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Erika Martin Seibert
University of Maryland

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African-American Archaeological Sites & the National Register of Historic Places: Creating a Public Memory

Erika Martin Seibert, National Park Service/University of Maryland

Maintained by the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Places was authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to recognize the, "districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture," at the local, state and national levels (NPS 1997). Archaeological sites are sorely under-represented in this federally recognized, national list. Currently, there are approximately 71,000 properties listed and only about seven percent of these represent archaeological sites (Little 1999:19). Moreover, African-American archaeological sites are also under-represented in this important list. Approximately 0.06 percent of National Register properties are African-American archaeological sites. While many archaeologists avoid preparing nominations because they think it is a time-consuming process and sites that are determined eligible are offered the same protection, it is still important to nominate sites, African-American archaeological sites in particular.

As Barbara Little notes, "Listing in the National Register serves to authenticate the worth of a historic place. It is this authentication that gives the National Register power in public perception" (Little 1999:19). Recently, the National Register has become more accessible as a public database due to its availability on the World Wide Web. This database makes the National Register a powerful tool in the creation of public memory.

Since the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the public has become increasingly important to the discipline of archaeology. Public support can help provide funding for archaeological programs, help to protect archaeological resources, and the public lobbies for legislation addressing these concerns. Little also notes that the beginning of the most recent edition to the National Register book states that the National Register has meaning that far transcends an honor roll of significant places. National Register documentation of historic properties becomes part of a national database and research resource available for planning, management, research, education, and interpretation. Listing furnishes authentication of the worth of a historic place and often influences a community's attitude toward its heritage (Little 1999:19).

African-American archaeological sites are important to the National Register because they become part of the public memory, they can be used in planning and management, and because often, archaeological sites are the only evidence which survives of historic properties. African-American archaeological resources may provide detailed information that neither the documentary record nor the architectural record of historic structures may reflect, such as details about housing size, construction techniques, and floor plans for structures that are no longer standing, material evidence indicative of folk beliefs and practices, data on mortality, nutrition, and quality of life, or information about industrial sites where free and enslaved Africans labored (Singleton 1994:34, 36, 38).

For instance, the Trapp and Chandler Pottery site in South Carolina is a pottery where African-slave labor was used. Stoneware ceramic sherds with an alkaline glaze recovered from the site may be indicative of an African-American art form and technology which spread through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas. In addition to understanding how African Americans may have influenced pottery making and design, this site provides the opportunity to explore industrial African-slave labor (McGuire, Novick, Rodeffer, Terry 1986). This site was listed on the National Register in 1986.

The Kenner and Kugler Cemeteries Archeological District in Louisiana, listed in 1987, provides the opportunity to explore issues which may not be available elsewhere. These cemeteries, uncovered by the excavation of a drainage ditch in 1975, are the final resting places of more than 250 African-Americans from the antebellum through the Reconstruction eras. Human remains and artifactual evidence may yield information about the demography, morbidity, mortality, nutrition, patterns of personal property, mortuary customs, belief systems, and changing patterns of economic status for rural Southern African Americans during a broad time frame. As the nomination notes, this kind of information is particularly important for this population, because documentary records during the Reconstruction period in Louisiana are incomplete (Stout 1987).

Excavations at the site of the Manassas Industrial School in Virginia located the structural remains of several principal buildings which made up the school. Established in 1893 by Jennie Dean, an emancipated slave, the school operated as a private residential institution for African-American boys and girls until the late 1930s. Archeological remains address many important questions about the school and life in Manassas, Virginia. For instance, what was the quality of life of the students? What does the archeological record tell us about the struggle of African Americans during the Jim Crow era? What specific patterns can be identified that suggest the activities of boys and girls who attended the school (Sprinkle 1994a)? The location of the structures was used in the development of the Manassas Industrial School/Jennie Dean Memorial Park. The site was listed in the National Register in 1994.

In a search done on the National Register Information System (NRIS), only 42 sites with an African-American archeological component were listed (Table 1). When searching NRIS, information potential (Criterion D) and area of significance (in this case, African-American), were chosen as the parameters to query these sites. Most archeological sites are nominated under Criterion D, however, other Criteria, especially A (association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history) are often possible (See Table 1). Criterion B (association with the lives of significant persons in our past) and Criterion C (properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic value, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction), are used less often.

Important African-American archeological sites which do not appear on this list represent a gap which needs to be filled. Preservation planners look to the National Register to "know which archeological resources are important and, more importantly, why they are important" (Townsend 1994: 11). The National Register list of archeological properties is also used for

research and provides visibility by stressing the importance of underground resources (Sprinkle 1994b: 12).

To nominate a site to the National Register, contact the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for the state where the property is located, or if the property is owned by a federal agency, contact the Federal Preservation Officer (FPO). If the property is located on a tribal reservation, contact the Tribal Preservation Officer (THPO). These preservation officers will provide guidance throughout the nomination process (NPS 1997). The National Register web site (www.cr.nps.gov/nr/) is also a valuable source of information. Most of the National Register Bulletins and other publications are available on the web site, as is NRIS, where you can search for National Register properties.

Nominating African-American archeological sites will add an integral part of our national history to the public record. African American archeology has been an important specialization within historical archeology for at least the past three decades, however, the sparse amount of archeological sites listed with an African American component implies that it is not. It seems clear that the properties on the National Register, ". . . [are] meant to be representative of American history" (Little 1999: 19). Therefore, nominating African American archeological sites will give a voice to these underrepresented properties and present a more accurate picture of our history and our discipline to the American public.

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Table 1

STATE	SITE NAME	CRITERIA LISTED	YEAR LISTED
Alabama	Westwood Plantation	C, D (D was added)	1984
Colorado	Dearfield	A, D	1995
Connecticut	Lighthouse Archaeological Site	D	1991
Delaware	Barnes Woods Archeological District	D	1996
District of Columbia	Woodlawn Cemetery	A, D	1996
Florida	Roberts Farm Historic and Archeological District	A, C, D	1995
Florida	USS Alligator	A, B, C, D	1996
Florida	Kingsley Plantation	A, B, C, D	1970
Florida	Ft. Mose (also a NH Landmark)	A, D	1994
Florida	Naval Live Oaks Reservation	A, D	1998
Georgia	Ossabaw Island	A, C, D	1996
Georgia	Hamilton Plantation Slave Cabins	A, C, D	1988

Iowa	Buxton Historic Townsite	A, D	1983
Kentucky	Barren Fork Coal Camp and Mine Archeological District	D	1997
Kentucky	Pisgah Rural Historic District	A, C, D	1988
Louisiana	Kenner and Kugler Cemeteries Archeological District	A, D	1987
Maryland	Snow Hill Site	D	1984
Massachusetts	Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery	A, D	1997
Massachusetts	Camp Atwater	A, D	1982
New Jersey	Gethsemane Cemetery	A, D	1994
New York	African Burying Ground (also a N H Landmark)	A, D	1993
New York	The African-American Cemetery	A, D	1996
New York	Sandy Ground Historic Archeological District	A, C, D	1982
New York	Stony Hill Cemetery	A, D	1999
North Carolina	Horton Grove Complex	A, B, C, D	1978
North Carolina	Potts Plantation	A, B, C, D	1997
North Carolina	Hogan,	D	1996

	Alexander, Plantation		
South Carolina	Fish Haul Archaeological Site	D	1988
South Carolina	Stoney-- Baynard Plantation	D	1994
South Carolina	Trapp and Chandler Pottery Site	A, D	1986
Tennessee	Ashwood Rural Historic District	A, B, C, D	1988
Tennessee	Bledsoe's Station	A, B, D	1992
Texas	Annie B., and Henry G. Green House	A, D	1996
Texas	Sessums--James House	A, B, C, D	1998
Texas	Archeological Site No. 41 HZ 227 (Indian Hot Springs MPS)	A, D	1990
Texas	Archeological Site No.41 HZ 228 (Indian Hot Springs MPS)	A, D	1990
Texas	Archeological Site No. 41 HZ 439 (Indian Hot Springs MPS)	D	1990
Texas	Bullis' Camp Site	A, D	1978
Texas	McKinney Homestead	D	1974
Virginia	Middlebrook Historic District	A, C, D	1983

Virginia	Fort Pocahontas	A, C, D	1999
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