National Museum of African American History & Culture
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT & SECTION 106 CONSULTATION

Results of Phase II Archeological Study

September 19, 2007
Goals & Objectives of the Phase II Archeological Study

Section 106 Objective

• Does the NMAAHC site contain significant (NRHP-eligible) archeological resources?

Archeological Research Questions

• What is the extent, integrity and significance of the prehistoric deposits?

• What is the stratigraphy in the western area of the site? Natural landscape below fill? Historical carriageways? Undifferentiated fill?

• Is there an intact mid-19th-century landscape surface or structures associated with the Washington City Canal? (northern area of site, along Constitution Avenue)
Phase II Work Plan

Archival Research
- Washington City Canal
- Colonial history
- African American associations with site

Field Investigations
- Manually excavated test pits
- Backhoe trenches

Public Interpretation
- Interpretive sign on site
- Formal guided tours

Technical Report
The Antebellum Urban Landscape

- Northern part of site was in the channel of Tiber Creek, which was transformed to the Washington City Canal, and finally B Street Sewer

- Relatively benign landscape history through modern times (no WWII tempos built on site)

Robert King’s *A Map of the City of Washington in the District of Columbia*, 1818.

Detail from Boschke’s *Map of Washington City, District of Columbia*, 1857.
The Landscape from Archeological Perspective

Phase I findings:

- Elevation in southeastern part of site is at or near natural historical grade (no fill)
- Northern part of site has massive fill deposits (more than 8 feet deep)
- Preserved elements of the natural landscape include upland landscape surface and tidal flat marsh muck
Field Investigations

Three-week Phase II field investigation completed July 30 to August 17

High temperature on August 9 was 102° F; a full 3° F below all-time record

Phase II Excavations included
  8 test pits
  7 backhoe trenches

Most areas of site sampled
Landscaping of the Monument Grounds

Complex stratigraphy: fill layers, pavements, household refuse deposits

Plan of Monument Grounds showing landscaping, and.... circulation and plantings
(NCPC Map reference 807 44-45), circa 1890

Stratigraphic profile with multiple soil layers
The Typical 19th-Century Domestic Assemblage

Typical late 19th-century domestic assemblage:

- Ceramic tableware
- Beverage bottles
- Tobacco pipes
- Dietary bone
- Oyster shell

No known long term domestic occupation on site

Household refuse disposal by citizens
Similar Deposits Found on the North Bank of Tiber Creek

2005-2006 testing at the Ellipse found similar late 19th-century domestic assemblage.

Annual Reports of the Corps of Engineers (1870s) mention cellar excavations and street sweepings.

Other sources of fill were from leveling of Pennsylvania Avenue.
Ceramic Tablewares

Ceramic vessel forms included typical storage vessels and tablewares

Foot ring from ironstone pitcher, with British maker’s mark used by Cork & Edge; registered 1847; used circa 1847-1860
Local Bottling Companies

Numerous bottle and vessel forms:

- Soda/mineral water bottles
- Wine/liquor bottles
- Beer/ale bottles
- Milk bottles
- Pharmaceutical/medicine bottles
- Lamp globe/chimney
- Tablewares (tumblers, stemware)

Bottle embossments:

- George Washington brewery
- Rock Creek Ginger Ale Company
- Pepsi Cola
- William N. H. Maack
- ... more
Public Interpretation

On site signage and tours
Public Interpretation Takes Off

Informal tours
Washington Post article
Smithsonian “Torch” newsletter
...more
What is the significance of the finds?

Little evidence of Native American (prehistoric) occupation.

No features associated with the Washington City Canal.

Archeology of the NMAAHC site is mostly about the story of landscaping of the Washington Monument Grounds.

Most interesting “story” is citizen disposal of refuse (“quirky history”), as known from previous work on Ellipse and from Annual Reports of the Corps of Engineers (1870s): cellar excavations and street sweepings.

The same “story” is replicated on the Ellipse and other public lands

Our ability to interpret the history (or prehistory) of the Washington Monument Grounds will not be diminished by construction of the NMAAHC.

No NRHP-eligible archeological resources have been identified on the site.
Wrap-Up & Questions/Answers

Next Steps:

• Incorporate results into EIS
• Prepare technical report
• Agency review & consultation (formal concurrence with NRHP eligibility assessment)
• Fulfill remaining ARPA permit requirements
• Curation of artifact collections
• Additional public interpretation

Questions or Comments?