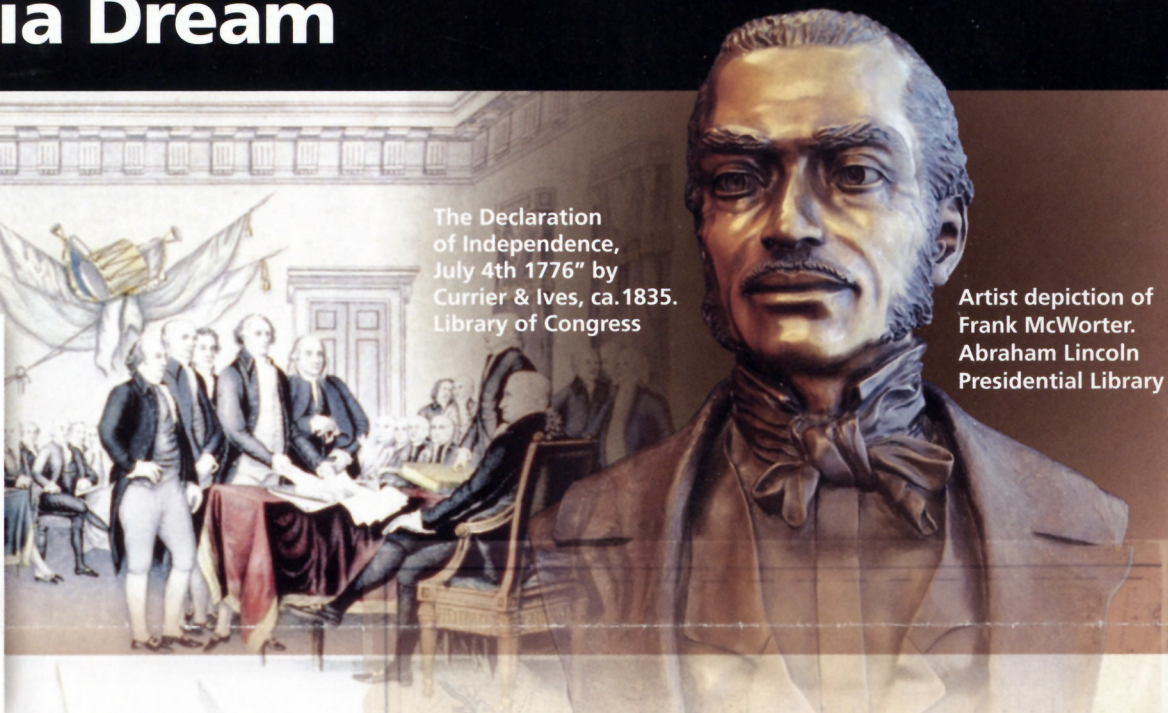


McWorter, Lincoln and the Philadelphia Dream



Flag ceremony at Independence Hall with Lincoln on June 29, 1861.
Library of Congress



The Declaration of Independence, July 4th 1776” by Currier & Ives, ca.1835.
Library of Congress

Artist depiction of Frank McWorter.
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Lincoln stopped in Philadelphia on his way to assume the presidency of a nation that was headed to war with itself over who the founders intend to include in the vision of freedom found in the Declaration of Independence. While in Independence Hall Lincoln summarized how that document inspired him. “I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance.”

A year after the nation’s founders signed the famous document of freedom, a woman named Juda, who had been taken from West Africa to be enslaved in South Carolina, gave birth to a son named Frank. Frank’s father was probably Juda’s master. In 1796, when Frank was nineteen, he was taken by his father to work in central

Kentucky. Four years later, in 1799, Frank married an enslaved woman named Lucy, although not in an official ceremony since that was not allowed under Kentucky’s “Black Codes.” Lucy was born in 1771.



Frank continued to work in enslavement to his master but was also hired out to others and worked in a saltpeter mining operation. Saltpeter was a key ingredient in the production of gun powder. Frank was able to keep a portion of the funds he earned from the additional work.

Saltpeter mining ruins at Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky.
Library of Congress

Frank and Lucy’s family grew with the arrival of Juda in 1800; Frank Jr., in 1804, Sarah in 1811; and, Solomon in 1815. The Black Codes determined that these children were born into slavery because their mother was enslaved.

It was also at this time, in 1809, on a small Kentucky farm not too far from Frank, a baby named Abraham Lincoln was born. Lincoln’s father was a farmer working for himself, and his mother took care of the home. As a white family, the Lincoln children were born free. Frank continued to work and save so that he and his family could someday enjoy the same freedom that the Lincoln family enjoyed. The first step for Frank was the purchase of his wife Lucy’s freedom in 1817. Upon her freedom, any additional children they had were free. Those children born free were Squire in 1817, Commodore in 1823 and Lucy Ann in 1825. Frank had purchased his own freedom in 1819, thereafter being referred to as “Free Frank.” Frank also purchased land and owned his saltpeter mining operation.

In 1816 the Lincoln family moved from Kentucky to a farm in southern Indiana. In 1830, the Lincolns moved to Illinois. Free Frank was planning a similar move and undertook the steps in preparation for the journey, including securing the necessary “character reference,” or certificate of freedom, from Kentucky citizens for himself and Lucy. This was a requirement of the restrictive Illinois Black Laws for any African American entering the state.

1818 map featuring Kentucky and including part of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.
Library of Congress

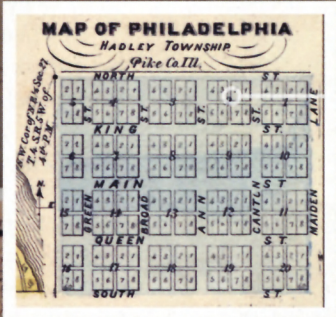
In 1831, Lincoln left his father’s farm near Decatur, Illinois and moved to New Salem, then in 1837 on to Springfield. At that same time Free Frank was setting up his farm in Pike County. Both were hard working, ambitious, showed great ingenuity, and were community minded. But Lincoln was able to travel where he pleased and do what he liked without much fear of interference. Free Frank, on the other hand, was faced with Illinois’ Black Laws that restricted what African Americans could do in Illinois, and he had the constant fear that he, or a member of his family, might be kidnapped and sold into slavery.

Lincoln began his political life in New Salem with his 1834 election to the Illinois Legislature. In 1835, Free Frank returned to Kentucky to purchase the freedom of his son Solomon. By 1836 Free Frank owned 600 acres of land in Pike County and mapped out the town that became New Philadelphia, the first known town planned and legally registered by an African American before the Civil War. Free Frank sold lots to African Americans and white settlers.

Students visiting Vandalia Statehouse State Historic Site in 2017. This is where the McWorter legislation was passed in 1837.
National Park Service



1860 plat map showing “Philadelphia,” or New Philadelphia, in Hadley Township, Pike County, Illinois.
Library of Congress



1872 plat map showing the New Philadelphia town plan.

In May of 1837 McWorter filed an Illinois “Certificate of Good Character,” or certificate of freedom, which stated that he was founding a town, what it would be called, and why he was doing it. “[Frank McWorter] has laid off a town which he calls Philadelphia, and understanding and believing that the said Frank has laid out the town intending to apply the proceeds of the sales for the purchase of his family yet remaining as slaves.”

Frank and Lucy were formally wed in 1839. Four years later, Frank returned to Kentucky to purchase the freedom of his daughter Sarah, followed in 1850 by the purchase of his oldest child, fifty-year-old daughter Juda.

The 1850 U.S. Census showed 58 residents living in New Philadelphia. In September 1850 the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law which made it more difficult for freedom seekers to escape enslavement along the underground railroad. The McWorter family was known to help freedom seekers, and New Philadelphia residents recalled their town to be a stop on the underground railroad.

1850 engraving titled “Effects of the Fugitive Slave Law.”
Library of Congress



In 1826, Free Frank’s son, Frank, Jr. fled enslavement to Canada. In response, Free Frank sold his saltpeter mine in 1829 to purchase Frank, Jr.s freedom. The next year Free Frank sold land he owned in Kentucky and purchased 160 acres in Pike County, Illinois.

The Lincoln family’s move, first from Kentucky to Indiana, and then Indiana to Illinois, carried with it all the risks of frontier travel in the 1800s. Free Frank’s family, however, had additional risks and sacrifices. First, Free Frank had not yet been able to purchase the freedom of all his children, so Juda, Sarah, Solomon and four-year-old grandchild Charlotte were left behind. Second, Free Frank and his family risked kidnapping from slave catchers during their travels to Illinois.



1844 image from the "Western Citizen" promoting the Underground Railroad. New York Public Library

LIBERTY LINE. NEW ARRANGEMENT---NIGHT AND DAY.

The improved and splendid Locomotives, Clarksons and Lundy, with their trains fitted up in the best style of accommodation for passengers, will run their regular trips during the present season, between the borders of Patriarchal Dominion and Libertyville, Upper Canada. Gentlemen and Ladies, who may wish to improve their health or circumstances, by a northern tour, are respectfully invited to give us their patronage.
SEATS FREE, irrespective of color.
Necessary Clothing furnished gratuitously to such as are "fallen among thieves."

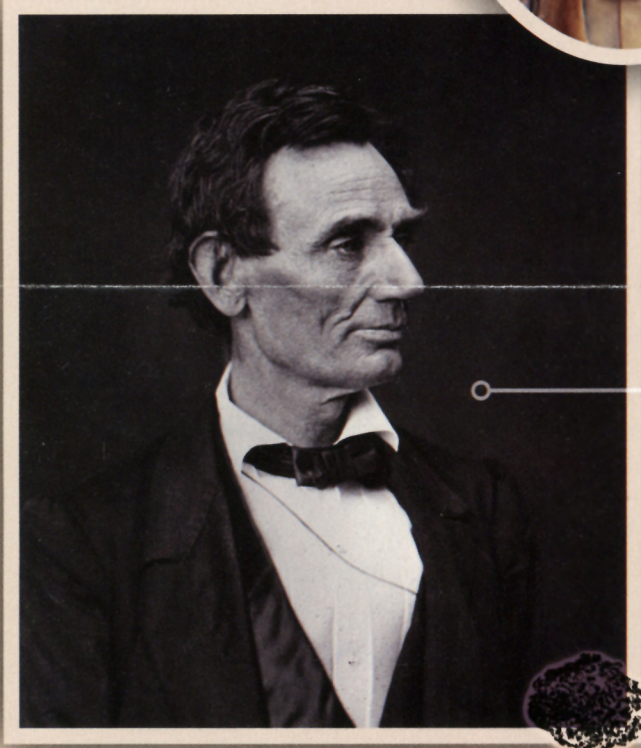
"Hide the outcasts—let the oppressed go free."—Bible.
For seats apply at any of the trap doors, or to the conductor of the train.
J. CROSS, Proprietor.
N. B. For the special benefit of Pro-Slavery Police Officers, an extra heavy wagon for Texas, will be furnished, whenever it may be necessary, in which they will be forwarded as dead freight, to the "Valley of Basals," always at the risk of the owners.
Extra Overcoats provided for such of them as are afflicted with protracted chilly-phobia.

FAC-SIMILE OF UNDERGROUND RAILWAY ADVERTISEMENT (From "The Western Citizen," July 13, 1844)

McWorter passed away on September 7, 1854. By the time of his death, McWorter had purchased the freedom of his four children born into slavery and two enslaved grandchildren, in addition to himself and his wife Lucy. He also directed his descendants to purchase the freedom of additional grandchildren and great-grandchildren after his death. Frank and Lucy McWorter's efforts over the course of many decades resulted in the freedom of fifteen enslaved family members.

The same year that McWorter passed away, the U.S. Congress passed the Kansas Nebraska Act that had the potential for spreading slavery throughout the nation. Lincoln fought against this. In a speech in Peoria, just 150 miles from New Philadelphia, Lincoln voiced his opposition to the spread of slavery.

"This declared indifference, but as I must think, covert real zeal for the spread of slavery, I can not but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself."



Photograph of Abraham Lincoln taken in 1860. Library of Congress

Two years later, in 1856, McWorter's daughter Sarah returned to Kentucky with funds from her father's estate to purchase the freedom of three of her five children she had left behind thirteen years earlier. The remaining two were also eventually freed.

Lincoln continued to work against the Kansas Nebraska Act and in 1858 ran against Stephen A. Douglas for U.S. Senate. The two debated one another throughout Illinois with Douglas campaigning on who he thought the founders intended to include in the 1776 Philadelphia document.

"Now, I say to you, my fellow-citizens, that in my opinion the signers of the Declaration had no reference to the negro whatever when they declared all men to be created equal."

Lincoln reemphasized his long-held position that the founders intended for the freedom to include all.

"I think the authors of that notable instrument [Declaration of Independence] intended to include all men. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what they did consider all men created equal—equal in certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Lincoln lost the senate race to Douglas but the interest and publicity from the debates propelled Lincoln to national prominence and a run for the presidency. Lincoln gave a series of speeches in early 1860, one of which summarized Lincoln's view of America and could also be considered an overview of Frank McWorter's life.

"When one starts poor, as most do in the race of life, free society is such that he knows he can better his condition; he knows that there is no fixed condition of labor, for his whole life. I want every man to have the chance—and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him! That is the true system."

That same year, there were approximately 31 people living in seven households in New Philadelphia.



Photograph of Lucy McWorter taken later in life. Mythic Mississippi Project



1864 engraving titled "Reading the Emancipation Proclamation." Library of Congress

Lincoln was inaugurated sixteenth president of the United States on March 4, 1861, Lincoln's presidency was dominated by bloody Civil War. By the summer of 1862 Lincoln had drafted an emancipation proclamation, the first step in the end of slavery. The final Emancipation Proclamation, that also authorized the enlistment of African Americans into the military, was signed and took effect on January 1, 1863.

Frank McWorter's grandson, Squire McWorter, Jr., was one of the many African Americans who enlisted in the Union Army, serving in the 38th Regiment United States Colored Infantry.

On April 11, 1865, Lincoln spoke from a window at the White House to a crowd gathered to hear some remarks in response to General Lee's surrender to General Grant on April 9. In what would be his last speech, Lincoln surprised many when he advocated for the right to vote for African Americans. John Wilkes Booth was in the audience and commented that the result of what Lincoln said would be citizenship for African Americans. He went on to declare "Now, by God, I'll put him through! That is the last speech he will ever make." On April 14, 1865, the Lincoln's attended a play at Ford's Theatre, where Booth shot Lincoln. Lincoln died the following morning.

The population of New Philadelphia peaked in 1865 with approximately 66 people living in fifteen households. Frank's wife Lucy died in 1870, having lived almost 100 years.

The population of New Philadelphia declined in subsequent years and little evidence of the town remains today. Frank and Lucy's efforts were not for a town however, but for family and freedom. Generations of McWorters descended from the freedom first claimed by Frank and Lucy.

1865 engraving titled "Emancipation." Library of Congress

Like McWorter, Lincoln understood the importance of working for the future generations. In 1861 Lincoln told congress that the nation's fight for the vision of freedom first committed to in Philadelphia wasn't for their generation alone.

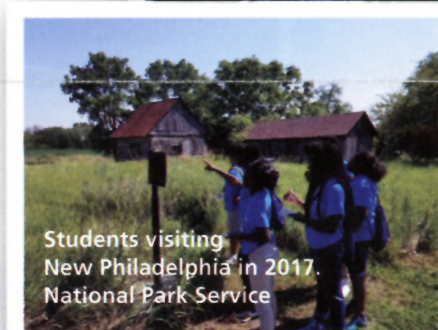
The struggle of today, is not altogether for today—it is for a vast future also.

The work to honor the efforts of Frank and Lucy, the community of New Philadelphia and the McWorter family continue, most recently with the designation of New Philadelphia as a unit of the National Park Service as New Philadelphia National Historic Site.



Students visiting New Philadelphia in 2017. National Park Service

Frank McWorter descendent Gerald A. McWorter talking with students at New Philadelphia in 2022. National Park Service



Students visiting New Philadelphia in 2022. Kenny Price

