

Introduction

In 2010, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will unveil its annual state history theme of African American history in Pennsylvania. One aspect of this theme is to consider historic resources that are associated with some aspect of the African American experience in Pennsylvania from the founding of the Commonwealth in 1690 through mid 20th century. These properties embody the history, culture, and values of the African American community and provide a tangible connection to important events and themes within that community.

This survey initiative is one of the components funded under a Preserve America grant from the National Park Service to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the other being the creation of a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) for evaluating and nominating properties significant for their associations with African American history to the National Register of Historic Places. The groundwork for the ideas, stories, and programs that support this initiative comes from a variety of sources, one of which is a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) that will provide an historic context under which properties associated with African American history in Pennsylvania can be identified and evaluated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The MPDF has been assembled from two primary components, a Statement of Historic Contexts and Associated Property Types. This report is the culmination of a historic resources survey that sought to document, analyze, and recognize historic resources that were then used to inform the Associated Property Types (APT) component of the MPDF.

Studies of this nature have been undertaken in the past but with geographical or thematic limits at the local or regional level. African American history and resources have been studied in a more thorough context in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh where the role of that history has historically been recognized as a vital and significant part of the past and present community. Several surveys and studies have been completed in Philadelphia, the most recent initiative on African American churches, and two important ones have been prepared for southwestern Pennsylvania, one in the city of Pittsburgh and one addressing the entire southwestern Pennsylvania region. This study looks to augment these earlier studies and develop a context within which all of the Pennsylvania's African American communities can be identified and celebrated for their role in the Commonwealth's history.

The study that follows is best viewed as a framework for future research into this important and understudied part of our common history. Early in the project, it became evident that each of the communities that were designated for survey and assessment would benefit from additional study beyond that which could be accomplished during the course of this project. Many communities, small and large, urban and rural, were not documented. Additionally, research completed as a component of this project uncovered evidence of satellite communities and other potentially significant sites that were tangential to or associated with those that had been designated for assessment; although beyond the scope of this project, studying those resources will also likely yield information that enhances the understanding of the African American community in Pennsylvania. The survey and research methodology established through this report can theoretically be applied in other communities and those communities can then, using the companion historic context, be evaluated against the common themes that emerged from this first effort.

This report is organized around a survey methodology framework, the presentation of important themes and conclusions related to the built environment, a brief statement of recommendations, and the survey findings. The data from the nine communities surveyed as part of this project is included as appendices at the end of the report. The companion historic context study that was completed by Craig Stutman, Ph.D. has not been reproduced in this document but must be read and consulted in any study of historic resources associated with African American history in Pennsylvania.