

# Philadelphia Freedom

*Independence National Historical Park captures our nation's earliest days and provides a glimpse of George Washington's domestic life.* By JOANN GRECO

It's not your typical national park, surrounded as it is by office buildings, colonial-era houses, and a loft district of shops and restaurants. But in its small 52-acre site of dense urban blocks connected by swaths of green, Independence National Historical Park is home to the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, two important national symbols. And while this area may be lit by re-creations of 18th-century streetlights, it's a living part of workaday Philadelphia. History is integral here, blended with commerce

and recreation, just as it was 230 years ago.

The park ([www.nps.gov/inde](http://www.nps.gov/inde)) has been in transition in recent years, with mixed



results. Enhanced security measures in the wake of 9/11 have made access to sites more of a chore, but improvements have included new buildings and a renewed sense of mission in linking the sites to tell a fuller story.

The chief development is an interpretive exhibit detailing the domestic lives of Presidents George Washington and John Adams, who resided here when Philadelphia was the nation's capital, from 1790 to 1800. During recent excavations near the Liberty Bell Center, the Park Service discovered further archaeological evidence relating to the enslaved Africans that Washington brought to his new home. In 2003, the city of Philadelphia pledged \$1.5 million to commemorate the lives of the enslaved people who lived here. Two years later, Congress appropriated \$3.6 million toward the memorial, called "The President's House: Freedom and Slavery in Making a New Nation." Slated to open in 2009, the memorial will illustrate the slaves' daily lives (as well as that of Washington and his family). Not only has the excavation led to the unearthing of artifacts like vases and kitchen utensils used in the presidential household, it's also proven to be architecturally revealing. Most noteworthy were remnants from a bow window, that archaeologist Jed Levin

calls "a tour de force of brickwork." Washington greeted visitors by standing with his back to this curving window, a habit thought to have influenced the design of the Oval Office of the White House.

**•THE ICONS** The Liberty Bell's new home includes updated installations that examine the history of the famous bell—crafted in 1752—from its brief use to herald public announcements to its eventual status as a symbol of liberty. The modest, symmetrical Hall is where the Declaration of Independence was hammered out and adopted, the design of the American flag was agreed upon, and the U.S. Constitu-

tion was drafted. Admission, by timed ticket, takes visitors to the Assembly Room, where Washington's original chair and a silver inkstand serve as reminders of these key historical events.

**•THE REST OF THE STORY** The park's 20 other buildings and sites address different aspects of life in colonial Philadelphia and the early days of the United States. One of the most important, Congress Hall, served as the meeting place for Congress while Philadelphia was the capital, and witnessed the inaugurations of Washington and John Adams. Elsewhere, the enormous presence of Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia is well preserved. A "ghost structure" outlines the footprint of his final home, a museum showcases his many inventions, and a penny-strewn burial site (honoring Franklin's famous saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned") at Christ Church's graveyard pays lasting tribute to this quintessential renaissance man.



A bell rings every hour from the tower at Independence Hall, where re-enactors (top) suit up daily.