

**Request for Proposals
for a Biographical Investigation of Martin Luther King, Jr.
with Respect to 753 Walnut Street, Camden, NJ,
during the years 1948-51.**

Introduction

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is soliciting Proposals for an investigation of the presence of Martin Luther King, Jr., at 753 Walnut Street, Camden, NJ, during the years 1948-51, and of the significance of that presence in King's life and to his career as a pre-eminent civil rights leader. During that time, King was a graduate student at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Upland, Pennsylvania, near Chester. He is known to have spent some time at 753 Walnut Street during 1950 and may have been present there at other times during these seminary years. This investigation seeks to answer questions not only related to King's whereabouts during this period, but also to King's activities during the period of his stay(s) there, and the relationship or importance of those activities to his subsequent career. These questions are spelled out in greater detail below.

This will be a project both of discovery and of analysis. HPO expects that the investigation will focus on, and perhaps hinge upon, unpublished and even obscure local records of the 1948-51 period, including records not currently known, especially with respect to King's presence in Camden and his activities there. The project will also require a deep familiarity with King's own writings and with the biographical literature about him.

Scope of Services

HPO requests proposals from qualified scholars affiliated with New Jersey state colleges and universities, acting individually or with subconsultants (either way, hereafter referred to as the Research Team), to develop the product deliverables described below. The selected Research Team will work closely with HPO staff.

The Research Team will perform the following services that will include, but not be limited to:

- 1) Attend three or four project status meetings, in Trenton, in Camden, or at the offices of the Research Team, as needed. These will include a meeting to review the Research Team's proposal; a progress meeting to review the course of the work; and a meeting for HPO to present comments on a draft report;
- 2) Prepare a report that carefully the questions described more fully below; and to submit a draft version of that report for HPO comment;
- 3) Include in the report a careful and detailed explanation of the course of the research, the logic behind the selection of sources consulted, and an evaluation of the quality of the available evidence that supports or contradicts the conclusions drawn in the report.

Qualifications of the Research Team

The research will be conducted (or the Research Team led) by a college or university faculty or staff member with a demonstrated expertise in African American history. In the weighing of a research proposal, higher value will be accorded to teams with demonstrated knowledge of the biographical literature of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., based on research conducted by one or more team members; to teams with demonstrated knowledge of the history of the 20th-century African American civil rights

movement in the United States; and to teams with demonstrated ability to identify and document places in New Jersey with importance to African American history.

Additional members of the team may be drawn from junior faculty, college or university staff members, or graduate students, whose qualifications based on previous experience make them suitable additions to the team. HPO will examine the qualifications of each team member, and great weight will be given to the qualifications of all team members in the selection of the successful proposal.

The proposal must identify each member of the team, enumerate their credentials, and identify the team leader who will serve as the project liaison with HPO. Proposals must include vitae detailing the qualifications of each team member, and provide full contact information for the team leader (postal mailing address, daytime phone number, mobile phone number, fax number, and email address).

Research Questions

A cluster of research questions surround the central theme of this investigation: did Martin Luther King, Jr. as a young man spend appreciable time at 753 Walnut Street between the summer of 1948 and the summer of 1951 inclusive, or were his visits there few and inconsequential in the course of his life and career? To disentangle this complex question, the following questions can be posed.

King's Whereabouts: Did King spend an appreciable amount of time at 753 Walnut Street?

Evidence indicates that King visited 753 Walnut Street, and that he stayed there overnight on one or more occasions in the company of his close friend Walter McCall, whose cousin, Benjamin Hunt, and his family, had occupied the house since 1945.

- 1) Can actual visits by King be specifically documented in the record, with dates and lengths of stay?
- 2) Can frequent visits by King be documented within an established period of time (eg. summer 1950)?
- 3) Can King's whereabouts at other places be ascertained within the 1948-51 time frame? When was he at Crozer, for example, or in Atlanta? Are trips to other places known for King at this time? [This would be helpful negative evidence; dates when he is known to have been elsewhere would be times when he could not have been visiting 753 Walnut Street. This information could be used to inform conclusions about the frequency or length of stay of King's Camden visits.]
- 4) By comparison, how much time did King spend at Crozer, in Atlanta, or at other places during the years in question?

The Relationship to or Impact upon King's Life or Career?

- 1) Did King engage in any significant activities during periods of stay at 753 Walnut; can these be documented in detail?
- 2) Did King comment upon any such activities in any contemporary record that has survived?
- 3) Did King, himself, attach significance to any activities that he engaged in during periods of stay in Camden?
- 4) Have King's biographers attached significance to any activities that he engaged in during periods of stay in Camden?
- 5) Have other persons discovered or amassed convincing evidence of the impact on King's career of events associated with periods of King's stay in Camden?

Product Deliverables

The Research Team will produce a draft report with its findings that will be due 120 days following issuance of the Notice to Proceed. This report will include draft findings, as well as a detailed explanation of the course of the research, an explanation of dead-ends that have been explored, and of further research still to be pursued within the scope of the project.

The State of the Investigation to Date:

HPO has to date conducted an informal investigation and also received information from outside parties with respect to the issues and questions raised in this RFP. A number of pieces of relevant information have already been identified; digital copies of them will be provided on a DVD disk that will be forthcoming. The items range in date from 1940 to the present, and their types are varied and their value as evidence of what actually happened is uneven. Some pieces of evidence may be much stronger than others.

The Racial Incident of June 12, 1950

One specific event has been attributed to the time that King was staying in Camden. On June 12, 1950, King, together with a close friend from the Crozer Theological Seminary, Walter McCall, and two young women, were driving together in Maple Shade, in Burlington County, when they were denied service at a restaurant known as "Mary's Place," in violation of a New Jersey civil rights law. A Mr. Ernest Nichols, who operated the restaurant (or who was staffing the restaurant at the time of the group's visit), threatened violence against the four with a firearm. King, McCall, and the two women left, but they went to the police station and filed a police report against Nichols. A police report has survived from this incident, and it bears King's name, "M.L. King, Jr." and his address given as "753 Walnut St., Camden, NJ," although that address is crossed out in the document. That address was the home of Benjamin Hunt and his family. Hunt was a cousin of King's friend McCall. Hunt's presence at 753 Walnut Street is confirmed by several pieces of evidence, including the 1947 city directory of Camden (forthcoming).

McCall apparently took the lead in filing charges against Nichols; the complaint was officially filed on June 15, 1950, signed by McCall. The complaint lists Pearl E. Smith and Doris Wilson as the two women who were present with King and McCall at the Mary's Place incident. Nichols was arrested, released upon bail, and secured W. Thomas McGann as his attorney. Nichols and King sought counsel through the assistance of the local chapter of the NAACP, and secured Robert Burke Johnson as their attorney. McCall and King evidently continued to pursue a prosecution of Nichols, but the case against him evidently fell apart when some white witnesses who had been present in the restaurant during the incident refused to testify. Some of this legal activity is confirmed in contemporary newspaper articles. Some of this information came from contemporary stories in Camden and Philadelphia newspapers.

It seems plausible that King and McCall may have appeared in Camden several times to meet with their attorney to further the legal effort in this case, but if so, this course of events has not been demonstrated by evidence. King did not remain long in Camden after June 12th, 1950. He is known to have driven to Atlanta to attend the wedding of a relative there on June 17, 1950. He may have spent much of that summer in Atlanta--or not. Several biographies suggest that he may have spent much of the summers during which he was a seminary student assisting his father, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA. The church might possess records that identify dates on which King, Jr., preached in the pulpit or otherwise assisted in worship services.

Several pieces of retrospective evidence have placed King in Camden with regard to the June 12th incident. These include a 1970 oral interview with Walter McCall, conducted by Herbert Holmes for the Oral History Project of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Non-Violent Social Change (the King Center) and subsequent newspaper articles. Also, a recorded recollection by Jeanette Lily Hunt, suggests that King had a frequent presence at 753 Walnut Street during these years, but corroboration should be sought.

Walnut Street in 1950

Sanborn fire insurance maps are available for the City of Camden for 1926, updated through July 1950. (from the New Jersey State Library collections.) The 1940 census and a 1947 directory of the City of Camden are available; these materials show the layout of the houses along Walnut Street and provide the names of the heads of household in the 700 block of Walnut Street. Pursuing this line of inquiry further may help lead to a more complete and comprehensive list of the residents of the block in the 1948-51 period, and thereby help to identify additional persons who may have been witness to the comings and goings of the Hunt household at 753 Walnut Street.

Potential Paths of Further Investigation

King's Presence in Camden

The following suggestions identify some paths of further investigation for direct and indirect evidence of King's presence in Camden during the Crozer years. This list should not be considered exhaustive.

Establish whether Crozer Theological Seminary Students lived on campus during summer months; seek any Crozer records related to King or Walter McCall.

Evidence strongly suggests that King lived on the Crozer campus during the academic years in which he was enrolled. Assuming that that situation prevailed during the school year, it would greatly limit the time that King could have been in Camden. It also suggests, however, that the academic calendar together with the Seminary's rules for student housing at that time could identify times when King would not have been resident at Crozer. Crozer Theological Seminary merged with the Colgate Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, New York in 1970. To date, HPO's initial contact with the institution's archive has been unproductive. An approach from a scholar at another educational institution may have more success. The Delaware County Historical Society in Chester, Pennsylvania has not yet been contacted. It is recommended that the selected team contact the Society to determine what information they have in their collections concerning Crozer Theological Seminary and Chester while Martin Luther King was in attendance at the seminary. Establish where Walter McCall lived during the school year. Did he reside in the dormitory?

Further identification of residents of Walnut Street, based on other written records.

Investigation should pursue whether other records survive in Camden that can more fully identify the residents of properties that closely neighbor 753 Walnut Street. (Neighbors or friends of the Hunts may have become aware of King's presence during the period of his visits.) The 1947 city directory of Camden contains a "criss-cross" section that reports heads of household in order by street address. The principal, alphabetical section of the directory is likely to have more information, and this has not been consulted.

Other records to be consulted should include the records of the Camden City Bureau of Assessments (City Hall, Room 329). A Bureau of Assessments staff member has identified

that the Bureau holds "Property Record Cards" from 1950 (the oldest ones that it possesses), which should help strengthen information about residents on Walnut Street at that time. Information from this source could buttress that obtained from the 1947 city directory.

Request for 1950 U.S. Census Record

Consideration should be given to request the record of the U.S. Census of 1950 for the household of 753 Walnut Street. An "Application for Search of Census Records" is available online from the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. Excessive reliance, however, should not be placed upon this source.

Further oral history interviews

Investigation should seek to interview or further interview persons who were present at 753 Walnut Street or neighboring properties to help provide a more thorough social context of the neighboring families interaction with one another during the years in question. Such interviews could reveal other friendships among persons who did not live on Walnut Street but who might nonetheless have been a witness to gatherings at 753 Walnut Street with McCall and King. A further purpose of such interviewing could include soliciting whether contemporary written records that include letters, postcards, or other correspondence, or diaries, or photographs survive that might shed light on social relationships among neighbors on Walnut Street and perhaps even contain direct evidence of King's presence.

HPO has learned that Robert Burke Johnson, the attorney for King and McCall, is still living, and can be contacted. McGann, the attorney for Nichols, is deceased.

HPO has learned through Congressman John Lewis that King's older sister, Christine King Farris, is still living. She is approximately 88 years of age. The Congressman's office has offered to assist in making contact with her.

As of last report, Walter McCall's two children are still living in the Atlanta area. They may have been told by their father about his associations with Martin Luther King. Communication with either or both of them may yield new insights concerning the relationship between the two men.

Pursuit of Relevant FBI Information

The period 1948-51 is generally understood to predate the period of interest by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (the "Bureau") into the activities of King, which may not have begun until the Montgomery (Alabama) Bus Boycott of 1955-56. Yet the Bureau collected reports filed from its field offices related to civil rights matters during the period of King's study at Crozer, and these papers are held by the National Archives.

Further Pursuit of Burlington County Court Records

Records should be sought for the Burlington County Superior Court to determine whether additional information might be obtainable to strengthen the record of the legal action taken in the wake of the June 12, 1950 incident. Superior Court records can be sought through the record custodian for the appropriate "vicinage," which can be identified through consultation with the New Jersey judiciary.

Further pursuit of King family papers

Contact of King's sister Christine (mentioned above) might focus in part on whether she possesses any personal papers from King's Crozer years that would confirm his visits to Camden. Did King, for example, receive any letters there? Did he mention being there in any letters sent to her? Did she receive any letters that King sent from Camden, or that bore a Camden postmark?

Further Consideration of McCall's relations with the Hunts

An online biographical profile of Walter McCall notes that he worked in Camden, NJ for the Board of Education during the summer of 1948. HPO has not confirmed this information. If he was, in fact, temporarily employed there, one might speculate that that may have led McCall to seek to stay temporarily with the Hunts. If such an arrangement had begun in 1948, could it have continued during the succeeding years of McCall's and King's study at Crozer, at least for those times of year when Crozer's dorm(s) was/were closed?

The Impact of King's Camden Experiences

Even if King spent considerable time in Camden, if the impact of that time upon him was insignificant, then its historic importance would be negligible. Further research is needed to demonstrate that King's activities in Camden had a noteworthy impact upon him personally and with regard to his emergence as a civil rights leader, as evidenced through his oral statements, his writings, his recollections or reflections, or through the judgments of his biographers.

King was a prolific writer. His papers are being collected, edited, and published by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project (MLKPP), housed at Stanford University. HPO has not clarified how much material has been collected from King's Crozer years, nor how the MLKPP has treated this material. The MLKPP website indicates that seven volumes of these papers have already been published. HPO has not learned whether the unpublished King material will be available in an electronic form, or otherwise available.

Proposal Requirements

A research proposal must include the following items:

1) Identification of Team Leader / Point of Contact, and contact information

To foster more effective communication between HPO and the Research Team, the proposal must identify a team leader through whom all communication between HPO and the Research Team may be directed. (see regarding contact information, above).

2) Identification of Team Members and their Respective Roles

Carefully explain how the team will be structured, and what roles will each member perform. Which members will conduct the research in Camden, for example; identify the team members who will conduct the other various elements of the research plan. Once the Notice to Proceed has been issued, changing members of the Research Team will require HPO approval.

3) Research Plan

This must be a narrative statement detailing how the scope of services will be successfully completed. Although a research plan must be a flexible strategy that is necessarily adjusted as unexpected findings occur, the proposal must include a careful explanation of the research activities that can be anticipated. The research plan needs to address issues of how the research will be sequenced, and, for example, whether travel will be needed, to where and for what purposes.

4) Schedule of Work

This must include an explanation of the course of the proposed research outlined above, including an estimated timeline of project milestones and deliverables. Time must be built into the schedule for the HPO review of the Proposal and of the deliverables.

5) Cost Proposal

A detailed breakdown of the costs for the services to be provided, including an estimate for project expenses. An allowance for travel expenses should be included in the proposal, with cost breakdowns for overnight meals and lodging, and transportation expenses including train or airline fares.

6) Curriculum Vitae for all Team Members

The proposal needs to include a curriculum vita for each team member, including the team leader, one that highlights the relevant accomplishments, education, and experience that commend them to be members of this Research Team.

Deadline and Delivery

The proposal is due no later than October 31, 2016 at 5:00 pm. Please address the proposal to Kathryn J. Marcopul, Administrator, NJ Historic Preservation Office, and email it to kate.marcopul@dep.nj.gov with a copy to njhpo@dep.nj.gov