

**Opening Statement
Chairman Mark Souder**

“Historic Preservation of the Peopling of America”

**Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy
and Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform**

May 20, 2004

Good afternoon and thank you all for coming. At today’s hearing we will examine the historic preservation of the story of the immigration, migration and settlement of the population of the United States—the peopling of America. This is a facet of our history that strikes a chord with many Americans, because it so closely relates to our own personal histories as Americans and how our families came to be here.

Recent years have seen a boom in Americans’ interest in family history. A poll conducted in 2000 found that “approximately 60 percent of the U.S. population is interested in family history,” and that about 35 million people had conducted family history research online. One of the gems in my district is the Historical Genealogy Department of the Allen County Public Library. With its renowned collection of historical records, every year the library’s Genealogy Research Center serves over 100,000 researchers who come from all 50 states as well as from foreign countries to discover their family roots. They search for information about the places where their families entered the U.S., trace their paths as they moved through their new land, uncover the places where they settled and made their new homes. They discover their family’s role in the peopling of America.

At some point, all Americans traveled to this country from another land. The story of how people immigrated to this country, migrated within it, and settled in communities is not only an important part of our personal family histories—it’s an important part of our national history as well. It is part of the story of many people coming together to form this great country of ours, as our national motto expresses, *E Pluribus Unum*—“from many, one.”

How do we preserve this part of American history and educate future generations about it? Because the history of the peopling of America is very much embedded with a sense of place—the ports of entry where people came

into the U.S., the routes they journeyed along as they moved within the country, the communities where they settled—one of the primary ways we commemorate it is by preserving those places that are of particular significance to our national story.

As the guardian of many of our nation's historic places, the National Park Service has a crucial role in preserving the story of the peopling of America. Many of us have been to, or at least know of, Ellis Island, part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in New York. Over 12 million immigrants entered the U.S. at Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954, and the exhibits and programs there now mark an important period in the peopling of America. Other National Park Service units—from the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve in Alaska, to the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail, to Gloria Dei Church National Historic Site, originally built by 17th-century Swedish colonists in what is now Philadelphia—preserve elements of the history of the peopling of America.

In its revised thematic framework, adopted in 1994, the National Park Service identified “peopling places”—human population and change—as one of eight primary themes for preserving and interpreting American history. The Park Service has explored various aspects of this theme not only through interpretation at individual park units but also by connecting related sites through educational and research programs. For instance, the National Register of Historic Places’ program Teaching with Historic Places, which incorporates historic sites listed on the National Register into educational materials, has created lesson plans on such subjects as “Immigration,” “Pioneer America,” “Westward Expansion,” and several ethnic studies.

Yet with the importance of the peopling of America to our national history, we should examine if historic sites can be still better linked through resources such as educational materials and heritage tourism products to increase public awareness of these historic places and promote education on American history. Are there heritage tourism products available for people interested in this history, so they can visit sites related to the peopling of America? Are comprehensive lists of historic sites that interpret themes of immigration, migration and settlement available for people who wish to learn more about the places that tell this story?

We should also consider how sites significant to the peopling of America are identified and preserved. Even though there are over 77,000 listings on the National Register of Historic Places, sites associated with a broad range

of cultures are not well represented. Even designated sites can be in danger of being lost. Just five years ago, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the Angel Island Immigration Station, a National Historic Landmark often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West,” as one of “America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.” What about sites that have no designation? We need to identify where these gaps in historic preservation are and take steps to ensure that nationally significant sites are protected.

How do we identify important sites and establish their significance? What partnerships can be formed to preserve and interpret them? What is the role of the National Park Service in this historic preservation, and how are local, state and private entities also engaged in this work? These are valuable questions for us to ask as we examine how we can best preserve this part of our nation’s history.

Today we are pleased to hear from Dr. Janet Snyder Matthews, Associate Director for Cultural Resources for the National Park Service. I look forward to learning more about the Park Service’s sites and programs that help tell the story of the peopling of America, and discussing the Park Service’s continued role in preserving this important part of American history.

Private organizations and individuals have often been vital actors in preserving historic sites and structures. Today we are pleased to hear from witnesses who will discuss community efforts and interest in preserving the history of the peopling of America. We welcome Katherine Toy, the Executive Director of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation in San Francisco; Ellen von Karajan, Executive Director of the Society for Preservation of Federal Hill and Fell’s Point in Baltimore and a board member of the Baltimore Immigration Project; and Kathryn Wilson, the Director of Education and Interpretation at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Arnoldo Ramos, who works with cultural communities here in Washington, DC, was invited to testify but is ill and unable to attend the hearing today. He will be submitting a written statement for the record.

We thank everyone for joining us today for this important hearing.