

THE NEED FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH
IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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For a biographical sketch of Dr. Porter, the reader is referred to GUIDELINE, Protection section, p. 17 (Nov. 1963).

With libraries full of books on the Civil War, the American Revolution, Western History, and biographical accounts of our national heroes, why should it be necessary for the National Park Service to have a historical research program? The answer lies in the fact that the college professors and writers in history deal with the overall, general story of the battle or the man's life. To administer a historical building or historical area successfully and in line with public interest and enjoyment, the story must be related directly to the building and directly to the ground or battlefield terrain.

How many college professors have walked over the battlefield of Waterloo? Not many! The writer knows of only one professor who attempted to explore on foot the most probable routes taken by Hannibal in crossing the Alps. The tour of the field of Waterloo and the crossing of the Alps are a rare luxury for the college professor. Once or twice in a lifetime he may do this. In the National Park Service, this type of research is not a pastime or luxury, but a stark necessity; for it must be done if the historical park or building is to be preserved, restored, interpreted to the public with authenticity and administered efficiently. The books piled high on the library shelves spare the Park Historian the necessity of studying the general, overall story and he is grateful to Douglas Southall Freeman, to Bruce Catton and to others for their labors in this regard; but to answer the questions required in the park program for basic preservation and interpretation he must dig for new facts, detailed in nature and having practical application to park problems, such as assessing the park resources and making good use of them in the public interest.

A list of the principal categories of National Park Service historical research is appended below to illustrate the nature of the research data that the Service needs and which the Service itself must supply. The list will be of interest to all those interested in the administration of historical areas, Federal, State, local, or private. Useful hints on source materials to be used in obtaining needed information are given for some of the categories and may be helpful to some readers.

Principal Categories of National Park Service Historical Research

1. Research for purposes of survey is needed to determine the historical importance of proposed areas for possible inclusion in the National Park System or for purposes of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings and the Registered National Historic Landmarks Program. This is a high level type of research resulting in an evaluation, which forms the basis for the legal act of classification under the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (49 Stat. 666). It involves wide reading and comparative historical analysis for the purpose of making recommendations to the Advisory Board. Examples--any area, site or structure of the many thousands covered in the National Survey, or any theme study of the Survey, such as "Spanish Exploration and Settlement," "Development of the English Colonies," etc.
2. Research for locating and identifying historic areas, sites, or structures proposed for inclusion in the National Park System. This involves the study of early maps and documentary materials to locate an area on the ground, of which a classic instance is Arkansas Post. It may involve research abroad in foreign archives (Arkansas Post involved studies in both French and Spanish sources), and archeology may be essential to reach a final determination. In the case of identifying or authenticating the claims made for historic buildings, it may be necessary to trace land title records and study wills, diaries, Bible records, newspapers, gazetteers, maps, plans, etc., as well as printed sources. This type of research is always mandatory in determining desirable boundaries for proposed historical areas.
3. Research for Preliminary Analysis and Planning. This involves the detailed history of newly established areas or of long established ones that have not had adequate historian personnel to perform such a service. The purpose of this type of research is to analyze the historical resources of the area and their possible uses in development and interpretation. Good examples are Fort Mc Henry (which recently had such a program) and Harpers Ferry (now going on).
4. Historical Research for Interpretation. While many facts for purposes of interpretation are made available by the steps already enumerated (1, 2, and 3 above), further detailed research is usually necessary to supply basic historical data for superintendents, historians, guides, audio-interpretive devices like message repeaters, audiovisual machines, and for the writing of park literature, such as park leaflets to be distributed to visitors free, or brochures to be sold to visitors for moderate sums (Handbooks, Source Books, etc.). This kind of research is also needed to interpret archeological sites and buildings (such as the 17th Century Glasshouse site at Jamestown, or unusual historic structures such as the bake ovens at Hopewell, or hot shot furnaces at Fort Pulaski and Castillo de San Marcos).
5. Historical Research for Purposes of Development. Intensive historical research is needed to permit the accurate restoration or reconstruction of a historic building. Failure to do proper historical and archeological research can lead to endless embarrassment, such as the inaccurate restoration or reconstruction of an expensive building. Good research on the other hand can bring much praise, such as the fine reconstruction of the McLean House at Appomattox, and our recent restoration of the Assembly Room at Independence Hall. Currently, we are forced to study the feasibility of reconstructing Fort Caroline. Every phase of development requires previous research because construction work must be

done correctly the first time, since it is costly and sometimes impossible to make later changes. Similarly, historical research is needed for the writing of accurate informative statements for signs, markers, trailside markers, exhibits in place, and wayside exhibits.

6. Research for Protection. Research is not only needed in aid of many types of development, but is also needed to protect the historical area from adverse or unwise developments. For lack of such historical research, the Park Headquarters building at Guilford Courthouse was built in the area of heaviest fighting (i.e. in the sacred area); and the superintendent's residence at Yorktown was placed on the American line about where Washington fired the opening gun at the Siege of Yorktown. To prevent such blunders and to guide development in the interest of protecting historical values, the Master Plans of the historical areas must have historical base maps, troop position, and troop movement maps, which make clear what the area looked like in historical times and where important events took place. Such maps require years of intensive research into military records, insurance policies, historic prints and photographs, as well as maps, papers, and diaries of all sorts. Archeology may also be necessary to work out the exact location of fence lines, wells, roads, paths, etc., as at Appomattox Court House, which has a good historical base map on both historical and archeological data.
7. Research for Museum Development (Museum Story). Experience has shown that a museum plan of any scope or complexity can rarely be carried out successfully on the basis of ordinary studies made for purposes of park interpretation (No. 3 above). For instance, in the case of the museum for the Cumberland Gap Visitor Center and Museum, it suddenly became necessary to know the exact number and make-up of the Party of Dr. Thomas Walker who discovered and named the Gap in 1750, also the time of day and presumed weather at the moment of discovery. The Gettysburg dioramas involve data on the kind of weapons and dress of specific Union and Confederate regiments, correct likenesses of individuals concerned so far as possible, time of day and weather, ground cover, etc., details that the park historian or interpreter could hardly be expected to answer without special research. Every historical museum program raises a multitude of such historical questions that must be answered correctly. This is an exacting and time consuming task, often requiring highly skilled research ability.
8. Research for the Historical Identification of Museum and Other Historic Objects. One of the functions of the Branch of History is the identification and dating of historic objects, some of which are found in the historical areas by the archeologists. (Jamestown has millions of objects and fragments of historic objects waiting to be identified.) When properly identified and dated, they become valuable historical resources for the interpretive program or the museum, such as the oldest piece of pewter made in America and the sword and armor pieces found at Jamestown. Sometimes the problem relates to museum objects that are given or offered to the Service, such as the Renaissance jewelry and rare books bought with the Bennett Fund (individual pieces cost thousands of dollars) and the large Walker painting of General Hooker and his men at Lookout Mountain, which was offered to the Service and accepted (value about \$30,000).
9. Research for Historic House Furnishings. The problem of furnishing a historic house requires research into what furniture was actually used in the house in historic times. The Park Service wants to acquire, if possible, the original furnishings; the use of period furniture and bought

antiques is permissible only as a last resort. This necessitates historical studies of wills, inventories, diaries, letters, family papers, photographs, insurance policies, account books, newspapers, auction catalogs, and books to determine what furniture was in the house in historic times, what the pieces looked like, and who inherited them. The National Park Service has done this type of research completely for only one of its many historic houses—The Custis-Lee Mansion. The studies of Dr. Murray Nelligan and Miss Agnes Downey have been basic to the refurnishing of this house with authentic pieces acquired from the estate of Mrs. Robert E. Lee, III, and others. In this case, the historical research of the Service has had rich rewards. Another case in point was the purchase of the George Washington Revolutionary War tents, which we were able to authenticate by a complete chain of title going back to George Washington, largely through the Custis-Lee Mansion studies.

10. Research for the Management of Historical Areas. Visitors use studies and related visitor reaction studies are necessary from time to time to understand what the visitor wants or needs and to gauge the degree of success or adequacy of the Service programs in historical areas. Such studies can also help to preserve the area and its significant historical features from overuse or other damage. The Cotter Report on "Field Observations of Visitor needs and Interpretive Methods at Fort McHenry" lead to important improvements in handling visitors.

11. Administrative History. Narrative histories of all the areas included in the National Park System, be they historical, archeological, scenic or scientific need to be undertaken in order that the public may know by whom any given park was established, what principles of preservation were uppermost in the minds of the founders, what purposes were intended to be served, what groups, or societies, or individuals can be depended on to work for the park's betterment, what big undertakings or policies in the past have been undertaken and with what results, etc. In other words the history of the park and the experience of the park administrative staff in the past can be an invaluable aid to good and efficient administration in the future. Typical examples of this valuable work are the histories of the Statue of Liberty, Mammoth Cave, and Mount McKinley.

The Professional execution of these eleven kinds of historical research is a heavy responsibility upon which much of the success of the historical conservation program of the Service depends.

