



Foundation Document Overview

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site

Washington, D.C.



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of FORD'S THEATRE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve the setting and interpret the assassination and death of President Abraham Lincoln in April 1865.



Significance



Significance statements express why Ford's Theatre National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **First Presidential Assassination.** Ford's Theatre is the site of the first assassination of an American president.
- **Key Event of the Civil War.** The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln was a key event in the Civil War era.
- **The Petersen House.** The federal government purchased the Petersen House in 1896 to commemorate and preserve the site where President Lincoln died. It is the first home bought by the federal government to be operated as a museum and interpretive site.
- **A Working Theatre.** After the restoration to its 1865 appearance, Ford's Theatre was reestablished as a working theatre in 1968 in recognition of President Lincoln's love of the performing arts.
- **Presidential Line of Succession.** The events at the Petersen House surrounding President Lincoln's assassination led to the development of the presidential line of succession and continuity of office.
- **Artifacts and Evidence of the Assassination.** Ford's Theatre National Historic Site manages and interprets the most extensive collection of artifacts associated with the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Authenticity and sense of place experienced at Ford's Theatre and Petersen House**
- **The Recreated 1865 Theatre Interior**
- **Museum Collections and Archives**
- **Commemoration of President Lincoln**
- **Survival of our Democracy**
- **Ford's Theatre Society Partnership**
- **Live Performance**



Ford's Theatre National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **10th Street Landscape and Viewshed**
- **Baptist Alley and Booth's Escape Route**
- **Archeology at the site**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park— they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The causes behind the assassination of Abraham Lincoln were many and varied, and are still meaningful today.
- Lincoln's assassination and death had far-reaching and profound consequences.
- Lincoln's love for the performing arts provides insight as to why Ford's Theatre became the backdrop for the assassination, and why the physical site is still relevant today.
- The Lincoln assassination created political, social, and personal crises that found their geographical focal point at the Petersen House.
- During the presidency of Abraham Lincoln and the time of the Civil War, the city of Washington and the nation underwent profound changes.



Description

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site includes the Ford's Theatre restored to its 1865 appearance, the Petersen House (also known as The House Where Lincoln Died), and the Lincoln Museum collection (exhibited in the basement of Ford's Theatre) and other associated artifacts.

While attending a performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre, President Abraham Lincoln became the first American president to be assassinated. On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth, southern sympathizer, shot President Lincoln in the presidential theatre box. President Lincoln was carried across the street to the Petersen House where every effort was made to comfort him during his final hours. Members of the president's cabinet, family, and friends rallied around his side. The Petersen House became a focal point for the federal government during this national catastrophe. Meanwhile, having fled through Baptist Alley at the back of the theatre, Booth was on the run, and the manhunt for the president's assassin and his conspirators began. On April 15, 1865, President Lincoln died at the Petersen House and the mood of the nation shifted from celebrating the end of the Civil War to one of national mourning.

As early as 1946, public and congressional efforts to restore Ford's Theatre to its appearance on April 14, 1865, began to emerge. As support grew, funding for the project was secured and Ford's Theatre closed its doors on November 29, 1964, as a full restoration project began. Over the next three years, extensive historic research and documentation were used to painstakingly restore Ford's Theatre, its interior, and the presidential theatre box to the condition during President Lincoln's time. In partnership with the Ford's Theatre Society, founded in 1967 by Frankie Hewitt, Ford's Theatre reopened its doors as a working theatre and historic site on January 30, 1968. Over the years, the Ford's Theatre Society has brought live theatre and performances to Ford's Theatre through their partnership with the National Park Service. With the support of this partnership, further renovations were undertaken in 2007, including the addition of new exhibit and display space in the basement of the theatre and improved accessibility and educational opportunities. The theatre reopened on February 12, 2009, the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth.

