



Foundation Document Overview

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia



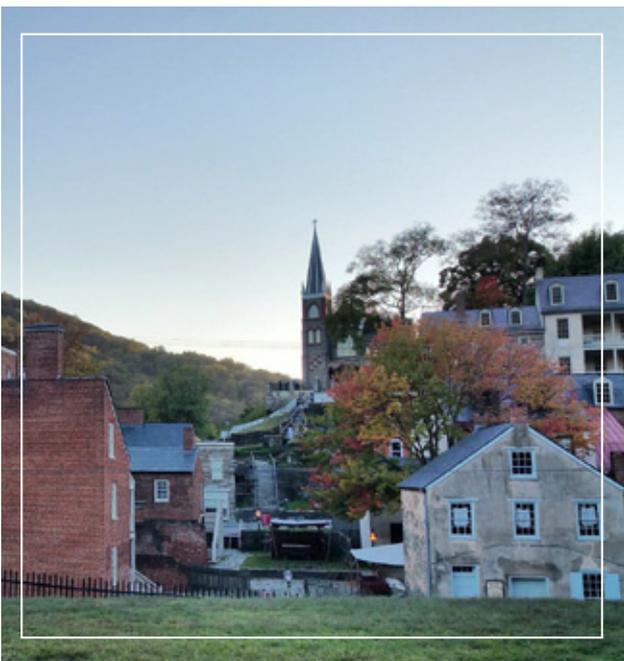
Contact Information

For more information about the *Harpers Ferry National Historical Park*, contact: hafe_superintendent@nps.gov or 304-535-6029 or write to: Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, P.O. Box 65 Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

Purpose



To preserve HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK for the benefit and enjoyment of the people as a public national memorial, commemorating historical events that occurred at or near Harpers Ferry.



Significance

Significance statements express why Harpers Ferry National Historical Park 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.

- The geography of the Harpers Ferry area, including the mountain gap at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, made this a key crossroads from the times of the earliest human habitation to the present. The view of the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, considered by Thomas Jefferson as “perhaps one of the most stupendous in nature” and “worth a voyage across the Atlantic,” continues to inspire people today.
- George Washington designated Harpers Ferry as the second national armory in 1796 to manufacture firearms for the defense of the United States, making Harpers Ferry a stage for many significant events in American history, including outfitting Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery expedition in 1803.
- The armory at Harpers Ferry became a center for technological innovations where new ideas about the interchangeability of manufactured parts were tried and tested in the armory workshops, and the successful introduction of large-scale manufacturing transformed Harpers Ferry from a quiet, rural village to one of the leading industrial centers of its day.
- Harpers Ferry preserves the site of John Brown’s Raid of 1859, an epic event in opposition to slavery, which helped precipitate the Civil War.
- On the border between North and South, Harpers Ferry changed hands eight times during the Civil War. Control of this strategic location—a gateway into the Shenandoah Valley and a backdoor to Washington, DC—resulted in five battles being fought at Harpers Ferry in three successive years.
- The largest surrender of US troops during the Civil War occurred at Harpers Ferry in September 1862, when Stonewall Jackson captured nearly 12,700 Union forces at the largest battle in present-day West Virginia.
- Storer College, established in Harpers Ferry in 1867 as a school primarily for former slaves, was one of the first institutions of integrated higher learning in the United States that was open to all applicants, regardless of race or gender, providing educational opportunities to formerly enslaved people during the Reconstruction era and beyond.
- Storer College was the site of the second Niagara Movement Convention in 1906, where W. E. B. Du Bois presented a progressive philosophy and strategy for civil rights. The conventions led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.

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.

- **Historic Structures**
- **Cultural Landscapes**
- **Archeological Resources**
- **Museum Collections**
- **Natural Communities**
- **Views and Vistas**
- **Connections with the Harpers Ferry and Bolivar Communities**
- **Monuments and Memorials**

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park 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.

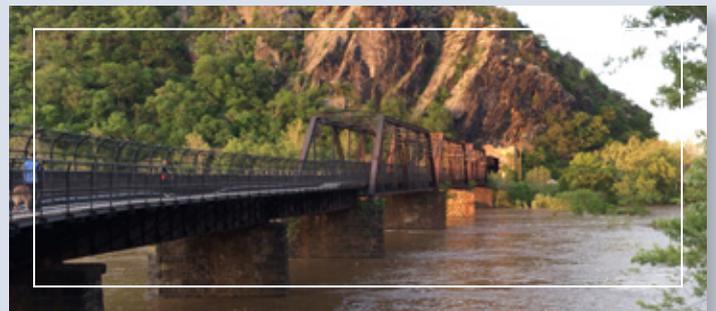
- **Appropriate Recreation**
- **Nexus of National Trails**
- **Opportunities for Recreation**



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 physical and historical geography of the Harpers Ferry area demonstrates how landscapes shape human history and how human endeavors profoundly affect natural landscapes—a powerful reminder that the actions of today determine the opportunities of tomorrow.
- The Harpers Ferry Armory played an important role in the production process of interchangeable parts in arms manufacturing, intensifying the ongoing dialogue concerning the costs and benefits of technological innovation.
- The story of the cataclysmic impact of John Brown's Raid, followed by the intense and pervasive effects of the Civil War on the community of Harpers Ferry and the nation, can provide myriad insights into the violent, transformative reality of war.
- The social history of Harpers Ferry chronicles critical milestones and issues in the continuing struggle to achieve the evolving American ideals of freedom, education, and equality for African Americans.
- The history of Harpers Ferry weaves together common threads in the tapestry of 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century America, offering a deeper understanding into the great American experiment and providing important contexts for the challenges and opportunities facing the United States today.
- The dynamic natural environment of Harpers Ferry—its night skies, natural sounds, water quality, ecosystems, habitats, and viewsheds—can be a mirror in which people examine their own place in the natural world. By highlighting actions the National Park Service takes to reduce the impacts of its operations on the environment, the park can emphasize resource stewardship and conservation values.



Description

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park lies at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, where the states of West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland converge. This confluence of the two rivers cuts a gap through the Blue Ridge Mountains, as the Potomac River continues its voyage to the Chesapeake Bay. Located at the point of a peninsula formed by these two rivers, Lower Town is the historic center of Harpers Ferry. Harpers Ferry National Historical Park was established primarily to preserve historic resources and to commemorate the historic events that occurred at and around Harpers Ferry.

Harpers Ferry National Monument was authorized by Congress in 1944 (Public Law [PL] 78-386). The name was changed to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in 1963. Today, the national historical park contains 3,745 acres, primarily in West Virginia, with additional lands in Maryland and Virginia.

During its earliest period, Harpers Ferry was an important manufacturing and commercial town, using the two rivers for water power and transportation. George Washington recommended a federal armory be located at Harpers Ferry, and the Congress authorized the armory on June 15, 1796. When production began in 1801, it became the nation's second federal armory. By the 1850s, Harpers Ferry was militarily significant because of the US Armory and Arsenal; geographically significant due to the Baltimore and Ohio (B & O) Railroad and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal transportation networks.

In 1859, Harpers Ferry was the scene of the electrifying John Brown Raid, a critical event in the months leading up to the Civil War. Strategically important, due to its location at the gateway into the Shenandoah Valley, Harpers Ferry changed hands eight times during the war. Stonewall Jackson's capture of the Union garrison at Harpers Ferry in September 1862, along with nearly 12,700 US soldiers, set the stage for the great battle at Antietam Creek that ended the South's first invasion of the North. It was the largest number of Union soldiers to surrender during the Civil War.

The Union army quickly reoccupied Harpers Ferry, and in 1862–1864 converted the position into a fortress with strong field fortifications on the summits of Bolivar Heights, Loudoun Heights, and Maryland Heights overlooking the town. In July 1864, the Union army repelled an attack at Harpers Ferry by Lieutenant General Jubal Early's Confederate army. The four-day operation, and the later battle at Monocacy Junction, delayed the Confederate army long enough to allow the Union army to reinforce Washington, DC, and ward off its capture.

From August 1864 to December 1864, Harpers Ferry served as the main base of operations and chief supply depot for Major General Philip S. Sheridan's Union army during the final campaign in the war-torn Shenandoah Valley. Sheridan successfully destroyed Early's army and conquered the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, helping to lead to the Union's victory in the Civil War.

By the end of the Civil War, Harpers Ferry was a ghost of the former town. Mills on Virginus Island and the US arms manufacturing plants on Lower Hall's Island along the Shenandoah and in the Musket Factory yard along the Potomac River were largely destroyed. The US government decided not to rebuild the armory at Harpers Ferry and to dispose of the lands and ruined buildings. Harpers Ferry never fully recovered its industrial importance due to these decisions.

The final events of national significance at Harpers Ferry occurred during the period of 1865–1955 and were connected to civil rights, black history, education, and the Niagara Movement. These events were related to the founding and operation of Storer College. Established through the efforts of the US Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, popularly known as the Freedmen's Bureau, the Freewill Baptist denomination, and a New England philanthropist named John Storer, the school was one of the first to provide education for freed slaves. It was chartered as an integrated institution, a symbol of freedom through education, and

a symbol of what John Brown had hoped to achieve. Among the first trustees was Frederick Douglass. It was the location of the second conference of the Niagara Movement in 1906, an event where W. E. B. Du Bois demanded equality and civil rights in his *Address to the Country*, and where the foundation was established for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Today the national historical park consists of portions of the Lower Town, the former Storer College campus, landscapes associated with the national historical park's Civil War significance, and lands preserving the historic viewshed down the Potomac River.

