



Foundation Document Overview

Longfellow House – Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site
Massachusetts



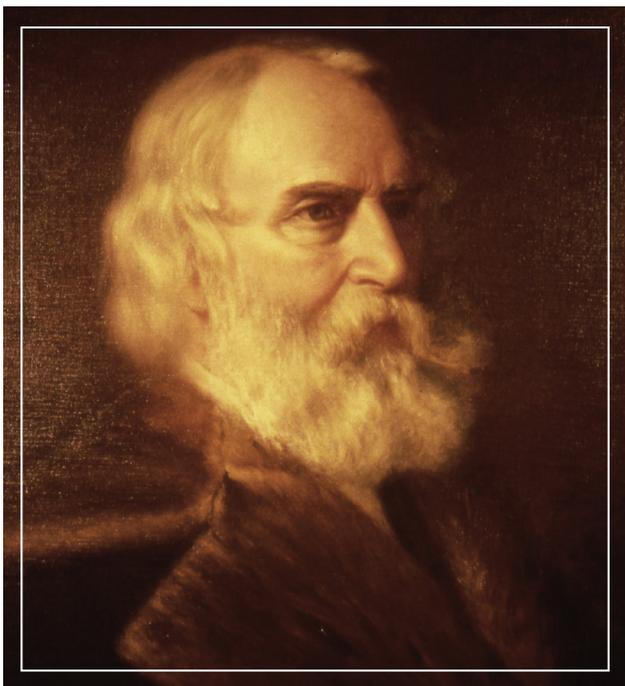
Contact Information

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Purpose



LONGFELLOW HOUSE – WASHINGTON’S HEADQUARTERS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves the Georgian house that served as headquarters for General George Washington during the Siege of Boston and later became home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of America’s foremost 19th-century poets.



Significance

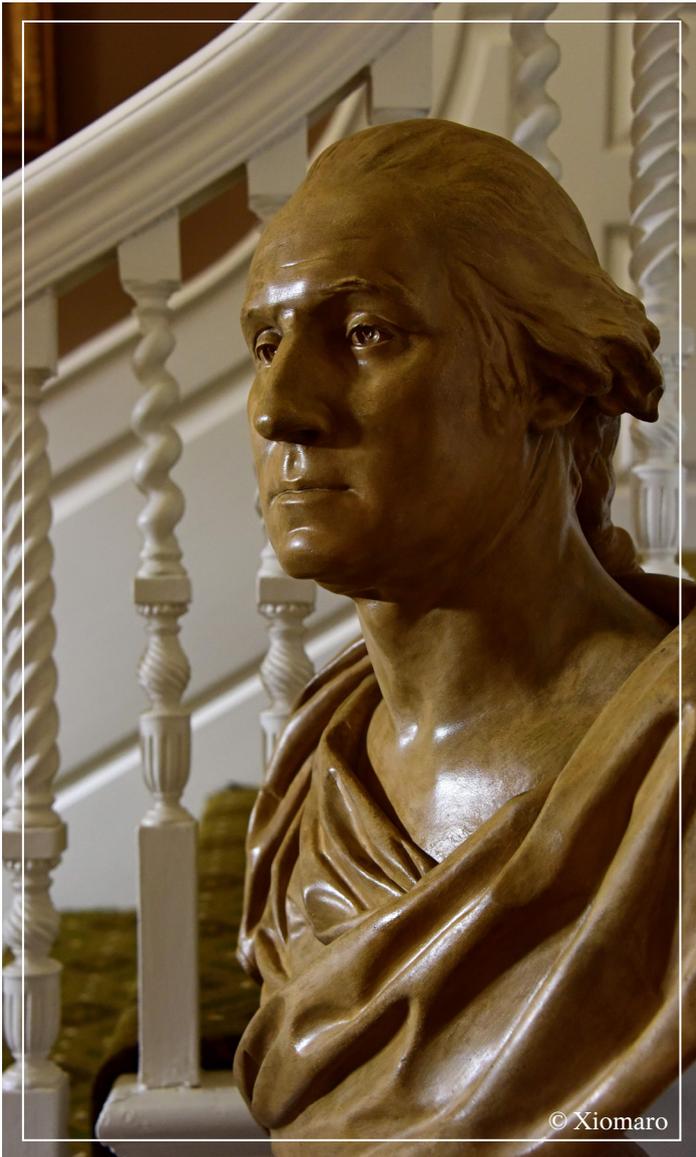
Significance statements express why Longfellow House – Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. 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.

- The 1759 house of John Vassall was funded by wealth produced by the British Atlantic World of trade and commerce and, during the Powder Alarm of September 1774, was visited by the colonial insurgency that preceded the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.
- The house served as General George Washington’s headquarters and home from July 1775 to April 1776, from which he organized the Continental Army and oversaw the plan that resulted in the British evacuation of Boston. His experiences here significantly shaped him as a military and political leader.
- Longfellow’s writings and poetry, composed mostly in the house, contributed to the development of a uniquely American literature and made him one of the earliest American cultural celebrities. His fame and intellectual cachet positioned Henry and wife Fanny to interact with and host many significant domestic and international political, cultural, and literary figures of the time.
- Longfellow House – Washington’s Headquarters is an outstanding example of Georgian architecture that later became an icon of the Colonial Revival movement and was widely depicted in popular images and imitated in residential architecture across the country. The original 1759 house, along with its associated carriage house, formal garden, and grounds, possesses a high degree of integrity exemplifying colonial architecture as well as 19th and early 20th century landscape design characteristics.
- Longfellow House – Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site possesses a rich and varied collection of museum objects and archival materials that provide extraordinary depth and context for understanding the Longfellow, Dana, Wadsworth, and Appleton families and the historical periods and culture in which they lived.

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.

- **Longfellow House – Washington’s Headquarters**
- **Cultural Landscape**
- **Longfellow Museum Collections and Archives**
- **Carriage House**



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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.

- **Colonial History.** John Vassall and his neighbors were a community at odds with their immediate surroundings, and their decision to evacuate following the Powder Alarm of 1774 shows the tumultuous and uncertain nature of political disagreements preceding the American Revolution.
- **George Washington.** At his Cambridge headquarters, General George Washington made important decisions that led to the successful conclusion of the Siege of Boston and the creation of a national fighting force, and his experiences stimulated personal growth, transforming him into the key figure of early American history.
- **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.** Longfellow played a key role in creating an American literary tradition, publishing works that synthesized American history and environment with international traditions, engaging deeply with his peers, and becoming one of the nation’s earliest celebrity figures.
- **Slavery.** The institution of slavery and the history of the house are intertwined physically, financially, and philosophically, from the earliest years when enslaved people worked throughout the estate until the Longfellow family’s involvement in the antislavery movement and the Civil War.
- **Family.** Through their involvement in social and political movements, succeeding generations of the Longfellow family reacted to and helped shape a society undergoing rapid change.
- **Architecture.** The colonial Georgian mansion’s architecture embodies Americans’ evolving ideas of self, beginning with its construction as a statement of British identity, through its adoption as an icon of the Colonial Revival style, and then in its continued preservation as a national historic site.

Description

“He who undertaketh a great house undertaketh a great care!”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow recorded these words in his journal shortly after becoming owner of his “great house” in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was 1844, and Longfellow was enjoying some success as an up-and-coming poet and professor of modern languages at nearby Harvard College. He had recently married Fanny Appleton, and one of their wedding gifts was this gracious house.

They were well-acquainted with their home’s role in the American Revolution. The mansion, built in 1759, was the home and headquarters of George Washington during the Siege of Boston. Here he welcomed his wife Martha, received a host of dignitaries and fellow patriots, plotted strategy with his generals, made decisions about army policy, procedures, and commanders, and, eventually, celebrated the evacuation of the British army. Most importantly, Washington stepped onto a national stage for the first time and began earning the reputation that made him the key nationalizing figure of early American history. His experiences here shaped him for the rest of his life.

The Longfellows filled their new abode with treasures from their travels, illustrating their interests in art, literature, and history. They had six children, and their home was a welcoming place for family and friends along with writers, artists, and politicians from around the world. Inspired by and grounded in this treasured home, Longfellow produced much of his highly regarded poetry and literary translations.

Following Longfellow’s death, his children and extended family preserved the house via a trust before donating it to the National Park Service in 1972. In 2010, the park’s name was officially changed to Longfellow House–Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site.

Today, Longfellow House –Washington’s Headquarters is a premier example of Georgian architecture. With its preserved view of the Charles River, it is considered the best remaining “Tory Row” mansion on Brattle Street in Cambridge. Filled with furniture, artwork, books, ceramics, and an extensive archive, the house reflects the Longfellow family’s wide-ranging interests and pursuits.

Surrounding the house is a 1.98-acre landscape that is the core of the much larger 1759 estate. In the early 1900s, noted landscape architects Martha Brooks Hutcheson and Ellen Biddle Shipman took aspects of Henry Longfellow’s garden and created the current Colonial Revival design, which was restored in the early 2000s. The carriage house is now used for programs and meetings.

The National Park Service manages and interprets the home today, welcoming visitors to explore the legacy of its occupants through its stories, collections, arts, library, architecture, and grounds. The park is open for general visitation May through October and offers education programs and special events the rest of the year. Researchers are able to study objects, photographs, journals, and other papers in the collections and archives by appointment. Annually, 40,000 to 50,000 visitors enjoy the site’s peaceful grounds, architectural aesthetics, compelling history, and vibrant programming.

