



Foundation Document Overview

Natchez National Historical Park

Mississippi



Contact Information

For more information about the *Natchez National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: natc_superintendent@nps.gov or 601-442-7047 or write to: Superintendent, 640 South Canal Street, Box E, Natchez, MS 39120

Purpose



The purpose of NACHEZ NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve and interpret the complex history and material culture of all the peoples of Natchez, Mississippi, emphasizing European settlement, African enslavement, the American cotton economy, and the Civil Rights struggle on the lower Mississippi River.



Significance

Significance statements express why Natchez 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.

1. Woven into the historic fabric of Natchez, Mississippi, Natchez National Historical Park provides an opportunity to explore the world of the antebellum cotton economy on the Lower Mississippi River, a culture derived from a slave-based plantation system that generated a concentration of wealth and power unparalleled among other American cities at that time.
2. Natchez National Historical Park provides a connection to the world of the enslaved people of African descent who were sold by the thousands at the Forks of the Road slave market, fought for their freedom in the Civil War, and assumed prominent positions as political leaders during Reconstruction, including the first African American to sit in either house of the U. S. Congress.
3. Melrose is one of the great houses of the American South, distinguished by its Greek Revival architecture, original furnishings, decorative arts, landscape, and outbuildings. It is a tangible link to the Southern planter class and the enslaved people who lived and worked on the estate.
4. Natchez National Historical Park preserves an exceptionally comprehensive museum collection of well documented decorative arts, historic objects, original furnishings, archaeological artifacts, and archives that serve as primary source material on the history of Natchez.
5. The William Johnson House provides a window into the life of a free man of color whose published diary and personal papers provide a detailed account of daily life in the antebellum south.
6. Established by the French in 1716, Fort Rosalie was the earliest European settlement on the lower Mississippi River; the French, Spanish, British, and Americans who occupied it considered it a strategic location in their quest for control of the lower Mississippi River.

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.

Melrose - Melrose is an intact antebellum estate whose main house and surrounding cultural landscape remain largely unchanged. Key structures on this cultural landscape include the main house, kitchen building, dairy, two slave quarters, carriage house, and barn. The formal garden, vegetable garden, orchards, pastures, and fields as well as the main entrance and pathways all contribute to the cultural landscape of Melrose as a resource. As a whole, Melrose and its landscape present a comprehensive picture of the Southern planter class and the enslaved people who lived and worked there.

William Johnson House - The William Johnson House connects visitors with the life of a free man of color and his family during the antebellum era. Guided by Johnson's personal papers and published diary, as well as information provided by his descendants, the park has created a historically accurate interpretation of the site. Today, the insightful and engaging exhibits and many original furnishings in the house enable visitors to make meaningful connections to the William Johnson story.

Fort Rosalie Site - In 1716, the French constructed Fort Rosalie, the earliest European settlement in what is now Natchez, Mississippi. Archaeological investigations at the site have provided valuable data on not only the early French settlement but the subsequent British, Spanish, and American occupations. The 200-foot bluff at the Fort Rosalie site provides an expansive view upstream and downstream of the Mississippi River, the vast artery cutting through the center

of North America that was used to bring goods and people, including slaves, and to ship cotton out to the world.

Museum Collections - Natchez National Historical Park contains an exceptionally important museum collection, an assemblage of decorative arts, historic objects, personal papers, and archives intrinsically tied to the various sites. The collection's direct connection to Melrose, the William Johnson House, and the Fort Rosalie site allow for interpretation based on accurate historical evidence, fostering an authentic experience for visitors.

Connections to the Natchez Historic District and Community - Natchez National Historical Park is deeply rooted in the City of Natchez, Mississippi, a community containing 8 National Register of Historic Places districts, 13 national historic landmarks, and the UNESCO-recognized Forks of the Road slave market site. Through its various relationships and partnerships with local and state agencies, the park plays a pivotal role in the interconnected preservation landscape, as well as regional education and interpretive efforts.



Other Important Resources and Values

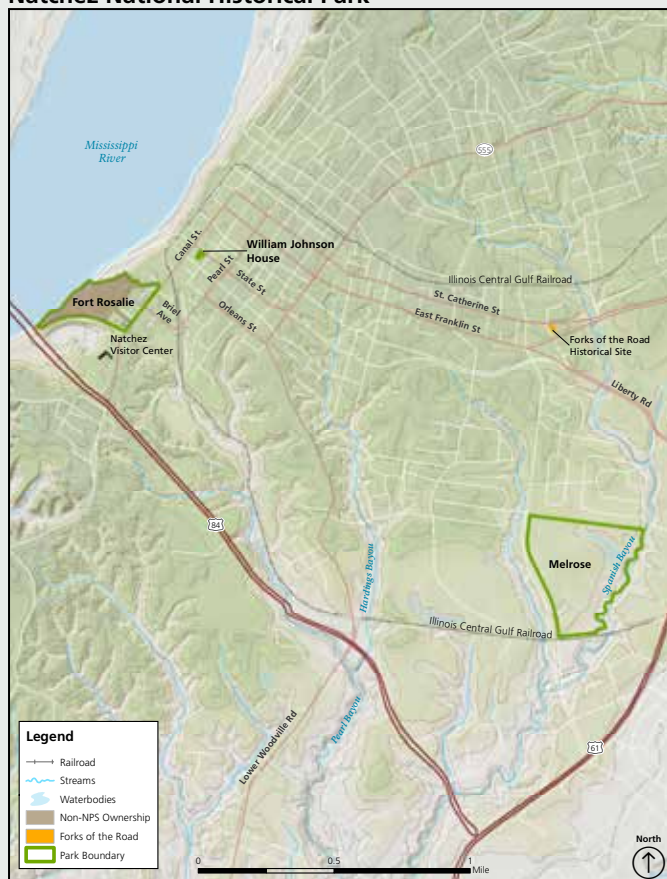
Natchez National Historical Park may contain other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

Old Fort Rosalie Gift Shop - Located near the original site of Fort Rosalie, the log cabin is the last remaining building of a fort-related Natchez tourist attraction built in the late 1930s.

Stietenroth House - The Stietenroth House is the last of a number of Victorian-era houses that once lined South Canal Street. Once restored, it will serve as the primary visitor contact center for Fort Rosalie.

Heritage Gardens and Gardening at Melrose - The Melrose cultural landscape includes existing formal gardens as well as the location of former vegetables plots and orchards, which provide an interactive gardening experience. These outdoor classrooms support both educational and research opportunities, engaging youth and adults in a wide range of interpretive programs.

Natchez National Historical Park



Description

Natchez National Historical Park was established by Congress by Public Law 100-479 (October 7, 1988) to preserve and interpret the history of Natchez, Mississippi. Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, the City of Natchez is in southwestern Mississippi, approximately 100 miles southwest of Jackson (the state capital), 70 miles south of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and 90 miles north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Natchez National Historical Park tells the story of Natchez in the American South. The park protects the sites and structures associated with the peoples of Natchez and its surrounding area from earliest inhabitants to the modern era. The name Natchez is derived from the “Natchez” American Indians who inhabited the area at the time of European exploration. The historic sites maintained by the park, and the surrounding preservation district, give visitors an opportunity to understand the region’s social, political, and economic development, particularly in the pre- and post-Civil War eras. They also provide insights into the region’s commercial and agricultural history, especially in relation to the Mississippi River, slavery, and cotton. Cotton planters in Natchez and the surrounding area relied on slave labor to make their businesses highly profitable. With those profits they built palatial columned mansions in the area, many of which remain today.

The integrity of the City of Natchez and the NPS properties attracts a large number of visitors who are seeking to experience a historic landscape that is, in many ways, unchanged from the antebellum period. Natchez National Historical Park saw almost 200,000 visitors in 2012, with visitation peaking during the annual Spring Pilgrimage, a four-week event of historic house tours. Since 1932, the annual Spring Pilgrimage has grown into a four-week historic house tour that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors. Visitors are able to tour dozens of historic properties and house museums. The long-standing preservation efforts by the community of Natchez provide the backdrop for an authentic visitor experience. Working in partnership with the local community is an essential element to maintaining the historic context and setting of the Natchez National Historical Park.

