



Foundation Document Overview

Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site

Massachusetts



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of SAUGUS IRON WORKS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve and interpret the reconstructed Hammersmith site and resources associated with the first sustained, integrated ironworks in British Colonial America, which operated on the Saugus River from 1646 to approximately 1670.

Significance

Significance statements express why Saugus Iron Works 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 1646 Saugus Iron Works provided crucial iron commodities to the young colony and served as a training ground for skilled ironworkers, who established ironworks ventures throughout the northeast, laying the foundation of the U.S. iron and steel industry. Financed by British investors, Hammersmith was an integral part of the British Atlantic economy and a critical step in the development of the emerging U.S. economy.
- Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site is a prominent example of the Colonial Revival Movement, historic preservation, and historical archeology in the first half of the 20th century. Beginning with Wallace Nutting's preservation of the Iron Works House, and followed by the First Iron Works Association, the park memorializes the earliest successful integrated iron works in the country by reconstructing many of the buildings integral to its operation.



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 Buildings and Structures**
- **Archeological Resources**
- **Cultural Landscapes**
- **Museum Collections**
- **Immersive Sensory Experience – 17th-Century Iron Making**

Saugus Iron Works 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.

- **Saugus Iron Works Nature Trail (national recreation trail)**
- **Natural Resources**

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 Birth of the American Iron and Steel Industry and the Transfer of Iron-Making Skills.**
- **Industrial Impacts on Physical, Social, and Economic Relationships with the Environment.**
- **Hammersmith Remembered: Archeology and Preservation as Reflected by the First Iron Works Association’s “Restoration.”**
- **Understanding American Social Characteristics (Class, Race, Ethnicity, Religion).**

Description

Saugus Iron Works is a reconstruction of Hammersmith, the first successful, sustained, and integrated iron works in British North America. The reconstruction is based on extensive archeological excavations undertaken in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was probably the most extensive industrial plant built in North America in the 17th century. In 1646, Hammersmith was established by a group of English investors (including Governor John Winthrop's son) known as the Company of Undertakers of the Iron Works in New England. Hammersmith produced cast and wrought iron for sale in the colony, as well as nail rod in the slitting mill (a watermill for making iron rods), one of only about a dozen such factories in the world at that time. Hammersmith had economic problems and in 1653 the courts ordered it seized to satisfy its debts. The blast furnace was operated well into the 1660s, although some iron work continued at the site afterward. After Hammersmith no longer operated, the Saugus River hosted other watermills and prospered into one of New England's industrial zones. Much of Hammersmith's original 600-acre property, then known as the Iron Works Farm, was used for agriculture until historic preservationist Wallace Nutting restored the Iron Works House from 1915 to 1917. Nutting used the house as a "show house" (called Broadhearth) for Colonial Revival furniture and as a photography setting for colonial vignettes. The potential relocation of the Iron Works House to Dearborn, Michigan, as part of Henry Ford's historic building museum led to local preservation efforts and a greater recognition of the significance of the site at the national level. With financial backing of the American Iron and Steel Institute, a newly established First Iron Works Association hired Roland Robbins to conduct archeological explorations of the site between 1948 and 1953. Robbins' fieldwork led to a reconstruction of the blast furnace and forge, and estimated location of a slitting mill. The reconstruction was dedicated in September 1954 and operated as an independent historic site until donated to the National Park Service in July 1969.

Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site, which encompasses 12.58 acres (of Hammersmith's original 600 acres from the 17th century), evokes the character of a working, water-powered, iron-making plant from the early Massachusetts Bay Colony. Visitors tour three mill buildings where an elaborate system of waterwheels and sluiceways powers 17th-century engineered mechanical equipment, demonstrating the core operations of Hammersmith. The site includes the reconstructed blast furnace, forge, slitting mill, and warehouse, together with the original slag pile and several post-Hammersmith era structures (i.e., Iron Works House, museum, visitor contact station, blacksmith shop, maintenance buildings, and 1940s residences). Visitation in 2018 was 10,660.

In 1998, Saugus Iron Works was administratively "re-connected" with Salem Maritime National Historic Site after independent management from the mid-1970s. Saugus Iron Works has a number of partners including Essex National Heritage Area and Saugus River Watershed Council.

