



Foundation Document Overview

Steamtown National Historic Site

Pennsylvania



Contact Information

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Purpose



STEAMTOWN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE was established to preserve, interpret, and protect the history of steam railroading in America including the historic railroad yard, collections, technical knowledge, and skills that further the public understanding of the impact of steam railroading on U.S. industry, commerce, and society.



Significance

Significance statements express why Steamtown 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 unprecedented scale and integration of anthracite mining, iron ore manufacturing, and railroad development in the Lackawanna Valley made the region a hub for innovations in technology, industrial institutions, labor, and city planning in 19th-century America.
- The advent of the steam engine and associated technological advances had an unparalleled influence on industrialization, setting into motion the biggest leap in transportation technology in history. Steam locomotives facilitated the movement of freight and people across the United States, transforming the nation into a modern industrial and commercial power.
- Steam railroading profoundly affected global and national cultural norms, fundamentally shifting human perceptions of time, distance, and possibilities in everyday life. Steamtown National Historic Site is reflective of this nationally significant phenomenon.
- The collections at Steamtown National Historic Site, including the diversity of rolling stock, represent steam-era railroading in the United States with a high degree of integrity and completeness.
- The historic maintenance shop allows for the preservation and application of the skills, techniques, and traditional crafts of the railroad industry required for maintenance and preservation of a full range of rolling stock, keeping alive early 20th century technical skills through practical application and live demonstrations.

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.

- **Cultural Landscape of the Railroad Yard**
- **Rolling Stock Collection**
- **Practicing Traditional and Historic Craft Skills**
- **Museum and Archival Collections**

Steamtown 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.

- **Live Steam Experience**
- **Library**



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.

- **Steam Railroading.** Steam railroading technology influenced the development of America, its resources, and its people.
- **Industrialization: Context, Connections, and Interdependence.** Steam railroading operated within a larger context and network of interconnected, associated, and auxiliary industries and services that built, supported, and served it, and together these businesses fueled an industrial and commercial era that in its heyday contributed to growth and prosperity, and in decline challenged a nation's economic foundation.
- **Cultural Influence.** Steam railroading fundamentally shifted how people across the world thought, connected, and interacted with their world.



Description

Steamtown National Historic Site encompasses 62 acres in downtown Scranton, Pennsylvania, at the confluence of six major historic anthracite railroads. Legislation designated the historic site on lands formerly comprised by the Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad yard. Most of the original assemblage of steam locomotives, cars, and railroad equipment originated as the Steamtown USA collection, amassed by millionaire F. Nelson Blount. Blount created the nonprofit Steamtown Foundation to operate the collection, originally located in Vermont.

In 1984, the foundation moved Steamtown USA to Scranton, Pennsylvania, a transfer that was partially funded by the city and envisioned as an urban redevelopment project. Today, the site includes land, the railyard, historic roundhouse, turntable, switchyard, a locomotive repair shop, extensive collections, and associated buildings, track, and equipment. The site's larger context within this region where 80% of the world's anthracite coal was extracted, intimately ties the railroad industry to the anthracite mining and iron ore manufacturing industries, which facilitated its unprecedented growth. The achievements and advancements of the burgeoning railroading industry in this region were not without human and environmental costs, setting the stage for some of the greatest battles between capitalism and social and environmental responsibility.

Steamtown National Historic Site has become a living manifestation of the history, technology, craft, and culture epitomizing the steam era. Visitors can immerse themselves in the historic roundhouse, switchyard, and associated buildings, track, and equipment. From locomotives, freight cars, and passenger cars, to the equipment used to maintain all walks of railroad life, the park features one of the most diverse collections of historic railroad material in the United States, providing critical context for the impact this region had on society and the legacy that is built upon today.

The extensive and diverse historic collections of the park and the expansive craft and skill of on-site experienced railroad technicians, offer opportunities for visitors at Steamtown National Historic Site to experience a piece of industrial-era living history. Every sense is invited to participate, whether it is the unforgettable smell of smoke and steam, the core-shaking rumble of a passing engine, the iconic sound of a train whistle, or the feeling of tracks flying by as you are transported by short train rides in the railyard or longer train excursions through this historic region. A large percentage of the archival collection has been made digitally available to the public, making Steamtown National Historic Site function as a public asset beyond the confines of the park boundary and into a historic resource for enthusiasts around the world.

The operation of the live railyard at Steamtown National Historic Site transcends the experience of passive onlookers to one of active understanding and appreciation of each operational component. The motion of a functioning turntable, the sight of machines and shop tools wielded by talented craftsmen and craftswomen, and observing the operation of a live freight line provide a sense of immersion in the history of the steam era. Visitor surveys conducted in 2012 found that the park received visitors from 30 states, 65% of which were first-time visitors. Visitation increased 20% from 2014 to 2015.

