

# Paterson Great Falls

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



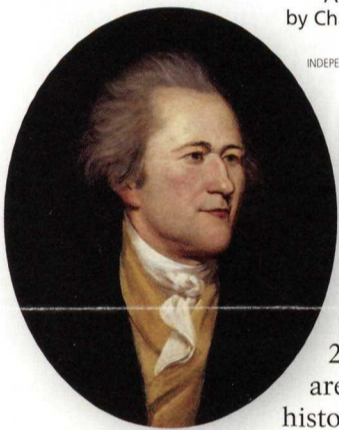
National Historical Park  
New Jersey



Great Falls of the Passaic River, Paterson, New Jersey.  
© MARK HILLRINGHOUSE

## Waterpower Drove America's Early Industry

Alexander Hamilton  
by Charles Willson Peale  
about 1790–1795  
INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



The Great Falls of the Passaic River—77 feet high and 260 feet wide—are the heart of historically industrial Paterson, New

Jersey. Their great power and raw energy—as up to two billion gallons of water a day plunge into the gorge—inspired Alexander Hamilton's vision to harness waterpower to manufacture goods in the infant United States.

Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton knew America could not be economically independent while depending on British manufactured goods. In 1792, his investment group, the Society for Useful Manufactures (SUM), began to develop Paterson, a planned industrial city. Canals, raceways, and spillways were built to drive its factories and build a US market economy.

Called “Silk City” in the heyday of its textile industry, Paterson's 100-plus factories employed thousands of skilled and unskilled laborers. Mills processed cotton, flax, paper, hemp, and jute fibers. Waterpower fueled Samuel Colt's first firearms factory. Union Pacific locomotive #119, built here, took part in the “Golden Spike” ceremony in Utah to open the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Paterson remained a hub for building aircraft engines through World War II.

Labor and management would clash in Paterson over long hours and harsh working conditions. An 1835 textile workers' strike, one of the nation's earliest labor actions, reduced the workday for children from 13 ½ to 11 hours. A six-month silk strike in 1913 focused on the threat of emerging technology and sought an eight-hour workday, but Paterson's silk workers would not win an eight-hour workday until 1919.

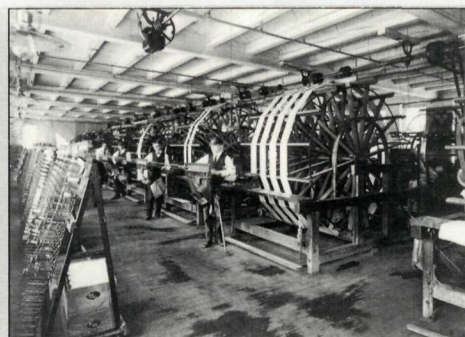
A succession of waves of immigrant workers drove Paterson's early growth and industrial might. Their talents and traditions created a diverse, vibrant culture. Immigrants still settle today

in Paterson to pursue their versions of Hamilton's vision and to weave their threads into the city's fabric.

The Great Falls of Paterson became a National Natural Landmark in 1967, and part of Paterson was designated as a National Historic Landmark District in 1976. The Great Falls raceway and power systems became a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark the next year. Established in 2011, Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park preserves and protects the heritage of this area along the Passaic River.



Interior of a dye house. Skeins of silk thread were dipped in the vats of hot water and chemicals.



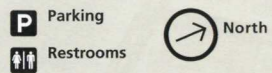
Workers in a silk mill, around 1910.



Strikers rally at the Botto House, 1913.



Birdseye view of Paterson, NJ, 1897.  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



## A Brand New Historical Park

Paterson Great Falls is a new national park area "in progress" with limited services and programs. Here you encounter a park in its infancy—and you can return in coming years to watch it mature.

Don't miss seeing the Great Falls. Their beauty and power are central to Paterson's story. Trace the paths of the Passaic River and millraces. Take in the mill buildings' architecture in the National Historic Landmark District around the park. Or relax and reenergize by enjoying the natural features at the heart of this historic industrial city. Some structures, like the 1813 Phoenix Mill, Paterson's oldest mill, and the Rogers Locomotive buildings, have been rehabilitated for new uses as affordable housing and office space.

The Paterson Museum at 2 Market Street next to the park (see map) is a partner site of the National Park Service. Museum exhibits on Paterson history include textile machines, Colt revolvers, two steam locomotives, and the first modern submarine's prototype, which was tested in the Passaic River.

**For a Safe Visit**  
Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Be careful crossing busy streets. Lock all valuables out of sight in your car.

**Getting to the Park**  
**From the Garden State Parkway**  
**North:** Take exit 155P to Route 19 North. Go two miles and take I-80 West/Grand Street exit.

Stay to right for Grand Street exit ramp. Turn left at light onto Grand. At second light on Grand turn right onto Spruce Street. At second light on Spruce bear right onto McBride Avenue Extension, then make immediate left into Great Falls Overlook parking area.  
**South:** Take Exit 159 (Saddlebrook) onto I-80 West. Follow the I-80 West directions below.

**From I-80**  
**West:** Take Exit 57 B-A. Follow the Downtown Paterson signs. Turn left at second light onto Cianci Street, and left at first light onto Market Street for ¼ mile. Turn right onto Spruce. Go one block and turn right onto McBride Avenue Extension, then immediately left into Great Falls Overlook parking area.

**East:** Take Exit 57B, circle onto Grand Street exit. At end of exit ramp turn left onto Grand. At second light on Grand turn right onto Spruce Street. At second light on Spruce bear right onto McBride Avenue Extension, then turn immediately left into the Great Falls Overlook parking area.

**More Information**  
Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park  
72 McBride Avenue Extension, Paterson, NJ 07501  
[www.nps.gov/pagr](http://www.nps.gov/pagr)

Paterson Great Falls is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).



COURTESY OF THE PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, PATERSON, NJ