



Foundation Document Overview

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park

Virginia



Contact Information

For more information about the *Appomattox Court House National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: apco_superintendent@nps.gov or 434-352-8987 x 22, or write to:

Superintendent, Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, Hwy. 24, P.O. Box 218, Appomattox, VA 24522

Purpose



The purpose of APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to

- *commemorate the surrender of General Robert E. Lee to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant and the effective termination of the Civil War brought about by the Appomattox Campaign and the surrender, March 29–April 12, 1865, and to honor those engaged in this great conflict*
- *preserve and protect those park resources, including landscape features, historic structures, archeological sites, cemeteries and monuments, archives and collections that are related to the Appomattox Campaign, the surrender, and its legacy*
- *provide opportunities for the public to learn about the Civil War; the people affected, the Appomattox Campaign, and its culmination in the surrender at Appomattox Court House; and the beginning of peace and national reunification*

Significance

Significance statements express why Appomattox Court House 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.

- The site of the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Union forces, April 9–12, 1865, effectively marking the end of the Civil War. The village of Appomattox Court House and the surrounding landscape have exceptional integrity and are intrinsic to understanding the surrender and subsequent events. In combination with park archives and artifacts, they form an outstanding assemblage that contributes markedly to the public's awareness of how these events helped to shape the military, political, and social outcomes of the Civil War.
- The site of the Battle of Appomattox Station, April 8, 1865, and the Battle of Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, which led directly to the surrender. Park lands display the largely unaltered terrain of the battle and key topographic features that influenced its outcome, and contain the remains of the domestic and agricultural sites associated with the engagement.
- The site where reunification of the nation commenced with the terms of the surrender and the magnanimous actions of Union and Confederate soldiers at Appomattox Court House. The rural setting evokes a timeless sense of place for the consideration of these events. The park's landscape and structures, commemorative features, archeological resources, archives, and artifacts provide an opportunity for the public to understand the different conceptions and meanings that the end of the Civil War has taken on through time.

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.

- **Buildings and Structures Associated with the End of the Appomattox Campaign, the Surrender, and Its Legacy**
- **Sites, Roads and Lanes, Cultural Landscape Features, and Archeological Resources Associated with the End of the Appomattox Campaign, the Surrender, and Its Legacy**
- **Archives and Museum Collections Associated with the End of the Appomattox Campaign, the Surrender, and Its Legacy**
- **Commemorative Resources**
- **Viewshed Values**
- **Contemplative Atmosphere**

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park 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.

- **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.

- **From Petersburg to Appomattox, the Final Days and Surrender** – From March 29 to April 12, 1865, the military activities of the Appomattox Campaign culminated in the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. On April 9–12, 1865, Generals Grant and Lee set the tone for the men who had followed them into battle by choosing reconciliation over vengeance, thereby signaling the effective end of the Civil War. The peaceful conclusion—unlike most civil wars—was not a given, as injuries and hatreds on both sides could have led to a bloody aftermath in the wake of the nation’s most destructive war.
- **The Legacy of Appomattox** – Appomattox came to symbolize the promise of national reunification, a first step on the long road to dealing with sectional divisions. However, this ideal was not always supported by reality as African Americans struggled for equal rights ostensibly guaranteed through newly ratified constitutional amendments. White Southerners coped with economic and political dislocations and feelings of submission, humiliation, and resentment. The tensions among conflicting societal forces are part of the unresolved legacy of Appomattox.
- **Memories and Meanings** – Appomattox occupies a significant and compelling place in our national memory. The meaning of the historic events at Appomattox has been shaped and reshaped by the differing views held by veterans interested in national reconciliation, white Southerners supporting the “Lost Cause,” African Americans believing in the promise of freedoms yet unfulfilled, and others. In turn, preservation and commemoration efforts undertaken at the park reflect differing views of the meaning of these events.

Description

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park commemorates the events that led to the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Union forces, effectively marking the end of the Civil War.

A defining moment in American history took place in Appomattox County during April 1865, as Confederate General Lee retreated from Petersburg and Richmond, across southern Virginia, with Union forces in relentless pursuit. On the morning of April 9, 1865, the final battle of the Appomattox Campaign took place, sealing the fate of the Army of Northern Virginia. Hostilities shortly ceased and that afternoon Lee ordered truce flags sent out and wrote a note to Grant requesting a meeting to discuss the terms of surrender. The two generals met at the home of Wilmer McLean to agree upon the final terms of surrender for the Army of Northern Virginia. By April 13, Confederate troops had stacked their arms along the Richmond-Lynchburg Stage Road, were issued paroles, and were allowed to return to their homes. Other Confederate commanders still in the field soon followed Lee's lead in surrendering, thus concluding the Civil War.

In a Civil War that was marked by such divisiveness and bitter fighting, the surrender at Appomattox Court House is often remembered as the first step toward the reconciliation of a reunited nation. Grant's compassion and generosity did much to allay the emotions of defeated Confederate troops. The magnanimous actions by both sides at Appomattox Court House set the stage for the peace and reunion of the nation following a devastating war.

Currently, the park encompasses approximately 1,700 acres of rolling hills in rural, central Virginia. There are 27 original and reconstructed 19th-century structures on the site, which includes the reconstructed McLean House, the original 1819 Clover Hill Tavern where paroles were printed for Lee's army, and the village of Appomattox Court House, the former county seat for Appomattox County. Although reconstructed, the McLean House sits on the historic building foundation and includes approximately 5,000 original bricks. The Appomattox Courthouse was also reconstructed and functions as the park visitor center. The village as a whole offers an immersive experience of a rural town of its time (April 1865), with country lanes and fields that allow visitors to walk among historic homes, fenced yards, and outbuildings including the tavern, jail, and store, small family burial plots, and orchards. Sweeping views of the surrounding pastoral landscape and forested hills provide a contemplative setting where visitors can reflect on the causes and consequences of the Civil War.

