



Foundation Document Overview

Hampton National Historic Site

Maryland



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of HAMPTON NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources of this rare commercial, industrial, and agricultural estate in the Chesapeake region, and to stimulate understanding of how national events and social change are revealed in the site's resources and the interrelationships of the family and the workers who lived and labored on the estate as it took shape and changed throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.



Significance

Significance statements express why Hampton 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.

- Hampton National Historic Site was once the center of a vast and regionally important commercial, industrial, and agricultural estate that ran on a system based on free, paid, indentured, and enslaved labor under the ownership of the Ridgely family, who presided over the estate from 1745 to 1948.
- Hampton National Historic Site structures, landscape features, museum objects, archives, and archeological and ethnographic resources form an exceptionally comprehensive assemblage that represents key periods in American history including the American Revolution, establishment of a new economy, slavery, the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction. This ensemble, preserved by one family over seven generations, is an unusually complete chronicle that reveals the daily activities of the Ridgely family and the estate's laborers, both free and enslaved, and illustrates 18th and 19th century history and design.



Significance

- Once called “a palace rising in the wilderness,” the Hampton Mansion is a premier example of Georgian architecture and landscape design, and is one of the largest and most ornate late-Georgian houses in America. Hampton was the first national historic site recognized for its architectural significance.
- Hampton National Historic Site’s mansion and farm along with its domestic landscape are the core of what was once an immense 24,000-acre estate, and today includes rare surviving examples of slave quarters and other outbuildings in Maryland.
- Hampton Mansion’s fine and decorative arts and furnishings are an internationally recognized collection that represents the social and economic activities of one of the largest and grandest Georgian estates in America during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
- The 18th- and 19th-century formal gardens and grounds surrounding the Hampton Mansion are an exceptionally intact and rare example of English Renaissance landscape design principles in the United States.
- Hampton National Historic Site’s wealth of artifacts, estate equipment, written records, photographs, and archeological collections recreates a world where, for the better part of two centuries, a community of hundreds of individuals played out the comedies and dramas of their own lives against the backdrop of America’s development as a nation.



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, structures, landscapes, and associated archeological resources that are related to the historic Ridgely estate known as “Hampton”**—There are 24 historic structures at Hampton National Historic Site, reflecting the many activities that supported its role as a country estate and working farm, as well as the social and economic relationships of its people. These structures include the mansion (cited in the site’s designation as a premier example of Georgian architecture and design), slave and other quarters, orangery, stables, icehouse, outhouses, greenhouses, lower house, barns, and dairy. All but one of these structures date from the 18th or 19th century. Park historic structures, both as an assemblage and individually, retain remarkable historic integrity. These structures are sited within the park’s cultural landscape, itself a complex collection of designed landscape features, formal gardens, and agricultural fields. The associated archeological resources represent buried evidence of the development, uses, and modifications of structures and landscapes. The physical collection of structures and cultural landscape is primary to the park’s national significance, and all elements described here are considered contributing resources in the park’s national register documentation.
- **Museum collections and archives**—The historic collections at Hampton National Historic Site represent more than 160 years of life and work on the estate, with a concentration on the period between 1790 and 1870. They consist of more than 45,000 historic objects, 100,000 archival items, and 30,000 archeological artifacts associated with the Ridgely family, enslaved people, tenant farmers, and other people historically associated with the plantation. Surviving in their original context, the collection’s historic objects and archives greatly enhance understanding of trends in American history and culture and are specially mentioned in the park’s national register documentation.

Description

Hampton National Historic Site is a 64-acre unit of the national park system in Baltimore County, Maryland, located approximately nine miles north of downtown Baltimore. The park is the remnant of a 24,000-acre industrial and agricultural estate amassed and operated by one Maryland family, the Ridgelys, for more than 200 years of America's development as a nation, from before the Revolutionary War until after World War II.

Funded by the family's iron works and sale of munitions during the Revolutionary War, Captain Charles Ridgely built Hampton Mansion, originally called Hampton Hall, between 1783 and 1790. During the late 19th century, the residence was probably the largest home in America with its 24,000 square feet dwarfing both George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Over the next 150 years, the Ridgelys weathered economic and social change that shifted the family's commercial focus from 18th-century iron works to 19th-century slave-supported agriculture and tenant farmers to 20th-century residential development. The mansion remained in the Ridgely family for seven generations until a small parcel encompassing the main house and support buildings was transferred to the National Park Service in 1948.

During the first decades of the site's management under the National Park Service, most interpretation centered on the Ridgely family and the main house as a site of genealogical and architectural interest. The main house at Hampton stands as one of the largest and most ornate Georgian style residences in the country. The house features hallmarks of regional post-Revolutionary War Georgian architecture: rigid symmetry, five-part composition, axial entrances, geometrical proportions, pedimented gable ends, and sash windows.

The acquisition of the lower farm in 1980 allowed a wider story of plantation life and its workers to be told. Needing labor in abundance, the Ridgely family employed many types of workers, first in their industrial endeavors and then primarily to support the plantation's agriculture.

In the last 50 years of the 18th century, they employed more than 300 indentured servants as well as free workers, British prisoners of war, and enslaved African Americans. Slaves were instrumental in building the mansion and their work undergirded the gracious lifestyle of the Ridgelys in the mansion. The park's historic structures, which include slave quarters, and the broader cultural landscape is a rare surviving ensemble from a late antebellum Maryland slave estate. Through surviving accounts, records, structures, and objects, the stories of the Ridgely family and of the indentured, enslaved, and paid workers who made the estate function are told. This material culture reveals details about the lives of those who designed, built, lived in, and died at the estate.

Hampton National Historic Site reflects the evolution of American social, economic, and cultural history through the lens of one family and their large and diverse labor force from 1745 to 1948. The present site encompasses the family mansion with its formal terraced gardens, numerous state champion trees, landscaped grounds, and support buildings, and the original lower farm, with barns, dairy, slave and servant quarters, and other farm structures, which supported the needs of the mansion and the workers in its immediate area.

