



Foundation Document Overview

Morristown National Historical Park

New Jersey



Contact Information

For more information about the *Morristown National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: morr_superintendent@nps.gov or (973) 543-1949 or write to: Superintendent, Morristown National Historical Park, 30 Washington Pl., Morristown, NJ 07960

Purpose



The purpose of MORRISTOWN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve, protect, and interpret the landscapes, structures, and other property of the military encampments of Revolutionary War interest in Morristown, New Jersey, and the vicinity and to maintain a museum and library containing manuscripts, books, paintings, and other objects pertaining to George Washington, the Revolutionary War, and the periods both preceding and following the war.



Significance

Significance statements express why Morristown 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 encampments, historic houses, and fortifications in and around Morristown, New Jersey, sheltered General George Washington and the Continental Army during the winters of 1777–1778 and 1779–1780. Strategically located to protect the colonies from British incursion from occupied New York City, Morristown’s abundant forests, fields, waters, transportation systems, and supportive populace sustained the army.
- At Morristown during the encampment of 1779–1780, General George Washington demonstrated his leadership by holding the Continental Army intact despite seemingly overwhelming difficulties including expiring enlistments, disease, food shortages, and the worst winter of the century.
- Morristown National Historical Park is built on the shoulders of private historic preservation efforts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The establishment of Morristown as a “national historical park” is part of an early 20th-century movement to commemorate, preserve, and memorialize the history of our nation.
- In addition to documenting General George Washington and the encampments of the Continental Army, Morristown National Historical Park’s museum collection includes a nationally significant assemblage of documents presenting a broad-brush collection that reflects the entire course of America’s history, from the period of European contact to the early 20th century.



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.

- **Ford Mansion**
- **Encampment and Brigade Sites**
- **“Fort Nonsense,” also known as Kinney’s Hill / Upper Redoubt**
- **Wick House and Orchard**
- **Historic Roads and Road Traces**
- **Museum Collections Associated with the Revolutionary War**
- **Park Monuments**

Morristown 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.

- **Washington’s Headquarters Museum and Landscape**
- **Guerin House**
- **The Lloyd W. Smith Rare Book and Manuscript Collection**



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 Encampments (1777 and 1779–1780).** Endurance characterized the Continental Army’s winter encampments in Morristown—especially during the harsh winter and deprivations of the fifth year of the war (1779–1780) when veteran soldiers and American war strategy were entrenched in a strategy of perseverance.
- **A Military Capital and Community in War.** Not only did war affect Morristown with a sudden influx of thousands of American soldiers creating a bustling military city, but the civil war aspect of the American Revolution was deeply felt throughout New Jersey by a population with divided loyalties who experienced war on the front lines of some of the most fiercely contested ground in the conflict.
- **George Washington’s Leadership.** More than any other factor, it was George Washington’s character—his leadership skills, political savvy, and personal integrity—that was the basis for the cohesion of the army and ultimate victory of the American cause in the Revolution and the War for Independence.
- **Preservation and Memorialization.** The landscapes and natural and cultural resources of Morristown National Historical Park have been valued differently over time by generations of Americans in response to changing societal values, social movements, and evolving ethics of memorialization and resource stewardship.



Description

Morristown National Historical Park encompasses the 18th-century village of Morristown in northern New Jersey, approximately 30 miles west of New York City. The park lies on the eastern edge of the Highlands physiographic province and west of the Watchung Mountains. To the east, the land gradually slopes to the coastal plain, which leads to the Hudson River and the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1779, the Revolutionary War was going badly for the patriot cause. Earlier that year, the Continental Army had been ingloriously routed from New York City and hounded across New Jersey by British forces. Despite successes at Trenton and Princeton in 1776–1777, General George Washington needed to find a safe and secure winter quarters within striking distance of the main British position in New York City. Morristown was selected because it was home to many who supported the patriot cause, was surrounded by rich farmland, and lay along the only communications route between the New England colonies and patriot capital in Philadelphia and the colonies to the south that was not controlled by the British. Additionally, Morristown's location behind the Watchung Mountains and the Great Swamp protected it from incursions by the British who were based in New York City.

Morristown National Historical Park totals 1,705.69 acres and is composed of four separate areas: Washington's Headquarters, Fort Nonsense, Jockey Hollow, and the New Jersey Brigade Area. These areas are associated with the Continental Army's Revolutionary War encampments of 1777, 1779–1780, 1780–1781, and 1781–1782.

- The Washington's Headquarters area totals approximately 10 acres and is just outside the center of Morristown. During the 1779–1780 winter encampment, General Washington, along with his "military family" and wife Martha, were housed in the Ford mansion, which stood on a low terrace overlooking the Whippany River.
- The Fort Nonsense area totals approximately 35 acres and is on Kinney's Hill, the tallest hill overlooking the Morristown village green and the critical transportation route. During the 1777 winter encampment, a fortified position was constructed on the crest of Kinney's Hill because it commanded the strategic position above the town and provided panoramic views to the east that included a line of hilltops between Morristown and the Hudson River where warning fires were lit signaling when British troops moved away from their base in New York City. Fort Nonsense was maintained by the army from 1777 until the end of the war.

- The Jockey Hollow area totals approximately 1,339 acres and is about 3 miles southwest of Fort Nonsense. During the 1779–1780 winter encampment, a "log hut city" that housed more than 12,000 soldiers and camp followers was constructed in the small Y-shaped valley along Primrose Creek between Sugar Loaf, Tea Hill, and Mount Kemble. This was the heart of the winter encampment and housed most of the patriot brigades and provided an area for mustering troops called the Grand Parade. Portions of this log hut city were renovated for a second, smaller Continental Army encampment from 1780 to 1781.
- The New Jersey Brigade area totals approximately 321 acres and is about a mile southwest of Jockey Hollow. This was one of the brigade encampments farthest from the Grand Parade. During the 1779–1780 winter encampment, more than 1,000 soldiers of the New Jersey Brigade camped along the lower slopes of two hills on either side of this upper stretch of the Passaic River. A smaller number of soldiers from the New Jersey Brigade camped there for the winter of 1781–1782.

