



Foundation Document Overview

Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park

Rhode Island and Massachusetts



Contact Information

For more information about the *Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: blrv_info@nps.gov or (401) 428-3816 or write to:
Superintendent, Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, 670 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville, MA 01588

Purpose



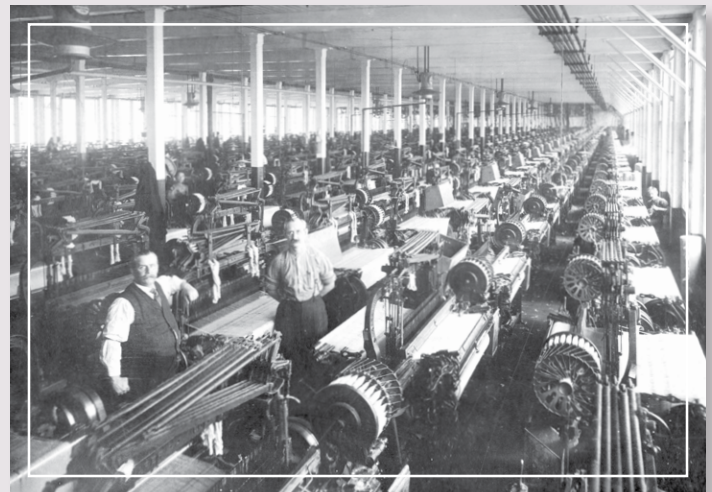
The purpose of BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant historical and cultural resources of the Blackstone River Valley including lands, waterways, and structures that exemplify our nation's industrial heritage, and to support and enhance the network of partners in the protection, management, and operation of related resources and facilities throughout the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.



Significance

Significance statements express why Blackstone River Valley 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 historic structures and waterways woven throughout the urban and rural landscape of the Blackstone River Valley, particularly the survival of representative elements of entire 18th- and 19th-century production systems, are an outstanding example of an industrialized landscape developed over a period of 150 years. The national historical park is part of a larger cultural landscape that makes up Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The corridor, approximately 600 square miles, provides the context in which the story of the American Industrial Revolution is told.
- Old Slater Mill, the first successful water-powered cotton-spinning mill in the United States, together with the hundreds of 19th-century factories and their associated mill villages located throughout the Blackstone River Valley, collectively illustrate the influence of Samuel Slater and the creation and evolution of the Rhode Island System of Manufacture, a dynamic force in American industrial history from 1790 to 1950.



Significance



- Slatersville was the first planned mill village in the United States and the first example of a Rhode Island System of Manufacture village. Its component parts and spatial organization, including housing, civic amenities, and commercial resources clustered around a factory and a power canal system, were duplicated throughout the Blackstone River Valley, and served as a model for industrial development across the nation. The Rhode Island System of Manufacture focused on hiring entire families to work in the mills, and usually had a single owner, or a small group of owners, as opposed to the corporate ownership and mill girl boarding house style of the Waltham System.
- The Blackstone River Valley has served as an incubator for technological innovation from the time Samuel Slater arrived in Rhode Island with ideas for a textile factory through today. Inventions designed and created within the Blackstone River Valley include the screw-cutting lathes of the Wilkinson machine shops in Pawtucket, the cotton-processing equipment developed by the Whitin Machine Works, and the Draper looms made in Hopedale used in textile mills across the nation. These and many other innovations from workshops across the Blackstone River Valley helped drive the industrialization of America.
- The Blackstone River and its tributaries powered mills and factories launching the industrialization of the nation. The Blackstone River Valley, with waterpower systems including dams, reservoirs, and power canals, became a “managed river network.” These engineered resources that powered the mills continue to be one of the most visible elements of the Blackstone River Valley’s industrial landscape, and now are part of the region’s recreational resources.

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.

- **Old Slater Mill Complex**
- **Mill Villages**
 - Slatersville (North Smithfield, RI, 1807)
 - Whitinsville (Northbridge, MA, 1809)
 - Hopedale (Hopedale, MA, 1841)
 - Ashton (Cumberland, RI, 1867)
- **Waterpower System**
- **Transportation Systems**
- **Partnerships**
- **Innovation and Enterprise**

Blackstone River Valley 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.

- **Recreational Opportunities**
- **John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor**



Description

The Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park was established by Congress on December 19, 2014. The creation of the new national historical park followed the designation of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in 1986. The park was created to help preserve, protect, and interpret nationally significant resources that exemplify the industrial heritage of the larger Blackstone River Valley. The national heritage corridor provides a broad context that is critical to understanding the region and its place in history. The new national historical park, with multiple partners, preserves resources and tells stories related to the birth of industry in America.

The Blackstone River Valley of Massachusetts and Rhode Island is significant as the first heavily industrialized region in the United States. The story of the Blackstone River Valley began not in 1790, but thousands of years before when the American Indians of the Nipmuc, Narragansett, and Wampanoag Tribes settled there. They used the Blackstone River as a source of transportation as well as for fishing and drinking water. Their life was changed forever by the arrival of the valley's first English settler, the Reverend William Blackstone, who arrived in what is now Cumberland, Rhode Island, in 1635. After 40 years of expansion, the English solidified their control over the region following their defeat of the three local American Indian tribes during King Philip's War in 1675–1676.

As the towns of the Blackstone River Valley recovered from the devastation of the war, they began to take greater advantage of the waterpower opportunities of the Blackstone River and its tributaries. In 1790, the forces of capital, ingenuity, mechanical know-how, skilled labor, and the power of the Blackstone River came together at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, when Samuel Slater successfully recreated the water-powered cotton-spinning machines he had worked on in England. The development of Slater Mill triggered a wave of industrialization, and its significance is best viewed not just as the site of a single successful mechanical experiment, but as the event that sparked the transformation of the entire Blackstone River Valley into an industrialized landscape.

The Blackstone River Valley remains a living landscape where these stories and resources can still be explored.

The Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park focuses on six distinct nodes that have been identified as the original and most highly developed expression of this larger, valley-wide industrial system. The historic sites and districts listed in the park's enabling legislation include the Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark District, Blackstone River State Park, Slatersville Historic District, Ashton Historic District, Whitinsville Historic District, Hopedale Village Historic District, the Blackstone River and its tributaries, and the Blackstone Canal.

The National Park Service will not own or manage the majority of the resources within the park boundary, but will instead work in partnership with others to provide for resource preservation and visitor enjoyment. The success of these partnerships is critical to the park's ability to meet its legislated purposes. The park supports public programming and maintenance activities at partner-owned sites through formal agreements. The park is managed by an NPS superintendent who is also responsible for Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence, Rhode Island.

