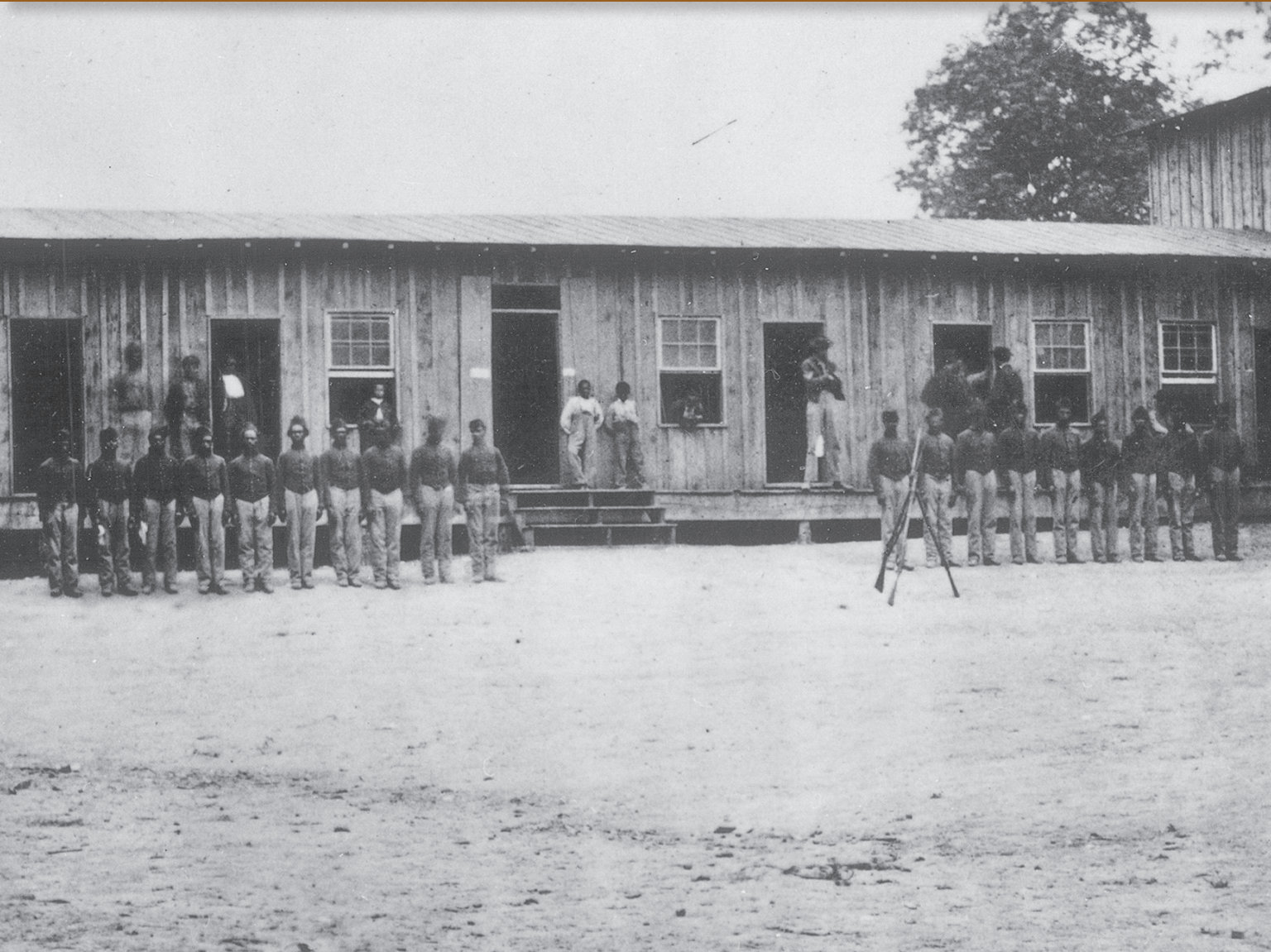




Foundation Document Overview

Camp Nelson National Monument

Kentucky



Contact Information

For more information about the *Camp Nelson National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: cane_superintendent@nps.gov or (859) 881-5716 or write to: Superintendent, Camp Nelson National Monument, 6614 Old Danville Road Loop 2, Nicholasville, KY 40356

Purpose



CAMP NELSON NATIONAL MONUMENT in Jessamine County, Kentucky, preserves and interprets the historic and archeological resources of a Union Army supply depot that became one of the largest Civil War-era recruitment and training centers for United States Colored Troops and an African American refugee camp. The monument is a testament to the courage, resiliency, and perseverance of those seeking freedom from slavery and pursuing self-determination during and after the Civil War.



Significance

Significance statements express why Camp Nelson National Monument 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.

- Camp Nelson was established as a fortified supply depot and recruitment center on approximately 4,000 acres in central Kentucky, strategically located along important transportation routes and adjacent to the Kentucky River and Hickman Creek. A large number of troops were enlisted, trained, and housed at the camp, which supplied Union military campaigns in western Virginia, eastern Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia.
- Camp Nelson was one of the nation's largest recruitment and training centers for African American soldiers, known as United States Colored Troops, during the American Civil War. By the end of the war, more than 23,000 African Americans had joined the Union Army in Kentucky, making it the second largest contributor of United States Colored Troops from any state. Of these recruits, more than 10,000 were either enlisted or trained at Camp Nelson.



Significance



- During frigid weather in November 1864, approximately 400 African American women and children—United States Colored Troop family members who escaped slavery and also sought refuge at Camp Nelson—were expelled by force from the camp; 102 people died of exposure. The event brought national attention to the plight of the refugee families. In response, Congress took action, passing the March 3rd Act of 1865, emancipating all wives and children of any enlisted member of the United States Colored Troops.
- The Union Army established the Camp Nelson Home for Colored Refugees in January 1865, ultimately housing more than 3,000 women and children and creating a safe haven during the war for the families of enlisted African American soldiers. Descendants of the original families that occupied the Home for Colored Refugees continue to live in the community of Hall, Kentucky, formerly known as Ariel. The Ariel community has a rich history including early efforts at integrated education in Kentucky that began with the work of John Fee, Abisha Scofield, Gabriel Burdett, and the American Missionary Association.
- Camp Nelson National Monument retains a high level of archeological integrity and is the best-preserved archeological site of a large Civil War depot, recruitment center, and refugee camp. The cultural landscape of Camp Nelson's main depot and encampment area has remained largely undisturbed since the United States Army dismantled the camp after the Civil War. The site has potential to yield information about the working and living conditions of military personnel and civilian refugees.

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.

- **Archeological Resources**
- **Camp Nelson Cultural Landscape**
- **The Oliver Perry “White” House**
- **Museum Collections and Archives**
- **Cultural Connections to Camp Nelson**
- **Remembrance and Reflection**

Camp Nelson National Monument 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.

- **Appropriate Recreational Opportunities**
- **Reverend John G. Fee Memorial Church**
- **Karst Features**

Related resources are typically not owned by the National Park Service. They may be part of the broader context or setting in which park resources exist, represent a thematic connection that enhances the experience of visitors, or have close associations with park fundamental resources and the purpose of the park. The related resource represents a connection with the park that often reflects an area of mutual benefit or interest, and an opportunity for collaboration between the park and owner or manager of the related resource.

- **Camp Nelson National Cemetery**
- **Hall Cemetery**



Description

Established in 1863 as a Union Army supply depot and logistics center for the Western Theater of the Civil War, Camp Nelson gained national importance as an African American troop recruitment and training center. Once all racial restrictions on enlistment in the state of Kentucky were removed in June 1864, Camp Nelson quickly became the third largest United States Colored Troops (USCT) recruiting center in the entire nation, surpassed only by Camp William Penn in Pennsylvania and recruiting centers in New Orleans. By the time the 13th Amendment was finally ratified on December 6, 1865, ending slavery throughout the United States, roughly 10,000 African American men had enlisted in the Union Army or trained at Camp Nelson.

Many of the formerly enslaved African American men enlisting at Camp Nelson were accompanied by their parents, wives, or children who also sought freedom. While African American family members created makeshift refugee camps within Camp Nelson, the Union Army's official position was to restrict anyone not under the employ of the camp from living within the camp. Refugee removal efforts culminated in the November 22–24, 1864, forced expulsion of approximately 400 wives and children of enlisted United States Colored Troops. Freezing temperatures and harsh conditions resulted in 102 deaths in the days following the forced removal. A few weeks after the November expulsion, the army reversed its policy towards refugees and began construction of the government-sponsored "Home for Colored Refugees" at Camp Nelson in January 1865.

The end of the Civil War marked the end of Camp Nelson's time as a military installation. Over the summer of 1865, many of Camp Nelson's temporary military buildings were either sold and moved or dismantled. The site gradually returned to its largely agricultural antebellum appearance. The Home for Colored Refugees officially shuttered in March 1866, but a small number of the thousands of emancipated African Americans that considered Camp Nelson their first home as free men and women built permanent residences on the site of the refugee home. The resulting community of Ariel, now known as Hall, Kentucky, blossomed into a thriving, early 20th-century African American settlement nationally known for the musical contributions of the Ariel Singers and family bands.

Established October 26, 2018, Camp Nelson National Monument consists of approximately 380 acres of the core historic Civil War-era Camp Nelson site situated roughly 20 miles southwest of Lexington, Kentucky.

The monument protects and interprets two discontinuous locations in Jessamine County, Kentucky, including the Camp Nelson site (373 acres) and sites associated with the Home for Colored Refugees (7 acres) now part of the modern-day community of Hall. The Camp Nelson site is part of a larger historic and archeological district that was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2013.

Visitors to the monument can learn more about Camp Nelson's establishment, the supply depot and training center's role during the Civil War, and the recent archeological surveys that brought renewed attention to the nationally significant site in the visitor center / museum and reconstructed troop barracks located at what was once the heart of the army camp. The monument's five miles of walking trails lead from the visitor center past earthen forts along the camp's northern border and other visible landscape features that date back to the 1860s, such as the Civil War-era cut stone walls bounding the Officers' Spring. The Oliver Perry "White" House, the only surviving building within the core camp area that dates back to the Civil War, is open during special events.

