



Foundation Document Overview

James A. Garfield National Historic Site

Ohio



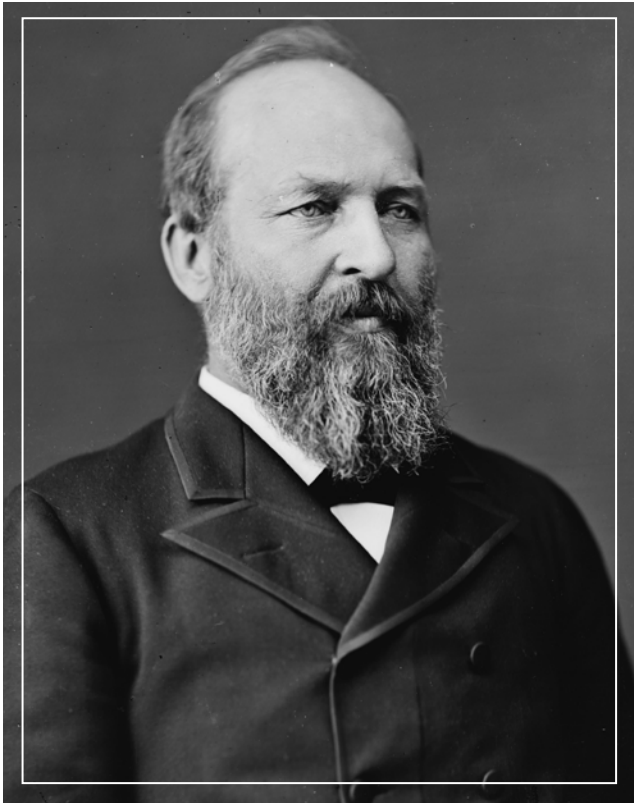
Contact Information

For more information about the *James A. Garfield National Historic Site Foundation Document*, contact: jaga_superintendent@nps.gov or 440-255-8722 ext. 237 or write to:
Superintendent, James A. Garfield National Historic Site
8095 Mentor Avenue, Mentor, OH 44060

Purpose



James A. Garfield National Historic Site preserves the property that best represents the life and legacy of the 20th President of the United States for the benefit, education, and inspiration of present and future generations.



Significance

Significance statements express why James A. Garfield 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.

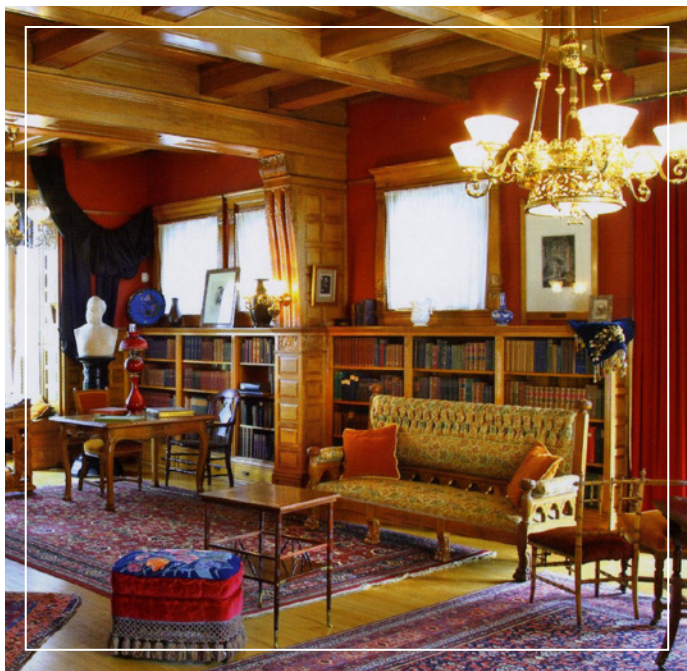
- The Mentor Farm was the home of James A. Garfield from the later years of his long congressional career until his assassination while serving as president in 1881. The property was significant to Garfield's congressional constituency during his rise to the presidency, became a national symbol during the presidential campaign, and remains a tangible symbol of Garfield's political acumen.
- James A. Garfield's Mentor Farm was the site of the successful 1880 "front porch" presidential campaign, a style of campaigning that Garfield popularized and that influenced subsequent presidential races. Composing many of his speeches in his study, he delivered them to reporters and visitors from the front porch of his home, which was a new approach to relating to and directly communicating with the public.
- The exceptionally well-preserved and accurately restored home, combined with one of the most complete collections of a 19th century presidential family's belongings, provides a rich, immersive experience. Visitors see the family's furniture, decorative artwork, and personal belongings situated as they were during President Garfield's life and Mrs. Lucretia Garfield's subsequent memorialization efforts.
- Lucretia Garfield created the first presidential memorial library as an addition to the home. It contained her husband's books; personal, professional, and political correspondence; speeches; and diaries. She was dedicated to preserving his legacy for the rest of her life, and her work advanced the concept of presidential libraries and archives.



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.

- **The Garfield Family Home and Property** – The home and property where James A. Garfield resided and where his wife Lucretia memorialized him after his death.
- **Collection** – The house, its furnishings, books, and memorial objects were donated by the five Garfield children, and restricted by the deed of gift to be used “only and solely as a memorial to our father...and our mother... for the purposes of a historic building and museum to preserve objects of historic interest.”
- **Physical Elements of the Presidential Campaign** – The campaign office, the front porch, and the lane that led to the house from the railroad tracks.
- **Inspirational Story of James A. Garfield’s Character and Life** – Garfield’s abilities to craft a destiny through education, hard work, and public service are inspirational. Overcoming an impoverished birth in a log cabin and the early loss of his father, Garfield found a focus in education and religion. His intellectual curiosity, balanced by a gregarious personality, won friends and political influence. A lifetime of public service was made possible by strong family support.



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.

- **Context:** During Garfield’s lifetime, the state of Ohio evolved from frontier society to national economic, political, and social leadership; it was a progressive and stimulating environment that influenced Garfield’s Civil War service, political career, and social consciousness.
- **Character:** Garfield’s intellectual curiosity, determination, and versatility propelled him into a career as a preacher, teacher, self-taught general, and a leading member of the Republican Party. Lifelong dedication to learning and self-improvement made Garfield a true leader in our country’s highest office.
- **Public Service:** During his quarter century of public service, James A. Garfield confronted, considered, and responded to issues of civil rights, constitutional protections, education, and economic development, issues that continue to have relevance today.
- **Campaign:** The 1880 Republican presidential campaign harnessed technology and Garfield’s oratorical skills to wage the first “front porch” campaign, laying the foundation for modern presidential campaigns that personally involve the candidate in planning, strategy, and direct public communication.
- **Marriage/Partnership:** James A. Garfield and Lucretia Garfield built a strong partnership based on mutual respect and devotion and developed a home and family life making possible Garfield’s successful career as a college president, state legislator, lawyer, Civil War officer, congressman, and president of the United States.
- **Home:** The Garfield property served as both an Ohio refuge from politics and a place where the family could farm and spend time together.
- **Memorialization:** The tragedy of James A. Garfield’s assassination provided the impetus for philanthropy that led to an unprecedented memorialization effort, culminating in the creation of a memorial library that continues to serve as a template for the U.S. tradition of presidential libraries.

Description

James A. Garfield National Historic Site is located along Route 20 in the town of Mentor, Ohio. Then-congressman James A. Garfield acquired the home in 1876 and expanded it to accommodate his large family. The Mentor Farm (nicknamed “Lawnfield” by reporters) was the site of the first successful “front porch” campaign for the presidency in 1880. Garfield broke from the tradition of previous candidates who remained in the background during the election process, actively seeking the presidency by giving speeches from his front porch. Dignitaries, students, well-wishers, and political supporters came by horse, buggy, and train to hear Garfield give speeches on the issues of the day. The campaign office on the property was equipped with a telegraph for communicating with the rest of the country.

James A. Garfield was the 20th president of the United States from March 4, 1881, until his untimely death on September 19, 1881, when he was assassinated by a political fanatic in Washington, D.C. Following his death, his wife Lucretia dedicated her life to memorializing her husband. Four years after his assassination, the Memorial Library wing was added to the house by Mrs. Garfield and her family—setting a precedent in the development of presidential libraries. The library included a safe to preserve

President Garfield’s papers, as well as commemorative objects and his collection of books. During this time, she also modernized the estate, adding the carriage house, windmill, tenant house, and other farm buildings. After Lucretia’s death, the estate remained in family ownership until 1936 when it was donated to the Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS).

The site was designated a national historic landmark in 1964 and added to the national park system in 1980. At the time of designation, the National Park Service and the Western Reserve Historical Society entered into a partnership that entailed WRHS operation of the park. In January 2008, the partnership transitioned to NPS operation of the park with a long-term loan agreement for the WRHS-owned collection to remain at the park. Today, the 8-acre site encompasses the Main House, outbuildings (including the building that served as the campaign office) and the carriage house that is used for visitor contact and education. The Main House underwent detailed restoration in the 1990s and represents the period of 1880–1904, from Garfield’s presidential campaign through the memorialization led by Lucretia Garfield after his assassination.

