



## They Passed This Way

Very little knowledge of history is needed to recognize the names of the many history-makers at Harpers Ferry. Thomas Jefferson, for example, stopped here with his eldest daughter Patsy in October 1783 on his way to Philadelphia to serve as a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress. No town existed here then, only the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers crashing their way through the mountains in a drama that Jefferson declared "perhaps one of the most stupendous scenes in Nature." Another early visitor, George Washington, knew Harpers Ferry much better than Jefferson because of his years as a surveyor working in the area. Washington also knew the power of the rivers and, as President in 1794, worked with Congress to establish a federal army and arsenal here to help safeguard the fledgling republic and spur its industrial and commercial development.

In March 1803 Washington's army supplied Meriwether Lewis with items needed for survival on the transcontinental expedition that he and William Clark planned to undertake. For protection and acquiring food, armory gunsmiths provided Lewis with modified Model 1792 contract rifles bearing Harpers Ferry lockplates, along with spare parts and tools, including a simple grindstone, to repair them. Lewis also obtained powder horns, pouches, bullet molds, knives, tomahawks, and an innovative portable iron boat frame, which he planned to cover with animal skins and use for transport beyond the Great Falls of the Missouri River. The boat failed for lack of pine tar to make the skins watertight.

Fifty-six years later, weapons, slaves, and mountains lured abolitionist John Brown to Harpers Ferry. In October 1859, Brown attempted to seize the 100,000 rifles and muskets stored here as a first step in his

## Harpers Ferry on the Eve of the Civil War

A visitor to Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in the summer of 1860 would find it a diverse, vibrant, and thriving community. Seven combination dry goods/hardware stores, four men's clothing stores, five shoemakers, four tailors, four taverns, and six churches lined the narrow streets. These establishments competed for patrons among a pop-

ulation of almost 3,000. Farmers and butchers filled the market place with freshly cut produce and meats. Trains delivered fresh seafood from the Chesapeake Bay. The Masons met regularly to share their fraternal secrets. The temperance hall provided reformers with a place to rail against alcohol, tobacco, and other sins and vices.

The town's major business was the U.S. Armory, which President George Washington persuaded Congress to establish here in 1796. In 1860 it consisted of the musket factory, a complex of 20 handsome brick structures stretching for 600 yards along the Potomac River; two arsenal buildings, a large one and a smaller one,

where thousands of finished weapons were stored; and the U.S. Rifle Factory, formerly the Hall Rifle Works, about one-half mile away on Upper Hall Island along the Shenandoah.

The armory employed more than 250 men with wages averaging just over \$2 for each 10-hour day. Slave owners also

rented their human property to the government for use as laborers. Altogether, men and machines turned out more than 10,000 weapons each year—rifles and muskets for American soldiers to defend their growing country.

Harpers Ferry was still a relatively young town, although its origins could

be traced to 1733, when a Pennsylvania Dutchman named Peter Stephens settled here and began a ferry boat service. In 1747, Robert Harper, a Philadelphia millwright and the man for whom the town was named, bought out Stephens, improved the ferry operation, and built a gristmill on Virgin Island. The gristmill disappeared long

ago, replaced by a succession of industries: an iron foundry, flour mill, cotton mill, and machine shop, all powered by water diverted from the Shenandoah River. The ferryboat across the Potomac was replaced by a bridge in 1824. By 1836 a 900-foot covered railroad bridge had been built, the same one used by John Brown's raiders

in 1859. A toll bridge spanned the Shenandoah.

Thanks to the expansion of industry and the extension of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, the population of Harpers Ferry had grown to almost 3,000. Of these about 150 were free blacks, whose lives were controlled by state and

local laws, and 150 were slaves, who had no freedom at all to determine their own destinies. Many of the white male residents were employed at the armory or at the manufacturing plants on Virgin Island. Women had limited job opportunities, owned some property, and could not yet vote. With land at a premium, the houses, saloons, hotels, restaurants, and shops were aligned tightly along Shenandoah, Potomac, and High streets, and sprawled up the slopes of Camp Hill. In some places the rocky cliffs had been blasted away to make room for another building. Most of the homes were of simple design, but those of the armory officials were more elaborate.

Manure and stagnant water often covered the streets. Outhouses occupied the backyards. Hogs roamed the town, coal smoke from the armory and the industries filled the air, and disease often plagued the citizens. (A cholera epidemic in 1850 killed more than a hundred people.) It was a far cry from the bucolic scene

that Thomas Jefferson believed "worth a voyage across the Atlantic." Nevertheless, it was a prosperous time for the town and its people. Despite the ominous clouds on the political horizon, no one expected that the whirlwind of civil war would soon consume them.

## A Heritage Shared

Many prominent people, such as those shown here, have come to Harpers Ferry over the years and helped to shape the course of its history.

Sharing in that contribution to the town's growth and development are the lesser-known people who made up its day-to-day community life—the

workers, black and white, employed by the armory and other industries; the tradesmen and shopkeepers who operated the hotels, taverns,

restaurants, and general stores; the women who kept the homes, taught the children, and nursed the sick; and the slaves and freedmen whose

visions of freedom and equality were often clouded by an uncertain future. All are part of the Harpers Ferry story.





# Visiting Harpers Ferry Park



Shenandoah Pulp Company mill ruins



Harpers Ferry water gap



The old Winchester and Potomac Railroad trestle



John Brown's Fort



Civil War living history groups



Original Storer College Building

PHOTOS: TOP, NPS/ROBERT LAUTMAN; FAR LEFT, NPS/DAVE GILBERT; CIVIL WAR SOLDIER GROUPS, NPS; ALL OTHERS, GERIC LONG

## Understanding the Past

The history of Harpers Ferry has few parallels in the American drama. It is more than one event, one date, or one individual. It is multi-layered, involving a diverse number of people and events, decisions and actions that influenced the course of our nation's history. Harpers Ferry witnessed the first successful application of interchangeable parts, the arrival of the first successful American railroad, John Brown's attack on slavery, the largest surrender of Federal troops during the Civil War, and the education of former slaves in one of the earliest integrated schools in the United States.

To help you understand Harpers Ferry's complex past, the National Park Service has identified six themes that run through the town's history: Industry, Natural Heritage, Transportation, John Brown, Civil War, and African American History. Each theme, or "Path Through History," deals with a specific set of events or circumstances that influenced the growth and development of Harpers Ferry and the role this area played in the history of the United States. Although each path (highlighted below) focuses on a single subject, you will discover that the stories within each path often intersect and influence the direction of one or more other paths.

### Exploring the Park

Begin your visit at the visitor center. Here you will receive information on park sites and activities. Brochures highlight specific park areas and help you choose one of the "Paths Through History." Ranger-conducted tours and programs may be available in the spring, summer, and fall.

During winter months, organized park activities are limited, but the visitor center, museums, and trails remain open. Winter visitors to the park are treated to a tranquil environment.

We invite you to explore our many diverse park areas, keyed by number to the map at right:

1 Lower Town Relive 19th-century Harpers Ferry through restored buildings, exhibits, media presentations, and ranger-conducted talks and programs. Allow 3-6 hours

2 Virginian Island Explore the ruins of a once-thriving 19th-century industrial town along the Shenandoah River. 1-2 hours

3 Camp Hill Visit Harper Cemetery and examine old armory buildings devastated by civil war and returned to use as classrooms for Storer College. 1-2 hours

4 Murphy Farm Explore a site where Civil War conflict and Civil Rights freedom come together. 1 hour

5 Bolivar Heights Walk in the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln and Stonewall Jackson. This location also affords a splendid view of the Harpers Ferry water gap. 1-2 hours

6 Union Skirmish Line Site of the final infantry engagement during the 1862 battle. 1 hour

7 Jackson's Right Flank From this position, Jackson orchestrated movements

sealing the fate of the Federals. 1 hour

8 Maryland Heights Hike to discover ruins of Civil War forts and campgrounds and savor the spectacular views. 3-6 hours

9 Loudoun Heights Ascend the Blue Ridge via the historic and scenic Appalachian Trail and relish the splendid mountain vistas. 3-5 hours

**Protect Your Park** Help us protect the cultural and natural resources of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Hunting and the collecting of artifacts and natural specimens are forbidden by law. No camping is permitted, and no open fires are allowed. Picnic only in designated areas.

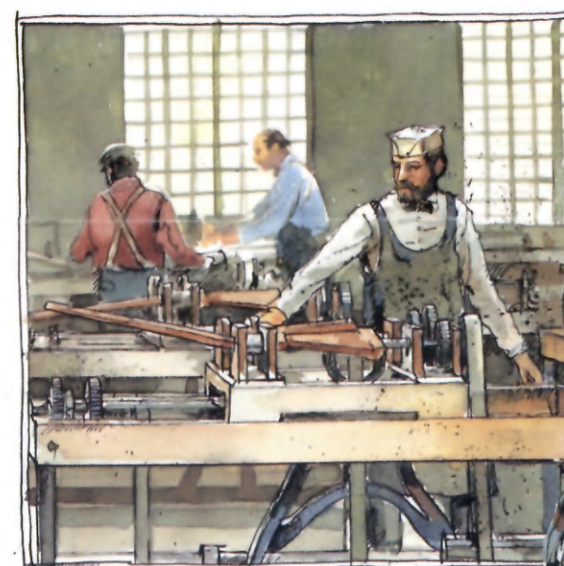
**More Information** Harpers Ferry National Historical Park P.O. Box 65 Harpers Ferry, WV 25425 304-535-6298 www.nps.gov/hafe National Park Service www.nps.gov



**Caution** Steps and sidewalks. The early settlers constructed steps and sidewalks with brick and natural stone. Walk carefully and use handrails on these surfaces; they are sometimes uneven or slippery. Pedestrians, especially children, should beware of automobile traffic on the narrow streets.

**Beware of the rivers** At low water they appear calm and peaceful, but deep holes and swift undercurrents make them treacherous at any time. The park does not monitor the water for pollutants; consequently, swimming is not advised. Anglers and boaters must wear life jackets. Transporting inflatable devices to or from the river across park property is permitted only at designated locations.

## Paths Through History



Turning gun stocks on Blanchard lathes

### Industry

The United States Army and Arsenal, established here in the 1790s, transformed Harpers Ferry from a wilderness into an industrial center. Between the time the first buildings were constructed in 1799 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the armory produced more than 600,000 muskets, rifles, and pistols, and employed, at times, more than 400 workers. Among the weapons the armory produced were the first United States military rifle (the Model 1803 flintlock) and the first percussion rifle (the Model 1841). Inventor John H. Hall developed interchangeable parts technology at his rifle factory in the 1820s and helped lead the change from craftsmen-based production to manufacture by machine. Before the Civil War, Virginian Island boasted a number of private industries, including a sawmill, flour mill, cotton mills, tannery, and iron foundry. Following the war a paper pulp industry provided local jobs. Today only ruins remain of Harpers Ferry's 19th-century industrial heyday.

### John Brown

John Brown believed he could free the slaves, and he selected Harpers Ferry as his starting point. Determined to seize the 100,000 weapons at the arsenal and to use the mountains for guerrilla warfare, abolitionist Brown began his raid on Sunday evening, October 16, 1859. His 21-man self-styled "army of liberation," which included three of his sons and five free African-Americans, seized the armory and several other strategic points. Thirty-six hours after the raid began, with most of his men killed

An armory worker checking the Model 1841 Harpers Ferry percussion rifle

or wounded, Brown was captured in the armory fire enginehouse (now known as "John Brown's Fort") when U.S. Marines stormed the building. Brought to trial at nearby Charles Town, Brown was found guilty of treason against the Common-



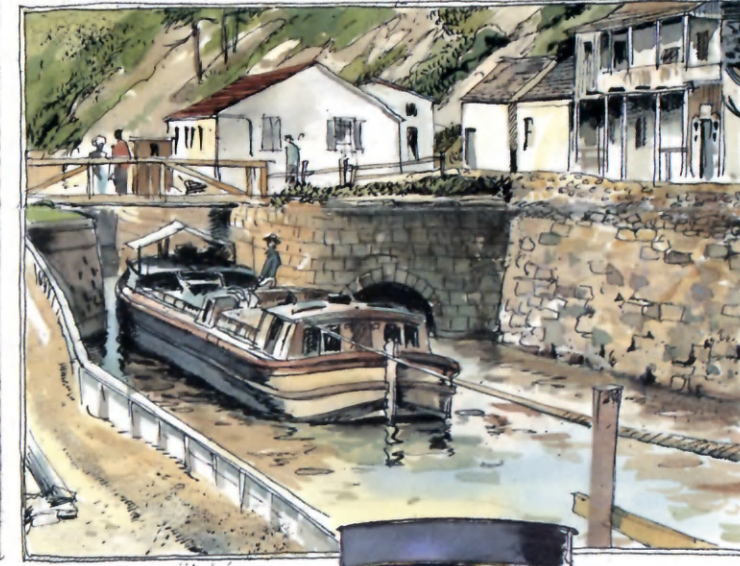
- 1 Lower Town Point of Interest
- 2 Information Center/Master Armorer's House
- 3 Restoration Museum
- 4 Frank's Clothing Store
- 5 Industry Museum
- 6 Bookshop
- 7 Blacksmith Shop
- 8 Hamilton Street
- 9 A Place in Time
- 10 Provost Marshal Office
- 11 Mrs. Stipes' Boarding House
- 12 Dry Goods Store
- 13 Arsenal Square
- 14 John Brown's Fort
- 15 The Point
- 16 John Brown Museum
- 17 Harpers Ferry Wetlands
- 18 Storer College/Niagara Movement
- 19 A. Burton Clocks and Jewelry
- 20 1862 Battle of Harpers Ferry
- 21 Confectionery
- 22 Civil War Museum
- 23 Black Voices
- 24 White Hall Tavern
- 25 Meriwether Lewis Exhibit
- 26 Harper House
- 27 Jefferson Rock/Harper Cemetery

### Natural Heritage

In Harpers Ferry the landscape shaped the history. The water gap, carved out by the rivers over thousands of years, provided a travel route for Native Americans, explorers and settlers, and later the canals and railroads. The Potomac and Shenandoah rivers produced the necessary power for local mills and factories. Surrounding hills yielded building stone, hardwood for charcoal, limestone, and iron ore for a growing community. This development and the strategic terrain lured John Brown and helped bring about the devastation of the Civil War. Floods, intensified by a war-torn and denuded landscape, ravaged what human hands had built. Wetlands filled abandoned canals, and plants and animals converted lost ruins into homes. Today's altered landscape and the natural forces that shape it remind us of the unbreakable connection between people and place.



Visitors at Jefferson Rock



Lock 33, C & O Canal, opposite Harpers Ferry

### Transportation

The convergence of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, the Winchester & Potomac Railroad, and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal in the mid-1830s inaugurated an era of economic and industrial growth for the town that lasted well into the 1850s. Trains and boats reduced travel time from days to hours and served as avenues for local commerce. Passengers traveled with ease from the Ohio and Shenandoah valleys and from growing eastern cities like Baltimore, Washington, and Alexandria. The German and Irish laborers who helped to build the railroads later settled in the area and diversified the local culture. The ferry service that Robert Harper managed in the mid-1700s became obsolete in the early 1800s as bridges spanned the rivers. Today, only the railroad remains as an active reminder of Harpers Ferry's transportation heritage.

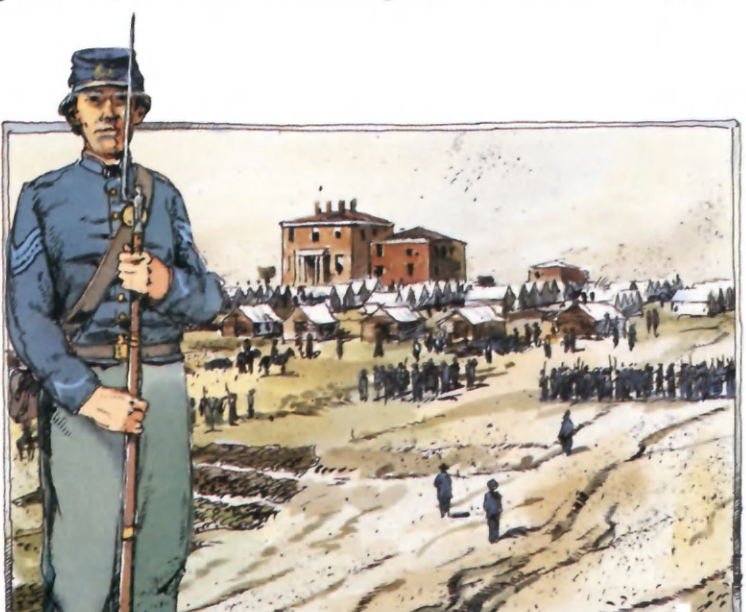


Steam engine of the 1850s and competitor of the C & O Canal

### Civil War

The Civil War had a profound and disastrous effect on Harpers Ferry, leaving a path of destruction that wrecked the town's economy and forced many residents to depart forever. Because of the town's location on the strategic Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Shenandoah Valley, Union and Confederate troop movements through Harpers Ferry were frequent. The town changed hands eight times between 1861 and 1865.

On April 18, 1861, less than 24 hours after Virginia seceded from the Union, Federal soldiers set fire to the armory and arsenal to keep them out of Southern hands. The arsenal and 15,000 weapons were destroyed, but the armory flames were extinguished and the weapons-making equipment was shipped



Federal Troops drilling on Camp Hill, 1862. Left: Non-commissioned officer of the Union Army

south. When the Confederates abandoned the town two months later, they burned most of the factory buildings and blew up the railroad bridge.

United States forces re-occupied Harpers Ferry in 1862, using it as a base for operations in the Shenandoah Valley. During the Confederacy's first invasion of the North, Stonewall Jackson captured the 12,500-man Union garrison stationed here on September 15, 1862. After the Federals returned to Harpers Ferry, they transformed the surrounding heights into fortified encampments to protect both the town and the railroad. In 1864 Union Gen. Philip H. Sheridan used Harpers Ferry as his base of operations against Confederate troops in the Shenandoah Valley.

### African American History

African Americans have been a part of Harpers Ferry history since before the American Revolution. The first black arrived here in the mid-1700s as a slave to Robert Harper. By the time of John Brown's raid in 1859, about 10 percent of the town's residents were black and a key element in the town's economy. The town's 150 slaves, considered property, could be rented out, sold, used as collateral for business transactions, or given away. Another 150 free blacks often worked as laborers or teamsters, but some prospered as skilled masons, plasterers, butchers, and blacksmiths.

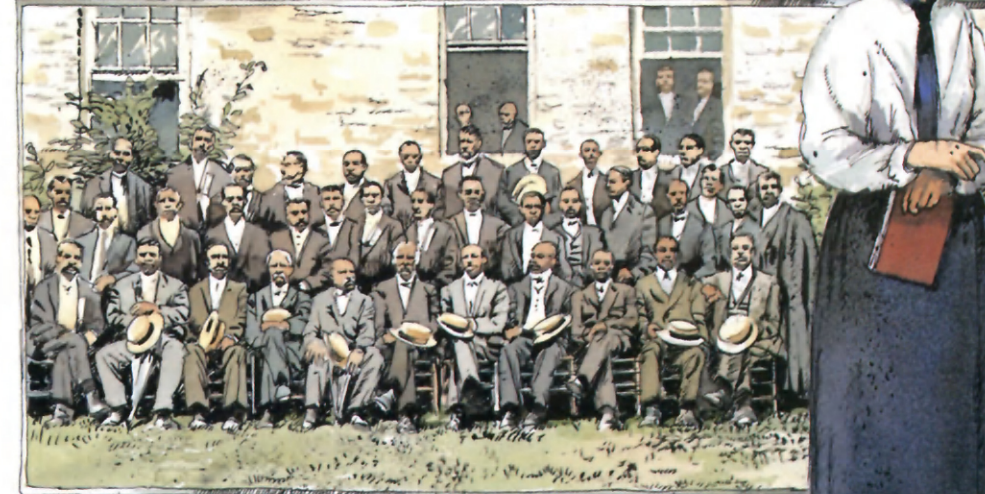
During the Civil War, Harpers Ferry became one of many Union garrison towns where runaway slaves, or "contrabands," as they were called, sought refuge. In 1864 reformer/educator Julia Mann established a

freedmen's school here for their benefit. In 1867, New England Free Will Baptist missionaries acquired several vacant armory buildings on Camp Hill and started Storer College, an integrated school designed primarily to educate former slaves but open to students of all races and both genders. Frederick Douglass was one of the school's trustees.

By the end of the 19th century, the promise of freedom and equality for blacks had been buried by Jim Crow laws and legal segregation. To combat these injustices, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois and other leading African Americans created the Niagara Movement, which held its second conference at Harpers Ferry in 1906. In "one of the greatest meetings that American Negroes

ever held," Du Bois declared: "The battle we wage is not for ourselves but for all true Americans."

For the next 48 years, Storer College taught its students the ethic of honest labor, religion, education, and property ownership. In 1954, legal segregation finally ended and the next year Storer College closed its doors. Today the National Park Service continues the college's educational mission by using part of the old campus as a training facility.



Gathering of delegates to the second annual meeting of the Niagara Movement at Storer College, 1906. Right: Storer College student, early 1900s.