

Civil War Tour Outline

I. Introduction — at Green

A. Welcome, safety message, brief overview

- * Welcome everyone to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. I'm Megan, a Park Ranger here at the park. To begin, I would like to give a brief safety message. The streets are very active, so please watch for vehicles, and also, the sidewalks are quite uneven, so please watch your step. Throughout the tour, we will be moving to various locations in order to relay how a conflict that ripped this country into two directly affected the people of Harpers Ferry and its path through history, but also how what happened here still affects us today.

B. Slavery and its impact

- * The first slaves to arrive in America came in 1619 from Africa. During the course of the Atlantic slave trade, about 16 million Africans were forcibly removed from their homes to work on plantations and within houses as domestic servants. In America, a majority of these slaves found themselves in the south, working under harsh conditions.

C. Harpers Ferry

- * Harpers Ferry even had a slave population beginning with the earliest resident. Robert Harper, whose name the town derives from, stated in his will upon his death that his slave "wench Beck" was to be shared amongst the family members. By 1860, there were 300 African Americans in Harpers Ferry, half of whom were enslaved.

D. Importance

- * In the end, African Americans were not content with their given place in society. A series of rebellions marked southern history up to the Civil War. The most notable being Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831 resulting heightened southern anxiety and increased Northern scrutiny. Slavery, as a polarizing issue, could no longer be blatantly ignored. By 1859, the tensions came to a climax when John Brown, an ardent white abolitionist, raided the Armory and Arsenal here to arm the slaves of the south in order to free them.

Even though the plan failed, it brought renewed attention to how slavery divided the nation. For just 18 months later, shots are fired in Fort Sumter and Virginia secedes from the union. America becomes immersed in a Civil War and Harpers Ferry quickly becomes a battle ground.

Transition - From here we will move on to Arsenal Square to talk about the early years of the war and how Harpers Ferry plays a prominent role.

II. Early Years of War - at Arsenal Square

A. 1861

1. secession
2. burning of armory
3. death of Roeder
4. confederate occupation and Jackson

* Once Abraham Lincoln becomes president and the Gulf States begin to secede, discussion begins on how Virginia would vote. Harpers Ferry, much like everywhere in Virginia, had to vote on whether or not they would stay in the union. Eventually, on April 17th of 1861, Virginia decides to join its southern brothers in separating from the union. Immediately, Harpers Ferry becomes the center of attention. Since John Brown raid, the US government established 42 regular US soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Roger Jones to protect the armory and arsenal from further attack. Almost right after Virginia's decision to secede, Lt. Jones received word that a large force was marching from the south to take possession of the armory machinery and the weapons being stored there. Realizing that he faced drastically uneven odds, Jones decides that he will destroy what he cannot defend. Filling mattresses with gunpowder, Jones set the armory ablaze then retreated with his men northward. The townspeople of Harpers Ferry saw their livelihoods going up in flames and therefore endeavored to save what they could. While the some 15,000 guns being stored in the arsenal were lost, most of the machinery was rescued, later sent to Richmond and Fayetteville, NC. With the loss of the town's main industry, Harpers Ferry began to decline.

* Tragedy would further more Harpers Ferry on July 4th of 1861. Frederic Roeder, a leading citizen of the town, was a staunch unionist who mourned the lose of his country. Having just lost his wife that spring and being left alone to care for 7 children, Roeder sought a way to privately celebrate the birth of the nation he called home. On that day, Roeder set out to downtown Harpers Ferry, now known as the point, to see the American flag that was flying over Maryland. Thinking him a Confederate, federal troops opened fire. One of the bullets glanced off one of the buildings hitting Roeder in the stomach. Managing to drag himself back home, Roeder died on his back porch leaving his eldest daughter to care for her 6 siblings. Roeder would become the first of many deaths at Harpers Ferry.

B. 1862

1. burning of the point
2. Seize of '62 → Antietam

Transition - The first half of the war proved to be destructive to Harpers Ferry. Lets journey to the point to see what the rest of the war had in store for this town.

III. Later Years of the War - at the point

A. military occupation

1. changed hands 8 times but 80% spent in union control
2. 1863-1864 marshal law under the 34th Mass.

a. what experience like for townspeople and soldiers

B. town doesn't grow back

IV. Conclusion - Because of the conflict we can call this a United States park. African Americans can now enjoy the freedoms gauranteed by Const. war led to towns ultimate demise → Nat. Park

* The next year, more devastation came to Harpers Ferry. Very quickly, the people of Harpers Ferry found themselves on an international border. Right across the Potomac River lay another country. In 1862, Confederates occupied Harpers Ferry while Federal troops were similarly encamped in Maryland. Captain Baylor over in Harpers Ferry sent two of his slaves across the Potomac by boat carrying a white flag. Two Federal scouts started out on a boat to meet them half way. At that point, Confederate soldiers hiding out in the abandoned buildings at the point opened fire on the Federal scouts killing one. Colonel Geary, who commanded the Federal troops on Maryland became highly incensed over the death of one of his scouts. In retaliation, Geary ordered the complete destruction of downtown Harpers Ferry in order that no snipers could kill Federal troops from within the abandoned buildings.