

Harpers Ferry Place in History – Megan Sullivan

Tangibles: railroad trestle, water power / rivers, Robert Harpers, George Washington, armory / arsenal, John Brown, John Hall, Heywood Shepherd, Civil War, Frederick Roeder, Storer College, floods

Intangibles: transportation, industry, innovation, change, industrial revolution, growth, origins, leadership, national pride, defense, opportunity, freedom, challenge, avenging angel, interchangeable parts, dedication, death, war, irony, controversy, conflict, patriotism, loss, love, education, equality, natural disaster, destruction, regeneration

Physical Resource: Hall 1819 Rifle, pocket watch

Meaning: time, change, industry, defense

I. Introduction – Stop 1: the Green

Throughout Harpers Ferry's history, the rivers have provided a unique opportunity for industry, growth, and conflict shown especially through the items like this pocket watch or John Hall's rifle which we will discuss in detail throughout the tour. For the next hour, I will take you to the important places that mark Harpers Ferry as a place in history, even through the controversy, up until it became a national park for all of you to enjoy.

A. Particulars

1. safety message – uneven grounds, streets not closed to car traffic
2. themes – transportation, civil war, John Brown, African American history, armory
3. geography of park

TJ Quote from 1783: "one of the most stupendous scenes in Nature" and "this scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic"

Thomas Cather Quote from 1836: "There is a most abominable little village just in the pass between the mountains. Here is the Government Manufactory of Firearms; and the smell of coal smoke and the clanking of hammers obtrude themselves on the senses..."

B. The Beginning of Harpers Ferry

1. starting with "the Hole", going to a height of 3,000 occupants (9/10ths of which were white), and ending up with about 300 today
 - a. *Harpers Ferry grew from an untamed wild to a highly industrialized town to a war torn epicenter of change and finished at the National Park we see today.*
2. importance of rivers
3. Robert Harpers
4. George Washington

In 1747, Robert Harper came and bought to the area he aptly named "the Hole" where he promptly established a ferrying service. Therefore, that's where we get the name "Harper's Ferry".

In 1794, George Washington chose Harpers Ferry as the site of a national armory for its proximity to the national capital, the abundance of water power available to run the factories necessary, and also for the presence of iron ore. George Washington's location proved to be a smart for in the 1830's when the first railroads were being built, the Winchester and Potomac Railroad, seen to your right, was chosen to travel through Harpers Ferry and then connect with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Having a railroad access changed the scope and scale of production on Harpers Ferry as businesses flourished and the population grew to unforeseen proportions. With the coming of the railroad, trinkets, such as these pocket watches took on a new meaning. Keeping time became very important and as we will see later in the tour, it led to conflict and disaster.

Transition: To better understand the growth and development of this river town, let us move to our next stop.

II. Harpers Ferry as a Town – Stop 2: the Alcove

A. Establishment of armory effect on growth of town

1. increase in population
2. people build from the slate cliffs present there
 - a. the slaves were responsible for blasting the cliffs

Before we can understand the importance of these items, we must first understand Harpers Ferry as a whole. When George Washington called for the establishment of a national armory here, he had no way of knowing that 22 brick buildings would change the very face of this river town. From their construction to their destruction, the armory offered a place of opportunity and growth. Almost immediately, the population of Harpers Ferry spiked and drew a number of different kinds of people. With a total of 3,000 at its height, 300 of which were black, Harpers Ferry called to all kinds of people, but especially potential armory workers. The government soon realized that decent housing needed to be constructed and indeed housing arose from the very slate cliffs seen before you. Soon other businesses arose and flourished that also were constructed from the slate cliffs. Slaves were contracted to blast these cliffs for the building of the town, some of which you see today. With the growth of the town and the change it went through, pocket watches would have become more prevalent amongst the people and within the stores that filled every available space along the street.

B. Kind of town it was

1. hygiene issues – only three outhouses, reason for wearing many layers, 90 foot smoke stack billowing coal dust across the town making it smell like rotten eggs
2. social variances – Isaac Gilbert story, the wealthiest man in Harpers Ferry was a free black, 36 pocket watches = 4 slaves (or 9 pocket watches for 1 slave)
3. floods
4. economy (interchangeable parts)

Despite the presence of luxury items, like the pocket watch, this town was not the pristine, healthy town you see before you. In the nineteenth century, Harpers Ferry proved to be a very unhealthy and dangerous town with only three outhouses and filth so bad that a town ordinance was published making it illegal to dump chamber pots out onto the streets. From the armory, a 90 foot smoke stack was erected to keep massive furnaces running 24-7 but the unwanted side effect of government business occurred in the form of coal dust in the air and a putrid rotten egg smell. In addition, the 3,000 people all living in a tight space created massive epidemics and constant sickness. To the people of nineteenth century America, the culprit was "bad air" and one needed to protect oneself from it at all cost. Their solution came in the form of how I am dressed with the idea that one should be clothed from head to toe with only the face and hands showing. The more layers you wore, the more you were protected from any deadly sickness, or at least that's what they thought.

Isaac Gilbert - Isaac Gilbert was a slave who lived in Harpers Ferry in 1858. Even though slaves were not allowed to marry, Isaac had a wife, Sarah, and 3 children. Sarah and the children were also slaves. Isaac had a plan to gain freedom for his family. Although it was against the law, Isaac's owner allowed him to earn his own money on the side. He was able to save \$1,400. With this money Isaac intended to purchase the freedom of his wife and children, who were the property of a different owner. However, a slave could not purchase the freedom of another slave. Isaac asked his friend, Fontaine Beckham, the mayor of Harpers Ferry to take his money and buy his family for him. Beckham agreed to do this, and in his will Beckham declared that when he died the wife and children of Isaac Gilbert would be set free. Beckham died a year later, killed during the John Brown Raid. The family was given their freedom.

Transition: Now that we know what this crowded river town was like, let us move on to discover the important features that make Harpers Ferry so unique starting with the national armory defense plant that brought so much change.

III. The Arsenal & John Brown – Stop 3: Arsenal Square

A. Why here?

1. water power
2. iron ore deposits

B. The Armory

1. John Hall
 - a. changed the way things were produced – pocket watch connection
 - b. the revolutionary idea of interchangeable parts
2. with innovation came problems and conflict
 - a. Colonel Dunn and Cox story
 - b. drinking in armory issue
 - c. 1842 clock strike

C. John Brown – an instigator for change

1. Timeline of pivotal events in life

- a. saw beating of black boy that had befriended
 - b. 1856 Kansas
 - c. picks Oct. 16th because a black family was split up and the man committed suicide due to despair
 - d. Oct. 16-18 have raid
 - e. trail
 - f. execution on Dec. 2nd
2. significance
- a. on the day of his execution, John Brown had a pocket watch that he gave to his jailer, Brown passed on the need for change to the next person

1842 Clock Strike – Originally, people could work as fast or slow as they pleased, so long as they met quota. They had a fair amount of freedom with their job. If they finished early, they got to go home. With the clock, every worker has to stay for a certain number of hours. People felt like they are becoming like the machines themselves. They work when and for however long they are told and just keep producing. There is no more freedom in their workday. They, like the clock looming over them, have become mechanized. Clock mean restriction and more pressure to complete tasks and meet standards but when workers go see President Tyler, he says that they must “hammer out [their] own salvation.” The workers have a choice of whether or not to follow the clock or to quite their job. In a way, the clock for the armory workers translated over to railroads as well in the sense that trains required a passenger to know the time of when they were leaving and arriving. Pocket watches became a necessity in order to use the transportation system available but it also proved to be a hindrance for the armory workers who were paid by the clock.

John Brown Statement – “I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with Blood. I had as I now think vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done.” / “I came here from Kansas and this is a slave state; I want to free all the negroes in this state; I have possession now of the United States Armory and if the citizens interfere with me, I must only burn the town and have blood.”

Lincoln on JB. (Battle Cry of Freedom, pg. 212) “Even though Brown agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong, that cannot excuse violence, bloodshed, and treason.” Brown’s raid effectively polarized the country between north and south, even at the ballot box. Abraham Lincoln agreed with Brown in principle, but disapproved of his methods. Despite this, the nation was so polarized that when Lincoln is elected President in 1860, South Carolina immediately seceded from the Union for fear of a large scale version of John Brown’s Raid; this time with the force of law and military strength

Transition: As a defense plant, Harpers Ferry became a magnet for the ensuing trouble John Brown instigated. With the arrival of the Civil War, Harpers Ferry had its own history of conflict and destruction. To better discuss this phase in Harpers Ferry journey, let’s move on the place where an international boarder was established and maintained for 5 years.

IV. Harpers Ferry on an International Boarder – Stop 4: the Point

A. Civil War

1. burning of armory in 1861 by Lieutenant Roger Jones
 - a. Brown predicted
 - b. the state militia were marching on Harpers Ferry to get guns
 - c. there would be no Confederates here until a couple of days later
2. death of Frederick Roeder on July 4, 1861
 - a. an unhappy man in a foreign country
3. burning of point in Feb. 1862 by union Colonel Geary
 - a. prompted by killing of union scout, Rohr
 - b. Charlie Stuart story
4. siege of 1862 – point to heights

Opening Statements at This Stop – The very ideals that created the constitution and established the US will be tested and threatened just like the U.S. Armory in April of 1861. The constitution stated that a young nation needed its own weapons for national defense. Those weapons are about to be fought over by Virginia and the US Gov. The soldiers of both sides would use the weapons made here as tools of persuasion to convince the other side that they were right.

Frederick Roeder Story – Thus far in the story, Mr. Roeder had already lost his wife and his country so he went to where we are now to look upon the American flag on July 4th, the day we celebrate the birth of our nation, which was flying over Maryland Heights. A writer from the time noted that “Mr. Roeder walked towards the railroad office and while he was sauntering about, a shot was fired from the Maryland side of the Potomac, which inflicted a mortal wound on him, of which he died” in the arms of his seven children. To those in the community, they felt they “lost one of its very best citizens” for Mr. Roeder was well known for his hospitable nature. A touch of irony comes into the story of Harpers Ferry for “the first who lost his life at Harpers Ferry at the hands of the union army was a warm friend to the government” and a person who “was very much opposed to slavery.”

Charlie Stuart Story – Charles Stewart was a slave that belonged to Confederate Capt. Robert Baylor who lived just outside Charles Town. It was February of 1862 when Baylor says he wants to prove that the federals occupying the Maryland shore of the Potomac are helping slaves to cross the river and escape to the freedom of the North. Baylor will take his two slaves to Harpers Ferry and put them at the point area of the town where the two rivers meet. Baylor instructed slave John to wave a white flag to summon the union men across on their skiff. John did not want to cooperate and Baylor put a gun to Johns head. John waved the flag and the union men started over for the Ferry. As the skiff approached, Baylor’s men opened fire killing a union scout named Rohr. Scout Rice got back to safety on the Maryland side of the river. The federals retaliated the death of Rohr by crossing troops over to Harpers Ferry to burn the point and chase off Baylor’s men. Baylor made his point and removed both of his slaves to Winchester. Stewart said Baylor shot John. Baylor wanted to use their labor to unload supplies from trains. Charles said he ran away so Baylor could not work him for the Confederate army. Charles came back towards Harpers Ferry and was stopped by the federals. His story is recorded by the union. By March 4, 1862, Charles was turned over to the Provost Marshal to be sent to Harpers Ferry.

Siege of 1862 – In late summer/early fall of 62, Lee decides to invade the north. While he's advancing, he expected the Union garrison (12,000+ soldiers commanded by Colonel Dixon Miles) in Harpers Ferry to retreat. Miles doesn't retreat and decides to hold Harpers Ferry. Lee sends Jackson with 25,000 soldiers to take Harpers Ferry. Jackson sends General McLaws (sp?) up Maryland Heights. There is some fighting. Colonel Ford is in charge of the Union troops up there. His men are holding off the Confederates fairly well. For some reason, he orders a retreat. McLaws puts artillery up on Maryland Heights. Jackson sends another division (I want to say it was commanded by Anderson, but don't hold me to that) up on Loudoun Heights with a bunch of artillery (Miles hadn't put any soldiers up there). Jackson has the rest of the army on School House Ridge. Miles has his men mostly on Bolivar Heights. A. P. Hill is sent to flank Miles. There is a little fighting. Miles sees no way out (even though McClellan is sending reinforcements) and orders a surrender. The cavalry manage to escape, though. Just as the white flag goes up, a Confederate cannon fired and blew off Miles' leg. He died a couple of days later. Jackson captures the town, 12,500 Union soldiers, 14,000 small arms (muskets), and a bunch of supplies. He then marches towards Sharpsburg (where Antietam would take place).

Transition – Still a vital defense plant for the nation in the 1860's, Harpers Ferry came under siege and conflict repeatedly throughout the Civil War for the simple reason that it possessed a store of manufactured arms. Let us move on to discover the scars of war that were left for Harpers Ferry to manage.

V. Conclusion – Stop 5: Heywood Shepherd Monument

A. The Scars of War

1. slaves during the war were considered contraband
 - a. slaves saw the north as Jubilee – a way to freedom

B. The Monument

1. stone dedicated to someone struck down
 - a. Heywood Shepherd
 - i. first killed in Brown's raid – ironic
 - ii. a free black under the patronage of mayor Fontaine Beckham
2. a few years later, blacks can now come and stand here to read it's inscription
 - a. under Virginia law before the end of slavery, it was illegal to educate a slave
 - b. 1865 Storer College was established for the education of African Americans

C. Final Statements

By this point we have journeyed through Harpers Ferry's history, seeing how Robert Harper could take "the Hole" and George Washington could take the potential water power and turn this place into a legacy. Here, in this river town, John Hall was able to take machines and create the industrial revolution with this interchangeable rifle. This home of 3,000 and one of this country's largest defense plants caused change, opportunity, and revolution. I thank you all for coming on this tour with me to discover how Harpers Ferry is a place worth noting in history. Thank you.