

INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS  
VISITOR CENTER  
HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL MONUMENT

HFR-443

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## INTRODUCTION:

The principal interpretive unit considered in this prospectus is the Visitor Center for Harpers Ferry National Monument which will be housed in an existing building. Building No. 45, The Wilson Building, has been selected to function in this capacity. The public use areas of the facility will contain exhibits, an information and sales desk, rest rooms and an audio-visual room. Due to the space limitations on the first floor of the structure certain of these facilities may need to be housed in an adjoining building. It will be desirable to include in connection with this work a combination audio-visual work and projection room and conference room, as well as offices and temporary library and artifact storage-work space. These facilities are needed at this Park.

## THE INTERPRETIVE MEANS:

The means by which the interpretation of Harpers Ferry National Monument will be presented to the visitors can cover a wide range of techniques developed. The stories are interesting, varied and complicated and should be communicated by several means. Museum exhibits, wayside exhibits, audio and audio-visual stations, signs, markers, self guided tours and to a limited extent guided tours will be utilized.

It is expected that the majority of visitors will avail themselves of the main Visitor Center in the Wilson Building, No. 45, before touring the Monument. This facility which is the main consideration in the Prospectus will be treated in more detail under a separate heading. Here orientation to the area and information on the various trails, exhibits and points of interest in the Monument will be provided. The Lower

Town Section of the Monument is small in area and must be visited on foot.

By activating the Visitor Center in Building No. 45, the present temporary Center in Building No. 36 can be converted to other use. This house which was built for the residence of the Master Armorer of the Federal Armory lends itself to a special interpretive use. One of the important secondary themes in Harpers Ferry's history is the story of the manufacture of arms.

At Harpers Ferry the techniques and concepts of interchangeable parts, assembly line, mass production were developed. Captain John H. Hall at the Rifle Works brought Eli Whitney's idea of interchangeable parts manufacturing to a high degree of perfection and established it as a practical matter. Today we live in an economy made possible by further refinements of a system which was early applied to gun production at Harpers Ferry.

The history of the Armory at Harpers Ferry from 1796 to 1861 should be presented including both the general improvements and specific inventions. The problems of flood, fire and disease were faced together by the Government and the town. These factors in Harpers Ferry's history are common denominators in several aspects of our whole picture.

Building No. 36 is the most important surviving structure in the Lower Town Section related to the Armory story. A branch museum devoted to exhibits detailing the history of the Federal Armory - Musket Factory, Arsenal and Rifle Works - will be established here. After viewing the exhibits the visitor will follow a path leading from the rear of the

building to the Arsenal site. Here the present foundations of the two arsenal buildings will be interpreted. Here reconstructed walls, fences and landscaping and partially reconstructed building walls will present the scene in a more readily understandable manner. An audio station and wayside exhibits will supplement the scene. The audio station can be incorporated into the fencing to become part of the picture. Passing from the Arsenal Square to Building No. 9 across the street the visitor will be introduced in detail to one of the outstanding aspects of the Harpers Ferry story which is also related to the Arsenal.

This is the John Brown Story which will be told in exhibits of a permanent nature replacing the present temporary museum development. Not only the John Brown Raid, but also the background and effects of John Brown and his actions will be presented. Then the visitor will be directed to the site of the John Brown "Fort" and the Musket Factory. Although no part of the Musket Factory or Armory site is presently owned and there is no prospect of more than a small portion ever being part of the Park, the story can be interpreted. Of special interest in the Brown story will be the restored John Brown "Fort" containing period fire engines to point up its original use. The building will be restored to its original foundations. This will conclude the on-site interpretation of both the Armory and John Brown stories.

The tour will then carry to the "point section" where the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers join. Here the story of water power and transportation and the natural history aspect of the river gap can be interpreted. Also the story of the river crossings by bridge and ferry can be brought out by using the present bridges and surviving bridge pilings. Though it

is well in the future, there will come a time when the reconstructed covered bridge will be considered justifiable from the standpoint of interpretation and of access to the Maryland Heights Section of the Monument. Interpretive reference to both Maryland and Loudoun Heights will be made at the "point".

Returning to the town scene the visitors pass the buildings that will ultimately be restored to their 1859 condition. At this time the windows are utilized to display artifacts and take on the aspect of exhibit cases. This provides interest stimulating sidelights to enhance the visitor's enjoyment of Harpers Ferry. As the restoration progresses exhibits in the windows will more and more represent the use of the structures in the historic period. The eventual goal of fitting out the interiors of the stores is many years in the future, but is a desirable objective to be kept in mind.

The Stone Steps carved out of the hillside rock provide access to the Harper House level and the trail to Jefferson Rock. The Harper House, oldest surviving structure in the Monument, will be an increasingly important point of visitor interest. Restored both on the exterior and interior, refurnished and exhibited as an historic house museum, this fine old stone house will receive heavy visitation. Lacking manpower to provide personal interpretation of the house, the use of room barriers and impersonal interpretation will be required. Key features of the house will be the extravagant French wallpaper in one room of the house and the fine views from windows and porch. The history of the house and how it fits into the Harpers Ferry story will have to be conveyed by signs, markers, exhibits or literature.

The riverside room in the basement could become an exhibit room with the other basement room fitted out as a kitchen. This suggested exhibit room is not large, but should be adequate to accommodate Harper House interpretive displays. The kitchen exhibit would be appropriate to its actual use.

The trail from the Stone Steps leads past the Catholic and Episcopal Churches to Jefferson Rock. Stabilization rather than restoration is contemplated for the Episcopal Church. Only a sign at this structure will be required. At Jefferson Rock there is opportunity to develop a rather nice, small overlook and rest stop.

Here an audio station in a stone housing to blend with the situation at the Rock will briefly tell the story of Jefferson Rock and the scene as they relate to the history and to orient the visitors to their location. Benches will be provided so that visitors can spend some time surveying the scene more conveniently than at present when only dirty rocks are available for seating. A low wall will be constructed to discourage people from going too near the edge with its attendant hazards. This is a very desirable development due to several factors. Jefferson Rock is a well known point of interest and many people visiting Harpers Ferry plan to visit it, while others learn of it after arrival and as a result the majority of visitors do go to this point. To reach the Rock requires a rather steep climb and on a hot day visitors would be benefited by a rest before proceeding further with their visit. The scene is well worth encouraging visitors to prolong their stop, but to do this will require the development of some facilities to make it a more attractive stop. At present this point of interest does not hold the

visitor as long as it rightfully should.

Above Jefferson Rock is the Harper Cemetery, which is not part of the Monument, and Storer College, which will soon be included in the Monument. At the head of the cemetery is the Lockwood House. In this historic structure, due to its location and historical associations, will be located the Civil War Branch Museum. This is a large house and there is ample room to tell the Civil War story. Harpers Ferry merits detailed consideration not so much for a major single battle, but for its importance throughout the entire period of the war. Here is the best opportunity the Service has to tell the Civil War story in terms of a continuing phenomenon and in terms of the effect of war on a town over a four year period. It should be an extensive coverage of the event. It can be told by exhibits and by special literature supplementing the handbook.

The Harpers Ferry Civil War story is a detailed and rather complicated one. War came early to Harpers Ferry when Federal troops destroyed the Arsenal to keep the store of arms from Confederate hands. The famous "Stonewall" Jackson in the following weeks made considerable progress in turning volunteers into soldiers and during this time effected the capture of important railroad rolling stock which was partly put to use on Southern railroads. Confederate evacuation followed the removal of the arms producing machinery from the Armory and Rifle Works and the destruction of those buildings and of the covered bridge across the Potomac. Harpers Ferry is connected with the first battle of Manassas as these troops participated in that action. The fall of 1861 saw the Battle of Bolivar Heights and the destruction of private property by Confederate forces. In February of 1862 the town suffered a severe blow

when Federal forces burned the "point section" of the town. This had long-range, serious effects on the town and contributed to its decline after the Civil War. In the spring of that year Harpers Ferry was associated with Jackson's famous Valley Campaign although Jackson did not capture the town at that time. It was in the fall of 1862 that Harpers Ferry again came under fire. This time it was in connection with General Lee's first invasion of the North which began at Second Manassas and ended at Antietam. In between these battles Jackson captured some 12,500 Federal soldiers by gaining control of Loudoun and Maryland Heights and then approaching from the direction of Halltown, he gained the victory by completing the encirclement of the town. This event is the best remembered Civil War action at Harpers Ferry. Less well known facets of this fascinating story are the evacuation of the town at the time of Gettysburg, Early's attack on Washington and Sheridan's headquarters and supply base at Harpers Ferry. The recounting of these events merits and requires considerable space and attention. Information on the Maryland and Bolivar Heights interpretive facilities and the Civil War remains on the three surrounding heights will be provided for the visitors as an inducement to visit these points. These three surrounding heights - Bolivar, Loudoun and Maryland - figure prominently in the Civil War story.

Loudoun Heights contains rifle pits and rather small Civil War remains. This will be left largely as a natural area, accessible only by trails and will contain no new developments.

Bolivar Heights is significant as the surrender area in Jackson's siege and capture just prior to the Battle of Antietam in September of 1862. A small parking area and interpretive center to specifically

detail the action at this point will be provided. Surviving trenches will be cleared and identified for the visitors' understanding. Additional portions of the trenches should be considered for acquisition.

Maryland Heights is the largest and most impressive of the three heights areas. When it is acquired by the State of Maryland and added to the Park, considerable development should be undertaken. Here is an outstanding combination of scenic and historic values. The elaborate system of fortifications should be stabilized and restored to some degree. The old military roads should be developed as a trail system to link the battery and fort positions and provide access to the scenic overlooks. A parking area and interpretive center are needed to develop the area. The access road and the parking area should be behind or to the north of the Stone Fort so that they will not be visible from Harpers Ferry. To develop roads on Maryland Heights would be undesirable and to provide no access except by hiking would be equally undesirable. A visit to Maryland Heights would be an enriching experience which should not be denied our visitors.

Returning from the Lockwood House, the visitor can take advantage of two special museums. One of these is in Building No. 16 and will be an architectural exhibit building. Here the story of the architectural research of a structure which makes possible its restoration will be presented. Although it may be rather unusual in the Park Service to devote an entire exhibit to this specific subject, it is justifiable and appropriate at Harpers Ferry. Architectural research is an integral part of the work here and as the restoration program is explained to visitors, their interest in the matter is aroused. The Lower Town

Section is basically an area of buildings - buildings that are restored, that are in the process of restoration and that will be restored.

Visitors can be shown the various steps and stages of architectural research and restoration as they circulate through Building No. 16 and the fabric of the structure itself will constitute a portion of the exhibit material. The building would in this case never be restored on the interior.

Next door, in Building No. 15, a natural history branch museum could be activated to explain this secondary, but important theme of Harpers Ferry National Monument. This Park is rather unique in the rich combination of natural history and human history values. The scenery and history are almost equally well known. Here the geology and the bird, plant and animal life will be explained by exhibits and personal contact. The various trails will be located, identified and explained to the visitor. Of special note at this point would be the history-nature trail on Virginus Island. There a trail circles what at one time was an island system, but has since become part of the mainland. The trail passes by various remains of historic structures which will be more adequately interpreted by signs and markers.

At the upper end of the island loop trail, near Highway #340, is a site with the potential to become a key point of interest. Here are located the foundations of the U. S. Rifle Works which superseded the Hall Rifle Works. Further archeological excavations will open up all the remains and set the stage for final development of the site. This would consist of a wayside exhibit shelter to interpret the Hall and U. S. Rifle Works, the development of new manufacturing techniques, the John Brown Raid and the Civil War destruction. The area of the Rifle

Works will be cleared and foundations clearly marked and buildings identified. At such time as the flood situation is solved, it would not be unreasonable to reconstruct one of the buildings for exhibit purposes and portions of the other structures to convey more graphically the extent and nature of the Rifle Works. In conjunction with the interpretive development a small parking area should be provided near the junction of Highway #340 and Shenandoah Street.

Entrance signs to the Park are inadequate. Four double faced entrance-exit signs should be installed on the highway approaches. These are on Highway #340 at the Virginia State line and above the Shenandoah bridge, on High Street in the town and on the Pipertown Road on Loudoun Heights. The Shenandoah Street access off of Highway #340 is in very serious need of improvement to eliminate the severe traffic hazard.

Vista clearings are necessary at a number of points. Some of our finest scenic and interpretive vantage points fail to serve a useful purpose due to the excessive ground and tree cover. Determinations need to be made as to where we shall halt the spread of Nature. It will not be desirable to return completely to the scene during the Civil War when the area was virtually denuded, but neither is it desirable to convert this historic site into a wilderness area. Harpers Ferry National Monument was established primarily for its historic and not its scenic values. Thinking in regard to the ultimate development of the Park should take note of this fact.

Interpretive and informational signs need to be spotted about the Park to provide for the visitor's understanding of the scene and story.

Signs will be located in each of the four sections of the Park - Lower Town, Loudoun Heights, Bolivar Heights and Maryland Heights. The following listing of subject matter would provide a rather complete supplement to personal contact by uniformed personnel and the literature to be available.

| <u>Location</u>  | <u>Subject</u>                     |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Lower Town       | Individual Building Identification |
|                  | Water Gap                          |
|                  | River Crossings                    |
|                  | Civil War Action at "Point"        |
|                  | Musket Factory Site                |
|                  | John Brown "Fort"                  |
|                  | Arsenal Site                       |
|                  | Stone Steps                        |
|                  | Harper Garden                      |
|                  | Jefferson Rock                     |
|                  | Harper Cemetery                    |
|                  | Virginus Island                    |
|                  | Rifle Works                        |
| Loudoun Heights  | Civil War Action                   |
|                  | Rifle Pits                         |
| Bolivar Heights  | Surrender Story                    |
|                  | Trenches                           |
| Maryland Heights | Stone Fort                         |
|                  | Gun Positions                      |
|                  | Others as determined               |
| Variable         | MISSION 66                         |
| Trails           | Identification                     |

By the use of the devices set forth above, the Harpers Ferry story can come alive in the minds of the visitors. Here we have a potential blending of the old and new, of the historic scene and story with modern devices of reaching the public. The interpretation and presentation of Harpers Ferry National Monument will ever be a challenge. Success in making a visit to Harpers Ferry the most meaningful experience for the visitor will be in relation to the development of the program outlined above. Much can be excused on the grounds of the early stage of development and the large majority of visitors react favorably to their experience, but it must be realized that more complete means of disseminating information are necessary. There should be a steady movement in this direction.

The interpretive program and the restoration program go hand in hand. As the restoration progresses and the town scene conforms more and more to the historic period, new subject matter will be available for the interpreters of the Harpers Ferry story. In an effort to provide protection for the Lower Town section three permanent quarters are provided. This should be the extent of this program. Most of the buildings in this section are in the flood zone and therefore undesirable for housing. One of the permanent quarters provided is in that zone and no more should be so located. Allowing our people to live in the heart of the restoration scene is directly contrary to the goals and justifications for the restoration program even though the town was lived in in the historic period. We cannot present to our visitors the Harpers Ferry of 1859 if we are going to intrude on the scene a 1959 way of living. The many little things of everyday living cannot be camouflaged or in this Park

concealed or segregated from the visitor use area. It is all one compact area and the sight and sound of television, radio and air conditioning is not part of mid-nineteenth century America.

Another aspect of the Park not previously mentioned is quite important. What is developed should be of value to all visitors including the scholar. Harpers Ferry should rightfully become a research center. Primary source materials should be gathered in small segments and in large collections when the opportunity is presented. This material is vital to research by the Service or by individuals. The Service would do well to actively promote the acquisition in this area of the Boyd Stutler John Brown Collection, the Thornton Perry Jefferson County and Civil War Collection and the Meade Patterson Harpers Ferry Gun Collection. With these in hand scholars would find in the Park Service a respected place to study. Harpers Ferry is not unique in its potential for development as a research center, but it is certainly a prime area for such a movement.

#### FUNCTIONS OF THE VISITOR CENTER:

The functions of this Visitor Center are several. It provides the first contact with the Park for the majority of visitors. Its location is across the street from the main parking lot and at the entrance to the Lower Town group of buildings and scene. It should therefore provide information as to what to see and do in the Park and the highlights of the historical events being interpreted. In conjunction with this there should be an audio-visual program to supplement the exhibits. Individual contact at the sales and information desk will also supplement the exhibits by personal interpretation. It is hoped that the exhibits, without playing down the two nationally significant events - the John Brown Raid and the Civil War - will still be able to inform the visitor that there is a variety of interesting natural and human history at Harpers Ferry National Monument.

The facilities comprising the Visitor Center must be provided within the limitations imposed by the size of existing structures. A new building will not be erected for this purpose. The building should be restored on the exterior and remodeled on the interior for Visitor Center functions.

These functions will be to provide museum exhibits, a sales and information desk, rest rooms, an audio-visual room and a rest area if possible considering the lack of a lobby. The visitor will enter directly into the exhibit area which will contrast sharply with the exterior appearance of the building. Visitors' first most common requirement is for rest room facilities which must be provided for. Although there are unfortunate aspects to using a portion of the limited space available for this purpose, this demand must be met without undue inconvenience to the visitor if his visit is to be as pleasant as possible. The audio-visual room must also be a part of the Visitor Center whole. The chosen building

cannot accomodate all that is proposed for it. Therefore, it is recommended that the audio-visual room be located in the adjoining structure, Building No. 44, and doorways cut through the walls of the buildings. This will allow the visitor to take advantage of the total Visitor Center experience without going out of the buildings. To place the audio-visual room in another structure or to require visitors to enter Building No. 44 from the street after leaving the museum exhibit building will result in a high loss of participation in this program. Also it is hoped the museum exhibits will prepare the visitor for the slide program. To interrupt the interpretive sequence by discharging the visitors into the town scene would reduce the effectiveness of the total Visitor Center experience.

Building No. 45 has ample space on the second floor to accomodate various needed facilities. These include a combination conference room and audio-visual work and projection room as well as offices for the interpretive staff and library and artifact storage-work space. As development proceeds at the Park some of these facilities will be moved to more desirable and efficient locations.

#### CONTENTS OF EXHIBITS:

It is hoped that as there is a variety of subjects to be treated, there will also be a variety of treatment of the exhibits. In addition to the use of artifacts the following should be considered: illustrations, flat, perspective and electric maps, models, technasation and diorama.

#### Exhibit #1.

An interpretive statement to keynote the exhibits.

Exhibit #2.

You Are Here

1. An area map of about a hundred mile radius. On this will be shown the key cities and highways as well as other Park Service areas which the visitor may choose to visit after leaving Harpers Ferry. Certain non-Service areas as well may be shown.
2. Large photographs from Maryland, Bolivar and Loudoun Heights and historic sketches and photographs exhibited around the map in this exhibit to orient the visitor to Harpers Ferry.

Exhibit #3.

We Are Here (The Park Service)

1. An artist's rendering of the restored town scene. American Heritage in their Picture History of the Civil War employed a novel technique that would be adaptable to representing our town scene.
2. The Restoration Story told concisely to explain this objective to the visitor. MISSION 66 can be brought out in this connection.

Exhibits 2 and 3 should be located to relate to each other and provide a visual connection between the two themes of "You are here and We are here".

Exhibit #4.

Nature and Man

1. The Geological Story will relate the physical characteristics, such as water power, to the historical events and explain how this power source attracted industry and contributed to the growth of the town, the John Brown Raid and the Civil War.

#### Virginian Island

1. Story of manufacturing on the island.
2. Relief map or model of the island and its water power system.
3. Working models of waterwheels.

#### Exhibit #5.

##### Nature vs. Man

1. Floods - photographs and descriptive comments on the floods and a statement of their effect on the history of the town.

We should also state our position on the flood situation relative to the development and restoration of the town scene.

Exhibits 4 and 5 should also be grouped together as a unit.

#### Exhibit #6.

##### A Town is Founded

1. Robert Harper story
  - a. The ferry story including a model.
  - b. This site as a passage West for pioneers.
  - c. Harper House built and used as a tavern.
2. Jefferson's comments and the "Rock" story.

#### Exhibit #7.

##### . . . . And Grows

1. George Washington chooses Harpers Ferry for Armory site.
2. Businesses attracted to Harpers Ferry.
3. Private business on "reserved land".
4. Hall Rifle Works.

#### Exhibit #8.

##### Railroad vs. Canal

1. Railroad-Canal fight

2. Harpers Ferry becomes a transportation center.
3. Models of train and canal boat coming around Maryland Heights.
4. Models of various types of rail and canal equipment in use prior to the Civil War.
5. Advertisements of transportation services available at Harpers Ferry.

Exhibits 6, 7 and 8 constitute a unit in the museum.

#### Exhibit #9.

##### John Brown in Kansas

1. Winter of 1855-56 with description and drawing of open shelters in which the Browns faced the severe Kansas winter.
2. Sack of Lawrence and Pottawatomie killings.
3. Chatham Convention and Provisional Constitution.

#### Exhibit #10.

##### John Brown Raid

1. Diorama - "Storming the Fort".
2. Brief account of the action by means of a rear screen projection of the text.

#### Exhibit #11.

##### John Brown Trial and Execution

1. Trial.
2. Jail.
3. Execution.
4. Effects and national reaction.

Exhibits 9, 10 and 11 constitute a unit in the museum.

Exhibit #12.

United States Arsenal Destroyed

1. Account of action.
2. Technamation to represent the burning.
3. Salvaged artifacts to be used in this exhibit.

Exhibit #13.

Siege and Capture

1. Second Manassas - Harpers Ferry - Antietam Campaign story.
2. Simple electric map to tell the story.

Exhibit #14.

Harpers Ferry in the War.

1. Highlights of entire war at Harpers Ferry. Text may be either audio or visual.
2. Illustrated exhibit of events. This could be done either by rear screen projection or a mechanical means of bringing up appropriate pictures and sketches in relation to the events.

Exhibits 12, 13 and 14 constitute a unit in the museum.

Exhibit #15.

What to See and Do

1. Artist's sketches of the various available activities.
2. Included in this flat exhibit, attractively arranged sketches would point out the other exhibit buildings, Harper House, Jefferson Rock, John Brown Fort, Island Trail, Audio-Visual Room, the surrounding heights and the C. & O. Canal.

Large lettered headings in connection with the exhibit groups indicated above will serve to compartmentalize the exhibits and quickly identify specific

subjects for the visitor. Short interpretive statements beneath these headings could tie the entire exhibit together and summarize the history of Harpers Ferry. This would be in the nature of a frieze and the right selection of material to work in would be a key to its effectiveness.

#### DESCRIPTIVE OUTLINE OF AUDIO-VISUAL SCRIPT:

The audio-visual program should be more of an introduction to the Monument than a history lesson, but there should be a blending of the several approaches to such programs. Highlights of Harpers Ferry's history have been presented in the museum exhibits and the function of this program should be to acquaint the visitor with the activities he has available while visiting Harpers Ferry National Monument.

The Park would be introduced by slides of the Shenandoah Street entrance and the lower town as the majority of visitors enter the area. Other slides would take the visitor on a tour of the Lower Town, to Jefferson Rock, the Island Trail, Loudoun Heights, Bolivar Heights and finally to Maryland Heights for the historic and scenic values. A few black and white slides should be included to provide a measure of continuity between past and present.

The script will be basically a "what to see and do" type with enough reference to historical events to relate the present situation with the past. It should be noted for the visitor that he has the opportunity to come in close contact with significant elements of his historical heritage. A right blending of these two themes will produce an audio-visual program which will enrich the visitor's experience at Harpers Ferry National Monument.

COST ESTIMATE FOR VISITOR CENTER: (From PCP B-9-3)

|                                          |              |
|------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Architectural Investigation and Research | \$ 4,000     |
| Construction                             | 62,000       |
| Contingencies                            | 3,610        |
| Plans, Surveys and Supervision           | 7,290        |
| Museum Exhibits                          | 20,000       |
| Audio-Visual Program                     | <u>4,000</u> |
| Total                                    | 100,900      |



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