

Imperiled Promise

THE STATE OF HISTORY

IN THE

NATIONAL

PARK

SERVICE



COMPLETED BY THE
Organization of American Historians
AT THE INVITATION OF THE
National Park Service

2011



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THE STATE OF HISTORY IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PREPARED BY THE OAH HISTORY IN THE NPS STUDY TEAM

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Executive Summary

The State of History in the National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) takes care of and interprets some of the most powerful and instructive historic places in the nation. Millions of Americans each year cultivate a deeper appreciation of the nation's past through encounters with historic buildings, landscapes, and narratives preserved by the NPS and its constituent agencies and programs. At two-thirds of the nearly four hundred national park units, history is at the heart of the visitor experience, and human activity has profoundly shaped them all. History is central to the work of the Park Service.

In 2008, the Organization of American Historians (OAH) agreed, at the behest of the NPS chief historian's office, to undertake a study of "the State of History in the National Park Service." Four historians—Anne Mitchell Whisnant (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Marla Miller (University of Massachusetts Amherst), Gary Nash (University of California, Los Angeles), and David Thelen (Indiana University)—were charged with carrying out this assessment.

Although only about 182 NPS employees carry the job title of "historian" (0170 series), many more are engaged in the agency's vast history-related preservation, research, compliance, and interpretive work. Therefore, this study focuses both on what historians do within NPS, and the larger question of *who* does history in and for the Park Service.

The centerpiece of our work was an electronic questionnaire sent to over 1,500 members of NPS's permanent staff who have some responsibility for history. We received 544 responses, generating more than 800 single-spaced pages of discursive replies. We also solicited perspectives and advice from numerous retired and current NPS historians and administrators, including key leaders at the regional and national levels. We consulted a set of external stakeholders—historians generally based in colleges and universities who have worked closely with the agency. Team members visited dozens of parks and conducted seven large-group listening sessions at annual meetings of the OAH, National Council on Public History (NCPH), and National Association for Interpretation (NAI). Finally, we combed through OAH-sponsored site-visit reports, NPS administrative histories, and of other previous studies. These strategies yielded a broad view of the fortunes of NPS history practice in recent decades.

We found that much is going well. Our study identified nearly 150 examples of historical projects and programs that NPS personnel regard as effective, inspiring models. We ourselves observed many instances of high-quality scholarship and creative interpretation. More than a dozen of these successes are profiled herein, as lamps lighting the path ahead.

But we also found that the agency's ability to manage its sites "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations"—let alone achieve its highest aspirations to become the nation's largest outdoor history classroom—has been imperiled by the agency's weak support for its history workforce, by agency structures that confine history in isolated silos, by longstanding funding deficiencies, by often narrow and static conceptions of history's scope, and by timid interpretation. As a consequence, one of our survey respondents wrote, history in the NPS is "sporadic, interrupted, superbly excellent in some instances and vacant in others."¹ Our findings describe many specific aspects of the state of history practice today—an uneven landscape of inspiration and success amid policies and practices that sometimes inhibit high-quality work.

¹ Respondent 10273.

6 | Promises to Keep: Our Vision for an Expansive, Integrated, and Vital Practice of NPS History

This report urges NPS to recommit to history as one of its core purposes and invest in building a top-flight program of historical research and interpretation that will foster consistently effective and integrated historic preservation and robust, place-based visitor engagement with history. The more central history can be to NPS's missions and activities, the more relevant and responsive NPS can be to the needs of American society in the twenty-first century.

In the spirit of the 1963 *Leopold Report* as well as the landmark 1966 study *With Heritage so Rich*, and building upon invigorating new directions in the larger profession of history, we recommend at the outset a general philosophy for both agency and park history grounded in these key actions:

- Expand interpretive frames beyond existing physical resources.
- Emphasize connections of parks with the larger histories beyond their boundaries.
- Highlight the effects of human activity on “natural” areas.
- Acknowledge that history is dynamic and always unfinished.
- Recognize the NPS's own role in shaping every park's history.
- Attend to the roles of memory and memorialization at historic sites.
- Highlight the open-endedness of the past.
- Forthrightly address conflict and controversy both in and about the past.
- Welcome contested and evolving understandings of American civic heritage.
- Envision “doing history” as a means of skills development for civic participation.
- Share authority with and take knowledge from the public.
- Better connect with the rest of the history profession and embrace interdisciplinary collaboration.

Findings and Recommendations

Careful review of the history of history practice in the NPS reveals that many of the challenges history faces in the agency today result from several defining legacies of the way the history program has developed over time. These legacies include:

- An underemphasis and underfunding of historical work as priorities shifted to natural resources, law enforcement, and other concerns;
- An artificial separation of cultural resources management from interpretation;
- An artificial separation of natural resources interpretation from cultural and historical interpretation;
- An overemphasis on mandated compliance activities at the expense of other ways history can be practiced; and
- A misperception of history as a tightly bounded, single and unchanging “accurate” story, with one true significance, rather than an ongoing discovery process in which narratives change over time as generations develop new questions and concerns, and multiple perspectives are explored.

Findings 1, 2, and 3 describe how these legacies have too often left history without strong, consistent sources of leadership, fragmented history practice across the agency, divided what should be the closely linked arenas of history and interpretation, and increasingly isolated the practice of history in NPS from developments in scholarship, museums, and schools. These conditions have created administrative inefficiencies and dampened the agency's ability to both draw on and contribute to broader scholarly and public conversations.

Findings 4, 5, and 6 address workforce development and funding challenges that have created a severe dearth of professional history expertise and capacity, both for now and the future. Meanwhile, findings 7 and 8 explore the current limitations and unexplored possibilities offered by targeted and thoughtful partnerships and creative uses of technology to enhance history practice and spread ideas and knowledge. In neither area is NPS presently mobilizing these strategies to best effect for history.

Finding 9 describes the irony that, despite a palpable reverence for longstanding agency practices and traditions, NPS has been surprisingly slow to deeply engage its own history. Findings 10, 11, and 12, meanwhile, discuss specific ways in which historical interpretation is constrained by inflexible conceptualizations and approaches that do not take maximum advantage of emerging ideas and methods that are transforming history practice and history-based civic engagement elsewhere.

This report makes or endorses nearly one hundred recommendations to improve history practice in the NPS. In some cases, we underscore recommendations made by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), the National Parks Second Century Commission, and National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), whose thorough and impressive studies yielded many important observations and insights. In many cases, too, we have adopted and advanced recommendations our NPS informants first proposed.

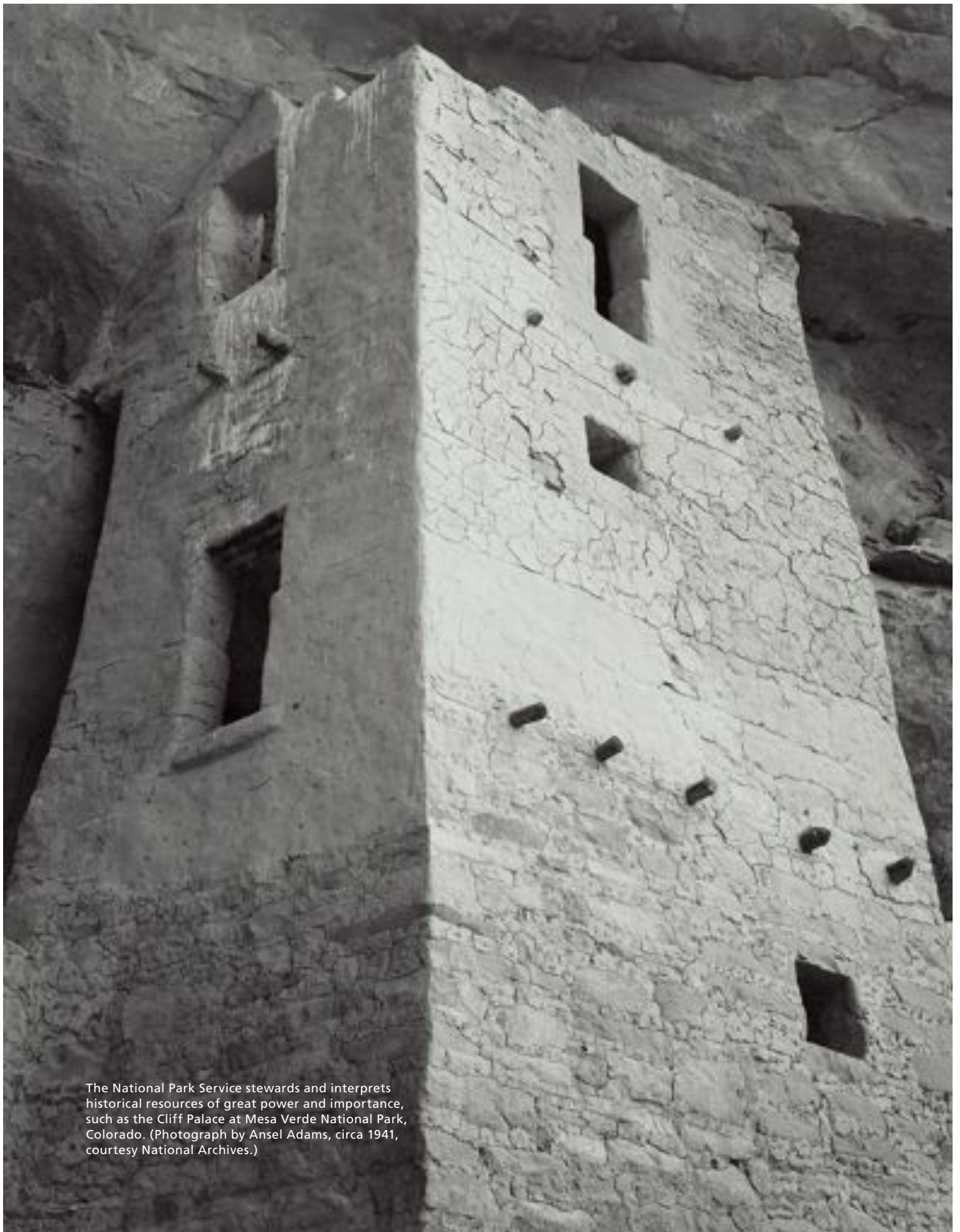
Among the key recommendations herein, we join NAPA, Second Century, and NPCA to advocate a concerted effort to invest in adequate staffing and restored funding for history (recommendations 1.1, 2.2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 6.1). We urge NPS to reopen lines of consistent connection between history and interpretation in every way possible. This might take the form of scoping cultural resources studies to include interpretive deliverables, and reconfiguring interpretive planning to incorporate the findings of historical resource studies (1.3). We propose formal and informal mechanisms to improve communication and reduce isolation both within and beyond the agency (3.2, 3.3, 3.5). We suggest that NPS revisit position qualifications (4.5) and essential competencies (1.4), study the agency's historical employment patterns for historians (4.1), distribute historians more widely across the agency (4.1, 4.6), and take other steps to ensure that additions to the staff are adequately trained for their work. We urge that existing staff be supported in pursuing necessary, ongoing professional development (4.2, 4.3, 4.4). We endorse recommendations made by the Second Century Commission to establish conduits for innovation (3.1), and to strive to cultivate an ever-more-diverse workforce (5.1, 5.2).

We encourage efforts to maximize synergies with an array of external partners, from colleges and universities to local community groups (7.1, 7.2), and to harness the power of technology to facilitate interpretation and conversation, with visitors, peers and partners (8.1). We recommend ways to make NPS scholarship more widely available, to disseminate more broadly knowledge cultivated within the agency (8.2–8.5). We describe ways to engage the agency's unique history and to improve internal documentation (9.1, 9.3).

With greater attention to the agency's own history, we envision ways for parks to adopt a more reflexive posture, interpreting their own pasts and engaging in more challenging and relevant interpretation with visitors (9.2, 10.1, 10.2). And we suggest several ways in which historical interpretation can be better connected with wider aims of civic engagement built upon incorporating multiple perspectives and listening more closely to visitors (11.1–11.3, 12.1).

We make two cross-cutting recommendations to bring together leadership empowered to implement the best and most useful of the suggestions offered here: a History Leadership Council (recommendation 1.2), comprising the agency's most talented and influential historians and interpreters; and a History Advisory Board (2.1), comprising the nation's leading public history professionals from beyond the agency—the most innovative curators, the most insightful scholars, the most savvy administrators. With these two bodies providing much-needed leadership, other needs (dissolving internal barriers and fostering interconnection, better engaging the agency's own history, and learning of and from some of the most exciting developments both within and beyond the agency) should fall more readily into place.

We conclude by enjoining the OAH and the history profession more broadly to embrace and enlarge their efforts to support history in the NPS, through expansion of the partnership that produced this report and through other creative efforts to make common cause in the interest of rearticulating a reinvigorated public and civic role for national parks-based history for a new era.



The National Park Service stewards and interprets historical resources of great power and importance, such as the Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado. (Photograph by Ansel Adams, circa 1941, courtesy National Archives.)

The Promise of History in the National Park Service

Glacier. Yosemite. The Great Smoky Mountains. The Grand Canyon. When Americans think of our national parks, these majestic natural landscapes spring quickly to mind. Indeed, the elements of the National Park Service's iconic logo—grazing buffalo, snow-capped mountain, towering pine and distant stream—all cue ideas about nature. But the agency's logo gathers these elements within the outlines of an arrowhead, an artifact of the nation's oldest cultures, and longest histories. If our National Park Service (NPS) was initially conceived as an effort to preserve the country's most scenic landscapes, that enterprise was and remains inextricably braided with the stewardship of the human stories that it also preserves and protects.

Despite popular perceptions that NPS is first and foremost the steward of spectacular natural vistas, two-thirds of the system's nearly four hundred parks exist explicitly to protect and interpret cultural and historic resources.¹ At these sites, history is at the heart of the visitor experience. As visitors gaze at the east room of Independence Hall, where Continental Congress delegates wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence, troop with rangers over the Gettysburg Battlefield, listen to the clattering water-driven looms at the Lowell textile mills, marvel at ancient cliff-dwellings at Canyon de Chelly, and as they contemplate the barren, high desert landscape at Manzanar, where ten thousand Japanese Americans spent most of the World War II years, visitors encounter the national story as they can nowhere else.

At the same time, through an array of preservation programs (from the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) to the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program) NPS shapes the everyday landscapes—the main streets, downtowns, and village centers—in which millions of Americans carry out their daily lives. The NPS is nothing short of the conservator of our nation's origins and of its triumphs and struggles: the historic places the agency documents, preserves, and interprets instruct us on the course of American history and encourage lifelong learning.

By holding many of the places where our American heritage has been forged, the National Park Service has great potential to make a substantial difference in public historical understanding, education, engagement, and civic discourse. In many places, it already does.

On the ground, however, this great potential is too often hobbled by the agency's weak support for its history workforce, by agency structures that confine history in isolated silos (each with its separate leaders and lines of authority), by uneven and sometimes erratic funding priorities, by often narrow and static conceptions of history's scope, and by timid interpretation. When these problems manifest themselves, NPS falls short of its full potential to serve as keeper and interpreter of the nation's past.

This report proposes a new vision for history in the NPS—one that is appropriate for the agency's unique possibilities and challenges. Our vision includes both guiding perspectives that should infuse all history practice in the national parks and suggestions for how to build the professional capacity that will foster the ability to apply these perspectives. Our goal is a stronger, more consistently supported, more professional, and better-integrated practice of history that is appropriate and relevant for our parks, the public, and our times. This new approach can lift history out of its often marginal state within the NPS and situate it more centrally to core activities of both individual parks and the national park system. So positioned, history can help the NPS better guard the precious resources in its care, and propel the agency toward greater relevance to American civic life.

1 National Parks Conservation Association, *The State of America's National Parks*, June 2011. <http://www.npca.org/about-us/center-for-park-research/sanp/>, 33 and Appendix A.

12 | About this Study

This project was launched in spring 2008 and completed in 2011 under a cooperative agreement established in 1994 between the Organization of American Historians (OAH) and the NPS that has for fifteen years worked to enhance history work in NPS. The “State of History in the National Parks” project seeks to explore whether the present practice of history in the agency is sufficiently robust, current, and flexible enough to enable the NPS to fulfill its promise of creating an inspired, informed, and thinking citizenry.

Undertaken at the behest of NPS Chief Historian Robert K. Sutton’s office (located at the NPS Washington Support Office, often referred to internally as WASO), this report was coauthored by a team of four university-based historians, chosen by the OAH: Marla R. Miller (University of Massachusetts Amherst); Gary B. Nash (University of California, Los Angeles); David Thelen (Indiana University); and Anne Mitchell Whisnant (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, chair). All have substantial experience working with the National Park Service and on other public history projects. Susan Ferentinos and Aidan J. Smith of the OAH provided project support and served as the liaisons between the team and the chief historian’s office.

This report has three parts and need not be read in a linear fashion. Part 1 introduces the study’s goals and methods in the larger context of other related studies, discusses the benefits of professional history training, provides an overview of the history of history in NPS, and outlines our vision of key principles that should guide overall history practice in the NPS. Part 2 highlights model NPS projects, moments, partnerships, and practices—lamps along the path that are already lighting the way ahead. Part 3 shares key findings—observations about current conditions that inhibit the strong, creative historical work that NPS wishes to support—and offers associated, specific recommendations, many of which were proposed by our survey respondents and consultants. We intend the recommendations not as fixed prescriptions but as suggestions for promising approaches to solving the problems we identify and enacting the principles we articulate. Several online appendices provide additional background data and other resources.

Our research engaged—via a service-wide electronic survey and many other avenues of conversation—hundreds of NPS historians and other professionals working with history at an individual level. As a result, our report is deeply informed by voices from the field. The centerpiece of our research, conducted together with the Indiana University Center for Survey Research, was an electronic questionnaire sent to over fifteen hundred members of NPS’s permanent staff who have some responsibility for history, whether or not they call themselves “historians,” based either on job title, job description, or training. Five hundred and forty-four people responded (many at great length) to this challenging survey, providing us more than eight hundred pages of discursive feedback. The respondents were a varied group, both in terms of educational background and in terms of primary duties and titles. Forty-nine percent of them hold either a bachelor’s or a graduate degree in history, but just over 50% have either no formal postsecondary education in history (9.8%) or only “some undergraduate courses” (40.4%). Professionals in the 0025 Ranger series and 0170 Historian series represented the largest plurality of respondents for whom we could determine job title.²

2 Additional information about the survey, including the questionnaire itself, is posted in the online appendices. It was not possible to determine what series 192 respondents (35% of total) were employed in or to determine the GS level for 177 respondents (33%). The largest plurality of respondents for whom we could determine job title are employed in the 0025 Ranger Series (35%), with the next largest group are 0170 historians (12%). Museum curators (1015 Series) made up 9% of the respondents, and we had a smattering of respondents from the 0090 Guide Series, 0193 Archaeology Series, 1421/1420 Archives Tech/Archivist Series. The respondents tended to be employed as GS levels 9, 11, 12, and 13 (these together comprised 59% of respondents) with the largest plurality being at the GS 11 level (21%).

In addition to the survey, we solicited perspectives and advice from retired and current NPS historians, interpreters, and administrators. We visited dozens of parks (see Sources Consulted) and talked with key leaders at the regional and Washington office levels (including all members of the staff of the chief historian's office, Associate Director for Cultural Resources Stephanie Toothman, and Director Jonathan Jarvis). Furthermore, we made an effort to connect with the regional offices, querying current or past historians and other personnel from the Northeast, Southeast, Intermountain, and Pacific West regions.

We also identified a set of external stakeholders—generally historians based in colleges and universities whose work on or with the agency had brought them into close contact with the NPS—and asked them to respond to a set of questions about their experiences and observations (see appendices). Team members also conducted seven large-group conversations at annual meetings of the OAH, National Council on Public History (NCPH), and National Association for Interpretation (NAI), events to which NPS employees and anyone else with a stake in the “state of history” in NPS could come and offer their thoughts. The interest and engagement demonstrated by all of our survey respondents and other informants and consultants testifies to the deep commitment NPS staff and many non-NPS historians have to history and to the NPS's public mission.

We augmented our surveys of the field with extensive documentary research. We combed OAH-sponsored site-visit reports and administrative histories to extract information on successes and challenges, and scrutinized the reams of reports and studies that have preceded this one. Together, these strategies yielded a broad view of the fortunes of NPS history practice in recent decades, and particularly the last twenty-five years.

A Stream of Reports

The present report follows a long series of other reports on related matters, and echoes many findings of many undertaken at the close of the twentieth century and opening of the twenty-first on the state of the National Park Service. These more recent reports include those by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA; *Saving Our History: A Review of National Park Cultural Resource Programs*, 2008), the National Parks Second Century Commission (*Advancing the National Park Idea*, 2009), and the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA; *The State of America's National Parks*, 2011), each of which documents the increasingly dire state of cultural resources, including history resources, within the Park Service. The summer 2011 report *Aligned for Success* takes a somewhat parallel approach to ours and recommends improvements to the federal historic preservation program.³ We have also integrated material from the recently released *A Call to Action* (2011), the agency's response to several of those previous reports.

Some themes emphasized in these recent reports were, indeed, already evident in earlier ones. A decade ago, in a landmark report commissioned by the National Park System Advisory Board, historian John Hope Franklin and his colleagues encouraged NPS to make many of the changes we will recommend herein: to embrace the agency's educational mission and promise, to expand interpretive contexts well beyond particular parks, and to better integrate understandings of nature and culture. The Franklin report also urged more funding, better support for professional development, and improved scholarship.⁴ Back further still we find the 1994 report *Humanities and the National Parks: Adapting to Change*, prompted by Director Roger

3 Federal Historic Preservation Task Force (Andrew Potts and David Morgan, co-chairs), *Aligned for Success: Recommendations to Increase the Effectiveness of the Federal Historic Preservation Program*, Preservation Action Foundation, Summer 2011.

4 John Hope Franklin and National Park Service Advisory Board, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century: A Report of the National Park System Advisory Board*, July 2001, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/report.htm>.

G. Kennedy's desire to strengthen the service's history and archeology programs. Chaired by James O. Horton, the committee that produced that report suggested many ways to strengthen education, research, and scholarship in the parks, to encourage the professional development of its employees, and to help the service more effectively engage national audiences.⁵

These many reports (and ours, too) are artifacts of NPS's desire to improve its ability to achieve its mission and of an ongoing interest in improving the practice of history. But the picture that emerges from these reports, individually and collectively, is distressing. The authors of *Saving Our History* found that "the evidence clearly indicates that cultural resources, including resources of national significance, are at risk throughout our National Park System."⁶ The Second Century Commission observed the damaging consequences to both conditions and morale after years of declining support. In a chapter titled "History Forgotten," the National Parks Conservation Association's report says that the "cultural resources in the National Park System...are in serious trouble" and that the nation's heritage is thus "imperiled."⁷

While the NAPA and NPCA reports together confirm a state of crisis now facing the agency, a longer view suggests a decades-long decline in the relative investment made in ensuring that history scholarship and interpretation remain sound and robust. Indeed, years before the deterioration now documented by the NAPA study commenced, historians were already feeling the pinch. Writing to Chief Historian Ed Bearss regarding an assessment of NPS history undertaken in 1988, Bob Krick, then Chief Historian at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania, called that assessment "a renewed reminder of the historical staffing crisis that has been growing like a noxious weed in the National Park System over the past decade." Describing the problem, Krick noted that "even when the consequent attitude toward history is not outright disdain, there is a dreadful tendency to view historic sites as somehow emasculated by the absence of geysers, waterfalls, granite grandeur, and genuine law enforcement challenges."⁸

Despite this near unanimity over a long period of time about the nature of several persistent problems, change has been slow to come. A decade ago, the Franklin report pictured the National Park Service "as a sleeping giant—beloved and respected, yes; but perhaps too cautious, too resistant to change, too reluctant to engage the challenges that must be addressed in the 21st century."⁹ Those words ring no less true today.

As we entered the concluding weeks of our project, the NPS's *A Call to Action* appeared. Among other promised steps, NPS commits to preparing "a contemporary version of the 1963 *Leopold Report* that confronts modern challenges in natural and cultural resource

5 Humanities Review Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board. *Humanities and the National Parks: Adapting to Change*. 1994. This study is discussed in E. Shannon Barker, James O. Horton, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "Humanities and the National Park System." *CRM: Cultural Resource Management* 18, no. 2 (1995). <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/18-2/18-2-1.pdf>.

6 National Academy of Public Administration for the National Park Service, Frank Hodsoll, James Kunde, and Denis P. Galvin, *Saving Our History: A Review of National Park Cultural Resource Programs* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration, October 2008), http://www.napawash.org/pc_management_studies/NPS_Saving_Our_History_Oct2008.pdf, ix.

7 NAPA, *Saving Our History*, 9; National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea. Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation Committee Report: A Different Past in a Different Future*, [2010?], http://www.npca.org/commission/pdf/Committee_Cultural_Resources.PDF, 3; and NPCA, *State of America's National Parks*, 25, 27. "In fact," this latter report continues, "these places and collections are being maintained in a condition well below the level that the National Park Service itself has deemed appropriate. In 91% of the parks we surveyed, cultural resources were found to be in 'fair' or 'poor' condition (see Figure 2). None merited an 'excellent' rating. And the weaknesses are widespread. The problems affecting cultural resources occur across park designations and across regional divisions" (25).

8 Robert Krick to Edwin C. Bearss, August 2, 1998, included in packet of materials pertaining to the 1988 historians' survey, provided by Lu Ann Jones, National Park Service, WASO.

9 John Hope Franklin and National Park Service Advisory Board, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century: A Report of the National Park System Advisory Board*, July 2001, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/report.htm>.

management.”¹⁰ Written to address wildlife management in the parks, the *Leopold Report* transformed thinking about nature in the parks and articulated an expansive vision for science research and scientists in the agency; it was so influential that NPS now hopes to revisit its success by appointing a team of twelve distinguished scholars to review and update it.

Our report constitutes a no less urgent call to reinvigorate history in the NPS, to make the highest quality history research, scholarship, and interpretation central to the agency’s management and even worldview. And as did the *Leopold Report*, we too offer key principles we hope will guide NPS history in the future. Beyond the *Leopold Report*, we also look for inspiration to another extraordinarily influential document from the same era, *With Heritage So Rich* (1966). That “powerful, eloquent manifesto” led directly to the creation of the National Register of Historic Places and the Advisory Council in Historic Preservation.¹¹

Like our report, *With Heritage So Rich* emerged at a moment of perceived crisis, as a response to the “corrosion of neglect.”¹² The threat at that time was physical: a chipping away at the historic fabric of the nation that put heritage at risk. Today, there is a different, but hardly less palpable, sense of jeopardy as support for historical expertise itself has withered to a barely tenable state. Instead of addressing threats to historic buildings and cultural landscapes, we are concerned with the state of historical insight more generally. As that insight is increasingly relegated to the margins, misunderstood and undervalued, the threat we are concerned with—though perhaps less immediately tangible than that presented by a decaying building or an altered landscape—is no less worrisome or potentially corrosive.

Examining the Current State of History within the NPS

The focus of this present report is to examine what history looks like in the NPS context. We decided early on that we would focus both on what historians do within NPS, and the larger question of *who does history* in and for the service. We found that partly because of the agency’s administrative structures, the state of history in the National Park Service is as diverse as the hundreds of individuals who practice it within the Washington offices, in the regional offices, and at nearly four hundred parks spread across the nation. From the familiar rangers in green and gray leading tours through Independence Hall, to behind-the-scenes researchers documenting and protecting historic properties, to curators and archivists, history practitioners in the NPS today are dispersed and often only loosely connected.

Only about 182 of the NPS’s over 22,000 permanent, temporary, and seasonal employees carry the federal job title of “historian” (0170 series), and many of these are in positions that might not be recognizable as such.¹³ But many more people with history training or history-related responsibilities work in other classifications, including the crucial 025 “ranger” series that includes most staff for whom regular public contact is a key component of their work.

For these reasons, although sponsored by the chief historian’s office, this study is by no means a performance review only of that office or of the “history program” itself. Indeed, as currently organized within the NPS, the “Park History” program is just one of several cultural resources programs, together with archaeology, cultural landscapes, ethnography, historic structures, museum management (museum collections and archives), and

10 A. Starker Leopold, Stanley A. Cain, Clarence M. Cottam, Ira A. Gabrielson, and Thomas L. Kimball, *Wildlife Management in the National Parks: The Leopold Report*, March 4, 1963, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/leopold/leopold.htm.

11 U.S. Conference of Mayors, Special Committee on Historic Preservation, *With Heritage So Rich*, ed. National Trust for Historic Preservation (New York: Random House, 1966).

12 U.S. Conference of Mayors, *With Heritage So Rich*, preface.

13 Figures online at Asbury Park Press, “Datauniverse” (<http://www.app.com/section/DATA>), show 183 0170-series historians employed by NPS in 2009. Figures obtained from NPS WASO personnel office in summer 2011 indicate 182 0170-series historians. Figures on total employees in this system come from National Park Service, “Frequently Asked Questions,” 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/faqs.htm>.

the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).¹⁴ Unlike at other points in NPS history, neither the chief historian's office, nor any other single entity within the service, clearly speaks on history's behalf or has responsibility for overseeing all history work throughout the NPS. Indeed, that fact is one of the issues this report seeks to address.

While many of the programs referenced above also work with park-based resources, several others, including the NRHP and National Historic Landmarks (NHL) programs, have expansive missions that range well beyond the parks and sites directly managed by the National Park Service. Although we sought and received input from people working in these "external" history programs, we did not systematically study and do not comment upon the effectiveness or reach of those programs beyond referencing some of the good ideas and high-quality work proceeding under them. We are fortunate that the new *Aligned for Success* report dovetails with ours in noting that some of the programmatic shortcomings of the national historic preservation program, like problems we point out with NPS history, derive partially from misalignments within NPS administrative structures.

Our investigations reveal that while history practice is alive and vital in many corners of the agency, the NPS is not presently structured to realize the full potential of its objectives as they relate to history. As one of our survey respondents wrote, history in the NPS is "sporadic, interrupted, superbly excellent in some instances and vacant in others."¹⁵ Most of our respondents agree with another who said simply that history is "endangered."¹⁶

Our recommendations are thus directed to the chief historian's office and to the NPS director, regional directors, park superintendents, and individual practitioners, as well as to the history profession and the members of Congress who have the authority and responsibility to steward the important historical and cultural resources of the national parks.

Making a Case for History, Historians, and Historical Thinking

At the outset, it is crucial to understand that while the NPS faces particular challenges to fulfill its potential for engaging Americans and overseas visitors with history, many of the larger issues of how to make history, of historical thinking, and of historical training and expertise more intelligible and relevant are shared by other institutions where history is practiced: museums, colleges and universities, schools, and public programs.

In these settings, historians and the profession of history have not made a convincing case for themselves in recent years, despite evidence that the public is and remains very passionate about engaging the past.¹⁷ Currently, history and the humanities are under siege and facing threats, including cuts to state and federal efforts that support key programs inside and outside of the NPS.

14 National Park Service Headquarters Organization chart, <http://www.nps.gov/news/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=402384>.

15 Respondent 10273. The five-digit respondent numbers are unique identifiers assigned by the Center for Survey Research at Indiana University to each survey recipient. The numbers allowed tracking of potential participants (many of whom might have shared the same name) throughout the process of conducting the survey—including sending email reminders, authenticating responses, and managing data output. They also permitted the study team to receive the survey results free of any reference to respondents' personally identifying information.

16 Respondent 11355.

17 Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

The Park Service cannot shoulder all of the blame for larger problems that are beyond its capacity to solve alone. As one informant observes, “until the historical profession actively engages policy makers with the importance of sound scholarship, expecting a government agency (even one entrusted with the historic structures and landscapes of the American public) to adhere to professional historical standards in its [the agency’s] conduct of work is unrealistic.”¹⁸

While we will argue below that there is much the NPS can do to raise professional standards of history in the agency, we agree that the history profession must also examine itself and find ways to strengthen, support, engage, and partner with the agency most central in the presentation of its work to the American public. For far too long, academe’s own culture and structure have prevented many talented scholars from engaging with history in the national parks—in effect reinforcing the insularity that NPS practices build from within, and preventing us from recognizing and nurturing our common purpose. Working together, the profession and the Park Service must face the future as full partners, rearticulating the public and civic role of history.

To begin with, a clear case needs to be made for current understandings of what history is, the ethics and methods of its professional practice, and how encouraging wider dispersal of the kinds of skills and thinking that professional historical training develops can benefit the parks, the public, and political discourse. This is not always easy to do, since we are working against a wide public perception that history is either a boring recital of memorized facts or a series of arcane and tedious debates about esoteric topics.

Yet if we inventory the fundamental benefits that historical insight and historical thinking offer society, it is clear that they extend well beyond dates and facts to provide a wellspring of skills, and a dynamic array of tools and insights that people can use to approach both their own lives and the welfare of society as a whole.

As historian Peter Stearns wrote in his 1998 essay “Why Study History,” arguments for history’s utility rest on at least two observations: first, that history “offers a storehouse of information about how people and societies behave,” and second, that history helps us understand why things came to be, and how things change. History, he continued, must function as “our laboratory” with data from the past “our most vital evidence in the unavoidable quest to figure out why our complex species behaves as it does in societal settings.” People need a sense of this “simply to run their own lives.”¹⁹

Clearly, working in this “laboratory”—with those materials left to us from the past (including resources managed by the NPS)—cannot involve simply memorizing information. Professional training in history is the key to moving inquiry about these historical fragments beyond consumption to true engagement—to the development of capacities of analysis that are transferable to many settings. The American Historical Association has usefully described the professional practice of history today. Professional practice, it observed, commits us to “particular scholarly protocols that establish what qualifies as appropriate evidence and viable arguments” based on “original research and synthetic scholarship.” Historians’ work is “empirically grounded,” yet also importantly involves the “imaginative construction of narratives.” Crucially, it aims “to examine the human experience over time, with a commitment to the explanatory relevance of context, both temporal and geographical.”²⁰ No matter where they practice, formally trained historians gather and weigh evidence; identify multiple perspectives and evaluate conflicting data, accounts and interpretations; and assess the relative significance of past examples of both continuity and change.²¹

18 Vivien Rose, personal narrative for State of History team, 2009.

19 Peter N. Stearns, “Why Study History?” 1998, American Historical Association, <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>.

20 Thomas Bender et al., *The Education of Historians for the Twenty-First Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, for the American Historical Association, 2004), 4.

21 Stearns, “Why Study History?”

History, therefore, is much more than just a collection of facts, and historical expertise is more than just a matter of discovering and memorizing or “mastering” those facts. Rather, historical expertise combines a knowledge of pertinent information with a particular set of skills and techniques in locating, considering, analyzing, organizing, drawing meaning from, and interpreting for (and in conversation with) others the evidence left by the past.

These habits of mind and these skills (what we might call our “historical capacities”) grow with practice—most importantly, with direct experience encountering the past through the firsthand evidence people in the past left to us (what historians call “primary sources”). By virtue of the places and resources they hold, the national parks provide unparalleled opportunity for the public to encounter some of those primary sources for themselves, and to learn something about thinking historically. Yet, to do this most productively, they need expert guides—historians with graduate training—who can demonstrate and facilitate the most productive and informative possible engagement with those resources.

Working with primary sources in the search for answers to real questions about the past—that is, doing history, not just reading it—is the key experience that graduate training in history provides. Graduate training, unlike much undergraduate history study, always entails conducting one’s own research in original historical sources (letters, diaries, images, maps, oral histories, material artifacts, expressive culture) and producing a contextualized narrative about a topic.

Struggling to find, read, and make sense of evidence left to us from the past significantly heightens a historian’s sensitivities to what the often fragmentary traces from the past can and cannot reveal, and to the challenges of making sense of sometimes incomplete or contradictory records.

Encountering and immersing oneself in the past in this way builds skills in asking questions, assessing the validity of various accounts, testing pieces of historical evidence against each other, considering voices that are not represented, understanding past contexts, and seeing the options that actors in the past had before them. Narrating the stories thus discovered builds skills in logic, written and oral communication, attribution of cause and effect, and varied techniques of presentation and interpretation.

Historical skills are not as well developed at the undergraduate level, where one tends to read finished historical narratives crafted by others. Though usually bounded by some particular area of topical expertise, the skills of historical research, analysis, and interpretation developed in graduate school can be transferred to a wide variety of evidence, materials, theories, techniques, and arguments in many different historical contexts.

Thus by offering an independent, self-directed experience in conducting original research in primary sources (that laboratory of past data) combined with thoughtful consideration of competing narratives created by prior historians, advanced training in history offers a firsthand opportunity to see how historical understanding of any era, topic, or event in the past is a moving target, a dynamic, ever-changing landscape of ideas, rather than a static narrative that once recovered need never be revisited. One can see how and why narratives about the meaning of the past inevitably change both as new information is uncovered and as people living in each era ask new questions or develop new methods and approaches to help illuminate and uncover meanings in the past and their relevance in the present.

Bringing skills in historical thinking and experience working directly with the “stuff” the past leaves to us, trained historians are well prepared to cope thoughtfully and critically with the necessarily fragmentary record that any national park’s resources present. Given that the national parks’ power lies in the “authenticity of the place and artifacts,”²² as many of our respondents note, it is critical that the NPS acquire, nurture, and develop a cadre of highly trained professional historians with deep experience dealing with those sources.

Trained historians are prepared on an ongoing basis to ask new questions of a site, to gather and organize information about it, to understand what its resources can and cannot say, to think

22 Respondent 10122.

about the larger contexts into which the particular resources fit, and to engage in dialogues about a site's meaning. These skills, even if developed in one particular topical context, are applicable in many different contexts having to do with many different topics and moments in the past.

More broadly, graduate education is also the most inviting and disciplined place for future historians to encounter wider debates about the content and practice of history. The traditional mission of graduate schools to teach research capacities now takes place in the context of readings, seminars, and community projects that challenge students to envision their contributions to varied audiences in varied ways. With the rise of public history programs, more and more history departments are also cultivating new abilities and approaches that actively engage audiences in the production of historical knowledge.

The current shapes of these discussions are more challenging than those of the past. In the wake of the social justice movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the historical profession was broadened and transformed—both in terms of the subjects historians studied and the demographics of the profession. But these changes have in turn raised other complex questions about how history is practiced. These questions range across issues of how history seeks to engage audiences beyond specialists in research topics; how it navigates the challenges to its authority that travel under the rubric of “postmodernism”; how it should adapt its historic educational and civic missions to changes in content and practice; how it should engage competing intellectual interpretation and political controversies; and how the new interest in what visitors, readers, and audiences bring to and carry away from their experiences with history generate new concerns about civic engagement.

This report's proposal for a more integrated approach to history interpretation grows out of these debates. The easiest way for NPS to draw these new concerns and practice into day-to-day NPS practice—and therefore to enliven the historical experience for everyone who encounters history via the national parks—is to recruit historians who have engaged these concerns in graduate school and to allow its current workforce to consider those new perspectives more regularly through professional meetings, ongoing professional development, and greater flow back and forth between the agency, other nodes of public history practice, and the academy.

Framing the Challenges: A Brief History of History in the NPS

Whatever else it may be observed to be, the current configuration of history practice in the NPS is itself a *historical creation* that emerged from other times, in response to specific developments both in the profession at large and in the NPS's own history. This legacy has produced several persistent tensions within the NPS that profoundly shape history's place, practice, and status today. Most significant are two fundamental internal tensions that have become tightly woven into many of the agency's structures, policies, and culture:

- The fact that “history”—the exploration and interpretation of the past—came relatively late to and has fit uneasily within an agency that started as a federal bureau focused on preserving, protecting, and providing for public “enjoyment” of grand and inspiring natural and scenic landscapes. Within the NPS, this divide often expresses itself in shorthand as a split between “nature” and “culture.”
- The fact that historical work within the NPS has itself been divided between preservation-oriented processes designed to document and protect the physical remains of the past, and education-oriented processes aimed both at increasing public appreciation for the resources and introducing larger narratives of the American story. Institutionally, this divide expresses itself as a split between “cultural resources management” and “interpretation.”

20 | The most problematic legacy of the history of history within the Park Service has been the agency's tendency, built gradually over the last forty years, to define and confine history, historical research, and its history "program" almost entirely in the context of the nation's legally mandated historic preservation activities that emerged in the 1960s and are largely housed within the NPS.

History emerged as a clearly defined arena of NPS work in 1931 when, in response to 1920s-era studies advocating an expanded educational mission for the Park Service, NPS director Horace Albright hired Verne E. Chatelain into his new branch of research and education as the NPS's first chief historian.²³ Chatelain's arrival coincided with the expansion of the NPS from the west into the eastern United States, where Mammoth Cave, Shenandoah, and Great Smoky Mountains national parks were under development and where Colonial National Historical Park had just been authorized.

Other new developments in the 1930s thrust history and culture into a new prominence within NPS. After a major government reorganization in 1933 and the passage of the seminal Historic Sites Act in 1935, the NPS found itself transformed from an agency primarily focused on nature and scenery to one nearly buried under what Chatelain termed "a veritable avalanche of historic places" it had little idea how to manage.²⁴ Chatelain understood that fitting history work into NPS would be a challenge. Recounting his career later, he recalled fearing at the outset that "history would be tolerated as a little additional frosting on the scenic park cake."²⁵

Nevertheless, Chatelain embraced the task of developing a coherent history program. His prior career had bridged academia (he had headed the History and Social Sciences Department at Nebraska's Peru State College) and the public sector (he had worked eighteen months as assistant superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society).²⁶ Influenced by educational theorists who prioritized student-centered learning, he was passionate to "breathe the breath of life into American history for those to whom it has heretofore been a dull recital of meaningless facts."²⁷ The parks, Chatelain argued, should be like classrooms: places for teaching history.

Chatelain believed that doing good history in parks required historically sensitive leaders and trained historians who had learned the special skills needed to connect visitors with physical resources.²⁸ Throughout the 1930s, thanks largely to the New Deal, the NPS hired hundreds of historians to flesh out programs and even head operations at the dozens of new historical sites that had come into the system. "I was hiring Ph.D.s a dime a dozen," Chatelain later recalled.²⁹ His own staff soon grew to include more than sixty historians.³⁰

Chatelain envisioned turning the haphazard collection of NPS historic properties into an integrated national program that presented a coherent, thematic narrative of American history.

23 See Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "National Park Service History: National Parks and Education: The First 20 Years," 2002, NPS History E-Library, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/resedu/education.htm>.

24 Quoted in Charles B. Hosmer, "Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service," *Public Historian* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 25–38, quotation on 29–30.

25 Quoted in Hosmer, "Verne E. Chatelain," 29.

26 Much of our account of the career of Verne Chatelain is taken from Denise Meringolo's forthcoming book, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). Since we read the book in draft, we cannot cite specific page numbers that match the forthcoming volume, so instead refer readers to the chapter on Chatelain's work developing the NPS history program. Barry Mackintosh, "The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation," *Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 51–63, esp. 53; and Hosmer, "Verne E. Chatelain," 26.

27 Quoted in Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*.

28 Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*.

29 From pages 12–13 of a 1971 interview with Verne Chatelain, conducted by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., quoted in Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*.

30 Edwin C. Bearss, "The National Park Service and Its History Program: 1864–1986: An Overview," *Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 10–18, esp. 13.

“An historic site is source material for the study of history, just as truly as any written record,” he wrote. Each park, he explained, would illuminate one piece of the national past until ultimately the NPS as a whole would be able “to tell a more or less complete story of American History.”⁸¹

Chatelain viewed as a great accomplishment of his tenure the 1935 passage of the Historic Sites Act, which not only authorized a vast new coordinated program of research, survey, documentation, acquisition, and preservation of historic properties but also mandated educational initiatives related to the new network.³² Nevertheless, the act’s emphasis on research in the service of historic preservation (as well as a competing, more fully documentary impulse embodied in the Historic American Building Survey program) foretold what would become a second central tension that would come to plague NPS history practice: the uneasy marriage of historic preservation documentation, physical preservation, and stewardship with the desire to present and interpret historic narratives.³³

In 1936, Chatelain articulated a set of chronologically based, thematic frameworks to guide site selection.³⁴ These frameworks, which guided NPS historical site selection from the 1930s to the 1990s, initially “focused on relatively few broad themes, such as the development of the English colonies and the westward expansion, that stemmed from a view of American history as a ‘march of progress.’”³⁵

The survey of historic sites begun under Chatelain’s frameworks picked up again in the flush years of the Mission 66 program (1956–1966), which generally proved a productive time for NPS historians who were centrally involved in both the survey and in a vast expansion of interpretive infrastructure inspired by Freeman Tilden’s 1957 injunction to inform and provoke—embodied in more than one hundred new NPS visitor centers.³⁶

Historian Ronald F. Lee, who succeeded Chatelain as chief historian in 1938, moved on to head the newly created Division of Interpretation in 1954, and later became regional director for the Northeast Region, shared Chatelain’s belief that the NPS should—and could—build a system of sites illustrating “all the major phases of American history.”³⁷

Watching the rise of 1950s-era “urban renewal” programs in the Mission 66 context, Lee forged a crucial role for the NPS in historic preservation and planning efforts that created or reinvigorated numerous historical parks and funded rehabilitation or reconstruction of hundreds of historic buildings within the system. Seeing historic resources conservation as a parallel to the NPS’s wilderness conservation, Lee helped move the NPS into a national leadership role in the emerging postwar preservation movement.³⁸

During Mission 66, the growing preservation impulse began to reshape the NPS’s educational programs into what was by then almost universally termed *interpretation*. The difference between earlier education programs and the new interpretation thrust turned on a subtle but palpable shift

31 Mackintosh, “National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation,” 55, 62.

32 Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*.

33 Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*. See especially her discussion of HABS versus the work of the History Office.

34 John H. Sprinkle, Jr., “‘An Orderly, Balanced and Comprehensive Panorama...of American History’: Filling Thematic Caps within the National Park System,” *George Wright Forum* 27, no. 3 (2010): 269–79, esp. 270–72.

35 Laura Feller and Page Putnam Miller, “Public History in the Parks: History and the National Park Service,” *Perspectives* (January 2000), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2000/0001/0001pub1.cfm>.

36 Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957); Bearss, “National Park Service and Its History Program,” 13–15; and Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 184–92. Carr does note that Mission 66 provided little funding for research that went beyond that needed for new interpretive materials. See also John Shirley Hurst, *That the Past Shall Live: The History Program of the National Park Service*, 1959, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/nps/past_live/index.htm.

37 Quoted in Sprinkle, Jr., “‘An Orderly, Balanced and Comprehensive Panorama,’” 271.

38 Carr, *Mission 66*, 179–84, 197.

from a focus on broad historical themes to more targeted messages intended to convey specific information about particular sites so that visitors would “appreciate the park landscapes and resources” and be moved to help conserve them. Although Mission 66 critics pointed out the irony that many of the new visitor centers were situated practically on top of the resources they interpreted, NPS historians in this period participated in an integrated way in park research, planning, and development of the expansive new interpretive infrastructure.³⁹

In *That the Past Shall Live...: The History Program of the National Park Service* (1959), Mission 66 planners articulated a specific set of aims for the history program. In order to “turn back the pages of time and establish a vital relationship between the visitor and the memorialized people and events,” they said, NPS pledged to rehabilitate, refurbish, and restore historic buildings, and create new exhibits “to help recreate the atmosphere and mood of the time or event commemorated.” When necessary, NPS would acquire land to protect historic environments, and invest in “new markers, new trailside exhibits, [and] new interpretive publications.” In short, under Mission 66 NPS would provide all “products and activities” essential to the “re-awakening of history...in the sites and shrines which form so important a part of the National Park System.” The development of Philadelphia’s Independence National Historical Park emerged from this effort, and a sizeable investment was also made in archaeology, but the centerpiece of the initiative was the creation of dozens of visitors’ centers designed “to bring the story of a particular time or event clearly into focus,” and thus to help visitors “feel the story of the past.”⁴⁰

In the Chatelain and Lee era, NPS entertained little doubt that through professional and detached analysis, a properly trained historian would form accurate conclusions that could stand the tests of time and controversy. But since the original events and their significance always had the potential, and often the reality, of being controversial within the academy and/or the public, there was tremendous pressure on park historians to find and assert that their conclusions were noncontroversial, final conclusions that could spare NPS from criticism. *That the Past Shall Live*, indeed, proclaimed the Park Service to be “engaged in an unending search for truth—and reality—in its presentations.”⁴¹

Yet the focus on accuracy created conundrums for the Park Service, when many of the new historic sites it took on board were, as Barry Mackintosh pointed out in 1987, “inherited...from other agencies and organization,” and thus “bore little resemblance to the way they had appeared during their historic periods.” Debates over restoration, reconstruction, and interpretation raged, and NPS struggled with inaccuracies (indeed fabrications) embodied in its sites (for example, the reconstructed George Washington birthplace and Abraham Lincoln’s purported birthplace cabin) with the need to claim the ground and project the aura of accuracy and authenticity.⁴²

Meanwhile, Lee’s efforts and the historic preservation impulses of Mission 66 led directly to the passage of the landmark National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which located the new National Register of Historic Places under the National Park Service. With the advent of this law and its elaboration through subsequent executive orders and amendments, the labors of NPS historians were gradually redirected to focus heavily upon preservation and legal compliance with the provisions of this and related legislation.⁴³

Unfortunately, as former Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley would later observe, this redirection of NPS historians’ work toward the field of practice that came to be called *cultural resources management* (CRM) resulted “in a gradual separation of the history program from issues dealing with the interpretation of history and historic places.”⁴⁴

39 Carr, *Mission 66*, 184–98.

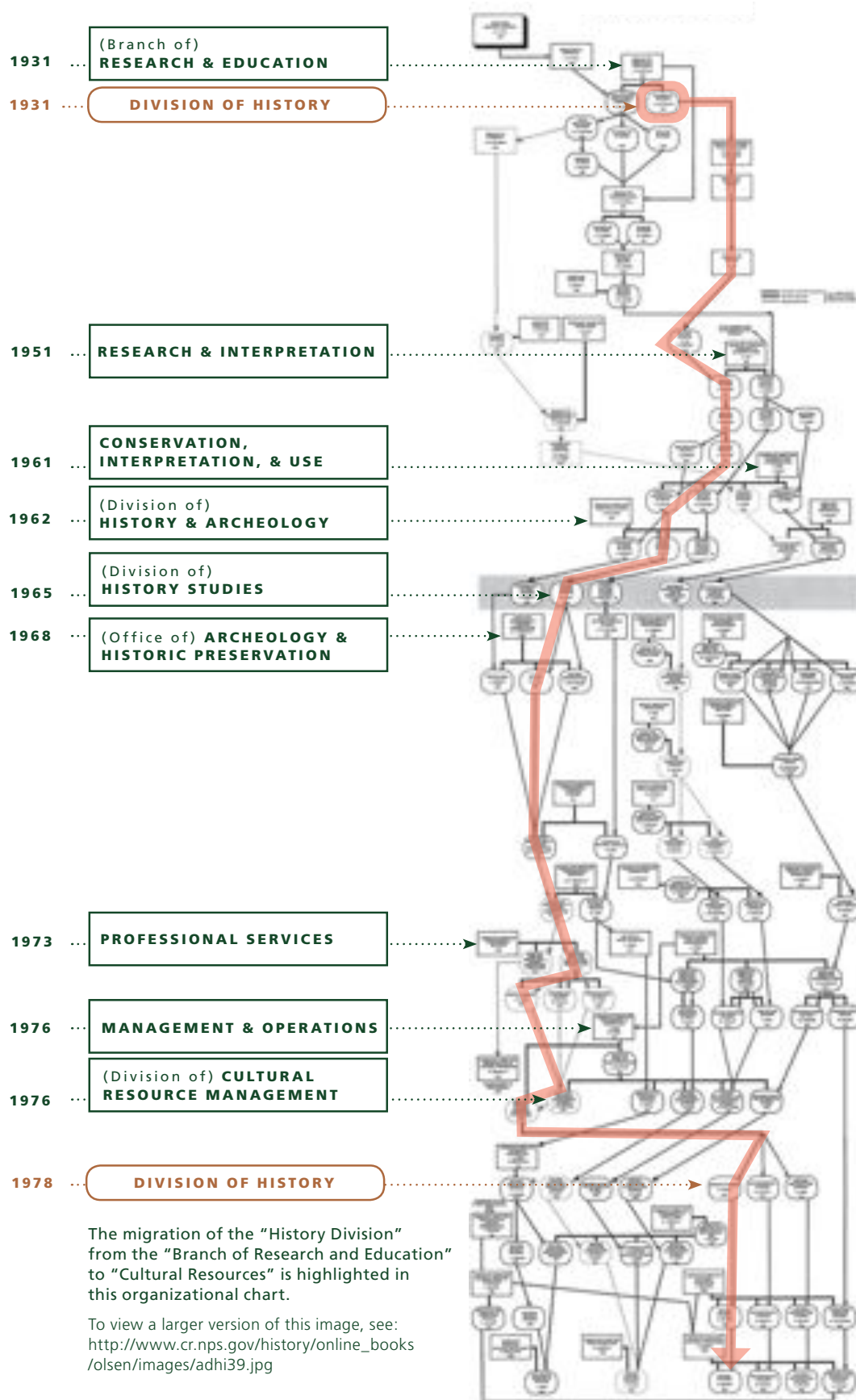
40 Hurst, *That the Past Shall Live*.

41 Hurst, *That the Past Shall Live*.

42 Mackintosh, “National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation,” 56–62.

43 Carr, *Mission 66*, 197; Bearss, “National Park Service and Its History Program,” 15–18; and Pitcaithley, “Future of the NPS History Program,” 52.

44 Pitcaithley, “Future of NPS History Program,” 52.



The evolution of the NPS organizational chart from the 1930s to the present day reveals the migration of the “History Division” from the “Branch of Research and Education” (1931) through the area of the “Assistant Director, Research and Interpretation” (1951–1954) to the “Division of Interpretation” (1954–1961) to the “Assistant Director, Resource Studies” (1965–1968), to the “Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation” (1968–1973) to the “Assistant Director, Cultural Resources” (1978–1981) or “Assistant Director, Cultural Resource Management” (or “Cultural Resources” (1981–1983 and after)).⁴⁵

The rise of the professionalized field of historic preservation studies in the wake of the landmark National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 has brought indisputable benefits for preserving the nation’s built environment. And it certainly elevated the National Park Service—now home of NRHP and the NHL programs, along with many other key preservation programs—to a position of national preeminence in this arena of history practice.

On the one hand, the mandate (hence the power) to inventory, recognize, and preserve historic structures and landscapes has provided a much-needed legal basis for NPS to employ research historians, and has nurtured a cadre of professionals who lovingly care for the nation’s historic resources both inside and outside the parks. The mandate has also generated significant new research and has undergirded both well-regarded educational programs (for example, the National Register’s Teaching with Historic Places program, which published its 140th lesson plan online this year) and an effective tax incentive system that has touched communities across the United States, and thus a vast swath of the public who may never visit a historical park. But just as the NPS became more institutionally committed to history than before, the way it embraced history had the long-term effect of marginalizing the discipline and limiting its ability to have a powerful impact upon public understanding of history or upon the nature of Park Service practice.

As a result, as one of our survey respondents points out, is that NPS historians today are “buried under compliance and a variety of bureaucratic mandates.... Much of our professional talent in the cultural resources disciplines spends the bulk of its time on resource management compliance and much less on the applied research that directly benefits park interpretation through historic resource studies, well-researched and written site bulletins, exhibits, etc.”⁴⁶

Thus, as it has turned out, the Park Service’s tendency, built gradually over the last forty years, has been to define history, historical research, and its history “program” almost entirely in the context of these legally mandated historic preservation activities (for example, Section 106/110 compliance or NRHP listings and documentation). This has limited the practice of history in the agency and hobbled its ability to be as relevant a force in public education as Horace Albright, Verne Chatelain, and their successors may have hoped. Thus the consequences of the professionalization of historic preservation as a distinct enterprise for NPS history writ large have been mixed.

Interpretation vs. History

The processes that moved many of the NPS’s professional historians and the history program itself into the CRM orbit did not mean that NPS abandoned efforts to conduct significant educational work in history. But that work increasingly migrated into what was, after the 1950s, becoming an emerging and separate field of interpretation. Interpretation as a field never was—and still is not—well connected to history as field. Indeed, the first precursor organization of what became the National Association for Interpretation was formed in 1954 as the Association

45 Russ Olsen, “Organizational Structures of the National Park Service, 1917 to 1985,” n.d., see Chart 39, “The Naturalist, Ranger, & Historian Line,” at http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/olsen/adhi39.htm

46 Respondent 10155.

of Interpretive Naturalists.⁴⁷ While it made sense for NPS to develop a field of work focused directly upon “provoking” visitors, as Freeman Tilden advocated, the grounding of interpretation in nature and science tended to cut it off from systematic participation by historians both inside and beyond the agency. As a result, the content of historical interpretation has fallen out of step, in many cases, with the best professional, scholarly practices in history.⁴⁸

Leaders in the NPS, including former Chief Historian Pitcaithley, recognized in the 1990s that the distance between NPS history work, especially interpretation, and the professional field of history needed to be bridged in order to rebuild sturdier history programs more closely aligned with current work in the discipline that would engage the public and encourage visitors to explore the American experience more fully.

To nourish those linkages, the National Park Service in 1994 signed a cooperative agreement with the Organization of American Historians. One of the cooperative agreement’s first sponsored projects was a congressionally mandated revision of the Thematic Frameworks that had since the 1930s (with revisions in the 1970s and 1980s) framed the history NPS would preserve and interpret. The revised frameworks, signaling the contribution that collaboration with the academy might bring, eschewed linear change, a topical approach, and narrow conceptions of relevance and embraced social history, multiple frames of reference, a conceptual and process-based approach, and interdisciplinarity.⁴⁹

This agreement has facilitated the Park Service’s efforts to draw upon the scholarly expertise and resources of the nation’s foremost American history professional organization. The OAH has benefited from a durable association with the NPS that provides research opportunities and jobs for historians, archaeologists, archivists, and preservationists while deepening the academy’s appreciation and understanding of the historical practice that unfolds in the nation’s museums and historic sites, whether federally managed or otherwise.

These efforts complemented and supported broader changes afoot in both the profession and NPS that incorporated into NPS sites what historians termed the *new social history*—history and perspectives of common people, workers, and previously underrepresented or marginalized groups (for instance African Americans, American Indians, and women). Examples of new sites that entered the system from the 1970s on as the new social history expanded the canon of the American story told in the National Parks included Lowell (1978), Maggie Walker (1978), Women’s Rights (1980), Little Rock Central High School (1998), and Manzanar (1992). The post-1998 transformation that brought slavery into interpretation of the Civil War at NPS battlefield sites and ongoing efforts to open up the multidimensional nature of American values such as “liberty” and “equality” at sites like Independence National Historical Park reflect the considerable inroads that changes in the historical profession have made into historical interpretation in NPS.

Yet the discipline of history has continued to evolve; and again, NPS is lagging behind in incorporating new directions. A significant change is the profession’s greater focus now on history as *process* rather than history only as *content* to be revised, enlarged, and mastered. These new directions, as we describe below, offer exciting prospects for enhancing and invigorating NPS’s historical work.

47 See National Association for Interpretation, “Overview,” [2011], http://www.interpnet.com/about_nai/index.shtml.

48 For some insight into the present state of professional training in “interpretation,” see Brenda K. Lackey, “The State of Interpretation in Academia,” *Journal of Interpretation Research* 13, no. 1 (June 2008): 27–36.

49 Revisions to the Frameworks in 1970 and 1987 had applied more detail in chronological and topical approaches and greatly expanded the number of themes and subthemes. However, the basic conceptualization of the past remained the same. The process leading to the 1990s revision is discussed in Feller and Miller, “Public History in the Parks”; and also Sprinkle, “An Orderly, Balanced and Comprehensive Panorama.”

26 | Promises to Keep: Toward an Expansive, Integrated, and Vital Practice of NPS History

“History in the NPS,” one of our survey respondents observes, “is poised for transformation from the archaic, static, single-themed interpretive presentations of the mid-twentieth century into a new, vibrant, multiple perspective, interactive entity for the future—but only if the NPS can bring to the table vision, money, and openness to new ways of doing business.”⁵⁰ “History in the NPS,” another mused, “is a public promise waiting to be kept.”⁵¹

The proposals that emerge from our analysis aim to restore, reposition, and rethink the ways in which history is developed and disseminated across the agency, but in particular at the national parks where most Americans and international visitors encounter NPS approaches to the past. Our suggestions range across matters small and large, but all aim to help the NPS to mobilize the distinctive civic power of place-based history and reclaim the agency’s place as the leading curator and interpreter of the nation’s past.

We are mindful of the lean budgetary times that the federal government anticipates in the near future. In keeping with this realization and with director Jarvis’s hopes that many of the priorities elaborated in *A Call to Action* are within the agency’s present capacity to implement, we have included many suggestions that are either budget neutral or would demand only moderate additional investment. Many, indeed, advocate internal structural or cultural changes.

However, consistent with the findings of NAPA, NPCA, and the Second Century Commission, our report likewise documents the degree to which history in NPS has become increasingly, and now severely, underresourced. We therefore wholeheartedly endorse these other studies’ calls for the significant reinvestment required to address new needs identified by our own research.

We also recognize that it is impossible to predict, and unwise to try to control, how a large federal agency subject to unpredictable changes in funding will reconfigure its historical mission at hundreds of individual locations and through a number of diverse programs. We encourage NPS to consider our ideas and also to identify internally other strategies that will address the challenges observed.

Whatever the approach, to realize fully its promise, the agency must embrace and support development of a broad, internally integrated, dynamic, and flexible vision of history that is regularly and reliably connected to other nodes of professional history practice, to other disciplines in NPS, and firmly linked to the vibrant, diverse, and contested world outside the agency.

The agency’s aspirations for its history practice should be no less ambitious than those recently set forth for its parallel practice of science. Borrowing and repurposing a sentence from the 2009 “Strategic Goals for NPS Science,” we urge that NPS “establish and define best available sound *history scholarship* as a standard of quality for NPS *history*, and apply this standard to NPS *history* activities. Such *history* is relevant to the issue or need, delivered at an appropriate time, rigorous in method, peer-reviewed, mindful of its limitations, and delivered as usable knowledge in compelling ways to NPS managers and stakeholders.”⁵²

Essentially, the agency as a whole needs to recommit to history as one of its core purposes, and to configure a top-flight program of historical research, preservation, education, and interpretation so as to foster effective and integrated stewardship of historic and cultural resources and places and to encourage robust, place-based visitor engagement with history. The more central *history* can be to the NPS’s missions and activities, the more *relevant* and *responsive* NPS can be to

50 Respondent 10844.

51 Respondent 10716.

52 Gary Machlis, “Advancing Science in the National Park Service: Introduction to the NPS Science Dialogues,” January 21, 2010, in Whisnant’s possession.

the needs of twenty-first-century American society. Getting there will require:

- Adopting new thinking about how history is understood;
- Examining internal dynamics and structures to understand how they constrict history;
- Changing how history is practiced, and how history and historians are deployed;
- Listening to and engaging visitors in new ways; and
- Encouraging innovation and flexibility.

In the spirit of the *Leopold Report* and building upon invigorating new directions in the larger profession of history, we begin by emphasizing a recommended philosophy for agency and park management that lays out the key *historical* principles involved.⁵³ Later, in part 3, we propose more specific recommendations tied to particular findings.

Adoption of these principles will infuse NPS with new thinking about how to approach the history it stewards and shares. Asking different questions and reframing stories in the light of these approaches—which are integral to the professional practice of history today (including in some places within NPS)—would impart renewed energy and interest into history practice in the parks. Reinvigorated perspectives and approaches, not incidentally, offer special promise because they dovetail with similar developments in the discipline of interpretation and thus can help NPS address one of the greatest challenges that presently constrains effective history practice in the agency: the breach between history and interpretation as the NPS understands them.

We therefore suggest discussion and incorporation throughout the agency of the following twelve basic approaches to historical research and interpretation:

1. Expand interpretive frames beyond existing physical resources.

Each NPS site, no matter how elaborate or significant its physical resources, is only a fragmentary remnant of a disappeared past. While preservation of those remnants is crucial to the agency's mission, and the power of place, artifact, and document is impossible to deny, NPS history should work harder to foreground the experiences, stories, and larger social dynamics and contexts that the resources represent or to which they relate. It should also be honest about the imperfect alignment between extant physical remains and the important legacies of the past. Historical research that uncovers stories and experiences that relate strongly to sites but that are not well represented among the physical resources should nevertheless be encouraged, and interpretation of those stories facilitated.

2. Emphasize connections of parks with the larger histories beyond their boundaries.

NPS should incorporate into its historical interpretive practices elements of the perspective that, in the wider profession, has moved toward "transnational" histories that transcend political boundaries. In the parks, this might mean taking a more "trans-park" approach that which recognizes always that parks and historic sites are not isolated islands whose histories can be safely contained within latter-day park boundaries. Rather, each site is fundamentally connected to that which surrounds it—either in the immediate, physical sense or in a narrative or thematic sense. In this regard, we endorse NPCA's recent advice that NPS adopt "landscape-level conservation" and encourage NPS also to practice "landscape-level history."⁵⁴ National Heritage Areas are potentially promising models in this regard.

53 See letter of transmittal for A. Starker Leopold, Stanley A. Cain, Clarence M. Cottam, Ira A. Gabrielson, and Thomas L. Kimball, *Wildlife Management in the National Parks: The Leopold Report*, March 4, 1963, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/leopold/leopold.htm.

54 National Parks Conservation Association. *The State of America's National Parks*, June 2011. <http://www.npca.org/cpr/sanp/>, 49.

28 | 3. Highlight the effects of human activity on “natural” areas.

NPS should integrate nature and culture more fully, taking every opportunity to highlight the histories of supposed natural areas, which, as recent scholarship in environmental history has amply demonstrated, have all been shaped by human activity and by evolving (and thus historically shaped) ideas about nature.

4. Acknowledge that history is dynamic and always unfinished.

History practice should be grounded in and incorporate the inherently dynamic processes of historical scholarship and recognize that meanings change over time, and respond to not only new information, but new audiences, new questions, new approaches and analytical techniques and new perspectives. Interpretations of the past are forever open and subject to reconsideration; history is never “done.”

5. Recognize the NPS’s role in shaping every park’s history.

The NPS should always and everywhere recognize that the agency as a whole and each particular park or unit within it have themselves been actors in the past that have shaped communities, lands, and the historical resources the NPS stewards. NPS history should always be ready to acknowledge and reflect upon both the agency’s actions at any site and how that park’s own history has shaped it.

6. Attend to the roles of memory and memorialization at historical sites.

History should always include attention to the role of memory, memorialization, and remembrance in considering how particular pasts have been understood over time. This perspective, emerging as a prominent theme in the historical profession over the past several decades, is especially appropriate to the parks, which are in many cases sites of commemoration and remembrance. Rather than freezing an event depicted at a park or site as something that happened in the past, history interpreters should acknowledge and investigate the diverse and changing ways (and reasons) that people have remembered and assigned significance to that event or place (up to and since when the park itself was designated “historic”).

7. Highlight the open-endedness of the past.

Historical narrative should acknowledge ways in which the past was always open-ended and contingent. Rather than cloaking historical outcomes with a gloss of inevitability, history interpreters might pry open past events to reveal the many viable alternatives a multitude of past actors faced as they struggled to solve problems, take actions, and frame horizons. This practice advances larger NPS aims concerning both stewardship and engagement, because it reminds audiences of the role they themselves play in shaping our collective future. History does this not by abstraction and generalization but by exploring particular cases and examples where people have made a difference. NPS sites are the ideal places for this kind of consideration.⁵⁵

8. Forthrightly address conflict and controversy both in, and about, the past.

Rather than minimizing disagreement and controversy both in the past and about the past, history interpreters should embrace and discuss conflict among actors in the past and among scholars and members of the public ever since. Most important events of the past were experienced both at the time and ever since through multiple perspectives. Thorough and careful grounding in research is without question the basis for effective and informed discussions that highlight and respect multiple perspectives both in and on the past. History interpreters

55 “The principal public function of historical debate,” John Tosh writes, is “to keep open an awareness of alternatives,” to show that individuals can make choice and thereby shape outcomes (*Why History Matters* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 138).

must become comfortable discussing—and helping their publics become more comfortable encountering—unsavory characters, painful episodes, oppression and conflict, and even uncertainty about the basics of “what happened” and “what it means.”

9. Welcome contested and evolving understandings of American civic heritage.

NPS can and should reflect the historical and contemporary reality that the content and meanings of American civic heritage are not self-evident; they too are contested and evolving. At our iconic sites, history practitioners should present the civic challenge of applying supposedly “timeless” truths of American founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to changing perspectives in a complicated world.

10. Envision “doing history” as a means of skills development for civic participation.

In presenting history, interpreters and historians should point to its practice as a wellspring of *skills*—in addition to a repository of *content knowledge*—that are useful in civic life. With less focus on specific, fixed *content* and more on practicing the habits of historical thinking (finding and weighing evidence, asking questions, thinking about whose voices are not included, pondering cause and effect, considering open-endedness and the viability of alternatives not chosen), a more flexible and fluid approach to history can help the NPS facilitate and model meaningful essential skills and awareness for civic participation, that will help people encounter difference, uncover assumptions, consider evidence, suspend judgment, recognize the differential effects of choosing one alternative over another, come to terms with the legacies of injustice, listen respectfully to others, develop empathy, and embrace multiple perspectives. More robust development of those skills could prove transformative both within and outside the agency.

11. Share authority with and take knowledge from the public.

NPS history should recognize—with those working in other nodes of professional public history practice especially—the value and limitations of sharing authority in the creation of historical narratives with visitors and the public. While we endorse the value that historians with deep subject expertise can bring to flexible, dynamic, yet empirically grounded discussions of the past, we encourage thoughtful efforts to incorporate other voices, perspectives, and “truths” into conversations about the past and its meaning.

12. Better connect with the rest of the history profession and embrace interdisciplinary collaboration.

To embody and enact the approaches outlined above and to find creative ways to engage new publics in history, including those who may never visit the parks, NPS history should be thoroughly and multiply interconnected with other nodes of historical scholarship and innovative and effective historical education and interpretation: in other public history sites, in academia, in K-12 education. It should embrace the promise of interdisciplinary collaboration with allied fields such as interpretation and the exciting possibilities the digital revolution is bringing to the practice, dissemination, and widely shared participation in history.

NOTICE TO VACATE

The Decision Is Made

For the more than 2,000 people who still made their homes in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the establishment of Shenandoah National Park brought years of confusion and uncertainty. Three presidential administrations had presided over the establishment of the park, each with its own ideas and policies regarding the residents. But in 1934 the Roosevelt Administration ended the uncertainty by refusing to accept the deeds until all residents were relocated. In response, the Reclamation Administration established seven homestead communities and offered chosen residents the opportunity to buy new homes. Others made their own arrangements and the remainder became welfare cases. A few resisted the changes being forced upon them.

Harbert Melvin Clark, a local politician, resident, and his wife, Gertrude, bought his acre and built a granite quarry and built a summer home for his country home. Clark owned a saw-log home to keep his property within the park. Clark signed a one-year lease to keep his property within the park after being of power to local authorities, National Park officials, and President Hoover and Roosevelt. He refused to accept the \$5,000 payment for his property, but in October 1934, he a small settlement. Clark and his wife were forced by the Reclamation Administration officials.

*"We are unwilling to part with our homes
to help a small part of our population
to get their hands into tourist pockets."*



New exhibits installed at Shenandoah National Park's Byrd Visitor Center in 2007 document the controversial removal of mountain residents when the park was created in the 1930s. (Photograph by David E. Whisnant, 2009.)

Lamps along the Path: What's Going Well with History in the National Park Service

Many of the perspectives and approaches discussed in part 1 are already in practice throughout the park system. Indeed, we have been impressed both with the thoughtful, rigorous, and creative history work underway in many corners of the NPS and with the passion and dedication of historians within the agency. Our survey respondents, too, identified nearly 150 examples of historical projects and programs they regarded as effective, inspiring models. In individual site visits, we observed many instances of high-quality scholarship and creative interpretation. Clearly, when conditions are right, Park Service historians and historical interpreters (and those they work with outside the agency) do imaginative, up-to-date, stellar work to make national parks and historic sites such inspiring places for engaging history.

Many of our respondents eloquently describe the power of place-based encounters. "Our most effective and successful interpretation of history and historical topics," one writes, "includes the 'real stuff' and the 'real words' of those who lived in the time being interpreted."¹ At a Civil War battlefield, visitors can "see what soldiers saw on the days of battle."² In Springfield, Illinois, a park recreated the homes surrounding Lincoln's abode to appear as he saw them.³ At Cape Hatteras National Seashore, "you get a feel for weather on the outer banks and what it took to do the job of a weather man just because you were exposed to the areas where those people roamed a hundred years ago."⁴

Best of all, visitors can often participate in experiences of the past through "experiential programming." Immersion in the original experience means "being able to touch, act out the events, feel the emotion for the stories make it real."⁵ At an Underground Railroad site, visitors take on the role of runaway slaves seeking freedom.⁶ In a hands-on experience at Robert E. Lee's Arlington House, fourth graders try on Civil War-period clothes in what they often say is the best part of their visit. These examples are what best distinguish national parks as sites for stimulating the public's interest in history. Writes one respondent, "they offer direct engagement with historical sites and themes, not just reading about it."⁷

This special magic between the visitor and an original site pivots around two kinds of experiences: appreciating a specific place as it existed in the past, and learning through experts how figures from that past faced its challenges. The key lesson to be learned from a site, then, is not that here, some men signed a Declaration of Independence; or there, some high school students desegregated a school; or over there, a soldier fired a shot. The key lesson is that before taking the actions that would make this place famous, or "historic," particular individuals struggled with how they would meet the challenges before them. By understanding the original open-endedness that Americans reveled in or struggled with, the ranger-interpreter

1 Respondent 10203.

2 Respondent 10364.

3 Respondent 11230.

4 Respondent 10055.

5 Respondent 10925.

6 Respondent 11186.

7 Respondent 10697.



A notebook at Richmond National Battlefield Park's Tredegar Iron Works invites visitors to share their perspectives on the Civil War. (Photograph by Anne Mitchell Whisnant, 2009.)

signals the deeply democratic message that history is neither made by fate nor full of inevitable outcomes, but rather that people have struggled to comprehend and to make choices at different times in the past. This act of contemplation, based not only on abstractions and generalizations but also on exploring particular cases in specific places, is an extraordinary gift that Park Service personnel provide for the public.

It is worth calling particular attention to some of the brightest lamps already illuminating the way forward for the practice of history in the NPS. While the scope of our study allows us to explore only briefly each of the following cases, we highlight them to demonstrate some of the positive directions in which the NPS is already moving and the powerful potential of a dynamic history practice infused with the perspectives and approaches we outlined above.

Gaining the High Ground: Reinterpreting Slavery and the Civil War

The nation's Civil War battlefields are among our most iconic landscapes. Ground where Americans died by the thousands, they are today not merely historic sites, but sacred places. As early as the 1890s, these lands were recognized and preserved as significant cultural resources; by the time NPS assumed their management in the 1930s, some already had forty years behind them as places Americans went to make sense of the bloodshed.

Preserved as they were while Reconstruction itself was still fresh in many minds, these battlefields became memorial and commemorative sites, rather than places that prompted historical reflection. The causes of the war so fresh and so raw for so many, the battlefields were places to talk about the whats and whos, but not, emphatically, the whys—questions that many visitors and managers alike found too charged to tackle. Over time, that silence became untenable. As the Civil Rights movement altered the expectations of audiences, and the historical profession developed an ever greater understanding of the role of slavery in American political life from the Revolution onward, NPS historians became increasingly aware that thorny historical issues had to be confronted.

As early as 1991, NPS staff in the mid-Atlantic region had begun to focus on this issue, and in 1998, battlefield superintendents also turned their attention here.⁸ NPS historian John Hennessy drafted a report of those discussions entitled “Holding the High Ground: Principles and Strategies for Managing and Interpreting Civil War Battlefield Landscapes.” Around the same time, an OAH site visit to Gettysburg helped articulate that “slavery was the cause of secession, and secession was the cause of the war.”⁹ Those conversations found a catalyst in 2000 when a Department of the Interior appropriations bill, authored by Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., directed NPS “to encourage Civil War battle sites to recognize and include in all of their public displays and multimedia educational presentations the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War.”¹⁰

8 Robert K. Sutton, “Holding the High Ground: Interpreting the Civil War in National Parks,” *George Wright Forum* 25, no. 3 (2008): 47–57, <http://www.georgewright.org/253sutton.pdf>. See also Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “‘A Cosmic Threat’: The National Park Service Addresses the Causes of the American Civil War,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: New Press, 2006).

9 John A. Latschar, “OAH and the National Park Service,” [August 2009], <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2000aug/latschar.html>.

10 Bruce Babbitt, “Foreword,” in *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War, Ford’s Theatre*, May 8 and 9, 2000, ed. Robert Kent Sutton ([Fort Washington, Pa.]: Eastern National, 2001), http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/rthg/fore.htm.

But if those battlefields' managers were poised to move on these issues, segments of the general public were not, and NPS staff members encountered resistance, both within and beyond the agency. "Why and how these two armies got to that battlefield is irrelevant at the point of the battle," one person complained. "The only thing that matters at that point is *what* happened and not why," the complainer observed. "Allow the NPS to deal with the facts about the battle and leave the why to the educators."¹¹ Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley led the NPS response, noting that the 1916 legislation that created the Park Service, together with the 1935 Historic Sites Act and the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, established a mandate to educate the public in a way that goes beyond mere narration of military activities.

A May 2000 symposium convened at Ford's Theatre, *Rally on the High Ground* (televised on C-Span) brought together some of the nation's foremost historians of the Civil War—Ira Berlin, David Blight, Drew Gilpin Faust, and others—to help advance this uneasy conversation. Robert K. Sutton, who succeeded Pitcaithley as chief historian, wrote in his introduction to the subsequent volume *Rally on the High Ground*, that "National Park Service Civil War battlefields certainly will not right all the wrongs of the past. But, they have the opportunity to become laboratories, places that will help all Americans, from all ethnic backgrounds, understand their past. People should expect to visit a Civil War battlefield and come away with an understanding of not only who shot whom, how, and where, but why they were shooting at one another in the first place."¹²

Because of these efforts, millions of visitors to NPS sites, and readers of NPS publications, now encounter a richer and more sophisticated conversation about this wrenching moment in our history. Public programs, museum and wayside exhibits, and other interpretive media are being updated to reflect this more accurate and encompassing understanding of the past; the handbook *The Civil War Remembered* reflects these priorities, and the Southeast Region's booklet *Slavery: Cause and Catalyst of the Civil War* has been recognized for excellence by the National Association for Interpretation.¹³

The multiyear effort to broaden the interpretation of the Civil War, and to confront the reality of slavery in the past and its legacies in the present, required real bravery in the face of public vitriol and misinformation. From the office of the chief historian to the superintendents who steward these sites, NPS historians and history managers harnessed the power of sound scholarship to confront resistance. These NPS professionals, with the aid of the nation's leading historians, held their ground, and disseminated these new points of view to audiences both near and far. This story of intellectual courage—one cited by dozens of the survey responses discussed here—continues to resonate through the agency today. Perhaps most important, it engaged many of the best practices that will be called for throughout these pages: coordinated leadership across multiple levels, collaboration with academic partners, and real financial investment in terms of gatherings to support discussion, publications and other activities.

11 Quoted in Kevin Levin, *Civil War Memory: Where History, Heritage, and Education Intersect*, blog, June 5, 2006.

12 Sutton, "Introduction," in Sutton, *Rally on the High Ground*.
http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/rthg/intro.htm.

13 NPS, *The Civil War Remembered* (Virginia Beach: Donning Co. Publishers, 2011); and NPS Southeast Region, Division of Interpretation and Education, "Slavery: Cause and Catalyst of the Civil War," brochure, National Park Service, 2011, http://www.illinoiscivilwar150.org/pdfs/SlaveryCause_CatalystNPS.pdf.

Building Effective Civic Ties, Seeing Beyond “Resources,” and Using Technology to Support Creative Distance Learning: Manzanar National Historic Site | 35

Many survey respondents highlighted Manzanar National Historic Site (NHS) as a leading light in modeling effective community engagement. “The effort put forth by the NPS to seek collaboration with the concerned communities—particularly the Japanese American community—in telling the story of that place is essential to the effectiveness of historical interpretation at that site,” one respondent wrote.¹⁴ Manzanar embodies many of the other approaches we call for as well: an ability to consider a site’s multiple, layered histories; a respect for evolving memory in dialogue with history; and an ability to effectively and creatively interpret (partly through digital history and distance learning), a site that has few extant “resources” and is far from well-traveled tourist paths.

Manzanar sprawls across 814 acres of windswept, sparsely vegetated high desert in California’s Owens Valley. Perched beneath the majestic peaks of the Sierra Nevada, it was one of the largest of ten internment camps where about 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, were imprisoned during World War II.

Established in 1992, Manzanar is one of the three NPS sites that tell the story of civil liberties and civil rights denied. Here, approximately eleven thousand Japanese Americans created churches and temples, schools, a newspaper, social, musical, and athletic organizations, and other structures of community life to prepare themselves and their children for eventual release from the camps.

Manzanar uses digital tools and selective reconstructions to convey the site’s complicated history (of which the internment camp was only one episode). Off-site visitors can view (and purchase if they like) a twenty-two-minute documentary, “Remembering Manzanar,” which features former internees and staff of the camp telling their own stories and thus giving voice to authentic actors. A scale model created by former internees in 2004 helps visitors envision the destroyed features of the camp. In addition, a *Layers of History* exhibit provides context for Manzanar’s prewar history with stories of the Paiute Indians who have long lived in the Owens Valley, the homesteading era, and the fruit-growing community that preceded the acquisition of most Owens Valley land by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

Distance-learning technology and digital media are vital for Manzanar because its remoteness—Bakersfield is the only city within three hours by car—has all but guaranteed that it would be a low-traffic NPS site. Thus, planners have emphasized bringing Manzanar to the people through modern media; the number of virtual visitors greatly exceeds the eighty-five thousand people who come through the park entrance each year. In addition to the *Remembering Manzanar* DVD, online booklets tell personal stories of more than seventy imprisoned Japanese Americans.¹⁵ Many more interviews of internees at Manzanar and the other nine internment camps are archived in the Manzanar Oral History Project and are available online through the Densho: Japanese American Legacy Project archive.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Manzanar photo gallery enriches the online experience by making available the photography of Dorothea Lange, Clem Albers, and Francis Stewart, who were sent to the camps by the War Relocation Authority to create a visual record. The site also contains a link to a Library of Congress collection of photographs Ansel Adams took of Manzanar. Although the photographs are not available online, the interpretive center features dozens of the images taken by Toyo Miyatake, a Los Angeles commercial photographer who smuggled a lens into Manzanar

14 Respondent 10156.

15 *Remembering Manzanar*, produced by Signature Communications, Huntingtown, MD, for the NPS, http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/manz/videos/remembering_manzanar.html.

16 Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, c. 2007–2011, www.densho.org.

36 | and was permitted to continue shooting after being discovered by the camp director.

In 2007, Manzanar partnered with Ball State University, the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and the National Park Foundation to create an electronic field trip entitled *Desert Diamonds behind Barbed Wire*, with supporting curriculum, website, and webisodes.¹⁷ Also recently installed (2010) is an online virtual museum showing hundreds of artifacts—paintings, ceramics, furniture, weavings, and other expressions of Japanese-American creativity in the ten camps. Included are the pencil drawings, pen-and-ink sketches, and watercolor paintings of Charles Isamu Morimoto, who taught his craft at Manzanar to internees young and old.¹⁸

As we write, Manzanar NHS is working with Minidoka NHS and the Tule Lake Unit of WWII Valor in the Pacific National Monument (NM) on collaborative research projects and to procure the equipment necessary to link the three sites for school-based distance-learning efforts. Meanwhile, Manzanar is providing a model for Park Service distance learning.

Negotiating Civic Engagement and Civic Heritage: African Burial Ground National Monument and the President's House, Independence National Historical Park

The visitor center and memorial at the African Burial Ground NM in Lower Manhattan are legacies of a remarkably inclusive, patient, and creative process of civic engagement managed by the NPS Northeast Region. In the course of developing plans for a federal office building, archeologists uncovered remains of approximately fifteen thousand free and enslaved Africans buried on this site between about 1690 and 1794. Some called it the most important urban archaeological project in the United States. The African descendant community protested mightily against the construction of an office building on top of what they regarded as a sacred space that connected them with their ancestors. Negotiations between the community and General Services Administration were essentially gridlocked. At that point, NPS was given responsibility to negotiate a resolution. Working with major black cultural institutions such as the Schomburg Center and Howard University, and developing a patient listening process that sought to incorporate descendants' voices and concerns, NPS shepherded into existence a stunning memorial not only to the individuals who were buried here but also to the rich origins and cultures of those people of African descent who shaped New York in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In another case, Independence National Historic Park (NHP) engaged in an often-contentious, drawn-out debate over whether the land outside the new Liberty Bell Center at Sixth and Market Streets should be used to build exhibits commemorating the site where Presidents Washington and Adams operated the executive branch from the Robert Morris mansion. This house, to which Washington brought nine slaves from Mount Vernon as part of a household workforce that included white indentured servants and free waged employees, stands as a poignant example of how slavery and freedom were joined at the hip throughout history and points up the cardinal paradox of American freedom in the Revolutionary era. Site and symbol, freedom and slavery, black and white: how should the Park Service explain the site over which several million visitors each year would enter the Liberty Bell Center?

The superintendent of Independence NHP preferred to avoid the issue, wary of confusing the Liberty Bell Center's story of the internationally famous American icon. But Northeast Regional director Marie Rust, a founding member of the International Coalition of Historic Sites of Conscience, launched the Park Service's Civic Engagement Initiative, sending the

17 The field trip may be viewed at <http://www.schooltube.com/video/dfb7f72371e4928f1c82/Desert-Diamonds-Behind-Barbed-Wire>.

18 NPS, Museum Management Program, Virtual Museum Exhibit, Manzanar Historic Site, "Pastimes: Artwork," www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/manz/pastimes_artwork.html.

straightforward message that “in a democratic society such as ours, it is important to understand the journey of liberty and justice, together with the economic, social, religious, and other forces that barred or opened the ways for our ancestors, and the distances yet to be covered.”¹⁹

A group of local historians and institutional leaders calling itself the Ad Hoc Historians (of which one author of this report was cofounder) captured newspaper headlines and airtime to publicize the reluctance of Independence’ NHP’s superintendent to take hold of the problem and urge action on treating fully and frankly one of the nation’s most history-soaked pieces of urban real estate. The intervention of Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley on the side of the Ad Hoc Historians was crucial. So too was the mobilization of black Philadelphians by a black trial lawyer, who founded the Avenging the Ancestors Coalition and led them into the streets for a Fourth of July demonstration.²⁰

With nearly \$13 million from Congress and PECO, a Philadelphia energy company, and after eight years of planning, exhibit designing, and construction—all attended by public viewings of exhibit design mock-ups and often furious arguments—the exhibits opened in December 2010. Called *The President’s House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of the New Nation*, the exhibits featured outlines and architectural features of the first executive mansion; wall displays of colonial slavery in Philadelphia, the emergence of a free black community, and high points of the decade when Philadelphia was the nation’s capital; audiovisual reenactments of some of Washington’s slaves, including two who fled to gain their freedom; and a sculptural commemoration of the nine enslaved people who lived in the president’s house. Though long, complicated, and controversial, the project engaged large segments of the community and brought together the two principal partners that jointly approved the final plans—NPS and the city of Philadelphia.

Sharing Authority: The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Traveling Exhibit and the Tent of Many Voices

Between 2003 and 2006, in celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition, a traveling exhibit called the “Corps of Discovery II” (Corps II) stopped at sites across the country, allowing visitors to share differing interpretations of the past. Within the exhibit, a Tent of Many Voices provided space for live demonstrations, lectures, cultural presentations, and audiovisual showings created in partnership with American Indian communities, federal agencies, local and state governments, and the private sector. Inside the tent, in the words of one of our respondents, “speakers were invited to share their take on the Lewis and Clark story.”²¹

Gerard Baker, then superintendent of Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, also served as superintendent of Corps II. A member of the Mandan-Hidatsa tribe, Baker saw the project’s goal as “inciting curiosity.”²² To this end, as one informant expresses it, in the Tent of Many Voices, “speakers were given liberty to tell their story without prior review by the NPS,” affording them a forum to engage a wider audience. “We allowed history to be rewritten from a predominantly American Indian perspective (over three hundred speakers had tribal affiliation). We heard history as we never had, and we were open to experiencing that. We discovered the value of oral tradition, and facilitated a safe place to record such

19 Quoted in Gary B. Nash, *The Liberty Bell* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 200. “The National Park Service and Civil Engagement” can be viewed at <http://www.nps.gov/civic/>.

20 See Gary B. Nash, “For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll?: From Controversy to Cooperation,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: Norton, 2006).

21 Respondent 10827.

22 Quoted in Joseph Flanagan, “Tent of Many Voices: In the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark,” *Common Ground* (Spring 2003): 22.

38 | history. *Every* program, unless the speaker declined (very rare) was recorded.”²³ Recordings are archived at the University of Nebraska’s Peter Klewit Institute. Available for viewing are 346 video segments from the presentations, as well as other aspects of the bicentennial events.

In fashioning the Corps II exhibits, NPS took the risk of allowing others to participate in the interpretation of the past without managing the message. One respondent wrote: “NPS didn’t write the history and we didn’t pretend to have all the answers. The employees on this project understood history in a way somewhat unknown in the NPS upon completion. It shaped how I think about things every day.”²⁴

This willingness to allow a conversation to unfold that might be challenging, even uncomfortable—provided a model for other NPS projects. Another respondent calls the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, “a huge partnership experience that was beneficial for all involved.” This person says that “the same thing occurred for the Dred and Harriet Scott Sesquicentennial in the City of St. Louis,” adding that she/he finds that “the knowledge shared there opened my horizons and allowed me to sense that it was not the history of one race but the shared history of us all.”²⁵

Forging Interdisciplinary Partnerships: Cape Cod National Seashore and the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

A fine example of productive partnership between NPS and universities emerged when Cape Cod National Seashore (NS) contacted the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (OCLP, founded at the Frederick Law Olmsted NHS) to help document cultural resources in a complex political landscape, and eventually NPS engaged the help of researchers from several departments at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to respond to a complex challenge. Setting the boundaries of the 43,000-acre Cape Cod NHS on the fragile Outer Cape a half-century ago had led to abrasive relationships between NPS and Cape Cod residents in the six towns bordering the park. By the 1980s, the character of Cape Cod NHS was threatened by proposed redevelopment of inholdings and plans for intense development of areas in and around the national seashore. Scholars from the UMass Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Department and the Public History Program (part of the History Department) undertook a two-year effort to provide research to inform these issues in a strategy involving graduate courses (“studios”) and funded research assistantships that eventually engaged several faculty and over thirty graduate students.

This collaboration generated innovative approaches to research and analysis. The research plan used NPS’s cultural landscape report as a point of departure, but the group necessarily “expanded and customized” their approach. To create what the team came to call a “landscape character study,” the public historians organized a series of “Cape Conversations”—community meetings at which residents gathered to “share their responses to certain images, plans, and other representations of the landscape, as well to contribute their own observations.” Combining “description and documentation of both physical features as well as historical and ongoing activities, such as surf casting or berry picking,” the landscape architects and planners documented “the cultural and ephemeral qualities of the landscape as well as landscape morphology and patterns.” The interdisciplinary report that emerged received an award from the National Environment

23 Respondent 10827.

24 Respondent 10827.

25 Respondent 10450.





Many respondents highlighted the effectiveness of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery II traveling exhibit (2003-06), which commemorated the 200th anniversary of the famous expedition. (Photograph courtesy U.S. Army Center of Military History.)

Design Research Association and now serves as a basic planning document. Equally important, the collaboration engaged “a range of people, many of whom had not been drawn into public processes when orchestrated by the NPS alone.”²⁶ The flexibility of park managers and other NPS officials was key to facilitating this innovative project. Thus the stage was set for more cooperative and productive discussions as the work of landscape preservation moves forward.

²⁶ Ethan Carr, personal narrative for State of History team, 2010.

40 | **Harnessing the Power of Local History: San Antonio Missions National Historical Park and *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site**

Recognizing the significance of local history has long been a part of the mission of the NPS. Throughout the half-century history of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), approximately 60% of the nominations cite local significance (another 30% cite state-level significance, and the remaining 10% are listed as nationally significant). However, if a park's enabling legislation is grounded in national significance, tensions between national and local narratives can emerge. As former NPS historian Art Gomez points out, too often, "park managers are reluctant to divert from the park's mission statement to present other historical aspects of the park, no matter how viable." At San Antonio Missions NHP, for instance, he noted, "a substantial number of visitors came to that park because their father or grandfather participated in the 1930s restoration of San Jose Mission as members of the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]." Yet "because the enabling legislation emphasized the eighteenth-century Franciscan missionary experience in south Texas," it had been difficult to pursue this locally important subject.²⁷

As NPS seeks a broader range of partnerships to cultivate new audiences and to meet basic operational obligations, more parks are exploring local stories alongside national ones. San Antonio Missions NHP reached out to members of the local parishes of the four church missions to share personal experiences through photographs. "We told their history through their photographs and words and shared it with the public," explains a respondent. "It was quite effective, created a better bond between the park and the local community, and told extremely interesting stories and talked about recent and modern history of the park that visitors were surprised to see and experience."²⁸ In embracing "the lure of the local," the park worked effectively with local partners to utilize resources beyond park boundaries.

We concur with the respondent who argues that "to truly be successful, a park must be able to tell a story on a local, regional, and national level. While the 'big picture' helps explain the significance of a park, it is the local history that best makes that story believable and understandable to park visitors." This respondent offers another good example of using local history to broaden a story's significance and appeal—a program undertaken in partnership between the Shawnee County Historical Society, Unified School District 501, and the Brown v. Board of Education NHS that examined the segregated high school basketball teams of Topeka, Kansas. By using the topic of high school basketball to illustrate the larger issue of Jim Crow laws and the fight for equal educational opportunity, the park drew approximately 450 people to the program, "about double the number of people who turned out for the Brown v. Board of Education NHS program commemorating the 55th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision."²⁹

Local stories—stories that may lie beyond strictly construed enabling legislation but are of passionate interest to the men and women who live alongside a park's boundaries—have proven equally important at Lowell NHP, the Mount Rushmore NM, Hopewell Furnace NHS, and elsewhere. Among the few history-specific items in *A Call to Action* is a pledge (under "Connecting People to Parks, Action No. 3") to "expand the meaning of parks to new audiences and provide an opportunity for communities to learn more about their heritage by conducting history discovery events, using oral histories and other methods, in at least 100

27 Art Gomez, personal narrative for State of History team, 2009.

28 Respondent 10022.

29 Respondent 11483.

parks.”³⁰ The prospect of people gathered in fully one-quarter of the nation’s parks, connecting the stories of their own lives to the work of NPS—activity that would necessarily expand a park’s reach beyond its enabling legislation—is indeed heartening. The process would enable local residents to contribute meaningfully to and collaborate with the NPS.

Confronting a Park’s Own History: Shenandoah National Park

More than a decade of new and imaginative scholarship on history and memory has opened new possibilities for understanding the intertwining of past and present at any site of historical remembrance. Meanwhile, burgeoning scholarship on the histories of particular sites within the NPS, as well as a mushrooming number of anniversaries commemorating the work done on the national parks in the 1930s, have called attention to the profound influence the Park Service itself has had where it has acted to create, protect, preserve, or develop (and redevelop) parks. That influence extends both to the telling of history and to on-the-ground matters such as land use and regional economic development.

In view of the power of these histories and their continuing relevance both to conversations about the meanings of history (witness the Civil War) and to current management issues, some parks’ attempts to build regional partnerships and enhance cooperation with nearby neighbors and communities have made them realize the importance of forthrightly confronting their own histories in their interpretive materials.

One of the most careful and creative efforts by a park to make itself the subject of public historical interpretation is Shenandoah National Park’s (NP) expansive exhibit, *Within a Day’s Drive of Millions*, installed in 2007 at the Harry F. Byrd Visitor Center at Big Meadows, Virginia.³¹ The exhibit is a splendid example of repurposing a Mission 66-era structure to candidly recount the Park Service’s own role in shaping the history of the southern Appalachian region where this park was carved from private lands in the 1920s and 1930s. The exhibit, funded with \$1 million in park fees, grew out of a thoughtful ten-year process that combined first-rate primary research with substantial public engagement with the Children of Shenandoah, a group of descendants of families moved out of the park in the 1930s.

The exhibit opens with the effort to bring western-style national parks to eastern population centers in the 1920s and ends by asking visitors to consider the ongoing conundrums of park management. In between, the exhibit packs in a tight, linear, and chronological—yet dialectical—narrative of park establishment, development and early use, and evolution to the present. Innovative use of exhibit panels and three-dimensional features such as fences, shovels, a house, a landscape architect’s office, a park store, and life-size cutouts of people that seem to emerge from the panoramic photographs that line the halls effectively invite viewers into the historical scene in ways that are reminiscent of nineteenth-century cycloramas.

Carefully chosen historical documents, images, and artifacts support a narrative that foregrounds the complexity of the decision-making processes that shaped the park, including the pivotal decision (justified largely through public portrayals of the residents as illiterate, ignorant, isolated, and apolitical) to remove several thousand residents from more than three thousand separate tracts of land purchased for the park. The exhibit also confronts the development and use of the Lewis Mountain “Negro Area,” where black visitors gathered and camped

30 NPS, *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*, August 25, 2011, http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/Directors_Call_to_Action_Report.pdf.

31 The discussion that follows is condensed from Anne Mitchell Whisnant and David E. Whisnant, “Exhibition Review: ‘Blue Ridge Parkway, America’s Favorite Journey,’ Blue Ridge Parkway, and ‘Within a Day’s Drive of Millions,’ Shenandoah National Park,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009), http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/96.3/exr_6.html.

42 | and picnicked before the site was desegregated in 1947 (two years after a federal order that directed desegregation of all national park facilities).³²

Shenandoah's success in mounting this engaging project owes a great debt to primary research on the park's history conducted over more than a decade by the park's in-house historian Reed Engle and to park-sponsored historical and archaeological research conducted by consultants. Their work was extended through a deliberative process in which park interpretive staff (including one ranger whose time was almost completely dedicated to the project for several years) mounted preliminary versions of portions of the exhibit and invited feedback from descendants of relocated residents and other interested citizens. The process was funded in part by money that this park raised for its own use through park entrance fees (an option not available to many other sites). The confluence of all of these factors, one of the staff members told our team, created a "perfect storm" that offers promise elsewhere.³³

Mobilizing Public Conversations about History through New Media: NPS and Social Networking

It appears self-evident that NPS must connect rapidly and forcefully to the explosive growth of social media that has transformed personal, institutional, and governmental communication around the world. Now that the Department of the Interior has lifted restrictions on the use of social media, NPS use of web 2.0 technologies has begun to grow, and we are seeing hints of its potential to reach new publics.³⁴

One site that has engaged and integrated new media is Glacier NP. While many NPS websites actively conceal information about the specific people behind the prose, Glacier identifies its social media team with brief bios and photos. Glacier thoughtfully harnesses specific tools (gathered on the park's "Social Networking Media" webpage) to achieve specific ends. A Twitter feed shares "updates on breaking news in the park," social events, and "what is happening now," while a Facebook page (with ninety thousand "friends" as of October 2011) allows real and virtual visitors to the site to "engage in conversations, post photos and videos," and to "bring clarity to any rumors floating around out there." Through Flickr, the park encourages the public to select from among (currently) more than thirteen hundred images for their own "publication, school project, PowerPoint or next viral video." Staff posts footage via two YouTube channels. Several blogs share insights into NPS through the eyes of its stewards; posts like that of curator Deirdre Shaw's "Twenty-one Days Traveling through Glacier: Journal Excerpts from the 1912 Geographic Society of Chicago's Visit to Glacier National Park," allow users to encounter documents historians use to understand the past in ways that generate excitement and curiosity.³⁵

While Glacier uses social media to reach general visitors and supporters beyond NPS, the Northeast Museum Services Center (NMSC) uses these tools to reach the NPS peers and colleagues they serve. This particularly thoughtful entry into social media aims to raise the profile of NPS museum collections in general as well as the services the NMSC provides by engaging a range of strategies designed to address their various audiences, including two Twitter feeds, a Facebook page, and a blog.³⁶

32 See Reed Engle, "Shenandoah National Park—Segregation/Desegregation (U.S. National Park Service)," January 1996, <http://www.nps.gov/shen/historyculture/segregation.htm>.

33 Anne Mitchell Whisnant, site visit, Shenandoah National Park, March 13, 2009.

34 See U.S. Department of Interior, "Notices—Social Media Policy," November 18, 2010, <http://www.doi.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy.cfm>.

35 Glacier National Park, "Social Networking Media," <http://www.nps.gov/glac/parknews/socialnetworking.htm>; *Deirdre Shaw's History Blog*, "Twenty-One Days Traveling through Glacier: Journal Excerpts from the 1912 Geographic Society of Chicago's Visit to Glacier National Park," March 2, 2011, http://www.nps.gov/glac/parknews/blogs_shaw.htm.

36 The NMSC's efforts are described in Giles Parker, "Since No One Knows Us, We Decided to Social-ize: The National Park Service Northeast Museum Services Center," *Voices of the Past: Connecting the World of Heritage Online*, March 4, 2011, <http://www.voicesofthepast.org/2011/03/04/nmsc-case-study/>.

Consistent with and supportive of the NMSC's mission ("to support and strengthen park management, partnerships and programs that preserve and protect natural and cultural resource collections within Northeast Region sites of the National Park Service and make those collections accessible for research, education and public enjoyment"³⁷), the center's Facebook page promotes events, and engages in humorous but substantive discussions of artifacts in the collection. One Twitter feed, aimed at volunteers and interns, seeks to "build the workforce and reinforce the types of museum opportunities that are available," while another addresses "all things storage-related for NPS collections: preventative conservation, equipment, security, fire protection."³⁸

Within six months of inaugurating these social media efforts, the center had made "significant progress toward our goals with NPS and non-NPS followers from across the nation. In many ways," they report, "the numbers speak for themselves. We primarily provide service to 76 sites in the Northeast, but @NPS_NMSC (190+ followers), @NMSC_Volunteers (80+ followers), NMSC on Facebook (70+ followers), and our blog (300+ readers per posting) are reaching a much broader audience."³⁹

Last, African Burial Ground's Twitter feed is a model of how to engage readers well beyond the specific aims of the park or the agency. Their posts share not only time-and-place-sensitive alerts as to what is happening at the site, but also news regarding scholarship and ideas pertinent to their park and of broader scholarly interest. As of this writing, about fifty thousand readers follow their tweets, expanding the site's reach exponentially and modeling for other units the potential of this deceptively simple tool.

Building Learning Links: Place-Based Approaches to the American Revolution in the K-12 Classroom

Little can be more useful in cultivating the interest of new generations of young Americans than drawing upon the Park Service's extraordinary array of sites, documents, and artifacts to create K-12 learning materials. One outstanding example of this is the collaboration that produced, among other things, the website "The American Revolution: Lighting Freedom's Flame," as well as *Honored Places: The National Park Service Teacher's Guide to the American Revolution* (available online and in published form).⁴⁰ Beginning as an initiative to bring together the resources surrounding more than twenty Revolutionary War parks for the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution, the website gathers together resources for students, researchers, and teachers; the site posts a timeline and brief biographies of key players, as well as short essays on a range of topics. This collaborative effort of teachers, scholars, and Park Service educational specialists also offers a list of NPS sites associated with the American Revolution and describes NPS educational programs at various American Revolution sites. *Honored Places* extends the use of the material. Organized around five lessons: "Prelude to the Revolutionary War," "Words and Action," "Making Choices," "The Power of Remembrance," and "The Legacy," each lesson includes learning objectives,

37 "About | NMSC Archeology Blog", n.d. <http://nmscarcheologylab.wordpress.com/about/>.

38 The two Twitter feeds are @NMSC_Volunteers (132 followers as of December 4, 2011) and @NMSC_StorageGuy (formerly @NPS_NMSC), which as of December 4, 2011, had 433 followers.

39 Parker, "Since No One Knows Us."

40 NPS, "The American Revolution: Lighting Freedom's Flame," "Revolutionary Teaching Resources," "The Learning Center," updated November 7, 2005, http://www.nps.gov/revwar/educational_resources/overview.html; and NPS, "The American Revolution: Lighting Freedom's Flame," "Revolutionary Teaching Resources," *Honored Places: The National Park Service Teacher's Guide to the American Revolution*, updated October 3, 2008, http://www.nps.gov/revwar/educational_resources/teachers.html. This material is based in part upon work conducted under two cooperative agreements, one between the U.S. Department of the Interior, NPS, and National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, and another between the NPS Southeast Regional Office and the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation.

44 | historical background essays, rich primary sources that undergird active learning classroom activities, and student worksheets.

Valley Forge NHP has also created a curriculum guide to the park that uses engaging primary source-based teaching activities for six lesson plans, including “Create Your Own Broadside Ballad,” “Critical Thinking with 18th-Century Technology,” “The Need for Manpower,” and “Examining the Leadership Traits of George Washington.” Additional materials on African Americans and American Indians in the revolution are available.⁴¹

Valley Forge’s website also presents a series of short essays on “The Unfinished American Revolution.”⁴² Written by historians on such subjects as children’s rights, unicameralism, democratizing the judiciary, religious freedom, and indentured servitude, the essays also include “questions to consider” and activities to prompt additional student learning. The essays invite teachers and students to discuss the ferment concerning political, social, and religious issues that erupted in the course of the revolution. In still another distance-learning program, Valley Forge has created a series of ten podcasts aimed at upper elementary and middle school students on a variety of revolutionary episodes such as “Timothy Murphy: Rifleman of the American Revolution,” “General von Steuben: The Making of an American Army,” “French Alliance Artillery Firing Demonstration” (featuring Oneida Indian Nation members demonstrating artillery procedures), and “Hannah Till, Washington’s Enslaved Cook.”⁴³

Provided adequate resources, many heavily visited Park Service sites could follow Valley Forge in constructing rich curricular materials and on-site learning activities for K-12 students, their teachers, and their parents.

Transporting Visitors to the Open-Ended Past: Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and Antietam National Battlefield

Two examples illustrate the transformative power of exposing visitors to the original open-endedness of history by shifting from fixed explanations of the past to considering the past moment as the original participants experienced it when they did not know what the outcomes would be. Themes that scholars can see through hindsight may not be congruent with what participants saw on the original site.

At Harpers Ferry NHP, visitors stand at the point where the two rivers converge, looking at the pillars that originally held a railroad bridge on which a train has stopped, its crew unaware of the raid that is in progress around them. We imagine the raiders agonizing over whether to let the train proceed, carrying news to the outside world that the arsenal has been seized. We try to comprehend what we would have done had it been our responsibility to decide the train’s fate.

Or, guided by a skilled interpreter like the late David Larsen, we can look up to some second-floor rooms in Harpers Ferry, and imagine a young husband in 1850 trying to decide what birthday present to buy his wife that will best convey his love. We are jolted when Larsen imagines that the husband decides to buy her a slave to spare her doing housework. In imagining ourselves thinking about a birthday present, we are prepared to picture slavery at the intersections of intimacy, commerce, and work. Instead of simply hanging on with confidence to our unexamined faith that slavery was evil, we are asked to consider the challenges it presented to the individuals who experienced it.

41 NPS, “Valley Forge National Historical Park, Curriculum Guide,” <http://www.nps.gov/vafo/forteachers/upload/CurriculumGuide.pdf>.

42 Disclosure: a member of this committee was commissioned to organize this project.

43 These podcasts may be downloaded via iTunes (search Podcasts>Government & Organizations>National>Valley Forge National Historical Park).



Similarly, at Antietam National Battlefield we can imagine ourselves as Confederate soldiers standing in the Sunken Road, looking up at the distant hill in front of us, and worrying as we imagine Union troops beginning to appear over its crest. Initially, we appreciate the great cover the sunken road apparently provides. A little later, however, standing in the same ditch, we look to our right as Union troops flank us, stare down the road at us, and open fire as if we were fish in a barrel. Interpreter Manny Gentile adds to our horror by lining us up and then asking our reinforcements to line up behind us. We realize we are trapped. The Union troops can mow us down—"roll up our flank," if you prefer—until the road is so strewn with bodies that our feet, like those of soldiers on that day, can feel only other bodies, no ground, as we try to walk on it. As visitors, we see on a wayside the photograph of the carnage taken by Alexander Gardner, one of Matthew Brady's colleagues, and displayed as "The Dead of Antietam" in New York. What did the people who lined up over a mile to see these photographs think when they saw the images of the carnage on September 17, 1862, on what even today remains the bloodiest day in American history?



Confederate Dead by a fence on the Hagerstown road, Antietam, Maryland, September 1862; photographed by Alexander Gardner. (Courtesy Library of Congress.)

The Antietam visitor center features a poster whose words transport us back from this carnage to contemplate its meaning. The poster's words were written by William Childs, a surgeon for the 5th New Hampshire Infantry, a month after the battle, while he was still on the field treating the wounded. "When I think of the Battle of Antietam, it seems so strange," he wrote. "Who permits it? To see or feel that a power is in existence that can and will hurl masses of men against each other in deadly conflict—slaying each other by the thousands is almost impossible. But it is so—and why, we cannot know."⁴⁴

Collaborating with Historians in Colleges and Universities: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and the Rhode Island School of Design

Many survey respondents and other contributors noted the potential of partnerships with higher education to do everything from filling basic labor gaps with undergraduate interns to creating robust collaborations with local faculty. Among the most successful partnerships nationwide are found in the Pacific Northwest, where Fort Vancouver NHS enjoys a thriving partnership with Portland State University (PSU) through the park's Northwest Cultural Resource Institute (NCRI). The Public History Field School, available to graduate students in the PSU public history program, is designed to "build on the context of their introductory coursework by providing a focused, hands-on immersion into how history is promulgated" by the NPS. In this eleven-week program, "students actively apply knowledge gained through group discussion, directed readings, research, practical exercises, peer review, and class instruction to crafting programs and interpretive media for the public."⁴⁵

Fort Vancouver chief ranger and historian Greg Shine has an adjunct appointment in the PSU history department. In his dual role, he teaches the upper-division public history seminar, Historic Site Interpretation (Public History Field School) on-site at Fort Vancouver. In 2009, the students created an online exhibit, *Beyond Officers Row: Duty and Daily Life at the U.S. Army Fort Vancouver*.⁴⁶ In the 2011 course, Shine "led Portland State University students through discussions, directed readings, practical exercises, on-site instruction, and research in the creation of a plan for the national park system to use podcasting and other new media techniques to tell the story of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War."⁴⁷

The collaboration allows PSU students to glimpse public history in action, while the park harnesses the skills and interests of the rising generation in the development of podcasts and other digital media. As Shine teaches a group of students about the theory and practice of public history, his course also engages his peers across the NPS, exposing students to an ever-wider array of sites and history while serving his colleagues both by producing materials of use and interest to them and by providing a forum where they can connect with one another.

In another exemplary collaboration, the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and NPS have organized a course around the use of wood from felled "witness trees." In a joint furniture studio and history seminar, senior critic of furniture design Dale Broholm had become intrigued by the opportunities presented by these trees after visiting Gettysburg NHP, where trees still

44 Child, quoted in George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 182.

45 NPS, Fort Vancouver, "2011 Public History Field School," <http://www.nps.gov/fova/historyculture/2011-public-history-field-school.htm>.

46 NPS, Fort Vancouver, "Beyond Officers Row: Duty and Daily Life at the US Army Fort Vancouver," <http://www.nps.gov/fova/historyculture/dailylifebarracks.htm>.

47 NPS, Fort Vancouver, "2011 Public History Field School."

on the landscape that were present during the three-day Civil War battle in July 1863 are classified as “witness trees.”⁴⁸

Inspired, Broholm developed a course using lumber from a felled pecan tree at Hampton NHS, a former plantation outside Baltimore, Maryland. Class readings and discussions looked at the history of slaveholding, the lives of slaves, the slave-based economy of the Upper South, and the lifestyles of the planter class. Students researched Hampton’s significance in American history and visited the tree’s site in Maryland, building a fully informed design vocabulary from which they created objects. The RISD student artwork was then displayed at Hampton NHS in spring 2010. “Working with the tree from Hampton,” said Broholm, “shows how history informs objects and provides a deeper understanding of culture. This has been an enriching experience and our hope is this project will enrich the learning of others as well.”⁴⁹ “This project brings to life the social, cultural, and economic history of the Hampton property,” said Gregory Weidman, Hampton’s curator. “Watching the process of RISD students creating objects in response to the pecan Witness Tree was fascinating and a wonderful learning experience.”⁵⁰

In both collaborations, students are exposed in fresh and creative ways to NPS work, while the agency benefits from the infusion of youthful energy, and also the resources higher education can offer, from access to and application of new media tools to furniture workshops and exposure to developments in the visual arts.

Bridging the Gap between Nature and Culture: Martin Van Buren National Historic Site

Since its founding, NPS has drawn distinctions between sites protected for their natural and scenic qualities and others preserved for their cultural and historical significance. As Mark Fiege points out in a recent issue of the *George Wright Forum*, environmental history in some form has always been valued by the agency; its contemporary iteration an “outgrowth of a much older effort to identify and understand nature and the causes of environmental change.”⁵¹ Yet while the agency is increasingly alert to the many ways such boundaries are blurred, a too-broad gap continues to separate natural and cultural resources. In many instances, that separation undermines sound stewardship, particularly with regard to agricultural lands within national parks. Parks that interpret farming or collaborate with farms are often hampered by the nature/culture distinction, as well as by the difficulty of knowing how—or whether—to engage with decision making about how to keep farms viable within the contemporary agricultural economy.

One site that is bridging the gap between nature and culture is the Martin Van Buren NHS in Kinderhook, New York. For more than a decade, the park has been working to incorporate interpretation of Van Buren’s post-presidential farming activities, which Van Buren saw as an important expression of his political and personal values. This interpretive shift was greatly enhanced in 2009 with a boundary expansion that brought most of Van Buren’s farm within the park. Several scholarly studies, including an ethnographic landscape study of farming in Columbia County, where the farm is located, support the development of innovative new

48 “Rhode Island School of Design and National Park Service Partner on Cultural Study and Object Creation from Fallen Witness Tree,” press release, <http://www.risd.edu/templates/content.aspx?id=4294974149>; “Witness Tree Exhibit Opens,” *NPS Digest*, <http://home.nps.gov/applications/digest/headline.cfm?type=Announcements&id=8911>; WTP General Introduction, 2010 (thanks to Dale Broholm for sharing this document); and Charles A. Birnbaum, “Tree Hugging Is Back in Style,” *Huffington Post* April 1, 2011.

49 “Rhode Island School of Design and National Park Service Partner.”

50 “Rhode Island School of Design and National Park Service Partner.”

51 Mark Fiege, “Toward a History of Environmental History in the National Parks,” *George Wright Forum* 28, no. 2 (2011): 128–47.¹²⁹

48 | approaches to the history of agriculture that hold promising implications for sites elsewhere.

By embracing the dynamic history of farming and analyzing both how and why it is too often oversimplified in the majority of historic sites, the staff at Van Buren's staff is pioneering new ways to engage the public in a more sophisticated discussion about past and present food-supply systems. Especially important are insights about the ways in which soil itself can be considered a cultural resource.

Van Buren's model builds on work undertaken at other national parks, such as Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller NHP and Minute Man NHP, which have moved toward an "agro-ecological" approach that integrates cultural and natural processes and interpretations. Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller especially has cooperated with other local groups on surfacing and engaging local concerns about the community's future. The aim is to build those concerns into a movement for preserving lands that might otherwise fall to unwanted development. Elsewhere within NPS, too, other exciting projects that bridge gaps between nature and culture through a focus on agriculture include Haleakala National Park's "agreement with a native Hawaiian organization to at Kipahulu, Maui, Hawaii to restore taro patches on park lands. This is a successful example of how parks can make the past relevant to today and at the same time celebrate and learn from the history of Hawaii's first Polynesian settlers. This also establishes the connections to the land that native community at Kipahulu have with their lands, economy, and ancestors."⁵² Through these and other initiatives, NPS can show real leadership as the nation rethinks our relationship to our food supply, and engage understanding of the past to create a more sustainable future.

Fostering, Producing, and Disseminating Historical Research: Studies, Exhibits and Handbooks

History research, undertaken by or under the auspices of the NPS, has made and continues to make powerful contributions to historical understanding. Talented historians across the agency, as well as the many historians from outside the agency employed or contracted for specific projects, generate daily insights that advance scholarship in political, social, cultural, economic, and architectural history.

We have read administrative histories that make thoughtful contributions to the understanding of not just a single park, but also of the evolution of public history. The best historic resources studies, NRHP nominations, and cultural landscape reports document the history of a given place while also grounding these stories and insights in the broadest contexts of U.S. history. Theme studies, too, undertaken by the National Historic Landmarks program (on labor history, civil rights, desegregation, and other topics), generate fresh scholarly insight as they draw together disparate sites that relate to a common development. In 2000, for instance, Congress directed NPS to undertake a study of the American Civil Rights movement; two volumes in that study (on racial desegregation and voting rights) are presently available through the OAH-NPS partnership, IUPUI University Library's eArchives. The segregation study was downloaded 967 times in just five weeks, suggesting its effectiveness in reaching interested audiences. This important and substantive work is not as widely known and studied as it ought to be by historians outside NPS (and sometimes even within NPS—a matter addressed later in this report).

The Park Service also produces scholarship in other forms, including substantive museum exhibits that are recognized well beyond the agency. For instance, the 1998 exhibition *Lying Lightly on the Land: Building America's National Park Roads and Parkways*, "employed a wide range of visuals, artifacts, and technologies to expand on the usually dry and internally

52 Respondent 10085.

circulated HAER report format to reach a broad audience”; the project won the Vernacular Architecture Forum’s Paul E. Buchanan Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the study and preservation of vernacular architecture and the cultural landscape.⁵³ In 2006, two NPS curators working in partnership with Amnesty International USA, the Gulag Museum in Perm, Russia, and the International Memorial Society, developed the innovative exhibition *GULAG: Soviet Forced Labor Camps and the Struggle for Freedom*. The exhibit traveled to a number of NPS sites as well as to partnered colleges and universities. The *New York Times* called it “powerful,” noting how “small things tell large truths ... in spareness and simplicity.”⁵⁴ In 2009, San Francisco Maritime NHP’s *The Cargo is King!* multimedia exhibit, located on the ‘tweendeck of the 1886 square-rigger *Balclutha*, was recognized by the National Association for Interpretation’s (NAI) Interpretive Media Competition.

Exhibit Planning Document - Floorplan & Themes



FLOOR PLAN and THEMES

- The starboard side of the ship is filled with “outbound” cargo - cargo that is leaving San Francisco
- The port side of the ship is filled with “inbound” cargo - cargo that is arriving in San Francisco



Individual back-lit PANEL BUTTONS (above) identify career, dates, type of voyage (inbound/outbound) and cargo.

A plan for the “Cargo Is King” exhibit at San Francisco Maritime NHP shows how evolving and complex histories of ocean-going trade were represented in the physical space of the *Balclutha*. (Image courtesy San Francisco Maritime NHP.)

- 53 An online version is available at National Park Service, “Lying Lightly on the Land,” <http://www.nps.gov/history/hdp/exhibits/lll/overview.htm>. The original brochure is at National Building Museum, “Lying Lightly on the Land: Building America’s National Park Roads and Parkways,” June 6, 1997-January 11, 1998, http://www.nationalbuildingmuseum.net/pdf/Lying_Lightly_on_the_Land.pdf.
- 54 Quoted in Martin Blatt, “Remembering Repression: The GULAG As an NPS Exhibit,” *Perspectives on History* (November 2008), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2008/0811/0811pub1.cfm>.

The Park Service has also drawn on scholarship based in colleges and universities to produce attractive, high-quality handbooks that make scholarship about parks and history readily accessible to the reading public. The new handbook *The American Revolution*, published by Eastern National and skillfully edited by Ron Thomson, could easily be assigned in a college classroom: essays by Charlene Mires, Pauline Maier, Don Higginbotham, Gordon Wood, and Gary B. Nash—among the very top historians of the period in the nation—reflect the best of recent scholarship, while well-chosen illustrations are engaging and instructive for readers.⁵⁵ Likewise, *The Civil War Remembered*, the NPS handbook on the Civil War, features sixteen essays written by some of America's most noted Civil War historians.⁵⁶ After James McPherson's thoughtful introduction, James Oliver Horton's essay "Confronting Slavery and Revealing the 'Lost Cause'" and Ira Berlin's "Race in the Civil War Era" tackle some of the most delicate and controversial issues that the parks engage; other subjects are covered by teaching scholars on landmark topics: Eric Foner on Reconstruction, Drew Gilpin Faust on death and dying, and David W. Blight on the Civil War in American memory.

A review of Thomson's handbook articulates the qualities that the best handbooks achieve: they are authoritative, succinct, readable, well illustrated, and loaded with extra features that readers appreciate, such as sidebars and timelines.⁵⁷ The combination of nationally recognized scholarly expertise with the lively format and appealing design of the NPS handbooks, which reach wide public audiences through distribution at NPS sites, blends the best of each community of history practitioners in ways that are most advantageous for the widest range of readers.

Engaging Professional Associations: The OAH-NPS Partnership

Relationships with professional associations within the discipline of history have become increasingly important in NPS's quest to strengthen its presentation and interpretation of history. Among the most significant is the Organization of American Historians (OAH)-National Park Service partnership that commissioned this study. In 1994, NPS signed the first in a series of five-year cooperative agreements with the OAH that allows that organization to undertake projects for the NPS; since that date, nearly 150 projects have strengthened the practice of history in the NPS. Thirty-three collaborative projects are currently in process, with an average budget of less than \$30,000; nearly all represent multiyear commitments.

The work undertaken through this partnership includes eighteen administrative histories, sixteen historic resource studies, and twenty-two projects aimed at developing National Historic Landmarks, as well as interpretive projects, oral histories, and more than a dozen trainings and conferences. Approximately two-dozen NPS site visits have brought many college- and university-based historians into parks to talk about strengths and needs, events that generated numerous reports on how history can be more effectively programmed and delivered; other collaborations have produced statements of significance, theme studies, and cooperative work to create teaching materials.⁵⁸

55 NPS. *The American Revolution*. NPS Handbook. Eastern National, 2008.

56 NPS, *Civil War Remembered*.

57 Bob Janiske, "The American Revolution: Official National Park Service Handbook—Everything that an NPS Handbook Should Be," *National Parks Traveler*, March 19, 2009.

58 For a list of projects, see Organization of American Historians, "OAH/NPS Projects (1994–2009)," 2011, <http://www.oah.org/programs/nps/cumulative.html>. We thank Aidan Smith at the OAH for providing a detailed breakdown of projects to date.

The OAH-NPS partnership has numerous benefits beyond the products delivered most immediately. NPS staff members gain access to the nation's leading content specialists and opportunities to develop relationships that can extend well beyond the project immediately at hand. Meanwhile, a growing cadre of non-NPS historians (mostly academics) learn about the nuances of history practice within the NPS, which differ in important ways from practice in the academy; what's more, those scholars become invested in the future of the park they visited. Since 2006 alone, nearly 300 outside historians have contributed to the practice of NPS history through the OAH partnership. As larger numbers of academic historians are exposed to the broad world of history practice within the NPS, from National Register documentation to interpretive plans, the barriers to collaboration that academics face (a reluctance to "count" this work as part of one's case for tenure or promotion, the academy's version of performance evaluations) will in time fall, as the historians who become department and campus administrators will have a better sense of the rigorous nature of this scholarship.⁵⁹ At the same time, faculty members are better positioned to steer capable undergraduate and graduate students into internships with NPS, and even toward careers with the agency, helping cultivate the twenty-first-century workforce.

The NPS partnership with OAH has also helped the agency strengthen ties to the National Council of Public History, the American Historical Association, and other professional associations. The OAH-NPS cooperative agreement has been renewed twice; the most recent renewal carries the relationship through 2015. Both NPS and OAH should continue to support this important partnership to the fullest possible degree.

These are just a few especially notable examples of the leading-edge work that can occur in the NPS when a dynamic, flexible, deeply informed, and multiconnected practice of history such as the one we have called for is employed. Many others could likewise have been shared. We offer these cases as the start of a much longer conversation.

Where will that conversation unfold? In the wake of the Second Century Commission's report, which proposed a Center for Innovation "to gather and share lessons learned quickly throughout the organization," NPS has launched the Network for Innovation and Creativity (a pilot phase now hosted by the Conservation Study Institute in Woodstock, Vermont), a "bold and forward-thinking initiative, with the goal to rapidly share knowledge, new approaches, and insights from practical experience to solve mission-critical problems and advance organizational excellence."⁶⁰ "By supporting a higher level of peer-to-peer collaboration across the national park system," planners hope that the "network will encourage and share innovation and improve performance." Practitioners will harness an "internet platform of blogs, discussion forums, wikis, and other tools" as well as "video conferencing, telephone, email, and face-to-face meetings" to disseminate new ideas, insights and strategies for success.⁶¹

Although not the ambitious Center for Innovation envisioned by the Second Century Commissioners, perhaps this network will flourish and prove a resource for creative practitioners across the agency. And the projects featured above might provide some good starting places. To be sure, one's peers can be a powerful source of inspiration and information, and it is critically important to transfer the knowledge gained by the agency's most innovative practitioners to their counterparts elsewhere in NPS.

59 NPS, "NPS Scorecard for FY 2010 Now Out," May 19, 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/applications/digest/printheadline.cfm?type=Announcements&id=10474>.

60 National Parks Second Century Commission. *Advancing the National Park Idea. Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation Committee Report: A Different Past in a Different Future*, [2009], http://www.nps.gov/commission/pdf/Committee_Cultural_Resources.PDF, 34; "Developing a Network for Innovation and Creativity to Enhance NPS Learning and Effectiveness: A Concept Paper Requested by the National Leadership Council," May 2011, and "Project Update: Launching a Pilot of the Network for Innovation and Creativity," June 3, 2011, both online at <http://www.nps.gov/csi/pdf/Network%20for%20Innovation%20and%20Change%20Concept%20and%20Update.pdf>.

61 "Project Update: Launching a Pilot of the Network for Innovation and Creativity."



This crumbling gravestone of a Providence, Rhode Island sea captain who died at Portsmouth, North Carolina in 1810 evokes a nearly forgotten era when North Carolina's Outer Banks were a gateway to a busy Atlantic world of maritime trade. (Photograph taken at Cape Lookout National Seashore by David E. Whisnant, 2008.)

The Endangered and Fragmented State of History in the NPS: Findings and Recommendations

With so many examples of lively, vibrant, and innovative history practice at the NPS, it seemed reasonable to expect that our survey respondents would have been upbeat about the prospects for history in the agency. Yet when asked to characterize the “state of history” in two or three sentences, all but a handful among the discursive comments paint a bleak picture. They describe NPS history as “an afterthought” relegated to “small cubicles and minor sideshows” and therefore either “stagnant and irrelevant to today’s generation and issues” or “moribund, old-fashioned, and largely irrelevant, with a couple of spots of fearlessness and innovation.”¹ It is “erratic,” one respondent says, “outstanding in some places, awful in others.”² “Underfunded, undervalued, underutilized and misunderstood,” summarizes another, while several express a sense of decline: history in the Park Service, respondents asserted, is “deteriorating”; “losing ground”; and “threatened.”³

As our “lamps on the path” abundantly demonstrate, there have certainly been many attempts by chief historians, regional directors, and many individual superintendents and their staff members to strengthen history. However, we believe that much of the energy that has led to innovative approaches to research, analysis, and dissemination of historical work like those featured above has arisen locally and flowed from the creativity and initiative of particular individuals rather than from system-wide encouragement and inspiration. In the words of one respondent, history is “lost in the wilderness...we have lost our way.... If it weren’t for the incredible dedication of some employees who want to do the right thing for the Service, we’d be in even worse shape than we are now.”⁴ As one of our consultants observed, “Where the agency is strong they are just lucky. Individuals... have taken it on themselves to take up the slack.”⁵

In many places, the robust history we all want to see has taken hold—as the examples gathered in part 2 illustrate—but is not flowering on the whole, and people have a negative sense of its current state and prospects. What is holding the agency back?

Our research has revealed several, often intertwined, areas of concern that we outline in the list of findings below. For each finding, we make specific recommendations ranked by priority for putting history back to work in the National Park Service and enabling it to realize its full potential as the steward of the nation’s heritage.

1 Respondents 10337, 11808, 10137, and 10713.

2 Respondent 10584.

3 Respondents 11558, 11156, 11256, and 11325.

4 Respondent 10321.

5 Ethan Carr, personal narrative for State of History team, 2010.

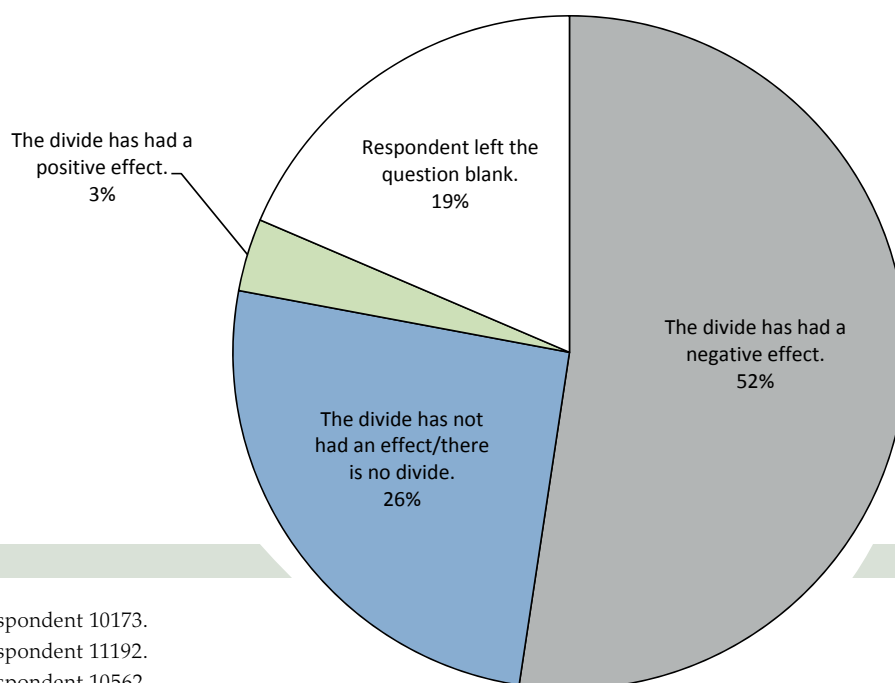
54 | Finding 1: The History/Interpretation Divide

The intellectually artificial, yet bureaucratically real, divide between history and interpretation constrains NPS historians, compromises history practice in the agency, and hobbles effective history interpretation. The NPS should find and take every opportunity to reintegrate professional history practice and interpretation.

As noted in part 1, historians are, fundamentally, both researchers and interpreters. Yet the structure and culture of the Park Service have allowed its historians' interpretive role to wither. Our survey respondents describe how they view the current relationship between historical research and interpretation: while some report that there is no gap between history and interpretation at their parks, a majority believe not only that the gap exists but that it is growing and detrimental to both research and interpretation. "I think many historians have been relegated to the 'Section 106 ghetto,'" one respondent observes, and "that has become the essence of their work in the NPS. It's a shame, but I also feel that historians deserve a good bit of the blame for allowing this to happen to their profession."⁶ In short, writes another, "history is generally practiced in NPS as an adjunct to administration, i.e., through NR/HABS/HAER/HALS and related programs.... The professional field of history has only selectively been used in the NPS interpretation program."⁷ A colleague concludes that "history has been relegated to small boxes on organizational charts at WASO and the regional office."⁸ Indeed, as evidence of this imbalance, most of the agency's 0170-series professional historians, including the chief historian, have for decades been housed on the cultural resources management (CRM) side of the organization; few are on the interpretation side.

How has the Service-wide divide between resource management and interpretation affected the practice of history in the parks?

BY PERCENT OF TOTAL RESPONSES



⁶ Respondent 10173.

⁷ Respondent 11192.

⁸ Respondent 10562.

The fact that “a lot of historical research is compliance and management focused,” laments one respondent, means that it is done “not with interpretation in mind.”⁹ History research, writes another, is “too isolated from the interpretative effort.” Compliance work, this respondent continues, means that there is “not enough time to develop programs that aid interpretation.”¹⁰ Because historians are “concerned with NEPA and Section 106 compliance,” another adds, “interpreters are left to do much of the research for interpretive programs”—research for which they often lack formal training.¹¹ The interpretive division at a fourth respondent’s site, meanwhile, “does not get the results of resource studies.... Cultural resource reports go right to the library,” and “interpretation seems totally out of the loop.”¹² Meanwhile, “those interpreting are often not supported in learning the history, and those caring for the resources are often not trained in important interpretive messages.”¹³

By some accounts, part of the blame for the isolation of historians from interpretive work lies with former NPS director George Hartzog. After having visited a historical park in the 1960s where he was ignored by the one uniformed staff member on duty—a historian who proceeded instead to focus on his research—Hartzog is said to have directed a structural reorganization that significantly reduced park historians’ roles in visitor interactions. Historians, according to the informant who recounted this tale to us, were “presumed to be introverted, inarticulate, and happy among their documents.”¹⁴

This administrative reorganization separated those responsible for history research from those responsible for history education. While the historians migrated to the preservation and stewardship side of the organization, programs, exhibits, and public engagement with history became more and more the purview of professional interpreters, the cherished uniformed park ranger (generally hired in the 025 series, and often employed only seasonally) whose “storytelling skills,” this informant continues, “would obviate the need to know the history (or other subjects) in detail.”¹⁵

While many interpretive rangers are capable of, and some have training in, conducting historical research, analysis, and writing, one respondent observes that since the 025 series “does not have a degree requirement...we don’t always hire academically trained professionals in fields directly related to our work (history, archaeology, biology, etc.).”¹⁶ Several other survey respondents agree that “interpretation’s focus on having visitors make emotional connections (not intellectual ones) makes it harder [to] incorporate nuanced history into programs and media...interpretive staff often equate history and heritage, which I don’t find encouraging.”¹⁷

While we, as historians, find the divide problematic, we observe that many of our survey respondents on the interpretive side do too. Typical was one respondent’s complaint that the curator at his/her park so restricted access to the park’s archives that “we recently revised our exhibits, and only at the end of the process, and largely by chance, did I discover and gain access to most of our historic photo collection. Too late to improve the exhibits.”¹⁸

Our informants in a variety of settings noted that the managerial requirement to complete a predetermined set and sequence of studies sometimes undermined genuine scholarly inquiry. Real questions to which parks needed answers were necessarily set aside as funds were

9 Respondent 10079.

10 Respondent 10139.

11 Respondent 10931.

12 Respondent 10625.

13 Respondent 10573.

14 Jerry Rogers, personal narrative for State of History team, 2010.

15 Rogers, personal narrative.

16 Respondent 10927.

17 Respondent 10442.

18 Respondent 10345.

56 | devoted to projects in which few had a genuine interest, but which were among the forms of documentation NPS has prioritized as essential management tools.

One informant noted that some of the most valuable studies he and his colleagues undertook were, in fact, completed “outside and independent of the normal NPS history program.” Had this site “followed the normal path of attempting to gain funding for special history studies, the region or Washington would have wanted the park to first complete an Administrative History and an Ethnographic Overview and Assessment,” our correspondent observed. Instead, he continued, “The park felt that these administrative and bureaucratic studies could be produced at a later date, when the park was on sound footings as to what, actually, its history was.” This park had access to independent funding, and so was able to complete the research needed to interpret its resources in new and important ways and create “an effective and state-of-the-art program.”¹⁹

We concur with this respondent that the best results emerge when a site can first “survey and determine” what its “cultural and interpretive staff [feel] are the studies that they need to do their jobs more effectively. Checklists of needed documents (GMP, historic structure reports, historic landscape reports, special history studies) should be discarded in favor of documents that seek to define the cultural history of a park in the broadest and most accessible manner. Once this definition has been accomplished, more bureaucratic [work] could be undertaken.”

In any case, the split between cultural resources management and interpretation processes replicates itself at almost every level of NPS, from WASO to the regional offices to many of the larger parks. Smaller parks often have combined interpretation and cultural resources management divisions or by necessity foster regular communication among all park staff—an arrangement many survey respondents found more logical and functional.

More often, however, this pervasive divide and the narrow conception of history’s role that the agency perpetuates seriously impoverishes the NPS’s mission in a number of ways:

- The agency’s most highly trained professional historians, and the outside scholars often hired under contract for particular projects, too often have little to do with the agency’s most visible and public history activities—its interpretive exhibits, products, and programs. Historical interpretation, meanwhile, is left to a cadre of staff with (often) little formal training in history, subject knowledge, or experience doing primary source research on the topics they are charged with communicating. Interpretation thus misses opportunities to take advantage of the most up-to-date historical research and scholarship, including that conducted and sponsored by NPS itself.
- Mandated cultural resource preservation or planning processes have an undue influence on NPS history practice; “compliance” becomes the end unto itself, rather than a means by which resources are better understood and documented. History seems trapped in a standardized systems of plans and studies that are not necessarily as or relevant as they should be to genuine historical questions and needs—either for resource management or interpretation. Meanwhile, with the exception of parks that have either private support or fee-based funds, there is little money or latitude for parks to commission topical studies on the questions they—or their publics—genuinely want answers to. More than one survey respondent notes that cultural resources management can be unresponsive or out of touch with interpretation’s needs for research, and about 26% of our respondents mentioned site-specific research as their most pressing research need.²⁰

19 Reed Engle, personal narrative for State of History team, June 2010.

20 The 26% figure is based on 80 out of 304 of our respondents who identified a primary history research need for their site.

- The current practice of history in the NPS is thus inefficient and wasteful of funds, time, talent, and expertise. The agency's most significant investments in new historical research often produce very high-quality administrative histories, historic resources studies, cultural landscape reports, and other studies that sit on shelves, unread by colleagues, unused by other scholars, and inaccessible to the public. There is no regularized way for the fruits of this CRM-related scholarship (often done by outside contractors) to be used for the larger benefit of interpretive programs and materials. Cultural resource studies are rarely scoped to include interpretive components and there is little systematic follow-up between parks or sites and scholars after studies are completed (this is even the case with studies sponsored through the cooperative agreement between the Organization of American Historians [OAH] and NPS).
- Historians (whether NPS staff or contractors) are disconnected from the concerns of visitors and interpreters and isolated from emergent and promising areas of collaboration among historians, interpreters, and innovators in the museum world who are exploring more informal and interactive interpretive experiences that foreground open-endedness, contested meanings, and multiple perspectives and changing interpretations of the significance of a site.

These realities compromise the agency's ability to steward its resources through improved public understanding of their value. They also limit the agency's power to develop creative, interdisciplinary, and research-based interpretive initiatives that mobilize its significant resources for meaningful and relevant history education.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 1.1** Restore full staffing and budget for the chief historian's office as projected in the chief historian's 1999 position description (approximately five professional historians and one clerical staff person) to enable the office to serve as a resource for historical research and interpretation throughout the NPS and a facilitator of collaboration between historians and interpreters.
- 1.2** Create a History Leadership Council consisting of historians, interpreters, curators, and other pertinent NPS staff to meet at least annually and (among other tasks: see below) develop strategies to bridge the structural divide between cultural resources and interpretation and engage historians more fully in interpretive planning and work.
- 1.3** Scope all CRM studies, including administrative histories, historic resource studies, National Register nominations and updates, and similar documents to include, in both the timetable and budget, an interpretive "deliverable" as well as a follow-up meeting that involves the project researchers and park staff from both interpretation and cultural resource management.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.4** Revise the Essential Competencies²¹ for both interpreters and historians to support cross-disciplinary training.
- 1.5** Revisit the structures of regional and park-based history offices to better facilitate their ability to contribute to cultural resources management and interpretive activities.

21 NPS, "Essential Competencies," <http://www.nps.gov/training/npsonly/npsescm.htm>.

- 1.6 Incorporate a research needs statement into all long-range interpretive plans for historical areas and have scholars with subject matter expertise review park interpretive themes as stated in these plans.
- 1.7 Encourage and facilitate peer and public review of NPS history products—exhibits, interpretive materials, research studies, etc.—by capable historians inside and outside the agency, before and after distribution. Work closely with the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to enhance and extend the usefulness of the OAH-sponsored peer review that is already conducted of OAH-sponsored studies.
- 1.8 Create more opportunities for professional crossover and direct interaction between cultural resources divisions’ historians and staff in the interpretation divisions at all levels, from WASO to the parks, through both formal collaboration on planning processes and informal conversation.
- 1.9 Define any Cultural Resources Challenge broadly enough to articulate and fund roles for historians and the history program in both resource management and interpretation.
- 1.10 Create a low-cost (\$6,000–\$15,000) scoping study to assess historical research needs and priorities beyond and outside of general management planning, National Register documentation, or Section 106/110 compliance imperatives, as a means to ensure that contracted research addresses pressing questions and not simply completing requirements.

Finding 2: The Importance of Leadership for History

Without visionary, visible, and respected leadership at the top, and managers throughout the agency who understand, value, and systematically advocate for and nurture the professional practice of history, a number of consequences ensue: resources are directed away from historical work, and fragmentation, demoralization, and isolation become endemic across the agency. Stronger leadership for history at the national, regional, and local levels is imperative to encourage and capitalize on notable successes.

As we spoke to NPS professionals, one of the most vivid metaphors that we heard described the agency as having the “best ships in the worst navy.” An urgent need exists for visible, and well-supported leadership that articulates an inspiring and wide-ranging vision for NPS history, encourages new directions, highlights and enables quality scholarship and innovation, and fosters interconnection and community among history and interpretive professionals throughout the agency and with historians outside NPS.

Fashioning and pursuing an inspiring and comprehensive vision for NPS history could start with the chief historian’s office. And indeed, although located within the cultural resources division at WASO, the chief historian’s current position description includes language that suggests a broad mandate to “serve as spokesperson, advocate, and planner of the overall NPS history program,” and to “[establish, monitor, and evaluate] Service-wide programs, professional standards, guidelines, and procedures as they relate to the management and interpretation of historical sites and resources.”²² Yet while the current position description envisions a chief historian’s office rounded out by “approximately five professional historians and one clerical employee,” the reality is much leaner: two permanent professional historians, one term historian, and no clerical support.²³

Thus at present, the WASO history office’s capacity to lead and inspire is severely limited. Our survey asked respondents, in an open-ended question, to tell us where they look for

22 Position Description, Chief Historian, National Park Service, October 20, 1999, provided by Robert K. Sutton.

23 Position Description; Robert K. Sutton to Anne Whisnant, email, October 21, 2011.

“leadership or inspiration about what history can be and do.” “Other NPS units” received the most mentions (12.4%), followed closely by non-NPS museums or historic sites (11%). Academia and professional associations followed next, with about 10% each (and another 6.3% cited the profession’s publications or journals). A sizeable number (8.4%) thought of colleagues in their own workplace. Only 6% of the mentioned WASO as a source of “leadership or inspiration” and just 4.6% named officers and staff in the regional offices. State and local resources (colleges, museums, historical societies, community contacts) were mentioned in 3.4% of the entries here. Just over 3% named their immediate supervisor, and an equal number said “no one.”²⁴

The fact that so many NPS historians first look to their colleagues for leadership is both positive and worrisome: of course, it is good to learn that NPS historians can find among their peers talented coworkers who inspire their own work, but WASO and the regional offices should play a stronger role.

For a glimpse of what is possible, one need only mine the survey responses. “If WASO History can’t be bold,” one survey respondent notes, “none of the rest of us can be, either.”²⁵ As an example of the kind of impact that is possible, many survey respondents mention with appreciation former Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley’s pervasive influence on the (re)direction of NPS interpretation of slavery and the Civil War, and his ability to foster a positive and lasting esprit de corps among NPS history practitioners. Engaging such a volatile subject, one that generated significant controversy both within and beyond the agency, took real courage. It is that kind of leadership that produces change. In that vein, we applaud as well current Chief Historian Robert Sutton (who as the superintendent of Manassas National Battlefield Park joined Pitcaithley in the effort to reinterpret slavery) for his leadership in pursuing and supporting the independent investigation that has produced this report.

But leadership is not only abstract and inspirational; it is also a managerial reality. The authors of this report, like those of *Saving Our History*, call for strong WASO leadership, but we also recognize that WASO does not have line authority—making it critical that the chief historian’s office provide tangible leadership, active support, ideas, and inspiration. Respondents and our informants made clear, however, that vitality in history programs depends at least as much on positive leadership at the regional and park level as at the WASO level.

One of the great challenges we encountered—one that is unique to the practice of history in NPS—stems from policies and practices surrounding “superintendent autonomy.” As *Saving Our History* explains, in recent years power has devolved to the parks: “NPS made far-reaching changes in 1995 that significantly decentralized authority. These changes included substantially reducing the number of regional staff, collapsing the number of regions from 10 to 7, making clear that regional office staff are primarily ‘service providers’ to the parks, and ceding greater authority to park superintendents, such as authority for Section 106 reviews to assess the impact of federally-funded activities on historic properties.”²⁶ As a result, power accrued to superintendents, who today enjoy extraordinary control over what can or cannot happen at a given park.

Most park superintendents we have met are (not surprisingly) hardworking professionals, passionate about the resources they steward. But few appear to have training or experience as historians. One admittedly imperfect indicator of the backgrounds of superintendents is a statistic that NPS human resources provided to our team in summer 2011: in the last decade, only seven of the current park managers (superintendents and deputy and assistant superintendents) came from the 0170 series.

24 Other sources that received scattered mentions included NPS policies, including the enabling legislation and the availability of funding, stakeholder groups, other government agencies, visitors, state or tribal historic preservation officers, Internet and online resources, and past chief historians.

25 Respondent 10713.

26 NAPA, *Saving Our History*, 7.



National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection, Harpers Ferry Center, photograph James V. Lloyd.

But whatever the backgrounds, it is clear that a superintendent can make all the difference: “I know of one park,” a survey respondent writes, “where the history program is on fire in its innovation and scholarly relevance; and others where the superintendent (or supervisory historian or rough equivalent) has been there longer than two or three popes, and whose program is akin to that contained in an old cast-off history textbook.”²⁷ “At my park,” says another, “we have a superintendent who has stated before the staff that history is only a sheet of paper and can be handled by a student worker. As a result, while many thousands of \$\$\$s have been spent on bricks & mortar [and]...beautifying the landscape...almost nothing has been expended in support of interpretation or history.”²⁸ This respondent adds that appeals for help to the regional office had been “utterly fruitless” as the regional office supported the superintendent. And as a participant in one of our listening sessions observed, “that’s where change needs to come—If the superintendents don’t own history, nobody else can.”²⁹

This autonomy of superintendents notwithstanding, the NAPA study observes that “evaluations of superintendent performance by the regional director is the strongest mechanism identified during the course of this study for ensuring accountability across all elements of a park’s mission.” However, superintendent evaluations are no longer required to include any cultural resource elements. For that reason, this report joins NAPA in recommending that park superintendent performance evaluations include a resource stewardship (cultural and natural) element.³⁰

Leadership needs to be more than compliance with a predetermined set of expectations. “In a rapidly changing environment,” the Second Century commissioners noted, “where organizations need to acquire and act on new information constantly, the rapid sharing of knowledge—and good ideas—ranks as a key management asset.”³¹ Indeed, *A Call to Action* seems to emphasize flexibility and “choice”: as NPS implements the steps called for, “Program managers and superintendents will select actions that best fit the purpose of their program or park workforce capacity, and skills, and that generate excitement among employees.”³² The degree to which these individual managers see themselves as agents for sound history practice will shape the influence of *A Call to Action* and our report: leadership for history is necessary to ensure that resources flow to history as well as other NPS agendas.

Thoughtful leadership is also essential to engage promising new ideas that emerge to improve history practice. Elsewhere in this report, we applaud related efforts to support the sharing of innovation and the transfer of knowledge. But replication should be mindful—each park has a unique history that needs consideration, and what works at one park may not work at another. As noted earlier, when asked about sources of leadership, most respondents cited peers at other parks, an impulse that also guides superintendents, who draw inspiration from successes elsewhere too. “Generally ours is a game of ‘Keeping up with the Jones NHP,’” one respondent observes; “Any idea that looks vaguely interesting from another site becomes a priority for us, even if the idea is not necessarily applicable. Granted, we have gotten some good ideas by borrowing from other sites, but more often than not, practicality/usability is thrown to the winds.”³³ Sound history leadership—involving a sensitivity for the subject matter informed by

27 Respondent 11359.

28 Respondent 10716.

29 NCPH Listening Session April 3, 2009. Providence, RI.

30 NAPA, *Saving Our History*, 49–50, recommendation #4.

31 National Parks Second Century Commission. *Advancing the National Park Idea. Cultural Resource and Historic Preservation Committee Report: A Different Past in a Different Future*. Washington, DC: National Parks Conservation Association, 2009, 36, http://www.npca.org/commission/pdf/Committee_Cultural_Resources.PDF.

32 NPS. *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*, August 25, 2011. 7, http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/Directors_Call_to_Action_Report.pdf.

33 Respondent 11575.

62 | solid disciplinary expertise—recognizes how innovations elsewhere can best be applied to another site or unit’s unique resources and aims.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 2.1 Create a History Advisory Board for the NPS. Unlike the History Leadership Council proposed in recommendation 1.2, comprised of NPS staff, this advisory board would help sustain ties between NPS and history writ large, thus improving the agency’s ability to track innovations from leaders across multiple history and museum professions, and enhance the agency’s ability to exert leadership in shaping those fields as well. While being independent of any single history organization, this board should include representatives from OAH, American Historical Association (AHA), National Council on Public History (NCPH), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), American Association of Museums (AAM), and other such organizations as well as leading historians from a range of fields and places of practice. The board should be advisory to the director and should connect regularly with representatives of the History Leadership Council. The board’s reports should circulate throughout the NPS. In consultation with the History Leadership Council, it would be responsible for articulating and pursuing a coherent vision and concrete plans for enhancing historical work across the agency.
- 2.2 As per recommendation 1.1, restore full staffing and budget for the chief historian’s office to enable the office to take a more visible leadership role in coordinating, supporting, and enhancing history practice across the agency.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.3 Establish, in partnership with OAH and/or NCPH, a competitive award that recognizes excellence in NPS history practice and acknowledges how superintendents and/or regional directors have specifically facilitated the recognized work.
- 2.4 Acknowledge and reward superintendents for the professional activities of their staff members: attending professional conferences, publishing, pursuing graduate training or continuing education in history.
- 2.5 Adopt the 2008 NAPA recommendation #4, that “NPS include resource stewardship (cultural and natural) as an element in all superintendents’ performance evaluations, in particular with respect to park cultural resources at risk.”³⁴

34 NAPA, *Saving Our History*, 50.

Finding 3: The Challenge of Disconnection

| 63

NPS history is undermined by conditions that isolate both people and knowledge; employees feel sequestered, even “exiled” (as some respondents said), in their offices, unaware of developments across the agency or across the profession. At the same time, with NPS historians absent from discussions in the profession and NPS history scholarship largely invisible from databases and journals the larger field relies on for information and insight, historians beyond NPS are not in conversation with the strong scholarship and innovative practice the agency conducts and contracts. The agency should foster historical scholarly and collegial connections more vigorously, both within its borders and beyond. To build a more coherent, responsive, flexible, integrated practice of history, boundaries around, within, and across NPS must become more porous.

In the absence of organizational structures that create areas of collaboration as well as clear and consistent leadership throughout the agency that systematically nurtures the professional practice of history, fragmentation, demoralization, and isolation have severely weakened many NPS sites. As one respondent phrased it, “decentralization” has become “total fragmentation.”³⁵

Part of the problem is that history practice is too often split into numerous separate programs and organizational divisions, and entangled in a thicket of laws, regulations, and policies. Meanwhile, with plummeting support for professional development (conference attendance, journal access, and so on), employees can no longer communicate professionally—they’re “disconnected both horizontally and vertically”³⁶ (a point evidenced by the large number of survey respondents who qualify their replies by saying they can only speak to conditions at their site of employment). Lone historians at some sites lament their sense of powerlessness in advocating for history by themselves.

Given the effects of budget constraints and shrinking numbers of positions associated with the practice of history in the parks, the NPS has had difficulty keeping abreast of current developments in scholarship, teaching, and public history practice that have generated exciting new ways of thinking about and doing history. Ultimately, a large portion of historical practice within the NPS occurs without systematic connection to other nodes of historical scholarship and activity in universities, museums, and other cultural institutions.

Sometimes the isolation is self-imposed: the NPS can be a very insular bureaucracy that distrusts outsiders and those who have not “paid their dues” as seasonal rangers or NPS employees. At times, this sensibility prevents the hiring of historians from outside the agency. As one respondent phrased it, “the NPS tends to be a little island.”³⁷ At the same time, insufficient internal capacity means that a considerable amount of historical work is farmed out to contractors who may have little ongoing connection with their projects or the sites that sponsored them.

At the same time, NPS staff members are not offered sufficient opportunities to take advantage of the crucial opportunities that professional conferences offer for ongoing connection with other historians. The problem is not, as a rule, that blanket NPS policy prohibits staff members from attending conferences, but that the ability to attend depends closely on whether one’s supervisor views these events as valuable. Additionally, agency

35 NCPH Listening Session, 2009.

36 NCPH Listening Session, 2009.

37 Respondent 10217.

64 | rules defining appropriate “training” often fail to encompass professional history conferences under that rubric, and so the degree to which historians across the agency are able to avail themselves of these opportunities is a product, really, of chance—that is, of the sensibilities of their supervisor at any given time.

Which organizations do you find most valuable in connecting you with the wider professional field?

TOP TEN ANSWERS, by frequency (out of 544 respondents):

Organization Name:	# of responses
National Association for Interpretation	48
National Council on Public History	21
American Association of State and Local History	20
Organization of American Historians	18
American Association of Museums	15
George Wright Society	10
Association of National Park Rangers	7
Society for Historical Archaeology	7
National Trust	6
Society of American Archivists	5

The chart above shows that our respondents found that a number of organizations provide valuable connections. The biennial George Wright Society conference, for example, does draw many NPS employees in the years that it meets. The agenda is crowded with papers on new scholarship, new interpretive strategies, and new collaborations with historians in the academic world. Furthermore, the society’s journal, *George Wright Forum*, fosters these discussions outside the conference. The annual meetings of the Organization of American Historians and the National Council on Public History are other places where NPS historians can meet others with similar interests.

But conferences do not solve the whole problem. Park Service history professionals are constrained from connecting with other historians through basic scholarly resources that should be available to everyone whose job description engages history scholarship in any way. At the outset of our study, we were confused by conflicting reports about whether NPS employees had access to JSTOR, a database that makes the full-text content of hundreds of scholarly journals available online and, arguably is one of the most important tools in any historian’s toolbox. In time, however, we were able to confirm that while NPS does indeed make JSTOR available to employees via the DOI website (a fact that itself surprised many employees, who were unaware of the link), the series within JSTOR to which the agency subscribes are aimed at the sciences (Arts & Sciences II and Arts & Sciences VII), and not the humanities (Arts & Sciences I).³⁸ The NPS must remedy this oversight at the earliest possible opportunity.

38 Many thanks to Anne Ray at JSTOR for tracking down the answer to this puzzle.

Any condition that compromises history expertise necessarily undermines the agency's broader aims. For instance, *A Call to Action* encourages large-scale replacement of outdated and inaccurate interpretive media, an aim we heartily support.³⁹ But for NPS to achieve such a goal, its historians and historical interpretive staff must have access to the newest scholarship and the most innovative ideas about practices emerging across the discipline.

While NPS historians lack access to historical scholarship produced outside the agency, at the same time, the excellent scholarship produced within the NPS and by its contractors (some of which we discussed in part 2) languishes in obscurity and thus fails to reach its potential to contribute to larger scholarly conversations about the nation's past. Thus, NPS historians are not "in on" the conversation, on either side, and both NPS and the wider profession (including historians in academia) lose out.

In many cases, too, once research studies are completed, heavy workloads often prevent NPS historians from publishing their research in scholarly venues. And, as noted above, shrinking travel budgets and a lack of support by supervisors also often prevent them from attending professional conferences where they can share these important and substantive works with other historians and interpreters, within or outside the NPS.

Another problem, too, is distribution of the scholarship. The NPS history website now provides access to hundreds of uploaded documents and studies, and while this is commendable, the site is not searchable in a way that makes it useful to researchers either within or beyond NPS. The so-called grey literature that NPS professionals and consultants produce should find a wider readership. Distributing some of the best NPS scholarship through standard, searchable databases like JSTOR and/or the developing Open Parks Grid at Clemson University would have a number of beneficial effects.

Most significant would be the wider application of the extensive knowledge developed in these documents, and the resultant creation of a better base for collaboration between history professionals inside NPS and those working in other venues. As larger numbers of college- and university-based scholars encounter this literature in the course of their regular work, for instance, it will become easier for historians in the academy and historians in NPS to interact as professional peers. Historians in the academy asked to consider colleagues' NPS work in tenure and promotion processes, meanwhile, will have a much better sense of what those documents actually look like, which will advance efforts to get them recognized and rewarded alongside more traditional academic publications. These processes, in turn, will help advance the longstanding effort afoot in the profession to reduce a perceived divide between "public" and "academic" historians. Additionally, when historians in academia better understand both the practice and scholarship of history in NPS, they will be better equipped to undertake resources-based historical work sponsored by the agency, and to steer students to opportunities within the service.

³⁹ NPS, *A Call to Action*, 14.

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 3.1 Invest more substantially in the new Network for Innovation (the comparatively less robust version of the Center for Innovation recommended in the Second Century report) and seek ways to harness it to share information about innovative historical work.
- 3.2 Devise and implement multiple avenues of ongoing communication among NPS historians, via small-group meetings (either through the web or in person), listservs, social networks, formal and informal publications (such as WASO's history newsletter), and professional networks. These efforts should focus on building community and providing sources of professional information, resources, and innovative ideas gleaned from inside and outside the Park Service.
- 3.3 Support formal and informal mechanisms for historians in parks to develop ongoing collaboration with historians at colleges and universities, including (a) more fully exploiting existing Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESU) agreements or facilitating "sister city" arrangements between sites and nearby colleges or universities; (b) creating programs that allow university and college-based historians to spend time in residence at NPS sites—perhaps similar to the ones in the natural sciences that allow mid-career academics to serve as "scholars in residence" in a park, or modeled after the already-on-going Artist-in-Residence programs; and c) making fuller use of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act, which enables state and federal employees to trade places and keep their salaries and benefits, to facilitate the flow of personnel between state institutions of higher education and NPS. Such trades might permit academics to perform targeted services for the agency, and allow NPS staff to teach while pursuing graduate work.
- 3.4 Adopt NAPA recommendation #5, which urges NPS to "seek sufficient travel ceiling to support skill-sharing between parks and regional offices, meet critical training needs" (including, for historians, scholarly conferences), and "facilitate cross-learning."⁴⁰
- 3.5 Improve access for NPS staff to history scholarship by adding the JSTOR Arts and Sciences I Subscription to the Department of the Interior's collection of library resources.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.6 Continue to encourage thematic park groups to work together to develop coordinated research, preservation, and interpretive projects and to share ideas. One model is the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites, which provides support in preservation, interpretation, and research.⁴¹
- 3.7 Invest in sabbatical systems (both incoming and outgoing) that would afford NPS historians the time to concentrate on research and writing relevant to their work, while hosting university-based scholars in the parks. Seek funding for parks to create positions to cover the work of park historians given a sabbatical, perhaps competitively granted as an award in which the superintendent shares the accolade.
- 3.8 Work with AHA, OAH, and NCPH to place more NPS-related sessions on conference programs, and fund travel of staff members necessary to present.

⁴⁰ NAPA, *Saving Our History*, 50.

⁴¹ National Collaborative for Women's History Sites, <http://www.ncwhs.org>.

- 3.9 Create mechanisms, perhaps grounded in regional historians' offices as well as WASO, to identify documents appropriate for uploading to JSTOR and Google Books and/or Google Scholar, or the *Journal of American History's* Recent Scholarship Online portal (for example, administrative histories, National Register nominations, historic resource studies, and other research reports) so as to make them more readily discoverable by the scholarly community in the venues most commonly used for research.⁴² Doing this would allow NPS to achieve its educational mission while also helping non-NPS historians learn more about historical work sponsored by the agency, raising the agency's profile both within academia and in the community that will produce its future workforce.
- 3.10 Create mechanisms for regional offices to steer the best administrative histories and other NPS history studies, as appropriate, to university presses for publication as monographs, or to provide support for their revision for publication and public distribution through the NPS historic handbook series, in order to increase access to the best history scholarship generated by the agency.

Finding 4: Historical Expertise in Today's Workforce

For an agency devoted to the stewardship of our most spectacular historic sites, support for professional expertise in history is surprisingly weak. Position qualifications for historians do not require advanced training in history, working historians have difficulty gaining the ongoing training they need to stay abreast of developments in the field, and most parks—even historical parks—have no historian on staff. Historical interpretation is often left to poorly-trained seasonal workers. For NPS to develop historical programs based upon sound scholarship across the agency, greater emphasis needs to be given to the acquisition and maintenance of a strong base of in-house, professionally qualified historical expertise.

The question of what constitutes—and what *should* constitute—sufficient historical expertise, and of who should properly be considered a “historian” in the agency, is a thorny one. It challenged us at the outset of the survey as we constructed the list of survey recipients, and it continued to confront us as we fielded questions from listening session participants who asked us to address the minimal amount of training stipulated by standard position descriptions. Even now, at the end of our work, we have been unable to compile conclusive, longitudinal data about the number of historians (definition either by job title or by advanced training) employed by the agency.

Meanwhile, over the past two decades, historians have become more concerned about the role of expertise in our work. On one hand, we are eager to invite everyone into the tent, to embrace Carl Becker's classic formulation of “everyman” as historian.⁴³ On the other hand, those who have undergone the rigorous disciplinary training demanded in graduate programs are inclined to advocate for the value of that training—the importance of maintaining professional standards, of understanding historiography and incorporating existing scholarship in relevant fields, and the other features of graduate-level work outlined in part 1 of this report—when qualifications are developed for positions involving the cultivation and sharing of historical insight.

The question has long been controversial within NPS. When Chief Historian Edwin Bearss

⁴² *Journal of American History*, Recent Scholarship Online, <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/rs>.

⁴³ Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Minneapolis, December 29, 1931, *American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (1932), 221–36, http://www.historians.org/info/aha_history/clbecker.htm.

68 | polled the agency in 1988 to assess the number of trained historians in key positions, he unleashed a storm of criticism. Many respondents, a summary of the 1988 survey results noted, “emphasized that in their experience they had encountered many interpreters that did not have a formal history degree but had studied their subject matter so thoroughly that they almost had a degree in their particular site. These respondents were concerned that this survey would ignore the fact that one did not need to have a history degree on the wall to know one’s subject matter intimately and present that subject matter to the public.”⁴⁴

Responses to our queries affirm that the question is no simpler today. Like Bearss, we fielded questions from observers eager to remind us that much historical expertise resides well beyond the 0170 series. Our consultants reminded us of this fact, too. As one astutely observes, “almost every park I have done research in has had at least one person (although sometimes not a trained historian) whose interest and knowledge in cultural resources has made them important to know. At Glacier it was the head of snow plow operations, Dennis Holden. At Yosemite it was Jim Snyder, longtime head of trail crews as well as the park historian. In Alaska it was Bill Brown—these are unique historians, dedicated to the history of their parks and regions, real practitioners of ‘place-based’ history.” “Park history gets practiced by all kinds of people,” this observer continues, “and without the non-historians, many vital archives, stories, and artifacts would have been permanently lost. It is the combination of great historians, with a real interest in park history, combined with many, many dedicated people in the field that has made it so meaningful, and such a pleasure, to write NPS history.”⁴⁵

Put another way, people across the agency have become experts in the historical content related to a place, event, or subject area, and the knowledge they possess is and should be appreciated. Indeed, many employees whose positions do not primarily involve history should be applauded for the initiative they have shown in the face of the agency’s increasing inability to provide trained historians. However, our study nevertheless found a serious need for professional historians who can incorporate knowledge of existing scholarship and bring the strengths of disciplinary training to both research and interpretation. This important work should not be relegated to the self-trained or avocational historian. As one informant (anonymous here) asked, “would it be OK if I were the historian at Yellowstone and, in the face of a glaring need, stepped up to develop the park’s Wolf Migration program? Would that be an adequate fulfillment of the park’s duty to protect this endangered species, or would it be a sign of a serious problem with staffing priorities?”

The undervaluing of professional historians’ contributions to Park Service objectives stems partly from a generalized notion among those without advanced training in our field that history is (or ought to be) the objective recovery of facts rather than an ongoing interpretive activity. Additionally, many nonhistorians believe that once historical research and narratives are “completed,” they need not be revised or revisited unless new documents come to light, and thus that there is no ongoing need for a historian’s services. “There’s a perception that once a topic has been written about, it need never be revisited,” remarked one commentator at a listening session we held, accurately characterizing our own findings.⁴⁶ When NPS managers share that misperception, the practice of history inevitably becomes static, distorted, and removed from both scholarship and the public alike.

The bottom line is that sound history—like sound science—requires ongoing, rigorous research by trained professionals to support reinterpretation of the past in light of new information and new perspectives. If NPS is going to develop the “robust internal research capacity” the Second Century Commission calls for, if it is to “cultivate excellence” in scholarship, as

44 NPS, “Summary of 1988 NPS Survey of Historians in the Park Units Dealing with History,” obtained from Lu Ann Jones, WASO.

45 Carr, personal narrative.

46 NCPH Listening Session, 2009.

A Call to Action asserts, “as a foundation for park planning, policy, decision making, and education,” then serious attention must be paid to nurturing historical expertise in the agency.⁴⁷

QUALIFICATIONS AND DISTRIBUTION OF HISTORIANS

While everyone seems to accept the premise that quality science demands highly credentialed researchers drawn from specific disciplines, current expectations about history imply that work as a historian is open to everyone from well-trained professionals to enthusiastic volunteers. Many agency employees “share...a lack of knowledge of what constitutes history” and “how it specifically supports the agency mission,” one respondent affirms; “they need to understand the limitations and uses of sources and the limitations and uses of narrative arguments. In general they don’t. The NPS needs to increase its own literacy before trying to impact public perceptions.”⁴⁸

But for this to occur, another respondent adds, the “agency would have to undergo a cultural transformation and value history equally with nature and recreation. It needs to stop calling people who dabble in history with no academic credentials ‘historians.’”⁴⁹ As John Latschar further explains, “within NPS, there are no standards or qualifications to be met—such things as a professional degree, scholarly publications, or peer credibility. In our world, all you have to do to become an ‘expert historian’ is to proclaim that you are one.”⁵⁰

The discrepancy in expectations can be readily observed in the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) *Personnel Qualifications Standards Handbook (X-118)*, which describes the minimal qualifications for cultural resource positions. An Anthropologist/Applied Ethnographer, for instance, must have, at minimum (GS-190, 7–9), “an M.A. in cultural anthropology/applied ethnography with coursework in North American ethnography, applied anthropology, and cultural ecology; at least one month of supervised fieldwork in a cross-cultural setting involving the application of anthropological theory and method to the study of contemporary Native American or other North American peoples; familiarity with major anthropological theories and applied methods, evidence of writing skills, and ability to conduct field and documentary research under supervision; ability to work in multidisciplinary settings.”

The qualifications for historians are far less rigorous. At minimum, a historian (GS-170) should have a “graduate degree in history or closely related field,” but a bachelor’s degree in history or closely related field (involving as few as eighteen hours of undergraduate history coursework) “plus at least two years of full-time experience in research, writing, teaching, interpretation, or other professional activity with an academic institution, historical organization or agency, museum, or other professional institution” is also acceptable. A bachelor’s degree plus “substantial contribution through research and publication to the body of scholarly knowledge in the field of history,” but no graduate training, would also be accepted.⁵¹

“In no other professional series in the federal government is the baseline credential so low,” notes one informant.⁵²

The generalist 0025 ranger series (into which many interpretive staff are hired) also requires little or no historical training, this informant notes. Meanwhile, “[h]istory graduate students hired under student employment authority may be more highly credentialed than permanent staff, but historical research and analytical skills may not transfer to effective

47 National Parks Second Century Commission. *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 33; and National Park Service. *A Call to Action*, 17.

48 Respondent 11558.

49 Respondent 10613.

50 John A. Latschar, “OAH and the National Park Service,” [August 2009], <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2000aug/latschar.html>.

51 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, “Qualifications Standards, History Series 0170,” 2011, <http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/Standards/IORs/GS0100/0170.htm>.

52 Vivien Rose, personal narrative for State of History team, April 2009.

70 | public programs in a setting where such skills are misunderstood or undervalued.”⁵³ While we understand that revising OPM standards is a challenging task, agency-specific standards are indeed permissible, and revising qualifications for the historian and ranger series is something NPS should pursue to ensure that history work in the agency is carried out according to pertinent professional standards.

Revising the position qualifications for the 0170 series, however, will not address the agency’s dearth of expertise as long as so few historians are hired and the limited number of historians the agency has are so poorly distributed across the parks. NPS data provided to us show that the agency’s 182 current 0170 historians are heavily concentrated at WASO (25%) and the regional offices (32%). Meanwhile, while the national battlefields, national battlefield parks, and national military parks are fairly well staffed with historians, only about a third of national historical parks and a mere 13% of national historic sites are staffed with 0170 historians. Percentages of the rest of the park types that have historians on staff are abysmally low. While we do not have figures on how many employees in other series (especially 025) have advanced training in history, these statistics do suggest that there are simply not enough historians widely distributed across the service to carry out historical work at a professional level.

Where are the historians?

OF THE 182 SERIES 0170 EMPLOYEES IN THE NPS

Unit Designation	Number of Historians	Percentage
National Battlefield	7	4%
National Battlefield Park	3	2%
National Historic Site	10	5%
National Historic Trail	1	1%
National Historical Park	18	10%
National Memorial	1	1%
National Military Park	9	5%
National Monument	4	2%
National Park	11	6%
National Recreation Area	3	2%
National Seashore	2	1%
Other	7	4%
Parkway	1	1%
Regional Offices (NERO, SERO, &c)	59	32%
Scenic Riverway	1	1%
WASO	45	25%

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF NPS UNITS HAVE SERIES 0170 EMPLOYEES?

Unit Designation	Number of sites with Historians	Percentage
National Battlefield (11 in NPS)	5	45%
National Battlefield Park (3 in NPS)	3	100%
National Historic Site (77 in NPS)	10	13%
National Historical Park (45 in NPS)	15	33%
National Memorial (28 in NPS)	1	4%
National Military Park (9 in NPS)	4	44%
National Monument (74 in NPS)	4	5%
National Park (58 in NPS)	11	19%
National Recreation Area (18 in NPS)	1	6%
National Seashore (10 in NPS)	2	20%
Other (68 in NPS, see below)	6	9%
Parkway (4 in NPS)	1	25%
Scenic Riverway (10 in NPS)	1	10%

As well as those units the NPS classifies as "other," the category here includes all unnamed categories (lakeshores, preserves, affiliated areas, etc.)
WASO and the Regional Offices are not reflected in this table

With few 0170 historians to carry a large load, in-service training for all employees who work with history takes on even greater importance. Yet, as this report notes elsewhere, with declining financial support for professional development, a sense of isolation pervades the agency, cultivating inefficiencies, dampening morale, and hindering ongoing historical training for the current workforce. This draining of resources coupled with an absence of commitment to the experiences that develop and sustain expertise compromises the abilities of NPS historians (whether or not classified in 0170). Survey respondents cry out for more opportunities to keep current in their fields. Many report that lack of funding and travel ceilings have impeded their ability to participate in various sorts of professional development, from attending scholarly conferences in their fields to attending skills-based workshops. “I have begged, pleaded, and scrimped to attend conferences and necessary training,” writes one respondent, a sentiment repeated often in our survey.⁵⁴ More worrisome are the accounts of employees willing to provide these experiences for themselves at their own expense, but whose supervisors forced them to use vacation time to do so. “Over the years,” another informant writes, “as funds have become more scarce, I have found it more and more difficult to attend professional meetings, or have had to use personal funds to do so.”⁵⁵ The result is that the “site’s exposure and the opportunity to create awareness and support of the site” are both “reduced.”⁵⁶

Even more striking is the number of people who simply cannot train for the future while being swamped in the present. In response to a survey question about opportunities for ongoing training, one respondent notes, “the biggest hindrance to my training is not what training I’m allowed to take. It’s my workload! I choose not to take some training because of falling further behind in my workload.”⁵⁷

The difficulty of finding time or support to participate in an ongoing basis in professional development activities seems, some respondents note, to be part of a general atmosphere in which supervisors—often park superintendents—discourage employee learning, even when it would provide obvious benefits to the park.⁵⁸ Part of the problem is that superintendents do not see conferences as necessary training; conference participation has somehow taken on a whiff of junket or boondoggle. But academic conferences are to NPS historians as required trainings are to NPS firefighters trying to maintain their red cards—activities that together constitute “certification that a person is qualified to do the required job.”⁵⁹

SEASONAL TRAINING

If ongoing professional development for permanent staff is lacking, historical training for the seasonal employees who augment the NPS interpretive workforce during each site’s busy season is, at best, unsystematic and in many places very limited. Discussing training for seasonal employees, about a quarter of our survey respondents reported that seasonals at their location went through some kind of formal training program. Only 7%, however, reported that such program included training by subject experts. A large percentage of respondents (16%) named some form of training or mentoring by colleagues as a major strategy, reinforcing the importance of having knowledgeable permanent professionals available to work with transitory staff.

54 Respondent 10256.

55 Pam Sanfilippo, personal narrative for State of History team, April 2009

56 Sanfilippo, personal narrative.

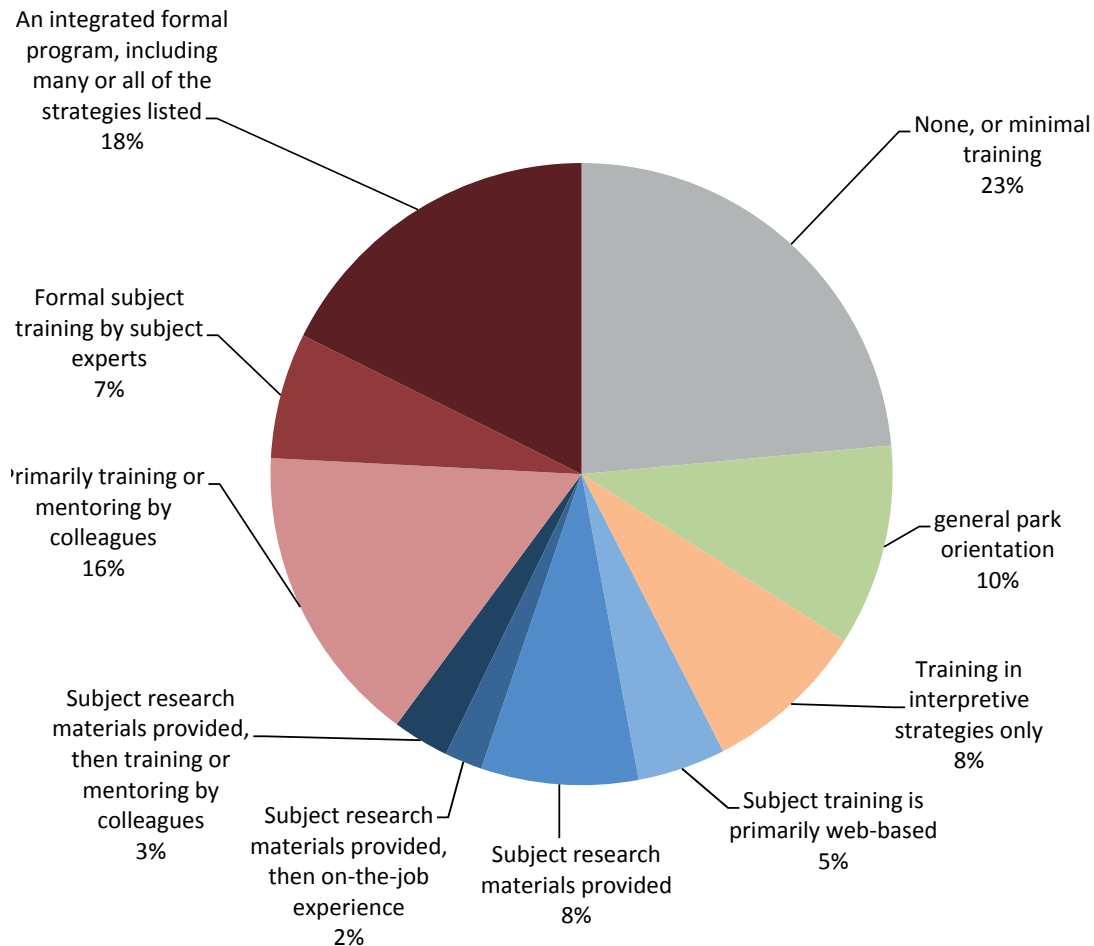
57 Respondent 10022.

58 Respondent 10865 noted, for example, “I had to leave the National Park Service for two years in order to get my master’s degree because my park felt that that education would not help them out at all. I incurred a lot of debt and two years off my service comp date to gain the knowledge and skills from which the agency benefits.”

59 See NPS Fire and Aviation Management Incident Qualifications, http://www.nps.gov/fire/developmental/dev_skills_incidentquals.cfm.

72 | Training Strategies: 355 valid responses to the question “what are the training strategies used for seasonal employees?”

FREQUENCY OF TRAINING STRATEGIES MENTIONED, AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE WHOLE



CONSEQUENCES

What happens when historians’ red cards are allowed to lapse? When commitment to expertise falters, the consequences are numerous, and they compromise NPS aims in education, relevancy, and stewardship.

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) quantified some of these consequences in their summer 2011 report on ten years of studies of the condition of park resources at over eighty parks. Cultural resources at 91% of the surveyed parks were “in serious trouble,” in either “poor” or “fair” condition, and “being maintained in a condition well below the level that the National Park Service itself has deemed appropriate.”⁶⁰ A key cause of this state of affairs, NPCA concluded, is that “there simply aren’t enough qualified and trained people overseeing the parks’ cultural heritage.”⁶¹

60 National Parks Conservation Association, “The State of America’s National Parks, Center for Parks Research,” June 2011, 25, <http://www.npca.org/cpr/sanp>.

61 National Parks Conservation Association, “State of America’s National Parks,” 27.

Other consequences of the resulting insularity and lack of sufficient expertise are equally serious. Not least, as Latschar has observed, when a controversial situation erupts in and around some interpretive issue, NPS historians “lack the credibility” to respond to critics, and “complex issues get reduced to the level of a modern-day political campaign: the person with the best sound bite prevails.”⁶² There are other deleterious effects. For instance, there is a “very conservative effect when people just learn one from the next,” one of our most perceptive informants observes; “Too often, some senior employee unofficially becomes the ‘philosopher-king’ of the park, someone to whom people turn for info on particular subjects.”⁶³ Knowledge about the past becomes less the product of training and expertise and more the expression of conventional wisdom.

In sum, as one participant at a listening session asserted, failing to value or supply ongoing training is a “disservice to the agency, a disservice to the visitor, and a disservice to the employee.”⁶⁴

At the same time, the quality of the scholarship generated or shared rises commensurately with staff training levels. To give just one example, at Arlington House National Memorial (NM), one respondent reports, the historian “decided that all the stories we told there needed to be investigated. Being that most of the staff there had bachelor’s or master’s degrees in history, she made each ranger responsible for researching a component of that history. We were able to correct many of the stories and properly cite sources. This led to us changing exhibits, creating new programs, rewriting our brochures, etc. Because we already had an interpretive staff with the skills to research, a historian who actually communicated with the interpretive staff, and a site manager and supervisor who encouraged the project, great progress was made in making the interpretation at Arlington House current, relevant, and accurate.”⁶⁵

Having well-trained historians on staff brings other benefits as well. “The public has to have more than a textbook history presented to them if we ever want them to even take any real interest in the parks,” one respondent asserts; NPS “needs historian/researchers who are willing and able to dig for the deep, personal stories that are associated with each park, and who can then work with interpreters who can bring those stories to life through various interpretive techniques and show their relevance to our society (and the individual visitor) of today.”⁶⁶

Well-trained professionals who hold up the NPS end of the all-important partnerships integral to the agency’s future are also essential pieces of the puzzle. “As in other areas of NPS endeavors,” one stakeholder observes, “partnerships hold the promise of the future and are necessary to the success of historical enterprises in the parks;” but “bringing in even the best academics,” this person continues, “simply is not enough. What is working well now? Situations where strong historians within the agency (often at individual parks, e.g., Martin Van Buren, and Cape Cod National Seashore) are able to be real partners with those of us coming from universities.”⁶⁷ Conversely, in Washington, the regional offices, and the Denver and Harpers Ferry service centers, “cuts have taken a toll and left these places less able to give the kind of support to parks that they should. Just managing a contract is not enough, but when a historian is asked to manage more than a certain number of projects, they become project managers. Qualified people must be kept on the public

62 Latschar, “OAH and the National Park Service.”

63 Listening session conducted at the annual meeting of the National Association for Interpretation, Hartford, Connecticut, November 2009.

64 NAI listening session, Hartford 2009.

65 Respondent 10865.

66 Respondent 10403.

67 Carr, personal narrative.

74 | side to preserve a balance with the academic side.”⁶⁸

The bottom line is that there simply are not enough well-educated historians distributed across the Park Service to do the work needed to bring NPS history into line with the best professional standards and scholarship. As a result, preservation of fragile and complex historical resources suffers, planning efforts that would benefit from historical perspective proceed without it, and the interpretation of history to the public, often left in the hands of staff members with little training in history and no access to historical expertise, risks being barren of recent scholarly research and missing the broader contexts of local stories. As one of our consultants points out, “having Ph.D. historians in the NPS lends a great deal of authenticity and credibility to how the NPS ‘does history.’ It helps foster communication and collaboration with the academic community, which I think is critical to the survival of history as a discipline in the National Park Service.”⁶⁹

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 4.1 Undertake systematically to restore and augment the agency’s professionally trained history workforce at all levels. This process should begin with a detailed, longitudinal, statistical analysis (overseen by the chief historian’s office) of NPS patterns of employment of historians in both the 0170 series and in other classifications involving substantial historical work.
- 4.2 Invest 4% of annual personnel budgets per year in staff training, as per the Second Century Commission report’s recommendation, which aims to make “professional and technical development throughout NPS ranks a priority, and consistent with best practices in the private sector.”⁷⁰
- 4.3 Focus attention on ways to upgrade the historical research and interpretation skills for present staff who have responsibility for historical resource management and interpretation but who lack adequate professional history training.
- 4.4 Submit needed documentation to define participation in scholarly organizations and conferences (for example, OAH, NCPH, and so on) as formal training opportunities.
- 4.5 Update qualification standards for the GS-0170 series to require graduate training in history. Completion of the master’s degree is preferred, but a minimum number of hours of graduate-level coursework should be established.
- 4.6 Prioritize hiring master’s level (at least) historians for all positions managing historical research and interpretation in history-focused parks and other parks for which history is a significant programmatic or resource management component.

68 Carr, personal narrative. The Second Century Commission affirms that observation when it notes that “fielding its own robust research program will also make the Park Service a more valuable collaborator with other federal agencies with land management responsibilities. And it will support more productive partnerships with colleges, universities, and other research organizations for which the national parks have long served as valuable natural laboratories and cultural study sites” (National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 33).

69 Todd Arrington, personal narrative for State of History team, April 2009.

70 National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 32.



- 4.7 Prioritize hiring of subject-matter experts (credentialed historians) into the 025 Ranger series when positions encompass significant history-related content.
- 4.8 Strengthen, expand, and bring more consistency to the training of seasonal employees with responsibility for historical interpretation. Enhancing this training could take the form of focused presentations by and interaction with professional historians with expertise pertinent to a site; collaboration with current NPS staff who have site- or subject-specific experience; development and identification, in concert with professional historians, of pertinent training materials and information (some of which may already exist, online or in print, either within or outside NPS); and creation of opportunities for ongoing training throughout a given season.
- 4.9 Expand the commitment made in *A Call to Action* concerning the creation, “through partner funding, [of] an NPS Science Scholars program enabling 24 Ph.D. students from biological, physical, social, and cultural disciplines to conduct research in national parks each year,” to include a comparable investment in funding Ph.D. humanities scholars in history, American studies, art history, and related disciplines.⁷¹
- 4.10 Embrace the longstanding proposal—one that dates back at least to the “Findings and Recommendations” of the 1997 NPS-DOI-sponsored education symposium—to “create an environment that encourages employees to pursue advanced studies to remain current in their field.”⁷² This might take the form of flextime to attend courses during the workday or to conduct thesis or dissertation research, or other such accommodations.



Parkway ranger force with patrol vehicles, Blue Ridge Parkway, Between Shenandoah National Park & Great Smoky Mountains, Asheville, Buncombe County, NC (Image Courtesy Library of Congress.)

⁷¹ National Park Service, *A Call to Action*, 15.

⁷² Education Initiative Symposium, “Findings and Recommendations” (Santa Fe, NM, 1997).

76 | Finding 5: A History Workforce for the Future

NPS must plan more purposefully to cultivate its twenty-first-century history workforce. Achieving many of the aims articulated herein depends in part on attracting the rising generation of historians to the Service, but barriers to employment in NPS exacerbate the already-challenging prospect of recruiting and retaining the nation's brightest young historians, especially historians of color.

Among the most startling findings of the 2008 NAPA study was that “nationally, the Park History Program has 158 FTEs, of which 110 (70%) are eligible to retire in the next five years.”⁷³ Who will succeed that generation of historians?

The Park Service can be an attractive place of prospective employment for well-trained historians, but the agency is not presently taking advantage of a vast well of latent talent. While traditional history graduate programs produce far more Ph.D.s than the academic market can absorb, many well-trained history MAs are also graduating from the flourishing public history graduate sector. Both groups include talented, thoughtful, passionate, technologically adept, and capable young scholars who could be hired at (sadly) relatively modest salaries. With a program of intensive, targeted efforts, NPS could hire young history professionals who could refresh and enhance its research and interpretive work in ways that are relevant to twenty-first-century publics while they bolster the ranks of its soon-to-be-retiring body of professional historians.⁷⁴

Many survey respondents refer to the “graying” of the Park Service, and the general absence of a “rising generation,” while NPS itself has long articulated the need to attract a broader range of Americans to NPS employment, an aim that gets significant attention in *A Call to Action*. At least as early as the 1992 Vail Agenda—the series of strategic objectives that emerged from a planning symposium associated with the NPS’s 75th anniversary—the agency began asserting an aim to improve in the latter regard.⁷⁵ But is it happening? If not, why not? And what are the challenges to cultivating a diverse cadre of rising historians?

The challenge of recruiting and retaining historians of color in NPS is compounded by the challenge that faces the discipline of history writ large, as history departments have struggled to attract a diverse group of candidates for advanced study in the field. Of 1,045 PhDs conferred in 2009 (the most recent year for which data is available), 17.4%

73 NAPA, “Saving Our History,” 35.

74 Many articles and considerable online commentary has documented the now longstanding employment crisis among PhDs in history, PhDs’ quest for relevant and engaging intellectual work in the public sector, and the need for graduate programs in history to support preparation for a wider array of history careers. See, for instance, Robert B. Townsend, “Job Market Sagged Further in 2009–10,” *Perspectives on History* (January 2011), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2011/1101/1101new2.cfm>; Anthony Grafton and Jim Grossman, “Plan C,” *Perspectives on History* (November 2011), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2011/1111/1111pre1.cfm>; and Robert B. Townsend, “The Ecology of the History Job: Shifting Realities in a Fluid Market,” *Perspectives on History* (December 2011), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2011/1112/The-Ecology-of-the-History-Job-Shifting-Realities-in-a-Fluid-Market.cfm>.

75 *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, the July 2001 report of the National Park System Advisory Board overseen by John Hope Franklin, recommended that NPS “improve the Service’s institutional capacity by developing new organizational talents and abilities and a workforce that reflects America’s diversity” (National Park Service Advisory Board, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century: A Report of the National Park System Advisory Board*, July 2001, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/report.htm>). A decade earlier (1992), the so-called Vail Agenda urged NPS to “strengthen recruitment, hiring and retention of a culturally diverse professional workforce” (National Parks for the 21st Century—The Vail Agenda, 1992, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anps/anps_8e.htm).

went to members of “racial and ethnic minorities.”⁷⁶ No comparably recent data exist for history MAs, though a major study undertaken by the AHA found (after noting that master’s programs have always been more diverse than Ph.D. programs) that while the percentage of history MA recipients between 1995 and 2001 from diverse backgrounds rose, it was a result of the declining numbers of white men, rather than a rise in the absolute number of historians of color.⁷⁷ Given that the number of students of color in history programs across the United States is comparatively small, NPS faces a real challenge—shared by history departments everywhere—in attracting employees who reflect the nation’s diversity.

The bar is high. But what can NPS do to improve recruitment and retention of a diverse new workforce of historians?

For the past decade, through its (woefully understaffed) Cultural Resources Diversity Program (CRDP), the agency has been trying to develop “programs and approaches that will diversify the professional workforce in the cultural resources/historic preservation field.” The Program’s aim is not simply to enrich the history interpreted by NPS but to do so by incorporating more diverse perspectives into the NPS itself by increasing the “number of individuals representing all the nation’s cultural and ethnic groups in professional jobs in this field, as historians, archaeologists, historical architects, ethnographers, historical landscape architects, and curators.”⁷⁸

The Park Service has recognized that there is a relationship between the scope of the histories it stewards and interprets and the aspiring professionals drawn to its ranks. The CRDP has produced three well-designed and widely distributed booklets to promote the preservation of Hispanic, Asian American, and African American heritage.⁷⁹ In an effort to better engage African American history, and African Americans, across the agency, the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom links more than four hundred sites across the United States in ways that “empower communities to tell their own stories.”⁸⁰ The NPCA calls this “one of the Park Service’s best diversity-expanding programs,” and it can serve as a model for comparable programs that address other themes. Recently, for instance, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has drawn attention to the need for the NPS, National Register of Historic Places, and National Historic Landmarks programs to better address our national

76 Robert B. Townsend, “New History PhDs in 2009 Surged to Second-Highest Level in 32 Years,” *Perspectives on History*, March 2011.

77 Philip M. Katz et al., “Retrieving the Master’s from the Dustbin of History: A Report to the Members of the American Historical Association (2005), 8–9, <http://www.historians.org/projects/cmd/2005/Report/index.cfm>. By comparison, “as of September 30, 2008, almost three-quarters (72.7%) of the total NPS workforce in the IMR remained white. Blacks represented 10.5% of the workforce, Hispanics 10.7%, Asians 3.6%, Native American & Native Hawaiians 0.8%, and multi-race, 1.7%.” See NPS, “Diversifying the Workforce: A Question of Survival,” NPS Intermountain Region briefing, March 2009, http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~nroberts/documents/consulting/NPS-IMR_Brief2_Mar09_Final.pdf. With these figures, the IMR has acknowledged that black, Hispanic, Asian, and multirace populations continue to be underrepresented, in some cases grossly, in today’s workforce.

78 NPS Cultural Resources Diversity Program, “Program Description,” May 27, 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/history/crdi/description/prgm.htm>.

79 See, for example, Brian Joyner, *Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Hispanic Heritage*, 2009, http://www.nps.gov/crdi/publications/NPS_HispanicReflections_English.pdf. In order to cultivate the rising generation of students, the CRDP has also developed a curriculum guide, *Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation: Historic Preservation, Cultural Resource Stewardship, and Related Fields* (September 2002, <http://www.nps.gov/history/crdi/colleges/TCHP.htm>), aimed in particular at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American Studies programs, and tribal colleges. On a related note, a cooperative research project between the NPS and George Washington University’s Center for the Study of Public Culture and Public History, supported the study “Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites,” a large initiative in which researchers surveyed visitors and front line staff at three major sites—Arlington House (the Robert E. Lee Memorial in George Washington Memorial Parkway), Frederick Douglass NHS, and Manassas National Battlefield Park—to discuss their perceptions on how race and slavery are presented.

80 Respondent 10394.

understanding of Hispanic history and culture—an effort that would certainly extend the insights of the CRDP program and one that may, if indirectly, help diversify NPS ranks. Other stories need telling too—stories, for instance, of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Indonesian, and African demographic movements or farmworkers’ search for economic justice.⁸¹ Future generations will want to learn and share these narratives.

As it works to diversify its ranks of historians, NPS leadership should work closely with the professional associations serving the discipline, which share these aims; both the AHA and OAH have devoted resources to this issue.⁸² The Park Service might also look to the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s impressive Diversity Scholarship Program as a model, funding students to attend the George Wright Society gatherings and cultivating the interests of participants in the program. The George Wright Society has its own fellowship program to enable members of minority populations (especially Native Americans) to attend its meetings, and the society’s “Park Break” program—an all-expenses-paid, park-based field seminar for graduate students who are thinking about a career in park management or park-related research and education—undertaken in partnership with NPS and other entities, is an especially promising initiative.⁸³

A larger issue is at hand here. For a variety of reasons, NPS in general has trouble both recruiting and retaining young talent—whether culturally diverse or not.⁸⁴ The agency appears to do little targeted recruiting. Survey respondents pointed out that vital programs such as the Student Career Employment Program, the Intake Program, and the Student Temporary Employment Program, which once brought people trained in history into the NPS, have been scaled back, or cut altogether.

History departments, meanwhile, are full of students who could add a great deal to the NPS history program through their knowledge of recent historiography, but who soon learn that other factors are more valuable in terms of landing that first job. Entry, it often seems, can be made only at the bottom, as a very young seasonal ranger. Leaders are internally grown, advancing up the ranks through a military-like system of geographic moves. The existing system, it seems, leaves little room for taking advantage of the opportunities that do exist to bring in or leverage the historical talent the agency needs. Hiring and promotion practices that prioritize agency experience, for instance, can make it hard for professionals coming out of history MA and PhD programs in their mid- to late twenties to compete for positions, and seem to discourage introducing new, mid-career historian/leaders from outside the agency when vacancies occur in interpretive or research leadership positions.

Retention is an issue as well. As one of our respondents points out, many of the “younger generation of NPS employees...do have formal training in history. Given the seasonal nature of much NPS history work and the hurdles to advancement, however, many of these young

81 Thanks to Art Gomez for pointing out these gaps in NPS history (Gomez, personal narrative for State of History team, April 2009).

82 The AHA has a standing Committee on Minority Historians to “advocate for a more inclusive profession” and shares reports on the cultivation of a diverse workforce through its website and publishes on this issue in its newsletter, *Perspectives*. At the AHA’s website, see in particular the page on recruiting: American Historical Association, “Minority Equity Websites,” updated November 17, 2009, http://www.historians.org/resources/equity_web_resources.cfm#recruiting. The OAH also has a Committee on the Status of African American, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native American (ALANA) Historians and ALANA Histories, as well as a committee dedicated to the NPS collaboration.

83 George Wright Society, “Park Break: A Unique Learning Fellowship for Graduate Students Contemplating a Career Working in Parks, Protected Areas, or Cultural Sites,” 2011, <http://www.georgewright.org/parkbreak>.

84 Many astute observations and worthwhile recommendations were contained in M. Duffin, D. Laven, E. Pranis, N. Mitchell, and M. Camp, *Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future: Strategies for National Parks and Other Special Places, A Front End Evaluation, Final Report* (Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute and Shelburne Farms, 2009), a report for the National Park Foundation. Though focused on environmental sustainability, many proposals here have broader implications, and applications, for history programs.

people leave the agency after a few years to seek other employment.”⁸⁵ Other conditions in the agency exacerbate the problem. One respondent muses, “we have some dynamic people, but—for the most part—our rolls are clogged with bureaucrats who lack creativity, passion, and intellectual rigor. And why would junior historians want to stay with an organization that can’t—or chooses not to—fund research and training?”⁸⁶

Indeed, NPS culture can push promising young historians out of the agency, as the demands of compliance too often squelch the opportunity to contribute to exciting new scholarship. One respondent reflects that “What they don’t teach us in the academy, and what we are not told when we’re grad students working for the NPS on some cooperative agreement research or study, is that NPS needs things in a very set, pat, format. No creative thinking, organization or artistic writing. NPS needs cut and dried, formulaic reports and documents. In NPS-speak. They also do not tell you that the service is interested in cultural resource management, not history.”⁸⁷ Another thoughtful commentator—a scholar who regularly works with NPS sites—writes that “good historical scholarship does find its way into parks’ interpretation system-wide. But I see this as reflecting the efforts of specific and quite heroic individuals throughout the system who are adept at seizing sometimes very small opportunities to advocate for change and create exhibits and interpretive plans that incorporate new historical ideas.” This observer notes that “the requirements” of the agency’s “often stultifying bureaucracy mean that the most imaginative and innovative thinkers—precisely the kinds of people needed to bring new historical scholarship all the way into front-line interpretation—tend not to stay in the agency or to be hired in the first place.”⁸⁸

With the rise of graduate programs in public history, history departments are turning out growing numbers of students eager to work for NPS. The agency and profession should work together to ensure that those cohorts grow ever more diverse, and that new practitioners find engaging and rewarding work in the field.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 5.1 Use, as the Second Century Commission report urges, “youth service corps, intergenerational programs, and other means to actively recruit a new generation of National Park Service leaders that reflects the diversity of the nation.”⁸⁹ Increase investment in the CRDP.
- 5.2 Restore and augment the agency’s history workforce as per recommendation 4.1 above.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.3 Seek opportunities for parks to serve as host sites for public history field schools that would enable graduate students to fill interpretive and resource management roles while learning about public history practice in an NPS context. Actively recruit graduate students from both conventional and public history graduate programs to participate.
- 5.4 Create a workshop for graduate program directors, perhaps at OAH or AHA meetings, or the AHA-sponsored training for new Graduate Program Directors, to educate them about NPS opportunities.

85 Anonymous respondent.

86 Respondent 10256.

87 Respondent 10604.

88 Cathy Stanton, personal narrative for State of History team, 2010.

89 National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 46.

- 5.5 Make more visible on multiple NPS websites clear explanations of how to get NPS jobs, including seasonal, student, and permanent positions.
- 5.6 Create a lateral-entry or postdoctoral type program similar to the Council on Library and Information Resources fellowships to draw in PhD-trained historians.
- 5.7 Seek opportunities presented by the surplus production of history PhDs to hire highly qualified historians for positions at all levels, especially mid-career positions for which internal NPS experience has traditionally been afforded priority over education.
- 5.8 Develop strategic partnerships with community organizations that can help create a more diverse community around a site, office, or program; such partnerships can help cultivate diverse perspectives, and perhaps lead to a more diverse workforce as well.

Finding 6: Inadequate Resources for Historical Practice

History in the NPS has been underresourced for decades. Chronic underfunding and understaffing have severely undermined the agency's ability to meet basic responsibilities, let alone take on new and bolder initiatives, nurture and sustain public engagement, foster a culture of research and discovery, and facilitate connectivity and professional growth among NPS staff. Reducing inefficiencies and forming productive partnerships can help address these gaps, but after decades of deferred maintenance, the history infrastructure seriously needs repair.

The recent NAPA, Second Century Commission, and NPCA reports have all documented how cultural resources funding has eroded in favor of the traditional NPS emphasis on natural resources. Between fiscal years 1995 and 2008, staffing levels in the NPS for natural resources rose by 335 FTEs while staffing level for cultural resources declined by 294 FTEs. Furthermore, the NAPA study notes, “since 2005 (the year of the reorganization of WASO Cultural Resources), both natural resource and cultural resource programs have experienced staff reductions, but cultural resources has lost far more staff (147 FTE, or 15.8%) than natural resources (19 FTE, or 1.3%). This disparity was especially pronounced over the past year (FY2008), as park cultural resources staffing declined by 74 FTE (8.6%) while natural resources experienced an increase of 20 FTE (1.4%).” Largely due to the Natural Resource Challenge, the NAPA study further observes, “funding for natural resource programs today is double that for park cultural resource programs, notwithstanding the fact that two-thirds of the 391 national parks were created because of their historic and cultural significance.”⁹⁰ Noting the anemic allocation of resources for historical work, one of our survey respondents concludes that “one of our core missions...comes off collectively as a collateral duty.”⁹¹

Participants in the OAH-sponsored site visits over the past fifteen years also report dismay at the working conditions of the NPS professionals they encountered. “The overall impression,” one historian observes, “is of an embattled, hardworking staff that is trying to chart a new course with little help and few guideposts.” He found that park staff are “assailed on all sides, are undermanned, and also are underequipped.”⁹² “To fulfill critically important mandates,” another asserts, “the park staff urgently requires additional resources, both human and financial.”⁹³ At almost every site visited, visiting historians note that funding and staffing limitations are among the biggest obstacles to making recommended changes in history research or interpretation.

90 NAPA, *Saving Our History*, xii, xi.

91 Respondent 11141..

92 Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, OAH site report.

93 Vicksburg National Military Park, OAH site visit.

With staffing thin everywhere, meanwhile, the historical expertise NPS does possess is often squandered as its trained historians are redirected to other duties, while the implementation of history is often left to park interpreters with varied responsibilities and uneven training. The Morristown NHP Long Range Interpretive Plan reports a common complaint: “Daily scheduling is difficult due to extremely limited back-up ability.... Another unfortunate consequence is the loss of the contributing expertise of the park historian and education specialist to other critical park projects. This is caused by their need to consistently cover basic operations—tours or the visitor center desk.”⁹⁴

Our survey results are likewise filled with observations of this sort. “I was hired as a park historian and have not done a bit of historical work in years,” one respondent reports.⁹⁵ Another tells us, “I was taught and trained by universities in the 1970s but I have rarely in my 31 years in the NPS ever been able to utilize research potential outside of the park itself. I did get to spend 5 days in the National Archives researching and a few days at [another institution] but that is all in a career spanning more than 30 years.”⁹⁶ Many survey respondents concur with an informant—in this case, housed in a regional office—who says “historians need to function as historians, rather than as administrators (i.e., collecting and depositing fees; recruiting, training, and supervising ranger staff; supervising contracts; cleaning visitor centers) who manage to carve out a few hours each month to research and to write.”⁹⁷ For the agency’s talented and dedicated historians, being unable to use their skills to contribute to resources they care passionately about is frustrating or, as one of our informants puts it, “a source of great disappointment as I draft scopes of work for history projects that I myself would love to write.”⁹⁸

That historians find themselves too tethered to other work to deploy their skills represents a significant “loss for the NPS because it sidelines some very talented historians who are not able to take the time away from administrative work to research and write about the park resources that they know so well.” As NPS curator Patricia West observes, in this way the “NPS becomes the recipient rather than the producer” of historical knowledge about its own resources.⁹⁹ Put another way, many talented NPS professionals do make concerted efforts to remain connected to larger professional networks, but even they tend to be history *consumers*—people who read or commission history written by others. As a result they are less active as history producers who generate knowledge about the agency’s own resources or shape scholarship for the larger discipline.

Given this situation, it is hardly surprising to find that when asked to identify three top priorities for any new funds that might be available for history in the NPS, our survey respondents overwhelmingly identified increased staffing as their most urgent need.

94 Department of Interpretive Planning Harpers Ferry Center and Morristown National Historical Park, “Morristown National Historical Park Long Range Interpretive Plan,” January 2007, 53–54, <http://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/ip/morr-lrip-2007.pdf>.

95 Respondent 10423.

96 Respondent 10598.

97 Christine Arato, personal narrative for State of History team, 2009.

98 Patricia West, personal narrative for State of History team, 2009.

99 West, personal narrative.

82 | **If a large infusion of money were suddenly to become available to improve the practice, visibility, and relevance of history at your park or in the NPS generally, what would be your top three priorities for spending it?** (*Arranged by percentage of valid responses; ideas with fewer responses omitted.*)

FIRST PRIORITY

Increase Staffing	33.57%
Programming, Interpretation and Exhibits	12.68%
Conservation/ Preservation	10.33%
Staff training and education	9.15%
Support Research	9.15%

SECOND PRIORITY

Programming, Interpretation and Exhibits	19.38%
Increase Staffing	18.90%
Digital media and technology	13.64%
Support Research	11.96%
Staff training and education	11.48%

THIRD PRIORITY

Programming, Interpretation and Exhibits	21.50%
Digital media and technology	14.25%
Increase Staffing	13.73%
Staff training and education	11.14%
Public Outreach and Education	10.62%

Ample documentation exists of the consequences here. The NAPA panel, for instance, concluded that NPS is failing to fulfill its public trust for museum collections, because 45% of its collections are not cataloged. As a result, fifty-six million items are irretrievable and unavailable to park staff, researchers, and the public. The challenge this creates for historical practice in the agency has received attention elsewhere in this report.

Resource deprivation has also delayed the updating of introductory films, waysides, exhibits, and other materials offered to visitors. As the Second Century Commission observed, “for the Park Service’s expanded educational mission to achieve its high purposes, investment is necessary.”¹⁰⁰ Under a heading appropriately titled “out with the old,” *A Call to Action* pledges to “engage national park visitors with interpretive media that offer interactive experiences, convey information based on current scholarship, and are accessible to the broadest range of the public. To that end we will replace 2,500 outdated, inaccurate, and substandard interpretive exhibits, signs, films, and other media with innovative, immersive, fully accessible, and learner-centered experiences.”¹⁰¹ Our report affirms the urgent need for this work, and anticipates that historians with appropriate expertise will be integrally involved in it.

¹⁰⁰ National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 24.

¹⁰¹ NPS, *A Call to Action*, 14.

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 6.1 Seek funding to restore the number of cultural resources FTEs, now at the lowest point in more than a decade, to the pre-2005 level.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.2 Request annual budgets through 2016, as recommended by the Second Century Commission, to increase the funding levels for the Historic Preservation Fund to support state, local, and tribal governments to guarantee that prehistoric and historical resources are properly preserved.
- 6.3 Seek additional funding, as recommended by the Second Century Commission and pledged in *A Call to Action*, to replace broken, dilapidated, out of date, and inaccurate media, including exhibits, signs, films, and other technology-delivered information.
- 6.4 Develop more robust volunteer programs to staff reception desks and perform other general clerical duties so that NPS professional staff members are able to contribute their expertise to the tasks for which they are employed.
- 6.5 Consider joint or cluster hires, where one historian is hired across two or three parks or a team of historians to serve several parks is assembled.
- 6.6 Implement recommendations #14–18 from the NAPA report *Saving Our History*, which address issues associated with backlogs in museums and archival collections, and improved access to those collections.

Finding 7: Productive and Enduring Partnerships for History

As vast as the Park Service seems, by no means can or should it be a self-contained entity. In this, the NPS is not unique. Most cultural organizations today rely on partnerships to fulfill their missions. History in the national parks depends on cooperation and collaboration with others—to obtain funding, to harness expertise, and simply to leverage much-needed labor. But partnerships must be crafted carefully with an eye to how they can contribute to the improvement of history practice.

Partnerships of many kinds have become essential to raising money, securing volunteers, furnishing new ideas, hosting conferences, and many other activities. In fact, today's NPS puts so much emphasis on partnerships that a dedicated Washington office and a "Partnerships Council" have been created to cultivate and sustain them.¹⁰² Director Jonathan Jarvis calls partnership skills a "core competency." Agency employees, he adds, "must be able to find and welcome partners, to reach common ground and leverage each other's skills and resources." In terms of selecting people to fill the all-important superintendent positions, these skills, Jarvis asserts, are "at the top of [the] list."¹⁰³

¹⁰² For the fulsome website that shares the resources gathered by the Washington Partnerships office, including case studies and other materials, see NPS, "Partnerships," 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/partnerships>.

¹⁰³ Interview with Jon Jarvis published on the "NPS Partnership" website, <http://www.nps.gov/partnerships/>.

Indeed, with cutbacks in funding, parks increasingly harness partnerships to carry out basic responsibilities. The Second Century Commission report urges “harnessing the power of citizen service,” noting that some five million hours of service contributed annually by volunteers created \$100 million in value.¹⁰⁴ In truth, partnerships often help parks meet fundamental obligations. As Doug Eury, former superintendent of Nez Perce NHP, has observed, “if we don’t have partnerships, we don’t have a park.”¹⁰⁵

Sometimes, working with external partners is a contractual relationship: contractors write administrative histories, consult on exhibits, or produce historic structures reports. In other cases, external consultation “helps to blunt any potential NPS arrogance or over-confidence at having the ‘right’ answer to historical questions.”¹⁰⁶

Other times, partners are members of the local community whose expertise is engaged to inform planning processes. When, for instance, Mount Rushmore NM superintendent Gerard Baker involved South Dakota’s American Indian community in the long-range interpretive planning process, NPS benefited not just from the expertise shared but by the positive tone it set between the agency and native people in fostering the partnership.¹⁰⁷

Partners also play important roles in fundraising and generating resources, including massive amounts of volunteer time. Mention partnerships in NPS circles and many think immediately of the more than 170 “friends” groups that support various parks within the agency.¹⁰⁸ Some create high-impact, permanent results, among the best known being the \$103 million Gettysburg Museum and Visitor Center, opened in 2008 and owned and operated by the Gettysburg Foundation.¹⁰⁹ The aggregate benefits are almost incalculable. The C&O Canal Trust’s Canal Pride Days, for example, draw hundreds of volunteers to perform essential grounds work for the C&O Canal National Historic Park. At Golden Gate National Recreation Area’s (GGNRA) Fort Barry Nike Site SF-88, volunteers play instrumental roles in everything from collections to interpretation to maintenance.

The advantages of such partnerships extend beyond the generated value. As former superintendent of GGNRA Brian O’Neill has pointed out, “every time we do [something] ourselves, we miss out on an opportunity for community engagement.”¹¹⁰ The Second Century Commission report likewise observed, “people who participate in service to the national parks gain a sense of pride and ownership that lasts a lifetime. Discovering firsthand that they can be agents of positive change for their communities and for the environment, they become the informed and engaged citizens our country so urgently needs.”¹¹¹

Partnerships with higher education entities have also proven valuable. For example, NPS has worked since 2005 to expand the historical work that goes on within the CESUs, “partnerships that pair universities with federal agencies to facilitate research, technical assistance, and education for federal land management, environmental, and

104 National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 31.

105 NPS, “Partnerships,” 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/partnerships>.

106 Kathleen McClain Jenkins, personal narrative for State of History team, April 2009.

107 “Partners Can Make a Difference in LRIP Process,” *HFC onMedia*, Harper’s Ferry Center, July–August 2009, <http://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/onmedia/hfc-onmedia-aug09.pdf>.

108 The National Park Foundation and Eastern National are two large nonprofits that advance the agency’s mission. The NPF, for instance, has established a grant program “to connect under-represented audiences to their national parks,” and has awarded nearly \$500,000 to thirty-five national parks to develop outreach strategies and sustainable community partnerships. Another good example is the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation’s license tag program, which channels some \$500,000 to the Parkway every year.

109 Scott, OAH site report. Likewise, the Friends of the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield have raised approximately a \$500,000, which when matched by a million-dollar Congressional appropriation, resulted in a new Visitors’ Center housing offices, a library, bookstore, and museum.

110 NPS, “Partnerships.”

111 National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, 31.

research agencies.”¹¹²

Other forms of partnership with higher education seem especially promising. Many parks make use of students in as seasonal interpreters, interns, and volunteers. Contract work between universities and parks often engages (and is in part undertaken to provide income for) student workers.

Some carefully constructed relationships have proven highly advantageous. Middle Tennessee State University, for instance, manages the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area. Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (NHS) enjoys a thriving partnership with Portland State University (PSU) through the park’s Northwest Cultural Resource Institute (NCRI), while Monocacy National Battlefield’s Catoctin Center for Regional Studies, created in 1998 by the Frederick [Maryland] Community College and the NPS, hosts conferences and workshops to promote the research and study of the history and culture of central Maryland and the surrounding area. Relationships across the humanities more generally have linked NPS, history, and the arts. The benefits are evident: students learn not only the subject matter the projects require but also gain some exposure to how historians work in the real world—and perhaps develop interest in an NPS career. Meanwhile, parks gain access not only to the labor of faculty steeped in the discipline of history but also to the fresh insights and enthusiasm that younger scholars often bring to the table.

These relationships confer advantages but they also have costs. When NPS partners with universities and colleges, for instance, it must acknowledge and conform to the rigors of the academic calendar, the inherent sluggishness of the large bureaucracy notwithstanding. It may be necessary for NPS units eager to partner with institutions of higher education to alter their practice in order to respect the requirements of students and faculty, or university administrators. In all kinds of partnerships, there is an additional demand in terms of time that must be calculated into the equation. Successful partnerships rely on sound relationships, and those relationships must be patiently cultivated and nurtured—real work that demands real time. The NPS “do’s and don’ts” of ethical partnerships notes that supervisors must “authorize official time for employees to work on the joint effort for which the partnership was established,” a point that bears repeating here.¹¹³

Collaboration can also mean compromise, and in some cases, partnerships have created real tensions. As one respondent notes, “more private sector action is needed in some parks, but there is a genuine danger of privatization of what should be the inalienable public heritage.”¹¹⁴ In an era in which privatizing the entire national parks system is suggested in all seriousness from time to time, this danger should not be dismissed lightly.

Partnerships can also prove a distraction, particularly in cases where the external partner(s) have interests apart from the site’s more scholarly aims. “Our current superintendent,” one respondent complains, “frequently circumvents the interpretive division entirely and goes directly to the park’s Foundation in order to organize ‘events’ that have little or no relationship to the primary significance.”¹¹⁵ Also problematic are superficial partnerships that serve only to create an appearance of consultancy or inclusiveness; some survey respondents reported frustration with partnerships that did not fulfill their potential for co-creation because of the agency’s fear of losing control.

Despite some resistance to them, carefully considered partnerships will undoubtedly shape the future. “Good partnering,” NPS notes, “is both a skill and an art.”¹¹⁶ As Director

112 Laura Feller, “Dwight Pitcaithley Retires: Search for the Next Chief Historian of the National Park Service Begins,” *Perspectives*, October 2005, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2005/0510/0510new3.cfm>.

113 “NPS Ethics Do’s and Don’ts,” http://www.nps.gov/partnerships/ethics_dos_donts.htm.

114 National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*.

115 Respondent 10320.

116 National Park Service, “Partnerships.”

86 | Jarvis himself has observed, partnership requires distinct skills, and one must also bring to partnerships realistic expectations about the significant time and energy they demand, and the genuine flexibility they require. “Be prepared for the friction progress creates,” an experienced NPS professional warns. “Progress means change which has a tendency to frighten some folks; some for fear it will affect their economic well-being, some simply because they don’t understand what is happening.”¹¹⁷ One must “conscious[ly] seek out other, unexpressed, viewpoints about history.”¹¹⁸

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 7.1 Maximize synergies with the professional history community outside of the NPS as a way of addressing and offsetting some budgetary and staffing constraints. The longtime partnership between the NPS and OAH is a good model and should be expanded and extended to other organizations.
- 7.2 Encourage parks to develop relationships with institutions of higher education or other cultural organizations in their areas. A possible model is “sister city” relationships: informal, flexible arrangements in which an individual history practitioner outside NPS (at a nearby college, for example) partners with an individual history practitioner at a park to meet regularly and identify ways their respective park and college can meet each other’s needs (e.g. helping with research, internships, guided park tours for alums). Unlike OAH team visits, which are usually only brief encounters, the point here is to sustain contact over time with academic partners.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.3 Seek opportunities to partner with universities and history graduate students to conduct needed research for parks as part of thesis or dissertation projects. Maintain and post on an NPS website a list of needed research projects and/or topics, and work with OAH, AHA, NCPH, or other organizations to develop modest grants to support travel and research costs for students who take on park-identified topics.
- 7.4 Explore and expand partnerships with universities, museums, and libraries that contain complementary resources to develop digital history projects, digitize, and archive resources, and create interpretive and K-12 materials.

Finding 8: Technology and the Practice of History

Although substantial and rapid progress has been made during the period of our study, the NPS can do more to harness the power of technologies that offer specific promise to advance historical research, interpretation, and connections between the agency staff and the larger historical profession, as well as public engagement with the past. Indeed, intelligent and collaborative deployment of new technologies offers the prospect of breaking down many of the barriers that have constrained NPS history for decades.

117 John Latschar, “Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum and Visitor Center,” April 14, 2008, <http://www.nps.gov/partnerships/gettysburg.htm>.

118 Jenkins, personal narrative.

When asked in 2010 how prepared the NPS was “to connect with twenty-first century audiences and to take advantage of new methods of communicating knowledge,” our survey respondents offered a mix of responses that reflected both real differences across sites and significant frustrations about restrictions preventing NPS engagement with “web 2.0” and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. For everyone who responded, “I think we are doing very well,” another wrote, “not prepared in the slightest.”

Because the NPS technological landscape is highly varied and changing daily, it is difficult to make across-the-board observations based on the 2010 survey data. Still, it is clear that as a whole the NPS has moved haltingly and sluggishly to embrace fast-moving new technologies. The following factors seem pertinent:

- **Demographics of the NPS:** The agency’s aging workforce may be holding it back. As one of our respondents observes, the NPS can be “too slow to embrace new technology, partly from bureaucratic inertia and risk aversion, partly because the workforce is aging without a proportional increase in new young employees.” Another concurs: “I don’t think that we’ve been hiring enough young people in permanent positions to bring their thoughts and knowledge of technology to bear on this issue. Those of us in management positions are not in touch with what 21st-century audiences are looking for, and are still doing things the 20th-century (or earlier) way.”¹¹⁹
- **Workload, funding, and staffing:** There is no question that effective and creative use of technologies and development and ongoing maintenance of new digital projects is expensive, and can require enormous amounts of staff time and intensive IT support and training, all of which are in short supply within the NPS. “The WASO office puts out a great set of guidelines and websites,” one respondent observes, but “most individual parks cannot rise to the challenge, due to staffing, funding, and avalanche-like amounts of work.”¹²⁰
- **Rapid pace of change:** Embedded as it is in the regulatory structure of the Department of the Interior, the NPS has found it difficult to adapt quickly to new technologies. But as one respondent writes, “nothing is permanent in the new media world and if we keep sitting and thinking, we will have no influence on audiences.”¹²¹ “Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc. have all been in use for quite some time now and the NPS is only just getting on board,” writes another; “By the time we are fully operational, they will likely be obsolete and kids and young adults will have moved on to the next big thing. The NPS must be more nimble in either reacting to these new technologies or leading the way with new technologies of its own.”¹²² A greater level of agility than has heretofore been in evidence is clearly key.
- **Bureaucratic cultures:** The rather rigid yet (paradoxically) highly fragmented structure of current NPS web infrastructure itself (especially the non-intuitive templates used at the park level) seems to be hampering both innovation and interconnection among the rather considerable digital resources NPS already marshals. While the standardized templates imply that consistent information will be found across parks, in fact (as we note below), there is almost no consistency, while the template itself seems to restrict imaginative, site-specific projects.
- **Hesitation to embrace the principles of shared authority that have come to inform public history practice:** NPS seems by and large reluctant to fully enter the “2.0” world, in which audiences no longer wish simply to receive information but rather to help create it.

119 Respondents 10015 and 10068.

120 Respondent 10871.

121 Respondent 11859.

122 Respondent 11763.

88 | Despite these hindrances, efforts are flowering in many areas. Here, we consider specific areas of progress and possibilities for the agency's use of technology to advance the practice of history. Developments in the larger field of the "digital humanities," combined with some promising efforts already underway within NPS, offer exciting possibilities for new research, new ways of understanding, new relevancy to more audiences (both internal and external), and new, wide-ranging dialogue for history in the parks.

Emerging technologies can clearly help history in the agency escape some of the constraints we describe in this report. Technology's openness and fluidity can offer paths to integrate history research and interpretation, realign the balance of authority between the NPS and its publics, invite ongoing dialogue with non-NPS scholars, allow for much more frequent and ongoing updating of historical information, engage publics near and far in park-based learning and park planning, and offer isolated park employees vastly greater interconnection with each other and with non-NPS history professionals. Indeed, agency officials and Director Jarvis himself have suggested that internet gateways will increasingly supplant the venerated park "visitor center" (a product largely of the 1950s) as visitors' first point of contact with a park.¹²³

As one begins to consider these exciting new possibilities, one must also be aware that there may be cultural resistance to them within NPS. Somewhat perplexingly, our survey respondents at once place a high priority on developing park technology and digital media, but also express ambivalence about the role of technology, especially in on-site interpretation at parks. One respondent, for instance, finds "the image...of fifty visitors walking around Lincoln's boyhood home all plugged into some sort of interpretive iPods, and having no interaction with either other visitors or staff...a little sad."¹²⁴ Many respondents express the feeling that "rangers in the field do much more for the visitor than a computer monitor."¹²⁵ Some respondents also comment that "the American public can get on the web and feel they have learned more about the past than in visiting the parks. We must become alive and show history, the sights, sounds and smells things people cannot get out of a computer program."¹²⁶ Another writes, "what we offer is a non-digital experience—real rocks, real trees, real human stories. People seem to want that connection when visiting, more than the digital world."¹²⁷ "I see many moms and dads trying to drag their kids away from the interactive gadgets now scattered around our visitor centers. Moms and dads would like to see the kids interact with the resource."¹²⁸

One respondent—who notes that, as a park's "IT person," s/he was not fearful of technology itself, also argues that new technologies are "no replacement for the Ranger and [direct] interface with the audience. That connection between ranger and visitor is what has made the NPS what it is. Ask most people about a visit to an NPS site. Do they remember the electronic message at stop number 12? No, they remember talking to the ranger."¹²⁹ One especially perceptive commenter notes that, "as a member of the younger generation, I can observe that too many NPS managers think that the 21st-century audience needs shiny gadgets to enjoy our resources. They know just enough about technology to fool themselves into thinking it's what everybody wants. Managers need to get to the root of the audience's desires, not the superficial bling."¹³⁰

123 Laura Petersen, "Traditional Visitor Centers May Fade as National Park Service Embraces Digital Age," *New York Times*, June 3, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2011/06/02/02greenwire-traditional-visitor-centers-may-fade-as-nation-46973.html?pagewanted=all>.

124 Respondent 11746.

125 Respondent 10658.

126 Respondent 10519.

127 Respondent 11222.

128 Respondent 10438.

129 Respondent 10491.

130 Respondent 10264.

Such perspectives need to be taken seriously, of course. Nevertheless, while new media are being harnessed to enhance experiences at a park, the challenges of climate change, increasing environmental strain, and other cultural and economic trends will place stronger emphasis on interpretation at a distance. Historian Cathy Stanton has written thoughtfully about intersections between the heritage industry and our petroleum-based car culture. Stanton argues that as people think more carefully about their automobile use, the auto-based tourism that accompanied the birth of the NPS is undergoing a major shift.¹³¹

As the Park Service's second century rolls on, larger numbers of users will necessarily be virtual. A study for the American Association of Museums suggests that skyrocketing fuel costs will be a defining factor in the future of museums and historic sites, and that as awareness of carbon footprints rises and travel budgets decline, interest in distance-learning technology will strengthen. While many of our respondents remind us that there is no substitute for human engagement at the scene of a historic event (a point with which we concur), and the personal storytelling so celebrated in NPS culture and history, others acknowledge that we "have to recognize that much of our audience will never visit NPS parks, and never go to our libraries. We need to communicate our history messages and stories on the web, and we need to do that for the general public, not just the historic preservation and academic community."¹³² And so we applaud the ways that many NPS sites are, for instance, making increasing use of YouTube¹³³ and harnessing other tools to bring their knowledge to virtual visitors around the globe.

In fact, studies have shown that exposure to a site's themes and content via new media have the effect of encouraging visits, not replacing them.¹³⁴ As one astute survey respondent writes, "we need to be available and at the cutting edge of technology...then, when we have captured their casual interest we must be compelling in our presentation of history, in order to draw them in further toward the source: our parks."¹³⁵ What works is not technology for technology's sake, but tools that meet a rising expectation of interactivity, in which the information delivered matches the unique interests of the visitor, and, often, in which the visitor can make his or her own contribution to the conversation. Just as the visitor converses with the ranger, technologies that facilitate both self-direction and two-way interaction are key.

Taking all of these perspectives and data into account, we believe that the intelligent, intentional, and creative use of new technologies (which is already proceeding in many corners of NPS) has far more potential to invigorate historical practice in the NPS than it does to undermine it. Indeed, technology can help bridge many of the divides identified above, and help NPS history become more accessible, relevant, and participatory. We emphasize here that several areas offer great promise and should be pursued as vigorously as possible.

131 Cathy Stanton, *History on Wheels*, <http://historyonwheels.blogspot.com>.

132 Respondent 10261.

133 Often this material is categorized under travel, however, rather than education—something NPS should address. The National Archives' YouTube channel, which posts video about the CCC in the National Parks among other archival footage, may be a model: <http://www.youtube.com/user/usnationalarchives#grid/user/6C92411EB3B3D76B>. The NPS YouTube channel opened on June 12, 2007, and so far has nearly 500 subscribers. Channel views (number of times the page has been loaded) so far total nearly 20,000, and upload views (accumulated total of all views of the videos) nearly 34,000. Videos (still a small number, from one or two to about twenty minutes each) offered on the channel focus on individual parks, park features, historic events, current in-park events, technical training for staff, public service themes (park-centered exercise for children), and other topics. Views of individual videos range from a few hundred to thousands. A number of individual parks have now launched YouTube sites as well.

134 See, for example, *Interconnections: The Institute for Museum and Library Services National Study on the Use of Libraries, Museums and the Internet* (2008, <http://interconnectionsreport.org/>), which found that "the amount of use of the Internet is positively correlated with the number of in-person visits."

135 Respondent 10463. Bright spots in terms of web interpretation and online exhibits include, for example, the virtual tour of the Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS. See also Acadia National Park's eCruise (NPS, Acadia National Park, <http://mms.nps.gov/podcasts/glac/acad/eCruise.htm>), which was developed with the help of David Restivo of Glacier National Park. Restivo was the 2007 recipient of the National Freeman Tilden Award for excellence in interpretation for a series of eHikes.

Moreover, the reticence some survey respondents express ignores many possible uses of technology besides on-site interpretation. The NPS holds vast archives and libraries of primary sources and, as we have noted elsewhere, often very useful research reports and studies (“gray literature”) pertaining to the parks’ and agencies’ histories as well as to the histories they interpret. Voluminous amounts of this material are digitized already. Yet as several respondents remark and our own experiences confirm, these archives—even the digital ones—are often inaccessible to the public, difficult for scholars to find, and at times underused even by park staff.

Yet these archival resources are themselves part of the resources of the past that NPS holds. The digital revolution expands the potential availability of that material to audiences beyond professional researchers, and thus blurs the line between interpretation and research by offering visitors, students, and professional researchers alike self-directed experiences exploring parks’ historical materials. A beneficial by-product of making these materials more easily available on the web will be to foster and encourage professional historical research on and in the parks. This potential is not presently being fully utilized, however.

Part of the problem has to do with the fragmentation and seemingly haphazard organization of existing digital resources. As one respondent comments, “there is no national leadership for web presence in the NPS that combines access to collections, archives, photographs, historical research, etc. NPSFOCUS and the WebCatalog in Washington and eTIC in Denver do not know how to communicate and often work at cross purposes.”¹³⁶ Indeed, we are aware of several national repositories of NPS archival material that could (and do) support development of dissertations, books, interpretive exhibits, and other historical scholarship about the parks. Yet this material is complicated to locate and search—even for experienced NPS researchers—and not always readily accessible to non-NPS scholars. For the NPS to be a serious player in the work of historical researchers nationwide, collections must be made more easily and centrally available in digital form.

Providing access to research within the NPS is an area where the chief historian’s office at WASO has been a leader for years. The NPS “History E-Library” website is probably the closest thing to a “portal” for anyone researching park history.¹³⁷ The database contains vast numbers of digitized historical reports and documents, and is largely searchable (although because it comprises largely PDFs and flat HTML pages, not in quite the same way a conventional database-driven library catalog is). It also provides centralized links to other key NPS databases, including the IRMA Portal, NPS Focus, and the NPS Library. But the page is often difficult to find unless one knows to look for it and, oddly, is not one of the links featured from the main NPS history website accessible from the main [nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) page under the tab “Discover History,” nor is it found under the subpage of NPS history featuring “Collections,” which does link to other NPS repositories.¹³⁸

Meanwhile, another vast and valuable repository of digitized agency historical materials is available through the eTIC, the electronic Technical Information Center at the NPS’s Denver Service Center, said to be a “central repository for NPS planning, design, and construction drawings and related documents.”¹³⁹ However, this database is presently available only to NPS employees. Links to other related collections—for example, the Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Records collections at the Library of Congress; NPS Historic Photograph Collection (with around two thousand historic images

136 Respondent 10999.

137 NPS, “History E-Library,” <http://www.nps.gov/history/history>.

138 NPS, “Discover History,” <http://www.nps.gov/history/>); and Collections, <http://www.nps.gov/history/collections.htm>.

139 NPS, Denver Service Center, http://www.nps.gov/dsc/a_who/a_8_TIC%20info.htm.

available¹⁴⁰) and the NPS History Collection at Harpers Ferry; Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System; NPS records at the National Archives; the NPS Maps collection; and the NPS GIS data collection—are randomly located on various webpages, although there appears to be no cohesive list. Researchers are left to wander around and stumble upon these gems, with little guidance to the differences among collections, their individual scopes, their relationships to one another, or even signposts leading from one to the next.

Special mention should be made of the excellent finding aid for National Park Service Record Group 79 (National Archives), created in 2007 as a cooperative project between OAH and the chief historian's office and now available in PDF on the NPS website.¹⁴¹ This document, however, is buried on a subpage two clicks below the main NPS History E-Library page¹⁴², not searchable in the way a library catalog is (although you can keyword search through the PDF), and apparently not linked from the National Archives pages having to do with RG 79—the place most researchers would probably start when approaching NPS history through the National Archives.¹⁴³

In all of these cases, NPS could improve the ability to locate pertinent historical materials by creating a more centralized, easy-to-navigate repository that organizes materials under professional library cataloging and metadata standards and allows more intelligible search and browse features. A promising project in this regard is the Open Parks Grid Project, a collaboration between the Southeast Region and Clemson University's departments of Library Services, Computing, and Technology and Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management. The project, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, will digitize over three million pages of critical park plans, studies, journals and technical reports and as well as 150,000 artifacts, photographs, and other sensitive objects. The idea is to create a central portal for parks-related research material; this project may offer opportunities in the future to incorporate and connect some of the existing repositories of historical material mentioned above.

Meanwhile, at a more "local" park level, current NPS web infrastructure does not well accommodate parks' attempts to develop attractive and compelling digital repositories of historical materials that would be of interest to researchers or the wider public. The haphazard web archive situation mirrors the uneven use of park websites for historical interpretive purposes. The subsections of the web template where history and culture interpretive material might live (people, places, and stories) are unhelpful and overly distinct categories that stifle the creation of varied and complex historical narratives.

Furthermore, despite the apparent parity from site to site of the categories of information (for example, photos and multimedia, history and culture, and park management) there is little consistency across parks as to the amount, quality, or type of material digitized and available under each, and often, basic information such as a park's founding date is difficult to find. While some parks (Yellowstone National Park, for instance) have a wide variety of historical and interpretive material (including the park administrative history, a digital slide file of thirteen thousand images, and clear guidelines about what is found in their archives) available under the "History and Culture" and "Photos and Multimedia" tabs on their website, others (Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, for example) bury their administrative history under "Park Management." Many other sites have a limited array of historic photographs,

140 Digital Blue Ridge Parkway, "Driving through Time," <http://docsouth.unc.edu/blueridgeparkway/> and <http://home.nps.gov/applications/hafe/hfc/npsphoto2.cfm>.

141 *Inventory of the Records of the National Park Service Record Group 79*, comp. Edward E. Hill (Washington, DC: Published in cooperation with the Organization of American Historians Park History Program, National Park Service, 2007), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/RG79/NPSrg79_inventory.pdf.

142 National Park Service, History E-Library, "Archives and Records," <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSarchives.htm>.

143 National Archives, Guide to Federal Records, "Records of the National Park Service [NPS]," <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/079.html>.

videos, and sometimes, virtual tours or podcasts available. Other parks (for instance, De Soto National Memorial) do not post their recent administrative histories at all. The websites of still other parks that do have excellent archival collections (for example, Blue Ridge Parkway) betray nothing about the existence of those materials. Few park websites seem to direct visiting researchers to outside scholarship about the park.

In response to such diversity, one survey respondent suggests that “an on-line study of web-sites” would be useful “to see how in depth web users go when visiting an NPS site.”¹⁴⁴ We concur. With researchers at places such as the UNC School of Education already finding grant funding to study self-directed student learning in digital environments, it is not difficult to imagine a joint NPS-university collaboration to study visitor engagement with NPS web resources.¹⁴⁵

Some parks are venturing beyond the confines of the uninspired standard nps.gov web template to develop attractive and innovative interpretive and archival sites. Notable are several new online exhibits—such as the one for Manzanar discussed above, and one for the Maggie L. Walker NHS in Richmond, Virginia—developed and hosted under the NPS Museum Management Program.¹⁴⁶ With inviting graphics, logical subsections, engaging visuals (including, for Maggie Walker, a virtual tour of her Richmond home), and modest-length, accessible narratives, these online exhibits are models for distance interpretation. Other parks (for example, Grand Canyon) are posting extensive photo collections (including historic photos) on the more flexible and accessible Flickr site.¹⁴⁷

Park-university collaborations, too, are making primary source digitization, creative online interpretation, and student engagement possible. In addition to the Clemson Open Parks Grid project, there are several park-specific collaborations. The Blue Ridge Parkway digitization initiative known as “Driving through Time” (developed in collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries and funded under the federal Library Services and Technology Act through the State Library of North Carolina), makes available in one place historic photographs, maps, drawings, and other documents pertaining to the parkway’s development, as well as offering short interpretive narratives that provide scholarly context for the park’s history.¹⁴⁸ It includes K-12 lesson plans and has involved university students in research and content development. Arizona State University’s “Nature, Culture, and History at the Grand Canyon” site, meanwhile, integrates and explores four hundred years of natural and cultural history on that iconic landscape through short narratives, images, maps, and educational materials.¹⁴⁹ Both projects hint at the expansive possibilities offered by collaborative digital history projects that involve parks, universities, and scholars. They expand the boundaries of the sites’ relevant histories beyond their actual geographical confines, as the digital medium makes it easier to offer a more broadly regional approach.

Other projects expand virtual visitors’ experience of a particular site. For example, the Blue Ridge Parkway project incorporates a large collection of georeferenced historical maps, which permit “seeing through” historical maps to present-day Google Earth landscapes in ways that allow users to visualize change over time. This technique—part of a larger digitally inspired flowering of geospatial humanities projects—offers great possibility for many

144 Respondent 11222.

145 UNC School of Education, Faculty News, “Jeffrey Greene, Cheryl Bolick Project Wins \$435,000 NSF Grant,” October 11, 2010, http://soe.unc.edu/news_events/faculty_news/2010/101011_greene.php.

146 National Park Service, Museum Management Program, Museum Collections, Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/Maggie_Walker/index.html.

147 National Park Service, Grand Canyon NPS’ Photostream, http://www.flickr.com/photos/grand_canyon_nps/collections.

148 Digital Blue Ridge Parkway, “Driving through Time.”

149 Arizona State University and Grand Canyon Association, Nature, Culture, and History at the Grand Canyon, “Introduction,” July 8, 2010, <http://grandcanyonhistory.clas.asu.edu/about.html>.



"Georeferencing" techniques permit overlaying historical maps, such as this one showing Tennessee's favored route for the Blue Ridge Parkway, onto present landscapes. By adjusting the historical map's opacity, users may see where the Parkway would have been had Interior Secretary Harold Ickes adopted Tennessee's plan rather than North Carolina's in 1934. Image courtesy "Driving Through Time: The Digital Blue Ridge Parkway."

parks, which are nearly always interpreting landscapes in which many key historical features have disappeared or been layered over by other developments. With the treasure trove of historical maps that NPS holds, these digital and spatial visualization techniques—combined with historical and contemporary GIS data—offer an exciting new arena for historical research, interpretation, and resource management planning that respects extant landscapes and on-the-ground resources without slighting important histories that are no longer visible on the land. Pioneering historical geographer Anne Kelly Knowles has employed these techniques to great effect in understanding the historical battlefield landscape and what General Lee could see at Gettysburg, although it does not appear that the Gettysburg website links to or uses her work.¹⁵⁰

Location-based historical interpretive information, furthermore, becomes even more exciting when considered in conjunction with dramatically expanded mobile and smart phone capabilities. Assuming connectivity (a large assumption in many park areas, we know), these technologies offer the prospect of delivering on-site interpretation and information pertinent to the visitor's precise vantage point. Interpretive professionals and public historians alike are seriously exploring what is possible through mobile technologies that may soon supplant the traditional Park Service wayside. Interpretive technologies, it is clear, can begin to address the dilemma of expensive, quickly obsolete, fixed physical exhibits, and the like, as more readily updated digital versions of those tools offer an opportunity to respond more easily to changing needs and new information.

¹⁵⁰ Patricia Cohen, "Geographic Information Systems Help Scholars See History," *New York Times*, July 26, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/27/arts/geographic-information-systems-help-scholars-see-history.html?_r=2.

A fascinating effort by Northern Michigan University's Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, coordinated by Craig Rademacher, tracks "New Media in Interpretation."¹⁵¹ Rademacher's focus on "new media as a way of communicating about public lands," investigates "how and why these new technologies mediate connections between agency, resource and the public." In another venue, Rademacher writes, "as mobile media is currently used in NPS areas its delivery is often seen as a one-time outreach effort, not an ever evolving on-site experience. Eventually on-site mobile media delivery will become valued. Visitors will seek it out as they bring their iPhones, Blackberry, and Android-based phone into parks, museums, and cultural sites. Make no mistake. It will happen. Will park managers and interpretive planners be prepared to deliver what the audience wants...and what can also benefit the resource?"¹⁵²

Even in 2008, on-site strategies such as cell-phone tours were making inroads. For instance, in order to engage casual visitors to Valley Forge National Historical Park—those many people who use the grounds for running or jogging, walking dogs, etc.—many of whom were carrying cell phones, the staff developed a service to make interpretive information easily available. Several other parks followed this lead.¹⁵³ Tools such as the GPS Ranger (developed by Bar Z Adventures of Austin, Texas), an interactive handheld GPS (global positioning system) that delivers place-triggered audiovisual messages to visitors, were already becoming widely used in several parks by 2008 as well.¹⁵⁴ At Vicksburg National Military Park, rental of the GPS Ranger tour was then the park's fourth best-selling product.¹⁵⁵

With the widespread adoption of smart phones, it seems likely that many parks will migrate toward downloadable mobile apps to help guide visitors. The options offered at the National Mall and Memorial's "Mobile Apps Page," for instance, include a QR code that allows iPhone and iPad users a link to iTunes, where several maps, visual aids, and tours can be downloaded.¹⁵⁶

These applications are well suited to location-based historical interpretation built on growing databases of historical archival material. Cleveland Historical, a mobile app developed by a partnership including scholars and programmers at the Cleveland State University's Center for Public History and Digital Humanities, allows iPhone and Android users to "explore the city's rich history through the GPS-enabled map, curated walking tours, historical essays, archival photographs, oral history audio, and documentary films."¹⁵⁷ This approach would be well suited to many NPS sites.

Finally, social media technology is providing unprecedented opportunities for professional connection and public outreach within the Park Service. The relaxation of some policies has allowed enterprising staff members to experiment with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and other resources. NPS does have a growing presence on Twitter; users can follow the Twitter feeds of the NPS (@NatlParkService—with 27,542 follows

151 Craig Rademacher, "New Media in Interpretation," <http://newmedia.nmu.edu/Home.html> (accessed November 10, 2011).

152 Craig Rademacher, "Mobile Wi-Fi, Power, And Interpretation," *HFC onMedia*, Harper's Ferry Center, January 2010. http://newmedia.nmu.edu/Articles_&_News/Entries/2010/1/15_Mobile_Media_Requirea_Mobile_Power.html.

153 "What New Media Products Are Parks Using Today?" *HFC onMedia*, Harper's Ferry Center, May/June 2008.

154 Kurt Repanshek, "Another Look at Those GPS Rangers in the National Parks," *National Parks Traveler*, August 22, 2008, <http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2008/08/another-look-those-gps-rangers-national-parks>.

155 "What New Media Products Are Parks Using Today?" 'See also "Another Look at the GPS Ranger: Shenandoah National Park and Vicksburg National Military Park," *HFC onMedia*, Harper's Ferry Center, September 2008; and "GPS Ranger Incorporates Accessibility," *HFC onMedia*, Harper's Ferry Center, December 2008.

156 NPS, National Mall and Memorial Parks, "Mobile App Page," <http://www.nps.gov/nama/photosmultimedia/app-page.htm>.

157 "Cleveland Historical," <http://app.clevelandhistorical.org/>.

as of this writing), the NPS Volunteer in Parks network (@NPSVIPNetwork), or a number of other NPS units. The Twitter feed of the African Burial Ground National Monument (@AFBurialGrndNPS, with more than 50,000 followers as of this writing) profiled in part 2 of this study is an especially good model of how Twitter can be used to reach new and broad audiences.

As we hinted above in discussing NPS's new embrace of social media, the fluid and easy conversation possible here can mitigate some of the professional isolation and disconnection that has hindered NPS collaborations with outside scholars. Even in the absence of support for significantly increased participation in professional historical conferences, social media offers many opportunities for building links that might lead to more professional collaboration and cross-fertilization.

In sum, *A Call to Action* now suggests that in its second century NPS will "use leading-edge technologies and social media to effectively communicate with and capture the interest of the public," and pledges to "reach new audiences and maintain a conversation with all Americans by transforming the NPS digital experience to offer rich, interactive, up-to-date content from every park and program [by creating] a user-friendly web platform that supports online and mobile technology including social media."¹⁵⁸

Yet despite the exciting developments and potential for explosive growth in the NPS's digital presence, the "conservative undertow" in NPS culture concerns us in this area as well. To cite an example, our informants describe plans for a major historical website associated with the Civil War sesquicentennial that would have incorporated recent, critical historical scholarship and creative uses of historical spatial data; however, due, apparently, to intervention from nonhistorians in NPS upper management who preferred a more "commemorative" approach, the site has never appeared, despite significant investments of time, funds, and professional expertise in developing it.

This situation points again to a need for historians to be at the table in planning for NPS deployment of new technologies. It also speaks to a need to confront (and accept) the fact that expansive interpretive and connectional possibilities offered by new technologies do represent a potential for history to escape comfortable boundaries and create the "dissonance" for the public that historians have long called for.¹⁵⁹ We urge that efforts at the creative use of technology in the service of history be encouraged, provided for in policy, supported financially and through training and staffing decisions, and extended throughout the Park Service.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 8.1 Expand opportunities for training and knowledge sharing among NPS staff via programs such as THATCamps and PWR's Media, Technology, and New Media working group to bring targeted trainings for tools like Zotero, Twitter, JSTOR, Omeka, GIS, and digital recording/oral history.
- 8.2 Upgrade and reconfigure the current NPS History E-Library portal in accordance with professional library and web standards (possibly through the Clemson Open Parks Grid Project) and ensure that the site is linked directly from NPS main history page. Ensure that the portal contains prominent links to all other pertinent collections of NPS historical materials. Encourage regular submission of new studies to the History Portal.

¹⁵⁸ National Park Service, *A Call to Action*, 13.

¹⁵⁹ Jill Ogline, "'Creating Dissonance for the Visitor': The Heart of the Liberty Bell Controversy," *Public Historian* 26, no. 3 (August 2004): 49–58.

- 96 | 8.3 Initiate conversations with Clemson University about expanding historical content for the Open Parks Grid project.
- 8.4 Work with the National Archives to see that the OAH-NPS-produced finding aid for Record Group 79 is made searchable and prominently available from both the NPS and the NARA Record Group 79 websites.
- 8.5 Improve the quality of, and make more easily accessible and attractive, the historical content on individual park websites. Develop a checklist of things that parks would be encouraged to include or link to from their sites (including Historic Resource Studies, Administrative Histories, non-NPS repositories of materials on the park, and information about how to access their archives if they have one.)

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.6 Integrate internal databases (NPS Focus, NPS Library, eTIC, the History E-Library) for ease of searching. To the degree possible, make eTIC publicly available.
- 8.7 Launch a Twitter and Facebook feed from the chief historian's office to promote NPS history and draw attention to relevant projects outside the agency. This could also serve simultaneously as an internal resource for NPS historians, to address the sense of professional isolation and need to share news of innovation discussed in findings 1, 2 and 3).
- 8.8 Continue to support and enable enhancements of social media presence via training and workshops in which staff interact and teach each other about effective processes to talk about history and engage publics. Encourage individual NPS staff to maintain Twitter and Facebook feeds to enable them to engage in professional conversations through these media.
- 8.9 Invite, through the OAH, outside review of the full Civil War 150 website as developed; deploy as quickly as possible.
- 8.10 Develop internal capacity with historical GIS applications so as to advise sites in building online content (also deployable in visitor centers) to help reveal vanished landscapes and features.
- 8.11 Develop a systemwide strategy for mobile interpretive apps; with partners, seek grant funding to develop them as appropriate historical content becomes available.
- 8.12 Replace current national NPS website template with web tools that are more flexible, more easily deployed to and by diverse staffs, and easily customized in terms of content and categories to parks' specific needs and situations.

Finding 9: Stewardship and Interpretation of Agency History

Although it holds massive archives about the development of the national park system, the NPS has traditionally considered its own story (and the story of its parks) to be somehow separate from the history “out there” that it is charged with preserving or telling. Insufficient attention is paid to the stewardship of the agency’s own history, and the consequences both undermine research, interpretation, and management and create inefficiencies. The NPS will be a better steward and interpreter of the nation’s historic resources and a better partner with the public when it can more effectively steward and interpret its own past. The upcoming NPS centennial in 2016 provides an excellent opportunity for service-wide efforts at greater self-reflection.

Good stewardship and effective interpretation begin at home. While park administrative histories as a management tool have until recently been undertaken regularly, the agency has only erratically ensured that the materials or incentives are in place to support this work. For instance, the superintendents’ annual reports that form the bedrock of administrative histories are submitted only sporadically, and little in the way of oral history is collected from longtime agency veterans. As one participant in a conference listening session observed, “when someone retires, all we ask them for are their keys.”¹⁶⁰

The agency also is an indifferent curator of its own institutional memory. Several survey respondents affirm that “document retention practices are capricious, relying most often on the decisions of individual employees. . . . There seems to be no larger vision of for how desperately important to begin systematically documenting the contested narratives of those who have used these lands.”¹⁶¹ Others, describing the loss of materials crucial to the agency’s history, suggested a need for closer attention to records management at the park and regional levels.

In 2008, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) documented these shortcomings. The NAPA study identified serious problems and backlogs with the NPS’s archival and curatorial efforts, and noted that the annual Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) goals for completing park administrative histories and historic resource studies (the only goals for the NPS History Program and key studies for understanding parks’ histories) were dropped in 2006 and never restored.¹⁶²

The NPS history website maintained by the chief historian’s office at WASO is a heroic effort to address part of these deficiencies, as it posts dozens of documents that together track the agency’s history.¹⁶³ In some cases, the hardworking manager of that page has located one of a handful of surviving copies of some reports, in effect rescuing them from extinction. But the documents posted there are not easily searchable or well linked to other repositories; most users would need to know in advance what they are seeking to navigate the page effectively. The website is a good stopgap solution, but it falls far short of what is now possible with electronic archives.

The absence of mindful and well-supported stewardship of the agency’s history has consequences for both management and public engagement with park audiences. Most obvious,

160 NCPH annual meeting, 2010, Pensacola, Florida.

161 Respondent 11759.

162 National Academy of Public Administration Panel, Frank Hodsoll, James Kunde, and Denis P. Galvin, *Saving Our History: A Review of National Park Cultural Resource Programs*, a Report by a Panel of the National Academy of Public Administration for the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, October 2008, 35–44.
http://www.napawash.org/pc_management_studies/NPS_Saving_Our_History_Oct2008.pdf.

163 National Park Service, “History E-Library,” <http://www.nps.gov/history/history>.

98 | inefficiencies result as NPS sponsors studies whose ideas, findings, and recommendations are forgotten, only to resurface later as part of “new” initiatives.

The best example of this tendency directly affected this report. More than two-thirds of the way through our work, we were stunned to discover that in 1988 the NPS had undertaken a study almost identical to ours, circulating in an issue of *CRM Bulletin* a questionnaire that articulated nearly identical concerns. The issue of the bulletin featured articles describing history practice in parks, regional offices, and WASO, and in programs such as the National Register. In the lead article, “Shaping the Future of the NPS History Program,” historian Stephanie Toothman (now Associate Director for Cultural Resources at WASO), noted that “the number of park historians [had] dwindled to ‘endangered species’ status” and enjoined her colleagues, “who have some responsibility for managing our historical resources,” to respond to a survey about the “who, when, where and what of ‘doing’ history in the Service.” Dozens of people apparently responded. Any data collected in this effort would have been enormously enlightening for the present study, vastly shortening the amount of time necessarily dedicated to identifying survey themes and crafting the present survey questions, and facilitating some longitudinal comparisons across the results. But in 2011, we could locate only about one file folder’s worth of information about that study. Like many others the NPS has commissioned, it apparently languished, and has now been almost entirely forgotten.¹⁶⁴ The resulting inefficiency and missed opportunity is disappointing.

The failure to pay sufficient attention to agency and park history emerges in some degree from the NPS’s legal mandates and agency self-understanding. Park Service actions have profoundly shaped landscapes, land-use patterns, local communities, and what is seen and experienced at every NPS unit. When it comes to interpretation, however, the agency tends to view itself as a transparent interpreter of generally “outside” histories that are perceived to have stopped before the NPS arrived on the scene. The agency appears to see its role as “preserving” and “interpreting” stories that have to do with everything but the agency itself.

This approach, while an understandable product of “legislative intent” and the emphasis and interpretive focus on a designated “period of significance” for each site, is both out of step with current historical scholarship on the parks and detrimental to NPS attempts to engage the public in the current and future management challenges of the sites it stewards.¹⁶⁵

In this regard, the NPS would benefit greatly from engaging the self-reflexive approach to interpretation that is one of the most important developments of recent historiography, museum practice, and even documentary film practice. Simply put, self-reflexive interpretation acknowledges the position of the storyteller vis-à-vis the story being told.

This approach—especially appropriate as the Park Service approaches its centennial in 2016—can be useful to the parks in at least two respects. One of the crucial insights of recent scholarship on public memory is that meaning resides both in the past event itself and in the act of commemorating and remembering it, and that, because of the interplay between these, historical narrators are always changing. The parks are ideal places to make those processes transparent.

164 “CRM Bulletin General Issue.” *CRM Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (February 1988), <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/issue.cfm?volume=11&number=01>; National Park Service, “1988 NPS Survey of Historians in the Park Units Dealing with History—WASO from Jones,” 1988; and Stephanie Toothman to Anne Whisnant, email, June 20, 2010; Whisnant call to Bearss, June 2010.

165 See, for example, Anne Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Joan, Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Seth Bruggeman *Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008); and David Louter *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

Even at parks that are not primarily commemorative or “historic” (as strictly defined; of course, all parks are historic, whatever their resources or emphasis), much recent scholarship about the parks (including that found in recent park administrative histories) has demonstrated that NPS actions have profoundly reshaped landscapes, travel and commercial patterns, and lifeways, sometimes breeding significant local resentment and debate. Navigating relationships and, increasingly, partnerships, with surrounding neighbors or gateway communities is a persistent and often thorny issue for nearly all parks, as is fostering public appreciation for the myriad challenges of park management and preservation in the face of political, environmental, and other threats.

From both standpoints, the twenty-first-century NPS can no longer afford to present itself as an ahistorical and invisible container for histories that do not involve the parks themselves. Conducting meaningful interpretation that supports efforts at both stewardship and larger understandings of how history works needs to start with a concerted NPS effort to preserve and understand its own history and include itself in the story.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 9.1 Fill the now-vacant position of a bureau historian (in the chief historian’s office) who will curate the agency’s institutional memory and collect, research, publish, consult, and speak about the history of the agency, including soliciting from superintendents the annual narrative reports that are often the building blocks for understanding the development of NPS management and culture.
- 9.2 Encourage parks to think about how to incorporate their own histories and the historical context of their founding and enabling legislation into interpretation. Make use of the bureau historian, OAH scholars, and other internal and external resources to research and interpret these histories.
- 9.3 Address spotty compliance regarding the submission of annual reports—the foundation on which sound administrative histories rest—by developing a template that superintendents can easily complete over the course of the year, and make submission of the annual report a condition of successful performance in the superintendent’s annual evaluation.
- 9.4 See recommendation 8.2 above regarding changes to the NPS History E-Library Portal.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.5 Establish and maintain a schedule of oral history interviews with retiring and retired staff.
- 9.6 Publish online an annual bibliography of published work and recently completed dissertations pertaining to NPS history.
- 9.7 Work with OAH to convene and organize network of OAH scholars who have worked on/with NPS projects.

100 | Finding 10: The Constraints of Boundaries, Enabling Legislation, and Founding Histories

The Park Service's own founding histories and boundaries are too often construed as constraining, rather than facilitating, the presenting and interpreting of history. Partly because of the manner in which parks are created and partly because of their need to fulfill missions dictated by enabling legislation, histories in and of the parks are often trapped in confining, static boxes. The inflexibility of interpretive and management plans has the same effect. A more sophisticated, innovative, and flexible approach to these histories, boundaries, plans, and enabling legislation would strengthen NPS's aims with regard to relevancy, stewardship, and education.

History at many sites seems to be understood as having ended at the park's creation and stopped at its boundaries, its interpretation fixed in time based on language of often decades-old legislation. But these outdated conceptions of the past hinder sites from highlighting continuities between past and present, relationships with larger contexts, and notions of so-called natural or recreational parks as having relevant *histories* too. Similarly, the possibility of understanding historical parks (and even now-dated exhibits, when still in place) themselves as artifacts of ongoing public and professional discussion of the meaning of the past is diminished.

We understand that history practice in the NPS is constrained by legal mandates that do not apply to historical inquiry in academic settings.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, openness to ranging beyond the strict confines of legal boundaries and establishing legislation varies greatly from one NPS site to another. Trained historians could help increase such openness where it is absent, and explore ways to think creatively beyond those limits. For instance the language captured within a site's enabling legislation is itself a historical artifact that documents the time in which the legislation was passed; hence, contemplating together with visitors why certain themes were emphasized and others were not in that particular moment in time becomes a chance to contextualize the legislation itself. Enabling legislation need not—and should not—be used to close interpretive opportunities, but rather should become an opportunity to open them.

It follows, then, that a park's mission is also to research, interpret, and explore the moment at which it was created—and this is work that historians are well positioned and trained to undertake. Our survey respondents describe ongoing struggles with defining parks' areas of mission and focus as tension arises between the original ideas about the park and its ever-changing needs over time. For example, one respondent complains, "parks do a lousy job of breaking out from the confines of their enabling legislation; they interpret their stories too narrowly."¹⁶⁷ Another agrees: "community members, and the NPS to a point... tie the hands of park sites [so] that they can only talk about subjects covered within their enabling legislation..., while historians identify that everything is tied together.... If you talk about George Washington, it is appropriate to discuss his practices, his views, the impacts of his views on slaves, American Indians, etc. But...[communities] haven't embraced [this] more comprehensive view" of history.¹⁶⁸

166 Stephanie S. Toothman, "Cultural Resource Management in Natural Areas of the National Park System," *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 65–76.

167 Respondent 10329.

168 Respondent 11602.

Others, however, are more conservative. One notes that “we start with our enabling legislation which tells us what we are to protect, manage, and interpret.”¹⁶⁹ Asked about historians having more input into park planning, another insists that “actually, historians should have played *less* of a role in park management decisions, and kept the park’s focus on paleontology instead of conjuring up a cultural landscape for ranching, that was not mentioned in the park’s enabling legislation.”¹⁷⁰

We tend to concur with the view, and urge NPS to take a more expansive broader path—to probe the largest possible questions that a resource allows us to explore. Several brief examples illustrate the possibilities and limitations of a more flexible approach:

De Soto NM (Bradenton, Florida): In the wake of the four hundredth anniversary of the Hernando De Soto expedition of 1539, De Soto NM’s 1948 enabling legislation authorized “an appropriate memorial” to the conquistador on Tampa Bay. The park’s designation came at a time when local citizens in Bradenton considered De Soto and his men to have begun “to blaze the way to a better civilization than that of which [they were] a conspicuous part.” Yet by 1993, in the wake of American Indian critiques of Columbus and his legacy, and of Indian protests during the local De Soto festival, the celebratory tone that had prevailed at the park’s creation had given way to a more critical perspective on what many people termed *genocide*.¹⁷¹

What, in that altered context, would constitute “an appropriate memorial” to De Soto? To its credit, the tiny park—staffed in the 1990s and early 2000s with several professional historians and in regular contact with established De Soto scholars—expanded the historic notion to encompass native perspectives, new scholarship, and a revisionist take on the conquest.



From the late 1940s to the early 1990s, citizens in Bradenton, Florida used the beach at De Soto National Memorial to stage an annual reenactment of De Soto’s 1539 landing. This picture is from 1957. (Photography courtesy National Park Service.)

¹⁶⁹ Respondent 11522,

¹⁷⁰ Respondent 10604.

¹⁷¹ See David Whisnant and Anne Whisnant, *Small Park, Large Issues: De Soto National Memorial and the Commemoration of a Difficult History* (National Park Service Southeast Region, 2007), 37, 153.

Unfortunately, one of the most promising, creative new avenues for interpretation—viewing the park itself as a historical artifact of the commemorative mood that held sway in 1939 and a remnant of a particular (but probably erroneous) theory about De Soto’s landing site—has failed to penetrate a park that still sees its primary mission as telling the stories of 1539, not 1939. This has happened despite the fact that as a national memorial, the site is clearly acknowledged as a site of memory, with no need to claim direct connection to the historical figure commemorated.¹⁷² Consequently, memorial visitors leave with no sense either of how the ever-changing scholarship about De Soto’s route or the dynamics of public memory and commemoration have shaped what they have (and have not) seen and heard.

Shenandoah NP, meanwhile, established in the 1930s primarily as a nature preserve, struggled with the legacy of forced removals of hundreds of local residents from parklands as part of the effort to return Shenandoah to a “natural” state and to create “an eastern park in the western tradition.” Anger among removed residents and their descendants festered and clouded the park’s relationship with the surrounding region, especially because the story of the removals—attention to which the park did not consider part of its mandate—was largely buried for decades.

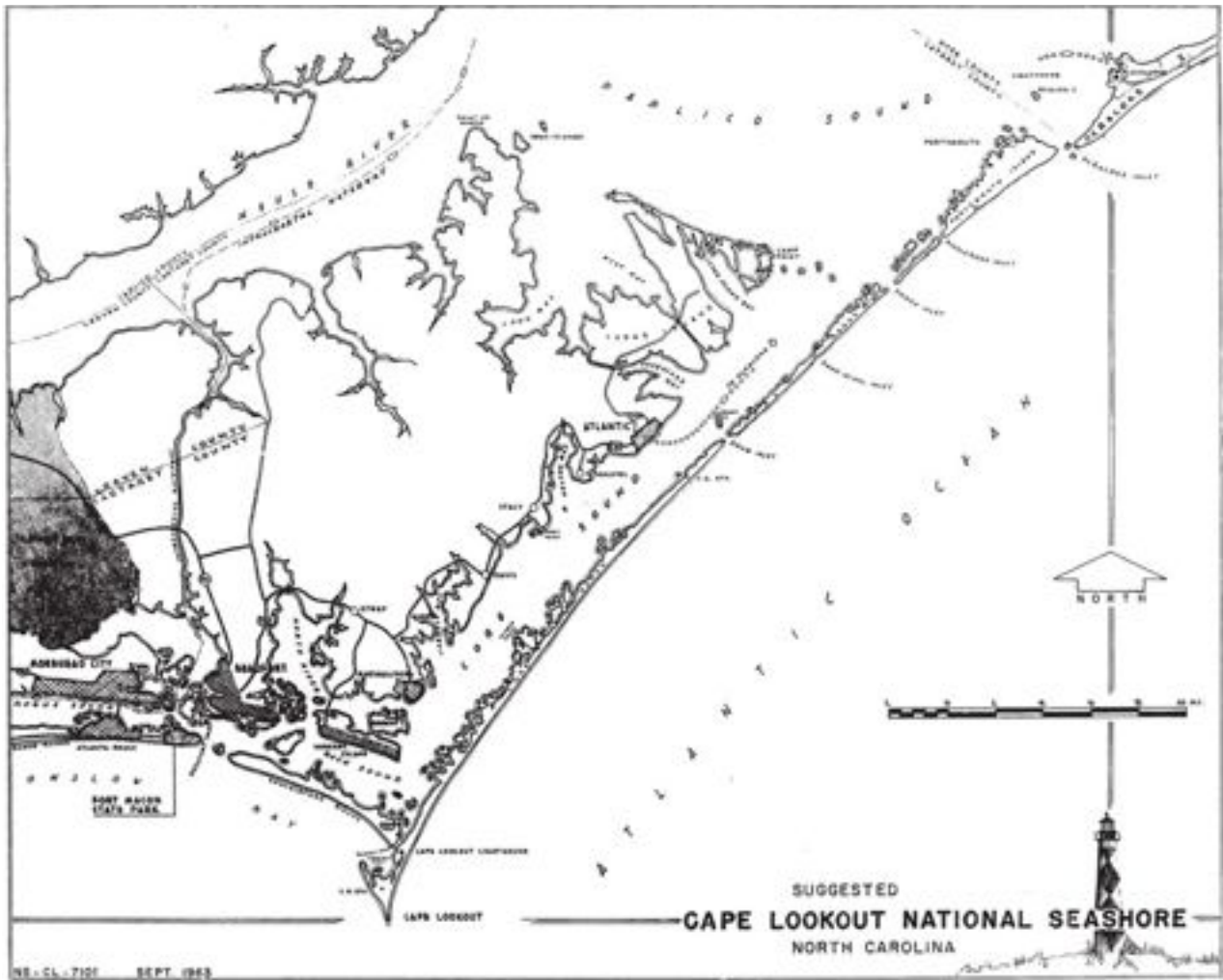
Finally, in the 1990s, the park undertook a long and careful process that culminated in the 2007 installation of extensive new exhibits at the park’s Mission 66-era visitor center. The new exhibit honestly confronted the conflicting agendas at work during the park’s creation, the dishonesty that underlay the population removals, as well as the park’s subsequent struggle with segregated visitor facilities. Based in deep and tenacious research by the park’s historian and developed through extensive consultation with descendants of the removed (organized as Children of the Shenandoah), the exhibit emerged as one of the Park Service’s best efforts to date to “manage cultural resources in a natural park” and historicize the park itself. A corollary benefit was increased public understanding of and engagement with the park’s ongoing management issues.¹⁷³

Like the statements in enabling legislation, physical and conceptual boundaries are only imperfectly congruent with the histories they purport to interpret. Many of our respondents urged NPS to be bolder in rethinking the legal perimeters of parks and sites. Similarly, a turn in historical literature over the past decade has encouraged the whole field of history to transcend histories grounded strictly in the nation-state, in order to work at a transnational scale. Likewise, ecologists and other scientists have successfully shifted attention to migration patterns that cross, but are not encompassed within, a given park. Just as the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) encourages “landscape-level” approaches to conservation, so do we encourage “landscape-level” approaches to historical research and interpretation.

A recently completed NPS historic resource study of Cape Lookout National Seashore illustrates the benefits of this kind of expanded conceptual and investigative approach. Cape Lookout’s existing interpretive infrastructure and programs emphasize an older, tightly bounded interpretive framework: a set of lonely barrier islands, cut off from both the watery world to the east and the landlocked (and consequently underdeveloped) interior of North Carolina, long inhabited by a culturally and economically insular set of folks who live as they “always” have, and speak the “hoi toide” brogue of their ancestors.

172 Harpers Ferry Center, Barry Mackintosh, and Janet McDonnell, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005), 31.

173 See Douglas K. Morris, foreword to “Shenandoah: Managing Cultural Resources in a Natural Park,” *CRM: Cultural Resource Management* 21, no. 1 (1998): 3; and Anne Mitchell Whisnant and David E. Whisnant, “Exhibition Review: ‘Blue Ridge Parkway, America’s Favorite Journey,’ Blue Ridge Parkway, and ‘Within a Day’s Drive of Millions,’ Shenandoah National Park,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009), http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/96.3/exr_6.html.



Planning map for Cape Lookout National Seashore, 1963. (Courtesy National Park Service.)

More expansively (and appropriately) conceptualized analysis from an “Atlantic world” perspective easily sets aside such notions, situating the Outer Banks within an Atlantic regional system characterized by four hundred years of intense, continuous trade and cultural exchange with the entire Atlantic coast, as well as with the trade and settlement system of the Caribbean and western Europe. Viewing the barrier islands in such a context, visitors can understand Portsmouth Village, within which perhaps half of Cape Lookout’s historic resources and much of its significant geography lies, in a far more complex (and interesting) way.¹⁷⁴

174 See David E. Whisnant and Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Gateway to the Atlantic: Cape Lookout National Seashore Historic Resource Study* (National Park Service Southeast Region, 2012). It is ironic to note, however, that, the 2011 Cape Lookout National Seashore Long-Range Interpretive Plan, completed after the OAH-sponsored historic resource study referenced (which suggested alternative perspectives and specifically recommend a new interpretive frame that would “most importantly, emphasize the park area’s essential but ever-changing connectedness both to mainland North Carolina and to the larger maritime worlds to which it has always been joined by the sea”), continued under its “Cultural Geography” theme to stress the islands’ “isolation,” and “distinctive speech patterns, cultures, folkways, living traditions, and social ideology.” See Harpers Ferry Center, *Cape Lookout National Seashore Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, National Park Service, 2011, 15, http://www.nps.gov/caloparkmgmt/upload/CALO-LRIP-2011_small.pdf. This outcome provides yet another example of the disconnection of commissioned historical research studies from interpretive efforts.

A promising development in the NPS that has great possibility for engaging this more expansive perspective, and speaks to the matter of more tangible boundaries, is the growth of national heritage areas (NHAs). NHAs are partnerships that link governments at all levels, the nonprofit sector, and private interests to engage local energy in preserving nationally significant resources as “living landscapes” in which people continue to live and work. Intended to assist in the conservation of natural resources while also boosting local and regional economies (largely through cultural tourism), they emerge from grassroots movements. They do not involve federal land acquisition, though land trusts or other agencies may acquire property, and zoning laws are used to manage the landscape. According to the Park Service, “the partnership approach creates the opportunity for a diverse range of constituents to voice a range of visions and perspectives. Partners collaborate to shape a plan and implement a strategy that focuses on the distinct qualities that make their region special.”¹⁷⁵ Paul Bray has called the NHA program “a response to a societal need to reconcile conservation and economic imperatives.”¹⁷⁶

The first NHA, the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, was established in 1984.¹⁷⁷ As of this writing, there are forty-nine NHAs, encompassing thousands of square miles and populations in the tens of millions. In 2010, the NPS budget sought \$17.8 million to finance heritage areas—an increase of \$2.1 million over the previous budget, reflecting the expanded number of heritage partnership areas authorized by Congress, which grew from twenty-seven in 2008 to forty-nine in 2010, including nine new areas authorized in March 2009.

The benefits of this approach, as articulated by the NPS, are several. Because areas encompass a range of resources, NHAs tend to blur distinctions between natural and cultural resources; by definition, they engage the community in substantive ways; and in so doing, they have greater potential to engage youth and attract new constituencies.¹⁷⁸ Other advantages include freedom from NPS bureaucratic structures, making the NHA more agile, more responsive to changing local contexts.

Preservationist Carroll Van West has sounded a note of caution, however: “The dependence on local support can generate a consensus, noncontroversial approach to local history. Where historical societies, museums, and universities are engaged partners, it is a different story. Heritage areas may rely on their professional expertise and the skills of their partners to carry out field projects, research, exhibit development, and public programming. Where these same partners are missing...most attention goes to marketing and development, leaving the education and interpretation projects underfunded and often lacking in scholarly credibility.” Put another way, it can be easy for heritage areas to fall back on boosterism: “the scholarly contribution is a must if a heritage area wishes to be successful.... Otherwise, it is too easy for communities to mouth the stereotypes of American history that they assume everyone wants to hear.”¹⁷⁹

How can NPS harness the advantages of the heritage area without sacrificing interpretive rigor? Perhaps one answer is ensuring that institutions of higher education are among the partners. The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, for instance, is administered by the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University. The result has been a “community-centered, scholarly facilitated program” that looks beyond battlefields

175 National Park Service, National Heritage Areas, “What Are National Heritage Areas?” <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas>.

176 Paul M. Bray, “The Heritage Area Phenomenon: Where It Is Coming From,” CRM 17, no. 8 (1994): 3–4.

177 For the long history of the NHA impulse see Brenda Barrett, “Roots for the National Heritage Area Family Tree,” *George Wright Forum*, special issue on the stewardship of heritage areas, 20, no. 2 (2003): 41–49.

178 National Park System Advisory Board, *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas*, 2006, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/advisory/NHAreport.pdf>.

179 Carroll Van West, “Historians and the Opportunities of National Heritage Areas,” *OAH Newsletter*, August 2009, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2009aug/west.html>.

toward larger historical contexts. The program has brought a wide range of scholars to public programs and has provided subvention grants for new research.¹⁸⁰ This is rare. Most NHAs are nonprofits (for example, Essex National Heritage Area), while others are federal commissions (for example, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor); state agencies (for example, National Coal Heritage Area); or parts of municipalities (for example, Lackawanna Heritage Valley).

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 10.1** Use OAH scholars' visits to parks to consider the relationships between founding legislation and current interpretation and scholarship, and to explore opportunities to expand interpretation, where appropriate, beyond park boundaries and legislative mandates so as to incorporate relevant contexts and histories that have emerged since a site's founding.
- 10.2** Continue to engage the nation's most knowledgeable scholars to write thematic and park-based historical studies (to be published as NPS handbooks) that connect individual sites to larger themes and contexts and move away from the interpretation of parks as isolated islands.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.3** During park planning initiatives that impinge upon resource management and historical interpretation, take the opportunity to assess the continuing relevance and adequacy of a site's enabling legislation in relation to ongoing historical scholarship and park interpretive and planning needs.
- 10.4** Find ways to incorporate new technologies (especially geospatial and mapping) into park interpretation, both on-site and online, in ways that allow exploration of vanished landscapes and resources and trans-park and extra-park histories that enlarge visitors' understandings of park contexts.
- 10.5** Engage visitors in consideration of and conversations about the outdated exhibits, their meanings in the past and today, and how they might be improved to address contemporary publics. This might involve creating an "exhibit-as-artifact" team of historians and interpreters to consider ways to incorporate outdated exhibits or other interpretive materials into park interpretation at several sites where exhibit upgrades or updates are not imminently possible.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Ben H. Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army: The State Guard and Its Role in Reconstruction, 1867–1869* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

106 | **Finding 11: Fixed and Fearful Interpretation**

The NPS's interpretive approach has tended to focus on fixed and final conclusions or "themes" that are supposed to guide interpretation over the long term. This approach has artificially sequestered interpretation from the original open-ended experiences of historical actors, from dynamic, ongoing patterns of scholarship, and from engaging visitors with flexible, multiple perspectives on interpretation. This fixed approach, in turn, reinforces a tendency toward "defensive history" that seems to stem from a certain timidity in the face of controversy or criticism. These dynamics predispose NPS to underestimate visitors and view them as people to be instructed rather than listened to and engaged.

The NPS should, of course, strive to present "what really happened" during (and because of) events that occurred on a site. But from interpretive plans through ranger talks to exhibits and visitor centers, NPS often reduces "what really happened" to factual details that support two or three fixed and timeless assertions about the significance of the event. This approach draws an artificial distinction between "facts" and "interpretation." In fact, "what really happened" here, as trained historians can reconstruct, is usually that participants faced challenges, struggled to frame a range of choices about what to say and do, and often argued about the best course. Before taking the actions that would make a particular place famous, "historic" people explored what they were capable of, afraid of, and hopeful for, and how they could engage people who lived and thought differently from themselves.

Many sites, in short, were originally open-ended places of controversy: they are significant today because they were once the scene of, for example, vigorous debate about whether or how to form a new government, conduct a battle, respond to a law some found unjust, or desegregate a school. The controversial nature of original events then became the source of subsequent debate about alternatives the original actors chose not to take, for example whether to charge Union positions on the third day at Gettysburg or to abolish slavery in the Constitution. The (sometimes unanticipated) consequences of those original actions over time became sources of contested and changing interpretations both of the original events and of the possibilities for healing some of their legacies.

History then becomes a record of ongoing and contested interpretation in which the meanings of past places, actions, and events are rarely consensual, fixed, or final. Reinterpretation and competing perspectives are at the heart of the historical process. And if presented in this way, interpretive history sends visitors the crucial civic message that history is neither made by fate nor has inevitable outcomes, but is rather something people like themselves create by probing what they are capable of and responsible for.

Even when NPS has tried to incorporate recent scholarship, it has sometimes done so in ways that have frozen what was dynamic in that scholarship, or has failed to recognize the multiple perspectives that were so central to developing it. The cumbersome processes for identifying interpretive themes for parks, combined with a one-time transfer of historical scholarship to a park—which takes a concentrated form during a visit from OAH scholars or the creation of a resource study or other research report—have in some cases undermined the uses of scholarship to engage visitors with contemporary civic concerns.

For example, in struggling to treat slavery as a cause of the Civil War, many Civil War sites focus on the moment of emancipation but rarely discuss the challenges that emancipation presented to actors of the time. Recent historians have argued that many people (including Abraham Lincoln) who disliked slavery held back from championing emancipation outright because they feared what would happen to slaves once they were freed; the challenge was not so much to decide whether slavery was an evil system, but to define and embrace the

social and political rights and economic possibilities freedmen would enjoy if emancipated. Such questions did not end with emancipation; indeed, they continue to haunt American civic life. Confining interpretation to the question of slavery or freedom keeps this issue frozen safely in the past while at the same time cutting history practice in NPS off from the more recent scholarship that informs narratives like that described here as well as deeper



A 1940 HABS/HAER photograph shows what came to be called the “symbolic birthplace cabin” of Abraham Lincoln, enshrined in a neoclassical memorial building constructed in Hodgenville, Kentucky in 1911. The saga of the cabin (whose connections to Lincoln are dubious) illustrates the complex politics of historical memory in which many National Park sites have been involved. (Lester Jones, Photographer August 22, 1940. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

By imagining a singular national inheritance as the “civic glue” for all Americans, NPS not only misses the chance to represent numerous, complex, and often conflicting interpretations of history found among Americans but also overlooks the simple fact that Americans might have different interpretations to begin with.

Asking questions of the civic costs and meanings of sacrifice in wartime illuminates basic civic meanings of war. Remembering the bloodiest day of American history—the Battle of Antietam—raises such questions, often painfully. At the end of an Antietam talk in 2009, a team member heard a ranger tell visitors that the bloodshed was the inevitable price of freedom. But a year earlier, that same team member heard a U.S. Army colonel tell a staff ride from the Army War College that soldiers had died in vain at Antietam because of incompetent military leadership. If a battlefield can be a place for candid discussion of whether soldiers died in vain, surely NPS ought to be able to present controversy with equal candor.

We have observed occasions on which the drive to identify a single frozen interpretation sometimes overwhelmed obvious opportunities to present multiple perspectives that were present at the time and clearly resonant in the present. A U.S. Army staff ride from West Point to Harpers Ferry and Antietam observed by one team member in 2005 began by challenging participants with an issue. Robert E. Lee explained that the army he was leading to invade Maryland would be greeted by Marylanders as an “army of liberation.” No, replied his boss, Confederate president Jefferson Davis, Marylanders would view it as an “army of occupation.”¹⁸²

At a time when the American occupation/liberation of Iraq was being deeply contested, soldiers found great resonance in this disagreement between Lee and Davis. Yet, attending two consecutive NPS ranger talks at the site sometime later, our team member observed that the rangers shied away from introducing multiple views or ambivalent conclusions to visitors. One ranger framed the battle around his respect for George McClellan’s military acumen and contempt for Lincoln’s, while an hour later the next ranger reversed the view to praise Lincoln and condemn McClellan. There is good evidence for both views and a good argument for encouraging rangers to develop individual interpretations, but in this case, the problem was that both presented their interpretations as if they were facts, not interpretations, and gave no indication that the battle could be understood in other ways.

The most basic change NPS should adopt was captured by Edward Ayers in his OAH-sponsored evaluation of Appomattox Court House National Historic Park: “Appomattox should be portrayed as the hub of an unfolding, unfinished and complex story rather than as the end of a single, simple story secured safely in the past.... Appomattox offers a wonderful way to show visitors how history is continually redefined and manufactured.... Reunion should be treated as a process, unfolding slowly and unevenly over generations. It should be treated as a subject in and of itself, not as the fact to be commemorated and romanticized.”¹⁸³ Ayers’s advice for how to present history at Appomattox should resonate throughout the NPS.

An approach that sees interpretation as unfinished and unfolding poses challenges not only for how rangers and other interpreters present history but also for how interpretive media and formats that are more fixed and inflexible depict it. Especially challenging, as one of our study informants (a thirty-four-year veteran of the NPS) puts it, is staying “current with scholarship when exhibits may be in place for 25 years or more.”¹⁸⁴ Along with

181 See Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); and Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), for recent examples.

182 David Thelan, 2005.

183 Edward L. Ayers, “Appomattox Court House National Historical Park: OAH Site Report,” September 2000.

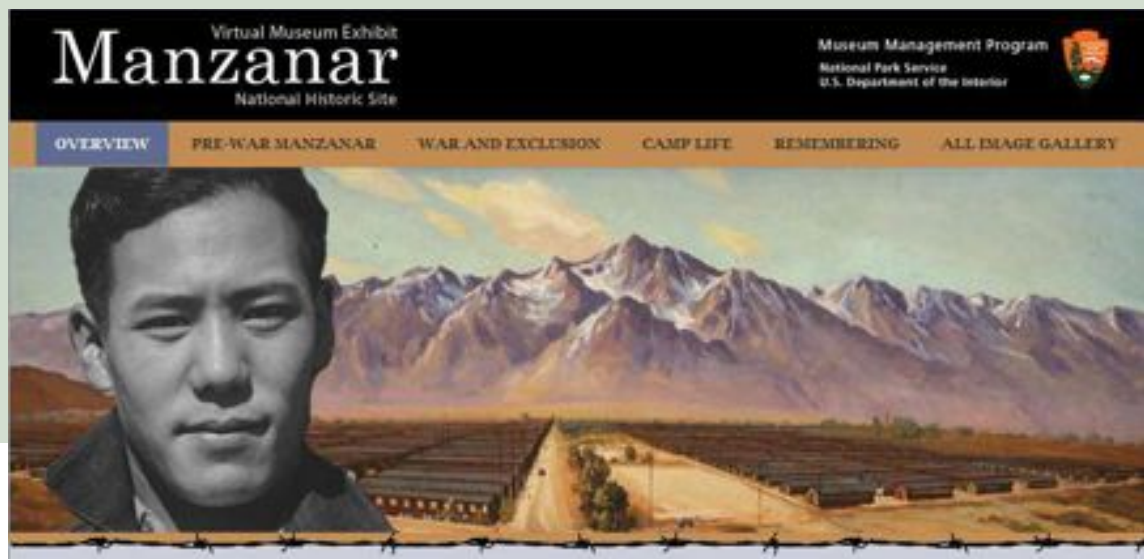
184 Phil Noblitt, personal narrative for State of History team, 2009.

members of the NPCA and NAPA study teams and other scholars who have visited parks since 1995 through the OAH-NPS cooperative agreement, we observed that exhibits and other interpretive materials at too many sites are woefully outdated—many installed in the Mission 66 era (1950s–1960s) or in the 1970s. They have fallen behind not only the latest scholarship on their subjects but also, perhaps more significantly, on an entirely new approach to history.

We applaud the expansive and engaging exhibits recently developed at sites like Gettysburg and Shenandoah, which draw on the latest scholarship while provoking visitors to consider different perspectives. Gettysburg’s new museum, for example, includes a digital exhibit regarding the monuments installed on the battlefield by the generations after the Civil War to introduce visitors to issues of memory and to frame the battle in broader historical contexts. But such new installations are both more expensive and less adaptable than brochures, K-12 curricula, and websites, which can be updated more frequently at lower cost.



Online exhibits create the opportunity for fluid and up-to-date interpretation.
(Images Courtesy National Park Service.)



But even without updating media of whatever sort, it is possible to introduce visitors to the controversies that lie behind even the most iconic pieces of the nation's inheritance. Monuments on the National Mall, for instance, give an aura of unchanging permanence, but the history of those monuments is in nearly every case marked by arguments that have given the monument different forms and uses by different people at different times (and still do).¹⁸⁵ The National Mall is thus an ideal place, as Kirk Savage has recently argued, to introduce visitors to the contested, evolving patterns by which Americans remember, remake, and use our civic traditions to meet new challenges.

FEAR OF CONTROVERSY

Closely related to this preference for fixed and final interpretation is an inclination to approach past controversies with caution, and to create interpretive themes that will not rock any boats. Put another way, one of the greatest challenges to interpretation in the NPS, argued the late chief of interpreter training David Larsen, is that interpretation often proceeds out of fear.¹⁸⁶ Another of our informants, a longtime NPS interpreter with a graduate degree in history, adds, "I'm not sure that the NPS, as an agency, is comfortable presenting controversial issues. Perhaps it's the bureaucratic imperative to avoid controversy—better not to be too provocative. I often got the impression that controversy was best left to people in academia. There was more emphasis on getting one's facts right than thought about what overriding interpretation to present."¹⁸⁷

In light of the fact that the seminal writings on interpretation in the NPS—Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage* and Larsen's *Meaningful Interpretation*—identify provocation as the most important function of interpretation, this fear is both counterproductive and painful to observe in action.¹⁸⁸ Respondents to our survey identify various components of this fear.

First, there is a reluctance to admit errors, inaccuracies, and fabrications in which sites are embedded. With its traditional understanding of historical authority dependent most fundamentally on accuracy, the NPS has sometimes acted hesitantly even when controversies flared or critiques of its sites emerged. It was, for instance, very slow to acknowledge that the log cabin it featured at the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace NHS had no documented connection to Lincoln.

Second, NPS has acted hesitantly to embrace new scholarly themes. Many Civil War sites, having focused so long on battles, had trouble emphasizing the centrality of slavery to that war, perhaps the greatest interpretive shift the NPS has ever made. But in an ironic illustration of the slowness in adapting to changing scholarly directions, once having caught up with the broad turn toward social history, the agency then had trouble adapting to the development of a new military history. Complains one respondent: "at our park the interpretation division is still caught up in doing displays for 'black history' and 'women's history' and stays clear of talking about 'dead white men.' *Hello! We are a Revolutionary War Battlefield.*"¹⁸⁹

Given that parks are visible public sites vulnerable to and anticipatory of significant political pressure, we are not surprised that a culture of timidity may have arisen. While many respondents talked sensitively about their experiences and thoughtfully considered strategies for engaging many types and levels of controversy—from historic structure paint colors to historic and ongoing tensions with native communities—several agreed with

185 Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), traces many of these battles on the National Mall while presenting a creative suggestion for how to handle such controversies in the future.

186 David Larsen, Interview, 2010.

187 Noblitt, personal narrative.

188 Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957); and David Larsen, ed., *Meaningful Interpretation: How to Connect Hearts and Minds to Places, Objects, and Other Resources* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003).

189 Respondent 10259.

one respondent, who said “we run screaming from any controversy. Period. We have been trained to avoid controversy like the plague.”¹⁹⁰

Examples abound among our respondents. One describes a frustratingly futile press for new research and interpretive efforts to understand and discuss American Indian history, a topic outside of the site’s traditional emphasis on American military history. Other park colleagues resisted, however—a response our informant attributes to the topic being “controversial, tied to on-going land claims, bigotry, &c.”¹⁹¹ Precisely the elements that made the undiscussed histories relevant rendered them, in this respondent’s view, too hot to handle.

Several respondents noted that controversies could provide welcome opportunities for educating visitors about the contingent nature of historical processes and events. Yet, as one respondent notes, “most new park managers don’t have [the] professional maturity to handle [controversies] well and will steadfastly steer away from them. They fear that they will become professionally dented or banged up over such.... But, where park managers across the Service have allow[ed] their staff or ... themselves [to step] out into these controversies, it has been a great source of pride. We have provoked the public dialog on great issues, made them current and relevant and got people excited— mad or supportive—but got the[m] excited about history and the institutions that care for it.”¹⁹²

But NPS seems to lack a coordinated approach to controversial interpretation that would enable it to embrace and turn controversies into educational opportunities. One respondent observes that “we appear only to be relieved that a controversy is ‘over.’ [But it] isn’t ever over.... After a controversy, there is a higher expectation of park management attention to particular constituencies and expectations of increased sensitivity to related issues in the future. I’m not convinced that we are prepared to meet those expectations. We don’t seem to learn and certainly not apply the lessons learned.... [Park] managers and interpretation chiefs [need to be prepared] for these high expectations and [to develop] tools for what to do next.”¹⁹³

Some respondents sought new approaches to interpretation that could counter timid interpretation in ways that could reinvigorate Tilden’s and Larsen’s vision by connecting with new developments in history practice. Connecting fearful interpretation to an NPS desire to present the last word, one respondent urges NPS to “stop interpreting from a place of fear. We need to step back from the position of authority and become provokers, facilitators and encourage the public to engage with the material, consider multiple perspectives, and make their own choices.”¹⁹⁴ Museums like the Wing-Luke Museum in Seattle, the Levine Museum of the New South, and the Jewish Museum in New York model ways for using controversy to challenge visitors.

LISTENING TO AND ENGAGING VISITORS

Perhaps the most basic reorientation would be, as the previous respondent suggests, to transform how NPS approaches visitors. Sharing authority with visitors would require a change in how NPS has generally exercised its authority, by listening to concerns visitors bring to and take away from engagement with a site. Engaging visitors in exploring controversies, for example, would enable NPS to know in advance how visitors might view various possible interpretations. Interpreters and historians could explore how more open-ended presentations and multiple perspectives might turn controversy into provocative interpretations with which visitors could best engage.

190 Respondent 11514.

191 Respondent 11114.

192 Respondent 11141.

193 Respondent 10713.

194 Respondent 11819.

But the most important reason for sharing authority with visitors is not to defuse controversy but to build a new culture of collaboration and trust. “I think we underestimate the ability of the public to handle controversial subjects,” writes one respondent, “and so we tend to present bland, non-threatening and generalized information so as to not upset or offend them. The irony is that most of the history sites preserved in the NPS were not chosen for their bland or non-threatening character—they were chosen for the part they played in revolution or civil war or other cataclysmic events.”¹⁹⁵ Listening to what visitors want to know, to see, to engage could reshape interpretation across the agency and model education based on inquiry and dialogue while extending possibilities of more robust partnerships of many kinds.

The Park Service too often assumes, however, that it knows best what visitors should engage. Expressing the customary NPS caution about what visitors can handle, the most appropriate frames for them to encounter at this time and place, the council and leaders at the Flight 93 site—interviewed by a member of our team in 2010—asserted that the public did not want to know about the hijackers of United Flight 93. In fact, a majority of visitors to that site told public history graduate students from American University in spring 2010 that they did want to know about the hijackers. In this case, NPS may indeed have a policy of not wanting to offend families or members of Congress so soon after a traumatic event, but it is crucial that NPS not confuse those fears with what actual visitors can deal with.

“Everyone needs collectively to listen to the visiting public,” notes another respondent: “Their thoughts and impressions of the past will tell us where they are coming from and how best to formulate programs, exhibitions, etc., to meet their needs.”¹⁹⁶ Another champions sharing authority with visitors: “Go to the people. Do not be afraid to let others be the experts.”¹⁹⁷

Toward the end of his life, David Larsen concluded that listening to and collaborating with visitors was the most creative and sustainable way forward for the discipline of interpretation. The problem for NPS was, in Larsen’s 2010 words, “we don’t even know what we don’t know about visitors.”¹⁹⁸

In reaching this conclusion, Larsen was following the direction museums and other cultural institutions had begun to take about a decade ago. To meet this need, they largely created the field of visitor studies (sometimes called museum learning)—in the process, developing ways of listening to and engaging with visitors in shaping programs. Since the 1990s, for example, the pathbreaking Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, has required interpreters to interview dozens of potential visitors before they even begin to frame interpretations and curate interpretive exhibits.

Some museums have developed processes for imagining how open-ended engagements with visitors and communities could turn a park, for example, into a participatory cultural institution where visitors create, share, and connect not only with NPS staff but also with other visitors. By trusting visitors’ abilities as creators, remixers, and redistributors of content, a park could become a place where users’ voices inform and invigorate new relationships among visitors, with staff, and with partners outside the park. The social media tools we have discussed above open these possibilities more than ever.¹⁹⁹

We were surprised that most NPS staff with whom we spoke knew little about the field of visitor studies—either the kinds of questions being asked, the methods being used to engage and listen to visitors, or the organizations in which the questions and methods are being presented and discussed. Museums like the Smithsonian Institution and Conner Prairie Interactive History Park have conducted probing ethnographic studies of how visitors draw

195 Respondent 10047.

196 Respondent 11388.

197 Respondent 10827.

198 Larsen, Interview, 2010.

199 The vision here draws on Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), available online at <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>.

experiences into their ongoing relationships, and how families process what they experience and infuse it into their ongoing lives and relationships. Visitor studies, in turn, have led to experimentation in ways visitors can shape experiences in the “participatory museum.”²⁰⁰

Staff members report that two barriers in the NPS stand in the way of good listening to and collaborating with visitors. First is the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) interpretation of the Paperwork Reduction Act to prohibit NPS from conducting formal surveys of visitors. The second major hurdle is the reliance since 1982 on survey instruments developed at the University of Idaho that do not probe deeply into visitors’ experiences. It is hard to tell whether the primary problem is the survey itself, the way it is used in the culture, or both. But there is no question that NPS has not kept up with the development of visitor studies in museums, and thus has not benefitted from its possibilities.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 11.1** Charge the proposed History Leadership Council (recommendation 1.2) with exploring how NPS can better present open-ended interpretation and multiple perspectives. The HLC might identify parks that want to model these perspectives and help secure resources to experiment and then share results with other parks via the Innovation Network or other means.
- 11.2** At park, regional, and agency levels, engage and explore the field of visitor studies.
- 11.3** Encourage the secretary or director to press the Office of Management and Budget to grant an exemption for NPS from the Paperwork Reduction Act, or to lobby Congress to amend it so that NPS can engage visitors more effectively.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.4** Supplement the current Idaho visitor surveys with more cognitively oriented methods developed by Visitor Studies Association and American Association of Museums’ committees on visitor experiences. See also recommendations under Civic Engagement, below, for specific suggestions ways to draw upon visitor studies to make parks more deeply connected with visitors.
- 11.5** Make maximum use of social media for engaging in two-way conversations with the public, rather than using it only for one-way announcements and information.
- 11.6** Encourage interpreters to be more comfortable with controversies that existed both in the past and in the present by training researchers to seek out and interpreters to present visitors with open-ended challenges and multiple perspectives.

²⁰⁰ See Simon, *The Participatory Museum*.

114 | Finding 12: Civic Engagement, History, and Interpretation

The NPS's approach to civic engagement—while laudable in many respects—misses many opportunities developed by other cultural institutions to enrich civic life, and discourages more creative civic platforms through which history can connect with interpretation in ways we suggested earlier in this report. Engagement with, wider exposure to, and understanding of these diverse platforms can help the NPS contribute to deeper and more far-reaching civic transformation.

The core traditions of history center on interpretation, education, and civic engagement. Indeed, as an NPS historian responding to our project writes, “the discipline and exercise of history is an essential task of civic engagement.”²⁰¹ But in the NPS, as we observed above, history and interpretation are housed in separate divisions. History has most often seemed to be about facts and preservation. Interpretation has emphasized technique and presentation. And in its Director’s Order 75A (2003, 2007), the NPS has proclaimed that civic engagement “reinforces public commitment to the preservation of resources” and provides “a framework for successfully engaging the public in our work and activities to instill a sense of ownership in the NPS mission.”²⁰²

A broader approach to civic engagement, however—one that extends beyond fostering “ownership in the NPS mission” to embrace possibilities for larger societal change—can help integrate history and interpretation and enhance the effectiveness of both for the public interest. At times, NPS has done considerable work to move in this direction. In its 2001 report *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, the National Park System Advisory Board called on the NPS to fulfill its promise in the twenty-first century, calling “our nation’s history...our civic glue.” Three years later, in her keynote at the NPS-sponsored 2004 “Great Places/Great Debates” event, Ruth Abram of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and founder of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, said “the Museum professionals and supporters gathered here today are in the business of forming memory and therefore conscience. We hold the power of history in our hands. The power to offer role models, The power to illuminate directions and strategies, The power to provide safe places for civic dialogue, The power to play a central role in the ongoing task of democracy building.”²⁰³

In a series of seminars, workshops, conferences, and other events that NPS undertook during this period of intense focus on the promise of civic engagement, the agency actively searched out sites whose missions lent themselves to more energetic civic conversations around pressing contemporary issues. Manuals, websites, and handbooks were drafted to help additional sites consider how they, too, might expand their outreach in this way.

The power of civic engagement, as the NPS and other cultural institutions understand, is that it provides a means for engaging the dynamic and contested worlds beyond park boundaries. Indeed, the most exciting possibilities for civic transformation emerge at points where staffers and visitors encounter difference—from their own worlds, their own times, their own experiences—above all, people whose understandings of history and civics differ from their own. Encounters with difference challenge them to uncover, explore, and create new possibilities in themselves and their civic lives and work.

But in the NPS, as in other institutions, civic engagement has proved easier to say than to do. It has often been embraced instrumentally as a means to meet the everyday challenges

201 Arato, personal narrative.

202 “Director’s Order #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement,” 2003; rev. 2007, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/75A.htm>.

203 Ruth J. Abram, “Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” keynote address, Opening Historic Sites to Civic Engagement, April 1–2, 2004, National Park Service, *Great Places, Great Debates*, <http://www.nps.gov/nero/greatplaces/openingkeynote.htm>.

that these institutions face—stretching limited resources, drawing more or different kinds of visitors, incorporating new scholarship, managing conflict, and fulfilling mandates for public involvement. It is often hard to identify the “civic” component in these activities. “Civic engagement” practice sometimes blurs into preservation or a sort of “partnership” that assists a park in doing things they wanted to or planned to do in any case.

Reflecting on their experiences with their Animating Democracy civic initiatives, however, Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Pam Korza offer a more expansive vision for civic engagement: “to build relationships and situate history organizations genuinely as civic and community organizations by relating history to personal experience and contemporary issues, including multiple ‘truths’ and viewpoints; and sharing authority with community members as advisors, informants and co-developers of exhibitions.”²⁰⁴



African Burial Ground
National Monument
(Photograph Courtesy
National Park Service.)

Some of the activities described on the NPS “Civic Engagement” website, however, seem more aimed at advancing instrumental needs, such as containing damage from public controversies.²⁰⁵ Manzanar NHS responded to pressure from Japanese Americans and criticism in the *Los Angeles Times*. In the wake of congressional and public pressure, NPS facilitated a memorialization process at African Burial Ground NM. These were worthy initiatives, but fell short of the transformative potential of civic engagement more broadly defined.

Rather than merely recruiting support for one partner’s goals, the alternative vision Bacon, Korza, and others have proposed emphasizes sharing authority among partners and co-creating new initiatives with clear civic dimensions. One of our informants points to how broader civic engagement could facilitate the approach to history and interpretation suggested in this report: “As the agency struggles to adopt a more civically engaged posture, and position itself as a partner to local communities rather than the source of an ‘official’ story, it is becoming more and more imperative that staff members be exposed to the new scholarship on public memory and the ‘shared authority’ approach to public history.”²⁰⁶

Many non-NPS organizations have challenged visitors to define and engage solutions to contemporary injustices. The Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for example, applies this definition to launch programs on miscarriages of criminal justice and the desirability of capital punishment, hardly the instrumental core for an art museum. The Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, North Carolina points to current challenges of racism and discrimination. Seattle’s Wing Luke Museum raises difficult issues at the intersection of immigration and citizenship.

By identifying injustices and exploring solutions, cultural institutions can fulfill what one historian calls “the principal function of historical debate,” namely, “to keep open an awareness of alternatives.”²⁰⁷ Dialogue on controversial issues helps people develop new civic skills: the ability to uncover and surface assumptions, to suspend judgment, to experience equality among participants, to listen attentively, to practice empathy, to embrace multiple perspectives, and to use the knowledge of past conflicts to inform these processes. Civic engagement can also be a means to repair dysfunctional or unresponsive politics and help citizens reclaim

204 Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon, *Interpretive Practices in History Organizations: Philadelphia in a National Context* ([Washington, DC]: Animating Democracy, [2006]), 11.

205 National Park Service, “Civic Engagement,” <http://www.nps.gov/civic>.

206 Jill Oglie Titus, personal narrative for State of History team, 2010.

207 John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 18.

116 | and rejuvenate political practice. Initiatives like these could help NPS widen its approach to civic engagement, potentially transforming a park from a “shrine” into a “forum,” from an “inward-looking citadel” into an “active town meeting” that “confronts issues such as racial inequality, poverty, war, and environmental justice.”²⁰⁸

But meaningful civic engagement ideally is not just another program to be added to a park’s activities. It takes fullest shape when some staff members imagine civic components in their individual work, when they begin by rekindling their individual civic hopes, when they reflect on how they could expand those civic dimensions in their lives and work. NPS might consider as models processes developed at the University of Minnesota and Harwood Institute through which people turn understandings grounded in their own ideals and workplaces into platforms for shaping relationships with those outside.

Experiencing civic engagement through everyday relations among themselves, as well as with visitors, volunteers, and collaborators, NPS staffers can try to remake their parks (and possibly even the Park Service as a whole) into more civically engaged places. It is very hard, for instance, to embrace the thrust of civic engagement toward erasing boundaries and encouraging open-ended engagement with outsiders when one’s everyday workplace is fragmented and one feels isolated. Embracing the egalitarian thrust of civic engagement in a hierarchical system can be demoralizing. And promoting multiple perspectives to the outside world when they are not modeled within one’s park seems hypocritical. Many Park Service staff members note that it is hard to respond to calls for diversity in relationships with outsiders when the people making those calls look, sound, and often think alike. The goal, in short, would be first to make NPS itself a more civically engaged institution at individual parks and as a whole.

By reaching out and sharing authority with visitors and communities, a new emphasis on transformative civic engagement can help reorient both history and interpretation, as well as their relationship to each other. In other words, encounters with visitors and communities can help build a shared platform for historical scholarship and park interpretation. By exploring a wider range of civic engagement practices, historians and interpreters can together develop interconnected approaches to research and interpretation that would be characterized by many of the reconfigured history practices we outlined at the outset of this report.

Many models suggest what that reorientation might look like:

A video at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans illustrates how visitors can explore what they are capable of and responsible for as they try to make choices. In the film, a black army nurse on a Pacific island describes a dilemma she faced. A bleeding white marine approaches her in need of a transfusion, but the only blood she has was drawn from blacks, and army policy prohibited giving it to white soldiers. By not saying how she resolved her dilemma, the narrative challenges visitors to imagine what they might have done had they stood in her shoes.

Civic engagement experiences in other settings can help us imagine how to apply multiple perspectives on “truth,” perspectives that liberate us from giving one right conclusion. Recognizing people’s desire to learn about terrible events in the past while also laying groundwork for reconciliation, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggested four perspectives on historical truth: forensic truth (who did what to whom, when and where); experiential truth (how participants experienced what they did); dialogic truth (how different people approached and engaged their different experiential understandings); and healing truth (what could be agreed on in order to move on).²⁰⁹

208 Edward T. Linenthal, “The National Park Service and Civic Engagement,” *George Wright Forum* 25, no. 1 (2008): 5–11, esp. 6, <http://www.georgewright.org/251linenthal.pdf>; Ron Chew, “Introduction” in Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon, eds., *Museums and Civic Dialogue: Case Studies from Animating Democracy* (Washington: Americans for the Arts, 2005), v.

209 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. 1, 110–14, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf>.

To imagine how it can better help visitors develop skills of historical empathy, NPS might follow leadership of pioneering institutions in this area. In Conner Prairie's Interactive History Park's *Follow the North Star* immersion experience in Fishers, Indiana, visitors take the role of slaves making their ways to freedom in 1836 Indiana. They encounter slave catchers, slavery sympathizers, Quakers, free blacks and others who try to help and hinder them. At the end of the ninety-minute experience, they meet with other visitors to reflect on what they learned about themselves in the process and what they imagine they might do to address challenges of race today.

We imagine both a national park system and a civic life that embrace open-ended approaches to and multiple perspectives on experience, that acknowledge change over time, and that invite visitors to develop skills of empathy as they stand in the shoes of others. Working more collaboratively, historians and interpreters could frame park experiences around such a civic understanding.

Recommendations

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- 12.1** Seek and explore initiatives that push NPS's civic engagement efforts toward a wider range of theory and practice. Promising ways to do this might include:
- a) Identify parks that want to become more civically engaged and/or explore possibilities and give them resources to pilot such explorations and report their experiences.
 - b) Partner parks with museums or other institutions that have pioneered relevant civic engagement initiatives. Underground Railroad sites could partner with Conner Prairie, for example; sites focused on immigration might partner with the Wing Luke Museum.
 - c) Charge one or more employees to research a wide range of civic initiatives undertaken in the private sector and suggest how they can be applied to the NPS as an agency, or to individual parks. Or contract with people with broad perspective on diverse initiatives to identify promising ones for NPS.
 - d) Seek out and evaluate possibilities at the NPS or regional level to explore whether and how Brown University's initiative for confronting legacies of injustice in that institution might apply to NPS.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.2** Create a formal reference manual to accompany Director's Order 75A and supplement the current NPS civic engagement website. Such a manual would introduce readers to a full range of civic engagement practice outside NPS, provide guidelines for how NPS might incorporate those practices, and give examples of the most creative applications both within and outside of NPS. In developing this manual, it may be necessary to review and update the order itself.

First Steps Forward and the OAH's Ongoing Role

As we sifted through the hundreds of pages of survey results, one comment brought us up short. “Ironically,” one respondent observed, “until the effort by the OAH to pursue this [survey] the OAH was one of my greatest disappointments in terms of their articulation with NPS historians. It seemed to me at every juncture that the OAH was, understandably perhaps, rather solicitous of the NPS upper-level historical organization, all the while having little to offer the rank and file NPS historian in terms of connection and support. This survey, of course, changes all that in my mind.”²¹⁰ “It is my hope,” this respondent continued, “that the OAH will make serious demands of the NPS and the NPS Chief Historian to ‘get real’ about history, especially at the park and site level.”

Over the course of this effort, with readers like this one in mind, we have striven to remain true to the on-the-ground concerns of the “rank and file,” the men and women who form the front lines in the stewardship of the nation’s historic places. We also hope the observations and recommendations herein meet this respondent’s high standard, that they indeed—the adverse budgetary climate notwithstanding—strenuously challenge the NPS to confront and remedy the well-documented draining away of investment in history work, to tackle the obstacles posed by bureaucratic cultures, and to capitalize on the many exemplary programs and fruitful approaches to the practice of history at individual sites.

In *A Call to Action* and elsewhere, Director Jon Jarvis has expressed confidence that inspirational change can come to the national parks by redeploying and reprioritizing existing resources. Perhaps that is true, though given the regrettable deferred maintenance of recent years, the practice of history must become a larger priority in future budgets if NPS is to recover the territory lost—let alone break new ground. We suggest that in the immediate future, for the agency’s history work to succeed, these efforts begin with dismantling the elements of agency culture and structure that keep history and historians in small boxes and detach the agency as a whole from systematic and vibrant interaction with the larger field of professional history scholarship and practice.

Many of the recommendations herein are not just about intellectual or abstract issues: in these times of real scarcity, NPS simply cannot afford the inefficiencies that present practices create. As one of our informants noted, the divide between cultural resources and interpretation “is essentially wasteful of NPS resources. Work that is paid for is not fully leveraged.” Failing to steward park records and histories with vigor means that contracted studies take longer than necessary and have less impact than they might. Neglecting to consult with historians on staff when scopes of work are drafted results in ineffectively designed projects. Putting employees with solid history training at reception desks squanders expertise that the agency must then pay others to provide. Omitting follow-up with scholars who work with parks through the OAH agreement wastes the knowledge academics gain of a park and its resources and fails to harness the intellectual and emotional investment these historians make in the future of the site and the agency.

The vision for history articulated herein, the “public promise waiting to be kept,” imagines both new and reinvigorated history practice across the agency. It envisions a revitalized history program in which fresh voices and emerging scholars who embrace the most exciting developments in history and public history practice engage new audiences in shared contemplations of the past, where the nation’s historic buildings, landscapes, and narratives can both inform us about our past and prepare us for the present. We picture a future in which a robust and well-supported cadre of historians distributed across the NPS collaborates closely with their counterparts in the academy to create a richer scholarly community for all historians, where

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history achieves its full potential in cultivating civic meaning and making the relevance of these unique resources plain. This will guarantee NPS historical stewardship into the future.

The NPS History Leadership Council proposed herein (see recommendations 1.2 and 2.1), which would gather together the finest minds and most creative leaders in the agency today to guide and inspire their peers, is an essential first step. A second essential step is creation of a History Advisory Board (recommendation 2.1), composed of the nation's most innovative and respected history practitioners, who can bring knowledge from wider history communities into the agency and carry knowledge of the agency's most promising accomplishments to wider communities of practice. The History Leadership Council, in addition to the tasks articulated in recommendation 1.2, might help address the general sense of disconnect that respondents voiced (finding 3); it might also help revise qualifications and competencies (recommendations 1.4 and 4.5), develop strategies to build and diversify the ranks (finding 5), and work with the chief historian's office to improve mechanisms to improve the stewardship of the agency's own history (finding 9). The History Advisory Board can expand the work that has been done for fifteen years under the OAH-NPS Cooperative Agreement, play an important role in policy decisions bearing on the practice of history throughout the agency, and offer help to expand the work of the new Network for Innovation.

Lastly, we close with a few words for the OAH, the sponsors of this study. In his 2000 article "OAH and the National Park Service," John Latschar articulated the benefits to the NPS of this unique partnership. Access to the nation's leading scholars, he noted, boosts the agency's credibility when controversial issues erupt. Academic historians help the agency place its resources in the broadest possible contexts and identify the strongest (and ever-changing) aspects of their significance. Relationships launched and nourished through the partnership contribute to ongoing professional development throughout the agency. At the same time through the partnership, OAH "is helping the NPS provide better educational opportunities to the millions of people who visit national park areas each year."²¹¹

This successful collaboration can be further strengthened and expanded to encompass a wider and more durable partnership between the historical profession and the NPS. We also urge the OAH to use its experience and influence to encourage the agency to implement the changes we recommend for the practice of history service wide.

In that spirit, we offer the following recommendations for the OAH, specifically, as it continues to carry out and help manage important historical work on behalf of NPS. Although many of these recommendations echo those listed above (which are directed to the NPS as a whole), their inclusion below reflects the fact that the OAH has the power to influence some changes in projects it manages before such standards are adopted service-wide:

- Require (per recommendation 1.3 above) all CRM studies, including administrative histories, historic resource studies, National Register nominations and updates, and other such documents undertaken under its auspices, to be scoped with enough time and budget to include an interpretive deliverable as well as a follow-up meeting that involves the project researchers and park staff from both interpretation and cultural resources management.
- Require site visits undertaken through the NPS partnership to be scoped to include at least one follow-up visit with project scholars.
- Peer review all historical work undertaken for NPS under the OAH cooperative agreement before final approval or publication (per recommendation 1.7 above).
- Ensure that every OAH annual meeting has an "NPS 101" workshop to introduce future researchers to NPS opportunities and structures.

²¹¹ Latschar, "OAH and the National Park Service."

- Establish a competitive award (per recommendation 2.3 above) that recognizes excellence in NPS history and also acknowledges the superintendent and regional directors as facilitators of the work.
- Explore the prospect of harnessing the *Journal of American History's* Recent Scholarship Online (RSO) database to address circulation of the agency's "gray literature" (per recommendation 3.9 above).
- Explore the possibility of enrolling NPS as an institutional member of OAH, as some universities are. This would enable every employee of NPS to have full-text electronic access to *Journal of American History*, *Magazine of History*, *OAH Newsletter*, and possibly the Recent Scholarship Online database.
- Complete the work necessary to have the OAH annual meeting listed as "official training" within the NPS to increase the likelihood that NPS staff can receive funding and permission to attend (per recommendation 4.4 above).
- Create and maintain a website that advertises research needed by the NPS that is not currently funded, as a means of spreading ideas for dissertation work and book projects to academics. Seek funding for modest research support for such projects if they are pursued (per recommendations 7.3 and 9.6 above).
- Make it a policy to seek journal reviews (in *Journal of American History*, *CRM*, *Public Historian*, and other venues) of research products created through its NPS partnership.
- Regularly convene (at least at every annual meeting) the by now large network of OAH scholars who have worked on NPS projects in sessions at which participants share experiences and observations with one another and with historians (faculty and graduate students) who are contemplating work on NPS projects.
- More closely involve the OAH Committee on National Park Service Collaboration with developing standards and criteria for and with identifying researchers and peer reviewers for NPS projects to be conducted under the OAH-NPS partnership.



Books for sale at Richmond National Battlefield Park, 2009. (Photograph by Anne Mitchell Whisnant.)

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Listening Sessions / Open Forums Conducted

- National Association for Interpretation, National Workshop, Hartford CT, 2009
- National Council on Public History annual meeting, Pensacola, FL, 2011
- National Council on Public History annual meeting, Portland, OR, 2010
- National Council on Public History annual meeting, Providence, RI, 2009
- Organization of American Historians annual meeting, Houston, TX, 2011
- Organization of American Historians annual meeting, Washington, DC, 2010
- Organization of American Historians annual meeting, Seattle, WA, 2009

Written Narratives Submitted

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Allen, Michael. April 2009.	Pitcaithley, Dwight. February 2009.
Arato, Christine. March 2009.	Rogers, Jerry L. June 2010.
Arning, Chuck. April 2009.	Rose, Vivien. April 2009.
Arrington, Todd. April 2009.	Sanfilippo, Pam. April 2009.
Blatt, Marty. March 2009.	Sellars, Dick. 2010.
Boland, Beth. April 2010.	Stanton, Cathy. November 2010.
Carr, Ethan. June 2010.	Titus, Jill Ogline. June 2010.
Engle, Reed. June 2010.	Toogood, Anna Cox. April 2009.
Feller, Laura. 2010.	Warren-Findley, Jannelle. January 2010 and May 2010.
Gomez, Art. April 2009.	Weinbaum, Paul, April 2009.
Huyck, Heather. May 2009.	West, Patricia. April 21, 2009.
Jenkins, Kathleen. April 2009.	Whisnant, David. February 2011.
Louter, David. April 2009.	Zenzen, Joan M. June 24, 2010.
Noblitt, Phil. April 2009.	

Personal Interviews or Conversations

Edwin Bearss	Bob Krick
Joanne Blacoe	David Larsen
Janet Blanchard	Gary Machlis
Harry Butowsky	Janet McDonnell
Mike Caldwell	Cynthia McLeod
Dominic Cardea	Karen Michaud
Richard Colton	Cicely Muldoon
Claire Comer	Marilyn Nickels
Cathy Cook	Dan Odess
Eola Dance	John Peterson
Laura Feller	Karl Pierce
Susan Ferentinos	Dwight Pitcaithley
Kevin Foster	Carol Schull
Grant Gates	Robert Sutton
Louis Hutchins	Klydie Thomas
Betsy Igleheart	Stephanie Toothman
Les Inofuku	Marie Tyler-McGraw
Jonathan Jarvis	Terrie Wallace
Tommy Jones	Sandy Weber
Lu Ann Jones	Paul Weinbaum
Brian Joyner	Patricia West
Bob Kirby	Brett Wright

130 | Site Visits by Team Members during the Study Period

African Burial Ground National Monument	Klondike Gold Rush (Seattle)
Antietam National Battlefield	National Historical Park
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore	Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee National Memorial	Mammoth Cave National Park
Blue Ridge Parkway	Manassas National Battlefield Park
Cabrillo National Monument	Manzanar National Historic Site
Cape Cod National Seashore	Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park
Cape Hatteras National Seashore	Minute Man National Historical Park
Cape Lookout National Seashore	National Mall and Memorial Parks
Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park	New Orleans National Historical Park
Cumberland Gap National Historical Park	Petersburg National Battlefield
De Soto National Memorial	Point Reyes National Seashore
Federal Hall National Memorial	Richmond National Battlefield
Flight 93 National Memorial	Salem National Historic Site
Fort Raleigh National Historic Site	Santa Monica National Recreation Area
Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial	Saratoga National Park
Frederick Douglas National Historic Site	Shenandoah National Park
Gettysburg National Military Park	Springfield Armory National Historic Site
Golden Gate National Recreation Area	Valley Forge National Historical Park
Great Smoky Mountains National Park	Vicksburg National Military Park
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park	Wright Brothers National Memorial
Independent National Historical Park	Yellowstone National Park
	Yosemite National Park

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Catholic chapel at Manzanar Relocation Center, California, 1943; photographed by Ansel Adams.
(Courtesy Library of Congress.)

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