

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Harpers Ferry

By Jon-Erik Gilot

Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title. City: Publisher, Year.</i>
Frye, Dennis E.	<i>Harpers Ferry Under Fire: A Border Town in the American Civil War.</i> Harpers Ferry, WV: Harpers Ferry Park Association, 2012.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title. City: Publisher, Year.</i>
Barry, Joseph	<i>The Strange Story of Harpers Ferry, With Legends of the Surrounding Country.</i> Martinsburg, WV: Thompson Brothers. 1904, chap. 5.
Frye, Dennis E. & Catherine Magi Oliver	<i>Confluence: Harpers Ferry as Destiny.</i> Harpers Ferry, WV: Harpers Ferry Park Association. 2019.
Frye, Dennis E.	<i>History and Tour Guide of Stonewall Jackson's Battle of Harpers Ferry.</i> Columbus, OH: Blue & Gray Enterprises, 2012.
Hearn, Chester G.	<i>Six Years of Hell: Harpers Ferry During the Civil War.</i> Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996.
Horwitz, Tony	<i>Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War.</i> New York: Henry Holt, 2011.

Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park	<p>Harpers Ferry National Historical Park was established as a National Monument in 1944 and a National Historical Park in 1963. The park encompasses more than 4,000 acres across three states and interprets more than 200 years of history in the Harpers Ferry area. The park’s address is: 171 Shoreline Drive, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, telephone 304 535 6029. The park is open from 9-5 seven days a week. Their website is https://www.nps.gov/hafe/index.htm .</p>
Harpers Ferry Park Association	<p>The Harpers Ferry Park Association was established in 1971 and works as a National Park Service cooperating association, providing funding for educational and interpretive enhancements at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, such as certified guide tours and historic trades workshops, as well as aiding in conservation and preservation projects. Their address is 723 Shenandoah St. PO Box 197 Harpers Ferry WV 25425, telephone 304 535 6881. Their website is https://www.harpersferryhistory.org/ .</p>

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://www.battlefields.org/visit/battlefields/harpers-ferry-battlefield	<p>The American Battlefield Trust provides exclusive, free content on Harpers Ferry during the Civil War era as well as the organization’s long history in preserving land there.</p>

Other Sources

Scholars

Name	Email
Jon-Erik Gilot	jegilot@gmail.com
Dennis E. Frye Historian (Emeritus), Harpers Ferry National Historical Park	
Chester Hearn Historian	
Catherine Magi Oliver Harpers Ferry Park Association	cmagi@hfpawv.org

Topic Précis

For nearly six years the site described by Thomas Jefferson as “one of the most stupendous in nature” and “worth a voyage across the Atlantic” would see sustained combat, bloodshed and military occupation rivaled by few peers of its size during the American Civil War. Harpers Ferry, Virginia, situated at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, had been founded in 1763, attracting visitors not only for the ferry crossing on the Potomac River but for the picturesque beauty of the area. Federal armories and a rifle works were constructed at Harpers Ferry which was the site of John Brown’s famous raid in 1859. As a gateway to the Shenandoah Valley and a transportation hub, the town was fought over continually during the war. In April 1861 the small federal garrison burnt the arsenal buildings in the face of advancing Virginia militia. The Virginians were able to salvage much of the machinery to send south where it was used to manufacture arms for the Confederacy throughout the war. In May 1861 the Confederates withdrew from the town, first setting fire to the armories and the B&O railroad bridge. In October 1861 a battle was fought on Bolivar Heights. In the spring of 1862 Stonewall Jackson attempted to take the town, but gave up in the face of strong federal resistance. As part of the invasion of Maryland, Confederate troops converged on Harpers Ferry and at the Battle of Harpers Ferry on September 12-15, forced the surrender of the entire federal garrison taking 13,000 prisoners and canon, rifles, wagons and other war materiel. When they left the town a few days later the Confederates burned it and destroyed the B&O bridge again. The federals reoccupied the town after the Confederates left. The town experienced a quiet period until July 1863 when the rebuilt B&O bridge was again destroyed, this time by the Federals to prevent the Army of Northern Virginia, retreating after Gettysburg, from crossing the Potomac at Harpers Ferry. Another quiet period ended in January 1864 with a series of attacks on railroad property and federal troops by Confederate raiders. In May the B&O bridge was again destroyed this time by floodwaters in the rivers. In July 1864

advancing Confederate troops forced the garrison at Harpers Ferry to retreat to fortifications on Maryland Heights above the town, which they did after destroying the recently repaired B&O bridge and a temporary pontoon bridge to prevent the Confederates from advancing. The Confederates shifted their advance to the north, crossed the Potomac River at Shepherdstown and attacked the Federal garrison on Maryland Heights for three days. During this fighting the lower town again suffered damage from canon fire which fell from the battle on the heights above. The battle ended when the Confederates withdrew. The federal garrison was greatly strengthened and a series of battles took place in the area during the rest of 1864, but none in Harpers Ferry proper. The final winter of the war saw continued Confederate partisan attacks in the Harpers Ferry neighborhood. With the war's end, marked by four years of almost continual warfare, the town presented a scene of destruction and desolation. Eventually rebuilt, Harpers Ferry was designated at a national Monument in 1944 and in 1963 became Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.
