



| Executive Summary

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Special Resource Study | Great Falls Historic District | Paterson, New Jersey

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Birdseye view of Paterson [sic], N.J. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, e.g., LC-USZ62-110212].

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In November 2001, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized by Congress, through the “Great Falls Historic District Study Act of 2001” (P.L. 107-59), to conduct a Special Resource Study of the Great Falls Historic District in Paterson, New Jersey to determine if its resources meet applicable criteria for designation as a unit of the national park system. This report constitutes the results of the study undertaken by the Northeast Regional Office of the National Park Service (NPS).

The study, in accordance with previous legislation regarding the criteria to be used in such analyses and reflecting current NPS management policies, examines the national significance of the Great Falls Historic District, its suitability and feasibility for designation as a unit of the national park system, and the need for NPS management of the resource versus management by other agencies of government, or through other means. The importance and methods of applying these criteria to result in a recommendation by the Department of the Interior to Congress for potential designation of a resource as a unit of the national park system are explained in the following chapters of this report.

Paterson enjoys a distinguished history as one of this nation’s earliest industrial centers. It was, most simply stated, chosen to be such a place. It owes its existence to the far-reaching vision of one of America’s most important founders, and a true shaper of our modern governmental and financial institutions, Alexander Hamilton.

Hamilton envisioned Paterson, with its water power provided by the Great Falls of the Passaic River, as America’s counterpart and response to the industrial revolution occurring in England during the same period. Indeed, Hamilton was not beyond attracting, through inducements and active recruitment, the talents of those who knew of the English technological advancements despite English laws prohibiting exportation of such proprietary knowledge and skilled labor.

The history of the City of Paterson includes its beginnings as the ambitious project of Hamilton and the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures (S.U.M.) in 1792 at the Great Falls, the early development of water power systems for industrial use, and the various types of manufacturing that occurred



Great Falls of the Passaic. NPS photo.

in the District's mills into the 20th Century. These included cotton fabrics; railroad locomotives; textile machinery; jute; and silk spinning, weaving and dyeing, among many others. The Great Falls also represents compelling stories of the lives of immigrants who labored in the mills, those who owned and operated manufacturing concerns and became wealthy, and the quest of laborers and the labor movement for better working conditions and pay. These are stories that resonate in and are characteristic of many early industrialized cities of America.

Chapter I of the report describes the purpose and background of the study including the criteria used by the NPS to determine if resources are eligible for designation as a unit of the national park system, the various other designations that have occurred, authorizing legislation for the study and other legislative actions that have affected the District, and a description of the study area. It also reviews the NPS presence in New Jersey and related studies.

Chapter 2 discusses the history and resources of the Great Falls Historic District from the advent of the S.U.M. through the growth of various industries that made Paterson a major industrial city. The Chapter also reviews the role of immigrants in the City's industrial past, and its major labor strikes. The chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive historical account. Rather, it provides the basis for public understanding of the resource and information helpful in the determination of whether the district meets criteria for potential designation as a unit of the national park system.

Chapter 3 provides the analyses of the various criteria for designation of a potential unit of the national park system including national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management. It is important to note that the suitability analysis, by definition, requires that the resources and thematic framework of the Great Falls Historic District be compared not only to those of existing units of the national park system, but also to resources that are protected by other agencies of government and the private sector.

The study concludes that the Great Falls Historic District meets the criterion for national significance, but does not meet criteria for suitability, feasibility, or need for NPS management. With the introduction of New Jersey's new state park at the Great Falls, the study suggests that it may qualify for designation as an Affiliated Area of the national park system, subject to conclusion of the State's current design competition, and a demonstration that the resources will be managed in a manner consistent with NPS Management Policies. Should that determination be made at a later date,

amendments to existing legislation (P.L. 104-333) that created the Great Falls Historic District would likely be necessary. Affiliated areas normally qualify for technical and financial assistance from the Secretary of the Interior if designated by the United States Congress.

Chapter 4 outlines the consultation and coordination that occurred before and during the study, including a summary of scoping meetings and written communications.



Plaque: "Great Falls of Paterson on the Passaic has been designated a Registered Natural Landmark... 1967". NPS photo.

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