

Documenting the Little-Known History of Rock Creek Park

An Interactive Qualifying Project
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This report represents work of WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, see

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Abstract

The goal of this project was to create a searchable library of named historical sites and individuals in Rock Creek Park that provides an easily accessible platform for researching those sites and the little-known histories and contributions of African Americans. This was completed by first receiving the names of the specific sites and historical individuals to be researched for the National Parks Service. Through online research, interviews and library visits information was compiled. The expandable online data library was then created and includes photos, the site address, coordinates and a short paragraph description for each location and person.

NPS Little-Known History

Executive Summary

December 16th 2022

Introduction

Systemic racism is evident in many accounts of our nation's history, including the history of the 106 years old [National Park System \(NPS\)](#). Part of the mission of the NPS is to preserve native cultural heritage and celebrate tribal cultures. Much of the history of African Americans and Indigenous people has been obscured or lost due to systemic racism. NPS has addressed these issues by maintaining an archaeology program, "[Research in the Parks](#)," which offers a searchable historical database of park sites. This program provides a pathway for obscured history to be accessible to the public and other researchers.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of this project was to create a searchable library of named historical sites and individuals in [Rock Creek Park](#) that provides an easily accessible platform for researching those sites and the little-known histories and contributions of African Americans. We split our project into the following two objectives:

1. Research and organize the obscured information from selected named locations and individuals in Rock Creek Park that lack historical data.
2. Create and develop an expandable, publicly available library of historical information about the identified sites and individuals.

Methodology

In order to achieve the goal and objectives we gathered Rock Park maps and marked sites were used to visualize the geography of the park, as well as to identify where historical events occurred. To document the nineteen sites and individuals we visited each site, took site pictures, and photographed any NPS information, such as plaques and signs, available at the sites. Additionally, we conducted interviews with subject matter experts and researched them through various resources such as the datastore, books, and libraries.

For the expandable library, we created a data template to organize the information of the historical sites and individuals. We then created individual vignettes for each of the researched sites based on the data template and incorporated the vignettes into the expandable library.

Results

The team conducted research on the nineteen historical sites and individuals such as Fort Reno, Peirce Mill and Sarah Whitby, etc. We gathered information through archival data which was mostly found online, through the [NPS Datastore](#), videos, books, websites, reports, and articles, etc. We also conducted interviews with five out of the twelve contacts our sponsor [Kym Elder](#) provided to us. The individuals interviewed were: [Bradley Krueger](#), [Bryan Joyner](#), [Marvin](#)

[Tupper Jones](#), [Patricia Tyson](#), and [Dr. Carroll Gibbs](#). Finally our team visited various museums, libraries and the park sites.

The expandable library was developed using information collected from our research. Each site and individual was logged into one DOCX file using the data template. Included in this data template is the address, coordinates, the year of the site, an image and lastly a link containing more information on the site. The file includes all of the information included with the data template, as well as a link that directs the reader to a longer, more in-depth history of the site or individual.

Additionally, the team developed a guidebook to assist future teams during their process of adding sites and individuals to the expandable library. The guidebook discusses strategies the team utilized during research, and provides solutions to roadblocks we faced.

Recommendations

We recommend the following actions for the National Parks Service to help bring awareness to these named locations and individuals.

1. *Improve signage at named park locations.*

The signage in many sites is in poor condition or are in locations where they are not visible. The signage does not acknowledge the little-known histories of the individuals and events that have occurred at these sites.

2. *Make the data template as well as the full library available online to the public.*

The data template and full library should be available both online and as a pamphlet to educate visitors about the locations and individuals of Rock Creek Park.

3. *Recruit individuals or interns to continue to add to the library with additional entries.*

Individuals such as graduate students seeking a potential class credit or “certificate of research” can add onto the expandable library, monitored by a National Parks Service advisor.

4. *Utilize Future Project Guidebook when working with new teams.*

Refer to the guidebook in section 4.7 of this report to assist the process of adding sites and individuals to the expandable library. The guidebook discusses strategies the team utilized during research and provides solutions to roadblocks we faced.

In addition to the National Park Service recommendations, we created recommendations for a future project team.

1. Collaborate with [Rock Creek Conservancy](#).

Rock Creek Conservancy has an abundance of information available and may want to sponsor a project in conjunction with the National Park Service, based on their interest and needs at the time.

2. Continue to improve and add to the existing library.

Polish how the library is formatted/accessible and edit according to the National Parks Service's requests. This would include adding more of the hundreds of sites and individuals that are in Rock Creek Park.

3. Create a website or webpage for these sites and individuals.

This could be used in conjunction with Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek Conservancy to show what the sites and individuals of the park have to offer. This website can also include ways to visit these sites and other general information on the park as a whole.

4. Utilize the Future Project Guidebook.

Refer to the guidebook in section 4.7 of this report to assist during the process of adding sites and individuals to the expandable library. The guidebook discusses strategies the team utilized during research, and provides solutions to roadblocks we faced.

Authorship Table

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1.0 Introduction

Systemic racism describes the systems in place that both create and reinforce racial inequality in the life of marginalized Americans and is manifested in our economics, social structure, education, housing, health care, and the overall well-being of certain racial groups. These issues have been caused by [gerrymandering](#), [Jim Crow](#) laws, and other racist initiatives which excluded minorities from society. Systemic racism has led to minorities being sent to underfunded schools, working lower-wage jobs, and not receiving the same benefits as others received for the same work. Systemic racism is present in national parks, as minorities were not allowed to use certain amenities such as picnic tables and restrooms or even visit some national parks (Repanshek, 2022).

Systemic racism is evident in many accounts of our nation's history, including the history of the 106 years old [National Park System \(NPS\)](#). Part of the mission of the NPS is to preserve native cultural heritage and celebrate tribal cultures. Much of the history of African Americans and Indigenous people has been obscured or lost due to systemic racism. The National Park Service is addressing this issue throughout their parks system. For example, [Dr. Doug MacDonald](#), a professor of anthropology at the [University of Montana](#), has been excavating [Yellowstone National Park](#) since 2007 to uncover the history of the population of Native Americans that was forced out of their native lands by European settlers. His work sheds light on how the once considered "untouched wilderness" of the park had been used for hunting, fishing, and gathering by Native Americans for over 11,000 years ([Lost History of Yellowstone, 2021](#)). In his work [Before Yellowstone: Native American Archaeology in the National Park](#), MacDonald provided a revitalized description of Yellowstone's past as a place of great importance to indigenous peoples.

The National Park Service also maintains an archaeology program, "[Research in the Parks](#)," which offers a searchable historical database of park sites. The research about each park's history is stored under the supervision of the NPS and provides a pathway for obscured history to be accessible to the public and other researchers. More recently, additional funding has been granted to parks, allowing them to conduct more research into their history. For example, the [Reconciliation in Place Names Act](#) has provided additional funding for research.

The goal of this project was to create a searchable library of historical sites and individuals in [Rock Creek Park](#) that provides an easily accessible platform for researching historical sites and the little-known African American histories that are tied to them. The objectives to achieve this goal included organizing obscured histories from NPS selected locations and individuals in Rock Creek Park and creating and developing an expandable library of historical information about the identified sites and individuals.

2.0 Background

This section presents a deeper explanation of our project's background. It is important to understand the effects of systemic racism on communities and their histories, as well as the National Parks Service's mission. Additionally, the background provides detail about the undocumented histories of [Rock Creek Park](#) (RCP) and the lack of African American and Indigenous people's history in the park. The background also includes what Rock Creek Park is doing in regards to unearthing these undocumented histories and what other parks are doing to recover their own undocumented histories.

2.1 Systemic Racism

Systemic racism is defined as conditions that limit "opportunities, resources, power and well-being of individuals and populations based on race/ethnicity." ([Nittle, 2021](#)). One way opportunities were limited was through working conditions for Black Americans which were disregarded in the [Fair Labor Standards Act](#), which only applied to white workers ([Costigan, 2022](#)). Understanding that systemic racism obscures the history of African Americans and Indigenous peoples is important because it can take many forms. For example, history courses, specifically when discussing African Americans and Indigenous peoples, do not provide the full story about these groups' oppression. Ultimately, this suppression led to African American and Indigenous history becoming little known or even lost forever.

2.2 Lost Histories

Inclusive History tells a more complete story of the United States. However, it is also important that people understand the perspectives of all people in order to provide future learners the opportunity to take into account different factors like background, economic status, and race to experience how those factors shape feelings toward a historical event ([Victoria State Government, 2019](#)). Without these differing perspectives, groups will continue to be marginalized, leaving little room for growth or an ability to understand their history.

Discriminating against groups of people on the basis of the color of their skin has been a harsh reality of American History since even before its inception. The histories that African Americans and Indigenous peoples left as well as the contributions they made to the development of American culture and society, have been intentionally obscured by the "winners" of history. In particular, when we learn history, especially in cases that involve racism, it becomes "white history" that we learn instead of history from a full perspective. These situations do not provide the full story and limit our knowledge to include only what one group wants us to know. One of many injustices that are not mentioned is, despite the 800 treaties the U.S. government signed with different tribes protecting sacred lands from intervention, a significant amount were violated by the U.S., and the land was taken anyway. Less than half of those treaties were even ratified, resulting in land theft and persecution against those Indigenous peoples ([Gilio, 2021](#)). National Park Service protected areas like [Yellowstone National Park](#) in Wyoming or the [Aztec Ruins](#) in New Mexico, and Rock Creek Park in Washington D.C. Archaeologists still work to uncover lost

artifacts that create a narrative of how these forgotten peoples lived and to establish a legacy for them and their descendants.

2.3 How Lost Histories Impact Communities

Systemic racism impacts the understanding of world history; as noted by Clea Simon, "It's difficult to have real dialogue about anything to do with race when we don't have an accurate depiction of history" ([Simon, 2020](#)). For instance, a resident of Tulsa did not know about the [Tulsa Massacre](#), which took place in his own town, until he was in his twenties. [David J Harris](#) states, "there's no way forward until and unless we truly reckon with all of this history." The intentional omission of African and Native American histories further places stress in various areas, such as healthcare settings in these communities. When true history is dismissed or overlooked, it is not readily available, making history challenging to find or learn about information. Stress can be experienced as simply a lack of representation and is only reinforced by the nature of systemic racism.

To begin to correct these omissions, the lack of representation of key individuals who stem from these historically underrepresented communities must be addressed to give members of those communities a figure to look up to. As [Jeanne Braha](#) explains, "the first step to reconciling this history is to discuss it." Providing background details for these other named locations could attract more visitors and allow visitors to have a fuller understanding for when they visit that location.

2.4 National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS), according to their website, is "a bureau of the Department of the Interior, entrusted with administering approximately 84,000,000 acres of land throughout nearly 400 national park units in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam."([National Park Service, 2022](#)). Their mission is to preserve the cultural and natural resources of national parks for the education, enjoyment, and inspiration for future generations. ([National Park Service, 2022](#))

Rock Creek Park (RCP) was the third national park to be designated by the federal government and is located in Washington, D.C. ([National Park Service, 2021](#)). Many of Rock Creek Park's named locations have associated histories; however, systemic racism and a lack of funding has diminished the public's knowledge. NPS and supporting groups like the [Rock Creek Conservancy](#) are now taking steps to document this little-known history.

2.5 The Lack of Indigenous History in Rock Creek Park

The first evidence of Indigenous peoples inhabiting Rock Creek Park is during the Late Archaic period, around 4,500 years ago. To date, there is minimal recorded history of these people. Archaeological evidence suggests these groups used the land since their first settlement, and because they did not use the land for permanent settlement, there are little to no instances of remains left by villages or traveling groups. Further, the first European settlers to arrive drove

away the Indigenous peoples so that they could settle and use the resources of Rock Creek Park ([National Park Service](#)).

2.6 African Americans in Rock Creek Park

African American History in Rock Creek Park can be traced from the 1700s to the 1960s. The earliest history of African Americans in Rock Creek Park is from when [Isaac Peirce](#) moved to the park. He owned African American slaves and NPS has a record of their names, ages and occupations. Many African Americans moved to Washington DC during the civil war because slavery was outlawed in the District, and the forts surrounding the area provided protection from confederate advances ([Tenleytown Historical Society](#)). After the war ended, some African Americans moved into Rock Creek Valley, where they mainly purchased untouched land and built homes and communities ([cultural tourism](#)). The history of these communities has been mostly destroyed or heavily obscured. For example, [Reno City](#) was a predominantly African American neighborhood that surrounded what was once [Fort Reno](#) and had developed into a self-sufficient town. The community was destroyed entirely by white-run associations who sought to turn the neighborhood into parkland and an area for white schools. They succeeded in doing so, and not a trace of that neighborhood can be seen in Fort Reno Park today ([National Park Service, 2022](#)). There are also several prominent African American individuals from the Rock Creek area whose legacies are not discussed today: [Elizabeth Proctor Thomas](#), [Hattie Sewell](#), and [Sarah Whitby](#), among others.

2.7 Rock Creek Park

Rock Creek Park is filled with hundreds of named locations, many of which have meaning and a rich history; however, the history is difficult to find for some of these locations. For example, trails, roads, and sites such as [Milkhouse Ford](#), Sherrill Drive, and [Bryce Park](#), respectively, have a lack of historical context. Whether these locations' recorded history is little-known due to systemic racism or because of a simple lack of documentation, they all fall under the scope of the research that the National Park Service is conducting.

Figure 1 is a map of Rock Creek Park that explicitly highlights the trails, roads, and significant locations in the park. Maps are crucial as maps from different time periods can uncover trails, roads, and other structures that had once been a part of the park but have since been destroyed. For example, there are maps in the [National Archives](#) and [DC History Center](#) that depict Rock Creek Park from decades and even centuries past, many of which contain locations that no longer exist. Particular maps can also bring a social perspective, as maps drawn by white slave owners likely differ from maps by freed African Americans, perhaps from a difference in knowledge or differing opinions on what locations are significant enough to include. Analyzing these types of maps can help build a full understanding of the park's history (["Lying With Maps", 2017](#)).

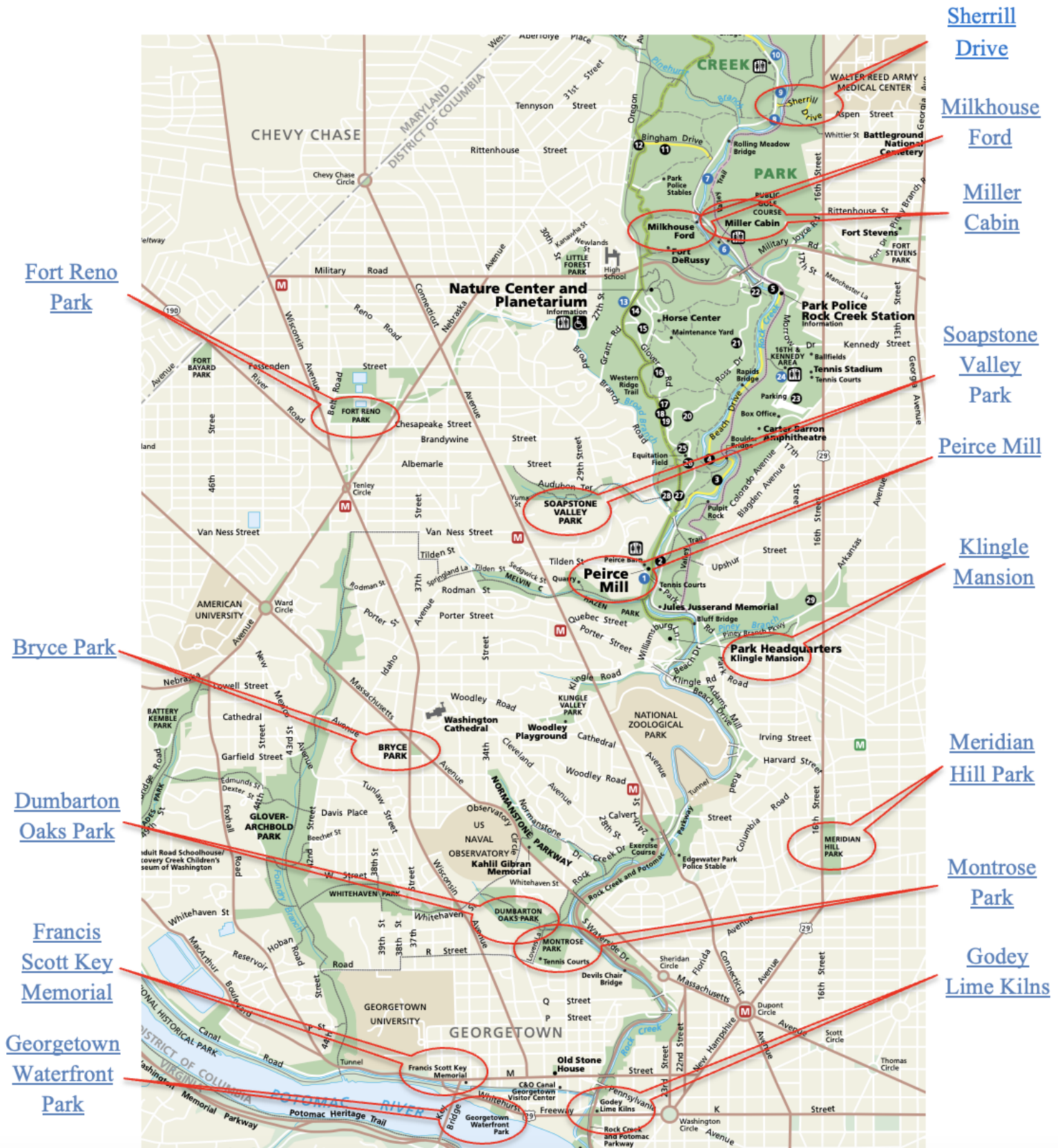


Figure 1. Rock Creek brochure map. (n.d.). National Park Maps. Edited by Ana Roure. <http://npsmaps.com/rock-creek/>.

2.7.1 Unearthing the Lost Histories of Rock Creek Park

The interest in unearthing lost and little-known histories, especially that of African Americans and Native peoples, was sparked in part by the influx of new funding provided to smaller National Parks that do not receive enough attention by the federal government or the people of the United States (["It's time to own up to the racism and violence embedded in the names of parks and public lands," 2021](#)). Many National Parks, including Rock Creek, have been historically understaffed and underfunded, making it difficult to conduct this in-depth research. However, steps to increase federal funding for neglected parks, most recently the passing of the [Reconciliation in Place Names Act](#) in Congress, have provided the resources to allow places like Rock Creek Park to do this crucial research. The bill also creates an avenue to remove specific names of monuments or trails that are offensive, inappropriate, or that promote racism and racist heritage. Rock Creek Park's history does have racism embodied in it, so it is essential to research park locations and give proper recognition to the African American and Indigenous communities that have not been properly attributed in the park's history.

2.8 Golden State National Parks Conservancy

One way to approach this type of research is to use strategies other parks have adopted. For example, [The Golden State National Parks Conservancy](#) has created a database of videos, articles, and podcasts to help educate people about the many Indigenous people and tribes who lived across the parks within the bay area. The database also refers to racism in parks as a whole and how they are honoring Indigenous families today.

2.9 Shenandoah National Park

[Shenandoah National Park](#) is in the process of researching the history of segregation in the park through archival research and oral histories of those who experienced it. Interviews have been conducted with many of the earliest park visitors to gain an understanding of the segregation that once occurred at the park. Maps of Shenandoah showed segregation in certain facilities that the park offered, such as restrooms and picnic areas. Shenandoah created a database that guides visitors through the park's history of segregation and created an exhibit to acknowledge the history of racial segregation in our national parks. (["Shenandoah National Park Is Confronting Its History," 2019](#))

3.0 Methodology

The goal of this project was to create a searchable library of named historical sites and individuals in Rock Creek Park that provides an easily accessible platform for researching those sites and the little-known histories and contributions of African Americans. We split our project into the following two objectives:

3. Research and organize the obscured information from selected named locations and individuals in Rock Creek Park that lack historical data.
4. Create and develop an expandable, publicly available library of historical information about the identified sites and individuals.

The methods used to achieve each objective are presented below.

3.1. Research and organize history for selected named locations and individuals.

Rock Creek Park maps and marked sites were used to visualize the geography of the park, as well as to identify where historical events occurred. To document selected locations we visited each site, took site pictures, and photographed any NPS information available at the sites, including historical information signs, plaques, and structures. Books from local libraries provided obscured information about the park, its early residents and selected park sites.

To document information about each individual and site, we interviewed and recorded subject matter experts about their knowledge on the subjects. We supplemented our interview information with archival data found in the [NPS Datastore](#) and [National Registry of Historic Places](#), as well as physical locations in the area, such as the [DC History Center](#) and [National Battleground Cemetery](#). Resources such as maps, books, signs, letters, as well as the physical sites documented through research were provided by our primary sources, those being libraries, museums and archives. Subject matter experts included university professors, historians, park rangers and librarians.

3.2 Create and develop an expandable library of information about the selected named sites and individuals.

The team first constructed a template for logging the data collected from research. The contents of the template include: The name of the site or individual, a photograph (if available), the address of the site or home of the individual, the corresponding coordinates, the year of the structure's construction, and a short description of its history. The team consulted other libraries and databases created by other national parks, and developed a strategy to deliver a further, more in-depth history of each site and individual.

4.0 Results

This section presents a deeper explanation of the results the team reached through seven weeks of working on this project.

4.1 Historical Sites and Individuals

Figure 2 below is a list of the selected historical sites and individuals given to us by our sponsor, Kym Elder. This list was chosen from the dozens of Rock Creek Park sites which lacked information. Additionally, Ms. Elder asked us to provide information about three individuals who were early residents of the park.

Sites and individuals researched				
Rabaut Park	Hattie Sewell	Sarah Whitby	Battery Kemble	Fort Reno Park
Bryce Park	Elizabeth Proctor Thomas	Klinge Mansion	Francis Scott Key Memorial	Godey Lime Kilns
Peirce Mill	Fort Bunker Hill	Joaquin Miller's Cabin	Milkhouse Ford	Sherrill Drive
Dumbarton Oaks Park	Georgetown Waterfront Park	Meridian Hill Park	Soapstone Valley	

Figure 2. List of historical sites and individuals researched.

4.2 Research Materials

Archived data was mostly found online, through the NPS Datastore, online videos, online books, websites, reports, and articles, etc. Most of the information was taken from the [NPS Datastore](#). Numerous PDFs of books about Rock Creek Park were found in the datastore. Reports, articles, websites and videos were also used from the datastore.

4.3 Interviews

We conducted interviews with five out of the twelve contacts our sponsor [Kym Elder](#) provided to us. The results from those interviews are detailed below and organized by subject matter expert (SME).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each SME was asked a different set of questions based on their expertise and knowledge of Rock Creek Park's history. The interviews were conducted over zoom, except for Marvin Jones, which was conducted in person. The information the experts provided was used in the development of the library.

The first interview was with [Bradley Krueger](#), the Cultural Resources Manager for Rock Creek Park. The goal of the interview was to create a foundation of historical sites and individuals we should research and strategies to collect the data. Bradley recommended two websites to utilize during our research, the [NPS Data Store](#) and [National Registry of Historic Places](#). Bradley spent the majority of the interview describing each of the sites we listed to him in detail, along with a recommendation for the first place to look when beginning our research about each particular site and individuals. After the interview, Bradley provided us with a list of each site and a corresponding link to research into, as well as his contact information to work with him further.

The second interview was conducted over zoom with [Bryan Joyner](#), the Deputy Superintendent of Rock Creek Park. The goal of the interview was to decide how the library

documenting our historical sites and individuals should look and be presented. During our conversation we came to the conclusion that an editable DOCX, a document that could be sent to the Rock Creek Park National Parks Service, would be suitable. Bryan explained to us that a one-to-two-page description of each site would be ideal so readers can gain a deeper understanding of the history of the site or individuals as opposed to the short description in the data. Brian also added a few more sites that he would like to be researched and included in the library as well as more potential contacts to interview. These additional locations were added to the library which was formatted to Bryan's desires.

Our third interview was conducted in person, with [Marvin Tupper Jones](#), a historian and the founder of the [Chowan Discovery](#) group. In the interview we asked him how he started working with Rock Creek Park, suggestions on sites we should and should not focus on, what museums he suggested we visit and who else we should talk to. To start off the interview he showed us the video "[Aunt Betty and Fort Stevens](#)". He told us that he had gotten involved with Rock Creek Park because he is a part of a group that improves the conditions of forts in DC. He suggested we focus on [Fort Reno](#) but besides that he said that he could not think of any sites that should be focused on for this project. Mr. Jones recommended we talk to Dr. Carroll Gibbs and Patricia Tyson. He suggested that we not focus on Peirce Mill and [Fort Derussy](#) as there are already large amounts of information about these sites. This interview helped us narrow our focus on certain sites and who we should interview for more information.

Our fourth interview was with [Patricia Tyson](#), the executive director of the [Military Road School](#), and an expert on Elizabeth Proctor Thomas's life. Our goal for this meeting was to learn more about "Aunt Betty" from Patricia Tyson, as she was featured in the video "[Aunt Betty and Fort Stevens](#)," which celebrated her life and legacy. During the interview she talked about Elizabeth Proctor Thomas's life in detail, from her time as a child to her fight for compensation of her property. Ms. Tyson discussed her ties to a relative of Elizabeth Thomas, and how they have worked together to preserve her history through reenactments.

Our final interview was with [Howard University](#) professor, historian, and author [Dr. Carroll Gibbs](#). The goal of this interview was to retrieve more information on the named sites and individuals we were documenting. Dr. Gibbs provided context behind several historical locations the group was researching, including [Georgetown Waterfront Park](#), [Battery Kemble](#), and the [Godey Lime Kilns](#). Dr. Gibbs also shared his own strategies for organizing the sites and individuals for our final library. We discussed the "buried" history in Rock Creek Park, and asked his opinion on which sites and individuals should be researched and collected next, including the [Holt House](#) and [Holy Rood Cemetery](#). Dr. Gibbs also shared with us about his book "Black Copper and Bright" which speaks upon African American History during the civil war.

4.4 Museums/Libraries/Sites

Our team visited various park sites, museums, and libraries. For example, we discovered some new information when visiting Peirce Mill, toured the mill and its storage building, read about Peirce Mill on informational signs, and spoke with the local rangers who are site experts.

However, when visiting a site such as [Battery Kemble](#), the entirety of what was once there is completely gone, with not even a sign in the area telling the story of the history behind it. The group visited several museums, including the [African American History Museum](#) and [American History Museum](#), however none provided information about any sites with African American history or any information on Rock Creek Park as a whole. Visiting libraries like the [DC History Center](#) provided us with physical information to work with, such as books, photos, and artifacts from specific sites. The information the team discovered from these places was used to help finalize the library. Figure 3 below is a list of the museums and libraries the team visited.

Museums	Libraries
African American History Museum	DC History Center
American History Museum	

Figure 3. *List of Museums and Libraries visited.*

4.5 Developing the Library

The concept of the expandable library was developed in conjunction with [Brian Joyner](#), the Deputy Superintendent of Rock Creek Park. The library consists of the completed data template (base template in Figure 4) for each site or individual in a DOCX or PDF file, followed by a hyperlink that directs the reader to a longer, more in-depth history about the corresponding site. The research compiled from the 19 selected sites and individuals were logged into one DOCX file using the data template. The longer descriptions were constructed in separate files using the same research, and the hyperlinks are included under each logged site and individual. Figure 4 below outlines the data template used to construct the library.

Site Name

[Photo Of Site/Individual]

Address:
Coordinates:
Year Constructed: (If Applicable)
Short Description

[Link to 1 Page “Click Here to Learn More About...”](#)

Figure 4. *Data Template.*

4.6 Example from Data Template & Library

Figure 5 is an example about Peirce Mill using our data template. There is a one-page description hyperlinked below the short description in the physical library. Due to the size and the number of sites and individuals documented, an addendum is included with the report that contains the full list of sites and individuals.

Peirce Mill



Address: 2401 Tilden St NW, Washington DC, 20008

Coordinates: 38.94024193465567, -77.05189653091318

Year Constructed: 1829

Short Description: Isaac Peirce and his son Abner built Peirce Mill in 1829, where they processed grain into flour and sold other products like wheat, corn, and rye. Peirce owned 14 slaves whom all lived on the grounds of the mill and worked in it as well as its surrounding orchards, along with other farm-related tasks. The mill continued to run even after Isaac's death in 1841 until the main shaft broke in 1897, sometime after it was purchased by the federal government. Today, it still stands as one of the only remaining mills in the entirety of Rock Creek Park, with tours available on the weekends from 10-4.

[Link to 1 Page](#)

Figure 5. *Data Template Completed with Peirce Mill*

After you click on the link you will be sent to this page. Figure 6 is a representation of what that page would look like.

Peirce Mill

Isaac Peirce was born in 1756 in Pennsylvania and was raised by [Quaker](#) parents. In 1788, he and his wife Elizabeth purchased 150 acres of land along Rock Creek before it was a park. The property included 10 acres with a mill and a few other scattered structures. Over time, the estate grew to around 2,000 acres, which included a distillery, springhouse, cow barn, carriage barn, potato barn, and several other buildings.



Peirce Mill, Source <https://www.nps.gov/rocr/learn/historyculture/peirce-mill-history.htm>

Peirce Mill was built in 1829, sometime after the land was purchased. The mill used the [Oliver Evans System](#), which made labor easier for those working it, the workers mostly being slaves. Peirce owned the mill but did not manage it. Instead, he leased it out to others who operated it for him. The reasoning behind this is most likely Peirce's lack of experience as a miller and would hire others to do the job for him and collect money from their success.

Figure 6. *Peirce Mill One Pager*

The federal government began purchasing land in the Rock Creek Valley to create the park starting in the 1890s. Peirce Mill, along with the carriage barn and springhouse, were purchased at that time but were allowed to continue to be run after that by the previous owners. The mill operated until 1897, when it was forced to shut down due to the main shaft breaking. In the years following, the mill was converted into a tea house to provide refreshments for park goers. The tea house had five managers from its conception in 1905 until its closing in 1934, most notably Ms. [Hattie Sewell](#). Sewell was an African American who operated the teahouse successfully from 1920-21. However, her contract renewal was denied by UPBG director [Colonel Clarence Sherrill](#) because of several complaints from white residents about the influx of African Americans frequenting the area.



2 ½ lb bag of White Corn Meal from Peirce Mill, date unknown

The shutdown of the teahouse in 1934 was prompted by the new superintendent of National Capital Parks, C. Marshall Finnan, who had proposed that Peirce Mill be restored to its original design with the mill machinery inhabiting it. Several restoration projects over the 20th century have restored it to how it looked in the 1850s, and since 2011 the mill has been operational, thanks to the help of [The Friends of Peirce Mill](#).

Figures 6 (CON'T). *Peirce Mill One Pager*

4.7 Future Project Guidebook

Our sponsors have stated that they would like to continue and expand upon the library with future groups. As a result, a guidebook was developed by the team using the strategies we utilized, as well as what we learned from the roadblocks we faced over the course of the project. The work produced from our project serves as a foundation for the next group to continue adding sites and individuals. Below are the contents of the guidebook:

1. Receive a list of the sites and individuals of interest from the sponsor early on. The earlier the list of sites and individuals is received, the more time there is to research. Since many museums and libraries require a week's notice in advance for appointments this would help organize those meetings. Interviews could also take time to schedule as certain individuals have a busier schedule than others. Being able to schedule interviews even months in advance will reduce scheduling conflicts and time constraints.
2. Receive a list of contacts in advance to communicate with who are experts of these sites and individuals or know where to search for information. A list of the contacts with contact information will be provided from our team for the future teams:
 - a. [Rock Creek Conservancy](#)
 - b. [Friends Of Pierce Mill](#)
 - b. [Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy](#)
 - c. [Washington Parks & People](#)
 - d. [Dr. Carroll Gibbs](#)
 - e. [Alexi R. McHugh](#)
 - f. [Patricia Tyson](#)

The contacts listed above were the most helpful during our research. Creating a set of questions specific to each interviewees background beforehand, is essential to creating a smooth and thorough interview process.

3. Communicate to the superintendent and other park staff early on to receive any additional information/requests for input. Individuals that are not the sponsors from the National Parks Service may have different ideas and suggestions for the project. Communicating with these individuals earlier on will make it easier to implement their ideas into the project without having to change the overall projects direction later on.
 - a. [Julia Washburn](#) - Superintendent
 - b. [Brian Joyner](#) - Deputy Superintendent
 - c. [Bradley Krueger](#) - Cultural Resources Manager
4. Utilize resources such as the [NPS Datastore website](#). Reports from this website have historical information relevant to sites and individuals. Reports sometimes provide

additional links and even mention of National Park Service resources with information. In addition to the NPS Datastore, other scholarly websites could be found on the internet.

5. Visit the various local museums and libraries in DC. There are hundreds of libraries and museums located within the city so going to ones that provide valid information are essential in saving time, some even have local history sections. At the bottom of the list where it says local neighborhood libraries, we are referring to the libraries that are more specific to a certain neighborhood within the city. Based on the specific parts of the Rock Creek Park being researched, different local libraries will be used.
 - A. [National Archives Museum](#)
 - B. [Mary Mcleod Bethune National Museum](#)
 - C. [Library of Congress](#)
 - D. [DC History Center](#)
 - E. [African American Civil War Museum](#)
 - F. [DC Office of Public Records](#)
 - G. [Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#)
 - H. [Anacostia Community Museum](#)
 - I. [Charles Sumner School](#)
 - J. Local Neighborhood libraries
6. Ask contacts during interviews/emails if they have suggestions as to where to search for information or other people they would suggest getting into contact with. This is important as networking will help teams find as much information and or resources as possible.

5.0 Recommendations

We recommend the following actions for the National Parks Service to help bring awareness to these named locations and individuals.

1. *Improve signage at named park locations.*

The signage in many sites is in poor condition or are in locations where they are not visible. Additionally, signage does not acknowledge the little-known histories of the individuals and events that have occurred at these sites.

Several locations do not have signs which does not enable people to use the park with a full understanding of the location's history. Other locations have either older signs that are difficult to read or the signs are placed in locations with less foot traffic. Appropriate signage would help better inform park goers as they walk the landscape. As presented below in Figure 5, the [Francis Scott Key Memorial](#) has signage but much of the lettering has faded away from age. The sign should be updated so it is easier to read. Other locations like [Rabaut Park](#) do not have any signage about the park's history. Additionally, many sites do not acknowledge much of the little-known history. For example, the bunker at Fort Stevens that held ammunition for the Union army, was originally the basement of the home of Elizabeth Proctor Thomas, however there is no signage there that indicates this.



Figure 5. Francis Scott Key. (n.d.). Trip Advisor. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g28970-d615512-Reviews-Francis_Scott_Key_Memorial_Park-Washington_DC_District_of_Columbia.html.

2. *Make the data template as well as the full library available online to the public.*

The data template and full library should be available both online and as a pamphlet to educate visitors about the locations and individuals of Rock Creek Park. The pamphlet should include the information provided from the data template, as well as the contact information for sponsors Kym Elder and [Kenya Finley-Jean](#) if park visitors wish to access the full library. The pamphlet should be handed out by park rangers or available at information stands at the park locations.

3. *Recruit individuals or interns to continue to add to the library with additional entries.*

Individuals such as graduate students seeking a potential class credit or “certificate of research” can populate the library with additional entries through research on their own or in a group. Research could be done with the many college preparatory schools located within the Washington DC area as a class project. This research would be monitored by a professor or teacher in conjunction with a sponsor from the National Parks Service.

4. *Utilize the Future Project Guidebook when working with future teams.*

Refer to the guidebook in section 4.7 of this report to assist during the process of adding sites and individuals to the expandable library. The guidebook discusses strategies the team utilized during research, and provides solutions to roadblocks we faced.

Future Service Project Ideas

In addition to the National Park Service Recommendations, we created recommendations for a future project team.

1. *Collaborate with [Rock Creek Conservancy](#).*

Rock Creek Conservancy has an abundance of information available and may want to sponsor a project in conjunction with the National Park Service, based on their interest and needs at the time.

2. *Continue to improve and add to the existing library.*

Polish how it is formatted/accessible, and edit according to the National Parks Service’s requests. This would include adding more of the hundreds of sites and individuals that are in Rock Creek Park.

3. *Create a website or webpage for these sites and individuals.*

This could be used in conjunction with Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek Conservancy to show what the sites and individuals of the park have to offer. This website can also include ways to visit these sites and other general information on the park as a whole.

4. Utilize the Future Project Guidebook.

Refer to the guidebook in section 4.7 of this report to assist during the process of adding sites and individuals to the expandable library. The guidebook discusses strategies the team utilized during research, and provides solutions to roadblocks we faced.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Informed Consent Agreement for Participation in a Research Study

Investigator: Adam Tedesco, Adam Lepore, Rebekah Mendoza, Ana Roure

Contact Information: gr-dc22-nps@wpi.edu

Title of Research Study: NPS Little Known History

Sponsor: National Parks Service

Introduction:

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree, however, you must be fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and any benefits, risks or discomfort that you may experience as a result of your participation. This form presents information about the study so that you may make a fully informed decision regarding your participation.

Purpose of the study: The goal of this study is to create a searchable catalog of historical sites in Rock Creek Park that help resurface the obscured and little-known histories of African Americans, Indigenous people and Pierce Mill's enslaved residents.

Procedures to be followed: The research will be conducted by a thirty minute to an hour-long interview based on the interviewee's knowledge on the subject.

Risks to study participants: None anticipated.

Benefits to research participants and others: The research will help create a library on the lost histories of Rock Creek Park which will educate others on the history of the park and bring justice for the families having a connection with the lost history.

Record keeping and confidentiality: We will keep record by taking notes for the library and these notes will impact the library which is presented to the National Parks Service. "Records of your participation in this study will be held confidential so far as permitted by law. However, the study investigators, the sponsor or its designee and, under certain circumstances, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute Institutional Review Board (WPI IRB) will be able to inspect and have access to confidential data that identify you by name. Any publication or presentation of the data will not identify you."

Compensation or treatment in the event of injury: No risk is anticipated.

For more information about this research or about the rights of research participants, or in case of research-related injury, contact: gr-dc22-nps@wpi.edu In addition, included is the contact information

for the IRB Chair (Professor Kent Rissmiller, Tel. 508-831-5019, Email: kjr@wpi.edu) and the University Compliance Officer (Michael J. Curley, Tel. 508-831-6919, Email: mjcurley@wpi.edu).

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will not result in any penalty to you or any loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You may decide to stop participating in the research at any time without penalty or loss of other benefits. The project investigators retain the right to cancel or postpone the experimental procedures at any time they see fit.

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have been informed about and consent to be a participant in the study described above. Make sure that your questions are answered to your satisfaction before signing. You are entitled to retain a copy of this consent agreement.

_____ Date: _____
Study Participant Signature

_____ Study Participant Name (Please print)

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Person who explained this study

Additional clauses to add to Consent Agreements, as appropriate:

Significant new findings or information, developed during the course of the research, may alter the subject's willingness to participate in the study. Any such findings will be promptly communicated to all research participants.

Should a participant wish to withdraw from the study after it has begun, the following procedures should be followed: any recording of the interview will be discarded. There won't be any consequences for

early withdrawal for the subject and the research.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Questions on specific locations

- 1.) How do you know of ___ site?
- 2.) What can you tell us about ___ site?
- 3.) Is there anything you wish for us to know about this site?
- 4.) Any fun facts?/ Buried history? Rumors?
- 5.) Is this site related to other sites?
- 6.) Who had significant impacts on this site?

Questions on African American History

- 1.) Do you know of the people of Pierce Mills?
- 2.) Who were the families that who had slaves at the park?
- 3.) What activities would the slaves do at the park? What were they responsible for?
- 4.) Where were the slaves located? Did they have specific sites/ houses?

Questions on Native American History

- 1.) What tribes used to call Rock Creek home?
- 2.) How were the interactions with the new settlers?
- 3.) Were the tribes forced out of their home?

General question of Rock Creek Park

- 1.) How/When was the park founded?
- 2.) What is/was the mission of the park?
- 3.) How would you say history was lost in the park?
- 4.) What role did systematic racism play in the park's history?