



Rock Creek Park; The Little-Known History

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Goal

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.



WPI

Objective 1

Research and organize the obscured information from selected named locations and individuals in Rock Creek Park that lack historical data.



Peirce Mill

Objective 2

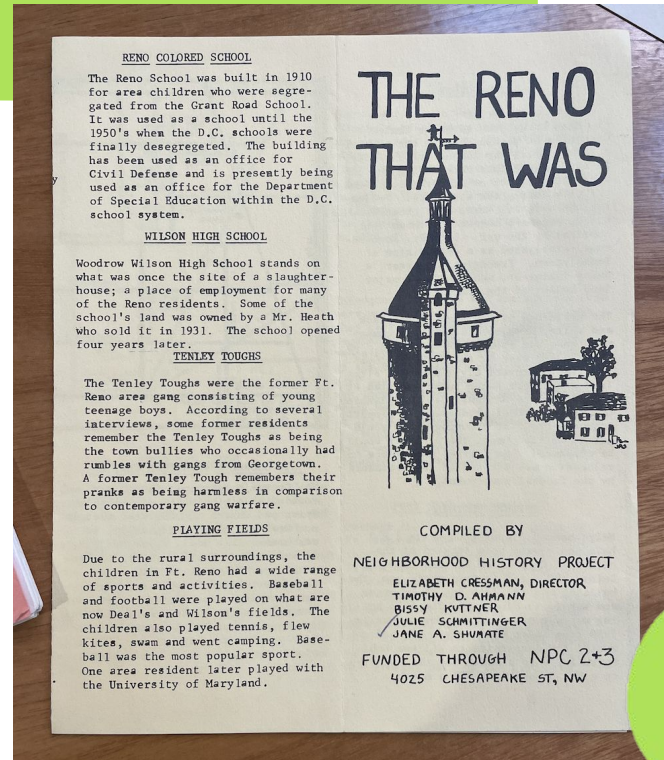
Create and develop an expandable, publicly available library of historical information for the identified sites and individuals



River in Peirce Mill

Background

- X Obscured history:
- X African American History
 - Systemic Racism
- X Indigenous History
- X General History
 - Lack of..



Fort Reno Paper, 1900's DC History Center

Methodology

- X Historical information found through:
 - X Interviews
 - X Websites
 - NPS Data Store
 - X Libraries, museums, sites
 - DC History Center



Klinge Mansion DC History Center

Results: Interviews

- X **Bradley Krueger** (Cultural Resources Mgr, RCP)
- X **Bryan Joyner** (Deputy Supt./Historian, RCP)
- X **Marvin Tupper Jones** (Chowan Discovery Group)
- X **Patricia Tyson** (Military Road School Preservation Trust)
- X **Dr. Carroll Gibbs** (Historian/Professor and Author)

Results: Library

Developed a library with 19 Rock Creek Park historical 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 it processed grain into flour as well as sold other products like wheat, corn, and rye. Peirce owned 14 or so slaves whom all lived on the grounds of the mill and worked on 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. [same time](#) 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](#)



Sarah Whitby

Address: 5200 Glover Rd NW, Washington, DC 20015
Coordinates: 38.9598030732165, -77.05169360207653

Year Constructed: 1800s

Short Description: The remains of a house owned by an African American were found recently in the year 2005, and with excavations of the house found many pieces of African American lost history. The owner of the house was discovered to be an African American woman named Sarah Whitby, who lived in the land now known as Rock Creek Park between 1870 and 1900

[Link to 1 Page](#)



Joaquin Millers Cabin

Address: Beach Dr NW, Washington DC, 20008

Coordinates: 38.96402733874794, -77.04634298919065

Year Constructed: 1883

Short Description: Joaquin Miller's Cabin was first constructed on what is now known as Meridian Hill Park in 191. After Joaquin Miller left Washington, DC, Meridian Hill Park was being constructed, and the house was to be removed. With advocates from the state of California, where Joaquin Miller originated from, the cabin was moved to Rock Creek Park. The cabin was leased to Joaquin Miller's Niece, where it was a snack shack and held poetry classes until the mid-1950s. It was used for the Miller's Cabin Poetry Series from 1973 until 2011.

[Link to 1 Page](#)



Dumbarton Oaks Park

Address: 011 of R St NW, Washington DC, 20007

Coordinates: 38.91575170726434, -77.06179160409843

Year Constructed: 1932

Short Description: Dumbarton Oaks Park, made by landscape architect Beatrix Farrand, wanted to create an illusion of country life inside of a city for the Bosses who were the owners of the land. With the help of Farrand that became a reality. After the National Park Service took over taking care of the land they didn't have enough funds to properly take care of it and this caused the park to have a lot of issues. With the help of the citizens of the area they were able to somewhat fix what was basically abandoned.

[Link to 1 Page](#)

Documented Sites

X Sherrill Drive

X Miller Cabin

X Milkhouse Ford

X Fort Reno Park

X Soapstone Valley

X Peirce Mill

X Klinge Mansion



RCP Historical Figures

- X Elizabeth Proctor Thomas
- X Sarah Whitby
- X Hattie Sewell
- X Isaac Peirce
- X Joaquin Miller
- X James Bryce



Results (Data Template)



Fort Reno Park

Address: 4000 Chesapeake St NW, Washington DC, 20016

Coordinates: 38.951458105215224, -77.07725270409728

Year Constructed: 1861

Short Description: Fort Reno used to be one of the forts that protected the nation's capital during the Civil War. After the war, the fort was reconstructed into a primarily African American neighborhood. Unfortunately, the neighborhood was then destroyed by a white conspiracy group that wanted to “clean” the neighborhood of the African American community, against the community's wishes.

[Click Here to Read More About Fort Reno Park](#)



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 it processed grain into flour as well as sold other products like wheat, corn, and rye. Peirce owned 14 or so slaves whom all lived on the grounds of the mill and worked on 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, some time 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.

[Click Here to Read More About Peirce Mill](#)

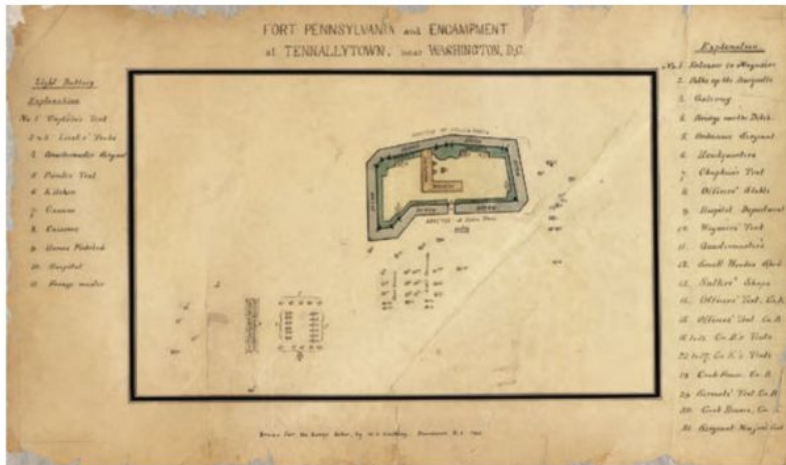
Full page example

Results

Fort Reno

The Birth of Fort Reno or Fort Pennsylvania

Fort Reno was developed on 61 acres of land owned by a woman named Jane C. Dyer. The federal government, in search of land to protect the federal district, seized her property and built the fort in 1861. The land provided an advantage to the Union because it was the highest point of the city (4)(14) at 429 ft above sea level, and provided a view of the western and northern approaches to the city (1).



1862 map of Fort Pennsylvania. (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

Reno City

While Onion and Butts initially marketed these properties to presumably white government employees, African American families began buying these lots. Reno City attracted African Americans who needed to find work to then support their families and themselves.(2) By the 1890s, Reno City was characterized as an expanding, interracial community. African American settlers were joined by freedmen, women and whites who bought small plots of land on which they built their homes (2). By 1901 residents knew that Fort Reno was the center of the African American population and referred to it as the "colored settlement of Reno..."(1).

The destruction of a community

Around the 1930's the citizens of Fort Reno were removed from the neighborhood they built and all of their homes were then destroyed. (11) But how and why did this happen? This started around 1899, when a group of property owners, around Tenleytown, that would later become the Friendship Citizens Association (FCA) planned to clear Fort Reno and use its land. (16) The FCA expressed their fears that black neighborhoods threatened their real estate values. (16)

Nearby white-only subdivisions Chevy Chase and Tenleytown (15) citizens lobbied the federal government to destroy Fort Reno to develop a park and schools for their use. (11) According to Neil Flanagan "it was hard to persuade Congress to spend money on a huge network of parks for people who couldn't vote."(16) The American Planning and Civic Association (APCA) were able to convince the Congress by pitching "Washington as a model of planning". (16) In November 1925 the board voted to remove the houses of Fort Reno and convert it to a park, but did not fund it because they estimated the cost of removing the community to be too expensive (estimated cost: \$1 million). (16)

Residents of Fort Reno protested but this did nothing as, in 1929 the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) began buying houses in Reno and threatened those who refused to sell with condemnation. (11) NCPPC's "compensation" was not enough to afford a new house and most residents that lived in Fort Reno moved to black neighborhoods west of Rock Creek Park. (11) African American families were forced out of their homes and by 1951 the last of Reno City's residents had moved and the Jesse Lee Reno School was closed. (15)

Cold War

In 1961, during the Cold War, the White House Signal Agency built two towers in Fort Reno, code- named "Cartwheel". They were built to protect members of the Executive Branch (15) during a nuclear attack (13). These towers were constructed to have line-of-site to its nearest neighbor for microwave communications. (13) In the 1970s the government saw "Cartwheel" as useless and transferred to the Federal Aviation Administration, where a civilian use was determined.(15) You can see the towers to this day but it is not open to the public.



NPS Recommendations

Improve & Provide Signage



Lepore, Adam. (2022). *Defamed Signage* [Photograph]. Tenleytown. Washington DC



Collaborate With Others



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



Future Project Guidebook

- X Preliminary list of the sites and individuals of interest
- X Provide a preliminary list of contacts
- X Communicate with superintendent and other park staff

List of historical sites and individuals we 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	

Future Project Guidebook

- x Utilize resources such as the NPS Datastore website, visit museums/ libraries



Expand Library & Its Availability



Soapstone Valley

Address: Washington DC, 20008

Coordinates: 38.9457116192308, -77.05807331288128

Year Constructed: Unknown

Short Description: Around 2000 BC, people extracted stone from beds of river cobblestone that are exposed along some of the bluffs around Rock Creek. Natives would use these stones to make weapons and tools. Dig sites were formed by archaeologists to excavate these artifacts, and today Soapstone Valley Park stands over these sites.

[Click Here to Read More About Soapstone Valley](#)



Klinge Mansion

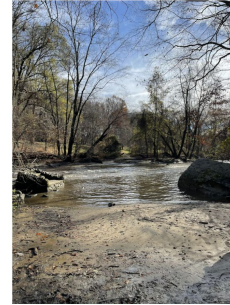
Address: 3545 Williamsburg Ln NW, Washington DC, 20008

Coordinates: 38.93600226120419, -77.04998685991713

Year Constructed: 1823

Short Description: Klinge Mansion, also called the Klinge Estate or Linnean house, was constructed by Joshua Peirce and is a still standing structure in Rock Creek Park. The Peirce family was interested in horticulture, and the estate became a famous nursery in DC. Trees planted from the mansion still exist today at the White House, Capitol, and other government buildings and parks. Linnean Hill, where the estate sits, is a comfortable ground for shrubs and flowers. The hill additionally became a popular meeting place for several Washington historical members, such as Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun. Currently, it serves as the headquarters for Rock Creek Park.

[Click Here to Read More About Klinge Mansion](#)



Milkhouse Ford

Address: Off Beach Dr NW, Washington DC, 20008

Coordinates: 38.964827589666035, -77.04764660207638

Year Constructed: 1904

Short Description: Milkhouse Ford is a ford, a shallow part of a river made for crossing. It was constructed in 1904 to make it easier for people on horseback and later automobiles to cross the river. The origins of the name "Milkhouse" are unknown, but it can be assumed that a dairy farm was located close to it on the bank of Rock Creek, hence the naming.

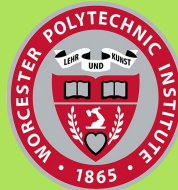
[Click Here to Read More About Milkhouse Ford](#)

Acknowledgements

- X To Our Sponsors
 - X **Kym Elder** (Program Manager - Civil War Defenses of Washington)
 - X **Kenya Finley-Jean** (Supervisory Park Ranger)
- X Contacts
 - X **Brian Joyner** (Deputy Supt./Historian, NPS)
 - X **Bradley Krueger** (Cultural Resources Mgr, RCP)
- X Our Advisors
 - X Professors **Linda and Fred Looft**

THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?



WPI