

Town Governance and Services

The mayor is the chief executive officer of the town responsible for the enforcement of ordinances, oversees the police and water department, and also supervises the expenditure of funds above \$500, with the approval of the Town Council. There are an eleven member Planning Commission and a five member Landmarks Commission. Planning is responsible for the orderly growth of the town as prescribed by town ordinances. Landmarks preserves the historic town through similar ordinances. Both Commissions are advisory, but assist in governing Harpers Ferry as a registered historic community with the advice of the mayor and the consent of the town council. A town clerk and treasurer maintain the day to day operation of town government. These positions are protected by an approved town council Code of Employment.

There are a police chief and three police officers. The police chief serves at the pleasure of the mayor. All police officers are civil service employees. Employment is approved by the town council after officers have been certified by the West Virginia Police Academy. Policing takes place in Harpers Ferry, Bolivar and Route 340. A contractual memorandum of understanding is negotiated every year with Bolivar for police protection in their community.

The water plant is owned and operated by the Town of Harpers Ferry. It provides water for both towns. A water plant superintendent and three Class 2 operators assist in maintaining the plant and water pipe infrastructure. Sources of water are Elk Runs, Mayhew Springs, and when needed, the Potomac River.

The town's budget is approximately \$1,100,000. per year. Sources of revenue are video lottery; business and occupation taxes, property taxes; franchise, liquor and wine taxes; plus others.

Demographics

In 2000, the official census listed 315 residents in Harpers Ferry; fifty percent of those residents are over 43 years of age. Young people, 18 and under, numbered 75; older people,

60 and over, numbered 66. Females outnumbered males by 174 to 141. A total 149 households, with an average household size of 2.11 persons; 104 households in owner-occupied housing and 45 in renter-occupied housing recorded in the 2000 census.

Of the 252 persons aged 16 or over, 170 were in the labor force, more than half (89) were employed in management, professional or related occupations. The next largest group was 34 persons in sales and office occupations and 28 persons in service occupations. The Census showed 44 people in education, health and social services; and 34 in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services. Of those employed, 24 worked at home, 17 walked to work, 17 used public transportation, of 110 who drove to work, 103 drove alone and 7 carpooled. The median household income was \$52,344, significantly higher than Jefferson County's \$44,373, West Virginia's \$29,696, or the United States at \$41,994.

The education levels attained by Harpers Ferry workers were 91.1% with a high school diploma; 22.9% with some college or an associate's degree; 31.8% had a bachelor's degree; and 28.4% had a post graduate or professional degree.

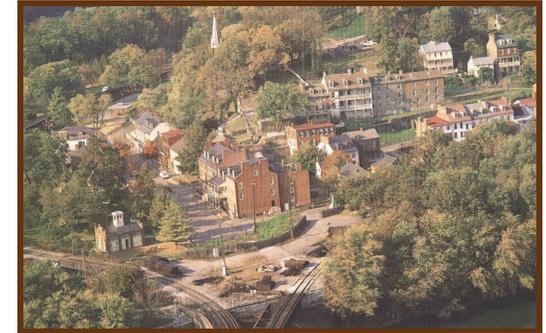
The Town of Harpers Ferry will likely experience limited population growth, with new housing being offset somewhat by continued reduction in household size as the existing population ages. Also, limited building lots prevent subdivision development.

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**View Our Web Site at
www.harpersferrywv.us**



Harpers Ferry in History



Harpers Ferry is situated on a peninsula at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers. The history of the Town is embodied in its location at the junction of these rivers. On the North, the Potomac is flanked by Maryland Heights and on the South, Loudoun Heights rises above the Shenandoah.

In 1733 Peter Stephens settled on the “point.” As the elevation of Harpers Ferry is the lowest level in the state, the town was unflatteringly referred to as the “hole.” Robert Harper, for whom the Town is named, purchased the land and established Harpers Ferry. Prior to the industrialization of the town, the scenic grandeur of the site was much admired by visitors. An early comment made by Thomas Jefferson said the view “was worth a voyage across the Atlantic.” George Washington had another vision for the Town. His vision was one of economic development. As president of the “Potowmack” Company, he wanted the Potomac River to be an avenue of commerce to the west. Thus, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was born. However, the canal never reached the Ohio River due to the arrival of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1834 and its advance to the Ohio in 1854.

United States Armory and Arsenal

The Town’s destiny was established by President Washington in 1796, who chose it as a site for a United States Armory and Arsenal because there was an abundant water supply, also forestry for wood. Nevertheless, there was controversy within his administration about the site. The War Department complained about the lack of building space and occasional events of high water-floods! Washington prevailed, and in 1799 the building of the armory began. With the armory, came the industrialization of a former bucolic town now enshrouded in smoke from the factories. The view observed by John Quincy Adams in 1834 is as follows; “There is not much of the sublime in the scene, and those who first see it after reading Mr. Jefferson’s description are disappointed....”

The economic hey day of the town was one of the success stories of early nineteenth century industrialization; invisible today, as visitors walk the town’s streets. Turning out gun stocks, armory production proceeded. Lathes produced musket barrels and clothes were manufactured on Virginius Island. Hall Rifle Works along the Shenandoah River developed interchangeable

rifle parts, a marked advance over muzzle loading muskets. Of course, all has been swept away by natural and man made “riots and tumults.”

After 1842 the armory and arsenal became a source of work and wealth for the town. Population crested toward 3,000. Hotels, saloons, and bawdy houses thrived. In 1851 the Virginia legislature granted the town a charter to organize local government. A mayor, recorder and nine town councilmen were elected. An issue in the 1851 mayoral election was the condition of the streets, an issue that continues to this day.

John Brown and Civil War

In the sixth decade of the 19th century Harpers Ferry became the scene of a momentous event in American history. On the night of October 16, 1859, five blacks and fourteen whites with their leader John Brown, “Commander in Chief” of the “Provisional Army of the United States,” attempted to seize the federal armory and arsenal to liberate slaves and end slavery in the United States. It was an ill fated mission. John Brown’s liberation movement failed. He and his followers were tried and executed for treason. During the insurrection, Mayor Fontaine Beckham was killed by one of John Brown’s raiders. He had gone to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad station to view the body of his friend and railroad employee, Heyward Shepherd. Shepherd, a free black, was the first person killed in the Brown attack. Beckham’s will freed Isaac Gilbert, his wife, and three children. These events were two ironies of the Raid.

We could conclude that John Brown’s raid was the first shot that led to the Civil War. Whatever one believes, the years from 1859 to 1865 were a living hell for the town and its people. With the rifle works destroyed, and the town changing hands between rebel and federal armies, military rule prevailed. The Civil War devastated Harpers Ferry. After the war, people began to return and rebuild; but Harpers Ferry was never to regain the industrial base that had maintained its prosperity prior to the conflict. The years ahead saw a sleepy town regularly devastated by raging floods flowing amid the ruins of the armory grounds.

Storer College

The administrative buildings of the former armory became Storer College to educate the newly freed men and women. Storer College campus developed into a sacred place for those who venerated John Brown and his raiders. In 1906, the first American civil rights meeting of the Niagara Movement held its convention at Storer College. Here the twin sins of slavery and segregation were challenged in the great redoubt of human freedom – Harpers Ferry. The College closed in 1955. Many of the buildings are now used by the National Park as administrative or educational facilities.

Recovery

With much of lower town deteriorating, Representative (later Senator) Jennings Randolph was able to have Harpers Ferry established as the Harpers Ferry National Monument. In 1944 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the legislation into law. Later, President John F. Kennedy signed legislation changing the name to the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The entire town became a Historic District in 1979, an additional protection for the town’s heritage. Since 2003 efforts to preserve and beautify the town have been carried on by the Harpers Ferry Historic Town Foundation.

Harpers Ferry Today

During the post Civil War Years the towns of Bo-livar and Harpers Ferry were united as one local governing entity. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory so the Circuit Court was petitioned to divide the towns. In 1872 the Court issued the charter that established the Corporation of Harpers Ferry. Residents of the town elect a mayor, recorder and five council members. Initially, they served for one year. Now their terms of office are for two years. Election takes place the second Tuesday of June in odd numbered years. Terms of offices commence July 1 and terminate, after two years, on June 30.