

# HARPERS FERRY PARK ASSOCIATION



## 50th Anniversary Perspective

This booklet was made possible by a generous donation from  
Progressive Printing  
526 West King Street  
Martinsburg, WV 25401  
*September 2021*

# Contents

Acknowledgments | 2

History of the Association | 3

Significant Dates | 8

The Founding Directors | 13

At the Helm:

Debbie Piscitelli's 36 Years of Leadership | 18

Reflecting on HFHA through a National—  
and Personal—Lens | *by Paula Degen* | 20

Board of Directors | 23

Our Supporters | 23

Our Partners | 25

# Acknowledgments

The Harpers Ferry Park Association extends heartfelt gratitude to all those who carried us to this milestone. It is not hyperbole to say we wouldn't have made it without your support. Your passion for the unique history and beauty of Harpers Ferry inspires all that we do. With special appreciation to these heroes:

To the HFPA staff for their dedication and adaptability over these hard months. Thank you for all the ways you “respect, communicate, relate, and radiate.”

To the volunteers who give us their time and talent far beyond what we could ever ask for. Thank you, Jim Koenig, for everything from soup to nuts; Hugh Clayton for his love of Harpers Ferry and eagerness to help in any way he can; and Autumn Cook for jumping down the rabbit holes of research for us.

To the guides who have led our Trails Less Traveled hiking series, purely as volunteers, because that's who they are: Dave Cahan, Chris Craig, Clark Dixon, Dave Gilbert, David Fox, Jim Silvia, and Ed Wheelless.

To our current Board of Directors: Jim Beckman, Laura Clark, Chris Craig, Mark Elrod, Cynthia Gayton, Susan Journell, Mike Lynch, Doug Perks, Sarah Shafer, Jim Silvia, Ed Wheelless, Michael Zeleke. Thank you

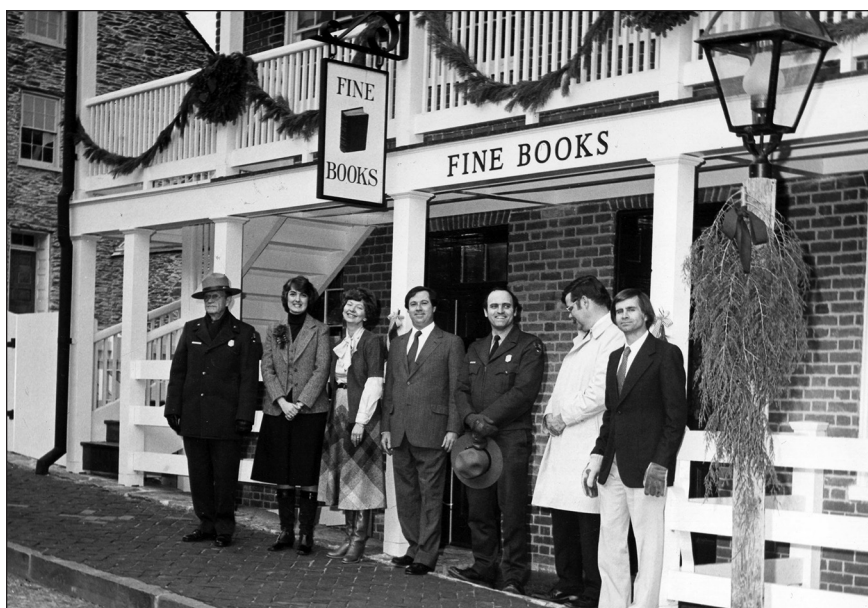
for being fierce advocates of this association.

To the staff at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, especially the interp staff for your amazing knowledge of Harpers Ferry history and your joy in sharing it with us and our members; the resources, maintenance, and custodial staff for keeping this old building standing; Samantha Zurbuch for appreciating our partnership like no other; Scott Pardue and Kristen Maxfield for guiding us through the pandemic and for the future success we'll certainly share together; and Tyrone Brandyburg for your wisdom and ear—it's an honor to be your partner.

To Paula Degen, Doug Perks, and Dennis Frye for mining the dusty corners of the association's past to help us create this anniversary perspective. And special thanks to David Gilbert for putting it all together in this beautiful booklet.

To Sue Baker for coming out of retirement to help with our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Membership Weekend. You will always be the heart of the association.

And to Debbie Piscitelli... one of your greatest gifts is your humility, but we all know that this association has reached its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary because of your leadership for 36 years, and your mentorship over the last five years. Thank you for being our guiding light.



## History of the Association

### Establishment

Cooperating associations have a long history with the National Park Service (NPS), beginning in 1920 at Yosemite, just four years after the creation of the NPS itself. Associations formed to provide interpretive services and materials not available with federal funds. Through cooperative agreements the associations operate bookstores in the parks and use the proceeds to support educational and scientific activities.

In the late 1960s, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (HFNHP) was part of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the National Park Service, and Eastern National Parks & Monument Association operated a sales outlet in the park visitor center. By 1970, the

park administration was placed under the jurisdiction of Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) where the NPS consolidated Mather Training Center, the Interpretive Design Center (IDC), and museum services on the campus of historic Storer College. At the recommendation of Doug Hubbard, acting manager of HFC, the independent Harpers Ferry Historical Association was created in a letter of designation dated November 17, 1970, and signed by NPS Director George Hartzog.

**Above:** Bookshop moves to High Street on December 5, 1980. Left to right: Preston Smith, Deborah Piscitelli, Paula Degen, Terry Flaherty, Paul Lee, Dr. John Stealey, and Don Campbell.

Formal incorporation of the Harpers Ferry Historical Association took place in January 1971, followed by the first annual meeting held on April 6, 1971. The first directors included both NPS employees and non-federal members. In later years, associations were solely private-sector entities. The founding board members were Benjamin H. Davis, William C. Everhart, Douglass H. Hubbard, Shirley Hunt, Jeanne Martin, Bradley D. Nash, and Roger J. Perry. Many generous loans from other established cooperating associations provided funds for the new organization. Initially the audiovisual division at IDC helped start the association, but by 1970 the position of service-wide cooperating association coordinator was established and filled by James V. Murfin, an editor in the Division of Publications. Helen Snyder was hired as part-time business manager for HFHA.

## Original Purpose

One of the first actions was to establish a new bookstore. Located on the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets, instructions for “The National Park Bookstore at Harpers Ferry Center,” specified:

*to develop a model bookstore located in old Harpers Ferry National Historical Park as a cooperative effort between the National Park Service and the Harpers Ferry Historical Association. The store will handle Publications directly*

*related to the National Park Service and its activities, or interests to visitors and service personnel in training at Mather or working with the IDC.*

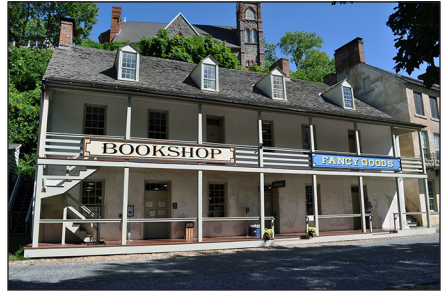
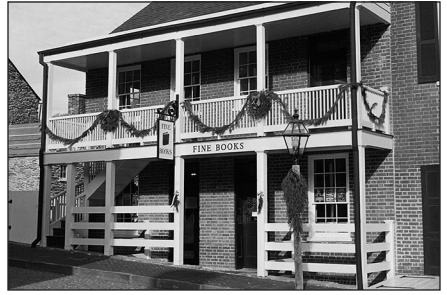
The original concept of the association also specified distribution to schools and libraries of the educational films produced by the park service. As the association evolved to serve HF-NHP as well as the HFC, this continued as a major role of the association. In the 1970s, the HFHA also operated a tailor shop, which produced clothing for the Bicentennial events of the National Park Service.

## Change of Administration

In March 1974 the administration of the park changed again to become part of the National Capital Region (NCR), and the association became more park-focused. But it still maintained strong ties with HFC by renting and selling park films, then videos and eventually DVDs. Having repaid all its debts by 1978, the association initiated publication projects and began to increase its aid to the NPS, sponsoring many park interpretive events, especially living history programs. Publications and sales items focused primarily on Harpers Ferry's history.

## The Bookshop Moves...and Moves...

The bookshop that was located in the old bank building on the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets was



designed by NPS architect Kip Stowell and was modern with large windows showcasing the products (*top left*). When this block of buildings was scheduled to be renovated in the late 1970s, the store temporarily moved to the Master Armorer’s House across the street.

In 1980, the store returned to High Street, one building up from its original location (*top right*). This new sales area, with its red oak fixtures, increased the association’s revenue considerably. It was designed with services of a book merchandising specialist through Jim Murfin’s office. The flood of 1985 then drove the store from its home for about six months (*above left*). By 1990, the association had outgrown this space and had moved back to its bookselling origins in the Stagecoach Inn Visitor Center on Shenandoah Street (*above*

*right*). Once more, sales increased significantly. But in January 1996, the store was again flooded—and again in September—with water over five-feet high. It was temporarily relocated after the first flood for two months, and then for more than six months after the second flood.

## Growth

In 1980 Debbie Mehrkam was hired as a full-time business manager, and the association began to show steady gains in revenue and membership. It was able to provide more services to the park and produce more publications. *A Walker’s Guide to Harpers Ferry* by Dave Gilbert was first published in 1983, and *The Harpers Ferry Heritage Trail* by Ryan Campbell appeared in its first edition in 1984. In 1985, the association purchased its first computer—a

second-hand one. In 1989 a team from the association and IDC came together to finish *From the Riot and Tumult*, a book started by Jim Murfin before his untimely death. Dave Gilbert published the first association newsletter, *The View*, in 1991.

Merchandise selection expanded in the bookstore, and Author Fests were held from 1997–2002. The association helped support the 1994 commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the park. A five-year strategic plan was formulated in 1998 focusing on education. Revenue and aid figures increased annually, interrupted only by flood evacuations.

## The Association in the 21st Century

As the association developed, it has provided more funding and services to the park, playing an active role in park special events. Support in the form of grant seeking for park programs has been included in its role. An expanded scope of sales has provided the shop with more diverse inventory and increased product development. The association now works very closely with park staff to enhance the visitor experience at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Total donations to the NPS from 1971 to the present exceed \$4 million.

The beginning of the new century brought many commemorative activities. In 2001, the association celebrated its 30th anniversary with reminiscences

about the early years from Bill Everhart, first manager of Harpers Ferry Center, and Carl Degen, chief of the Division of Audiovisual Arts. The association supported many of the park's commemorative events as well. These included the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial (2003), the Niagara Movement Centennial (2006), the 150th Anniversary of John Brown's Raid (2009), the Civil War Sesquicentennial (2011–2016), the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 (2012), the Centennial of the National Park Service (2016), the 150th Anniversary of the founding of Storer College (2017), and the 75th Anniversary of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (2019).

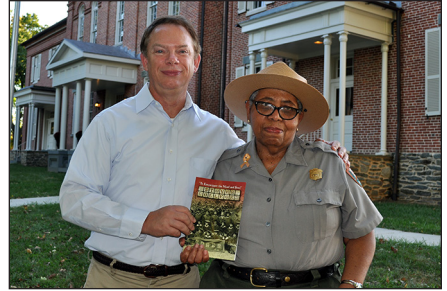
These commemorations produced several publications in partnership with HFNHP. Rangers, volunteers, and scholars collaborated on *The Harpers Ferry Anthology: Civil War-era Stories by Park Rangers and Volunteers* (HFHA, 2011), dedicated to David Larsen, and "*To Emancipate the Mind and Soul*": *Storer College 1867–1955* (HFPA, 2017), dedicated to Guinivere Roper. And former park historian Dennis Frye wrote the award-winning *Harpers Ferry Under Fire: A Border Town in the American Civil War* (HFHA, 2012) and *Confluence: Harpers Ferry as Destiny* (HFPA, 2019) with co-author Catherine Mägi.

The impressive growth of HFHA over the years is a credit to the steady, dedicated management of Debbie Piscitelli, who retired in 2016 after 36 years at the helm (*see page 18*).



# 2016

## National Park Service™ CENTENNIAL



Among the many park events supported by the association (clockwise from top left): Lewis & Clark Bicentennial (March 2003), Niagara Movement Centennial (August 2006), Storer College Sesquicentennial (October 2017), and NPS Centennial (2016).

### A New Name and Renewed Mission

Over the first two decades of the 21st century, the demographics of park visitors had evolved. More young and diverse visitors came to Harpers Ferry for its hiking, nature, and recreation, only to discover the unique and nationally significant history of the town. A 2015 strategic plan outlined ways to make better connections with this audience. The following year, members voted to change the name of the association to the Harpers Ferry Park Association.

Under the new leadership of Catherine Baldau as executive director, HFPA developed new branding, revised the scope of sales to include more

nature-related product and apparel, and its educational mission focused on experiences, workshops, and tours. The Harpers Ferry Certified Guide Program, started in 2013 with three guides, grew to seven guides providing tours to 2,000 visitors annually.

After three years of reduced revenue (due to weather in 2018, a government shutdown in 2019, and the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020–21), the association rebounded in the spring of 2021 with increased sales, memberships, and tours. HFPA now heads into its 51st year with strength and energy, recharged to fulfill its mission of supporting the interpretive and educational programs of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

# Significant Dates

## November 17, 1970

Letter of designation establishing the Harpers Ferry Historical Association (HFHA) signed by George Hartzog, Director of the National Park Service.

## January 18, 1971

Association officially incorporated in the State of West Virginia. Incorporators include Douglass Hubbard, William C. Everhart, Benjamin Davis, Roger J. Perry, Bradley D. Nash, Shirley Hunt, and Jeanne A. Martin.

## 1971

First Bookshop, designed by NPS architect Kip Stowell, opens on the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets.

## 1976

HFHA wins publication award for *Harpers Ferry, Child of the 19th Century* at Albuquerque meeting of cooperating associations.

## 1977

Conference of National Park Cooperating Associations (CNPCA) is formed. Helen

Snyder appointed the Association's Business Manager in February.

## 1978

Bookshop temporarily moves to Master Armorer's House during restoration of Lower Town Package No. 110. On April 21, first "Memorandum of Agreement" signed between the Association and National Park Service.

## December 5, 1980

Bookshop opens on High Street in the "Ann C. Stephenson Building"; Senator Robert C. Byrd visits.

## March 17, 1980

Deborah Piscitelli officially appointed the Association's Business Manager.

## 1981

Credit Cards first accepted in Bookshop.

## 1981

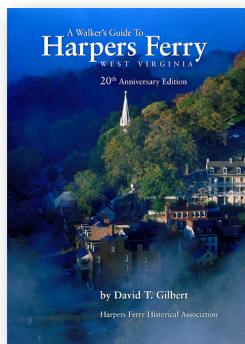
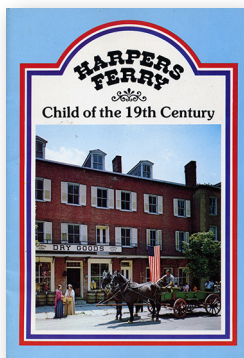
HFHA joins the Conference of National Park Cooperating Associations (CNPCA).

## 1982

Association undertakes Film/Video Marketing Study, leading to greater role in sale and distribution of NPS-produced audio-visual products.

## 1983

Bookshop begins to sell postcards, *Walker's Guide to Harpers Ferry*, and VHS tapes.



## 1984

Association purchases the historic “Burton Drawings” in July for donation to the park’s museum collection. Harpers Ferry Heritage Trail established.

## 1985

The Flood of 1985 forces the Bookshop to move out of its High Street location for six months, relocating to the “Nichols-Williams Building” further up High Street.

## 1989

Association publishes *From the Riot and Tumult* by James Murfin.

## 1990

In May, the Bookshop moves from High Street to the Park Visitor Center (Stagecoach Inn) on Shenandoah Street. In November, the Association receives “National Association of Interpreters First Place Publications Award” for *From the Riot and Tumult*.

## 1992

Association donates \$10,000 to help acquire the “John Brown Family Bible” for the park’s museum collection. Association also adopts a new logo featuring John Brown’s Fort.

## 1994

Harpers Ferry NHP celebrates its 50th Anniversary. The Association produces several commemorative items and hosts a reception for the oil paintings of Garnet Jex.



The Flood of September 1996 forces the Bookshop to higher ground on High Street. (Reused with permission of the Baltimore Sun Media Group. All Rights Reserved)

## 1995 – 1998

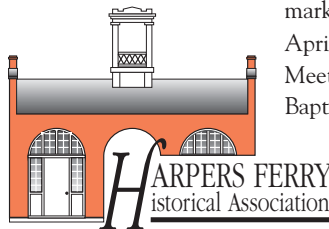
HFHA presents Elderhostel programs featuring Harpers Ferry’s extraordinary history.

## 1995

Association assumes publication of *A Walker’s Guide to Harpers Ferry*. The first edition was published by the Pictorial Histories Publishing Company of Charleston, WV in 1983.

## 1996

Two historic floods (January 20 and September 8) force evacuation and relocation of the Bookshop. Association marks its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on April 13 by hosting its Annual Meeting in the Curtis Freewill Baptist Church. Bill Everhart, Kip Stowell, Carl and Paula Degen, and Deborah Piscitelli are among the guests. Lincoln also comes to dinner on June 7, 1996: “Dinner with the President” featuring Jim Getty.



## 1997 – 2002

Association hosts annual Author Fests with authors and artists featuring park themes.

## 1998

Association receives Award of Excellence for the “School House Ridge Elementary Education Study Guide” and Award of Honorable Mention for the “Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Virtual Visitor Center” at the Gatlinburg, TN Cooperating Association Conference. Association embarks on a five-year strategic plan entitled “Stewardship through Education”.

## 2000

Association receives Award of Honorable Mention for *Waterpower: Mills, Factories, Machines and Floods at Harpers Ferry, WV 1762-1991* by David T. Gilbert at the Cooperating Association Conference in Anchorage, Alaska.

## 2002

In February, the association launches Education Adventures with a program entitled “Black Education in Jefferson County.” On June 10-14, the association conducts its first Teacher Institute, “The John Brown Fort,” modeled on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Teaching with Historic Places.”

## 2003

Association joins Harpers Ferry NHP in commemorating Meriwether Lewis’ 1803 visit to the Harpers Ferry Armory. Special Lewis and Clark Bookshop opens on High Street. HFHA also sponsors two educa-

tional programs: “Prepared for Success,” a Storer College history seminar for 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and “Shenandoah & Potomac History Seminar” for 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and brings Bridging the Watershed to Harpers Ferry NHP, a hands-on curriculum-based outdoor study program funded by the Alice Ferguson Foundation.



Members of the 1998 Strategic Planning Committee. Left to right (kneeling): Suzanne Silvia, Marsha Wassel, Megaly Green; (standing): Jim Silvia, James Castleman, Dennis Frye, Bruce Hopkins, Susan Baker, Bruce Noble, Douglas Perks, Michael Watson, Deborah Piscitelli, Heather Morgan McIntire, and Rebecca Sollars.

## Winter 2005-2006

Bookshop relocates during renovation of the Stagecoach Inn (John G. Wilson Building).

## 2006

Association joins the Park in celebrating the Niagara Centennial with an Academic Symposium.

## 2007

HFHA reformats Park Service films into DVDs for sales distribution.

## 2009

The *John Brown Handbook* is revised and published for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of John Brown's Raid. Association supports week-long John Brown commemoration event and Academic Symposium.

## 2009

Cumulative Aid to the National Park Service surpasses \$2 million.

## 2011

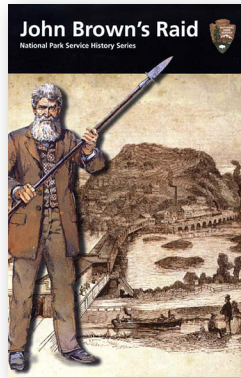
Association helps establish the David L. Larsen Memorial Fund to honor David's extraordinary career as Training Manager for Interpretation and Education with the National Park Service.

## 2012

HFHA publishes *Harpers Ferry Under Fire: A Border Town in the American Civil War* by Dennis E. Frye. The book wins the Public Land Alliance (PLA) 2012 Publication of the Year award at the 2013 annual conference in Portland, OR.

## 2012-2014

Association sponsors several events to help commemorate the Civil War Sesquicentennial, including "Prelude to Freedom: The 1862 Battle of Harpers Ferry," "The Birth of a State: 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the State of West Virginia," and "Thunder in the Valley: Sheridan's 1864 Valley Campaign."



## 2013

Association, in cooperation with Harpers Ferry NHP, launches Harpers Ferry Park Guide Tours. Jim Prentice and Doug Perks serve as the first certified Park Guides.

## 2015

Back on the bookshelves: Association revises and re-publishes Tom Hahn's

*Towpath Guide to the C&O Canal* nine years after the original publication had gone out of print.

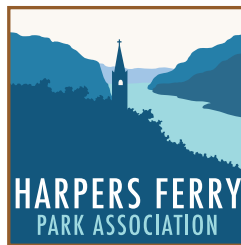
## 2016

Association joins Harpers Ferry NHP in celebrating the National Park Service Centennial. Also a year of notable changes: long-time Executive Director Deborah Piscitelli retires after an extraordinary 36-year career; Catherine Baldau is named new Executive Director; and the Association formally changes its name to the Harpers Ferry Park Association (HFPA).

## 2017

HFPA joins Harpers Ferry NHP in hosting the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Storer College

Commemoration on October 6-8. The Association also publishes "*To Emancipate the Mind and Soul*": *Storer College 1867-1955*, which features essays by park rangers, historians, academics, and volunteers. Private travel and philanthropic business Tauck awards HFPA a major grant for the stabilization and preservation of the Lockwood House.



## 2017

Retired Executive Director Deborah Piscitelli receives the James V. Murfin Award. The Award—inaugurated in 1988—recognizes excellence and innovation in the National Park Service Cooperating Association program.



Deborah Piscitelli receives the James V. Murfin Award on February 13, 2017, with (left to right): Doug Perks (HFPA), Julia Washburn (NPS), Debbie Piscitelli, Dennis Frye (NPS), and David Gilbert (HFPA).

## 2019

Association joins Harpers Ferry NHP in celebrating the Park's 75th Anniversary on June 28-30 with a gala weekend of speakers, tours, and events. The Association also publishes *Confluence: Harpers Ferry as Destiny*, by Dennis Frye and Catherine Mägi Oliver.



Executive Director Catherine Baldau and Park Superintendent Tyrone Brandyburg building a new partnership at the opening ceremony of the park's 75th Anniversary in 2019.

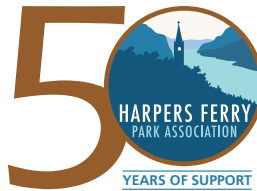
## 2020

Rocked by the COVID pandemic, the Bookshop finally reopens to the public in October after a seven-month hiatus. The pandemic even forced the association to move its Annual Meeting online for the first time in its history.

## 2021

Happy Golden Anniversary! The Association celebrates 50 years of support to

Harpers Ferry NHP with a series of hikes, new merchandise, and special events.



# HFPA Founding Directors

At the time the association was founded in 1971, it was common for NPS employees to serve on the board of directors and for the park superintendent or designee to be the executive secretary. This changed nationally in the 1980s. Shirley Hunt, Roger Perry, and Bradley Nash were the non-federal employees on the first HFHA board.

## Benjamin H. Davis

In 1970, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park operated under the administration of Harpers Ferry Center. Benjamin H. Davis was superintendent of the park August 1967 to April 1972 and worked closely with Bill Everhart and Doug Hubbard at HFC to form the Harpers Ferry Historical Association.

A Kentucky native, Davis began his NPS career at Mammoth Cave National Park in 1936. His assignments as a historian took him to Abraham Lincoln Birthplace, Kings Mountain National Military Park, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Site, and Antietam National Battlefield.

Prior to Harpers Ferry, he served as superintendent at Roosevelt-Vanderbilt NHS and Andrew Johnson NHS, where he met poet Carl Sandburg. After working for three years as the Bicentennial coordinator for the Southeast Regional Office, Davis was named superintendent of Carl Sandburg Home NHS. Under Davis's leadership, Carl Sandburg Home NHS was fully

developed as a national park. He laid a foundation for the park's management goals and established the administrative and physical infrastructure. He retired there in 1986.

## William C. Everhart

Bill Everhart began his National Park Service career at Gettysburg in 1950. He served as a park historian at Vicksburg and Independence, was a member of the Seashore Study Task Force, and worked with the Historic Sites Survey in San Francisco. George Hartzog, Jr. hired him as park historian to supervise the planning of the Museum of Westward Expansion, one of the largest interpretive projects undertaken by NPS. In 1962, Everhart was assigned to the Long Range Requirements Task Force. When Hartzog became NPS director, Everhart took on the job of organizing a new Division of Interpretation, originally based in Washington, D.C.

Everhart combined exhibits, audiovisual programs, publications, planning and interpretive services into a single division. His team of designers, editors, filmmakers, craftspeople, and others (some brought in from outside the park service) produced "cutting edge" films, exhibits, and publications that were progressive for a government agency at that time. Hartzog's support and a series of awards from professional organizations gradually won over the critics.

In the late 1960s, Everhart brought the various interpretive media functions together at a new center in Harpers Ferry. The Interpretive Design Center opened in 1970, and Everhart served as the first manager.

During Everhart's tenure at HFC, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park operated under HFC management. Part of Everhart's vision advocated for cooperating associations to play a significant role in advancing innovative interpretation in parks. It was through his efforts that the Harpers Ferry Historical Association was established in January 1971. The plan was to make this association a model and a showcase for the interpretive products designed by HFC. One of the earliest examples of this was the association's distribution of films produced by HFC for the Bicentennial of the American Revolution. Thousands of copies of these films were rented and sold to schools and other public venues during and after the commemoration.

After his work at HFC, Everhart served as special assistant for policy under NPS directors Ron Walker and Gary Everhardt. He retired in 1977 and spent time as a visiting professor at Clemson and published two NPS histories, *The National Park Service* and *Take Down Flag and Feed Horses*.

For many years he remained a friend to the association, visiting, calling to check on us, signing books for us, and contributing financially. He passed away in February 2017.

## Jeanne Adele Martin Hoffman

Jeanne Martin Hoffman of New Port Richey, FL, was the wife of Herbert "Herb" Franklin Martin who worked as a museum specialist in the Division of Museum Services at Harpers Ferry 1967–1980. The couple had two children: one son, Herbert Martin Jr., and one daughter, Daina Jeanne Clevenger. Little information could be found about Martin while she served on the HFHA board. She passed away in Florida at age 94.

## Douglass Hubbard

The son of educators, Doug Hubbard grew up in Fresno, CA. He graduated from UC Berkeley in 1940 in zoology and completed an MS degree at Texas A&M in wildlife management in 1942.

Hubbard joined the park service in the summer of 1940 in Yosemite, followed by work as a seasonal naturalist in Sequoia National Park in 1941. After returning from service in WWII in the US Navy, he served at Hawaii Volcanoes and Yosemite as chief naturalist. A major achievement at Yosemite was the establishment of the Yosemite History Pioneer Center in 1960, where visitors enjoyed cultural recreations of 19th-century mountain life, introducing living history interpretation to this park. Hubbard, along with his wife, Fran, created the Awani Press that published a series of books about Yosemite. Hubbard was known for his creative and forward-thinking approach to interpretation.

From Yosemite, Hubbard went to the Washington office of NPS in 1966. He held the position of chief of the Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services and then was appointed deputy director of NPS Interpretive Planning. He served as assistant director/manager of Harpers Ferry Center January 1970–January 1971 and was responsible for coordinating the construction and staffing of the new facility.

At the end of his tenure at HFC, Hubbard retired from the NPS and assisted in developing the Nimitz Museum project. Later years saw Fran and Doug Hubbard traveling through the world giving programs on cruise ships. He passed away in 2010 in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the age of 92.

### **Shirley Miller Hunt**

Shirley Hunt was born in Harpers Ferry, but shortly before World War II his father moved the family to Charles Town. The younger Hunt's interest in local history was kindled by his father who for many years conducted weekend tours at the Jefferson County Courthouse.

Following graduation from Charles Town High School, Hunt went to work for his uncle, John Campbell Woody—the “Filling Station Czar” of Charles Town, who owned service stations at three of the four gateways leading into Charles Town. In the early 1950s, after a decade in management, Hunt became a partner. In January 1957, Hunt left the filling station busi-

ness for a career in banking, joining the Bank of Charles Town as an assistant trust officer.

Active in local politics and community service, Shirley Hunt chaired Jefferson County's “Kennedy for President Campaign.” On the night of April 27, 1960, he introduced Senator Kennedy to a crowd of 3,000 gathered at the Charles Town Races. Project chair of the annual Christmas Basket Program, Hunt suggested that a fundraising stand, manned by volunteers, be set up on Washington Street to solicit donations. The Christmas Cheer Booth became a Main Street fixture providing good will at Christmas for families in need.

Hunt chaired the building fund campaign for a new Jefferson County hospital; he served several terms as president of the Jefferson High Band Boosters Association and established the “John Campbell Woody Bowl,” in memory of his uncle, which was awarded to the best senior athlete at Jefferson High School. In 1971, when the Harpers Ferry Historical Association was founded, Hunt was one of seven named as a director.

In 1983, Shirley Hunt left his position as vice president and trust officer at the Bank of Charles Town and moved to Belleair on Florida's Gulf Coast. There, Hunt served as executive director of the Greater Clearwater Public Library Foundation, which was established in 1985 to “expand and improve library services in the greater Clearwater area.” Shirley Miller Hunt

died on April 29, 2001, at his home in Belleair, ending five decades of service to the community.

### **Bradley D. Nash**

Bradley D. Nash was a New York banker, WWII veteran, and served under three presidential administrations before impacting the town of Harpers Ferry and Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

Born in Boston in 1900, Nash graduated *cum laude* from Harvard in 1923, majoring in economics and finance. From 1927 to 1929, Nash was an aide to President Herbert Hoover, then the Commerce Secretary under President Calvin Coolidge. He collaborated with Cornelius Lynde in writing *A Hook in Leviathan: A Critical Interpretation of the Hoover Commission Report* (Macmillan, 1950), a book about recommendations made by the 1947–1949 Hoover Commission, which Congress had authorized to appraise the executive branch of government. Under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, from 1953 to 1961, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force and then Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce.

In 1951, Nash and his wife, Ruth, moved to Harpers Ferry and established their residence on the Baker farm, “7.07 acres with dwelling house and other buildings,” overlooking the Potomac River. Over the next five decades, Nash played a significant role in the development of the community

and Harpers Ferry National (Monument) Historical Park. Nash worked closely with West Virginia Congressman Jennings Randolph to ensure continued congressional interest and support in the park. As he was a trustee of Storer College before its closure, the NPS hired Nash in 1963 as a historical consultant after the park acquired the campus.

Nash served twice as mayor of Harpers Ferry, from 1971 to 1977 and 1981 to 1987. As a director of the association, he helped mend fences and forge bonds with local merchants, some who saw the new “National Park Book Store at Harpers Ferry” as competition. In 1990 and 1991, Bradley and Ruth Nash donated their properties to the National Park Service in exchange for a “life occupancy” on the farm complex. Nash passed away in 1997 at the age of 96. Today hikers and birders enjoy the woodlands and meadows of his farm, which is now preserved for future generations.

### **Roger J. Perry**

Roger Johns Perry attended Randolph Macon Military Academy and was a graduate of Washington and Lee University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree and an LLB. In 1954, after passing both the Virginia and West Virginia bar exams, he was commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Army Judge Advocate Corps. After three years in Germany, he returned home to establish his law practice in Charles Town.

Perry practiced law for 35 years, including an individual practice and with the firm of Avey & Steptoe, later Avey, Steptoe and Perry. In 1970, he drafted the Articles of Incorporation for the Harpers Ferry Historical Association.

Perry was elected to two terms in the West Virginia House of Delegates representing Jefferson County. His public service contributions included serving on the Jefferson County Board of Health for 50 years, serving as chairman. He also served as a director for the Jefferson County Development Authority, the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, Charles Town General Hospital and the Charles Town Library.

In recognition of these many contributions, Perry, together with his wife Wanda, was selected as Jefferson



March 1976 photo of association directors taken on the Mather Training Center campus. Left to right: Bradley Nash (Founder), Roger Perry (Founder), Martin Conway (Park Superintendent), Paula Degen, Shirley Hunt (Founder), Marc Sagan, Terry Flaherty. (HFNHP Modern Photo Collection)

County Citizen of the Year in 1997 and received the SAC-BSA Scouting 2020 Distinguished Citizen Award for Jefferson County. He passed away in December 2020 at the age of 90.

# At the Helm: Debbie Piscitelli's 36 Years of Leadership

In 1980, after serving nearly ten years as a front-line interpreter and supervisor at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Deborah Piscitelli received a call from park management. The association was struggling. Could she come in and help out for a while? With just hours to deliberate, Piscitelli agreed. She arrived at the Master Armorer's House (the association's location at the time) with a toddler in tow and got to work. She "helped out" for the next 36 years, making the Harpers Ferry Historical Association a model independent cooperating association and creating a bookstore recognized by many as the best across the National Park Service.

The following excerpt comes from the nomination letter for the James V. Murfin Award, written by Piscitelli's longtime cooperating association liaison, Dennis Frye:

*Ms. Piscitelli's time at HFHA was not without challenges, both natural and economic. Pinched between the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, Harpers Ferry is under constant threat of flooding. During Ms. Piscitelli's tenure as executive director, floods overcame the association and the park not just once (1985), or twice (1996), but thrice (1996 again). In each instance, water in the sales area topped five feet. During the floods, Ms. Piscitelli coordinated dozens of employees and*



Debbie Piscitelli welcomes park visitors to the Bookshop.

*volunteers to move books, equipment, and infrastructure, and no inventory loss or injuries ever occurred.... A temporary sales area was quickly established to ensure continued operations.*

*In addition to floods, HFHA has weathered severe economic recessions over the years. Yet, during each downturn, Ms. Piscitelli managed the association with pragmatic rigor, making difficult, but necessary, decisions that ultimately strengthened the organization... [She] displayed an extraordinary ability to identify publications that connected visitors to the park. Piscitelli's creativity and her passion for Harpers Ferry's diverse history resulted in twelve unique publications — including three national award winners. Titles such as *The Harpers Ferry Heritage Trail* (1984) imbue the park with meaning for visitors of all backgrounds. Ms. Piscitelli also oversaw the publication of teacher study*

guides, including: “School House Ridge Elementary Education Study Guide” (1998) — a Civil War guide for which the association received an award of excellence; and the “Niagara Movement Education Study Guide” (2006) that focused on civil rights and the establishment of the NAACP.

Over the course of Ms. Piscitelli’s tenure, more than \$1.8 million in aid to interpretation was donated to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Without the association’s sponsorship, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, centennial, and sesquicentennial special events would have been impossible....

When Piscitelli announced her impending retirement in early 2015, ripples of panic spread from the park to the Potomac and carried all the way to Washington, DC. Piscitelli had held the association together for over three decades. She built partnerships within the agency and with other organizations with shared missions of interpretation, education, and preservation. Fortunately, she formed a succession committee with the board of directors and ensured her successor would possess the same passion for this mission.

In 2017, Piscitelli received the James V. Murfin Award, which honors an individual who has made a significant and lasting contribution to the partnership between the National Park Service (NPS) and cooperating associations over time. Named for her friend and mentor, the honor carried special meaning. Accepting the award at the Public Lands Alliance 2017 Convention, Piscitelli—accompanied by her sons and a daughter-in-law who was expecting a child—reminded her peers why we do what we do.

“We do it for our children. We do it for our future generations. We do it for our grandchildren. And I don’t think we ever should lose sight of that.”



Debbie Piscitelli (center) is recognized for 36 years of service at the 2016 Harpers Ferry Park Association Annual Meeting, with David Gilbert (left) and Dennis Frye.

# Reflecting on HFHA through a National—and Personal—Lens

by *Paula Degen*

The image is as vivid as yesterday—not 48 years ago. On a clear October day I crossed the bridges into Harpers Ferry—fall colors popping off the hill-sides. I had been to Harpers Ferry once as a Civil War buff in the '60's, but that was as different as going from black-and-white film to Technicolor. Crossing the bridges this time meant the start of a new chapter of life, as I would soon marry Carl Degen, chief of Audiovisual Arts for the National Park Service.

Carl, 19 years my senior, was one of the creatives that Bill Everhart had attracted from “outside” to break the bounds of traditional government media production. We had met a year or so earlier when I coordinated a seminar for the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). Carl was an instructor, representing the NPS AV program—already recognized for its excellence. One thing led to another, and here I was.

These were glory days for the history field leading up to the American Revolution Bicentennial—and Harpers Ferry was at the heart of it. In addition to creating award-winning films, publications, and exhibits, the Interpretive Design Center along with Mather Training Center worked with parks to improve quality and professionalism at all levels. At the time, HFNHP and the

newly formed Harpers Ferry Historical Association were inextricably part of this mission. The park would showcase Harpers Ferry Center products; the association would carry resources needed by participants in the Center's programs. Importantly, the association would also distribute NPS publications and AV media to a nationwide audience—the only cooperating association to have this role.

Into this environment I came with five years of experience at AASLH where we had a similar mission working with historic sites and museums. Thanks to available grants, AASLH and NPS co-sponsored several seminars here. Harpers Ferry became a mecca for people working in interpretive services and media.

I was already familiar with NPS cooperating associations through AASLH but somehow had missed knowing that the service-wide coordinator was based here. It was nearly a year before I met Jim Murfin and learned of our common interests. We soon teamed up on training courses and the biennial conferences.

Through Jim I learned about HFHA and attended my first meeting in April 1975. I can still picture meeting the young Debbie Mehrkam (now Piscitelli) in her NPS uniform. A year later I was elected to the board of directors and attended my first cooperating

associations conference. Debbie attended, too, and proudly accepted an award for her book *Harpers Ferry! Child of the 19th Century*, the first of many national awards earned by HFHA.

Coincidentally, at that conference in 1976, seeds were planted for an umbrella alliance of the associations. By the next biennial meeting—Denver 1978—the Conference of National Park Cooperating Associations was a reality. HFHA joined CNPCA in 1981 and has remained active in the national organization.

Just as HFHA and the park showcased HFC media in the '70's and '80's, we were Jim Murfin's "go-to" association as he rolled out new ideas for cooperating associations generally. He chose us to be among 10 associations for the services of a special bookstore designer. Guidelines that were developed for associations were "tested" here and became our first operations manual.

Largely through Jim's encouragement, my 12 years on the HFHA board were a blend of local and national activities. I was elected to the board of the Conference of National Park Cooperating Associations. In 1987 I joined the staff of Parks and History Association and for a time was simultaneously on the board of one association, the staff of another association, and on the national board. This changed in 1996 when I became executive director of CNPCA as it began the transition to the Association of Partners for Public



Paula Degen (right) with board member Carol Gallant in 2012.

Lands. Harpers Ferry Historical Association was with me through all the changes.

My involvement with HFHA has necessarily diminished over the years. Carl took early retirement from NPS for health reasons, and we relocated to Annapolis, Maryland. I commuted from there for my last year on the board and to facilitate completion of the association's major project at the time, *From the Riot and Tumult*, a book by Jim Murfin.

Jim had retired from NPS after 18 years, most of them as cooperating associations coordinator. When HFHA decided we were ready to publish our own book on Harpers Ferry, we chose Jim to be the author. A native of this area and a Civil War authority with numerous book credits already, Jim knew the kind of book we needed. He delivered a first draft in March 1987, only a couple weeks before he died of leukemia at age 58. In tribute to him, HFHA and several individuals Jim had mentored over the years came together to finish the project and make *From the*



Paula Degen was president of the association during one of its most important acquisitions for the park: the James H. Burton Armory papers. Left to right: Donald Griffin, Debbie Piscitelli, Paul R. Lee (HFNHP Chief of Interpretation), Degen, and Superintendent Don Campbell. (*Spirit of Jefferson, Farmer's Advocate*, July 5, 1984)

*Riot and Tumult* an award-winner.

Jim's influence on the success of national park cooperating associations cannot be overstated. More than 650 public lands are now served by nonprofit educational organizations modeled on those in national parks. In 1988 the National Park Service acknowledged his role by establishing the James V. Murfin Award to recognize individuals who have made lasting contributions to the National Park Service-cooperating associations partnership. I was honored

to be the third recipient of the award (1994) and to be present when Debbie Piscitelli received the award in 2017. While the award names us as individuals, it is really a tribute to Harpers Ferry Historical Association. We would not have succeeded without many

others who have given their time, talents, and hearts over the years.

Now when I cross the bridges, Harpers Ferry is in the rear-view mirror, but my gratitude for the park, HFC, the history, and the people remains.

*Paula Degen is a charter member of HFHA and served on the board 1976–1988. Her publications career has included American Association for State and Local History (1969–1973), Appalachian Trail Conference (1981–1987), and Parks and History Association (1987–1996). She served as executive director of the Conference of National Park Cooperating Associations/Association of Partners for Public Lands (1996–2000) and as an interpretive specialist with the National Park Service, 2005 until retiring in 2015.*

# Board of Directors 1971 - present

|                 |                         |                              |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| James Beckman   | Cynthia Gayton          | Mike Musick                  |
| Madison Briscoe | David Gilbert           | Brad Nash                    |
| James Castleman | Richard Gillespie       | June Newcomer                |
| Laura Clark     | David Guiney            | Doug Perks                   |
| Rock Comstock   | Bruce Hopkins           | Roger Perry                  |
| Chris Craig     | Shirley Hunt            | Carol Polkinghorn            |
| Audrey D'Andre  | Jim Jenkins             | George Rutherford            |
| Bruce Davidson  | Robert Johnson          | Sarah Shafer                 |
| Kirk Davis      | Susan Journell          | Jim Silvia                   |
| Paula Degen     | Anne Long               | Suzanne Silvia               |
| Mark Elrod      | Mike Lynch              | John Stealey                 |
| Terry Flaherty  | Jeanne Martin           | Wayne Welty                  |
| Patrice Flynn   | Minnie Mentzer          | Ed Wheelless                 |
| Dennis Frye     | Allan Montgomery        | Midge Flinn Yost             |
| Carol Gallant   | Heather Morgan McIntire | Michael (Micaelle)<br>Zelege |

---

## Our Supporters

The Harpers Ferry Park Association extends its sincerest gratitude to these members who have shown tremendous loyalty and support through the decades.

**Charter Members (joined between 1971 and 1980):** Katherine Akers, John Bagladi, Todd Bolton, Deborah Bolyard, Gayleen Boyd, Catherine Bragaw, Richard Brown, Donald and Sandra Campbell, Arthur Chenowith, Jas D. Coats, Carlton Combs, Rev. Thomas Composto, Donald and Barbara Cumberland, Phyllis D'Angelo, Harvey E. Davies, Melinda Day, Paula Degen, Myron Derr, Mark Elrod, Russell Eury Jr., William Everhart, Philip

Folk, Gary Froelich, Dennis and Sylvia Frye, Francis Frye, John Frye, Carol Gallant, Dave Gilbert, Richard Gillespie, Mary Glenn, Nancy Grams, Robert Grogg, David Guiney, Nancy Haack, Mildred Hammond, Russell Hendrickson, Kim Holien, Bruce Hopkins, Eleanor Hubbard, Susan Journell, John King, Paul Lee, Alan Levitan, Jean Libby, John Maddox, Tim Manka, Richard McCormick, Susan Mentzer-Blair, Robert Millard, Carolyn Moler, Mrs. Edward Morgan, Keith Morris, Michael Musick, Mrs. Bradley Nash, Jim Pearson, P. Douglas Perks, Wanda Perry, Deborah Piscitelli, Dick Potteiger, Ron and Linda Rago, Cari Ravenhorst, Paul Jeffrey Ridgeway, Robert

Sampsell II, Arnold Schofield, Linn Secrist, Tom Shelton, Mildred Smith, Dr. John Stealey, Michael Thompson, Michele Tomillo, Michael Vice, Marsha Wassel, Mike Watson

**21+ year Members:** Stephen Bartlett, Patricia Chickering, Hugh Clayton, Nora Corra, George and Carol Ann Decker, Walter Degroot, Peter Des-sauer, Patty Disbrow, Clark Dixon Jr., Frank and Kim Edwards, Kathleen Ernst, Hon. Scot and Vicki Faulkner, David and Lissa Fox, Deborah Hale, Annette and Lawrence Keener-Farley, Noah and Hilary Mehrkam, Barbara Onofrey, Bartlett Regan Jr., Gary Roth, Jim and Suzanne Silvia, Jeffrey Snider, Frank Surdu, Dale Utrup, James Creighton Waters, Michael and Janis Woshner, Terrance Yount, Jamie Zirkle

**16–20 year Members:** Profs. James and Maria Beckman, Kim Bet, Kim Biggs, Kirk Bradley, Tom Bradley, Samuel and Gwen Brown, Donald and Patricia

Burgess, Wayne Hammond, Bernie Klemanek, Bruce Kramer, Leon Kunkle, Ed and Kaaren Mahoney, Cynthia Mason, Jack Mays, James McCarthy, Rita Mihalik, Adam Oestreich, B.J. and Kathleen Pino, George Rutherford, Wayne Welty, Mitch Yockelson

**11–15 year Members:** Karl Buchspics, Chris Craig, Hon. Thomas Curtis, James Dawson, Chris Dove, Cynthia Gayton, V. David Grayson, Rebecca Harriett, Richard Mancini, Hayden Mathews, Earl Mills, David Mitchell, Robert O'Connor, Rea Andrew Redd, Kim, Tom, and Becky Shayda, Karan Townsend, Gayle Underwood, Ed Wheelless

**6–10 year Members:** Beth Batdorf, George Best, Nancy Price Biggs, Carolyn Blocker, Robert Carson, Carole Powell Carter, Autumn Cook, Mike and Kerri Duffy, Carol Macknis, Kenneth Mitchell, Deborah Ransom, Bruce Rice, Cindy Snider, Ernest Webb Jr., Claude Williams, Jerry Wilson



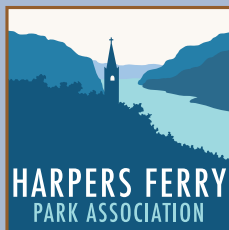
Welcoming our next generation of park supporters!

## Our Partners

Since our founding, the Harpers Ferry Park Association has partnered with organizations who have supported our goal to share Harpers Ferry's natural beauty, nationally-significant history, and cultural heritage with the public. We are indebted to their generosity, energy, and commitment to the greater good.

American Battlefields Trust  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
C&O Canal Association  
C&O Canal Trust  
Civil War Trails  
Harpers Ferry – Bolivar Historic Town Foundation  
Harpers Ferry – Bolivar Merchants Association  
Harpers Ferry Center  
Harpers Ferry Civil War Roundtable  
Harpers Ferry Middle School  
Harpers Ferry Woman's Club

Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area  
Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society  
Jefferson County Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Jefferson County Historical Society  
Jefferson County NAACP  
Journey Through Hallowed Ground  
Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation  
McCormick Civil War Institute at Shenandoah University  
National Parks Conservation Association  
Public Lands Alliance  
Shepherd University  
Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation  
Stephen T. Mather Training Center  
Storer College Alumni Association  
Washington County Historical Society  
West Virginia Humanities Council  
West Virginia University



**Harpers Ferry Park Association**

P.O. Box 197

Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

[www.harpersferryhistory.org](http://www.harpersferryhistory.org)