



Foundation Document Overview

Gateway Arch National Park

Missouri



Contact Information

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Purpose



The Old Courthouse looking east to the Arch and the Mississippi River.

The purpose of GATEWAY ARCH NATIONAL PARK, as established in President Roosevelt's 1935 Executive Order, is threefold:

- 1. To commemorate Thomas Jefferson's vision of building a unified continental nation and St. Louis' role as a confluence and gateway to the American West during the 19th century.*
- 2. To interpret key individuals and cultural groups involved in exploring, exploiting, and inhabiting the lands from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.*
- 3. To preserve the architecturally significant Old Courthouse as the site of the Dred Scott case.*

Significance

Significance statements express why Gateway Arch National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- St. Louis was politically, geographically, and culturally pivotal in the westward expansion of the United States during the 19th century. Significant historic events associated with westward expansion occurred at the site, including the transfer of the Louisiana Territory from Spain to France and finally to the United States; treaty negotiations with American Indian tribes; and the launch and return of the Lewis and Clark expedition. St. Louis became a site for cultural interaction, with both positive and negative results, including the forced removal of American Indian tribes. St. Louis was also the starting point for numerous other explorers, fur traders, and pioneers who made the journey west.



The Keystone exhibit provides webcam views from the top of the Arch for those unable to take the tram ride.

Significance

- In 1846, Dred and Harriet Scott sued for their freedom from slavery at the Old Courthouse in St. Louis. Their search for individual freedom through the judicial system forever changed the nation. This historic case resulted in the 1857 U.S. Supreme Court decision determining that no “people of color,” enslaved or free, could become citizens of the United States. The decision also removed restrictions on the extension of slavery into the U.S. western territories, further dividing the nation on the issue that would cause the Civil War.
- The Old Courthouse is a prime example of mid-19th century Greek Revival civic architecture, using the latest technological innovations and materials available at the time. It features the first wrought-iron dome completed in the United States.
- Gateway Arch National Park is a tangible symbol of St. Louis’ historic role as the “Gateway to the West,” purposefully located on the footprint of the original 1764 village of St. Louis. The site is considered a masterpiece composition of integrated structure, landscape, and interpretation. The Arch is recognized globally as an exceptional example of mid-20th century modernist design and one of the world’s great architectural and engineering achievements.
- As an educational institution, the park preserves museum objects and archival records that document the westward expansion of the United States and the planning and building of the Arch. The collection is used in ongoing research by site staff, scholars, and the public and is the basis for the site’s interpretive programming and museum exhibits.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

The park staff is committed to providing meaningful interactive opportunities in the museums, throughout the park, and in the community in order to inspire audience participation, reflection, and dialogue as forums for civic engagement. The desired outcome for interpretive programming is to reveal history from multiple perspectives so that diverse audiences make connections from the past to critical issues of the present and consider possible solutions to contemporary problems.

- The park explores Thomas Jefferson’s vision of the West as a land that would foster and sustain democratic values shaped by U.S. law and policy, including the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition.
- The Gateway Arch acts as a symbol for westward expansion in the 19th century, an unprecedented and rapid migration of people into the Trans-Mississippi West. As such, the Arch represents hope, opportunity, and religious freedom for some and cultural clashes, environmental destruction, and the forceful removal of American Indians for others.
- The design and scale of the Gateway Arch, and its integration with its setting, make the Arch one of the world’s architectural, artistic, and engineering marvels.
- The Dred Scott decision is a significant event in United States’ history, denying citizenship rights to those of African descent and allowing for the potential expansion of slavery. As a result, the decision exacerbated regional tensions that led to the Civil War.
- The architecturally significant Old Courthouse was the site of legal cases that galvanized the struggle for civil rights, justice, freedom, and equality, including Dred and Harriet Scott and Virginia Minor.
- The American West is both a symbol and a physical reality that attracts people from all over the world. This region continues to shape national identity as we recognize the diversity it represents.
- St. Louis’ strategic location near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers made it a logical hub for exploration, commerce, transportation, military activities, and cultural encounters during the 19th century.

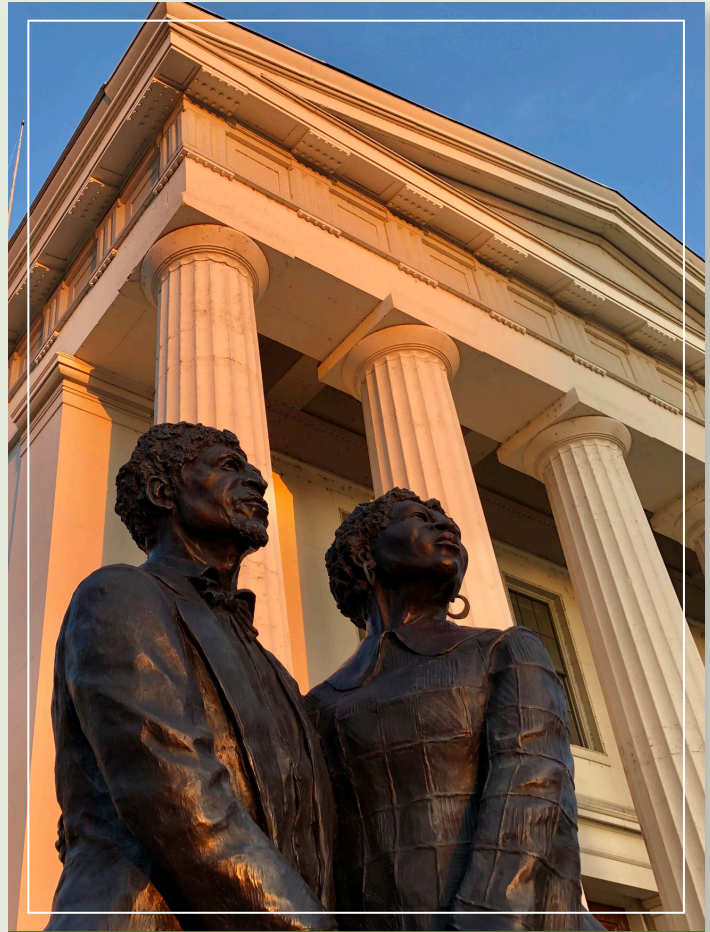
Description

Gateway Arch National Park commemorates St. Louis' role in the westward expansion of the United States. The park consists of the Gateway Arch, St. Louis' Old Courthouse, a museum, and exhibits. The 630-foot tall Gateway Arch, situated on the west bank of the Mississippi River, symbolizes St. Louis' historic role as the "Gateway to the West."

Construction of the Arch began in 1963 and was completed on October 28, 1965, at a total cost of less than \$15 million. The two foundations of the Arch extend 60 feet below the surface and are built to withstand earthquakes and high winds.

Visitors can ride a unique transportation system to the top of the Arch to experience spectacular views of downtown St. Louis to the west and the Mississippi River to the east, representing where we are going and where we have been. The museum, located below the Arch, displays an extensive collection of artifacts and exhibits, allowing visitors to explore colonial St. Louis, Jefferson's vision, riverfront commerce, new frontiers, western exploration, and the Arch's construction from multiple perspectives.

Just two blocks west of the Gateway Arch is the Old Courthouse, built between 1839 and 1862 and one of the oldest standing buildings in St. Louis. It was here that the first two trials of the Dred Scott case were held in 1847 and 1850. The building houses restored courtroom exhibits about the Dred Scott case for freedom from slavery, other significant civil rights cases from the 19th century, and the Old Courthouse architecture.



A statue of Dred and Harriet Scott stands in front of the Old Courthouse where they first sued for their freedom.



Visitors enjoy the replica pirogue in the museum's Colonial St. Louis gallery, designed for all ages and abilities.



The restored Circuit Court No. 4 courtroom in the Old Courthouse.