

in Washington's writings nor in books about the Revolutionary War. The young New Jersey soldier's letter to his family recounting the terror of the dawn surprise attack by Confederate troops at the 1864 battle of Cedar Creek, in the Shenandoah Valley, conveys a deeply personal perspective on that crucial engagement. The recollection of the colonial militia officer at Fort Frederick, in western Maryland, of a visit in the 1750s from neighboring Cherokees—whose chief “invited us to Smoak a Pipe with him”—helps illuminate relations between colonists and Native Americans in the mid-eighteenth century. And the amusing aside of the soldier at Fort Ethan Allen in Arlington, Virginia, finding tedious his duty to guard the nation's capital during the Civil War—“the only thing we have to record is a remarkable dream of one of the men, in which he saw the Confederates scaling the parapet,” he wrote—sheds light both on the extensive network of fortifications around Washington, D.C., and, on a personal level, the weary monotony faced by young men itching to fight.

The destinations in these pages illuminate both the majestic and everyday events that have helped shape our American experience, from its origins to the mid-nineteenth century. Chapters, arranged chronologically, encompass the colonial and revolutionary eras, the War of 1812, and the Civil War—from the mid-seventeenth century to 1865. All but four of the destinations are part of the National Park Service system. Side trips suggest lesser-known sites travelers might visit en route or while in the area—for example, a short detour from Harpers Ferry or Antietam Battlefield leads to Shepherdstown, West Virginia, just across the Potomac River. The chapters include site features that can escape the notice of visitors, such as the hiking trails at Valley Forge; the only intersection of the Appalachian Trail and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, near Harpers Ferry; and the short, albeit steep, climb onto Big Round Top at Gettysburg, overlooked by many who tend to cluster on the adjacent, iconic Little Round Top. National Park Service websites are particularly detailed; travelers should check them for directions, hours, and events. Superintendents' reports on these sites contain impressive detail on the Park Service's multifaceted work, and most offer guides for educators. Many parks have social media options and free mobile apps with up-to-date information that further enhance a visit.

A word about my criteria for choosing these sites: the Baltimore and