Alexander Hamilton Center

Where Alexander Hamilton founded the world's first city of innovation

Paterson Great Falls National Park
The Alexander Hamilton Center will be a new model for a National Park visitor center. The themes—innovation, independence, immigration, opportunity, perseverance—come from Hamilton’s actual words when he founded the city of Paterson. Even though these ideas are over 200 years old, they speak directly to Americans today.

Building on years of close collaboration with distinguished historians and educators as well as some of the talent involved in the hit Broadway musical Hamilton, the Center will tell the stories of the park and the city in ways that will appeal to a new generation of park visitors. There will be no lengthy films in darkened theaters, nor static dioramas behind glass keeping everyone at a distance. The Center’s dynamic exhibits, community programs, and seamless integration with the Hamilton Partnership’s popular Mill Mile audio tour app will engage visitors, giving them a starting point for their exploration of Paterson’s rich history and cultural diversity.
EXHIBITS

• **HAMILTON’S VISION:** Music and video from the hit Broadway show Hamilton will help present Paterson’s founding father’s vision of innovation, immigration, and opportunity.

• **INNOVATION:** An interactive mini-theater will showcase the products and inventions made in Paterson that revolutionized our national character and America’s relationship with the world.

• **TIMELINE:** A chronological depiction of Paterson’s evolving importance in the history of America and the world.

• **MODERN SILK ROAD:** The origins of the American silk industry here that made Paterson the silk capital of the world, the city’s role in the American labor movement, and its special place in the historic networks of trade and cultural exchange will show how Paterson extended the Silk Road to America.

• **BASEBALL:** Paterson’s impact on American sports and social history will be shown through stories from Hinchliffe Stadium, the only historic stadium in a national park. This stadium was the home field to the NY Black Yankees and NY Cubans in Negro League baseball, and showcased some of the nation’s greatest athletes at a time when they were blocked from playing in the major leagues of our national pastime.

• **POWER AND SUSTAINABILITY:** A hands-on, activity-focused exhibit will tell Paterson’s story of renewable energy, from Pierre L’Enfant’s ingenious waterpower system to the refurbished 1915 hydroelectric plant that still operates today, providing enough clean energy to power up to 11,000 homes.

• **GREAT FALLS MODEL:** A digitally-enhanced, three-dimensional model of the Great Falls Historic District will show how this natural wonder evolved over hundred of millions of years, from the supercontinent Pangaea to the glacial cover of the Ice Age to the modern era.

• **PATERSON PORTRAITS:** An interactive “hall of fame” will tell the stories of the people of Paterson, whose great achievements inspire visitors to pursue their own dreams.
The Paterson Great Falls is where Alexander Hamilton launched what we have come to call the American Dream. In 1792 when he was the first Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton chose this spot to begin implementing his ambitious strategy to transform a rural agrarian society based in slavery into a modern economy based in freedom.

Fifteen years after the Declaration of Independence and long after the British surrendered, America remained dependent on Britain for virtually all manufactured goods—including military supplies. Hamilton believed that America could never truly be free from foreign oppressors so long as it was dependent on foreign manufactures.

What Alexander Hamilton created in Paterson had no precedent anywhere in the world. Paterson was a whole new city, planned from the start to stimulate industry and innovation.

Recognizing the high startup costs of constructing and powering a factory, he created New Jersey’s first corporation, and secured large investments to purchase land around the falls and finance a complex hydropower system to power dozens of mills. Hamilton’s pathbreaking business plan allowed investors to make money by renting mill sites and selling power to manufacturers, sometimes building new factories for renting to entrepreneurs.

Hamilton—perhaps America’s greatest immigrant—recognized the spirit and ingenuity that immigrants would bring to the nation. He wrote when he founded Paterson that the “diversity of talents” from immigrants would make the nation stronger, and that Paterson would provide opportunities for “classes of the community not ordinarily engaged in business.”

Because Hamilton’s business plan lowered the costs to start manufacturing, Paterson industries provided not only jobs but also gave people opportunities to rise to the top of society. Paterson would always be a city that welcomed newcomers from all over the world, fueling innovation and industry while fulfilling Hamilton’s vision.

Paterson has the only national park that combines a spectacular natural wonder with a site of supreme importance in American history. Just four years old, the 52-acre Paterson National Park already attracts almost 200,000 visitors a year. The Alexander Hamilton Center will connect Paterson’s historical narratives to contemporary life, promoting cultural tourism, economic development, learning, and civic engagement.
THE BUILDING

The Alexander Hamilton Center will be built in the foundation of what was an early 20th-century steam plant, directly across from the Great Falls. The 7,500 square foot space will have an open floor plan and flexible design features that will accommodate programs, classes, and revenue-generating spaces for special events like weddings, galas, conferences, workshops, and cultural festivals.

Each of the Center’s three levels will enhance the visitor experience in a different way. The Terrace will offer stunning views of the Great Falls. The Mezzanine will be the gateway to the National Park, with an information desk, shops, and restrooms. The Main Gallery will feature interactive exhibits, educational programs, and legendary products of Paterson—including original Colt revolvers, silk goods, the first submarine, and a model of The Spirit of St. Louis—that will engage visitors in the national significance of the manufacturing that began around the Paterson Great Falls.

“PATERSON BECAME THE HOME FOR THIS INDUSTRIAL LABORATORY, THIS FUTURISTIC CITY, THIS MODEL OF WHAT AMERICA COULD BE.”

Ron Chernow
Alexander Hamilton Biographer
EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

A National Historical Park is more than just landscaped real estate. It is the educational content and programming that give visitors unforgettable cultural, historical, and natural experiences.

Together the Alexander Hamilton Center and the National Park will create an expansive series of indoor and outdoor classrooms for students, teachers, and learners of all ages to explore the park’s interpretive themes: innovation, immigration, independence, opportunity, and perseverance. The Center’s family-friendly activities, multilingual materials, and modern media will appeal to all visitors including immigrants and first generation Americans, people of color, millennials, and young families.

- Visitors will learn how the natural wonder of the Great Falls evolved over hundreds of millions of years, driving the history and culture of the region.

The Center’s exhibits will help visitors learn about economic independence, sustainable energy, engineering, globalization, and even baseball.

- The Center will continue the long tradition of the arts in Paterson with hands-on visual arts classes, writing workshops, open mic events, and other programs that celebrate the beauty and history of the Great Falls.

- New educational formats will link historical concepts to real-world experiences. Music from Hamilton star and creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, integration with mobile platforms and social media, and place-based learning activities will encourage and inspire innovation and creativity in all subjects.

Through creative methods of education and interpretation, the Alexander Hamilton Center will provide visitors with a deeper understanding of the past, a better appreciation of the present, and a way to shape paths for the future.