



NHL Executive Summary



Name of Property:	Fort Snelling (Updated Documentation)
City, State:	Saint Paul (vicinity), Minnesota
Period of Significance:	1819–1858, 1861–1946
NHL Criteria:	1, 6
NHL Theme:	I. Peopling Places 2. Migration from Outside and Within 6. Encounters, Conflicts, and Colonization IV. Shaping the Political Landscape 2. Governmental Institutions 3. Military Institutions and Activities V. Developing the American Economy 6. Exchange and Trade 7. Governmental Policies and Practices VIII. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community 1. International Relations 2. Commerce 3. Expansionism and Imperialism
Previous Recognition:	1960 designated a National Historic Landmark (documentation prepared 1978) 1969 National Register of Historic Places 2023 National Register of Historic Places (Mni Owe Sni/Coldwater Spring, Traditional Cultural Property)



National Historic Contexts:

Westward Expansion and Extension of the National Boundaries 1830-1898: Military and Indian Affairs (1959)

Westward Expansion and Extension of the National Boundaries 1830-1898: The Fur Trade (1960)

The Clash of Cultures Trails Project: Assessing the National Significance of Trails Associated with U.S. Army/American Indian Campaigns in the Trans-Mississippi West (2002)

Japanese Americans in World War II (2012)

The Era of Reconstruction: 1861–1900 (2017)

The U.S. Constitution (1986)

NHL Significance:

- Fort Snelling is nationally significant under Criterion 1 as an excellent representation of a nineteenth-century US frontier fort that provides unique insight into a range of topics related to US military history and its intersections with political, economic, and social history.
- When Fort Snelling was completed in 1824, it helped to assert American territorial claims in the Great Lakes region following the War of 1812. The fort also supported US involvement in the fur trade by providing a military presence that countered the influence of foreign powers involved in the trade.
- Fort Snelling provides unique insight into the history of military slavery. Slavery was practiced at Fort Snelling between 1819 and 1858. Several people who were enslaved at Fort Snelling filed lawsuits to end their enslavement based on their time at the fort, which lay within territory where slavery was illegal. Dred and Harriet Scott brought the most famous of these freedom suits. Their case ultimately resulted in the 1857 *Scott v. Sanford* US Supreme Court decision, a major precipitating factor in the outbreak of the Civil War.
- The fort illustrates the central role played by the US Army and frontier forts in the process of Native American land dispossession in the western US. Between 1805 and 1862, a series of cession treaties were negotiated at Fort Snelling that steadily expanded US land holdings at the expense of the Dakota, Ho-Chunk, and Ojibwe. In 1862, during the US-Dakota War, Dakota and Ho-Chunk prisoners were interred at a concentration camp at Fort Snelling before both tribes were exiled from Minnesota. For most of the period between 1866 and 1911, Fort Snelling was the headquarters of the Department of Dakota, which played a central role in continued US expansion in the West by suppressing Native American resistance through military action.
- Between 1944 and 1946, the fort was the headquarters of the Military Intelligence Service Language School, which provided soldiers with Japanese language instruction for the purpose of assisting in intelligence gathering and interpretation. The program not only produced graduates who were instrumental in achieving an Allied victory in the Pacific but provided a means for some Japanese Americans to demonstrate their patriotism at a time when their fellow citizens and the US government questioned their loyalty.
- Fort Snelling is nationally significant under Criterion 6 because it has yielded, and will continue to yield, information of major scientific importance that can affect theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree. Archeological investigation at the fort provides insight into a wide range of topics, including frontier forts as colonial institutions, slavery and the experiences of enslaved people on the northwestern frontier, the existence of diverse communities and the creation of identity within a military and colonial hierarchy, and the relationship between Native American peoples and the US government.
- The original walled fort (Lower Post) features twenty-one buildings and structures that were reconstructed between 1966 and 1978 and meet NHL Exception 6. The reconstructions were carried out



according to a master plan informed by extensive archeological and archival research and utilized period techniques and materials. No other nineteenth-century frontier forts in the Great Lakes region or Mississippi River valley contain intact collections of 1820s-era military buildings.

Integrity:

- Overall, the collection of resources within the Fort Snelling NHL retains a high degree of integrity in location, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship. The integrity of setting has been adversely affected by the construction of highways that pass around and through the discontinuous areas of the NHL, and by the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport, which borders the NHL on the south. However, key aspects of the fort's setting, notably the proximity of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, remain.
- The Fort Snelling NHL is comprised of four primary areas: Cantonment New Hope, Camp Coldwater, the Lower Post, and the Upper Post. The integrity of each portion is discussed separately below.
- **Cantonment New Hope:** The boundaries of the original NHL have been increased to include this discontinuous portion. The Cantonment New Hope area retains a high degree of archeological integrity through its well-preserved subsurface archeological features that relate to the national significance of Fort Snelling. Additionally, given the minimal amount of disturbance in this area, there is a high potential for the discovery of other features that could yield additional important information about the earliest period of US military occupation of the area.
- **Camp Coldwater:** Camp Coldwater retains a high degree of integrity of setting, feeling, and association, as the natural prairie has been restored and the woods along the river bluff remain. Although many portions of the Camp Coldwater area were heavily disturbed by the construction and demolition of the Bureau of Mines Twin Cities Research Center Campus, recent studies have shown that there are well-preserved archeological features, as well as the potential for other intact features that could yield additional important information.
- **Lower Post:** Overall, the Lower Post retains a high degree of integrity of location, feeling, association, and design.
 - Although integrity of materials and workmanship in the walled fort is somewhat diminished by the reconstructions, the walled fort includes four original resources and retains a high degree of integrity in comparison with similar resources. The buildings and structures within the Lower Post that are sited outside the walled fort have had minimal material alterations since the end of the period of significance.
 - The Lower Post retains a high degree of integrity as an archeological site. Recent studies have shown that intact archeological features, deposits, soils, and contexts still exist within the Lower Post, including buried remnants of both historically mapped and previously unidentified structures and features that have the potential to yield important archeological data in the future.
- **Upper Post:** Overall, the Upper Post retains a high degree of integrity of location, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship.
 - The Upper Post's integrity of setting and feeling have been diminished due to the loss of some historic resources, including twelve of the original twenty-two officers' quarters along Taylor Avenue. Despite these changes, the Upper Post possesses character-defining landscape features and buildings that retain their original spatial relationships and enable it to convey Fort Snelling's national significance during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
 - The extant administrative buildings, officers' housing, and support buildings retain a high degree of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Recent and ongoing rehabilitation of buildings within the Upper Post has complied with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for*



Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for Preserving, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings, and does not affect the overall integrity.

- Recent studies have demonstrated that intact archeological features, deposits, soils, and context still exist within the Upper Post. This strongly suggests that undisturbed areas with the Upper Post may contain additional features.

Owner of Property:

State of Minnesota, City of Minneapolis, City of St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, Northern Star Scouting, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Acreage of Property: 333.267

Origins of Nomination:

The National Park Service, through the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area located in St. Paul, Minnesota, sought the preparation of an updated NHL nomination for Fort Snelling that meets current professional standards and thematic framework, addressing all relevant historic contexts, areas of significance, and boundaries, and identifying contributing and noncontributing resources. The most recent NHL documentation, prepared in 1978, did not adequately reflect Fort Snelling's rich and complex military history.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

This NHL update provides expanded and detailed documentation to allow for interpretation to the public of Fort Snelling's role in US military history and its intersections with political, economic, and social history. While this nomination maintains a focus on Fort Snelling's significance in military history, it acknowledges diverse perspectives and events related to that history. The nomination expands discussion of US military history with regard to westward expansion, the North American fur trade, the practice of military enslavement, the central role played by the US Army in the process of Native American land dispossession, and the history of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

Although no objections were raised during tribal consultation, there has been a preference expressed by some Dakota stakeholders not to expand the boundaries of the NHL due to the cultural importance of the land on which Fort Snelling is located.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of June 12, 2025):

- Ben Leonard, Senior Vice President, Historic Sites and Operations, Minnesota Historical Society
- Amy Spong, Director and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- In the discussion of comparable properties, provide additional information on Fort Vancouver and Fort Michilimackinac and consider adding Fort Gratiot and Fort St. Joseph.
- Expand references to the broader context of military landscapes in discussion of the differences between Upper Post and Lower Post.
- Clarify that archeological investigations at Fort Snelling have occurred intermittently for nearly seventy years.
- Mention the importance of Grand Portage to the fur trade in the Great Lakes region.



Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the updated documentation for Fort Snelling NHL near St. Paul, Minnesota, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: