



**Media Advisory** Date: May 14, 2021

**Contact:** Phyllis Terrell, Director of Communications - 757-251-2754

**160<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of the 1861 Contraband Decision at Fort Monroe**

*Fort Monroe Contraband Decision and the Legacy of Freedom Seekers*

FORT MONROE, VA. – Fort Monroe Authority and the National Park Service in partnership with the Contraband Historical Society and Hampton History Museum, will host two virtual commemoration events for the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1861 Contraband Decision.

The first of the two events will be a Virtual Campfire Chat that will take place Saturday from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. ET, May 22, 2021. The second event, a Virtual Archeology Talk will happen on Monday from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. ET, May 24, 2021. These events are open and free to the public, where noted registration will be required to attend; all programming will be streamed to organizational Facebook and YouTube channels.

**Virtual Campfire Chat:** Saturday, May 22, 2021, at 6 pm (registration required) – As we think about the impact of a decision on a life, a community, a people, and the world, explore the lasting legacy and modern-day relevance of the risk and perseverance exhibited by freedom seekers in discussion with Dr. Eric Claville, Norfolk State University Director of African American Public Policy and Mr. Joseph McGill, Founder and living history artist of [The Slave Dwelling Project](#). We welcome Mr. McGill to the largest masonry fortification ever constructed in the United States, the location of the 1861 “Contraband Decision” made by US Major General Benjamin F. Butler, a lawyer and politician. Butler interpreted the forced labor and legal status of enslaved Africans used in rebellion of the US as subject to confiscation under the rules of war as “Contraband.” Explore this effective, yet problematic argument that perpetuated a status of property yet influences US President Abraham Lincoln and to issue the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, the establishment of the United States Colored Troops, and ultimately the passage of the 1865 13th Amendment to the US Constitution ending slavery in the United States. The spirit of place and the changing landscape found in telling untold histories expands the narratives available for all when visiting “Freedom’s Fortress.” Registration for this event is available on Eventbrite: <https://contraband-commemoration-campfire-chat.eventbrite.com>

**Special Messages:** Throughout the commemorative week and weekend we will explore the legacy of the Contraband Decision through the life of freedom seekers during and following the Civil War; through virtual living history presented by the Contraband Historical Society and special messages prepared by James Apostles Field’s family descendant and Park Ranger Ajena Rogers, songstress Marie St.Clair and the poets of **Fragments of Freedom**. Local historian, Dr.



Bill Wiggins will contextualize the lives of Baker, Townsend, and Mallory following this pivotal moment in history. These special messages will be shared on each organizations' social media pages.

**Virtual Archeology Talk - A Taste of Liberty: Fort Monroe and the Grand Contraband**

**Camp:** Monday, May 24, 2021 at 7 pm ET on Hampton History Museum Facebook Live  
Dr. Matthew R. Laird, Partner & Senior Researcher of the James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc., will present the archaeological findings from the survey of the community that evolved in the ruins of Hampton after it was abandoned by residents following secession from the Union in 1861. Through mapping, research, and careful excavation in coordination with the City of Hampton, the team located the camp in present-day downtown Hampton; let's talk about the discoveries, successes, and challenges in analyzing the artifacts and interpreting the evidence of contraband camps as a window into the past.

**Learn More:**

Exhibits, tours, and special programs provide an opportunity to increase our understanding of how freedom seekers lived, and survived freedoms lost and freedoms won over time; while acknowledging continued struggles for freedom as individuals and families rebuilt their lives and reunited their families at Fort Monroe and "contraband camps" across the country. Today, we see the impact of the decision granting sanctuary to Baker, Townsend, and Mallory; followed by tens of thousands of men, women, and children in a movement determined to secure freedom from bondage resulting in the establishment of educational institutions, churches, and descendant communities significant to the telling of inclusive histories of the American Civil War and African American experience.

Due to the COVID-19 Health Emergency, the Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center and the Casemate Museum remain closed; please check the Fort Monroe Authority website for updates on operating hours and future virtual and onsite public program offerings: <https://fortmonroe.org/>

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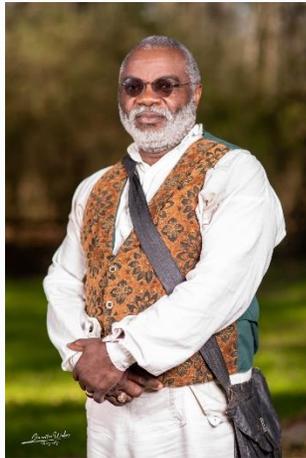
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*Fort Monroe is cooperatively managed by the National Park Service and Fort Monroe Authority; designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960, a National Monument in 2011, and a UNESCO Site of Memory in 2021, acknowledging the significance of Fort Monroe historically known as Point Comfort; the location of African landing in English North America in 1619 when a vessel carrying "20. and odd" captive Africans arrived at Point Comfort (present-day Fort Monroe located in Hampton, VA). As well as the location of the 1861 Contraband decision, making this historic site the location of the beginnings and dissolution of slavery in Virginia. In partnership, the NPS, FMA, City of Hampton, and a host of stakeholders preserve the resources, document the history, and share key stories significant to Fort Monroe in the making of America.*



Brief bios about the Virtual Campfire Chat participants:

**Joseph McGill**



Mr. Joseph McGill, Jr., is the founder of the Slave Dwelling Project and a history consultant for Magnolia Plantation in Charleston, SC. By arranging for people to sleep in extant slave dwellings, the Slave Dwelling Project has brought much needed attention to these often-neglected structures that are vitally important to the American built environment.

As of the beginning of 2018, Mr. McGill has conducted over 250 overnights in approximately 100 different sites in 19 states and the District of Columbia. He has interacted with the descendants of both the enslaved communities and of the enslavers associated with historic plantations. He speaks with schoolchildren and college students, with historical societies, community groups, and members of the public.

Mr. McGill is a native of Kingstree, South Carolina. Upon graduating from high school, he enlisted in the United States Air Force. While in the Air Force, Mr. McGill served as Security Policeman in England, Washington State and Germany. Mr. McGill holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Professional English from South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, South Carolina. He is married to the former Vilarin Mozee, and they have one daughter, Jocelyn Mozee McGill.

**Dr. Eric Claville**



Eric W. Claville is a graduate of Southern University and A&M College with a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science, Southern University Law Center with a Juris Doctorate in law and Louisiana State University with a Masters of Library and Information Science.

Professionally, Eric W. Claville is a licensed attorney in state and federal courts, a federally trained mediator, and a member of the American Bar Association, the

National Bar Association, the Louisiana Bar Association, the Association of Governmental Relations Professionals, the Washington Government Relations Group and the American Association of Political Consultants.

Eric W. Claville is an Executive Board member of the First Tee of the Virginia Peninsula, an Executive Committee member and officer of the Newport News Branch of the NAACP and very active in community and school related organizations.