



Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center



Through the adaptive reuse of an original Beaux Arts style building, which was first built as a Library in 1909 by the Coast Artillery Schools, the Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center will complement the existing Casemate Museum. With visitor amenities, galleries, a gift shop, information desk, archives, and multi-purpose space, it will also feature exhibits that include the story of the first landing of Africans in English North America and the “Contraband Decision” at Fort Monroe. The history surrounding Old Point Comfort has many layers of complicated and multi-racial themes that helped to change the course of history of this nation.

Restaurants

- A** Firehouse Coffee 1881
- B** The Deadrise at Old Point Marina
- C** The Channel Bistro
The Chesapeake Dining Room
- D** Paradise Ocean Club
- E** Oozlefinch Beers & Blending



Sites of Interest

1 Casemate Museum

Located within the fort's walls, the museum contains a chronological history of Old Point Comfort and Fort Monroe. A casemate is a room within the walls of a fort, used for a variety of different purposes including as gun emplacements and living quarters.



2 Pet Cemetery

400 reported graves found atop the ramparts mark the final resting place for US Army working dogs, unit mascots, and pets belonging to military personnel and their families. The cemetery was officially closed for burials in 1988.



3 Building #17

Building #17, constructed in 1823, served as quarters for young 2nd Lt. Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary Custis Lee. Lee was responsible for directing large engineering projects during the fort's construction.



4 Flagstaff Bastion

This site offers a commanding view of Hampton Roads, one of the largest natural harbors in the world. The flag is the first US flag mariners will see when returning and the last when heading out to sea.



5 Chapel of the Centurion

Dedicated in 1858, the Chapel of the Centurion was designed by noted architect, Richard Upjohn. The chapel is named for the Roman Centurion Cornelius, the first gentile converted to Christianity. Two active congregations meet here.



6 Lincoln Gun

Cast in 1860, this gun is the first 15-inch Rodman gun produced, and named for President Abraham Lincoln in 1862.



7 Algernonne Oak

This live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) is estimated to be over 400 years old. It was named for the first English fort, Fort Algernonne, which was built on the site in 1609.



8 Quarters No. 1

Constructed in 1819, this building is the oldest house inside the moat. It originally served as the constructing engineer's quarters and, later, the commanding officer's quarters. Famous visitors include the Marquis de Lafayette, President Abraham Lincoln, and King Kalākaua of the Kingdom of Hawaii.



9 Water Battery

Completed by 1821, the water battery was a series of casemates housing 42 cannons that supplemented the fort's original defenses. Today, only the powder magazine remains.



10 Endicott Era Batteries (Battery Parrott and Battery Irwin)

Completed in 1905, Battery Parrott originally held two 12-inch disappearing guns. The 90mm anti-aircraft gun seen here was installed in 1976. From 1902 to 1920, Battery Irwin held four 3-inch rapid-fire guns. In 1946, two 3-inch guns were moved from Fort Wool and installed here as a salute battery.



11 Old Point Comfort Lighthouse

Built in 1802, this lighthouse is the oldest structure on Old Point Comfort and the second oldest lighthouse on the Chesapeake Bay. It was captured by the British and used as an observation tower during the War of 1812. Today, it is operated by the United States Coast Guard as an active aid to navigation.



12 African Landing Memorial

Proposed site for the African Landing Memorial. Plans are to create a public memorial that will honor the first Africans who were brought to Point Comfort. The memorial will have a work of art that engages the public, narrating the journey, struggles, and triumphs of the Africans who landed here in 1619 as well as the generations of African Americans that followed.



13 Engineer Wharf

The original wharf was built in 1818 to receive construction materials for Fort Monroe. Currently, it is open to the public from dawn until dusk for sightseeing and fishing. A Virginia saltwater fishing license is required to fish from the pier.



14 First Africans in Virginia - State Historical Marker

The first Africans in English North America arrived here at Old Point Comfort in August 1619 aboard the ship, *White Lion*. The Africans brought with them their languages, cultures, and traditions that along with their presence would forever change the course of the United States.



15 Bandstand/ Continental Park

Built in 1934 by an African American camp of the Civilian Conservation Corps and Work Progress Administration laborers, the Bandstand, located in Continental Park, was originally designed for the 40-member, 2nd Coast Artillery Band.



16 The Chamberlin (second Chamberlin hotel)

Constructed in 1928, this building replaced the original 1896 Chamberlin Hotel, which was destroyed by a fire in 1920. Today, the Chamberlin is an active senior living community.



17 Saint Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church

Built in 1903, this building replaced the original 1860 church structure. The two original steeples have since been removed. Today, an active congregation still remains.



18 Main Gate

Constructed in 1820, the Main Gate was the first portion of the fort to be completed. On May 23, 1861, three enslaved men known to us today as Frank Baker, James Townsend, and Shepard Mallory fled from Sewell's Point in Norfolk seeking freedom with the Union Army at Fort Monroe. The following day, Major General Benjamin Butler declared them “Contraband of War.” Thousands of enslaved people would follow finding freedom at Fort Monroe during the American Civil War, earning it the name “Freedom's Fortress.”



Just a Bit Further

The sites below may not be walkable for some visitors.

19 Fort Monroe Arsenal

Built in 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, the arsenal produced gun carriages and stored weapons and ammunition.



20 Contraband Quarters

Following the “Contraband Decision” of 1861, thousands of enslaved men, women, and children fled to Fort Monroe seeking their freedom. This influx of people led to the creation of several “contraband” camps. This general area was the site of one such camp in 1863. Other larger camps were established in nearby Phoebus and Hampton, and as far away as Portsmouth, Yorktown, and Norfolk.



21 Contraband Hospital

Fort Monroe's “Contraband” Hospital was constructed in 1863 to treat the wounded and sick. Harriet Tubman would serve here as a nurse and cook for several months.

