



Hampton's Civil War Experience – The Peninsula Campaign 1862

When Virginia left the Union on April 17, 1861 Northern and Southern leaders recognized the Peninsula as an extremely strategic location. The Virginia Peninsula, bordered by the James and York rivers and the Chesapeake Bay was one of three major approaches to the Confederate capital at Richmond. The port town of Hampton, the largest community on the lower Peninsula was in a path of the opposing armies and would quickly become the scene of several significant events. The Union's ability to maintain control of Fort Monroe during the secession provided the Federals with an important strategic footing in Confederate territory.

Civil War sites from Fort Monroe to the Confederate capital of Richmond along the Virginia Civil War Trail can be tailored into a multi-day tour to meet your group's interest. Sites in Hampton include:

- **Fort Monroe and the Casemate Museum.** Built on Old Point Comfort on the tip of the Virginia Peninsula, Fort Monroe was the largest moat encircled masonry fortification in North America and designed to mount 412 cannons. It was the only fort in the Upper South not to fall into Confederate hands when the war erupted. Fort Monroe commanded the entrance to Hampton Roads and the lower Chesapeake Bay. Virtually overnight it became a major base for Federal fleet and infantry operations.

On May 23, 1861, Major General Benjamin F. Butler accepted three runaway slaves seeking their freedom under the declaration that they were "contraband of war." News of this extraordinary development quickly spread and thousand more would follow. Fort Monroe earned the nickname "Freedom's Fortress."

Confederate President Jefferson Davis was imprisoned in a casemate within the walls of the stone fort. The National Historic Landmark features the cell in which Davis was held for treason following the Civil War.

- Gain additional Civil War knowledge by taking the three-hour tour on **Miss Hampton II Harbor Cruise.** Engaging guides share the history of the Hampton Roads harbor including the Battle of the Ironclads – the Monitor and the CSS Virginia (formerly the Merrimac.) A 45 minute stop at Fort Wool, an island

fortress and companion to Fort Monroe is also included. Fort Wool was used in operations against Confederate-held Norfolk in 1861-62.

- Learn of the burning of Hampton with a stop at the **Hampton History Museum**. The port town was burned by local Confederates on August 7, 1861, to prevent its fall into Union hands. Also at this stop, tour **St. John's Church**, the lone survivor of the destruction.
- Enjoy lunch at the **Grey Goose Tearoom**, next door to the Hampton History Museum and Hampton Visitor Center.
- Stand beneath the expansive **Emancipation Oak**, a living symbol of freedom for African Americans and a National Historic Landmark grows at the entrance to Hampton University. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was first read under the limbs of this mighty oak in 1863. At ninety-eight feet in diameter and still growing, it continues to be a source of inspiration. While on campus, visit the **Hampton University Museum**. The museum dates back to 1868 with the opening of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a school dedicated to the education of thousands of newly freed Southern slaves.

Continue your journey west through Newport News, Williamsburg and on to Richmond with stops at Civil War Trail sites along the way. Visit Richmond National Battlefield Park available maps/guides will direct you to battle sites at Drewry's Bluff, Beaver Dam Creek, Gaines' Mill, Savage's Station, Glendale and Malvern Hill. Also tour the White House and Museum of the Confederacy and The American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar Ironworks while in the Confederate capital.