



CASEMATE MUSEUM FOUNDATION NEWS



IT'S THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CASEMATE MUSEUM !

What is a casemate? It is any room inside the walls of a fort. The original design and use for the casemates at Fort Monroe were to hold cannons in defense of the Hampton Roads and the Chesapeake Bay. Yet over 200 years later these rooms have served several purposes and functions. Today, front 1 (also known as Building 20) serves as the Casemate Museum.

The history of the Casemate Museum starts before its doors officially opened. On December 12, 1949, Dr. Chester Bradley addressed the Warwick Rotary Club with a speech titled "The Lower Peninsula and the American Tourist." He noted how people visited Fort Monroe to see the casemate where Jefferson Davis was imprisoned, which was closed to the public. His remarks prompted an editorial in a local newspaper and led to the deputy post commander, Colonel Paul Goode, inviting Dr. Bradley to Fort Monroe to discuss the creation of a museum.

Initially progress slowed because of the Korean Conflict, but Dr. Bradley and Col. Goode never gave up. The "Jefferson Davis Casemate Museum" officially opened after a ceremony at the parade field on June 1, 1951. It consisted of only one casemate, number two, where Jefferson Davis had been imprisoned for a few months in 1865. Casemate 2 was restored by the Army and exhibits were funded by chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Two uniformed military police opened and closed the museum daily and a museum committee developed new exhibits.

Since then, the Casemate Museum has grown at an unbelievably rapid pace. Within two years of opening, Casemates 1 and 3 were added to the museum footprint and the name of the museum was changed to the "Fort Monroe Casemate Museum." Casemate 1 opened with an exhibit on the Battle of Hampton Roads, while Casemate 3 held exhibits honoring the history and personnel of Fort Monroe. The years between 1967-1969 saw rapid expansion and growth. The museum became part of the Army Museum System and Dr. Bradley was hired as the museum's first salaried curator. Additionally, the museum's gallery space doubled with the addition of casemates 4, 5, and 6. The West Bastion exhibits, where the 32-pounder seacoast guns are displayed today, and casemates 7-9 were opened to the public as an addition to the museum from 1974-1976.

In 1977, the U.S. Army Center of Military History designated the Casemate Museum as the "Army's Coast Artillery Museum." It would become an accredited institution by the American Association of Museums in the same year. All the additions over 25 years allowed for greater interpretation of the history, but the facility was disjointed and lacked a cohesive storyline. Towards the end of 1982, the museum closed for massive renovation and expansion. 16 new exhibits were installed and the exterior of the museum landscaped before its July 1, 1983, reopening.

The Base Realignment and Closure decision in 2005 led to the deactivation of Fort Monroe and questioned the existence of a Casemate Museum. However, in 2011 the museum underwent the unprecedented process of transitioning from a U.S. Army museum to a Fort Monroe Authority museum. Continual updates to the galleries provide guests with the national significance of the land; Tsenacommacah, Point Comfort, Old Point Comfort, and Fort Monroe.

Presented by the Fort Monroe Authority

LIVING HISTORY PROGRAM



Saturday, June 13 2026

10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Join the NY 99th Volunteer Infantry, Company D, and the 124th NY State Volunteers, Company B, for a living history program.

Learn from historic interpreters about the Battle of Big Bethel and military life at Fort Monroe during the Civil War.

FREE

Registration Not Required

Fort Monroe Visitor Center
30 Ingalls Road, Fort Monroe, VA

Questions?

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