

ROAD TO NORFOLK

THE UNION OCCUPATION OF NORFOLK IN 1862

It was decided in cabinet council that the President, Abraham Lincoln, the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, and the Secretary of Treasury, Salmon Chase, should proceed to the seat of active operations on the Peninsula (Hampton Roads, Virginia) in order to gain, from personal observation, a better knowledge of the situation.



(Above) This 1864 F.B. Carpenter painting was a depiction of the first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation on July 22, 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln before his cabinet. From left to right: Edwin Stanton (Secretary of War), Salmon P. Chase (Secretary of the Treasury), President Abraham Lincoln, Gideon Welles (Secretary of the Navy), Caleb B. Smith (Secretary of the Interior), Montgomery Blair (Postmaster General), Edward Bates (Attorney General), William H. Seward (Secretary of State), Courtesy Library of Congress

For obvious reasons, the departure of the President from Washington at such a moment and for such a purpose was kept a profound secret; and when, without any previous intimation, I was requested by the Secretary of War, late in the afternoon on the 4th of May, 1862, to meet him within the hour at the Navy Yard, with the somewhat mysterious caution to speak to no one of my movements, I had no conception whatever of the purpose or intention of the meeting.

The vessel immediately got under way and steamed down the Potomac. The *Miami* was one of the finest models and most neatly appointed vessels ever owned by the government. She was originally an English yacht, named the *Lady Murchard*, built for his own use by a wealthy gentleman who came out in her to Canada, and afterward sold her to the Treasury Department for a revenue cutter, her name being changed by the Secretary.

Neither the President nor either of the Secretaries had ever been at Fortress Monroe, and the conceptions they had formed of its location and topographical surroundings were quite inaccurate. While we were examining the maps of Virginia, I pointed out what I regarded as a feasible route to the rear of Norfolk from a point near Linn Haven Bay, opposite Fortress Monroe. I had been anxious that we should attempt this route while our expedition to Port Royal was lying rather listlessly at Hampton Roads in 1861, awaiting the completion of some minor details. We had nearly 20,000 men on board the transports at that time, destined for a descent on the Southern coast, and we could have readily struck the blow and re-embarked during the time we were lying there idle in the ships.

The next morning, the President and party went over to the Rip Raps to see the naval combat. The *Merrimac* moved out of the mouth of the Elizabeth River, quietly and steadily, just as she had come out only a few weeks

before when she had sunk the *Congress*. She wore an air of defiance and determination even at that distance. The *Monitor* moved up and waited for her.

Suddenly, the stillness was broken by the cannon from the vessels and the great guns from the Rip Raps that filled the air with sulphurous smoke and a terrific noise that reverberated from the fortress and the opposite shore like thunder. The firing was maintained for several hours, but all to no purpose; the *Merrimac* moved sullenly back to her position. It was determined that night that on the following day vigorous offensive operations should be undertaken.

The whole available naval force was to bombard Sewell's Point, and under cover of the bombardment, the available troops from Fortress Monroe were to be landed at that point and march on Norfolk.

No time was lost on the following morning in re-embarking the troops for the purpose of marching on Norfolk by the rear. At the last moment General John Wool, with much emotion, begged the Secretary to allow him to command the troops. The Secretary had decided to relieve him of the command of the expedition on account of his advanced age, but finally reversed his decision with the remark that he could not inflict sorrow upon gray hairs.

At seven o'clock General Wool, accompanied by Secretary Samuel Chase, General Joseph Mansfield, and General



Egbert Viele, landed at Ocean View, and they were soon on the way to the front, the men cheering them as they passed.

Upon arrival of the party at the Half-way Crossroads they were distant from Ocean View by five miles, and, by the short road to Norfolk, the same distance from that place.

The Half-way Crossroads is as picturesque a spot as one often sees, a greater portion of the place being sheltered by magnificent willow oaks, the largest that I remember to have seen. Under these trees were grouped, in the coziest manner, the Twentieth Regiment.

He acceded to both requests, and we went on; that is, General Viele, myself, and a half-dozen dragoon.

Starting at once to the front of our escort, we had not gone very far before it became evident that a great deal of confusion existed in the command. In fact, there was no organization, and an utter absence of definite instructions or orders of any kind. Overtaking a regiment that was scattered along the road, most of the men lying down wherever any shade could be found, as the day was intensely warm, Mr. Chase inquired of the colonel to whose command he belonged and what his orders were. He replied that he had no idea who was his commander; that some said Weber and some said Mansfield. He had received no orders, except that when he landed he was told to take a certain road, and he thought he would wait to see what was to be done next. Overtaking another regiment, a mile or two beyond, the Secretary received the same answers.

Straggling soldiers now came running toward us, with exaggerated rumors of the enemy being in force, burning the bridges and contesting with artillery the passage of the streams that crossed the road.

As General John Wool and others drew near Brigadier General Max Weber was questioning some dirty-looking fellows in gray that had been taken prisoners. He learned that they were a portion of the garrison of Sewell's Point, which had been evacuated by reason of our shelling of the night previous, by which one man had been killed and several wounded. I asked them what all the smoke was about. "Youse fellows throw some kind of things that spill fire when they burst, and it just sot everything in a blaze; so we run into the woods and then we all run away."



(Above) Federal Troops march north on Bank Street ca. 1862-66. Courtesy Sargeant Memorial Collection, Norfolk Public Library

(Far Left) Fort Wool Rip Raps (Harper's Weekly, December 17, 1864), Courtesy Harrison B. Wilson Archives, Norfolk State University

(Left) The great expedition—the vessels at anchor at Hampton Roads, from the top of the Hygeia Hotel, Old Point Comfort, Va. (c. Jan. 23, 1862), Courtesy Library of Congress



(Left) Courtesy Sargeant Memorial Collection, Norfolk Public Library
(Right) This May 24, 1862 Harper's Weekly drawing publicized the surrender of Norfolk and Union occupation. Norfolk's Mayor and Council met Federal forces commanded by General Wool under a flag of truce and performed a most skillful ruse to gain time for the Confederates to secure their retreat from the city. The mayor, with all the formality of a medieval warden, appeared with a bunch of rusty keys and a formidable roll of papers that included a letter from General Huger, which he proceeded to read with the utmost deliberation previous to delivering the "keys of the city." The reading of the documents—which embraced a large portion of the history of Virginia, the causes that led to the war, Norfolk, and in short a little of everything that could have the remotest bearing upon the subject and exhaust the longest possible space of time in reading—was protracted until nearly dark.

(Above) Harper's Weekly was again on-hand to witness the moment-by-moment entrance of federal troops into the City of Norfolk (Sketched by Mr. Theodore R. Davis), Courtesy Harrison B. Wilson Archives, Norfolk State University
(Left) The Reoccupation of Norfolk by the Union Forces, Under General Wool (Harper's Weekly, May 10, 1862, sketched by Mr. Theodore R. Davis), Courtesy Harrison B. Wilson Archives, Norfolk State University



At the extreme limits of the city, in front of a group of low wooden houses and before the formidable line of entrenched works was reached, a large deputation, headed by the mayor and municipal council, made its appearance with a flag of truce and performed a most skillful ruse to gain time for the Confederates to secure their retreat from the city. The mayor, with all the formality of a medieval warden, appeared with a bunch of rusty keys and a formidable roll of papers that included a letter from General Huger, which he proceeded to read with the utmost deliberation previous to delivering the "keys of the city."

The reading of the documents—which embraced a large portion of the history of Virginia, the causes that led to the war, Norfolk, and in short a little of everything that could have the remotest bearing upon the subject and exhaust the longest possible space of time in reading—was protracted until nearly dark.

In the meanwhile, the Confederates were hurrying with their artillery and stores over the ferry to Portsmouth, cutting the water pipes and flooding the public buildings, generally while our General was listening in the most innocent and complacent manner to the long tirade so ingeniously prepared by the mayor and skillfully interlarded with fulsome personal eulogium upon himself. Losing all patience, Mr. Chase at last interposed and suggested that any further parley was unnecessary and that we should proceed to the city.

The correspondents of the press had gone before the General—the reporter of the Associated Press, Theodore Davis, of Harper's Weekly, and the correspondent of The New York Herald. As we entered the city the smoke of the burning Navy Yard seemed to cloud about to fall with the suddenness of wrath, and blot out the stain of treason with which the air seemed full. Fortunately for us it did not this time, so we went on. The children scattered, some of the boldest stopping an instant to say, "I am a going to hurt you." Then they grew more bold, as the young procession trailing after us grew in length. Blind stamming, and the people peeped rather than looked. The crowds upon the corners were quiet.

The sixteenth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment was at Seelye Quarter-master of that corps.

The Stars and Stripes were raised over the Customhouse on 10th, at noon, the colors used being those of the Tenth New York. They were flung to the breeze by Lieutenant Aaron B. Beelye, Quarter-master of that corps.

And now another well-devised plan presented itself in the shape of a number of carriages which the mayor particularly desired should be used by the officers in taking possession of the city. The troops in the meanwhile were to remain where they were. Falling readily into this second little trap, the General accepted, and we were driven to the City Hall, where some more rusty keys were produced and more formal speeches were made. A collection of several thousand people, some of them in butternut and gray, assembled in front of the building.



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NORFOLK

CIVIL WAR SITES IN

ON THE COVER
1859 memorial painting of the famous battle between ironclads USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia* was produced by Kurtz and Allison Art Studio in Chicago. The battle between the two vessels was witnessed by countless people throughout Hampton Roads. This scene is illustrated by the battle that was fought on March 9, 1862 near Norfolk. Courtesy Library of Congress.



CIVIL WAR SITES IN NORFOLK

- 1. FORT MONROE** The Second U.S. Colored Cavalry was formed at Fort Monroe on December 22, 1863 under the command of Brevet Brigadier General George Cole.

Fort Monroe is also the place where Major General Benjamin Butler made his "contraband" decision on May 27, 1861, saying that enslaved persons who found asylum in Union-occupied territories would not be returned to slavery. This action earned the fort the nickname "Freedom's Fortress."

- 2. CAMP HAMILTON** The First Colored Cavalry was formed at Camp Hamilton on December 22, 1863 under the command of Lt. Colonel Albert N. Seip. The regiment had 1,170 men (77 were from Norfolk).

- Enslaved Labor Gangs were sent by local Confederate commanders to construct defensive batteries in a number of **locations throughout Hampton Roads** in 1861, including:

- 3A. NAVAL HOSPITAL** Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, is the oldest continuously running hospital in the Navy. Built on the site of the 1776 Fort Nelson, the hospital admitted its first patients in 1830.

On April 20, 1861, three days after Virginia voted to secede from the Union, the 3rd Virginia Regiment took possession of Naval Hospital Portsmouth and reinforced the area by erecting a battery, named Fort Nelson, at Hospital Point. The hospital remained in Confederate hands until May 10, 1862, when Union occupation of Norfolk began. The Navy regained control in October 1864 and from that time to the end of the war, Naval Hospital Portsmouth was one of the busiest Navy hospitals, seeing its patient load exceed 1,000 patients yearly in 1864 and 1865.

- 3B. FORT NORFOLK** Built in 1810 and occupied by Confederate troops at the beginning of the Civil War, the Fort's magazine provided ordnance for the CSS *Virginia* during its historic battle with the USS *Monitor* on March 9, 1862. Union troops took possession of the fort after the surrender of the city on May 10, 1862. Crew members of the Confederate blockade runner *Mary & Ann* were imprisoned here and left behind a wall of graffiti that may still be seen today.

- 3C. CRANEY ISLAND** This was the site where thousands of black refugees encamped beginning in 1862. Quaker missionaries Sarah and Lucy Chase were assigned to work on this island, establishing schools for the former slaves.

- 3D. TANNER'S CREEK** Daniel Tanner settled in Norfolk County in the first part of the 17th century. A 1637 land grant refers to the "great creek...going into the Elizabeth River about two miles on the north side from Daniel Tanner." In September 1642, a ferry was established on Tanner's Creek between the foot of today's Wythe Place in Larchmont and the point of the present Algonquin Park. The name of Tanner's Creek was changed to the Lafayette River around the turn of the 20th century.

- 3E. SEWELL'S POINT** This was also where the Battle of Sewell's Point was fought (currently located inside the grounds of Naval Station Norfolk). Confederate batteries located here repulsed an attack by the Union fleet on May 19, 1861. This was the first Civil War engagement in Virginia.

- 3F. PIG POINT** In June 1861, Union Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, in order to clear a route for the capture of Suffolk, sought to neutralize the Confederate battery at Pig Point three miles north on the James River at the mouth of the Nansemond River. At 9:00 a.m. on June 5, the steamer USS *Harriet Lane* shelled the battery. The Portsmouth Rifles, manning the guns there, returned fire and struck the vessel twice. One shot hit a tub of musket balls; the flying balls wounded six men. No Confederates were injured in the engagement, which ended after 20 minutes when the *Harriet Lane* withdrew.



PANORAMA OF
NORFOLK, VA.
AND SURROUNDINGS.
1892.



Map Courtesy Sargeant Memorial Collection, Norfolk Public Library.

- 3G. LAMBERTS POINT** Annexed to the City of Norfolk in 1911. The name "Lamberts Point" is attributed to Thomas Lambert, who received a grant of 100 acres of land from the English crown in 1635, in what would become Lower Norfolk County. The grant included the area now occupied by the Lamberts Point coal piers and Lamberts Point neighborhood.
In 1883, the first carload of coal to Norfolk arrived by rail from the Pocahontas coal fields in West Virginia, and coal soon replaced cotton as Norfolk's number one export. The Norfolk & Western Railroad built coal and cargo piers at Lamberts Point in 1886. By 1900, Norfolk was the leading coal exporting port on the East Coast. The industry continued to grow even through the Great Depression.
- 4. CAMP TALBOT** Located a half mile west of the corner of Oak Grove Road and Granby Street, this was where Confederate troops from Virginia and Georgia were encamped from April 1861 until the surrender of the city on May 10, 1862.
- 5. LANDING OF UNION TROOPS AND OCCUPATION OF NORFOLK**
 - 5A.** Union troops landed at Sewell's Point under the cover of a naval bombardment the morning of May 10, 1862.
 - 5B.** Major-General John Wool and Union troops landed near the present intersection of West Ocean View Avenue and Mason Creek Road on the morning of May 10, 1862.
 - 5C.** Approximately 6,000 Union troops rendezvoused at the Half-Way Crossroads and proceeded to Norfolk where Norfolk Mayor William W. Lamb surrendered the city.
- 6. HALL'S SLAVE JAIL** Owned by William Hall from 1845 to about 1865, the jail was located on northeast lot at the intersection of Calvert's Lane and Union Street. The site where numerous black refugees were brought into the city.

- 7. ORPHANS ASYLUM AND ROPE WALK** The site where hundreds of black refugees entered the city. Many were reunited with loved ones.
 - 7A. ORPHANS ASYLUM** This was the site where hundreds of black refugees were brought by federal troops from the rural countryside following the occupation of Norfolk in May 1862.
 - 7B. ROPE WALK** This was the site where hundreds of black refugees were brought by federal troops from the rural countryside following the occupation of Norfolk. Northern missionaries in Norfolk also recalled that the Rope Walk was the site where numerous tearful reunions with loved ones occurred.
- 8. OFFICIAL OCCUPATION SITES**
 - 8A. U.S. CUSTOMHOUSE (101 E. Main Street, built in 1858)** This Classical Revival structure has housed both customs offices and the post office and was the site where the Union Army raised the U.S. flag on May 10, 1862. It was also used by federal troops as a prison between 1862 and 1865.
 - 8B. NORFOLK CITY COURTHOUSE (Now MacArthur Memorial - 421 E. City Hall Avenue, built in 1850)** Norfolk Mayor William Lamb surrendered the City to Union General John E. Wool on the steps of this building in an elaborate ceremony on May 10, 1862.
- 9. MECHANICS HALL** This was the site of numerous important meetings during Reconstruction, including the Unionist Club and the **Colored Monitor Union Club formed on April 4, 1865**. This club, formed at Mechanics Hall, featured the Reverend William I. Hodges as president. The purpose of the group was to promote union and harmony among blacks. The group issued the "Equal Suffrage" pamphlet on June 5, 1865. Written by Dr. Thomas Bayne and Rev. Brown, pastor of St. John's AME Church, it focused on promoting political rights. On May 25, 1865, the Club organized the assembly of blacks to vote at 8 a.m. in front of St. John's. This was designed to mobilize the community and to demonstrate support for voting rights.

- 10. NATIONAL SAVINGS BANK FOR THE COLORED CITIZENS OF THE U.S. (Norfolk Branch, 47 Bank Street. H.C. Percy, Cashier)** Blacks began weekly meetings in 1863 to promote relief programs and made deposits at this freedman's bank. It was chartered by Congress in 1865. Open Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. In 1866, the bank reported over \$12,000 in deposits from local residents. It was moved to the Gray Street (near Main Street) location by 1869.
- 11. NATIONAL FREEDMAN'S SAVINGS AND TRUST COMPANY (Norfolk Branch, 14 Main Street)** The Freedman's Bank moved to this location shortly before the bank closed nationally in 1874.
- 12. FREEDMAN'S BUREAU (Norfolk Branch, 26 S. Catherine Street)** Catherine Street is today's Bank Street, and #26 would have been on the west side of today's Bank Street and one building to the north of the current curb at the southwest corner of Plume and Bank Streets.
- 13. H.C. PERCY** Cashier, Freedman's Trust and Savings Company, home at 5 E. Freemason Street
- 14. AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION TEACHERS IN NORFOLK:**
 - 14A.** William L. Coan, Superintendent for the black schools, home, 27 S. Catherine Street
 - 14B.** Fannie Coan and Margaret Rodger, teachers, boarded at the "Mission House," 5 E. Freemason Street
- 15. DR. WILLIAM B. SELDEN HOUSE (351 Botetourt Street, built in 1807)** While Dr. Selden worked as a surgeon for the Confederate Army, his home served as headquarters for Union occupation troops during the Civil War, and was occupied by Union General Egbert L. Viele, Military Governor of Norfolk, in 1862 and 1863 and by General Benjamin Butler from 1863 until 1865.

- 16. PROMINENT BLACK RECONSTRUCTION LEADERS IN NORFOLK:**
 - 16A. THOMAS F. PAIGE**
Hotel owner and entrepreneur,
7 E. Bute Street
 - 16B. THOMAS BAYNE**
Dentist, 217 Church Street
 - 16C. JOSEPH T. WILSON**
Customs Inspector, 326 Bute Street

- Norfolk had the largest number of schools for blacks in the area. Many schools were maintained by the American Missionary Association (AMA), and later by the Freedman's Bureau. School hours were from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Here is a **selected list of schools for blacks during this period:**
 - 17A. COAN SCHOOL** Opened in April 1863, this was the first school in Norfolk for African Americans. Established by AMA missionary William Coan, the school operated in the Colored Methodist Church on Bute Street. Within a few days after opening, there were 1,200 pupils who would eventually be divided between the Coan School and another one that opened in the Bute Street Baptist Church.
 - 17B. BUTE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH** Established by AMA missionary Mr. Tyler, this school began operation in the church shortly after the Coan School opened.
 - 17C. CATHERINE STREET** This small school was operated during the day by missionaries.
 - 17D. CALVERT STREET SCHOOL** This was a government-owned building. The teachers included Miss M. Kildare, Miss M.K. Colburn, and Miss E.F. Twitchell.

- 17E. SOUTHGATE'S INSTITUTE** Located in the Seminary building at the corner of Fenchurch and Cove Streets, this school offered a night program for adults on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. The teachers included Mrs. M. Rodger, Miss H.L. Chase, and Miss C.C. Chapel.
- 17F. COVE STREET** This school occupied a building owned by Sam Cuthrell. The teacher was Margaret Rodger, the school was later renamed Southgate's Institute.
- 17G. COTTON FACTORY** This school opened in the Cotton Factory, which was located on James Street.
- 17H. ROPE WALK** This school operated in a privately-owned building in the Rope Walk district.
- 17I. TALBOT STREET** This school operated only for a short period.
- In addition to AMA schools, others were opened including:
 - 18A. COAN HIGH SCHOOL** Established in March 1869, the school was located on Bute Street in the Joseph T. Wilson's building. Rent was \$33 monthly.
 - 18B. PERCY SCHOOL.** This school was located on Marsh Street, at the corner of Fenchurch Street.
 - 18C. JAMES ST. SCHOOL** Later called St. Mark's School (in September 1869), the James Street School was located at the Methodist Episcopal Church on Bute Street, later known as St. John's AME Church. Rent was \$12 monthly.
 - 18D. WILSON INSTITUTE** This school was located at the corner of Bute and Union Streets. The teachers included Miss H.M. Russ and Miss A.F. Ward.

- 19. EMANCIPATION DAY PARADE (on Fair Grounds site, January 1, 1863)** Four thousand blacks, headed by drum and fife corps, paraded through Norfolk's main streets cheering "loudly for the downfall of African slavery." Five hundred black soldiers accompanied the parade while marching from Market Street to Dr. William Selden's residence (located at Botetourt and Freemason Streets), occupied by General Viele. The procession then went to the Fair Grounds (located at 18th and Church Streets) where it ended with speeches and the burning of a Jefferson Davis effigy in a nearby cemetery.
- 20. CONFEDERATE MONUMENT** The foundation of the Norfolk Confederate Monument was originally laid in 1899 at the head of Market Square (later renamed Commercial Place). By 1907, the monument was completed with the placement of a fifteen-foot bronze statue of Johnny Reb.
- 21. WEST POINT MONUMENT** In 1886, a portion of the black West Point Cemetery was designated as a special burial place for Union veterans and a monument was planned. In 1906, the monument was completed; in 1920, the bronze statue of Norfolk native Sergeant William H. Carney was placed at the top. Carney was awarded the Medal of Honor because of his actions during the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, on July 18, 1863.
- 22. KENMURE (420 W. Bute Street, built in 1845)** Kenmure was built for William Wilson Lamb, the Norfolk Mayor who surrendered the City to Union troops on May 10, 1862. Lamb is credited with saving Norfolk's historic Mace by hiding it under a hearth in his home.
- 23. OLD NORFOLK ACADEMY (420 Bank Street, built 1840)** During the Civil War, this Greek Revival Boys School served as a hospital for Union troops.
- 24. PURDIE-TAYLOR-WHITTLE HOUSE (227 W. Freemason Street, built in 1791)** This was the home of Richard Lucian Page, Lieut. USN and later Capt. CSN; William Conway Whittle, Jr., executive officer of the CSS *Shenandoah*; and birthplace of Walter Herron Taylor, Lt. Col. CSA, who served as Gen. Robert E. Lee's aide de camp during the Civil War.