



Hampton

CONVENTION & VISITOR BUREAU



FIRST AFRICAN LANDING AT OLD POINT COMFORT, VIRGINIA IN 1619

MEDIA RELEASE

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Fort Monroe Hosts 'Escape to Freedom' May 4

Hampton, VA- Join in a celebration of a wonderful piece of American history at “Escape to Freedom,” Saturday, May 4, 2019, at Fort Monroe!

In a year that is commemorating the 400th anniversary of the first Africans' arrival in English North America at what is now Fort Monroe, this event celebrates another momentous event at the same place: the first step in the beginning of the end of the institution of slavery.

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This event, which is free to the public, celebrates the “Contraband Decision” of May 1861, the first action by the U.S. Government in the Civil War to take enslaved people from their bondage. When three enslaved men who had been forced to work for the Confederate army fled to Fort Monroe in hopes of sanctuary, the U.S. Army commander there refused to return them to their master. Since they were being used by an enemy who called them “property,” the commander declared, they could be kept at Fort Monroe as “contraband of war.”

Eventually thousands of the enslaved fled to Fort Monroe, the “freedom fort.” These “contrabands” founded many of the free back communities in the region. It was the start of a process that led to the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery.

WAVY-TV news personalities Don Roberts and Anita Blanton will be Mcs/Parade Marshals for “Escape to Freedom.”

The schedule:

11 a.m.: A procession, led by African dancers and drummers and including African-American heritage groups and community representatives, will march past Fort Monroe's Cannon Park and through the Main Gate of the old historic fort, to the Parade Ground. This procession will honor the many enslaved people who walked through the fort's gates on their path to freedom.

Noon: A stage program on the fort's Parade Ground, featuring:

- * Performances by musical groups including the USCT Singers and Music Mosaic.

- * Featured speaker Thulani Davis, author, poet, playwright and descendant of one of Hampton's most prominent “contraband” families.

- * Excerpts from “Prelude to Freedom,” a musical drama by Gerri Hollins, founder of the Contraband Historical Society, based on the events of 1861.

2 p.m.: A concert by Steve Wilson and his quartet, also on the Parade Ground stage. Wilson is an acclaimed multi-instrumentalist who has played on scores of recordings, been a member of the Smithsonian Jazz Orchestra, and performed with musical greats Lionel Hampton and Chick Corea, among others.

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In addition, historical reenactment groups will be on the grounds for the public to see and visit
With.

These include:

* The Buffalo Riders, mounted reenactors who represent the African-American cowboys and cavalymen of the Old West in years following the Civil War.

* Civil War reenactors of U.S. Army units, including the 4th U.S. Artillery, the 5th New York Zouaves, and the 99th New York Infantry.

All the public is invited to this free celebration of our history. Bring a picnic lunch and lawn chairs so you can stay for all of the day's attractions. All who care about American history and heritage will enjoy this entertaining and inspiring event!

“Escape to Freedom” is presented by the Contraband Historical Society and Fort Monroe National Monument of the National Park Service, with the assistance of the Fort Monroe Authority.

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