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Eastern United States Road Trip (E22A-2)

South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania

My Eastern United States road trip continues.

After heading east across a number of states, I turned north, heading up the East Coast and visiting a number of state parks and NPS units along the way, mostly sites focused on American History, from early colonization to the American Revolution, slavery, the Underground Railroad, Civil War and the Reconstruction Era.

My first stop was at the historic coastal town of Beaufort, South Carolina, the site of the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, which was established as a national monument in 2017 and reclassified as a National Historical Park in 2019.

Beaufort is on Port Royal Island at the heart of the Sea Islands, a robust cotton-growing region at the start of the Civil War. Some months into the Civil War, Union forces occupied the area after the Battle of Port Royal, which it held for the rest of the war. Local whites fled the Union occupiers, leaving behind their home, plantations and slaves. The Union declared the slaves emancipated, and a combination of the federal government and Northern service agencies launched education, property distribution and other initiatives to help the former slaves achieve real independence. This created a model for the post-war Reconstruction Era, although by the end of the century much of the progress had been erased as Jim Crow laws were enacted in South Carolina.



Penn Center was part of the education system set up in 1862 for freed slaves. Darrah Hall was built rather late in the school's history, but it is the oldest surviving building at the school.



Brick Baptist Church was built by slaves in 1855. During services, Blacks were relegated to the balcony, out of sight of the white parishioners. After the Battle of Port Royal, 8,000 freed slaves took control of the church.

Historic Charleston, South Carolina, further up the coast, was my next stop. Charleston was founded in 1670, and soon became the fifth largest city in North America. The city became a major slave trading post – almost half of African slaves imported to what is now the United States arrived here in Charleston. South Carolina strongly favored independence from the British at the American Revolution, but in what was the greatest American defeat of that war, the British captured Charleston in 1780, and held the city for more than a year after their surrender at Yorktown in 1781.

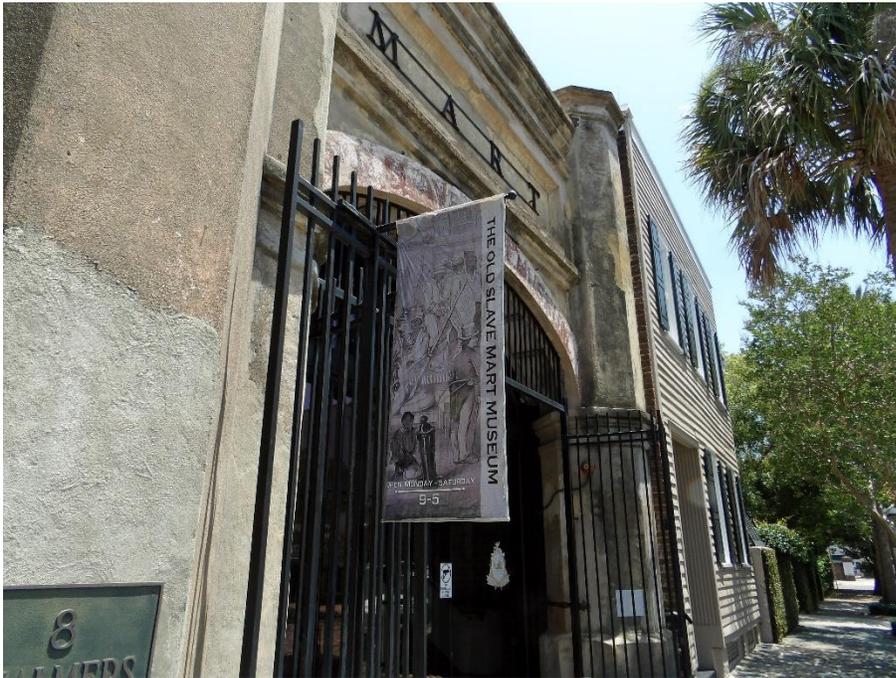
After Abraham Lincoln was elected in 1860, it was in Charleston where South Carolina delegates voted to secede from the Union, the first state to do so. Union troops evacuated from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter, located on a small island in Charleston Harbor. The first full battle of the Civil War occurred in April 1861 when Confederate troops opened fire on Fort Sumter, driving Union forces out in 34 hours. It wasn't until 1865 when Union forces captured Charleston.



A walking tour through the heart of the original city showcases several historic houses and gardens. Many of the houses date back before the Civil War and in many cases the American Revolutions.



The County of Charleston Historic Courthouse was originally built in 1753, and served as the statehouse of the British Royal Government.



Charleston's Old Slave Mart Museum is housed in the Old Slave Mart, which was built in 1859 as a slave auction facility.



This building stands at what was the site of Institute Hall, built in 1854, Charleston's largest public space at the time. It hosted the 1860 Democratic convention, which split over the mention of slavery in the party platform. After Abraham Lincoln was elected president that fall, South Carolina held a secession convention, which met in Columbia on December 17, but moved to Charleston the next day. South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860. That night, convention delegates signed the Ordinance of Secession before a huge crowd here. Institute Hall was destroyed a year later in the Great Fire of 1861 that burned over 500 acres of the city.



Inside Ft. Moultrie, on Sullivan Island. There have been forts here as far back as the American Revolution, although Fort Moultrie was finally decommissioned in 1960. It became part of Fort Sumter National Monument, renamed Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park in 2019.



Fort Sumter dates back to the War of 1812 when construction began on an artificial island. It never was completed, and was badly damaged in 1861 during the Battle of Fort Sumter. This is the view from Fort Moultrie. Fort Sumter is only accessible by boat.

My next stop was also Civil War-related – Fort Fisher State Historic Site southeast of Wilmington, North Carolina along the Cape Fear River. A number of people in my family tree fought for the Union during the Civil War, but the only one to die in the war was killed at Fort Fisher.

Fort Fisher was one of a handful of forts near the mouth of the Cape Fear River, protecting access to Wilmington, one of the Confederacy's most important ports. Well-fortified, Fort Fisher was nicknamed the Southern Gibraltar. A Union effort to take the fort in December 1864 turned back in the face of Confederate reinforcements.

A second attack was organized at the Union's Fort Monroe, up the coast in Virginia, and launched on January 12, 1865 with heavy continual bombardment. Union troops were landed to the north of the fort on January 13 and 15. Union infantry troops, including my great great grandmother's youngest brother, Duncan McNeil, attacked the land face of the fort, especially at its Cape Fear River end where its only gate was located at Shepherd Battery. Union troops succeeded in entering the fort, where hand-to-hand combat then took place. By the end of the day, Union troops had taken the fort. Victory here cut the supply lines to Wilmington and points north in interior Virginia, including General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Union celebrations took place at the fort through the night and into the next morning. Some celebrants entered the fort's main magazine, which then exploded minutes later, killing at least 200 Union troops and Confederate prisoners, many of whom were sleeping on the ground near the magazine. Duncan McNeil was among those killed.



The land-facing side of Fort Fisher, with Shepherd's Battery and the fort's only gate at far end



Inside the fort at Shepherd's Battery, where hand-to-hand combat took place



The main magazine that exploded was at approximately this location.



Duncan McNeil was buried in Union Cemetery, Fort Edward, New York. His headstone notes that he was killed at Fort Fisher on January 16, 1865. His mother was buried next to him 25 years later. McNeil had never married and had no children, but a handful of nieces, nephews and their descendants were named after him, including my grandpa Duncan Wasson.

After a couple previous failed attempts to establish a permanent settlement in North America, in 1607 the English established Jamestown, in present-day Virginia. 164 years later, British Lt. General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington's troops at Yorktown, just 18 miles away, in the battle credited with securing American independence. Both sites, along with a parkway that connects the two, are in Colonial National Historical Park, a NPS unit.



Jamestown Memorial Church and Old Tower. The old church tower is the oldest surviving structure at Jamestown, although it was not part of the settlement's original church.



Inside the 1607 James Fort site. Many of the first batch of colonists died that first year; the crosses mark where they were buried.



Glass and stone beads that colonists brought with them for trade are on display at the Voorhees Archaearium museum at Jamestown, built over the foundation of Virginia Colony's first statehouse.



Earthworks at the Second Siege Line at Yorktown Battlefield. The Siege of Yorktown began September 28, 1781 and ended on October 19. It resulted in a decisive American victory, and it was the last major land battle of the American Revolutionary War. A park road leads to a number sites relevant to the siege.



After determining that their situation was hopeless, British Lt. General Charles Cornwallis and his advisors determined that they had to surrender. The terms of the British surrender were negotiated here at Moore House. The Articles of Capitulation were signed October 19.



Surrender Field is where British forces surrendered to the American and French allies on October 20, although Cornwallis refused to attend the Surrender Ceremony. In all, the allies captured 8,000 soldiers, 214 pieces of artillery, thousands of muskets, and other items.



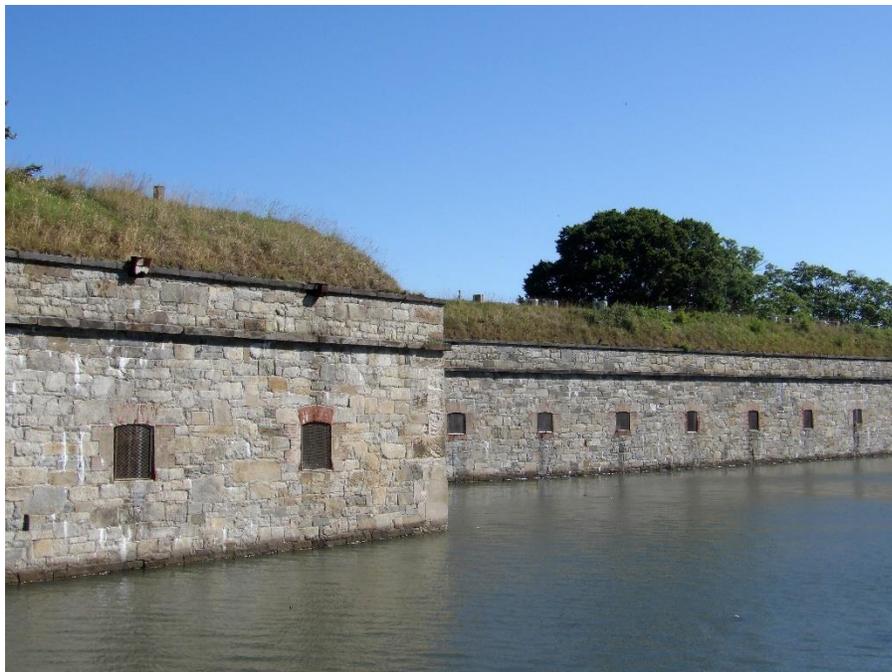
Some of the artillery pieces that the British surrendered at Yorktown are displayed at Surrender Field.



Part of Washington's Office/Sleeping Quarters tent, basically a tent that was set up in larger tent. This became a family heirloom that ended up in the Robert E. Lee household at the time of the Civil War. They were passed to Martha Washington's grandson George Washington Parke Custis, whose daughter Mary Anna Custis married Robert E. Lee in 1831.



The first Africans in Virginia arrived here at Point Comfort, Virginia in 1619. Although this is often cited as the start of slavery in what is now the United States, other colonial powers had brought African slaves here much earlier, and some Native American tribes had also practiced a degree of slavery before the European colonizers arrived.



Fort Moore National Monument, a new NPS unit established in 2011, was built at Point Comfort, at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River region. The brick-and-stone fort was the largest such fort ever built by the United States. It remained in Union hands for the duration of the Civil War.

It was here in 1861 that Major General Benjamin Butler decided that enslaved men who reached the fort were contraband of war, and would not be returned (overriding the traditional practice of returning slaves to their owners). Thousands of slaves gained their freedom here during the war. Many eventually enlisted or supported the Union Army in other ways.

Duncan McNeil would have been here in early 1865 as Union forces prepared for their second attack on Fort Fisher to the south. Both Robert E. Lee and Edgar Allan Poe were once stationed here.

Fort Monroe's most famous prisoner after the war was Confederate president Jefferson Davis.



The original door, lock and key to the cell where Jefferson Davis was imprisoned, and behind them his cell.



Jefferson Davis was imprisoned in this cell, where a large American flag was hanging on wall. Davis was held at Fort Monroe for two years.



The 17.6-mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel crosses the mouth of Chesapeake Bay with a series of low bridges and underwater tunnels, connecting Virginia's Hampton Roads region to the Eastern Shore areas of Virginia and Maryland on the Delmarva Peninsula.



This was the site of the Brodess Farm, near Bucktown, Maryland, where Harriet Tubman grew up as a slave. She may have been born here, but historians have not yet been able to verify that.

This is now part of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park, established as a new NPS national monument in 2013 and redesignated as a National Historical Park the following year. Several places associated with Tubman and the Underground Railroad can be found in Maryland's Eastern Shore region.



Bucktown General Store was the site of Tubman's first act of defiance when she refused an order by an overseer to help him tie up an escaped slave. In retaliation, the overseer threw a 2-pound weight at her, cracking her skull.



First State National Historical Park was established as a new NPS unit in 2013. Its primary feature is the historic center of New Castle, Delaware, which I had been to twice before. But it also includes the "landscape of the Brandywine Valley", so I decided to check out that area. You wouldn't know it from visiting that it was anything more than a county park, with little NPS-level development or signage.

This was about as far to the north and east as I got, as I finished off my coastal states segment by headed west across southern Pennsylvania, mostly following Highway U.S. 30.



My next stop was in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, home to a Pennsylvania Dutch/Amish community and a tourism industry that showcases it. Dutch Haven's Shoo-Fly Pie reminded me of a pecan pie without the pecans, a bit underwhelming.



I toured The Amish Farm and House, a heritage museum centered on a farm and house once owned by an Amish family, with the house dating back to 1805. I can't say that I got much insight into the Amish, their history or their culture while exploring the farm, though.



Some cute kids at the Amish Farm and House



A chance to pet the farm animals (Shhh! Don't tell the city kids that these aren't real.)



Bark Rd Scenic Overlook in Pennsylvania's Buchanan State Forest looks east from atop the long, steep, narrow Sideling Hill mountain ridge in the Allegheny Mountains. This is often rated as one of the top scenic overlooks in Pennsylvania, but the view is probably best on a sunny afternoon.



I first became acquainted with Sideling Hill decades ago when traveling along I-68 in western Maryland, where a turnout at a road cut lets you get a good look in the folded rock layers that comprise this syncline mountain.



A faded mural along the old Lincoln Highway, Highway U.S. 30 west of Schellsburg, Pennsylvania.

On September 11, 2001, al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four planes, and crashed two of them into New York's World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon. The fourth – United Airlines Flight 93 – was heading east towards a planned crash into the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. when the passengers on board found out what their destiny was.

After a vote, they agreed to fight back as their only hope for survival. They launched an assault on the cockpit. The terrorist piloting the plane rocked the plane violently, attempting to disrupt the passengers. When that didn't work, the terrorists deliberately crashed the plane near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, only about 20 minutes flying time away from their intended target.

Flight 93 National Memorial was established in 2002. I first visited the site in 2004, but an actual memorial had not yet been built at the site. Today, a visitor center tells the story of the events of that day, and a Memorial Plaza has been built for those who wish to pay their respects at the crash site.



The crash site at the time of my 2004 visit



The Visitor Center Flight Path Overlook looks down what was the last moments of Flight 93's flight path towards the Memorial Plaza, the Wall of Names which runs parallel to the flight path, and the impact site, marked by a large sandstone boulder near the trees in the distance.



Memorial Plaza approaching the Wall of Names



The Wall of Names. On September 11, 2001, these Americans saved the U.S. Capitol from being hit by their plane at the cost of their own lives. Twenty years later, a different group of Americans led an attack on the U.S. Capitol, something you can't help thinking about when reading about the sacrifices that the Flight 93 passengers and crew made that day while listening to news coverage of the January 6 Committee hearings that evening.



Barronvale Covered Bridge, near Rockwood, PA, was one of four covered bridges I came across that day.



I stopped at Pennsylvania's Ohiopyle State Park, where Ohiopyle Falls is one of the features of the Youghiogheny River. A sharp bend in the river here creates the Ferncliff Peninsula, seen across the river here. The river flows from south to north, carrying seeds from the south that have established themselves on Ferncliff Peninsula, which has a warmer microclimate than the surrounding area. The peninsula is a national natural landmark for that reason. I took a short hike on the peninsula.

Fort Necessity National Battlefield, a NPS unit, in 1754 was the site of an early battle in the French and Indian War, resulting in the surrender of British colonial forces under then-Colonel George Washington. The park also includes the grave of British General Edward Braddock, killed the following year. He was originally buried under the middle of this military road,



Braddock Road Trace, an old Indian path initially improved a bit by George Washington and then substantially improved by Braddock. Burying Braddock under the road helped to hide his burial location. He was discovered years later, and his body was moved to a nearby site. Braddock Road was the first improved road to cross the Appalachians.



Friendship Hill National Historic Site is another official NPS unit. It was the rural home of Albert Gallatin, an early American diplomat and statesman. His name doesn't mean much to most people today, but he was well-known back in the day. The Jefferson, Madison and Gallatin Rivers come together at Three Forks, Montana to create the Missouri River.

Although I had been heading west since leaving First State National Historical Park, this was my last stop in East Coast state Pennsylvania. Crossing into West Virginia marked the start of my drive home.

But don't worry. I did a lot more sightseeing along the way, which is highlighted in Part 3.