Fort Story through the Years

Highlights

Native American History

The landform now known as Fort Story was occupied for thousands of years before the establishment of the first European colony at Jamestown. Archaeological evidence, historical documentation, and culturally-affiliated Native American nations make clear the abiding presence of Native peoples within what is now Virginia Beach. Within 5 km of Fort Story, archaeological sites suggest consistent Native occupation of specific places over many generations and thousands of years. At Fort Story, archaeologists have uncovered evidence of such occupation. Lithic scatters, or distributions of stone artifacts worked and / or used by human hands have been identified in various locations on Cape Henry. Within the broader 5-km area, evidence of Native occupation spans from the Paleoindian period (prior to 8501 BCE) through the Archaic period (8500-1201 BCE) and the Woodland Period (1200 BCE-1606 CE). Camps, middens, artifact scatters and palisaded settlements are among the diverse array of archaeological sites in the vicinity of Fort Story.

Across the broad arc of Native history in what is now Virginia, archaeological evidence suggests complex and evolving modes of social organization, settlement patterning, and subsistence. During the Paleoindian period, Native peoples were thought to have engaged in hunting and gathering. Socially organized into small groups or bands,

these peoples likely occupied seasonal camps located along smaller streams and upland tributaries, as well as larger base camps near lithic (stone resources) procurement sites. During the Archaic Period, Native peoples are thought to have practiced more specialized forms or resource procurement. These groups may have engaged in subsistence strategies revolving around the seasonal availability of resources, involving increasing emphasis on seasonal mobility as well as shorter-interval movements. Archaic peoples may have been socially organized at the band level. Base camps were likely occupied by single groups for part of the year. These larger groups may have dispersed into groups as small as single families, occupying smaller camps seasonally. The Woodland period was characterized by the introduction of ceramic technology, a gradual reliance on horticulture (and eventually on agriculture) and increased sedentism. Towards the Late Woodland period, many Native peoples in the Chesapeake region lived in village settings and small hamlets, often fortified by circular or oval palisades.

For many thousands of years Native land use in the Chesapeake region involved integrated subsistence and settlement systems spanning a large land area. Fort Story's pre-Contact history should be understood within this broader context. No time period designation exists for Native American archaeological sites identified to date at Fort Story, the area was occupied by Native people who may have utilized its natural resources to sustain themselves, their families, and communities.

Colonialism and Native History

On April 26, 1607, English colonists made first landfall on the American continent, on what is now Fort Story. Upon arrival, the colonists named the landform 'Cape Henry' in honor of King James' son, erected a wooden cross to mark the location of their arrival, and skirmished with members of the Chesapeake tribe. Colonists remained on Cape Henry until April 30th, before setting off to land at Jamestown on May 13th, 1607. The Chesapeakes were reportedly vanquished by the Powhatan chiefdom shortly after, and the neighboring Nansemond resettled Cape Henry. The Nansemond were a powerful presence in the region, and prevented the English from settling south of the James River until the 1620s. Thereafter, early activity on Cape Henry was generally limited to sailors and fishermen taking on drinking water and wood for fuel before embarking on ocean voyages (Engineering and Environment 1999:4).

Lighthouses and Government Outposts

By the 18th century, the increased amount of maritime traffic in the Hampton Roads area prompted efforts to provide navigational assistance along the shores of Cape Henry for ships plying the waters near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The earliest attempts at this consisted of bonfires lit on the beaches, but a lighthouse was deemed necessary (Virginia Beach Public Library 2006: 40). Following a failed attempt to secure funding followed by construction delays, the first lighthouse was constructed at Cape Henry in 1792.

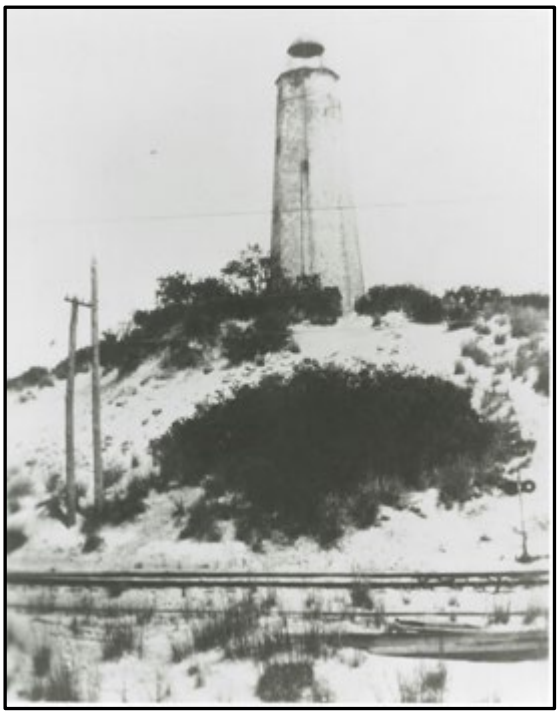

Figure X. 1792 Lighthouse, N.D. (Housed at: JEBLCFS PWD)

After the construction of the Cape Henry Lighthouse in 1792, very little activity took place along Cape Henry throughout much of the 19th century. Due to the importance placed on the availability of fresh water and other necessary resources, the Commonwealth of Virginia declared it to be public land in 1770, which it remained until after the Civil

War, but no additional construction took place until the establishment of a U.S. Bureau station and a lifesaving station in the 1870s (Virginia Beach Public Library 2006: 4).

Despite the lighthouse at Cape Henry, the continued frequency of shipwrecks off the Virginia coast encouraged the establishment of lifesaving stations throughout the mid-Atlantic, including five stations in the Virginia Beach area (Virginia Beach Public Library 2006: 71). The first of these was the lifesaving station at Cape Henry, which was constructed around 1874 (Engineering and Environment 1999: 10). This station consisted of a main building, which included observation areas and a boat room, two surfboats, and the requisite rescue equipment which was common for the period, including a breeches buoy, life car, and a Lyle gun utilized for establishing a line between distressed ships and the shore (Tyler 2005: 45). The lifesaving station at Cape Henry remained operational until the late 1930s, at which time it was consolidated into the Little Creek Coast Guard Station and the original lifesaving station was demolished in 1941 (Tyler 2005: 47).

Around the time the lifesaving station was established at Cape Henry, the U.S. Weather Bureau constructed a weather station near the base of the lighthouse. Created in 1870, the U.S. Weather Bureau was developed to establish a network of weather observation stations which, used in conjunction with the burgeoning telegraph network of the time, would provide the government and citizens with advance notice of approaching storms and other meteorological forecasts (National Weather Service n.d.). In accordance with this mission, the weather station at Cape Henry (originally located in the lighthouse keeper's house until the construction of a separate facility within the lighthouse complex in 1876) provided weather-related data to the Hampton Roads area for the benefit of both mariners and residents (Engineering and Environment 1999: 11).

By the 1870s, the original lighthouse at Cape Henry was deemed obsolete, and a replacement was scheduled for construction. The new lighthouse was made of cast-iron plates, and at 150 feet it was almost twice as tall as the original. Initially using a kerosene-fueled lamp, the new lighthouse was converted to electricity by 1929, and remains in use today, projecting a 60,000 candlepower signal through the original 1881 Fresnel lens (Engineering and Environment 1999: 11; Tyler 2005: 22).

Resort Development, Fort Development

During the early-20th century, a small resort community developed at Cape Henry, alongside plans for and eventual construction of the Army garrison. Resort development at the Cape was spurred by the Cape Henry Park and Land Company (reorganized as the Cape Henry Syndicate in 1899), which purchased over 5,500 acres at the cape beginning in 1890. The company developed a plan to subdivide the land into lots for various purposes, including the development of a beach resort. The Cape Henry Park and Land Company leased the lots for timber, fisheries, and sand quarries as well.

Figure X. Undated Photograph of Cottages Located Between 37th and 38th Streets (Photo

housed: JEBLCFS PWD)

Development plans for Cape Henry were initially limited by the isolated nature of the location. The area was accessible only by horse-driven cart, water, or horseback. In 1902, the Chesapeake Transit Company constructed an electric trolley line from Norfolk to Cape Henry, and a train station was opened the same year (Building 591). The route was completed with a section of track to Virginia Beach during the summer of 1902 (WSP 2023: 10). Round-trip fare from Norfolk or Virginia Beach to Cape Henry ranged from 25 to 40 cents during the early years of operation (The Portsmouth Star, 12 MAY 1906: 6; Virginian-Pilot, 4 OCT 1902: 3);

Virginian-Pilot, 13 MAY 1906: 22). In 1903, the Chesapeake Transit Company's competitor, the Norfolk Southern, constructed a steam line to Cape Henry from its terminus to Virginia Beach, which ran parallel to the existing line (WSP 2023: 11).

Figure X. Railroad Car at Cape Henry, N.D. (Housed at: JEBLCFS PWD)

The electric line spurred increased development over the course of the 1900s. Several hotels and guest cottages opened during this time. By 1909, at least three hotels were operational, including the Hygeia Hotel (Rowe & Dyer, proprietors), Hotel Maury (Mrs. Frank Walke, proprietor), and Colonial Hotel (Mrs. Mapp, proprietor). Guest cottages included Capps Cottage (Talbot Capps, proprietor), White Cottage (Mrs. C.A. White, proprietor), and the Ferebee Cottage (Mrs. Ferebee, proprietor) (Virginian-Pilot 28 MAY 1909: 12). The Sea Breeze (also known as the Washburn Cottage), opened during this time as well. To further stimulate tourism, the Chesapeake Transit Company erected a large, dancing pavilion in 1903. O'Keefe's Casino opened soon after and served as a venue for dances and other social events. Most of the guests frequenting the early establishments at Cape Henry hailed from Norfolk, Richmond, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore (WSP 2023: 13).

In addition to advertising for day tripping or stays in the various hostelries at the Cape, newspapers encouraged private development, positioning Cape Henry as "the ideal location for a summer home on the coast" (The News and Observer 26 JUN 1904: 1). The Cape Henry lighthouse and U.S. Government Life Saving Station were key attractions featured in such advertisements. A number of privately-owned cottages were constructed, mainly along the coast. Additional research is required to examine the demographic makeup of this small, seasonal community. However, of the lots sold by the Cape Henry Park and Land Company during the early-1900s, at least one was subject to a race covenant. The Cape Henry Park and Land Company included a clause in a 1902 land deed restricting sale or rental of the property by individuals of African descent (WSP 2023: 10).

While some of the Cape Henry Syndicate's lots were sold to private individuals, there is little evidence to suggest many of these lots were built upon (WSP 2023: 27). Contemporary accounts suggest that Cape Henry remained relatively rustic compared with its competitor, Virginia Beach, to the south. For instance, one columnist for the Virginian-Pilot wrote of Cape Henry in 1914, "the impression first made on the mind of the observer on his first visit to Cape Henry is that it is a wilderness of sand, with a few houses here and there, hardly enough to relieve the monotony" (Jeffers 1914: 51). It is possible that owners of Cape Henry land held the lots for speculative purposes, refraining from construction in anticipation of receiving a federal buyout (WSP 2023).

For several decades prior to construction of the fort at Cape Henry, the War Department had considered acquiring the land for such purpose. These considerations took the form of land surveys, inspections, and reports dating from as early as the 1880s. Cape Henry was reportedly included in the 1886 report of the Secretary of War as a possible location for future coastal fortifications (Virginian-Pilot 3 JAN 1908: 3).[1] In August of 1905, following a land survey by government engineers, a committee under

[1] The Virginian-Pilot (1 JAN 1908: 3) reports that a House Resolution (No. 4,848) was introduced by Harry L. Maynard in 1908 to appropriate funds for government purchase of land at Cape Henry for the purpose of fort construction. The text of this resolution is reported to read, "That the secretary of war be, and he is herby [sic] authorized to acquire the lands at Cape Henry, VA., as contemplated by the project of the War Department, as embodied in the report of the secretary of war for the year 1886, which lands have been duly surveyed by the

the direction of William Howard Taft (then Secretary of War) inspected Cape Henry as a potential site for future military fortifications (Virginian-Pilot, 3 AUG 1905: 4). Newspapers continuously circulated reports of such proceedings, making it clear to prospective investors that a potential future government buyout was a possibility (WSP 2023: 28).

In 1914, the federal government acquired 343.1 acres encompassing 520 laid lots near the coast and a large amount of un-platted land to the south. Of this acreage, approximately 25 acres (140 lots) had been sold. Condemnation proceedings document 29 property owners with a total of 38 improved lots within this acquisition, with the remainder of private and corporate-owned lands remaining undeveloped (WSP 2023: 16; see also Petition of the United States of America filed February 10th, 1914 in the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Virginia). Property valuations documented in the condemnation proceedings suggest some variation in the extent of improvements on these lots. For instance, Leonard T. Garrison's property, located on Lot 16, Block 7, C, was valuated at only $225. The improved lot on which the Hygeia Hotel situated (Lot 1, Block 7, C) received the highest valuation at $10,300 (Petition of 10 FEB 1914: 8). An additional 102 lots owned by private individuals were undeveloped at the time of the government acquisition, potentially reflective of speculative real estate investment.

Following the establishment of the Army garrison, real estate speculation and limited residential / resort development continued around the edges of the centrally-located fort. St. Theresa's Chapel, located at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Leyte Street, was dedicated in 1924. That same year, a concrete road was completed which connected Virginia Beach boulevard to Cape Henry, and provided an alternate means of access in addition to rail (Virginian-Pilot 19 OCT 1924: 13). Atlantic Avenue, the primary roadway throughout Cape Henry, was paved with concrete in 1925 (WSP 2023: 20).

The hospitality industry at Cape Henry had declined significantly by 1930. A small number of summer cottages remained, and the community remained relatively modest (WSP 2023: 25). O'Keefe's Casino burned in 1931 and was never rebuilt. During the 1930s, Cape Henry's colonial history as the first landing site drove much of its annual visitation. The annual pilgrimage to Cape Henry on the anniversary of the first landing began as early as 1922, when The Assembly of Tidewater Virginia Women began holding annual ceremonies on the anniversary (Virginian-Pilot 25 APR 1926: 41). Ten years later, tourists gathered annually on the anniversary of the landing date around a large granite cross erected in 1935 by the Daughters of the American Colonists in memorial to the first landing of colonists (WSP 2023: 25).

During the 1930s, the federal government began making plans to acquire additional acreage at Cape Henry to expand Fort Story. Acquiring the remaining acreage by 1944, the federal government eventually closed the area to civilian occupation. The Norfolk Southern discontinued passenger service to Cape Henry in 1947, eventually removing the tracks in 1954 (WSP 2022: 29; see also Virginian Pilot 1 JUL 1954).

Coast Artillery Post

Besides the development of a resort community at Cape Henry, its location provided an ideal vantage point for military coastal defense operations. Concerns about the defense of America's coasts and ports date back to the years just following country's foundation. Pre-World War II examples of U.S. coastal fortifications predominantly featured earthen or masonry (stone or brick) construction and were armed with smoothbore muzzle-loading artillery (Lewis 1970: 7). It was not until the 1880s that technological advances allowed for the development of the modern breech-loading rifled cannon, capable of significantly longer ranges while sustaining a greater rate of fire (Lewis 1970: 75).

government of the United States and embrace an area of 1,280 acres, more or less, by condemnation proceedings, under the provisions of the act of August 18, 1890, and the sum of $500,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for said purpose is hereby appropriated out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated." Additional research is required to confirm the text of the 1886 report of the Secretary of War and the act of August 18, 1890.

As a result of this extended range, fewer emplacements were necessary in order to successfully defend larger areas surrounding strategically significant coastal locations. Such was the case along the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay, which by World War I was host to a network of coastal defense fortifications intended to protect the port at Hampton Roads from naval attack. Centered on Fort Monroe, these fortifications spanned from Cape Charles on the Eastern Shore to Cape Henry and featured overlapping fields of fire to prevent intrusion by hostile naval vessels.

In order to fully defend the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay, the U.S. Army was authorized to construct a fort along the shores of Cape Henry, funds for which were appropriated in 1913 (Engineering and Environment 1999: 17). Originally consisting of 343 acres, this fort (known as Fort Story) was initially armed with a pair of six-inch rapid-fire Model 1900 guns and a pair of five-inch rapid-fire Model 1897 guns. These, along with four five-inch rapid-fire guns located on Fisherman Island at Cape Charles, represented the extent of defensive works at the entrance of the Chesapeake Bay (Tyler 2005: 58). By 1921, four M1920 16-inch howitzers were installed in two batteries: designated batteries Walke and Pennington were supplemented by rail-borne mobile artillery (Tyler 2005: 64). Support facilities for these batteries included the construction of two concrete shell rooms and two concrete powder rooms per gun, arranged in a boomerang configuration for ease of loading. These armaments were primarily located in the eastern portion of the post, and configured to aim east towards the Atlantic Ocean to complement the other fortifications located around the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay.

Following World War I, development of Fort Story stagnated as budgets shrank and efforts were diverted away from military fortification. The economic effects of the Great Depression presented additional drains to the already reduced budget at Fort Story, although some government work projects associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps made efforts to stabilize the dunes located on the post (Engineering and Environment 1999: 27).

By the beginning of World War II, Fort Story had expanded to nearly 1,500 acres and security concerns resulted in the closure of Route 60 through the post and government seizure of all private property within its boundaries through eminent domain (Tyler 2005: 70). The primary defensive weaponry consisted of four M1920 16-inch howitzers at Batteries Walke and Pennington. These batteries were located in the secondary dune line in the southeastern portion of the facility, while secondary defenses were provided by three 6-inch gun batteries located within the primary dunes near the fort's east entrance. These included Battery Worcester (Building 309), Battery Cramer (Building 101), and Battery #226 (Building 317). An observation room for Battery Walke was set up at the top of the 1881 lighthouse in 1940 (Engineering and Environment 1999: 29).

Figure X. Battery Cramer under Construction (Photo housed: NARA)

Two additional batteries consisting of two 16-inch Navy rifles (MKII and M1) at Batteries #1 (Ketcham, Building 605) and #4 (Building 807) were constructed by 1944 and, having a range of 25 miles, each made Fort Story one of the most heavily defended areas on the east coast. Although this capability could easily close the gap between Cape Henry and Cape Charles, Fort Story was just one of several coastal artillery emplacements located in the Hampton Roads area. Batteries located at Fort Winslow near Cape Charles helped make up the outer defenses, while guns located at Fort Monroe in Hampton provided inner defenses (Engineering and Environment 1999: 32, 40). All harbor defense units utilizing traditional artillery were ended by 1949, followed swiftly by the deactivation of the Coastal Artillery Corps as a separate branch of the U.S. Army (Engineering and Environment 1999: 42).

Figure X. Mobile 3" Anti-Aircraft Gun, 1941 (Housed at: JEBLCFS PWD)

In addition to its coastal artillery capabilities, Fort Story also controlled mine operations for the defense of the bay's main channel. This included the construction of two mine casemates on the post, one of which is located on the reverse of the dune supporting the 1792 lighthouse. The mines used in the original minefields were of limited effectiveness against the German U-boat threat, and were upgraded in 1943, by which time U-boat activity in the Hampton Roads area had decreased to almost none. It was not until late 1945 that the final minefields here were destroyed (Engineering and Environment 1999: 41).

Post-WWII Changing Mission

Although Fort Story's use of coastal artillery had ended in the years immediately following World War II, a different kind of mission was introduced to take its place. Amphibious warfare training had first occurred at the post as early as 1940, and by 1946, with the arrival of the 458th Amphibious Truck Company it became a permanent component of Fort Story's military role (Engineering and Environment 1999: 43). The vehicles used in the course of this training originally included DUKWs ("Ducks"), and were followed by more modern LARC-Vs (Lighter, Amphibious, Resupply, Cargo, 5-ton capacity) by the mid-1960s, as well as LARC-XVs (15-ton capacity), and BARCs (Barge, Amphibious, Resupply, Cargo, later re-designated as LARC-LXs, 60-ton capacity). The location of Fort Story at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, with the accompanying diversity in beach-front environments, proved to be highly valuable for the purposes of training troops in amphibious operations and transportation methods. As a result of this, Fort Story was the only site used by the Army for Logistics-Over-The-Shore (LOTS) training during this time period (Tyler 2005: 101).

Even though coastal artillery such as that located at Fort Story during World War II had been rendered obsolete following the end of the war, the need to defend the nation's coasts against foreign threats remained a serious consideration. Attack by high-altitude, long-range bombers was of particular concern as both the U.S. and Soviet Union developed increasingly powerful aircraft capable of covering the distance between the two countries and deploying atomic weapons. In an effort to provide a defense from these new threats, the U.S. military began development on a variety of new weapons technology. Foremost among these was the introduction of missiles intended to intercept Soviet bombers. As this development came to fruition, several sites located in coastal areas around the country were chosen for the installation of missile batteries. As one of the facilities chosen for this purpose, Fort Story experienced a new round of development in the mid-1950s as preparations were made to install the Nike-Ajax missile and its requisite support facilities (Engineering and Environment 1999: 43).

Installation of these new weapons included the construction of three separate areas: the Integrated Fire Control (IFC) site, which controlled radar and associated equipment; the missile launch facility, which housed the missiles themselves in three large underground magazines; and the administration area, which contained administrative offices and buildings associated with the daily lives of the men

who worked there (Tyler 2005: 108-109). The administration area was located in the central section of the fort, between the IFC (located at the primary dune) and the missile launch facility (atop the large secondary dune).

By 1958, the Nike-Ajax missile had been upgraded to the Nike-Hercules missile, which was capable of carrying either atomic or conventional warheads while offering protection against higher flying, faster moving, and more numerous aircraft than the earlier design. Fort Story was one of 110 sites to have been upgraded from Nike-Ajax, out of the original 145 batteries deployed at the beginning of the Cold War (Tyler 2005: 108-109). The nature of these upgrades allowed missile sites to retain the usage of the buildings and facilities which had previously been constructed for the Ajax program, and the only major physical alteration to these facilities was the addition of auxiliary acquisition radar, which increased the range of surveillance while decreasing the site's vulnerability to electronic countermeasures (Nike Historical Society n.d.).

The Nike missile facility at Fort Story was a part of a much larger missile-defense network surrounding the strategically vital military and urban resources of the Hampton Roads area. Although designed to intercept air-supported missiles and ballistic missiles in addition to high altitude bombers, other defensive measures were determined to provide greater security as the threat of attack by Soviet aircraft diminished. As a result the Nike missile mission at Fort Story was de-emphasized and final closure of the missile facilities occurred in April 1974 (Engineering and Environment 1999: 45).

Following the end of the Nike missile program, Fort Story continued to be used for amphibious warfare and transportation training purposes. This training dropped off significantly in the late 1970s, but was revitalized with the stationing of the Army's LACV hovercraft at the post in the 1980s. Amphibious vehicle and LOTS training continued at Fort Story through the early twenty-first century; however in 2005, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process recommended the transfer of the installation to Navy management. The Navy had already possessed several tenant commands at the installation, and as of 2009, complete management was turned over to the Navy. JEB Fort Story continues to be home to the Navy, as well as tenant commands of the Marines and Army, and provides specialized training for frontline initiatives.