

## Background on Delaware City

The Town of Delaware City was incorporated in 1851 with a town plan that included two wharves, two public squares along with a compact plan of ten major streets. The site was a larger tract of land granted to Henry Ward in 1675 by the Duke of York for the sum of “four and a half bushels of winter wheat.”

Delaware City’s initial settlement is linked with the opening of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. Generally small towns at that time grew from existing crossroads, its developers, however, wanted to take full advantage of it being the only town in the state that served the canal in a major capacity. Construction of the C and D canal began in 1824; with its opening in 1829, it shortened the route by water between Philadelphia and Baltimore by 316 miles. Delaware City saw the passage of significant freight as well as passengers through the canal and lock. Local produce, coal, lumber and grain were all shipped from the wharves in Delaware City.

For a span of 20 years Delaware City was recognized as the nation’s major peach producing region. There were also three companies that processed sturgeon roe for caviar located in Delaware City due to the plentiful population of sturgeon in the Delaware River.

The C and D canal was similar to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in the Potomac Valley and the Erie Canal in New York State, all of which slowly lost their importance as the railroad lines multiplied, changing not only commerce but, the average traveler’s experience. Access to the southern markets for farmers and the City of Philadelphia for citizens became more accessible, travel by boat simply became more a leisurely excursion and the canal was purchased by the Federal Government.



*Top, Main Street in Delaware City. Above, the Clinton Street Promenade.*

Delaware City is also home to both Fort Delaware and Fort Dupont. While the island of Fort Delaware is infamous for the role it played as the Civil War Camp, Fort Dupont played a longer more significant role in the history of Delaware River defense.

### **Fort Delaware nearby**

Fort Delaware sits on a patch of land known as Pea Patch Island, which legends says received its name after a ship hauling peas ran aground and spilled its contents in the mud bank below. The peas took root and started forming the beginnings of the island. It was used as a private hunting ground until 1813 when the state legislature seized the property, following the recommendation from Pierre Charles L'Enfant to use it as a defense site for the American military. An early incarnation of a military fort was launched in 1819, but a fire heavily damaged the structure in 1831 and the rest was completely scrapped two years later. The construction on the current incarnation of the fort began in 1848 and was completed in 1859 for the estimated cost of three million, making Fort Delaware the largest fort in the country at the time.

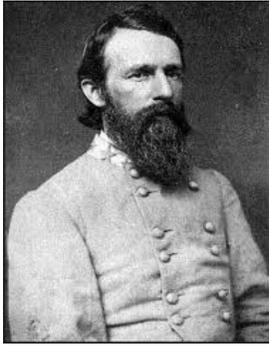
During the Civil War, Fort Delaware went from protector to prison; a prisoner-of-war camp was established to house captured Confederates, convicted federal soldiers, local political prisoners as well as privateers. General Albin F. Schoepf was commandant of Fort Delaware Civil War Prison and was dreaded by the Confederates, and known by the soldiers as "General Terror." The majority of Confederate prisoners contained within Fort Delaware during the Civil War were captured at Gettysburg. Some of the first prisoners names can still be seen carved into the brick of some of the rooms. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the island "contained an average population of southern tourists, who came at the urgent invitation of Mr. Lincoln." By August 1863, there were more than 11,000 prisoners on the island; by war's end, it had held almost 33,000 men. Unfortunately the conditions at the prison camp were extremely harsh; Fort Delaware had the highest mortality rate among Union prison camps with reports of 2500-3000 prisoners dying there. Half of the total number of deaths occurred during a smallpox epidemic in 1863.



***Sterling's Tavern*** - Original portions date to c.1830 and is on the National Register of Historic Places

Today, the paranormal activity is strong at Fort Delaware, so many deaths in such cruel conditions have produced one of the most haunted places in America. People have claimed to here moans, chains rattling and voices. Apparitions of Confederate soldiers running under the ramparts have also been seen. It has been suggested that these ghosts are still looking for ways to escape the prison camp.

### **Brigadier General James Archer**



James Jay Archer was a Confederate Brigadier General that was captured during the Battle of Gettysburg and transported to Fort Delaware.

Though Archer had been freed from Fort Delaware, many insist that his spirit returned in death. According to some, a figure is seen moving around the former-powder magazine/dungeon that housed Brigadier General Archer many years before. Witnesses that have spotted the apparition have described him as a bearded man wearing a gray uniform, which is eerily similar to existing photographs of Archer.

### **The Immortal Six Hundred**

As bad as conditions were at Fort Delaware, they paled in comparison to what several of its own inmates would later encounter. While their fellow prisoners despised the former-Confederate troops that joined Ahl's Heavy Artillery Company, a select group of their population would become revered for their loyalty and become known throughout the south as the "Immortal Six Hundred."

In June 1864, the city of Charleston, South Carolina was under constant bombardment by Union forces. It was then that Confederate General Sam Jones sent a wire to his Union counterpart, General J.G. Foster, to inform him that there were fifty captured Union soldiers that were made up of general and field officers inside the city limits. Foster took the wire as a threat that the men were being used as human shields and fired off a request to President Lincoln for the Union to respond in kind.

Immediately, fifty Confederate officers at Fort Delaware were assembled for this very purpose. However, by the time they reached Charleston, negotiations had started for a possible prisoner exchange. The men were made to wait aboard the ship for several days until an agreement had been reached and the men suddenly moved from being potential human shields to free men again, serving the Confederate army. In 1947, ownership was transferred over to the State Parks Commission of



Delaware and the Fort Delaware Society was formed to restore the old fort. Their hard work paid off and in 1951 it was established as a State Park - the first state park in Delaware.

### **Delaware City Events**

Since 1980 the Delaware City Day Celebration has been a full day of fun family entertainment ending with a fireworks display over the Delaware River. This event is attended by 12,000 visitors and the goal is to honor and celebrate our riverfront town's historic architecture and our "small town America" culture. There are two viable venues for large events; the first is along Delaware City's downtown area, Clinton Street and the second is at the Battery Park Promenade. Fort Dupont also has a creative venue on what was the historic military parade ground. The parade grounds are an important attribute to the livability of the any future residential or office uses that might be suggested for any adaptive reuse of Governor Bacon.

The Philadelphia International Airport is the 49 minutes/ 37 miles from Delaware City .

Delaware City continues to look for creativity and capitalism, especially with entrepreneurs that have vision, ambition and flexibility to follow that opportunity wherever it may lead. The town is actively pursuing revitalization on a variety of fronts, and has designated Governor Bacon as an area for future annexation. Delaware City is a hidden waterfront gem, that is convenient to substantial urban amenities in the North East area but, still holds onto the safe harbor of Main Street culture.

- *Compiled by Main Street Delaware City*