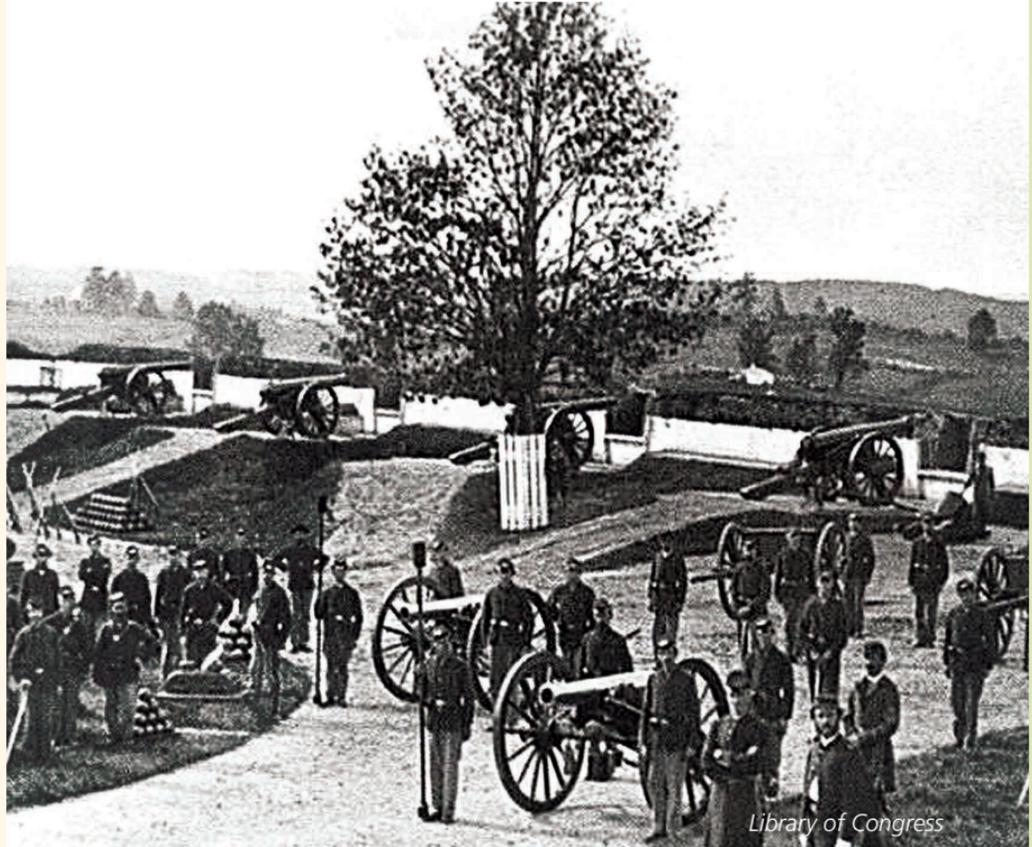
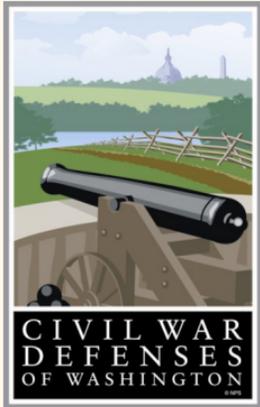




# A Hiker's Guide to the Civil War Defenses of Washington

Fort Mahan to Fort Stanton  
Self-Guided Tour

First Edition March 2018



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Dear Hiker,

The Civil War Defenses of Washington, built by Union troops between 1861 and 1864, are an engineering feat that transformed the vulnerable capital into one of the most fortified cities in the world. The 1902 “MacMillan Plan” proposed a vehicular parkway connecting the Civil War fortifications, many located on the topographic high points. Today the surviving sites—some with preserved or reconstructed earthworks—are green spaces woven into the past and present of neighborhoods in the midst of a densely populated city, and the connections between and among them reimaged as a “greenway” and a continuous route for pedestrian travel.

This guide complements two similar hiking guides and a hiking and biking brochure (see “Resources”). Together, the opportunity to explore the Civil War Defenses of Washington on foot could become one of the most unique experiences in the region. The overall route—exceptional in the National Trails System—is recognized as a segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHT), a developing network between the mouth of the Potomac River and the Allegheny Highlands.

We hope you enjoy the walk.

Donald E. Briggs, Superintendent  
Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail

David N. Myers, Ph.D., ASLA, Associate Professor  
University of Maryland

Designers:

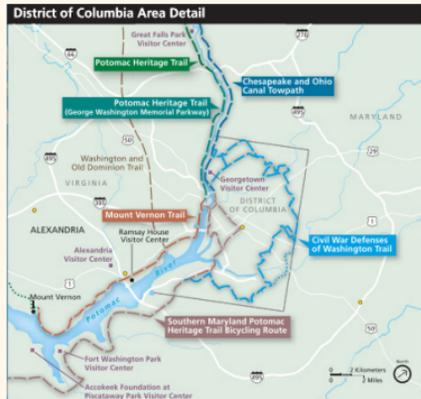
*Beverly Hernandez and Sarah Whiteley (2018)*

*Renee LaGue (2014)*

*Jessica L. Heinz (2013)*

*“With the Anacostia and the Potomac below and the city of Washington spread out beyond and the hills of Virginia in the distance, these are the most beautiful of the broad views to be had in the District.”*

*- MacMillan Commission Plan for the District of Columbia (1902)*



The PHT network in the region includes the C & O Canal Towpath; Mount Vernon Trail & PHT within George Washington Memorial Parkway; and Southern Maryland PHT bicycling route.

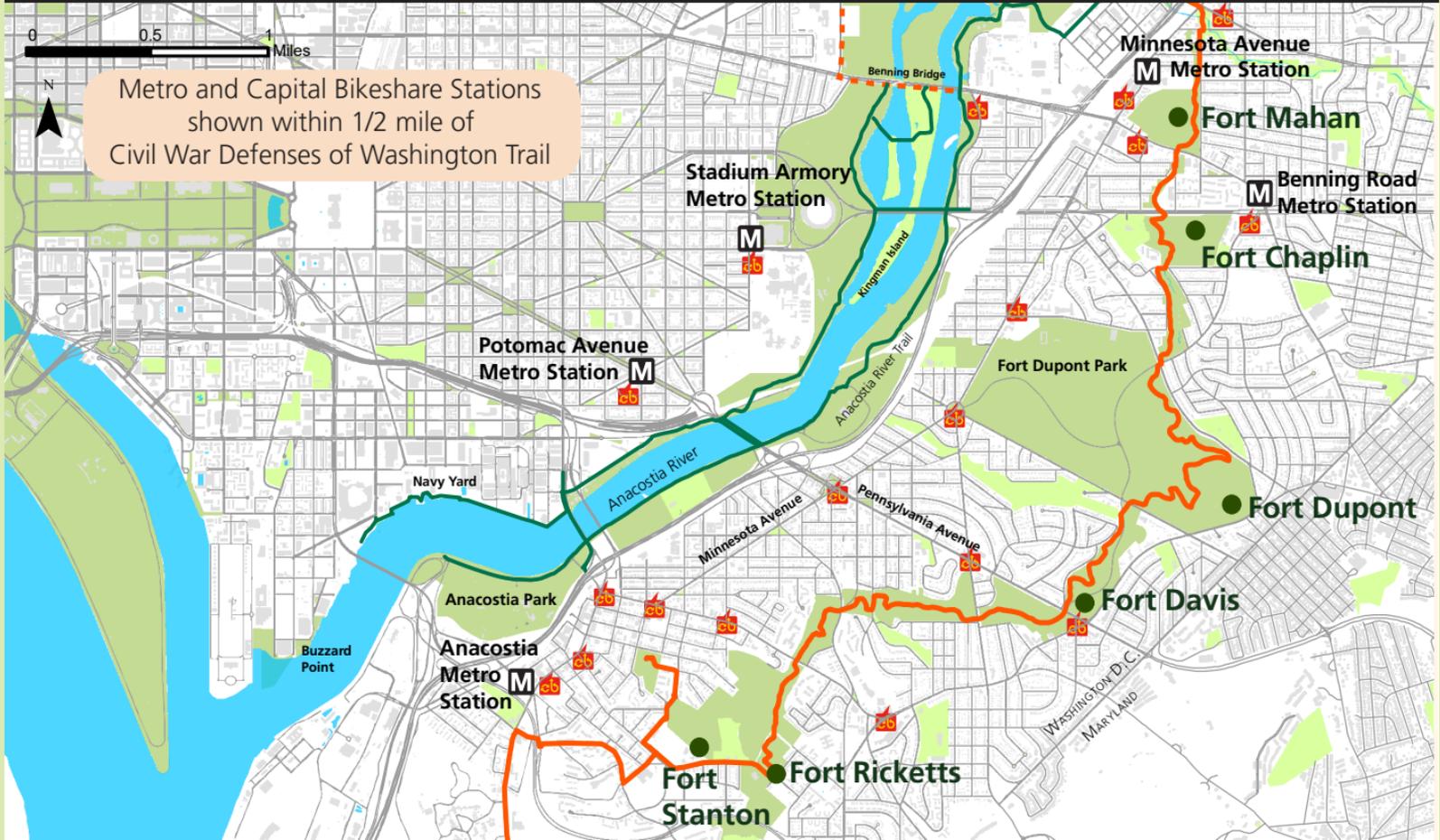
For information on trail closures and alerts for Fort Totten and Fort Bunker Hill, visit Civil War Defenses of Washington at Rock Creek Park website ([www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr)) or call (202) 895-6070. For Fort Mahan information, visit the National Capital Parks-East website ([www.nps.gov/nace](http://www.nps.gov/nace)) or call (202) 829-4650.

Restaurants, gas stations, and convenience stores can be found around Fort Totten, along Eastern Avenue, and Benning Road.

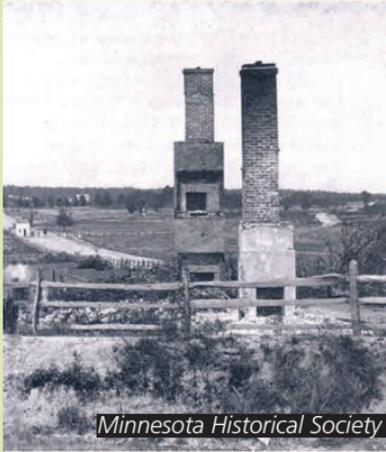
**You can help protect the defenses!** You play an important role in history when you visit the Civil War Defenses of Washington. For your safety and the preservation of the forts, do not climb on the earthworks—some are unstable and healthy vegetation helps to prevent erosion. All natural and cultural objects are protected by law. Stay on established trails and keep dogs on a leash. Leave rocks, animals, and wildflowers in place. Learn to identify and avoid poison ivy. **Dial 911 for emergencies.**



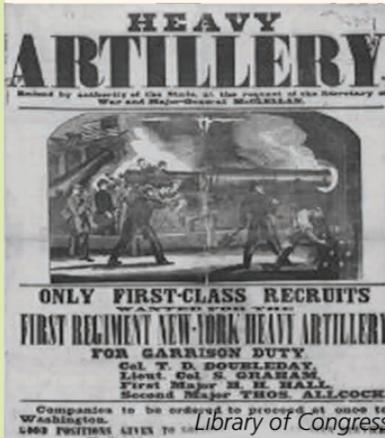
Rock Creek Nature Center







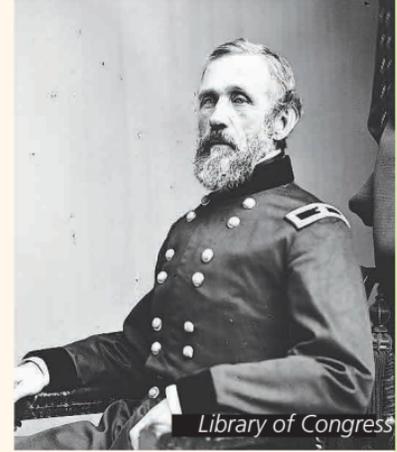
Minnesota Historical Society



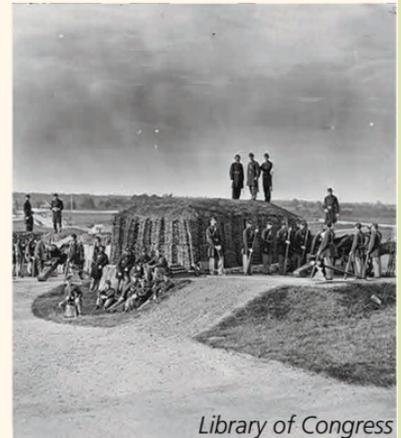
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At the outset of the Civil War, the Federal capital of Washington, D.C. was not well-prepared to defend itself against potential Confederate siege or invasion. Reeling from the unexpected Confederate victory at First Manassas (Bull Run) in July 1861, the task of fortifying the capital fell to Major John G. Barnard (top right), the US Army's chief engineer. Relying on the blueprints outlined by his West Point professor of engineering, Dennis Hart Mahan, in his *Complete Treatise on Field Fortification* (1836), Barnard marshaled Union troops, civilians, and escaped slaves to transform a largely rural area into a landscape of war.

By 1864, Washington had become one of the most fortified cities in the world, with an encircling array of forts, batteries, and military roads. At the war's end, Barnard reported that the defenses of Washington included 68 enclosed forts and batteries, emplacements for 1,120 guns (with 807 guns and 98 mortars actually mounted), 93 unarmed batteries with 401 emplacements for field-guns, twenty miles of rifle trenches, three blockhouses, and thirty-two miles of military roads linking the defenses.



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### Directions from Minnesota Avenue Metro to Fort Mahan

For Minnesota Avenue exit	
turn right towards Minnesota Ave NE	131 ft
Turn right onto Minnesota Ave NE	26 ft
Cross Minnesota Avenue	
Turn left onto Grant St NE	0.2 mi
Turn right at trail along 42nd St NE	

Fort Mahan is straight ahead

### Directions from Minnesota Avenue Metro to Fort Mahan via Kennelworth Avenue NE

Take overhead pedestrian walkway to Kennelworth Avenue NE	0.2 mi
Turn left onto Kennelworth Avenue NE	0.4 mi
Turn right onto Deane Ave NE. Continue onto Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave NE	0.1 mi
Turn right onto Trail at Watts Branch	456 ft
Turn right onto Hunt Place NE	66 ft
Turn left at trail along 42nd St NE	0.2 mi

Fort Mahan is straight ahead

Fort Mahan was part of the fourth section of forts (terminating with Fort Greble) of the Defenses of Washington south of the Eastern Branch of the Potomac (Anacostia River). The main purpose of the Fort Mahan was to protect Benning's Bridge.

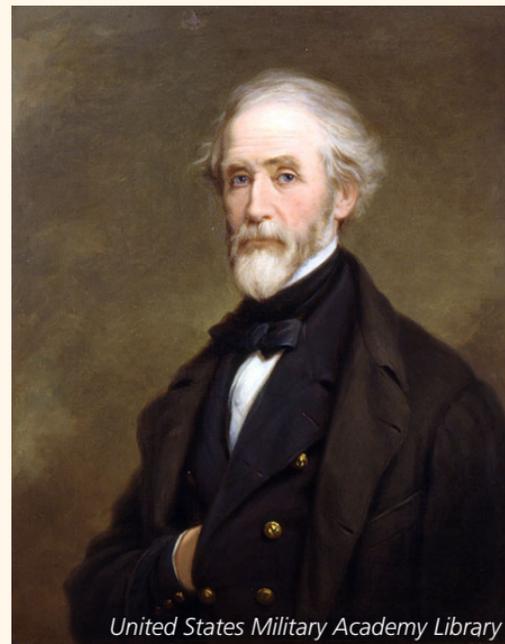
From a Dec. 24, 1862 letter to Hon. E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War:

“Fort Mahan may be considered an advanced tete-de-pont to Benning's Bridge, and commands the valley of the Eastern Branch as far as Bladensburg, as well as the immediate approaches to the bridge. It is situated upon an isolated hill, the steep slopes of which are unseen from the fort, and are necessarily defended by external rifle-pits. As long as this work is held, an enemy cannot bring artillery to bear upon the bridge, nor move in force along the road which leads from Baldness-burg to the Navy-Yard Bridge.”

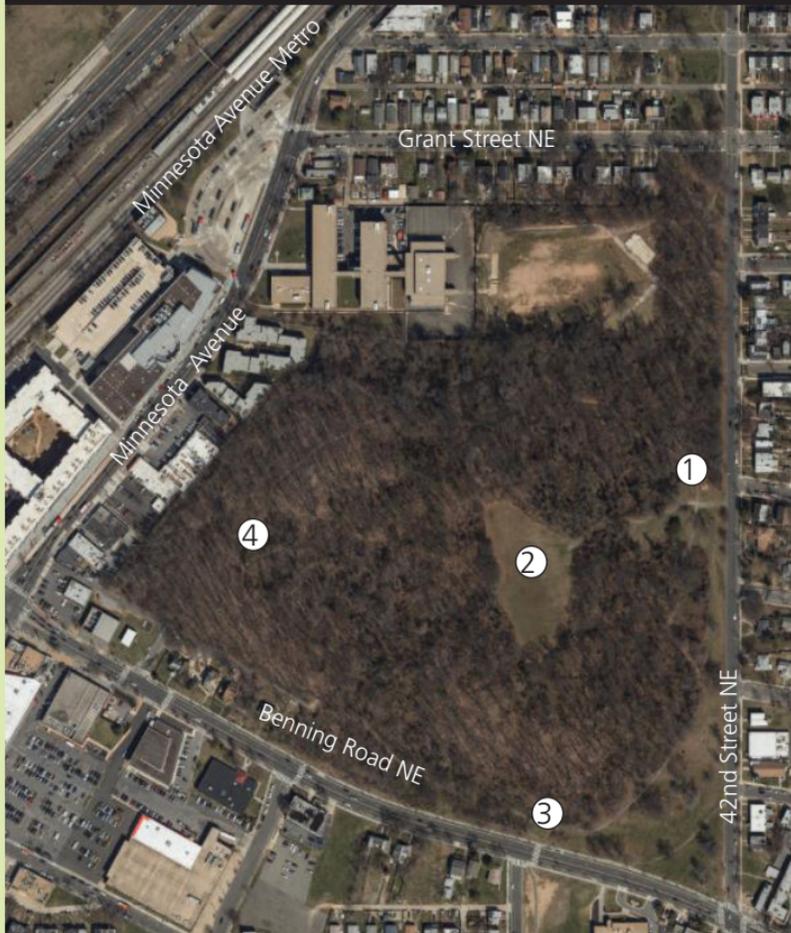
Originally completed in 1861, Fort Mahan underwent numerous repairs and renovations. The intensive modifications resulted in a nine sided fortification totaling 354 yards. Fort Mahan included a guard house, barracks, officers' quarters, a mess house, and stables and sheds. The parapet walls blocked views of the enemy approaches, causing them to build rifle pits on the surrounding steep hillsides. The fort had structures on every side of it to defend a full range of attack options. In the summer of 1865 when Civil War forts were being abandoned, Fort Mahan was one of the eleven forts retained. It was then given back to the original owner, the Manning Family. Authorized garrison: 531 infantry and 216 artillerymen.

Fort Mahan was named for Dennis Hart Mahan, an American soldier and West Point Military Academy

professor who taught civil and military engineering. Most Civil War commanders, both Union and Confederate, learned about fortifications and strategy from Mahan's lectures and writing.



*United States Military Academy Library*



- ① An entry path leads from 42nd Street NE up the hill to a large open meadow.
- ② An open meadow is located on the hilltop of Fort Mahan Park. The Washington Mounment is visible from selected vantage points. Some visible remains of earthworks, including a rifle battery, can be found on the hilltop.
- ③ A entry path to the circular loop trail is located along Benning Road on the south side of Fort Mahan Park. This area has open lawns and large canopy trees.
- ④ A circular loop trail provides a wide variety of hiking experiences - from open clearings to densely forested. Fortification earthworks are clearly visible in north, south, and east locations of Fort Mahan Park.






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**Fort Mahan to Fort Chaplin** 0.3 mi


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From the south entrance on Benning Road

NE cross Benning Road 45 ft

41st Street NE turns slightly right and

becomes Flint Place NE 285 ft

Turn left toward 41st Street NE 144 ft

Follow hiking trail or continue onto 41st

Street NE 0.1 mi

Cross East Capitol Street SE at 41st Street

NE cross walk

Turn right onto E Capitol Street SE 180 ft

Turn left onto hiking trail

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**Fort Chaplin is straight ahead**


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**Benning Stoddert Recreation Center is located just west of Fort Chaplin on East Capitol Street SE**



Colonel Barton S. Alexander



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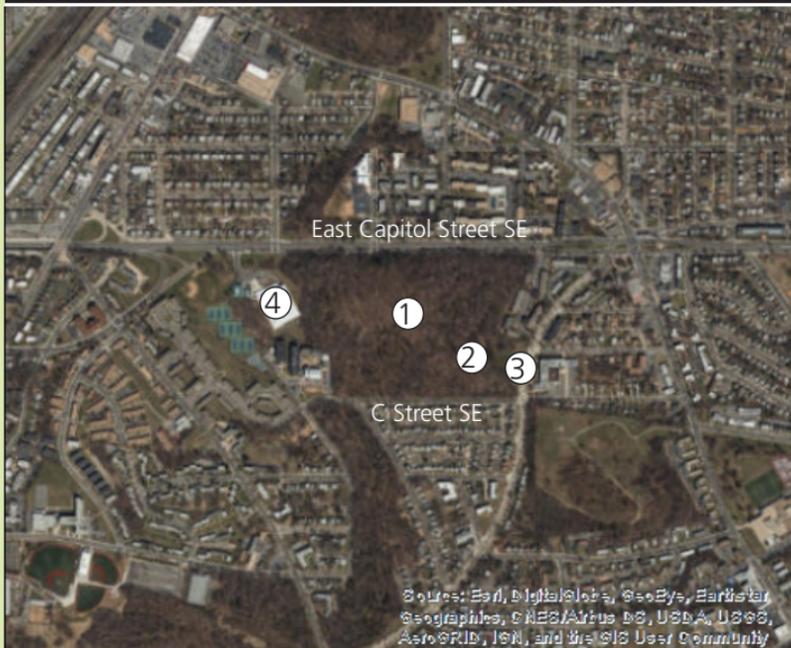


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The construction of Fort Chaplin, just south of Fort Mahan and Bannings Bridge began in 1864 and was completed in the same year. Colonel Barton S. Alexander, the second Chief of Defenses, placed it among the second class of fortifications for purposes of retention. It had 12 gun emplacements, eleven, of which were empty, and a single 24-pounder siege gun mounted and set in position (en barbette) was the fort's sole armament. It had a perimeter of about 225 yards, and was built at the altitude of approximately 180 feet.

There were no buildings at the site when the army returned the land back to the original land owner, Selby B. Scaggs, in the summer of 1865.

The fort is named after Colonel Daniel Chaplin. He was commander of the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery when he was struck down by a bullet from a Confederate sharpshooter at Deep Bottom, Virginia, on August 17, 1864. Chaplin died from his wound three days later on August 20, 1864.



- ① Fort Chaplin Park is primarily forested. Understory vegetation includes native shrubs Mountain Laurel, (*Kalmia latifolia*) and Pinxter Azalea (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*).
- ② The fort ruins are located at the highest elevations of the site.
- ③ An open lawn and meadow border Texas Avenue SE. An interpretive sign is located here.
- ④ Benning Stoddert Recreation and Community Center, operated by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, offers outdoor basketball and tennis courts.





**Fort Chaplin Park to Fort Dupont** 1.2 mi

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Turn right onto C St SE 174 ft

Turn left onto Fort Circle Park trail 0.5 mi

Cross Texas Ave SE at Ridge Road 20 ft

Cross Ridge Road at intersection to enter 20 ft

Fort Dupont Park

You have arrived at Fort Dupont Park. See the following pages for information

**Follow trail to Massachusetts Ave SE** 0.5 mi

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**Fort Dupont Park to Fort Davis**

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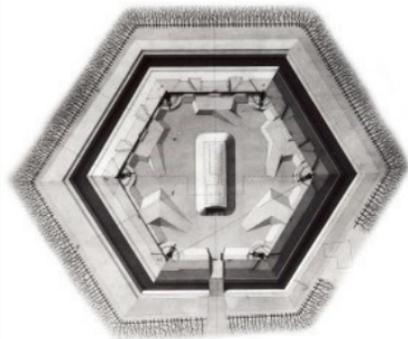
Cross Massachusetts Ave SE at cross walk

Follow trail to Fort Davis Park 0.6 mi

You have arrived at Fort Davis. See the following pages for information about the history and exploring the site today.

**Fort Chaplin Park to Fort Davis: Total** 2.3 mi

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S.F. DUPONT

Library of Congress

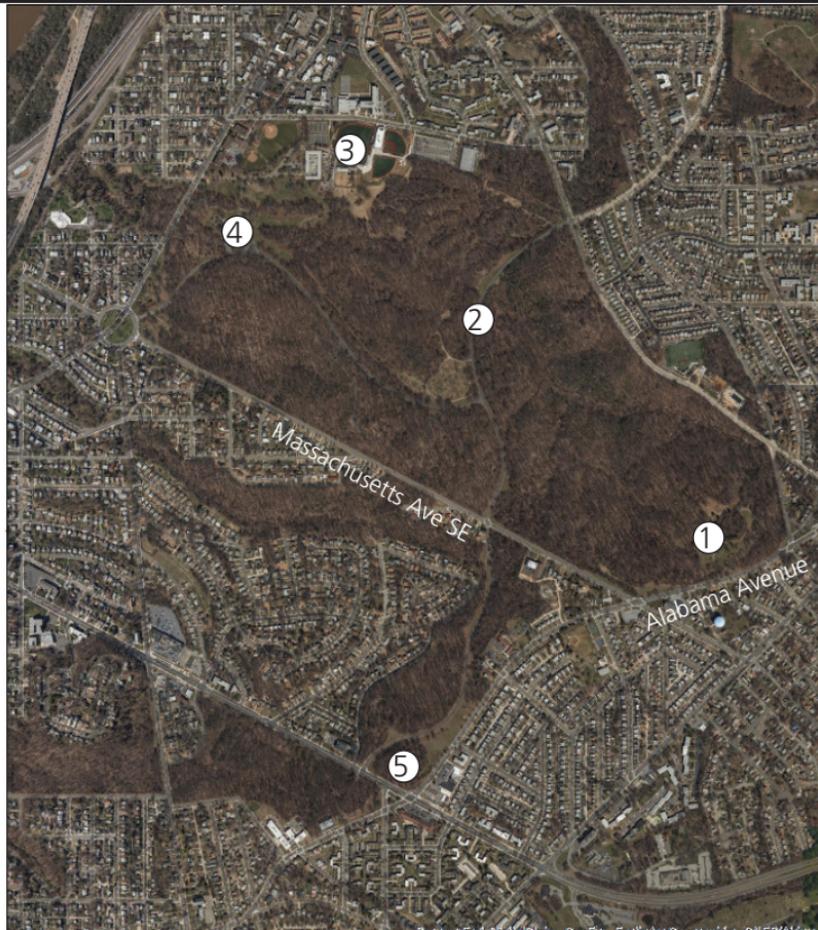
Fort Dupont, a hexagonal structure constructed in 1861-1862, had a perimeter of 200 yards, and was protected by a deep moat and trees felled side-by-side with branches pointing outward. Structures within the fort included a 2000 sq.ft. barracks, a mess hall, and two officer's quarters. Fort Dupont supported a garrison of 300 infantry and 117 artillerymen. Fort Dupont was armed with three 8-inch siege howitzers, three 24-pounder seacoast guns, two 6-pounder field guns, and one 24-pounder Coehorn mortar.

Fort Dupont was named for Rear Admiral Samuel F. Dupont, who commanded the naval victory at Port Royal, South Carolina, in November 1861. Although its garrison and guns never saw battle, Fort Dupont served as a lifeline of freedom. Runaway slaves found safety here before moving on to join the growing community freed former slaves in Washington.

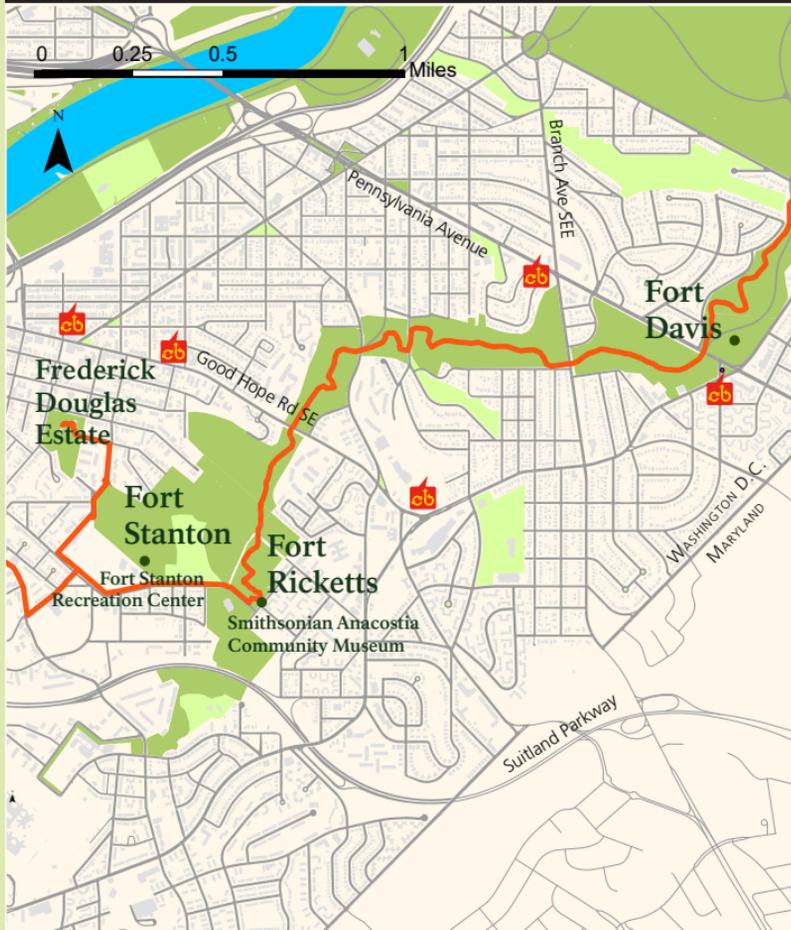
Fort Davis was built with a perimeter of about 225 yards. Fort Davis had no buildings. A 17 May 1864 report from the Union Inspector of Artillery noted the following:

“Fort Davis, Lieut. D. D. Dana commanding. – Garrison, one-half company Ninth Unattached Company Massachusetts Volunteer Artillery–1 commissioned officer, 1 ordnance-sergeant, and 32 men. Armament, five 6-pounder field guns, three 24-pounder barbette, three 8-inch siege howitzers, one Coehorn mortar. Magazines, two; dry and in good order. Ammunition, full supply. Implements, complete and serviceable. Garrison not drilled at artillery.”

Fort Davis was named in honor of Colonel Benjamin F. Davis, 8th NY Cavalry. Benjamin Franklin Davis, commonly known as “Grimes,” was a Mississippian who fought for the Union during the Civil War.



- ① Traces of the fort earthworks and an interpretive bronze plaque can be seen in the center of the one way loop drive that is accessed from Alabama Avenue. A picnic area is also located here.
- ② Fort Davis Drive SE bisects Fort Dupont from Ridge Road SE to Massachusetts Ave SE.
- ③ In the 1930s, the National Capital Planning Commission acquired the old fort and surrounding land for recreation. A golf course was constructed and as the city grew, golf gave way in 1970 to the sports complex along Ely Place. Facilities now include tennis and basketball courts, athletic fields, and a softball diamond. An indoor ice rink offers skating.
- ④ A parking lot at Fort Dupont Dr SE provides access to the Fort Dupont Park Activity Center and trails throughout Fort Dupont Park.
- ⑤ Remains of Fort Davis earthworks are visible. A interpretive sign and interpretive bronze plaque located on a stone are also located here.




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**Fort Davis to Fort Ricketts** 1.3 mi

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Follow trail from Pennsylvania Avenue to  
Branch Ave SE 0.4 mi

Cross Branch Ave SE

Follow trail to 28th St SE 0.5 mi

Cross 28th St SE

Continue on trail to Good Hope Rd SE 0.4 mi

Cross Good Hope Rd SE

Continue on trail to Fort Ricketts 0.4 mi

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**Fort Ricketts is on your left as you approach  
Erie Street SE**

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**The Smithsonian Anacostia Community  
Museum is located across Erie Street SE**

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**The Fort Stanton Recreation Center is  
located on Erie Street SE**

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**Directions to the Frederic Douglass National  
Historic Site are on a following page**

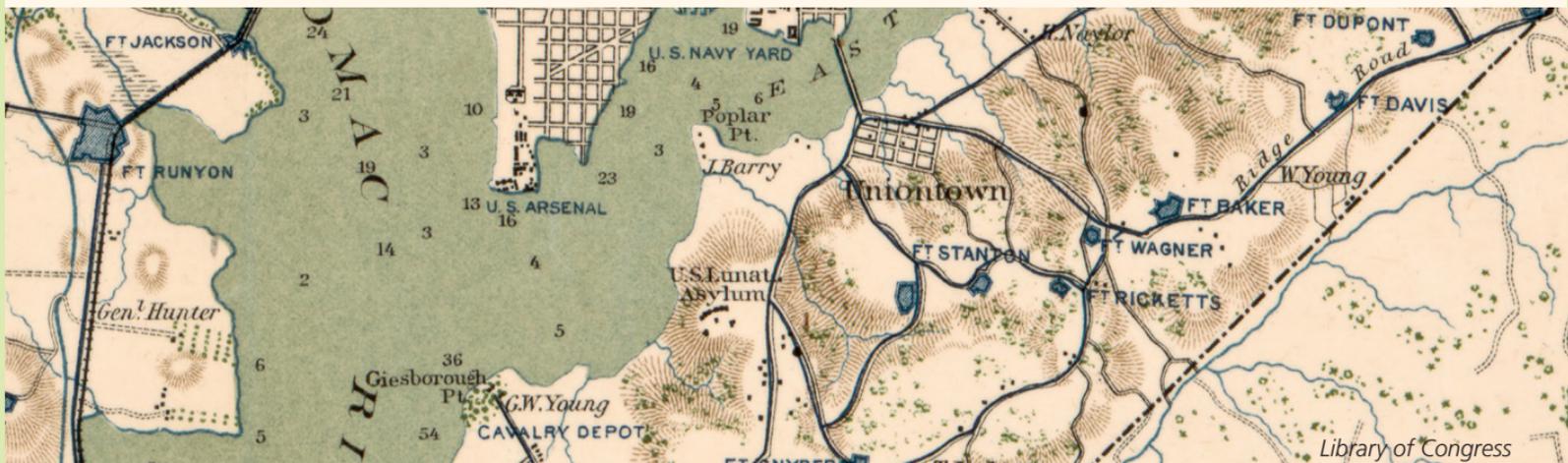
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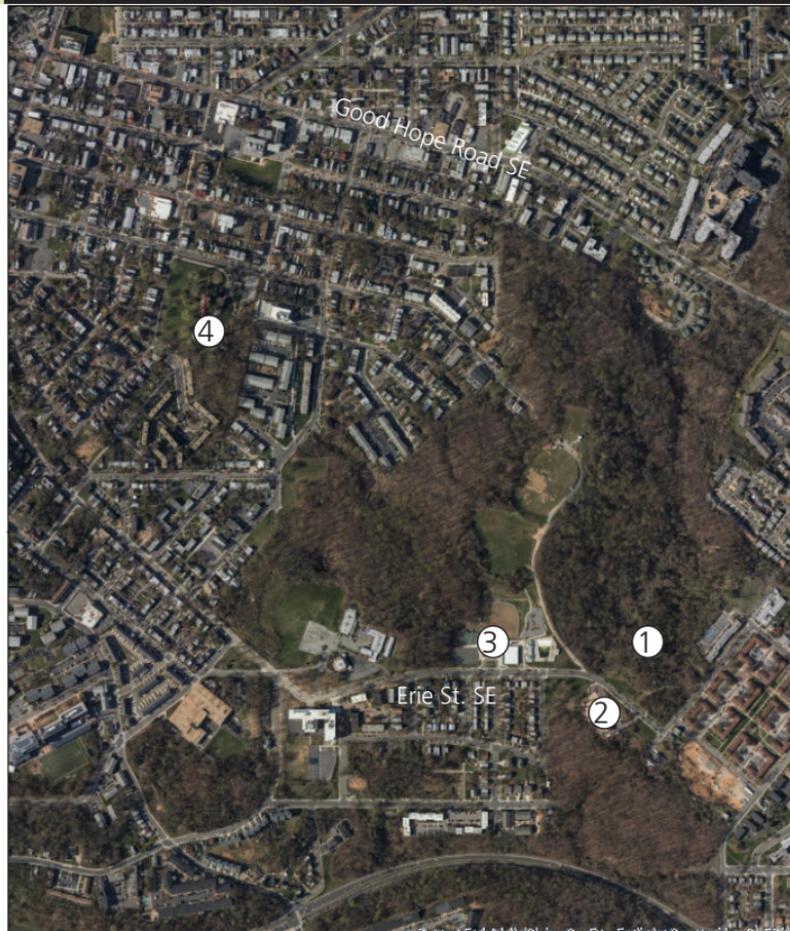
Fort Ricketts was constructed after the Battle of First Manassas, when it was determined that the fortification of the entire city would be necessary. on the north. Fort Ricketts was built to sweep a ravine in front of Fort Stanton that it could not cover. Fort Ricketts was a small fort with a perimeter of 123 yards equipped with four guns requiring a garrison of 206 men (42 artillery and 164 infantry).

Fort Stanton was constructed to protect the Maryland or eastern end of the two bridges crossing the Anacostia

and to occupy the heights above the Navy Yard and Washington Arsenal.

“Fort Stanton occupies the nearest point of the ridge to the arsenal and navy-yard, and overlooks Washington, the Potomac, and Eastern Branch. It is a work of considerable dimensions, well built, and tolerably well armed. Casemates for reversed fires are recommended in northwest and southwest counterscarp angles, and platforms for two or three rifled guns on the east front. The deep ravine which flanks this work on two sides requires some additional precaution, and further study of it is recommended.”





- ① Overgrown remains of the Fort Ricketts earthworks and two separate markers can be found on the site.
- ② Some fort related exhibits are located at the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum.
- ③ The Fort Stanton Recreation Center offers a variety of outdoor facilities.
- ④ The Frederic Douglass National Historic Site preserves and interprets Cedar Hill, where Frederick Douglass lived from 1877 until his death in 1895. The centerpiece of the site is the historic house, which sits on top of a 50-foot hill and eight acres of the original estate. Restored to its 1895 appearance, the house is furnished with original objects that belonged to Douglass.



Library of Congress



NPS



### Fort Stanton Area to Frederick Douglass National Historic Site

1.0 mi

From Fort Stanton area turn right (west) onto Erie St SE	0.2 mi
Continue onto Morris Rd SE	0.3 mi
Head west on Erie St SE	0.3 mi
Turn right onto Hunter Pl SE	0.1 mi
Continue onto Pomeroy Rd SE	151 ft
Continue straight onto Bangor St SE	167 ft
Slight left onto 16th St SE	404 ft
Turn left onto W St SE	0.2 mi

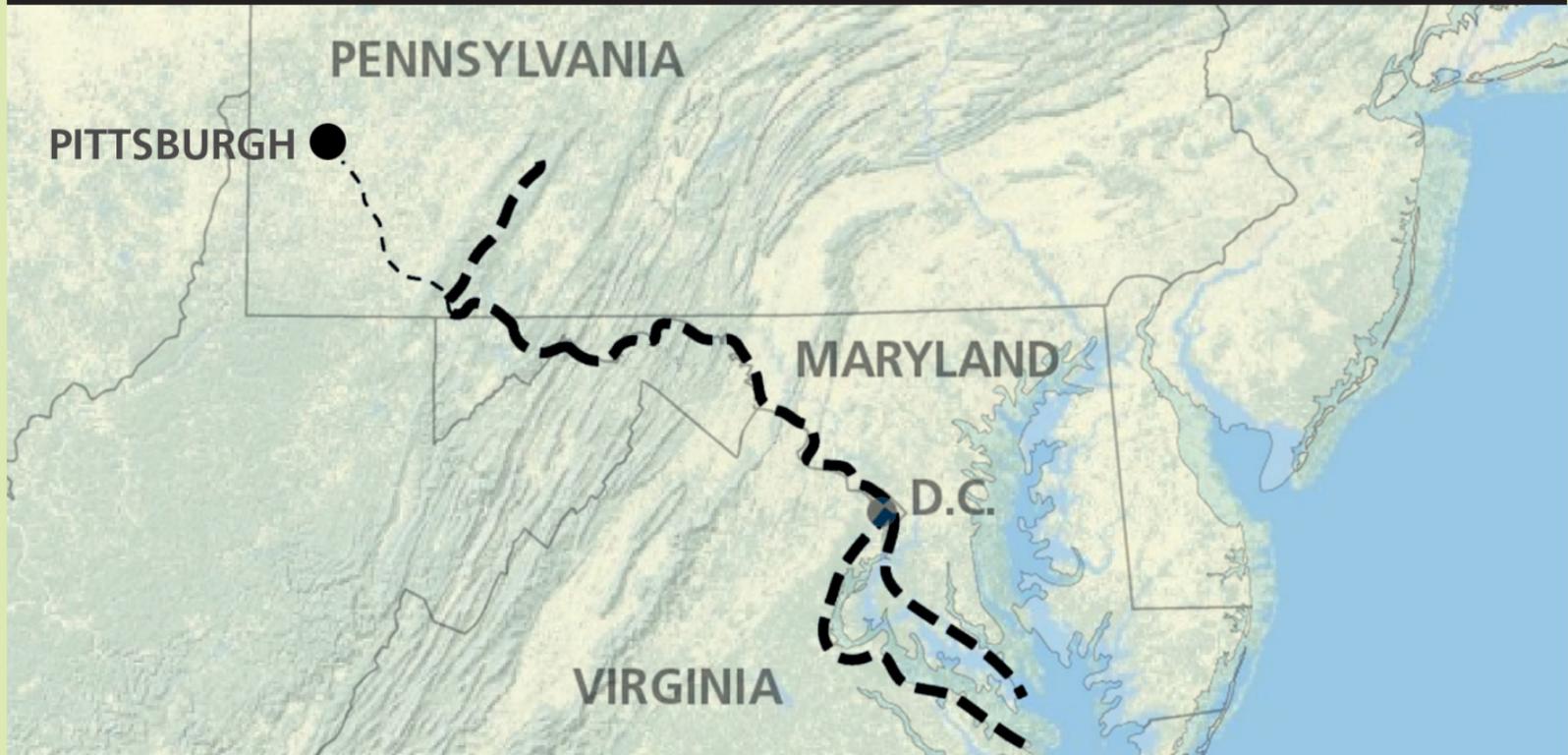
Frederick Douglass National Historic Site is on your left

### Fort Stanton Area to Anacostia Metro Station

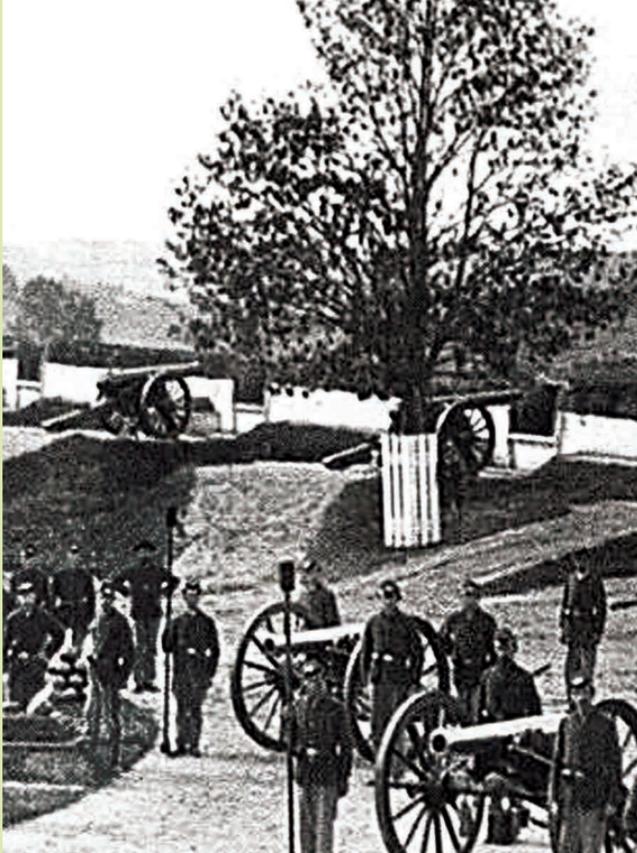
1.2 mi

Head west on Erie St SE toward 18th Pl SE	0.2 mi
Continue onto Morris Rd SE	0.8 mi
Turn left onto Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE	0.2 mi
Turn right onto Howard Rd SE	479ft

Anacostia Metro Station is on your left



The route connecting the Civil War Defenses of Washington is part of a network of trails and routes between the mouth of the Potomac River and the Allegheny Highlands. The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail network, a component of the National Trails System, is a means to explore contrasting landscapes on foot and by bicycle, horse, boat and cross-country skis.



### Sources and Additional Information:

Civil War Defenses of Washington: [www.nps.gov/cwdw](http://www.nps.gov/cwdw)

Rock Creek Park (Fort Stephens, Fort Totten, Fort Bunker Hill):  
[www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr)

National Capital Parks-East (Fort Mahan): [www.nps.gov/nace](http://www.nps.gov/nace)

District Dept. of Transportation: [www.ddot.dc.gov](http://www.ddot.dc.gov)

Metro Rail and Metrobus: [www.wmata.com](http://www.wmata.com)

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail: [www.nps.gov/pohe](http://www.nps.gov/pohe)

Capital Trails Coalition: [www.capitaltrailscoalition.org](http://www.capitaltrailscoalition.org)

Cultural Tourism DC: [www.culturaltourismdc.org](http://www.culturaltourismdc.org)

Washington Parks & People: [www.washingtonparks.net](http://www.washingtonparks.net)

Cooling, B.F III. and W. H. Owen II. *Mr. Lincoln's Forts: A Guide to the Civil War Defenses of Washington*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010.

National Capital Planning Commission. *CapitalSpace: Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space*. Washington, DC: NCPC, 2010.

GIS Aerial Photo Basemap Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

