

# Historic Hotels!

## XXXVI: Fort Monroe's *Chamberlin Hotel*

The Chamberlin Hotel offers so much in the way of uniqueness, it's hard to know where to begin. For starters, it's inside Fort Monroe, VA, home of the largest stone fort ever built in the United States. Even though it's on federal land, the Chamberlin is privately owned and operated.

Secondly, the Chamberlin enjoys a commanding view of Chesapeake Bay. The dining room offers a simply splendid panorama, no matter what the weather. Most of the guest rooms offer the same view, and the swimming is so near the water's edge you can pretend you're swimming in the ocean. The first hotel to occupy this magnificent spot was built in 1820. Called the Hygeia, the resort drew a steady stream of well-heeled visitors. One of them was Edgar Allen Poe, who recited "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" on the Hygeia's porch one September night in 1849, a month before he died. After serving as a hospital during the Civil War, the Hygeia was torn down. Another hotel sprang up in its place, followed shortly by the first Chamberlin establishment. When it burned down in 1920, the present edifice was erected.

The Chamberlin is huge, imposing, and worth a visit. A buffet luncheon is served every day in the dining room, an all-you-can-eat smorgasbord for a very reasonable price. If you're lucky, you'll get to sit near the windows facing the bay.

Afterwards, stop by the hotel museum, which is housed in a porch behind the gift shop. Inside glass cases are mementos from every decade of the Chamberlin's past, including pictures of the conflagration that burned the first hotel to the ground. The Chamberlin is haunted. More than one apparition is said to walk the halls of this cavernous establishment, but the most famous is the ghost of a young woman. Her father, a fisherman, went to sea one day and never returned. "She's still waiting for him," said the clerk in the gift shop. "She knocks things off shelves every once in a while, and sometimes she plays the piano."

