

Fort East Martello

By [Angela Ash](#)



If you're in the mood for a little history, or you want to take a peak at one of the darker residents of Key West, then a visit to Fort East Martello is definitely in order.□

Construction of the fort began in 1863, and it was designed to protect against a Confederate attack by sea. As the fort was not finished before the war was, it was abandoned in its unfinished state.□

In 1950, the Key West Art and Historical Society came in to clean and clear away debris and the reminders of its years of abandonment to open their first museum.□ With continued work, the society returned the fort to its original plans from the 1860s.□ Visitors may marvel at its design, view a collection of relics from the Civil War, see how the wrecking and cigar

industries shaped Key West, and witness the amazing art of Mario Sanchez and Stanley Papio.□

This is an astounding place to visit for its history and connection to the Civil War.□ However, there are those of us who visit for quite a different reason altogether.□ We have come for Robert the Doll.□



Robert the Doll is housed within the shadowy confines of Fort East Martello, where thousands of visitors come to see this mysterious item in person. And what is so special about Robert the Doll, that he is housed in a fort in Key West? Well, that answer is quite simple. It is because Robert the Doll is haunted.

Making reference to Robert as "haunted" may not be the correct terminology. Some call it possession by a supernatural spirit. Others call it a mysterious enigma. Whatever the case, those who have come into contact with this child's toy claim that he is no ordinary doll. I would have to agree.

The short of Robert's story is that he once belonged to a boy, who was his lifelong companion. However, when young Gene was questioned by his parents as to why he did this or that, he too often replied that Robert had done it. After Gene's death in 1974 after designing the gallery at Fort East Martello, Robert went to live with Myrtle Reuter, who donated him to the fort in 1994, after claiming that Robert moved about the house of his own accord.

Since then, ghost hunters, psychics, and those drawn to the paranormal have visited Robert the Doll to see if they might catch his expression changing, or feel as if his spirit may have followed them home.

When I came to visit Robert the Doll, I instantly felt an odd presence in the gallery, even though I had entered alone. Upon inspection, the doll was made in a very unique fashion, and while I never saw a change in his expression, it definitely did seem as if he were somewhat amused with all of this scrutiny.

However, as I walked past the doll to turn around to view him at a different angle, I did feel as if something rubbed down my back, almost like a stick or some other foreign object. Chalking it up to an overactive imagination, I left Robert in peace.

Later that day, curiosity set in, and I began to peruse Fort East Martello's site for more information on Robert the Doll. As I read, something literally seemed to jump off the screen. It was reported that someone once felt something like a metal bar running down their back while in the doll's presence. This was very close to my experience, as well.

Whether you visit Robert the Doll and see his expression turn to a frown, or you merely meander about the fort, taking in its role in Civil War history, a visit should definitely be on your list.

For more information, visit them [online](#) or call (305) 296-3913.