

Text for Museum Exhibits

Fort Moultrie Visitor Center
1214 Middle Street
Sullivan's Island, SC 29482

Revolutionary War Island

Colonel William Moultrie

Colonel William Moultrie, shown in a major general's uniform, commanded Patriot forces on Sullivan's Island in June 1776. The son of a wealthy physician, Moultrie rose to prominence as a captain in the South Carolina Militia in 1761. He was appointed colonel of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment on June 17, 1775. When a British fleet attacked an incomplete fort on Sullivan's Island, Colonel Moultrie and his troops defeated them in a 9 ½ hour battle that resulted in one of the first decisive victories in the American Revolution. By the end of the war, Moultrie had been promoted to major general. After the war, he served in the South Carolina House of Representatives as Lieutenant Governor and then two terms as South Carolina Governor. For his victory on Sullivan's Island, the fort was named Fort Moultrie.

The British Attack

In June 1776, a British fleet appeared and "*displayed about 50 sail before the town.*" A partially completed fort on Sullivan's Island was the Patriots' only hope to keep the British out of Charleston Harbor. The fort, constructed of spongy palmetto logs and sand, and with only 31 cannon, faced nine British warships armed with about 300 guns. The time had come to fight for freedom. Major General Charles Lee, commander of the American forces in the South, asked Colonel Moultrie, "*Do you think you can maintain this post?*" Moultrie replied, "*Yes, I think I can.*" The June 28, 1776 Patriot victory on Sullivan's Island raised morale after the American defeat in Quebec and the capture of Boston.

Major General Charles Lee

Major General Charles Lee was third in command of the Continental Army. He arrived in Charleston on June 8, 1776. After an examination of the defenses, Lee criticized Moultrie as a commander too "*easy going*" in his duties. As for the fort on Sullivan's Island, Lee referred to it as a "*slaughter pen.*" After the battle, Lee wrote, "*The behavior of the garrison, with Colonel Moultrie at their head, I confess astonished me. It was brave to the last degree.*"

The Palmetto Fort

Historically, Fort Moultrie's location at the mouth of the Charleston Harbor has proved to be the key to its success. Every ship sailing into Charleston Harbor came within range of the fort's guns.

The red squares on each map will help you locate the fort.

The fort was a square with a bastion at each corner. Once complete, 1,000 men could occupy the fort. The model is a section of the ocean side wall, showing a 3-gun position. Notice that the palmetto logs were placed upon one another in parallel rows 16 feet apart. The logs were linked together like a log cabin and the interior was filled with sand. This palmetto log and sand construction absorbed much of the shock of enemy fire.

Private 2nd South Carolina Regiment, 1776

Reproduction leather cap of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment, 1776

26 pound cannonball a type fired by both sides during the June 28, 1776 battle

Sergeant William Jasper

A Revolutionary War Hero

In the midst of battle, a British cannonball broke the fort's flagstaff and the colors fell outside the fort. Sergeant Jasper reacted quickly. Captain Peter Horry recounted the event, writing that Jasper jumped over the ramparts *"deliberately walked the whole length of the fort, until he came to the colors,..when he cut the same from the mast, and called to me for a sponge staff, and with a thick cord tied the colors and stuck the staff on the rampart in the sand. The sergeant fortunately received no hurt, though exposed for a considerable time into enemy's fire."* South Carolina President (Governor) John Rutledge presented his sword to Jasper for his bravery.

Many artists through the years have remembered Jasper's heroic actions.

Enslaved African Labor

Slaves from both the city and surrounding plantations played a critical role in helping build Charleston's defenses. They cut thousands of palmetto logs that were rafted to Sullivan's Island to build the fort. Colonel Moultrie stated, *"a great number of mechanics and negroe laborers"* were at work on the fort and that *"everyone was busy, and everything went on with great spirit."*

Rice & slavery formed the basis for South Carolina's wealth. With the expertise and labor of enslaved West Africans, South Carolina planters were the richest colonists in British North America. Enslaved workers cleared cypress swamps and moved vast amounts of earth, building dykes and canals by hand, using skills brought from homelands where rice had been grown for centuries. Out of this lowcountry transformation grew what is known today as Gullah culture. By 1708 Africans made up the majority of the colony's population. For over a hundred years Charleston was a main port of entry for captive Africans. By the end of the legalized international slave trade in 1808, over 240,000 men, women and children from the West Coast of Africa had landed on Charleston's shores. To prevent the spread of disease, many of these Middle Passage survivors served a period of quarantine on board ship, or in lazarettos or pestilence houses on Sullivan's Island or James Island. They were then sold to planters from outlying areas.

Sir Peter Parker

Commodore Sir Peter Parker commanded the British Naval forces during the June 28, 1776 battle of Sullivan's Island. While he was standing on the quarter-deck of the flag ship *Bristol*, a shot fired from the fort left Sir Peter's "*Britches...quite torn off, his backside laid bare, his thigh and knee wounded.*"

This 1777 American song interprets Admiral Parker's dispatches to the Lords of Admiralty

*"De'el take 'em, their shot
Came so swift and so hot,
And the cowardly dogs stood so stiff, sirs!*

*That I put ship about,
And was glad to get out,
Or they would not have left me a skiff, sirs!*

*Now bold as a Turk,
I proceed to New York,
Where with Clinton and Howe you may find me.*

*I've the wind in my tail,
And am hoisting sail,
To leave Sullivan's Island behind me."*

The British Return to Charleston

Charleston was often referred to as the "*London of the Low Country.*" In 1771, Thomas Leitch painted a view of the city's impressive harbor. In 1780, British forces returned to capture Charleston. This time they bypassed Fort Moultrie and landed 30 miles south of Charleston at Edisto Inlet. Marching over Johns and James Islands to the Charleston peninsula, the British placed the city under siege. On May 12, 1780, the Patriot forces, under the command of Major General Benjamin Lincoln, surrendered in the greatest loss to Patriot forces in the war. Over 5,500 Continentals and militia were captured along with a large number of artillery, arms and munitions.

General Henry Clinton, shown here, had commanded British troops during the June 28, 1776 battle. As commander of all British forces during the 1780 siege of Charleston, he led the British troops to "*the one solid British triumph of the war.*"

British Occupation, 1780-1782

On May 7, 1780, the British captured the now complete Fort Moultrie without firing a single shot. During the British occupation, the fort was called Fort Arbuthnot, in honor of the Commander of the British fleet, Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot. These objects (artifacts and replicas) are examples of everyday items used by the British Army during their occupation of the fort.

British Private 63rd Regiment of Foot, 1780

The 63rd Regiment of Foot garrisoned the fort from 1780 until the British Army left on December 14, 1782. The buttons and belt buckle belonged to a soldier of that regiment and were found at the fort.

Civil War Island

The summer of 1860 was the beginning of turbulent times for the small garrison of Fort Moultrie. Captain Abner Doubleday wrote that the entire force “*consisted of sixty-one enlisted men and seven officers, together with thirteen musicians of the regimental band; whereas the work called for a war garrison of three hundred men.*”

The secession movement was growing. Radical southerners threatened to dissolve the Union if Abraham Lincoln was elected President. On November 6, 1860, Lincoln won the election. Four days later, the South Carolina Legislature authorized a December convention to consider secession. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina withdrew from the Union.

Under cover of darkness on December 26, 1860, Major Anderson and his troops slipped out of Fort Moultrie and crossed the harbor to the unfinished, but more defensible, Fort Sumter. Before leaving Fort Moultrie, they drove spikes into the cannons vents (touch holes) and set the wooden gun carriages on fire.

This incident aroused passions in both Charleston and Washington. Late the next day, South Carolina troops moved into Fort Moultrie.

Union Major Robert Anderson

Commanding Officer – Fort Moultrie, Fort Sumter and Castle Pinckney

“...a gentleman, courteous, honest, intelligent, and thoroughly versed in his profession...In politics he was a strong pro-slavery man. Nevertheless, he was opposed to secession and Southern extremists.”

Sergeant, Company E, 1st U.S. Artillery Regiment, 1860

Model 1858 Eagle Hat Badge

Model 1841 U.S. Shoulder Belt Plate

Model 1841 U.S. Waist Belt Buckle

The Army began painting the fort's interior brick walls and buildings a yellow ochre color in an effort to protect the soft brick from the elements. Today, this color is used as an aid to identify the section restored to its original appearance in the early 1800s. A portion of this area is outlined in yellow above.

24 pound cannonball nearly identical to the one used in the Revolutionary War exhibit

Lieutenant George S. James 4th U.S. Artillery pictured in his dress uniform.

George James was born in Laurens county South Carolina in 1829. He left college for the adventure of fighting in the Mexican War [1846-1848]. Commissioned a lieutenant in the U.S. Artillery in 1856, James resigned his commission on February 1, 1861 after learning

of South Carolina's secession from the Union. He was then appointed a captain of the South Carolina Battalion of Artillery. On April 12, 1861, Captain James gave the command to fire the first shot of the war from Fort Johnson toward Fort Sumter. Promoted to lieutenant colonel, James commanded the 3rd South Carolina Infantry Battalion until his death on September 14, 1862 in the battle of South Mountain, Maryland.

Second Lieutenant, 1st South Carolina Battalion Artillery 1861-1862

This is the unit that is pictured at Fort Moultrie in the large mural on the wall behind you. This drawing was made from a photo taken on April 16, 1861 - four days after the war started.

This group of images shows some of the damage done to Fort Moultrie during the April 12-13, 1861 bombardment. Though repaired, the fort was heavily damaged by Union artillery during the 1863-1865 siege of Charleston. In response, Confederates used sandbags, logs, timbers and earth to cover and protect large sections of the fort.

These are some examples of objects used by the fort's Confederate defenders. The ceramic bottle held beer. The glass flask is from the hospital. The South Carolina officer's belt buckle is very rare.

These pictures show the changes brought about to all masonry forts by the use of rifled artillery. It was discovered that as a defense against such artillery, mounds of earth or sand were a better fortification material than brick or stone. A shell would penetrate deep into the mound before exploding harmlessly. In the two lower photographs, notice the use of earthen mounds between each gun position. Artist and Confederate soldier Conrad Wise Chapman produced these paintings in 1863.

Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard Commanding Officer, Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida

Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard was born near New Orleans, Louisiana in 1818. He entered West Point in 1834 where he was instructed in artillery by Robert Anderson. After graduating second in a class of forty-five, Beauregard received his commission as an engineer and served with General Winfield Scott during the Mexican War where he was twice wounded. In March 1861, he resigned his U.S. Army commission, was appointed a brigadier general in the Confederate Army, and assigned to command forces in and about Charleston. Here he became famous as the commander of Confederate forces during the April 12-13, 1861 bombardment of Fort Sumter, which marked the beginning of the Civil War. Beauregard returned to New Orleans after the war, and was a leading business and political figure until his death in 1893.

Compare these rifled projectiles to the smooth round cannon balls of the preceding eras. The new, more powerful and accurate rifled artillery quickly reduced the masonry forts to rubble. These projectiles could penetrate deep into the walls and explode creating large craters. This often caused pieces of masonry to become deadly missiles. The solution was to protect the guns with earthen mounds, so that only a direct hit could damage or destroy

the cannon. Notice the rifling on the inside of the cannon barrel that gave the projectile a spin. This greatly increased its accuracy and range.

Jacob Stroyer age 13, slave and author

“In the summer of 1863 with thousands of other negroes... was sent to Sullivan’s Island to repair forts... While the men were engaged in such work, the boys of my age... waited on officers and carried water for the men at work... we fared better on these fortifications than we had at home on the plantations.”

To load and fire the fort's muzzleloading cannon required a crew of at least 6 men and implements like those standing here. The rammer staff was used to seat the powder bag and cannonball into the bore of the gun. The wet sponge was used after each shot to extinguish any burning particles remaining in the bore. The worm was used to remove any remains of unburned powder bags.

Spanish American War/First World War Island

Private

Company F, 35th U.S. Infantry

United States Colored Troops

1866

The Rodman Era 1865 – 1890

After the Civil War, the U. S. Army installed the latest coastal defense cannon. The largest weapon in service in North America, the 15-inch Rodman was a muzzle-loading smoothbore cannon with a barrel weighing approximately 50,000 pounds. Capable of firing a 400-pound projectile a distance of more than 4 miles, these cannon were usually mounted in pairs and protected by earthen mounds. Work began in 1872 to modernize Fort Moultrie, with installation of the 15-inch Rodmans taking place in 1876.

At about this same time, the fort’s garrison was reduced to an ordnance-sergeant, seen in the image to the left.

Sabot

This 15-inch Rodman shell weighs over 300 pounds and is mounted on a sabot. To ready for firing, two 25-pound bags of gunpowder were inserted into the cannon. Then the cannonball, mounted on the sabot, would be rammed down the barrel so that it rested against the powder bags.

The area of today’s fort where the Rodman guns are mounted is outlined in yellow.

By 1902, the last of the Rodman cannons were removed from Fort Moultrie. The newer, breech-loading rifled artillery had arrived, making the smoothbore Rodmans obsolete. A new era in coast artillery was about to begin

The Endicott Era 1890 – 1920

The development of powerful battleships with massive guns posed a threat to the defense of the United States. In 1885 President Grover Cleveland appointed Secretary of War William Endicott to head a board considering improvements to America's coastal defense. Modernization began at the Fort Moultrie Military Reservation in the 1890's, beginning with the construction of Batteries Jasper and Capron. The video in front of you shows this construction work. Battery Jasper would contain four 10-inch disappearing cannon capable of firing a 571-pound projectile a distance of nearly eight miles. Battery Capron held sixteen 12-inch mortars, designed to drop 700-pound shells in groups of four onto enemy warships.

Major

1st U.S. Artillery Regiment

1897 – 1899

On April 21, 1898, following the sinking of the *USS Maine* at Havana, Cuba on February 15, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain.

The Spanish-American War lasted only four months, ending on August 12, 1898. The conflict increased the efforts to complete and build new coastal fortifications. Two months later, after the end of the war, Battery Bingham was completed and armed with two 4.7-inch British Armstrong rapid-fire guns. The following year, Battery McCorkle was completed and armed with rapid-fire 15-pounders. This area is outlined in yellow in the map above.

These films were taken after World War I, but show the two types of heavy coastal defense guns used at the Fort Moultrie Military Reservation. There were four 10-inch disappearing guns on Battery Jasper and sixteen 12-inch mortars at Battery Capron.

571-Pound Projectile

Between 175 and 225 pounds of gunpowder was used to fire this round from the 10-inch disappearing gun. These guns could hit a target nearly 8 miles away. By 1916, seven out of every eight heavy seacoast guns were of this type. A change in battleship turret design that allowed high angle fire would soon make the disappearing gun obsolete.

World War I

1914 – 1918

In 1914 World War I began in Europe. America managed to remain out of the war until February 1917 when Germany opened unrestricted submarine warfare on shipping. In response, the U.S. entered the war in April of that year. By the summer of 1918, in addition to the coastal defense guns at the Fort Moultrie Military Reservation, a submarine net was placed across the entrance to Charleston Harbor and was controlled

from the fort. These tranquil pictures of troops at the fort contrast sharply with the grim reality of war taking place in Europe.

Private
Battery A, 61st Coastal Artillery Regiment,
1917

First Lieutenant
Battery B, 75th Coastal Artillery Regiment,
1918

Fort Moultrie at Peace

Once again, just like after the Civil War, Fort Moultrie's garrison was reduced to a few maintenance men, and the fort became a tourist attraction.

These two bottles were recovered at the fort and date from the period of the Spanish-American War. The bottle labeled "*dispensary*" might have contained medicinal alcohol. The other contained alcohol of a different sort - it is an Anheuser-Busch beer bottle that was made in Charleston.

Second World War Island

Sergeant
Company D, 8th U.S. Infantry
1929

Between the Wars

Fort Moultrie had expanded far beyond the walls of the old brick fort. It now had elements all over Sullivan's Island. The Fort Moultrie Military Reservation was manned by units of the Coast Artillery and the 8th U.S. Infantry. The distinctive insignia of the 8th Infantry was worn by all of the soldiers in the regiment. In June of 1933, Colonel George C. Marshall arrived to take command of the regiment. These photographs of the regiment attest to a peacetime army. Duty was good and Charleston lay within easy reach after the Cooper River bridge opened in 1929.

Before World War II soldiers ate their meals off china bowls and plates. They were served their food by mess stewards. All of that would change after December 7th, 1941.

Each soldier arriving at the Fort received a guide book, this one is dated 1934. The photo album belonged to Private Gadberry Browder of Company G of the 8th U.S. Infantry. His 24-hour pass is dated October, 1939. There was and is a manual for everything - the red cover signifies this book was for an artillery soldier.

Private First Class

Battery C, 263rd Coast Artillery [HD]
1942

Peacetime Draft 1940

With the outbreak of World War II in Europe, America began its first peacetime draft. Additionally, many National Guard units were called into Federal service, including the 252nd North Carolina and 263rd South Carolina Coast Artillery Regiments. Assigned to Fort Moultrie, both units had trained at the fort in the 1930's. The North Carolina boys were housed in tents, while the South Carolina lads got the regular barracks. Colonel Cliff E. Singleton, pictured to the left as a Captain in the 263rd, was present at the dedication of the park's new Visitor Center in June of 1976.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7 and plunged America in war, security was tightened throughout the harbor.

Souvenir purchased at the Fort Moultrie Post Exchange

Coastal Defenses at Fort Moultrie

During the war changes were made to the defenses on Sullivan's Island. While the 10-inch and 12-inch disappearing guns and some of the mortars remained, as seen in the video, 155mm mobile guns were placed on concrete "Panama" mounts and 90mm anti-aircraft guns were installed on top of Battery Jasper. One of the 90mm dummy practice rounds is on display here. The 3-inch rapid fire guns inside the old fort were also manned. Perhaps the most important weapon was the completion of a new Harbor Entrance Control Post/Harbor Defense Command Post [HECP/HDCP]. Completed in 1944, this joint Army-Navy installation is located in Fort Moultrie. The HECP/HDCP's interior has been refurbished to its 1944-45 appearance.

In addition to the artillery weapons, submarine netting was placed across the harbor's channel. For a ship to enter or leave, the HECP had to grant permission. Once approved, the netting would be pulled back for the ship to pass.

Women's Army Corps

The WAC's were created to free men for combat. The WAC's went through six weeks of basic training that was similar to that of their male counterparts. From 1943 onward, WAC's served at Fort Moultrie as post vehicle drivers, hospital attendants and headquarters clerks. They remained at the fort until it was deactivated in 1947.

First Sergeant Rita G. Cournoyer's
WAC Song Book, 1944

Sergeant
WAC Detachment, 1446th Service Command Unit
1944

Backwater to the War

In 1942, the reality of the war came to Fort Moultrie and Charleston. On May 9, 1942, the Coast Guard Cutter *Icarus* sank the *U-352*, of Cape Lookout, NC; one of the first submarines sunk by US forces in the war. The *Icarus* picked up 31 survivors and delivered them to the Charleston Navy Yard the next day.

This was followed at the end of July with the *U-751* laying 12 mines at the entrance to Charleston Harbor. Sighted several times, planes and patrol vessels responded to calls from the Fort Moultrie HECF but the submarine escaped. Then on the nights of September 18th and 19th *U-455* laid 12 mines. In the distance, about 7-miles away, they saw the lights of Charleston. The mines were not detected until September 24th when one was detonated by a minesweeper. The HECF was contacted immediately. The information was relayed to the Port of Charleston commander and within 15-minutes the harbor was closed to all shipping and did not reopen until October 1st. In both cases no vessels or lives were lost.

After the defeat of the German U-boats in the Atlantic and the invasion of Europe, life at Fort Moultrie became much more settled as these photographs illustrate. The Navy personnel served at the HECF/HDCP. The Captain's summer uniform was for "Stateside use". With the end of the war in Europe in April 1945 and in the Pacific during August 1945, the soldiers at Fort Moultrie began to be deactivated.

The Army had changed from individual china to metal trays in the mess halls. The two soda bottles probably came from the Post Exchange. The fancy Thanksgiving menu is dated 1943.

The Deactivation of Fort Moultrie

World War II had demonstrated that fixed coastal forts did not prevent invasion of a country. Aircraft carriers, landing barges, bombers and rockets made fixed fortifications obsolete.

The photograph at the top of the panel was taken on April 13, 1945 as the flag of the fort was lowered to half-staff in response to the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The next picture was taken on July 27, 1945 and was the last parade at the fort. The other images were taken in the 1950's and show how quickly the fort fell into disuse. The guns had been cut up for scrap metal and the Coast Artillery Corps no longer existed. The fort was turned over to the National Park Service on September 7, 1960.

Aiming the Big Guns Display

It required a skilled artillery crew to not only load and fire big guns, but to also hit a moving target that was out of sight of the battery. Base stations, working in pairs, would determine the range of the target by triangulation. The top room of the camouflaged building in Fort Moultrie was the right base station for Battery Jasper.