

History House 1943 Coast Artillery Christmas Celebration Ft. Hancock, New Jersey

On 15-16 December 2018, the National Park Service (NPS), supported by the Sandy Hook Foundation (<http://sandyhookfoundation.com/>) and Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) presented a 1943 Christmas Celebration at "History House" located at Fort Hancock's Historic Post, part of the Sandy Hook Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area, which is located within the Fort Hancock Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District (the entire Sandy Hook Peninsula).

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Yvonne and Ron Brodzinski, Paul Casalese, Doug Ciemiecki, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Chris Egan, Renee and Joel Gonzalez, Mary and Henry Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Kim and Tom Minton, Steve Rossi, Paul Taylor, Wally and Linda Tunison, John Uhler, Bill Winslow, and Shawn Welch.

The educational objective was to provide an interpretation of the Harbor Defense soldiers of Fort Hancock as they would have celebrated Christmas in 1943.

The photo below shows the participating membership and guests on Sunday, 16 December in the parlor room of History House. The home was built in 1897, and completed just in time for the outbreak of the Spanish American War in 1898. Designated originally as a "Lieutenant's House" per Army standards, the home is 4,500 square feet and was intended for one junior officer and family. History House is known formally as "Quarters 1," and is one of 18 homes which comprise "Officers Row," one of the most visually appealing features of Fort Hancock's Historic Post.



Saturday morning started early (1000) with decorating and organizing. Below CPT(Chaplain) Uhler arrives.



In the dining room we provided a series of books and handouts about Fort Hancock, the work done at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck and other activities at the fort.



Below, 1LT Lutkenhouse chats with Barney and Kelly Sheridan. They have signed a lease for Bldg #53 in order to restore it for use as a restaurant and store.



In the living room, many pleasant conversations were had. Below 2LT Gonzalez discusses some of the aspects of living in one of these homes in the 1940s.



On Saturday, the Sandy Hook Foundation coordinated for the choir from Trinity Hall (<https://www.trinityhallnj.org/>) to sing for about an hour. Below this wonderful group regales us with their skills!



As the choir sings, Pat Alcara from the Sandy Hook Foundation (www.Sandyhookfoundation.org) and 1LT Winslow enjoy the performance.



We were so very happy with the wonderful songs they provided, we gave them each a special edition 2018 "History House" button.



The History House button was a fund raising idea by member Kim Minton. During the day on Saturday and Sunday, Renee Gonzalez sold almost two thirds of the buttons we had on hand. This year's button is of a Sergeant's wife showing her brand new refrigerator in 1943 .



One of the very best fund raisers in AGFA is Kim Minton. She is pictured below with her new son Maxwell and husband Tom Minton.



At 4:30pm (1630 hours), all of us in uniform rendered honors during Retreat. The US Coast Guard station plays the music and this year we actually heard it.



The public left by 5pm (1700) and we began to prepare for our catered dinner. Every year we have a dinner to celebrate the past year and our camaraderie. Below is the serving line in the kitchen of History House. This year's dinner was catered by Francesco's Restaurant (<http://www.francescositalianrestaurant.com/>). Georgio, the owner, delivered a wonderful dinner as usual!



Below, T-4 Ciemniecki, Mary Komorowski, CPT Cusano and 2LT Cusano line up for the buffet.



Below Doug Ciemniecki chats with our friend Samantha Monaco who was one of the NPS Volunteer Hosts for the weekend. Samantha is holding Maxwell Minton - the newest "Cosmoliner" and son of Kim and Tom Minton.



Below we gather in the dining room for Dinner. What a wonderful setting History House makes for our dinner.



We had eighteen members attending and our special guest Samantha Monaco.



AGFA members continued spirited discussions after dinner, reviewing all the accomplishments of the past year.



Below CPT(Dr) Cusano finishes his seconds and 2LT Cusano clears plates as T-3 and Mary Komorowski, T-3 and Yvonne Brodzinski, Renee and 2LT Gonzalez study the two major items we had to discuss as an organization.



Below LTC Welch prepares the discussion on these key topics regarding the 2019 program.



After we completed our deliberations and made our decisions, we gathered in the living room for a group photograph.



After the photograph, T-3 Komorowski and T-4 King discuss proposed restoration projects. T-4 King's representation combines remembrance of his Vietnam service in the 9th Infantry Division (ID) and the division's service in WWII. Many wounded members of the 9th ID were sent to New York for recovery and those unable to return to full service were ultimately assigned to Coast Artillery Units in Harbor Defenses of New York.



1LT Lutkenhouse and Kim Minton chat as Kim holds Maxwell. A major milestone for Max as this is his first "living history event"!



The stair case to the second and third floors was very nicely decorated as it would have been in 1943. Below Mrs. Gonzalez and 1LT Lutkenhouse are on the first step.



Once we finished preparing for Sunday, several photographs were taken in the house. Below T-3 and Yvonne Brodzinski stand next to the fireplace in the living room.



The mantel above the fireplace has many unique period Christmas decorations and ornaments. A small sample of these very unique and special items is shown below.



At about 2030 hours (8:30pm) we moved to Bldg #21A, the southern side of the duplex house. Building #21, #44 and #45 were each built in 1939 to the same floor plan. Bldg #21 was leased and restored by Brian Samuelson and Joe Dorsey in 2016 for short term rental. Visit www.sandyhookrentals.com for more information.



During the rest of the evening we enjoyed great camaraderie, cheese and crackers, in a most wonderful setting. Several members were staying the weekend in the house. Other Association members were in Bldg #73 on NCO (Sergeants) row.



Sunday morning started with a closed social hosted by the Sandy Hook Foundation (SHF) for their major donors and board members. AGFA was invited to attend. Below 1LT Taylor and CPT(Dr) Cusano chat with AGFA member and SHF Supporter CJ Gutch and SHF Supporter Mike Mason.



Beginning at 1100, the Swing Time Dolls started to sing (www.swingtimedolls.com). The Sandy Hook Foundation and AGFA teamed together to bring these wonderful singers to History House.



The conversations continued even after the public began to arrive. Below several key members of the Sandy Hook Foundation, National Park Service and AGFA engrossed in discussion and enjoying the wonderful heavy snacks provided by SHF.



The Swing Time Dolls moved about the main entrance area singing period Christmas songs and carols.



At about 1400 hours (2pm) the National Park Service Fire Truck arrived with Santa Claus!



Below NPS Law Enforcement Ranger Shawn Miller stands by the door as Santa heads into the living room area.



As everyone crowded in to see Santa, Shawn Miller and his son chatted with 1LT Lutkenhouse.



Santa found his rightful spot by the Christmas tree and greeted everyone who came in to see him.



This event could not have happened without the dedicated NPS Volunteers who are pictured below. They are key to Fort Hancock's success!



Below NPS Rangers Steve Schiffer, Tom Hoffman (historian) and Jennifer Cox gather around Santa. Some say there is a "slight" resemblance between Santa and NPS Ranger Pete McCarthy, the Sandy Hook Unit manager.



Just before Santa departed, members of AGFA gathered for a group photograph.



The pictures would not be complete without Santa and the Swing Time Dolls!



From about 1400 to 1530, Santa was besieged by young visitors eager to tell him what they really wanted for Christmas.



Below LTC Welch and CPT(Chaplain) Uhler explain various projects at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck to Scot Hagenev. Scot is negotiating leases with the National Park Service for Barracks buildings #24 and #25, the YMCA/Gym (Bldg #40) and the Officer's Club (Bldg #114).



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano stand by as a group of young visitors prepare to visit with Santa.



During mid-afternoon, the Swing Time Dolls moved into the dining room to continue singing Christmas carols and 1940s songs. The attentiveness of our guests is apparent in the photograph below.



At 1600, it was time for the Swing Time Dolls to depart. Just before they left, LTC Welch presented them with this year's History House buttons - which they are wearing in this photograph.



Below, Renee Gonzalez, 2LT Cusano, CPT(Chaplain) Uhler and CPT(Dr) Cusano pause for a photograph.



At the end of the day, we all began to depart. Below, 1LT Lutkenhouse, Samantha Monaco and LT(jg) Casalese bid 1LT Winslow a fond farewell for the day.



During the winter Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck's exterior will be open for self-guided tours. Workdays will be conducted monthly through April and will be listed in the Gateway Recreation Area program guide. For information call the Sandy Hook Unit, Fort Hancock & Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark Visitor Center (732) 872-5970, <https://www.nps.gov/gate/playourvisit/index.htm> or visit <http://armygroundforces.org>