

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

On 10-11 December 2022, teaming with the Sandy Hook Foundation (<http://sandyhookfoundation.com/>), the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) presented a 1943 Christmas Celebration at "History House" located at Fort Hancock's Historic Post. This is the first such event since December 2019. The historic post is part of the Sandy Hook Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area, which is located within the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District (the entire Sandy Hook Peninsula).

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Daniel Fortak and Rochelle Collantes, Joel Gonzalez, Ricard King, Anne Lutkenhouse, Joe McCoy, Tom Morrison, Paul Taylor, Wally and Linda Tunison, John Uhler, and Shawn Welch. We also had special guests Johnna-Lee Smith and her three children Watson, Marion and Chester - dressed in the attire of the 1940s and ready to provide an outstanding interpretation of a 1940s officer's family living at Fort Hancock!

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

On Friday 9 December, AGFA members prepared History House, toured the National Park Service's water plant and well stations, and toured Bldg. #56, a former mess hall built around 1900 that has been restored to support the Navy Junior ROTC (NJROTC) program at the Marine Academy of Science and Technology (MAST).

On Saturday, AGFA opened History House and also conducted two tours of Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck in the afternoon. History House again opened on Sunday.

The photo below shows the participating membership and guests on Saturday 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 per Army standards as a "Lieutenant's House", 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.





The sign below provides a conceptional view of the soon to be restored Barracks #23 at Fort Hancock. This building will support MAST with classroom and drill hall space. Two buildings are being restored for MAST - Bldg. #56 (former mess hall) was recently completed and we were fortunate to tour this newly restored building.



At 1100 hours on Friday 9 December AGFA members met with MAST Principal Earl Moore. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse stands outside the roadside entrance to the building.





Below is another view of Bldg. #56, looking towards the Sandy Hook Lighthouse.



Below is the entrance to the building on the road side.





In the main room of the building will be storage racks for NJROTC uniforms. Earl Moore is explaining the work done to restore the ceilings, windows and walls.

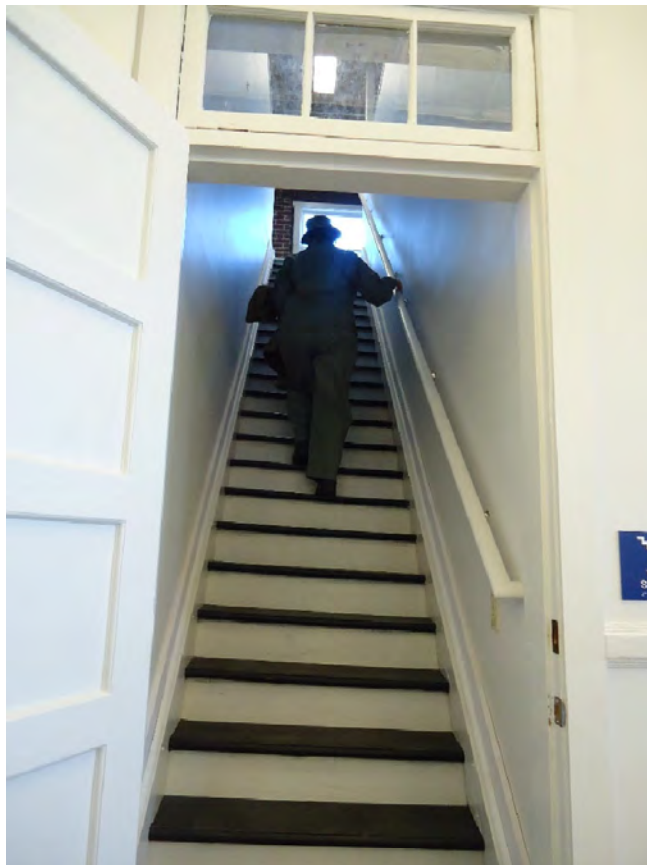


The photo below provides another view of the large room (former dining area) and the beautifully restored ceiling and pendant lights.





The upstairs has become the mechanical area. Below SSG King climbs the stairs to get to the mechanical area.



At the top of the stairs Earl Moore and member Dan Fortak (left) look down the stairs.





The “back” of the building (really the front) facing Barracks #23.



Below AGFA members are on the “front” porch of the building facing Bldg. #23.





The “back door” to Barracks #23 faces the “front” of Bldg. #56. The building has been stripped for reconstruction.



Another view of Bldg. #23. This building suffered a roof collapse around 2016. The collapse actually removed many historic preservation requirements enabling a more useful reuse restoration for the needs of the NJROTC program.





AGFA members then moved from Bldg. #56 to the historic water treatment plant for a tour by NPS plant supervisor Bob Galante and NPS Technician Matthew Sage. This photo is especially important as it shows two of the ten cathedral windows being restored to the building - very important for natural lighting and safety within this industrial facility. This building was constructed in 1911-1912 and fully operational in 1917.



The tour actually started at the current well that provides water for all of the Sandy Hook Peninsula. Bob Galante (left) outlines the well operations to 1LT Lutkenhouse, 2LT Cusano, CPL Cusano, T-4 Tunison and PVT Fortak.





Below are two great views of the inside of the well's pump house. Most of the material is circa 1960s, but some is actually earlier. The photo on the right includes PVT Fortak - whose is a degreed and licensed Engineer. His current specialty is utilities systems - specifically water and waste water systems. He took the day off to join in this tour and consultation as we reviewed the very historic and capable system at Fort Hancock.



The pump backup gasoline motor is present in the foreground.





One of the neatest aspects of the Fort Hancock water system is it was designed to continue working during an active bombardment. This required an unobtrusive and robust tank. Buried underground is a 250,000-gallon tank from the 1930s time period. The entrance to the mechanical room of the tank is below left. The electric switch to the exterior lighting on the right is of WWII vintage.



The mechanical room has these two pumps to manage the water flow into and out of the tank. The actual tank wall is the back wall in this photo. The incandescent light in the left of the photo is of WWII vintage. The florescent is 1960s vintage.





Below Bob Galante is explaining the functioning of the tank.



Bob stands next to the electrical panel as CPL Cusano, 2LT Cusano, and 1LT Lutkenhouse listen to his explanation.





Below the group is walking on one of the 1930s roads near the water plant.



Much of the historic 1930s and 1940s overhead electrical system is still in evidence. The pole below shows two large ceramic insulators. This pole is at least 80 years old.





A major component of the water system is the aeration building below. CPL Cusano is looking into the door as 1LT Lutkenhouse awaits her turn.



The inside of the aeration building shows the overhead “wash” system that allows the water to fall and remove impurities as well as aerate the water. This building is about 70 years old.





Below plant technician Matthew Sage explains portions of the water plant to AGFA members.



Two of the six water filters are seen in this photo. These sand filters were installed in 1941 and are the mainstay of the filtration system.





2LT Cusano looks at a historic auxiliary pump from the 1950s. Along the back wall are three of the other four sand filters. Note also the large cathedral window being installed to the center left. The remaining three windows will be installed in the near future.



The two pumps below are the main source of water movement in the filtration system.





One of the very important functions of the main water plant up until about 25 years ago was the main power switching station for the entire garrison. The panels in the photo below were installed sometime in the 1940s and are a visible reminder of the electrical system management 80 years ago.



The photo to the left shows some of the major circuit numbers. The steel sign to the right shows what those circuits covered. Electric demand was much less than in the 2020s - the average house was a 25-amp service. The average new home in 2023 has a 200-amp service.





The AGFA team was also shown (location undisclosed) one of the old, out of service wells at Fort Hancock. This well was apparently constructed in 1940-41.



Below CPL Cusano looks over the existing pump motor.





After the tours, members began preparations for Battery Tours on Saturday. Below CPL Cusano applies grease to the elevation system. In December, sundown is around 1730 hours.



Below CPL Cusano heads to the Tool Room/Machine Shop to secure lubricants and materials in preparation to close the Battery for the evening.





Below the team has dinner in Bldg. #102, a 1907 brick barracks wonderfully restored and repurposed into housing by the National Park Service.



Bright and early Saturday morning the team arrived at History House for setup. Below CPT(Chaplain) Uhler prepares the kitchen.





Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and LTC Welch chat with visitors. At 1200 hours, the first tour of Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck left from History House. LTC Welch is wearing field equipment as he will be at the Battery - on guard against German ships!



In the entrance area the Sandy Hook Foundation (SHF) set up a table to greet visitors. Below Pat Alcaro, President of SHF, is at her table as 2LT Gonzalez speaks with visitors.





In the entrance foyer, 2LT Cusano greets visitors and orients them to an Officer's house.



Below Watson, Marion and Chester are in front of the Christmas Tree.





On the left, 1LT Lutkenhouse is with Watson, Marion and Chester at the Christmas Tree. On the right, CPT(CH) Uhler works with Watson on the Field Organ playing Christmas music.



Below Watson has just finished his first Christmas song on the organ.





At 1100 hours on Saturday, a team went to Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck to prepare for the 1200 tour. Below CPL Cusano is adjusting the traversing mechanism on Gun #1.



It took CPL Cusano about 10 minutes to install the equipment and get the gun operational. The day was windy and cold - but the gun worked well in spite of the cold and hardening of the grease.





Below the first tour group is introduced to the members - CPL Cusano on the left.



On the Gun Platform, CPL Cusano and PFC McCoy show our visitors how to traverse the gun.





Below T-5 Morrison explains the submarine mine program. The large black item behind him is an M2 Mine Case which is an actual mine that would hold 2,000 pounds of flaked TNT explosive.



In the photo below CPL Cusano explains gun powder bags and their storage inside the powder magazine.





As the tour group moved to the plotting room, SSG King sat down at his work table to continue working on his restoration projects.



In the plotting room the team begins the explanation of how the guns are aimed. T-5 Morrison is talking with T-4 Tunison, SSG King, CPL Cusano and the public is listening intently.





The second tour is inside the powder magazine as Technical Sergeant (T-4) Tunison speaks with CPL Cusano standing by.



Technical Corporal (T-5) Morrison explains a powder bag that is laying on the loading tray.





Staff Sergeant (SSG) King is sitting at his work table explaining some of his restoration projects to the visitors.



After the last tour, the remaining members of the tour team are shown in the photo below in front of the machine shop - LTC Welch, CPL Cusano, PFC McCoy, T-5 Morrison and SSG King. Notice Gun #1 in the background on the right.





At History House, 2LT Cusano chats with Johnna-Lee and 1LT Lutkenhouse on the second-floor landing.



Below Watson, Marion and Chester are in front of the Christmas Tree.





Watson spent plenty of time chatting with the public about the children's room - especially focusing on the toys that would have belonged to a boy his age in 1943.



Marion is shown below looking at a vintage 1940s toy fire truck (left) and on the banister for the stairs in the foyer.





Sundown came quickly - at 1700 in the afternoon we closed History House for the day. Below 2LT Cusano and CPL Cusano organize the music for the Sunday portion of the weekend event.



Below LTC Welch, 1LT Lutkenhouse, PFC McCoy, CPT(CH) Uhler, 2LT Cusano and CPL Cusano are shown at the Christmas Tree just before securing History House for the evening.





Dinner again was served in Bldg. #102.



And seconds were on hand - CPL Cusano and PFC McCoy head to the stove to dish out some more chow!





On Sunday morning, CPT(CH) Ulher conducted Religious Services for the members present.



The photo below gives one an idea of the size of the kitchen/dining area in Bldg. #102. The wood floor is original and has been nicely polished and maintained.





After breakfast and service, the team prepared to depart for History House. Below PFC McCoy and CPT(Dr) Cusano pause for a photo.



We opened History House at 1030. Below Pat Alcaro (SHF President), 2LT Gonzalez and 1LT Lutkenhouse pause for a photo.





Just before we opened for the public, we took a photo of the team.



And another photo that includes additional members of the "Sunday Team".





Visiting the kitchen was key to getting coffee or hot cider. Below 2LT Cusano chats with visitors, one of whom is holding a cup of hot cider.



In the living room 1LT Lutkenhouse and Marion sit on the couch reading periodicals from 1943.





Below visitors enter the front door and are greeted by PFC McCoy.



Below 2LT Gonzalez and CPT(Dr) Cusano stand by the front door to greet visitors.





Below Johnna-Lee and her younger son Chester work on Christmas decorations.



Below all three kids begin work on the decorations - these are ginger bread cookies made to a 1940s wartime recipe. This is the "icing" step of the process.





Below visitors look on as Marion holds one of the ornaments.



The photos below show Johnna-Lee, Watson, Marion and Chester at the Christmas tree.





There are many rooms in History House. The one shown below is the “office” for the officer who resided in the house. Notice the office has its own entrance from the outside.



Below Watson and Marion play with the 1940s toys - ships and “coast artillery cannon” - toys that actually fire wooden “shells” at the ships.





2LT Cusano chats with visitors who are holding cups of hot cider in the dining room of the house.



In the kitchen, CPT(Dr) Cusano, PFC McCoy and LTC Welch chat with visitors.





The main staircase in the house is shown below. The area under the stair landing is actually a toilet/powder room with a sink, mirror and period toilet.



The mid-stair landing has a small table and the open door is to the “servants’ stairs” from the kitchen area.





Below is the foyer for the second floor. All bedrooms and the latrine are arranged around the landing area.



Another view of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor foyer area. Notice the tin ceiling and high doors with ventilation windows. This does work well in keeping the house cool in the summer.





Below is a photo of the "baby's room" complete with period furniture and materials.



One small bed room is displayed as a sewing room - a common application for a small room in the 1940s period.





Below is one of three pictures of a child's bedroom. Notice the curtains and toys.



Another view of the room showing the twin beds and the fireplace.





Below is the master bedroom.



Another view of the Master Bedroom showing the bed (likely a "double" in size) and the walk-in closet door which was connected to one of the children's room.





Another view of the Master Bedroom.



The photo below is looking down on the second-floor foyer from the landing heading to the third floor.





At the end of the day, we took one final picture of the "Sunday team".



During the winter History House is often open with a Park Ranger or Volunteer-In-Parks member to guide one through the house. Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck is open for exterior tours whenever the park is open. Check on the AGFA website for scheduled work days and events at the Battery. <http://armygroundforces.org>

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/planyourvisit/index.htm> or visit