

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

On 14-15 December 2024, the National Park Service (NPS) 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 and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District (the entire Sandy Hook Peninsula).

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Tony Antonucci, Callum Bujdos, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Joel Gonzalez, Ricard King, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Weiselman, Liz Bukowski-Weiselman, Tom Morrison, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Shawn Welch and our guest Greg Miller.

The educational objective was to provide insight into how the Harbor Defense soldiers of Fort Hancock would have celebrated Christmas in 1943.

On Saturday, we also opened Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck for visitation.

History House 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 area.

The photo below shows the participating members and NPS Rangers on Sunday afternoon on the front porch of History House, facing the bay side of Fort Hancock.



The Friday was spent working at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck on various aspects of the Battery systems. Below SGT Meiselman and Mrs Bukowski-Meiselman are working on a 1918 "Camp Telephone".



SGT Meiselman is continuing to work on the Camp Telephone as 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse look on.



After the day of work inside the Battery, we had dinner in Bldg #102.



Saturday morning activities came early in Bldg #102. Below SGT Cusano and RCT Miller finish breakfast.



By 1200 we had Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck open to the public and we were quickly engaged. Below about 12 visitors are moving through the plotting room and the Chemical warfare room.



Below a visitor is chatting with a member while looking at the plotting board.



The gun platform stayed busy throughout the day. Below T-5 Morrison and SGT Cusano are chatting with visitors as they take turns traversing the gun and elevating the gun barrel.



One of the most significant issues for the day was the weather - it was COLD out as can be seen by all the ice hanging off the side of the Battery service area.



Below is the M1904 telescopic sight on the M1904 sight cradle. This was one of our recent restorations. The sight and cradle are fully functional.



Below is a large container ship exiting New York harbor as seen through the M1904 telescopic sight.



SGT Meiselman is smiling and having a great time chatting with visitors in the plotting room.



The photo below of LTC Welch, T-4 Bujdos, T-5 Morrison, T-5 Antonucci, SGT Cusano, SGT Meiselman and T-4 Tunison was taken towards the end of the day just before we began closing activities on the Battery.



While Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck was open, another contingent of AGFA members was busy at History House. Below RCT Miller is playing Christmas carols on a 1942 US Army field organ.



In the room next to RCT Miller was a family learning how to make 1940s era paper ornaments. AGFA member Liz Bukowski-Weiselman, center, assisted that programming.





On the left RCT Miller gets a cup of hot Cider and on the right NPS Ranger Guarino and CPT(CH) Uhler chat in the entrance foyer.



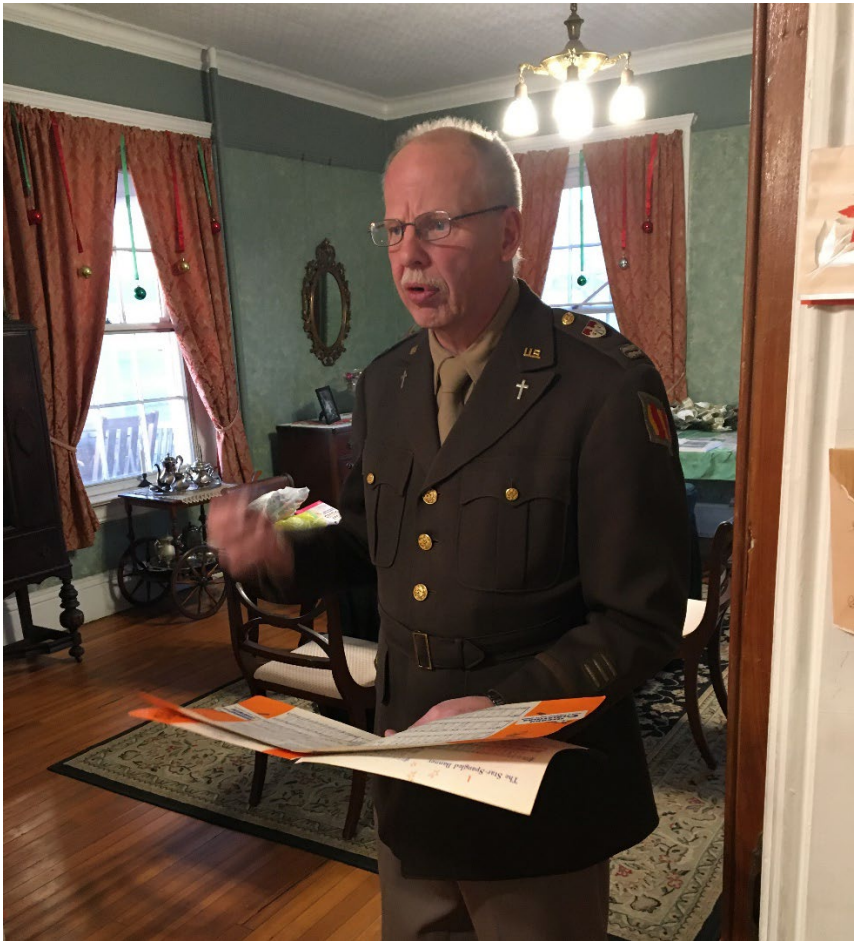
Below RCT Miller takes a break from playing the Field Organ in the living room next to the Christmas tree.



During the day there were several sessions of caroling. Below 2LT Cusano sings from a WWII caroling book as RCT Miller plays the organ.



Below CPT(CH) Uhler joins in the caroling.



At the end of the day on Saturday, we all met for our dinner at the Mule Barn Tavern (<https://www.mulebarntavern.com/>). As always, the food was superior!



The team ate on the second floor - and we could not help but to take our group picture with the classic "Leg Lamp" in the window!!!



The Mule Barn was very festively decorated - the beauty was breathtaking!



After dinner we gathered in the dining area of Bldg #102 to chat, enjoy each other's company and read old magazines!



On Sunday morning it was cold - below CPT(Dr) Cusano and 2LT Gonzalez stand in the dining area entrance, prepared to head over to History House.



Once at History House, the organizing began. Below CPT(Dr.) Cusano, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse chat with NPS Ranger Cox on the key preparations for the day.



On the front porch of History House we had set up an M1910A1 azimuth instrument for the public to experience. Below T-4 Bujdos is looking through the instrument.



Our visitors really enjoyed looking through the M1910A1 - below two visitors take turns with the instrument, which was focused looking over the Raritan Bay.



On both days we prepared Hot Apple Cider for our visitors on an outstanding “retro” propane stove.



Below 2LT Gonzalez and Ranger Guarino chat about the 1918 optical training device on the table and how the device is used to help soldiers understand telescopes.



Below T-4 Bujdos and CPT(CH) Uhler chat near the front door.



In the kitchen we had a lot of visitors. The NPS Ranger team was well represented - below Ranger Cox is chatting with a visitor.





The second floor of the house was a busy place. CPT(Dr.) Cusano chats with visitors in the center hall space.



Below is one of the "children's rooms" upstairs in History House.



Below is a look at the master bedroom in History House.



There were several sessions of caroling during the day - below RCT Miller plays the organ as 2LT Gonzalez and visitors sing along out of a WWII hymnal that has Christmas Carols.



As the day continued, 2LT Gonzalez worked on several optical instruments. This was a great time for the public to ask questions about optical instruments and how they are maintained.



Below a pair of visitors ask about maintaining and adjusting optical instruments and how we use them at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck.



The day was busy and sometimes one just has to take a quick break. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse takes a seat on the landing area between the first and second floors.



Looking down from the landing one sees CPT(CH) Uhler and CPT(Dr.) Cusano.



Throughout the day, children and their parents participated in the NPS activity to learn how to make paper Christmas ornaments as was done in the 1940s.



Looking out the window behind the ornament event table one sees several children experiencing the M1910A1 Azimuth instrument.



Below CPT(Ch) Uhler, Ranger Turner and T-4 Bujdos chat in the entrance to the dining room.



2LT Gonzalez continues his work as RCT Miller asks questions and learns about the construction and interior items in the optical fire control instruments.



The photo below is the AGFA team on Sunday towards the end of the day in the living room in front of the Christmas Tree.



After we closed the house for the weekend, we took some of our key items such as the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument back to Battery Peck. Below CPT(Dr.) Cusano, 2LT Gonzalez, LTC Welch and T-4 Bujdos are in the plotting room Sunday evening.



After everything was returned to the Battery, we went back to the Mule Barn Tavern for dinner. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and T-5 Morrison are awaiting dinner.



The beauty of the decorations inside the Mule Barn were quite astounding and made the evening warm and inviting.



Another Fort Hancock 1943 Christmas weekend has come to an end and we look forward to seeing everyone in 2025. 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 <http://armygroundforces.org>