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# Andersonville National Historic Site

## Living History Program

### Andersonville Prison (Camp Sumter) Fact Sheet

This material is intended to provide a general overview to the operation, history, and context of the Andersonville Prison, officially designated Camp Sumter. Please use this fact sheet to familiarize yourself with the story, but we strongly encourage that living history volunteers increase their knowledge by reading some of the sources listed in the "Further Reading" section of the event participant manual.

- 1) Reasons that Andersonville Prison (Camp Sumter) was built.
  - a) Alleviate the over-crowded conditions at prisons in Virginia.
    - i) Richmond.
    - ii) Belle Isle.
    - iii) Libby.
    - iv) Danville.
  - b) To move the prisoners as far away from the fighting on the front.
    - i) Decreases the chance of an escape attempt by the prison masses.
  - c) To move the prisoners from the larger civilian populace.
    - i) Decreases the economic drain on the civilian resources.
      - (1) Food.
      - (2) Medicine.
      - (3) Materiel.
- 2) 2.) Reasons this site was selected.
  - a) Remoteness.
    - i) This area was open farmland and virgin forests and was far from both the battlefields (of Virginia and Georgia) and the larger civilian population centers at the time the prison was constructed.
  - b) Proximity to the railroad.
    - i) The Anderson[ville] Depot is less than 1 / 2 mile to the west of the prison site.
    - ii) Easy to transport large numbers of prisoners to the prison.
  - c) Building materials.
    - i) This area was covered with virgin forests with several lumber mills in business, therefore there were an abundance of natural raw materials available to build the prison stockade and barracks.

- ii) However, because the hospitals and railroads paid more for lumber than the Army, most of the available lumber was shipped elsewhere. As a result only two feeble attempts were made to build barracks for the prisoners.
- d) Water.
  - i) There are several streams and rivers in the area so water was available. The specific site chosen has a stream that flows through the center of the prison stockade.
  - ii) However, time would prove that this stream was woefully inadequate.
- e) Food.
  - i) This area was considered to be the Deep South's "bread-basket."
  - ii) Numerous plantations and farms in the area growing grain crops such as corn.
  - iii) Florida was an important source for cattle.
- 3) Prison construction.
  - a) The prison was originally intended to confine 6000 – 8000 prisoners, with 10,000 being the maximum.
  - b) Clear-cut the forest, leaving only 2 trees standing in the Southwest corner of the stockade.
  - c) The prison walls were built in two "phases."
    - i) "Phase 1."
      - (1) Construction began the first week of January 1864.
      - (2) Construction completed March 18, 1864.
      - (3) Constructed with slave labor, impressed from plantations as far away as Savannah.
      - (4) Constructed of log walls.
      - (5) Walls are approximately 15 feet high.
      - (6) Logs are 19-20 feet long.
      - (7) Hewn on all four sides.
      - (8) Placed on end with 5 feet buried in a trench and then back-filled.
      - (9) Enclosed approximately 16 and 1/2 acres.
        - (a) 1010 feet long. (North to South)
        - (b) 779 wide. (East to West)
    - ii) "Phase 2." (The 10 acre addition)
      - (1) Construction started in May 1864.
      - (2) Construction completed in June 1864,
      - (3) Opened for use July 1, 1864.
      - (4) Constructed with a combination of impressed slaves and some prisoner labor.
      - (5) Also constructed of log walls.
      - (6) Walls are approximately 15 feet high.
      - (7) Logs are 19-20 feet long.
      - (8) Are not hewn at all.
      - (9) Placed on end with 5 feet buried in a trench and then back-filled.
      - (10) Enclosed an additional 10 acres.
    - iii) Completed prison is shaped like a parallelogram.
      - (1) Enclosed a total of 26 and 1/2 acres.
        - (a) 1520 long. (North to South)
        - (b) 779 feet wide. (East to West)

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- iv) West wall.
    - (1) Contained 2 gates; one on each side of the stream.
      - (a) North Gate.
      - (b) South Gate.
    - v) Pigeon Roosts (Guard Towers) - completed prison with 10 acre addition.
      - (1) Every 90 feet.
      - (2) 52 total.
    - vi) Additional structures inside and outside the prison walls.
      - (1) Inside.
        - (a) Bridge across Stockade Branch
        - (b) Sutler's shack.
        - (c) "Hospital" tents.
        - (d) 2 incomplete barracks.
      - (2) Outside.
        - (a) Bakehouse
        - (b) Cookhouse
        - (c) Deadhouse
  - 4) Prison operation.
    - a) Period of operation.
      - i) Andersonville Prison was in operation only 14 months.
      - ii) Approximately from February 25, 1864 through May 5, 1865.
    - b) First prisoners arrived February 25, 1864 from Belle Island in the James River (Richmond Virginia).
      - i) Do not know the exact date the prison was closed. Cavalry from General Wilson's command arrived May 7, 1865 to find the gates of the prison swung open with only the sick that could not be removed in the hospital and a few former prisoners that stayed behind to take care of them.
    - c) Rations were to be issued once daily, usually starting immediately after the morning roll call. (Bearrs' report - NPS)
    - d) Sick call was made after the morning roll call. (Bearrs' report - NPS)
    - e) Police details. (Bearrs' report - NPS)
      - i) 2 details of 25 men each were assigned daily to "police" the prison and clean up the prisoner waste. Anything that was burnable was used as fuel. Other waste was dumped into Stockade Branch.
    - f) Mason's Tent. (Bearrs' report - NPS)
      - i) Erected by the prisoners.
    - g) Barber Shops. (Bearrs' report - NPS)
      - i) Established by the prisoners, to make money or trade for food.
    - h) Other businesses such as tailors were established.
      - i) The sale of fresh drinking water from the wells that Wirz authorized the prisoners to dig was also a good business.
  - 5) Prisoner population.
    - a) Total.
      - i) Approximately 45,000 total prisoners for the 14 month period of operation.
      - ii) Approximately 400 United States Colored Troops (USCT).

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- (1) Most were captured at the Battle of Olustee (Ocean Pond), Florida.
  - (2) Many USCT from Major Archibald Bogle's 1<sup>st</sup> NC Infantry were camped in the Southwest corner of the prison, near the Mason's Tent. (Bears' Report - NPS)
- b) Peak population.
- i) Approximately 33,000 prisoners.
  - ii) August 1864.
- 6) Deaths.
- a) Total.
- i) 12,920
  - ii) 29% death rate.
  - iii) Includes the 6 Raiders that were tried and hanged by the prisoners.
- b) Peak number of deaths in one month.
- i) Approximately 3000.
    - (1) Averaged 100 per day.
    - (2) Occurred in August 1864.
- c) Causes.
- i) Poor diet.
    - (1) Each prisoner was supposed to get the same ration as that stipulated by regulation for the soldier in the field.
      - (a) Rations were issued once each day.
      - (b) Prisoners were organized into detachments of 270 men, with 90 men to a squad and then into messes that each contained 30 men.
      - (c) A sergeant was in charge of each mess who would draw his mess's rations from the squad leader who had drawn the daily ration for his squad.
      - (d) This was the fairest method of seeing that each prisoner received his ration of food.
      - (e) In August, at the prison's worst time, the average daily ration was a double handful of course ground cornmeal and about 3-4 ounces of salt beef or salt pork, supplemented with about 1 ounce of beans.
      - (f) The meal was unbolted (not sifted) and frequently included the husk, cob, dirt, and etc.
      - (g) The meat was usually spoiled.
    - (2) Reasons for poor diet.
      - (a) Large numbers of prisoners.
      - (b) Inadequate numbers of cooking utensils.
      - (c) Inadequate stockpile of food in local commissary.
      - (d) Intended to keep 3 days worth of rations on hand.
        - (i) Had to requisition food from depot in Columbus GA.
        - (ii) Could not fulfill intention because blockade was keeping imports out and the majority of the food was being sent to the battlefields to feed the soldiers.
  - ii) Exposure to the elements.
    - (1) Except for two attempts at building barracks, the Confederates provided no shelters for the prisoners.
    - (2) The prisoners were left up to their own ingenuity to make their shelters.
    - (3) Shelters were called shebangs and were made from whatever the prisoner had on his body or could beg, borrow or steal.

- (a) Tent halves.
  - (b) Blankets.
  - (c) Gum-blankets.
  - (d) Shirts.
  - (e) Mud bricks.
  - (f) Pine boughs.
  - (g) Rough-cut boards (remains from when the logs were hewn).
  - (h) Caves dug into the hillside.
- iii) Insufficient quantities of firewood.
- (a) Each 270 man detachment was issued 3 pieces of wood, 4 feet long x 2 inches in diameter, every 3 days. (L.S. Pond, 2<sup>nd</sup> NY Heavy Artillery - Wirz Trial testimony.)
  - (b) Wirz reported that 10 cords per day were issued to be divided equally among the detachments. (Wirz to Winder 24 Sept 1864, O.R. Series II, Vol 7, p 759)
  - (c) No firewood was gathered or issued for a 6 week period after the stockade was expanded by 10 acres in July.
  - (d) It was believed that the limbs and pieces of lumber left over after the construction of the new North wall and extension, along with the logs left standing from the old North wall would suffice for that time.
- iv) Inadequate source of and polluted water.
- (1) One small stream (Stockade Branch) was the main source of supply.
    - (a) Approximately 4 feet wide and knee deep.
    - (b) Sluggish flowing through a swamp.
    - (c) Used for bathing, cleaning, cooking, drinking, and the sinks.
  - (2) Providence Spring.
    - (a) Located on north side of Stockade Branch at the west wall between the deadline and the wall.
    - (b) The spring erupted about August 10<sup>th</sup> 1864 during a severe downpour and after several lay-ministers had been praying for relief from a drought.
    - (c) Prisoners obtained permission to dig a channel so that they could safely get to the water.
  - (3) Wells.
    - (a) After the new section of the prison (the 10 acre addition) was opened, Captain Wirz did authorize the prisoners in that area to dig wells.
    - (b) The National Park Service discovered approximately 85 holes (wells or tunnels) when the park was established.
    - (c) Do not know for sure which hole was a well or which hole was a tunnel.
- v) Unsanitary conditions.
- (1) Due to over-crowded condition of the prison.
  - (2) No control over haphazard construction of shebangs.
  - (3) No initiative exhibited by the prisoners to keep the area clean.
  - (4) Many of the sick prisoners would not go to the sinks. Filth piled up next to shebangs.
  - (5) Widespread disease such as bronchitis, diarrhea, dysentery, pneumonia, scurvy and smallpox all took their toll.
- vi) Lack of adequate medicines.

- (1) Due to blockade of Southern ports.
  - (2) Medicines confiscated as contraband of war.
  - (3) Any available medicines were sent to the battlefields for the soldiers.
- vii) Raiders.
- (1) The "Raiders" were gangs of prisoners that preyed upon their fellow prisoners.
  - (2) Some of the gang names.
    - (a) Pug-Uglies.
    - (b) Mosby's Raiders.
  - (3) Transferred in with the other prisoners. Most certainly were "raiding" at the other prisons also.
  - (4) Numbers grew as prison population grew.
    - (a) Exact number unknown. Various reported estimates range from a couple hundred to between 400 and 600.
  - (5) Organized very well.
  - (6) With the authorization of Captain Wirz, approximately 100-200 Raiders were arrested and removed from the prison stockade by the "regulators" with the help of the guards, and were tried in a prisoner court for their transgressions.
  - (7) Captain Wirz provided law books for reference and ledgers to keep a record of the proceedings.
  - (8) Many of those found guilty were made to run through the gauntlet and were beaten. Others were forced to wear the ball and chain and still others were put into the stocks or were bucked and gagged.
  - (9) Six (6) of the gang leaders were tried in a prisoner court for murder.
    - (a) Willie Collins.
      - (i) 88<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry.
      - (ii) Reportedly born in England 1835.
      - (iii) Known As "Mosby."
      - (iv) Leader of Collin's Raiders A.K.A. "Mosby's Raiders."
      - (v) His rope broke while being hanged.
      - (vi) Pleaded for his life saying it was God's intervention that the rope broke and that he should be spared.
      - (vii) Prisoners ignored his pleas and hanged him a second time.
    - (b) Charles Curtis.
      - (i) 5<sup>th</sup> Rhode Island Artillery
      - (ii) Leader of the Curtis' Raiders
      - (iii) Tried to escape the hanging by running into the swamp along Stockade Branch.
      - (iv) Was recaptured by the prisoners and hanged with the rest of the gang leaders.
    - (c) Andrew Munn (Muir?).
      - (i) United States Navy
    - (d) Pat Delaney.
      - (i) 83<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry
    - (e) John Sullivan (Rickson?).
      - (i) 76<sup>th</sup> (79<sup>th</sup> ?) New York Infantry, Company F
      - (ii) From Buffalo NY

- (iii) Willie Collins' henchman.
  - (f) John Sarsfield.
    - (i) 144<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry
- (10) The jury was made up of 24 "fresh fish" sergeants who had no known ties to the raiders.
- (11) Raiders were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.
  - (a) The scaffold was built inside the prison walls, from lumber found within the prison.
  - (b) The 6 gang leaders were hanged July 11, 1864.
  - (c) Are buried in Andersonville National Cemetery, but are located separate from the other graves.
- 7) Escape.
  - a) 329 successful escapes.
    - i) A successful escape is when the prisoner escapes from the prison and then makes it all the way back to Union lines.
    - ii) Most were made by men, who were already outside the wall on some sort of a detail or parole, and then either bribed the guard or had one of his friends distract the guards so he could escape off into the woods.
      - (1) 1 man escaped by tunneling out. (Wirz to Chandler 1 Aug 1864, O.R. Series II, Vol 7, p 522)
- 8) Typical punishment for escape.
  - a) Ball and chain. (Wirz's Jewelry)
    - i) One man chained to a 32 pound ball.
      - (1) Sometimes used for first time offenders.
      - (2) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days, weeks, months, and even duration of imprisonment.
    - ii) Two men chained together to a 64 pound ball.
      - (1) Sometimes used for first time offenders.
      - (2) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days, weeks, months, and even duration of imprisonment.
    - iii) 12 men chain-ganged together
      - (1) Sometimes used for repeat offenders.
      - (2) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days, weeks, months, and even duration of imprisonment.
  - b) Stocks
    - i) Foot/leg.
      - (1) Prisoner sits (or lies) on the ground with his legs between two boards and his feet suspended 12 inches above the ground.
      - (2) Sometimes used for repeat offenders.
      - (3) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days.
  - c) Spread-eagle.
    - i) A square frame used to suspend the man by his wrists so that he is standing with his arms and legs spread apart that also has a neck brace to keep both his body and head upright to prevent him from falling asleep.
    - ii) Sometimes used for repeat offenders.
    - iii) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days.
  - d) Bucking and gagging.

- i) A prisoner is placed into a sitting position with his knees drawn up.
  - ii) A stick is then run behind his knees and his arms are then tied so that they are wrapped around his knees with the stick running in front of his elbows.
  - iii) A stick is then used as a gag.
  - iv) Sometimes used for repeat offenders.
  - v) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days.
- e) "Riding the rail."
- i) Sitting straddle legged on a rail suspended above the ground so that your feet did not touch the ground.
  - ii) Sometimes used for repeat offenders.
  - iii) Length of time for punishment varied from a few hours to a few days.
- 9) Guards
- a) Peak population.
    - i) August 1864.
    - ii) Approximately 3600.
  - b) Required approximately 870 men to guard the prison and surrounding area each 24-hour period of three 8 hour shifts.
    - i) 52 pigeon roosts.
    - ii) North and South gates.
    - iii) Earthworks.
    - iv) Railroads.
    - v) Bridges.
    - vi) Surrounding area out to one mile.
  - c) Suffered from many of the same problems as the prisoners.
    - i) Disease.
    - ii) Measles
    - iii) Dysentery
    - iv) Typhoid
    - v) Smallpox
    - vi) Diarrhea
    - vii) Poor diet.
  - d) Received the same food as the prisoners from the same commissary but could be supplemented with fresh vegetables from the town.
  - e) Guard death rates.
    - i) *Among the ill*, the death rate ran about the same as that of the prisoners.
    - ii) Overall, 202 guards died. (approximately 6.5%).
    - iii) Initially buried in a cemetery near the prisoners.
    - iv) Later, all were disinterred with 86 of the bodies being shipped home.
    - v) 116 guards were re-interred in Oak Grove Cemetery in Americus GA.
  - f) Units.
    - i) 55<sup>th</sup> Georgia Infantry.
      - (1) First guards at Andersonville.
      - (2) Most of the regiment had been captured at Cumberland Gap.

- (3) Considered too small a force to be effective, the survivors were sent to Andersonville to act as guards and to refill their ranks.
  - (4) The regiment was divided into two forces with some remaining at Andersonville and some being sent to the Army of Tennessee to fight against Sherman in his Atlanta Campaign about May 15, 1864.
  - (5) The guards remaining at Andersonville were then sent to Millen GA when the bulk of the prisoners were transferred to that and other prisons in September/October/November 1864.
- ii) 56<sup>th</sup> Georgia Unfantry
  - iii) 57<sup>th</sup> Georgia Infantry
  - iv) 26<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry.
    - (1) Raised in northern Alabama
    - (2) Tuscumbia and surrounding area.
    - (3) Cycled back and forth between Richmond and Andersonville while guarding and delivering the first groups of prisoners transferred from Belle Isle to Andersonville in February and early March 1864.
    - (4) Became post guards along with the 55<sup>th</sup> GA, first week in March 1864.
    - (5) Transferred to Army of Tennessee, May 15 1864 to fight Sherman during his Atlanta Campaign.
  - v) Georgia Reserves
    - (1) Mainly old men over the age of 43 and young boys under the age of 18 previously exempted from military duty.
    - (2) Started arriving by regiment in late March/early April 1864 and
    - (3) Completely relieved the 26<sup>th</sup> AL and portions of the 55<sup>th</sup> GA Infantry as guards May 15, 1864.
      - (a) 1<sup>st</sup> GA Reserves (Fannins Brigade)
        - (i) Raised in the Atlanta area.
      - (b) 2<sup>nd</sup> GA Reserves.
        - (i) Also raised mainly in the Atlanta GA area.
      - (c) 3<sup>rd</sup> GA Reserves.
        - (i) Raised mainly in the Macon GA area.
      - (d) 4<sup>th</sup> GA Reserves.
        - (i) Raised mainly from the Albany GA area.
      - (e) Furlow's Battalion.
  - vi) Leon Florida Light Artillery.
    - (1) Raised in NW Florida.
    - (2) Sent to Andersonville from Milton FLA.
  - vii) Dogs.
    - (1) One of the main reasons there were so few successful escapes (Per This Was Andersonville, Ovid Futch, page 329).
    - (2) Two packs kept in two different kennels.
      - (a) First pack owned by Benjamin Harris.
        - (i) A local man that lived about 5 miles from the prison.
      - (b) The second pack owned by Sgt. Edward C. Turner, 1<sup>st</sup> GA Reserves. (Bearrs' report - NPS)

## 10) Key people at Andersonville.

- a) Alexander Persons, Col. C.S.A.
  - i) Commander 55<sup>th</sup> Ga. Infantry.
  - ii) Second Post commander, from February 25, 1864 to June 17, 1864.
- b) Captain Heinrich Wirz.
  - i) Swiss immigrant.
  - ii) Came to America in 1849.
  - iii) Enlisted in 4<sup>th</sup> Louisiana Infantry.
  - iv) Enlisted June 16, 1861.
  - v) Promoted to Sergeant, by spring 1862.
  
  - vi) Promoted to Captain, June 12, 1862.
  - vii) Ordered to Andersonville March 1864.
  - viii) Commandant of Prison Stockade from April 1864 until end of war, April 1865.
    - (1) Did not have direct control over commissary operations or the troops assigned to the post.
    - (2) Had to requisition what he needed (guards, rations for the prisoners, etc.) from other commands stationed at Camp Sumter.
  - ix) The only man tried, convicted, and executed for war crimes committed during the Civil War.
    - (1) Arrested May 5, 1865
    - (2) Hanged November 10, 1865.
- c) General John H. Winder
  - i) In charge of all Confederate military prisons east of the Mississippi River.
  - ii) Third Post commander (relieved Persons), from June 17, 1864 until October 9, 1864.
  - iii) Died February 6, 1865 while inspecting prison at Florence South Carolina.
- d) Father Peter Whelan.
  - i) Catholic priest from Savannah.
  - ii) Spent many weeks (May 1864 through September 1864) at Andersonville administering to the spiritual needs of the prisoners.
- e) Father William Hamilton.
  - i) Catholic priest from Macon.
  - ii) Along with Father Whelan, also spent many weeks (May, 1864 through September, 1864) at Andersonville.
- f) Colonel George C. Gibbs.
  - i) Fourth commandant of the post (Camp Sumter).
    - (1) October 9, 1864 until end of war.
  - ii) Departed Andersonville on or about April 31, 1865 and went home (Baldwin Florida).
  - iii) Returned to Andersonville May 3, 1865 and paroled the few remaining prisoners.
- g) Captain Richard B. Winder.
  - i) Nephew of General John H. Winder.
  - ii) In charge of prison construction.
  - iii) First Prison Quartermaster.
- h) Captain J. H. Wright
  - i) Second Post Quartermaster.
  - ii) Took over responsibility from Captain Winder September 30, 1864.

- i) Captain W. Sidney Winder.
  - i) Son of General John H. Winder.
  - ii) Selected site for prison.
  - iii) First Post and Prison Commandant.
    - (1) During construction of prison, January 1864 until February 26, 1864.
- j) Dr. Isiah White.
  - i) Chief surgeon.
- k) Dr. R. Randolph Stevenson.
  - i) Strongly criticized the hospital conditions at Andersonville.
- l) Surgeon Joseph Jones.
  - i) Born in Liberty County Georgia, 1833
  - ii) Received M.D degree from the University of Pennsylvania.
  - iii) Taught at Savannah Medical College and the University of Georgia.
  - iv) Professor of medical chemistry at Georgia Medical College in Augusta at the start of the war.
  - v) In August 1864, Jones convinced C.S.A. Surgeon General Moore to allow him to go to Andersonville to “institute an extended investigation upon the causes, pathology, and treatment” of the diseases affecting the prisoners confined there.
  - vi) Spent about 3 weeks in September 1864 at Andersonville and wrote a scathing report about the deplorable hospital conditions.
- m) Captain James W. Armstrong.
  - i) Post Commissary Officer.
  - ii) Took over responsibility from Captain Winder February 27, 1864.

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