



COUNCIL ON AMERICA'S MILITARY PAST - U.S.A.

PRESERVING, INTERPRETING AND SHARING OUR MILITARY HERITAGE

presents

The Persistent Pandemic Preservationist October, 2020

Editor's Note:

Welcome! This is Volume 1, Number 3 of a monthly newsletter featuring historic sites across the country responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The intent is to stay in touch with old and new members, and to share information that is interesting and useful, in the hope that we will create a community of practice among those preserving the nation's military past. Each issue will focus on one or more sites. The original Persistent Preservationist was an excellent newsletter produced by CAMP member Col. Hal Youmans, USA (Ret).

This issue features Ft. Concho, a Texas site helmed by longtime CAMP member Bob Bluthardt. We're also following up on the authors' query by Mary Ellen Cortellini and Karen Scanlon relating to their work at Ft. Rosecrans on a lovely promontory overlooking San Diego Bay. They asked for help from our community, and they received it!

Our thanks to the authors!

Stay safe, everyone! — Nick Reynolds, Editor.

"It isn't as bad as it sounds." A Classic Fort Copes with the Pandemic

By Robert F. Bluthardt, Site Manager

Much like a Texas "blue norther," the COVID crisis was seen from afar, clear but distant on the horizon. And just like those classic cold fronts, it hit Ft. Concho in downtown San Angelo, Texas hard, fast, and with some long-term effects.

We had such great plans for 2020! Thanks to a cooperative effort with our local convention and visitors bureau, we submitted our paperwork to True West Magazine. Our efforts were rewarded when the publication declared San Angelo THE Top Western Town in the whole U. S. What a line-up of programs, tours, events, displays, projects, and more we had planned! One by one, alas, they fell by the wayside as COVID grew and grasped the state and wouldn't let go.

After mid-March, anything that drew a crowd was not welcomed. Spring Speakers Series, gone; April's Frontier Day and Regional Cavalry Competition, also gone. Say goodbye to all guided tours; special living history training classes for infantry and artillery volunteers were pulled; no events for Armed Forces Day or Memorial Day, though we did fire the artillery hourly for the Fourth of July. A new and exciting event, the Cowboy Way Jubilee, was postponed in April and then cancelled two months later. Summer children's workshops also disappeared and indeed we disappeared for all of April when we shut down entirely. Staff members hid in their buildings but no display buildings were open. It didn't matter anyway because no one was visiting! All conventions cancelled, we lost the meeting of state newspaper editors, a classic car show, and a state archaeology society workshop, just to name a few. And our attendance and income levels sank as we lost dozens of building rentals plus all private parties, weddings, and events evaporated for several months.

So, what did we do? Well, there's an old saying in the museum business that "if it weren't for the visitors, we could get a lot of work done." We concentrated on non-guest work: cataloguing and accessioning, research, dozens of deferred pesky maintenance projects, and additions to our Facebook page and web site. And, believe it or not, canceling events is hard work too. We had to stay in constant contact with volunteers, board members, and upper management at City Hall (we are owned and operated by the City of San Angelo) as each event was reviewed, evaluated, and pulled.

We did manage to hold our annual American Plains Artists Show and by summer time travel had increased some and we drew guests from 25 states and 50 Texas communities. Our Buffalo Soldier 154th anniversary event on July 28 drew a small crowd and we made it rain—always a welcome event in West Texas. General visitation has slowly improved with over 1000 guests in July and August, a fraction of our usual numbers. More encouraging is the steady visitation of distant guests as we have seen visitors from 25 states these past three months. People are traveling, just not enough of them!

Financially, as Mark Twain once said of Wagner's music, "It isn't as bad as it sounds." This site and our city management run a conservative shop; we have held two positions unfilled while existing staff members kindly picked up a few extra duties here and there. Those cost savings combined with decreased expenses caused by a slower events and rental program may keep us close to a balanced budget for the fiscal year. We also received a small but timely grant for operations and another for equipment. Thanks to a fund balance we maintain and grow in the good years, we have a modest safety net. The Texas oil bust and the national stock market crash in the spring followed by three major wind/hail/rain storms did make me recall Queen Elizabeth's naming 1992 her "Annus Horribilis" (on account of family scandal and castle fire) but we remain healthy, engaged, and employed.



Fort Concho volunteer Bob Broene briefs guests in the site Visitor Center about late 19th century weaponry. Everyone has on a mask! *Courtesy Bob Bluthardt.*

After all, Fort Concho is a survivor of the Indian Wars, having served the region from 1867 to 1889 and then passing into civilian occupancy and adaptation to a residential and light industry area. Restoration efforts date to the late 1920s, ranking it among the oldest continued preservation projects in the nation. It has been locally managed and funded for all of its time as a public museum and historic site since the early 1930s. Like the city it founded, it has endured worse and looks forward to better days. We plan to stay the course, not only to honor those soldiers of old but for the generations of local citizens who have spent much time, talent, and treasure in restoring the place and making it a top civic asset.

CAMPers Respond to Research Query

Cheers to members of CAMP for the wonderful response to our request for interior photos of the historical Post Exchange at Fort Rosecrans, San Diego! Though no photos have surfaced, Norm, Quentin, and Matt sent us some gems from other, similar post exchanges. Members also sent other useful items, including a list of Army Standard Plan #175 and #176, official OQM records for several Army posts of the early 1900s similar to "ours." These documents give us a useful image of the interior workings of our 1909 Post Exchange.

Sports equipment was removed, we believe, in a 1950s partial renovation and the building employed otherwise. After standing empty and forlorn for the past 20 or so years, our handsome red brick structure has risen to grandeur once again, to serve the Security Department at what has been Naval Base Point Loma since June 1959.

Thank you, CAMP historians, for the overwhelming wealth of information you have forwarded to us!

With appreciation, Mary Ellen Cortellini and Karen Scanlon, San Diego



Fort Rosecrans 1904 Barracks. *Library of Congress.*