



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

PRESERVING, INTERPRETING AND SHARING OUR MILITARY HERITAGE

presents

The Persistent Preservationist August 2023

Editor's Note:

Welcome! This is Number 16 of an occasional newsletter featuring historic sites across the country responding to various challenges. 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 esteemed CAMP member Col. Hal Youmans, USA (Ret). This issue features a brief article by your editor.

*Thanks to all who helped out, and a tip of the hat to the fort's dedicated volunteers!
— Nick Reynolds*

For the Love of a Fort; A Few Thoughts on What Makes for Good Preservation

Last summer we spent a couple of weeks in Newport, RI where our aging dog Nemo led my wife Becky and me on a few walks around one of America's most important coastal forts. Ft. Adams was built to guard the main approach from the Atlantic Ocean to one of the best deep-water anchorages in the North East. As you can see from the photos below, it is a massive installation on a rocky peninsula, looking out over Narragansett Bay in one direction and Newport Harbor in the other. We also toured the inside of the fort and spoke to the president of the trust that cares for the fort, Chris Zeeman. He turns out to be a member of Coast Defense Study Group (CDSG) who is quite familiar with CAMP. Since I learned that the fort is now approaching its 200th anniversary, I decided to offer these reflections as it prepares for the next 200 years.

By way of comparison Chris named two other significant forts that guard harbors on the east coast, Ft. McHenry in Baltimore and Ft. Sumter in Charleston. Adams is larger by far than either McHenry or Sumter; each could fit inside Adams, with plenty of room to spare. But Adams was never tested in combat, while McHenry and Sumter were themselves wartime flashpoints that took on almost mythic proportions. For that reason, they now belong to National Park Service, backed by the resources of the Federal Government. Built between 1824 and 1857, garrisoned through World War II but never attacked, Adams is surrounded by a RI state park, supported by the state to the tune of about \$300,000 per year, and run by the trust. The various groups cooperate to keep the fort going.

What Adams lacks in resources it makes up in the dedication of people like Chris. Chris has been volunteering at the fort for over two decades and devotes much of his free time to its service, driving up from his home in Connecticut. Guided by a master plan written in 2010 to restore the fort in phases as funds become available, the results have been nothing short of spectacular. Hard

physical labor, mostly by volunteers, has worked wonders, as these before and after pictures show. Basically, you get out there and work with your hands – perhaps clearing brush or repointing miles of masonry. Then you maintain what you uncover so that it will attract visitors, who may come on a tour, spend a night, or rent the site for a special occasion. Perhaps the most important takeaway from our talk is that if you want to preserve a site, it takes this kind of dedication as much or more than money.

A few of the paraphrased interview highlights:

Q. What do you like best about the fort?

A. The redoubts [basically the quirky little forts within or just outside the fort proper that help to guard the installation].

Q. What gives you the most satisfaction?

A. Resurrecting parts of the fort and maintaining them as an accessible part of the community that citizens can enjoy. [The fort is not isolated; it is integral to the life of Newport. Not only is it the site of weddings and concerts, it is adjacent to a military housing development as well as a sailing center. Not least is the so-called Eisenhower House, the commandant's mansion where President Eisenhower once spent the summer.]

Q. How did the fort fare during the pandemic?

A. It was very quiet. The trust had to lay people off, but Federal PPP funding helped, and thankfully the fort and the park have more than bounced back. The future looks bright.

The trust has a wonderful website at fortadams.org.



Nemo leads the way past the fort (photo courtesy Becky Reynolds).



The advanced redoubt in 2009 and 2020, a monumental task accomplished (photos courtesy Chris Zeeman).

CAMP is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization whose members are interested in the identification, restoration, preservation, and memorialization of old military installations as well as their history and traditions. All persons sharing these interests are invited to join. CAMP publishes an academic journal (The Journal of America's Military Past) and a newsletter on recent developments in historic preservation (Headquarters Heliogram), and holds an annual conference. Find out more at: www.campjamp.org.