The Florence Stockade Project

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The Florence Stockade Project

By Jonathan M. Leader

The Office of the State Archaeologist is assisting the Florence Historical Society and the City of Florence, South Carolina in assessing and delineating the portion of the Civil War-era Florence Stockade located on city property. Originally scheduled for development as a ball park and picnic area, the site may eventually have interpretive displays, a small museum, and reconstruction of a portion of the stockade palisade wall and main gate. The archaeology at the site has focused on identifying the gross architectural features of the moat, earthen berm, palisade wall, "deadline," main gate, prison hospital, and guard house. Funded, supported, and initiated by the Florence Historical Society, this work has been immeasurably enhanced by the actions of local and University volunteers, the City of Florence staff, the Florence Historical Commission, the Friends of the Florence Stockade, and the Columbia office of the SCIAA Underwater Archaeology Division.

The Florence Stockade (38FL2) holds an important place in South Carolina’s history. Numerous articles, books, and monographs cover the State’s involvement in the politics, economy, military actions, and social life during the Civil War. Far fewer documents exist to chronicle the realities of management and life in the War’s prisoner-of-war camps. It is a sad fact that these institutions have been neglected in serious research.

The decision to erect a stockade at Florence was based upon several factors. Sherman’s advance through Georgia made it necessary for a new location to be found to receive ill prisoners to the camp, the overcrowded conditions, the general breakdown in supply lines, the lack of supplies in the immediate area, and the lack of competent management made the Florence Stockade a nightmare for the prisoners kept there.

The Florence Stockade operated from September 12, 1864 to no later than February 22, 1865. It was formally recorded as disbanded in a Confederate dispatch of March 10, 1865. During its operation, between 15,000 and 18,000 Union soldiers passed through the prison. Better than 2,300 prisoners died there, the victims of disease, malnutrition, exposure, and, to a lesser extent, random acts of brutality. The dead were buried in two locations. The first burial ground was outside the Stockade and dates to the building and earliest occupation of the camp. The second cemetery was located on the nearby Jarrott plantation and became necessary when the number of dead averaged between 20 and 30 a day. In both instances, slit trenches were used for the hasty entombing of the deceased.

The dead from the smaller cemetery were eventually exhumed and re-interred on the Jarrott planta-
Her deception was uncovered after her transfer to the Florence Stockade, where she worked as a nurse in the hospital until she succumbed to disease on January 25, 1865. Thought to be the first woman interred in a national cemetery, she is buried in section d, row 13, surrounded by the now unknown soldiers with whom she served and suffered.

The Confederate guards at the Florence Stockade have been identified by local historians as units raised in Georgia and South Carolina. They included, at different times, elements of the 5th Georgia Infantry, 32nd Georgia Infantry, 55th Georgia Infantry, 2nd South Carolina Artillery, Waccamaw Light Artillery, 1st South Carolina Cavalry, Captain Holman's Company of Reserve Cavalry, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and the 7th Battalion South Carolina Reserves. The conscripted guards apparently shared a common connection with the union prisoners. The letters, diaries, and military dispatches make it very clear that they did not wish to be there either. Life at the Stockade was not pleasant.

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The Florence Stockade was rectangular in shape, spanned a creek, and extended onto the rising land to either side. Its dimensions were roughly 1,400 feet by 725 feet, on an east-west axis, with an off-center gate in the west wall. The stream provided the only drinking water available to prisoners and removed filth from the “sinks.” The creek also passed through the Confederate encampment where it was used first. It is important to remember that the Civil War saw the birth of the Sanitary Commission.

The shape and placement of Confederate prisoner-of-war camps was based on a common plan devised and directed under the supervision of General John H. Winder. The walls of the Florence Stockade were made from rough tree trunks, set securely into the ground, and covered with an earth embankment on the outer side. The height of the wall was approximately 16 feet. The roughly 5-foot-deep trench along the outside of the wall, which resulted from the manufacture of the embankment, was believed sufficient to discourage tunneling. This activity had been a problem at other camps, such as Andersonville, and the Florence Stockade building plan was modified to benefit from the experience. The Confederate guards mounted the embankment and had a clear view of the interior of the camp. Additional control was provided by cannons situated on elevated platforms at the four corners and aimed into the interior of the stockade. The “deadline” at the camp was a combination of a plank placed on posts and a simple plowed furrow, both of which were set back 12 feet from the wall. Any prisoner who crossed this line could be shot without warning.

One unique feature of the Stockade was a sutler’s store located, in one account, in the southeastern corner of the stockade. It apparently had a “window” that opened through the wall into the camp for prisoner use. The union POW’s are reported to have bartered their buttons, personal items, small coins, and scrip for the items available.

After the Civil War, the area was allowed to revert to nature. Eventually the portion of the camp on what is now city property was plowed down, while the eastern portion on the opposite side of the creek was preserved by a private landowner. In 1980, the Stockade was determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places.

GRONAUER LOCK PROJECT
By Jonathan M. Leader

Drawing 2 TIMBER CRIB LOCK

Drawing of timber crib lock similar to the Gronauer Lock. (Courtesy of the Canal Society of Indiana)

After six years of planning, negotiation, and fundraising, the first portion of the Wabash and Erie Canal Lock #2 has arrived at the SCIAA Conservation Facility and is in conservation. The canal lock is better known as the Gronauer lock to the people of New Haven, Indiana, where it was affectionately named after Joseph Gronauer its primary operator. Originally part of a 458-mile canal system that linked the interior of Indiana through Ohio to the Great Lakes, lock #2 is one of only a very few lock structures that survived to the present.

The Wabash and Erie canal system required 73 locks to function. The wooden structure, with beams in excess of 30 feet in length and 3,000 pounds in weight each, was comprised of red oak, white oak, and poplar. In many cases an entire tree was shaped by skilled carpenters and pressed into service. Started in 1838, construction of the canal system was a pivotal economic and historic event in Indiana and national history. Phased out by the 1870’s, the newer railroad companies bought the canal right-of-ways, filled them in, and used them for railroad track beds. It is interesting to note that the first locomotive arrived in 1855 in Indiana on a canal boat. The 50 tons of wood being conserved during the first treatment cycle will take approximately 24 months to preserve. Once done, the wood will be returned to Indiana where it will be rebuilt and become the main exhibit in the new $105 million Indiana State Museum located in Indianapolis. Dr. Leader and Mr. Daniel Bilderback, Conservators, are expected to accompany the materials to Indiana and assist with the exhibit.

Dan Bilderback beginning profile work on stockade wall trench after backhoe excavation and prior to clean up. [Photo by Jonathan Leader]