



# Camp Douglas News

Committed to the Preservation of Chicago History



Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation

Chicago, Illinois

Summer 2014

Volume 5, Issue 2

## Project Phases:

Awareness and Support:  
2010-2014

Site Location and Site  
Planning: 2012-2014

Archaeological Investigation:  
2012-2013-2014

Virtual Camp Douglas: 2013

Construction: 2014-2015

## Scheduled Events

The Camp Douglas Restoration  
Foundation

### Presentations Scheduled

July 27-28-All Day, Sweet En-  
campment, Lombard, IL

September 14-Museum of Grand  
Prairie, Mahomet, IL

November 3-7:00 pm, Oak Lawn  
Public Library, Oak Lawn, IL

### Participation in Shows

September 20-All day, Chicago  
Civil War Show, Wheaton, IL

## Support CDRF

Don't miss the Camp Douglas  
items that are for sale on  
www.Campdouglas.org.

Purchase of these items sup-  
ports the efforts of the Founda-  
tion.

**SHOP TODAY!**

## Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation—Latest News

### May Archaeological Excavation a Success

Over 35 students from De Paul University and other volunteers participated in a second excavation at the John J. Pershing Magnet School, May 16-23. Led by Dr. Michael Gregory, De Paul University, five units were investigated.

Many artifacts were discovered, representing 19th and 20th Century Bronzeville.

While unverified, it is likely that evidence of Camp Douglas was discovered, based on buttons, stoneware and ground texture. Confirmation will be worked on over the next few months by De Paul students and Dr. Gregory.

Again, the Foundation worked with students from the Pershing Magnet School. Fourth grade students participated in a literacy program and visited the site for a briefing by archaeologists.



Results were encouraging enough to warrant further exploration next fall.

### Museum Site

The Foundation is currently negotiating to locate the museum on the site of Camp Douglas.

Definitive discussions are taking place to

participate in a museum campus with other Bronzeville organizations. Hopefully, an announcement will be forthcoming.

Special thanks to the law firm of Freeborn & Peters for pro bono support in our negotiations.

### Barracks Model

A scale model of the barracks to be used as the museum is nearing completion and should be available soon. Thanks to an anonymous architectural firm who donated the work.

## Chester Durfee Locket from Camp Douglas

Chester Durfee of the 1st Minnesota Infantry and 15th Veteran Reserve Corps, purchased the locket, shown on the right, made by a prisoner in December 1864.

He paid \$7.00 for the gutta-percha and silver locket engraved with his initials and the initials of his first wife Sara Harvey. Sara's photo is still inside the locket. Chester's is missing.

Durfee was wounded July 2, at the Battle of Gettysburg. He was an 18 year old farmer who enlisted in the 1st Minnesota August 26,



1862. After his wound at Gettysburg (he was shot in the left leg, and his wound never really healed). Durfee was ultimately sent to a hospital in Keokuk, IA, In Dec 1864, his uncle, Martin Flood, (3rd WI and Lt. Col. of the 15th VRC) had him transferred to Camp Douglas.

After the war Durfee was engaged in farming and railroading. He died in 1929.

The locket is in the personal collection Paul Russinhoff who provided this information to CDRF.

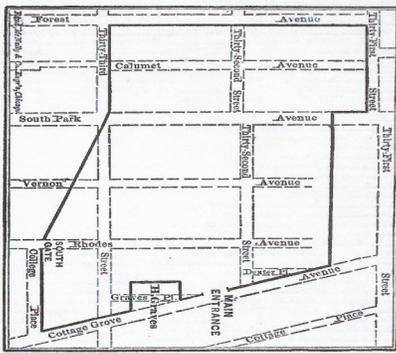
## Foundation Speaking Engagements

The Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation participated in a number of successful presentations to Chicago Public Library facilities, including Harold Washington, Rogers Park, Austin-Irving, Edgebrook and Sulzer Branch. These presentations bring the Camp Douglas story to new audiences. Salt Creek, and Prairieville, WI Civil War Round Tables also hosted presentations.

Special presentations to the Civil War Surgeons National Convention and the Naperville Civil War Days were also given. CDRF participated in the Ohio Civil War Show.

Camp Douglas Restoration  
Foundation  
Chicago, Illinois  
www.campdouglas.org

David L. Keller, Managing Director  
1368 N. Mohawk St  
Chicago, IL 60610  
Tel: 312-751-1693  
Mobile: 312-859-1940  
dkeller@campdouglas.org



CAMP DOUGLAS, 1864-5.

Map prepared by William Bross for a paper read before the  
Chicago Historical Society, June 18, 1878

*A Chicago Story that Must  
Be Told*

Join us at:  
www.campdouglas.org

*The Vidette*

The *Prisoners Vidette* newspaper was published by Morgan's Raiders in Camp Douglas in March 1864. The only known copy of the *Vidette* is in the collection of Chicago's Harold Washington Public Library. Unfortunately, the copy is badly damaged by light as a result of being on public display in the Chicago Cultural Center (previously a public library) until the Harold Washington Library was completed in 1991.

Glenn Humphreys, Special Collections, Harold Washing Library, provided CDRF with a transcript of the *Vidette* and allowed us to study the original document. Two pages were displayed in the Cultural Center back-to-back. The page that could be viewed was substantially deteriorated, in spite of restoration attempts the back page, was more protected, yet barely readable.

The newspaper, hand written on plain foolscap and given the name *Vidette* (meaning mounted sentinel stationed in advance of pickets) is approximately 8 by 13 inches.

War news in the *Vidette* was decidedly slanted to the South, including, reporting Jeb Stuart marching into Washington DC.

Advertisements and other *Vidette* information will be published in future *Camp Douglas News*.

*Recollections-Letters, Diaries and Journals*

Editor's Note: This section is devoted to letters, diaries, and journals of Civil War veterans. Although often considered the best source of contemporaneous information on the war, readers must be cautioned that this material represents individual experiences and feelings. Letters often reflected what the writer thought the recipient wanted to hear. In addition, many of the journals were written well after the war and include the frailties of age and time. Grammatical and spelling errors have not been corrected in quotes.

**Catching and Eating Rats**

Catching and eating rats were common stories in many prison camps. In addition to Camp Douglas, Elmira, NY and Point Lookout, MD have documented accounts of this practice.

Frequently, this activity by Confederate prisoners is attributed to starvation. However, the truth may be somewhat different. Southern men were known to eat squirrel, possum, and nutria in ordinary life. Brown or Norway rats of today were largely unknown in the South in the 1860's.

James Burke's journal is often used as a basis for eating rats as a necessity. "Friday, January 19, 1864. The kitchen to number six barracks near ours was torn down and a lot of rats killed. Two men gath them up and clean them up to eat. I understand that rat eating is very extensively carried on in other squares, but my curiosity has never made me taste any rats yet."

"Wednesday, January 20, 1864. I saw Jack Curd with a large bunch of rats, which he said he intended to eat." Jack Curd was a close friend of Burke. Burke, before being captured, wrote the following of Curd, July 10, 1863 "Jack [John] Curd was my partner. He was the life of the first section and in fact the whole company. I was generally sleepy and Curd would always wake me up with his nonsense (sic)." Curd was the leader of the minstrels that performed at Camp Douglas, a



Catching Rats at Point Lookout, MD

barber, sheriff at trials held by prisoners against other prisoners, and frequently participated in work details at the camp. All of these activities resulted in payment of some kind to purchase food or other items. Based on his activities in the camp, and his relationship with Burke, it is unlikely that he ate rats out of necessity.

"Thursday, January 21, 1864. Our kitchen

was torn down and some of the men had a great time catching rats. They even have traps set every night for rats. All of which they clean and eat. They clean them like squirrels and let them soak well in salt water."

Consuming rats was reported in other Confederate prisons including Camp Chase, OH and Elmira, NY. a prisoner at Camp Chase reported, "A 'rat killing' was about the only real entertainment we had." At Elmira a prisoner reported "They smelled very food while frying." And, "a boiled rat was superb." Rats were considered "Chinese delicacies," at Elmira. Private W. G. Whitaker, 4<sup>th</sup> Georgia Infantry. Also a prisoner at Elmira wrote, "Rats were great luxuries there. It was common thing to see someone carrying rats around to sell, at five cents apiece."

While rations in prison were minimal and, at time, inadequate, consuming rats was as much for entertainment and a supplement to the diet provided by the prison as out of necessity.

*More on the Sam Houston Drawing*

Recently the "letter" accompanying the drawing was transcribed. To our surprise, it was not a letter but a poem penned by James Jenkins, 9th Texas Infantry.

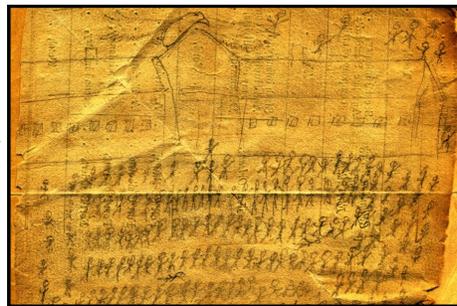
The poem is entitled "President Lincoln Return From James River Immediately after the seven days fighting before Richmond, Va." Included were the lines:

"The president returned to the great white house.

And withdrew to his chamber as mute as a mouse.

Laying away his faithful disguise.

Was quietly seated. Slaping (sic) off flies



Enjoying a brief respite from his peril and ire.

With his feet as high as his head or higher. "

Obviously not a wringing endorsement of President Lincoln.

Ron Coddington, editor and publisher of *Military Images*, was so kind to enhance the drawing for the Foundation.

The enhanced drawing appears to show a prisoner formation including two soldiers laying on the ground. In the upper-right is an open gate with soldiers passing through. This suggests a possible escape with the prisoners in a formation held until the capture of the escapees. The eagle at the top of the drawing may represent flight of the prisoners.