



Camp Douglas News

Committed to the Preservation of Chicago History



Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation

Chicago, Illinois

Winter 2011

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Project Phases:

Awareness and Support:
2010-2011

Site Location and Site
Planning: 2012

Archaeological
Investigation: 2012

Virtual Chicago: 2013

Construction: 2012-13

Camp Douglas Bits & Pieces

Chicago Tribune
February 14, 1862

AN ABSURD RUMOR—The rumor was present upon the streets yesterday that an order had been received to put Camp Douglas in readiness for the accommodation of five thousand rebel prisoners. This is decidedly *the* joke of the season. The idea of keeping five thousand prisoners in a camp, where the strongest guard couldn't keep in a drunken corporal, is rich. The whole population would have to mount guard and Chicago would find itself in possession of an elephant of the largest description. If authorities will give Chicago permission to hang the whole batch as soon as they arrive, let them come.

Chicago Tribune
February 15, 1862

...if prisoners are to brought to this part of the State there is no better and more suitable accommodations than this very camp... [Camp Douglas]

Chicago Tribune
February 19, 1862

**7,000 CONFEDERATES COMING
TO CHICAGO**

A New Use for Camp Douglas

Camp Douglas Restoration Foundation—Latest News

FOUNDATION RECEIVES THE DAVID ROBINSON CIVIL WAR COLLECTION

Martha Mason, trustee of the estate of John S. Barnes has donated to the Foundation the family Civil War collection originally preserved by David Robinson, Chicago businessman and Union soldier. The collection consists of a number of orders, letters and enlistment certificates.

These important documents are being added to the growing original and copies of Camp Douglas and other Civil War documents entrusted to the Foundation.

Special thanks to Peter Alter, Archivist, Chicago History Museum for arranging the gift.

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REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

The Foundation is eager to add to the archival documents currently being collected. This material will be made available to historians and educators as part of the Foundation's goal of providing support to interpretation and education of Camp Douglas, and the African American contribution to the Civil War.

Donations to the Foundation are appreciated. The following items are of special interest:

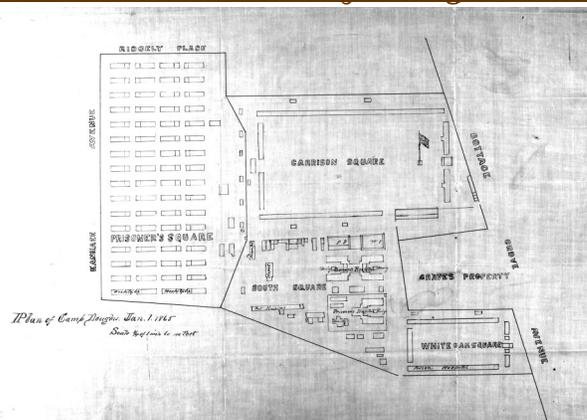
- ◇ Prison and military records
- ◇ Prison artifacts
- ◇ Diaries and other written accounts of prison life
- ◇ Prison photos and drawings
- ◇ Prisoner Photos
- ◇ Any information on African Americans in the Civil war

SCOTT DEMEL ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

Scott Demel, Northern Michigan University, will be working with the Foundation to implement our plans to conduct the archaeological investigation in 2012. Dr. Demel has done preliminary work in investigations and has agreed to join the Foundation in the project funded, in part, by the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation. The project includes participation of the Chicago Public Schools.

Virtual Camp Douglas

The Foundation has embarked on a major project to create a virtual Camp Douglas. The project headed by Josh Anderson will create a computerized reproduction of the buildings of Camp Douglas. Josh is a graduate of Lake Forest College and was instrumental in the development of the Virtual Burnham, Initiative at Lake Forest. He is currently on the staff of the Chicago History Museum and is volunteering his services.



Plan of Camp Douglas, Dec. 1, 1862
Scale: 1/4 inch = 100 feet

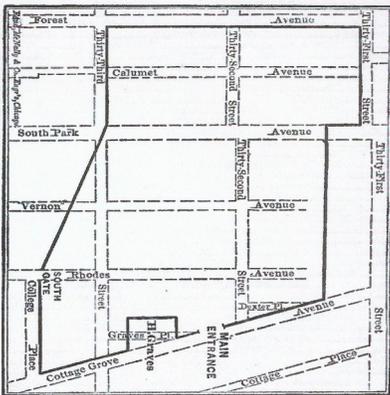
This virtual Camp Douglas can be superimposed on Google Maps for a clear historic view of the camp. Our plans included interior views of buildings with imbedded videos of actors recreating important historic information on the camp.

Our goal is to have initial versions of the project available for

historians and educators in early 2013. To provide financial assistance contact dkeller@campdouglas.org.

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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
Needs to be Told*

Join us at:
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The Other Chicago Prison Camp

Libby Prison Camp the four story former tobacco warehouse in Richmond, VA housed approximately 40,000 Union Soldiers during the war. After the war W. H. Grey purchased the building, had it dismantled and moved to Chicago.

The C&O Rail Road used 132 cars to transport the building to Chicago in 1889. On September 20, 1889 the building had been reassembled and opened as a private facility with admission charged. The opening attracted 300 including 10 former prisoners. An extensive collection of Civil War artifacts owned by Charles F. Gunther was on display there until the facility was closed and demolished in 1899. The Gunther collection was later purchased by the Chicago History Museum and is currently housed there.

Special thanks to Mike Boucek, Volunteer, Chicago History Museum for the information contained here.

Camp Douglas Escape

James Blanchard may have been the most irrepressible inmate in Camp Douglas. On March 16, 1862 he was caught trying to slip past sentries. In April he escaped over the fence only to be caught in downtown Chicago. In May he bribed his way out of the camp and made it to Canada where he was apprehended. Later he attempted to tunnel his way out. Fortunately, for the Camp Douglas guards, he was later exchanged.

Prison Camp Conditions Some of the Whys...

Neither the Union or Confederate armies were prepared to handle a large numbers of prisoners. No international accords on prisoners existed in 1861. Often prisoners were either killed, enslaved or paroled.

Officers and troops received no training on how to conduct themselves as prisoners or how to guard and manage prison facilities.

Initial holding of prisoners was necessary only until the accord for prisoner exchange was established in mid 1862. The accord required "short term" holding of prisoners until exchanged. However, with the suspension of the accord in 1863, long term imprisonment became necessary.

Prison health care was primitive. (See Fall 2011 Newsletter). Sanitary needs were poorly understood and badly implemented. While food was generally available it was subject to corruption by contractors and often lacked vitamins and minerals needed for good health. The lack of fresh vegetable was of particular concern in both North and South prisons. (See Winter 2010 Newsletter).



Andersonville Prison seen between March and August 1864



48th Tennessee Infantry at Camp Douglas captured at Fort Donelson

As with the front line troops disease was a greater killer than bullets. Much of the disease, especially at Camp Douglas, was a direct result of the poor health of the prisoners as they arrived at the camp. The first prisoners from Fort Donelson had been subject to near zero weather in Tennessee and were delivered to Chicago in unheated transportation to the cold Chicago winter. Likewise, the last prisoners at Camp Douglas from the Army of Tennessee captured at Nashville had walked from Atlanta and were deprived of food, shelter and clothing for months during their fight.

Often the comparison standard has been Andersonville, GA (Camp Sumpter). Andersonville, however was only in existence from February 1864 until April 1865 compared to Camp Douglas, February 1862 until July 1865. While Camp Douglas offered wooden barracks and other facilities, Andersonville had none. 13,000 total deaths in Andersonville are compared to approximately 6,000 at Camp Douglas. Considering the vast differences, comparisons are difficult, if not impossible.

Prison Discipline

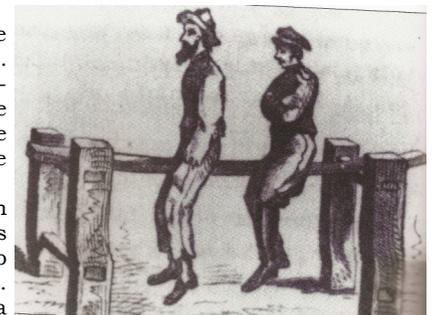
Discipline at Camp Douglas was not unlike discipline at other military and prison camps. Standing or kneeling in place for minor infractions was common. The dungeon "White Oak" used for escape attempts or other more serious offenses was often crowded to the point that inmates could not lie down.

In 1864 Colonel Sweet devised the "Morgan Mule", named for inmates from Morgan's Raiders. The mule was a four foot long two by four with four legs (see photo upper right). Those to be punished mounted the mule on a ladder and were forced to sit on the 2x4 for extended periods of time, often with sand bags tied to their feet.

Escape attempts were often met with the ball and chain (lower right photo). The ball was a solid shot cannon ball attached to the prisoner's leg by a chain long enough for the inmate to carry the ball. Requiring an offender to strip and wear a barrel was often punishment for minor offenses such as stealing from another inmate.

Reduction in rations and limiting movement of prisoners to parts of the camp and after dark were common punishment for general discipline problems.

Frequently punishment was administered by unsavory guards. Beatings and even shooting deaths were attributed to undisciplined Union soldiers. William O'Hara, "Red Bull" or "Old Red" was the most infamous of these guards. He delighted in patrolling the camp bullying prisoners. Old Red met his fate when he was knifed to death in a saloon fight in Chicago.



Riding the Mule-Punishment Camp Douglas



Ball and Chain-Camp Douglas