

## Ft Delaware – Pea Patch Island

### Greetings/Introduction

WM, RW DPGM (GM elect), DDGM officers members and visitors to Civil War Lodge of Research No. 1865, Good morning!

My name is Michael Rodgers. I am the SW at Ionic Lodge No. 31 in New Castle, WM of the Delaware Lodge of Research and Aide to the GM, MW Ronald Philip Ferraro. I had been planning on attending this meeting today since RW DGM Hanby had told me about it a little less than a year ago. Earlier this week RW Bob Carmine asked me if I would be willing to speak here today. I told him that I would be honored too and here we are.

Before I begin I want to give a little backstory to why RW Carmine asked me to speak here... Forts Delaware, DuPont, Mott and Miles

Today I am here to speak to you about the history of Fort Delaware and by consequence, Pea Patch Island and to give more of a "local" perspective. Some of which I hope will be novel to you. Pea Patch Island is a small island, approximately 1 mile long and located in the mid channel of the Delaware River. Tradition has it that Pea Patch Island got it's name when in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a ship ran aground on a muddy bank. When the ship ran aground, and this is where accounts differ either some of its cargo (peas) spilled out, or the crew threw overboard a portion of the cargo to help lighten the ship to get it afloat again. No matter which version you hear the peas ended up sprouting and growing. This ended up catching sand and silt which ultimately led to the island being formed. The story is not all that difficult to believe. During the colonial period ships traveling up the Delaware River often were accompanied by ferrymen who had knowledge of the shifting sands and shallows and would safely navigate the vessels to Philadelphia.

Regardless of the veracity of the details of the story Pea Patch Island first appeared on a map in 1794. In the same year, the French military engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant was tasked with surveying and identifying future sites for defensive fortifications. He identified an island that he called "Pip Ash" as an ideal site for the defense of

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Philadelphia. In fact, he was the first to suggest a system of fortifications with one on the Delaware shore at Reedy Point (present day Delaware City and Ft. DuPont) and one at Finns Point (Ft. Mott).

L'Enfant was born in Paris on August 2, 1754, as the third child and second son of Pierre L'Enfant. He studied art at the Royal Academy from 1771 until 1776, when he left school in France to offer his aid to the American Colonies. L'Enfant was recruited to serve as a military engineer in the Continental Army. If you are familiar with the name of L'Enfant it is because it was he who first laid down designs for Washington DC. I also bring up his name because he provides us with perhaps the first Mystic tie to Pea Patch Island and Ft Delaware.

After the war for American Independence and while L'Enfant was in New York City, he was initiated into Freemasonry. His initiation took place on April 17, 1789, at Holland Lodge No. 8, F & A M, which the Grand Lodge of New York had chartered in 1787. So far as we know today, L'Enfant took only the first of three degrees offered by the Lodge and did not progress further in Freemasonry. No records have been found and in those days candidates progressed much quicker.

The island that L'Enfant called Pip Ash was locally known as Pea Patch Island. There is a bit of controversy surrounding this island. Dr. Henry Gale, a New Jersey resident, used Pea Patch as a private hunting ground. Gale was offered \$30,000 (\$1,005,707.61 today) for the island by the US Army, but he refused. The military was determined to get the island, so they appealed to the state of Delaware, which claimed ownership of the entire Delaware River and all islands therein within a twelve mile circle around New Castle's Ft Casimir.

The Delaware state legislature passed an act in May 1813 ceding the island to the United States government, which subsequently seized it from Gale. In 1820, seeking to resolve questions surrounding the ownership of the island, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun requested a legal opinion from Attorney General William Wirt. Wirt's conclusion, based on a report by George Read, Jr. and former Attorney General

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Caesar A. Rodney was that the state of Delaware had the valid claim to the island, and so New Jersey could not have properly deeded it to Gale.

By 1814, the island had been sufficiently developed for the construction of the first Fort Delaware. A five-pointed star fort was built 1815–1824. This fort was wrecked by a fire in 1831. Construction began on a much larger polygonal fort in 1836. Construction then began in 1848 on the current fort, with an irregular pentagon design about the size of the previous star fort. The fort was substantially complete by 1860. By 1866, approximately 156 guns were mounted in total, filling the fort's casemates and ramparts to capacity.

During the Civil War, Fort Delaware went from protector to prison; a prisoner-of-war camp was established to house captured Confederates, convicted federal soldiers, and local political prisoners as well as privateers. The first prisoners were housed inside the fort in sealed off casemates, empty powder magazines, and two small rooms inside the sally port. In those small rooms, names of Confederates can still be seen carved into the brick. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the island "contained an average population of southern tourists, who came at the urgent invitation of Mr. Lincoln".

The first Confederate prisoner to die at Fort Delaware was Captain L. P. Halloway of the 27th Virginia Infantry. He was captured at Winchester, Va. on March 23, 1862, dying on April 9. Captain Halloway, a Freemason, was given a full Masonic funeral by Jackson Lodge #19 in Delaware City. The funeral procession was led by fort's commander, Captain Augustus A. Gibson, from the town's lock on Clinton Street, and ended in the cemetery on Jefferson Street. According to church records, Halloway's body was reclaimed by his family after the war.

Minuets from Jackson lodge:

Jackson Lodge No. 19 A.Y.M. met April 11th AL 5862, pursuant to a call from Brother Senior Warden in absence of the Worshipful Master Lodge opened in due form and solemnity.

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Present	Brother	Alex M. Biddle W.M. pro tem
A, Culin	SW pro tem	
R, White	J.W. pro tem	visitor
W.J. Matchett	Secretary	
E.H. Peckard	J.D.	
H. L Peckard		
G. Cass		visitor
E. L. McLane		visitor
J.W. Patterson	Tyler	

### Transactions

The Worshipful Master pro tem stated the object of this extraordinary meeting to be the purpose of attending the burial of and performing the last solemn rites to the memory of Brother Lewis P. Halloway of Covington, Allegheny County, VA, who departed this life on the 9th inst. at Fort Delaware while confined as a prisoner of war.

On motion the Lodge called off for the purpose of proceeding to the wharf to meet the remains of our deceased brother and escort them to the Episcopal burial ground in this place where they were deposited and the last solemn rites and honor were duly performed.

On reassembling at the Lodge room, the Lodge called on when on motion Brother Adam V. Culin, Alex M. Biddle, and Henry L. Peckard were appointed a Committee to draft a series of resolutions expressive of our regret for the loss sustained by the order and condolences with the family and friends of deceased and have the same forwarded, also published in some Delaware paper – And that the action of said committee shall considered part of the proceeding.

The Lodge was closed is form.

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The following is the actions of the Committee

Jackson Lodge No. 19 A.Y.M. met April 11th AD 1862 AL 5862 pursuant to call.

Whereas it has pleased Almighty God, in His providence to remove from amongst us, our worthy Brother Lewis P. Halloway. Be it resolved that although he is comparatively a stranger to us we have every assurance of his exalted worth both morally, socially and fraternally.

Resolved that while we deplore the loss sustained by the Masonic fraternity, we also sympathise with his family and friends in this their sad bereavement.

Resolved that the following obituary published by Captain A.A, Gibson Commander Fort Delaware is very expressive and worthy of being copied into these resolutions.

Mr. Lewis P. Halloway of Covington Allagheny County Virginia Captain of the Twenty Seventh Regiment Virginia Volunteers died of Typhoid pneumonia at Fort Delaware on the 9th of April; He was buried with Masonic Ceremonies in Delaware City. – Captain Halloway was transferred from Baltimore to that post March 30th a prisoner of war, taken at the battle of Winchester. A cold caught by exposure in his last service followed by symptoms of congestion of the lungs, caused his removal to the hospital before his condition was critical. Gradually growing worse in the reaction of undue excitement in five days he sank under the exhaustion of a constitution too feeble to sustain the efforts of nature. In full possession of his faculties he was conscious that his end had come. – The character of this young man was soon known. Touched by the traits which his suffering revealed every heart was quickened with intense anxiety for his fate, every tongue was eloquent with sad forebodings and prayerful wishes. When he died he was not among

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“strangers in a strange land,” nor without the sorrow of friends. He was a soldier and soldiers were around him – all subject to the vicissitudes of war and the commands of destiny. Death has given him his release. It has gone to the asylum of the victor and the vanquished, where the dead – past is forgotten and animosities cease, there to sleep until the last reveille shall call all, brave hearts and noble souls to the ranks of immortal.”

Resolved – that these resolutions with that part of our proceedings relating to his burial be forwarded to his Brother Masons and prisoners for transmission to the Lodge of which deceased was a member and to his afflicted family.

Resolved – that these proceedings be published in the “Delaware Gazette” a newspaper published in Wilmington Delaware.

Attest William

Matchett

Delaware City

April 11th 1862

The following is an extract of a letter from Captain Gibson to Brother Culin on the above subject.

“The comments in the Conducting of the funeral are complimentary – and to me most gratifying – I feel grateful to you all, and wish I was a brother mason.”

Jackson Lodge No. 19 A.Y.M. met August 5th A.L. 5862

Master Masons Lodge opened in due form and solemnity

Present:

Benjamin N. Ogle      WM

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A.M. Biddle	SW
A.V. Culin	JW
W.J. Matchett	Secretary
H. Ogle	Treasurer
John Siffries	SD pro tem – visitor
E. J. McClain	JD pro tem – visitor
J. Whitehead	
F.S. Dunlap	visitor
T. Smith	Tyler pro tem – visitor

### Transactions

Minutes of last meeting read and approved. The committee on the petition of Captain Augustus A Gibson reported favorable, he was (on motion) balloted for and elected to Enter the Lodge, The WM handed in a dispensation signed by the WGM of the State of Delaware authorizing this Lodge to Enter, pass to the degree of fellow craft and raise to the sublime degree of Master Mason, Captain A. A. Gibson, all at one meeting.

The Lodge was closed in Harmony.

### Dispensation for A.A. Gibson

Copy of Dispensation for A. A. Gibson

To all whom it may concern

Know ye That I, Allen V, Lesley Grand Master of Masons in Delaware, have received the petition of the Master of Jackson Lodge No. 19 of free and accepted ancient York Masons in the town of Delaware City, asking for a Dispensation by virtue of which Captain A.A. Gibson of Ft. Delaware who will be entered on Tuesday 5th August, may receive the degrees of Fellow Craft and Master Mason in said Lodge on the date

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above written in order that he may have and receive the benefits thereto pertaining before his departure to any other state.

Now therefore, There appearing to me good and Sufficient cause, for grating the prayer of said petition, I, by virtue of the powers in me vested by the ancient landmarks and constitution of the order do grant this my Dispensation, empowering Brother Benjamin N. Ogle Worshipful Master of Jackson Lodge with suitable brethren to assist him to confer the Degrees of Fellow Craft and Master Mason upon Captain A. A. Gibson after being made an entered apprentice Mason, in their Lodge on the date above mentioned according to the ancient and unalterable usages of the order.

Given under my hand and seal of the Grand Lodge of Delaware the fourth day of August Anno Lucis 5862

Signed Allen Voorhees Lesley

Attest Benj N. Ogle Grand Secretary

By August 1863, there were more than 11,000 prisoners on the island; by war's end, it had held almost 33,000 men. The conditions were relatively decent, but about 2,500 prisoners died on Pea Patch Island. Statistically, the overall death rate for prisoners was about 7.6 percent. Half of the total number of deaths occurred during a smallpox epidemic in 1863. Inflammation of the lungs (243 deaths), various forms of diarrhea (315 deaths) and smallpox (272 deaths) were the leading killers amongst the prison population. About 215 prisoners died as a result of typhoid and/or malaria, according to records in the National Archives. Other causes of death include scurvy (70 deaths), pneumonia (61 deaths) and erysipelas (47 deaths). Five prisoners drowned, and seven died from gunshot wounds. During the war, 109 Union soldiers and about 40 civilians died on the island as well. Many of the Confederate prisoners and Union guards who died at the fort are buried in the nearby Finn's Point National Cemetery in Pennsville, New Jersey.



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The present Fort Delaware was erected mainly between 1848 and 1860 as one of the larger forts of the third system of US fortifications. Although major construction was wrapped up before the Civil War, the post engineer did not declare the fort finished until 1868. The fort was about the size and location of the previous star fort. It was in the shape of an irregular pentagon. The irregular shape provided for more cannon on the east-facing fronts, where the deeper channel was. The fort had positions for 169 cannon. The fort also had a moat, with a tide gate on a canal from the river to control the moat's level.

Construction of a deep foundation was necessary since the island's soils were of "a compressible mud often forty feet deep; the level where sand was finally reached". In 1849, crews began using steam powered pile drivers to place long piles (similar to modern telephone poles) in excavated areas to provide adequate support. In 1850 pile driving was complete; crews had driven 4,911 piles, reusing 1,095 piles from the Delafield fort. Because of the star fort's failed foundation, It was decided to evaluate the weight resistance before moving forward with construction. The engineers proposed a singular test consisting of 30 blows from an 8-foot height using an 800 pound weight. A total of 5,754 piles were tested and 2,955 failed more than one fifth of an inch. Roughly 1,700 piles were subsequently spliced and re-driven an additional 10 to 20 feet. The pile driving was finally complete in 1851 and the wooden grillage was the next layer constructed.

The fort is primarily composed of gneiss, granite, brick, and cement. Initially, the stone for the scarp wall was gneiss imported from Port Deposit, Maryland. In 1852, it was reported the gneiss was too hard for the stone masons and cutters to shape, slowing the progress of construction. After that, purchase records show granite was bought from a quarry in nearby Delaware County, Pennsylvania. The granite was also used throughout for various items such as the steps for the circular stairways. Stone from Vinalhaven, Maine was used for the stairways' large platforms. More than two million bricks were purchased from Wilmington, Del. and Philadelphia, Pa. for the scarp wall's interior. These bricks were used in construction of underground cisterns,

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casemates, powder magazines, soldier barracks, officer quarters, bread ovens and the fort's breast high wall. Masonry arches and vaults were used throughout the entire fort to equally distribute weight and to provide stability. Poured concrete was used as a layer above the vaults to offer counter resistance and to "create a strong floor system".

Delaware acquired the fort from the United States government in 1947 after the federal government declared it a surplus site. Today, Fort Delaware State Park encompasses all of Pea Patch Island, including the Fort. As of 2018, transportation to Fort Delaware from Delaware City and Fort Mott is provided by a seasonal passenger ferry, the Forts Ferry Crossing. Once at the island, visitors are brought to the fort on a jitney. Tours and special programs are available to visitors. For example, visitors may see the 8 inch Columbiad gun, which is located on the northwest bastion, fired daily. Park staff and volunteers interpret the roles of people who were at the fort during the Civil War. Beach erosion affecting Pea Patch Island was recognized as a potential threat to the Fort in 1999. The United States Army Corps of Engineers erected a 3,500-foot-long seawall during the Winter of 2005-2006 which now protects the historical fort site and a migratory bird rookery, considered to be the largest such habitat north of Florida.