

May 2021

WELCOME



Welcome to the first edition of **Fort DuPont News**, the monthly newsletter of Fort DuPont. In this newsletter, you will find updates on all the goings-on at Fort DuPont as well as vital information about construction, utility changes, amenity installations and a host of other topics of interest related to our town.

We'd like your feedback in the months to come. Please email your questions or topics you'd like to see covered by emailing marketing@fortdupont.org.



DELAWARE RIVER NAMED RIVER OF THE YEAR

It's no secret that Delawareans like being first. We've had several hundred years' practice, right?

But now we're being recognized as first at something new. The Delaware River was named 2020 River Of The Year by *American Rivers*. Don't think that's big? Today, the Delaware River provides drinking water to two of the largest cities in the country - New York and Philadelphia. Seventy-five years ago, it was so choked with trash, sewage and pollution that much of it was not suitable for any aquatic life. Running through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and New York, surrounding inhabitants couldn't stomach the smell.

And while it's true that there's still a ways to go, the Delaware River has earned her spot, being the "most improved" in terms of its ecology.

Federal, state and local initiatives have worked hard to ensure the change.

American Rivers says, "The quality of waters in the Delaware have dramatically improved, fish and wildlife have returned in tremendous numbers and the main stem of the Delaware remains the longest free flowing river in the

eastern United States, with the most extensive national wild and scenic River protection of any watershed in the country. Today, communities along the Delaware River are setting a national example of river stewardship."



American Rivers
RIVERS CONNECT US®



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DID YOU KNOW?

By Laura Lee

Fort DuPont served as a mobilization station for units deploying overseas in World War II but was also once home to the 1265th SCSU prisoner of war camp. It was one of 175 Branch Camps nationwide that served 511 'Area Camps' - in Delaware we had 5 area camps downstate.

Over 400,000 Germans were held in the US; about 3,000 of those were housed at Fort DuPont. Most of the Delaware prisoners hailed from the AfrikaKorps campaign, but a handful were captured near Normandy. The camp consisted of 23 two-story barracks, five mess halls and kitchens, and a variety of service buildings such as a barbershop, guard barracks, paint shop, classroom (yes, they were able to improve their education while here), and even a large theater hall. Prisoner labor was very valuable to the US war effort as the bulk of our young work force was off fighting the war. We did follow the Geneva Convention on prisoner protocol and as such the prisoners were paid for their work. They also served as cooks, dishwashers, waiters, butchers, and other support roles. Some worked on other installations, or at civilian canneries, repaired the boardwalk at Rehoboth, and for garbage companies, wearing the "PW"-stamped uniform wherever they went.

Kurt Henkel, who showed up as a tourist at Fort Delaware in 2006 with his wife, told us he spent his 17th birthday in the camp. He proclaimed "I like to remember those days as I was treated well. I was still very young.... I was lucky to be taken a US prisoner and thus been able to survive the war." Other

former prisoners commented on how a lot of the men gained weight and even a little chub.

I had the accidental pleasure of being a pen pal for one prisoner for years- Egon Bethke, of Berlin. His daughter located photos of the camp on the Internet, and he spotted himself in a photo published on page 105 of the Fort DuPont Images of America book. He wrote a letter to me, addressed in shaky handwriting to "Laura Lee, Fort Delaware, USA". He stated, "I am the fellow with the sun spectacles and the scoop



turned backwards." Somehow this letter made it to the State Archives and was then forwarded to my workplace. A friendship was born! Egon commented that one of his jobs was catching chickens at a downstate chicken farm. He fondly remembered the Coca-Cola the kind farmer used to give them, and they were treated to occasional dips in his pool. But about the chickens- he emphatically said, "They did NOT want to be caught!" He was the first prisoner I'd identified that was captured near Normandy and stated

that upon his arrival he and a fellow prisoner were mightily distrusted by the rest as possible 'plants'.

As has always been protocol, officers are generally separated from their men in captivity and as such Fort DuPont mainly held privates and a smattering of NCOs. Memories of locals regarding the prisoners demonstrate that the community was generally not unkind despite the atrocities of war. One local recalls his father worked at the post and a prisoner made a toy wagon for him. Mary Lou Monsen who lived in one of the post duplexes, fondly remembered "Alex and Freddie" who worked in her house and "were implicitly trusted with us (children)." She stated "It was a prison, but we didn't call it that. We called it a barracks because we liked them. My grandmother used to bake pies and set them out on the windowsill so they could take them from the sunroom."

If anyone out there can identify any of these people, please share the info!



Laura Lee is the former park interpreter at Fort Delaware and Fort DuPont State Parks, and is currently on the board of the FDRPC and serves as chair of the historic preservation committee. She is passionate about history and the fort, as she was also a resident for four years. Have a history question Fort DuPont? Send it our way and she will endeavor to answer it.

HAPPENINGS ARE...HAPPENING AGAIN

Fort DuPont has been the location for many festivals, concerts and other family events. Of course, COVID put a stop to that for over a year now. But as things are getting a little better every day, fun is coming back to the Parade Grounds.

On Saturday, May 1st, the **John Medkeff, Jr. Beer & Baseball Festival** was in town, and a great time was had by participants and spectators alike. **Wildwich** served great food and **Wilmington Brew Works** offered some delicious beers.

Watch these newsletters and our website for upcoming events. Next up? On Saturday, **May 22nd from 8am to 2pm**, **DSWA** is hosting a collection event. Bring your hazardous waste, electronics or documents to be shredded. And on **Saturday, May 29th & 30th**, a popular event returns - **Whippet Races!** **The Jersey Rag Racers** will be here and starting at 10:00 am.

Want some information on having your event here? Send an email to marketing@fortdupont.org to get some details.



WELCOME RESIDENTS



Please welcome your neighbors, Dan & Janis Harlow. The Harlows moved here from Avondale, PA in January, 2020. They enjoy the outdoors, biking, walking, birding, gardening, and anything on or near the water. They are inveterate sailors, having spent many years racing on the Chesapeake, and love to gather for good food and spirit!

CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

Housing

The Canal District is entering its final stage. 21 home sites are under construction.

Roadways

Upgrades to N. Reedy Point Road and Polktown Place will soon be underway. Improvements include widening and raising the road to resolve flooding. The Roundabout construction is scheduled for early next year with a completion of May 2022. This will allow for completion of the main entrance roadway and landscaping.

Natural gas will soon be available to residents and business at Fort DuPont. Installation is underway and a mid-June completion is the goal.

Several restoration projects

are underway, including Battery Elder, the Theater and former stable. Work on the Chapel and duplexes along Old Battery Lane will start this summer.

Amenities

Construction will soon be underway for new park amenities that will include a dog park, inclusive playground, basketball/pickleball/tennis courts, picnic facilities, public restrooms and goats to entertain the "kids" at play. This park will be open to the public.





FORT DUPONT

SHAPED BY HISTORY & ANCHORED IN NATURE



Beautiful Waterfront Biking

One of the coolest new outdoor amenities for Delawareans is the beautiful bike trail, connecting the Castle Trail to Chesapeake City.

At a length of about 17 miles, this trail is a beautiful showcase to the beauty of our local environment, and a healthy, fun activity for residents of all ages.

Grab the family and some water bottles and hit the trail!

Fort DuPont News is a free monthly newsletter that gets mailed to all residents and business owners in Fort DuPont and Delaware City. If you are not in the City limits and would like to receive the newsletter, email: *marketing at* [fortdupont.org](mailto:marketing@fortdupont.org) to receive the newsletter in digital form via email.

