



# Tales of Texas

## NEWSLETTER



### June 2024

This issue of Tales of Texas has as its setting Fort Sumter, South Carolina.

Fort Sumter is the site of the first shots of the Civil War.

The two photos, by the author, in the masthead and first page are the first Republic of Texas flag and the replica of the flag that flew over Fort Sumter during the first battle of the Civil War. Other photos in this edition are taken by the author, except for the picture of Major Robert Anderson which is from the Library of Congress.

Comments? Go to website listed below.

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## The Civil War Begins

Fort Sumter sits on an artificial island of landfill in Charleston Harbor. It's constructed of handmade brick and mortar and houses a museum and guns which made the fort a defensive bastion of the U.S. Army. Of course, the designers of the fort never imagined the state of South Carolina would be the enemy.

### 1812 - 1829

My grandson, Lincoln, and I had the honor and privilege to visit the Fort Sumter National Historical Park in Charleston, South Carolina. To visit the fort, one must take a shuttle boat from either of two embarkation points on the mainland. If you go, plan on high winds and mist whipped up by the near gale force gusts. As the boat crosses the harbor, visitors get a good look at the World War Two vintage carrier, *U.S.S. Yorktown*, the replacement for its predecessor

sunk at the Battle of Midway. Tour tickets can include the ride to Fort Sumter, entrance to the *Yorktown* and *U.S.S. Laffey* destroyer, and an exceptional interactive exhibit of the Vietnam War.

As the Fort Sumter shuttle boat traverses the harbor's choppy waters, a guide points out the strategic value of Charleston and why the federal Congress authorized forts in the area. After the War of 1812, the government evaluated our ports and found them vulnerable to British attacks from the Atlantic. Charleston got two forts, Fort Moultrie and Fort Sumter completed in 1829.



# Tales of Texas



Author & Lincoln  
Fort Sumter



A Child's Handprint  
Fort Sumter

As far as Fort Sumter goes, the first thing needing construction was an island for it to sit on. Laborers, including slaves, built the land up so the new fort's guns could command the sea approach to Charleston. The wind and waves proved formidable obstacles for 1820's construction practices, but the workers got the island built.

The next challenge was the bricks themselves. The fort required four million bricks to house guns and barracks. Where to get the bricks? Four million bricks is a pretty tall order, even by today's standards.

Charleston's coastal region is called the "Low Country" and in the 1800's it was the home to plantations. The manufacture of the bricks became a metaphor for the whole sorry situation that caused the Civil War.

The builders used slave labor to make the bricks and each plantation had a daily tally to meet. The task masters on the plantations employed all the slaves to meet production quotas.

My grandson, Lincoln, and I examined the bricks closer. The fingers of the brickmakers left marks in the bricks that are vivid reminders of the people who molded them. I took photos of the indelible traces of the fingers. What set these marks apart is that they were made by children.

As modern visitors to the fort, we stopped for a moment. The big guns and walls are the things which garner the most attention from visitors. But the bricks and the tiny imprints made by the boys and girls, still plainly visible today, ought to make us reflect on a war that started on this very spot. Lincoln put his own little fingers on the spot making it personal for us as it should have.



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Major Robert Anderson  
US Army



Author & Lincoln in  
Gun Emplacements  
Fort Sumter

## April 12, 1861

The Civil War battle at Fort Sumter started because Major Robert Anderson refused to evacuate the fort and disobey his orders when confronted by South Carolina authorities.

The defenses of Charleston, of which Fort Sumter was only one part, commanded the sea and land approaches to the fort. When the federal government dispatched a ship to resupply the fort, it was turned away, leaving Major Anderson with no means of support.

When Major Anderson refused to leave the fort, South Carolina militia fired on the federal troops. South Carolina's artillery blasted the fort for thirty-four hours.

Finally, Major Anderson agreed to terms, which included him firing a 100-gun salute. Of course, he was simply trying to expend his ammunition prior to leaving the fort in his enemy's hands. His plan literally backfired on him when an explosive detonation caused the only loss of life of the entire battle. Two of his soldiers were killed, becoming the first casualties of the Civil War.

Before leaving the fort, Major Anderson lowered the colors and personally kept them safe on his person.

President Lincoln was in the second month of his presidency. He promoted Major Anderson to Brigadier General and brought his troops home, but the damage had been done. The president called for 75,000 men to put down the rebellion.



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Top  
 Replica of Anderson's  
 Flag

Bottom  
 View From Sumter  
 towards Site of Fort  
 Wagner (Lost to Beach  
 Erosion)



Officially, the war started with South Carolina's militia firing at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, but there are those who say the first shots were fired by cadets of the South Carolina Military Academy when they turned the relief ship away several months earlier.

The academy today is called "The Citadel" and its red battle flag, clearly seen by the crew of the relief ship, *Star of the West*, is in the university's museum.

Regardless of the official or unofficial first shots, the ensuing bloodbath which killed over 600,000 people started in Charleston.

Major Anderson took his flag, went home, and accepted Lincoln's promotion. General Anderson's health quickly deteriorated, and he had to retire from the army.

Fort Sumter stayed in Confederate hands throughout the war. Fort Wagner, made famous in the movie "Glory", sat within sight of Fort Sumter and it, too, never fell to the U.S. Army.

When Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Charleston was a devastated wreck of a city. President Lincoln sent for retired General Anderson to return to Fort Sumter in celebration. Anderson said he would do the president one better. He still had the flag. He would return and raise it again.

Anderson and other dignitaries returned to Charleston to celebrate the raising of the national colors. The celebration took on a carnival like atmosphere as Anderson unfurled the banner and ran it up the flagpole. Reporters and photographers were there to spread the happy news, but President Lincoln was assassinated that night. The celebration at Fort Sumter was all but forgotten. The flag which flies today is a replica of Anderson's flag.

The bricks with the children's handprints, however, are not replicas. They are very real, you can lay your fingers in them. Sometimes, History beckons us to reach out and touch it as our Lord did when he beckoned his doubting apostle, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."