

# "So much history here" -- St. Helena Island's Fort Fremont finds renewed sense of history



Pete Richards, a founding member of the Friends of Fort Fremont, center, talks with fellow members Wendy Wilson, left, and Janelle Proctor, right, during the docent led tour of Fort Fremont on Saturday afternoon on St. Helena. The Friends of Fort Fremont plan on offering docent led tours of the fort, which dates to the Spanish American War, monthly. Delayna Earley  
dearley@islandpacket.com <http://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/community/beaufort-news/article56301430.html>

By MINDY LUCAS [mlucas@islandpacket.com](mailto:mlucas@islandpacket.com)

Despite temperatures that hovered just below 40 on Saturday, a handful of people gathered at the St. Helena Branch Library for a little insight into a part of Beaufort County's history that's been all but forgotten.

"This was part of a history that, when we started, very few people knew about," said Pete Richards, who led a group of about 20 on a tour of Fort Fremont at the end of Lands End Road on Saturday morning.

Built in 1899 during the Spanish-American War, the fort was one of six fortifications designed to protect the Southeast coast from what was then a formidable Spanish navy.

Before the fort and 15 acres surrounding it were purchased by the county as part of its Rural and Critical Land Program in 2004, only a few historians and dedicated history buffs knew of the abandoned structure's significance.

"If the Spanish fleet had not eventually been destroyed, there would have been reasons why this was so important," Richards said.

The director emeritus for the Friends of Fort Fremont, Richards was among the volunteers who first pushed to increase awareness of the site.

He, along with a few others who were on hand Saturday, remember what the then-graffiti-covered structure nearly hidden beneath a jungle of thick vines looked like prior to the county and the Friends organization stepping in.

When it was built, Fort Fremont and similar fortifications of the era with their breach-loaded cannons were considered state-of-the-art in terms of weapons technology.

"Although a gun was never fired, it was representative of the state of our technology at that time," Richards told the group on Saturday.

The site, once 170 acres and manned by a force of more than 100 personnel, was also significant in that the fort played a strategic role in protecting the U.S. Naval Station in Port Royal. The naval station had a drydock and fueling station critical to the Atlantic fleet.

Saturday's tour also included a look at a diorama on display at the library. Built by master modeler Dennis Cannady, the diorama depicts what the original site once looked like.

"The thing about this is, it's different from Civil War or Revolutionary War history," said Richard Lefevre as he studied the diorama.

Lefevre and his wife, Jan Lefevre, of Ohio, own property near the fort and have watched with interest over the years as the site has found a renewed sense of history among visitors to the area.

The couple, who had already visited the Santa Elena History Center in Beaufort the day before, were getting ready to visit the fort along with others in the group.

The Lowcountry, Richard Lefevre said, has much to offer in the way of history and culture.

"There's just so much history here," he said.

### **If You Go**

The Friends of Fort Fremont will lead tours of Fort Fremont starting at the St. Helena Branch Library, at 6355 Jonathan Francis Senior Road, St. Helena Island, on the fourth Saturday of every month. The docent-led tours are free.

For details visit [www.fortfremont.org](http://www.fortfremont.org).

*Follow reporter Mindy Lucas on Twitter at [twitter.com/MindyatIPBG](https://twitter.com/MindyatIPBG).*

Read more here: <http://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/community/beaufort-news/article56301430.html#storylink=cpy>