

The Restoration of Fort Thorvald

By Jehanne de Montauban

This September I have seen many Facebook “Memories” of the lovely event we had a year ago, the Ansteorra 40th Year Celebration at Will Rogers Boy Scout Reservation in Cleveland, Oklahoma. Those memories led to other memories of events at this site. It has been home to Northkeep’s Castellan for decades, and several other Northern Region groups’ events as well. As I sifted through the all the memories that were made at this site, I began to think about the wooden fort out at Will Rogers. I thought I should write down the process before it fades from my memory. And hopefully you will enjoy the pictures!

After years of deterioration, the Fort at Will Roger Boy Scout Reservation was finally given the attention it needed. The original Fort, built in 2012 as Centurion Thorvald Egilsson’s project, was made possible by donations from many members of the SCA. The list of donors has unfortunately been lost to time. An effort has been underway to re-compile the list, but is still lacking most names (we only have 6 so far). If you or anyone you know of donated to the original Fort please email seneschal@northkeep.ansteorra.org to get them added. After tragically losing Thorvald in November 2018, it seems more important than ever to honor his plan to put up plaques of original donors.

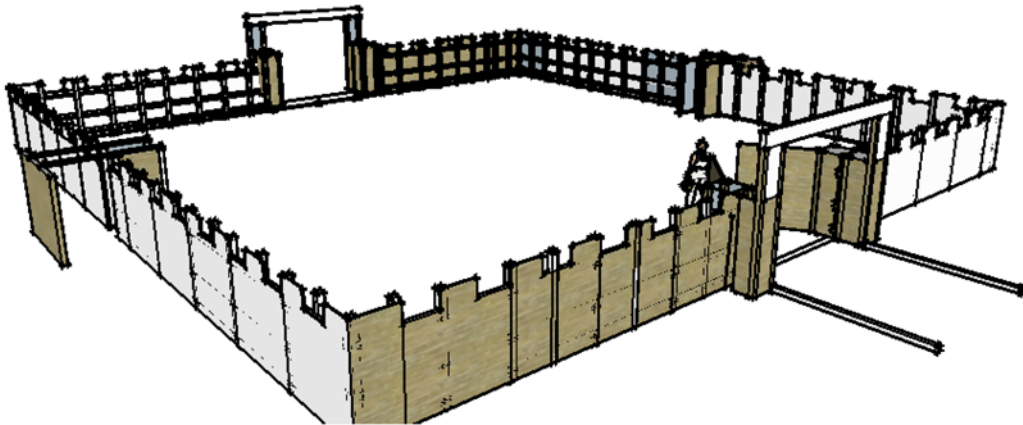


Original Fort at Castellan 2012, photo by I. Marc Carlson

After 5 years of wind and weather, the Fort was looking pretty bedraggled. During Castellan 2017 Roger, the Ranger in charge of the camp, told then Seneschal Lord Alexandre Crane that we needed to either fix it or get rid of it, as it was becoming a hazard as well as unsightly. Although most agreed that it needed to be fixed, there was never any forward progress for lack of a plan to fix the sagging walls and non-functioning gates.



Alexandre discussed the problem with Lord Perrin de Beaujeu, who offered to come up with some design ideas for the improvements. First there was a trip out to the Fort to get the all measurements, and then there were several months of mundane life obligations that interfered, but through the persistent reminders of Lady Ysabeau Brossier, by the winter of 2017 Perrin had drafted three different designs. After discussions weighing the merits and drawbacks of each, a design was chosen.



The design featured gate towers flanking the north and south gates, and sally ports midway on the east and west walls. These would both stabilize the walls and provide multiple scenario options for fighting. The next step was for Perrin to create a cut list of materials needed, which Jehanne then priced out for presentation to the financial committee.

On April 30, 2018 Jehanne and Ysabeau presented the plan and the projected funds needed to the Financial Committee: Their Excellencies Beorhtlic Folcwinesone & Elisaveta ap Isafjord, Seneschal Alexandre Crane, and Exchequer Adalia Von dem Berg. The plan was approved, and the check cut! Now it was time to put the plan into action. Perrin started a list of tools & equipment needed, Alexandre made arrangements with Roger for work to begin May 11-13 and got permission for the workers to stay overnight at the camp, Jehanne placed the materials order and arranged the trailer and auger rentals, and Yzzy started planning worker support (like fighter support but with more food!). A Facebook Group was made and potential workers hastily added to coordinate the work days.

After a snafu with the materials delivery (don't trust what Home Depot says on their site), Ludewicus von Lichtenstein heroically volunteered to tow the materials trailer to site on Friday morning, and work commenced!



The lofty goals for this first weekend were to build the sally ports, rebuild the back gate, brace and repair the front gate, and stain/seal the whole thing so it didn't continue to disintegrate. Early on we had discussed hand-digging the holes, but after using the 2-man auger we all agreed it was the only way to go! We had additional workers come out after work on Friday, and the augmented crew worked until well after dark in order to have all the postholes dug and posts braced for the concrete delivery Saturday morning. That was a loooooong day.



The workday was filled with small setbacks, which were made manageable with the expertise of Ludo. How to remove the old concrete when the post has broken off? Leverage for the win!





Saturday morning came real early, and the concrete truck came exactly on time. Those new posts are not going to move anytime soon!

After the concrete was all poured, we moved on to applying the stain & seal.



Saturday afternoon picture of the crew from left to right: Morgan Blackdragon, Perrin de Beaujeu, Jehanne de Montauban, Ysabeau de Brossier (holding Daphne), Míchall Morrison, Skeggi berbeinn Sebbason ins sterka, Ludewicus von Lichtenstein, Wulfgard Martel, and Alexandre Crane (not pictured).

Sunday morning, Martel was up before everyone else to get back to the painting. Most of our crew had to leave on Sunday before the painting was complete, but luckily some of our Mooneschadeen brethren recruited by THE Centurian Charles the Gray came out that day to help.



This first weekend, we met the majority of our goals. The sally ports were built, the back gate towers were built, the posts for the front gate towers were placed, and the first coat of stain & seal was (mostly) applied. There was a small contingent that went out the Thursday before Castellan to finish up the painting and do some clean-up work.



The Fort was prepared for Castellán!



Everyone was pretty proud of the amount of work we had accomplished, but we also knew that there was much more to do. Planning immediately started on the next steps, and Ludo compiled original plans and new ideas into a punch list in 5 Phases. As more people heard about the project we also gained more volunteers!

We managed to get a small group out to the Fort on August 11, 2018 for some clean-up and planning, but the main work wasn't started until September 8th. This time the goals were to dig holes and set posts in concrete for the front gate, build the front gatehouses, add decking to the gatehouses to make them archery towers(!), touch up some paint, and clean fasteners out of old boards for re-use. Even with the mid-wall supports built, the walls still tended to sag if even the smallest person leaned against them, so after some discussion the plan was made to add catwalks around the full interior wall of the Fort. We were able to lay out the start of the catwalks this time around.



Rear gatehouse archery platforms with the beginning of the catwalk



View of the archery platforms



View of the front gatehouses from the rear archery platform



The start of the front gatehouses, end of day September 8, 2018

Our next work weekend, starting November 30th, was mainly about the catwalks! This part of the project was spearheaded and funded by Mooneschadowe (Charles). These catwalks provide a platform for the defenders, as well as a raised level of seating for activities held inside the Fort. These are both secondary to stabilizing those walls, but we were definitely thinking of how to put the “fun” in function! By the end of the weekend the archery towers were completed and the catwalks were partially framed and decked.

We wanted the Fort to look really fabulous for the 40th Year Celebration, and there was still a lot to do. Another work weekend was set for March 29-31, 2019, to finish up the catwalks and make sure everything looked spiffy. We had a lot of people from both Northkeep and Mooneschadowe turn out for this one, and thus the weekend was hugely productive!





Panorama of the Fort interior

After five major work weekends, the Fort was ready to be used at events. If you haven't seen the Fort in this iteration, I would encourage you to go out and visit the next time you can. And if you're sad that you didn't get to participate in this epic project, we haven't built and hung the gates yet. There is still an opportunity to be involved!