

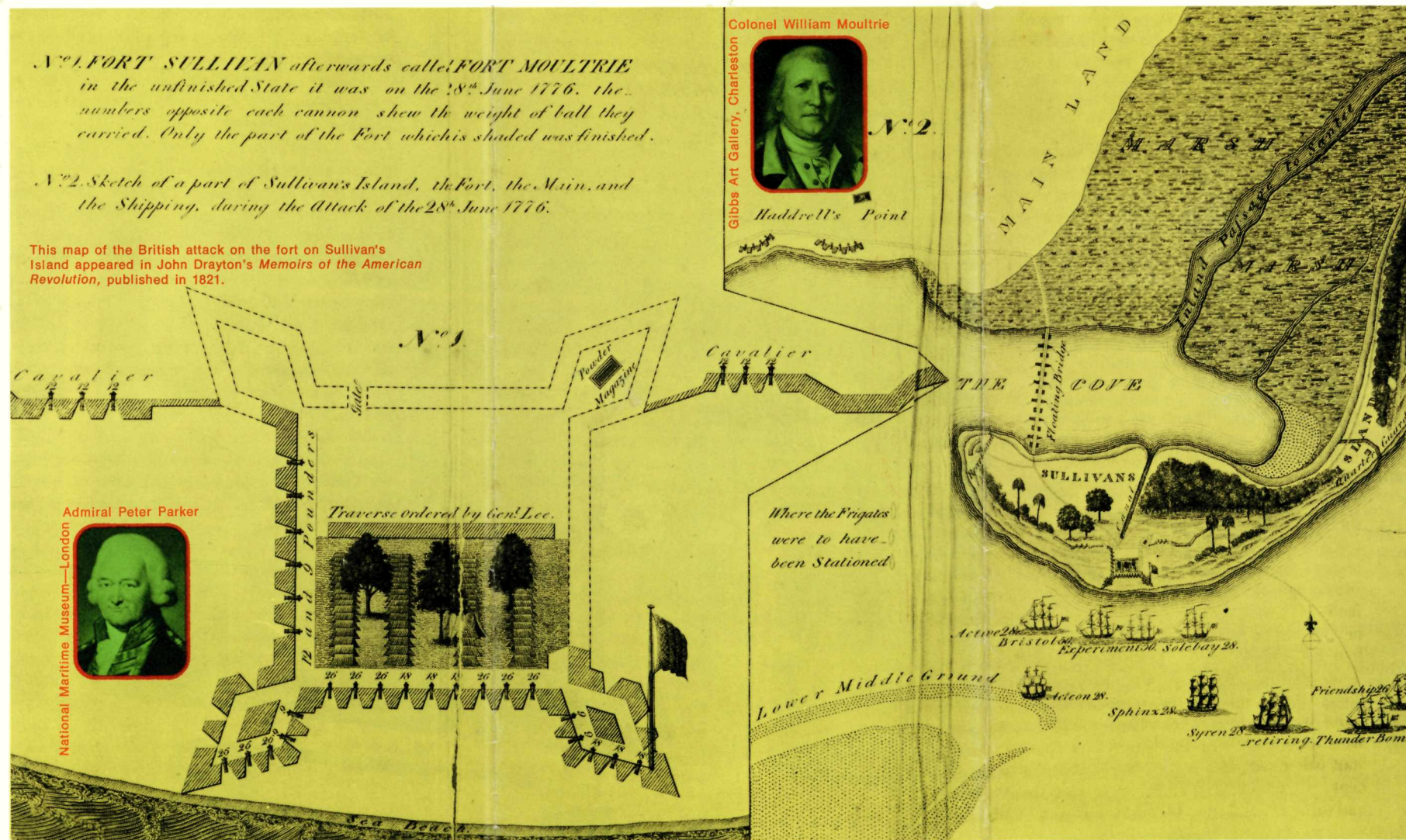
# Fort Moultrie

The coastal fortifications of the United States had several purposes: to prevent an enemy from gaining a foothold on shore at a strategic point, to prevent enemy ships from bombarding important arsenals, depots, and navy yards, and to prevent an enemy from using waterways to move inland. They also provided a safe haven for offensive operations of the Navy and blockade runners.

Coastal defense, as a form of military preparation, was popular in the United States. It was evidence of the American belief that the country had no aggressive intentions, that it was seeking only to defend itself from possible attack. Coastal forts were also relatively inexpensive. They could be built, armed, and maintained with a minimum of money and manpower. Ships, on the other hand, had to be continuously manned and employed, at great expense, to do what a powerful fort could do merely by its presence. In war a fort could be rapidly manned by the local militia, satisfying the American prejudice against a standing army.

Strategists knew that powerful stationary guns mounted in a fort were more than a match for sea-going artillery. The advent of rifled guns capable of reducing Civil War masonry forts to rubble, was the first major change in the balance. To counter the threat, new coastal fortifications of reinforced concrete were developed and protected with harbor obstructions and mines. But the tactical and technological innovations of the 20th century—amphibious landings, ballistic missiles, and air-borne nuclear weapons—spelled the end of stationary coastal defenses.

Fort Moultrie was a unit in the coastal defense system of the United States. The evolution of the several forts on this site from the first palmetto log and sand structure during the Revolutionary War to the reinforced concrete fortification of World War II reflects the 170-year development of American coastal defense.





### The First Fort

Immediately prior to the Revolutionary War Charleston became a center of Whig politics, in open rebellion against the Crown. Traditionally opposed to the merchants and planters of the urban center, the small farmers of inland North and South Carolina found themselves cast in the role of supporting England, not so much out of loyalty to England as out of political opposition to the dominion of the Low Country.

The British, checked in Massachusetts in the spring of 1776, decided to capitalize on the backcountry loyalty by joining with the Tories and opening a new front in the South. A combined army-navy expedition would leave Boston and England and rendezvous off North Carolina and restore British authority in the four southern colonies. But the fleet, sailing from England 2 months late, did not reach North Carolina until May 1776, by which time the patriot victory at Moores Creek Bridge in February had dashed all hopes that large numbers of Loyalists would join the regulars. Attempting to salvage what they could of the Southern Campaign, Sir Peter Parker, commanding the naval forces, and Henry Clinton, commanding the army, decided to attack the fort then building on Sullivan's Island in Charleston Harbor.

Since January Charleston had been readying its defenses. A few days after the battle at Moores Creek, the South Carolina Provincial Congress ordered Col. William Moultrie to Sullivan's Island to take charge of the fort's construction.

Work went on round-the-clock, but on June 4 when the British appeared off Charleston Bar, the fort was still unfinished.

Three days later Gen. Charles Lee, who had been ordered by Washington to take command of the defense of Charleston arrived at the fort. The presence of this well-regarded leader caused troop morale to soar. But Lee recommended abandoning the fort because it was incomplete and, he thought, indefensible. When the provincial government refused, Lee ordered protective walls added within the fort and an escape bridge built to the mainland; but he had little to do with the eventual battle.

By June 10 most of the British fleet had crossed Charleston Bar and Clinton had landed 2,200 men on nearby Long Island. Moultrie sent his workmen back to the city and positioned his soldiers about the island. On the morning of June 28, 1776, Parker moved 9 warships against the fort.

Moultrie's fort was a 500-foot square with a bastion on each corner. The walls consisted of parallel rows of palmetto logs 16 feet apart, filled with sand. When the battle began, only the two seaward bastions, the south and west walls, were complete. There were 31 cannon in position, the largest being French 26-pounders. The fort could garrison 1,000 men, but that morning there were 364 men of the 2d S.C. Infantry and 4th S.C. Artillery within the fort. Another 780 men were deployed on the island's northern end to stop Clinton's attack from Long Island.

The British bomb ketch *Thunder* opened fire at 10:30 in the morning. She was joined by *Bristol*, 50 guns, *Experiment*, 50, *Active*, 28, and *Solebay*, 28. At one time or another 125 British guns were firing on the fort. To cut off American escape to the mainland the frigates *Acteon*, 28, *Syren*, 28, and the sloop-of-war *Sphinx*, 20, maneuvered to take position behind the fort, but all three ran aground on shoals. For over 9 hours the British pounded the fort, at times closing to 400 yards. Despite the fury of the attack, the defenders replied like seasoned troops.

Because the water was deeper than expected, Clinton was unsuccessful in getting his troops across the inlet between Long Island and Sullivan's. Armed boats dispatched by Clinton to rake the South Carolinians defending the inlet were repulsed.

In the fort, Moultrie maintained a slow and deliberate fire. By 9 p.m. Parker began to withdraw. His ships were heavily damaged, and *Acteon*, still aground, had to be blown up. British losses were 64 dead and 141 wounded, while the patriots had only 12 killed and 25 wounded. On July 23, the British sailed away and did not return for 4 years.

News of the victory reached Philadelphia a few days after the Declaration of Independence was adopted. The Continental Congress thanked the men responsible and the South Carolina legislature named the fort in honor of its commander.

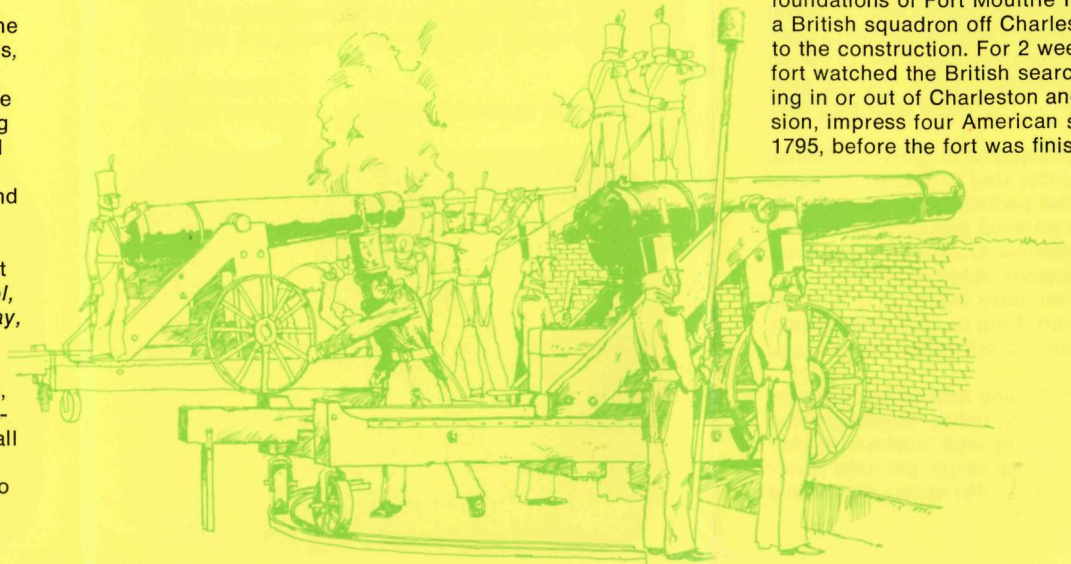
A massive expedition to crush the rebellion again brought British forces back to Charleston in February 1870. This time, ignoring the har-

bor forts and concentrating on the town, the British were successful. Cut off, Fort Moultrie surrendered on May 7, 1780, and was occupied until December 1782 by the British. In October 1783 a hurricane badly damaged Moultrie, but the Nation, now at peace, made no effort to repair the work. Only the ruins of the celebrated fort greeted George Washington on his visit in 1791.

### Fort Moultrie II

The outbreak of the war between Britain and France in 1793 aggravated smoldering antagonisms between Great Britain and the United States. American seacoast fortifications lay in ruins, while British warships sailed unchallenged in American waters and the warring nations refused to recognize neutral rights at sea. In March 1793, Congress passed an act to provide for the defense of key harbors from Maine to Georgia—the First American System of fortifications.

William Moultrie, now governor of South Carolina, approved the projects for Charleston Harbor, and on August 4, 1794, workmen began the foundations of Fort Moultrie II. The presence of a British squadron off Charleston lent urgency to the construction. For 2 weeks workers at the fort watched the British search all vessels sailing in or out of Charleston and, on one occasion, impress four American sailors. In June 1795, before the fort was finished, the Senate



Life in coastal fortifications was tedious, relieved only occasionally by practice on the big guns.

ratified the Jay Treaty with Britain, easing tensions between the two countries. Congress refused to appropriate more funds, leaving Fort Moultrie uncompleted.

France, angered by the treaty, which appeared to favor British interests, stepped up harassment of American vessels. America readied itself for war with France, and Congress resumed work on abandoned military projects. A concerned citizenry in Charleston donated \$12,000 to the Sullivan's Island project, and by November 1798 the army had rushed Moultrie to completion.

The new fort was a five-sided structure surrounded by an 8-foot ditch. The walls stood 17 feet high from the bottom of the ditch to the crest of the parapets. Close by were barracks, a bakehouse, and officers' quarters, finished before ratification of the Jay Treaty. Armament consisted of 16 cannon—six English 12-pounders and ten French 26-pounders. The latter, mounted in Charleston by the British before the Revolutionary War, had been used on Sullivan's Island to repulse the British in 1776.

The undeclared war with France was settled by diplomacy, and with peace came cutbacks in military expenditures. Between 1799 and 1805 the government spent only \$48.68 on fortifications in Charleston Harbor, despite another hurricane which wrecked Fort Moultrie in September 1804.

### Fort Moultrie III: 1809-1860

Like Fort Moultrie II, many First System fortifications needed extensive repairs. When the Jay Treaty expired in 1807, Britain once more began to harass American shipping, and in December 1807 Congress voted funds for a Second System of coastal defense. This time American-born engineers, many educated at West Point, planned and supervised construction of the forts.

In the summer of 1808 the army began a brick fort near the site of Fort Moultrie II. Workmen razed the fort and salvaged building materials for the new structure. Fort Moultrie III was completed and turned over to its garrison in December 1809. Irregular in form, it presented three sides to the sea and two bastions on the landward side. The walls mounted 40 guns. The free-standing brick magazine held 500 barrels of powder and the barracks were large enough for 500 men.

Although Fort Moultrie III was considered "little inferior . . . to any work in the United States," that description gave a false impression of the Nations' preparedness for war. Two months after the country went to war with Great Britain the garrison at Fort Moultrie witnessed the capture of a Swedish ship by an American privateer and a British blockade of Charleston Harbor. Though the garrison often spotted enemy ships, there was little action. After the British burned Washington, D.C. in August 1814, the expected attack on Charleston did not happen. Instead, the British unsuccessfully attacked New Orleans. The Treaty of Ghent, signed in December 1814, soon ended the war.

The next 45 years saw no threat from a foreign navy, but they were eventful. In the fall and winter of 1832-33 South Carolina tested the right of a State to suspend Federal laws. During the Nullification controversy President Andrew Jackson feared South Carolina might seize the forts in Charleston Harbor, and reinforcements were rushed to the area. Eventually one-fourth of the United States artillery was in Charleston—most of it at Fort Moultrie. In the winter of 1838 the fort served as a prison for a group of Seminole Indians being moved from their homes to the west—among them Osceola, the great Indian leader, who died within a month of his arrival. During the Mexican War, the fort served as a training camp and port of embarkation for troops going to that conflict.

During these 45 years, Fort Moultrie did not change drastically. Commanders expanded the facilities and saw to the repair and replacement of old buildings. Engineers raised the parapet and modernized the armament, and most importantly, built and extended breakwaters to save the walls from the ocean.

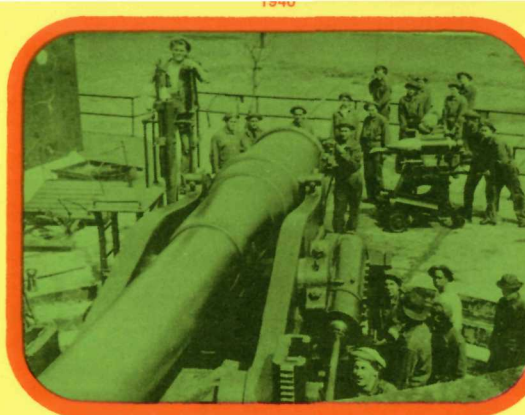
### Civil War and New Technology

In November 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected President, and on December 20 South Carolina carried out her threat to secede from the Union.



The two companies of the U.S. 1st Artillery stationed at Fort Moultrie braced the work for the impending clash, but the commander, Maj. Robert Anderson, thought that Fort Sumter, in the harbor, was a more defensible position. On the night of December 26 Moultrie's guns were spiked, and the garrison occupied Sumter. South Carolina troops took possession of Moultrie the next evening.

In February 1861 the Confederate States of America was proclaimed. In April President Lincoln, in office for only a month, announced his intention of resupplying Fort Sumter. The Confederate government ordered Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard, commanding Southern troops in Charleston, to demand the surrender of the fort. Major Anderson refused to surrender, and on the morning of April 12, Confederates at Fort Johnson fired a signal shot over Fort Sumter, beginning the 34-hour bombardment between Sumter and batteries on Morris Island and Sullivan's Island. The bloodless battle ended when Major Anderson, running out of ammunition and supplies, surrendered. The next day



Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion.

The first two years of the Civil War Charleston was not threatened, and the Confederates used the time to perfect their defenses. On April 7, 1863, Union ironclads attacked Charleston Harbor but retired after an unsuccessful 12½-hour engagement with Moultrie and Sumter. In July Union forces placed rifled cannon on Morris Island, and throughout the summer Union batteries inched up the island while the Confederates strengthened the Sullivan's Island defenses. By August 17 Union shells could reach Sumter and Moultrie. At Moultrie the barracks were razed and the walls of the fort banked with sand to protect them from the penetrating fire of rifled cannon.

By September 6, Union troops held all of Morris Island. For the next two days, U.S. Navy monitors bombarded Sumter and Moultrie, finally withdrawing at 2 p.m. on September 8. Until February 1865, when Gen. William T. Sherman advanced through South Carolina, Fort Moultrie

dued the Morris Island batteries and an occasional ironclad. When the Confederates evacuated Charleston, after Sherman's march into South Carolina, Union troops occupied Fort Moultrie, which they held for the rest of the war.

Not until the 1870s did the war-weary United States again look to the protection of its shores. Starting in 1872, the Army renovated Fort Moultrie, utilizing concepts developed during the war. Heavy guns were mounted, and new magazines were built and covered with tons of earth. In 1876 work was stopped and a fort keeper placed in charge of Fort Moultrie, once again leaving the work uncompleted.

### The Endicott Period

Until the end of the century, except for a brief period in the 1870s, the fort was neglected. In 1885 President Grover Cleveland convened a board headed by Secretary of War William C. Endicott to study United States coastal defenses in light of the new technology in guns and warships. The board called for a defensive system employing rifled cannon, mortars, and minefields, but no money was appropriated for Charleston until 1895. The following year workmen began constructing a 12-inch mortar battery a mile east of Moultrie. In 1897 Battery Jasper, an emplacement for four 10-inch disappearing guns, was begun.

In March 1898, as Spain and the United States drifted toward war, troops returned and Fort Moultrie was again garrisoned. The Army hastened construction of the two batteries and by April 21, when war was declared, they were complete. During the war, an electrically controlled minefield guarded the harbor entrance.

The end of the Spanish-American War in August 1898 did not mean, for a change, the end of construction at Moultrie. Inside the fort, batteries McCorkle, Bingham, and Lord were built as emplacements for small rapid-fire guns to protect the minefield. The Army also constructed four batteries for large guns: Battery Huger at Fort Sumter and Batteries Logan, Thomson, and Gadsden on Sullivan's Island. Early in this century, Fort Moultrie Military Reservation stretched for half a mile along the island.

### The World Wars

After the United States and Germany went to war on April 6, 1917, five companies of the S.C. National Guard reinforced the four regular army Coast Artillery companies at Fort Moultrie. The fort also became a troop staging area, where units were organized and trained before being shipped overseas. Charleston Harbor was never threatened during World War I. After the war the troops were quickly demobilized, so that by October 1919 what had been a command of 3,000 was reduced to 280 men. Between 1920 and 1940 Fort Moultrie's main function was to train citizen-soldiers. The Regular Army helped train Army Reserve and National Guard units here.

In 1940, because of the serious international situation, many units of the National Guard were federalized, among them the 252d Coast Artillery (N.C. National Guard), and the 263d Coast Artillery (S.C. National Guard), which were stationed at Fort Moultrie. In 1941, just before the outbreak of war, a Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) was established in a World War I frame structure at the fort to coordinate the harbor's defenses.

After Pearl Harbor, the Army again strengthened its seacoast defenses, activating the old batteries and mounting new 90-mm anti-aircraft guns. But the most immediate concern of the post was the operations of German submarines, which twice in 1942 mined the harbor entrance. Anti-submarine patrols were directed through the HECP.

As the war went on, new construction began on Sullivan's Island. A new concrete HECP was built at Moultrie and new batteries with overhead cover were begun between Battery Jasper and the east end of the island. Only one of these batteries was completed. Toward the end of the war older guns were scrapped, and in 1945 only two batteries were active.

By 1947 new technological advances in warfare had made a static seacoast defense system obsolete. In that year the U.S. Government deactivated Fort Moultrie, bringing to an end two centuries of coastal defense on Sullivan's Island.

#### About Your Visit

Fort Moultrie is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in summer and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in winter. It is closed Christmas Day.

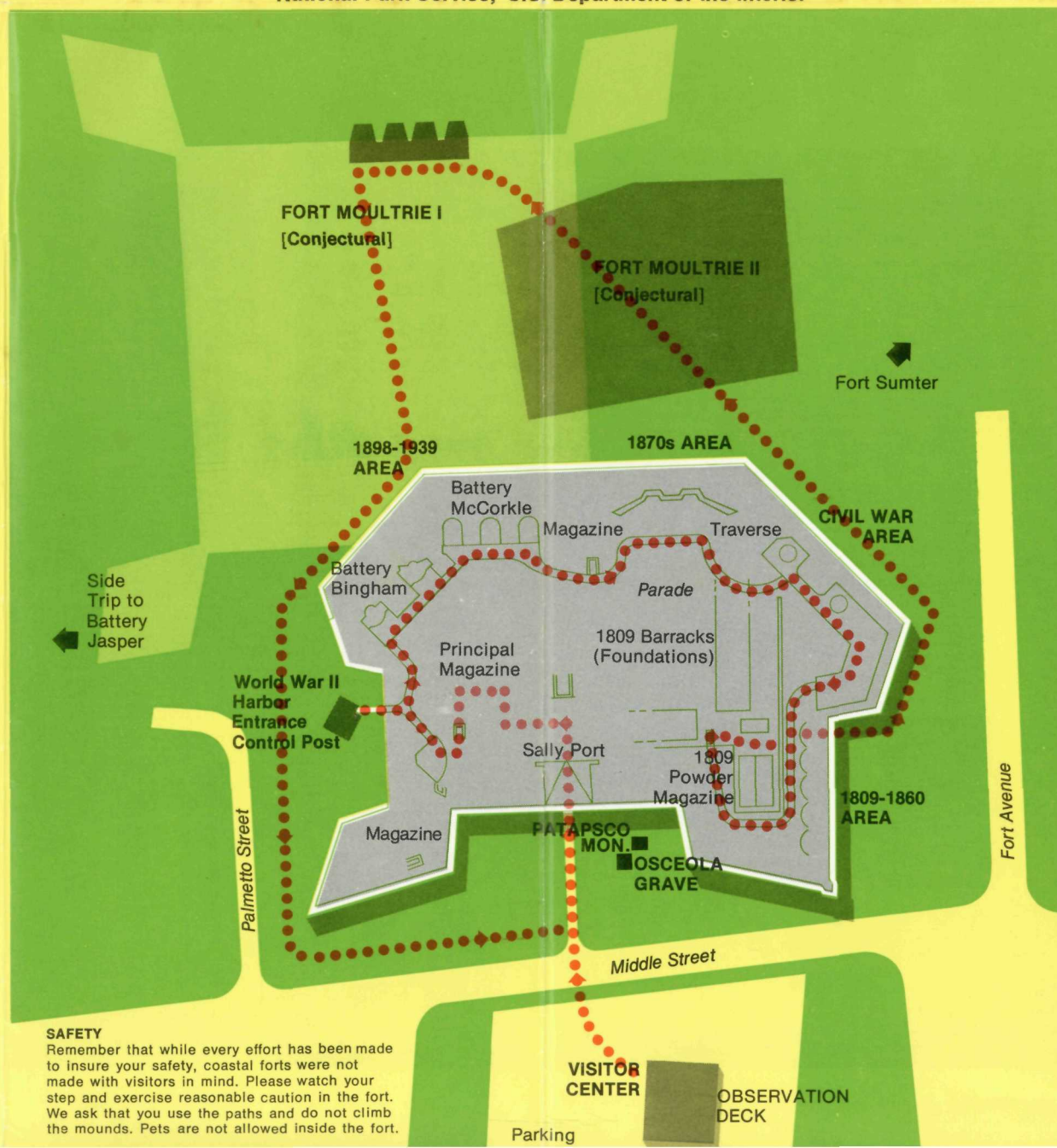
The fort is on west Middle Street on Sullivan's Island. From Charleston, take U.S. 17 N (business) to Mt. Pleasant, turn right on S.C. 703. At Sullivan's Island, turn right on Middle Street. The fort is located 2 miles from the intersection.

#### Administration

Fort Moultrie is administered as part of Fort Sumter National Monument by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Drawer R, Sullivan's Island, SC, 29482 is in immediate charge.

The present Fort Moultrie has been restored so that each of the 5 areas represents a different period in its history.

### National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior



#### SAFETY

Remember that while every effort has been made to insure your safety, coastal forts were not made with visitors in mind. Please watch your step and exercise reasonable caution in the fort. We ask that you use the paths and do not climb the mounds. Pets are not allowed inside the fort.