

Fort Wood and the Eleven Point Star

by Lynne Belluscio

As work begins on the new landscaping for the LeRoy Statue of Liberty on the creekbank, several people have asked about the cement star that is in the ground. This was part of the original installation in 1950 and was poured on site when the plinth was cast. Although the plinth has not survived very well and is being replaced, the star is in great condition.

The new landscaping and retaining wall that is being done by Bubbas, will expose the street side of the star, which has never been seen before. The only way you could see the star was to stand by the creek and look at the back-side of the Statue of Liberty. But why does it have eleven points?

The eleven point star is based on the base of the Statue of Liberty in the New York Harbor. That statue was built within the walls of an old fort.

The fort was built on Bedloe's Island by the Army Corps of Engineers and was completed in 1811. The fort was one of a series of fortifications built to defend the New York Harbor. Other batteries were built on Governor's Island, and Ellis Island as well as the round battery at the tip of Manhattan, known as Castle Clinton (which is where you buy tickets to take the boat to the Statue of Liberty today).

Fort Wood was known only as the "works on Bedloe's Island," but on November 9, 1814, the governor of New York named the fort after Eleazer D. Wood, who had died a hero in the Battle of Lake Erie at the end of the War of 1814.

Eleazor Wood was born in 1783 in New York City and he was educated at West Point and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers in 1806. He was involved with the construction of Castle Williams on Governor's Island.

During the War of 1812, he was part of the heroic defense of Fort Meigs on in Ohio and was the artillery commander in the Battle of the Thames. He was transferred to the forces on the Niagara frontier and was involved with the capture of Fort Erie, for which he was commended for bravery and promoted to lieutenant colonel. He was killed by the British while leading a sortie from Fort Erie. Fort Wood was defended by thirty heavy cannons capable of firing 24 pound cannonballs. The fort also had a stone magazine that held 200 barrels of gunpowder. By 1818, there were 306 men living at Fort Wood. It remained in military use until 1823, but was seldom used.

In 1844, the War Department



Statue of Liberty within the walls of Fort Wood, Liberty Island.

rebuilt the old fort with heavy, rusticated blocks of granite and in 1848, the New York Commissioners of Emigration established a convalescent hospital on Bedloe's Island for immigrants recovering from contagious diseases. During the Civil War the fort was used as an army recruiting station and was used for ordinance storage. The hospital also remained in operation.

In 1877, General William T. Sherman, at the request of President Rutherford Hayes, selected the fort as the site for the new Statue of Liberty, which was being constructed in France. After the Statue of Liberty was erected in 1886, a lighthouse keeper was posted on the island to oversee the Statue of Liberty as a beacon in the harbor. The old Fort was open to tourists. In 1907, new

repairs were begun, and in 1930, the old granite was replaced and work was done on the parapet and the rampart walls. In the 1950s plans were underway to install a museum of immigration, but it wouldn't be until 1972 that the museum would be opened.

From 1904 until 1923, the Army Signal Corps replaced the regular army at the fort. The Signal Corps were replaced by the Military Police, which remained until 1937, when the Secretary of War turned Bedloe's Island over to the National Park Service, as part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The island's name was changed from Bedloe's Island to Liberty Island by a joint resolution of Congress and was signed into law by President Eisenhower, on August 3, 1956.



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