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Fort Sumter: Ft. Sumter and Charleston, SC during the Civil War, 1861-1865

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According to the 1860 census, Charleston was ranked the 22nd largest city in the United States. Situated on the southeastern coast of the United States, Charleston served as a hotbed for trade during the late 1800s. However, when eleven southern states declared their succession from the rest of the United States in the early 1860s, people became angry and armies began to form. The eleven states formed what was known as the Confederate States of America—"The Confederacy." These eleven states fought against the rest of the United States, "The Union," in which soon became known as the American Civil War or War between the states. A major cause for their succession and the start of the war was over slavery. Many Confederates believed that slavery was an important part of southern society; however, many Union men were fighting to abolish the idea of slavery. Fort Sumter key to the beginning of the civil war. Located directly in the center of the Charleston harbor, the fort protected the city from neighboring islands located on all sides. The war began on April 12, 1861, when the first shots were fired from Fort Sumter. Many believe that images of downtown Charleston during the Civil War were from excessive amounts of bombing. While the city did face destruction, many of these images are not actually from the fighting aspect of the war. Rather, on December 11, 1861, an enormous fire broke out in downtown Charleston. This fire covered over 500 acres causing massive destruction and millions of dollars worth of damage. To this day, the origin could not be identified.

Fort Sumter played an important role in the American Civil War. Placed in the harbor of Charleston, its strategic location soon became the main focal point in a series of coastal fortifications. The five-sided brick structure was designed to house 855 men and 135 cannons. However, the fort was never filled to capacity. The cannons which can be found there included 42-pounders, 32-pounders, and 24-pounders. Each gun was strategically placed facing out towards its combatants. Cannons could be found around each tier of the fort; however, as the main source of artillery from the American Civil War, the cannons played an important role during the bombings towards and away from Fort Sumter. Each cannon was classified with regards to the size of the shot it was designed to fire. The 42-pdr Seacoast Gun Model 1845, which can still be found at Fort Sumter, weighs approximately 8,900 pounds and can fire a shot ranging over 700 yards.

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