Civil War Violin



One year after Rock Island Arsenal was established, a prison camp was built in 1863 to house Confederate prisoners of war. During the twenty months that the prison was in operation, 12,192 prisoners were confined at the Rock Island Barracks.

Prisoners occupied their time in a variety of ways. There was a prison library, church services, and a debating society. Games would help pass the time, and the prisoners enjoyed marbles and tag. Some prisoners carved rings, buttons, and trinkets from shells taken from the Mississippi River. One prisoner even carved violins by hand to sell to other prisoners, guards, and visitors.

Private H. E. Purdee, 7th Florida Infantry, made this violin which he sold to Mr. E. M. Cralla of Moline, Illinois on August 16, 1864. Glued inside the violin is a note which states, "is manufactured expressly for E. M. Cralla by H. E. Purdee of the 7th Fla. Reg. rebel prisoner of war. Made with a pocket knife in Barracks 33 Rock Island prison Ill. Aug. 16 – 1864".

The museum also owns a letter that mentions the violin. "There is some splendid violins here made with nothing but a pocket knife, so we music & dance & kill time."

Rock Island Prison BK 31 Ang 241-64
(och Island rison OK 31 Aug 2/1/6/1
My dear Hunt
4/ / -/' . ' 4
I have been throughing I would write
To you for some line, I had The pleasure of meeting
to you for some lime, I had the pleasure of meeting
All alike the state of the stat
John Hiber here a few days ago, he isvery well & looks better
Than Lever saw lim, I have had very good health
man sur man man, a much made only for man
this summer except at present I have had a slight attack
and a weight of present I have now a weight analy
of the facility of the facility of
of flux for a week but am better now I heard from
Ill had I want
home a few days since my little girl was quite sick
of the second
The rest of our relatives were all well, I have not
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
heard from Ed & John for some time if know my thing
of Them please let me hear I suppose uncle Charley
is still attending to the lower will, till him it
is still attending to the lower mill, till him if
is still attending to the lower mill, till him if
he can find line please write to a fellow I would
he can find line please write to a fellow I would
he can find hime please write to a fellow I would a be gled to hear from him any time, Tell Mip Sallio
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he can find time please write to a fellow I would be glad to hear from him any time, Tell Mit Sallie flat to keep the dogs off until the hunters come in. you will find my discommended seroll very hundersting as I have nothing to write about
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