

Newsletter

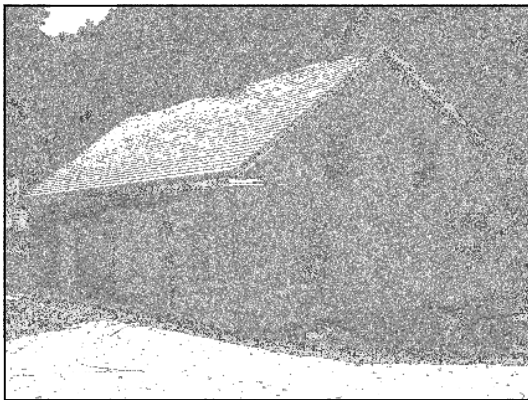
FRIENDS OF FORT TOTTEN PARKS

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FALL / WINTER ~ 2007 ~ VOLUME 2 / ISSUE 2



New Visitors' Center **at Fort Totten**

Thanks to \$850,000 in funding from Borough President Helen Marshall, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation has just completed the renovation of the old museum building near the entrance to the Battery at Fort Totten. Renovations included making the building ADA accessible by regrading the entrance and creating wheelchair accessible bathrooms. A new roof was installed and the area around the building was also renovated with concrete.

The renovated building will become the Fort Totten Visitors' Center and will be open to the public. The Center will feature both historical and environmental exhibits. At first, the exhibits will consist of some uniforms and artillery along with photographs that the Rangers were able to obtain. They will also have a live animal touch tank showing local sea life and some preserved animals. Janice Melnick, Northeast Queens Park Administrator, hopes to receive some grants in the future that will allow the Parks Department to create a real interactive exhibit.

The building will also become home to the Fort Totten Urban Park Rangers. The Rangers will now have indoor space to use in coordination with the many programs they offer at the Fort. This will include an indoor classroom for when children visit, artifacts, pictures and replicas of equipment from the Civil War era. The Rangers' new facility will not only have much for the history buff, but it will also have an astronomy exhibit along with information on the native wildlife species located in and around Fort Totten.

Ms. Melnick is excited to be able to once again have a place to store artifacts and historical information related to Fort Totten. She said, "I am grateful to Borough President Marshall for her support and recognition that a Visitors' Center at Fort Totten will enhance the public's ability to learn about and enjoy all that we have to offer." Ranger Supervisor John McCoy is equally thrilled.

Fort Totten Is Not Just Another Park – It's "Our" Park !

www.FortTottenParks.org

Interesting Places near Fort Totten — Pat Riot

Fort Totten holds a special place in our history, but there are many nearby places that are just as fascinating and historical. We plan to discuss some of these places in a recurring column highlighting areas of nearby historical interest.

HART ISLAND – Part 1

Located approximately three miles to the Northeast of Fort Totten and a half mile East of City Island, Hart Island has quite a colorful past. The island can be seen with a pair of binoculars from the North coast of Fort Totten. This 101 acre island has been used for a variety of purposes which we will explore over the next two issues of the FOFT newsletter.

Sold by the Siwaanoy tribe to John Pell in 1654, British mapmakers named it “Heart Island” in 1775 because they felt it was shaped like a heart. Another version claims the more common reason that it was named “Hart Island” was that it was the Middle English word for “deer” which seemed to reflect the primary inhabitants at the time. In any case, charts and maps began showing “Hart Island” two years after the British charted the island.

In 1860, Hart Island served as a training ground for Union Soldiers and later on as a Confederate prisoner of war camp during the Civil War. Over thirty four hundred Confederate soldiers were housed on the island and two hundred thirty five died. Their remains would later be relocated to Cypress Hills Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York in 1941. After the Civil War, Hart Island would begin the next chapter of her checkered history.

As a young New York City expanded North and previous Potter’s Fields (Washington Square, Madison Square, Bryant Park and the current site of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel) became too small to house the unclaimed it was decided push on to Randall’s and Ward’s Island and then to Hart Island as the City’s newest “unclaimed” burial ground. The name “Potter’s Field” is generally accepted as being derived from the New Testament of the Bible. (Mathew 27: 4-8)

On April 20, 1869, 24 year old Louise Van Slyke was the first person to be buried on the island after no one came forward to claim her body. Born at sea, she died in New York’s Charity Hospital on Welfare Island (now known as Roosevelt Island) and was interred in the newly established Potter’s Field

By the end of that year, more than two thousand more burials would take place at Hart Island. Since Louise Van Slyke, the City of New York has interred more than 750,000 unclaimed bodies on the island.


Today, prisoners bused and ferried from Riker’s Island Prison dig the graves and process the unclaimed as part of their jailhouse duties for which they are paid twenty five cents per hour. Calling themselves the ‘death patrol’ and ‘potter’s navy’ they appealed to the Board of Corrections to erect a memorial for the forgotten dead. In 1948 a thirty foot monument was built with a cross and a sign with the single word “peace”. Many buried at Hart Island took their stories to the grave but some stories survived. One story tells of a World War 1 Veteran buried at Potter’s Field being disinterred by French Nuns (whom he had sent money donations for nursing him to health during the war) after learning of his fate. He was then flown to France and buried in the convent cemetery.

In the next installment – Hart Island houses US Navy Prisoners and plays a part in the Cold War with the former Soviet Union..

Did you know that Bayside was, and in at least one case still is, home to celebrities of stage, screen and the fine arts? ~ Here is a sampling of some of our famous neighbors:

- Hei Kyung Hong is a Metropolitan Opera soprano and Bayside resident. She recently appeared as Violetta in Verdi's "La Traviata."
- John Barrymore star of stage and screen, once lived on 208th Street, just North of Northern Blvd.
- Dame May Witty famous Broadway actress, lived in what is now the Bay Terrace shopping mall.
- The Bennett Sisters Constance and Joan, were Bayside residents.
- Rudolph Valentino owned a home in Bayside. It is now known as "Café on the Green."
- Francis X. Bushman silent movie actor and star of the original "Quo Vadis" lived in a house overlooking Little Neck Bay.
- Spring Byington I lived in Bayside near the L.I.R.R. station.
- James J. Corbett aka "Gentleman Jim", lived on 35th Ave. in Bayside.
- Gloria DeHaven lived near Bell Blvd. on 38th Ave.
- Paul Douglas lived on 214th Street in Bayside.
- W.C. Fields lived near Little Neck Bay in Bayside.
- Buster Keaton the stone-faced silent screen star, lived in Bayside.
- Johnny Long bandleader from the Swing Era, lived on Bell Blvd. in Bayside.
- Groucho Marx once lived here in Bayside.
- Gloria Swanson was a Bayside resident.
- Robert Wagner once lived on 211th Street in Bayside.
- Roger Williams composer, lived near Crocheron Park in Bayside.
- Burt Young who played in the "Rocky" movies, lived on Bell Blvd. in Bayside.

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Fort Totten Fact

British Troops set up a garrison along the shoreline of Willets Point during the Battle of Brooklyn in August of 1776. This was to cut off outflanked Colonial Army troops being pushed North during battle, and to cut off any ships from attacking from sea. See a future edition of the newsletter for a story on this great post-Declaration of Independence battle.

NATURE & WILDLIFE

Winter Birds at Fort Totten

Fort Totten is a great place to see winter birds, especially waterfowl. Many ducks and geese visit the Fort and use it as a winter refuge. These birds are from the North and although it may seem cold to us, to these birds New York is like Florida with much friendlier temperatures and more food available to them. Today, I spotted a large “raft” of Scaup (diving ducks). There were hundreds of them floating together in the middle of Little Neck Bay, between the Fort and Udall’s Cove. They may have been here for weeks. There was a large group of these birds in the bay last year. This is probably the same group. Their dark blackish heads and necks, bluish bills and white sides can identify these birds. Other birds that are recent arrivals are the buffleheads. So far, I have seen only the males with a striking white bonnet-patch on their heads. These birds are smaller than the Scaup and seem to travel in smaller groups around the Fort. I urge everyone to walk around the Fort Totten Peninsula, Little Bay Park and the Joe Michael’s Mile and treat yourself to some fun bird watching this winter.—NY Park Ranger John McCoy

OUR FLAG

Our great flag is a symbol of our unity as a country. We will highlight our flag and it’s history in issues to come.



Our US Flag consists of thirteen horizontal stripes, seven red alternating with 6 white. The stripes represent the original 13 colonies, the stars represent the 50 states of the Union. The colors of the flag are symbolic as well: Red symbolizes Hardiness and Valor, White symbolizes Purity and Innocence and Blue represents Vigilance, Perseverance and Justice.

Consumer Corner

IF NYPD CALLS FOR MONEY IT’S NOT A COP—IT’S A CON

The NYPD never solicits charitable donations. Many people have been fooled by con artists that their “donations” will be used to support the NYPD or help widows & children of slain Officers. If you receive such a call, write down as much info as possible, ask for written materials or a callback number and report them to :

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www.FortTottenParks.org

Check our calendar, pictures of events,
 newsletter, and upcoming events.



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FORT SCHUYLER — COUSIN TO FORT TOTTEN

Fort Schuyler, located just northwest of Fort Totten and across Long Island Sound is nestled under the shadows of the Throgs Neck Bridge. Construction of a fort at that location had already been considered in 1818 by the US Government as a companion to Fort Totten. Together, these two forts would block off the western end of the Long Island Sound and protect New York from attack by sea to the East. The Federal Government finally purchased the 52 acre tract from William Bayard in 1826 to build the Fort. Construction of the pentagonal-shaped fort began in 1833 using granite brought over from Greenwich, Connecticut. By the end of 1845, the Fort was ready to accommodate a garrison of over 1,200 men, equipped with a vast array of armament. The armament installation took 11 years to complete.

Once completed, the Fort was given the name "Fort Schuyler" in honor of General Philip Schuyler, who commanded the United States Northern Army in 1777. General Schuyler was credited with laying the groundwork for the final defeat and capture of English General John Burgoyne, head of the British forces, who attempted to invade the US colonies by way of Canada.

After 1870, the Fort stood abandoned for three years after the US Army artillery vacated. In 1873, work was begun to widen the north and eastern waterfronts to install a new battery of 15 inch guns. The work was suspended in 1875 due to a lack of funding. Very little activity surrounding the fort took place for the next fifty six years.

In 1931, the Fort was taken over by the *Headquarters and Service Platoon and Company A, US ARMY* who were making a fire control map of New York and the vicinity. In 1934, the land was leased to the New York State Merchant Marine Academy, which is now a part of the New York Maritime College (SUNY). Following the lease to the Maritime Academy the fort saw very little defense activity and most of the guns in the Fort were stripped and used for scrap metal during World War II. The fort remains under the guidance of the Maritime Academy today.


Today, visitors to the College can also tour the Maritime Industry Museum. The museum was established in 1986 and is dedicated to the history of Fort Schuyler and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The museum has one of the largest collections of maritime history and is chronologically displayed. There are vast collections of ship models, navigational instruments, paintings, historical artifacts, and photographs. The museum also serves as a depository for maritime industry books, periodicals, documents, and old steamship company records. The museum is funded, staffed, operated and maintained through volunteers and outside monetary contributions. Many Maritime Cadets volunteer their time to serve as tour guides and assist in exhibit construction, and help in the upkeep of the museum. For more information about the museum, visit: www.maritimeindustrymuseum.org. or call 718 409 7218.

- Lily Louis

Stories, Email, comments and suggestions can be Emailed to
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New York's Greenway Explosion

Picture spending an entire day cycling around New York City and only rarely encountering automobiles. Consider being able to ride with your child along leafy paths without worrying about dangerous drivers. A fantasy? No, these are just some of the cycling joys available in the City's 400-mile greenway project – a considerable portion of which is already in place.

Greenways are New York City's biggest and best cycling secret. After years of planning and construction, a sprawling network of greenway paths has emerged in every borough. A "greenway" is an off-street path, often following waterfronts and parks. Some of these paths stretch for miles, others for only a few hundred yards. The new Brooklyn-Queens Greenway is a scenic 40 mile bike and pedestrian route from Coney Island in Brooklyn to Fort Totten Park here in Queens.

The Little Neck Bay greenway runs from the Throg's Neck Bridge in Little Bay Park to Fort Totten Park, then down the Joe Michael's Mile to Northern Blvd. for a total distance of a little over three miles. The Bayside Marina is the midpoint on the bike path where you can stop for refreshments. The bike path offers the rider splendid views of Little Bay, the Throgs Neck Bridge and Little Neck Bay. In July 1998, Little Bay Park received a renovation sponsored by Council Member Michael J. Abel that included a refurbishment of the athletic fields. Then, in August 1999, Abel sponsored further funds that included a roller hockey rink and the shoreline bike path.

Greenways are a century old idea, dating back to 1895 when the Ocean Parkway bike path in Brooklyn was created by Fredrick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux (who also designed Central Park). Robert Moses was another greenway builder. Moses built the Belt/Shore, Bronx River, Hutchinson River, Cross Island, and Wantagh Parkway bike paths.

The goal of the greenway plan is to connect the existing paths into a much larger and continuous network. Eventually, the NYC greenway network will be hooked into the East Coast Greenway, which is planned from Quebec to Washington, D.C. and then south to Key West, Florida. Regionally, the Hudson River section of the NYC greenway will stretch from the southern tip of Manhattan to Albany. There are also plans to eventually link bike paths from the Queens border all the way to Montauk. In the last ten years, the number of daily cyclists has increased by 30,000. In 1993, there were 59 miles of greenways. Today there are 90 miles of greenway for everyone to enjoy. - Bob Sansosti

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Don't forget the
Fort on Haunted Hill
All your favorite ghouls and
goblins are back.

Saturday, October 27 2007

12 pm to 4 pm

Rain date Sun., Oct. 28, 2007

www.FortTottenParks.org

Friends of Fort Totten Receive Financial Grants and Donations

The Friends of Fort Totten Parks has been fortunate in receiving a variety of grants, donations and financial awards this past year. The Partnership for Parks, a program of the New York City Dept. of Parks and Recreation, and the City Parks Foundation provided a grant in support of the Friends of Fort Totten Parks. This grant from the Partnership for Parks Capacity Fund enabled us to publish our newsletter for 2007. A prior grant by the Partnership for Parks enabled us to establish a website and voicemail. An anonymous donation has helped maintain this website.

Elected officials have also been strong supporters of our organization. Councilman Tony Avella is an active supporter in events such as "Back to School Festival" and with "Fort on Haunted Hill." Always willing to don a potato sack and join in the festivities, one ponders who's having more fun, the kids or Tony? Senator Toby Ann Stavisky continues to support the "Crafty Totten Kids" program, now in its second year. Next year's program (2008) will include adding an 8-14 year old and adults 50+ free arts program. The Cord Meyer Development Company is a strong supporter of The Friends of Fort Totten Parks by providing funds and materials for events such as our Family Fun Day. Senator Frank Padavan recently offered his support to expand Family Fun Day to include a Civil War reenactment for 2008. The AXA Foundation contributed generously, as the result of our own Second Vice President, Phil Konigsberg, being the recipient of the Darwin Davis Award for community service. These funds will be used to increase public awareness of the Parks cultural, educational and recreational events. Assemblywoman Ann Margaret Carrozza and will also be providing funding for 2008's fiscal year.

Donations have also been received via the newsletter request and general donations. We would like to thank each and every person who donated money and/or time. Without such contributions, we would be unable to provide these free events to the community. Please support our organization in any way you can.

Interested in forming a Runners Group within the Fort Totten Parks area?

If so , contact us at our website and tell us what you'd like to see happen.

www.forttottenparks.org

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www.FortTottenParks.org

Friends of Fort Totten Parks and The New York City Dept. of Parks
Schedule of Events

SeptemberCrafty Totten Kids

Sat 9/15 10:30 AM - 12 Noon

Patriots Day

OctoberFort on Haunted Hill

Sat 10/27 12 - 4 PM

(rain date 10/28)

Haunted Lantern Tour

Sat 10/27

6.30 - 8.30 PM

Dog Costume Party

Sun 10/28 1PM @ the dog park

**November**Crafty Totten Kids

Sat 11/17 10:30 AM /12 Noon

FEBRUARY—2008Crafty Totten Kids

Sat 2/9 10:30 AM - 12 Noon

Valentines Day

Please call (718) 352 4793 x16 or check the websites
for all the details and/or changes
www.FortTottenParks.org / www.NYC Parks.gov

Community Board 7 approves demolition of 19 abandoned military barracks on Fort Totten

Members of the community and Board members of Community Board 7 (CB7) met June 11, 2007 to discuss the Parks Dept. request to demolish 19 of 21 abandoned military barracks in Fort Totten. The topic was outlined by Northeast Queens Park Administrator Janice Melnick to a packed room. Assisted by staff from Nancy Owens Studio, LLC, the Landscape Architects, Ms. Melnick outlined the reasons for the proposed demolition. The primary reasons included the lack of use as a result of the buildings being abandoned for more than ten years, and the obstruction of views and available areas to park patrons. Under the proposed plan, 19 of the 21 existing buildings would be made safe for demolition and then deconstructed. Once the area has been cleared, the area would be filled in with earth and seeded with new grass. Additional ideas were brought up as part of a "master plan," but it was stressed that these were ideas open for discussion and approval. CB7 stated that each addition to the park would be brought to the Board for discussion and approval. The Parks Dept. filed and received approval for this phase from the Landmarks Preservation Commission as the Fort is a Landmark.

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