FORT TOTTEN MASTER PLAN UNDERWAY

The redevelopment of Fort Totten as a park for the public to enjoy is finally underway. The project began in October with asbestos abatement in the twenty-two 1950s Capehart Townhouses. The asbestos abatement is now complete and 19 of these buildings will be demolished beginning this summer.

The Parks Department had presented their Master Plan including Phase I of the project to Community Board 7. Phase I, which includes the asbestos abatement, demolition, and landscaping of the “North Park” area, was approved by CB 7. Much of the fort is a NYC Historic District and therefore requires approval from the Landmarks Preservation Committee (LPC) before any work can begin. The project, which was designed by Nancy Owens Studios, was approved by LPC and received high marks from the Municipal Arts Society as well.

While the schematic plans depicted include an outdoor performance area, a Veteran’s Garden, and other amenities, Parks only has funding to demolish the buildings and minimally landscape the area. We certainly hope to get additional funding in the future that would allow us to create some of the amenities that the community requested.

The demolition and landscaping is scheduled to begin summer 2008. The project will take approximately 18 months to complete so much of the park will be closed during the construction. We look forward to completing this project and opening so much more of the park to the public.

-Janice Melnick

Fort Totten Is Not Just Another Park — It’s “Our” Park!

www.FortTottenParks.org
Hart Island ~ Part 2

At the end of the 1800’s, the Department of Corrections established a jail workhouse for the aged and infirmed inmates as well as the city’s drunks & drug addicts. In 1925 a proposed amusement park was quickly shut down by the City but not until a boardwalk, a dance hall and a bathing house had been constructed. During World War II, The US Navy built disciplinary barracks there to house a German U Boat crew captured nearby, and later on during the war, “high spirited” US Navy sailors.

From 1955 - 1961 The US Army established and maintained a “NIKE” missile defense system on the island as part of the Cold War standoff with the former Soviet Union. This was a top secret military installation so secret that many did not know it existed until many years after it’s dismantling. Army personnel stationed at nearby Fort Slocum (located on David’s Island) maintained the missiles as the primary line of defense against air attacks. The twenty one missiles in their silos were capable of destroying any aircraft within 30 miles at super sonic speeds. The program became obsolete when the Soviet Union changed it’s tactics to using ballistic missiles, making the NIKE obsolete. One can assume that the NIKE missile program served to change the course of how the Soviets would think. By 1961, the Army would close the base and remove the missiles but the silos are still intact on the island and serve as a chilly reminder of the cold war.

After 1961 the island would settle down into its current use but not until a few more twists and turns. During the course of the 20th century, an Almshouse (poorhouse), Debtor’s Prison and Phoenix House (a drug rehabilitation facility) would all call Hart Island their home. The island also served as quarantine area for yellow fever & tuberculosis during World War II.

At present, The Dept of Corrections maintains the island along with Potter’s Field. It is not open to the public and large signs warn would-be visitors that is a prison and all should stand clear of the island. Trespassing is punishable by a fine of $600 and a year in prison. The Dept. of Corrections has a guided tour of the island every five years or so based on local resident request. During these tours visitors are allowed to see the outside of the abandoned missile silos & ruins of building some dating back to 1850. There have been proposals to turn the missile silos and abandoned buildings into a museum. Hart Island remains a complex but important part of New York City’s history.—Pat Riot

(chart above shows Hart Island to the northeast of Willets Point– numbers surrounding the islands are water depth at low tide)

www.FortTottenParks.org
AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY—RELAY FOR LIFE

The American Cancer Society will be hosting the 5th Annual Relay For Life of Fort Totten taking place on June 7-8, 2008. Relay For Life is a unique celebration of life. It is a non-competitive overnight event where teams take turns walking, running, skipping or dancing around a track, relay-style, in honor and in memory of those whose lives have been touched by cancer. A festive atmosphere prevails as team members camp out on the surrounding grounds for the duration of the event to enjoy music, food, fun, entertainment and activities while building camaraderie with fellow teammates and participants. It raises awareness of cancer in the community and raises money to support the programs and services of the American Cancer Society.

A team captain forms a team and team members collect contributions prior to the event through a variety of creative fundraising ideas. Relay For Life is the celebration party at the end of the fundraising period. Participants grab tents and lawn chairs and head to the Relay For Life location. Teams and individual participants pitch tents on the field and take turns walking around the track. Relay For Life is not just about honoring survivors – it’s about empowering them to fight back against cancer. The first lap at a Relay For Life is special – the Survivor/Caregiver Lap. Cancer survivors and caregivers from the community are invited to take part in this victory lap and are cheered on by fellow participants in true celebration of their courageous battle.

In the evening, there is a luminaria candle ceremony in tribute to those who have been affected by cancer. The luminarias are purchased in honor of those who have survived their battle with cancer, for those that are still fighting, and in memory of those who have courageously battled this disease but lost. Votive candles are placed in white bags filled with sand and are positioned around the track and are kept burning throughout the night, representing the healing power of community and the importance of funding to find a cure. To register, participate, or volunteer, log on to http://events.cancer.org/RFLforttottenNY or contact John Link at 718-263-2225, ext. 38 or e-mail John.Link@cancer.org. For 24-hour cancer information call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

- John Link

FREE WATERCOLOR ART CLASSES

The Friends of Fort Totten in connection with Senator Toby Stavisky and the NE Queens Park Administrator will offer free water color classes for adults & children. The classes (a total of 4 Saturdays for each student) will take place at the fort. There is no charge for these series of classes & supplies will be issued free of charge. Classes are limited so check the website for details and reservation forms.
Our National Anthem was written by Francis Scott Key after witnessing the attack on Fort McHenry in Baltimore by the British on September 14, 1814, and it’s sung to the tune of a popular English pub song of the times. The Star Spangled Banner had humble beginnings as a poem titled “the Defense of Fort McHenry”. On September 21, 1814, The Baltimore American published that poem thus making it known if not yet popular. It would take another 116 years for it to be the official anthem of the United States.

The song would become the unofficial anthem of the Northern Army at the start of the Civil War. After the war, The US Naval Academy adopted the “Star Spangled Banner” song as its anthem in 1889, The US Marines in 1890, and The US Army in 1895.

The first time The Star Spangled Banner was ever played at a sporting event was on September 5, 1918 on the occasion of the first game of the World Series between the Chicago Cubs and Boston Red Sox. Heated debates in Congress over the following years regarding the appropriateness of the song kept the Star Spangled Banner in the shadows. Finally on April 21, 1930 the House approved a bill to adopt the song as our National Anthem, backed by Congress and signed into law by President Herbert Hoover.

www.FortTottenParks.org
The British are coming!

Well, in fact they were already here. The Battle of Brooklyn which took place on August 27, 1776 is considered by many historians to have been an understated historical event in America’s independence. The major difference in this battle was the shift in how the Continental Army did battle with the British.

After the reading of the Declaration of Independence in New York City on July 9th, 1776 the Continental Army fought as a united nation, not just as rebels against the English Crown. It was also the largest battle of the revolution in terms of soldiers and casualties. The conduct of warfare would change as well in methods used on opposing sides. No longer was it a “gentleman’s war.”

The British wanted to secure the port of New York harbor and quell what they still considered a rebellion by non-loyalists in a British colony. English ships had landed on the shores of Gravesend Bay, Brooklyn and along the shores of what is now Bay Ridge. They also landed along the shores of “coney” (old English for rabbit) island so named because of the abundance of the furry little creatures.

A surge of fierce fighting with ‘rebel’ troops took place all along the east river up towards Hells Gate (in now what is known as Astoria). The British thinking they would out flank Washington’s Continental Army set up a garrison at our own Willets Point to block any rebel ship entering the East River and any advancing Continental soldiers. Even back then, Willets Point was recognized as an important strategic location for protection of New York Harbor. The English set up cannons on the shores under what is now the shores of the Triboro Bridge and Blackwell (now Roosevelt) Island in anticipation of their invasion of Manhattan. Further down the East River another important moment in history was soon to take place.

In the evening of September 6, 1776 a whaleboat towed the first hand-powered submarine ever made across New York Harbor towards the British Flagship EAGLE. Invented by David Bushnell of Connecticut the “American Turtle” submerged and approached the flagship with the intent of drilling into the hull and attaching a gun powder bomb. The copper-clad hull proved to be impossible to drill through thus the operation was a failure but was the first time a submarine successfully submerged, navigated to the target and return safely.

In the final result, the thirty-two thousand well-trained British force overcame the Colonial Army of only eleven thousand; but it showed England that the “United Colonies” (as they were called during this period) were no longer just a mob of angry rebels but a united force that would ultimately overcome the British and be an independent nation. - Pat Riot
History of Crocheron Park
Located on 35th Avenue near Little Neck Bay in Bayside -
There is an abundance of history in these 45.8 acres

The Crocheron family lived on the edge of Little Neck Bay for centuries. The first family member to live in the area was John Crocheron, a farmer whose will dates from 1695. His long line of distinguished descendants include Henry Crocheron, a Congressman from 1815 to 1817; Jacob Crocheron, a Congressman from 1829 to 1831; Nicholas Crocheron, a member of the 1854 State Assembly; and Joseph Crocheron, a horse racer and gambler who was as renowned as Cornelius Vanderbilt and August Belmont.

In the days when the Tweed Ring ruled city government (1866-1871), the park was a political gathering place. The “Old Crocheron House” here on the shores of Little Neck Bay was a favorite site for Tammany Hall picnics and clambakes.

The Crocheron family house burned down in 1907, and the estate remained unused and undeveloped for almost 20 years. In 1924, the City of New York purchased the land where the house once stood. The following year, at the request of the Bayside Civic Association, the city purchased another 45 acres and drew up plans to build a park on the consolidated property. By 1936, the City had turned the area into a park with picnic grounds, winding walks, an enlarged lake for winter-time skating, and thousands of trees. Since 1936, fields of saplings have grown into a veritable forest, and the Parks Dept. has added a playground, a dozen tennis courts, a baseball diamond, and a field house. In addition, visitors can also take in the splendid views of Little Neck Bay from the hexagonal gazebos that stand on the bluff. - Bob Sansosti

Fort Totten Fact
In 1922, the first anti-aircraft unit arrived at Fort Totten. During World War II, the Fort’s armament would be limited to the remaining three inch batteries mounting four rapid fire guns, vintage 1902 and a three-gun anti-aircraft battery. In 1941, the Fort was made the Anti-Aircraft Command of the Eastern Defense Command, responsible for the entire east coast of the United States.
The Fort on Haunted Hill Halloween Celebration was a big success this year. Pushed back a day due to rainy weather, the event was held on Sunday instead. The evening tour of the fort was a scream!!!
Friends of Fort Totten Parks and The New York City Dept. of Parks
Schedule of Events for 2008

MARCH
Free Watercolor Classes, check our website for details - www.FortTottenParks.org
Sat / March 1, 8, 15, 22 2008 Adults 10.30 AM, Children 12.30 PM
Sat / April 5, 12, 19, 26—2008 Adults 10.30 AM, Children 12.30 PM

MAY
Crafty Totten Kids—Spring is here! Crafts
Sat/May 3 10.30 AM—noon
FOFT free arts & crafts (check website for details)

JUNE
Crafty Totten Kids—Father’s Day Crafts
Sat/ June 7 10.30 AM—noon
FOFT free arts & crafts (check website for details)
Romeo & Juliet—Moose Hall Theater
June 15, 2008 7PM (bring a chair)
Free theatre at the Parade Grounds

JULY
Family Fun Day
Sat / July 12, 12noon—4 PM
Free games, demonstrations, pet microchip
Sun / July 27, 7PM (bring a chair)
Free theater at the parade grounds

AUGUST
Crafty Totten Kids—Summer Arts Crafts
Sat/ date announced on website 10.30 AM—noon
FOFT free arts & crafts (check website for details)
Cinderella Samba
Mon / August 18, 10.30AM
( bring a chair or blanket)

SEPTEMBER
Back to School Festival
Sat/ September 6, 12 noon—4PM
Games, rides, crafts and giveaways

OCTOBER
Crafty Totten Kids—Halloween Crafts
Sat/ 10.30 AM—noon
FOFT free arts & crafts (check website for details)
Halloween Festival
Sat/October 25, 12noon—4pm
NOTE—Fort Totten OR Crocheron Park
(check website for updates)
Haunted Lantern tours
Sat /October 25, 6.30PM—8.30 PM

NOVEMBER
Crafty Totten Kids—Native American Crafts
Sat/ date announced on website 10.30 AM—noon
FOFT free arts & crafts (check website for details)

Please call (718) 352 4793 x16 or check the websites for all the details and/or changes

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2008 FRIENDS OF FORT TOTTEN PARKS DONOR
Please join us in shaping the future of Fort Totten Parks by making a donation.

Name _____________________ Address _____________________ City/State ____________ Zip Code_______

E-Mail Address _________________________________ (for notices, updates and events)

Please make checks payable and mail to: Friends of Fort Totten Parks, PO Box 604984, Bayside, NY 11360

$5  $10  $25  Other

Are you interested in joining one of our many committees? ____ Yes ____ No
(We welcome your suggestions under separate note or via e-mail FriendsOfFortTottenParks@yahoo.com)

~ The FOFTP Newsletter— All the news that fits, we print ~