Spring is Bustin’ Out All Over!

Hopefully, as you read this cover story, the birds will be singing, the tulips will begin to blossom and local critters will be flying or crawling back into our area. Turtles will be waking up and woodpeckers will start hammering away again. Hawks and local fisherman will anxiously wait for the arrival of spring flounder and fall bluefish. Yes, it was a long winter, but the good news is – IT’S OVER!

Time for outdoor activities and walks in the park. That’s our cover story, a walk in the park.

If you haven’t done a walk through our wonderful park, you really should! Make an afternoon of it. Of course you can bike through the park, kayak around the park or even ride the free tram around the park but walking has so many advantages. Pack a light lunch or an afternoon snack and take a slow walk past the historic front gates. Imagine Admiral Farragut shouting to his crew “Damn the torpedoes – Full steam ahead!” – Why you ask? – Well, see those silver spheres atop the front gate posts? Those are sea mines or as they were known back in the Admiral’s day, “torpedoes”. There’s a lot of history as well as beauty and tranquility in our park. As you continue to walk up the road inside the gates, you’ll see many original historic houses. To the left is the New York Police Department Communications Unit, beyond that is the U.S. Coast Guard Station and the Bayside Volunteer Ambulance Corps! Bear to the right and walk past old officers quarters as you walk up the hill. Stop at the yet to be renovated “Bachelors Officers Quarters” with its majestic porch and beautiful architecture. Just beyond there to the right is the Bayside Historical Society. That building is the original Officers Club of the Army Corps of Engineers. Make a quick left and take a look at the chapel. We at the Friends of Fort Totten Parks utilize the chapel for our Crafty Totten Kids programs. If it’s open, walk inside and admire the craftsmanship, the wooden benches and altar. After the chapel, walk to the east and towards Little Neck Bay. A walk along the shoreline is very relaxing and filled with sights to see. A large building on the corner continued on page 5

Well, it’s hard to believe that the FOFTP newsletter is five years old now. Two issues a year packed with stories and information regarding events in the park and issues that impact our park and neighborhood. The distribution of the newsletter has reached over five thousand readers. Your humble editor and staff have enjoyed researching the history of the Fort and meeting people associated with it.

Needless to say, we could not have done any of this without the help of our friends at the Parks Dept, The Partnership for Parks, elected officials such as Congressman Gary Ackerman Senator Frank Padavan, Senator Toby Stavisky, Assemblywoman Ann Margaret Carrozza, Councilman Tony Avella, and local vendors who purchased ads in our newsletter to offset the printing costs. Thanks to our friends. Friends such as NE Parks Administrator Janice Melnick, all the Park Rangers, The New York City Police & Fire Departments, The US Army and thanks to our own current and former volunteers. So thanks Joe, thanks Al, Rosemarie, Lu, Sylvia, Phil, Lily, Meg, Bob, Warren, Matt and Gary. And thanks to those who have donated time or funding to make what we do as the Friends of Fort Totten Parks possible.

Next time you attend an event or walk through the park, think of all of those who have donated time and effort to make the park the best park it can be. Then think, “I could do this!” Call or write and become part of the volunteer group here and make a difference. Just a little time goes a LONG way.

–Regards, Pat Riot
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ARMED FORCES DAY

President Harry S. Truman led an effort to establish a holiday for US citizens to rally together and thank members of the military for their service to the country. In 1949, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson announced the creation of an Armed Forces day to commemorate the unification of the Air Force, Army, Navy & Marine Corps. under one jurisdiction – The Department of Defense. The US Coast Guard was later added to the list of services being honored.

In the United States, Armed Forces Day is recognized on the third Sunday in May. Many military bases celebrate the day with an “open house”, parades, receptions and air shows. The picture below shows a young boy climbing on a tank during an Armed Forces Day open house at Fort Totten in 1964!

HALLOWEEN @ FORT TOTTEN

Ghouls, goblins and parents alike had a screaming good time at this year’s Fort Totten event. Daytime saw family events such as inflatable rides, costume parades, crafts and pumpkin patches. Sack races, face painting and hay rides filled in this fun day. Co sponsored by Councilman Tony Avella, The Friends of Fort Totten Parks and the Parks Department the event was a huge success. The evening event brought out the REAL spooky ghouls! Park Rangers, Friends of Fort Totten Parks volunteers and Bayside High School Volunteers dressed up in their scariest and managed to haunt the fort for groups of guests led by lantern touting Rangers. Look in the fall edition of the newsletter for the next Fort on Haunted Hill event next October.

Crafty Totten Kids ~January, 2010

On a brisk but clear day this past January more than two dozen kids and parents got together in the chapel on Fort Totten to assemble and paint paper mache face masks. Under the direction of our Artistic Director Meg Branzetti, the kids were encouraged to be as creative as possible with color and design. The results were impressive indeed! Many thanks to Meg and all those involved with the event. Look for future Crafty Totten Kids events on our website.”
DON'T TREAD ON ME – also known as the “Gadsden Flag” and named after US General and designer Christopher Gadsden holds an important place in American history.

The use of a timber rattlesnake as a symbol of the American colonies and symbol also of discontent can be recorded back to Benjamin Franklin when in 1751 he published an opinion in the then very popular Pennsylvania Gazette. It had been the policy of England to send convicted criminals to America to cause havoc in those days. Franklin suggested in return that America thank England by sending back rattlesnakes.

The snake would be used later as a means to unite and show opponents that America would not stand unopposed. In 1754, during the French & Indian War, Franklin would publish his famous woodcut of a snake cut into eight pieces. The rally phrase of “JOIN OR DIE” would unite the eight colonies in that conflict. It was also marked the first political cartoon ever published in an American newspaper.

In 1775, the United States Navy was established in part to intercept incoming British ships carrying soldiers and supplies into the American colonies. To assist in this defense, the Second Continental Congress mustered five companies of US Marines to accompany the Navy on their first mission. One of the three members of the Marine Committee outfitting the mission was one Christopher Gadsden. The Marines carried drums painted yellow, with a coiled snake and thirteen rattles (one for each colony) aboard the ship. Below the snake was their motto – “Don’t Tread On Me”. This flag later became an early motto and flag for the Marines. The Navy then used a variation of the original coiled snake as their own flag. Considered to be one of the first visible flags of the United States, the coiled timber snake flag was later replaced by our current “Stars & Stripes”. The “Don’t Tread On Me” flag has endured time and has been re-introduced in recent years as both a symbol of patriotism and as a symbol of disagreement with the government. Most recently the Don’t Tread On Me flag has been used in so called “Tea Party” rallies held in protest of taxes. The flag is also flown aboard all active US Navy ships, Customs Service, Coast Guard and worn by many active US Military personnel in the wake of the 9/11/01 attacks. All are proudly worn in a showing of vigilance and courage.

(source: Wikipedia)
FAMOUS QUOTES
– DON’T TREAD ON ME FLAG
(or why Ben Franklin thought the snake was a good symbol of the American spirit)

“I recollected that her eye excelled in brightness, that of any other animal, and that she has no eye-lids—She may therefore be esteemed an emblem of vigilance.—She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders. She is therefore an emblem of magnanimity and true courage.—As if anxious to prevent all pretensions of quarreling with her, the weapons with which nature has furnished her, she conceals in the roof of her mouth, so that, to those who are unacquainted with her, she appears to be a most defenseless animal and even when those weapons are shown and extended for her defense, they appear weak and contemptible; but their wounds however small, are decisive and fatal—Conscious of this, she never wounds till she has generously given notice, even to her enemy, and cautioned him against the danger of treading on her.—Was I wrong, Sir, in thinking this a strong picture of the temper and conduct of America?”

—Benjamin Franklin

The American Cancer Society will be hosting the 6th Annual Relay For Life of Fort Totten taking place on June 5-6, 2010. Relay For Life is a non-competitive overnight event where teams walk around a track, relay-style, in honor and in memory of those whose lives have been touched by cancer. The first lap at a Relay For Life is special. It’s the Survivor/Caregiver Lap. Cancer survivors from the community are invited to participate in this victory lap. In the evening, there is a luminaria candle ceremony. These luminarias are purchased in honor or in memory of those who have courageously battled this disease. The candles 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://www.relayforlife.org/forttottenNY or contact Leslie Orlovsky at 718-261-1092, ext. 5526 or e-mail Leslie.Orlovsky@cancer.org.

For 24-hour cancer information call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

Enjoy! Check elsewhere in this issue for topics discussed here — Pat Riot

The location of the base hospital. Built in 1864, the Grant General Hospital sadly fell in disrepair and is no longer in use. Doctor Walter Reed served at this hospital. You may recognize that name as Dr. Reed identified the mosquito as the carrier of yellow fever, stemmed the spread of the disease and has a hospital named after him in Washington, D.C. As you walk along the coast, look to the northeast (hope you brought binoculars), watch for local woodpeckers, red tailed hawks, and ospreys along the walk. Besides all the wonderful migrating and local birds, you can look off and (usually) see a large blue and white ship at a dock. That’s probably the training vessel T/V KINGS POINT, part of the Merchant Marine Academy. Often on the weekends, you’ll see a gaggle of small sails in that area as well. Small boat training and competition is an integral part of midshipmen training. A walk to the north from there will bring you to the actual Fort. You can walk around and marvel at the design and imagine cannons being pulled out the gun turret holes. (kids love this part by the way, even the big ones). The Fort’s Visitor Center is located right at the Fort (filled with artifacts and an information kiosk). Thankfully, next to the Fort are the restrooms as well. A walk to the south from there will bring you back to the front gate and back into the big city. For a printable map of the park to help chart your walk, please visit us at www.forttottenparks.org

Enjoy! Check elsewhere in this issue for topics discussed here — Pat Riot

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“Spring is Bustin’ Out All Over!” continued from page 1
DAMN THE TORPEDOES, FULL STEAM AHEAD!
Admiral David G. Farragut
Torpedo Development at Fort Totten
— Pat Riot

US NAVY Admiral David G. Farragut’s often quoted statement, “Damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead,” was shouted during the offensive at Mobile Bay during the Civil War. But it was really in reference to the sea mines blocking the harbor, not what we commonly refer to as torpedoes today.

Today, we think of a torpedo as a self propelled underwater missile launched from a ship at an opponent. Historically, the term “torpedo” referred to what we now call an underwater explosive mine. Back in 1840, Samuel Colt, inventor of the Colt revolver, engineered a means of firing an underwater explosive using electricity and invented a wire that could be used underwater. These two new devices launched the development of torpedoes (or sea mines) into an new era.

“Torpedoes” were of two basic types. One type was anchored in a harbor or seaway via cables and exploded when a ship came into contact with the mine. The other type was also anchored but fired via a remote control wire. The advantage of the remote controlled sea mines were to allow access to “friendly” ships while being able to secure the harbor from unwanted ships entering.

In 1869 US Army Col. Henry L. Abbot was assigned to Fort Totten at Willets Point to develop and perfect the use of the sea mines (or torpedoes) as a method of protecting harbors and coastal areas from enemy ships. He worked and developed these mines right here at Fort Totten. The first mines were deployed in 1869 during the Spanish / American War. These mines were used all along the US coast and right here off Fort Totten! The NY Times reported on February 26, 1898 that a line of torpedoes were being placed in the (Long Island) sound between Willets Point and Fort Schuyler.

Since the Army Corps of Engineers pioneered and perfected the sea mines, it became their responsibility to deploy and manage the mines for years to come. They operated under the authority of the “Coast Artillery Corps”. In 1949, that responsibility was transferred to the US Navy due to the belief that air power had left the sea mines obsolete.

A pair of decommissioned sea mines can be seen atop the entry gate columns at Fort Totten. A sea mine also became logo of The Friends of Fort Totten Parks. Next time you walk up to the main gate, remember the words of Admiral Farragut from the deck of his flagship the USS Hartford.

Ed. note – Admiral Farragut remained on active duty for life, an honor only given to six other US naval officers. He died at the age of 69 in Portsmouth NH and is interned in Woodlawn Cemetery, The Bronx, NY.
Laying Torpedoes in the Sound

The Defenses at Willets Point Strengthened
—Reprinted from The New York Times  Feb 26 1898

WILLETS POINT, L. I., Feb. 25.— There is great activity at Willets Point, the fort on the Long Island side of the Sound, and at Fort Schuyler, opposite, on the Westchester side. At Willets Point two ten-inch disappearing guns have just been mounted.

A line of torpedoes is being placed in the Sound between Willets Point and Fort Schuyler. The torpedoes will be anchored so close together that it would be impossible for a vessel to cross the line without being blown up if the torpedoes were fired. Several groups of torpedoes are being laid. Each group has twenty-two torpedoes, and each torpedo contains 120 pounds of dynamite. The torpedoes are connected with electric wires.

At Fort Schuyler a torpedo magazine has just been completed. It is the strongest in any fort in the country, and is surrounded by several smaller ones. The outside wall of the fort where the magazine faces has a wall twenty feet wide and ninety feet long.

Little Bay Dog Run  Fetching parcel thrills dog & owners alike

The Little Bay Dog Run will be transformed from a temporary playground for man’s best friend to a permanent one this year. Funded through a grant obtained by Councilman Tony Avella, groundbreaking took place back in December along with Queens Park Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski and City Councilman elect Dan Halloran. Also in attendance was Councilman Halloran’s dog “Dasher” who was reported to be quite in favor of the project.

The new dog run will replace the temporary run with improvements to include separate runs for large and smaller dogs, ‘paw friendly’ stone screens rather than fencing, shaded areas and benches.

The Freedom Run Association (a non-profit organization) will monitor and maintain the dog run for the City. President Miguel Chavez thinks, “This is Great” when asked his thoughts on the plans.

The dog run is scheduled to open in spring.

EMERALD AWARD GOES TO ONE OF OUR OWN!

The Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces awarded their annual “Emerald Award” to honor exceptional service to the Community and The Parks Department this past November. Lu Kernahan was awarded this prestigious award to acknowledge her services to the community and particular to The Friends of Fort Totten Parks. Lu serves as our Treasurer and on the Board of Directors.

CONGRATULATIONS LU! WELL DONE !!!
United States Merchant Marine Academy

“Acta Non Verba” — Deeds Not Words

Also known as Kings Point (based on its location), the USMMA is one of five US service academies. Its primary purpose is to train officers for the merchant marine services, various branches of the military and the transportation industry. Students (or Midshipmen – as they are called at the academy) are trained in marine engineering, navigation, administration, law and other aspects relating to operation of large ships.

If you walk along the east shoreline of Fort Totten and look to the northeast you may often see a group of small sailboats racing off Kings Point Academy. That’s part of the Academy’s training program. Take a pair of binoculars and see if you can spot the large blue and white training ship docked there.

The US Federal Government decided that after the disastrous fire aboard the SS Morro Castle in 1934 in which 134 lives were lost, there was a need to standardize training aboard ships.

In 1936 Congress passed the Merchant Marine Act and two short years later the US Merchant Marine Cadet Corps was established. The land at Kings Point was acquired in 1942 and dedicated on September 30, 1942 by Franklin D Roosevelt who noted “The (Kings Point) Academy serves the Merchant Marine as West Point serves the Army and Annapolis the Navy.”

World War II would have the academy forego its usual operations and gear its efforts to train officers for combat readiness. From 1942 – 1945, the academy graduated 6,895 officers. Many served bravely and sadly, 142 perished in the cause. As the war drew to a close, plans were made to change the operations into a four year maritime college to meet the peacetime needs. Congress granted this change in 1949.

Midshipmen have played a very important role in US operations worldwide. During the Persian Gulf War, Midshipmen and Graduates of the Academy were involved in sealift operations as well as humanitarian efforts to Somalia, Iraq and Kuwait. As a result of service of Academy Members in every major conflict and relief effort since WWII, the regiment is privileged to carry a regimental battle standard. The Merchant Marine Academy is the only Federal Service Academy granted the right to do so.

The Academy amended its admission requirements in 1974 and became the first federal service academy to enroll women into the program. This was two years before the other service academies. In 1990 the Academy acquired its large campus based training vessel, the T/V Kings Pointer, still in service today.

(data compiled from various sources and Wikipedia)

Friends of Fort Totten Parks
Crafty Totten Kids
Sat, March 27; 10:30 am — 12 noon
(Decorative picture frame with an animal mask)
May 15; 10:30 am — 12 noon (Bird House Blues)
June 19; 10:30 am — 12 noon (TBA)

Fitness Activities
Fit Walk (Step Out)
Tues & Thurs May 4 through Oct 21; 9 am
Joe Michael’s Mile
Adults only - join us for a free fitness walking program.
Sponsored by The Fitness Consultants.

Puppets in the Park
Wed, July 7; 10:30 am
Check at front gate.
Enjoy this production of Sleeping Beauty.
Please bring chairs or blanket.

Friends of Fort Totten Parks
Family Fun Day
Sat, July 10; 12 noon — 4 pm
Parade grounds
Please join us for a fun afternoon of free activities including games, crafts, medical screening, pet microchipping, demonstrations, and more.

Yoga in the Park
Sat, June 5 through June 26; 9 am – 10:30 am
Little Bay Park roller hockey rink
Description: An instructor will lead us through hatha yoga exercises in a peaceful outdoor setting overlooking the Long Island Sound. Please bring your own mat.
Sponsored by the Queens County Savings Bank and Hot Yoga Paradise.

Back to School Festival
Tues, September 7; 3 pm — 6 pm
Little Bay Park
Summer’s not over. Beat the stress of returning to school with an afternoon of fun activities including games, rides, craft projects, and free giveaways.

Friends of Fort Totten Parks Donor
Please join us in shaping the future of Fort Totten Parks by making a donation.

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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)