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

www.FortTottenParks.org
Born in humble surroundings in Indiana, Earnest (Ernie) Taylor Pyle served in the US Navy at the close of WWI as a young lad. Ernie attended university after the war and became a reporter for the Washington Daily News in 1923.

After a few years of being a reporter, Ernie became bored, quit his job and went on a road trip with his wife to see America. When he returned to Washington it was suggested he write a series of stories about his trip to fill in for a vacationing columnist. These short columns were a big hit. The Scripps-Howard newspaper chain noted that his stories had a Mark Twain quality to them and signed Ernie on to write a nationally syndicated column in 1935. His stories would now be read in over 400 newspapers country wide. He wandered around the country writing about people and places he had seen. All from a humble perspective point of view.

Shortly after the United States entered WWII, Ernie focused his writing style and column to the war. Pyle didn’t write about large scale war stories but from the perspective of a common foot soldier as he toured with active combat units. He was able to convey the fear, hardships and courage experienced by the enlisted men serving. He didn’t glorify the war but brought his tales from the front into homes back in the United States. This approach won great popularity with soldiers and the public alike and eventually won Ernie a Pulitzer Prize in 1944. In the same year, he argued with his writings that soldiers in combat should get “fight pay” similar in fashion to the US Airmen who received “flight pay”. Congress ultimately passed a law that did reward soldiers with an additional 50 percent pay in combat and called it the “Ernie Pyle Bill”. The one time Indiana farm boy covered combat in North Africa, Italy and France before shipping over to the Pacific to cover that conflict. With Germany near surrender, Pyle wanted to continue reporting about the war but quietly confided to friends he didn’t expect to live through it.

At Okinawa, he witnessed US Forces battling the Japanese defenders entrenched while kamikaze suicide pilots wreaked havoc on the fleet offshore. April, 1945 saw the US Army’s 77th Infantry (now stationed at Fort Totten) landing on the island of Ie Shima (a small island off Okinawa) to capture a small airfield.

The 77th Division of the National Army was organized at Camp Upton, Yaphank, NY in 1917. It was known as the “Metropolitan Division” because its members were mostly from New York City. Many diverse back grounds made up the unit. From taxi drivers, and tailors to Wall Street executives to factory workers, they all served. They also wore the now famous shoulder patch: the Statue of Liberty in gold on a blue truncated triangle. Their motto - "New York's Own"

Pyle wrote about the battle of Ie Shima with frightening detail. The fighting was so fierce it was noted that “not one Japanese soldier surrendered until he was killed”. A few days into the battle, Pyle and three officers came under attack from Japanese forces. The group scrambled for cover in an attempt to survive the onslaught. Ernie raised his head above the ditch to ask if his comrades were safe when a 30 cal bullet hit him in the head, killing him. Ernie Pyle was originally buried with other fallen American Soldiers on Ie Shima and later exhumed and interned at the National Cemetery on Hawaii in 1949.

Since 1967 the Headquarters of the 77th called Fort Totten their home. In 1983 the Ernie Pyle US Army Reserve Center was built in Fort Totten and served as the largest Army Reserve Center in the nation. It is also the only one named for a civilian.—Pat Riot
Sunny skies and warm smiles were plenty on hand at this year’s Family Fun Day Event. This free event to the community was sponsored by the Friends of Fort Totten Parks along with the Northeast Queens Parks Administrator, Janice Melnick. It is estimated that over 2000 visitors were treated to giveaways, rides, games, health screenings, fire prevention demos along with pet micro chipping. The FOFTP would like to thank the following who donated their efforts and goods. Cord Meyer Development Co., Whole Foods Manhasset, Glaceau Vitamin Water, The New York Mets, New York City Dept Of Hospitals, FDNY, Clean Air NY, Vet John and the Central Vet Associates, Betsy Lopez—US ARMY Reserve at Fort Totten & her volunteers, The American Cancer Society, US Army Reserve Betsy Lopez and her volunteers. Alley Pond Park Environmental Center, NYC Dept of Parks, Bayside Historical Society, 1 Million Bubbles, Bruce’s Bakery, Mens Wearhouse and Exxon Dunkin Donuts.

Making new friends!!

Kids will be clowns!

All your favorite ghouls and goblins are back.

The Fort On Haunted Hill

Daytime Family Events Saturday, Oct. 25, 2008
12 pm to 4 pm Rain date Sun., Oct. 26, 2008

Fort Totten Fact

The earliest known inhabitants of the Fort Totten area were the Matinicock Native Americans. A tribe of the Algonquin nation, the Matinicock tribe was named after the local “hilly country” conditions. Records indicate that the name may have been given by a neighboring tribe, the Lenapes, one of the oldest tribes in North America.

www.FortTottenParks.org
**OUR FLAG**

“OLD GLORY” is a name we associate with our national flag but it was so named by a sea Captain from Salem, Massachusetts named William Driver.

In 1831, Captain Driver left for one of his many voyages aboard the ship CHARLES DOGGETT. Friends presented him with a beautiful flag of twenty four stars. As the flag opened to the ocean breeze for the first time the Captain exclaimed “Old Glory!” That name became synonymous with the US Flag ever since.

Captain Driver retired to Nashville in 1837 along with his beloved “Old Glory.” By the time the Civil War erupted, many in the Nashville area knew of Captain Driver and “Old Glory.” So when Tennessee seceded from the Union, Rebel soldiers were determined to destroy the Captain’s flag but it was never found.

In 1862, Union forces captured Nashville and raised a rather small American flag over the capital. Local people asked the retired Captain if “Old Glory” still existed. With Union soldiers at his side, the Captain went to his home and tore the seams of his bedcover apart. Inside was the original flag safe and ready to fly again.

Captain Driver gathered up the flag and returned to the capitol. The sixty year old Captain climbed to the top of the tower to replace the smaller banner with his beloved “Old Glory.” Members of the 6th Ohio Regiment cheered and later adopted the name “Old Glory” as their own.

**NOW HEAR THIS! NOW HEAR THIS!**

This plea goes to all the Mommies, Daddies & Good Samaritans who have enjoyed the Park and its special events. The Park is here for you and your families to enjoy.

The Friends of Fort Totten Parks needs your support. Not a money contribution (although you can do that by looking at the back page!) but by a contribution of your time assisting during an event.

This Park can only survive if people like yourself help make a difference. Assisting in a single event will prove to be exciting and beneficial to the community. It really feels great to participate and make a difference! Please contact our membership Chairman, Al Evans via Email FriendsOfFortTottenParks@yahoo.com or by telephone (718) 670-3684 to see what events may be of interest to you.

Get involved! It’s your Park!

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**Visit us at our ever changing webpage**

www.FortTottenParks.org

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

Bordered by Manhattan, Randall’s Island/ Ward’s Island (formally two separate islands now made one via landfill) Hell Gate is a place of considerable sea history. The area of Hell Gate is easily recognized as a very distinct arched stone towers bridge (known as the Hell Gate Bridge) spans over this body of water. This bridge is currently used by AM-TRACK railroad to service the Northeast corridor of it’s system. This tidal straight is located less than 10 miles to the west of Fort Totten and prevents ships sailing many extra miles around the south side of Long Island to enter Long Island Sound. The well known “Hell’s Gate” bridge whisks cargo trains in and out of New York.

Adrian Block the Dutch explorer, is the first recorded sailor to navigate the area in 1614 aboard his ship ONRUST. (Block Island just east of Montauk Long Island bears his name as well) Originally named “Hellegate” a Dutch word meaning “hells gate” or “gate passage.” It’s mentioned in many ships logs dating back to the early 1700’s. First handed accounts record a convergence of tides causing fierce whirlpools interrupted by jutting rocks and islands which must have appeared as the gates of hell to the wary sea captains. By the 1900’s, hundreds of sailing ships had sunk in the area due in part to sailing these treacherous conditions while being at the mercy of shifting and light winds. (Ed note – Don’t forget – steam engines were not in use until the late 1700’s).

In 1850, a French Engineer was hired by a spirited New Yorker to remove Pot Rock as it hindered the shipping trade in New York. The US Congress was petitioned to remove the rock but they declined so donations from New York merchants was sought. Interestingly less than one hundred years since the revolution, the British Royal Engineers were employed to undertake the operation. For the sum of $15,000 the Royal Engineers agreed to remove Pot Rock and Ways Reef. An unusual plan was devised to remove the underwater obstacles by blasting the rocks underwater without drilling to help set the charges. The gunpowder charge was lowered via rope next to the rock and set off the explosion from a safe distance. The blast did knock off the top four feet off Pot Rock but didn’t have the effect mariners and merchants had hoped for. On September 24, 1876, the US Army Corps of Engineers decided that a particularly pesky group of rocks had to go and used 50,000 pounds of explosives to blast into pieces. Now that explosion was impressive! It was even reported in the NY Times!

Although the tidal dangers are very real, nowadays kayaks transit the area where English ships ran aground. Today, tides are more understood and ships are always under power using diesel engines rather than the graces of the wind. The fierce currents go slack twice a day so that the basin appears strangely calm allowing small craft to transit the area safely. Understanding and technology has rendered the fierce Hell Gate into an understood body of water.—Pat Riot

Stories, emails, comments and suggestions can be Emailed to FriendsOfFortTottenParks@yahoo.com
Or can be mailed to Friends of Fort Totten Parks - PO Box 604984, Bayside, NY 11360

Breakfast Lunch - Dinner OPEN 7 DAYS

Terrace Diner
Upper Level at The Bay Terrace Shopping Center
212-97 26th Avenue Tel:718-224-4434
Bayside, NY 11360 Fax: 718-224-4436
www.terracediner.com

www.FortTottenParks.org
Turtles—are spoken of by countless Native American tribes floating in the sea before there was land. According to Native American beliefs, all other animals climbed onto their backs until the lands were formed. Clearly they knew what we know now as well, that turtles have been around a very long time!

There are two common turtles in New York, one being the snapping turtle found in fresh waters and the painted turtle which is found in salt marshes and salt water coastlines. There are many other species, but these are seen less often around Fort Totten.

The painted turtle is generally smaller than the snapping turtle and reaching about 6 inches along the shell. These shy turtles have colorful yellow and red stripes on their head and limbs. The carapace is smooth and dark with yellow and red borders. The plastron is bright yellow, with or without dark blotches, depending on the sub-species. It’s common to see these turtles basking in the summer on partially submerged rocks or logs early in the morning when it’s quiet along the shoreline of Joe Michaels mile. You’ll have to be extra quiet or they’ll submerge when they sense danger! Their diet is mostly animal material, algae and plants.
1639: Dutch assume control of peninsula.
1640: Land deeded to William Thorne ("Thorne Point").
1657: Ann Thorne (heir to William Thorne) marries William Wilkins ("Wilkins Point")
1820-1860: Third System of Fortifications.
1821: Government survey concludes that the property would be useful for coastal defense.
1829: Land sold to Charles and Martha Willet ("Willet's Point")
1857: Congress appropriates $15,000 for the building of the "Fort at Willet's Point."
1860s: (late 1860s) Commander's Quarters constructed.
1861: "The Fort at Willet's Point" officially designated Camp Morgan after Governor Edwin D. Morgan of New York.
1862: Start of wharf and Water Battery construction.
1863: 26.35 acres of adjoining land bought from Henry Day and his wife for $57,000
1864: Water Battery construction halted. New rifled guns and pointed rounds could penetrate masonry coastal defenses, making them obsolete.

1864: Brevet Major General Joseph Totten dies.
1865: Camp Morgan's first permanent garrison, three companies of engineers, arrives.
1866: Army Engineer School moves to Camp Morgan.
1870: Officers' Club constructed.
1870: Camp Morgan designated Engineers Depot for the East.
1872: Torpedo School established at Camp Morgan.
1878: War Dept. begins upgrading living conditions and consolidating Army posts.
1885: Endicott Board recommends new type of coastal artillery battery for strategic coastal locations.
1885: Engineer School of Application established at Camp Morgan.
1887: Officers' Club expanded.
1898: Renamed Fort Totten, after Brevet Major General Joseph Totten.
1898: (Feb) Battleship Maine explodes in Havana harbor.
1898: (Apr-Aug) Spanish American War.
1898: First minefields off Willets Point.

THE BROOKLYN—QUEENS GREENWAY PROJECT—COMING TO OUR TOWN!

The ever changing Brooklyn-Queens Greenway (BQG) is a 40 mile continuous pedestrian and cycling route that stretches from Coney Island in Brooklyn to Alley Pond Park in Queens. The BQG offers a path to many diverse range of cultural and urban experiences. This path links 13 parks, 2 botanical gardens, the NY Aquarium, the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Hall of Science and 4 lakes!

This project is part of the 1993 NYC Dept. of Planning “Greenway Master Plan for New York City” and is implemented and monitored by the NYC Dept of Transportation & City Planning and the NYC Dept of Parks.

There is a comprehensive guide outlining the entire route at present which is divided into chapters covering the 9 areas of interest. Fort Totten / Alley Pond Park is described in chapter 9. The Greenway in our area extends from Alley Pond Park along Little Neck Bay and onto the Fort itself. It will then continue along the promenade towards the Throgs Neck Bridge. You can obtain the “Brooklyn-Queens Greenway Guide” from the Parks Department office in Fort Totten or online at www.nyc.gov/parks
Friends of Fort Totten Parks and The New York City Dept. of Parks
Schedule of Events

Saturdays in October ——-2008
Adult Water color classes
Saturdays 10:30 am to 12 pm
Saturday—October 25 2008
Fort on Haunted Hill Event
Noon to 4 pm
Rain date Sunday Oct 26
Saturday - October 25, 2008
Haunted Lantern Tour
6:30 pm—8:30 pm

Sunday—October 26
Totten Trot
9 am @ Bayside Historical
Sunday—October 26
Dog Costume Party
12 noon @ the dog run
Sunday—October 26, 2008
Haunted Lantern Tour
6:30 pm—8:30 pm

Saturday— November 8 2008
Crafty Totten Kids— Crafts
10:30 am to 12 pm
Saturday— January 12 2009
Crafty Totten Kids — Crafts
10:30 am to 12 pm

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

2007 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 our groups membership ? _____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 ~