

FORT HAMILTON OFFICERS' CLUB (CASEMATE FORT) beginning at the westernmost end of the uppermost retaining wall where it meets grade and continuing to its eastern end, then running along a line in an easterly direction over the lawn to a northerly right angle turn over the lawn which is aligned with the outer edge of the continuation of the uppermost retaining wall and meeting its southernmost end; thence running along the outer profile of the uppermost retaining wall and around its easterly prowlike configuration continuing along the northern side of the prow-shaped wall in a westerly direction to its end; thence running along a line set back 25'-0" from the main lower retaining wall ending at the small guard house; thence running along a line following the curb line of the north-south access road in a northerly direction and set back from it 25'-0" until it meets the line of the southerly curb of the east-west access road; thence running along a line which crosses the service road running around the western edge of the Fort Hamilton property at right angles to a fence which coincides with the "Outgrant A Limit" line; thence running along the fence around in a southerly direction to a point where a line extended out from the southernmost upper retaining wall would intersect it; thence running along a line over the lawn to the point where it meets the westernmost end of the uppermost retaining wall, Fort Hamilton, United States Government Reservation, Fort Hamilton Parkway and Shore Parkway, Bay Ridge, Borough of Brooklyn. Built 1825-31.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6153, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land described above.

On January 11, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Fort Hamilton Officers' Club (Casemate Fort) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses including the facility manager of Fort Hamilton spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Department of the Army has expressed its approval of the designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The original granite casemate fort of the Fort Hamilton reservation, now the Fort Hamilton Officers' Club, was built in 1825-31 as part of the Totten System of United States seacoast fortifications and is an important reminder of the nation's early military history. Due to its strategic location on the Narrows, Fort Hamilton in conjunction with Fort Lafayette was a vital element in the defense of New York City. Named Fort Hamilton in 1825 after Alexander Hamilton, it was on the site of several earlier fortifications including a British fort from the Revolutionary War and the American fort, Fort Lewis. Fort Lafayette (originally Fort Diamond) occupied a small island offshore from the Fort Hamilton site.

During Queen Anne's War in 1703 when a French invasion was feared, the colonial legislature of New York passed a bill at the instigation of the governor, Lord Cornbury, to raise 1500 pounds to fortify the Narrows, but the fortifications were never completed. The strategic importance of the site was recognized during the Revolutionary War, and it was the point of British invasion during the Battle of Long Island in August 1776. The Fort Hamilton site remained under British control throughout the war.

The need for strong seacoast defenses was a prime concern of the new nation, and the fortification of New York harbor was an important element in this plan, especially since the United States capital was first located in New York City. In Seacoast Fortifications of the United States, Emanuel Raymond Lewis describes the three systems of seacoast fortifications in the United States. The First System started in 1794 when it seemed that the United States might be drawn into the European wars that followed the French Revolution. The Second System started in 1807 under the threat of war with Britain and ended with the War of 1812.

To fortify the eastern side of the Narrows, Fort Diamond (later renamed Fort Lafayette) was built offshore on Hendricks Reef in 1812. It was located by the site of Denyse's Ferry, the main route connecting Staten Island and Brooklyn, which had been established as early as 1679. Fort Lewis was established on the mainland on an elevation about forty-seven feet above low water in 1814 on the present site of Fort Hamilton. Both were built in response to the threat posed by the War of 1812.

Late in 1816, the Acting Secretary of War, George Graham, formed a board of military engineers to plan and build a permanent and systematic series of seacoast fortifications which became known as the Third or Totten System. It was headed by a Frenchman, Simon Bernard (1779-1836), who had been head of the French topographical bureau and aide-de-camp to Napoleon. Another member of the board, who was to remain deeply involved in the project and after whom the Totten System was named, was General Joseph Gilbert Totten (1788-1864). In the course of his lifetime, Totten became an internationally known expert in the development of 19th-century seacoast fortifications and one of the leading military engineers in American history. Captain René E. De Russy (1789-1865) of the Army Corps of Engineers was assigned as assistant engineer for the defense of New York harbor in 1816 and was promoted to Superintending Engineer in 1817. Rewarded for gallant conduct in the War of 1812, De Russy built up a distinguished career in the Corps of Engineers and was in charge of constructing many major fortifications.

In 1819-20 a joint board of Army and Navy officers under the direction of Totten prepared plans for a new fort which was to be built on the eastern side of the Narrows on the site of Fort Lewis. Congress appropriated funds to acquire lands and materials for the new fort in 1824, and Lieutenant Andrew Talcott of the Army Corps of Engineers surveyed the site, prepared the ground for work, and built wharves to receive the building materials. The following year, Congress appropriated further funds to erect the fort, and ground was broken on April 26, 1825. Lieutenant Joseph K. F. Mansfield, assistant to Captain George Blaney, Superintending Engineer, was placed in charge of construction. The cornerstone was laid on June 11, 1825. Construction was completed in 1831 under the direction of Major De Russy. Fort Hamilton was first occupied in November 1831 by Battery F, Fourth Artillery, from Fort Columbus on Governors Island.

The site of the Fort Hamilton reservation was gradually expanded throughout the 19th century. The casemate fort was kept in a state of military preparedness through the periodic upgrading of the armaments although no shot was ever fired from it in battle. In a report of 1884 it was recorded that enlisted men occupied quarters in the casemates of the fort and that a library and reading room was provided in one of the casemates. The granite seaward wall of the casemate fort was removed after the Spanish-American War. In 1937-38 the fort was altered for use as an officers' club. When the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge was under construction between 1959 and 1963, Fort Hamilton had to give up some of its land for an anchorage and bridge approaches. Several of the casemates were removed from the northern end of the fort at this time.

The casemate fort, an impressive example of military architecture, is sited so that a part of it faces the Narrows; thus, in conjunction with the fortifications at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island, its guns protected the harbor from attack. The other portion of the fort provided protection from the landward side.

Built of gray granite blocks, laid up in random ashlar, the fort has a trace, or ground plan, in the form of an elongated C. As one approached the fort from land, one sees the escarp or granite wall of the structure which protects the casemates within.

The casemate system of fortification, which consists of a series of vaults or chambers housing guns which may be fired through the embrasures or openings of the main outer wall, was developed by the French engineer Montalembert in the 1780s. It came into general use in the United States following the War of 1812. Not only did the use of casemates afford increased protection to the guns and gunners from enemy fire, it also made possible the arrangement of a fort in multiple tiers thus increasing the volume of gun fire over a given area.

The escarp of the fort is punctuated by a series of slits for guns which flank the main segmental-arch openings or embrasures. The sills and arches of these openings are made of red brick, while additional brickwork at the sides of each opening keys it to the flanking gun slits. These openings are flared outward as they penetrate the walls to permit a wider range of gun fire. At several points along the wall are larger segmental-arch openings placed just above ground level. Midway in the long wall, a barrel-vaulted passageway leads through the fort to its seaward side and is formed of brick. A heavy stone coping terminates the stone wall. Originally the fort was surmounted by an earthen bank on which guns were mounted; part of this earthen bank may still be seen at the northern end of the fort. Tall brick chimneys, venting the casemate fireplaces, rise from it. A portion of the wall has been altered and staircases have been added to provide an entrance to the officers' club. Rising above the original wall of the fort can be seen the red brick walls which were added in the 1937-38 alteration. The side of the fort facing the water is of brick, now painted yellow, and is partially obscured by a covered veranda at ground level. Despite the alteration much of the original integrity of the interior of the fort has been maintained. The barrel-vaulted configuration of the original casemates can still be seen in the various rooms on the ground floor. A handsome staircase with wrought-iron railing has also been preserved with its original brickwork exposed.

The fort is set within a dry moat or ditch which is defined by two outer retaining walls. The lower wall is known as the counter scarp; it is surmounted by an earth rampart several feet below the level of the upper wall. Both walls are set into the glacis or natural slope of the hill above the fort. Like the fort itself, the walls are constructed of granite blocks in random ashlar. They are terminated by large slabs of smooth stone joined together by metal clamps. An unusual feature of the dry moat is the V-shaped projection at the eastern end. Called a caponniere it provided a protected place for the resistance of attack from the landward side as did the earth rampart between the upper and lower walls.

Several other structures in addition to the fort have been built within the dry moat. The most interesting of these is the munitions depot directly behind the fort opposite the passageway. Dating from about 1841, it is built of granite blocks in random ashlar like those of the fort. Two segmental-arch openings with brick arches are placed at basement level of the wall facing the fort. Like the original fort, it also is surmounted by an earthen bank, which served as a gun emplacement. The eastern end of this structure is V-shaped to conform with the V-shape of the moat. In an inner chamber of the structure there is evidence to indicate that the munitions depot was once connected to an underground passage leading to the old redoubt--a smaller earthwork to the east--which had been built in 1841 under the direction of Robert E. Lee for the rear defense of the fort. The redoubt was demolished in 1953.

Also of interest, opposite the entrance to the officers' club, is a small square guard house with a picturesque cupola roof.

The original granite casemate fort of Fort Hamilton remains an impressive example of military architecture. While it is no longer needed for strategic and defense purposes, it is an important reminder of the nation's early military history.

#### FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Fort Hamilton Officers' Club (Casemate Fort) has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Fort Hamilton Officers' Club (Casemate Fort) is an impressive example of military architecture, that due to its strategic location on the Narrows it was a vital element in the defense of New York City, that it was named in honor of Alexander Hamilton, that it was built as part of the Totten system of United States seacoast fortifications, that it is constructed of gray granite blocks and set within a dry moat, and that it is an important reminder of the nation's early military history.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Fort Hamilton Officers' Club (Casemate Fort) beginning at the westernmost end of the uppermost retaining wall where it meets grade and continuing to its eastern end, then running along a line in an easterly direction over the lawn to a northerly right angle turn over the lawn which is aligned with the outer edge of the continuation of the uppermost retaining wall and meeting its southernmost end; thence running along the outer profile of the uppermost retaining wall and around its easterly prowlike configuration continuing along the northern side of the prow-shaped wall in a westerly direction to its end; thence running along a line set back 25'-0" from the main lower retaining wall ending at the small guard house; thence running along a line following the curb line of the north-south access road in a northerly direction and set back from it 25'-0" until it meets the line of the southerly curb of the east-west access road; thence running along a line which crosses the service road running around the western edge of the Fort Hamilton property at right angles to a fence which coincides with the "Outgrant A Limit" line; thence running along the fence around in a southerly direction to a point where a line extended out from the southernmost upper retaining wall would intersect it; thence running along a line over the lawn to the point where it meets the westernmost end of the uppermost retaining wall, Fort Hamilton, United States Government Reservation, Fort Hamilton Parkway and Shore Parkway, Bay Ridge, Borough of Brooklyn and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 6153, Lot 1 described above.