The Stephen B. Luce Library Presents

Fort Schuyler:
A History from the
Stephen B. Luce Library Archives
Timeline of Fort Schuyler:

- **1826** – Federal government acquires the land to build a fort in Throggs Neck.
- **1826** – Throggs Neck Lighthouse established.
- **1833** – Work commences on the fort.
- **1835** – Original lighthouse torn down; new one built.
- **1856** – Fort Schuyler ready for occupancy.
- **1861** – First army units assigned to Fort Schuyler under Lieutenant William Cushing Paine.
- **1862** – McDougall General Hospital opened on the upper campus to service Union troops.
- **1863** – Fort Schuyler houses Confederate prisoners of war.
Timeline of Fort Schuyler:

- **1866** – Garrison reduced.
- **1883** – Lighthouse replaced.
- **1911** – Garrison reduced further; Fort Schuyler begins to fall into disrepair.
- **1910s-1920s** – Fort Schuyler used as a filming location for motion pictures.
- **1931** – Fort Schuyler placed on the abandoned list for the U.S. Army.
- **1932-1934** – New York State Maritime Academy and the New York Parks Department fight over the rights to Fort Schuyler.
- **1932** – First lease for the New York State Maritime Academy signed by Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt. Lease deemed void by new Governor Herbert Lehman.
Timeline of Fort Schuyler:

• **1934** – New lease for the use of Fort Schuyler executed; Governor Lehman signs it.

• **1934** – Reconstruction work at Fort Schuyler begins first under the TERA agency.

• **1935** – Reconstruction work transferred to the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

• **1938** – Reconstruction work completed. Fort dedicated as the home of the New York State Merchant Marine Academy.

• **1944** – Lighthouse decommissioned.

• **1948** – New York State Maritime Academy becomes a founding member of SUNY and is renamed Maritime College.
Construction

• Work began in 1833; finished in 1856
• $740,000 spent on construction
• Construction was slow due to lack of skilled masons and strikes by workers
• Built with granite from Greenwich, CT that was shipped by schooner
• Most of the work done by Irish laborers who established “Schuylerville” in the Bronx
Description

- Fort Schuyler is an excellent example of an early French bastioned fort.
- Three bastions were built overlooking the entrance to the East River.
- Two tiers of guns connected by spiral staircases that mostly turn to the right to allow the greatest amount of space for defenders to use their sword arm.
- The batteries of guns were named after famous U.S. officers such as Gansevoort and Hazard.
Description

• Shaped like a pentagon. Rumored to have inspired the design of the U.S. Pentagon.

• Designed to garrison 1,250 men with a total of 318 pieces of armament.

• Tunnels interconnect various rooms in the Fort. No evidence of tunnels that extend under Long Island Sound.

• No indoor plumbing.

• Mess halls and officers quarters were outside the fort; enlisted personnel lived inside.
Fort Schuyler was used as a staging ground to muster Union troops, and house about 500 Confederate prisoners of war during the Civil War.

Prisoners were kept in the casemates.

The McDougall General military hospital was built outside the Fort which opened in 1862. Total capacity was 1,662 beds. During the Civil War, 11,957 troops were treated here. The hospital closed after the war.
• In 1866 the garrison was reduced to 100 soldiers. They would often interact with the people of West Chester town (now Westchester square) helping the fire department, and getting into trouble at the local saloons.

• In 1911, the garrison was reduced to eleven men. The fort began to decay.

• In 1931, the fort was put on the abandoned list.
The Reconstruction

• In 1932 the New York State Maritime Academy headed by Superintendent Captain James H. Tomb attempted to obtain a lease to Fort Schuyler from the federal government. This was opposed by the New York Parks Department headed by Robert Moses.

• In December 1932, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt signs a lease giving Fort Schuyler to the academy. This is voided since the law provided that the academy could only operate aboard ship.
• By 1934 the law was amended and a new lease was executed and signed by Governor Herbert Lehman.

• In 1934 refurbishing work begins under the Temporary Emergency Relief Agency (TERA).

• Work under TERA was slow since it was their Transient Division and composed of sailors who viewed the school as competition for their jobs.

• The project was taken over by the Works Progress Administration in the Fall of 1935 with an initial grant of $1,752,270.
• By 1936 the project employed 1,004 men. Most of the work was headed by the Assistant Superintendent, George W.R. Hughes.

• Work was slowed because the lease would not allow for the removal of any historical structures.

• On May 28, 1938 the rebuilt fort is dedicated. Total cost: $4,250,000.
Becoming a College

- Having a land base allowed the academy to expand.
- New facilities were available where the students could sleep, obtain supplies, and practice.
- In 1948, the academy joined SUNY and changed into SUNY Maritime College.