

Adopt-a-flowerbox at Fort Jay

Imposing, impregnable and proud are some of the adjectives that best sum up a visitor's first view of Fort Jay on Governors Island. The majestic sandstone sculpture, the bridge and wide dry moat along with high walls and portcullis all give an impression of strength and endurance. It is only after passing through the entryway and viewing the quadrangle that the second facet of Fort Jay's existence is revealed. A glimpse is provided into the history of the fort when it was housing quarters for junior army officers and their families and later coast guard officers and their families.

The history of Governors Island and Fort Jay between the 1770s and 1960s, and even into the 1990s is strongly linked to America's military history and evolution. The site of Fort Jay was first fortified in 1776 and the present fort was completed in 1809. The quadrangle and barracks were incorporated into the Fort Jay structure in 1833 and the present style of housing was designed and constructed in the 1930s for junior army officers and their families. When the coast guard moved on to Governors Island in 1966, Fort Jay remained family housing for junior officers and their families.

With the addition of family life to the fort, there is evidence and first hand accounts from former military personnel and their families of what life was like in the fort community. The quadrangle was the principal play area for the smaller members of these military families, with a sandpit at one end and a jungle gym anchoring another side of the quad. However, one of the more notable sights within the quadrangle during its use as family housing were the flowerboxes and hanging baskets with which various 'green-thumbed' residents, usually the wives of army or coast guard officers, decorated the wide porches and balustrades in the quadrangle.



Photo of Fort Jay Quadrangle, circa autumn 1983.

As part of the effort to provide a link to the history of the fort and the people who lived and worked here, the National Park Service Rangers and Volunteers of Governors Island National Monument are offering visitors an opportunity to help recreate the flower filled quadrangle of Fort Jay's recent past. Visitors will have an opportunity to '**adopt-a-flowerbox**' in Fort Jay's quadrangle and to help with the initial planting and maintenance of the flowerboxes and hanging baskets over the duration of the summer. Supplies (trowels, gloves, watering cans, soil and plants) will be provided, visitors are only asked to bring their enthusiasm and 'green-thumbs'!

Happy gardening.



Fort Jay Quadrangle with flower boxes, circa summer 2008.

Text by National Park Service Volunteer Rhonda de Freitas