Harbor Forts : Battery Steele & Preservation.

Battery Steele Committee, Peaks Island

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Enclosed is my $15.00 Membership fee for 1995. Please enroll me as a member of Peaks Island Land Preserve.

Enclosed is a $____ donation toward the Battery Steele purchase by Peaks Island Land Preserve.

I pledge to contribute $____ by May 25, 1995, toward the purchase of Battery Steele by Peaks Island Land Preserve.

Name

Address

Phone Number

Please mail to
P.O. Box 99,
Peaks Island, Maine 04108.

Checks should be made out to
Peaks Island Land Preserve.
Established in December 1994, the Peaks Island Land Preserve (PILP) is a State of Maine not-for-profit corporation with membership open to all. PILP’s first large project is to purchase and establish stewardship over the Battery Steele property; with this brochure PILP seeks participation of all Peaks Islanders in this effort. This may be the last opportunity within the foreseeable future for an island-based group to acquire and maintain this unique property that includes more than fourteen woodland and wetland acres. It is the site of the historic, massive concrete structure that housed the large guns defending Casco Bay and the Europe-bound convoys anchored in Hussey Sound during World War II.

When the Battery Steele parcel was offered for sale on the open market in late 1994, PILP believed that fast action was required if the site was to be preserved as it has been known to Islanders for the past fifty years. Contrary to popular belief, existing deed restrictions permit significant development of the site, including the construction of eight residences. In order to prevent development and to ensure effective use restrictions, PILP contracted in January of 1995 to purchase the entire property. Closing on the property is scheduled for July 15, 1995. A critical stage in the effort will be reached on May 30, 1995, when a substantial additional amount of earnest money must be paid to the seller.

In response to an early limited campaign for funds, a total of $25,000 was pledged as of February 15 by a relatively small number of supporters. This excellent start provides confidence that the total fundraising goal will be met. To complete the purchase and to ensure long-term stewardship and Island involvement, the participation of many others is important. The purchase price is $70,000; an additional $40,000 is needed to establish an endowment for continuing care and maintenance.

Please join in the effort. Checks may be made out to the Peaks Island Land Preserve and sent to PILP, P.O. Box 99, Peaks Island, Maine 04108. (If, for any reason, the purchase is not consummated during 1995, contributions will be refunded.) Should you wish to become an active PILP member (annual dues are $15.00) or should you seek additional information, please contact any of the following:

Ralph Ashmore (766-2981)  
Tom Bohan (766-2483)  
Irene Church (766-2533)  
Terry Cline (766-2372)  
Henry Myers (766-2371)  
Albert Presgraves (766-2604)  
Ted Schmidt (766-5556)  
John Whitman (766-2211)

Some Supporters of the Battery Steele Acquisition
Susanna Adams · Jack & Janet Anderson · Nancy Arnold · Ralph Ashmore · Bob & Fran Baker · Nancy Barba · Alyce Bauerle · Joe Bean · Michael & Nancy Beebe · Rhonda Berg · Tom Bergh · Tom Bohan · Nick & Margaret Broadwater · Gary Brookman · George Campbell · Rick Caron · John & Susan Carroll · Clare & Bob Cary · Irene Church · Robin & George Clark · Bunny Clark · Terry Cline · Cynthia Cole · Tom & Laurie Cox · Deborah Deatrick · Joel Eastman · Avner Eisenberg · Paul Erica · Richard Erica · John Feeney · John & Dot Flynn · Steve & Kerry Flynn · Stan & Ginny Foster ·
OUR THANKS TO ALL WHO ATTENDED THE FIRST BATTERY STEELE MEETING last month to voice their concerns about the future of this historic 14-acre property.

We’ve scheduled a second meeting for February 10 to continue our discussions about expanding community involvement in the Battery’s future.

Please join the Battery Steele Ad Hoc Committee (we don’t yet have a formal name) and get involved! We’re establishing four subcommittees to look into property acquisition, fundraising, programs, and organizational structure.

We’ve invited representatives from the Star Foundation (the current owners) and the Oceanside Conservation Trust (which holds an easement on the property) to Wednesday’s meeting to answer questions and discuss scenarios for the future.

Your comments and questions are an important part of the process. Please plan to attend!

Wednesday, February 10 1993
Peaks Island Public Safety Building
7:30 PM
A group of Peaks Island residents interested in the future of Battery Steele are hosting an island-wide meeting to discuss what should be done -- if anything -- about the old artillery fortification and the property around it.

The meeting will begin with a slide show and talk focusing the Battery’s intriguing history. Prof. Joel Eastman, a history professor at the University of Southern Maine and an expert on Casco Bay fortifications, will share his research on the fort from its construction as a gun port through more recent proposals to convert it to a United Nations conference facility.

Afterwards, everyone is invited to participate in an open discussion about the Battery’s future. Battery Steele is currently owned by the nonprofit Star Foundation, which acquired the 14-acre property in 1980 to develop an appropriate technology center. These plans foundered, and the Battery has by and large been abandoned and neglected, used for parties, as a dump, and as an overgrown park.

This ad hoc group is eliciting support in negotiating with the Star Foundation for the benefit of all Peaks Islanders. Your ideas on how the land might be managed to benefit the island community as a whole are important!

Please plan on attending this meeting to help define the Battery’s future.

Wednesday, January 13, 1993
Peaks Island Public Safety Building
Slide show starts at 7:00 PM
Vision Statement of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Battery Steele

Battery Steele and the 14 acres surrounding it represent, in its way, the real soul of Peaks Island. The best and the worst, the history (both natural and human) and the future potential of both those legacies. Like many ex-military installations, it is at once beautiful and ugly, haunted by the memory of violence and the joyful echo of children playing. The site has often been the repository of off-islanders' grandiose plans and equally grand failures. From the Defense Department's post-D-Day 16-inch guns to the balsa wood model of a United Nations conference center to the Star Foundation's windmills and greenhouses, the island's back shore has long been victim to sincere but misguided visions. The missing ingredient has always been the islanders themselves: their needs and desires. Denied the positive power to take control, the only influence islanders could have was furtive (in hiking around and exploring) or destructive (vandalism, dumping garbage, blowing up cars, etc).

It is high time for the community to consciously take control of this property and re-shape it in the image of its varied self. Control means community ownership, commitment, responsibility, imagination, hard work and whatever results we desire. A thoroughly democratic process will be crucial as will the transcendence of hidden agendas, personality politics or the distrust of new ideas. A barren, neglected plot and a trashed-out 600-foot tunnel needn't be a metaphor for our community relations, but after a long while it might become one by default. Let share our projections, concerns, strategies and dreams about Battery Steele and together repair the soul of the island.
The Peaks Island Military Reservation: 1942 - 1946

A two part exhibition showing Peaks Island's role as the principal defense of Portland Harbor and Casco Bay during World War II.

June 23 thru October 30, 1996

Fifth Maine Regiment Community Center
Peaks Island, Maine
During World War II Portland Harbor and Casco Bay was considered an area of prime importance for several reasons. The South Portland shipyards were building liberty ships to transport troops and supplies brought to Portland by train to Europe; the Navy maintained its major refueling depot on Long Island; convoys of liberty ships, battleships and their escorts formed in Hussey Sound before leaving for England and Russia; and the commander of the North Atlantic fleet made his headquarters here.

Peaks was chosen as the primary defense site due to its proximity to Portland and its location. As an outer island in the bay, it has an unobstructed view of the Atlantic Ocean.

The 198-acre reservation was located in the southern and central sections of the island. It was a village unto itself, separated from the rest of the island by a barbed wire fence yet very much integrated into the community.

Many islanders helped to build the bunkers and other buildings; some worked there after it was completed. The army doctor treated civilians. Soldiers were invited to social and community events.

Following a devastating fire in 1957 the only visible remains are a few concrete bunkers and towers and foundations overgrown with bittersweet and bamboo. But there are other less visible remains: a few of the barracks were moved to other locations and converted to homes and cottages.

The water mains and many of the roads throughout the backshore area were built by the army. Trout Pond was created when the Corps of Engineers drained a large marsh to make way for Battery Steele. They also planted bittersweet and bamboo (not native to Peaks) as quick growth groundcover.

Today most of the reservation area is parkland. The Battery Steele site is governed by a conservation easement which prevents future commercial or residential development. Many new homes have been built, primarily along the shoreline.

Please join us on Tuesday July 23rd at 7 pm for An Island at War, a slide presentation about the Peaks Island Military Reservation. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.

or

for A Walk Along the Military Trail on Sunday August 11 at 1 pm. This is guided walking tour lasting approximately 2 hours. For reservations call 766-5130. Cost is $10 & includes lunch at the Fifth Maine.