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Eric Hertfelder, executive director of the Fort Adams Trust, discusses plans Monday to renovate three rooms in the former officers' quarters along the east wall of the fort to be used for overnight accommodations for re-enactors, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts and other groups.

Old fort with a new look

Restoration will enable Scouts to spend a night at Fort Adams

By Sean Flynn
Daily News staff

NEWPORT — No one has slept at Fort Adams since it was decommissioned as a garrison for Army soldiers in 1950.

That could change this fall, when the Fort Adams Trust hopes Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and re-enactors will be staying overnight in former officers' quarters.

Eric Hertfelder, executive director at Fort Adams, said three rooms will be restored, including one common room

ning this summer; the walls will be stripped down to their original brickwork and new floors will be installed. Newport Collaborative Architects is working on the plans for the overnight center, which will cost about \$750,000, Hertfelder said.

The new center will be a continuation of the restoration work that has been taking place at the fort in recent years, and part of an effort to find new uses for the space.

Fort Adams, built between 1824 and 1857, was designed for 464 cannons, more

Fort Monroe in Virginia.

The Navy took over the fort in 1951 but used it mainly for storage until it was deeded to the state in 1965, Hertfelder said.

With lack of maintenance, the fort was eventually closed to the public. The Fort Adams Trust, established in 1994 to restore and maintain the fort, was able to reopen the fort to the public the following year.

Hertfelder said work has progressed in recent years thanks to donations from

Fort

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Treasures. The state's Department of Environmental Management also has provided funds.

In 2004, voters approved an open space bond that included a total of \$3 million for the restoration of Fort Adams and its 80-acre site. The money will be released in increments in the coming years as the state sells bonds, Hertfelder said.

The trust is still dependent on private donations for operating expenses, as well as needed repairs.

However, funding from the different sources paid for the repair and restoration of the roof over the officers quarters, which extends along the east wall for about 600 feet. The work was completed last fall.

The officers' quarters were once very elaborate. The molding, ceiling medallions, fireplaces and shutters that can still be seen in the rooms indicate they could once compete with fine drawing rooms. The rooms are seriously deteriorated though, since they have not been maintained for almost half a century.

The rooms will be restored if uses for the space can be found, as well as the funding to sustain them, Hertfelder said. He noted that the Museum of Newport Irish History does not have a home.

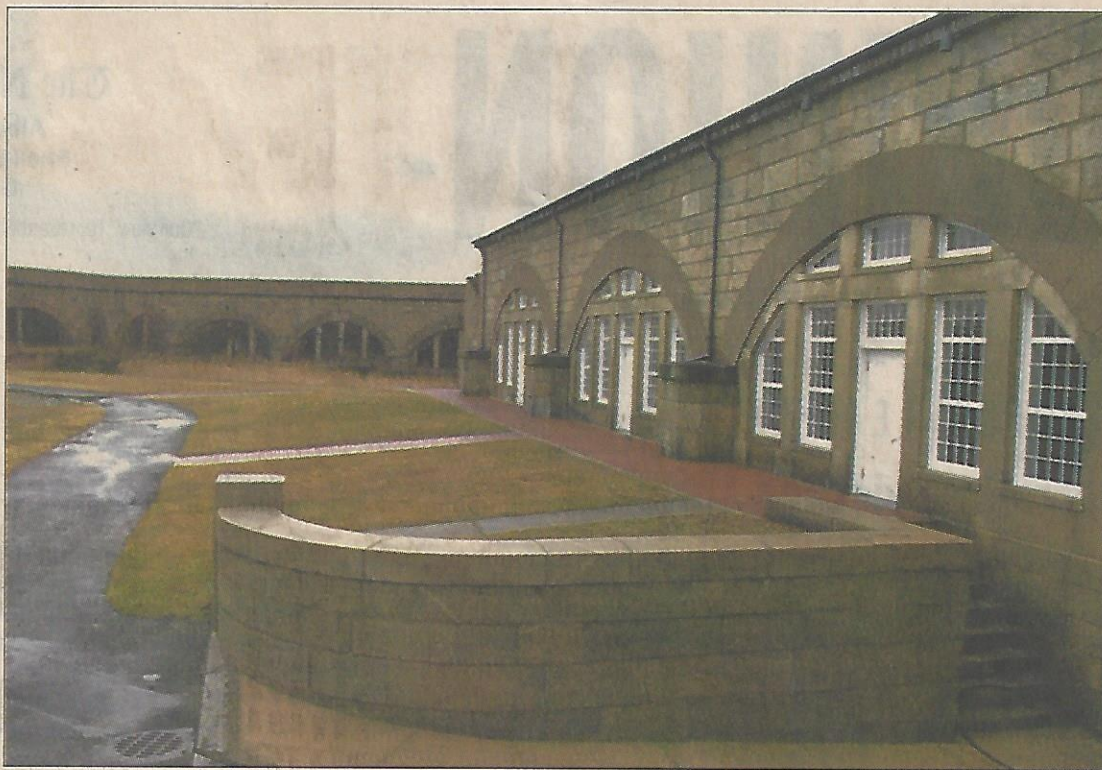
"Something like that would be good fit, because of the role the Irish played in building the fort," he said.

The labor force to construct the fort was supplied by more than 300 Irish immigrants, who came here in search of a better life. The Army had advertised for laborers in Ireland, offering free passage to the United States and good employment.

Navy museum

The fort is already being used by another museum.

The Naval War College Museum now has an exhibit in the North Casemates, the former gun rooms along the north wall of the fort. The casemates were the first rooms that were restored and enclosed when the



Above: Three new bastions along the north end of the fort are shown at right. A proposal to move the Naval War College Museum to the fort would require renovations to the section in the background.



Left: Repairs to the roof along the southeast section of the fort have been completed, including a boardwalk for visitors.

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summer, tells the story of Count Rochambeau's landing in Newport and the French contribution to winning the Revolutionary War.

The current exhibit also portrays the history of coastal fortifications and the current work at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center. The exhibit shows what future submarines might look like, for example.

This smaller exhibit is perhaps a harbinger of bigger and better things to come, according to Hertfelder and Aimee L. Saunders, director of visitors' services at the fort.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, access to the Naval Station base was restricted and visitation to the Naval

side the base.

A partnership with the Fort Adams Trust was formed, with the current exhibit being the first fruit of that cooperation.

However, in the current enclosed casemates, there are no temperature and humidity controls, so paintings, documents and some types of equipment cannot be displayed.

"Soldiers complained from the very beginning that the fort was cold and damp," Hertfelder said.

A feasibility study is now under way to determine whether the full Naval War College Museum could be moved to the fort, if an area could be created with heating, ventilation and air conditioning

there," Hertfelder said.

That, he stressed, is still only a long-term strategy and a hope.

Meanwhile, other repairs are taking place.

A viewing deck was built last fall on top of the roof of the northeast bastion of the fort, giving visitors who make the climb one of the best views of Newport Harbor.

The fort had about 15,000 visitors last year as measured by ticket sales for tours, Saunders said. If participants at special events held at the fort are counted in the visitation total, the number is closer to 30,000, she said.

Fort Adams is now closed for the winter, but will open to the public May 13 for the season.