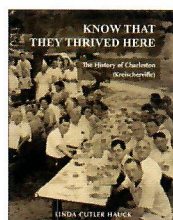
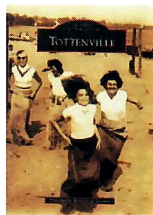
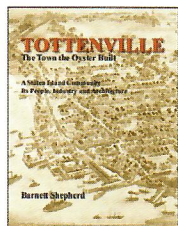


The Tottenville Historical Society was founded in 2005 to collect, document and preserve the history of Tottenville and vicinity. The Society is a member-supported, not-for-profit volunteer organization.

You can learn more through our website, our books, and by becoming a supporting member. As a member, you will receive our quarterly newsletter and announcements, and invitations to all programs and events.

Visit our online Gift Shop!

<https://www.tottenvillehistory.com/about/gift-shop.html>



We are located at the
H.H. Biddle House
70 Satterlee St.
Conference House Park

This exhibit was made possible with support from the Office of Council Member Joe Borelli.



Tottenville Historical Society

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Staten Island, NY 10307

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THE GREAT FIRE OF 1963

An exhibit commemorating the
60th anniversary of one of
Staten Island's greatest
tragedies

Opening: Sat., April 15, 2023
12-3 pm



TOTTENVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

718.887.9125

COMPELLING – HEARTBREAKING – INSPIRING

On April 20, 1963, Easter Saturday, a beautiful spring day turned into one of the South Shore's greatest disasters. Raging brush fires destroyed more than 100 homes, leaving 500 people homeless and causing more than \$2 million in damage. While no deaths were reported, 36 people were treated at local hospitals; five were admitted.

The first fire started around 10 a.m. on Arthur Kill Rd. in Rossville. High winds carried it to Charleston, Huguenot and Annadale, reaching as far as Hylan Blvd. Sandy Ground was especially hard hit. A second fire erupted near the Tottenville beachfront, ravaging buildings from Manhattan St. to the South Shore Swim Club. With low water pressure on the South Shore, and in some areas no hydrants, it was a hopeless situation for firefighters. Frantic residents, young and old, battled the flames with brooms, mops and garden tools, and used anything liquid – including bottled milk and sodas – to fight the fire.

To this day, the cause of the fires remains unknown. Three boys were arrested initially but later released by a grand jury. Eventually, the city upgraded the water supply system to the South Shore. "The irony of it all," one resident commented, "is that it could have been prevented."



Firemen and civilians attempt to extinguish the flames at St. Michael's Orphanage, Greenridge.

Sixty years ago, the Great Fire of '63, also known as Black Saturday, rocked our community. The story is told here through photographs, newspaper accounts, and, most importantly, through memories. Other tragic events that have greatly impacted our community are included in the exhibit. They include the Morgan Explosion (1918), the Great Appalachian Storm (1950), and Superstorm Sandy (2012).

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our historic knowledge of these events that we hope will help you gain a deeper understanding of the power of community through resiliency, kindness, and hope.



Top: Fire consumes a house on Rossville Ave.

Bottom: Ruth Kraemer, Surf Ave. resident, examines her burned vehicle. The Tottenville Beach community was ravaged by the fire, and never really recovered.