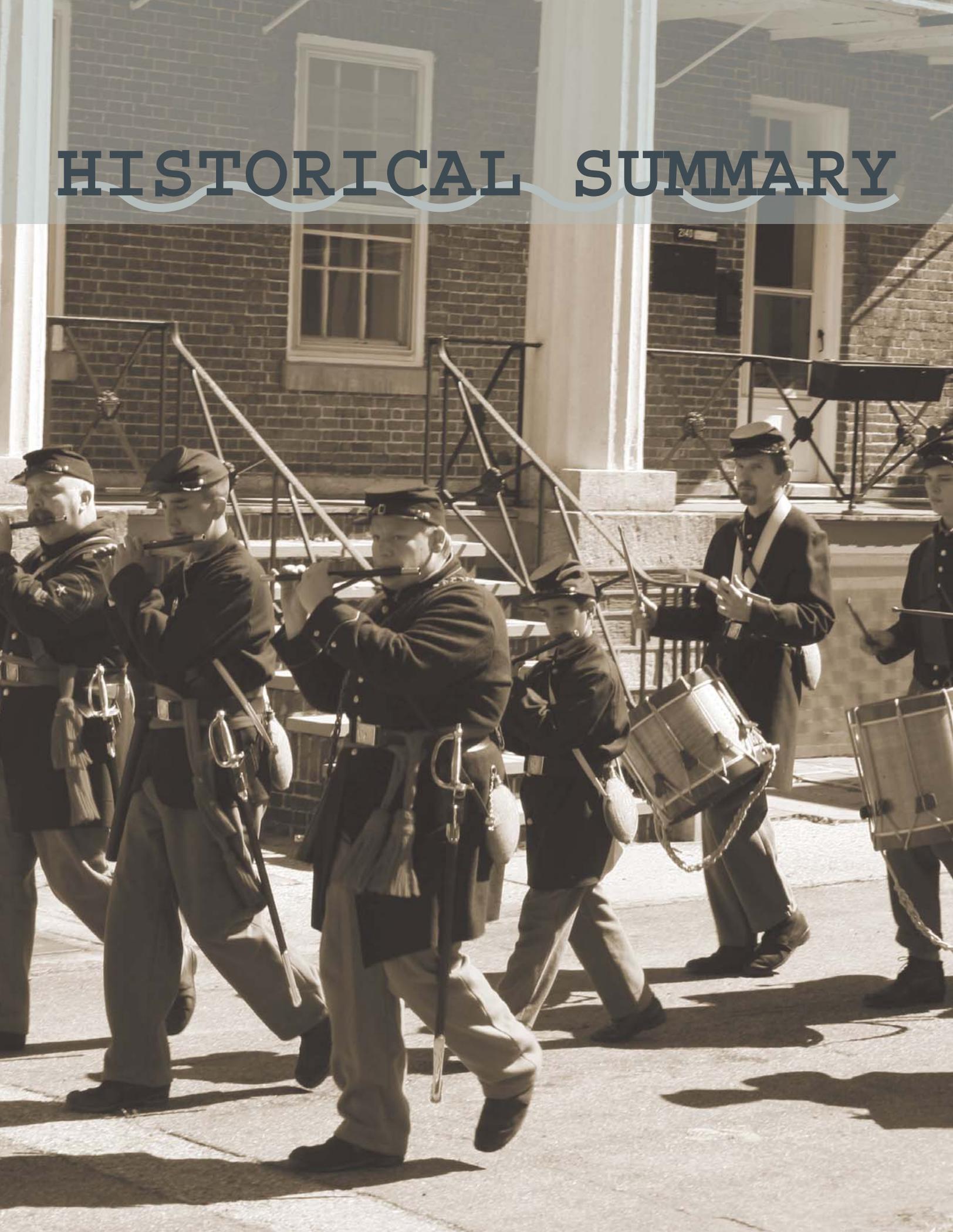


HISTORICAL SUMMARY



Collier's

THE NATIONAL WEEKLY

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MAY 31, 1919 VOL. 63 NO. 22



Richard W. Child

"Under the Peace Table"—an account of the "whispering gallery" that was Paris during the Peace Conference

Harrison Rhodes

"The Cliff Walk"—a story of Newport and a midsummer night's madness

Wm. Almon Wolff

"Finance and Tom-Toms"—the second article describing the Marines' occupation of Haiti

Lucian Cary

"Where Romance Is"—the story of a young husband and wife who discovered that there is such a thing as too much contentment

J. B. W. Gardiner

"The Court-Martial Controversy"—an answer to Arthur Train's "Military Justice in the American Army"

Also in this issue: "The Farmers' Motor-Truck Express," an article by Joseph Brinker; Editorials; Photographic Pages

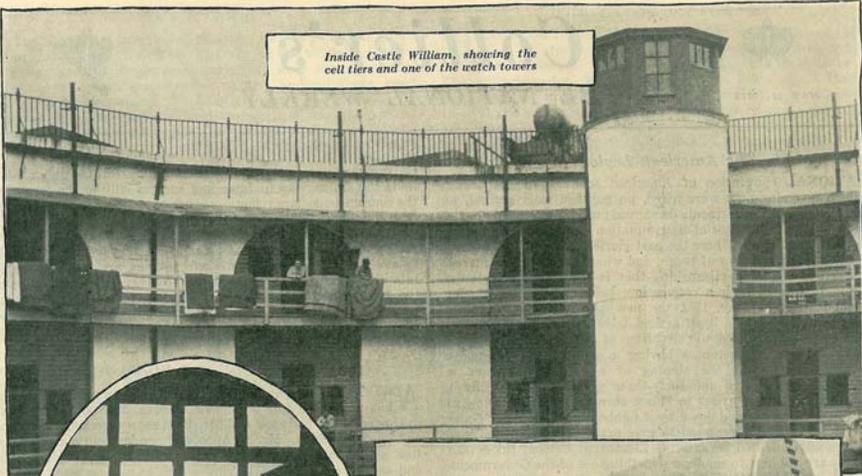
Million a Week

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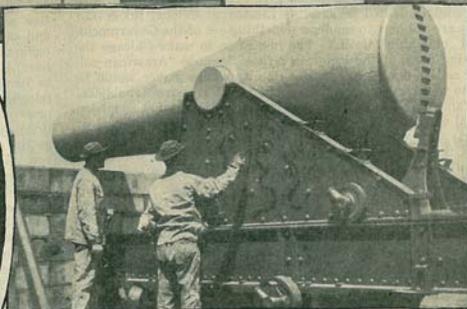
The National Weekly

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Inside Castle William, showing the cell tiers and one of the watch towers



Not many prison cells have a view like this



The camouflage class puts its heart into its work



"Good-by, Castle Bill!"



The prison methods at Castle William are thoroughly modern. There is an honor association, a uniformed honor battalion, athletic teams, and a trade school. Here is the print shop

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The following narrative briefly describes the remarkable history of Governors Island from its earliest known occupation to the present. It draws upon a growing body of scholarship to give the reader an understanding of the events, personalities, and processes necessary to plan for the island's future.

Pre-Contact

Governors Island rests on the same solid bedrock that supports the Manhattan skyscrapers, but its historical form, and thus its human use, was determined more directly by glaciers. About 80,000 years ago the continental ice sheet known as the Wisconsin began to expand from its sources in the polar region. Eventually an equilibrium was reached where the forward thrust of the ice was matched by the melting of its leading edge. At this point the glacier dropped the accumulation of stone and gravel it had been carrying, leaving a terminal moraine. This ragged line runs across New Jersey, exits the state at Perth Amboy, crosses Staten Island and Brooklyn, and continues to the eastern tip of Long Island and beyond.

The glacier began to retreat from the New York area around 20,000 years ago, leaving conditions far different than we see today. So much water was tied up in the ice sheet that ocean levels were lower, exposing hundreds of miles of continental shelf. The terminal moraine and the glacier itself disrupted the

previous drainage system, forming long, cold lakes in the valleys. Over several thousand years the Hudson River broke through to reestablish its outlet, and rising sea levels filled New York Harbor and formed estuaries such as the East and Harlem Rivers. At first the departing glacier left behind a barren, frigid landscape, but conditions moderated rapidly. Human beings arrived in time to witness some of these changes and may have been present to see Governors Island become permanently separated from other land. When European explorers ventured into the bay in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, they found bands of native Lenape Indians making regular use of the rich island, which they called Pagganack, a name that refers to the abundant nut trees.

In 1524, Verrazano reported seeing people clothed with feathers of birds of various colors. He wrote that the harbor was a beautiful lake with a circuit of about three leagues which Indians traversed in little boats (canoes), with innumerable people passing from one shore to the other to meet him. A rising wind blew Verrazano's ship back out to sea before he had a chance to speak with anyone. Later observers describe the Native Americans in this part of New Netherland (later known as New York) as members of the Manhattan Nation who spoke a distinct dialect and resided in several communities, each led by a sachem, surrounding the bay, along the Hudson River, and on Long Island. Later known as the Lenape or Delaware, descendants of these people now live in Oklahoma and Wisconsin within the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. They recognize Governors Island as part of their aboriginal homeland.



Giovanni da Verrazano.
Public domain.

Nooten Eylandt

During the "Age of Discovery" several European explorers sailed into New York Harbor, but events in Europe decided that it would be the Dutch who first settled there. Energized by their long struggle for independence from Spanish oppression, the inhabitants of this isolated, low corner of Europe built a far-ranging maritime and commercial empire. Using many of the techniques of modern capitalism and taking advantage of greater individual freedom than could be found elsewhere in the continent, the Dutch Republic became wealthy. It was during this expansive "golden age" in the early 17th-century that the Nieu Nederlandt colony was established along the river Henry Hudson had explored.

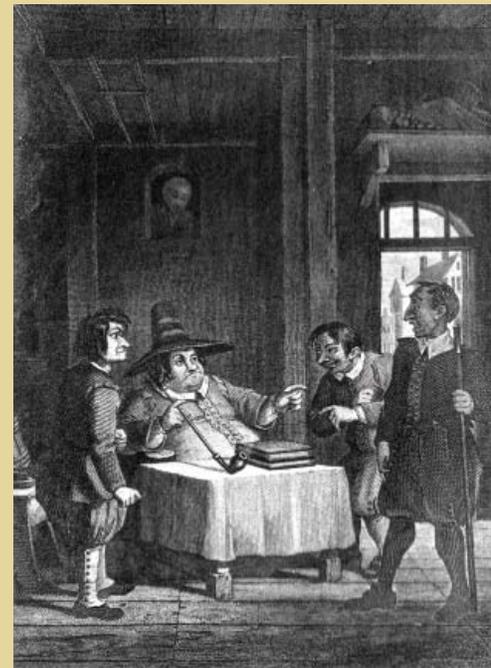
Modeled on the highly successful Dutch East India Company, a West India Company was formed in 1621 and three years later sent a shipload of 30 families to the new colony in North America. A majority of them sailed upriver to establish a trading post near what is now Albany, but another party spent the winter of 1624 on Governors Island, which they named Nooten Eylandt, their translation of Pagganack. In the following year they moved across to Manhattan with their cattle and began building a fort to defend the settlement they fondly named Nieu (New) Amsterdam. The Dutch set up a sawmill on Nooten Eylandt, which produced timber for the first cabins on Manhattan. In this way Governors Island assisted the birth of New York. Living in a rich area and well provisioned by the home company, the inhabitants of New Amsterdam did not undergo a "starving time" like the settlers of Plymouth or Jamestown.

In 1633 Wouter van Twiller, only 27 years old, arrived as governor of the colony. With a circumference approximating his height and a fiery temper, the new governor provided delightful material for Washington Irving's later Knickerbocker tales. The early Dutch governors had no compunctions about enriching themselves while conducting company business, and in 1637 the redoubtable van Twiller allegedly "purchased" Nooten Eylandt from the local Lenapes for trinkets, much as Peter Minuit had bought Manhattan in 1626. As with other land "sales" to Europeans, the Lenape would have viewed the transaction not as a final transfer of land and resources, but as an initial gift cementing a sociopolitical relationship and involving an expectation of future "gifts" for continued shared use of the island. A somewhat similar situation occurred in Boston, where a harbor island was granted to Governor John Winthrop in 1632 and also became known as Governors Island. Unlike the New York example, Winthrop actually built a house on his island, and his family retained ownership into the 19th-century.

For his personal and other abuses, van Twiller was recalled in 1638 and his private land acquisitions were annulled. According to tradition, he may have built a house and started plantations on Nooten Eyland, but no trace of them remains. His equally corrupt successor Willem Kieft revived the sawmill on the island, but it apparently ceased operating by 1648, indicating that the luxuriant forest cover was mostly gone. Kieft is also remembered for instigating a period of bloody conflict between the colonists and Native tribes. Under the irascible, authoritarian Petrus (Pieter) Stuyvesant, the New Netherlands colony prospered, though pushed back by the expanding English from its claims on the Connecticut River. English envy of the Dutch



1635 Dutch map by Willem Blaeu.



A painting of Wouter van Twiller by Washington Allston. Public domain.



Public domain.

seaborne empire and dislike of the Dutch wedge between the colonies in New England and Virginia led to a series of wars between the two naval powers. In 1664, with only Stuyvesant willing to take up arms, a British fleet seized Manhattan. The invaders renamed both the city and the colony New York, after the king's brother James, Duke of York.

At the time of the British takeover, New Amsterdam was a town of about 1,500 residents, clustered south of the defensive barrier along today's Wall Street. Dutch settlements (many of whose inhabitants were not ethnically Dutch) were scattered over Long Island, northern New Jersey, and up the Hudson Valley, but Nooten Eylandt was not permanently occupied. During another war in 1673 a Dutch expedition recaptured the territory and was warmly welcomed by the Dutch residents. To their bitter disappointment, the colony was exchanged for Surinam in South America by treaty, ending hopes of reviving Nieu Nederlandt.

New York Colony

Despite its strategic location, Nutten Island remained generally a quiet backwater during more than a century under the British flag. In 1698, early in the administration of Governor Lord Bellomont, the colonial Assembly set aside the island as "part of the Denizen of His Majesty's Governors," probably to prevent subsequent governors from giving it away to private interests. The name Governors Island thus came into use, but the former names Nutten or Nut Island persisted. As a preserve of the royally appointed governors, the island was further insulated from the political turmoil and rapid growth of the nearby city. At times the park-like island was stocked with

pheasants, and it seemed that its future course would come under the theme of recreation, rather than defense.

Bellomont's successor Edward Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, a relative of Queen Anne, levied a tax in 1702 to fortify Governors Island. This tax was assessed on an odd assortment of social groups, such as periwig wearers and bachelors. Cornbury then spent the money he had raised to build a splendid house for his personal use on Governors Island. Not surprisingly, an unproven and unlikely tradition grew up that at least part of this house is incorporated in the present "Governor's House" (Building 2). A combination of Cornbury's unsavory financial manipulations, ineffective rule, political disputes and eccentricities caused him to be replaced in 1708.

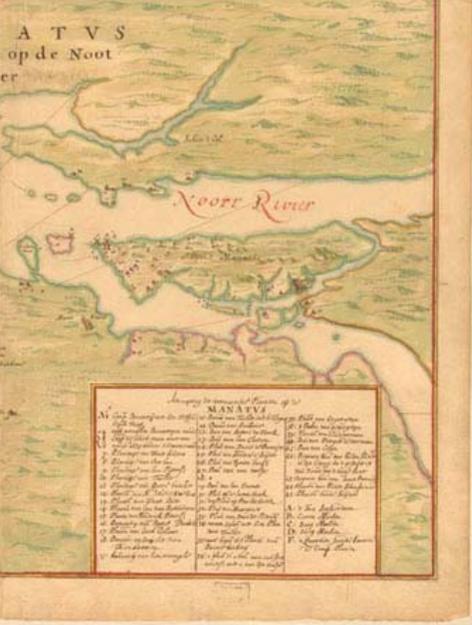
One notable interruption in the island's placid existence came shortly after Cornbury's departure, with the arrival of several thousand "Palatine" refugees. These were German-speaking Protestants who had been driven out of the Rhineland and impoverished by French King Louis XIV's territorial expansion. Sympathetic to their plight and perhaps hoping they would be useful to the crown by producing tar and other "naval stores" from pitch pine, Queen Anne arranged to bring some of them to New York. When they arrived in the harbor many were sick with typhus and other communicable diseases, and were quarantined on Governors Island. At least 250 Palatines died and presumably were buried somewhere on the island. Subsequently, the naval stores project turned out to be a fiasco, and the hapless Palatines were left to their own devices. Many settled in the Mohawk Valley, where they became a significant part of the population and were later caught up in fierce frontier fighting during the War for American Independence.



Mantus Map, circa 1639.
Library of Congress.

Governors Island, parts of Brooklyn and Long Island. A view of New York from Governors Island extends along the bottom.





Military activity came to Governors Island in 1755, during the French and Indian War (the Seven Years War, in Europe), the last of four imperial conflicts between France and Britain, all of which had a prominent North American component. Several British regiments were quartered and trained on the island, among them a regiment composed of Americans. No record seems to survive as to whether these troops were housed in anything more permanent than tents.

In the War for Independence

The treaty that ended the French and Indian War in 1763 removed the danger of French attack on the British colonies but left the problem of how to administer Britain's expanded empire. A move to defray the cost of defending the colonies by imposing a stamp tax in 1765 provoked violent resistance in New York, as elsewhere. For the next 10 years periodic discord flared as King George III tried to maintain and enlarge his prerogatives in North America. New York City, with a population approaching 25,000, concentrated below Chambers Street, was already deeply divided by family rivalries, religion, and economic interests; and the arguments over royal authority added to the volatile mix. Historians have examined this period exhaustively, and the overall impression they convey is a profoundly divided city. Perhaps because the two sides were relatively equal and conspicuous, each tended to view the city as a stronghold of its foes. Long-simmering tension between the colonists and their distant mother country exploded into open warfare at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, followed two months later by the bloody clash at Bunker Hill. George

From Jeffrey's and Faden, 1776. (<http://www.microcolour.com/us004-1.htm>)



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Washington, commander of the rebel forces, besieged the British in Boston over the winter of 1775-76 and forced them to evacuate the city in March 1776. For a time there were no British military forces in the colonies, and it was during this interval, while the British were regrouping in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that the Continental Congress pushed toward independence.

history

Guessing that once they were reinforced, the British would move against New York, Washington dispatched General Charles Lee, erratic but highly regarded because he had been a British officer, to direct the defense of the city. Lee arrived in February 1776 but remained only about a month before he was called away to command at Charleston, South Carolina. He apparently felt that New York was not really defensible, and his strategy seemed to be to draw the British invaders into Manhattan and make them pay a steep price in lives by forcing them to attack a series of defensive barriers. Under this plan, continued by Lee's successor, no effort was made to fortify Governors Island.

This neglect ended dramatically on April 8, when 1,000 men landed on the island and worked all night to build defensive works. The man responsible for this change was General Israel Putnam, a legendary hero of the French and Indian War, who won further fame for the earthworks his troops hastily threw up at Bunker Hill. Indeed, William Prescott's regiment, which had earned renown at that battle, garrisoned Governors Island for a time. Under Putnam's direction, the Americans also placed a battery on Red Hook, a nearby projection of Brooklyn that was sometimes an island during high water. Eventually the Americans installed more than 30 guns on Governors Island, and Washington declared "Governor's Island is more strong and better

guarded than any other post in the Army." That may well have been true, since none of the American defenses were as strong as they needed to be.

On July 2, 1776, two days before the Declaration of Independence was read in New York City, the largest military force ever seen in North America and the largest force the British had ever sent abroad appeared in New York Harbor. Commanded by the Howe brothers, Admiral Richard and General William, the British landed unopposed on Staten Island. Shortly afterward, they sent two warships up the Hudson to test American defenses. Even though these ships escaped without severe damage, the vigorous American firing from Governors Island and elsewhere may have reinforced the characteristic caution of the Howes.

In August the British army moved across to Long Island and, battling over hilly terrain left by the terminal moraine, quickly outmaneuvered and overwhelmed the American defenders. Washington and a large portion of his army made an almost miraculous escape from Brooklyn (then the name of only a small community on Long Island) on the night of August 29-30. British respect for the guns on Governors Island may have been one of the factors that prevented them from interfering with the American evacuation. This idea is reinforced by the fact that when the British fleet opened a terrific bombardment of the island on August 30, it stood off at such a distance that little damage was done. An embittered loyalist later observed that the thunderous display "might as well have been directed at the moon." No one would have guessed it at the time, but that was the only occasion in its long military history that Governors Island came under fire.



Franklin played the part of the rustic sage, as he shrewdly calculated the sophisticated courtiers would want to see him—wigless, bespectacled, and donning his "Quaker" suit of sober brown. He appeared again at the French court one year later as the U.S. Minister to France. Philadelphia: John Smith, n.d. Hand-colored lithograph, Library of Congress.

From Library of Congress website: *In this idealized version of Franklin's appearance at the Court in Versailles on March 20, 1778, King Louis XVI avowed the treaty of alliance between France and the United States by formally receiving the American commissioners.*

Later on August 30, the American garrison on Governors Island withdrew to Manhattan. The last to leave their posts, they joined the rest of a dwindling and somewhat demoralized army. After they occupied Governors Island, the British turned some of its guns against the Americans on Manhattan. In subsequent fighting the British drove Washington's army beyond the limits of New York City but seemingly held back from destroying it. In addition to the natural caution and indolence of General Howe, his brother had been authorized to negotiate peace with the rebels, and that may have been their overriding goal.

For the duration of the war, Governors Island with the rest of New York City remained under British control. A short distance away, on Wallabout Bay, the later site of Brooklyn Navy Yard, as many as 10,000 Americans, a number far exceeding total American battle deaths in the war, may have died horribly on rotting British prison ships. Lacking a fleet, the United States could do little to threaten the British position, but the situation changed dramatically in 1778 when France, impressed by the stunning American victory at Saratoga and the Continental Army's resiliency in the

battles around Philadelphia, signed an alliance with the new nation. On several occasions powerful French fleets stood just outside the dangerous bar between Sandy Hook and Coney Island, forcing the British and their loyalist supporters in New York to dig in. They reported "repairing the ruined Fortifications & Batterys, erected by the Rebels" on Governors Island and added buildings such as a hospital. Both the Americans and the British probably fortified the high part of the island, around present Fort Jay.

Throughout the war Washington nurtured hopes of retaking New York and avenging the humiliating defeats of 1776, but even with French help he never amassed the overwhelming superiority he needed. It was only after the peace treaty of 1783 that the Americans returned to New York City, marching in by arrangement just hours after the British pulled out. The British left behind the structures they had built on Governors Island, but no trace of them survives; and the only reminder of this stirring period of the island's history might be British cannonballs and shell fragments buried in its soil.

Coastal Defense

The soldiers and civilians who labored with shovels and wheelbarrows to fortify Governors Island and thereby protect New York also shaped the island's future. For the next 50 years or more, its primary function was as part of the U.S. coastal defense establishment. America's emphasis on coastal defense (more accurately harbor defense, since the intent was not to defend long stretches of coastline), which began in the colonial period and whose line of descent can perhaps be traced to today's anti-

ballistic missile program, is deeply rooted in national attitudes. With its restless energy absorbed in internal development, America's policy toward the outside world was basically defensive. Forts cannot be moved around like armies and navies to draw the nation into foreign entanglements. Indeed, the very existence of strong defenses, as 19th-century congressmen argued repeatedly, could deter war and shield the U.S. from involvement in foreign conflicts. There was an ingrained fear of large permanent armies, and in any case the thinly populated country could not afford an army large enough to protect its vast spaces. Coastal forts could be prepared in advance and occupied in emergencies by militiamen. Reliance on technology and armament would reduce casualties, as well as costs. Although building fortifications was less expensive than maintaining a large army and navy, it was still a major federal expense. As the only sustained federal construction program, it created an eager constituency among contractors.

American coastal defense can be divided into distinct periods. Historians generally recognize eight such "systems," not all of which were carried to completion. Every 20 years or so a perceived threat would appear, prompting a nervous Congress to appropriate funding for a new generation of defenses. Usually enough time had elapsed since the previous crisis that the old fortifications had become dilapidated, or advancing technology would have made them obsolete. Systems have generally been defined as having nationwide scope, springing from a formal initiative, and employing common characteristics of design and armament. At first, although the location of the defenses was determined by national priorities, there was considerable local variation in construction, but gradually uniformity prevailed.

There was an interlude of uncertainty between the end of the War for Independence and the renewed use of Governors Island for military purposes. With no one to care for them, the buildings left by the British must have rapidly decayed. New York Governor George Clinton leased the island as a racetrack, and it was also used as a quarantine station from 1786 to 1790, when Columbia College was granted rights to the island. As Kings College, the institution had been a bastion of toryism in colonial times, and its backers hoped that a change of name could make it an acceptable guardian of conservative principles in the federalist republic. Apparently the intent was for Columbia, crammed into an inadequate space west of City Hall Park, to use the proceeds from land sales to build a roomier campus uptown, rather than to transfer to Governors Island. A somewhat similar example existed in Boston, where in 1682 Samuel Ward willed Bumpkin Island to Harvard College so that rental income could support college operations. These tentative efforts to define a civilian role for Governors Island came to an abrupt end when it was called back into military service. It was as though the island had tried civilian attire but felt at last more comfortable in uniform.

In 1794, a year when the infant federal government made a number of far-reaching decisions about military matters, it launched what became known as the First System of coastal defense. Renewed tension with Great Britain was the immediate incentive. Some unfinished business from the War for Independence contributed, but most of the threats during this period were a spillover of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars that kept Europe in almost continuous conflict from 1789 to 1815. On March 20, 1794, Congress appropriated money and authorized

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the appointment of engineers to construct fortifications at key locations. Since there were no trained American military engineers, the men appointed were mostly French. At New York, the defenses were supervised by Charles Vincent.

Although this First System was a national program, which attempted to defend 21 seaports, there was great variation in the individual works. State governors had to approve the projects, and this was especially important in New York, where popular governor George Clinton had been a staunch anti-federalist and remained suspicious of federal power. Dissatisfied with the size of the congressional appropriation and the rapidity of its implementation, Clinton called on organizations of tradesmen, students and political groups to volunteer on the fortifications. Each group was assigned its own day, which made the labor something of a festive outing. An observer reported on May 24, 1794, "As I was getting up in the morning, I heard drums beating and fifes playing. I ran to the window, and saw a large body of people on the other side of the Governor's House, with flags flying, and marching two and two towards the water-side." It was "a procession of young tradesmen going in boats to Governor's Island, to give the state a day's work." Although the writer was English and the defensive efforts were directed against his country, he still marveled: "How noble is this! How it cherishes unanimity and love for their country!" By 1796, work had progressed to the point that an official report could announce, "Governor's Island has been fortified with a fort made of earth, and two batteries under its protection, partly lined with brick masonry, two air furnaces, a large powder magazine, and a barrack for the garrison; the whole completed."

history



John Jay (1745-1829) by artist Gilbert Stuart. Detroit Publishing Company Collection, Library of Congress.

A treaty negotiated by John Jay, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and an experienced diplomat, removed the immediate threat of war. Jay had been governor of New York State and was unpopular in New York City and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the fort on Governors Island, one of the four major works of the first system, was named in his honor. Although large in dimension, it was an unreinforced earthwork, and it deteriorated rapidly once the emergency passed. Later in the 1790s, the U.S. became involved in a naval "quasi war" with revolutionary France, prompting a new round of defensive appropriations. In this period, considered to be a second phase of the first system, engineers made greater use of masonry, at least as a veneer. In 1800, in a gap between George Clinton's terms as governor, New York State agreed to transfer Governors Island, as well as its neighbors Ellis Island and Bedloe's Island (now Liberty Island), to federal control for military purposes.

By 1801 Fort Jay was a square structure lined with some masonry, with arrowhead-shaped bastions projecting from each corner. These bastions, derived from the concepts of the 17th-century French marshal Vauban, protected the long-exposed "curtain walls" of the fort. Beyond the main fort stood three ramparts to guard the channels around the island, which was roughly triangular, and discourage enemy landings. In the center of the fort stood a timber blockhouse, which had questionable practical value and did not survive long. The garrison was housed in barracks within the square of the fort, but, since the strategy of coastal defense depended on calling out large numbers of militia, the regular military complement was small. Still, the fact that Governors Island was garrisoned at all, with a detachment of about 50 soldiers through this period, confirms its importance. An 1800

map shows a powder magazine in the northeast bastion and barracks on the north and east sides of the "parade" (the enclosed central square). The fort had a graded "*glacis*" sloping to the water's edge. Pleasing to the eye, this feature also served an important defensive purpose: attackers by land would have to charge and fire uphill, exposed all the while to devastating fire from guns behind the walls of the fort. An officer's mention of a "handsome gateway" in an 1802 report has been taken to mean that the remarkable ornamental eagle crest above the gate was already present. Surprisingly for such an unusual feature, documentary references to it are scanty, and there is no firm confirmation of its existence until the Civil War era. In the absence of documentation, it was inevitable that this embellishment would inspire legends, and a story grew up that the sculpture was the work of a skilled stonecutter who was imprisoned on the island.

As the struggle between Great Britain and Napoleonic France intensified, American maritime commerce was caught in the middle. Exasperated, President Jefferson in 1807 declared an embargo, which prohibited trade with all belligerents and soon had ruinous effects on American commerce. He also determined to build up the nation's defenses. Reluctant to enlarge the permanent military establishment, he turned to coastal defense as a passive alternative, acceptable within his philosophy of limited federal government. This was the origin of the Second System, which sought to defend 30 vital harbors and has left enduring traces on Governors Island.

Much of the Second System works that are so conspicuous today are the legacy of Jonathan Williams, one of those distinctive individuals who periodically exerted a powerful influence on



Colonel Jonathan Williams 1750-1815.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, public
domain.

Governors Island. A grandnephew of Benjamin Franklin, Williams shared his distinguished relative's wide-ranging curiosity. His diverse scientific interests, validated by his prominence in the American Philosophical Society, also impressed Thomas Jefferson, who named him the first commander of the Army Corps of Engineers when that organization was formed in 1802. Always sensitive to slights, Williams resigned in the following year, but Jefferson persuaded him to return as chief in 1805. He was thus in place to take charge when the defense program of 1807 was initiated. Although trained in Europe, he represented the first generation of American engineers, men who brought an end to the risky practice of relying on foreign experts.

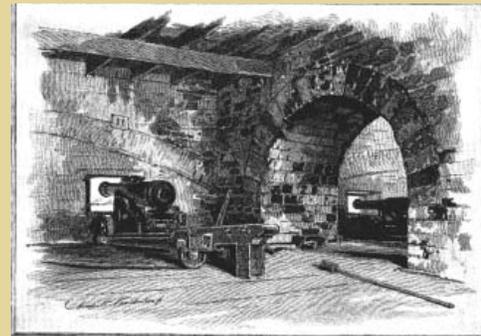
At Fort Jay, which had been described in 1806 as being "in a state of absolute ruin," Williams performed what amounted to a rebuilding. He extended all walls to 14 feet in height and added a ravelin to provide additional protection to the north face, but did not alter the basic Vauban-inspired trace. Jay's treaty had become increasingly unpopular at a time when relations with Britain were deteriorating, and since it had been heavily altered, the fort bearing his name was renamed Fort Columbus in 1806 or 1807. The reconstruction was considered to be complete by January 1810, and in the following year the fort, designed to accommodate 104 guns, was armed with 25 50-pounders, 57 18-pounders, and assorted field pieces. The striking parallel with the Governors Island in Boston Harbor persisted, and in 1808 a Second System fort was

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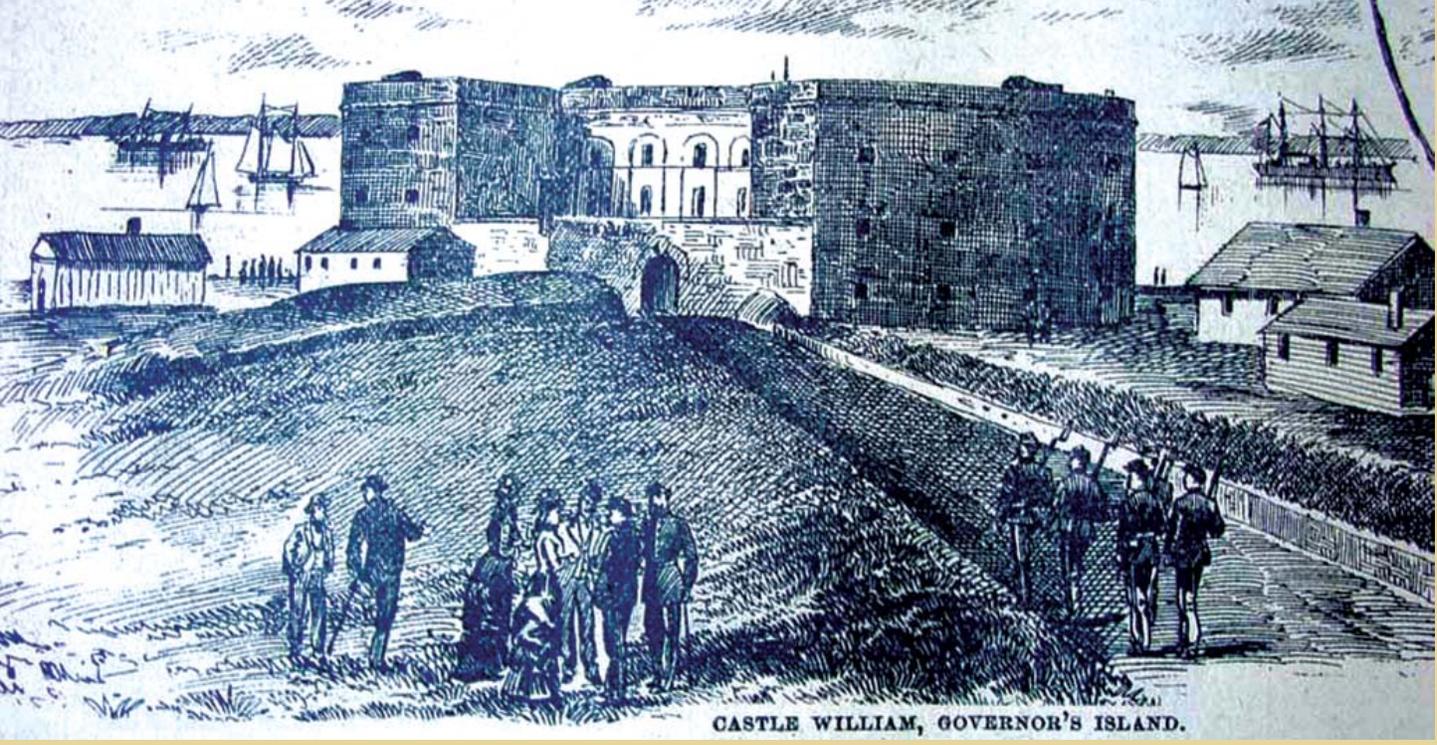
started there. Originally called Fort Warren, the name was changed to Fort Winthrop in 1833, when work began on the massive new Fort Warren that still dominates Georges Island.

Jonathan Williams's masterpiece was a new fort entirely of his own design, employing concepts not previously seen in America. Drawing on the ideas of French military engineer Rene de Montalambert, Williams constructed a fort in circular form, able to accommodate three tiers of guns in protected "casemates." Although guns mounted on a stable platform such as the earth would always have an advantage over guns firing from a rolling ship, it was conceivable that a fleet might fire a concentrated broadside that could overwhelm a coastal fort. Williams's (and Montalambert's) idea was to counter this by massing artillery at a critical location so that it could out-duel even a powerful fleet. Thus, although the two forts on the island were considered part of the Second System and were informed by French military theory, they differed radically in design.

Beginning in 1807, Williams anchored the new fort to a treacherous rock outcrop on the northwest point of the island and constructed it of Newark sandstone, brought over by barge from New Jersey. A passageway, lined with masonry, connected Fort Columbus and the new castle, about 200 yards apart—in military terms this passage was called a "covered defile", meaning that troops using it were protected, but it was not roofed. The new fort, which most students consider the outstanding achievement of the Second System, was named Castle Williams in honor of its builder in 1810. This formidable work could mount 26 guns in each of the three levels, plus at least 25 of the powerful new 50-pound "Columbiads" on the open terrace, where they could fire "en barbette" (over the parapet). Unfazed by its



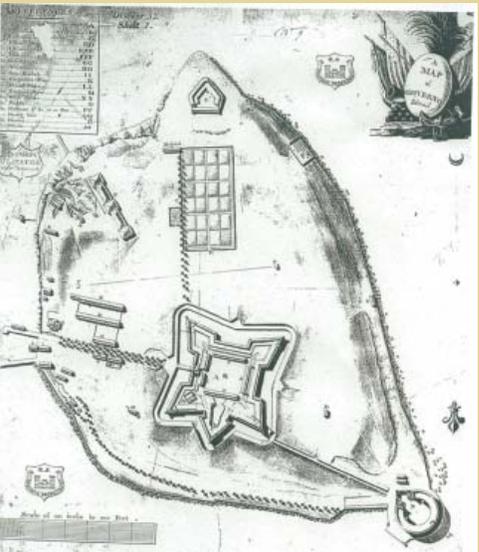
Sketch of casemate in Castle Williams, 1881. Library of Congress.



CASTLE WILLIAM, GOVERNOR'S ISLAND.

Sketch showing "covered defile", circa 1886. Library of Congress.

glowering appearance, which led Washington Irving to describe Governors Island as "a fierce little warrior in a big cocked hat, breathing gunpowder and defiance to the world," the American habit of democratization figuratively disarmed the Castle by referring to it as a "cheesebox." New Yorkers may have already been cultivating their reputation for thinking on a colossal scale, as this cheesebox had an exterior diameter of 210 feet. Enormous cheeses were in the public consciousness, as residents of Cheshire, Massachusetts, had presented President Jefferson a cheese on New Year's Day, 1802, that measured four feet in diameter and weighed 1,235 pounds.



Governors Island around 1812. U.S. Army.

Castle Williams was essentially completed by the end of 1811, and in the following year Colonel Williams constructed the South Battery, able to mount 14 guns, on what was then the shoreline of Governors Island. By 1813 the available space on the island was almost entirely occupied by fortifications, support facilities, and gardens. Williams also supervised construction of a star-shaped

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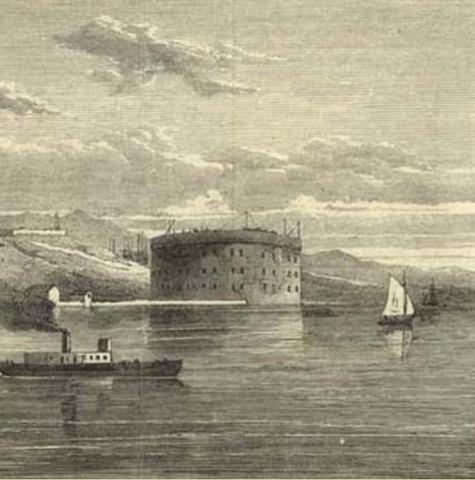
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fort on Bedloe's Island and another on Ellis, or Oyster, Island. On the southern tip of Manhattan he built a fort similar to Castle Williams, intended to provide a cross-fire with its mate on Governors Island. This fort was also tied to a formation of outlying rock; later connected by landfill to the Battery, it originally required a causeway to reach Manhattan. Due mainly to financial cutbacks, this fort, now Castle Clinton, was never raised beyond its first tier. Other works on Manhattan, at the Narrows, and around Hell Gate rounded out the city's defenses.

Williams resigned in pique on July 31, 1812, largely over a dispute in which artillery men refused to take orders from him because he was an engineer officer. This was one of those issues in which a youthful military establishment, operating in a republic, had to set its ground rules. Almost simultaneously, the long-threatened war with Great Britain finally began. New Yorkers, living in a city that had not been successfully defended in 200 years, felt a mortal terror that the catastrophe of 1776 would be repeated. By October 1814 the city was protected by 570 field pieces, plus others on vessels. This complement of guns would have required 25,000 men, but most of them presumably could be called up on short notice. It is possible that this formidable armament discouraged British attack, since their naval blockade was already effectively choking New York's commerce. After seizing Washington, D.C., in 1814, the Royal Navy moved against Baltimore, but its repulse at Fort McHenry would have strengthened the argument against testing the New York defenses. In later years, Robert Moses and others derided forts like Castle Williams that "had never fired a shot." In reality, that was the finest compliment they could receive: fighting off an enemy could be glorious, but the real purpose



Atmospheric sketch of the island circa 1865.



N.Y. Public Library.

of coastal defense was to discourage him from attacking at all.

Although Baltimore had resisted and New York had possibly deterred attack, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of American coastal defenses in the War of 1812. Almost immediately after its conclusion, Secretary of War James Monroe convened a board, the first of several over the next 125 years, to examine the problem. This board's report in 1821 led to the Third System, which has left more than 60 impressive stone fortifications around the nation's coasts. One of the system's defining features was to continue moving defenses farther out from the city being protected. In New York this led to an emphasis on forts at the Narrows (Forts Lafayette, Hamilton, Richmond, and Tompkins) and at Throgs Neck (Fort Schuyler) in what is now The Bronx. By the close of the Third System, New York City was defended by 12 forts.

The forts on Governors Island, although reduced in relative importance, continued to be part of the defensive system. At Fort Columbus considerable effort was devoted to adding a dry moat and facing the structure with granite to conform to Third System practice. This work continued through the 1830s. At times work went slowly, first because of a cholera epidemic that brought the city's economy to a virtual standstill in 1832. Recovery was almost as troublesome, as "The constant employment afforded to mechanics and laborers of every description in the city of New York renders it very difficult to procure their services on the island." Castle Williams, less flexible, remained essentially a Second System work. During a long interval of peace it apparently was allowed to deteriorate. An English officer visiting in 1832 reported, "When I entered it through the small wicket door, I was nearly

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upset by a quantity of half-starved pigs, which rushed grunting up to me, as if attempting to gain the exterior of the fort, and compelled me to make strenuous use of my walking-stick. The interior was little better than a sty, and in a most unfinished state." (The porkers may have been brought in to provide a food supply for workers on the forts, as was the practice at Fort Warren in Boston.) From a distance this squalor was invisible, and another English visitor wrote that Governors Island "lies like an emerald on the sunny surface of the bay." The city across the bay was expanding rapidly, guided by a plan adopted just before the War of 1812 began. This plan imposed a relentless grid on the undeveloped portion of Manhattan north of Houston Street, altering the picturesque terrain to maximize the number of building lots. Meanwhile, for similar reasons, the long-standing practice of filling the irregularities of Manhattan's shoreline continued. As Manhattan expanded and Red Hook was joined more permanently to Brooklyn, many people believed that Governors Island was shrinking due to erosion, although the lack of accurate surveys makes it difficult to confirm.

The Third System was sometimes referred to as the permanent system, both because of the masonry it favored and because its advocates claimed it would meet the nation's defense needs indefinitely. Jonathan Williams had made a similar claim for his castle, declaring it would "endure for ages." In a structural sense this was true, though substantial reinforcement was needed as early as the 1830s; but rapid advances in armament could not be halted, and many of the Third System works became obsolete before they were finished.

Added Missions: The Antebellum Years

After the peace of 1815 the U.S. Army, per usual practice, was greatly reduced, but it retained a more impressive standing force than it had previously. In subsequent decades it steadily assumed the characteristics of an established institution. Dominated by the towering personality of General Winfield Scott, it developed a clear hierarchy and a structure of regulations and procedures. However, even Scott's commanding bulk could not insulate the Army from the winds of politics. Changing administrations at Washington subjected the military to frequent reorganizations and disruptive fluctuations in support. The Jacksonians, who saw themselves as successors to Jefferson, remained suspicious of the military, so that in some years even funding for coast defense was reduced to a trickle—one reason construction of the Third System dragged on so long.

Castle Clinton was returned to civilian control, but there was no thought of following that example on Governors Island, which remained firmly under military ownership. Persistent doubts about the island's defensive value could not be silenced, but although Chief Engineer Colonel Joseph G. Totten conceded in an 1840 report that "the destruction of the city might be going on simultaneously with the contest between these forts and the fleet," he maintained that the inner forts remained valuable as a "last barrier." While coast defense, the most visible function, remained paramount, the island gradually assumed other missions, so that its operation became more diffuse. In 1816 the headquarters for the Third Military District was transferred

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to Governors Island, and in 1821 another reorganization made it the headquarters of the Eastern Division. As one of only two such commands, the island became one of the most important military bases in the country. It was the site of General Scott's headquarters during much of this period, though he did not live on the island. Scott, a military intellectual, enjoyed socializing with New York's upper crust. Already New York was a thoroughly business-oriented community, and the General, with his knowledge of the West and military matters, probably offered valuable investment advice.

Governors Island's promising role as a major military headquarters lasted only until 1827 and was not resumed until later in the century. Meanwhile, as the Army, with a total strength of more than 5,000, increasingly stabilized and adopted a routine, the island took on more of the trappings of a permanent military post. Housing for the garrison was a vital concern, and in the 1830s the Army constructed four new barracks inside the walls of Fort Columbus. These solid brick and stone structures not only improved life for the soldiers but left more room for formations in the center of the fort, so that it could truly function as a "parade." In the following decade a new Commanding Officer's house (Building 1), designed by a prominent architect, Martin E. Thompson testified to the permanence of the military establishment. The first detached housing for subordinate officers, two double sets of quarters (Buildings 4 and 5) were added in the 1850s.

With a permanent garrison and soldiers transferring from remote frontier posts, medical care became a pressing concern, leading to the building of a post hospital (Building 9) in 1839. Reverend John McVickar, the

well-connected chaplain of Columbia College, persuaded General Scott to lease a small plot for an Episcopal chapel, overcoming the Army's usual reluctance to construct religious buildings. This was the original Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion, dedicated 1847.

Although the Mexican War (1846-48) was generally unpopular in the Northeast, a regiment of New York volunteer infantry was mustered on Governors Island. This war provided experience for the generation of officers who led both sides in the Civil War. Since Governors Island was an important post, many of these officers passed through it during their careers. As a young engineer officer, Robert E. Lee was stationed at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, in the late 1830s and probably visited Governors Island. Captain Ulysses S. Grant was stationed on the island for several months in 1852.

The New York Arsenal, an important but unrelated function, transferred to Governors Island from Manhattan in 1832. As part of the Ordnance Department this entity was largely separate from other military operations on the island. Though the distinction was often blurred, ordnance officers tried to distinguish between armories, which manufactured weapons and materiel, and arsenals, which stored and repaired them. At the start of the Civil War there were 22 arsenals scattered throughout the nation. Few of them were situated in conjunction with coast defense installations, though Fortress Governors Island was already under military ownership and had a storehouse in use, the reasons for choosing it as an arsenal site are not entirely clear. Retroactive justifications given decades later when officers were fighting to retain the facility are not fully explanatory. Governors Island offered docking facilities for the

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arsenal, but that feature was not considered necessary at most arsenals. The dock made it easier to service the cluster of defensive facilities around New York Harbor, but Boston, which also had fortifications scattered on numerous islands, managed without a seaside arsenal.

Beginning in the 1830s the arsenal constructed a cluster of service and storage buildings on its separate six-and-a-half-acre plot on Governors Island. This must have meant some loss of defensive capability, since in the area occupied by the arsenal, the *glacis* had extended to the water's edge. Officers from the various Army branches studied the site and apparently concluded that the arsenal did not block an important field of fire. One of the arsenal buildings was a residence for its commanding officer (now incorporated in Building 135), and it is tempting to speculate that this development prompted the construction of Building 1 in 1843, as the post commander sought to maintain his proper prerogatives. Many of the permanent arsenal buildings survive, although the function was transferred to Raritan Arsenal, New Jersey, in 1920, following World War I.

In the Civil War

The coming of the Civil War thrust both combatants into a situation they could not have foreseen or prepared for. Forts guarding Southern ports turned their guns against men who in many cases had built them. Conversely, since the Confederate Navy did not present a serious threat, forts in the North had little purpose unless, as Jefferson Davis hoped, European powers came in on the Confederate side. Whether or not it faced a credible



New York Arsenal, Governors Island, N. Y.

YMCA postcard of New York Arsenal about 1900. Building 104 at left.



Governors Island
National Monument
museum collection.

threat, Governors Island contained massive firepower: 52 32-pounders in casemates and five 15-inch and 16 10-inch Rodmans en barbette atop Castle Williams; and 15-inch Rodmans in each salient and 72 10-inch Rodmans along the seaward curtain at Fort Columbus. The Rodmans were scientifically designed weapons developed by ordnance officer Thomas Rodman.

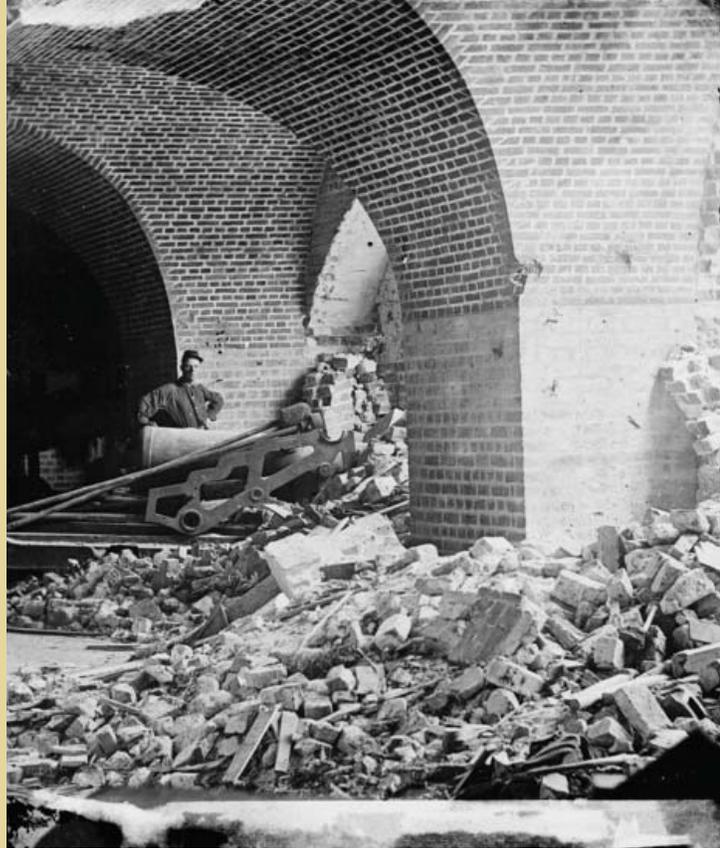
As they began a long series of improvisations, neither of the opposing armies could anticipate the enormous scale of the land campaigns or the horrific casualties that would result. Governors Island expanded its recruiting and processing functions. Despite its confined space, thousands of soldiers passed through on their way to the battlefield. Islands like this and Georges Island in Boston, occupied by Fort Warren, were well-suited to such activities since their isolation reduced temptations such as desertion for young recruits. The arsenal was exceptionally active, leading to complaints that it was too cramped.

A major problem that took both sides by surprise was the need to deal with prisoners of war. Even though in the first part of the war many captives were exchanged, they still had to be held for long periods. In the emergency, existing facilities intended for other purposes were pressed into service. Inevitably, coastal forts in the North such as Castle Williams were converted to use as prisons. Fort Lafayette, Fort Schuyler, and Fort Wood on Bedloe's Island in New York City and Fort Warren in Boston also held rebel prisoners. Castle Williams, considered unsuitable to house a garrison, held up to a thousand Southern prisoners for short periods. An army surgeon reported, that "They are crowded into an ill-ventilated building which has always been an unhealthy one when occupied by large bodies of men," and a number of prisoners died and were buried on Governors

Island. In the early part of the war, when it was still suffused with the romantic postures of Sir Walter Scott's novels, captured officers were treated somewhat as guests. Even later they were provided with better accommodations than the enlisted men, being housed in Fort Columbus or adjacent buildings, rather than the dungeon-like Castle.

With little else to occupy their time, many prisoners left accounts of their stay on the island. One captured Confederate (actually a native of Maine) observed, "We have a splendid view of New York, Brooklyn, Jersey City and all the surroundings both North and East River and anything that is going on in the Bay. We could not have chosen a better place for imprisonment if we had made our own selection." With his fellow imprisoned officers in Fort Columbus he started a weekly newspaper and played interminable games of cards. Obviously he remained in good health, for on one occasion when New Yorkers came over to gaze at the secessionists, he was interested to note that "The wind was blowing quite hard at the time, often exposing something that made our long exiled thoughts wonder, as our eyes have not feasted on White Stockings and Gaiter Boots for a long time." Somewhat ironically, this man had been captured at Fort Pulaski in Georgia, whose quick surrender to Union bombardment represented the doom of the entire elaborate Third System of coastal defense.

On July 4, 1863, Confederate Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, who had served at Fort Columbus as a young artillery officer in 1838 and 1839, surrendered the vital bastion of Vicksburg, Mississippi, to General Grant. On



Technological advances in artillery and ordnance made it possible to breach the seven foot thick walls of Fort Pulaski, near Savannah, Georgia after two days of shelling in April 1862. The Confederate defenders were taken as prisoners of war and held for several months at Fort Jay and Castle Williams. Library of Congress.

the same day General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia began its retreat from Gettysburg. Despite these stunning successes, the North remained far from final victory. With few illusions remaining about the nature of the war, the supply of volunteer manpower had dried up, and both sides had instituted drafts. Application of the draft law set off riots in New York City on July 13 that quickly turned into race riots and burst beyond the control of the metropolitan police. The population of the city had exploded to over 800,000 by 1860, and its composition was quite different than it had been early in the century, with large numbers of impoverished Irish and German immigrants. Many of the Irish, who apparently made up the bulk of the rioters, feared job competition from freed blacks and had little desire to fight in what they considered a rich man's war.

Facing the largest disturbances ever seen in the United States, officials called for federal troops, but so much troop strength had been drained by the Gettysburg campaign that few soldiers remained in the city. Many of those were members of the Invalid Corps, fit only for light duty. Soldiers from Governors Island defended key locations such as the Sub-treasury building. Probably they also guarded non-federal facilities, which raised constitutional and jurisdictional questions, especially since Governor Horatio Seymour was not supportive of the draft. In addition, Governors Island became, in effect, a safe-deposit box for valuable draft records and treasury deposits. It was a further example of how the war had turned things upside down and forced the post into duties for which it had not been intended. Later, a legend grew up that rioters had attempted to row out to the island to capture supplies and weapons and were repulsed by the civilian work force. It was only after combat troops were brought back from distant

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battlefields that the riots were suppressed, and the draft did not resume until August 19.

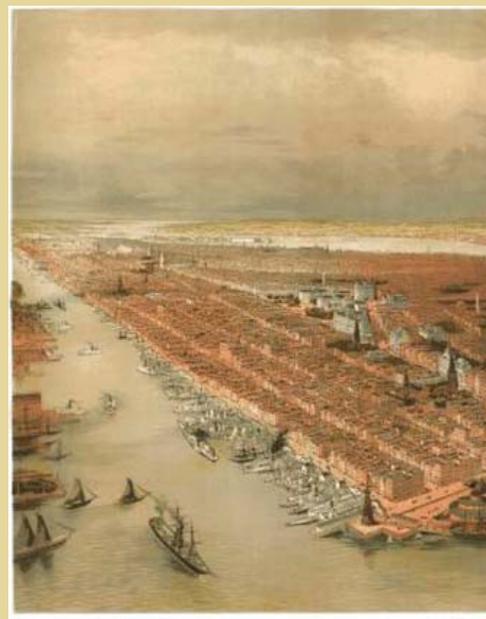
Reshaping Governors Island in a Reshaped Army, 1865- 1917

HIStory

In the decades after the Civil War, Governors Island, like the army in general, experienced long stretches of dulling tedium, interrupted by spasms of frenzied wartime energy. In many respects this pattern replicated and magnified the "hurry up and wait" routine of the individual soldier. During this period two characteristic activities on the island dwindled toward extinction, while another—the headquarters function—was renewed and became paramount. This function was restored after a lapse of some 50 years when the post became headquarters, Military Division of the Atlantic and Department of the East, in 1878. These administrative entities had been created June 27, 1865, in the closing days of the Civil War. Originally comprising five departments, the division had been consolidated to two by 1878. Fort Columbus managed army activity from Virginia northward, and east of the Mississippi, except for Illinois.

Since November 1872, the division had been commanded by Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, who, especially on horseback, presented such a magnificent, confidence-inspiring figure that he was known as "Hancock the Superb." Apparently without much effort on his part, he was nominated by the Democratic Party as its candidate for president in 1880. Without noticeably interrupting his routine on Governors Island, he came within 10,000 votes

Bird's eye view of Fort Columbus, Castle Williams and Lower Manhattan, 1874. Library of Congress.





Gen. W. S. HANCOCK.

Taken Jan 27th, 1885, at Governor's Island.

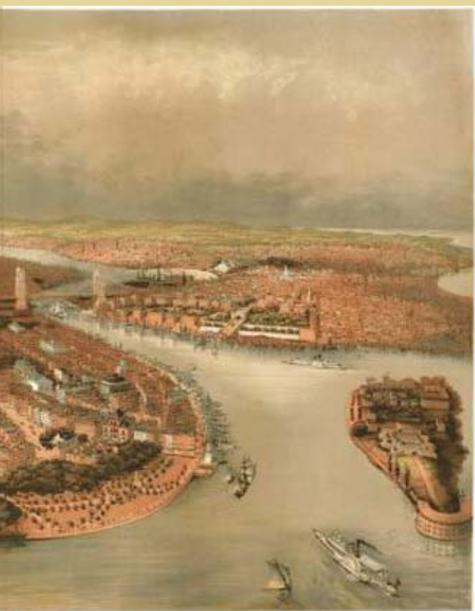
Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1889, by E. A. Lewis, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

General Winfield Scott Hancock during the 1880 presidential election. Governors Island National Monument museum collection.

of his opponent, James A. Garfield, although the distortions of the Electoral College made the margin seem wider. Two earlier elections had been won by General Grant, and Garfield was also a Civil War general, though not in the regular army. With only three exceptions, Hancock carried every state south of the Mason-Dixon Line and nothing above, almost as though the election of 1860, secession, and the war had never occurred. Hancock died February 2, 1886, and the removal of his coffin was an occasion of solemn ceremony on the island. He was succeeded by another Civil War general, O. O. Howard, who had lost an arm in battle and, unlike most Civil War generals, was a dedicated abolitionist and friend of the freedmen.

Hancock was reform-minded and, like the officer for whom he was named, something of a military thinker. He brought a renaissance to Governors Island, introducing city water (in mains under Buttermilk, Channel), exterior lighting, and free ferry service. He organized an officers' club and housed it in the South Battery, displacing the "band boys" who had lived there to barracks in Fort Columbus. To enhance the exchange of ideas among officers, he started a Military Service Institution and set up a military museum. Housed in Building 104, a former Arsenal storehouse, it lasted through World War I, closing in 1922.

The changed role of the island had immediate and substantial effects on its physical appearance. The former hospital was converted to use as the headquarters. With the departure of the recruiting and processing function in 1878, there were fewer troops present and thus less need for housing enlisted men. Conversely, more officers and their families were stationed there. The Army, of course, was a rigidly hierarchical institution, in which, unlike the civilian world, the order of



precedence was clearly codified and visible. Privileges of rank were most evident in housing, even though, as a cost-saving measure, the Army turned to standardized housing plans, adapted to regional climate and stylistic traditions. Under Hancock's administration nine sets of officers' residences (Buildings 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18) were constructed in 1878, facing what was commonly called "The Green," more recently named Nolan Park after a commanding officer, Major General Dennis E. Nolan. Quarters 14 through 20 were informally termed "Colonel's Row," while a group constructed in the 1890s and early 1900s comprising Buildings 403-409 was called "Regimental Row" or "Brick Row."

These clusters of handsome residences give the older portion of the island a pleasing harmony of style and appearance. In those quiet years Governors Island seemed a bucolic place. A writer for Scribner's Magazine observed that "the children are omnipresent, and their amusements reflect the military bent given to their fancies by the surroundings. There are enough toy drums, trumpets, cocked hats and wooden cavalry-horses to stock a shop." The respected King's Handbook depicted the scene in idyllic terms: "The center of the island is elevated thirty feet above high-water mark and laid out as a parade-ground and a handsome park, with band-stand, brick walks, trees, flowers and shrubbery. A score or more of pretty houses, the residences of the officers, surround this park." The contrast with the frontier outposts that were more characteristic of the Army between 1865 and 1898 must have stunned newly arrived officers.

An incident in 1885 suggested that many secrets lie hidden in the layers of Governors Island's military past. Probably because space was too scarce to waste on the dead, the Army decided



Quarters 15-18, new residences built on the west edge of Nolan Park identified in this turn of the century postcard as "General's Row".



Governors Island
National Monument
museum collection.

to close the cemetery on the southwest corner of the island and transfer the remains to Cypress Hill National Cemetery on the Brooklyn-Queens border. This may have been part of a larger initiative in the Army, as graves at Boston's Fort Warren were likewise moved to another island. Fearful of disease, since many of the interred had died in epidemics, contractors on Governors Island worked only when the temperature fell below freezing. They opened 530 presumed graves, but found no remains in 42. Burial records accounted for only 309 interments, including some 20 Confederate prisoners.

With the island primarily devoted to other purposes, coastal defense maintained a tenuous presence. By the end of the Civil War the catastrophic obsolescence of the vaunted Third System was undeniable, but engineers and artillerymen were unsure of a unifying concept to replace it. Agreeing that earthworks were preferable to masonry fortifications and that dispersed batteries were better than the vertical concentration of guns stressed under the previous system, the Army launched a new program of defenses in 1870. This plan affected Governors Island, as it included construction of a barbette battery extending southeast from Castle Williams almost to the South Battery, with positions for 13 15-inch Rodman guns and 14 of the 10-inchers. This battery was partially constructed 1871-72, with eight magazines built and foundations prepared for eight others, but then funding was halted. This was the fate of the entire abortive 1870 program, which amounted to a "fourth system," though it was never called that. On Governors Island the incomplete works were obliterated by later construction.

Still, the island's role in coastal defense was not quite extinct. Although it is difficult to

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reconcile conflicting and changeable tallies, as late as 1899 the three old forts mounted some 39 10-inch and five 15-inch Rodmans, five 100-pound Parrotts, and assorted mortars, converted rifles and antique smoothbore pieces. The count in 1909 was even higher, suggesting that old guns had been brought there from elsewhere around the harbor. None of these had any practical defensive value (some were used for saluting visiting warships); nor did anyone propose to emplace large modern guns on the island—if enemy ships got through the outer defenses to Governors Island, the city would already be at their mercy. Nevertheless, planners still saw a defensive role for the island and in 1901 advocated placing 12 mobile guns on field carriages to defend against light minesweeping vessels and torpedo boats. It does not appear that such guns were actually deployed. Moreover, there would be a question of who would man them, since the artillery detachment was replaced by infantry in 1894 (except for a brief interlude during the Spanish-American War of 1898).

The other long-established activity on the island, the arsenal, also slid toward extinction. Building 110, the last major arsenal building to be constructed (in the 1870s), was intended primarily to store obsolete weapons. The arsenal had become a collection point for this kind of military detritus, described in reports as a “large accumulation of obsolete, worn-out and useless stores,” and by the end of the century its survival seemed doubtful.

On the other hand, the prison function continued, and after 1915 operated as a branch of the Disciplinary Barracks headquartered at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Alcatraz Island off San Francisco was the Pacific branch. (These facilities should not be confused with the



As Castle Williams was formally renovated into a prison, numerous 1812-era 32-pound guns were removed from the fort and distributed to various towns and communities around 1901. This cannon marks a Revolutionary War battlefield in Pennsylvania. Michael Shaver, NPS.

later federal penitentiaries in those places.) The five massive 15-inch Rodmans at Castle Williams were mounted "en barbette" on the parapet. Below them, in casemates converted to cells, prisoners lived, although an 1870 report had found the structure "unfit for quarters by reason of dampness, especially in mid-summer." Most of the prisoners were incarcerated for relatively minor offenses and their treatment seems not to have been severe. The Scribner's reporter in 1881 found that "The prisoners are not deprived of sunshine and cannot complain of austere treatment. They are employed about the grounds of the

fort, and though they are guarded in deference to the military code by a soldier with loaded musket and revolver, they usually find so much fellow-feeling in him that their industry is not overtaxed." Guided by progressive principles that were taking hold at some civilian prisons, authorities at Governors Island generally tried to reform offenders to become useful soldiers and citizens.

Progressive concepts figured prominently in a sweeping discussion of the island's future around the turn of the 20th-century, related to larger shifts in the Army's structure and mission. The decade of the 1890s was heralded by the Census Bureau's famous pronouncement that a discernible frontier no longer existed and closed with the United States in possession of a far-flung colonial empire. Many of the abundant western forts and posts were abandoned, and the Army concentrated its strength nearer to big cities and transportation facilities. Since land was scarce, existing installations were used

where possible. Governors Island must not have been capable of housing all the administrative functions it was assigned, since the Army maintained an eight-story office building at the corner of Whitehall and Pearl Streets, near the ferry pier.

Just at the time Governors Island was becoming more valuable to the Army, it faced the greatest threat to military control since 1814. Around 1890 the island was proposed for an immigration station to replace Castle Garden (the former Castle Clinton). Eventually this function was transferred to Ellis Island.

Proposals to return the island to the city for use as a public park, beginning as early as 1888, presented a more serious threat.

New York City, which already included parts of former Westchester County that became the Borough of The Bronx, had consolidated with Brooklyn, Staten Island, and several towns in Queens in 1898 to form Greater New York. Before the merger, Brooklyn itself had been the third largest city in the United States; now the total population of the metropolis reached three million. Sections of Manhattan, such as the Lower East Side, were among the most densely populated areas in the world, and this crowding was unrelieved by open space—an affront and challenge to progressive reformers. Their belief in the restorative value of parks inspired a proposal to capture Governors Island.

The Army waged a vigorous campaign to retain its valuable island real estate. Each corps rallied to protect its holdings: Ordnance



The newly established landfill at Governors Island was put to use with aviation demonstrations, mock battle demonstrations and polo matches.



During the world wars, it was home to temporary warehouses and barracks. This view is from Colonels' Row during a Army Relief Society garden party about 1908. George C. Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

claimed a continuing need for the arsenal; the Engineers argued the need to maintain defensive capabilities; the Infantry cited the island's value as a mobilization center. Instead of ceding Governors Island, the Army demanded additional land so its operations could be expanded. Title to some contiguous land underwater had been conveyed in 1880, and in 1903 New York State surrendered additional underwater territory. This cession allowed Governors Island to expand from less than 70 acres to 172—almost certainly more dry land than had been present when first seen by Europeans. (Supporters of the enlargement argued that the island was being restored to its colonial dimensions. Since the first maps with anything approaching accurate

scale date only to the War for Independence at the earliest, no one can be sure of the island's original size, and the problem is compounded by the fact that it was surrounded by ever-changing tidal lands.) Fortunately for the Army, the expansion coincided with the building of New York City's first subways. A sure sign of metropolitan greatness, subway construction started in 1900, and the first line of the Interborough Rapid Transit—New York's familiar IRT—went into service October 27, 1904. Spoil from this and the subsequent phase was hauled out on barges to create the "new" portion of Governors Island. Although the contract was contentious at times, by 1912 Manhattan's varied terrain had provided materials ranging from bedrock to sand that were needed in the landfill.

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Perhaps defensive over the refusal to yield Governors Island, Secretary of War Elihu Root brought in America's premier architectural firm, McKim, Mead & White, to design a landscape for the island. Root, though associated with Theodore Roosevelt's progressivism, had actually been brought to Washington by President McKinley. Root, Roosevelt, and the three architects were all members of a tight, elite New York social circle. The precise sequence of events and the thought processes behind them deserve further study, as does the broader theme of the Army's impulse toward beautification. Though peripheral to the military mission, this attitude is visible in the Third System forts, the mid-19th-century development of Springfield Armory, and most distinctly at the Presidio in San Francisco. There, beginning in 1883 and perhaps inspired by nearby Golden Gate Park, a desolate, windswept waste was transformed into a lush park-like setting in which military activity flourished. Since the Presidio was headquarters of the Military Division of the Pacific, it had many parallels to Governors Island and both were coveted assignments. By 1900 the urge to make Army posts attractive and permanent had been subsumed under the "City Beautiful" branch of the progressive movement, which employed Beaux Arts styling to create more livable cities. This goal had become widely accepted among the officer corps: in 1907; for example, a board planning the expansion of Fort Andrews, a coastal defense installation in Boston, advocated placing buildings "with regard to landscape effect and general beautification."

Root was also a supporter of historic preservation, rejecting calls to destroy the old forts even though a board had recommended the demolition of Fort Columbus, which blocked approximately a quarter of the island from being turned to more productive use. In a



General Frederick Dent Grant, Mrs. Leonard Wood, Mrs. Grant, General Leonard Wood at South Battery during an annual Army Relief Society garden party, circa 1910. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

1901 memo he recommended that new structures "should be in harmony" with the venerable forts. Perhaps this concern for history led to the restoration of the original name Fort Jay for the fort and the army post on January 25, 1904. In another nod to history, a new and more imposing edition of the St. Cornelius the Centurion chapel was completed in 1906 and became a repository for flags and other military relics.

As befitted a prestige posting, many of the Army's outstanding officers served at Governors Island. Among them were Major-General Arthur MacArthur and Brigadier-General Frederick Dent Grant, son of the Civil War commander, who had three tours of duty on the island before his death in 1912. After some interim officers filled the post, Grant was succeeded in 1914 by probably the most influential military man of the time, General Leonard Wood. An activist with superb connections and political ambitions

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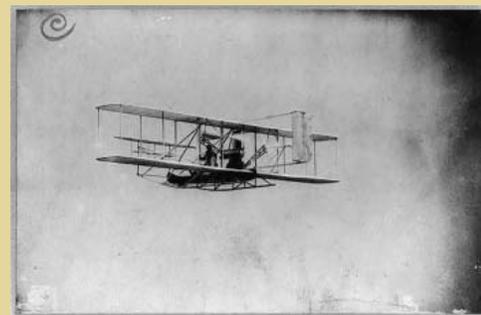
of his own, Wood exemplified the progressivism of the era as applied to military affairs. With the onset of World War I, he waged an often unpopular struggle to increase the nation's military preparedness.

An Aviation Episode

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The dirt had hardly settled on the "new" portion of Governors Island when it was put to a use that had been completely unanticipated when the filling began. So rapid was the advance of aviation in its first decade that the new flat space in the heart of the metropolis gained renown as a staging ground for pioneering feats of air travel.

During the Hudson-Fulton celebration of 1909, Wilbur Wright set up shop on Governors Island and flew around the Statue of Liberty in what historians consider the first successful flight over water in America. It so happened that the proud liner Lusitania, whose sinking with great loss of life shocked American opinion during World War I, was passing beneath. On October 4 Wright flew up the Hudson as far as Grant's Tomb. A newspaper reporter captured the excitement of early air travel when he wrote, "The sight took your breath away. It was all so new, all so totally different, and more thrilling than one thought it was going to be. There is nothing else like it." Another prominent early aviator, Glenn Curtiss, was present at the time and in the following year won a prize by flying from Albany to New York, landing at Governors Island. Not long afterward on the island, Major Henry H. "Hap" Arnold began a career in flying that led to his command of the Army Air Forces in World War II. During the previous world war an aviation training center, approved by General Wood, functioned on the island.



Wilbur Wright flying over Governors Island in 1909. Library of Congress.



Wilbur Wright, center, seems lost in thought as young admirers look on from his temporary Governors Island plane shed, September 1909. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

After that war, numerous proposals to use Governors Island for a civilian airport arose. New York's dynamic congressman and Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, who loved new things—even the subway was old hat to his way of thinking—was an enthusiastic supporter of the idea. Again the Army resisted, even though many of the proposals allowed it to retain its holdings on the old portion of the island. La Guardia, famed for his expressive language, described Governors Island as a “playground for generals who like to play golf and give garden parties.” The battle lasted nearly 15 years, not reaching its culmination until 1936. By then it had become obvious that progress in aviation had rendered the site hopelessly inadequate as a

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metropolitan airport. Even Crissy Field at the Presidio, where the Army had maintained the first Air Coast Defense station on the Pacific coast, was closed for similar reasons around that time.

In the World Wars and Beyond

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the McKim, Mead & White plan for the "new" part of Governors Island had not been executed. The reasons are unclear but may be due simply to the fact that the soil had not compacted enough to allow permanent structures. Nor had the occasional use for aviation left any enduring mark. With the coming of war, the vacant area quickly filled with more than 70 temporary structures, mostly warehouses, totaling more than 30 million square feet of

World War I warehouses fill the south half of Governors Island, circa 1920. U.S. Army Signal Corps, National Archives.



floor space. One of the new structures was an engine house, which sheltered locomotives for the island's railroad, built to haul freight from the pier to the various storage buildings. All this carried out a plan described 15 years earlier by Secretary Root that the island "should be made a great depot for the receipt and distribution of supplies and a base for the government's use in fitting out any expedition which might be necessary." A black labor battalion was stationed on the island and did much of the construction and transport work, since in the segregated army of the time African Americans were impeded from joining combat or technical units.

The 22nd Infantry Regiment, a Regular Army unit, was brought in from the West to garrison Governors Island. Its main function was to guard transportation facilities against sabotage, but it participated in the first U.S. military action when on April 6, 1917, immediately after the declaration of war, its troops seized German shipping in New York Harbor. The enormous liner Vaterland was a conspicuous prize. In aviation's first decade, its military potential had become apparent, and the Coast Artillery Corps added anti-aircraft to its responsibilities. During the war, three anti-aircraft guns were emplaced on the island. General John J. Pershing left from Governors Island May 28, 1917, to take command of the American Expeditionary Force in France, but because of the submarine menace he slipped away in secret, with no parades or fanfare. Recognition came later, when the headquarters building (125) was dedicated as Pershing Hall in 1954. After the war many streets and features on the island were given names reminiscent of American battles in France, so that a mood of the Great War lingers. As late as 1958 a French military attaché planted a tree from the Argonne Forest at Meuse Argonne

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history

Point (just east of the parking lot for Building 140).

Following the war, the Army reorganized itself into nine corps, with Governors Island the headquarters of the Second Corps. This was part of an effort to retain an effective military force and avoid the ruinous cutbacks that had followed previous wars. Instead, rampant isolationism took hold, at least in Congress, and before long the Army was reduced to a point where it could barely sustain itself, much less deal with proliferating new developments. On Governors Island the scene that greeted visitors was not the elegant vision of McKim, Mead & White but flimsy, rundown, temporary buildings that had been intended to last only a few years and were none too attractive at best. Although most were removed, others, by necessity, remained in use, even as barracks. Thus, in 1927 a visiting congressman exclaimed bluntly, "From what one sees from the water side, it is a dump." With most of the storehouses gone, the island's industrial railroad became unnecessary and was removed with WPA labor in the late 1930s.

During those years soldiers on Governors Island had a curiously contrasting relationship with the city. These juxtapositions have always captivated photographers, who recorded masked soldiers conducting chemical warfare training against a backdrop of the Manhattan skyline. Two companies of the 22nd Infantry were dispatched to Manhattan to maintain order after the Wall Street bombing on September 16, 1922. Officers on Governors Island trained bank clerks, including women, in the use of handguns to combat a "crime epidemic" in the city. In the most popular interaction,



Temporary World War I building long past its prime, circa 1928. New YMCA, constructed 1926 at right.



U.S. Army Signal Corps,
National Archives.

crowds of New Yorkers took the ferry to watch polo games on the island. The Army had created a polo field on the recently cleared south end of the island in the mid-1920s. Beyond its desirable upper-class associations, polo had practical value as training for cavalymen. As a tradition-minded organization, the Army was hardly ready to concede that after several thousand years the use of mounted troops was nearing its

end. In a similar vein, officers from Governors Island participated in New York horse shows. Sharing it with civilians may have been the Army's way of compensating for not yielding the entire island for park use; but these interactions were carefully controlled, and the public probably had only a dim idea of how the military operated there.

Toward the end of the 1920s, funding slowly filtered through for a major building program. Most conspicuous was Liggett Hall (Building 400), intended to provide full living and training facilities for an entire regiment. Designed by the McKim, Mead & White firm (the three principals were dead by then) and completed in 1930, it supplied unmistakable testimony to the Army's intention to remain on Governors Island and the importance it attached to this post in the center of American finance and cultural achievement. La Guardia, still agitating for an airfield, suspected that the orientation of this structure was designed to prevent the island from being used for that purpose. For whatever reason, the enormous building had the effect of creating a divide between the new and old portions of the island. Liggett Hall was joined by several large brick officers' quarters, NCO housing, a new hospital, nurses' quarters, and a new school,



North elevation of Liggett Hall. General Services Administration.

further evidence of the post's importance in a time of bare-bones budgets. Together, these buildings convey a harmonious if conventional architectural grouping, like some college campuses of the period.

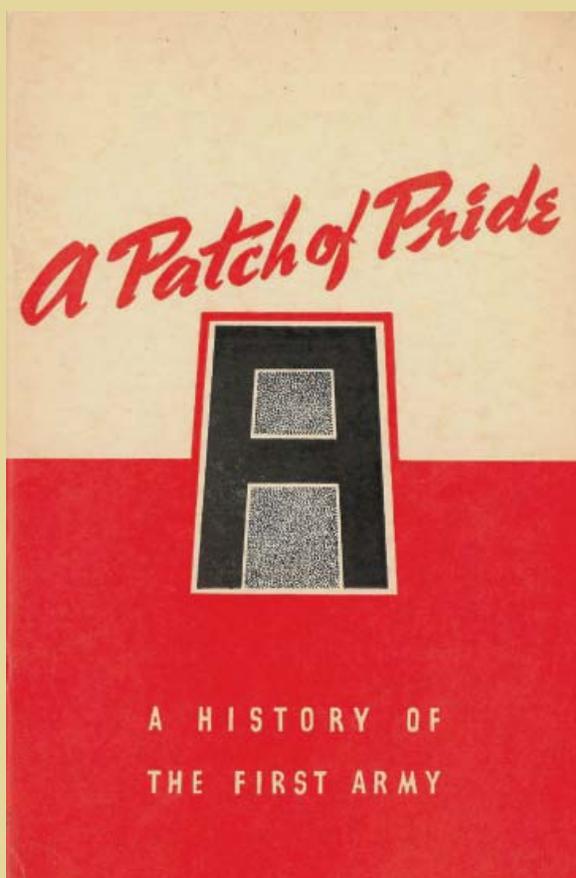
Arrogant fascist aggression in Europe in the 1930s gave warning that the U.S., however reluctantly, might have to prepare for another war. Construction of new buildings on Governors Island continued, with assistance from a New Deal agency, the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This organization generally did not construct large buildings, but added numerous sidewalks, garages, loading docks, etc., and repaired existing buildings. Under a federal arts program, T. Loftin Johnson painted murals depicting scenes from American military history on the walls of Building 125. Once the U.S. entered the war, another deluge of temporary buildings littered the island. Temporary barracks, utterly utilitarian and built to standard designs across the country, replaced the polo field, bringing a symbolic and actual end to the relaxed country-club atmosphere of the inter-war years.

During the war the island's primary function was as a headquarters. The headquarters building (125, later Pershing Hall) had been constructed to house this function. It was conceived by New York architect Lorimer Rich, noted for designing the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, Virginia. In 1933 Fort



Liggett Hall. NPS.

Jay was designated headquarters of the First Army, under a reorganization in 1932 that had combined the former corps into four armies. The post was also headquarters for the Eastern Theater of Operations, and the Second Service Command, entities that were established after the Pearl Harbor attack. The mission of the Eastern Theater was to guard key industrial and transportation facilities. When the draft was established the island became the induction center for New York City, but space proved too limited and the Center was moved out in October 1942. In some respects the mechanized war was waged on such a vast scale that it seems to have outgrown the facilities on Governors Island, so that the post had its greatest importance in the early stages of the conflict. With the buildup of personnel on the island, a new prison stockade was built along the western shoreline, but the island's importance as a prison actually diminished. Its role as part of the national system of disciplinary barracks



Much of the history of the U.S. First Army was written at Governors Island. Created as the Army's largest combat command in World War I, the organization was reactivated at Fort Jay in 1933, and except from 1943 to 1946, made Fort Jay its home until 1966.

had been terminated before the war began, and thereafter it held only minor offenders from the local garrison.

In October 1943 First Army headquarters was transferred to Bristol, England, to prepare for the Normandy invasion and did not return to Governors Island until June 1946. The headquarters function continued as the post's main activity during the remaining 20 years of Army occupancy, though wartime organizations such as the Eastern Defense Command and the Second Service Command were discontinued. Following normal Army practice, officers rotated every couple of years, so none had the enduring



Top: Construction of enclosed catwalks, north tower. Bottom: Construction of new floors and enclosed catwalks, Castle Williams July 1947. U.S. Army Signal Corps, Governors Island National Monument museum collection.

impact of some of the 19th-century commanders. The prison function endured to the end of Army administration, and after World War II major alterations to the interior of Castle Williams created the existing institutional appearance.

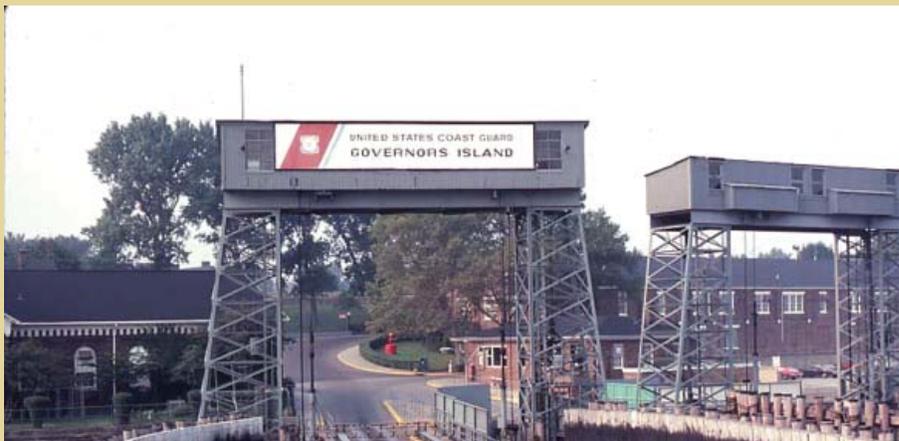
A prominent feature was added on the northeast shore of Governors Island in 1950: the ventilation tower for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel. New York's "master builder" Robert Moses had wanted to put a bridge over the East River at that point, but that would have entailed removing Castle Clinton; and after years of seemingly hopeless struggle, preservationists succeeded in saving Castle Williams's smaller sister. The Army, which had fought tenaciously to hold on to Governors Island for much of the 20th-century, built additional

housing, mostly apartments, on the south end of the island, reinforcing the impression that it intended to remain. Instead, in 1964 the Department of Defense announced due to cost considerations that First Army headquarters would be transferred to Fort Meade, Maryland. Cost considerations are customarily cited in base-closing decisions, but the underlying reasons often remain obscure. U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was near its peak in 1965, and that may have been a factor.

The Coast Guard Era

The island, however, continued its military career, and on June 30, 1966, the Coast Guard took over. Upon activation, Governors Island immediately became the largest Coast Guard base in the world. It was the headquarters of the Atlantic Area Command and several local commands, responsible for search, rescue, law enforcement, safety, marine inspection, navigation aids and civil engineering in New York Harbor. In a way this represented a return to the island's earliest military use in coastal defense. Naturally, the new occupant modified the physical plant to meet its needs. Liggett Hall was transformed into a training center. In Castle Williams, part of the prison was converted to a community center, so that the former prison shower room became a nursery for infants. The Coast Guard further expanded housing, most conspicuously with a high-rise apartment building in 1972, so that the island attained its greatest residential population. More than 4,000 Coast Guard personnel were stationed there. With a new school, a hotel, and other amenities, the island took on the characteristics of a small town. As always, it retained its anomalous relationship to the nearby metropolis. Situated on the doorstep of the city but isolated from many urban problems, life there resembled the outlying communities in Queens and Staten Island; and many former

Governors Island ferry dock, 1977. Frank Bennett, U.S. Public Health Service, Governors Island National Monument museum collection.



residents look back on their years on Governors Island with deep nostalgia.

Some notable events punctuated the routine of patrols and training. In 1973 the Coast Guard saved 64 crewmen when a container ship collided with a tanker north of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Thousands of military families and New York notables gathered on the island in 1976 to salute the "tall ships" parading in the harbor. President Reagan came to relight the Statue of Liberty on July 4, 1986. He must have been impressed by the setting because he returned in December 1988 to meet with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. The two leaders stood on Governors Island and posed with the Statue of Liberty as a backdrop. Visitors were still awed by the contrast presented by 19th-century guns aimed at the towering skyline of Manhattan, although the skyline had lost the depth and texture it retained through the 1950s, as the range of buildings was blocked by slab-like towers situated directly on the waterfront.

Despite the attractions of the site, the Coast Guard, again citing cost, announced plans to close the base in October 1995. Formal

President Reagan and Vice-President Bush meeting with Soviet Premier Gorbachev on Governors Island, New York, December 7, 1988. White House Photo, Reagan Library National Archives.



closing took place September 30, 1996, and the last caretaker detachment departed for Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island. This departure was part of a long-term trend, already discernible when the Army left in the 1960s, that has seen a steady shift of military facilities from the Northeast to the South. Defense Secretary McNamara had announced the death sentence for Brooklyn Navy Yard and Brooklyn Army Terminal at the same time as Fort Jay. During World War II the New York City area contained a number of vital installations, but by 1983, 21 of the 22 military facilities that had operated in the city during the war were gone. In addition to possible strategic considerations, the perception that city congressmen are less supportive of the Pentagon and in any event usually have less seniority on key committees has been offered as an explanation by historian Kenneth Jackson. The demilitarization of the Northeast and the concentration in the South is conspicuous. For Governors Island the end of more than 200 years of military occupancy was like the felling of a venerable tree that had descended from the original forest of Nutten Island, had been a sapling in 1776, and in its rings recorded most of American military history.

Establishment of the National Monument

The end of military occupancy after more than 200 years reopened debate about the future of Governors Island. Concern about the preservation and maintenance of its historic buildings and character once the Coast Guard departed led to execution of a Programmatic Agreement among the U.S. Coast Guard, General Services Administration, Advisory Council on



President George W. Bush meets with New York Governor George Pataki, right, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg in the Oval Office Monday, April 1, 2002. During their meeting, the president announced that New York's Governors Island will be transferred from federal to local and state government. White House photo by Tina Hager.

Historic Preservation, the New York State Historic Preservation Officer, the City of New York, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The April 11, 1996 agreement called for various actions:

- ◆ a Stage I and Stage II archaeological survey of the island;
- ◆ provisions for agency and public involvement in the disposition of the island;
- ◆ federal funding to maintain structures within the Governors Island National Historic Landmark District;
- ◆ a scope and schedule for proper maintenance, fire protection and security; and
- ◆ the development and implementation of preservation and design standards for the historic district, culminating in the development of a Preservation and Design Manual.

The northern half of the island had been designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1985. In 1996, The City of New York Landmarks Preservation Commission also designated the district as a City Historic District, thus reinforcing the island's historical significance.

As part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the U.S. Congress directed that the island be sold at fair market value, no sooner than 2002, and that the City and State of New York be given the right of first offer. The General Services Administration appraised the island at approximately \$300 million.

New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan initiated discussions with President William J. Clinton to give back the island to New York at no cost for public benefit uses. Senator Moynihan presented his case by saying:

"In 1800, New York magnanimously gave the Island to the Federal government to provide for the Nation's defense. It is only just that Governors Island now be returned to the people of New York, and that its historic forts are protected."

The President indicated he would give the island back to New York for \$1 if the City and State came up with a good plan. Pressed by civic advocates, the City and State each sought ideas for the island, which culminated in 2000 in a joint City-State conceptual plan that included hospitality, tourism, education and park uses. However, unclear prospects for future private tenants, coupled with strained relations between the City and State and between Washington and New York, stalled negotiations on any sale/transfer.

During this same time, members of the New York Congressional delegation introduced several pieces of legislation to establish Fort Jay and Castle Williams as a National Monument and transfer the rest of the island to the city and state of New York. When none of these legislative initiatives passed Congress, the NY delegation encouraged President Clinton to use his authorities established by the Antiquities Act to create a National Monument by Presidential Proclamation.

As one of his last acts as President, on January 19, 2001, President Clinton established the Governors Island National Monument. This proclamation affirmed the important role the island played in the nation's history, the significance of the two 1812-era fortifications, and assured they would be preserved in perpetuity as part of the National Park System, under the management of the Secretary of the Interior/National Park Service.

However, while the National Monument's approximate 20 acres would be protected, the future of the island's remaining 150 acres remained unsettled until April 1, 2002, when President George W. Bush met with Governor George Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg and publicly announced his intention to give the island back to New York for \$1.

Over the next several months, federal, state and city government officials and private legal counsel negotiated the terms of the sale, transfer, island uses, and operational issues. These negotiations culminated in several legal documents signed on January 31, 2003, that provided for the sale of the island and transfer of the Monument to the National Park Service and transfer of the other island property to the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation, a subsidiary of

Empire State Development Corporation.

With the disposition of the island resolved, President Bush issued a Proclamation on February 7, 2003. This document confirmed the provisions of the previous proclamation, enlarged the Monument boundaries to 22.78 acres to include additional facilities necessary for the operation of the Monument, and directed the Secretary of the Interior to prepare a management plan for the Monument.

While this plan will guide NPS managers on the proper ways to preserve and interpret the National Monument for current and future generations, it has deep roots in its illustrious past. More than 10 years after the departure of the Coast Guard, 40 years since the Army's occupation, 200 years since the construction of Fort Jay and Castle Williams, and 400 years since Dutch settlement, Governors Island is being reinvented to serve a new public purpose. While there are still many unknowns, it is certain that the island will continue to play an important role in the life of this changing harbor, city, and nation—and its rich legacy of stories, buildings and landscape will assuredly help guide its future.

Bird's eye view of Governors Island and Lower Manhattan, 2003. Lisa Kereszi.

