



Fort Jay

Chapter 4

The Redcoats finally marched off Governors Island, and the new flag of the United States replaced the ensign of old England on the island's flagstaff. The American garrison was immediately re-established by the victorious Colonials, who found that the island's erstwhile inhabitants had made considerable improvements and additions to the premises.

Before their surrender, the British had removed almost all guns from their emplacements, but the rather extensive fortifications remained unharmed. Also intact were the military buildings put up by the English troops; these included a captain's quarters, another set of quarters for junior officers, barracks for enlisted personnel, several kitchens, the guard house already mentioned, a convalescent hospital, a barn, a summer house, a gardener's hut, and a wharf. None of them seemed to need much in the way of repair, but in the natural lessening of civilian interest in military matters, which is characteristic of all postwar periods, there

was little, if any, public support for properly maintaining the island as an Army post. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that Governor Clinton himself was so forgetful of the primary importance of Governors Island, that he leased it for use as a race track, almost as soon as the State of New York had regained possession of it.

The unique utilization of civil prerogatives and property did not last long, for in 1786 the island again became a quarantine station and remained one until 1790. It was then that Columbia College obtained a franchise for the island, in the hope that it might be used to raise funds for the college. Exactly how this was to be accomplished was not definitely stated, but apparently the sporting example of Clinton was not lost upon the fund-raising committee, for a contemporary advertisement from the *New York Journal* reads:

November 30th, 1790. This day at 11 there will be a Horse Race on Governors Island which, if the weather is fine, will give satisfaction to the Public.