

official protest to President Washington. The president ordered the island command to fix a time when the salute in question would be fired. Whatever the immediate action on this directive may have been, there remains a report to Governor Clinton dated April 19, 1795, that the French man-of-war had that day, left the North River and the required 15-gun salute had been rendered by the island batteries. So was honor satisfied and the amity of nations preserved.

The Secretary of War had also interested himself in Governors Island to the extent of reporting to Congress that the island fort begun in 1794 should be repaired and enlarged. The result that a further sum of \$100,000 was appropriated for the work. In 1797 another \$30,117 was granted, followed by \$30,116 in 1779, \$20,124 in 1800, and \$10,338 in 1801. As the century turned, this total of more than \$330,000 at last put the Governors Island fortifications in what a correspondent of that time described as "a respectable state of defense."

These were ramps of sodden earth and included a battery overlooking Buttermilk Channel, another on the southern rim of the island facing the lower bay, and a third commanding the water approaches from the Jersey shore and the Hudson River to the northwest. All of them served as outposts to the main defensive work which was located where it is today and named Fort Jay, in honor of John Jay. He was the Congressional Secretary of Foreign Affairs, who had helped to draft the treaty of peace with England and later became the first chief justice of our Supreme Court.

On Feb. 15, 1800, Governors Island was ceded by the State of New York to the United States Government. With the threat of another war with England looming in the immediate future, the federal authorities demolished the island's impermanent emplacements and began to install more durable construction that would preserve the fort intact and solid for generations not yet born. Nor were the alterations all of a physical nature; John Jay's popular fame was suffering a temporary eclipse as a suspected adherent of England, so in 1810 the name of

Fort Jay was changed to Fort Columbus.

The plan of the renovated fortifications was prepared by the French engineer Vincent and represented the latest developments in this class of military establishment. Surrounded entirely by a moat, which was crossed by a drawbridge, Fort Columbus consisted of an outer pentagonal parapet of earth, backed with brick, and enclosing four masonry bastions. The shape and placements of guns provided that the walls of each parapet could be protected by a crossfire from the adjacent parapets. This design also made it possible for the fort to bring fully half its entire armament into play at one time, against enemy shipping seeking to pass into the East River. Within the fort were erected barracks for 1,000 men, kitchens, bake ovens, a hospital, a pump for a fresh water well, and a powder magazine to hold

sufficient ammunition for the 96 guns which the fort boasted. All the guns were mounted with the ability to change their angle of fire. The pivot-point controlling the movement was directly under the muzzle, allowing the muzzle to continuously fit through the narrow opening in the embrasure. This allowed each gun to occupy approximately the same space regardless of what portion of its 54 degree field of fire it was covering. It permitted the opening of

each embrasure to be so small that an enemy shot could not enter between the gun and the embrasure walls.

While of no direct defensive value, the fort also contained another feature which then, as ever since, drew the admiration of soldier and civilian alike. It was the elaborate carving in red sandstone surmounting the main gateway and representing the original seal of the former War Department. It was sculptured by George Horton, an Army prisoner convicted of being a Tory spy. Horton had formerly been a stonemason and, so the story goes, the carving was responsible for obtaining his freedom. According to tradition, the small daughter of the fort's commander happened to pass beneath the gateway just as a large portion of stone broke loose under the finishing blows of the sculptors chisel.

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## ***In 1810 the name of Fort Jay was changed to Fort Columbus, possibly because of John Jay's sympathies toward England.***

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