

gious guidance in the Army; few if any church services had been held on Governors Island since the days of the English occupation, and the War Department was appalled at this highly irregular idea of providing a chapel for Chaplain McVickar. It announced that it was not accustomed to build chapels; it would provide no appropriation to build a chapel and, to make its refusal complete, would not allow anyone else to build a chapel on government property even though erected with private funds. But that didn't stop John McVickar. He marched straight down to Washington to put the matter before his friend Winfield Scott, who was the Army's Commanding General. As a result the government suddenly saw its way clear to lease – subject to the exigencies of war – about 150 square feet on the south side of Governors Island. It was there, in 1846, that a small frame chapel from plans drawn by Dr. McVickar was constructed and paid for with funds given and collected by him. This he appropriately named the Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion, after that Roman warrior described in the 10th Chapter of Acts as “a just man and one who feareth God.”

For almost two decades Chaplain McVickar continued his ministrations to his Governors Island parish. He led it through the Mexican crisis and the fearful cholera epidemics of 1854 and 1857, and only in 1862, when his span of service brought him at the age of 75 to another war, was he finally persuaded to relinquish the great work he had performed so faithfully. In the present stone Chapel of St. Cornelius, which replaced its wooden predecessor in 1906, a marble tablet memorializes Dr. John McVickar with the well-deserved tribute: “The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips.”

With the end of the Mexican operations, the 7th and 4th Artillery were successively stationed on Governors Island, together with various staff officers. Among the latter was a young quartermaster lieutenant breveted to captain for gallant and meritorious service in Mexico, who lived in Quarters 13 from April to July of 1852 and whose connection with the garrison began a tradition which his son and grandson would follow in their turn. His name was Ulysses S. Grant. One of Lieutenant Grant's letters from Fort Columbus to his wife gives an interesting account

of the post life of that period:

We are now pretty well settled in camp with the usual comforts; that is, a chest and a trunk for seats and a bunk to sleep in. The weather has been exceedingly warm for the last few days and very unpleasant for the camp. We can go to the city at almost all hours of the day in small boats belonging to the government which ply regularly for the convenience of us all. But while it keeps so warm there is but little pleasure in visiting the City. Most of the day we get the benefit of the sea breeze here, while in the City we would get but little of it. Two companies of our Regiment go around Cape Horn, in a sailing vessel. It is impossible to tell when they will start.

The troop movement to which Grant referred apparently was the one that eventually saw almost all of the 3d Artillery sail away Dec. 22, 1853, on the side-wheel steamer San Francisco for a new station on the Pacific Coast. Their voyage was to take them around South America, but hardly had they cleared New York Harbor when they ran into a terrific storm of tornado proportions. A huge wave had swept from the main deck of the steamer 175 passengers who had sought refuge there, and in a short time the vessel was in grave danger of



*The Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion*