

foundering. A passing ship, too small to be of any immediate assistance herself, raced to Boston with news of the wreck and rescue vessels at once started for the scene. Two American ships and one British ship reached the San Francisco just in time to save the 600 surviving passengers from certain death, for, with the leaking steamer's boats washed away and her engine fires extinguished, all on board were completely helpless against the raging seas. The survivors finally returned to Governors Island by various circuitous routes, and votive shields emblematic of the voyage and the rescue now hang in the Post Chapel.

New York was swept by a new epidemic of the dread cholera in 1854, followed by a visitation of yellow fever in 1856, and another siege of cholera in 1857. In each instance the disease took its toll on Governors Island, crowding to capacity the little post cemetery inherited from British days, and necessitating the consecration of a second graveyard. A portion of the old iron fence that once surrounded this half-acre plot in the vicinity of the chapel — the first cemetery was located near the row of houses lining Nolan Park nearest Fort Jay — now stands by the original cobbled road immediately in the rear of Quarters 2 and 3. Both cemeteries were closed in 1878, and in 1886 the remains of those who lay therein were re-interred in the National Cemetery, Cypress Hills, Brooklyn.

Fortunately, the year 1854 was made memorable for Governors Island by events other than those concerned with illness and death. For one thing, the use of whale oil and kerosene lamps was introduced for interior lighting to replace the candles that hitherto had been the only means of illumination. For another, 21-year-old David Robertson of Edinburgh, Scotland, enlisted in the Army and was assigned to the Medical Corps at the Governors Island hospital.

From then on, for the unbelievable span of 64 years of continuous active duty at one post, David Robertson served his community with conspicuous fidelity and ability. Although his final rank was that of master sergeant, he combined so aptly the professional skills of doctor, druggist, and nurse that everyone called him "Doctor" and none questioned his right to that title. When the cholera and yellow fever plagues hit the post, Robertson, with complete disregard for his own safety, ministered unremittingly to the sick and dying, but miraculously escaped contagion. The overworked and pitifully few medical officers were loud in their praise of his labors and unhesitatingly accepted him as one of themselves.

Early in his island life Robertson married Mary Moore, daughter of the leader of the "Music Boys," and from then, until his death, in 1918, lived in the frame bungalow, now Quarters 11, just to the northeast of the chapel. The garden which Mrs. Robertson lovingly tended there was long one of the sights of the island. When Dr. Robertson was laid to rest he was mourned by thousands of the Army's rank and file and their families. So had he endeared himself, by his kindly nature and unusual ability so unsparingly given. He and his late father-in-law together, represented a total of 123 years of uninterrupted Army service, a record which is unequalled in U.S. military annals.

Building activities on the island were resumed in 1855 with the erection of a group of quarters now known as Colonel's Row. This construction lasted through 1857 and during that time a commissary building also was put up.

Then the island relaxed for a few years before the arduous activities to be asked of it, when another fort, named Sumter, would provoke another war.