

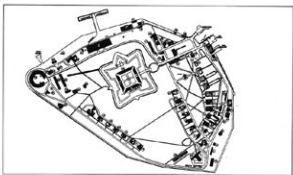


(Above) Governors Island today. (Right) Governors Island as it looked in 1908. In 1912, 103 acres of land were reclaimed from New York Harbor. Since Dutch ownership, constant erosion had shrunk the island to less than 70 acres.

Chapter 8

The quiet and uneventful year of 1869 gave Governors Island just the breathing spell it needed to initiate long-delayed improvements and additions to existing facilities.

A sea wall was built along the southwest side of the island, extending from Castle Williams to the South Battery. The barracks on the west side of the quadrangle in Fort Columbus became officers' quarters on the basis of two rooms and a kitchen for each set of quarters. The Music Boys were found to be overcrowding their billets in the South Battery and half of them went into a tent camp. An enterprising sergeant named Gubbins augmented the ferry service to New York with his privately owned tug Madden, charging 25 cents for the round trip. Elaborate plans were made for the installation of a barbette battery to cross the parade from the castle in a southeasterly direction but actual work on this was not started for another 10 years, and then only to be halted and the entire battery removed in the early 1890s.



But 1870 was a different story. In August a case of yellow fever was discovered on the island, and before the month was out there were 172 cases of the dread "yellow jack" on the sick reports. September saw the total reduced to 66, but in October the number jumped to 131, and the island was quarantined against itself. The hospital could not possibly receive all the patients and a pest house was constructed, but even this did not help the situation materially and those infected were cared for wherever they lived by volunteer nurses. In one barracks there were 21 cases of the disease out of 22 inhabitants; in another 33 out of 40; and the epidemic was finally curbed only by removing