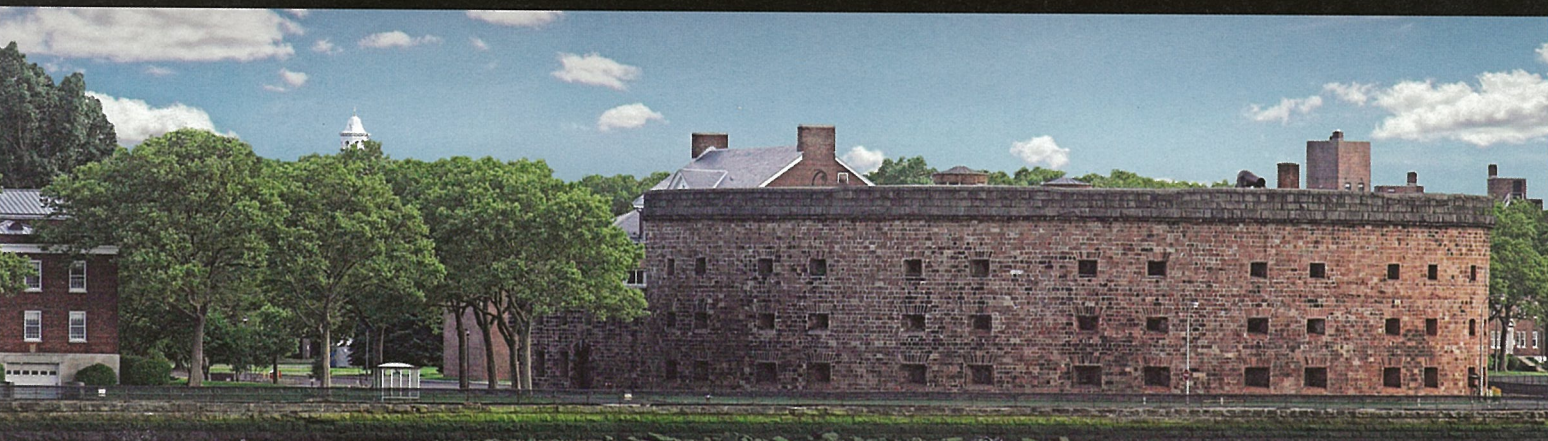


Governors Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
New York



Castle Williams was the first fortification designed by an American military engineer. Completed in 1811, it was an integral part of the harbor's defenses and protected New York City during the War of 1812.

© DANIEL C. KREBS

Sentinel in New York Harbor

Governors Island was one of the longest continuously active military posts in the United States. Since the late 1700s the island has served as a major Army headquarters and later as the largest Coast Guard base in the nation. Its military role ended in 1996 after over 200 years of service.

The story began with the construction of Fort Jay and Castle Williams, which were part of the network of forts protecting New York Harbor. At the time Castle Williams was constructed shortly before the War of 1812, these imposing stone fortifications were state-of-the-art, but advances in weaponry rendered them obsolete by the 1830s. Their survival as two of the best preserved coastal fortifications of that period was due to the continuous presence of the military and the important role the island played over two centuries.

The military legacy of Governors Island lies not only in the island's physical structures, but also in the stories of those who worked to promote the security and values of our nation here and abroad. One such individual was Secretary of War Elihu Root who, while enlarging the island for Army support functions in 1901, recognized the historic significance of Fort Jay and Castle Williams and saved them from demolition. The island's heritage also includes the accounts of soldiers who temporarily called the island home while mustered here before being deployed to faraway battlegrounds like Mexico in 1846 and the Normandy beachheads during World War II.

The history includes the experience of Confederate prisoners crowded into Castle Williams during the Civil War, and their

20th-century counterparts incarcerated in the old fort, which had become part of the army prison system. Governors Island preserves the stories of personal achievements like the first successful flight over water. In 1909 Wilbur Wright took off from the island's dusty parade ground and flew around the waist of the Statue of Liberty. Over time this early airstrip would serve as an airfield, polo ground, and warehouse depot.

Though retired from active duty, Governors Island has again been called to serve, this time for public enjoyment and discovery. In 2001 Governors Island National Monument was established to preserve Fort Jay, Castle Williams, and the setting for over two centuries of military life.



© PETER ARON / ISTO

Built in 1843, the Commanding Officer's residence was home to the island's highest ranking officer. In December 1988 President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev held their final meeting here as heads of state.



Col. Jonathan Williams designed and constructed the coastal defenses in upper New York Harbor: Fort Jay and Castle Williams on Governors Island, Fort Wood on Bedloe's Island (now the base for the Statue of Liberty), Fort Gibson on Ellis Island, and Castle Clinton at the Battery.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART



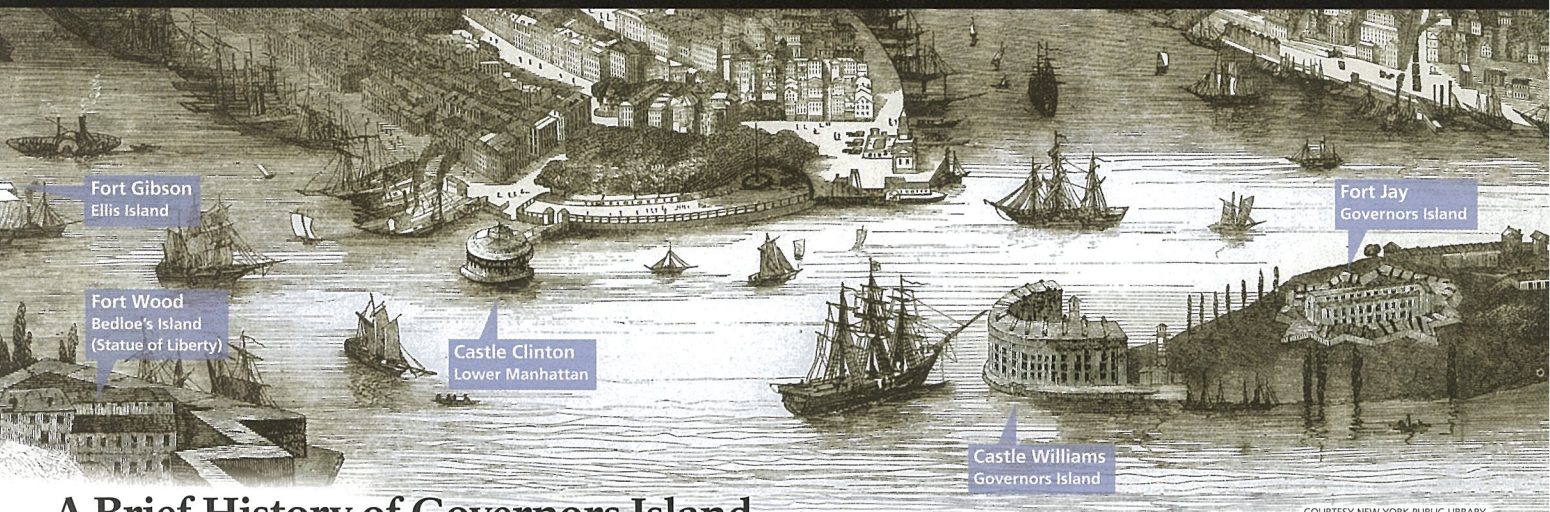
© ANDREW MOORE

The Federal-style sandstone entrance gate is Fort Jay's most prominent feature. Begun in 1794 and revamped by Colonel Williams, the fort serves as a reminder of our nation's ongoing coastal defense efforts.



Governors Island (foreground) with Lower Manhattan in the background. The national monument is part of a 90-acre national historic landmark district (northeastern half of the island) preserving nearly two centuries of military architectural heritage.

© DAVID JAY ZIMMERMAN / CORBIS



COURTESY NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Brief History of Governors Island

New York Harbor's abundant waters and lands first attracted American Indian peoples like the Lenape. Dutch settlers in the 1620s took advantage of the diverse ecosystem and established maritime enterprises. The British noted the harbor's strategic potential and, by 1674, secured it for the Crown.

In 1776 Gen. George Washington's colonial army made a valiant attempt to fend off the British siege of New York. Patriot cannons on Governors Island fired some of the first shots of the Battle of Brooklyn. The British prevailed and held New York for the duration of the Revolutionary War, but the experience steeled the resolve of the young nation to protect its harbors.

In one of its first initiatives that was truly national in scope, the United States began in the 1790s to fortify important harbors with a series of coastal defenses. Fort Jay and Castle Williams represent this early national effort. By the War of 1812, New York Harbor's installations (*above*) proved effective deterrents to the British Navy.

As the early forts became obsolete, most were converted to other uses. Governors Island remained in service as a U.S. Army administrative and training center. In 1878 the island, once considered an outpost, became the Army's headquarters for the eastern United States, and after World War II, the First U.S. Army was headquartered here.

As New York City gained in international importance, so did the prestige of a posting to Governors Island. For army officers, it was recognition of accomplishment and a test of leadership that often led to more senior commands. Soldiers stationed here enjoyed social, political, and business connections in the city rivaled by few other posts.

On June 30, 1966, the Army left the island and the U.S. Coast Guard established the headquarters for its Atlantic Area Command—its largest base in the nation. For 30 years the Coast Guard and their families enjoyed the same sense of community and military prestige as their predecessors, a touch of small town life in America's largest city.



Troops drill at Fort Jay, 1902. NPS

Planning Your Visit

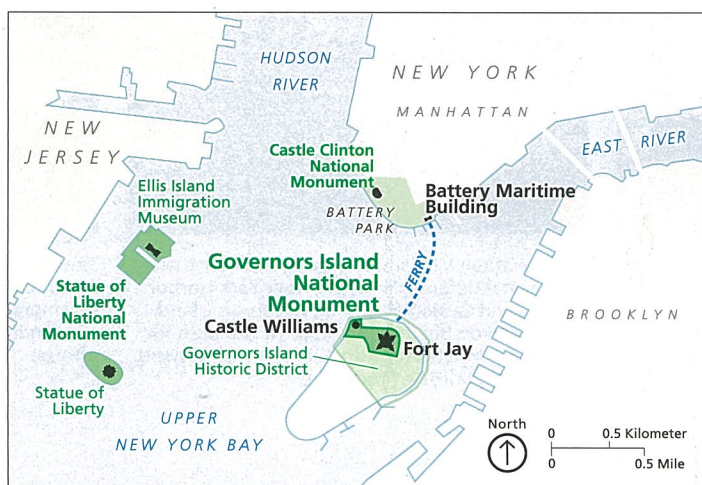
About the National Monument

Governors Island National Monument is a new national park site still being developed. Visitor access, tour schedules, ferry departure points, and ferry service are subject to change as the park evolves.

Hours and Transportation

The national monument is currently open during the summer season. Dates, hours of operation, and event schedules are announced each spring.

The island is reached by ferry from the Battery Maritime Building at South and Whitehall streets in Lower Manhattan. There may be a fee for ferry transportation. Private boats are not permitted to dock at the island.



Things To Do

The 22-acre national monument includes the historic fortifications of Castle Williams and Fort Jay. In summer there are opportunities to explore the fortifications and the national historic land-

mark district through park ranger programs or a self-guiding walking tour. Services and facilities are extremely limited. Bottled water is for sale, and vendors sell food in the summer season.

For a Safe Visit

All visitors and their belongings are subject to search before boarding ferries. No weapons or alcohol are permitted on ferries or island. • Walkways and steps inside historic structures are narrow and uneven. Watch your step!

More Information

Governors Island National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

Governors Island National Monument
10 South St., Slip #7
New York, NY 10004-1900
212-825-3045
www.nps.gov/gois



National park rangers help visitors explore Governors Island and its history.



Governors Island programs occasionally include art exhibitions and performances, which can provide new perspectives on the historic forts.



Special living history events bring the island's military heritage alive.