

# Governors Island

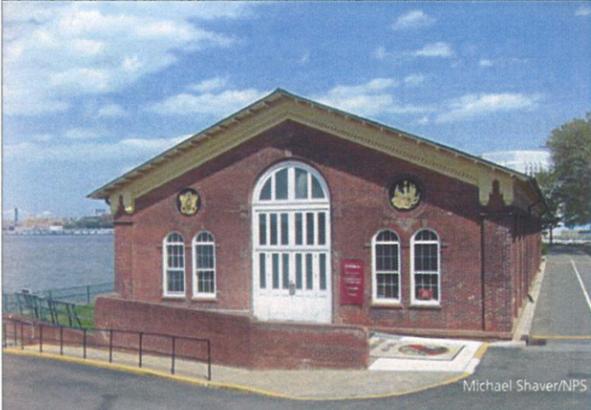
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Governors Island  
National Monument

## A Do-It-Yourself Walking Tour

Welcome to Governors Island! This self-guided tour will help you explore some of the wonderful places on the island. All of the stops on the tour are in bold and correspond to the building numbers on the map.



Building 140 was originally part of the New York Arsenal.

Tour begins at **Building 148**, the ferry waiting room, which has restrooms and vending machines with water, soft drinks and snacks.

Across the street is **Building 140**, the **National Park Service visitor information center and bookstore**, with books about the history of New York City, its harbor and the military eras connected with Governors Island. National Park Service rangers and volunteers can help answer questions. Please fill out a comment sheet and, if you're an island "alumnus," share your experiences about living here.

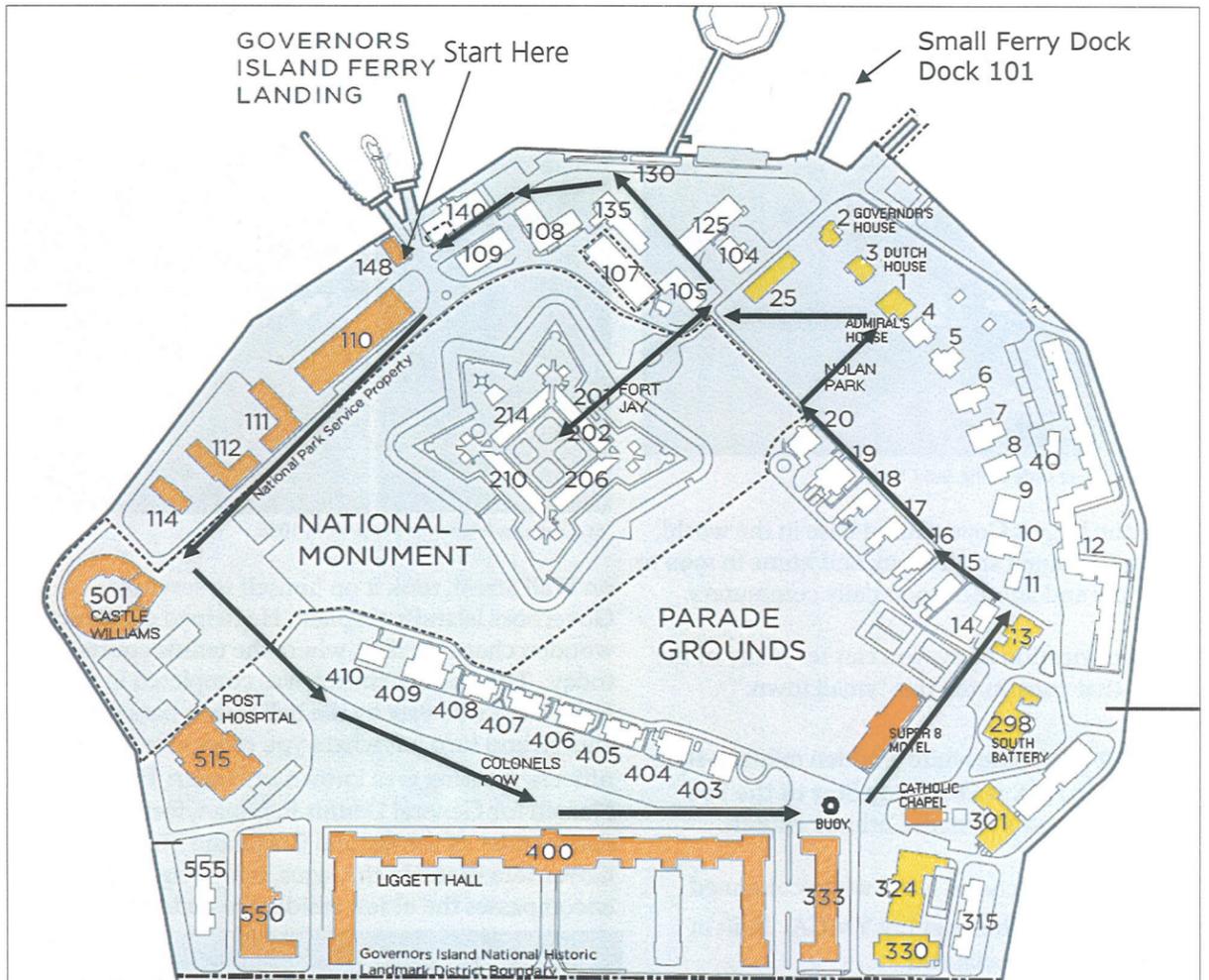
Charge up the hill to the cannon surrounded by flowers.

Turn right at the cannon onto Andes Road and walk past the long brick **Building 110**. It is the last and largest in a series of warehouses constructed for the New York Arsenal, located here from 1833 to 1920. Because of its location, Governors Island was strategically important in the defense of New York Harbor. It was a key distribution center for arms and ammunition for other army posts up and down the Atlantic Coast, and the island arsenal was always prepared to supply a military post in time of need. The arsenal was run by the Army's Ordnance Department, with its own commanding general, making it an military post within a military post. After the arsenal left the island, Building 110 became the island's "city hall," with administrative offices for the Army post and Coast Guard base. Today there is a design competition exhibit about the new park proposed for the south end of the island. Check it out.

Between Buildings 110 and 111 is a **stone with a bronze plaque** that commemorates the namesake of Andes Road. Most of the streets on the island are named after those who died during combat in World War I 1917-1918. The 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was one of the first regiments sent to France in 1917. When they made Governors Island their home from 1920 to 1940, they provided many of the island's place names. Look for other plaques along the way.

**Buildings 111, 112 and 114** are examples of 1930s-era residential construction on the island. The two L-shaped Georgian Revival buildings were homes to the families of mid-ranking Army officers. Just few yards from the hospital, Building 114 served as nurses' quarters.

All three of these buildings were designed by Rogers & Poor in 1934, a New York City architectural firm that designed the Wright Brothers Memorial at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.



The interior of Castle Williams, 2004.

**Castle Williams** is one of the best remaining examples of an early American designed coastal fortification. Constructed between 1807-1811, Castle Williams was used to defend the harbor, as a recruit barracks, and temporary prisoner of war holding facility for Confederate soldiers during the Civil War in 1862. It was an Army disciplinary barracks until 1965.



In the "baby boom" of the years after World War II, the post hospital was a busy place.

**Building 515 was the post hospital**, designed in 1935 by McKim, Mead and White, one of New York City's most famous architectural firms.

Continuing along Hay Road, stroll past **Colonel's Row**. Historically known as "**Brick Row**," these houses were constructed between 1893 and 1917 as an effort to improve the quality of housing for Army

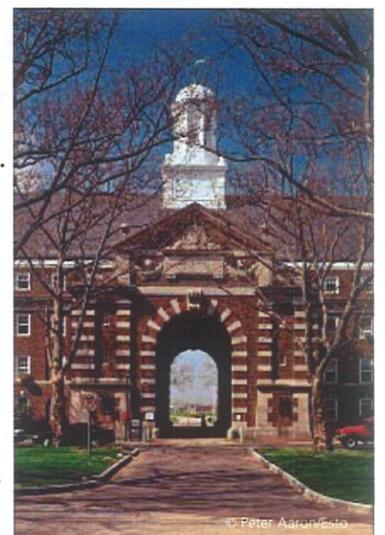


Interior of Quarters 403 on Brick Row, 1995.

officers and their families. Other older army posts have the same style of brick officers' residences. Brick Row was waterfront property until the area across Hay Road was filled by dirt and rocks removed from Lexington Avenue subway line between City Hall and Grand Central Terminal in the early 1900s. The landfill increased the size of the island from 70 to 172 acres.

**Building 400, Liggett Hall**, named for General Hunter Liggett, was the first structure built during a wave of new construction in 1929 that replaced deteriorating temporary wood barracks left over from World War I. In 1902, Secretary of War Elihu Root, a New Yorker, asked McKim, Mead and White to draw up a new master plan for the newly enlarged island. He went against War Department staff who sought to demolish Fort Jay and Castle Williams. Root wanted to keep the old forts and tear down everything else. In the end neither plan was carried out.

During the planning for Liggett Hall, then congressman and later New York mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, began to push for an airport in New York City, viewing the newly enlarged Governors



Archway of Liggett Hall, 1995.

Island as the perfect spot for a that airport. LaGuardia Airport did get built – but it’s in Queens!

**Building 333** serves as one of the “book ends” with Building 550 to the massive Liggett Hall. Building 333 served as housing for a Women’s Army Corps unit.

The **navigation buoy**, was an island landmark and a centerpiece of many family holiday cards during the Coast Guard years when the island was



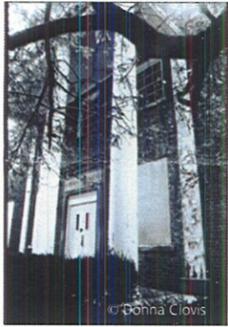
The “Buoy” and Our Lady of the Sea Chapel.

not only the largest Coast Guard base in the world, but a self-contained small town, and home in 1990 to 3000 people and another 2000 daily commuters.

From the navigation buoy, you can see many of the buildings that constituted this “small town.”

**Building 309**, the white wooden military-style chapel built in 1942, is **Our Lady Star of the Sea Chapel**, the island’s Roman Catholic church.

To the right of the chapel is the white columned **Building 324**, the **Fort Jay YMCA**. Built in 1926, it provided a social and recreation center for soldiers stationed a long way from home and its stage hosted school plays and community musicals.

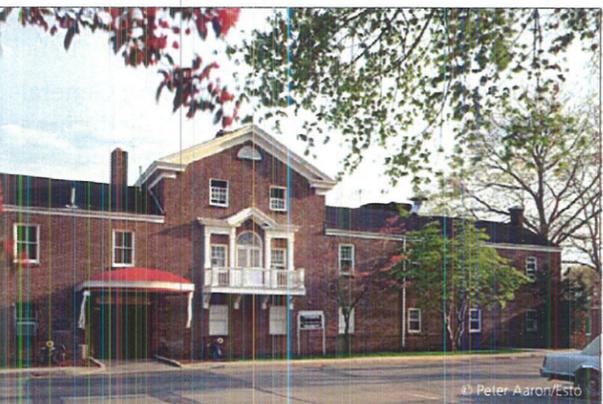


Next door, at the end of the street is the **post theater**, **Building 330**. Built in 1939, it seats 700 people. In 1950, you could see first run movies here for 18 cents.

Veer left across the parking lot to the original **South Battery**, **Building 298**, with its massive sandstone



foundation. Its history is that of the island –



The South Battery as the officers club, 1995.

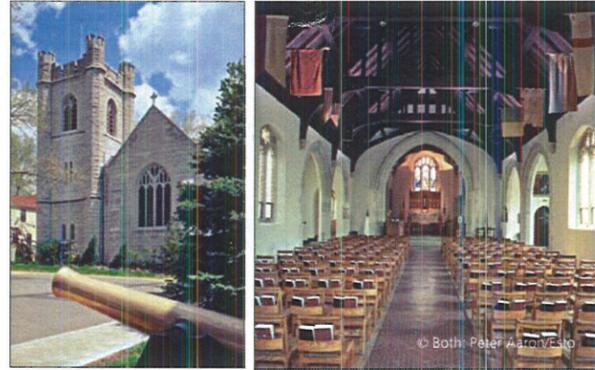
adaptation to the changing needs of the U.S. Army. Built in 1812, South Battery defended against enemy ships entering Buttermilk Channel and worked with the other forts on Governors Island, Liberty and Ellis Islands as part of a harbor defense system. South Battery was also known as Half-Moon Battery because of its shape. It had a tier of mounted guns and a one-story barracks that is the front of the building. By the 1830’s the battery housed the “Music Boys,” students of the School of Practice for Army musicians.

By 1863 a second story was added to the barracks to house non-commissioned officers. In 1878 it was converted to officers’ mess and Catholic chapel. In

the 1880’s a courts martial hall were added. By 1904 the building became an amusement hall and lecture room for enlisted men. In 1930’s and again in the 1950’s the building was renovated for use as the officers club.

**Building 293**, a former **Super 8 motel**, (1986) is one of the few non-historic buildings on this part of the island. It replaced a 1880s era guest house that sat on the same site and served visitors to the Coast Guard base.

The gray stone **Building 13** is the **Chapel of St. Cornelius the Centurion**. In 1844 Rev. John McVickar, an Episcopal priest from Trinity Church



St. Cornelius interior and exterior in 1996.

on Wall Street, took it on himself to serve as Governors Island’s chaplain. He helped construct a wooden chapel in 1847, where the tennis courts are today. The present church was completed in 1906. Follow the sidewalk by the bell tower, pass the church and turn left where you enter into the officers’ housing area known as **Nolan Park**. Named for General Dennis E. Nolan, former commander of the Second Corps and First Army on Governors Island in the 1930s, this “neighborhood” encompasses the oldest residential buildings on the



Officer residences in Nolan Park.

island. The yellow houses around the park were built between 1854 and 1902 as single or double family officers’ quarters. The houses are in a standard vernacular style as specified by U.S. Army Quartermaster plans, with spacious interiors and open porches. At the northern end of Nolan Park sit a number of prominent brick buildings.

**Quarters 1**, the **Admiral’s or Commanding Officer’s Quarters**, was constructed in 1843 according to the plans of Martin E. Thompson, a leading New York architect. The house was assigned to the highest ranking officer on the post. It was the home of General Winfield Scott Hancock during his run for president in 1880. It was also the home of General Jonathan Wainwright who witnessed and signed the Japanese surrender ending World War II, and General Walter “Beetle” Smith, who accepted the surrender of Germany for General Dwight D. Eisenhower and signed the document on May 7, 1945.

. The last building in the row is the **Governor’s House**, **Quarters 2**. Long rumored to be an early

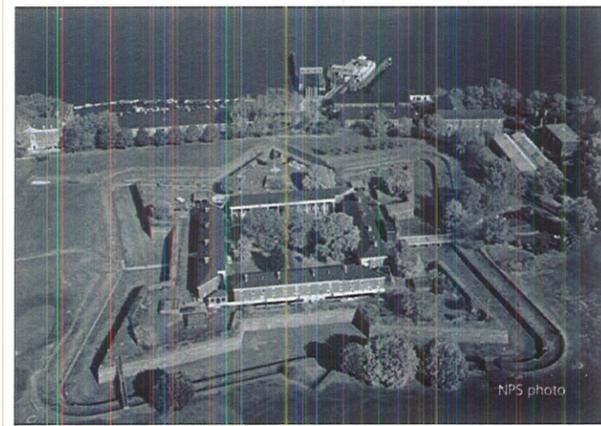


Quarters 1, Admiral’s or Commanding Officer’s house, 1984.



Quarters 2, the “Governor’s House” in 1984.

18<sup>th</sup> century construction for the British Royal Governor, this building was really built about 1813. The building has undergone numerous practical and cosmetic alterations. It was originally constructed to be the post’s main guard house, but was subsequently used to house the post’s commanding officer, a purpose for which it was remodeled in 1824. When the Admiral’s House was built in 1843, the Governor’s House probably returned to use as a guard house and, at times, the headquarters of various commands. In 1922 the building was returned to use as a residence.



A bird’s eye view of Fort Jay, the ferry in the background, 1984.

The oldest structure on Governors Island is **Fort Jay**. The walls and gate of the fort were rebuilt in 1806 to replace a series of earthen forts built in 1776 and 1794. The gate dates to 1796, the walls to 1806 and the barracks on the inside the fort to 1834. The barracks were first as officers housing, then family housing from the 1930s to 1996. The cannons at either side of the gate date to the Civil War, about 1864. Enter into the fort, then turn around going back to **Building 105** across from the entrance to Nolan Park and turn left.



Building 105

**Building 125—Pershing Hall**

The former headquarters building for the First Army and the Coast Guard Atlantic Area Command. It has murals about American military history from the American Revolution through World War I.



Continue along the sidewalk behind Building 105 to a small triangular yard and...

**Quarters 135—Arsenal Commander’s House**

The home for the commanding officer of the New York Arsenal from 1833 to 1920. Its front yard view has one of the most spectacular views of lower Manhattan. Go down the steps and turn left on to the road and follow it to where you started your tour.



Quarters 135—Arsenal Commander’s residence