

**GOVERNOR'S ISLAND: ITS
MILITARY
HISTORY UNDER
THREE FLAGS, 1637-1913**

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Governor's Island: Its Military History Under Three Flags, 1637-1913 by Rev. Edmund Banks Smith

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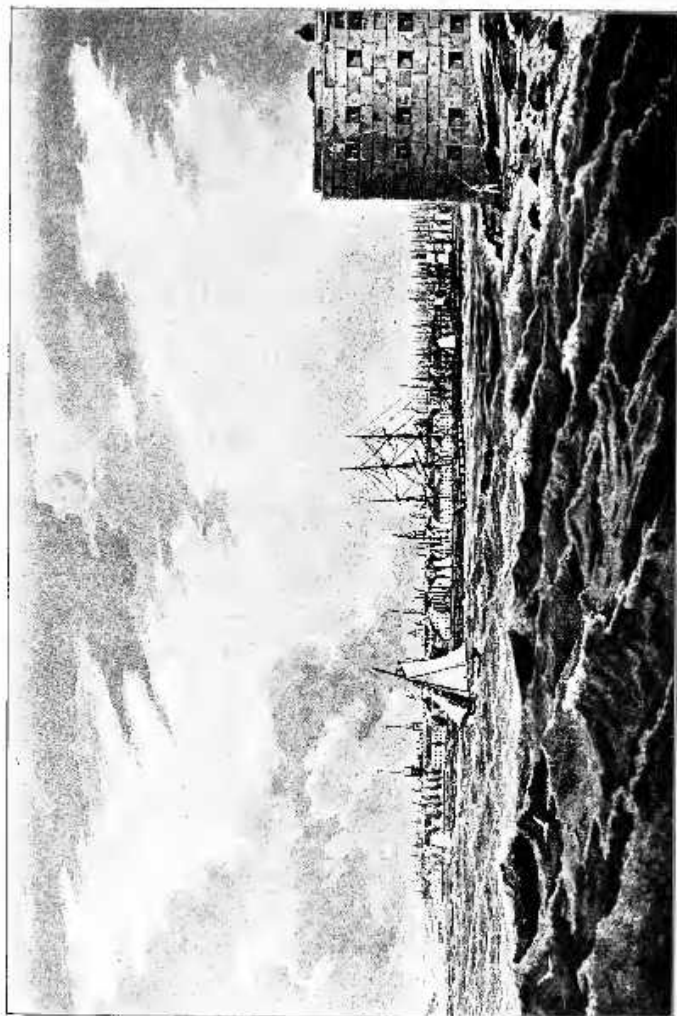
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REV. EDMUND BANKS SMITH

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CASTLE WILLIAMS IN 1823.

Governor's Island

Its
Military History
under
Three flags

1637-1913

BY THE
REVEREND EDMUND BANKS SMITH, B.D.
CHAPLAIN OF GOVERNOR'S ISLAND

New York

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1913

PREFACE

IT SEEMS to be a beneficent arrangement of Nature that all great harbours are provided with small islands. These serve highly important purposes as breakwaters or stations for various official uses, and especially for Army and Navy purposes as ship yards and bases for defensive works and military supplies.

Thus the harbour of Rio de Janeiro has Lage with its forts—Cobras, Santa Barbara and others; Naples, its Ischia and Capri; San Francisco has Angel Island and Alcatraz; St. Petersburg, Basil and Petropski Islands; Montreal, St. Helen's and Ile Ronde; Manila has Corregidor, our Eastern Gibraltar; and Panama in the South, Naos, Perico and Flamenco. New York Harbour is well provided with these friendly aids to good National housekeeping, which, beginning with the lighthouse islands in the lower bay, and including the mighty Richmond with its quarantine attendants, sweep in graceful lines through the curving East River to where it debouches into the open Sound. Among these sentries which stand on guard wherever an open door invites attack is one, the fairest of them all, the "Smiling Garden of the Sovereigns of the Province," as the old Colonial Governors used to call it, which in its long career has done more smiling than frowning, the subject of this History, Governor's Island.

"Pagganck" in Indian days, "Nutten" in Colonial Dutch and "Governor's" in English and American occupation—by every name it has been fair and sweet, and it deserves as well of the future as it has served well the past.

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May the day never come when it shall lose its beauty and its dignity and sink to the level of mere commercialism, swarming with restless crowds on outing bent or disfiguring the noble approach to our Metropolitan city by ranks of cheerless chimneys and a dismal waste of warehouses!

Governor's Island has stood in four centuries for that which is best in our National life. It has represented authority and defense. The Dutch and English before us regarded it as a source of influence and power. Its nearness to the Metropolis gives it convenience; its isolation bestows dignity and security. In addition to its value and importance in time of peace for the preservation of civic interests and in war for defense as a centre of administration, a depot for supplies and a receiving and training station, a value may be mentioned which as a principle ranks above the definite purposes already mentioned. Historical continuity and veneration for persons and places of dignity are not valued as they should be by the American of today. It is needless to say how important these considerations are for the higher development of our National life. The writer does not know of any one place in America where opportunities for developing these characteristics of a high National life cluster as they do at Governor's Island.

Here, for two hundred and seventy-five years, since Von Twiller and the Indians signed their Roman-Dutch agreement, authority has held the keys; here, for one hundred and fifty-six years, since the "Royal Americans" mounted guard in 1756, the tramp of sentries has never ceased; here, since 1783, our flag has welcomed and dismissed the sun each day at reveillé and retreat; here, gallant officers and fair ladies have lived and served and by their simple devotion to God and country have taught to others that great silent lesson of patri-

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otism which is the alphabet of the Army; here, have been received with dignified respect the representatives of the Powers of every land, who have returned to their homes with a better opinion of America because in seeing our greatest Port they have seen also Governor's Island with all it represents. Truly, this Island has served well the State. As a picture of our Past, as a living reality in our Present, for the development of our Future, it must be preserved and endowed with greater power and activity.

The thought is not mere sentiment. It is practical patriotism. Our people need the object lesson which this military Station in New York can furnish. Washington has its Capitol, a picture in stone and iron for the Nation. New York has its civic and mercantile buildings to inspire municipal pride and to encourage financial enterprise. Governor's Island is the one point in our vast City on which to centre a common patriotism. We have pride and enterprise strongly developed. Our patriotism which mounts to the sky in time of war lags sadly below in peace when it is most needed. If this book has any suggestion in its story of Governor's Island, it is of the importance of preserving inviolate this spot of National and Municipal interest, which through its long and honoured career has touched so many points in the history of the American Army and of the City of New York, and which today is a reminder to millions, as it watches o'er the Town, that the eternal vigilance of the Army is of fullest value to the State when every citizen is a patriot. *Semper floreat.*

It has been found impossible to give the data in full of every organization and individual stationed here. The records available are incomplete, and if they were not so to transcribe them in full would encumber these pages with a mass of details and not carry out the idea of the writer, which is to present a sim-

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ple picture of our Island in four centuries from a military point of view, with such touches of social life as can be gathered from various sources.

The author desires to express his thanks to a number of friends for aid in writing this History, especially to Brigadier-General George Andrews, The Adjutant-General of the Army, and to Colonel Herbert J. Slocum for valuable assistance, and to Captain Arthur F. Halpin for his kindness in preparing the illustrations.

GOVERNOR'S ISLAND, New York Harbour. 1914.

AUTHORITIES CONSULTED

(The spelling and capitalization in original papers, orders and reports are retained.)*

Reference is made in the following pages to the authorities mentioned, with the acknowledgments of the author:

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* The profuse use of capital letters in the time of Washington, as exhibited in some of the Revolutionary Orders quoted in this History, may be defended on the ground of good usage at the period. Benjamin Franklin, as late as 1789, laments the new use coming then into vogue of the non-capitalization of the initial letters of all nouns.