

THE HISTORY OF A FORT.

A Description of Castle Williams and How It Received Its Name.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

In reply to the letter of S. C. H. in your issue of today, I beg to say the writer is entirely correct. Perhaps the following quotation on the subject from my "Military History of Governors Island Under Three Flags: 1637-1913," may be of interest to many New Yorkers who, while valuing Castle Williams as a picturesque feature of our harbor, are not familiar with its history.

Castle Williams was begun in 1807 and completed in 1811, as the crumbling dates in the stone over the gateway set forth. It was designed and built by Lieut. Col. Jonathan Williams, Engineer Corps. The material of the castle is Newark red sandstone. It rests on a bed of rock at the extreme northwesterly point of the island. In form it is three-fifths of a circle, 200 feet in diameter. The walls are 40 feet in height, casemated with bomb-proof arches for two tiers of guns. Guns are also mounted on the top, to which access is had by two interior stone turret staircases. The walls are 8 feet thick on the lower tier and 7 feet on the upper tier. The arches are 13 in number, and are of 30 feet span, 2 feet thick and 24 feet long.

The cross walls are 7 feet thick between the arches and 12 feet at the termination of the segment. The guns are mounted in such a manner that the centre of motion is immediately under the muzzle of the guns, so that, although the angle of fire is 54 degrees, the mouth of the gun occupies always the same place, which permits the throat of the embrasure to be so small that a shot could not pass between the gun and its side and the line of fire cross at twenty feet distance.

The wall arches are turned over each pair of embrasures, so that if it were possible for the enemy's fire to batter a break into the lower tier the upper one would rest upon those arches and exhibit the appearance of a bridge composed of very solid tiers. The outside cut of the wall is laid in Flemish bond and each stone dovetailed in such a manner that no one could be dislocated without first being broken to pieces. It contained, in 1812, two stone powder magazines and an inexhaustible well of finest water, from which all the shipping might be watered with ease.

In a letter dated New York, Nov. 27, 1810, addressed to the Secretary of War, Colonel Jonathan Williams of the Corps of Engineers says:

I take the earliest opportunity of expressing my gratitude for the high honour conferred upon me by adding my name to the Castle I erected upon the west point of Governor's Island in this harbour.

Accompanying the letter referred to above is a copy of an order dated Fort Columbus, 24 November, 1810, issued by Colonel Henry Burbeck, Commanding New York Harbor, which reads:

In future the stone tower on the Island (by the approbation of the Secretary of War) will bear the name of Castle Williams in honour of the Commandant of the U. S. Corps of Engineers, who designed and erected it. E. F. Ladd, Military Secretary.

Colonel Williams also designed and built the S. W. Battery at the lower end of Manhattan Island. This spot is still called the Battery. The fort was called Castle Clinton in 1812. In 1823, after the removal of the troops from Castle Clinton to Governors Island, the fort was converted into a place of public amusement, the old name surviving in the designation Castle Garden.

EDMUND BANKS SMITH,

Chaplain Governors Island.

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