

A Beacon and a Fort

*That “a sea fort...
be built, 40 feet
long, 21 feet wide,
for the defense of this
colony.”*

**General Court
recommendation,
March 4, 1634**

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded by Puritan dissidents who faced a host of potential enemies in Holland, France, and England itself.

Getting Started

Although granted a charter by King Charles I, the King's advisors quickly had second thoughts about the Puritan founders and demanded the charter's return. Concerns grew that an English fleet might arrive to dissolve the colony. A beacon was placed “on sentry hill” to give warning of approaching threats (the origin of the name “Beacon Hill.”) The colony government also decided to erect a fort. Nantasket, in present day Hull, was considered before Castle Island was selected to defend the new Boston settlement.



A column at the Massachusetts State House commemorates the warning beacon on “Beacon Hill.”
Swampyank photo



As commanding officer in 1805 Nehemiah Freeman issued an order naming the fort's bastions. One was dedicated to **John Winthrop** “the first governor of Massachusetts under whose auspices the fort was built.” In fact the fort was started under Governor Thomas Dudley but Winthrop was the dominant figure in the colony, serving twelve terms as governor.

Matters of Protocol

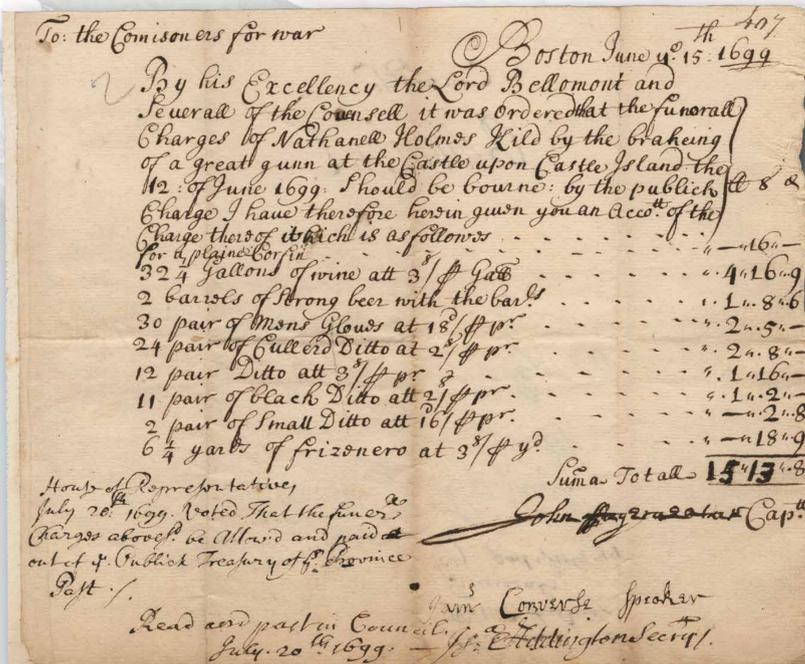
At first the Puritan government refused to fly the English flag, which featured the cross of St. George (a red cross on a white field.) It was thought to be idolatrous, symbolizing the Church of England. After controversies with visiting ship captains, they reneged, deciding not to provoke the king.

Still it was important that visitors identify themselves. In



These seventeenth century English warships fly the cross of St. George. Puritans objected to the flag's symbolism. Duesseldorfer

1637 a warning shot struck the rigging of a ship and fell to the deck, killing a crew member. A local coroner pronounced the death due to the “providence of God.”



What's In a Name: Castle Island

Many assume that the island takes its name from the castle like fort that occupies the site. Possibly the island's natural topography resembled a castle when viewed from the deck of a ship. It was called “Castle Island” almost immediately.

Counterintuitive While generally strict, Puritans served food and drink after a funeral, “one of the few occasions when New Englanders drank to excess” according to historian David Hackett Fischer. This 1699 document “Reimbursing funeral charges for Nathaniel Holmes Kild by the Breaking of a great gun at the Castle upon Castle Island” includes 32 gallons of wine and 2 barrels of “Strong beer.” Massachusetts Archives

Turbulent Times

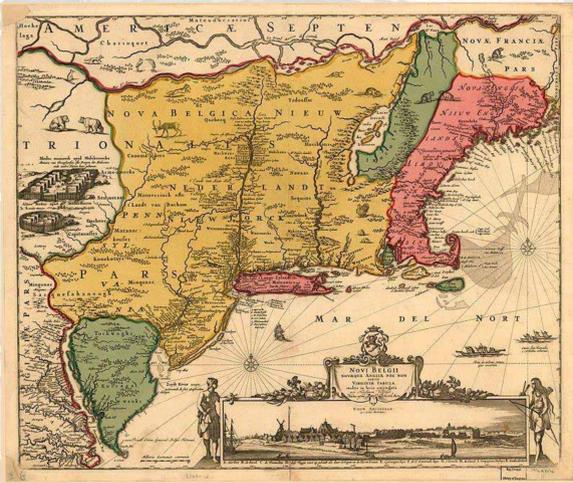
“Sir Edmund Andros did attempt to make an escape in women’s apparel.”

Nathaniel Byfield,
1689

From its earliest years, Castle Island was used to hold captives including religious dissenters, Native people, and French prisoners of war. One of the most prominent was Governor Edmund Andros.

The Dominion of New England

In 1684 the colony charter was withdrawn and Massachusetts was combined with neighboring colonies into the Dominion of New England. Sir Edmund Andros was appointed Governor. Complaints about unfair taxation and other injustices were similar to those that later led to the American Revolution. Colonists arrested Andros in 1689 when news of England’s “Glorious Revolution” reached Boston.



A seventeenth century Dutch map roughly parallels the Dominion of New England. Library of Congress

Arrest of Governor Andros,
Massachusetts State House Art Collection

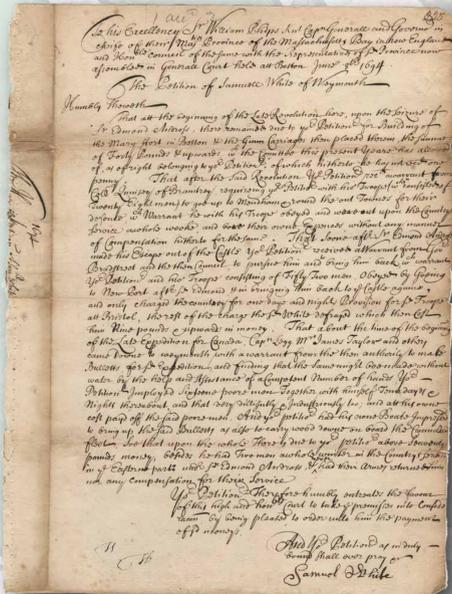


Sir Edmund Andros was one of the most famous prisoners on Castle Island. Rhode Island State House Collection

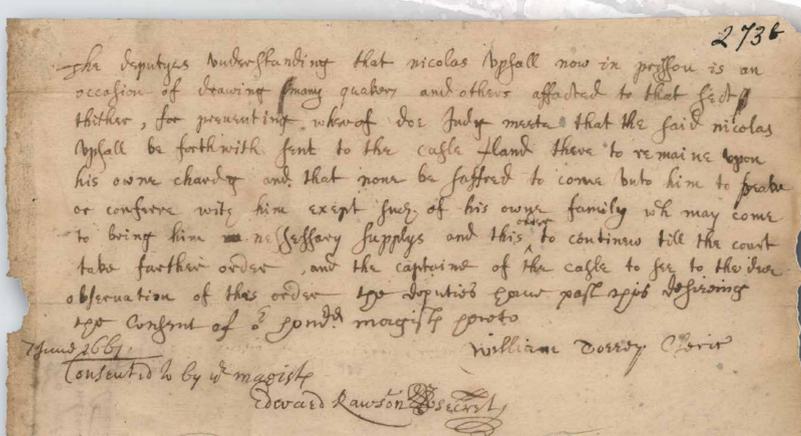


Escape Artist

Nathaniel Byfield reported “That on Friday last towards evening Sir Edmund Andros did attempt to make an escape in women’s apparel and passed two guards, and was stopped at the third, being discovered by his shoes, not having changed them.” Andros was moved to Castle Island for greater security but still managed to escape. He was captured in Newport, Rhode Island, returned to the Castle, and eventually sent to England on instructions from King William.



Capturing Andros In 1694 Samuel White of Weymouth petitioned Governor William Phipps for reimbursement for expenses in the capture of Andros. “That soon after Mr. Edmund Andros made his Escape out of this Castle yo Petitioner received the Warrant...to pursue him and bring him back which warranted Your Petitioner and his Troops consisting of Fifty-Two men Obeyed by Going to Newport...bringing him back to the Castle.” Massachusetts Archives



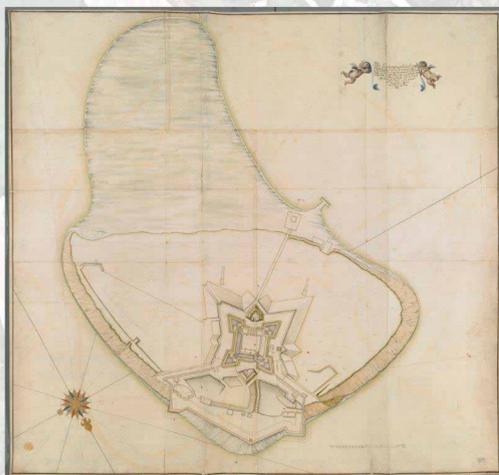
The Puritan colony was intolerant of religious dissent. Quaker Nicholas Upsall was imprisoned in 1661. “That said Nicholas shall be forthwith sent to Castle Island there to remain ...that none be suffered to come to him...except...of his own family who may come to bring him...supplies and this continues till the court take further order.” Massachusetts Archives

Castle William

“It seems the Castle is ordered to be called Fort William: and the governor went down yesterday, and caus’d the inscription to be set up, a pretty many guns fired.”

**Samuel Sewall,
October 27, 1705**

This map illustrates the shape of Castle William after Romer’s design. Retreating into the fort was a last resort. There are two defensive lines between the main fort building and potential landing places on the harbor side. British Museum



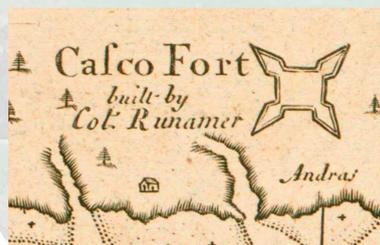
In 1691 monarchs William and Mary issued a new charter for the “Province of Massachusetts Bay.” The King ordered improved fortifications for Castle Island, now known as “Castle William” in his honor.

Looking impossibly smug in these portraits, King William and Queen Mary agreed to serve as constitutional monarchs with limited powers after the 1689 overthrow of King James II. Their reign was welcomed by most Massachusetts colonists. Hampton Court Palace



Culture Clash: Colonel Wolfgang Wilhelm Romer

Early fortifications had a provincial quality. In 1698 Colonel Wolfgang Wilhelm Romer, “chief engineer to their royal majesties in North America,” arrived at the Castle. A professional military officer, Romer was disdainful of the colonists. He complained that the workers followed Captain Clarke’s orders “they must expect their payment of him.” Romer wished to give directions “without like contradiction from Clarke or any other ignorant person who give direction in matters they are wholly ignorant of.” In turn, the puritanical workmen objected to Romer’s profane language.



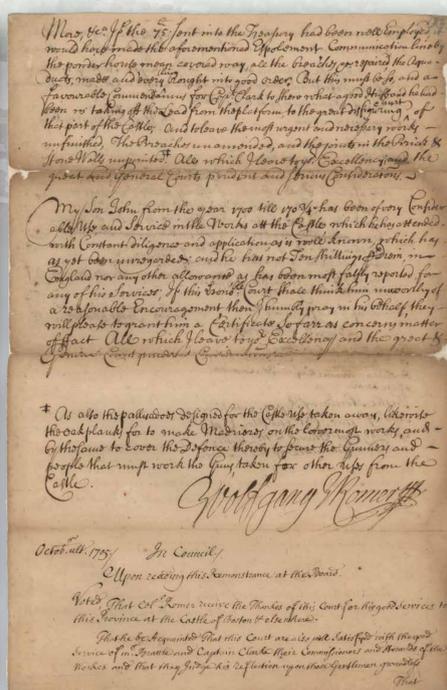
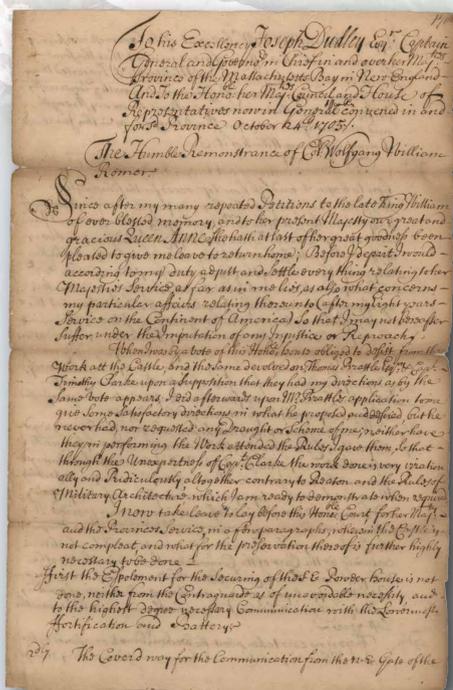
Romer was here. Colonel Romer was responsible for several projects. This detail from a Maine map bears his name. Cyprian Southack, 1720

Render Unto Caesar

Puritan minister Samuel Sewall intervened in the dispute between Colonel Romer and Massachusetts workers. “I told the workers that if any intemperate language proceeded from Colonel Romer, twas not intended to countenance that or encourage their imitation, but observe his direction in things wherein he is Skillful.”



Samuel Sewall



Exit Interview. After sawing references to the late King William and present Queen Anne, Romer presents a detailed listing of flaws in the fort’s construction under the orders of Captain Clarke, “the work done is very irrationally and Ridiculously altogether contrary to Reason and the Rules of Military Architecture.” In a hometown decision the colony’s Council thanks Romer but states “That he be Acquainted that this Court are also well satisfied with the good service of Captain Clarke.” Massachusetts Archives

Colonial Wars

“The safety of this province in great measure depends on the strength of his majesty’s Castle William.”

Governor
William Shirley

During the eighteenth century Britain and France waged a series of wars for control of North America. Castle Island was a staging area for operations in Canada.



Governor William Shirley The fort’s southeast bastion is named for William Shirley who served for sixteen years as Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay because he “repaired Castle William, erected other works, made it the strongest fort while under the British government.” National Portrait Gallery, Washington



“A View of the Landing of New England Forces... against CAPE BRETON.”
1745 Archives Anglaise

William Shirley

Ambitious politically and financially, William Shirley advocated aggressive action against the French in Canada. During his administration colonial forces captured the great fortress of Louisburg, Nova Scotia. It was thought to be impregnable but an English fisherman, captured and released by the French, reported that the garrison was undermanned. Its siege by colonial forces in 1745 was a sensation, even in Europe. Captured guns were placed at Castle William in the event of a French counterattack.

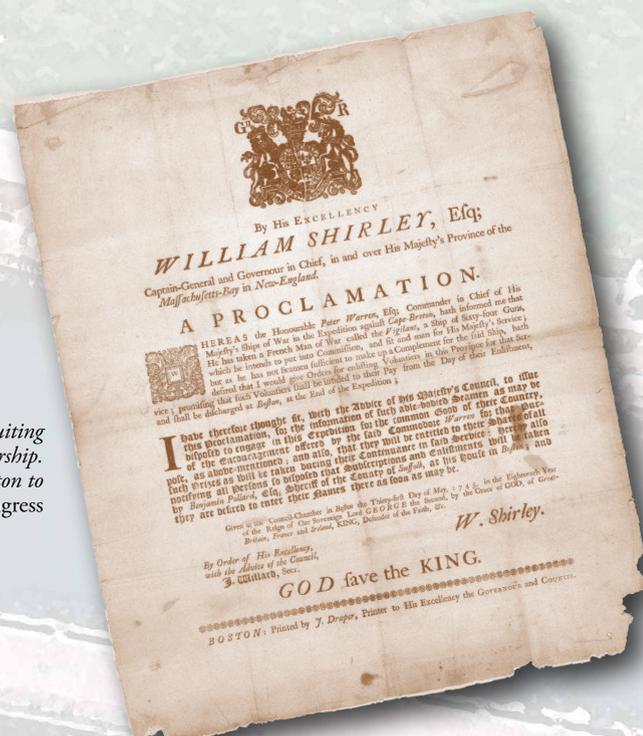
Imperial Tensions

In November, 1747 British Commodore Knowles brought his fleet from Louisburg to Boston. To replenish his crews, press gangs descended on the town forcing men into service. “Impressment of seamen” was a contentious issue before the War of 1812. This issue also led to riots during the administration of William Shirley, including mob action at his home. Shirley retreated to Castle Island to organize suppression of the mob but also negotiated with British authorities to stop the practice.



Shirley profited from his position and related military activities. He built a magnificent home in Roxbury but paid a heavy price for ambition. Two sons died in colonial wars. The home was later owned by William Eustis, Secretary of War under President James Madison and Governor of Massachusetts. Shirley-Eustis House

Proclamation from Governor William Shirley, recruiting Massachusetts men to serve on a captured French warship. Riots occurred when British press gangs descended on Boston to compel service. May 31, 1745. Library of Congress



Tory Refuge

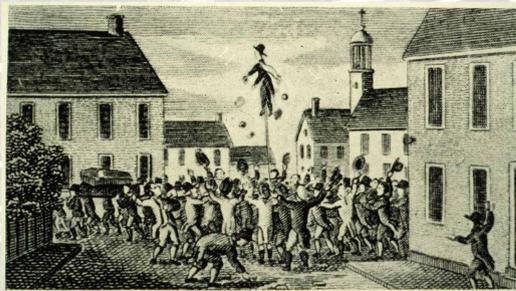
“We blew up Castle William, its Extensive Batteries and dependencies, all of masonry, with 87 mines, not one failing.”

British Captain Montessor, describing the British evacuation of Boston in 1776

In the turbulent years leading to the American Revolution Castle William became an offshore refuge for British soldiers and administrators.

The Stamp Tax Crisis

The requirement to fix revenue stamps to newspapers, legal documents and other items such as playing cards led to protests against “taxation without representation.” During the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 revenue stamps were stored on Castle Island but never distributed because of vigorous, at times violent, demonstrations. Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his family fled to Castle William after his home was destroyed in the Stamp Tax riots.



Stamp Tax riots. Marchand Archive



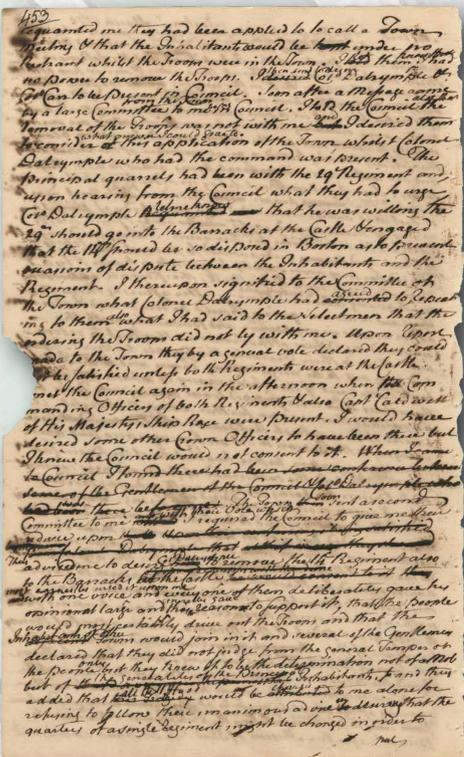
Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson took refuge from mob violence on Castle Island. Massachusetts State House Art Collection

The Boston Massacre

In 1770, after British soldiers killed five civilians in the “Boston Massacre” Samuel Adams and other Sons of Liberty demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Boston. The 14th and 29th Regiments retreated to the Castle.



Paul Revere's copper engraving plate for the Boston Massacre image is on display in the Commonwealth Museum Treasures Gallery. Massachusetts Archives



Troops Withdrawn to Castle Island The principle quarrel had been with the 29 regiment and upon hearing from the Council what they had to urge Colonel Dabrymple (said) that he was willing the 29th should go into the Barracks, at the Castle. ...to prevent...dispute between the Inhabitants and the Regiment.” Massachusetts Archives

The British Evacuation of Boston

During the Siege of Boston General George Washington famously ordered the placement of cannons on Dorchester Heights. British General William Howe felt that honor demanded an attempt to dislodge the rebels. Howe ordered troops to use Castle Island as a staging area. A severe gale scattered the British boats and the assault never took place. The only shots fired in anger from the fort occurred on March 20, 1776 when British gunners fired at American rebels in present day South Boston (and missed.)



Lord Howe Organizes the British Evacuation of Boston, 1776. Rulers and Leaders

The Tyrannicide Affair

“That proper measures may be taken for the return of said Negroes... The Negroes are placed on Castle Island.”

Order on South Carolina slaves taken to Boston by privateers, June 29, 1779

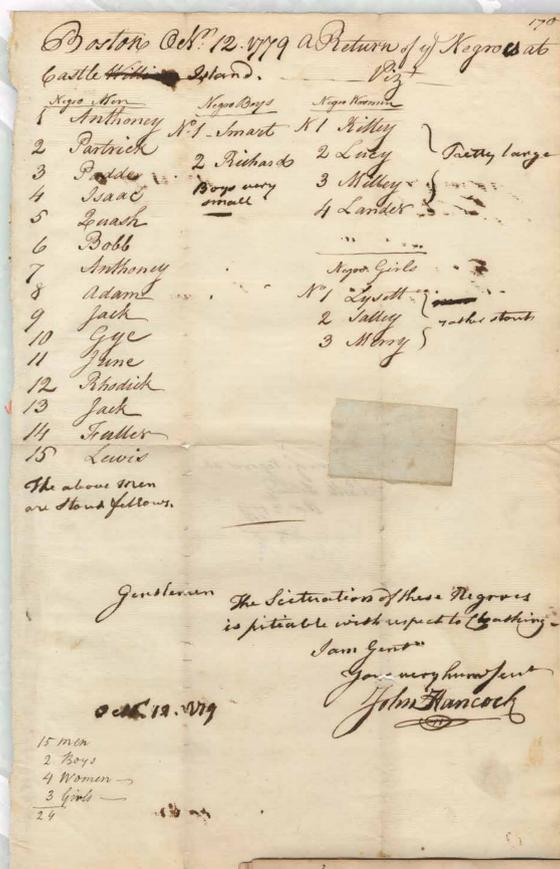
During the American Revolution Paul Revere served as commanding officer at Castle Island.

The fort was the scene of an early regional controversy over the issue of slavery.

A Predatory Age

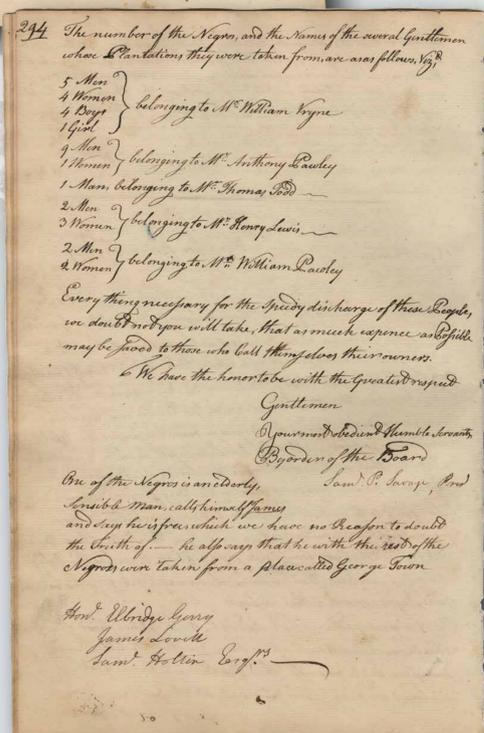
On June 16, 1799 two Massachusetts privateers, Tyrannicide and Hazard, escorted the Spanish ship Victoria into Boston Harbor. Along with its cargo of salt and wine, the Victoria held 34 slaves from South Carolina plantations.

To weaken the economy, British privateers seized slaves from coastal plantations. This group began its voyage on a British ship. After a sea battle, they transferred to the Spanish ship Victoria. The Victoria was in turn captured by two British privateers. All three ships were then overpowered by Tyrannicide and Hazard.



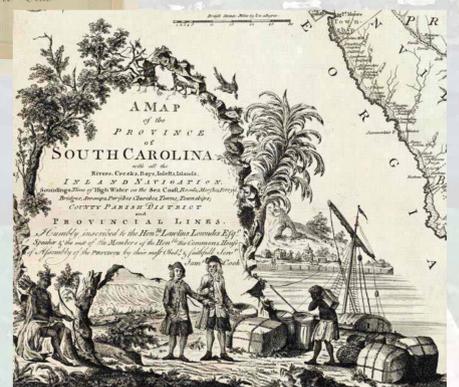
A Return of Negroes at Castle Island This document, signed by John Hancock, includes the names of 24 slaves and owners of South Carolina plantations. It also notes conditions at the fort. “The situation of these Negroes is pitiable with respect to Bathing.” October 12, 1779. Massachusetts Archives

The names of plantation owners, and numbers of slaves from each location, are included in this document. “One of the Negroes is an elderly Sensible Man, calls himself James and says he is free which we have no reason to doubt.” Massachusetts Archives



Detail of 1773 map of South Carolina by James Cook (not to be confused with the Hawaiian explorer.) The map includes “Rivers, Creeks, Bays, Inlets, Islands.” British privateers operated in the area capturing slaves. Some left willingly hoping for freedom. David Rumsey Map Collection

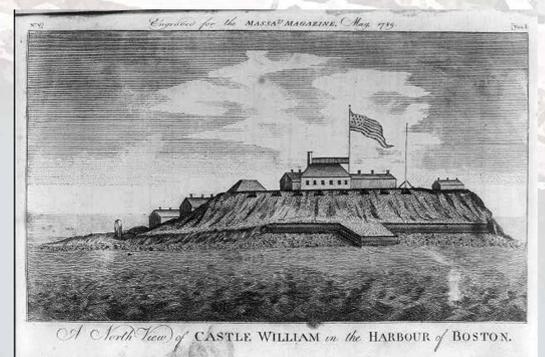
A fanciful eighteenth century view of Boston Harbor. Library of Congress



Interred at Castle Island

The captives were held at Castle Island. While legal in Massachusetts, slavery was increasingly seen as incompatible with the ideals of the American Revolution. However there was also a desire to maintain southern allies in the war against Great Britain.

Massachusetts found a way out when the slaves voted to return to South Carolina. The decision may be understandable, considering the experience of three sea battles, followed by confinement and work assignments at Castle Island. Plantation owners were quickly identified and contacted.

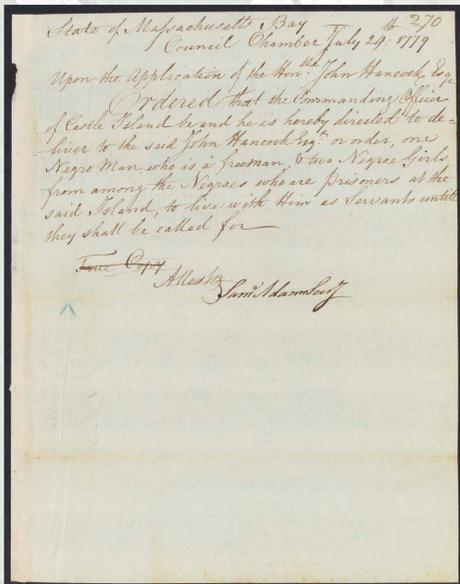


Castle Island near the time of the American Revolution. Massachusetts Magazine, 1789

New Nation, New Realities

“It was the opinion of the court that there was no legal ground for their detention in prison and that we consequently are obliged to liberate them.”

**Chief Justice
William Cushing,
1783**



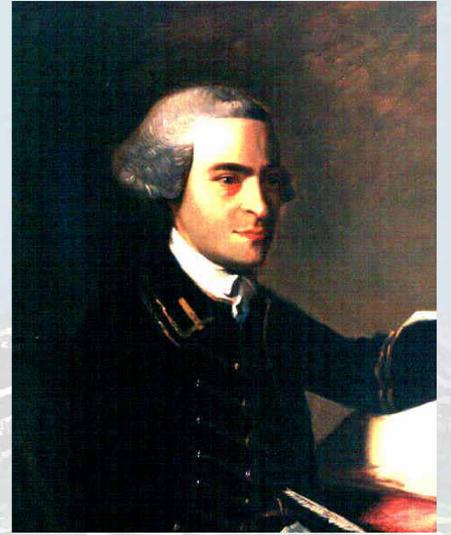
John Hancock had been deeply involved in this issue. While waiting for a response from South Carolina in 1779 those who were free of disease were offered positions as domestic servants. Paul Revere is ordered “to deliver to the said John Hancock ... on order, One Negro Man, who is a freeman & two Negro Girls from among the Negroes who are prisoners at the said Island.” Massachusetts Archives

Plantation owners retained merchant John Codman, of Massachusetts, to transport most of the slaves back to South Carolina. The Pawley family waited until the end of the war to make claims.

Governor John Hancock

After the Revolution an agent for the Pawley family demanded of Massachusetts Governor John Hancock that the remaining South Carolina slaves be returned. After the war, the practice of slavery had been ended in Massachusetts through court decisions.

Hancock referred the case to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. By then many former slaves had already fled, joining the state’s free black population.



*John Hancock,
Massachusetts State House Art Collection*

Justice Cushing’s Decision

Chief Justice Cushing ruled against detaining former slaves. In an explanatory letter to South Carolina, he avoided the terms “slaves” and “property” (not wishing to acknowledge the institution of slavery.) Cushing characterized those remaining in Massachusetts as servants or laborers bound by a service contract. While the Pawley’s were entitled to their service, Massachusetts had no obligation to hold them or pay for their return. The practical effect was to free the “Pawley” slaves because the family did not have the resources to recover them.



Official portrait of Chief Justice William Cushing



Some of the South Carolina captives worked as house servants in John Hancock’s Beacon Hill home, pending resolution of their case. Library of Congress

Before the war Prince Hall, a prominent African-American activist, joined a British army masonic lodge at Castle Island. He had been rejected by white masons in Massachusetts. Still, Hall supported the Revolution when the war for independence began.



An actor portrays Prince Hall in the Commonwealth Museum’s Revolution Gallery.

Constitutional Issues

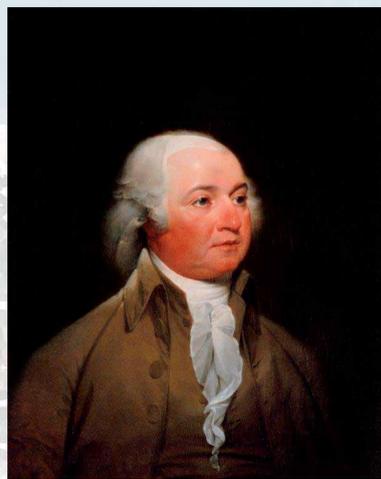
South Carolina Governor Benjamin Guerard bitterly objected, characterizing the Massachusetts response as “puritanism” - imposing morality on others. Some argue that this incident influenced the later debate regarding the fate of “fugitive slaves” at the 1789 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

The Famous and the Infamous

“My thirst for amusement was insatiable.”

Stephen Burroughs

On July 31, 1799 President John Adams visited the island and designated the site “Fort Independent.” Possibly the President misspoke. It has been known as “Fort Independence” ever since.

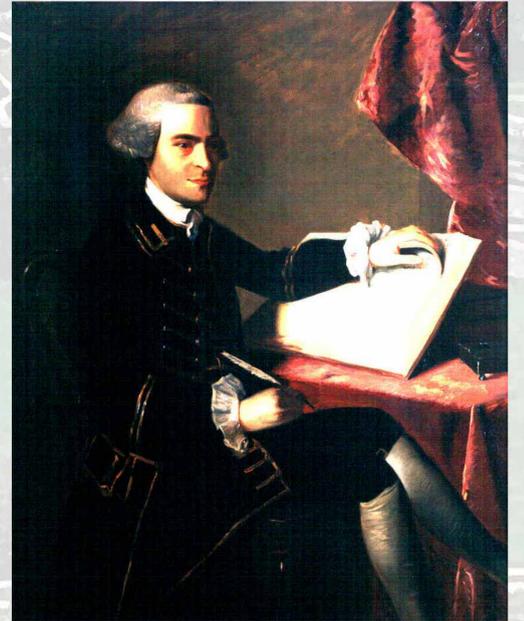


The Fort's northwest corner is named for John Adams. Official portrait of John Adams, White House Collection

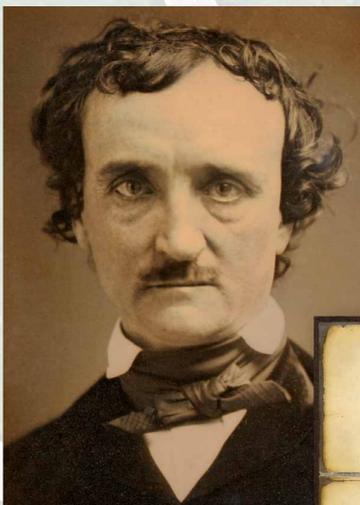
Edgar Allan Perry?

Edgar Allan Poe had a troubled childhood. He enlisted in the army as “Edgar Allan Perry” and served at Fort Independence.

Supposedly his story, the Cask of Amontillado, is based on an incident at the fort. A popular officer was killed in a duel and his assailant was trapped for eternity behind a bricked up wall (the same fate as an Italian nobleman in the story.) In reality the surviving duelist continued his military career for nearly thirty years. Perhaps Poe's imagination was fired by the fort's austere setting.

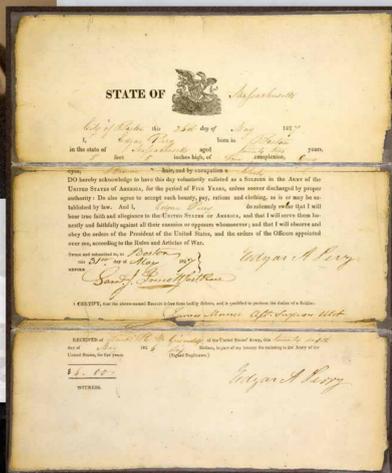


The fort's southwest corner is named for John Hancock, “the first Governor of the Commonwealth under whose administration new works were thrown up.” Perhaps fancying himself a military leader he also assumed the title of “commander” of the Castle. Massachusetts State House Art Collection



Edgar Allan Poe. “Annie” Daguerreotype

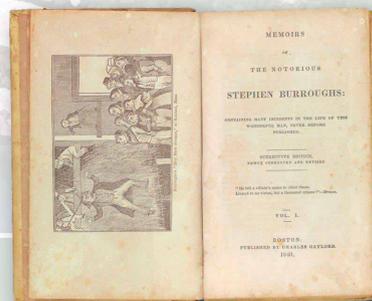
Enlistment papers for Edgar Allan “Perry.” National Archives



State Prison: The Notorious Stephen Burroughs

For a time Castle Island served as the state prison. One inmate, Stephen Burroughs, was the son of a Presbyterian minister, although his insatiable “thirst for amusement” led him astray. From childhood pranks he advanced to a life of crime including passing counterfeit coins. Burroughs offered high minded excuses including economic theories on the importance of expanding the money supply.

He escaped from Castle Island with seven fellow inmates but distinguished himself by saving the life of a guard they had kidnapped. When recaptured he was spared flogging.



Burroughs' best-selling memoirs make entertaining reading even today. No doubt some incidents are more amusing two hundred years later. Internet Archive



Casks of Amontillado (a variety of sherry wine) JJJimenez photo

Nailing It

Burroughs was assigned to making nails and managed to produce only five a day. (He claimed that a larger number would lower the quality.) When promised a gill of rum if he and other inmates could produce 500 in a day, he made the quota. When the ration of rum did not appear the following day, Burroughs resumed his regular pace.

Not as Easy as it Looks: Building Fort Independence

“Pour elever les fortifications necessaires a la defense du port de Boston, j’ai construit le fort independence a la Satisfaction des citoyens de cette Ville.”

John Foncin to
President Thomas
Jefferson*

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Peckham

Lieutenant Lewis Peckham drew the watercolor sketch of Foncin’s plan. Despite his skill as a draftsman, Peckham’s wife was not impressed. She placed an ad in Vermont and Pennsylvania newspapers.

Beware of a Monster... (Lewis Peckham) had deserted my bed and board...I do denounce him a Liar and a Villain and a person not to be trusted by either sex. He is a robber of innocence...He is despised by his comrades and pitied by his acquaintances. ...I have to caution all young females as well as old women to beware of this monster; wherever he may go...In consequence of his standing in the army, I took him for a gentleman but alas, I was deceived.

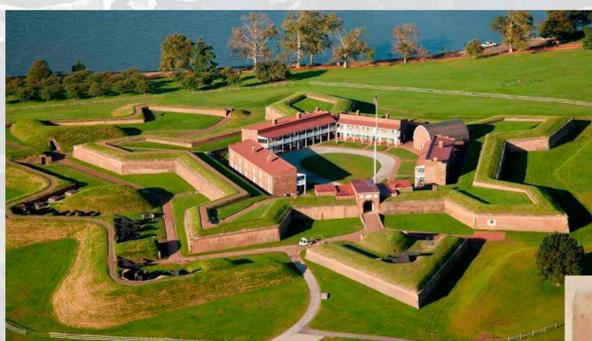
The Peckham’s were later divorced.



Jean Foncin, a French military engineer, designed a five sided fort for Castle Island that was in place during the War of 1812. He also worked on the design of Fort McHenry in Baltimore, the famous “Star Spangled Banner” fort.

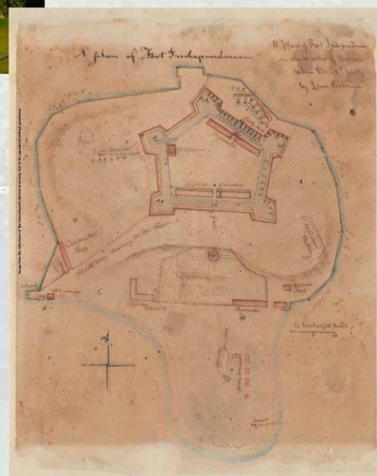
Foncin’s Design of Fort Independence

Traditional castles had high walls that were easily shattered by modern cannons. The star shaped fort had lower, thicker walls that could absorb some cannon shots. Multiple angles made direct hits more difficult. Five bastions allowed defensive fire from every direction.



“The fort of Boston has been drawn on the same scale as that of Baltimore.” – Jean Foncin. This image of Fort McHenry suggests the possible appearance of Foncin’s Fort Independence, before construction of the current granite fort. National Park Service

Plan of Fort Independence, Massachusetts Historical Society



Lost in Translation

Writing in French, Jean Foncin, appealed to President Jefferson in April 1803. Apparently he expected a salary but was paid for individual projects. “Pardon me, Sir, for writing in my native language. I do so...to avoid any improper expressions.” Secretary of War Henry Dearborn reprimanded Foncin: “I regret that there had not been a better understanding of the subject previous to your engagements.” Cost estimates for Fort Independence were “so incorrect as to prove either a want of candour or judgement.”

One bastion is named for Secretary of War Henry Dearborn “under whose auspices Fort Independence was actually built.” Dearborn was born in Hampton, New Hampshire and served in the American Revolution. Dearborn, Michigan is named for him. Maine’s capital is named for his daughter Augusta. Gilbert Stuart portrait, Art Institute of Chicago



*“To erect the fortifications necessary to defend Boston Harbor, I built Fort Independence to the satisfaction of the citizens of that city.” Jean Foncin to President Thomas Jefferson

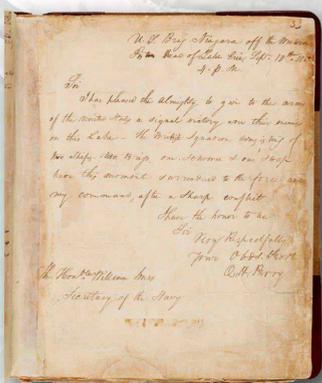
War Clouds

*“Don’t Give Up
the Ship,”*

**Captain James
Lawrence,
off Marblehead,
1813**

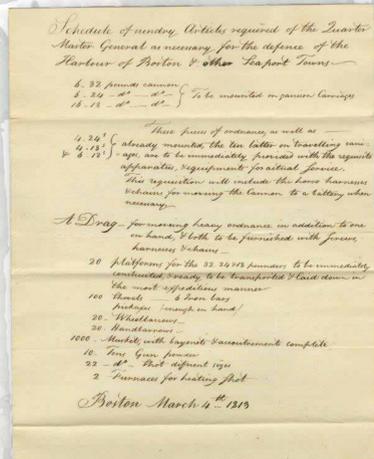
The War of 1812

Although never tested, Fort Independence had real military significance during the War of 1812. Militia members occupied the fort, with a number of regular army soldiers. Fortifications were also placed in several nearby locations, including Dorchester Heights, Savin Hill, and Commercial Point, site of the present and colorful gas tank.



A partial list of armaments for coastal defense during the War of 1812. Massachusetts Archives

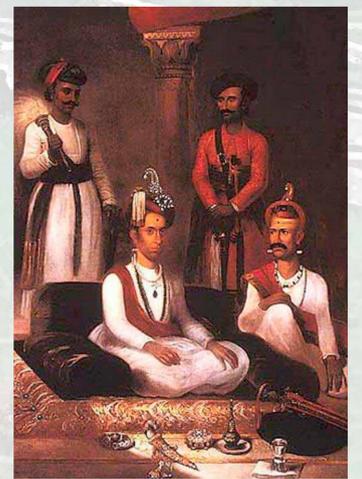
Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry reports his “signal” victory over a British fleet on Lake Erie in 1813. He named his ship “Lawrence” after his friend Captain James Lawrence and flew a flag with the words “Don’t Give Up the Ship.” Although forced to abandon the Lawrence, Perry won the battle. National Archives



Despite tensions over the “impressment of seamen” into the British Navy, the War of 1812 was unpopular in maritime New England. On the western frontier, some feared British incitement of attacks by Native people.

1812 Overture

William Henry Harrison’s 1811 victory over native warriors in Tippecanoe, Indiana propelled him into the White House. Troops stationed at Fort Independence participated in the battle. Their commander, John P. Boyd of Newburyport, had been a “soldier of fortune” who offered his services to various rulers in India. Returning to America he served at Castle Island and was second in command to Harrison. Troops traveled from Boston to Philadelphia by ship, then marched most to the way to Vincennes, Indiana.



Before serving at Castle Island, Newburyport’s John P. Boyd fought in India’s colonial wars, at one point offering his services to the Peshwa of Poonah. James Wales, 1792



Commemorating the Battle of Tippecanoe, The Exponent

Legendary

On June 1, 1813 the British frigate H.M.S. Shannon, entered Boston Harbor and fired a challenge shot. Captain James Lawrence, newly in command of the U.S.S. Chesapeake, responded. The ships tacked out of the harbor and met off Marblehead. Although the American ship was pummeled and forced to surrender in less than fifteen minutes, a dying Captain Lawrence uttered the famous words “Don’t give up the ship.” The encounter took place within view of “spy glasses” at Fort Independence.



H.M.S. Shannon and U.S.S. Chesapeake, Randers Art Museum



Captain James Lawrence, 1781-1813. National Archives

Tippecanoe and Tyler Too

In a sad incident William Henry Harrison moved to confront a growing confederacy of native nations. Tecumseh, a respected warrior and diplomat, was traveling to promote unity. His brother, known as “The Prophet,” unwisely ordered a pre-dawn attack on the American forces. Warriors knew that Harrison rode a white horse. In the confusion another officer mounted the horse and was killed. Harrison and running mate John Tyler won the 1840 Presidential election.



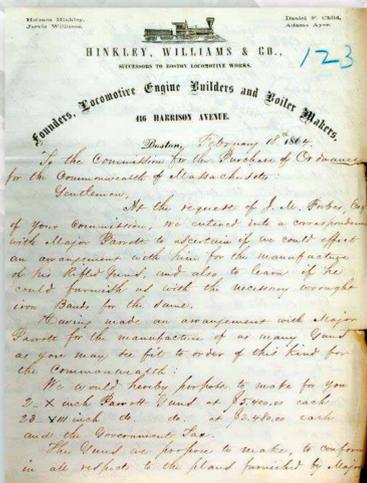
The Battle of Tippecanoe by Alonzo Chappel, Smithsonian Institute

Civil War Industry

“A pleasanter or more useful five weeks... I do not think I ever passed than those during which I played soldier at Fort Independence in April and May, 1861.”

Colonel Charles Francis Adams, grandson of President John Quincy Adams

Rodman gun at Fort Foote, near Washington D.C. This artillery piece was made in South Boston and likely tested at Castle Island. Earlier cannons were cast in iron that cooled from the inside out, making outer sections weaker. The Rodman process cooled the inside of the barrel with water allowing outer walls to harden into a more durable form. National Park Service



A Boston company proposes to make “parrot guns.” Robert Parker Parrot was a West Point graduate who had served at Fort Independence. His “rifled cannon” did not fire a round cannonball but a conical shell. Grooves inside the barrel made the shell spiral, like a football, giving greater distance and accuracy. Massachusetts Archives

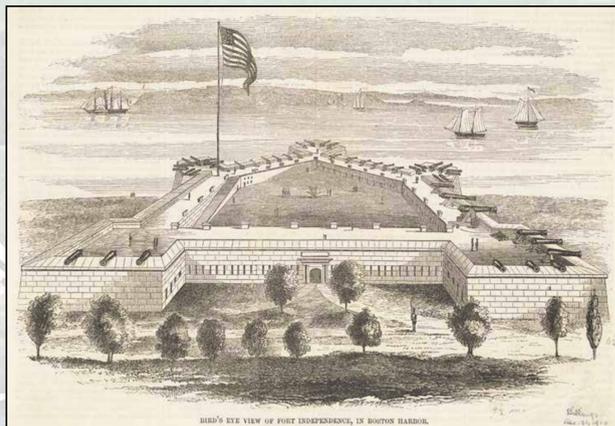
During the Civil War Castle Island played a significant role in training recruits and testing artillery before shipment to the battlefield.

Sylvanus Thayer

The current designs of Fort Independence (and Fort Warren on George’s Island) are mainly the work of Sylvanus Thayer. Often called “the Father of West Point” Thayer emphasized high standards for admission, performance, and character when serving as superintendent. Forced out by President Andrew Jackson who famously preferred the “Spoils System” for advancement, Thayer continued his career as a military engineer and retired with a reputation for competence and integrity.



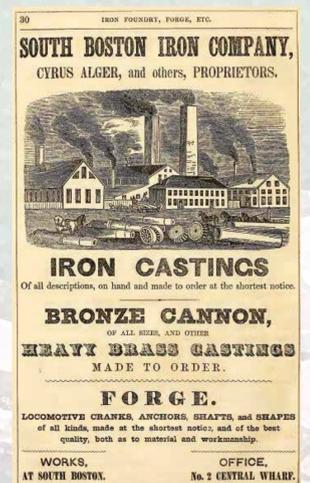
Birthplace of Sylvanus Thayer, Braintree. Thayer’s bequests later helped establish Thayer Academy and the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth College. John Phelan photo



Completed by 1851, Thayer’s design continued the five-sided “star fort” concept. Heavily built of Rockport granite, it provided more protection for defenders. Gleason Pictorial, 1852

Civil War: Testing Weapons

South Boston residents regularly heard the sound of booming cannons from Fort Independence. “Cannon and mortar firing is practiced most every day” wrote one soldier. South Boston foundries and machine shops turned out weapons twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. The South Boston Iron Works, also known as Alger and Company, cast 472 Rodman cannons that were tested at the fort before shipment to the battlefield. Possible shell fragments have been found as far away as Thompson Island.



Ad for Alger’s Iron Works in South Boston. Boston City Directory, 1848-49

Changing Times

“Hawaiians Wild Over U.S. Flyers”

**Boston Herald
June 30, 1927**



The “Bird of Paradise,” an Atlantic-Fokker C-2 trimotor plane was the first to cross the Pacific. Aviation Hawaii.gov

In the twentieth century Fort Independence evolved from military use to become an important historic and recreational site.

From Castle Island to Oahu

After Charles Lindberg’s historic flight, James Dole of the pineapple company offered a prize for the first flight from the mainland to Hawaii. Army aviators Lester J. Maitland and Albert F. Hegenberger made the flight from Oakland, California in twenty-five hours and fifty minutes. Seven others lost their lives in the attempt.

In 1919 Lieutenant Hegenberger married Louise Berchtold in the “only wedding ceremony” ever held on Castle Island. Louise’s family lived on the island in a caretaking role. Hegenberger grew up in South Boston, attended MIT, and joined the army air corps, combining technical and flying skills.

Lt. Lester J. Maitland and Lt. Albert F. Hegenberger (right) received a hero’s welcome in Hawaii after their trans-Pacific flight. Hegenberger later retired as a Major General. National Museum of the U.S. Air Force



On Castle Island, Hegenberger’s wife and two sons listened for news over the radio. It was national news as reflected in this article from the Milwaukee Journal in 1927.

Into the Twentieth Century

In 1890 the city of Boston received permission to improve and beautify (but not own) the island. By 1892 a wooden bridge connected Castle Island to the mainland. In 1932 a causeway opened on land filled with mud, clay and silt. Many modern visitors don’t realize that the site was originally an island.

World War II – Degaussing at Castle Island

During World War II Castle Island was chosen for a special naval project. In a process called “Degaussing,” named after the German scientist Carl Freidrich Gause, electric coils were wrapped around ship’s hulls to reduce magnetic attraction for mines. In the Castle Island version, called “wiping,” ships passed over coils buried in the harbor for temporary demagnetizing.

Frederick Law Olmsted proposed creating an Emerald Necklace of green space around metropolitan Boston. Castle Island would be included. Seeing military value in Fort Independence, the federal government hesitated. Artrenewal

