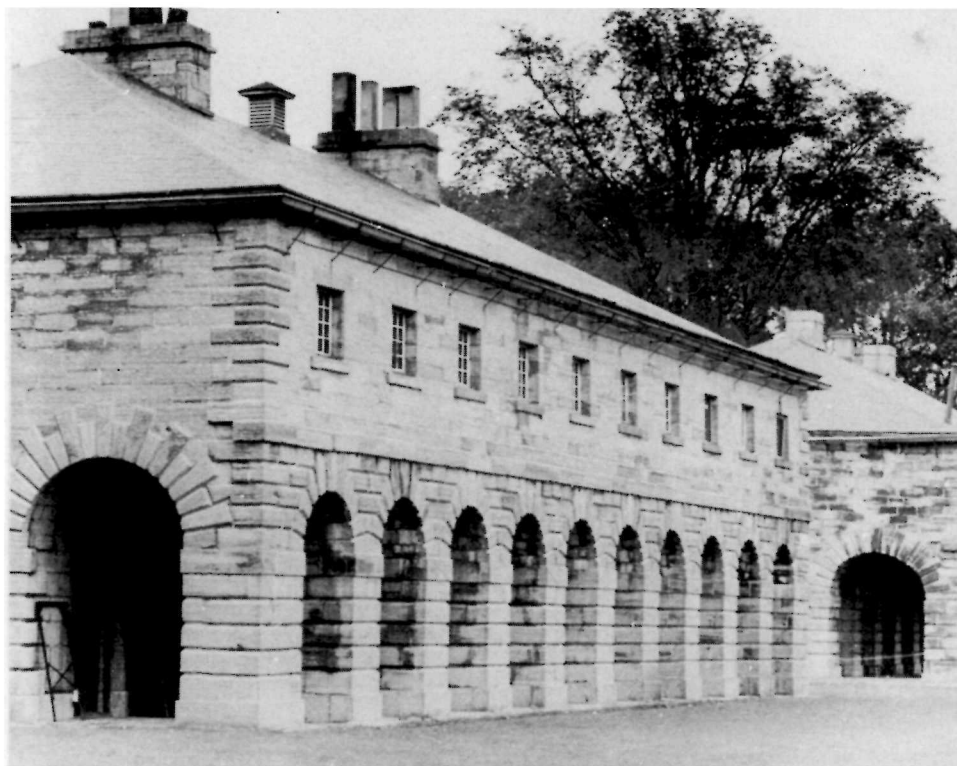


# Fort Lennox National Historic Park

Ile-aux-Noix, P.Q.

Canada



A wise nation preserves its records . . . gathers up its muniments . . . decorates the tombs of its illustrious dead . . . repairs its great public structures and fosters national pride and love of country by perpetual reference to the sacrifices and glories of the past.

. . . *Joseph Howe*

Issued under the authority of  
THE HONOURABLE JEAN LESAGE, Minister of  
Northern Affairs and National Resources



Fort Lennox National Historic Park

# FORT LENNOX

*Ile-aux-Noix - - Quebec*

## *The Old Fort*

Among the historic memorials of Canada there is none richer in interest or more charmingly situated than massive old Fort Lennox. The fort stands in quiet dignity on the southern end of Ile-aux-Noix, in the Richelieu River, 12 miles below the outlet of Lake Champlain and 10 miles from the United States border.

It is said that Champlain visited Ile-aux-Noix in 1609. At least he must have passed it about the 13th of July of that year, while travelling from Saint Therese island, which he had left the day before, to the islands of Lake Champlain, which he reached on July 14.

Ile-aux-Noix forms part of the seigneurie granted to Sieur Chavoze de Noyan in 1733. It appears from a lease, made at Montreal, on April 7, 1753, before Foucher, King's Notary, that the first occupant was Pierre Jourdanet, one of Captain de Lorimier's soldiers; it was he who did the first clearing. The rent stipulated was one bag of nuts from the island.

## *A Line of Forts*

With the French occupation of the Richelieu territory a line of defence for the Richelieu river became a necessity, since the Richelieu was the chief highway from the south to the cities of Montreal and Quebec. In the course of time a chain of forts was built stretching from Sorel to Lake Champlain. In these operations the famous Carignan regiment took a prominent part and the names of many of its officers are still preserved in the place-names of the Richelieu region.

Around these forts the first settlers clustered for protection and thus formed the "French Country" of the Eastern Townships. In the term "habitant" is preserved the literary memorial of the stockaded villages or "habitations" that were the outcome of these defensive posts. After the smoke of battle and the terror of the Iroquois had died away and most of the resplendent "gentlemen of France" had returned to their country these habitants were found with cleared lands and growing crops, the real hope of the new colony, asking only from their superiors peace, justice and the opportunity to cultivate the land whose riches they alone could appreciate.

## *The Island is Fortified*

The struggle between English and French involved the fortification of Ile-aux-Noix. The island is three quarters of a mile in length with a swift narrow channel on each side and shores rendered unapproachable for troops on account of wide tracts of treacherous marsh land. These factors made Ile-aux-Noix an ideal site for the defence of the Richelieu. To the south, where attack might be expected, the river takes a sharp bend and an approaching flotilla coming suddenly around Sturgeon Point could be surprised by a deadly fire from the guns of the fort.

In 1759 the French were forced to abandon the forts of Carillon and St. Frederic which guarded that part of New France situated around Lake Champlain. General Bourlamaque decided to entrench himself strongly at Ile-aux-Noix with the intention of arresting the march of the

English commander, Haviland. With 2,000 men of the detachments of "la Reine", of Guyenne and of Berry, Bourlamaque worked so well that his adversary was afraid to attack him immediately. It was only in the month of August, 1760, after having received some reinforcements, that Haviland appeared before Fort Ile-aux-Noix, then commanded by de Bougainville, who distinguished himself later by his voyages and discoveries and whose body rests in the Pantheon of Paris.

The French had thrown stockades across the river to close the passage but the English had succeeded in establishing themselves on the peninsula situated on the east side and with their cannon pointed at three sides of the fort. The French commander judged it better to retreat than to surrender with all his forces and during the night of August 27-28, profiting by darkness, he embarked the greater part of his troops in canoes, leaving in the fort 50 men in order to hide his stratagem. He thus succeeded in evading the enemy and reaching St. Johns and Montreal where he joined Lévis. The morning of the 28th the British commenced to bombard the fort in response to the fire of the few French remaining there. Later, the French offered to surrender, provided they were allowed to leave with the honours of war. Their proposal was immediately accepted but the British realized that a trick had been played upon them and were naturally much chagrined.

The surrender of the island was the prelude to the fall of Montreal and the loss of New France. Ile-aux-Noix was the last defence of the old régime.

### *The American War of Independence*

From the time of the British occupation Ile-aux-Noix was recognized as a strong position and was constantly garrisoned by troops. With the outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775 the need for a strong fortress on the island became apparent. In that year the American rebels, commanded by Generals Schuyler and Montgomery, took Ile-aux-Noix in the course of their advance on Montreal and Quebec. It was from here that they issued their famous proclamation inviting the Canadians to join the Congressional troops. After Montgomery's failure and death before the walls of Quebec the American army retreated to the Richelieu and entrenched at Ile-aux-Noix under the orders of General Arnold. Fever broke out among the soldiers, the Americans left very hurriedly in order to escape the ravages of the epidemic, and the British reoccupied the fort.

Brigadier-General Fraser was its first commandant. He had just previously, on June 8, won a victory over the United States troops, at Three Rivers. He occupied the island with three battalions from July. The Brunswick regiment, which he employed to complete Bourlamaque's fortifications, was sent to him in the month of August. The following year, on October 7, 1777, Fraser was killed while with the unfortunate Burgoyne expedition.

The British government decided in 1782 to build on the island a real fortress. Plans were made and immediately the work of reconstruction was begun under the direction of Commanding Engineer William Twiss, afterwards General and Colonel-commandant of the Royal Engineers.

A large number of Canadian prisoners who had joined the Americans during the invasion were employed on this work, but the major part was carried out by the German mercenaries who were in the British service. The plan was to dig a large moat surrounded by high ramparts

in the form of a rectangle with bastions on four corners and then build, in the interior, quarters for the officers and soldiers. This was a gigantic enterprise when one considers the rudimentary means at that time to build large earthworks. The workmen were obliged to make great cribs of timber which they filled with earth brought in wheelbarrows from the ditches. The stone for the casements and barracks were hauled from the island at Lamothe.

### *The War of 1812*

When trouble once more broke out between the neighbouring countries in 1812 it was found that the fortress built at the cost of so much labour and suffering was not sufficient to meet the purposes of defence. It was decided to reconstruct the interior, and from time to time the present buildings were erected. The island also became a naval station where warships of the lesser class were built. The work was begun in 1812 and was not completed for many years.

The reconstructed fort was named "Fort Lennox" probably from the family name of Charles, Duke of Richmond, who was Governor-in-Chief of Canada from 1818 until his tragic death in the following year.

On June 3, 1813, two American ships appeared in sight and were successfully captured after two hours fighting. These two ships, having been repaired on this island, were used in the expedition which, under orders from Captain Everard, destroyed the barracks, military stores and the American ships at Plattsburg, Burlington, Swanton and Champlain. In the winter of 1813 and in the spring of 1814 there were constructed in the dry-dock at the island a number of ships of war, among others *La Confiance*, a ship of considerable tonnage. These ships took part in the unfortunate expedition of Sir George Prevost, in 1814, and most of them were sunk in the bay of Plattsburg, by the Americans.

### *The Abandoned Fort*

After the war of 1812-14, the fort continued to be garrisoned until the withdrawal of the British troops in 1870. After having been used as a penitentiary it was abandoned and became the free resort of tourists and picnic parties and naturally drifted towards decay. On May 18, 1921, on the recommendation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the fortress and adjoining lands were transferred to the National Parks of Canada for preservation and restoration.

### *Fort Lennox To-day*

The Fort Lennox of today, although showing many signs of its age, presents to the visitor an aspect of proud and magnificent solidity as if it had the power in itself to defy the disintegrating influences of time and weather.

At the entrance is a massive archway of great blocks of hewn stone on which is cut in large letters the name "Lennox". The gateway opens upon a spacious square on three sides of which are arranged the various buildings of the fort: officers' quarters, guard-house, canteen, barracks and commissariat, all of which are constructed of stone on the massive lines adopted by the British authorities at the beginning of the 19th century. The square, with its buildings, is surrounded by a steep rampart of earth which rises abruptly from the waters of a moat sixty feet wide and ten feet deep, running like a girdle around the whole structure.

The fortress stands at the south end of the island and occupies about one-quarter of the total area, which comprises 210 acres. Outside the fort may be seen the remains of a church, two graveyards and other ruins. Of the nut trees that attracted the attention of Champlain and gave the island its name, there is no trace, but within the fort are many magnificent elm trees which add a dignified beauty to the scene.

### *The Fort Without and Within*

Landing on the west side of the island the first object of interest is the encircling moat sixty feet wide, with the mounting rampart on which were formerly mounted the great guns that commanded the reaches of the river. Everywhere the vegetation is luxuriant and beautiful. It is obvious that the earth dug from the moat was used for the construction of the rampart.

In the old times the means of approach was by drawbridge but of this there is at present no trace. Proceeding through the gateway the visitor will at once be struck by the massive solidity of the buildings. In front of him on the parade ground is a sundial which was erected in 1820. On the right are the officers' quarters and on the left the guardhouse. Both buildings will immediately attract attention by the beautiful archways and colonnades. The guardhouse was built in 1824, and the officers' quarters in 1826. Within the latter building will be found the museum, containing a collection of historic relics with additions connected with the Great War. Behind the officers' quarters will be seen various buildings, constructed in the ramparts and which were used for kitchen purposes. Farther to the right in the northwest bastion will be seen the magazine where the ammunition was stored. There the thickness of the side walls will be appreciated. The arch inside is four feet thick while the side walls are eight feet thick. Shell rooms were built on each end of the stone wall, separating the site of the magazine from the other buildings. Next on the west side the men's barracks will be observed, the massive character of which will be appreciated by an examination of the interior. It may be said that the chief feature of all these buildings is the excellence of the construction of the various archways. Behind the barracks and under the ramparts will be observed other buildings once used as bakeries, where the soldiers baked their bread.

On the south side there is another outlet to the water connecting with a curious triangular structure, also surrounded by a moat, which was intended as an additional protection from attack on the south side. Here there is a most beautiful view of the Richelieu river. Proceeding to the east side there are the artillery store, canteen and commissariat buildings. To complete the itinerary of the fort there is the guardroom building which is on the left side of the main entrance where will be seen the cells for refractory soldiers.

Leaving the fort by the main entrance the visitor will see the sally-port, rebuilt in 1913. It was originally much longer and included a protective stockade to the wharf on the east side of the island. Before him is spread out the expanse of the island which, in the summer time, presents a charming vista. About two hundred yards north of the entrance can be seen two cemeteries enclosed by fences. The names of the soldiers who are buried there are preserved in the records. In some cases the original head-stones had disappeared and the memorials were renewed.



Near the western landing-place there is a large excavation which once served as a dry-dock. It is approximately two hundred and fifty feet long by fifty feet wide with signs of an entrance from the river about two hundred and fifty feet long by twenty-five feet wide. In the days of naval activity on the island the boats were brought into this enclosure, the gates closed and the water pumped out by hand. Great preparations were made for ship building, but with the conclusion of the war in 1814 the works were closed and the ships under construction were sold.

### *The Museum*

Visitors will find the museum of great interest. In the Indian relics which have been dug up on the island or in the vicinity there is ample proof that Ile-aux-Noix was used by the Indians long before the 17th century. Among these relics there are stone axes, flint arrow points, totem stone, spear heads and other curiosities. The relics, military and domestic, of early French and later British occupation are very numerous. Students of regimental history will find a unique collection of military buttons, badges, crests and plates. The collection includes an English triangular bayonet dated 1618, Scottish claymore, marine cutlass, guns of early construction, cannon balls, ship axes, earrings and trinkets, leg irons, wooden shoes, steel and tinder for striking fires. There is also an extensive collection of old coins including a Portuguese coin dating back to 1530.

### *A Public Reserve*

Under the supervision of the National Parks Branch there has been given full freedom to the public for the use and enjoyment of the island as a holiday resort and historic shrine. Special areas have been reserved for campers and facilities provided for their needs. Good bathing opportunities are afforded. Wharves have been built on the east and west sides of the island, that on the east giving accomodation to steamers of heavy draught such as excursion boats. There is a caretaker in charge who meets visitors and supplies necessary information.

### *Looking Back*

The imaginative visitor standing on one of the bastions which commands a fine view of the river and looking through the trees across the spacious parade grounds of the fort will reconstruct for himself the fevered activity of naval operations which once characterized this placid river. He will hear once more the call of the bugle and see the officers and men issuing from their quarters in the resplendent uniforms of the olden times. Once more he will hear the sharp word of command and picture the vigilant sentry scanning the river for signs of hostile approach. The day of this method of warfare has passed away but it is well that there should be monuments still standing, such as the old fortress on Ile-aux-Noix, to focus the thrilling story of the nation's early defenders, and to create and keep alive reverence for those who counted not life as dear in the service of their country.

**For additional copies of this publication, or other information on the National Parks of Canada, write to:**

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