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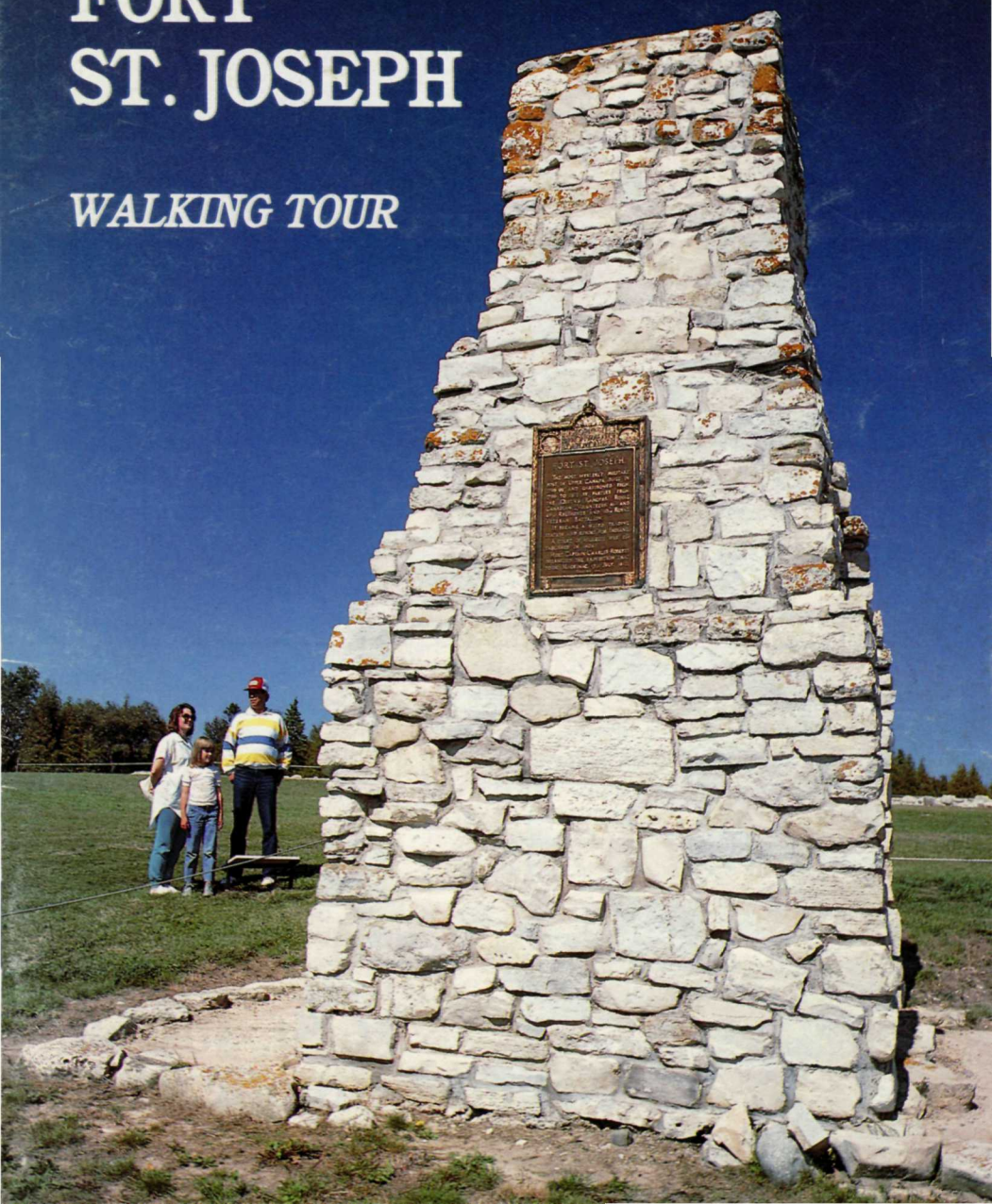
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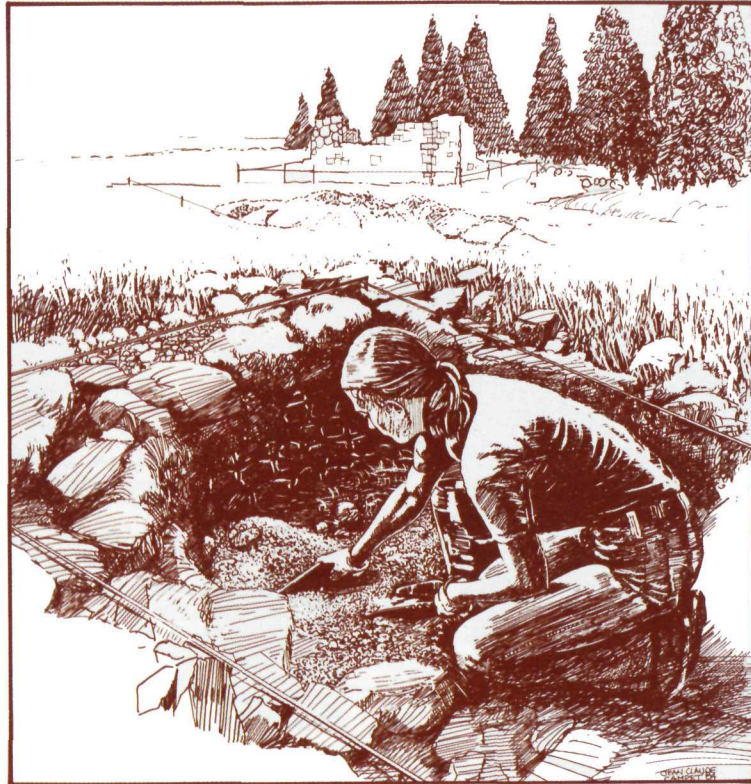
Canadian Parks
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FORT ST. JOSEPH

WALKING TOUR





Ft. St. Joseph National Historic Park

A Tour of the Fort



An aerial view of the approach to the fort

Welcome to Fort St. Joseph National Historic Park. After travelling the roughly 50 kilometres between the entrance to St. Joseph Island and the fort, you can appreciate the feeling of solitude experienced by the residents of this post in the early 1800s. Loneliness was part of everyday life for the small garrison, clerks and “voyageurs” employed by the fur trading companies.

The only link with the colonized areas of Upper and Lower Canada was not by road but by canoe or sailing vessel. During the all too brief summer months, the fort would be occasionally visited by the fur brigades. It was primarily the Natives, however, who came to trade and exchange presents and information with both residents

and government officials.

Today, the ruins of the fort retrace what life must have been like in this remote outpost.

Using This Guide

Wander through the ruins at your own pace. Panels have been installed to explain what each ruin represents, however, we recommend that you follow the order given in this brochure. A site plan appears on pages 8 and 9.

1. The Site

From here, you can see that the fort was located atop a promontory overlooking the St. Marys River. This offered strategic advantages for the defense of the Fort.

2. Palisade

Around 1800, a four-metre-high (13 foot) cedar picket palisade surrounded the fort. It was located in the vicinity of the line where the lawn is cut.

The palisade and accompanying fortifications protected the fort against Native or American attack. Unfortunately, it was allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that a violent windstorm blew a portion of it down in 1811.

3. Powder Magazine

The thick walls of this building protected the black powder used in firearms and artillery from enemy fire. This was the longest-lived of the fort's buildings, remaining in use from 1805, when it was completed, to 1828. In fact, when the British army established a new post on neighbouring Drummond Island after the War of 1812, it continued to use the Fort St. Joseph powder magazine.

Powder magazines were built very carefully. Archaeological evidence



The powder magazine

suggests that all the hardware (hinges, nails, lamps, etc.) was made of copper in order to avoid sparks. The least hint of fire would have destroyed not just the powder magazine, but the entire fort!

4. Trail Towards Shore

A ten minute walk to the shore along this trail will take you through land which was once built-up and cultivated. A plan drawn in 1925 indicated the presence of three chimneys, old garden flowers and even an old apple tree.

The most significant structure in this small village was a canoe-



Re-enacting a voyageur brigade

building factory. Here freighter canoes were built by the North West Company for interior posts and to carry furs down to Montreal.

5. Old Bakehouse and Kitchen

The bakehouse was very important in the lives of ordinary soldiers because bread was one of the few fresh foods in an otherwise drab diet. Their salt meat rations,

imported from Great Britain, may have been stored for as much as several years prior to serving.

The island's small community did practice some gardening and kept several farm animals. Soldiers with the means to do so could plant a vegetable garden or purchase produce from civilians. Of course, fishing and hunting were also an important source of fresh food.

When the building burned down in 1802, it was a devastating loss. A temporary roof was erected over the oven, but construction of a suitable new bakery outside the fort grounds was not completed until two years later. Meanwhile, the cooked bread was often inedible, to the extreme dissatisfaction of the men.



The old bakehouse and kitchen

6. Blockhouse

The ground floor of this two-storey building was used to store ordnance and supplies. The second storey provided accommodation for officers and soldiers, however, it was anything but comfortable.

The wind whistled between the squared timbers of the walls until they were weather-boarded in 1804-1805.

The chimneys, too, were inadequate — even dangerous. Support timbers under the hearths occasionally burned, and there was a risk that the cedar shingle roof might be set on fire by sparks from the chimneys. It was later covered with roofing tin.

Despite all the efforts to improve it, the blockhouse always remained uncomfortable, particularly in winter.



The blockhouse

7. Kitchens

After the 1802 fire, construction began on two new kitchens. The men's kitchen was completed in 1804, and the officers' kitchen in 1805. The remains of a large chimney suggests that this building may very well have been one of these kitchens.

8. Stores Building

The history of this building is shrouded in mystery. The exact date of its construction is not known, but it did exist in 1802; a report mentions that it was then used for stores and as a workshop. The building was weatherboarded around 1805; a chimney was added in 1810, when it was converted to quarters for the Commissary and Barracks Master.

9. Guardhouse

Despite the remote location of the fort, a 24-hour guard had to be kept. The guardhouse consisted of a room in which sentries could rest between rounds, and three solitary cells measuring four feet by four feet by four feet. These *black holes* held soldiers who had broken regulations.

On several occasions, conflicts within the garrison grew extremely bitter. In 1810, a number of soldiers of the 100th Regiment garrison were held under guard in the guardhouse *black holes* for attempted mutiny.



The guardhouse, with chimney in background

10. Chimney

Number 7 of this guide describes two kitchens built in 1804. This imposing chimney quite possibly carried the smoke from one of those kitchens. Unfortunately, archaeologists have been unable to locate the perimeter of the building, possibly due to disturbance of the foundations during the 1940s.

11. Military Wharf

Except for the remains of stone cribbing hidden beneath the surface of the river, the dock has long since been washed away by ice and water.

Once ships laden with supplies for the fort anchored offshore, sending their bateaux across the shallow water to the dock. An essential part of life at the fort, the dock

received the barrels of salt provisions and flour, livestock, tools, weapons and, of course, trade goods. Its presence helped, after the ice break-up, to renew contacts with the settled areas and receive friends and relatives.

12. New Bakehouse

When the old bakehouse burned down (see number 5), they were afraid that the fire would spread to the neighbouring blockhouse. No chances were taken when its replacement was built. The new bakery was made of stone and located outside the enclosure of the fort.



The new bakehouse

13. Semi-subterranean Buildings

In 1798, the military authorities gave merchants permission to establish their presence on the

island. These merchants built a number of small buildings which were used for housing or storage.

Each building had a cellar beneath a wooden floor. Although information about their above-ground appearance is incomplete, archaeological evidence suggests that they were made of squared timber. The presence of broken glass indicates that they had windows. You will find a reconstructed "traders hut" in the Visitor Centre diorama.

14. Lime Kiln

Limestone extracted from Lime Island, across the river, was burned in a kiln at the fort to produce lime. The kiln has been buried to prevent further deterioration.

15. Civilian Structure 2

Archaeologists made an interesting discovery at this site. Unlike the other buildings surrounding the fort, this house was not burned

by the Americans in 1814. It is assumed to have belonged to the **South West Company**, a trading firm established jointly by American businessman John Jacob Astor and by the **North West Company** of Montreal.

Ramsey Crooks, a civilian whose job was to protect Mr. Astor's interests, was on board one of the American ships. Crooks quite likely intervened to prevent the burning of the building.



Civilian structure 2

17. Blacksmith Shop

In an isolated outpost such as Fort St. Joseph, the presence of a blacksmith was indispensable. The blacksmith manufactured items for everyday use, such as nails and hinges. He also repaired tools, weapons, axes or traps. Everyone was equally in need of his services: the army, merchants and Natives.

Actually, there was more than one smithy in the fort. We know that the Indian Department had its own blacksmith, a man named Louis Dufresne.

18. Visitor Centre

We hope this guided tour has given you some understanding of what life was like in this former "Military Siberia", this outpost on the edge of Canada.

If you have not already done so, please take a few moments to tour the Visitor Centre and view the exhibits and film presentation. They will provide additional insight into the life style at the fort during the early nineteenth century.



A modern Native painting displayed in the Visitor Centre



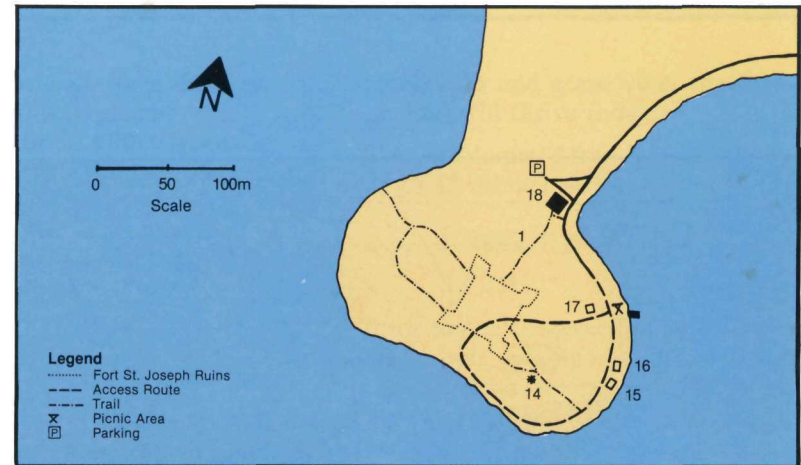
Visitor Centre entrance and exhibit



16. Civilian Structure 1

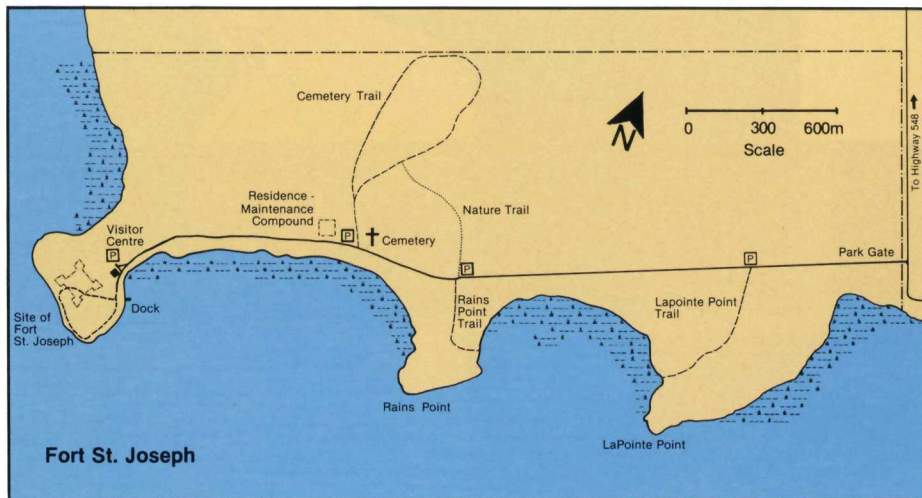
If accommodations inside the fort were deemed inadequate, officers had the privilege of residing in private houses. Several documents indicate that certain officers rented or purchased houses such as this one. They were merchants' houses left vacant during the winter when the owners returned to Montreal.

FORT ST. JOSEPH



Legend

1. The Site
2. Palisade
3. Powder Magazine
4. Trail Towards Shore
5. Old Bakehouse and Kitchen
6. Blockhouse
7. Kitchens
8. Stores Building
9. Guardhouse
10. Chimney
11. Military Wharf
12. New Bakehouse
13. Semi-subterranean Buildings
14. Lime Kiln
15. Civilian Structure 2
16. Civilian Structure 1
17. Blacksmith Shop
18. Visitor Centre



19. Cemetery

Unfortunately, nothing remains of the crosses that originally marked the graves in this small shady cemetery. The present-day crosses were erected to mark known grave-sites.

Most of these graves are the result of some tragic event, since few people are believed to have died of old age at Fort St. Joseph. A number of accidental deaths were recorded. For example, private Garrinel was killed when a loaded gun accidentally discharged. The



The fort's cemetery

cemetery laid claim to a deserter from the 100th Regiment who froze to death 50 kilometres from the fort. Twins born to Mrs. Lewis Crawford, wife of one of the traders, are also buried here. In all, at least ten deaths were recorded at the fort during its period of active use.

20. Cemetery Trail

The cemetery is the starting point of a charming trail through a mixed softwood and hardwood forest. Sign panels have been installed along the trail to explain and interpret the environment. The entire two kilometre trail can be covered in 45 to 90 minutes, depending on your pace.

21. Rains Point Trail

There is quite a story surrounding Rains Point. It was first occupied by a Montreal trading company, the **Michilimackinac Company**, which erected two large stores and a house there in 1808. The company's financial problems, however, forced it to forego its expansion plans and abandon the site.

Rains Point is named after Major William Rains, who attempted, with his associates, to colonize the island in 1835. The attempt failed, but Rains remained on the island and, in 1837, built a house on Rains Point. In 1849, Major Rains moved to Sterling Bay.

Although remains of the building have long since disappeared, lilacs,

rosebushes and grape vines that he planted still thrive today.

The ½ kilometre trail is a pleasant 25 to 45 minute walk.

22. Lapointe Point Trail

Prior to the construction of Fort St. Joseph, a temporary fort was constructed in this area. The site is now completely overgrown and would go unnoticed except to the trained eye.

This lovely hiking trail runs for 1.4 kilometres through a majestic maple stand but does not pass near the site. Between 30 and 60 minutes are required to cover the entire trail.

The People and the Land

When the Europeans arrived at St. Joseph Island they had to cope with living in a Northern Ontario wilderness. Like the Native inhabitants of the region, they learned to use the resources at hand. Game species, such as white-tailed deer, snowshoe hare, ruffed grouse and waterfowl, contributed to their diet.

The evergreen and deciduous forests supplied logs for the fort buildings and palisade, lumber for furniture, and firewood for

cooking and heating. In the spring, the Natives tapped the sugar maples for sap and painstakingly boiled it into maple sugar. They also used local shrubs and wildflowers for herbal and medicinal purposes.

Today, the island is not as wild as it once was. Still, within the 372 hectares of Fort St. Joseph National Historic Park you will find a rich variety of plants and animals typical of this region.

The grounds around the ruins support a lush growth of summer wildflowers.



Flocks of Canada Geese and ducks feed offshore during spring and fall migration.



White-tailed deer are occasionally seen along the trails or the entrance road.

History of the fort



Watercolour of Fort St. Joseph by Lieut. Edward Walsh in 1804 (Clements Library, University of Michigan).

1. Why Fort St. Joseph

When the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783, effectively putting an end to the American Revolution, the Michilimackinac trading post at the entrance to Lake Michigan was awarded to the United States. The British kept control of the site until 1796, however, when it was finally ceded to the Americans.

The British then had to build a new fort. St. Joseph Island was chosen as the site because of its proximity to Fort Michilimackinac and to the busiest navigation routes.

From a military standpoint, Fort St. Joseph played a defensive role — its primary purpose being to protect the fur trade from the Americans. The British Indian

Department was present at the fort to maintain good relations with the Natives.

Construction began on the block-house in 1797, and on the other important elements of the fort (palisade, guardhouse, kitchen and storehouse) in the following year. The rest followed as needed.

2. War of 1812

As early as 1807, relations between the Americans and the British were growing strained. There were a number of reasons for this, mostly related to the foreign and trade policies of these two countries. Regional issues were also involved, notably control over the Great Lakes and the fur trade routes.

Fort St. Joseph became a rallying

point as soon as the United States declared war on Great Britain in June of 1812. The garrison commander, Captain Charles Roberts, knew that his fort was vulnerable and decided that his best defence was a good offence. On July 17, leading a force of about 40 regular soldiers, 150 Canadians and 300 Natives, Roberts captured the American fort on Michilimackinac Island, thereby serving notice to the American garrison that war had been officially declared.

The garrison and traders abandoned Fort St. Joseph and moved into the American fort.

Later, in 1814, an American expedition burned the abandoned Fort St. Joseph to the ground.

3. After the War

Under the peace treaty signed in December 1814, all territories conquered by the two participants in the war were returned to their previous owners. The British army returned Michilimackinac to the Americans, but decided not to rebuild Fort St. Joseph. They subsequently established a post on Drummond Island. Buildings that were not burned were moved across the ice to the new site.

In the 1920s, the Sault Ste. Marie Historical Society became interested in the ruins of the fort. Some work was carried out to stabilize the ruins. After the Second World War, a road was opened to the site, which was developed into a picnic ground.



Fort St. Joseph as it appeared in 1820, several years after it was burned by the Americans. Palisade and blockhouse remnants are still visible and the powder magazine is still operational (Public Archives of Canada).

Archaeology at Fort St. Joseph



Archaeologists excavating ruins at the fort

Because written documents are sometimes insufficient (or can even be misleading), archaeologists play a significant role in piecing together the story of sites such as Fort St. Joseph. Their research requires patience and care because clues are destroyed as work progresses; once a layer of soil has been removed, it cannot be put back.

During the summers of 1963 and 1964, teams from the University of Toronto conducted systematic preliminary research. No further work was carried out until 1974, when the Parks Service launched a three-year archaeological program.

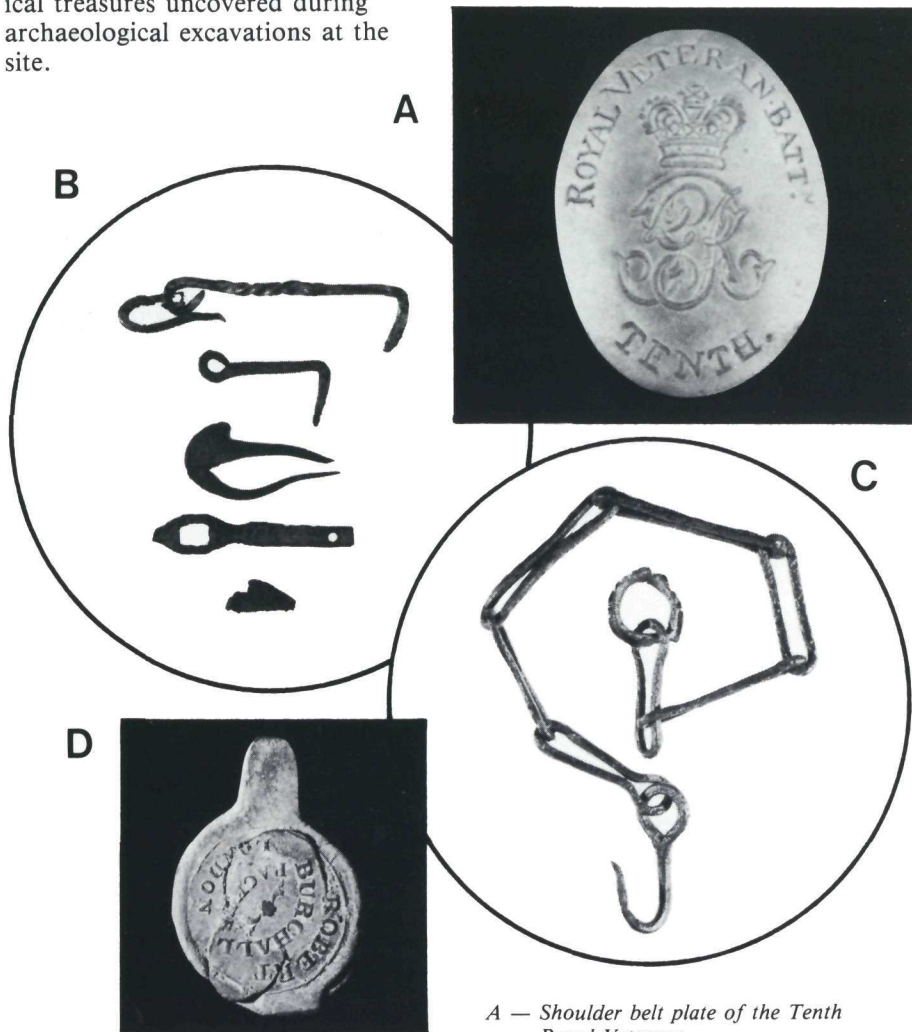
From this research work (on-site excavations and the study of archives), 21 buildings with excavated cellars and 21 above-ground buildings were identified.



Pearlware bowl with painted chinoiserie decoration, c. 1790-1800, English.

Artifacts

These are only a few of the historical treasures uncovered during archaeological excavations at the site.



A — Shoulder belt plate of the Tenth Royal Veterans

B — Hasp, latch catches and hooks

C — Chain and hook

D — Lead seal used on supplies and fur bales



Visitors appreciate the blend of history, nature and recreational opportunities that Fort St. Joseph offers.

For more information, please contact:

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