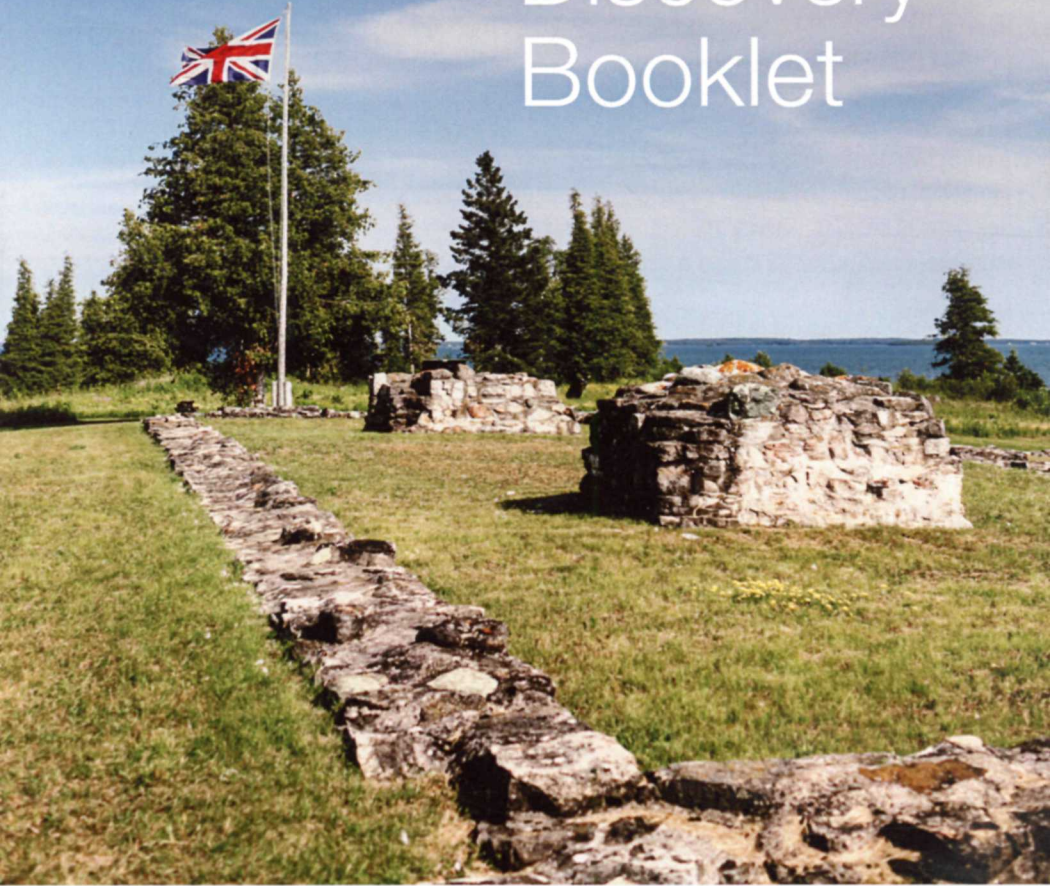




Fort St. Joseph  
National Historic Site

# Discovery Booklet



Parks  
Canada

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# Welcome to Fort St. Joseph National Historic Site

Fort St. Joseph was a British military fort built in 1796. About 45 British soldiers and officers were stationed here to guard the remote western frontier of Upper Canada.

Fort St. Joseph tells the story of several groups of people: the British military, Indigenous peoples, and fur traders. They supported each other to create a community

here on the southern tip of St. Joseph Island. That community came together to launch one of the first strikes in the War of 1812.

Today, the fort ruins stand as a mark of the people and events that affected this region over 200 years ago.

## History of Fort St. Joseph

### The British built Fort St. Joseph to defend the fur trade in the Upper Great Lakes

Signed in 1783, the Treaty of Paris put an end to the American Revolutionary War. Fort Michilimackinac, known today as Fort Mackinac, was awarded to the United States, but was not turned over until 1796.

The British had to build a new fort. St. Joseph Island was chosen due to its location near Fort Michilimackinac and Great Lakes transportation routes.

From a military standpoint, Fort St. Joseph's primary purpose was to protect the fur trade from the Americans. The British

Government's Indian Department was present at the fort to encourage good relations with Indigenous peoples.



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



# War of 1812

## The British military, Indigenous allies and fur trade partners captured Fort Michilimackinac

As early as 1807, relations between the United States and Great Britain were growing strained due to conflict over trade and foreign policies, as well as control over the Great Lakes and the fur trade.

Fort St. Joseph became a rallying point as soon as the United States declared war on Great Britain in June of 1812. Capt. Charles Roberts, the commanding officer at the time, knew that the fort was vulnerable to attack, and decided to go on the offensive. On July 17, 1812, Capt. Roberts led a force of about 40 regular soldiers, over 150 voyageurs and engagés, and almost 400 Indigenous warriors in a surprise attack to capture the American fort on Michilimackinac Island.

In 1814, an American expedition burned the vacated Fort St. Joseph to the ground.



19th century map showing early territorial borders and military positions during the War of 1812.

## After the War

### The British moved to Drummond Island

The peace treaty of 1814 returned all conquered territories to their previous owners. The British army returned Michilimackinac to the Americans, but decided not to rebuild Fort St. Joseph. Instead, they established a post on Drummond Island. Buildings that were not burned during the war were moved to the new site.



# Archaeology at Fort St. Joseph

## Beginning in the 1960s, archaeologists uncovered clues to life at the fort

Archaeologists play a significant role in piecing together the story of Fort St. Joseph.

The first scientific excavations and surveys were done in the 1960s and 1970s. This research helped identify 21 buildings with excavated cellars and 21 above-ground buildings.

In the early 2000s new technology was used to survey portions of the fort without digging into the ground. The electromagnetic survey identified an area in the northeast corner of the fort that may have been a midden (a place to dump garbage).

There are still many other buildings surrounding the fort

itself that have yet to be studied or identified. These features and the artifacts they contain may reveal more about the lives of civilians and Indigenous people at the fort.



Archaeologists excavating ruins of the fort, 1978.

## Artifacts

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



Clockwise from above: Fire steels; 10th Royal Veterans Battalion shoulder belt buckle; pearlware bowl.





# A Tour of the Fort

## 1 Palisade - A wall to protect the fort

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 protected the fort against Indigenous or American attack. Unfortunately, it deteriorated to such an extent that a violent windstorm blew a part of it down in 1811.

## 2 Powder Magazine - Safe storage for gunpowder



The thick walls and stone arch of this building protected the gunpowder stored inside from enemy fire. Archaeological evidence suggests that all the hardware (hinges, nails, etc.) was made of copper in order to avoid sparks. It was used from 1805 to 1828, and was the longest-lived of the fort's buildings. When the British army established a new post on nearby Drummond Island after the War of 1812, they continued to use the Fort St. Joseph powder magazine.

## 3 Old Bakehouse and Kitchen - Providing food for the soldiers



The bakehouse was very important in the lives of ordinary soldiers since bread was one of the few fresh foods in their diet. When the bakehouse burned down in 1802, it was a devastating loss. The soldiers erected a temporary roof over the damaged oven, but it took two years to construct a suitable new bakery outside the palisade walls.

## 4 Blockhouse - Housing for officers and soldiers



The ground floor of this two-storey building was used to store ordnance and supplies. The second storey provided housing for officers and soldiers.

The fireplaces were sometimes dangerous. On two occasions, the support timbers under the hearths caught fire and smoldered for days before being noticed. *There was also a risk that the cedar shingle roof might be set on fire by sparks from the chimneys.* It was later covered with roofing tin.

## 5 Kitchens - Replacing what was lost

After the 1802 fire destroyed the old bakehouse and kitchen, construction began on two new kitchens. The soldiers' kitchen was completed in 1804, and the officers' kitchen in 1805. This building foundation matches recommendations for

the soldiers' kitchen. The location of the new officers' kitchen has not yet been identified.

## 6 Stores Building - A workshop converted into officer's quarters



The history of this building is shrouded in mystery. The exact date of its construction is not known, but it did exist in 1802 when a report mentions that it was used for stores and as a workshop. *The building was converted into quarters for the Commissary and Barracks Master in 1810.* The fireplace was added at that time



## 7 **Guardhouse** - Shelter for lookout soldiers



Despite the remote location of the fort, the military kept a 24-hour guard. The guardhouse had a room where sentries could rest between rounds, and three small solitary cells known as "black holes" which held soldiers who had broken regulations.

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

## 8 **Chimney** - A challenge for archaeologists



The identification of the chimney structure has challenged archaeologists and historians. The structure does not appear on any period maps of the fort. Archaeology suggests the chimney may have been constructed after 1814, building on the remains of a smaller fireplace.

## 9 **Military Wharf** - A landing place for ships with news and supplies



The military wharf has long since been washed away by ice, water, and wind.

Only part of the stone-filled wooden cribbing remains on the floor of the lake.

Smaller bateaux ferried barrels of provisions, tools, weapons and trade goods to the wharf. The arrival of the first ships after the spring ice break-up brought news and visitors to the isolated outpost.



# Legend

- 1** Palisade
- 2** Powder Magazine
- 3** Old Bakehouse and Kitchen
- 4** Blockhouse
- 5** Kitchens
- 6** Stores Building
- 7** Guardhouse
- 8** Chimney
- 9** Military Wharf
- 10** New Bakehouse
- 11** Traders' Huts
- 12** Civilian Structure 2
- 13** Civilian Structure 1
- 14** Blacksmith Shop
- 15** Demonstration Area
-  Demonstrations
-  Exhibit
-  Gift Shop
-  Hiking Lookout
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Toilet
-  Visitor Centre

## Ruins of Fort St. Joseph



LAKE HURON  
(North Channel)



## 10 **New Bakehouse** - A safer location to make the soldier's daily bread



During the old bakehouse fire in 1802, the soldiers were afraid that the flames would

spread to the neighbouring blockhouse. The new bakehouse, completed in 1804, was relocated outside the fort walls for safety.

After the move to Drummond Island in 1814, a small detachment remained at Fort St. Joseph. The soldiers added a small room to the new bakehouse, and used the building as a living space.

## 11 **Traders' Huts** - Small buildings for storage and housing



Artist's sketch of a semi-subterranean trader's hut, based on archaeological evidence.

In 1798, the military gave fur trade merchants permission to establish their presence on the island. These merchants built many small buildings in this area that were used for housing or storage, eleven of which have been excavated. Each one was dug into the ground and had a cellar beneath a wooden floor. The above-ground part of the buildings was likely built of squared timbers and many of them had glass windows.

## 12 **Civilian Structure 2** - A house that was not burned in the war



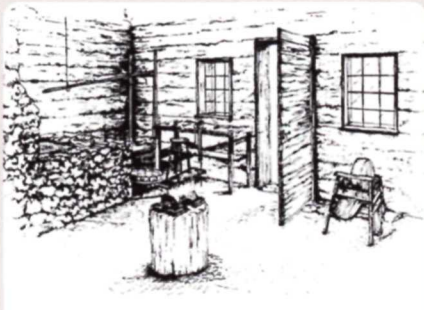
Unlike the other buildings surrounding the fort, this house does not show evidence of burning by the Americans in 1814. This suggests that it may have belonged to the South West Company, a trading firm partially owned by an American named John Jacob Astor.

### 13 **Civilian Structure 1** - Hunting and fishing provided extra food



Since the fort relied on food supplies to be shipped from Lower Canada, it was common for residents to hunt, fish, or trade with Indigenous peoples. Animal bones found in Civilian Structures 1 and 2 show that the people ate wild game species such as deer, fish, waterfowl and passenger pigeon.

### 14 **Blacksmith Shop** - An essential service for the entire community



Artist's sketch of the interior of the Blacksmith shop based on archaeological evidence

In an isolated outpost such as Fort St. Joseph, blacksmiths were indispensable. The blacksmith manufactured items for everyday use, such as nails, hinges and axes, and repaired tools, weapons, and traps. Everyone was equally in need of their services: the army, merchants and Indigenous peoples. The artifacts from this blacksmith shop suggest it was used by a fur trade merchant. The British Indian Department also had its own blacksmith here.

### 15 **Demonstration Area**



Visit the Demonstration Area to meet interpreters dressed in period clothing and learn about skills and activities from the era of Fort St. Joseph.



# Explore the serene wilderness trails around the fort



## 1 **Voyageur Trail** - 0.4 km loop, easy, 15-30 minutes



This trail begins at the fort ruins and passes through part of the community that surrounded the fort.

Remains of structures can still be seen through the trees.

## 2 **Rains Point Trail** - 1 km out and back, easy, 24-45 minutes



Access this trail from the fort road. Parking is available in a small lot across the road from the trailhead.

The trail leads to the rocky Lake Huron shore and Parks Canada's iconic Red Chairs. Rains Point was first occupied by the Michilimackinac Company. They had two large stores and a house in 1808. In 1837 Major William Rains, a settler who had attempted to colonize St. Joseph Island in 1835, built a home here. Lilacs, rose bushes and grape vines that he planted still thrive today.

### 3 Lapointe Point Trail - 1.8 km out and back, easy, 45-60 minutes



Access this trail from the fort road. Parking is available in a small lot across the road from the trailhead.

The trail leads to a small bay between Rains and Lapointe Point where waterfowl can sometimes be seen. Before the construction of Fort St. Joseph, a temporary fort was constructed in this area.

### 4 Cemetery Trail - 2 km loop, easy, 45-90 minutes



Access the trail from the cemetery. Parking is available at the trailhead.

The trail passes through a mixed softwood and hardwood forest that is typical for St. Joseph Island. Beech, maple, oak, yellow birch, and hemlock occupy the higher ground while small ponds are present in lower areas.







# Other Site Features

## Cemetery - Remembering those who were lost

Nothing remains of the crosses that originally marked the graves in this small shady cemetery. The cairn and memorial marker were erected in 1954. In all, at least ten deaths were recorded at the fort during its period of active use; most were the result of some tragic event. For example, Private

Gazzinel was killed when a loaded gun accidentally discharged. Other losses include a deserter from the 100th Regiment who froze to death 50 kilometres from the fort, and twins born to Jessie Crawford, wife of one of the fur traders.

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## St. Joseph Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary

Fort St. Joseph National Historic Site and the offshore waters extending to the International Boundary are designated as the St. Joseph Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary. The sanctuary was established in 1951 to protect migratory birds from extensive hunting that was happening in the area at the time. Ducks and other waterfowl are common in the open water and marshy areas of the site, while

songbirds can be heard throughout the forests. To date, over 200 different bird species have been identified here. Additional birding resources are available at the visitor centre.





**Open June 1 to September 30**

**Features**

- Visitor centre
- Gift Shop
- Daily historic demonstrations
- Xplorers & Club Parka activities for kids
- Nature trails
- Picnic areas
- Special events


**Location**

92 kilometres south-east of Sault Ste. Marie on St. Joseph Island, Ontario

**For information**

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