

FORT WELLINGTON NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

PRESCOTT, ONTARIO



A WISE NATION PRESERVES ITS RECORDS
... GATHERS UP ITS MUNIMENTS ... DECO-
RATES THE TOMBS OF ITS ILLUSTRIOUS
DEAD ... REPAIRS ITS GREAT PUBLIC
STRUCTURES AND FOSTERS NATIONAL
PRIDE AND LOVE OF COUNTRY BY
PERPETUAL REFERENCE TO THE SACRI-
FICES AND GLORIES OF THE PAST.

... *Joseph Howe*

Issued under the authority of the
Honourable Jean Chrétien, P.C., M.P., B.A., LL.L
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

On the outbreak of war with the United States in 1812, British authorities decided to fortify Prescott as the main base for the defence of communications between Montreal and Kingston.

The first site selected was at Windmill Point, then called New Jerusalem, where General Sir Jeffrey Amherst had established his headquarters in 1760. However a different location was chosen when the War of 1812 began and a new fort was built. It was named Wellington in honour of the Duke who recently had led British forces in the brilliant victory of Salamanca in Spain.

Originally Fort Wellington consisted of a wood-and-earth blockhouse, rather larger than the present structure and containing quarters for officers and about 150 men. North of the blockhouse, a barracks for 110 men were built and later artillery barracks, officers' quarters, engineers' stores, stables, a forge, a wood yard and a lime kiln. An outpost battery was built at the edge of the St. Lawrence River, near where the present railway freight building is located.

The fort's armament was four 24-pounder, two 18-pounder and three 12-pounder cannon. Fort Wellington at this time occupied 82½ acres; today the area of the fort is only one-tenth of this because after the War of 1812 the land included in the fort was sold to residents of the growing town of Prescott.

Throughout its 150-year history Fort Wellington saw five periods of military activity. During the War of 1812 its garrison attacked Ogdensburg, New York, twice. The first attack failed but the second gave the British command of the town and the river. Shortly after the capture of Ogdensburg, the guns of Fort Wellington fired on an American fleet making its way down the river for an attack on Montreal.

During the "Mackenzie Rebellion" of 1838, a band of adventurers from the United States led by Baron von Schoultz invaded Canada and occupied the windmill at Windmill Point.

British and Canadian troops assembled to put down this unofficial intervention by soldiers-of-fortune in what was essentially a Canadian rebellion but found Fort Wellington in too poor a condition to serve as a base. To repair and reconstruct the fort, Royal Engineers came from Kingston and their works are substantially those that exist today.

During the Fenian Raids of 1866 the fort was garrisoned by an artillery battery and on the outbreak of the Red River Rebellion of 1869 by a company of the 56th Canadian Battalion. A small garrison was kept in the fort also during the Northwest Rebellion of 1885.

Fort Wellington is being restored and refurnished to the period of the 1840's when an unit of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment was stationed here. This regiment was composed of volunteers who had served for 15 years in any of the 19 British regiments on duty in Canada and its main task was to prevent desertion.

To this Royal Canadian Regiment on July 16, 1841, was posted Captain George Black, formerly lieutenant and adjutant with the 80th Regiment of Foot, the Staffordshire Volunteers. Captain Black served for three years as commanding officer at Fort Wellington.

The officers' quarters at Fort Wellington is restored to its possible appearance in the years when Captain Black lived there. His bed-chamber is on the north end of the building and the office, which also served as a dining room, at the south end; between is the kitchen, in which lived a N.C.O. who probably combined the duties of cook, batman and orderly.

The bedroom and office are furnished with pieces of late-Sheraton or Regency style and the kitchen is more colonial in appearance. In the kitchen native Canadian furnishings of pine contrast with the mahogany and walnut furniture that Captain Black brought with him from Great Britain, and iron, pewter, copper and pottery replace silver, brass and porcelain.

The visitor will see the fort immediately east of the town, rising above the ramparts and surrounded by a tall palisade.

In the centre of the enclosure stands the blockhouse, a massive stone building of three storeys, fifty feet square with walls four feet thick, pierced with loop-holes. The upper portion, faced with wood, projects beyond the stonework and contains a gallery equipped with trap doors through which the defenders could drop missiles and fire at any enemy who might scale the ramparts and reach the walls of the fort.

On the south side is the entrance to the blockhouse through a narrow opening, guarded by a heavy door. On the ground floor are four rooms. The magazine room on the left was originally used for the storage of non-explosive material and a similar room on the right is now used to house part of the museum exhibits. Along the passage are two adjoining rooms, which, guarded by strong copper-lined doors and furnished with ventilators, formed the powder magazine of the fort. Beneath the floor of the passageway is a well 45 feet deep, designed to supply the fort with water in case of siege.

Passing from the interior of the blockhouse to the parade ground, the visitor's attention is attracted by a subterranean passage about three feet in width and lined with heavy stone, which leads to the caponniere. This building, oblong in shape, with curved end towards the south, was erected in 1838 and was intended as an additional defence to guard the ramparts in case of attack.

The small log building north of the blockhouse was erected as a residence by Edward Jessup. It was later used as a guardhouse by the various garrisons stationed at Fort Wellington. Edward Jessup was born in Stamford, Connecticut, in 1735. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he took up arms for the King and joined the Army, under General Burgoyne. After the war Jessup settled in the township of Augusta, founding the town of Prescott, where he died in 1816.

In 1923, Fort Wellington was placed under the care of the National Parks Branch of the Department of the Interior, and is now administered by the National Historic Sites Service.

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