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# FORT WELLINGTON

## National Historic Park

### A Self-guiding Tour





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1845 RCRR rifleman at rest.

◀ *Encampment at Fort Wellington during the Fenian Threat.*

## A Brief History

Two Fort Wellingtons have occupied the height of land above the St. Lawrence River at Prescott. They were built to guard the international border during the periods in the nineteenth century when Canada's existence was repeatedly threatened.

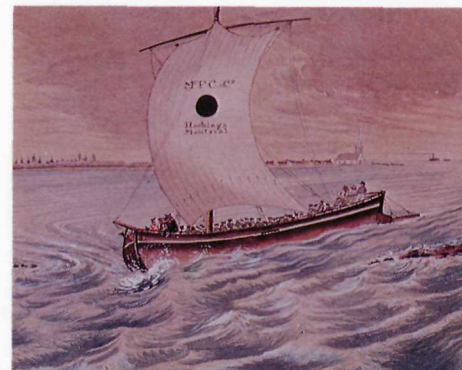
The first Fort Wellington was built during the War of 1812 to protect British shipping between Upper and Lower Canada. Situated just upstream from an eighty kilometre stretch of rapids, the fort was constructed at a strategic location where the batteaux and Durham boats, used to navigate the rapids, transferred their cargoes to lake vessels. Although peace was signed late in 1814, Fort Wellington was garrisoned for several years more. The improvement of British relations with the United States reduced its military importance, however, and by the 1830's it was in ruins.

The second Fort Wellington was built as a result of the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837-38. Because the rebels failed to overthrow the colony's government, many of them fled to the United States where they

gained supporters for an invasion of Upper Canada. Disquieted by the threat, the government, in 1838, ordered the reconstruction of Fort Wellington. Completed in 1839, the fort itself was never attacked. Its garrison, however, took part in the Battle of the Windmill (1838), at a site a little more than a kilometre east of the fort.

Fort Wellington was garrisoned until the early 1850's, by which time relations between the United States and Britain had considerably improved. From 1866-1870 it was again garrisoned because of the threat of border raids by the Fenians, a group of Irish-Americans hostile to British rule. That threat, too, passed away, and, thereafter, the fort served as a militia depot for a number of years.

In 1923, Fort Wellington was declared a National Historic Site. It is now administered by Parks Canada, and its buildings and earthworks have been restored to represent the fort as it was in 1845 when garrisoned by a company of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment.



*Bateau descending Lachine rapids.*

*Bateau qui descend les rapides de Lachine.*

## Points of Interest

### 1. The Main Gates

Consisting of large double doors mounted in a stone archway, the Main Gates are the only entrance to the fort. They were the most vulnerable part of the fort and, because an attack was likely to come from the direction of the river, were situated in the north wall. The carronade, a piece of artillery mounted over the Gates, protected the northern approach to the fort.

### 2. The Officers' Quarters

This building is furnished to represent the living quarters of a captain of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment. The northernmost room is the bedroom; the centre room, the kitchen and servant's quarters; and the south room, the dining room and office.

The officer's servant was an enlisted man chosen from the ranks of the company. He slept in the kitchen, on a cot which folded into a bench for daytime use. He cleaned the quarters, cared for the officer's uniform and cooked his meals.



◀ Officer's Dining Room.  
*Salle à dîner de l'officier*

The kitchen was equipped for the preparation of elaborate meals. While enlisted men suffered a diet of boiled meat and potatoes, an officer expected to dine on fresh venison, roast beef, veal and a wide assortment of well-prepared dishes.

The living quarters are well furnished and comfortable. Because an officer moved often from post to post, most of his furniture was designed to be easily transportable. The dresser in the bedroom is an example. Made in two sections, with handles at both ends, it is light enough to be carried by only two men.

### 3. The Latrine Building

This building, which has not yet been restored, housed the officers' latrine and the men's and women's privies.

### 4. The Blockhouse

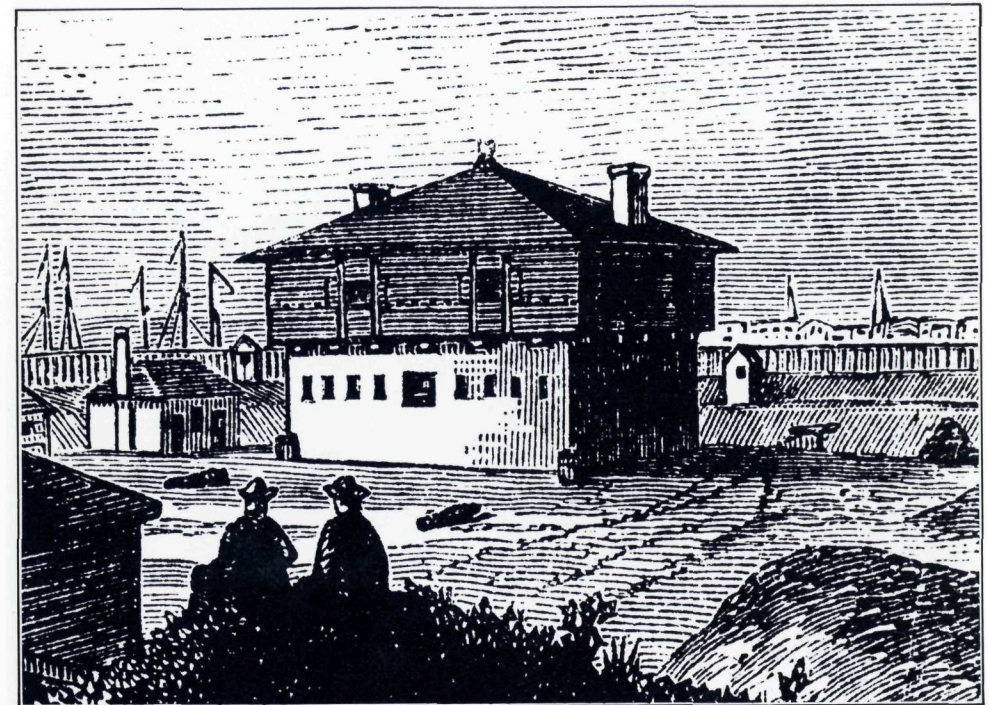
A massive stone structure, the Blockhouse is a fort within the fort. Its walls are almost a metre thick at ground level. Loop-holes cut into the walls allowed defenders to fire on enemy soldiers who had gained entry to the fort. On the third floor level, there is a walkway, the machicoulis, which overhangs the blockhouse wall, enabling defenders to fire directly down on the enemy through trap doors. To protect the Blockhouse against mortar shells, the roof structure was filled with layers of cedar logs. Within the Blockhouse, a well-supplied garrison would have been able to hold out against the enemy until the arrival of reinforcements from Kingston.

#### GROUND FLOOR: Guard Room and Storerooms

To the right of the entrance is a room originally used as a Guardroom. Here, the sentries rested between shifts. Later it was the Artillery Stores' Room.

Opposite the Guardroom is the Armoury. Over 1700 muskets were stored here for issue to the local militia in the event of an invasion or rebellion.

To the right of the stairs is a room originally built for the Commissariat Stores. In it were stored various pieces of equipment, uniform items, cartridge paper and barrels of flour, salt pork and beef. Later it was a canteen, where soldiers bought beer and other items.



▶ *The Blockhouse from  
Lossing's Pictorial Field-book, 1860*

*Le Blockhaus  
Pira de Lossing "Pictorial Field-book, 1860*

The Powder Magazine, to the left of the Commissariat Stores, is large enough to hold over four hundred barrels of gunpowder, an amount which, if exploded, would have destroyed the blockhouse. Many precautions were taken to prevent such an occurrence. The use of iron from which a dangerous spark might have been struck was avoided: the fittings of the doors were of brass, the doors were sheathed in copper and the ventilation shafts were clad with copper. Iron nails were used to hold the boards in place, but the boards were elaborately laid to avoid exposing them. Because an enemy soldier could have fired into the magazine through the ventilation shafts, they were designed to zig-zag through the outer walls.

When gunpowder was measured into musket or cannon cartridges, the barrels were moved, one at a time, into the adjacent Shifting Room. As a precaution, it was separated from the magazine by two heavy wooden doors covered with copper.

#### **SECOND and THIRD FLOORS: Barracks**

The Barracks housed the men of the garrison and their wives and children. In contrast to officers, they lived under appalling conditions which were crowded and unsanitary.

From the third floor, a number of low doorways provided access to the machi-coulis, mentioned earlier as part of the defences of the Blockhouse.

*Daily routine.*

*La routine quotidienne.*



*Daily life, 1845.*

*Vie quotidienne, 1845.*



## 5. The Caponnière

The Caponnière is of stone thick enough to stop small calibre cannon balls; its roof is made of heavy timbers covered with a layer of earth to make it bomb proof. Joined to the fort by a passage under the earthworks, the Caponnière allowed defenders a secure position from which to fire at attackers who had reached the ditch.

## 6. The Earthworks

The outer defences of the fort consisted of the ditch, the palisade and the ramparts. Attacking soldiers would have had to contend with these lines of defence while under fire from the fort.

Fort Wellington was not, however, a large-scale fortification. It was not designed to withstand a well-equipped, determined enemy, and its earthen ramparts were defenceless against large calibre mortars.

## 7. Artillery

Fort Wellington was equipped with two 24 pounder cannons, two 12 pounder cannons, two 10 inch mortars and a carronade.

Mounted on traversing platforms, the 24 pounders fired cannon balls weighing 24 pounds (52.8 kg). They face the river and could have been used to fire at enemy shipping or to destroy buildings in the American town of Ogdensburg. The mortars, mounted south of the block-house, served the same purpose. They fired a 10 inch diameter exploding shell, weighing about 41 kilograms, a distance

of 2286 metres.

The 12 pounder on the north earthworks were to protect the areas to the north, east and west of the fort, while the carronade, mounted over the Main Gates, protected the northern approaches.

## 8. The Lost Buildings

Two other buildings once stood within the ramparts of Fort Wellington: the Guardhouse, to the east of the Main Gates, and the Cookhouse, between the Officers' Quarters and the Latrine. Off-duty sentries rested in the Guardhouse between shifts, and the Cookhouse was used for the preparation of the soldiers' meals.

At various times, the fort's garrison used buildings outside of the fort. There were storehouses, stables and other military structures which were torn down as Prescott expanded.

For more detailed information on Fort Wellington, contact:

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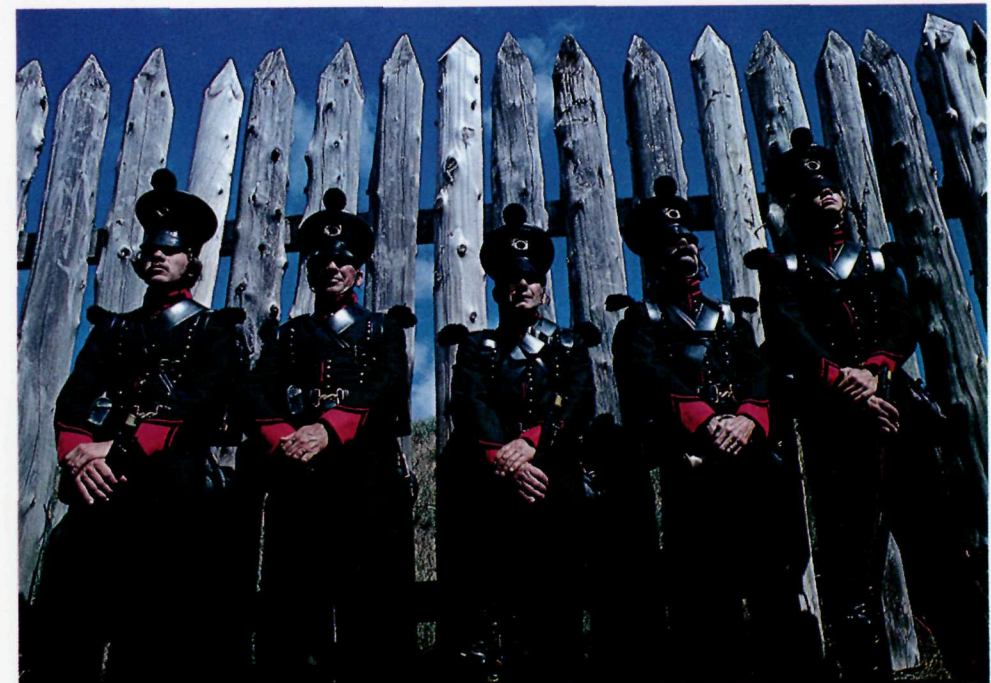
*Minutes before morning parade.*

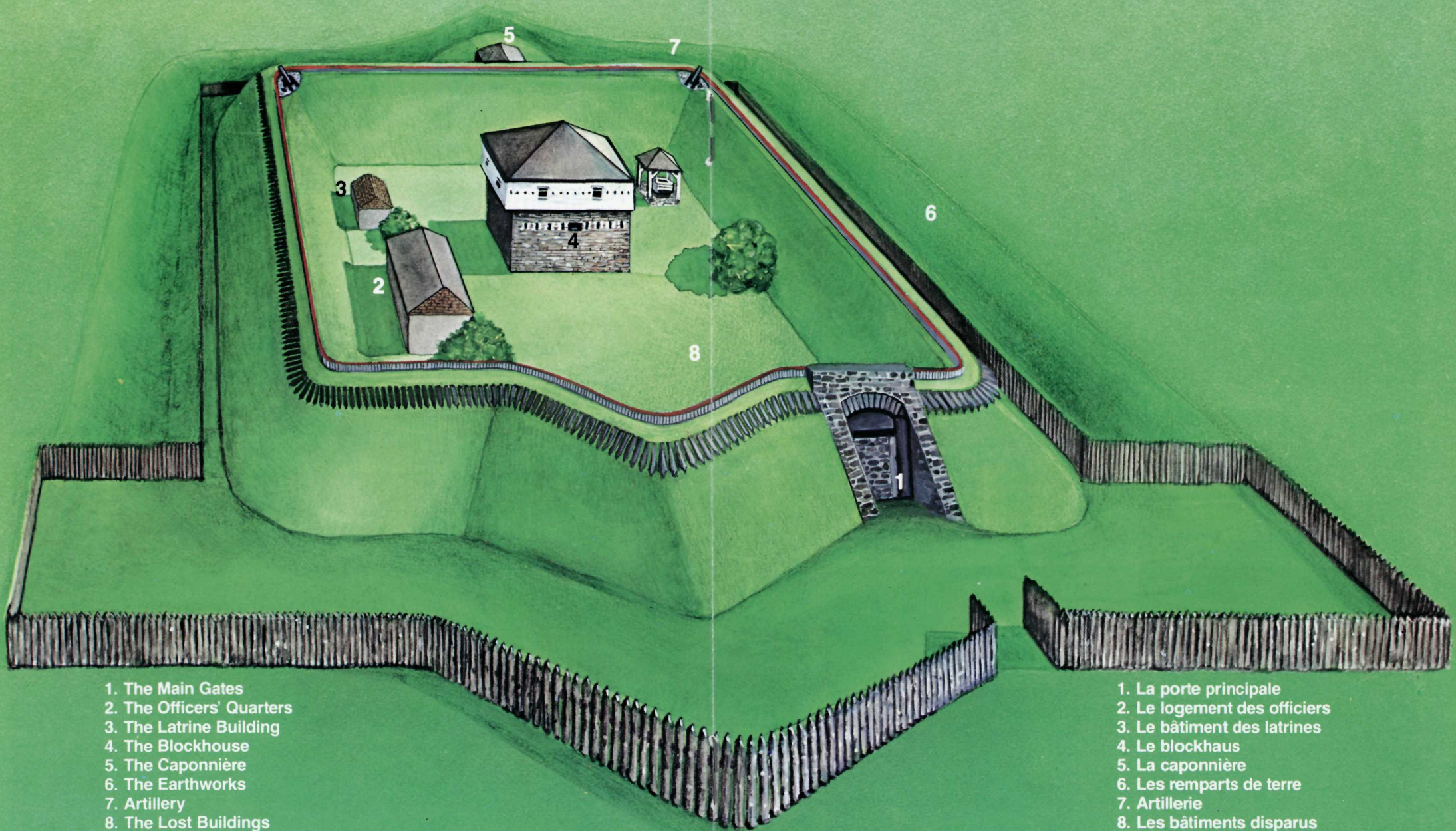
*Quelques minutes avant la parade du matin.*



*Receiving orders.*

*Attentif aux ordres.*





- 1. The Main Gates
- 2. The Officers' Quarters
- 3. The Latrine Building
- 4. The Blockhouse
- 5. The Caponnière
- 6. The Earthworks
- 7. Artillery
- 8. The Lost Buildings

- 1. La porte principale
- 2. Le logement des officiers
- 3. Le bâtiment des latrines
- 4. Le blockhaus
- 5. La caponnière
- 6. Les remparts de terre
- 7. Artillerie
- 8. Les bâtiments disparus