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FORT WELLINGTON

NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

Walking Tour





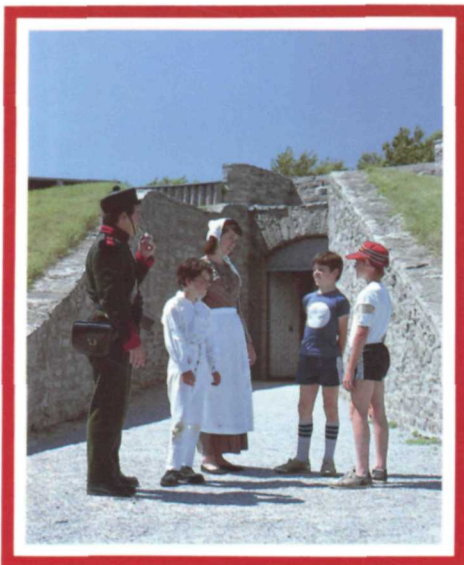
Encampment at Fort Wellington during the Fenian Threat.

Welcome

As you wander through the grounds and historic buildings of Fort Wellington you will see a fort refurbished to represent its appearance in 1846. At that time it was garrisoned by a company of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, a unit of the British Army.

This was the second Fort Wellington to occupy this strategically important site overlooking the St. Lawrence River. Both forts were built to protect transportation along the St. Lawrence River during periods in the 19th century when Canada's existence was repeatedly threatened.

Discover for yourself what life was like here more than 140 years ago. Enter the fort's imposing main gates and become a part of the past.



Visitors being greeted at the main gate.

A Brief History

The first Fort Wellington was built during the War of 1812 to protect British shipping between Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec). Situated just upstream from an eighty kilometre stretch of rapids, the fort was constructed at a strategic location where the bateaux and Durham boats, used to navigate the rapids, transferred their cargoes to lake vessels. Although a peace treaty 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 1830s it was abandoned and left to decay.

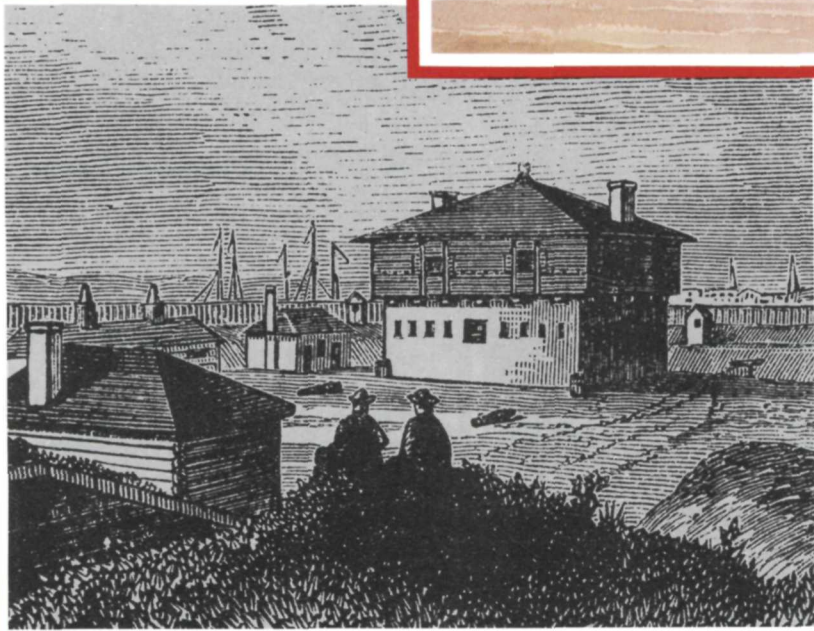
The second fort was built as a result of the outbreak of rebellions in Canada in 1837. When the rebels failed to overthrow the colonial governments, many of them fled to the United States. There they gained support for an invasion of the *Canadas*. The British government, meanwhile, in response to the threat, ordered the reconstruction of Fort Wellington in 1838. 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 1850s, 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 Great Britain. By 1870, that threat, too, passed away. 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 the Canadian Parks Service.

The Windmill near Prescott, after the 1838 rebellion. Fort Wellington is visible in the background.



The blockhouse in 1860, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-book of the War of 1812 (1869).



Fortifications have stood guard over the St. Lawrence River at Prescott since the War of 1812. Today there are friendly relations with the nearby town of Ogdensburg, New York.

Using This Guide

As you begin your tour of the site, you may wish to follow the sequence suggested in this guide. A diagram situated on pages 6 and 7 identifies the fort's major features.

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 Officer's Quarters

This building is furnished to represent the living quarters of an Ensign of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment in the year 1846. The northernmost room is the bedroom; the centre room, the kitchen; and the south room, the dining room and office.

Officers lived much better than the private soldiers. Each officer was assigned a soldier-servant to clean his quarters, care for his uniforms and prepare some of his 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 fur-



Officer's bedroom.



Soldiers' wives and children lived with the men in the barracks.

nished 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.

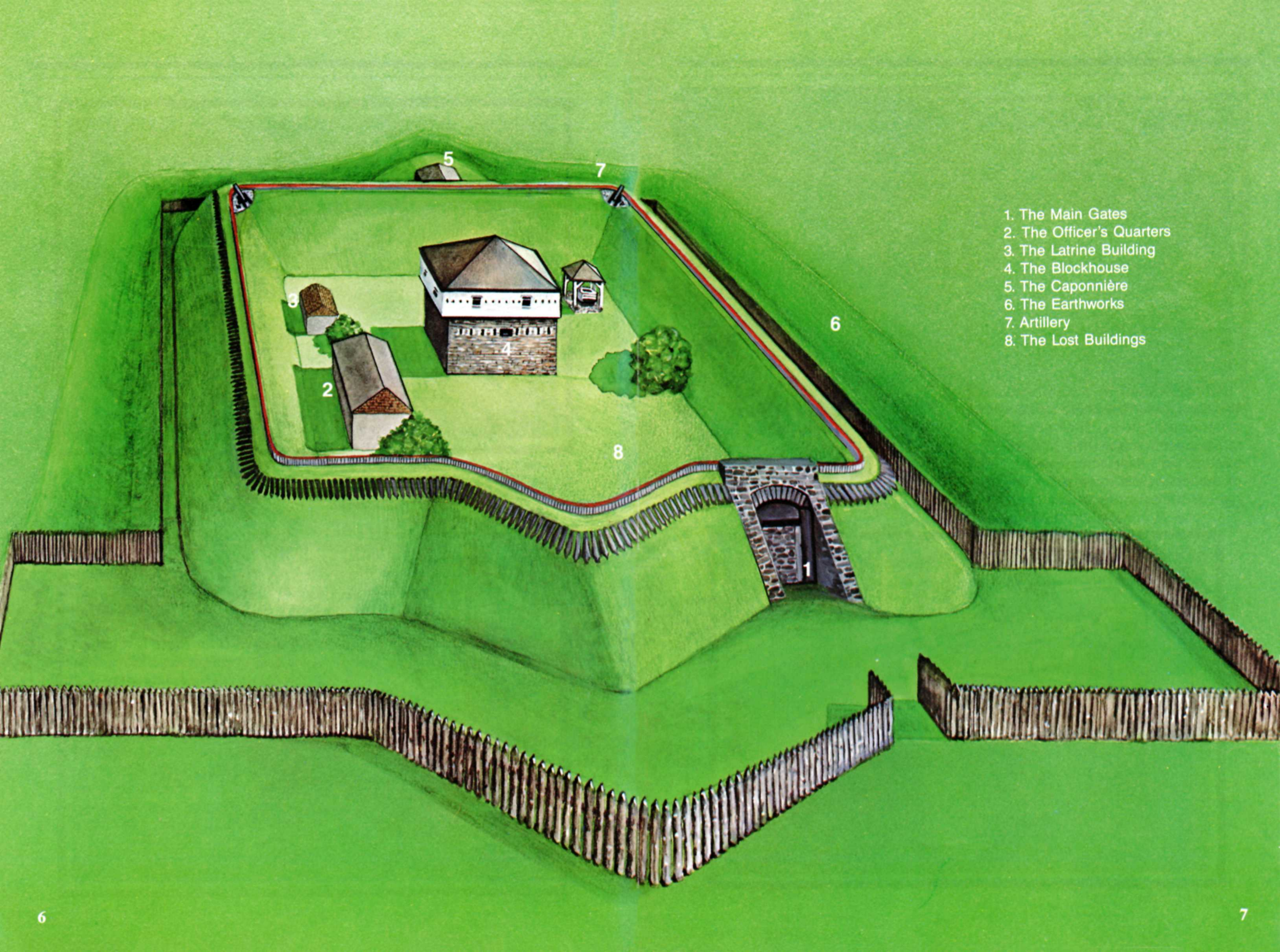
3. The Latrine Building

This building housed the privies for the officers, enlisted men and the women. It is scheduled for restoration in a few years.

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 there is a gallery which overhangs the blockhouse walls. It enabled 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.



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

GROUND FLOOR: Powder Magazine and Storage Rooms

To the right of the entrance are rooms used as artillery stores and ordnance stores. While artillery stores contained equipment used to fire the fort's cannons, the ordnance store was used for surplus supplies and other material.

On the other side of the hall 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 the commissariat stores. Emergency rations, such as salt beef and biscuit, were kept here. Passing to the left of the stairs, on your right is the refurbished barrack



Commissariat stores.



Artillery stores



Daily routine in 1846.

stores room where various pieces of equipment, tools and uniforms were stored.

The powder magazine, to the left of the barrack stores, is large enough to hold over two 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. To prevent an enemy soldier from firing into the magazine from outside, ventilation shafts zig-zagged 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. In 1846, at least 65 men, 26 women and 36 children lived on the second and third floors.

From the third floor, a number of

low doorways provided access to the overhanging gallery, mentioned earlier as part of the defences of the blockhouse.

This floor currently houses an exhibit that traces the history of the fort.

5. The Caponnière

The caponnière is constructed 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 offered 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, which bristled with horizontal log defences known as fraises. 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



Artillerymen using levers to move a mortar.



Horizontal fraising provided a formidable defense against an enemy attack.

mortars, a carronade and a 6 pounder field gun.

Mounted on traversing platforms, the 24 pounders fired cannon balls weighing 24 pounds (10.9 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 blockhouse, served the same purpose. They fired a 10 inch (25 cm) diameter exploding shell, weighing about 41 kilograms, which could hit targets across the river.

The 12 pounders 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.

The field gun, a mobile piece, stood near the blockhouse.

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 officer's 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.

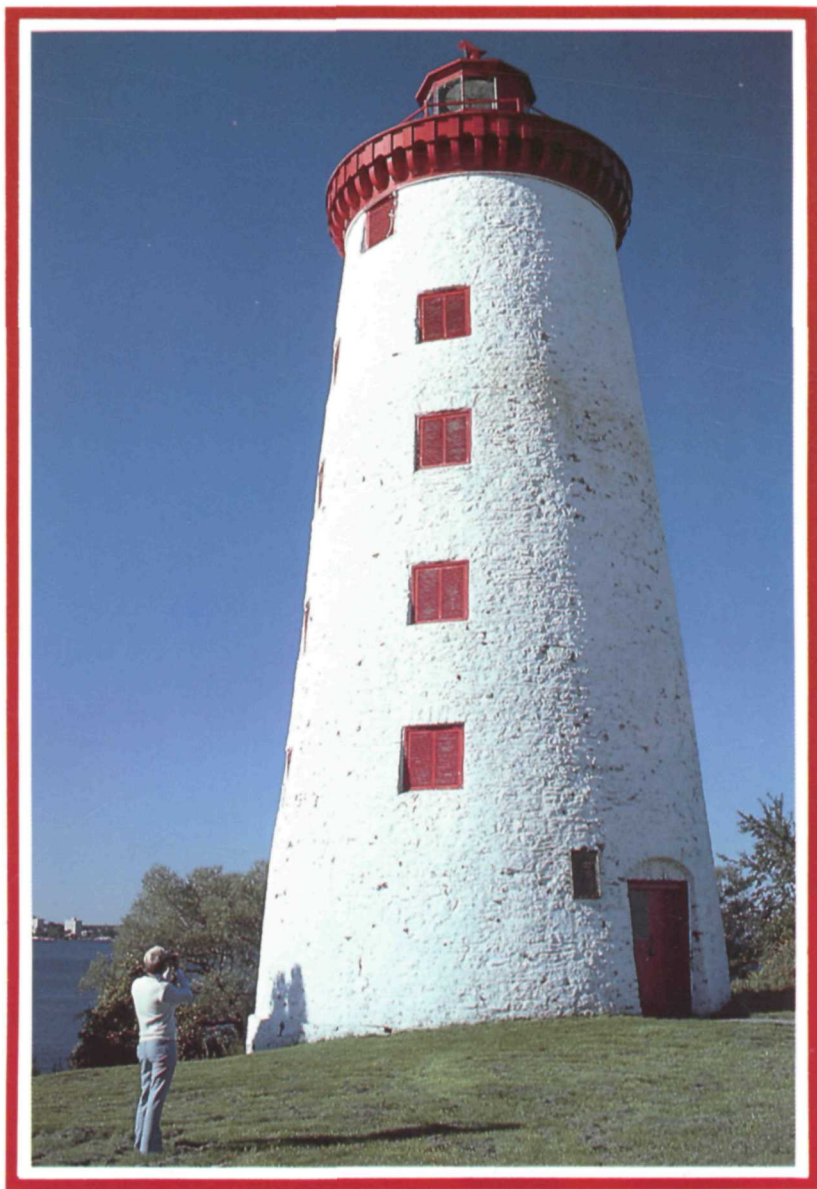
At various times, the fort's garrison used buildings outside of the fort. There were storehouses, stables and other military structures which were torn down as Prescott expanded.



For more detailed information on
Fort Wellington, contact:

Area Superintendent,
Fort Wellington National Historic
Park,
P.O. Box 479,
Prescott, Ontario. K0E 1T0
Telephone: (613) 925-2896





In 1838 the garrison at Fort Wellington helped to suppress an invasion by Canadian rebels and American sympathizers at the Battle of the Windmill. This national historic site is located just off Hwy. 2, east of Prescott.



1846 RCRR rifleman at rest.

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