

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario
Blockhouse No. 2
Fort George

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Blockhouse No. 2 was built in 1939, to designs by Toronto architects W.L. Somerville and Edward Carswell, as part of the reconstruction of Fort George. Minor repairs and reroofing have been undertaken since construction. The Environment Canada Parks Service is the custodial department. See FHBRO Building Report 89-15.

Reasons For Designation

Blockhouse No. 2 was designated Recognized because of its association with the 1930s philosophy of preservation and presentation of historic sites, and its architectural qualities, its use of traditional materials and techniques, and its relatively unchanged environment.

The Depression was a period of development at historic sites accelerated by the provision of government funding for relief works programs. The philosophy of historic reconstruction employed at a variety of Canadian historic sites in the 1930s followed a North American pattern influenced by the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg. Both the Niagara Parks Commission and Ontario Ministry of Highways, advocated the reconstruction of Fort George as a tourist destination. Both the reconstruction process and the subsequent influx of the public contributed to the economic development of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

At Fort George, the architects tended to interpret freely the historic information, and to supplement it with conjecture where necessary. The rugged appearance of the Fort George blockhouses - based on Fort York blockhouses after their exterior cladding was removed during a 1934 "restoration" - represents the Somerville and Carswell's concept of the "frontier" aesthetic.

Blockhouse No. 2 houses a ground-floor display, and is a local landmark.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this structure is defined by its architectural qualities, craftsmanship and materials, and its contribution to the military character of the setting.

The plans and dimensions of the Fort George blockhouses were generally based on similar structures surviving at Fort York. Blockhouse No. 2, however, has been doubled in length, and as a result does not closely resemble its prototype.

It does, however, exhibit defence-related details - loopholes, small windows and

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second-storey entrances. As is typical of the other reconstructed Fort George blockhouses, it is constructed of squared logs with dovetailed corners. The roof is covered with hand-split cedar shakes.

The structures were reconstructed to evoke the massing of the originals and to interpret one aspect of military life in the pre-1812 fort. The use of traditional materials, methods and hand tools in their construction was part of the reconstruction philosophy of the 1930s. As the heritage character of Blockhouse No. 2 resides in its 1930s use of traditional design and construction, these elements should be preserved.

The site and setting of the structure has changed relatively little since its reconstruction. The blockhouse contributes to the military ambience of the fort, and is a local landmark.

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