

FHBRO Number 96-51

Kingston, Ontario

Curtain Wall and Demi-bastions

Fort Henry

The curtain wall and demi-bastions of Fort Henry were reconstructed in 1936-38, according to the remains of the original curtain wall and the documentation for the original fort structures prepared by Lt.-Col. Gustavus Nicolls. Architect William Lyon Sommerville, with the assistance of the historian Ronald Way, designed the reconstruction. Service conduits and Gunitite finishes are the only known intrusions since the reconstruction date. The building is currently used as a museum. The Department of National Defence is the custodian of this National Historic Site. See FHBRO Building Report 96-51.

Reasons for Designation

The curtain wall and demi-bastions have been designated Classified mainly because of their environmental associations, but also because of their importance as a work of architecture and of historical reconstruction.

The curtain wall and demi-bastions are prominent landmarks within Fort Henry. The reconstructed wall and casemates close off the south side of the redoubt. They also contain the main entrance to the parade ground and the redoubt through the drawbridge and therefore make a formidable first impression on the visitor.

The building is based on the original as designed by Nicolls. The reconstruction is a reasonable facsimile of the original wall, and as such, plays an important role in replacing a lost element of the fort.

The design work of Sommerville on the reconstruction of a curtain wall and demi-bastions marked a turning point in his career. After work at Fort Henry, Sommerville and his research assistant, Ronald Way, were involved in other projects of a similar nature. Their work set the pace for future restoration projects of this type and signaled a new movement in conservation: the living museum.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the curtain wall and demi-bastions resides in their prominent location in Fort Henry and in the high level of integrity of the reconstruction.

The design of the curtain wall and demi-bastions followed the site evidence and documents prepared by Nicolls. The original structure spanned the width of the parade ground. Aesthetically, it was designed in the British classical tradition. The present design has the same level of sophistication and quality of materials as its 1834 predecessor. The structure deviates from the original drawings in matters of proportion and precise measurements. Also, the high round-headed arch over the main gate

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differs from the original elliptical one. Overall however, the reconstruction conveys a reasonable image of the original 19th century military building. Discrepancies should not be corrected in the future because they represent this structure and its time in history.

The curtain wall and demi-bastions were reconstructed with the same care and quality of materials as the original building. The builders used Kingston limestone, the same material that the original builders used one hundred years previously. The design is restrained, but not without decorative features, in keeping with the traditional neoclassical style used in British fortifications at the time. It exhibits order, good craftsmanship and symmetry. Future maintenance and repair should ensure the same level of quality.

The interior layout of the curtain wall and demi-bastions follows the original design. It includes casemates, now housing a museum on life in the 19th-century fort. Each bay contains one door and a single window. On the exterior, the facade on the ditch side of the wall has loopholes and a vaulted entrance passage over the drawbridge. Stairways in the far corners of the curtain wall lead to the terreplein of the demi-bastions. The integrity of all openings should be maintained. Contemporary intrusions should be kept to a minimum. Water penetration problems merit priority attention. In time, interior Gunitite finishes should be replaced with finishes more appropriate to the fort.

The curtain wall and demi-bastions are key landmarks within the fort complex and are a familiar sight to those visiting the fort. No significant alterations have occurred to their respective sites since the reconstruction. The integrity of the setting will be maintained when the view of the curtain wall and demi-bastions is free of obstructions, additions or vegetation. The drawbridge merits careful maintenance.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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