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FORT GEORGE

National Historic Park

Walking Tour



A Tour of the Fort



Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, the hero of Upper Canada. (Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum)

Welcome to Fort George. This guide will introduce you to a major British fort as it prepared for war with the United States nearly two hundred years ago.

In defending against invasion, Fort George helped prevent the Niagara area, and indeed all of British North America, from falling into the hands of the Americans during the War of 1812.

Today you may wander as you please, and, with the help of this booklet, explore this historic fort. During the main visitor season, you may watch soldiers in period uniform perform drills on the parade square, witness musket and artillery demonstrations, learn 19th-century cooking techniques, and admire the ingenuity and craftsmanship of artificers in the carpenter's and blacksmith's shops.

Enter the fort's imposing front gates, and become part of a frontier garrison preparing for war.

Using This Guide

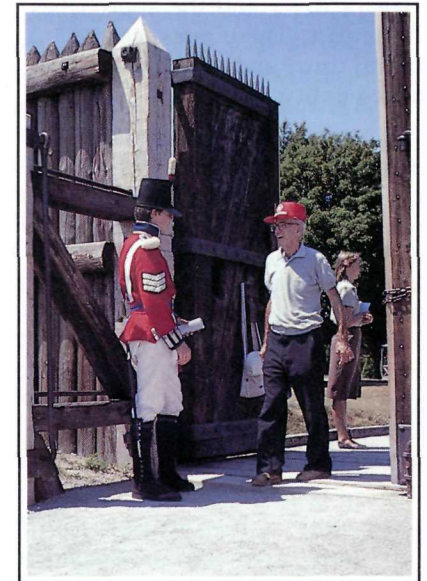
As you begin your tour of the grounds and buildings you may wish to follow the sequence suggested in this guide. A site map situated on pages 6 and 7 identifies the fort's major features.

1. Front Gates and Sentry Box

You will notice that the fort's main entrance is secured by heavy gates made of massive timbers and

reinforced with iron spikes. By day, these gates were open, and a sentry was posted to keep careful watch over all who entered. At night, they were closed and locked. A sentry box was provided for him near the gates as shelter during bad weather.

An enemy force attempting to storm the gates faced certain obstacles. The gates opened outwards: the crush of enemy troops forcing their way in actually helped the defenders close the gates quickly.



Visitors are welcomed at the front gates.

A V-shaped picketing called a ravelin served to break the enemy force in two and direct it into the range of the cannon in the bastions to the left and right. The bridge was protected by a pair of smaller cannon, and the dry ditch made access to the wooden palisade difficult.

2. The Park of Artillery

Artillery was essential to the defence of Fort George. Large garrison guns were mounted in the fort's bastions to cover the Niagara River and the approaches to the fort. These guns weighed several tons, and could not be moved easily.

Gunners of this era were also equipped with field artillery which was much more mobile. Field guns were designed to be moved quickly into battle to support the infantry. When not in actual use, the field guns would have been lined up in a state of readiness in a park of artillery. In addition to the field guns, the park also contained support vehicles such as a portable blacksmith's forge and ammunition carts.

3. Guardhouse

The guardhouse was the centre of the fort's daily operations. All visitors — merchants, contractors, suppliers, etc. — were required to report here before proceeding with their business.

For the guards manning the sentry posts, the guardhouse was a place to rest between four-hour shifts. The shelf bed allowed a few hours of light sleep, but soldiers were not permitted to remove their uniforms or accoutrements while they slept.



Field artillery was transported by horses to the battle site.

As uncomfortable as the soldiers must have been, the prisoners were more so. Deserters, drunken soldiers, and other unfortunates were confined to small, dark cells. Flogging, the punishment for most offences, was administered outside, on the punishment triangle. The offender's shirt was removed, his wrists tied to the cross-piece, and a cat-o'-nine tails laid on formally and rigorously. When an offender was sentenced to more lashes than he could withstand without danger to life, his punishment was delivered in instalments.

4. Officers' Quarters

Officers expected to live like gentlemen, even on the frontier, and those at Fort George were no exception. They attempted to re-create in their living quarters the high material and social standards they were accustomed to in Great Britain. The mess — the centre of social activity — is the central feature of this building. Originally, the word mess meant to eat. Later, it came to mean dining together, and ultimately, to signify a dining room or social area.

Elaborate mess rules were established, and social life here became a military version of civilian "high society." Dinners were sophisticated affairs, complete with silverware, fine china, pewter serving dishes, and decanters of port and sherry. After dinner, card games, music, and more imbibing of wine would conclude the evening in the games room.

The bedrooms or personal quarters reflect the background, rank, and interests of the officers. Some furniture was brought from home, some purchased from local cabinet-makers or tradesmen, and some supplied by the barrackmaster.

5. Officers' Kitchen

This building provided the officers' mess with elaborate full-course dinners. It contains typical early 19th-century cooking technology. An experienced cook could create sophisticated dishes in this simple open hearth and brick bake oven.



Senior officers dined in relative luxury.

Army cooks and civilian cooks hired in Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake) were expected to be able to prepare such delicacies as collared beef, fruit tarts, wine sauces, claret jelly, and other favourites. The ingredients reflected a discriminating standard of living. Some, such as chocolate, soy sauce, lemons, tea, and spices, were imported. Others, such as vegetables, fresh meat, and fruit, were purchased from the town market. Fresh game and fish from the countryside provided sport and a change of diet for the officers.

6. Artificers' Building

Self-sufficiency was critical in British North America. Thousands of miles of forest, rivers, and ocean separated the colony from the mother country — the central source of supplies. It was essential that the army employ well-trained and resourceful craftsmen, or artificers. Often only their initiative could get the job done.

The carpenter and the blacksmith, the two most important artificers, could repair or manufacture almost any item, from tools for other craftsmen and mess benches for the enlisted men to gun carriages and fort buildings such as blockhouses.

Today, craftsmen and their apprentices re-live the tradition of the military artificer at Fort George. Tools such as flatters and adzes are used to reproduce and repair articles once found in everyday use in the British army on the frontier.

7. Powder Magazine

Built in 1796, the powder magazine was the only fort building to survive the War of 1812 and the ensuing years of neglect.

During the tensions of the early 1800s, several hundred barrels of gunpowder were stored within these thick stone walls. Strict precautions were designed to avoid an accidental explosion, which could have destroyed not only the magazine but also much of the fort. Only spark-proof materials were approved for use in the magazine. The floor boards were secured with wooden pegs, not iron nails. The doors were covered with copper, and soldiers working here wore special smocks and shoes with no metal fastenings.

Although this building was protected from cannon fire by high earthen banks, it once received a direct hit from American gunners at Fort Niagara. On October 13,



Captain Vigoreux and his men saved the powder magazine from an American red-hot shot on October 13, 1812.

1812, during the Battle of Queenston Heights, a red-hot cannonball penetrated the roof and set fire to the wooden supports. With 800 barrels of gunpowder apt to explode, the garrison deserted the fort in panic. Only a small party of local militiamen and Royal artillerymen, led by Captain Vigoreux of the Royal Engineers, remained. They climbed onto the magazine roof, tore off the metal, and extinguished the fire before it could ignite the gunpowder.

8. Octagonal Blockhouse

This small octagonal blockhouse in the centre of the south ravelin is a replica of the original. Constructed as an artillery storehouse, the original structure also provided a defensive position and lookout during an attack.

The south ravelin served the same defensive function as the north ravelin at the front gates, but is much stronger. A passage called a caponier connects it to the fort.

9. Sawpit and Woodyard

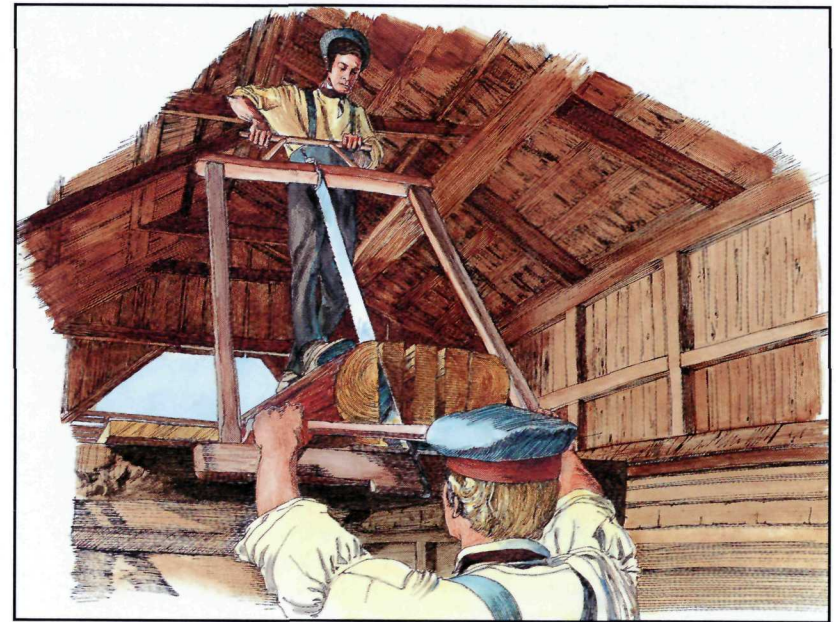
This sawpit was used from 1937 to 1940 to produce boards and planks for the reconstruction of Fort George, in the same manner that sawpits were used nearly two centuries earlier. It was a gruelling two-man operation: one man stood on the log; the other in the pit. Using a large pit saw, they could cut boards of any desired thickness by sawing down the log lengthwise.

The area enclosed by a rail fence represents a woodyard. Firewood was the principle fuel used for both heating and cooking at Fort George. The commissariat officer

would purchase cords of wood from local merchants to issue to the garrison. Because firewood was a valuable commodity, it was stored in a fenced area patrolled by a sentry.

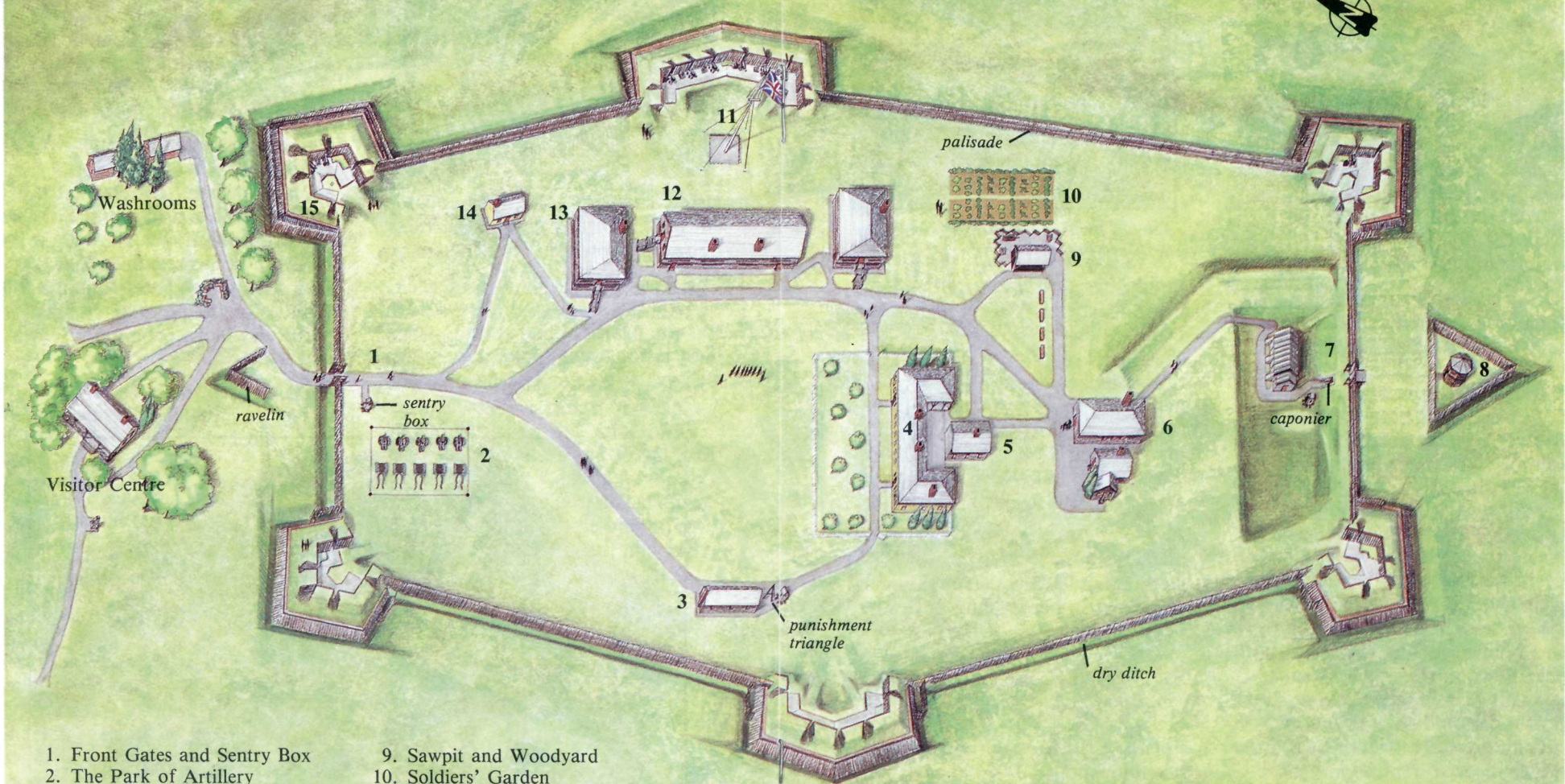
10. Soldiers' Garden

The British army issued an official ration to their soldiers that included dried peas, dried rice, salt beef and other preserved items. Soldiers at Fort George were allowed to cultivate gardens to supplement their diet. This garden contains samples of the types of vegetables, herbs and fruits commonly grown in 1812.



Soldiers cutting planks in the sawpit.

FORT GEORGE



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| 8. Octagonal Blockhouse | |

11. Flag Bastion

Overlooking the American Fort Niagara across the Niagara River and commanding a view of the river, this bastion is the fort's largest and was the most heavily armed. The largest calibre cannons were placed in the centre of the earthworks to oppose American batteries on the opposite shore. Nine-pounder guns at either side covered the palisade walls and swept the dry ditch to protect against infantry attack.



The flag bastion with cannon overlooking the Niagara River.

Below the bastion stretched the storehouses and wharves of Navy Hall, local headquarters for Britain's Great Lakes fleet. This military complex was destroyed by the Americans during the War of 1812. The reconstructed stone building is all that remains of Navy Hall today.

12. Blockhouse 2 — Interior

In times of peace, the blockhouse at Fort George stored supplies for the garrison, or for forwarding to other forts on the upper Great Lakes. It also provided living quarters for the soldiers and their wives and children. Six of every 100 men at Fort George were permitted to bring their families, which were fed and housed at the army's expense. The "married quarters" consisted of a blanket hung around a bottom bunk. Children slept in a spare bunk, on the floor, or wherever they could find a spot.

Food, like most aspects of a soldier's life, was fixed by regulation. Daily rations of flour, fresh meat, cheese in lieu of butter, peas, and rice were issued. For variety, the men often pooled their resources to buy vegetables from the town market. They combined their ingredients in a stew, which was served at noon.

A soldier's possessions, which might amount to a change of clothing and a few personal items, were kept in packs hung on wall pegs.

13. Blockhouse 1 — Exterior

For the British Army on the frontier, blockhouses were almost indispensable. These large rectangular buildings served as sturdy barracks and storehouses. Constructed of heavy white pine logs, their roofs and walls were "splinter proof." Jagged metal splinters from an exploding enemy artillery

shell could not penetrate. A well constructed blockhouse was really a fort within a fort. If the palisades were overrun, the blockhouses became the fort's last line of defence. Defenders took shelter inside, firing muskets through slits in the walls and floors. The upper storeys overhung the bottom storey so that soldiers could fire on an enemy taking shelter against the lower walls.

14. The Cottage



Cottages of this design were built near Fort George by local settlers or army officers desiring privacy.

This Georgian-style cottage is similar to one an officer or settler might have built for himself near the fort. Constructed with materials salvaged from an original building dating from about 1820, it was erected during the fort's reconstruction from 1937-1940.

The sturdy and secure Georgian style of architecture was introduced to the frontier by British and Loyalist settlers. It consisted of simple, well-proportioned buildings, symmetrical facades, and small-paned rectangular window openings.



Brock's bastion with cannon overlooking the Niagara River.

15. Brock's Bastion

Brock's bastion was the fort's most strategic. From here, British gunners could train heavy artillery directly into the heart of the American Fort Niagara. The bastion also covered the mouth of the Niagara River and was in position for firing on enemy ships attempting to gain access to the river from Lake Ontario. It is named after Major General Isaac Brock, who, along with Lieutenant Colonel John Macdonell, was buried here after the Battle of Queenston Heights, on October 13, 1812. Twelve years later, their bodies were re-interred in a vault in the newly constructed memorial on Queenston Heights, overlooking the historic battlefield.

History of the Fort

In the late 18th century, suspense and anxiety about the defence and future of the young British colony hovered over the Niagara frontier. There was great concern about the threat of an American invasion on this isolated and vulnerable settlement.

On the Niagara River bank stood a complex of military buildings known as Navy Hall, dating from 1765. It had been the headquarters for the volunteer Provincial Marine, and by the late 1790s had become a critical link in the supply route to British forts on the upper Great Lakes.

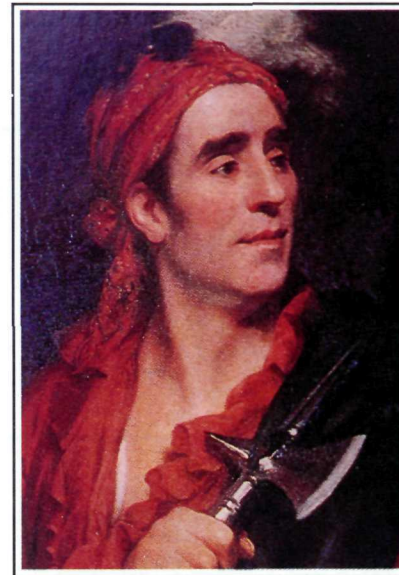


The Battle of Queenston Heights. Painted by Major Dennis, who was present at the battle. (Courtesy of the Weir Foundation)

Construction

The British built Fort George here between 1796 and 1799 to complement Navy Hall and to guard the strategic river mouth and Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake). As Fort George expanded over the years, it shared the supply depot role with Navy Hall and began to counter-balance uneasiness.

The strong presence of the British military at Fort George, the fort's well-trained and well-organized garrison, the strategic supply routes, and the gallant commander in chief, Major-General Isaac Brock, fostered a sense of security.



Chief John Norton, (Teyoninhokarawen), was of Scottish and Cherokee ancestry. Adopted by the Mohawk Chief, Joseph Brant, he rose to become the principal war chief of the 6 Nations of Iroquois. An important ally of the British, Norton led warriors at Queenston Heights, the Battle of Fort George and many other important military engagements. Courtesy of the Champlain Society, Toronto.

But this security was tempered by the attitudes of some of the Niagara settlers, whose loyalty to the colony was questionable. Nor was the much-needed allegiance of the Indians assured.

These perceptions of security and insecurity struck a capricious balance, and on the eve of the War of 1812 the Niagara frontier was apprehensive. Fort George was poised for an invasion.

More than a century later the his-



The esplanade — Fort George, watercolour by Edward Walsh, 1805 (Clements Library, University of Michigan).

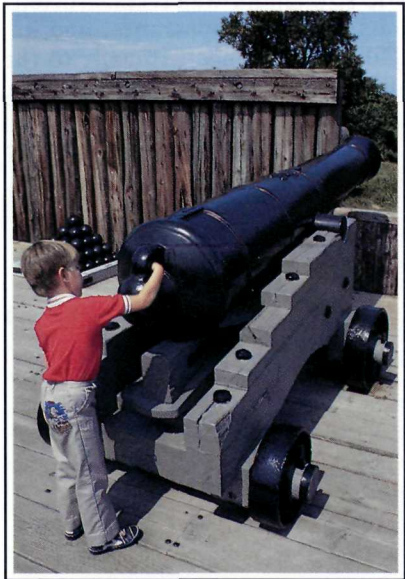
toric stronghold was reconstructed to its pre-1813 appearance, and in 1950 it was opened officially to the public. Since 1969, it has been administered by Environment Canada, Parks as a national historic park.

Fort George

During the War of 1812, the American campaign on the Niagara region focused on Fort George. In May 1813, American warships pounded the fort into a smoking ruin as a prelude to the sweeping invasion of the peninsula. The outnumbered British garrison was forced to withdraw. American army engineers later re-fortified the site and occupied it throughout the summer and autumn of 1813.

In December, the Americans abandoned Fort George, burned the town of Newark, and retreated to Fort Niagara. The British then re-occupied the fort, attacked and

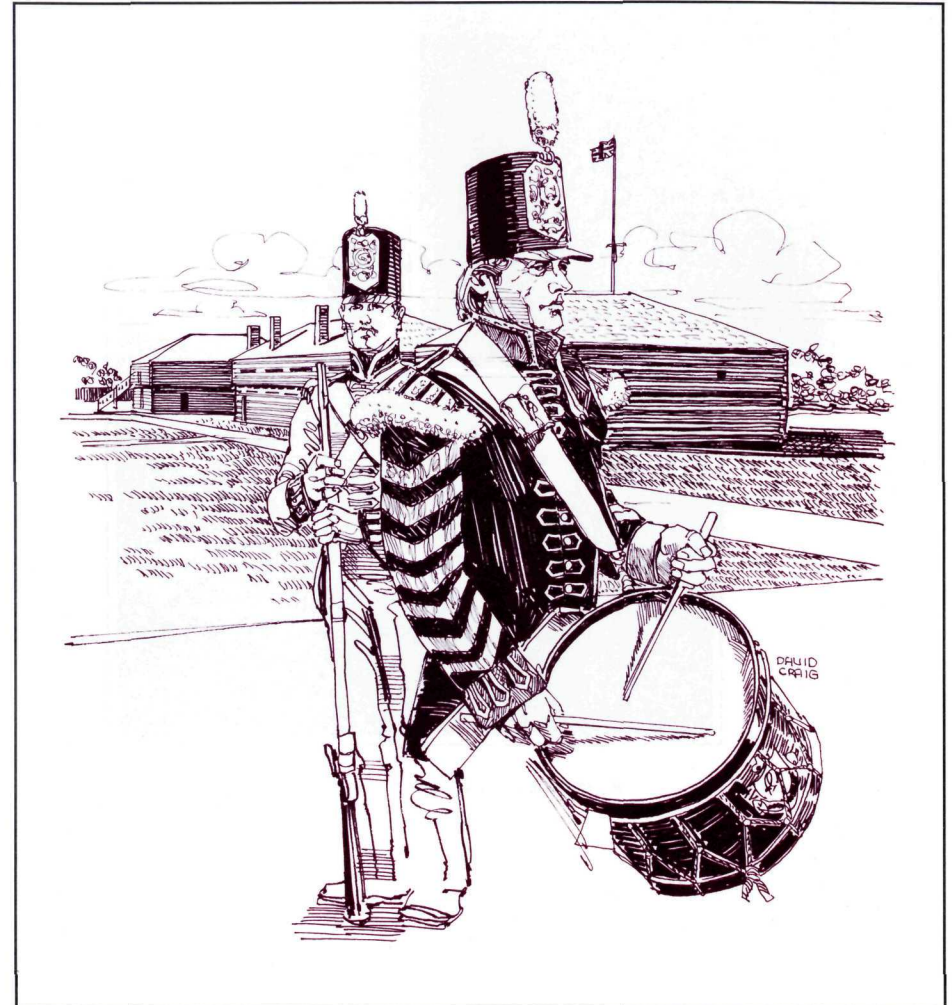
captured Fort Niagara and took firm control of the Niagara frontier. After the war, British engineers constructed Fort Mississauga at the river mouth and Butler's Barracks on the plains to replace Fort George. Fort George was allowed to fall into ruin, and was abandoned, finally, in the late 1820s.

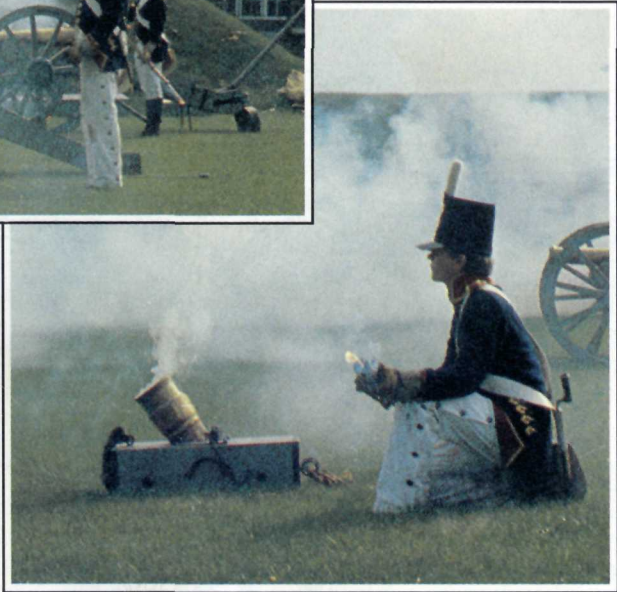


This brochure offers a glimpse of the rich history of Fort George National Historic Park. We invite you to attend our demonstrations, chat with our staff, and record your comments in our visitors' book.

For more information, please contact:

Superintendent
Niagara National Historic Parks
Box 787
Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario
L0S 1J0





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