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# The Many Faces of Fort George National Historic Site of Canada: Insights into a Historic Fort's Transformation

Barbara Leskovec

*Fort George National Historic Site of Canada is situated in the picturesque town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. Constructed by the British following the capitulation of Fort Niagara, Fort George is of national historic significance because it served as the Headquarters of the Central Division of the British Army, and played a crucial role in the defence of Upper Canada during the War of 1812. Archaeological investigations in the last 50 years have shed light on the fort's early structures and modifications. In 2009, funding allocated through the Federal Economic Action Plan provided an opportunity to further explore the fort's historic transformation. The following paper will present the findings from archaeological investigations and mitigation conducted at Fort George from 2009 to 2010 and delve into the nature of Fort George's early landscape, construction techniques of the British Royal Engineers, early occupations of the site, and the defensive alterations undertaken by the Americans during the War of 1812.*

*Le lieu historique national du Fort George est situé dans la ville pittoresque de Niagara-on-the-Lake, en Ontario (Canada). Construit suivant la capitulation de Fort Niagara, le Fort George est un lieu d'importance historique nationale parce qu'il a servi de quartiers généraux à la Division Centrale de l'armée Britannique, et a joué un rôle défensif crucial lors de la guerre de 1812. Les recherches archéologiques des 50 dernières années ont permis de faire la lumière sur les structures anciennes du fort ainsi que les modifications qui ont suivies. En 2009, le Plan d'action économique du Canada a permis aux archéologues d'explorer davantage les transformations historiques du fort. Cet article présente les résultats des recherches archéologiques menés au Fort George de 2009 à 2010, nous permettant ainsi de mieux comprendre la nature de paysage ancien du Fort George, les techniques de construction des ingénieurs royaux Britanniques, la période d'occupation ancienne du lieu et les modifications entreprises sur le fort par les Américain pendant la guerre de 1812.*

## Introduction

Parks Canada is a proud steward of nationally significant heritage places across Canada and is committed to fostering public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of these special places, while ensuring that these designated sites remain unimpaired for present and future generations. In support of its mandate, Parks Canada developed the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) Policy (Parks Canada Agency [PCA] 1994, Revised 2013), an integrated and holistic, principles-based approach to the management of these heritage places and the wide range of cultural resources that constitute them. In 2009, funding allotted through the Federal Economic Action Plan afforded Parks Canada an opportunity to implement the CRM Policy firsthand throughout an intensive two-year rehabilitation program at Fort George National Historic Site of Canada (NHSC).

Fort George NHSC is in the picturesque town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada (FIG 1). Rebuilt in the 1930s, Fort George NHSC

boasts six earthen bastions enclosed by a wooden palisade and defensive ditch (FIG 2). Funding acquired through the Federal Economic Action Plan was committed to the major rehabilitation of the defensive features in need of immediate attention at the fort: the degraded palisade and timber-faced bastions and embrasures. In support of the CRM Policy, Parks Canada archaeologists conducted investigations prior to construction, targeting areas to be impacted during rehabilitation activities. Aims of the archaeological program included locating and identifying features associated with the historic defensive works; discerning the impacts of the 1930s reconstruction upon the original fort; and improving the overall understanding of the archaeological potential of the site. Subsequently, findings from the archaeological investigations were used to inform engineering design and decision-making during construction monitoring activities.

The research presented here is only a fraction of the archaeological work undertaken at Fort George NHSC in the last 50 years. Focusing on

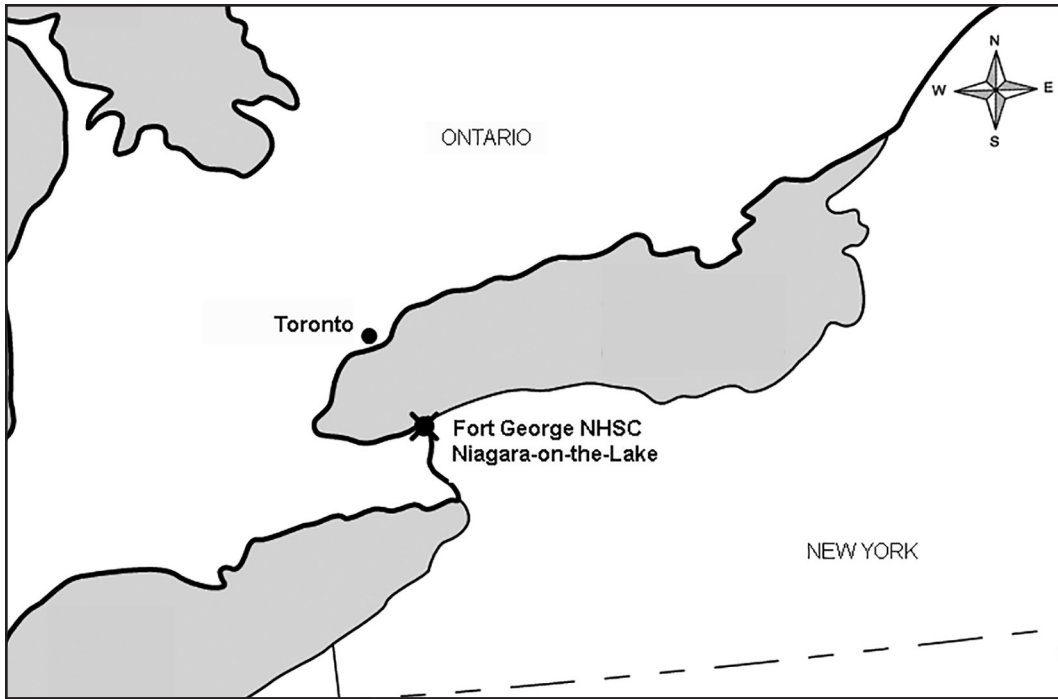


Figure 1. Location of Fort George National Historic Site of Canada, Niagara-on-the-Lake. (Figure by author, 2016; base map by Don Ryan, 2016.)

the findings from the 2009-2010 archaeological program, the following paper will provide insights into Fort George's historic transformation prior to and during the War of 1812. Supported by documentary evidence, topics will include the nature of Fort George's early landscape, construction techniques of the British Royal Engineers, early occupations of the site, and the defensive alterations undertaken by the Americans during their tenure.

### Historical Background

Following the capitulation of Fort Niagara in accordance with the terms of the Jay's Treaty (1794), the British quickly began construction of a new fort on the west bank of the Niagara River. This new fort, Fort George, was set on a military reserve located on a plateau bordered by a steep rise, west of the mouth of the Niagara River and south of the town of Newark<sup>1</sup>. Counterpoised to Fort Niagara, Fort George assisted in maintaining a British presence in the Niagara region and provided a commanding view of the Navy Hall complex positioned by

1. Newark, present-day Niagara-on-the-Lake, was the administrative capital of Upper Canada from 1792 to 1797.

the river below (PCA 1998: 2). Originally the Provincial Marine naval barracks, Navy Hill evolved into a naval base containing a small shipyard, the King's Wharf, stores, barracks and a supply yard. In 1792, the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, had one of the buildings converted into a residence.

The construction of Fort George commenced in 1796. The Corps of Royal Engineers toiled to erect officers' quarters, a guardhouse, kitchens, a storehouse and three blockhouses to accommodate the increasing garrison. Within the year, a masonry powder magazine with a brick-arched vault was constructed in the natural gully that traversed the southern half of the fort and afforded additional protection from enemy fire. In comparison, works on the defenses progressed rather slowly, that by January 1799, the governor in chief of British North America, General Robert Prescott, sent orders to Colonel Gother Mann<sup>2</sup> "to take measures as soon as practicable in the Spring for enclosing the Post of Fort George on

2. Gother Mann was the Royal Engineer in Canada from 1793 to 1804. In 1811, he was appointed inspector general of fortifications, responsible for reviewing fortification proposals throughout the British Empire. For British North America, he reviewed both fortifications and canal proposals.

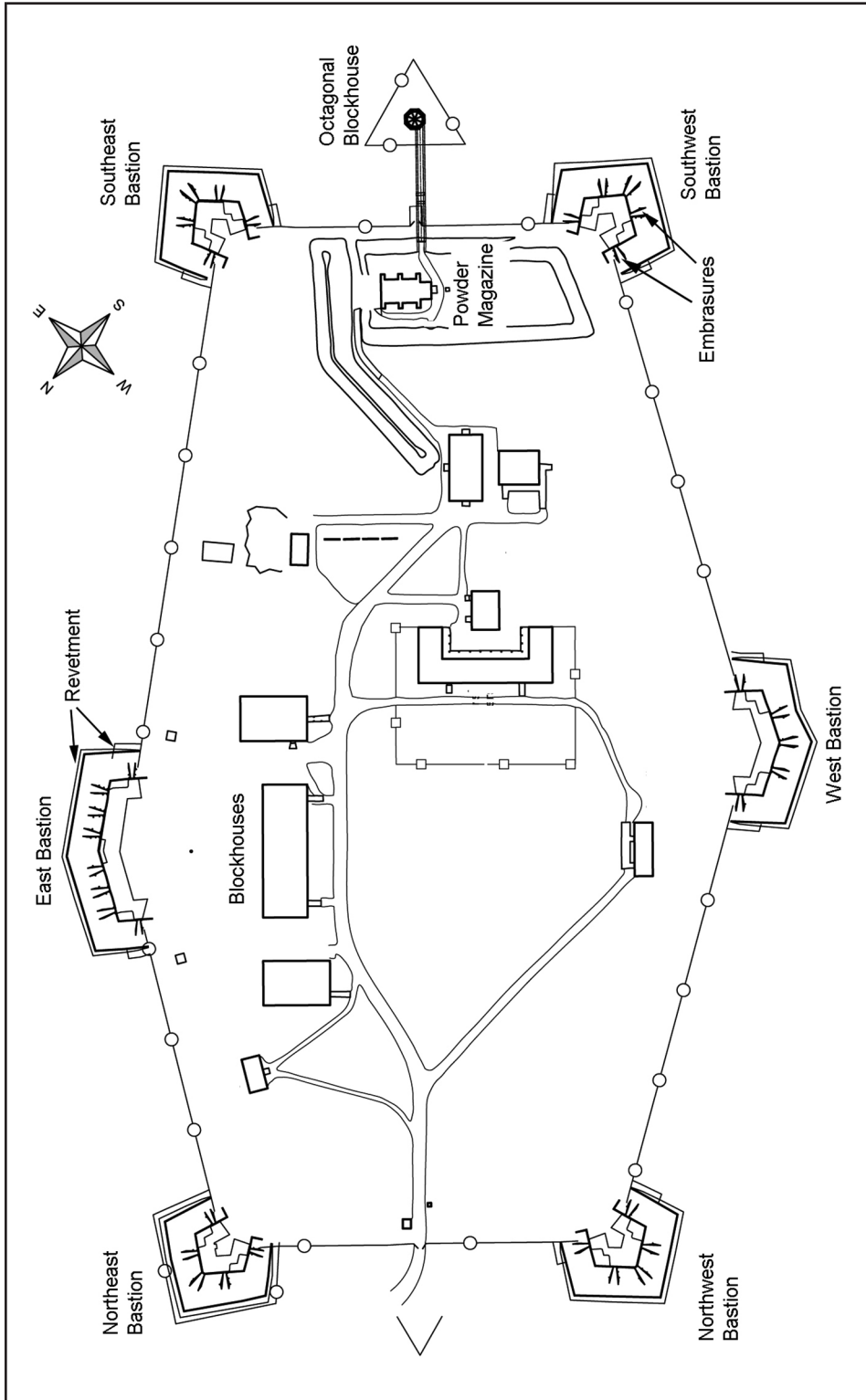


Figure 2. Site plan of Fort George National Historic Site of Canada. (Figure by author, 2016; base map by Don Ryan, 2016.)

the high ground above Navy Hall with a strong Picketing, in circumference about Twelve hundred yards, and to Flank the same with small Works" (Hunter 1799a). Mann had plans prepared and provided the necessary instructions to Captain Robert Pilkington, a Royal Engineer assigned to Upper Canada and active at Fort George during its construction. Permission was granted to Lieutenant Colonel John MacDonell, commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion Royal Canadian Volunteers<sup>3</sup> at Fort George, to contract for the procurement of timbers as a means to lower costs and, inadvertently, expedite construction (Hunter 1799b). Wood was obtained from trees felled in the area and floated down the Niagara River (MacDonell 1799). Cedar, likely the eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), was utilized for picketing (Cruikshank 1931). Oak was employed for gun platforms, and pine was used in the construction of buildings (Bowering 1979: 34). In 1800, an octagonal blockhouse was erected in the southeast redan to further bolster southern defenses.

Although there are some discrepancies as to the exact pre-war appearance of Fort George, historical documentation and period plans suggest that Fort George was "an irregular field work consisting of six small bastions, each faced with framed timber and plank...connected with a line of picketing, twelve feet high...and surrounded by a shallow dry ditch" (FIG 3) (Bruyères 1811). With rumours of war looming, orders were sent in 1812 to further strengthen the fortifications "as [was] necessary to render the post tenable" (Way and Way 1973). In September, Major General Roger Hale Sheaffe<sup>4</sup>, commander at Fort George, provided the following comments on the state of the fort:

We have been very busy in Fort George on the River side a Curtain as high as the Picket has been raised from the flat bastion to that on the right flank, on which are an eighteen and a twelve pounder on Travelling platforms of the new construction - the bastion on the left flank of that side, in which provisions were stored, has been filled up to be converted into a cavalier, on which one of [the] twentyfours is to be mounted (cited in Coleman 1977: 16).

3. The Royal Canadian Volunteers served at Fort George from 1798 to 1802 and would have provided much of the labor required for the construction of the fort.

4. Roger Hale Sheaffe arrived in Canada with the 49th Regiment of Foot in 1802 and took command of Fort George in May 1803. Sheaffe served as a general in Upper Canada during the War of 1812.

Major General Sheaffe further wrote on 3 November: "[W]e are yet employed in raising works for the protection of the interior of Fort George. The magazine is considered secure from the effects of hot shot" (Way and Way 1973: 27). In February 1813, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Henry Bruyères<sup>5</sup>, commanding Royal Engineer in Canada, inspected the fortifications at Fort George, noted key deficiencies and recommended that the existing fort footprint be replaced with a properly designed fieldwork reduced in size and containing low splinter-proof<sup>6</sup> buildings protected by solid curtains connecting the bastions (Way and Way 1973: 35).

Conceived originally as a supply depot, the design of Fort George was ill-suited as a fortification. Given its considerable size, Fort George was simply too large to be defended easily. Diminutive and poorly positioned bastions resulted in a lack of interlocking lines of fire, opening up areas for enemy assault. The wooden defences and buildings were extremely vulnerable, "liable at all times to accident by fire, and within the power of an enemy to be burnt," as Bruyères (1811) warned. The stone magazine, although vaulted, was not shell-proof. Additionally, although commanding Navy Hall, Fort George neither protected the town of Newark nor guarded the Niagara River, a vital supply route to the British forts south and west of the region. Ultimately, the poor design, combustible construction materials and location of Fort George contributed to the Americans' victory in the Battle of Fort George, and their subsequent seven-month occupation of the area.

### The Battle of Fort George

On 18 June 1812 the United States of America declared war on Great Britain. The acquisition of Canada was expected to "be a mere matter of marching," as so infamously written by Thomas Jefferson. The conflict that emerged was fought on a number of fronts, and Niagara became one of the most contentious and bloody loci of conflict in the War of 1812. Fort George represented one of the linchpins of British defense in the Niagara region.

On 25 May 1813 Fort George was **bombarded by American artillery**. An intensive

5. Ralph Henry Bruyères was the Royal Engineer in Canada from 1806 to 1814, succeeding Gother Mann.

6. Capable of withstanding the impact of solid shot or exploding shell without fragmenting.

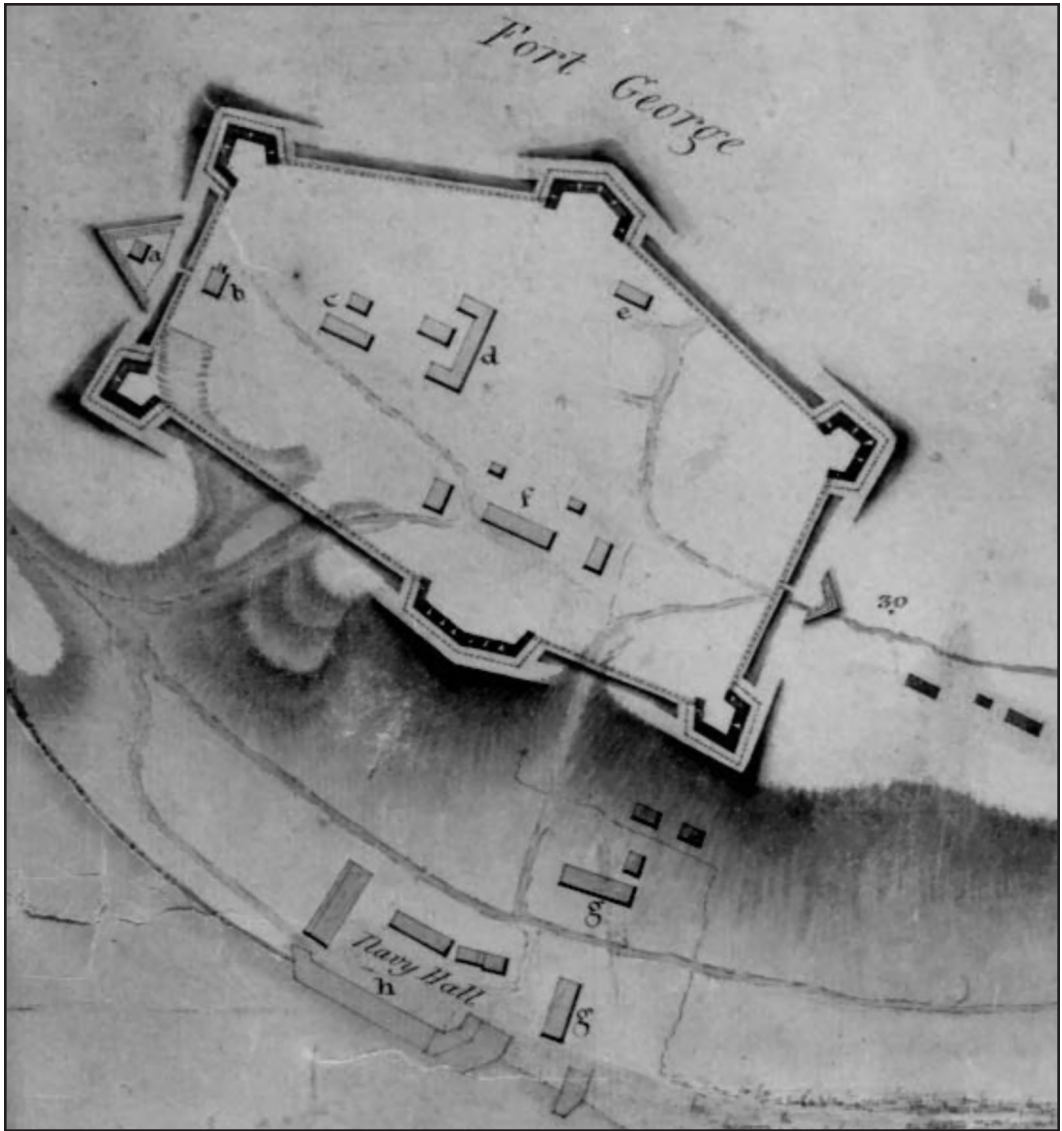


Figure 3. First Fort George, 1799. Letters represent the following: a: Blockhouse; b: Magazine; c: Hospital and Kitchen; d: Officers Quarters and Kitchens; e: Guard House; f: Set of Blockhouses; g: Storehouses; h: Wharf. Detail of "Plan of Fort George Upper Canada shewing the Works of Defence ordered to be constructed in 1799" (LAC, National Map Collection [NMC], 0016811).

barrage of shell and hotshot from Fort Niagara and new, heavily armed batteries on the American shore tore through Fort George and set fire to the log structures within. Two days later in a heavy fog, American fleets lined the Niagara River preparing to embark; the main assault had begun. Under cannonade cover, American forces landed by Two Mile Creek, approximately 3 kilometers west of Fort

George, and fighting ensued. As enemy troops continued to disembark, the outflanked British decided to draw back toward Fort George and the Commons. By noon, vastly outnumbered by the Americans, Brigadier General Vincent gave orders for the British forces to retreat. Prior to evacuating Fort George, the British spiked the guns and destroyed the ammunition (J. Vincent 1813). The sound of repeated explosions was

heard as British forces marched “in a line parallel to the Niagara river, towards the position near the Beaver Dams beyond Queenston mountain” (J. Vincent 1813). Although not directly besieged by American infantry, Fort George now lay decimated by the 25 May bombardment and free for enemy taking. In a correspondence from American Major General Dearborn to Governor Tompkins dated 27 May 1813, Dearborn wrote:

[W]e took possession of Fort George and its immediate dependencies this day. Our loss does not exceed thirty killed and forty-seven wounded. We have ascertained that the enemy had upwards of seventy killed and above 150 wounded. We made upwards of 100 prisoners. (Dearborn 1813: 401-402)

Confirmed British casualties included 52 killed, 44 wounded, and 262 wounded and missing (Baynes 1813).

American forces formally occupied Fort George on 9 June 1813 and began construction of a new field work (Bowering 1979: 64). The Americans completed a substantially smaller, more defensible, pentagonal fortification, likely incorporating some earlier fort elements into their new configuration. They further improved upon the defences: repaired the palisade, constructed temporary magazines, and added entrenchments that extended from

the northwest bastion into the town of Newark (FIG 4). The main American camp lay within this large enclosed space now effectively defensible from a potential inland attack (Wilson and Southwood 1976: 19). The Americans also established “a trench down to the river and a small redoubt” (Bowering 1979: 64).

Disease<sup>7</sup>, increased desertion rates, and British military advances in the region spurred on the American abandonment of Fort George on 10 December 1813. Hastily retreating, they “passed axes in [the] Cannon and Stores;” discarded guns, ammunition, and shot into the ditches; and set the town of Newark ablaze (DesLoges 1977: 80; Bowering 1979: 67). At the time of British reoccupation, only the original stone powder magazine and some temporary magazines were left standing at Fort George (Coleman 1977: 61). The British immediately began construction of new temporary barracks, a temporary officers’ quarters, a guardhouse and a brick powder magazine (Way and Way 1973: 37; Sattelberger 2001: 138). On 19 December 1813, with the capture of Fort Niagara on the

7. Typhoid, diarrhea, dysentery and “lake fever” caused by poor sanitation, a lack of personal hygiene, and adulterated foods, resulted in the deaths of American soldiers while encamped at Fort George (Coleman 1977: 35; Dale 2001: 50). Cases of ague were also noted among the British troops in 1799, possibly a result of the damp conditions in the wooden barracks (Vincent 1977: 117).

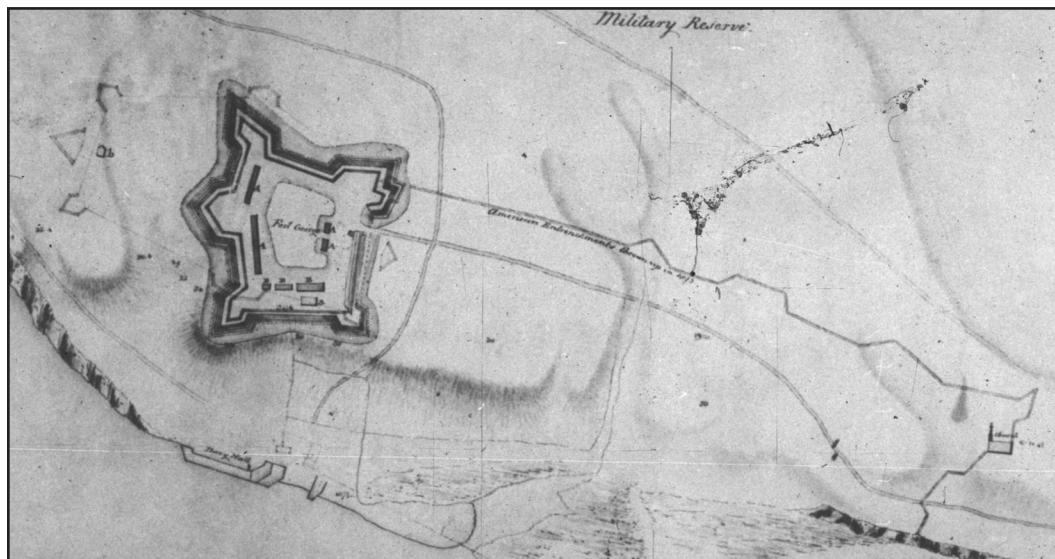


Figure 4. Second Fort George and American Entrenchments, 1816. Faint trace of original Fort George configuration visible to left. Letters represent the following: A: Splinter-proof Barracks; B: Barracks; a: Magazine; b: Old Magazine. Detail of “Plan of Fort proposed to be erected at Mississauga Point” (LAC, NMC, 0017882).

opposite side of the Niagara River, British military focus gravitated to more strategic locations. A small, but strong, irregularly-shaped fieldwork with a prominent brick defensive tower was constructed on Mississauga Point, and a larger installation evolved at the southwest edge of the Fort George Commons, beyond the range of artillery from Fort Niagara and the American batteries. As British military activities shifted, little to no further investment was made in maintaining Fort George.

### After the War

A series of site inspections conducted between 1815 and 1825 documented Fort George's continued state of disrepair (Desloges 1977: 87–99). In 1821, an auction of all the decayed and rotted equipment was held and, in 1822, palisade pickets in reasonable condition were taken down and reused (Desloges 1977: 97–98). The size of the garrison continued to be reduced such that by 1825 several of the wooden buildings had not been occupied for some time. In 1832, a passing officer noted that Fort George "contain[ed] some low wooden decayed barracks" (Wilson and Southwood 1976: 20). Fort George was formally relinquished in 1828 as the headquarters of the British army in Upper Canada relocated to York.

Throughout the remainder of the 19th century, Fort George was occupied by a succession of tenants and caretakers. Historical records suggest that the fort interior was leased to a John McNeilly as early as 1847 and until ca. 1853 at 4 pounds 10 shillings per annum (Desloges 1977: 102; Sattelberger 1996: 4). A lease was later granted to Alexander Wright from 1882 to 1911, and his son, William, served as the first official caretaker, overseeing the maintenance of the site from 1897 to 1911 (Sattelberger 1996: 4). The last caretaker, Robert Reid, served onsite from 1912 until the 1930s (Sattelberger 1996: 4).

A military presence returned to Fort George during World War I, when Camp Niagara<sup>8</sup> erected a military hospital, mess hall, and kitchen in the southern half of the first Fort George. As part of a national training effort during the First World War and in the years leading up to it, a summer camp was established on the military reserve lands in Niagara. Fort George was utilized as training grounds and housed canvas tents and a hospital. The camp remained in use until 1964 (Brooks and Last 2001: 87).

footprint and used the grounds for training militia. During the Depression, a make-work impetus sponsored by the Province of Ontario and the Niagara Parks Commission restored Fort George to its pre-War of 1812 appearance based on available information. In 1921, Fort George was designated as a National Historic Site of Canada, as it was the principle British fortification on the Niagara Peninsula during the War of 1812, and, as the headquarters of the Central Division of the British army, it played a crucial role in the defense of Upper Canada. Parks Canada acquired Fort George in 1969 and continues to promote and preserve this national historic site.

### Archaeological Findings

The 2009–2010 archaeological program at Fort George NHSC afforded a prime opportunity to discern the evolution of the fortification, particularly the modifications implemented during the War of 1812. Between July and October 2009, 18 test trenches were excavated within the embrasures and around the palisade and bastion revetment walls. Investigations revealed that, although the 1930s reconstruction efforts included significant grading of the central and southern portions of the fort, much still remained from the earlier periods. Ensuing archaeological monitoring and strategic recording of 201 construction trenches provided a further glimpse into Fort George's early landscape and construction, site occupations, and American alterations to the fortification during their seven-month occupation.

### The First Fort George

Edward Walsh's period painting of the first Fort George illustrates an undulating and sloping landscape (FIG 5). Three gullies cut through the fort with the deepest traversing the southeast end, in which the masonry powder magazine was set. Archaeological evidence revealed that the British built up the terreplein by successively dumping small amounts of redeposited soils. Wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow, British troops brought in variegated layers of mottled grey and orange silts, compact red clays, and mottled yellow silts and black clay loam to combat the contours and erect the defence works. An 1816 plan of Fort George may indicate that, needing to secure earth with the least effort, the British



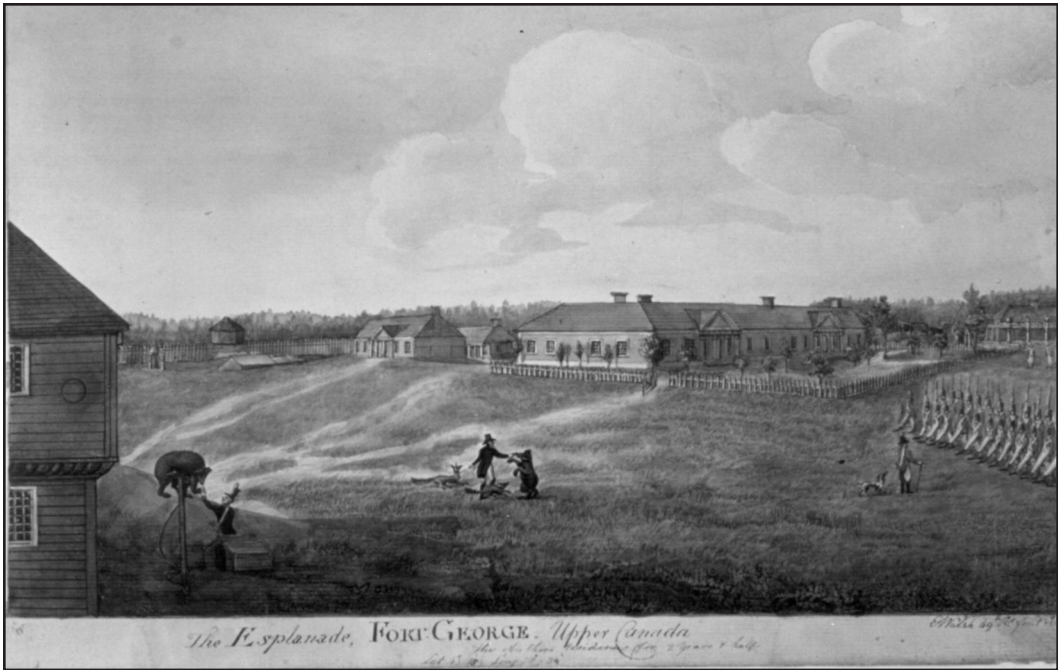


Figure 5. *The Esplanade, Fort George, Upper Canada, 1805*. Painting by Edward Walsh illustrating interior landscape of the fort and the wild pets kept by the garrison (Image courtesy William Clements Library).

created a “borrow pit” within the terreplein of the fort (Way and Way 1973: 42). To assist in erecting the defensive earthworks across the deep gully, the Royal Engineers constructed wooden cribs, comprising horizontally stacked timbers likely of cedar, with each timber measuring roughly 15 cm in diameter. Soils were deposited into the cribbing, and the palisade may have been set within. The earthworks were likely built up around the cribbing to also protect the wooden features. Supplemental estimates, to the sum of £330.0.0, were submitted to cover the costs of the additional work “arising from the inequalities of the ground”, and attest to the significant time and resources expended in building these works (Hunter 1800). The Royal Canadian Volunteers were instrumental in the construction of Fort George, and a single Royal Canadian Volunteers pewter dome button recovered may have been lost during the laborious work undertaken to erect such a defensive work.

### The American Fort George

The May 1813 American attack of Fort George was evidenced archaeologically by the

presence of a red oxidized soil layer with charcoal flecking, representing the original terreplein. Above this burn layer, the American expansion of the northwest bastion was observed through successive layers of redeposited sterile soils. Along the western flank of the fort, remnants of the American defensive dry ditch were exposed. Ditches, intended as second lines of defence, were wide, deep trenches enclosing a defensive work and could be either dry or wet. Due to the natural sandy matrices of the soils in the area, the Americans incorporated inundated heavy clays<sup>9</sup> into the ditch construction; clays either from the marine yard by Navy Hall or the swampland to the south of the fort site (Heriot 1807). Sandy layers were alternated with heavy clays to establish the scarp and counterscarp, followed by a final coating of the slopes with clays as a means of further stabilization. To maintain a dry ditch, the Americans excavated a narrow drain, or *cuvette*, into the bottom of <sup>9</sup>. Analytical analysis revealed that the black color of the heavy clay soils was likely due to the ferrous iron compounds such as iron sulphides (FeS) and pyrite (FeS<sub>2</sub>), common characteristics of flooded soils. The lack of oxygen in these soils promotes growth of anaerobic bacteria, which produce the iron compounds (Sergeant 2010).

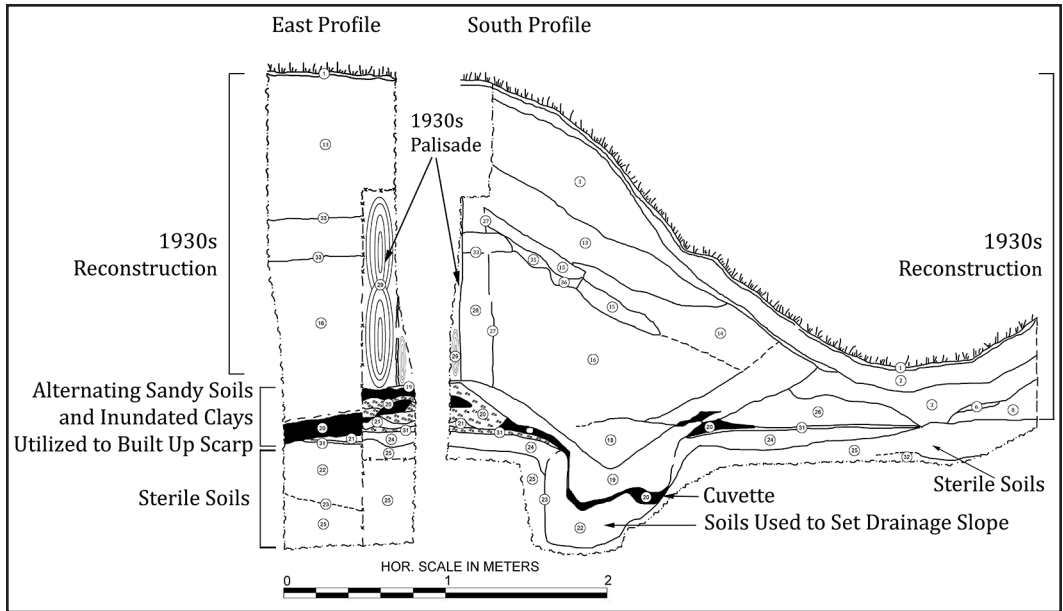


Figure 6. Profile drawing of cuvette and partial scarp face constructed by American forces. (Drawings 19H-2009-155-D18 and 19H-2009-219-D11 by Parks Canada [Cornwall], 2009.)

the ditch, set the drainage slope with dark yellowish brown sand, and surfaced it with impervious clays (FIG 6). The cuvette prevented standing water by channeling it through the ditch, with an intended result of decreasing the chance of contracting insect-borne infections and diseases.

### Material Culture

The legacy of the British and American garrisons stationed at Fort George is evidenced in the material culture they left behind. The thousands of artifacts recovered from the 2009–2010 archaeological program shed further light on life at Fort George prior to and during the War of 1812. Pre-war military rations were consumed from cream- and pearlwares. Common late 18th- to early 19th-century decorated specimens recovered include underglazed blue painted vessels; green and plain edged wares; and blue transfer-printed, polychrome painted and banded pieces. Meat dishes, a staple for the British garrison, were possibly spiced with dry mustard shipped from England in the square mustard bottle recovered (Jones 1983: 70).

Alcohol also formed part of the British-military daily diet. Soldiers were issued spruce beer and

rum, supplemented occasionally with beer or wine, “to maintain good health and morale, or as a reward for special duties” (Jones and Smith 1985: 7). Officers enjoyed a wider array of beverages. Officers’ spirits were decanted from bottles or blue transfer-printed punch bowls, and drunk from hand-cut, lead-glass paneled tumblers. The recovery of an amber-coloured liquor bottle, dating between 1800 and 1840, indicates that spirits arrived at the fort site in a variety of containers, not solely wooden casks (Jones 1986: 68–69). Wine was stored in and possibly also served from mold-blown olive-colored bottles, including a dip-molded version dating from the 1730s. Wine-bottle finishes collected include down-turned lips with straightened string rims dating between ca. 1793 and 1806, and tooled cracked-off lips with down-turned string rims common ca. 1794 (Jones 1986: 56, 63). Tipples were likely accompanied by smoking one of the many undecorated white-clay smoking pipes recovered.

Domestic duties, such as mending, are witnessed by the presence of an early straight pin with a wound-wire head. Fragments of Derbyshire-type saltglazed stoneware blacking containers likely attest to soldiers cleaning and waterproofing their leather accoutrement.

Although limited, social activities for troops at Fort George may have entailed playing cards or dominos. The garrison officers partook in boisterous dinners in the mess<sup>10</sup>, gaming at the racetrack on the Commons, hunting, fishing, or fortnightly subscription dances held at a town inn (Carter-Edwards 1985: 71; Ormsby 1991: 40).

In May 1813, Fort George was decimated by American shell and hotshot. The 2009–2010 archaeological investigations unearthed ammunition of varying type and size, attesting to the bloody battle: .625 calibre ball, .69 calibre American ball, .32 calibre buck, .75 calibre musket balls, and 24- and 32-pound solid shot. Powder was sparked by honey-coloured blade gunflints and grey prismatic flints and D-shaped spall, recovered alongside lead sprues and a Brown Bess musket butt plate, the British infantry's basic arm from about 1740 until the 1830s. Remains of a stock clasp, an officer's epaulet or ornamental shoulder piece, British shako badges, and military buttons provide a further grim picture of the battle. Twenty-five shako-badge fragments derive from a stovepipe shako, of a type worn by the Royal Regiment of Artillery between 1800 and ca. 1812. A single fragment displaying a crown from the universal badge for a Waterloo-pattern shako, worn by the British military from 1812 to 1816, was also recovered (Bradley 2011: 45). Two silver-finished copper-alloy officer's buttons have been identified to the 41st Regiment of Foot<sup>11</sup>. Each button exhibits a differing 19th-century London manufacturer's mark on the reverse. The first example reads I. MCGOWAN KING ST. SOHO LONDON<sup>12</sup>, and the second is S. FIRMIN STRAND.

A large cache of over 700 Royal Regiment of Artillery<sup>13</sup> buttons was recovered from a burn

10. A midden uncovered by the officers' quarters contained the remains of an extensive dinner service for seven. The multicourse meal of chicken, domestic goose, duck, passenger pigeon, quail, and a variety of fish, was served on decorated cream- and pearlwares and consumed with copious amounts of wine. See Plousois (2006) *Remains of a Day* for further details of this illustrious party, at which spirits were running high.

11. The 41st Regiment of Foot served in Canada from 1799 to 1815. From 1806 to 1809 and 1811 to 1812 the unit's headquarters was at Fort George. The regiment was involved in the 1813 capture of Fort Niagara. They remained in garrison on the Niagara frontier until the end of the war (Stewart 1964: 199).

12. The manufacture's mark from the firm of James McGowan between 1802 and 1804 (Nayler 1993: 50).

13. The Royal Regiment of Artillery served in Canada from 1755 to 1871 and in the Niagara region from 1791 to 1815.

layer exposed between the southern palisade wall and the exterior octagonal blockhouse (FIG. 7). All buttons possess the arms of the Board of Ordnance: three cannonballs above three aligned cannons, all within a shield. Historical records suggest that this Ordnance shield-style of button was not issued in Britain after 1802, when it was replaced by the crowned-garter pattern<sup>14</sup>. Archaeological evidence, however, has indicated that the former style continued to be worn in Canada for many years following and suggests that the colonies also acted as destinations for obsolete stores.

Four sizes of buttons are present in the cache: coatee (19.6 mm), gaiter (12.75 mm), and two midsize versions, one flat (14.7 mm) and one convex (16.2 mm), possibly from a coatee or coveralls (FIG. 7). Some specimens have cloth or leather adhering to the shank. Several buttons exhibit the stamped marks of known London button manufacturers, including Samuel Firmin (pre-1800), Firmin and Westall (ca. 1800–1811), Nutting & Son (1802–1817), and James/John McGowan (1800–1834) (Nayler 1993). Seven specimens possess the mark of William Harris of Birmingham.

Alongside the buttons, three fragments of a die-struck copper alloy band stamped: ARTILLERY were also recovered. The top and bottom edges of the band are finished in a plain boarder, and the background exhibits a textured crosshatch design. A square nail hole had been punched through the lower right corner. Although the exact function of this find is unknown, it may represent a partial crate or similar packing label used to identify ordnance stores. Interestingly, until 1802, the octagonal blockhouse, which once stood within proximity of the button cache and artillery band, served as an artillery storehouse (Bowering 1979: 34).

The sheer number of Royal Regiment of Artillery buttons suggests a systematic discarding by either British or American forces. Given that the octagonal blockhouse served as an ordnance depot during the early British occupation, this deposit may represent a cleaning of obsolete stores or hospital discards (Leskovec and Last 2010: 16). The buttons could represent entire uniforms, individual packages of buttons, or both<sup>15</sup>. If the buttons represent a deposit of discarded uniforms, the cache could outfit six <sup>14</sup>. The garter and crown insignia consisted of a crowned garter inscribed: Royal Regt. Of Artillery with the reversed and intertwined Royal cipher within (Parkyn 1956: 56).

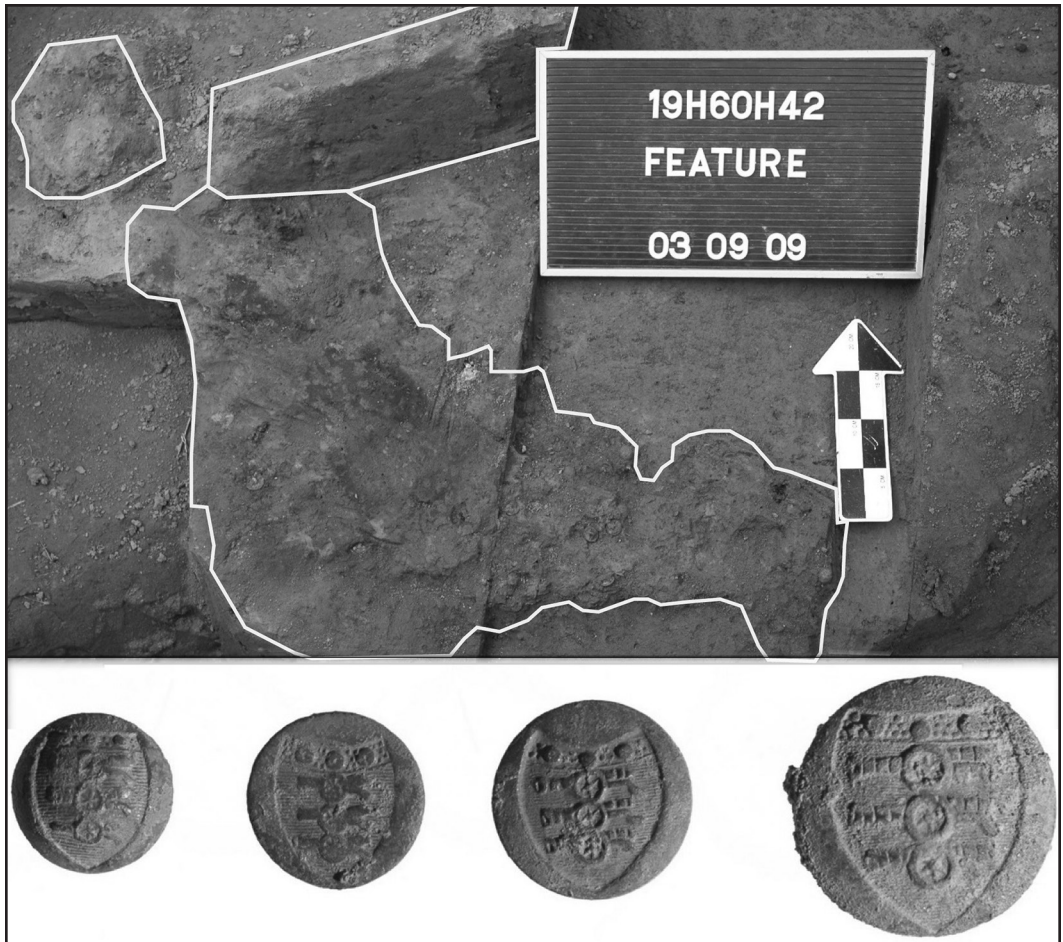


Figure 7. Burnt button feature (19H60H42), with inset illustrating the four sizes of Royal Regiment of Artillery buttons recovered. (Feature photo 19H280E by Parks Canada [Cornwall], 2009; inset photo by Joseph Last, 2010.)

coatees (with approximately 29 buttons per coatee) and 44 individual or 22 sets of gaiters (with 10 and 12 buttons per gaiter).

The in-situ presence of American buck and ball shot and a gunflint within the button cache suggest the deposit may be contemporaneous or post-date the Battle of Fort George. On 11 October 1813, American Colonel Winfield Scott, stationed at Fort George, wrote to General Wilkinson:

The British burnt everything in store in this neighbor hood, three thousand blankets, many hundred stand of arms, also the blankets in the men's packs, and every article of clothing not in actual use (Cruikshank 1907).

15. Throughout the 19th century, buttons could be ordered either attached to a uniform or bulk shipped separately by gross weight (Strachan 1975: 17–19).

Alongside the button cache, were remnants of a stovepipe shako badge, a stock buckle, and footwear fragments including heels, soles and grommets. These findings in conjunction with Scott's written exchange provide an evocative visual of British troops acting quickly to dispose of stores from the octagonal blockhouse, prior to abandoning Fort George on 27 May 1813.

A differing postulation questions whether the buttons were discarded as part of a cleaning episode by American troops upon taking command of Fort George. Colonel William Claus was allegedly the last British troop to evacuate Fort George, and his diary records indicate that "at the time [he] went out the breach by the octagon blockhouse, a flag came in at the gate" (Wilson and Southwood 1976:

18). The notation of the breach in the south curtain wall illustrates the extensive damage inflicted upon the fort by the American bombardment and alludes to the possibility of impacts to the octagonal blockhouse. Perhaps as with the other wooden buildings at the fort the exterior blockhouse caught on fire during the battle, burning all items found within. Upon inspection of the blockhouse, the Americans may have disposed of all non-reusable items, including buttons and burnt attire.

## Conclusions

As the custodian of nationally significant heritage places and the cultural treasures within, Parks Canada developed the CRM Policy as a tool to guide the conservation and presentation of these key assets. As per the policy, effective CRM is based on identifying heritage resources, understanding the heritage value of these resources, and taking their value into consideration in all actions that affect them (Parks Canada Agency 2013). The 2009–2010 rehabilitation program at Fort George NHSC afforded Parks Canada the opportunity to implement the CRM Policy firsthand in conjunction with an extensive archaeological field program aimed at locating and inventorying heritage resources affiliated with the historic defensive works. Information gleaned from the program not only added to the overall knowledge of the site, but was employed to refine engineering design.

The investigations illustrated the ingeniousness of the British and Americans in erecting a fortification on a sandy-matrixed undulating landscape. Creative solutions included erecting wooden cribs over the deep gully traversing the fort to facilitate construction of earthworks, and utilizing inundated clays to stabilize defensive works. The investigations also offered a glimpse into life at Fort George prior to the War of 1812—daily tasks undertaken by the garrison and social forays by the officers.

The stratigraphy and material culture uncovered provide a somber reality to the Battle of Fort George, from the charcoal-flecked red-oxidized soils of a burnt terreplein to the varying type and size of ammunition uncovered. During the American occupation, Fort George was transformed and rebuilt into a smaller, more defensible earthwork. The

American redesign of the fort lies in the exposed second ditch and expanded northwest bastion.

One of the most notable finds recovered from Fort George was a large cache of Regiment of Royal Artillery buttons, numbering over 700. How and why the buttons were deposited remains a mystery, but their presence immortalizes Fort George's early history. Today, Fort George NHSC stands as a reimagining of the fort prior to the War of 1812. Reconstructed during the Depression Era, Fort George NHSC continues to retain secrets from a bygone era.

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