

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario  
**Blockhouse No. 1**  
Fort George

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

Blockhouse No. 1 was built in 1939, to designs by Toronto architects W.L. Somerville and Edward Carswell, as part of the reconstruction of Fort George. Major repairs were undertaken in 1986-87, including door and window modifications, and the addition of horizontal clapboarding. The Blockhouse is currently used for interpretive displays, and houses a theatre. The Environment Canada Parks Service is the custodial department. See FHBRO Building Report 89-15.

### **Reasons For Designation**

Blockhouse No. 1 was designated Recognized because of its association with the 1930s philosophy of preservation and presentation of historic sites, its architectural qualities, and its relatively unchanged environment.

The Depression was a period of historic site development 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. A recognition that increasing private ownership of automobiles would generate growth in tourism, encouraged the reconstruction of Fort George as a tourist destination. Both the reconstruction process and the subsequent attraction of the public to the area contributed to the economic development of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The reconstruction was based on freely interpreted historical research. Where documentation was absent, conjecture was used. The architects concept of a "frontier" aesthetic, expressed in the rugged exposed log exterior of the buildings, parallels the visual effect created by the Fort York blockhouses after their exterior cladding was removed during a 1934 "restoration." The recent addition of clapboard to the exterior of Blockhouse No. 1, while perhaps useful for maintenance purposes, has departed from this design concept.

Blockhouse No. 1, an interpretive centre and theatre, is a local landmark.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of this structure is defined by its "frontier" aesthetic, its functional design, and its contribution to the military character of the setting.

The plans, dimensions, and construction of the blockhouses at Fort George were

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario  
**Blockhouse No. 1** (Continued)

based on Fort York examples. Blockhouse No. 1 is a hipped-roof, two-storey structure,

with an overhanging second storey typical of North American blockhouse design. The exterior massing, small window size and loopholes contribute to the military appearance. The blockhouse is constructed of squared logs with a dovetailed corner treatment and the roof is covered with hand-split cedar shakes. As originally built, Blockhouse No. 1 had the 1930s rugged exposed log appearance preferred by the architects of the reconstruction. This blockhouse now differs from the others through the addition of horizontal clapboard to the exterior, resulting in a more refined architectural appearance.

The blockhouses were reconstructed to evoke the massing of the original and to interpret one aspect of life in the pre-1812 fort. The use of traditional materials, methods and tools in their construction was part of the reconstruction philosophy of the 1930s. Logs were milled in a saw-pit on site, and broad-axes and adzes were used for finishing. As the heritage character of Blockhouse No. 1 resides in its 1930s use of traditional materials and construction, these elements should be preserved.

While the orientation of the entrance has changed, the wider setting of the blockhouse has remained essentially the same since construction. The structure contributes to the military ambience of the fort, and is a local landmark.

1992.03.23