

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario  
**Officers' Quarters**  
Fort George

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The Officers' Quarters 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 1983-84, including window modifications, log replacement and the addition of horizontal clapboarding. At the same time, internal reorganization facilitated the use of the Officers' Quarters for interpretation. The Environment Canada Parks Service is the custodial department. See FHBRO Building Report 89-15.

### **Reasons For Designation**

The Officers' Quarters was designated Recognized because of its association with the 1930s philosophy of preservation and presentation of historic sites, its architectural qualities, its superior detailing, and its contribution to the setting.

The Depression was a period of development for 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. A recognition that an increase in private ownership of automobiles would stimulate growth in tourism contributed to the support for 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 architects interpreted freely the historic information about the configuration and appearance of the original fortification and, where documentation was absent, relied on conjecture in the preparation of the designs. The Fort George reconstruction represents the designers' preference for the prevailing colonial revival style combined with elements of the "frontier" aesthetic. The recent addition of clapboard to the exterior of Officers' Quarters, while closer in appearance to the original and perhaps somewhat easier to maintain, departs from Somerville and Carswell's design concept.

The Officers' Quarters is a major interpretive centre on the site and a local landmark.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of this structure is defined by its combination of Colonial Revival and "frontier" aesthetics, its craftsmanship, and its contribution to the character of the setting.

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Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario  
**Officers' Quarters** (Continued)

The overall aesthetic of Fort George derives from two sources: the Colonial Revival

style, as represented by hipped roofs, prominent chimneys, and balanced facades with a regular rhythm of bays; and Somerville and Carswell's concept of the frontier, expressed in exposed log construction. The Officers' Quarters building is a one-storey structure, composed in plan of a long rectangle with wings at each end. With its symmetrical plan, regular rhythm of doors and shuttered windows, and its low-hipped roof with symmetrically placed chimneys, this structure clearly express the Colonial Revival style. It is built of squared logs, joined at the corners with dovetailed joints. The roof is covered with hand-split cedar shakes. As originally constructed, the building had the rugged exposed log exterior representative of the "frontier" aesthetic preferred by the architects of the 1930s reconstruction. The addition of horizontal clapboard to the exterior has significantly altered the rugged character of the original building to a more refined architectural appearance.

The use of traditional materials, methods, and tools in the construction of the buildings at Fort George 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. This structure shows superior detailing in its shuttered windows and porch woodwork. As the heritage character of Officers' Quarters resides in its 1930s use of traditional materials and construction, these elements should be preserved.

While the site has been modified by the addition of a fence, the wider setting of the Officers' Quarters has remained essentially the same since reconstruction. The structure, given its size and location near the palisade gate, is highly visible, and is a local landmark.

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