

Yesterday's Rotary Address

Mr. H. W. LeMessurier Gives Interesting Review of Nfld's "Historic Points of Interest."

At yesterday's weekly luncheon held at the Rotary Club, the speaker was Mr. H. W. LeMessurier, C.M.G., who gave a most interesting account of the historic points of interest in Newfoundland.

Mr. LeMessurier's address was as follows:—

In dealing with Points of Historic Interest in Newfoundland one naturally takes the places in and around St. John's first. The premier place of interest in St. John's is without doubt the spot on which Sir Humphrey Gilbert landed. On the 3rd August, 1583, entered St. John's Harbour in the night and on the 4th August he landed and had a consultation with the English Merchants. Upon the 5th, he caused his tent to be set up on the top of an hill in the view of all the English men and strangers, which were in number between thirty and forty; "then being accompanied by all his captains, masters, soldiers and soldiers he caused all the masters and principal officers of the ships as well as Englishmen as sailors, Portuguese and all other nations to repayire into his tent and then there in the presence of them all he caused his commission under the great seal of England to be opened and solemnly read to them whereupon he granted unto him his heyres and assigns by the Queen's most excellent liberties and privileges. The act whereof being signified unto the strangers by an interpreter he took possession of the said land in the right of the Crown of England by digging up a turf and receiving the same in a hazell wand delivered unto him after the manner of the lawe and custom of England. Then he signified to the company, both strangers and others that from thenceforth they were to live in that land as the territories appertaining unto the Crown of England and to be governed by such laws as by good advice should be down, which in all points, (so far as might be) should be agreeable to the lawes of England and for to put the same in execution, present he ordained and established these laws:—

1. Establishment of the Church of England.
2. Any attempt prejudicial to Her Majesty's rights in the territory to be punished as in case of High Treason.
3. Anyone uttering words of disrespect to Her Majesty should lose her and have his goods and ships forfeited.
4. All men did verily willingly submit themselves to these laws.

Then he caused the Queen's Majesty's Arms to be engraved and set upon pillars of wood not far from the tent, a great solemnity."

The landing place of Sir Humphrey Gilbert is known to us only by tradition, but it is almost certain that it had not been other than at the place which was then, no doubt, and many years after the principal landing place for all ships' boats. As the first of 1583 when the wharves at the water front were destroyed, it was very evident that from Harvey's premises west to Bowring's there were very few places where a ship's boat could make an landing. Prowse, in his History of Newfoundland, has a foot note p. 71 which he says "the hill would be probably Garrison Hill, the centre of the harbour." I do not agree with Prowse; at that period (1583) the hill about St. John's were covered with woods and only the land at the water's edge cleared. Garrison Hill had been far away for sailors to land and the trouble of carrying and material ashore would have been a great deal. The hill would be probably Garrison Hill, the centre of the harbour. The Gills, Newmans, Car and others who were here, some in the eighteenth century, described the beach as the landing place of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and the top of it as the hill on which his was erected. The "Beach," known as Downing's Cove, was just west of the Customs Examining House and on which Col. Amherst and Harvey & Co.'s water premises are erected. The land on which the Memorial Monument stands, a hill which extended from the north Street almost to the water's edge. Any one in 1790 wishing to go to Gilbert's premises to Morris's hill have to go by the landward or climb the Beach Hill and go up the "middle path" now Duckworth Street. The top of this flat mound or hill was easily accessible, from the top of the west side, and in my father's early days it was a very fine place for fishermen and servants and the scogs of many a fisherman.

The next point of interest is the place on which Fort William stood. As in 1613 a fort was built there, the inhabitants as a place where they might shelter when attacked by foes. This fort was then known as "the Fort" and subsequently styled the North Fort. When a fort was built on the south side, the latter was called the South Fort. These forts were built and manned by the inhabitants, and no soldiers were detailed to man them until 1697, when Lt. Col. Handyside and three hundred men were left at St. John's for the winter. John Downing in his narrative of 1674 says that guns were mounted in a fort at St. John's and the fort was supplied with small arms for the use of the inhabitants who manned the fort. Mr. Downing and Thomas Oxford, on behalf of the inhabitants of St. John's, petitioned the King for twenty-five guns and two hundred small arms to defend the harbour and some small arms to defend the creek Que de Vido. A few years previously (in 1665) the Dutch had attacked St. John's and destroyed the fort. This fort was again rebuilt by the inhabitants and another built on the South side of the Narrows. In Thornton's map of St. John's dated 1689, the North Fort is shown as being about where Fort William was situated and the South Fort on the site of Fort Amherst at the entrance to the Narrows. On April 5th, 1689 "Sir Robt. Robinson asks leave to use his crew and much munition as he is willing to raise fortifications which shall be done with no expense except a little brandy to the crew for labouring." This was in all probability the commencement of a Fort on the site of Fort William, and it appears to have been first called Fort William in 1696. In 1696 the French, under De Brouillon and D'Iberville, in the month of November, reached St. John's by way of Bay Bulls and after taking the outer defences attacked the Fort into which many of the inhabitants had fled, and finally caused them to surrender. The French Captain Baudouin, whose M.S. Diary is in the Archives at Quebec, says "this fort was situated on the hill to the northwest, commanded on one side by two heights both within gunshot of it. It was square in shape, with four bastions, a palisade eight feet high, a covered trench, now full of snow, also a drawbridge, with a small tower upon which there were four cannons, the balls for which weighed four pounds, under the tower there was a cellar for keeping gunpowder." Before vacating St. John's the French burnt and destroyed everything movable and immovable, there was not a solitary building left standing and all the forts were razed to the ground. When it was too late, a large squadron, under Admiral Norris, with 1500 soldiers were sent out in 1697 to recapture Newfoundland, they found St. John's completely abandoned. The soldiers were set to work at once and Fort William was erected on the site of the old Fort under the direction of a Mr. Richards of the Royal Engineers. Only the palisade was erected during the first year, but between 1698 and 1708 the ramparts were faced with brick and bomb-proof parapets, and powder magazines and barracks were erected. A Fort, named Fort George, was built near the water's edge due South from Fort William, about where now stands the office of Messrs. Furness Withy & Co., and the two were connected by a subterranean passage. All the work about Fort William was the work of English Engineers commenced in 1697 and added to from time to time. In 1699 a small Church was built within the precincts of the fort in which the Rev. John Jackson officiated.

In February, 1705 the French, under Subercase, again invaded St. John's and made an attempt to take Fort William which was so ably defended by Lieut. Moody, that the French returned to Placentia after pillaging the surrounding settlements.

In December, 1708, a French force, under St. Ovide de Brouillon, arrived overland from Placentia and attacked St. John's, taking Fort William and Fort St. George and compelling the garrison at Fort Amherst to surrender. The forts were afterwards strengthened and for forty years no attempt was made by the French to retake St. John's. On the 27th June, 1782, four French ships of war after taking Bay Bulls appeared off St. John's and captured it. The fortifications had been neglected and but a small force of regulars were in charge. The French set to work to repair the old fortifications and erect fresh defences on Signal Hill. On the 11th September Lord Colville with a fleet and transports appeared off St. John's, landed men at Torbay and proceeded by land to attack the French. They were successful and captured a French force to the number of 710, the French fleet of five vessels escaping into the Bay Bulls. John's in a thick fog. Ever since that event Fort William has been unoccupied.

Fort Townshend was begun in 1773 and finished in 1778. From 1780 to 1823 the Governor had his dwelling there. The Infantry had their barracks and the Officer Commanding his dwelling. The Artillery Officers and men were housed at Fort William. Queen's Battery situated on the plateau overlooking the Narrows, at an elevation of about 430ft. was begun in 1783 and enlarged and made stronger in 1809. The only published record of the building of forts that we have is contained in a book of "Family Recollections" written by Miss Durnford, the daughter of Lt. Genl. Durnford, an eminent officer of the Royal Engineers. The then Capt. Durnford, who was stationed in Ireland in 1803 was appointed to the command of the Royal Engineers in Newfoundland to repair and strengthen the fortifications. It was the summer of 1809 before he arrived here in the transport brig "Britannia." He immediately began the re-construction of the old forts and the building of some new ones. Miss Durnford in writing of these batteries says "The first covered heights overlooking the entrance to the harbour of St. John's are planted with batteries romantically situated. The raging surf of the Atlantic's billows dashes against the embrasures of Amherst and Chain Rock batteries, and the line of battle-ships, as well as the red sail fishing fleet come almost within arm's reach of the cannon. Mid-way, and crowning the eminence, guns commandingly point from Queen's battery and the lines on Signal Hill. Captain Burnford threw up fresh batteries, and repaired and improved, and in some cases entirely rebuilt such as were falling into decay. The Queen's Battery and a large block house on Signal Hill were among the newly constructed; Frederick, Amherst and Chain Rock amongst those repaired." Col. Durnford remained in St. John's from 1809 to 1816 when he was transferred to Quebec to plan and carry out the strengthening of its fortifications.

Fort Amherst. A Fort appears to have been constructed here as early as 1622, but it was not until 1763 that it was made formidable and was then named after Col. Amherst who was in charge of the troops at the retaking of St. John's in 1762. A light was first established there in 1812.

Fort Frederick, which was an earthwork to the west of Fort Amherst and opposite the Pan Cake shoal was reconstructed by Col. Burnford and fitted with ovens to heat shot to a red heat for use in repelling an enemy.

Chain Rock Battery at the narrowest part of the entrance to the harbour and opposite the Pancake shoal was merely an earthwork for many years. Col. Durnford repaired it with stone and built a bomb proof there. About 1770, a large chain was attached to Chain Rock and led to Pancake shoal where two captains were used to raise it so as to obstruct the passage of large vessels.

Duke York Battery was situated on the southern shoulder of the crest of Signal Hill and mounted eight 24 pounder guns, four 18 pounder cannonades and two ten inch mortars. Its date was 1796.

Fort Waldegrave. This battery was first built in 1797 and named after Admiral Waldegrave. It is situated on an eminence to the North of Chain Rock and was long known as the Battery. A dwelling house for the Artillery men was near by, also a large powder magazine.

Block House on the northern eminence of Signal Hill in 1796 mounted six guns on the ground floor.

Crow's Nest Battery, was on the crest of the hill known as Gibbet Hill and in 1762 it was taken from the French and as it commanded Fort William the French Commander, Count D'Haussonville was compelled to surrender to Col. Amherst—When a myth occurred on board of H.M.S. Latona in 1797 (the year of the mutiny of the Nore) three of the ring-leaders were hung on this Hill hence the name Gibbet Hill.

Quidi-Vidi a small fort or earthwork was erected here in 1709 but not being maintained it fell into ruins.

In 1763 the French sank Shallops filled with stones in the narrow entrance and built a redoubt on the South Hill overlooking the village. The road to the Cable House passes the spot on the south. This fort or redoubt was gallantly stormed by the Highlanders under Captain McDonnell.

In 1763 the English built a fort on the hill overlooking the entrance and maintained it until 1870.

Cox Marsh on the Torbay Road—two redoubts were formed here in 1763 mounting 18 pound cannonades they were each one mile from Torbay.

Piperstock Hill—A small battery, mounting three guns, was stationed at this point in 1773 covering the approach from Middle Cove.

Torbay—A battery on the south side built in 1773 overlooking the beach mounted four six pounders, with a guard house attached, was for many years maintained there.

Petty Harbour Battery situated on the old Petty Harbour Road on the Hill overlooking Maddox Cove.

Hayes Farm—Petty Harbour Road—a guard house and a battery was stationed here in 1709 and resisted the attacks of the French.

Portugal Cove—A battery of three guns was placed on the top of the hill leading down to the east of where the public wharf stands. It was constructed in 1765 to prevent enemy from landing troops at that point to attack St. John's nine miles distant.

The foregoing gives an account of the forts in and about St. John's, other points of historical interest that have also vanished are old Government House situated on Duke of York Street. This Street was a short one to the east of Cochrane Street running parallel to it from Gower to Duckworth Street. The house was built in 1779 and first occupied by Rear Admiral Edwards. It continued to be Government House until 1809, and was destroyed in the great fire of 1892. The garden by which it was surrounded was known as "the garden" for many years and was celebrated for its beauty.

Prior to the removal of the troops in 1870, the Barracks and Stores Department had their houses and store on the plot of ground bounded by Ordinance Street, Duckworth and Gower Streets, the buildings were destroyed in 1892. The officer commanding the Royal Engineers lived in a house erected in 1809 where now Mr. H. Outerside's house is, the Engineers' staff houses and offices were to the north of it. The Commissariat House now St. Thomas's Rectory was built in 1801, the officers were on the ground floor and the dwelling rooms in rear of the offices and on the second floor. The Kings Bake House was on the corner of Military Road and King's Bridge Road nearly reaching where now the Monument stands, from the door step one could look up Gower Street. Where the Day School stands was the Commissariat Coal depot, and the building now occupied as the Bishop Field Hotel is on the site of the Engineers' work shop. The Military Hospital was on the site of the present General Hospital, the old building forms a part of the same. At the east gate of Government House a Guard House stood which was placed there in 1834. I notice that some writers place the date of the removal of the troops at 1871, this is incorrect the last of the Imperial Garrison left here in July 1870.

Government House. The erection of this building was commenced by the Governor Sir Thos. Cochrane in 1827, artisans having been sent out from England in the summer of that year. The first estimate in 1828 of cost was £12,577, to which was added in 1829 a further sum of £5,567, to complete and furnish it, on the whole it is said to have cost £29,000. In 1831 it was occupied by Sir Thos. Cochrane and the Council and Assembly as well as Government Officials had offices there. Colonial Building or House of Parliament was built in 1847 at a cost of £100,000. It is 110 feet long and 35 feet wide. Its Ionic Portico is borne by six massive columns, 30 feet high.

Placentia, known as the "Ancient Capital," was early occupied by the French and in 1622 King Charles II, of himself gave the right to Louis XIV. to occupy and fortify it. In Prowse's History a mistake is made respecting the forts. Although the author quotes La Hontan he does not do so correctly. Early in the seventeenth century a fort was erected on the Meadow Point, opposite the gut. In 1662 Fort Louis was erected on the Jersey Side at the entrance of the gut and not on the town side as stated by Prowse. The remains of this fort were very evident when I first saw it in 1854. In La Hontan's narrative a sketch of the Harbour and its surroundings, as it appeared in 1659, shows Fort Louis as above stated. In 1688 a redoubt was marked out on Castle Hill and was afterwards completed and heavier guns mounted. This was known as the Castle Fort. The bomb proof, the remains of which are to be seen, was built by the English in 1713. When Placentia was surrendered to Great Britain in 1713, the English built a fort on the town side of the gut and called it Fort Frederick. Near by they erected an Artillery Barracks, which I have been in, and near the old Church a barracks for Infantry. Both buildings have long since disappeared. At Gunns Point a small redoubt was built by the English in 1715 to command the Roadstead. A Block House was also erected near the foot of Point Verde Hill where there is but a small isthmus separating the waters of the Roadstead from those of the South East Arm. A sketch of this Block House appears in the "Diary of Prince William Henry (afterwards William IV.)"

In the old Court House there was a tip staff of the reign of George III. bearing the date 1772 which is still preserved. In the church are the remains of some tombstones of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, relics of the old Basque and French settlements. There are altogether five stones, two are in French and three in Basque. Archbishop Howley gives a full account of them in his paper of the 27th May, 1903, read before the Royal Society of Canada. There is also a painting of the Royal Arms of England of the Reign of George III. which has also been described in a paper by Archbishop Howley read 26th May, 1908. There is also a Silver Communion Service presented in 1787 to the Protestant of Placentia, by Prince William, Duke of Clarence who was afterwards King William IV. Prowse says the wooden church was built in 1787 but tradition says it was built long before that. The Court House was built in 1730 and shortly after that the church was erected.

Ferryland—Time does not permit me to deal as fully as I might with this historic spot. I may say en passant that our historians have made several guesses as to the derivation of the name and have asserted that it was called Verulam by Lord Baltimore and the same corrupted into Ferryland. If historians had examined old charts and old documents they would have found that it was called by the English Ferryland before Lord Baltimore's time and by the French Frillon. In Abbe Boudoin's diary 1686 it is called Frillon. On the old charts three places bear that name, one on the north shore of Conception Bay, one at Ferryland and one near Cape Chapeau Rouge at the western entrance to Placentia Bay. The one at Ferryland and the one at Cape Chapeau Rouge are named Ferryland Heads. The name Frillon is Norman French and means a noise behind a stone. Any one acquainted with either of the Ferryland heads can see how appropriate the name was, as in all instances a large gap exists between the rock of the heads and the points of land through which the sea rushes making a loud noise. Ferryland appears to have had a fort in 1639, and when Lord Baltimore settled there in 1628 he fortified it and the Isle au Bois and in 1629 successfully resisted an attack by some French Ships of War. In 1673 a Dutch squadron of four ships plundered Ferryland. In 1694 Holman defeated the French at Ferryland. In 1708 a French attack on Isle au Bois was unsuccessful. Various other attacks were made but the inhabitants successfully repelled them.

Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland. The traditional landing place of John Cabot, who on the 24th June, 1497, at early dawn sighted the new world. Historians are not agreed as to the landfall, some holding it to be Cape Breton and some Labrador, but the tradition in Newfoundland, which has been handed down since 1600 points to Cape Bonavista.

Cupids—Guy's Colony, under the charter of James I. to Lord Bacon and his associates, was founded at this place in Conception Bay in 1606. Guy was an Alderman of Bristol and sailed from there on his colonization scheme in May 1610. Making a quick passage he had houses and mills erected before the cold weather set in. Carbonara—Battery at Carbonara. Built and manned by the inhabitants in 1690, successfully resisted the French attacks under D'Iberville in 1696.

Until quite recently, were to be seen, the Charcoal pits used to produce the charcoal for the winter heating of the houses of the earliest inhabitants. Channel Islanders were among the first settlers and it is a matter of record that they called the Charcoal pits Charbonniere, hence the corruption of the name to Carbonara.

Trinity—Admirals Island and Fort Point. This was the head station of the "Fishing Regal." As early as the middle of the sixteenth century cannon were mounted here during the fishing season as a defence against pirates. About 1700 the Imperial Government erected permanent batteries here and stationed a small force of artillery men on the island and point. There were no soldiers there in 1762, and the fort was in a dilapidated condition, when the French took it and threw the guns into the sea. Batteries were repaired and remanned in 1763. About 1800 a brick barracks were erected at the Point Fort and a bomb proof magazine for ammunition. Nothing now remains, earth works in ruins, and a few cannon embedded in the sod.

Fox Island—At the Northern side of the entrance to Trinity, is not really an island but a peninsula as at its inner end, it is connected, with a long beach. A battery of eight guns was mounted here on the outer part of the island in 1705. During war time inhabitants of the North side of Trinity Bay were ordered by the Governor to winter at Fox Island.

The Church Register at Trinity—founded by the Rev. Benjamin Lindsay and dating from 1755 is the oldest register of births, deaths and marriages in Newfoundland.

At the Western end of Ryan's premises is still standing an old store, known as "the Pork Store" built by Benjamin Lester in 1763. It is probably the oldest existing building in Newfoundland.

Labrador, Nfld.—Fort York, built at Chateau Bay by order of Governor Palliser in 1765. The plan of the fort is shown in Prowse's History of Newfoundland at page 327.

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charge were kept busy attending to the wants of their guests. A cook-book, which contains over 500 of the latest recipes on home cookery, and compiled by Mesdames David Baird and J. A. Young, was a special attraction. A large number of copies were sold yesterday, but a few are still to be had. The entire sale was most successful and the ladies are very pleased with the results of their efforts.

THE TRAINS—Thursday's express arrived on time.