



Louisbourg



By 1713 the French had lost most of Acadia to the colonial British but they still held the most vital part—Louisbourg harbor on Cape Breton; with it they controlled the St. Lawrence, the approach to Quebec and the rest of New France.

Louis XV sent two of his ablest military engineers, Verville and Verrier, to build a fort. They planned one occupying seventy acres within two miles of massive walls—a citadel and a barracks surrounded by gun embrasures, casemates and a village of 1463 men and women. The barracks, 363 feet long, three stories high, with 100 rooms, would house 3000 troops. A dry moat, a drawbridge, a palisade and earthworks would protect the inner entrances. A thirty-foot wall bristling with cannon would face the sea.

It took twenty-five years and the equivalent of \$10 million to build. The result was fantastic to the eye, though on closer inspection there were serious flaws—the mortar had been mixed improperly with sea sand and the stones were badly dressed. The barracks were almost empty; the authorities in France saw their magnificent fort as sufficient unto itself.

In 1745 the British colonists decided to invade. Massachusetts mustered 3000 volunteers and Connecticut, New Hampshire and New York sent smaller contingents. Pennsylvania declined to send any. Ben Franklin wrote his Massachusetts brother that "fortified towns are hard nuts to crack; and your teeth have not been accustomed to it." In a sense Ben was wrong. The New Eng-

landers, backed by a British fleet, landed without the loss of a single life. The Fort was held by only 600 soldiers. After a couple of months the Fort gave up. Some 330 Frenchmen had died and only 131 New Englanders. The nut had proved easy to crack, but the visiting Yankees found the meat hard to digest. They settled down as an army of occupation and that winter 1200 of them died—of disease, the weather and drunkenness.

Two years later the British returned the Fort to the French at the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Ten years after that, France and England were once more at war and once more Louisbourg fell. This time the British blew it up with gunpowder and carted off the stones to build public buildings in Halifax.

For some 200 years the ruins remained undisturbed among the sands and bogs of the isolated shore. In 1928 it was made a National Historic Site and in 1940 it moved up a grade to a National Historic Park. In 1960 a Royal Commission recommended that it be restored and in 1961 the rebuilding began. This time it will cost \$20 million.

Today most of the major work is done—the citadel, the barracks with the governor's wing, the King's Bastion, the towering walls. With blue slate roofs and high brick chimneys, the magnificent failure gleams in the setting sun like an apparition from the past—a walled French town clustered around the high buildings of officialdom, two centuries and three thousand miles from home.