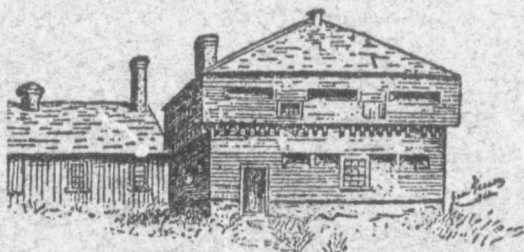


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THE OLD FORT AT TORONTO

1793—1906



ONE OF THE BLOCKHOUSES

JEAN EARLE GEESON

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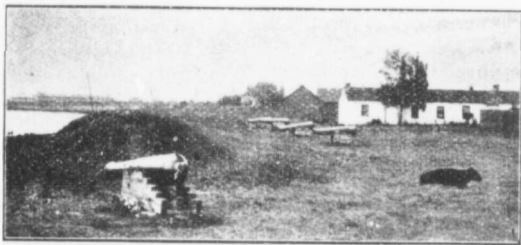
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Proctor
1878 R



View from Half-Moon Battery looking west. Stanley Barracks in the distance.

Photo by W. W. Fox

A Brief History of the "Old Fort" at Toronto

ON the 27th of August, 1793, a royal salute
awoke the echoes along the deeply wooded
shores of Toronto Bay, and was answered
by the ships riding at anchor in the harbor.
Thus did Governor Simcoe inaugurate the new
capital of Upper Canada, for those echoing
volleys announced the birth of a new city,
known as York for forty-one years, but now
known as the City of Toronto.

Governor Simcoe, knowing the defenceless
condition of Niagara and apprehensive of Indian
hostilities or of trouble with the United States,
decided to make Toronto his military centre, for
he writes: "It possesses many eminent advan-
tages . . . and at a less expense may be
rendered more easily impregnable than any place
I have seen in North America."

During the month previous to the naming of
the new city—it was named after the victory of
the Duke of York at Famars—the first division
of Simcoe's own regiment, the "Queen's Rangers,"

sailed from Queenston on the Niagara in bateaux for Toronto, the second division following shortly afterwards in the government ships *Onondaga* and the *Caldwell*, the Governor with the remainder of the regiment embarking on the schooner *Mississaga* for the same destination. These all landed on the north side of the lake, within the bounds of what is now Toronto, the troops pitching their tents along the banks of Garrison Creek, close to where it emptied into the bay. Tradition states that the Governor's tent was pitched on the north bank of Garrison Creek, where afterwards stood the Garrison Hospital. This tent, which had belonged to Captain Cook the great explorer, was imported by Simcoe expressly for this occasion, and formed his abode during the summer of '93 and winter of '94. It was known as the "Canvas House," and was boarded in winter to render it more comfortable. It seems to have held a prominent place for many years in the Garrison, for long after the departure of its "venerated and gracious host," invitations were issued to a ball to be held within its walls.

The site of the enclosure was chosen for its great command of the entrance to the bay, while it also presented natural advantages to aid in its fortification. It was situated on an oblong knoll, bounded by the waters of the lake, which swept its southern embankment, and Garrison Creek ravine, which skirted it to the north and east. Its western area presented the most accessible front to an enemy, which fact was all too well known in later years to its foes.

The first work toward building the Fort of which we have any record, was the erection by

the Queen's Rangers of their own dwellings during the latter part of 1793 and beginning of '94. These were made of logs, and were built along the different sides of the enclosure. There was also built a large blockhouse barracks in the south-east angle of the Fort ground. This building with two log houses, situated on the northern embankment and now clap-boarded over to improve their appearance, are thought to be the only remaining buildings erected at this period.

A round log hut built for the Commissariat of stores and provisions of army staff was built in 1794 and a powder magazine of square hemlock logs in 1795. General Brock, during the spring of 1812, built what he termed "a temporary magazine" for the reception of the spare powder at Fort George and Kingston. This was the magazine that blew up when the Americans took the Fort in 1813. It was a strong stone building built into the embankment of the water front midway between the half-moon battery and the south-western bastion.

The present stone magazine near the western entrance has the door facing the water-front. At some remote period this door had a great wooden porch or veranda placed over it, as though it had suddenly occurred to the one in command that the door was exposed to an enemy's fire from the water-front. This heavy structure became dilapidated, and a few years ago was removed whereupon there came to view an inscription engraved on the key-stone, "34 G.R. III."* It was thought that this stone had

* George III began to reign in 1760. The 34th year of his reign would therefore make the date of this stone 1794.

U.S. Army

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belonged to the fated magazine of 1813, but as the date 1794 belongs to Simcoe's period this theory has been abandoned.

There is no record of all the buildings put up during Governor Simcoe's time, but we read that 20,000 bricks were delivered from time to time, for public services at the barracks previous to 1800, for the building of new bakeries and for the repair of barrack buildings and ovens; also that canals, locks and wharfs were constructed on Garrison Creek, and a bridge built across the same stream. The Surveyor-General D. W. Smythe, writing at that period states that, "on the mainland opposite to the point is the Garrison, situated in a fork made by the harbor and a small rivulet, which being improved by sluices affords an easy access for boats to go up to the stores." This stream at one time measured eighteen feet across, and ~~forty years ago~~ the anglers of the fort were wont to angle for trout within its shadowy pools.

In 1796 Governor Simcoe returned to England and his plans for fortifying York were but little furthered. In a report to the Government, dated July 2nd, 1800, we read that "The intervals between huts were ordered to be stockaded and gates put up with locks and bars; likewise a large space afterwards stockaded in front of huts on the parade." Outside of the Fort proper a field of from seven to eight acres was cleared, enclosed and laid down with grass seed, for the more easy mode of procuring the quantity of hay required for the King's oxen. Very little is known of its actual condition until September, 1811. The garrison then could boast of one sergeant, one gunner, and two light six-pounders.

Fishing

i

*as late
as 1865*

In December of the same year General Brock, writing to Sir Geo. Prevost, states that "the only magazine is a small wooden shed, not sixty yards from the King's house, which is rendered dangerous from the quantity of powder it already contains." In the spring of 1812 General Brock built the magazine on the water front and in other ways strengthened the fort.

Now we come to what makes the fort at York a spot second to no other in Canada in tragic interest, and that is the part it took in the war of 1812, when it was captured by the Americans.

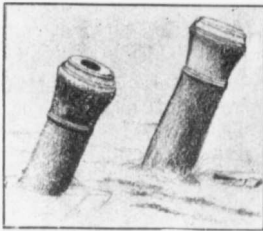
The land campaign of 1812 had proved a victorious one for our troops, but on the lakes the Americans took the lead, and, in the spring of 1813, were fully equipped and ready for sea as soon as navigation opened, while our fleet was not ready until the month of May.

General Dearborn, who commanded the middle division of the American Army, with Commodore Chauncey, set sail from Sackett's Harbor on the 25th of April, 1813, for Little York, with twenty-three vessels mounting between seventy-two and eighty guns, with a land force on board of two thousand five hundred, and one thousand seamen. The watch set upon Scarboro' Heights sighted the fleet late on the evening of the 26th and carried the news to York. The little town was all excitement, but, "old and young, rich and poor, high and low, rushed to arms. The maimed, the wounded, the invalid, the reckless school-boy, the grave judge of the land, all shouldered their muskets and fell into the ranks."* Major General Sheaffe, who chanced to be at the Fort, made what preparations he

*Coffin's History of War of 1812.

The

could with his small force. The regular garrison consisted of a company of Glengarries and fifty men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and militia. A division of the 8th Regiment, who chanced to arrive from Kingston a day or so before, swelled this little company to six hundred or seven hundred men. The Artillery consisted of three old French guns, minus their trunnions, clamped down upon pine logs made to answer for carriages.



Guns taken from Fort Rouille, built in 1749.

These were placed between embrasures facing the mouth of the harbor. The morning of the 27th dawned bright and clear, and the American squadron was seen bearing down toward the Fort. The point chosen for disembarkation was opposite the site of the old French Fort Rouille, now marked by a granite shaft within the exhibition grounds. But the wind carried them beyond to the eastern extremity of Humber Bay, before the ships could round to and present a broadside to the shore. Here they anchored and the boats assembled to carry the men to shore.

Seeing that the enemy was in overwhelming force, General Sheaffe, in chief command in this part of the Province, believed it best to withdraw towards Kingston.

Capt. McNeil, with two companies of the 8th Regiment, and about two hundred militia, was despatched to check the enemy's advance, and to

give time to evacuate the post. Col. Givens, with a small body of Indians, was already skirmishing along the wooded shore of Humber Bay, to ascertain the exact spot of landing. Captain McNeil, upon learning the enemy's intended point of descent, hurried his men to the heights, now known as King Street Crescent, where he drew them up, "a startling red line," in full view of the American batteries. But, alas, the first sweeping broadside from the American ships "mowed the men down like grass before the scythe." The brave Captain himself fell, and his men scattered.

e/ The Americans drew into what was then known as Wolf's Cove, later called "The Yankee Cut," but in our times known as "Sunnyside." Their landing was soon effected, but not without resistance. Colonel Givens and his Indians harried the enemy, while the remaining regulars and militia disputed every foot of the way.

General Pike,* perhaps the ablest and most courageous of the generals on the United States side during the war led the attacking party and made his way slowly but steadily toward the Fort. Our forces made a gallant stand at the first battery, but had to retreat to the second where they spiked their guns and retired to the Fort. It was about 2 p.m. when Pike halted at the second battery. This was about 300 yards distant from the enclosure. He sent forward a detachment to learn what was going on inside the Fort, for it bore the appearance of being evacuated. This was indeed true;

* This general was leader of the expedition which discovered Pike's Peak, and that celebrated mountain was named in his honor.

*enemies
U.S.*

*?
enemies
forces*

General Sheaffe had collected his remaining regulars and was then in full retreat towards Kingston.

Learning this Pike himself drew near and was in the act of questioning a militia soldier named Joseph Shepherd as to the location of the public buildings when a terrific explosion occurred which wrought dreadful havoc among the American soldiers who were crowding into the enclosure. The magazine on the water-front, full of ammu-



One of the old guns pointing through embrasure towards the Lake.
Gun removed a few years ago.

Photo by W. W. Fox

invading forces

tion, had been fired by our defeated troops. A heavy stone struck down General Pike, who died shortly after, and severely injured Shepherd, who, however, lived long after to make the hills and dales of Scarboro' ring with his hearty shout of "Rule Britannia." This explosion caused a loss to the Americans of 220 men, while our loss is estimated to be 62.

Many are the stories as to who blew up the magazine. In the records of the 8th Regiment it is stated that a sergeant, Marshall, when he

U.S. forces
 saw the Americans about to enter the Fort, jumped back over the defences into the Fort exclaiming, "They may have the Fort, but they shall not have the ammunition." Another claimant to this act lived in Scarborough, Pilkey by name.

enemy
 The Americans did not remain in possession long, as they retired on the 2nd May. But they stayed long enough to plunder and destroy much private property and to burn the public buildings of the town, the library, and all the papers and records belonging to these institutions, including the mace, the Speaker's wig, and the flag from the parliament building. These relics are now in the military museum at Annapolis, Md. All this was contrary to the terms of the capitulation.

Canadians have every reason to be proud of the brave defenders of York, for the struggle for its keeping lasted eight hours, and was mainly carried on by our militia. Bodies have from time to time been dug up along the fighting line, which extended from Sunnyside to the Fort, showing how stoutly each step was disputed.

The prisoners taken by the Americans were two hundred and four privates, some officers, and about thirty regulars.

After three or four days' occupation, the invaders evacuated the Fort, but made a second descent upon it on July 31st of the same year. The larger vessels remained outside the harbor, while six schooners anchored opposite the Fort and three opposite the town. About two hundred and fifty men were landed. They broke open the gaol and liberated the prisoners. The flour in St. George's, Allan's and the King's stores amounting to several hundred barrels, they carried away and burned the Blockhouse on

remove

U.S. forces

Gibraltar Point, the point on the Island next to the western entrance to the Bay—also the barracks and the woodyard. They left at day-break on August 2nd.

After this visitation but little remained of the Fort, but it was rebuilt in 1816, and made a "regular fortification." The bastions were arranged in accordance with the plan drawn up for Governor Simcoe in 1793, while the batteries were placed so as to meet any attack on the curtain wall.

The barracks were built along the sides of the enclosure, just below the parapet. They were long, low buildings, divided off into large rooms, each room to hold about eighteen men. Those along the water-front have long ago disappeared; also the row on the eastern embankment. The latter were pulled down about 1860, and the present building, called the drill shed, put up upon the site. The original buildings were made of logs, and were occupied by the Queen's Rangers in 1794. The rows of brick barracks built along the western embankment are still standing. The large rooms were partitioned off about forty years ago when they were given as dwellings to the married men, hence their present name—"The married men's quarters."

The engineers' office and store was on the site of the large barracks situated in the north-west angle of the enclosure. This building was put up at the time the Fort was repaired during 1837 to 1840. It will accommodate about four hundred men. Over the doors leading to the huge apartments can still be read "38 men, 1 sergeant," while over the doors of the smaller rooms is the word "Sergeant." To the front of this

No 1



No 2



No. 1 shows "Married Men's Quarters" and large barracks on the left; Officers' Quarters across background, and stone magazine on the right palisaded.

No. 2 shows centre blockhouse and gun shed attached. Sergeants' Quarters at left front, supposed to have been built by Queen's Rangers under Simcoe. Small building beyond blockhouse is a magazine once used as a prison.

is a long, low red brick building running parallel to the parapet. These were the superior officers' quarters. A long hall divided it from end to end. The south division contained the dining-hall, recreation room, and billiard room; on the north side were the kitchens and sleeping rooms, while underneath are extensive wine cellars and an immense vault, built of solid masonry with heavy iron doors. This was the treasury.

The Commandants' quarters were erected a little to the north-west of what is now known as the canteen. They were built two stories high, and for some time were used as a storehouse and canteen. They were burnt down forty years ago, and the present roughcast house put up to replace them. A cook house also



Cook House—removed
in 1902.

stood in this angle of the Fort, at the north-east corner of the Officers' quarters. This was pulled down in the fall of 1902, and so solidly and of such good material was it

built that the contractor made one hundred dollars out of the sale of it. It had contained immense ovens and "coppers," as they were called, consisting of great square-shaped iron pots, fifteen in number, built into masonry, each one requiring its own fire underneath and separate flue. In these were made tea, coffee, soup, and in fact everything that needed boiling. The ovens were heated by burning great piles of cordwood inside of them. When thoroughly heated the fire was raked out and the bread put in and enclosed by heavy



One of the "coppers"
used in cook house.

iron doors. This building rested upon a platform of brick laid four deep.

The blockhouses with their loop-holed sides and projecting upper stories are by far the most interesting buildings of the Fort. Such blockhouses were designed by the French for defence from the Indians and forcibly remind us that at the time of their construction Indians were a dreaded foe in Upper Canada. The one in the south-east corner was built during Simcoe's time, but the one known as the centre blockhouse was built in 1816. This one has a gigantic flag-pole arising from its roof which is so firmly built into the structure that an attempt to remove it revealed the fact that the roofing would have to be taken off in order to do so. To the east of this blockhouse is a story and a half brick building surrounded by a high palisade. It was used in 1816 for ordnance stores, later on as a prison, but now is filled with ammunition. The magazine to the west of the centre blockhouse is still fulfilling the original purpose for which it was built. It also dates back to 1816.

Running parallel with the central roadway are two long rows of one-story buildings made of logs but clap-boarded over to improve their appearance. The first two contained the staff officers' quarters and are thought to be a part of the original Fort. The last two contain the fire-hall and guardhouse.

Planted upright in the ground, one on each side of the roadway where it passes between the married men's quarters, are two old French guns. There is every reason to believe that these guns were left by the French when they destroyed Fort Rouille in 1759, and that they were the

abandoned

French guns spoken of as being the only guns within the Fort enclosure at the time of its cap-



Old French guns at western gate. Part of "married men's quarters" and the large barracks in background.

U. S. fort U. S. fort by the Americans. With what interest should we view these relics of the past.

In 1837 the pickets around the Fort were put into thorough order and the gateways made secure, while in 1840 to 1841 the storehouses and Stanley Barracks were built by Sir John Colborne.

Some of the guns mounted here now do duty in neighboring parks, while a number lie in the yard of the storehouse near by.



View of Fort from water-front. From a pencil sketch made by J. R. Lumley, about 1837.

The military cemeteries must not be overlooked. The first one is on Portland Street, near to Front Street. This sacred spot was chosen by Governor Simcoe, and the first to be buried there was his eldest daughter, who died when an infant. This spot was closed to burials in 1860, at which time the present cemetery was laid out. It is to the west of the Fort at the top of Strachan Avenue. The first cemetery has been made into a square in the centre of which stands a magnificent monument to commemorate the dead buried there.



The Canteen. Built about 40 years ago to replace the original canteen.

In the fall of 1903 one side of the Fort was mutilated by the cutting away of the south-eastern bastion to make way for a

pork-packing establishment. The earth thus removed was used to deepen the roadway in the Fort and also dumped to the north side of the eastern gateway. While digging away the embankment remains of three bodies were unearthed and carted away with the debris. These were American and British soldiers who fell on the fatal day of April 1813.

U. S.

Detachments of over one hundred different regiments have been quartered at this Fort since its erection. Among the famous British regiments garrisoned here were the following: The Queen's Rangers, the 1st Royal Scots, the 8th King's, many of whom fell in its defence; the 42nd Highlanders and the 93rd Highlanders

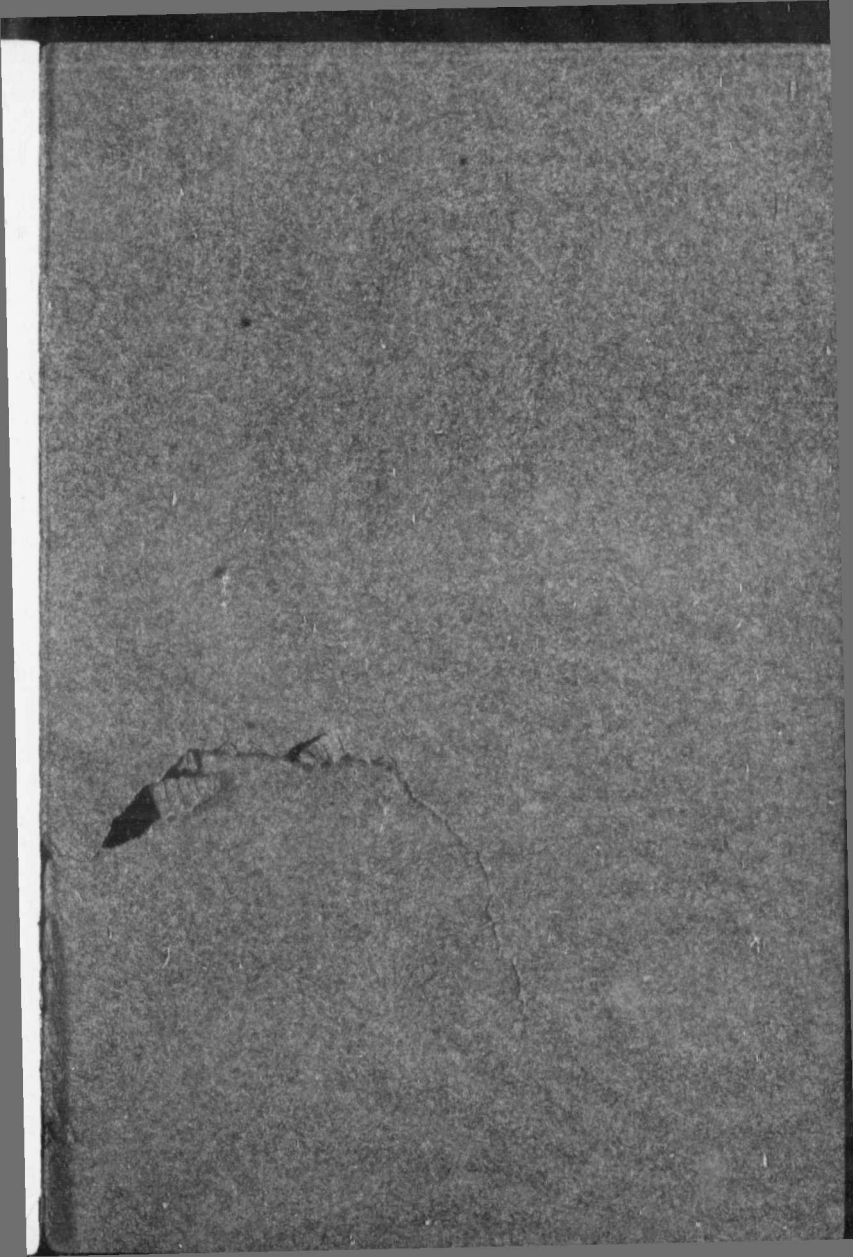
(both of whom fought at Waterloo), the 71st Highlanders, the 13th Hussars, the 30th Regiment, the 19th Hussars, who fought at Queens-
ton Heights, the 47th Lancashire, celebrated in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo; a detachment of the 29th Regiment, under Captain Middleton (afterwards General Middleton); the 16th, brought out during the Trent affair; the 17th Bengal Tigers, 3rd, 4th and 10th Batteries of Artillery, the 24th Regiment, which was wiped out in India, and afterwards in the Zulu war of 1879; lastly, the Newfoundland Regiment, and the 100th Regiment of Royal Canadian Rifles, which was raised in Canada for service in the Indian mutiny, and afterwards disbanded in Canada.

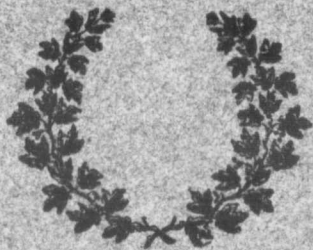
This Fort as it remains to us to-day is almost unique as an example of a stockaded fort of the period of Indian warfare, showing us by comparison with the present what great changes have been made in the arts of war in this time. And let it not be forgotten that this same little Fort, built and garrisoned by Imperial troops, has in recent years furnished the equipment for the Canadian volunteers who served the Empire in the Fenian raids, the Riel rebellion, and the South African war.

May the city which traces its earliest history to this spot treasure it as a monument of the past, and may the Government which it so nobly struggled to uphold, so protect and restore it that future generations may see from what small beginnings this great and glorious country has grown.

JEAN EARLE GEESON.

Parkdale, Toronto, May 24th, 1906.





Wm. Briggs

TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
1906