



Fort George  
National Historic Site

# Visitor Guide

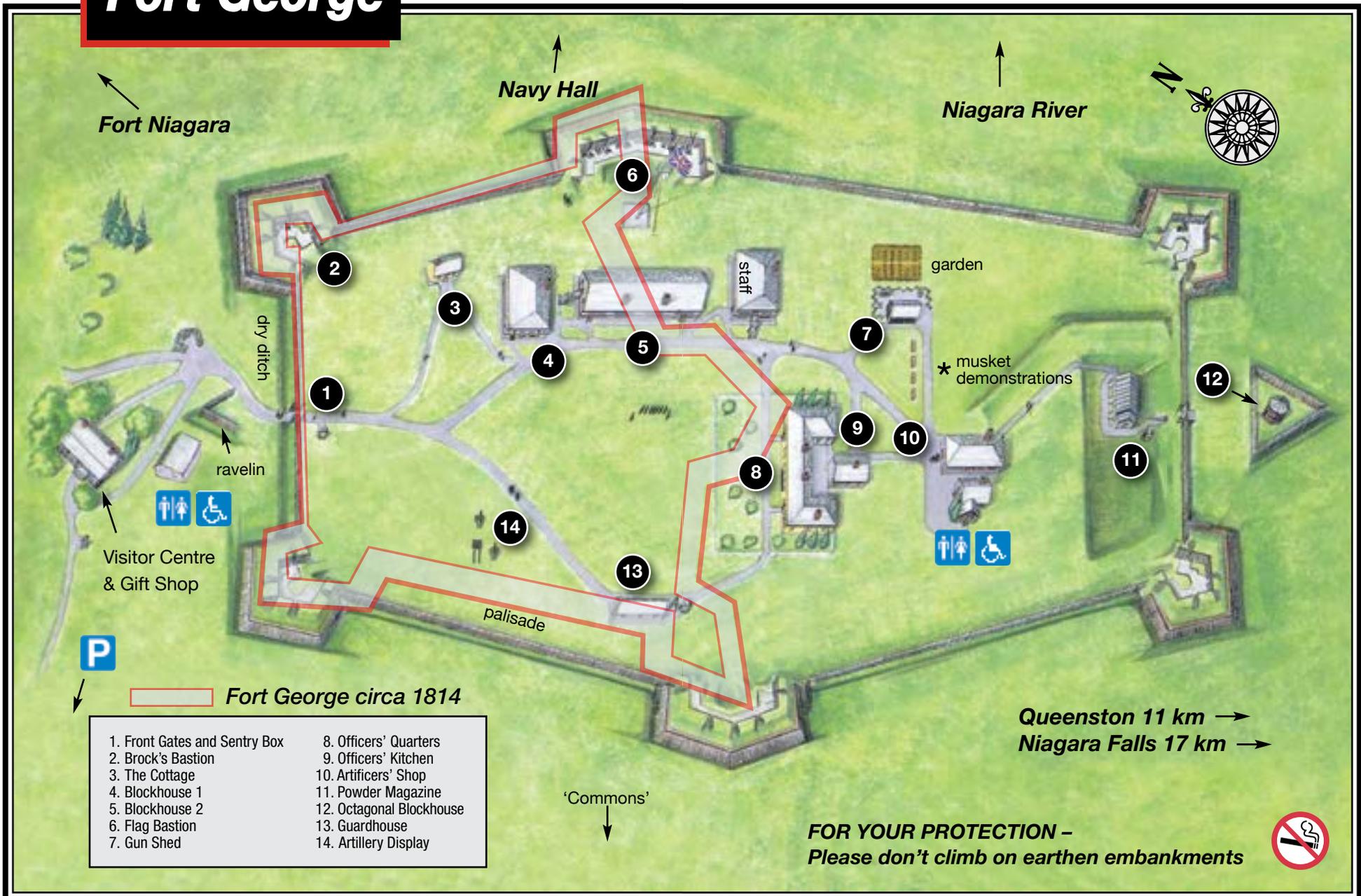


Parks  
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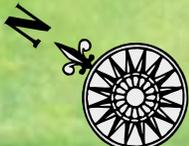
# Fort George



Fort Niagara

Navy Hall

Niagara River



dry ditch

ravelin

staff

garden

\* musket demonstrations

Visitor Centre & Gift Shop



Fort George circa 1814

Queenston 11 km →  
Niagara Falls 17 km →

- |                               |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Front Gates and Sentry Box | 8. Officers' Quarters    |
| 2. Brock's Bastion            | 9. Officers' Kitchen     |
| 3. The Cottage                | 10. Artificers' Shop     |
| 4. Blockhouse 1               | 11. Powder Magazine      |
| 5. Blockhouse 2               | 12. Octagonal Blockhouse |
| 6. Flag Bastion               | 13. Guardhouse           |
| 7. Gun Shed                   | 14. Artillery Display    |

'Commons'

**FOR YOUR PROTECTION -**  
Please don't climb on earthen embankments





## MEMORIES AWAIT

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# Welcome to Fort George National Historic Site!

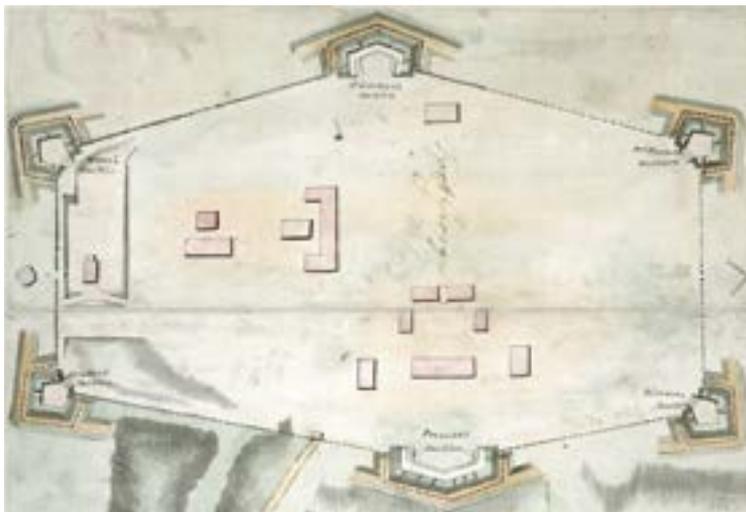
We are delighted that you have taken the time to visit one of Parks Canada's national treasures that commemorates the War of 1812 - a conflict between the United States and Great Britain, and therefore Canada. The Niagara region saw some of the heaviest fighting during that war when Canada's very existence hung in the balance. The War of 1812 also marked the road towards peace and friendship that has lasted for over two centuries. Today at Fort George National Historic Site,

we honour the sacrifice and hardships of thousands during this conflict and remember those who fell in the service of their country. We commemorate nation-building events and celebrate over 200 years of peace. It is our goal to provide you, our guest, with a unique and memorable experience that brings this important part of our shared history to life. On behalf of Parks Canada and the "Fort George Family", we thank you for joining us and hope that you enjoy your visit.

## *History of the Fort*

In the late 18th century, suspense and anxiety about the defense and future of the young British colony hovered over the Niagara frontier. There was great concern about the threat of an American invasion on this isolated and vulnerable settlement.

On the Niagara River bank stood a complex of military buildings known as Navy Hall, dating from 1765. It had been the headquarters for the volunteer Provincial Marine, and by the late 1790s had become a critical link in the supply route to British forts on the upper Great Lakes.



*A plan of Fort George circa 1800, Parks Canada Collection*

## Construction

The British built Fort George between 1796 and 1799 to complement Navy Hall and to guard the strategic river mouth and Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake). As Fort George expanded over the years, it shared the supply depot role with Navy Hall and began to counterbalance uneasiness.

The strong presence of the British military at Fort George, the fort's well-trained and well-organized garrison, the strategic supply routes, and the gallant commander in chief, Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, fostered a sense of security. On the other hand, the presence in the Niagara region of many American-born settlers, whose loyalty was questionable, was cause

for concern. As was the much-needed allegiance of the First Nations assured.

These perceptions of security and insecurity struck a capricious balance, and on the eve of the War of 1812, the Niagara frontier was apprehensive. Fort George was poised for an invasion.

## Fort George

During the War of 1812, the American campaign on the Niagara region focused on Fort George. In the fall of 1812, repeated artillery duels between Fort George and American Fort Niagara damaged defences on both sides of the river. In May, 1813, a massive bombardment by American artillery batteries pounded the fort into a smoking ruin leaving the powder magazine as the



*The esplanade – Fort George, watercolour by Edward Walsh, 1805 (Clements Library, University of Michigan).*



*Chief John Norton, (Teyoninhokarawen), was of Scottish and Cherokee ancestry. Adopted by the Mohawk Chief, Joseph Brant, he rose to become the principal war chief of the Six Nations of Iroquois. An important ally of the British, Norton led warriors at Queenston Heights, the Battle of Fort George and many other important military engagements. (Courtesy of the Champlain Society, Toronto).*

only building to survive. Two days later, the Americans invaded forcing the outnumbered British forces to withdraw. The Americans re-fortified the site and for the next seven months, Fort George and the town of Niagara were enemy occupied territory.

In December, the Americans abandoned Fort George and retreated to Fort Niagara. In an act condemned throughout British North America

and the United States, they burned the thriving town of Niagara to the ground, driving inhabitants out into a fierce winter storm. The British then re-occupied the fort, attacked and captured Fort Niagara and took firm control of the Niagara frontier. In 1814, British engineers began construction of Fort Mississauga at the river mouth and Butler's Barracks on the plains to replace Fort George. Fort George was allowed to fall into ruin and was abandoned, finally, in the late 1820s.

More than a century later, the historic stronghold was reconstructed to its pre-1813 appearance and in 1950 it was opened officially to the public.

Since 1969, Parks Canada has administered the fort as a national historic site. This brochure offers a glimpse of the rich history of Fort George National Historic Site. Today, explore the fort as it appeared before that fateful day in May of 1813. We invite you to attend the living history demonstrations and chat with our staff. Your comments are always welcome.



*A view of Fort George from Old Fort Niagara (N.Y.) 1800 (Courtesy of the J. Ross Robertson Collection, Metropolitan Toronto Central Library)*



## Front Gates and Sentry Box

You will notice that the fort's main entrance is secured by heavy gates made of massive timbers and reinforced with iron spikes. By day, these gates were open and a sentry was posted to keep careful watch over all who entered. At night, they were closed and locked. A sentry box was provided for him near the gates as shelter during bad weather.

An enemy force attempting to storm the gates faced certain obstacles. The gates opened outward – the crush of enemy troops forcing their way in actually helped the defenders close the gates quickly.

A V-shaped picketing (ravelin) served to break the enemy force in two and direct it into the range of the cannon in the raised platforms, (bastions) to the left and right. The bridge was protected by a pair of smaller cannon and the dry ditch made access to the wooden palisade difficult.



## Brock's Bastion

Brock's bastion was the fort's most strategic artillery battery. From here, British gunners could train heavy artillery directly into the heart of the American Fort Niagara. The bastion also covered the mouth of the Niagara River and was in position for firing on enemy ships attempting to gain access to the river from Lake Ontario. It is named after Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, who, together with Lieutenant-Colonel John Macdonell, was buried here after



*Major-General Sir Isaac Brock (1769-1812), the Saviour of Upper Canada*

the Battle of Queenston Heights, on October 13, 1812. Twelve years later, their bodies were re-interred in a vault in the newly constructed memorial on Queenston Heights, overlooking the historic battlefield.



## The Cottage

This Georgian-style cottage is similar to one an officer or settler might have built for himself near the fort. Constructed with materials salvaged from an original building dating from about 1820, it was erected during the fort's reconstruction from 1937-1940.

The sturdy and secure Georgian style of architecture was introduced to the



*A soldier and his wife prepare for their day at the fort. The soldier will spend most of his time on the parade square, practicing battle drills and cleaning weapons and equipment. His wife will work to supplement the meager wage of her husband.*

frontier by British and Loyalist settlers. It consisted of simple, well-proportioned buildings, symmetrical facades and small-paned rectangular window openings.

### **Blockhouse 1**

As you enter this building ask yourself this question; Who won the War of 1812? This exhibit explores this question and also looks at the war from the different perspectives of the key players; the British, Americans, First Nations, and the citizens of the Province of Upper Canada. The exhibit makes use of first hand accounts, historic artwork, one of a kind artefacts and is supported by an immersive multimedia experience that will put you right in the middle of the bombardment and Battle of Fort George.

### **Blockhouse 2**

For the British Army on the frontier, blockhouses were almost indispensable. These large rectangular buildings served as sturdy barracks and storehouses. A blockhouse was really a fort within a fort and became the last line of defense for the garrison. In times of peace, this blockhouse at Fort George stored supplies for the garrison or for forwarding to other forts on the upper Great Lakes. It also provided living quarters for the soldiers and their wives and children. At least six of every 100 men at Fort George were permitted to bring their families, which were fed and housed at the army's expense. The "married quarters" consisted of a blanket hung around a bottom bunk.

Children slept in a spare bunk, on the floor or wherever they could find a spot.

Food, like most aspects of a soldier's life, was fixed by regulation. Daily rations of flour, meat, cheese in lieu of butter, peas and rice were issued. For variety, the men often pooled their resources to buy supplementary ingredients from the town merchants.



## *Flag Bastion*

Overlooking the American Fort Niagara across the Niagara River and commanding a view of the river, this bastion is the fort's largest and was the most heavily armed. The largest calibre cannons were placed in the centre of the earthworks to oppose American batteries on the opposite shore. Nine-pounder guns at either side covered the

palisade walls and swept the dry ditch to protect against infantry attack.

Below the bastion stretched the storehouses and wharves of Navy Hall, local headquarters for Britain's Great Lakes fleet. This military complex was destroyed by the Americans during the War of 1812. The restored stone building is all that remains of Navy Hall today.



## *Gunshed*

Artillery was essential to the defense of Fort George. Large garrison guns were mounted in the fort's bastions to cover the Niagara River and the approaches to the fort. These guns weighed several tonnes and could not be moved easily.

Gunners of this era were also equipped with field artillery which was lighter and



*Flag Bastion*

much more mobile. Field guns were designed to be moved quickly into battle to support the infantry. When not in actual use, the field guns were lined up in a state of readiness in a park of artillery, or in a gunshed.

An estimate for “a shed for the field ordnance” for Fort George exists, though the location of this building is not known. Support vehicles, such as ammunition carts and a portable blacksmith’s forge, were also stored at the fort.



### *Officers’ Quarters*



Officers expected to live like gentlemen, even on the frontier, and those at Fort George were no exception. They attempted to re-create in their living quarters the high material and social standards they were accustomed to in Great Britain. The mess – the centre of social activity – is the central feature of this building. Originally, the word mess meant to eat. Later, it came to mean dining together, and ultimately, to signify a dining room or social area.

Elaborate mess rules were established and social life became a military version

of civilian “high society.” Dinners were sophisticated affairs, complete with fine silverware and china, serving dishes and decanters of port and sherry. After dinner, card games, music and more imbibing of wine would conclude the evening in the games room.

The bedrooms or personal quarters reflect the background, rank and interests of the officers. Some furniture was brought from home, some was purchased from local cabinetmakers or tradesmen and some was supplied by the barrack master.



### *Officers’ Kitchen*



This building provided the officers’ mess with elaborate full-course dinners. It contains typical early 19th century cooking equipment. An experienced cook could create sophisticated dishes in this simple open hearth and brick bake oven. Army cooks and civilian cooks hired in Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake) were expected to be able to prepare such traditional delicacies as roast beef, fruit tarts, wine sauces, claret jelly and other favourites.



*Kitchen duties performed by civilians.*

The ingredients reflected a discriminating standard of living. Some, such as chocolate, soy sauce, lemons, tea and spices were imported. Others, such as vegetables, fresh meat and fruit were purchased from the town market. Fresh game and fish from the countryside provided sport and a change of diet for the officers.



## *Artificers' Building*



Self-sufficiency was critical in British North America. Thousands of miles of forest, rivers and ocean separated the colony from the mother country, the central source of supplies. It was essential that the army employ well-trained and resourceful craftsmen, or artificers. Often only their initiative could get the job done.

The carpenter and the blacksmith, the two most important artificers, could repair or manufacture almost any item, from tools for other craftsmen and mess benches for the enlisted men to gun carriages and fort buildings, such as blockhouses.



## *Powder Magazine*



Built in 1796, this powder magazine was the only fort building to survive the War of 1812 which makes it one of, if not the oldest, surviving military buildings in the Province of Ontario.

During the tensions of the early 1800s, several hundred barrels of gunpowder were stored within these thick stone walls. Strict precautions were designed

to avoid an accidental explosion, which could have destroyed not only the magazine but also much of the fort. Only spark-proof materials were approved for use in the magazine. The floor boards were secured with wooden pegs, not iron nails. The doors were covered with copper and soldiers working here wore special smocks and shoes with no metal fastenings.

Although this building was protected from cannon fire by high earthen banks, it once received a direct hit from American gunners at Fort Niagara. On October 13, 1812, during the Battle of Queenston Heights, a red-hot cannonball penetrated the roof and set fire to the wooden supports. With 800 barrels of gunpowder likely to explode, the garrison deserted the fort in panic. Only a small party of local militiamen and Royal artillerymen, led by Captain Vigoreux of the Royal Engineers, remained. They climbed onto the magazine roof, tore off the metal and extinguished the fire before it could ignite the gunpowder.



## *Octagonal Blockhouse*

This small octagonal blockhouse in the centre of the south ravelin is a replica of the original. Constructed as an artillery storehouse, the original structure also provided a defensive position and lookout during an attack.

The south ravelin served the same defensive function as the north ravelin at the front gates but is much stronger. Today, a tunnel connects it to the fort.



## *Guardhouse*

The guardhouse was the centre of the fort's daily operations. All visitors – merchants, contractors, suppliers, etc. – were required to report here before proceeding with their business.

For the guards manning the sentry posts, the guardhouse was a place to rest between four-hour shifts. The shelf bed allowed a few hours of light sleep but soldiers were not permitted to remove their uniforms or equipment while they slept.

As uncomfortable as the soldiers must have been, the prisoners were more so. Deserters, drunken soldiers and other unfortunates were confined to small, dark cells. Flogging, the punishment for most offences, was administered outside, on the punishment triangle. The offender's shirt was removed, his wrists were tied to the cross-piece and a cat-o'-nine tails whip was laid on formally and rigorously. When an offender was sentenced to more lashes

than he could withstand without danger to life, his punishment was delivered in installments. While flogging seems an unusually harsh punishment by today's standards, it was an accepted form of discipline within the military in the early 19th century.



## *Transportation of Artillery*



Whether moving big iron guns from bastion to bastion or shipping them to another fort, the transportation of artillery was vital to the defense of the province. The equipment on this field demonstrates how the Royal Artillery moved cannons, some of which weighed several tonnes!



**[parks canada.gc.ca/fortgeorge](https://parks canada.gc.ca/fortgeorge)**

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Niagara National Historic Sites

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QS-C-25-000-EE-A14

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**The Friends of Fort George** is a non-profit, co-operating association working with Parks Canada to enhance and support the interpretive programme. The association operates a gift shop in the visitor centre.

For more information: [www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca](http://www.friendsoffortgeorge.ca)



## Other Niagara Sites



**Fort Mississauga**  
NHS



**Navy Hall**



**Butler's Barracks**  
NHS



**Brock's Monument**





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