

The Birthplace of Toronto

The Newsletter of Historic Fort York ~ Vol. 1, No. 3 ~ Winter 2004



The view North (left) and East (right) from the 20th floor of Waterpark City, our soon-to-be neighbours to the south. Check out www.waterparkcity.ca/project.html for more views.

Recent Events at the Fort

By David Juliusson

This is the third issue of The Birthplace of Toronto, the newsletter of Historic Fort York. We publish the newsletter quarterly, giving visitors, patrons, volunteers, staff and the community brief but informative insight into daily life at "the old fort". You will read about special events, volunteer activities and opportunities, and staff news. You'll learn some interesting facts about artifacts, buildings, and exhibits. You'll get advance notice of special events and how you can become more involved in this National Historic Site.

Every season at Fort York is different, and the beginning of another cold January gave me the time to reminisce about the fall season.

The last few days of summer ended with the steady drifting away of the Fort York Guard, so by Labour Day, they had all returned to their regular lives. The next day, Ken Purvis, Peter Gibbins and myself represented the fort one last time at the *Mel Lastman Charity Golf Tournament* by firing the cannon to signal the start the event. Fall had arrived.

October saw our annual *Ghosts of the Garrison* event. Over three nights, about 300 visitors were led by candlelight through the site, where they met "ghosts" who told their unique stories.

The last special event of the year was the annual *Remembrance Day* ceremony on November 11, co-

hosted by the IODE, (*Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire*). Members of the public, some school classes, and an ever-diminishing number of veterans attended.

In September we were informed that Jessup Food and Heritage would be leaving the fort after five years of providing food service. Until December 31st, Jessup was the exclusive caterer at the site but, for various reasons, Paul Fortier has decided to concentrate his efforts in Eastern Ontario. We wish Paul and the Jessup staff well. Fort York will continue to offer booked and catered events in the future.

Finally, January 17th saw the third annual *Queen Charlotte's Birthday Ball*. It was a great success, with dance workshops, lectures (by Jessica Warner and Fort York archaeologist David Spittal), gin tasting, a buffet dinner and an elegant ball.

David Juliusson is a full time Program Officer and has been working at Fort York since 1989.

Garrison News - A Staff Report

by Karen Crisp

This fall the fort welcomed four new part-time staff members to its team!

Edward Bell, a former guard member, has joined the Fort York Interpreting staff. He is in his second year at the University of Toronto and is studying history. **Melissa Wright**, who also works at Mackenzie House, is helping out by working a few shifts here as well. Melissa has completed her undergraduate degree and is taking some time to think about her further options. **Genevieve Dix** has just finished four years at the University of Toronto and is currently taking some time off while contemplating her future studies. Genevieve also works at Casa Loma. **Clare Whittingham** is here from St. Catherines, in her third year at the University of Toronto where she is studying art history. We welcome all of the new staff and hope their time here is enjoyable.

A Volunteer Recruitment Night was held in October. Through November, December and January the screening and interview process was completed and 14 new volunteers have been added to our ranks. Joining the Dance Programme are: **Yishin Khoo, James Smith, Cassandra Perkins, Ruth Kitchen, Mirta Kitchen, Alma Sinan, Christianne Boin-Goessell** and **Ed & Shirley Martin**. A new project will be started in 2004 with the Garrison Garden. Joining specifically to work on this exciting project are **Mark Feltoe, Susan Carson** and **Cynthia Feldman**. Adding more support in the officers' kitchen will be **Ellen Johnstone, Gareth Newfield, John Hammond** and **Valerie MacDonald**.

*With notes from Melanie Garrison and Bridget Wranich.
Karen Crisp is a part-time museum store attendant.*

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Credits:

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Swords

Recent Artifact Acquisitions at Historic Fort York

By Peter Gibbins

Toronto's City museums recently acquired two new items, generous donations by Gavin Huxtable of Kingston and David Holbrook of Toronto. While the artifacts are interesting in themselves, the historical circumstances with which they are connected make them even more so.

Both are Pattern 1796 Light Cavalry Sabres, the armament of most British light dragoon (and later, hussar and lancer) regiments until 1821. While they are identical in basic structure, the decorative flourishes on one specimen marks it as an officer's weapon. Embellished or not, the 1796 Sabre was a businesslike weapon, one of the better British military swords. Its designer, Maj. Gen. John Gaspard Le Marchant, was a rarity in his time: a cavalry officer who thought deeply about his profession. During Flanders campaign in the early 1790s he systematically studied the British cavalry system and found it wanting in many respects. Le Marchant therefore proposed improvements in training, tactics, and equipment; often using allied cavalrymen, the famous Austrian hussars, as his standard. One proposal - that all British cavalrymen carry a curved hussar-style sabre of his design - was too large a break from tradition for the War Office. While light dragoon regiments received these effective instruments, heavy cavalrymen obtained a more conventional (and virtually useless) straight-bladed sword. Critics noted the Pattern 1796 Sabre's lack of hand protection and its clumsiness in dismounted action while most users appreciated its advantages. The Prussian army adopted it in 1811, and sepoy cavalrymen in India admired it as well. Wielded skillfully it could inflict frightful damage: in Spain, a British corporal allegedly split his opponent's helmeted head nearly in two. Le Marchant died at the Battle of Salamanca in 1812 with one of his sabres in hand. Some of these swords made their way to a distant seat of war in Upper Canada, where cavalry actions were few.

The first, an example of the officers' version, purportedly belonged to Stephen Heward (177? - 1828), Gavin Huxtable's great-great grandfather. Born in England, Heward came to Upper Canada via the United States and New Brunswick. At the outbreak of war with the United States in 1812, he was a prosperous citizen, enjoying further local prominence as captain of the 2nd Flank Company, 3rd York Militia. The two flank companies of an Upper Canada militia battalion equated (respectively) to the grenadier and light companies of a regular infantry unit. Their real significance, however, was political not military. When hostilities began Upper Canada's military administrator, Maj. Gen. Isaac Brock, remarked that most people were either "so indifferent or so thoroughly American" that a change of government would not bother them - poor material for a militia to supplement his regular forces. Therefore, Brock called upon volunteers "from the best description of inhabitants" to form flank companies.

Flankers trained more frequently than ordinary militiamen, were uniformed and accoutered if possible, and received certain civic privileges in return for their commitment. Stephen Heward's 2nd Flank Company of the 3rd York was present at Detroit and Queenston Heights; at the latter Brock supposedly made his famous exhortation, "Push on, brave York volunteers!" Its rolls included some other York notables, Lt. John Beverly Robinson, and Ensign Samuel Jarvis. Flank companies were abolished early in 1813 but Stephen Heward continued in his avocation as a militia officer. By 1821, he was a lieutenant colonel, commanding the newly formed 1st East York Militia. It is quite possible that Heward carried his Light Cavalry Sabre at Detroit and Queenston, though he might have obtained it any time during his long service with the militia.

What was a militia officer -whom we might expect to carry an infantry pattern sword - doing with a light cavalry sabre? Light infantry officers of the regular army frequently donned elements of cavalry dress and equipment to reflect the elan of light troops. It is reasonable to assume that some of their more dashing militia equivalents might follow the practice. As well, officers' dress and equipment was often loosely regulated (particularly in backwater colonial militias!) and, at least in the field, many carried weapons of their own choice. In action, the 1796 Sabre was probably far better than the largely ornamental swords prescribed in 1803 for infantry officers. Thomas Austin of the 35th Foot, for instance, found his 1803 Flank Company sword most effective as a set of brass knuckles. Slugging faces with the hilt sent more opponents to the dentist than the grave, he admitted, but the weapon's flimsy blade was apt to break. Whoever purchased Stephan Heward's weapon may have had some of these things in mind.

The second sword, a trooper's weapon, is associated with an interesting man, John Willson (1776-1860). An ancestor of the donor, David Holbrook, Willson emigrated from New Jersey to Upper Canada, where by 1796 he was a prosperous farmer at Saltfleet, near Stoney Creek. Willson later entered politics and was elected to the Legislative Assembly on the eve of war in 1812. During the conflict, he exhibited something of a radical streak. A vocal critic of "military despotism" that threatened civil liberties, Willson cast the only vote against the suspension of habeas corpus in 1814. Unlike his erstwhile colleague and political ally, Joseph Willcocks (who defected to the United States and took up arms against the Crown), Willson's loyalty was never in question. Indeed, during the course of a long political career (that saw him appointed Speaker of the 9th Parliament and ended in 1841) he veered steadily toward the right.

Continued on page 4



Do you have any old or interesting photos of *Historic Fort York?*

If you do, give us a call!

We may use your photos to help build our Historic Fort York photo archives.

We are especially interested in photos, maps or artwork from the 1800's- 1950's. These images may depict the Old Fort York, Stanley Barracks or associated areas, landmarks & people.

If you have any questions or comments please call René Malagon at (416) 392- 6907 ex. 233 or e-mail rmalagon@toronto.ca

Swords – *Recent Acquisitions at Historic Fort York* *continued from page 3.*



“Honest John” never entirely shed his populist leanings, but became conservative enough to attract imprecations from a former admirer, William Lyon Mackenzie, who characterized him as the epitome of a political turncoat. This bitter epithet may have some connection with the sword.

Willson probably did not carry the weapon in the War of 1812. As an assemblyman he was exempt from militia service, and there seems to be no record of him in connection with local militia or volunteer units. There are, however, no less than three people that share his name on the rolls of the 1st and 2nd Niagara Light Dragoons. These volunteer units formed along the Niagara frontier and, since the men furnished their own mounts, tended to recruit from the more prosperous segments of society. Later embodied as the Provincial Light Dragoons, they saw much service in the Great Lakes theatre – though mostly as scouts and couriers. The Willsons in this organization, all troopers, would certainly have received Pattern 1796 Sabres; perhaps they were relatives, and perhaps John Willson obtained his sword from one of them. Holbrook family lore has him carrying this arm during the Rebellion Crisis of 1837-41. An admittedly incomplete search of militia and volunteer pay lists turned up no mention of the man in question, which is not to cast doubt on the story. Rather, it is quite easy to imagine the aging parliamentarian making an appearance (officially or otherwise) with the government forces, the old sword a symbol of Upper Canada's past loyalty to the Crown.

Both of the donated items remind us of interesting (and rather dramatic) historical contexts, and pose some intriguing questions that await further research. We thank Messrs. Huxtable and Holbrook for them.

Peter Gibbins is a part-time Program Officer.

Re-enactor Battle School Weekend

By David Juliusson.

Winter is often a slow time for the re-enacting community. Some groups do drill, get together for social occasions and prepare for better weather. In April, the opening event of the re-enacting season happens at Fort York.

On April 17 and 18, Fort York will offer its 3rd annual Re-enactor Battle School Weekend. The idea for this came from Roland Wardle, one of our volunteers. He pointed out that with the trend towards gun registration and firearms control, there was a need for recognized training standards, and Fort York could take a leadership role in establishing these standards. His concerns resonated with Ken Purvis, Senior Program Officer, Fort York, and myself. Peter Twist, in his capacity as a board member and Commander of the Brigades of the Americas, became enthusiastic and agreed to help. Finally, Ed Anderson, member of the Friends of Fort York and a specialist in historic weapons, became involved. His expertise is vital in what we are trying to accomplish.

Our goal is to set a standard of training for all the black powder groups re-enacting in Ontario. At Fort York we teach the drill considered appropriate at a War of 1812 site. We employ both classroom instruction and practical demonstration in our training program. On the Saturday we teach infantry drill and tactics, and on Sunday artillery. Other lessons include care and maintenance of a musket, how to make cartridges, gun crew placement when a cannon is fired, and rules of safe handling of black gunpowder. Roland Wardle, a volunteer historic cook at Fort York and a re-enactor, presents a lesson on proper transportation of weapons and ammunition, and current legislation relating to gun control. At the end of the weekend, participants are evaluated for their drill, their ability to give commands and their deportment. It is a hands-on learning experience for all and gives the leaders of different groups skills and information they can take back to their units.

This year we are expanding the program in another direction. Re-enacting is a family hobby and our course appeals primarily to the men. Some of their wives have expressed interest in cooking classes, and so Bridget Wranich, Program Officer, Fort York is organizing an afternoon campaign cooking workshop.

A unique feature of the artillery Sunday will be the range of guns displayed and fired at the fort. There is a good display on artillery in the centre blockhouse, as part of the new *Soldier's Trade* exhibit. The guns include a brass piece from William Perry's *The Fury* and one of only two surviving guns from the Commonwealth period. In the field will be a 6 pounder and a mortar from Fort York's collection. Fort Henry is bringing an Armstrong from the 1850s. A Civil War re-enactment group is bringing an 1860s piece, and Ed Anderson has arranged for an original World War I 18 pounder and a World War II 25 pounder to be fired. Guns will be crewed and fired by people in appropriate era uniforms. The firing of this broad range will be of interest to artillery enthusiasts as well as the general public. (Everyone is welcome to watch. Be here Sunday June 6th at 11:30 to watch this rare and unique display of artillery firings. Included with admission to the fort.)

The cost of the Re-enactor Battle School is \$5 for the Saturday and \$15 for both days. This covers black powder and other related costs. A historic stew lunch is available for \$5 per person. It is a fun weekend and gives the fort a chance to connect with the re-enactment community. For more information call Ken Purvis at 416-392-6907 ext. 224.

David Juliusson has been a full time Program Officer at Fort York since 1989.



Battle School participants with Ed Anderson, historic weapons specialist, (Ed is the one in the baseball cap.)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Winter - Spring 2004

*Events may be subject to change or cancellation.
Please call the fort to confirm specific activities, times and prices.*

March Break

Mon. March 15 thru Fri. March 19th

10:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. each day.

Drop-In style program with timed and on-going events for kids aged 3-12.

\$6/adult, \$4/child, \$4.25/youth & senior, \$20/family (2 AD, 3 CH).

Storytelling Festival – Panther in the Sky

Sun. March 28th: 2:00 p.m.

As part of the Culture Division's partnership with the *Toronto Festival of Storytelling*, Duke Redbird will recount the story of the life and times of the great First Nations leader and warrior, Tecumseh. *Included with admission to the fort.*

Re-enactor Battle School

Sat. April 17th and Sun. April 18th:

See article in this issue.

Battle of York Day

Sun. April 25th 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Fort York's "first day of spring." Tours, demonstrations, and a free walking tour of the battlefield. Regular admission.

History Fair

Thurs. May 6th 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

History exhibits by more than 50 schools from the Toronto District Catholic School Board.

Free with admission to the fort.

Walking Tour:

Garrison Reserve and Niagara Neighborhood

Sun. May 23rd. 2:00 p.m.

Discover the history of this neighbourhood to the north of Historic Fort York.

Free admission to the fort following the tour.

Victoria Day

Mon. May 24th 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Tours, kids' drill, military music. *Regular admission rates apply.*

Doors Open

Sat. May 29th and Sun. May 30th

All Weekend

Architectural tours, archaeology exhibit. Free admission all weekend.

Tactical Weekend

Sat. June 5th and Sun. June 6th

The King's Royal Regiment of New York (KRRNY) Revolutionary War-era re-enactors will bring up to 200 re-enactors on site for a weekend encampment with demonstrations and a flag dedication ceremony. *Regular admission both days.*

Bike Tour: Toronto's French Forts.

Sun. June 6th . 2 p.m.

Enjoy the scenic *Humber Bike Trail*, and learn about Toronto's old French Forts. Meet outside the Old Mill subway station. The tour ends at Fort York. *Free admission to the site following the tour.*

Buffalo Jump Peace Walk.

Mon. June 21st: (Aboriginal Day) 12:00 p.m.

Join the Peace Walk as it makes its way from Nathan Philips' Square to Fort York.

Music and stories until 4:00 p.m.

Free Admission from 12:00 p.m.

Our Mailing List: If there are any spelling errors on your mailing label, or if you wish to be removed from our Mailing List and no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please call the fort at 416-392-6907 x100 or email fortyork@toronto.ca and we will happily make the changes you request.



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