

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario

Blockhouse No. 3

Fort George

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Blockhouse No. 3 was built in 1939, to designs by Toronto architects W.L. Somerville and Edward Carswell, as part of the reconstruction of Fort George. Installation of an emergency exit, interior modifications, and reroofing have been undertaken since construction. The building now provides common room, kitchen, and office facilities for the staff. The Environment Canada Parks Service is the custodial department. See FHBRO Building Report 89-15.

Reasons For Designation

Blockhouse No. 3 was designated Recognized because of its association with the 1930s philosophy of preservation and presentation of the historic sites, and its architectural qualities, its use of traditional materials and techniques, and its relatively unchanged environment.

The Depression was a period of development at historic sites accelerated by the provision of government funding for relief works programs. The philosophy of historic reconstruction employed at a variety of Canadian historic sites in the 1930s followed a North American pattern influenced by the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg. A recognition that increased ownership of private automobiles would promote tourism, encouraged the reconstruction of Fort George as a tourist destination. The economic development of Niagara-on-the-Lake was facilitated by both the reconstruction process and increased public interest in the area.

At Fort George, the architects freely interpreted the historic information and supplemented it where necessary. The rugged appearance of the Fort George blockhouses - based on Fort York blockhouses after their exterior cladding was removed in a 1934 "restoration" - represents Somerville and Carswell's concept of the "frontier" style.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this structure is defined by its exterior appearance, its craftsmanship and materials, and its contribution to the military character of the setting.

The plan and dimensions of Blockhouse No. 3 were based on similar structures surviving at Fort York. It is a two-storey hipped-roof structure, whose overhanging second storey, loopholes, small windows and upper-floor entry are indicative of the military function of blockhouses. Its exposed squared-log

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Blockhouse No. 3 (Continued)

construction, with its cedar-shake roof finish, is typical of the rugged "frontier" aesthetic

preferred by the reconstruction architects.

The 1930s structure was reconstructed to capture the massing of the original and to interpret one aspect of military life in the pre-1812 fort. The use of traditional materials, methods and tools, such as broad-axes and adzes, in the construction was part of the reconstruction philosophy of the time. Although the interior has been modified, the heritage character of Blockhouse No. 3 is retained in its exterior, and those elements which represent the 1930s use of traditional design and construction should be preserved.

There have been no significant changes to the site or setting of the structure since its reconstruction. The blockhouse contributes to the military ambience of the fort, and is a local landmark.

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