

FHBRO Number 92-97

Windsor, Nova Scotia

## **Blockhouse**

Fort Edward National Historic Site

The blockhouse at Fort Edward National Historic Site (NHS) was constructed in 1750 by the British Military. The Department of the Interior acquired the building in 1922 from the Canadian Department of Militia and Defence and named it a National Historic Site. Alterations to the exterior cladding and a variety of maintenance-related repairs have occurred. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report No. 92-97.

### **Reasons for Designation**

The Fort Edward Blockhouse was designated Classified for its historical, architectural and environmental significance.

Britain had taken possession of Nova Scotia, a former French territory, by the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht and began to claim its rights of possession by implementing a settlement plan which included construction of Fort Edward. The blockhouse was among the first of two hundred blockhouses constructed in Canada by the British, of which fewer than twenty now survive. It is the only structure of the fort surviving from the 1750s and is illustrative of the military strength required to ensure Nova Scotia's continuance as a British settlement.

The 1950s restoration work was characterized by pragmatism as well as an emerging philosophy of architectural conservation technology which illustrates the approach of national historic site management during the mid-twentieth century.

The blockhouse is an excellent early example of typical blockhouse design and also a rare surviving example of a wooden blockhouse. It is a well known local landmark because of its age and history. The adjacent community of Windsor often utilizes its image as a symbol representing the town.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the Fort Edward Blockhouse resides in its characteristic form and functional design. Perched on the crest of a small hill, the blockhouse is a recognizable landmark within the community.

The distinctive form is based on functional requirements which are characteristic of blockhouse design. It is a compact two-storey structure with an overhanging second

floor and pyramidal roof. All elevations are identical, the only distinguishing features

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being the entrance door with adjacent windows (the windows being a later modification that were in place by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and the brick chimney. Windows (formerly gunports, which may have been smaller in their original form) are centred on each second floor wall immediately below a row of loopholes. Rows of loopholes also line the three walls of the lower floor. Additions would not be appropriate since the simplicity of this form is an important character-defining feature.

This blockhouse is constructed entirely of wood. The exterior walls which are mostly of original construction consist of sturdy, dovetailed timbers intended to absorb the impact of bullets and arrows. A medium-pitched, kingpost roof structure is clad in wood shingles. Heavy timber floor plates with wood decking provide additional stability to the structure. Any future repairs or maintenance should continue utilizing wood. Visible from beneath the overhanging upper storey are the machicolations, which are evidence of an ancient defensive tradition and merit protection. Also of note are the Roman numerals incised into the timbers by the original carpenters in Halifax to guide the assembly of the structure after the members were transported to Windsor. Replacement of original wood should be resisted and any treatment which would diminish these marks should be avoided.

The exterior cladding is horizontal shiplap siding with vertical corner boards, installed during the 1950s restoration. The detailing of this siding is not based on any historical documentation. However, at the time it was considered a pragmatic way of recladding and protecting the timbers. Historical evidence indicates that this structure would have been clad at or near the time of construction. Any future recladding work should carefully consider the appropriate profile and detailing.

The interior layout is unchanged, consisting simply of two large rooms, upper and lower, connected by a stair. The blockhouse was intended as an adaptable form of fortification which could be used as a magazine, armoury, storehouse, and barracks. It would be appropriate to maintain this flexible, open layout.

The blockhouse stands isolated on a hill and can be seen from the highway that runs below it. All visible evidence of other buildings has disappeared, and the immediate surroundings have changed considerably over time. However, the openness of the grounds and the vista to the St. Croix and Avon rivers remain largely intact. While the

fabric of the earthworks is known to have been changed and rearranged over the years, the trace and overall form of the earthworks is an important feature of the setting and should be protected. Remaining site relationships and features should be retained.

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For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

Revised

1999.02.09