

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Halifax Citadel

Casemates of Defense 51-52, Southwest Demi-Bastion

Halifax Defense Complex

The Casemates of Defense 51 and 52 in the Citadel at Halifax were constructed between 1828 and 1832 for the colonial garrison of the Imperial War department based at Halifax, under commander-in-chief Lieutenant General Peregrine Maitland. The Casemates were the work of Lieutenant-Colonel Gustavus Nicolls (1825-1831), a member of the Corps of Royal Engineers, who both formulated the design and oversaw their construction. Modifications are summarized at Appendix A to this document. Casemates 51 and 52 are currently the property of Canadian Heritage. See FHBRO Building Report 95-01, Volume 1.

Reasons for Designation

Casemates 51 and 52 were designated Recognized because of their important historical associations, the qualities of their architectural design and the important role they play in the environment.

The structures are associated with the active defense of the Imperial naval station in the period of mutual suspicion and hostility between Great Britain and the United States following the War of 1812. Displaying the prototypical characteristics of a casemated work in a bastioned masonry fort for the mounting of smoothbore ordnance and bomb-proof storage, Casemates 51 and 52 are excellent examples from the initial phase of construction of the present Citadel.

The construction of the Casemates between 1828 and 1832 was part of an ambitious building program on Citadel Hill, involving civilian contractors, the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners, the Corps of Royal Engineers, and military labour. The employment generated by the project and the money poured into the local economy gave a great boost to the economic and social life of Halifax.

Colonel Gustavus Nicolls was the first of three senior Royal Engineers to have a major impact on the design of the Citadel. Casemates 51-52, and their counterpart on the north, Casemates 57-58, are the only extant buildings of the Citadel begun and completed under his authority. The adoption of the cranked, rectangular plan, to improve the line of fire and working space for the guns, is an innovation that can be credited to Nicolls. Not surprisingly, the Casemates proved very good functionally, being representative of British military construction from the first half of the 19th

century. Occupied for one function or another, they were in continuous use up until

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1922. The intact surviving original masonry elements, particularly the segmental profile brick vault, the granite trimmed gun-port and loopholes in the escarp and the door and windows in the retaining wall, demonstrate a high quality of workmanship and competent handling of materials.

The comprehensive restoration of the Casemates and the ramparts of the Southwest Demi - Bastion in 1980-1981 have largely recovered the appearance of the Casemates and associated landscape in the 1869-1871 period. As integral components of the main body of the work, Casemates 51 and 52 have a strong, reinforcing influence on the military character of the Citadel.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Casemates resides in their status as specialized military structures for the mounting of artillery in casemates for flanking the dry ditch of the south ravelin and bomb-proof storage when not under attack. Externally, the features which define the heritage character of these casemates are the cranked rectangular plan, the construction of the escarp wall (a thick, battered wall of roughly squared hammer-faced ironstone, laid in irregular courses with a projecting cut sandstone coping), the construction of the retaining wall (a vertical wall of roughly squared hammer-faced ironstone, laid in irregular courses) and the ironstone rubble-lined areaway containing a cut granite stair leading to the terreplein. Another character defining feature of these defense casemates is the treatment of openings. In the escarp wall each casemate has a single gun-port with 3 checks cut in the east jamb (in Casemate 52 the gun-port is cut obliquely) and two flanking vertical musketry loopholes of oblique design trimmed in granite. In the retaining wall the doors and windows have one piece flat lintels, quoined jambs and lug sills/thresholds in rock-face granite ashlar with chiseled margins.

The heritage character of the exterior would be best protected by conservation treatment of the iron bars on the windows and the iron balustrade of the stair, cleaning of the iron oxide and efflorescence staining on the masonry, regular repointing of the ironstone walling, regular inspection of potential weak points in the rampart waterproofing (the junction of the escarp and dwarf retaining walls with the roofs of the casemates), and keeping catchbasins and drains clear.

Internally the features which define the heritage character of these casemates are the vaulted bomb-proof construction of the roofs (segmental profile brick vaults of multiple

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rings, a counter-flagging with granite slabs with both ends hipped, a 3/8" layer of asphalt and thick earth cover), and the open fireplaces connected by inclined flues to chimney stacks rising from the southern slope of the rampart.

The heritage character of the interior would be best protected by monitoring the performance of the waterproofing over the casemates, conservation treatment of the iron ring bolts beneath the gun-ports, regularly repointing the brick floor and keeping up the parging and stucco finishes on the ceiling and walls.

The historic relationship between the areaway walls projecting from the ramparts of the Southwest Demi-Bastion and its associated landscape has been enhanced and strengthened by the mounting of ordnance and the restoration of the emplacements, brick lined ammunition and shell recesses, shaped parapet, sod traverse and other features on the terreplein. The continued maintenance of these vulnerable and less-stable elements will preserve the military character of this area.

APPENDIX A

External modifications over the years include: the uncovering, hipping, flagging, asphaltting, piping and re-covering of the Casemates (1851-1854), the replacement of the original two flight, timber stair in the areaway by a single flight granite stair (1857 or 1858), the introduction of a squinch in the south-west corner of the areaway (c. 1864), the removal of the transom bar and transom sash in both retaining wall doors, the partial blocking up of the central door opening in the retaining wall of Casemate 52 to form a window and the installation of bars in the retaining wall windows of both casemates (c. 1886), the reconstruction of the area wall, the replacement of the granite steps and iron railing on the stairs and the installation of new iron bars in the retaining wall windows (1956-1957), and the restoration of the exterior of both Casemates (including the areaway) to their 1869-1871 configuration (1980-1981). Internal modifications include: the breaking of a passageway in the party wall (1842-1849), the mounting of 24-pounder guns on wooden-ground platforms in each Casemate (c. 1855), the dismounting of the guns and the construction of masonry cell walls down the centre of each Casemate between the escarp wall and bend (c. 1886), various changes to the fireplaces and lamp recesses in the pier walls of each Casemate (n.d.), the application of a cement parging to the vaulted ceilings and stucco finish to the pier and

party walls of both Casemates (n.d.), the removal of the masonry cell walls (pre 1950), the removal of the original timber or brick floors, the pouring of concrete sub floors, the laying of brick parquet finish floors and the construction of new wooden-ground

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platforms for the guns in each Casemate (1958-1959), and the restoration of the interior of both Casemates to their 1869-1871 configuration (1980-1981)

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