FHBRO Number 95-01

Halifax, Nova Scotia
Former Laboratory (No. 92)
Fort Charlotte, Georges Island
Halifax Defence Complex

The former Laboratory at Fort Charlotte was constructed between 1873 and 1877 for the colonial garrison of the Imperial War Department based at Halifax, under the command of Major General Hastings Doyle. The Laboratory building was used for making up cartridges and filling shells for the rifled muzzle-loading (RML) guns. The building was designed by Lieutenant-General William F. Drummond Jervois and Lieutenant E. Harding Steward of the Corps of Royal Engineers. The building evolved to serve other functions, notably an ablution building (1901) and a cookhouse (1906). External modifications are summarized at Appendix A to this document. The former Laboratory is currently the property of Canadian Heritage. See FHBRO Building Report 95-01, Volume 2.

Reasons for Designation

The former Laboratory was designated Recognized because of its important historical associations and its environmental significance.

The theme identified for the building is the defence of the Imperial naval station during the period of heightened tension following the Trent affair of 1861, and the change in armament technology represented by the introduction of the RML gun. Displaying the general form of an RML period laboratory building (for making up cartridges and filling shells), the Fort Charlotte structure is a rare surviving example of this class of building.

The relatively minor changes in the topography and landscape of the ground between the building and the entrances to the main magazine, recessed into the steep slope of the earthwork forming the gorge, and the demolition of the loading platform, have changed but not entirely altered, the military character of the site. As one of only three surface buildings erected on the parade inside the work prior to 1894, the former Laboratory is an essential component of this historic grouping of support buildings.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the former Laboratory resides in its status as a specialized military structure, integral to a permanent fortification, for the making up of cartridges and filling of shells to service RML batteries. Externally, the features which define the heritage character of this Laboratory are: the simple rectangular plan, the large

segmental arched opening in the south elevation, made in half (the lower half an issue hatch for shells and above it a ledge for cartridges, the upper half an operable window for light and the passing out of cartridges), the three bay design of the long elevations (five of the bays with recessed panels and no openings, and one bay with a single door), the two conventional windows in the shifting lobby, the lamp recess in the south elevation (accessed from the exterior), the Flemish bond, solid brick walls with camber jack arched openings and cast concrete lug sills, and the low pitch gable roof to present less of an aiming mark.

The heritage character of the exterior would be greatly enhanced by the restoration of the gable end openings and the original door.

Internally, the features which define the heritage character of this Laboratory are the brick partition between the shifting lobby and laboratory, with a single communicating door and lamp recess (now both filled in), the absence of an original heating system, the original floors of wood supported on joists and plates (now removed), and the light construction of the roof (to reduce injuries from an explosion taking place within).

Anchor holes and ghosting on the walls survive as evidence of the characteristic fittings which lined the interior: (in the shifting lobby) shelves, coat hooks and bench seating; (in the laboratory) two work benches along one side for filling cartridges, one with drawers and one without, a weighing bench rather lower than the others, and some shelves, and on the other side skidding to hold empty cartridge cylinders.

The value of the physical evidence to future restoration efforts cannot be over-stated. No interim renovation of the interior, which would compromise this evidence, should be considered.

The historic relationship between the Laboratory, Artillery Stores, the earthwork forming the gorge, and the parade is largely intact. The restoration of the loading platform of the Laboratory, the earthwork ramparts of the Upper Battery, the entrance features of the Main Magazine, and the control of vegetation generally will enhance the military character of the area.

APPENDIX A

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External modifications over the years include: (for the conversion to a barracks) the breaking out of four new window openings, one in each of the recessed panels; the bricking up of the lamp recess at the south elevation; the construction of a lavatory fitting and sump pit at the north wall and the parging of the exterior (c. 1903); the breaking down of one window on the west elevation to form a single door opening; the concreting up of all remaining openings in the laboratory proper; the breaking out of a central window in the east elevation and the insertion of what looks to be an earlier window assembly turned on its side; the dismantling of a loading platform at the south elevation (n.d.); the breaking down of the brick chimney to below ceiling height; and the re-roofing of the building and the boarding up of all openings (c. 1965). Internal modifications include: the breaking of a smoke pipe flue through the east wall and the insertion of a chimney pipe (c. 1903); the concreting up of the lamp recess and communicating door in the partition wall, the removal of the wood flooring, joists and plates and the pouring of a concrete floor, the installation of a steam boiler, brick chimney and expansion tank in the former shifting lobby, and the installation of wall radiators (a box coil system) in the former laboratory (n.d.).

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