

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Halifax Citadel

West Curtain (including Casemates Nos. 7-14 and 53-56)

Halifax Defence Complex

The West Curtain in the Citadel at Halifax was constructed between 1829 and 1856 for the colonial garrison of the Imperial War department based at Halifax, under the commander-in-chief Lieutenant General Peregrine Maitland. The Curtain was the work of five members of the Corps of Royal Engineers: Lieutenant-Colonel Gustavas Nicolls (1825-1831), credited with the initial design and construction of the casemates of defence; Lieutenant Colonel Richard Boteler (1831-1833), who introduced the idea of using granite ashlar for facing walls; Captain Loyalty Peake (Acting) (1833), credited with the idea of building 13 arched demi-casemates in the uncasemated portion of the retaining wall; Lieutenant Colonel Rice Jones (1833-1842), who supervised the building of the demi-casemates and who designed and built the two privies behind the retaining wall on either side of sallyport 4; and Lieutenant Colonel Patrick D. Calder (1842-1848), who proposed and built four new casemates, 7, 8, 13 and 14, and re-built the fronts of the four existing casemates of defence. Modifications over the years are summarized at Appendix A of this document. The West Curtain is currently the property of Canadian Heritage. See FHBRO Building Report 95-01, Volume 1.

Reasons for Designation

The West Curtain was designated Recognized because of its important historical associations, the qualities of its aesthetic design and the important role it plays in the environment.

The structure is associated with the active defence 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, and in the period of heightened tension following the Trent affair of 1861. Displaying the prototypical characteristics of a bastioned masonry fortress component designed for the mounting of smoothbore ordnance and the storage of side arms and small stores of guns to service them, the West Curtain is a valuable survivor from both eras.

The completion of the West Curtain in 1856 was part of a major upgrade of the Halifax defences advocated by the Smythe Report of 1825 and largely accomplished between 1838 and 1862. The civilian employment generated by this project and the increased personnel needed to man the defences gave a boost to the economy of Halifax.

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Viewed from the dry ditch, the Curtain is impressive for the tall, slightly battered, irregularly coursed, roughly squared ironstone escarp wall, with finely executed cut granite corner quoins and framed openings, projecting sandstone coping and shaped sod parapet. Seen from within the parade square the Curtain is notable for its equally high granite ashlar masonry retaining wall, pierced at regular intervals by the pattern of openings given the casemates in the 1850's and 1870's, and the elegant arcade fronting the 13 demi-casemates. The interior spaces, in particular the brick-lined "Calder" casemates, set off by the extensive use of chiselled granite for skewbacks, skirting, and the trimming of openings, display a simple elegance and warmth.

As an integral component of the main body of the work, the West Curtain plays an important role in defining the military character of the Citadel site. The fact it has also become the principal entry to the Citadel for visitors arriving by car, and the location of signage (over sallyport 4) identifying the entrance, have given the West Curtain a conspicuous identity within the region.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Curtain resides in features expressing its status as a specialized military structure, a length of rampart in a bastioned masonry fort, for the mounting of artillery on a rampart and firing through embrasures for land defence, the mounting of artillery in casemates for defence of the ditch, the passage of defenders to the ditch if under attack, and the accommodation of troops and stores in bombproof casemates. Externally, the features which define the heritage character of this curtain are the construction of the casemated rampart - (at the demi-casemates) a thick, battered, escarp wall of irregular coursed, roughly squared, ironstone reinforced by buttresses, a demi-casemated, vertical, retaining wall of coursed granite ashlar, earth fill, and a shaped earthen rampart (at the casemates of defence) a thick, battered escarp wall, a vertical retaining wall, solid, brick vaulted casemates supported on rubble ironstone pier walls, earth fill and a shaped earthen rampart. Another defining feature of this curtain is the treatment of openings found in the escarp walls; (at the casemates of defence) an obliquely cut gun-port with a step chiselled into one jamb, flanked by vertical, obliquely cut musketry loopholes (the sallyports) a low opening with a one piece flat lintel and quoined jambs.

The heritage character of the exterior would be best protected by regular inspection of

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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 this curtain are the vaulted bomb-proof construction of the "Calder" casemate roofs (segmental profile brick vaults of three rings, a counter-flagging with granite slabs with both ends hipped, a 3/8" layer of asphalt and thick earth cover), the ventilation system beneath the floor and back walls, and the open fireplaces (some being bricked up) connected by inclined flues to chimney stacks rising from the western slope of the rampart.

The heritage character of the interior would be best protected by monitoring the performance of the waterproofing over the casemates, unblocking ventilation openings, restoring the historic timber floors and keeping up the pointing on the wall and ceiling surfaces.

The historic relationship between the West Curtain and the interior of the main body of the work has been enhanced and strengthened in recent years by the restoration of the retaining walls of the Redan, salients and demi-bastions, the Cavalier, the boundary wall of the South Magazine, the ramp and the surface of the parade. The continued maintenance of these features as well as the elements on the ramparts will preserve the military character of the fortification.

APPENDIX A

External modifications include: the installation of bars in the gun-port of casemate 9 (1856), the breaking of 4 new window openings in the retaining wall at casemates 7-10 converting the single punched openings to paired units (1870-1879), the breaking of 3-foot gaps in the dwarf retaining wall south of sallyport 3 and north of sallyport 4 and the fitting of an iron gate and munition hoist to lift heavy projectiles and ammunition to the ramparts (1874-1879), the blocking up of the door in casemate 55 and the cutting down of the north window to form a door (c. 1891), the blocking of the south window in casemate 11 and the conversion of the remaining window and door to a single wide door opening, the blocking of the door openings in casemates 12 and 13 and the

conversion of the two windows in each to a single wide door opening (c. 1908), the dismantling of the retaining wall and arches of the demi-casemates and the partial

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reconstruction of demi-casemates 37-41 (1933-1936), the tearing down of the front and rear walls of casemate 10 and the dropping of the floor to provide rear access for construction vehicles to the Citadel (1963), the removal of the work done to the retaining wall in 1933-1936 and the reconstruction of the retaining wall and demi-casemates, including the 3-foot gaps in the dwarf retaining wall (c. 1967), the numbering, taking down and replacement of the facing stones of the section of escarp between the sallyports 3 and 4 (1973), the reconstruction of the demi-casemates and retaining wall, except the openings of casemates 7-10, to their 1856 appearance (1976), and the construction of a wooden expense magazine building on the ramparts to disguise a wheelchair access elevator entry to the Tides of History galleries (1993). Internal modifications include: the rebuilding of the soil pits in the privies of casemates 54 and 55, and the extension of the drain to 3 new cess pits excavated on the west glacis (1856), the connection of the sanitary drain to the city sewers (1862), the construction of casemates 53 and 56 for cartridge stores (1870-1891), the conversion of casemates 9 and 14 to latrines, the blocking up of the sallyport entrances to the privies in casemates 54 and 55, the breaking of a door in the north wall of demi-casemate 41 as an entrance to casemate 54 and the move of the partition in casemate 55, north (c. 1891), the blocking up of the door in the north wall of demi-casemate 41 (c. 1908), the replacement of the timber floors of casemates 9-12 by concrete (c. 1908), the bricking up of various communicating doors, fireplaces and lamp recesses in the casemates (n.d.), the excavation of the ramparts for the Tides of History galleries and the removal of the buttresses (1973).

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