

The Three Blockhouses

THE WEST POINT blockhouse is the last of three blockhouses which went up at the end of 1812 and beginning of 1813. One was located at Indian Point, another at Joe's Point, and the third is the one still in existence. They were paid for locally by well-heeled individuals such as Christopher Scott, a ship captain and shipbuilder from Greenock Scotland, the man who also financed the construction of Greenock Church. These amateur efforts were not very well done, however, and later in the year of 1813 the government upgraded these installations to something more befitting a proper military emplacement. During the entire period of the war the blockhouses probably never fired a shot and served more as a symbol of defiance than as any real deterrent. They were staffed by only a skeleton Imperial garrison. An 1815 government report described the West Point blockhouse in some detail. "Inside the work [capable of housing 30 men] is a platform on which are mounted 18 pounder iron guns mounted on traversing platforms to fire *en barbette*. Outside the work are two nine pounders on standing wooden carriages. All these guns have been lately dismounted and the carriages put under cover; one 18 and one 19 pounder are in a terrible state (the former is said to be the property of the inhabitants). The other guns with the carriages, side arms, and ammunitions are complete. The blockhouse and breastwork are in want of repair." It is uncertain what exactly the original blockhouse looked like. It may have been covered with shingles or clapboards; there may have been a porch. Probably the garrison was quartered on the lower floor, with the upper serving as an arms storeroom.

In 1823 Scott petitioned the War Office for remuneration. This request fell on deaf ears, even though the buildings had been used to garrison several artillery men for years. The Imperial Government kept up only the barest of repairs on the blockhouses. By 1830 a report noted them to be in a serious state of decay. At this point in time the West Point blockhouse was noted to have a cookhouse and to be heated by oil stoves, replacing the original fireplaces. By 1840 even this building was much decayed, though it continued to

be used as a barracks and a store for firearms. By 1853 the West Point blockhouse had been leased to a pensioner, John Shannon; this was considered an inexpensive way of dealing with military posts of lesser importance. Shannon was still there in 1887 when a report noted that the blockhouse and gun shed were occupied “by an old soldier late of His Majesty’s 32nd regiment, aged 88 years. For over 30 years this man with his brother (who served in the same regiment and is about 78 years of age) has inhabited the site.” Repairs and upkeep were contributed by both Shannon and the Government but both added little to keep the buildings in decent condition.

By this time the West Point blockhouse was the only one of the original three left standing. The one at Indian Point was taken down in 1847 during the construction of the St. Andrews and Quebec Railway. The one at Joe’s Point was destroyed in the great Saxby Gale of 1869. The West Point blockhouse was handed over to the Canadian Government in 1871, and around this time Lady Tilley, wife of then Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, Sir Leonard Tilley, made some inquiries as to acquiring the property but nothing it seems was finalized on this notion. Assessments of the state of the structures at this time were quite negative. A lot of work would be required to make the buildings usable. After the turn of the century the West Point blockhouse seems never to have been used again for military purposes. It began to be leased to the Town of St. Andrews around this time and may have been used as a tea house. In 1925 it was handed over to the Department of the Interior which continued to lease it to the Town.

The West Point block was approved as a National Historic Site in 1962. It was seriously damaged by fire in 1993 and rebuilt. ~

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Well on to eighty years have passed since the blockhouses were erected in St. Andrews. Three of them were put up, one at Joe’s Point, one at the Western block, and one at the lighthouse wharf, near Indian Point. Their primary purpose was for the protection of the inhabitants of the peninsula against attacks of unfriendly Indians



from United States territory, but the Indians never came, although they were frequently seen hovering around the shore on the Maine side of the St. Croix. In those days these wooden forts were considered almost impregnable against the attack of such an enemy, and certainly the precautions that were taken to strengthen them would justify such an idea. They were constructed of heavy pine logs, seventeen inches square, piled on top of each other, the interstices being tightly closed with tow. The lower section of these blockhouses was in one room eighteen feet square, the upper section being twenty-two square feet, thus projecting two feet all around. The upper room of the fort had two rows of musket-holes around it, and there were also openings in the projection, so that those occupying the fort could fire down upon an enemy approaching the door

**West Point
Blockhouse,
with tenants.
Charlotte
County
Archives
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or seeking to destroy the building by fire from either side. Racks filled with loaded muskets encircled the room, above them being a collection of boarding-pikes, cutlasses and other implements of offence and defence. Two brass four-pounders completed the armament of the fort, portholes being provided to shoot from. Of the three blockhouses, only one - that one at the western block - is standing today. The fort at the lighthouse wharf yielded to the march of civilization, being removed at the time the railway was begun. [1847] The Saxby gale proved more than a match for the fort at Joe's Point, for when the gale subsided not a stick was left upon another. The Western block fort is still in a good state of preservation, but it was robbed of its munitions many years ago. The ramparts around this latter fort were protected in early times by twelve eight-pound cannons. For years these watchdogs did silent duty, and then when their usefulness was gone, and they were able to bark no longer, they were sold for old junk to the Pembroke ironworks. The present large ordnance were placed at the Fort during the period of the Fenian scare, but they have never been used, except for practice. The present blockhouse became one of the possessions of the Dominion government at Confederation, and the militia department has since controlled its destinies and collected the rents therefrom. Within a recent period, Lady Tilley has secured a lease of the blockhouse. It is not known what purpose she intends putting it to. It would make quite a romantic summer hotel.