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THE MARTELLO TOWER AT HALIFAX

SITUATED ON A COMMANDING EMINENCE at Point Pleasant, Halifax, the Prince of Wales's Tower stands today as a mute sentinel of a bygone age when its bristling guns and carronades guarded the approaches to a great harbour. The first and the only remaining one of five Martello towers erected in or near Halifax between 1796 and 1828, it is now, as the tablet affixed to it attests, a national historic site. At present it is being restored; the work has been in progress, at intervals, for the last two or three years and is now in its final stages. It is anticipated that the restoration of the structure will have been completed by the summer of 1963. Efforts will also be made to furnish its interior in the same manner as when it was part of the defensive system of Halifax, after which the Tower is expected to be open to the public.

It is a picturesque defensive structure modelled after a Corsican tower which owed its reputation as a work of defence to an incident in the French Revolutionary War. Early in 1794, British forces, in an effort to support the Corsican insurgents, attacked a tower on Cape Mortella by land and sea. The attackers suffered so heavily, without making any appreciable impression on the tower and its small garrison until a hot shot set fire to the "bass junk" with which the thick parapet was deeply lined, that a defensive work of this nature came to be regarded as virtually impregnable. This conclusion was confirmed by the fact that the armament mounted on the top of the tower consisted only of two 18-pounders and one 6-pounder. One consequence was that large numbers of Martello towers, the name being a corruption of Mortella, were built along the southern and eastern coasts of England to ward off the threatened Napoleonic invasions. There was widespread adoption of the Martello tower for coastal defence, not only in Great Britain but also in British North America, and His Royal Highness Prince Edward, who was the father of Queen Victoria, introduced this species of fortification in the Halifax area when he was Commander-in-Chief in Nova Scotia. Its chief characteristics are solid masonry con-

taining vaulted rooms in the interior for the garrison, a platform at the top for guns, and a ladder for access to a door about 20 feet above the ground.

The Prince of Wales's Tower at Halifax is circular and is often cited as an instance of Prince Edward's fondness for round structures. Whether it owed its origin to this penchant may be doubtful, but Edward's memory is linked not only with it, but also with such other round buildings in or near Halifax as the Rotunda or music room at Prince's Lodge, which he had built on the wooded shore of Bedford Basin, St. George's Church whose corner-stone he laid in 1800, and the old Town Clock which was constructed after his departure in accordance with his instructions.

This Martello Tower owes its origin to Prince Edward. It was built while he was Commander-in-Chief of the forces in Nova Scotia and as a result of his zeal for studding Halifax with bastions, batteries, and other fortifications in a time of war with France. Edward took up his duties in Nova Scotia in May, 1794, shortly after the tower on Cape Mortella in Corsica had gained its reputation, and just after he himself had displayed such conspicuous valour in the West Indies that Parliament thanked him for his services. He was tall, athletic, and intelligent, he had been trained in the rigid German military system from the age of seventeen, and he had had military postings at Gibraltar and Quebec before his service in the West Indies. His gallantry there won for him the chief command in Nova Scotia. He strongly desired an appointment more in keeping with his vaulting ambition and his enormous sense of his own importance. But if he could not immediately get the chief command in the West Indies, British North America, Ireland, or North Britain,[1] he determined to make as much of his assignment in Nova Scotia as soldierly ambition could. There he took an interest in civil as well as in military affairs. He was a patron of church and theatre, and he befriended the poor. But discipline continued to be his god. He was a martinet to his men, and extravagance continued to dog his steps. He was successful, however, in making marked military improvements in his command.

Upon his arrival at Halifax in 1794, he devoted his attention to these matters. Soon he was planning the entire reconstruction of the Halifax Citadel and the strengthening of the outworks, and these projects were undertaken.

Progress was made, and new developments seemed to be necessary. In the spring of 1796 Vice-Admiral Murray received information from the British Consul at Norfolk of the arrival of a strong French squadron at Santo Domingo.[2] It was anticipated that a squadron of Dutch and French ships might appear on the coast of America. Citing these circumstances as justification, Prince Edward considered

it necessary without delay to make such further exertions as could be made for the protection of Halifax Harbour. In his opinion it was immediately necessary to provide protection for the three sea batteries at Point Pleasant, as well as for the entrance to the North West Arm. Captain James Straton, Commanding Royal Engineer at Halifax, emphasized the urgency of the need by declaring that should an enemy effect a landing upon any part of the peninsula of Halifax near those sea batteries they would not be tenable even for a moment, for they were commanded completely by rising ground behind them. Action was imperative, and earth being extremely scarce on the spot, whereas stone was plentiful, it was decided to build not an earthen work but a stone tower on the highest ground in what is now Point Pleasant Park. Without waiting for approval from England, Prince Edward authorized the construction of it.

One day early in July, 1796, His Royal Highness Prince Edward and Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Wentworth laid the foundation-stone of this Martello tower.[3] The plans and the estimates for this work were forwarded by the Commanding Royal Engineer at Halifax, with his letter of August 14, 1796, to Marquis Cornwallis, Master General of the Ordnance. It was to be a tower 72 feet in diameter at the base, 26 feet in height, with massive walls which were to be 8 feet thick at the bottom and 6 feet thick at the top. Mounted on its summit there were to be four 68-pounder carronades and two long 24-pounder guns.

When Prince Edward reported on the pressing need for this stone tower to the Duke of Portland on August 15, 1796, it was, as he stated, "already in some forwardness", or, as Captain Straton expressed it in a letter to Marquis Cornwallis the previous day, "about one third finished." Actually at that time Straton was "in hopes that the Principal part of it will be done this Season before the Frost sets in." Prince Edward not only commanded Captain Straton to request that Cornwallis, the Master General of the Ordnance, would be pleased to allow the expense of this work to be defrayed by the Ordnance, in the same manner as the other new works already approved and ordered by his Lordship and the Board, but he also requested the Duke of Portland to mention it to the Master General that the Storekeeper of that department in Halifax might receive the necessary orders to deal with it. Optimistic as to the outcome, Prince Edward through his military secretary informed the Commanding Royal Engineer on September 4 that the tower then abuilding was to be considered as a part of the new works and the expense of it was to be defrayed by the Storekeeper of the Ordnance.[4] By the time the Master General and the Ordnance Board set forth for Portland their first reaction on October 31, Prince Edward had already written to the Colonial Secretary that the tower "is

about two thirds complete, so that we flatter ourselves, two months labour at the utmost in the Spring, will finish it entirely."[5] But neither the influence of His Royal Highness nor a virtual *fait accompli* sufficed to prevent the issuance of a rebuke. His Majesty's regulations required the previous approbation and concurrence of the Master General and the Board, and there had not been compliance with these. Consequently the Master General and the Board could not recommend that the expense of this work should be defrayed by the Ordnance, as they were precluded from obtaining a reimbursement of the money from Parliament.[6]

Rebuke or not, this was not the end of the matter. On February 16, 1797, Prince Edward defended his action in an able and persuasive letter to Portland.[7] He declared that he had fully realized that the Ordnance Board could object on the grounds of His Majesty's regulations and that he would not have solicited his Grace to use his interest with the Master General in the manner he did had he not "at the very moment before my eyes, the precedent of the new works on Citadel hill, Georges Island, and the new pile of North Barracks, which, although commenced by me previous to answers being received from the Board of Ordnance, on the subject of the Plans and Estimates forwarded, and for a considerable length of time, defrayed by Bills drawn on the Treasury by me, have nevertheless since been transferred to the direction of the Ordnance. . . ." He then asserted that he felt the most perfect conviction that in ordering the stone tower to be commenced he was acting in direct obedience to the 5th Article of His Majesty's regulations, in which particular provision was made for cases of sudden and unforeseen emergency, when it was absolutely necessary that the service should be undertaken before His Majesty's pleasure was known. He conceived the stone tower to be a case of this precise nature, for it was essential to provide effective cover for the sea batteries at Point Pleasant and for the North West Arm. Moreover, he added, "had we not been peculiarly disappointed in procuring some of the necessary Artificers, instead of being two thirds done this Season, the Work would have been entirely finished. . . ." These claims had the desired effect, for the Master General of the Ordnance, by a letter of June 10, 1797, informed Prince Edward of the consent of the Board to include the charge of the stone tower in the estimates of the Ordnance.[8]

Having received this decision, Prince Edward ordered the tower to be completed with all possible dispatch. He hoped that it would be completed by the end of October at the latest, but this result was not achieved. On December 16, 1797, His Royal Highness forwarded to Marquis Cornwallis the estimate for completing the tower and the glacis around it.[9] This amounted to £1,293.7.3 for excavating and palisading the ditch, partitioning off the inside of the officers' rooms, etc., and

for making berths for 96 men. By December, 1797, the tower was all but complete. Captain William Fenwick, then Commanding Royal Engineer at Halifax, stated in his letter of December 20 to Lieutenant-Governor Morse, Acting Chief Engineer, that "The Point Pleasant, or Prince of Wales's Tower is completed except some trifling work to be done to the cisterns, and which the Money remaining will be sufficient to answer the Expense of. . . ."[10] This circular stone tower owed not only its origin but also its name to Prince Edward. He dubbed it the Prince of Wales's Tower in general orders of October 20, 1798, the day before he embarked for England,[11] ostensibly on account of an injury sustained in a riding accident but mainly for the purpose of advancing his own interests. By the end of 1797 the picket fence surrounding the tower had been painted a second time with two coats, and this circumstance raised a question as to the authorization of the extra painting.

The armament for the tower was mounted on the top of it and on the upper floor. Two 24-pounder iron guns and four 68-pounder iron carronades were on the top and four 6-pounder iron guns were on the upper floor, which was pierced with twelve loop-holes. Ammunition to the amount of one hundred pounds for each piece of ordnance was lodged in the magazine in the tower, which would also hold 80 barrels of powder. Seventy-two muskets, a number of pistols and boarding pikes, and 10,000 ball cartridges were also stored in the tower.[12] The non-commissioned officer at Point Pleasant had charge of the ordnance and stores. The tower could accommodate about 200 men.

In case of attack the guns in the tower, as well as those in Fort Ogilvie and the Point Pleasant and North West Arm batteries, were to be manned by seamen from merchant ships and other ships in port, assisted by volunteer artillery, inhabitants of the town, and a few men of the Royal Artillery.

The Prince of Wales's Tower was hardly completed before it was in need of repairs. By the spring of 1803 the roof, which had been formed of several layers of unseasoned timber, was in a bad state.[13] Its leaky condition was a menace to the interior. The outside cement had crumpled and the walls needed to be painted. The palisading around the tower also needed attention. At this time the Commanding Royal Engineer not only pointed out these defects but urged that the roof be arched over with masonry sufficiently thick to resist the shock of shells. A similar report was made in the spring of the following year, when it was also stated that the coping of the merlons, being of stone not well chosen, was crumbling to pieces, thereby exposing the body of the masonry to all the damage resulting from alternate wet and frost. By the summer of 1804 repairs to the roof and masonry had been undertaken,[14] and work was also carried on in 1805 and 1806,[15] without, however,

making the tower bomb-proof then. By the end of 1809 the roof had again deteriorated to such an extent that it had been found necessary to remove the four 68-pounder carronades from it.[16] Renewal of the roof was urgently required.

Eventually the Ordnance Board ordered the needed alterations. It was proposed to replace the timber-work of the interior by masonry, to remove the present interior circular wall, and to throw an arch all round the interior of the tower. It was also decided to fill up the embrasures and to place the guns on traversing platforms.[17] These alterations were authorized by the Board's order of July 25, 1810,[18] and were begun on September 1, 1810.[19] The amount of the original estimate for this work was £1,998.8.1 (later revised to £1,799.9.3/2). By January 1, 1811, the sum of £419.12.5 had already been paid or incurred, and the probable expenditure needed to complete the project was estimated to be £1,579.18.8. By January 1, 1812, the alterations were nearly completed, and two 24-pounders on traversing platforms and six 24-pounder carronades on traversing slides had been mounted on the top of the tower. By June 1, 1812, the expenditures already incurred amounted to £1,515.12.9/4. Before the end of 1812 the alterations had been completed.[20]

The ordnance for the tower now included not only two 24-pounder guns on traversing platforms and six 24-pounder carronades on traversing slides, mounted on the top, but also four 6-pounder guns mounted inside. Centrical to Fort Ogilvie, the Point Pleasant and North West Arm Batteries, and the tower (the Engineer's report continued) was a building with walls of stone and roof of wood, previously used as a magazine but now for a laboratory.

As time passed, repairs again became necessary. The estimates for work and repairs for 1815 contained items for repairing the coping of the merlons of the tower and the boundary fence, amounting to £19.6.2½.[21] At the beginning of 1817, the report stated that "This Tower having been built with rough Stone not closely jointed, has been much injured by the severe frosts." In 1822 it was described as being nearly unserviceable, from not being water-proof, its present state making it unsuitable for keeping ammunition or stores in it.[22] Provision was made in the estimate for 1829 for renewing the curbs, carriages, and slides for six carronades, taking down and rebuilding the exterior door and repairing the painting.[23] In that year the doorway was altered. The following year the tower was described as being in tolerably good order. On August 13, 1834, Lieutenant-Colonel Rice Jones, Commanding Royal Engineer, stated that "This Tower is built of rough masonry, which is loose and defective, particularly on the Western portion of the Circle.[24] In 1848 John Hull undertook to strip and shingle the roof and rebuild the outside steps for £61.10.0 sterling.[25] The next year a report was made, with plans, elevation and sec-

tion, as well as an estimate of the cost, of renewing the wooden terraplein, banquette, and racers on the upper floor and of renewing the floor and joists of the basement of the tower.[26] According to the report of Lieutenant-Colonel R. J. Stotherd, Commanding Royal Engineer, the Tower was in very good order in 1855.[27] At that time, however, some of its ordnance was not ready for action. The two 24-pounders were mounted on their wooden traversing platforms and carriages, which were in very good order, and the six carronade wooden traversing platforms were in good order, but there were no carriages for them and the carronades in the tower were dismounted. In later years additional expenditures were made for repairs or reconstruction, with £1,537 being incurred between 1862 and 1870 when the Tower was considerably improved.[28]

The Prince of Wales's Tower had an important place in the system of defence at Halifax for many years. It was originally designed to provide effective cover for Fort Ogilvie and the North West Arm and Point Pleasant Batteries, as well as to command the passage of the North West Arm. Later its object was the defence of the harbour for which, with York Redoubt and Sherbrooke Tower, it provided a cross fire to protect the main entrance of the harbour. Subsequently it had its place in one of the three distinct lines of defence at Halifax. The first line—immediately covering the harbour—comprised Fort Charlotte on George's Island, Fort Clarence on the eastern side of the harbour, and the Grand Battery near the southern extremity of the city. The third or outer line—about 6,000 yards distant from the harbour to seaward—included Sherbrooke Tower on the extremity of Mauger's Beach, McNab's Island, and York Redoubt, situated on Point Sandwich on the western side of the harbour. Between those lines was the second or intermediate one, about 3,000 yards from the harbour to seaward. This one consisted of four batteries, two old and two new (Cambridge Battery and Fort Ogilvie), in the rear of which, on a central high ground, stood the Prince of Wales's Tower, mounting four guns on the roof, with four carronades, and protecting the gorges of the batteries, which were further supported by the Citadel at a distance of about 3,000 yards.

With the introduction of new, ponderous, rifled muzzle-loading guns and breech-loading guns in the 1860's and 1870's, much of the old defensive system of Halifax became obsolete. But the Prince of Wales's Tower still stands, where it has always stood since those princely days of 1796, but now as a national historic site, 3,127 yards to the southward of the Citadel, a vivid reminder of the significance of a romantic past.

NOTES

1. Wm. F., A.G. to H.R.H. Prince Edward, August 5, 1795. W.O. 3/14, pp. 108-112.
2. Prince Edward to Portland, August 15, 1796. C.O. 217/71, pp. 72-75.
3. Captain J. Straton to Marquis Cornwallis, August 14, 1796. Public Archives of Nova Scotia (hereafter PANS), MS Docs., R.E.-B, p. 75.
4. Captain J. Hale to Captain Straton, September 4, 1796. PANS, MS. Docs., R.E.3, p. 31.
5. Prince Edward to Portland, October 29, 1796. C.O. 217/71, pp. 92-93.
6. R. H. Crew, Secretary, Office of Ordnance, to John King, October 31, 1796. C.O. 217/71, pp. 88-90.
7. Prince Edward to Portland, February 16, 1797. C.O. 217/71, pp. 126-134.
8. Prince Edward to Portland, August 12, 1797. C.O. 217/71, pp. 148-152. Cf. A. Apsley to R. H. Crew, May 16, 1797. P.R.O. 30/11/59, p. 386. Also Cornwallis to Prince Edward, June 10, 1797. P.R.O. 30/11/59, p. 397.
9. Prince Edward to Marquis Cornwallis, December 16, 1797. W.O. 55/857. Cf. C.O. 217/71, pp. 196-197.
10. W. Fenwick, Commanding Royal Engineer, to Lieut. Gen. Morse, Acting Chief Engineer, December 20, 1799. W.O. 55/857.
11. PANS, MS. Docs., H.Q.3.
12. Report of January 1810. PANS, MS. Docs., R.E. 52.
13. Fenwick's report of May 6, 1803. W.O. 55/857.
14. Fenwick's report of August 20, 1804. W.O. 55/857.
15. Abstract of Expense Accounts incurred in repairing the Prince of Wales Tower between Oct. 1, 1805, and June 30, 1806. W.O. 55/858.
16. Report of January, 1810. PANS, MS. Docs., R.E. 52.
17. Gother Mann and Wm. Twiss (Committee Room) to General Morse, March 4, 1810. W.O. 55/1558 (4), p. 31.
18. Report of January 1, 1811. PANS, MS. Docs., R.E. 52.
19. Report of June 1, 1812.
20. Report of January 1, 1813.
21. Report and Estimate of Works and Repairs for 1815, dated October 30, 1814. W.O. 49/135.
22. Observations by Major Forster, 1822. W.O. 44/93, p. 27.
23. Report of August, 1828. W.O. 49/150.
24. Return of the Defences in the Province of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.
25. Contract, dated April 26, 1848. W.O. 49/2.
26. Plans of Lieut. Arthur P. Smith, April 5, 1849, with report and estimate. W.O. 49/174.
27. Stotherd to Inspector General of Fortifications, September 26, 1855, No. 665. W.O. 55/887.
28. Harry Piers, *The Evolution of the Halifax Fortress 1749-1928,* Publication No. 7, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (Halifax, N.S., 1947), p. 54.