

# FORT GEORGE POST

The Newsletter of the Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance

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## Fort George Between Two Wars

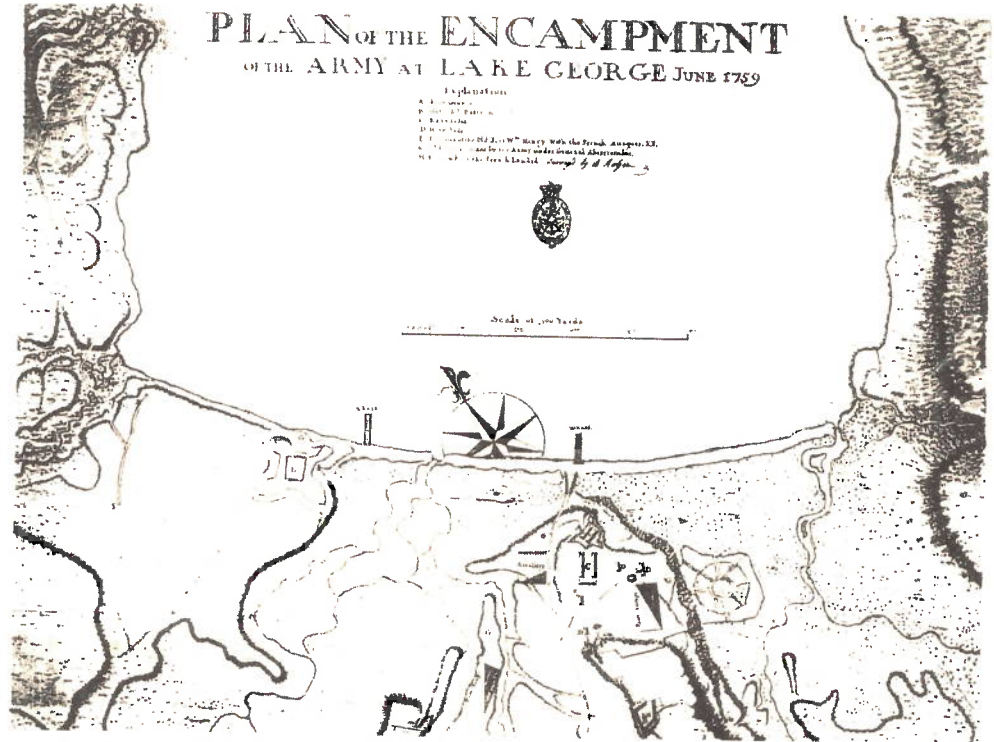
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The French and Indian War (1754-1763), which involved pivotal battles in the Lake George-Lake Champlain corridor, had pitted the French and their Native American allies against British and provincial (American) troops. The war was the North American theater of the larger Seven Years' War, and as such the surrender of French troops in Canada in 1760 did not end all hostilities. Thousands of British and provincial troops were thereafter sent to capture the valuable French islands in the Caribbean.

After the capitulation of French forces in Canada on September 8, 1760, Fort George remained a viable military post; however, the small forts constructed between Fort Edward and Lake George were rapidly decommissioned. In 1761 Fort George continued to function as a supply depot/way station for materials being transported north to Ticonderoga and Crown Point. In 1761 and 1762 Major General Jeffery Amherst raised 3,500-4,000 provincial troops each year to continue building the massive fortress at Crown Point and to make improvements to Fort Ticonderoga.

Bateaux and larger vessels docked at Fort George were used on the lake to ferry troops and supplies to the northern landing on Lake George to be forwarded to the Lake Champlain forts. In addition, the boats on Lake George conveyed troops returning from Canada during the two years following the French surrender. In July 1761 "all the Stores . . . in the Storehouse at Fort George belonging to . . . the [1758 sloop] Earl of Halifax" were sent to Ticonderoga onboard the provision vessel *Snow Shoe*.<sup>1</sup> (The sloop *Halifax* never returned to service on Lake



"Plan of the Encampment of the Army at Lake George June 1759," showing Fort George as a stockaded post near the lake (A), a completed bastion of the stone fort (B), barracks (C), hospitals (D), and the octagon-shaped garden. (National Archives of Canada)

George after 1760.) The *Snow Shoe* was the workhorse of the Lake George fleet and was later employed in carrying civilian goods. In 1765 William Gilliland, one of the early settlers of Lake Champlain, "embarked at Fort George . . . [with] all the Cattle in the Vessel called the *Snow Shoe*."<sup>2</sup> The large 1759 radeau *Invincible*, which had been "buried in the Mud" at the northern Lake George landing, was "forced out of her bed" by a strong squall in June 1761.<sup>3</sup> The vessel was repaired and pressed into service the next month, carrying "Artillery and Stores" from St. Jean, Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Fort George itself was not neglected after the end of hostilities in Canada. On May 29, 1761, Colonel George Williamson ordered the commanding artillery officer

at Fort George "to Mount on the Platforms" six 12 pound and four nine pound cannons "with their Iron Truck standing Carriages."<sup>5</sup> The artillery was part of the war material taken from the French fortifications in Canada. Williamson's orders are somewhat puzzling since a year earlier Amherst had written that 15 guns were mounted at the fort. Williamson may have been replacing artillery at Fort George with larger caliber cannons. On the same day in 1761, Williamson had also ordered the artillery officer at Fort Ticonderoga to mount cannons on platforms with "the largest caliber for the [a]rthrest distance."<sup>6</sup> Fort George was still active during the following year. On April 8, 1762, Major General Jeffery

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Amherst ordered the boats repaired at Fort George to facilitate “bring[ing] Some Troops that are coming from Canada.”<sup>7</sup> A return of provisions and the contents of the barracks, dated September 23, 1762, provides some insight into the size of the garrison at Fort George. The “Return” listed 245 barrels of pork, 226 barrels of flour, 121 blankets, 100 bolster cases, 137 night caps, 44 rugs, 9 tables, and 68 pairs of snowshoes.<sup>8</sup> (Some of the latter items were recorded as unfit for service.)

The Treaty of Paris signed on February 10, 1763, ending the Seven Years’ War, did not mean that Fort George was abandoned—a small garrison remained at the fort well into the 1760s. The fort complex was still an active post and transportation hub during this period. On June 11, 1766, William Gilliland placed his supplies aboard “Mr. [John] Stoughtons Schooner” at Fort George for the voyage to Ticonderoga.<sup>9</sup> (Stoughton drowned the following year when his schooner sank during a fierce squall on the lake while carrying three wagonloads of goods and 12 farm animals.)

Fort George was also used as a convenient location for a few important meetings. In order “to fix the bounds betwixt the two provinces of New York and Quebec,” William Gilliland met at Fort George on September 2, 1766, with Sir Henry Moore, the governor of New York, Guy Carleton, the lieutenant governor of Quebec province, Philip Schuyler, New York boundary commissioner (1764-1767), and Charles de Fredenburgh, a settler living at the mouth of the Saranac River on Lake Champlain (present-day Plattsburgh, NY).<sup>10</sup>

The size of the garrison steadily decreased during the decade of the 1760s. In November 1763 one full company of the 55th Regiment of Foot was stationed at Fort George. In late 1764 Colonel John Bradstreet ordered John Christie, an ensign in the 60th Regiment of Foot (Royal Americans), to take command of the garrison at Fort George in 1765, replacing men from the 42nd Regiment (Royal Highlanders) with those from the 60th. By October 1766 only a half

company of the 17th Regiment manned Fort George and a half company remained at the post during 1767. The following year Major General Thomas Gage listed John Jones as the “Barrack Master” at Fort George. Jones became an adjutant in the New York militia in 1775 and a decade later received a land grant of 200 acres, encompassing the future site of the village of Caldwell.<sup>11</sup>

The condition of Fort George had changed during the period of the 1760s. Lord Adam Gordon, a colonel in the British army and a member of Parliament, made a grand tour of northern French and Indian War fortifications in 1765. At Fort George, Gordon described the stockade fort, constructed by Jeffery Amherst’s troops in 1759 (see *Fort George Advice*, Spring/Summer 2014) on the northern section of the hillside overlooking the lake, as “tumbling down and not ten[a]ble [defensible]” and “a little above this (and now Called Fort George) we have a Compleat Bastion built of Stone, the Casemates [bombproof rooms built under a rampart] of Wood; It mounts ten Guns.”<sup>12</sup> Two years later, Francis Grant, third son of Sir Francis Grant, made virtually the same journey to the northern forts as Gordon, noting that the only fortification at Lake George was “a redoubt mounting 12 guns, about 200 yards from the shore, and some barracks.”<sup>13</sup> Grant also commented that at the site of Fort William Henry “there is not at present any remains of it to be seen”; however, he observed that “between that place and the present Fort are lines thrown up by General [James] Abercromby after the [1758] defeat at Ticonderoga extending about two miles.”<sup>14</sup>

On the eve of the American Revolution Fort George was manned only by a 65-year-old retired British officer, living in an adjacent cottage. However, beginning in 1775 the fort would gain new prominence in the American war effort. ■

### Notes:

1. Public Records Office (London) 285/2, War Office 34/65, folio 60.
2. William Gilliland, *Willisborough Town-Book Commencing the 8th Day of June 1765*, Plattsburgh Public Library, Plattsburgh, New York, 2.
3. PRO 283/1, WO 34/50, fol. 59.
4. *Ibid.*, fol. 65; See also PRO 284/1, WO 34/51, fols. 167, 178.
5. Williamson to Steward, May 29, 1761, Williamson Family Papers, National Archives of Canada, Microfilm A573.
6. Williamson to Brady, May 29, 1761, Williamson Family Papers, NAC, Microfilm A573.
7. PRO 159/1, WO 34/54, fol. 243.
8. *Ibid.*, fol. n/a.
9. David Kendall Martin, ed., *The Journal of William Gilliland* (Plattsburgh: Clinton Historical Assoc., 1997), 23.
10. *Ibid.*, 27.
11. Clarence Edwin Carter, comp. and ed., *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage* (1933; reprint ed., Archon Books, 1969), Volume 2, 210, 278, 294, 382, 410, 452; B. F. DeCosta, *Notes on the History of Fort George* (New York: J. Sabin & Sons, 1871), 79.
12. Newton D. Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies* (1916; reprint ed., New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1961), 445.
13. Frances Grant, “Journal from New York to Canada 1767,” *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 30 (1932): 321.
14. *Ibid.*

### Please join us on Memorial Day 2018

Please mark your calendars to join us on Memorial Day, Monday, May 28, 2018 for our annual event honoring the Four Unknown Soldiers of the Battle of Lake George buried in our park. These four represent the countless other soldiers buried in unknown graves throughout our region who died during the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars. As part of the event, we will be dedicating the upgrades done to this site and recognizing all who donated to support this project. The event will start at about 10:30 AM.