



Historic Fort York, 1793-1993

Carl Benn

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Fearing an American invasion of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe had Fort York built in 1793 as an emergency defensive measure. That act became the first step in the founding of modern Toronto.

Twenty years later, the Fort was the scene of the bloody Battle of York in which the famous American explorer, Zebulon Pike, died leading U.S. forces against the Fort's outnumbered Canadian, British and Aboriginal defenders. The Americans won this battle – their first major victory in the War of 1812 – and torched the province's public buildings during a six-day occupation. A year later, British forces retaliated by capturing Washington and burning its government buildings, including the White House.

Rebuilt in time to drive off another American attack in 1814, Fort York was maintained through the 1880s to guard against internal unrest and potential American annexation. Even after its defences became obsolete, Fort York continued to serve as barracks and training grounds for the Toronto garrison until the 1930s, when it reopened as a historic site museum.

In this book, Carl Benn explores the dramatic roles Fort York played in the frontier war of the 1790s, the birth of Toronto, the War of 1812, the Rebellion of 1837 and the defence of Canada during the American Civil War, and describes how Toronto's most important heritage site came to be preserved as a tangible link to Canada's turbulent military past.

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