

Halifax, Nova Scotia

**Northwest and Northeast Caponiers (Nos. 82a and b)**

**Fort Charlotte, Georges Island**

Halifax Defence Complex

The Northwest and Northeast Caponiers were constructed in 1829-31 for the colonial garrison of the Imperial War department based at Halifax, under the commander-in-chief Lieutenant General Peregrine Maitland. The caponiers were built to throw flanking fire into the dry ditch defending the landward face of Fort Charlotte on Georges Island. The design of the caponiers was overseen by Lieutenant-Colonel Gustavas Nicolls of the Corps of Royal Engineers. External modifications include: the rebuilding of the escarp walls between the caponiers which narrowed the ditch and reduced the length of exposed loopholed wall at one end of each caponier (n.d.); the removal of the timber framed, slated roofs (n.d.); the blocking up of the caponier loopholes covering the ditch and the gallery entrances inside the work (c. 1965); the installation of light timber framed protective wooden covers over both caponiers (most recently in the 1990s); and the unblocking of the entrance to the gallery serving the northeast caponier (c. 1995). The northern caponiers are currently the property of Canadian Heritage. See FHBRO Building Report 95-01, Volume 2.

**Reasons for Designation**

The northern caponiers were designated Recognized because of their important historical associations, the quality of their functional design and construction and the important role they play in the environment.

The completion of the original five caponiers in the ditch of Fort Charlotte in 1831 was part of a major upgrade of the Halifax defences with its focus on the Citadel. The influx of funds targeted to the fortifications together with increased personnel to man the defences had a significant impact on the community of Halifax.

The theme is the defence of the Imperial naval station during a period of concern over potential American incursions, following the visit of the Smyth Commission in 1825.

Displaying the prototypical characteristics of fighting caponiers, these two extant examples are valuable survivors from the smoothbore era. The functional program for these caponiers was far from simple. The challenge of defending an irregular decagon trace was solved by running five single-storey caponiers across the ditch at each of the angles to throw flanking fire into the dry ditch. Steep gable roofs ensured the

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caponiers were not used by an attacking force as a bridge across the ditch. Vertical musketry loopholes of an oblique design gave better vertical range and corrected the obtuse angle formed by the caponiers and adjoining escarp walls. Having chosen to keep the loopholes lower than a man's height from the level of ground immediately in front, an accepted defensive strategy, there was finally the problem of how to prevent an attacker from firing directly into the exterior loophole opening. This was solved by building vaulted chambers into the escarp and cutting loopholes in the escarp wall to command the ground immediately in front of the caponiers.

The decayed condition of the caponiers, the partial collapse of sections of the escarp walls and the overgrown state of the ditch give the site an abandoned and somewhat picturesque appearance but have not altered the basic historic relationship between the fortification and its associated landscape.

**Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the north caponiers resides in features expressing their specialized military structures, outworks of a permanent fort, for close musketry defence of a dry ditch. Externally, the features which define the heritage character of these caponiers are the elongated rectangular plan of the shooting galleries (spanning the ditch between the high escarp and lower counterscarp walls), the three foot thick ironstone rubble sidewalls with an upper section in solid brick in which are formed the vertical musketry loopholes, and the cut-granite stairwells sunk within the ground platform of the north battery leading down to the granite-trimmed gallery entrances in the parapet wall.

A degree of skill is evident in the architectural embellishment of the gallery entrances. In the case of the NE entrance, the segmental arch over the doorway is constructed of cut-granite voussoirs, impost blocks and a keystone. The jambs are quoined. In the case of the NW entrance the segmental arch over the doorway is constructed of equal height cut-granite voussoirs supported on impost blocks. The jambs are quoined. A five-piece jack lintel relieving arch, also in cut-granite, is centered over the previous arch. In both doorways the cut-granite arch and jamb stones are rebated to receive a heavy door.

The original roof construction comprised in each case a semi-circular profile brick vault

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of five rings coated in two layers of asphalt, some feet of rubbish to form a steep pitch gable shape and a timber roof covered in slates or other material. The original roof is missing. The heritage character at the exterior, particularly the brick vaulting of the roof, which is presently at some risk, would be best protected by the installation of a permanent roof modelled on the original.

Internally, the character-defining features are the inclined galleries connecting the open North Battery (on the landward face) to the caponiers, the casemated chambers within the escarp serving as shooting galleries to flank the loopholed face of the caponiers, and the main shooting gallery of the caponiers (admitting two opposite ranks loading and handing the muskets to the men at the loopholes), all with walls of irregular coursed ironstone rubble and roofs of semicircular section brick vaulting.

In addition to routine repointing of the masonry, the opening of some loopholes for ventilation and the maintenance of the historic drains are encouraged to achieve a stable interior environment and slow the rate of deterioration.

The historic relationship between the Northwest and Northeast Caponiers, the dry ditch, the escarp wall and counterscarp wall is largely intact despite the partial collapse of both the escarp and counterscarp walls, the accumulated debris in the ditch and the overgrown condition of the earthworks generally. The restoration of all of these elements will enhance the military character of the site.

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

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