

Kingston, Ontario

Fort Frederick Martello Tower (Building No. 30)

Royal Military College

The Fort Frederick Martello Tower was built by the Royal Engineers in 1846 based on plans drawn in 1816, and reworked in 1845 by Colonel Holloway, Commanding Royal Engineer for Canada. A metal-clad snow roof was added to the parapet in 1849 and was frequently replaced thereafter. There have been no significant changes to the tower and its immediate setting. The structure currently functions as a museum for Canadian Forces Base Kingston. The Department of National Defence is custodian. See FHBRO Report 93-99.

Reasons For Designation

The Fort Frederick Martello Tower was designated Classified for its exceptional architectural design and excellent craftsmanship, for the quality and integrity of its setting and for its strong historical associations.

The Fort Frederick Martello Tower was the most strategically important of the four towers built in Kingston between 1846 and 1848 as part of the defence plan for the Royal Navy dockyard and the Rideau Canal. These martello towers, which had become standardized in British fortification theory, relied on their massive masonry construction with few openings to provide defensive superiority. The Fort Frederick tower displays an exceptional interpretation of the design elements of a martello tower which was modified to contain a larger barracks. The fine execution of these elements is evidence of the superior craftsmanship employed in the construction of the tower.

The tower's site remains much as it was when developed as a fortification in 1846, displaying a designed strategic defensive form. The site is also important for its considerable archeological value, as the site of the 1812 development of Fort Frederick, and its symbolic importance as a landmark on the RMC campus.

The tower has significant historical associations with the early military development of the Kingston area. Although politically redundant and militarily obsolete before it was adequately armed in 1862, the tower served a symbolic role as a commitment by the British government to the defence of the colony and a functional one as a barracks until the British withdrew their army in 1870.

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Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of the Fort Frederick Martello Tower resides in its design and construction excellence and in the outstanding integrity of its setting.

The Fort Frederick Martello Tower displays superior strategic design in the placement and detailing of its components. The alignment of the trefoil parapet and its gun mounts, the wood-shutter covered embrasures and the caponiers, were designed for maximum defensive advantage. The complex interior design was intended to house a greater number of men on two barrack levels and to be more heavily armed than the previous towers.

The craftsmanship evidenced in the tower's elaborate ashlar limestone construction is of exceptional quality. The parabolic vaults of the caponiers, the interior annular vault ceiling, the parabolic facets of the exterior and the external ogival arches of the caponiers all exhibit superior design and construction techniques. The interior displays equally high standards in the functional design of its powder magazines, barracks and central masonry pillar. Conservation expertise is recommended for any future masonry repairs. The metal-clad wood-framed snow roof is temporary and utilitarian by design, and was meant to be removed during battle. The design and construction of the roof displays a successful adaptation of the martello tower to the Canadian climate and should be maintained or replaced in-kind at the end of its functional life span.

The Tower's site has remained remarkably intact, displaying the original defensive landscaping of the Fort, and maintaining the military character of the Fort within its current academic setting. The masonry-lined ditch, the triangular-shaped ramparts and the loopholed wall all remain, although slightly compromised by the adjacent roadway and parking lot. The continued protection of these features and appropriate maintenance of the site should be assured.

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