

Halifax, Nova Scotia

**Halifax Citadel**

**West Ravelin Guardhouse**

Halifax Defence Complex

The West Ravelin Guardhouse in the Citadel at Halifax was constructed in 1848 -1849 for the colonial garrison of the Imperial War department based at Halifax. The Guardhouse, a casemated defensible work with a "V" shaped front, sunk into the terreplein of the ravelin on the west front, was built as a redoubt or infantry stronghold, bomb-proof barracks and secure passage for troops entering and leaving the ravelin. The Guardhouse was the work of two members of the Corps of Royal Engineers: Lieutenant-Colonel Gustavas Nicolls (1825-1831), who developed the initial design and oversaw its construction, and Lieutenant Colonel Patrick D. Calder (1842-1848), who supervised the dismantling of Nicolls' guardhouse, introduced the idea of a ditch, and oversaw the construction of the present guardhouse. External modifications include: the reroofing of the Guardhouse with asbestos shingles (1934), the clearing of the ditch and installation of proper drainage, the repointing of the area walls, and the reroofing of the Guardhouse with slates (1980-1981), the construction of a vehicular ramp across the gorge of the ravelin (1993-1995). Internal modifications include: the reconstruction of the upper and lower floors (1980-1981). The Guardhouse is currently the property of Canadian Heritage. See FHBRO Building Report 95-01, Volume 1.

**Reasons for Designation**

The West Ravelin Guardhouse was designated Recognized because of its important historical associations, the qualities of its architectural design and the important role it plays in the environment.

The structure is associated with the active defence of the Imperial naval station in the period of mutual suspicion and hostility between Great Britain and the United States following the War of 1812. Displaying the prototypical characteristics of a defensive work within a triangular outwork of a bastioned masonry fort, the Guardhouse is a valuable survivor of the smoothbore era.

The completion of the Guardhouse in 1849 was part of a major upgrade of the Halifax defences advocated by the Smythe Report of 1825 and largely accomplished between 1838 and 1862. The employment generated by the project and the money poured into the local economy gave a great boost to the economic and social life of Halifax.

Viewed from the terreplein of the Ravelin or the ramparts of the West Curtain, the

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Guardhouse has a compact yet handsome angular and symmetrical massing, with granite gabled end walls and a slate gable roof extending from end to end. Extending above the roof in the salient angle of the front is a distinctive pentagonal granite chimney shaft with a doublecourse oversailing in cut granite.

Faced with program requirements that included effective local musketry defense, bombproof accommodation and safe passage from the dry ditch to the level of the terreplein, Lieutenant Colonel Calder achieved a very credible design solution. Excepting the Caponier link with the main body of the work deleted early in the design, which would have provided more secure access to the ravelin, and the inadequacies of the original roof tiling laid in cement, there are few improvements which could be made in the Calder design from a functional standpoint.

The skill of the masons employed in the construction of the Guardhouse is best demonstrated in the elegant granite walling of random punched, rustic granite ashlar with chisel drafting, the loopholes of chiselled granite, sunk, weathered and throated, and the single pentagonal chimney shaft similarly built.

As one of the last major elements of the Citadel to be completed, and the finest of the three ravelin guardhouses, the West Ravelin Guardhouse is a fitting tribute to Lieutenant Colonel Patrick D. Calder, of the Corps of Royal Engineers.

The comprehensive restoration of the West Ravelin (escarp walls, gorge wall, shaped sod ramparts, embrasures, gun platforms and terreplein) in 1980-1981, the West Curtain in 1976 and the Cavalier c. 1970 has largely recovered the 1875-1877 character of the area. As an integral component of the West Ravelin outwork screening the West Curtain, the Guardhouse has a strong, reinforcing influence on the military character of the Citadel.

**Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the West Ravelin Guardhouse resides in features expressing its specialized military function as a redoubt or infantry stronghold, bomb-proof barracks and sheltered passage. Externally, the features which define the heritage character of this guardhouse are: the shape (an irregular hexagonal trace with an acute angled

gabled end wall facing the west front to deflect shot, long straight side walls to

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accommodate a series of musketry loopholes and an obtuse angled gabled end wall at the east front to conform to the line of the gorge wall); the silhouette (eaves lying close to the terreplein to present a small target); the construction of the walls (thick rubble masonry faced with granite ashlar, the gabled end walls continued above the line of the roof to form a parapet finished with chisell dressed granite coping stones); and the disposition of openings (horizontal musketry loopholes in the front, vertical musketry loopholes and a door in the side walls, and 3 windows and a door in the gorge).

Another character defining feature of this guardhouse are the measures taken to protect the defenders: the positioning of the firing step/upper floor level such that the loopholes were lower than a man's height from the ground immediately in front, the surrounding of the loopholed walls by a dry ditch to prevent attackers firing directly into the musketry loopholes, and the bridging of the ditch by a single timber draw-bridge which could be raised when under attack.

The heritage character of the exterior would be best protected by regular repointing of the ironstone rubble walls below terreplein level, the granite facing and trim of the superstructure, the ironstone rubble retaining wall of the area and the particularly vulnerable horizontal joints in the copings and chimney capping. The slate roofing and lead ridge roll should also be monitored for leaks, and the drains in the base of the ditch kept clear.

Internally the features most characteristic of this type of structure are: the bomb-proof construction of the roof (a segmental profile brick vault, of two 14 inch brick rings in mortar, with a *dos d'anes* of rubble masonry averaging one foot in thickness), the ventilating arrangement of the interior (ventilators in the gorge wall passing air under the floor of the lower rooms, to rise in brick flues in the front wall, and escape through apertures near the ceiling), the brick lined and granite trimmed open fireplaces at upper and lower floors, and the finish of the walls (a lime whitened half-brick lining with skewbacks and chamfered skirting in chiselled granite).

The heritage character of the interior would be best protected by monitoring the performance of the roof, stabilizing the humidity levels on the interior, and regularly inspecting the timber framing of the upper and lower levels for signs of deterioration.

The historic relationship between the West Ravelin Guardhouse and its associated landscape has been enhanced and strengthened by the restoration of the sod

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ramparts, banquettes, masonry embrasures, gun platforms, and other features on the terreplein. The continued maintenance of these less-permanent elements will preserve the military character of this area.

97.10.20

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

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