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Introduction: The Fortress of Louisbourg is a national historic site and a partial reconstruction of an 18th century French fortress at Louisbourg, Nova Scotia.


The original fortress, constructed between 1720 and 1740, was one of the most extensive European fortifications constructed in North America. Captured by British colonists in 1745, it was a major bargaining chip in the negotiations leading to the 1748 treaty ending the War of the Austrian Succession, and was returned to French control. It was captured again in 1758, by British forces during the Seven Years' War, after which it was systematically destroyed by British engineers.

The fortress and town were partially reconstructed in the 1960s, using some of the original stonework. The site is now operated by Parks Canada as a living history museum.

Early History: A French settlement at Ste-Anne (now Englishtown) on the central east coast of Île Royale (now Cape Breton) was established in 1629 and named Fort Ste-Anne, and lasted until 1641. A fur trading post was established on the site from 1651–1659, but Île Royale languished under French rule as attention was focused on the St. Lawrence River/Great Lakes and the small agricultural settlements of mainland Acadia.

The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 gave Britain control of part of Acadia (peninsular Nova Scotia) and Newfoundland. However, France maintained control of its colonies at Île Royale, Île St-Jean (now Prince Edward Island), Canada and Louisiana, with Île Royale being France's only territory directly on the Atlantic seaboard. It was strategically close to important fishing grounds on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, as well as being well placed for protecting the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
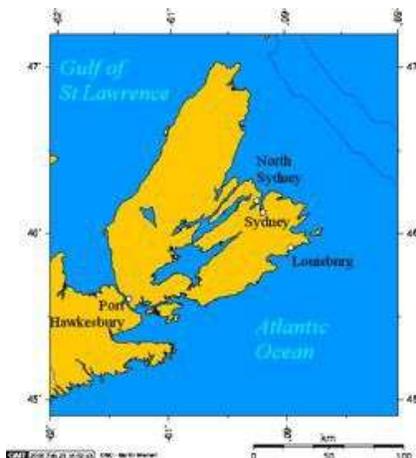
In 1713, France set about constructing Port Dauphin and a limited naval support base at the former site of Fort Ste-Anne. However, the winter icing conditions of the harbour led the French to choose another harbour on the extreme southeastern part of Île Royale. The harbour, being ice-free and well protected, soon became a winter port for French naval forces on the Atlantic seaboard and they named it Havre Louisbourg after King Louis XIV.

Fortress Louisbourg: The Fortress of Louisbourg was the capital for the colony of Île-Royale, and was located on the Atlantic coast of Cape Breton Island near its southeastern point. The location of the fortress was chosen because it was easy to defend against British ships attempting to attack Quebec City. South of the fort, a reef provided a natural barrier, while a large island provided a good location for a battery. These defenses forced

British ships to enter the harbor via a five- hundred-foot channel. The fort was built to protect Quebec City from British invasions, and to protect France's hold on one of the richest fishing grounds in the world, the Grand Banks.

Citizens and Establishments: Louisbourg was a large enough city to have a commercial district, a residential district, military barracks, marketplaces, inns, taverns, and suburbs, as well as skilled laborers to fill all of these establishments. For the French, it was the second most important stronghold and commercial city in New France. Only Quebec was more important to France.

The population of Louisbourg quickly grew. In 1719, 823 people called this maritime city their home. Seven years later, in 1726, the population was 1,296, in 1734 it was 1,616, and by 1752, the population of Louisbourg was 4,174.

Smallpox ravaged the population in 1731 and 1732, but Louisbourg continued to grow, especially economically.

Economy: Unlike most other cities in New France, Louisbourg did not rely on agriculture or the seigneurial[1] system.

Louisbourg was the third busiest port on the Atlantic Coast of North America only behind Boston, Massachusetts, and Philadelphia.

Louisbourg was an important investment for the French government because it gave them a strong commercial and military foothold in the Grand Banks. Its economy was based primarily on fish, and other products made from fish, such as cod-liver oil. For France, the fishing industry was more lucrative than the fur trade. In 1731, Louisbourg fishermen exported 167,000 quintals of cod and 1600 barrels of cod-liver oil. There were roughly 400 fishing vessels out each day vying for the day's catch. Louisbourg's commercial success was able to attract merchant ships from Europe, the West Indies, Quebec, Acadia, and New England.

Fortifications: Louisbourg was renowned for its fortifications, which took builders twenty-eight years to complete. The engineer behind the project was Jean- Francois du Vergery de Verville. Verville picked Louisbourg because of its natural barriers. The fort cost France thirty million livres, against an original budget of four million livres.

Two and a half miles of wall surrounded the entire fort. On the western side of the fort, the walls were thirty feet high, and thirty-six feet across. The city had two gates known as the Dauphin gate, which is currently reconstructed, and the Queen's gate which is not. Louisbourg was also home to six bastions, two of which are reconstructed. Dauphin bastion, commonly referred to as a 'demi-bastion' for its modification, the King's

[1] The seigneurial system of New France was the semi-feudal system of land distribution used in the North American colonies of New France. Under this system, the lands were arranged in long narrow strips, called *seigneuries*, along the banks of the St. Lawrence River. Each piece of land belonged to the king of France and was maintained by the landlord, or *seigneur*.

bastion, Queen's bastion, Princess bastion, Maurepas bastion and the Brouillon bastion.

Dauphin Gate

On the eastern side of the fort, fifteen guns pointed out to the harbor. The wall on this side was only sixteen feet high and six feet across. The fort had the embrasures to mount one hundred and forty-eight guns; however, historians have estimated that only one hundred embrasures actually had cannons mounted. Separate from the main fort, yet still a part of Louisbourg, a smal island in the harbor was also fortified. The walls on the island were ten feet high, and eight feet thick. Thirty-one twenty-four pound guns were mounted facing the harbor. The island itself was small, with room for only a few small ships to dock there.

First siege: 1745 - The fortress was attacked in two major sieges: once in 1745 and the again in 1758. The first siege involved a New England force backed by a British Royal Navy squadron. The New England attackers succeeded when the fortress capitulated on June 16, 1745. A major expedition by the French to recapture the fortress led by Jean-Batiste de La Rochefoucauld de Roye, duc d'Anville the following year was destroyed by storms, disease and British naval attacks before it ever reached the fortress.

The New Englanders' elation turned to disgust three years later, in 1748. The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which ended the War of the Austrian Succession, restored Louisbourg to France, in return for the British trading post at Madras in India.

The New England forces left, taking with them the famous Louisbourg Cross, which had hung in the fortress chapel. This cross was rediscovered in the Harvard University archives in the latter half of the 20th century. It is now on long-term loan to the Louisbourg historic site.

Having given up Louisbourg, Britain, in 1749, created its own fortified town on Chebucto Bay which they named Halifax. It soon became the largest Royal Navy base on the Atlantic coast and hosted large numbers of British army regulars.

Second siege: 1758 - A large-scale French naval deployment in 1757 fended off an attempted assault by the British in 1757. However, inadequate naval support the following year allowed a large British combined operation to land and lay siege to Louisbourg which ended on July 26, 1758, with a French surrender. The fortress was used by the British as a launching point for its 1759 Siege of Quebec that culminated in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

The fortress was systematically destroyed by British engineers in 1760 to prevent its future use by anyone. The site was abandoned at the end of the Seven Year's War.

National Historic Site: In 1961, the government of Canada undertook a historical reconstruction of one quarter of the town and fortifications with the aim being to recreate Louisbourg as it would have been at its height in the 1740s. The work required an interdisciplinary effort by archaeologists, historians, engineers, and architects. The reconstruction was aided by unemployed coal miners from the industrial Cape Breton area, many of whom learned French

King's Bastion Barracks
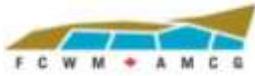
masonry techniques from the 18th century and other skills to create an accurate replica. Where possible, many of the original stones were used in the reconstruction. The Fortress of Louisbourg is the largest reconstruction project in North America.

Today, the entire site of the fortress, including the one-quarter reconstruction, is Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, operated by Parks Canada as part of the national park system. Offerings include guided and unguided tours, and the demonstration and explanation of period weapons.

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