



Photo: Rod Stears Photography Ltd.

▲ The former British Military Ordnance Building has been overlooking the Saint John harbour since 1842. The 1911 Armoury is visible in the background.

▲ *L'ancien bâtiment des magasins militaires de l'armée britannique surplombe le port de Saint John depuis 1842. Le manège militaire datant de 1911 est visible en arrière-plan.*

► A partial view, circa 1863, shows the original gable roof structure.

► *Vue partielle de la structure du toit à pignon d'origine, vers 1863.*

Reopening the Stores

A refurbished military ordnance building in New Brunswick reveals its treasures.

At the end of the windswept southern peninsula of Saint John, New Brunswick, on the sandy soil of Barrack Green, stands a remarkable sandstone building dating back to 1842. Designed by Britain's Royal Engineers to house supplies, equipment and weapons, the former Military Ordnance Building has survived a 168-year battering of salt sea winds from the Bay of Fundy, the Great Fire of 1877 and human neglect. An unadorned, solid building, it has withstood a number of changes over time and is the only structure on the Barrack Green site remaining from the time when British soldiers were stationed there.

In 1995, when its last military occupants, the officers and cadets of HMCS *Brunswicker*, moved to new quarters, the Department of National Defence had no further use for it.

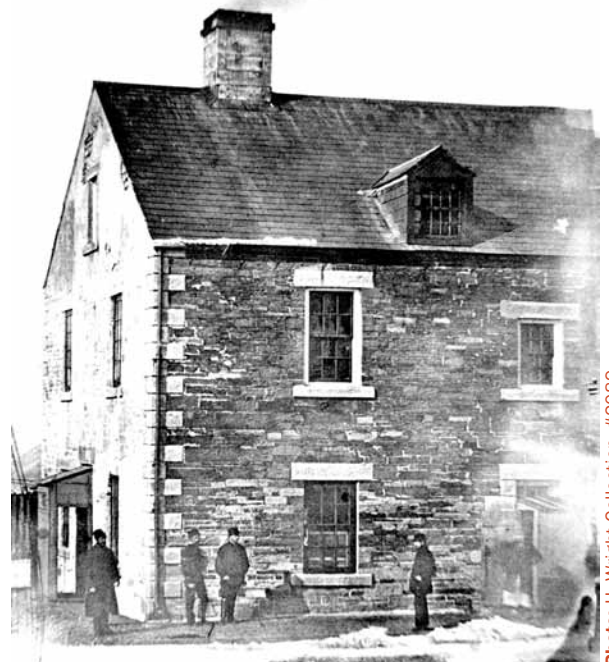


Photo: H. Wright Collection, #2089

► Approved plans of the Ordnance Building, 1842.

► *Plans approuvés du bâtiment des magasins militaires, 1842.*

▼ The 10th Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery, at Lower Cove circa 1875.

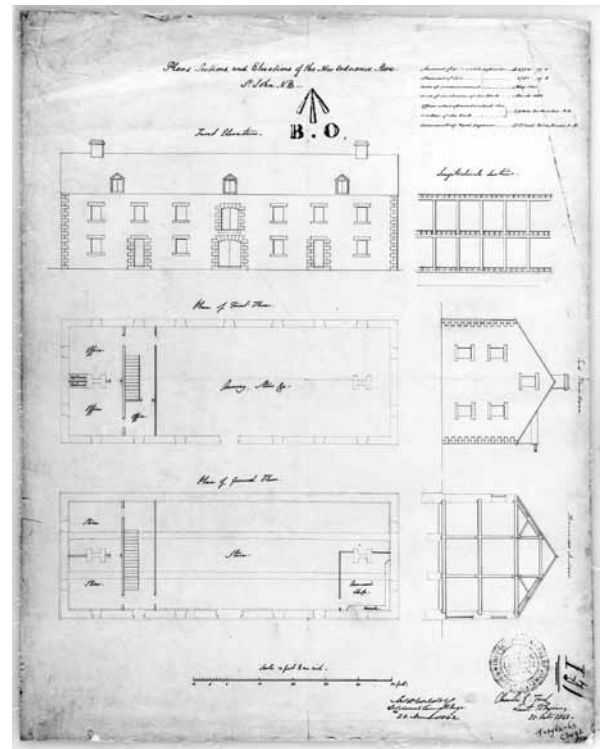
▼ *La 10^e Batterie de l'Artillerie royale canadienne, à Lower Cove vers 1875.*

Eager to see it survive into its third century, Commercial Properties Limited of Saint John purchased the neglected Ordnance Building from the Canadian government in 2009 along with a small area of surrounding land. When completed, the building's interior space will meet the needs of 21st-century business clients while its rehabilitated exterior will reflect the significant role it played in the history of Canada.

In 1780 Barrack Green was a British military site on the shores of Lower Cove, its land claimed as royal property belonging to the King. By 1785 the adjacent new city, Saint John, was emerging as the commercial centre of New Brunswick. For the next 100 years people came by the shipload, first as refugees from the new American states and then as immigrants from the old world (England, Scotland, Ireland, Europe) as new opportunities opened up. Barrack Green quickly became a strategic military site essential to the defence of New Brunswick.

The British Military Ordnance Building was one of the last construction projects for the armoury site. It was required to hold the equipment of a battle-ready army: guns, rifles, bayonets, and the supplies needed to maintain them. Positioned at the very tip of a peninsula, jutting into the bay with its upper windows facing seaward, it was an excellent location for monitoring vessels approaching the inner Saint John harbour.

The building's architecture reveals much about how British military engineers designed utilitarian



Drawing: National Archives of Canada (NMC #985)

structures, namely by keeping them simple, symmetrical and solid. The 1842 plans reveal a rectangular two-storey Georgian Classic-style building with a steeply pitched slate gable roof anchored by a chimney at each end and evenly placed windows and doors in three equal bays. It was 34 feet wide and 137 feet long, equalling 4,658 sq ft (433 m²) per floor.

The prominent white granite sills and lintels allowed for modest decorative features borrowed from the classical past. Not mentioned in the plans is the use of colourful sandstone for its

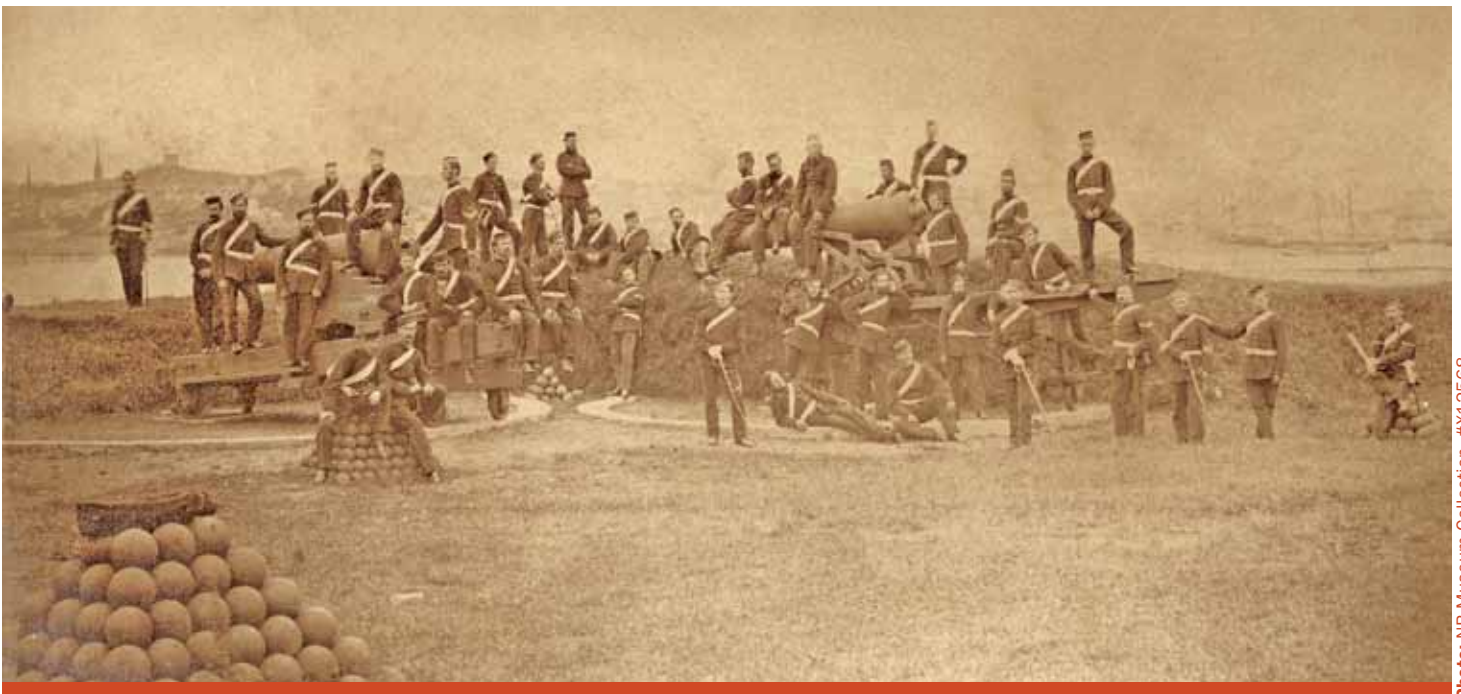


Photo: NB Museum Collection, #X12568



Photo: Rod Stearns Photography Ltd.

▲ The cleaning and repairs to the building's exterior in 2010 reveal once again the sandstone's natural colours.

▲ Le nettoyage et les réparations effectués à l'extérieur du bâtiment en 2010 ont remis au jour les couleurs naturelles du grès.

construction—shades of red, yellow, green and gold. The glow of the building in the sunlight must have brightened the spirits of soldiers far from home.

Separating the symmetrical placement of doors and windows along the front façade are two central openings: a lower massive segmented door, arched to allow entry of wide and tall loads, and a smaller one, similarly arched, on the second floor with wooden doors that swing open for hauling up stores using a block and tackle system.

Heavy quoins of white granite—both decorative and practical—distinguish the building, providing additional stability and accentuating its solidity. Wedge-shaped white quoins form the arch and surrounds of both central openings of the original front façade, giving the utilitarian structure a touch of Georgian gracefulness.

Commercial Properties Limited, the new owner, is eager to rehabilitate this historic building that has been part of Saint John's built heritage for over 160 years. Since January 2010 workers have been busy cleaning, repairing and repointing the exterior masonry. It now appears that attractive multi-coloured sandstone was used for the entire building, including the extension added in 1911. Weathering salt spray had scoured away the bright surface colours and the stone had darkened from years of industrial soot from nearby factories. Now the factories are gone; the air is cleaner. Completed repairs reveal the sandstone's natural colours that once again brighten the exterior walls.

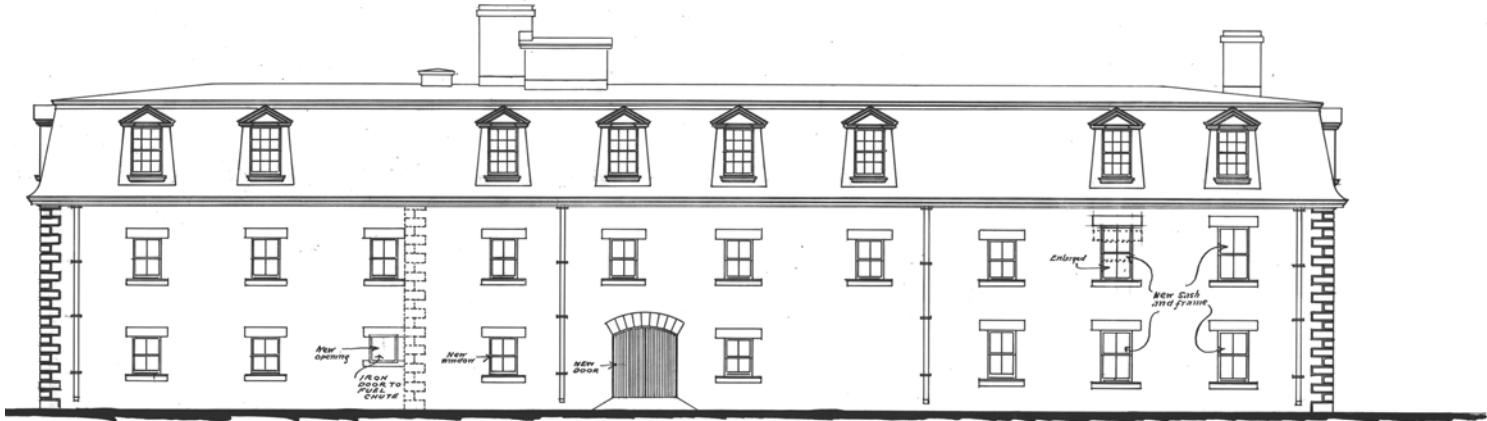
The new owner had a surprising piece of good luck when excavating the surrounding hillside for a parking lot. Workers uncovered a portion of a large tunnel, one not shown on any of the site maps, which appeared to lead to another area of Barrack Green. The rehabilitation team was excited to find undamaged sandstone blocks lining the tunnel walls whose colours and size were compatible with those used for both the original 1841 masonry and the later 1911 addition. The sandstone "gift" was incorporated into the Ordnance walls to replace damaged pieces.

The American Civil War saw Barrack Green Armoury preparing for an influx of troops. In 1862, British ships loaded with men and armaments converged at Saint John ready to fight an expected invasion of American forces. It was from the Ordnance Building that the cannon, guns and necessary stores were packed on sleighs for a three-month journey up the frozen Saint John River to Quebec. There were close to 7,000 soldiers in that great movement over ice and snow to defend the Canadas from invasion at Kingston and Montréal.

Not long afterwards in 1865-66, New Brunswick's border communities were threatened with an attack from Maine by the Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish independence movement that wanted to gain concessions from Great Britain by holding parts of British North America hostage.

The Ordnance Building again had a role to play when the British garrison and militia stationed at Barrack Green were made ready for combat. With the encouragement of Lieutenant-Governor Gordon, small communities along New Brunswick's southern coastline put together additional militia units. Beginning in December 1865 these units were trained and drilled, ready to

ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO STORES BUILDING
ST. JOHNS N.B.



Drawing : National Archives of Canada (NMC #58341)

▲ The 1911 alterations and additions extended the building by three bays and enlarged the top floor with a new copper mansard roof. Elevation shown above faces Sydney Street; opposite page faces the military grounds.

march against a Fenian invasion.

A highly organized show of strength, however, deterred the Fenians, and American forces under General Meade overtook their Maine encampment.

Military invasion was not the only threat the Ordnance Building had to face. On a June day in 1877, the British Armoury site was almost completely destroyed by the Great Fire that swept away much of the centre of the city. Beginning at

falling there during the Great Fire, was uncovered beneath some floorboards in the oldest part of the building. It was an exciting discovery. The follow-up report described the find as “exceptionally rare” and concludes that it is unlikely that a similar sealed layer “which so directly demonstrates the effects of the Great Saint John Fire of 1877” exists elsewhere in the city.

The owner followed the report’s recommendation that a more extensive mapping of the layered contents be undertaken. This past July the remainder of the original floor was exposed and the artifacts mapped by archaeologist Kevin Leonard. Before the floor was closed and sealed, Archaeological Services returned to remove some items for conservation and future display.

After the fire, immediate repairs and re-roofing made the Ordnance Building serviceable for the following 30 years. A new Armoury building was added in 1911, a massive red brick structure, vaguely medieval in style, with decorative brickwork culminating in massive round-headed arched windows and crenellated turrets at the corners.

At the same time the Ordnance Building was enlarged to support the new Armoury and redesigned to complement its style. It was a practical decision. A new copper mansard roof created a full third floor of usable interior space. The length of the building was increased by a third to provide three additional regularly spaced bays. Close to the lower edge of the mansard roof, new dormers with pediments reinforced the regularity and symmetry of the longer exterior façade. Larger six over six windows in the dormers brought more light into the top storey. The increased area on all floors was designed to accommodate storage and equipment, offices, meeting rooms, contemporary



Photo: H. Wright Collection, #9414

▲ Barrack soldiers pitched tents around the Ordnance Building—gutted by the Great Fire of 1877—to provide shelter for the destitute.

▲ Les soldats de Barrack Green ont planté des tentes autour du bâtiment des magasins militaires – ravagé par le grand incendie de 1877 – pour abriter les démunis.

the harbour’s east side waterfront, fire burned over the southern peninsula destroying all buildings in its path, including those on the Barrack Green. The stone Ordnance Building was the only structure left standing, but its slate roof and supporting wood beams had collapsed, leaving the stone chimneys standing alone against the sky.

In November 2009, the new owner invited a team from New Brunswick Archaeological Services to examine the building before restoration work began. A layer of artifact debris, undisturbed since

toilet facilities, electric light and an elevator. The building had moved into the 20th century.

By 1914 the Ordnance stores had been renamed Building #36, and became the responsibility of the Canadian Ordnance Corps, No. 8 Detachment. The role of this regular army corps was to secure and maintain all necessary equipment. It was ready when Britain announced the “British Empire” was at war with Germany in August 1914. Barrack Green became a vital administrative headquarters with the Ordnance Corps supplying its armaments.

During World War II, Building #36 was used primarily for office space, while the Armoury became the dedicated headquarters for New Brunswick’s defence. As the war continued another ordnance depot was constructed (1943) off the site, ending Building #36’s connection with the Ordnance Corps. It was turned over to the “Reserve Army.”

the stairwell. Looking up, the massive original beams installed after the 1877 fire are visible too. The staircase also provides glimpses of interior rough stone walls assembled by labourers in 1841, a distinct reminder of the building’s long history. Atrium walls are covered, floor to ceiling, by painted grey beadboard panelling, some reclaimed from the building’s original offices and re-installed, unchanged since the 1911 redesign. Original wood and cast-iron columns supporting the structure also remain in the atrium. Visitors can linger over cased displays of the best-preserved and most stable military artifacts rescued from under the floorboards, conserved and interpreted, as agreed to by the province’s Archaeological Collections. Brent D. Suttie of Archaeological Resources wrote: “We believe it is important that some of the material be shown near its original context to inform others of the role this building played in the defence of Saint John and New Brunswick.”

Sharp winds off the Bay of Fundy continue to whistle across the Ordnance Building’s restored sandstone walls and around its corners of granite quoins. This enduring historical treasure now awaits its new visitors.

Jo Anne Claus is a writer based in Saint John, New Brunswick, with a great appreciation for heritage buildings and history. The author would like to acknowledge the support of John K.F. Irving, President of Commercial Properties Limited, in the preparation of this article.

Photo: National Archives of Canada (NMC #58340)



▲ The 1957 alterations undermined the regularity of the building’s façades, marring the complementary designs of the two earlier periods.

▲ *Les transformations de 1957 ont brisé la régularité des façades du bâtiment, gâchant l’agencement complémentaire des styles des deux périodes anciennes.*

It was 1957 before any significant new changes were made to the former Ordnance Building. They were not as sensitive to the original building’s exterior and interior design as alterations had been in 1911. Remodelling focused on the practical needs of the occupants.

After 168 years, the British Military Ordnance Building has been refurbished to take on a new non-military role as a business centre. At the same time application has been made to Canada’s Historic Sites and Monuments Board for it to be designated as a national historic site and placed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places.

The public will be welcome to visit the Ordnance Building’s grounds and the interior atrium’s displays. Light floods down to this entrance space from third-floor skylights above



Photo: Courtesy Commercial Properties Limited