

Steve Mecredy. *Fort Henry: An Illustrated History*, Third Edition. Toronto: Lorimer Press, 2020. Pp. 96.

Known for its twin claims to fame as the largest British fortification west of Quebec City and the first living history military museum, Fort Henry is the titular topic of Steve Mecredy's *Fort Henry: An Illustrated History*. Now updated for a third edition, Mecredy's work is composed of an introduction to the history of Fort Henry from its predecessor fortifications during the War of 1812 through to the present day. Striking visuals throughout—including historical documents, paintings and sketches but also recent pictures of military history interpreters in action—grant great aesthetic value to *Fort Henry*, while the collection of documents in the Appendix provides snapshots of life at and around the Fort from drill manuals, newspapers and diaries of notable visitors, such as Charles Dickens. As Peter Truman notes in the Foreword, Mecredy's introduction to Fort Henry draws out the peacetime significance of the site. While many military historic sites naturally focus on battles, Mecredy shows how the life of the soldier beyond the field is important—not only to understand the present-day historical interpretation undertaken at Fort Henry, but also for a full appreciation of the history itself.

Fort Henry is intended primarily as a public-facing text, but merits consideration by the historian of Canadian and British military affairs because of the niche that it addresses. While it therefore lacks the attentive footnoting of a conventional scholarly monograph, the accessibility of the prose is a welcome relief. The main text consists of five chapters, followed by appendices of a glossary, garrison records and archival excerpts. The first chapter offers a tour of the physical structure, a large polygonal-trace casemated redoubt constructed between 1832 and 1837 to defend the terminus of the Rideau Canal and the Royal Naval Dockyards at Kingston. The second chapter turns to the present day, introducing the artillery, infantry, military music and regimental colours represented by the Fort Henry Guard. The final three chapters outline three key historical periods in the Fort's history: original service as a British colonial fortification, restoration as a public work project during the Great Depression and as an internment site during the First and Second World Wars.

The appendices offer the reader sufficient background for the military history and technical vocabulary that even the most amateur historian is surely able to follow the text. A glossary of terms outlines the specific architectural features and other key terms necessary, while the garrison record shares the historic and contemporary names of each regiment stationed at Fort Henry during its years of active service. The “Historical Documents” section is comprised of twenty-nine excerpts from various sources, including the local newspaper from the nearby city of Kingston, diaries from officers stationed at Fort Henry and civilians passing through. One substantial excerpt comes from the diary of William Lyon Mackenzie King, reflecting upon his experience at the opening of Fort Henry on 1 August 1938, reminiscing on the memory of his own grandfather’s posting at the Fort a century earlier. Another, from an essay by Mecredy, offers insight into the work of Ronald Lawrence Way, a pioneer in the field of museum education and military reenactment who oversaw the restoration of Fort Henry and the founding of the Fort Henry Guard.

Fort Henry has received scattered attention from historians since the late 1800s, but this impact pales in comparison to its touristic and public-education contributions. In the two decades since the book’s original release, interest in Fort Henry has increased, with a special issue of *Ontario Archaeology* including contributions focused on recent excavations in the Fort’s surroundings and articles on museum education practices and pedagogies at work in the current historical interpretation programs have appeared in a variety of outlets. To this end, Mecredy includes a scant “Recommended Reading” list, consisting of books related to the historic period commemorated at Fort Henry, as well as a small selection of articles (although this list is largely focused to the local historical society’s journal) on Fort Henry. Interested readers might look to the broader literature that speaks to Fort Henry as a military, archaeological and educational

site, consisting of a variety of articles, dissertations and essays not included in Mecredy's list.¹

I write this review during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hobbled the tourist industry that would usually see many thousands of visitors flock to Fort Henry during the summer season. While the full experience cannot quite be captured in an introductory volume, Mecredy's accessible prose and selection of striking images offers the potential tourist an alternative means of accessing the site. Until such time as crowds can return, *Fort Henry: An Illustrated History* can serve well as a "staycation" read for the historian and amateur alike.

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¹ A first collection would be "Fields of Fire: Fortified Works of Kingston Harbour," a special issue of *Ontario Archaeology*, no. 76 (2003) which had a number of articles related to the excavation of Fort Henry. For dissertations, see: Pamela K. Peacock, "Interpreting a Past: Presenting Gender History at Living History Sites in Ontario" (PhD Dissertation, Queen's University, 2011); and Henry C. Cary, "Engineering Empire: The Evolution of Fort Henry, Kingston, Upper Canada, as a Case Study in Colonial Defence Strategy and Tactics, 1812-1845" (PhD Dissertation, Royal Military College of Canada, 2013). For publicly-accessible essays of Ronald L. Way, see: Ronald L. Way, "Historical Restorations," *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association* 29, 1 (1950): 58-83; "Old Fort Henry: The Citadel of Upper Canada," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 40, 4 (1950): 148-169; and "Soldiering at Fort Henry," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 48, 4 (1954): 178-199. For recent academic articles, see: Katherine M. J. McKenna, "Women's History, Gender Politics, and the Interpretation of Canadian Historic Sites: Some Examples from Ontario," *Atlantis* 30, 1 (2005): 21-30; Michael P. A. Murphy, "'Blending' Docent Learning: Using Google Forms Quizzes to Increase Efficiency in Interpreter Education at Fort Henry," *Journal of Museum Education* 43, 1 (2018): 47-54; and Michael P. A. Murphy and Daniel Rose, "Curator's Curiosities: Active Learning as Interpretive Pedagogy," *Journal of Museum Education* 44, 1 (2019): 81-88.