

HISTORY OF FORT EDWARD AND ROGERS ISLAND

The present village of Fort Edward, New York, was called “The Great Carrying Place” because it was the portage between the Hudson River and Lake Champlain.

The first recorded military expedition to have passed through the Great Carrying Place, led by Major General Fitz-John Winthrop, occurred in 1690. The following year, Peter Schuyler led another expedition against Canada.

The first fortification to have been built in Fort Edward was under the command of Colonel Francis Nicholson in 1709, during the conflict known as “Queen Anne’s War.” Fort Nicholson was garrisoned by 450 men, including seven companies of “regulars in scarlet uniform from old England.” A crude stockade was built to protect storehouses and log huts.

John Henry Lydius, a Dutch fur trader, came to the site of Fort Nicholson to construct a trading post in 1731. Lydius claimed this land under a title granted to the Rev. Dellius in 1696. According to a 1732 French map, the trading post may have been surrounded by storehouses and fortified. Lydius may also have built a sawmill on Rogers Island. It is unknown whether the Lydius post was destroyed and later reconstructed in 1745 when many French and Indian raids were being conducted on the Hudson River.

Many Provincial troops arrived at the Great Carrying Place during July and August of 1755. Among these were the celebrated Rogers’ Rangers. Rogers Island became the base camp for the Rangers for about 2 ½ years during the French and Indian War. Many Ranger huts, a blockhouse, a large barracks complex, and a large smallpox hospital were constructed on Rogers Island between 1756 and 1759.

Many men of Revolutionary War fame were stationed in Fort Edward during the French and Indian War. Men such as Philip Schuyler, Israel Putnam and Paul Revere would hone their skills as officers and soldiers at Fort Edward and Rogers Island.

Fort Edward was garrisoned until 1766, when it was ordered evacuated and the stores moved to Crown Point. With Fort Edward now evacuated, more settlers were beginning to move into the area.

During the American Revolution, Fort Edward once again saw many troop movements, and a handful of soldiers garrisoned the fort. General Schuyler, Benedict Arnold, Knox, Howe, Burgoyne and others all passed through Fort Edward.

CHRONOLOGY OF FORT EDWARD AND ROGERS ISLAND

5000 B.C. or earlier – Native Americans were hunting and fishing on the east bank of the Hudson River and on Rogers Island, leaving behind hearths, trash pits, and dumps. They continued to visit the local area until shortly before the first Europeans arrived in the area.

1690 General Winthrop marched to the “Great Carrying Place” (Fort Edward).

1691 Major Peter Schuyler arrived at the Great Carrying Place, where he remained for 16 days to build canoes before traveling north to Canada.

1709 General Francis Nicholson ordered Peter Schuyler to build a fort at the Great Carrying Place. The fort was garrisoned with 450 English, Dutch, and Indians equipped with cannons and mortars.

1731 John Henry Lydius built a trading post at the Great Carrying Place. The trading post was called “Fort Lydius” by the French and Indians.

1755 Sir William Johnson sent General Lyman to build a fort at the Great Carrying Place, and this was named “Fort Lyman.” A month later, Sir William Johnson arrived at Fort Lyman and changed the name to “Fort Edward,” in honor of Edward Augustus, Duke of York and Albany. The fort was a three-bastioned, Vauban-style fort, surrounded by a dry moat that was 14’ wide and 8’ deep.

1755-1756 Barracks, blockhouses, guard houses, storehouses and a magazine were completed in Fort Edward. Rogers Island was used by some of the Provincial soldiers as a camp.

1757 General Daniel Webb was put in charge of the troops at Fort Edward and Fort William Henry.

July 23, 1757 The outworks at Fort Edward were attacked by the French under Marin, and about a dozen men were killed.

Aug.-Sept. 1757 The garrison in Fort Edward was enlarged after the “massacre” at Fort William Henry. Fort Edward was now the sole northern outpost for the British.

Winter 1757-1758 Colonel William Haviland was in charge of the soldiers at Fort Edward and on Rogers Island.

Dec. 25, 1757 A fire broke out inside one of the barracks in the fort. Captain Israel Putnam and other soldiers from Rogers Island helped to put out the fire.

1757-1758 British barracks, Rangers' huts, a blockhouse and a hospital were built on Rogers Island. Major Duncan Campbell of the "Black Watch" may have died in a hospital on the island in July of 1758 after General Abercromby's unsuccessful attack upon Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga).

1759 General Amherst's army gathered in Fort Edward to prepare for their attack upon Forts Carillon and St. Frederic (Crown Point). After the capture of the two forts, the garrison in Fort Edward was greatly reduced.

1766 Fort Edward was evacuated, and the stores were moved to Crown Point.

1775-1783 Fort Edward and Rogers Island were still occupied by a small garrison of American soldiers during the Revolution, but General John Burgoyne's army forced them to flee in 1777.

mid-19th Century Homes were being constructed over portions of Fort Edward and its outer earthworks.

1890s Part of Fort Edward was dug up by William McDougall, Frank Morgan and others (a total of 10 men), to a depth of several feet. They sold the numerous artifacts they found, some of which owned by Fort Edward Historical Association and are now on display in the Rogers Island Visitors Center.

1991-1994, 1997-1998 Professional archaeological excavations were conducted on Rogers Island by Adirondack Community College (ACC).

1995-1996, 2002-2003 ACC conducted archaeology at the site of Fort Edward, exposing casemate rooms, postholes, and fireplaces.

2001-2002, 2004-2009 ACC conducted archaeology at the site of a 1750s' sutlers' (merchants') house on the east bank of the Hudson River.

2008-2009 ACC began work at a very productive new site further south on the Hudson River, where outworks are located from the original fort site (and close to where English settlements were located in the 1730s).