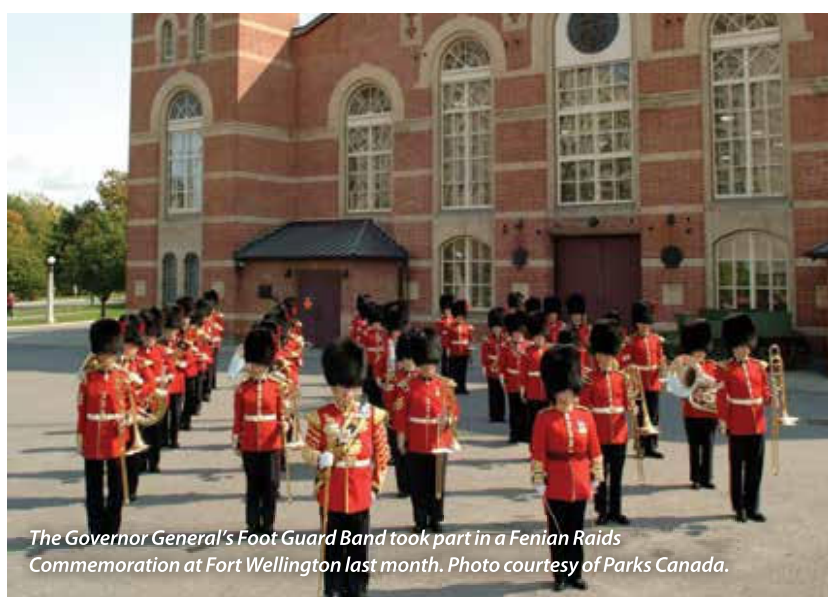




The first photographs of Fort Wellington Military Parade c 1866. Photo courtesy of Parks Canada.



The Governor General's Foot Guard Band took part in a Fenian Raids Commemoration at Fort Wellington last month. Photo courtesy of Parks Canada.

THE FENIAN CRISIS HELPED CREATE CANADA

By Lisa Crandall

The 2016 season at Fort Wellington will be focused on commemorating a largely ignored period of Canadian history - the Fenian Raids.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the beginnings of this lengthy military challenge, which saw attempts and incursions at various points along the Canadian-American border between 1866-1871. A period of special significance in the formation of this country because it helped to create a sense of unity among the various groups living in the area. In 1866 the Brockville - Prescott area was a major railway hub, the confluence of tracks that carried cargo and passengers between Toronto, Ottawa and points of Quebec. An interruption here could have crippled the fledging economy of the country, which at the time consisted of only Ontario and Quebec.

The Fenian Brotherhood was an Irish Republican organization founded in the United States in 1858 with the ambition of supporting the rebels in Ireland fighting to oust the British from the Emerald Isle. The assassination of Irish-Canadian politician Thomas D'Arcy McGee in 1868 was in retaliation for his opposition to the Fenian Raids.

In March of 1866, appropriately enough on the 17th (St. Patrick's Day) a group of

Fenian rebels struck out across the St. Lawrence River in the dead of night, intent on capturing the town and fort. The river was reportedly cluttered with drifting ice, the frigid temperatures of March were unwelcoming and the soldiers of the area were on high alert. Before the rebels even set foot on Canadian soil they were met with a volley of rifle fire and the threatening thunder of the cannons. They turned back, foiled before the battle was joined. Historians report that the rebels had hoped to capture the rail lines, holding the Canadian economy as hostage to force the British out of Ireland. It was a calculated political maneuver and it failed.

As part of a commemorative focus during the 2016 season, a special temporary display entitled "On to Canada! Fenians Along the Upper St. Lawrence", will be viewed in the Information Center at the Fort. It features items specific to this period of time, including a very rare Fenian soldier's jacket. The green uniform jacket has just recently returned from being on display in Ireland at The National Museum of Ireland.

The Fort opened for the season on May 21st with an Artillery Day scheduled for May 28th. Special guests during Artillery Day included the Brockville Rifles, a militia from Brockville, and the 30th Field Artillery

Regiment from Ottawa. It was a force made up of volunteer militiamen and regular soldiers from these regiments groups that acted so effectively in 1866 to foil the planned invasion in this part of Canada. As part of the commemorative celebrations the 30th Field Artillery brought 3 of their 19th century cannons with them, temporarily relocated from their current home on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The Governor Generals' Footband from Ottawa provided a celebratory musical background for the events of the day. **LH**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Did you know on the weekends it is possible to have a guided tour of the Fort in the company of a costumed animator? For the price of \$11.20 per person, a group of 4 can enjoy a private escort around the fort and the museum, subject to availability of a guide. For pre-booked groups of more than 25, the rate drops to just \$5.80 per person. Regular admission for the 2016 season will be \$3.90 per person.

Fort Wellington-370 Vankoughnet St, Prescott ON K0E 1T0 · 613-925-2896 or visit www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/on/wellington/index.aspx for details about the Fort and it's History.