

THE MOHAWK FORT AT ANNAPOLIS ROYAL

By Brian McConnell, UE *

How did a Mohawk Fort get built in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia? The Mohawks fought on the side of the British Crown in the old province of New York during the American Revolution from 1775 to 1783 and were granted lands in Ontario afterwards. (1) This, however, was not the only time they served side by side. Another occasion where they fought together against a foe was more than a thousand kilometres away in southwestern Nova Scotia. There some Mohawks served with the British between 1712 and 1713 against the French and their allies. (2)

On the Eastern side of the town of Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia along the south side of St. George Street beside the Annapolis River stands a post with a plaque commemorating the *Iroquois at Annapolis Royal*. It is a reminder of the part played by a company of Mohawks in the defense of Annapolis Royal.



Location of Plaque to the Iroquois at Annapolis Royal

The plaque reads:

Iroquois at Annapolis Royal

In 1712, two years after the British captured the Acadian capital, Colonel John Livingston returned to New York with about 50 men recruited among the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, also known as the League of Five Nations. During the last months of the War of the Spanish Succession (1702- 1713) these men carried out scouting duties and prevented attacks on the garrison of Annapolis Royal by French troops and their Mi'kmaw, Wolastok'qew (Maliseet), and Abenaki allies. The Iroquois company also built a small fort near here, before being disbanded in the spring of 1713.

It was unveiled on August 29, 1938 by Professor Daniel Cobb Harvey for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. (3) Born in Cape Traverse, Prince Edward Island, Professor Harvey graduated from Oxford University. He became Archivist for the Public Archives of Nova Scotia and taught history at Dalhousie University as well as being involved in several historical associations including the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. (4) The site in Annapolis Royal had been designated as a national historic event on May 30, 1932.



Historic Plaque

A combined British and New England force captured Port Royal, the capital of the French colony of Acadia, on October 16, 1710. In November 1710 Acadians of the area wrote to the Governor General of New France, Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, soliciting his aid. He organized resistance to the occupying British troops and sent Baron de Saint – Castin at the head of a large force of First Nations which included Abenakis and Malisets. Saint – Castin was to keep the Acadians and Mi'kmaq in the area loyal to France and defeat the British garrison.

Saint – Castin threatened any Acadians who provided timber or supplies to Port Royal. Cooperation with the British was considered treasonous. On June 8, 1711 Captain David Pidgeon led a detachment of seventy men from the fort up the Annapolis River to meet with Acadians and seek timber and lumber. The detachment was ambushed at a bend of the river, approximately 15 kilometres above the fort. A cairn and plaque erected by Historic Sites and Monuments Canada now marks the site located on Highway 201 as *Bloody Creek*. (5)



Bloody Creek Site

Samuel Vetch, born in Edinburgh, Scotland was appointed Governor after the capture of Port Royal. He had experience as a soldier in Europe and leader in several overseas mercantile projects. (6) He asked his brother – in – law Colonel John Livingston of New York, who had been a Colonel in the Connecticut militia, to raise a company of Mohawk to be stationed at the fort. Livingston was respected and had influence among the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. He had led an Iroquois contingent during the 1710 attack on Port Royal. Afterwards he went to Quebec.

In March, 1712 Livingston's Mohawk Company arrived in Port Royal which had been renamed Annapolis Royal by the British in honour of their monarch Queen Anne. The Company included a captain, two lieutenants, three sergeants, three corporals, two drummers, and forty – seven privates. It was expected that they would scout the area around Annapolis Royal and prevent attacks on the town. (7)

Governor Vetch also directed Livingston that the Mohawk soldiers were to be kept busy, sober, out of trouble and not to molest the Acadians. When it was peaceful they should cut firewood on Goat Island.

The site which the Mohawk company occupied was adjacent to the Annapolis River by the far end of the lower town about a kilometre from the fort. They constructed their own small fort. It had thick, drystone walls approximately six feet in height, landward bastions, a ditch, a seaward battery with a breastwork and embrasures facing the river. There were three buildings located inside the fort which were a house for the officers and two barracks for the Mohawks. A palisade ran across the front of the buildings on the inside of the fort that provided a place of retreat if the walls were breached. It was known locally as the Mohawk Fort.

Livingston had a wife who was dying of cancer at his home in New London, Connecticut and was anxious to return to her. The Mohawk company was disbanded in May, 1713. For a time afterwards the Mohawk Fort was used as a Catholic Church. In 1816 the property was purchased by Lawrence Sneden, a local merchant. Later the property passed into the hands of the Roman Catholic Church again and in 1832 St. Louis Chapel was built. It was demolished in 1930. A graveyard remains near the property now.

Relations between the British at Annapolis Royal with the Acadians and indigenous people were effected by conflict within the context of larger European events for many years. By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, France ceded Acadia and Newfoundland to the British Crown. Article 14 provided that French subjects had one year to relocate to French held territory. Article 15 stated that French subjects were not to molest the Haudenosaunee or other English allies or subjects. (8) Nonetheless, it was not until the fall to the British of Fort Beausejour in 1755, followed by Louisbourg in 1758, Quebec in 1759, and Montreal in 1760 that hostilities began to markedly diminish. As well the British began to expell Acadians in 1755. From 1760 to 1761 in Halifax, Nova Scotia the Peace and Friendship Treaties were signed between the Mi'kmaq and the British. (9)

- This article was prepared by Brian McConnell, UE on December 4, 2021. He is the President of the Nova Scotia Branch of the UELAC and as well an historian and author. To contact him please email brianm564@gmail.com

Notes:

1. The Mohawks were one of the original five nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Others were the Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca. In 1722 the Tuscarora joined after leaving their traditional territory in North Carolina and Virginia to become the sixth nation. See: Haudenosaunee Confederacy accessed on December 4, 2021 at <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/the-league-of-nations/>
2. Iroquois at Annapolis Royal National Historic Event, accessed on December 4, 2021 at https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=1073
3. “Annapolis Royal & Area, Established 1605 – Exciting History That Fills Four Centuries”, brochure published by The Historical Association of Annapolis Royal, 1987
4. Daniel C. Harvey and the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University, accessed on December 3, 2021 at <https://digitalexhibits.library.dal.ca/exhibits/show/lives-of-dal-volume-2/chapter-2-2/daniel-cobb-harvey>
5. Bloody Creek National Historic Site accessed on December 3, 2021 at <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/ns/bloodycreek>
6. Waller, G.M., “VETCH, SAMUEL,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 2, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed December 3, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/vetch_samuel_2E.html
7. Dunn, Brenda, “A History of Port Royal / Annapolis Royal, 1605 – 1800, published by Nimbus Publishing Ltd. and The Historical Association of Annapolis Royal, 2004
8. Peace, Thomas, G.M. “Two Conquests, Aboriginal Experience in the Fall of New France and Acadia”, Dissertation for Doctor of Philosophy, York University, 2011, accessed on December 4, 2021 at <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/002/NR88677.PDF>
9. Peace and Friendship Treaties at the Nova Scotia Archives, Mi’kmaq Holdings Resource Guide, Nova Scotia Archives, accessed on December 4, 2021 at <https://archives.novascotia.ca/mikmaq/results/?Search=AR5&SearchList1=all&TABLE2=on>