

feature

Fort William Historical Park

FIFTY YEARS OF BRINGING LIFE TO



HISTORY

BY
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In the late 1960s, an archeology professor at Lakehead University led a team of students who excavated the original site of Fort William in Thunder Bay's East End. They found the foundations of the Great Hall, palisade posts, and other remnants. The excitement around their work reinvigorated community interest in the fort's reconstruction and, in 1971, the Ontario government announced that reconstruction of the fort would begin later that year at Pointe de Meuron, 14 kilometres upstream from the original site.

On July 3, 1973, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip officially opened Old Fort William (now named Fort William Historical Park) with three historic buildings. Over the next decade, all 46 buildings were reconstructed and furnished with meticulous attention to historic details representative of the years around 1815. Authenticity was maintained using information found during the archeological dig, historic journals, and the Selkirk Papers—meticulously detailed documents compiled by Lord Selkirk when he seized Fort William for ten months in 1816.



This year marks Fort William Historical Park's (FWHP) golden anniversary and the main celebration will be the Great Rendezvous Week from July 8-16. This festival will celebrate the history of FWHP, highlight natural history, astronomy, farming, and Indigenous culture, and feature music and interactive activities, like a community games challenge and alumni events. The festival will culminate with the Great Rendezvous on the final weekend.

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Fort William Historical Park is much more than recreated buildings and preserved artifacts—it's a living history site that allows visitors to become fully immersed in the fur trade era. One of the first things visitors notice is the enthusiasm and knowledge of the interpretive staff who are incredibly knowledgeable and convincing when playing the role of their character, whether it be voyageurs, bourgeois, or Anishinaabe men and women.

David Shepherd is an interpretive specialist who has worked at FWHP since 2016. He holds certification from the National Association of Interpretation—

a not-for-profit professional organization dedicated to advancing the profession of heritage interpretation. David's primary role is to train, coach, mentor, and monitor all of FWHP's interpreters—from staff to volunteers—so that they are ready to interact and share the history with visitors. He also oversees the interpretive messaging and writes and directs period dramas and scripted performances.

"The thing I enjoy most while working with the public is seeing the excitement and sense of wonder as a visitor learns something new and seeing how it broadens how they see the world," he says. David has spent countless hours looking at historic information through different cultural lenses which helps him "do justice to the topics and themes portrayed."

Elliott Cromarty is FWHP's Indigenous Heritage Program coordinator who was initially hired as a student in 2003. Elliott teaches staff about the Anishinaabe way of life during the fur trade period and how to interpret history and culture through an Indigenous perspective. He also helps develop traditional skills, such as harvesting birch bark and spruce roots to make wigwams, canoes, and baskets.

"I enjoy the artisanal demonstrations that I do from time to time as it engages visitors on a different level while leading to deeper conversations about history and culture," says Elliott. "It also gives them a chance to feel the materials and gain an appreciation for the land that we live on and our relationship with nature."

Elliott describes learning as a continual journey. "When I began as a student, I had limited knowledge of history and culture, but learned more over time. Whether through oral traditions, research, land-based learning, or first hand experience, there have been different avenues for learning and development. I continue to learn new



things and develop new skills to this day, most recently helping to build a birch bark canoe. Having colleagues that are equally engaged and provide new knowledge and perspectives helps to expand and refine our interpretations."

While the visitor experience speaks for itself, FWHP has earned over 70 awards and recognitions for its programs, services and events over the past twenty years. This includes the National Cultural Tourism Award from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada.

ANISHINAABE CULTURE AT FORT WILLIAM HISTORICAL PARK

Although Fort William Historical Park has been depicting Anishinaabe culture and technology since it opened in 1973, the Indigenous Life Program and Anishinaabe Encampment grew exponentially when Elder Freda McDonald began working at the park in 1976.

Freda was born in Fort Alexander (Sagkeeng) First Nation in 1932 and grew up in a traditional hunting and trapping culture; however, years at residential school and loss of her official status when she married a non-status person separated her from her childhood experiences of living off the land. During her tenure at FWHP, she helped lay the foundation for the accurate portrayal of Anishinaabe culture and the importance of women in fur trade society.



According to the City of Thunder Bay's Women's History Month web exhibit, thousands of visitors to FWHP from all over the world have learned about Anishinaabe culture because of Freda's work. As Freda's knowledge of her culture increased, so too did her spiritual awareness. Of her craft making Freda said, "For me, the work is very therapeutic and centering. It's a healing thing."

"Today, Fort William Historical Park is privileged to pass on the ancestral knowledge shared by Elder Freda and continue educating students and visitors about Anishinaabe history, traditions, culture, language, and technology," says Patrick Morash, general manager. "This includes teaching visitors about the critical role Indigenous Peoples played in the development of the fur trade and expansion of North America, through their generosity, sharing their invaluable knowledge and skills with their European partners and trading furs for European goods."

In addition to continuing to provide in-person and virtual education programs on topics such as Anishinaabe traditional teachings, history, and culture, FWHP is upgrading and expanding the Anishinaabe Encampment. For example, in 2021-2022, employees rebuilt two wiigiwaams using traditional methods and there are plans to rebuild another in 2023.



8 QUESTIONS to Test Your Knowledge of Fort William Historical Park

2023 Events at Fort William Historical Park

VOYAGEUR WINTER CARNIVAL, FEBRUARY

A weekend of winter fun for all ages on Family Day weekend, featuring tubing hills, skating, winter games and activities, live indoor and outdoor entertainment, and more!

CANADA DAY, JULY

Remember, learn and engage. Explore the Anishinaabe Encampment and Fort William to learn about and celebrate our nation's diverse heritage.

GREAT RENDEZVOUS CELEBRATION, JULY 8-16, 2023

Enjoy a variety of exciting programs and activities that celebrate the people who helped build Fort William Historical Park and its fur trade history, culminating in a weekend re-enactment.

ANISHINAABE KEESHIGUN, AUGUST

A weekend of entertainment, activities, and demonstrations that celebrate Indigenous culture and traditions.

HAUNTED FORT NIGHT, OCTOBER

Experience the thrills and chills of William's Town, an unlucky town that is tormented by sinister events year after year.

NEW YEAR'S EVE FAMILY FROLIC, DECEMBER

Ring in the new year at New Year's Eve Family Frolic. Enjoy an evening filled with a variety of fun indoor and outdoor activities.

For more information on Fort William Historical Park's programs, call (807) 473-2344, visit fwhp.ca, or find them on social media @fortwilliamhp.

1 True or false: Fort William was not a traditional fort.

2 What is the name of the **first bateau constructed in FWHP's Naval Shed**?

3 What three buildings were complete when Old Fort William opened in 1973?

4 What full-length feature film was filmed at FWHP in 2018?

5 What was Fort William's **original name** when it opened in 1803?

A) The Great Hall, Taitt's House, and the Common Gaol.

B) The Naval Shed, Taitt's House, and Boucher's House

C) Boucher's House, the Apothecary, and the Naval Shed

6 True or false: FWHP's astronomical observatory is named after Simon Fraser.



7 What is Fort William Historical Park's longest running event?

8 Why did Lord Selkirk seize Fort William in 1816?

A) Anishinaabe Keeshigun

B) The Great Rendezvous

C) Canada Day

A) It was retaliation for the Nor'Westers' theft of furs from a Hudson Bay trading post.

B) He was carrying out an order from King George III.

C) It was retaliation for the Nor'Westers disrupting his Red River settlement and the Battle of the Seven Oaks.



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FIND THE ANSWERS



Fort William Historical Park respectfully acknowledges they are located on the traditional lands of Fort William First Nation, Anemki Wajiw (Thunderbird Mountain, also known as Mount McKay), located on the western shores of Gichigami (Lake Superior), signatory to the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850. They also recognize the contributions of all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples across Turtle Island (North America).