

Fort Gibraltar

Fort Gibraltar was built the Forks of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers near the previous location of Fort Rouge. It was built by Cuthbert Grant's brother-in-law John Wills. Fort Rouge was built in 1738, at the south point of the present site of the Forks of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, by Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de la Vérendrye's and was used as a trading post for the local Aborigines. The fort may have operated for only one season, and by 1809, Fort Gibraltar was built across the river from this site, on the north side, by the North West Company.

The sites of the two forts Gibraltar (I: 18010; II: 1816) and the first Fort Garry (1822) have been identified adjacent to the present day Union Station, while the site of Fort Rouge is believed to be on South Point, immediately south across the Assiniboine River. From this location guns on the top of the walls could control traffic on both the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

John Wills was active in the fur trade well before 1798. He was a wintering partner of the X.Y. Company. He became a partner of the North West Company in 1804 when it amalgamated with the X.Y. Company. In 1810 he started the construction of Fort Gibraltar. Jean Baptiste Roi was one of the men employed to construct the fort. At the time he was living across the river. He noted that the fort was built about fifteen paces from the shore of the river. Wills remained in charge of the North West Company's Red River Department until he was relieved of his duties as a result of ill health, in 1814. Mr. Wills married Cuthbert Grant's sister, Josephite. He died at Fort Gibraltar on Friday, January 6, 1815. On August 30, 1812 the first of several contingents of Selkirk settlers led by Captain Miles Macdonell arrived to establish a colony. Although Wills was initially regarded by the Selkirk settlers as supportive, he resisted Miles Macdonell's Pemmican Proclamation, regarding it as an "indignity". Macdonell also ordered all NWC agents to leave the territory. In June of 1814 Macdonell sent sheriff John Spencer, trader Joseph Howse and three men up the Assiniboine River and they seized the NWC pemmican being stored at Fort la Souris (34 tons of goods in total). They carried most of this across the river to HBC fort Brandon the rest they shipped to fort Douglas, a mile below Fort Gibraltar. Duncan Cameron retaliated by arresting Joseph Howse preparatory to sending him for trial at Montreal.

In April of 1815 Cameron lured a number of settlers with promises of transportation to Upper Canada and free land. They left the colony and moved to Fort Gibraltar taking the field guns of Fort Douglas with them. Upon return from a visit to Fort Daer, Macdonell was arrested and sent to fort William. Later the rest of the settlers were ousted and left for Norway House on Jack River. Later, in August Colin Robertson returned with these settlers who were then joined by a party of 180 new settlers along with the new Governor, Robert Semple.

On March 17, 1816, Fort Gibraltar was captured and destroyed by HBC employee Colin Robertson, a former NWC employee who became a leader of the colony. This then culminated in the Battle of Seven Oaks on June 19, 1816 when Semple attacked Cuthbert

Grant's party trying to bypass Fort Douglas with pemmican for the brigades from Fort William who were further down the Red River.

Later, the 1816 capture of Fort Douglas was ruled illegal by British authorities and the North West Company was given permission to rebuild the fort in 1817.

Before eventually amalgamating with the Hudson's Bay Company, North West Company had 97 trading posts compared to the 84 in Manitoba that flew the Hudson's Bay Company standard.

On March 26, 1821, The North West Company was merged with its rival under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company. The site of the fort was designated a National historic Site in 1924.

- 1822 Fort Gibraltar's name is changed to Fort Garry.
- 1835 Fort Garry is abandoned but its warehouses are still used.
- 1852 Fort Garry is destroyed by the Red River flood.
- 1978 Fort Gibraltar is rebuilt across the Red River at Whittier Park by Festival du Voyageur.



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