

# FORT GIBRALTAR

## HISTORY OF THE FORT

The North West Company built Fort Gibraltar at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in the year 1810. The fort was able to tap into already existing trade networks for provisions such as pemmican and locally grown produce. Food traded here was used to supply brigades of voyageurs destined for the rich fur country in the North-West. For over 6,000 years, the Forks was a meeting place for many different First Nations: a strategic location at the heart of the prairies.

In 1815, the Forks was home to a diverse population of First Nations peoples, a growing Métis community, recently arrived settlers from Europe, retired voyageurs, and fur traders. These inhabitants formed complex relationships rooted in commerce and kinship ties. In this environment, Fort Gibraltar tells the story of competition and connections at the centre of the fur trade.

## MAP OF THE FORT

### 1. Trading Post

Trade goods on display range from every day necessities to more luxurious wares from around the world. Good relations between the company and local communities were essential to keeping business moving at the fort. Furs, from muskrats to moose, could have been temporarily stored here before being shipped east and eventually to Europe.

### 2. Workshop

Company employees or *engagés* were kept busy throughout the year with general maintenance. Skilled labourers would be tasked with repairing canoes, making barrels and preparing timber for construction. The fort had to be self sufficient in effecting repairs and made many daily items from raw materials harvested nearby.

### 3. Blacksmith's Shop

Tradesmen such as the blacksmith received a basic, yet thorough, formal education as an apprentice often in the major centres of eastern Canada or overseas. They were charged with the task of repairing iron tools, muskets and hardware as well as limited production of trade for the local market.

### 4. Warehouse

Fort Gibraltar was built as a provisioning post to supply the company's employees with foodstuffs such as pemmican, made from dried bison meat mixed with fat, and locally grown produce. Along with provisions, items such as trade goods and furs would be stored here until they could be shipped out. A clerk would have bunked in the loft to keep an eye on the company's important possessions.

### 5. Winterer's Cabin

Winterers or *hivernants* were a group of voyageurs who travelled from Lake Superior to the far reaches of the north west and spent the winter at forts like Fort Gibraltar. Typically, they were young men hired by the company to transport trade goods and furs. This accommodation was provided as a warm and dry place to stay during the frigid winter months.

### 6. Summer Kitchen

Processing food was an important task at the fort for voyageurs, local Indigenous day labourers and domestic servants. They would smoke water fowl and fish, dry meat, render grease and parch wild rice and corn. The bake oven was used to cook bread and prepare hard biscuit and on special occasions for baking treats like cakes, cookies, and pies.

