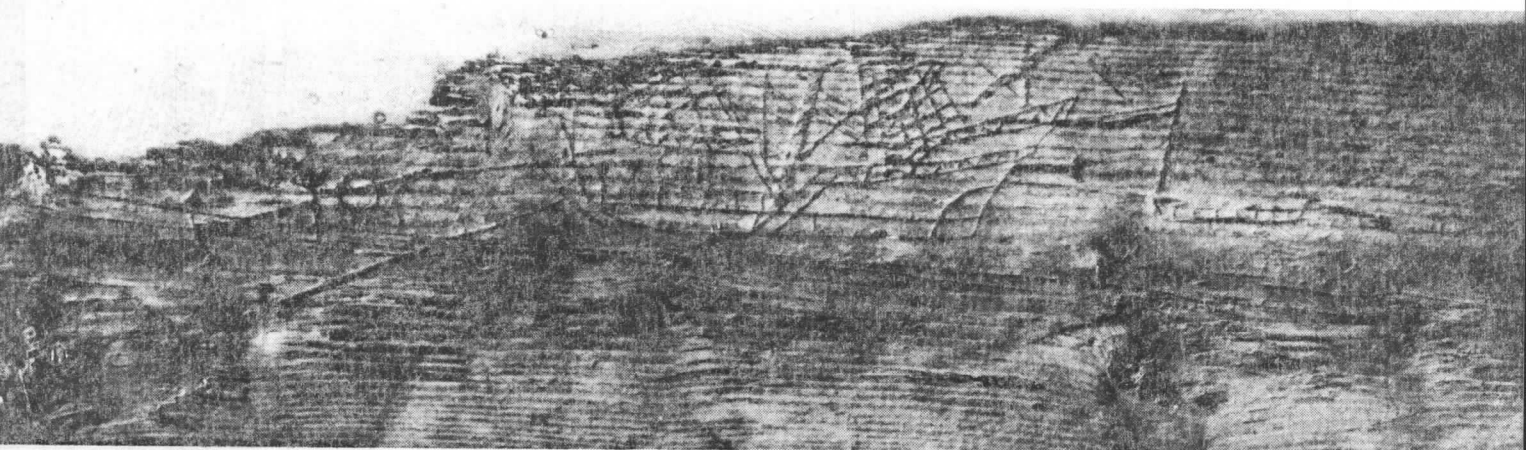


# ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR 1984

EDITED BY  
JANE SPROULL THOMSON  
CALLUM THOMSON



ANNUAL REPORT No. 5

HISTORIC RESOURCES DIVISION  
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, RECREATION & YOUTH  
GOVERNMENT OF NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

1985

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES INVENTORY, SIGNAL HILL NATIONAL  
HISTORIC PARK, ST. JOHN'S, 1984**

Rob Ferguson, Staff Archaeologist  
Parks Canada, Atlantic Region

An inventory of archaeological resources in Signal Hill National Historic Park was undertaken in the summer of 1984 to provide input to a new management plan for the park. Signal Hill was made a national historic park in 1958. Prior to this summer, however, no inventory had been made of the archaeological resources relating to British military occupation from ca. 1780 to 1870, subsequent use of the hill for medical quarantine purposes to 1920, and its long term function as a communications centre. Reports by Parks Canada historians (Ingram 1964; Proulx 1978; Candow 1979, 1980a, 1980b) provided the documentary background for the survey. Candow (1979) is the most comprehensive of these reports and is the source for most of the uncited historical information contained herein. Previous archaeological research in the park, in 1965-66 (Jelks 1973) and 1969 (Karklins 1971), was largely restricted to Queen's Battery with additional excavations at Ladies' Lookout.

Folded and eroded beds of sedimentary rock form three ridges with intervening valleys running north/south through the park. The highest of these provides a natural citadel, with steep cliffs facing the Atlantic and the entrance to the harbour. This ridge, including Signal Hill proper and Ladies' Lookout, contained the greatest concentration of military features of the British defenses.

Although the British garrison had attempted to concentrate its facilities on the highest ridge, the complications of rugged topography and harsh climate forced the military establishments to be scattered along the ridges and through the valleys in discrete areas of activity. Each of these areas, with the exception of Queen's Battery, provided a focus for the archaeological survey. With limited time available, our strategy was to select representative features within each of the areas and excavate minimal test

barracks, and revealed layers of both charcoal and plaster in the interior of the room. The present road cut, enlarged from the original military road, has destroyed a corner of this structure and most of an adjacent one.

#### GIBBET HILL

Guarding both the harbour and the entrance to the park, Gibbet Hill rises to an elevation of 119 m above sea level (Figure 9). By the mid-1700s, a gibbet had been placed on the peak of the hill to display the bodies of executed criminals. It continued in use there until 1794. The following year, Wallace's Battery was built on the same spot, its armaments described in 1805 as two 12-pounders. The battery also included a brick powder magazine and a wooden guardhouse/barracks for two officers and ten privates. By 1827 only the barracks remained in use. It is referred to again in 1834 and appears finally on a plan of 1851.

During World War II, a 155-mm anti-aircraft gun position was built over the site of Wallace's Battery. A concrete base for the gun still covers the earlier battery.

Guardhouse/Barracks: A straight ridge running through a sheltered depression behind the battery suggested the location of the guardhouse/ barracks. A test trench was placed at either end of the ridge in an effort to determine the extent of the structure as well as to which side of the ridge the structure might lie.

Excavations did not uncover intact structural remains. The ridge was composed of large stones lying loosely in a soil matrix. There was no evidence of mortar on them and no explanation for the ridge has been formulated. It did separate strata of differing composition, however, suggesting that a barrier of some kind had stood there. Artifacts gave little indication of a temporal development within each test unit but were surprisingly different between the two, indicating a horizontal rather than vertical distribution through time. Both trenches provided large samples of artifacts from barracks activities. Ceramics in the earlier trench suggest deposition from the late 18th century to ca. 1825. Sherds in the lowest levels include

83% creamware with small quantities of pearlware and Chinese export porcelain, as well as fragments of a black basalt stoneware teapot ca. 1767-1820 (Figure 12j). Among the non ceramic artifacts were two flat, two-piece Royal Artillery buttons, ca. 1785 to ca. 1802 (Figure 11 a), and an Irish George III halfpenny dated 1766.

In the other trench, ceramic ware types include later 19<sup>th</sup> century yellow earthenware and vitrified white earthenware. The former indicates continued occupation of the building after ca. 1850. This trench held a variety of military artifacts, including 16 Royal Artillery buttons of various designs (Figure 11 b, c, d), an ammunition pouch attachment (Figure 11 o), a shako chinstrap plate, probably Royal Artillery of 1846-1855 (Figure 11 n), two lead musket balls and two small pieces of iron shot. Other artifacts include bone buttons (Figure 12 a, b), four glass beads (Figure 12 d,e), a stone marble, a key and a bone cutlery handle (Figure 12 f).

While limited testing revealed no extant structural remains, the artifact yield indicates rich midden deposits spanning the entire period of British military occupation. In this respect, the archaeological resources of the guardhouse/barracks must be regarded as significant.

An undocumented mound above the guardhouse/barracks was identified through excavation as a World War II small gun position. A thin layer below the earthwork contained an undisturbed British context with creamware, pearlware and white earthenware sherds of early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century ascription. This probably represents casual scatter from the adjacent guardhouse/barracks.

#### CARRONADE HILL

The battery on Carronade Hill was placed at its northern end ca. 1797 to protect the defences from land attack across Quidi Vidi gut. This had been the route by which the British successfully assaulted the French in 1762. In 1805, the battery was listed as having three 18-pounders. It is not subsequently listed and must have been discontinued shortly thereafter.

During World War II, the south end of the hill was occupied by B Battery of the U.S. Army and a major gun position, probably for a 155-mm anti-aircraft

Figure 12

Scale 1:1, except j (2:1). Metals shown prior to conservation.

a. bone button; b. bone discs, possibly used as buttons; c. scissors; d. blue glass spherical beads; e. blue glass tubular bead; f. bone cutlery handle incised with initial 'H;'; g. wine glass stem; h. fire steel; i. early 18th century Dutch tobacco pipe bowl; j. black basalt stoneware teapot, ca. 1767-1820; k. 'rosso antico' red-bodied stoneware tea or coffee pot lid fragment, ca. 1762-1786.

