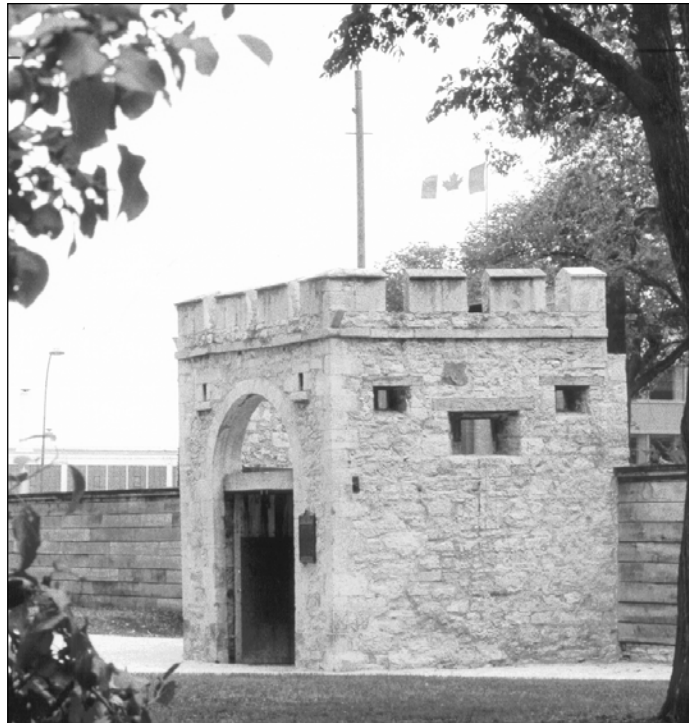


130 MAIN STREET – UPPER FORT GARRY GATE
A.H. Murray, c. 1853



For more than a century, Upper Fort Garry Gate has withstood neglect and threats of removal to remain a symbol of Manitoba's pre-Confederation fur trade, settlement and political history.

The gate originally marked the northwestern end of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC's) most important inland post, located at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers (i.e., the Forks). Founded in 1670 under a British royal charter, the HBC held sweeping commercial and government powers over the part of North America known as Rupert's Land.

Upper Fort Garry was among a series of posts built at the Forks since 1810 by the HBC and North West Company (NWCo). The first Fort Garry was a converted NWCo post (Fort Gibraltar) over which the HBC assumed control following amalgamation of the two trade rivals in 1821. The facility was renamed in honour of Nicholas Garry, the HBC deputy-governor responsible for the merger.

Badly damaged in an 1826 flood, Fort Garry was in a dilapidated state by 1830. Governor George Simpson opted to construct a new post, called Lower Fort Garry, on the Red River some 32 kilometres to the north. This complex was completed in 1839, but never fulfilled Simpson's intent to be the center of the Red River Settlement.

That role went instead to Upper Fort Garry II, initially built in 1835-37 on higher ground at the Forks facing the Assiniboine River. The post's 4.57-metre stone walls and corner bastions soon enclosed an assortment of buildings related to the fur trade and the work of the Council of Assiniboia, the governing body of the period.

In 1852-54, the fort was more than doubled in size when a large extension was constructed at its northwest end. The new walls were of oak planks filled with earth. The new north gate was a shell structure consisting of cut limestone blocks and limestone rubble, at least some of which had come from the fort's original north wall.

Vernacular in style and largely without ornamentation, the entrance featured a large, rounded, central archway reminiscent of 16th century Italian Renaissance forms and crenellated battlements suggestive of Norman architecture. The gate had a double-leaf, center-opening wooden doorway and a small second-storey gallery, complete with loopholes, to accommodate a guard and a flag-pole. The gallery was partially screened from the south by a log wall or embrasure, originally of Red River Frame construction.

Once known as the Governor's Gate, this entrance was intended to convey a sense of dignity to the portion of the fort which housed the Governor of Assiniboia. The gate's ceremonial nature was reflected in the fact that its heavily fortified appearance was not extended to the neighbouring wooden walls.

Available information indicates that this element was designed by Alexander Hunter Murray (1818-1874) and built by day labourers, perhaps Chelsea Pensioners who had been brought from England to the Red River Settlement for defensive purposes.

The Scottish-born Murray originally immigrated to the United States where he was employed by the American Fur Company. In 1845, he joined the HBC as senior clerk for the Mackenzie River District. Between 1847 and 1851, he established Fort Yukon at the junction of the Yukon and Porcupine rivers. Failing health subsequently brought him to Fort Garry. Murray later took charge of various HBC posts until his retirement in 1865.

Upper Fort Garry Gate's functional role was short-lived. Erosion of the HBC's fur trade monopoly, transfer of its territory to Canada in 1870, and subsequent agricultural settlement across the Prairies lessened the post's importance in the Company's changing operations. The fort served as headquarters for Louis Riel's provisional government in 1869-70. It later housed Manitoba's lieutenant-governors from 1872 to 1883. However, as early as 1871, portions of the fort began to be dismantled.

Under the pressure of increasing urbanization, all of the original stone walls and bastions were gone by 1880, their material recycled into several building foundations in downtown Winnipeg. The wooden walls and north gate surrounding the former Governor's House remained in place chiefly because of this building's temporary vice-regal function. When that occupancy ended, the fort's remaining structures were either demolished or left derelict. Final clearance occurred in 1888 when four buildings were sold by auction.

The HBC offered the north gate to the provincial government free of charge, provided that the structure was dismantled and re-erected elsewhere. This proposal was countered by the Manitoba Historical Society and others who wanted the gate preserved *in situ*. They gained the support of a special City Council committee which recommended retention of the gate and acquisition of surrounding lots for park purposes. No action resulted, however, despite various appeals to the HBC.

The issue resurfaced in 1893. The gate was again saved from removal, but nothing was done about its physical deterioration. Four years later, a proposal for a nearby athletic facility again endangered the site. Following a City Council petition, the HBC in August 1897 agreed to donate the gate and the lots on which it stood to the City "as a public park forever".

Steps were taken immediately to stabilize the structure, followed in ensuing years by landscaping of the adjacent grounds, called Fort Garry Gateway Park. A commemorative plaque was placed on the site by the Canadian Club of Winnipeg in 1909. Another tablet from the Dominion Historic Sites and Monuments Board followed in 1926.

The gateway remained intact despite at least two plans (in 1902 and 1912) to convert the area to an historic park; unsympathetic adjacent development of athletic and commercial buildings; disappearance of its inner and outer gates in the 1930s; and a 1953 proposal for its relocation to a recreation center on Pembina Highway.

In 1949, the City renovated the structure, rebuilding its gates. This was followed by some redevelopment of the park grounds in the early 1960s. However, major restoration did not occur until 1982-83 when, under the auspices of a federal-provincial conservation agreement, the gate received a major face-lift, a replica wooden fence was erected, and a mural and various interpretive panels were added to the site.