



NANAIMO MUSEUM

100 Museum Way, Nanaimo, BC, V9R 5J8
TELEPHONE 250 753.1821
info@nanaimomuseum.ca www.nanaimomuseum.ca

Media Release – Summer at the Bastion – May 2009

Fire in the hole...of a large 19th century cannon that is

Brace yourself, and hold your pets and little ones close, the Bastion cannon firing season is about to begin. The 2006 Bastion season begins at 10:30 a.m. on May 20, so all this week costume-clad staff at Nanaimo District Museum were busy training to fire the authentic 19th century cannons located on Pioneer Waterfront Plaza. Armed with black powder, a custom made styrofoam charge, a six foot tall rammer and swab, a metal priming key, and a linstock (a metre-long stick with a forked head to hold a salt-peter-soaked wick), trainees were taken through the motions of firing these two 760 kg lead cannons an unprecedented four times on Thursday.

As part of the cannon firing re-enactment that will take place at noon everyday throughout the summer, staff and volunteers also have to memorize a two-minute script that both entertains and teaches spectators about the history of the Bastion and why cannons are still fired today.

Cast in England to the standards of the British Royal Navy, the two cannons on the plaza were left here by the Hudson's Bay Company to be used by its employees after the Bastion was built in 1853. "It's been said that given perfect conditions the cannons can shoot a six-pound shot from the Bastion to Protection Island," said Arvon Brunt, the Bastion coordinator.

Cannons that were similar, but smaller to the two outside, were housed on the second floor of the Bastion and were meant to protect this former HBC fort and the early citizens of Nanaimo. The reality though, is that they were more commonly used to fire welcoming salutes to visiting dignitaries as they sailed into the harbour.

Today, some 153 years since the construction of the Bastion was completed, daily cannon firings in the summer are still used to welcome visitors to the city.

For next Saturday's ceremony, there will not only be two cannon firings at noon, but also Bill Poppy on his Scottish pipes as well as games, toy making, mural painting, and tours of the Bastion every half hour from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m..

"We think it's important for people to visit the Bastion because it's a huge part of our history," said Brunt. "And the cannon firings still represent a significant invitation to all those who visit our city."

In a city-wide survey conducted several years ago, this symbol of our frontier beginnings was chosen Nanaimo's most important heritage building and was recognized as a national treasure. The Bastion will be open daily from May 20 to Sept. 4 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The operation of the Bastion happens thanks in large part to the financial contributions of the City of Nanaimo and the Nanaimo Port Authority.

The Nanaimo Bastion is proudly sponsored by the City of Nanaimo, Nanaimo Port Authority, Hub International Insurance, Senini Graphics, The Buccaneer Inn, Coast Bastion Inn and Signage.

The Bastion, which is an English word meaning stronghold, is the oldest original freestanding Hudson's Bay Company fort left in North America, the oldest building in the city, and quite possibly the second oldest building in British Columbia. Most HBC forts were established for fur trading for the European market, but in Nanaimo the Bastion was built to serve as a company office, arsenal and storage facility, and in the event of

enemy insurgency, a safe haven for miners and their families. It is the only known HBC out-post that focused primarily on coal mining rather than fur trading.

According to museum records, Joseph McKay, a company clerk, supervised the building of the Bastion. It's constructed of hand-hewn logs using a broad axe and an adze, which allowed for a close fit and smooth surface.

A French-Canadian construction method called "poteau-sur-sole" was used to construct the building. The advantage of this technique was its strength, and it also allowed the men to use various thicknesses of logs. The Bastion was originally 36 feet in height, octagonal in shape and had three floors. The first and second floors are 19 feet across and the third floor is 24.5 feet across. The structure was built without the use of nails.

The roof was originally covered with cedar bark and the structure was painted with lime made from clamshells. On December 2, 1985, the Bastion was designated a Municipal Heritage Building and was listed on the Canadian Register of Heritage Properties.

Bastion History

The Bastion, which is an English word meaning stronghold, is the oldest original freestanding HBC fort left in North America, the oldest building in the city, and quite possibly the second oldest building in British Columbia.

Most HBC forts were established for fur trading for the European market, but in Nanaimo the Bastion was built to serve as a company office, arsenal and storage facility, and in the event of enemy insurgency, a safe haven for miners and their families. It is the only known HBC fort that focused primarily on coal mining rather than fur trading.

According to museum records, Joseph McKay, a company clerk, supervised the building of the Bastion. It's constructed of hand-hewn logs using a broad axe and an adze, which allowed for a close fit and smooth surface. A French-Canadian construction method called "poteau-sur-sole" was used to construct the fort. The advantage of this technique was its strength, and it also allowed the men to use various thickness of logs. The Bastion was originally 36 feet in height, octagonal in shape and had three floors. The first and second floors are 19 feet across and the third floor is 24.5 feet across. The structure was built without the use of nails.

The roof was originally covered with cedar bark and the structure was painted with lime made from clamshells. On December 2, 1985, the Bastion was designated a Municipal Heritage Building and was listed on the Canadian Register of Heritage Properties.