Naval Historic Sites:

Explore U.S. in 2007, the Rideau Canal and the fortifications at Kingston and Lake Ontario via Ottawa, in the event of another war with the Montréal. The capital was moved to Kingston's location made it the primary military and economic centre of Upper Canada. Kingston served as the capital of the united provinces of Canada from 1841 until 1844 when the capital was moved to Montréal.

The French explorer Robert Cavelier de la Salle was the first European to discover Kingston, known as Cataraqui, in 1669. The name Cataraqui is of aboriginal origin, meaning “where the rivers and lake meet,” referring to the St. Lawrence and Cataraqui Rivers joining with Lake Ontario.

In 1673, Louis de Buade, Count Frontenac, the Governor of New France, met the Iroquois aboriginals on friendly terms and established what came to be called Fort Frontenac. The British subsequently captured and destroyed Fort Frontenac in 1758. What we now call Kingston was founded in 1782 as a settlement for refugee British colonists (United Empire Loyalists).

The War of 1812 was fought between the United States (U.S.) and Great Britain. Most of the fighting took place along the border of the U.S. and the provinces of British North America. During the war, Kingston was the base for the British naval fleet on Lake Ontario. The war ended in 1815. Between 1815 and 1846, the British built a series of defences at Kingston. Some of these were to guard the entrance to the Rideau Canal. The canal was completed in 1832 as a secure route between Montréal and Lake Ontario via Ottawa, in the event of another war with the U.S. In 2007, the Rideau Canal and the fortifications at Kingston were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Fort Frederick is located at the tip of Point Frederick and was originally made of earthworks (fortifications built from soil). Fort Frederick was built to defend the navy dockyard and the town of Kingston. On 10 November 1812, the Fort took part in repulsing an American naval squadron. The current Fort and a tower with thick stone walls built in 1846-47, commonly referred to as a Martello tower, replaced the War of 1812 era fort. Today, Fort Frederick is part of the Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada and the tower houses the College’s museum.

The Royal Naval Dockyard was established on Point Frederick in 1789 for the Provincial Marine, a branch of the British Army that provided transports and armed vessels to the colonial government. It was transferred to the Royal Navy in 1813. During the War of 1812, the dockyard built warships in a naval arms race with the American fleet based at nearby Sackets Harbor, New York, for control of Lake Ontario.

Some of the ships that were built and launched at the dockyard before 1815 included:

- HMS Duke of Gloucester 1807 – 6-gun schooner. Gloucester was captured by the Americans on 27 April 1813
- HMS Royal George 1809 – 21-gun sloop. In November 1812, Royal George was the largest warship on the lake. On 9 November 1812, she was intercepted by an American fleet of seven ships but managed to escape to Kingston. Renamed Niagara 1814
- HMS Sir George Prevost 1813 – 21-gun schooner renamed Wolfe 1813, altered to brig and renamed Montreal 1814
- HMS St. Lawrence 1814 – 112-gun warship that served during the last months of the War of 1812. She was the largest warship on the Great Lakes and larger than British Admiral Nelson’s flagship HMS Victory. HMS St. Lawrence was decommissioned in 1815. She lies sunk in Lake Ontario at the foot of Morton Street in Kingston.
- HMS Prince Regent 1814 – 56-gun frigate renamed Kingston in 1814
- HMS Princess Charlotte 1814 – 42-gun frigate. Renamed Burlington 1814
- HMS Psyche 1814 – 56-gun frigate. Her frames were sent out from Britain to be assembled at Kingston.

The Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 between the U.S. and the United Kingdom provided for the demilitarization of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain.

The Stone Frigate is a stone building that was erected in the Dockyard as a warehouse for naval stores. Although planned in 1816, it was not completed until 1820 when the need for storage facilities to...
Canadian Navy shipbuilding in Kingston was centred at the Kingston Shipyards, built for the RCN; however, most of these ships were minesweepers, trawlers, and anti-submarine vessels. The Kingston Shipyards built several minesweeping trawlers from 1917-19; 11 corvettes from 1940-44; and two anti-submarine boats. This shipyard was reactivated because of the rebellions in Lower and Upper Canada.

The 1890 drydock, which is now part of the Kingston Naval Division, was the largest fortification west of Québec. It was used at the NRD for training until it was moved to RMC.

Fort Henry. The first Fort Henry was built during the War of 1812 to defend the Royal Navy Dockyard from attack by land. It was composed of earthworks and a wooden blockhouse. The present fort was built between 1832 and 1837. It is the largest fortification west of Quebec City. It was built to defend the Rideau Canal. Fort Henry now is a museum and holds many artifacts from the warships Prince Regent and Princess Charlotte. Their wrecks lie in Deadman Bay to the east of the fort.

Canadian Navy shipbuilding in Kingston was centred at the Kingston Shipyards in operation from 1910 until 1968. The Marine Museum of the Great Lakes now occupies the remaining shipyard buildings. The 1890 drydock, which is alongside the museum, is a National Historic Site.

The Kingston Shipyards built eight minesweeping trawlers from 1917-19; 11 corvettes and two anti-submarine trawlers from 1940-44; and one minesweeper in 1954. Most of these ships were built for the RCN; however, several saw service with the U.S. Navy or the British Royal Navy. Many of the RCN corvettes built in Kingston were named after nearby Ontario communities, e.g., Napanee, Belleville, Smiths Falls and Trentonian (for Trenton).

Over the years there have been many shipyards along the Kingston waterfront, most of which have ceased to exist. One of these, Canadian Dredge and Dock, on Anglin Bay, built tugs and other small vessels for the Navy during and after WW II.

In response to the war in 1939, the Kingston Naval Division was established on the site of the old feed mill, where the Holiday Inn now stands at the foot of Princess Street. In 1941, the Division was commissioned as HMCS Cataraqui. There are now 24 NRDs spread across Canada. The mission of NRDs is to recruit and train sailors to support and sustain Canadian Forces (CF) operations. Naval reservists have diverse backgrounds and commitments, e.g., full-time students, farmers, teachers, mechanics, lawyers, etc.

HMCS Cataraqui has occupied several sites in Kingston since 1939. From 1943-59, Cataraqui occupied 47 Wellington Street (right). Originally built as a school in 1873, it also served as the Kingston Badminton Club and is now an apartment building.

In 1959, Cataraqui moved into a new navy-built facility located on the opposite side of Highway 2 from the RMC campus. In 1972, this building was transferred to RMC and became part of its new gymnasium, the Sir Archibald MacDonnell Athletic Centre.

From 1972-92, HMCS Cataraqui moved to the Kingston Armoury located at 100 Montréal Street.

In 1992, it moved into its current home on the Cataraqui River at 24 Duty Drive, adjacent to its former facilities that are now part of the Kingston Military Community Sports Centre.

The Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston is located at 55 Ontario Street. Its largest artifact is the icebreaker Alexander Henry that operates as a bed and breakfast residence during the summer. The museum has, in its collection, two superb warship models – a “Flower” class corvette like those built in 1941 and the 112-gun St. Lawrence, built 1814.

Monuments

Navy Memorial Park is in front of the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes. It has several monuments commemorating Canadians who have served in the Canadian Navy and Merchant Marine.

The War of 1812 Monument was constructed in 1937 in memory of the officers, seamen and soldiers who served in this area in defence of Canada in the War of 1812. It is located at the Fort Henry Visitor Centre at the intersection of Highway 2 and Fort Henry Drive.