

Property Inventory Evaluation
Macdonald Park



Macdonald Park / Murney Tower

Built heritage attributes:

1 King Street/

2 King Street West

1. Murney Tower (A)

2. Richardson Bath House



Macdonald Park

1 King Street

Date: 1890

(as a formal park)



Macdonald Park is part of a late 18th century crown grant of farm lot 24, concession 1, to the Revd. John Stuart, U.E. and part of a crown grant of farm lot 25 given to Michael Grass, U.E. This area had, by that time, already been exploited for military strategic purposes when, in 1758, British forces landed along the shore to march east to Fort Frontenac, which they captured from the French. Stuart built a house (near and to the west of today's Murney Tower) and worked a farm on his land. In 1809 Grass sold his lot to Henry Murney, whose name was given to Murney's Point.

The waterfront land was deemed of strategic importance during the War of 1812 because of the need to protect the small town of Kingston -- then east of West Street and mainly developed near the shore of Lake Ontario -- from potential overland invasion by the enemy. A defensive line of picket fences, blockhouses and batteries was erected around the land side of the town including a section along West Street. It had the extra



protection of a blockhouse (burnt 1835) and battery in the area of Murney's Point. Certain civilian buildings such as barns were converted for barracks. After the war, the area was used for housing and farming. It became an arena of illness and death in the early 1830s when cholera accompanied Irish emigrants, who were treated in a hospital converted from the blockhouse, as well as in the barracks.

In 1838, the town's boundaries expanded to the west to include farm lot 25. It did not include Stuartville, a subdivision concentrated north of today's Union Street by the Revd. Stuart and mainly populated by members of the working class. It was not until 1850 that lot 24 became part of the city.

Parts of lots 24 and 25 were acquired in 1840 by the government for military purposes and as part of the secret preparations for making Kingston the capital of the United Canadas (Upper Canada or Ontario and Lower Canada or Quebec). The government moved to Kingston the next year and created a Parliament House out of the general hospital. Had the government remained (Kingston was abandoned as the capital in early 1844), the undeveloped land on what is now City Park would have likely been the site of a new Parliament House. Kingston requested that the land be turned over to the municipality for a Public Square, but no action was taken, and it became part of the city and area's defences during the Oregon Crisis of 1845. The worry over American attack resulted in the erection of a number of Martello towers, including the 1846 **Murney Tower*** (at first named Murray) south of King Street in the area now known as Macdonald Park. The land in what is now City Park became a marching ground for the Royal Artillery until John Counter, Kingston's mayor, officially requested its conversion to a public park in 1852 -- placing it among the earliest public parks in the province. On 19 December 1853 the province offered three acres of land to the county (then consisting of the United Counties of Frontenac, Lennox & Addington) as a site for a new Court House (since 1864 known as the Frontenac County Court House). The new site was to the west of the city proper and at a height of land overlooking some twenty acres of open land down to the lakeshore. In 1856 Court Street was opened.

In the late 19th century -- when the Murney Tower was no longer of interest for military purposes -- the area becomes increasingly used for recreation such as swimming. The city looked to gain a 99-year lease on the Murney Tower land in 1889.[†] George

* The Murney Tower is discussed in a separate entry in this inventory (see below). It is a National Historic Site and, since 2007, a World Heritage Site.

[†] Relevant transcriptions from newspapers and city records are found in Lyndsay Hatlelid, "Macdonald Park: a Cultural Heritage Overview" for the City of Kingston, 2006, see chronology pp 12-29.

Kirkpatrick held the lease year-to-year from the government but was willing to transfer it to the city to establish a public park, which would enhance City Park to its north. In 1890 a lease was granted to the city for a token yearly payment by the federal government except for Murney Tower itself. When Sir John A. Macdonald died the next year, the park was named after him. The need for a bath house was immediately expressed but would not be realized for almost another three decades. It is not until 1967 -- Canada's centennial -- that the park land (except the tower) was transferred from the federal government to the city.

In 1896 architect William Newlands designed a park music pavilion, now known as the **Newlands Pavilion**, close to the shore. Architectural drawings, dated 8 May 1896, are in the Queen's University Archives. Under a cross-form, shingled, roof, decorated with wave-like scrolls on the cresting, the wood walls are open for visibility and maximum exposure to the lake breezes while shelter is given from the sun. A turned spindle balustrade is found on top of and following the perimeter of the foundation, which is interrupted with a flight of steps facing north. Characteristic late Victorian latticework, spooling and openwork panels add visual interest to the areas under the gables and in the frieze. On the longer axis of the roof, at each end the roof dips down into a hipped form -- a device popular in the late 19th century. In 1979, it was restored with new cedar framing, shingles, a projection for the band, balusters, cresting and latticework by architect Lily Inglis with the support of the Sydenham Ward Ratepayers Association, the Ontario Heritage Foundation and the city.[‡]

Symbolic of its historic military use, the park became the location for obsolete **weaponry** in 1908. In the next year, R. J. Gaskin donated a bronze, standing, male **lion**, which has recently been restored. At this time, there was activity around changing the land formation, particularly along the shoreline.[§] This became more pronounced in the 1970s when rocks, removed



[‡] Notes from Jennifer McKendry.

[§] *Ibid.*, 19-20.

from the new underground parking at Queen's University, created an undulating shore in Breakwater Park.

Toronto architect Barnard H. Prack's plans were accepted in 1918 for a bathing house donated by the Richardson family in honour of Captain George T. Richardson who was killed in action in 1916. The stone **Richardson Bath House** was opened 11 June 1919. Note the inscription stone. The building, positioned parallel and close to the shore, features a two-storey centre unit under a hipped roof and accessed by doors -- protected by bracketed canopies -- to the south and north. The upper windows are in the form of thermal windows taken from Roman architecture. It has a red tiled floor and grey marble wainscoting. Flanking the centre unit to each side is a one-storey wing with the exposed end wall under a hipped roof. The small-paned windows in the wings are positioned in a strip high above the ground and immediately under the roof overhang. This allows protection from the sun and maximum privacy for these changing rooms, segregated for males and females. The roofs are covered with tiles, evoking images of Roman and Italian architecture.



Gaskin Lion



Richardson Bath House

To the northwest of the Richardson Bath House is a free standing, very tall **flag pole**, which is shown in a postcard cancelled in 1906 (private collection) and in an aerial view

of 1924. A platform forms the arms of a cross (or mast) near the top of the pole with ropes running diagonally to a ring near the ground level.

In 1925, the Kingston Historical Society leased the Murney Tower, then in a state of disrepair, from today's Parks Canada to run as a museum. In the same year, the **Cross of Sacrifice** was unveiled west of Murney Tower. It was a project of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. A tall, stone, Latin cross on a pedestal and base -- raised on three surrounding steps in an octagonal formation -- is ornamented on the north side by an applied sword. In 1939 a stone, free standing **water fountain**, dedicated to temperance leader Frances F. Willard, was installed.



Of fundamental heritage importance is the continuous concept of a public park since at least 1890.



Murney Tower

2 King Street West

Built: 1846

Rating: S

**UNESCO World
Heritage Site**



A defining feature of “Martello” Redoubt Towers in general is their round shape. This enables omni-directional defence against an invading force. At the top of the Murney tower a circular gun platform, surrounded by a six-foot high parapet wall, supports a 32-pounder canon. The canon is made movable by a single-rail track. The Murney Tower is constructed of limestone walls that vary in thickness, from 6 feet at the top north side of the building, to 15 feet at its southern base. While most Martello towers are built above grade, typically on higher elevations, the Murney Tower was constructed below the level of surrounding earthwork – defined also by a surrounding stone wall – which forms a dry moat around the structure. Four caponiers, each with a series of 11 small rifle openings, extend from the base of the tower. Apart from the tower’s most southern face, four arched openings with heavy wood shutter doors are spread across the perimeter of the building, just above the level of the dry moat. Access to the tower is currently provided by a wood bridge, of no heritage value, spanning the dry moat and leading to one of these openings on the tower’s northeast side. The original, removable frame roof of the tower has been replaced with a modern roof, supported by short wood walls with large plain openings.

The Murney Redoubt Tower at 2 King Street West is one of the most historically significant buildings in Kingston. Its importance is recognized on the local, provincial, national and international levels. The tower is a significant tourist attraction, having operated as a museum by the Kingston Historical Society since 1925. It is listed on the Ontario Heritage Properties Database, and is protected as a national historic site under

Parks Canada. In June of 2007, the Murney Tower, along with the Rideau Canal and other Kingston fortifications, was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Murney tower was erected on the broken front of Farm Lot 25, Concession 1. Farm Lot 25 was originally granted to Loyalist Michael Grass. Grass was the captain in charge a group of Loyalist immigrants who first settled Western

Quebec (later Upper Canada) in 1784. In 1809 the entire lot was purchased by Henry Murney. The Murney family subdivided and sold the lot in sections during the 1830s and 1840s. The property on which the Murney tower was built was acquired by the Federal Government, and the tower, along with three others near the Kingston shoreline, was erected in 1846 during the Oregon Crisis: a boundary dispute between Great Britain and the United States that nearly led to war. As such it is a significant local landmark, and physical testimony to the historic relationships between Great Britain, Canada, and the United States.



After 1849 the tower was regularly occupied by the militia, although it was not fully armed until 1862. It was abandoned in 1885 when it was no longer considered strategically useful.

An inscription on the tower, carved in stone, bears the transliterated name "Murnay Tower." The "N" is a metal replacement of an original "R," as the tower was originally named after former Master-General of Ordnance, Sir George Murray. In 1889 the property surrounding the tower, with the exception of the tower itself, was leased by the City of Kingston from the Federal Government for the creation of a park. In 1891, following the death of Sir John A. Macdonald, the park was named in his honour.

The Murney Tower is a defining feature of the Kingston's immediate south-western shoreline, and a focal point of Macdonald Park (although it is located on a separate parcel owned by the Federal Government). Due to its open surroundings, the structure is readily visible from the southwest part of City Park, and the main traffic artery of King Street West. It occupies a location heavily travelled by visitors and students of Queen's University; patients and visitors of Kingston General Hospital, park-goers, bathers, and those travelling to or from Kingston's downtown core. The presence of an historic pavilion and beach house in the tower's immediate vicinity lend to its exposure and popularity. The tower is a distinctive feature of Kingston's near-western shoreline, as viewed from Lake Ontario.