

'Siege of Fort Niagara' set for July 5-7

Old Fort Niagara Press Release and Photos

Old Fort Niagara has been standing guard at the Niagara River's mouth for almost 300 years. During the fort's long history, it has seen many changes and endured many conflicts. Chief among them is the Siege of 1759 during the French and Indian War.

Every year, on the weekend closest to July 4, Old Fort Niagara commemorates this historic siege with a large-scale, three-day reenactment involving hundreds of participants from throughout North America. Now in its 44th year, the event features four action-packed battle reenactments, artillery firings, Native American councils and acres of period artisans and merchants.

The French were the first Europeans to explore the Niagara Region. By the time they surrendered the fort to the British, the French connection to the Niagara went back 90 years.

When the French and Indian War broke out in 1754, British strategists considered Fort Niagara to be a high-profile target. The fort controlled the strategic Niagara Portage, a trail that linked Lake Ontario with Lake Erie and the upper Great Lakes. The fort was also



a vital link between French Canada and French outposts in the Ohio Valley and Louisiana.

In 1759, the British organized an expedition of 2,500 British and New York provincial soldiers to attack the fort. They enlisted the support of some 945 Haudenosaunee warriors, through whose territory their army would pass.

On July 6, the British army landed at Four Mile Creek, just east of the fort. For the next 19 days,

they dug trenches toward the fort and moved artillery into place to bombard its walls. By July 24, the fort's North Bastion lay in ruins, the victim of many days of British cannonades.

For the French defenders, one hope remained. A relief column was on its way from northwestern Pennsylvania to break through the besiegers' lines. Warned of the attack, the British blocked the trail that paralleled the Niagara River



and soundly defeated the French troops. The next day Fort Niagara surrendered.

"This is the fort's largest special event of the year," said Robert Emerson, executive director of Old Fort Niagara. "Hundreds of reenactors from all over the United States and Canada gather here to bring this seminal event in Great Lakes history to life. There are few events in our region's past that had such monumental consequences."

In addition to battle reenactments, the event offers extensive 18th century camps. Reenactors will live in canvas tents and cook meals over open fires just as soldiers did in the 18th century.

Demonstrators will display period crafts from the 1750s such as blacksmithing, pottery making, basket weaving, dressmaking,

quill penmanship, silversmithing, cartography, woodworking and hornsmithing. Period merchants will offer 18th century wares from soap to clothing to Native American jewelry.

British and French officers will conduct councils with their Native American allies in the original languages including French, Mohawk and Seneca. Interpreters will translate the dialogue to help visitors understand the intricate maneuverings of frontier diplomacy. New this year will be a demonstration of Native American dance on Saturday afternoon.

The event takes place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday, July 5-7. For more information, call 716-745-7611 or visit the fort's website at www.oldfortniagara.org.

NIAGARA COUNTY SERVICE DIRECTORY

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