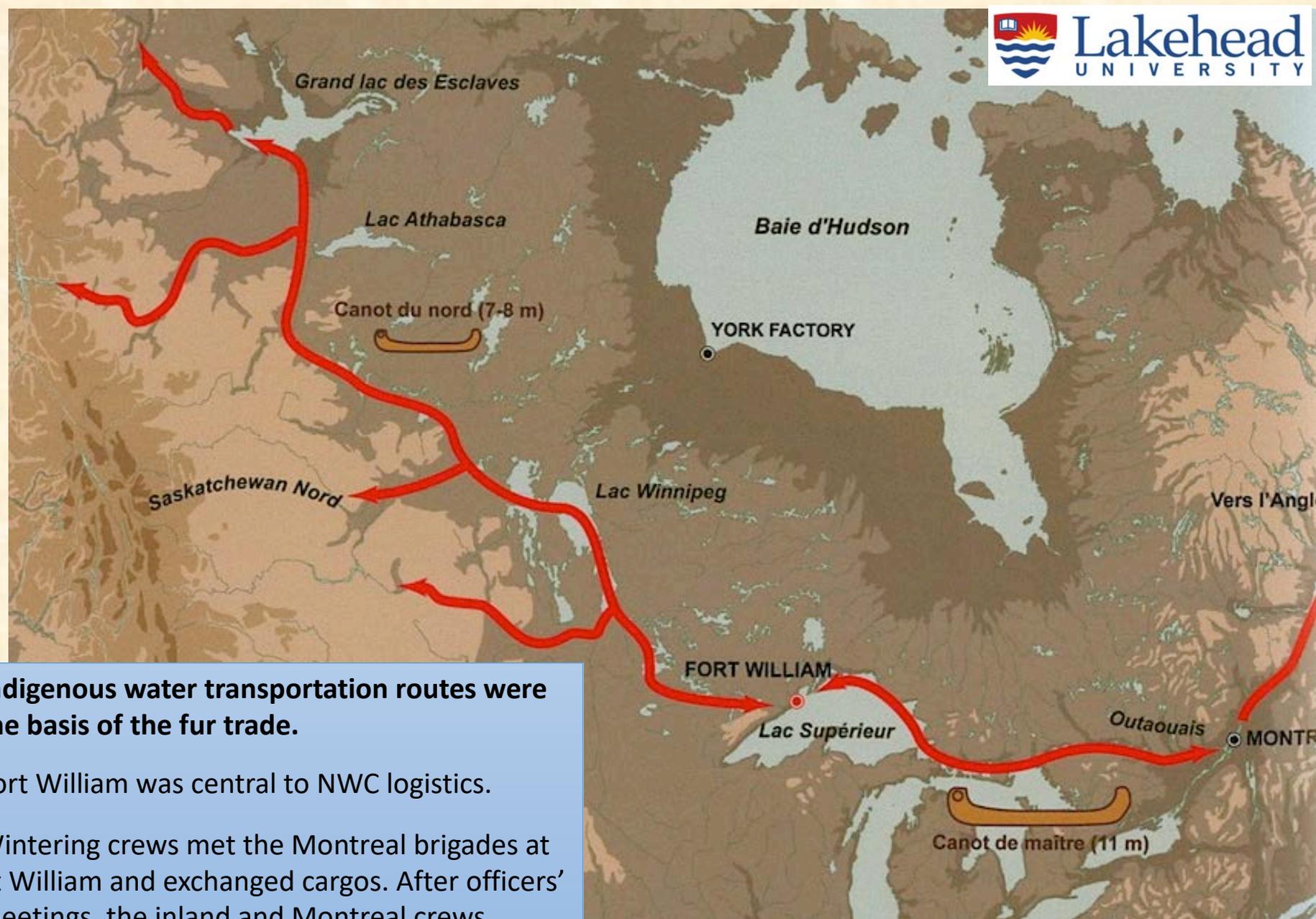


# Fort William: The North West Co. transcontinental transportation hub.

- Established in 1803 to replace Grand Portage.
- Largest fur trade post in North America.
- Administrative headquarters, transshipment depot and rendezvous.
- Gradually declined after 1821 Amalgamation of NWC and HBC.
- Continued as a regional trade post until establishment of CPR rail marshalling yards and Fort William townsite and waterfront



**Indigenous water transportation routes were the basis of the fur trade.**

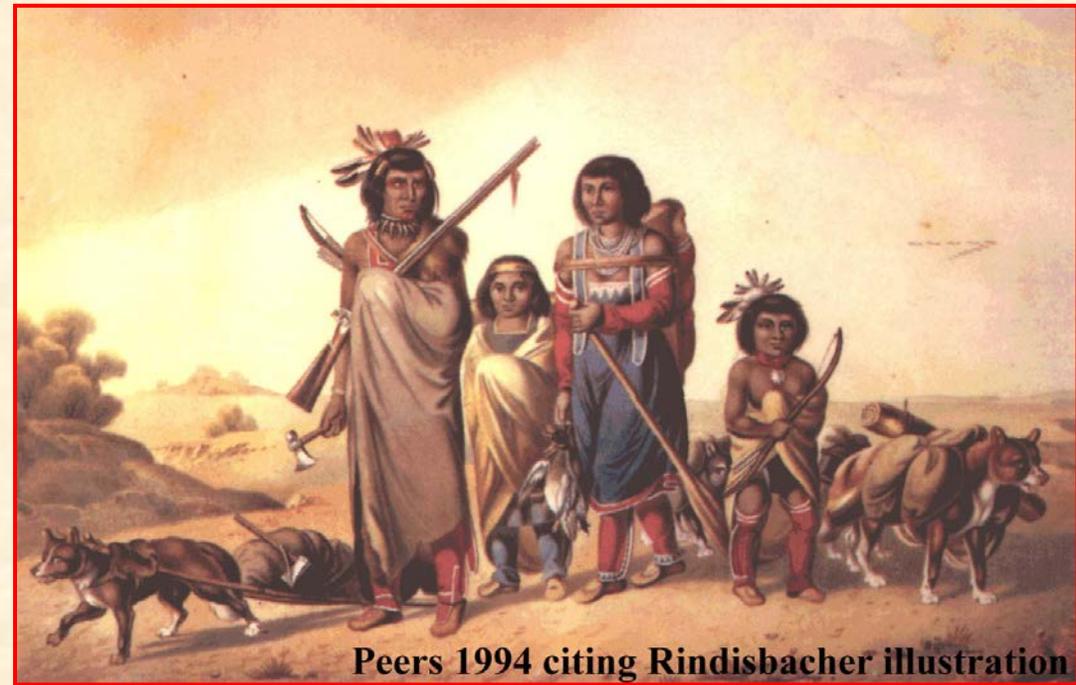
Fort William was central to NWC logistics.

Wintering crews met the Montreal brigades at Ft William and exchanged cargos. After officers' meetings, the inland and Montreal crews returned home, leaving a small winter crew at Ft. William.





The NWC relied on birch bark freighter canoes, while the HBC more frequently used heavy wood boats.

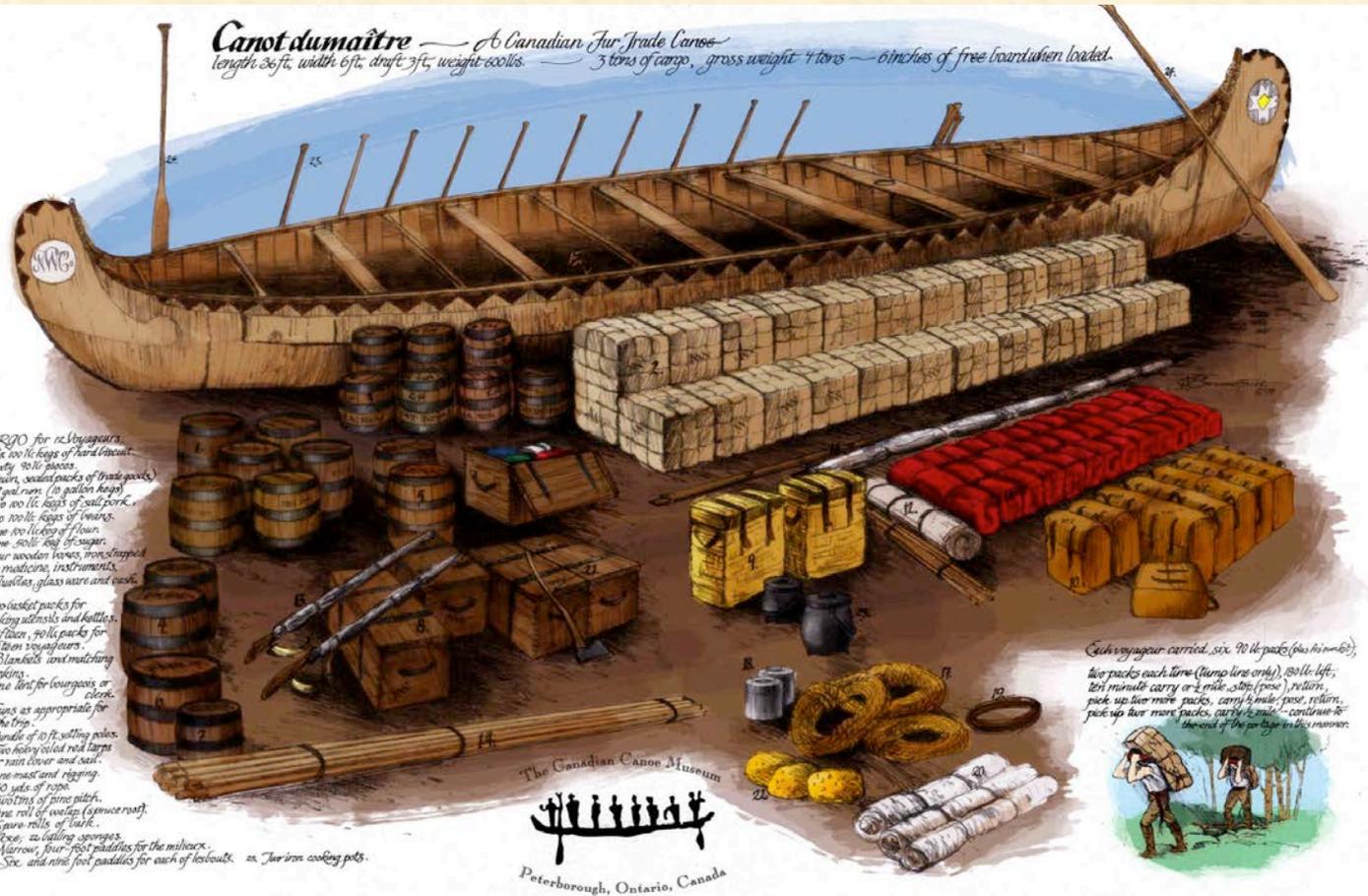


Peers 1994 citing Rindisbacher illustration

Trade involved transport of goods from Europe to N. America. Indigenous families were the eventual consumers of a vast array of utilitarian and luxury items.

Required a complex supply chain, oversized watercraft and men able to paddle long distances and portage heavy loads.

The NWC relied on French Canadian and Métis voyageurs, while the HBC used labourers from the Orkney Islands.



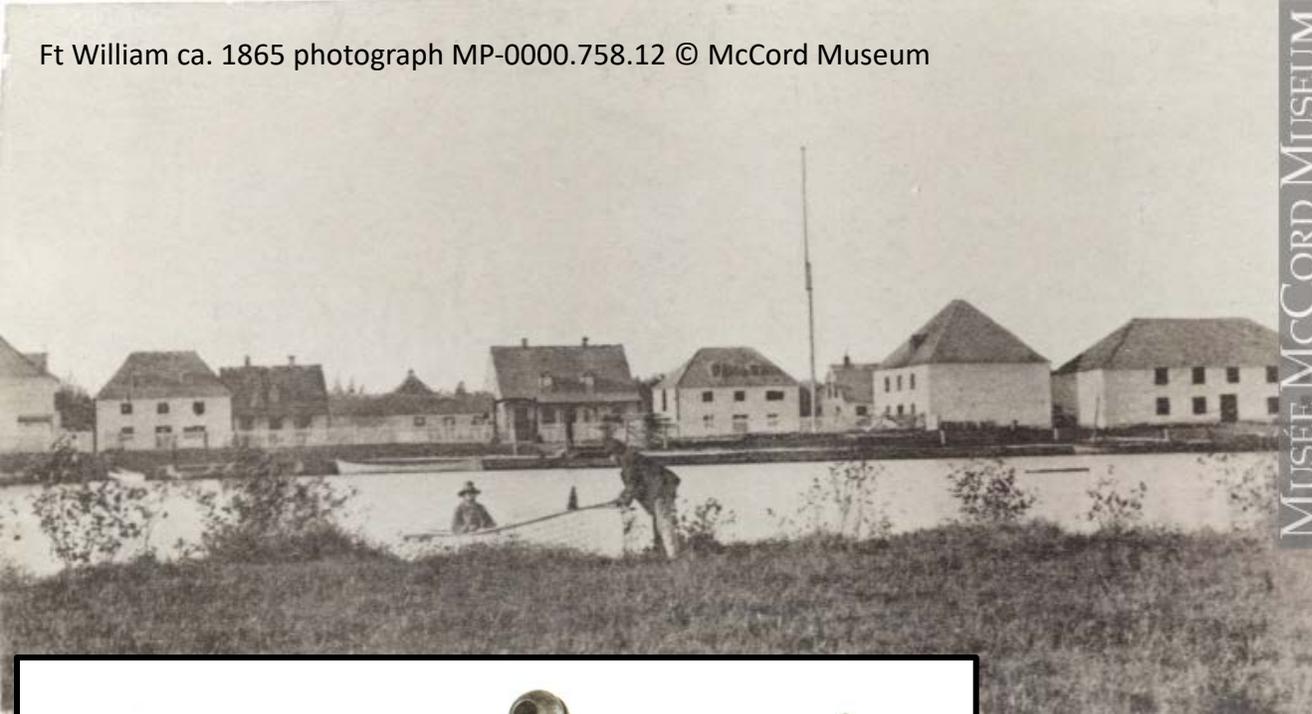


Strategically located at the Kaministiquia R. mouth, Fort William was large and with extensive facilities.

This included comfortable officers' quarters during the summer rendezvous, but the voyageurs lived in tents outside the fort walls.



Copper and brass sheet metal cooking vessels were a fur trade staple. These durable pots were of various sizes that nested one inside the other. Worn out pots were cut apart and recycled into a range of goods.



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After the 1821 Amalgamation, Fort William became a smaller regional trade post. It was demolished in the 1880s to establish the CPR marshalling yards.

The locality gradually developed as a port, with associated Fort William settlement. The CPR railyards and 'East End' neighborhood currently lie upon the fort.

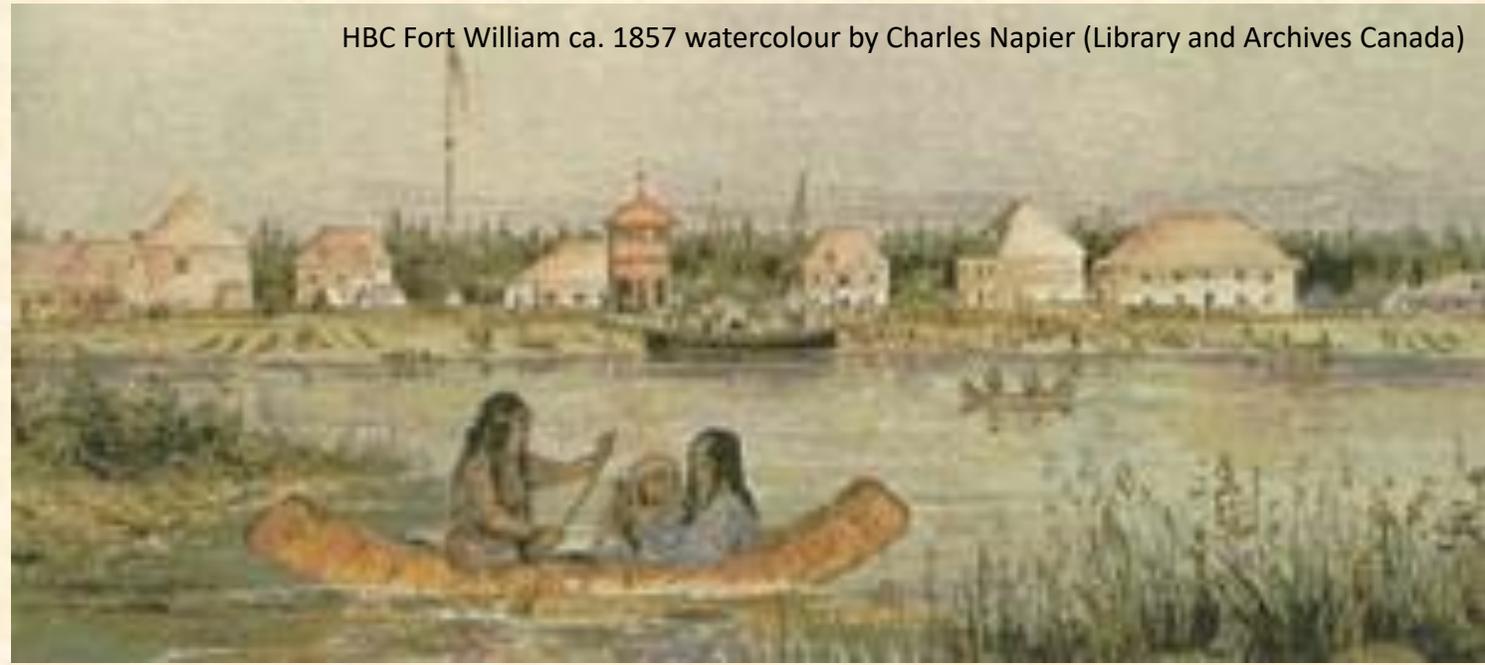
Archaeological excavation during the 1970s revealed extensive deposits below the railway yard, streets and homes in the East End.

Gale 2009:31



Smooth bore flintlock muskets are widely traded, with component parts often found in archaeological deposits.

HBC Fort William ca. 1857 watercolour by Charles Napier (Library and Archives Canada)

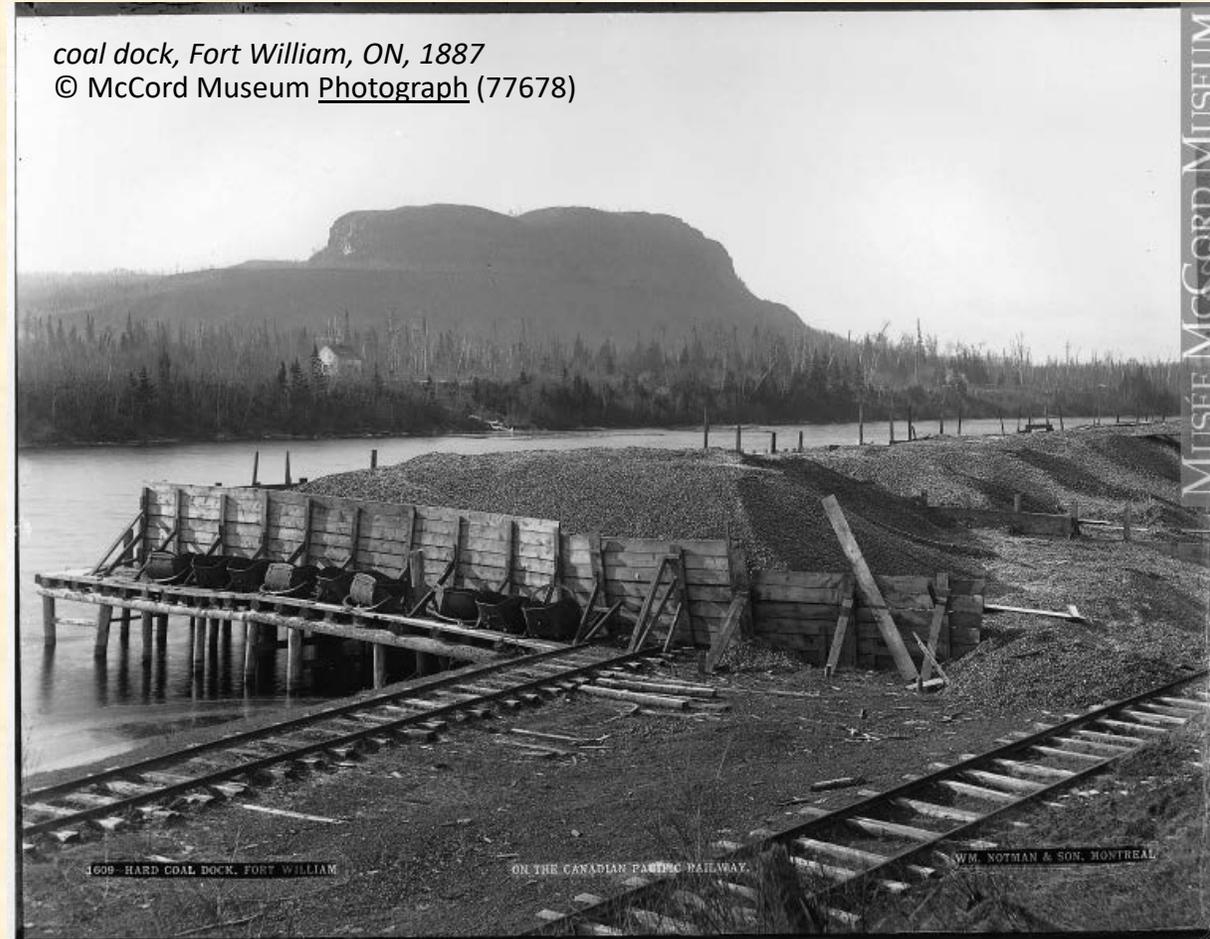


Fort William, ON, about 1910  
MP-0000.761.6 © McCord Museum



**As the town of Fort William developed, the waterfront rapidly transformed, resulting in the eradication of its earlier history.**

coal dock, Fort William, ON, 1887  
© McCord Museum Photograph (77678)



Fort William and its rival Port Arthur developed as competing transportation hubs, with railway marshalling yards, warehouses, grain, coal and ore handling facilities.

The original ports persisted until the 1960s when the St. Lawrence Seaway made the shallow waters of the original waterfronts obsolete.



Fort William lies along the north channel of the Kaministiquia River mouth, under the rail yards and residences of the East End.

**What lies beneath the streets of the East End?**

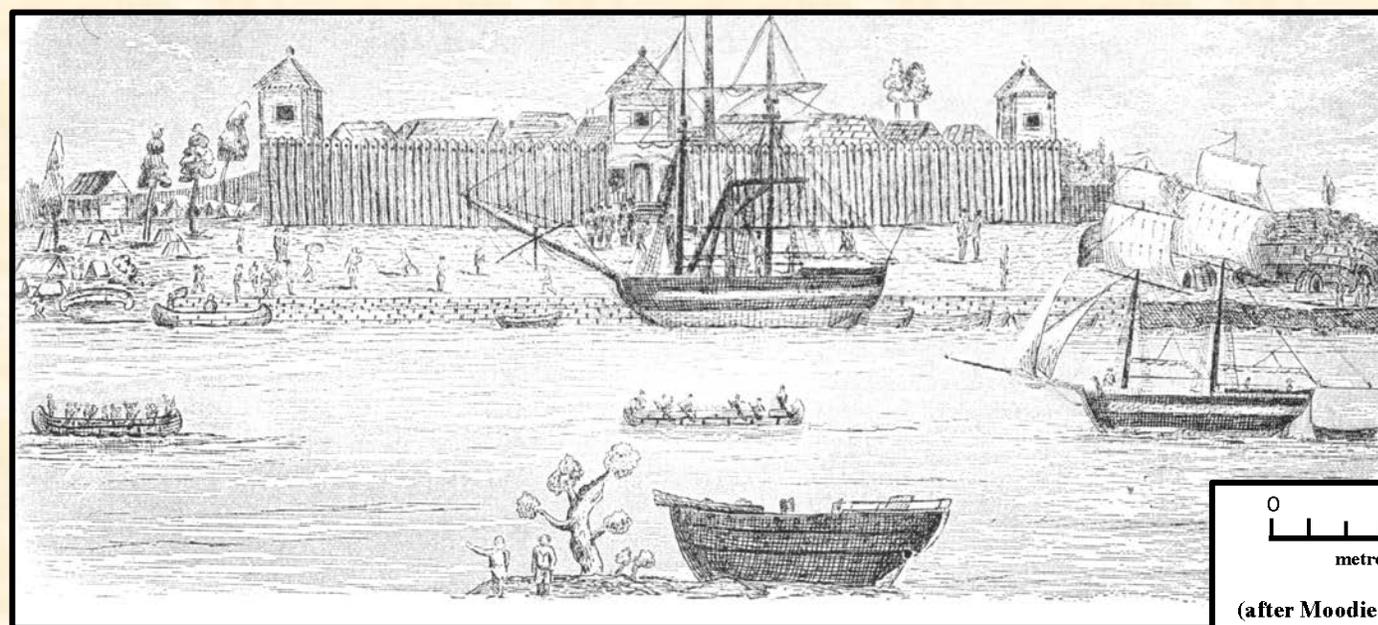
Google Earth image of the Fort William locality.

The yellow oval marks the site monument.

1970s archaeological excavations intercepted some building features beneath the railway tracks.

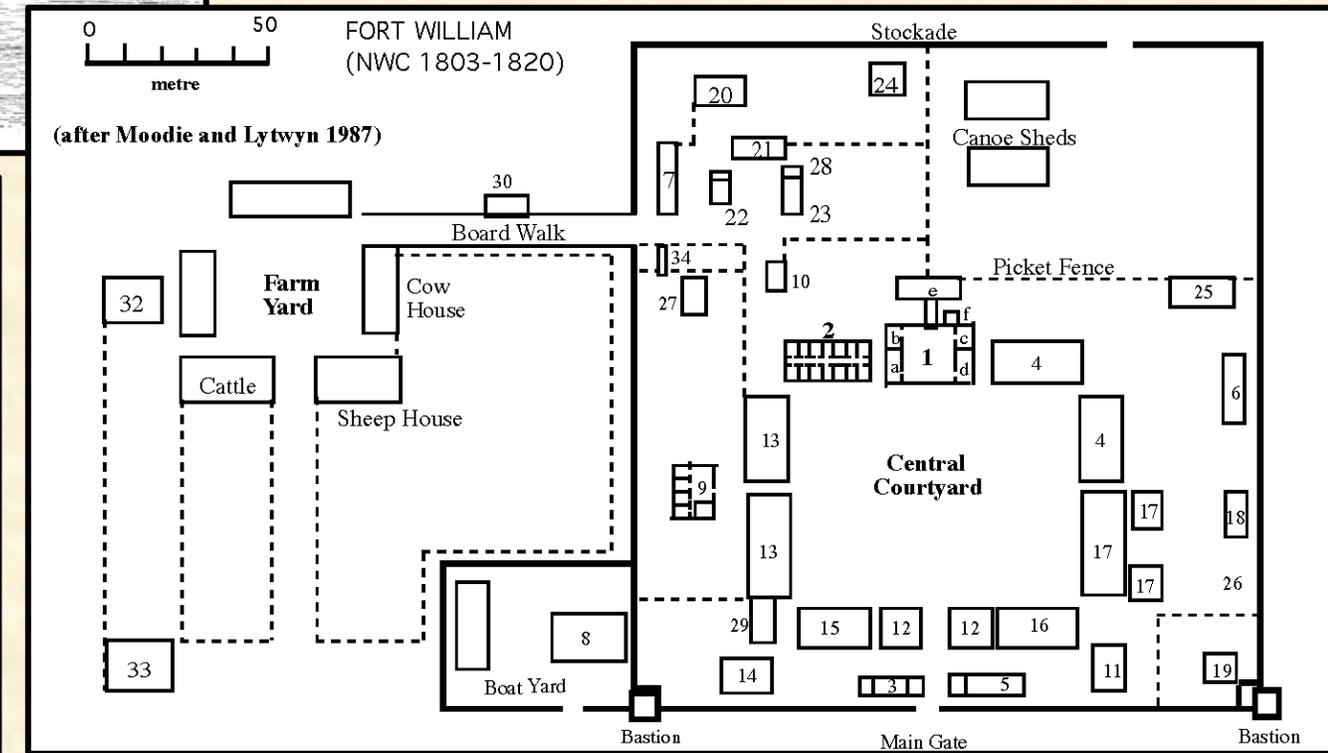
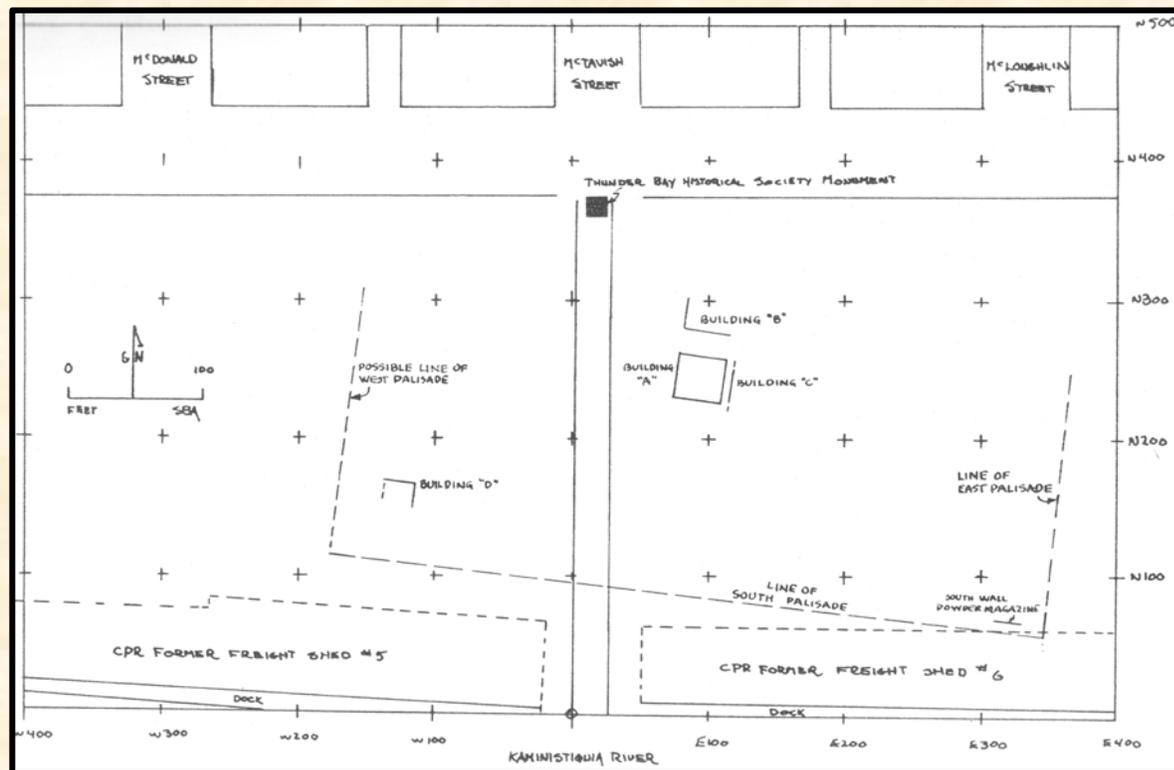
Subsequent construction of repair facilities (1988) revealed a large refuse pit (privy) full of mid 1800s artifacts (HBC) (yellow arrow).



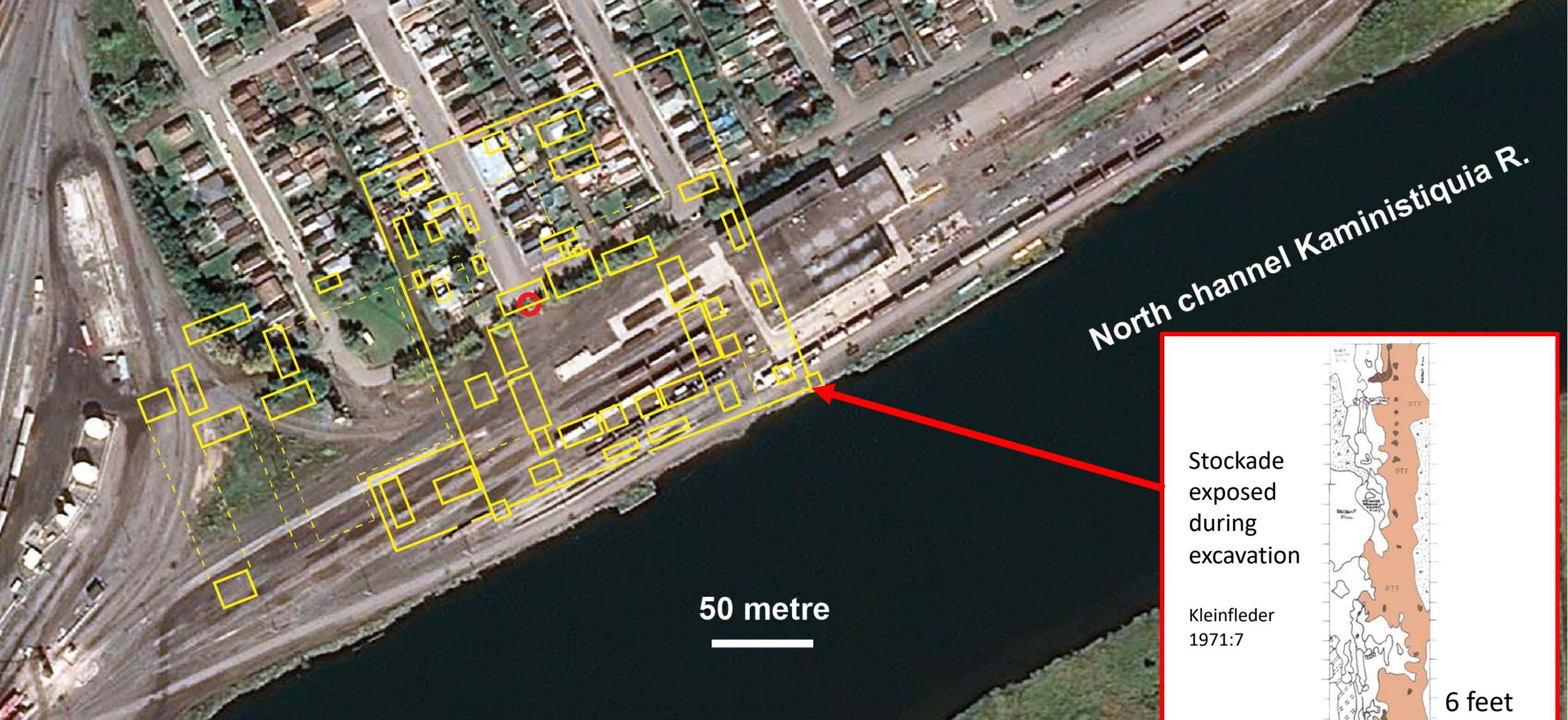


**Left:** Front view sketch of Fort William dated 1805 (Library and Archives of Canada, Acc No. 1990=553-777 x, after R. Gale 2009:46)

**Down:** Fort William plan based upon an 1816 sketch (Hamilton 1991:62 after Moodie and Lytwyn 1987)

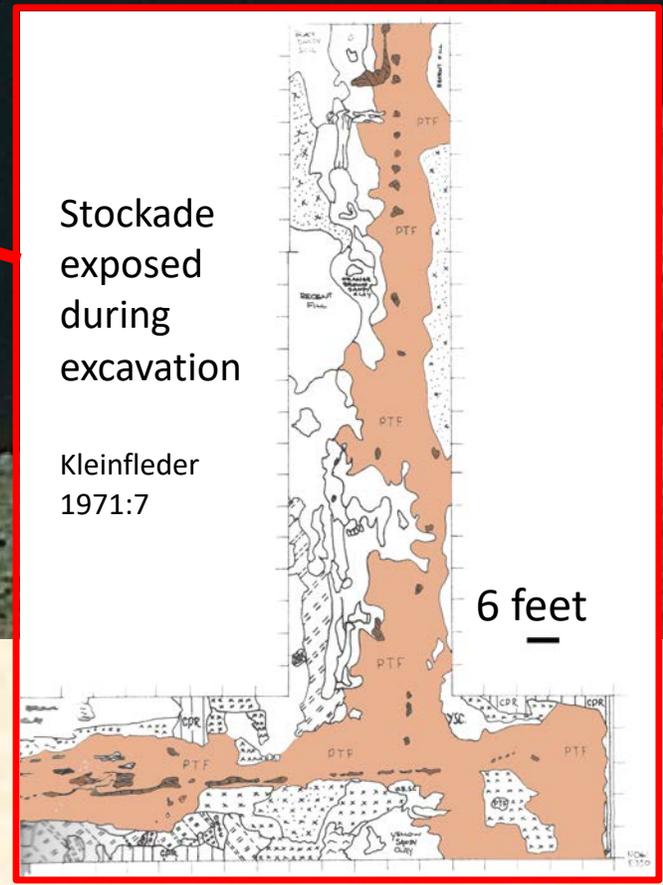


**Left:** 1970 Archaeological plan of Fort William (after Kleinfelder 1971: 3)



North channel Kaministiquia R.

50 metre



Stockade  
exposed  
during  
excavation

Kleinfleder  
1971:7

6 feet

Google Earth satellite image overlaid with the 1816 sketch. Red Circle is monument. Yellow lines mark structures whose cellars and foundations may survive below the modern infrastructure.

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