



Fort Ontario Special Resource Study 2024



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FORT ONTARIO SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY

NEW YORK

2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

On October 9, 2018, Congress passed the Fort Ontario Study Act (Public Law 115-255) authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York. As directed by Congress, the National Park Service (NPS) has prepared this special resource study to evaluate the potential of the Fort Ontario site to be included within the national park system. The text of Public Law 115-255 is included in appendix A.

The legislation further requires that the study process follow the National Park System New Areas Studies Act (54 United States Code [USC] 100507) and that the Secretary of the Interior submit a report containing the results of the study, along with any recommendations from the Secretary, to the House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

Situated at the mouth of the Oswego River and the south shore of Lake Ontario, Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, bore witness to two centuries of North American military actions. The Fort Ontario Military Reservation National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) boundary includes approximately 62.75 acres and 22 contributing resources related to the site's history of military use, which spans from British occupation of the site in 1755 to its decommissioning in 1953. Notable contributing resources include "Fort Ontario" (1836–1838)—the star-shaped earthworks and stone fortification surrounding several two-story sandstone buildings (circa 1840)—located in the northwest quarter of the site; one-story, red brick military support buildings (1903–1905) arranged along curved, paved roads in the south and southeast portion of the site; a small military cemetery (1903; older burials were relocated to this site during the early 20th century) in the northeast corner of the property; and a central kidney-shaped military parade ground that is now home to municipal baseball fields.

The study area includes Fort Ontario State Historic Site, managed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and City of Oswego property. The state historic site was established in 1949 and currently encompasses the core fortification of Fort Ontario, the buildings within the star fort, and the 20th-century post cemetery. The City of Oswego leases several circa 1903–1905 brick buildings to private, public, and nonprofit organizations and manages the ballfields constructed within the 20th-century parade ground, as well as additional recreational facilities within the historic military reservation boundary. The nonprofit, Safe Haven Inc., established in 1989 to preserve the story of the European refugees who lived at the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, leases Building 22 (former guardhouse), which is open to the public as the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum.

STUDY PROCESS

The special resource study process provides Congress with critical information about the resource qualities in the study area and potential alternatives for their protection. By law (Public Law 91-383 § 8, also known as the National Park System General Authorities Act, codified in 54 USC 100507) and NPS *Management Policies 2006* (section 1.3), potential new units of the national park system must fully meet four legislatively mandated criteria: (1) possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources, (2) be a suitable addition to the system, (3) be a feasible addition to the system, and (4) require direct NPS management instead of protection by other public agencies or the private sector. These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources.

If the National Park Service determines that a resource meets all four criteria, the study will also identify potential management alternatives for Fort Ontario that describe what the National Park Service considers to be the most effective and efficient approach to protecting the significant resources and providing for public interpretation and education. If legislation for the establishment of a new unit or units is drafted, the draft legislation may draw from these study findings and management alternatives but does not have to. Ultimately, this information is provided to inform Congress and the president of the broad spectrum of available options and the communities, stakeholders, and potential partners that are critical for engagement should they choose to act on this study's findings and designate these resources as a unit of the national park system.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the analysis performed through this special resource study, the National Park Service concludes that a portion of the Fort Ontario study area meets all the established criteria for new national park system units.

National Significance: Fort Ontario's long military history is impressive, starting with its initial construction as a British defensive outpost in North America. However, the core fortification of Fort Ontario and the buildings within the parade ground represent the fort's 1840s appearance and postdate the earlier and arguably more significant military events associated with the site. Other designated National Historic Landmarks—including Fort Stanwix National Monument—are as central, or more central to political and military events of the French and Indian War, the American Revolutionary War, federal treaty negotiations between the United States and Native nations, and the War of 1812. The study area's historic resources do not appear to meet the nation significance criterion for their association with 18th or 19th-century military actions in North America and additional consultation and archeological research is needed to determine the significance and integrity of resources associated with the treaty signed at Fort Ontario in 1766.

However, Fort Ontario is identified in the *World War II and the American Homefront National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* (2007) for its association with emergency European refugee shelter activities from 1944 to 1946. This study finds that the historic resources directly associated with the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, which

welcomed 982 European refugees as “guests” of President Roosevelt between August 1944 and February 1946, meet the national significance criterion. Fort Ontario was the only European refugee shelter in the United States and represents the nation’s political approach to the refugee crisis of World War II, 20th-century immigration policies, the Roosevelt administration’s reaction to reports of the Holocaust, and the actions of the War Refugee Board.

Suitability: The addition of the study area to the national park system would substantially add to its ability to tell the history of Fort Ontario’s role in serving as the only European refugee camp during World War II. There currently is no direct representation of the United States’ stance and policy related to the European refugees of World War II and the related immigration history, and thus would fill a gap in the national park system. The site is suitable as an addition to the national park system based on the character, quality, quantity, and rarity of the resources and for its educational and interpretive potential related to the site’s use as the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter.

Feasibility: A portion of the Fort Ontario study area meets all the factors considered under the analysis of feasibility. A boundary configuration including the area surrounding Building 22 (former guardhouse / Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum), Building 23 (bakehouse / Hot Stove Building), Building 30 (warehouse / Head Start Education Center), and Building 31 (commissary / Arts Center of Oswego) is of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment. Current land ownership patterns, economic and socioeconomic impacts, and potential threats to the resources do not appear to preclude the study area from becoming a new unit of the national park system. The area has extensive local and national support for inclusion of the study area within the national park system. There is public satisfaction with the current on-site visitor opportunities but also an interest in expanding them and a desire to see permanent protection as an NPS unit. One-time development and restoration costs would be associated with upgrading the limited visitor facilities to meet the standards the public expects to encounter at an NPS unit and maintaining the historic structures and cultural landscape.

Direct NPS Management: A need exists for NPS management of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter portion of the study area to protect its resources fully and permanently and to enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of the nationally significant resources and important stories associated with it. Opportunities exist for partnerships with the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, Fort Ontario State Historic Site / New York Department of Historic Preservation, the City of Oswego, and others for advancing the interpretation and stewardship of the site.

NPS Management Concepts: The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter is proposed for designation as a national historic site. A new potential national park system unit would include Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31. The National Park Service would pursue direct management or ownership of Building 22 due to the significance of the site as the only example of a World War II European refugee shelter and the National Park Service’s desire to have a tangible stake in the site’s ownership and management. Buildings 23, 30, and 31 would continue to be owned by the City of Oswego and leased to arts nonprofit organizations. These historic buildings would be managed via NPS partnerships and preservation easements

under a new national park system unit designation. This proposed management alternative is the most effective and efficient alternative to preserve a section of the World War II-era cultural landscape and historic buildings and interpret the history of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRESERVATION

The National Park Service recognizes that, beyond the study findings, there are strong public support and many opportunities for enhancing the interpretation and preservation of the resources evaluated in this study. The National Park Service administers several programs designed to acknowledge important historic resources that are not national park units and offer owners/managers additional technical support. Safe Haven Inc., the City of Oswego, and other site partners could pursue designations, funding, or technical assistance from the National Historic Landmarks Program or the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program independently of a national park system unit designation.

CONCLUSION

Resources in the Fort Ontario study area that are directly associated with the emergency refugee shelter that operated at the fort from August 1944 to February 1946 meet the established criteria for national significance and suitability. A small section of the historic military installation including Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 appears to be a feasible addition to the national park system as a stand-alone unit at present. Opportunities to protect and provide access to the significant resources of the corridor exist via partnerships among current land managers, but a demonstrated need exists for direct NPS management of Building 22 / Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum. Therefore, this special resource study finds that the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter meets all of the criteria necessary to be considered eligible for designation as a new unit of the national park system.

A GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

This special resource study is organized into the following chapters. Each chapter is briefly described below.

Chapter 1: Study Purpose and Background provides a brief description of the study area and an overview of the study's purpose, background, and process. This chapter also summarizes the NPS findings on the special resource study.

Chapter 2: Context and Resource Descriptions provides an overview and comprehensive description of Fort Ontario and describes the historical, cultural, and environmental contexts that relate to the resources.

Chapter 3: National Significance describes the analysis of nationally significant cultural resources in the study area.

Chapter 4: Suitability describes the analysis of whether nationally significant resources are suitable for inclusion in the national park system.

Chapter 5: Feasibility describes the analysis of whether nationally significant and suitable resources are feasible as a unit of the national park system.

Chapter 6: Direct NPS Management describes the analysis of whether direct NPS management is optimal when compared with other management options.

Chapter 7: NPS Management Concepts presents a range of potential future management options for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of the study area. This analysis was conducted, in part, to explore considerations for NPS management, and it assisted the National Park Service in evaluating potential costs and other topics included in the description of feasibility.

Chapter 8: Public Involvement describes the civic engagement efforts conducted by the National Park Service and a summary of major input that was provided by the public, state/local government agencies, Tribal governments, and stakeholder organizations.

The appendixes include the legislation authorizing this special resource study, NPS policy criteria for the inclusion of new parks in the national park system, a summary of civic engagement, sources cited and consulted in the study, and members of the study team.

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CHAPTER 1: STUDY PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 describes the purpose of the study, including the methodology, criteria, and process used by the National Park Service (NPS) to determine whether a resource is eligible for potential designation as a unit of the national park system. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the study compliance and limitations.

PURPOSE OF THE SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY

New areas are typically added to the national park system by an act of Congress. However, before Congress creates a new national park unit, it frequently requests information about whether the area's resources meet established criteria for designation. The National Park Service is often tasked with evaluating potential new areas for compliance with these criteria and documenting the findings in a special resource study (SRS).

In May 2016, US Representative John Katko (NY-24) submitted a request to the Director of the National Park Service for a reconnaissance survey of Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum in Oswego, New York. Department of the Interior Unified Region 1 planners began gathering background research and data collection in the spring of 2017 for a draft survey report, but a preliminary site visit revealed that elements of the site's significance and resources would likely merit more in-depth examination in the form of a special resource study. On October 9, 2018, Congress passed the Fort Ontario Study Act (Public Law 115-255, included as appendix A), directing the Secretary of Interior to conduct a special resource study of Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York. This legislation superseded the reconnaissance survey request.

The purpose of the special resource study is to evaluate the national significance of the study area and determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the study area as a unit of the national park system. Also considered in the study were other alternatives for preservation, protection, and interpretation of the study area by federal, state, or local government entities or private and nonprofit organizations if the study area would be an appropriate addition to the national park system.

This special resource study evaluates the site for potential inclusion in the national park system. The study evaluates opportunities for preservation, protection, and interpretation of the study area by federal, state, or local government entities or private and nonprofit organizations. The study is intended to provide Congress with information about the quality and condition of the resources at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, and their relationship to established criteria for NPS parklands.

STUDY AREA

Fort Ontario Military Reservation is located on the east side of the mouth of the Oswego River in the city of Oswego, New York (map 1). The former military reservation is bordered by Lake Ontario to the north, the Port of Oswego Authority to the west, and residential city blocks to the east and south (figure 1).



MAP 1. FORT ONTARIO STUDY AREA VICINITY



FIGURE 1. FORT ONTARIO STUDY AREA, AERIAL VIEW LOOKING EAST

The Fort Ontario Military Reservation was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1978; additional documentation was submitted in 2018 to better convey the historic extent of the military installation and its 20th-century significance (figure 2). The 2018 national register boundary includes approximately 62.75 acres and 22 contributing resources related to the site's history of military use, which spans from British occupation of the site in 1755 to its decommissioning in 1953. Notable contributing resources include “Fort Ontario” (1836–1838)—the star-shaped earthworks and stone fortification surrounding several two-story sandstone buildings (circa 1840)—located in the northwest quarter of the site; one-story, red brick military support buildings (1903–1905) arranged along curved, paved roads in the south and southeast portion of the site; a small military cemetery (1903; older burials were relocated to this site during the early 20th century) in the northeast corner of the property; and a central kidney-shaped military parade ground that is now home to municipal baseball fields.



FIGURE 2. FORT ONTARIO SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY AREA

STUDY CRITERIA

This study provides Congress with information about the quality and condition of the study area and its relationship to established criteria for designation as a unit of the national park system. The study methodology follows the process established by law (Public Law 91-383 § 8, also known as the National Park System General Authorities Act, codified in 54 United States Code [USC] 100507) and addresses the criteria for new areas outlined in NPS *Management Policies 2006*; the text of these criteria are included as appendix B. According to NPS *Management Policies 2006*, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a favorable recommendation from the National Park Service if it meets all four of the following criteria:

1. **Possesses nationally significant natural or cultural resources.** NPS *Management Policies 2006* directs that proposed additions to the national park system must possess significance at the national level.

For cultural resources, national significance is evaluated by applying the National Historic Landmark (NHL) nomination criteria in 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 65.5.

For natural resources, *NPS Management Policies 2006* directs that a natural resource be considered nationally significant if it meets all of the following conditions:

- It is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource.
 - It possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage.
 - It offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or for scientific study.
 - It retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.
2. **Is a suitable addition to the system.** To be considered suitable for addition to the national park system, an area must represent a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the national park system or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other federal agencies; Tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector.
 3. **Is a feasible addition to the system.** To be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, a resource must be (1) of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment and (2) capable of efficient administration by the National Park Service at a reasonable cost. In evaluating feasibility, the National Park Service considers a variety of factors for a resource, such as: land use, ownership patterns, planning, and zoning; access and public enjoyment potential; boundary size and configuration; existing resource degradation and threats to resources; level of local and general public support; social and economic impact; and costs associated with development, restoration, and operation.
 4. **Requires direct NPS management instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector.** Under this criterion, management by public and private entities is evaluated to determine if these entities can effectively and efficiently provide long-term resource protection and visitor services or if direct NPS management is the optimal approach. If other entities can provide an equivalent or superior level of resource protection and visitor services, the National Park Service will determine that the establishment of a national park unit is not needed, and other organization(s) should manage the area.

These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources that are not already adequately protected by other entities. Additional information on detailed considerations of the four evaluation criteria are included in chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. The four SRS criteria are analyzed sequentially for each study resource evaluated. Several pathways exist for concluding the study process based on individual criteria findings. For example, an

evaluation may be truncated for any study resource if a negative finding is made for any one of these criteria. The National Park Service also recognizes that there may be other management alternatives for preserving the nation's outstanding resources. This study describes the evaluation findings and will serve as the basis for a formal recommendation from the Secretary of the Interior as to whether or not the study area should be designated as a new unit of the national park system.

STUDY PROCESS

The National Park Service used the following process to determine if the Fort Ontario study area satisfies the SRS requirements:

- **Assess public opinion and ideas about managing the site through public involvement.** Early in the study process, the National Park Service conducted civic engagement and outreach about the special resource study. The bureau collected information on a variety of topics, including the level of public support for the inclusion of resources at Fort Ontario in the national park system, and other options for protecting the resources and providing opportunities for visitors. See chapter 8 for a summary of this study's public involvement and outcomes.
- **Evaluate study area for inclusion in the national park system.** The National Park Service evaluated the study area by applying the four required criteria described in the "Study Criteria" section above. See chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 for the study findings for each of these criteria.
- **Evaluate NPS management concepts.** According to NPS policy and the legislation directing this study, if the resources meet the criteria for inclusion in the national park system, including the need for direct NPS management, then the study process continues with an analysis and identification of management options for management, administration, and protection of resources at Fort Ontario. See chapter 7 for the outcomes of this step.

Following rigorous bureau review and affirmation of study findings, the study report will be transmitted by the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior. The study report and any recommendations from the Secretary of the Interior are then transmitted to Congress, which may or may not take action.

The SRS report is made available to the public following receipt by Congress by posting it to the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. Study documents are not shared prior to their receipt by Congress, nor can findings be discussed with the public or with key stakeholders until their transmittal.

COMPLIANCE

The National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 requires each study to be "completed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 USC 4321 et seq.)" (54 USC 100507). This study complies with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as

amended, which mandates that all federal agencies analyze the impacts of major federal actions that have a significant effect on the environment.

This study determined that the most appropriate pathway under the National Environmental Policy Act was a categorical exclusion, which excludes the requirement for an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement because there is no potential for impacts on the human environment without further legislative actions by Congress or executive actions by the president. The applicable categorical exclusion is in the category of 3.2(R): “Adoption or approval of surveys, studies, reports, plans, and similar documents which will result in recommendations or proposed actions which would cause no or only minimal environmental impact” (NPS 2015). Similarly, this study does not meet the requirements of section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act because a special resource study is a report that involves analysis for informational purposes only and does not involve a federal or federally assisted project with the potential to affect historic properties.

Public involvement is not required for categorical exclusions. However, the statute requires special resource studies to be prepared with public involvement, including at least one public meeting in the vicinity of the area under study (54 USC 100507). See chapter 8 for a summary of this study’s public involvement and outcomes.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND SOVEREIGN NATIVE NATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE STUDY AREA

The Fort Ontario special resource study’s area of focus in Oswego, New York, is within Haudenosaunee territory. Numerous sovereign Native nations residing in, or maintaining traditional associations with, the study area continue to enrich the area’s cultural, political, and economic life.

Indigenous peoples inhabited the area within and around Fort Ontario for millennia and were present when colonial powers initiated military occupation of the study area in the mid-18th century. The Fort Ontario special resource study did not identify or evaluate specific Indigenous peoples’ or sovereign Native nation habitation or artifacts within the study area prior to the mid-18th century. Archeological, ethnographic, and other investigative surveys are beyond the scope of a special resource study.

In addition to this report’s descriptions of the origins of Indigenous peoples and sovereign Native nations, traditional knowledge within Native nations today may offer other facts, research, and stories addressing these topics differently or more completely. Collaboration with present-day sovereign Native nations would be essential for any future activities within the study area that acknowledge, document, or honor this history. This special resource study does not evaluate or recommend any specific future activities, and it focuses solely on the required SRS criteria described in the “Study Criteria” section of this chapter.

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 (54 USC 100507) requires that each special resource study “shall be prepared with appropriate opportunity for public

involvement, including at least one public meeting in the vicinity of the study, and after reasonable efforts to notify potential affected landowners and State and local governments.”

The National Park Service made an effort to engage interested and potentially affected individuals, groups, and agencies during the preparation of this study. In the initial steps of the process, the National Park Service conducted research, including targeted stakeholder consultation, to document the environmental and cultural history of the study area. National Park Service personnel planned and conducted public engagement aimed at sharing information about the SRS process and collecting information that would inform the findings of the study. The National Park Service solicited public input on a variety of topics, including current management of the study area and ideas for future resource protection and visitor enjoyment. This outreach also helped the National Park Service assess the level of local support for adding resources at Fort Ontario to the national park system. Public outreach efforts conducted as part of this study are summarized in chapter 8.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

A special resource study serves as one of many reference sources for members of Congress, the National Park Service, and other persons interested in the potential designation of an area as a new unit of the national park system. Moreover, this special resource study incorporates the best available information gathered during the study period. The reader should be aware that the analysis and findings contained in this report do not guarantee the future funding, support, or any subsequent action by Congress, the Department of the Interior, or the National Park Service. Because a special resource study is not a decision-making document, it does not identify a preferred NPS course of action.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT AND RESOURCE DESCRIPTIONS

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the cultural, historical, and environmental contexts for identifying resources associated with Fort Ontario. These contexts are not meant to be exhaustive and/or definitive but highlight the development and history of the military installation(s) found at the mouth of the Oswego River. The topics, themes, and resources in this chapter have been identified in consultation with representatives of land managers, activists, scholars, landowners, and other stakeholders and from the input received through the study's public involvement. The National Park Service did not conduct original research relating to the resources in this study. Rather, in addition to the information received in consultation, the National Park Service analyzed available reports, data, oral histories, and other documentation and scholarship to develop the contexts presented in this chapter. For more detailed information, refer to the sources listed in appendix D.

Because Congress directed the National Park Service to investigate historic resources like Fort Ontario as a potential new unit of the national park system, understanding the site's historic context, site treatment, and condition is essential. The SRS legislation broadly identifies the study area as "Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York." The first Fort Ontario was constructed by British forces in 1755, and the site continued to operate as a military reservation until 1949.

The historical background given in this chapter provides a high-level history of the site throughout its existence and is divided into three parts: "First Peoples," "Historical Background," and "Resource Description." The "Resource Description" section focuses on the current buildings and layout of the former military reservation, as well as modern development, surrounding land use, and visitor infrastructure. The information in this chapter is presented only as a brief summary for the purpose of contextualizing the national significance evaluations included in chapter 3.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The study area's geology formed during the Pleistocene glaciation "Ice Age" when the first of numerous continental glaciers up to 2 miles thick moved southward from the Hudson Bay area. The advances and retreats of these massive glaciers shaped the topography of today's central New York state, including gorges, waterfalls, and the study area's dramatic bluff above Lake Ontario. Around 19,000 years ago, the climate warmed and glaciers began retreating and eventually disappearing entirely from the state and forming the Great Lakes and central New York's Finger Lakes. Lake Ontario is the 12th-largest freshwater lake in the world, by area and by volume, and represents a deep, cold freshwater ecosystem that is comparatively rare. The lake and shore, which have been the subject of restoration efforts for more than 40 years, feature significant biodiversity in coastal fish and wildlife habitats, and the lake's water and food web support the piping plover and American eel, two federally listed endangered or candidate species (State of New York Governor's Office 2017).

The Oneida and Seneca Rivers intersect to create the Oswego River, a 23-mile, north-flowing water line that runs from Three Rivers through the present-day city of Oswego, New York.

The Oswego River is the second-largest tributary to Lake Ontario and joins the Great Lake at Oswego Harbor, the oldest freshwater port in the United States. The river provides a route from the Erie Canal to Ontario and features eight locks and six dams that connect to the New York State canal system. Today the river has an extensive bulkhead in Oswego, and the harbor is characterized by high-density industrial, commercial, and recreational development. In 2019, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration proposed designating 1,724 square miles of Lake Ontario that border New York state as a national marine heritage sanctuary to preserve and raise national awareness and appreciation of the area's historically significant collection of shipwrecks and other maritime heritage resources (National Marine Sanctuary Foundation n.d.).

The 1.5-mile segment of the Oswego River below Verrick Dam and an approximately 450-acre area of Lake Ontario at the river mouth was designated by the State of New York as a Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat in 1987. While the river has been impacted by centuries of human disturbances in the forms of dams and harbor developments, the waterway continues to be an important spawning location for a variety of warm-water fish species and a significant wintering location for waterfowl (New York Department of State 1987; New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) 2006). The river is a popular recreational fishing location and has a year-round diverse fishery; it is annually stocked with Chinook salmon and steelhead trout provided by the state Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC n.d.).

FIRST PEOPLES

People have been living in the Oswego area for thousands of years, throughout the recession of the older glacial Lake Iroquois at the end of the last Ice Age and the creation of the current Lake Ontario shoreline and the St. Lawrence River. The study area, where the Oswego River meets Lake Ontario, has been home to Indigenous communities thriving through traditional knowledge and customs. These include ancestors of federally recognized sovereign Haudenosaunee Nations still living in and near Oswego, New York. According to archeological records, which can reveal something but not everything about ancestral people, groups of nomadic Paleoindians travelled through what we know today as central New York state at least 12,000 years ago. Some traditional Native knowledge today describes earlier habitation in the area.

Small bands of these hunter-gatherers followed large game during the last stages of the Ice Age as glaciers receded. Somewhat more recent Early Archaic archeological sites in New York reflect a culture that was highly mobile and left little that archaeologists have found. Early peoples primarily settled by streams or near bodies of water, supplementing their diets with fish (McCarthy and Newman 1961). Ancestors to present-day Haudenosaunee Nations moved into today's New York state following migrating herds of large mammals as glaciers receded. Villages developed and expanded along streams, lakes, and rivers. Communities were sustained by fishing and hunting as well as increasingly sophisticated agricultural practices, and the use and refinement of a variety of pottery types became more prevalent. These were the ancestors to those who became the modern nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Haudenosaunee Confederacy

Prior to European contact, the Five Haudenosaunee Nations politically banded together to create the Haudenosaunee Confederacy bound by the laws of the Great Peace. Closest to Fort Ontario are the Onondaga, the traditional center of the Confederacy. To the west are the Cayuga and Seneca and to the east, the Oneida and Mohawk. The political alliance is one of the earliest examples of a formal, diplomatic confederacy and the oldest governmental institution in North America maintaining its original form. The French called this confederation the Iroquois League. The British referred to it as the League of Five Nations until a sixth nation—the Tuscarora—joined the confederacy in 1722 after being forced out of its traditional land in today's North Carolina. Thus, the Five Nations became the Six Nations, also referred as the Iroquois Confederacy and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The political stability, strength, and protection offered by the confederacy allowed members the opportunity to create excess goods and develop an extensive trading network with neighboring Tribes.

Nations in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy were further united by cultural similarities and familial connections. Citizenship and clan affiliation were matriarchal, and women were largely in charge of the political and social life. Traditionally, men hunted and fished, while women gathered native plants and gardened. Three main crops—corn, beans, and squash—were the foundation of the Haudenosaunee diet and considered to be divine gifts (Haudenosaunee Confederacy 2024).

By the European colonial period, the confederacy was one of the best known among Indigenous North American societies. The designated political authorities and balances of power embedded in the confederacy's structure are considered an inspiration for the branches of government outlined in the US Constitution. In 1987, the US Senate formally acknowledged in a special resolution the influence of the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace on the US Constitution (National Museum of the American Indian Education Office 2009).

Colonization Brings European Geopolitical Competition and Conflict

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy's wide-reaching political influence, vast geographic territory, and control over waterways and trade routes throughout present-day New York and Canada made it a valuable trading partner for European nations and major players in the North American fur trade. Competition between Native nations and Europeans for resources useful to European trade heightened tensions and violence between all parties.

In the early 17th century, the French were the first European colonizers to explore today's central New York state, followed by the Dutch establishment of Fort Orange in 1624 near present-day Albany, New York. The French relied on alliances with Native nations north of the St. Lawrence River in today's Canada to counter the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the 1600s were marked by dramatic conflict and violence between the Haudenosaunee Nations and the French and their Native allies. By the 1660s, all the Haudenosaunee Nations suffered major epidemics.

By the 18th century, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was increasingly pressured by the British and French conflict in today's central New York state. As tensions increased between

England and France in North America during the 1700s, both nations courted the Haudenosaunee Nations as potential allies. Although the strategic location of the study area at the mouth of the Oswego River at Lake Ontario made it an extremely important site for Haudenosaunee Confederacy nations and their ancestors, Oswego was not a focal point for much of the 17th- and early-18th-century violence among European and Native nations.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

This historic background is primarily based on the Fort Ontario Military Reservation National Register of Historic Places 2018 update by Travis Bowman, Paul Lear, and Jenny Emmons; History of Fort Ontario by Rebecca J. Fisher, Paul A. Lear, and Wallace F. Workmaster (2017); and Robert J. Hetzler's Fort Ontario State Historical Site Cultural Landscape Report (2003).

Oswego's Fort

In attempts to maximize proximity to valuable trade with the Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous nations, Europeans established outposts and forts farther into the interior of Haudenosaunee territory and the Great Lakes. The French followed the St. Lawrence River into the Great Lakes and discovered that the Oswego River provided a water route inland to the Oswego-Oneida-Mohawk Carry, a trail using the largest portage connecting the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. French colonizers and traders quickly established a supply and trade route down the Oswego River and attempted to establish a fort on the shore of Onondaga Lake as early as the 1650s. The harsh winters, remote location, and raids from the Haudenosaunee led the French to abandon the idea (Workmaster 1972).

It is not possible to understand the study area at Fort Ontario in today's Oswego, New York, without examining its critical importance as part of a transportation network linking the Atlantic Ocean to the North American interior through a series of waterways. For centuries, today's sovereign Native nations and their ancestors relied on multiple rivers and portages or "carries" (where boats, goods, and people transferred from one body of water to another) to move people, goods, and communications across a vast landscape. The strategically important Oneida Carrying Place in today's Rome, New York, allowed boat traffic between widely dispersed sites like New York City and Albany to the east and Buffalo and the Ohio River Valley to the west, as well as Canadian sites to the north via the Oswego River to Lake Ontario (Campbell 2017, NPS 2023d). This set of waterway connections from the ocean to the interior of North America was so economically, politically, and culturally important that it was later replicated at great expense in the early 19th century by the Erie Canalway system, many elements of which are a National Historic Landmark and celebrated as part of the National Park Service's National Heritage Areas System through the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor.

Through these associations, Oswego was a long-standing meeting place of great cultural, spiritual, political, military, and economic importance for the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and their ancestors. It was also part of the larger network of important meeting places along the extended system of interconnected waterways from the ocean to the continent's interior.

From Native nations European colonizers came to understand the strategic importance of this network of waterways, portages, and sites to enable free passage by boat as well as key choke points to deny the advantage to opponents. In seeking to control the fur trade and establish territorial dominance, the British built forts along the waterways, including at key portage sites. For example, the British built Fort Stanwix at the critical Oneida Carrying Place location (near today's Fort Stanwix National Monument). Similarly, to control the movement of people and goods through Lake Ontario via the Oswego River, the British eventually constructed three British forts in Oswego, including the study area's Fort Ontario. These are discussed in greater detail in following sections.

In 1664, the British took control of the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, and as early as 1678, Onondaga representatives suggested to the mayor of Albany that an English fort be constructed at Oswego to facilitate trade with the western Haudenosaunee. Colonial wars between Britain and France in North America came to a head in 1688 with King William's War and continued into the 18th century.

In 1727, British Colonial New York Governor William Burnet ordered the establishment of a fortification on the western bank of the mouth of the Oswego River (on the opposite side of the river from the present-day fort and the study area) in response to the French's construction of Fort Niagara at the mouth of the Niagara River on the east end of Lake Erie. The British garrison named Fort Oswego was located on low ground that was vulnerable to artillery and difficult to access from other British outposts. It was also shoddily constructed as the British Empire decided to focus its wealth and attention on Atlantic fisheries and West Indian sugar plantations over the French-dominated Great Lakes fur trade. For 28 years, from its 1727 construction to the 1750s, Fort Oswego on the western bank of the Oswego River was the only British fortification on the Great Lakes (Workmaster 1972).

The colony of New York's strategic importance gained the attention of French and English empires as hostilities between the European nations grew. For a period from 1730 to 1815, the area that is now upstate New York—considered part of the northern frontier of 18th-century European colonialization and settlement—was one of the most contested landscapes in North America.

French and Indian War (1755–1763)

British Major General William Shirley arrived in Oswego in 1755 while the two European nations were on the verge of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763).¹ Upon his arrival, Major General Shirley improved the defenses of Fort Oswego, constructed a royal dockyard to build a British naval fleet on the Great Lakes, and erected two additional forts: Fort George and Fort Ontario. Fort George was built on the highlands to the west of Fort Oswego and the Oswego River (figure 3). Fort Ontario—also called the East Fort and the Fort of Six Nations—was constructed on the bluff east of the mouth of the Oswego River to provide strategic

1. The 1750s–1760s conflict between France and Britain spanned two continents. Action in Europe is often referred to as the Seven Years' War, while the North American conflict is called the French and Indian War.

control of the harbor where the river meets Lake Ontario. Fort Ontario is the study area for this special resource study.

The first Fort Ontario was made of 18-inch-thick log palisades arranged in an eight-pointed star design. Wood barracks were built against the angles of the walls, and a gallery provided a platform to fire small arms over the walls. Fort Ontario was the best fortified of the three forts located at Oswego, but all three fortifications were poorly constructed and vulnerable to cannon fire (Bowman et al. 2018).

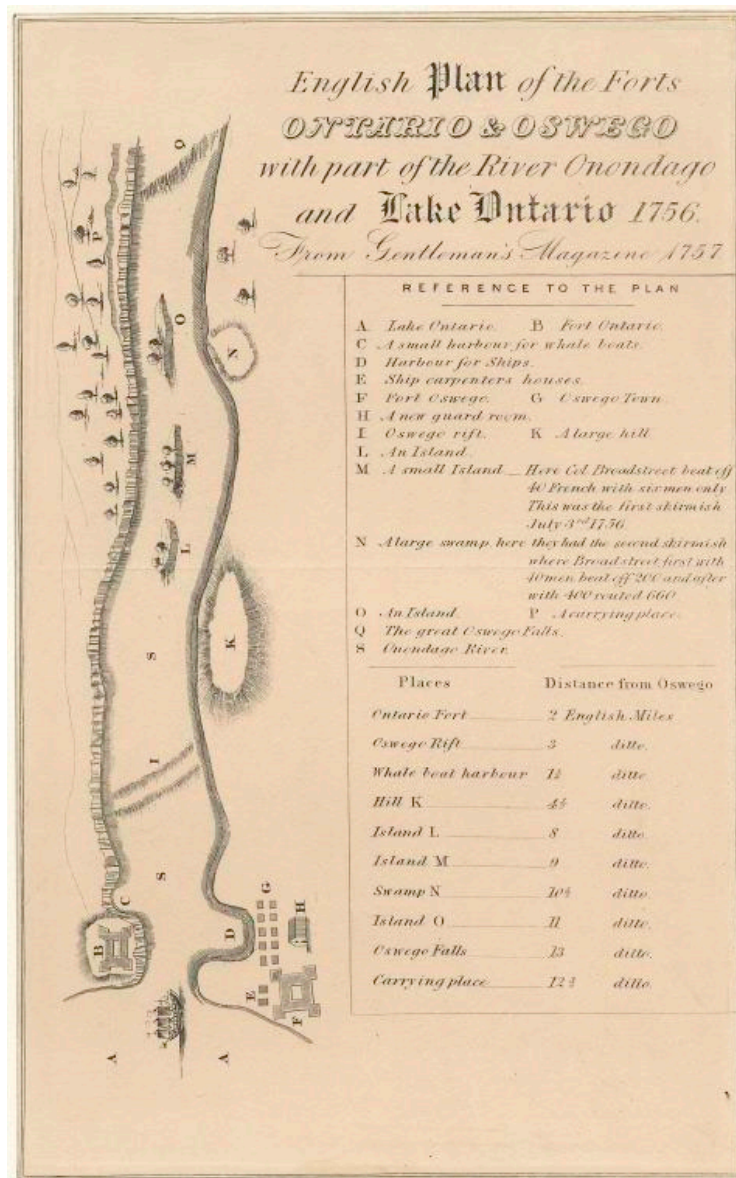


FIGURE 3. "ENGLISH PLANS FOR THE FORTS ONTARIO & OSWEGO WITH PART OF THE RIVER ONONDAGO AND LAKE ONTARIO 1756" (NYPL DIGITAL COLLECTIONS)

Following his March 1756 victory at Fort Bull at the Oneida Carry (in today's Rome, New York, near Fort Stanwix and 60 miles southeast of Oswego), French Commander-in-Chief Louis Joseph, the Marquis de Montcalm, led nearly 4,000 French regulars, Canadians, and

During the spring of 1760, British forces gathered 10,000 men soldiers and 300 Native fighters at Fort Ontario to attack Montreal, the last major stronghold in New France. With the surrender of Montreal in September of that year, Canada became part of the British Empire (Bertsch 1914).

The February 1763 Treaty of Paris officially ended the Seven Years' War and removed the threat of French hostilities against British colonial outposts. With the French claims ceded to the British, the British government left Fort Ontario lightly garrisoned and shifted attentions to seaside colonial cities and the newly acquired, French-built Great Lakes forts farther west. English and other European settlers pushed into Haudenosaunee and other Native lands, which increased tensions among all parties (Hetzler 2003, 45).

In April 1763, the American Indian War for Independence—also called Pontiac's Rebellion or Pontiac's Uprising for the Ottawa Nation leader who organized a coalition against European colonial powers—started with the siege of Fort Detroit. In July 1764, an English colonial force that included 500 Native fighters departed from Oswego for operations against Pontiac's forces to the west. Attacks by Native forces spread east and south in response to continued European colonists' trespassing and settlement on Native lands (American Battlefield Trust n.d.).

In October 1763, King George III unilaterally issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, intended to establish a boundary between British eastern seaboard colonies and an "Indian Reserve" in the North American interior. The proclamation prohibited English settlement west of a "proclamation line" that ran along the Eastern Continental Divide through the Appalachian Mountains. The proclamation line bisected what would become New York state, and the study area in present-day Oswego, New York, was within the Indian Reserve area (NPS 2023a). However, the proclamation line did not consider the Native nations that continued to reside on their traditional lands east of the proclamation line, nor did it stop land speculators and English colonists already pushing into the Ohio Valley.

Pontiac's Rebellion continued into 1764, although representatives from more than 20 Native nations and Tribes signed the Treaty of Niagara in August 1764; this treaty is considered the foundation of English-Native American political relations within North America by many of the signing tribes. Pontiac refused to attend the summer 1764 conference at Fort Niagara, and skirmishes continued across the Ohio Valley throughout 1765. In July 1766, Pontiac and Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs Northern Department who previously negotiated the Treaty of Niagara, signed a peace treaty at Fort Ontario which effectively ended the conflict, although tensions remained.

Johnson and his counterpart in the Southern Department, John Stuart, petitioned the British Board of Trade for treaties to be negotiated to formalize the boundary line established by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and to resolve concerns of colonial settlers, officials, and land speculators. Meanwhile, hostilities among Native nations complicated plans for such a negotiation. In March 1768, the Treaty of Johnson Hall ended hostilities between the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and the Cherokee Nation.

Also in 1768, the British Board of Trade approved Johnson and Stuart's request to establish a boundary according to the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The board stipulated that the

boundary line would start at Fort Stanwix in today's Rome, New York, proceed south and west to the confluence of the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers near present day Point Pleasant, West Virginia, then south on the Kanawha River to its headwaters near today's Kanawha Falls, West Virginia, then south to Spanish East Florida (figure 5).

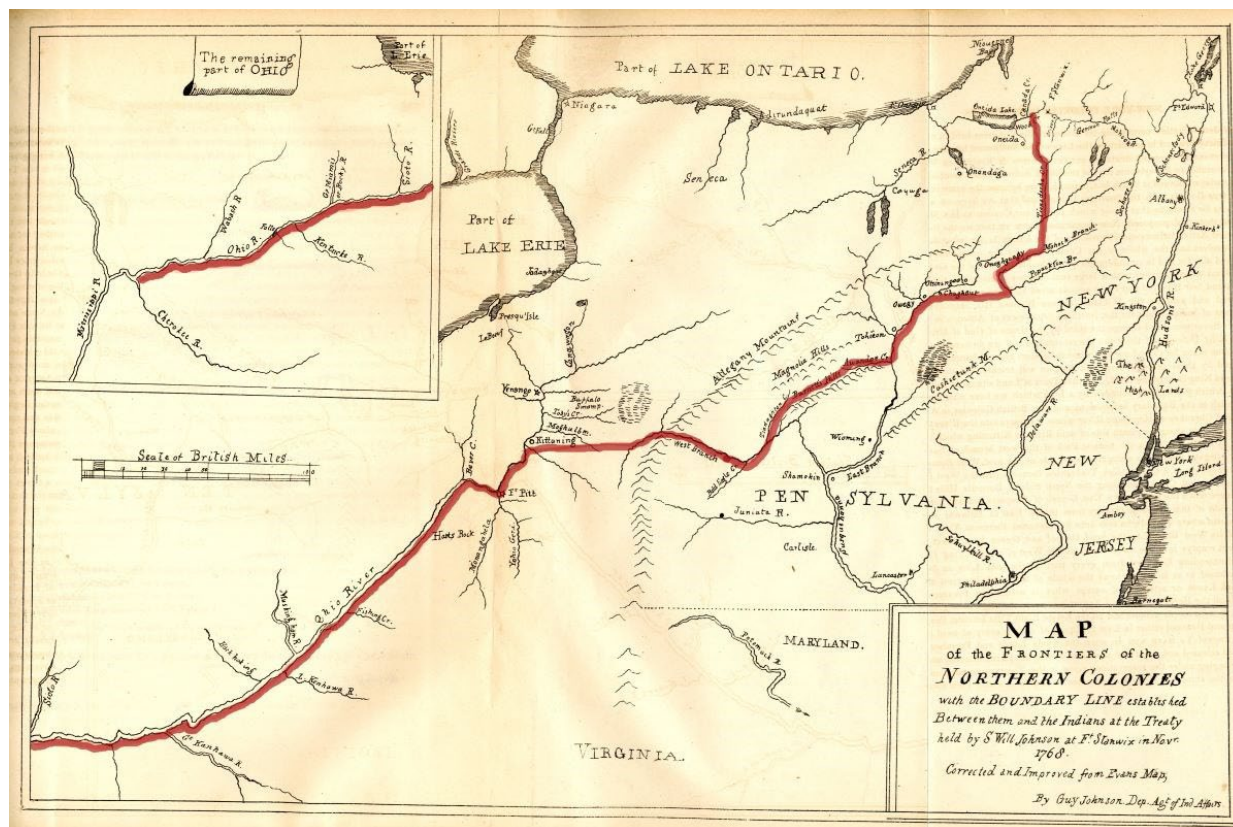


FIGURE 5. "MAP OF THE FRONTIERS OF THE NORTHERN COLONIES WITH THE BOUNDARY LINE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THEM AND THE INDIANS AT THE TREATY HELD BY SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON AT FORT STANWIX IN NOVEMBER 1768" (NPS)

First, British Indian Affairs Southern Department Superintendent Stuart conducted a council with the Cherokee in October 1768. They negotiated the Treaty of Hard Labour, which drew a boundary line from the confluence of the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers to the headwaters of the Kanawha River, then south to Spanish East Florida.

Then, Northern Department Superintendent Johnson invited Native nations to Fort Stanwix, which at that time was dilapidated after abandonment by the British Army in 1765. A council house, living quarters for colonial officials, and other buildings were constructed in advance of the negotiations. Negotiating representatives began arriving in September, and eventually Johnson recorded over 3,000 Native attendees to the council. On November 5, 1768, representatives from the Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Nations (the Six Nations) signed the Boundary Line Treaty, also on behalf of Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo, and other nations, and ceded interests in land east and south of the boundary line to Great Britain. Oswego and Fort Ontario (the study area described in this document) were north of the boundary line within Indian lands, not British colonial lands. The boundary line drawn at Fort Stanwix varied from the Board of Trade's instructions by

continuing further much farther west down the Ohio River to its confluence with the Tennessee River (then known as the Cherokee or Hogohege River) near today's Paducah, Kentucky, rather than turning south to Spanish East Florida at the headwaters of the Kanawha in present day West Virginia.

The 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix delineated the boundary between English territory and Native reservation land, although controversy continued. The Oneida Nation and Johnson disagreed about whether the boundary line started on the east or west end of the Oneida Carrying Place that Fort Stanwix protected during the French and Indian War.² If the line started on the east end, then the carry was controlled by the Oneida; if it started on the west end, the carry was controlled by the British and their New York colony. Stuart's relationship with the Cherokee to the south was made more difficult by the final boundary line, and aspects of the Treaty of Hard Labor boundary were later amended by the 1770 Treaty of Lochaber with the Cherokee and the Pennsylvania 1773 Purchase Line. In sum, the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix facilitated significant colonial westward expansion into lands that became parts of western Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and northeast Tennessee, and the future states of Kentucky and parts of Virginia that later became West Virginia. In addition, in direct defiance of the treaty, White settlers continued to illegally settle north and west of negotiated boundary lines.

Military Events at Fort Ontario During the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783)

The American War for Independence again centered the Great Lakes in the middle of international conflict. By the 1770s, as tension between Britain and its American colonies reached a breaking point, Fort Ontario was essentially abandoned. No American Revolutionary War battles were fought in Oswego, but it was used as a British base of operations and supply. Loyalists used Fort Ontario as a convenient stop on their travels to Canada and as a staging area for small raids and attacks (Hetzler 2003, 45). In 1775, Mohawks sailed from Oswego with British forces to Montreal. In June 1777, Fort Ontario was the point of assembly of the forces for an expedition under St. Leger to attack the Mohawk Valley and cooperate with Burgoyne. Left ungarrisoned, in 1778 the fort was destroyed by an American detachment under Lieutenant McClelland (Bertsch 1914, 22–23). In July 1779, Continental Army troops from Fort Stanwix set fire to the abandoned Fort Ontario's parade buildings and wood ramparts to dissuade British use of the site, but the earthworks remained intact. Throughout 1780–1781, British forces and Loyalist-Iroquois raiding parties intermittently used the remains of Fort Ontario as the starting point for attacks on New York settlements. In 1780, Sir John Johnson's force passed through Oswego from Montreal en route for his destructive raid in the Schoharie and Mohawk Valleys.

In 1782, the Governor-General of Canada Major General Frederick Haldimand ordered British troops to permanently garrison at Oswego and build the third Fort Ontario to provide additional protection for Canada. While the fort's earthworks were revetted with timbers,

2. As noted above, the legislated study area for Fort Ontario is approximately 55 miles northwest of the Oneida Carrying place in today's Rome, New York, and was within Indian lands according to the treaty.

horizontal pickets were installed on the outer walls, and blockhouses and a palisade were constructed during the occupation, British troops ultimately surrendered in April 1783.

The Treaty of Paris signed in September 1783 officially ended the Revolutionary War and established the formal border between the United States and British-controlled Canada. However, Britain retained control of Fort Ontario and six other existing forts at strategic locations along the northern US border for over a decade, until the ratification of Jay's Treaty in 1795 reconfirmed the United States' claim on the Great Lakes posts. On July 14, 1796, US troops finally relieved the last British garrison at Oswego and raised the American flag over Fort Ontario. With the border established and restrictions on trade between the United States and Canada in place, US troops were officially withdrawn from Fort Ontario in 1803. New York militia troops garrisoned at the fort sporadically until the outbreak of the War of 1812.

The Six Nations Divided and Weakened by the American Revolutionary War

As tensions leading to the American Revolution developed, Native nations were divided in their loyalties to England, the American rebels, and their own alliances. Initially, Haudenosaunee Nations viewed the conflict as a civil war between colonists and chose to remain neutral. Over time, it became clear to Haudenosaunee leaders that the winners of the revolution would ultimately be the parties they negotiated their futures with. Loyalties and allyship among the Nations diverged, weakening the overall power of the Confederacy (Onondaga Nation 2012).

In late 1774, the Six Nations were pulled into the fray when the First Continental Congress of Patriots passed the Continental Association, which instated an embargo on British goods. This action disrupted the Haudenosaunee trade network into British-controlled Canada and violated the trade agreement between the Native nations and Great Britain. First in October 1775 and again in July 1776 after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Patriot representatives met with the Haudenosaunee Council at Fort Pitt in present-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to negotiate neutrality. The Haudenosaunee Nations agreed to peace with the Americans and neutrality in the fast-approaching Revolutionary War if the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix would be honored and European settlement was kept to the east of the defined boundary between English colonies and Indigenous lands. Patriots did not comply and continued to push further into Native lands.

When the political discontent erupted into the American Revolutionary War, the member Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy split their support between the British and newly formed American forces. The majority of Nations and individual members supported the British under the belief that the Nations would be more likely to keep their relative independence and land under continued British rule, while the Oneida and Tuscarora backed the American colonists and fought alongside Patriot forces. As with many British families living in North America, alliances were not clear-cut, and in some cases, allegiance was split on a person-by-person basis, which destabilized the clan-based society. What had started as a European civil war on North American soil soon turned the Confederacy against itself, undermining the social unity and political stability that the Haudenosaunee had

enjoyed for centuries. The divergence of allegiance during the war set the stage for the United States to aggressively pursue expansion into Haudenosaunee homelands.

In 1778, Loyalists and members of the British-backed Native nations participated in raids that crippled Continental forces and destroyed frontier colonial settlements in New York and Pennsylvania. Fearing that the New York frontier would be pushed east to the Hudson River if decisive action was not taken, General George Washington ordered General John Sullivan to lead four brigades—approximately 4,500 men, making up a sizable portion of the Continental Army—on a scorched-earth campaign that would limit the Haudenosaunee's ability to attack in the future. This is known today as the Sullivan Campaign of 1779 (also known as the Sullivan-Clinton Genocide, Sullivan Expedition, and Sullivan-Clinton Campaign). Washington tasked Sullivan with launching a terror campaign to destroy the food supply and weaken the Cayuga and Seneca Nations. Smaller expeditions were tasked with destroying Seneca settlements in western Pennsylvania and Onondaga settlements in central New York. Their progress was marked by the smoldering villages they left behind as they made their way across central and western New York. The Battle of Newtown on August 29, 1779, ended in a retreat of British-allied Haudenosaunee forces, destroying morale for the British-backing Confederacy Nations, who now chose to proactively flee to other nearby settlements (Soodalter 2011).

This series of devastating attacks occurred south of the study area and not in Oswego or at Fort Ontario. However, the long-term effects on Haudenosaunee settlement locations, stability, political and economic power, and relationships around the study area cannot be overstated. While the Sullivan Campaign did not reach as far north as Lake Ontario, it devastated the Haudenosaunee Nations, resulted in rapid displacement of Haudenosaunee peoples from their homelands, and destroyed the Native nations' capacity to wage war and maintain their political and economic independence. For the remainder of the war, they were almost wholly dependent upon the British for food, clothing, and equipment. This strained British resources, and in the end, the British would abandon their Indian allies. By the end of September 1779, the Six Nations faced starvation in the upcoming winter. More than 5,000 arrived at the British Fort Niagara expecting food, clothing, and shelter in the face of their catastrophic losses at the hands of the Americans, but many died (NPS 2022). Instead of lessening the threat to frontier settlements, the Sullivan Campaign increased the animosity of Haudenosaunee and British alike, laying the groundwork for fierce fighting within the expanding American New York territory and British-backed Native nations raids during the 1780s (Fischer 2005).

Treaties Between the Six Nations and the United States

Immediately following the war, states in the newly created United States competed for control and settlement of Indigenous lands. This included the study area in Oswego, which was within Indian lands designated by the 1768 Fort Stanwix Boundary Line Treaty. The Treaty of Paris of 1783 did not include the allied Native nations, leaving their legacy treaties with different European parties unresolved and their future to be determined through separate treaties with the new American government. In September 1784 the Six Nations representatives began arriving at Fort Stanwix which was uninhabitable because it had burned down and was abandoned by the Continental Army in 1781. Temporary buildings

were constructed, federal representatives arrived in October, and negotiations began. The United States recognized the allegiance of the Oneida and Tuscarora nations during the Revolutionary War but admonished the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations for their perceived support of the British. As part of the treaty negotiations, the United States established the boundary for a reserve for the Six Nations that included much of today's central-western New York state. The reserve, which was the first example of an American Indian reservation in the United States, did not include "six miles square round the fort of Oswego" (the study area), which was ceded to the United States for continued military activities (NPS 2023e, 2023f).

Federal representatives of the Native nations signed the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in October 1784, but Six Nations leaders later refused to ratify the treaty on the grounds the delegates lacked the authority to agree to the terms, including the enormous exchange of lands. The US government ratified the treaty in 1785, but the Six Nations never did. While the 1764 Treaty of Fort Stanwix recognized each of the Six Nations as sovereign nations and became a template for later treaties between the federal government and other American Indian nations, its promise to protect the Six Nations and the reserve's land was not kept (Onondaga Nation 2024, NPS 2023f).

The day after the US government ratified the 1784 treaty, representatives from Pennsylvania negotiated the Treaty with the Indians at Fort Stanwix with the Six Nations. The northern and western boundary, established in Pennsylvania with the 1768 Fort Stanwix Boundary Line Treaty and subsequent clarifications, was pushed north and west to the state of Pennsylvania's current northern and western borders (except the northwest triangle, added in 1792). The entire Six Nations reserve was then within the boundaries of the state of New York (NPS 2023b). The United States negotiated other treaties with the Wyandot, Delaware, Chippewa, and Ottawa (January 1785); Cherokee (November 1785); Choctaw (January 1786); Chickasaw (January 1786); and Shawnee (January 1786). These treaties contained articles and elements from the 1784 Treaty of Fort Stanwix and initiated waves of westward expansion by settlers and land speculators. Collectively, these treaties significantly diminished the influence, inter- and intra-nation stability, and land holdings of Native nations associated with and beyond the Fort Ontario study area in Oswego, New York.

In 1794, the Treaty of Canandaigua established the recognition of sovereignty between the United States and Haudenosaunee Nations and affirmed Haudenosaunee land rights, although it greatly reduced their land within central New York's 1.75-million-acre "military tract" and restricted the Haudenosaunee Nations from making future land claims (Historical Society of the New York Courts 2023). The treaty remains in effect and is memorialized in Canandaigua, New York, annually on November 11. In 2016, Haudenosaunee leaders met with US officials at the White House to commemorate and formally acknowledge the Treaty of Canandaigua. Furthermore, the United States government maintains sovereign-nation-to-sovereign-nation relationships based on mutually recognized treaty rights with the federally recognized Haudenosaunee Nations associated with the study area in today's Oswego, New York.

Also in 1794, through the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation between the United States and Great Britain—also known as Jay's Treaty—Great Britain agreed to withdraw all

troops and garrisons within the US boundary created by the Treaty of Paris, including Fort Ontario (Drexler 2020).

War of 1812 (1812–1815)

Remaining friction between Britain and the United States escalated into another war in North America. Both countries were determined to assert control over Lake Ontario, bringing Fort Ontario to the front lines of the War of 1812. Britain saw Oswego as an integral connection to New York shipyards that could support future naval battles and supply additional American ships. A few Lake Ontario naval skirmishes in June 1813 led to the British naval bombardment and subsequent taking of Fort Ontario on May 3–4, 1814 (figure 6). The occupying British troops burned the wood portions of the reconstructed fortifications and returned to Kingston, New York, leaving Fort Ontario in ruins again. Although Oswego and remains of the Fort Ontario earthworks were returned to the United States after the Treaty of Ghent officially ended the war in December 1814, there were no immediate efforts to rebuild a US military post at the site. Squatters moved into the former military reservation as the settlements of West Oswego and East Oswego grew in development and population.



FIGURE 6. "ATTACK ON FORT OSWEGO, LAKE ONTARIO, N. AMERICA," 1815 (NYPL DIGITAL COLLECTIONS)

Patriot War (1838–1839)

In the late 1830s, the US military again turned to Oswego to protect the country's border with Canada and the Mohawk-Oneida-Oswego waterway. Skirmishes between French Canadian nationalists and the British colonial government of Upper Canada (now Ontario Province) and Lower Canada (the southern portion of present-day Quebec) led to the 1838–1839 conflict known as the Patriot War. US Major General Winfield Scott visited the US-Canada border and felt the military should protect Oswego's connection to interior New York and the Erie Canal and curtail any Canadian Patriot support from American sympathizers. Following Major General Scott's recommendations, President Martin Van Buren reactivated Fort Ontario in 1838; the first company to reestablish the reservation arrived in November of that year.

Construction of the fourth Fort Ontario began in the spring of 1839. The US Army essentially reconstructed the previous earthworks, but the 19th-century fort included thicker and higher ramparts than the 1759 version. The fourth fort also featured wood-revetted scarp slopes and parade walls and additional support buildings outside the core fortification. While Canada's Patriot War ended in 1842 with the signing of the Webster-Ashbury Treaty, construction of the new Fort Ontario wasn't completed until 1845. The start of the Mexican-American War in 1846 drew Fort Ontario's garrisoned troops west and left the reservation under the care of a string of ordinance sergeant caretakers and individual companies for the next 15 years.

American Civil War

Although the fort was showing its age and signs of disuse by the 1860s, the New York governor named Fort Ontario as a regional assembly point for Union Army volunteers at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. In 1863, updates to the fortification began; the aging military reservation continued to host induction and training activities throughout the course of the war. A quarry was opened east of the fort to provide stone for the outer walls (figure 7). The American Civil War ended in April 1865, but improvements to Fort Ontario continued as the US military turned its attention toward subduing the US-based Irish national group the Fenians and their plans to overthrow the British-Canadian government. By the 1870s, the Fenians no longer posed a threat to the United States or Canada. In 1872, Congress declared Fort Ontario obsolete as a defensive installation, and all funding toward improvements at the fort was rescinded. Companies continued to report to Oswego throughout the 1880s, but by 1894, the fort was again abandoned. The Fort Ontario Military Reservation was deactivated in 1901, when the last garrison was reassigned and all remaining supplies were transferred to Madison Barracks in Sackets Harbor, New York.

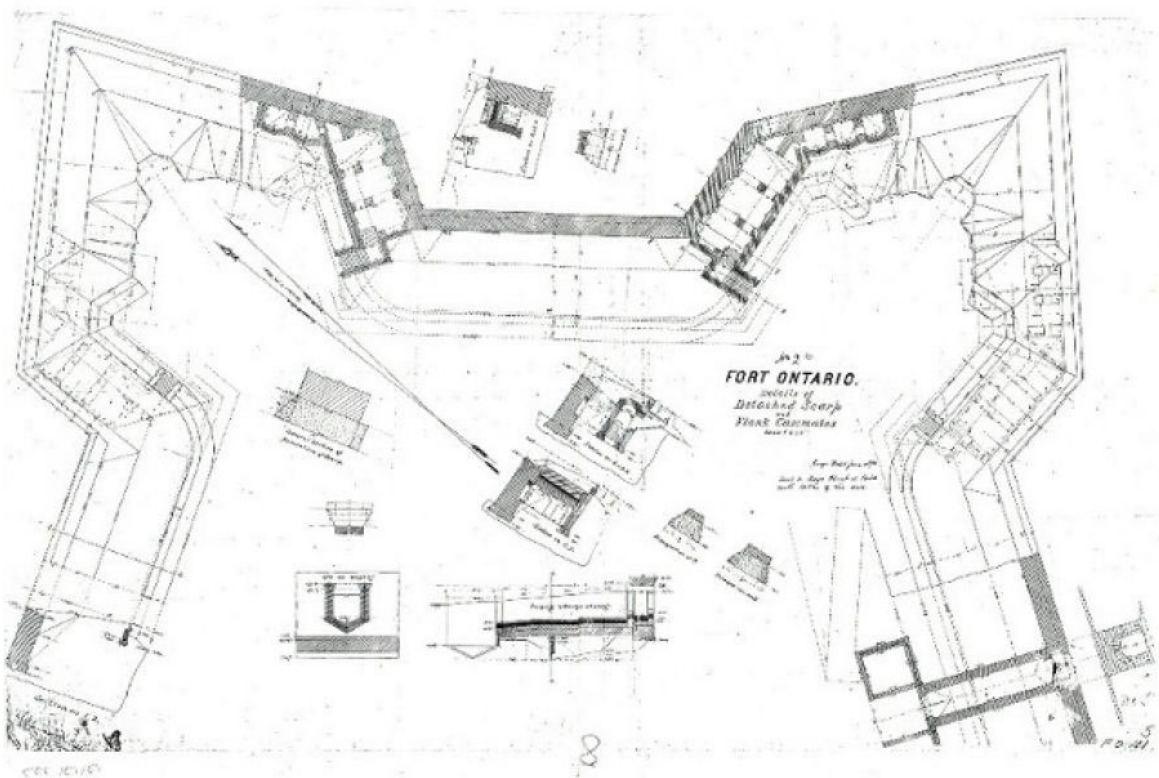


FIGURE 7. "FORT ONTARIO DETAILS OF DETACHED SCARP AND FLANK CASEMATES, JUNE 10, 1863" (NARA)

Military Buildup and World War I

As part of the reorganization of the US Army, Secretary of War Elihu Root (a native of New York) recommended that Fort Ontario be reopened as a training center as part of the broader military reorganization occurring at the beginning of the 20th century. The main tenants of the Root Reform Era were modernizing the armed forces, strengthening the standing Army, and effectively training the US Army to respond to missions outside of war (Yarrison 2001).

Between 1903 and 1905, the Fort Ontario military reservation shifted from a frontier defensive outpost to a training installation that could accommodate approximately 300 to 400 men. The outer earthworks and 19th-century buildings outside the core fortification were removed to make space for additional development. A large, kidney-shaped parade ground was created east of the fortification and surrounded with new roadways and 21 brick buildings that would support the companies or battalions training at the reservation. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the regular garrison station at the military reservation transferred out and was replaced with medical personnel who helped convert Fort Ontario into a base hospital. The Army Medical Corps operated General Hospital #5 at the fort throughout the course of World War I; Fort Ontario returned to its status as an infantry training post in 1921.

World War II: Training Center and Emergency Refugee Shelter

In October 1940, the War Department decided to make Fort Ontario home to a permanent anti-aircraft artillery unit and invested over \$1 million to update the facility and increase its capacity to accommodate up to 3,000 men. Over 60 additional buildings were constructed, and at the peak of the military reservation's development, 129 buildings stood on the grounds (figure 8) (Bowman et al. 2018, sec. 8, 17). One of the first anti-aircraft battalions to train at Fort Ontario was the 369th Coast Artillery Regiment, an African American company based out of New York City that arrived in Oswego in January 1941. The fort also hosted military police training and a troop literacy program led by instructors from the nearby Oswego Teaching College (now the State University of New York at Oswego).

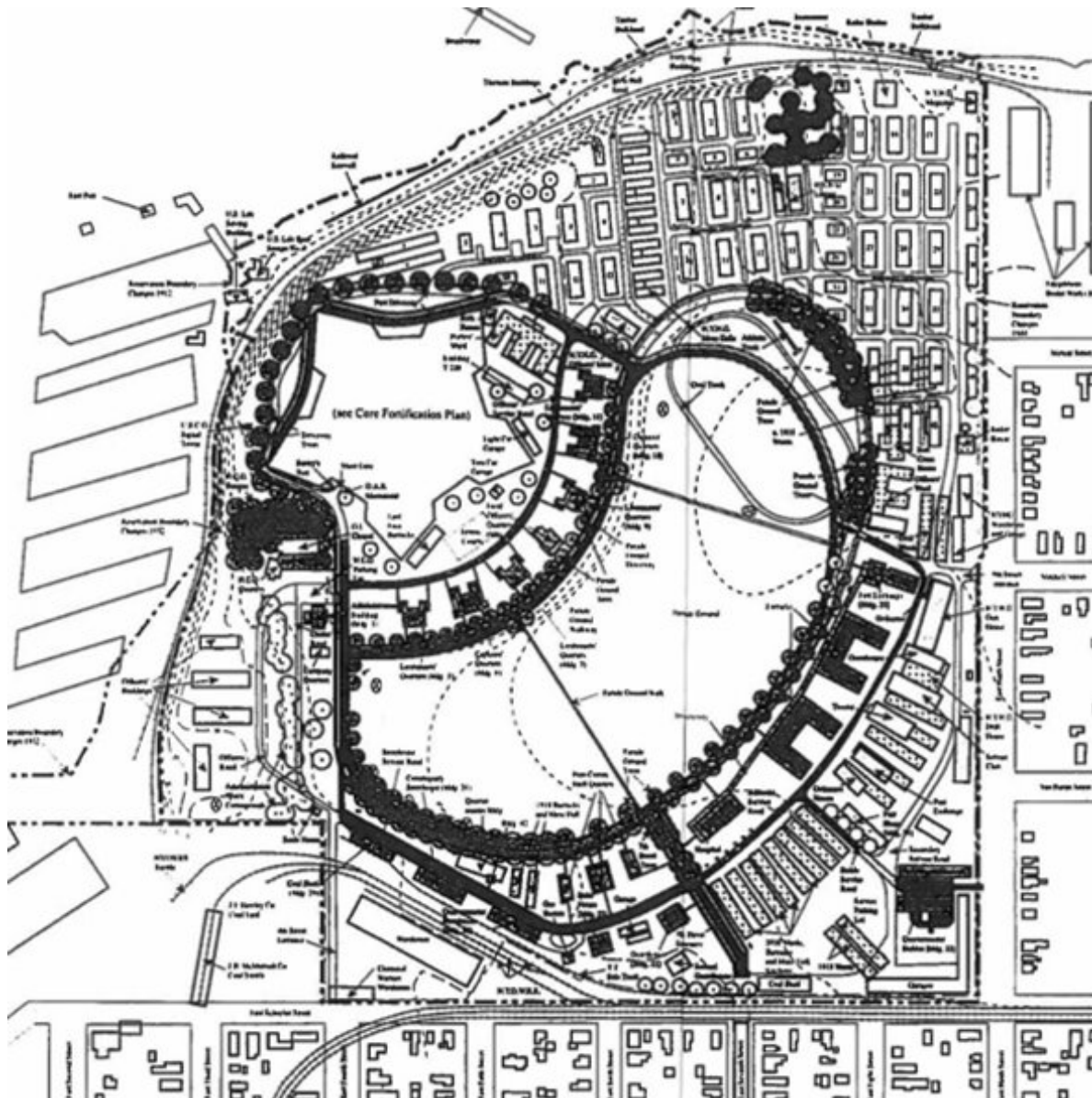


FIGURE 8. EXTENT OF FORT ONTARIO MILITARY RESERVATION DURING WORLD WAR II SHOWING BUILDING DENSITY (CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT)

By March 1944, the troops had completed training and the fort was again mostly vacant. The town petitioned the War Department and the White House to establish a new and appropriate use for the fort (Marks 1975, 18). On June 12, 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt announced that the largely vacant Fort Ontario Military Reservation would become an emergency shelter for European refugees who were invited to stay in the United States for the duration of the war as “guests” of the president. In August, a group of 982 hand-selected individuals representing 18 different nationalities arrived in Oswego from overcrowded refugee centers in Italy. Wood buildings constructed earlier in the decade to house soldiers were converted into small family apartments and other community buildings necessary for long-term accommodations. The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, operated by the War Relocation Authority, officially opened on August 5, 1944.

Over the remaining course of World War II, the War Relocation Authority provided food, housing, medical care, clothing, and education for the Fort Ontario refugees while private aid organizations provided additional social services and amenities. Following the Allies’ victory in Europe and official end of the war on May 8, 1945, the refugees were faced with uncertainty regarding their legal status in the United States and their potential return to Europe. In December 1945, President Harry Truman stated that all the refugees at Fort Ontario appeared to meet immigration criteria and could remain in the United States as legal immigrants (Bowman et al. 2018, sec. 8, 21).

Post-World War II: Fort Ontario State Historic Site

The last refugee departed Fort Ontario on February 5, 1946, and the military reservation returned to the War Department at the end of the month. The property then transferred to the State of New York on April 3, 1946. Approximately 60 wood-frame buildings constructed in 1941 were demolished. For a short time, the New York State Housing Authority repurposed the 1903–1905 Officers’ Row buildings into housing for veterans returning to Oswego or those using the GI Bill to attend Oswego State Teacher’s College (now the State University of New York at Oswego).

As early as 1947, the Oswego County Historical Society, the New York State Historical Association, and local history advocates supported preservation of the core fortification and lobbied for the creation of a state historic site dedicated to Fort Ontario’s 18th- and 19th-century military history (Hetzler 2003, 290). In January 1949, the New York State Lands Office officially transferred approximately 20 acres including the fortification and land surrounding it to the New York State Education Department for administration as a historic site. The first site custodian began offering tours of the ramparts and casemates in the summer of 1949, but the buildings within the core fortification continued to house veterans and their families until 1953. Once the last veterans departed in early 1953, the historic site was enlarged to 30 acres to include the core fortification, cemetery, administration building, and noncommissioned officer quarters. The State Lands Office sold additional parcels of the former military reservation to the City of Oswego, the Oswego Port Authority, and private interests. During the 1950s, the State Education Department focused on returning Fort Ontario to its Civil War-era appearance and developing interpretation at the site. Changes included demolishing the larger 1903–1905 brick buildings and some of the roadways developed in the 1940s and constructing a visitor parking lot south of the fortification.

In the 1950s, about half of the military fort's east and south sections adjacent to city streets and neighborhoods were conveyed by the state to the City of Oswego for public purposes. In 1956, the Oswego Little League was established and included games on the former parade grounds at Fort Ontario (Oswego Little League 2005).

In 1967, jurisdiction of the state-owned area (the western and northern portions of the former fort that are adjacent to today's port and Lake Ontario) was transferred to the New York Division of Parks, which created a five-year plan for the site that focused on interpreting Fort Ontario as a representative Civil War-era fort. By 1970, most of the recommendations in the plan had been implemented, and the property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its engineering and military importance on the state level during the 18th and 19th centuries. Management of the Fort Ontario historic site transferred to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation in 1973. During the 1980s, this state office appropriated funds for archeological surveys and improvements to the core fortification to allow the resources to better represent the 1868–1872 period of the fort's history.

At the same time, the idea for memorialization and education about the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter began circulating, starting with a New York State Museum Holocaust Resource Center exhibit in Albany, New York, created by the museum and the Greater Albany Jewish Federation. A New York State History Network newsletter article by the project director Norma Bell in the summer of 1986 described the impetus for the exhibit, which also supported the later creation of a museum at Fort Ontario:

Some of my most important students over the years have been teachers who have wanted to learn how to relate the story of the destruction of European Jewry to their students in such a way that this terrible event is seen not as an isolated "Jewish" incident, but as a frightening possibility for all of us, revealing the potential for evil in all of us. These teachers have frequently expressed a need for a tangible resource center that they could use as a tool to help teach their students. . . . We wanted to lead visitors through the story of the Holocaust without shocking them into numbness. We wanted to explore the role of the U.S. government honestly. Most importantly, we wanted to reveal the extraordinary situation which developed once the Oswego refugees and the townspeople of Oswego and surrounding communities came together. We wanted to tell the human story—a story of love and concern, of fear and frustration, of determination and faith. (Bell 1986)

In 1988, the City of Oswego created a new vision for their lands at Fort Ontario (the eastern and southern portions of the former fort adjacent to East Schuyler Street, East 9th Street, and largely residential neighborhoods). In 1988, the city made a successful grant application from the state to create a new "urban cultural campus" including restoration and adaptive reuse of six 1903–1905 buildings for arts/cultural programming, and recreation centers within a new "urban cultural park" on a City of Oswego-owned portion of the former Fort Ontario. The new park would "serve as an incentive for creating a Local Historic Preservation committee to address the conservation of Oswego's heritage" (City of Oswego 1988). This was part of a

larger “Waterfront Revitalization Plan” creating and linking Fort Ontario venues to parks west of the Oswego River.

The grant envisioned retaining some uses and adding new ones for buildings on city property, including a gymnasium in Building 25, recreation offices, a youth sports center, a mixed-use studio and public restroom, a children’s science museum, a museum dedicated to Fort Ontario’s Holocaust refugees, a community theater and visual arts organizations, and parking. Restoration activities funded by the grant included repairs to slate roofs and masonry, insulation installation, utilities upgrades, ADA-compliant access installation, window/door replacement, restroom construction, and more. The grant-funded activities did not alter Little League or other field sports’ use of the former parade grounds, which are cherished local activities that continue today.

In 1989, an important new partner for the city, the Friends of Fort Ontario, was chartered to help support educational efforts at Fort Ontario State Historic Site. Safe Haven Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to preserving the stories of the refugees brought to Fort Ontario in 1944, was also established that year.

The city largely fulfilled the 1988 urban cultural park plan, with some changes over time to the types and locations of uses (Van Iderstine Associates 1999). For example, in 1988 a museum dedicated to Holocaust refugees and a children’s museum were planned for a former quartermaster building where the Head Start program is located today. Overall, the general arrangement of the campus on City of Oswego land today is generally consistent with the urban cultural campus intention from the late 1980s.

In October 2002, Building 22 (former guardhouse) became home to the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, which is dedicated to keeping alive the stories of the 982 refugees from World War II who were allowed into the United States as “guests” of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 2005, the Oswego U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Station purchased the southwest corner of the former military reservation to the west of the main entry road on 4th Street. This approximately 2-acre parcel is occupied by a private medical service building. Neither area appears to have been associated with improvements funded by the 1988 grant.

Today, the former Fort Ontario offers the public a variety of services and experiences, including visiting the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation’s Fort Ontario State Historic Site, learning at the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum in the former guardhouse, attending community theater and children’s early education programming in former quartermaster buildings, ice skating in a rink that incorporates former Fort Ontario stables, enjoying field sports on the parade grounds and the batting cage, and storing recreational equipment. Additionally, the City of Oswego Department of Public Works sign shop and an active US Army Reserve Center are located in former fort structures. The following section reviews the resources within the study area in detail.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTIONS

Methodology for Resource Identification

The Fort Ontario Study Act (PL 115-255) broadly defines the study area as “Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York.” The historic military reservation boundary in the updated NRHP documentation includes the Fort Ontario State Historic Site, City of Oswego property, and additional noncontributing parcels managed by other government agencies (map 2).



MAP 2. STUDY AREA PROPERTY BOUNDARIES (2023)

CULTURAL RESOURCE DESCRIPTIONS

Fort Ontario State Historic Site

The state historic site is open to the public and is managed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The site includes the core fortification commonly referred to as “Fort Ontario,” additional buildings and visitor facilities within the Fort Ontario, parking lots, and the post cemetery. Archeological collections and archives associated with Fort Ontario State Historic Site are managed with the assistance of the New York State Historic Preservation Division’s Bureau of Historic Sites, which is headquartered at the Peebles Island Resource Center.

Core Fortification

The current five-bastioned, star-shaped fort dates to the 1840s and is the fourth iteration of Fort Ontario constructed at the site (figure 9). The earthen ramparts were originally covered wood revetments constructed of Kyanized timbers. During the Civil War, the fort’s scarps were finished with the exterior stone blocks that can be seen today (figure 10). The casement entries are made of stone set into earthen parapets and stairs descending to a landing; a second flight of stone stairs leads from the landing down to the stone casements.

Five historic structures are located within the parade ground, each of which is sheltered by a bastion.



FIGURE 9. CORE FORTIFICATION, AERIAL VIEW



FIGURE 10. CORE FORTIFICATION, EXTERIOR VIEW OF SOUTH RAMPART AND MAIN ENTRANCE / SALLY PORT

Left and Right Entrance Guardhouses (1867–1868)

The guardhouses sit in the south portion of the parade ground, directly inside the main entrance / sally port. The small, limestone-block buildings have hipped roofs with metal sheathing. A door with a three-light transom and a wood-framed window faces the parade ground. The left entrance guardhouse has two loopholes for musketry facing the entrance / sally port (figure 11).

Guardhouse/Storehouse (1842–1844, c. 1937, c. 1940)

The Guardhouse is a five-bay rectangular building with a one-story addition on the north elevation of later construction (figure 11). The Guardhouse houses the Fort Ontario State Historic Site administrative offices, bookstore, research library, and storage space.



FIGURE 11. LEFT ENTRANCE GUARDHOUSE AND GUARDHOUSE/STOREHOUSE



FIGURE 12. VIEW OF GUARDHOUSE/STOREHOUSE AND OFFICERS' QUARTERS 2 FROM UPPER GALLERY OF THE ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACK

Officers' Quarters 1 and 2 (1841–1844, c. 1891, c. 1927)

Officers' Quarters 1 and 2 are identical in design and massing (figure 13). The two-and-a-half-story sandstone buildings with corner quoins and extruded mortar joints. The quarters, like the barracks building, are built into the earthwork bastions and are flanked by whitewashed wood retaining walls. Officers' Quarters 1 has a frame privy addition and two brick chimneys on the gable ends; Officers' Quarters 2 has 4 chimneys.



FIGURE 13. OFFICERS' QUARTERS 2 (LEFT) AND 1 (RIGHT)

Powder Magazine (1842)

The one-story, sandstone-block powder magazine is built into the bastion with an entrance and three loopholes for musketry on the gable end facing the earthworks (figure 14). The magazine has a slate roof, and the building is separated from the earthworks by a whitewashed wood retaining wall.



FIGURE 14. VIEW OF POWDER MAGAZINE AND ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS FROM ACROSS THE PARADE GROUND

Enlisted Men's Barracks (1839–1843, 1885, 1893)

The barracks are a two-and-a-half-story stone building constructed into the bastion and flanked by whitewashed wood retaining walls (figure 15). The 10-bay building has two entrances on each story and a full-width double gallery with exterior stairs on each end. The barracks have two nonhistoric wood privies at the ends of the lower gallery that are historical reconstructions based on photographic and archeological evidence.

The building is open to the public and features interpretive installations and furnishings. The first floor contains the enlisted men's mess hall and kitchens; upstairs, the barracks have replica bunk beds and bedding.



FIGURE 15. ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS AND RIGHT ENTRANCE OF THE GUARDHOUSE

Post Cemetery

Located in the northeast corner of the state historic site, the cemetery was relocated here in 1903–1905 and contains the remains of 77 officers, men, and family members dating from the French and Indian War to World War II. (Burials from the 18th and 19th centuries were reinterred here from the previous post cemetery.) Cemetery markers are typical 20th-century granite and marble designs. The cemetery was officially added to the state historic site in 1953. It is enclosed by a split-rail fence from about 1965.

Daughters of the American Revolution Cemetery Monument

The Fort Oswego Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored a bronze plaque to commemorate the military post's 1903–1905 expansion. Placed on July 4, 1906, the plaque is located on a large boulder just outside the main entrance to the fortification and recounts the fort's history from its 1755 construction under British Governor Shirley through the 1903–1905 brick additions to the military reservation.

Hearth of American Monument

The Hearth of America Monument, which was designed to resemble an 18th-century fireplace, was installed in the southeast corner of the cemetery in 1976 as part of the national bicentennial celebration. The monument is dedicated to the women and children who lived and died on the American colonial frontier.

Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Memorial

A memorial to the refugee shelter at Fort Ontario was dedicated in 1981 by Syracuse Women Pioneers/NA'AMAT (a nationwide member organization that advocates for women and families in Israel) and the Jewish community of Central New York (figure 16). The memorial includes a rectangular granite marker surrounded by plantings within a raised wood bed in the shape of a Star of David (figures 17 and 18). The memorial is on City of Oswego land south of the state historic site parking lot that overlooks Lake Ontario.



FIGURE 16. FORT ONTARIO EMERGENCY REFUGEE SHELTER MEMORIAL AND INTERPRETIVE PANEL



FIGURE 17. FORT ONTARIO EMERGENCY REFUGEE SHELTER MEMORIAL



FIGURE 18. FORT ONTARIO EMERGENCY REFUGEE SHELTER MEMORIAL TEXT

City of Oswego Property

In 1950s, the New York State Land Office conveyed several parcels consisting of a total of approximately 42.5 acres to the City of Oswego for public purposes:

This grant is given and accepted for local park, recreation, playground, street or highway purposes only. . . title and interest hereby granted shall forthwith revert to The People of the State of New York in even that the whole or any part of the land hereby granted and conveyed shall not at any time be used for local park, recreation, playground, street or highway purposes by the City of Oswego or shall be used for any other purposes.

The parcels (figures 19 and 20) sit directly south and east of the state historic site and adjacent to city neighborhoods. This property includes covenants for recreational use or highway maintenance support activities and the requirement that the parcels be returned to the State of New York if the city no longer desires to use them for their stated purposes. Currently they are leased to a variety of nonprofit organizations and government entities.



FIGURE 19. CITY OF OSWEGO PROPERTY



FIGURE 20. VIEW FROM CORE FORTIFICATION LOOKING EAST; CITY OF OSWEGO PROPERTY IS ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE PAVED ROAD

Building 25—Anthony J. “Butch” Ponzi Recreation Building (1903–1905)

Constructed during the 1903–1905 buildup that accompanied the US Army’s reorganization, Building 25 was initially the post exchange (figures 21 and 22). It was converted into an enlisted men’s barrack during the early 1940s and then into a recreation center during World War II. Since then, it was most recently used by the City of Oswego Parks and Recreation Department as the Anthony J. “Butch” Ponzi Recreation Building, but it is currently vacant.



FIGURE 21. BUILDING 25, PONZI RECREATION BUILDING



FIGURE 22. BUILDING 25, REAR GYMNASIUM

**Building 22—Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum (former guardhouse)
(1903–1905)**

Building 22 originated as the 7th Street Guardhouse and acted as the administration building for Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter from August 1944 to the shelter's closure in February 1946 (figures 23 and 24). The roughly square building is 47 feet by 59 feet. Safe Haven Inc. leases the building and operates it as the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum (figures 25 and 26). The museum was dedicated on October 6, 2002, and includes hands-on exhibits, interactive video stations, artifact displays, and a small research library containing written material about the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter and original photographs and archives.



FIGURE 23. BUILDING 22, SAFE HAVEN HOLOCAUST REFUGEE SHELTER MUSEUM



FIGURE 24. BUILDING 22, REAR



FIGURE 25. SAFE HAVEN HOLOCAUST REFUGEE SHELTER MUSEUM ENTRY



FIGURE 26. SAFE HAVEN HOLOCAUST REFUGEE SHELTER MUSEUM EXHIBIT SPACE

Building 23—Bakehouse (1903–1905)

Constructed in the 1903–1905 expansion of the military reservation, this modest brick building was originally the fort bakehouse (figures 27 and 28). Commonly called the Hot Stove Building, it is now used as storage for Oswego Parks and Recreation (figure 29).



FIGURE 27. BUILDING 23, HOT STOVE BUILDING (FOREGROUND), AND BUILDING 22 (BACKGROUND)



FIGURE 28. BUILDING 23, REAR



FIGURE 29. BUILDING 23, INTERIOR

Building 30—Quartermaster's Warehouse (1903–1905)

Building 30 (figures 30 and 31) is a 40-feet-by-20-feet brick building on Barbara Donahue Drive near the southern border of the historic military installation. The building has three levels that were originally used as a quartermaster's warehouse. Today the building houses the Oswego County Head Start Pre-K classrooms.



FIGURE 30. BUILDING 30



FIGURE 31. BUILDING 30, REAR

Building 31—Commissary Storehouse (1903–1905)

Building 31 (figures 32 and 33) is of similar size and shape as Building 30. Today the building is home to the Oswego Civic Arts Center, a 60-seat theater used by a community theater group, and the Art Association of Oswego Inc., a nonprofit founded in 1990 to further art appreciation and cultural enrichment in the Oswego Community (figure 34).



FIGURE 32. BUILDING 31



FIGURE 33. BUILDING 31, REAR



FIGURE 34. BUILDING 31, UPSTAIRS GALLERY

Building 34—Former Post Shop (1903–1905)

The one-story brick building is used by the Oswego Traffic Department as a sign shop (figures 35 and 36). It sits in a fenced area adjacent to the ice rink parking lot.



FIGURE 35. BUILDING 34

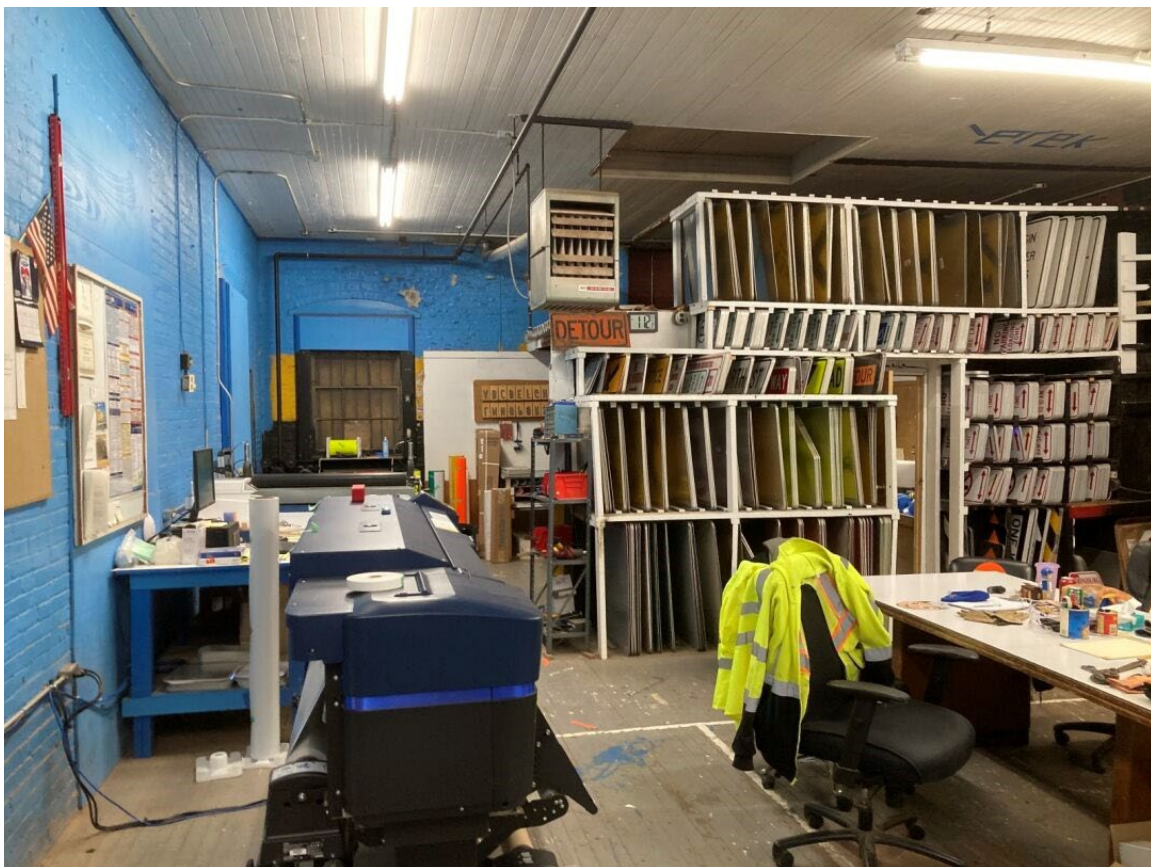


FIGURE 36. BUILDING 34, INTERIOR

Building 27—Lighthouse Keeper's Residence (1821)

The stone house south of the core fortification was constructed in 1821 by the US Treasury Department to house the keeper of the Oswego West Pierhead Light (figure 37). Coast guard personnel were withdrawn from the station in 1968, and the house was more recently used as the Fort Ontario site manager's residence.



FIGURE 37. BUILDING 27

City of Oswego Parks and Recreation Department Facilities

The City of Oswego manages multiple public recreation facilities within the historic military reservation boundary.

Ball Fields

The kidney-shaped parade ground to the east of the state historic site is home to the Oswego Little League Complex. The complex includes four active ballfields, complete with fences, scoreboards, bleachers, storage sheds, and dugouts, and one unused field (figure 38).



FIGURE 38. LITTLE LEAGUE BALL FIELDS

Skateboard Park (1980)

This park consists of an approximately 75-foot-by-100-foot asphalt pad with various obstacles and ramps and is enclosed by a chain-link fence.

Recreation Building (1990)

The one-story, concrete block recreation building is south of the skateboard park and is fenced into the swimming pool complex.

Charles E. Gallagher Swimming Pool (1980)

The Z-shaped, concrete, in-ground pool was constructed in 1980 (figure 39).



FIGURE 39. RECREATION BUILDING AND CHARLES E. GALLAGHER SWIMMING POOL

Building 32—Former Stables (1903–1905) / Anthony J. Crisafulli Ice Skating Rink (1985)

While the red brick portion of this building dates to 1903–1905, there are two large nonhistoric additions (figure 40).



FIGURE 40. BUILDING 32, ANTHONY J. CRISAFULLI ICE SKATING RINK

Adjacent Properties Within the Historic Military Reservation Boundary

At the height of its development, the Fort Ontario Military Reservation encompassed the entire section of land north of East Schuyler Street and west of East 9th Street. Over time, sections of the historic reservation were sold and repurposed, resulting in the boundary used for the 2018 NRHP documentation update (figure 41). The following parcels were once associated with Fort Ontario but are no longer part of the historic district.

- In 1852, the Oswego River waterfront was permanently leased to the City of Oswego for the construction of wharves. In the 1960s, the Oswego Port Authority filled in the area to create additional storage facilities.
- The “Cove Property”—a small parcel in the southwest corner bordering Schuyler Street—provided rail connections to the wharf under another permanent lease granted in the 1850s. Since 2005, the site has been home to the US Customs and Border Protection Oswego Station Office.
- After the US Army demolished the temporary buildings constructed during World War II, two parcels located on the eastern border of the World War II-era military reservation were sold to Fitzgibbons Boiler Works in 1951 and 1952 for the company’s expansion.
- A 1.4-acre triangle parcel directly east of the East 4th Street entrance was sold by the State of New York to a private owner in 1954. Originally a gas station, the building at 33 East Schuyler Street is now a medical clinic.

- The US Army Reserve owns approximately 3.2 acres of land south of Building 25, the Ponzi Recreation Building. The parcel is home to the US Army Reserve Training Center (444th Engineer Company, 479th Engineer Brigade USAR) at 60 East 9th Street, constructed in 2003.

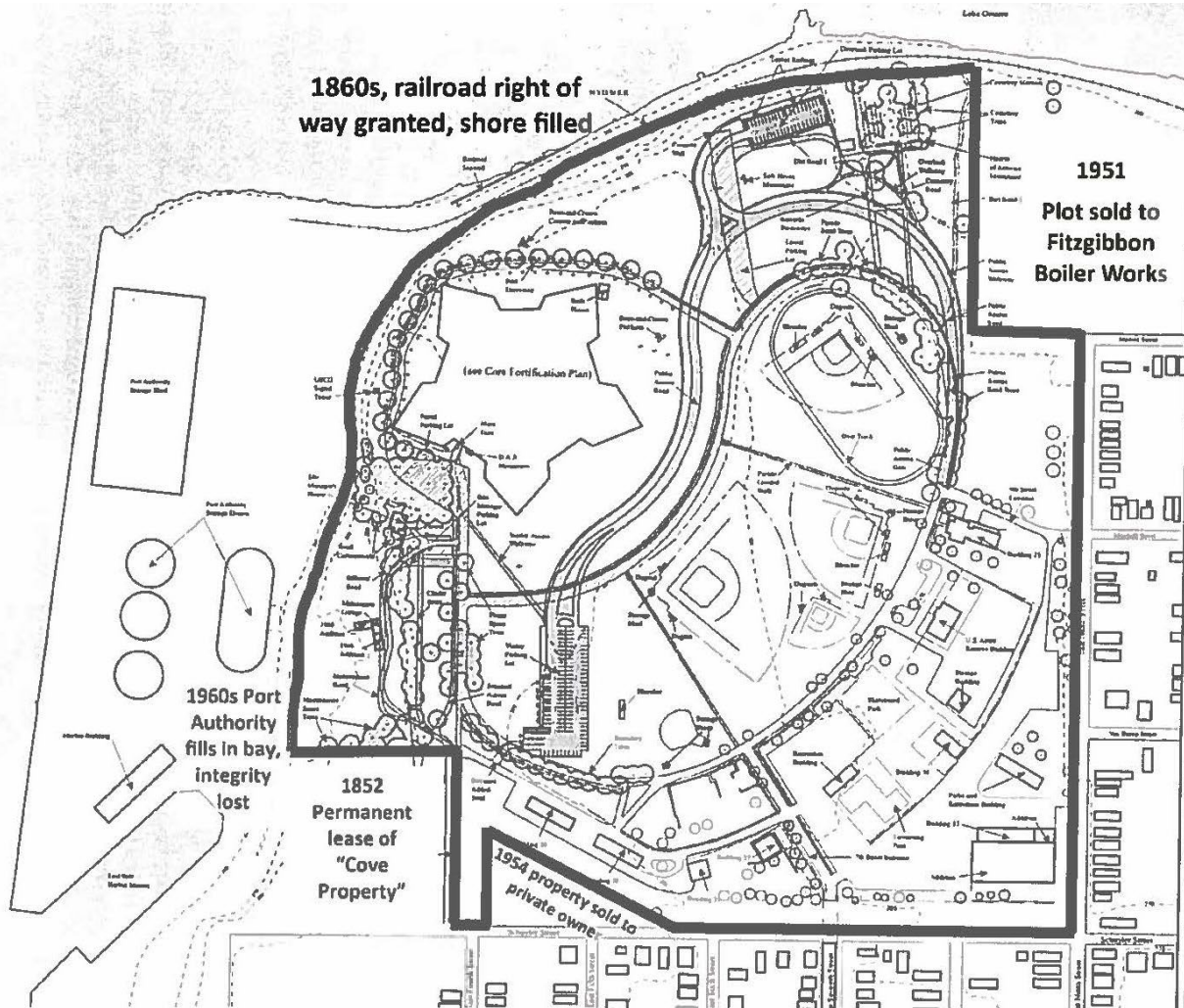


FIGURE 41. FORT ONTARIO MILITARY RESERVATION NRHP BOUNDARY (CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT)

CHAPTER 3: NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

This chapter provides an analysis of nationally significant natural and cultural resources in the study area.

NPS *Management Policies 2006*, section 1.3.1 “Criteria for Inclusion,” states that to receive a favorable recommendation from the National Park Service, a proposed addition to the national park system must possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources. Further, an area will be considered nationally significant if it meets all the following criteria:

- It is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource.
- It possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation’s heritage.
- It offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or scientific study.
- It retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

For cultural resources, NPS *Management Policies 2006*, section 1.3.1, directs the National Park Service to evaluate national significance by applying the NHL criteria contained in 36 CFR Part 65.5. Therefore, for cultural resources, NHL criteria are used in lieu of the four criteria listed above.

The four criteria listed in NPS *Management Policies 2006* are applied to the natural resources in the study area. Because cultural and natural resources use different sets of criteria for an analysis of national significance, the resources are analyzed separately below.

NPS *Management Policies 2006* also directs that NPS professionals, in consultation with subject matter experts, scholars, and scientists, will determine whether a resource is nationally significant.

NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS: CULTURAL RESOURCES

NPS *Management Policies 2006* directs the use of NHL criteria (as defined in 36 CFR Part 65) to evaluate the national significance of cultural resources for potential new park units.³ The following explanation of NHL criteria is excerpted from the *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations* (NPS 2023d). Nationally significant cultural resources must satisfy at least one of the six following NHL criteria:

- **Criterion 1:** Properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent the broad

3. Although NPS *Management Policies 2006* requires the use of NHL criteria for the national significance evaluation of cultural resources, consideration of the properties analyzed in this study for NHL designation would require consultation with the National Historic Landmarks Program. National Historic Landmark designation is guided by regulations found at 36 CFR Part 65, and only the Secretary of the Interior can designate a property as a National Historic Landmark.

national patterns of US history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained.

- **Criterion 2:** Properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.
- **Criterion 3:** Properties that represent some great idea or ideal of the American people.
- **Criterion 4:** Properties that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction or that represent a significant, distinctive, and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- **Criterion 5:** Properties that are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but which collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture.
- **Criterion 6:** Properties that have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures or shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such resources are those that have yielded, or that may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree.

The federal regulations define eight NHL criteria exceptions under which certain types of properties require special consideration in order to be designated as National Historic Landmarks. In introducing the NHL exceptions, the federal regulations in 36 CFR Part 65.4 state: “Ordinarily, cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years are not eligible for designation. Such properties, however, will qualify if they fall within the following eight categories.”

- **Exception 1:** A religious property deriving its primary national significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance.
- **Exception 2:** A building or structure removed from its original location but that is nationally significant primarily for its architectural merit or for association with persons or events of transcendent importance in the nation’s history and the association consequential.
- **Exception 3:** A resource of a building or structure no longer standing, but the person or event associated with it is of transcendent importance in the nation’s history and the association consequential.

- **Exception 4:** A birthplace, grave, or burial if it is of a historical figure of transcendent national significance and no other appropriate resource, building, or structure directly associated with the productive life of that person exists.
- **Exception 5:** A cemetery that derives its primary national significance from the graves of persons of transcendent importance or from an exceptionally distinctive design or from an exceptionally significant event.
- **Exception 6:** A reconstructed building or ensemble of buildings of extraordinary national significance when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan and when no other buildings or structures with the same association have survived.
- **Exception 7:** A property primarily commemorative in intent of design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own national historical significance.
- **Exception 8:** A property achieving national significance in the past 50 years if it is of extraordinary national importance.

More information about these criteria and criteria exceptions can be found in *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations* (NPS 2023c).

The use of the NHL criteria to determine national significance is the only link between the SRS process and the National Historic Landmarks Program regulations. Usage of these criteria in this study does not recommend or confer NHL designation. All properties analyzed here would need to undergo a separate NHL designation process governed by National Historic Landmark Program regulations.

For cultural resources, an analysis of a resource's integrity is a measure of how a property physically conveys its national significance. If a resource does not convey its national significance to a high degree, then it does not retain sufficient integrity to meet the minimum requirements of the established NHL evaluation framework for national significance. Therefore, whether a resource maintains a high degree of integrity is essential in a special resource study's national significance evaluation. The federal regulations at 36 CFR Part 65 state that to be eligible for NHL designation, a property must "possess a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association." More information on an analysis of integrity can be found in *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations* (NPS 2023c).

National Significance Evaluation

Fort Ontario's Military History

In 1958, Fort Ontario was documented by the National Park Service's Northeast Regional Office as part of the NPS National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings—the precursor to today's National Register of Historic Places (NPS 1958). The 20 acres administered by the State of New York were associated with the Development of the English Colonies, 1700–1775, and The War for Independence. The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings theme study *Development of the English Colonies, 1700–1775* mentions Oswego's Fort Ontario

as another site considered in the survey that was “evaluated but failed to meet the established criteria for exceptional value in terms of the present [theme] study” because the “present buildings are of a later period” (NPS 1960, 110, 113). This conclusion was affirmed at the National Historic Landmark Committee meeting held March 21–23, 1960 (NPS 1963).

In 1964, Member of Congress Clarence E. Kilburn forwarded a request to the National Park Service from his constituent and *Oswego Palladium Times* journalist Robert Chetney to designate Fort Ontario as a National Historic Landmark based on the site’s association with British and French actions during the French and Indian War, British frontier politics and Indian relations, military and naval operation during the War of 1812, the American response to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837, General Hospital camp services during World War I, and military training and emergency European refugee shelter operations during World War II. The National Park Service reviewed Fort Ontario for a second time and again determined that the resources did not meet NHL criteria. However, the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 for its state significance related to its two centuries of military activities and engineering developments (Liebs 1970).

The Northern frontier special Resource Study completed by the National Park Service in 2002 examined the resources of 10 counties in upstate New York including Oswego County. The study was undertaken to determine if the area met criteria for designation as a national heritage area. It identified 85 years of settlement and military action starting in 1730 with the establishment of Fort Oswego on the west shore of the Oswego River—the first major milestone in the military competition between the English and the French for control of what is now New York State—and continuing through the French and Indian War (1755–1763), the American Revolution (1775–1781), and the War of 1812 (1812–1815) as a defining theme across the broader landscape. Fort Ontario is identified as one of the 194 resources supporting the potential theme of the Northern Frontier. The study ultimately determined there was not enough local interest to support the creation of a new national heritage area dedicated to this theme (NPS 2002).

The American Battlefield Protection Program included Fort Ontario in its 2007 *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States*. Fort Ontario is considered a Class A Associated Historic Property associated with both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Associated properties are historic sites other than battlefields that have tangible, documented connections to events that had a demonstrable influence on the course, conduct, and results of the Revolutionary War or War of 1812, but which were not part of the action itself. This classification supports the earlier NPS determination that present resources related to the entirety of the fort’s military history do not appear to meet the NHL criteria because the fortification at Fort Ontario supported the nationally significant events of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 but was not the site of a notable battle or action (NPS 2007a, 25, Table 4). Fort Ontario is not called out as a principal site associated with Indian Tribes, but additional research, archeological surveys, and consultation related to 18th-century Native nation activities in Oswego may reveal additional meaningful connections.

In 2018, the updated NRHP documentation expanded the site boundary, description of the fort resources, and significance level from state to national under criterion A and criterion C

(Bowman et al. 2018). The 2018 documentation replaces the original rectilinear boundary with a new boundary encompassing 62.5 acres of the original Fort Ontario Military Reservation that retains historic integrity. The 2018 Fort Ontario Military Reservation NRHP form identifies the property's period of significance as 1755 to 1954 (the entirety of the property's use as a military installation) and identifies 27 individual years as significant events.

The updated national significance states:

Fort Ontario Military Reservation is nationally significant for its contributions to American military history from 1755 to 1954. Over two hundred years, five major fortifications stood at the mouth of the Oswego River—an outlet to the vitally and strategically important Mohawk-Oneida Lake-Oswego River to the Great Lakes. Built of earth, stone, and logs, these forts were a scene of repeated conflict between the world's great colonial powers. Four times Fort Ontario repulsed an enemy frustrated its attempt [sic]. Three times was taken and destroyed—a record unparalleled by any other fortification in North America. (Bowman et al. 2018, sec. 8, 1)

A draft NHL letter of inquiry was also included in the regional file for the historic site (NPS n.d.).

Comparable Military Sites

Fort Stanwix National Historic Site (Rome, New York)

Established as a national monument in 1935, Fort Stanwix National Historic Site includes the archeological remains of the 18th-century Fort Stanwix—an earth- and timber-clad, reinforced concrete, partial reconstruction of the fort built at the original site in the 1970s (figure 42)—and the Oriskany State Historic Site (NPS 2016a). The historic site interprets the Oneida Carrying Place, a portage connecting the Mohawk River and Wood Creek that linked the Atlantic Ocean and Great Lakes, and the events of the Revolutionary War. In 1755, British forces constructed forts across what is now central New York state to keep the French Army in Canada out of British-controlled New York during the French and Indian War. The British built fortifications at each end of the Oneida Carrying Place, with Fort Bull sitting on the western end and serving as a supply depot for the British garrison in Oswego. The French, recognizing the strategic value of Fort Bull and the importance of disrupting the supply line to the British garrison in Oswego, attacked and destroyed the fort in March 1756. Fort Stanwix was constructed in 1758 to replace five smaller British forts that previously protected control of the Oneida Carry. The fortification was abandoned by the British in 1766 after the close of the French and Indian War (Luzader 2001).

The Continental Army reopened the fortification as Fort Schuyler in 1776. Fort Schuyler withstood a 21-day siege that was ended after the British were defeated in the Battle of Oriskany and additional Continental forces arrived in 1777. In 1781, a fire destroyed part of the fort and it was decommissioned. The fort also holds substantial significance as the site of several treaties, including the 1768 Boundary Line Treaty and the 1784 Treaty of Fort

Stanwix, as well as four land deals negotiated with the Oneida, Onondaga, and Cayuga Indians in 1788 and 1790 (NPS 2023e).



FIGURE 42. AERIAL VIEW OF FORT STANWIX NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IN ROME, NEW YORK. THE 1970s-RECONSTRUCTED FORT IS SIMILAR TO THE DESIGN OF THE SECOND ITERATION OF FORT ONTARIO (CONSTRUCTED IN 1759).

Old Fort Niagara

Fort Niagara, built on the south shore of Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Niagara River, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960. The Niagara River was a heavily travelled passage associated with the wealth of the European fur trade and a strategic key in the North American battle between British and French colonial powers. Early in 1679, French explorer and trader Rene Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, established a small post on the mouth of the Niagara River called Fort Conti to represent the Haudenosaunee-French frontier. The post accidentally burned, and the site was abandoned until 1687 when the French, motivated by the British acquisition of Dutch territory in North America, constructed the Denonville stockade. This fortification was abandoned in 1688. In 1725, the French delegation met with Haudenosaunee representatives to request permission to build a stone trading post at the site. After receiving permission from representatives of the Confederacy, construction of Fort Niagara began in 1726, and the fortification—which included a massive stone trading post surrounded by a wood stockade—secured French control of the Western Great Lakes (Old Fort Niagara, n.d.).

Following the close of the French and Indian War and the 1763 Treaty of Paris, England assumed control of the North American colonial landscape including Fort Niagara. Approximately 2,000 people representing 24 Tribes and Native nations met with Sir William Johnson during the summer of 1764 to discuss relations between the English and Native nations as well as address Pontiac's Rebellion and attacks on forts in the Ohio Valley. Signed

August 1, 1764, the Treaty of Niagara is seen as a foundational document for subsequent relations and treaties with the British Empire (Hele 2021).

The State of New York acquired Fort Niagara for park development in 1964, and the site is now managed by the Old Fort Niagara Association Inc. in cooperation with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Fort Niagara contains the most complete collection of extant 18th-century military architecture in the United States including the 1726 stone fortress that is the oldest masonry structure in the Great Lakes Basin (Conlin 1986).

Fort Ticonderoga

Fort Ticonderoga represents 18th-century French fortifications along the Northern Frontier. The Fort Ticonderoga / Mount Independence National Historic Landmark is nationally significant for its strategic location at a narrow point of Lake Champlain that was a key military corridor connecting the Hudson River Valley and western New England to New York City and Montreal—two centers of power when European countries battled for control of North America (Ashton and Hunter 1984). The fort, constructed by French forces at the junction of Lake Champlain and Lake George from 1755 to 1757, was attacked by British and colonial troops in 1758 and ultimately captured by the British in 1759. The *Development of the English Colonies, 1700-1775* theme study identifies Fort Ticonderoga as a site of exceptional value, stating:

Ticonderoga probably saw more of the savage struggle of North America than did any other military post and its story is one of the most dramatic and colorful in American military annals. The fort has been largely restored on the basis of careful research and it constitutes today a notable achievement in historic restoration and interpretation. (NPS 1960, 63–64)

National Significance Analysis

Theme studies produced by and for the National Historic Landmarks Program recognize Fort Ontario's historical connection with the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, and War of 1812; however, the fort does not retain its 18th-century appearance. The core fortification and landscape of Fort Ontario have been drastically altered in the more than two centuries since it was established. The current landscape most resembles the fort during the mid-1800s when Congress appropriated funds for updating the border fort in the face of potential attacks from Canadian nationalists, although the Oswego County Historical Society called the improvements “scarcely more than a re-construction of the old work” (Bowman et al. 2018, sec. 8, 15). The buildings within the circular parade ground date to the 1830s, and once the historic site was established in the late 1940s, the State of New York worked to return the core fortification landscape to its circa-1845 appearance. The extensive 19th-century earthworks, wood walls, and earliest barracks / parade ground buildings were removed or replaced as Fort Ontario adapted to the needs of the US Army in the 20th century and then the state historic site. Stone buildings within the core fortification date to the 1840s, when Fort Ontario was a border fortification on the periphery of military action. The current historic cultural landscape is dominated by the extensive parade grounds associated with the early-20th-century expansion of the military reservation, more than a century after Oswego's

strategic importance in the battle between Britain and France for political dominance of North America.

The updated NHL Bulletin released in 2023 stated, “Under Criterion 1, a nominated property possesses one of the strongest associations possible with a nationally significant historical event or pattern” (NPS 2023c, 41). In 1935, President Roosevelt signed legislation creating the Fort Stanwix National Monument to recognize the importance of the Oneida Carry and to tell the history of the early French, British, and Haudenosaunee interactions leading to the French and Indian War and continuing through the American Revolution. The National Park Service reconstructed a circa-1750s fortification at the site of Fort Stanwix during the 1970s, and today the national park unit interprets the French and Indian War as well as American Revolution campaigns in what is now upstate New York. Fort Ontario was constructed in response to the French establishing Fort Niagara—a historic site managed by the Old Fort Niagara nonprofit and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation that interprets the 1720s fortification’s long history. Past NHL theme studies and NPS surveys recognize Fort Ontario’s long military history, but the other Great Lake sites retain a higher level of historic integrity and already interpret European colonial powers’ 18th-century battle over the resources of the Great Lakes.

Treaties between the colonial governments of North America and Native nations shaped the 18th-century political, military, social, and cultural landscapes of newly arrived colonists and the well-established Tribes and Native nations of the Great Lakes. Sites across what is now the state of New York—Fort Stanwix, Fort Niagara, Fort Oswego, Canandaigua, Johnson Hall (the home of British Indian Agent Sir William Johnson), and others—hosted peace conferences, negotiations, and signings that defined political relationships starting with the 1763 Royal Proclamation. Additional archeological research and consultation with the Six Nations and other Tribes involved with the various negotiations, conferences, and treaties between European and American government entities could highlight the role of Fort Ontario in treaty development and may support additional topics of national significance. If future conversations and research determine that Fort Ontario is nationally significant as the site of treaty negotiations or signings, the surviving archeological resources would be evaluated for integrity and compared to the resources preserved at Fort Stanwix, Fort Niagara, and other treaty sites.

Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter

In 2002, the National Park Service asked state, federal, and Tribal historic preservation officers to suggest properties associated with the World War II home front that have the potential for national significance associated with the themes of production, manpower, politics and government, civil rights, and morale and propaganda. Results were incorporated into the *World War II and the American Home Front National Historic Landmarks Theme Study*. The theme study names Fort Ontario in the National Historic Landmarks Study List as one of the properties that “appear to have strong associations with nationally significant topics within the World War II home front context” (NPS 2007b, 140). The following is included as a brief description of the site’s potential significance:

This emergency shelter for Jewish refugees is associated with the unwillingness of the Roosevelt administration to take timely action to aid victims of Nazi persecution. . . Although the dormitories are gone, the administration building for the camp survives. The Safe Haven Museum and Education Center, a memorial to the suffering and the triumph of the human spirit, was created in the old Administration Building for the refugee shelter at Fort Ontario and dedicated on October 6, 2002. (NPS 2007b, 145)

Historic Context

Fort Ontario is recognized as the only example of a World War II European refugee camp in the United States. It was created by President Roosevelt in June 1944 over a year after the US State Department confirmed that Adolph Hitler planned to exterminate the Jewish people of Europe.

While scattered reports of mass killings perpetrated by Nazi government began running in American newspapers in 1941, it was not until May 1942 when the Polish-Jewish underground resistance smuggled a report to international press that claimed German forces murdered approximately 70,000 Polish Jews since the war officially began in late 1939. In August 1942, World Jewish Congress representative Gerhart Riegner of Geneva, Switzerland, compiled a report that confirmed Nazi policies to exterminate Jewish people; this report was shared with the US State Department, and although department officials initially dismissed the reports as rumor, the State Department independently confirmed the information three months later. On November 24, 1942, Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the World Jewish Congress, held a press conference to publicize the Geneva office's findings and urged President Roosevelt to act. A few weeks later on December 17, the United States, Great Britain, and 10 other Allied governments issued a "Declaration on Atrocities" denouncing "Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe." These actions combined to stir public opinion and stoke rallies for the US government to take action to help European Jews (US Holocaust Memorial Museum [USHMM] n.d.c).

In response, the US State Department and British Foreign Office organized the Anglo-American Conference on Refugees to discuss the war refugee problem in Europe and possible solutions. Held April 19–28, 1943, the Bermuda Conference resulted in few suggestions, with both countries restricting what their delegates could offer in terms of relief (USHMM n.d.d; Yad Vashem n.d.). Neither country was willing to accept additional Jewish refugees; the United States stood by its restrictive immigration quotas, and Britain refused to discuss its restrictions on admitting Jewish refugees into British-ruled Mandatory Palestine (American Experience n.d.b). Instead of committing additional relief to European refugees, the nations affirmed their primary goal was defeating the Axis powers as quickly as possible and that additional funding or support for refugees could hinder the war effort. When the conference concluded without tangible plans to help the millions of Jews suffering in Europe, Jewish American organizations and the press were quick to call the effort a public relations gesture that highlighted the governments' inaction (Friedman 1973, 180).

Jewish American activists and organizations including Peter Bergson's Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe organized public campaigns to influence

public opinion and force members of Congress to address the mass extermination of Jewish people taking place in Europe. More than 40,000 people attended March 1943 performances of the Bergson Group–sponsored dramatic pageant “We Will Never Die” at Madison Square Garden. The production toured the country, playing Washington, DC’s Constitution Hall with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, and foreign diplomats in attendance.

Restrictive European immigration laws had been in place in the United States since at least 1917.⁴ Congress and many American citizens worried about an influx of immigrants during the years of World War I and supported the idea of American cultural hegemony. In 1917, Congress passed a widely restrictive immigration law which implemented a literacy test, increased taxes paid by immigrants on arrival, and provided immigration officials a new level of discretion on individuals’ immigration decisions. The Immigration Act of 1924, also called the Johnson-Reed Act, further limited the number of immigrants accepted annually by implementing national origin quotas that offered immigration visas to only 2% of the total number of people of each nationality in the United States, as recorded in the 1890 census. These calculations were based on the whole of the US population, including natural-born citizens. As a result, visas for those immigrating from southern and eastern Europe were further limited. The act also created the US Border Patrol (Office of the Historian n.d.; Breitman and Kraut 1987).

Requiring immigrants to apply for and receive visas before arriving in the United States created another barrier for those who tried to flee Europe as Germany gained power and invaded territories (Diamond 2020). Worried that persecuted Europeans were unable to secure visas for immigration and that the already low national quotas had not been met since the beginning of the war in Europe, Congress asked the State Department to testify. In a closed-door hearing, Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long claimed the State Department was actively assisting Jewish refugees and the United States had admitted 580,000 refugees since 1933, a number that aligned with the Johnson-Reed Act national quotas (USHMM n.d.e).

The Treasury Department, which had become suspicious about State Department delays in approving World Jewish Congress funds for refugee aid, launched an investigation into the State Department’s actions. Staff discovered that Assistant Secretary Long, a known anti-Semite who expressed admiration for fascist dictator Benito Mussolini during Long’s time as an ambassador to Italy (1933–1936), ordered the US delegation in Switzerland to stop sending information about the treatment of European Jews specifically to block details from World Jewish Congress representative Gerhart Riegner. Long also ordered consular officers to “put every obstacle in the way and require additional evidence and to resort to various administrative advices which would postpone and postpone and postpone the granting of visas” (PBS 2003; Long 1940). After the events of 1938, more than 300,000 Germans—mostly Jews—applied for visas; considering the Germany quota was a maximum of 27,370 immigrants per year, this created a 10-year waitlist. In reality, the US immigration quota from Germany was filled in 1939 and almost filled in 1940, but it was not filled in any other year of

4. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the first legislation that singled out an ethnic group for immigration restriction.

Nazi rule (1933–1945) due to anti-Semitic policies and the State Department's use of bureaucracy to slow or restrict the issuing of visas (USHMM n.d.a). Treasury Department staff presented their findings to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. in "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government to the Murder of the Jews" (DuBois et al. 1944). On January 16, 1944, Morgenthau and two staff members personally met with President Roosevelt to discuss the report, and the president removed refugee and relief activities from the State Department.

On January 22, 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9417 "Establishing a War Refugee Board" to provide for "rescue, transportation, maintenance, and relief of the victims of enemy oppression" and to assist refugees in temporary refuge (Roosevelt 1944). A joint organization composed of the Secretaries of State, War, and Treasury, the new, independent government agency assumed responsibility for implementing US policy on refugees. It streamlined bureaucratic paperwork and regulations among departments and communicated with private organizations interested in donating relief funds (USHMM n.d.e; American Experience n.d.a).

While the War Refugee Board made strides domestically, it became apparent that refugees from German-controlled territories displaced by the fighting needed asylum and members of the United Nations were not prepared to accept these refugees. In March 1944, a War Refugee Board staffer from the Treasury Department submitted a report to the president recommending the United States take the lead in providing temporary shelter for refugees throughout the war, with the understanding that these individuals would return to their homelands after the war's conclusion (Marks 1975, 14). After months of drafting memoranda about the possible benefits and risks of creating temporary havens in the United States and outlining site administration, the executive director of the board presented a memorandum to the president on May 11. President Roosevelt suggested utilizing an available Army camp but hesitated to create "free ports" without congressional action. Instead, he suggested that if a situation arose in which fewer than 1,000 refugees needed asylum, he would take the opportunity to use presidential power to show the United States' commitment and send a message to Congress (Marks 1975, 15).

A week after delivering the memorandum to the president, the War Refugee Board supplied documents describing the conditions in Italy's refugee camps, which were crowded and had limited facilities for the wave of refugees from recently liberated territories (Marks, 1975, 16). A War Refugee Board representative visited Fort Ontario after the War Department suggested the site as a potential location for a temporary camp. With the site selection complete, President Roosevelt announced the creation of an Emergency Refugee Camp at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, in a June 12, 1944, address to Congress.

The president and War Refugee Board stipulated that the individuals selected must represent the diverse populations that had been persecuted across Europe to not appear as if the shelter were catering to European Jews. On June 20, 1944, the following notice was posted at refugee camps in southern Italy:

The President of the United States has announced that approximately one thousand non-Italian refugees will be brought to the United States from Italy. The

refugees will be maintained in a refugee shelter to be established at Fort Ontario in Oswego in the State of New York, where under appropriate conditions they will remain for the duration of the war. The refugees will be brought to the United States outside regular immigration procedure. The shelter will be equipped to take good care of the refugees and it is contemplated that they will be returned to their homes at the end of the war. (Vogel 1998)

Representatives from the War Refugee Board, the Subcommittee on Displaced Persons of the Allied Control Commission, and two private agencies helped solicit applications from those living in the southern Italian camps. Of approximately 3,000 individuals who applied for temporary asylum in the United States, 775 were selected. The remaining individuals who would travel to the United States were selected by a representative of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees from the Rome area. All were required to sign statements that they were to be guests of the United States and that “no promise of any kind was given to be either in regard to the possibility of working or permission to work outside the reception center, or in regard to the possibility of remaining in the United States after the war” (Marks 1975, 21). The selected group represented 18 nationalities and ranged in age from a baby born two days before sailing to an 80-year-old. While most of the refugees were Jewish (874 individuals), there were also Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Protestants.

Since Fort Ontario’s selection as the site of the camp, the War Relocation Authority—the federal agency created in 1942 to care for the 110,000 Japanese Americans unlawfully incarcerated under Executive Order 9066—worked to convert the troop barracks and other training facilities into year-round accommodations appropriate for the individuals and families who would soon arrive. Barracks were converted into apartment units for families, and dormitory accommodations for single individuals and women’s lavatories were constructed (Bowman et al. 2018, sec. 8, 18).

On August 3, 1944, the 982 refugees arrived in New York City and made their way to Oswego by train, arriving at Fort Ontario early the morning of August 5, 1944. On September 20, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited Fort Ontario with Secretary Morgenthau’s wife Elinor Lehman Morgenthau; she reported on the visit in her nationally syndicated “My Day” newspaper column, published September 22, 1944 (Roosevelt 1944). Private aid agencies provided equipment for one orthodox and one reform synagogue, as well as educational, recreational, religious, and other goods and services. Refugee children of elementary, junior high, and high school age attended classes in Oswego.

President Roosevelt’s death on April 12, 1945, put the status of his European “guests” at Fort Ontario in question and plunged the refugees into a period of uncertainty. Less than a month later, Germany’s unconditional surrender to Allies on May 8, 1945, marked the official end of World War II. On June 6, 1945, the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter was transferred to the Department of the Interior in preparation of the abolishment of the War Relocation Authority.

A delegation of six members of Congress composing the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Immigration visited Fort Ontario June 25–26, 1945, to hear testimony from government officials, Oswego residents, and refugees. A delegation of representatives from

the State and Justice Departments returned in September to conduct interviews with refugees and gauge how difficult it would be to return the refugees to their European homelands. There were still no answers about the Fort Ontario refugees' future when the War Refugee Board was dissolved in September 1945.

On December 22, 1945, President Harry Truman delivered the "Statement and Directive by the President on Immigration to the United States of Certain Displaced Persons and Refugees in Europe" (the Truman Directive). This directive gave preference to displaced persons under the existing immigration quota system and allowed private agencies to help sponsor immigration. The speech also directly addressed the plight of Fort Ontario's refugees:

There is one particular matter involving a relatively small number of aliens. President Roosevelt, in an endeavor to assist in handling displaced persons and refugees during the war and upon recommendation of the War Refugee Board, directed that a group of about 1,000 displaced persons be removed from refugee camps in Italy and settlement temporarily in a War Relocation Camp near Oswego, New York. Shortly thereafter, President Roosevelt informed the Congress that these persons would be returned to their homelands after the war.

Upon the basis of a careful survey by the Department of State and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, it has been determined that if these persons were now applying for admission to the United States most of them would be admissible under the immigration laws. In the circumstances, it would be inhumane and wasteful to require these people to go all the way back to Europe merely for the purpose of applying there for immigration visas and returning to the United States. Many of them have close relatives, including sons and daughters, who are citizens of the United States and who have served and are serving honorably in the armed forces of our country. I am therefore directing the Secretary of State and the Attorney General to adjust the immigration status of the members of this group who may wish to remain here, in strict accordance with existing laws and regulations. (Truman 1945)

A technicality prevented changing an individual's immigration status unless they were entering the United States. Starting in January 1946, groups of Fort Ontario refugees were bussed to the American Consulate at Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, to officially submit their formal applications for immigration visa under the United States' immigration policy and reenter the country. With 765 shelter residents scheduled for permanent admission in January and February, and the remaining 88 who were scheduled for March admission given temporary permits to enter the country before their date, the War Relocation Authority officially closed the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter on February 6, 1946. The property was returned to the War Department on February 28, 1946 (Marks 1975, 113). Having no additional need for the military reservation, the War Department formally returned the property to the State of New York on April 3, 1946 (Hetzler 2003, 232).

Integrity

The military reservation's evolution from 18th-century British frontier outpost to a 21st-century historic site is well documented in the cultural landscape report prepared for the

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation by the current site manager of the Fort Ontario State Historic Site. Needing to accommodate approximately 3,000 servicemen, 68 new buildings were constructed in 1940–1941, including numerous barracks and mess halls near the north boundary of the reservation (Hetzler 2003, 238).

The majority of activity within the refugee shelter took place in the area directly north and northeast of what are now the municipal baseball fields. Refugees lived in the wood-frame barracks and utilized community buildings, dining halls, and lavatories constructed in 1941 to accommodate the US troops training at the site. These semipermanent buildings were removed by the US Army immediately following the European refugees' departure and the closure of Fort Ontario. The State of New York demolished additional buildings constructed during Fort Ontario's 1903–1905 expansion once the property was officially decommissioned and the state historic site was established.

In July 1946, approximately 60 wood-frame buildings constructed around 1941 were demolished, and the brick buildings along Officers' Row were converted into apartments in preparation for returning veterans (Hetzler 2003, 299). Ten more wood-and-concrete buildings located between the core fortification and the cemetery were demolished in 1947, followed by the removal of the concrete slabs and 1940 road system north of the parade ground. The New York National Guard mess halls constructed in the 1930s were removed in 1938.



MAP 3. WORLD WAR II BOUNDARY AND ASSOCIATED HISTORIC RESOURCES

Evaluation Challenges

Prior to the demolition of temporary structures following World War II, the area used as the emergency refugee shelter was a far more densely developed military base supporting multiple uses and comprised primarily low, one- to three-story buildings. It also included noisy active rail tracks along Schuyler Street that delivered and sent materials from the quartermaster's storage and other operational areas within the fort. Today, the areas surrounding the surviving historic buildings—Buildings 22, 23, 25, 30, and 31—are a mixture of loosely spaced, one- to three-story buildings, paved two-way roads, sidewalks, parking areas, mowed turf grass, trees, and low-maintenance landscaping. The buildings are recognized as contributing features within the Fort Ontario Military Reservation NRHP historic district.

The *Japanese Americans in World War II National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* (NPS 2012) outlined similar challenges associated with Japanese internment sites, which were also administered by the War Relocation Authority:

Never intended to be permanent, the construction at relocation centers was cheap, regimented, plain, and rudimentary. Amenities were few. At most of the sites, the buildings were removed very soon after the war's end. The land reverted to previous uses, or was given new uses, transferred to other Federal agencies, or sold. . . In most cases, a cursory look would indicate the centers have virtually vanished from the landscape. A closer look reveals the remnants of foundations, roads, landscaping, archeological deposits, and small collections of buildings.

Thus a dichotomy exists for those who want to commemorate these wartime villages as historic sites: the site is there, but the village is gone. What remains, however, is potentially significant: the landscape, remnants of the infrastructures, random buildings, and the archeology of the site. . . An evaluation of the significance of many of these sites must be considerate of their temporary nature and, at the war's conclusion, the government's drive to quickly close the centers and return the land to its original stewards or convey it to new owners. The sites must be evaluated for their ability to convey the sense of remoteness, isolation, and desolation that existed, with some imprint or evidence of the intensive development that stood for a short number of years but impacted lives for decades after. (NPS 2012, 81–82)

Discussions of integrity for temporal building types, like those constructed by the War Department in the immediate military facility buildup during World War II and the hasty construction of Japanese relocation centers, can be difficult under the NHL criteria:

Sites of exceptional historical significance that retain few above ground resources pose challenges when evaluated under criteria 1-5. In these cases, if the integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association is intact, the other aspects of integrity—design, workmanship, and materials—may be evaluated with less rigor because of the exceptional national significance of these sites. In some cases, no buildings or only a small number of buildings remain, but the surrounding landscape may be highly reminiscent of the period of significance. . . (NPS 2012, 90)

NHL exception 3, “the site of a building or structure no longer standing but the person or event associated with it is of transcendent importance in the nation’s history and the association with it is consequential,” applies to the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. The *Japanese Americans in World War II National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* mentions that exception 3 is rarely met when considering NHL criteria, but relocation centers “may be a valid application of the exception” if “the nomination demonstrates the site’s transcendent importance in relation to other sites related to this theme” (NPS 2012, 103–104). Topaz Relocation Center and Heart Mountain Relocation Center are designated National Historic

Landmarks under criterion 1 and exception 3. The Topaz Relocation Center NHL nomination describes the site appearing “essentially as it did following the removal of the buildings by the [War Relocation Authority] in 1946” (Burton and Farrell 2005, quoted in NPS 2012, 95).

The temporary structures constructed between 1940 and 1944 were removed immediately following the Department of the Army’s closure of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. Additional early-20th century brick buildings were removed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation in accordance with management and interpretive plans that identified the 1840s–1860s as the period of interpretation.

Refugees spent the majority of their days in living quarters / dormitories and communal spaces in the temporary wood structures located northeast of the core fortification, although they also had access to the historic fort, parade grounds, and other buildings serving the quartermaster, food preparation, and other purposes. The wooden barracks and multiple other structures were demolished after World War II. The few remaining 1903–1905 brick buildings on the perimeter of the kidney-shaped parade ground were also used for recreational and administrative tasks. These buildings retain the appearance of the World War II military reservation (figure 43). Building 22—the former guardhouse where refugees and others were required to check in prior to admittance and the main point of egress for refugees at the 7th Street tunnel (as seen in figure 44)—are recognizable in World War II-era photos of refugees. Figure 45 shows the tunnel today filled in by the city. Surviving buildings from this historic period have direct connections to the experience of European refugees living at the military reservation and retain enough integrity and association to be considered nationally significant for the purposes of this special resource study.



FIGURE 43. BUILDINGS 23, 30, AND 31 (L–R)



FIGURE 44. ORIGINAL CAPTION: "FORT ONTARIO EMERGENCY REFUGEE SHELTER, OSWEGO. SCENE FROM THE GATE LOOKING UP THE ROAD WHICH LEADS FROM THE SHELTER INTO THE TOWN OF OSWEGO...", MAY 1945 (NARA)



FIGURE 45. THE 7TH STREET TUNNEL FILLED IN, 2023; LOOKING SOUTH FROM INSIDE FORT ONTARIO

Summary of National Significance: Cultural Resources

Due to Fort Ontario's association with the NHL World War II American Homefront and its status as the only example of a World War II European refugee shelter created within the United States, this study concludes that criterion 1 (significance) is met. The Fort Ontario Military Reservation was first listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1970; its context and significance were expanded in the 2018 updated nomination form to highlight the site's long military history. The core fortification and parade ground buildings represent the fort's 1840s appearance, but earlier and arguably more significant military events are not associated with the mid-19th century construction. The fort's long military history is impressive, but Fort Stanwix National Monument in Rome, New York, and other designated National Historic Landmarks are as central, or more central, to political and military events among colonial powers and the early republic including the French and Indian War, the American Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. When viewed only through the lens of military activities and not including the 1944–1946 emergency refugee shelter, Fort Ontario's historic resources do not appear to meet the NHL criteria for national significance.

However, the *World War II and the American Home Front National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* (2007) recommended that Fort Ontario be evaluated for possible designation as a National Historic Landmark because of the emergency refugee shelter activities associated with World War II. The evaluation in this special resource study found that suggestion to be valid. The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter is the only example of a European refugee shelter created within the United States during World War II. The unique circumstances that led President Roosevelt to invite 982 refugees to spend the duration of the war within a military reservation in upstate New York, and the European refugees' struggle to legally immigrate after the war's conclusion, are best interpreted and experienced within the few Fort Ontario buildings directly associated with the refugees' experience of the site. Most of the structures standing during 1944–1946 have been demolished, but a few remaining brick buildings constructed during the 1903–1905 site expansion remain: Building 22—guardhouse, Building 23—bakehouse, Building 25—former barracks / recreation building, Building 30—warehouse, Building 31—commissary, Building 32—stables, and Building 34—fire station.

CONCLUSION: NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE FINDINGS

For the Fort Ontario study area, resources that were directly associated with the World War II history of the site and the European refugee shelter that operated between August 1944 and January 1946 are found to meet the national significance criteria. These resources are further evaluated under the criterion for suitability in chapter 4. The remaining resources associated with the long history of military use of the site were found to lack significance at the national level and, as a result, will not move forward to be evaluated by the other SRS criteria.

CHAPTER 4: SUITABILITY

This chapter describes the National Park Service’s analysis of whether the nationally significant resources identified in the previous chapter are suitable for inclusion in the national park system.

National Park Service *Management Policies 2006*, section 1.3.2, states, “an area is considered suitable for addition to the national park system if it represents a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the national park system or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other federal agencies, Tribal, state, or local governments, or the private sector.” Adequacy of representation is determined on a case-by-case basis by comparing the proposed area to other similar resources in the national park system or other protected areas. The comparison results in a determination of whether the proposed new area would expand, enhance, or duplicate resource protection or visitor use opportunities found in other comparably managed areas. Only those resources determined nationally significant in the previous chapter are evaluated for suitability below.

NPS THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Every unit of the national park system preserves important aspects of our nation’s natural and/or cultural heritage. The National Park Service uses a series of natural history and cultural themes to categorize the important resources protected by national park units. These themes are listed in the National Park Service’s NHL Thematic Framework (NPS 1996). The themes are used to evaluate whether resources in a study area would broaden and diversify resources protected by the national park system. Nationally significant natural and/or cultural resources in the study area are organized by these themes. This analysis also evaluates whether these resources would expand, enhance, or duplicate resource protection or visitor use opportunities in other national park units or comparably managed areas.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Type of Resource Represented

Fort Ontario is a military reservation that evolved from a wood-and-earth fortification built in 1755 to a military installation through World War II. The fort hosted a unique use as a domestic military facility during World War II by serving as the only World War II refugee camp in the United States. This refugee camp accommodated 982 European war refugees from August 1944 to February 1946.

Theme or Context in Which the Resource Fits

In evaluating the suitability of cultural resources within or outside the national park system, the National Park Service references the 2017 NPS System Plan, as well as its 1994 thematic framework, “History in the National Park Service: Themes and Concepts” for history and prehistory. The NPS System Plan built upon the 1994 framework and examines the special places, stories, ecosystems, and recreational opportunities that the National Park Service

currently protects, while identifying gaps and opportunities to seek new ways to protect important natural areas and cultural heritage in the national park system and beyond. The 1994 framework provides additional guidance for the National Park Service related to historic resources and serves as an outline of major themes and concepts that help to conceptualize American history. It is used to assist in the identification of cultural resources that embody America's past and to describe and analyze the multiple layers of history encapsulated within each resource (NPS 1994).

Through eight concepts that encompass the multi-faceted and interrelated nature of human experience, the thematic framework reflects an interdisciplinary, less compartmentalized approach to American history. The concepts are:

1. Peopling Places
2. Creating Social Institutions
3. Expressing Cultural Values
4. Shaping the Political Landscape
5. Developing the American Economy
6. Expanding Science and Technology
7. Transforming the Environment
8. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community

Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, contributes to our understanding of the following themes within the NPS Thematic Framework: "4. Shaping the Political Landscape" and "8. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community."

The theme "Shaping the Political Landscape" encompasses Tribal, local, state, and federal political and governmental institutions that create public policy and those groups that seek to shape both policies and institutions. Fort Ontario also served as the grounds for the United States to fulfill its commitment to the Atlantic alliance and worldwide alliance. The United States upheld its commitment as part of Allied powers under the War Refugee Board to participate in welcoming refugees into the United States at the former military fort. The fort reshaped geopolitical agreements by serving as the only refugee camp for 982 European refugees in the United States. These actions are further aligned with the subtopics "parties, protests, and movements" (alliances during World War II) and "military institutions and activities" (refugee camp at former military fort).

The theme "Changing Role of the United States in the World Community" explores diplomacy, trade, cultural exchange, security and defense, expansionism, and, at times, imperialism. The interactions among Indigenous peoples, between the United States and Native peoples, and between the United States and the world have all contributed to American history. The fort served as the grounds for the United States to uphold its political commitment to welcome European refugees during World War II. This international commitment forever changed United States politics. Under President Roosevelt's plan, 982

refugees from 18 different countries were transported from Italy to Fort Ontario. The refugees were identified as “guests” to circumnavigate rigid immigration quotas, but that status gave refugees no legal standing and required their eventual repatriation. After 18 months in the refugee camp, President Truman permitted the refugees legal entry into the United States. These actions are further aligned with the subtopics “international relations” (international alliances) and “immigration and emigration policies” (after being closed, fort refugees were able to apply for American residency).

In regard to Tribal and federal governmental institutions and groups that shape those institutions, two centuries before World War II a special set of relationships associated with the Oswego region played a role in shaping the political landscape of the United States. As described in chapter 2, Oswego and the Fort Ontario study area have long-standing traditional associations with Haudenosaunee Nations, and members of the Nations continue to live in the region and maintain connections with its resources. In 18th-century treaties separating colonial and Native nations, Oswego was designated to remain in Native nation control more than once. Political and military actions by colonial, Tribal, and later federal governmental powers were very influential in the early political landscape of the United States. Politically, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s balances of power and authorities are considered a key inspiration for the US government’s branches of government outlined in the Constitution. While these associations are not directly connected to the World War II Safe Haven Refugee Shelter, the study area’s unique relationship with both the federal government and sovereign Native nations is related to the “Shaping the Political Landscape” and “Changing Role of the US in the World Community” themes in a way that transcends typical categories.

Furthermore, the *World War II and the American Home Front National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* (2007) provided six broad property types reflecting important topics under the theme study’s context. Fort Ontario was contextualized within:

Places associated with politics and government are where federal agencies developed policies and directed programs, where individuals influenced politics, where major political leaders and public officials made important speeches, held meetings, or debated policies; or places that reflect governmental policy. Examples of property types include government agency headquarters, homes, and public meeting facilities. (NPS 2007, 128)

Descriptions of Similar Resources

Camp Nelson National Monument

Camp Nelson National Monument in Jessamine County, Kentucky, was established in 2018 to preserve and interpret the historic and archeological resources of a Union Army supply depot that became one of the largest Civil War-era recruitment and training centers for United States Colored Troops and an African American refugee camp (NPS 2020). Numerous orders from the US Army to remove women and children of enlisted troops from the military installation led to the November 1864 expulsion of approximately 400 family members from Fort Nelson. Ultimately, 102 of these domestic refugees died in the days

following the forced removal due to frigid temperatures and harsh weather. In the weeks following the November expulsion, the Union Army reversed its policy toward refugees and began construction of the government-sponsored “Home for Colored Refugees,” which opened in January 1865 as a “safe haven” for the families of enlisted Black troops. Later, Congress passed the March 3rd Act of 1865, which provided legal protection for the refugees at Camp Nelson.

The national monument preserves the core of the Civil War–era Camp Nelson site as well as the site of the Home for Colored Refugees approximately 1.5 miles south of the Camp Nelson unit. This unit interprets the supply depot and training center’s role during the Civil War as well as the enslaved people who escaped to the site with the hope of securing freedom and ultimately controlling their futures by aiding in the destruction of slavery.

Minidoka National Historic Site

Established in 2001, Minidoka National Historic Site provides opportunities for public education and interpretation of the exclusion and unjust incarceration of Nikkei—Japanese American citizens and legal residents of Japanese ancestry—in the United States during World War II (NPS 2016b). The site, which collaboratively manages resources related to the Minidoka War Relocation Center in Idaho and the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial in Washington State, interprets how the US government ordered nearly 120,000 Japanese residents and Japanese Americans into 10 war relocation centers across the American West under authority derived from Executive Order 9066.

The War Relocation Authority was created as a civilian agency in March 1942, less than a month after President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, to build and operate the network of “camps” for involuntarily detained Japanese Americans and legal residents of Japanese ancestry. Like the other War Relocation Authority internment site, Minidoka was a hastily constructed, densely populated, large-scale facility in an isolated and unforgiving landscape. It resembled a military installation with its temporary, tar paper–covered construction, guard towers, and barbed-wire fences. When President Roosevelt announced his decision to invite approximately 1,000 European refugees to the United States for care throughout the duration of the war, the War Relocation Authority was a logical choice for administering the emergency refugee shelter due to the agency’s experience with the Japanese American internment sites (Marks 1975, 13). Joseph H. Smart, a former Farm Security Administration employee who served as the regional director and field assistant director of the War Relocation Authority Denver Field Office (which oversaw Minidoka and several other internment sites), was selected by the director of the War Relocation Authority to serve as the shelter director at Fort Ontario.

US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Chartered by a unanimous Act of Congress in 1980, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945, to preserve the memory of those who suffered, and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy (USHMM n.d.b). In addition to hosting a permanent exhibit about the Holocaust, the museum aspires to be a

living memorial to the Holocaust and educates, interprets, and furthers research on the World War II Holocaust and genocide prevention through in-person, traveling, and online exhibitions and numerous partnerships with research institutes. The current “Americans and the Holocaust” exhibit reveals how the Great Depression, isolationism, xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism shaped responses to Nazism and the Holocaust.

Additionally, the museum’s David M. Rubenstein National Institute for Holocaust Documentation includes millions of documents, artifacts, photos, films, books, and testimonies in an unparalleled repository for Holocaust evidence. The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is a generator of new knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust that offers museum fellowships, faculty seminars, and a variety of programs to ensure the development of future generations of Holocaust studies scholars.

Museum of Tolerance

The Museum of Tolerance is the educational arm of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, an internationally renowned Jewish human rights organization. Established in 1993, the Los Angeles, California, museum’s mission is to challenge visitors to understand the Holocaust in historic and contemporary contexts and to confront all forms of prejudice and discrimination in the world today. Visitors can experience a 70-minute, sound-and-light guided, dramatic presentation that covers the period from the 1920s to 1945 in the Holocaust Museum, see the recently opened Anne Frank exhibit, and focus on the major issues of intolerance in daily life within the Social Lab collaboration space. Since its opening, the museum has welcomed over 7 million visitors and regularly hosts speakers and events.

SUITABILITY ANALYSIS

This section compares the character, quality, quantity, and rarity combination of resource values and themes of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter.

The NPS System Plan identifies the need to prioritize the history of US diplomacy and immigration policy and migration stories in evaluating the inclusion of sites into the national park system. No sites under NPS management or comparably managed areas compare to the character, quality, quantity, and rarity of Fort Ontario. Fort Ontario fills a gap in the national park system as the only site that interprets the refugees of Europe during World War II. Further, Fort Ontario contributes to our understanding of the important themes “Shaping the Political Landscape” and “Changing the Role of the United States in the World Community” (NPS 2017).

No existing NPS sites represent the United States’s evolving political relationship with other nations and its international activities during World War II. Fort Ontario possesses exceptional historic value by serving as the grounds for the United States to uphold its political commitment to welcome European refugees during World War II under an executive order from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Fort Ontario was the only foreign refugee camp established in the United States during World War II, and it accommodated 982 European war refugees from August 1944 to February 1946. Refugees lived in semi-

permanent barracks constructed in 1940 to accommodate US troops. The barracks, mess halls, bath houses, and other community buildings were removed by the State of New York in the years following the formal closure of the emergency shelter in early 1946, but photographs and remnants of the cultural landscape—including a handful of 1903–1905 auxiliary buildings—can visually connect today’s visitors to activities of the emergency refugee shelter.

Camp Nelson National Monument preserves historic resources associated with African American refugees who fled the war-torn South and sought security at a US military supply-depot-turned-recruitment-and-training-center—a 19th-century refugee crisis that was created by the Civil War. Minidoka and other national historic sites that interpret War Relocation Authority involuntary internment centers and the injustices of Executive Order 9066 can highlight the similarities between conditions experienced by those held in Japanese internment centers and European refugees who arrived at Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter and provide opportunities to confront the xenophobia that directed the United States’s policies during the war. Although the same agency oversaw daily operation of both types of sites, it is important to highlight the differences between the treatment of American citizens of Japanese ancestry who were forcefully removed from their homes and communities within the West Coast Exclusion Zone and denied their civil rights and the Europeans who came to the United States first as “invited guests” of President Roosevelt and later worked to legally stay in the country.

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Museum of Tolerance interpret the causes and atrocities of the Holocaust and provide space for dialogue and learning about how intolerance fuels genocide. The museums are located, respectively, on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and in Los Angeles, which puts both institutions near large population centers on the East and West Coasts, but neither site has a direct connection to World War II and the United States’s approach to the European refugee crisis. In fact, the history of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter would provide a counterpoint to the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond, California, and the Japanese American internment sites in Idaho, Washington, Colorado, California, and Hawaii, and would broaden the National Park Service’s interpretation of domestic and international responses to the events of World War II.

The current use of Fort Ontario State Historic Site and the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, including tours, education programs, exhibits, and a display of objects that once belonged to the refugees, has demonstrated that there are abundant opportunities for interpretation, education, and public use. The site is currently open to the public, and a variety of interpretive programs have been designed for a range of age groups and interests.

The refugee camp of Fort Ontario is not yet represented and protected as an entity in the national park system or by any other federal agency. Fort Ontario State Historic Site interprets the military history of the fortification, but the state historic site boundary does not include several extant buildings (circa 1903) that directly supported the War Relocation Authority’s activities at the site between August 1944 and February 1946. Therefore, the resources in the study area are not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment and would enhance and expand existing resources in the system.

Summary

This study concludes that Fort Ontario resources associated with the European refugee shelter meet the suitability criterion. The addition of the study area to the national park system would substantially add to its ability to tell stories associated with NPS Thematic Framework themes “4. Shaping the Political Landscape” and “8. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community.” Currently, there is no direct representation of the United States’s diplomatic involvement or response to European refugees during World War II in the national park system; thus, the addition of this site would fill a gap. Also, there is no site outside the national park system that has a historical connection to how the United States and its citizens responded to news of the Holocaust occurring in Europe during World War II. The study area is associated with a period when 982 European refugees were brought to Fort Ontario during World War II and is the only European refugee camp established in the United States. The site is suitable as an addition to the national park system based on the character, quality, quantity, and rarity of the resource and for the educational and interpretive potential of Fort Ontario as a refugee camp.

CONCLUSION: SUITABILITY FINDINGS

The World War II–era resources at Fort Ontario found to be nationally significant in chapter 3 also meet criterion 2 (suitability). The nationally significant resources represented in the Fort Ontario study area are not already represented in the national park system or protected in similar ways by other entities or organizations. Therefore, these resources are further evaluated in this study under the feasibility criterion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FEASIBILITY

This chapter describes the National Park Service's analysis of whether study resources are feasible as a new unit of the national park system.

Study area resources that meet the criteria for national significance and suitability in the previous chapters must also meet the feasibility criterion. According to *NPS Management Policies 2006*, to be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, a resource must be:

1. of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries), and
2. capable of efficient administration by the National Park Service at a reasonable cost.

METHODOLOGY FOR FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

The National Park Service considers a variety of factors in evaluating feasibility for study area resources, such as the following:

- size
- boundary configurations
- current and potential uses of the study area and surrounding lands
- landownership patterns
- public enjoyment potential
- costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration, and operation
- access
- current and potential threats to the resources
- existing degradation of resources
- staffing requirements
- local planning and zoning
- the level of local and general public support (including landowners)
- the economic/socioeconomic impacts of designation as a unit of the national park system

The National Park Service operates with a legislative mandate to preserve its resources unimpaired for public enjoyment, and it is assumed that the park units it manages will be maintained under this mandate indefinitely. However, being designated as a national park unit does not automatically ensure funding or staffing for new units. Newly designated park

units must compete for limited funds, with over 400 units existing within the National Park Service.

Areas that might be significant, suitable, and technically feasible for designation often face feasibility and sustainability challenges due to significant competing needs across the agency. The introduction of new units can exacerbate the National Park Service's repair and maintenance backlog and further strain budgetary constraints.

A special resource study provides a preliminary analysis to help understand the basic costs associated with acquiring lands for park purposes and establishing initial operations. However, the full costs of acquiring and maintaining a site as a national park unit are not currently fully understood and are influenced by factors such as the existing landscape, the condition of facilities, and ongoing preservation needs. Any planned facility development is expected to be modest and will be carefully analyzed for long-term sustainability and potential trade-offs. Such projects must also compete with other deserving initiatives within the agency.

Communities should be mindful of long-standing trends indicating that most NPS units experience modest levels of visitation. The estimated costs for acquisition, development, and operation of a site are likely to be modest, with any new spending being critically assessed and prioritized against the agency's existing financial obligations, including its repair and maintenance backlog.

Additionally, the process of establishing a new national park unit typically unfolds gradually over decades rather than years. It would likely take several years, at least, for the National Park Service to staff and begin operations at any newly designated unit to even a modest extent.

DATA COLLECTION AND SITE VISIT

As part of the SRS process, the National Park Service conducted multiple resource visits in 2019, 2020, and 2022, during which NPS staff gathered information on the criteria considerations for feasibility and the need for direct NPS management, presented in chapter 6. During all on-resource visits, property owners (or delegates), local officials and representatives, and other interested stakeholders were consulted for feedback and resource information. Information related to the current condition of resources was collected, and cost estimates were developed based on information available during the resource visits and additional data such as construction documents and drawings. These cost estimates accounted for potential one-time facility improvements, if included in a new national park unit. Gross cost estimates are presented in fiscal year 2023 dollar amounts and include base construction, federal management, contingency, and design and compliance costs.

There are three options for the feasibility findings: the resource is *feasible* as a potential national park unit or part of a national park unit, the resource is *not feasible* (or infeasible) as a potential national park unit or part of a national park unit, or the resource is *conditionally feasible* when the reason it is currently infeasible could change in the future or require that

certain conditions are met before being determined feasible. Sites noted to be conditionally feasible could be reevaluated at a future time if their circumstances change.

FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

Size and Boundary Configuration

Given the positive findings for criteria 1 and 2 (national significance and suitability, respectively), the feasibility analysis focuses on historic resources directly associated with Fort Ontario's use as an emergency refugee shelter between President Roosevelt's June 9, 1944, press conference announcing the creation of a European refugee shelter in the United States and the formal closing of the Fort Ontario shelter in February 1946.

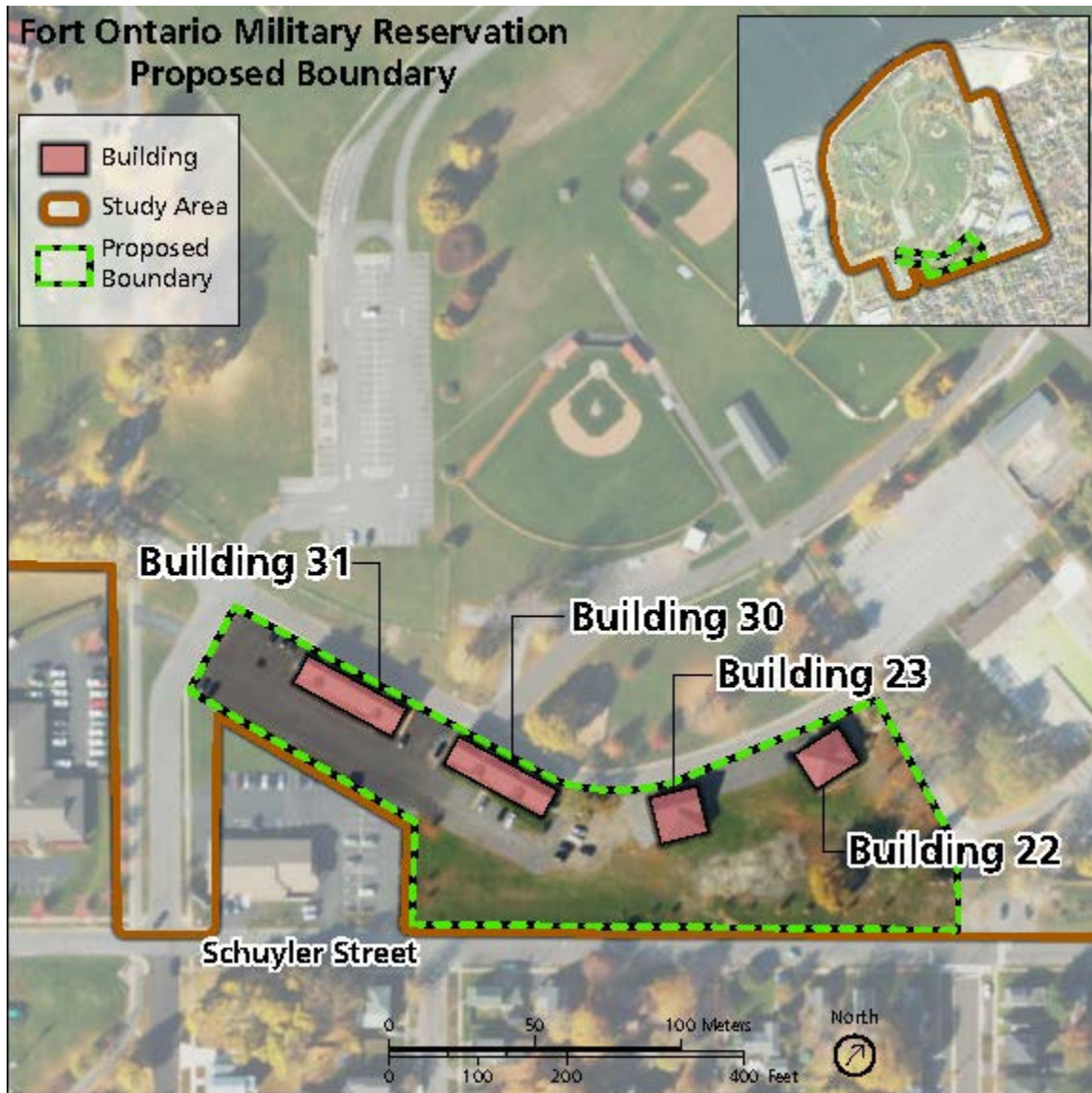
The current 26.4-acre Fort Ontario State Historic Site including the core fortification and enclosed historic buildings, post cemetery, Fort Ontario Holocaust Memorial, and parking lots would be excluded from the initial boundary configuration. The buildings and cultural landscape within the core fortification have been restored to an 1860s appearance and do not have as strong a connection with the activities of the refugees and the buildings. Historic resources currently protected as part of the New York state historic site would not need to be included in a potential NPS unit boundary.

Of the surviving buildings that predate World War II and the refugee shelter on the City of Oswego property, Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 retain their overall appearances dating to the refugee shelter period and would create an approximately 2.5-acre contiguous campus that could be managed by the National Park Service.

The following 1903–1905 buildings are not included in the potential boundary configuration:

- **Building 25—Gymnasium / Ponzi Recreation Center.** Building 25 was last used as the Ponzi Recreation Center over a decade ago, and the building has condition issues related to water infiltration and general deterioration. While the building is directly associated with refugee shelter activities and served as a recreation center for European refugees at the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, the National Park Service estimates that restoring the building would cost over \$3.6 million. Due to this cost and the building being separated from the other 1903–1905 buildings by the massive US Army Reserve building and other City of Oswego recreation facilities, this study does not recommend including Building 25 in the potential boundary configuration.
- **Building 32—Stables / Ice Rink.** The former post stables were incorporated into the Anthony J. Crisafulli Ice Skating Rink, a 100-foot-by-235-foot corrugated metal-clad addition completed in 1985. The 1903–1905 building is dwarfed by the massive rink addition and is still operated as a local ice skating facility. This study does not recommend including Building 32 in a potential boundary configuration due to the insensitive addition, the City of Oswego's continued use of the site, and its discontinuous location.

- **Building 34—Post Shop / Sign Shop.** The former post shop is located within the fenced Traffic Department yard. This study does not recommend including Building 34 in a potential boundary configuration due to its continued use by the City of Oswego and its location.
- **7th Street tunnel.** Given the complexities of land ownership, maintenance, and management for local roadways and overpasses that serve local neighborhoods and businesses and the tunnel's current deteriorated condition, this study does not recommend including the 7th Street tunnel or the cultural landscape immediately around it in any potential new national park system unit boundary.



MAP 4. POTENTIAL BOUNDARY CONFIGURATION

A potential boundary around the approximately 2.5 acres that includes Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 is of sufficient size and configuration to ensure resource protection and access for the public; the contiguous resources would provide adequate space for NPS management and administration and would preserve the only surviving portion of the cultural landscape that is similar in appearance and design to what would have been present during World War II and the operation of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. Other areas within the New York state historic site, such as the core fortification and the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Memorial, would complement the visitor experience and help interpret the significance but would not need to be included within a potential NPS boundary.

Surrounding Lands and Landownership Patterns

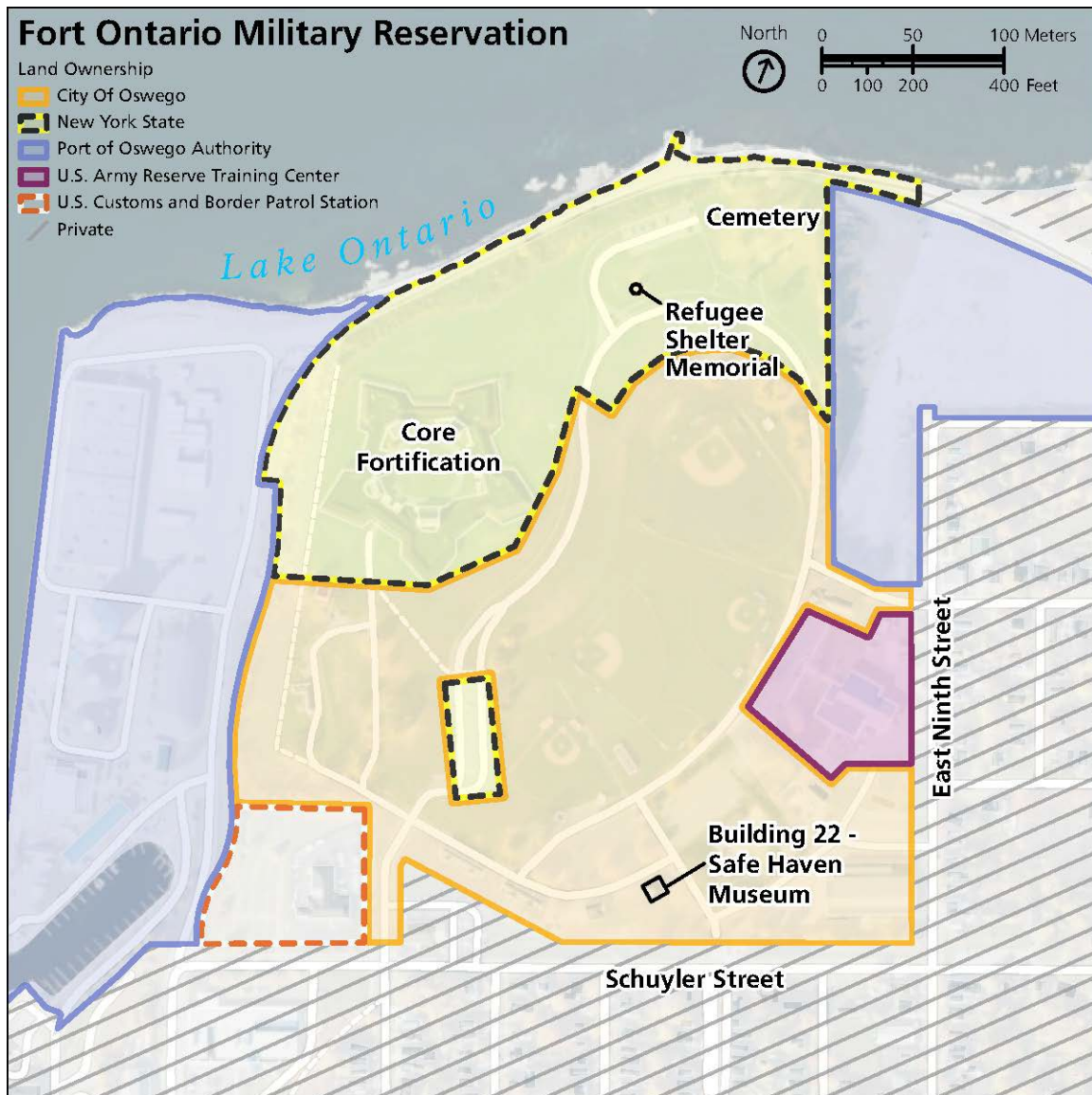
Currently, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation owns and maintains the Fort Ontario State Historic Site, which consists of the core fortification and the historic buildings enclosed in the fort, the post cemetery, and two parking lots (approximately 26.4 acres). There was no indication to the study team that the state intends to lease, sell, or otherwise diminish the total number of acres within their state historic site. There was also no indication that the state intends to close the historic site, significantly change the interpretive themes or programming offered to the public, or demolish or construct facilities in ways that would impact potential NPS unit resource protection or visitor experiences if a new park unit is established.

The Port of Oswego Authority is a state public-benefit corporation with leadership appointed by the New York State governor. The port owns a 27.36-acre parcel adjacent to the fort's western edge and downslope next to the Oswego River as well as the former Fitzgibbons Boiler Works in the 12.9-acre parcel in northeast corner of the historic military reservation across the street from Building 25. The port also owns active rail lines between the Fort Ontario State Historic Site's northern boundary and Lake Ontario. The port has publicly discussed the potential for additional development to support Port of Oswego Authority operations. There is concern that taller structures at the port could intrude visually on the visitor experience within the cultural landscapes at the state historic site or City of Oswego property. Given the location of Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 on the other side of the former fort property, taller structures at the port may not directly interfere with resource protection and visitor experience, although more would need to be known about the port's plans as they develop.

The US Border Patrol's property is located in the southwest corner of the former fort between the main visitor entrance to the state historic site and the Port of Oswego. This federal installation is not visible directly from the proposed boundary configuration. The study team did not learn of any plans for major new construction or other activities that could impact resource protection or visitor experience at Buildings 22, 23, 30, or 31.

The City of Oswego owns the remainder of the historic military reservation (42.7 acres) except for the Oswego Port Authority and US Border Patrol parcels, which are currently not visible from the potential boundary configuration. The study team found no plans for major new construction or demolition on City of Oswego land in the study area.

Current land ownership patterns support the feasibility of establishing a new unit of the national park system that includes historic buildings associated with the World War II European refugee shelter at Fort Ontario.



MAP 5. STUDY AREA PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Current and Potential Uses of the Study Area

Following the fort's decommissioning after World War II, the federal government transferred the entire fort and the surrounding landscape to state ownership. Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 were within the lands conveyed by the State of New York to the city in the 1950s, which included this requirement:

This grant is given and accepted for local park, recreation, playground, street or highway purposes only. . . title and interest hereby granted shall forthwith revert to The People of the State of New York in the event that the whole or any part of

the land hereby granted and conveyed shall not at any time be used for local park, recreation, playground, street or highway purposes by the City of Oswego or shall be used for any other purposes.⁵

Any new national park system unit's potential property interest options (fee-simple ownership, easements, etc.) to create a manageable unit must be reviewed with the City of Oswego and the State of New York to ensure compliance with this deed restriction. It is possible that "local park, recreation, playground, street or highway purposes" might be broadly defined as the kinds of interpretive, educational, and recreational activities that a national park system unit may offer local residents as well as visitors from afar, or it may mean those services must in some way prioritize local resident access and participation; it also may mean certain roles, responsibilities, and agreements between levels of government working in partnership. It is beyond the scope of this special resource study's criteria evaluation to resolve such questions, and it would be impossible to do so without a specific description of a new national park system unit. This study therefore notes defining the deed restriction as an important potential step, should a national park system unit ever be created on City of Oswego land at Fort Ontario.

The 1988 grant documentation provided to the study team did not reveal any perpetual land use restrictions, nor review and approval processes for changing land ownership within the grant-funded area. However, this would also need to be reviewed with the city and the state to ensure compliance with any perpetual grant funding restrictions on land use or the transfer of land rights. In any case, potential national park system unit activities within the boundary described above would likely be consistent with the intent of the urban cultural campus funded by the grant.

This study found no indication that the City of Oswego intends to make major changes to the types and intensities of uses or the mix of tenants currently offering a wide range of services and experiences. Restrictions imposed by the land conveyance from the state in the 1950s limit the types of acceptable uses, which provides some assurance about consistency of uses over time near any new national park system unit.

During the public comment phase and throughout the study, numerous parties noted the importance of maintaining existing uses on City of Oswego lands. Public comments received indicated support for a new national park system unit as long as Little League program use of the fields and other local public recreation uses were not disrupted. The facilities appear to be in frequent use by local residents, who expressed strong support for maintaining Fort Ontario's recreational opportunities. These include the wide range of activities on site: Little League play on the parade grounds and in the batting cages, the Crisafulli Ice Rink, the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, the community outdoor swimming pool, the Little League program's Hot Stove Building, the Art Association of Oswego Inc., the Oswego Players Inc. community theater, and the Oswego County Head Start program. The US Army Reserve Training Center next to Building 25 also is active and supported by reservists and local residents. The city's sign shop in a small historic building in between the pool, the US

5. Deeds are on file with the Oswego County Office of the County Clerk (46 East Bridge Street) and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Army Reserve, and the ice rink is not used by the public, although it serves a public use and does not intrude on nearby activities.

Although the potential boundary configuration includes Buildings 23, 30, and 31, fee-simple ownership or direct management by the National Park Service would not be required to protect the cultural landscape and World War II-era appearance of the historic buildings; the City of Oswego could retain the buildings and continue to lease them to nonprofit organizations that support the recreational focus stipulated in the 1950s land transfers. Designating a potential national park system unit would not impose on, or require significant changes to other City of Oswego uses at the site. Exceptions would include accommodating additional vehicular and foot traffic, shared parking solutions, and wayfinding and signage needs.

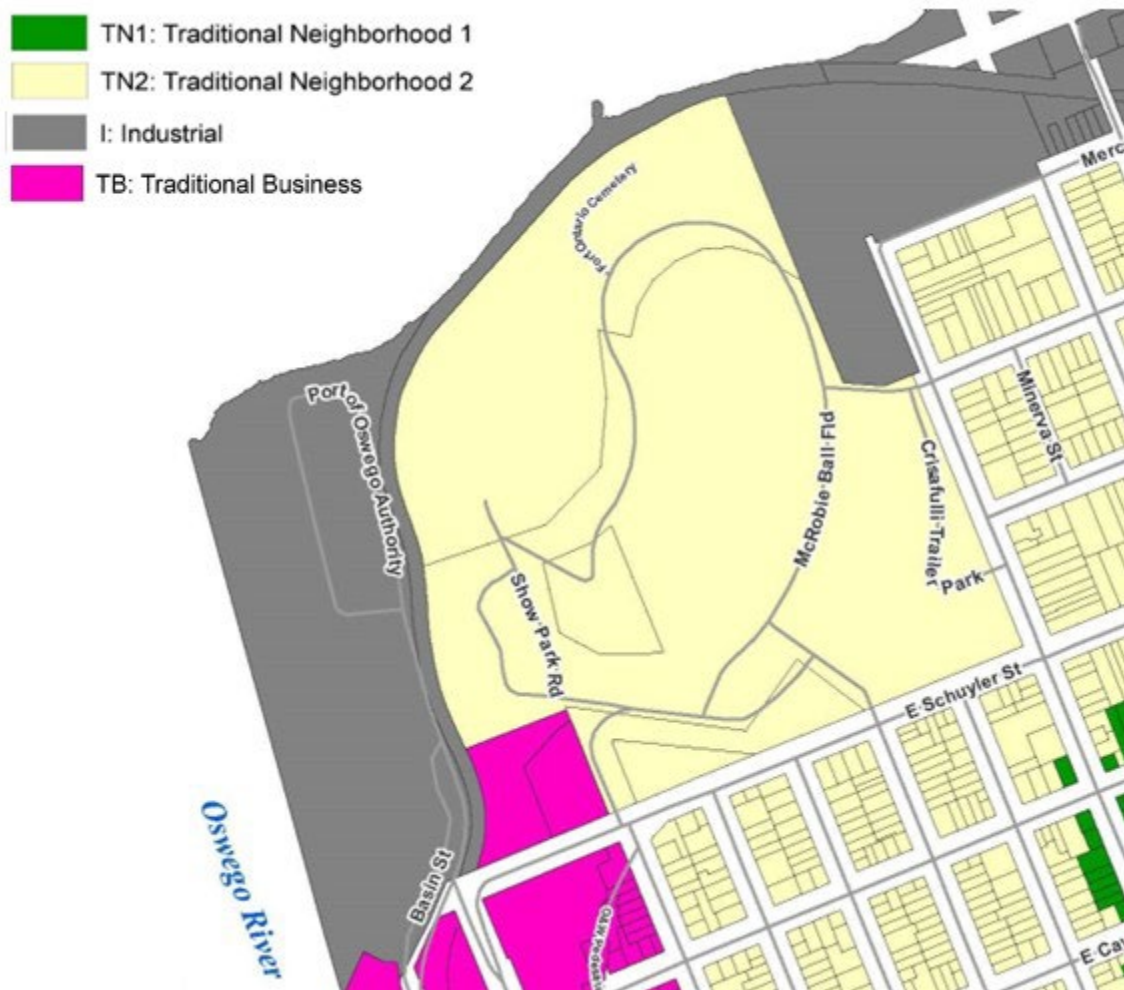
Building 22 (former guardhouse / Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum) is within view of the community pool, public parking between the pool and batting cage, and the 7th Street tunnel, which was the main entrance to the fort during the refugee shelter period. The roadway above the tunnel, E. Schuyler Street, serves large residential neighborhoods south and east of the fort. It seems unlikely the road will be removed or realigned, which could significantly impact resource protection and visitor experience at Building 22.

Local Planning and Zoning

The former military reservation falls within three primary land use zones identified in the zoning code: Industrial, Traditional Neighborhood 2, and Traditional Business (see map 6). The zoning districts as outlined on the zoning map guide land uses in accordance with a comprehensive plan including the City of Oswego 2020 Vision Plan and the City of Oswego 2020 Strategic Plan.

- The Traditional Neighborhood 2 zone (light yellow on the zoning map) includes the current Fort Ontario State Historic Site and the City of Oswego lands. The purpose of this land use zone is to provide for a compatible mixture of private residences of varying density and commercial uses, where the permitted commercial uses historically have coincided with residential use. This land use regulation zone applies to large areas throughout the City of Oswego. Uses permitted by right are single family dwellings, religious institutions, and schools. Uses requiring a special use permit include: civic uses, general; public and commercial parking; professional offices; public utility facilities (which are special uses in all Oswego zones); clubs; community centers; tourist homes; home occupations; two-family dwellings and certain domestic dwelling renovations/expansions; antique sales; consumer services; funeral services; hospital, medical, and dental services; group residences; and nursing homes.
- The Traditional Business zone (pink on the zoning map) includes the US Customs and Border Protection property east of the Port of Oswego Authority and west of Fort Ontario State Historic site. The purpose of this land use zone is to establish a transition between the Traditional Downtown District and the Commercial Business District. This zone emphasizes compatible pedestrian and vehicular traffic and preservation of the city's cultural, historic, and architectural heritage.

- The Industrial zone (gray on the zoning map) encompasses the area managed by the Port of Oswego including the land between the state historic site and Lake Ontario occupied by rail lines and the northeastern area of the former fort near Building 25 referred to as the Fitzgibbons site. This land was previously owned by a boiler company and is currently used by the Port of Oswego Authority for storing oversized wind turbines before they are shipped elsewhere. The purpose of this land use zone is to establish a suitable location for industrial uses within the city. Because industrial uses may have considerable impacts upon infrastructure, utilities, transportation, wastewater treatment, and electricity, the location of this zone and its standards ensure that industrial users have access to these resources.



MAP 6. CITY OF OSWEGO ZONING (OSWEGO COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM & PLANNING 2019)

In sum, Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 are within a City of Oswego local land use regulation zone (Traditional Neighborhood 2) that would potentially allow for the creation of a new national park system unit as a “civic use.”

The evaluation of Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 meets this factor of feasibility analysis based on current land ownership, local planning and zoning, and land use patterns in the area. The addition of Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 to the national park system is considered feasible under this factor.

Public Enjoyment Potential

As previously noted, the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Museum in Building 22 provides opportunities for visitors to learn about the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter during World War II, a history that many commenters expressed is not well known by the public. The museum is open seven days a week from Memorial Day to Labor Day and Thursday through Sunday for the remainder of the year. The museum space was updated in 2020 with interpretive panels and includes an electronic app that visitors can download to their personal device to learn more about the history. The museum also includes a library with historical books on the Holocaust, firsthand refugee accounts of their experiences, and vintage and exclusive photographs.

Similarly, visitors can walk from the museum to Fort Ontario State Historic Site and experience the larger landscape where refugees were stationed during their time in Oswego. During public comment, Fort Ontario's tangible resources were noted as highly valuable for the visitor experience. Many noted the important role that the fort played in the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the American Civil War, World War I, and the crucial role it played during World War II. While the fort itself would not be designated as a component of the potential national park unit, the fort's short distance from the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum enhances visitor opportunities for meaningful experiences and connection to our nation's history.

Ancient and ongoing associations between the study area and Haudenosaunee Nations may also be a source for partnership and education, although any research and programming should be done in consultation with sovereign nations.

Should the site become designated, partnership opportunities may allow visitors to engage beyond Building 22 and walk the surrounding landscape in the footsteps of the refugees. The site offers innumerable stories of the human spirit that lend themselves to interpretive opportunities to help visitors connect with the site. The oral history stories and personal experience as told by those who lived it offer opportunities for engaging, meaningful, and relatable experiences for visitors.

Comments also highlighted some of the natural resources of the area, noting the pastoral setting, shoreline of Lake Ontario, and view of the Oswego River that provide opportunities for visitor experience. In addition, many of these natural resources draw the connection between what visitors can experience now and what the refugees would have experienced during their time at the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter.

With the current infrastructure in place, the public has opportunities to explore the Safe Haven landscape. Visitors to the Safe Haven site would be able to readily experience the site due to the existing road network, which provides easy vehicle and pedestrian navigation (see the "Access" section below). During public comment, many commenters voiced concern that

the history of the Safe Haven refugees was not widely known. For many, this was a motivating reason for supporting NPS designation, expecting that the broader reach and resources of a federal entity would help bring the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter to the attention of wider audiences.

The Safe Haven site possesses many opportunities for visitors to connect with and uniquely experience and learn about this significant and unique aspect of American history. Therefore, the addition of Fort Ontario's World War II resources to the national park system is considered feasible under this factor.

Access

Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 are located approximately 1 mile northeast of downtown Oswego, which had a population of approximately 17,000 during the 2020 census. While the distance from the city to the buildings is relatively walkable, most visitors drive to the state historic site and surrounding area, which includes the museum.

Overall, the current condition of the Fort Ontario on- and off-street parking options appears to offer sufficient parking capacity potential. On-street parking is available adjacent to and near the historic buildings. At various times of the year, it is possible that visitors to either may compete for parking with local citizens participating in popular recreational, cultural, and professional activities.

The potential for new NPS visitors and staff to use existing off-street parking would have to be addressed with the City of Oswego, managers of the existing facilities, and citizens and community groups. At Building 22 (former guardhouse), a parking lot is located across a small street between the community pool, batting cage, and skating rink less than 0.1 miles from the museum building. There are existing parking facilities next to Buildings 30 and 31 although it is unknown if any capacity could be shared or what agreements may be required. Additional parking lots are near the City of Oswego skating rink and the state historic site's public parking (at a distance of 1,500 feet, just over 0.25 miles). In all cases, the land is flat, with paved roads and sidewalks surrounded by mowed turf and minimal barriers for pedestrian access.

The museum offers an accessible ramp from the street. However, it is likely that some accessibility improvements may be warranted, should the site be designated a unit of the national park system. The museum is currently open to the public on a seasonal basis. During the summer season (i.e., Memorial Day to Labor Day), the museum is open daily from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. In the off-season (i.e., Labor Day to Memorial Day), the museum is only open Thursday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. In addition, group tours are available if scheduled in advance.

Oswego, New York, offers a multitude of visitor services and accommodations convenient to Fort Ontario, including lodging, restaurants, retail, and travel destinations. The nearest major airport to Oswego is Syracuse-Hancock International Airport, which is approximately 45 minutes by private vehicle. Alternately, travelers may purchase a bus ticket from Syracuse airport to Oswego, although the travel time is approximately two hours. Once in town,

Oswego County Public Transit offers regularly scheduled services for those without a vehicle, including a stop at Fort Ontario State Historic Site.

Two parcels within the former Fort Ontario boundary may have higher threat profiles than surrounding properties; at some future time this could increase security concerns or impact visitor access and experiences at Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31. The US Army Reserve Center, 444th Engineer Company (60 East 9th Street) is approximately 500 feet northeast of the easternmost historic building in the potential boundary configuration, Building 22. The Oswego Border Patrol Station at 19 East Schuyler Street in the southwest corner of the former military reservation oversees activities along 36.5 miles of international border between the United States and Canada that is comprised solely of water (Lake Ontario) and over 5,300 square miles of central New York State. Both government facilities likely store equipment and materials and support staff, activities, and events that could be the target of anti-government action, although the study team found no evidence of such activity in the recent past.

The National Park Service concludes that Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 have sufficient access by personal vehicle and public transportation. The area is approximately 35 miles from the nearest major airport, and the existing infrastructure and transportation services provide relatively easy access to the Safe Haven site. The site is walkable from downtown Oswego. Current visitor access is adequate to support visitor use and administration of the site, as evidenced by current management and visitation levels to the nearby state historic site and Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum (n.d.b). No significant safety or security threats were identified. Therefore, the addition of the historic buildings to the national park system is considered feasible under this factor.

Level of Local and General Public Support (Including Landowners)

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the National Park Service hosted a 60-day public comment period including two virtual public meetings during the fall of 2021 in lieu of an in-person informational presentation. Individuals were asked to submit comments and participate in virtual public meetings from September 1 to November 1, 2021. The vast majority of the 102 correspondences received by the National Park Service expressed strong support for designating Fort Ontario as a unit of the national park system. This support mentioned resources associated with the military fort as well as the World War II European refugee shelter. Multiple commenters expressed the belief that the National Park Service was the appropriate entity to protect and manage the site due to the expertise, funding, and visibility the bureau offers. Two commenters expressed opposition to national park unit designation on the basis of the NPS budget deficit and maintenance backlog and fears that the National Park Service may shy away from telling the whole history and significance of the site.

Local officials and representatives of Fort Ontario State Historic Site and Safe Haven Inc. expressed enthusiasm to work with the National Park Service and share history and resources of Fort Ontario with a national audience. Members of the public and members of the Oswego City Council voiced concerns over the future of the recreational facilities located within the NRHP boundary that are managed by the City of Oswego. There was strong desire to allow the city to maintain public access to all the existing facilities and continue their

current community use. The City of Oswego was not interested in conveying ballfields, swimming pool, ice rink, or any other public recreation facility to the National Park Service.

Existing Degradation of the Resources

The historic Fort Ontario Military Reservation has been managed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the City of Oswego since the end of the 1940s. The state office has restored the core fortification, interior stone buildings, and surrounding lawn to its circa-1840 appearance in accordance with site management and interpretation documents. The City of Oswego leases Building 22 to Safe Haven Inc. for use as the Safe Haven Museum and has supported the restoration of the building and exhibit development. Buildings 23, 30, and 31 were included in the 1988 grant improvements and have been occupied as part of the cultural campus.

Current and Potential Threats to the Resources

Climate change–driven lake levels may be a potential threat to the broader Fort Ontario site. The military installation’s location on the shore of Lake Ontario creates the potential for erosion associated with rising lake levels and shipping traffic, but these effects do not impact the historic resources situated on the bluff overlooking the Oswego and lakeshore; the US Border Patrol and railroad right-of-way that skirts the north edge of the historic district boundary is more prone to erosion from wave action and changing lake levels. Increases in precipitation and humidity could impact historic building materials, stress HVAC and electrical systems, or damage building exteriors and features of the landscape (US Global Change Research Program [USGCRP] 2024). Should a national park unit be created here, more thorough assessments of potential sea level rise and climate impacts would help site managers address threats should they arise. Additional considerations for climate change are noted under operational costs if the National Park Service were to establish a new unit associated with Fort Ontario.

Within the last decade, the Port of Oswego Authority has proposed several projects that would increase the storage space and activity at Oswego harbor, which borders the Fort Ontario State Historic Site to the west. A 22,000-metric-ton grain storage and handling facility opened in October 2021 as the Central New York Agriculture Export Center. The port recorded a 300% increase between shipping levels of 2021 and 2022, and the port received foreign trade zone status in February 2023, which allows goods to be stored at port facilities indefinitely.

Correspondences received during the study’s public comment period urged preservation of the fort’s viewshed to avoid large or modern development adjacent to the study area. Multiple commenters expressed concern related to development and maintenance. Commenters expressed concerns about a new Port Authority development (to the west of Fort Ontario State Historic Site) which might “ruin” the view from the fort. Comments noted that the eastern and western viewscapes are already impeded by a nuclear power plant and the city of Oswego, respectively.

The Port of Oswego Authority also uses the Fitzgibbons Boiler Works site on Mitchell Street across the street to the northeast of Building 25 for large equipment storage (figure 46). These

activities and any additional harbor development could impact viewsheds and visitor experiences at the Fort Ontario site, although it is unknown if they would be visible from the considered boundary.



FIGURE 46. FITZGIBBONS BOILER SITE, VIEW FROM MITCHELL STREET NORTHEAST OF BUILDING 22, AUGUST 2023

Costs Associated with Acquisition, Development, Restoration, and Operation

In a special resource study, analysis of feasibility provides an initial opportunity to understand the magnitude of the costs required for acquiring park lands and establishing operations. New units and additions require an investment of time and money to inventory and document resources; develop management or treatment plans for those resources; develop educational and interpretive materials; and develop and improve facilities for visitors and park operations, including facilities that would meet legislative requirements for accessibility. The full costs to acquire and sustain the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter site as a unit of the national park system would be affected by the level of visitation, requirements for resource preservation, future planning outcomes, and the desired level of facility development. Although the details of Fort Ontario costs as an NPS unit are unknown, generalizations can be made based on knowledge of current management and through comparisons to similar units elsewhere in the National Park Service. This study assumes the direct NPS management or ownership of Building 22 (former guardhouse / Safe Haven

Museum) and preservation easements with the City of Oswego to maintain the exteriors of Buildings 23, 30, and 31.

Acquisition

Costs for land acquisition vary depending upon the final property boundary configuration and the level of existing development on the site. While the study team communicated with the City of Oswego, no formal discussions or agreements were created, which is typical for a special resource study.

Costs associated with land donation such as legal fees, title history work, subdividing, and transfer are viewed as negligible to the overall cost that would be incurred by the National Park Service to acquire and maintain the site. Before or upon acquisition of any property, the National Park Service may conduct an environmental survey and/or site assessment to identify possible contaminants and evaluate any environmental liabilities. Such an assessment and any necessary environmental remediation would have additional expenses.

Any future land acquisition would have to consider larger agencywide and regional priorities for purchasing new park lands. The establishment of a new national park unit by Congress does not guarantee funding or the purchase of lands, and any improvements would require further cost analysis and planning. If Congress were to designate a new park unit, there may be no immediate need to change existing land ownership. Any property that is considered for inclusion in a national park unit is anticipated to be acquired from willing sellers at fair market value or from willing donors. Changes to land ownership may occur in the future, while management of the site could be taken over by the National Park Service.

Development/Restoration

Development costs of national park system additions vary widely, depending on existing and desired conditions and facilities. New national park system units frequently require investments of time and money to inventory and document resources in the unit, develop management or treatment plans for those resources, develop educational and interpretive materials, and develop and improve facilities for visitors and park operations, including facilities that would meet legislative requirements for accessibility. Building 22 was restored prior to the Safe Haven Museum's opening in 2002 and actively welcomes guests, while Buildings 30 and 31 are currently used by local nonprofits and Building 23 is used for storage.

Should Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 be designated as a unit of the national park system, planning would be undertaken to determine appropriate treatment of the historic structures and development of additional visitor facilities. In August 2023, a representative of NPS Historic Architecture and Conservation Engineering Center (HACE) visited Fort Ontario to create preliminary estimates for restoration projects associated with the 1903–1905 buildings in the southeast section of the study area.

One-time restoration costs are those necessary to get the historic building to meet the minimum accessibility, safety, and structural standards per federal law and NPS policy to allow the site to become open to the public as part of an NPS unit. The cost estimates represented in tables 1 and 2 are based on condition assessments conducted by staff of the Historic Architecture and Conservation Engineering Center in fall 2022 and include

predesign/design costs, compliance, NPS management of the projects, and construction contingency. Development costs for Building 22 are estimated to be approximately \$1.7 million in 2022 dollars (table 1). Estimated costs would be expected to increase in the future in relation to the value of the dollar, inflation, and the scope of individual projects as they are being formulated or implemented by the National Park Service.

Table 1. HACE Development Cost Estimates for Building 22 (Safe Haven Museum)

Anticipated Project	Estimated Cost in 2022 Dollars	Notes
Replace slate roof	\$185,000	Includes replacing slate roofing system, repairing deteriorated sheathing, and replacing all existing metal flashing in kind
Replace metal gutters and downspouts	\$25,000	
Exterior wood trim repairs	\$35,000	
Exterior brick masonry repairs	\$15,000	Includes repointing of chimney
Rehabilitate wood windows	\$75,000	Includes new interior storm windows
Rehabilitate wood doors	\$15,000	
Exterior painting	\$45,000	Includes masonry coatings
Exterior accessibility upgrades	\$45,000	Adjustments to parking and walkways for ABAAS compliance
Hazmat remediation	\$30,000	Assumes presence of lead-based paints and glazing materials
Upgrade electrical system	\$60,000	
Install new energy efficient HVAC	\$150,000	
Install fire suppression	\$120,000	
Alarm and security upgrades	\$40,000	
Upgrade basement French drain system	\$35,000	
Rehabilitate administrative areas	\$25,000	
Rehabilitate existing kitchenette and accessible bathrooms	\$65,000	
Rehabilitate exhibit area	\$95,000	Includes painting, new flooring, and preservation of pressed metal ceilings
Upgrade existing exhibits for universal accessibility	\$475,000	
Create historic structure report	\$150,000	

Anticipated Project	Estimated Cost in 2022 Dollars	Notes
Estimated Total for Building 22	\$1,685,000	

Total cost of facility ownership analysis estimates life-cycle costs of a physical asset, including all activities that occur over its lifetime and the organizational resources and capacity required to perform those activities. The total cost of facility ownership calculator estimates life-cycle costs based on the square footage, current condition, and number of systems in each building and includes inflation rates for the life cycle. The estimated costs summarized in this study are based on current condition assessment.

According to the NPS total cost of facility ownership calculator, the 50-year total cost of facility ownership for Building 22 is approximately \$3.8 million in 2022 dollars. Using current condition assessments and best available data, the total cost would be approximately \$3.8 million (in 2022 dollars) over the course of 50 years (table 2). Costs would be expected to increase over time due to inflation and other factors.

Table 2. Total Cost of Facility Ownership for Building 22

Resource	Square Footage	Estimated Development Cost in 2022 Dollars	50-Year Life Cycle Costs	50-Year Total Cost of Facility Ownership
Building 22	2,800	\$1,685,000	\$2,147,865	\$3,832,865

Specific visitor and operational facilities would be identified in a future management planning process for the unit. The cost of new NPS developments at the site would vary with the level of implementation but would likely be minimized due to the work and preservation that has been done to date. Because of current budget shortfalls and a servicewide effort to reduce spending on the construction, operation, and maintenance of new facilities, it is unlikely that the National Park Service would be able to implement many improvements in the near future solely with internal resources. However, the National Park Service could pursue implementation of these types of improvements through partnership efforts and should also consider costs associated with planning, such as a completing a general management plan, to inform decisions and park management of the site.

Operation

National park system unit operating costs vary widely, depending on the overall size, types and quantities of resources managed, number of visitors, level of programs offered, safety and security issues, and many other factors. In fiscal year 2023, annual operations and maintenance costs for comparable units such as Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historic Park, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Minidoka National Historic Site, and Roger Williams National Memorial ranged from \$685,000 to \$1.49 million (table 3). Based on the information presented in table 3, the

estimated park annual operating cost for a Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter unit ranges from \$650,000 to \$800,000 in 2023 dollars.⁶

Table 3. Annual Operating Costs and FTE at Comparable Units of the National Park System*

Unit of the National Park System	Park Base FTE (FY22)	Annual Operating Costs (FY23 Enacted)
Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, New York	2	\$685,000
Cedar Creek and Bell Grove National Historic Park, Virginia	7	\$1,020,000
Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, New York	11	\$1,488,000
Minidoka National Historic Site, Idaho	4	\$774,000
Roger Williams National Memorial, Rhode Island	5	\$815,000

*Based on the "Operations of the National Park System Organizations" table from the FY 2024 Green Book

At a minimum, the operating costs would include utilities, communications, and other miscellaneous expenses. Operating costs would also include NPS staffing. All long-term staffing, programming, and facilities commitments would be reviewed for long-term financial and operational sustainability. Personnel would be required to design and deliver programming (e.g., interpretation, exhibits, special events), perform administrative functions (budget, management, planning, and compliance), manage partnerships, and engage with local and national stakeholder communities. Law enforcement, as necessary, could continue to be provided by the municipal police. Currently, regular maintenance work is carried out by City of Oswego staff. If a unit were to be designated, there would be a variety of opportunities for partnerships that could include shared staffing and volunteer positions for operations.

Historical and archeological research and documentation meeting NPS cultural resource standards would likely occur in connection with site development, and these activities would incur additional costs. As an NPS unit, synthesizing this data into NPS systems and continuing research efforts to locate, protect, and preserve additional artifacts and features that support the site's historical significance would be needed. Artifacts from past archeological surveys and administrative records associated with the broader Fort Ontario historic site are managed by the New York State Division of Historic Preservation's Bureau of Historic Sites and would not be part of a future unit of the national park system. Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31, the refugee shelter landscape, and the associated research library/archive created by Safe Haven Inc. may also need a variety of resource management and treatment plans and studies, including but not limited to historic structure reports, archeological

6. As comparisons, the two French and Indian War forts that are designated NPS units—Fort Stanwix National Monument and Fort Necessity National Battlefield—each have 14–15 park base FTE and approximate \$1.8 million in annual operating costs.

surveys, and museum management documents. These documents would take time to prepare and require additional funding ranging from \$500,000 to \$800,000 in 2022 dollars.

Additional considerations for operating costs involve accounting for climate change. Primary climate change considerations at the Fort Ontario study area include increasing temperature and increasing extreme precipitation events (including heavy snowfall) (USGCRP 2024). The considerations could impact up-front and ongoing maintenance of the historic buildings and landscaping. The property will be subject to more annual days with a maximum temperature of or above 90°F, which may create additional stress on HVAC systems and could have direct effects on staff and visitor health (Risk Factor 2024). Increases in heat and precipitation could require more frequent maintenance on building exteriors and landscaping. Changing humidity levels could also promote mold growth or decay on historic building fabric. Onsite flooding does not appear to be a concern directly at Fort Ontario considering its location on the bluff above Lake Ontario, but it is a concern in the broader area, and increases in precipitation could lead to ground saturation and use impacts on wet soil (USGCRP 2024). Overall, the estimated costs of acquisition, development, and operations associated with Building 22 would be low to moderate compared to comparable sites in the national park system. Options for acquisition would have to be discussed with the City of Oswego, and any real estate transactions would be voluntary. Safe Haven Inc. and the City of Oswego have done substantial work to preserve Building 22, resulting in only a slight need for additional development. The site currently accommodates visitation and could continue to do so, although one-time development and restoration projects would be necessary to ensure any existing buildings incorporated into a new NPS unit meet federal standards and NPS policies. Lastly, while additional staffing would be needed for NPS operations and maintenance of the site, collaboration and partnerships with the current stakeholders and City of Oswego could reduce the unit's staffing needs.

In summary, overall costs and budgetary considerations associated with acquisition, potential development, and operations of a new unit interpreting the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter are projected to be minor to moderate in comparison to the majority of NPS units. While the establishment of any new national park unit will add to the overall costs of the system, the costs estimated for Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 represent a manageable and worthy investment for the National Park Service. Therefore, the addition of this portion of the historic Fort Ontario installation to the national park system is considered feasible under this factor.

Economic/Socioeconomic Impacts of National Park Unit Designation

The 2022 *National Park Service Visitor Spending Effects Report* analyzes and presents an estimated amount of annual dollars that visitors spend in gateway economies. The model uses information from visitor survey data, visitation data, and regional economic multipliers to generate estimates for visitor spending and economic contributions, or the “value added” of each unit in the national park system. Value added refers to the incremental, or net, increase in economic output that can be attributed to a particular activity or the price of its final output minus the cost of its inputs (the total of value added in a particular economy equals its gross domestic product.) In 2022, approximately 213 million national park visits contributed

\$23.9 billion to local gateway communities. The economic benefits of national parks to local businesses are well established, as visitors to these areas directly affect sectors including lodging, restaurants, retail, recreation industries, and transportation.

Estimates of these impacts for several nearby NPS units that are roughly comparable in terms of location, community size, and significance were evaluated to assess the anticipated economic value added by visitation to Fort Ontario. Table 4 shows annual visitation to similar or nearby national park units such as Fort Stanwix National Monument, Women’s Rights National Historical Park, and Saratoga National Historical Park from 2016 to 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and park closures significantly affected visitation in 2020 and 2021. Economic contributions for NPS units such as Fort Stanwix National Monument, Women’s Rights National Historical Park, and Saratoga National Historical Park are presented in figure 47. However, it is important to note that the Safe Haven Museum and Fort Ontario State Historic Site are established local heritage tourism destinations and therefore already contribute to the local economy. Consequently, unless visitation drastically increases, additional economic spending effects would likely be minimal to modest should a new unit of the national park system be designated in Oswego, New York.

Table 4. Annual Visitation to Nearby National Park Units from 2016 to 2022 (NPS Visitor Use Statistics)

Year	Fort Stanwix National Monument	Women’s Rights National Historical Park	Saratoga National Historical Park
2016	94,006	52,683	102,808
2017	106,936	61,806	97,781
2018	90,507	42,784	135,444
2019	97,412	39,064	145,118
2020*	24,134	8,237	73,825
2021*	45,684	22,847	70,682
2022	71,716	34,294	70,742

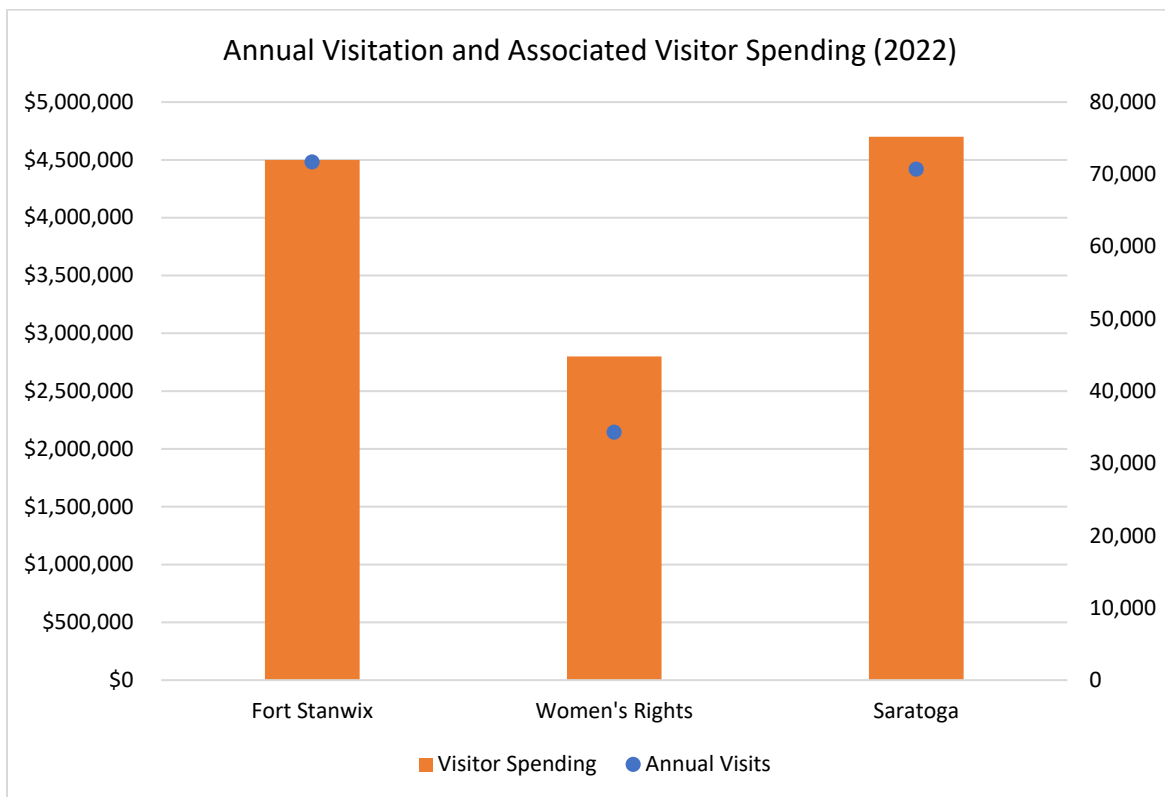


FIGURE 47. ANNUAL VISITATION AND ASSOCIATED VISITOR SPENDING FOR NEARBY NPS UNITS

While the impact on the local economy is uncertain, potential new unit designation is not expected to result in negative economic impacts and would likely support and complement current socioeconomic activities within the region. Therefore, the addition of Fort Ontario to the national park system is considered feasible under this factor.

SUMMARY OF FEASIBILITY

The portion of the Fort Ontario study area including Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 meets all the factors considered under the analysis of feasibility. The area surrounding Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 is of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment. Current land ownership patterns, economic and socioeconomic impacts, and potential threats to the resources do not appear to preclude the study area from becoming a new unit of the national park system.

The area has extensive local and national support for inclusion of the study area within the national park system. There is public satisfaction with the visitor opportunities offered by the Safe Haven Museum and Fort Ontario State Historic Site but also an interest in expanding them and a desire to see permanent protection as an NPS unit. Costs would be associated with upgrading the limited visitor facilities to meet the standards the public expects to encounter at an NPS unit, and costs would be associated with maintaining the historic structures and cultural landscape. However, the costs associated with establishment,

development, and long-term operation and maintenance of the portion of the Fort Ontario study area as a new unit of the national park system are relatively low.

Notably, the designation of a new unit in the national park system does not automatically guarantee that funding or staffing to administer that new unit would be appropriated by Congress. Any newly designated national park unit would have to compete with 429 existing park units for limited funding and resources within the current fiscally constrained environment.

As evidenced by the NPS maintenance backlog, the agency has greater demands for cyclic and recurring maintenance than the funding that is currently available allows. The addition of historic resources at Fort Ontario to the national park system would likely further dilute these funds; therefore, the feasibility of the National Park Service serving as the managing entity for the site as a unit of the national park system is dependent on NPS fund source managers' ability to prioritize cyclic and recurring maintenance projects to meet the requirements of the facilities within this potential new unit. Considering the NPS maintenance backlog, potential options to engage in partnerships may provide opportunities for shared operating responsibility and resources. The portion of the Fort Ontario study area identified as significant and suitable could be effectively administered by the National Park Service at a reasonable cost, depending on fund source availability.

Evaluated under the feasibility criterion, costs and budgetary feasibility associated with the potential acquisition, one-time facility development and improvements, and long-term operations of a unit at Fort Ontario appear to be feasible, even considering the current deferred maintenance backlog and budgetary challenges facing the National Park Service. This study concludes that criterion 3 (feasibility) is met.

Completion and transmittal of the study does not guarantee establishment of a new NPS unit or future funding for any NPS actions at Fort Ontario. Even if a unit is established, while new national park system units share common elements, each park unit requires a distinct organizational structure. The organizational structure may be influenced by the unit's enabling legislation or proclamation, its size, resources, scope, delivery of public programming, and location. National Park Service units are not considered operational (prepared to welcome visitors, preserve resources, and provide programming and services on a regular basis) until they receive an operating appropriation from Congress, which can take years.

CONCLUSION: FEASIBILITY FINDINGS

The National Park Service finds that a portion of the Fort Ontario overall study area meets the feasibility criterion for consideration as a unit of the national park system. Building 22 (former guardhouse / Safe Haven Museum), Building 23 (bakehouse / Hot Stove Building), Building 30 (warehouse / Head Start Education Center), and Building 31 (commissary / Arts Association of Oswego) are considered according to need for direct NPS management in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: DIRECT NPS MANAGEMENT

This chapter describes whether the direct management of the study resources by the National Park Service is optimal when compared with other management options.

The fourth criterion in the SRS evaluation process addresses whether the study area requires direct management by the National Park Service instead of protection by another public agency or the private sector. *NPS Management Policies 2006* (section 1.3.4) not only requires direct NPS management to be needed, but also that NPS management be “the clearly superior alternative.” Inclusion in the national park system would provide Fort Ontario with the stewardship mandate defined in the National Park Service Organic Act,

... which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations, ...

In the context of a special resource study, “direct NPS management” means the National Park Service owns or manages lands within an authorized park boundary and has lead responsibility for park operations, resource protection, and visitor services. This level of management provides national park units with a dual mandate of preserving resources and providing opportunities for visitor enjoyment. Direct NPS management may be needed if current or potential management entities cannot provide opportunities for resource stewardship or public enjoyment and NPS management is the clearly superior alternative. “Clearly superior” is understood to mean that the National Park Service could provide optimal resource protection and visitor opportunities when compared to current management or other management scenarios.

Alternately, the National Park Service may find that other organizations or agencies could provide new or continuing resource management responsibilities for the study area resources and opportunities for public enjoyment of the nationally significant resources. In such a case, the National Park Service would not be the clearly superior or optimal management entity, and the study area would not be recommended for inclusion as a new unit of the national park system.

In this chapter, management by public and private entities is evaluated to determine whether these entities can effectively and efficiently provide long-term resource protection and visitor services or if direct NPS management is the best option. This analysis pertains only to the resources found to be nationally significant, suitable, and feasible for inclusion in the national park system in the previous chapters.

SUMMARY OF EXISTING MANAGEMENT

Safe Haven Inc.

Safe Haven Inc. was established in 1989 to bring attention to and preserve the refugees’ stories and help interpret the refugee shelter period of Fort Ontario’s history. The group,

which is managed by a board of directors, has organized past reunions of the site's refugees and was central in gathering oral histories from those who lived at the refugee shelter during the 1990s. Today, the nonprofit's primary responsibility is operating the Safe Haven Museum in Building 22. Safe Haven Inc. and the museum are funded by memberships and donations. Volunteers conduct tours and support the single paid museum staff member in everyday operations and special events organized by the museum. Oral histories and interviews of Fort Ontario refugees collected during the 1980s are digitized and are part of the Oswego State University of New York's Penfield Library collections.

Safe Haven Inc. has successfully managed the museum for the past 20 years. Started in 1989, the group originally formed to preserve the stories of the individuals who lived at Fort Ontario during its time as a European refugee shelter and their lives after the shelter closed in February 1946. The nonprofit was instrumental in collecting oral histories from those who lived at the Oswego camp during World War II and organizing the 50th anniversary reunion in 1994. The oral histories became the basis of the Safe Haven Museum, which opened in 2002. In 2021, Safe Haven Inc. oversaw museum renovations that upgraded the interpretive panels to provide more in-depth information about the shelter and the refugees who lived there and incorporated more interactive components; the museum opened with a rededication in October 2022. The Safe Haven research library includes historical books on the Holocaust, historical fiction novels about the Holocaust, firsthand accounts recorded by refugees as oral histories or memoirs, and photographs (Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum n.d.a).

City of Oswego

The City of Oswego owns approximately 42.5 acres of the Fort Ontario Military Reservation NRHP property and leases the historic buildings to various agencies of the city and private interests, including Safe Haven Inc.

While the City of Oswego is not associated with Safe Haven or the museum, the municipality has provided one-time grants to the nonprofit to support museum operations and recent upgrades. Safe Haven Inc. received funds from the City of Oswego's Business Revival and Innovation grant program, created to assist local businesses' recovery from the effects of the 2020–2021 pandemic, as well as grants from New York State Senator Patty Richie and the Oswego County Community Foundation for 2021 interpretive exhibit updates.

Current NPS Support

Safe Haven Inc. and the museum have received considerable technical assistance from Fort Ontario State Historic Site staff in the past. The nonprofit/museum is not part of any existing NPS program.

NEED FOR NPS MANAGEMENT

During public outreach, many commenters stated a desire for NPS involvement at the site to ensure long-term resource protection and interpretation. The museum is open limited hours each week, and while the history of the European immigrants who lived within the fence of

Fort Ontario for approximately 18 months is nationally significant, the small museum has a limited reach and limited resources to support interpretation of the site, additional research, or broader resource protection because the group has no formal funding mechanism beyond memberships and donations. Conversations with representatives from Safe Haven Inc. also expressed the need for a steady source of income and dedicated staffing to help manage the museum and expand visitor opportunities. Direct NPS management could relieve Safe Haven Inc. of some of the nonprofit's responsibilities at the museum and provide a stable source of funding while identifying partnerships and agreements that promote collaboration between the nonprofit, Fort Ontario State Historic Site, and other preservation and history organizations.

CONCLUSION: NEED FOR NPS MANAGEMENT

Direct NPS management of a site dedicated to the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter activities from 1944 to 1946, in partnership with others, offers the greatest potential for sustained resource protection and broad interpretive offerings. For the past 20 years, Safe Haven Inc. has successfully worked with the City of Oswego and the Fort Ontario State Historic Site to develop and operate the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum solely on grants, memberships, and donations. The nonprofit originally formed to preserve the stories of the Fort Ontario refugees and their lives in the United States and gradually evolved into a museum.

Lack of dedicated staffing and funding under the current management by Safe Haven Inc. does not guarantee long-term preservation of the site and its resources. The nonprofit's activities are limited by the capacity of volunteer docents and funds raised through donations and memberships. Therefore, under NPS management and through the proposed efficient and effective alternative, the agency could ensure long-term preservation and increase interpretation of resources associated with the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. This study concludes that criterion 4 (need for direct NPS management) is met.

CHAPTER 7: NPS MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS

Management concepts are developed for resources found to be eligible for inclusion in the national park system. The study findings are applied to the management alternatives to determine possible management options to optimize preservation of resources, visitor use, and partnerships in order to achieve a successful management model.

Several options were considered for future management of the resources: management by the existing partners, partnerships for management with the National Park Service, management by state or local agencies, inclusion in a national heritage area, and management under a new national park system unit. This chapter describes current management and actions that the National Park Service can take to preserve key resources, conduct visitor services and interpretation, and manage and operate the resources described in each concept. The option presented below is based on the findings for each criterion described in the previous chapters. Included in the summary are one-time costs for acquisition (for resources under direct NPS ownership) and development requirements for each resource. See the feasibility analysis in chapter 5 for a more detailed description of these cost estimates.

The National Park Service determined that Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31 met all four study criteria for direct ownership and management by the National Park Service, and the City of Oswego and Safe Haven Inc. were supportive of being NPS partners and having their resource included in a potential new national park system unit. A new national park system unit designation is proposed as a conceptual management framework for Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31. The management concept presented below identifies the most efficient and effective way to protect significant resources and provide opportunities for visitor access to historic resources associated with the World War II European refugee shelter at Fort Ontario.

FORT ONTARIO EMERGENCY REFUGEE SHELTER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter is proposed for designation as a national historic site. A national historic site usually contains a single historic feature that is directly associated with its subject. National historic sites preserve places and commemorate persons, events, and activities important in the nation's history. Examples of national historic sites include Minidoka in Idaho and Manzanar in California, both of which protect resources related to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Proposed Management Structure

The National Park Service would have direct management responsibility for the proposed Fort Ontario Holocaust Emergency Refugee Shelter National Historic Site, including interpretation and education associated with the emergency refugee shelter and its resources, as well as the development of interpretive media and programs and the preservation and resource management of the new historic site.

Building 22, the Safe Haven Museum, would be acquired by the National Park Service for direct management. Federal acquisition of the historic building and property would allow the National Park Service to have a tangible stake in the management and operation of a future

NPS unit preserving the only example of a World War II European refugee shelter created in the United States. Converting one key building—Building 22, the former guardhouse and current Safe Haven Museum—into federal property provides the National Park Service a physical presence on the landscape, a direct connection to the unique and nationally significant resources at the site, and a base to build additional partnerships. Under NPS ownership or management, there may be modifications in the operations and visitor experiences currently available at the Safe Haven Museum / Building 22 to align with federal law, NPS funding and staffing allocations, and NPS management policies.

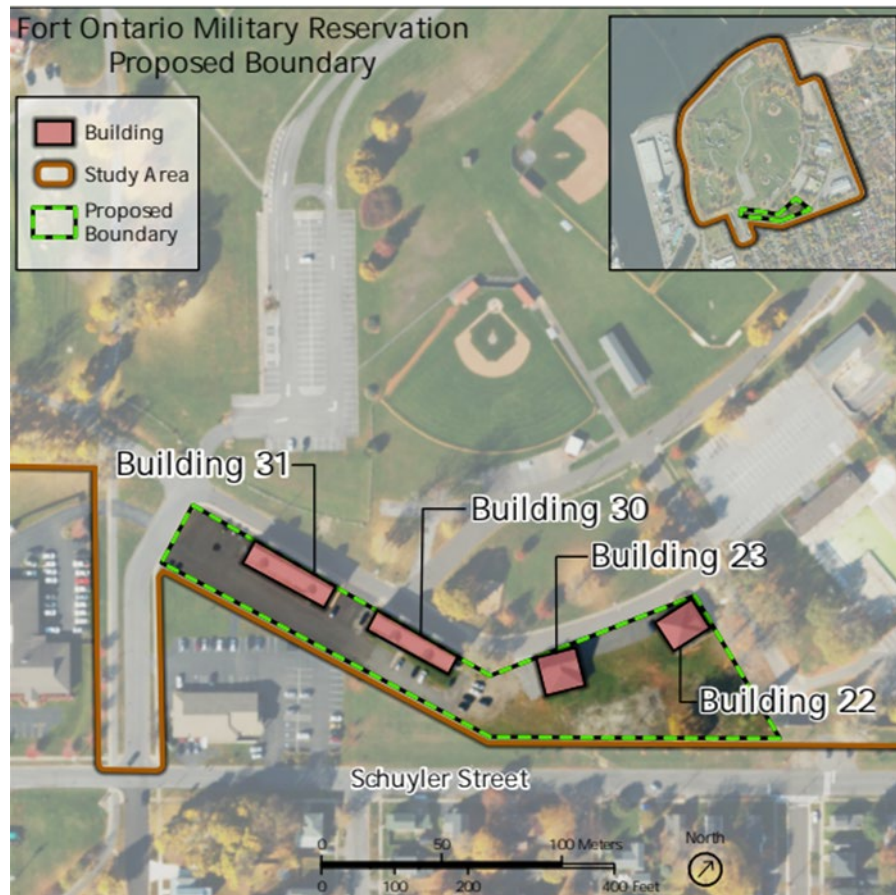
The National Park Service would pursue preservation easements with the City of Oswego for the remaining historic buildings within the proposed boundary (Buildings 23, 30, and 31); this approach would allow the various nonprofits that lease space in the buildings to continue serving the Oswego community while preserving the building exteriors and cultural landscape.

The National Park Service would not acquire archives or collections that are currently managed by the State of New York Historic Preservation Division as part of the Fort Ontario State Historic Site or other organizations. The Safe Haven research library and any supporting material would remain property of the nonprofit. If ownership of Building 22 were transferred to the National Park Service, an inventory and cataloguing of real property would be necessary, and a future scope of collections would guide artifact curation and record keeping.

The agency would continue to work with the City of Oswego for future site maintenance and management and to ensure members of the Safe Haven board and survivor and descendent communities remain engaged in their educational and preservation mission. In addition, the National Park Service would seek to maintain the existing partnership with the Fort Ontario State Historic Site to inform future management and support the interconnected history of the Fort Ontario Military Reservation.

Boundary

The potential boundary of a new national park system unit would initially total approximately 3.5 acres, including Building 22, Buildings 23, 30, and 31, and the associated land immediately around the buildings to the street. The boundary (map 7) would provide the minimum required for staff safety, operational and financial efficiency, sustainability of operations, and visitor facilities and programming inside the buildings.



MAP 7. POTENTIAL NPS BOUNDARY CONFIGURATION

Potential Partnerships

As mentioned throughout this report, the City of Oswego, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's Fort Ontario State Historic Site, and Safe Haven Inc. have done significant work to preserve resources, collect data, and document and interpret the political stance during World War II as well as how immigration policy and anti-Semitism influenced the United States' approach to European refugees. The National Park Service would seek to maintain these partnerships for future management of the Fort Ontario Holocaust Emergency Refugee Shelter NPS unit. In addition, the National Park Service would explore, develop, and maintain new partnerships for the preservation and interpretation of World War II activities at Fort Ontario and related sites.

The Fort Ontario Holocaust Emergency Refugee Shelter National Historic Site would have substantial opportunities for partnerships with public agencies, educational institutions, nonprofit entities, and individuals. Potential partnership projects are numerous and could include developing educational programs, developing facilities, and conducting resource stewardship activities, such as additional archeology and research projects. Partnerships could also include shared facilities for interpretation, operations, and maintenance and leasing additional space from the City of Oswego.

The National Park Service would continue working with involved partners and stakeholders such as Safe Haven Inc., the City of Oswego, and Fort Ontario State Historic Site to maintain the site, offer educational materials and interpretive programming, protect resources, and conduct research on World War II activities at the military reservation. In addition, the National Park Service could work cooperatively with descendants of the European refugees, Jewish American groups, the Oswego community, partner organizations, and other comparable NPS units to explore opportunities for interpretation and/or preservation.

Interpretation

Under NPS management, visitors would have similar opportunities to experience Building 22 as they do now, with potential for improvements and additional interpretation. Visitors would have the opportunity to learn about the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, how restrictive immigration policy and racism shaped the United States' stance on European refugees during the war, and how Fort Ontario shaped post-war policy. Correspondences received during the public comment period expressed the need for future interpretation to highlight the diverse stories associated with Fort Ontario. Interpretation would be accessible and relevant to diverse audiences and multiple generations. Virtual visitor experiences would be explored so that people could learn about the United States's involvement in World War II, 20th-century immigration policy, and the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. Programs could be provided by NPS rangers, partners, and volunteers. Information could be presented in multiple languages.

Costs

National park unit operating costs vary widely depending on park size, types and quantities of resources, visitor numbers, program levels, safety and security needs, staffing, and other factors. At a minimum, the operating cost of a proposed new park unit would include staffing, grounds and facilities maintenance, utilities, communications, administration, and other miscellaneous expenses. Personnel would be required to design and deliver interpretive programming (such as personal interpretation, exhibits, and special events), maintain facilities and grounds, perform administrative functions (budget, management, planning, and compliance), provide for law enforcement (if necessary), and conduct outreach to the community and related resources.

Summary

Under this potential management framework, Congress would establish a new unit of the national park system dedicated to the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. In collaboration with partners such as Safe Haven Inc., the City of Oswego, and Fort Ontario State Historic Site, the National Park Service would preserve the site and interpret the United States' political approach to World War II and the history of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. Given the need for increased interpretation at the site and reliable funding, the National Park Service has determined that there is a need for direct NPS management.

A new potential national park system unit would include Buildings 22, 23, 30, and 31. The National Park Service would pursue direct management or ownership of Building 22.

Buildings 23, 30, and 31 would continue to be owned by the City of Owego and leased to arts nonprofit organizations. These historic buildings would be managed via NPS partnerships and preservation easements under a new national park system unit designation. This proposed management alternative is the most effective and efficient alternative to preserve a section of the World War II–era cultural landscape and historic buildings and interpret the history of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter.

OTHER POTENTIAL MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

NPS Affiliated Area

National Park Service affiliated areas preserve resources outside the national park system that are linked in importance and purpose to the larger system. These related areas are established by Congress or by administrative action of the Secretary of the Interior under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935; however, unlike national park system units, these resources are not federally owned or directly managed by the National Park Service. The role of the National Park Service in the management and administration of affiliated areas is typically outlined in the designation legislation or Secretarial action and varies from strong partnerships with NPS staffing to occasional programmatic assistance. Federal funding for affiliated areas is determined on a case-by-case basis. Affiliated areas established via legislative means may receive base funding for staffing and/or interpretation and operations via the Department of the Interior, similar to federally owned and managed national park system units. Areas established via administrative action may only receive direct federal funding if Congress specifically appropriates funding for that resource. Other affiliated areas receive no federal funding; their primary connection to the National Park Service is via technical assistance.

To be eligible for affiliated area status, *NPS Management Policies 2006* guidelines state that the potential area's resources must:

1. meet the same standards for significance and suitability that apply to national park system units,
2. require some special recognition or technical assistance beyond what is available through existing NPS programs,
3. be managed in accordance with the policies and standards that apply to national park system units, and
4. be assured of sustained resource protection, as documented in a formal agreement between the National Park Service and the nonfederal management entity.

The National Park Service has determined that Fort Ontario resources associated with World War II are significant and suitable for inclusion in the national park system and thereby meet the first two eligibility criteria for affiliated areas.

If any of the resources were designated an NPS affiliated area, the current management partners would be expected to adhere to federal mandates and the high standards specified in NPS management policies, as stated in affiliated area eligibility criterion 3. As volunteer

nonprofit organizations, the current management entities may not be equipped to assume additional responsibilities connected to federal compliance and management constraints associated with federal policies required for an affiliated area; the management organizations could require additional funding or direct NPS support to continue to offer visitor facilities and experiences that meet NPS standards and comply with federal regulations.

While past management and preservation of Fort Ontario's resources have been in accordance with the standards of the national park system, this study does not recommend designating the site as an affiliated area due to the site's significance, the lack of a unit representing similar themes in the national park system, and the need for long-term preservation and sustained resource protection. Affiliated areas typically operate under agreements between a nonfederal entity and the National Park Service, are nationally significant, and meet the suitability criterion. An affiliated area designation is not recommended because there has been an identified need for direct NPS management to offer additional visitor experiences and long-term preservation of resources that meet NPS standards and comply with federal regulations.

National Heritage Area

National heritage areas are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. The National Park Service assists the coordinating organization in developing a management plan for the administration, using federal funding, and interpreting the national heritage area. Individual resources are managed independently within a regional framework of related resources but benefit from NPS brand recognition and opportunities for technical support or financial aid from the National Park Service via the national heritage area program. National heritage areas are community-led conservation and development for lived-in landscapes where the National Park Service owns little to no land. National heritage areas collaborate with the National Park Service and local partners to expand conservation and historic preservation by supporting community-driven initiatives.

Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor

Established by Congress in 2000, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor recognizes the national significance of the 524-mile New York State Canal System, which includes the Erie, Cayuga-Seneca, Oswego, and Champlain Canals and their historic alignments. The 23-mile Oswego Canal, opened in 1828, connects the Erie Canal in Syracuse to Oswego Harbor on Lake Ontario. The corridor focuses on interpreting the legacy of the canal and its connection to the historic themes of nation building, economic development, national identity, engineering, and social innovation and reform. Oswego-based recreation organizations and the local maritime history museum have partnered with the national heritage corridor in the past to promote events and the paddle and bike trails along the canalway.

The long military history associated with Fort Ontario's core fortification aligns with the themes of early nation building and engineering even if the military installation is not directly connected to the development of the New York State Canal System. However, the nationally

significant history of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter does not fit the recreation focus and canal system history of the national heritage corridor.

Management by State and Local Agencies

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, also called the State Park System, includes over 250 parks, historic sites, recreational trails, golf courses, and boat launches that together welcome over 79 million visitors each year. In 2022, the state office had an operating and capital budget of approximately \$462 million and employed 2,087 full-time employees, with another 4,500 seasonal positions (New York State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation 2022). It manages Fort Ontario State Historic Site, which includes the core fortification and post cemetery.

The National Park Service has active agreements with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for site management and interpretation. For example, in 2008, the National Park Service established a cooperative management agreement with the state office for managing and staffing Oriskany Battlefield State Historic Site and the Steuben Memorial State Historic Site. Through this agreement, the National Park Service provides visitor services and maintenance at Oriskany Battlefield and Steuben Memorial.

The Fort Ontario State Historic Site has supported interpretation of the Safe Haven Museum and has sponsored special events and academic conferences about the World War II history of the site. The historic site dedicates a portion of its exhibits in the 1840s buildings within the core fortification to the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter and has a portion of the nearly 7-foot, chain-link fence that separated the refugee “guests” from Oswego residents. Considering the long and varied history of military installations on the site, it is difficult for the casual visitor to follow more than 200 years of military development starting with competition between British and French colonizing powers before the French and Indian War. Resources within the state historic site boundary best represent the fort’s earlier history, and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has completed decades of projects to recreate a 19th-century landscape. Establishing a new unit of the national park service that focused primarily on the activities of the European refugee shelter would call visitor attention to the unique national significance of the site. The state office could continue to offer a high-quality experience in the core fortification and provide historic context for why Fort Ontario exists at the mouth of the Oswego River, the fortification’s strategic importance during the 19th century, and the different stages of development leading to World War II.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRESERVATION

The National Park Service recognizes that, beyond the study findings, there is strong public support and many opportunities for enhancing the interpretation and preservation of the resources evaluated in this study. The National Park Service administers several programs designed to acknowledge important historic resources that are not national park units and offer owners/managers additional technical support. Safe Haven Inc., the City of Oswego, and other site partners could pursue designations, funding, or technical assistance from any of the following programs independently of a national park system unit designation.

National Historic Landmarks Program

Fort Ontario may qualify for NHL status. The National Historic Landmarks Program—which oversees the almost 2,600 properties designated National Historic Landmarks by the Secretary of the Interior—is administered by the National Park Service and works to preserve the stories of nationally important historic events, places, and people by helping protect the historic character of National Historic Landmarks. Program representatives monitor the condition of NHL properties and can provide technical assistance to interested NHL owners and information on a variety of preservation subjects. The National Historic Landmarks Program reviews federal undertakings as part of their responsibilities under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and may suggest actions to avoid, minimize, or mitigate damage to National Historic Landmarks. Property owners would need to complete nomination documentation for the property, reviewed by the NPS National Historic Landmarks Program, and ultimately designated by the Secretary of the Interior to become part of the program.

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

The City of Oswego may pursue general support through the NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. This program does not provide financial assistance or monetary grants but offers professional services that can help bring conservation and outdoor recreation projects to life.

CHAPTER 8: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This chapter describes the civic engagement efforts conducted by the National Park Service for this study. It includes a summary of major input that was provided by the public, state/local government agencies, Tribal governments, and stakeholder organizations.

The NPS New Areas Studies Act requires that each special resource study “shall be prepared with appropriate opportunity for public involvement, including at least one public meeting in the vicinity of the study, and after reasonable efforts to notify potential affected landowners and State and local governments” (54 USC 100507). The National Park Service conducted virtual and in-person public engagement to share information about the SRS process and collect information to inform study findings. Public input was solicited on a variety of topics, including the potential management of the Fort Ontario study area and ideas for future resource protection and visitor enjoyment. This outreach also helped the National Park Service assess local support for adding study resources to the national park system. Public outreach efforts conducted as part of this study are described below.

NOTIFYING THE PUBLIC

The National Park Service solicited public feedback related to the Fort Ontario Special Resource Study through an informational project newsletter; the project’s NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website; two virtual public meetings during the 60-day public comment period (September 1–November 1, 2021); and seven stakeholder group briefings prior to and during the public comment period.

The four-page newsletter included a brief overview of the study area (Fort Ontario); a description of the study’s purpose and process; the criteria used in the SRS process; and an invitation to submit comments via multiple methods, including the PEPC project website, email, and through the US Postal Service. A phone number was also provided for comment submission via voicemail. The project newsletter was distributed digitally on September 1, 2021, on the project PEPC website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FortOntarioSRS>) and to the project emailing list.

In preparation for the public comment phase beginning in September, in late July 2021, the National Park Service shipped 500 hard copies of the project newsletter to stakeholders in Oswego, New York, associated with the Fort Ontario State Historic Site, the Safe Haven Museum, and the City of Oswego. Stakeholders distributed the document locally to neighboring property owners, related nonprofit organizations, and interested parties.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Prior to and during the 60-day public comment period, approximately 60 stakeholders were reached through seven stakeholder group briefings. A combined total of 22 people attended the two virtual general public meetings on September 15th and October 6th.

AGENCY CONSULTATION

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation oversees the Fort Ontario State Historic Site and includes the state historic preservation office. The National Park Service consulted with the Fort Ontario historic site manager as well as representatives of the Central Region and the state preservation office regarding the current management and administration of Fort Ontario State Historic Site and interest in the potential designation of a new national park unit in the Fort Ontario study area.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

Any national park system unit that may eventually include a portion of Fort Ontario would be created on the ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples. The National Park Service therefore consulted with Native American Tribal Nations whose traditional homelands intersect the study area. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy—representing the Seneca, Cayuga, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk Nations—responded via email; this was followed by several phone calls with NPS Interior Region 1 Planning program and Tribal and Cultural Affairs representatives to discuss representation within the study. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy Development Institute, a department within the Confederacy government, determined that the study would not negatively impact their ancestral lands and asked that the National Park Service note their historical connection to the area, as done in chapter 2. Following are the Tribal nations that were contacted for this study:

- Cayuga Nation
- Oneida Indian Nation
- Onondaga Nation
- Seneca Nation of Indians
- Seneca-Cayuga Nation
- Tonawanda Band of Seneca
- Haudenosaunee Confederacy

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS

On September 15th, 2021, and October 6th, 2021, the National Park Service hosted two evening virtual public meetings that were identical in content. Both meetings utilized the virtual videoconferencing platform and offered a two-way phone line for interactive participation for those without internet access. Meeting materials were uploaded to the project website and were available throughout the comment period for the public to view online at their leisure. Both public meetings were recorded (except for the live question-and-answer sessions). The September 15th meeting recording with captions was posted online and on the PEPC project website for members of the public who were unable to attend the two virtual public meetings.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The National Park Service sought feedback by asking the public to answer questions that were designed to gauge public support. The questions were listed in the newsletter and displayed during the public meetings. The questions were:

1. How do you feel about the potential for Fort Ontario to become a national park system unit?
2. Are there additional stories and historic resources at the Fort Ontario site about which the NPS study team should know?
3. Are you aware of documents (letters, diary entries, photographs, newspaper articles, etc.) that are not publicly available that relate to the Fort Ontario site?
4. Do you have any other comments, concerns, and suggestions for this study?

During the public comment period, 102 correspondences were submitted to the National Park Service. Correspondence during the virtual public meeting and the emailed correspondence were entered into the PEPC website by NPS staff. The majority of individual public comments (72 correspondences) were submitted from New York.

WHAT WE HEARD

The vast majority of commenters expressed support for Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven to become a unit managed by the National Park Service. Many commenters expressed that this designation is long overdue and supported this designation for the refugee shelter as well as the military fort and the natural resources of the Lake Ontario shoreline and Oswego River. Multiple commenters expressed that Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven would benefit from NPS management due to the expertise, funding, and visibility of the National Park Service. Commenters also noted the benefit of NPS management in supporting potential property expansions at the site if nearby properties are put on the market for sale. Commenters noted that a bigger audience may be reached under NPS management, allowing more people to learn about the site's rich history that can only be told at Fort Ontario. Some commenters noted that the site is vulnerable to state budgetary constraints, which has threatened the preservation of the site's key resources. These commenters hoped that NPS management would help ensure adequate funding to preserve the resources. In addition, commenters noted the opportunity for partnerships among the National Park Service, the existing Safe Haven Museum and Education Center, and the Friends of Fort Ontario. Commenters shared that the NPS designation would provide a great benefit to the City of Oswego and the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego), as park visitors would contribute positively to the local economy through spending on shopping and lodging.

See appendix C for the complete civic engagement summary.

SITE VISITS

The NPS study team visited Fort Ontario State Historic Site and the Safe Haven Museum in September 2019 to kick off the special resource study and view the legislated study area. In February 2020, the National Park Service sent a researcher to gather information from collections held at the Safe Haven Museum, SUNY Oswego, and the Oswego County Historical Society to answer questions related to the national significance of the study area and help develop the rationale for the first SRS criterion. National Park Service staff from Interior Region 1's facility and planning programs and the Historic Architecture Conservation and Engineering Center documented the condition of the historic structures owned by the City of Oswego to be used in the study's cost estimates.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND TECHNICAL REVIEW

The Interior Region 1 planning division invited Native nations associated with the study area to review and provide comments and improvements to the text included in chapter 2 ("Context and Resource Descriptions"). Language within the historic context has been revised to reflect the recommended edits submitted by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Regional representatives of the NPS National Historic Landmarks Program and Cultural Resources Division consulted on the analysis of the national significance criterion and evaluation of the Fort Ontario study area under this criterion, described in chapter 3.

After a September 2022 site visit, the NPS Historic Architecture Conservation and Engineering Center provided cost estimates for the restoration and continued maintenance of Buildings 22, 23, 25, 30, and 31 that were used to analyze the feasibility criterion in chapter 5.

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APPENDIXES

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APPENDIX A: FORT ONTARIO STUDY ACT (PL 115-255)

Public Law 115–255
115th Congress

An Act

Oct. 9, 2018
[H.R. 46]

To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of Fort Ontario in the State of New York.

Fort Ontario
Study Act.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Fort Ontario Study Act”.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Interior.

(2) STUDY AREA.—The term “study area” means Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York.

SEC. 3. FORT ONTARIO SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall conduct a special resource study of the study area.

(b) CONTENTS.—In conducting the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall—

Evaluation.

(1) evaluate the national significance of the study area;

Determination.

(2) determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the study area as a unit of the National Park System;

(3) consider other alternatives for preservation, protection, and interpretation of the study area by the Federal Government, State or local government entities, or private and non-profit organizations;

Consultation.

(4) consult with interested Federal agencies, State or local governmental entities, private and nonprofit organizations, or any other interested individuals; and

Cost estimates.

(5) identify cost estimates for any Federal acquisition, development, interpretation, operation, and maintenance associated with the alternatives.

(c) APPLICABLE LAW.—The study required under subsection (a) shall be conducted in accordance with section 100507 of title 54, United States Code.

(d) REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the date on which funds are first made available to carry out the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate a report that describes—

(1) the results of the study; and

(2) any conclusions and recommendations of the Secretary.

Approved October 9, 2018.

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APPENDIX B: NPS MANAGEMENT POLICIES – CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION

1.3 CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION

Congress declared in the National Park System General Authorities Act of 1970 that areas comprising the national park system are cumulative expressions of a single national heritage. Potential additions to the national park system should therefore contribute in their own special way to a system that fully represents the broad spectrum of natural and cultural resources that characterize our nation. The National Park Service is responsible for conducting professional studies of potential additions to the national park system when specifically authorized by an act of Congress and for making recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior, the president, and Congress. Several laws outline criteria for units of the national park system and for additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and the National Trails System.

To receive a favorable recommendation from the National Park Service, a proposed addition to the national park system must

(1) possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources, (2) be a suitable addition to the system, (3) be a feasible addition to the system, and (4) require direct NPS management instead of protection by other public agencies or the private sector. These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources. These criteria also recognize that there are other management alternatives for preserving the nation's outstanding resources.

1.3.1 National Significance

National Park Service professionals, in consultation with subject matter experts, scholars, and scientists, will determine whether a resource is nationally significant. An area will be considered nationally significant if it meets all of the following criteria:

1. It is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource.
2. It possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage.
3. It offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment or for scientific study.
4. It retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

National significance for cultural resources will be evaluated by applying the national historic landmarks criteria contained in 36 CFR Part 65 (*Code of Federal Regulations*).

1.3.2 Suitability

An area is considered suitable for addition to the national park system if it represents a natural or cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented in the national

park system or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by other federal agencies; Tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector.

Adequacy of representation is determined on a case-by-case basis by comparing the potential addition to other comparably managed areas representing the same resource type, while considering differences or similarities in the character, quality, quantity, or combination of resource values. The comparative analysis also addresses rarity of the resources, interpretive and educational potential, and similar resources already protected in the national park system or in other public or private ownership. The comparison results in a determination of whether the proposed new area would expand, enhance, or duplicate resource protection or visitor use opportunities found in other comparably managed areas.

1.3.3 Feasibility

To be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, an area must be (1) of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries), and (2) capable of efficient administration by the National Park Service at a reasonable cost.

In evaluating feasibility, the National Park Service considers a variety of factors for a study area, such as the following:

1. size
2. boundary configurations
3. current and potential uses of the study area and surrounding lands
4. landownership patterns
5. public enjoyment potential
6. costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration, and operation
7. access
8. current and potential threats to the resources
9. existing degradation of resources
10. staffing requirements
11. local planning and zoning
12. the level of local and general public support (including landowners)
13. the economic/socioeconomic impacts of designation as a unit of the national park system

The feasibility evaluation also considers the ability of the National Park Service to undertake new management responsibilities in light of current and projected availability of funding and personnel.

An overall evaluation of feasibility will be made after taking into account all of the above factors. However, evaluations may sometimes identify concerns or conditions, rather than simply reach a yes or no conclusion. For example, some new areas may be feasible additions to the national park system only if landowners are willing to sell, or the boundary encompasses specific areas necessary for visitor access, or state or local governments will provide appropriate assurances that adjacent land uses will remain compatible with the study area's resources and values.

1.3.4 Direct NPS Management

There are many excellent examples of the successful management of important natural and cultural resources by other public agencies, private conservation organizations, and individuals. The National Park Service applauds these accomplishments and actively encourages the expansion of conservation activities by state, local, and private entities and by other federal agencies. Unless direct NPS management of a studied area is identified as the clearly superior alternative, the National Park Service will recommend that one or more of these other entities assume a lead management role and that the area not receive national park system status.

Studies will evaluate an appropriate range of management alternatives and will identify which alternative or combination of alternatives would, in the professional judgment of the National Park Service Director, be most effective and efficient in protecting significant resources and providing opportunities for appropriate public enjoyment. Alternatives for NPS management will not be developed for study areas that fail to meet any one of the four criteria for inclusion listed in section 1.3.

In cases where a study area's resources meet criteria for national significance but do not meet other criteria for inclusion in the national park system, the National Park Service may instead recommend an alternative status, such as "affiliated area." To be eligible for affiliated area status, the area's resources must (1) meet the same standards for significance and suitability that apply to units of the national park system; (2) require some special recognition or technical assistance beyond what is available through existing NPS programs; (3) be managed in accordance with the policies and standards that apply to units of the national park system; and (4) be assured of sustained resource protection, as documented in a formal agreement between the National Park Service and the nonfederal management entity. Designation as a "heritage area" is another option that may be recommended. Heritage areas have a nationally important, distinctive assemblage of resources that is best managed for conservation, recreation, education, and continued use through partnerships among public and private entities at the local or regional level. Either of these two alternatives (and others as well) would recognize an area's importance to the nation without requiring or implying management by the National Park Service.

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APPENDIX C: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC OUTREACH

A 60-day public comment period opened on September 1, 2021, and closed on November 1, 2021. The National Park Service (NPS) solicited public feedback related to the Fort Ontario Special Resource Study (SRS) through an informational project newsletter; the project's NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website; two virtual public meetings during the 60-day public comment period (September 1–November 1, 2021); and seven stakeholder group briefings prior to and during the public comment period.

The four-page newsletter included a brief overview of the study area (Fort Ontario); a description of the study's purpose and process; the criteria used in the SRS process; and an invitation to submit comments via multiple methods, including the PEPC project website, email, and through the US Postal Service. A phone number was also provided for comment submission via voicemail. The project newsletter was distributed digitally on September 1, 2021, on the project PEPC website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FortOntarioSRS>) and to the project emailing list.

In preparation for the public comment phase beginning in September, in late July 2021, the National Park Service shipped 500 hard copies of the project newsletter to stakeholders in Oswego, New York, associated with the Fort Ontario State Historic Site, the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, and the City of Oswego. Stakeholders distributed the document locally to neighboring property owners, related nonprofit organizations, and interested parties.

On September 15th, 2021, and October 6th, 2021, the National Park Service hosted two evening virtual public meetings that were identical in content. Both meetings utilized the virtual Webex videoconferencing platform and offered a two-way phone line for interactive participation for those without internet access. Meeting materials were uploaded to the project website and were available throughout the comment period for the public to view online at their leisure. Both public meetings were recorded (except for the live question-and-answer sessions). The September 15th meeting recording with captions was posted on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_1AyLULszk) and on the PEPC project website for members of the public unable to attend the two virtual public meetings.

Throughout the 60-day public comment phase, comments were received via the PEPC project website, email, mailed correspondence, and the live question-and-answer sessions during both public meetings (not recorded).

PUBLIC INTEREST

Prior to and during the 60-day public comment period, approximately 60 stakeholders were reached through seven stakeholder group briefings. A combined total of 22 people attended the two virtual general public meetings on September 15th and October 6th.

102 individual correspondences were received during the public comment period. Of these, 88 correspondences were submitted directly to the project website. Fourteen letters were sent via email and US Postal Service mail. These were manually entered into the project website by NPS staff.

Public comments were submitted from individuals in 17 states in the United States and one individual in Germany. The following table provides the distribution of public comments that were submitted to the project website or to the team (as of November 16, 2021).

Table C-1. Geographic Distribution of Correspondences

State	Percentage	Number of Correspondences
New York	71%	72
California	5%	5
Florida	3%	3
Minnesota	3%	3
New Jersey	2%	2
Pennsylvania	2%	2
Massachusetts	2%	2
Ohio	2%	2
Michigan	1%	1
Colorado	1%	1
Alabama	1%	1
Illinois	1%	1
Virginia	1%	1
South Carolina	1%	1
North Carolina	1%	1
Montana	1%	1
Wisconsin	1%	1
Germany	1%	1
Unidentified	1%	1
	Total	102

PUBLIC OPINIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND VALUES

The National Park Service sought feedback on the special resource study by asking the public to answer four questions:

1. How do you feel about the potential for Fort Ontario to become a national park system unit?
2. Are there additional stories and historic resources at the Fort Ontario site about which the NPS study team should know?
3. Are you aware of documents (letters, diary entries, photographs, newspaper articles, etc.) that are not publicly available that relate to the Fort Ontario site?
4. Do you have any other comments, concerns, and suggestions for this study?

The questions were listed in the public scoping newsletter and presented during the two virtual public meetings. The following is a brief overview of the comments made by respondents, broken down by the four scoping questions listed above and related sub-topics.

Question 1: How do you feel about the potential for Fort Ontario to become a national park system unit?

Support

The vast majority of commenters expressed support for Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven Museum to become a unit managed by the National Park Service. Many commenters expressed that this designation is long overdue and supported this designation for the following reasons, broken into thematic categories:

Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter

Multiple commenters expressed that, as the only site in the United States where immigrants from Europe were allowed into the country during World War II, the Safe Haven refugee history is not well known by the general public and deserves national recognition. Commenters shared that this recognition would honor the refugees who endured tremendous sacrifices by being driven from their home countries and families during the war. One commenter shared that Fort Ontario represents the nation's only attempt to save Jewish and Christian lives from the Holocaust. It was noted that almost all of these refugees became American citizens, greatly contributing to the US economy since 1945. Commenters expressed that this history mirrors how our "best selves" can behave in the worst of times, and how the perseverance and kindness of a few people managed to save almost 1,000 lives. Commenters also noted the importance of acknowledging that the United States could have done more to save even more lives. One commenter noted that the people of Oswego were very kind to the refugees and were instrumental in helping the refugees learn American ways.

Military Fort

Multiple commenters expressed that the building, destruction, and repeated rebuilding of the fort itself is significant and makes the fort worthy of preservation. Commenters shared that recognizing the fort would honor its vast number of histories spanning from the colonial period to World War II and its aftermath. Commenters shared that after being built in 1775, the fort played significant roles in the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the American Civil War, World War I. The fort then played a crucial role as the Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter more than 125 years later during World War II. Commenters shared the significance of these histories in reflecting stories of the British, French, Native American, and Black soldiers. It was noted that the fort can be used to teach little-known pieces of history.

Natural Resources

A few commenters expressed that the site's natural resources such as the pastoral setting, shoreline of Lake Ontario, and views of the Oswego River are beautiful and worthy of preservation.

Benefits of NPS Management

Multiple commenters expressed that Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven Museum would benefit from NPS management due to the expertise, funding, and visibility of the NPS. Commenters also noted the benefit of NPS management in supporting potential property expansions at the site if nearby properties are put on the market for sale. Commenters noted that a bigger audience may be reached under NPS management, allowing more people to learn about the site's rich history that can only be told at Fort Ontario. Some commenters noted that the site is vulnerable to state budgetary constraints, which has threatened the preservation of the site's key resources. These commenters hoped that NPS management would help ensure adequate funding to preserve the resources. In addition, commenters noted the opportunity for partnerships among the National Park Service, the existing Safe Haven Museum and Education Center, and the Friends of Fort Ontario.

Location

Many commenters expressed that this site would make a great addition to the National Park Service because it is a perfect location for travelers from the United States and Canada with ample tourism opportunities. Commenters shared that the location is accessible from major roads and highways. Commenters shared that NPS designation would provide a great benefit to the City of Oswego and the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego), as park visitors would contribute positively to the local economy through spending on shopping and lodging.

Opposition

Two commenters expressed opposition for Fort Ontario and/or the Safe Haven Museum becoming a unit managed by the National Park Service. One commenter expressed opposition by stating that this study attempts to capture too many ideas, thus reducing the value of the fort's national significance. This same commenter referenced the NPS budget

deficit in routine maintenance of existing units as reason to disapprove Fort Ontario as a new unit of the National Park Service. Another commenter expressed concern that management by the National Park Service might mute the history and significance of the site.

Question 2: Are there additional stories and historic resources at the Fort Ontario site about which the NPS study team should know?

Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter

Commenters urged the study team to consider the following stories and resources pertaining to the Safe Haven European refugee camp at Fort Ontario. Nine hundred and eighty-two refugees were transferred to Oswego, New York, from Ferramonti di Tarsia, an Italian internment camp in Cosenza, Calabria, Italy. These refugees came from 18 different European countries.

Some comments received noted the surprise and bitterness of the refugees' experience. Comments included references to the refugees being labeled with a pin reading "casual baggage" while on the US Naval Ship Henry Gibbons to New York City and then on the train to Oswego, New York. Other comments described the alarm some refugees must have felt upon arriving at Fort Ontario and finding themselves once again behind barbed wire, given no official status, and required to sign agreements to return to their home countries at the end of the war. Some commenters noted that the history of the Safe Haven shelter should be placed in the context of anti-Semitism predating World War II.

Other comments reflected more positive aspects of the refugees' experiences at Fort Ontario, such as the group being considered special guests of President Franklin Roosevelt; how Dr. Ruth Gruber from the Department of the Interior escorted the refugees from Europe; that the refugees' assistance was supported by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes; and how President Harry S. Truman allowed the refugees to apply for US citizenship after political pressure was applied.

Military Fort

Commenters urged the study team to consider the aspects of the military fort's history, including that Fort Ontario played an important role in critical moments of American and international history, from the French and Indian War to hosting a send-off ceremony for recent deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan even though the fort was decommissioned in 1946. The history of the fort dates to 1754 and ties to three regional conflicts, capturing history from the first French missionaries during the colonial period through its use as a Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter in World War II.

Commenters referred to the many 18th- and early-19th-century events at the fort, including:

- The treaty between the British and Chief Pontiac that ended the Indian War, often referred to as the Pontiac Conspiracy (1766), was signed at the fort.

- During the Revolutionary War in February 1783, Fort Ontario was the object of General George Washington's last military campaign, the Willett Expedition.
- From the Treaty of Paris (1783) to the implementation of the Jay Treaty (1796), Fort Ontario and the mouth of the Oswego River were occupied by British troops as a potential avenue for intervention into US territory and growth.
- The fort played an important role in the War of 1812.
- During the Civil War, the fort was a major assembly location for the various regiments that were formed in Oswego County.
- In 1894, troops from Fort Ontario were sent to Chicago to quell riots during the Pullman Strike.
- The Buffalo Soldiers were stationed at Fort Ontario from 1908 to 1911.
- During World War I, the fort served as a military hospital for training medics before they were deployed.
- The fort served as a hospital serving thousands of war casualties and victims of the Spanish Flu in 1918–1919.
- During World War II, the fort transitioned from a military encampment to house Black soldiers in a still-segregated US Army.
- The fourth and current Fort Ontario was garrisoned and rebuilt by the US Army from 1838 to 1844 on the ruins of three fortifications dating to the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, and War of 1812.
- Throughout the fort's military history, it was always rebuilt to serve new purposes. For example, in 1917 the fort was refitted to assist in World War I by serving as a hospital. In 1940, the fort underwent major upgrades to accommodate new training divisions for World War II, and was later retrofitted to accommodate refugees during World War II.
- Three 18th century forts in present-day City of Oswego boundaries (Fort Ontario, Fort Oswego, and Fort George) were important in stopping the lines of communication between the French and the English and were associated with European geopolitical tensions felt across the Great Lakes.
- The history of Fort Ontario in relation to British, French, and Native American politics in the 17th and 18th centuries captures the transnational or trans-imperial perspective in museum narratives and exhibit captions.
- A commenter also noted the importance of the “Great Rope”—the successful transport and delivery in 1814 of a massive line or rigging by the Americans in a shipbuilding race with the British during the War of 1812.

- It is important to recognize the impact of the fort on the lives of those in the surrounding communities. There are numerous stories related to ghosts, as evidenced by the ghost walk at the fort. For example, the head of a soldier named George Fikes was supposedly taken off by a cannonball and his ghost wanders the lakeshore and grounds looking for his head.

Importance of the Site's Diverse and Multicultural Stories

Commenters noted the importance of sharing these stories through multicultural lenses. Commenters urged the study team to consider the importance of the study area to African American history and Native nations' stories, in addition to those of Puerto Rican Americans and the struggle for women's rights.

The study area is important to sovereign Native nations that continue to have deep connections to the Oswego River and the study area today as well as associations with military encounters with European colonizers starting in the 17th century.

In addition to the fort being used as a military encampment to house other Black soldiers in a segregated US Army, multiple commenters noted that for eight months prior to World War II, the fort was used to train the 369th Black Regiment from Harlem known as the Harlem Hellfighters, among other troops throughout history.

One commenter noted stories of Puerto Rican and other ethnic groups' presence during World War II that should be captured.

One commenter has ties to the area dating back to the early 1800s. They noted the surrounding community's role in the Underground Railroad for escaping slaves, championing women's rights, the coal and wood industries that fueled development, and the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825.

Personal Connections

Multiple commenters provided personal connections and offered to provide additional information as needed.

One commenter shared the story of their grandmother, who was interned at Fort Ontario as an enemy alien even though she had two sons serving in the US Army. One son was distinguished for his service with a special US German-Austrian unit of the military intelligence service trained at the secret Camp Ritchie in Maryland during World War II. Meanwhile, another son served in the US Army in Europe. The wife of the second son tried to bring her mother-in-law from Oswego to her home in Los Angeles, but her mother-in-law was not allowed to leave the Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter.

One commenter shared the story of their father, who arrived at the Safe Haven shelter as a 14-year-old Yugoslavian Jewish boy and grew up to be a diplomatic historian at Ivy League universities. A fellow refugee grew up to become one of the major creative forces behind MAD magazine, the iconic American publication. Another young refugee became a doctor integral to the development of both MRI and CT scans. Another commenter was

commissioned to write a play based on the refugees' experiences transitioning from Europe to Fort Ontario and their impact on the refugees' children's generation.

Suggested resources

The following publications and sources of information were mentioned by commenters as potential references:

- *Fort Ontario: Guardian of the North* by George A. & Carol Reed (2000)
- *Where Soldiers of Three Nations Rest: History of the Post Cemetery at Fort Ontario* by Corey S. King, 2019
- *Sarinka: A Sephardic Holocaust Journey from Yugoslavia to an Internment Camp in America* by F. Linda Cohen, 2019
- *The Shelter and the Fence: When 982 Holocaust Refugees Found Safe Haven in America* by Norman H. Finkelstein, 2021
- Gloria Fredove is a survivor currently writing her memoir, *Casual Baggage*, anticipated in 2022.
- files with the Port or City of Oswego on archeological studies and surveys of the area
- Members of the H. Lee White Maritime Museum are involved in studying and preserving the Maritime history, which is intertwined with the history of Fort Ontario.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is studying a Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary for the eastern end of Lake Ontario, partly to recognize the large number of shipwrecks there and the importance of Fort Ontario and Lake Ontario in the early western expansion of the United States after the Revolutionary War (anticipated in 2022).
- Oswego Welcomes New Americans, a nonpartisan group that welcomes refugees and immigrants, is embracing the inheritance of the honor of Safe Haven.
- The Oswego County Historical Society has collections pertaining to Fort Ontario.
- The New York state park system has an amazing comprehensive collection pertaining to Fort Ontario stored in Peebles Island.
- SUNY Oswego studies on the music that came from the Safe Haven shelter
- SUNY Oswego history department research, including oral histories and collection of items

Question 3: Are you aware of documents (letters, diary entries, photographs, newspaper articles, etc.) that are not publicly available that relate to the Fort Ontario site?

Commenters provided the following to ensure the full history is captured:

- US Department of Veterans Affairs, US Immigration Service (including Ellis Island records), and National Archives
- international resources, including British records on British involvement with the site
- Peebles Island State Park
- Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum archives
- SUNY Oswego's special collections, including oral histories
- an academic associated with SUNY Oneonta
- a written script of a play titled *I Have Seen the Mississippi*
- copies of the Safe Haven camp's newsletter
- One commenter offered to provide a copy of a newspaper article profiling their grandmother and a framed original certificate of their father's completion of military training.
- Several commenters offered to share old photos, art pieces, letters, and other documentation from members of the military and Safe Haven refugees.

Question 4: Do you have any other comments, concerns, and suggestions for this study?

Commenters suggested that the study engage with the residents of the city of Oswego and nearby towns, attend some of the various events that take place at the fort, and visit the Safe Haven Museum. Multiple commenters suggested contacting living refugees early on in the process for memoirs, mementos, photographs, and more. One commenter suggested that it would be important to have a creative NPS superintendent at this site, if it is added as an NPS unit.

Commenters suggested including the full extent of the area's history from the Native American perspective.

One commenter suggested selling the NPS Annual Pass at the site to provide in-person access to this pass option, which would be especially relevant to senior citizens.

One commenter noted that Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial could be thematically associated with the study area. The current brochure for this site lists other thematically associated sites and locations, and at this time it does not include Fort Ontario.

Commenters expressed concern about the long duration of the SRS process given the advanced age of people with direct experiences at the Fort prior to its decommissioning in 1946, especially Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter residents.

Commenters expressed concerns that the current costumed historical reenactments would be altered or removed if the National Park Service began managing the site. Commenters urged the continuation of these reenactments.

One commenter expressed concern that the free public access to the waterfront (the bluff overlooking Lake Ontario and adjacent lawn and parking area) would be lost if the site were under NPS management. If a new unit of the national park system were created here, this commenter urged continuing to allow free public access outside of the fort structure, similar to Fort Stanwix National Historical Park in Rome, New York, to ensure ample opportunity for the public to enjoy green spaces.

One commenter expressed concern about how the National Park Service might envision the relationship between the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum and Fort Ontario, now owned by the State of New York, and noted that the current separate management of the two sites ensures that both sites' stories are preserved and interpreted uniquely. Concerns were also expressed about how the integrity of the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum might be lost if it comes under NPS management.

Commenters urged preservation of the fort's viewshed to avoid large or modern development within it. Multiple commenters expressed concern related to development and maintenance. Commenters expressed concerns about a new Port Authority development to the west of the Fort Ontario State Historic Site, which might "ruin" the view from the fort. Comments noted that the eastern and western viewsapes are already impeded by a nuclear power plant and the city of Oswego respectively.

One commenter expressed concern about the poor condition of the backside of the old tunnel leading to the fort from East 7th Street. They expressed hope that NPS management could help address this need for repair.

APPENDIX D: REFERENCES

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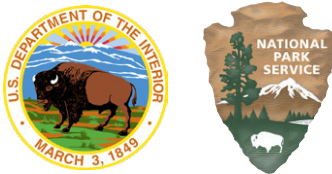
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As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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