

The Passing of Fort Henry's Fine Internment Camp

Fort Henry is soon to lose its present population of 300 prisoners of war and close another chapter of its interesting history. This old fort was built to protect Kingston from Fenian invasion, and within its walls in 1828 Von Shulz, an enemy of Canada, was hanged. It has been the home of between 300 and 400 foreigners who were in Canada when the great war started between Great Britain and Germany, and among them are men who were leaders in Canada's mercantile life.

When the war began preparations were immediately made to intern all aliens who attempted to leave the country. There were a few who got out with the assistance of friends and traitors, but hundreds were caught at the border and placed in safe keeping. Montreal was particularly prominent because of its cosmopolitan population, and in that city alone there were enough men arrested to form a camp, and Kapuskasing, away up in the wild north woods of New Ontario, and miles away from every habitation, or even the National Transcontinental railway, sprang into being. Officers, men and supplies were taken away up there and clearing of the forest was started.

One of the First Chosen.

Fort Henry was one of the first camps to be selected. It was ideally suited for internment prisoners, being so placed that there was small possibility of their escaping. In the west, the camp at Lethbridge has been causing a great deal of trouble by the foreigners digging tunnels through the soft clay, and some of these attempts were successful. At the local camp there was no such prospect. The ground is of shelly limestone, and while efforts have been made, they have not been rewarded by success.

Because of its lay-out Fort Henry was adapted for a prison camp. There is an upper court about as large as a city block. This is surrounded by a series of low buildings, and in these buildings the guard has been quartered and the commandant and his staff have their offices. This court has a commanding view of the country, and trouble in daylight could be thus avoided. The inland end of the fort is some twenty feet below the level of the upper court. It is also surrounded by rooms built into the walls, and these rooms were used for the prisoners.

In each room there are from fifteen to twenty men. The commandant of each room elect one man as its leader. He is the one responsible for the good behavior, and all complaints must be made to the proper authorities through him. The men ate and slept in these rooms and liv-

ed their lives for the past three years in the same quarters.

Keeping the Men Healthy.

Their physical troubles were taken care of by doctors appointed by the Militia Department. The authorities selected three rooms, and with a sergeant in charge a small hospital was constructed. In serious cases the patients have been brought to the city hospitals, but for minor troubles the cure process was within the walls. The small hospital is a model of cleanliness.

To keep the patients out of the hospital was a care placed upon the shoulders of Baron Polenz, one of the prisoners, who by virtue of his title was recognized as leader. He organized physical training classes, and to prevent laziness he had every man go through certain exercises every day. This has proved to a great extent responsible for the low percentage of hospital cases that have been treated.

Amor, other things, the prisoners have spent their time at wood-making. Almost any man can adapt himself to this interesting work if he has the time. With nothing to do and a lot of time on their hands one of the commandants conceived the idea of keeping the prisoners' minds employed with this work. He opened a room as a carpenter shop, and se-

luring tools soon got the men interested. The idea caught on splendidly, and to-day every room at the fort is littered with the wooden mementoes of the prisoners' interment. They have made picture frames, maps, designs of the German crest, and even furniture elaborately carved.

Gardening and Reading.

Another way of spending the long hours was by gardening. There are prisoners who would certainly now give interesting talks on intensive farming who before their interment were sailors or business men who never gave such work a thought. The ground upon which the fort is built is nearer to being solid rock than tillable soil. Nevertheless the prisoners had a garden that probably is not equalled in the district. Under the shadow of a high wall, on which constantly passed a sentry, the men built a garden that contained flowers and vegetables of all kinds, and every room was supplied with its produce.

Reading also came high in the list of ways in which the men whiled away the hours. The German American Club of New York City collected thousands of dollars for this purpose alone. They purchased books in every known language, and these were sent, after an inspection, to the fort, where they were read and re-

read. Newspapers were also sent and by this means the prisoners were kept in touch with the war events. In this connection it is interesting to report a conversation with a Whig representative, who in spite of official orders to the contrary, had an opportunity of making an inspection. The reporter in conversation with one of the German officers asked for an opinion on the war. The reply was characteristic of the speaker, who said: "The British Government has all your papers and all the United States papers well, nearly all—corralled into saying what they want said."

How the Band Got Drunk.

In recalling the many ways in which the Germans passed the long hours of their two years and a half of enforced idleness the German band of the fort should not be forgotten. The Germans are naturally musical, and long before the war—though not since—the citizens many times heard German bands playing on the street corners. The only German band that has played in this district since war was declared in 1914 was that at the fort.

By permission of the commandant, the German-American Club was permitted to send musical instruments

that included everything from a cello to a base drum. With his usual organizing talent, Baron Polenz was the man to take on his shoulders the work of bringing the band into being. He selected the best players for each instrument, had them given musical instruction, and then selecting a bandmaster was able to see as a result of his efforts a very fine musical aggregation that was capable of playing anything from grand opera to rag-time.

The "finale" of this band is a story in itself, and the Whig is the first to put the story into print.

There are two names that seem to rhyme with German—one is "land" and the other is "beer." It was allowable to have a band, but naturally enough beer was not on the menu. The prisoners, however, were not to be deprived of their luxury even on this account, and it was their inventive genius that brought them at least one drink during their residence at Fort Henry.

One day when the bandmen had been practically active during the forenoon and strikingly quiet during the afternoon one of the staff became curious and went to the room to investigate. He found them stretched out on the floor and most of them dead drunk. In spite of the smell of

the liquor, such a thing was almost unbelievable. The thought that the guards, who had always proved so loyal even in the face of many temptations, at last falling from grace, was the only solution of the moment.

That was not correct, however. Taking what is called a "blitz" or military kettle and using part of their band instruments, the bandmen in their spare time had made an almost perfect "still." In this "still" there were placed properly prepared apples, raisins and potatoes, and after distillation a wine was produced that had the desired effect. The apparatus was seized and is now in the possession of Lieut.-Col. P. G. C. Campbell.

The fact that these men had personal means and if they wanted luxuries they should have the liberty of buying them was solved in quite a satisfactory way. Every man had a bank account with the Government. When work was being done outside of the walls the pay for it was placed to his credit. If friends sent him money it went in the same place. Each prisoner had cheques on this account, and two canteens sold him tobacco, soft drinks, etc., taking these cheques in exchange. This system had to be slightly changed a short time ago when it was found

that the men were playing poker with the cheques.

The Commandant.

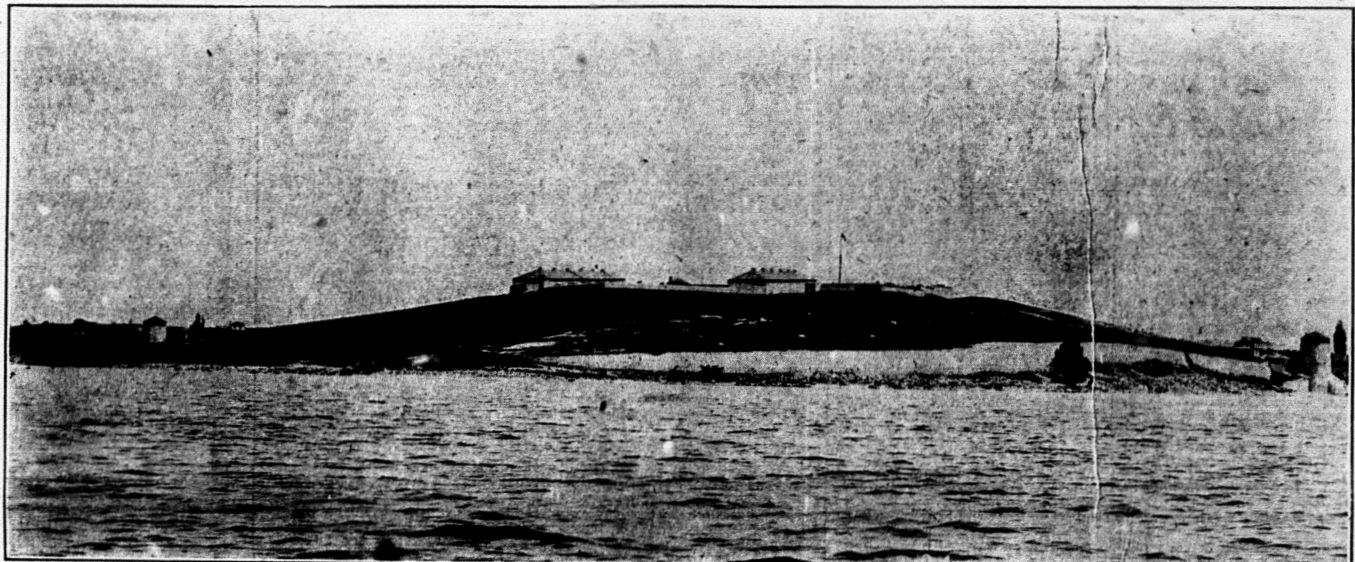
Fort Henry was one of the first war institutions to open in the city. It came even before the 21st Battalion was authorized in November, 1914. H. J. Dawson, then a professor of the Royal Military College, and a major in the 14th Regiment, was the first commandant. On his shoulders fell the work of organization, and he made a success of it, although needless to say he was very unpopular among his guests through his strict ideas on liberties. When the 59th Overseas Battalion was authorized he was given the rank of lieutenant-colonel and the command.

The position as commandant was then taken by Lieut.-Col. J. J. H. Fee a Lindsay man, who was a personal friend of the ex-Minister of Militia. Col. Fee was very satisfactory as commandant and inaugurated the system now in use of having one man in each room made responsible for the conduct of the men in that room.

Col. Fee took the command of the 199th Battalion and was succeeded at the fort by Lieut.-Col. P. G. C. Campbell, who in turn relinquished the position on taking over the command of the 253rd Queen University Highlanders. The present and last commandant is Lieut.-Col. H. E. Date who has been charged in such work since the war began, having been commandant at Spirit Lake, Kapuskasing, Lethbridge and other camps.

Before closing this article there should be some reference made to United States Consul F. S. S. Johnson, who acted for Germany and worked in the prisoners' interests. All packages and mail to the prisoners was opened, examined and acknowledged by him. This work alone took up a great part of his time. Nevertheless he also handled all matters that they wished him to take up with the Government. Periodical inspections had to be made when the prisoners would line up before him and state their cases. These caused an immense amount of detail work but with characteristic thoroughness Mr. Johnson continued it to the best of his ability.

The removal of the prisoners from the fort will cause many great changes. The greatest of these is that the 14th Regiment Guard will be almost completely disbanded. The Kingston regiment has been one of the greatest recruiting agencies for overseas units here. Men have been taken out of civilian life and trained in the guard and then by request allowed to transfer to an overseas unit. In this way the guard has been valuable beside doing its constant work of keeping watch over the alien enemies in their prison camp.



THE FORT HENRY GERMAN INTERNMENT CAMP WILL SOON BE CLOSED.