

INTRODUCTION

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Located on a strategic bend of the Detroit River, Historic Fort Wayne has guarded the international strait separating Detroit from Windsor, Ontario, Canada, since the 1840s. It is Detroit's third and last fort built to control the use of the key connecting waterway in the Great Lakes system. The fort is located on 96 acres. Since the 1970s, 83 acres, the star fort, and many buildings have been operated as a museum and recreation site by the City of Detroit. The remaining acres comprise the Army Corps of Engineers boatyard.

The origins of Fort Wayne begin with a conflict on the Michigan-Ontario border in the late 1830s known as the Patriot War. Local residents of the period remembered the War of 1812 a few decades earlier when Detroit had been captured by the British Army and held for over a year. Indeed, it is the only major American city to have this distinction. Canadian and American rebels organized in the late 1830s to free Canada from British rule. Battles were fought in 1838 along the Detroit River. American troops were mustered to suppress the American volunteers and enforce the nation's stated neutrality in that conflict. Concurrently the United States government realized Detroit had no counterpart to British Fort Malden down the Detroit River at Amherstburg, Ontario, to resist a British attack on American soil.

A major effort began to fortify strategic locations along the northern border. In 1841, Congress appropriated the funds to build a chain of 14 forts including a fort at Detroit. Soon afterwards, the army sent Lt. Montgomery Meigs to buy the strategic riverfront farm location three miles below Detroit in Springwells Township and plan a square bastioned defensive fortification. Construction began in 1843 and was completed in 1851 at a cost of \$150,000. The army named the new post in honor of Gen. "Mad" Anthony Wayne, a hero of the American Revolution, whose troops had taken American possession of Detroit from the British in 1796. Peaceful relations were restored with British Canada and Fort Wayne stood unused with only a watchman on guard for its first decade of existence.

After the attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1861, Pres. Abraham Lincoln asked for 75,000 troops from the northern Union States. Two weeks later, the Michigan 1st Volunteer Infantry Regiment was mustered into Federal service at Fort Wayne. During the rest of the Civil War, the fort served as a mustering center for more Michigan units destined for battles with the Confederacy. Michigan veterans returned to Fort Wayne to recover from wounds and illnesses. Fears of Confederate raids coming from Canada, whose parent country sympathized with the South, gave the fort a new strategic importance. More federal funds were allocated to rebuild the crumbling wooden walls of Fort Wayne with brick and concrete, seven and a half feet thick, in the 1860s.

With the end of the Civil War, the fort assumed the role of a garrison post. Infantry regiments rotated from the western frontier for rest and recruitment. Companies, supplied from Detroit's fort, also staffed the outlying Michigan posts at Port Huron (Fort Gratiot), Mackinac Island (Fort Mackinac), and Sault Ste. Marie (Fort Brady). Army units from the fort went overseas to fight in the Spanish American War in Cuba and the Philippines.

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With the rise of the American automobile industry, Detroit assumed a new importance in the replacement of horses and mules with motor vehicles for America's military transportation needs. Although still used by infantry units as a garrison post until 1920, Fort Wayne began its new function as a base for army motor supply. Beginning in World War I, the fort's role in the acquisition of cars, trucks, and spare parts for America's military grew, reaching its zenith during World War II. During World War II, Fort Wayne's facilities were greatly expanded. Major office and shipping buildings were built on the riverfront. Seven warehouses were constructed to house the thousands of tons of vehicle parts that moved through the facility on a daily basis. An army of 2,000 mostly civilian workers provided the woman and man power to supply the equipment to make victory possible. Other workers, controlled from Fort Wayne, operated the vehicle storage and shipping facility at the Michigan State Fairgrounds and the Port of Detroit docks and waterfront warehouses. Detroit became known as the arsenal of democracy, recognition that the city and Fort Wayne made key manufacturing and supply contributions to winning the Second World War.

With the beginning of the Cold War era, the fort gradually lost its motor supply function. It served as the supply base for the anti-aircraft batteries protecting metro-Detroit during the 1950s. When the guns were replaced by Nike missiles in the 1960s, Fort Wayne became the launch control and supply base for the missile batteries. Rumors have it that some of the missiles had nuclear warheads. The fort continued to serve as the armed forces entrance station for Michigan. It was a role the Springwells site had performed since militia camped there while being organized for the Black Hawk War by the garrison at the Detroit barracks. Thousands of enlistees and draftees were given military physicals and swore their oaths of allegiance upon entering service during the Korean War and Vietnam War eras.

The original bastioned fort continued to serve as a storage facility until the end of World War II. It had been recognized as a site of historic and architectural significance in the 1930s by the Depression-era program, the Historic American Building Survey. During the Great Depression architects and historians were employed to record its design resulting in 14 pages of drawings on its buildings and fortifications. In 1949, the star fort and barracks were turned over to the City of Detroit's Historical Commission to be operated as a military museum. In 1971, the Interior Department offered the remaining property to the City of Detroit to expand the museum with additional 19th and early 20th century buildings. The Detroit Historical Museum gradually opened a number of restored buildings to the public and installed a major collections center in one of the large warehouses.

After 1991, funding for the fort declined along with the City of Detroit's and the Detroit Historical Museum's budgets, and the fort closed until 2001. It has reopened on summer weekends and for special events only. A master plan for development and future use of the fort was completed in 2005. The following year, fort operations were turned over to the City of Detroit Recreation Department which continues to keep it open for public and special event use. The Detroit Historical Society, now operating the Detroit Historical Museum, keeps the