

TOURS

"A stroll at Mackinac is worth a day in any man's life."

Horace Greeley, 1847

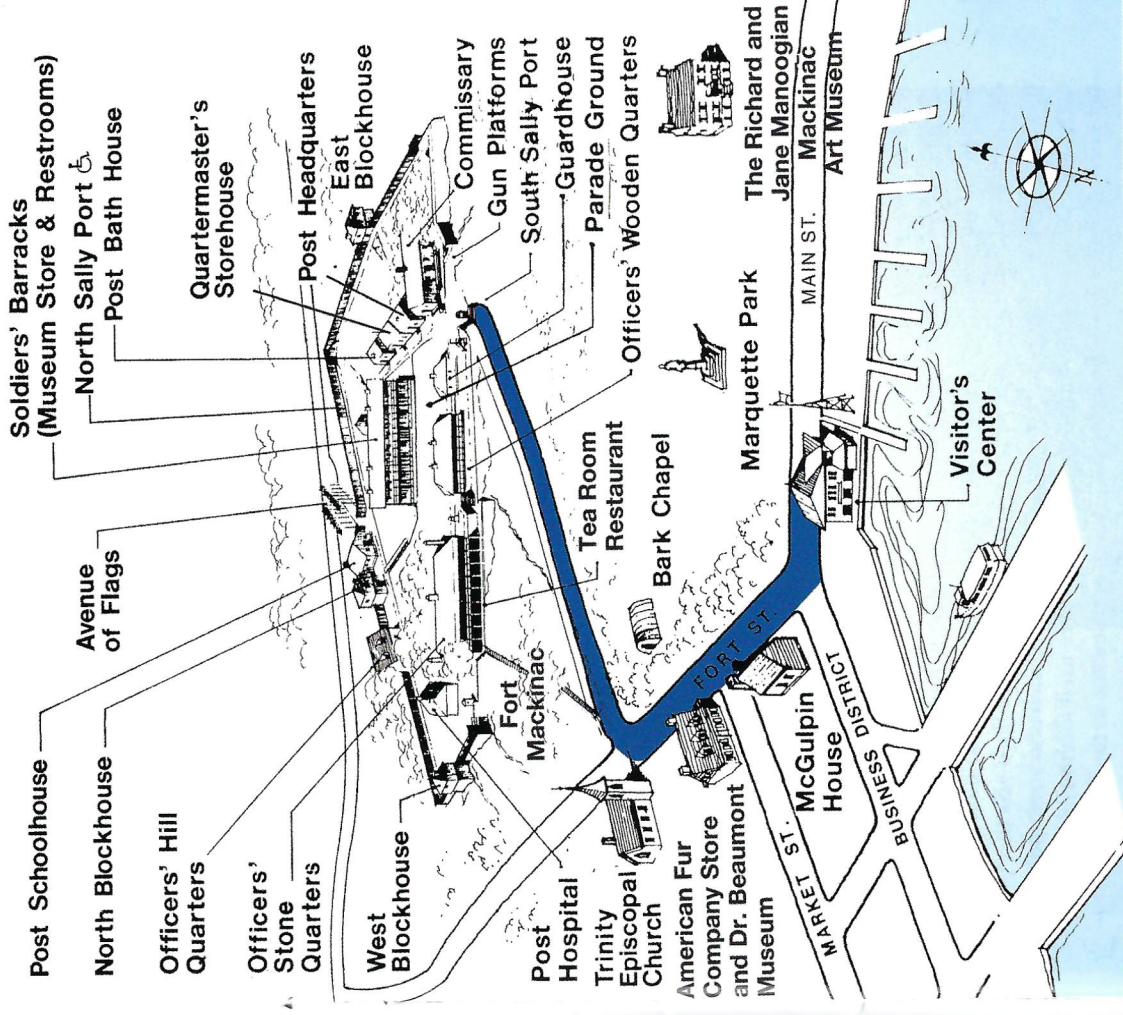
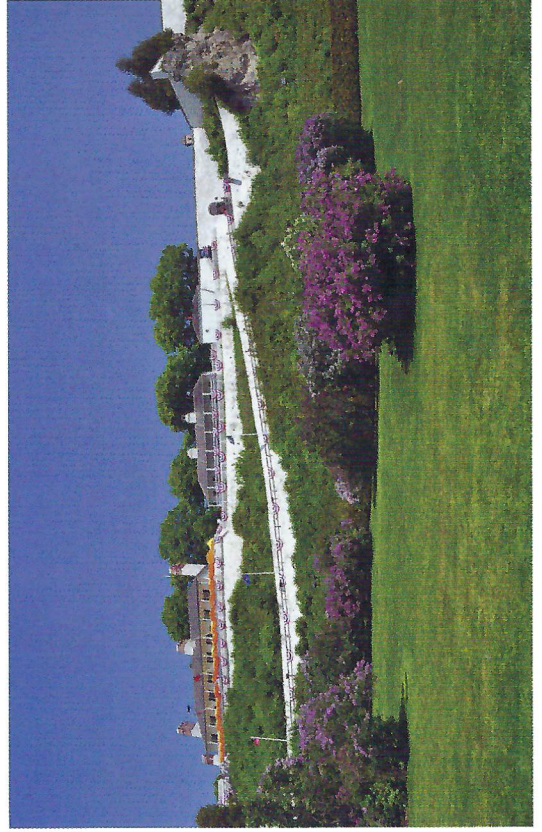
1 A DESIRABLE STATION: THE FORT MACKINAC TOUR

Walking, 1 to 2 hours

VISITOR'S CENTER TO FORT MACKINAC

Fort Mackinac served as a military outpost for British and, later, American soldiers from 1780 to 1895. The role of the military on Mackinac Island changed dramatically during the fort's 115 year history. In the early years Fort Mackinac was a crucial Great Lakes border post and its soldiers helped protect the lucrative fur trade and maintain alliances with neighboring Indian tribes. By the late nineteenth century the post had outlived its military importance but gained new significance when Mackinac National Park was established in 1875. The post commander became the superintendent of the park and his soldiers assumed new duties caring for America's second national park, which was becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination. It was during this period that one of the fort officers described Fort Mackinac as a "desirable station," reflecting the high regard that most soldiers had for service at the fort in the late nineteenth century.

In 1779, during the American Revolution, Lieutenant-Governor Patrick Sinclair decided to move the military and fur trade community



of Michilimackinac from the mainland (present-day Mackinaw City) to Mackinac Island. Afraid that American rebels would attack the vulnerable wooden post of Michilimackinac, Sinclair built the new stone-walled fort on the island's steep and defensible limestone bluff and established the trading village around the bay below.

Walking up Fort Street to the foot of the fort ramp you pass the triangular stone monument erected in 1931 by the Daughters of the American

Revolution. It proclaims that "Mackinac is the most historic place in Michigan." On the left is Trinity Episcopal Church and on the right is the Missionary Bark Chapel. (See Tour 3.)

The ramp looks formidable, but it is not too bad. Take it easy and enjoy the view, which becomes more impressive as you approach the 150-foot high South Sally Port entrance. Persons with mobility impairments should proceed up Fort Hill, turn right at the top and purchase a ticket at the Avenue of Flags where the guest services representative will provide additional access information. A wheelchair is often available.

FORT MACKINAC

You can inspect the fort buildings in any order that is convenient. Every building in Fort Mackinac is original, built by the army and used by soldiers more than

100 years ago. All are well interpreted and complete in themselves but two buildings that provide a good orientation are the Soldiers' Barracks and the Post Commissary.

The **restrooms** are in the rear of the Soldiers' Barracks and the **Tea Room Restaurant** is in front of the Officers' Stone Quarters.

The largest building at Fort Mackinac, the **Soldiers' Barracks** (1859, above) was home to the enlisted men. Originally most of the soldiers lived on the first floor and the large central room on the second floor was the post chapel. After Mackinac National Park was established and a second company of soldiers added in 1876, both floors were used for housing with the kitchens and mess halls in the back wing. An elevator in the Soldiers' Barracks provides access between floors and the upper and lower sections of the fort.

Today the second floor of the Soldiers' Barracks houses the fort's largest exhibit *Mackinac: An Island Famous in These Regions*. This exciting exhibit tells the story of Mackinac Island as a summer gathering place for Indians, missionaries, fur traders, fishermen, soldiers and summer tourists. Original artifacts, colorful murals, interactive displays and video programs bring the rich history of Mackinac to life.

The west end of the Soldiers' Barracks first floor is restored as barracks rooms with furniture and personal belongings of soldiers who served during the 1880s. A telegraph clatters in the company office and biographies of

soldiers from the 23rd Regiment provide insight into the lives of the men who lived in this building.

The former first floor squad room is now the **Sutler's Store**, with books and merchandise related to the history of Fort Mackinac and the island. Items are available for all ages and interests. The heated shop makes a welcome stop on a cool spring or fall day.

The rear wing of the Barracks has accessible **restrooms** and the elevator. **The Post Commissary** (1878) was the warehouse for food supplies. Pork, beef, vegetables, fowl and many other food items were stored in huge quantities to get the garrison through the winter when Mackinac Island was isolated by storms and ice. Today, the Post Commissary is a comfortable auditorium. At frequent intervals the lively, 12-minute video, "Heritage of Mackinac," explores the dynamic history of Fort Mackinac and Mackinac Island.

The Post Headquarters (1854) was the administrative center of Fort Mackinac. Here the commandant and his officers issued daily orders, corresponded with the Secretary of War and other army officials in Washington and managed an unending list of construction and maintenance projects. Every two

months the soldiers lined up outside Post Headquarters where the traveling paymaster set up a temporary office. One by one the men filed through the office, signed the payroll and received their payment. In the years following the Civil War, enlisted men earned between \$13 and \$34 per month while officers earned between \$1,400

and \$2,500 a year. Today, visitors can use an interactive database in the headquarters to explore the lives of Fort Mackinac's soldiers.

The Quartermaster's Storehouse (1867) housed supplies, equipment and uniforms used by the soldiers. Each soldier received an annual clothing allowance that included an undress work uniform and a formal dress uniform along with socks, shirts and suspenders. Because of the frigid northern Michigan climate, Fort Mackinac soldiers also received overcoats, fur caps and muskrat gloves.

The Post Bathhouse was one of the last buildings constructed at Fort Mackinac. Constructed in 1885 during a "hygiene fever," the building was a





Interactive exhibits in the Post Hospital

testimony to modern technology and featured six cast iron bath tubs and hot and cold running water. The post surgeon, Dr. John Bailey, boasted that the men bathed "once a week, or more."

The two rooms of the **Post Guardhouse** (1828) reflect its dual purpose. The guardroom was headquarters for the soldiers assigned to twenty-four hour guard duty while the cell served as a jail for prisoners convicted of crimes or awaiting trial. A squad of six to eight men rotated between marching the sentry beats and keeping watch on prisoners in the cell. This is the third guardhouse on this site. The only remnant from the first guardhouse is the "Black Hole" dungeon beneath the cell.

The Wood Quarters (1816) was constructed by American soldiers after the War of 1812 and served a variety of functions over the years. The building was used as a soldiers' barracks, officers' quarters, temporary hospital, laundress quarters and storehouse. In 1889, the building was remodeled into the post canteen. Here off-duty soldiers relaxed while playing billiards, reading magazines, enjoying sandwiches or sipping a mug of beer, "Schlitz of Milwaukee," for five cents a glass.

The Officers' Stone Quarters is one of the oldest buildings in Michigan. Construction began in 1780 when British soldiers moved from Fort Michilimackinac to the island. The structure was always used as an officers' quarters and was often the home of the post commandant. Late 19th-century period settings depicting the lifestyle and furnishings of officers' families are displayed in the east end of the building. Children of all ages will enjoy the

many hands-on activities offered in the Kids' Quarters on the west end.

The Post Hospital (1828) is Michigan's oldest hospital building. It was here that the fort's dedicated surgeons performed a wide variety of medical procedures from setting broken bones to delivering babies. While Fort Mackinac was a generally healthy outpost, soldiers did suffer from disease and injury. The most common diseases were influenza, respiratory ailments and stomach and intestinal disorders. While visiting the hospital today, stop and listen to an historic Army doctor and modern surgeon compare notes on the treatment of sick and injured soldiers from Fort Mackinac's past.

The Officers' Hill Quarters (1835) was home for two officers and their families. Featuring authentic 1880's furnishings, the two apartments tell the story of family life at Fort Mackinac and focus on social, recreational and family activities.

Constructed in 1879, the **Post Schoolhouse** provided educational opportunities for soldiers and their children. Late nineteenth-century enlisted men, many of whom were foreign-born, had little education. Classes in writing, arithmetic, spelling, reading and history were offered to improve their education and make them better soldiers.

Fort Mackinac soldiers assembled on the **Parade Ground** for daily roll call, Sunday morning inspection and to practice their military drills. The Parade Ground was originally gravel and on bright, sunny days the white gravel and white buildings created an uncomfortable glare on the soldiers' eyes. As a result, Captain Greenleaf A. Goodale ordered several of the buildings surrounding the Parade Ground painted brown in 1888 to relieve the glare. The original color has been discovered through scientific paint analysis and the appropriate buildings have been authentically repainted.

Conveniently located in the center of the fort, the Parade Ground is home to many live interpretation programs. Here the fort interpreters conduct marching and weapons demonstrations, reenact courts-martial, play music and host dances and lead guided tours.

Stairs from the Parade Ground lead to the fort **Tea Room Restaurant** on the veranda in front of the Officers' Stone Quarters. Here you can relax and enjoy the spectacular view of the island village and



Fort Mackinac's Tea Room Restaurant



Victorian children's games on the parade ground are led by a costumed, historic interpreter.

shimmering blue waters of the Straits of Mackinac. The Tea Room Restaurant menu has something for everyone, including a children's menu.

FORT DEFENSES

Fort Mackinac may appear to be a small and peaceful complex of nineteenth-century buildings, but the pickets and cannon emplacements around its perimeter remind us that the soldiers were expected to defend it to the last man. The three blockhouses form a triangle designed not only to withstand frontal attack, but to be the final place of refuge for soldiers and their families if an enemy broke into the fort.

Three-foot thick limestone walls with overhanging second stories enabled defenders to withstand small arms and artillery fire and to return the fire through strategic gun ports.

The **North Blockhouse** (1798) comes to life through a dramatic period setting highlighting the British capture of Fort Mackinac during the War of 1812.

The **East Blockhouse** tells more of the fort's role in the war with a short video about the Battle of Mackinac Island in 1814 (see Tour 6). Visitors to the **West Blockhouse** will find panoramic views of the Round Island Passage and lighthouses, the village of Mackinac Island, the Straits of Mackinac, and the Mackinac Bridge. The **Upper Gun Platform** dominates the harbor and town below. From here you will see why British commander Lt. Colonel Robert McDouall described the fort as "A fortress built by nature for herself" in 1815. The town nestles 150 feet below the cliff. Almost the entire length of Market Street, the center of mid-America's 1820's fur trade is visible. Beyond is the Straits of Mackinac with Mackinaw City anchoring the south end of the five-mile long Mackinac Bridge and the Upper Peninsula's St. Ignace at the north end.

You may exit Fort Mackinac via the Avenue of Flags near the Schoolhouse to the road behind the fort. Both the stairway at the Tea Room and the ramp via the South Sally Port lead directly into town.

