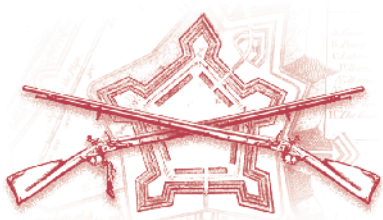


UP FRONT



FORT PITT MUSEUM

By Andrew Gaerte,
Education Manager, Fort Pitt Museum

The Guns of King George: English Cannons at the Point

For two long months in the summer of 1763, the inhabitants of Pittsburgh and soldiers of Fort Pitt were besieged by a large force of Native American warriors participating in the uprising known as Pontiac's Rebellion. While other English forts in the Great Lakes region quickly fell, Fort Pitt withstood all attacks. Key to the success of Fort Pitt was the small detachment of Royal Artillerymen and the 40 pieces of artillery mounted on the walls of the fort. For almost two decades in the middle of the 18th century, the great guns of King George profoundly influenced the history of the Point.

By the start of the French & Indian War, the importance of artillery within European armies had grown to where Prince Joseph Wenzel Liechtenstein commented in 1753, "the artillery branch has progressed so far that it determines the fate of our arms and victory or defeat in battle."¹ The English were key players in this 18th-century arms race. In 1716, King George I established the Royal Artillery Regiment, providing a "sufficient number of gunners with proper officers ... kept ready for our service."² When news of the French occupation of the forks of the Ohio reached England in 1754, it was these professional artillerists along with their guns that would accompany General Braddock

on his campaign to repossess the Virginia backcountry.

Braddock's army would march towards Fort Duquesne with one of the largest collections of artillery yet assembled in North America. Seventy men of the Royal Artillery Regiment and 29 pieces of artillery accompanied the general on his march.³ The cannons that were hauled over the mountains and through the dense woods in 1755 were some of the newest and most advanced pieces in the English arsenal. Included were six bronze six-pounders, capable of firing a solid iron cannonball a distance of almost two miles. It was the threat of these guns that caused the French to leave the walls of Fort Duquesne and led them to the ambush and defeat of Braddock's force seven miles from

their objective. The rout was so complete that the British lost their entire train of artillery, which proved a great windfall to the French, who would use the captured British ordinance for the rest of the war.⁴

Three years after the terrible defeat on the banks of the Monongahela, a much larger British army made its way towards Fort Duquesne through the "thick woods and dangerous defiles" of Pennsylvania.⁵ Like Braddock before him, General John Forbes brought a large number of cannon with him on the campaign of 1758. Under the supervision of 37 Royal Artillerists, 33 pieces of artillery made the trip west.⁶ Forbes succeeded in driving the French from the Point and left behind him a string of forts protected by the cannons he had brought. At



The Fort Pitt Museum's new English light six-pounder cannon. The barrel and carriage together weigh over 1,000 pounds.

Both photos by Andrew Gaerte.




Detail of the raised molding on the barrel, showing the intertwined GR2 for Georgius Rex 2, or King George II.

the Point, one of the largest British military fortifications in North America would be built over the next three years.

When Fort Pitt was completed in 1762 it boasted an impressive arsenal of 40 pieces of artillery, ranging in size from small iron swivel guns to large eight-inch mortars.⁷ For the next decade, the town of Pittsburgh grew under the safety of these guns. The British ultimately abandoned Fort Pitt in 1772, taking with them all the worthwhile artillery, while destroying some old iron pieces and any ammunition too heavy to transport back across the mountains.⁸

In the spring of 2013 an English cannon returned to Fort Pitt. In what was a two-year project, museum staff researched and contracted with a local company, Heritage Restorations, in Ligonier, Westmoreland County, to faithfully reconstruct a French & Indian War period English light six-pounder cannon. The reproduction bronze cannon will be used at the museum to educate visitors

about the important role of artillery at the Point, and will be fired throughout the year. 

¹ Quoted in Johnathan B.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 165.

² Oliver F.G. Hogg, *English Artillery 1326-1716* (London: Royal Artillery Institution, 1963), 269.

³ General Edward Braddock to Robert Napier, 8 June 1755, in *Military Affairs in North America 1748-1765*, ed. Stanley Pargellis (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969), 90-91

⁴ M. de Vaudreuil to M. de Massiac, 1 November 1758, in *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, ed. E.B. O'Callaghan (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1858), 10:863.

⁵ Letter from General Forbes' Army, 28 November 1758, in *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, ed. S.K. Stevens, Donald H. Kent, and Autumn L. Leonard (Harrisburg: PHMC, 1951), 2:614.

⁶ Douglas R. Cubbison, *The British Defeat of the French in Pennsylvania 1758* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010), 27.

⁷ Simon Ecuyer to Henry Bouquet, 26 January 1763, in *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, ed. Louis M. Waddell (Harrisburg: PHMC, 1994), 6:150.

⁸ General Gage to Captain Edmonstone, 31 August 1772, Gage Papers, WLCL.

Braddock's Battlefield History Center



Photo by David Kissell.

- The new Braddock's Battlefield History Center (BBHC) at 609 Sixth Street in North Braddock is on the site of the famous 1755 French & Indian War battle. Approximately 650 Native Americans and 150 French Canadians defending Fort Duquesne converged here to confront a powerful force of British regulars and colonial militias led by General Edward Braddock heading to the Point. The British defeat shocked the colonies and Europe. Known as "The Battle of the Monongahela," "Battle of the Wilderness," and "Braddock's Defeat," this engagement became one of the most legendary military conflicts in American colonial history.
- Those who fought in the battle, most of whom were quite young at the time, included George Washington, Thomas Gage, Horatio Gates, Charles Lee, Daniel Boone, Daniel Morgan, Charles de Langlade, and quite possibly Pontiac.

- The BBHC features more than 50 works of art including maps of the battle, approximately 250 original artifacts, a theater showcasing educational films and documentaries pertaining to the French & Indian War, and a gift shop with publications and souvenirs.
- The BBHC is the culmination of two decades' effort by retired Pittsburgh-area lawyer Robert T. Messner, greatly facilitated by the support of local foundations, corporations, communities, and the Carnegie Free Library of Braddock. The BBHC was designed by Landmarks Design Architects and renovated by Repal Construction, and the current building is a striking renovation of a former Pontiac automobile dealership. Tours of the BBHC may be combined with tours of the Carnegie Free Library of Braddock—the first Carnegie Library in the United States—which was recently designated a National Historic Landmark.
- BBHC is open Tuesdays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sundays, noon to 4 p.m.; and by appointment. Guided and self-directed tours are available.
- For information please visit www.braddocksbattlefield.com or contact the center at Battlefield1755@verizon.net or (412) 271-0800 / (412) 651-1793.



The History Center Affiliates Program, HCAP, is a membership-based network that allows local and regional historical societies and museums access to museum professionals and best practice standards through the Senator John Heinz History Center.

To find out more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Robert O. Stakeley, Educator, at rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org or (412) 454-6359.