

Québec Strikes Up the Bands!



Musicians made by Martin Ritchie of U.S. Military Miniatures strike up the band!

James H. Hillestad unexpectedly encounters international bands on parade while exploring history and hunting for toy soldiers in Québec City

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad



Inspired by Editor Stuart A. Hessney's articles on Québec City (TSMF issues 105 and 136), my wife Carol and I traveled to the historic Canadian city for a memorable five-day visit in August 2011.

As luck would have it, our visit coincided with the annual International Festival of Military Bands, and what a festival it was!

Down the Grande Allée -- the main thoroughfare of walled Old Québec -- came 14 marching bands resplendent in the dress of the six countries that they represented: Belgium, Canada, Russia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. With flags fluttering in the breeze under a sun-drenched sky, the parade gave one goose bumps. It was a visual and auditory extravaganza.

RIVER NARROWS

Established in 1608 by French explorer Samuel de Champlain, Québec City is situated on a rocky promontory jutting into the St. Lawrence River (321 feet above sea level). It draws its name from the Algonquin word "kebec," meaning "where the river narrows."

Because of its strategic location -- basically controlling access to the entire northern part of North America -- Québec City was a longtime battleground and besieged six times. It was unsuccessfully besieged by the British in 1632, captured by the British in the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War) in 1759, and unsuccessfully attacked in

TOP, LEFT: Band of the Royal 22e Regiment.

ABOVE, LEFT: The National Band of the Naval Reserve from Toronto.

LEFT: The Royal Canadian Artillery Band traveled from Edmonton, Alberta, to march in the festival parade.



1775 by Colonials led by Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery during the American Revolutionary War.

Most noteworthy was the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, named for Abraham Martin, a wealthy farmer living in Québec City in the 17th century. It was there that British troops, under the command of Maj. Gen. James Wolfe, defeated French troops led by Maj. Gen. Louis-Joseph de Montcalm Sept. 13, 1759. Both generals were mortally wounded in the clash.

LANDMARK HOTEL

We stayed at Château Frontenac, built in 1892 and named after the Comte de Frontenac, who was governor of New France from 1672 to 1682. The historic hotel towers over the city and is its most enduring symbol.

Through the years, the landmark has



TOP, LEFT: The Royal Air Force Band of Belgium.

ABOVE, LEFT: The 78th Highlanders (Ross-Shire Buffs) Pipes and Drums from Halifax, Nova Scotia.



LEFT: The Central Band of the British Royal Air Force.



ABOVE: The Royal 22e Regiment is based in the Citadelle of Québec.

ABOVE, LEFT: The United States was represented by the New York City Police Department Band.



LEFT: The Top Secret Drum Corps from Switzerland.

GOLFING, TOWERS AT PLAINS OF ABRAHAM

When Québec City's last British garrison returned to England in 1871, their open drill field on the Plains of Abraham was left vacant.

The rising popularity of golf in the Province of Québec prompted fans of the game to establish the Royal Québec Golf Club in 1874 on the vacated land, known as Cove Field.

The grass was initially maintained by a dairyman's cattle. Proper attire for the sport was red jackets imported from England, gray trousers, and matching shirts and ties. Some golfers wore white gloves.

The flow of visitors to the historic site in the early 20th century made golfing a more "hazardous" pastime. As a result, the golf course was relocated to a more secluded site.

In the early 19th century, the British feared that the Americans, having declared their independence in 1776, would proceed to try to an-

nex Canada. In 1808, three Martello towers were built on the Plains of Abraham to thwart any such maneuver.

Inexpensive to erect and easy to defend, the Martello towers were arranged to provide for each other's defense in a line nearly parallel to Old Québec's walls. Their design is distinctive: the west wall, which faces the potential enemy, is very thick; the east wall is thinner and could be easily destroyed from the city walls in the event that a tower was captured.

By the time the War of 1812 erupted, the three defensive towers were completed and ready for use. However, they were never tested by an attack.

BELOW: Martello tower No. 1 overlooks the St. Lawrence River at the Plains of Abraham.



hosted luminaries such as American aviator Charles Lindbergh and British Queen Elizabeth II. Château Frontenac hosted British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt for their World War II Quebec Conferences in 1943 and 1944.

While in Old Québec, we stopped in at La Boutique Artisans Canada, home of the Toy Soldiers' Club operated by brothers Antoine and Thomas Théberge. The shop was well-stocked with toy soldier items by King & Country Ltd., John Jenkins Designs and other makers.

Figures were nicely displayed in mini-dioramas. Unfortunately, they were not titled and price tags were absent, which left the

ABOVE: The Russian Alexandrov Red Army Choir and Ensemble.

BELOW: Frontline Figures products for sale in the Musée du Fort gift shop.

BOTTOM: Montcalm and Wolfe's troops clash on the Plains of Abraham in the museum diorama.





viewer with more questions than answers!

A short walk will bring visitors to the Citadelle of Québec, home to an official residence of the Canadian governor general, the Royal 22e Regiment and the regimental museum of the “Van Doos.”

BATTLE DIORAMA

A real treat was our visit to the Musée du Fort, just a stone’s throw from the Frontenac. Located in an 1849 building, the museum houses a spectacular 30-foot-long diorama of the 1759 Battle of Québec on the Plains of Abraham. Accompanied by a sound and light presentation, hundreds of 30-mm figures sweep over a topographically



ABOVE: Photo on display at Château Frontenac showing Roosevelt and Churchill with aides and the hotel in the background.

ABOVE, RIGHT: View of the St. Lawrence River, looking east from the Upper City.

RIGHT: The Terrace Dufferin with the Château Frontenac at left.

BELOW: Musée du Fort’s diorama depicting the Battle of Québec in 1759.





realistic landscape while warships do battle on the river.

The figures used in this masterpiece were made initially in Spain in the 1960s. In the 1990s, the diorama was refurbished and the soldiers were replaced. The makers are unknown, but a guess would be Alymer and Greenwood & Ball.

The Musée du Fort's very nice gift shop is well-stocked with books as well as 1:30-scale French and Indian War combatants produced by Frontline Figures.

For the history buff, 400-year-old Québec City is paradise. A bus tour of the provincial capital provides a helpful introduction.

For those interested in good food and wine, it is an epicurean delight. Try the Omelet restaurant on Rue Saint-Loui, and Starbucks – yes, Starbucks! – at the Frontenac for exquisite croissants and pastries.

As they say, "Bienvenue à Québec!" ♦

ABOVE: Displays at the Toy Soldiers' Club.

LEFT: Musée du Fort in Old Québec.



acknowledgments

I am grateful to Marie-Eve Jacob, communications director of the Festival of Music; and to Anick Hébert of the Musée du Fort for their generous help with information for this article.

--James H. Hillestad

about the writer

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.

HOTEL LANDS SURPRISE GUEST

At around 8 p.m. April 24, 1928, a tall figure dressed in a peculiar-looking jumpsuit, with a sheepskin collar, made a spectacular entrance into the lobby of the Château Frontenac in Québec City. His airplane had just touched down on the nearby Plains of Abraham.

American Charles Lindbergh was on a mission of mercy. His friend and fellow aviator, Floyd Bennett, lay at death's door in a Québec hospital.

Accompanied by a doctor from the Rockefeller Institute, Lindbergh delivered a serum intended to be used to save Bennett, who was battling pneumonia.

The next morning Lindbergh again took to the sky and circled over the hospital as though to bid his friend goodbye. Despite these efforts, Bennett died the same day.

--James H. Hillestad

RIGHT: A pencil sketch of Lindbergh hangs in the lobby of the Château Frontenac.

