

# Tower of London and Fort Michilimackinac: Ties of Steel and Lead

Many American tourists to England go to see the Tower of London. This medieval castle, first built in 1067 by William the Conqueror and rebuilt many times since, has served since the time of Queen Victoria as a tourist attraction and home of the crown jewels of the former British Empire. When Mackinac Island was young, however, from the late 1600s until after the War of 1812, the Tower of London was the King of England's principle research-and-development armory, the place where small arms were designed and prototypes built for battlefield use.

In the early 1700s, the foremost English infantry weapon was the relatively reliable Brown Bess musket. This .75-caliber, 10-pound flintlock smoothbore, with its ability to be reloaded quickly and fired in disciplined volleys, was a favorite of the officer corps. The officers would continue to issue guns like this throughout the century to the king's troops throughout the world; variants of the Brown Bess would be the standard guns carried by the British soldiers manning the Straits of Mackinac starting in 1761. Well before this time, however, the king's Native American allies had turned their backs on the broad-gauge musket.

Throughout the first half of the 1700s, American traders from the East Coast had begun to penetrate inland North America. Two major trails led inland. One, from New York City, went up the Mohawk River into the lands of the Iroquois, longtime friends of the British; the other, from the Potomac River, led up into Western Pennsylvania and what was to become Ohio Territory. Both trails, if followed to their end, led to the richest fur-bearing country in the world: the shores of the Great Lakes.



## A Look at History

By FRANK STRAUS

### Brown Bess

Several Indian tribes and bands became friends of the English, one of the westernmost of which was a Miami band that lived in a corn-growing village at Pickawillany, the modern Piqua, Ohio. In May 1752, a war band of 260 men, led by Mackinaw City's Charles de Langlade, left the Straits of Mackinac to chastise this threat to French dominance. They were probably armed with the standard .59-caliber French trade gun of the day, much lighter than the .75-caliber Brown Bess. Fittings from these guns, familiar to French and Indians, have been dug up at Fort Michilimackinac. On June 21, 1752, this mixed French and Indian expedition raided Piqua, killed the chief, and took five British traders as hostages.

The fur traders and the Indian friends of the English needed lighter weapons to defend themselves. In Indian country, the European musket was useless.

We have a snappish letter from Sir William Johnson, the Mohawk Valley grandee and de facto British ambassador to the Iroquois Confederacy, in 1755: "I have got up the guns you sent me, which will not answer at all; instead of being light Indian guns as I wrote for, I find they are Old Muskets vamped up anew. So large and wide a bore the Indians never use, neither would they carry them if they were to be paid ever so much for it. So I return them to you, in order to change them for light guns if you can; if not I don't

want them."

The fur traders had already begun to demand what was called the "North West" gun, so called from the compass direction of the trails that they used to enter Indian country. Starting in 1753, the British Board of Ordnance contracted with the Tower of London armory to assemble 380 light muskets. These guns were also smoothbores, but with 48-inch "North West" barrels. Despite the barrel's length, these were lighter guns because their caliber, the width of the barrel, was narrower. The caliber of the 1753 gun is not stated in the requisition, but surviving similar guns from this period are 16-gauge and 20-gauge; they have smoothbore calibers of .65 and .60.

The Tower of London guns were known in the English capital as "chief's guns." In contrast to the 10-pound Brown Bess, they weighed from five to 7.5 pounds. They were meant to be shipped to North America and given to friendly Native American "chiefs" as rewards for loyalty, symbols of alliance, and means of self-defense on the English-speaking frontier. It was characteristic of the time that even though most Englishmen and English-speaking Americans thoroughly shared the racist feelings of their generation, they were willing and eager to share with friendly Indians the best guns they had. The French, of course, had already learned this lesson. Indians were demonstrating, by hunting, birding, and fur trading, their eagerness to shoot sharp in what was becoming a war for the North American con-

tinued.

1753 was also the year that the young Virginia envoy, George Washington, took the North West trail up from the Potomac to the French posts of western Pennsylvania. The trail led to Lake Erie, which young Washington never saw. His way was politely barred by the French at Fort le Boeuf, 16 miles south of the lake in northwest Pennsylvania. In the summer of 1754, Washington returned, this time leading a war party of 300 men. He was surrounded and forced to surrender at Fort Necessity, in southwest Pennsylvania. In this battle,

Native American allies of the English and French fought on both sides.

With the help of their long guns, the English and Americans won the "French and Indian War." In 1761, the French flag flying over Fort Michilimackinac came down for the last time; but only 15 years after this date, the English and their American colonies would themselves be at war, and the Native allies of the King of England would be facing in a new direction. The Indians of the upper Great Lakes would be reacting to a new threat from the south-east.

## Brodeurs, Spatas Buy Sweet Shop



Tony and Shannon Brodeur behind the counter at Martha's Sweet Shop.

By Bernie Nguyen

The little downtown bakery has changed hands once again. Martha's Sweet Shop, which for years has been known on the Island for its sugary baked goods, is now under the ownership of Tony and Loretta Spata and Tony and Shannon Brodeur, who purchased the Shop from Mandy Taylor last winter.

Mr. Brodeur, who does the majority of the baking and runs the shop on a daily basis, said the family has been concentrating on perfecting everything Ms. Taylor did when she owned the shop, and are using the original recipes of Martha Graning, who was the shop's first owner.

Mr. Brodeur said that the adjustment to the new business has been eased by Ms. Taylor's presence, who, before the season started, gave the new owners a crash course in how to run a bakery.

"She came down for two weeks and helped us out with learning the business," Mr. Brodeur said, adding that she also helped them with adapting to the timing and schedule of baking fresh muffins and cookies every morning.

The shop's cinnamon rolls and blueberry muffins are

among its most popular items, he noted, and toward the later part of the summer when the weather gets hot, the ice cream is an often-sought relief from the heat. But, he said, one of the Shop's biggest sellers is coffee, especially in the morning when downtown employees stop by for a hot cup.

"My favorite part is just getting to talk to everybody that I normally don't get to see," Mr. Brodeur said.

While Mr. Brodeur is involved in the day to day operations, Mrs. Brodeur will be in charge of the wedding and specialty cake-decorating, which is a new addition to the

whose husband teaches at Mackinac Island Public School and who also worked with Ms. Taylor, has been helping out weekly and will take a greater role once the season gets underway.

The Spatas will take a more behind-the-scenes role in the bakery.

Mr. Brodeur said the shop is once again selling pizza and he may offer cold sandwiches.

Martha's Sweet Shop is on Main Street and will be open every day from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Friday, May 26, when it extends its hours to 10 p.m.

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