

# FORT KNOX - BUILT TO PROTECT THE PENOBSCOT RIVER VALLEY FROM NAVAL ATTACK

## History

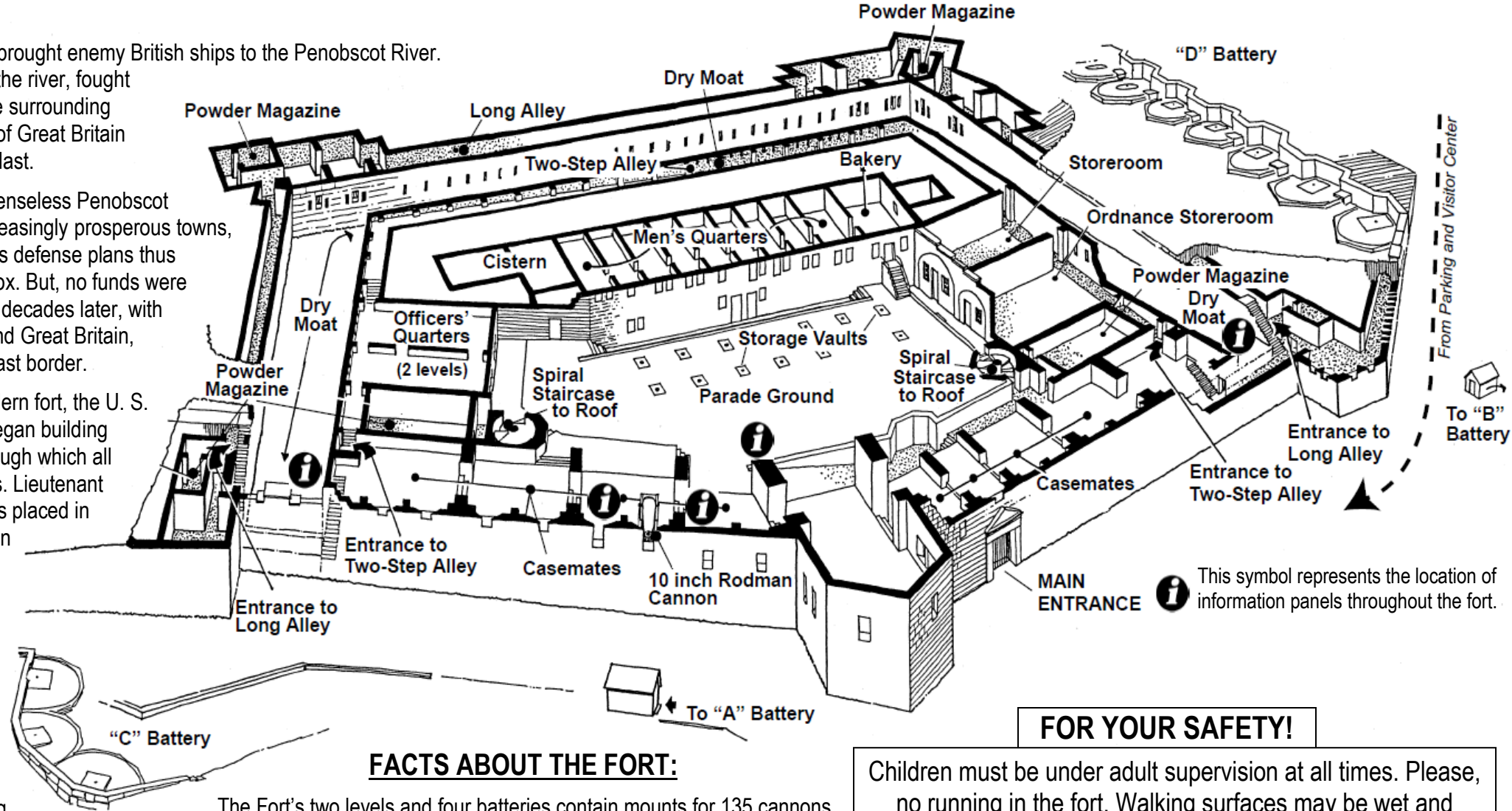
The American Revolution and the War of 1812 brought enemy British ships to the Penobscot River. During both wars, Great Britain seized control of the river, fought battles in the river valley's towns, and claimed the surrounding land for the British crown. With America's defeat of Great Britain in the two wars, British claims to the area did not last.

Still, the U.S. government recognized that a defenseless Penobscot River could be attacked again and the river's increasingly prosperous towns, such as Bangor, threatened. By 1825, the nation's defense plans thus included a Fort at the present-day site of Fort Knox. But, no funds were actually provided for construction until nearly two decades later, with tension still present between the United States and Great Britain, most recently over the location of Maine's northeast border.

After acquiring land and designing a large, modern fort, the U. S. Department of War and its Corps of Engineers began building Fort Knox, sited to guard the narrow channel through which all enemy ships traveling upriver would have to pass. Lieutenant Isaac Stevens, a young West Point graduate, was placed in charge of the massive project. Construction began in May 1844.

Stevens and his crews first built the gun batteries nearest the river and tried to get them ready for cannons. Workers then excavated the main fort site and by about 1853, work began on the granite foundations and walls of the large, central fort building.

The Fort saw two periods of military activity. From 20 to 54 troops were garrisoned here during the Civil War. As the Fort was still under construction at that time, they lived in temporary wooden buildings behind the fort's granite structure. About 575 troops from Connecticut lived at the fort for one month during the Spanish-American War. They lived outside the main Fort structure in large tents. No enemy ships ever appeared on the Penobscot or threatened its towns during these wars.



### FACTS ABOUT THE FORT:

The Fort's two levels and four batteries contain mounts for 135 cannons, although no more than about 74 cannons were brought to the site.

Fort Knox was the first and largest granite fort built in Maine. The design of Fort Knox was similar to later Maine forts such as Fort Popham at the mouth of the Kennebec River, and Fort Gorges, Fort Preble, and Fort Scammel in Casco Bay (Portland).

### FOR YOUR SAFETY!

Children must be under adult supervision at all times. Please, no running in the fort. Walking surfaces may be wet and uneven. Flashlights are needed in some areas and glass containers are prohibited in the Fort.

**Please remember** that Fort Knox is a National Historic Landmark. Please do not remove anything from the Fort or grounds. Please report any vandalism to staff.

## More about Fort Knox...

- The fort was named after Major General Henry Knox, America's first Secretary of War and Commander of Artillery during the American Revolution. General Knox lived in Thomaston, Maine during the final years of his life. America's other Fort Knox, which is located in Kentucky, is also named after him.

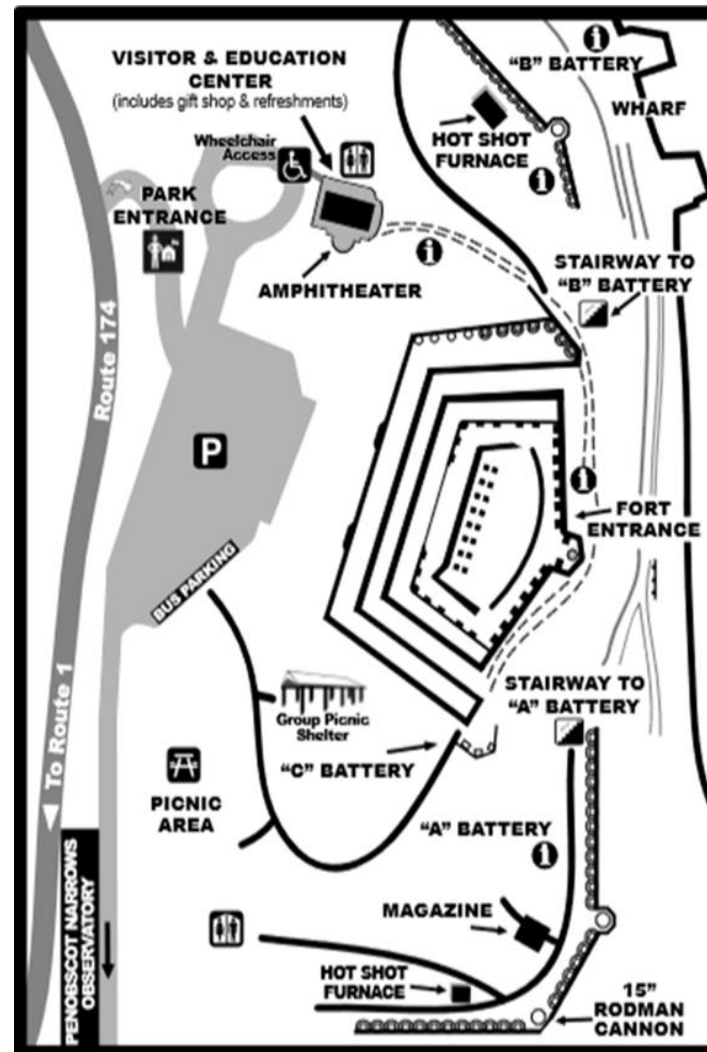
- Fort Knox's granite was quarried on Mt. Waldo, located about five miles upriver from the fort. Once they were quarried, the granite blocks were transported down the mountain, and then carried by scow to Fort Knox's wharf. Some of the granite was cut and finished to proper sizes on site at the fort.

- Nearly one million dollars was spent to build Fort Knox. Congressional appropriations were sporadic and construction continued for 25 years. When work finally stopped in 1869, the Fort was still not completely finished.

- Fort Knox's "A" Battery and "B" Battery (see site map on adjacent panel) each have a hot shot furnace. These small brick structures were built for use with 32 pound cannons, which were the cannons originally planned for the batteries. Hot shot furnaces heated cannonballs so hot that, when the balls hit wooden ships, the ships were set on fire. With the development of iron-clad ships, the firing of red hot cannonballs was no longer an effective means of defense and hot shot furnaces became obsolete.

- Some of Fort Knox's most memorable features are the large Rodman cannon in "A" Battery and the slightly smaller Rodman cannon inside the main fort structure. Developed by Thomas Jefferson Rodman who improved the methods of casting metal for the cannon tubes, the Rodman cannons were stronger and safer than previous models.

- The large 15-inch Rodman (15-inch refers to the diameter of the bore) in "A Battery" was extremely powerful, but slow to maneuver. Twelve men were needed to load the cannon. They used a mechanical hoist to lift the 330 pound shell or 450 pound solid cannonball. Often, two men had to manage the rammer. The tube weight of the 15-inch Rodman is 50,000 pounds and the weight of the gunpowder charge was 60 pounds for a shell and 100 pounds for a solid cannonball. At a 20 degree elevation, the cannon could fire a solid cannonball 5,579 yards.



## Enjoy your visit!

You should begin your visit by stopping at the Visitor and Education Center, operated by the Friends of Fort Knox, a non-profit group that partners with the State of Maine to help preserve and interpret this site for people like you.

While here you can see the exhibits and displays inside and ask questions, get a snack, use the nearby restroom and purchase souvenirs about the fort and Maine history.

When you are ready, take the short walk (with river view!) around to the front of the fort where you will find the main entrance or "sally port." Walk through the tunnel past the iron gate and you can explore the inside of this great structure.

As you visit the fort, be on the lookout for self-guided tour information panels that provide a great deal about the fort, its various rooms and passageways, and its construction.

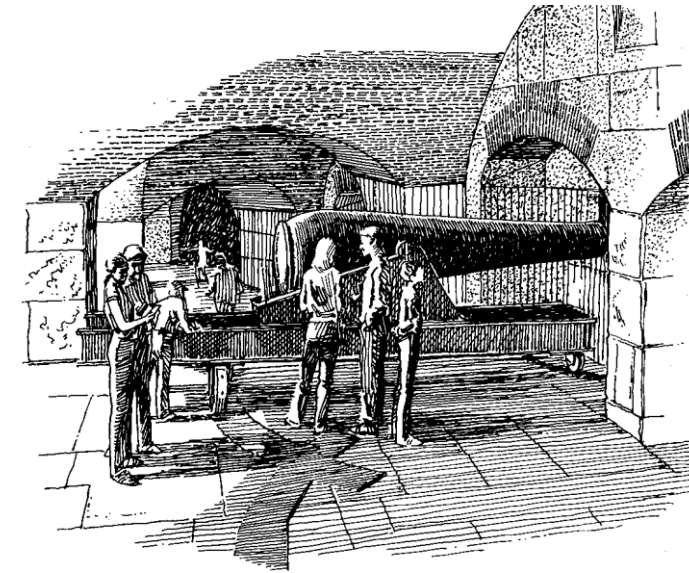
Don't forget to visit the lower areas of the Fort known as "A" and "B" Batteries. Both provide a nice walk along the river bank and you can also see the original wharf down near "B" Battery. Each of these areas also has a "Hot Shot Furnace"; small brick buildings that were used to heat the cannonballs until they were red hot. The heated cannonballs were then shot into the wooden hulls of enemy ships to cause fires.

### Hours/Season

Fort Knox is open daily, 9:00a.m. to sunset, from May 1 to October 31 unless otherwise posted at the gate. Guided tours are available daily from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Reservations for group tours may be arranged by calling the Friends of Fort Knox at (207) 469-6553 or [info@fortknoxmaine.com](mailto:info@fortknoxmaine.com).

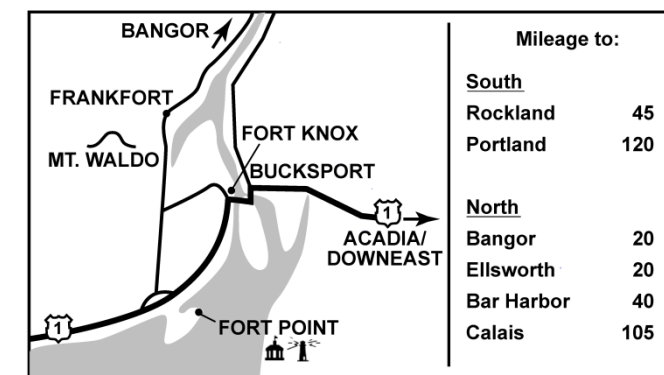
This brochure is available in alternative formats from: Bureau of Parks and Lands, 22 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0022, Phone (207) 287-3821

## Fort Knox State Historic Site



*"Protector of the Penobscot"*

[www.FortKnoxMaine](http://www.FortKnoxMaine)



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