

New Bell Farm Discovery # 003:

Martello Tower Photographs

- Items:** Two coloured post cards, measuring 9 x 13.5 cm
- Photographers:** Unknown; cards published by Nerlich & Co., Toronto, Ontario
- Date:** Both cards: ca. 1905
- Caption:** (Top) *“R.M.C. from Fort Frederick, Kingston, Canada”*
(Bottom) *“Martello Tower, St. John, N.B.”*

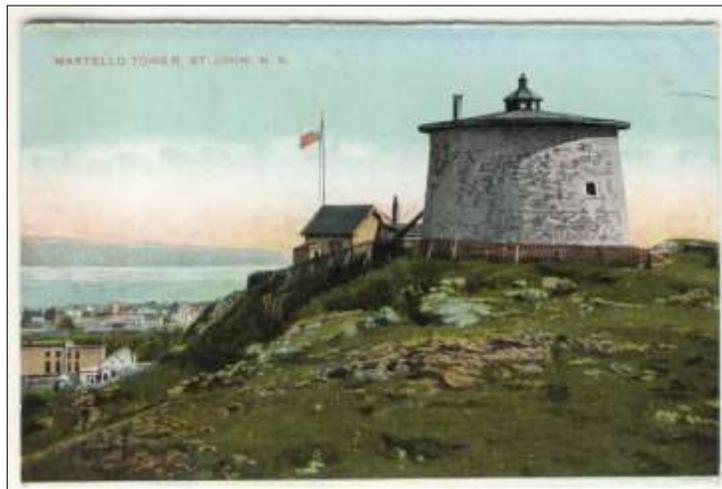


Image # 1: Martello Towers at Kingston, Ontario (top) and at St. John, New Brunswick

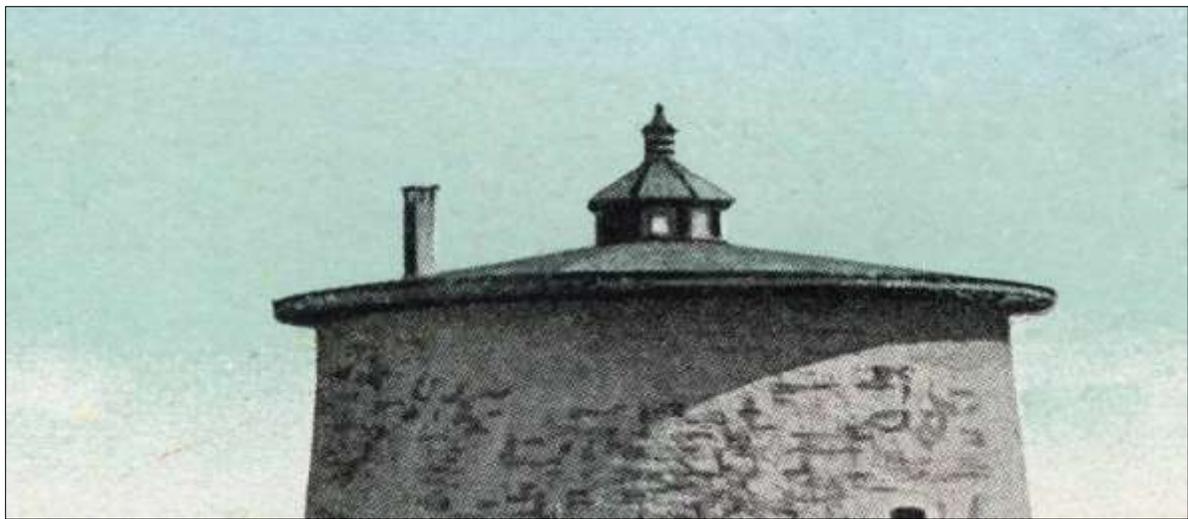
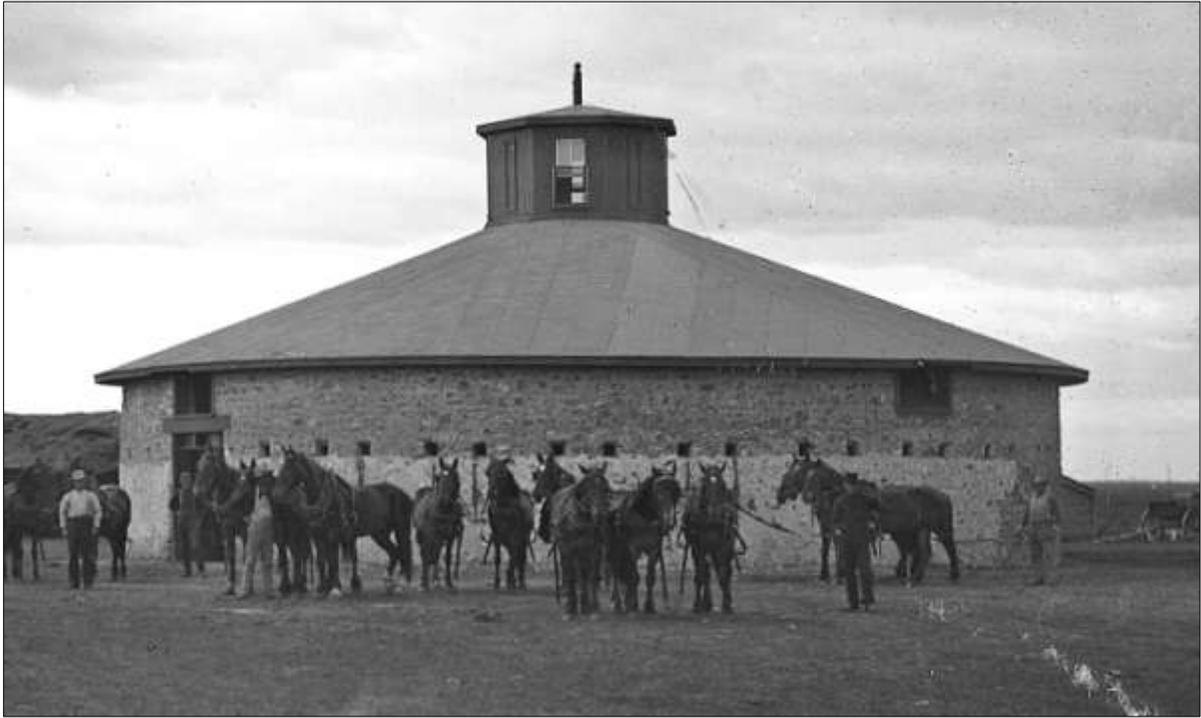


Image #2: (Top) Bell Barn in 1884 (Credit: McCord Museum, Notman Collection: V1388)

(Bottom) Top half of the Martello Tower at St. John, New Brunswick



Image # 3: (Left) Sketch of the Martello Tower at St. John, New Brunswick (Credit: Parks Canada); and recent photo showing small rectangular gun ports near the base (Credit: F. Korvemaker, 2013)

Background: These two hand-coloured post cards were found among a batch of post cards acquired by Spafford Books, of Regina. There is no text on the back of the cards other than the manufacturer details, nor is there any further information relating to these two items.

Comments: It has long been conjectured that Major Bell built his round stone barn to serve two functions: a stable to house his horses and a place for possible defence in case of an Indian uprising, such as occurred in the USA at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 – just six years before the Bell Farm was established. As a retired military man, Major Bell would have been well aware of the American conflict, and likely wanted to ensure that he, his family, and his employees were protected. Although no documents attesting to this dual function have yet been discovered, circumstantial evidence seems to support this theory.

Some of that evidence is found in local history books for the Indian Head region, wherein reminiscences from pioneers who lived through the North-West Rebellion of 1885 indicated that it was agreed that in case of attack, all would gather at the Bell Barn.

The round stone barn bears a number of similarities with Martello Towers erected by the British Army in Eastern Canada during and after the War of 1812. Major Bell would have been familiar with the towers at Kingston, near his hometown of Brockville, and likely learned about the other towers during his military service in the 1860s and 1870s, especially while enlisted to fend off the Fenian Raids, for which he received the appropriate military medals and his military credentials.

A close examination of the upper half of the Martello Tower at St. John, New Brunswick shows some particular similarities with the Bell Barn, especially the central lookout tower and metal clad roofing. The lower half includes a number of small rifle ports, similar to those found in the Bell Barn. If the Barn was to be used as a place of refuge and defence, it would have been possible for the defenders to stand in the horse stall mangers and fire out of the rifle ports. Those were placed around the entire perimeter of the Barn, and hence afforded those inside full view in all directions.

Finally, the round stone barn was strategically located within the confines of the headquarters buildings – in close proximity to all of the major structures. Moreover, a tradition exists that a tunnel was built between Major Bell's massive stone farmhouse and the round stone barn. In discussion with Trevor Quinn in 2011, formerly of Indian Head, he indicated that as a youngster he used to play in that tunnel, though it was partly collapsed. As the main farmhouse, with its many large windows and doors, was not practical to defend, it would be logical for Major Bell to provide a safe underground egress from the house and into the barn.

Importance of the Discovery: These photographs provide additional proof that Major Bell may have designed the Bell Barn to serve both as a horse stable and as a potential defensive structure. *[These original post cards will be donated by the Bell Barn Society to the Saskatchewan Archives Board.]*

Sources: St. John: <http://website.nbm-mnb.ca/Transition/english/details.asp?item=998>

St. John: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/nb/carleton/natcul/natcul5.aspx>

Kingston: <http://www.ebay.com.au/itm/1905-Royal-Military-College-Fort-Frederick-Kingston-Ontario-Canada-postcard-/151066828087>

Kingston: <http://www.delcampe.net/items?catLists%5B0%5D=18289&searchOptionForm%5BsearchTldCountry%5D=fr&language=E>

Personal Communication: Trevor Quinn, Regina, Sask. - 24 Nov. 2011.

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