

THE OLD CASTLE AT FORT NIAGARA AS IT LOOKS TODAY

## A NIAGARA FRONTIER MUSEUM.

*Reprinted from "Buffalo Sunday Express," November 5, 1916*

The following letter, suggesting that the famous old castle at Fort Niagara be restored internally to a semblance of what it was in the long ago, and be turned into a national museum of the Niagara frontier, as a peace centennial memorial, will be read with a great deal of interest. It will receive approval, not only along the frontier itself, but generally.

The castle has played an important part in history. While Quebec was the Canadian seat of government, the commandant of Fort Niagara, whose office was in the castle, was the executive to whom was necessarily entrusted the control of, and most all of the dealings with, the savages of the west and as far east as Albany. To those savages (during the eighteenth century, the sole owners and inhabitants of interior North America) that castle was the real embodiment, successively, of the power and government of France and Britain.

Mr. Porter's suggestion, if carried out will result, not only in a national museum, but one necessarily largely of the nature of a real international museum. Added to its central location, the varied and remarkable historic associations which so thickly cluster about and also the fact that it is so close to the much visited cataract of Ni-

agara, make it an ideal location for such a purpose.

Editor Buffalo Express:—The recent placing of a tablet on the Old Castle at Fort Niagara by the Daughters of the War of 1812 brought vividly to our minds the transcendent historical importance of that famous old structure. It is the oldest perfect building in the interior of the United States, and is in itself (because it was the actual seat of government, under both French and British rule over all the Indian Tribes in the Great West during the most of the eighteenth century) almost an epitome of the story of North America from 1725 to 1796, and (under United States ownership) until after the war of 1812. Those facts make it (perhaps, equal in importance to, certainly only second to, the citadel at Quebec) the most important historic structure in North America, and beyond question the most interesting such structure in the United States.

Its overshadowing military importance during most of the eighteenth century, and because it is the largest and most famous of the very few fron-

tier structures (all of them inside of Fort Niagara) which have looked down in approval on a whole century of peace between us and our Canadian cousins, lead me to make the dual suggestion that the federal government (which owns it) should be urged to have it turned into a national historical museum of the Niagara Frontier, which at the same time would be a unique and most appropriate memorial to that century of peace. Externally it should be preserved exactly as it has been all during that 100 years and as it is today. Internally, at least on the first floor, it should be restored as nearly as may be to the condition in which it was back in 1759-1774; when, from its great room on the lake side of the first floor, Indian North America (and that was nearly the whole of it) was ruled by Sir William Johnson, not merely during the brief periods when he sat there in state, but absolutely under his direction and orders during all that period. That great room, from which during the last three quarters of the eighteenth century the policies of both France and England towards their savage allies were enforced, should be restored to its original shape and size. Today it is divided into two small rooms, with a lath-and-plaster closet between them.

Then my suggestion would be that one of the four front rooms on the first floor on the land side should be devoted, through relics, pictures, etc., to the respective histories of the Indians, the French, the British and the United States.

On the first floor, on the lake side, the two eastern rooms could be connected by a doorway and therein could be collected the relics, pictures, etc., of the Niagara frontier (both sides), of events which were integral parts of its history, although not so directly connected with the wondrous story of the castle itself.

One more room would remain; that could properly and almost essentially be made into a library, wherein could be collected the voluminous literature of the entire frontier during all the troublous days of the castle's longevity. The last remaining space on that floor is the windowless "dungeon," one of those now rare but gruesome chambers where both France and Britain used to incarcerate offenders, many of whom were exiled from across the seas to this spot, there to drag out a miserable exist-

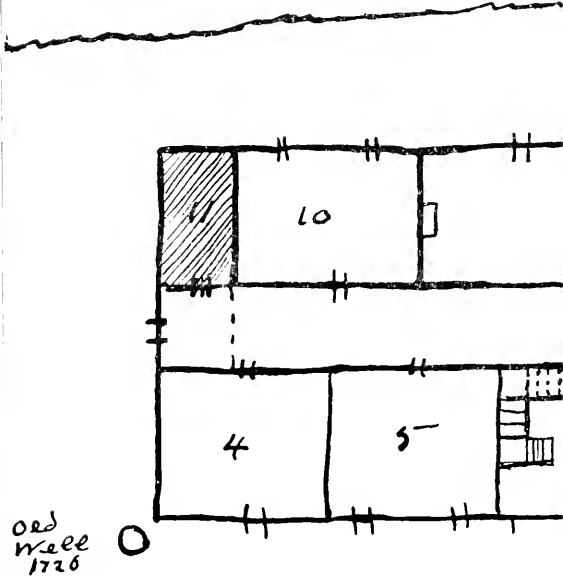
ence until death relieved them of their agonies.

Such a museum, in such a building, at such a spot and in such a central location would be both unique and of enormous historical value. The castle stands exactly on the border. I venture to hope that our friends across the line would take a live interest in such a museum, for so much of the history of early Canada was made within the walls of that castle.

And while the martial history of the Indians and of those three great nations would primarily predominate in its collections, it would also necessarily, in antithesis, be our own nation's contribution of a memorial to the 100 years of peace between the two great English-speaking nations of the earth. And a most fitting memorial! it would be to that century of peace.

My letter is already too long. In the near future I plan to write and publish a history of that castle—fairly, fully illustrated. I attach hereto a crude plan of the arrangement of the rooms as I have outlined them in the

To a KE



THE CASTLE AT FORT

- 1, porch; 2, entrance hall; 3, the Great Room
- 8-9, Niagara Frontiers room

foregoing. My intention is at the coming session of congress to present my suggestion to our New York senators and representatives and ask their approval and affirmative aid towards having the national government authorize it. And I shall do so, not merely because I am a student of and a lover of the history of the old Niagara frontier, but also because I am a member of the Niagara Falls peace centennial memorial committee.

PETER A. PORTER.

Buffalo, Nov. 3d.

**REAL PEACE MEMORIAL.**

A letter from Peter A. Porter, published elsewhere in The Express, relative to a national museum of the Niagara frontier, will be read with much interest. He suggests that the old Castle at Fort Niagara, itself an historical monument, be transformed into a museum of frontier history. The proposition will receive general approval. The change could be ac-

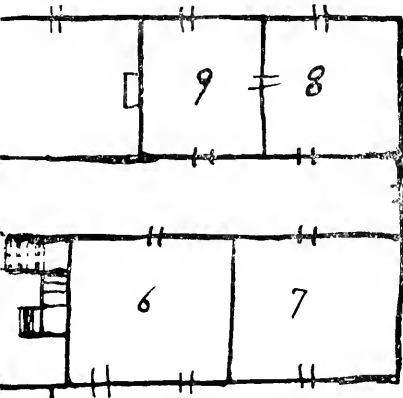
complished at so little expense and the building is so well adapted to such a use that it is hard to believe that it will encounter any serious opposition.

It was in this Castle that the government of all this region had its center in the days when France ruled the Great Lakes and afterward when the British were in control. It is the oldest perfect building—so Mr. Porter says—in interior America, and it possesses, what most old buildings do not, historical interest of great importance. If a site were to be chosen for such a museum as Mr. Porter proposes for this frontier, the Castle would naturally be that site. There can be no doubt that the people of the Niagara frontier will welcome the suggestion, therefor. They will expect that the people of the state and congress—to which the suggestion is to be carried—will also favor it. The approval of Canada can also be expected, for the Castle played a great part in Canadian history.

It is easy to imagine what an interesting and much-visited institution this museum would be. In the first place it would not be in some inaccessible spot remote from travel, but it would be one more addition to the attractions of the Niagara river region and would be visited by throngs of strangers. Then, it would provide a place for collecting relics, books and documents relating to frontier history; each succeeding year would add to its value. Again, the Castle is big enough to allow of proper classification of such material; Mr. Porter suggests that a room be devoted to each of the peoples who have struggled upon this frontier. Finally, the property already belongs to the government, and its surroundings are such as make sure that the museum always would be inviting to the visitor.

But the best feature of Mr. Porter's idea is his suggestion that this museum be created as a memorial of the 100 years of peace. Unfortunately, there appears no hope at present that any of the other memorials, like the peace bridge, already proposed will be erected. But this national

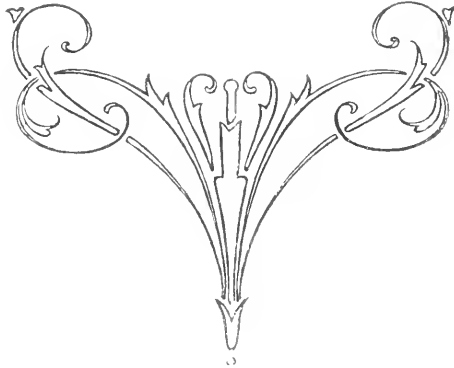
nta r 10



- a National Frontier Museum.

n; 6, British room; 7, United States room; Drawing by Peter A. Porter.

museum of the Niagara frontier would be a memorial in itself of the 100 years of peace between the two great English-speaking nations. And from the very history of the Castle itself there could be no finer memorial. It happens to stand on the American edge of the border, but that fact does not injure its availability, since the old building is a monument to every race that fought, and made peace, along this frontier.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 011 696 707 8