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Archaeology, History and Activities at Fort St. Joseph 2: Fort History

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

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Fort History

The French established Fort St. Joseph in 1691 in present day Niles.



Contemporaneous forts in the area.

Louis claimed the territory for Spain, though they remained at the site for only a day. The area became part of the American Northwest Territory in 1805, earning Niles the nickname *The City of Four Flags*, as the French, British, Spanish and American flags had all been raised at the site.



Fort St. Joseph has long been remembered and commemorated in the Niles community.

By the 1730s the fort became an important mission-garrison-trading post complex that supported a military commandant, 8-10 enlisted men, a blacksmith, a priest, an interpreter and nearly 15 additional households. Native populations also lived in close proximity to the fort. Interactions in the vicinity of the fort created a multi-ethnic community. The post came under English control in 1761 and was attacked by the Potawatomi during Pontiac's Rebellion two years later. The fort was never re-garrisoned and French traders remained there until 1781 when a small contingent from St.



Voyageurs were also a part of the population at Fort St. Joseph.

Documentary sources tell us little about how the fort was constructed. They indicate that there were entrances on the north and south palisade lines and that the palisade enclosed a small commandant's house, a building that could accommodate 20 soldiers, a military storehouse, and some buildings to store trade goods and furs. Another document states that by 1753, a jail also existed as well as about 15 houses. These meager descriptions are all that archaeologists have to make sense of the structural remains they are uncovering. Years of documentary research have yet to yield a map depicting the layout of the fort, necessitating the archaeological investigations of the site.