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Military Fortifications

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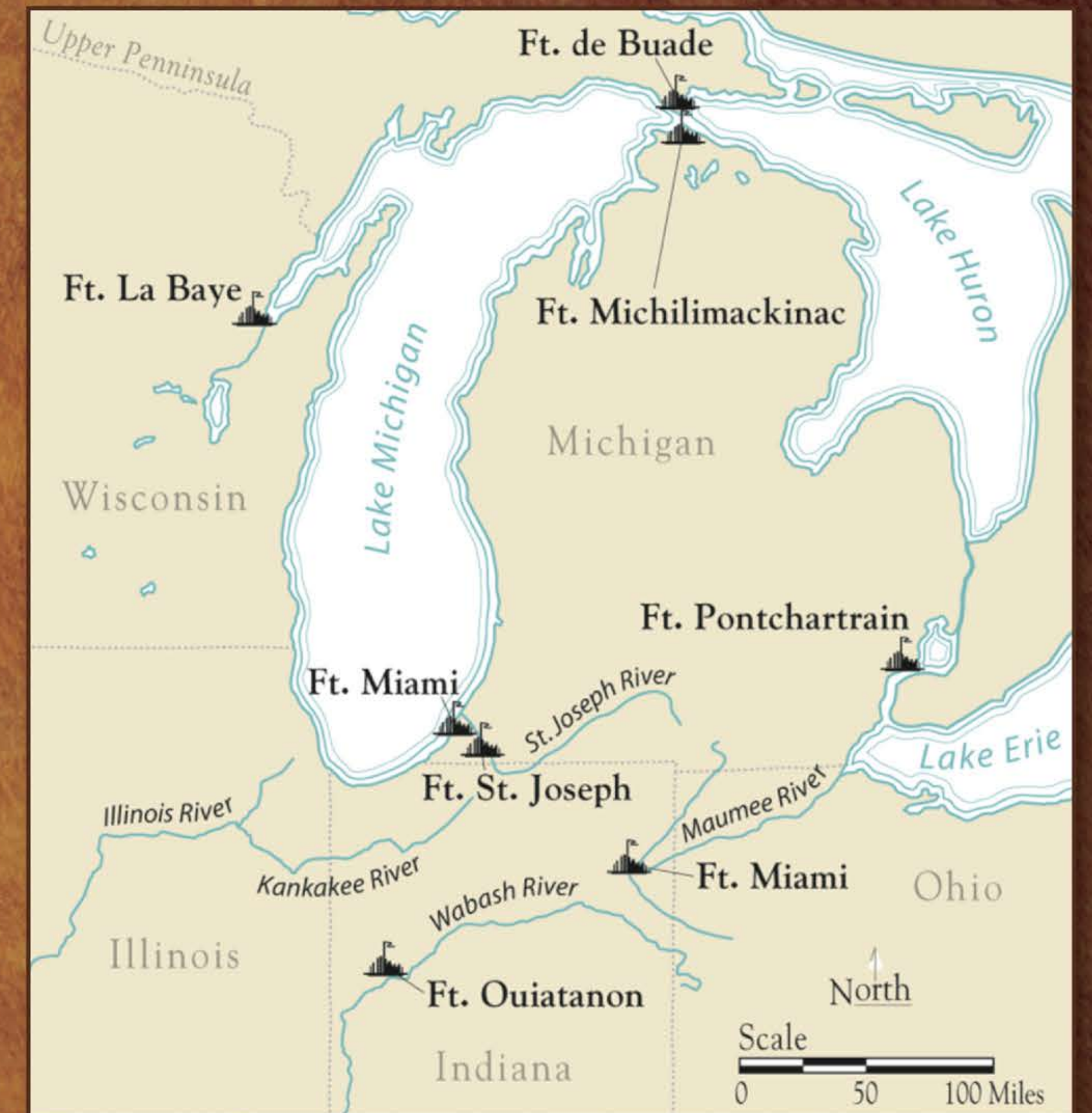
Fortifications and Military Buildings in New France



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

The military played a substantial role in the establishment of New France. They constructed fortifications for use by soldiers, fur traders, and Jesuit priests. Many were built hastily and at little cost to spread French influence and to facilitate communications throughout the area.

These fortifications are strategic landscape modifications adapted from a design by French military engineer Sebastien Le Prestre de Vauban. Vauban's design used bastions, pentagonal-shaped projections at the corners of the stockade for artillery. Cannon positioned in bastions could fire down the length of the forts' walls if attackers managed to get close to the walls themselves.



Archaeological evidence of a 1960s palisade reconstruction at Fort Willow, Minesing, Ontario, Canada (from: <https://fortwillow.wordpress.com/>)



Charleville Musket Model 1766. Courtesy of the Antique Military Rifles Flickr account.



Map of forts in the western Great Lakes region. Courtesy of the Archaeological Conservancy.

Commanders often adapted fort designs to accommodate local circumstances and placed garrisons near rivers and along other waterways. Forts were built with lumber for interior buildings and palisade walls. Resources, landscapes, and builders' skills all impacted the final appearance.

Palisades were made with rounded or split logs placed vertically 4"-9" apart. A 1'-4' deep ditch was excavated for a wall about 15' high. Evidence from Fort Massac (Illinois) and Fort Michilimackinac (Michigan) indicate that cedar was commonly used.

Documentary sources indicate that Fort St. Joseph had a palisade, though it was not especially secure. In 1695, attacking Iroquois Indians put their guns through its gaps and shot into the fort. If the attackers managed to get that close to the palisade, it probably had no platforms or bastions for defensive fire. The palisade was constructed with entrances on the north and south sides.



Soldier's map of Fort St. Pierre in Mississippi during the 1720s

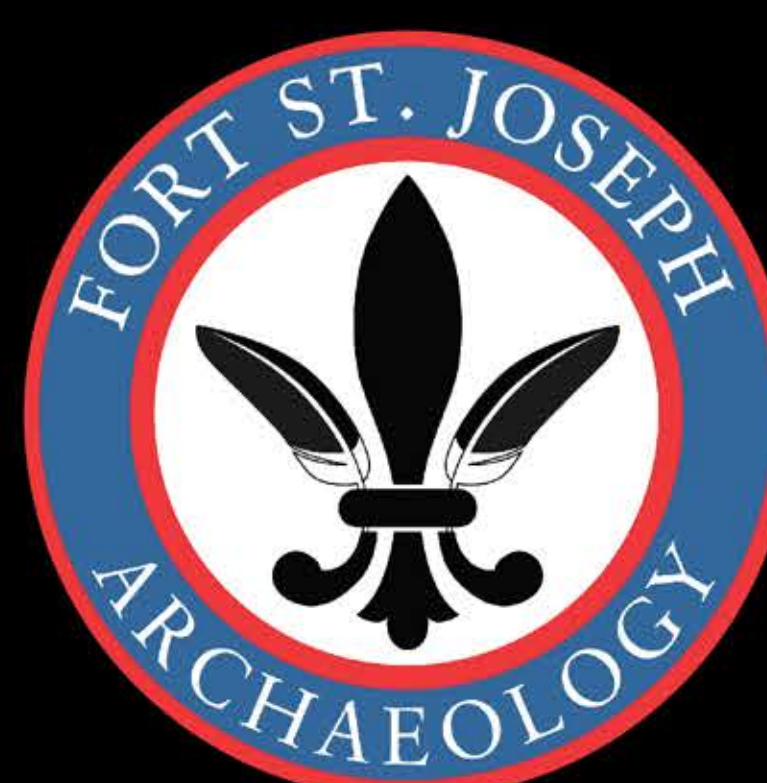
Copy of a military engineer's map of Fort Massac.

Archaeological plan view of Fort Massac. The archaeology revealed the absence of a north doorway and the soldiers were housed in barrack-style buildings, not separate structures.



Barracks Reconstruction at Fort Massac, Illinois

Fort St. Joseph had a small garrison of soldiers. Conflicts with natives were uncommon, but the fort played an important role during the Fox and Chickasaw Wars in the 1730s and 1740s. It is not known if soldiers lived in barracks or with individual families. Excavations at Fort St. Joseph have yet to identify any military buildings, or the palisade.



Excavations at Fort St. Joseph have yet to identify any military buildings, or the palisade.

Other fortifications in the area provide examples of what we might expect to find. The buildings at Fort Massac were built in the *poteaux en terre* (posts in the ground) style. At Fort de Chartres (Illinois) the officers and soldiers had separate rooms that measured 22' x 22' with lofts for storage.

