

Credit: Parks Canada Collection, photographer unknown



Four steel chambers like this were installed underground at Cape Spear in 1941.

Credit: Parks Canada, Don Parsons



## NEWFOUNDLAND UNDERGROUND

By David J. Penny

Archaeologists exploring Newfoundland and Labrador continue to find remnants of civilizations that went before us; shelters where, 1,000 years ago, Vikings dug in and stayed over the long winter months. Infrastructure that was once utilitarian can become a tourist draw if it tells an interesting story.

This May, the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers (CSCE) met in St. John's and, as part of their conference, held a historic site dedication honouring engineers and constructors who have left a mark.

The lighthouse at Cape Spear, built in 1836, watches over the approaches to St. John's harbour.

In order to protect the harbour and vital supply convoys during the Second World War, the Canadian Army installed two 10-inch guns on disappearing carriages at the tip of the Cape. Behind the guns, a network of underground bunkers, magazines and tunnels hid and protected the soldiers and the ammunition. An overhead rail was used to transfer the heavy shells to the guns. The underground arch chambers were built of structural plate corrugated steel pipe (SPCSP). All that was visible from the sea were four small corrugated steel pipe (CSP) ventilation shafts that protruded from the earth.

In 1941 American forces installed two eight-inch coastal defence guns at the summit of Signal Hill—the site of the present-day Cabot Tower parking lot. Ammunition was stored in two underground bunkers consisting of a round CSP entrance leading to a larger SPCSP underground arch chamber.

The underground infrastructure left behind has been studied by architects, but is also contributing to the local economy as a tourist draw. 🍁



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