

McLoughlin House

National Historic Site
Oregon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Oregon City in 1852, by John Mix Stanley. The McLoughlin home is behind the church (center left). Amon Carter Museum

John McLoughlin retired to the home he built at the falls of the Willamette River after directing the fur trade at Fort Vancouver through its first and most influential two decades. He had come to the Northwest to turn the bounty of the land into profit for the Hudson's Bay Company, to promote British interests in the vast wilderness. McLoughlin's domain extended from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean and from Russian-held Alaska to the northern border of Mexican California—a chunk of land equal to about one-fifth of today's continental United States. By the time his career ended, he was famous for his efforts, intentional or not, in securing most of that territory for Americans.



"Emigrants Crossing the Plains," by Albert Bierstadt. National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center

Born into a Quebec farming family in 1784, McLoughlin was 19 when he signed on as a physician for the North West Company. He soon worked his way up to company partner. After the merger with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, McLoughlin was sent to the Oregon Country to preside over the vast wilderness on which the organization pinned its hopes for expansion. As chief factor (superintendent of trade), McLoughlin oversaw the construction of the new headquarters at Fort Vancouver, promoted agriculture, opened new trapping routes, and took in an impressive profit. In transacting business with the Indians, key players in the fur trade, he kept the peace and won respect.

Successful as it was, the Hudson's Bay Company operated without clear title to the land. The Oregon Country was caught in a tug of war between Britain and the United States. An 1818 treaty settled the dispute temporarily by establishing joint occupation. Thereafter both sides maneuvered to be in a position of strength when the treaty was renegotiated. McLoughlin foresaw that Britain's dominance of the region, based as it was on control of the fur trade, was doomed in the long run. The fur supply was dwindling as was demand. Emigrant wagon trains were moving in; thousands of American farmers clearing plots would inevitably tip the balance of power. Defying company orders to discourage American settlement, McLoughlin extended credit for food, seeds, and

farm tools to the newcomers, then steered them southward into the Willamette Valley. He came to be regarded by the emigrants as a paternalistic figure who would never turn away those in need. One transplanted Pennsylvanian's gratitude was typical: "He is always on the lookout for an opportunity to bestow his charity, and bestows with no sparing hand."

Though genuinely kindhearted by all accounts, McLoughlin also had practical reasons for his open-handedness. Ill treatment of weary, impoverished new arrivals would reflect badly on the fur men. Moreover, if the Oregon Territory were divided along the course of the Columbia, as many predicted, the land to the south would cede to the United States no matter what. While the Hudson's Bay Company asserted its claim to the territory, reported one British observer, "it appears that their chief officer on the spot was doing all in his power to facilitate the operations of those whose whole object was to annihilate that claim altogether." Gov. George Simpson, the top Hudson's Bay official in North America and an old rival of McLoughlin's, battled continually with the chief factor. In 1845 McLoughlin was forced to resign. The following year the Oregon Country was divided along the 49th parallel. The company continued to trap and trade south of the boundary for 14 years, but British notions of acquiring the land permanently were squelched.

Fort Vancouver

The Hudson's Bay Company wanted furs and land, and the Columbia watershed offered both. John McLoughlin's first task as administrator of company holdings in the Oregon Country was to

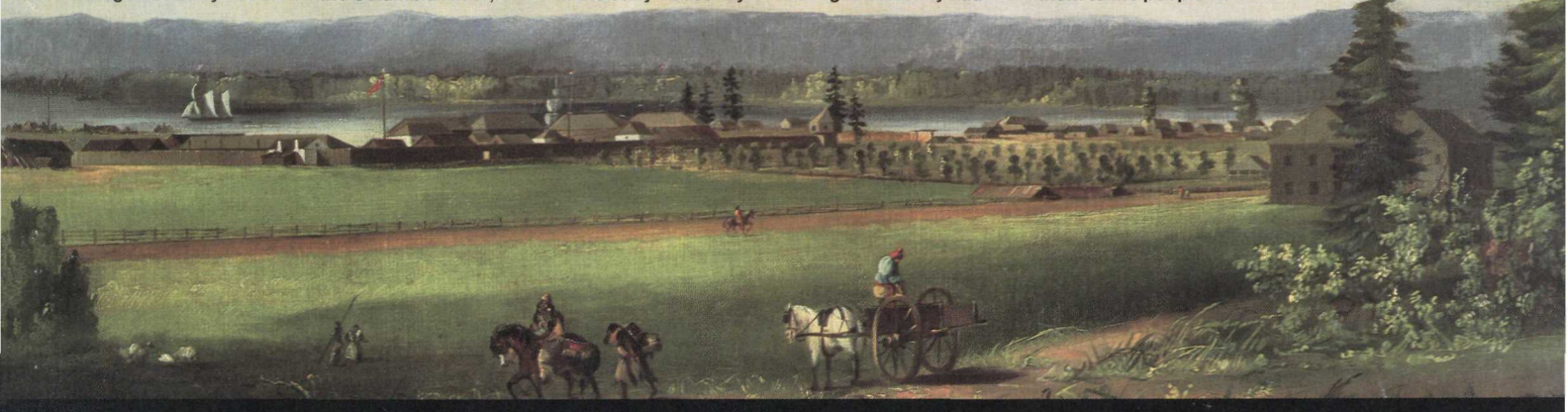
construct a headquarters from which the company could conduct its business of marketing the region's natural wealth. Fort Vancouver, named for the British captain who explored the Columbia River,

was built on that river near the mouth of the Willamette. Living quarters, factory, storage depot, and seaport, Fort Vancouver was hub of the Northwest Coast fur trade during its heyday in the early 1800s. By

1845, when this painting was made, Fort Vancouver's location near the end of the Oregon Trail placed it squarely in the path of American westward expansion. Its role in shaping Oregon's destiny had

changed. Emigrants stopped here on their way to claim farmland in the Willamette Valley. At this British outpost, Chief Factor McLoughlin gave supplies and encouragement to the people he

came to view as the rightful possessors of much of the Oregon Country.



Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

McLoughlin House



McLoughlin House Russell Lamb



Dining Room Russell Lamb



Bedroom Russell Lamb

John McLoughlin built his home below the Falls of the Willamette and lived here with his wife, Marguerite, and other family members until he died in 1857. Many of the present furnishings were

here during McLoughlin's time: the dining room table and chairs, the Staffordshire china, the hand-carved bed from Scotland, and the Bible used during services at Fort Vancouver.



Oregon Historical Society

In 1829, Chief Factor McLoughlin and Governor Simpson claimed land along the Willamette River 25 miles south of Fort Vancouver. The acquisition was part of the Hudson's Bay Company strategy to diversify in the face of a limited fur supply. McLoughlin envisioned a company town as the center for subsidiary industries. The falls were ideal for powering mills and the river was a convenient water route for shipment of manufactured goods and agricultural products. McLoughlin retired from the company before he could fully implement his plans. He placed the land in his own name in 1845 by paying the company \$20,000 for the claim and constructed his family home on a piece of this property.

Simple in design, with two stories and a root cellar, the house was elegant for the Willamette Valley, where most emigrant families lived in crude log cabins. It was built completely of finished lumber—local timber and prefabricated trim shipped from a Boston factory. The first floor consisted of a large parlor, a dining room, a reception room, and McLoughlin's office. Upstairs were three bedrooms, as well as a sitting room and a hallway that often doubled as a guest room. The kitchens were separate buildings out back. The McLoughlin home was known locally as "the house of many beds," a reference to the hospitality the family extended to just about anyone passing through Oregon City. The steady stream of house guests included

relatives, friends, business associates, new emigrants, a traveling artist, and a good many retired Hudson's Bay Company employees to whom McLoughlin felt a special responsibility. McLoughlin's wife Marguerite opened her home to the needy and was thought of as "one of the kindest women in the world." Other permanent residents were daughter Eloisa and her family, and the Indian servants who had been in McLoughlin's employ at Fort Vancouver.

Known throughout the valley as the Doctor because of the vocation that had started him out in the fur trade, McLoughlin built himself a new career promoting the economic prosperity of the territory he had helped to establish. In part to smooth over a controversy arising from an American claim to his property at the falls, McLoughlin took U.S. citizenship in 1851. That year he served as mayor of Oregon City. A supporter of small business as a means for helping emigrants become established, McLoughlin loaned money for commercial ventures and himself owned two sawmills, a grist mill, a granary, a general store, and a shipping concern. He also donated land for schools and churches. John McLoughlin died in 1857. His house now occupies one of the sites he set aside for public use when he helped to plat the town in the 1840s. The home is restored to honor the life and accomplishments of a man well deserving of the title "Father of Oregon."

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About Your Visit

John McLoughlin lived in this house from the time he left the Hudson's Bay Company in 1846 until he died in 1857. After the death of Marguerite McLoughlin the home changed hands many times. In 1909 the McLoughlin Memorial Association saved the house from demolition and moved it from the falls up to the bluff overlooking the river.

Today the house is restored as nearly as possible to its appearance during the McLoughlin occupancy. Furnishings are period pieces that belonged

to the McLoughlin family, the Hudson's Bay Company, and local residents.

Visiting the house
Tours are conducted Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. The house is closed on Mondays, holidays, and for the month of January. The home is not fully accessible to the disabled. There are no restrooms.

The house stands in McLoughlin Park at 713 Center St. between 7th and 8th Sts. It is fewer than 4 blocks east



of Pacific Highway (U.S. 99) and about 9 blocks from I-205.

Related sites The neighborhood surrounding the house is a local historic district and part of McLoughlin's original plat. At 719 Center St. is the *home of Dr. Forbes Barclay*, an associate of McLoughlin's. McLoughlin's step-granddaughter and her husband lived in the

Ermatinger House. The first territorial legislature met in the late 1840s at *Rose Farm*, 536 Holmes Lane. Local Indian culture and Oregon history are exhibited at the *Stevens-Crawford House (County Museum)* and *End of the Oregon Trail center*.

Administration
McLoughlin House National Historic Site is administered by the McLoughlin Memorial Association, the city, and the National Park Service. Write: Curator, McLoughlin House NHS, 713 Center St., Oregon City OR 97045 Phone: 503-656-5146.

