

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site was first established as a National Monument in 1948 and was elevated in status to a National Historic Site (NHS) in 1961.

The National Historic Site commemorates the Columbia District Headquarters and commercial trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company. Fort operations began in 1825, and moved to the current site on the plain near the Columbia River in 1829. The fort is credited with leading the way for the development of European civilization in the Pacific Northwest. The operations of the fort consisted of trading goods for animal pelts, primarily beaver, and farming. Many crops were grown and livestock raised for self sufficiency and to provide goods for sale. The fort and its immediate surrounding served as home to as many as 900 people of many cultures including native american, european, and the pacific islands. It was here that the Pacific Northwest had its first pioneer schools, churches, and theatrical presentations.

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site was established to collect and preserve archeological resources, to reconstruct important aspects of the original Fort, and to interpret to the general public the day to day life of 1845. Through this interpretation we preserve major elements of our culture and heritage; the exploration, settlement, and development of the Pacific Northwest.

FORT HOURS AND ACTIVITIES

When visiting Fort Vancouver National Historic Site today, you are able to step back in time and experience life of 1845. The park is open daily from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. throughout the winter season (Nov. 1 through Feb. 28) and 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. the rest of the year. It is CLOSED on Thanksgiving Day, and December 24 & 25. An entrance fee (\$2 per adult, \$4 maximum per family) is charged for entry into the reconstructed Fort during the summer season (May 1 through Sep. 30). National Park Service Passports are available year-round.

We recommend that you start your visit at the **Visitor Center**, where displays tell of fort life. A 15 minute video is shown on request to provide introductory information and help you enjoy your visit. Also located in the Visitor Center is the **Fort Vancouver Gift Shop**. Here unusual and interesting items representing the fur trade, such as Hudson's Bay Blankets, Spode earthenware, and a wide assortment of beads, books and other items can be purchased. The shop is operated by the *Northwest Interpretive Association*, a non-profit company, and its sales support the educational efforts of the Historic Site.

At the fort site, you will find the surrounding palisade and nine reconstructed buildings. Tours of the buildings are presented regularly throughout the day. During summer months historic demonstrations are presented daily in the kitchen, regularly in the Blacksmith Shop, and occasionally in the Bakehouse. Call ahead for the daily schedule and activities:

(360) 696-7655, or 1-800-832-3599.

Tours are also offered for schools and other groups. To obtain information on how to reserve a tour, call the above number and a reservation form will be mailed to you.

THE FORT TODAY

Since 1966 Fort Vancouver's palisade walls and nine other buildings have been reconstructed on their original locations. They demonstrate what life was like when Fort Vancouver was the most important settlement in the Pacific Northwest. The buildings and other features you will find at the Fort include:

1. **Chief Factor's House** - This residence was home to Dr. John McLoughlin and others. Visitors to the Fort described the "Big House" as "very handsome" and "commodious and elegant." The Mess Hall (dining area) was a daily gathering place for the Company's gentlemen, and for special occasions.

2. **Kitchen** - Few details are known about any of the kitchens used at Fort Vancouver over the years. The kitchen used in 1845 evidently contained a cooking area, pantry, larder, and living quarters for some of the kitchen staff. The kitchen provided meals for the gentlemen of the fort and for special guests.

3. **Bakehouse** - The bakehouse was a two story structure set in the east palisade wall. It contained two fire-brick ovens. As many as four men baked sea-biscuits for the 200-300 fort employees. The biscuits were also baked for the trapping brigades, for use by ship crews and other posts and for trade.

4. **Wash House** - The wash house appears on several maps of Fort Vancouver drawn in the early 1840's. Little is known of its appearance or use. The building was probably destroyed by fire in 1852.

5. **Blacksmith Shop** - The blacksmith shop served as the principal smithy at Fort Vancouver. The shop produced a variety of iron and steel items needed for conducting the fur trade and agriculture.

6. **Indian Trade Shop, Dispensary, and Surgeon's quarters** - In keeping with general Hudson's Bay Company practice, the Indian Trade Shop was under the direction of the fort's doctor. This building housed the fur trading operations at Fort Vancouver, the hospital, doctor's office and residence.

7. **Fur Store (Warehouse #8)** - The multitude of animal pelts, primarily beaver, brought to the fort were kept in "stores", or warehouses. The furs were inventoried, cleaned, and pressed into bales before being shipped. In 1843, more than 61,000 furs were sent to England.

8. **Bastion** - The bastion was built in 1845 to protect against American threats., and to fire salutes to ships arriving at the fort. It was three stories high, with the top floor containing eight 3-pounder cannon.

9. **Carpenter Shop** - Scheduled to open in summer of 1998. Here fort carpenters made doors, window casings, furniture, and wagons, and planned the construction of other buildings.

The fort grounds have also been partially restored with other significant features including:

The Palisade - After several expansions, the palisade in 1845 enclosed an area 734 feet by 318 feet.

The Garden and Orchard - a one acre period English garden represents what was 7 to 9 acres during the fort's heyday. Several dozen fruit trees represent the more than 500 trees that were maintained at the fort's peak of operation.

The Belfry - a bell on a tower was used to start the day and announce a variety of events to fort workers. **The Flagpole** - a high pole was used to fly the Hudson's Bay Company flag to let people know who controlled this fort.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

The fort also hosts several special events throughout the year. The schedule for 1998 Special Events:

Sunday, May 24, 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. - **Queen Victoria's Birthday.** Celebrate the birthday of the renowned Queen with Her loyal subjects of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Sat. and Sun., July 18 and 19, 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. - **Brigade Encampment.** Experience the annual return of the trapping brigades and witness their adventurous way of life.

Tuesday, August 25, 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. - **Founder's Day.** Commemorate the establishment of the U.S. National Park Service. Fees are waived on this day.

Fri. and Sat. Oct. 2 and 3, 7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. - **Candlelight Tour.** The fort is illuminated by candles to allow you to experience the night life and activities of 1845.

Sunday, December 13, 12:00 Noon to 4:00 P.M. - **Christmas at Fort Vancouver.** Come participate in the festive traditional sight, smells, and sounds of the holiday season.