

# Fort Vancouver

National Historic Site  
National Park Service  
Vancouver National Historic Reserve

## National Park Service Collections

The National Park Service (NPS) cares for over 90 million cultural and natural objects, some of the most significant treasures of our country's heritage. They preserve moments of glory, with items as large as U.S.S. Constitution, as well as symbols of our darker periods, like the derringer used to kill President Lincoln or the flag that flew over Fort Sumter during the opening shots of the

Civil War. Pottery sherds from the Ancestral Pueblo culture represent our earliest days, while archives documenting women's suffrage or writings of Frederick Douglass remind us of events that have changed the course of our history in recent times. Most importantly, the items do not just commemorate familiar or great names. The power of the NPS mission lies in also preserving

objects of the nameless that might otherwise be forgotten. For example, the personal belongings left behind by immigrants that came to Ellis Island encapsulate the diversity that strengthens the nation. The NPS is charged with preserving these, and other, treasures in perpetuity, ensuring that these artifacts survive for future generations and allow us to learn of our past in tangible ways.

## Preserving Vancouver's Past

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site carries on this mission, preserving the multicultural heritage of the City of Vancouver's birthplace. The NPS is committed to a lead role in cultural resource preservation and research for the Vancouver National Historic Reserve. The archaeological resources shape our legacy from the original inhabitants of the fort, its village, and the U.S. military

post of Vancouver Barracks. Excavations have occurred here over the last 50 years, yielding



*Fort Vancouver and vicinity c. 1854, by Gustavus Sohon (National Park Service)*

a world-class archaeological collection of 1.5 million artifacts, 200,000 of which are arranged in a study collection. The array of artifacts provides tangible evidence of daily life at the site. While the majority reflect the 35-year Hudson's Bay Company era from 1825-1860, many artifacts remain from earlier Native American use and the later U.S. Army presence.

## The Fort Vancouver Collection

The collection at Fort Vancouver is stored in a state-of-the-art curation facility. The storage rooms have been designed to reduce the speed at which artifacts deteriorate and protect delicate objects from accidents and overuse. They provide a stable environment to minimize

fluctuations in temperature and humidity, which are detrimental to sensitive items. The NPS follows the highest standards for preservation, and Fort Vancouver has one of the most updated facilities in the system. The goal is to care for the collection in such a way that it remains accessible to the public while ensuring that preservation of the objects is not compromised in any way. Catalog records and digital images of selected artifacts are available online at [www.nps.gov/fova/archy.htm](http://www.nps.gov/fova/archy.htm). Tours of the collection are available by appointment to researchers and the general public. The NPS is honored to be the steward of the rich Fort Vancouver collection, which remains as a

physical representation of the unique development of Vancouver, and the entire Pacific Northwest.



*An NPS volunteer produces digital images of an artifact from the study collection.*



*Artifacts are periodically surveyed by the Curator or Museum Technicians who look for changes in their condition.*

# Artifacts and Historic Objects at Fort Vancouver

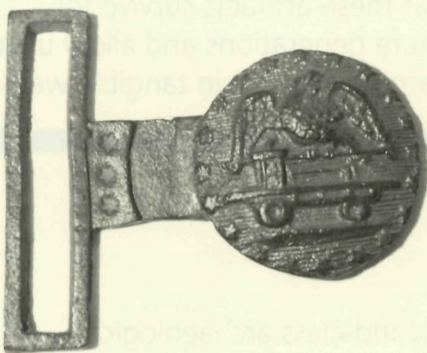
Fort Vancouver has yielded the largest recovered collection of 19th century Hudson's Bay Company artifacts in the world. They represent not only everyday life, but also the fort's position as the political, cultural, and mercantile center for the region. Imported items from Europe are found in great quantities, including ceramics, bottles, glassware, and personal ornaments. A large percentage



*Transferprinted earthenware from England's Spode company was a common import, but ceramics from elsewhere in Europe, and China, have been found as well.*

of the collection represents types of goods associated with the fur trade: beads, trade rings, axes, awls, tobacco pipes, guns, ammunition, and beaver traps. There are many artifacts from the various industrial trades, including blacksmithing and carpentry tools, and unfinished items. Agricultural activity left a mark as well: scythes, whetstones, forks, shovels, trowels, plowshares, flowerpots, and seeds have all been found during excavations. The amount of artifacts of American manufacture is significant, reflecting not only the presence of the U.S. Army at Vancouver Barracks after 1849, but also the fort's growing dependence on locally made articles. There are many artifacts in the collection from the Army era that directly reflect the military presence, including munitions (shot, bullets, grenades), insignias, and ceramics and cutlery issued by the Quartermaster's Depot. Other artifacts portray a more family-oriented side of life, such as jewelry, a garter belt buckle, dominoes, jacks, marbles,

dolls, and a miniature tea set. Though most of the collection is archaeological in nature, Fort Vancouver also curates historic objects and reproductions, some of which are used as furnishings to bring the reconstructed buildings to life. The objects at Fort Vancouver, both archaeological and historic, are a treasure of cultural material left by the site's various occupants over time. Vancouver's history as an early, diverse center of the Pacific Northwest is preserved in this collection.



*This belt buckle (above) may be associated with a fire brigade of the U.S. Army. The style is from the 1840s, and its presence at Fort Vancouver remains a mystery. The tobacco pipe fragment (below) is carved argillite, and is believed to be Haida, a Native American group from British Columbia, Canada.*



*The daguerreotype photograph of Dr. John McLoughlin was taken in the Oregon Territory after he left his post with the Company.*



The fur trade supported the Company until the supply of pelts declined in the mid-19th century. Beaver traps, like this one assembled from recovered artifacts, were manufactured in the Blacksmith Shop at the fort. Today, blacksmiths at the fort use artifacts as prototypes to forge replicas of traps and other metal objects.



Excavations sometimes unearth items readily associated with a specific person. This glass tumbler is inscribed with the name of A.L. Lewes, a clerk at Fort Vancouver in the 1840s.

*To schedule a tour of the Fort Vancouver collection, or if you are interested in donating appropriate historic objects, contact the Curator at (360) 816-6250.*

*For more information on Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, contact the Visitor Center at (360) 816-6230*