



Dr. McLoughlin's Garden



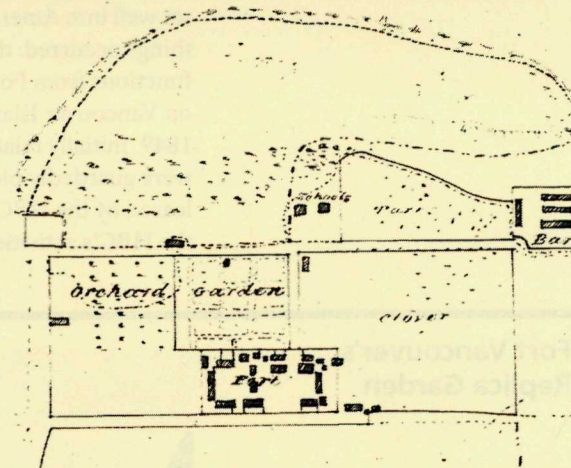
This 1855 illustration by Richard Covington, a school teacher at the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Fort Vancouver, shows the garden on the north side of the stockade, which is at right center. The view is looking east, with Mt. Hood in the background. The southeast area of the garden appears well-groomed with wide paths and possibly shows the portion of the garden retained by the HBC when the remainder was leased to the U.S. Army in 1852.

A European Garden in the Wilderness

The fertile soils of the Willamette Valley that nurtured edible bulbs and berries and tobacco cultivated by native people, also well-nourished seeds and plants from Britain and other exotic places around the globe. The garden at Fort Vancouver provided nutrition, medicinal remedies, and an emotional connection to homes far away. Even as the garden impressed on both native people and arriving American immigrants the power of the British Empire, it also provided for them in the form of seeds and cuttings offered by Dr. McLoughlin.

The Garden Grows in Significance

The first references to a garden at Fort Vancouver were made in 1828. Referred to as "extensive," by HBC Governor George Simpson, and including "some small apple trees and vines," according to American explorer Jedediah Smith, the size and location of the garden at that time is not currently known. By the mid-1830s the garden, located on the north side of the stockade, was estimated to be five acres, and high-status Company employees were enjoying apples, peaches, grapes, melons, and many varieties of vegetables. Flowers decorated Dr. McLoughlin's dinner table. The garden was also an experimental nursery, containing seeds and plants from locales around the world: dahlias (grown in glass frames) and acacia from Hawai'i, peaches from South America, and seeds and possibly apricot, plum, pear and cherry trees from the Royal Horticultural Society in Britain. Oranges, lemons and nectarines were also grown, undoubtedly protected in greenhouses during the cold winters.



Detail of the 1844 "Line of Fire" map, attributed to HBC clerk Henry Peers, illustrating damage done to HBC agricultural operations and property by a naturally-occurring fire (dotted lines). This is the only known map indicating a schematic layout of garden beds. Courtesy of Hudson's Bay Company Archives

This scientifically and socially significant space, which eventually spread to more than eight acres, was tended by the head gardener, William Bruce. Initially hired as a laborer in the mid-1820s, he was first referred to as the gardener in 1833. Bruce was given the opportunity in 1838 to visit the Duke of Devonshire's garden at Chiswick House, outside of London, in order to obtain information on the care of plants (thought to be grafted fruit trees) donated to Fort Vancouver by Joseph Paxton, the Duke's head gardener at his Chatsworth estate, and a renowned horticulturalist. After returning from Chiswick, as related by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, an American naval officer, "all [Bruce's] success here continues to be compared with Chiswick, which he endeavors to surpass: this is alike creditable to both."

Just as at Chiswick House, and other gardens in Britain at the time, access to the garden was by invitation, in this case by Dr. McLoughlin. Several visitors commented on the enjoyable hours spent strolling the 20 to 30 foot wide walks. A summerhouse, located on the northern edge, perhaps functioned as a shady respite in the summer and greenhouse in the winter. Other than Mr. Bruce, little is known about those who labored in the garden. Planting and harvesting was done by men, while weeding was a job women and boys were allowed to perform. According to Eloisa McLoughlin, daughter of Dr. McLoughlin and his wife Marguerite, the head gardener previous to Mr. Bruce had been an "Indian." This is not surprising as generally about one-third of the entire work force was local natives.

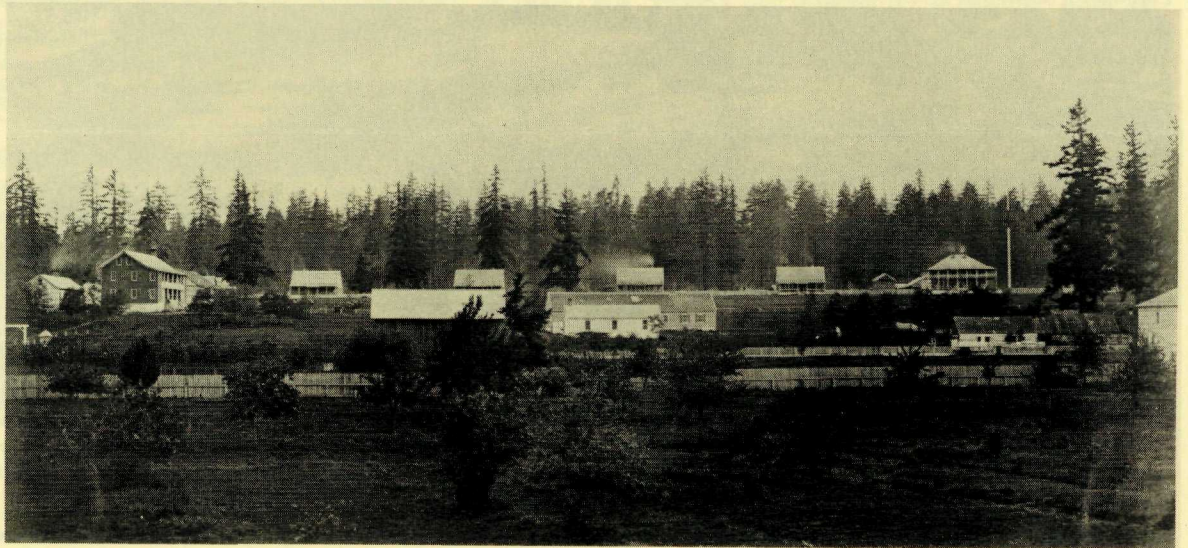
Broader Agricultural Activities

Fort Vancouver was the first large-scale farming operation in the Pacific Northwest. Beginning in 1825, the Hudson's Bay Company established a number of farms and dairies, initially to reduce the high cost of importing food from England. Agriculture and grazing lands extended for thirty miles along the Columbia River and ten miles inland. The farms included over 1,400 acres of cultivated fields and thousands of acres of pastures. Numerous barns, stables, and sheds sheltered a

wide variety of livestock, including cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, goats and poultry.

The products from the farms and dairies provided food for Fort Vancouver employees, a number of other HBC forts in the region, and the crews of supply ships. The bountiful surplus also allowed the Company to feed thousands of starving Oregon Trail immigrants, and to ship goods to Hawai'i and the Russian American Fur Company in Alaska.

Decline and Long-Term Effects



This 1860 North American Boundary Commission photo shows small, yet apparently mature trees, possibly dwarf fruit trees, in the area of the HBC garden. Courtesy of Royal Engineers Library

Gold was discovered in California in 1848, creating a constant shortage of laborers at Fort Vancouver. This undoubtedly effected agricultural activities, as did the boundary decision of 1846, which placed the boundary between Great Britain and the United States at the 49th parallel. Fort Vancouver sat well into American territory. Two significant things occurred: the HBC moved its administrative functions from Fort Vancouver to Fort Victoria on Vancouver Island, and the U.S. Army arrived in 1849. Initially relations between the two entities were guardedly pleasant, and 70% of the garden was leased by the HBC to the Army in 1852. However, the HBC's activities in the region continued to wane

and in 1858 army recruits devastated both the garden and orchard. In 1860 the HBC moved all operations north to Fort Victoria.

The HBC's agricultural operations in the region resulted in the first invasion of non-native species in the Northwest, stemming from the introduction of agricultural crops from Europe and "stowaway" seeds on ships and in cargo. Agricultural activities allowed more people to live successfully in the area, but it also brought exotic plant species to compete with the native flora. The invasion of exotics in the United States has had a dramatic impact on native flora, even in our national parks.

Fort Vancouver's Replica Garden



Courtesy of National Park Service

A stroll through today's garden gives you a glimpse of Fort Vancouver's agricultural history. Many of the vegetables and flowers are varieties from the 1840s. And, just as in the past, the garden today provides produce for the Chief Factor's kitchen, and a place of beauty and rest for visitors.

Take a moment to talk to one of the dedicated garden volunteers, whose countless hours of labor make this project possible. Also, a map of the current plantings in the replica garden is available at the Contact Station, just inside the main gate of the stockade.