

# Vancouver National Historic Reserve



## Heart of the Early Northwest

The Vancouver National Historic Reserve brings together a national park, the region's first military post, an international fur trade emporium, one of the oldest operating airfields, the first national historic site west of the Mississippi River, and a waterfront trail and environmental center on the banks of the Columbia River.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was a center of frontier exploration, global trade, political transformation, and both cultural conflict and

cooperation. Its stories are the stories of the entire Northwest, preserved in a single place. The sites – including Vancouver Barracks, Officers' Row, Fort Vancouver, the McLoughlin and Barclay Houses, Pearson Air

Museum, Pearson Field, the Water Resources Education Center, and the Landbridge – make it an essential destination for anyone interested in the people and events that shaped this singular region.



ca. 1860: Royal Engineers Library



The Columbia River was, from the earliest days of human occupation in the West, a landmark that offered transport, communication, sustenance, and a spiritual underpinning to American Indians. Villages were established along the Big River and its tributaries and, supported by abundant natural resources, the indigenous population of the Portland Basin grew to astonishing numbers. Local tribes had distinct languages, artistic styles, and worldviews that set them apart from native peoples in other parts of the country.

Though no evidence of a settlement has yet been uncovered within what is today the Historic Reserve, prehistoric artifacts found during archaeological excavations imply at least an intermittent native presence here.



National Archives of Canada

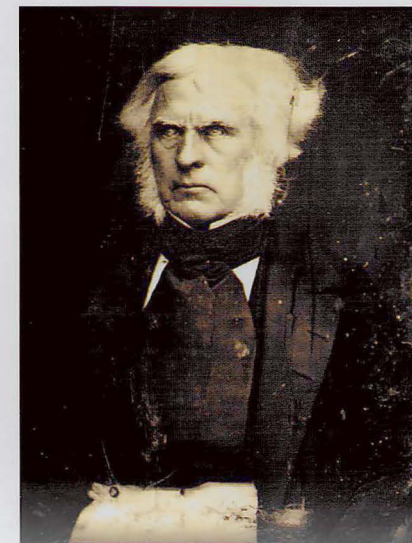
By the time the fur trade had extended west, epidemics had devastated the local population and left the region vulnerable to foreign claims.



## Fort Vancouver

When it was established in 1825, Fort Vancouver was a British outpost on the far frontier. The boundary between the United States and Canada had not yet been set, and the fort not only provided a trading outlet but also a reminder of British claims to the west coast. Vancouver was designated the administrative headquarters for a vast territory called the Columbia Department: 700,000 square miles stretching from Alaska to California and from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains. John McLoughlin was appointed Chief Factor and enjoyed a great degree of autonomy since his superior officers were based on the opposite side of the continent. He would later use this latitude to aid American immigrants coming across the Oregon Trail, an action strictly against company policy.

Fort Vancouver was also the supply depot for the two dozen posts in the department, twice a year receiving and redistributing many tons of goods. The fort served as a grand experiment in self-sufficiency and industry, a large multicultural settlement once called the "New York of the Pacific". Agriculture, including formal gardens, cultivated fields, orchards, and grazing land, stretched for thirty miles along the riverbank. Dairies and mills met not only local needs, but also produced a surplus to sell to Russian and Mexican establishments on the borders of the department. Blacksmiths, tinsmiths, carpenters, and other tradesmen worked long hours to produce equipment, hardware, and containers. A diverse population surrounded the fort – Scots, Irish, English, Americans, Hawaiians, and Native Americans from more than 30 different tribes – supporting the various profit-making endeavors.



National Park Service

*Dr. John McLoughlin retired to Oregon City where he became an American citizen and contributed both intellectually and financially to the fledgling community. His sympathetic actions on behalf of settlers, though they meant censure by his company, earned him the title "Father of Oregon". His home, as well as that of Dr. Forbes Barclay, the fort's surgeon, became a unit of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site in 2003.*

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## Vancouver Barracks

Vancouver Barracks began in 1849 as a small grouping of log cabins on the south end of the current Parade Ground. The military not only protected American settlers, it also reinforced the newly-won claims to lands below the 49th parallel. By the time Fort Vancouver was abandoned in 1860, the U.S. Army had already been its uneasy neighbor for eleven years. In these early years the Quartermaster Depot, located in the

former village area of the fort, was run by Rufus Ingalls and Ulysses S. Grant, both of whom would go on to illustrious and intertwined careers. With the withdrawal of the fur trading operations based at Fort Vancouver, the full transition to American jurisdiction and influence was completed.

Vancouver Barracks eventually grew to be a powerful regional headquarters, and the officers and soldiers played prominent roles in the nation's

history. During the Indian Wars of the 1870s, Generals O.O. Howard and Nelson Miles forever altered the future of the West's native peoples, harshly enforcing their move to reservations and sometimes incarcerating them in the military guardhouse. Later, these same officers (like several who had served during this period) spoke against the government's ill treatment of American Indians.



## The Vancouver National Historic Reserve

The effect of World War II on Vancouver was profound. Since its establishment in 1825, Vancouver had grown slowly as the home of retiring fur trappers, Oregon Trail emigrants, and other settlers. Though the population and industrial base continued to increase, Vancouver was outpaced by other cities. However, it was ideally located to meet military and homefront needs during the war. Vancouver's course was changed, thrusting it into a new role as a large and bustling city.

After the end of the war, the historic heart of Vancouver began an era characterized by community support and involvement that continues to this day. The site of the original Fort Vancouver fur trading post was relocated by archaeologists in 1947, and the site became a unit of the National Park System the next year. Vancouver Barracks continued as an active army post until 2000. The West Barracks has been transferred to the City of Vancouver for adaptive reuse. The re-

mainder of the Barracks is still used by Army Reserve units. The city opened the Water Resources Education Center to re-establish the community's deep connection with the Columbia River and promote stewardship of this critical resource. In 1996, the entire area was recognized as one of America's treasures when Congress designated all 366 acres as a national historic reserve.



## Pearson Air Field

While Vancouver Barracks was growing in size and importance, its airfield was beginning its tenure as one of the nation's oldest operating fields. Inside the Pearson Air Museum you can learn about the aviation firsts that occurred here. Aviation landed in Vancouver, quite literally, in 1905 when a dirigible commanded by Lincoln Beachey flew from Portland to the army's polo field. Six years later, several Vancouver aeronauts began using the military field as a base for their experimental flights. Silas Christofferson, a former race car driver, flew a Curtiss-type pusher aircraft from the top of Portland's Multnomah Hotel to the barracks grounds. Walter Edwards completed the first airmail flight in the northwest, delivering 5000 letters from Portland to Vancouver.



for biplane manufacture. The mill at Vancouver covered the entire plain that once had been Fort Vancouver and Pearson Field. At peak operation, it was producing one million board feet per day. The mill operated for only about 18 months before the war came to an end and the buildings were sold as surplus. The airfield resumed operations, and the period between the wars came to be recognized as its most significant era. In 1925, the field was officially named Pearson Field in honor of Alexander Pearson, one of the army's most skilled pilots who had been killed the year before. In the 1930s, Vancouver once again rose to national prominence under Gen.

George C. Marshall, who commanded both the department and the Civilian Conservation Corps' main training facility in the Pacific Northwest. While he was in residence, the first transpolar flight landed unexpectedly at adjacent Pearson Field, adding the mission commanded by Valery Chkalov to Vancouver's reputation for pioneering moments in aviation.



Pearson Air Museum



Vancouver National Historic Reserve

## Artifacts, Archives, and Architecture



The Historic Reserve exists today because of its tangible legacy. Authentic pieces of the past, including artifacts, archival documents, and historic buildings, make this site truly remarkable.

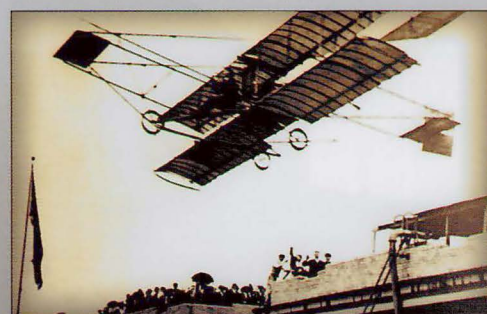
Artifacts, rich in information about daily life, are preserved underground for archaeologists to recover. Over 60 years of archaeological excavations have generated a spectacular array of two million objects, representing the American Indian, fur trade, and military periods of the site. The entire museum collection is curated by the National Park Service at the reconstructed fort site, and is available for research by appointment.

The Historic Reserve is characterized by a rich variety of historic structures. Some are examples of standard 19th and 20th century military construc-

tion, while others show the influence of numerous architectural styles including Second Empire, Italianate, and Queen Anne. Rehabilitation and reuse of the buildings is done in such a way that their historic integrity and character-defining features are maintained.

The history of the Northwest is captured here in three dimensions, preserved for study today and in the future. We hope you enjoy the special places and objects we hold in trust.

Vancouver National Historic Reserve Visitor Center  
(360) 816-6230 [www.nps.gov/fova](http://www.nps.gov/fova)  
1501 East Evergreen Blvd. Vancouver, WA. 98661



Pearson Air Museum

During World War I, the logging industry in the Northwest was remade into a military operation called the Spruce Production Division, extracting enormous amounts of lumber