

*The Factor's House of Fort Nisqually as it is being restored at Tacoma, Washington. It is to be furnished with period pieces and will be used as the fort's museum.*

# Fort Nisqually Lives Again

By  
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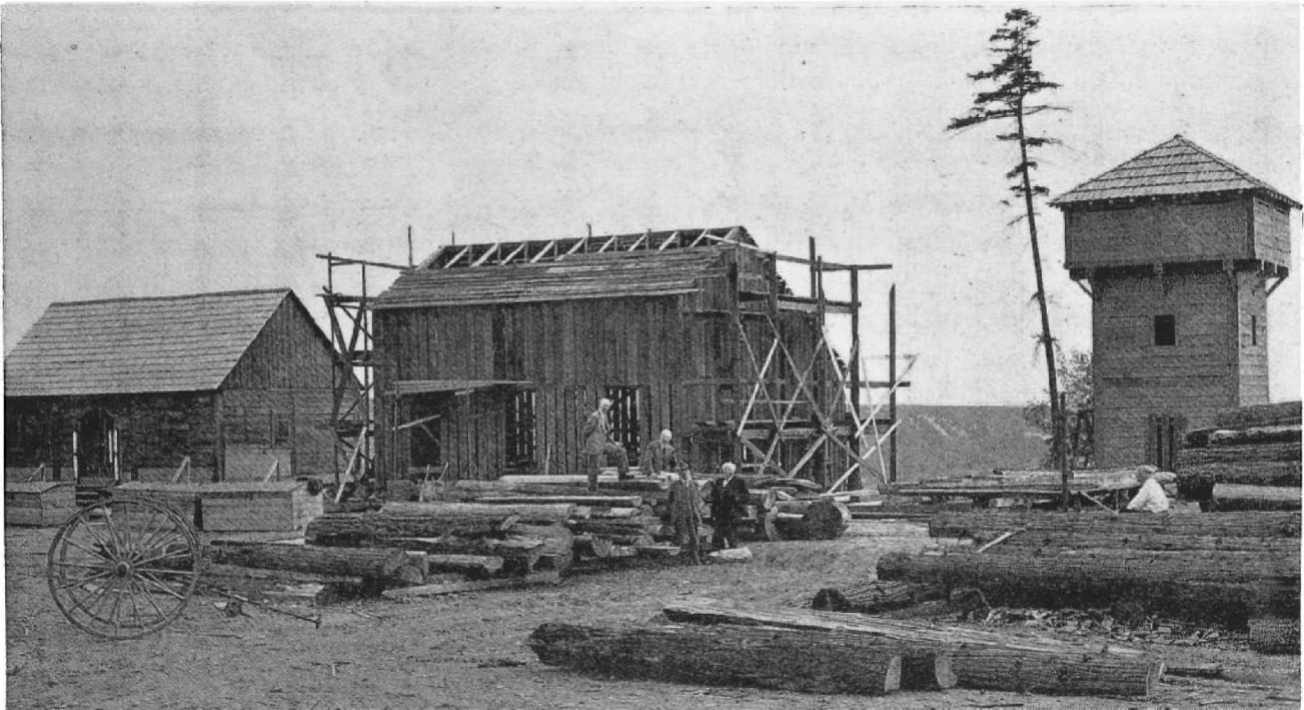
With Genuine Regard for Pioneer Workmanship and an Understanding of the Past This Old Company Post Is Being Restored at Tacoma, Washington

**F**ORT Nisqually, an old Hudson's Bay Company's trading post, founded on Puget Sound in 1833, is being restored as a historical landmark by the combined efforts of the United States government, the State of Washington and the City of Tacoma. The factor's house, store, granary, blacksmith's shop and bakery are being constructed exactly as they stood in 1843 within a log palisade by unemployment relief labour. The original Nisqually house was built by a party of Hudson's Bay men, under Archibald McDonald, who set out from Fort Vancouver on the Columbia river with instructions to establish a trading post on Puget Sound. They chose a location on a high bluff overlooking the Nisqually river valley and a broad expanse of Puget Sound. To the rear of the site were rolling prairies, on which grazed vast herds of deer. The post, the first habitation constructed by white men on Puget Sound, was a crude log building surrounded by a hastily erected picket palisade. This poorly constructed palisade blew

over in a gale during the first winter and had to be replaced by a more substantial structure.

The Nisqually and other Puget Sound Siwash Indians with whom trade was established were friendly and helpful. The fort prospered from the start. In 1843 Dr. William Tolmie (the father of ex-Premier Tolmie of British Columbia, who was born at Fort Nisqually) was given full charge as factor and encouraged to embark on a programme of expansion. He at once commenced building a larger trading post and a walled fort a little more than a mile inland on the prairie. The buildings of squared logs and whip-sawed lumber were much more comfortable and serviceable than the old. At opposite corners of a log palisade substantial bastions were erected and armed with cannon and swivel guns.

After the fort was finished Dr. Tolmie sought trade with the Yakima and Klickitat Indians occupying the territory east of the Cascade Mountains between the Fraser and Columbia rivers.

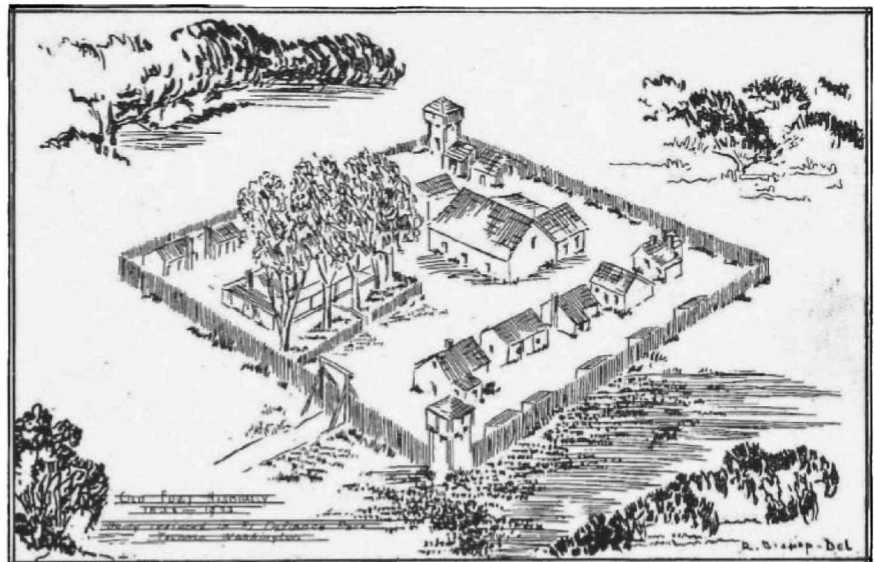


*Above: The Bastion and buildings rise as a tribute to fur traders.*

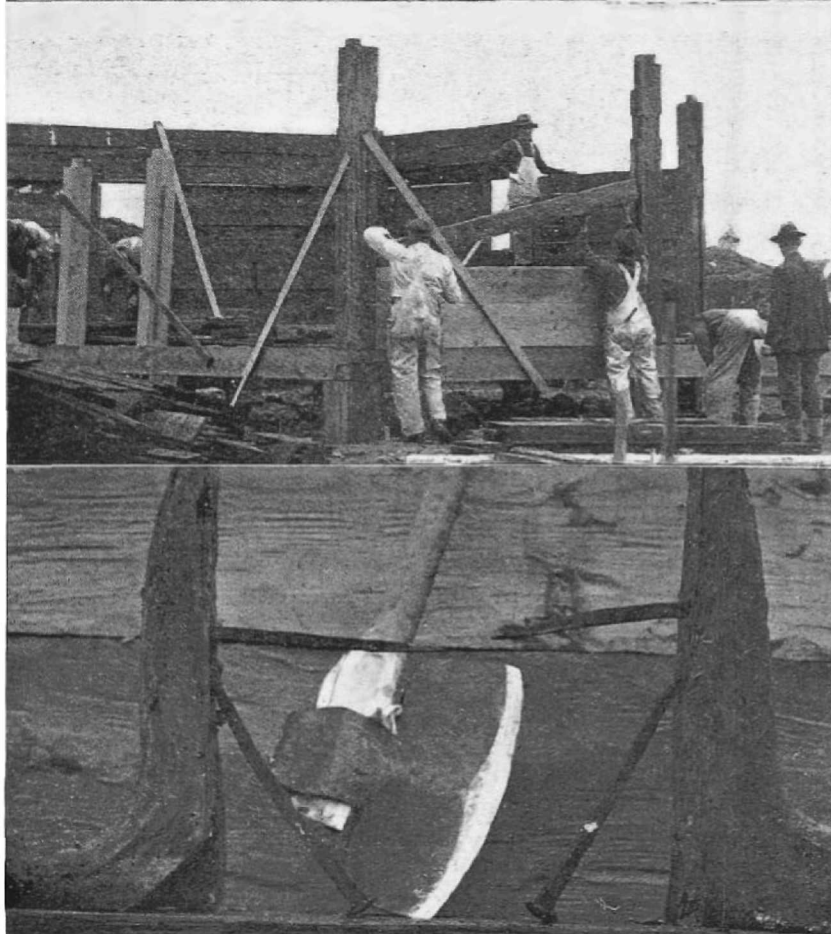
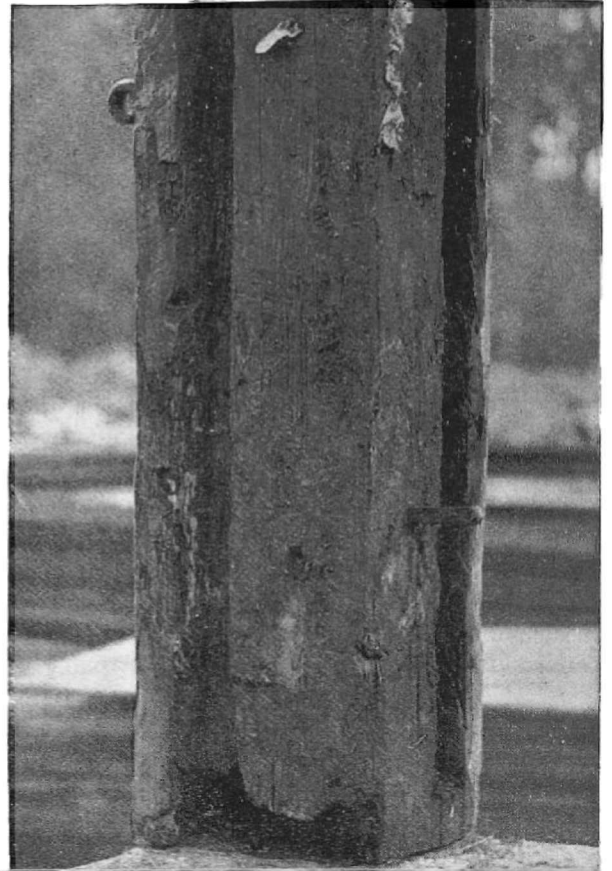
*Right: Nisqually as it will appear.*

Mr. Edward Huggins, assistant factor under Dr. Tolmie and later factor, records in one of his letters the arrival of a brigade of 250 fur laden horses from the newly tapped territory. That Dr. Tolmie and Mr. Huggins were successful in dealing with these troublesome Indians is borne out by the fact that, except for a riot at the fort gates in 1849, when one American settler and one Indian were killed, there is no record of bloodshed. The United States authorities who had then established jurisdiction over the territory promptly hanged the Indian instigators of the riot after a fair trial at Fort Steilacoom. During the Indian uprising of 1855, when every homestead between the Puyallup and Stuck rivers was burned and a number of settlers killed, none of the cattle or property of the Company was harmed. This was a remarkable tribute to Dr. Tolmie and Mr. Huggins, who were honoured and respected among all Indian tribes because of their kindness and fair dealings.

Dr. Tolmie encouraged settlers to locate near the fort, and allowed them to trade home-made cedar shake shingles at the rate of \$3.00 per thousand. There was no outside demand for these shakes, and they accumulated rapidly. It was thought by some of the Company's authorities



that they should discontinue to take these shakes, or at least greatly reduce the price. Governor Douglas immediately replied that the shakes were the only method by which the settlers could pay for their supplies, that the price was low enough, and that the Hudson's Bay Company were morally responsible to take them. So the unsold shakes accumulated. But this excellent example of the fairness to the American settlers in the end entailed no loss to the Company. Gold was discovered in California, and the resulting building boom at San Francisco created such a demand for shingles that the Company was able to dispose of their whole stock at \$13.00 per thousand, realizing a handsome unexpected profit.



*Upper left: Hand split cedar shakes. Above: The grooved upright of original granary. Centre: Reconstructing granary, using the original timber. Bottom: Broadaxe and original hand forged nails.*

Foreseeing the falling off of the fur trade in the northwest due to the steady influx of settlers, the Hudson's Bay Company organized in 1838 a subsidiary firm, the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company. At Fort Nisqually this firm pastured great herds of sheep and cattle on the prairies and river bottoms. Under Dr. Tolmie's leadership the Nisqually post had 1500 acres under plow, with 10,000 sheep and 6000 head of cattle on the range. Farm products were shipped to the Russians in Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands and England. The Company laid claim to 167,000 acres of land between the Nisqually and Puyallup rivers. Land then valued at 25 cents an acre could not be purchased today for \$10,000.00 an acre.

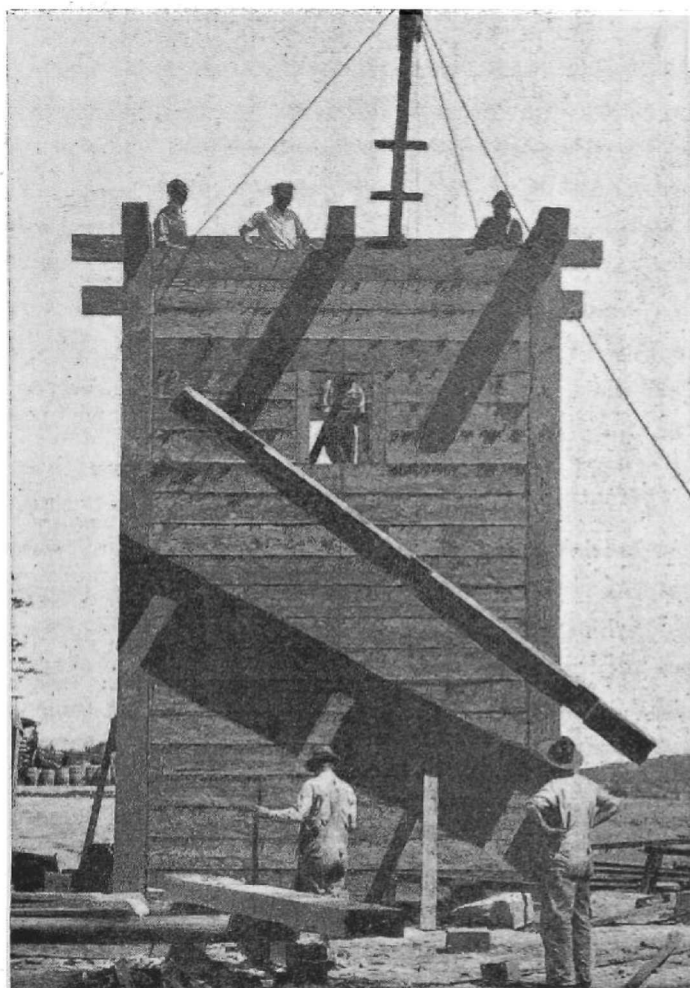
In 1846, when the boundary west of the Rocky Mountains between Canada and the United States was determined, the United States government agreed

to reimburse the Hudson's Bay Company and the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company for the loss of their land and investment in the Oregon Territory. A joint commission was appointed, which surveyed and appraised the holdings and agreed upon a fair price. In 1869 the sum of \$650,000.00 in gold was paid the Hudson's Bay Company and the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company for all their properties and claims in Oregon Territory. Of this amount \$12,000.00 was the value placed on Fort Nisqually. The companies then withdrew. Edward Huggins, the last factor, became an American citizen and held as a homestead the land on which the fort stood.

His farm was sold to the Du Pont Powder Company in 1906. Only the old granary, which had been used as a chicken coop, and the much altered and remodelled factor's house remained to show where the fort had stood. The Washington State Historical Society in 1933, the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of Fort Nisqually, realizing that the granary was the oldest standing building in the state, made an effort to preserve the structure. They enlisted the aid of the Young Men's Business Club of Tacoma, which ambitiously agreed to sponsor the restoration of the entire fort. The club evolved a plan to rebuild Fort Nisqually in one of Tacoma's parks. The Du Pont

officials gladly consented to the removal of the buildings, which interfered with their plans of expansion. The original site is now marked by a massive monument.

The Young Men's Business Club interested the Honourable Clarence E. Martin, governor of the State of Washington and a member of the club, in the project. He at once pledged his influence to have Federal and State unemployment relief funds set aside to pay labor for the immediate rebuilding of the complete Fort Nisqually. A site in Point Defiance Park within the city limits of Tacoma was chosen. This location, on a high wooded knoll, commands the same scenic view of Puget Sound, the Olympic Mountains, and Mt. Rainier-Tacoma that the original fort enjoyed. Mr. Roland E. Borhek, A.I.A., was engaged as architect to draw plans and supervise the reconstruction. It was decided to rebuild the fort with historical accuracy as to materials and details. No paleontologist reconstructing an extinct animal from a few fossils had a greater task than Architect Borhek in preparing accurate plans of buildings long since vanished. Various histories disagreed in such major details as the number of bastions on the palisades: A description of the fort with the relative location and ground size of the buildings within the palisade, which measured 200 by 250 feet, was found



*Lower left: The bastion goes up. Below: Saw filer truing a whip-saw; Whip-sawing planks—old style; Squaring logs in the timber yard.*



among the records of the joint commission which set a value on the property. In the Ferry Museum at Tacoma were several pieces of heavy old hand forged hardware, and a rough pencil sketch of the exterior of the palisades. Fortunately the old granary, an excellent example of the Hudson's Bay Company's method of building, was intact. Instead of the notched round log construction of the American settlers, squared timbers with mortised joints were used.

Gray haired pioneers, who as children had played around the fort, were interviewed. One of them wrote:

"The construction of the bastions, or blockhouses, two in number at opposite corners, was the same as used for the granary. Heavy fir logs were adzed to timbers 10 by 14 inches square with tenons on the ends. These tenons were mortised into grooves in heavy upright corner posts and pinned with oak dowels. Oak pegs three feet long were driven down through holes bored in the horizontal timbers, making a very strong construction. When the last blockhouse was taken down after many years it had to be dismantled timber by timber and these oak pegs had to be sawed. The bastions had three port holes on the second story for the cannon. These port holes were of the same construction and hinged so they could be raised outward when the cannon was to be fired. The port holes faced west, north and east." Again the pioneer writes, "The fireplaces in the factor's house were faced in brick. The one in the dining room had swinging angles of iron built into it to hold pots for cooking. In my early youth I never saw it used other than to suspend a tea kettle. I have vivid memories of this steaming kettle during stormy winter evenings and the mystic songs it sang. Particularly when old Billy Young was in good humor and would favor us with his Scotch ghost stories."

After assembling all of the historical data, the Young Men's Business Club called upon the relief agencies to furnish skilled and unskilled labor. The public works directors looked upon the rebuilding of Fort Nisqually as an excellent means of employing needy men who were too proud to accept direct relief. They agreed with the architect that in restoring the fort with historical exactness it would be necessary to do all work by hand labor. No power equipment was to be used. The rate paid the men was the prevailing union scale. The crews were rotated, no man being allowed to receive in wages more than his allotment, according to the number of his dependents, would be under direct relief. It was known that this method would be inefficient but would give employment to a great number of needy men. The men averaged two day's work a week, and considerable time was lost in starting three different work crews each week. It is estimated that the total cost of the reconstruction of Fort Nisqually with the furnishings, landscaping, and picnic grounds will be in excess of \$75,000.00. No set amount of money was allotted to the project. Each month the State Relief Board appropriated the sum needed. These relief funds are for labor only. The Park Commission advanced the funds necessary to buy the preliminary materials. The Young Men's Business Club

had a poster stamp designed commemorating the rebuilding of the fort and the hundredth anniversary of its founding. These stamps were placed on sale in the leading stores of Tacoma and Seattle. Various philatelic societies recognized the stamp in their publications and stamp collectors from all over the world purchased them. Well over a thousand dollars has been realized from this source and turned into the building fund. Leading pioneer families of wealth have contributed liberally to the fund and a number of mercantile establishments have made material donations.

The site in the park was heavily wooded with giant Douglas firs and cedars. These were hewn into timbers by hand. At first it was found that the average carpenter knew little of swinging a heavy broadaxe, or how to dress timbers true and smooth with the adze. Much time was lost until the men acquired the skill of their forefathers. To roof the buildings, a large crew were put to splitting cedar shakes with a frow and dressing them down to shingles with a drawknife. The men, many of them sons of pioneers, entered into the spirit of the rebuilding. Once when funds were exhausted before the end of the month, several of the men worked without pay in order to complete a necessary piece of construction.

Whip-saw frames were built and planks for the floor and window trimmings were ripped out. Great difficulty was experienced in sharpening the whip-saws so that they would saw true. Although any number of saw filers could be obtained who understood sharpening cross-cut saws, none seemed to possess the skill necessary to set the whip-saws. Finally an old man who, in his youth had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in the North, was located. In a short time he adjusted the saws and no more trouble was experienced. With the wrought hardware and hinges from the Ferry Museum as patterns, two blacksmiths were set to fashioning hardware. Their glowing forge and ringing anvils was a great source of interest to sight-seers who visited the project. Incidentally, without any special publicity, 2000 cars in one day visited the park to inspect the old granary, which had been carefully dismantled and re-erected at the new location.

Newspapers all over the West have published feature articles about the project. One large daily, sensing the public interest, has been running a series of historical essays. Local radio stations have broadcast special Fort Nisqually programmes. A Tacoma department store assembled from all over the state examples of pioneer relics and displayed them in their show windows. Day and night people thronged to view the spinning wheels, looms, clothing, domestic implements, and farm tools of the days before the machine age. Suburban schools were closed early so that the pupils could view the display. So great was the interest that the exhibition was kept several days longer than originally planned. The school board encouraged the students to compete for a prize of \$50.00 offered by the Young Men's Business Club for the best essay on "The American Settlement of Pierce County From the Establishment of Fort Nisqually to 1870." Another prize has also [Continued on Page 65]

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been offered for the best art poster designed by a student to advertise the dedication of the restored Fort Nisqually.

So encouraged was the committee by this public interest that they at once planned to furnish the factor's house and store, making of them a free museum. It is planned to arrange the house as it was when Dr. Tolmie lived in it instead of having the relics displayed in cases. Furniture of the period will be installed. Food of wax and papier mache will be hung in iron pots over the fireplace. The table will be set with old dishes and lamps, and dresses of the period will hang in the clothes press. It is even hoped that wax figures representing Factor Tolmie, his wife, and the servants can be installed, so that school children will be able to visualize how these sturdy pioneers lived and dressed.

The park commission has agreed to keep an attendant versed in Northwest history on duty during the tourist season, and has assumed all responsibility for the upkeep of grounds and buildings. From all over the district pioneer families have pledged their heirlooms. Furniture, dishes, clothing, and weapons have been offered. It is planned to refit the old blacksmith shop with a forge, leather bellows, anvil, tools and other equipment. Similarly the bakery, with its huge brick oven, will be restored.

Anyone interested in contributing relics or funds toward the restoration is asked to communicate with the Young Men's Business Club, Tacoma, Washington. The volumes of "Journal of Occurrences" which records the day to day happenings

at the fort since its foundation will also be put on exhibition under glass. Unfortunately the books covering the period between May 31, 1839, and January 20, 1846, have disappeared and cannot be located. The State Department has searched diligently in the United States for them. Any person having knowledge of these books or letters written at Fort Nisqually during that period will do a great favour by communicating with the Young Men's Business Club.

"The New Fort Nisqually," said Mr. Fred Hendrickson, the president of the Young Men's Business Club, in addressing a convention, "is a monument to our pioneers, living and dead. More especially is it a monument to the two great factors of the Hudson's Bay Company, Dr. William Tolmie and Mr. Edward Huggins. These men brought civilization into a wilderness. Struggling settlers, weary, exhausted in funds and spirit from their long trek overland were received with open arms and fed and clothed at the fort. Credit for the purchase of supplies for themselves and families and equipment for their farms was given. A fair value was always allowed for their produce in settlement.

"At the dedication ceremonies which will mark the completion of the restoration of Fort Nisqually, four flags will fly from the four corners of the log palisade. The flag of Canada and the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company will fly at the two northernmost corners, and the Stars and Stripes and the Washington State emblem to the south, these flags symbolizing a hundred years of friendship and understanding. Speakers from both sides of the boundary will be present, and another knot in the chord of friendship between the two countries will be tied."