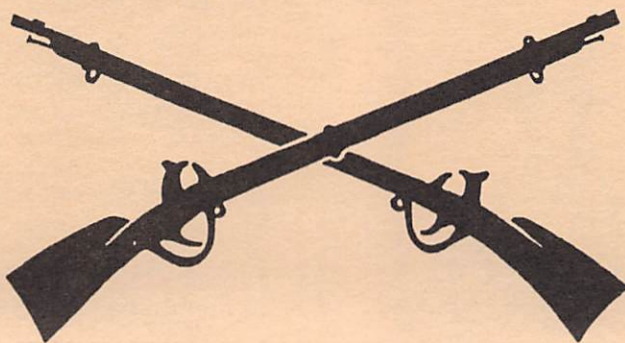


Fort Spokane

Coulee Dam National Recreation Area
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort On the Final Frontier



Keeping the Peace

By the end of the 1870's, two large Indian reservations had been established in Washington Territory north of the Columbia River. Most of the Indians intended for these reserves lived elsewhere. Adding to the uneasiness, the tribes sent to the Colville Reservation had never made treaty with the government ceding their lands. Although these tribes came to the reservations peaceably, tensions existed.

The Northern Pacific Railroad had begun to advertise the tremendous farming potential of this region, opening the door to trainloads of settlers with their horses, cattle and farm machinery. Even though the reservation boundaries had been laid down, keeping the semi-nomadic tribes within and the land-hungry settlers without was a difficult task.

Strategic Location

The consolidation of tribes on reservations, along with improved railroad and boat transportation, eliminated the need for the many small stockade-style forts erected earlier in this region. A board of officers was appointed in 1880 to select a central location for a new post that would protect the settlers of the upper Columbia, as well as keep a watchful eye on the Indian reservations to the north.

This site at the confluence of the Columbia and Spokane Rivers was found to be that strategic point.

"...hundreds of Indians annually congregate from all directions from various tribes, and all the great Indian trails center at this point, thus making it easy for troops to move in any direction that may be necessary."

- Lt. Col. Henry Clay Merriam

Birth of a Fort

Construction of Camp Spokane began in 1880 with the transfer of troops of the 2nd Infantry from

Camp Chelan, over 80 miles to the west. During the first year many temporary buildings were erected by troop labor with a minimum of funds.



Following his annual inspection of the Department of the Columbia in 1881, Commanding General Nelson A. Miles recommended that \$40,280.07 be appropriated for construction of a permanent post, which by military decree was named Fort Spokane in 1882. With this money, building began in earnest. During the next 12 years over 45 structures were erected.

Sentinels of Silence



The tribes of the surrounding area were relatively peaceful and the settlers needed little protection. Timely patrols by Fort Spokane troops helped to dampen tempers and dispel rumors. But for the most part the soldiers enjoyed routine garrison life.

In an 1893 report, Major V.B. Hubbard, Post Surgeon, summarized his opinion of the reason for that enjoyment. "I think the manifest contentment and even cheerfulness of the men here is due to great measure to a cause of which they are almost if not entirely unconscious;... the great beauty of the natural scenery and the healthfulness and salubrity of the climate."

Over a period of 18 years, the troops of the 2nd, 4th, and 16th Infantry, and 2nd Cavalry saw duty here. At the height of Army occupation, over 300 soldiers, plus

families and other civilians lived at Fort Spokane.

With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the entire garrison was withdrawn and the equipment and furnishings moved by wagon to the newly established Fort George Wright near the growing city of Spokane.

Between 1899 and 1929 the former Army post was used by the Office of Indian Affairs as headquarters for the Colville Indian Agency and boarding school, and later a tuberculosis sanatorium and general hospital for the local tribes.

After 1929, the abandoned fort grounds became a popular picnic site for local residents. Through the years some the the buildings were destroyed by fire and vandalism, while others were sold or moved to the new Colville Indian Agency headquarters in Nespelem.

The New Guard

Fort Spokane was transferred to the National Park Service in 1960, and major restoration efforts began on the four remaining original buildings: the Quartermaster Stable built in 1884, the Powder Magazine built in 1888, the Reservoir built in 1889, and the Guardhouse built in 1892.

The Guardhouse now serves as the visitor center. The other three buildings can be seen along the Sentinel Trail. You may follow this self-guided interpretive trail starting from any location on the fort grounds.

