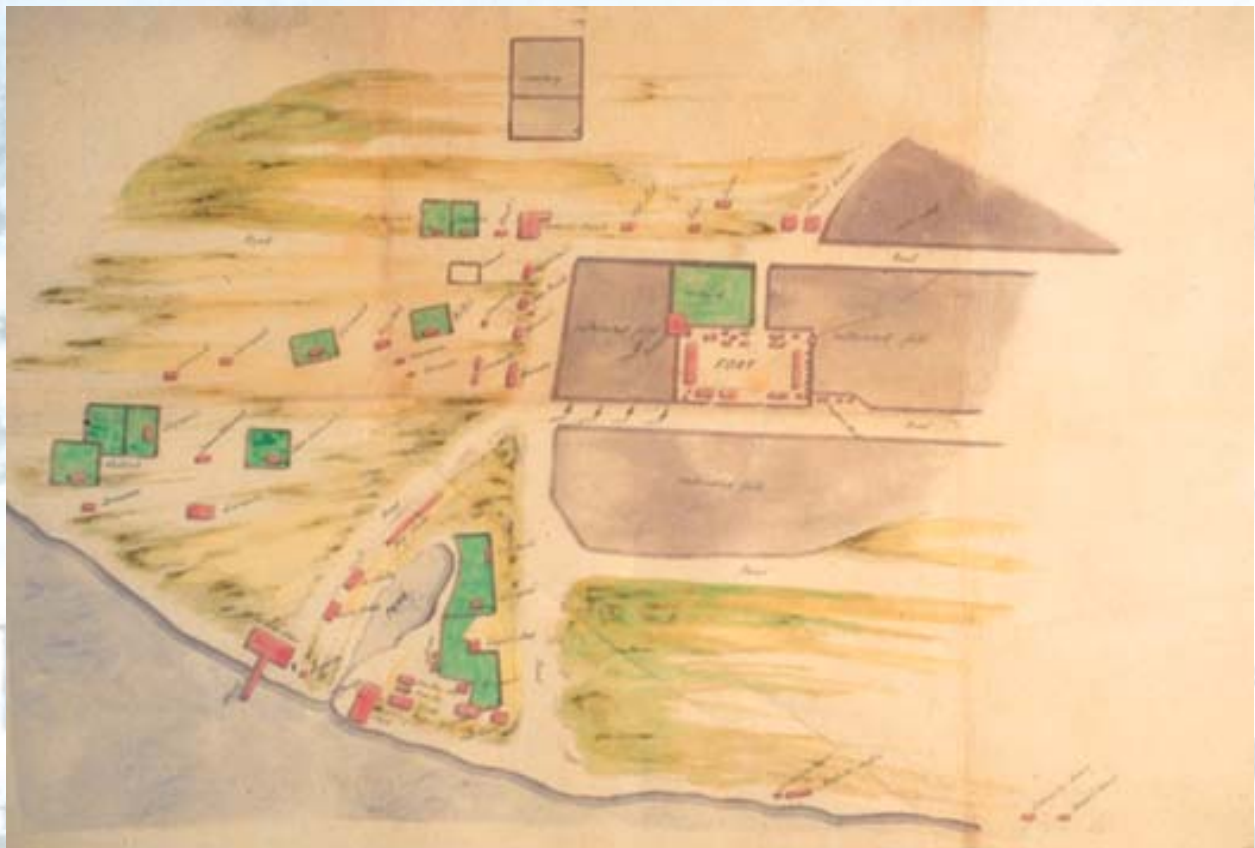


# Background of the Park



*Map of Fort Vancouver*  
Watercolor by Richard Covington, 1846  
Courtesy of Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, Washington



# Background of the Park

*Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (NHS) is located in southwestern Washington on the north bank of the Columbia River. In 1829, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) moved its palisade to the present site, establishing headquarters and principal supply depot for its operations west of the Rocky Mountains. The national historic site is within Washington's Third Congressional District in Clark County and is located within the heart of Vancouver's Central Park. The authorized boundary of the NHS is defined by the Columbia River to the south, Evergreen Boulevard to the north, East Reserve Street to the east, and Fort Vancouver Way and Interstate 5 to the west. (See Figure 1, Willamette-Puget Trough Ecoregion.)*

## Background

### Establishment of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

#### Fort Vancouver National Monument

Fort Vancouver National Monument was established on June 19, 1948 “to preserve as a national monument the site of the original Hudson's Bay stockade (of Fort Vancouver) and sufficient surrounding land to preserve the historical features of the area” for “the benefit of the people of the United States” (62 Stat. 532 and the Senate Report on the legislation). The Department of the Interior report on the legislation further stated that the lands so dedicated should fulfill “two essential requirements—the preservation of the historic stockade...and the preservation of the historic parade ground of the later United States Army Post.” In addition, the total area of the national monument was not to exceed 90 acres.

#### Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

To improve the conditions for achieving the legislative requirements of the park, Congress passed an act June 30, 1961 (75 Stat. 196), enlarging the boundaries of Fort Vancouver and redesignating the national monument as a national historic site. Congress also allowed for a revision of the boundaries of the monument to include an additional 130 acres of land “adjacent to, contiguous to, or in the vicinity of the existing monument”. (See Appendix A, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site legislation.)

There are approximately 209 acres within the authorized Fort Vancouver National Historic Site boundary. The National Park Service (NPS) manages approximately 165 acres of this area and the U.S. Army, City of Vancouver, and the State of Washington manage the remainder of lands.

The authorized boundaries of Fort Vancouver NHS contain parcels obtained either by fee simple transactions or through federal property surplus actions. Some parcels are still part of the U.S. Army's Vancouver Barracks operations and may be available only if the Department of the Army determines that the parcels are “excess to their needs.” This determination relates specifically to properties within what is referred to as the east and south barracks (note: the names “east barracks” and “south barracks” are used in this document to refer to properties located in the east or south portions of Vancouver Barracks within the authorized NHS boundary. The east barracks area includes that portion of Vancouver Barracks east of Fort Vancouver Way. The south barracks includes the area south of East Fifth Street.) (See Figure 2, Ownership.)

### **Establishment of McLoughlin House National Historic Site**

On February 19, 1941, the John McLoughlin and Barclay houses in Oregon City, Oregon became a National Historic Site administered by the McLoughlin Memorial Association (Association) under a cooperative agreement with the Secretary of the Interior. The agreement required the Secretary to regulate the way that the Association maintained the historic character of the McLoughlin House and to provide planning and technical advisory assistance as requested and possible within existing appropriations limits.

In January 1966, the NHS officially took over responsibilities from the former NPS Portland, Oregon office including the annual inspection of the McLoughlin House. The amount of assistance by NHS staff has varied over the years. The City of Oregon City owns the land where the McLoughlin and Barclay houses are situated and is a “Charter Park”. As a Charter Park, the City of Oregon City must maintain title to the land. (See Appendix B for the 1941 McLoughlin House National Historic Site Legislation.)

### **Establishment of McLoughlin House Unit**

On May 15, 2001, the citizens of Oregon City, Oregon voted to convey an easement interest in the McLoughlin House National Historic Site from the city to the NPS via donation if authorized by Congress.

On July 29, 2003, President Bush signed Public Law 108-63 (known as H.R. 733), which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to acquire the McLoughlin House National Historic Site in Oregon City, Oregon for inclusion in Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. This legislation changes the name of the site from the “McLoughlin House National Historic Site” to “McLoughlin House.” It also changes the status of the site from an affiliated unit of the National Park Service, not managed by the NPS, to a unit of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, managed by the staff at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. Ownership of the McLoughlin House, the Barclay House, and other associated real property, improvements, and personal property changes from the McLoughlin Memorial Association to the NPS. (See Appendix B for the 2003 McLoughlin House Addition to Fort Vancouver National Historic Site Act.) The land itself will remain a charter park of Oregon City and in City ownership. An easement interest in the Park has been conveyed by the City to the NPS to allow for NPS administration of the site.

Under the terms of agreement, the McLoughlin Memorial Association will sell the McLoughlin and Barclay houses to the NPS to allow for direct NPS management and maintenance of the structures. A NPS site manager and staff will administer the site and provide various enhancements, and support for a volunteer cadre to assist the NPS in site operation will be pursued. The Association will assist the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site superintendent and site manager. Additionally, the Association through their nonprofit status will continue to pursue private sector support for educational programming, site preservation, and other activities. It is intended that some of the proceeds from the sale of the two historic properties to the NPS will be used to establish an endowment fund administered by the Association’s Board of Directors. The endowment fund will be available to assist in the long-term preservation and public use of the site and the development of various education programs throughout the community and the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan region.

## Actions Affecting Fort Vancouver NHS after Enabling Legislation

### History of Reconstruction at Fort Vancouver NHS

The National Park Service's *Management Policies 2001* reaffirm a long-standing position on the practice of reconstruction within National Park Service or System sites. The policies (Reconstruction of Obliterated Landscapes 5.3.5.2.4) state:

No matter how well conceived or executed, reconstructions are contemporary interpretations of the past, rather than authentic survivals from it. The National Park Service will not reconstruct an obliterated cultural landscape unless:

- There is no alternative that would accomplish the park's interpretive mission;
- Sufficient data exist to enable its accurate reconstruction, based on the duplication of historic features substantiated by documentary or physical evidence, rather than on conjectural designs or features from other landscapes;
- Reconstruction will occur in the original location;
- The disturbance or loss of significant archaeological resources is minimized and mitigated by data recovery; and
- Reconstruction is approved by the Director. (National Park Service 2001: p.56)

The decision to reconstruct the stockade and key buildings at Fort Vancouver was made after years of discussion within the NPS and with public and private supporters of the national historic site. The discussion began with the earliest efforts by public groups in the years between 1915 and 1948 to establish a monument or memorial and reconstruct the stockade. It was complicated by conflicting land uses, including the presence of Pearson Field and its aviation easement that extended over the stockade site, limiting possibilities for both reconstruction and safe visitation. At the dedication of the monument in 1955, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay, a descendant of Hudson's Bay Company employees, made it clear that:

...the reconstruction of the stockade and buildings is not favored. We would like to replant the orchard, fence in the fields and re-establish the old wagon roads now forgotten [but] the National Park Service does not favor reconstruction of historic structures, particularly when most or all evidence of the original building has disappeared (Merritt 1993: p.28).

In the earliest NPS planning for the site, Fort Vancouver was considered primarily as an archaeological site. The focus was on further archaeological investigations and a museum perched on the bench above the Fort that would utilize artifacts recovered from the site to interpret the Hudson's Bay Company era. The local community, however, continued to lobby for reconstruction, initially by supporting the re-designation of the monument as a national historic site. Such a designation, it was believed, would encourage NPS to interpret and develop the area under the authorities of the Historic Sites Act of 1935.

Ultimately, Congressional action determined that the reconstruction of the stockade and key structures would proceed. In 1965, with the concurrence of NPS Director Hartzog, Congresswoman Julia Butler Hansen arranged for an appropriation of \$83,000 to reconstruct a portion of the stockade. In subsequent years, through the efforts of Congresswoman Hansen, Congress funded an extensive program of archaeological research, excavation, and reconstruction. National Park Service planning for the Fort, beginning with the *Master Plan for Preservation and Use of Fort Vancouver National Monument, Mission 66 Edition*, reversed the initial course and cautiously endorsed reconstruction based on sound research

and archaeological investigations and a clear identification of any resultant structures as “replicas.” The 1969 *Master Plan* prepared by the park outlined reconstruction of the stockade, key structures to support “living history” interpretation (a keen interest of Director Hartzog), fields, pasture, and the “original surrounding forest environment.” The most recent *Master Plan*, published in 1978 and scheduled for replacement by this general management plan, reaffirmed reconstruction as a priority, outlining a five-phase reconstruction program.

All future reconstruction at Fort Vancouver will continue to adhere strictly to the historical and archaeological research requirements of NPS *Management Policies 2001*, as cited above. The park will continue to work with qualified professionals, as well as build its own professional capabilities, to support these requirements. Guidelines will be developed to identify, justify, and prioritize future reconstructions, based on research, educational, and interpretive goals.

### **Pearson Field**

When the Hudson’s Bay Company departed Vancouver in 1860, the U.S. Army assumed management of the properties within the boundaries of the Vancouver Barracks Military Reservation. During the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the open fields of Vancouver Barracks were the site of a number of early experimental flights by both civilian and military aviation enthusiasts. In 1925, Pearson Field was formally dedicated within Vancouver Barracks and functioned as an Army Air Corps station during the interwar period between World War I and World War II. Shortly after World War II, the NPS received the site of the Fort and Parade Ground and the city received the airfield for the purpose of aviation operations from the War Assets Administration.

In 1972, the City of Vancouver sold the western portion of the airfield (approximately 72 acres) to the NPS but reserved a 30-year “use and occupancy” of the property allowing for continued operations of the airport until 2002 and development of a new airfield facility at another county location. The Fort Vancouver National Historic Site master plan proposed to reestablish the historic HBC scene in this area after the airfield ceased operation.

In 1996, Congress extended city use of the airfield until 2022. During this extension period general aviation uses may continue subject to FAA approval. After 2022, the focus will be on operations of historic aircraft. Related portions of Public Law 101-523 and a Memorandum of Agreement between the NPS and the city cite the following conditions:

### **Public Law 101-523, 1997-1996 Interior Appropriations**

Sec. 334. The National Park Service, in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between the United States National Park Service and the City of Vancouver dated November 4, 1994, shall permit general aviation on its portion of Pearson Field in Vancouver, Washington until the year 2022, during which time a plan and method for transitioning from general aviation aircraft to historic shall be completed; such transition to be accomplished by that date. This action shall not be construed to limit the authority of the Federal Aviation Administration over air traffic control or aviation activities at Pearson Field or limit operations and airspace of Portland International Airport.

### **Memorandum of Agreement between United States National Park Service and City of Vancouver**

(8) The Vancouver Partnership will be requested to prepare a long-term master plan for Pearson Airpark within a timetable to be established by the Partnership. Said master plan would be completed as soon as possible, but no later than 36 months from the date of this Agreement. Said master plan shall include, as a minimum, the following:

(A) A plan and method for transitioning from general aviation aircraft to historic aircraft which transition shall be completed by the year 2022. Historic aircraft shall be defined as aircraft based on a design from: (1) World War II era or earlier, (2) which are 50 years or older, or (3) which is determined by a qualified aviation advisory group selected by the Vancouver Partnership to be of historical significance.

### **Fort Vancouver Waterfront**

Part of the vision and implementation of the *City of Vancouver Central Park Plan* in the late 1970s involved construction of a landscaped greenbelt along the Columbia River on federal property. (The Vancouver Central Park consists basically of the surplus areas of the military reservation.) In March 1982, the City of Vancouver and the NPS signed an agreement to allow the city to utilize, develop, and maintain the federal waterfront property as a public park. This agreement expires on March 9, 2007 and was negotiated with the understanding that NPS would eventually restore portions of the waterfront's historic landscape based on its 1978 master plan. In late 2003, the NPS reassumed responsibility for the day-to-day upkeep and maintenance of the waterfront area within the park.

### **Pearson Air Museum**

In 1995, the City of Vancouver and the National Park Service jointly conducted an environmental assessment to site a proposed aviation museum on federal lands and in federal buildings within the national historic site. This action required an amendment to the 1978 park master plan to justify the use of federal land for a nonprofit public museum. Three historic aviation buildings comprise the principal structural components of the museum complex. Under the amended 1978 master plan, these buildings qualified as an approved element within the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site master plan since it provides for adaptive reuse of historic properties (these properties are recorded on the Washington State Register of Historic Places and are eligible for the National Register). Museum use is thematically linked with the historical interwar period of aviation and is one of the themes of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve (Reserve).

A memorandum of agreement signed in November 1994 between the City of Vancouver and the NPS allowed for the development of the new museum within the national historic site. A December 1995 cooperative agreement authorized the City of Vancouver to assist in the historical interpretation of Pearson Field aviation history.

### **Vancouver National Historic Reserve**

Significant historical events occurring in Vancouver, Washington resulted in a rich collection of cultural resources, including sites such as Fort Vancouver, Vancouver Barracks, Pearson Field, the Columbia Riverfront, and Kaiser Shipyards. In 1990, (Public Law 101-523) Congress directed a commission to study the feasibility of establishing a Vancouver National Historic Reserve. Five representatives served on the commission. A private citizen served as one representative and as commission chairman, and four were representatives from the following public agencies: the National Park Service, the Department of the Army, the City of Vancouver, and the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Completing its study in April 1993, the commission recommended establishment of the Reserve. Though historically important, Kaiser Shipyards was not included in the Reserve boundary.

The 366-acre Reserve was established in 1996 (Public Law 104-333, Section 502). Though not a unit of the National Park System, it is an affiliated area, making the Reserve eligible for technical and financial aid from the National Park Service. Congress gave national status to the area when it established the Reserve. As part of a public/private partnership, Congress has historically provided support to the Reserve through annual appropriations that match other public and private funds. The Reserve is cooperatively managed by a partnership composed of the same four agencies that served on the commission. A cooperative agreement signed by the Reserve Partners provides for specific funding and program support for various Reserve functions. The National Park Service is the lead Reserve Partner for interpretation, education, and cultural resource protection. Leadership in these areas provides an important contribution in fulfilling the goals of the *Vancouver National Historic Reserve Cooperative Management Plan*.

Fort Vancouver NHS is essentially a park within a park because of the legislatively established Reserve that surrounds it. As a partner in the Reserve and a signatory agency to its cooperative management plan, NPS staff is committed to communicate and coordinate its planning and operational activities within the context of the larger Reserve. In addition, the NPS serves as the lead partner in education, interpretation, and cultural resources.

### **Conveyance of West Portion of Vancouver Barracks**

On October 30, 2001, Congress approved Public Law 106-398 [114 Stat.1654A], Section 2843. This section of the act authorized the conveyance of property situated within the Vancouver National Historic Reserve from the Secretary of the Army to the City of Vancouver, Washington. The property included 19 structures at Vancouver Barracks that are identified by the Army using numbers between 602 and 676 in the west barracks area.

The city intends to actively pursue the adaptive reuse of these historic properties for a variety of public and private uses. Any reuse will be accomplished in adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and in the spirit of the preservation of the historic features of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve.

## **Purpose and Significance**

### **Purpose of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site**

The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 established management criteria for all units of the National Park System. The stated purpose is "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

As interpreted through enabling legislation, the purpose of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site is to preserve and interpret the following:

- The site of the nineteenth century Hudson's Bay Company's activities
- Settlement of the Oregon Country (Became Oregon Territory in 1848)
- The establishment of the U.S. Army's Vancouver Barracks

## Significance of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

Through NPS staff workshops and public meetings the significance of Fort Vancouver NHS has been determined to be the following:

- From 1825 through 1849 Fort Vancouver was the site of the Hudson's Bay Company's administrative headquarters and supply depot west of the Rocky Mountains. As a result, the HBC greatly influenced the economic, political, and cultural development of the Pacific Northwest.
- Fort Vancouver was the Pacific Northwest center for fur trade and other commerce, agriculture, and industry between 1825 and 1849.
- Fort Vancouver was the first terminus of the Oregon Trail (water route along the Columbia River).
- Vancouver Barracks, established in 1849, was the first military post developed in the Pacific Northwest. It served as headquarters for the U.S. Army operations into the twentieth century.
- Fort Vancouver NHS contains extensive archaeological resources, both *in situ* (in original location) and recovered, that provide important information about the physical relationships and the cultural and economic operation of the Hudson's Bay Company and the U.S. Army.

## Desired Future Conditions

The following are desired future conditions or goals that management of the national historic site will strive toward:

- Through preservation, park resources are protected, restored, and maintained in accordance with NPS policies. These resources include recovered and *in-situ* archaeological resources, collections, and reconstructed structures and landscapes.
- Park visitors are provided effective interpretation, education, and orientation about the history and significance of the park resulting in a greater understanding of HBC and early U.S. Army resources and support for their preservation.
- Park visitors are able to safely enjoy park facilities and services.
- Formal partnership programs with Reserve Partners and others are established to assist in education, interpretation and in the conservation and preservation of park resources related to the HBC and early U.S. Army periods.
- The NHS is the lead partner serving the Reserve Partners in interpretation, education, and preservation of resources related to venues within the VNHR.
- The most current management practices, systems, and technologies are used to accomplish these future conditions.

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