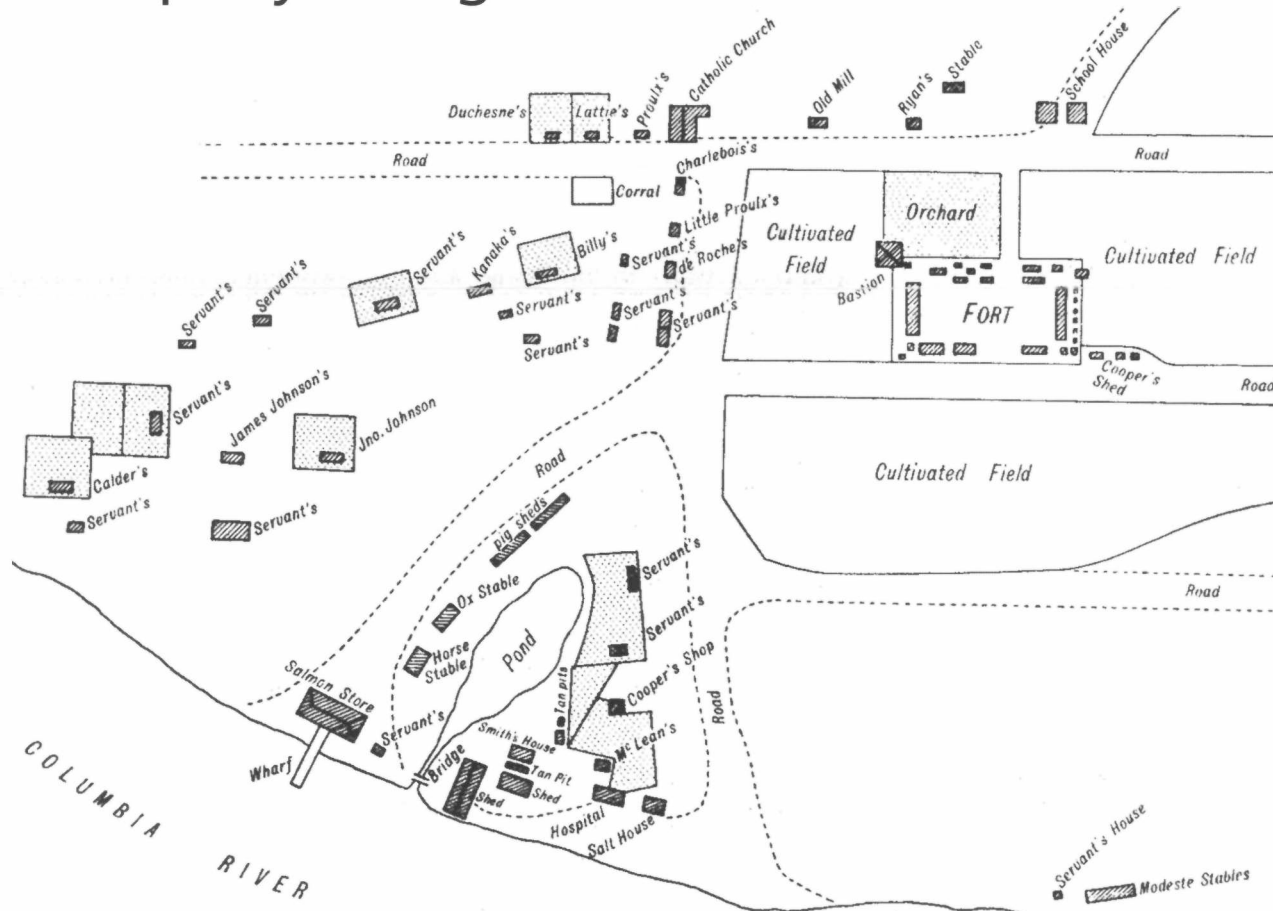


Fort Vancouver

National Historic Site
National Park Service
Vancouver National Historic Reserve

The Company Village



Detail of Company Village, based on Richard Covington map, c. 1846 (National Park Service)

For many years, Fort Vancouver was unique among fur trade posts in the Columbia Department in having a separate area designated for laborer living quarters. Located west of the fort, the village was inhabited by the lower ranks of the Hudson's Bay Company employees and their families. It extended from present-day 5th Street to the Columbia River.

During peak seasons, the village contained upwards of 600 people in dwellings of varying conditions and styles. The village residents formed the necessary support system for Fort Vancouver in its role as an immense supply depot and farm that strove to be self-sufficient. Company employees, their wives, and children formed the backbone of the Pacific

Northwest fur trade while on brigade, and also provided the labor that allowed Fort Vancouver's operations to expand to an unprecedented scale. Its extensive operations included several thousand acres of agricultural land – gardens, orchards, and pastures – plus a shipyard, distillery, tannery, sawmill, gristmill, and dairies.

A Diversity of Peoples

The village was the home of the diverse population living in the area of the fort. Not only did the Hudson's Bay Company purposefully hire a diverse workforce, but the fur trade, as an industry, offered opportunities to many different types of people. Employment and Catholic Church records, two of the main sources for estimating the diversity of the village population, note French-Canadian, Scottish, Irish, Hawaiian, Iroquois, and people from over 30 different regional American Indian groups. As the number of marriages *à la façon du pays* (contracted without clergy) increased, they gave rise to the *Métis*, a culture of mixed European

and Native heritage. Dwellings in the village were arrayed along broad lanes. There is some evidence that homes were arranged into ethnic "neighborhoods". As the amount of furs in the area decreased, and settlement expanded, the population of the village saw a gradual shift from a fur trade economy, based on waterways and French-Canadian *voyageurs*, to land-based mercantile activities. During this period the number of Hawaiians working as contract laborers grew steadily. By the early 1850's, American immigrants began calling the area Kanaka Village, adopting an Hawaiian word for person.



Native Americans near Fort Vancouver, Henry Warre, c. 1845 (National Archives of Canada)

The Physical Structure of the Village

The company village was not only a place of diverse people but also a place of diverse structures. In the 1960's, National Park Service historian John Hussey combined evidence from the Company inventory of 1846-1847, the Papers of the British and American Joint Commission (especially the testimony of H.A. Tuzo), and two historic maps from 1845 and 1846 to compile a list of structures outside the palisade. For the areas in or near the village he lists the following buildings: A hospital, cooper's shop, salt store, salmon store, a boat shed and a distillery. He also mentions several dwellings and farm structures, De Roche's dwelling, lined and ceiled, 30 x 20 feet and between about twenty to forty additional dwellings, sheds, out-houses, etc.

In 1834 John Kirk Townsend found the Canadian and other servants of the establishment living in thirty or forty 'log huts,' placed 'in rows, with broad lanes or streets between them,' the whole forming a 'neat and beautiful village.' He was at first impressed with the 'fastidious cleanliness' observed in the town. He saw the women sweeping the streets and scrubbing the doorsills as regularly as in his own 'proverbially cleanly' Philadelphia.



The reconstructed Engagé House, showing typical Canadian post-on-sill construction (National Park Service)

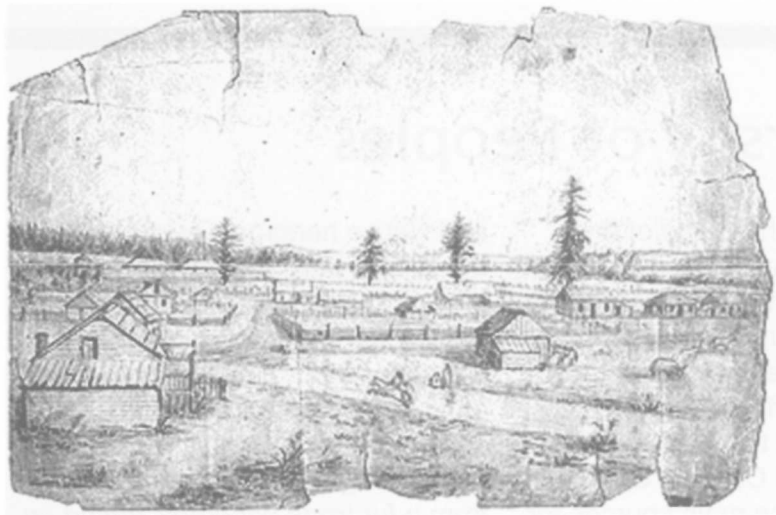
Upon closer acquaintance, however, he changed his mind and admitted that his first estimate concerning the cleanliness of the village had been 'too high.'

Members of the United States Exploring Expedition in 1841 variously estimated the number of dwellings in the town to have been between about thirty and fifty ranged in 'regular order on each side of the road' and 'swarming with children, whites, half-breeds, and pure Indians.' These 'comfortable' homes, the explorers noted, were generally built of hewn logs, Canadian style.

In 2007 the National Park Service began reconstructing some of the village buildings. The first was a laborer's house. This structure was built in the traditional Canadian post-on-sill technique found extensively throughout the Fort Vancouver area. This building is a close representation of the dwellings of the laborers having a single, dirt floored room. In future years the NPS plans to reconstruct several more dwellings and also some of the commercial buildings and structures that once made the village and the waterfront area such a bustling place.

Sharing the Story of the Village

Because of the astounding diversity of Fort Vancouver's population, Kanaka Village holds great potential for enhancing the visitor's experience. As park personnel strive to continually diversify historical interpretation to include multiple perspectives of the history that occurred here, it is fortunate that this area can serve as a background, allowing visitors a connection with the actual physical space of the village. Excavations and analyses of the material culture from the village area can fill in gaps in the historical record. Since many of the employees and their families were illiterate, archaeology can compensate for the lack of first-hand accounts of village life and social organization. The village is a site that allows the inclusion of the lower classes, the less-educated, and



The north end of the village area, from an unsigned sketch c. 1851 (National Park Service)

non-British ethnicities into the story. The National Park Service is engaged in discussion with local Hawaiian and Native American communities as the site's program incorporates the area of the village and its inhabitants. Kanaka Village is the location of some of the most compelling aspects of the story of

Fort Vancouver and Vancouver Barracks. Its demography and social history represent the true context of the regional fur trade industry and political transitions. The resources here remain an integral part of the National Park Service's duty to protect and share this historic site.