Within The Collection

A LOOK INSIDE THE FORT VANCOUVER MUSEUM

Belle Vue Sheep Farm

SAN JUAN ISLAND NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

NCRI CURATION SERIES No. 3

Belle Vue Sheep Farm

San Juan Island National Historical Park

by

Theresa Langford

Mike Vouri

Heidi Pierson

Photographs by

John Edwards

Designed by

Jane Vanderzanden

Belle Vue Sheep Farm: A Brief History

By Mike Vouri, Chief of Interpretation and Historian,
San Juan National Historical Park

On a chilly December 15, 1853, a group of Kanaka (Hawaiian) herdsmen, led by freshly appointed chief agent John Charles Griffin, landed on the southern tip of San Juan Island and turned loose 1,369 sheep to graze on the sweeping prairies that gave onto the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Gazing at the Olympic Mountains directly across the Strait, Griffin called his prairie home "Belle Vue Sheep Farm."

This "pastoral establishment" had been ordered by James Douglas, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Victoria and governor of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island. While San Juan Island's open prairies were ideal for agriculture and livestock, Douglas's primary purpose was political. The presence of a thriving agricultural community would solidify Great Britain's claim to the island, which had been in dispute with the United States since the two nations signed the Treaty of Oregon in June 1846. Douglas had already "succeeded in defeating every attempt made to preoccupy the Arro Islands (San Juans) by American Squatters" by warning off Yankee timber men, while at the same time establishing fishing stations on San Juan's western shore.

Belle Vue Farm was the last of the agricultural facilities established by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) south of the 49th parallel. The foray into agriculture by a company principally known for the fur trade had begun in the 1820s as means to feed and clothe employees. However, by the late 1830s the HBC operated several corporate farms in the Oregon Country, which, combined with timber and fishing interests, made it an economic force on the Pacific Rim. Wool, mutton, lumber and fish, in addition to furs, were shipped from the West Coast to Russian America (Alaska), China and other points west, as well as to England.

By early spring, crews of Cowitchan Indian employees

had cleared a rough track running north-south up the center of the 16 1/2 mile-long island that transited or terminated at open pasturage where the flocks could expand. A large truck garden was planted at Home Prairie (just north of Grandma's Cove at American Camp), while work began on log rail and picket fences as well as the "post on sill" cottages that formed the farm's headquarters. By 1855, the farm was a going concern as the stations tallied a total of 2,700 sheep on site, 1,000 supplied to "other places," 150 killed for food and 400 carried away by Americans!

As Douglas had feared, Belle Vue Sheep Farm drew an immediate response from the Americans. In the first two years of the farm's operation, federal customs officials and county tax collectors besieged Griffin, at one point making off with 35 breeding rams (not 400 as Griffin claimed) in lieu of unpaid taxes. An international incident ensued that was calmed only when the President of the United States gave his assurances that British property would be respected.

Nevertheless, U.S. customs inspectors kept book on Griffin's operation in anticipation of the day the islands became U.S. possessions. By May 1859, the HBC flocks rose to 4,500 sheep, 40 cattle, 5 yoke of oxen, 35 horses and 40 hogs, plus 80 fenced acres under cultivation with oats, peas, and potatoes. Griffin had 19 employees, three of whom were naturalized American citizens who actually voted in the territorial election. But no Americans settled on the island until several frustrated miners drifted over from the Fraser River diggings between the summer of 1858 and January 1859. Indian fears had heretofore kept them away.

The Americans were settled on preemption claims that they expected the U.S. government to recognize as valid, but which the British considered illegal. Neither side recognized the authority of the other. The stage was set in June 1859 for one of the miners-turned-farmers, Lyman Cutlar, to shoot one of Griffin's hogs and precipitate the "Pig War" crisis. For all of the ado it engendered, Griffin's journal entry for the

incident was succinct and buried in the text:

> Wednesday 15th Heavy rain during the night & showery all day, light wind. — Shepherds packing wool, finished shearing Ignace's flock last eveg. — Jacob & Lamane hauling logs. Robillard & George sawing oak for hay carts, cradles etc. — Inds weeding etc. — Napoleon left for Victoria to have his account settled. — An American shot one of my pigs for trespassing!!! — Beaver arrived wh Messrs Dallas, Fraser & Dr Tolmie. —

Throughout the crisis, Griffin continued to list events of international import along with daily farming tasks, such as Pickett's landing and the men's official encounter:

> Wednesday 27th Dark & cloudy wh constant thunder & showers of rain. — wind fresh west — L'Gamine wh two kanakas out at Grande Prairie cutting hay. George at cradles. Inds whitewashing house. — Last eveg. late the U:S: Steamer "Shubrick" & "Massachusetts" anchored in the Bay. They have been all day landing stores etc etc — wh the intention I fancy of building a military station a number of soldiers, officers etc- wh tents stores etc are encamped near the Lagoon at my wharf. —
>
> Saturday 30th Very warm & calm. — Mens occupations as yesterday. — This morning I lodged a complaint before Capt Picket personally his being a trespasser here & warning him off the Island — see official correspondence. — Mr Dallas left in "Beaver" about 1:30 pm: —

Despite his initial fury at losing a hog and his occasional consternation with soldiers and sailors overrunning his property and shooting his livestock, Griffin still managed to make friends, Americans and British alike. However, with the coming of the soldiers and marines also came more settlers, many of whom squatted on HBC property and further diminished sheep grazing areas. Moreover smugglers, whisky sellers, and prostitutes beset the island, which Griffin claimed were "demoralizing" his employees.

The company's London headquarters, acting on advice from Alexander Grant Dallas, an HBC director in Victoria,

ordered on Feb. 9, 1861 that Belle Vue Farm should be closed "as soon as circumstances would permit". Charles Griffin left exactly one year later and was replaced by Robert Firth, a shepherd who later leased the farm from spring of 1864 until 1873, when he became owner of the land. The Hudson's Bay Company's remarkable chapter on San Juan Island came to an end.

The legacy left by Charles Griffin and his staff is still apparent. Many of the island's roads today trace the paths of the sheep runs carved through forest and around the tremendous rocks left behind by glaciers. A few of the prairies are still in use for grazing, though in some instances sheep have given way to alpacas, which pay more per acre. All that is left of the Home Prairie complex today, besides the open expanse of prairie preserved and protected by the National Park Service, is a crumbling piece of masonry at American Camp, between the parade ground and Grandma's Cove, where it is marked by a flagpole.

The Belle Vue Sheep Farm Archaeological Collection

by Theresa Langford, Curator,
Fort Vancouver National Historical Site

Archaeological sites do not capture a moment in time, but rather preserve the multiple histories that overlap at a single place. Although the Pig War, as an incident of international significance, is the primary focus of the National Park Service on San Juan Island, other themes are important to the history of the Pacific Northwest. The archaeological assemblage of the Belle Vue Sheep Farm site encapsulates not only the material remains of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) agricultural outpost, but also what came before, and what came after.

Though the route and type of transport are debated, it is generally accepted that people traveled to the New World at least 12,000 years ago, and that their point of entry was the northwest corner of the continent. The oldest sites documented archaeologically in the Gulf of Georgia culture area, within which San Juan Island lies, date to between 12,500 and 8,000 years ago. The distinctive Northwest Coast cultural pattern, characterized by socially stratified, at least semi-sedentary hunter-gatherer groups, began to develop around 5,000 years ago. Regional variations were common and continued into the post-contact period. An excellent summary of the cultural history of the area is given by Julie Stein (2000)and Ames and Mascher (1999), and only mentioned here in the briefest of manners.

For this area, the time period immediately pre-dating contact with Europeans is known as the San Juan Phase (approximately 400 A.D. to 1800 A.D.). Based on archaeological investigations and ethnographic data from Coast Salish peoples, this period is distinctive for a relative lack of flaked stone tools; the majority of both tools and domestic goods were fashioned from bone, antler, shell, and

wood (Matsen and Copeland 1995). Indigenous peoples had developed complex woven textile and basketry industries, and lived in substantial villages with both row houses and single dwellings arranged in rows. Although elk, deer, and birds were a part of their diet, they relied heavily on marine resources such as fish and shellfish.

When Griffin arrived to establish a sheep station, he did so in an area adjacent to seasonal native villages, settlements most likely associated with summer salmon runs or reef netting (Sprague 1983 and Stein 2000). These occupations certainly continued despite the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company, as was common throughout the territories in which their posts were established. George Gibbs, who visited the area in 1858, reported that members of the Lummi, Clallam, and Saanitch Indian tribes camped on San Juan Island at times, especially during salmon runs (Thompson 1972:13).

The archaeological excavations that produced the Belle Vue Sheep Farm collection described here, physically focused on the establishment itself, did not venture into the surrounding area. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that very few artifacts of native manufacture were recovered. Only two examples could speak to the other residents of the Island: a bone awl and an unfinished piece of carved argillite. However, even assuming these to be a separate component from the sheep farm is problematic, as American Indians were employed by the HBC and worked at the post throughout its existence. Though early maps of Belle Vue Sheep Farm show an "Indian Village" southwest of the site, they also note an "Indian hut" within the purview of the station.

The archaeologists who investigated the site used a historical archaeological approach, that is, they combined information from both artifacts and historic documents (see Sprague 1983). Although early maps and descriptions of the Belle Vue Sheep Farm showed the relative size and placement

of the structures, no information was available as to their specific function or inhabitants. Excavations were a way to explore these basic questions and, in addition, attempt to tease out more data on the employees' social status and cultural backgrounds. With these research questions driving the project, the excavations focused on locations of features that had been constructed but no longer existed: the six to ten buildings known to have been located on home prairie, as well as the flagpole and well.

The vast majority of artifacts within this assemblage are associated with the operations of the sheep farm itself. Like other HBC sites such as Fort Vancouver and Fort Colville, it is composed of a fascinating mix of both imported items and locally made goods. The HBC had well established and far reaching trade routes, and it was common at Pacific Northwest posts to see goods from both Europe and Asia. The combination of the HBC's traditional mix of imports and items procured from nearby American settlements increased the diversity within the Belle Vue collection. One example is the tobacco pipe assemblage; as described by Pfeiffer (in Sprague 1983), it is unusually varied for a short-term site generally occupied by ten men or less. The recovered pipes include examples from England, Scotland, France, Germany, Holland, and the United States.

Belle Vue Sheep Farm benefitted from the trade shops at the larger HBC posts, designed to decrease reliance on the annual supply ships and outfit the company's needs for tools, hardware, tack, and storage vessels. Products manufactured by blacksmiths, tinsmiths, coopers, and others were sent to subsidiary trading posts and farms throughout the region. Along with the domestic goods, these artifacts help to fill out the picture of life at this remote ranch.

The employees at Belle Vue Sheep Farm included Scotsmen, French-Canadians, Métis (of mixed European and native heritage), Hawaiians, and American Indians. There is also one account of an African, but his presence was not

documented in official company records (Sprague 1983). There was apparently a high amount of turnover in the labor pool, perhaps a result of the company's tendency to move employees between posts as needed and the attractiveness of gold-mining and homesteading elsewhere.

The multicultural nature of the site's inhabitants, and a pay scale ranging from £17 to £75 per year, suggests that differences in buying power and consumer choice should be apparent. As the archaeologists note, however, many of the artifacts that could have indicated differences in status were not recovered. This is a common challenge in archaeology, as original owners tend to keep track of their most valuable belongings and not leave them for future archaeologists, plus it is the valuable items that are the first target of looters (Sprague 1983). An additional challenge to seeing these variations in the archaeological record has been documented at other HBC sites (Cromwell 2006): since employees were only paid with credit that could be redeemed at the company stores, the HBC in effect enforced itself as a monopoly for employees. It can be stated simply: if everyone is forced to shop at the same store, from a limited supply of goods, how can we see any difference in their purchases? Several archaeologists are investigating this very question at Fort Vancouver (Cromwell 2006) and the Belle Vue Sheep Farm collection would benefit from this same sort of refined analysis.

After the boundary dispute was settled and the operations of Belle Vue Sheep Farm came to an end, the land was opened to settlers. Small family farms and orchards began to dominate the landscape, before they were superseded by commercial orchards utilizing machinery. The area of the sheep station was claimed by a succession of different families. Some evidence of their tenure appears in the archaeological record, including wagon parts, a razor, and a few other late 19th and early 20th century artifacts. The small size of this segment of the collection likely reflects not

the true rate of deposition, but rather a collecting bias on the part of earlier archaeologists; more modern components are not always appreciated like they should be. The National Park Service acquired the park in 1970 and archaeological excavations began three years later.

The original analysis of this collection during the 1970s produced few definitive conclusions, but several of the buildings were confirmed to be dwellings, the kitchen was identified, a rough chronology of Hudson's Bay Company buildings was assembled, and the first forays into assessing social status markers were made. The Belle Vue Sheep Farm assemblage is a unique grouping, representing a British politico-agricultural outpost with a culturally diverse population, on the cusp of American dominance in the area. Interpreting this archaeological collection has only begun, and waits as fertile ground for future researchers.

Carved Argillite

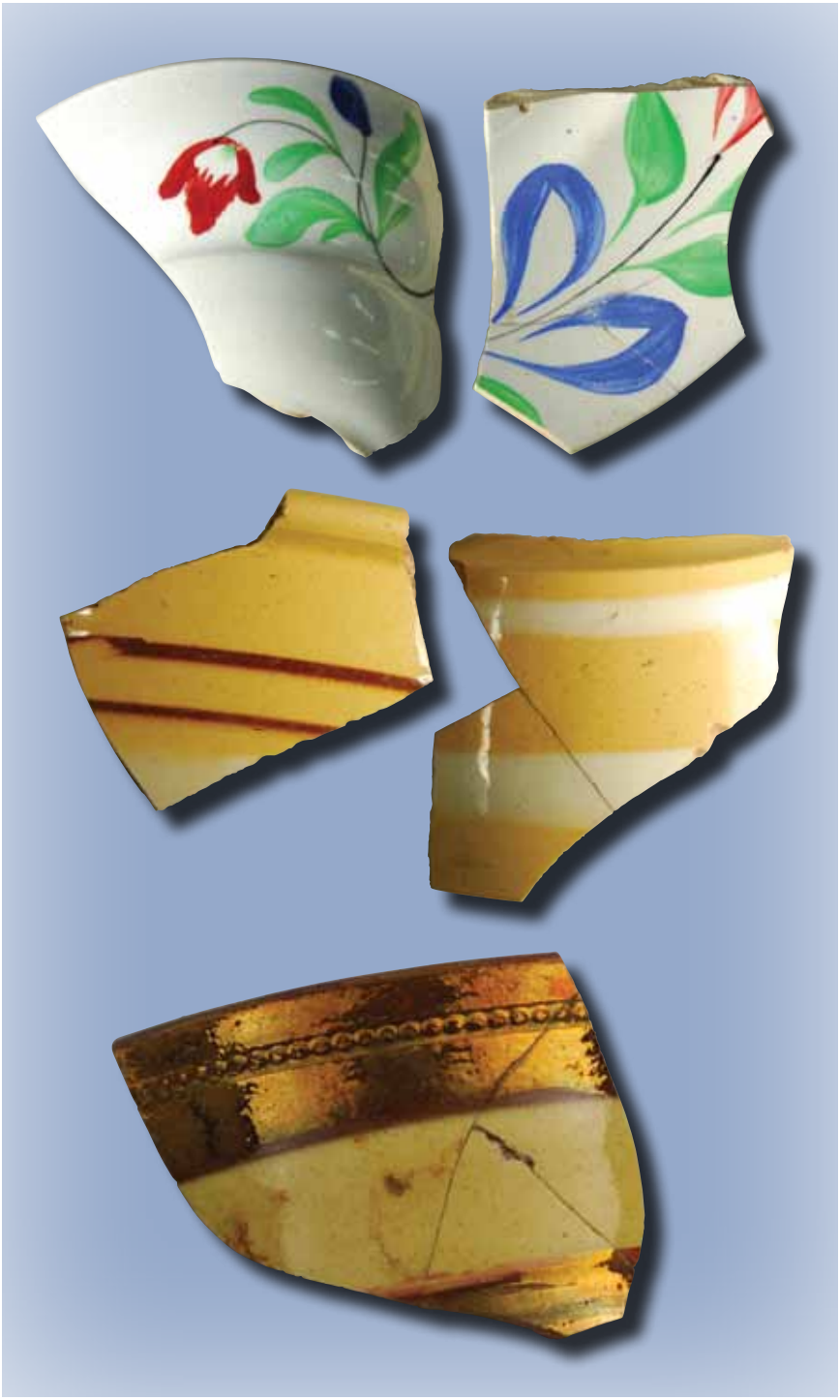
Argillite, a sedimentary stone, is harvested from the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia by the Haida tribe. The presence of unfinished argillite pieces found during archaeological investigations of fur trade sites, such as this carving, implies that both the raw material and finished pieces were considered trade goods. (SAJH 118816)

45052396/983

Plates and Teacup

These dishes were all made by the Spode Company in Staffordshire, England, the ceramic manufacturer that set the royal table. The Hudson's Bay Company had an exclusive contract with Spode, and used the wares at all their posts. These types, printed with Oriental, floral, or nostalgic British scenes, became extremely popular in the fur trade, and were purchased by officer and laborer alike.

The patterns represented here (left row, top to bottom) are: Antique Vase (manufactured from 1847 until the 20th century), Bedford (1855 – post-1865), Rural Scenes (1850-20th century), (right row, top to bottom) Flower Vase (1828-20th century), and Field Sports (1846-20th century). (SAJH 119045, 119040, 119046, 119049, 118228)

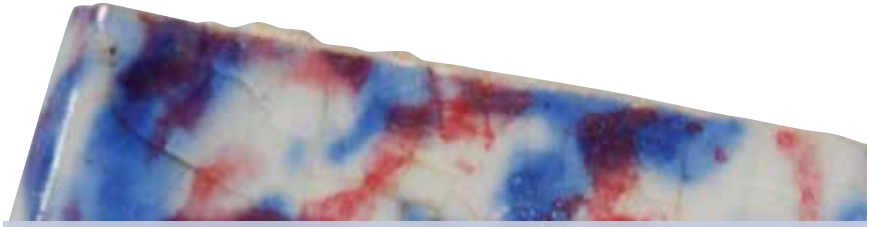


Cups and Bowl

Though Spode was the most common type of ceramic at Hudson's Bay Company posts, others have been found during archaeological excavations as well. Some of the more typical include cottageware, with hand painted flowers and leaves; yellowware, often with banding; and lusterware, usually with a copper sheen. (SAJH 115789 and 117114, 118955 and 114223, 117675)

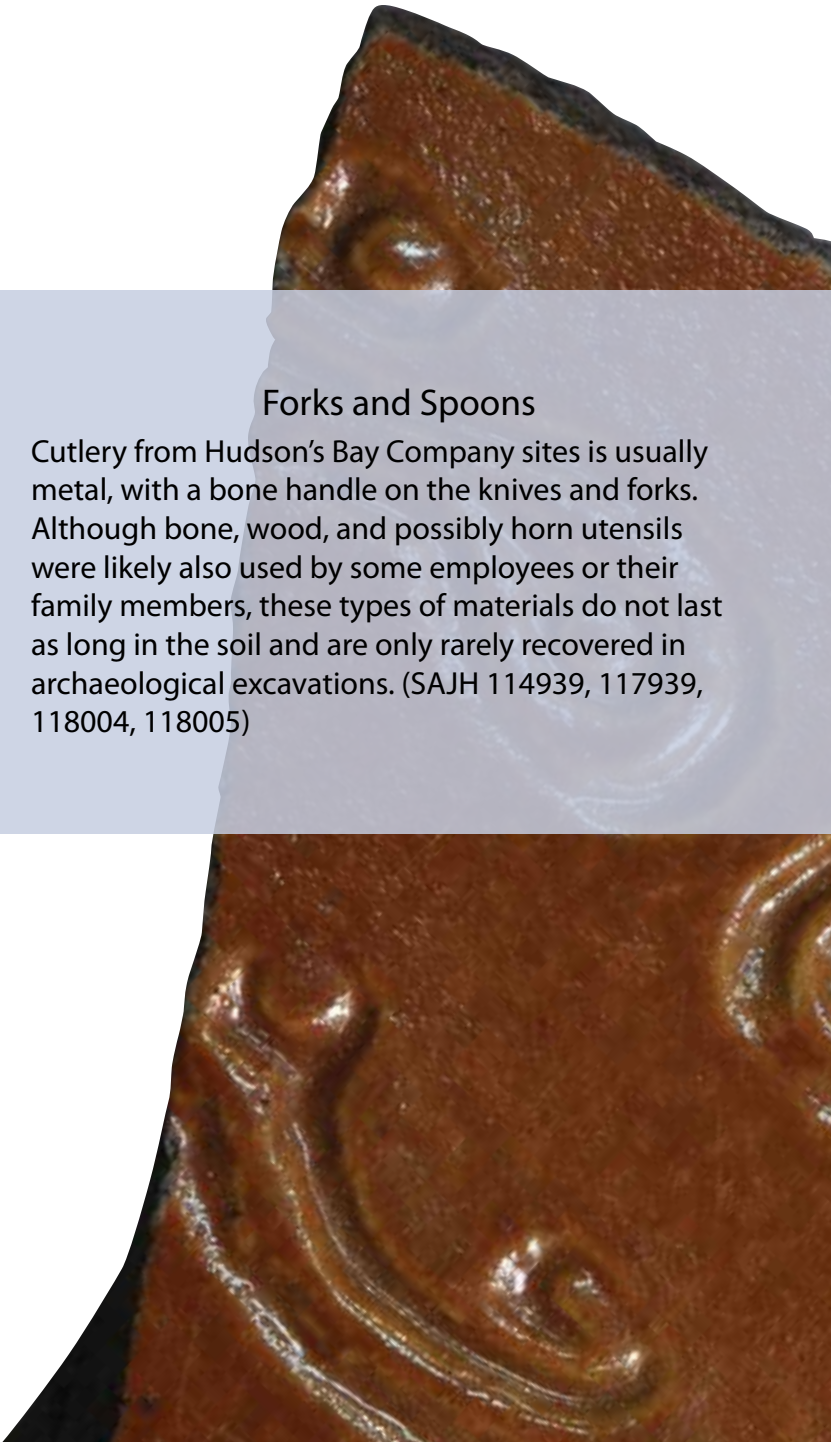
Bottles and Vessel Sherd

Salt-glazed stoneware is also a familiar feature of archaeological sites associated with Hudson's Bay Company sites. These bottles were used for ale (right) and either ink or blacking (left). Normally the vessels are more functional than decorative, but infrequently a decorated example is found, such as this container sherd with an impressed design which may post-date the Belle Vue Sheep Farm era. (SAJH 119044, 119039, 116530)



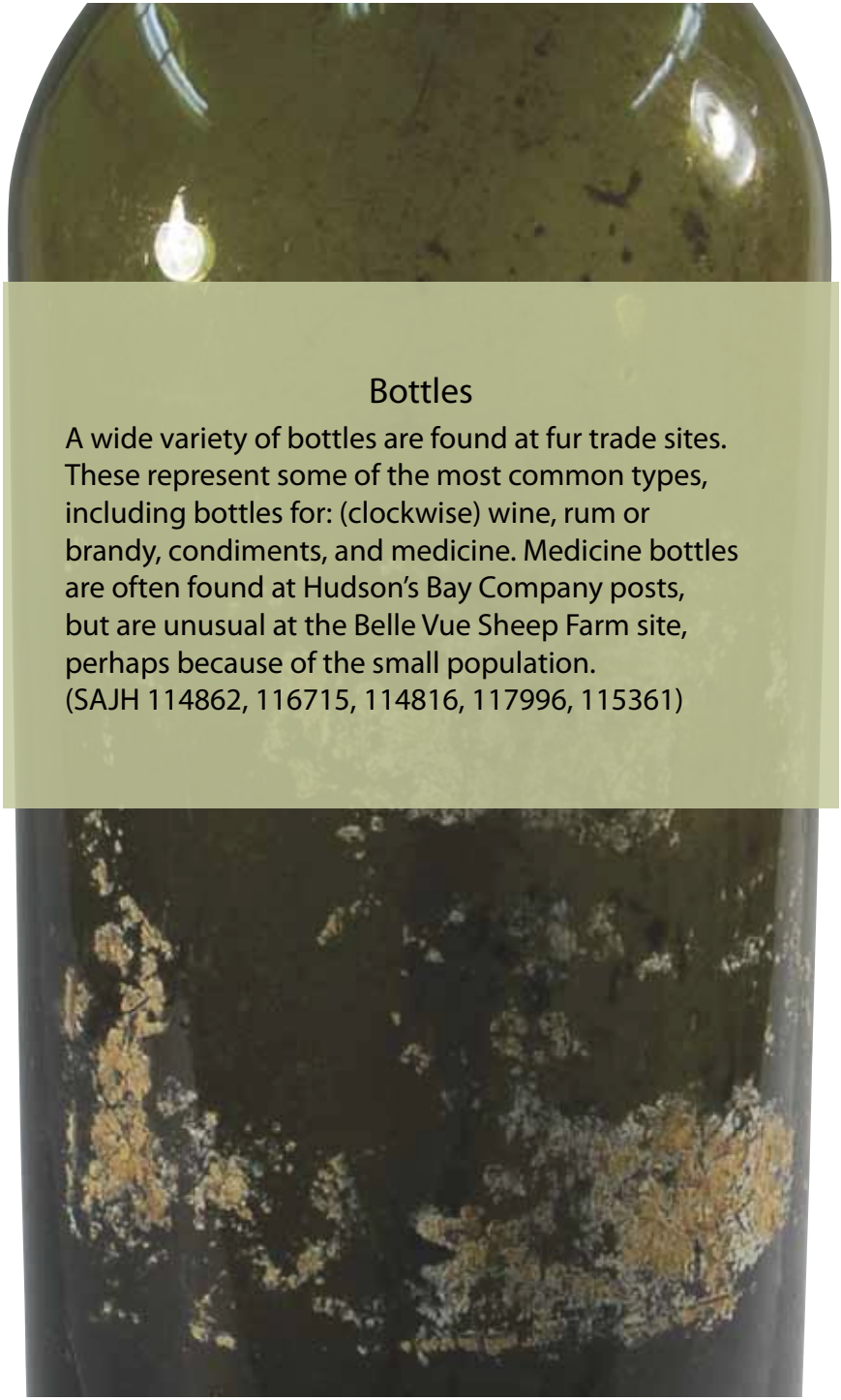
Spout, Handle, and Sherd

Ceramics from the later 19th century and early 20th century, those associated with the homesteading era of the site, differ dramatically from those imported by the Hudson's Bay Company. Some examples include types described generally as "art pottery", like this creamer spout with embossed oak leaf design and handle with embossed vine design, as well as spongeware. (SAJH 118857, 117921, 117961)



Forks and Spoons

Cutlery from Hudson's Bay Company sites is usually metal, with a bone handle on the knives and forks. Although bone, wood, and possibly horn utensils were likely also used by some employees or their family members, these types of materials do not last as long in the soil and are only rarely recovered in archaeological excavations. (SAJH 114939, 117939, 118004, 118005)



Bottles

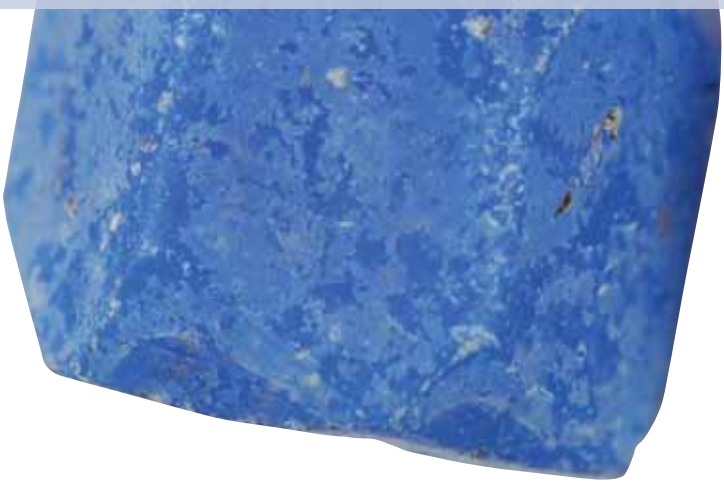
A wide variety of bottles are found at fur trade sites. These represent some of the most common types, including bottles for: (clockwise) wine, rum or brandy, condiments, and medicine. Medicine bottles are often found at Hudson's Bay Company posts, but are unusual at the Belle Vue Sheep Farm site, perhaps because of the small population. (SAJH 114862, 116715, 114816, 117996, 115361)

Glassware

Other types of glassware commonly found at fur trade sites include tumblers (top and middle) and bottle stoppers (bottom). (SAJH 115780, 115780, 117995)

Beads

From the time of Native-European contact, glass beads were one of the most prevalent and popular trade items. The Hudson's Bay Company imported tons (literally) and distributed them throughout the continent. Simple blue and white tube beads were most common in this region, though other colors, as well as wound and molded beads, are also found. In excavations at the central supply depot of Fort Vancouver, just under 200,000 beads have been recovered, representing approximately 190 different varieties. (SAJH 114107, 117742, 118117, 118142)



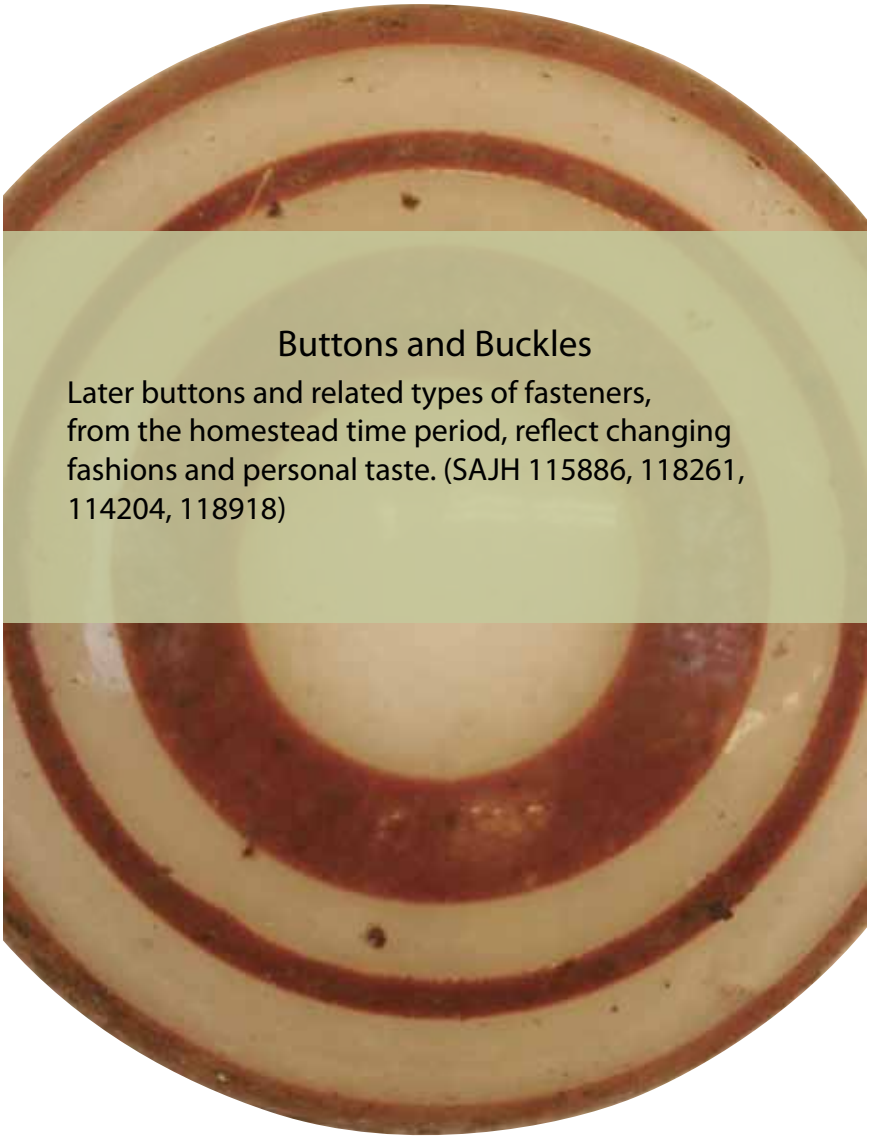
Buttons

Like beads, buttons are one of the more widespread items of personal adornment and can often help date a site. The examples from the Belle Vue Sheep Farm include ones made from glass, ceramic, wood and shell. (SAJH 114202, 115869, 116028, 119001)

US

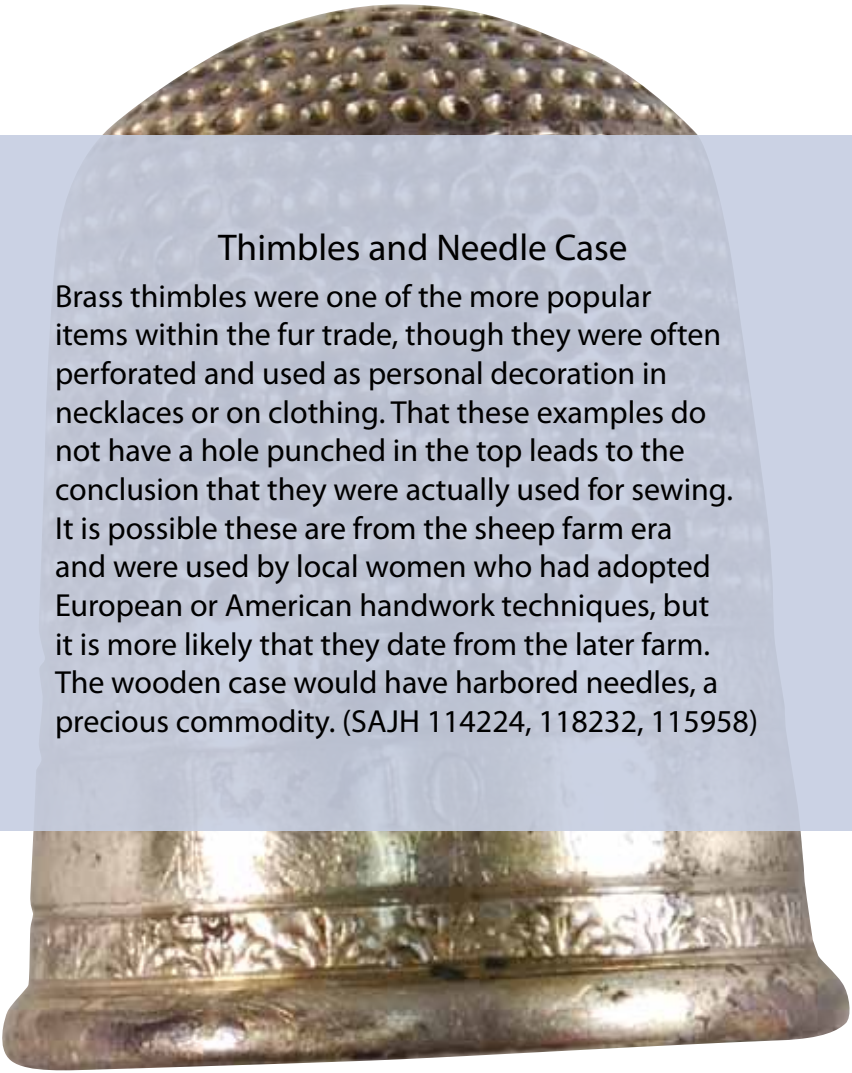
Buttons and Insignia

The American military presence on San Juan Island is very visible in the archaeological record. Uniform insignia and buttons are found even beyond the official boundaries of American Camp. Buttons were sometimes used as gaming pieces, which could explain how they were distributed far and wide. (SAJH 114267, 114956, 116337)



Buttons and Buckles

Later buttons and related types of fasteners, from the homestead time period, reflect changing fashions and personal taste. (SAJH 115886, 118261, 114204, 118918)



Thimbles and Needle Case

Brass thimbles were one of the more popular items within the fur trade, though they were often perforated and used as personal decoration in necklaces or on clothing. That these examples do not have a hole punched in the top leads to the conclusion that they were actually used for sewing. It is possible these are from the sheep farm era and were used by local women who had adopted European or American handwork techniques, but it is more likely that they date from the later farm. The wooden case would have harbored needles, a precious commodity. (SAJH 114224, 118232, 115958)

Tobacco Pipes

Tobacco pipes are extremely common at 19th century sites, and these are a few of the most interesting ones recovered from Belle Vue Sheep Farm (described top to bottom). The John Taber pottery of East Alton, New Hampshire, produced the terracotta knobby pipe. The shield pipe appears to be of French manufacture, as is the keeled bowl pipe, which was probably made by Gambier of Paris. Another French pipe with wide, rounded cockles was manufactured by Gisclon, another Parisien maker. The double cockled pipe was made in Hull, England. (SAJH 119021, 115809, 118071, 117933, and 115874)

Shoulder Scale and Heel Cleats

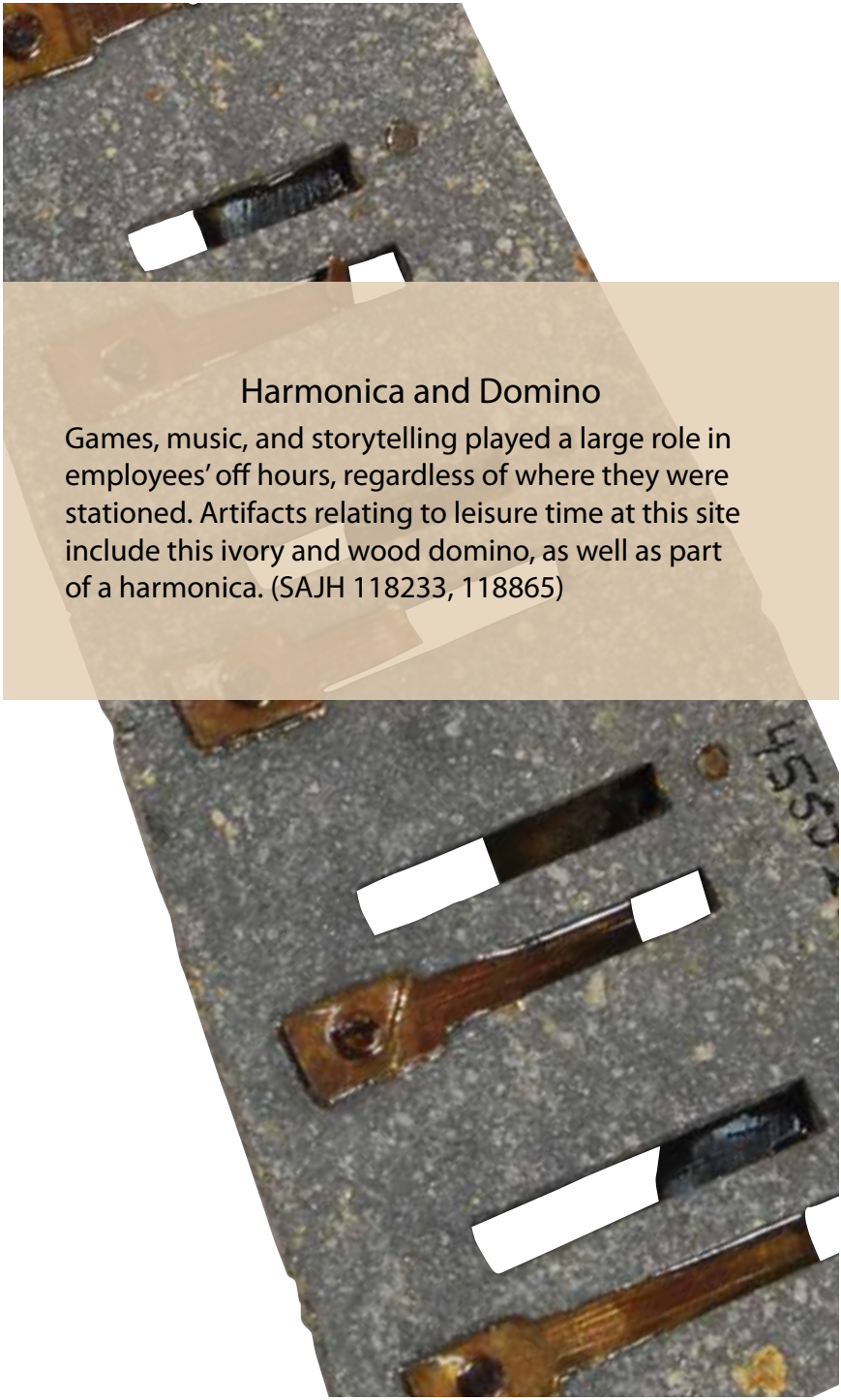
Other personal items that have been recovered from the site include a shoulder scale from an army officer's uniform, and heel cleats of various sizes. (SAJH 114014, 114841, 114921)

Combs and Razor

It is always interesting to uncover such personal items as these, that perhaps were owned by one individual and then abandoned. The lice comb on top is made of bone, so may be an earlier type. The comb on the bottom is made of vulcanized rubber, patented in 1851 by Goodyear, and a popular material for many items. Straight razors were replaced by "safety" razors like this example, known by this name because the surface of the skin was exposed only to the edge of the blade. In 1901, Gillette invented the first such razor with disposible blades. (SAJH 115929, 119016)

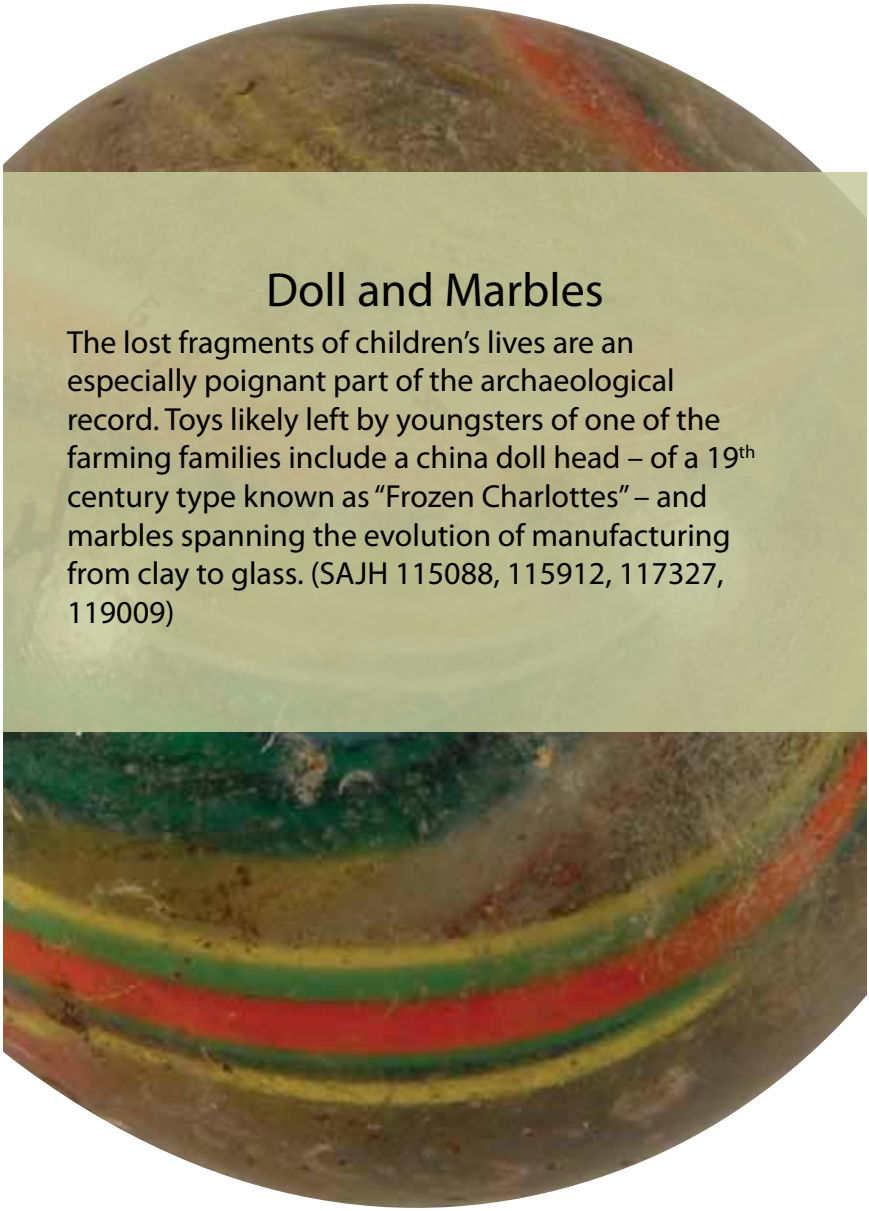
455J 295/933

455J 295/5/A



Harmonica and Domino

Games, music, and storytelling played a large role in employees' off hours, regardless of where they were stationed. Artifacts relating to leisure time at this site include this ivory and wood domino, as well as part of a harmonica. (SAJH 118233, 118865)



Doll and Marbles

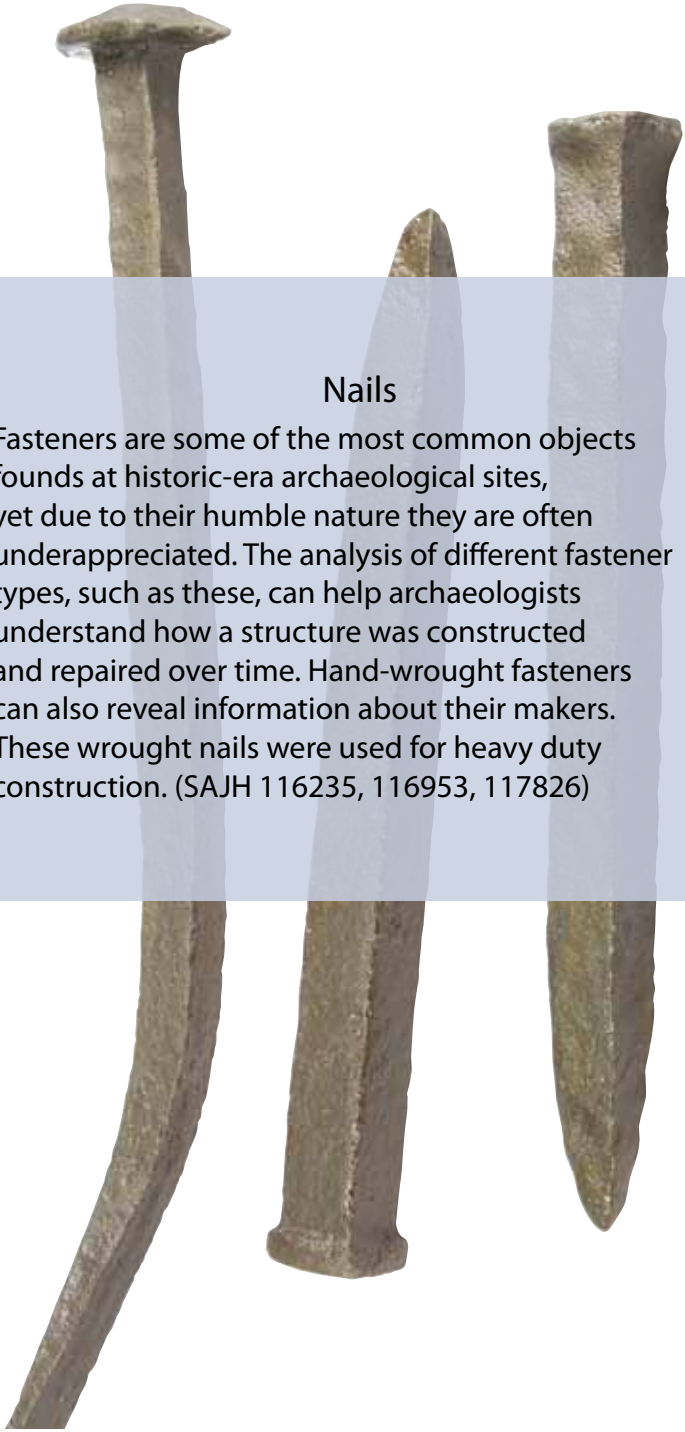
The lost fragments of children's lives are an especially poignant part of the archaeological record. Toys likely left by youngsters of one of the farming families include a china doll head – of a 19th century type known as "Frozen Charlottes" – and marbles spanning the evolution of manufacturing from clay to glass. (SAJH 115088, 115912, 117327, 119009)

Axes

With most tools, style and function are complementary. While the basic shape remains constant, details may change over time to improve its look or performance. Within the fur trade, ax styles evolved as a response to consumer pressure: customers preferred and demanded different shapes. The first ax is a British style hatchet; the others are typical American style axes. (SAJH 114253, 114283, 114941, 117571)

Guns

The brass dragon figure is a sideplate from a front-loading musket known as the Northwest Gun, one of the most popular and expensive trade items in the fur era. Such a weapon was considered by many to be an essential item for hunting and protection. The metal "pistol" is a toy, a reminder of the fact that children's playthings often reflect future tools of adulthood. (SAJH 117760, 116811)

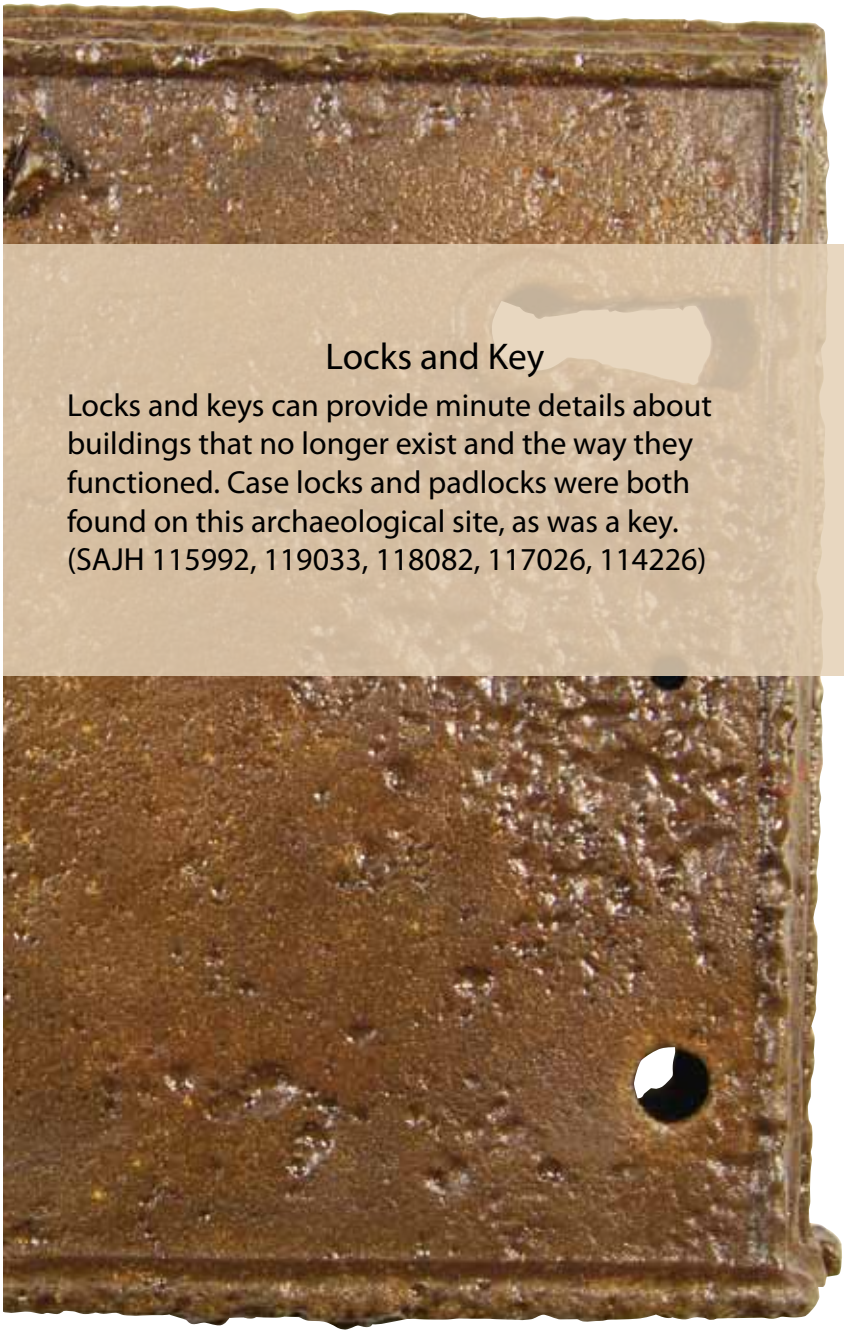


Nails

Fasteners are some of the most common objects founds at historic-era archaeological sites, yet due to their humble nature they are often underappreciated. The analysis of different fastener types, such as these, can help archaeologists understand how a structure was constructed and repaired over time. Hand-wrought fasteners can also reveal information about their makers. These wrought nails were used for heavy duty construction. (SAJH 116235, 116953, 117826)

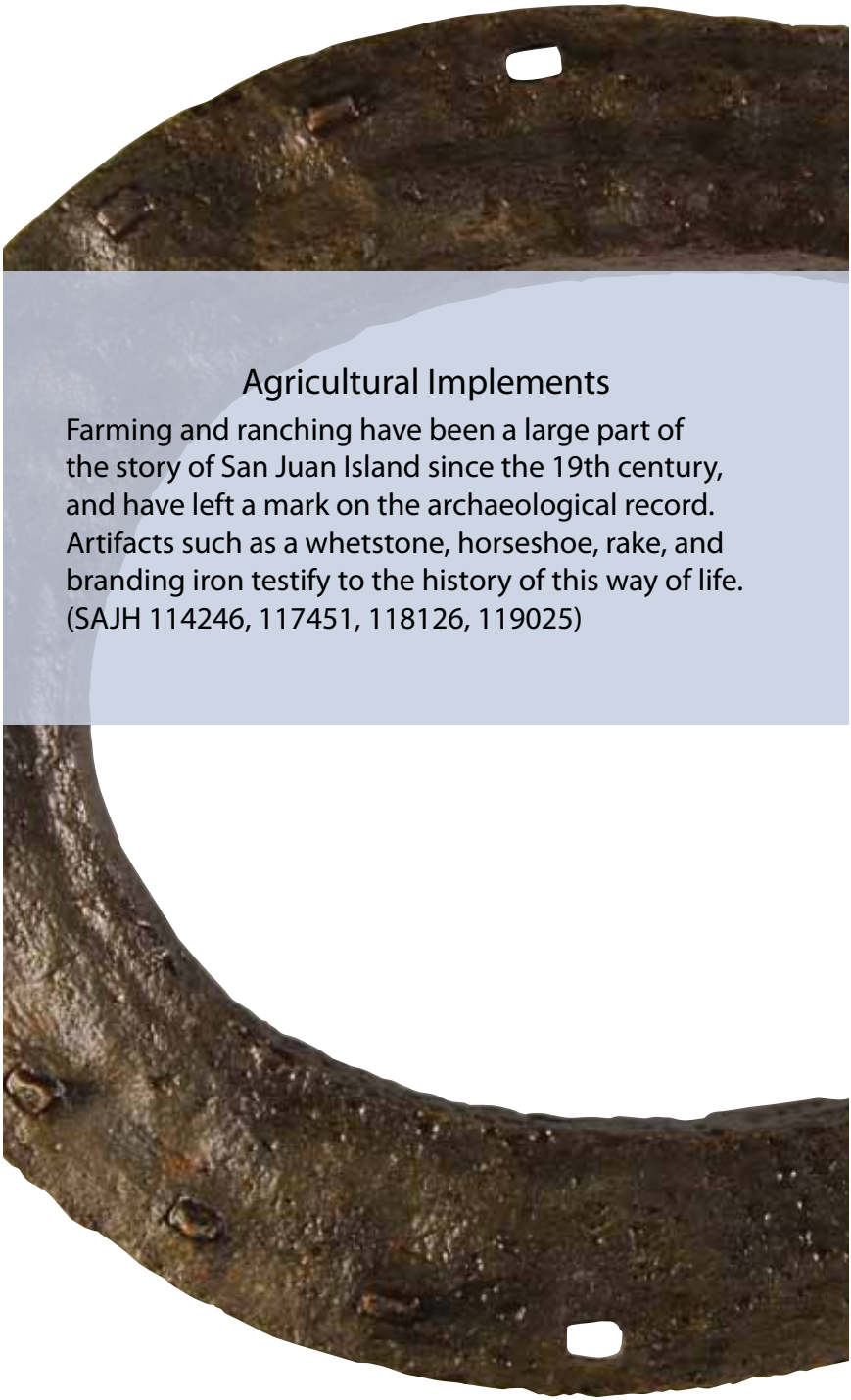
Building Hardware

Like fasteners, hardware – its size, shape, and deposition on the ground – can offer many details about structures that no longer survive. Samples recovered from this site include a doorknob and several types of hinges. (SAJH 115704, 115270, 116510, 117627)



Locks and Key

Locks and keys can provide minute details about buildings that no longer exist and the way they functioned. Case locks and padlocks were both found on this archaeological site, as was a key. (SAJH 115992, 119033, 118082, 117026, 114226)



Agricultural Implements

Farming and ranching have been a large part of the story of San Juan Island since the 19th century, and have left a mark on the archaeological record. Artifacts such as a whetstone, horseshoe, rake, and branding iron testify to the history of this way of life. (SAJH 114246, 117451, 118126, 119025)

Wagon Parts

At one time wagons were a common and essential form of transportation, so worn parts are often found at sites such as this. A variety is represented, including (top to bottom) a carriage bolt, whiffletree hook, brake lever, and step platform. One of the most interesting objects is the brake block and shoe; the wooden brake shoe is reinforced with the leather sole of a human's shoe. Most of these items were found in situ on the site. (SAJH 116463, 117006, 118910, 119030, 119034).

References and Bibliography

Ames, Kenneth M. and Herbert D.G. Maschner
1999 Peoples of the Northwest Coast: Their Archaeology and Prehistory. Thames and Hudson, London.

Gilbert, Cathy A.
1987 Historic Landscape Report: American Camp & British Camp. Pacific West Regional Office, National Park Service, Seattle, WA.

Horton, Elizabeth
2010 Archaeological Survey for Three Pedestrian Trails at American Camp, San Juan Island National Historical Park, San Juan County, Washington. Northwest Cultural Resources Institute Short Report No. 31, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, National Park Service, Vancouver, WA.

Hudson's Bay Company Records, microfilm, Post Journals, Belle Vue Sheep Farm, 1854-1855 and 1858-1862. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Matson, R.G., and Gary Coupland
1995 The Prehistory of the Northwest Coast. Academic Press, San Diego.

Pratt, Boyd
2003 Belle Vue Sheep Farm. MMS. San Juan Island National Historical Park, Friday Harbor, Washington.

Sprague, Roderick
1983 San Juan Archaeology. Laboratory of Anthropology, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID.

Stein, Julie K.
2000 Exploring Coast Salish Prehistory: The Archaeology of San Juan Island. Burke Museum Monographs 8. University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Suttles, Wayne
1951 The Economic Life of the Coast Salish of Haro and Rosario Straits. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle.

Thompson, Erwin N.
1972 Historic Resource Study, San Juan Island National Historical Park/Washington. Denver Service Center, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Vouri, Michael P.
1999 The Pig War: Standoff on Griffin Bay. Friday Harbor, WA: Griffin Bay Books.

_____. 2004 Outpost of Empire: The Royal Marines and the Joint Occupation of San Juan Island. Seattle: Northwest Interpretive Association/University of Washington Press.

_____. 2008 The Pig War. San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing.

The Northwest Cultural Resources Institute (NCRI) is a cooperative partnership based at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, dedicated to fostering cultural resources research, education, and stewardship in the Pacific Northwest. The institute brings together National Park Service staff, university professors, and subject matter experts to facilitate research and training, provide expertise, and support other innovative educational endeavors using national parks as laboratories.

Under the auspices of the NCRI, museum collections from several national parks are curated at Fort Vancouver and available for study. One of these is the archaeological collection from Belle Vue Sheep Farm, a Hudson's Bay Company site on San Juan Island. These artifacts form a fascinating part of fur trade studies, as a primarily agricultural frontier outpost that reflects the diversification of a corporation faced with an end to profitable trapping. In addition, this site highlights rapid political and cultural change, transitioning in a short period of time from American Indian villages to British farm, to American military camp, to homestead claim.

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site
612 E. Reserve Street
Vancouver, WA 98661
(360) 816-6230
www.nps.gov/fova

San Juan Island National Historical Park
PO Box 429
4668 Cattle Point Road
Friday Harbor, WA 98250
(360) 378-2240, ext. 2228
www.nps.gov/sajh

2010

Northwest Cultural Resources Institute
FORT VANCOUVER
National Site