

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site  
Northwest Cultural Resource Institute



# Why We Do Interpretation

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# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Mission

In the end, we conserve only what we love.  
We will love only what we understand. We will  
understand only what we are taught.

Baba Dioum, Senegalese poet

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# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Mission

Interpretation aids organizations in preserving resources by helping visitors find meaning in the sites.

# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Significance

Each resource, private or public, subtle or obvious, has enough relevance (spoken powerfully to enough people or powerfully enough to a few people) to have achieved protected status.

David Larsen, 2003

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# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Significance

Interpretation, as the voice for the site, can be a critical tool in the preservation of the resources at the site.

# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Relevance

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life.

Victor Frankl, 1959

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# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Relevance

Through interpretation, resources can change from being a pleasant background to being something full of wonder.

# Meaningful Interpretation

## Tenet 1

**Resources possess meanings and have relevance**

### Implications?

- Each resource means different things to different people
- Each resource has enough relevance (spoken powerfully to enough people or powerfully enough to a few people) to have achieved protected status

# Meaningful Interpretation

## Tenet 2

**Audiences seek something of value for themselves**

### **Implications?**

- Motivations run the gamut, from fun to sublime
- Audiences believe there's something special in the resource

# Meaningful Interpretation

## Tenet 3

**Interpretation facilitates a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor**

## Implications?

- Meanings are more important than information
- Interpreters must channel their own understandings, enthusiasm, passion, and love for the resource so their audiences can form their own understandings, enthusiasm, passion, and love for the resource

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# Meaningful Interpretation

## Other Implications?

- **The visitor is sovereign**

# Meaningful Interpretation

## Visitors' Bill of Rights

- To have their privacy and independence respected
- To retain and express their own values
- To be treated with courtesy and consideration
- To receive accurate and balanced information

# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

## Writing Assignment

What tangible resources does the author want you to care about?

What tangible icon does the author use as a focus or vehicle to explore intangible meanings?

What intangible meanings link to the tangible?

# Why Do We Do Interpretation?

Fort Vancouver National Historic Reserve

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior

## The Counting House Nerve Center of Company Operations

**Profit.** Fort Vancouver existed to make a profit for its British shareholders.

As headquarters for the Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia Department, and with responsibility for more than one thousand employees and two dozen forts, Company clerks needed space to track operations. The office provided that space; it served as the financial and administrative nerve center of Company operations in the Columbia Department.

When the Hudson's Bay Company constructed Fort Vancouver, an office was one of the first structures built. Known also as a counting house, a term for buildings that housed bookkeeping functions, it stood several yards to the southwest of this structure. By 1845, the building's deteriorating condition prompted the Company to construct a new office. Completed in December 1845, its clapboard siding, interior and exterior paint, and Hudson's Bay Company coat of arms reflected its vital role in Company operations.



Company clerks placed weights on scales to measure gold dust and other items. This one found weight, dated 1836, was recovered in a 1980 archaeological dig. Being much heavier than weights listed on the fort inventories, its use remains a mystery.

The arrival of *HMS Modeste*, a British warship, changed Company plans for the structure. Chief Factor John McLoughlin decided to house the ship's captain, Thomas Baillie, in the building for his 18-month peacekeeping assignment at Fort Vancouver.

Following Baillie's departure in 1847, clerks labored inside the building for more than a decade, verifying tons of incoming and outgoing goods, tracking employee pay, and recording

purchases by employees, American Indians, and later, American settlers. Each year clerks produced a volume of records so great that employees needed a cart to transport records from the office to a London bound ship. The pages told a year's story of toil, sweat, and long hours of all Company employees -- and of course, the profit.



*"It is needless to describe the agonies I endured while sitting, hour after hour, on a long-legged stool, my limbs quivering for want of their accustomed exercise, while the muttering of birds, barking of dogs, howling of coons, and neighing of horses seemed to invite me to join them in the woods."*

Robert Ballantyne  
Clerk at York Factory, 1841-1845

*"I am suffering much from sore eyes brought on by working too much in the office by candlelight."*

Thomas Lowe, Clerk

March, 1849  
8:45 p.m.

Through blurry eyes, you check your pocket watch, briefly glancing from your candle lit ledgers. Eleven hours of copying inventory records today.

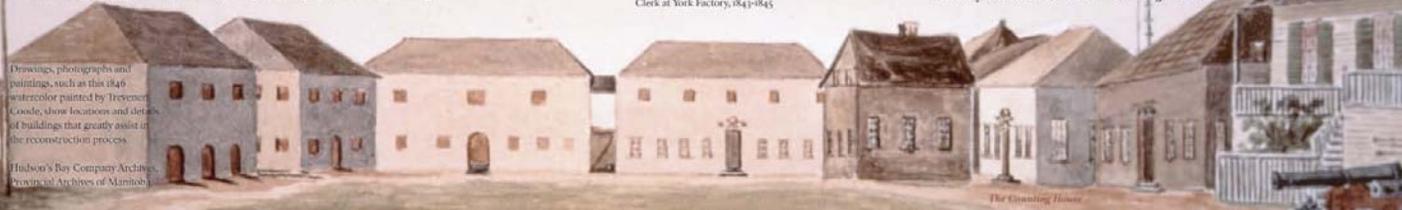
For the past several weeks, you and two fellow clerks have worked in this room, crouching over books, dipping the pen, copying fort inventory records by hand in triplicate. You have weighed hundreds of pounds of sugar, coffee, nails, flour, and black powder. You have measured nearly 26 miles of fabric in the stores. Counting all property at the fort -- including every spoon, dish, tool, trade good, and piece of furniture -- recording its condition, and establishing its value proves to be exhausting work, as attested by your aching neck, tired eyes and sore hand.

Yet, despite the tedium, you are proud of your profession, and proud to be a gentleman at Fort Vancouver. You earn a respectable salary, with yearly raises to be expected. With diligent work, you may be given charge of a post in ten more years. By summer, these long hours may lessen, leaving Friday and Saturday afternoons and Sundays your own, perhaps to ride, hunt, sail, or picnic. Maybe someone will organize another ball, like the ones Captain Baillie hosted in this very room. You could certainly use the exercise.

After a brief respite, you return to your work. Only six more pages to copy until you blow out the candle and drag yourself back to Bachelors Hall to sleep. This stool will hardly be cold when you return tomorrow at 6:30 a.m.

Drawings, photographs and paintings, such as this 1846 watercolor painted by Trevelyan Goode, show locations and details of buildings that greatly assist in the reconstruction process.

Hudson's Bay Company Archives,  
Provincial Archives of Manitoba



The Counting House

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National Park Service  
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