

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Fort Vancouver National Historic Site
Northwest Cultural Resource Institute



The NPS & Historic Site Interpretation

PSU HST 496/596

Introduction to Public History

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NPS by the Numbers

\$5,409,252,508 in preservation and outdoor recreation grants awarded	68,561 archeological sites
\$2,750,000,000 annual budget	28,000 employees
121,603,193 objects in museum collections	27,000 historic structures
97,417,260 volunteer hours	2,461 national historic landmarks
2,482,104 volunteers	391 national parks
218,000 jobs supported in gateway communities	40 national heritage areas

NPS by the Numbers

11.7 billion visitors, 1 mission:

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

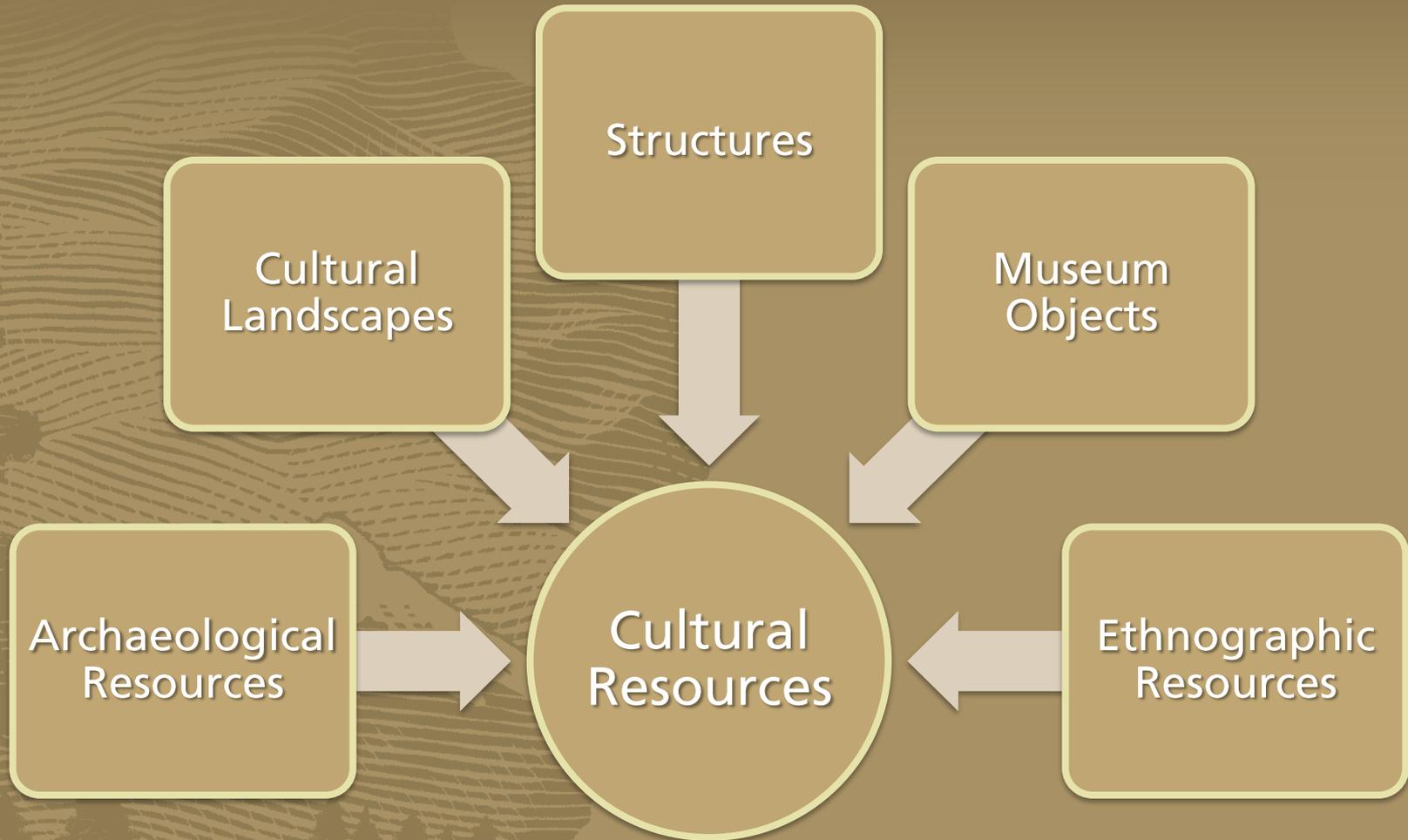
History & the NPS

Interpretation
& Education

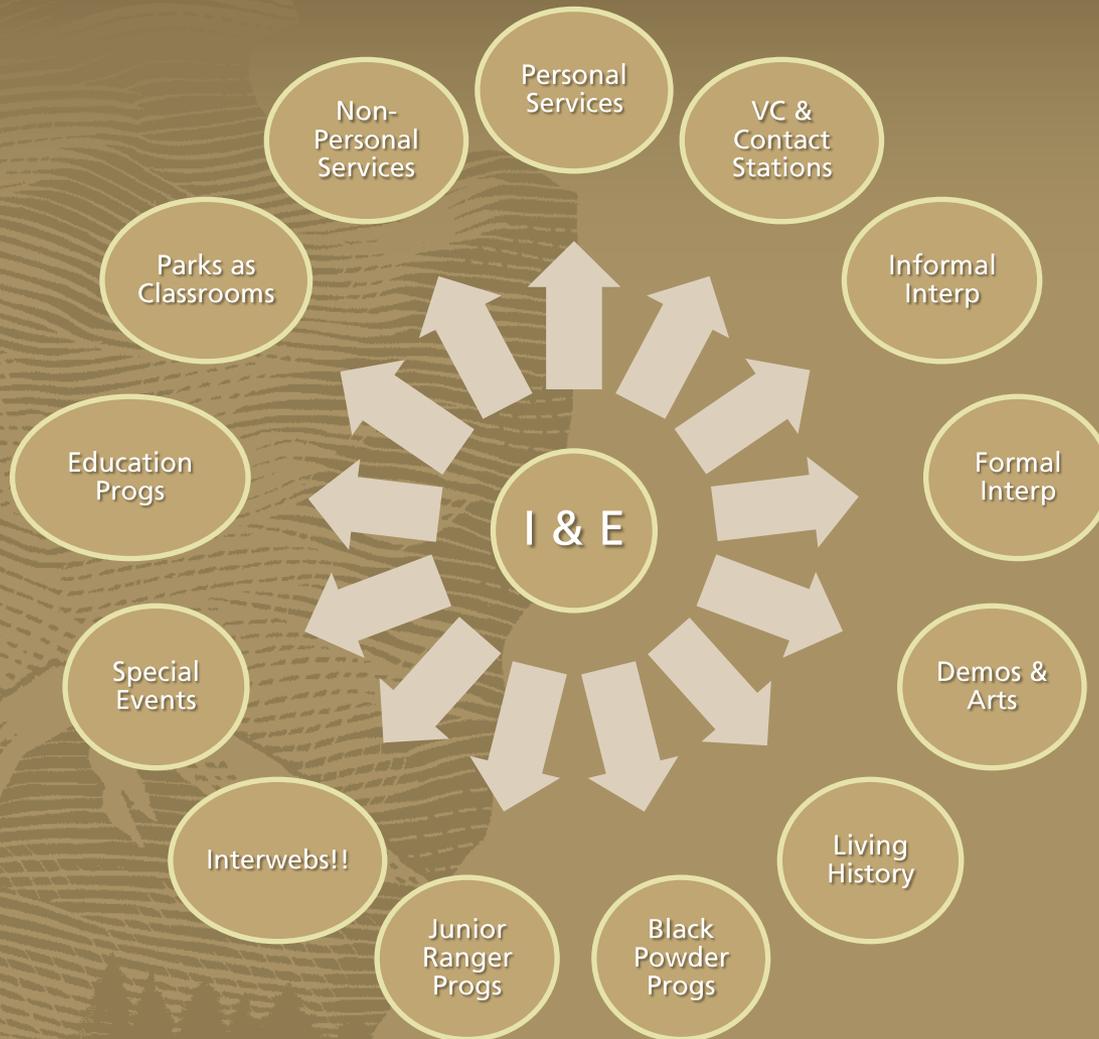
Cultural
Resource
Management

History
in the
NPS

Cultural Resource Management



Interpretation & Education

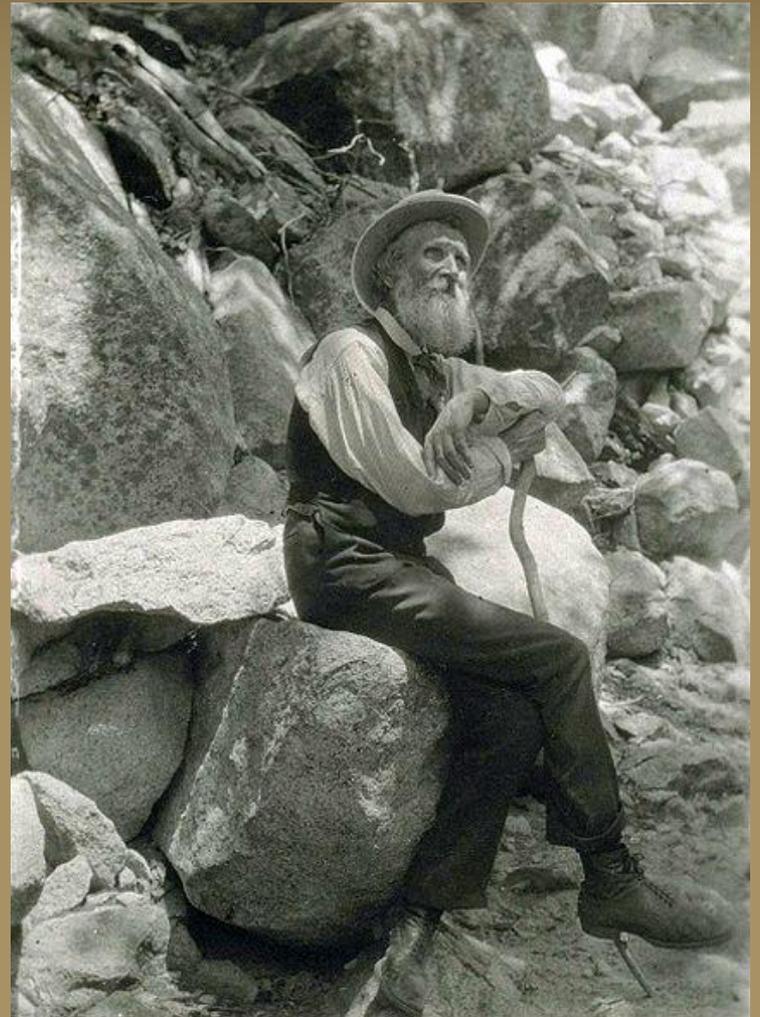


EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

What is Interpretation?

I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.

John Muir, 1896



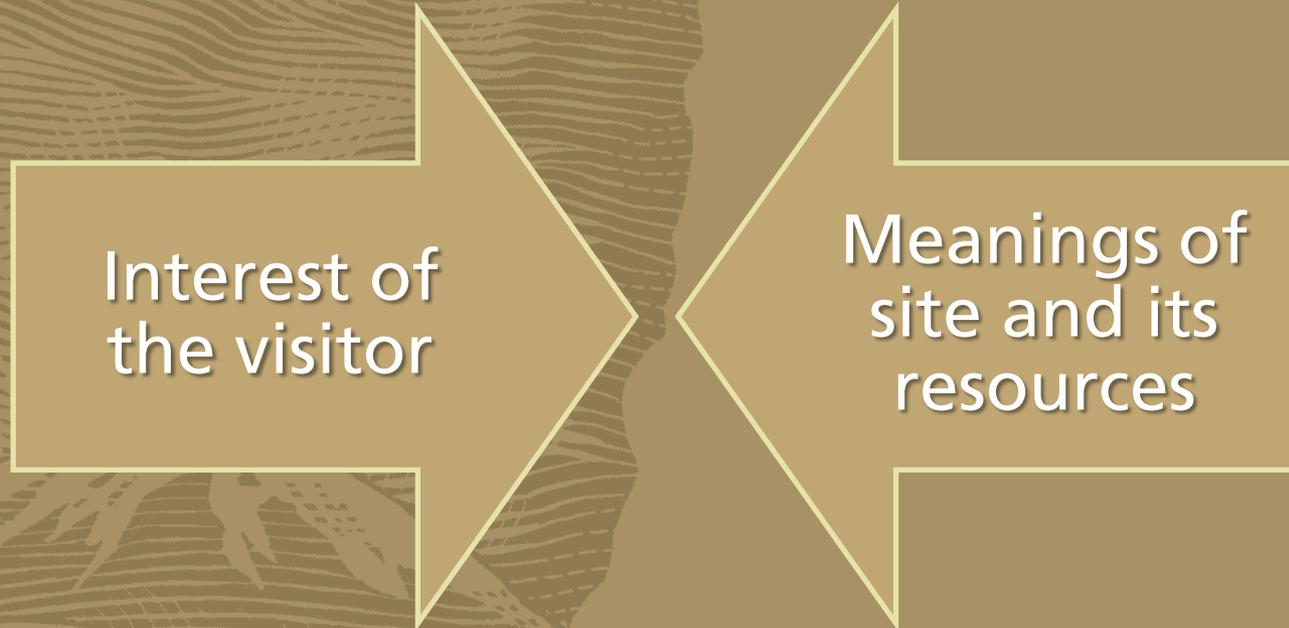
EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

What is Interpretation?

- Interpretation is "a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance inherent in the resource" (National Park Service, 1996).
- Interpretation is a "mission based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource" (National Association of Interpretation [NAI], 2006).

Making Connections

Interpretation



Making Connections

Connecting a site's tangible resources to their intangible meanings makes the resources more personally relevant and valuable to visitors.

Making Connections

Truly meaningful interpretation answers the question:

"Why should I care?"

Why Do We Do Interpretation?

Significance

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

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

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

How Do We Do Interpretation?

Tangible
Resources

- Buildings, artifacts, people, physical features, information...



Intangible
Resources

- Ideas, meanings, systems, concepts...

**Effective interpretation links these
in order to reveal meanings**

How Do We Do Interpretation?

Intangible resources
to which almost
anyone can relate

Intangible resources
that provide the
greatest degree of
relevance to the
greatest number of
people

Intangible resources
that make meanings
accessible and
resource relevant to
a diverse audience

Universal
Concepts

How Do We Do Interpretation?

Universal Concept

Not all people will agree on the meaning of or share the same perspective toward a Universal Concept, BUT...

All people will relate to it in some significant way

How Do We Do Interpretation?

Class Exercise

- 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?
- What universal concept(s) emerge(s)?

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 8-ounce weight, dated 1846, was recovered in a 1980s 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 twittering of birds, barking of dogs, lowing of cows, and neighing of horses seemed to invite me to join them in the woods."

Robert Ballantyne
Clerk at York Factory, 1843-1845

"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.

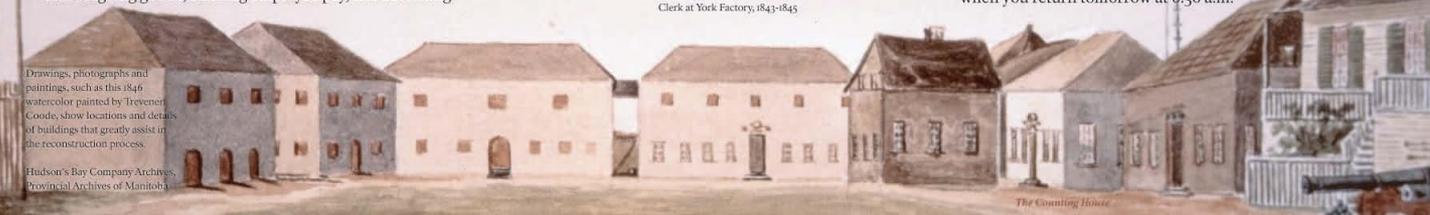
For the past several weeks, you and two fellow clerks have worked in this room, crouching over books, dipping the pen, copying fort inventory records by hand in triplicate. You have weighed hundreds of pounds of sugar, coffee, nails, flour, and black powder. You have measured nearly 26 miles of fabric 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 Trevenen Coode, 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

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

How Do We Do Interpretation?

Strive to create programs that:

- promote personal connections
- Help people understand the many – and often contradictory – stories of America
- Develop an informed citizenry committed to stewardship
- Establish the NPS as a positive resource for the education community
- Guarantee that all have the opportunity to learn, regardless of ability to visit the site



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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA