

Fort Vancouver  
National Historic Site  
612 East Reserve Street  
Vancouver, WA 98661

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Fort Vancouver  
National Historic Site

# 2020

## Annual Report



CONNECT PRESERVE PARTNER INSPIRE



2020 has been an unprecedented year - one in which uncertainty and tragedy prevailed. The COVID-19 pandemic caused many of us to make significant changes to our everyday lives. Working together, we made changes to protect not just ourselves, but others, too. In accordance with federal, state and local guidance, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site closed its facilities in March, briefly reopened in November, and then closed facilities again. Many of our staff teleworked and our volunteers found new ways to help from afar. From safe distances and behind face masks, we reconnected with our mission and discovered new ways to share this national park's story with the public.

Despite the very difficult circumstances of this year, we were hard at work. Projects begun before the pandemic continued successfully, and many were completed. Other projects, like the park's new virtual resources you will read about in this report, were launched.

Throughout the year, the grounds of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site remained open. Our trails and green spaces provided a welcoming refuge for people in our community to relax, exercise, and play. On any day in 2020, visitors were here walking our trails and enjoying time outdoors.

I am so proud of the dedication that our staff, volunteers, and partners displayed in 2020, and I am so grateful for the support of our community in Southwest Washington and Oregon. In a time in which we all faced more than our share of hardships, I have been witness to the selfless, kind actions of so many and, further, been inspired by the beauty and wonder of this urban national park. These incredible moments of goodness, caring, and nature's beauty at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site made the weight of this pandemic lighter for me and I hope for you, too.



Tracy Fortmann, Superintendent  
Fort Vancouver National Historic Site



# Connect

With park facilities, including Fort Vancouver, Pearson Air Museum, the McLoughlin House, and the Visitor Center closed due to the pandemic for much of the year, our staff and volunteers had to get creative in order to continue to connect the public to the story of this national park!

In spring, we began to produce and promote virtual versions of events traditionally held at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. Park rangers produced a virtual Junior Ranger Day event that included online activities and a swearing-in ceremony. Our annual Campfires & Candlelight event became a new video series called *Park After Dark* that featured our talented staff and volunteers.

As summer came to a close, it began to become clear that we would not be able to host on-site educational field trips, as

has been done at Fort Vancouver since the park's beginnings in the 1940s. In response, we created a brand new Virtual Field Trip program that includes new activities and videos designed for upper elementary students, and the opportunity for teachers to invite a "virtual park ranger" to visit their classroom. The Virtual Field Trip program connects students to the story of the fur trade in the Pacific Northwest from a distance. An Open Outdoors for Kids grant from the National Park Foundation made this virtual field trip possible.

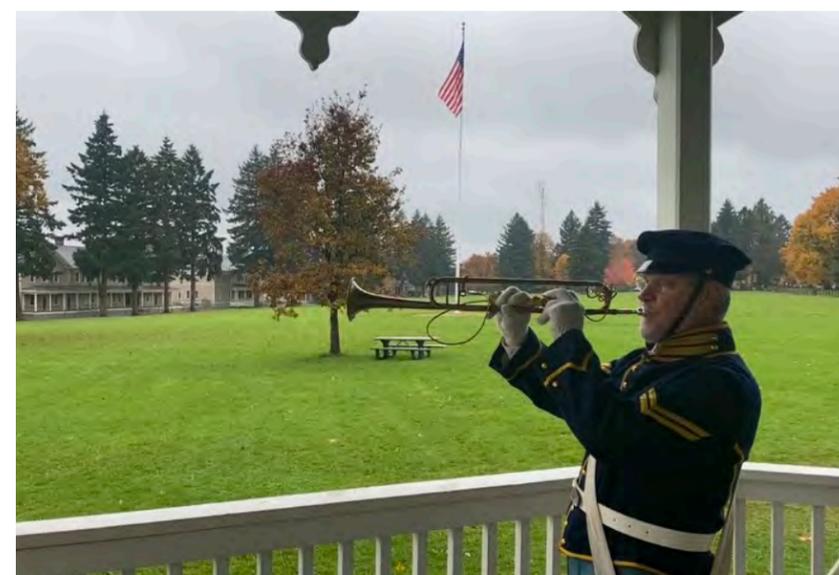
Throughout the year, park staff worked to produce new content for the park's website to help the public stay connected to Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. On our website and social media channels, we shared new articles about our site's history, information about ways to enjoy the national park, and up-to-date information for visitors.



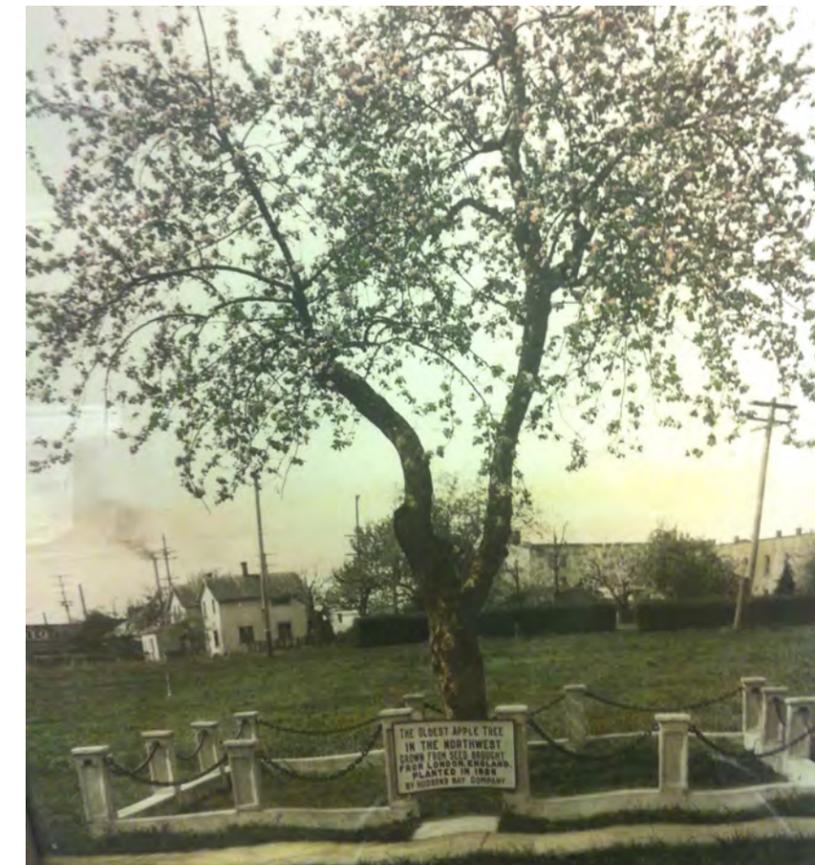
Continuing our partnership with iTech Preparatory, history and social studies educator John Zingale filmed Fort Vancouver's building interiors in 360 degrees. During remote learning, middle school students used these images to develop a new version of the park's virtual tour that iTech students first launched in 2016.



To help everyone get into the holiday spirit this year, Fort Vancouver NHS rangers developed a virtual "Countdown to Christmas" on our social media channels. Each day in December, we featured crafts and recipes inspired by the 19th century, historic accounts of holidays, or photos from past events. One of the posts shared instructions for making pomanders with oranges and cloves.



During this challenging year, Fort Vancouver NHS rangers were keen to stay connected to our visitors through virtual learning opportunities and commemorations. These included a virtual Memorial Day Observance in partnership with the Community Military Appreciation Committee, and a virtual Veterans' Day Observance featuring a park ranger sharing highlights from the history of Vancouver Barracks and a bugler in historic costume playing "Taps."



Fort Vancouver NHS has a robust and active museum program. In 2020, the national park accepted several new donations into the collection. These donations from members of our community included photographs, documents and postcards from Vancouver Barracks, a rare 42-star American flag that flew here from 1889-1890, and silverware owned by the McLoughlin family.

Our preservation efforts continued at the park's McLoughlin House Unit in Oregon City, Oregon. The National Park Service funded a professional conservator to treat significant outdoor resources on display, including a historic cannon and fountain as well as

several bronze commemorative plaques. The fountain has been cleaned and repainted in more historically accurate colors, and will be returned to its basin once concrete and plumbing repairs are completed.

In preparation for rehabilitation work on the McLoughlin House, an archaeological testing project was completed this year, including three units adjacent to the house's foundation. Park archaeologists adapted their work in response to pandemic safety protocols and wildfire smoke, recovering over 2,500 artifacts to add to understanding of Indigenous use of this bluff overlooking the Willamette River.

This year, sadly, we said goodbye to

an old friend: The Old Apple Tree. This historic tree dates back to the early 19th century, potentially to circa 1826, and was originally within the Fort Vancouver employee Village. The Fort Vancouver orchard and Village were the site of the first apple trees in the Pacific Northwest, now one of the main agricultural products of the region. Though the main trunk finally succumbed, the Old Apple Tree lives on through selected suckers growing up from the root stock, as well as clones and seedlings growing throughout our community. Samples from this historic tree will also be preserved in the Fort Vancouver NHS museum collection.

This photograph of one of three YMCA locations at Vancouver Barracks was taken during World War I. It was donated to the national park's museum collection in 2020. Items like this one help us share the stories of the soldiers who served here.

The McLoughlin House in Oregon City, a unit of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, was the location of several preservation projects in 2020.

Alongside our partners with the City of Vancouver, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site works to preserve the memory of the Old Apple Tree. In 2020, historic photographs and documentation already in the park's museum collection were joined by two samples from the tree's trunk.



# Partner

Despite the challenges of working during a pandemic, several wonderful partner groups worked safely within appropriate protocols to help the park complete outdoor projects this year. The Three Creeks Rotary Club held their annual clean-up of the Clark County War Veteran's Memorial ahead of Memorial Day. The Washington Conservation Corps worked on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day - a national day of service - to pick up branches and other debris left behind by winter weather. The Community Military Appreciation Committee and Vancouver Lions Club participated in weeding and litter pickup, and the Marine Cadets of Washington helped to clean up and organize one of the buildings in the park.

In late 2020, we began a partnership with Portland State University's Visually Impaired Learner and Orientation & Mobility Programs to produce a virtual, accessible tour of Fort Vancouver for their annual Mobility Matters conference in February 2021. Alongside students and teachers from the Washington State School for the Blind, Fort Vancouver NHS archaeologists and curators discussed the history of the fort as hundreds of online participants followed along using tactile maps and 3D printed models of building floorplans. Participants also received artifact replicas made by the fort's volunteer blacksmiths and carpenters, and other history-themed items from the Friends of Fort Vancouver to provide a fully sensory experience from the comfort of home.



When the Fort Vancouver Visitor Center closed to the public due to the pandemic, the Friends of Fort Vancouver moved their bookstore outdoors! This pop-up wagon store was hand-built in Iowa and assembled by volunteers. Outdoor sales boosted the Friends' projects, and volunteers working at the wagon store helped connect visitors with our site and its history.

Photo: Friends of Fort Vancouver



In Winter 2019, Fort Vancouver NHS staff began working with local dance studio Columbia Dance to provide historic information for a new Fort Vancouver-themed production of *The Nutcracker*. When the pandemic forced a change of plans, we worked with Columbia Dance to safely film a "teaser" video for this "whimsical holiday adventure with a historical twist," which brings the story of this place to the public in a new and exciting way.

Photo: Becky Moore



Eagle Scout Douglas Wilson, Jr., Troop 479, was one of four Eagle Scouts who completed major projects at the park in 2020. Wilson worked with Facility Manager Alex Patterson to install markers along the Spruce Mill Trail. Other Scout projects reintroduced trees to support the historic allée in the South Vancouver Barracks, developed two orienteering programs, and built bat boxes to support bat species at the national park.



# Our Team

We are so proud of the staff and volunteers who have worked hard over the last year to continue to provide a wonderful experience for our visitors, whether in person or virtual, and all the people in our community who care about Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. We are all a team, helping to care for this national park and share its unique history with others.

Many of the park staff were on-site daily throughout this year, maintaining trails, grounds, and facilities, or roving the park to answer visitor questions and monitor important resources. Others were able to use this time as an opportunity to create virtual offerings, or update older interpretive programs and publications so

we have even more options to offer the public after reopening.

Many of our amazing park volunteers stayed busy as well, supporting community groups with pandemic relief efforts, helping staff develop remote learning opportunities, sprucing up and rearranging spaces for social distancing, or working outdoors at the park. Over 150 individuals volunteered more than 50 hours each at the park during 2020!

Our community really showed its support for their national park this year, and we want to say a heartfelt thank you! From “leaving no trace” when you visited to keeping pets on a leash or just giving our rangers a smile behind your mask, we saw and appreciated everything you did! We could not have done it without you!



While at home in Spring 2020, our amazing Costume Department volunteers, who maintain and create Fort Vancouver NHS's large collection of historically-accurate living history costumes, put their skills to work making 5,000 face masks to help protect our community's medical professionals. They made and delivered face masks to local clinics, hospitals, schools, and other front-line workers.



While our facilities were closed this summer, our fantastic volunteers were hard at work cleaning and maintaining living history equipment. Volunteers worked together, following safety protocols, to clean Fort Vancouver's Bake House and 233 lanterns!



Throughout the pandemic, Fort Vancouver NHS volunteers continued to work in the Fort Vancouver Garden. During a difficult time for our community, this garden, a recreation of the fort's 19th century garden, provided a wonderful place for visitors to wander, relax, and learn about the history of the site.

# Look Towards the Future

We hope you are enjoying the recent improvements to the eastern portion of Vancouver Barracks, including upgrades to parking lots, greenspace, lighting, and vehicle circulation routes, as well as the transition of Alvord Road to a pedestrian path. The next year will bring additional improvements to the historic military post as we continue to enact its Master Plan, including - fingers crossed - construction beginning on a new main visitor parking lot south of East 5th Street!

We will also be installing new exhibits at Pearson Air Museum. The pandemic delayed this project a bit, but installation is now scheduled for May 2021. The new panels around the perimeter of the main hangar will still tell the unique history of Pearson Field, but with improved accessibility and interactive features. We can't wait to share the refreshed Pearson Air Museum with you soon.

As a new season nears, we are feeling optimistic and look forward to welcoming everyone to Fort Vancouver National Historic Site again. Our staff works for the National Park Service because we believe in public service and we've missed being able to welcome visitors from near and far. Thanks for hanging in there with us this year, and here's to 2021!



Photo: Troy Wayrynen