

# DESIGN A FORT

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## Meeting People's Needs in the Wilderness

**Purpose of This Activity:** To appreciate how difficult it was to build a fort in the wilderness and to understand the many important uses of forts.

Imagine you are a pioneer in the wilderness, and you are helping to build a self-sufficient fort for your community. A complete model of the fort will need to include many of the features found at Fort Vancouver (a fort on the Columbia River near present-day Vancouver, Washington):

**Blacksmith's shop** – where iron and steel items were made for trade and for tools needed at the fort

**Bakery** – a two-story building containing two fire brick ovens. Bread was baked for the 200-300 employees, and biscuits were made for ship crews and trade.

**Trade Shop and Dispensary** – the fort doctor was not only in charge of the hospital and medicines but also directed the fur trade shop.

**Wash House** – destroyed by fire in 1852, it was the smallest building.

**Chief Factor's Residence** – a large and elegant home for the families of the Chief Factor and the doctor. Two cannons stood watch in front. (The Chief Factor was the person in charge of a trading post.)

**Kitchen** – this building contained a large cooking area, pantry, laundry and living quarters for the staff.

**Shipping** – ocean-going vessels brought supplies and trade goods in exchange for furs, lumber and salmon.

**Farming** – the area surrounding the fort was used for farming. Oats, peas, barley, wheat and vegetables were grown alongside orchards of apples, pears, peaches, plums and cherries. Livestock included cows, sheep, horses, goats and hogs.

**Stockade** – Douglas fir posts stood 15 feet high and enclosed 30 acres. The stockade protected the main buildings of the fort from theft, primarily, and from attack.

**Bastion** – three stories high, the bastion contained eight cannons to salute arriving ships and to protect the fort from attack.

Use whatever building materials you have available to construct your model of the fort (for example: Legos, Lincoln logs, lumber ends, sticks, shoe boxes.) An alternative is to make a detailed drawing of the fort. Use your imagination to make the fort as real as possible. (See **Information to Help You** in this section for more ideas.)

Based on the information given below, create a guide to identify each part. As you work on your model or drawing, consider and respond to these questions:

1. Why was one of the first Washington sawmills so important to the success of the fort?
2. What uses of trees or forests were common in daily life at the fort?
3. If this had been the only trading post for 1,000 miles, how often would you have visited the fort and what would you have bought?
4. Can you think of modern-day examples of places and things we depend on to provide our daily needs, much like Fort Vancouver did for early settlers?

### **Information to Help You**

Fort Vancouver was the center of commerce in the northwest for many years in the 1800s. It was headquarters for the Columbia Department of the Hudson's Bay Company. That department included all of present day British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The fort had to be as self-sufficient as possible: It took two years for goods to arrive from England. (Imagine making a shopping list two years in advance!)

The following comments were written by Lt. Charles Wilkes during his visit to Fort Vancouver more than 150 years ago, in 1841:\*

#### About the Fort

The fort stands at some distance beyond the village, and to the eye appears like an upright wall of pickets, twenty-five feet high. This encloses the houses, shops and magazines of the Company. The enclosure contains about four acres, which appear to be under full cultivation. Beyond the fort, large granaries were to be seen. At one end is Dr. M'Laughlin's house.

Everything may be had within the fort. They have an extensive apothecary shop, a bakery, blacksmiths' and coopers' shops, trade-offices for buying, others for selling, others again for keeping accounts and transacting business; shops for retail, where English manufactured articles may be purchased at as low a price, if not cheaper, than in the United States, consisting of cotton and woolen goods, ready-made clothing, ship-chandlery, earthen and iron ware and fancy articles; in short, everything, and of every kind of description.

All these articles are of good quality, and suitable for the servants, settlers and visitors. Of the quantity on hand, some idea may be formed from the fact that all the posts west of the Rocky Mountains get their annual supplies from this depot.

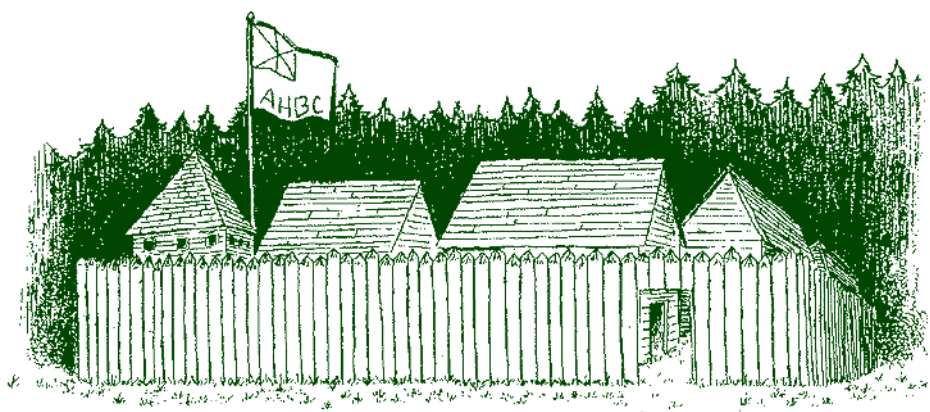
## Daily Life at the Fort

The routine of the day at Vancouver is perhaps the same throughout the year. At early dawn the bell is rung for the working parties, who soon after go to work. The sound of hammers, click of anvils, the rumbling of carts, with tinkling bells, render it difficult to sleep after this hour. The bell rings again at eight for breakfast; at nine they resume their work which continues till one; then an hour is allowed for dinner, after which they work till six, when the labours of the day close. At five o'clock on Saturday afternoon the work is stopped, when the servants receive their weekly rations.

Vancouver is a large manufacturing, agricultural and commercial depot, and there are few if any idlers, except the sick. Everybody seems to be in a hurry, whilst there appears to be no obvious reason for it.

\*Charles Wilkes,, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842* (5 vols., New York, 1856), IV, 828-39.

If time allows, send for more information to: Ft. Vancouver National Historic Site, 612 E. Reserve St., Vancouver, WA 98661-3897.



*Fort Vancouver*