The Decline and Fall of the Hudson’s Bay Company Village at Fort Vancouver

Douglas C. Wilson, Ph.D., Portland State University
THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE HUDSON’S BAY COMPANY VILLAGE AT FORT VANCOUVER

Douglas C. Wilson

Archeological exploration of the remains of the Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Vancouver and its Village (also known as “Kanaka Village”), including its demise in the 1850s, provides the means to explore a difficult but important period in history that continues to shape modern relations between indigenous peoples and other Americans. Historical archaeology provides an independent measure of the Village, supplementing and enlarging its history, and shifting the focus to its inhabitants. Exploration of the human use of space, investment in houses, and ceramics use by households offer new insights into the fur trade community. These data provide us a means to better understand the people behind this contested place which was at the center of the transition from British to American colonialism.

Issues of inclusion are current in the Pacific Northwest, tied to increasing cultural diversity, particularly in urban settings like Portland, Oregon (De Morris and Leistner 2009; Singer et al. 2008). It is important to recognize, however, that there was a period of diversity that preceded the American colonial period. Even prior to the short-term influx of African Americans after the Spanish American War, or longer-term immigration during and immediately following World War II (e.g., Williams 2007; Shine 2006; Maben 1987), a period of significant ethnic diversity existed in the Pacific Northwest tied to the British Colonial fur trade. Archaeological exploration of the remains of the Fort Vancouver Village (also known as “Kanaka Village”) and the historical archaeology of its demise in the 1850s provides the means to explore a difficult but important history that continues to shape modern relations between indigenous peoples and other Americans in the region.

At the time that the Oregon Territory was established, the community that would become Vancouver, Washington, was already nearly 25 years old and had been substantial and important since its establishment, representing essentially the British colonial capital of the Pacific Northwest (Wilson and Langford 2011; Erigero 1992; Hussey 1957). As the largest colonial community preceding American settlement, Fort Vancouver (1825-1860) was a lightning rod for American nationalism and the struggle for economic dominance in the 1850s Pacific Northwest (Steele 1975; Hussey 1957:91). As such, the Fort Vancouver community was intrinsically tied to the Hudson’s Bay Company’s colonial corporate venture, one that was nearly 200 years old by the mid-nineteenth century. This company had dominated the affairs of much of the Canadian West and Pacific Northwest in the period preceding the great American immigration (Wilson and Langford 2011; Satterfield and Lavender 2001; Hussey 1957). Thus, the Village was tied to British colonial identity. However, it was also the result of colonial policies that not only tolerated ethnic diversity, but encouraged the formation of mixed ethnicity families (Deur 2012; Langford 2000; Hussey 1977). The later policy of the Hudson’s Bay Company to build alliances and relations with American Indian tribes to secure furs and other Pacific Northwest resources, combined with the hiring of Pacific Islanders in large numbers, and an already diverse fur trade culture imported from Canada, led to a colonial system that favored the development of multiethnic families. Fort Vancouver and its Village are iconic of this early history of diversity in the Pacific Northwest and contrast strongly with the policies and political systems imported (and devised) by the American settlers (Whaley 2005).
Fort Vancouver was the headquarters and supply depot for the vast Columbia Department of the Hudson's Bay Company (Figure 1). Annual supply ships would bring in trade goods destined for fur trade posts throughout the Pacific Northwest and would ship the year's take of animal pelts back to England for the manufacture of hats and other fashions. Over much of this time period, the Fort Vancouver operations included substantial agricultural activities, including hundreds of acres under cultivation, the management of large herds of cattle and sheep, and a sizeable orchard and garden. Agricultural produce was used to feed the employees of the fort and far-flung posts of the District, but was also traded to the Russians in Alaska and other west coast colonial posts. Likewise, lumber and salmon were harvested and processed for external use, and a retail trade with employees grew to a significant endeavor as the American immigration provided a large base of new customers in the 1840s (Wilson and Langford 2011).

![Figure 1. Covington Map of Hudson's Bay Company Fort Vancouver (1846) showing agricultural fields, major improvements, and the physical and symbolic separation of the elite classes in the Fort Stockade from the Village (Hudson's Bay Company Archives).](image)

The peculiar circumstances of the post, its remoteness, and the history of the fur trade created the conditions for the ethnic diversity of the settlement (Wilson and Langford 2011). The fur trade was already diverse prior to the establishment of Fort Vancouver, containing peoples from across the continent and Europe in its ranks. Scots, French-Canadians, eastern North American
Indian tribes, like the Cree and Iroquois, and Métis people were central to the Hudson’s Bay Company operations. The remoteness of the post, along with supply routes that ran through the Hawaiian Islands resulted in the importation of Native Hawaiians as laborers. Combined with the already ethnically diverse Pacific Northwest and Plateau Indian communities that worked for, traded with, or married into the fur trade, Fort Vancouver contained a surprisingly diverse workforce (Wilson and Langford 2011; Cromwell 2006; Thomas and Hibbs 1984). The Hudson’s Bay Company built alliances with local indigenous communities, which led to relatively close relations between the employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company and American Indian populations (Deur 2012; Hussey 1977; Kardas 1971). Many of the people who lived at Fort Vancouver lived in the Village, a clustering of 40-60 houses west of the Fort stockade (Hussey 1957). At times, the Village population would swell to perhaps as many as 1000 people when the “fur brigades” would return in the spring to their headquarters to discharge the season’s catch and to refit. There were also informal encampments of indigenous peoples on the margins of the Village or nearby who traded with the Hudson’s Bay Company and/or were relatives of people living in the Village.

The Decline

Under joint occupation by Great Britain and the United States since the Treaty of 1818, the Hudson’s Bay Company was the de facto government during much of this early colonial time period. The Chief Factor of the Columbia Department meted out punishment and rewards (Hussey 1957). For most of this time period (1824-1846), Dr. John McLoughlin served in this capacity. American immigration over the Oregon Trail in the 1840s disrupted the British colonial system. By 1843, the settlers created a provisional government and by 1844 there were more American immigrants than British fur traders and their former employees (Hunt 1980).

By the time that the Oregon Territorial Government was established in 1849, the rapid increase in population had swamped the original British settlements. Fort Vancouver and its community became a potent symbol of a foreign company and its power over commerce, as well as its alliances with indigenous peoples. The decline and demise of the Village thus tracks intentional American strategies to break Hudson’s Bay Company interests in the increasingly American dominated territory. This was important because of British control and power over retail goods and Indian labor, both crucial aspects of economic power. Chapman (1993:17) suggests, “without question Fort Vancouver had the largest, most diversified selection of goods in the Northwest even up to about 1850.” The enforcement of U.S. tariffs in the 1850s along with the introduction of a gold economy and the Donation Land Law accelerated the decline of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Oregon Territory (Chapman 1993; Steele 1975; Steele et al. 1975).

On the subject of labor, Deur (2012:147) suggests that Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens “worked behind the scenes to prevent the development or ratification of treaties that might set aside lands for Columbia River tribes of southwestern Washington.” Deur suggests that one purpose for this was to remove from the lower Columbia River region Indian labor tied politically to the Hudson’s Bay Company. Starting with the missionary William Slacum in the 1830s and the U.S. Indian Agent Elijah White in the 1840s, cases were made in Congress and in public sentiment against the Hudson’s Bay Company monopoly on retail trade and its Fort Vancouver affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church and American Indian tribes (Deur 2012; Hussey 1957). Many Americans blamed British, Catholic, and Company collusion for conflicts between indigenous peoples and American colonizers on the Oregon Trail, culminating in the November 1847 Whitman
Massacre. This sentiment was widespread in spite of the aid given to immigrants by Chief Factor McLoughlin and the successful negotiation for the release of the Whitman hostages by Chief Factor Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson’s Bay Company (Deur 2012; Addis 2005).

Starting with the creation of the Willamette Valley Treaty Commission in 1850, there were a number of attempts at treaties addressing indigenous communities in and around Fort Vancouver. These include the failed Willamette Valley, Tansy Point, Chehalis River, and Wasco treaties, and the successful Kalapuya, Olympia, and Yakama Treaties. These treaties relegated most of the tribal groups of the lower Columbia River, including those affiliated with the Fort Vancouver community, to the reservations of the Grand Ronde, Siletz, Quinault, Chehalis, Warm Springs, Yakama, and Shoalwater Bay, all far from the lower Columbia River (Deur 2012; Beckham 1990; Marino 1990).

While the Company headquarters and fur trade functions of the fort shifted in 1846 with the move to Victoria, British Columbia, the retail functions continued quite profitably into the early 1850s (Hussey 1957:97-99; Steele et al. 1975). The Hudson’s Bay Company’s Sale Shop was highly successful and Company stores had been set up to cater to the immigrants in Oregon City, Champoeg, and elsewhere. This retail success undoubtedly irked some Americans who were predisposed to resent the British and their allies. On the other hand, the quantities and variety of trade goods attracted many to the Company’s shops.

The economic warfare waged against British interests was overtly racist (see Brooks 2004). The Oregon Territorial Legislature considered a petition to ban Catholics, clearly directed against the people of the fur trade communities, as much as Catholic missionaries tied to indigenous communities (Deur 2012:176). Even more direct was the 1855 law which prevented “half-breeds” people from owning property, only somewhat mitigated by the 1857 revision created for the children of Company elites who could read, write, and were “good” citizens (Whaley 2005; Taylor 1982). The outcome of these sentiments, laws and policies was to disperse the fur trade community, marginalize its rights, and effectively destroy the multiethnic settlements or assign them the status of “Indians” (see Cromwell 2006:312-313; Pollard 1990). The death knell for the Hudson’s Bay Company interests was the crippling tariffs imposed by the U.S. Government that put the Company at an extreme disadvantage (Steele 1975).

The Fall

The establishment and development of the U.S. Army post at Fort Vancouver in 1849, especially the creation of the Quartermaster’s Depot in the same area as the Village, completed the erasure of the earlier era. Cromwell’s (2006:75-78) analysis of the 1850 U.S. census suggests that there were only 11 occupied houses in the Village holding at most some 52 people (all male workers). In December of 1853, Isaac Ebey, at the request of Governor Stevens, described the Village as “old, dilapidated huts, most of them untenanted, and are left to decay” (BAJC 1867:231). Kardas (1971:169) indicates that from nearly 200 employees at Fort Vancouver in 1841, population dropped such that there were only 12 employees by 1853 with only about six through the remaining years of the 1850s.

Hussey (1957:104-108, 220) reports that relations between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the U.S. Army were initially friendly, but by the mid-1850s these had deteriorated. He describes the Army teamsters’ “sport” of trying to knock down abandoned Village houses with their wagons as
they drove by (Figure 2) (Hussey 1957:219). Disputes over a Hudson’s Bay Company corral in the Village area (1846) and the erection of a wharf and military storehouse adjacent to the salmon store and dock (1857) culminated in the 1860 removal of all but three of the Village houses (Erigero 1992:216-218; Hussey 1957). Included in the destruction was the eviction of the Hawaiian preacher, William Kaulehelehe, and the burning of his house. Still useable building materials, including posts, sills, windows, and doors were used by the military, given to “citizens,” or used as firewood (Erigero 1992:217). In an even more symbolic act, soldiers removed fences and wooden headboards from the Hudson’s Bay Company cemetery to use as fuel in their barracks fireplaces (Erigero 1992:216).

Figure 2. View of Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Vancouver in 1854 with U.S. Army Fort Vancouver on the terrace to the left. The northern portion of the Village, including the St. James Mission is in the foreground (NPS/Fort Vancouver National Historic Site).

The transcripts of the British and American Joint Commission memorialize the Village’s final reckoning as they attempted to set a value on the homes of the Fort Vancouver villagers. Angus MacDonald wrote: “in this village there were at least ten dwelling houses, worth $1200 each; twenty worth at least $500 each; and nearly as many worth $300 each, besides a number in the occupation of Indians and Kanakas, which were of very small value” (cited in Nielson 2003:37, vol.1 pg. 178). Testimony to the commission on the values of houses correlates closely with national affiliation, and as demonstrated in the quote, ethnic biases clearly devalued non-western homes.

The economic results of the decline and fall of the Hudson’s Bay Company Village, tied to institutional racism, was to disperse indigenous and creolized labor that was affiliated with the fort, ensuring that the Portland/Vancouver basin (as well as the Willamette Valley) would be secured for American (white) interests. This work helped to crush the corporate-colonial power of the Hudson’s Bay Company. For many Americans, Fort Vancouver was a powerful target that had to be destroyed in order to secure their fledgling territories.
The Historical Archaeology of the Village

As noted above, the historical record of the Village and its place in the history in the Pacific Northwest are difficult to decipher. It is challenging to measure the transition from vibrant, multiethnic fur trade community to the dispersed and marginalized populations that survived the 1850s. Bias stemming from American nationalism and racism colors the historical documents pertaining to the Village. Even those records of the British fur trade officers (like McLoughlin, Ogden, and physician Forbes Barclay) who, more or less successfully, made the transition to the new economic and political landscape, are biased. The families that testified or otherwise left a record of their lives are few.

The Village community, therefore, is particularly suited to be studied through historical archaeology as material remains provide the ability to explore the community separate from the documentary record (Little 2007). As an independent measure of the nature of the Village, it can supplement and enlarge history, shifting its focus to the people that made up its unique community.

Perhaps as early as 1947, National Park Service Archaeologist Louis Caywood initiated excavations in the Village, although all he left on this particular dig is a note in his 1955 report (Caywood 1955). In 1968 and 1969, Susan Kardas and Edward Larrabee, using a variety of hand-dug trenches and test pits, combined with mechanized removal of sod from trenches, identified four house sites (identified as Houses 1, 2, 3, and 4) and a number of extramural pits and concentrations of rock. Kardas (1971) attempted to infer the ethnicity of the inhabitants of the Village based on diagnostic artifacts, specifically of Native Hawaiian and American Indian manufacture. Unfortunately, for Kardas, most of the materials she recovered were British or European origin, probably purchased from the Hudson’s Bay Company Sale Shop, which was the principal retail outlet for the employees of the Company, early missionaries, and Oregon Trail settlers. The methods by which archaeologists attempted to identify ethnicity in the 1960s focused on “ethnic markers,” like diagnostic stone tools (e.g., projectile points), precluding careful analysis of the ways in which domestic artifacts and consumables, including foods, furnishings, and tools might reflect the ethnic backgrounds of the individuals. For Kardas, the lack of indigenous manufactures pointed to the inhabitants’ lack of indigenous skills and stunted cultural expertise (Kardas 1971), an inference that appears simplistic, even absurd today. For example, in 1847 Paul Kane reports on Native Hawaiian men dancing the hula (Kane 1859:258-259). Likewise, in spite of Great Britain’s Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which banned slavery in all its colonies, some of the Chinookan women who married employees and lived in the Village, brought slaves to their fur trade households (e.g., Rich 1941:237-238). Like those Hawaiians who were able to perform the traditional dances of the Hawaiian Islands, it is hard to believe these Chinookan women were not properly socialized in their traditional culture (see Peterson-del Mar 1995).

Cultural resources management studies of the Village continued into the 1970s and early 1980s associated with a revision in the Interstate 5/State Route 14 Interchange (Thomas and Hibbs 1984; Carley 1982; Chance et al. 1982; Chance and Chance 1976). Twelve dwelling areas or houses were tested or excavated as part of these projects (Mullaley 2011:27, Table 1; Thomas and Hibbs 1984). Excavations attempted to (1) characterize the material culture associated with the fur trade Village and U.S. Army use of the site, (2) identify and characterize important features of the Village area, and (3) identify some of the differences between Village houses to verify historical accounts of “ethnic neighborhoods” (Bray 1984:814-831). While Bray’s analysis was largely unsuccessful, there
were significant advances by the researchers, particularly in the description of material culture, the characteristics of house architecture, the description of other Village features, and a much better general understanding of the Village.

In 1993 and 1994, survey and test excavations sought to identify Village resources associated with a planned pedestrian crossing of State Route 14 (Thomas 1993, 1994). While never built as envisioned, these two small projects verified the presence and explored the extent of one of the houses identified by Kardas and Larrabee (House 4) and identified other areas associated with the southeastern portion of the Village. This project was the first to employ remote sensing data in the form of ground penetrating radar.

Current Research in the Village

Recent excavations by the National Park Service (NPS), Portland State University, and Washington State University Vancouver, combined with syntheses of previous work by scholars, are now providing new insights into the nature of the Fort Vancouver community. In 2001-2003, the NPS excavated within the Village with the goal of systematically collecting data across its area. Goals were to (1) identify any additional house sites that might be present within the area managed by the NPS, (2) confirm historical accounts, maps, and drawings of the site, (3) verify three of the house sites identified by Kardas and Larrabee (Houses 1-3), and (4) provide additional information for the development of a concept plan for the Village to support interpretive programs. The project intended to contribute to the restoration and reconstruction of the ca. 1829-1860 Village landscape (Gembala et al. 2004).

The archaeological project employed a field school during these years to survey systematically the site with 50 x 50 cm shovel test units in a grid pattern. In addition, NPS archaeologists and students collected a sample of a newly identified house site (House 5). National Park Service archaeologists established a grid spacing of 12 m to attempt to intersect houses based on the known size of previously excavated houses, as well as the likely “halo” of sheet trash that appears to be typical of these structures (e.g., Thomas and Hibbs 1984:153, Figures 14-21). Remote sensing specialists using ground penetrating radar, electrical resistivity, and magnetic gradiometry, among other techniques, surveyed the Village area in 2002 and 2003. NPS archaeologists extrapolated the distribution of square nails (hand wrought and machine cut) and other artifacts to identify likely loci of Hudson’s Bay Company houses (Figure 3). The outcome of the archaeological research (Gembala et al. 2004) was the identification of five previously unknown Village houses, identified as Houses 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, the relocation of Houses 1-3, originally found by Kardas, and the collection of a large sample of one of the newly discovered house sites (House 5).

As an early phase of this restoration and reconstruction project, the NPS built a historical fence line that delineates the eastern edge of the Village. Since then, two historic roads, two houses (House 1 and House 2), and some of the fence lines interior to the Village have been reconstructed. An outgrowth of the proposed pedestrian crossing of the 1990s, The Confluence Project and City of Vancouver partnered with the NPS to build the Vancouver Land Bridge, a 40 ft.-wide bridge crossing over State Route 14, in 2008. This crossing explores the Native American presence on the Columbia River prior to Lewis and Clark through art, landscape plantings, and interpretation, and the historical developments of the past 200 years, including the multicultural Village. While test excavations associated with the Land Bridge project found intact historical and precontact American
Indian cultural deposits within the State Route 14 right-of-way (Wilson 2005), construction was able to avoid these areas.

Figure 3. Distribution of square nails (hand wrought and machine cut) at the Village based on 2001-2003 excavations of 50x50 cm test units. High concentrations of square nails are suggestive of the location of Village houses and associated sheet trash (Gembala et al. 2004).

As a result of the I-5 bridge replacement (Columbia River Crossing) project, extensive test excavations took place within the Village site on lands managed by the NPS, the U.S. Army Reserve, and the Washington Department of Transportation in 2009 and 2010. NPS test excavations
confirmed the location of House 4 on NPS lands and the “Kanaka House” on U.S. Army Reserve property. NPS archaeologists located for the first time an additional house site within U.S. Army property (the “Joseph Tayenta House,” O’Rourke et al. 2010). In 2010, research associated with the field school continued, focused on better understanding the landscape of the Village. The goals of this research are to (1) locate and explore the attributes of more ephemeral, and perhaps seasonal or temporary, encampments, (2) to identify extra-house floor activity areas, and (3) to address the possibility of household economic specialization.

The following sections summarize some of the research results since 2000 as they pertain to the nature of the Village. This archaeological research has focused on inferring the ways of life of the community to enlarge upon and contrast with the sparse, biased, and sometimes contradictory written records. This discussion addresses the (1) spatial arrangement and development of the Village, (2) investment in and maintenance of houses, (3) relationship of ceramic artifacts to ethnicity and economic status, and (4) landscape use. These preliminary results provide a greater context for understanding this important community and its role in the colonial history of the Pacific Northwest.

**Spatial Arrangement and Development**

Following on the work of Monks (1992) Hamilton (2000), and Nelson (2007) explored the spatial structure of Fort Vancouver and interpreted the symbolic meanings tied to these patterns. His research suggests that the Hudson’s Bay Company arrayed the Fort stockade and its dwelling, business, and storage buildings to express symbolically the power of the elite managers of the Hudson’s Bay Company, including John McLoughlin. The Village houses, in contrast to the dwellings and offices inside the fort, were much smaller, built in a more rustic style. Likewise, their physical separation from the Fort by agricultural fields, orchards, and gardens physically and symbolically separated elite from non-elite classes (see Figure 1). Nelson suggests that the hierarchical system of status and occupation of the Hudson’s Bay Company was reinforced by the spatial layout. The managers of the Company placed their greatest investment on improvements in the stockade, fort structures, and gardens. The location of the Fort Stockade, where the Chief Factor, Chief Trader, and other “gentleman class” managers and their families lived rested in the middle of extensive agricultural fields. This situation contrasts with the Village, which rested on the western margins of Fort Plain Prairie with woods to the west, and the Hudson’s Bay Company docks and waterfront complex to the south (see Figure 1).

The Fort’s northwest bastion symbolically, if not in reality, guarded the furs, trade goods, and elite managers against any incursions from American immigrants or the villagers. The arrangement, condition, and plantings associated with Chief Factor McLoughlin’s formal garden, directly north of the fort, formed a symbolic control over wilderness (Dorset 2012), reinforcing the symbolic structure of the Fort and Village. The introduction of a 6-8 acre garden following English forms included a summerhouse and the maintenance of exotic food and flowering plants. This important symbol was a place that Villagers could not access unless they were working in it. The Roman Catholics initially held services in a warehouse inside the Fort Stockade, but built Saint James Mission on the northern edge of the Village, ca. 1844-1845 (Erigero 1992:125). This placed the church on the higher-elevation side of the Village, in a location that was symbolically superior but that tied it directly to the Village community (see Figure 1).
Mullaley’s (2011:214-216) research summarizes the development of the Village and its maintenance (Figure 4). Based on the analysis of fasteners, window glass-thickness distributions, and other architectural evidence, Mullaley suggests that the Village developed in the late 1820s and early 1830s in close proximity to the waterfront and the stockade areas. It then spread to the north and west. The final boom of construction and maintenance of houses appears to have coincided with the height of population at the site in the mid-1840s (and also with the construction of St. James Mission on its northern margins). Mullaley observes a significant period of maintenance in the early 1840s, which she ties to the increase in population, which mandated the continued use of aging buildings and the shifting economic focus of Fort Vancouver from the acquisition of fur-bearing animals to agricultural and retail pursuits. Areas on the peripheries of the Village appear to contain remnants of more temporary dwellings.

Prior to 1846, the layout of the Village, including its relationship to the Fort, reflected a British colonial fur-trade community. Even with development through time, the landscape reflected a hierarchical fur trade culture that developed out of eastern Canada and spread west with the British fur trading companies. None of the house sites appear to have been manufactured after 1846, coinciding with the settlement of the U.S. and Canadian boundary. As the Village declined, those houses that endured into the later 1850s tended to be those on its eastern margins (Mullaley 2011: 217).

**Investment in Houses**

Mullaley’s analysis suggests that many of the houses from the earlier, more fur trade focused economy of Fort Vancouver, conformed to French-Canadian and Métis architectural styles, including abundant evidence for *piéce-en-terre* (pile in the ground, earthfast) architecture with *pièce-sur-pièce* walls. There is also evidence for the *pièce-sur-pièce en queue d’aronde* style, likely with dovetail notching, and a few structures in the more substantial *poteaux-sur-sol* (post on sill) style of foundation similar to those found inside the fort stockade (e.g., Hoffman and Ross 1972; Hussey 1972). These houses were built in sizes consistent with the French Canadian *toise* unit of measurement (6.5 ft. [2 m]) and likely had earthen floors (Mullaley 2011:221). During the early 1840s, as the fur trade declined and industrial and retail activities at Fort Vancouver increased, many of the older fur trade employees retired to the Willamette Valley and elsewhere. New workers inhabited the Village and often reoccupied the old houses. Some houses show considerable renovation and investment in windows, roofs, and repairs, possibly tied to the presence of higher-wage and more elite tradesmen living in the Village (Mullaley 2011:222). While a hierarchical system by nature, it appears that higher wage earners, particularly in the later years, had the opportunity and means to upgrade their homes to suit their individual needs and tastes. The diversity of renovations is tied to a number of factors, including the turnover of employees and reuse of houses, and occupational status. That the community continued to reflect a British fur-trade identity, as reflected in its architectural styles, is important in defining its character during colonial settlement and how it contrasted with American settlements.
Figure 4. Development of the Village (from Mullaley 2011: 215).
Ceramic Analyses Related to Ethnicity and Economic Status

Cromwell’s (2006) study compared the ceramic assemblages of the Chief Factor’s House and Bachelor’s Hall privy, inside the Fort stockade, with four Village houses. He explored the relationship between the hierarchical structure of the Company and access of its employees (termed engages or “servants”) to ceramics. His study recognized that there was overall greater ethnic diversity in the Village, that the elites made significantly higher wages, and that the cost of goods was set significantly higher for the servant classes who would have lived in the Village. For example, on average a Chief Factor made nearly 15 times more per annum than a voyageur (Cromwell 2006:126, Table 14). The markup for imported ceramics was about 2000% above the Staffordshire price-fixing agreements. A gentleman (during the summer) would get an additional 25% markup, while a servant would get a 50% markup (Cromwell 2006:126-130). Native Hawaiians received a 200% markup. Given the relatively low wages of the employees, the cost of ceramics bought at the Company’s Sale Shop was a significant portion of their annual income. It is surprising, then, that there are so many Staffordshire ceramics present in the Village. Cromwell could not correlate the number of ceramic vessels in a household with its location either within the stockade or in the Village. While bandedware and cottageware vessels were found in higher relative frequencies, Cromwell found that well over 50% of the Village house assemblages were transfer-printed whiteware ceramics (Cromwell 2006:279-282). Likewise, he found no significant difference in the variety of ceramic patterns or colors between the Fort or Village, suggesting that many Village houses had matched sets or partially-matched sets of transferprint ceramics (Cromwell 2006:283-287). Interestingly, the bandedware and cottageware vessels are dominated by “slop bowl” forms, tied to the English tea ceremony. Cromwell’s analysis, however, indicated they contained usewear consistent with the consumption of soups or stews, a non-traditional use for a slop bowl (Cromwell 2006:290).

Teawares were the most expensive ceramic on sale at Fort Vancouver, so it is surprising that well over 50% of the Village household assemblages consisted of those ceramics (Cromwell 2006:291, Table 81). In spite of the reuse of slop bowls, noted above, the presence of teawares strongly suggests that the English tea ceremony was an important part of the lifeways of the Village.

Perhaps most surprising of Cromwell’s analyses, comparing the value of the ceramics based on the Staffordshire price-fixing agreements, the value of ceramics inside the Fort is not that much greater than for the Village households. There is even less of a difference when factoring the summer markups, which were greater for people living in the Village (Cromwell 2006:298-300). Cromwell (2006:301-315) argues persuasively that ceramics in the Village had tremendous social utility. He posits that people in the Village, particularly mothers, used ceramics to socialize their daughters in the values of the fur trade elite, including the British tea ceremony (see also Pollard 1990). Specifically, this is seen as a means for women to compete for status through the etiquette of the tea ceremony in fur trade society as posited by Burley (1989) for the Red River Métis. Cromwell also stresses that it enabled mixed-ethnicity families to become more “white” in the increasingly American culture surrounding them. Cromwell (312-315) suggests that during the 1840s, as American immigration increased, the demand for ceramics appears to have increased as a response to the need of Village families to adjudicate their changing status. Cromwell writes:

As the social prejudices increased against the wives and children of the voyageurs, the acquisition and use of these ceramic vessels may have been the perfect
combination of ‘ornament and function’ to fit into the rapidly changing social order. As shown above, it seems that the women of the Village would have received the greatest potential social benefit from the acquisition of these ceramic goods, making the presence of these ceramic vessel remains the greatest symbol of the presence of the women of the fur trade.

That ultimately this failed to prevent the decline and fall of the Fort Vancouver Village is not a testament to the inflexibility of the community or its qualities, but rather the racism and distrust leveled at the British presence by many Americans. Most of the Villagers were identified by the characteristics of race rather than their ability to practice the behaviors of Victorianism. Further, most were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to totally repudiate or disguise their past cultural affiliations.

### Landscape in the Village

Recent (and continuing) research has focused on extra-household areas with the goal of exploring the nature of landscape use within the Village (Wilson 2012). To date, the NPS, Portland State University, and Washington State University Vancouver have conducted two field schools focusing on this research topic. Over the 2010 and 2011 field seasons, archaeologists excavated 64 m$^2$ at the Village. While research on the landscape of the Village is continuing, a few results are reported below.

Archaeological research has sought to locate temporary camping areas or non-western style house sites, possibly related to the periodic seasonal surges of population tied to the fur brigades. Given the seasonal nature of the brigades, it is quite likely that sites with evidence of more sparse activities may be associated with these encampments. Many of the historical accounts of Village houses also indicate considerable variability in quality and construction of the houses, with higher quality dwellings, those that were probably more likely to contain quantities of nails and window glass, generally not attributed to American Indians or Native Hawaiians (see Nielson 2003). Ephemeral house sites could be important indicators of seasonal and/or ethnic housing at Fort Vancouver. One of these types of potential house sites has been found to the east of House 2, in a 1 x 4 m test trench block placed adjacent to a shovel test excavated in 2002 (ST46). Underneath the remains of a twentieth century Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) barracks, archaeologists identified a sparse Hudson’s Bay Company era deposit. Beneath this, a very irregular stain of burnt earth, charcoal, ash, fire-modified rock and gravels rested above the gray clay floor of a previously undocumented structure. This structure does not appear to be associated with the dense concentration of artifacts indicative of other houses within the Village. The western edge of the structure had a north-south running wooden sill or edge (Feature 141). The gray clay floor ran east of this and a posthole (Feature 138) intruded into the floor, perhaps indicating a *pieux-en-terre* structure. Directly to the west of this, excavators found a dog burial in a 100 x 60 cm pit (Figure 5). Kardas (1971) found a similar dog burial north of House 2.
Because much of the focus of excavations has been on finding and exploring houses, there is relatively less known about the activity areas and gardens that were present within the Village. Archaeological test excavations within the McLoughlin formal garden site in 2005-2007 identified methods for more broad-scale exploration of the fort’s surrounding landscape using hand-excavated test trenches, and the use of pollen, phytolith, and macrobotanical analyses (Dorset 2012). The results of similar test excavations in the Village in 2010 and 2011, so far indicate that activity areas are abundant in the Village. One example is from excavations associated with House 7. In 2010 a 2 x 2 m test unit was excavated adjacent to a 50 x 50 cm shovel test unit (ST86) which had contained evidence for the house in 2003. This excavation yielded a dense deposit of historical artifacts consistent with a house floor. Archaeologists recorded architectural debris (including hand wrought and machine cut nails and some window glass), personal and domestic items (including glass trade beads, buttons, buckles, mirror glass, lead shot, a gun flint, a percussion cap, clay pipe fragments, transfer-printed earthenware, bandedware, mochaware, cottageware, Chinese export porcelain, and a variety of vessel glass), and food remains (including calcined bones and macrobotanical remains). At the base of the house floor deposits, archaeologists defined a possible post mold in the southeast corner of the block (Feature 110). This confirms that the floor of House 7 is present in this area.

Archaeologists expanded the excavation in 2011 with an east-west 1 x 4 m trench extending west of the original 2 x 2 m block (with a 1-m baulk in between). The relatively dense deposit of Hudson’s Bay Company domestic artifacts associated with the house appeared to drop off somewhat to the west. However, a concentration of charcoal (Feature 127) accompanied these
artifacts and extended across much of the unit. On the eastern edge of the trench, archaeologists recorded a 70-cm-diameter hearth, possibly related to an outdoor cooking facility for House 7. Directly to the west of this, under Feature 127, the excavators uncovered another dog burial (Feature 135) wrapped in what appears to be the remains of a green fabric blanket. On the easternmost edge of the trench, the archaeologists found a reconstructable ceramic transferprinting vessel within the trash scatter of Hudson’s Bay Company artifacts associated with a shallow posthole (Feature 131). Lastly, the excavators noted the edge of a pit or trench in the center of the excavation unit on its southern edge. The density of features within this 1 x 4 m trench is surprising and suggests an active area immediately west of House 7. There was little to indicate any transition to a garden or “door yard” within the fenced space adjacent to House 7.

Examination of period sketches and maps suggests that certain houses, including House 7, had attached fenced areas. Historical records are largely mute on the function of these fenced areas, or any of the Villagers’ economic pursuits outside of work hours, or more mundane, but critical aspects of their lives. The results of investigations to understand the landscape pertain to the question of economic specialization within the Village itself. While it was initially assumed that the fenced areas were yards or gardens to exclude free-ranging animals, the presence of numerous features, including smudge pits, hearths, storage pits, and sometimes abundant sheet trash, suggests a more complicated function for these fenced areas.

Excavations around two of the fenced areas associated with House 2 and House 7 contain a dearth of Hudson’s Bay Company artifacts, possibly consistent with a dooryard or garden. Interestingly, one of these is within a fenced area and another is outside of it. Pollen analyses are being undertaken by the Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston and these may help to determine if garden areas are present and what types of plants may have been cultivated. Regardless, the work to date suggests that the areas away from the houses are rich in a variety of features, concentrations of artifacts and abundant microartifacts.

Conclusion

The history of the Village continues to shape modern relations between indigenous peoples and other Americans in the region. Modern American Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian groups are acutely aware of the significance of the Village and its ties to their living communities. Partly because of cultural resources issues such as the management of the Hudson’s Bay Company cemetery and the restoration and interpretation of the Village, tribal groups have been vocal about their connections to the site. In 2010, for example, tribal members spoke about the significance of the site when attending the opening celebration of the reconstruction of the Village. Likewise, the NPS understands the importance of the Village stories in reaching out to non-traditional park users, including urban youth. The ability to use science to understand an ethnically diverse community, whose history is under-represented, resonates with visitors (Figure 6). There are opposing views, however, that speak to the continuing contested nature of the space and the persistence of racism in the Portland/Vancouver community. Recent graffiti on the Vancouver Land Bridge reflects some of this opposition (Figure 7). The irony is obvious when twenty-first century racists paint crass and hate-filled messages at the site of the most diverse nineteenth century community in the Pacific Northwest.
Figure 6. National Park Service staff and university students interpreting their finds to young visitors in 2010 (NPS/Fort Vancouver National Historic Site).

Figure 7. Racist tagging on an interpretive panel of the Vancouver Land Bridge, October 2011 (NPS/Fort Vancouver National Historic Site).
Regardless, the archaeological evidence from the Village provides insights into the unique fur trade community at Fort Vancouver, one that is tied to the history of the Hudson’s Bay and North West Companies, but also one that incorporated significant ethnic diversity. While the elites of the Hudson’s Bay Company imposed the structure of the fort, its settings, and surrounding landscape, perhaps to maintain the economic and social hierarchy, the homes of the Village reflect a separate community that both supported the economic endeavors of the company and wielded its own economic and social power. The Villagers built homes in a variety of styles, many of them tied to French-Canadian fur trade traditions, they adjusted their community as the structure of the Company changed, and utilized a variety of activity spaces that appear to represent endeavors outside of work. They purchased expensive transfer-printed earthenware, perhaps partially as a strategy for survival in a changing world. These interpretations of an important fur trade community beg comparison with people today, whose desires and needs for possessions, the need to adapt to new economic and social conditions, and the need to form identity and community are not unlike those in the nineteenth century Village.

We are left with the enduring issues of an imperfect historical record. Historical archaeology can help us to understand places associated with difficult and contested history. The Village is a place where historical archaeologists explore a unique and enduring place to recover the roots of the Pacific Northwest’s unique heritage.

Works Cited

Addis, Cameron

Beckham, Stephen Dow

Bray, Tamara

British and American Joint Commission (BAJC)
1867 *Evidence for the United States in the Matter of the Claims of the Hudson’s Bay and Puget’s Sound Agricultural Companies, Pending Before the British and American Joint Commission for the Final Settlement of the Same*. M’Gill and Witherow, Washington D.C.

Brooks, Cheryl A.
Burley, David V.  

Carley, Caroline D.  

Caywood, Louis R.  

Chance, David H. and Jennifer V. Chance  

Chance, David H. (editor)  

Chapman, Judith Sanders  

Cromwell, Robert John  
2006 “Where Ornament and Function are so Agreeably Combined”: Consumer Choice Studies of English Ceramic Wares at Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Vancouver. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY.

De Morris, Amalia Alarcon, and Paul Leistner  

Deur, Douglas  
2012 An Ethnohistorical Overview of Groups with Ties to Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. Ms. Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, National Park Service, Vancouver, WA.

Dorset, Elaine  
2012 *We Were Soon Conducted by the Doctor to His Garden...*: The Diverse Roles of the Hudson’s Bay Company Garden. Master’s thesis, Department of Anthropology, Portland State University, Portland, OR.

Erigero, Patricia C.  
Gembala, Danielle D.M., Robert J. Cromwell, and Douglas C. Wilson
2004 Results of the Systemwide Archaeological Inventory Project Excavations in the HBC Village Site (45CL300), Fort Vancouver National Historic Site 2001-2003. Ms., Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, National Park Service, Vancouver, WA.

Hamilton, Scott

Hunt, Robert S.

Hussey, John A.


Kane, Paul
1859 *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America: From Canada to Vancouver’s Island and Oregon Through the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Territory and Back Again*. Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts: London.

Kardas, Susan

Langford, Theresa E.

Little, Barbara
2007 *Historical Archaeology: Why the Past Matters*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Maben, Manly

Marino, Cesare
Monks, Gregory G.  

Mullaley, Meredith J.  
2011 Rebuilding the Architectural History of the Fort Vancouver Village. Master’s thesis, Department of Anthropology, Portland State University, Portland, OR.

Nelson, Peter  
2007 Power and Place: The Dynamics of Non-Verbal Communication in the Human-Landscape Interrelationship at Fort Vancouver. Senior Honors Thesis (Curtis Wienker Award), Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

Nielsen, Rebecca  
2003 Architectural Traditions and Outbuildings of the Hudson’s Bay Company Village at Fort Vancouver. Ms., Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, National Park Service, Vancouver, WA.

O’Rourke, Leslie M, Todd A. Miles, and Douglas C. Wilson  
2010 Results of National Park Service Archaeological Evaluation and Testing on the Vancouver National Historic Reserve for the Columbia River Crossing Project. *Northwest Cultural Resources Institute Report No. 8*. Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, National Park Service, Vancouver, WA.

Peterson – del Mar, David  

Rich, E. E.  
1941 *The letters of John McLoughlin, from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee; First Series, 1825-38*. Champlain Society, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Pollard, Juliet Thelma  

Satterfield, Archie, and David Lavender  

Shine, Gregory Paynter  
Singer, Audrey, Susan W. Hardwick, and Caroline B. Brettell, editors  

Steele, Harvey W.  

Steele, Harvey W., Lester A. Ross, and Charles H. Hibbs, Jr.  
1975 Fort Vancouver Excavations XII: OAS Sale Shop Excavation. Ms., Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, Vancouver, WA.

Taylor, Quintard  

Thomas, Bryn  


Thomas, Bryn, Charles Hibbs, Jr., and others  

Whaley, Gray H.  

Williams, Melissa E. E.  
Wilson, Douglas C.


Wilson, Douglas C., and Theresa E. Langford, Editors