

FORT NISQUALLY

A Brief History

In the spring of 1832, during a routine trip between Fort Langley and Fort Vancouver, Chief Trader Archibald McDonald of the London-based Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) paused for a few days on the Nisqually River. Under orders to find a suitable location for the establishment of a post in the lower Puget Sound region, McDonald supervised the construction of a storehouse and left several servants in charge with a couple of kegs of potatoes, garden seeds and blankets for trade.

The following spring McDonald oversaw the construction of a large walled wooden fortification a short distance inland on the grassy plateau east of the original landing site. For the next six years, Fort Nisqually was an outpost of the fur trade that drove the HBC across the North American continent in pursuit of beaver pelts. The main suppliers of the furs were local native tribes who took a fancy to the wool blankets, guns and other manufactured goods offered by the HBC.

The decline of the fur trade in the late 1830s and the high cost of supplying the distant HBC operations spurred the Company to look for new sources of revenue. Fort Nisqually became the headquarters of a subsidiary called the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, formed to oversee the production of grain, produce and livestock for local consumption, as well as export up and down the West Coast.

To take advantage of more open land and fresh water, Fort Nisqually was moved inland a mile from its original site in the early 1840s. The fort standing today in Point Defiance Park is a reproduction of this second site.

A treaty between the United States and Great Britain, signed in 1846, extended a border along the 49th parallel to the Pacific Ocean and left the HBC operating on foreign soil and contending with the influx of American settlers. By the late 1860s marginal profits no longer compensated for the mounting harassment from American revenue agents, tax collectors and settlers. In 1869, Fort Nisqually was closed. The United States paid the Hudson's Bay Company \$650,000 for all its American properties.

In the following years, the land on which Fort Nisqually stood changed hands several times. Only the Factor's House and the Granary avoided the disrepair and decay that befell the rest of the structures. In the early 1930s, the Dupont Company, then owners of the property on which Fort Nisqually stood, donated the remaining buildings to civic-minded citizens. With the help of New Deal federal work relief programs, the fort was reconstructed in Point Defiance Park on land owned by the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma.

Open to the public since 1940, the fort is owned and operated by the Metropolitan Park District. Fort Nisqually stands today as a memorial to the servants of the honorable company of gentleman out of Hudson's Bay who risked their "hides for skins" in the Pacific Northwest.

FORT NISQUALLY ca. 1855

KITCHEN

Originally constructed 1851

Located in close proximity to Dr Tolmie's house for efficient service, the kitchen contained a large cooking stove and an attached lean-to addition for the blacksmith shop and a bakery. The kitchen served meals to lother fort workers as well as the Tolmie family and visitors.

TYEE HOUSE

Originally constructed 1843/1844

Dr. Tolmie's original residence and the gentlemen's dining hall until construction of the Factor's House in 1854; the Tyee House was torn down shortly thereafter.

LABORERS' DWELLING

This non-historic sturcture represents the living quarters of workers at Fort Nisqually.

LARGE STORE

Originally constructed 1844

The "large store" warehoused supplies and trade goods imported from Britain before distribution to other HBC forts throughout the region. It also stored agricultural products and bales of furs for export.

Fort Meadow

WASH HOUSE

Originally constructed 1854

This structure served as the laundry for fort workers

CLERKS' HOUSE

Originally constructed 1849 and 1853

The clerks at Fort Nisqually had a separate dwelling house. This structure also contained an office and occasionally housed important visitors.

FACTOR'S HOUSE

Constructed 1855

This original building was built for Dr. Tolmie and his growing family. His house was built in the new "Yankee Style" instead of the standard post-in-sill, heavy-timber style used in the majority of Fort Nisqually's other structures.

STORE HOUSE #2

Originally constructed 1846

Much like the Large Store, this building was historically used for the storage of goods; it is currently used as a working blacksmith shop demonstrating how tools and hardware were made for company use and trade.

MAIN ENTRANCE

GRANARY

Constructed 1850

An original HBC building and one of the oldest standing buildings in the state of Washington, the Granary was erected as a storage facility for the large annual harvests of the fort's produce and grain.

MEN'S DWELLING HOUSE

Originally constructed 1845/46

Used to house single male laborers, these dwellings were partitioned into separate rooms.

BASTIONS/PICKETS

Originally constructed 1848

The primary purpose of the bastions and pickets was for defense of the fort, bastions also served occasionally as jails and living quarters.

SALE SHOP

Originally constructed 1848

This building contained a wide range of goods traded to Native Americans. The early American settlers also came to purchase food and supplies.

