

“ . . . a very neat and beautiful village”:
The Village at Fort Vancouver

Introduction:

In 1824, the Hudson’s Bay Company established Fort Vancouver on the north bank of the Columbia River, near present-day Vancouver, Washington. George Simpson, the company’s governor for all of North America, initially saw Fort Vancouver as just one of the company’s many fur-trading posts in a long string of such posts that spilled across the northern landscape from the mouth of the Columbia River to Hudson’s Bay. Fort Vancouver’s first chief factor, Dr. John McLoughlin, did not agree with Simpson. In McLoughlin’s opinion, Fort Vancouver was to be the administrative center of the Company’s Columbia Department, an area comprising 700,000 square miles of present-day British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest. Under McLoughlin’s leadership, the Columbia Department would eventually stretch from the Russian American Fur Company in present-day Sitka, Alaska south to Spanish California, from the Rocky Mountains west to the Pacific Ocean, and across the Pacific to Honolulu, Hawai’i. ¹

¹The Hudson’s Bay Company established Fort Vancouver just 19 years after the 33-member Corps of Discovery, under the leadership of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, passed by the area. There are a number of excellent histories about the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Columbia Department and about Fort Vancouver. This brief introduction [p. 1-3] is based primarily on the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site’s website--www.nps.gov/fova—and these works:

Hussey, John A. **The History of Fort Vancouver and Its Physical Structure**. Portland: Abbott, Kerns and Bell, 1957.

Mack, Lois. **One Place Across Time: The Vancouver National Historic Reserve**. Vancouver: Vancouver National Historic Trust Reserve, 2001.

Satterfield, Archie and David Lavender. **Fort Vancouver**. Washington DC: National Park Service, 1991.

As the Chief Factor, McLoughlin created a well-built, self-sustaining international business community at Fort Vancouver, a business community that was a confluence of natural resources, agricultural commodities and manufactured goods—furs, lumber and salted salmon, crops, dairy products and livestock, and wood, iron, and tin tools, household goods and trade goods. From Fort Vancouver, the business of selling and trading these commodities stretched across the Pacific Ocean to Hawai'i, north to the Russian colonies in Alaska and south to Spanish California, to the native peoples living along the west coast, across the Atlantic Ocean to London, England, and across North America to the Hudson's Bay Company many fur-trading posts.

To accommodate the needs of this diverse business community, Chief Factor John McLoughlin and later, James Douglas, directed twenty years of construction at Fort Vancouver, constantly expanding, remodeling and repairing the Fort's stockade and the buildings within the stockade, as well as the buildings and fences in the outlying areas. Inside the fort were dwellings and offices for the Company's "gentlemen," shops for craftspeople [bakers, coopers, tanners, and blacksmiths], and the support buildings necessary for the fur trade and the

company's other business ventures.² There were saw mills and grist mills on Mill Creek, located about six miles east of the Fort, acres of grazing land and fields of wheat, peas, timothy, potatoes, and other crops, an orchard and a large "kitchen garden." There was a boat-building business and boat sheds by the pond, near the Columbia River.

Building a Business at Fort Vancouver:

At Fort Vancouver, the challenge with each particular business venture was the prerequisite set of necessary structures and tools, skilled technicians, and unskilled laborers before the actual business could begin. Often, one business activity built upon another. For example, in order to build the blacksmith shop, Hawaiian laborers called Kanakas³ cut timber in the hills north of the Fort. They used teams of oxen to haul the logs to the water-powered

²The Hudson's Bay Company maintained a strict hierarchy of employees. The Chief Factor [i.e., John McLoughlin and later, James Douglas] were the Company's highest ranking officers. In addition to an annual salary, they were entitled to just under 1% of the Company's annual profits. The Chief Trader [James Douglas] might be the second-in-command at a post as large as Fort Vancouver; at smaller posts, the chief trader was in effect the "chief factor." Chief traders earned an annual salary and about .5% of the annual profits.

The clerks' salaries and responsibilities varied. They were the administrative backbone of the Hudson's Bay Company, and were often responsible for the fort's inventories and accounts, and employee's records. At Fort Vancouver, the factors, traders, professionals [physicians, teachers, religious leaders] and clerks, and their families lived in the fort. These men were the Hudson's Bay Company's "gentlemen."

The Company's unskilled workers were known variously as laborers, servants, engagés, and middlemen. Laborers were primarily the farm workers, but they might be further identified by a particular skill—baker, cooper, blacksmith, seaman, tinner. Middlemen were the paddlers in the middle of the canoe; the middle position required the least amount of paddling skills. At Fort Vancouver, the unskilled workers and their families lived in the Village outside the stockade or close to their work [www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical].

³The Hawaiian referred to themselves as **Kānaka Maoli**, meaning "the people." The word is used here as they used it, with respect.

saw mills, where one of the millwrights [i.e., William Cannon] and a crew of Kanaka sawyers⁴ cut the logs into timbers. The lumber was then hauled to the fort, where a carpenter directed another crew of servants in the actual construction of the blacksmith shop and the installation of the forges, tool racks and storage shelves. Only then could blacksmiths such the French-Canadian Joseph Ovide Beauchamp or George Aitken from The Orkney Islands⁵ and their assistants fashion nails, axes and hatchets, beaver traps, farm tools, and trade goods. One blacksmith's apprentice was a Kanaka named Kaihi, who worked at the Fort Vancouver blacksmith shop from mid-1849 to 1851.⁶

At the Company's wharf on the Columbia River, other servants unloaded supplies--coal, iron bar, and anvils--from one of the company's supply ships recently arrived from London. Using two-wheeled, oxen-drawn carts, they hauled the materials up the road, through the village, and into the fort. These teams of oxen required herders, pasture and shelter. The Fort's carpenters built the carts; men working in the saddle and harness shop made some of the equipment the cart drivers needed.

In each business, from the farms to the blacksmith shop to the bakery to the fur trade, some of the tools and materials were shipped from England. In response to Governor

⁴ Jean Barman and Bruce McIntyre Watson, **Leaving Paradise: Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest, 1787-1898** [Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996].

A perusal of the roster in **Leaving Paradise** shows a number of Kanaka sawyers—Cawanaia [p. 234], George Faito [p. 245], Fooina [p. 246], and Marouna [p. 345] to name just a few.

⁵ www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical [Aitken, George; Beauchamp, Joseph Ovide].
John A. Hussey, **Historic Structures Report: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, Volume 2** [Denver: National Park Service, 1976], 193, 200.

⁶ Barman and Watson, 272.
Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 218.

Simpson's economic policies, most tools used at Fort Vancouver, and throughout the Columbia Department, were soon "country made" by the blacksmiths, coopers, "tanners" [tinsmiths] and other craftspeople and their assistants at the Fort. These same skilled craftsmen also turned out many of the trade goods the Hudson's Bay Company used in the fur trade.

The Hudson's Bay Company's "Servants":

The Hudson's Bay Company called the unskilled workers they recruited from French-speaking Canada, the British Isles and the Kingdom of Hawai'i, "servants." Other terms that appear in the Hudson's Bay Company employee rosters include laborers, middlemen, and engagés.⁷ Many of the men were Métis, or "mixed heritage," meaning their parents were Euro-American, Kanaka, and American Indian.

Guided by supervisors and specialists, these servants provided the manual labor to construct the fort and its dwellings, storehouses, stores, service buildings, and stockade, as well as the farm buildings and fences, the mills, the wharf, and the boats. They paddled canoes filled with trade goods, reports, letters, and furs across North America, between Fort Vancouver and the Company's other North American fur-trading posts. Some served as seamen and "sloopers" on the ships that plied the coast of North America in the Company's coastal trade from Alaska to California. Others served on ships sailing between England, the northwest coast

⁷An alphabetical roster of many of the Hudson's Bay Company employees is found in the Company's archives at www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical. Each listing includes the employee's name[s], tenure, position, and posting[s] with the Company, as well as any known family information.

An alphabetical roster of the Company's Hawaiian [Kanaka] servants can be found in Barman and Watson's book, **Leaving Paradise**, 219-433.

and Hawai'i. They trapped furs, plowed, planted, and harvested the fields, orchards and kitchen garden, herded sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs, and cut and sawed timber. Servants earned £10 to £17 per year, more if they were skilled or willing to take on additional work.⁸ The men worked a six-day work week; much to the chagrin of the Fort's religious leaders, the servants used the Sabbath to pursue personal interests, to work odd jobs, and to tend their homes and small gardens.⁹

The servants also received a weekly ration of food. The weekly ration varied from fur-trading post to fur-trading post in the Columbia Department and from year to year. In general, this ration included 21 to 63 pounds of dried or salted salmon and a bushel of potatoes or 10.5 pounds of "biscuit." If the men preferred, they could have seven quarts of dried corn or 21 pounds of dried peas, and 14 ounces of lard.¹⁰ Families supplemented the men's weekly ration with small gardens, hunting, fishing, and foraging.

It was these hard-working men, with their wives and children, who lived in the Village located west of the Fort's stockade walls.

⁸John A. Hussey, **The Fort Vancouver Farm**, TMs [photocopy], 157, 190, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site Library and Archives, Vancouver, WA.
www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical

For example, Adolphe Chamberlain earned "a gratuity" for his work as the Catholic Church clerk in 1839 and as a tinsmith in 1840-1841. Peter Wagner received a similar gratuity for his work as a cowherd in 1828 and as a butcher in 1829.

⁹Barman and Watson, 129.

¹⁰James R. Gibson, **Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country, 1786-1846** [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985], 19, 23.

Hussey, **Farm**, 2, 40.

John A. Hussey, "The Women of Fort Vancouver," **Oregon Historical Quarterly** 92, no. 3 [Fall 1991], 286.

“ . . . a very neat and beautiful village”:

The Village at Fort Vancouver was a bustling community, filled with the sights and sounds of many different cultures brought together by the Hudson’s Bay Company. This confluence of cultures was reflected in the residents’ languages, clothing, dwellings, and religious beliefs.

From the Hawaiian Islands came the “Kanaka Maoli,” skilled swimmers, boatmen, and farmers. From eastern Canada came the Iroquois and the French-speaking engagés, skilled boatmen, tradesmen, and trappers. From the British Isles, including Scotland and the far northern islands of Orkney and the Hebrides, came clerks, craftspeople, seaman and sloopers. From the lands near Fort Vancouver came Upper Chinook, Chehalis, and Cowlitz people.

The village has been described as:

*“ . . . thirty or forty log huts, which are occupied by the Canadians, and others attached to the establishment. These huts are placed in rows, with broad lanes or streets between them, and the whole looks like a very neat and beautiful village.”*¹¹

The servants were responsible for building their own homes, and for acquiring the materials they needed for foundations, walls, roofs, and chimneys. With the help of friends and some of the Fort’s specialists, families constructed their one to three-room homes with the

¹¹Gibson, 34.
Mack, 41, 58, 64, 68, 81.
www.nps/fova/historyculture, “Places—The Village,” 2006.

The naturalist John Kirk Townsend visited Fort Vancouver in 1832, and it was he who described the village as “*very neat and beautiful*.” A perusal of some of the maps, illustrations and photographs made of the Village from the 1830’s to the 1860’s show the growth and changes there [see Mack, above].

skills and resources they had, incorporating some of their own cultural traditions as they worked.

In the early 1800's, most Euro-American homes were still small, about 12' x 16.' In Hawai'i, houses varied in size; most were no larger than 12' x 24'. Most of the homes in the Village measured 20' x 20.'¹² There was a minimal amount of furniture; each piece often did double duty as storage and as furnishings for daily living.¹³ Residents furnished their homes with household goods they made, such as baskets, mats, and wood storage containers. Employees could also purchase tools, clothing, foodstuffs [coffee, tea, sugar], and such household items as blankets, nails, window panes, candlesticks, and kettles at the company's "sale shop."¹⁴ Some of these goods were imported from England and Hawai'i; other goods were "country made." As time and resources permitted, families might add a ceiling, glass window panes, and cupboards or shelves.¹⁵

Not all the servants lived in the Village. Many preferred to live close to their work. There were homes for the millers at the grist mills, for the sawmill operators and sawyers at the

¹²Theresa Langford, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

Staff and volunteers at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site continue to conduct archaeological work at the Village site, and today, they are reconstructing some of the homes.

¹³Herb Kawainui Kāne, **Ancient Hawai'i** [Captain Cook, HI: The Kawainui Press, 1997], 62-64, 70-71. Virginia & Lee McAlester, **A Field Guide to American Houses** [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998], 5, 65. Donnell J. Rogers, "Ku on the Columbia: Hawaiian Laborers in the Pacific Northwest Fur Industry" [Master's Thesis, Oregon State University, 1993], 24. Jacqueline B. Williams, **The Way We Ate: Pacific Northwest Cooking, 1843-1900** [Pullman: WSU Press, 1996], 3-5.

¹⁴John E. Hussey, **Historic Structures Report: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, Volume 1** [Denver: National Park Service, 1972], 185, 188-189, 217-230.

¹⁵Williams, 6-7, 10, 13.

sawmills, for the dairymen at the Sauvie Island dairies, and above the bakery, sleeping quarters for the baker.¹⁶ Scattered across the land were small huts for the shepherds tending cattle, sheep and oxen.

As the Iroquois, French-Canadian, Kanaka, and Orkney men settled into married life, à la façon du pays, and their families grew, they might expand their homes with a half-story addition, a finished attic or an attached shed-roof extension.¹⁷

Marriage à la façon du pays:

In the early days of the Hudson's Bay Company, company officials discouraged marriages between their employees and the area's native peoples. Despite the policy, the men did meet, court, and marry native women, "à la façon du pays"—"after the fashion of the country." Most often, Hudson's Bay employees married women from the tribes closest to the Hudson's Bay Company fort they were assigned to, at that time. Thus, many of the men assigned to Fort Vancouver married, à la façon du pays, women from the Cowlitz, Upper Chinook, and Chehalis tribes.

With an appreciation of fur trade diplomacy, the men were careful to observe the tribal traditions of marriage, including the proper approach to the girl's older male relatives, the

¹⁶Hussey, **Historic Structures 1**, 59-60, 165-166.
Historic Structures 2, 151-152.

¹⁷McAlester, 28

exchange of gifts, and the role of the company employee as a good husband and son-in-law.¹⁸ Some of the men provided for their families in the event of their death in the dangerous work world of the fur trade,¹⁹ and saw to the education and apprenticeships of their sons and the education, domestic training, and marriage of their daughters to company employees.²⁰

Many of the marriages à la façon du pays were long-lasting. Fort Vancouver's retiring employees often chose to remain in the northwest with their wives and families and sometimes, their wives' extended families. They settled in the Willamette Valley and the Canadian San Juan Islands where they established small farms, worked intermittently for the Hudson's Bay Company, and raised their families.²¹

¹⁸Sylvia Van Kirk, **Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870** [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980], 28-30, 36.

See also:

John A. Hussey, "The Women of Fort Vancouver," **Oregon Historical Quarterly** 92, no. 3 [Summer 1991].

¹⁹Van Kirk, 45.

²⁰Van Kirk, 95, 99

Stephen Woolworth, " 'The School is Under My Direction': The Politics of Education at Fort Vancouver, 1836-1838 ," **Oregon Historical Quarterly** 104, no. 2 [Summer 2003] : 27.

²¹For a history of the retiring Kanakas, see Jean Barman, "New Land, New Lives: Hawaiian Settlement in British Columbia," **The Hawaiian Journal of History** 29 [1995] : 1-32.

For a roster of some of the Company's French Canadian retirees in the Willamette Valley, see Stephenie Flora, "Emigrants to Oregon Prior to 1839" at www.oregonpioneers.com.

For a thoughtful look at the challenges the company's retirees faced, see Susan Armitage, "Making Connections: Gender, Race and Place in Oregon County" in **One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests** ed. By Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus [Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2008], 55-79.

The Hudson's Bay Company soon realized that men with a solid family life, with a wife and children, were far more likely to remain in the company's employ, and to remain content.²²

As Chief Factor James Douglas noted of his own marriage to Amelia Connolly:

*"There is indeed no living with comfort in this country until a person has forgot the great world and has his tastes and character formed on the current standards of the state . . . habit makes it familiar to us, softened as it is by the many tender ties, which find a way to the heart . . ."*²³

"Social Services" at Fort Vancouver:

As the chief factor, McLoughlin encouraged parents to see to their children's academic education, religious and moral upbringing, and manual training. In the early years at the Fort, McLoughlin set aside a classroom in one of the fort's buildings and hired a succession of teachers, including John Ball, Solomon Smith, Cyrus Shepard, and George B. Roberts²⁴. By far the greatest challenge each teacher faced was the students' numerous languages, from the Algonquin of the Iroquois, the Gaelic spoken by the men from Scotland and the Orkney and

²²Van Kirk, 36, 53.

²³John English and Réal Bélanger, eds. **Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online** [Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008], James Douglas, Dr. John McLoughlin, and Jean-Etienne Wadden.

Hussey, "Women," 274-275.

Van Kirk, front piece, 111-112.

Amelia Connolly was the daughter of Chief Factor William Connolly and Connolly's Cree wife, Suzanne Pas-de-Nom. Douglas might also have been speaking of Dr. John McLoughlin's marriage to Marguerite Wadden McKay.

²⁴Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 290-292.

Hebrides Islands, the French of the French-Canadians, the Hawaiian of the Kanakas, and the English of British employees. With few exceptions, the children's mothers were from northwest tribes--Upper Chinook, Chehalis and Cowlitz, each speaking her own language. Teachers found the most common linguistic thread inside the fort was French.²⁵ In the village, the most common thread was Chinook Wawa. Chinook Wawa was [and is] the trade language of the Northwest Coast, and in itself is a confluence of cultures, world views and languages—Chinook, Nootka, Chehalis, French and English. It is said words of Hawaiian, Russian, and Spanish may also be found in Chinook Wawa.²⁶

McLoughlin expected the teachers to welcome the sons **and** the daughters of **all** the company's employees, including the servants. Mornings in the classroom were devoted to basic studies; afternoons were devoted to manual training. Boys worked in the fort's seven-acre garden; girls learned domestic skills, including sewing and housekeeping.²⁷ In his autobiography, John Ball noted he:

*"found the boys docile and attentive and making good progress."*²⁸

The Hudson's Bay Company provided their employees with an annual salary, paid in cash and in goods, a weekly ration of food, and medical care. A medical doctor was assigned to

²⁵Woolworth, 7.

²⁶See for example, Edward H. Thomas, **Chinook: A History and Dictionary**. Portland: Binfords & Mort, 1970 [1935].

²⁷Hussey, **Farm**, 196.
Woolworth, 22.

²⁸John Ball, **The Autobiography of John Ball** [Grand Rapids: The Dean Hicks Co., 1925].

Fort Vancouver, and there were two hospitals at the fort, one inside the stockade for the “gentlemen” and their families and one near the village for the servants and Native Americans, and their families.²⁹ Employees may have had to purchase clothing, household goods, and tools, but medical care and medicine was provided at no charge.³⁰ When Dr. William Tolmie arrived at Fort Vancouver in May of 1833, he was assigned a Kanaka assistant, Namahama.³¹

By the early 1830’s, some of the French-Canadian servants had retired from the Hudson’s Bay Company. With their families, they moved to the Willamette Valley, where they built homes, established small farms, and earned additional income, trapping and working intermittently at Fort Vancouver. In January of 1834 and again in February of the following year, some of these French-Canadian retirees wrote to the Catholic bishop at Red River [Canada], requesting a priest. It was not until November 24, 1838, that Fathers Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers arrived at Fort Vancouver, where they received a warm welcome.³²

²⁹Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 45, 67-69.
Mack, 81.

According to one map, “Fort Vancouver and Village in 1846,” the village hospital was south and east of the Village, on the east side on the pond. The map is based on a drawing Richard Covington made of the area in 1855.

³⁰Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 69.

³¹Barman and Watson, 85, 360.
Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 87.

³²Wilfred P. Schoenberg, **A History of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest, 1743-1983** [Washington DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987], 20, 22, 27.

At the Fort, the two Catholic fathers administered to the religious needs of the Company's Catholic employees, including some 26 French-Canadians and Iroquois servants. The two priests baptized the employees' wives and children, and married couples who had been living à la façon du pays. They offered religious instruction, performed mass, and buried the dead in the Fort's cemetery.³³

For those so inclined, there were often three different religious services each Sunday at Fort Vancouver. The Catholic priests performed Mass, first in one of the fort's old buildings, and by 1846, in their own church at the fort, St. James. One of the chief factors offered prescribed readings from the Church of England³⁴ and William Kaulehelehe offered Christian-Hawaiian services in the Owyhee Church. Many Native Americans, as well as some of the Kanakas, retained their own spiritual beliefs.³⁵

In the summer of 1844, McLoughlin wrote to the Hudson's Bay Company's agent stationed in Honolulu, asking for:

³³For a chronological record of the fathers' baptisms, marriages, and burials, see Mikell de Lores Wormell Warner and Harriet D. Minnick, **Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: Vancouver, Volumes I and II, and Stellamaris Mission**, [St. Paul, OR: French Prairie Press, 1972].

The French-speaking priests were careful to note as much information as they could about each individual they tended. They frequently spelled unfamiliar personal names and tribal affiliations phonetically. Native women were often given their tribal name as their last name; Kanaka men, the last name "Kanaka" or some form of "Owyhee," a phonetic spelling of Hawai'i. Children were given their father's last name.

For example, on June 17, 1839, the priests married Joseph Plouf, a French-Canadian blacksmith, and Thérèse, the daughter of Makaina ["Owyhee"] and Louise [Chehalis] [**Volume I**, 44]. On October 4, 1840, they baptized Henrietta, the young daughter of Pahapale Wyee and a Cascades woman [**Volume 1**, 61], and on December 28, 184, they baptized André, the son of Charles Kanack[a] and his wife, Nancy [**Volume II**, 28].

³⁴Woolworth, 8.

³⁵E. Momilani Naughton, "Hawaiians in the Fur Trade: Cultural Influence on the Northwest Coast, 1811-1875," [Master's Thesis, Western Washington University, 1983], 41-43.
Rogers, 2.

“ . . . a trusty, educated Hawaiian of good character to read scriptures and assemble his people for public worship.”

The agent wrote back to McLoughlin, recommending William Kaulehelehe and his wife, Mary Kaai. McLoughlin expected the couple to provide religious services, education, and moral guidance for the Kanaka men working at the Fort, and to serve as interpreters, for £40 per year.³⁶

McLoughlin allowed Kaulehelehe to use the school house for the Kanakas’ Sunday services, and soon, the building was known as the “Owyhee Church.”³⁷ Life was not easy for this missionary couple, whose strict Protestant views of the Sabbath conflicted with the Kanaka workers’ cultural and religious beliefs. The Kanakas also expected Kaulehelehe to help them resolve their differences with the Hudson’s Bay Company and its employees. After a short stay in the Village, Kaulehelehe and his wife moved into the Fort.³⁸

³⁶Barman and Watson, 129, 263, 302-303.
Naughton, 44.

³⁷Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 289.

³⁸Barman and Watson, 131-132, 152, 171-172.

Kānaka Maoli:

The Kānaka Maoli³⁹ arrived in the Pacific Northwest with the earliest fur traders, John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company. During the subsequent buyouts and mergers of the various fur-trading companies, the Kanakas remained in the northwest. By 1821, they found themselves working for the Hudson’s Bay Company, and the Hudson’s Bay Company found themselves with a group of hard-working men with some of the skills the Company needed in the Columbia Department.

What was it that brought Kānaka Maoli across the Pacific Ocean to the Pacific Northwest? For centuries, Polynesians had sailed eastward, seeking new lands. Their last stop had been the Hawaiian Islands.⁴⁰ By the time European explorers reached the islands in the late 1700’s, Hawaiian culture was well grounded in a communal concept of the use of the land and the sea, called ahupua’a.⁴¹ Skilled farmers, fishers, and craftspeople had created a way of life based on the reciprocal relationships between the ali’i [the chiefs] and the maka’āinana, [the common people].⁴² When the new king, Kamehameha II, abolished this complex system

³⁹Barman and Watson, x.
Kāne, 7.
Naughton, 4.

Hawaiians called themselves Kānaka Maoli, meaning “the people.” For Hawaiians, it is a term of respect, and it is used here in that same way.

⁴⁰See Kāne, **Ancient Hawai’i** for an overview of Polynesian journeys from Southeast Asia to the Hawaiian Islands.

⁴¹Kamehameha Schools, **The Ahupua’a: Life in Early Hawai’i** [Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools Press, 1994], VI-VII.
Kāne, 31.

⁴²Kāne, 50-51.

in 1820, he began the precipitous collapse of the islands' long-standing social, economic, and political structures, a collapse that greatly affected the kāne [the men] of the ahupua'a.⁴³

The Kānaka Maoli were attracted to the fur trade for many reasons, one being the cultural and economic turmoil in their own land. In addition, the fur trade offered the men opportunities to acquire coveted European trade goods, to pursue a life of adventure, or to find a better life.⁴⁴ As in the past, many Hawaiian men chose to set sail again, eastward to another new land.

The similarities between the traditional Hawaiian communal lifestyle, guided by a hierarchy of ali'i, and that of the Hudson's Bay Company, with the strict hierarchy of chief factors, clerks and servants and their emphasis on teamwork in the company's diverse businesses helped ease the Kanakas' transition to their new work world.⁴⁵ At Fort Vancouver, Kanakas worked together under the supervision of a miller, a blacksmith, a farmer, or another skilled craftsman, much as they had in Hawai'i. The Company valued the men's work ethic and their skills as farmers, seamen, and swimmers. From Fort Vancouver, the Kanakas spread out across the Columbia Department.

⁴³Kāne, 38-39.
Naughton, 7, 10-12.

⁴⁴Barman and Watson, vii.
Naughton, 14.

⁴⁵Barman and Watson, 2-3.
Hussey, **Farm**, 181-185.
Kamehameha Schools, 1-7.
Kāne, 31, 36.
Rogers, 7-9, 84.

In traditional Hawaiian culture, it was the men who farmed the land. Planters, called mahi'ai, raised a variety of fruits and root crops, using a system of carefully constructed and tended irrigation ditches, fences, and terraces, and a variety of soil enhancements.⁴⁶ It is possible Kanaka men brought those same skills to the fields and gardens of Fort Vancouver.

If they wished, the Kanakas could live together in a house in the Village, as they had done in Hawai'i, or they could take a native wife and start their family, blending many of their own values and traditions with those of their wives. It is possible some of the men brought their wives with them from Hawai'i.⁴⁷

In 1829, the Hudson's Bay Company established an agency in Honolulu. There, the company's agents and their assistants saw to the sale of manufactured goods from England and the sale of salted salmon, lumber, and flour from Fort Vancouver.⁴⁸ They also saw to the shipment of Hawaiian products to the Columbia District, including coral used to make limestone⁴⁹, molasses, sugar, and coffee, and to the repair of Company ships. In addition, the

⁴⁶Kamehameha Schools, 6.
Kāne, 80,-86.

⁴⁷Barman and Watson, 228, 320, 403, 429, and 431.
Milton Bona, "Hawaiians Made Life 'More Bearable' at Fort Vancouver," **Clark County History XIII** [1972] : 171.
Rogers, 67, 72.

All four authors [Barman, Watson, Rogers, and Bona] allude to the idea, but at this time, there is little written evidence of Hawaiian women at Fort Vancouver in the 1830's to 1850's. The one exception is Mary Kaai, the wife of William Kaulehelehe.

⁴⁸Mack, 53.
Alexander Spoehr, "Fur traders in Hawai'i: The Hudson's Bay Company in Honolulu, 1829-1861," **Hawaiian Journal of History** 20 [1986] : 29-30.

⁴⁹Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 123.

agents coordinated the recruiting of Kanakas, and the signing of the company's three-year contracts with the men wanting to work for the Hudson's Bay Company in the northwest.⁵⁰

Like most other Company employees, the Kanakas signed a three year contract. The Company's policy was clear—in order to be paid at the end of their contract, the men had to return to their point of hiring, meaning the Kanakas had to return to Oahu. The trading posts' clerks kept a careful accounting of the money owed each employee—in wages, additional work, and in sales to the company of furs, "country-made goods," or their wives' handicrafts.⁵¹ Subtracted from the money due each employee at the end of the year were the charges the employees had made for clothing, household materials, foodstuffs, and tools at the "sales shop," for broken tools, and for other expenses.

Some Kanakas chose to return to Oahu, then to reenlist with the Hudson's Bay Company; others reenlisted at Fort Vancouver without returning to the islands. Some men worked a single contract, others, three, four, and five three-year contracts. Many, especially those with families, chose to retire from the Hudson's Bay Company, and to move to the Willamette Valley or to the Canadian San Juan Islands with their wives and children.

⁵⁰Rogers, 34-37.
Spoehr, 33.

⁵¹Hussey, **Historic Structures 1**, 191-192.
Hussey, **Historic Structures 2**, 240.
Mack, 63.

Farming:

Conscious of Governor Simpson's directives that the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trading posts become more self-sufficient, McLoughlin directed the Fort Vancouver servants to begin plowing and planting the fertile plains around Fort Vancouver. The first spring, servants planted 100 bushels of seed potatoes, as well as three acres of peas and a quarter acre of beans. Most of the first harvest was saved for seed for the next year.⁵² As additional seed arrived from England, servants planted fields with timothy, wheat, barley, oats, corn and peas.⁵³ Many of the servants working these fields were Kanakas who had come to the northwest as skilled farmers. Most of the Kanakas are listed on the Company's roster as laborers; those with special skills are so noted, including farm laborers Aikane and Opunui.⁵⁴

In 1828, just three years after the first crops were planted, servants harvested 1,300 bushels of wheat, 300 bushels of peas, 4,000 bushels of potatoes, and 1,000 bushels of barley.⁵⁵ In 1838, approximately one-fourth of the servants were employed in "farm work" and by 1845, farming had become the predominant industry at Fort Vancouver.⁵⁶ Crop diversification and the cultivation of 1,200 acres meant McLoughlin could offer the servants year-round employment. Over the years, visitors noted the large garden just north of the fort, as well as orchards, fields of potatoes, wheat, barley and oats, timothy, pea, and gardens of

⁵²Hussey, **Farm**, 12.

⁵³Gibson, 32-33.

⁵⁴Barman and Watson, 221, 374.

⁵⁵Hussey, **Farm**, 24.

⁵⁶Gibson, 35.

melons, squashes and tomatoes.⁵⁷ The Kanaka workers may have found some familiar crops, such as sweet potatoes and gourds [squashes or melons].

Employees at the water-driven grist mills ground the wheat into flour. Some of the flour was shipped to Hawai'i and to the Russian American Fur Company in present-day Alaska. Some of the flour went to the Fort's bakery, where bakers, such as Joseph Petrain and Bazil Poirer, and their assistants made flat "biscuits" or crackers used on the Company's sailing ships and as a part of the servants' weekly ration.⁵⁸

Like most of the businesses at the Fort, agricultural ventures required a prerequisite set of tools, skilled personnel, unskilled laborers, storage, and sources of livestock and seed. To store and ship flour, butter and salt meat, coopers made barrels from lumber cut at the saw mills. The coopers' assistants included two Kanakas, Alexander Orohuay and Thomas Como, whose fathers also worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in the Columbia Department.⁵⁹ Blacksmiths fashioned farm tools, including picks, hoes, and shovels, on the anvils in the blacksmith shop.

⁵⁷Gibson, 36-37.
Hussey, **Farm**, 24, 30, 34.

By 1841, the garden, located north of the stockade, had grown to seven acres. In addition to herbs, root vegetables, and salad greed, there were gooseberries, strawberries, melons and currants. Today, volunteers continue to plant the garden.

⁵⁸Hussey, **Historic Structures 1**, 47-50.
www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical [Petrain, Joseph]

According to the Hudson's Bay Company records [www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical]
Joseph Petrain worked as a baker at Fort Vancouver from mid-1843 to mid 1849, when he retired.

⁵⁹Barman and Watson, 239, 374-375..

In 1825, a Kanaka swineherd named Naukane came to work at Fort Vancouver. In four years, he was managing a piggery of 200 hogs.⁶⁰ With careful husbandry on the grass-covered islands and prairies, the herds of cattle, sheep, horses, oxen and goats also increased, so much so that McLoughlin could begin shipping salt pork, butter, and wool to Hawai'i, London, and the Russian American Company.⁶¹

The Call to Work:

It was a warm and sunny morning in May of 1840. The sound of the bell echoed loudly across the grounds of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post, Fort Vancouver. The bell could be heard throughout the fort's grounds, to the south and west in the Village, across the pastures where sheep and cattle grazed, to Naukane's piggery. First rung at dawn, the bell called the company's gentlemen, clerks and servants to work. At 8 am, the bell called people to their breakfast and at 1 pm, to their dinner. At 6 pm, the ringing of the bell sounded the end of the work day.⁶²

⁶⁰Barman and Watson, 240-241.
Bona, 169.
Mack, 59.

Naukane was also known as John Coxe. In 1847, the Canadian artist Paul Kane painted his picture.

⁶¹Hussey, **Farm**, 13-15.

⁶² Hussey, **Historic Structures 1**, 71.

The company's servants—French Canadians, Iroquois, Orkneys, Scots, Kanakas, Métis, Cowlitz, Chinook, and Chehalis--living in the village gathered outside one of the fort's large gates on the south side of the stockade, waiting the "supervisor" who would direct them in the day's work—in the fields, in the fort, around the buildings, and on the wharf.

**“ . . . a very neat and beautiful village”:
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