

Fort Vancouver

The final stop on the Trail for many of the emigrants was Ft. Vancouver--the massive British outpost



on the north bank of the Columbia River. Most of the emigrants were now very low on supplies and completely exhausted.

Dr. John McLoughlin was head of British Fort Vancouver and his orders were to discourage the American emigrants--but he did just the opposite. He offered the weary travelers food and medicine, and even organized rescue parties for emigrants in trouble along the way. They affectionately dubbed him "The Father of Oregon." He supplied food, clothing, temporary shelter, and even jobs to immigrants at Fort Vancouver, despite Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) orders to the contrary. Without help here, many emigrants would not live through the winter. McLoughlin was convinced that it was inevitable that the area south of the Columbia River would become American territory. By sending settlers there, he hoped to keep them away from his British Company's activities north of the Columbia River.

Convinced the fort should be self-sufficient, McLoughlin had his men plant over 2000 acres of vegetables, oats and wheat. The first orchard in the west was here too, providing apples and pears. The fort had a church, school and library, even a theater--all quite astonishing to emigrants who had not seen a city for nearly six months. In 1845, a bastion was added, but not for protection against the local tribes--it was a response to threats from the American government. But no battle ever came. The boundary dispute with Britain was settled peacefully. However, the treaty put Ft. Vancouver on American soil. Trade diminished--and by the 1860s, the fort was gone.

Emigrant John Boardman: "Well received by Dr. McLoughlin, who charged nothing for the boat sent up for us, nor for the provisions; but not satisfied with that, sent us plenty of salmon and potatoes, furnished us house, room and wood free of charge, and was very anxious that all should get through safe."

Emigrant James Nesmith: "Dr. John McLoughlin, from his own private resources, rendered the new settlers much valuable aid by furnishing the destitute with food, clothing and seed, waiting for his pay until they had a surplus to dispose of."