

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE “OLD APPLE TREE,” LOCATED IN THE OLD APPLE TREE PARK, VANCOUVER NATIONAL HISTORIC RESERVE, VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON, COMPILED FROM VARIOUS HISTORICAL SOURCES



By

Robert J. Cromwell, Ph.D.

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site
National Park Service
612 East Reserve St
Vancouver, Washington 98661

September, 2010



Northwest Cultural Resources Institute Short Report No. 34



Introduction

The “Old Apple Tree,” is located within Old Apple Tree Park, which is a part of the City of Vancouver Parks and Recreation Department, but also within the Vancouver National Historic Reserve (VNHR). The VNHR is a congressionally legislated Reserve located in Clark County, Vancouver, Washington, with historical contexts commemorating the prehistoric past, as well as historic elements associated with the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) Fort Vancouver, the U.S. Army Vancouver Barracks, and the Kaiser Shipyards. The VNHR is jointly managed by the National Park Service (NPS), the City of Vancouver, the U.S. Army, and the State of Washington. Although Old Apple Tree Park is managed by the City of Vancouver, the NPS acts as the lead federal agency for all Sec. 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act undertakings throughout the VNHR, and as the lead on cultural resources issues. It is under these auspices that this effort at recording the historical significance of the tree is being made by the NPS.

Specifically, the Old Apple Tree is located in the Northeast (NE) $\frac{1}{4}$ section of the Southwest (SW) $\frac{1}{4}$ section of Section 27, Range 1E, Township 2 N, Willamette Meridian (Figure 1). It can be accessed from the south by pedestrians through a tunnel under the BNSF Railway railroad berm, coming from Columbia Way Boulevard; or from the east via the Landbridge Pedestrian Trail, which crosses over SR-14.

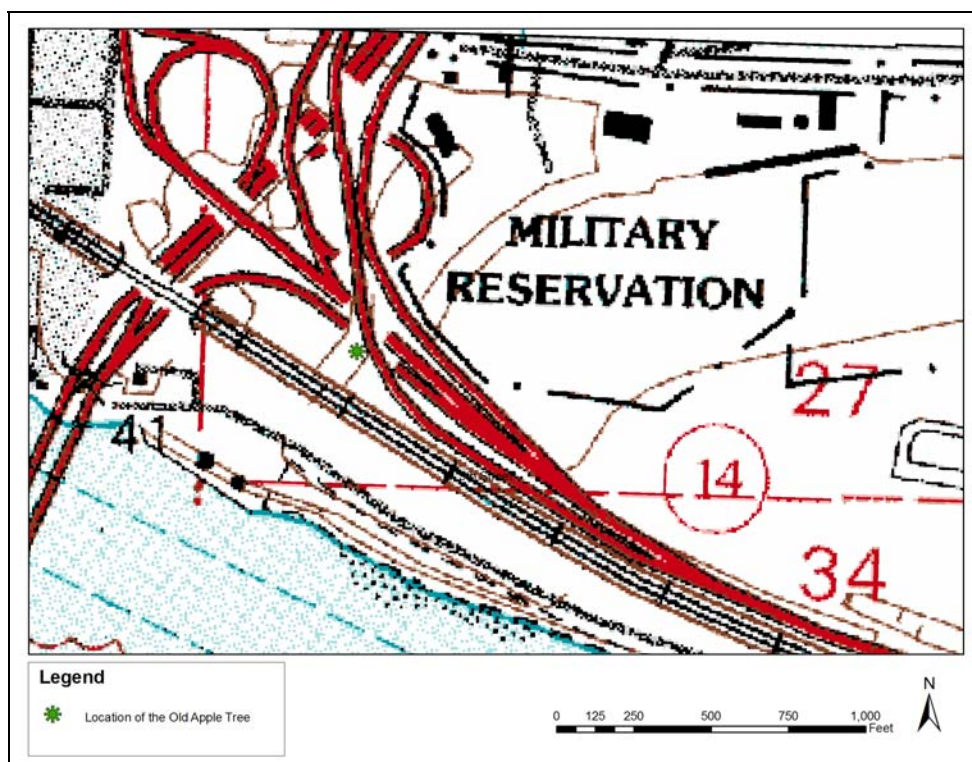


Figure 1. View of the location of the Old Apple Tree as viewed from the 7.5 Minute Series USGS Quad Map of Portland, Oregon.

The history of the “Old Apple Tree,” has been variously discussed in multiple historical and archaeological treatises revolving around Hudson’s Bay Company Fort Vancouver. The goal of this short paper is to synthesize the information presented in these various sources. It is hoped that by doing this, a more accurate representation of the importance and history of this tree can be portrayed for its future management and preservation. This presentation will also hopefully dispel the many rumors and myths that seem to pervade around the tree, and provide a more accurate context for any planned interpretative media revolving around the tree.

The Hudson’s Bay Company’s Gardens and Orchards

A history of the Old Apple Tree would not be complete without a short review of the origins of the apple orchard industry in the Pacific Northwest. The state of Washington, of course, is famous for its apple orchards, and the birthplace of that fame is within the town of Vancouver, Washington. The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), established Fort Vancouver in 1824, to be the administrative depot of the company’s Columbia Department. The original fort was established in an unverified location, somewhere near the present State School for the Deaf, around the corners of Grand Boulevard and Evergreen Boulevard. This location was on a raised and forested bluff, and the company had troubles establishing a useable water well on the upper bluff, and they noted that the lower plain did not seasonally flood, as had been initially feared. These issues resulted in the move of the fort to the lower plain in 1829 (Hussey 1957).

The nature of the fur trade forced a long and arduous trade route between England and North America. The Columbia Department was the farthest away from England, with a 17,000 mile sea voyage for the annual supply ship. This resulted in a policy of attempting to supplement the food supplies for the company’s forts by establishing gardens and agricultural operations. A garden was established at Fort Vancouver as early as 1828 (Erigero 1992: 24). American trapper, Jedidiah Smith, arrived at Fort Vancouver in 1829, and noted that the fort had, “...a fine garden, some small apple trees and vines.” (ibid.). This garden was famed for its variety of ornamental and food based plants, and early on, also apparently had fruiting trees planted within it. Eugene Dufлот de Mofras, visiting in the winter of 1841, commented that, “A large vegetable garden filled with fruit trees adjoins the fort...” (Wilbur 1937: 98).

The garden was often referred to as “Dr. McLoughlin’s Garden,” a reference to the Chief Factor of Fort Vancouver, who dedicated many resources to the garden from the limited personnel he had available to run the fort. Jesse Applegate, an American immigrant to the Oregon Country of 1843, reminisced in 1868 that, “In a region so remote the seeds of the most common vegetables were hard to procure, and it was not until after years of exertion that the head of the wealthiest company in the world (save one) could set upon his table as good a dinner as the common farmer may now every day enjoy. Dr. McLoughlin was very proud of his success as a farmer, and liked to tell of the difficulties he had to overcome before success was attained. He could tell how and

when each vegetable was introduced and the way he obtained a start of the domestic animals, some of these accounts were quite interesting...” (Erigero 1992: 138).

McLoughlin went so far as to designate a specific employee as the gardener, and William Bruce is labeled as the gardener in company records as early as 1833. Bruce was on the company roles as early as 1825, and was recorded by several visitors to the fort as being of Scottish decent. Bruce apparently left the service of the company in 1838, and returned to England with Dr. McLoughlin in that year. U.S. Navy Captain Charles Wilkes recorded the following in 1841 (Wilkes 1844, Vol. 4: 354):

Bruce’s first term of service had expired, he was desirous of returning to England, and was accordingly sent. This happened during the visit of Dr. M’Laughlin to England. One day an accidental meeting took place in a crowded street of London, where he begged Dr. M’Laughlin to send him back to Vancouver. William Bruce was accordingly taken again into employ, and sent back in the next ship. In the mean time, however, he was sent to Chiswick, the seat of the Duke of Devonshire, to get a little more knowledge of his duties, and remained till the vessel sailed; but no place was like Vancouver to him, and all his success here continues to be compared with Chiswick, which he endeavors to surpass; this is alike creditable to both.

That the company employed a gardener who was trained at Chiswick, arguably the epitome of a Victorian style garden, again speaks volumes as to the level of commitment they were willing to invest into the maintenance of the garden.

The primary function of the garden was to provide fresh produce for the employees of the company. However, as pointed out by Erigero (1992: 139), “it appears that most of the garden products ended up on the mess table for the officers, clerks, and guest, and in the Big House kitchen where select employees and visitors were fed.” A secondary function of the garden appears to have been as a restricted pleasure spot, to which only selected visitors and employees were granted access. American missionary, Mrs. Henry Spalding, wrote friends that, “The principal exercise our situation affords us is walking in the garden, to which place we frequently resort to feast on apples and grapes.” (Spalding 1912: 378-379).

In addition, the garden was apparently used as a nursery, for the growth of young seedlings to plant on the extensive HBC farms surrounding the fort, and to distribute seedlings and seeds to visitors to the fort who intended to settle in the region (Erigero 1992: 140).

Regarding the seed and plant sources for the garden and orchards, Gordon, Forsythe & Co., of London, was listed as the seed supplier to the HBC from ca. 1829-1845. In 1831, HBC archives record the importation of over 80 lbs. of vegetable and crop seeds, ranging from Cucumbers, Broccoli, Radishes, Turnips, Onions, Lettuce, Oats, Winter Wheat, and Potatoes (Erigero 1992:

132). In addition, visitors to the fort often brought seeds and seedlings from which plant varieties could be established in the garden.

Such is the case with the varieties of a story regarding the planting of the first apples and grapes at Fort Vancouver in the 1820s. Basically, the story states that a gentleman heading to Vancouver from London kept some seeds of apples and grapes that he had eaten, by placing them in a vest pocket. Upon arrival at Fort Vancouver, these seeds were planted by the gardener, William Bruce, or by Pierre Pambrun, and the seedlings became the basis for the first fruit trees at the Fort.

The first of these accounts comes from Henry Bingham, a missionary from Hawaii, who met Captain Æmilius Simpson, head of the Company's Pacific coastal trade, and wrote a friend in 1829, "He says he has himself planted the grape and the apple at that place." (Blue 1929: 164-164). Captain Simpson was apparently at Fort Vancouver in November of 1826, and the planting of these seeds could not have occurred until the spring of 1827 (Erigero 1992: 25).

Another variation of the story originates from Narcissa Whitman's journal of 1836, where she states: "Here I must mention the origin of these Apples and grapes. A gentleman twelve years ago, while at a party in London put the seeds of the grapes and apples he ate in his vest pocket and soon after took a voyage to this country and left them here. Now they are greatly multiplied." (Dodd 1990: 50). This account is seemingly corroborated by American immigrant, Jesse Applegate, who wrote to a friend in 1868 that he had heard directly from Dr. John McLoughlin that, "...a gentleman ate a fine apple in London and put the seeds in his vest pocket and thought no more about them until he arrived at Vancouver nine or ten months after, and having on the same vest at dinner, felt the seeds in his pocket, and from these seeds grew the first apple trees in on the Pacific—now the most famous country in the world for fruit." (Erigero 1992: 25).

Finally, a similar story is told by McLoughlin descendent, J.W. McLoughlin Harvey (Erigero 1992: 25):

In the year 1827 Mr. Simpson, cousin of Gov'r Simpson, who arrived in the county in 1826, at the dinner table happening to feel in his vest pocket found a few apple seeds wrapped up in a paper, the circumstances of which he explained as follows. At a dinner party in England prior to his coming to this country, a lady after paring an apple gathered the seeds together and handed them to Mr. Simpson with the remark 'that as he was going to a new country where apples were unknown she would make him a present of the seeds with the hope that at some time he would plant them.' These seeds were planted by Peter Pabrum (Pambrun), and the growth of the tree from day to day was carefully watched. At the first fruits some years later Mr. Pambrun received his portion.

Regardless the origins of the first apple seeds at the fort, it is not possible to state with certainty where the first of these trees would have been planted. As stated above, there appear to be many references to orchard trees being planted within the garden, and it is not known with certainty when the formal orchard was planted. The 1844 Stockade Area Map by Henry Peers represents an orchard directly west of the garden, representing trees as dots in a grid pattern (Figure 2). The ca. 1851 Covington Map of Fort Vancouver shows only an "Orchard" in the area that was the Garden and Orchards (Figure 3). The ca. 1851 sketch of the HBC village and the fort seems to show orchard trees within this same location. Certainly, the Sohon illustration (Figure 4) of Fort Vancouver of 1854-1855, seems to show an apple orchard planted in a grid pattern to the west of the fort's bastion and garden. In addition, the 1860 Boundary Commission photograph (Figure 5) of the U.S. Army Officers' Row appears to have been taken from within the orchard itself, clearly showing orchard trees planted in rows in the foreground of the photograph.

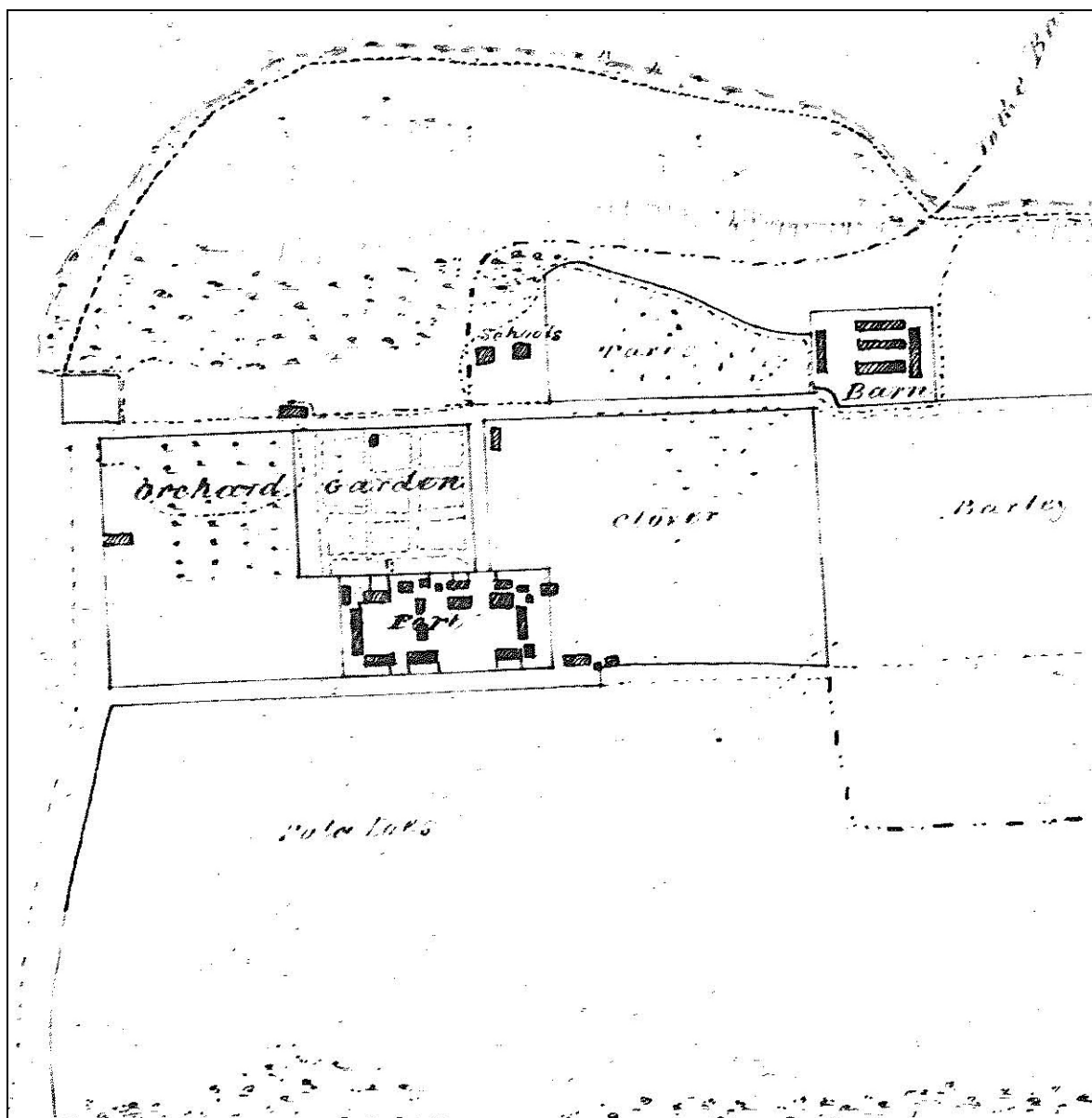


Figure 2. Close up of the ca. 1844 Peer's "Line of Fire," Map, showing the relationship of the Orchard and Garden to Fort Vancouver. (Hudson's Bay Company Archives).

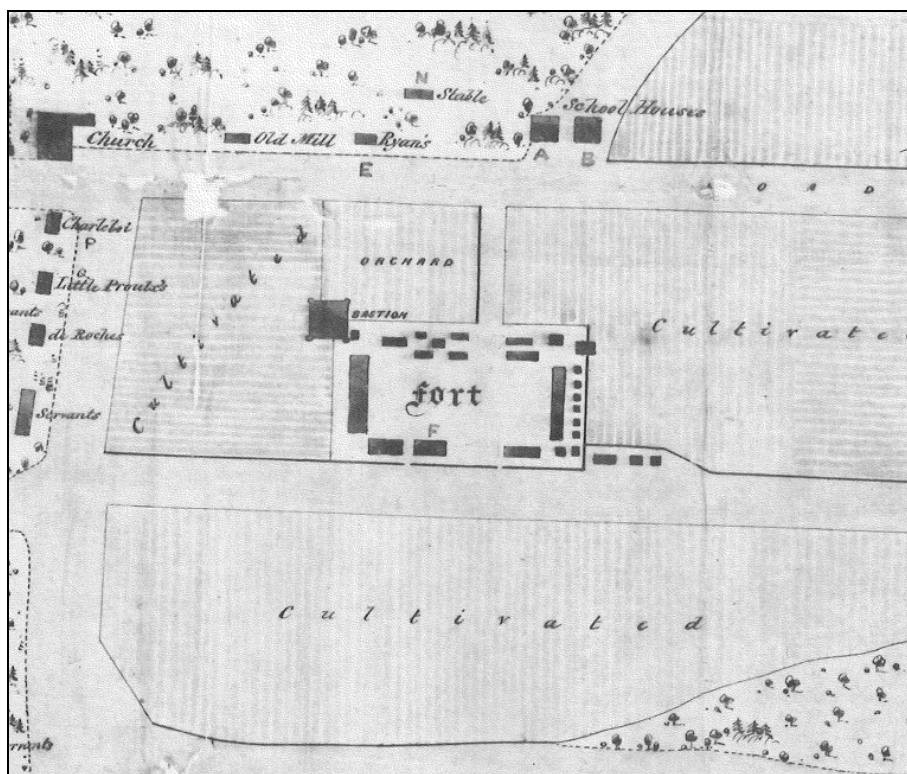


Figure 3. View of the location of the HBC Orchard on the ca. 1851 Covington Map of Fort Vancouver. Note that Garden is no longer recorded, but is likely integrated into the Orchard area. (Hudson's Bay Company Archives).



Figure 4. View of the ca. 1854 Sohon lithograph of Fort Vancouver. Note the presence of orchard trees in the right center of the image, and the garden appears to be represented to the left of the fort's palisade wall. (NPS image).



Figure 5. View of the northern edge of the HBC apple orchard as seen in the 1860 British American Joint Boundary Commission Survey image of the Vancouver Barracks Officers' Row. The Grant House stands in the right central portion of the image. (Image Courtesy of the National Archives of Canada).

The earliest reference to an orchard was by American missionary, Jason Lee, who in 1834 recorded, "After dinner took a turn in the garden and was astonished to find it in such a high state of cultivation. The orchard was young, but the quantity of fruit is so great that many of the branches would break if they were not prevented by props." (Erigero 1992: 134).

American T.J. Farnham visited Fort Vancouver in 1839, and remarked, "The gardener too, is singing out his honest satisfaction, as he surveys from the north gate, ten acres of apple trees, laden with fruit, his bowers of grape-vines, his beds of vegetables and flowers" (Farnham 1983: 98).

In September, 1841, American, William D. Brackenridge, with the U.S. Navy Wilkes Expedition, stated, "Dr. M.Loughlin, who in the most friendly manner showed me round his gardens, under the keeping of Mr. Bruce, a Scotch Highlander by birth. The Apple Trees bore a remarkable heavy crop of fruit and were invariably in a healthy Condition, there were from 4 to 500 of these in a bearing state, and with the exception of a few approved varieties imported from England the whole stock has been raised from Seeds at Vancouver, and to my taste the majority were better

adapted for baking than for a dessert, but in a new Country certainly a great acquisition (Erigeron 1992: 142).

The totality of these references then, definitely indicate that there was a formal HBC orchard, with upwards of 400-500 apple trees, occupying an area of between 5-10 acres, yet located to the northwest of the palisaded fort. The orchard was definitely still there in 1860, when the Boundary Commission photographed a portion of it, but in that year, the HBC vacated Fort Vancouver, leaving it in the hands of the U.S. Army. In 1866, the fort and all of its structures were mysteriously burned, and the Army dismantled the remnants. By 1874, an Army Map of Vancouver Barracks (Figure 6) has no reference to the orchard, and the site of the Fort Vancouver stockade was contained within a fence, and labeled as "Pasture."

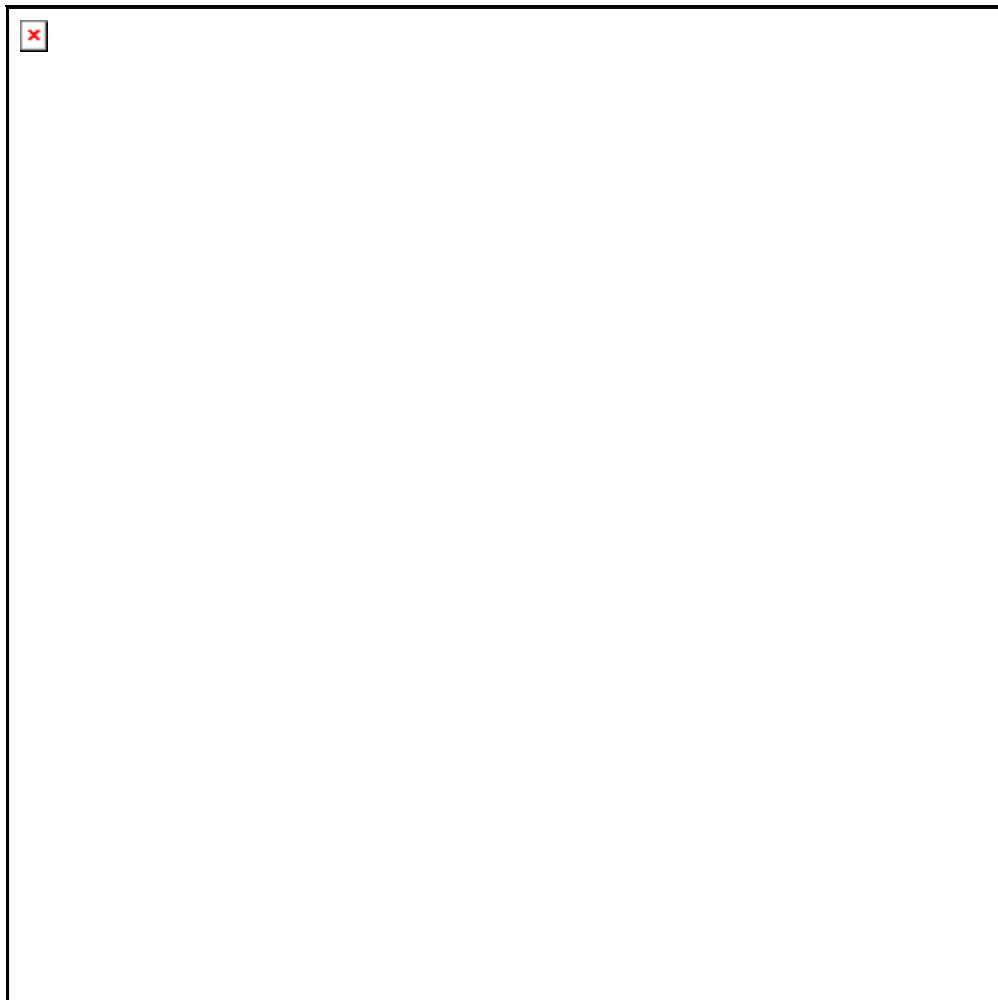


Figure 6. View of the southern half of the 1874 F.K. Ward Map of Vancouver Barracks, showing the former location of the HBC Fort Vancouver and associated orchard being labeled as "Pasture." (Map on File, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site).

As presented in Figure 7, the known location of the HBC orchard is nowhere near the location of the Old Apple Tree (nearly 1,000 ft. apart), presenting an historical question as to the origins of this tree, who could have planted it, and why it survived when the formal orchard did not?

Historical References to the Old Apple Tree

As presented above, there is an extensive history of the HBC agricultural operations in association with the garden and orchards that were located immediately to the north and northwest of the Fort Vancouver palisade. As presented in Figure 7, the location of the Old Apple Tree is some distance from the known locations of this garden and orchard. Indeed, the tree is located within the historically and archaeologically defined location of the HBC Employee Village, a settlement of up to 50-60 structures, where the ethnically diverse “Servants” of the Company resided. The location of the Village, nearly ¼ mile west of the fort, can be seen as a way for the Company to reinforce the social divisions between the “Gentlemen” of the

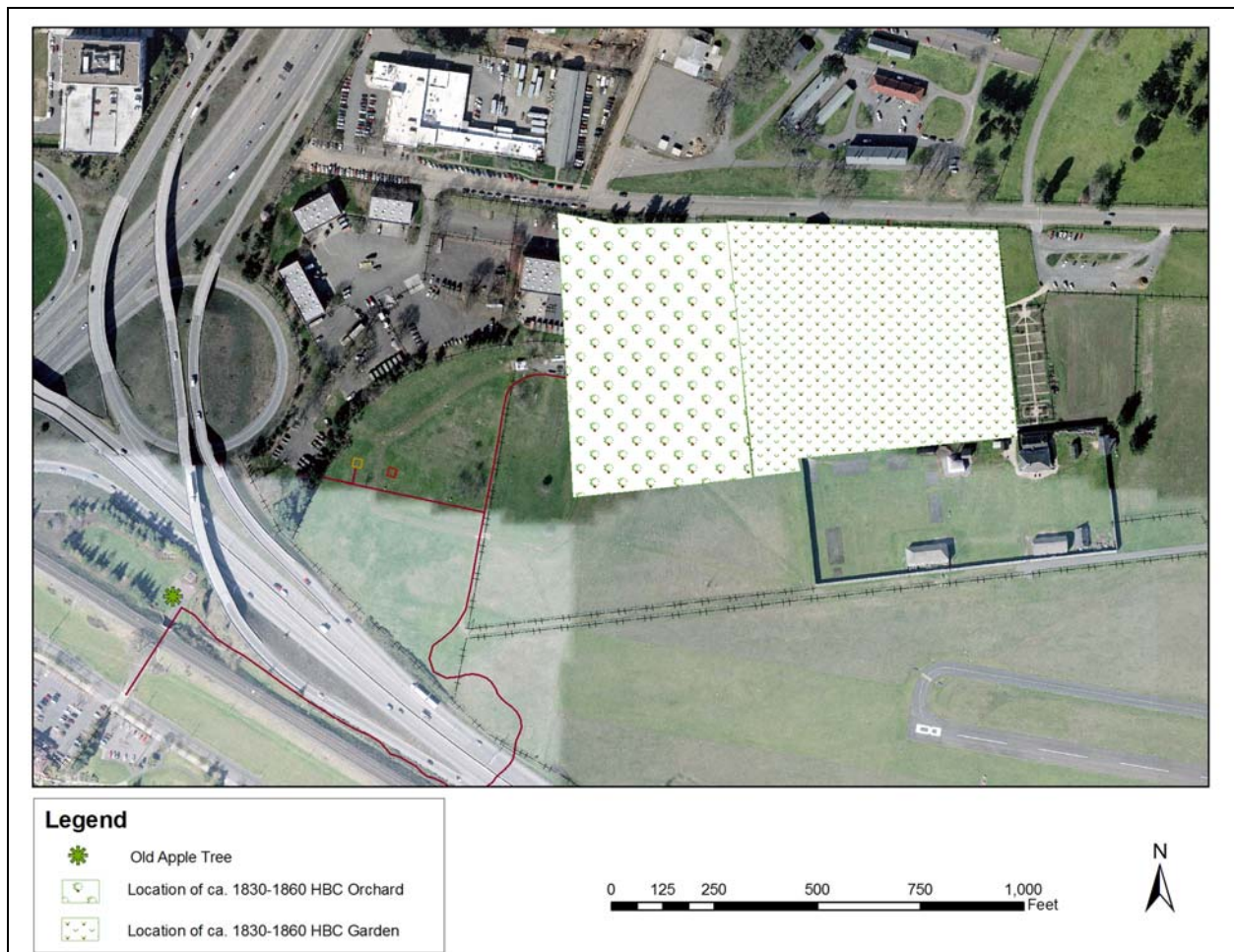


Figure 7. View of the location of the Old Apple Tree versus the historically documented locations of the HBC Orchard and Gardens.

Company, who resided within the fort's walls, and the occupationally and ethnically diverse Servants of the Company.

In 1906, Dr. J.R. Cardwell, presented an overview of HBC agricultural operations in an *Oregon Historical Quarterly* article, in which he states (Cardwell 1906: 29-30): "The apple and the pear trees, and the grapevines from these seeds are yet annually bearing fruits on the grounds of the government barracks at Vancouver. Not long ago I visited these seedling trees, now eighty years old, hoary chroniclers of time, yet showing a vigorous growth. Mrs. Gay Hayden, of Vancouver, informed me she had eaten fruit from these trees for fifty-four years. The fruit is not large, but of fair quality. Fortunately Government does not allow a tree to be removed or destroyed without an order from the department." This would lead one to believe that there were several HBC-era plantings within the Vancouver Barracks at that time, and that residents of Vancouver were fully aware of their association with the HBC and their heritage.

In 1911, a newspaper article in *The Morning Oregonian*, was the first public notice of the antiquity and heritage of the Old Apple Tree. As presented in the Excerpts and Notes Section of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, the newspaper article, dated January 21, 1911 stated:

Vancouver Barracks, Wash., Jan. 21.—The discovery this week of the oldest apple tree in the Northwest, which has borne fruit for more than eighty years, has aroused much interest, and hundreds have visited the post just to see the tree with a remarkable record. Colonel George K. McGunnege, commander of the post, as soon as he was convinced by A.A. Quarnberg, district fruit inspector, that this tree was planted eighty-five years ago, gave orders to have it preserved. A suitable fence around the base of the tree will be built, and a stone monument, with a short history of its remarkable record, will be placed in the enclosure. Relic hunters who desire a piece of the tree will be severely punished if caught marring the oldest inhabitant of any apple orchard in the Northwest.

The fact that this tree, after eighty years of bearing, should bear fruit each year, is regarded as of the utmost importance to the apple-raising industry in the Northwest.

The tree is located in the southwest corner of the reservation, in front of the chief commissary's office. So little was thought of the scrubby-looking relic of bygone days that it was used to anchor a guy wire to. This has been removed.

The tree is sixteen inches in diameter and about twenty feet high.

According to archaeologists Thomas and Hibbs (see below), who researched a house site in association with the Old Apple Tree in 1984, A.A. Quarnberg's diaries are at the Clark County Museum, and record that Mr. Quarnberg counted 71 rings on the largest limb that he removed

while pruning the tree in 1911 (Thomas & Hibbs 1984: 288). Thomas & Hibbs supposed that apple trees take at least 10 years to reach limb size, meaning that the tree was planted in 1830 at the latest, and as is exclaimed by the local plaque at the site, as early as 1826 or 1827.

The notoriety of the age of the Old Apple Tree apparently took it to national attention, and a photograph of the tree was even used in a horticultural encyclopedia dating to 1914 (Lowther 1914). This image is the oldest dated image now known of the tree, and shows that the Army made efforts to protect the tree even at this early date, apparently erecting a wood and chicken wire fence around it (Figure 8). Another image of the tree from the same vintage resides in NPS archives at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site shows the same fence arrangement with a freshly painted wooden interpretive sign (Figure 9)

The white concrete and chain fence that now exists around the tree was likely constructed by the Army, in an attempt to commemorate and protect the tree. It is interesting then, that the Army, which in the 1860s had taken great pains to remove all traces of HBC activities within the Vancouver Barracks, was suddenly making great strides towards the preservation of this tree. Based upon this reference, the fence was constructed after 1911, and the earliest photographic evidence on file at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, certainly shows this fence in place in 1920 (Figure 10). The Army continued to acknowledge the existence of this tree well into the 20th century, and actually recorded its location on maps of Vancouver Barracks in 1935 and 1944. The 1935 Carsner Map labels it as the “Oldest Apple Tree in the Northwest” (Figure 11). A Clark County History article, entitled, “The Genesis of Apple Culture in Washington and the Pacific Northwest,” gives direct credit for the fence, thusly (Landerholm 1962):

The credit for having the fence built and other protective measures taken to preserve the tree goes to the late E.L. French, Clark County orchardist and a one time state director of agriculture. Early in 1911, Mr. French, then state senator, first interested himself in the matter. He called upon A.A. Quarnberg, then county horticulturist, and asked the latter to take steps to save the long neglected and all-but-forgotten tree. Mr. Quarnberg in turn convinced Colonel George K. McGunnele, commander of the Barracks, that the tree was indeed of the first planting, with the result that orders were issued to preserve it.

Again memory and circumstance must be brought into play to substantiate as far as they may that the old apple tree is truly a genuine “first”. At the outset one notes the startling fact that the tree stands approximately a half mile southwest of where the historic orchard, mentioned by Mrs. Whitman and numerous others stood. Their statements and the contemporary maps show that this orchard was located just north of the stockade and the tree is quite isolated from any other former orchard! Because of this, doubts have been expressed regarding the claim. For instance, about 1925, the late George H. Himes of the Oregon Historical

Society thought that the tree was a descendant rather than an ancestor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

But, paradoxically, the location and isolation of the tree really argues for, rather than against, its priority; for, when the seeds were planted—in 1826 or 1827—the original fort on the hill at the site of the present State School for the Deaf was still the only establishment at Vancouver. There is no evidence of any fruit trees being planted there. The historic stockade, located over a mile west of the plain, was not constructed until the spring of 1829. Hence, the planting of the orchard there would hardly have occurred before the following summer of 1829, or two years and over after the seeds brought by Simpson were planted. Furthermore, the 'Old Apple Tree' stands on ground high enough to be pretty well out of reach of river floods, to the west and very close to where the road passed from the Hudson's Bay Company wharf to the original and later fort alike, and only a short distance from the wharf. It seems to be almost an ideal spot for that first planting: A well watered place, but level and elevated enough to be free from overflow and adjacent to the only road to the fort.

Landerholm was ahead of his time determining the layout and landscape of the HBC era Fort Vancouver, and determined that the Old Apple Tree was not a part of the HBC formal orchard. To his credit, he made these determinations a full 15-20 years ahead of archaeological excavations of the HBC Village and Fort Vancouver sites which enabled later historians and archaeologists to determine the location of the HBC orchard and garden areas.

The local community has certainly acknowledged the historical importance of the tree throughout the 20th century, and damage to the tree through natural events has been a news item. Ironically, the genesis of this report was the creation of the "Old Apple Tree Research Team," by the City of Vancouver in the summer of 2009 after two of the major limbs of the tree broke. Similarly, a Portland, Oregon, *Oregonian* newspaper article notes ice damage to the tree on January 27, 1950, "Ice Rives Vancouver's First Apple Tree, But Vigor May Save 134-Year Old Relic:"

"Vancouver's famed apple tree is a sorry sight. It looks all of its 134 years or even older. Last week's ice storm broke the historic tree's forked trunk. The larger fork broke off. Only the straggly-looking smaller fork remains. But a committee of horticultural experts examined the tree Thursday and decided it may live."

The 1950 committee obviously took efforts to ensure the tree's survival, just as the committee of 2009-2010 is doing now.

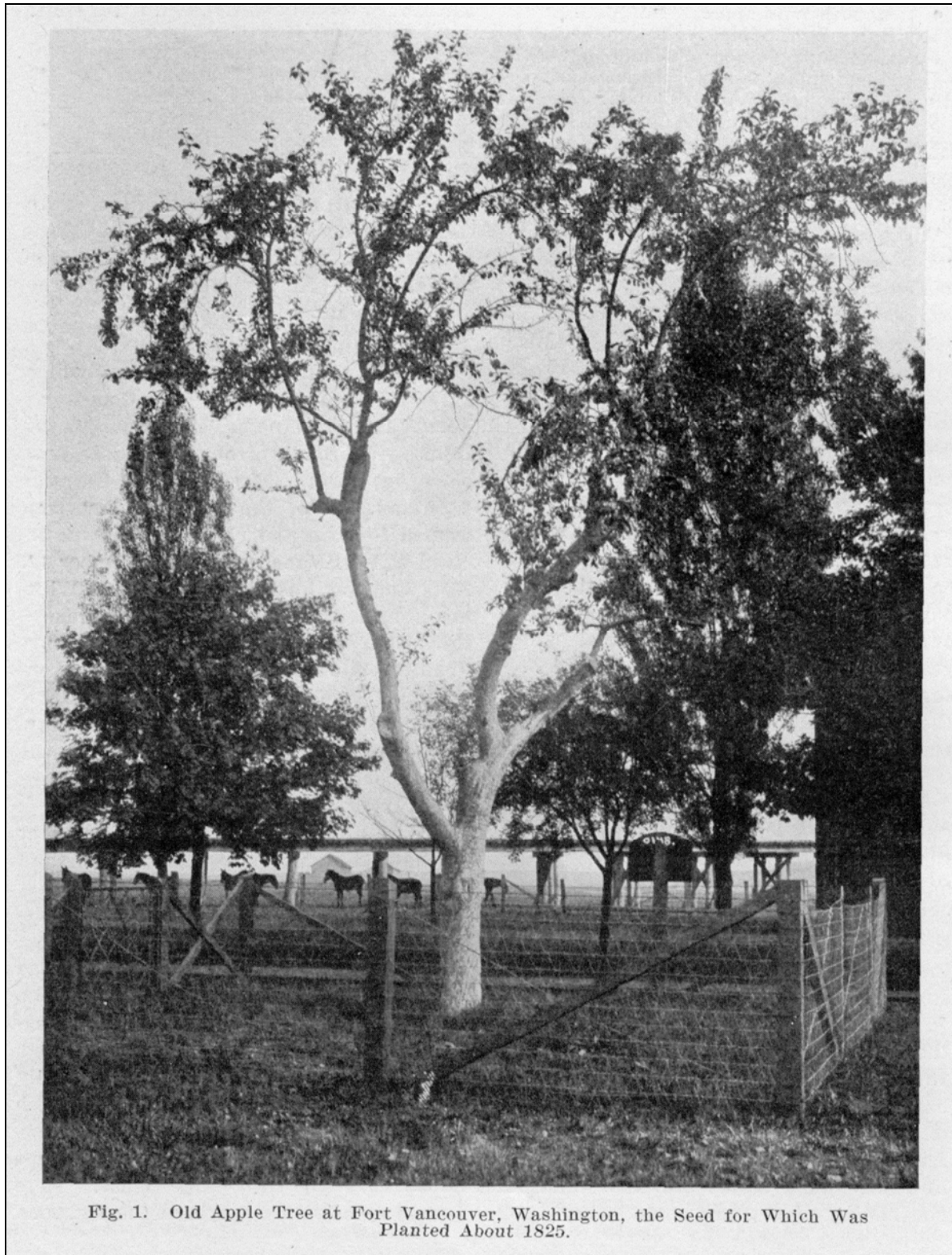


Figure 8. A ca. 1914 photograph of the Old Apple Tree, apparently facing east, as illustrated in the 1914 "Encyclopedia of Practical Horticulture." (Lowther, 1914).

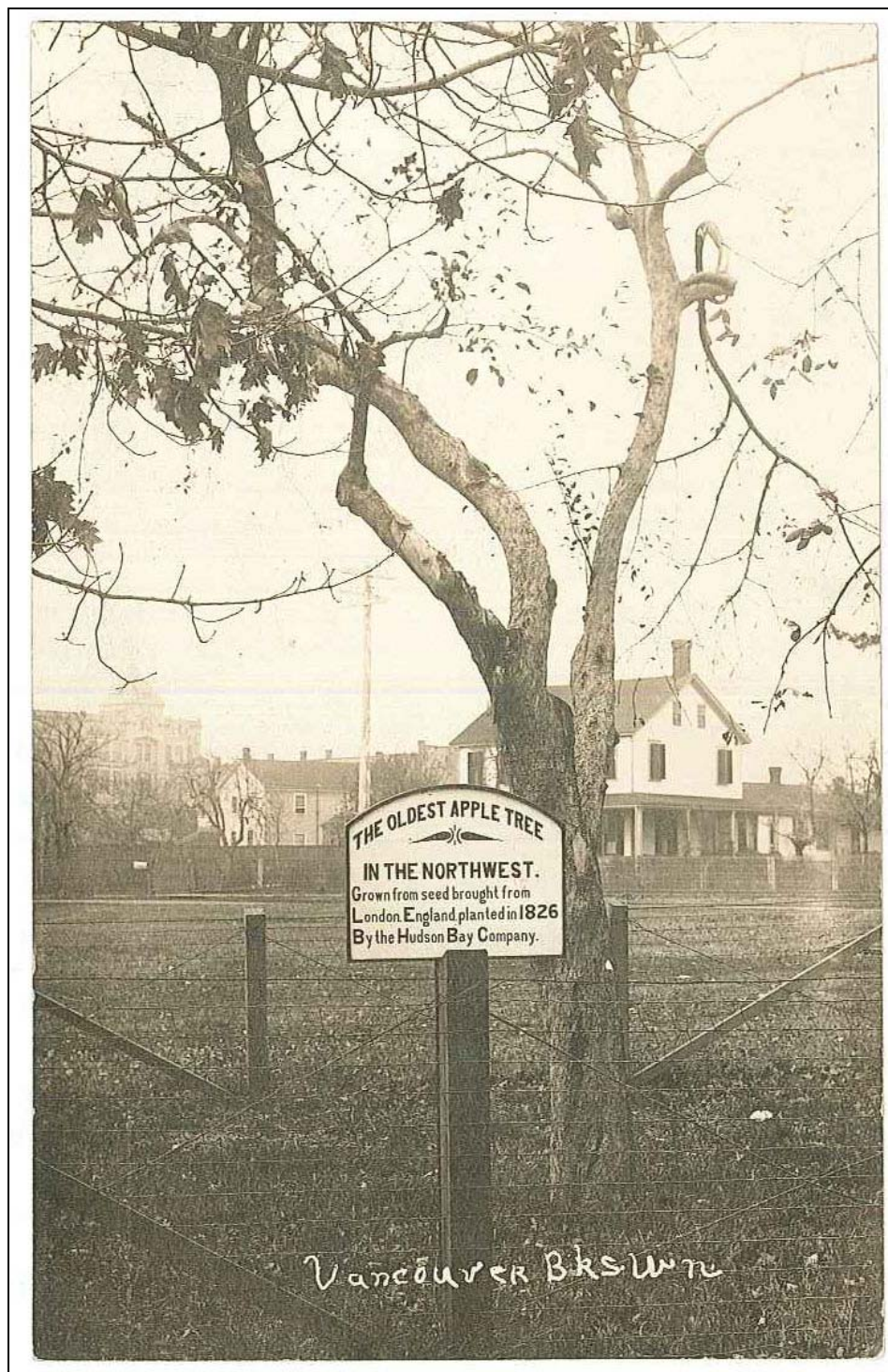


Figure 9. Image of the Old Apple Tree likely dating to ca. 1914-1920 period, facing west, showing the first interpretive sign denoting the age of the tree (NPS-FOVA #1683).



Figure 10. Photograph facing to the northwest of the Old Apple Tree taken ca. 1920, showing the newly erected concrete and chain link fence, and an interpretive sign. Note the woodpile in the background, and an Army NCO Quarters. (NPS-FOVA #1676a)

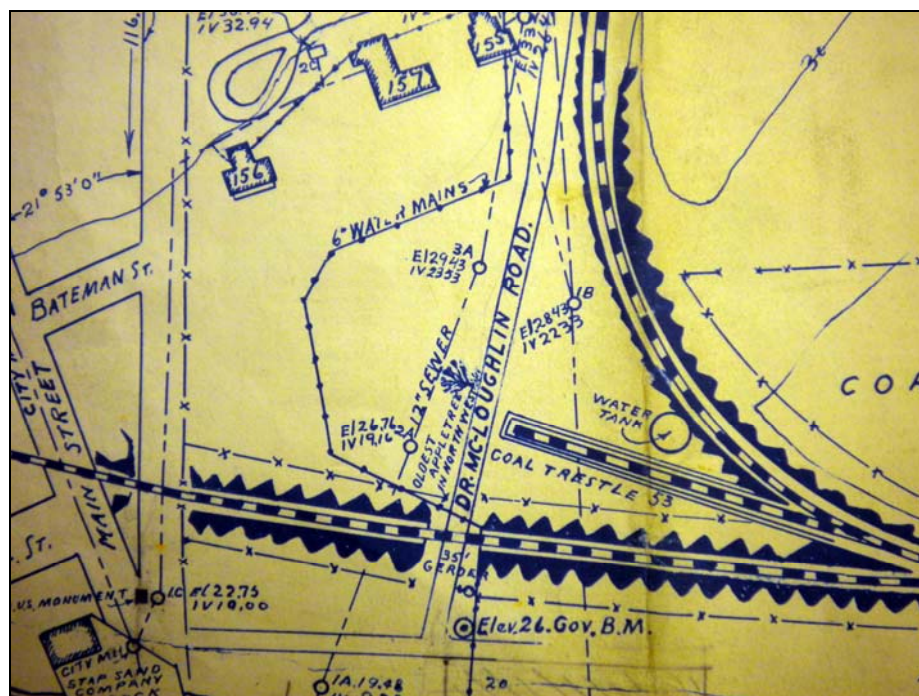


Figure 11. Close up of a portion of the 1935 U.S. Army Map of Vancouver Barracks, noting “OLDEST APPLE TREE IN NORTHWEST,” in center of image. (Copy on File, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site).

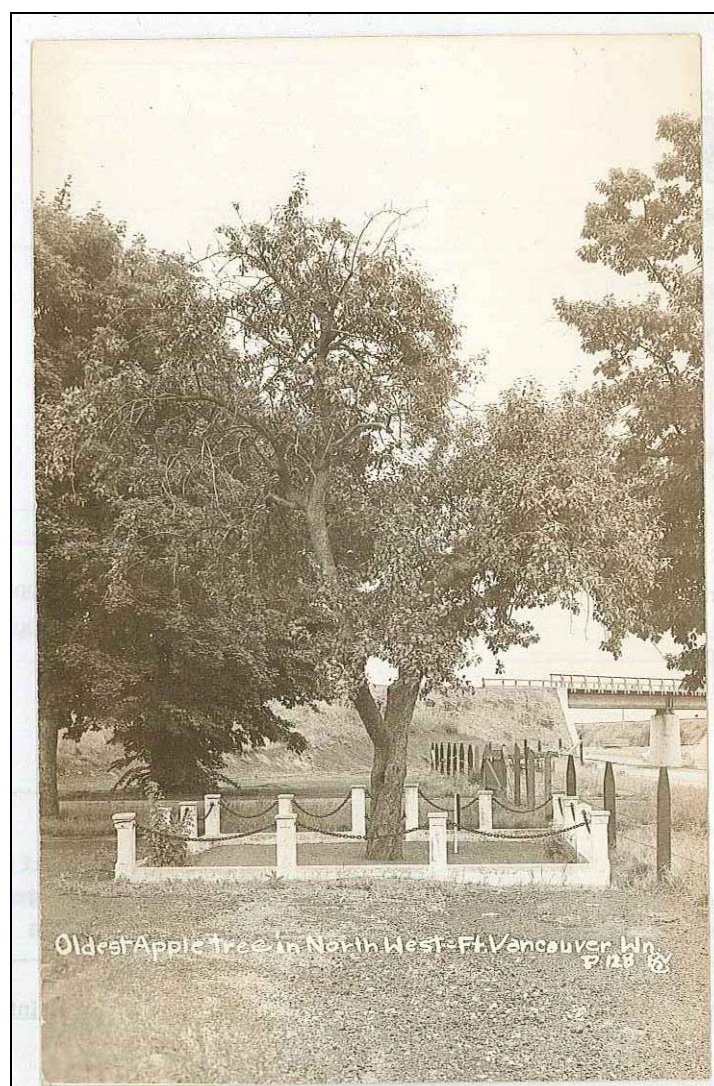


Figure 12. View of the Old Apple Tree, ca. 1950, facing east, showing a railroad trestle over “Columbia Highway,” now SR-14. (NPS-FOVA #1681).

Archaeological Associations with the Old Apple Tree

As presented above, a review of the available historic documents indicates that the Old Apple Tree was planted outside of any known HBC-era orchards, and well outside of the formal garden area. In fact, it is apparent that the tree was planted and thrived in the midst of the HBC Employee Village, an area associated with the low socio-economic, “Servant” class of HBC operations. As presented by Ross (1976) and by Cromwell (2006), the HBC maintained a rigid socio-economic caste system between the “Gentlemen” of the Company, and the “Servants.” The Gentlemen were almost solely of Scottish or British origin, and at Fort Vancouver resided within the palisaded walls of Fort Vancouver. The Servants were of motley origins, including French-Canadians, Metis, British, Scottish, and Native Americans—spanning the North American

continent from Native Hawaiian Islanders, to the Iroquois. As presented above, the first planting of apple trees at the fort is celebrated by members of the Gentleman class and their association with London high society. It is therefore, quite surprising that the only surviving apple tree from HBC operations at Fort Vancouver should exist in the midst of the Employee Village.

Extensive archaeological excavations have occurred within the site of the Employee Village, starting with the discovery of four houses by Susan Kardas and Edward Larrabee in 1968-1969 (Kardas 1971). The largest excavations at the Village however, occurred in the 1970s and 1980s as part of the cultural resources management surveys necessary for upgrades to the SR-14 and I-5 interchanges. These archaeological surveys, testing operations, and limited data recoveries were undertaken by David Chance in 1974-1976 (Chance & Chance 1976), Caroline Carley in 1976 (Carley 1981), and by Brynn Thomas and Chuck Hibbs in 1980-1981 (Thomas and Hibbs 1984).

Chance & Chance (1976: 29-30) were the first to excavate near the location of the Old Apple Tree, terming the excavation area as "Operation 14," excavating a single 5 x 5 ft. unit and a 2.5 x 30 ft. trench just east of the tree. They recovered common-cut square nails, window glass, and confusing stratigraphy, all of which they attributed to a U.S. Army Quartermaster Depot residence; yet they also postulated that there was evidence of a HBC-era structure nearby.

Thomas & Hibbs (1984: 111-300) came back to Operation 14 and undertook extensive excavations of a HBC-era dwelling in 1981 to the north and east of the Old Apple Tree, excavating 109 5 x 5 ft. units, totaling 2,725 ft.² of area. Interpretation of historical data led Thomas & Hibbs to believe that the archaeological dwelling site was associated with HBC-employee, John Johnson, a cooper who worked for at Fort Vancouver from ca. 1833-1852. According to Thomas & Hibbs, the Operation 14 structure was constructed and occupied as early as 1825 (1984: 265). The artifacts and features seem to show a series of occupants who enlarged the structure through time, with specific occupations dating to 1825-1835, 1835-1846, and 1846-1860 (1984: 265-281). They argue that John Johnson and his family (a wife named Marie Umpqua, and children) likely occupied the structure from ca. 1833 until the structure was rented and occupied by the U.S. Army in 1849. Historical information indicates that the U.S. Army demolished the structure in 1857 (Thomas & Hibbs 1984: 293).

The significance of the Old Apple Tree to both the occupants of the Operation 14 site, as well as to the excavators is demonstrated by the fact that the tree is shown in all of the excavation maps associated with the site, and that it is specifically listed as a "Yard Feature" associated with the house (Thomas & Hibbs 1984: 285). They unequivocally state that the tree was planted and living during the earliest period of occupation of the structure, and based upon its proximity to the structure, it seems likely that the occupants of the Operation 14 household tended to and harvested from the tree (and may have even planted the tree).

The association of the household with John Johnson, from Scotland, may be an indicator of a slightly higher socio-economic class than many other households located in the Village—households that may have had greater support from the Gentlemen class leading to access to rarified items such as seedling apple trees. Indeed, the 1846 Covington map of Fort Vancouver shows surname labels assigned to many of the households in the Village, with a concentration of Anglo-based names in the southwestern portion of the Village surrounding Operation 14. A remembrance of the organization of the Village by a local resident also supports this map, “Contiguous to the hamlet [the Employee Village] were about half a dozen houses of a better class, wherein dwelt George Aiken, blacksmith; Norman Martin, carpenter; George Johnston, cooper; Malcolm McLeod, assistant carpenter; James Johnston, pilot... and a man named McPhail, a shepard—all Scotchmen” (Alley and Munroe-Fraser 1885: 321).

Conclusions

The Old Apple Tree has been celebrated as such since at least 1911, and has been recognized as the only above-ground, living element that has an association with the Hudson’s Bay Company, within the city of Vancouver, Washington. Based upon available information, it seems that the tree was planted sometime between ca. 1826-1830, and was located within what was then the HBC’s Fort Vancouver Employee Village. The tree may provide some of the best evidence for the date of founding of the Village, which is typically dated to ca. 1829-1860. If the tree indeed dates to 1826, it may provide the basis for pushing the date of settlement of the Village to this earlier date.

The tree seems to be associated with a household from the HBC Servant Village, and is definitively not a part of the formal HBC Orchard, which was located some 1,000 ft. to the northeast, adjacent to the northern stockade wall of HBC Fort Vancouver. Archaeological excavations of a HBC Village household known as Operation 14 in 1980-81 indicate that the tree was part of the yard of a house that was occupied by John Johnson, a Scottish cooper, ca. 1833-1852. Given that the tree was planted ca. 1826, it may be that the tree was planted by a previous occupant of the house, or even of a house that has yet to be archaeologically identified.

The specific facts of the origins of this particular tree are “lost to history,” yet the tree lives on as a living hallmark of a time period that is now otherwise obscured from above-ground view.

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