



# FORT LANGLEY

NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK



DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

# FORT LANGLEY

## National Historic Park

### Cover Scene

*The painting reproduced on the front cover of this booklet shows the departure of Sir James Douglas, the Governor, and his party from Fort Langley on November 19, 1858 after proclaiming the Colony of British Columbia. The painting was commissioned from Franklin Arbuckle, R.C.A., of Toronto, by the Hudson's Bay Company. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Hudson's Bay Company for permission to reproduce the painting on the cover of this booklet and for loaning the original painting for display at Fort Langley National Historic Park.*

Issued under the authority of  
HON. ARTHUR LAING, P.C., M.P., B.S.A.  
Minister of  
Northern Affairs and National Resources

## **FORT LANGLEY NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK**

On November 19, 1858, at Fort Langley, an important trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Crown Colony of British Columbia was formally proclaimed. At Fort Langley, founded in 1827, the traders and artisans of the Hudson's Bay Company established the first permanent British settlement on the lower mainland of British Columbia and developed not only an active fur trade but also practical and productive agricultural and industrial activities.

It was fitting that Fort Langley should be partially restored for the Centennial of the Province of British Columbia in 1958. The restoration was carried out in 1957-1958 under an agreement concluded on November 20, 1956 between the Governments of Canada and of British Columbia.

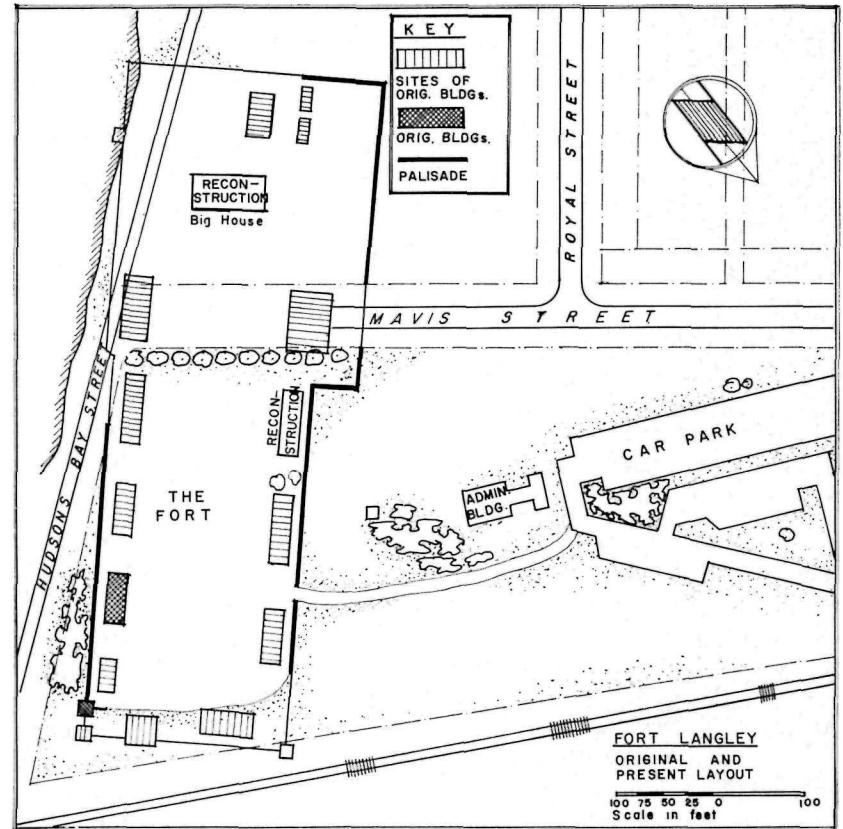
To the coastal Indians of the mid-19th century, Fort Langley presented an imposing appearance. The palisade was of heavy cedar logs pinned close together with stout wooden pegs. The logs were set into the ground so that the height of the palisades was roughly 18 feet. Three bastions, each armed with two 9-pounder cannon, guarded the corners of the fort.

Within the palisade 15 buildings were arranged in order about an area 660 feet long and 242 feet wide. The largest was the Officers' Quarters, or "The

Big House” to use the common Hudson’s Bay Company term for the quarters of the officer in charge and his principal assistants. The Big House, a two-storied building 70 feet long, 34 feet wide, and 32 feet high, was used for the ceremony proclaiming the Crown Colony. The others were the residences of the supervisor and Indian trader, the cooper, the boatbuilder, the blacksmith, the dairyman, the three labourers and the stewards, the depot storehouse, the shops of the Indian trader, cooper, blacksmith and carpenter, cookhouses, warehouses, and storerooms.

A total restoration of the fort is not feasible because a railroad line occupies some of the original area of the fort. As much of the palisade as could be erected within the limitations of the present site, one bastion, one 2-storey building, and the officers’ quarters were restored; other buildings will be restored when circumstances permit. The second building within the the restored area is an original structure of Fort Langley that has undergone some structural alteration during the years.

The materials and construction techniques used in the restoration follow those used by the skilled French-Canadian and British workmen who built Fort Langley. The poteaux-sur-sole (posts on sills) method of construction, which originated in the French colonies in Canada, was used. Logs of western red cedar were squared with the broad-axe to serve as the principal



timbers, sills, posts, plates, beams, wall-fittings, and roof-members and then dressed with the adze to fit together closely and provide reasonable smooth surfaces.

Unlike modern methods of log construction, the logs were not crossed or dove-tailed at the corners. A complete framework was assembled and then more squared logs were fitted horizontally into this and fastened by tongues that passed into grooves in the posts. These logs served as wall-fitting and when fitted in this way obviated any need for studding on walls and partitions. Large flattened beams and widely spaced rafters completed the framing. Cedar shakes, hand-riven from the baulk of wood with the froe and the mallet, and finished with the draw-knife, were nailed on the roof battens.

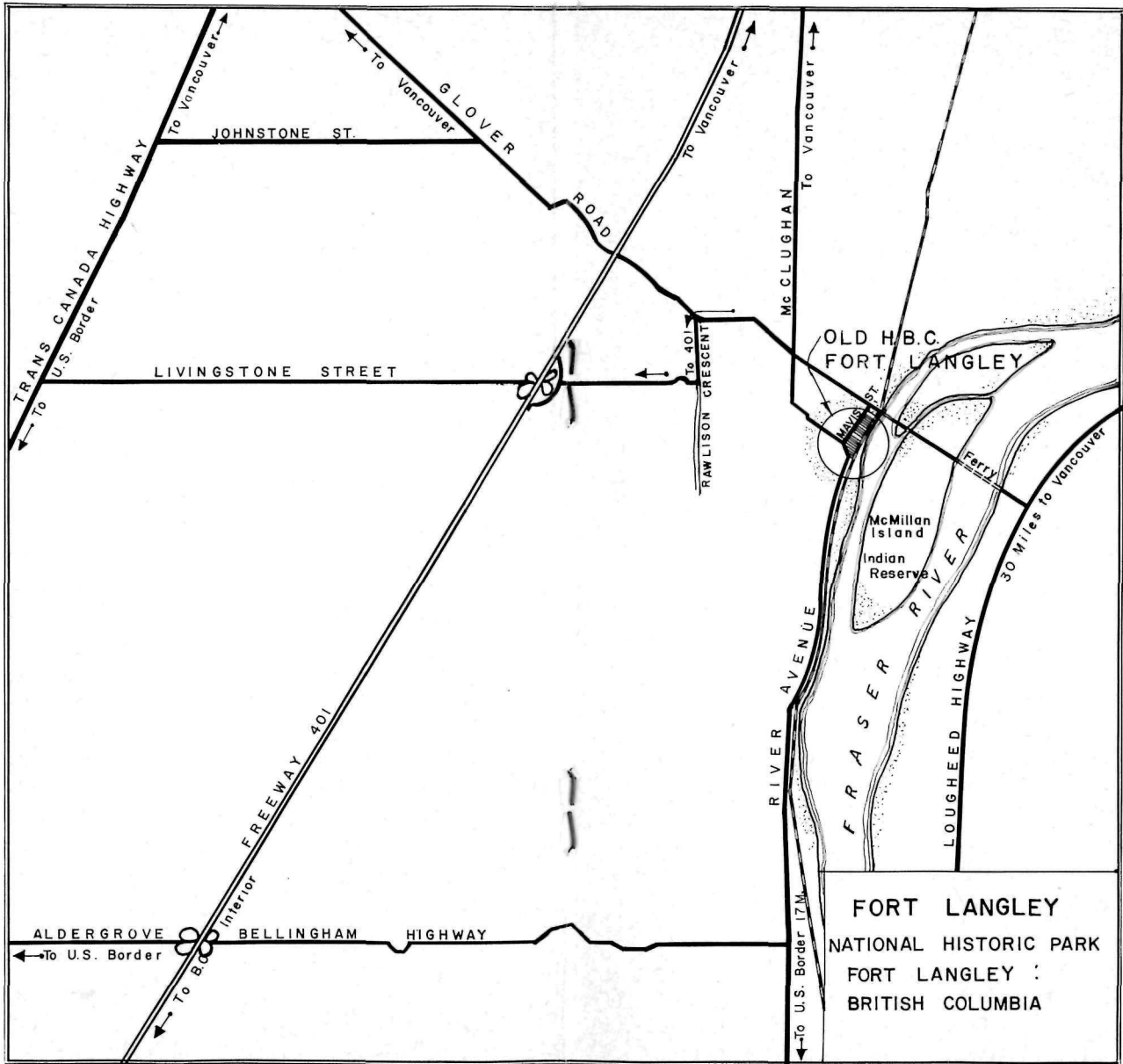
The partial restoration was carried out by the Engineering Services Division, National Parks Branch, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. J. Calder Peeps, M.R.A.I.C., Associate Professor of the School of Architecture, University of British Columbia, was consulting architect. To assure complete authenticity, a great deal of historical research into the architecture, construction, and plan of Fort Langley was carried out by the Historic Sites Division of the National Parks Branch in consultation with the Fort Langley Restoration Special Services Committee and the committee member representing the

Village of Fort Langley, Alex. Hope, president of the Fort Langley Restoration Society. The buildings were furnished in the manner of Hudson's Bay Company trading posts of the mid-19th century with the advice of Dr. Douglas Leechman, of Victoria.

### **History of Fort Langley**

When the Hudson's Bay Company built Fort Langley in 1827 it established a post through which the trade of the Indians of the Fraser River would flow. Such commerce had not been previously developed but the frequent excursions of American trading vessels along the Pacific Coast of Canada had shown how profitable this trade would be for any company that established a permanent post in this country.

Dominating the trade artery of the Fraser, Fort Langley became a British outpost in this unclaimed land. Its location on the Fraser River 35 miles from the present city of Vancouver was chosen wisely; Fort Langley marked the farthest point sea-going vessels could then navigate on the Fraser. In the Pacific Northwest, flag followed trade, and the presence of Fort Langley as a base from which the Hudson's Bay Company could organize the trade of the interior was a decisive factor in affirming and maintaining British influence on the Pacific Coast of Canada.

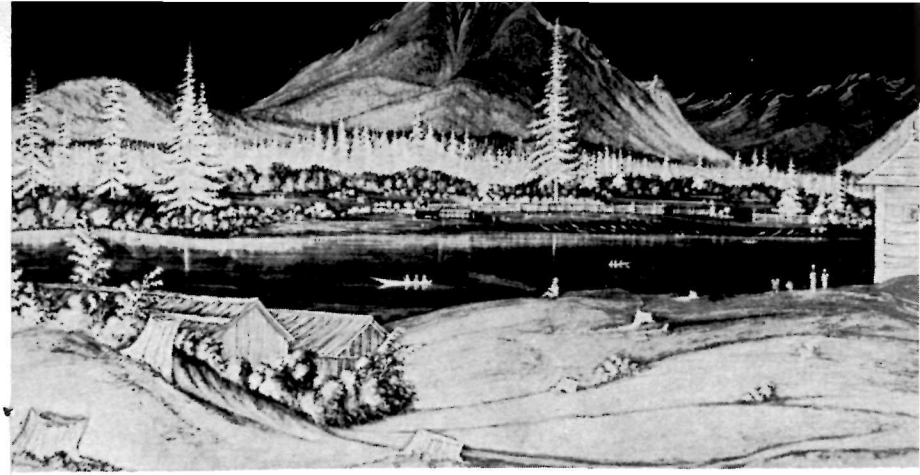


**FORT LANGLEY**  
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FORT LANGLEY :  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

In the early years of the 19th century the trade of the Pacific Northwest was extremely competitive. The Hudson's Bay Company traded in the interior while the American trading vessels from Boston had dominated the coastal trade. When George Simpson, the Governor of the Northern Department of Hudson's Bay Company, arrived at Fort George (previously Fort Astoria) near the mouth of the Columbia River in 1824 he decided the Hudson's Bay Company should extend its operations along the Pacific Coast and end the competition of the Boston ships.

A reconnaissance party left Fort George in November of 1824 to select new locations for posts and to investigate the potentials of the lands around the Fraser River and Burrard Inlet. This preliminary survey was followed by a second expedition in 1827. In July, James McMillan, the leader of the expedition, chose a site for a fort on the south bank of the Fraser below the mouth of the Salmon River. At this point, which is now called Derby, a small fort was hurriedly built to give protection if the Indians of the Fraser turned out to be hostile. On August 1, 1827, the first log was cut for the fort that McMillan named after Thomas Langley, a director of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Under McMillan, its first officer, Fort Langley entered a period of varied and profitable economic activity that lasted until the 1870's. Under Archibald



A painting of the Fraser River from Fort Langley in 1860  
by James M. Alden.

*Public Archives of Canada*

McDonald, who succeeded McMillan in 1828, and James M. Yale, the officer in charge from 1833, the fort prospered as a fur trading depot, a fishery, a farm, and a general manufacturing industry that provided much of the equipment and hardware for other Hudson's Bay Company posts in the interior of British Columbia.

Like other fur-trading posts, Fort Langley underwent changes in location and appearance. The temporary fort at Derby was abandoned in 1839 and a new Fort Langley built two miles up the Fraser River, on the site of the present restoration. This fort, accidentally destroyed by fire in 1840 but immediately rebuilt, flourished as a fur trading base and transportation terminal.

The business of salting and curing salmon caught by the Indians was started by Factor McDonald and expanded in later years. Fort Langley was the original exporter of salted salmon, selling fish to the Hawaiian Islands. To pack salmon, barrels were required and soon barrel-making had developed into an important secondary industry whose products were exported as well as used locally. By 1846, Fort Langley was exporting from 1,000 to 2,000 barrels of salmon a year.

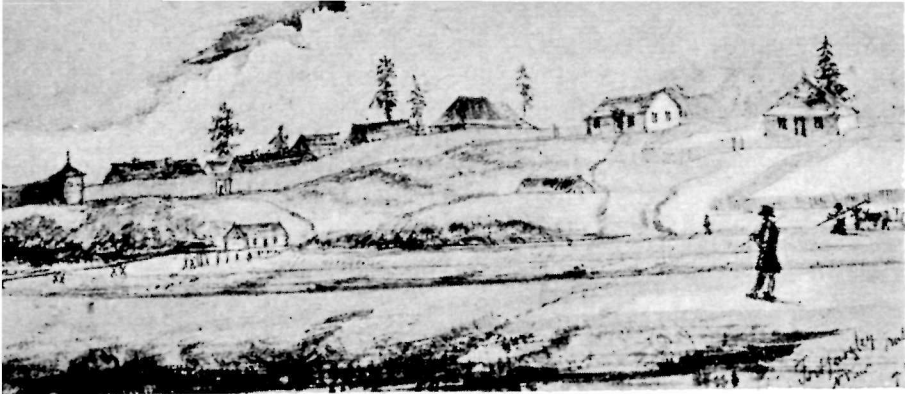
Interest in the agricultural possibilities of British Columbia led the company to begin farming on an experimental basis. Fort Langley contributed to the company's farming operations but not on a large scale until 1839, when agricultural produce became important not only for supplies but to pay rent on the Alaskan Panhandle which the company leased from the Russian American Company. Fort Langley's farm at Langley Prairie was a producer of food for the Russian settlements in Alaska and the British posts in North America until 1867 when Alaska was purchased by the United States. Cranberries were another export of Fort Langley; during the 1850's, large shipments of berries that had been picked by the Indians were sent to San Francisco. Fort Langley also exported hemp to England and its workmen made milk-pans, brooms, horse-collars, tool handles, and toboggans.

Fort Langley's position on the Fraser River be-

came of high strategic value when the Hudson's Bay Company lost the right to use the Columbia River route to the interior of British Columbia in 1846. Now forced to operate above the 49th parallel, which the Treaty of Washington set as the boundary between the United States and British possessions, the company made Langley the shipping depot for the furs and other raw materials that came from the interior and the trading goods and supplies going into the trading posts. At this time, Fort Langley was considered the head of steam navigation on the Fraser and goods and supplies coming from the district headquarters at Victoria were transferred from steamboat to canoe at Fort Langley to make the perilous journey up the rapids and canyons of the river.

Fort Langley was a large and busy place, particularly during the early months of the 1858 Gold Rush. Fifteen buildings were distributed behind the log palisades and the three formidable bastions each equipped with two 9-pounder guns. French-Canadians and Iroquois from Eastern Canada, Scottish employees of the company, Kanakas from the Islands of Hawaii, and Coast Indians and half-bloods worked at the fort as boatbuilders, carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, hunters, trappers, boatmen, clerks, and labourers.





A sketch of Fort Langley from the north drawn by E. Mallandaine in 1859.

*B.C. Archives*

Fort Langley's fortunes ebbed after 1858 when the American side-wheel steamer "Surprise" fulfilled the promise of her name by proving that the Fraser River was navigable as far as Fort Hope, 78 miles farther up the river. With the help of an Indian pilot from Langley, the American ship steamed to Fort Hope, making this the new terminus of river travel for steamboats and condemning Fort Langley to economic decline.

The Fort was not doomed to pass from the scene without one more contribution to Canadian history. Fort Langley's final—and greatest—glory was achieved when it was chosen for the proclamation of the Crown Colony of British Columbia.

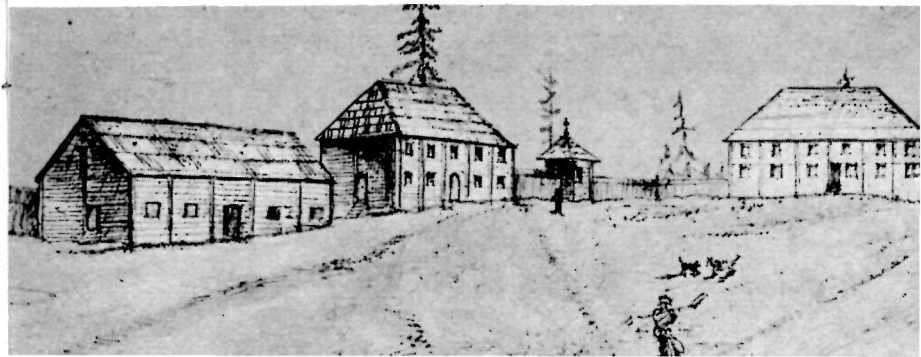
On August 2, 1858, the British Parliament passed an Act providing for the Government of the Colony of British Columbia. To proclaim the new colony, Sir James Douglas, the Governor of Vancouver Island, travelled from Victoria to Langley in the *Beaver*, first steamer on the North Pacific Coast. With him was Matthew B. Begbie, the jurist who was to become British Columbia's Chief Justice and earn fear and respect by his strict enforcement of criminal law. With them were Rear-Admiral Baynes of the Royal Navy, Chief Justice David Cameron of the Colony of Vancouver Island, and a detachment of Royal Engineers.

A salute of 18 shots from the cannon of Fort Langley welcomed the party as it arrived at the fort on November 19. A guard of honor was provided by the Royal Engineers and 100 persons gathered to witness the birth of British Columbia.

In the Big House of the fort, Governor Douglas

1858 sketch by E. Mallandaine showing the Officers' Quarters and two other buildings in the interior of Fort Langley.

*B.C. Archives*



first addressed Begbie, delivering his commission as Chief Justice. After Judge Begbie took the oath, Governor Douglas read Her Majesty's proclamation appointing himself as Governor of the Crown Colony of British Columbia; and Begbie then administered the oaths of office and allegiance. Then Governor Douglas read proclamations revoking the Hudson's Bay Company's licence of exclusive trading rights with the B.C. Indians, establishing the Government of British Columbia, indemnifying the Governor for any acts done by himself or by his officers prior to this date, and declaring that the laws of England should be in full force in British Columbia.

Sir James Douglas decided the capital of the new colony should be located at Derby, the site of the first Fort Langley, but on the arrival of Colonel Richard Moody of the Royal Engineers at Christmas, 1858 strong objection was taken to the location selected by Governor Douglas. On February 14, 1859 Colonel Moody gave notice that the new capital would be situated on the north bank of the Fraser at Queensborough which the new town was to be called. This name was later changed to New Westminster by Royal Proclamation on July 20, 1859. When the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia united in 1866, New Westminster became the Capital of the united colony and two years later the Capital was moved to Victoria.

**Great credit is due the Native Sons of  
British Columbia for maintaining interest  
in the preservation of Fort Langley.**

ROGER DUHAMEL, F.R.S.C.  
QUEEN'S PRINTER AND CONTROLLER OF STATIONERY  
OTTAWA, 1966



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