

Fort Langley

FORT LANGLEY was a trading post established in 1827 by the HBC on the FRASER R about 50 km from its mouth at the site now known as DERBY. It was named for Thomas Langley, an HBC official. In 1839 a new post was built 5 km upriver, closer to suitable farmland. When this fort burned in 1840 its replacement was relocated close by on the present site. BC was declared a colony here on 19 Nov 1858, by which time the post was a jumping-off point for miners heading to the Interior goldfields (see GOLD RUSHES). It remained in operation until 1886; for most of that time it was an important provisioning post, producing AGRICULTURAL products and cured SALMON. In 1955 the site was declared a National Historic Park and several buildings were reconstructed. The village itself, with its array of antique shops, sidewalk cafés and historic buildings, caters to an ever-increasing flow of TOURISTS. In the 1990s the GREATER VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT and LANGLEY Township began building a fort-to-fort trail linking the Historic Park with the old Derby site.

(Encyclopedia of BC: <http://knowbc.com/ebc/Books/Encyclopedia-of-BC/F/Fort-Langley>)

Fort Langley is the exact location where, a century and a half ago, a huge fur trade organization called the Hudson's Bay Company established a small post to trade with the First Nations of the West Coast. The enterprise grew, evolved, and influenced history, leading to the creation of the colony of British Columbia.

Furs were shipped to Europe via Cape Horn, produce was traded to the Russians in Alaska, local cranberries found their way to California, and Fraser River salmon was enjoyed as far away as Hawaii!

The Hudson's Bay Company established the original Fort Langley in 1827. It served as part of a network of fur trade forts operating in the New Caledonia and Columbia Districts (now British Columbia and northern Washington). The fort maintained a good and peaceful trade in furs, salmon, and even cranberries with the local native inhabitants. Because of its strategic position on the Fraser River the post developed into a regional depot and forwarding centre. European trade goods and supplies destined for the interior were received from the arriving steamers, re-packaged and sent inland from this fort and the District's outgoing fur, fish, and cranberry exports were prepared for overseas shipment. Langley also blazed the first useable all-Canadian route from the coast to the interior and with its sister posts helped preserve British interests west of the Rockies.

The First Fort is Built

Construction of the first Fort Langley commenced on August 1, 1827. The new fort measured 41 m by 36.6m and was solidly enclosed by a palisade 4.6m high. Buildings in the new complex included the Big House where the officers were quartered, a building with three compartments to house other ranks, a spacious store, one "good" house and a smaller house with two rooms and a kitchen. Two bastions equipped with artillery completed the new fort.

From the first years of the fort's existence, the Company men married local native women, and these families lived at the fort. The employees were a unique social and ethnic mix of people, including English, French Canadian, Scottish, Hawaiian, Iroquois, and Coast Salish. Country marriages were encouraged by the Company and supported by the Native peoples, as inter-cultural relations and economic trade were enhanced. Coast Salish wives in the fort became linguists and cultural intermediaries, and also became an unofficial workforce doing essential work for the fort.

Economy and Trade at Fort Langley

From 1827 to 1833, Fort Langley played a major role in the British coastal offensive against the American traders. More than half of the 3,000 beaver collected by the Hudson's Bay Company on the coast in 1831, were from the new Fraser River establishment. Under the astute direction of Chief-Trader Archibald McDonald, Langley systematically undersold its American competitors and soon commanded the trade with Indian tribes throughout Vancouver Island, the Fraser River and Puget Sound.

As its immediate area became exhausted, Fort Langley's primary function shifted from fur collecting to provisioning. A network of posts and vessels was gradually built up to expand the company's control of the coast, and the Langley fishery and farm supplied many of their basic needs.

Bountiful salmon in the Fraser River had long been a staple of the Coast Salish, and could be traded with natives for [blankets](#), vermillion and tobacco. Salting and packing of salmon became an industry under Chief-Trader McDonald and his successor James Murray Yale. By 1838 Langley supplied all the salt salmon required by the Company's operations west of the Rockies. As the Hudson's Bay Company became linked to the wider commerce of the Pacific, Langley-cured salmon found its way to markets in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and Australia.

Farming was begun on the fertile prairie 11 km from the fort, in the area then known as Langley Prairie. Crops were frequently washed out in the low-lying land, but the agricultural operations steadily expanded until the Langley farm covered over 800 hectares. Producing potatoes, barley, peas and wheat and maintaining a stock of 200 pigs and 500 head of cattle, it supplemented the produce of many Pacific forts and provided food for the "SS Beaver" and other Company vessels.

(Parks Canada: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/bc/langley/natcul/natcul2/a.aspx>)

Fort Langley, established 1827 on the FRASER RIVER, 32 km east of VANCOUVER near present-day LANGLEY, BC, was important in the province's development until the post's abandonment in 1886. Part of a network of trading posts established by the HUDSON'S BAY CO on the Pacific slope, it was initially a fur trade post but soon became a provisioning and administrative centre for the company's Columbia District. The old fort was abandoned in 1839 and a new one was built 3.5 km upstream. After a fire, it was rebuilt in May 1840. The fort operated a large farm, initiated fish packing and became a commercial centre for the colony of British Columbia. By the time it became a national HISTORIC SITE in 1923, its buildings were crumbling. But beginning in 1955 several buildings were reconstructed, and Fort Langley is now an important tourist attraction.



Fort Langley

Fort Langley was initially a fur-trade post but soon became a provisioning and administrative centre for the Columbia District (courtesy Environment Canada). 



Fort Langley

British Columbia was declared a colony here, at Fort Langley, 19 Nov 1858 (painting by William Henry Newton Image, courtesy BC Archives/PDP00029).

(The Canadian Encyclopedia: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/fort-langley>)

Fort Langley was part of a network of trading posts established by the Hudson's Bay Company on the Pacific Slope in the early nineteenth century. Though its trade in furs was initially profitable, its main role became a supportive one including varied economic activities. It operated a large scale farm, initiated the famous west coast salmon packing industry and began B.C.'s foreign commerce. Fort Langley also blazed the first useable all-Canadian route from the coast to the interior and with its sister posts helped preserve British/Canadian interests west of the Rockies.

Looking to the Fraser River to provide a new access to the interior, a reconnaissance party led by Chief Trader James McMillan made a preliminary survey of the lower Fraser Valley in November 1824. Three years later, a site on the south bank of the Fraser, near the Salmon River, was selected for a prospective depot named Fort Langley in honour of Thomas Langley, a director of the Company.

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Scarcely had Fort Langley been comfortably established when Simpson discovered he had been too confident. The Fraser River was an impossible route for regular traffic. A terrifying trip through the Fraser Canyon in October 1828 convinced Governor Simpson that the river was unnavigable and that the Columbia-Okanagan supply route must be retained. The position of the Pacific Depot went to Fort Vancouver on the north side of the Columbia, but Fort Langley was destined nevertheless to become an influential force in Company operations.

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Salmon, abounding in the Fraser River, had long been a staple of coast Indian and fur trader, and could be cheaply traded with the Indians for "vermilion, rings and other trifles". Salting and packing salmon became an industry under Chief Trader McDonald and his successor James Murray Yale. By 1838 Langley supplied all the salt salmon required by the Company's operations west of the Rockies. As the Hudson's Bay Company became linked to the wider commerce of the Pacific, Langley-cured salmon found its way to markets in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and Australia.



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New Fort Langley had been occupied just ten months when it was consumed by fire and had to be completely rebuilt. In May, 1840, construction commenced on a new complex which eventually enclosed an area 192 by 73 meters and contained three to four bastions and about 15 buildings. It is on this site that the present reconstruction has been made.

Two decades of intense activity followed the establishment of the new fort. Grain production increased, beef and pork were salted for the Company ships and two dairies were kept in full production. Salted salmon continued to be popular in the Sandwich Islands and an annual export

of 2,000 barrels was not uncommon in the years between 1845 and 1854. Cranberries traded from the Indians and packaged at Fort Langley sold at substantial profits in San Francisco.

When the Company established Fort Victoria as future Pacific headquarters in 1843, Langley's Chief Trader Yale felt the importance of his post was being undermined. He so resented the supremacy of the nearby fort that he misjudged its effect. In fact, the reorganization of HBC Pacific operations occasioned by the settlement of the Oregon boundary in 1846 increased the value of Fort Langley.

The international line drawn at the 49th parallel limited Company access to the Columbia-Okanagan supply route, just as Simpson had predicted, and forced a re-examination of the Fraser River as a possible artery to the interior. By 1848, a new route for the fur brigade was established by horse from Fort Kamloops through the Cascade Mountains to Fort Hope and from there by the flat-bottomed cargo boat or bateau down the Fraser. Fort Langley, at the head of navigation, became the transshipment depot for the interior, finally making Simpson's plan for the Fraser a reality.



(Gerry Borden – Fort Langley National Historic Site:

<http://users.uniserve.com/~gborden/fl-hist.htm>)