

ASTORIAN BICENTENNIAL ENCAMPMENT GUIDELINES

The Astorian bicentennial encampment will represent a living history reenactment to commemorate the establishment of the first permanent American settlement in the Pacific Northwest by the Pacific Fur Company in 1811. Participants are invited to represent not only the members of John Jacob Astor's company, but others involved in the fur trade in the Columbia region from the arrival of the first Astorian party in 1811 to the end of the period of joint British-American occupancy of the Oregon Country in 1846. It is hoped that the encampment will include those interpreting a variety of the diverse peoples involved in the trade, including members of the Northwest Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, French Canadians, Hawaiians, and the Native Americans with whom the trade was carried on over the course of these thirty-five years.

As the encampment will be open to the public, and as its purpose is in part educational, participants are encouraged to develop first-person interpretations of specific or typical individuals involved in the Columbia fur trade emanating from Astoria. Demonstrations of period crafts or activities will be an important part of the encampment as well, and this may include period music or other entertainment. Volunteers from amongst the encampment participants will give brief historical orientations to visitors arriving at the encampment grounds.

PERSONAS

A wide variety of personas could be interpreted at the encampment. The Astorian parties of the Pacific Fur Company can be divided into two main groups, those who traveled overland across the continent from St. Louis, and those who traveled by ship from New York City to the mouth of the Columbia River. The harrowing journey across the continent by canoe, on horseback, and on foot, will have left the "overlanders" looking very different from those who traveled in the relative comfort of the Company's ships the Tonquin and later the Beaver. Both groups comprised Americans, British subjects from Canada, particularly Scots, and French Canadians from Montreal, the Great Lakes region, and from the area of St. Louis. Most of the English-speaking Astorians were traders rather than frontiersmen,

although a number of American trappers were added to the overland party as it ascended the Missouri River. The Tonquin included in its complement a handful of Hawaiians recruited while the ship visited the Sandwich Islands.

The Pacific Fur Company's brief tenure at the mouth of the Columbia came to an end when the Northwest Company bought all the assets at Fort Astoria and established its sole power over the trade of the Columbia country over the course of the year 1813. The Northwest Company made its presence in the region felt as early as the summer of 1811 when David Thomson, a partner in the company and its official surveyor, arrived at the newly established post at the mouth of the Columbia. The Northwest Company carried on the fur trade from its acquisition of the former Fort Astoria, renamed Fort George, until its merger with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. A Northwest Company persona would therefore be very appropriate to the Bicentennial encampment. The company, based in Montreal, consisted primarily of English-speaking partners, traders, and clerks, many of Highland Scots origin, and the French Canadian voyageurs who formed the labor force of the trade. Many of the Astorians were former Northwest Company men, and many of the Astorians on the Pacific coast were in turn hired by the Northwest Company when it bought out the Pacific Fur Company.

Encampment participants may choose to represent a persona connected with the Hudson's Bay Company, which controlled the fur trade in the Columbia country from 1821 to the establishment of U.S. sovereignty in 1846. Although Fort George, on the site of the present-day city of Astoria, ceased to be the headquarters for the operations of the company with the establishment of Fort Vancouver in 1825, the post at the mouth of the Columbia continued to be one of the many posts that formed the vital nodes of the fur trade. Although the English figured more prominently under the Hudson's Bay Company than they had up to that time, virtually any of the personas already mentioned could be adapted to the later period leading up to 1846.

Native American personas suitable to the Bicentennial Encampment include not only the tribes of the immediate area of Astoria, the Clatsop and Chinook, but also the many tribes of the larger Columbia country in which the trade was carried on, for example, the Okanogan and other members of the Colville Confederated Tribes, the Nez Perce, the Walla Walla, the Salish, the Yakama, and many other inland and coastal tribes and communities.

Although only occasionally did members of the inland tribes actually make their way to the mouth of the Columbia, their essential role in the fur trade, and the centrality of their experience in the changes brought about in the region by the trade, make their participation in the encampment a vital part of the larger bicentennial commemoration.

The choice of persona is more limited for women. Marie Dorion was the only woman amongst the original Pacific Fur Company parties. With the transfer of the trade to the Northwest Company, Europeanized half-blood women begin to figure in the trade as the wives of company men. By the end of the period represented by the encampment white women had begun to arrive in the Oregon country in large numbers.

Sources that will help with the development of a persona, and with the choice of appropriate clothing and equipment, will be available in a bibliography to be posted on the Astoria 2011 website, www.astoria200.org.