

HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY FORT UMPQUA, 1836-1852

NORMAN D. SCHLESSER
Umpqua Community College

ABSTRACT

Located near Elkton, Oregon, Fort Umpqua served as the center of Hudson's Bay Company activities in southwestern Oregon for sixteen years. Constructed in 1836 and abandoned by the Company in 1852, this fort is known only through Company District Statements and Abstract of Accounts together with a few journal references. First attempts to relocate the site were made in the summer of 1973. Results of this site survey, descriptions of the artifacts discovered, and recommendations for future preservation of the site are discussed.

Significance of the Fort

For three decades the economic and social life of the Oregon Country was determined by the policies of the Hudson's Bay Company. Within the present state of Oregon major fur collection centers were established at Astoria, Sauvies Island, Champoeg, and Elkton. At the present time the Fort William site on Sauvies Island, and the Fort Umpqua site near Elkton (Fig. 1) are the only remaining undisturbed fur trade sites in the Pacific Northwest. Preservation of these two locations around which centered so much of the early history of the state should be seriously considered by both the individual land owners and the appropriate governmental agencies.

Fort Umpqua deserves a prominent place in the history of the Columbia District by virtue of the fact that next to Astoria it was the Company's major fur collecting point in the State of Oregon. This post ranked third in value (Elliott 1931:30-31, 40) of all fur posts in the District according to the inventory made in 1846. It was the first white settlement in southern Oregon; introduced the first agriculture and domestic animals; and had a significant effect on the Native Americans of the Umpqua basin.

Historical Summary

Early Exploration

It has been argued (Howay and Elliott 1929:200) that the first strictly commercial contact between white men and Indians in Oregon took place in the Summer of 1791 when the brig *Jenny* traded in Winchester Bay the mouth of the Umpqua River. Two decades later a few independent trappers of the Northwest

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF BEADS WITH KIDDS' (1970) IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS

Kidds' Identification Numbers	Color		Reflection	Total
	Primary	Secondary		
IIa (Tube)	White		Opaque	104
	Black		Opaque	2
	Blue		Opaque	1
	Lt. Blue		Opaque	1
	Yellowish Green		Translucent	24
	Green		Translucent	4
	Dk. Bluish Green		Translucent	3
IVa (Tube)	White	White	Opaque	8
W1b (Wire Wound)	Red		Translucent	2
	Greenish Blue		Translucent	1
GRAND TOTAL				150

The two patterns identified were "Broseley" (Fig. 4a) and "Portland Vase" (Fig. 4b).

Three styles of "Broseley" patterns have been found at HBC Fort Vancouver, and only one of these styles has been positively identified as to its manufacturer--The Spode-Copeland and Garrett-Copeland pottery in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England (ca. 1817-1867).

Only one style of "Portland Vase" has been observed at HBC Fort Vancouver, and it was manufactured ca. 1831-1857 by the Spode-Copeland and Garrett pottery. Both of these identified patterns are commonly associated with HBC sites in the Northwest.

Beads

Two manufacturing types of beads were observed, tube and wire wound (Table 3). Of the 150 beads found, there were 8 varieties of tube beads and two varieties of wire wound beads. The only variety not found at HBC Fort Vancouver is the red wire wound variety.

Nails

Of the 63 nail fragments, there were two manufacturing types--hand forged and machine cut. There were two varieties of hand forged nails--"Clasp" and "Rose" (Fig. 5a-b); and three varieties of machine cut nails--"Clasp," "Rose-Shingling," and "Common" (Fig. 5c-e). All five varieties commonly occur at HBC Fort Vancouver.