

Pacific Northwest Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Task Agreement No. P15AC01490

National Park Service

Recipient: Portland State University

Project Title: Analysis, Summary, and Public Archaeology Outreach of Artifacts  
from an Archaeological Field School at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

By

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Introduction

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (FOVA) is an unparalleled archaeological laboratory, comprising the remains of Fort Vancouver, the ca. 1825-1860 regional headquarters and supply depot for the Hudson's Bay Company, and Vancouver Barracks, the first (ca. 1849-2010) permanent U.S. Army post and command center in the Pacific Northwest. One of the largest complexes related to home front activities during the First World War (WWI) was the Spruce Production Division's main Spruce Cut-Up Plant (Spruce Mill) in Vancouver, Washington on the site of what is now FOVA. The Spruce Mill was constructed in 1917-1918 and served to produce aircraft-quality wood to support the U.S. war effort.

This project built on the results of a historic context study and an archaeological field school to address the archaeology of this important early 20<sup>th</sup> century WWI home front activity. Based on the recommendations in the historic context study, excavations were conducted in the summer of 2015 to record and evaluate Spruce Mill archaeological deposits. The purpose was to determine if the archaeological remains to the east of the Fort Vancouver stockade contained sufficient integrity and included material of sufficient scientific and historical value to contribute to the National Register significance of FOVA. Likewise, these test excavations sought to determine if the deposits have material characteristics that would argue for their preservation in place under the National Register of Historic Places criteria. A third benefit was to provide evidence of the tangible remains of these operations to improve the interpretation of history at Fort Vancouver. This project summarized information from this excavation, analyzed the artifacts, and developed public outreach materials for social media and an exhibit for the 2016 Archaeology Roadshow at Portland State University.

The Pacific Northwest Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) Task Agreement (No. P15AC01490) between the National Park Service (NPS) and Portland State University (PSU) was established on September 1, 2015. It provided funding for processing, analysis, and cataloging of archaeological materials from the 2015 field school excavations at the Spruce Mill site. During this work, students and volunteers gained hands on training in collections management. The project also a collaborative effort

to compile information from the field school and conduct outreach of the findings to the public through a Portland State University-sponsored outreach event called the Archaeology Roadshow. The products of the project are a catalog of the collected archaeological artifacts, a final project summary report, and summaries of the archaeological research presented to the public through a variety of media.

### Objectives

The purpose of this agreement was to conduct archaeological laboratory training for students and volunteers, compile information from the 2015 field school for public outreach, and develop and participate in a public archaeology outreach event. Specifically, the project had five objectives. The first was to train students and volunteers in the current status of collections management, focusing on the analysis and cataloging of archaeological artifacts. The second goal entailed tracking the artifacts collected from the archaeology field school using a computer database, cleaning the artifacts, analyzing them following standards developed for FOVA, and cataloging the artifacts to NPS standards. Third was to compile information from the field school for public outreach, including artifact descriptions, feature descriptions, maps, profiles, and plan views. Following this compilation, the fourth goal used this information to develop and present an exhibit on the results at the PSU Archaeology Roadshow in 2016. Finally, the fifth goal entailed engaging students from the Portland metropolitan area in the unique history of the region and in the cultural resources of FOVA.

The NPS and PSU staff achieved the goals over the course of 18 months through archaeological lab work, research and writing, cataloging, and participating in the 2016 PSU Archaeology Roadshow.

### Methods

On September 21, 2015, NPS staff and the PSU research assistants met at FOVA for a kick-off meeting to begin preparation of archaeology lab. Between this meeting and October 9, 2015, they established a lab schedule, and provided initial training in techniques and methodology in artifact processing, cataloging, and preservation of archaeological and archival collections. The archaeology lab opened for volunteers to begin working on the collection on October 9, 2015.

### *Personnel*

Through the task agreement, Katie Wynia was employed as a Research Assistant, and Emily Taber was employed as a PSU graduate student Research Assistant for two terms of the 2015-2016 academic year. For the spring term of 2016, Katie Tipton was hired as a PSU graduate student Research Assistant. Throughout the project, the PSU research assistants were aided by NPS staff including Theresa Langford and Douglas Wilson.

Emily Taber and Katie Tipton, assisted by NPS staff and Katie Wynia, trained students and volunteers in the archaeology lab at Fort Vancouver NHS. Training included collections management, analysis, and cataloging of archaeological artifacts. The lab was staffed by volunteers, including PSU students, others from surrounding universities, and community members. The research assistants recruited PSU student volunteers via email to former field school students, and through informal outreach on the PSU campus in the Anthropology Department and anthropology classes.

The archaeology lab processed, analyzed, and prepared the collection for curation over the course of the 18 months. During this time, the research assistants created and maintained computer-based

databases to track artifacts and compile analysis data. The databases are in Microsoft Excel format, and include the field bag catalogs, a lot catalog, and an artifact analysis database. Additionally, as the artifacts were analyzed, the research assistants, aided by NPS staff, identified objects from the assemblage for a study collection.

NPS staff collaborated with, and provided essential support to, the PSU research assistants throughout the project. The NPS staff participated in project management decisions throughout the project, including planning to ensure efficient completion of tasks, artifact identification, review of analysis sheets for quality control, and interpretation of the project findings. They also reviewed, edited, and provided writing assistance for the public outreach materials such as the social media posts and the Archaeology Roadshow exhibit. Throughout the project, the NPS ATR, Theresa Langford, cooperated with the PSU PI, Dr. Shelby Anderson, to ensure the conduct of the project complied with "Quality Control of Scientific and Other Scholarly Products in the Pacific West Region."

### *Lab Methods*

Artifacts were prepared, processed, analyzed, and curated to the Secretary of the Interior's standards at the Fur Store curation facility at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. All recovered artifacts were cleaned by either washing or dry brushing. Artifacts from each unit of provenience were assigned a unique field lot number. Bags of ceramics, glass, ferrous metal, other metal, faunal remains, stone artifacts, and diagnostic artifacts, from each lot were assigned a unique field specimen number. A computer-based database for all recovered materials was maintained to track the materials through the various analysis steps.

After cleaning, the artifacts were analyzed by material type, manufacturing and technological characteristics, and formation process traces. Previously constructed typologies for Fort Vancouver were employed to identify the collected artifacts. This data was then compiled in an Excel database for further analysis and interpretation.

### *Social Media*

NPS staff and the PSU research assistants collaborated to create social media posts during the project dates. These included posts for the FOVA twitter feed, Instagram page and Facebook page. The posts aimed to highlight the artifacts, project findings, and the work performed by the volunteers and students in the lab and at the excavations. The intention of the outreach products was to provide the public with opportunities to learn new information about the cultural and heritage resources at FOVA.

### *Roadshow*

Starting in early 2016, the PSU research assistants and the NPS staff met regularly to plan the exhibit for the 2016 Archaeology Roadshow. Using the artifacts and project results from the 2015 field school, the exhibit was designed to match the theme of the Roadshow: The Archaeology of Dwellings. Artifacts from the field school were identified that could interpret the soldier housing at the Spruce Mill. To provide an interactive element for visitors, project staff developed an educational activity that could teach the public not only about the Spruce Mill, but also other groups at FOVA through time.

## Results

### *Artifact Analysis and Study Collection*

The archaeology lab at Fort Vancouver was open to volunteers between October 9, 2015, and December 31, 2016. The research assistants from Portland State University supervised the archaeology lab, with guidance from NPS staff. The lab was staffed by volunteers, including PSU students, others from surrounding universities, and community members. A total of 14 PSU students volunteered in the lab and an additional 31 other volunteers helped in the lab during this period. The volunteers processed and analyzed the artifacts, and also assisted with data entry into the computer-based artifact database. The collection is now in the process of being cataloged and prepared for storage in the museum.

The work in the lab provided the graduate student lab supervisors and volunteers valuable hands-on education experiences. Training included processing, handling, analyzing, cataloging, and storing artifacts. The student participation provided a means to train the next generation of specialists.

The assemblage from the 2015 field school contained approximately 10,878 artifacts. From the Spruce Mill deposits, artifacts were primarily structural including wire nails, window glass, concrete, sewer tile, and wood. The excavations also intersected Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) era deposits underlying the Spruce Mill layers, containing remains from the HBC Cooper Shop site. Project staff identified diagnostic artifacts, in good condition, for a study collection.

To help interpret both the Spruce Mill, and HBC Cooper Shop site, staff created a study collection for use in public presentations and virtual exhibits. Spruce Mill artifacts were primarily architectural objects such as: wire nails, window glass, metal building hardware, and sewer tile. A railroad spike and a partial metal file tool were also included. Although fragmentary in nature, a few domestic item artifacts were also chosen to provide information on the soldiers' daily lives. These items included undecorated whiteware ceramic vessel fragments, and bottle glass fragments. The HBC cooper shop artifacts identified for the study collection included HBC-era ceramic and glass vessel fragments, square nails, and a blade to a cooper's tool called a "croze." The study collection objects were identified on the artifact database, allowing easy retrieval from the collections when needed. Because the 2015 excavations recovered limited diagnostic artifacts from the Spruce Mill, staff plan to supplement the study collection with 2016 field school artifacts to provide additional information to interpret the Spruce Mill.

### *Summary of Public Outreach*

Between October 15, 2015 and December 31, 2016, the project staff collaborated on social media posts about the Spruce Mill project. The posts highlighted field excavations, lab work, and the Archaeological Roadshow. Twitter posts on October 14<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015; November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015; January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016; March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016; May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016; and June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 highlighted the volunteer work in the archaeology lab. Posts on June 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016; and June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016 displayed archaeological excavations at the Spruce Mill site. Facebook posts about the archaeological excavations included those on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Lab work featured in the Facebook post on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and a post on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 displayed the table at the Archaeological Roadshow. Fort Vancouver's Instagram page featured two photos of lab work, one in November 2015, and one in March of 2016. A photo of the Roadshow was also posted in June 2016. These social media posts provided the public with easily

accessible information on the Spruce Mill project, archaeological methods, and the cultural resources at FOVA.

The Archaeology Roadshow was held on the PSU campus on Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The theme of the event was the Archaeology of Dwellings. Fort Vancouver's exhibit interpreted fur trade-era housing, and the housing available to soldiers at the Spruce Mill during WWI. The exhibit featured objects from the site, including artifacts from the 2015 excavations. Visitors learned about the two historical types of housing, and compared them to modern housing, addressing factors like house size and the number of people in a household. The exhibit at the Archaeological Roadshow provided information about the daily life of everyday people in history, and exposed the greater Portland metropolitan area to the unique archaeological resources of FOVA.

### Conclusion

This project compiled information from the 2015 field school excavations, analyzed the artifacts, and conducted outreach of the findings to the public through social media and PSU's Archaeology Roadshow. The completed collection is now more easily accessible to NPS staff and the public. Field records are available digitally, and the artifact data is compiled in a computer-based database. NPS staff can use the data for planning and management of park resources. The collection is also available to researchers and the public, providing support toward public archaeology efforts.

The project had a direct public benefit by integrating student researchers with cultural resources, and exposing the greater Portland metropolitan area to the unique archaeological resources of FOVA. The partnership with PSU provided opportunities to train students for future careers, supporting the research and educational mission of PSU. The public also benefited from the agreement through information about the cultural and heritage resources at Fort Vancouver NHS.