

Take a historic neighborhood stroll

Fort Vancouver, Officers' Row, Pearson Air Museum beckon

Story & photos by Tracy Beard



The 69-foot-high Salmon Run Bell Tower and Glockenspiel features a revolving musical display at 12 noon, 2, 4, 6 and 8 pm and commemorates the life cycle of the Pacific salmon and the fish's value to the Chinook tribe, the original inhabitants of the lower Columbia River.

If you're like me, you may find yourself waking up on any given morning interested in getting outside and doing something different for the day. The Discovery Historic Loop in Vancouver, Wash., is an easy walk offering many buildings to explore, open spaces to enjoy, and history to discover.

The 2.3-mile loop traverses Esther Short Park, follows along Evergreen Boulevard and Officers Row, and then heads down to the waterfront. If you want to travel farther, extend the walk to include the 4-mile Waterfront Renaissance Trail. Signs are easy to follow and you can bring your dog on a leash for the walk, but "Fido" cannot enter the buildings.

My husband, Steve, and I began at Esther Short Park. Located at 6th and Columbia Streets, this park encompasses five acres and boasts an artistic treasure, the Salmon Run Bell Tower and Glockenspiel. This area also hosts the Downtown Farmers Market, which is open on Saturdays and Sundays through October 27 this year.

The Market vendors sell produce, artisanal foods, and an eclectic array of art. Pick up

picnic supplies at the market and bring them with you, or plan to stop at The Grant House for a delectable lunch.

After checking out the market at the park, we walked east. Evergreen Boulevard becomes Officers Row, where The Grant House is located. The historic buildings along Officers Row are owned by the City of Vancouver, but maintained and operated by the Fort Vancouver National Trust.

A new eatery

Scott and Sarah Flury, new owners of the Grant House Restaurant, decided to make a few changes. "The restaurant's name will convert this summer to Eatery at the Grant House," said Scott Flury. "We plan to be open seven days a week with a new happy hour serving casual fare." The Flurys also plan to extend their outdoor seating onto the veranda upstairs during the summer.



Steve and I enjoyed lunch in the main room. I dined on half a turkey sandwich grilled to perfection with melted provolone cheese, crispy bacon, and tangy tomato aioli. Two sides accompanied the sandwich: a salad — wintergreens with crunchy walnuts, toasted feta cheese, tart grapefruit segments and a sweet poppyseed dressing — and a cup of the pesto chicken soup with sun-dried tomatoes, sweet onions, and celery. Steve enjoyed steak fries and a Rueben sandwich loaded with pastrami,



Thousand Island dressing and savory sauerkraut. After finishing our hearty lunch, we ventured down the loop over to the Marshall House.



Vancouver resident Tracy Beard loves food, wine, exploring new places and old, and writes travel and adventure stories for several publications. Read more about her at tracybeardwrites.com

Signs and flyers with interesting information and facts are available at most of the historical landmarks along the loop. The Marshall House, referred to as the "Jewel of Officers Row," has 15 rooms, six baths, and nine fireplaces. General John Gibbon was the first resident. In 1936, General George C. Marshall moved into the house with his family. The Marshalls occupied the house for 20 months, and then an assortment of parties inhabited the building over the next several decades: Field Officers, the Red Cross, Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, and United Good Neighbors. Refurbished in 1983, the then-empty house now resembles its original state.



Looking up

The downstairs ceilings exhibit particularly attractive artwork with decorative molding formed from cement. Diverse designs highlight each of the overhead ceiling lights. Several businesses rent office space which helps finance the house. Public tours are free, but donations are welcome.

As we traveled along the Discovery Loop, we passed the Vancouver Barracks and Fort Vancouver. The Fort is easy to spot with tall, pointed timbers lined up around the buildings forming a fence preventing any unwanted entry. In 1849, the U.S. Army established its first regional post just north of the Hudson's Bay Company.

This location soon became the U.S. Military's Northwest headquarters and supply base for goods, troops, and equipment. Soldiers protected Oregon Trail settlers, helped with developing transportation systems, and assisted with negotiations between settlers and natives. The barracks received its name, the Vancouver Barracks, in 1879, but its identity re-developed in 1905 during the aviation age.

According to recorded history, on September 19, 1905, Lincoln Beachey flew his Baldwin airship from the Centennial Exposition in Portland to



Photos, clockwise from top left: the Grant House; entrance to the Fort Vancouver National Site; the view across the Columbia River from the Waterfront Renaissance Trail; military artifacts on display; pointed timbers form the fence around the Fort.



the Vancouver post's polo field, making the flight the first aerial crossing over the Columbia River. Wikipedia references Lincoln Beachey as a pioneer American aviator who became wealthy from flying exhibitions. He staged aerial stunts, helped to invent aerobatics, and set numerous aviation records.

The Vancouver Barracks developed into a major player six years later when a few Vancouver aeronauts started operating their aircrafts in the barracks' backyard. These pilots flew anything from hot air balloons to newly-developed airborne contraptions.

Racecar driver Silas Christofferson began experimenting with a new aircraft, the Curtiss Pusher. On June 11, 1912, according to the next day's *Morning Oregonian*, "Aviation science took another stride toward perfection yesterday afternoon when Silas Christofferson, the youthful Portland bird-man, successfully piloted his biplane from the top of the Multnomah Hotel building to Vancouver, Wash. He flew the eight miles, crossing the Willamette and Columbia rivers, in 12 minutes."

In 1917, area lumber mills went on strike. Around the same time, America entered WWI in Europe, and Vancouver's grassy polo field at the barracks



transformed into the world's largest spruce sawmill, quickly built by the hard-working hands of more than 5,000 soldiers using an unlimited budget for the project. The mill was built in just 48 days, and 30,000 soldiers became lumberjacks and millwrights to help with the war effort in a new way. Mills began processing immediately-needed spruce wood in huge quantities to fabricate British- and French- designed planes to fight against the Germans.



Aircraft convey a historic sense at Pearson Air Museum.

The barracks filled with soldiers no longer training to fight the war directly, but working to produce the spruce. The overflow of men camped in tents on the unused grass. All efforts ended in November 1918, and the surplus spruce was sold for firewood.

This grassy area is now Pearson Air Museum

Inside, murals cover the walls of the hangar, articulating historical stories. Life-size planes suspend from the ceiling and rest on the floor, leaving visitors a sense of stepping back in time. A large-scale model on a wooden platform at the far end of the room depicts what the area looked like during the days when it functioned as home to a spruce cutting mill.

A life-size tent assembled in the corner replicates those used by men living in the area during this time. Six men lived in each tent. The non-waterproof canvas tent provided limited protection from the elements, but did not guard the residents from constantly battling the cold and wet throughout harsh Pacific Northwest winters.

Just around the corner

I often travel great lengths to discover new and interesting places, but am pleasantly surprised to find that history often abounds just around the corner. Look around your neighborhood for history near you, or the next time you find yourself out and about, make a trip to Vancouver, Washington, and take a walk on the Discovery Loop.

If You Go

Esther Short Park

605 Esther St • Vancouver, Wash.
Hours 5am-10p • 360- 487-8311

Salmon Run Bell Tower and Glockenspiel

SE corner of Esther Short Park, features a revolving musical display at 12 noon, 2, 4, 6 and 8 pm. See photo, page 18

The Marshall House

1301 Officers Row, Vancouver, Wash
360-693-3103

The Grant House

1101 Officers Row, Vancouver, Wash
Hours: 11am-8pm • 360-906-1101

Fort Vancouver

1501 E Evergreen Blvd, Vancouver, Wash.

Hours: 9am-5pm • 360-816-6230

Pearson Air Museum

1115 E 5th St, Vancouver, Wash.
Hours: 9am-4pm • 360-816-6232

Driving directions: I-5 Exit 1-C to Wash-501/Mill Plain toward City Centre/Port of Vancouver. Turn left onto WA-501/E Mill Plain Blvd. Follow signs.

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