

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

REVISED

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| 1. STATE<br><b>Idaho</b>   |  | 2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO.<br><b>XV - Overland Migrations, Fur Trade, Travel &amp; Communication</b> |  |
| 3. NAME(S) OF SITE<br><b>Fort Hall</b>   |  | 4. APPROX. ACREAGE<br><b>10 Acres</b>   |  |
| 5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet)<br><b>Bingham County, Snake River Valley, 11 mi. by dirt rd. (Sheephead Rd.) W of U.S. Hwy. 91-191</b> |  |   |  |
| 6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner)<br><b>Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Fort Hall Indian Reservation at Evans Trading Post</b>                                      |  |   |  |
| 7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant)   |  |   |  |

Fort Hall (1834-1856), situated on the south bank of the Snake River, and north of the mouth of the Portneuf River, occupied one of the most strategic positions in the West. It was first an important center of the Rocky Mountain fur trade; it then became one of the most famous of all the stations on the California-Oregon trail. During the period of Indian hostilities, 1858 to 1883, Fort Hall served as a military post, and in the late 60's and 1870's Fort Hall was a key road junction for the overland stage, mail, and freight lines to the pioneer settlements and mining camps of the Pacific Northwest.

Nathaniel Wyeth, who built Fort Hall, was a successful Cambridge businessman who saw in Oregon one of the few remaining possibilities of exploiting the wilderness. It was his ambition to develop and exploit the Oregon country by supplying it overland. In 1832, enlisting a company of men, he made an unsuccessful trapping trip overland to Fort Vancouver. In 1834 he set out again, having contracted with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to deliver supplies to the trappers annual rendezvous. Betrayed by his competitors, and with no takers for his large stock of goods, Wyeth established Fort Hall in July, 1834, as a trading post to store and dispose of his stock with the Indians, and to revenge himself on his rivals by rolling "a stone into their garden which they would never be able to get out."

Wyeth had little chance of making a success of Fort Hall, and in 1837 he sold his post to the powerful Hudson's Bay Company. The acquisition of Fort Hall (together with the establishment of Old Fort Boise in 1834) resulted in a major change in Hudson's Bay Company policy of collecting furs in the Snake River Country, and enhanced the company's trade in a region hitherto reached only by annual brigades of trappers. When the Idaho region passed into the control of the United States by the Oregon Treaty of 1846, the rights of the Hudson's Bay Company to this and other posts were guaranteed, and the Company operated Fort Hall until 1856.

(Continued on next page)

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

See Page Four.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, HABS, etc.)

"Historic Sites Study, Fort Hall, Idaho" (NPS Typescript, San Francisco, n.d., no author, 10 pp. CA 1940). Letter of Superintendent Lemuel A. Garrison, Yellowstone N.P., to Regional Director, Region Four, July 28, 1959, transmitting 4 pp detailed statement and maps by Aubrey L. Collins locating Fort Hall site.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ATTACHED: YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 600       | 13. DATE OF VISIT<br><b>6/25/58</b>                |
| 14. NAME OF RECORDER (Signature)<br><b>Charles W. Snell</b> | 15. TITLE<br><b>Reg. Chief, Br. Historic Sites</b> |
| 16. DATE<br><b>Oct. 24, 1963</b>                            |  |

\* DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10 1/2 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

Location: Bannock County, 11 miles  
west of Fort Hall, on the Fort  
Hall Indian Reservation.

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

|                |                              |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| STATE<br>Idaho | NAME(S) OF SITE<br>Fort Hall |
|----------------|------------------------------|

7. Continued:

Although some emigrants had passed earlier, Fort Hall, in 1842-43, became an important station on the newly established California-Oregon trail--the great wagon road to the Pacific. More than 200,000 emigrants stopped at Fort Hall during the next 20 years. Forty-eight miles west of Fort Hall, on the Raft River, the great overland trail divided: one leading west along the Snake River to Oregon and the other turning south, bound for California.

In 1849 the U.S. Army established a log fort named Cantonment Loring, 5 miles southwest of Fort Hall to protect the emigrant wagon trains. It was abandoned in 1850, because of difficulties in supplying the post. With the decline of the fur trade and as the result of Indian uprisings, the Hudson's Bay Company also abandoned Fort Hall in the summer of 1856. Fort Hall then began to fall into ruins, although occasionally occupied for the next 2 years by bands of itinerant half-breed traders who stayed there during summer months to sell supplies to the emigrants.

In 1859-60, in 1863, and again in 1865, regular and volunteer troops were stationed at Fort Hall during campaigns against the Indians. The War Department made Fort Hall a formal military post in 1870 and abandoned it in 1883.

Another colorful era in Fort Hall history opened in 1864, following the 1862 purchase of the California and Pike's Peak Express Company from Russell, Majors, and Waddell by an outstanding figure of overland freighting--Ben Holladay. Obtaining a government mail contract in 1864, Holladay established a tri-weekly stage service from Salt Lake City to the mining towns of the Northwest by way of Fort Hall. At Fort Hall there were branch connections for Boise, Walla Walla, Oregon, and Montana. In 1866 Holladay sold his 5,000 miles of stage lines to Wells, Fargo and Company.

During the gold rush eras of Montana and Idaho, Fort Hall also became an important junction of major freight routes. All of the communities of the inland empire had to be served and supplied from three great depots--St. Louis, the Sacramento Valley, and Portland. By 1864 long wagon trains of supplies followed the California and Oregon Trails in reverse from those states east to Fort Hall, where a road ran northward to serve Virginia City, Bannack City, and other new gold mining camps. From Fort Hall a road also extended south to Salt Lake City, through which much traffic passed, especially after the completion of the Union Pacific-Central Pacific Trans-continental Railroad in 1869.

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|       |                 |
|-------|-----------------|
| STATE | NAME(S) OF SITE |
| Idaho | Fort Hall       |

7. Continued:

Present Appearance of Site: Osborne Russell, a famous fur trapper who helped Wyeth build Fort Hall, described the beginnings of the fort: "On the 18th of July 1834, we commenced the actual construction of the fort, which was a stockade 80 feet square, built of cottonwood trees set on end, sunk two and one-half feet in the ground, and standing about 15 feet above, with two bastions eight feet square at the opposite angles. On the 4th of August the Fort was completed."<sup>1</sup>

After purchasing the post in 1837, the Hudson's Bay Company, about 1840, enlarged and rebuilt Fort Hall of adobe.

Major Cross, of the U. S. Mounted Riflemen, described Fort Hall in 1849 as "built of clay and much in the form of Fort Laramie, having a large sally port which fronts on the Portneuf, with its walls extending back towards the banks of the Snake River. There is a blockhouse at one of its angles. The buildings are built against the side of the wall and of the same materials. The main building is occupied by the proprietor while others are intended for storerooms and places for the hands who are employed in the service of the Company. The rooms are all small and by no means comfortable."<sup>2</sup>

Fremont, visiting the fort in September 1843, noted the setting: "We were agreeably surprised on reaching the Portneuf River to see a beautiful green valley with scattered timber spread out beneath us on which about four miles distant, were the white walls of the fort."<sup>3</sup>

Abandoned by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1856, a flood destroyed much of Fort Hall in 1863. In the fall of 1865, Lieutenant G.H. Walker reported that Fort Hall was only "a heap of ruins."

<sup>1</sup> Osborne Russell, Journal of a Trapper (edited by Aubrey L. Haines) (Portland, 1955), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond W. Settle, March of the Mounted Riflemen (Glendale, 1940), 170-71.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Nevins, ed., Narratives of Exploration and Adventure by John Charles Fremont (New York, 1956), 259.

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| STATE | NAME(S) OF SITE |
|-------|-----------------|
| Idaho | Fort Hall       |

7. Continued:

The inventory of the property at Fort Hall, as shown in the Hudson's Bay Company claims against the United States, indicates that this fort was approximately 100 by 80 feet in size, and enclosed by adobe walls 13 feet high and 19 inches thick. There were two two-story blockhouses, one 8 by 8 feet and the other 10 by 10 feet, situated at opposite corners of the fort. Inside the walls were some 13 two-story adobe buildings

Today the only surface remains are the lines of low earth mounds that mark the former lines of the walls. A small monument marks the site. The American Falls dam has backed water up to within 50 yards of the fort site, but the scene is otherwise unchanged.

8. Bibliographical References:

Osborne Russell, Journal of a Trapper, edited by Aubrey L. Haines, (Portland, 1955)  
5; Jennie B. Brown, Fort Hall on the Oregon Trail (Caldwell, Idaho, 1934); Allan Nevins, ed., Narratives of Exploration and Adventure by John Charles Fremont (New York, 1956), 259-262; Raymond W. Settle, ed., March of the Mounted Riflemen (Glendale, 1940), 170-171; Route of the Oregon Trail in Idaho (Pamphlet of maps, published by Idaho Department of Highways, May, 1963); John Boardman, "Journal of John Boardman (1843)," Utah Historical Quarterly II (Oct. 1929), 111; Chester Ingersoll Overland to California in 1847 (Chicago, 1937), 35; Thomas J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies (Reuben G. Thwaites ed.,) (Cleveland, 1906); Pierre Jean DeSmet, Letters and Sketches (Reuben G. Thwaites ed.) 229-250; Hubert H. Bancroft, History of Oregon (2 vols., San Francisco, 1888), I, 14, 63, II, 112, 513-14; Ezra Meeker, The Busy Life of Eighty-Five Years of Ezra Meeker (Seattle, 1916); Oscar O. Winther, The Old Oregon Country (Stanford, 1950), 265-272, 217.