

THE PRESERVATION POST



Clark County Historic Preservation Newsletter

Archaeologists are “Privy” to New Information at Vancouver Barracks

Beth Horton, NPS Archaeologist

Recent discoveries this past spring during rehabilitation of the ca. 1904 Artillery Barracks at the Vancouver National Historic Reserve in Vancouver, Washington are adding to our knowledge of the daily lives of soldiers stationed at Vancouver Barracks. While trenching for a new sewer line under the concrete basement floor of the east wing, broken bottles and other late 19th century artifacts were unearthed by the construction crew. Archaeologists Beth Horton and Elaine Dorset with the Northwest Cultural Resources Institute (NCRI), at Fort Vancouver, quickly mobilized to excavate the find before the new sewer line was installed, and identified it as a ca. 1800s to 1904 U.S. Army privy.

Privies, also referred to as outhouses, are pit toilets



The person who dropped this skeleton key to a door or padlock down the privy was apparently not eager to retrieve it.

lacking a connection to plumbing, sewer or septic systems. Walls and roofs provided privacy for the user,

as well as protection from the weather, and were often constructed of wood. They were typically located behind the structures with which they were associated – close enough to be convenient for use but far enough away to diminish the smell. Privies were commonly used to dispose of trash, and military posts were no exception. By throwing lime and/or trash down the privy, the waste below would be covered, thereby reducing offending odors. Because few ever ventured into the vault below, privies contain valuable information as deposited items can reflect the private and personal habits of their owners.

Historical maps document the first appearance of the building in 1888 with a small outbuilding, interpreted as the privy found this spring, associated with Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). Referred to as “the backbone of the Army” by Rudyard Kipling in his 1896 poem “The

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‘Eathen,” NCOs are the most experienced and senior leaders amongst the enlisted ranks. Late-19th century Indian Wars usually consisted of numerous scattered skirmishes over wide areas, leading to the enhancement of an NCO’s role as a small-unit leader. Often fighting in small detachments, troops relied heavily on the knowledge and abilities of their NCOs. They were, and still are, responsible for instilling the training and discipline necessary for troops to successfully carry out their mission on the battlefield. Staff NCOs (Staff Sergeants and above) set unit standards and developed the training regimen, while junior NCOs (Corporals and Sergeants) conducted the training in small unit tactics. NCOs often embody the values of self-discipline, courage, and good character. Archaeological investigation of the privy serves an important function because unlike commissioned officers, little written documentation survives on the daily lives of late 19th century Staff NCOs and NCOs.

The period encompassing the occupation of this building was one of great change in the Pacific Northwest. The earlier Indian Wars ended and soldiers were reassigned to peacetime duties, including civil engineering work, land exploration, keeping the peace during riots and strikes. The role of the NCO at Vancouver Barracks took on new importance immediately preceding the 1898 Spanish-American War and subsequent occupation of the Philippines, as the garrison served as a mobilization and training center for Oregon and Washington volunteers.

Over 3500 artifacts were recovered in the privy, ranging from housewares to horseshoes. Surprisingly enough, corset hooks and women’s shoes were also recovered, which was curious as Staff NCOs did not typically live with their wives on post at that time. Some of the Staff NCOs may have worked at the post Hospital, as a bottle labeled “Duff Gordon Sherry Medical Department U.S.A.” was recovered with its cork intact. Several patent medicine bottles were identified, reflecting the American consumption of patent medicines (often high in

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Day Hilborn's Kiggins Theatre

By Andrew Gregg, Clark County Historic Preservation Commission Chairman

Day Hilborn's eventful life began in Michigan. Born in 1897, Hilborn's family moved to Centralia, Washington in 1905. Christened Walter Day Hilborn, the future artist and architect went by his middle name throughout life. Hilborn served in the United States Army during the First World War, and sketched the landscapes and buildings of France as he moved through the countryside. Following an honorable discharge,



Hilborn studied architecture at Washington State College. Upon graduation, Hilborn became a construction superintendent for Richard V. Gough's architectural firm. In 1927, Gough and Hilborn moved to Vancouver, Washington, formed a partnership. Hilborn's first structure of note was the five-story Arts Building between Eleventh and Twelfth on Main Street. By the mid-1930s Day Hilborn was licensed as both architect

and structural engineer in Oregon and Washington states. In addition to his professional pursuits, Hilborn married school Principal Dorothy Janet White; the union resulted in two daughters and a son.

While Day Hilborn designed a prodigious number of homes, government buildings, business structures, and stadiums in the course of his long career, his iconic 1935 design and construction of Vancouver's Kiggins Theatre became the first edifice nominated to the National Registry of Historic Places in October of 2011.

Opened in April 1936, the Kiggins Theatre has long been hailed as a gem in terms of its design. Constructed entirely of concrete, the building features Art Deco elements, streamlined details, and wooden surfaces that reflect the Pacific Northwest's traditional building materials. Configured solely as a motion picture theater, the Kiggins boasted the finest in contemporary projection and amplification. With its design emphasizes on simplicity and practicality, the Kiggins interior was not replete with opulent artwork, intricate motifs, or ornate light fixtures. In a word, the Kiggins was modern. In

keeping with the utilitarian 1930s, the Kiggins was sturdy, functional, practical, and serviceable. Gone was the Wurlitzer pipe organ that harkened back to the days of Vaudeville. Forsaken were the trappings of a legitimate stage's equipment. The Kiggins was adorned with neon without, and primary colored lights within.

A Tennessee soldier by trade who had mustered out of the United States Army at Fort Vancouver, J.P. Kiggins was just past thirty years of age when he became a civilian again on the doorstep of the Twentieth Century. Kiggins got a foothold in Vancouver's building trade in 1900. First elected Mayor in 1920, J.P. Kiggins embodied the classic small city "booster" of the era. Branching out into the nascent motion picture entertainment industry, Mayor Kiggins first commissioned construction of Vancouver's Castle Theater. Located along Evergreen Boulevard between Main and Broadway, the Castle was established as both a Vaudeville and movie house. Kiggins commissioned several other downtown buildings in the 1920s that still bear his name, and Day Hilborn was the Mayor's architect of choice. In addition to commercial buildings and graceful residences, Day Hilborn also designed Kiggins Bowl, an athletic stadium still extensively used for Vancouver Public Schools' football and soccer teams after more than seventy-five years of existence.

Day Hilborn's Clark County landmarks include the Court House. Completed in 1939, Hilborn's design received a national award for design. After the Second World War, Day Hilborn continued to evolve as an artist. In the 1950s he executed the United Methodist Church, which featured an exterior from the brickyard of longtime parishioner Robert Hidden. *The Columbian*, Vancouver's daily newspaper, commissioned Hilborn to build a new operations center in 1955. In 1961, Hilborn's design for Vancouver Federal Savings and Loan was a triumph. Replete with an impressive metal sculpture of the Phoenix rising from the ashes, floor to ceiling windows, and an open setting, this structure, now Chase Bank, is widely regarded as Hilborn's most distinctive work.

With so many exceptionally unique buildings eligible for inclusion in the National Registry of Historic Places, it is remarkable that Day Hilborn's first nomination has come in 2011. Thanks to Bill Leigh, who recently purchased the beautifully restored the Kiggins Theatre, and Derek Chisolm of Parametrix, Hilborn's design was proposed to, and approved by, Clark County Historic Preservation Commission for submission to the National Registry.

Please plan to visit the Kiggins Theatre, and enjoy a cinema treasure that has been such an integral part to our region's cultural heritage.

Camas School District's Garfield Building: A Hidden Gem

By Eric Lanciault

Often, a historically significant structure is easy to spot. Perhaps it is the age of the building that's notable to anyone seeing it, or the style in which it was built. Sometimes, however, the historical significance of a building is harder to see, though it is there if you look closely. One such building is Camas School District's Garfield Building.

When looking at the Garfield Building, we see many of the characteristics that meet the National Historical Register's listing criteria that a "property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction."

The Garfield Building holds subtle surprises for those who look closely. Ravaged and almost obscured by inconsiderate architectural interventions over the decades since its construction, the remaining, intact architecture gives testimony to skillful design by a master Vancouver architect, Donald Stewart, during a transitional period in twentieth century American architecture. Stewart's handling of this transitional aesthetic possesses that high artistic value that the National Register notes as important.

The Garfield Building has managed to maintain its significant unique aesthetic since its construction in 1936 as a Junior High School extension of the 1915 Camas High School. It replaced a wood-framed grammar school that had been on that site since 1900. From 1936 to 1976, the Garfield Building stood integrated with the original High School. In 1976, the High School was demolished, leaving the Garfield Building free-standing with an exposed west flank that was once concealed by the High School. As a part of the 1976 demolition project, the Garfield Building was aesthetically damaged by an energy-saving intervention which left many of its elegant, streamlined windows closed up with red-orange brick masonry that did not match, nor enhance, the building's original rich red brick. Following the 1976 work, a new entrance was added on the building's west flank and the building's original exposed concrete wall was clad by brick

that, again, did not complement the building's original red brick.

Yet, despite these unfortunate architectural interventions, the Garfield Building still expresses its unique aesthetic in what remains of its original façade. Stewart's design incorporates clues from the original 1915 building's neo-Renaissance style, but filters them through the newly-emergent style of Art Moderne. Stewart had just arrived in Vancouver after working for several years in New York City where he was exposed to the streamlined aesthetics of such



important buildings as the Chrysler Building, Empire State Building and the newly-rising Rockefeller Center.

Stewart's design is an example of an architect sensitively designing within context. In this case, the context was a historic High School. Because of this sensitivity combined with originality, the Garfield Building has an aesthetic quality that stands on its own.

Stewart designed numerous projects following the Garfield Building and would eventually rise to great prestige within his profession in Vancouver as well as regionally. His work throughout his career evidenced a thorough knowledge of design aesthetic and his work was often on the leading edge of contemporary design.

Although the Camas School District's Garfield Building has been significantly altered over time and its original design context has disappeared, it still possesses the distinctive characteristics of the Art Moderne and is the work of a local master architect. Because of its unique design aesthetic, it possesses high artistic value.

You never know what jewel has been hidden over time. Like a diamond in the rough, one can find other structures throughout Clark County that may emerge as Landmark buildings.

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alcohol) which reached its height in the late-19th century. The majority of bottles, however, were from the Gambrinus (Beer) Brewing Company of Portland, Oregon.

Gilt-decorated and intricately hand painted ceramics collected reflect the higher status and greater economic buying power of the Staff NCOs over other enlisted men. The NCO diet also reflects this class structure, as more expensive food items were collected from the privy, such as condiment bottles, sardine tins, beef and chicken bones, egg shells, and seed clusters, possibly from berries.

Of particular interest are those objects related to personal health and hygiene, as they are not commonly found at Vancouver Barracks. A turquoise glass syringe and plunger was found with very small clear glass vials, interpreted at other military sites in the Pacific Northwest as hemorrhoid medicine applicators. These small details of daily life are often missing outside of privies because of their intimate

nature. Further analyses of the artifacts will provide more insight into the lives of senior enlisted soldiers at Vancouver Barracks.



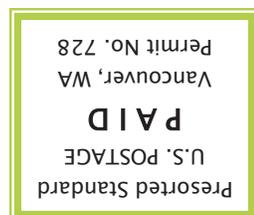
Few whole bottles were found during excavations. From left to right, these are identified as a Duff Gordon Sherry Medical Department U.S.A., a beer bottle from Gambrinus Brewing Company of Portland, Oregon, a brandy-style flask, a patent medicine panel bottle, and a Lea & Perrins® condiment bottle.

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