

Fort Langley.

Fort Langley was established on the Fraser River by Chief Trader James McMillan in 1827. He was assisted by his clerks, François Annance (Metis),¹ Donald Manson² and George Barnston³. In 1828 it was taken over by Chief Trader Archibald McDonald when McMillan left with Simpson of furlough. It was not useful for agriculture but had an excellent salmon fishery. The HBC also began an export lumber trade from Fort Langley



¹ François' great grandparents were New Englanders who were captured by the Abenaki as children and grew up among them, marrying as young adults. His father, Francis Annance, was one of a group of four boys who, as a result of Protestant missionary activity, were sent to school in New Hampshire. Francis Noel attended Moor's Indian Charity School as a young adult. He was in the Columbia District in 1820 as an employee of the North West Company and was retained by the Hudson's Bay Company. He returned to the Abenaki village of St. Francis in 1845. James McMillan felt that either François Annance or Donald Manson could have taken charge of Fort Langley, and he found François "as usual very useful" (McMillan 1827b:17) but George Simpson chose to leave Archibald McDonald in that position.

² Donald Manson (born 1798), fur trader, was born in Thurso, Caithness, Scotland, in 1798; and entered the service of the H.B.C. in 1817. He was employed at first in the English River district and on the South Saskatchewan; but in 1827 he was transferred to the Columbia district, and he remained on the western side of the Rocky Mountains until his retirement in 1858. He was promoted to the rank of chief trader in 1837, and from 1844-57 he was in charge of the New Caledonia district, with headquarters at Stuart Lake. The date of his death has not been ascertained.

³ George Barnston was educated as a surveyor and army engineer; he joined the North West Company as an apprentice clerk in 1820. He was taken into the Hudson's Bay Company following the union of the two companies in 1821, and served as a clerk at York Factory (Man.); he was described as having an excellent education, and showed great promise. During the 1825-26 season he was at Red River and Fort Bas de la Rivière (Man.), and in 1826 he was transferred to the Columbia District to help Simpson survey the Pacific coast. Finding Simpson an incompetent surveyor, he was obliged to conduct most of the work himself. He then helped James McMillan establish Fort Langley (near present day Fort Langley, B.C.) in 1827, and served there and at forts Vancouver (Vancouver, Wash.) and Nez Percés (Walla Walla, Wash.).

Due to circumstances resulting from an agreement with the Russian American (Fur) Company more emphasis was placed on the farming operation and the Fort was rebuilt 4 kilometres upstream (east) in 1839. Shortly thereafter it burned down and was rebuilt again in 1840.

Activity in Fort Langley reached its peak with the Gold Rush of 1858. For all intents and purposes all prospectors would depart from Fort Langley on their trek to find fortune. To deal with the potential social and political upheavals caused by this great influx of American adventurers the British Parliament decided to provide for a crown colony on the Pacific Mainland with James Douglas as the first Governor of British Columbia. Fort Langley was the location of this proclamation on November 19, 1858.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute