

Fort Clatsop

Suggested Historical Area Report



Fort Clatsop National Memorial SUGGESTED HISTORICAL AREA REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Public Law 590, 84th Congress, approved June 18, 1956, authorized and directed the Secretary of the Interior to investigate and report to the Congress as to the advisability of establishing Fort Clatsop, Oregon, as a national monument. The present report is a result of that authorization.

The full text of the Act is as follows:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Secretary of the Interior is authorized and directed to make a full and complete investigation of the advisability of establishing Fort Clatsop, located in Clatsop County, Oregon, as a national monument.

SEC. 2. As soon as practicable after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Interior shall report to the Congress the results of such investigation and study made by him under the first section of this Act, together with such recommendations as he deems appropriate. Such report shall contain specific findings with respect to (1) the national historical importance of the proposed memorial, (2) the size, present status and condition of Fort Clatsop, and (3) the estimated total cost of establishing such memorial.

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I. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SITE

A. Name, location, and brief description

Apparently there is no official or established name for the site which is the subject of this report. The area is generally referred to as "Fort Clatsop" or "Site of Old Fort Clatsop." A more convenient designation and one frequently used is "Fort Clatsop Site."

The site is located in Clatsop County, Oregon, near the mouth of the Columbia River. More specifically, it is situated on the west bank of the Lewis and Clark River, 1.8 miles south of its mouth. The site is about 4.5 airline miles southwest of the City of Astoria. The shore of the Pacific Ocean lies 3.5 miles directly west.

The property which has been suggested as a possible national monument consists of three contiguous tracts of publicly or semi-publicly owned land, totaling about 6.7 acres in gross area. The ownerships and areas of these tracts are as follows: 1. Oregon Historical Society, 4.9 acres; 2. Clatsop County, .9 acre; 3. Clatsop County Historical Society, .9 acre. A county road right of way, about .8 acre in extent, traverses the Oregon Historical Society property, thus reducing the area available for historic site purposes to a net of about 5.9 acres.

About three acres of this property form a fairly level plateau about 30 to 35 feet above sea level. The remainder of the area consists largely of rather steeply sloping land which drops away to the swamp adjoining the Lewis and Clark River. Except where the land has been cleared for a parking lot, the area is covered by a fairly dense stand of second-growth forest, composed largely of spruce and alder. The level portion of the property has been kept clear of brush, but the sloping sections are marked by heavy undergrowth.

The property is operated as a historic monument by the Oregon Historical Society, acting in cooperation with the Clatsop County Historical Society. The principal existing improvements consist of an approach road from the county highway which runs through the property, a graveled parking lot, a bronze historical marker, and a full-scale replica of the original log Fort Clatsop. Other facilities include a well, pump, drinking fountain, two pit toilets, and several picnic tables.

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IV. PARK DATA

A. Ownership of site

1. Present historic site property. The property now being operated as a historic the Oregon Historical Society in cooperation with the Clatsop County Historical Society, and that which has been suggested as a possible national monument, consists of three contiguous tracts of land. The exterior boundaries of these tracts enclose an area of about 6.7 acres. However, a county road runs through the property, the right of way which occupies approximately .8 acre. The net area presently used for historical purposes is, therefore, about 5.9 acres.

The locations and boundaries of these three tracts are shown on Map 2. Legal descriptions are given in the Appendix. The owner ship of each of the three tracts, as determined from available abstracts of title, the Clatsop County Records of Deeds, the records of the Oregon Historical Society, the records of the Clatsop County Historical Society, and interviews with officials of Clatsop County, is as follows:

a. Oregon Historical Society Tract. The property owned by the Oregon Historical Society consists of two parcels:

Parcel (1). This parcel, consisting of about 2.9 acres, was purchased by the Oregon Historical Society for \$250 from the American Mortgage Company of Scotland, Ltd., by Warranty Deed dated September 24, 1901. Excepted from this sale was the right to take clay from the property. The legal history of these clay rights is exceedingly complex, but as far as the present writer was able to determine, they have never been acquired by the Oregon Historical Society. Although commercial clay has not been extracted in this vicinity for a number of years, the possibility that operations might be resumed remains as a potential, if very remote, cloud upon the use of the property for historical monument purposes. This parcel contains the traditional site of Fort Clatsop, the reconstructed fort, the historical marker, the well, pump, and rest rooms.

Parcel (2). This parcel, consisting of about 2 acres, was purchased by the Oregon Historical Society for \$250 from Gladding, McBean & Co. by Warranty Deed dated May 15, 1928. The clay rights relating to this parcel were acquired by the Oregon Historical Society along with the land.

The Oregon Historical Society has leased the oil, gas, and mineral rights relating to both of the above-mentioned parcels (except for a 30-foot strip along the east side of the Fort Clatsop Loop Road right of way) to the Standard Oil Company of California. The lease, executed May 2, 1955, is for a term of 10 years and must be renewed annually as long as drilling is not actually under way. At present, the lessee has paid fees which will keep the contract in force until May 2, 1957. Once drilling has been commenced, however, the lease will automatically remain in force as long as such work progresses or as long thereafter as oil, gas, or other mineral is produced.

In making the lease, the Oregon Historical Society inserted provisions designed to protect the

property from physical defacement. The principal such provision is a stipulation that the lessee shall not conduct any operations above a depth of 500 feet from the surface of the land without the prior consent of the Society. As far as the present writer could determine through local inquiry, no oil or gas is being extracted commercially in Clatsop County at the present time, and it is rumored that certain oil and gas leases in the Fort Clatsop area have not been renewed by their lessees.

The Oregon Historical Society holds its acquisitions, including its Fort Clatsop property, in trust for the State of Oregon. Should the Society ever cease to operate, its assets would become the property of the State. According to Mr. Thomas Vaughan, Director of the Society, this trust provision would not present any legal impediment to the transfer of the Fort Clatsop property by the Society to the United States should the establishment of a national monument be authorized.

b. Clatsop County Tract. The property presently owned by Clatsop County at the Fort Clatsop site is approximately .9 acre in extent. This tract lies immediately to the west of the northern half of the Oregon Historical Society's Parcel (1). The northern part of the present parking lot occupies a section of this tract. The County's title was obtained through tax foreclosure proceedings on April 19, 1932.

By a deed dated October 30, 1905, this tract was sold for one dollar by A. M. Smith, et al, to the Concomly Tribe No. 7, Improved Order of Redmen, and to the Astoria Aerie No. 17 of the Fraternal Order of Eagles. Excepted from the sale were all oil and natural gas, if any, "in and under said real estate." Also a portion of the tract was subject to a right to dig clay granted to other persons by a prior deed. Thus, the oil, gas, and clay rights to this tract are not now owned by Clatsop County.

By an unrecorded lease, dated February 15, 1955, Clatsop County leased the tract for a period of 10 years to the Clatsop County Historical Society "for historical purposes only." The annual rental is one dollar. The lease contains the statement that the lessor's title was obtained through tax foreclosure proceedings, and it contains the provision that the lease shall be voided if the lessor should be divested of title.

According to information supplied orally by Mr. Otto A. Owen, President of the Clatsop County Historical Society, and by County Judge Guy Boyington, the Clatsop County Historical Society has made an offer to the County for the purchase of this tract. It is anticipated that the County will act favorably upon this application within about 6 months.

c. Clatsop County Historical Society Tract. The property owned by the Clatsop County Historical Society at the Fort Clatsop site is approximately .9 acre in extent. It lies immediately south of the Clatsop County Tract and immediately west of the southern half of the Oregon Historical Society's Parcel (1). The larger part of the parking lot occupies a section of this tract.

This tract was purchased by the Clatsop County Historical Society for \$1 from Archie Riekkola, et ux, by a Bargain and Sale Deed (still unrecorded as of December 11, 1956) dated February 7, 1955. Excepted from the sale and reserved unto the grantors, their heirs and assigns, were "all minerals of any nature whatsoever including coal, iron, natural gas and oil, upon or in said land, together with the use of such of the surface as may be necessary for exploring for and mining or otherwise extracting and carrying away the same." The clay right situation concerning this piece of property is not clear and probably cannot be made so without a complete title search. Evidently, however, these rights were conveyed by a former owner to the Oregon Pottery Company in 1887 and have not been recovered by the Clatsop County Historical Society.

2. Land needed to protect site. In the opinion of the present investigator, the three tracts constituting the present historic site property do not provide an area adequate for the proper interpretation and protection of the Fort Clatsop site regardless of what agency administers it in the future. The considerations leading to this conclusion are as follows:

a. The proper interpretation of the site would require access to, and the preservation of the natural scene at, two important features not included in the present historic site property: (1) the west bank of the Lewis and Clark River where the exploring party landed and kept its canoes, and (2) the spring from which the party obtained its water during the stay at Fort Clatsop and the existence of which helped determine the fort's location.

b. The proper administration of the site would require the construction and use of certain developments which could not be placed on the present property without serious impairment of the historic scene. For instance, a considerable section of the existing road from the parking area is located on privately owned property south of the Clatsop County Historical Society Tract. This road could not be relocated onto the present historic site property without rather severe grading which would detract from the historic scene. Also, the present property is not large enough to permit the construction of such needed features as employee housing, visitor center, and a utility area without intruding on the historic scene.

c. The proper protection of the site would require additional buffer areas to preserve the historic scene. At present the country surrounding the site is largely timber land and agricultural property, and it is not too difficult to visualize how the area must have looked in 1805. This type of land use is changing rapidly, however, and residential and commercial developments are becoming more prominent. One existing residence, only about 300 feet north of the existing historical property, demonstrates how damaging this type of land use can be to the integrity of the scene.

In the opinion of the present investigator, the minimum area required to assure the proper interpretation and protection of the historical monument, in view of the considerations described above and in view of the topography, is that shown within the green line on Map 2. The achievement of this boundary would require the acquisition of approximately 32 acres of land in addition to the 6.7 acres within the exterior boundaries of the existing historical site property. The exact acreage involved can, of course, be determined only after a survey on the ground.

The land thus recommended for acquisition is in four ownerships, as follows (see Map 2):

- 17 acres Ragnvald J. and Jean Kraft
- 4.2 acres Archie Riekkola
- 5.5 acres Crown Zellerbach Corporation
- 5.3 acres L. H. and Ruth C. Wood [81]

If all of the above-listed property were acquired, the area would still be somewhat cramped in view of the facilities which would be required for an entirely adequate historical monument. In particular, the heavy visitation which can be expected would develop a need for a rather extensive parking area, which would have to be so located and so screened as not to disturb the atmosphere of primeval forest which should be created around the actual fort site. Further, there would be the problem raised by the necessity of giving access over monument land to the one-acre tract and residence owned by Kenneth C. and Ruth M. Miller and located about 300 feet north of the existing historic site property. Due to the terrain, it is probable that access also would have to be given over monument land to the unpurchased portion of the Kraft property. In addition, the view southward from the fort site could be rendered unsightly by residential or commercial development of the lowlands lying along the

county road immediately to the south of the above-proposed monument area.

These problems probably could be avoided by the acquisition of all land within the yellow line on Map 2. The achievement of this boundary would involve the acquisition of approximately 69 acres of land in addition to the existing historic site property. Such an enlarged boundary would involve only one more land ownership than the minimum boundary recommended above--the one-acre tract and residence owned by Kenneth C. and Ruth M. Miller.

Ideally, a monument dedicated to the preservation of the historic scene at Fort Clatsop would also include land on the east bank of the Lewis and Clark River opposite the fort site. If the area within the purple line on Map 2 were acquired, only 2 additional owner ships would be involved, 4.3 acres of tidelands owned by Clatsop County and about 20.0 acres owned by Edith and Robert W. Johnson.

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