

Fort Vancouver Builds Its Own

A phone call to *Park Science* from Fort Vancouver NHS started this story. Jim Thomson, the Fort's superintendent, was reporting on an electrolysis technique for preserving and reclaiming the metal artifacts then being uncovered at the site. He also credited the method with slowing the march of time and oxygen toward eventual demise of the long-stored metal treasures that had previously been unearthed there.

For nearly 40 years, the trove of significant relics had been building up at the old fort site. Excavations that were begun in 1946, had resulted in the 1948 establishment of Fort Vancouver as a unit of the National Park System. Then, in 1976, with construction beginning for a new highway complex that would cover the old Fort village site, excavation work was accelerated. As the "digs" went down, the cache of artifacts went up.

Bryn Thomas, working out of the archaeological department at Eastern Washington University and under the auspices of the Washington State Department of Transportation, supervised the village excavations. A contract between NPS and Eastern Washington U gave Thomas the job of cataloging the artifacts, after which they wound up in cardboard boxes in the back of the reconstructed Indian Trading store.

Examination showed marked deterioration of the metal. Treatment was necessary if the relics were not to become mere piles of red dust. Instead of sending the collection to Eastern Washington U for treatment, Pacific Northwest Region Curator Kent Busch suggested treating them at the Fort.

Enter Herb Bump from Florida.

The June 1985 phone call from Thomson resulted in the picture story on the Fort Vancouver operation. A phone call from *Park Science* to Bump elicited the companion piece by Bump and Frank H. Gilson, describing the process and the work being done at the Florida Research and Conservation Lab in Tallahassee — part of the Bureau of Archaeological Research in the State Department of Archives, History, and Records Management.



A pair of scissors, recovered from one of the recent village excavations, is lifted from the processing tank to show the corrosion which is being arrested by immersion in the sodium hydroxide solution and subjection to the weak current. Several months may be required to rid the metal of its corrosive elements and arrest deterioration.