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Park Assumes Direct Operational Responsibility for Pearson Air Museum

Breaking News

February 19, 2013: [Pearson Air Museum Open for Special Events](#)

February 19, 2013: [National Park Service Accepting Loans of Pearson Air Museum Aircraft and Artifacts](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: March 12, 2013

Each national park is unique, has national significance, and was established for a specific purpose. Fort Vancouver was specifically established to preserve the resources associated with, and to tell the story of, fur trading and military history in the Pacific Northwest - including Army aviation and the "Golden Age of Flight."

Pearson Air Museum (Museum) is an important resource of the national park system and a valued part of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. For more than 40 years, the National Park has cared for and administered the historic buildings and grounds.

1. Is the National Park Service taking over Pearson Air Museum?

A. The Museum is owned by the federal government and is administered by the National Park Service. It sits on federal land inside Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. In the past, the Museum has been operated by partner organizations through a Cooperative Agreement with the City of Vancouver (City). In 2005, the City entered into a sub-agreement that allowed the Fort Vancouver National Trust (Trust) to operate the Museum. The agreement between the National Park Service and the City of Vancouver ceased on February 1, 2013 upon signature by both the City of Vancouver and the National Park Service, and the National Park Service assumed operational responsibilities on that date.

2. Why is this taking place now?

A. The agreement between the City of Vancouver and the National Park Service formerly in place was established 18 years ago, prior to the existence of the current Museum facility, and focused largely on construction and rehabilitation plans long since achieved. The National Park Service also sought a more direct connection with the Trust in light of several issues arising over

special events held onsite. Specifically, components of some events that the Trust wanted to allow were prohibited by federal law, regulation, and policy to occur on National Park Service land. The National Park Service and Trust worked in good faith for many months last year to establish a new cooperative agreement for the Museum operation, but the parties' objectives were too divergent. In January 2013 [the Trust informed the NPS that they could not operate effectively as the manager of the Museum and comply with National Park Service laws, regulations, and policies](#). The letter stated, "This is not a match. It will not work."

3. *When is National Park Service operation scheduled to go into effect?*

A. The agreement was concluded on February 1, 2013, and National Park Service operation began at that time. The National Park Service recognized that the transition of the Museum's operation could not happen instantaneously, and provided the Trust with a 45-day window within which operations would transition to the National Park Service. In addition, the Trust was given 180 days to identify and relocate its private property, consistent with the concluded agreement. The National Park Service also requested access to building keys and alarm codes; something that, as the property stewards, the Service felt necessary to protect the buildings and their assets and also to remain consistent with other shared spaces onsite. The National Park Service had hoped that public access would not be impacted and that the Museum would remain intact.

4. *I've read conflicting reports. What has the National Park Service contributed to the Museum?*

A. In 1972, the National Park Service purchased the land on which the Museum sits, and has since that time owned and administered the grounds and buildings where the Museum complex is located. Since 1998, the National Park Service has provided more than \$1,300,000 in funding support to the Museum and its immediate environs. Funding has been used for a wide range of activities including creating exhibits, painting, and constructing restrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

5. *What are the National Park Service's immediate plans for the Museum?*

A. The National Park Service is committed to having Pearson open as a free public museum, and intended to assume operations through a seamless 45 day transition process. The Trust's decision to remove exhibits and collection items--many understood to be City of Vancouver assets--and close the museum was a surprise, and the National Park Service is now assessing next steps and working to chart a course for this future. In the meantime, Pearson Air Museum is available for special events. If you are interested in holding your event at Pearson, please contact Kimm Fox-Middleton at (360) 816-6243 or kimm_fox-middleton@nps.gov. Permitting information can be found on our website at www.nps.gov/fova.

6. *What about events that have been scheduled at the Museum through the current operator?*

A. The National Park Service plans to honor existing commitments whenever possible. The

National Park Service has extensive experience managing special events at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, permitting 90 events in 2012 that had a meaningful connection to the park's purpose and complied with applicable laws, regulation, and policy. However, the Trust announced that they are working with the relevant individuals to relocate planned events. Pearson Air Museum is available for special events. If you are interested in holding your event at Pearson, please contact Kimm Fox-Middleton at (360) 816-6243 or kimm_fox-middleton@nps.gov. Permitting information can be found on our website at www.nps.gov/fova.

7. What does this mean for the NPS relationship with the City?

A. The National Park Service continues to hold the City of Vancouver in high regard, and hopes to continue productive partnership agreements with the City for the good of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve, the local community, and the greater metropolitan area.

8. What has been the involvement of the National Park Service in operations, maintenance, and collections at Pearson Air Museum?

A. As early as September of 2004 and continuing through 2006 and beyond, discussions between the National Park Service, City of Vancouver and the Trust indicated that the City was interested in reducing or eliminating their financial support to the museum while ensuring that it remain open to the public. Discussions took place regarding greater involvement of the National Park Service in core operations of the museum (interpretation, maintenance, and cultural resources duties). As a result of these meetings, planning for increased operational support for the museum was initiated and by 2006 the NPS began to provide increased support in interpretation, maintenance, and collections management, including installation of waysides, staffing of the museum (in 2007), installation of an ADA bathroom, painting of the Historic Hangar, better integration of visitor statistics with the rest of the national park, and other projects.

9. What is the history of National Park Service involvement in managing the museum collections from Pearson Air Museum?

A. Meetings in late 2007 and 2008 between the National Park Service, City of Vancouver, and the Trust identified a collaborative, two-year process whereby a scope of collections would be defined for Pearson Air Museum, an inventory of collections items would be made, and those collections that fit within the scope of the Museum would transfer to the National Park Service, as had been done with other partner collections in the Vancouver National Historic Reserve. The Trust collaborated fully in this planning, purchasing software for museum object cataloging and seeking grants for digitizing the collections. In late 2008, the Trust indicated that it was likely that the collection would be turned over to the National Park Service earlier than expected.

Museum planning continued through 2010, with the development of a scope of collections, an inventory of the collection, and assessment of the legal process necessary for establishing collections ownership given their incomplete donation documentation. In October 2010, the National Park Service provided recommendations for better documenting, preserving, and maintaining the collections.

10. Why weren't the collections transferred to the National Park Service?

A. Many of the Pearson collections items accepted by previous operators lacked clear documentation of ownership. Without clear title, the National Park Service could not accept them. The National Park Service provided guidance to the City of Vancouver and the Trust on how to resolve this issue. At the request of the City, the National Park Service has continued to caretake the portion of the collection in storage.

In November 2010, the City of Vancouver informed the National Park Service of their intention to sunset the 1995 agreement over operation of Pearson Air Museum. Negotiations between the National Park Service and the Trust over operation of Pearson Air Museum puts further collections work on hold, other than basic preservation and protection and housekeeping.

Official Correspondence

[June 13, 2012 Letter from the National Park Service to the Fort Vancouver National Trust](#)

[November 7, 2012 Letter from the National Park Service to the Fort Vancouver National Trust](#)

[December 7, 2012 Letter from the National Park Service to the Fort Vancouver National Trust](#)

[January 10, 2013 Letter from the Fort Vancouver National Trust to the National Park Service](#)

[February 4, 2013 Letter from the National Park Service to the Fort Vancouver National Trust](#)

On the Record Statements from Tracy Fortmann, Superintendent

February 6, 2013

We sincerely regret the many months of good faith discussions to develop an agreement to sustain the continued operations of Pearson Air Museum did not succeed, and that the Fort Vancouver National Trust has removed the contents of the museum and vacated the building.

This is a tremendous loss for the community who enjoyed this popular destination, for those who value the rich history that was preserved in the museum, and for the park and its visitors who have embraced the museum as part of the park and of the vast continuum of special places protected in the national park system.

The National Park Service remains committed to protecting this significant resource and ensuring its continued availability to the public. We look forward to working with the community to determine the next chapter. In the meantime, our interpretation of aviation and other history associated with the national park will go on and we invite our neighbors to continue

to enjoy their national park.

February 4, 2013

The National Park Service appreciates and values the work of the City of Vancouver and the Fort Vancouver National Trust in operating the Pearson Air Museum on the Service's behalf, and we look forward to a continued productive partnership agreements with both organizations. The National Park Service is committed to working with both entities to ensure a seamless transition of the museum operations over the next 45 days and to ensure that the public can continue to enjoy all that the air museum has to offer.

On Background

The National Park Service at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site has assumed operation of Pearson Air Museum, a National Park Service asset located within the boundaries of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

Pearson Air Museum operations were managed through a cooperative agreement until last week. On February 1, 2013, the National Park Service and the City of Vancouver (City) concluded an 18-year old agreement whereby the City of Vancouver helped to develop the Pearson Air Museum and operate it through subcontractors, most recently the Fort Vancouver National Trust (Trust).

The National Park Service will operate the museum on the same schedule and on conclusion of the transition period, access to the museum will be provided to the public at no charge.

For more than two years, and formally since April 2012, the National Park Service and the Trust have worked diligently to develop an agreement to operate the air museum which would support the National Park Service's mission and values, and the interpretation and protection of this portion of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

In developing this agreement, the National Park Service underscored its need for a partner who would work within the regulations, laws, and policies that have been put in place to preserve and protect the special resources of the site in perpetuity, while providing the public ample access to enjoy those resources. Unfortunately, despite great effort from both organizations, and including support from the City of Vancouver, it was determined that an agreement which addressed both organizations' mission and needs, and adhered to the NPS legal framework, was not possible.

A principal focus of the transition and museum operations will be public access. The National Park Service will work with current aircraft owners who would like to keep their aircraft on display.

The National Park Service will also seek ways to build on or incorporate existing educational and interpretive programs into the operations of the museum. The National Park Service will

work to honor existing commitments for events that have been scheduled at the museum while keeping consistent with Federal laws, regulations, and policies.

The National Park Service has extensive experience managing special events, permitting 90 events in 2012 that had a meaningful connection to the park's purpose and complied with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site is excited to better integrate the Pearson Air Museum into the highly successful programs of the National Park Service in history, science, and technology. With over 11,000 students directly reaching the park annually through curriculum-based educational programs, we hope to bring a vibrant, compelling, and timely understanding of the significance of aviation in the Pacific Northwest using the same commitment to excellence undertaken by staff and volunteers for its other programs.

Created in 1948, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site is one of 398 national parks which make up the National Park System. The mission of the National Park Service is to preserve and protect the most important cultural and natural resources of the nation and to provide for their enjoyment by the American people in perpetuity. Each national park is unique, is nationally significant, and was created for a specific purpose. Fort Vancouver was created to interpret and preserve the sites and related historic resources associated with the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade and the U.S. Army, including military aviation and the Golden Age of Flight.

Pearson Air Museum is an important resource of the National Park System and an important part of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. Since 1972, the National Park Service has administered the seven acre grounds and vicinity of the museum. This area contains historic structures and archeological sites tied to the U.S. Army, military aviation, and the colonial Hudson's Bay Company fur trading post. Two of the historic structures and much of the archaeological remains directly relate to the internationally-significant World War I-era Spruce Production Division Mill site. The museum building, constructed in 1998, helps to interpret the history of aviation, including the home front war effort.

- To access a .PDF copy of the statement of February 4, 2013, please [click here](#).
- To access a .PDF copy of the statement of February 6, 2013, please [click here](#).

