



# A GENEROUS GIFT BUILDS HISTORY OLD AND NEW

*One woman's legacy inspires the construction of  
Fort Vancouver's Counting House*

**N**ext to the old jail at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site stands a magnificent replica of the original Counting House. Lovingly created by skillful craftsmen and numerous dedicated volunteers, this stunning structure is testimony to the power of history and to the quiet vision and determination of one extraordinary woman.

Alice Suhr was never one to seek public attention. Even the demands of working with customers at the old Totem Pole Restaurant where she tried her hand as a waitress proved to be too much. She was most comfortable tucked away in the back of the restaurant washing dishes, a role that was more in harmony with her private nature and quiet habit of life, and a livelihood that she maintained for many years.

But, for all the humble simplicity of her days, Alice had a grand vision. She felt deeply connected to her

community and she was passionate about its history. And so, before her death in 1997, she embarked on a course that would in the end create history of its own. Modestly and without fanfare, as was her way, she harvested her many years of frugal existence by giving a significant bequest to the Community Foundation for Southwest Washington for the express purpose of reconstructing one of Fort Vancouver's most important buildings.

"Alice Suhr made the impossible possible," says Fort Vancouver superintendent Tracy Fortmann, with brimming admiration for a woman she never had the chance to meet. "She initiated the reconstruction of the Counting House because she was captivated by the Fort's rich legacy, and she wanted to create something permanently connected to its site. It simply wouldn't have happened without her vision and her generosity."

Alice and her memory quickly became not just the reason for this project's existence, but also a brilliant symbol of its spirit of dedication. As workers and volunteers came together to lend their talents and energy to the project, each one heard the story of Alice and her desire to make a difference to her community through this gift.

“Everyone who came to the site heard about Alice before they began their work,” remembers facility manager Gary Bickford. “People were so inspired and motivated by Alice’s story and her commitment to this reconstruction. And, at the end of the project, there wasn’t one person who didn’t feel good about what we had accomplished in her memory.”



BOB CHACE AND ALICE SUHR DRESSED  
IN PERIOD ATTIRE

Alice is such a beautiful example of the fact that everyone can give. She epitomizes perfectly the true spirit of philanthropy.”

Little is known about Alice and her life. But one thing we do know about her is that – in addition to her passion for history and her extraordinary dedication to her community – she possessed a sparkling sense of humor. One example of this was recorded the day she met with Fort officials to talk about her vision for the future.

As she was served tea, Alice sat quietly to savor the moment and then announced her intention to support the Counting House reconstruction. Someone later remarked that this must be the most expensive cup of tea Alice had ever drunk.

“WHEN I WATCH THE SMILES AND WIDE EYES OF CHILDREN AS THEY EXPLORE THE COUNTING HOUSE, I SEE HOW ALICE’S GIFT IS REBORN OVER AND OVER AGAIN. ALICE IS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF THE FACT THAT EVERYONE CAN GIVE. SHE EPITOMIZES PERFECTLY THE TRUE SPIRIT OF PHILANTHROPY.”

*Fort Vancouver Superintendent Tracy Fortman*

Today, the Counting House attracts more than 600,000 visitors each year, including 20,000 fourth grade students. Its exquisite workmanship and painstaking attention to detail make it a shining jewel on the Fort Vancouver campus, where learning regularly takes place and imaginations are continually sparked – just as Alice imagined they would be.

Tracy Fortmann sees the results of Alice’s vision every day. “When I watch the smiles and wide eyes of children as they explore the Counting House, I see how Alice’s gift is reborn over and over again.

With a twinkle in her eye and a huge smile Alice responded: “Sir, it’s a bargain and worth every penny.”

### CHARITABLE PLANNING TIP

Simple Steps Make a Lasting Difference

- ➔ Name the Community Foundation in your will or as the beneficiary of your life insurance policy, investment fund or retirement fund.
- ➔ Establish a “letter of intent” at the Foundation to describe your charitable intentions, fulfilled through your future estate gift.
- ➔ If desired, update your “letter of intent” as often as you would like and at no cost to reflect evolving interests.



Confirmed in Compliance with National Standards for U.S. Community Foundations



1053 Officers Row  
Vancouver, WA 98661  
360.694.2550  
www.cfsww.org