

John McNeil Eddings

John McNeil Eddings, was born near Belfast, Ireland in 1830. Eddings immigrated to the United States with his parents in 1841. They lived in New York initially, and then moved to St. Louis Missouri. John Eddings enlisted, on July 17, 1851 in the U.S. Army Infantry, Fourth Regiment, at Fort Gratiot, Michigan. As a first sergeant he came with that regiment to Vancouver Barracks by way of the Isthmus of Panama in 1851. On that journey were also Ulysses S. Grant, and Benjamin Bonneville. From 1855 to 1856 Eddings fought in the Rogue River Wars in the Southern Oregon Territory.

Per Mary Nicholas (Daughter of John Eddings)

“My Father was a man who loved adventure, and he found plenty in the Indian wars. My father had fiery red hair. He went to the Rogue River Indian War and when he came back his hair was snowy white. The scalping, the dead soldiers, and their lack of equipment was just too much for him.”

Eddings was appointed military store keeper for the Fort Vancouver. This was an important position at the Fort. He was responsible for purchases of all goods and armaments, storage management, and maintenance of the facilities at the Fort. Fort Vancouver was the main depot from which troops were supplied to the NW Region. Eddings served in this position for thirty years.

In November 1865 Eddings was elected to the Vancouver City Council, serving 2 years. Near the end of the term, he was appointed to the Committee for Cemetery Improvements, putting a picket fence around the city cemetery located at Grand and Mill Plain. In September 1866, he organized a volunteer fire department, eventually creating the first fire department in Vancouver. In July 1875, Eddings took the job of Postmaster for Vancouver, serving the next 11 years in addition to his other military and civil duties.

On December 20, 1853, a baby girl was born to John and Sarah Eddings, in one of the original log cabins of Fort Vancouver. There is a plaque commemorating this event placed in the Grant House on Officers Row. John and Sarah along with their large family were active members in the St. Lukes' Episcopal Church located at 426 E Fourth Plain in Downtown Vancouver.

When Grant, the former President, came to Vancouver in 1879, he visited John Eddings. When Eddings died in 1896, his was one of the most highly attended funerals in the history of Vancouver. The 14th Infantry Band led a procession stretching nearly a half mile in addition to a large contingent of carriages with relatives and friends. He is laid to rest in the City Cemetery, alongside his wife, Sarah.