

Alexander (continued from page 3)

I went over hurriedly in dressing gown and slippers and got him in his room and disarmed him, but had to stay with him 'till breakfast time at 8:30 a.m. Then he insisted on going over to my house to get my guns and pistol to kill all the people on the post whom he thought were plotting against him.

I got him out on the porch and there a half dozen soldiers brought up behind a fence made a dash on him and after a hard fight tied him. After that he had to be kept in an out-house in a straight jacket and his feet fastened to a staple in the floor.

Leaving Fort Steilacoom

When we all came home in April and May of 1861, Ector was brought along, always with his arms in a straight jacket and his feet tied together and fastened to the floor of a cabin on the steamers or a room in hotels. He made his vicinity known by howling and yelling, crying fire or murder or both, and vituperating every person he saw with a most extensive vocabulary of billingsgate and profanity.

Poor Major Ragan! Mrs. Ragan, Ector's half sister, was not very far from being crazy herself, even before

Ector became so. His affliction made her very excited and unreasonable and hard to do anything with. Then the major had a brother of his own with him, a little old man who could not help getting maudlin drunk whenever he could get a chance. Chances had to be allowed him or he would have DTs. Mrs. R. had also a miserable pet poodle dog named Annette which she cared for as much as for her adopted boys, Frank and Wyly. And the poor major had to make that trip from Fort Steilacoom to Georgia with that menagerie: Mrs. Ragan, Ector, the major's brother, Frank, Wyly B. and Annette.

After getting to New York he took Ector to an asylum in Philadelphia where he was cured within a year and came down to Georgia. And in 1874 he visited us in Apelika, Alabama, and scared Miss Teen awfully, for she had no confidence in his recovery. When I, maneuvering to bring a long, long, tedious and trying visit to a termination said I must go down to my office for a while, Miss Teen nearly fainted at the ideal of being left alone with him. She believes to this day that I put her in great danger in making the suggestion. But fortunately it worked and Ector went off with me and did not come back.

Revisiting Fort Steilacoom

Since the war the fort has been given to the territory for an insane asylum, and Miss Teen and I revisited it in 1892. Colonel Casey's quarters and our house on the right and Tom Casey's on its left were the only buildings left of the officers' quarters existing in our day. But some of the old soldiers barracks and the old trees about the vicinity still stood. We walked out to the little lake nearby where we used to walk in the days of our honeymoon and cut our initials on a tree with the dates '61 and '92.

Bless the memories of old Fort Steilacoom! Though possibly they are seeming peculiarly dear today as I write them, June 9, 1897, way down in Greytown, Nicaragua, where loneliness has its own abode and homesickness its everlasting habitation.

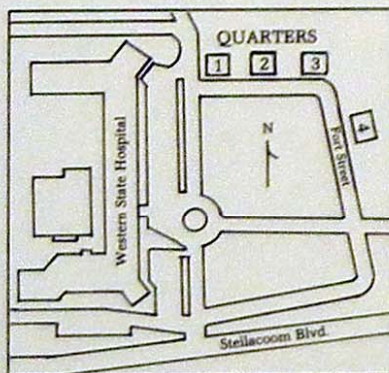
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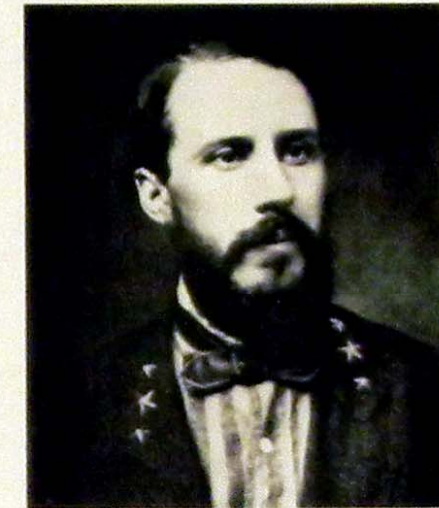
Fort Steilacoom, Washington

July, 1997

E.P. Alexander at Fort Steilacoom

Edited by Carol Neufeld

Edward Porter Alexander was appointed a Brevet 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Engineers in 1857 and was assigned to Fort Steilacoom. Forty years later he wrote about his experiences there after having served both as a captain and brigadier-general in the Confederate Army.



Soon after I returned to West Point I was ordered to relieve Lt. Robert at Fort Steilacoom in Washington Territory with the detachment of our company. With my wife, Miss Teen, I sailed on the steamer *Northern Light* for Aspinwall on August 10, then aboard the *John L. Stephens* from Panama on the 19th and by the *Cortes* from San Francisco on September 8, landing at Steilacoom City on September 20th.

The post was commanded by Colonel Silas Casey of the 9th Infantry and garrisoned by two companies of the 9th and our detachment of the 36th Engineer troops under Lt. Thomas L. Casey. There were no duties other than those of company routine. But it was a period of great anxiety to Southern officers whose native states, after debating the question of secession, began one after another to take the step.

The sappers with whom I came to serve were under command of 1st Lieut. Thomas Lincoln Casey of the engineers. I had known him slightly at West Point before I went to Utah. His wife, Emma, was a daughter of dear old Professor Robert Weir, professor of drawing at West Point.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to say that among all the many

stories facing the center of the parade ground; four rooms and two shed rooms on the lower floor and four rooms in the 1/2 story above. On each side of it were three other cottages with two full rooms and two shed rooms below and two rooms in the 1/2 story above.

After looking around we found our only chance for quarters was to divide the cottage next on the right to Colonel Casey's with Lieut. Shaaf, who being unmarried only needed half of the downstairs. He took the rooms on one's left entering.

The right front room, on entering, was our parlor and dining room. The rear or shed room was the kitchen. Upstairs, the rooms had no fireplaces. Our bedroom was over our parlor, which was the side next to Colonel Casey's. Anne, our cook and house girl whom we had brought from West Point, had the room over Shaaf's parlor for her bedroom.

It took us some little time to find all the furniture, bedding, etc. we needed to go to housekeeping. But we finally got fixed, getting some in Steilacoom and some at Nisqually, a fort or station of the Hudson's Bay Company on the prairie about six miles to the south.

Fort Steilacoom Garrison

Our garrison consisted, besides the sappers, of two companies of the 9th Infantry. The other officers, besides the Casey mentioned, were Captain Thomas English; Lieut. David McKibben, both married; Lieut. Arthur Shaaf; Quartermaster Major "Nosy" Myers; Chaplain Rev. Mr. Kendig (married); Paymaster Major

friendships which Miss Teen and I have made, in our varied journeying, our friendship with the Caseys was one of the very dearest, and it has proved the very longest of all in its duration. It continues today with poor Mrs. Casey, Tom having died last year after being retired as Brig. General and Chief of Engineers, though still charged with and having nearly completed one of the great Works of his life, the Congressional Library in Washington City.

Tom and Emma met us on the dock at Steilacoom City and we drove up in the post ambulance to the fort, where we became the guests of his father, Lt. Colonel Silas Casey of the 9th Infantry, who was in command of the post. I am tempted to linger a little over our six months stay at Fort Steilacoom.

Officers' Quarters at Fort Steilacoom

We stayed with Colonel Casey as his guests for about two weeks. The quarters were a double cottage, 1/2

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President's Message

It comes as no surprise to anyone that, so far this year, rainfall is reportedly seven inches ahead of normal. But the rain gods have been very kind to the museum. Our fourth annual Memorial Day weekend Civil War encampment was not only relatively dry, but enormously successful. Over 500 reenactors participated in the three day event— fifty percent more than last year.

Our publicity was clearly more effective, and the crowds and gate revenues showed it. Like any other recurring event, each year the public and we the sponsors both learn how to reduce the glitches and enhance the successes. If you were out of town this year and missed it, I can assure you that next year's encampment will be even more of a reason to stay in town over Memorial Day—and avoid all the traffic.

Our new diorama has proved to be a splendid addition to our interpretive center. It is soon to be accompanied by a very well-executed exhibit on the Medicine Creek Treaty, which we are in the process of borrowing from McChord Air Force Base. (I am thinking positively here; actually, we still need the base commander's approval.)

Additionally, Lyle Dunkin (who superintended the restoration of the four officers' quarters) is developing a pair of hands-on exhibits for youngsters. They're models of farm



Union camp at Fort Steilacoom during Memorial Day weekend Civil War reenactment.

wagons, and they come with a variety of appropriately sized tool chests, barrels, bedding, sacks of animal feed, etc. Youngsters will be able to experience the dilemma faced by refugee families at the outbreak of the Indian War. "There's just so much room in the wagon, Willis. What should we take to live on, until the war's over?" Special thanks to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City, Oregon, from which we borrowed the idea.

We are still desperately in need of docents and volunteers. This spring we had to reject requests for school tours because we didn't have the staffing. We are also looking for new faces and new ideas on our board of directors. If you are interested in becoming more involved with the museum in any way, please call me at (253) 584-1528.

Finally, if you're enjoying one of life's triumphs and want to commemorate it in a very special way, perhaps you'd consider following the example of one of our members. To celebrate the joyful arrival of a daughter, she signed up for a lifetime membership. Gloria Elena, we're looking forward to the day when you'll be big enough to play with our new farm wagon exhibit.

Raymond Egan

Seamstress Needed

The museum needs twelve miniature burlap sacks, 3 1/2 inches high and 2 1/2 inches in diameter when filled, and labeled as corn, peas, potatoes, oats, etc. These will be used in a hands-on exhibit for children. If you are interested, please call Ray Egan at (253) 584-1528.

Alexander (continued from page 1)
 A.B. Ragan, with Mrs. Ragan and two adopted children Frank and Wyley B. and her brother, John Ector; the surgeon Dr. Brown and family soon succeeded, however, by young Dr. Vansant and he later by Dr. Heger.

In Colonel Casey's household, besides Mrs. Casey, were also his two sweet daughters, Abbie, who while we were there married Captain Hunt of the 4th Infantry, and beautiful Bessie with her lovely eyes, who afterwards became Mrs. Robert N. Scott.

Besides these families there was the family of the sutler, Mr. Bachelor. There was also Capt. Fauntleroy in command of the armed steamer *Massachusetts* with his wife. The *Massachusetts* did not belong to the Navy, but was kept by the army to protect the settlers and Puget Sound Indians from a very warlike Alaska

tribe, the Stikines, who sometimes made incursions in immense war canoes carrying 60 warriors each.

Captain Fauntleroy was a Virginian, son of a former army officer, celebrated as a great rifle shot, and he had with him a Midshipman Barron, son of Commodore Barron who I think fought a duel with Commodore Decatur.

As I look back at it, now it seems to have been the last of my youth. Never to, or during that time, did I begin to realize what care and responsibility may mean. I had a position for life and an assured support in the profession I loved. I had only to get the most pleasure that I could out of my surroundings.

I kept up some professional reading and study, and I worked a bit at two proposed patents I had in mind for projectiles to give greatly increased ranges. One was for a projectile with a hole through its long axis, and one was for a flat projectile to sail like an aeroplane.

Social Life

My company duties were very light, and I had plenty of time for shooting, fishing, playing chess and for social pleasures.

One of our favorite walks was to a little mill pond about a mile north on a stream flowing into the Sound—a deep ravine. Here Miss Teen would sit on the bank and read while I, out on a log, could always catch a fine string of brook trout in a little while.

Indeed, we nearly lived on game and fish. I bought a nice pony which Colonel Casey kept in his stable, for the privilege of joint use by his daughters. Once a week I would ride down to the mouth of the Puyallup River, where the City of Tacoma is now situated, and leave Charley, the pony, at the house of a Swede named Delinn who had a little shingle mill on a little brook emptying into the Sound. I would walk up a mile or two to the Indian village on the Puyallup River and get an Indian to take me in his Kynim to paddle around the flats and creeks at the mouth of the river to kill ducks. I

could usually get fifteen or twenty by the time he would land me at Delinns, and if I cared to get any pheasants, I could always get them in an adjacent crab apple thicket with Mrs. Delinn's little dog.

Some four miles distant was a lake about one mile wide by four long which was a great resort for wild geese to roost in. At least twice every week I would get up long before day and saddle Charley and by dawn would be on the far side of the lake to get a shot at the geese as they flew for their feeding grounds. I usually shot one or two. One afternoon I walked out and back and brought in seven.

Occasionally, too, I would go deer hunting on the islands in the Sound with Capt. Fauntleroy, but only once did we get a deer. Then I killed it, running in the woods, one hundred yards off by a wonderful chance shot, with the old small bore rifle of Capt. Fauntleroy's father. The bullet hit it in the neck, cutting the jugular vein.

For social amusements we had a very occasional hop at some sort of a semi-public room or hall. Once some wretched traveling minstrels gave a show to which Miss Teen and I took Bessie Casey. I remember Joseph Bowers sang to the grinding of a coffee mill used in imitation of a hand organ. Once or twice we had attempts at sleigh rides with dry goods boxes on makeshift runners when we had a few inches of snow, but it usually melted in a day and we had to come back through the mud.

Once the little pond we used to walk to froze over so hard that Colonel Casey thought he might cut some ice, and he walked out there with Miss Teen, Bessie Casey and an orderly. The orderly thought the ice was strong enough and walked far out where the water was very deep. He broke through and would have drowned had not Miss Teen taken an oar and walked out near enough to give it to him. Bessie Casey ran back to the barracks nearly a half a mile and brought help. The oar enabled the soldier to hold up until ropes were brought and he was hauled out.

Sometimes we had riding or walking excursions or picnics with some of the ladies, and sometimes pistol practice for them. Miss Teen generally beat them all.

Once I was sent by Colonel Casey on a three days trip over to some settlements on the White River where it was reported that there were hostile demonstrations by Indians, but the alarm proved unfounded.

Officer of the Day

Once every five or six days I was on duty as officer of the day. Our guard had charge of a few very hard cases, deserters, etc., serving long terms. One day one of these fellows mutinied and, getting an iron bar, cleared the upstairs room in which they were confined and threatened to kill anyone who came up.

The sergeant of the guard ran over to my house for me, and I went over and advanced on the fellow with my sword. He retreated into his cell where he gave up and submitted to hand cuffs.

But the excitement of the winter was caused by the going crazy of my intimate associate, John Ector, who lived with the Ragans in the cottage adjoining us on the right. As the Ragans were from Georgia and the old major was a charming and hospitable gentleman, we became very intimate. Ector and I used to be together a great deal, especially to play chess.

Insanity of John Ector

Sometime early in February, 1861, Ector's conduct began to be a little peculiar at times. He got excited upon religious subjects and began to show that exaggerated self-appreciation which is so often a sign of incipient insanity. At last it became necessary to have him watched constantly. One night they sent for me about 4:00 a.m. to come over. He had a violent fit and had driven two soldiers who were nursing him and Major Ragan out of the house with a poker, breaking the bones of one man's hand.

(Continued on page 4)