

Fort Steilacoom

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Death Changes History

By Carol Neufeld

When Joseph Thomas Heath, gentleman farmer of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company at Steilacoom died March 7, 1849, changes were set into motion.

After July 27, 1849, the 640 acre farm with a house, granary, barns, smokehouse, kitchen, and seven other buildings was abandoned.

The livestock, wheat, peas, and potatoes were valued and transferred to the company. Personal belongings, farm implements, and selected items were sold at auction.¹

The Indian people who worked for Heath and pitched their lodges close to his home, disappeared as quickly as they had come.

Heath's brother, William, who worked aboard several of the Hudson's Bay Company vessels, could no longer stop by to talk about family matters.

Americans, searching for land, who passed by Heath's farm asking for a night's shelter, had to go elsewhere.

John Edgar, a fellow countryman and shepherd of the company, could no longer come to talk away half of the night.

Dr. Tolmie, company supervisor and friend who helped keep Heath's farm operating, now assisted to close it and settle the estate.

The Ross family who frequently exchanged visits with Heath, lost a friend, and perhaps a potential husband.²

Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, great, great granddaughter of Charles George Ross and author of *Fort Nisqually*, wonders if: "The attraction to the Ross family could have been Madame (Isabella) Ross,



Joseph Thomas Heath

the widowed mother of John Ross (gentleman), who maintained the other tenant farm for the company. Mrs. Ross, 36 years old widow of Chief Trader Charles George Ross (deceased at Fort Victoria), had arrived with several of her children to make her home with her eldest son, John. John often arrived at the Heath farm on fort business,"² as did two younger brothers, Walter and Charles, who were employed at Fort Nisqually. Other times the entire Ross family came to spend the day with Heath.

Heath's diary, below, notes these visits from the Ross' and his trips to the Ross farm. "Although the relationship between Joseph Heath and Isabella Ross seemed confined to dining and visiting, with occasional gifts to Heath, had Joseph Heath not



Isabella Mainville Ross

died in 1849, one ponders the possible outcome!"³

1847

May 30, Sunday - Visit early in the morning from John Ross who has settled with his mother and family near the Fort.... [p. 101]⁴

June 1, Saturday - ...Three visitors came in unexpectedly—Mrs. Ross, Mrs. Edgar and Mrs. Linklater Salmon (with) some potatoes made a good dinner for them.... [p. 104]

July 24, Saturday - ...Paid a visit to Mrs. Ross, was devoured by mosquitoes.... [p. 108]

November 28, Sunday - Cleaned up the house and had just finished when a large party...arrived—John Ross, his mother, sister and brother.... [p. 123]

December 19, Sunday - Intended to dine with Mrs. Ross, but owing to

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the thick fog none of the horses
could be found... [p. 125]

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President’s Message

For the third year, we are participating with the Dupont, Steilacoom Tribal, and Steilacoom Historical museums in the popular Inquiring Mind series. (Please note the topics, dates, and locations listed elsewhere in the newsletter.) For the convenience of those who dislike driving after dark in particular, all programs will be at 2:00 p.m. on Sundays.

It has been proposed, and may be brought to the floor for a vote at our annual meeting, that we substitute “Interpretive Center” for “Museum” in our name. The rationale for the proposed change is that we offer more than just a static, dry display of artifacts. Rather, through our docents we offer an interpretation of the period and the role that the fort played in Puget Sound history. Also, we have just acquired an important interpretive exhibit on the Medicine Creek Treaty from the McChord AFB museum.

We are still desperately in need of docents. As of this printing, we are unable to provide tours for more than a few school groups during the coming year. We are losing the two directors of our school program, Shea Munroe and Anna Mary Fitzgerald. (Congratulations are due to both of them. Shea is getting married and moving to Portland. Anna is expecting her first child.) Please call me at 584-1528 (in Steilacoom) if you are interested in becoming a docent or tour guide.



Ezra Meeker will be the subject of Andy Andersons talk at the Annual Meeting on October 5.

Annual Meeting

The featured speaker at our annual meeting at 1:00 p.m. in Quarters 2 on Sunday, October 5, will be “Andy” Anderson, the administrator of the Ezra Meeker Historical Society. Andy’s slide-illustrated presentation is entitled, “Ezra Meeker, Visionary of the West.” Andy describes his program as “not just another talk about the Oregon Trail. From 1852 to 1928, whatever happened on this side of the Cascades and north of the Columbia, Meeker was there. I want people to get a view of him in all his complexity. How does a man of only six months of education become the ‘Hop King of the World,’ the champion of the Oregon Trail and the founder and mayor of Puyallup?”

Andy is a retired Air Force Intelligence Officer and author of a treatise on the air war over Hungary in WWII. Recently appointed to the Pierce County Landmarks Commission, he is also a member of South Pierce County Historical Society and the Pierce County Heritage League.

Refreshments and a tour of Fort Steilacoom will follow the presentation.



Letter to Editor . . .

Delbert McBride: Kautz and his Indian Family

Was pleased to read the 1926 article on Gen. A. V. Kautz and his Indian family, which I had not seen previously. [See June, 1997, issue of Fort Steilacoom newsletter.] I enclose an overly dark Xerox of the son “Gus” Kautz (about 1879), a good friend from childhood of my grandmother, Christina (Mounts) McAllister. Gen. Kautz and my great grandfather, Daniel M. Mounts, were friends. Mounts also had an Indian wife and eventually 10 children.

There is a letter at WSHS from Kautz to Mounts written during the Civil War, and the General visited the Mounts family at Nisqually when he returned to the Northwest before his death.

I believe the State Capitol Museum has a good copy negative of the “Gus” Kautz photo. I still have the original “carte de visite” print, taken by Woodard of Olympia.

Wishing you well on the group’s various historical projects.

*Del McBride, Curator Emeritus
Washington State Capitol Museum*



“Gus” Kautz, c. 1879, son of Gen. A.V. Kautz and his N.W. Indian wife. Photo given to Christina McAllister.

Charly

One of the important—but little known—characters in the history of south Puget Sound is J. M. Bachelder who was, for several years, the sutler at Fort Steilacoom. Bachelder was a man who had the courage of his convictions. Like the officers at the fort, Bachelder was convinced that the execution of Leschi was a travesty of justice, and just plain murder. When the sheriff and the executioner came to hang Leschi the first time, Bachelder, in his role as a marshal, arrested the hangman on trumped-up charges of selling liquor to the Indians.

This ploy, which he and the army officers had concocted, served only to delay the hanging for a few, short weeks. But it succeeded in arousing the anger and enmity of most of the whites on the Sound. For Bachelder to take such a position was courageous, to say the least—living, as he did, in the isolated village of Steilacoom, with over 300 people who couldn't wait to see Leschi executed.

But those early settlers on the Sound were, perhaps inadvertently, given an early indication of Bachelder's feelings about the war and the Indians. On Friday, December 21, 1855, the *Puget Sound Courier* printed the following letter to the editor. (We have printed this letter exactly as it was originally published, including the misspelling and typographical errors.)

Plain Facts

Mr. Editor:

Some two years and a half since, I employed a little ragged Snohomish Indian boy to go out to Fort Steilacoom on an errand. The little fellow, only some ten or twelve years of age, discharged his duty so well and seemed so unaffectedly pleased that an opportunity had occurred for him to do a "Boston" a kindness, that I was at once prejudiced in his favor, and concluded to watch his move-

ments for awhile. A portion of his people were encamped at this place, and every morning for a week, he came to my house and remained all day, readily and cheerfully performed many little chores. He was very handy, and seemed possessed of an amiable disposition. My wife was well pleased with him, and soon fitted him out with a respectable suit of clothes, made up from some of my old ones. From the delight he manifested, when they were on, it seemed very evident that he had hitherto been used to nothing but rags, and they scanty, and of coarse quality.

He gradually and almost imperceptibly came to be a useful and almost indispensable servant in the family. Everything that was done by my wife, he watched narrowly and try to imitate, and such was his ingenuity and assiduity, that a year had not elapsed before he could get up a pretty respectable meal and not two years before he could "turn out" in the morning, prepare a breakfast of elegant coffee, broiled steak and hot cakes, clean away the things after the meal was over, then fetch and heat his water, wash and wring the dirty clothes about the house, hang them out, take them in when dry, sprinkle and fold them, and the next day iron them. All these things he could and frequently did do, and always cheerfully and without a murmur. My wife was very proud of him and always treated him with the most considerate kindness and frequently remarked to me "that she did not know how in the world she could keep house without Charly." I was of the same mind myself, for, with a house to keep in order, meals to prepare, all the garments to make for four restless, healthy, and mischievous children, as well as for herself, I was very much afraid that the task would prove too much for her physical endurance, and could not look forward with any degree of philosophy, to the time when we should be called upon to part with him. In fact I did not anticipate such an event, for the boy was well satisfied and seemed to take

more pleasure in manufacturing rude articles of mechanism, and taking part with the children in their noisy, innocent games, than, like most other Indian boys, in hanging around shops and bar-rooms, listening to the remarks of white men and watching for an opportunity to beg or steal from some drunken rowdy a bottle of poor whisky, or still worse brandy, upon which to get beastly drunk, and keep up a hideous yell for the ensuing night. For such things he had no taste, but constantly employed himself in something useful or innocently amusing about the house.

Useful and faithful however as he constantly provided himself to be, the edict was soon to go forth, that his presence in my family endangered the lives and property of the entire white community, and that he must be forthwith removed to some reservation and there placed in charge of some two or three individuals, who, from their daily and nightly intercourse with the Siwashes for years past, were justly supposed to have a right conception of their character and to be able to exercise a good influence over them. I was very loth to give him up, but did so quietly when the demand was made by the Agent. Whatever I might think of the policy of the act of our Governor and Indian Agents in removing the friendly "Siwashes" to places remote from communities of whites, or the effect it will have upon their ultimate decision relative to the others that have been and will be made them by the hostile tribes, I did not deem it advisable to "argue the point," and so said little or nothing about it. It was not my purpose when I commenced this article, nor is now, to censure the government officials for removing the friendly Indians, or endeavor to prove by argument that future events will show it to have been an unwise act, but simply to assure the public that the boy Charly, who performed the duties of a faithful servant in my family for two years and a half, was not a friend or a relative of any of the Indians now in arms against the

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whites, had no sympathy with them,
or wish for their success, and no

Charly (continued from page 3)

knowledge, whatever, of the causes which fed to the present unhappy war; and further, that if it was necessary to remove him that he should have the opportunity of communicating information to the hostile Indians, it is more than doubly necessary that the Indian agents, should be at once, strictly forbidden to travel constantly on the sound, stopping for a day or two at a time in all the white settlements with half dozen or more Indians, of doubtful honesty, who understands English and listens eagerly to every thing that is said by the whites, for a crew, and also that *indulgence* should not be granted certain white men to keep "cluchmen," [Indian women] whose busy tongues and natural disposition to create mischief, are far more to be feared than boys like Charly and some others who have been removed. If the Government officials are wise they will attend to this matter at once, that the public may no longer accuse them of an unwise policy, and a wicked and corrupting partiality.

Yours respectfully,
J. M. Bachelder.

Death Changes History (from page 1)

December 25, Saturday - ...Walked to Mrs. Ross's, spending a very pleas-

ant day. Drank in a bumper of port. Health and happiness to all our friends...Was pressed to remain all night and witness a dance...but returned (home) soon after sunset. [p. 126]

1848

March 19, Sunday - ...(Received a present from Mrs. Ross of five pairs of moccasins.... [p. 135]

June 18, Sunday - ...Went to pay a wedding visit to Mrs. Ross's daughter who had been married in the morning. John Ross's farm and crops (are) most excellent, far surpassing any at the Nisqually.... [p. 143]

June 25, Sunday - ...John and Walter Ross came to say that Captain Sangster expected me to dine with him....[p. 144]

July 16, Sunday - Mrs. Ross, her daughter and (daughter's) husband almost caught me in bed.... (They) remained until the afternoon, Walter Ross coming in for tea.... [p. 145]

July 30, Sunday - John Ross and Edgar (the shepherd) arrived, the former of whom brought me a deerskin shooting jacket which his mother had made.... [p. 149]

August 27, Sunday - Not quite well, took a blue pill. Visit from Mr. Mott, John and Walter Ross who dined with me. [p. 152]

October 1, Sunday - Visit from John and Walter Ross...who wished me to (hunt) wild pigs.... (I) felt inclined to stay at home.... [p.54]

Joseph Heath was inclined to stay home more often until his death, at age 44, from a heart condition aggravated by pneumonia.

History continued to change after Heath's death. His land and buildings reverted back to the Hudson's Bay Company and became the home of the first military establishment in the area—Fort Steilacoom.

Madame Ross scooped up her family and returned to Victoria. John Ross married the oldest daughter of Simon Plomondon of Cowlitz Farms and gave up his farm. With one swoop of the Death Angel, the prairie lands were wiped clean of the Heath and Ross existence. Their sojourn remains only in the historical records.

Bibliography

1. Anderson, Steve A., "Steilacoom Farm: The British Colonization of Puget Sound, 1841-1849" (Commissioned by Historic Fort Steilacoom Association, 1993).
2. Carpenter, Cecelia Svinth, *Fort Nisqually, A Documented History of Indian and British Interaction*, (Tahoma Research, 1986), p. 131.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Heath, Joseph, *Memoirs of Nisqually* (Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, WA, 1979).



Come to the Annual Meeting October 5 and hear Andy Anderson's illustrated Ezra Meeker talk.

Historic Fort Steilacoom

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