

## Sesquicentennial Celebration in August



Sketch by W. B. McMurtrie

Fort Steilacoom as it appeared shortly after it was established on August 24, 1849

**M**ark your calendars. The Historic Fort Steilacoom Museum Association will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the fort from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Aug. 22, 1999, with an all-day reenactment celebration and monument unveiling.

The event will include encampments of period soldiers and settlers as well as historical lectures on the life and times of the early Puget

Sound. We'll have Brits. We'll have soldiers. We'll have cannon fire. We'll have lectures. We'll have fun. The public is welcome to attend. Come to the event and spend the day during this special event.

Commemorative medals were also specially cast for this event and will be available from the association for \$10. Board member Bob Demorest, who built the diorama in the fort's museum, designed the collector's

quality medal. These are a limited addition and may go fast.

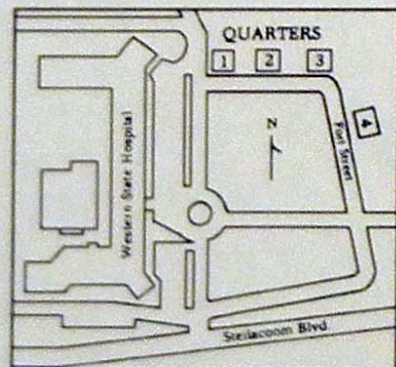
The museum association also gives tours to schoolchildren and groups during the year and to tourists in the summer, if you want to learn more about the museum's rich history.

The museum is open to the public from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sundays from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Steve Dunkelberger

### Historic Fort Steilacoom

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# Fort Steilacoom

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## Bancroft Comes to Fort Steilacoom

by Walter T. Neary

**T**he Fort Steilacoom Library recently received a donation of a 39-volume series that once belonged in every educated Westerner's library. Mr. and Mrs. James Bell of Lakewood donated *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* in honor of Bo Cooper, a Fort Steilacoom board member and dedicated volunteer whose interests include the library.

*The Works* were produced by a fascinating character, surrounded by much controversy. They are essential reading for any student of West Coast history. That's not the only reason that Bancroft's name comes up from time to time. The most dedicated students who wish to study primary sources in Western history often have to make a pilgrimage to the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

It's difficult to describe how ubiquitous his series became before the turn of the century. *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* were as common, perhaps, as those Time/Life documentary books that you often see on bookshelves—perhaps even your own. That's because Bancroft was driven not only to collect and study history, but to get his name in every library in America.

The Time comparison falters in that Bancroft's work blazed a path far more dramatic. But the comparison holds true in that the works that bear Bancroft's name were actually written by committee. In fact, our most read copy in our library, "The History of Washington, Idaho and Montana" was one of the six volumes actually written by



Herbert Howe Bancroft

Frances Fuller Victor, one of Bancroft's assistants.

Bancroft was a bookseller. He came to San Francisco following the Gold Rush and caught a sense of excitement about the West Coast's prospects. "Looking at the bustling, money-making city about him, Bancroft suddenly had the intuition that California's real destiny...would be with the intellectual life," writes California historian Kevin Starr. "Bancroft resolved to play a part in that creative destiny."

The story of this Ohio native was not always happy. He was not immediately a business success. His somewhat self-indulgent memoir, "Literary Industries," hints that he spent his time in dissolute pursuits while working at his brother's book-

shop in Buffalo, NY. His brother sent him to sell books in San Francisco.

The shock of the move and the business challenges shook Bancroft from his poor habits, and his business became the "Barnes & Noble Booksellers" of the period. It was the largest book dealer of the coast. He spent much of the money he made on materials related to the area's history, without a definite plan for what he would do with them.

Bancroft spent 1866 in Europe, collecting items related to West Coast history. By 1869 he had 16,000 books, maps, pamphlets, newspapers and more on the fifth floor of his building on San Francisco's Market Street.

Bancroft's beloved wife died in 1869. He appears to have suffered what we now call a nervous breakdown. In his search for a mission, and for a meaning to life, Bancroft decided to compile the political, social, economic and intellectual history of a big chunk of the globe. "As a historian," Starr writes, "Bancroft could satisfy that mixture of idealism and vanity which had led him to thirst for the role of visible intellectual."

He paid people to laboriously index the contents of his library, and came up with a plan to sketch out the history. "It was my ambition to do for this last western earth's end what Homer did for Greece, with these differences: Homer dealt in myths. I shall deal with facts; Homer's were the writings of poetical genius, mine of plodding

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## HISTORIC FORT STEILACOOM ASSOCIATION

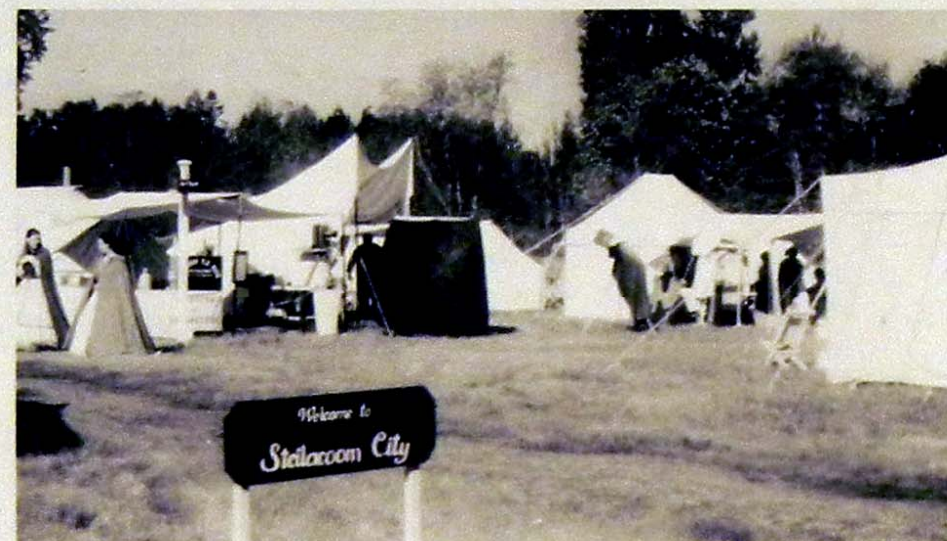
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### From the President

First, a word from our sponsor: please, if you have not sent in your membership check, please do so. We haven't been calling to remind you about your welcome membership in Historic Fort Steilacoom Association, but it's possible that some members may be hearing from us soon. Your membership provides not only support in numbers, but also helps pay for continued restoration of the fort's four buildings, exhibits and educational programs.

One thing that surprised me during the Memorial Day Civil War Reenactment is that very few of our members came up to ask for free admittance, which is one of the perks of membership. This tells me that we haven't done enough to remind you of this valuable benefit. We'll try to do a better job of that next year. It was one of several lessons from this year's reenactment, at which we introduced some new technology.

Let me explain what technology I mean. One of my favorite birthday gifts this year came from my brother-in-law, George. He saw a new product on one of those "infomercials" called Perfect Chef. Perfect chef is a two-pronged tool that you stick into meat while barbecuing or otherwise cooking it. You press a button, and Perfect



*Sutler's tents crowd into Steilacoom City at the 1999 reenactment.*

Chef's temperature sensor tells you if the meat is rare, medium or well done.

This got me to thinking that the way technology progresses, Perfect Chef 5.0 will probably consist of a robot that stands over the barbecue, turns the meat for you, and then takes it off the grill when cooked exactly to your personal tastes.

I'm proud that Fort Steilacoom already has Perfect Volunteer 5.0, even if it is powered by good ol' flesh and blood, and not temperature sensors. Our volunteers worked hard over Memorial Day Weekend, our busiest time of the year. That's when we co-sponsor the re-enactment with the Washington Civil War Association. The association must have put 500 re-enactors on the field, which helped countless adults and children learn a lot about the Civil War.

Our association, meanwhile, staffed the front gate and the museum. For the association, this is a valuable chance to raise money to pay for important stuff like the insurance bill for our four buildings. This was a challenging year, because several of our most stalwart volunteers were sidelined by illness—either their own, or a family member's. It did not help that a youth group that had promised to help us for a total of 21 hours over the three days

showed up for only about three of those hours.

That's no reason to put down youth, though, as my 11-year-old daughter JoAnna put those high school children to shame. She was a dedicated volunteer throughout the weekend. She and I worked the booth on an unexpectedly busy Monday, helping roughly 1,100 people get through the gate.

Several people responded to the challenge. Our volunteers staffed the museum, while some of us spent more time at the booth than we'd expected. Booth coordinator Steve Dunkelberger put in extra time at the booth, as did Chuck and Pat Collier. Bo Cooper worked through some pain to help out at the museum, as well as answer countless phone calls from members of the public who needed help finding the park or getting other questions answered. It takes great patience to do this—I didn't really know what to say to the lady who called me at home, not because she was interested in the reenactment, but because she wanted to sell a book about the Civil War (I referred her to a used bookstore).

We're now looking forward to the Fourth of July in Steilacoom, as well as the Sesquicentennial bash on August 22.

*(Continued next page)*

If we haven't called you about volunteering, and you're interested, it means you somehow fell off our phone list. One volunteer surprised me over the weekend by saying he was surprised we don't call on him very often. Please don't hesitate to call me at (253) 588-6090 if you'd like to join in on the fun. I mean that sincerely, by the way. It really is fun to help people get into an event when you know they will emerge all smiles several hours later. And then they thank you! Such a deal.

Last word: One goal our board is talking about is how we can establish a manageable educational outreach program for schools. Or, to put it another way, how we can get more kids into our buildings. One of our goals is to establish a consistent program that teachers can rely on year after year. If you have thoughts on the subject, please call me at the number above.

*Walter T. Neary*

### Bancroft (continued from page 1)

From 1881 to 1890, The History Co. produced 39 volumes. Indian culture was explored for five volumes in "The Native Races of the Pacific States." California accounted for 11 volumes, or 4.5 million words.

Bancroft traveled the East Coast, seeking complimentary reviews from intellectuals who thought of California as a place filled, as we might say today, with rednecks. His work attracted national attention.

This is not to mythologize the man. For one thing, your family might get prominent mention in the histories if you paid \$10,000 for the privilege. Bancroft sent traveling salesman throughout the West, with detailed instructions on how to manipulate homespun folks to agree to pay between \$4.50 to \$10 a volume, depending on how they were bound. Salesmen were told to be sure to get an order for all 39 volumes, to discourage folks from just getting a history of their area. Bancroft biog-

rapher John Walton Caughey wrote his book with cooperation from Bancroft's descendants, and it is often embarrassingly apologetic for the man. But Caughey notes that he could never find a piece of writing that actually told prospects how much they would pay total for the series: between \$175 and \$390.

A good example of how this all might work is found through railroad baron Leland Stanford. As a show of support for his San Francisco neighbor, Stanford agreed to buy 40 sets of the *Works*. He assumed each set would go only for four or five volumes—certainly not 39.

By 1890, Stanford had filled an entire room with the sets, and they still were not finished. He canceled his order. Bancroft then removed complimentary references to Stanford in the California volumes.

But this is not to diminish the overall accomplishment of the works. Bancroft became an astute historian, as did his staff members. Our Fort Steilacoom volunteers have been impressed with how well the Washington volume tells our state's early history.

The greatest controversy to envelope Bancroft stems from the fact that the Washington volume was one of several that he simply did not write. He had more than a dozen ghost writers who used suggestions from their boss to write works, although you can certainly see Bancroft's editing hand throughout the finished product.

The author of the Washington volume was Mrs. Frances Fuller Victor, Bancroft's sole female assistant. In New York, she and her sister sought to support their invalid father by writing. Her sister wrote prose; Fuller was a poet. They collaborated on potboilers and had some success.

Frances married Henry Victor, a naval engineer ordered to San Francisco in 1863. To supplement the meager Navy pay, Frances wrote editorials and society columns for the *Bulletin* newspaper. She fol-

lowed her husband to Oregon, cementing her love of the Northwest. She wrote several articles and books extolling its virtues.

Bancroft once wrote that he felt women could not bear the pressure of constant intellectual stimulation. That's why he did not allow them to work in the library. But he made an exception for the experienced author, and expert in Northwest matters, and praised her for her brilliance. "In ability, conscientiousness, and never-ceasing interest and faithfulness, Mrs. Victor was second to none," Bancroft wrote in his biography.

He probably later regretted using the term faithfulness. After the volumes came out with only one author's name, several of the ghost writers tried to get credit for their work. Victor wrote detailed articles for newspapers claiming acknowledgment. At a San Francisco fair in 1893 she exhibited four of the volumes with her name displayed as the author.

But all this should not take away from Bancroft's overall accomplishment. This is how some of his fellow historians described his legacy, following his death in 1918 at age 85:

In the death of Hubert Howe Bancroft, the Pacific Coast of America has lost one of its most useful and uniquely picturesque pioneers. With enterprise unbounded and with audacious courage, he created the conditions which made possible the first scientific treatment of the history of one half of our continent.

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