

Cadets were subjected to strict discipline. They were prohibited from possessing or using tobacco and liquor, playing cards and chess, gambling, reading romances or plays, leaving the post, bathing in the Hudson River, playing a musical instrument, and keeping cooking utensils in their rooms. Of course, they did all of these things, and more, for which they were awarded demerits. The number of demerits was offense based, and should a cadet accumulate too many, he could be dismissed from the Academy. Many demerits were awarded for personal behavior and appearance in addition to the above. Cadets were always on their best behavior.

Silas, like most cadets, gathered his share of demerits. His list is quite long and includes things such as: sleeping during study hours, remaining in bed at reveille, dirty shoes and uniforms, hair too long, inattention at drill, improper conduct leaving the mess hall, absent from inspection, late for parade, visiting during study hours, absent from duty, disobedience of orders, scuffling in ranks while on the march, failing to roll up his bedding, and unsoldierlike appearance.

Class standing was important upon graduation. Standing was determined from academic performance, military skills, accumulated demerits, and staff evaluations. Class stand-



Sylvanus Thayer
Superintendent 1817-1833

ing determined which branch and regiment the newly commissioned officer would be assigned to. Top class members were commissioned as engineers (topographical and civil). Lesser standing brought assignment to the artillery, then infantry, and lastly, cavalry. Silas was commissioned as an infantry officer.

The Military Academy produced more officers than were actually needed to fill vacancies within the Army. Some officers were given

brevet (temporary or honorary) commissions and assigned as over-strength officers until actual openings in the regiment occurred.

Silas Casey graduated (as the 467th graduate) from the United States Military Academy on July 1, 1826, was appointed a brevet Second Lieutenant, and assigned to the Seventh Infantry Regiment, Company I. That company was posted to Cantonment Towson, located in lands assigned to the Choctaw Nation on the Red River, then the boundary between the United States and Mexico. In 1828 he was in command of a small party which engaged a band of Pawnees. It was his first combat, but not his last.

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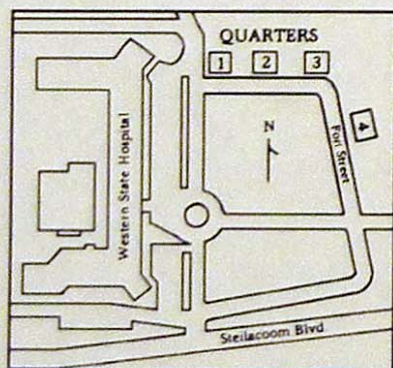
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Historic Fort Steilacoom

P.O. Box 88447
Steilacoom, WA 98388



Fort Steilacoom

Vol. XIX, No. 1

Fort Steilacoom, Washington

Spring, 2002

Silas Casey, USMA Class of 1826

by Kenneth A. Morgan

When LTC Silas Casey arrived at Fort Steilacoom in January 1856, he was an experienced and bloodied officer. He had served during the Florida (Seminole) War, the Mexican War and in various engagements with hostile Indians in the Southwest. He was in his thirty-fifth year of service with the United States Army. That service began in 1822 when he was accepted, at the age of fourteen years and eleven months, as a Cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

The US Army fort at West Point played an important role in the Revolutionary War, and indeed had become a training center for future Artillery and Engineer officers. But it was not until 1802 that Congress established a formal Military Academy at the Fort.

Silas was the son of Wanton Casey and Elizabeth Goodale of East Greenwich, Rhode Island. He was of the sixth generation of Caseys born in America. Wanton, his father, was sent to Paris, France, to learn merchandizing in the business of Jonathan Williams. Upon his return he entered the family business of Casey, Son & Greene. Williams was a friend of Benjamin Franklin, and became known as a scientist and engineer as well as a businessman. Although having no military experience, he was appointed by President Jefferson to be the first superintendent of the new Military Academy at West Point.

The Military Academy was soundly founded under the guidance of Superintendent Williams and his



West Point Military Academy as it looked in the 1820s when Silas Casey was a cadet.

successors, but the Academy was shaped into its present form under the fifth superintendent, Sylvanus Thayer. Major Thayer instituted a course of study, system of discipline, examination procedures, and other reforms that are essentially unchanged today. One of his reforms was to bring the Academy before the public eye. This he did through a series of "Cadet Marches" held during the summer months. One of these marches was through southern New England. Young Silas saw it and was impressed. Drill teams were quite popular throughout the country; the Corps of Cadets from West Point was the best. Perhaps it was the sight of the Corps, or his father's acquaintance with former

superintendent Williams, or both, that prompted Silas to apply for admission to the Academy.

Candidates applied directly to the Secretary of War for an appointment. Admission standards were: "...ability to read distinctly and pronounce correctly; to write a fair and legible hand and to perform, with facility and accuracy, the various operations of the ground rules of arithmetic, both simple and compound: the rules of reduction; of single and compound proportions; and also of vulgar and decimal fractions; and be above the age of fourteen, and not exceeding twenty-one years." These standards were not very high and Silas met them.

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From the President

Fort Steilacoom's "Christmas at the Fort" was enjoyed by reenactors and spectators alike. On December 8, 2001, the Fort was again alive, as it was in the 1850s and 1860s. Visitors were greeted by the sights, scents and sounds of a military Christmas celebration. The colorful uniforms of the officers, elegant dresses of their ladies, the smell of holiday greenery, Christmas punch, flickering candles, and music of the carolers was enchantingly nostalgic.

February's "A Visit with Aunt Harriet," Karol Brown's dramatic monologue of Harriet Tubman's life as a slave and conductor on the underground railroad, brought tears to the eyes of the audience.

What's next?

Teachers are invited to bring classes to the Fort for a hands-on educational experience on either April 19 or May 17. Call Christine Finnigan at 588-7654 to schedule a time, teachers!

The fort buildings will open for the summer season on Sunday during the Memorial Day weekend, May 26, from 1-4 p.m. There will not be a Civil War reenactment this year, as the reenactors will be east of the mountains. But we hope to have them back at Fort Steilacoom Park next year.

Currently, the board of your association is planning a summer event, perhaps a Founders' Day in August



Karol Brown visited Fort Steilacoom as "Harriet Tubman."

honoring the establishment of the fort in that month over 150 years ago. Your ideas are welcome. Let us know what you think by calling (253) 582-5838 or sending an e-mail to FortSteil@yahoo.com.

Many thanks to all who have made our programs successful!

This year's membership drive has brought in many renewals and even a new life member. It's your support that keeps us going, helping to preserve and interpret history, publish historical articles, monographs and books, and offer lectures and programs relating to our history. If you haven't had a chance to mail in your current year dues, or wish to make a memorial gift or a donation, please take a moment to do so now. Your continuing support is needed and much appreciated.

Carol E. Neufeld

Harriet Tubman Visits Fort Steilacoom

History came alive at Fort Steilacoom on February 10 when Karol Brown paid a visit as Harriet Tubman.

Wearing a shawl and gray wig, Brown portrayed Tubman as an aged woman in a senior citizens' home in upstate New York. The audience members were visitors for the day.

In the hour-long act, Brown became the famous "conductor" of the Underground Railroad, who led hundreds of escaping slaves to freedom in Canada in the years before the American Civil War.

Brown mused over the actions Tubman took during some twenty trips to rescue slaves from southern plantations. She did so at her own peril, with a \$10,000 price on her head—dead or alive.

During the Civil War, Tubman was also pressed into service as a nurse and spy for the North.

The first-person presentation was part of the fort's collaboration with surrounding historical groups and the Washington Commission for the Humanities Inquiring Mind series.

The event drew about fifty people to the fort and was covered by the *News Tribune* with a story and photo.

The next program in the Inquiring Mind series, on April 14 at 2 p.m. in Quarters 2 at Fort Steilacoom, will be "We Have Sorrow Upon Us Again," in which Theresa Trebon explores how the Industrial Revolution shaped death, mourning and burial customs in Washington State. The event is being hosted by the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association and is free of charge to all who wish to come.

CASEY, Class of 1826 (from p.1)

In September 1821 Silas applied to Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun, for admission. His father approved of the application and gave his permission for Silas to attend the Academy. Several citizens of East Greenwich, including members of the Greene family, Wanton's business partners, endorsed the application. Silas was informed by letter from the War Department dated 17 March 1822 that he was to "...repair to West Point, in the State of New York, in the month of June next, and reporting yourself to the Superintendent of the Military Academy, you will be examined for admission into that Institution, and if qualified, will be accepted conditionally, as a Cadet."

Silas reported, was examined, passed the examination, and was made a member of the fourth class. There were about eighty members in his class. That summer was spent learning drill, tactics, and military life, which meant living in the outdoors in tents. Upper class members instructed the new cadets in these matters. Gray uniforms were issued, and paid for by the cadets.

In the fall, the new cadets entered barracks for the academic year. Life in the barracks was not much better than living in tents on the plain. Rooms were furnished with only the minimum of comforts: a table, straight-backed chair, washstand and mirror, oil lamp, mattress and blanket. The mattress was to be rolled up during the day. Rooms were heated with open fires in fireplaces, which were often defective, producing too much or too little heat and far too much smoke. Running water was installed in 1826, too late for Casey to enjoy.

The day started early, usually about 5:00 a.m. and ended at 9:30 p.m. Every minute during the day was taken up with classes, parades and drills and inspections, area policing, studying, and meals. The only time cadets had for themselves was Sunday afternoon, after mandatory morning church. They were not allowed off post at any time, although many tried. Sometimes

they were caught, sometimes not. A favorite "escape" was to the local drinking places. Only one two-month furlough was given at the end of the third year the cadets were at The Point.

Cadets were paid, in theory, but rarely saw any actual cash. They could draw on their accounts at the commissaries for uniforms, razors, soap, and other necessities. They paid for all their clothing and meals. The salary was never enough to cover all their expenses and most cadets graduated in debt. They were not allowed to get money from home.

Food was at best simple. Meals usually consisted of boiled potatoes, boiled meat, and boiled pudding, bread, and coffee. One congressional commission reported that the food "was neither nutritious nor wholesome, neither sufficient nor nicely dressed." Cadets often went foraging, "finding" a goose or chicken running loose. These they took back to their rooms for roasting, which was of course, against the rules.

Since the Military Academy trained engineering officers, the course of study reflected that. Cadets primarily studied mathematics and French, since most engineering and military texts were written in that language. As they progressed from fourth (freshman) to first (senior) class, additional study areas were added. The third class added drawing,

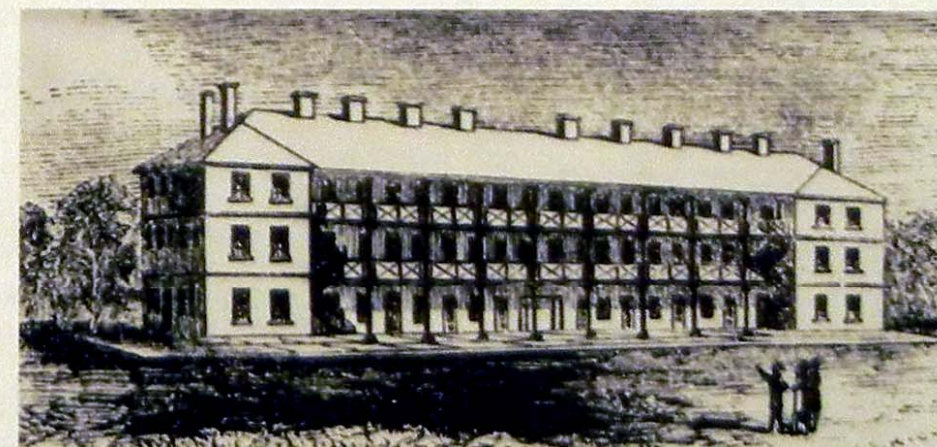
algebra, and geometry. Second classmen studied topographical drawing, natural philosophy (physics), and chemistry. When they entered the first year, the concentration was on pure engineering, mainly civil engineering. Engineering officers were expected to build roads, canals, forts, and public buildings when they entered active service. Additionally, during the first year cadets studied moral philosophy, grammar, history, and geography.

Classes were conducted in small sections, and each cadet was required to recite at each class. He had to be prepared, so study time was included in the daily schedule.

Examinations were held at the end of each year. They were comprehensive and administered by the Academy's Board of Visitors. Cadets were assigned class rankings based on how well he did on the exams. Silas's record was not outstanding. In his fourth year he ranked 48th out of 80; third year 46 of 61; second year 40 of 52; and first year 40 of 42. While he was consistent in his performance, the class numbers kept shrinking, and he stood lower and lower.

Cadets also studied military matters, including artillery theory, horsemanship, fortifications, small arms, defensive and offensive tactics, and other "military arts."

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The first barracks at West Point, built in 1815, had no running water and cadets slept on the floor. There were no beds until the 1840s, many years after Casey had graduated.