Into the Frontier *(from page 4)*

kill, and from the signs had been made by the Indians. They were still on the right track. About 4 o'clock the detachment approached a small stream with wooded banks. Casey was at the front of the column. Even though a stiff breeze was blowing, he thought he could see a plume of wood smoke arising from the river bottom. Casey called several of the party to his side to confirm the presence of the smoke when a lull in the wind plainly disclosed the smoke for all to see. They had found the killers they were after.

Casey divided his small force in two, sending the first section to secretly approach the smoke and attack. Casey, at the head of the second, crossed the stream and took up a position opposite the smoke in order to block any Indians attempting to escape in that direction. The first force attacked and drove the Indians in Casey's direction. They were attacked and a number, six or seven, were killed.

Inspection of the Indian camp revealed fourteen bows, many arrows of the type found in the slain soldiers, two shotguns, and horse furnishings. Also found were the scalps of the soldiers. They had been cut into several pieces and stretched on small wooden hoops. The Indians were dancing around them when Casey's men fired. There was only one casualty among Casey's detachment. One of the Delaware scouts had been shot in the leg with an arrow. Because of the quantities of blood, Casey believed that his femoral artery had been severed. The other Delaware bound the wound with a poultice of tobacco and water, which seemed to work.

Casey's party had followed the Indians for about a hundred miles before encountering them, and was anxious to return to the fort. There were rumors of a large group, about 250, of Pawnee-Picts camped on the Washita River, some 25 miles distant. As it was close to dark, they camped a short distance from the battle site, but got little sleep that night. They were kept awake by the roaring of the many buffalo in the area, and the howling and growling of wolves feeding on the bodies of the dead Indians. The next morning, September 3rd, being slowed by the wounded scout, they made about twenty miles. On September 4th, Casey was satisfied that the detachment was beyond danger of attack by the Indians encamped on the Washita River. He went on to the fort alone to make his report, arriving there at 6 o'clock in the evening.

Maj. Birch was impressed and told Casey that his action was deserving of a brevet. Casey replied, "I would like to get rid of the one I already have". Casey was at this time still a brevet Second Lieutenant in the 7th US Infantry.

In December 1828, Lieut. Casey was relieved of his brevet with the 7th Infantry, and was appointed a Second Lieutenant in the 2nd US Infantry, Company D, which was stationed at Madison Barracks, Sacketts Harbor, New York. He made ready to leave Fort Towson, but was unable to do so until February 1829.

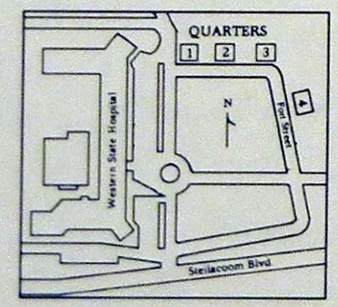
He left the fort on horseback, the same way he had arrived some two years earlier. His route was to Fort Jesup, then to Natchitoches and Alexandria on the Red River. From there he went down the river to New Orleans and thence by sailing ship to New York. After a short leave in East Greenwich, Casey reported in to his new commander, Colonel Hugh Brady, 2nd US Infantry.

The Army abandoned the original site of Fort Towson in April 1829. A new permanent location was chosen in November 1830. This second fort was vacated in 1854, ironically, the same year its namesake Nathan Towson died.

Remember Annual Meeting, October 20, 2002, 2 p.m. in Qtrs. 2

Historic Fort Steilacoom
P.O. Box 88447
Steilacoom, WA 98388

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Tacoma, WA
Permit No. 660



Fort Steilacoom

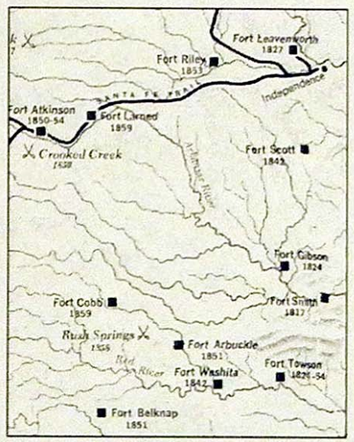
Vol. XIX, No. 3 Fort Steilacoom, Washington Autumn, 2002

Into the Frontier
Casey's First Post and Battle with Indians

by Kenneth A. Morgan

The regular Army of the early 19th century was composed of several regiments of Infantry, Artillery, and mounted troops,[1] as well as specialty corps such as Engineers. Recruits joining the Army and those officers receiving commissions were assigned directly to one of these regiments. Under normal circumstances, once a soldier became part of a particular regiment, he remained there until expiration of his service. This worked a particular hardship on officers. Congress set the strength of the regiments. Infantry regiments had one colonel as commander, a lieutenant colonel, and a major as staff. Regiments were composed of ten companies, each commanded by a captain and having a first lieutenant and second lieutenant to assist. If all the billets were filled, there was no room for additional officers, and perhaps worse, no officer could be promoted until a vacancy occurred within his regiment.

Each year a new class of about forty officers graduated from the Military Academy, and they all needed assignments. Silas Casey graduated in the summer of 1826. He had not been a particularly good student, standing 40th in a class of 42. Regular Army assignments were based on class standing. Those with higher class standings filled any current vacancies that existed in the Artillery and Engineers, leaving those with lower positions as surplus, and assigned to the Infantry. The Army solved the problem of how to deal with these surplus officers through the brevet system. This allowed an officer to serve in a regiment with all the responsibilities and privileges of a normally commissioned officer, but without violating the congressionally set strength limits. They served in this brevet status until a vacancy occurred. Silas Casey received his brevet as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry, and was ordered to serve with the 7th United States Infantry.



Forts in the Plains area of Casey's first assignment at Towson.

Most new Military Academy graduates were granted a furlough between the completion of their studies and the time they reported to their first assignment. There was much to accomplish: uniforms and personal equipage to purchase, orders processed, and of course families to visit. Probably Casey spent this time with his family in East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

Lieutenant Casey was ordered to report in person to Colonel Matthew Arbuckle,[2] the commander of the 7th US Infantry. Col. Arbuckle made his headquarters at Fort Gibson, located on the Arkansas River in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Fort Gibson was one of several forts along a line that was known as the "Permanent Indian Frontier." This line ran from Fort Snelling in the north to Fort Jesup in the south.[3] It roughly paralleled the Mississippi River and was some three hundred miles west of it. It was supposed that all lands west of the permanent frontier were to remain in Native American hands. In fact many of the eastern tribes had already been displaced to their new homelands in the west.

Permanency is, at best, temporary. Several emigrant routes soon crossed the Permanent Frontier.

Continued on page 3

[1] Mounted troops were at various times called Dragoons, Mounted Rifles, or Cavalry.

[2] Colonel Arbuckle was well known on the frontier and had two posts named for him.

[3] Other forts in the chain included: Fort Atkinson, Fort Leavenworth, Fort Scott,

HISTORIC FORT STEILACOOM ASSOCIATION

President..... Carol E. Neufeld
1st Vice Pres. .... Thomas A. Melberg
Secretary..... Orville H. Stout
Treasurer ..... Kenneth A. Morgan
Directors: Bill J. Arends, Robert Demorest, Steve Dunkelberger, Christine Finnigan, Steve Fortson, Walter Neary, Ebbe Sandeen
Editor & Publisher . Orville H. Stout
Telephone.....(253) 756-3928
Web Site..... homel.gte.net/5white/Fort_Steilacoom.html
E-mail: FortSteil@yahoo.com

President's Message

Fort Steilacoom has been important to many people since the arrival of Company "M" on August 24, 1849.

The Americans who were moving into Indian territory were relieved to have the presence and protection of the United States Army. The town of Steilacoom also benefited from the fort. The government money used for supplies and services of local merchants boosted the economy. Army engineers built the roads that improved transportation, and they surveyed land for the settlers.

When the fort was abandoned in 1868, the Territory of Washington purchased the buildings for use as an "Asylum for the Insane," now named Western State Hospital.

By 1975 only four of the original fort buildings remained. They had been allowed to deteriorate and were slated to be torn down. To preserve that history, Cy and Rita Happy, backed by a group of like-minded citizens, submitted an application to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination was approved by the State Historical Preservation Planners on December 19, 1975.

After DSHS contracted with Tonkin/Greissner Architects of Seattle to study the feasibility of restoring the four fort structures, the $139,000 appropriation for their removal was instead spent for partial restoration of the buildings. The Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation also granted another $100,000.

Meetings to discuss future organization for restoration culminated with the election of the first board of Historic Fort Steilacoom Association on October 22, 1983. Members of that board included Cyrus Happy as President and Lyle Duncan as Vice President; Pat Collier, Secretary; Jill Fluker, Treasurer; and Directors Lou Duncan, Sandra Dickenson, Aurora Toth, Charles Collier, Charlotte Naccarato, Mark Seling, Bette Bradley, Ray Egan, and Gary Reese.

Chuck Collier, current maintenance director and one of the original board members, recognizes the value of Fort Steilacoom. "It was the first U.S. Army presence and post on Puget Sound," he says. "Many individuals and groups volunteered during the period of reconstruction. Several large grants were given and organizations such as Clover Park and Bates Vocational, the Sea Bees, Boy Scouts and an Air Force wing sent workers to help."

In order to interpret the significance of the fort, Steve Anderson was hired as a consultant to obtain grants, and Christine Brewster-Wrey developed a plan for the Interpretive Center. Orville Stout produced a video that tells the fort story, and Bob Demorest constructed a diorama of the 1858 fort.

Educational outreach to schools increased when Shea Monroe and Anna Fitzgerald received grants to administer the program to students.

To make the lives of the soldiers and their families come alive, reenactors have presented events like Cannon Day and Christmas at the Fort. Christine Finnigan, current education director, maintains that participants in these events learn more about the past, and the past defines what we are today. "We give children the opportunity to engage in making butter and candles, fashioning prairie dolls, wearing costumes of the 1850s and 1860s. They learn to appreciate the hardships of the time."

Those who contribute articles to this newsletter continue to tell the story of the fort and those who were here. Newsletter editor Orville Stout states, "When I joined the board in 1987, I sensed that it was important to preserve the remaining fort structures and also to tell the story of a significant period in our local history which has contributed to the development of this region."

Walter Neary, the past board president, believes, "The fort is a celebration of the country's heritage, of importance to Washington Territory. I believe it is an anchor for the community of Lakewood. I hope that the folks at Fort Steilacoom, the Lakewood Historical Society and the new Lakewood Landmarks and Heritage Advisory Board help more and more people in Lakewood understand that they are a part of the continuum that helped build the State of Washington."

Many other board members, members of the Association, community groups and individuals have recognized the importance of Fort Steilacoom. Though all of their names cannot be mentioned in this small space, we say "THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT."

Carol Neufeld

Annual Meeting
October 20

Jerry Eckrom will be the featured speaker at the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association's Annual Meeting on October 20, 2002. The meeting will begin at 2 p.m. with a short business meeting to elect officers and directors for the next term. Jerry, a long-time member of the association and noted author of *Remembered Drums, A History of the Puget Sound Indian War,* will tell about the desperate attempt of Native Americans of the area to hold onto their way of life, only to be confined to inappropriate reservations by Governor Stevens. Officers at Fort Steilacoom attempted to save Leschi from the hangman's noose.

Coming Events:

October 20: *Annual Meeting and Program*

Author-historian Jerry Eckrom will present a lively talk about the

Indian War and Fort Steilacoom

2 p.m. Sunday in Quarters 2
at Fort Steilacoom

Jerry Eckrom, a life-long resident of Tacoma, is the author of *Remembered Drums*, a graphic account of the 1855-56 up-rising of the Indians in Puget Sound against a government and settlers who took the land, relegating the native peoples to inadequate reservations. In this presentation he will reveal the clash of wills between the first Territorial governor, Isaac Stevens, and Leschi, leader of the Nisqually tribe, and show how Capt. Silas Casey and others at Fort Steilacoom took sides, even as they subdued the tribes, in defense of Leschi.

November 3: *An Afternoon with George Pickett*

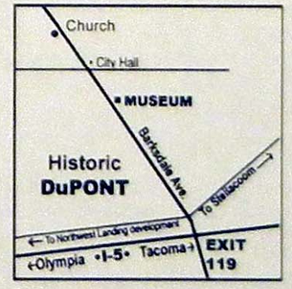
From West Point to Chapultepec, the "Pig War" to Gettysburg, George Pickett was witness to events that shaped the nation.

The DuPont History Museum is sponsoring this two act play by Mike Vouri on Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m. in the DuPont Presbyterian Church, 502 Barksdale Ave.

The play covers Pickett's life from his boyhood in Richmond, Virginia, to his untimely death in the 1870s while on a business trip. Along the way, Vouri offers a brisk interpretation of the 19th Century United States and its territories through Pickett's life. Two musicians will play and sing period songs during the performance.

Mike Vouri is Park Ranger/Historian for San Juan Island National Historic Park. He is also a veteran actor, having appeared in many community theater productions.

How to get there



Information: (253) 964-3492

Into the Frontier *(from page 1)*

Settlers were looking for new lands in which to establish homes, and soon wagon roads were springing up to the Pacific Coast, the Great Salt Lake, the Northwest, and the Southwest. White settlers were appropriating lands that had been established as Indian country. The concept was abandoned but the forts remained.

Transportation in the first half of the 19th century was time consuming and difficult. Railroads had not yet been built, roads were few and not well maintained, and the only reliable method of getting from one place to another was by ship. Presumably Casey traveled by sea from the east coast, most likely New York, to New Orleans. From there it was by horse to Fort Gibson. Casey recalled that "After a very tedious journey, 450 miles of which were made on horse back and alone, I reached that fort (Gibson) the first of December".[1]

Having been received by Col. Arbuckle, Casey was further detached to Fort Towson some 250 miles south of Fort Gibson. He arrived there the latter part of December 1826.

Major Alexander Cummings of the 7th US Infantry established Fort Towson[2] in May 1824 about six miles north of the Red River on the east bank of Gates Creek. The fort was named in honor of Colonel Nathan Towson, paymaster general of the Army and veteran of the War of 1812. The Red River was the boundary between American territory and Spanish Mexico.

The Choctaws and Chickasaws were to be relocated to this area and the fort was constructed to oversee the tribes. It was to be a temporary post and never consisted of more than a few wooden shacks and tents. Major General Winfield Scott, who then commanded the Western Department, was concerned because a band of "lawless marauders" had occupied the Red River country. The Army's presence at the new fort would also bring order to the region.

The Military Academy provided an excellent professional education, but did not provide instruction in those things a young officer needed to know concerning the practical every day operation of the Army. Casey was well versed in infantry tactics, engineering concepts, horsemanship, artillery science, and all the other technical skills an officer was required to know. He was not, however, trained in all the paperwork the Army required. Each month reports and returns were required to be forwarded to Headquarters. These dealt with supplies expended and required, company funds used and the balances remaining, soldier's descriptive roles, muster reports, pay records, records of clothing issued, and lost or destroyed property reports. Just about everything the Army did had some type of form, report, or return associated with it. Casey had to learn them all. Additionally, he needed to get out into the country around the fort to determine the geography of the area. He was sent out on scouting patrols after Indians who had come into the local settlement causing trouble. His first year at Fort Towson was indeed a busy one.

In the spring of 1828 Casey's newly acquired skills were sorely tested. There were at that time four officers posted to the fort, the commander, Captain Hyde, two other lieutenants, and Casey. One of the lieutenants had been shot in the shoulder by a local citizen and departed for home on a furlough in hopes of speeding his recovery. Captain Hyde had been on crutches for about a year due to a swelling in his ankle that was quite debilitating. Casey feared that he would never fully recover. The remaining lieutenant had a run in with Capt. Hyde and as a result was placed under arrest. Of course the lieutenant was not happy at being arrested and started a fight with the captain. He got in several punches, knocking out a tooth and severely bruising Capt. Hyde about the head. He drew his knife and continued the attack. Casey stepped in, managing, with great difficulty, to relieve the lieutenant of his knife and settling things down. The arrest was enforced, with the additional charges of mutiny and disobedience of orders levied. A Court Martial was ordered and both officers were sent to Natchitoches, Louisiana, about 350 miles away, for trial.

Lieut. Casey was left as the only officer at the fort. As such, he had complete responsibility for its operation. In a letter to his father, Casey indicated that his duties included those of post quartermaster, commissary of subsistence, post adjutant, ordnance officer, post treasurer, and commander of a company. Since he was the only remaining officer he was also the Officer of the Day– every day. He had to complete the monthly returns for each of those duties and account for about twelve thousand dollars in government property under his control. He did have the assistance of a clerk, but was awaiting the posting of another officer to relieve him of some of the extra duties. As compensation for all the additional duties, Casey received thirty dollars a month, which he did not expect to continue.[3]

During this time events occurring in New York State had an unanticipated effect on Fort Towson and Silas Casey. Captain William Morgan[4] was accepted into the Masonic Chapter in Batavia, New York. Whether he was actually a member of the Freemasons has never been established, but he knew enough of the rituals, told a good story, and was accepted. He was even granted

[1] Casey, Silas. Unpublished memoirs.
[2] Fort Towson was then known as Cantonment Towson.

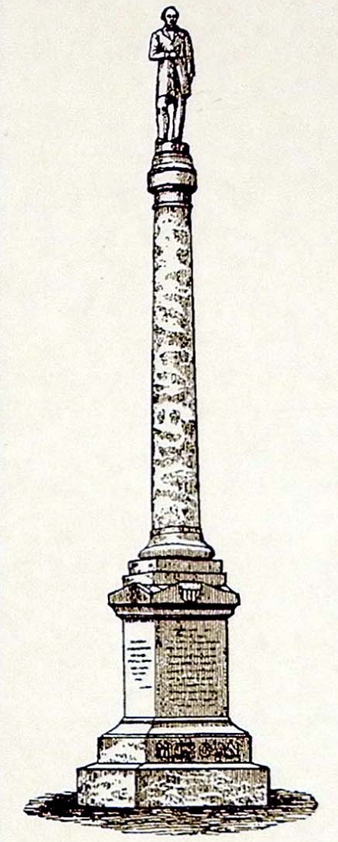
[3] Casey, Silas. Letter to Wanton Casey, East Greenwich R. I., March 27th 1828.
[4] William Morgan had purportedly served as a Captain under General Jackson during the Battle of New Orleans in 1814. He chose to continue using the title.

the Royal Arch degree, which was bestowed only on those who were Masons. Morgan was a bricklayer by trade and by professing his membership in the Masons, he anticipated plenty of work from his fellow Masons. Those who joined the Freemasons pledged that they would never divulge the secrets of the order, under penalty of death.

In March 1826, Morgan contracted with a Batavia newspaper publisher, David Miller, to publish an exposure of the Masonic ritual. The Chapter had dismissed him and perhaps this was to be his revenge. Morgan and Miller published the tell-all book in 1827 under the title of *Illustrations of Masonry*. Morgan was arrested and sent off to jail shortly thereafter for stealing a shirt and tie worth $2.68. He was released when several "gentlemen" (supposedly Masons) paid the debt in his behalf. Morgan was whisked away by carriage and was reported to have been placed in the powder magazine at Fort Niagara. The fort was not occupied by the Army, but was under the caretakership of a Mason named Giddins. Morgan was not seen again. The Freemasons were accused of killing him, but there is some evidence that he escaped to Canada.

In early 1828, perhaps February, three men from the State of New York arrived at Fort Towson. They inquired about Col. William King, who was the post sutler. Prior to his accepting this position, King had been a New York state legislator, a leading citizen, and a high priest of a Masonic chapter. They wanted to speak with him concerning the "Murder of Morgan." In fact they wanted to do more than speak with him, they had a warrant for his arrest. King received about ten minutes warning of the New Yorkers' arrival and escaped into the night on horseback. His escape was aided by some of the fort's officers.[1] King

[1] Many Army officers of that time were members of the Freemasons.



Monument to William Morgan

became lost in the wilderness, his horse ran off, and he was without food. After three or four days the New York men, who were not acquainted with the area around Fort Towson, left. Search parties were sent out to find Col. King. Silas Casey found him in a cane break about 25 miles from the fort. Upon their return to Fort Towson, Col. King settled up his business and departed for New York to stand trial. Fifty-four Masons were indicted in connection with the case, although no one was able to positively determine what had happened to William Morgan.

Casey related the incident at Fort Towson in a letter to his father. Perhaps he knew more than he let on because he stated, "What I know of the matter I shall say nothing at present."

At the end of August 1828 three members of Lieut. Casey's Company I decided to leave the post and do a little fishing in the Kiamichi River. The river was a few miles west of the fort. They expected to be gone for two days. Not long after departing the fort, one of the three returned. He was frightened, and told of being attacked by a war party composed of Pawnee-Pict Indians. Two of the soldiers were killed, a corporal from Casey's company and the company drummer.

Lieut. Casey, with the permission of Maj. Birch, the fort's commanding officer, organized a patrol to pursue the Indian War party. The party was made up of soldiers, local citizens, and two Delaware Indians who were the patrol's guides, for a total of sixteen men, all of whom except Casey had experience in fighting Indians. They left Fort Towson on September 1, 1828. Proceeding westward they soon discovered the bodies of the two murdered soldiers. They had been shot with several arrows, scalped, and stripped naked. All their clothing and equipment had been carried away by the Indians.

Casey's detachment set off after the War Party. The trail led west across the Kiamichi River and through high grass prairies crisscrossed with buffalo and other animal trails. It would have been very easy for inexperienced trackers to lose the trail, but the Delaware were excellent at their task and the Indian trail was not lost. The Indians had taken the soldiers' haversacks, which contained several loaves of wheat bread. The Indians sampled the bread but found it not to their liking and spit it out, which helped the guides stay on the trail. In the afternoon of the second day Casey's men came upon the carcass of a buffalo. It was a fresh

(Continued on page 6)