

Silas Casey (from page 5)

membership in the society often is extended to the sons of the original members.

The Aztec Club of 1847 was formed in Mexico City when hostilities in that country ended. Its purpose was to "...form a resort for officers, as a promotion of good fellowship, and of furnishing a home where they could pass their leisure in social intercourse, and where more palatable and healthful viands could be procured at a reduced price...." Silas was a charter member of the Club.

Civil War soldiers of both the Union and Confederacy also formed veterans' organizations. The primary Union organization was The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), while the Confederates formed the United Confederate Veterans (UCV). Officers who had served in the Federal Army formed a lesser-known group, The Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS). Officers who had served as honor guards in Lincoln's funeral cortege organized the Legion in Philadelphia. Membership was later extended to all officers of the Union Army. Casey became a member.

Assuredly, Casey was proud of his membership in these military societies, believed in their purposes, and supported their activities whenever he could. Upon his death, symbols of his membership: badges, diplomas, records and papers were willed to his sons, Thomas, Silas, and Edward.

Honors bestowed on soldiers take many forms: medals, brevet promotions, letters of commendation, and citation in general orders. Casey received his share of these honors. Additionally, he received civilian honors based on his service to the country.

As a native of Rhode Island, Casey received recognition for his service by that state. The Rhode Island legislature issued a Resolution of Thanks for his contributions during the Mexican War, and his home town, East Greenwich, presented him with a large silver vase engraved with the thanks of that town. For his service during the Civil War, and particularly at the Battle of Fair Oaks, the legislature enacted a resolution recognizing his bravery, skill, and energy.

Casey also received academic honors. He was awarded an honorary LLD from Hingham Institute in New

York, and was elected as an honorary member of the Phi Kappa Society of Franklin College, Athens, Georgia (now the University of Georgia).

His colleagues remember Casey as a man of great energy, bravery, compassion, humility, and affection. He was a student of military history and mathematics and was devoted to his family, country, and God. Clearly, Silas Casey was much more than a man in a uniform.

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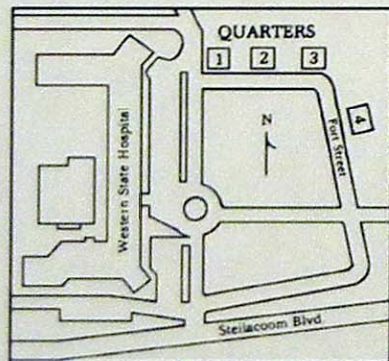
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Come to Christmas of 1859 at Fort Steilacoom on December 13, 4-8 p.m.

Historic Fort Steilacoom

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Silas Casey The Man in the Uniform

By Kenneth A. Morgan

Exploits of public figures, particularly military men of high rank, are well documented. The very nature of the military system makes it so. Most everything connected with Army operations in the field and in garrison requires some sort of written report, return or correspondence to headquarters. Therefore, it is easy to research the official doings of our military leaders. Researching the character and personality of the man in the uniform, however, is less easy.

Character clues can be obtained from many official sources. The reports and correspondence written by the individual often reveal, by choice of words, phrases and overall tone, the nature of the writer. Private letters and memoirs provide additional guidance.

And so it is with Silas Casey. Many of his reports are found in the official records, his letters to colleagues and family still exist, and his own reflections on his life all provide some insight into the man in the uniform.

Physically, Casey was not an imposing man. Photography was new in the early 19th century, so images of Casey as a young officer do not exist. However, by the time of the Civil War photography had become popular and everyone wanted his likeness made. Army officers were particularly fond of the technology and posed individually and in groups. In late 1861 General McClellan assembled his staff of division commanders and other staff officers to be photographed. Two



General McClellan (left) shown with some of his officers. Silas Casey is 5th from the left.

images were made, one with the officers hatted, the other bareheaded. The picture shows Casey as a Brigadier General. Compared to the others in the photo, Casey is somewhat shorter than the average and is of slight build. His hair had turned white and was thinning. Photos made later in the war show that he put on weight. He often wore a Lincoln style beard, also white.

Military service in the mid 19th century was, at best, difficult. Casey suffered from his service as did most other officers and soldiers. Hardships connected with the heat of the west and Mexico, and the humidity of the Florida swamps, all took their physical

toll. But the most damaging to him was his near fatal wounding at the Battle of Chapultepec in September 1847.

Casey was, as a young officer, known for his athletic abilities, being especially skilled in running and jumping. His fondness for athletic competition was known throughout the Army. It was common practice at remote Army posts to hold sporting events. These contests served to keep the soldiers in top physical condition and, perhaps more importantly, to keep them occupied during periods of slack military operations. Silas left his first posting at Fort Towson in late 1828 and stopped at

(Continued on page 4)

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President's Message

You are invited to come to *Christmas at the Fort* on December 13 from 4 to 8 p.m. You will see and hear Col. Casey and his family entertaining visitors, bachelor officers and their partners dancing, soldiers patrolling, carolers singing and musicians playing. In addition, children may make period Christmas decorations and you may shop at the Sutler's Store.

Have you ever wondered what was happening at the Fort and around the world during 1859? Here are some of the historical highlights of that time.

- Fort Steilacoom was established in 1849. It wasn't until 1858 that proper buildings were constructed, so in 1859 the buildings were all new.
- Local Indian hostilities were most heated in 1855-56. Other hostilities east of the Cascades also occurred in 1858. By 1859, in most cases, they had ceased. However, there was always the threat of hostile "Northern Indians."
- Occupation of San Juan Island began in 1859 when Col. Casey sent troops from Fort Steilacoom.
- The Fort was staffed by two companies of the 4th Infantry and one company of the 9th Infantry, so there were many soldiers on post in 1859.
- Settlers were returning to their homesteads now that the Indian threat was over.



Ladies of the Fort, Eileen Melberg and Amy Dunkelberger decorate a tree for the 1859 Christmas at Fort Steilacoom.

- The fort sutler sold a lot of stoves and hardware to the local people, and a bathing tub to Mr. Prosch, editor of the Steilacoom newspaper, the *Puget Sound Herald*.
- Relationships between the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Nisqually and Fort Steilacoom were good, as social visits and purchases back and forth were constant.
- The weather was the talk of the area in December. It was the coldest time in recent memory. The roads were impassable with ice 2 to 3 inches thick. High winds blew through stove pipes, causing sparks to singe cotton fabric ceilings, and hurricane-force winds destroyed property. A tree even fell on Governor Stevens' private office in Olympia.
- A ball for the benefit of the Steilacoom Library Association was planned for December 23.
- The Masons of Port Townsend dedicated their new hall on December 27th with a great ball. Col. Casey and some of the officers at Fort Steilacoom were Masons.

Elsewhere in the nation, James Buchanan, a Democrat, was President. He regarded slavery as an evil, but, since it was protected by law, would

do nothing to stop it. His cabinet appointments were divided between slave and free states. The Dred Scott decision, strife in Kansas, and the growing secessionist movement plagued his administration. He believed the Constitution did not allow states to secede, but could find no way to keep them in the Union.

John Brown, a noted abolitionist, and his sons conducted raids in Lawrence and Pottawatomie, Kansas, in 1856. He devised a plan to stir the slaves into rebellion against their masters, and in 1859 took over the federal armory at Harper's Ferry to get arms, but was captured by Robert E. Lee and put on trial for criminal conspiracy and treason, then hanged in December.

In the world at large in 1859, Charles Darwin published *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. The opera "Faust" was performed for the first time, and Tennyson published his poem of King Arthur, "The Idylls of the King."

These are some of the things the ladies and soldiers of the fort will be talking about as you step back in time to the 1859 Christmas at Fort Steilacoom on December 13th.

Carol E. Neufeld

He was breveted Major and Lieutenant Colonel for his gallant service in Mexico. Casey's personal courage had been tested several times under fire and had not been found lacking.

In 1861 the country was again at war, but a different kind of courage was to be tested. As a senior officer Casey's job was to order others to face personal danger. Casey was a Brigadier General and Division Commander in the Army of the Potomac. His division met the enemy at Fair Oaks¹ in late May 1862. His division was inexperienced, but nonetheless was placed in advance of the Army. It was attacked by a superior Confederate force,² held as long as it could, suffered twenty-five percent casualties, but was finally driven back; some say fled in mass confusion.

General Casey was held personally responsible for the defeat. General McClellan, his staff, and other Division Commanders questioned Casey's actions, while other senior officers supported him. Clearly, Casey's reputation and career were on the line. Casey stated his position in official after-action reports, in correspondence with senior officers, and demanded that a board of inquiry or court martial be held. He was called before Congress to explain his actions. Neither an inquiry nor court martial was ever held. General McClellan later privately exonerated Casey, but it came too late. Casey had stood for what he thought was right, testifying before Congress "...this government, whenever it employs anyone to manage its armies, should take men whose hearts are in the matter."

There can be no doubt that Casey's heart was in the matter; he stood on his beliefs of what was right, but others did not see it that way. He never again held a field command during the war.

¹ See the Summer 2002 Fort Steilacoom newsletter for a description of the battle.

² Casey's Division consisted of 4,000, while the attacking force contained 35,000.

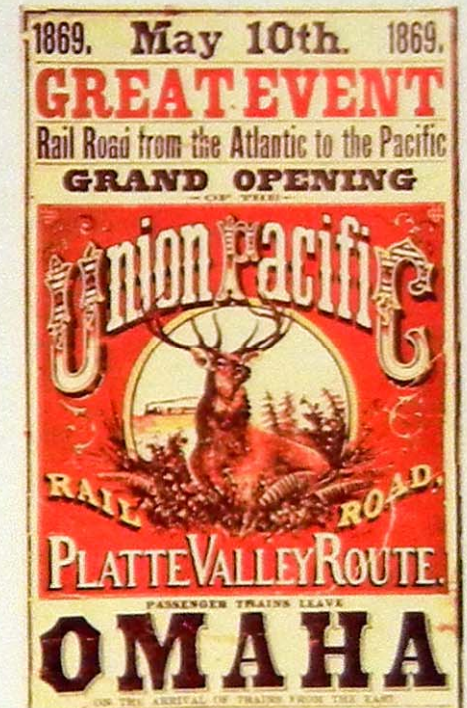
The Casey family held a strong love of country. Since the arrival in North America of Thomas Casey in the 1650s, members of the family were deeply involved in public service.³ Some served in elected office, some in appointed office, and others in military service. Silas Casey was one of the latter. He entered service in 1822 as a cadet at the Military Academy and retired from service in 1868 as a Major General.

Because of his long service, Silas knew the United States and its Territories better than perhaps any other 19th century American. He had served on the Pacific coast in California and Washington, in the Southwest, around the Great Lakes, in Florida and Georgia, along the East coast, in the Great Plains, and the central heartland. He lived in big cities, New York and Washington City, and small towns, Steilacoom. Members of Congress, leaders of his home state (Rhode Island), and presidents knew him. When he left active service, Casey could have settled on the family farm⁴ in Saunderson, Rhode Island. Instead he purchased property on South Oxford Street, Brooklyn, New York. Here he gathered the things that meant the most to him: his family's silver, mementos of his military service, and other family heirlooms. Amongst the items having special meaning, Casey featured two in his study: photographs of the town of Steilacoom and Fort Steilacoom.

After the Civil War America experienced a new growth. Veterans were restless and displaced southerners were looking for a new life. The

³ See the Spring 2003 Fort Steilacoom newsletter for a discussion of the Casey family.

⁴ The farm was owned by the Casey family since 1702 and remained in the family for 250 years. In 1955 Edward Pearce Casey bequeathed it to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). The family cemetery is on the property and Casey is interred, along with other members of the family, there.



Envisioning its potential, Casey invested money in the Union Pacific Railroad.

answers seemed to be in the west. The Civil War demonstrated the usefulness of the railroads in moving goods and people. Now there was a call to extend the rails to the Pacific coast. Casey had seen the potential the railroads offered during the war. All the railroads needed to expand was money; Casey had some so he invested in the Union Pacific Railway.⁵ His investment paid off, for at the time of his death in 1882 the value of his stock exceeded \$15,000.⁶

There is a special kind of comradeship associated with military service, particularly among those engaged in combat. Veterans, from the very beginnings of our country, sought to keep that comradeship alive through the formation of societies, orders, and other clubs. As the veterans themselves pass away,

⁵ Casey was part of an expedition scouting a route for the Pacific Railroad through the California mountains in 1849.

⁶ The 2002 value of this investment is \$269,000.

CHRISTMAS

of 1859

AT FORT STEILACOOM



Saturday Evening
December 13, 2003
 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Historic Fort Steilacoom Museum

9601 Steilacoom Boulevard S.W.
 (on grounds of Western State Hospital)

\$4.00 for adult / \$2.00 for child or \$8.00 per family

Travel back in time to Fort Steilacoom as it might have been at Christmas in 1859. Tour the candle and lantern lit quarters of Lt. Col. Silas Casey and soldiers of the fort and their families and guests engaged in Christmas merry making, conversation of the time, tree trimming, dancing to the tunes of a fiddler, and caroling. Special activities for children include hands-on ornament making and a visit with Father Christmas. And the Sutler's Store has a good stock of books, toys, and souvenir items for your Christmas gift shopping.

Information (253) 582-5838

Silas Casey (from page 1)

Fort Jesup. The fort was conducting sporting contests and Casey joined in. His specialty was sprinting, so it was no surprise when he completed the quarter mile in one minute.¹

Casey was well known throughout the Army for his Christian beliefs. When Casey died in January 1882, his obituary, published in the West Point annual reunion minutes, concluded with this paragraph:

Diffident and retiring in his manner, his disposition was most gentle and affectionate. There was nothing ungenerous or hard in his nature, and his sincere Christian life and virtues were conspicuous to all.

The Casey family had close ties with the Church. Casey's father, Wanton, and grandfather, Silas, were vestrymen in their Rhode Island churches so, assuredly, young Silas was brought up in a Christian household. Throughout his life, beginning with his days at the Military Academy, he made special efforts to record Bible verses, spiritual thoughts, and other inspiring messages in several notebooks. Later in life he continued the practice of saving inspirational messages he found in newspapers and other publications in scrapbooks.

One of the regiments serving with Casey at Fair Oaks was the 96th New York Volunteers. James Fairman was a colonel in the regiment. After the Civil War Colonel Fairman traveled to the Holy Land and upon his return presented General Casey with a special gift. It was a cane made from olive wood taken from the Garden of Gethesemone. The letter accompanying the cane says, "Permit me also at this time to say that I desire to record my profound respect for you as a military scholar, a patriot, an able and brave field commander, and a Christian...." While serving in the Mexican War, Casey distributed a large number of Bibles to the

¹ Although the quarter mile is now run as the 400 meter race, the current Olympic record in just over 43 seconds.



American soldiers under General Winfield Scott enter Mexico City in 1848. Silas Casey was severely wounded while storming the citadel.

Mexican people, the first time such distribution had occurred.

Mmilitary leaders are expected to be courageous. Courage comes in two forms, personal and professional. Personal courage is needed to face great danger in combat and other hazardous situations, while professional courage requires the ability to order others to face certain danger and to defend decisions in the face of criticism. Junior officers, lieutenants and captains, are required to show personal courage, but as promotions to higher rank come along the requirements shift toward professional courage. Casey was a master at both.

Silas was not yet fifteen when he left the comfort of his large family to attend the Military Academy at West Point, New York. The journey to West Point was difficult, and of course he had no idea what life at the Academy would bring. In letters to his family soon after arriving, he inquires about family matters and states "I don't think I shall ever stay here to graduate. I think I can do better else where." Casey did stay long enough to graduate and was commissioned in the infantry.

His first post was on the western frontier, Fort Towson,² where he experienced hostile fire. Casey was only twenty years old then. He was exposed to hazards and combat again in Florida, where he was recommended for the brevet of Major being "...an officer of rare merit... rendered very valuable service; equally intelligent and persevering in pursuit and combat with the enemy...."

By the time of the Mexican War (1846-1848), Casey was a seasoned company commander. He was a part of General Scott's army in the march across Mexico. He volunteered to command a detachment consisting of 250 soldiers and marines, which was given orders to storm the citadel at the eastern approaches to Mexico City. The Mexican position Casey's storming party was to attack was strong, being well protected by breastworks and a battery of artillery. During the attack Casey was severely wounded.³ The assault was successful.

² See the Autumn 2002 Fort Steilacoom newsletter for a narrative of Casey's experiences.

³ Casey family tradition says that he was shot in the belt buckle.