

Scott had had enough and declared the armistice at an end on September 9<sup>th</sup>. He attacked the Mexicans at Molino del Rey. Casey's regiment did not participate in the battle but did assist in securing the field while the dead and wounded were removed.

Mexico City was nearly surrounded by water. There were several roads and causeways leading into it, however. At the end of one of them sat the Castle of Chapultepec, the home of the Mexican Military Academy. General Scott chose to attack the Castle and then move into the city itself.

On September 12<sup>th</sup> an artillery barrage was opened upon the Castle, which continued all the day. That evening Casey was placed in charge of a picked force of 250 volunteers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. They were to storm the Castle the next day.

Casey's volunteers spent the night in the nearby town of Tacubaya where the time was spent preparing. The Castle was situated at the top of a hill, was encircled by a wall, and was believed protected by mines. Casey's mission was a desperate one and many believed he and his troops would not return. They were provided with the materials, ladders, ropes, crowbars and explosives needed to attack the Castle, received the good wishes of the regimental officers, and waited for morning.

Casey was at the head of his troops, about to start up the causeway, when a heavy and destructive fire greeted them. Casey was struck in the abdomen and was out of the action.

The attack was pressed on and after a hard fight the Castle fell. The Americans pursued the Mexicans, who were retreating up the causeway into the city. That night, after being bombarded by artillery, General Santa Anna left and the city surrendered to General Scott. On the morning of September 14<sup>th</sup> the American flag was raised at the Mexican National Palace.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was ratified in May 1848. It established the border with Mexico along the Rio Grande, Gila, and Colorado rivers and then extending due west to the Pacific Ocean. The United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million to settle damage claims. The United States now extended from ocean to ocean, much to the delight of those believers in Manifest Destiny.

Casey stayed on in Mexico recovering from his wound. While there he participated in distributing Spanish language Bibles and Testaments provided by several American Bible Societies. Several fellow officers assisted in the distribution. Casey left Mexico in June 1848.

Casey was honored for his service in Mexico. The citizens of his hometown, East Greenwich, Rhode Island,

presented a large silver vase to him. The state legislature gave special recognition for his service, he was brevetted Major and Lieutenant Colonel, and he became a member of the Aztec Club.

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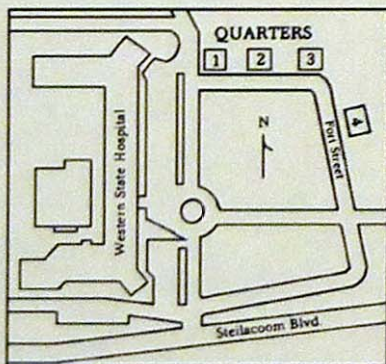
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## Fort Steilacoom Founders' Day Picnic, August 22, 1-4 p.m.

### Historic Fort Steilacoom

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# Fort Steilacoom

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Summer, 2004

## South of the Border From Vera Cruz to Mexico City

By Kenneth A. Morgan

Winter was almost over on the Great Lakes. It had been a normal one for the soldiers of Company C, 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Infantry. Ever since arriving at Fort Mackinac in early 1845 they had become used to the cold, winds, snows and ice that defined winter in northern Michigan. Spring would soon bring relief from the harsh weather. Silas Casey and his company were looking forward to it.

Spring did bring a change in the climate, but not the one expected. War was declared with Mexico in 1846, and Company C was ordered to join with the other 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry companies, who were already in that conflict, just as soon as the ice melted and steamer passage was possible. They departed on May 10, 1847.

What had caused the United States to go to war with Mexico? The problem started with Texas.

The Mexican movement to free itself from Spain began in 1810 and was finally concluded in 1821 when Agustin de Iturbide became emperor. In 1824 Mexico adopted a constitution based on the United States Constitution, but the government was unstable. Also in 1824 Mexico passed an immigration law encouraging foreign settlers to occupy its territory. This policy caused new settlers to flock to Texas and other Mexican lands.

Most of these new immigrants were Americans. Many were from the south, and they brought their slaves along. Mexico had abolished slavery in 1829,



Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna

but the Texas slave owners refused to abide by this emancipation.

As more and more Americans moved to Texas, it became in essence an American colony. Additionally, under the ever-changing Mexican government, Mexican states had become autonomous. This, of course, suited the Texans just fine, but the then President of Mexico, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, was not pleased. He was determined to bring Texas back into the fold.

Sam Houston was the chief rabble-rouser for Texas independence. After several battles with the Texas Army, Santa Anna's forces were defeated at the Battle of San Jacinto, and Santa Anna himself was captured.

The Mexican president, in return for his release, granted Texas independence. When he returned to the capital, however, he denied doing so. Texas declared itself to be an independent country and was so recognized by several countries, including the United States.

Texas found that independence was not an easy condition to maintain, and soon was looking toward the United States for annexation into the union. After debating the matter in public and Congress, Texas was admitted as a state in 1845.

Santa Anna, never recognizing Texas independence and now statehood, was angry at the United States for "stealing" its territory. Diplomacy failed to settle the problem and diplomatic relations were severed. The new US president, James K. Polk, sent an Army, commanded by General Zachary Taylor, to defend the border with Mexico.

And then there was *Manifest Destiny*. In July 1845, John O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, first used the term. He stated it was America's destiny to possess the whole continent, ocean to ocean. This soon caught on. Two things stood in the way of this doctrine; one, the lands of Mexico along the Pacific coast and in the southwest; the other, the claims of Great Britain to the Oregon Territory. The treaty of 1846 settled the Oregon question, at least temporarily, by giving the United States possession of the lands south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

(Continued on page 3)



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### President's Message



**H**istoric Fort Steilacoom Museum has flourished. School groups and other visitors have toured the four 1858 quarters. Author Robert

Ficken spoke at the last October Annual Meeting and autographed his book *Washington Territory*. Many enjoyed the sights and sounds of Christmas at the Fort. Six of twelve lectures sponsored by the Fort to celebrate Steilacoom's 150<sup>th</sup> celebration have been well attended and appreciated. The Civil War reenactment attracted many spectators. And the Fort booth at Steilacoom's 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration did a brisk business selling gift items, pop and cold water. Thank you to all the volunteers who make these activities possible!

Your membership contributions also make these events possible and keep the Fort functioning. Renewal forms and return envelopes were sent out in the Spring newsletter. If you have not done so already, please send in your dues payment today so that you will continue receiving the newsletter and enjoy the benefits of membership.

You are invited to come to the next six lectures in Steilacoom's Town Hall. George Wilkinson will locate historic roads around Steilacoom and display old surveying and drafting instruments on **Thursday**,



*Many people enjoyed visiting the camps and watching the battles during the recent Civil War reenactment at Fort Steilacoom Park.*

**July 22** (schedule change). John Hemphill, Alan Archambault and Patty Rigney will present *The Military Presence in Steilacoom* on **Thursday, August 19** (schedule change). All of the remaining lectures will be on the third Wednesday of each month through December.

You can keep in touch with the fort and its schedule of activities by logging onto our new web site at [www.fortsteilacoom.com](http://www.fortsteilacoom.com).

Come with your family and friends and enjoy an old fashioned potluck picnic at Fort Steilacoom on August 22 from 1 to 4 p.m. Bring your favorite food or recipe and table setting. Lemonade will be provided. After eating, tour the museum buildings.

Carol E. Neufeld

### Coming Events

**July 22:** George Wilkinson, *Historic Roads around Steilacoom*. Steilacoom Town Hall, 7 p.m.

**August 19:** John Hemphill, Alan Archambault & Patty Rigney, *The*

*Military Presence in Steilacoom*. Steilacoom Town Hall, 7 p.m.

**August 22:** Founders' Day Picnic, Fort Steilacoom, 1-4 p.m.

**September 15:** Alan Spreen & Stan Cybulski, *History of the Masonic Lodge in Steilacoom*. Steilacoom Town Hall, 7 p.m.

**Fort Steilacoom**

**Founders' Day Picnic**

**August 22, 2004  
1-4 p.m.**

*You and your family and friends are invited to celebrate the founding of Fort Steilacoom with an old fashioned Pot Luck Picnic at the fort. Bring your favorite food and tableware.*



*Casey's mission was to storm Mexico City's heavily fortified Chapultepec Castle with a hand-picked force of 250 volunteers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. Many believed he and his troops would not return.*

Mexican Armies had arrived there, one commanded by Santa Anna and the other by General Valencia. Fortunately for the Americans, these two hated each other and would not cooperate.

The night was dark and stormy. Scott's men were asleep "on their arms," but at 3 o'clock in the morning the attack was started. Casey was placed in command of the lead division of one of the attacking columns. As day broke the attack began. Casey's men soon came under a heavy fire from cannons and muskets. Casey pressed the attack and was able to capture several of the cannons. A large number of the enemy infantry gave up. Upon seeing the white flags, he ordered firing to stop and he went up to receive the surrender. Casey states: "The officers seemed somewhat in a hurry, when they gave up their swords, for my arms were loaded down with them." The

whole action had taken seventeen minutes.

Scott's army pressed on towards the fortified convent and fort of San Mateo in the village of Churubusco. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, Casey's regiment, was ordered to assist in the storming of the village. The approach was over broke ground and through cornfields, and the regiment was receiving grape shot from the fort. Just as the 2<sup>nd</sup> was about to run out of ammunition, the enemy ran off. They rushed forward with the regimental colors and entered the convent, the first regiment to do so.

During the advance on the convent, Casey was struck in the groin. The injury was not serious, but his sword scabbard was shot away.

A battery known as the San Patricios manned the Mexican artillery in the convent. These artillerymen were deserters from the American Army, and were perhaps the best artillery-

men in the Mexican Army. They had deserted because they were Roman Catholic, of mostly Irish and German origin, and suffered at the hands of Nativist<sup>1</sup> officers in the American Army. When the convent they defended fell, many were captured and later tried for desertion. Several of them were hung and others, including their leader John Riley, were branded.

After the defeat of the Mexican Army at Contreras and Churubusco, a flag of truce was sent out requesting a suspension of hostilities. Commissioners were appointed to discuss the terms. All seemed to be going well until the Americans discovered that the Mexicans were using the lull to reinforce the defenses of the capital.

<sup>1</sup>The Nativist movement renounced all foreign-born, particularly Roman Catholics.



### South of the Border (from p. 1)

In response to the presence of General Taylor, his Army now on the Rio Grande River which the United States considered the boundary and Mexico saw as another stealing of territory, Mexico sent an Army north. Several skirmishes occurred, and in April 1846 Taylor sent a message to President Polk stating, "Hostilities may now be considered as commenced." On May 11, 1846, Polk asked Congress to declare war on Mexico. It did. The war that U. S. Grant, a veteran of it, described as "the most unjust war ever waged by a stronger nation against a weaker nation," had begun.

The war was fought in three theaters: northern Mexico, California, and central Mexico. When Casey and his company left Fort Mackinac on May 10, he was to join the balance of the Second Infantry already in central Mexico. They left on the first available steamer for New Orleans, arriving there on May 19<sup>th</sup>. After a short stay in that city, they departed for Vera Cruz on June 2<sup>nd</sup> in a propeller,<sup>1</sup> arriving in the Mexican port on June 8<sup>th</sup>.

General Winfield Scott, with the approval of President Polk, believed the only way to win was to attack the capital in Mexico City. Such an attack would force the Mexican Army to further divide its fighting ability. Scott, therefore, began assembling the troops (on Lobos Island) and vessels necessary for the invasion of Vera Cruz. He blockaded all the ports from Tampico to Villahermosa.

By the evening of March 9<sup>th</sup> the first large amphibious operation that the American Army had conducted was completed; more than 9,000 soldiers, and most of their equipment, were ashore. Vera Cruz was attacked and the Mexicans surrendered the town. Scott was ready to begin his march toward the capital at Mexico City.

<sup>1</sup>Powered ships were divided in two classes. Steamers were side or stern wheel driven, while propellers were driven by screw propeller.

The American Army set out April 8<sup>th</sup> on the National Highway to the capital, but was stopped at Cerro Gordo. Scott's Army would have to pass through a narrow pass outside the city. Santa Anna would defend the pass. Scott split his army and attacked from two directions and was successful in breaking the Mexican line, causing them to flee in a panic. Several thousand of Santa Anna's soldiers were captured.

By the time Casey landed in Vera Cruz, Scott's army had advanced inland. The newly arrived force consisted of Casey's company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, two companies of the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and six companies of Voltigeurs.<sup>2</sup>

Their first night in Mexico was a disaster. A fierce storm, called a Norther, with high winds, rain, and a rising sea, struck the encampment. Most of the tents were blown away and one company of the 11<sup>th</sup> was flooded, the soldiers running for their lives from the advancing seawater.

The detachment set out on the National Highway, the same route Scott had taken a few weeks before. The road crossed a broad coastal plain, the Tierra-Caliente. A high mountain range with several snow-capped peaks was visible in the distance. The advance across the plain was slow, barely eight or ten miles per day.

As the party traveled the highway, they were often fired upon by enemy guerillas. On one occasion Casey was leading the column with his company when they took fire. He deployed a platoon as skirmishers, which drove

<sup>2</sup>Engineers



*General Winfield Scott captured Vera Cruz then set out on the National Highway toward Mexico City. Casey was to follow the same route.*

the attackers off. He reported that one of the voltigeur companies was firing wildly and were successful in bringing down leaves in great quantities.

Things became more pleasant as they began ascending the mountains towards Jalapa and Perote. The view behind them toward the Gulf reminded Casey of his home in New England. Many of the trees and plants were familiar to him; the mountains and waterfalls were impressive. He marveled at the beauty of the country predicting, "Someday it will be one of the bright spots on the planet."

The march was not easy on the men. The nighttime temperature on the Tierre-Caliente was in the 80s and several men died from the heat, while many others became disabled. Many discarded their blankets rather than carry them. Things changed as they marched into the mountains. Cold rains fell, soaking them. There was little firewood for drying clothes.



*Painting by James Walker*

*The American Army stormed into Churubusco. During the advance on the convent, Casey was struck in the groin, blowing away his sword scabbard.*

Casey says that even in Mackinac the nights were not this cold at this time of year. By the time the column reached Perote, elevation 8,000 feet, five to six hundred men were sick and in hospital, many having come down with yellow fever. Leaving the sick behind, the column marched to Puebla.

The Second Infantry was at Puebla, about one hundred miles from Mexico City; there Casey's company joined it. He describes Puebla as a city of 90,000 inhabitants, one of massive stone houses in the style of 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and a great number of churches and convents, the central Cathedral being particularly magnificent.

After resting for some time<sup>1</sup> in Puebla, General Scott started his march to the capital. The Army was composed of 10,000 men, mostly regulars of the old army and some

<sup>1</sup>The Army remained in Puebla for three months, where they came to respect the Mexican people.

artillery. Scott chose to leave most of his supplies behind, intending to live off the land.

A strong fort at El Penon blocked the approach to the city. Scott wanted to bypass the fort, as he felt it would take 1,000 men to storm it. Santa Anna had thought of that possibility, but believed the only road was impassible. An engineering survey sent out by Scott determined that, because the season had been unusually dry, the road was usable. Scott used it. When the people of Mexico City learned of this, they felt the end was near.

As the Army was marching toward Mexico City, Casey's company was often employed as skirmishers and scouts. Several times they observed large bodies of enemy soldiers and artillery. Often they were fired upon. On one occasion he was ordered to disperse a body of mounted Lancers, about 200, which was advancing on the column. Knowing that he had nowhere to go, he occupied a shallow ravine and fired a volley. Ten of the

Lancers were shot down and the remainder turned and fled. Casey retrieved one of the lances.<sup>2</sup>

Santa Anna set up his next defensive line on the roads approaching the city from the south at San Antonio and Churubusco. Again, Santa Anna counted on geography to aid in his defense. As Scott approached, there was a large lake on his right flank and an extensive lava field on his left.<sup>3</sup> Surely, Scott would fall into Santa Anna's trap.

Once again Scott sent out his engineers. Led by Captain Robert E. Lee, the engineers found a rough but passable route through the lava. Scott ordered the route improved and then sent the Army over it. On the far side of the lava field lay the town of Contreras, which Santa Anna hurried to reinforce. In fact two

<sup>2</sup>Casey saved the lance and took it home as a family souvenir.

<sup>3</sup>This lava field, called The Pedregal, was five miles across and referred to by one soldier as "hell with the fires out."