

What an impact the quarterly pay day had on the Steilacoom economy! There was a government sanctioned store on Fort Steilacoom, but all who could went to Steilacoom on pay day to spend money. The saloons were full, with drink running freely, causing problems in the town. For an economy where hard cash was scarce, the Army money was very important. In addition to the regular reimbursement, Fort Steilacoom was completely rebuilt from 1857 to 1858. Carpenters, bricklayers and other tradesmen were hired from Steilacoom and other Puget Sound locations. There were expenditures for supplies and materials. Army money put a lot of food on family tables and, probably, a few beers in workers' stomachs.

The Army contracted for the construction of roads to connect the various forts. These projects provided jobs. Colonel Casey's eldest son, Lieutenant Thomas Casey, was in charge of military road building. There is a monument, opposite the entrance to Western State Hospital, honoring two road projects. The first inscription reads: "In 1852, Congress appropriated \$20,000 for a military road from Fort Steilacoom to Fort Walla Walla. The road was made passable in 1853." Steilacoom resident Ken Light's ancestor, A. E. Light and his wife Caroline, came by this

road in 1853. A second inscription reads: "In 1857, Congress appropriated \$35,000 for a military road from Fort Steilacoom to Fort Bellingham." There are more of these markers elsewhere in the state. Along with its port, this road system made the town of Steilacoom a transportation hub.

Lieutenant William Slaughter, a West Pointer stationed at Fort Steilacoom, platted Balch's part of the town of Steilacoom in 1853. Slaughter and his wife Mary owned 32 lots in Steilacoom and built a rooming house on one of the lots. This was used for an officers' mess and berthing for those needing quarters. Next door, they built a house for themselves and operated a retail store from the house. Lieutenant Slaughter was killed in the Indian War in December 1855.

Lieutenant August Kautz was also stationed at Fort Steilacoom during the 1850s. Kautz kept an interesting diary while he was at the fort, giving us many details of life there. Like Slaughter, Kautz had considerable involvement in the town of Steilacoom.

At least twenty-six Fort Steilacoom soldiers became permanent residents of the Puget Sound area. The Company M's First Sergeant was John Rigney. His wife Elizabeth was a company washer woman who was paid and received Army rations to do

laundry. Both were born in Ireland. John Rigney left the Army in 1852 when his enlistment was up and became a settler, proving two donation land claims. In the 1854 census, Rigney was listed as a shoemaker. In 1860 he was a farmer, and by 1880 he was noted as a "capitalist." That same year, he purchased the Balch house at 1614 Rainier. John had houses built in Steilacoom for three of his children. Rigney descendants still reside in Steilacoom and the Puget Sound area.

After discharge from the Army, the artillery company's blacksmith, Peter Runquest, set up a blacksmith shop on Commercial Street at the foot of Puyallup in Steilacoom. His descendants lived in and contributed to Steilacoom for four generations.

During the Civil War, volunteers garrisoned Fort Steilacoom. When the war was over, the volunteers were demobilized and replaced by regulars. But after nineteen years as an Army base, Fort Steilacoom was abandoned on April 22, 1868. The last unit there was Battery E, Second Artillery, with five officers and 124 enlisted men.

The Territory of Washington bought the twenty-five remaining buildings for \$850 to use as a hospital for the insane, and in 1871 the Federal Government donated the land for that purpose and no other.

# Fort Steilacoom

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## Steilacoom and the Military

by Maj. Gen. John Hemphill, Ret.

The American military came to South Puget Sound many years before the town of Steilacoom was founded. The Wilkes Expedition even celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1841, at Lake Sequelitchew, located about four miles from the present town on North Fort Lewis. In June 1846, just as the war with Mexico started, the British and United States governments made a treaty for the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel to be the boundary from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The United States wanted and got Puget Sound, which led directly to the founding of Steilacoom as a town and a port.

The Army was needed to protect the immigrants as they settled the lands; but the Army had gone to war. When the Mexican War ended in 1848, the decision was made to send two companies of the First Artillery, to be followed by others when ready.

The two artillery companies, with dependents, left Governors Island in New York Harbor on November 10, 1848, aboard the War Department's 700-ton troop transport *Massachusetts*. This was a full-rigged sailing ship with steam providing power to an auxiliary screw propeller. It was big, new and modern. The ship sailed around Cape Horn, through the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, and up the Columbia River to the Hudson Bay Fort Vancouver. After a six-month voyage, eight officers, 142 enlisted men plus wives and children disembarked in what is now the State of Washington.



Henry James Warre

Indians gather at Fort Nisqually where a white settler, Leander Wallace, was killed, prompting the United States to establish Fort Steilacoom in 1849.

Just before the arrival of the artillery companies, Snoqualmie and Skewahamish Indians killed an American citizen at Fort Nisqually in a robbery attempt. This alarmed Joseph Lane, the Oregon territorial governor. He asked the Army commander to station one of the artillery companies in the Fort Nisqually area.

Company M, First Artillery, arrived on the sloop *Harpooner* at the Fort Nisqually landing on August 23, 1849. A few days later the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson Bay Company, leased the Heath farm to the United States Army. It became Fort Steilacoom. Three years later, in 1852, the

Town of Steilacoom became the neighbor of Fort Steilacoom.

The Fourth Infantry arrived at Fort Steilacoom in the spring of 1853, relieving the First Artillery for reassignment to the East Coast. At the same time, the bill to create Washington Territory was passed by Congress. Our county was named for the newly elected president, Franklin Pierce.

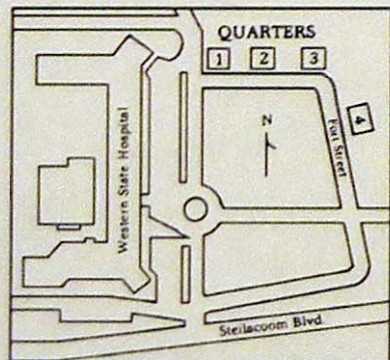
President Pierce appointed Isaac Stevens, the brilliant First Graduate of West Point's Class of 1839, Governor and Indian Agent for the Territory of Washington. Isaac Stevens immediately resigned his commission as a Brevet Major and began the move to Washington Territory. Isaac Stevens

(Continued on page 2)

**Come to the Annual Meeting on October 10!**

### Historic Fort Steilacoom

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### President's Message



**H**istory—What do you think of when you hear the word history? People? Places? Events? Old buildings, newspapers, clothing?

When I was in high school, I associated history with dates that I was required to memorize. It was difficult to recall dates of events, so I decided that I didn't like history. Now, I am interested, even intrigued, because I realize that by researching and writing of the past, I learn about the present and future. Each member makes his or her unique contribution to the Fort.

Sandra Lea Dickenson, an architect who helped with the Fort restoration in the 1980s, recently donated an album with samples of the layers of wallpaper from each room of Quarters 1. She writes, "I am enclosing my membership renewal. I have enjoyed your newsletters over the years and am pleased to see that you remain a vital organization. I was pregnant with my third child when I was working on the house. Jennifer just turned 21.

"When we started on Cottage 1, we stripped some wallpaper from each room. I soaked and labeled it. Some rooms had lots of layers."

Sandra's work provides valuable information about the interior decoration of the building during different periods. Because of the work of

volunteers like Sandra, Fort Steilacoom provides an educational experience for the community.

Programs planned for this fall, winter, and the coming spring are:

**October 10: Annual Meeting.** Following the election of officers and directors at 2 p.m. in Quarters 2, John McPherson will speak about the Indian War.

**December 11: Christmas at the Fort.** Reenactors will portray a candlelight Christmas of 1859 from 4-8 p.m. There will also be craft activities for children.

**January 30: Tea with Mrs. Casey,** the Commanding officer's wife.

**February 27:** Activity to be announced.

**March 27: "A Soldier's Life at Fort Steilacoom,"** will be presented by Alan Archambault.

Come to the **Annual Meeting** to vote on the proposed slate of officers and board members. They are: President, Carol Neufeld; Vice President, Thomas Melberg; Secretary, Orville Stout; Treasurer, Kenneth Morgan; Board members Robert Demorest, Steve Dunkelberger, Walter Neary, and Gene Knight.

We look forward to seeing you at the Fort programs.

*Carol E. Neufeld*

### Steilacoom and the Military (from page 1)

never resided in Steilacoom, but he had a significant impact on the town's citizens and the fort's soldiers.

As Indian Agent, Governor Stevens had the task of "extinguishing" Indian title to land in order to allow ownership by settlers. To do this, Indian leaders were to sign treaties agreeing to limit their ownership to defined reservations in exchange for rights and payments listed in the treaties. Just like treaties with foreign countries, the United States Senate then approved each of these treaties.

It all started the day before Christmas in 1854, along Medicine Creek, now called McAllister Creek, where it passes under Highway I-5 in the Nisqually Delta. Governor Stevens summoned Indian bands or tribes to the treaty council site with the promise of gifts. The weather was rainy, with wind causing waves. Some Indians had considerable difficulty getting there by canoe. By nightfall most of the participants had assembled. Treaty activities took place on Christmas Day.

*(Continued on page 3)*

Cascades. Winter became spring, and the Army declared the war to be over.

But the governor continued his belligerent, anti-Indian rhetoric, exciting the citizens and directing the militia to new operations. At Governor Stevens' direction, the militia arrested five former Hudson Bay employees, now farmers, who were married to Indian women. These farmers had stayed on their farms and not been molested during the war. The governor accused the five of being part of the Indian uprising.

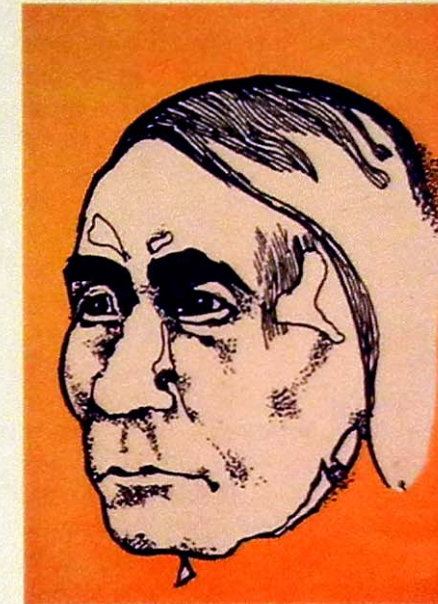
The governor sent them to Colonel Casey for pre-trial confinement. The Colonel publicly expressed doubt that locking up these civilians was legal. He had them placed in the fort's guardhouse, but wrote the governor asking that the case be investigated as soon as possible.

Territorial District Judge Cheneweth resided on Whidbey Island. On April 1<sup>st</sup> Steilacoom lawyer and prominent politician William Wallace, accompanied by the clerk of the court, set out by canoe for Whidbey Island. They went to get Judge Cheneweth to issue writs of habeas corpus to release the five from confinement. Upon hearing about the journey to get the writs, the governor put Pierce County under martial law. Legal warfare had been declared.

Colonel Casey wrote the governor that his proclamation of martial law would not stop the release of the five if writs of habeas corpus were presented. Governor Stevens sent his militia to transfer the five to Fort Montgomery, a militia blockhouse in today's Spanaway. New writs were required.

Rather than make the 160-mile trip to Whidbey Island, Wallace decided to wait for the judge to come to Steilacoom for the court session scheduled to begin on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Judge Cheneweth became ill, and Chief Territorial Justice Landers of Olympia stepped in and opened the court on Monday, May 5<sup>th</sup>.

The governor sent militia Colonel Shaw to tell Judge Landers to delay court a month. Judge Landers refused, and then went to Colonel Casey



*Leschi became a martyr for his people and their struggle for justice.*

asking the Army to protect the court. The Colonel declined, saying that he had no authority to use soldiers for that purpose. Judge Landers then commissioned four deputy United States marshals and furnished them with writs ordering every male citizen of Pierce County over 16 years of age to be at the court on Wednesday for the opening. Thirty armed citizens answered the summons. As the judge began court, the doors opened and Colonel Shaw and the governor's armed militia confronted the court's armed posse.

Judge Landers submitted to arrest rather than risk bloodshed and, along with his clerk, was incarcerated at Fort Montgomery with the five farmers. There was a torchlight meeting that night in Steilacoom. A resolution was passed condemning Governor Stevens.

Regaining his health, Judge Cheneweth arrived in Steilacoom on May 20<sup>th</sup> and served writs on Colonel Shaw demanding the release of all seven to the court. He also had the Pierce County sheriff deputize fifty men to protect the court. Shaw met the challenge with a thirty man detachment of the Washington Mounted Rifles under the command of Lieutenant Silas Curtis, a school

teacher from Vancouver. A sensible man, he did not believe the situation was worth a shoot out.

It was not until late summer that Governor Stevens, at John Swan's persuasion, agreed to new Indian reservations. The Nisquallies would remain on 4,700 acres straddling their river, and the Puyallups got 23,000 acres east and north of Commencement Bay. Squaxon Island remained a reservation. The Steilacoom Indians were lost in the shuffle.

Leschi and other warriors had not fought in vain, but Leschi was a wanted man. He returned from the Yakima area and sent word to Colonel Casey that he would fight no more. The Colonel's reply was to stay hidden, as civilian prejudice ran against him. For a fifty blanket reward, a nephew of Leschi's turned him in. The date was November 13, 1857. Governor Stevens ordered an immediate trial to start just three days later, charging Leschi with the murder of Col. Moses two years earlier.

The first trial was held in Steilacoom. A hung jury resulted in another trial in Olympia, where Leschi was found guilty. Leschi was confined at Fort Steilacoom. Old friends were allowed to visit, and he became a favorite at the fort. Leschi converted to Christianity. Before the war, he tried to fit in with the settlers. He dressed like them. He became a farmer. Now he was a Christian, but still an Indian. Colonel Casey refused the request to allow the hanging at Fort Steilacoom.

Every three months the Army paymaster would pay the troops. In the 1850s, officers and enlisted men, and washer women, were paid in cash. The four Army bases on Puget Sound, of which Fort Steilacoom was the headquarters and the largest by far, brought an aggregate payroll of \$76,000 to the area each year. The Commissary Department disbursed about the same amount, while the Quartermaster expended more. Prosch estimated that the Army contributed about \$300,000 annually to the Puget Sound economy. In today's terms, that would be about \$120 million.

## HFSA Annual Meeting

*October 10 at 2 p.m. in Quarters 2*

**John McPherson**

Will speak about

### "The Puget Sound Indian War"

**John is a teacher in the Snohomish schools who is especially interested in the history of the Washington Territory during the 1850s. He and his wife Kristen have taught a college level course about the Puget Sound Indian War and enjoy participating in reenactments of local historic events.**



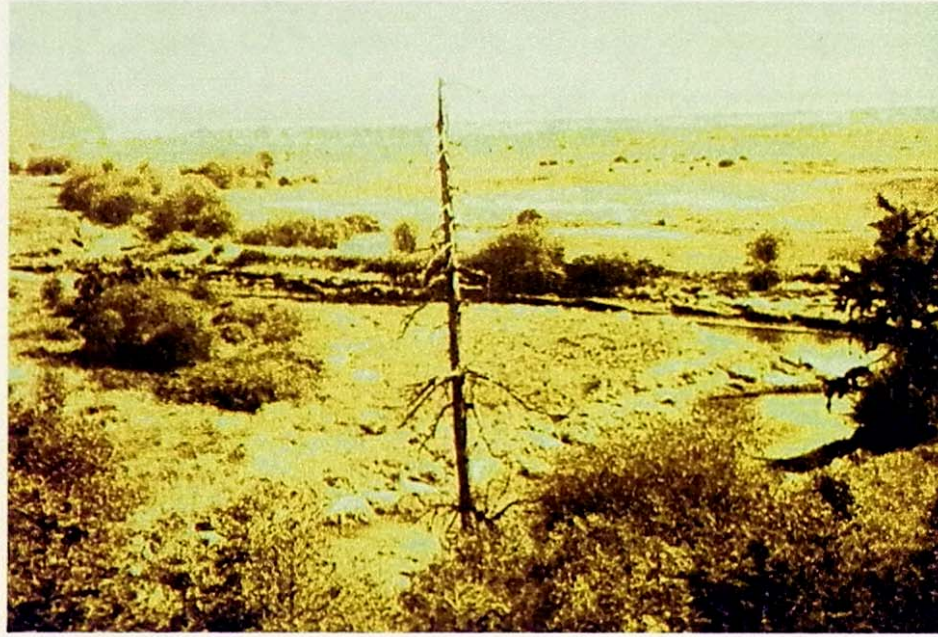
Stevens and his staff had come all prepared with maps and sales pitches. The governor was the primary speaker. His words were translated into the Chinook jargon. Very little that was said was fully understood by the Indians.

The whites identified sixty-two Indians as leaders. Their names were written phonetically at the bottom of the treaty. Today, historians agree that Leschi, a prominent Nisqually leader, did not sign. Nineteen whites signed the treaty. None were Steilacoom residents. Presents of food, blankets and trinkets were distributed. By nightfall, all had left the treaty council site. Indian historians now record Indian attendance at 662. There were about the same number of whites in Pierce and Thurston counties as Indians who attended the Medicine Creek Treaty Council.

The Indians were given Squaxon Island, a heavily forested, small island. They also got 1,280 acres on a bluff overlooking the Nisqually Reach, called by the Indians "the Rock." There was no fresh water. They got an additional 1,280 acres on the Commencement Bay bluff between Old Town Tacoma and Ruston; again, there was no fresh water. The settlers got all of today's Thurston and Pierce counties and parts of King, Kitsap and Mason counties.

Governor Stevens went on to other treaty councils, all the way into Montana. After realizing what they received, South Puget Sound Indians became very dissatisfied and asked that the Medicine Creek Treaty be re-negotiated. But the treaty had been sent to Washington D.C., and Governor Stevens had no time to listen to them. The treaty was ratified by the Senate on March 3, 1855. Among the Indians, war was a hot topic.

The subject of war festered until the following fall and was festering on the east side of the Cascades, resulting from Governor Stevens's treaties made there. An Indian agent was murdered in the Yakima Tribe area. The Army responded and war began.



*Governor Stevens assembled local Indians near this site on what was then known as Medicine Creek to sign a treaty relegating them to reservations.*

Leschi, a leader of the Nisquallies, soon became a war chief. Like the settlers, Leschi had started farming and raising horses on a plot of land in the Nisqually River valley. He let the settlers know that the Indians were going to fight.

One of the first white volunteer units to form was the Puget Sound Rangers, captained by Charles Eaton of Olympia. He was married to a Leschi daughter. Seventeen of the Rangers rendezvoused on October 24<sup>th</sup> at Yelm Prairie and set off for Leschi at the Hudson Bay horse farm.

When Leschi was warned that the Rangers were coming, he fled with his family. The Rangers set out after them. War had now come to Puget Sound.

The Rangers searched for three days with no success. Two Rangers, Jim McAllister and Mike Connell, went scouting for hostiles near today's Buckley and were killed in an ambush. In retrieving the bodies, the Rangers encountered more hostiles and holed up in a cabin for the night. The next morning only one horse could be found. The Rangers walked back to Steilacoom; their pursuit of Leschi was a failure.

Fort Steilacoom's two companies and a militia company were at Naches Pass preparing to return to Steilacoom. William Tidd, a carpenter from Steilacoom, was tasked to express ride a message to Fort Steilacoom. Six other militia volunteers were released to accompany Tidd, to include Pierce County sheriff John Bradley and Dr. M. P. Burns from Steilacoom.

Riding through the same area where McAllister and Connell were killed, the group was ambushed. Three were hit. Joseph Miles was left dying; Colonel A. Benton Moses, with serious wounds, stayed on his horse for a mile and a half; Tidd's wounds were not life threatening. The seriously wounded Moses was wrapped in overcoats and hidden in the brush.

Continuing on, they encountered another ambush site. Dismounting, and charging on foot, the volunteers caused the Indians to flee. Then their horses could not be found. They started walking.

Near a creek they saw a group of Indians on the other side. Steilacoom's Dr. Burns waded into the creek, sloshed across, and disappeared into a thicket. There was a wild yell,

three shots and silence. Dr. Burns did not come back.

The remaining four hid until dark, and then began a miserable foot march through the night. About 10 a.m. the survivors reached Fort Steilacoom.

A party of volunteers was sent to find the missing. Eventually all of the bodies were found where they were left. Pausing at a barn to look for horse feed, the volunteers found Dr. Burns hiding in a barley sack. He was indignant at having been given up for dead.

Other events added to the worry of war. On October 28<sup>th</sup>, marauding Indians murdered ten settlers living along the White River. Local Indians known to the settlers were involved. Other local Indians hid and saved children.

The same day, Stephen Judson, a sixteen year old boy from the Steilacoom area, was walking along Commencement Bay just north of where the federal courthouse stands. There

were some Indians dancing around the lodge of a Puyallup minor chief who was a friend of his. Steve went to join the fun. He was surprised to find many of the dancers were strangers, and his Tillicum hunting partners would not give him any attention. Shot-Face Charlie, as he danced past, whispered "Klat-aw-a, klat-aw-a, get away."

Word of these events soon reached the settlers. As early as daybreak on October 29<sup>th</sup>, the day after the White River massacre, the settlers began to arrive at Fort Steilacoom. Some continued to homes of friends in Steilacoom. Some brought very little; others brought all they could, to include livestock. Since the troops were gone, the women and children were quartered in the barracks; men slept in tents. These people were



*Alan Archambault*

*Volunteer militia companies were recruited in the Washington Territory to fight in the Indian War.*

experienced in wagon train discipline, which guided setting up their operations at the fort.

The regulars and militia were still days away from reaching Fort Steilacoom and would be diverted to chase insurgents. A company of volunteers was detained to protect the post. Of course, the town was being protected, too.

Volunteer militia companies were raised throughout the populated areas of the territory. Lawyer William Wallace was elected captain of the Steilacoom company that immediately reported for duty at Fort Steilacoom, and then continued a few days later to join the troops in the field.

On November 5 a second company of seventeen men was raised at Steilacoom. Albert Balch was a member. It reconnoitered the lower

Puyallup River area for six days looking after the property of settlers who had gone to Fort Steilacoom. They encountered no dissidents and found no molested property.

Regulars and militia continued offensive operations, searching in the forests and prairies between the Sound and the Cascades.

In the Steilacoom area, Indians remained friendly and appeared not interested in the war. Most of the non-hostile Puyallup and Nisqually Indians, totaling between four and five hundred persons of all ages, were removed to Fox Island. The warring Indians were holed up in the forests, but there were arguments and many deserted.

In early January, Leschi and some other Indian leaders sent word that they did not want any more war. But Leschi did not speak for all. Historically based estimates are that there were never more than 300 to 350 warriors, including

those who came from outside the South Puget Sound region.

More regular Army troops arrived in December and January, and field operations intensified. The acting governor ordered communities and isolated settlements to build blockhouses for protection. Settlers built twenty-three blockhouses, the militia built thirty-five and the regulars four. Steilacoom built a log cabin on the waterfront as a blockhouse. This cabin later became the home of the Meeker family and was used for Steilacoom's first school house.

Mid January 1856, Governor Stevens returned to Olympia. He wanted to run the war himself, rather than the Army. Both regulars and militia searched for dissident warriors, but few were found. Many Indians had just quit; others had gone east of the