

saloons here (Steilacoom), largely patronized by United States Soldiers, more than once was compelled to settle disputes amongst the rough, quarrelsome soldiers, which he did in a manner, leaving no doubt in the mind of the soldier man, as to the prowess of the dispenser of spirituous liquors.” Alcohol sometimes brought out the worst in men—and both sites suffered the consequences.

Summary

When all is said and done, relationships happen. And while this article just skims the surface of this topic, one can only gather that the inhabitants of Forts Steilacoom and Nisqually were neighbors, friends, adversaries, and competitors. They held similar, and in some cases, divergent points of views. But they came together when needed and made the best of the relationship when times allowed. They were, after all, married by convenience.

Note: Steve A. Anderson has experienced the relationships spoken above first hand in that he was director of Fort Nisqually Living History Museum



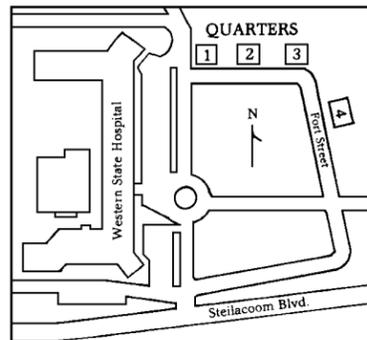
Reenactors from Fort Nisqually participate in the Fort Steilacoom candlelight Christmas of 1859, illustrating the cooperation still existing between the two forts.

in the 1980s and worked as a Washington State Heritage Resource Center consultant with the Fort Steilacoom Historic Site board in the early 1990s. In Christmas 2004 he participated for the first time in HFSA’s

candlelight tour and saw the friendship and support given by those who volunteer and work at Fort Nisqually first hand.

**Founders’ Day Pot Luck Picnic, August 20, 2-4 p.m.
Fort Steilacoom Museum**

Historic Fort Steilacoom
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A Marriage of Convenience Connections Between Forts Nisqually and Steilacoom

by Steve A. Anderson

Over the past twenty-five years, many relationships have resulted from the intermixing of supporters of Fort Nisqually Living History Museum in Tacoma and those who give time, energy and resources to Historic Fort Steilacoom in Lakewood. When one looks into the mid-19th century history of these two sites, nothing could be more natural, for similar connections formed in those days as well. These connections were largely maintained for the following reasons: commercial or professional involvement; mutual defense and/or survival; personal; ideological and/or social gatherings. Like today, these contacts did not always translate into friendships. For lack of a better term, we sometimes refer to these kinds of connections as “marriages of convenience.” To be sure, such “marriages” like those discussed below, must generate benefit for the parties involved, otherwise they need not exist.

So, what kinds of benefits might be generated by the interactions between English traders and American soldiers in the middle 19th century? What common ground might they share? What inconveniences might arise? To more fully understand how these relationships historically swayed to and fro, let’s walk down this path a spell and explore the possibilities.

Commercial & professional gain

The “bottom line” of the relationship between forts Nisqually and Steilacoom translates into financial dealings between one party and the



The “marriage” between Fort Nisqually and Fort Steilacoom began when the U.S Army rented the Heath farm from the Hudson Bay Company in 1849.

other. In other words, money formed the first bond of convenience between the two sites. The marriage was consecrated in 1849. Straight away, the U.S. Army paid \$50 per month rent to the Nisqually folks for the old Joseph T. Heath farm. The army also contracted with the Nisqually folks to provide beef. These arrangements conveniently provided the U.S. Army with ready-made shelter and a food source and the Nisqually folks with a steady cash flow from the United States government.

When Fort Steilacoom needed wood for construction or heating, they hired out Nisqually’s French Canadian laborers to do the work. When Dr. Tolmie desired a new home and office for the site in 1852, he employed a retired U.S. Army soldier, Robert

Daly, who conveniently happened to know how to build a “balloon framed – rat proof” house. So, each borrowed the other’s labor force to meet some of their housing needs. But the borrowing of labor was only one aspect of the interdependency of which we speak. Also included in this would be horse and equipment rentals, supplies, guides and other financial residuals. Further, this condition remained constant throughout the 1850s and 1860s.¹ (Continued on page 3.)

¹The Puget Sound Agricultural Company provided beef to the United States Army on a contractual basis throughout the 1850s. In 1849, the first contract was let at .20 cents per pound. By 1853, the contracts were awarded to the PSAC at .22 cents per pound.

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President's Message



As we arrive at the halfway mark of the 2006 calendar year, the momentum driving Historic Fort Steilacoom has finally reached

what in sailing terms is known as "hull speed." This is the point at which the driven vessel is going at a fast enough rate that one can discern a noticeable quiver running through the hull of the ship as it knifes through the water.

What, to Historic Fort Steilacoom Association, is hull speed? To me, hull speed for the Association is new members, increased volunteering, capital improvements, new displays being built, new activities to do, and increased involvement with the community. I am happy to announce to the membership that we are enjoying all of the above. In the month of July alone, the Museum has picked up three new memberships and a new member docent.

After attempting all winter to find some sort of funding for the Fort's failing roof, a call to Governor Gregoire's office resulted in the Board of Directors of HFSA being informed by the Department of Social and Health Services (our landlord) that \$80,000 has been earmarked by their department this year for the replacement of the two roofs of the Fort's four buildings that are in the worse



A period swap meet was held at Fort Steilacoom on the Memorial Day weekend. Reenactors displayed the many items they had for sale or trade.

need for repair. The Board of Directors, at the encouragement of the treasurer, Ken Morgan, had begun a "buy a bundle" campaign wherein persons can purchase a bundle of shingles for a building's roof in order to help offset the material cost of anticipated construction. Even the grade schoolers from Idlewild Elementary School in Lakewood got into the act by raising close to three hundred dollars for the roofs by holding a bake sale. That is a lot of cupcakes and cookies, I tell you!

In addition to all of this, Western State Hospital's maintenance crew is presently installing a brand new heat pump for Quarters 2, which is the old Headquarters building. Those of us with HFSA, and the various other community groups that use the conference room of that building in the winter, will really appreciate the Hospital's improvements.

Our newest Board of Director member, Lawrence Bateman, has gained permission from the Board to give the Fort's gift shop a little competition. He is presently constructing a display of what a period sutler's store would have looked like at the fort in the late 1850s. I have peeked at some of the items represented.

Too bad they are for display only and won't be available for sale! Finally, in addition to our monthly speaker series, we have added two new events this year. The first was a "Period Swap Meet" held this past Memorial Day weekend. It was designed to give something to see and do for those folk who still come out looking for the Civil War reenactment of the past years. This proved to be a marked success and will definitely be held again next year. The other new event is yet to come. It will be a two-day "immersion" living history experience, which will take place over the October 21st - 22nd weekend. If all goes according to plan, this should be the most authentic two days of accurately portrayed activity the Fort has seen in some time.

Again, as always, I invite each and every one of you to come on down and see what the Fort has to offer, and come down often. There is always something new going on.

C. Gideon Pete

Founder's Day Picnic

Annual pot-luck at Fort Steilacoom Museum, 2-4 p.m., August 20. Tour of Garrison Springs to follow.

not a few Fort Nisqually folks were in attendance (perhaps upper and lower classes).

It is known through the historical record,³ that such dinners were far more than social gatherings. They were also mediums of exchange, consensus building exercises, or educational settings where poetry or sections of books were read out loud. Quite possibly, if a ship had just come into port, one could learn of news from abroad. While together, individuals from each site shared their ideological and/or political viewpoints—which no doubt led to lively debates, if not highly animated conversations. More likely than not, aside from the daily banter and "catch up" issues of the day, "hot topics" entered the discussion on occasion. Politics, the San Juan Island "trouble" and the validity of the institution of slavery were particularly prickly subjects during those years building up to the American Civil War.

There are numerous examples of these issues leading to hard feelings. No better example of this is that of Chief Trader Angus McDonald's celebrated dislike and distrust of Americans. He nearly came to blows with soldiers in Olympia and Steilacoom over the San Juan issue.

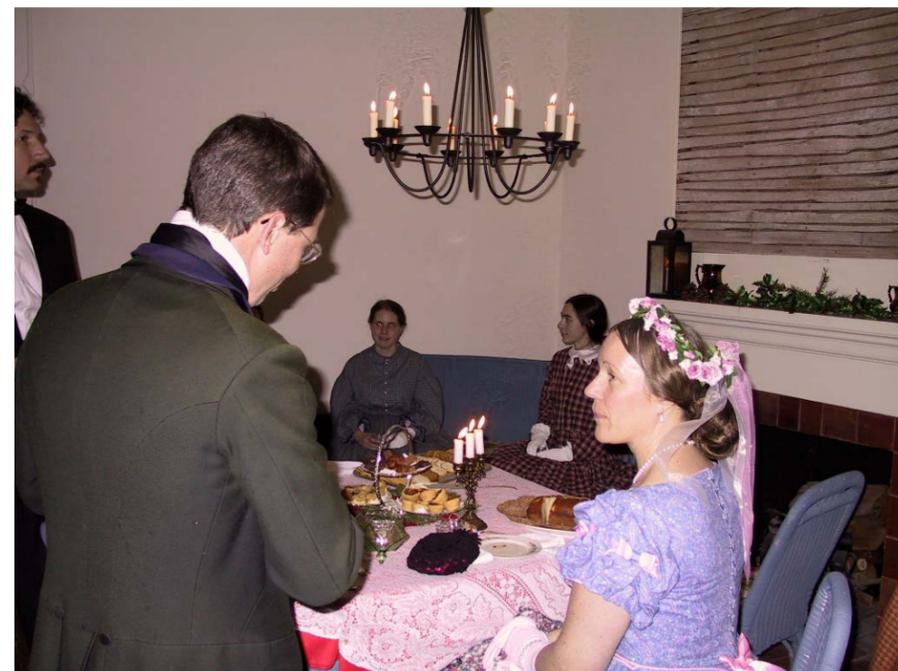
Another was Dr. Tolmie's strong position supporting abolition. He believed, as noted English phrenologist George Combe did, that the blacks enslaved in the south were of equal stature, both mentally and physically, as whites from Europe and America. This concept, of course, ran heavily against the grain of the southern born officers of Fort Steilacoom. The stronger the drinking was around the table, the higher the volume of debate.

Finally, temperance—or the taking of strong alcoholic drink. Again, Dr. Tolmie, and later his right hand man Edward Huggins, were indignant of those who drank; especially those

³Much of this can be gleaned from the Edward Huggins letters transcribed by Joe Huntsman.



Col. and Mrs. Casey often entertained guests from Fort Nisqually at Fort Steilacoom, as demonstrated by reenactors.



who drank to excess. Numerous watering holes in Steilacoom Town, including Westerbrook's⁴ or Parkin-

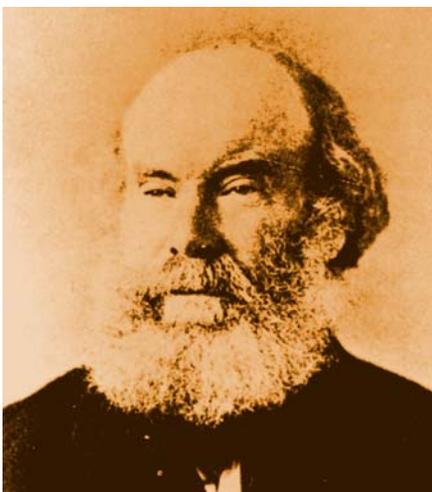
son's Saloon and Thomas Glasgow's house at the base of Sequelitchew Creek provided ample opportunities for the acquisition of American whiskey by both HBC and US Army personnel. Edward Huggins remembered: "...[the] barkeep in one of the

⁴In November of 1849, the *Fort Nisqually Journal of Occurrence* records that there were numerous drunken soldiers at the beach near Glasgow's house.

Marriage of Convenience *(cont.)*

And yet to say that all services were exchanged for cash would be incorrect. It is believed that out of professional courtesy (not to mention convenience), Dr. William F. Tolmie frequently assisted the U.S. Army's physicians—most notably Dr. Hayden and Dr. Craig—in vaccinating soldiers against small pox and providing assistance during operations. And when HBC laborers fell ill, such as when Thomas Cooper came down deathly sick in 1859, it was the army physician's turn to help Dr. Tolmie. These doctors likely shared each other's medical libraries—and no doubt shared their expertise in advances in the field of medicine as well.

Finally, another commercial arena involved the women living at each site. Until Olympia and Steilacoom offered more variety in their stores and shops, Nisqually and Steilacoom's forts had a monopoly on the various goods within their own trade shops and sutleries. Such commerce drove the relationships between these women and led to friendships and relationships outside the official business of the trade shop. By the middle 1850s, the above mentioned towns began to offer more in the way of merchandise—and drew away some of the business. But many relationships between the “women of the forts” had already been cemented by that point.



Dr. Tolmie of Fort Nisqually.



Painting by James Ware

Fort Nisqually, a Hudson Bay Company post, had important relationships with Fort Steilacoom—economic, social, and mutual defence. It was a “marriage of convenience.”

Mutual Defense & Survival

You come to the aid of a neighbor during a crisis for mutual defense and survival—such as during the Indian Wars of 1855-56. Conveniently, the forts were just six miles apart in distance, and each had something the other needed.

While today's public is mesmerized by cut throat “survival” characters witnessed by millions weekly on television, real survival in Washington's frontier often depended on who (and how many) one could count on in a pinch. The onset of the Indian War in that fall of 1855 brought about such alliances between the army and the British traders.

Though Fort Nisqually's palisades were up and functional at that time, Dr. Tolmie felt that a large contingent of well-armed and coordinated hostiles could easily breach the outer walls and overwhelm the fort's inhabitants. Dr. Tolmie knew Leschi personally—and knew that Leschi understood the value of a well-armed fighting force. Leschi also knew of the gunpowder, shot and weapons that were held (and lightly guarded) in stores at Nisqually. Feeling

vulnerable, Dr. Tolmie called upon the U.S. Army to provide a dozen soldiers to watch over these stores—stores that might provide a higher level of firepower to the wrong side if acquired.

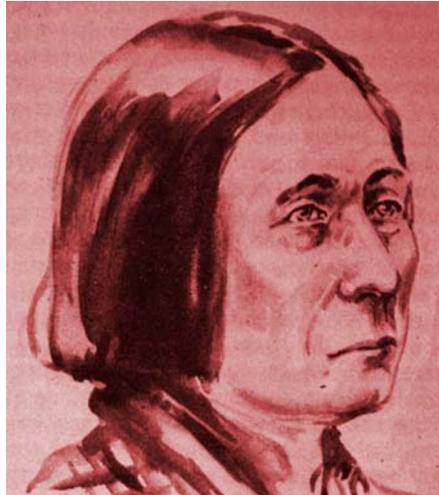
On the other hand, because the U.S. Army wasn't ready to fight a protracted war with the Indians, they requested that Dr. Tolmie provide “sundries” to them and the Washington Territorial Militia. During this period of mutual defense, Dr. Tolmie trusted his neighbors and collected paper “vouchers,” not cash, as a method of paying for the convenience of ready-to-use supplies. This later caused distress for the Nisqually folks because voucher redemptions were typically months behind in payment as the U.S. Army was woefully short of cash during the entire war period. Commerce with the army, so it seemed, had its shortcomings as well.

The mutual defense tradeoffs also manifested themselves on the water. The HBC's Steamship *Beaver* was pressed into service by the U.S. Army to transport troops. Company owned canoes were also commandeered for army purposes — and

because of the nature of these circumstances (survival), it is doubtful that the HBC ever received or requested compensation for their use.

But the Indian War also produced a galvanizing effect on Nisqually/Steilacoom relations. A segment of the Washington Territorial Militia began ambushing and sometimes killing peaceful Indians. They also threatened and/or plundered others who did not share their narrow and murderous mindset. Dr. Tolmie's appeal to the U.S. Army for defense against this rabble (and the army's immediate response) quelled the militia's arrogance and reestablished civil order. These supportive actions by the army's hierarchy also soothed the distrust sewn by the seizures of the HBC's vessels *Albion* and *Cadboro* in the early 1850s, and set the stage for what came next.

The final chapter in this period of mutual defense involves Leschi—the Nisqually war chief who eventually turned himself in to the authorities on Dr. Tolmie's suggestion. The "marriage of convenience" spoken of here had spawned an ideological constant in the minds of both entities, who believed in Leschi's innocence. While the U.S. Army did everything in its power to stall and delay the civilian authorities from hanging Leschi, Dr. Tolmie did everything in his power to fight the case in the courts.² Defending each other's actions (and in some cases safety), Dr. Tolmie and Steilacoom's officers marched arm in arm on this singular issue. But, as history now records, it was a battle which they did not win.



Leschi of the Nisqually.

Social, Personal & Ideological Discourse

In the middle 19th Century, class distinctions permeated the societies of both England and the United States. The individuals living at both forts brought these social predispositions with them, and in essence recreated those societal classes in the wilds of the Pacific Northwest. It is known that all classes at both sites shared conviviality's such as dancing, dining, horse racing, shopping, hunting and fishing, or those things having nothing to do with defense or commerce. Unfortunately, Native Americans were at the bottom of the social structure—a position they shared with Hawaiians and others of "questionable" bloodlines.

The officers at Fort Steilacoom, typically from eastern and/or southern families of wealth or stature, provided a ready pool of "upper class" gentlemen with whom the HBC's officers could comfortably mix. The army officer's, however, did not always "keep up appearances," such as the times Captain U.S. Grant used Cathlamet to recover from his drinking binges or the time when Chief Trader Dugald McTavish (who was then the Hudson's Bay Company's Governor on the coast), visited Fort Steilacoom with Edwards Huggins. There, McTavish was introduced to well dressed, and "smart

looking" officers. On their way back to Nisqually, they stopped in Steilacoom City, where they passed

"...in front of the then leading saloon [and] we went through a crowd of acquaintances of mine who were discussing politics. I introduced Dugald McTavish to general this and colonel that, not forgetting to include two or three majors and captains. He was astonished at the number of military men of high rank, and of such dirty aspect, [and some drunk] and just after meeting and talking with the polished regulars at the garrison. And then he was disgusted to think anyone would invite him to drink in business hours. A thing he never would or could do."

In spite of occurrences such as this, the officers of the HBC and U.S. Army held to their beliefs that they populated a much higher social circle than did common soldiers and laborers—who were far more numerous and who also shared in the exchange between the sites. Know that only upstanding officers and their wives received invitations to Nisqually's big house—and vice versa. If a laborer was invited to Fort Steilacoom or a noncommissioned soldier to Nisqually, it was typically to do a job or run an errand—but rarely a social call (unless the person was being met by someone of the same social class). This pattern of inviting officers to Nisqually was first established by Chief Trader John Tod, who, in 1849, invited officers over to Fort Nisqually for a Christmas dinner.

After that, army officers were regularly invited to and frequently dined with Dr. and Mrs. Tolmie, and later Mr. and Mrs. Edward Huggins. Needless to say, regular invitations to the Tolmie's, Huggins and other visiting HBC officials soon followed. These dinners had the option of being held at the military fort or in nearby Steilacoom City. On one such occasion in 1853, a "ball" or dance was presented by the officers of Fort Steilacoom and it is believed that

²William H. Wallace, Attorney from Dr. William F. Tolmie," February 27, 1857. "Received from W. F. Tolmie the sum of twenty five dollars with the understanding that if the Indian 'Leschi' shall be acquitted of the charges against him, and brought back in safety to Fort Steilacoom, the same shall be as a fee to me for depriving himself of otherwise, as regards Leschi, the sum shall go to offset of my account against the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company for legal services."