

**Chief Leschi** (from page 3)

as one people of Washington and admit the wrongs of the past.

“Like the eagle from above, we can see the landscape of our heritage in sharp focus. We can see the injustice done to Leschi and the Nisqually. We can see the pain caused by the multiple trials, the lingering appeals, and the obscene pressure to hang this man.

“Like the soaring eagle, we can now see the truth. We have wiped away the pain of death, and we have wiped them away with the clear vision of history. We know the truth. Can we not do the simple justice of declaring the truth?

“...We cannot bring Leschi back to life. We cannot restore him to his lands. It is that simple now after all these years—we must give Leschi back his good name....

“Let your verdict free the spirit of the eagle so that it may rest in peace.”

At the end of this testimony the panel met in private to discuss the case. When they reconvened they declared that Chief Leschi should never have been charged with murder because he acted as a lawful combatant during a time of war. In declaring this, they cleared the name of Chief Leschi. A joyous roar and



The cast of reenactors for Mrs. Casey's Tea presented in February 2008.

applause went up from the 300 plus members of various Indian tribes who had sat attentively during the long discourse. Chief Leschi had finally been exonerated after 146 years.

The work of the Exoneration Committee is not over yet. The task ahead is to request the Washington State Legislature to create a law to require the state's history books to be corrected and to present the story of Chief Leschi correctly. We hope that we have raised the conscience of the public toward that aim.

**Editor's note:**

Efforts to spread the news of Leschi's exoneration include Wash-

ington State History Museum's development of curriculum to present the story of the Nisqually chief. Information is available in the book *Leschi, Last Chief of the Nisquallies* by Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, which may be obtained from:

[tahomaresearch@aol.com](mailto:tahomaresearch@aol.com)

Information is also available at [www.washingtonhistoryonline.org](http://www.washingtonhistoryonline.org). Go to the topic "Leschi, Justice In Our Time.

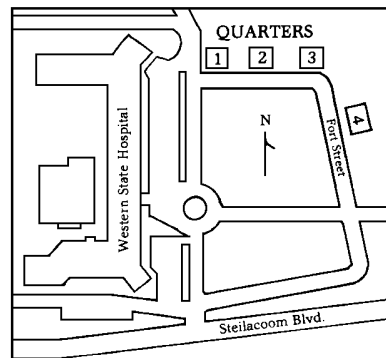
**Other references:**

Senate Joint Memorial 8054 S-4704.1

Washington State Minority and Justice Commission Biennial Report 2003-2004, pp. 34, 37, 38.

***Karen Haas presents "Westward Ho" on June 1, 2008 at 2 p.m. in Quarters 2.***

**Historic Fort Steilacoom**  
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# Fort Steilacoom

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## Chief Leschi's Name is Cleared

by Cecelia Svinth Carpenter

*It has now been 150 years since Chief Leschi was hanged for the death of A. Benton Moses during the Indian War of 1855-1856. The controversy of accusations surrounding the trial of Leschi were reported in the "Truth Teller" as revisited in the last two issues of our Fort Steilacoom newsletter. The final chapter to Leschi's story was resolved in 2004 when a Historical Court of Inquiry and Justice, reviewed the evidence and exonerated Leschi.*

*The following article is a statement by the eminent Indian historian and writer Cecelia Svinth Carpenter with additional comments from the 2004 Senate resolution and Biennial Report as edited by Carol Neufeld Stout.*

**F**or years the people of the Nisqually Indian Tribe have lived under the shadowy cloud that their Chief Leschi was hanged for his part in the Indian War of 1855-1856. They cried out at the injustice of his being put to death for a crime in the time of war and for which he was innocent.

In 2003 a group of interested people met in Olympia to see what could be done to clear the Chief's name. They understood that Leschi was innocent of the charges brought before the territorial court in 1857. As a combatant in the time of war, he should not have been tried in a court of law or executed. A pardon was not what they wanted, but a clear vindication—an exoneration to be exact.

There emerged from those who gathered a group of three, Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, Cynthia Iyall and



Photo by Orville H. Stout

*Memorial to Chief Leschi of the Nisquallies placed in the Oakbrook mall on Steilacoom Boulevard near where Leschi was hanged in 1858.*

Melissa Parr, who continued to meet with the Nisqually tribal attorney. One such meeting was with the Pierce County Executive, John Landenberg. It was suggested that we should go to the Washington State Legislature and obtain a resolution clearing the chief's name, then to the Washington Supreme Court for vindication. This we did.

In March of 2004 the Washington State Legislature, both the House of Representatives and the State Senate, passed resolutions which stated that Chief Leschi left a legacy in Washington State history as a courageous leader who sacrificed for his people and is worthy of honor and respect. Both houses appealed to the Washington State Supreme Court in Joint Memorial 8054 to cleanse its records

to vacate the conviction of Chief Leschi.

The text of the memorial, first read on February 11, 2004, states:

“We, your Memorialists, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Washington, in legislative session assembled, respectfully represent and petition as follows:

“WHEREAS, Chief Leschi was a Nisqually Indian leader at the time the Treaty of Medicine Creek was signed in December 1854; and

“WHEREAS, By the terms of the Treaty, the Nisqually Indians were assigned to a reservation on lands far removed from the Nisqually River and its fisheries which had sustained them for centuries; and

*(Continued on page 3)*

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**President's Message**



**H**ello again!  
 First of all, before I delve into anything else, I wish to personally thank each and every one of you who have taken the time to renew your membership in Historic Fort Steilacoom Association for 2008.

Your Association is made up entirely of volunteers, not a paid position in the bunch! The dozen or so souls who make up our Board of Directors not only put in literally hundreds of volunteer hours each month, but also scour the local antique shops looking for great "finds" to add to the displays in Fort Steilacoom's three furnished quarters. We also appreciate the many display items given by our members.

We have had the good fortune this past year to be visited by several professional curators from the "big city" museums, and they have all been simply dumbfounded at all that we have done and continue to do.

Again, I want to say a BIG THANK YOU to all of you. You are the ones who have helped to make it all possible. When the economy slows down, as it has recently, museums all too often fall way behind the doctors and dentists in getting "paid." Thank you once more for your continued support.

HFSA has a full docket lined up for everyone again this year. Besides keeping the fort open once a month each winter and every Sunday all summer long, we also will be hosting some exciting guests and events at least once a month. This is where your membership really pays off! Everything is free for all HFSA members! Our next major event takes place in June. We all had such a marvelous time with Karen Haas portraying Narcissa Whitman in March that we have asked her for an encore in June. Dressed in appropriate traveling attire of the period, Karen will sing songs and tell some of the stories of the pioneers who traveled west on the Oregon Trail. Mark your calendar for June 1, 2 p.m. in Quarters 2.

*Gideon Pete.*

**Recent Donations to Fort Steilacoom**

**Beth Julian**, continuing in the tradition of her mother, Ellen Freckleton, has given a number of items for use at the fort. Recent donations include: six carved Victorian chairs, a melodeon, a framed photo of the John Bradley barn, which was used as a blockhouse during the 1855-56 Indian War, an Underwood & Underwood stereoscope, and a hob-nail white glass chandelier.

**Lou Dunkin** and her husband Lyle have also given many artifacts. Most recently Lou presented an early Victorian chair to the museum.

**John McPherson** has given an army blanket. **Lawrence Bateman** and **Joe Lewis** have donated history books. All three are members of the Fort Steilacoom Board of Directors.

Thank you to these members and to the many others who have given so generously to Fort Steilacoom in the past.



*Karen Haas portrayed Narcissa Whitman at the fort in March. Watch for her Oregon Trail program on June 1, 2008, at 2 p.m.*

**August Valentine Kautz**  
*Biography of a Civil War General*  
 by Lawrence G. Kautz

Kautz was the quartermaster at Fort Steilacoom before the Civil War called him eastward. After the war he retired to Seattle. His descendants still live in this area. This detailed biography follows his early experiences in the Northwest as well as his military career. It will soon be available at a special discounted price of \$43 (a savings of \$16.84 off retail) to paid-up Fort Steilacoom Association members. Send your check now to Historic Fort Steilacoom Association, P.O. Box 88447, Steilacoom, WA 98388. Call Carol Neufeld Stout at (253) 582-5838 for details.

**Chief Leschi** (from page 1)

"WHEREAS, Chief Leschi met with territorial leaders seeking a reservation with a sufficient land base for the Nisqually people, but was refused; and

"WHEREAS, War broke out between Indians and territorial forces, and in the course of war, A. Benton Moses, a soldier in the Washington Territorial Militia, was killed during the Battle of Connell Prairie; and

"WHEREAS, Chief Leschi was charged with murder in the death of Moses and was tried before a territorial court. The trial resulted in a hung jury after the jurors were instructed that killing of a combatant in the time of war was not murder; and

"WHEREAS, The U.S. Army refused to execute Chief Leschi, who was regarded as a prisoner of war, and he was hanged only after the Territorial Legislature ordered the Supreme Court to schedule his execution which took place on February 19, 1858; and

"WHEREAS, The Supreme Court of the State of Washington has inherent authority to provide justice, no matter how old the case, and has exercised that authority by granting Takuji Yamashita posthumous admission to the Washington Sate Bar Association; and

"WHEREAS, Like Takuji Yamashita, Chief Leschi was the victim of discrimination—in his case, the ultimate discrimination of being executed because he was non-Caucasian; and

"WHEREAS, Chief Leschi left a legacy in Washington State history as a courageous leader whose sacrifice for his people is worthy of honor and respect; and

"WHEREAS, There was at that time and continues to be a public outcry over the wrongful conviction and execution of Chief Leschi;

"NOW, THEREFORE, Your Memorialists respectfully pray that the Supreme Court of the State of Washington use its inherent power of providing justice to vacate the conviction of Chief Leschi and depublish the record in his case; and



**Leschi**

"Your Memorialists further pray that the Washington State School Director's Association urge school districts throughout the state to purchase and use Washington History textbooks that accurately and fairly portray the life, trial, and execution of Chief Leschi; and

"Your Memorialists further pray that the injustice that occurred in 1858 with the trial and execution of Chief Leschi be recognized and the commitment to a legal system under which a fair trial is the right of everyone regardless of race or creed be reaffirmed.

"BE IT RESOLVED, That copies of this Memorial be immediately transmitted to the Honorable Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Washington, Bobbe Bridges, Tom Chambers, Mary Fairhurst, Faith Ireland, Charles Johnson, Barbara Madsen, Susan Owens, and Richard Sanders; and to the Washington School Director's Association; and to the Nisqually Indian Tribe."

In meeting with Gerry Alexander, the honorable Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Washington, our committee learned that the court could not do what the State Legislature had suggested, but

could do the next best thing. That was to convene "A Historical Court of Inquiry and Justice" to hear our case.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 2004, a seven member tribunal of judges led by Gerry Alexander convened to hear four hours of testimony put on under the guidance of Nisqually tribal attorney Bill Tobin. Expert witnesses were: Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, Charles Wilkinson, Shanna Stevenson, Professor Alexandra Harmon, Captain Eugene Ham, Captain Paul Robson, Kent Richards, Cynthia Iyall, Dorian Sanchez, Connie McCloud, and Billy Frank, Jr.

John W. Ladenburg, Pierce County Executive and one of the attorneys, made an eloquent plea for Leschi, as summarized here:

"So, the facts are not really in dispute here. The record is clear. Based upon the highly questionable testimony of only one eye witness, Leschi was convicted and hanged. Based upon the record of the original mistrial and the written record of the court itself, Leschi is entitled to absolute immunity under the laws of war, recognized by both sides.

"The only fair and just result is that this Historical Court correct the history of this State and declare Chief Leschi exonerated..."

"It is said that after Leschi was killed, a solitary bald eagle was often seen circling Leschi's original home. As it circled, the eagle would scream a single cry, and then disappear into a tall fir.

"It might be that the eagle represented the land itself, searching for Leschi. Maybe that eagle represented the family of Leschi, searching for their kin. Perhaps the eagle was Leschi himself, cruelly separated from his land and family.

"Today, another solitary eagle slowly circles that sacred land. It too cries a lonely simple cry.

"This cry is not for Leschi, but for us the living..."

"This cry demands to know when we will have the courage to stand up

*(Continued on next page)*