

**Margaret Whitesell** (from page 3)

up into the wagon bed, wetting everything. Indians, now friendly enough, were living near the river, and they advised against crossing....

“Almost everyone could talk Chinook with the Indians, and some of the old timers always used a few of the words such as Cultus, Tillicum, and Hiyu.

“We raised a crop of grain that year, threshing it by letting the oxen tread it out on a puncheon floor. To get this wheat ground, it had to be taken to the grist mill where the ‘Oakes’ now is. This journey required at least three days, taking two days to go with the heavy loads over the steep hills and poor roads....

“The only permanent residents in the upper valley after the Indian War, for many years, were the D. E. Lanes and ourselves. While we were at the Fort, I had two sisters born. Mary, whom I have mentioned, and then Josephine, born in 1858. In 1861 I had a brother born, but he died when two years old. In 1866 my sister Dora, the last of the family, was born. There were ten of us children who lived out our lives in this valley....

“The valley gradually settled up, and in 1883 I married Johnson C. Taylor. I have lived from the time of the ox cart to the airplane; from the time when it took months for a message to cross the continent until it is a matter of seconds; from the time there were only a few people in the dense forests which had to be cleared by their own efforts while they existed on the most frugal fare.... Until today, when people are surrounded by the advantages of our modern civilization....”

Margaret Whitesell Taylor, “The Whitesell family at Fort Steilacoom during the Indian War of 1855-56,” in Alice Ruston, *The History of the Town of Orting, 1854-1981*, pp. 16-23.



*Officers' Quarters 3 has a bright, new paint job and a new foundation.*



*A plaque recognizing Fort Steilacoom as an historic site has been installed on the exterior of Quarters 4, the Interpretive Center of the museum complex.*

## Building renovations completed

Under the guidance of Joe Lewis, Ken Morgan and Bernie Bateman, the building renovation project from state funds obtained through the efforts of the late State Senator Mike Carrel was completed this summer. The project included the exterior painting of the four buildings, major foundation repairs to Quarters 3, and the installation of a fire and security alarm system.

One of the upstairs rooms in Quarters 3 is now being converted into a hospital display by Patricia Bures and John Roten. This is to represent that Fort Steilacoom had a military hospital and resident doctor and surgeon. Fred Welcher has donated an impressive assortment of period medical equipment for the hospital display.

# Fort Steilacoom

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## Fort Steilacoom Refuge during the Indian War

*As told by Margaret Whitesell Taylor*

The Henry Whitesell family joined the Coates wagon train on an arduous and hazardous journey along the Oregon Trail in 1854, turning north to Puget Sound by way of Naches Pass. The Whitesells separated from the others at the Puyallup River and on October 10, 1854, Henry filed a claim on land which today is a part of Orting, Washington.

The next fall in 1855 there were repeated warnings of unrest by Indians unhappy with a treaty relegating them to reservations. White settlers became alarmed when three families in the White River area were killed. Margaret Whitesell, a child at the time, recounts some of her memories.

### Rumors of War

“Finally, a very friendly Indian named Jake came and told us we should go as it was no longer safe for us to stay, as the Indians had many guns and we had none.... One evening in October two bachelors, Isaac Lemon and Addison Perham from Elhi, came and said the women and children were going at once even if he (my father) wouldn't leave. The men walked and my mother and the children rode their horses, and we went to their home.

“We spent the night at their cabin which ... was of one room with two bunks and the always present fireplace roaring giving the only light we had. The men and my mother and older sister were up all night.



### Margaret Whitesell Taylor

The men were molding bullets to take with them on the journey to Steilacoom, which was to be started early the next day.

“Indians could be heard about the cabin all night and we knew they had an excellent view into the house for the fireplace made a very good light....

### Leaving for Fort Steilacoom

“Very early the next morning, my mother had breakfast ready and put up lunches and we set forth for Fort Steilacoom. My mother, myself, and my brother Calvin, not yet three, rode on one horse and on the other

were my sisters, Nancy Ellen and Elizabeth. My brother Anthony and the two men walked.

“The men led the horses with one hand and carried a gun in the other. We ate our lunches as we journeyed. Along late in the afternoon we came to Mahons' home where Mr. Lemon and Perham hoped to find rest for my mother, who was an expectant mother and very weary.

“Mrs. Mahon was an Irish woman who said she would like to see the Indians who could drive her away from her home. She would tell my mother to ‘go inside,’ but she stayed outside continuing her harangue about people who would leave their homes.

“While this was going on, a man rode up and told of the massacre of several families over on White River, near where Auburn now stands. Instantly, Mrs. Mahon changed her mind, and she had her husband hitch the oxen to the cart for their journey to the fort.... My brother, Anthony, then about thirteen, drove while Mrs. Mahon kept urging him to whip up the oxen until the poor beasts were almost as frenzied as she was.

“On reaching Steilacoom, Mrs. Mahon had friends to whom she could go, but my mother knew no one there. We were assigned to some Army building that had only benches and a table. We children curled up and went to sleep, but my mother and older sister were again up all night taking turns holding my little brother.

*(Continued on page 3)*

**HISTORIC FORT STEILACOOM ASSOCIATION**

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**President’s Message**



Usually, in writing these quarterly columns, I do my best to keep a light tone. Recent events however, attacks against history, have left me rather disturbed.

For today’s message, I have sought out reflections on the importance of history, from others far more gifted than myself. Why is it important for history, and old Fort Steilacoom, to be protected and preserved? Here are some thoughts.

“The most effective way to destroy people, is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.” *George Orwell*

“History is the torch that is meant to illuminate the past, to guard us against the repetition of our mistakes of other days. We cannot join in the rewriting of history to make it conform to our comfort and convenience.” *Claude G. Bowers*

“Should we be rewriting history just to make people feel good? That’s not history, that’s psychiatry.”

*Ed Koch*

“The past was erased, the erasure

was forgotten, the lie became the truth.” *George Orwell*

“Prejudice is a burden that threatens the past, confuses the future, and renders the present inaccessible.” *Maya Angelou*

“If you don’t know history, then you don’t know anything. You are a leaf that doesn’t know it is part of a tree.” *Michael Crichton*

“It is not the sentiments of men which make history, but their actions.” *Norman Mailer*

“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.” *Maya Angelou*

“He who controls the past, controls the future. He who controls the present, controls the past.” *George Orwell*

Is the past open to interpretation? Of course it is. This is exactly our mission here at the Historic Fort Steilacoom Museum. The Association attempts, through constant scholarship and study, to present the history of the fort as it existed during the mid-nineteenth century. We strive to do this by presenting these buildings, along with the personalities that lived here, as they actually were, not as we would hope they could have been. History is messy. It is populated with people and passions that were oftentimes less than perfect. Hopefully, the study of this will help us to better know ourselves today. See you at the Fort.

*Gideon*

**Coming Events**

**Smithsonian Museum Day Live!**  
**Fort Steilacoom**  
 September 23, 10 am to 4 pm

A nationwide event, Museum Day Live! offers free admission to visitors presenting a Museum Day Live! ticket at a participating museum or cultural institution.

The Museum Day Live! ticket will be available to download online. Visitors who present the Museum Day Live! ticket will gain free entrance for two guests at participating venues for one day only. One ticket is permitted per household, per email address.

Fort Steilacoom will come alive as living historians live and work as soldiers, officers and their wives, children and friends.

**September 23, 2017: Museum Day Live—Smithsonian**

See ad previous column. Open to the public 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**October 15, 2017: N.P. Railroad-Prairie Line**

Michael Sullivan, of Artifacts Consulting, will tell the story of the last section of the Northern Pacific Transcontinental Railroad and the building of the line past Fort Steilacoom and Nisqually Prairie.

Prior to the program, Historic Fort Steilacoom will have a short Annual Meeting and election at 2 p.m. in Quarters 2.

The slate of candidates submitted by the Nominating Committee is:

**First V. Pres.:** Lawrence Bateman

**Treasurer:** Michael McGuire

**Director Pos. 1:** Jim Lauderdale

**Director Pos. 2:** John Roten

**Director Pos. 4:** Tom Melberg

**Director P. 5:** Nancy Keller-Scholz

**Director Pos. 6:** Dennis Eller

**November 19, 2017: Ordnance Sergeant William Archbold**



Alan Archambault will speak about William Archbold, who served at Fort Steilacoom from 1853 to 1868, longer than any other soldier. He was appointed the post Ordnance Sergeant in 1856, becoming an important member of the post garrison.

Historical artist Alan Archambault has conducted primary research on the Ordnance Sergeant and will share his findings at Historic Fort Steilacoom at 2 p.m. in Quarters 2. Please Join Us!

**Margaret Whitesell (from page 1)**

**At the Fort**

“The next morning my mother asked to see someone in authority with the idea of finding a place to live. A soldier by the name of David Tutwiler said he had a cabin which we could have rent free. My brother, Anthony, rustled up some wood, built a good fire in the inevitable fireplace, cut some fir boughs upon which my mother laid down for a much needed rest.... She slept until late in the afternoon when my father and brother Alex arrived with our ox cart loaded with all our bedding and the tin dishes we used in crossing the plains.... Our house and everything we couldn’t take with us was burned.

“Indian Jake, who was so friendly to the white people and who warned them of their danger, was put to death by the Indians for his friendship with the Bostons.

“I remember coming into the house on Christmas Day and seeing my mother standing by the fireplace weeping. This frightened me and I called my sister Elizabeth.... Mother finally saw us and tried to reassure us that all was well. She was blue (sad) because she had nothing for us, and was probably in pain, for the next day my sister Mary was born. She had no baby clothes, but when the officers’ wives heard of the baby, they out-fitted her very nicely.

“It was here I had my first sight of marching soldiers.... The soldiers and the sound of the drum and fife were simply miraculous to children who had spent the past year in the wilderness—there being in the upper Puyallup valley only four families in our vicinity, and those not close together.

“Here at Steilacoom were all the settlers of the valley. Among our neighbors were a family by the name of Owens.... Mr. Owens died, leaving his wife and four children.... Mrs. Owens got a job from the government cooking for the carpenters at the fort. She married one of them, W. W. Sherman, and lost her job

because of her marriage....

**Schools at Fort Steilacoom**

“We went to school at Steilacoom, which was about two miles from where we lived. It was a one-room building of lumber, heated by a large box stove. The desks and seats were homemade of rough lumber.

“My first teacher was O. H. White.... Mr. White was an excellent teacher with great patience. I went the one term with Mr. White.

“It was quite a problem for the parents to provide books and the necessary school supplies for their children. No free textbooks those days. Every child took whatever books the family might provide, and there was no uniformity.

“My second teacher was Oliver Meeker, a brother of Ezra and Jolen. He also was a very good teacher. He went into a store at Steilacoom with his brother, Ezra. Oliver Meeker went to San Francisco to buy merchandise, and was drowned at sea.

“My next teacher was George M. Berry, the Army chaplain at the garrison. This school was located at the Fort, and was provided by the U. S. Government for the soldiers’ children; but my sister and I were allowed to go to this school as my mother paid for this privilege.

“This school was held in the large Wallace Building, which had been the Wallace home before Colonel Wallace went to Washington as the Congressional Representative from this Territory. Incidentally, Colonel Wallace was a brother of General Lew Wallace, the author of *Ben Hur*. This was a better building and better equipped than the school in Steilacoom. This time J. P. Stewart was my teacher. He later became a merchant in Puyallup. Mr. Stewart had an assistant teacher, Mrs. Veedor.

**Churches at Steilacoom**

“There were Catholic churches both in Steilacoom and at the Fort, but the first Protestant church in Steilacoom was the Methodist, built in 1856. The Reverend DeVore was the minister, and held services when-

ever he could, but was very anxious for a church.

“He went to the owner of a saw-mill to see about lumber. This man told him he could have all the lumber he could carry away. The Reverend went energetically to work and in a few hours had a sizable pile of lumber. When the mill owner saw his energy and determination, he said he would donate and deliver the necessary lumber.

“The Reverend DeVore was an ordained minister, but there were many young circuit riders who were not. Their circuit was an immense one, from Olympia down into the valley, and all over the prairie. They didn’t even have horses. Sometimes someone would let them have a horse to ride a certain distance, there to be released and allowed to return home while the young man went his way on foot, getting his food and lodging wherever he could. Many times mother would outfit them with some of my father’s clothes while she dried and pressed theirs and did up their white shirt, so they could be presentable for the services the next day.

“There were no musical instruments in the church, but the daughters of Colonel Casey, the commander at the Fort, had a melodeon which an orderly carried to the chapel every Sunday for services.

“George M. Berry, the chaplain and tutor whom I mentioned before, conducted the Sunday School. There was a small library in connection, which I greatly enjoyed and used to the utmost.

**Back to the Valley**

“In 1860 ... it was decided it would be safe for us to return to our donation claim in the valley, so we left Steilacoom, spending that winter at the home of J. B. Leach in Sumner. My brothers and father built another one-room cabin on our place in the spring of 1861.

“Of course there were no bridges then and the rivers were so high the oxen had to swim and water came

*(Continued next page)*