

Spring 2022

Vol. 39, No. 1

Fort Steilacoom

www.HistoricFortSteilacoom.org



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Fort Steilacoom sometime after 1860, as seen from the water tower south of the area.

A NEW YEAR, A NEW RESOLVE TO VOLUNTEER

by *Walter Neary*



Friends, I hope you are enjoying the return of warmer weather (now watch it snow the day this arrives in your email!). We've had quite the year, but one thing is for sure: The board of Historic Fort Steilacoom appreciates its members. Thank you for your support.

It's traditional in this report to be cheery and focus on upcoming events...but you can read about those elsewhere. I think the reason I got elected twice to City Council is that I'm pretty direct with people. Our members deserve that. So, I'm going to share my candid thoughts about our museum.

In so doing, we must talk about the world. After years of pandemic, the world has changed. The people who make up the world have been under—in most cases—the most stress they've ever faced in their lives. Local and world events like war don't help.

So how does that play out at Fort Steilacoom? I look at our board. Over the last two years, I think roughly half our board members have experienced a death or significant illness in the family. Sometimes they've experienced more than one, and that affects the survivors. We've seen many of Fort Steilacoom's most loyal volunteers forced to shift their priorities away from volunteering at the Fort.

As the pandemic lightened up (at least on the surface), we found ourselves rebuilding. We are asking tough questions like, with a limited volunteer pool, what activities can we offer to our members and the public?

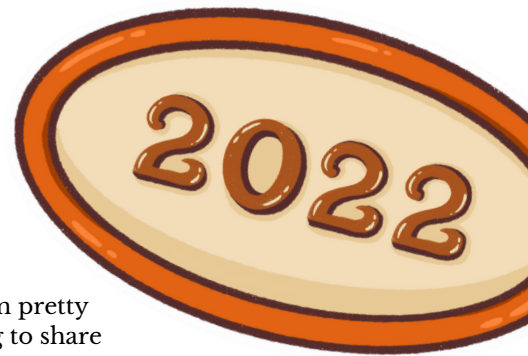
I've seen this happening with many other organizations as well. To say, "Everything can get back to normal" after a pandemic is a bit like saying, "Let's go out for dinner" after a tornado has flattened all the restaurants.

I share this because I'm sharing an opportunity. There has never been a better time to get involved at Fort Steilacoom. We are rebuilding after the peak of a pandemic. Great ideas are valued. People willing to do some of the work are even more valued.

If you have been involved before, you may have left the Fort for any number of reasons with which we are all familiar. I'll just tell you, as someone who was president in 2000 and now again in 2022, there's never been a better time to step up and join us. For reasons that will be clearer in future months, there's never been a better time to help tell the amazing story of Pacific Northwest history.

However, if you're coping with uncertainty (or worse) from the pandemic and don't have time to volunteer, we appreciate you as well. We are living in historic times...and history can be hard. If you are coping with illness, uncertainty, or the effects of death, we share our warmest wishes for you. We're there with you.

If you would like to get involved with the Fort—when you're ready—give me a shout at info@historicfortsteilacoom.org. You can also e-mail and ask for my cell number. Fort Steilacoom has so many wonderful stories to tell. We'd love to tell those stories with you.



TRIVIA FROM THE FORT STEILACOOM ARCHIVES

In 1861, the U.S. Army handed ownership of Fort Steilacoom to the Washington Territorial Militia, which in turn relinquished ownership to the Legislature in 1870 for use as the Insane Asylum of Washington Territory. The most notable of the facility's early superintendents was Dr. John Waughop who, between 1880 and 1887, planted many of the rare trees that still line the hospital campus and nearby hillside, and after whom the popular lake in Fort Steilacoom Park is named. The open field near what became Western State Hospital was eventually farmed as a form of therapy for patients, who grew fruit and vegetables as well as raised animals to feed fellow patients and staff.

During the hospital's farming heyday, the campus had more than 1,200 fruit trees (apple, cherry, plum, pear), 20 acres of vegetables, a dairy and a stable of animals that included 60,000 chickens, 2,200 turkeys and ducks, 800 hogs, and hundreds of cattle. One bovine in particular stood out above the rest...what was her name and her claim to fame?

Answer on Page 5!



MAGICAL MEMORIES OF *Christmas at Fort Steilacoom*

2021



Photos courtesy of Sydney Paulsen.

by Elizabeth Korsmo

Christmas at Fort Steilacoom made its long-awaited return in December 2021. Eager to be back, forty volunteers brought to life scenes of an 1863 Christmas in the Fort's historic cottages and parade grounds. Secretary Joe Lewis and Treasurer Michael McGuire greeted tour groups as they arrived at Quarters 4 and handled all the logistics during the evening. Our team of nine volunteer docents, headed by Past President Gideon Pete, led visitors through a candle-lit tour of holidays past.

Outdoors, the enlisted men on sentry duty found cheer around a small bonfire. In Quarters 3, the bachelor officers enjoyed their night off with card games, while the fort sutler kept late hours for off-duty soldiers to make some last-minute Christmas purchases. Young people from near and far took over the ready room in Quarters 2 for dancing and merriment. Claire Keller-Scholz and Kelsey Boyce provided live music for the occasion. In Quarters 1, an officer's family entertained friends from Steilacoom Town with food, song, and conversation. Of course, the highlight of the party was the parlor's candle-lit Christmas tree.

Fort Steilacoom's visitors were just as eager to be back as we all were. For the first time in the event's history, all of the scheduled tours sold out. If you missed the celebration—or want to relive the magic—Sydney Paulsen's enchanting photographs of the evening can be viewed on the [Historic Fort Steilacoom Facebook page](#).

The organizers would like to thank all of the volunteers, board members, and especially visitors who made the 2021 Christmas at Fort Steilacoom event possible. Watch for information in the fall newsletter on the 2022 Christmas at Fort Steilacoom event and mark your calendar for the second Saturday in December!



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Historic Fort Steilacoom
9601 Steilacoom Blvd SW
Lakewood WA 98498.
info@historicfortsteilacoom.org



Photos courtesy of Sydney Paulsen.

REINVENTING FORT STEILACOOM:

RETHINKING HOW WE TALK ABOUT LAKEWOOD'S FIRST INSTITUTION

by Walter Neary

In March of 1856, members of a Washington Territory militia massacred non-combatant Indians around the confluence of the Nisqually and Mashel Rivers. How do we know this? It's not the official story. The Olympia newspaper, *The Pioneer and Democrat*, served to write what today we would call press releases for Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens. The paper described the outcome as the result of heroic battles by the territorial volunteers.

We know about this massacre from three primary groups of sources. The first two don't involve Fort Steilacoom, so let's summarize them quickly—the oral traditions of the Nisqually Tribe and the memoirs of Ezra Meeker and James Wickersham. The third way we know of the massacre involves someone who met some of the survivors afterward, namely Augustus Kautz, the U.S. military officer who supervised the construction of the “permanent” buildings at Fort Steilacoom, including the four that form our museum today.

So how do we know about Kautz and the survivors? The mistreatment of Indians did not warrant any sort of special report in those times. Kautz's recollections come from his memoirs related to his attempted ascent of Mount Rainier. As he passed by a prairie, he wrote:

“ I had visited this spot, and camped nearby with a small detachment of troops, searching for Indians who had hidden away in these forests, completely demoralized and nearly starving. A family of two or three men, and quite a number of women and children, had camped in the fork of the Mishawh and Nesqually, about two miles from this prairie, and were making fish-traps to catch salmon. When we fell in with them we learned that the Washington Territory volunteers had been before us, and with their immensely superior force had killed the most of them without regard to age or sex. Our own little command in that expedition captured about thirty of these poor, half-starved, ignorant creatures, and no act of barbarity was perpetrated by us to mar the memory of that success. ”

(continued on Page 6)

TRIVIA ANSWER FROM THE FORT STEILACOOM ARCHIVES

According to the Winter 1999 edition of the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association's newsletter, in the article, *The Legacy of Fort Steilacoom*, by Steve Dunkelberger, "One note for the record books includes Steilacoom Prilly Holstein Blossom, a milk cow that produced 258,210 pounds of milk during her lifetime between 1921-38 at the farm. The amount was a world record at the time."



REINVENTING FORT STEILACOOM

(continued from Page 5)

The Army brought these Natives to a place of relative safety. They brought them to Lakewood. Well, it wasn't Lakewood then, of course. It was Fort Steilacoom.

The reason I share this story is that it seems important, and it's not a story we have often told around Fort Steilacoom. Part of the reason for this is that Fort Steilacoom has, during its history, been very focused on the buildings of Fort Steilacoom. But that's changing and evolving. Last winter, the board of directors approved an interpretive center plan which has been used to train docents. You can bet the plan includes references to our four buildings, because we're proud of them. But the plan also discusses the people and the place. Something I think we often fail to take credit for is that Fort Steilacoom has seen six different uses in its history. That's a lot; more than most areas in Washington, to be sure. Let's review those:

- The hunting and gathering grounds of the Nisqually, Puyallup, Steilacoom and other tribes.
- The farm of the Red River settlers from Canada, under the auspices of the Hudson's Bay Company.
- The farm of Joseph Heath.
- The first U.S. military post in Puget Sound, Fort Steilacoom, 1849-1868.
- The first formal mental health facility in Washington.
- A museum (which is of course what's there today) as the epicenter of the Fort Steilacoom District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Each one of these uses could generate a huge number of stories, yet our museum's focus has been primarily on the buildings. And of course, you can absolutely see why. In the 1980s, dozens of people mobilized to save the buildings from collapse. The men and women who saved those buildings held a grand opening, one by one, as each building was saved. It was done largely with volunteer labor, which is amazing.

It also tells you a bit about Washington and Washington's relationship to history. While volunteers saved the Alamo in a similar way, the Alamo is governed today by the Texas Land Office. I am pretty sure the government had a something to do with saving Fort Sutter near where I grew up in Sacramento, California. But perhaps in Washington, we like to do things ourselves. It was private citizens who mustered a small army to rebuild our buildings, and we should be just as proud as they were.

When our dear longtime secretary Orville Stout retired, he presented us with a hard drive full of images of the museum's history. There are countless photos of people posing happily next to buildings that they were preserving for us here in 2022. One photo is of Steilacoom Mayor Lyle Dunkin with then-Secretary of State Ralph Munro and Jean Gardner, wife of the governor at the time. The reconstruction of these buildings was, clearly, a big darn deal.

That said, with four glorious reminders of the pre-Civil War era in our backyard, we still have to remember that there is more to the story of Fort Steilacoom than our buildings. In future reports to the community, we'll be sure to share more of those stories. Yet we will also not lose sight of those buildings. It was in these buildings that our predecessors walked. They anchor us to the past.

I must conclude with a reminder that history doesn't just happen. It has a cost. Sometimes the cost is time. But sometimes the cost is money, such as what we pay for supplies to replace rotting boards. If you had been standing in the rain for 160 winters, you'd need repairs, too. Everyone at Fort Steilacoom would be grateful if you'd help us support the buildings and the stories in and around them. Memberships start at \$15, and you can sign up quickly and easily online at <https://historicfortsteilacoom.org/support>. We like to think that somewhere, Augustus Kautz would be smiling at your help. All this should be remembered and shared.

Author's note: If you'd like to read more about the Mashel Massacre, Historylink has a post at <https://www.historylink.org/File/8941>. This author thinks they are a bit hard on Meeker and Wickersham but the reader can make up their own mind.



MEET THE BOARD!

HELLO
MY NAME IS

Charlotte
Basch

by Erich R. Ebel

History has always been an important part of Charlotte Basch's life. It's largely why she was interested in joining the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association's board of directors in December 2020.

As the Historic Education Coordinator for the Puyallup Tribe's Historic Preservation Department, Charlotte recently participated in Fort Nisqually's *Indigenous Voices* podcast series with Metro Parks Tacoma, which can be heard at www.metroparkstacoma.org/indigenous-voices-podcast.



Charlotte is Clatsop-Nehalem and an enrolled member of the Puyallup Tribe.

HOW FAR BACK DOES YOUR INTEREST IN HISTORY GO?

"Growing up in the Northwest in a tribal community, I've always had a focus on culture and the interpretation of history. I remember being frustrated at not seeing my family's stories told in museums or in the curriculum of the local schools. And I was lucky to be surrounded by adults who helped me direct that frustration toward a career in the field where I could share and understand and interpret history."

WHAT STORIES FROM THE TREATY WAR ERA DO YOU REMEMBER LEARNING ABOUT GROWING UP?

"Actually, I don't remember much about that aspect of Washington history. Most of what we learned in school was focused on Lewis and Clark, and any stories beyond that would have been about the non-Native settlement of the territory. I didn't feel like there was a need to be interested in anything more until I came back after college and began to realize that my education had been incomplete. When I started working for the Tribe around 2018, I found stories that described my ancestors as 'warriors around the time of the treaty,' and I started putting the pieces together."

WHY WERE YOU DRAWN TO SERVE ON THE BOARD AT FORT STEILACOOM?

"It stemmed from work I was doing to help area tribes prevent a housing development from going up at Connell's Prairie in Pierce County, where several significant battles took place during the Treaty Wars. Our efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, but I was able to work with developers on the installation of interpretive historical signage around the property. In an effort to further uplift tribal perspectives of the Treaty Wars, I met Jim Lauderdale from Fort Nisqually, who invited me to learn more about Fort Steilacoom and its role in that time period as well."

WHAT UNIQUE ASPECTS DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO BRINGING TO THE FORT STEILACOOM STORY?

"There are so many different perspectives and experiences related to Fort Steilacoom, and the board has done a really incredible job ensuring the Fort's place in the lives of people locally as well as across Washington. However, there is room to expand on the diversity of those perspectives and weave more of the Native experience into the Fort's interpretation. The Nisqually Reservation is right next door to the Fort, and while efforts have been made to build and strengthen those relationships, they haven't yet reached a level of long-term sustainability. I think both my personal and professional backgrounds are well suited to help us move toward telling a more complete story that incorporates Native voices alongside those stories already being told. It becomes a lot more powerful when you can include a first-person narrative."



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DEVICE OR VISIT [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/CHARLOTTEBASCH](https://tinyurl.com/charlottebasch) TO
HEAR THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR CHARLOTTE BASCH!

EVENTS ON THE CALENDAR IN 2022

SUMMER TOURS BEGIN MAY 29

The fort will be open for summer tours beginning May 29 and will be open the first and third Sundays of each month before returning to first Sunday in September. Tickets are available through Eventbrite. It has always been free to visit our interpretive center, and you are welcome to drop in between 1 and 4 p.m. on tour days. However, because of the size of our historic buildings and small rooms, museum capacity will be limited. We require you to reserve a ticket for each person, even if admission for them is free. Printed copies of your tickets are not needed.

AROUND THE COUNTY

The Historic Fort Steilacoom Association will have a presence at a number of public events throughout 2022. Look for our booth at the Fourth of July Street Fair in downtown Steilacoom on July 4, as well as at Lakewood SummerFEST on July 23. And mark your calendars for a visit on Museum Day, September 17, as well as Christmas at Fort Steilacoom on December 10! More information can be found at our website, historicfortsteilacoom.org/events.

EDITOR'S PILOGUE

FROM ONE FORT TO ANOTHER

Buildings tell stories. On a recent trip with my son and his Scouts BSA troop to Fort Flagler on Marrowstone Island in Jefferson County, I was asked to give a history talk about the Fort and its importance to U.S. and Washington state coastal defense. Though constructed nearly fifty years after the establishment of Fort Steilacoom, there are a surprising number of connections between the two. Both forts were established to protect the citizenry of the area from enemy attack. Both were considered the front line of defense during their respective conflicts. And, much more indirectly, the Pacific Bridge Company—the firm that won the contract to build Forts Flagler, Casey, and Worden—also built the first Tacoma Narrows Bridge just six miles north of Fort Steilacoom before it spectacularly collapsed in 1941.

Those who love walking through the buildings at Fort Steilacoom no doubt muse over the conversations that may have taken place within their walls, contemplated the decision-making that military brass may have undertaken, or simply let their imaginations run free as they picture themselves living in another time. It is no different at Fort Flagler, or any of the other six Endicott-era fortifications in Washington, as visitors today try to imagine looking out across an Admiralty Inlet dotted with floating mines, or feeling their bodies struck by the concussive power of a 6-inch disappearing artillery gun firing at a target 7 miles away.

The point is this...no matter where you find yourself in Washington, it is a worthwhile endeavor to consider those who came before you, the situations they faced, decisions they made, and what may have motivated them to take one action or another.

That's what makes history so fascinating for many of us, and helps to not only connect us to our past, but build relationships today that will help us forge a better future.



3-inch pedestal mounted M1903 gun on permanent display at Battery Wansboro, Fort Flagler State Park.