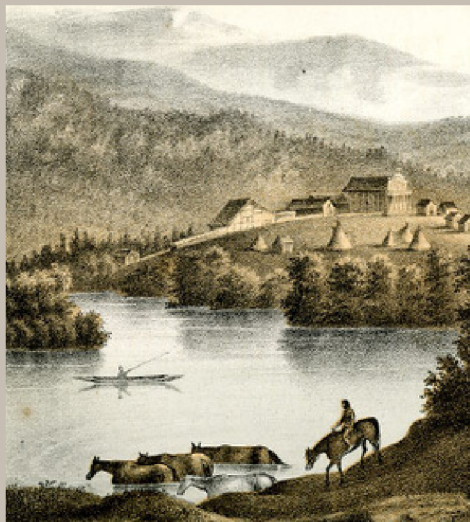


Fort Steilacoom

www.HistoricFortSteilacoom.org



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Painting by Gustav Sohon depicting Indians meeting with Gov. Isaac Stevens at the Walla Walla Council in 1855.



HOW WE CAN HELP PEOPLE LOOK BEYOND THE CIVIL WAR

by Walter Neary



What a warm and wonderful summer we're having. Here at the fort, we welcome so many visitors who exclaim that phrase we hear so often: *"I drive past this place every day/week/so often, and I had no idea the fort was here!"*

Each time I hear that, I reflect on how I only recently figured out why that is. It's only within the last year that I've realized the biggest challenge facing Fort Steilacoom's mission of telling the stories of the fort and community around it.

The lesson came to me, as so many life lessons do, by surprise. I'd like to share the insight with you for your own reflection and because I'd love to hear your thoughts.

The conversation was casual. It took place before one of the many online meetings we held last year on Zoom. I thanked the speaker. I said something to the effect of, *"Thank you for speaking with us."*

The speaker replied with words I shall paraphrase: *"Thank you for talking to me about the 1850s. Nobody wants to talk about the 1850s. They all want to talk about the Civil War."*

Ah, yes, the Civil War.

If you ask the average person to name one historic event of the 19th century in the United States, they're usually going to refer to the Civil War. For many people, that includes the related developments of slavery, abolition, and early reconstruction. That whole period gets a lot of attention.

Well, of course it does. Slavery was horrific. In the war, brother shot at brother.

There are a whole bunch of runners-up for the biggest story of the 19th Century. You all would have your own lists. I grew up in Sacramento with stories of the California Gold Rush. Many people would cite the Mexican War, the Louisiana Purchase, the voyages of Lewis and Clark, the Yukon Gold Rush, and so forth. And this is not to mention the many big-picture stories of the 19th century, whether that's wars on Native peoples or industrialization or many other possibilities. So where does that leave, "The settlement of Washington Territory of the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s?"

What we do right now is tell our stories to a few people on selected Sundays during tours of the fort. Certainly, that's a good thing to do. Certainly, some folks learn that important people walked the earth during an important time in history. It does not hurt that our fort was a "boot camp," as our members know, for many participants in the Civil War.

But given that our challenge is that the Civil War takes the oxygen from the room, I wonder if we have to do more. Let's remember the famous phrase: If you keep doing the same things, you will get the same results.

I'll leave you with a thought: For as long as I've been involved in the fort (off and on since 1996ish), it has been a truism that we only share our newsletter with paid members. If you want to know the deepest stories of Fort Steilacoom, you pay—and support repairs and restoration.

But if the challenge is that not enough people know our story, does that strategy still hold true? Let's draw a comparison. Please, for a moment, forget you ever heard of George Lucas and the Star Wars saga.

Suppose I believed that there was a really important story out there about a kid named Luke Skywalker. Suppose I wanted you all to know about him. So, suppose I created a newsletter about this kid, and shared his story with people who have a passion for Galactic Empire history. I charged them \$20 a year...not a high price.

If I was busy doing that, surely I would not bother making a movie called "Star Wars," because I've got a newsletter, right? So let's ask the question—would the story of Luke Skywalker get more attention if it were shared in a newsletter to members of a club, or if it were made into a movie?

And then let's end the analogy and return to our home in Fort Steilacoom. How can we best inspire people with the stories of this time and place? How can we let people know the gripping events and fascinating people of Washington Territory, resound with implications for all of us?

In a world wrapped about the Civil War, how does the tale of Fort Steilacoom surface?

Let's talk about that in the next issue, shall we? And in the meantime, your thoughts are as welcome as a double sunset on Luke's home planet of Tatooine.

THE STORY OF A DEATH, AND THE BIRTH OF A WAR

by Gideon Pete

The Yakima War began in spurts following Governor Isaac Stevens' Treaty of Walla Walla in June of 1855, fading to a conclusion in the fall of 1856.

A precipitating incident for the war was the death of Andrew Jackson Bolon, a governor's subagent for the Indian tribes, who was killed by members of the Yakama nation. His death sparked widespread rumors and fears of a general Indian uprising, even though many of the tribes held peaceful relations with the settlers, never taking part in any hostilities.

Bolon's death triggered a two-pronged military punitive action that was both loosely coordinated and unsuccessful.

The Cayuse, Umatilla, Yakama, and Walla Walla Tribes were not satisfied with Stevens' treaty (which promised land to the Natives), nor with the continuing influx of U.S. citizens. Just two weeks after the signing of the treaty, several small parties of Seattle gold prospectors set out for the Colville region through Yakama country by way of the Saint Joseph Mission at Ahtanum. It was rumored that six of them had been killed by the Yakamas in retaliation for offenses they had apparently committed against two Yakama women and a child.

Bolon, subagent for the Yakamas, was on his way to Spokane country where he expected to meet Governor Stevens on his return from Fort Benton, to assist him in creating treaties with neighboring tribes. Bolon passed The Dalles on this errand, where he met Chief Garry of the Spokane Tribe who shared the news. Bolon turned back at once to investigate.

A Catholic mission near the home of Kamiakin—a leader of the Yakama, Palouse, and Klickitat—was between 60 and 70 miles northeast of The Dalles. Bolon, determined to go there to learn from Kamiakin himself the truth of the stories concerning the Yakama in these killings, set out alone on his trip to show his confidence in the good faith of the tribe, and to disarm any fears they might have of the intentions of the territorial government.

(continued on Page 4)



Indian Subagent Andrew Bolon

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TRIVIA FROM THE FORT STEILACOOM ARCHIVES

Steilacoom's first newspaper had a masthead proclaiming it to be, "A weekly journal devoted to agriculture, literature, useful sciences, arts, politics, news, and general intelligence." In its first issue, the editors gave a general description of the Steilacoom area, including a bit about Fort Steilacoom:



Fort Steilacoom, at which are stationed two companies of the 4th Infantry, is distant one and a half miles from the town, and to this point ... government constructed a military road from Fort Walla Walla, and in that year a small number of immigrants came over it and settled upon the Sound.



In what year was that first edition published and what was its name?

Answer on Page 5!



THE STORY OF A DEATH, AND THE BIRTH OF A WAR

(continued from Page 3)

Bolon's absence went far beyond the time required for the trip, so Nathan Olney, an agent at The Dalles, sent an Indian to determine the cause. The Indian returned with news that Kamiakin's nephew, Qualchien, had participated in the earlier killings of the six miners, and that Bolon had been murdered by an Indian named Mosheel, the son of Yakama chief Shumaway, at the encouragement of Kamiakin. Along with others, Mosheel pretended to escort Bolon on his homeward journey, then—according to a purported eyewitness—cut his throat, shot his horse, burned them both, and buried the bodies.

All this Kamiakin confessed to Olney's messenger, who acted as a spy. The spy quoted Kamiakin as saying he would carry out a war to enforce the treaty, that he was insistent no Americans should come into his country, was inviting all tribes to join him, and would consider anyone who refused the invitation to be his enemy and therefore treated in the same manner as the Americans—all the adults would be killed, and their children enslaved. Father Jean Baptiste Brouillet, vicar general of the Walla Walla Diocese, confirmed the report in a letter to Olney that war had been the chief topic among the Yakamas since their return from the council.

Without any official pronouncement, rumor of the threatened violence spread. In late September, returning miners brought the report that some citizens had been killed in passing through the Yakima country. That some miners had mistreated Indians was not reported nor apparently considered as a factor. As soon as it was confirmed, acting Governor Charles H. Mason made a requisition upon forts Vancouver and Steilacoom for troops to protect travelers going by that route, also suggesting to the commanding officers that—as Governor Stevens was expected in Spokane country that month—a detachment of soldiers might assist him.

Meanwhile, Major Gabriel J. Raines, who regarded Kamiakin as one of the chiefs to be most feared, ordered 84 men under Major Granville O. Haller from Fort Dalles to enter Yakima country and combine with a force from Fort Steilacoom. Haller left Fort Dalles on October 3rd, and three days later encountered a skirmish with a large band of Yakama warriors at Toppenish Creek. The fight lasted another two days, with Haller being repulsed, losing five dead, 17 wounded, along with a howitzer and most of his equipment. He withdrew, fighting sporadically until his force reached safety on high ground across the Columbia from The Dalles.

Lt. William A. Slaughter left Fort Steilacoom with a company of 50 men on September 27th, intending to link up with Major Haller. Warned of Haller's defeat by a civilian scout, Slaughter wisely returned to the area of the White River to await reinforcements.

Acting Governor Mason declared war on the Indians, authorizing the formation of two companies of volunteer militia. Once word reached the Department of the Pacific, General John E. Wool dispatched 70 men to Fort Vancouver and asked for a regiment from the east coast, which was granted. It soon became clear this would be a hard war.

To learn more about Bolon's death and its ramifications, visit <https://www.historylink.org/File/8118>. Historic Fort Steilacoom exists on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish peoples whose ancestors resided here since time immemorial and stewarded this land throughout the generations. Our association acknowledges the complex history of the Fort and its role in the colonization of the area. We are actively working to incorporate the diverse perspectives and experiences of all individuals and communities who interacted with the fort.

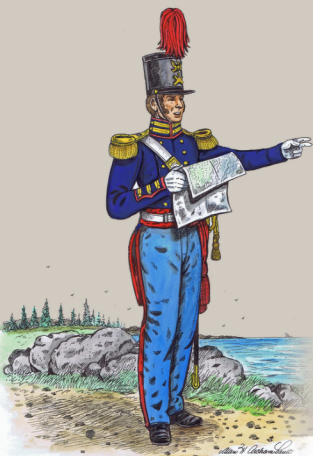
If you'd like to be part of these discussions of how to interpret and share the history of the fort and the 1850s in the United States, we'd love to hear from you. Email us at info@historicfortsteilacoom.org.



1855 sketch of Spokan Garry, Spokane Tribal Chief, by Gustav Sohon.



1855 sketch of Kamiakin, Chief of the Yakama, by Gustav Sohon.



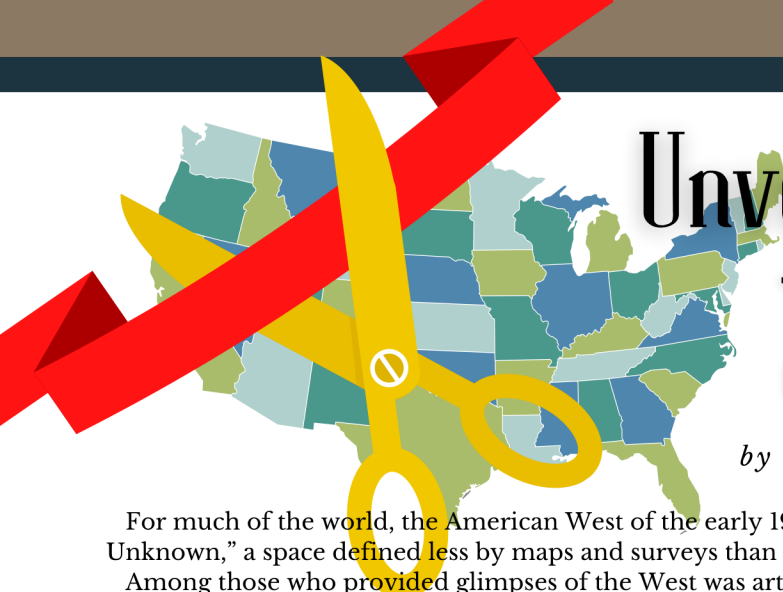
MILITARY UNIFORMS OF FORT STEILACOOM

by Alan Archambault

This painting represents the first commanding officer of Fort Steilacoom, Captain Bennett Hill, as he may have appeared while establishing the post in August 1849. Captain Hill is depicted in his dress uniform since it was customary for officers to wear their best uniforms when representing the U.S. Army to civilian or foreign officials.

Captain Hill wears an officer's shako adorned with ostrich feathers, an eagle insignia and crossed cannons and numeral 1. His blue wool coatee is trimmed with gold lace and he wears fringed epaulettes indicating his rank. He is armed with a sword and silk sash as befitting a company officer. Although seemingly impractical today, this impressive uniform was worn to reflect the power and prestige of the United States on the Pacific Coast.

Plate 1. Captain, Company M, 1st United States Artillery Regiment Dress Uniform, 1849



Unveiling the Northwest:

The Legacy of Gustav Sohon

by Karen Meador

For much of the world, the American West of the early 19th century was “The Great Unknown,” a space defined less by maps and surveys than by myths and illusions.

Among those who provided glimpses of the West was artist, interpreter, explorer, and topographer, Gustav Sohon, posted briefly at Fort Steilacoom early in his Army career (1852-57). Producing some of the earliest landscape paintings and sketches of the Pacific Northwest, along with portraits of Native chiefs and other notable figures, he unveiled previously unseen views of the culture, people, and landscape of the mid-19th century Pacific Northwest.

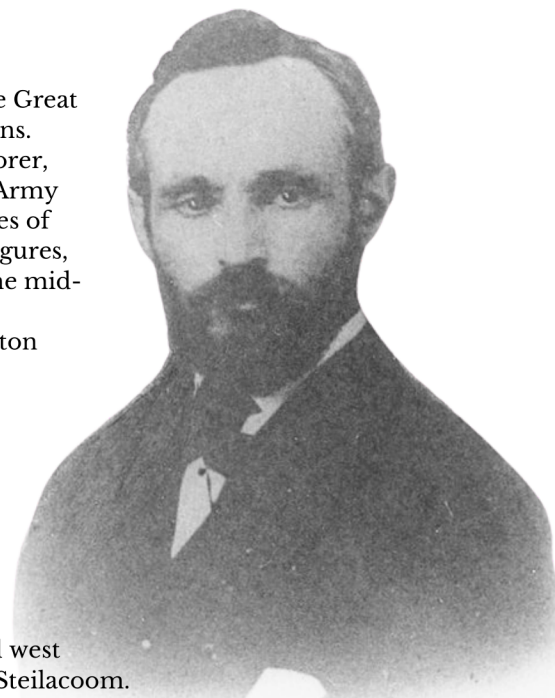
Gustav Sohon accompanied four historic expeditions across eastern Washington — the 1853-1854 Pacific railroad survey, the 1855 treaty tour of Governor Isaac Stevens (1818-1862), the 1858 military campaign of Colonel George Wright (1803-1865) against the Plateau tribes, and the construction of a noteworthy wagon road by Lieutenant John Mullan from 1859-1862. A man of exceptional talents and versatility, Sohon served as a guide, explorer, interpreter, and cartographer, but is best known as an artist whose pencil sketches and watercolors of notable figures and landmarks provide valuable eyewitness records of a transitional period in the history of the American West.

Born in East Prussia in 1825, Gustav Sohon immigrated to the United States in 1842 at the age of 17. Enlisting in the Army in the early 1850s, he was ordered west for service on the Pacific coast and assigned to Fort Vancouver, and later, Fort Steilacoom.

He became part of a detail supplying food and equipment to the command of Isaac Stevens, then in the process of conducting a survey for a transcontinental railroad route across the Great Plains and through the northern Rockies to the Pacific Northwest. Quickly recognizing Sohon's intelligence and creative talents, Stevens transferred Sohon to his immediate command. Starting with this assignment and for the next ten years, Sohon was closely involved in the exploration and mapping of the northern Rockies and the Pacific Northwest.

A gifted linguist, fluent in English, German, and French, Sohon quickly learned a number of Native American languages, including that of the Flatheads and Nez Perce. This unique ability prompted Stevens and later, John Mullan, to employ him as an interpreter whenever needed. This was particularly advantageous during Stevens' 1855 treaty expedition, where Sohon's humanity and interpretive skills were displayed in the Treaty Councils where he participated in negotiations and documented events in his illustrations.

Sohon's brand of diplomacy created trust among many indigenous people, allowing him unique access and enabling him to create portraits of Native chiefs and other notables. Stevens instructed Mullan to establish winter quarters in the Bitterroot Valley and survey the passes through the Rockies. Sohon was among the 15 men accompanying Mullan, where he began compiling a dictionary of Salish words and phrases as well as sketching portraits of Flathead and Pend Oreille tribal members and scenes of landscapes and events.



(continued on Page 6)

TRIVIA ANSWER FROM THE FORT STEILACOOM ARCHIVES

According to the [Summer 2007 edition of the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association's newsletter](#), in the article, *Waiting for the Weekly News: A look at Steilacoom's Early Newspapers*, by Nancy Covert, the first issue of Steilacoom's first paper, *Puget Sound Courier*, was published in May 1855. The publication didn't last long, however, on account of a lack of advertisers and poor sales. It was soon replaced by *The Washington Republican*, published in 1857. Learn more in the [HFSA Newsletter Archives!](#)



UNVEILING THE NORTHWEST: THE LEGACY OF GUSTAV SOHON

(continued from Page 5)

On other occasions, working alone, he traveled along the Palouse River in eastern Washington, mapping the land and taking elaborate notes of what he observed along the route, usually on a mile-by-mile basis.

Sohon was instrumental in the construction of the Mullan Road, a 624-mile military wagon route constructed to connect the Columbia River with the Missouri River—the first wagon road from Fort Benton to Fort Walla Walla. Sohon produced the only images of the road during its construction, many of which were published in the project report submitted to the House of Representatives. He created maps of many of the regions east of the Coeur d'Alene mission in northern Idaho and discovered a pass in this area (later named for him) that could be used to cross the Bitterroot Mountains.

During this period, Sohon accompanied Lt. Mullan, who had volunteered to provide topographic services for the military expedition headed by Col. George Wright. Sohon drew intriguing images on this assignment, as it was one of the rare times in the history of the American West that an artist directly observed military engagements and created precise illustrations of battles. Documenting the war as it took place, Sohon also produced beautiful landscapes of falls, vegetation, and mountain scenery along the route traversed by the military.

Most of Sohon's artistic and cartographic works were created while he was employed by the U.S. government between the years 1852 and 1863. After marriage to Julia Groh in 1863, he moved to San Francisco, where he opened a photography studio; by 1865, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he operated a shoe business. His interest in the development of the Pacific Northwest continued, and on several occasions Native Americans visited their esteemed friend. When a Flathead Indian delegation under Chief Charlot visited the nation's capital in 1884, they, too, called upon Sohon.

Gustav Sohon died in 1903 in Washington, D.C., at the age of 78. In 1947, his daughter, Elizabeth, donated 25 of her father's original drawings to the Smithsonian Institution. The Library of Congress, Washington State Historical Society, and Washington State University hold many of his illustrations, as well...unique eyewitness documents from a crucial period of Northwest history.



*Clark's Fork, south of Flathead Lake, Montana.
Painting by Gustav Sohon, 1855.*

UW I-SCHOOL MAKES SEARCHING EASY



by Erich R. Ebel

As longtime readers of the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association's newsletter know, it contains valuable information about the fort's deep ties to local and national history. Over 150 of these newsletter articles are available online but are only organized by basic bibliographic information. This presents all kinds of challenges to those looking to make a precise discovery.

Fortunately, your HFSA board of directors has recently partnered with the University of Washington's Information School (iSchool) to assist with this issue. Thanks to the efforts of Jennifer Stetson, Drew Jackson, Melissa Morgan, and Miles Stepleton, students with the iSchool's Master of Science in Information Management (MSIM) program, the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association newsletters

will soon have a custom indexing language, tagged newsletter articles, and a prototype of a searchable web-based index. Additionally, the indexing language will better represent the history of women and indigenous people at the fort.

What does all that mean, you may ask? Currently, to find an article from a past newsletter one must either remember the decade in which it was published (80s? 90s? 2000s?), recall the volume and edition when an article ran (you remember that intriguing article on Fort Steilacoom's connection to Gettysburg in Volume 17's summer issue, don't you?), or simply visit the online table of contents and meticulously pick through each issue, hoping to click on the right Silas Casey article from the two dozen or so in the archive.

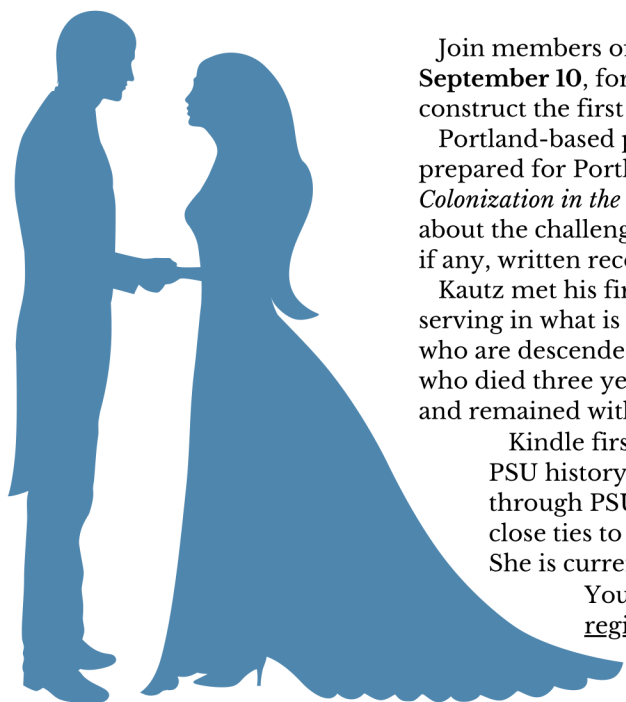
By "tagging" each article, iSchool

students are assigning key words and phrases that share a commonality with other article topics. By using a custom indexing language, the new search functionality will produce better, more accurate results. Further, much of the information about women and indigenous people is either limited or contains inaccuracies. The new indexing language will flag outdated terminology as well as highlight any potential gaps in the research.

For those interested in learning more, the iSchool has a webpage devoted to the project, as well as a video that explains in detail how the project was carried out—which can be found at <https://ischool.uw.edu/capstone/projects/2022/constructing-indexing-language-historic-fort-steilacoom>.

THE MANY WIVES OF GENERAL AUGUST V. KAUTZ

COLONIZATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1853-1895



Join members of the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association at 2 p.m. on Saturday, September 10, for a presentation about the three wives of the man who helped construct the first official U.S. Army fort in Puget Sound.

Portland-based public historian Nicole Kindle will speak on the title of a paper she prepared for Portland State University, *"The Many Wives of General August V. Kautz: Colonization in the Pacific Northwest, 1853-1895."* The talk will include information about the challenges of researching and writing the history of women who left few, if any, written records.

Kautz met his first wife, Kitty, a member of the Nisqually Tribe, when he was serving in what is now Lakewood. The tribe today includes many dozen members who are descended from Augustus and Kitty. In 1865, Kautz married Charlotte Tod, who died three years later of typhoid fever. He married Fannie Markbreit in 1872 and remained with her until his death in 1895.

Kindle first learned about Kautz when she was a graduate student with the PSU history department and working as a research assistant on a joint project through PSU and the National Park Service at Fort Vancouver, which had close ties to Fort Steilacoom. She graduated with a Master's in history in 2019. She is currently an administrator at PSU.

You can sign up on Zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/tZcocO6prTktG9cog6VAXobvxSNmUQClyn9T>. We're investigating whether we can offer the talk in person as well, so please watch for more information. If you don't see anything by Sept. 1, e-mail us at info@historicfortsteilacoom.org.

OTHER EVENTS COMING IN 2022

SEPTEMBER 17 IS MUSEUM DAY

The board of Historic Fort Steilacoom greatly appreciates Smithsonian magazine, which organizes an annual museum day with free admission. Historic Fort Steilacoom will be open for free tours on the 17th from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. To get into the spirit of the event, you can go to the [Smithsonian Museum website](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/museum-day) to learn more about Museum Day and sign up for tickets. However, we'll happily take you without tickets as long as you say it's Museum Day...we'd love to see you there!

HISTORIC FORT STEILACOOM BOOK SALE

Mark your calendars for October 1 and the return of the Historic Fort Steilacoom Book Sale! Open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., we will open the doors at 9 a.m. for Historic Fort Steilacoom Association members to get a head start on bargain hunting. We are not taking additional donations for the book sale at this time, but financial donations for the fort are always welcome, and we appreciate your help spreading the word!



OLD KEPI LOOKING TIRED AND WORN OUT?

Refresh your look with a new one from the Historic Fort Steilacoom gift shop! Come by Quarters 4 between 1 and 4 p.m. on the first Sundays of each month to choose the cap that's right for you. Or pick some up for the kids and grandkids! Kepis are only \$10.00 plus tax. Browse the other products in the gift shop for more great finds.

GOT ANY HISTORIC STUFF?

Hello members! In an effort to better serve those of you who have generously loaned your personal items to our museum exhibits, the Board of Directors would like to complete an inventory of these personal items.

If you have any personal items currently on loan to the museum, please email us at info@historicfortsteilacoom.org and notify us of what those items are and where they are located. If we don't know an item is yours, the fort will assume the fort owns the item; it could be moved or de-accessioned.

Our interpretive center committee will be in touch with you if additional information is needed.



DITOR'S PILOQUE

HISTORY IN THE COMMUNITY

When I was growing up, I remember watching a Civil War reenactment and thinking how cool it was that I was seeing history unfold again before my very eyes. It was almost as if I was witnessing a ghostly recreation of events that had already transpired over a century before, and that was one of the many things that helped inspire in me a love of history.

To this day, whenever I see a costumed reenactor at a fair, museum program, or community event, I'm instantly transported back to that time as a child, and it stirs up fond memories. I have an irresistible impulse to have my picture taken with the person. I want to ask questions about why the costume looks a certain way, or whether that person designs their own period clothing, or how one would even go about shopping for a sabre in today's market.

My point is that children today aren't really that much different than they were in the late 20th century, and for men and women brave enough to don a costume from the past, there are usually children present experiencing the same feelings as I did all those years ago. It's a magical moment for some, one that could potentially direct the course of someone's future career or passion.

Between August 18 and 21, nearly 2,000 Scouts and scouting families attended WashJam 2022 at Fort Steilacoom Park. Many of them ventured across Steilacoom Boulevard to visit Historic Fort Steilacoom, and, with a little luck, some of them may have been irreversibly bitten by the history bug as well. Special thanks to those who get to inspire the next generation.



Board members were delighted to see so many of you at the Fourth of July street fair in Steilacoom. Many thanks to Austin Rice for wearing this in the heat and interacting with so many people at the event!