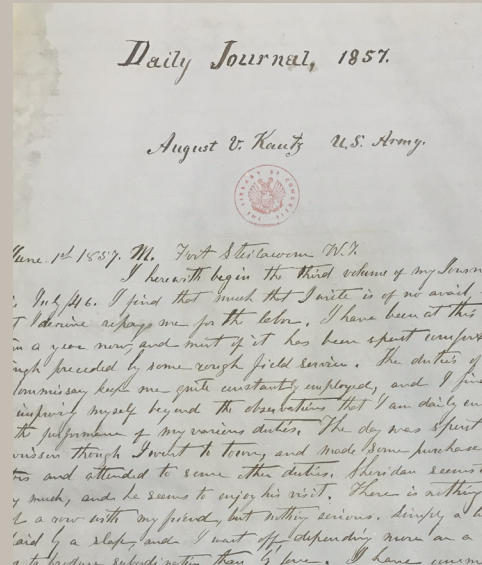


Fort Steilacoom

www.HistoricFortSteilacoom.org



In this edition:

**E.P. Alexander: Nostalgia
for Fort Steilacoom**

3

**August Kautz: His legacy
and his journals**

5

**August Kautz: An intro
and a personal letter**

6



Fort Steilacoom's history should be told—in full. It won't happen under DSHS's care

On April 27, *The News Tribune* [published a guest editorial](#) by Historic Fort Steilacoom Association President Walter Neary. Here is a slightly longer version:



When it comes to celebrating history, Washington State is unique. Not in a good way.

[Fort Steilacoom](#) will celebrate its 175th anniversary in 2024. Four buildings survive and you can walk through them today. Their ownership is what makes them unique. Why?

Wyoming's [Fort Laramie](#) is run by the National Park Service. In Texas, [Fort Croghan](#) is run by Burnet County's historical commission and heritage society. Nevada's [Fort Churchill](#) is run by State Parks. I could go on. Everywhere else, first and early forts are administered by groups with expertise in parks and museums.

So, who do you think owns some of the most historic ground in Washington State? A psychiatric hospital—[Western State Hospital](#) and its parent, the state Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS). That's unique. We're not aware of many U.S. military sites of nationwide significance governed by a psychiatric hospital. So, what's wrong with being unique?

Hospitals and museums are different things.

Now, I want to make it clear, this is no insult to Western State Hospital or DSHS, but hospitals and museums are different things. Thank heavens Western State is doing what it does, but it's not a museum. It might seem silly to say, "Hospitals and museums are different things," out loud because it seems obvious. But I must. We've normalized this strange relationship in Washington.

The reason is complex. The fort was decommissioned in 1868. Its buildings housed the first behavioral health facilities of Washington. The hospital moved into newer buildings nearby, but the fort buildings remain on Western State's front lawn—the old military parade grounds.

In the 1970s, DSHS appeared happy to let the aging fort buildings cave in. That's reasonable because DSHS is not a museum. Instead, the four historic buildings were restored several decades ago at the expense of volunteers. The grounds and buildings still belong to Western State.

Western State Hospital's staff doesn't have time to take on the skills in history, storytelling, museums, and education. In practical terms, few resources and little expertise are going into telling the story of Washington Territory. Does that matter? The answer depends on whether you think we learn anything from history. The history of Fort Steilacoom is challenging. Fort Steilacoom is part of U.S. Army history in such disputes as a [border face-off with Great Britain](#).

But parts of the fort's history can be hard to tell. Its forces were part of the war on Indigenous Tribes. Later, the Army would protect Native Americans from vigilante civilian militias, but not at first. Fort Steilacoom housed [Chief Leschi](#) during his civilian trials so he would not be murdered in a civilian jail. Turned out civilian authorities staged a trial to hang Leschi even though Army officers knew he was innocent.

The Army obeyed the law and handed Leschi over. But Col. Silas Casey refused to allow a legal lynching to take place on Army soil. So the civilians hanged Leschi in what's now a neighborhood that got attention just a few months ago when a [monument to Leschi was knocked over](#).

This is a complicated, emotional story to tell. We are grateful for support from Tribal members on our museum board, but this is a story that should involve the community. We need expertise in telling stories like this. There are lessons to be learned.

Fort Steilacoom's officers went on to fight in the Civil War. That connection is the reason many people visit our museum today. You can walk on the same floor as George Pickett who became a major general in the Confederate Army. [Pickett's Charge](#) contributed to the end of the Confederacy, one of the most famous events of the Civil War.

Many other Fort Steilacoom figures played a role in that war. The officer who supervised construction of Fort Steilacoom's buildings, August Kautz, served on the tribunal that tried the Lincoln assassins.

We all know that parts of the Civil War are still being fought today. Again, the Civil War and its past and present context are a [complicated, emotional story](#).

Maybe today we don't want to think about the Treaty War. Maybe we don't want to think about the divisions of the Civil War. If you don't want to confront and share these stories, then it makes sense to sideline Fort Steilacoom with a parent organization with no expertise in museums, history, or education.

But if we do think history can teach us something, then it makes sense to look for a new parent for Historic Fort Steilacoom.

Because hospitals and museums are different things.



Edward Porter Alexander: Nostalgia for Fort Steilacoom

Edward Porter Alexander (May 26, 1835 – April 28, 1910) was a military engineer, railroad executive, planter, and author. He served first as an officer in the United States Army and later, during the Civil War, in the Confederate Army, rising to the rank of brigadier general.

He was born in Washington, Georgia, into a wealthy and distinguished family of planters of the Old South. He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1857. His final assignments for the U.S. Army were at Fort Steilacoom, and at Alcatraz Island, near San Francisco.

In 1897, Lt. Alexander published memoirs with a portion dedicated to his nostalgia for his days at Fort Steilacoom. The following is part one of an excerpt from the typescript held at the University of North Carolina. The next edition of the newsletter will feature part two.

From the memoirs of E.P. Alexander, part one:

The sappers with whom I came to serve were under command of 1st Lieut. Thomas Lincoln Casey of the engineers. I had known him slightly at West Point before I went to Utah. His wife, Emma, was a daughter of dear old Professor Robert Weir, professor of drawing at West Point.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to say that among all the many friendships which Miss Teen and I have made, in our varied journeyings, our friendship with the Caseys was one of the very dearest and it has proved the very longest of all in its duration. It continues today with poor Mrs. Casey, Tom having died last year after being retired as Brig. General and Chief of Engineers, though still charged with and having nearly completed one of the great works of his life, the Congressional Library in Washington City...

Tom and Emma met us on the dock at Steilacoom City and drove up in the post ambulance to the fort, where we became the guests of his father, Lt. Colonel Silas Casey of the 9th Infantry, who was in command of the post. I am tempted to linger a little over our six months stay at Fort Steilacoom. As I look back at it, now it seems to have been the last of my youth.

Our garrison consisted, besides the sappers, of two companies of the 9th Infantry. The other officers, besides the Casey mentioned, were Captain Thomas English; Lieut. David McKibben, both married; Lieut. Arthur Shaaf; Quartermaster Major "Nosey" Myers; Chaplain Rev. Mr. Kendig (married); Paymaster Major A.B. Ragan, with Mrs. Ragan and two adopted children (Frank and Wyly B.) and her brother, John Ector; the surgeon Dr. Brown and family soon succeeded, however, by young Dr. Vansant and he later by Dr. Heger. In Colonel Casey's household, beside Mrs. Casey, were also his two sweet daughters, Abbie who while we were there married Captain Hunt of the 4th Infantry and beautiful Bessie with her lovely eyes, who afterwards became Mrs. Robert N. Scott.

Besides these families there was the family of the sutler, a Mr. Bachelder, who were visited by the ladies, and there were also Capt. Fauntleroy in command of the armed steamer Massachusetts with his wife.

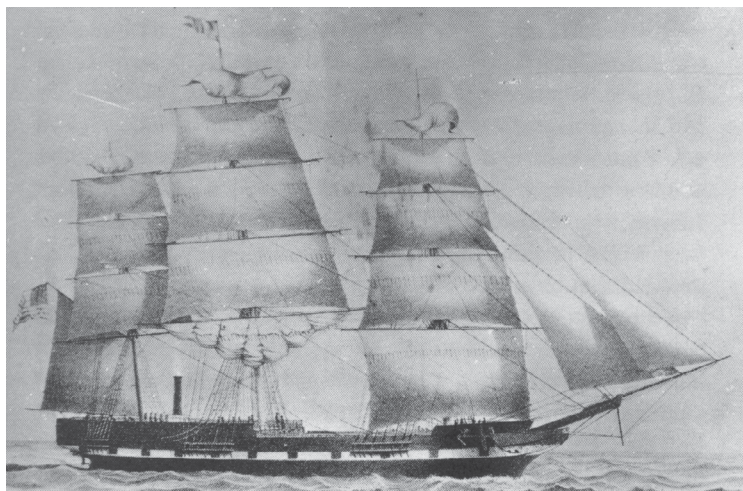


Illustration of USS Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts did not belong to the Navy, but was kept by the army to protect the settlers and Puget Sound Indians from a very warlike Alaska Tribe, the Stikines, who sometimes made incursions in immense war canoes carrying 60 warriors each. Captain Fauntleroy was a Virginian, son of a former army officer, celebrated as a great rifle shot and he had with him a Midshipman, Barron, son of Commodore Barron who I think fought a duel with Commodore Decatur.

We stayed with Colonel Casey as his guests for about two weeks. His quarters were a double cottage, 1.5 stories facing the center of the parade ground; 4 rooms and 2 shed rooms on the lower

continued on next page

From the memoirs of E.P. Alexander, part one (cont'd):

floor and four rooms in the ½ story above. On each side of it were three other cottages with two full rooms and two shed rooms below and two rooms in the ½ story above.

After looking around we found our only chance for quarters was to divide the cottage next on the right to Colonel Casey's with Lieut. Shaaf who being unmarried only needed half of the downstairs. He took the rooms on ones' left entering.



Commander's quarters, Fort Steilacoom.

The right front room, on entering, was our parlor and dining room. The rear or shed room was the kitchen. Upstairs, the upstairs rooms had no fireplaces. Our bedroom was over our parlor, which was the side next to Colonel Casey's, and Anne, our cook and house girl, whom we had brought from West Point, had the room over Shaaf's parlor for her bedroom.



Soldiers' barracks, Fort Steilacoom.

It took us some little time to find all the furniture, bedding etc. we needed to go to housekeeping, but we finally got fixed sending thirty miles to Olympia, the capital, for some things, getting some in Steilacoom and some at Nisqually, a fort or station of the Hudson Bay Company on the prairie about six miles to the south.

Mount Rainier, in the southeast across the parade ground, towered high above the Cascade Range which bounds the horizon there, apparently some forty to fifty miles away. The country is one of interspersed prairie and forests of fir, with many little lakes scattered about, a dozen or more within an hour's walk.

Since the war (Civil War) the fort has been given to the territory for an insane asylum and Miss Teen and I revisited it in 1892. Colonel Casey's quarters and our house on the right and Tom Casey's on its left were the only buildings left of the officers' quarters existing in our day, but some of the old soldiers barracks and the old trees about the vicinity still stood. We walked out to the little lake nearby where we used to walk in the old days of our honeymoon and cut our initials on a tree with the dates '61 and '92.

One of our favorite walks, too, was to a little mill pond, about a mile north on a stream flowing into the Sound, a deep ravine. Here Miss Teen would sit on the bank and read while I, out on a log, could always catch a fine string of brook trout in a little while. Indeed, we nearly lived on game and fish.

I bought a nice pony which Colonel Casey kept in his stable, for the privilege of joint use by his daughters. Once a week I would ride down to the mouth of the Puyallup River, where the City of Tacoma is now situated, and leaving Charley, the pony, at the house of a Swede named DeLinn, who had a little shingle mill on a little brook emptying into the Sound, I would walk up a mile or two to the Indian village on the Puyallup River and get an Indian to take me in his Kynim to paddle around the flats and creeks at the mouth of the river for a cultus mimeloose Kulla-Kulla, or for amusement kill ducks. I could usually get fifteen or twenty by the time he would land me at Delinns. And if I cared to get any pheasants, I could always get them in an adjacent crab apple thicket with Mrs. Delinns' little dog.

About five miles southeast from the fort was a large lake, about one mile wide by four long, which was a great resort for wild geese to roost in. At least twice every week I would get up long before day and saddle Charley and by dawn would be on the far side of the lake to get a shot at the geese as they flew for their feeding grounds, and I usually brought one or two. One afternoon I walked out and back and brought in seven.

Occasionally, too, I would go deer hunting on the islands in the sound with Capt. Fauntleroy, but only once did we get a deer. Then I killed it, running in the woods, one hundred yards off by a wonderful chance shot, with the old small bore rifle of Capt. Fauntleroy's father, the bullet hitting it in the neck and cutting the jugular vein.

Once I was sent by Colonel Casey on a three days trip over to some settlements on the White River, where it was reported that there were hostile demonstrations by Indians, but the alarm proved unfounded.

Find part two in the summer newsletter!

August Kautz: His legacy, his journals, and historical research

by Nicole Kindle

The journals of August Kautz, who was stationed at Fort Steilacoom starting in 1856, provide a nearly daily account of his life.

Even after researching and reflecting on his journals for years, it is not lost on me how truly remarkable it is that he devoted so much time to recording his thoughts and keeping the journals with him as he trekked across the western United States, even when resources were limited. He maintained his reports throughout the Civil War and his long military career that took him and his family to what is now Washington, New Mexico, California, and other western forts.

While he did not believe his words would hold any importance, he often reflected that it was worthwhile to document his life's work. The time and effort he put into his writings were reflective of a lasting legacy he hoped to be remembered for.

His journals tell us about the weather, the behaviors (and misbehaviors) of his fellow soldiers, his own overindulgences, and resulting hangovers. They offer insights into his innermost thoughts and insecurities. Even with records as well-documented as the Kautz journals, researching the past often leaves us with many unanswered questions and gaps—challenges faced by all who do historical research.

Despite a few missing years, the Library of Congress has copies

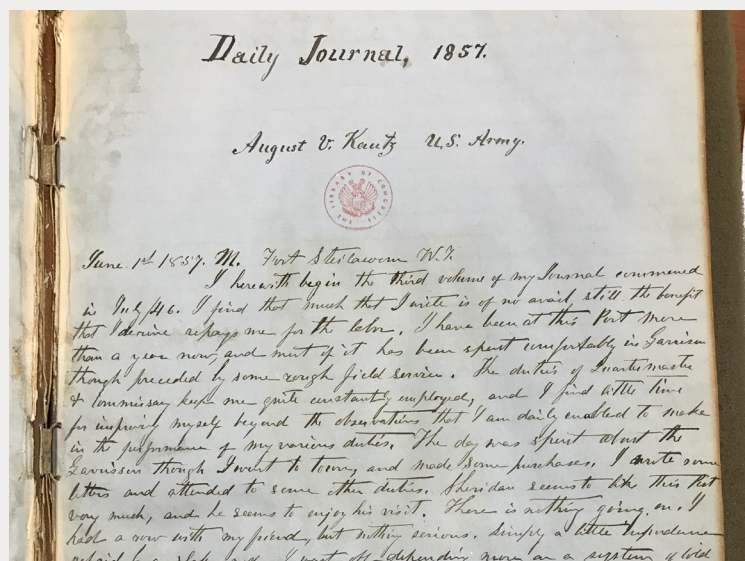
of decades of entries from August Kautz; however, even with such consistency, much has been lost. The faded and messy penmanship of his early journals likely hides some snarky comments about his fellow soldiers, more rainy days, and probably a few more hangovers.

Perhaps the only one more overjoyed than I was about Kautz's purchase of a typewriter was Kautz himself. Not only were the typed letters far easier to read as a researcher, but we are also given a deeper understanding of his life and relationships as his entries were longer and more personal. No doubt, in his later years, he also had more time to devote more details into these later entries.

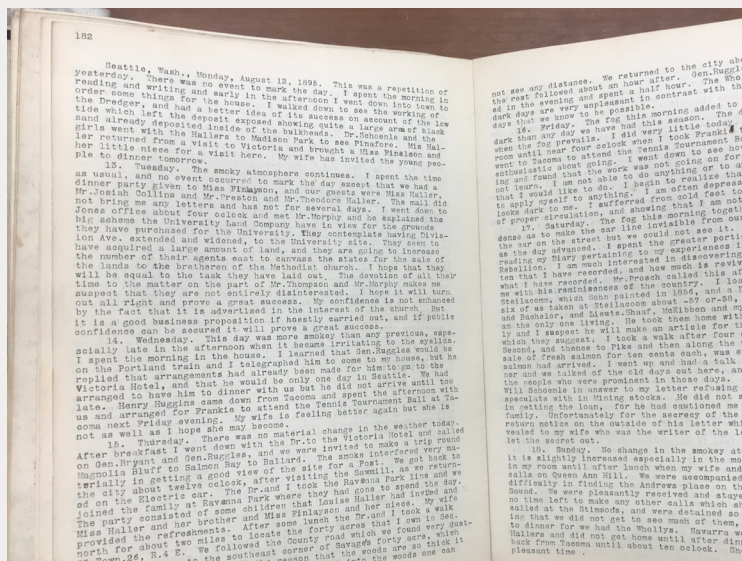
August Kautz's journals offer a unique and invaluable perspective on history, providing rich details about his life, experiences, and his reflections. Through his meticulous record-keeping, Kautz left a legacy that sheds light on the challenges and joys of life in the United States during the 19th century, as well as the complexities of military service during the Civil War and in the settlement of the West.

[Watch Kindle's presentation about Kautz and his family she produced after deciphering his handwriting.](#)

Kautz's handwriting was tough to transcribe



Research is much easier with typed journals



Images from August V. Kautz Papers. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

General August Kautz: Steilacoom Historical Society to unveil personal letter

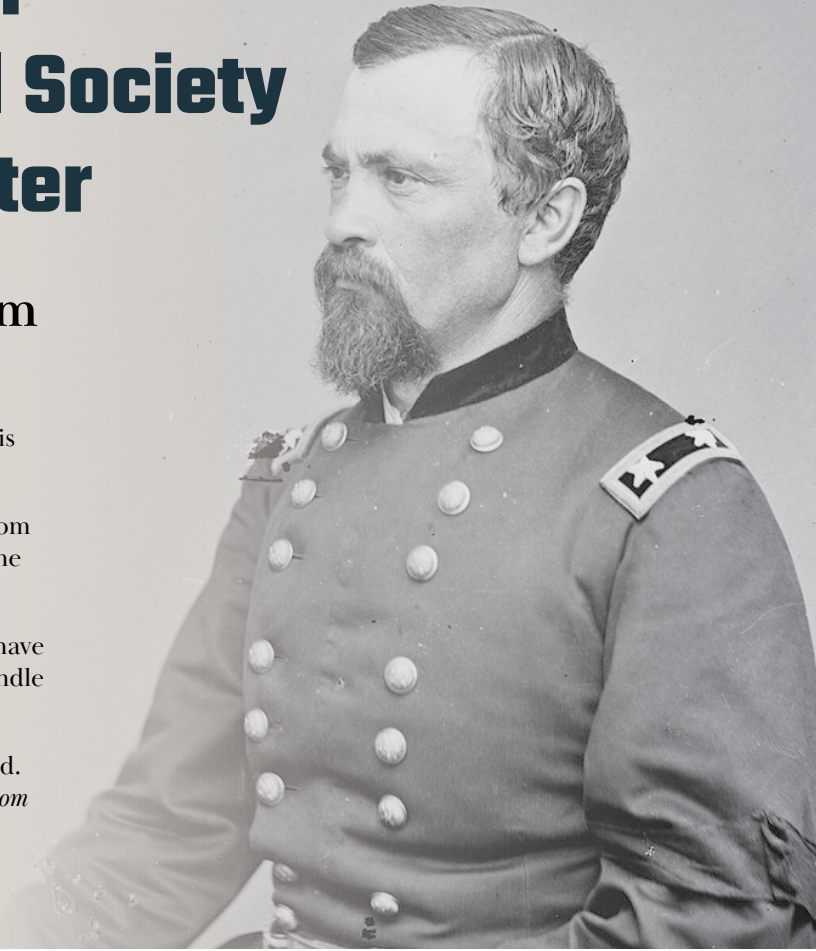
Kautz letter coming to Steilacoom

The Steilacoom Historical Museum Association announced in their recent March newsletter that they had made the very exciting acquisition of an 1857 letter written by August Valentine Kautz to his cousin, Louise Denver.

Through the coordinated effort of several members of the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association, the letter was purchased at an online auction.

Once the letter arrived, the letter was transcribed, which seems to have been a challenging task. (Editor's note: See the article by Nicole Kindle on page 4, which refers to Kautz's penmanship).

Several issues now considered controversial were reportedly covered. Further information is forthcoming in the June issue of *The Steilacoom Historical Review*. At some point in the future, the letter will be exhibited at the museum in Steilacoom.



Here's why everyone at Fort Steilacoom is so interested:

Kautz, an officer who graduated from West Point and served at Fort Steilacoom, was a man of diverse talents and interests. He supervised the construction of the buildings at the fort, a project which was delayed while he recovered from the ascent of Mount Rainier (an ascent which is sometimes referred to as the first ascent of the mountain although he did not make the final leg to Columbia Crest).

He fought in the Rogue River Wars where he was wounded and promoted to lieutenant. He advocated for the unfortunate Chief Leschi, who was hanged in 1858. Kautz published two issues of a newspaper on his behalf stating that the chief should be treated as a prisoner of war. The first of his three wives was a Nisqually woman, Tena Puss—known as Kitty in English. They had two sons and they have descendants who continue to live locally.

He returned to the East to fight during the Civil War, where he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. He also served on the jury which convicted those accused of assassinating Abraham Lincoln. In his final years, he returned to the Pacific Northwest where he died in Seattle in 1895 at the age of 67.

Sources:

- Historic Fort Steilacoom Association Long-Range Interpretive Plan
- The Steilacoom Historical Review, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 2023
- Wikipedia
- Photo from Library of Congress

ICYMI: Enjoy the photos from Fort Steilacoom's Reenactors' swap meet

from March 25, 2023 | photos by Trish Sowards



The Puyallup Tribe Mini-Museum is now open to the public

On March 31, Puyallup Tribal members got their first peek at the new [Puyallup Tribe](#) Mini-Museum. The Puyallup Tribe's [Historic Preservation Department](#) opened the new exhibit in its office spaces at the Salish Cancer Center Building. The pilot project is the first step toward a bigger and more permanent Tribal museum.

The history of Fort Steilacoom and the settlement of Washington Territory is deeply connected to the history of local Native communities. We encourage you to visit and steep yourself in the mini-museum's perspectives. You can hold a replica of the Medicine Creek Treaty in your hands, as well as enjoy a variety of videos and exhibits about language, history, culture, and more.

As of April 18, the mini museum is open to the public and admission is only \$5 per visitor.

(253) 573-7965 | HistoricPreservation@puyalluptribe-nsn.gov

3700 Pacific Hwy E, #311
Fife, WA 98424

Tuesday–Friday
10 a.m.–4 p.m.



Puyallup Tribe Mini-Museum. Photo from the Puyallup Tribe of Indians Historic Preservation Department Facebook.

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Fort Steilacoom welcomes visitors!

Come see Fort Steilacoom: We're open the Sunday of Memorial Day Weekend, and the first and third Sundays during summer.

[Book your visit now!](#)

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