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## E. C. FERGUSON IN STEILACOOM, 1858-59: A PROLOGUE TO THE FOUNDING OF SNOHOMISH

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A COLLECTION OF ILLUSTRATED ESSAYS  
BY JOAN CURTIS, DAVID DILGARD, AND ANN TUOHY  
ABOUT SNOHOMISH'S FOUNDER, EMORY C. FERGUSON'S  
SHORT TIME IN STEILACOOM, WASHINGTON TERRITORY.  
HE JOINED A BUSINESS SYNDICATE INTENDING TO ESTABLISH  
A FERRY SERVICE ACROSS THE SNOHOMISH RIVER FOR A MILITARY ROAD  
PLANNED TO CONNECT FORT STEILACOOM WITH FORT BELLINGHAM.  
FUNDING FOR THE ROAD WAS CUT FROM THE BUDGET,  
AND FERGUSON WAS THE ONLY MEMBER OF THE SYNDICATE TO  
TAKE UP RESIDENCE ON THE RIVER IN 1860 -- WHERE HE LIVED  
UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1911.

HISTORIC IMAGES COURTESY OF THE STEILACOOM HISTORICAL MUSEUM SOCIETY

EDITED AND DESIGNED BY WARNER BLAKE  
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**IF** SNOHOMISH COUNTY HAD A PATRIARCH, that man was Emory C. Ferguson. He wasn't the first settler in the county and during his early years here he wasn't as alone as he led later generations to believe; but "Old Ferg" was a powerful symbol of the past to those who came later and a man whose life was inextricably involved in the beginnings of Snohomish County.

He was born in Westchester County, New York on March 5, 1833, fourth child of Samuel and Maria (Haight) Ferguson, both natives of that state. Emory was apprenticed to a carpenter at age 16, the year of the California gold Rush. One month after his twenty-first birthday Emory and his brother, Yates, sailed for California via the Isthmus of Panama, arriving in San Francisco May 4, 1854.

Initially he looked for gold, but by 1856 he was operating a general store a few miles from the original Sutter strike. He soon left that to run a sawmill.

During the winter of 1857-58 hordes of gold seekers turned their attentions to the Fraser River in British Columbia and the following summer Ferguson

arrived on Puget Sound aboard a steamer, once more in pursuit of precious metal. [But] with very little to show for six weeks work on the Fraser, he headed further south in search of employment. His own account was recorded by a journalist in 1902:

From Whatcom we went to Seattle and there the man who owned the boat wanted to stop. I gave him \$5 to take me to Steilacoom and when I stepped ashore that night I had just \$2.50 left as a result of a summer's hunt for gold. I ate supper and paid a man 50 cents for it. He allowed me to pile my blankets on a loft floor and sleep there that night. The next morning after breakfast was paid for I had \$1.50 with which to start life.

My object in going to Steilacoom was to get as far as possible on my way to Olympia where the legislature was to meet in December and I hoped to get something to do. I asked my landlord about the road there. He said it was a rough trail through the woods 25 miles

in length and asked me why I wanted to go there. He asked me what I could do and I told him I could do anything but my trade was a carpenter. He said, "Well, if you are a carpenter, you needn't go there for work. I am building a house and I will give you \$1 a day and board to work on it." I took him up and for 9 days I worked away at that figure. Then I learned I could do much better and told him so. "How much can you make?" he asked. I said \$4 per day. He said, Well, I will give you \$3 a day and board." I finished his house and later built a nice home for the old physician who owned the townsite. While there I framed the first house built in Snohomish and became a member of the syndicate which sent it up there.

During the legislative session that had drawn Ferguson toward Olympia, an appropriation was made for work on a military road between Steilacoom and Bellingham. Ferguson later wrote an account of what followed, the events that led to the founding of the town of Snohomish

In the spring of 1859 a syndicate was formed in Steilacoom, composed of Col. W. H. Wallace, the firm Myers & McCaw, A. B. Rabbeson and Ferguson, for the purpose of taking up land on the Snohomish River and establishing a ferry at the point where the military road would cross the river. Ed Cady, E. H. Tucker and Hiel Barnes were sent down the river early in the summer of 1859 to locate the land at the place where the road would cross the river.

Cady located on what is now known as the Sinclair claim; Barnes on the Ferguson claim, and Tucker on the Harvey claim.

The trail as blazed would cross the river at the mouth of the Pilchuck River. This was a very poor plan for a ferry, so Barnes and Cady traced the line up the Pilchuck to where it struck high land.

This then followed the ridge of high land

to the river at the point where the Northern Pacific railroad bridge now crosses the river.

The road builders discovered two sets of blazes. They were at a loss to know which to take .... The foreman followed the blazes to the river, where he found Cady and Barnes, who explained to him the course of the two lines .... they went over the two lines and the foreman, finding the new line shorter and on better ground, cut the trail on the new line.

Ferguson made his journey to the site, known initially as "Cadyville," in March of 1860 aboard the Ranger No. 2, a sidewheel steamer captained by John Hill, bringing with him goods to establish a store. Years later he described his journey up the semi-navigable Snohomish:

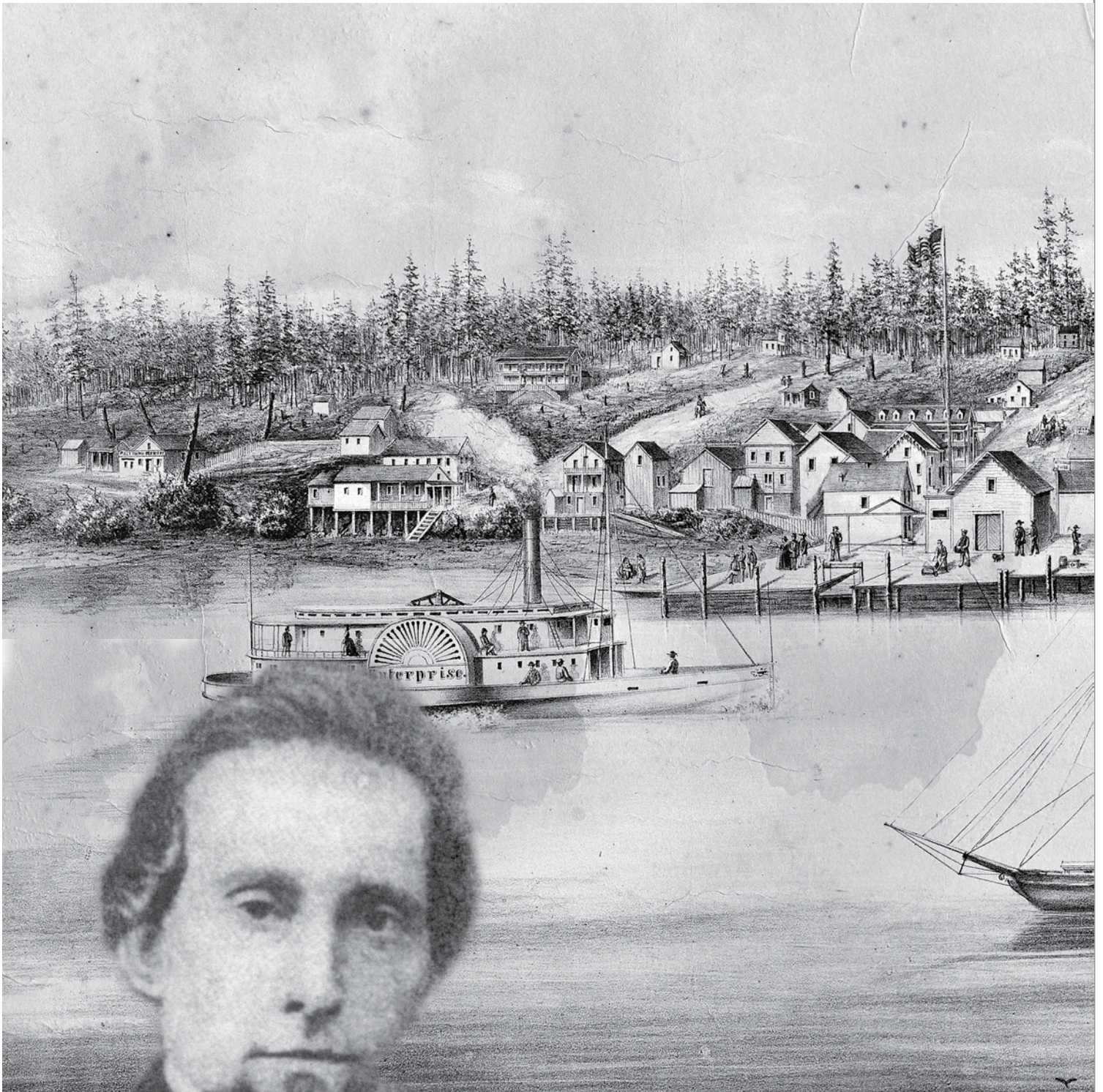
The Snohomish River was at that time a very weird place, the trees along the banks with their long branches extending out over the river, in many places meeting, with long strings of moss hanging from the branches, which nearly shut out the sunlight. At the head of Steamboat Slough we had to stop to cut out a small tree that had fallen across the stream and completely blocked the way. At that time the opening at the head of Steamboat Slough was not more than fifty feet wide.

The Ranger No. 2 had delivered Ferguson's prefab residence the previous summer, the house he was to occupy upon his arrival.

[I] lived for 20 years in that same house. You can see it now [November 1902] standing almost on the bank of the river and just in the rear of the new house built this summer by M. J. McGuinness. It wasn't a palace, but it was home sweet home to me for many a year, and I never have been happier than while I lived there.

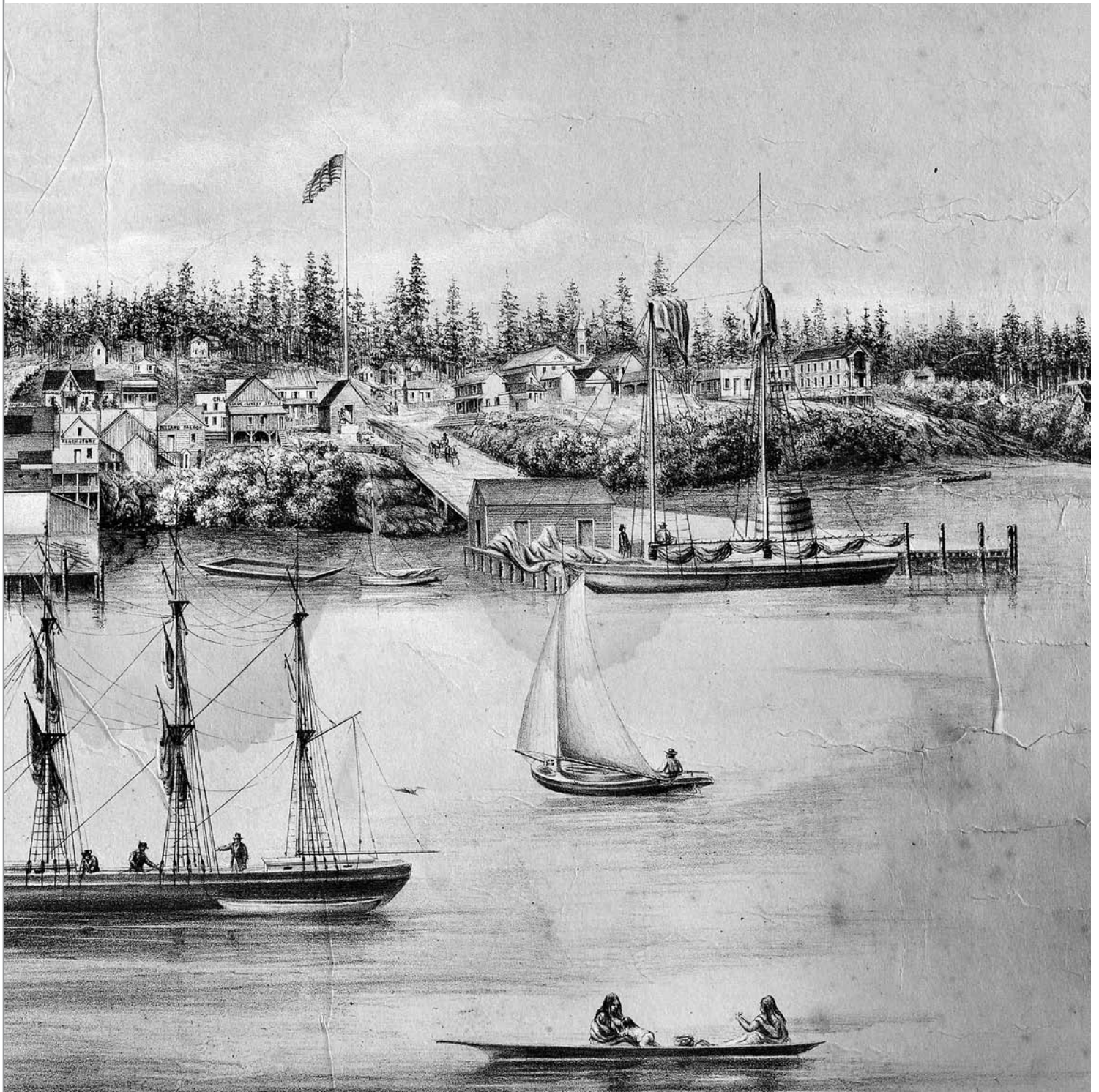
David Dilgard

Excerpts from: "*The Adventures of Old Ferg,*" Parts 1 and 2  
*Journal of Everett & Snohomish County History*  
(Everett Public Library), 1981-1982



CAPTAIN LAFAYETTE BALCH

**S**TEILACOOM WAS FOUNDED IN 1851 by Captain Lafayette Balch, and it was the first incorporated town in Washington Territory. By 1858 it was the busiest port on Puget Sound as the Fraser River gold rush brought miners north from California. In March, 1858, Steilacoom's *Puget Sound Herald*, was the first paper to give publicity to the discovery. Within a few months an estimated 100,000 came seeking



*Lithograph of the Steilacoom Harbor, 1864*

their fortunes. Some wisely abandoned the pursuit of treasure and settled on Puget Sound, some in towns and some on land claims.

As the county seat of Pierce County Steilacoom was the center of activity. There were nearly forty businesses, including seven saloons, four hotels, three blacksmith shops, a butcher shop, four mercantile establishments, a newspaper office and a new

schoolhouse with four lawyers and three doctors. Naval vessels and canoes were at anchor at the Balch Wharf. Sailing and steam ships carried barrel hoops and cut lumber from the surrounding forests to San Francisco in exchange for goods and merchandise for the local stores. On a hill a mile away stood Fort Steilacoom with its many officers, their families and nearly 250 enlisted men. →



Postcard, undated (The Hudson Bay Company established the first white settlement on the Puget Sound in 1833.)

**S**TEILACOOM CLAIMS MANY FIRSTS including first Protestant church building north of the Columbia River, first post office in Washington Territory and the first school. Added to these in 1858 were the first territorial jail and the first brewery built by Martin Schmieg who brewed and advertised the first lager beer in the northwest.

In February of 1858 the territorial legislature passed a special act to incorporate the Steilacoom Library Association. It was the first civic organization in the county and the only circulating library in the territory. Most of the prominent men became members and donated monies to buy books from San Francisco. In May, 1858 A. B. Rabbeson was one of many who joined. On January 2, 1860, E. C. Ferguson was elected corresponding secretary and his friend E. Tucker became a member. By then there were 41 active members.

It was a busy life during this time period according to Charles Prosch, editor of the *Puget Sound Herald*. He wrote at the end of 1859, “not less than forty-eight structures of various kinds, for dwelling, stores, and other purposes, have been added to our thriving town ... our population has quadrupled in number....” But it would seem to have been a lonely life.

On February 24, 1860 the following announcement was printed in the Herald:

Attention, Bachelors: Believing that our only chance for a realization of the benefits and early attainment of matrimonial alliances depends upon the arrival in our midst of a number of the fair sex from the Atlantic States and that, to bring about such an arrival, a united effort and action are called for on our part, we respectfully request a full attendance of all eligible and sincerely desirous Bachelors of this community to assemble on Tuesday evening next, Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, in Delin & Shorey’s building, to devise ways and means to secure this much needed and desirable emigration to our shores.”

It was signed by E. C. Ferguson, Egbert H. Tucker and ninety-five other Steilacoom bachelors. Five years later Asa S. Mercer of Seattle would take real action on this issue, going to New England and bringing back to Washington Territory about 200 of the “fair sex.”

By then E. C. and his friend Egbert had moved north.

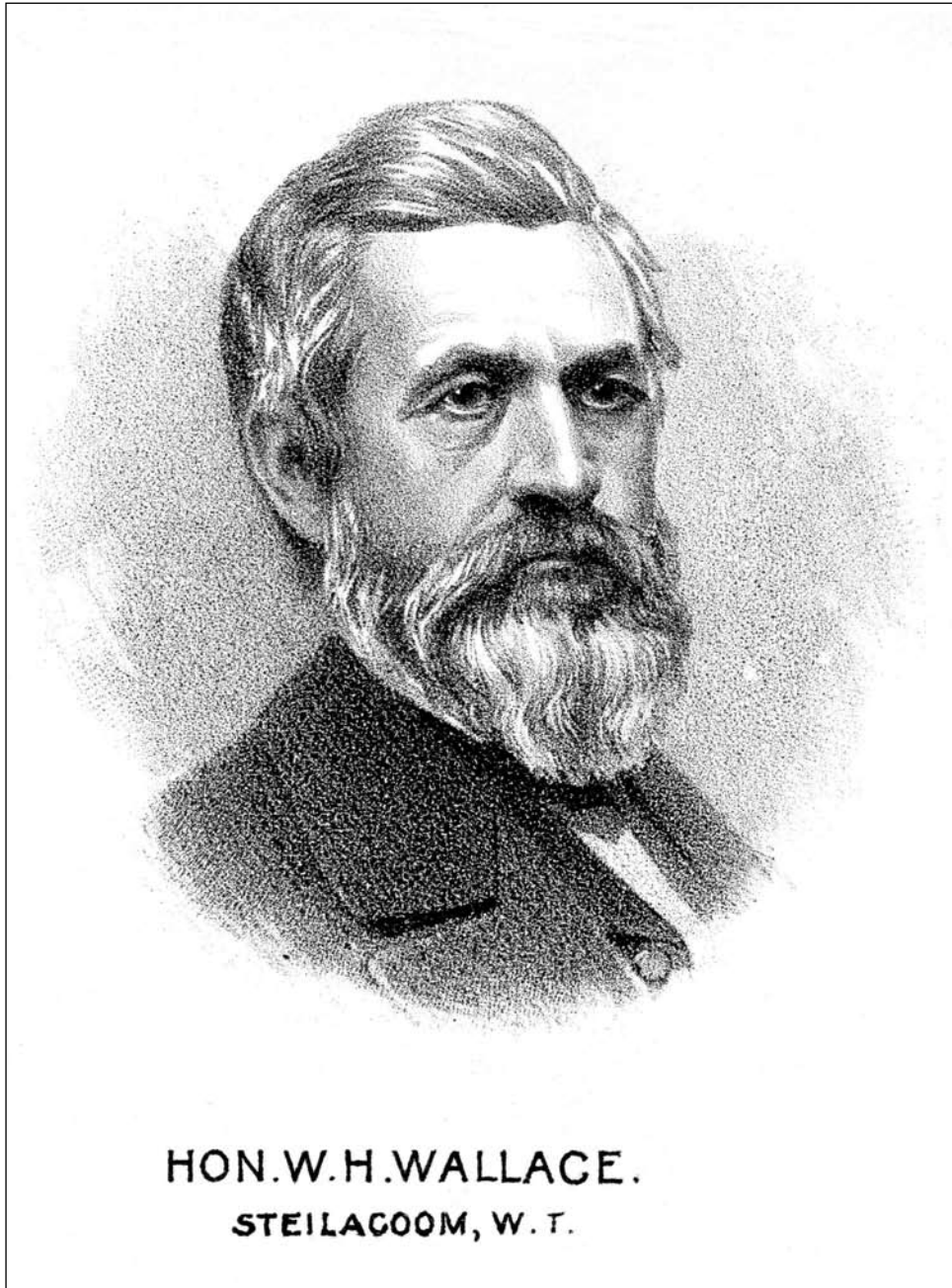
Joan Curtis  
“A Town on the Sound”



*Steilacoom John and Steilacoom Anne were two native Steilacoom people who lived in a home along the beach until it was destroyed by a grading project for the new streetcar. The townspeople helped John and Annie build their float home. The couple earned their living by fishing, harvesting shellfish, making baskets and selling blackberries.*

*Early Snohomish has a similar story of a native family being adopted by the settlers with Pilchuck Jack, Julia, Hattie and her husband Peter Jack, pictured left to right.*





**W**ILLIAM H. WALLACE, was most likely the leader of a syndicate formed in the spring of 1859, in Steilacoom, for the purpose of taking up land on the Snohomish River and establishing a ferry at the point a planned military road would cross the river.

Included in the group were Steilacoom merchants Myers, McCaw, Rabbeson and Ferguson. The syndicate sent Edson Cady, Hiel Barnes and Egbert Tucket to stake claims on the Snohomish River that summer.

When funding for the road was cut by the Territorial Legislature, the syndicate dissolved and only

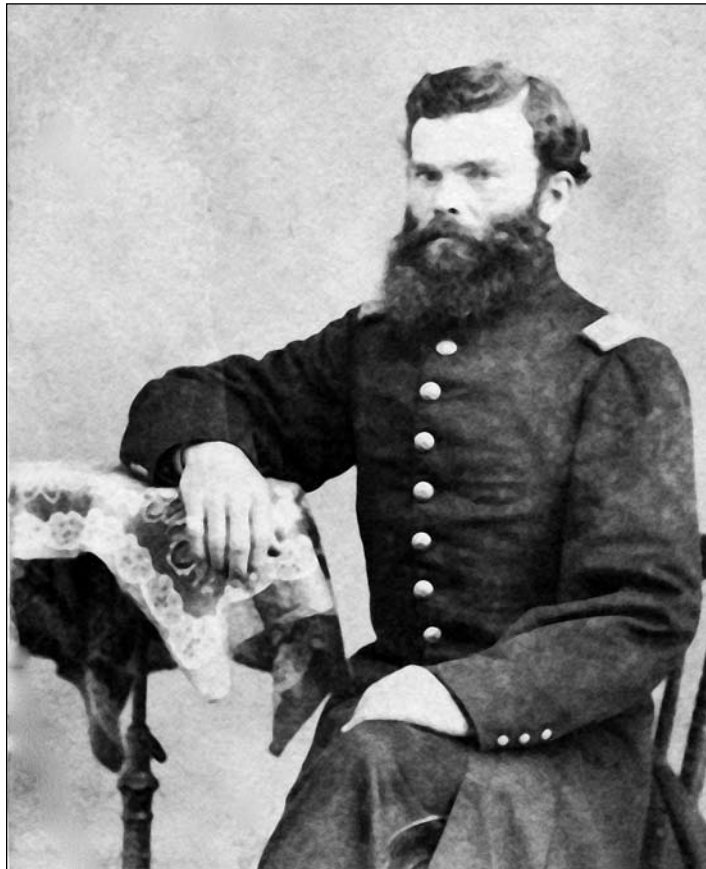
Ferguson moved to Snohomish in 1860.

In 1861, Wallace was appointed governor of Washington Territory by President Abraham Lincoln. Then he was appointed governor of the new Idaho Territory. When his term expired in 1865, he returned to Steilacoom to live out his life as a probate judge in Pierce County. He is buried in the Fort Steilacoom Cemetery.

Wallace was reputedly one of several people who turned down an invitation from Lincoln to accompany him to Ford's Theatre on the night Lincoln was assassinated.



*This photograph of Egbert Tucker was discovered in the Laura Belle Downey Bartlett collection of photographs, donated by a descendant to the Steilacoom Historical Museum Society in 1975.*



**E**GBERT H. TUCKER was born in Kentucky, son of Martin and Melinda Tucker. In 1850 Egbert was listed in their household on the census taken in Dallas County, Iowa. He had an older sister, Lutitia, and two younger brothers, John and William.

Tucker was in Cadyville, Snohomish County, Washington Territory, in 1859, when, with Heil Barnes and E.T. Cady as agents for associates of E.C. Ferguson, he took a claim on the south side of the river, which was taken up by John Harvey apparently not long afterwards.

E. H. and William Tucker were listed in 1860 on the census of Steilacoom, Pierce County, Washington. He was a liquor dealer, and his 19 year-old brother was a clerk.

He served as a Captain with the 1st Regiment, Washington Infantry in December 1864 in Washington Territory when it was sent to the Snohomish River to quell violence between the Indians and white men.

In 1870, again as E. H. Tucker, he was enumerated on the census in Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. He was still single, attending and boarding

at a commercial college with five other young men; and in 1880 he was in Kingsburg, Fresno County, California, living in a boarding house and recorded on the census as a "mail contractor." At this time he and several others were developing towns in the central valley area.

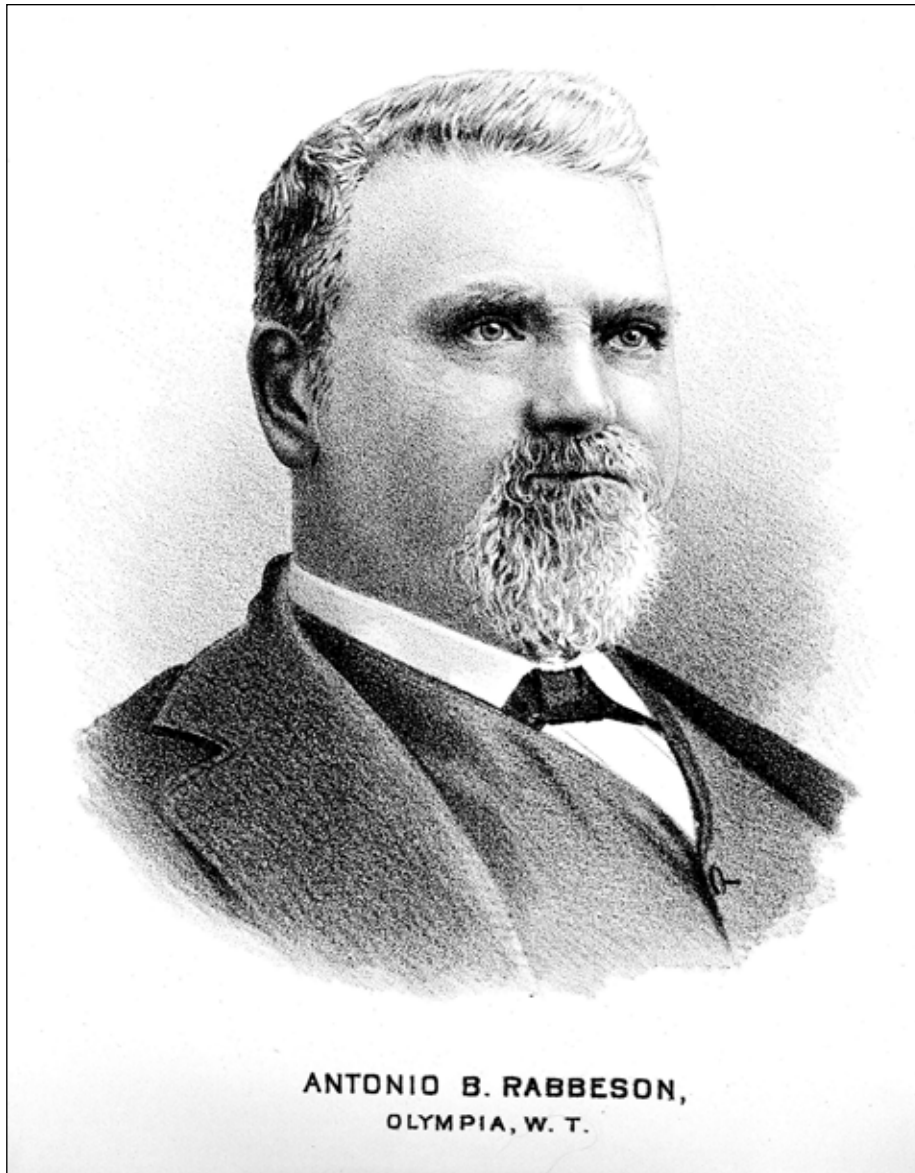
He married Martha Fanning in 1880.

On 11 November 1892 he received a pension for his Civil War service in Washington Territory.

Egbert, Martha and son Clay were enumerated on the 1900 census taken in Selma, Fresno County, California, where he was employed as a Justice of the Peace. Ten years later Egbert and Martha were still in Selma. He was called an "Officer, Justice of the Peace." Also in the home were an adopted daughter, Marie Labree, age 12, whose parents were born in Wisconsin and Michigan, and Clay's wife, Frances, and their two sons, Marshall and Fred, ages two and one.

Egbert H. Tucker died in 1912 in California at age 79 years and widow Martha Tucker obtained a widow's pension for his Civil War service on June 17, 1912.

Ann D. Tuohy



**A**NTONIO B. RABBESON was elected sheriff under the provisional government in 1848. During the Indian Wars he served under Captain Hays when Colonel A. Benton Moses was killed. Rabbeson claimed that Leschi, leader of the Nisquallies, killed the Colonel.

Many felt that Rabbeson lied, including Erza Meeker who was a juror at the first trial. He would later write in *The Tragedy of Leschi*:

A painful duty devolves on me to record the now unquestioned fact of the perjury of the chief, and in fact, the only witness. A. B. Rabbeson. He was a too willing witness to be truthful, and had not been on the witness stand five minutes until the guilt of perjury showed so plainly reflected in his eyes that no

one really believed he was telling the truth.

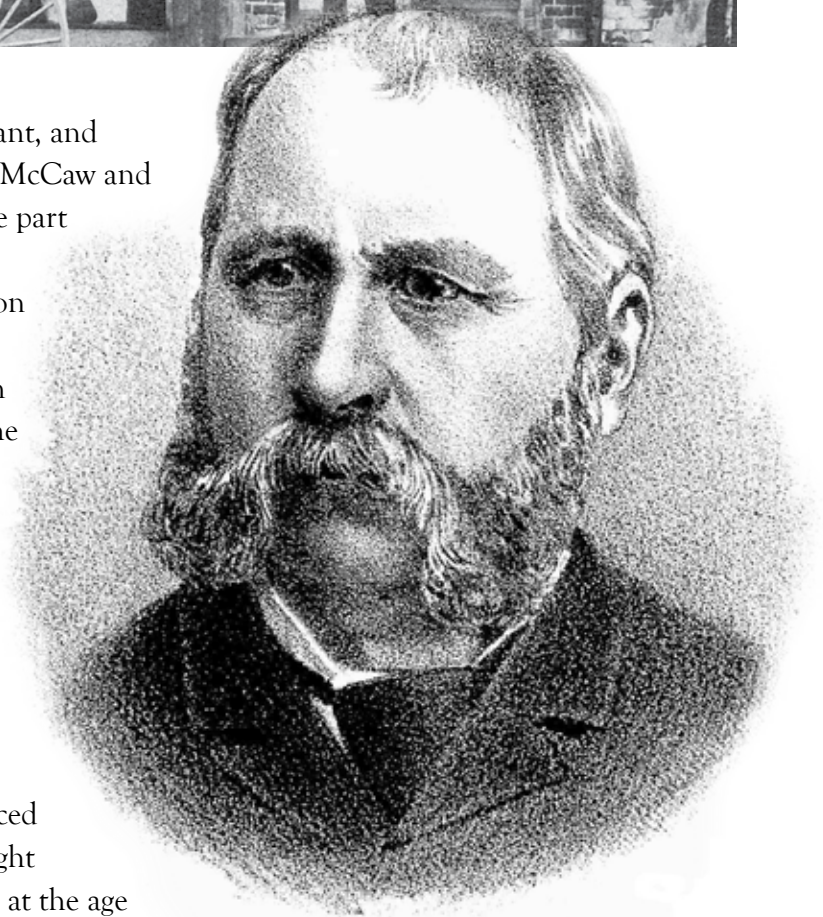
Later the soldiers at Fort Steilacoom produced a map, which showed that Leschi could not have been in the area but it was too late, Leschi was hung on February 19, 1858, on a gallows at Fort Steilacoom.

The following year, Rabbeson joined with E. C. Ferguson and others in the Steilacoom syndicate intending to establish a ferry service for the military road crossing the Snohomish River until funding was eliminated.

In the 1860 census Rabbeson is listed as 36 years old, a merchant from New York, Ferguson's home state. Rabbeson may have visited the town site called "Cadyville," since Heil Barnes, the man holding Ferguson's claim, was his brother-in-law.



**E. R. ROGERS** was a pioneer, sailor, merchant, and justice of the peace. He was a partner in the McCaw and Rogers Store pictured above. Both men were part of the business syndicate with Ferguson that hatched the plan to establish a ferry service on the Snohomish River. Although he lived in Steilacoom for such a short period, Ferguson joined with Rogers and others to establish the first library association in the territory ~ a civic action Ferguson repeated in Snohomish in the 1870s. Today the E. R. Rogers name in Steilacoom is synonymous with a stately 17-room mansion overlooking Puget Sound that he built for his wife, Catherine. Once a popular restaurant, it's currently law offices. The couple only lived in the house for a short time before the Panic of 1893 forced them to move back to their original home right next door. Rogers died in this home in 1906 at the age of 76. There is no record that he ever visited Snohomish.



**H**IEL BARNES was born on 10 May 1828 in New York state, the third son of Nelson and Anna (Gay) Barnes. In 1850 the entire family traveled the Oregon Trail, arriving in Portland in time to be recorded on that year's decennial census where "Hyel" was described as a tinner.

A year or two later he went north to Washington Territory and then to the gold fields of British Columbia's Fraser River. On Tuesday, July 20, 1858, Hiel was in Fort Yale in British Columbia on a gold hunting expedition when he wrote the following letter to his brother George, a merchant in Olympia, which was published in the local newspaper:

*I arrived here on Sunday evening – had a hard time getting up the river, and it is impossible to get any further up at present, on account of high water. It must fall fifteen feet yet, before there can be any mining done, and that will probably be six weeks yet. The Indians say so, and the men at the Fort confirm it. I suppose there are 10,000 persons on the river, from the mouth up to this place, and that is a moderate estimate, for I believe there are more; and out of that number, not more than twenty of them are doing anything. There are hundreds going back every week. We met, I think, one hundred boats going back, all loaded with passengers, besides what goes on the steamers every week. There are a great many here that are entirely destitute of provisions, and have to get back by working their way in some shape or other. You would confer an act of kindness upon all persons who think of coming to these mines, by telling them not to come this way; for if they want to mine, they must go higher up, and this is not the route for them to take. There has been quite a number of persons drowned within the past week. Three bodies were picked up the other day – one a woman. Many are never seen after they start up the river. They get Indian pilots – pay them from where they start, and who upset them to get their 'grub.' The little steamer Umatilla got up here about an hour ago, and has just blowed her whistle to start back, so you must excuse the haste.*

*Yours respectfully,  
Hiel Barnes*

Hiel Barnes arrived in Snohomish from Steilacoom the next year and staked a land claim for his friend from Steilacoom, E. C. Ferguson, who was a business partner of Hiel's brother-in-law, A.B. Rabbeson. (p.10) This claim eventually became the western portion of the city of Snohomish.

Snohomish was in Island County when Hiel voted in the election of July 9, 1860, along with sixteen other Snohomish pioneers, and was elected constable. Apparently still hoping to strike it rich, he moved on to California, where he married Mary F. McDonald on October 29, 1865 in "the Calaveras." But he must have persuaded her that a more prosperous future lay in Washington Territory, as at the 1871 Washington Territorial Census Hiel and Mary F. Barnes were living in Thurston County, where he worked as a tinsmith; Mary was only listed by her initials, M. F., and the Hiram D. Morgans, the parents of E. C. Ferguson's wife, Lucetta Gertrude, lived next door.

Whether by death or divorce, in 1880 Hiel Barnes was single, living in Seattle, Washington Territory and employed as a tinsmith. According to the census, he had a roommate, Ole L. Knudson, age thirty-seven. In 1887 the Washington Territorial Census recorded him in Olympia – he was single and working as a "tinner."

Hiel Barnes was enumerated on the 1900 census in Randle, Lewis County, Washington, where he lodged with the family of farmer Joseph and Alice Chilcoat (both born in Texas), still employed as a tinsmith, and now recorded as divorced. And in 1910 he was still in Randle (part of the Rainier National Forest) aged eighty-two years and boarding with Matt and Daisy Randle's family, now described as a widower. Nothing further is known of him at this time. He may well be buried in or near Randle.

Ann Tuohy

(Editor's Note: We hope one day to find a photograph of Hiel Barnes and Edson Cady to go with Ann's detailed accounts.)



*Cadyville, 1865, attributed to E. M. Sammis, a New York photographer credited with taking the only studio portrait of Chief Seattle. Ferguson's Blue Eagle Tavern is on the left, the Sinclair-Clendenning Store is on the right, and the man standing in the foreground could be Woodbury Sinclair who purchased Cady's claim in 1864.*

**E**DSON T. CADY took up a land claim in Snohomish in 1859 with the intention of creating a ferry across the river as part of the proposed military road from Fort Steilacoom to Fort Bellingham, along with E. C. Ferguson. When the road was abandoned, Cady and a man named Parsons made an exploratory trip to the Skykomish area and found a pass they named "Cady Pass." It was to be part of a trail from Snohomish across the Cascades to the mining districts on the east side.

Cady was born in 1828 in Utica, Oneida County, New York. A census of the new Snohomish county in 1861, really E. C. Ferguson's list of voters that year, gave his occupation as "Machinist." He and Ferguson had received their license to operate a ferry across the Snohomish River at the second meeting of the Snohomish County Commissioners in May.

In 1876 Eldridge Morse said of him,

*Cady was an engineer by trade, commanded a small steam scow, with a very peculiar name, the first steamer regularly run on the Snohomish. He was widely known ....*

*William Whitfield, also commented that, Cady made a living by freighting supplies up and down the river with his flat-bottom scow, the Minnehaha, for the few settlers along the river and the logging camps near its mouth, and by bringing supplies from Port Gamble.*

He also claimed 160 acres in the area of the future city of Everett, Snohomish County, Washington Territory, but later let it go. On 28 Feb 1861 Edson T. Cady was appointed the first postmaster, a job he held for two years. His post office was his scow, the *Minnehaha* in Snohomish, Snohomish County, Washington Territory.

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*Exhibition & Discussion at the Blackman House Museum, October 2009*



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