

## CAPTAIN LAFAYETTE BALCH

(Lucile McDonald, "Brush-off at Olympia led to founding of Steilacoom," Seattle Times, June 25, 1950)

Captain Lafayette Balch, energetic sea captain from New England, founded the town of Steilacoom a hundred years ago when the promoter of the new Olympia town site gave a quick brush-off to his proposal to build a store in that community.

Captain Balch, noted for his independence, concluded that if Olympia would not have him on his own terms, he would build a rival community. Accordingly, he erected his building on the shore of Puget Sound a few miles from the military post already established at Fort Steilacoom.

The store was said to have been the best stocked one on the Sound and Captain Balch eventually left the sea to take charge of it. Between voyages he platted a tract of 320 acres he had staked out, naming his infant town for the nearby creek and the Steillacomish Indian tribe.

It took a rugged individualist to accomplish as much as Captain Balch did in the brief twelve years in which he was a figure in Washington history. He was born in Trescott, Maine, February 3, 1825 and made his first trip around Cape Horn in his father's ship the Sacramento. During the gold rush his shore headquarters were in a shanty in San Francisco, but mostly he busied himself carrying timber cargoes to California in the George Emery.

His initial voyage to Puget Sound may have been as early as February, 1850, to load piling. He made four trips here during that year and on the second one had materials and stock for his store.

The date of his voyage is not established fully but is known that he passed Fort Nisqually on April 4, 1850, headed for Olympia with a cargo of general merchandise.

Edmund Sylvester, owner of the Olympia townsite had induced Michael T. Simmons to open a store there and did not relish another business in the sparsely settled community. Instead of welcoming Captain Balch, he quoted his property at a price too high for the thrifty Maine man.

The latter lost little time in locating land for himself near Steilacoom creek and founding a town of his own. The ready framed store must have been erected by July and Henry C. Wilson who had traveled north on the George Emery, was left in charge.

For the time being Captain Balch continued carrying timber to San Francisco Bay, returning to the Sound in November and again in December. On one of these voyages he had as passengers William B. Wilton, Charles C. Bachelder and A. A. Plummer. Wilton took up a land claim at Higgins Beach, north of Steilacoom, and contracted to cut piling. The other worked with him that winter, but lacking oxen, had a difficult time getting their timber to water. Balch then was paying eight cents a running foot for piling delivered alongside his vessel. He sold it in San Francisco for a dollar a foot.

Most of the land in the vicinity was still held by the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company, under possessory rights established by the treaty of 1846 and was not open to settlement.

During 1850 Frederick Rabjohn, William Elders, and William Bolton, members of the crew of the British ship Albion which was seized for violating the revenue laws, settled there. Late in the year John B. Chapman, his son, John M. Chapman, moved from Grays Harbor to Steilacoom and took up land just north of Captain Balch's though their title was in question until the donation land law became a fact.

In April Plummer and Bachelder, failing to make a go of their logging abandoned the enterprise and following Captain Balch's advise took up claims at Port Townsend. The Chapmans, however, were there to stay, and platted a townsite so close to the captains that the rival settlements were known as Upper and Lower Steilacoom.

Captain Balch attracted settlers to his town by donating land for public enterprises such as a Masonic building, court house, school and church. By May, 1855 it had 70 dwellings, six stores, one tailor shop, one cabinet maker, two blacksmiths, three saw mills, a grist mill, church, billiard parlor and two bowling alleys.

A wharf was under construction and a small steamer arrived monthly with troops and supplies for the fort. The town had the third newspaper in the territory.

The city was platted officially in September 1853, with stone monuments placed at street intersections. Lieutenant William A. Slaughter, then in command at Fort Steilacoom surveyed it. Boom years began in 1858 and the town at one time was the largest in the state.

Though Balch became a member of the first territorial legislature, was active in local affairs, and operated another trading vessel, the Demaris Cove, he continued to deal in piling and other timber products in California where he had a lumber yard. He also traded in fish and in hides.

His business required his presence in California where he died suddenly November 25, 1862, collapsing on a San Francisco street leaving no will. His family was far away on the East Coast and the administration of his affairs was envolved. The property was dissipated and squatters took possession of his land before the government in 1878 finally issued a patent to his heirs. By that time it was too late, his property was in other hands and nothing remaining to perpetuate his name in the town he founded.

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## FORT STEILACOOM

(Ten miles southwest of the city center on Steilacoom Boulevard).

This old abandoned fort, now the site of the Western State Hospital was established, under the British flag, as an outpost of the Hudson's Bay Company at Nisqually. Following the treaty of 1846 it was garrisoned by a company of United States artillery under Captain Bennett H. Hill in 1849. The immediate cause was an attack by Snoqualmie Indians upon white men at Fort Nisqually in which Leander Wallace was killed and a Mr. Lewis was quite seriously wounded. This was the first U.S. Army post and these were the first U.S. Troops on Puget Sound.

The first territorial court held in the Puget Sound country was convened at Fort Steilacoom on October 1, 1849, to try the six Indians accused of killing Wallace. Two of them, Qual-lah-worst, and Kus-sus, were convicted and hanged. In 1858 Chief Leschi was hanged for murders

committed in 1855 during the Indian outbreak. For several years before Pierce County had a jail, the military guardhouse at the fort was used for the detention of its prisoners.

In 1858 under the supervision of Lieut. August V. Kautz, the post was entirely rebuilt with handsome frame structures sufficient to house four companies. One of the houses constructed at that time is still being used as a home by Dr. C. E. Taylor in Steilacoom.

The post was continued for eighteen years. When the government abandoned it, and not long afterward gave it to Washington Territory, the site was converted to its present use.

During its military days the post was twice an important war point, in 1855-57 during the Indian War and in 1859 when war was impending with Great Britain over the San Juan island dispute.

It was here that many noted soldiers who became prominent during the Civil War gained their first experience to actual warfare.

Among the names of those who saw service at Fort Steilacoom and later attained high rank in the government service are those of General Ulysses S. Grant, at that time (1852) a lieutenant in charge of troops at Fort Vancouver, who had temporary headquarters in a building now standing in Steilacoom City, and a few years later General Phil Sheridan, then a brevet second lieutenant, who took an active part in the Yakima campaign of the Indian War.

Others who saw service there were Col. Silas Casey, Captains Hunt, William H. Wallace, and Bennett H. Hill; Lieutenants August V. Kautz, Scott, and William A. Slaughter; and Corporals Berry and Clarendon. Lieut. Slaughter and Corporals Berry and Clarendon were killed near Auburn, October 28, 1855, at the outbreak of the Indian War.

Perhaps the most noted family connection with the fort was that of Colonel Silas Casey, who served there for four years. His son, Thomas Lincoln Casey, was number one in his class at West Point, and became head of the military engineers.

He was engaged in work in Washington Territory in 1860 and it was he who finished the Washington Monument in Washington D.C. Another son, Silas, served in the navy and died, a retired admiral in 1913. A third son, Edward W. Casey, was killed by the Brule Indians of Montana while he was

in the service of his country. Two daughters, Abbie and Bessie, married officers at Fort Steilacoom, Lieutenant Scott and Captain Hunt, both of whom were among those who rank high in the service.

In the shadow of the present hospital buildings is the Old Fort Steilacoom burial ground. Here, when the shadow of great age old trees trace lacy shadows on the well-kept lawn beneath, sleep many of those whose names rank high among those of the sturdy men and women who helped build this great western empire.

The historical traditions that surround the site of this old fort make it a spot of unusual interest.

## WESTERN STATE HOSPITAL

(Ten miles from Tacoma city center on the Steilacoom Boulevard, served by the Lake Shore Bus line.).

When, in 1868, Fort Steilacoom was abandoned as a military post leaving a square mile of land, and buildings for housing three hundred persons, Congress was asked to donate this property for the care of the insane, but the bill was not passed. In August 1871 the buildings which formerly cost two hundred thousand dollars were purchased from the War Department for eight hundred and fifty dollars and later Congress donated the land.

The hospital was opened in 1871 with twenty-one patients transferred from Monticello, Cowlitz County, where they had been cared for under contract since 1868.

The first group of permanent buildings was completed in 1886, and the Legislature of that year passed an act establishing the Western State Hospital for the care of the insane and placed the management in a board of three trustees.

In 1921 the code system of state government was adopted and a Director of Business Control was appointed by the Governor to have supervision and control over all State institutions, which department was subsequently merged into the Department of Finance, Budget and Business by legislative enactment in 1935.

Within the seven hundred acres comprising the grounds of the institution are a thirty-five acre lake, a beautiful gulch in which are many fresh water springs, the source of an adequate water supply system. These add

materially to the value of the land for institutional development.

The grounds are covered with well-kept grass, and are sheltered by age-old trees. Flowers and ornamental shrubbery lend enchantment and beauty to every section. Products from these gardens are used to furnish cheerful bouquets of flowers and foliage for the wards.

There is a forest within a few minutes walk from the buildings which is replete with quiet winding paths. The air is invigorating, filled with earth smells, and the scent of evergreens. The sounds of swift running water completes a setting the beauty of which is almost beyond description.

There could perhaps be no more beautiful or restful spot on the continent for such an institution. Eminent authorities claim that this particular region is one of the three most favored spots on earth for the Caucasian race.

In the evening when the sun sets behind the rugged western skyline, there are myriad auroras of color in every section of the sky. Here is quiet and rest, health and regeneration. Here may be found all those things that aid in piercing the haze surrounding the minds of the patients, those things necessary to admit light to make possible restoration.

The number of patients now being cared for at the hospital varies, ranging from 2,250 to 2,500 or more. In 1933 a new modernization program was started. The new hospital, when completed will be of the newest, most modern and approved type. Designed in such a manner that space, sunlight, and air will be amply provided for 3,500 to 4,000 patients.

Modern hospital construction abhors sharp angles, edges and corners; accordingly in the new buildings curves, arches and pleasing conformations are used throughout.

## STEILACOOM

(11 miles southwest of Tacoma at the western terminus of Steilacoom Boulevard.)

Wonderful old Steilacoom, storehouse of precious Puget Sound history, a locality that teems with stirring and romantic incidents, lies scattered along the slopes overlooking southern Puget Sound, beneath ancient trees planted by the hands of sturdy pioneers whose children and grand

children in several instances still occupy the original homes and homesites of its builders.

It was at first named Chelakoom, for Chief Tchil-ae-cum, but later passed through several changes finally emerging in its present form, Steilacoom.

This historic old city of Steilacoom came into being through accident, rather than design. Lafayette Balch, early in 1850, loaded his sailing vessel, the George Emery, in Maine with a stock of general merchandise and enough lumber, ready cut, to erect a store building.

He sailed directly to Budd's Inlet, intending to open a general merchandise store at Olympia. However, he was unable to agree with Edmund Sylvester, the townsite owner of Olympia, as to price of lots, so pulled up anchor and sailed down the Sound, spending Christmas day, 1850, at Fort Nisqually.

While there, Balch decided to found a new city of his own. In looking for a suitable site, Steilacoom Bay attracted his attention. He anchored his ship, went on shore and after having satisfied himself of its natural advantages, on January 10, 1851, filed on a land claim of 315.60 acres, now in the records as Donation Land Claim No. 7.

Balch immediately unloaded his lumber, erected a store building, opening up his merchandise, founded the City of Steilacoom and employed a Henry C. Wilson to sell his goods from the store while he prepared to enter the lumber trade. In August, Wilson quit his job, sailed north and took up a claim where Port Townsend now is.

Balch then formed a partnership with Dr. Webber, in his store business in Steilacoom under the name of Balch and Webber, employing Lieutenant William A. Slaughter to survey and plat his townsite, and established a lumber yard in San Francisco to handle the piling, shingles, and other goods shipped from Steilacoom in his two ships, the George Emery and the Demaris Cove.

Still smarting under the treatment he had received at Olympia, and determined to extend a warmer welcome to prospective citizens than that which he had received, Balch offered a free town lot to all settlers who would agree to take possession immediately.

With this encouragement the town grew apace. On July 6, 1852 a post

office was established at Steilacoom with James Hall, post master and John Chapman carrying the mail weekly between Olympia and Steilacoom for \$2.70 the round trip.

Then, on January 6, 1853, Steilacoom was named the county seat for Pierce County and during the following August, the Rev. John F. DeVore came to the city and began the erection of the first Protestant Church built in Washington Territory. It was dedicated on March 19, 1854. Steilacoom was created the first school district in Pierce County in 1854 and the first school opened for three months term with Mrs. Sherwood Bonney as teacher.

The Indian War of 1855-56 reacted favorably to the growth of the new city. It caused an influx of settlers from the farms scattered throughout the Puyallup Valley and adjacent territory, many of whom never returned to their homes. To provide the maximum of security, should the Indians attack, a blockhouse was constructed but it was never used for Steilacoom was not molested.

From about 1855, extending for more than a decade, Steilacoom was the main shipping point for Puget Sound. Victoria, B.C. was the only place that could be called a city. Seattle, Olympia, and Steilacoom were all places of less than a thousand population.

From Steilacoom were shipped out supplies to British Columbia and to points along the west coast of the United States. The greater amount of this freight passed over one or the other of the two docks, known all along the Sound as Keach's dock and Balch and Webber's dock. At one time the government supplies for its western posts were all shipped into Steilacoom harbor.

The year 1858 proved the turning point in the destiny of this pioneer city. At that time Steilacoom was considered the metropolis of Puget Sound. Balch and Webber were doing an extensive business with San Francisco in lumber, hides, hoop poles, ship's knees, piling, etc.

Several other firms were established in Steilacoom doing business with and for the surrounding country. The Puget Sound Herald was started by Charles Prosch, the first issue coming off the press on Friday, March 12, the first jail in Washington was built that summer by George Manville; and the Steilacoom Library Association was organized with the first circulating library in Washington.



Then the great Frazer River gold strike was made. This was the opportunity which could have made Steilacoom a permanent metropolis. Thousands of gold seekers rushed out from the east. Steilacoom, the farthest north American city, would be their base.

But Balch, seeing visions of great wealth, would not sell. When these people could not get lots on which to build homes and stores, they moved on to Bellingham. Within a few weeks Bellingham was a tent city of ten thousand. When the lots were finally offered for sale there were no buyers. Steilacoom had received a blow from its founder, unintentional it is true, from which it never recovered.

Early in 1860 Steilacoom became the seat of the first institution of higher education in that part of the state when a group of Sisters of Providence and Charity established at that city St. Joseph's Academy, a boarding and day school for young ladies. The Old Church of the Immaculate Conception, first built by the soldiers at Fort Steilacoom and later moved to Steilacoom city to form a part of the institutional group, is still in a fine state of preservation and is used regularly for church purposes. The academy was moved to Cowlitz Prairie in June 1874.

The hopes of its early builders, that Steilacoom would eventually become the great metropolis of the Puget Sound region, were finally crushed when in 1873 Tacoma was chosen instead, as the terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

However, Steilacoom has never lost its natural appeal to those men and women who wish to build for themselves a home where refinement, beauty and magnificent views are combined in one glorious whole and where its quaint charm shall not be disturbed or marred by the noise and smoke of a busy city.

Perhaps Lafayette Balch in spirit, walks the bluffs of Steilacoom and perhaps as he sees that happy little home town, without worries, without noise, and metropolitan hubbub, where human beings can live, and love and grow old and die without being bothered and rushed from place to place, perhaps then, Lafayette Balch, the spirit, smiles and murmurs to himself, " I built better than I knew."

Steilacoom holds much that would interest the visitor who can find time to visit its points of interest. Many reminders of its more prosperous days still remain. Three of the largest weeping willows in Washington grow there, also some of the oldest orchards in the State, the majority

of which were planted from stock brought up from San Francisco by Seth Llewellyn and sold by his partner, Hugh Pattison, between the years 1854 and 1859.

Down on the waterfront may still be seen Philip Keach's grocery store, in the back room of which was held on the evening of February 3, 1858, that memorable meeting, the outcome of which probably reflects a greater influence on the subsequent history of Washington than any other held in the state.

Here, in the dim light of a smoke filled room was organized the Steilacoom Library Association. Not only culture, but romance also blossomed from seeds sown at that meeting, for it was the yearning of male members for female companions, as expressed in that meeting, which finally resulted in the famous shipload of "Mercer Girls," being sent out from the east, a delightful "Cupid's Cargo" of fair and lovely girls who came west, married the pioneers and became the mothers of native sons.

Up on the hillside, the ruins of the old jail that served the territory as a penitentiary is still an attraction to visitors. Except where the brick has fallen away from the northwest corner, the walls are in a fair state of preservation.

However, the exposed edges of the 2 x 12 planking with which sheriff, Steven Judson, lined the cell block so many years ago, makes it look capable of holding its quota of criminals even today, 1936.

After the jail had been completed the most desperate prisoners from all over the territory were sent to Steilacoom, some were "lifers" and some were sent to be hung, however, there was never an execution at the jail.

Across the street from the jail is the old Peter Judson home, built in 1855. In the course of time it descended to his son, Steve, for many years sheriff of Pierce County, and generally known as the "war horse of democracy." The old home is now occupied by one of Steve Judson's children.

One block farther up the hill is the old Church of the Immaculate Conception, surrounded by mammoth shade trees, which were planted when Steilacoom was a tiny frontier settlement clinging tenaciously to the steep sides of a bluff away out on the western edge of an unconquered wilderness.

Several other buildings survive, among them are the Meeker Brothers

Store, the Phillip Keach residence and the Balch home.

Early in the 20th Century the DeVore Methodist Church was torn down and a store building erected on the site. During the year 1908 the State Historical Society secured a deed to a small portion of the lot and erected a comprehensive marker and at the apex of the marker hung the old church bell.

Another attraction which draws large crowds each season is the Deep Sea Aquarium built and stocked by Capt. Edward Blair, in which may be seen many specimens of the strange creatures which inhabit the ocean depths, and where authentic souvenirs from the waters bordering the west coast may be obtained. (Smith, Alfred J. Points of Interest on Steilacoom Boulevard, Tacoma, Washington, December 26, 1936.)

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## LAFAYETTE BALCH, FOUNDER OF STEILACOOM

Carol Neufeld, "Lafayette Balch, founder of Steilacoom," Steilacoom Historical Museum Quarterly. XIV (Fall, 1985) p. 1,4-6.

Lafayette Balch is known in Steilacoom, Washington, as the founder of the 1851 pioneer town on Puget Sound. He was an adventurous sea captain, who sailed with some of his brothers from Maine around the Horn to San Francisco. For this first trip he was in command of his father's Sacramento. Seeing an opportunity to make a living by supply timber for the building of the booming San Francisco.

Lafayette Balch returned to his home port. Here he obtained two ships, the brig George Emory and the sloop Demaris Cove. Then he set out with merchandise and lumber ready for building.

Balch travelled to Puget Sound looking for a suitable site from which he could begin a coast wide trade between the Sound and San Francisco. After attempting to settle at Olympia, Washington, Lafayette continued to Fort Nisqually arriving on Christmas Eve, 1850.

On January 10, 1851, Balch located a 315.6 acre Donation Land Claim under the Oregon Land Law. On a part of the claim, he laid out the town of Port Steilacoom or Lower Steilacoom. He then unloaded his lumber and built a store and a house. Henry C. Wilson, who had traveled north on the George Emory was first left in charge of the store. Wilson stayed a

short time, then Dr. J. B. Webber took over as the store's proprietor and Balch's partner.

Captain Balch also established a timber camp at Henderson Bay. Willis Boatman, in *Told By the Pioneers* reminisced that " I met Lafayette Balch, who informed us he was wanting some men to work in the camp. So there we were....the three of us hired to him at seventy-five dollars a month." Boatman's wife also was hired as a cook for the men.

Another Balch enterprise was the sawmill at the mouth of Sequaltichew Creek near Fort Nisqually. Lafayette was in partnership with Levant F. Thompson, who located in 1852 a Donation Land Claim on the Creek. Thompson built and operated the sawmill until the Indian War of 1855-56 forced him out of business.

While Wilson was tending the store, and the men at the lumber and saw mill were preparing timber, Balch inaugurated trade between Steilacoom and San Francisco. Lafayette loaded his ships with timber from the forests of Puget Sound and sailed it to his lumber yard at Pier Twenty on Stewart Street in San Francisco. On return trips he carried merchandise for the store in Steilacoom, which was reportedly to be the best stocked on the Sound.

Captain Balch not only founded the town, he was its chief promoter. He encouraged settlers to come to Steilacoom and support many public enterprises. He gave land for building the Masonic Lodge, the county; the school district, and the Methodist Church.

Charles Prosch, editor of the *Puget Sound Herald* from March 1858 until June of 1863, verifies Lafayette's enthusiasm for Steilacoom. In his *Reminiscences of Washington Territory* he recalls that Balch "...gave me glowing descriptions of the Puget Sound Country and climate...Then when he asked me to publish a paper in Steilacoom, I readily consented; though doing well at the time in San Francisco. The Captain assured me that every want should be supplied."

Balch's rival for the proprietorship of Steilacoom was John M. Chapman, who established an adjoining claim on October 31, 1851 on 311.71 acres adjacent to Balch's townsite. This platted section was called Steilacoom City or Upper Steilacoom.

The two towns grew rapidly. In 1854, the territorial legislature passed a special act defining the boundaries and incorporated the two claims

into the town of Steilacoom.

The May 19, 1855, Puget Sound Courier reported on the growth of the settlements that Balch and Chapman founded. Steilacoom had a post office, seventy houses, six stores, two blacksmith shops, one tailor shop, one cabinet maker and three saw mills, and a grist mill in the process of construction. Thomas M. Chambers was also building a flour mill on Steilacoom Creek (Chambers Creek). The town was growing.

Captain Balch was not only the promoter of Steilacoom, he encouraged others to settle in the Puget Sound area. When Balch met Alfred Plummer and Charles Bachelder in San Francisco, they decided to take passage on the George Emory to Olympia. As they passed the future site of Port Townsend, Balch is said to have pointed out this good location for cutting timber and the excellent anchorage to the two men. Bachelder and Plummer took the Captain's advise, and located claims at Port Townsend.

Pope and Talbot were also encouraged by Lafayette's stories of plentiful timber in the Oregon Country. The two lumbermen from East Machias, Maine, encountered Balch in San Francisco in January of 1850, during the gold rush. They knew him well because he was a relative of Talbot's by marriage and he had often stopped by East Machias to pick up lumber. Lafayette offered to rent his little house, located at the corner of California and Dupont Streets (Now Grant) to the two partners. Then Balch set out to sea.

Balch returned to San Francisco in February with a load of lumber. Lafayette's stories of the forests of Puget Sound at last convinced Pope and Talbot to search for a place for a mill. They settled at Teekalet, which became known as Port Gamble.

Members of the Balch family also came west. Two of his other brothers, Henry and George, who sailed in the Sacramento around the Horn, settled in California. Henry was for seven years a superintendent for the Comstock gold mines while George amassed a fortune in mining. Albert, the youngest brother, was a merchant who moved to Steilacoom. He resided in the house that Lafayette had built for him at 1614 Rainier Street.

The Albert Balch house still stands and is one of the historic homes of Steilacoom.

When Steilacoom was threatened during the Indian War of 1855-56 Lafayette Balch acted promptly to protect the place. The Northern

Indians, natives of the Queen Charlotte and Alexander Archipelagoes, decided in plunder. In November of 1856, when these Haida Indians came in several large war canoes into the Sound Balch immediately asked for and received help from the warship Massachusetts.

He also protected the Puget Sound area. In 1851, the schooner Georgiana, was en route to the gold fields in Canada when it was driven ashore at Skidgate Channel in the Queen Charlotte Islands. Balch, who was on his ship Demaris Cove heard of the plight of the five crew members and twenty-two passengers who had been captured by the Indians and worked to release them....

At about the same time one of the Hudson's Bay Company coasting vessels, the brigantine Una was driven ashore near Cape Flattery. Fortunately, the Demaris Cove was nearby. Though the vessel was lost, Balch rescued all of the crew and passengers.

The energetic and industrious Lafayette continued to expand his trade. This was due partly to the news of the gold discovery in British Columbia. However, it is reported in the book Ships of the Redwood Coast, that "by 1860 ships of all shapes and sizes had ventured into the coastwise trade...Balch and Webber, mill owners on Puget Sound had a line of wind jammers plying between San Francisco and the Northwest, the fleet including the brigs, Cyprus, Cyclops, Rice, and Ork."

When Captain Balch died suddenly on a San Francisco Street on November 26, 1862, Steilacoom was still the commercial and governmental center of the Puget Sound region....

Steilacoom residents of today are surrounded by reminders of the town's founder. The town plat...the streets named Lafayette and Balch and the Albert Balch House, Balch Passage in the Sound.... the submerged Balch wharf. And each day Steilacoomites enjoy the beautiful section of Puget Sound that Balch chose as his town site.

Carol Neufeld, "Lafayette Balch, founder of Steilacoom," Steilacoom Historical Museum Quarterly, XIV(Fall, 1985), p. 1,4-6.

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## LAFAYETTE BALCH

Caroline Kellogg, "Lafayette Balch, father of Steilacoom," Tacoma News

Tribune. June 10, 1979.

Lafayette Balch, remembered as the father of Steilacoom, was called the ubiquitous Capt. Balch because "he always seemed to be present when anything of importance was occurring."

A daring, fearless, frugal sailing ship captain from Maine, he was born Feb. 3, 1825 at Trescott, Maine, the son of John and Hannah Stone Balch. As a sea captain, he commanded his father's ship "Sacramento." In 1850, when he was only 25 years old, he sailed it around the Horn to the western coast of the United States, arriving at the Hudson's Bay Co. port at Nisqually on Christmas Eve, 1850.

From his home port in Maine, he brought merchandise and buildings already framed and ready to be put together. He purchased two sea-going vessels, the brig George Emery and the sloop Demaris Cove.

Balch, a "man of force and business acumen," according to Herbert Hunt's "History of Tacoma," first attempted to set up a trade center at Olympia but encountered opposition from Edmund Sylvester, owner of the townsite who was afraid the competition would ruin a store already there.

Therefore, Balch set sail in search of a friendlier reception and found it at what is now Steilacoom. He unloaded his cargo there and built a large store. Built of the finished lumber he had brought with him, it was the first store in Steilacoom. He immediately went into the lumber trade and his ships busily plied between Puget Sound and San Francisco where he had opened a lumber yard.

Balch located a claim, 315 acres, where Steilacoom now stands. He laid out a townsite, built a sawmill and, according to Hunt, named the town after Steilacoom Creek. He is said to have spelled it "Chielcoom," but there were many different spellings. Eventually it changed to "Steilacoom."

Balch gave land to newcomers, thereby inducing them to become settlers. He donated land for the Masonic Lodge, courthouse, school and the first church in Washington Territory. He was a promoter and Steilacoom grew. By 1853, a plat of the city had been made and all the streets laid out and named.

The ever-ambitious Balch persuaded a California newspaper editor, Charles Prosch, to come north and found the Puget Sound Herald. Its first issue on March 12, 1858 carried 200 inches of advertising, most of

it from San Francisco, Olympia and Port Gamble, where Pope & Talbot operated the largest sawmill in the territory. Paul Harvey in his "Tacoma Headlines" says that copies of the newspaper were in demand "in faraway places and sometimes sold for several dollars. People were eager to learn about the Puget Sound country."

Capt. Balch was instrumental in rescuing a party of Americans in 1851 who had been captured by the Hydah Indians on Queen Charlotte Island when the Americans were on their way to find the gold reported discovered there.

When Balch told Simpson P. Moses, collector of customs at Olympia, of the men's plight, Moses chartered Balch's ship Demaris Cove and, with Balch in command, soldiers and a few others effected the rescue of the men who had been held captive for 54 days.

Ransom demanded by the Indians was for each man held one shirt, one bolt of muslin, two pounds of tobacco and five blankets. The federal government reimbursed Balch and the other men but not until several years later.

Balch built a home for himself in Steilacoom and decided to make a trip to California, intending to bring back a bride. But he was stricken with a sudden illness in San Francisco and died there Nov. 25, 1862. He was only 37 years old.

In a manuscript written by Balch's great-niece, Eva G. Smith, she ends, "Thus passed a most courageous figure in the history of the Northwest..."

Balch Passage, between Anderson Island and McNeil Island, was named in his honor. Lake Louise, east of Steilacoom, was once called Balch Lake but, as Balch's great-niece said, "Balch Lake changed by land speculators into the meaningless 'Lake Louise,'" Balch Street and Lafayette Street in Steilacoom also honor his name.

Caroline Kellogg, "Lafayette Balch, founder of Steilacoom," Tacoma News Tribune. June 10, 1979.

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## SHIPS OF LAFAYETTE

Carol Neufeld, "The Ships of Lafayette Balch," Steilacoom Historical



Balch's wharf in Steilacoom was a bustling place in the 1850's with ships coming and going, cargoes being loaded and unloaded, and passengers embarking and disembarking. It was here that Lafayette Balch, co-founder of the town, docked the vessels used in his coastwide lumber and merchandise trade between Puget Sound and San Francisco.

While his partner, J. B. Webber, was tending the store, and the men at the lumber camp and sawmill were preparing timber, Balch began sailing between Steilacoom and San Francisco. He loaded his first ships, George W. Emery and Demaris Cove, with timber from the forests of Puget Sound and sailed it to his lumber yard on Pier 20 at Stewart Street in San Francisco. On return trips, he carried merchandise for his store, which was reportedly the best stocked on the Sound.

The George W. Emery, one of Balch's original ships, claimed some "firsts." According to Lewis and Dryden's *Marine History of the Pacific Northwest*, the brig took out the first coasting license issued on Puget Sound on the 19th of November, 1851, and so was the first American ship to carry forest products to San Francisco from Puget Sound. The Emery also was the first vessel to call at Commencement Bay in Tacoma to load lumber from Nicholas Delin's sawmill.

Shipping during Captain Balch's time was a thriving but hazardous business. Because vessels were wrecked, Balch added new ones to replace them. Balch's line of packets included at different times the brigs Cyclops, Cyrus, W D. Rice, and the barques Glympse, Mary F. Slade, Ork and Massachusetts. From 1853 to 1860 four of the fleet were wrecked and one was stranded.

Ships travelling from one coastal town to another transported the crew and passengers, who often suffered inconvenience, discomfort, hardship, and even death. Captain Balch rescued, in 1851, all the people travelling on two ships in distress. The crew and passengers of the Georgians, who were enslaved by the Hydah Indians when their schooner blew ashore in the Queen Charlotte Islands, were brought back in the Cove. At about the same time, the brigantine Una was driven ashore near Cape Flattery.

Fortunately the Demaris Cove was nearby. Though the ship was lost, Balch rescued all who were aboard.

An interesting story of a seasick passenger on the brig Cyrus is reported by Charles Prosch, editor of the Steilacoom newspaper, Puget Sound Herald from 1858 to 1864. He tells of an exciting February, 1858, trip from San Francisco to Steilacoom.

... a fair wind came up just as the lines of the brig were cast off. As we proceeded down the bay the wind increased to such a degree that the captain was afraid to venture out, and put about to anchor until the wind abated. (John E. Burns) a passenger who knew something of navigation ... protested. Captain Diggs was finally prevailed upon to go to sea with two or three reefs in each sail .... The Brig Cyrus went bounding over the waves at a lively rate and soon left the Harbor of San Francisco far astern. On the morning of the sixth day Charles Eisenbeis (a seasick young man) asked Captain Diggs how much longer they would be at sea.

He replied, "I think two weeks longer."

"Ah, mein Gott!" exclaimed Eisenbeis..."den I goes overboard!"

He didn't jump, and when the clouds lifted, the shores of Fuca straits were visible. Eisenbeis left the ship at Port Townsend and was twice elected mayor of that city.

Two passengers on the Ork also recalled difficulties of ocean travel. E. A. Light, a Steilacoom merchant, remembered an 1856 trip.

On the first day of February .... I sailed in the Ork and was twenty-two days on the way to San Francisco and arrived at that place a day too late for the sailing of the vessel bound for the Isthmus.

One of the last people to travel on the Ork when Balch owned the ship was Lieutenant August V. Kautz of Fort Steilacoom. He wrote in his journal on the 8th of June, 1861: "From Steilacoom to San Francisco on the Ork. Two passengers. Inelegant conditions. "

Death by drowning occurred frequently at sea. The San Francisco Ship Passenger Lists, notes tersely that the ship George Emery arrived on January 19, 1852, from Puget Sound with Captain Collins and two lady passengers. The passage was described as

"... heavy weather first 15 days out. Lost fore topmast, staysail, split sails. On December 27, 1851, while in a heavy gale, Edward Rochester, a

seaman, of Liverpool, England, lost overboard....

Ships' cargoes that arrived intact supplied the settlers with necessities and luxuries. The November 24, 1858, Puget Sound Herald advertises:

**NEW GOODS! NEW GOODS! Balch and Webber HAVE JUST RECEIVED, PER BRIG Cyrus and barque Ork, a large assortment of articles, viz: China and New Orleans Sugars; Soap; Candles; Syrup; Liquors and Wines of all kinds; a full Assortment of CROCKERY, DRY GOODS AND CLOTHING.**

When Lafayette Balch died suddenly on a San Francisco street November 25, 1862, Steilacoom was still a busy shipping town. However, as the years passed, other ports gained prominence and the Balch dock gradually deteriorated.

The old Balch wharf at the foot of Balch Street is quiet now-sunken in the Sound. The stately vessels that once anchored there have disappeared. The busy shipping lanes used by Balch no longer lead to a lively port of call. At low tide one can see the markers of the wharf-markers of another time, another era. These old stones are a sentinel to the hazardous times and the thriving fleet known as the ships of Lafayette Balch.

Article submitted by Carol Neufeld, a librarian at Bethel junior High School. A Steilacoom resident, she previously served on the Board of the Association.

## CAPTAIN BALCH'S FLEET

### Name of Ship

George W. Emery (Brig)  
Deniaris Cove (Schooner)  
Cyclops (Brig)  
Cyrus (Brig, 213 tons)  
Glynipse (Barque, 500 tons)  
Mary F. Slade (Barque, 250 tons)  
W. D. Rice (Brig, 300 tons)  
Ork (Barque, 300 tons)  
Massachusetts (Barque, 500 tons)

### Captains

Lafayette Balch  
Enoch S. Fowler  
Collins  
Trask  
Lafayette Balch  
Lafayette Balch  
W. H. Diggs  
S. A. Dayton  
A. B. Gave  
H. P. Crowell  
W. H. Diggs  
Buddington  
A. Y. Trask  
Freeman Trask

Comments

Wrecked in December, 1853, at Winchester Bay when owned by Woods & Company of San Francisco

Wrecked at Coos Bay, Oregon

Sank December 23, 1858, in San Juan Harbor, Washington; a total loss

Stranded January 6, 1860, at Clover Point near Victoria; later floated and sold in Australia

Wrecked near Cape Mendocino, California

Wrecked at mouth of Umpqua River November 24, 1864 (when owned by the Port Discovery Mill Co., 1861-1864)

Carol Neufeld, "The Ships of Lafayette Balch," Steilacoom Historical Museum Quarterly, XIX (Spring, 1990) p. 1.

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LAFAYETTE BALCH LOCATES STEILACOOM SITE JANUARY 10, 1851

William P. Bonney, "Lafayette Balch locates Steilacoom site, January 10, 1851" History of Pierce County, Volume I, p. 156-57.

Lafayette Balch. In the gallery of pictures of daring pioneers who blazed the trail to our Northwest is that of the outstanding figure of Capt. Lafayette Balch, perhaps the most enterprising man of his day on the Sound. He was a man of keen intellect, high character, sound business judgment, and dared to venture where others hesitated.

He was the son of John and Hannah Stone Balch, and was born at Trescott, Maine, February 3, 1825. He was a sea captain and commanded his father's ship, the Sacramento, in which he sailed around the Horn. He finally bought two seagoing vessels, the brig George Emery and the sloop Demaris Cove, and set out from his home port with a stock of merchandise and lumber ready fitted for building purposes.

The spirit of adventure led him to the Puget Sound, arriving at Fort Nisqually for Christmas Eve, 1850. He inspected Olympia, and for two or three days while at Nisqually examined the shores along the Sound, determined to found a new city to compete with the present Thurston County metropolis.

Undaunted by the claims of the Hudson's Bay Company to the lands of Pierce County, Balch finally made his selection of a donation claim for his new townsite, his location being made January 10, 1851. It contained 315.60 acres, and was surveyed by F. M. Reed, December 14, 1870. Upon a portion of this claim Balch made his plans for the commencement of Port Steilacoom.

He secured Lieut. W. A. Slaughter to plat the townsite and to make the survey. The Slaughter plat was filed by Balch with the county auditor on September 14, 1853. Balch unloaded his merchandise and his lumber, started a store, built a home and store-the first in Steilacoom-out of the finished lumber he had brought with him, and energetically branched out in the lumber trade.

He kept his ships busy plying between the Sound and San Francisco, where he opened a lumber yard. He induced settlers to come to Steilacoom, giving them lots if necessary to accomplish the desired ends. He was ever ready to promote public enterprises, giving money and land to the Masonic Lodge, to the county for a courthouse, to the school district for a school site, and to the first church to be built in the county.

He induced Charles Prosch to come to Steilacoom and start a newspaper. He did everything possible to advertise the town and the Sound country, and many of the early pioneers of this Northwest came here through the

good work done by Captain Balch.

Captain Balch finally built a home, which still stands, intending to marry. He went to California, intending to return to Steilacoom with his bride, but he was stricken suddenly with illness on the streets of San Francisco and died on November 25, 1862, without regaining consciousness. He left no will.

His heirs were in the East, and it is said that but little of what he left reached their hands. In the twelve active-years that Captain Balch worked to advance the interests of Steilacoom he accomplished results which proved him to be a man of keen ability and fearless determination. Balch Island, Balch Lake, and Balch's Cove were all named after the dauntless captain and business man.

Eva G. Smith, a grandniece of Captain Balch, now resides in Tacoma, at 3117 North 13th Street. She is principal of the Longfellow School.

William P. Bonney, "Lafayette Balch locates Steilacoom Site, January 10, 1851," History of Pierce County. Volume I, p. 156-57.

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## THE GEORGE EMORY

Lucile McDonald, "The George Emory and Steilacoom," Washington's Yesterdays. Portland: Binfords and Mort, 1953, p. 109-111.

A ship also was responsible for the founding of Puget Sound's second American town. It was the brig George Emory commanded by Captain Lafayette Balch of Truscott, Maine.

The captain made a trip around cape Horn and busied himself carrying timber cargoes from the north to San Francisco, telling no one the source of the piling in which he traded so profitably.

He presumably made his initial voyage to Puget Sound in February, 1850. On his second trip he brought building materials and stock for a store he intended to open at Olympia.

Edmund Sylvester already had induced Michael Simmions to do that same thing and he did not relish another business house in the sparsely settled community. Instead of welcoming Captain Balch, he quoted

property at a price too high for the thrifty Maine man. The latter was noted for his independence.. He concluded that if Olynipia would not have him on his own terms he would build a rival community.

Accordingly he lost little time in locating land for himself near Steilacoom Creek and founding a town of his own. His ready-made store was erected by July and Henry C. Wilson, who had traveled north with him was left in charge.

For the time being Captain Balch continued carrying timber to San Francisco Bay. On one of his voyages he brought as Passengers William B. Wilton, Charles C. Bachelder and A. A. Plummer. Wilton took up a land claim at Higgins Beach, north of Steilacoom, and contracted to cut piling. The others worked with him that winter, but lacking oxen, had a difficult time getting their timber to the water. Balch paid eight cents a running foot for piling delivered alongside his vessel. He sold it in San Francisco for one dollar a foot.

Most of the land around Steilacoom still was tied up by the possessory rights of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company and was not open to settlement. During 1850 Frederick Rabjohn, William Elders and William Bolton, all members of the Albion's crew, settled there. Thomas M. Chambers already had staked a claim near Fort Steilacoom, including a millsite at the entrance of Steilacoom Creek.

Thomas Glasgow boldly took possession of the creek mouth at Nisqually Landing and served written notice to Dr. Tolmie to quit making improvements there. Late in the year John B. Chapman and his son John M. Chapman, moved just north of Balch. They arrived by way of Grays Harbor, after trying unsuccessfully to plat a town at what is now Westport.

In April Plummer and Bachelder, failing to make a go of their logging, abandoned the enterprise and, following Captain Balch's advice, settled on claims at Port Townsend and became its first citizens. The Chapmans, however, were at Steilacoom to stay and laid out a townsite so close to the captain's that the two places were known as Upper and Lower Steilacoom.

Captain Balch attracted settlers to his town by donating land for public enterprises such as a Masonic building, courthouse, school and church. The city was platted in 1853 and at one time in the 1850's wa's the largest town in the new territory.

Lucile McDonald, "The George Emory and Steilacoom," Washington's

Yesterdays. Portland: Binfords and Mort, 1953, p. 109-111.