

COLUMBIA

THE MAGAZINE OF NORTHWEST HISTORY ■ FALL 1997 ■ \$6.00



ME 1846

The Return of a War Party - Pacific Coast

<> BY MIKE VOURI <>

RAIDERS

from the

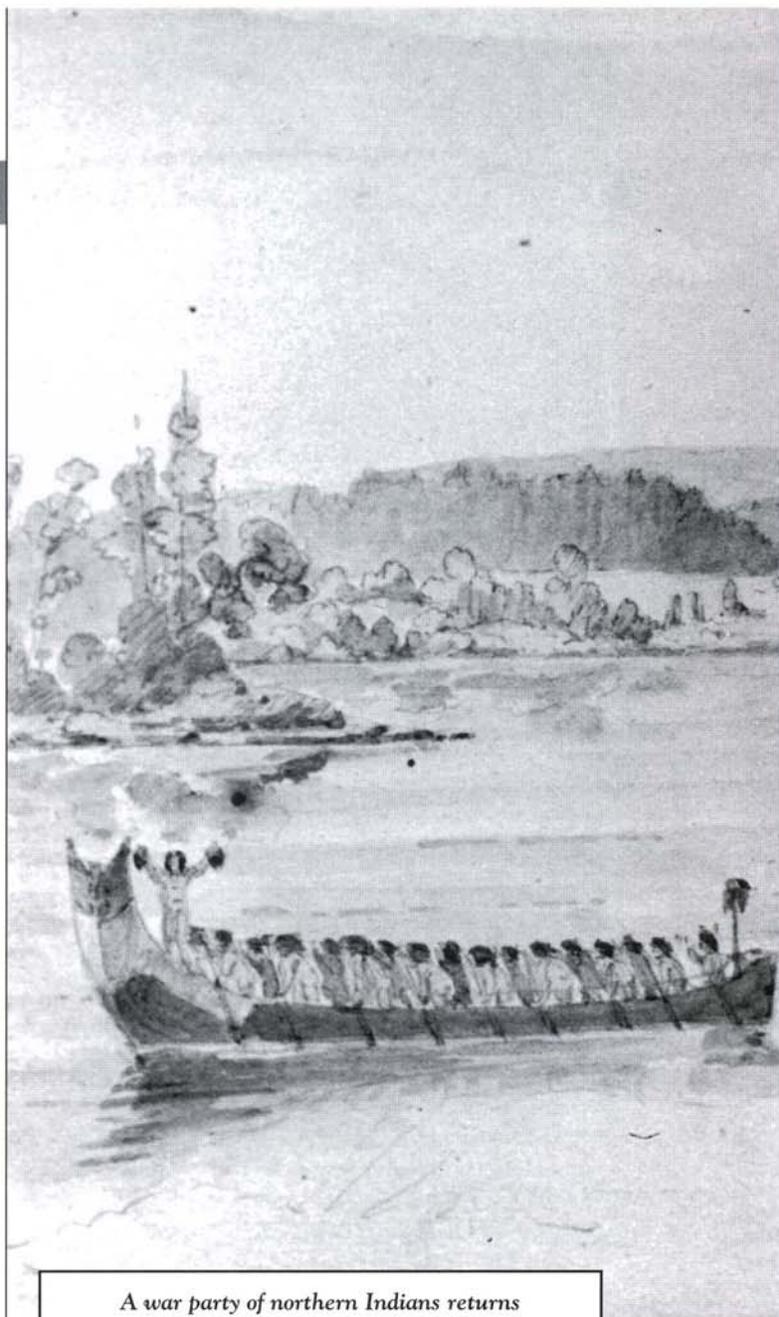
NORTH

*The Northern Indians
and Northwest Washington
in the 1850s*

It was a fine spring afternoon on Bellingham Bay, May 24, 1854. The waters of Puget Sound glimmered on the bay shore, rippling gently on a beach of fine, smooth stones that caught the light and stitched it around the bay to Whatcom—the source of wood smoke that drifted through the dark woods above Henry Roeder's sawmill. Joel Clayton, a prospector/engineer working a coal seam on the bay's southern end, was drinking in all of this from his hillside cabin when two enormous canoes suddenly emerged from Hale Passage on the north end of the bay.

The raised prows, bright paint and shouts of the paddlers at every stroke identified them as "Northerners." Knowing full well why they were coming, Clayton's stomach must have twisted, and he probably wanted to bolt for the woods. But he had recently been elected one of three judges for the fledgling Whatcom County (population 30), so he dutifully strode down the hill to the beach. And it was a mesmerizing sight. The warriors were perfectly synchronized, biting into the placid bay for several turns, then resting their paddles abeam while the canoes cut through the water, gliding swiftly and growing larger by the second.

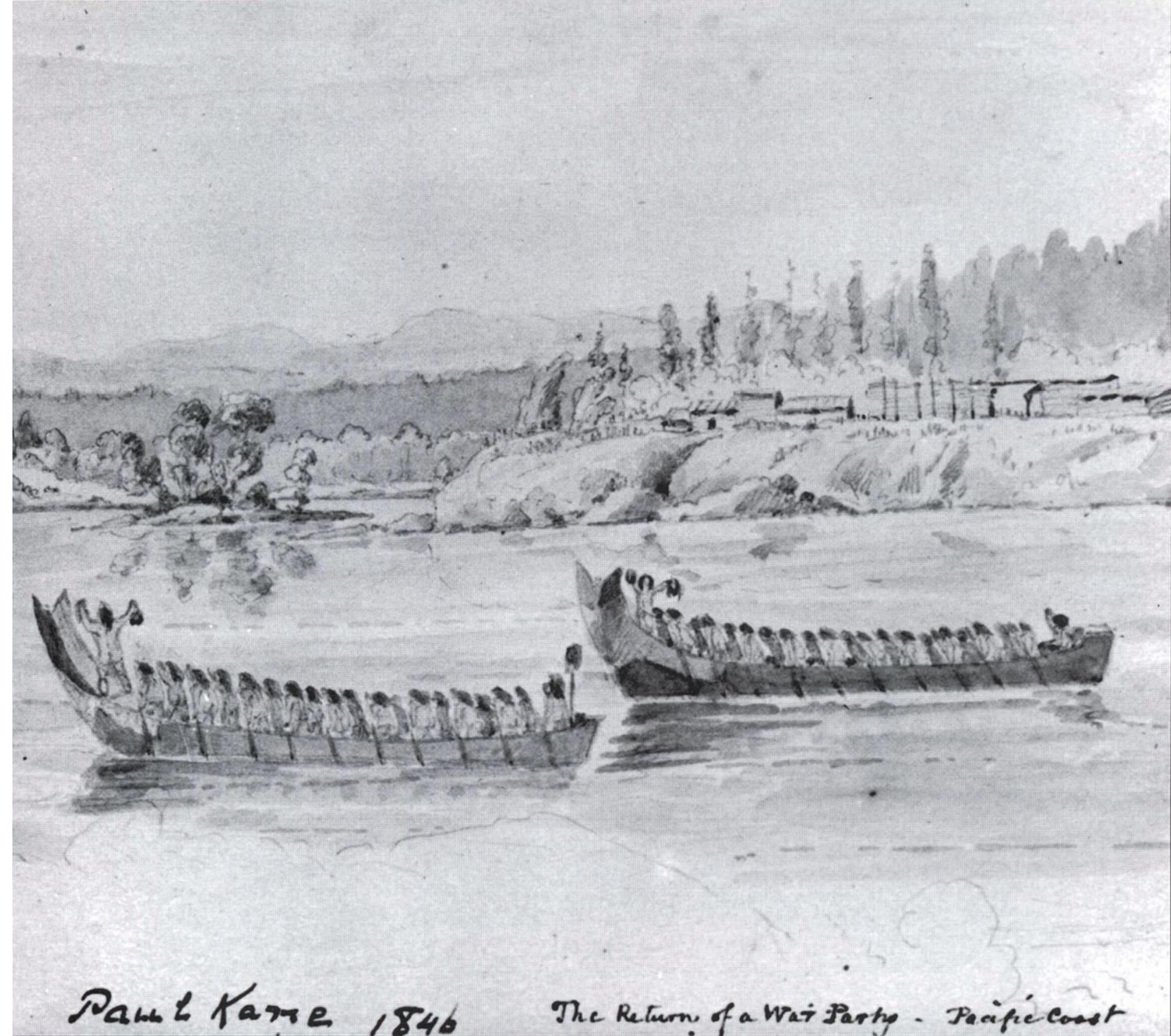
The canoes scudded ashore not far from where Clayton stood. The occupants seemed larger than the local Lummi, some wearing the traditional conical spruce-root hats with potlatch rings, skin trousers and button blankets, others



A war party of northern Indians returns from a raid. Warriors standing in the bows brandish the severed heads of their enemies as victory trophies. It also was not uncommon for a party to put on a similar display as a warning when entering the village of another group.

sporting European felt hats and wool shirts. All were heavily armed with knives, hatchets and an odd mix of firearms. The leader told Clayton they had come to trade, but Clayton knew better. No women were along, and the warriors were in paint. When this was the case, the evening almost always ended badly.

Clayton pretended to be interested in a button blanket worn by one of the Northerners but told them he would have to go to his cabin for money. This said, he ambled off the beach and once out of sight tore into the woods, scrambling uphill with the Indians in hot pursuit. Out of breath and for a moment out of view, Clayton dove under a fallen log and decided to wait it out. Frozen, he watched as the



Paul Kane painting; courtesy: Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas

Indians vaulted one by one over his hiding place and made for another log cabin near the coal diggings, located just above today's Boulevard Park. Several mine employees huddled inside, including a woman and two small children, while two Lummis opened fire on the Northerners. Long after dark the Northerners were still there, laying a steady fire into the cabin, hoping the occupants would give up.

Finally, near dawn, the Northerners withdrew, but not before they had ransacked and destroyed Clayton's cabin and killed two miners who tried to flank them on the beach. The raiders left the bodies headless for the horrified whites, then moved on to Whidbey Island where they destroyed several more homes.

The Northern Indians

FEAR OF NORTHERN Indians—then defined as groups from today's northern British Columbia, southeastern Alaska and the Queen Charlotte Islands—had been a constant in

Puget Sound long before American homesteads sprang up on the shorelines in the late 1840s. The Lummis and other Coast Salish shore-dwelling groups in the south had been raiding each other for generations. However, with the establishment in 1843 of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Fort Victoria, northern groups paddled south, bringing goods for barter along with a whole new dimension in the raiding culture.

Like the Vikings of northern Europe, they came out of the north without warning in swift, open craft 30 to 100 feet long and 8 feet abeam, each with a full complement of warriors, all heavily armed and without mercy. White settlers were not always clear about which group or clan was responsible for a raid. This was in large part because the raiders wore similar attire and traveled in the same large, seagoing canoes manufactured almost exclusively by the Haida from the Queen Charlotte and Prince of Wales islands. Often they were Haida; but they might also be Tlingit

from the Stikine River in today's southeastern Alaska, or Tsimshian from Fort Simpson along the northern British Columbia coast or the fierce Kwakiutl of northern Vancouver Island.

Raiding was deeply established in these cultures. Groups raided to avenge a wrong or to mourn a death, but more often to take booty—slaves, heads, tools, weapons and anything else not too big for the canoe—which boosted the wealth of a family or clan and cemented its status in the group. Raids against native populations in the area had become so frequent that the Lummi had fled their traditional fishing and clamming grounds in the San Juan Islands for safe haven in Bellingham Bay where heavily wooded uplands and broad vistas gave ample warning of attack.

Now the “Bostons” (Americans) had arrived, appearing rich and vulnerable with cabins full of Yankee goods, and the raids were intensifying from Whatcom to Olympia. This was cause for alarm amongst the British as well as the Americans. Thefts, murders and decapitations were bad for business, whether it be mercantile or development of real estate. No serious attempt at settlement and the march toward prosperity could be made until the raids were stopped.

Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens had northern raiders in mind when he drafted one of his whirlwind treaties in the winter of 1854-55 with the Nisqually and other bands. Article XII read:

The said tribes and bands finally agree not to trade at Vancouver's Island, or elsewhere out of the dominions of the United States; nor shall foreign Indians be permitted to reside in the reservations without consent of the superintendent or agent.

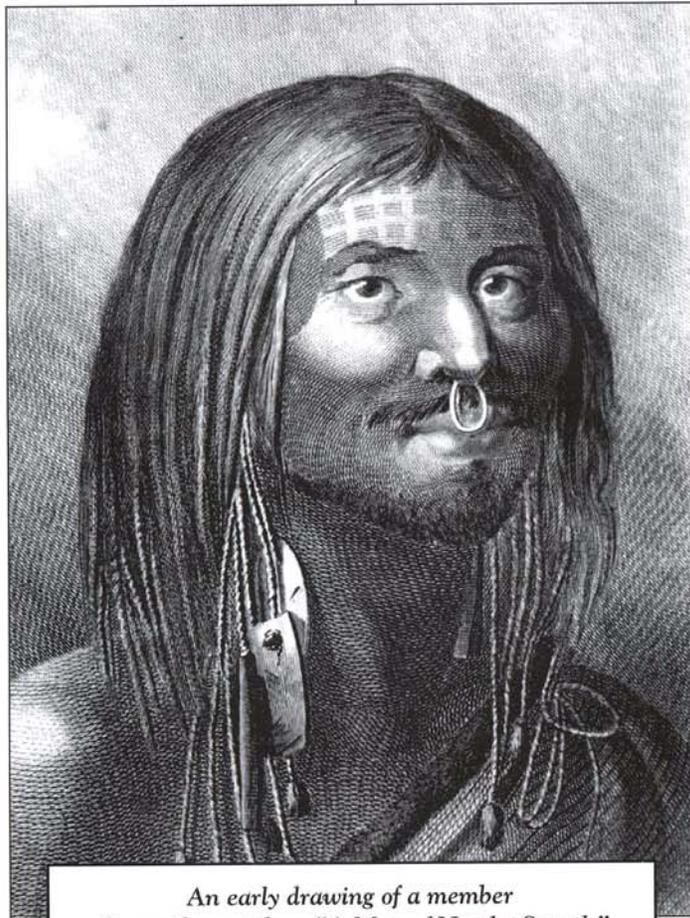
By the mid 1850s Americans on Puget Sound were becoming intimately acquainted with Northerners as

individuals came south in greater numbers seeking work as a more peaceable means to accumulate wealth. These workers invariably suffered in the wake of raids by their brethren, largely because native populations on Puget Sound believed in the same code of revenge. Once word worked north that the individual had been slain, another cycle of retaliation began. It did not matter who perpetrated the deed, only that revenge be taken, however remotely related the victim might be. In the case of whites it encompassed the entire race, the principal target being someone of rank and privilege because this enhanced the status of the redeemer.

To Stevens's mind, it was best not to tempt fate altogether. Good thing. His treaties had bred trouble enough with Indians living in his territory. By September 1855 the Yakamas had figured out the fine print in theirs and put on war paint, which inspired Indians living west of the Cascades to do the same. Now the territory had Indian troubles on all fronts, and for help it turned to the United States Army.

A new regiment had been promised to Washington Territory, but there was still no sign of it. And with northern Indian canoe sightings reported almost daily, several Whatcom County citizens started a letter-writing campaign in the *Olympia Pioneer Democrat*, the only newspaper west of the Cascades and north of Vancouver. In one letter, dated September 28, 1855, regional Indian commissioner/coal mine manager/county judge E. C. Fitzhugh wrote from Whatcom:

Can you give any information about the military post that is to be established? We are very much exposed, there being only some seven or eight men on this Bay. Two of those northern canoes loaded with armed Indians could easily exterminate every man, woman and child in this part of the country, and make their escape without any person in your part of the country being informed thereof. It is really time that this state of things should cease and protection to this sparsely settled



An early drawing of a member of a northern tribe—"A Man of Nootka Sound," from Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, 1798, The Journal of Captain George Vancouver.

#6729, Ashbel Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society

country on this frontier looking upon the hostile tribes of the British-Russia[n] America be afforded.

By December 1855 the territorial legislature had passed three memorials directing establishment of a military post on Bellingham Bay, urging Congress to allocate funds to garrison the fortress with army regulars, build a military road from the proposed Fort Bellingham to Fort Steilacoom, and to finally send steam warships to patrol Puget Sound from Budd Inlet to the Strait of Georgia because only steamships could keep up with war canoes.

However, the wheels of government had been grinding along. In mid January the newly reactivated Ninth Infantry Regiment—about 800 strong—landed at Fort Vancouver, Colonel George Wright commanding, with Lieutenant Colonel Silas Casey as second in command. The regiment was equipped with the 1841 Harper's Ferry or "Mississippi" rifle, which had been re-bored to fire the minié ball, a munition that would account for 92 percent of the battlefield casualties in the Civil War. Wright immediately took eight companies to eastern Washington to deal with the Yakamas, while Casey headed north to Fort Steilacoom with the remaining two companies, there to contend with the Nisqually, Klikitat and other groups.

No troops were assigned to face the Northerners.

A Lummi village in northern Puget Sound, c. 1865. The Lummis and other Coast Salish shore-dwelling tribes fell victim to raids by the fierce Northerners, as did the white settlers in the area.

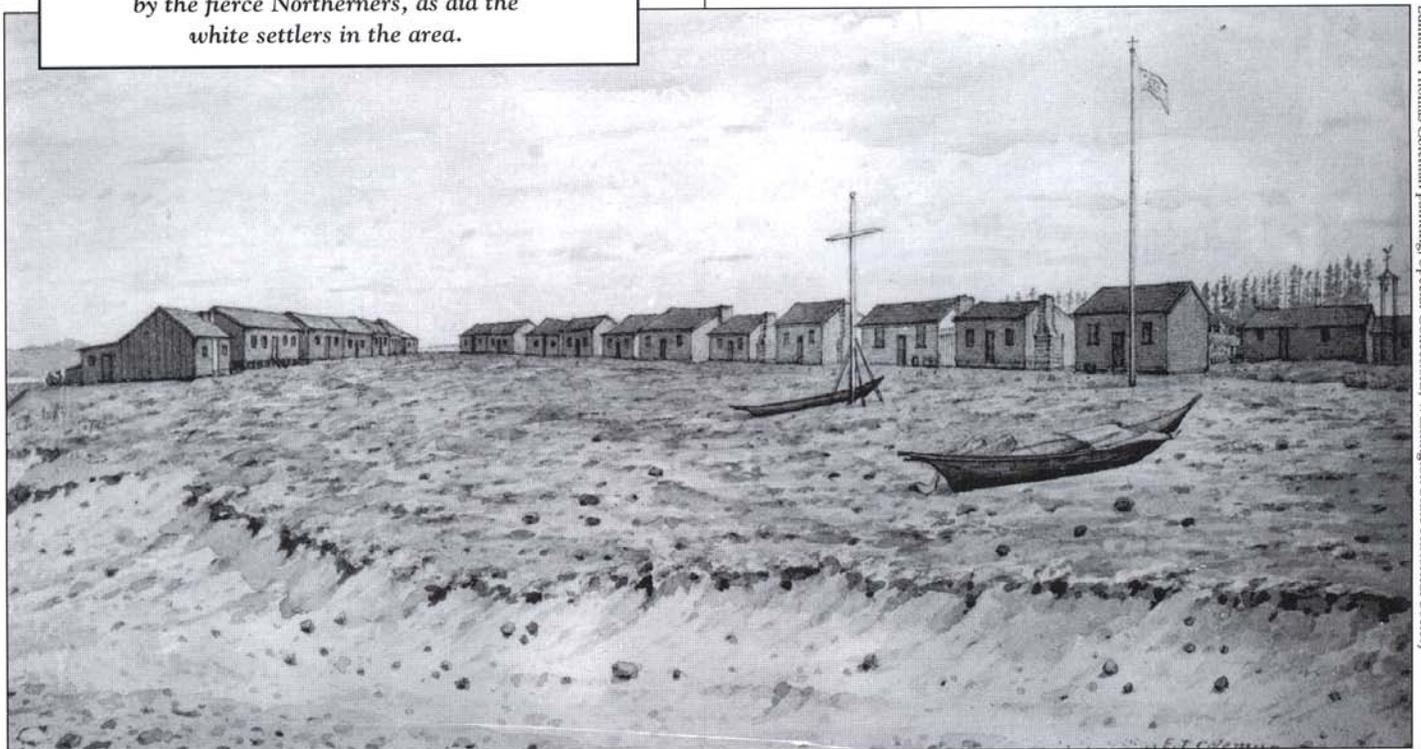
In September the *Pioneer Democrat* reported on the impending arrival of the steamer USS *Massachusetts*, which would assist the sloop of war USS *Decatur* (a sailing ship) and USS *Active*, a lightly armed side-wheeler survey ship, in providing protection to settlers.

The ships did not arrive soon enough to prevent a raiding party of Northerners from again striking the Isaac Ebey residence and three other homesteads on Whidbey Island the evening of January 19, 1856. The raiders even ransacked the revenue cutter *Rival*. The white settlers jumped into the lightened cutter and gave chase until they caught up with the canoes about 15 miles down-sound. The Indians surrendered several nautical items from the cutter but swore they would fight before they gave up anything else.

Shortly after the new year, the people of Whatcom took steps to protect themselves by forming a volunteer company they called the "Whatcom Rangers." In a January 23, 1856, letter to Governor Stevens, Russell Peabody—Henry Roeder's partner and a Ranger captain—stressed that the community soon expected an attack from the canoes:

They say that we are all girls and that they are coming to show us what men are. Take what they want, kill what they can and take all the Lummi tribe prisoners and make slaves of them. They may not do it, but that their will is good enough we have every reason to believe them.

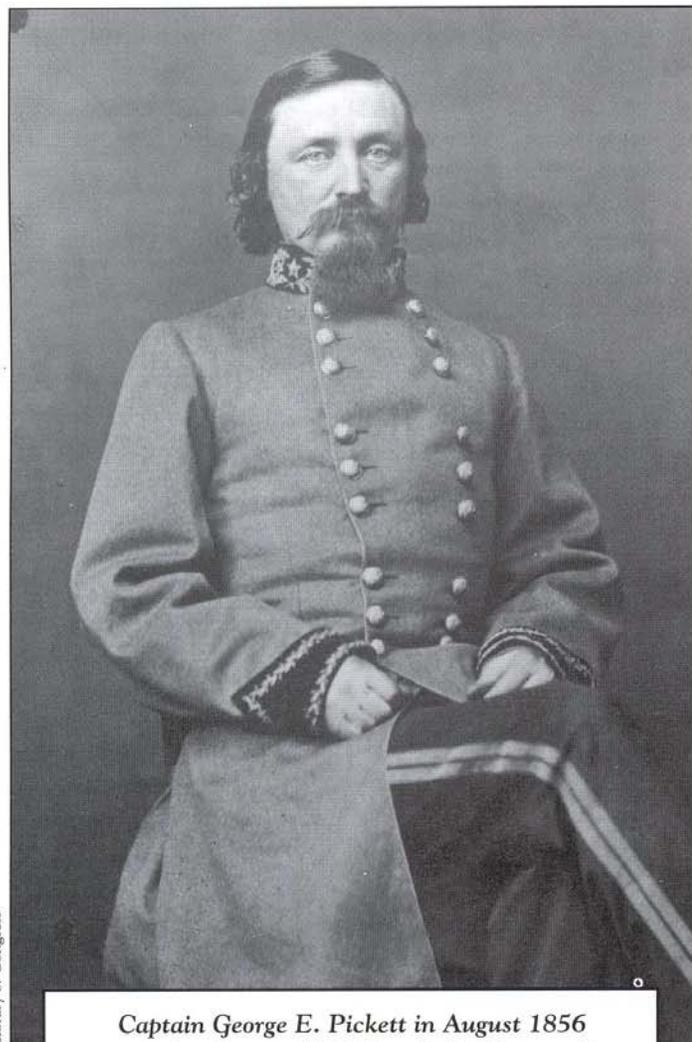
Peabody then (and not for the last time) asked for an armed steamer to cruise that portion of the sound, noting



Edmund Thomas Coleman painting, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society

that it “would relieve the minds of our settlers not a little. . . .” Finally, in a terse postscript he reported that two northern Indian women living with white men on the bay were warning that attack was imminent and that “they were afraid to stay any longer.”

With no hope of seeing troops any time soon, the Rangers built a small fort on the bluff just north of the Whatcom Falls mill and prepared for the worst. It came in February when Governor Stevens called up the militia, including the Whatcom Rangers. Despite the threat from the north, the Rangers were dispatched south to Seattle. The bizarre posting did not escape the *Pioneer Democrat*: “We are informed (Bellingham Bay) can boast of but 30 white residents capable of bearing arms, and being efficient in the field, a company of



Captain George E. Pickett in August 1856 was ordered to establish Fort Bellingham at the mouth of the Nooksack River in hopes of discouraging raids by northern Indians. The Northerners ignored the fort and threatened to cut off Pickett's head as well.

24 men (including a few ‘half-breeds’ and Indians) have been enrolled.” This certainly was evidence of the patriotism of the territory’s northern-most community, the newspaper lauded.

Remarkably, ten of the Indians were listed as residents of the “Northwest Coast,” with names such as John Short, John Long and Ank Stout. Here were the very people the Whatcom settlers were the most up in arms about, eager to fight alongside them. The Indians signed on for \$35 a month and blankets. Fitzhugh had sold Stevens on the idea of enlisting Northerners, hoping that the governor would employ them as scouts to “give them a lively chance for being killed.”

It also was hoped that regular patrols by the *Decatur* and the revenue cutter *Jefferson Davis* would be enough to intimidate numerous bands of northern Indians reported in and about Vancouver Island and the San Juans.

In a letter drafted June 18, 1856, British Crown Colony Governor James Douglas warned Bellingham Bay citizens that a Haida man had accused someone living on the bay of stealing his wife. Stressing the code of retaliation, the governor urged local officials to investigate the charge and, if true, return the woman.

By then Douglas was well-acquainted with the Haida. In the summer of 1855 more than 2,000 of them arrived in Victoria and camped in the vicinity of the fort. They said they were seeking employment, but Douglas was far from convinced. In a letter to the British government he expressed “great and increasing anxiety” over the “presence of so many armed barbarians in a weak and defenceless colony.”

Always one to tackle a problem head-on, Douglas appointed the first colonial militia of Vancouver Island. Although the militia was composed of but ten men, they proved more than enough to prevent disputes between the Northerners and white settlers from escalating into violence. By autumn the Haida were gone; Douglas felt that the colony had been made secure and the Indians had been provided with a quality educational experience:

They begin in fact to have a clearer idea of the nature and utility of laws, having for object the punishment of crimes and the protection of the property, which may be considered as the first step in the process of civilization.

By August 1856 the Whatcom Rangers returned from Washington’s Indian war—much to the relief of Bellingham Bay residents—and were officially deactivated as a formal militia unit. The only disgruntled Whatcom citizen was Indian agent Fitzhugh who, in a letter to the territorial militia commander in Olympia, complained that he needed more blankets to pay off the “savages” who had

refused to cooperate and get killed.

Meanwhile, a small item appeared in the August 29 edition of the *Pioneer Democrat*: "The brig *George Emory* sailed from Steilacoom on Friday last for Bellingham Bay, with Capt. Pickett and Company D, Ninth Infantry to garrison the fort at that place."

The establishment of Forts Bellingham and Townsend—the latter to be built by Company I, Fourth Infantry in October of that same year—was not only to serve as a deterrent against northern Indian raids but to lend these communities the essential perception of solidity required to attract the capital to mill lumber and, in the case of Bellingham Bay, dig Fitzhugh's coal—coal that would fuel the steamers of the United States Navy and commercial fleets. The forts also would serve notice of a strong American presence along the international border just 15 miles north on the mainland, where Great Britain and the United States still held to conflicting claims.

The Northerners were hardly intimidated. They simply paddled by, as in November 1856 when a large party clashed with the steamer *Massachusetts* on a beach near the sawmill town of Port Gamble. The Indians had been trading in the Olympia area, where one of their number had been murdered two years earlier. On the way home they took their revenge. One group attacked a small schooner, killing one of the crew, while others hit isolated settlements on the shoreline, including the Nisqually Reservation near Steilacoom.



nce alerted, the *Massachusetts* finally had an opportunity to demonstrate how steam power could bring the Northerners under control. She left her anchorage near Seattle early on November 19 and arrived in Steilacoom only to discover that the Indians had left, waging "bloody battles" with local Indians on their way out. The *Massachusetts* immediately chugged down-sound, pursuing the party to the Port Gamble encampment of Northerners employed by the sawmill. The ship's commander, Captain Samuel Swartout, immediately demanded the surrender of the raiding party, as well as the evacuation of the sawmill workers, or he would open fire.

Having yet to confront concentrated American military or naval power, the Northerners refused, countering that if it was a fight the "Bostons" wanted they could have it. They then raised a red war flag, according to the diary of Isaac Ebey, collector of customs at Port Townsend. Swartout brought the *Massachusetts* close to shore, then requisitioned the local steamer *Traveller*, which had just arrived in port with a log boom in tow. The *Traveller* and the *Massachusetts*'s launch were armed with field pieces and positioned offshore so as to prevent the Indians' escape during the night.

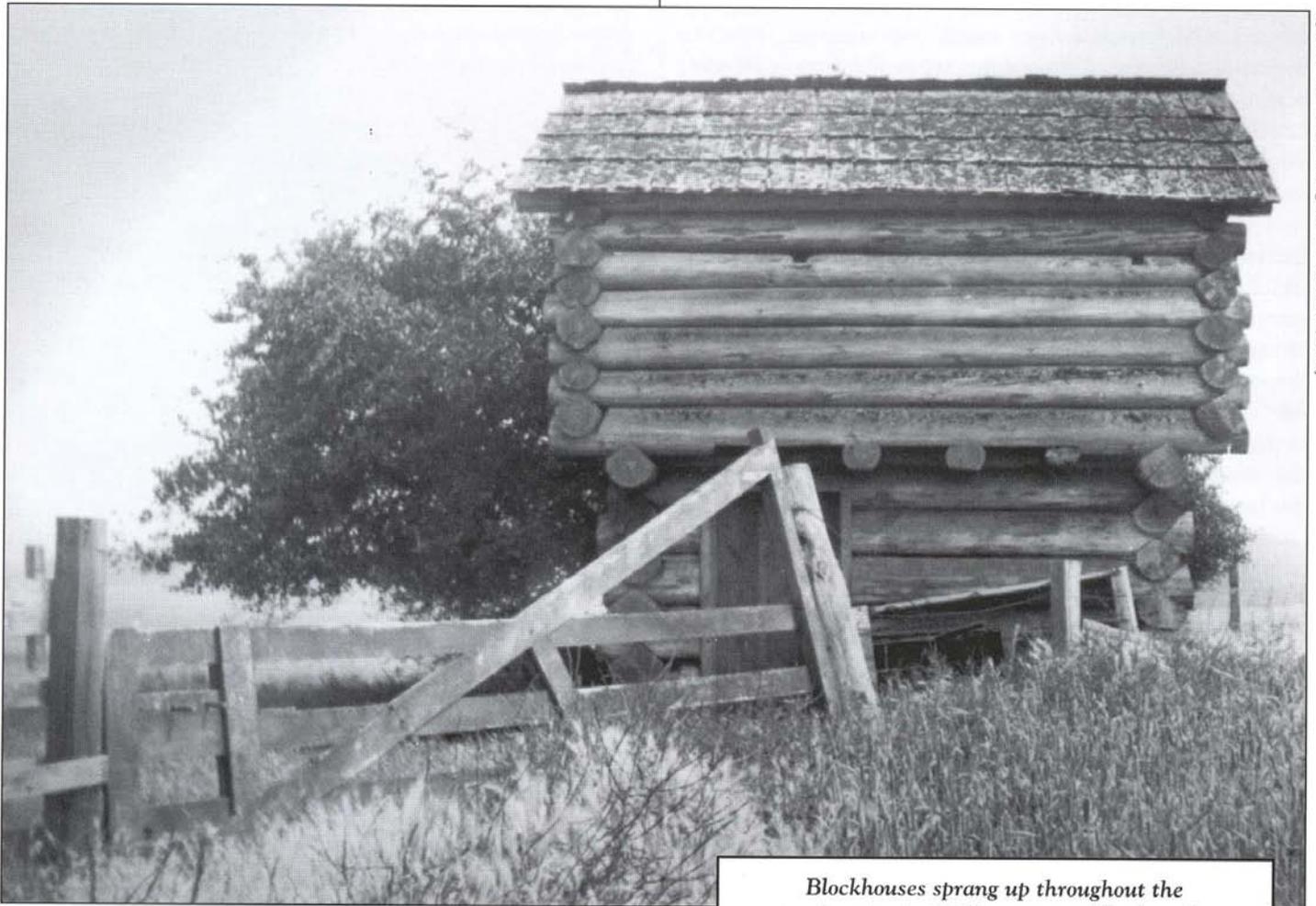


James Douglas wore two hats in the 1850s—governor of the British Crown Colony of Vancouver Island and chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Victoria. He consistently denied that the raiders entering United States waters were "British" Indians, but he helped the Americans when he could.

At dawn Swartout dispatched a flanking party ashore in heavy seas with a brass howitzer and mortar. Again he demanded a surrender. Again the red flag went up, at which time the ship's flankers opened fire in concert with withering broadsides of round and grape shot unleashed from four of the *Massachusetts*'s eight 32-pound naval guns, plus the guns aboard the *Traveller* and the launch. The Indians retreated into the thick woods to make a stand against the shore party, but the trees provided little cover from the warship's cannon and the looping howitzer rounds. By mid morning the Northerners emerged carrying a white flag. They found their village and most of their possessions—including more than 300 blankets and several fine canoes—destroyed or carried off by the sailors and marines.

As Ebey recalled:

Twenty-seven were found dead—seventeen in one place. Ten were missing. Those who were killed were dreadfully cut up. Some had been killed from splinters from trees. One woman was killed. She and another woman had come from the timber to the camp to carry off the chief who was



Blockhouses sprang up throughout the territory in the 1850s, prompted by first the Indian War of 1855 and then northern Indian raids. Several were built on Whidbey Island in the wake of the Ebey Massacre.

wounded (and later died). They were called to come to the marines. One of them started to them, the other started to run off. She was fired upon and killed, six balls having taken effect in her body.

Swartout next ordered all of the Indians aboard the *Massachusetts* for the purpose of deporting them to Vancouver Island. The Indians again refused, stating that they would rather purchase canoes from the local Indians and paddle home on their own. Swartout turned down the request, rounded up the survivors, and herded them aboard the warship. American casualties amounted to one marine killed by a gunshot to the head and another struck in the thumb. Three others also were hit by musket balls, but the rounds were deflected by knife handles and pistol butts.

The Indians were fed bread and molasses, then transported to Victoria where Governor Douglas protested that these were Russian Indians and refused Swartout permission to land them. Undaunted, the American proceeded north and put the Northerners ashore on Lasqueti Island. Before the *Massachusetts* weighed anchor, the Indians were warned a final time never to return. Being a newcomer to Puget

Sound, Swartout thought he'd taught the Northerners a lesson they would not soon forget. As one settler put it, he "flattered himself" that they would never return.

The locals knew better. The deaths of 27 Indians, including a headman, called for retaliation, and they knew it did not matter against whom. It came not one month later when a raiding party landed on San Juan Island to kill Oscar Olney, the assistant U.S. customs inspector. Olney barely escaped, which prompted the legislature to pass a law forbidding trade with Northerners and a resolution urging that the *Massachusetts* remain on Puget Sound. This sense of foreboding was heightened in Whatcom when in April 1857 a band of Northerners hit the beach at Sehome, broke into Louis Loscher's cabin—presumably looking for the woman Loscher claimed to have purchased from them fair and square several months before—and made off with a stack of blankets, not to mention Loscher himself.

But what about the deterrent of Fort Bellingham? In a frantic letter to Governor Stevens, Fitzhugh said that the

Loscher raid was also a scouting mission. The Northerners had reconnoitered the nascent military post and found it and its occupants so pathetic that just as soon as they could gather reinforcements they were going to return and cut off the heads of Captains Pickett and Peabody “and myself certainly,” Fitzhugh wrote.

We might all be killed as we expect no assistance from the Military Post, they having as much as they can do to protect their perimeter, their pickets not being finished and many of the soldiers being in irons in the guardhouse.

Fitzhugh hand carried his missive to the governor in Olympia and dropped off a copy at the newspaper office for effect. The *Pioneer Democrat* printed the letter almost verbatim, including the passage reporting that friendly Indians had spotted 14 canoes of Stikines, Haida and Bella Bellas in the Lopez Island area, about 375 men and only two women amongst them—“all painted and armed . . . and all around us, gathering meaner everyday.”

But there was more. The *Massachusetts* had left Puget Sound for refit and was to be replaced by the steamer USS *John Hancock*, which had not yet arrived. The *Pioneer Democrat* expressed alarm. For four years the raids from the north had persisted, with “murders—and some of them of the most daring character—within sight of our most populous towns,” the newspaper reported. Now there was nothing to prevent a visit from “these disagreeable neighbors.”

Fitzhugh’s Indians may or may not have been the large party that Swartout logged on his way out the Strait of Juan de Fuca aboard the *Massachusetts*. The steamer stopped off in Victoria where the captain consulted with Governor Douglas about northern raiding parties and other matters. With the Haida peacefully encamped about the fort, Douglas saw no cause for alarm. Consequently, Swartout saw no reason to delay his trip to San Francisco in order to overlap with the *Hancock*. How could he possibly know that Douglas would stir up the pot a few days later by turning away from Victoria’s inner harbor several canoes full of Northerners from Russian America seeking trade and all of the attendant excitements.

With Swartout gone, Fitzhugh told Governor Stevens he had no choice but to form his own volunteer company of miners and build his own blockhouse. Old Fort Defiance, way over on the other side of Whatcom Creek from the mines, was just too far away. All he needed to feel “cozier” was a cannon, which he believed would inspire confidence in his forces, otherwise they might just beat a path south and leave Bellingham Bay to the Lummis, the harbor seals and Henry Roeder. “They only remain now waiting for the arrival of a steamer and trusting to Providence not to be murdered in the meantime,” he concluded.

Stories of close calls, vanishing sailing craft and other raids, allegedly the work of the Northerners, abounded that spring and summer, even after the *Hancock* arrived. Whatcom’s Henry Roeder reported that his vessel, the *H. C. Page*, Captain James Carr commanding, had been chased from Port Townsend all the way up to Volcano Point by several canoes while en route to Olympia. They eventually caught up with and fired upon his vessel about 15 miles south of Steilacoom. Roeder escaped with his craft and immediately reported the incident to authorities in Olympia. Carr maintained in the *Pioneer Democrat* that these same raiding parties had boarded and robbed the schooner *Phantom* en route from Port Townsend to Victoria. State Adjutant General James Tilton had pursued these raiders in the steamer *Traveller*, but they were long gone.

The inferior quality of sail against the canoes was underscored again in July when the revenue cutter *Jefferson Davis*, with Captain Granville O. Haller and Company I, Fourth Infantry, aboard, failed to overtake a raiding party cutting through the lower sound. This same group was said to have waylaid the 15-ton schooner *Wild Pigeon*, bound from Steilacoom to Port Townsend with six souls. Nearly becalmed in a light breeze off Vashon Island and with only the helmsman on deck, the *Pigeon* was overtaken and boarded by the raiders. As Whidbey Island settler Hugh Crockett wrote:

The Indians shot him and all the others as fast as they showed their heads above deck. Just off Vashon Island. When they had killed all the crew and passengers, they plundered and burned the vessel, and in a few hours there was not a vestige left of the little craft.

But the Northerners were far from finished this journey, according to Crockett. A few hours later they encountered a small ship from Utsalady near Rocky Point, just south of Port Blakely. They killed the captain and all three of his passengers, looted and burned the vessel and sent it to the bottom.

Haller had no such worries, armed to the teeth as he was aboard the *Davis*. But the Indians held sailing vessels in such contempt that they actually stopped off and raided a Clallam village on the way home with Haller’s sails clearly in sight. They also attempted to kidnap and murder Whidbey Island’s Dr. J. C. Kellogg in revenge for the chief they had lost at Port Gamble, but Kellogg was not at home.

Three weeks went by without further incident until midnight, August 11, 1857. That’s when the Northerners returned to Whidbey and brutally murdered and mutilated Isaac Ebey, ransacked his home and drove his family into the night.

The Ebey Massacre

Isaac Neff Ebey came west in 1846, crossing the plains to find a home in the Oregon Country. An educated man,

brave and affable, Ebey became a community leader from the start, serving in turn as a district attorney, collector of customs for the Puget Sound district, delegate to the Oregon Territorial Legislature, a captain of the Territorial Volunteers and, briefly, as adjutant general for Washington Territory and probate judge for Island County. His homestead, "The Cabins," was visited frequently by whites and Indians alike.

The Ebey murder was to 1850s-era settlers what Pearl Harbor Day would be for their great-grandchildren. It is remembered in many pioneer accounts of the period. The story varies only according to details, and these depend largely on how close the teller lived to the Ebeys. There were a lot of the "just misses."

Henry Roeder recalled making preparations to sail his wife Elizabeth over to the islands on the *Page*. Elizabeth was friends with the wife of Marshall George W. Corliss, who had come west with Ebey's party in 1846. They were staying with the Ebeys during the session of the United States District Court, for which Ebey was prosecutor, at Penn Cove, across the prairie from the Ebey homestead. Fortunately for Elizabeth, a squall blew in and Roeder was forced to find shelter in the lee of the island, several miles from the cove. From his anchorage, Roeder said he spotted the campfires of the northern Indians who would soon visit the Ebey household. The Northerners had been by the Ebeys' earlier in the day seeking provisions. In observance of the law that forbade trading with the Northerners, Ebey turned them away. On their way back to the landing they asked one of Ebey's hired hands if Ebey were a "great chief." Indeed he was, the man replied, unaware that he was pronouncing a death sentence.

"Blanket Bill" Jarman, a Whatcom County settler who had once been enslaved by Northerners, sensed that something was up and tried to warn Ebey. He'd seen this same group gambling on the beach; the colonel "had better be on guard," he said. Ebey dismissed the warning. He and Mrs. Ebey had both met this bunch, he said, and they seemed like "good Indians." Luzena Wallace saw it differently. Three days earlier she and her husband, Colonel William Wallace, observed this same band in a tent on the beach, wearing war paint. She recalled, "I saw Indians in there with their faces painted, and when the Indians paint their faces they mean to fight." Her fears drew laughter from the menfolk, including her husband. Still another account had it that these Indians had approached Ebey on the afternoon of his death while the colonel was working in the fields. They wanted him to come down and inspect a canoe they said had been damaged. He demurred.

The raiders stole up to the house twice that evening, on both occasions given away by the colonel's "very fierce" dog.

The first time, Ebey padded out on the porch, saw nothing, and returned to bed. The second time, Mrs. Ebey told her husband that she suspected the Indians were after the laundry she had hung on the line that afternoon. The colonel went to check and was accosted by several warriors. He asked what they wanted. They replied, "Your head," and fired two shots. Ebey turned to run and they shot him twice more, one ball piercing his heart, the other entering his armpit. They next grabbed Ebey's ax and cut off his head.

Meanwhile, Ebey's wife and children and the Corlisses vaulted out of the windows in the rear of the house and ran across the yard. Some fled to the woods while others bounded across the open prairie to the Robert C. Hill residence—where Judge Henry R. Crosbie was staying—about three quarters of a mile away. Mrs. Corliss, who was in the latter group, was shot at by an Indian who had entered the house and followed the fugitives to the window.

Henry Roeder recalled:

As Mrs. Corliss climbed over the fence she was fired at twice. In her flight, Ebey, that is, Ebey's son, was close in pursuit of her. She supposed it was an Indian; and she ran barefooted for two miles and a half to the neighbors. I have been told by the young man that he ran his best and could not keep up with her.

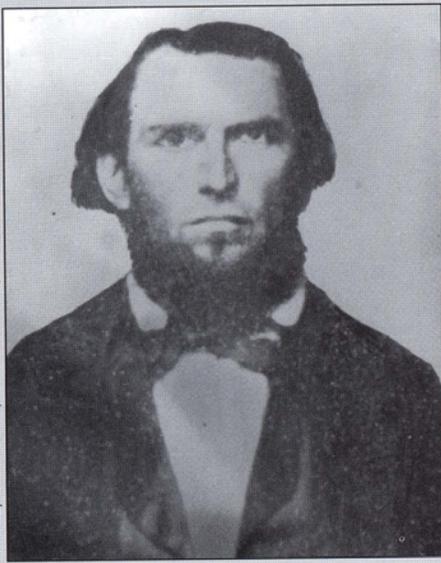
Mrs. Corliss, gasping, barefoot, and clad only in a nightgown, negotiated the blackberry vines and gooseberry bushes and finally made it to the Hill house, young Ebey still hot on her heels. She pounded on the door, screaming "The northern Indians have killed them all!" Hill gave Mrs. Corliss a wrap and some socks for her feet, then dispatched Indians in his employ to raise the alarm on the island. The five men staying in the cabin quickly armed themselves and tore out the door toward the Ebey residence. Not wanting to be left alone, Mrs. Corliss went with them.

The Indians already were in their canoes, paddling away, war songs wafting clearly across the black water. All the rescue party found was Ebey's headless body and a trashed household—curtains and bedding shredded, crockery and furniture smashed and strewn about the yard. There was no sign of Mr. Corliss and Mrs. Ebey or her other son and daughter. It wasn't until the next morning that the fugitives emerged from the woods where they had spent the night after slipping past the Northerners through the tall grass.

Following a hastily convened funeral—during which Ebey's mother groped for his hand and bemoaned the fact that she could not see him—the settlers immediately set about "forting up." The community, if not the entire territory, would remember the incident until that generation passed on. Hugh Crockett, a neighbor who helped lay the headless body in the coffin, found the memory still painful in 1892 when he wrote:

RAIDERS FROM THE NORTH

Courtesy Island County Historical Society, Coupeville, Washington



Isaac Ebey

From the diary of Isaac and Emily Ebey, October 13, 1856 - Jan. 6, 1857

Tuesday, November 25 [1856]. Morning clear and pleasant. Been employed today in hauling timber up the hill. The day has [been] very pleasant. I think three fugitive Northern Indians passed here today. I think they must have been some of the party that escaped from the fight at Port Gamble—which I neglected to mention yesterday. It appears that a party of Northern Indians had been up the Sound and had been committing depredations as usual, robbing houses, &c. When about returning to Vancouver Island they were pursued by the U.S. Steamer Massachusetts, and overtaken at Port Gamble, where Captain I. Ellis had a number of the same tribe at work, who, as these people arrived, joined them, making the party near one hundred strong. The Capt[ain] of the steamer sent word to the Indians that they

must deliver up the Indians who had been concerned in the depredations above. This they refused to do, and sent word to the Cap[tain] that if he wished to fight, they would fight him, and immediately hoisted a red flag. This was in the evening. At daylight the next morning the Cap[ain] had two parties on shore—one with a brass howitzer, and had the little steamer "Traveler" drawn up in shore and had a mortar on her. These dispositions were all made before the Indians were awake. This completed, the Captain sent Dr. Bigelow as an interpreter, to demand the Indians who were guilty. To this the Indians returned a defiant answer, hoisted the red flag, and commenced firing on the parties. The steamer then let off a broadside. The parties on the shore made a charge and waited. The enemy took refuge in the timber near by. The Cap[ain] would not suffer his men to follow them into the timber. The firing was then kept up all day, the steamer throwing her heavy metal in the timber where the Indians had taken refuge, and the mortar on this little steamer throwing shells, made dreadful havoc. Some two thousand dollars worth of property belonging to the Indians were destroyed, among which were three hundred new blankets. The next morning the Indians hoisted a white flag. Twenty-seven were found dead—seventeen in one place. Ten are missing. Those who were killed were dreadfully cut up. Some had been killed with splinters from trees. One woman was killed. She and another woman had come from the timber to the camp to carry off the chief who was wounded (both legs being broken). They were called to come to the marines. One of them started to them, the other started [to] run off. She was fired upon and killed, six balls having taken effect in her body. The Cap[ain] of the steamer then dictated his terms to them, which was that all who were there should come aboard the steamer, and he would take them over to Victoria. This the Indians did not wish to do, but rather wished to purchase canoes from the other natives, and go to Victoria by themselves. This was not suffered. One marine was killed by a slug of iron taking effect in his head. Two others were saved from wound or death by the ball of the enemy striking the handle of a large knife, and the other the butt of a pistol.

The day has been pleasant. A vessel is at anchor tonight at the landing. I believe it is the sch[ooner] H. C. Page, from Bellingham Bay.

—Isaac Ebey

and household goods which they landed and hauled over to Mr H. place they did not get through until after dark Mr H and wife and the Rev Mr Williams took dinner here today - The Minis ter appeared to feel a good deal of interest in Mrs H and the baby Emily thinks he is sweet on women in general The day has been cold rainy and did a greivable Mist South and prospects of rain -

Nov 25 Morning clear and pleasant - been employed to day in hauling timber up the hill the day has been very pleasant - I think three fugitive Northern Indians passed here today I think they must have been some of the party that escaped from the fight at Port Gamble which I neglected to mention yesterday - It appears that a party of Northern Indians had been up the Sound and had been committing depredations as usual robbing houses When about returning to Vancouver Island they were pursued by the U.S Steamer Massachusetts and overtaken at Port Gamble where Capt Ellis had a number of the same tribe at work who as soon as these people arrived joined them making the party near one hundred strong - The Capt of the Steamer sent word to the Indians that they must deliver up the Indians who had

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The tragedy threw a gloom over the entire settlement, and caused us to build stockades and blockhouses, many of which still stand. My brother and myself used to reproach ourselves somewhat for bringing our father and mother out to such an exposed country.

Aftermath

Years later most of the settlers tended to agree that the raiders were “Kake,” or Tlingit from Russian America and that the leader of the band was the brother of an Indian killed in the 1856 raids. Word filtered down the coast that the raiders stopped off at several villages on their way home, showing off Ebey’s head and serving notice that a similar fate awaited those who stood in their way. They scalped the trophy and carried it north; Hudson’s Bay Company officials at Fort Simpson reported seeing it in the possession of a raiding party passing through the area a few days later.

For more than two years the family tried to recover the head. In the summer of 1858 Hudson’s Bay factor Captain Charles Dodd thought he had located the head in a village about 750 miles north of Victoria. The trader’s first inquiry about the scalp was met by warlike threats and he was forced to back off. But when he returned a year later the tribe gave up the “scalp” for six blankets, one cotton handkerchief, three pipes, six heads of tobacco and one fathom of cotton. The trophy was delivered to Dodd in a filthy, fiber-wrapped bundle; to his horror, Dodd recognized it instantly. It remains unclear whether the skull came with the scalp, which was described in detail in the *Victoria British Colonist*:

The scalp is entire, with all the hair and ears. The skin is free from the fleshy matter, appears white, but slightly discolored with smoke. The beautifully fine silken hair is as natural as when struck down by the ruthless tomahawk of the savage.

Winfield Ebey, the deceased’s brother, commented at the time:

At last a portion of the mutilated remains of my Dear Brother is returned. Near Three Years have Elapsed Since his murder & now his poor head (or portion

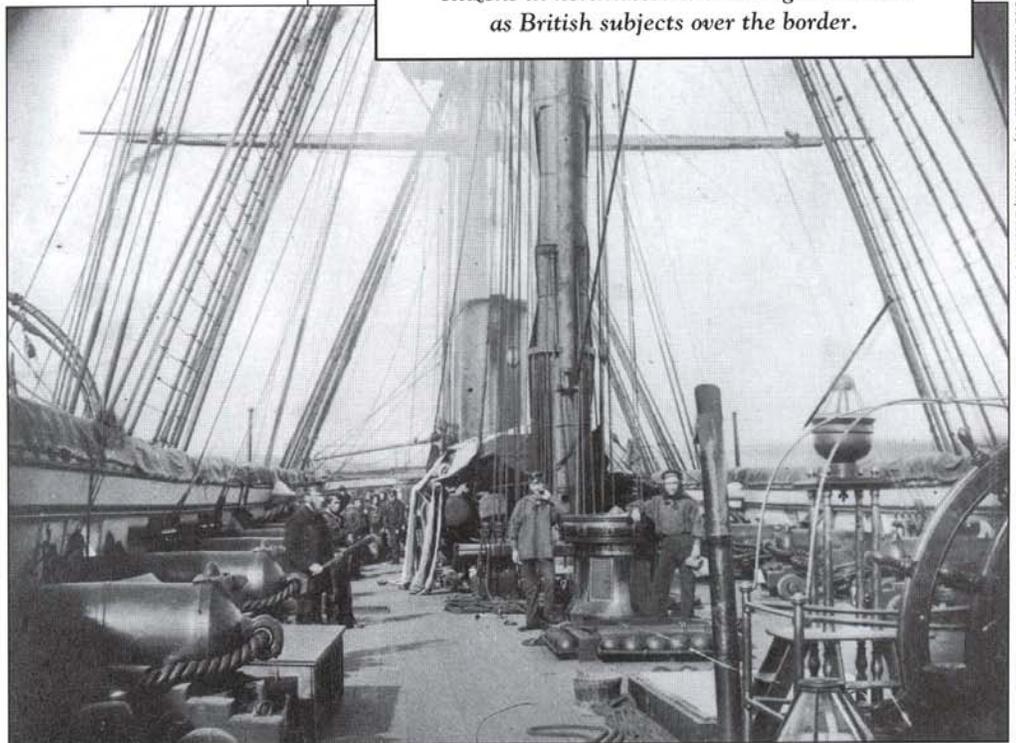
of it) returns to his home. . . . The hair looks quite Natural. It is a sad memento of the past. . . .

Revenge had been taken. The colonel was dead, and Whidbey Island and northwest Washington would never be the same. In fact, the murder had so angered the white communities, American and Canadian, that every conceivable class of commercial steamer was pressed into service to ferry soldiers from one potential trouble spot to the next. The big canoes quickly vanished from southern waters.

“As regards the northern Indians, there are none at all in our waters now nor have they made their appearance since the murder of Colonel Ebey on Whidbey’s Island,” reported Fourth Infantry commander Lieutenant Colonel Thompson Morris in a November 1857 dispatch from Fort Vancouver to his superiors in San Francisco.

Governor Douglas had confirmed to Morris that the Ebey raiders were “Russian.” The governor emphasized that these Northerners could not possibly be from the British possessions, for no “British” Indians had “ever committed outrages” in United States waters. The method of Ebey’s mutilation also confirmed for many the origin and identity of the murderers—only the Tlingit groups scalped

The real deterrent against northern Indian raids arrived in the late 1850s in the form of the HMS Satellite, a swift 21-gun steam corvette based out of Esquimalt Harbor near Victoria. The Satellite responded to raids against American citizens in northwestern Washington as well as British subjects over the border.



Provincial Archives, Victoria, British Columbia

decapitated heads. The governor said they would have no problem getting permission from the Russians for a punitive raid. However:

As the tribe is a large one it would be absolutely necessary to send a large force—at least 500 men—so that no failure could happen to the expedition. That they should be pursued and chastised for their outrages seem[s] to me to be desirable and the sooner it is done the better.

Morris again stressed the need for reliable steam warships on Puget Sound. The *Hancock* (much like the *Massachusetts*) was a tub that could barely make headway. What the district needed was a steam warship at all times, under direction of the army, preferably a swift side-wheeler with a long gun.

The presence alone of such a vessel would keep out the Indians, and from what I can learn, I am convinced that if the Massachusetts had remained in the sound the Indians would never have had the courage to kill Col. Ebey, as they knew very well they could have been pursued and captured.

Morris also did not think it would hurt to reinforce the “bitter hatred” the American Indians held for the Northerners. “There is hardly a tribe within our waters but has had some of their men killed by these Indians, and frequently their women and children stolen to be made slaves. . . .”

The San Juan Dispute

BY JANUARY 1859 northern parties were active again. On January 25 the schooners *Blue Wing* and *Ellen Marie* left Steilacoom for Port Townsend and were never heard from again. In April an Indian reported what had happened. As the *Blue Wing* passed Vashon she was attacked by a big canoe bearing ten warriors and five women; the warriors murdered the *Blue Wing*'s crew, then plundered and sank the vessel. They then attacked the *Ellen Marie*, whose captain ordered them away, then fired on the raiders, killing one as they attempted to board. The raiders retreated but renewed the attack after midnight, looting, burning and sinking the vessel with all hands.

Three weeks later the brig *Swiss Bay* was “swarmed” over by several hundred Northerners after she had put in to Nitinat Sound, near the Strait of Juan de Fuca, for emergency repairs. The rigging was stripped, the main mast toppled and the entire crew held prisoner for several days. One escaped and made it to Victoria where the Royal Navy promptly dispatched the 21-gun steam corvette *HMS Satellite* to the rescue. The *Satellite* caught up with and punished the raiders, released the prisoners and recovered some of the booty. The headman was arrested and taken to Victoria, much to the surprise of the Indians, who thought the

“Georgemen” would be pleased at the Indians’ treatment of the “Bostons.”

Three months later the Northerners were all but forgotten as the United States and Great Britain suddenly turned their attention to the possession and occupation of the San Juans. Captain George E. Pickett was ordered by General William S. Harney, commander of the Pacific Coast military forces, to occupy San Juan Island on July 27 under the pretext that Pickett’s company would protect all 18 American settlers there from the incursions of northern Indians. What the settlers really wanted protection from was the Hudson’s Bay Company, which grazed more than 4,000 sheep on the island and was jealous of its territory.

The island had been in dispute between the British and Americans for nearly 13 years thanks to an ambiguity in the language of the 1846 treaty that set the boundary at the 49th parallel. A joint boundary survey had been under way for more than a year to resolve the dispute, but the respective commissioners had reached an impasse with no resolution in sight, which made Harney’s move all the more provocative. But Governor Douglas was hardly an innocent victim. Only days before Pickett’s landing he had issued orders to evict as “trespassers” all American settlers on the island.

Nevertheless, there was some validity to concerns about Northerners on the island. They still quartered among the San Juan Islands on southern journeys, and they still did not mind lopping off the heads of any Americans they found.

With the onset of the crisis there were suddenly more steam warships than the Northerners had ever seen—British and American—huffing about the islands and Strait of Juan de Fuca. They had huge guns and contingents of Royal Marines and U.S. Army regulars, all armed with rifled muskets. The pickings seemed not so easy. Following the crisis, the raids continued to decline largely because American and British forces jointly occupied San Juan Island for the next 12 years, providing a double-barreled deterrent.

Finally, as more white settlers poured in during the 1860s, bringing strength in numbers and the accoutrements of modern civilization, the raids dwindled to small forays against isolated settlements and eventually ceased altogether. The Northerners came to rely more and more on the potlatch as a method of demonstrating and accumulating wealth. And many followed the precedent of a few of their brethren years before and sought employment in white society. The era of the big raids was gone forever.

Mike Vouri is park ranger/interpreter for the National Park Service at San Juan Island National Historical Park. In 1994 he curated the exhibit “George Pickett and the Frontier Army Experience” for the Whatcom Museum of History and Art. He is currently writing a book about the Pig War.

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