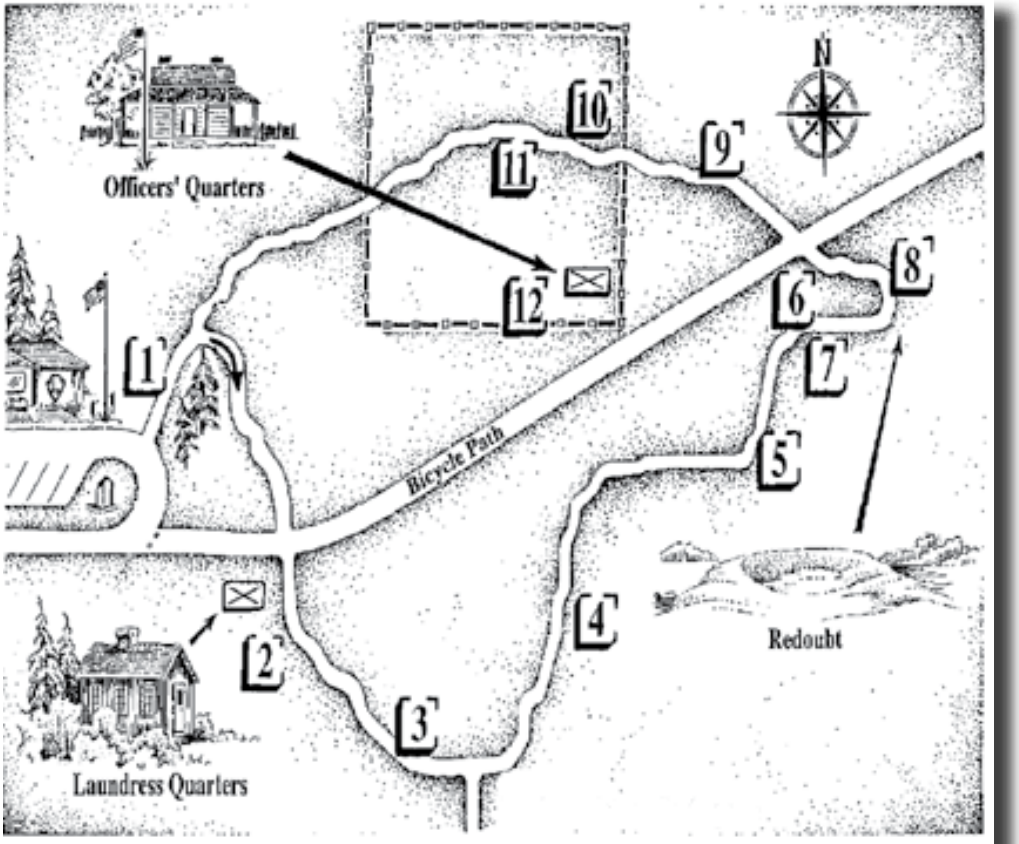
San Juan Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
San Juan Island National Historical Park

American Camp

A Historic Guided Walk

Camp San Juan Island in 1868



A Historical Guided Walk

Use this booklet to relive the Pig War along the one-mile trail that starts in the Visitor Center picnic area. The guide is conveniently numbered to correspond to trail stops along the way. Please protect and preserve the wildlife and vegetation around you by keeping to the marked trail. Also, beware of stepping in rabbit holes. Serious injury could result. Enjoy your walk!

"Camp San Juan Island" cover painting by Richard Schlecht

The Pig War

On June 15, 1859, an American farmer named Lyman Cutlar shot and killed a Hudson's Bay Company pig rooting in his San Juan Island potato patch. By so doing, he nearly started a war between the United States and Great Britain.

However, much more than a pig was involved. For more than 40 years, the two nations had been contending over the Oregon Country, which today comprises Washington, Oregon, Idaho, as well as portions of Montana and Wyoming and the province of British Columbia. On June 15, 1846, the two nations had agreed upon the 49th parallel as the international boundary. The final sticking point was possession of the San Juan Islands.

The Hudson's Bay Company allegedly threatened Cutlar with arrest by British authorities if he did not make fair restitution for the pig. This compelled U.S. Army Department of Oregon commander Brig. Gen. William S. Harney to dispatch a company of the 9th U.S. Infantry, under Capt. George E. Pickett, to San Juan Island on July 27, 1859. British Columbia Gov. James Douglas responded by sending three warships under Royal Navy Capt. Geoffrey Phipps Hornby to dislodge Pickett, but to avoid an armed clash if possible.

The two sides faced off on the Cattle Point peninsula for more than three months until the arrival of U.S. Army commander Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott. Scott and Douglas negotiated a joint occupation of the island until the dispute could be resolved through diplomatic channels. The Americans remained at Cattle Point while British Royal Marines established, in March 1860, a comfortable camp on Garrison Bay, 13 miles north.

The joint occupation ended 12 years later when, on October 21, 1872, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, acting as arbitrator, settled the dispute by awarding the San Juan Islands to the United States. And so ended the so-called war in which the only casualty was a pig.

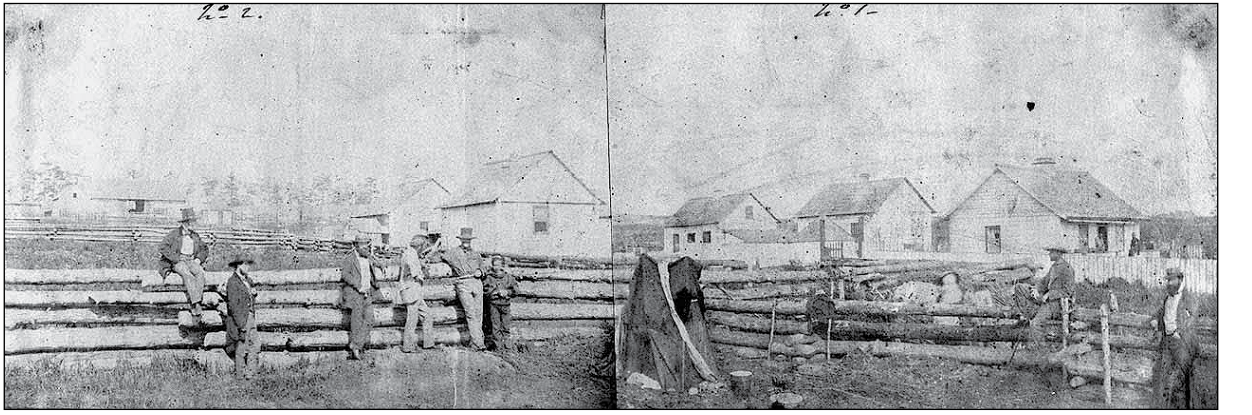
1

Start your walk by taking the trail through the grove of tall trees in front of you. When you emerge from the grove you will come to a fork in the trail. From here, on a clear day, you can see Mount Baker looming in the east beyond the other San Juan Islands and the old Parade Ground with its white picket fence. A wayside exhibit at the trail fork offers an artist's rendering of a typical day at Camp San Juan Island in the late 1860s. Take note: The numbers on the wayside do not correspond to the numbers in this booklet. ***Take the right fork in the trail, briefly skirting the picket fence, then cross the gravel bicycle path to the Laundress Quarters.***

2

This building once housed as many as three post laundress families during the joint occupation from 1860 to 1872. Laundresses were officially attached to the post and, like soldiers, were subject to army discipline. They normally earned a dollar per head per month doing wash for about 20 soldiers. A laundress had to be married. If she lost her husband, she was given 60 days to find another or would be escorted off the post. While some laundresses ran through several husbands, more typically they were married to sergeants and maintained stable households. One laundress, Catherine McGarey, eventually staked a claim and settled on the island. She and her family are interred in the island's Catholic cemetery on Madden Lane. ***Walk down the hill on the grass path and follow the trail markers to the third trail fork.***

On Dec. 15, 1853, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) employee Charles John Griffin (above) departed Fort Victoria to establish a sheep ranch on the southern end of San Juan Island. He brought with him four Hawaiian herdsmen, 1,369 sheep, seed for crops...and a few pigs. The Company's principle aim was to establish a presence on the island to solidify Great Britain's claim. But Belle Vue Sheep Farm, as Griffin called it, actually prospered as an HBC subsidiary. Wool, mutton, fish and produce were traded for furs with the Russian-American Company to the north. In the photograph below, Griffin's house is at far right. The building third from right served as a dormitory for single men. The two men at far right are British magistrate John deCourcy (left) and U.S. Magistrate Henry Crosby. Note the English pass-through barn at far left and in the foreground of the illustration by Richard Schlecht, above. The U.S. military camp lies in the distance. ***Proceed to number 4.***



4 This open prairie with its fertile soil was one of the primary reasons the Hudson's Bay Company and Lyman Cutlar chose to come here. After the U.S. Army left in 1874, the land was farmed. The farmhouse at right-center in photo is (from here) the far-right building inside the Parade Ground fence. The building was restored to its original state by the National Park Service in the 1970s. Cutlar's cabin (with potato patch) was about a half-mile north of here. He walked across this field to confess to the shooting of the pig and offer payment. Griffin turned him down. ***Our story continues uphill; proceed along the trail to number 5.***

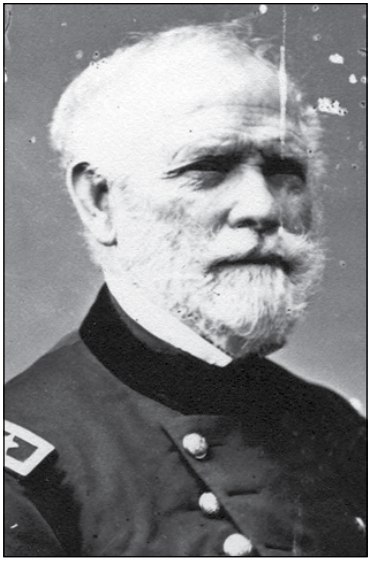
5 The hill before you was selected by U.S. Army engineers as the site for an earthwork (or redoubt) that would command the approaches to the shoreline on both sides of the Cattle Point peninsula. Extensive excavation went on here from August through October 1859. ***Proceed to number 6 by walking up the trail to the large rock at the top of the hill.***

5. San Juan Island NHP

6

This big rock is named for Henry Martyn Robert (above), who, as a second lieutenant in command of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sapper contingent, designed and supervised the construction of the redoubt to your left. Robert was two years out of West Point when he arrived here on Aug. 22, 1859. After leaving two months later, he enjoyed a long career in the Corps, retiring as its commanding general. He also wrote a little book on parliamentary procedure called *Robert's Rules of Order.* ***Take the lower trail to your left, following it along the ditch at the base of the redoubt. Number 7 is about halfway to the end of the redoubt.***

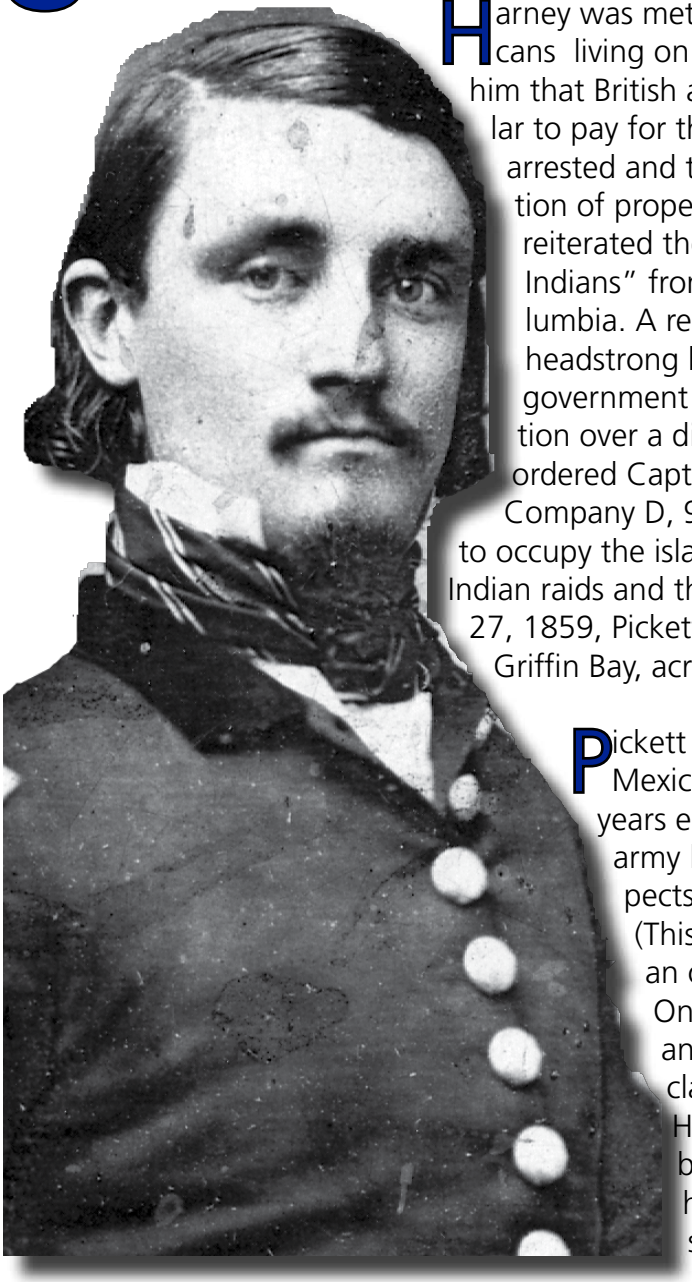
7



Brig. Gen. William S. Harney, Department of Oregon commander based at Vancouver Barracks, had been on an inspection tour of U.S. Army posts in the Northern Straits region, including Forts Bellingham and Townsend. During the trip, he visited Governor James Douglas in Victoria on July 8. He learned of the pig incident before meeting the governor. While steaming through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, he spotted an American flag on San Juan Island not far from where you're standing. He decided to stop and investigate. ***Walk to the end of the redoubt where you will find number 8.***

8

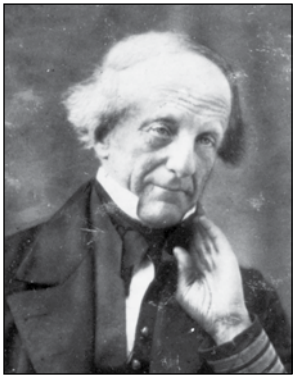
Walk up up the rampart and turn right and take a few steps to the end of the redoubt.



Harney was met here by several of the 18 Americans living on the island at the time. They told him that British authorities had ordered Lyman Cutlar to pay for the pig. If he did not, he would be arrested and tried in a British court for destruction of property and criminal trespass. They also reiterated their fears about raids by "Northern Indians" from Southeast Alaska and British Columbia. A renowned Indian fighter, Harney was headstrong by nature. He decided the British government had wrongfully assumed jurisdiction over a disputed territory. Consequently, he ordered Capt. George E. Pickett (left) and his Company D, 9th Infantry from Fort Bellingham to occupy the island and protect U.S. citizens from Indian raids and the Hudson's Bay Company. On July 27, 1859, Pickett landed at Old Town Lagoon on Griffin Bay, across the peninsula to your left.

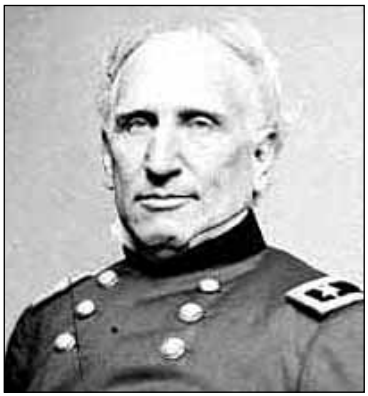
Pickett was a West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran and had spent years enduring the boredom of frontier army life. This assignment, with its prospects for glory, was more to his liking. (This same Pickett later would receive an overdose of glory at Gettysburg.) On landing on Griffin Bay, he posted an inflammatory proclamation declaring the island "U.S. territory." He next established his camp on the beach at the base of a hill, despite having been ordered to find a more secure position.

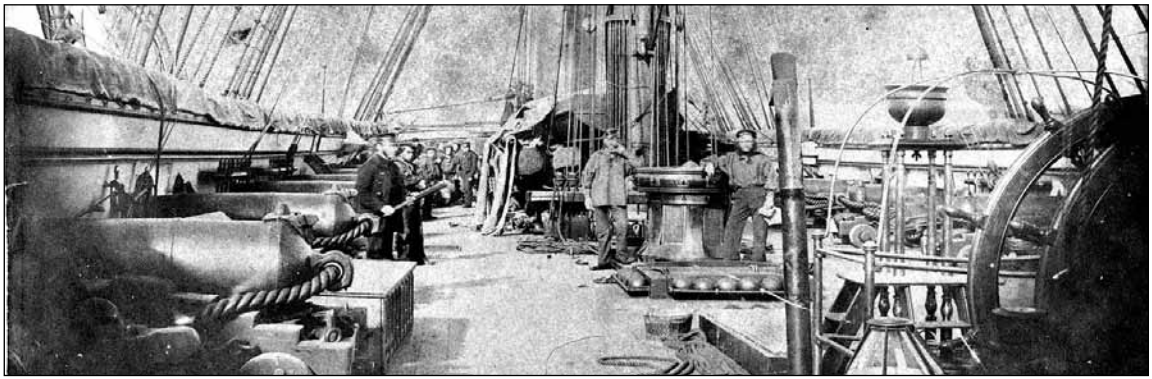
On July 28, recently appointed Royal Magistrate John deCourcy threatened Pickett with arrest if he did not leave the island. Pickett frostily refused to recognize deCourcy's authority. The next day, Governor Douglas dispatched the Royal Navy's Capt. Geoffrey Phipps Hornby (right) and his 31-gun steam frigate, HMS *Tribune*, to order Pickett off the island -- by force if necessary. Alarmed Royal Navy officers in Victoria talked the governor out of this course, suggesting instead that the governor land Royal Marines on the island equal to the number of American soldiers. By this time the Tribune already was anchored in Griffin Bay, its guns trained on Pickett's camp. Pickett positioned his men and civilian volunteers along the ridge (today's Cattle Point Road), expecting the worst. "We'll make a Bunker Hill of it," he reportedly said. When HMS *Satellite* arrived on July 30, Pickett decided to move his camp across the peninsula, away from the British guns. He set up his "Spring Camp" on the plain west of today's Pickett's Lane, above South Beach, to your right.



Hornby received Douglas' new orders, which additionally directed him to land the marines on the island. Hornby contacted Pickett and set up an August 3 meeting in the Americans' new camp. He also decided ahead of time that he would force a landing. Instead he ignored Douglas's orderds and awaited for his superior, Rear Adm. R. Lambert Baynes (left), who was en route to Victoria aboard HMS *Ganges* from Valparaiso, Chile.

Baynes arrived in Victoria on August 5, at which time Hornby told him about his fruitless August 3 meeting with Pickett. Pickett had at first threatened to resist a British landing, then asked for time to consult with Harney. Hornby added that Pickett probably would open fire if the British attempted to land troops. Baynes backed Hornby and ignored Douglas, deciding that with three warships in Griffin Bay -- the *Satellite* (below) and HMS ***Plumper*** had joined ***Tribune*** -- they could afford to await diplomatic measures. Meanwhile, on August 10, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Silas Casey (right) arrived aboard the steamer Julia from Fort Steilacoom with 180 soldiers. Having been warned beforehand that the British might fire on reinforcements, Casey landed the bulk of his force on South Beach in a thick fog. The steamer USS *Massachusetts* soon followed, her eight 32-pound naval guns unloaded and manhandled up the hill before you. The British watched and did nothing. Turn around and walk to the end of the redoubt toward Robert's Rock. As you proceed, note the earthen gun platforms constructed in the interior of the redoubt. Five are complete. Look closely for traces of three others. The platforms were to be timbered to accommodate the naval guns from the *Massachusetts*. Only one gun was emplaced, and the only time it was fired was in honor of Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, who visited Griffin Bay on Nov. 7, 1859. ***At the end of the redoubt (about even with Robert's Rock), turn right and walk through the fence opening to the parking area. Cross the parking area and take the main trail west toward the parade ground, stopping half way. There is no Number 9.***

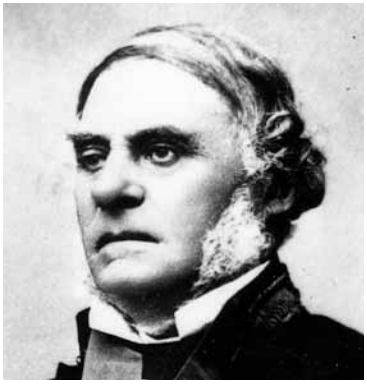




After enduring two storms at Spring Camp and wishing to move out of range of the British naval guns, Casey on August 22 relocated the camp to a wooded area just over the hill from Belle Vue Sheep Farm. The post began as a collection of buildings from Fort Bellingham and conical Sibley tents shipped from Fort Steilacoom. The British were impressed, Baynes later remarking that the Americans had become strong enough to repel any British force The redoubt, begun shortly after Casey's arrival, was starting to emerge on the rise east of the new camp as men labored with pick and shovel under the supervision of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sapper contingent in their colorful dress uniforms with red piping (example at right). But fighting was the last thing anyone wanted. Tourists from Victoria explored the camp and ships, while San Juan Village on Griffin Bay sold liquor and other wares to all comers. Soon, word came that Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott was on the way from New York City to negotiate an end to the incident with Governor Douglas. ***Proceed down the hill to the Parade Ground gate.***

National Park Service 10.

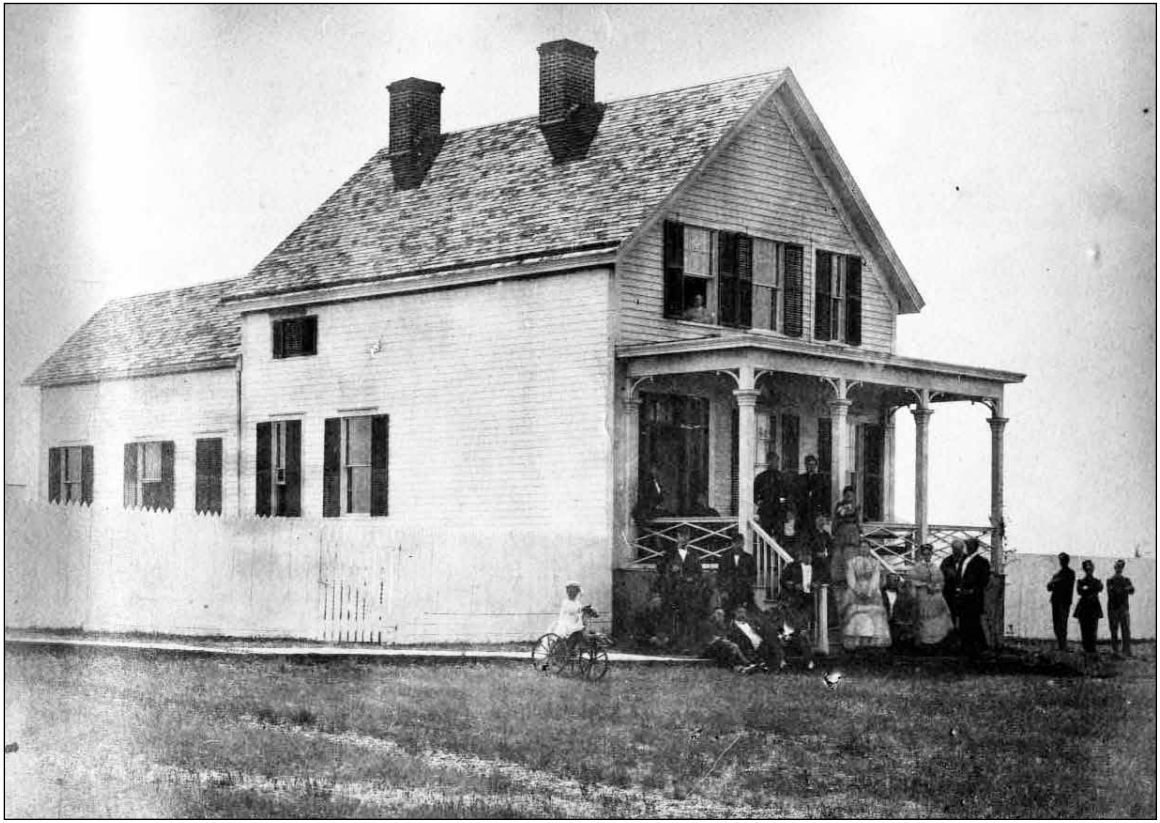
10



While Casey was building his camp, General Scott (above right) was en route, having been dispatched by a horrified President James Buchanan to cool the situation without abandoning U.S. interests. Scott already was an American institution, having fought in the War of 1812 and led the U.S. Army to victory in the war with Mexico in 1847. His six-week trip by steamship, via the Isthmus of Panama, brought him to Port Townsend on October 25, whereupon he began negotiations with Governor Douglas (above left). Scott proposed a joint military occupation, while Douglas insisted on a return to the status quo as it existed before Pickett's landing. After a week of dickering via dispatches posted between Port Townsend and Victoria by revenue cutters, Scott offered to remove Casey's reinforcements, including the artillery, if Douglas would withdraw all but one warship from the harbor. The British government eventually agreed to a joint military occupation. The Royal Marines established their camp (below) on Garrison Bay, 13 miles north of here, on March 21, 1860. ***Walk through the gate to the flagpole.***

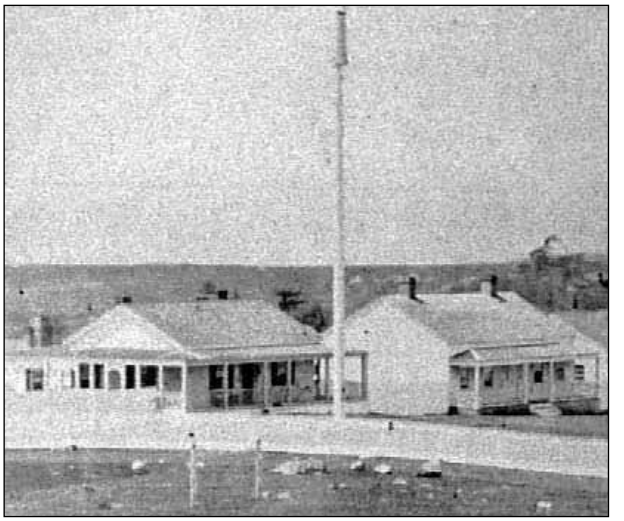
11

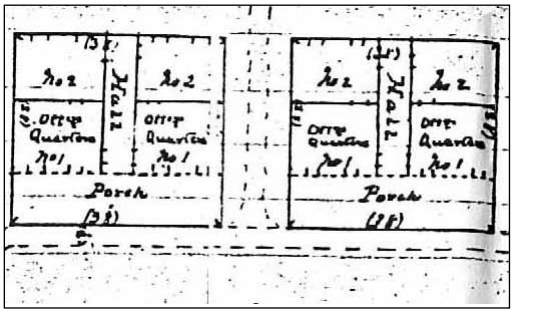
American Camp (primarily known then as Camp San Juan Island) shown above in1868, remained active through July 17, 1874. Eight companies or batteries from four regiments -- all regular army -- under command of 15 different officers would man the post through some of the most tumultuous years of American history. They endured isolation, bad food, worse quarters and crushing boredom. Unlike the officers, enlisted men seldom went home on leave because they could not afford the $300 for round-trip steam ship passage east. As an escape, some sneaked off to numb themselves with the rotgut whisky of San Juan Village, knowingly risking company punishment, which might include carrying a 40-pound log around the post perimeter or riding a sawhorse all day. A few committed suicide, while many more took "French leave" (deserted). Officers attempted to head off trouble by keeping the men busy with endless drill, which took place on the expanse of parade ground in front of you. ***Walk to the Officers' Quarters.***



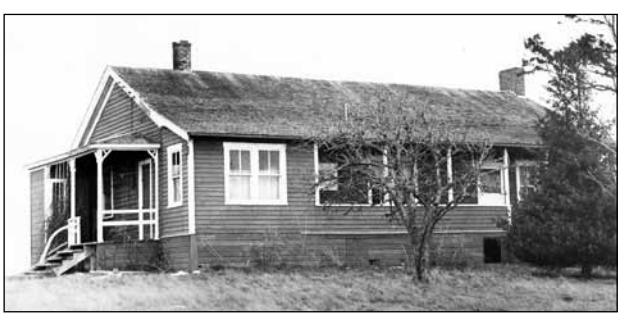
American Camp was a forgotten post throughout its 14-year existence, as Congress never appropriated money for repairs or improvements. Many of the buildings, including the blockhouse, were shipped from Fort Bellingham by George Pickett. Above is the commanding officer's house on Officers' Row as it looked in the late 1860s. This photograph, from the family album of the Capt. William A. Delacombe, the Royal Marine camp commander, was probably taken during a visit by the British contingent. Despite its tidy appearance, the camp became so run down by 1867 that the camp commander was begging for a new barracks roof. The original had been built with green lumber and had become "...rotten -- almost uninhabitable, and irreparable," wrote one army inspector. The quarters on Officers' Row were "shells, battered on the inside, and owing to the exposed position of the garrison, extremely uncomfortable and cold." One commander was "compelled to allow...stable hands (to sleep) in the stables." The Secretary of War denied all requests for improvements.

12





The two Officers' Quarters in historical photo above originated at Fort Bellingham (see drawing above). The far-left building served as both a duplex and a single dwelling. It was probably moved to San Juan Island during the 1859 Pig War crisis and occupied by Capt. George Pickett. The other structure was moved from the abandoned Fort bellinghsam in 1867. When the buildings were auctioned off in 1875, the far-left structure was converted into the farm house (below left). The structure at right was moved to Friday Harbor (below right) where it underwent a series of renovations and uses over the years, serving as a private residence, blacksmith shop, laundromat and art gallery. The park took possession of the building and in December 2010 moved it to the parade ground. ***You have completed your walk. Now, head west across the parade ground, through the fence opening and back to the parking area. If you have any questions, please stop at the Visitor Center.***



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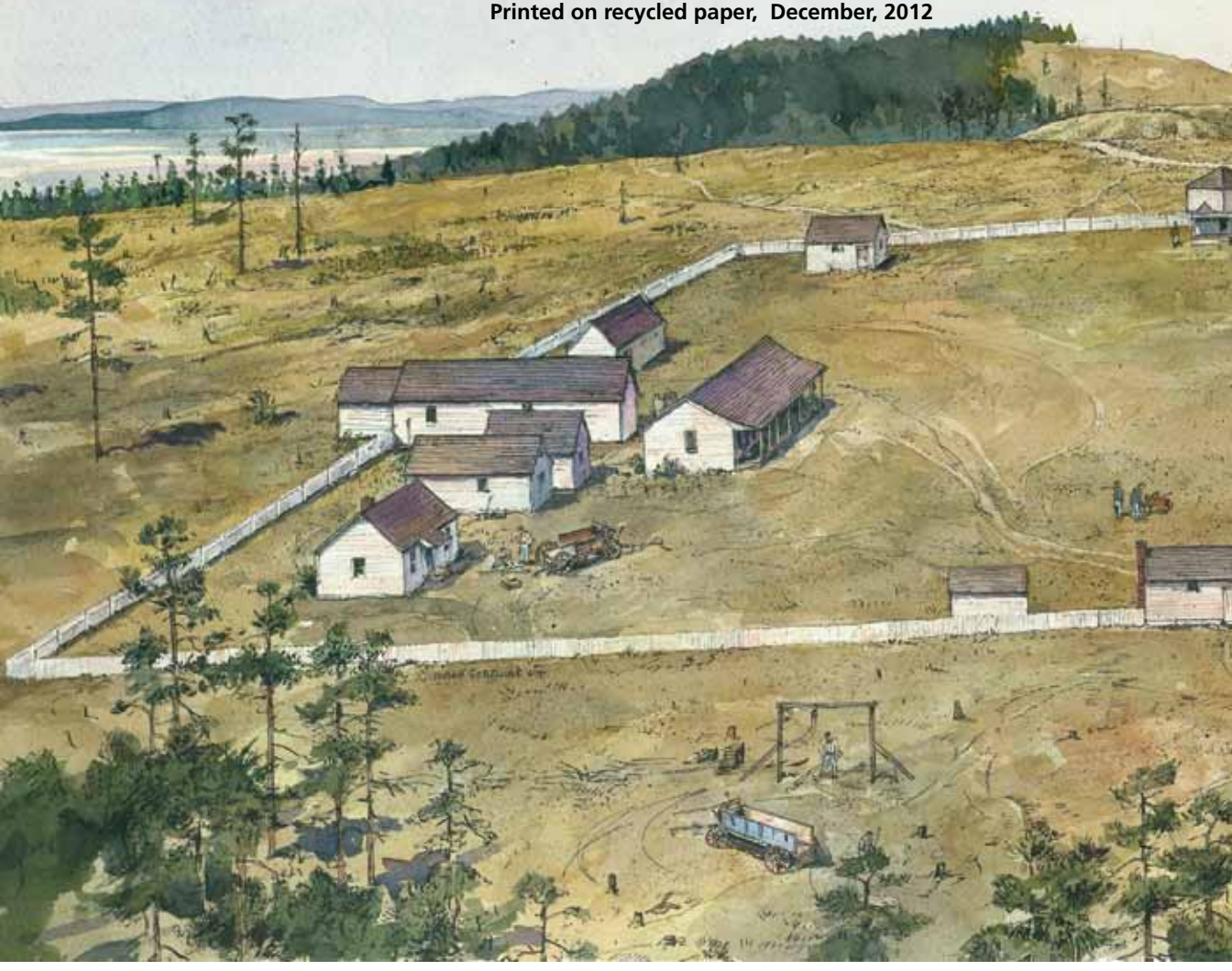
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