



Short Wave

San Juan Island National Historical Park

www.nps.gov/sajh



THIS WEEK: AUGUST 22-28, 2011

Special Program

A Weaving Weekend — Weavers from throughout San Juan Island and Washington State will gather for the weekend to demonstrate how European and American Indian techniques melded to create woven objects and clothing unique to the Pacific Northwest. Cowlitz Nation weaver Judy Bridges and Fort Nisqually interpreter and storyteller Karen Haas will show how it was done with all-natural fibers, including wild reeds. **All day, Saturday and Sunday, August 27 and 28, English Camp parade ground.**



Cowlitz weaver Judy Bridges works on a woven mat in foreground while at far left rear Karen Haas explains how the reeds (soaking in the tub) were used to fashion functional cooking vessels and baskets.

Army laundresses played a vital role on frontier outposts



American Camp's historic laundress quarters was moved to San Juan Island from Fort Bellingham by Capt. George E. Pickett in the summer of 1859.

By Park Ranger M. Karraker

Did you know that women served in the U.S. Army in the mid 1800's? No, they didn't carry weapons and they didn't march in formation.

They served as washer women and played a very important role in any army camp. Laundresses, as they

were known, were the only women recognized by the army; they received the same rations as the men, were provided living quarters, and received pay for the work they did.

But a laundress did more than just wash and hang the soldiers' clothes to dry. She had to haul water for the wash. She chopped wood in order to make the fire that would heat

the water. She made soap out of wood ash and fat. She did mending and ironing. She often served as a midwife or nurse.

Picture yourself in her shoes (and petticoat, heavy cotton dress, and bonnet). Your hands and arms chapped and raw from the sun, the water, and the lye soap. Your shoulders and back sore from chopping wood and scrubbing clothes on a washboard.

Laundresses had to be married to work on post. When Pvt. Ed McGeary arrived with Company D, 9th Infantry in July 1859, he was accompanied by his wife, camp laundress Catherine McGeary with their two children in tow: Mary, four, and Edward (Ed), four months. Catherine and her family remained on San Juan island. She rests in the family plot at St. Francis cemetery on Madden lane.

By 1882, the army no longer officially appointed laundresses to army companies. It was the end of an era.

English Camp Visitor Center
3905 West Valley Road
(360) 378-4409, Open 9-5 Daily

For dates and times of weekly programs go to www.nps.gov/sajh or visit us on Facebook or Twitter.

American Camp Visitor Center
4668 Cattle Point Road
(360) 378-2240, ext. 2233, Open 9-5 daily