



THE PICKETT HOME

From here to the San Juan Pig War; later the charge up Cemetery Ridge.
—Herald Staff Photo

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From Fort Bellingham to the 'High Tide' at Gettysburg

Just one hundred years ago today, one of the great incidents of American history took place—a climactic, dramatic and tragic moment in time which should have more than passing interest to Bellingham residents.

For it was the third and decisive day of the Battle of Gettysburg, the “high tide of the Confederacy” when 15,000 soldiers in gray marched up Cemetery Ridge. When those gallant southerners fell and the survivors were forced back, the North had won the war, though it was to be nearly two years more before Robert E. Lee offered his sword to General Grant at Appomattox.

Though it ended in defeat, the valor of “Pickett’s Charge” up Cemetery Ridge made a lasting place in the annals of American history as one of the most dramatic and significant single events of the Civil War.

General George E. Pickett, who led the awesome advance against Northern positions, was a resident of Bellingham Bay for three years, as the captain commanding Company H, Ninth U. S. Infantry at Fort Bellingham. The home he built for the Haida Indian girl he took as his wife and in which their son Jimmy was born, still stands on the hillside above “Old Town,” on Bancroft Street between F and E. It is owned by the State Historical Society and maintained quietly as a memorial by the Daughters of Pioneers. Though infrequently open to inspection and little noted by local residents, it is our most significant tangible link with local and national history.

George Edward Pickett was a Virginian who finished last in the 59-member class of 1846 at West Point and was immediately sent to the Mexican War where gallantry in action at Contreras and Churubusco caused him to be breveted first lieutenant. He was first to go over the parapets of Chapultapec Sept. 13, 1847 and replaced the Aztec emblem with a U.S. infantry flag while under enemy fire.

The next seven years brought garrison duty in Texas, a marriage to

Richmond girl who died less than a year later, and promotion to captain. It was in the summer of 1856 that he was assigned to Puget Sound and directed to establish a fort to protect settlers on Bellingham Bay from Indian harassment.

The stockade was built a few miles west of the townsite, overlooking the Bay. One of the two blockhouses was disassembled and taken to San Juan Island in 1859 when Pickett’s company was ordered there to stand firm against English intimidation during the Pig War episode. The other burned to the ground in August of 1897, unfortunately leaving no remnants of the historic frontier post.

Captain Pickett resigned his commission and left San Juan to join the Southern army in 1861 as a colonel. He was wounded at Gaines’ Mill, later received a divisional command as a major general and held the center of Lee’s line at Fredericksburg. Pickett survived Gettysburg and the rest of the war. He turned down offers from General Grant to be marshal of Virginia and from the Khedive of Egypt to resume his military career as a general. (He married a Virginia belle, La Salle Corbell, in 1863). Pickett spent his remaining years as an insurance executive in his native state and died in 1875.

Pickett’s assignment here 107 years ago brought increased recognition to the frontier community, along with a \$10,000 federal appropriation to build the first passable road here. It linked the town of Sehome to Fort Bellingham, and included a bridge across Whatcom Creek not far from the present Pickett bridge on Dupont Street near the courthouse.

Though this part of the country played no direct part in the great war which divided the nation a century ago, the Pickett Home still stands as a testimonial to our link with the history of that tragic conflict. It’s too bad there was no local public observance on the anniversary of Pickett’s Charge. We’re sorry we didn’t think of it sooner.