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The War of Griffin's Pig: A Bibliography of the Anglo-American Northwest Boundary Dispute

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Although the United States and Great Britain had signed the Oregon Treaty in 1846, which established America's northwest boundary as the 49th parallel from the Rocky Mountains west to the channel separating Vancouver Island from the mainland, in reality it did not settle their ongoing dispute. Specifically, there were differences in interpretation of the treaty regarding ownership of the San Juan Islands, which lay in the middle of the aforementioned channel.

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) had a fishing station and a sheep ranch on the largest of the islands, which itself was called San Juan (although the HBC referred to it as Bellevue Island). The United States, however, considered the islands to be part of the newly created Washington Territory, and an early provocation occurred in 1855, when an American sheriff from Washington seized 35 Hudson's Bay Company sheep as payment for "back taxes." A Joint Boundary Commission met during 1857, but the boundary was not settled. The gold rush in the northwest had brought more settlers to the area, along with an increased military presence to protect them from Indian uprisings. The British, needless to say, considered the Americans on San Juan to be squatters.

Into this already tense situation stepped one American settler, Lyman A. Cutler (sometimes also spelled "Cutlar"), who was originally from Ohio. On June 15, 1859, a frustrated and annoyed Cutler shot and killed a black pig that had repeatedly "trespassed" and eaten from his potato patch. He then went to the house of the pig's owner, Charles Griffin, the Hudson company agent on San Juan, and offered to pay $10 for the pig. Griffin informed Cutler that the pig was a prize breeder, rejected his offer, and demanded $100, which Cutler thought outrageous and refused to pay. The British wanted Cutler arrested and brought to Victoria for trial, but he refused to surrender. Thus began the so-called Pig War.¹

Acting on his own authority and responding to pleas from American settlers, Brigadier General William S. Harney, the commanding officer of the Pacific Coast forces, sent Captain George E. Pickett from the mainland along with a company of 50 men to establish a post on San Juan, while Vancouver's governor, Sir James Douglas, sent the frigate Tribune to Griffin Bay, where the American soldiers had made camp. (Pickett would later become a general in the Confederate army and lead the famous charge at Gettysburg.) By mid-August, the United States had nine companies there (over 400 men), along with eight cannon and over 100 civilians, while the British had eventually increased their forces to over 1,000 men, including five warships.

On the brink of a shooting war, however, cooler heads prevailed. Captain Hornby, commander of the Tribune, resisted Douglas' pressure to land troops and attack Pickett and was backed up by Rear Admiral Baynes, commander of the British fleet in the Pacific. President James Buchanan, who had been surprised to learn of Harney's actions, sent Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, the army chief of staff, to defuse the situation. After arriving in mid-October, Scott (who had clashed with Harney during the Mexican War) met with both sides and negotiated a reduction in forces, leaving only one U.S. company there. Harney attempted to interfere with the agreed-upon joint occupation of 100 men for each side and was relieved of his command and reprimanded. The Civil War, of course, occupied America's attention for the...
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next half decade, and when the United States and Britain negotiated the Treaty of Washington in 1871 to settle outstanding claims between the two countries, they agreed to refer the San Juan issue to Kaiser Wilhelm I for arbitration. On 21 October 1872, the German emperor's decision placed the U.S. boundary to the west of the archipelago, giving the San Juan Islands to America, and the British withdrew their troops a month later. Although the Pig War had lasted for over a decade, the total casualties consisted of one pig.

The following bibliography is limited to published materials about the Pig War itself, including both primary materials and secondary sources, as well as some Internet sources and unpublished dissertations. It does not contain materials on the earlier boundary disputes over the Oregon Territory per se, although relevant material can be found in several of the large collections of documents. The manuscript and archival materials, which are principally located in the Pacific Northwest, can be accessed via the bibliographies and notes in the published works.

NOTE

1. Historians have also used the phrase "Pig War" to refer to several other confrontations, including a dispute in 1841 between the Republic of Texas and France's charge d'affaires there, as well as an economic dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in 1906.

PRIMARY SOURCES

I. Memoirs/Documents


Richardson, James D. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents Prepared under the Direction of the Joint Committee on Printing, of the House and Senate, Pursuant to an Act of the Fifty-Second Congress of the United States.* 20 vols. New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897.

United States. Department of State. *The Northwest Boundary: Discussion of the Water Boundary Question; Geographical Memoir of the Islands in Dispute; and History of the Military Occupation of San Juan Island; Accompanied by Map and Cross-Sections of Channels...* Washington, DC: GPO, 1868.

---. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. Over 350 vols. to date.* Washington, DC: GPO, 1861–1959. Published annually since 1861, with slightly varying titles, this series presents the official documentary historical record of major U.S. foreign policy decisions and significant diplomatic activities.


II. Newspapers

For contemporary newspaper accounts, researchers are advised to consult the British Colonist (Victoria, B.C.: 1858–1860), which was continued by the *Daily British Colonist* (1860–1866) and the *Daily British Colonist and Victoria Chronicle* (1866–1872); and the Washington Pioneer (Olympia, WA: 1853–1854), which was continued by the *Pioneer and Democrat* (1854–1861), the *Overland Press* (1851–1864), the *Pacific Tribune* (1864–1868), and the *Weekly Pacific Tribune* (1869–1879). See the cited article by Richard D. Fulton for an excellent overview of the press war.
SECONDARY SOURCES

While this section is (hopefully) comprehensive in listing the many sources specifically about the Pig War, it includes only a small fraction of the many books about the Northwest (Oregon, Washington, Vancouver, etc.) and imperial rivalries.


Bailey-Cummings, Jo, and Al Cummings. San Juan: The Powder-Keg Island, The Settler's Own Stories. Friday Harbor, WA: Beach Combers, 1867. Has chapters on "The War of the Pig" (33–58), "The Peaceful War Years" (57–69), and "The End of an Era" (91–98) and intersperses excerpts from documents and reminiscences into the narrative. Also contains a useful list of commanding officers of the American and British camps in an appendix, 181–182.


Dallas, A. G. San Juan, Alaska, and the North-West Boundary Question. London: H. S. King and Co., 1873. Alexander Dallas was one of the directors of the Hudson's Bay Company and Governor Douglas' son-in-law.


Haller, Granville Owen. The Dismissal of Major Granville O. Haller, of the Regular Army, of the United States by Order of the Secretary of War, in Special Orders, No. 331, of July 25th, 1863; Also, a Brief Memoir of His Military Services, and a Few Observations. Paterson, NJ: Daily Guardian, 1863. Brevet Major (later Colonel) Granville Haller was commander of the 4th Infantry.


———, San Juan and Secession: Possible Relation to the War of the Rebellion. Did General Harney Try to Make Trouble with English to Aid the Conspiracy? A Careful Review of His Orders and the Circumstances Attending the Disputed Possessions during the Year 1859. [Tacoma?] n.p., 1886; reprinted in Washington State Genealogical and Historical Review 1, no. 3 (1993).


McKay, Charles. *"History of San Juan Island." Washington Historical Quarterly* 2 (July 1908): 290–293.

McKay was a settler and blacksmith on San Juan Island.


Morton, Arthur Silver. *A History of the Canadian West to 1870–71: Being a History of Rupert's Land (the Hudson's Bay Company's Territory) and of the North-West Territory (Including the Pacific Slope).* 2d ed. Toronto: Published in cooperation with University of Saskatchewan by University of Toronto Press, 1973.


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