

MASSACRE ON THE OREGON TRAIL IN THE YEAR 1860

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*A Tale of Horror, Cannibalism &
Three Remarkable Children*

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By Carl Schlicke

The natives never actually welcomed the white Americans who came to settle the West. For the most part they tolerated and sometimes were even cordial toward others who came earlier—explorers, Catholic missionaries and fur traders. Their motives were easily understood. But the white Americans came not to trade or to evangelize, but to claim land as their own—land that was part of what the Indians said belonged to everyone. The concept of private property as it pertained to land was beyond their understanding.

It is not surprising, then, that the Indians resisted the invasion. Even after little-understood treaties were signed by some tribal leaders, conveying title to the United States of broad areas and allowing Indians to keep some places where they could live unmolested, many continued to resist.

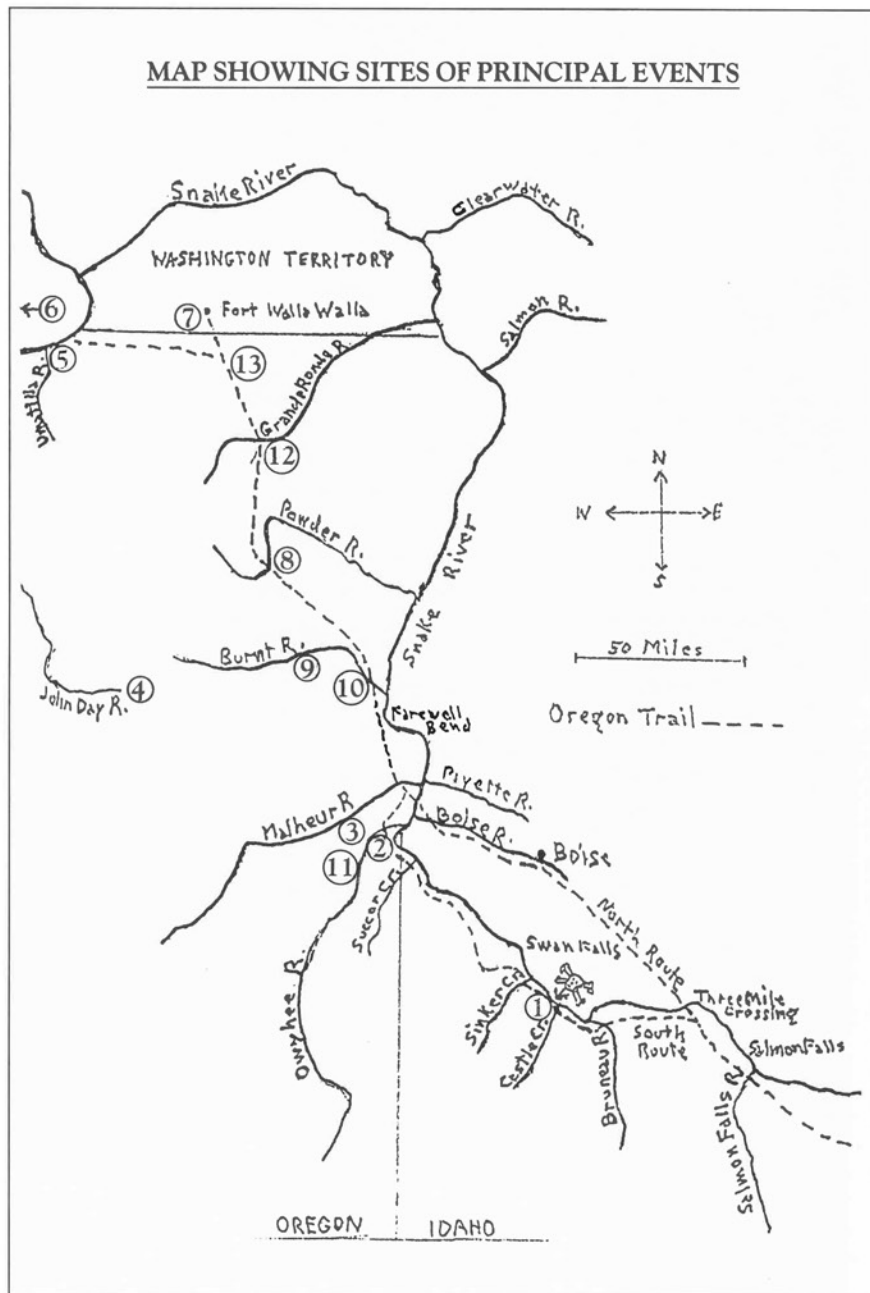
This resistance led to violence—terrible violence sometimes—as the Indians, out of desperation or the misguided

hope that they could successfully repel the invasion of whites, committed so many acts of depredation that army units were sent West to provide protection for the settlers and hunt down and punish bands of marauding Indians.

The influx of American emigrants began in 1843, and by the time the Oregon question was settled in 1846, and the border with Canada was settled at the 49th parallel, the wagon trains heading west from Missouri had increased in number steadily. The Indians took notice and felt threatened. Even the missionaries were settling down to stay. After Marcus Whitman led a large emigrant train westward in 1843, he seemed more interested in developing the country than in saving Indian souls. The first serious manifestation of Indian resistance occurred four years later with the Whitman Massacre at Waiilatpu, which in retrospect seemed almost inevitable. The resulting campaign of reprisal by white volunteers came to be known as the Cayuse War.

THE TRAGEDY UNFOLDS

1. **September 9, 1860.** Forty-four emigrants cross Castle Creek. One mile further on, the massacre begins and four men are killed. Thirty-six hours later, as the massacre continues, seven more persons are killed. Thirty-three emigrants survive, including four soldiers that desert the group.
2. **September 13.** After abandoning wagons and supplies and fleeing on foot, survivors camp at point on Owyhee River three miles west of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Boise, now abandoned. The attack resumes.
3. The two Reith brothers, who left the group after the party moved from Castle Creek, overtake the four soldiers at their camp on the Malheur River.
4. Three of the soldiers attempt to cross the Blue Mountains, but two are killed at the headwaters of the John Day River.
5. **October 2.** The Reiths finally reach the Umatilla Indian Agency, and a relief party is dispatched but is unable to locate survivors.
6. **October 4.** General George Wright orders Captain Frederick Dent to proceed from Fort Dalles to Fort Walla Walla to obtain supplies for an expedition to rescue victims and to punish the guilty Indian tribes.
7. **October 11.** Captain Dent leaves Fort Walla Walla with full equipment.
8. **October 17.** Expedition travels slowly and finally reaches the Powder River. Dent sends Lieutenant Reno on ahead with faster-traveling dragoons.
9. Lieutenant Reno scouts the area around Burnt River and finds Chaffee and Munson.
10. Reno finds the mutilated bodies of six emigrants who had left the camp on the Owyhee a few days earlier.
11. **October 24.** Lieutenant Anderson locates 15 emigrants, 10 alive and



5 dead and cannibalized, at camp on the banks of the Owyhee River. Dent arrives the next day with the main body of troops.

12. Ambulances and wagons with supplies sent from Fort Walla Walla meet Dent and survivors at the Grande Ronde River.

13. **October 27.** Bad weather closes in, and the search for other survivors is abandoned. The expedition crosses the Blue Mountains in a blinding snowstorm, reaching Fort Walla Walla November 7 with the 12 it has rescued. Three others had reached safety on their own.

Carl Schlicke

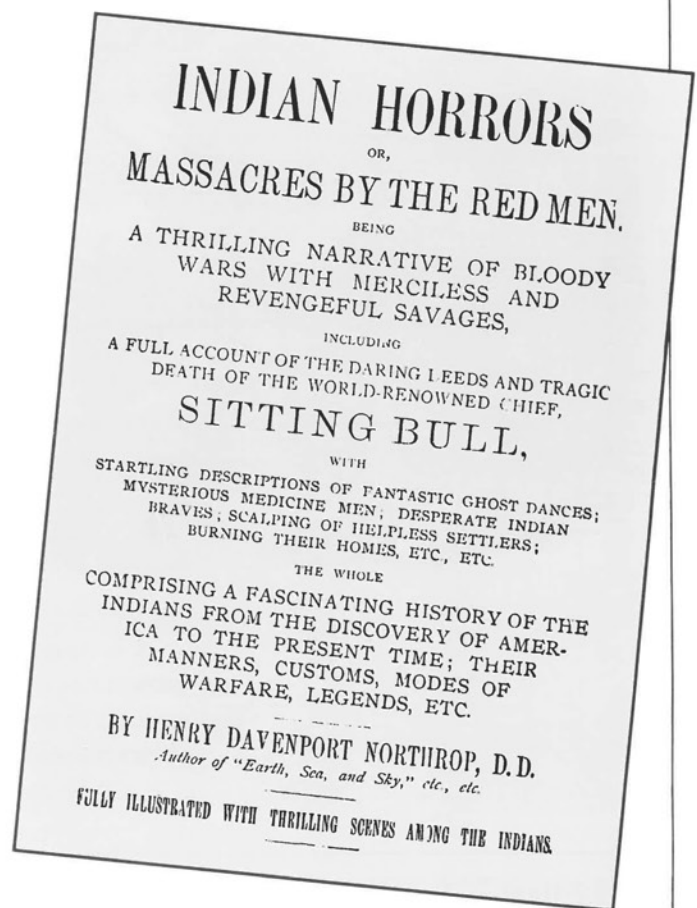
In 1848 gold was discovered in California, and a few years later in Washington and Oregon. The tide of immigration became a flood. The Indians could see that they were losing their lands, that their way of life and their very existence were in jeopardy. Something had to be done. Sporadic raids were made on settlements up and down the coast, isolated parties of travelers and supply trains were attacked and plundered, cattle were stolen, and murders and atrocities perpetrated with increasing frequency. It has been estimated that between 1846 and 1856 over 700 whites were killed by the Indians in the Oregon Country, few of these in actual battle. There seems to be little doubt that many of the outbreaks were the fault of the whites who regarded the Indians as an inferior species entitled to little consideration. Often the slightest Indian incident led to massive retaliation by the settlers, many of whom had developed a hatred of the Indians while crossing the continent. Indian women were molested, and captured Indian children sold into slavery.

In the meantime, Congress made matters worse for the Indians by passing the Donation Land Law, further encouraging settlement of the Pacific Northwest and requiring that regular army troops provide protection for emigrants. Territorial authorities undertook to negotiate treaties with the Indian tribes and persuade them to move onto reservations. Some of the later conflicts with the Indians were also of sufficient magnitude and duration to be designated as wars, such as the Klamath War of 1852, the Rogue River War of 1853, the Yakima War of 1855-1856, and the 1858 campaigns in eastern Washington Territory by colonels Edwin Steptoe and George Wright.

Wright's battles effectively brought to a close warfare with the Indians in Washington Territory, but emigrants on their way to the Pacific Northwest still had to pass through some extremely dangerous areas in order to reach their destination. The summer of 1860 happened to be a comparatively peaceful one. Troops were kept busy in the field, mapping, working on roads, visiting Indian tribes and escorting emigrant trains. However, as the summer progressed, the Shoshone or Snake Indians, in particular, became restless as they watched the ever-increasing flow of white immigration moving along the Oregon Trail. The Mountain Snakes, or Bannocks, in contrast to the more docile Digger Snakes, were athletic, well armed and formidable. They were not at all impressed with the power of the whites. They roamed in bands of 60 to 100 warriors for several hundred miles along the Snake River from Old Fort Boise as far south as the California Road. They had long constituted a "considerable annoyance" to travelers on their way to the far West.

In the latter part of June, a detachment of troops was

attacked by hostile Snakes near Harney Lake in southeastern Oregon, and reinforcements had to be sent to their relief. Later in the summer Digger Snakes raided the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in north-central Oregon and stole 40 horses. No one saw large numbers of Indians anywhere, but signs of sizable encampments were common, and white settlers feared an attack by a large body of marauders. As a precaution, Colonel Wright, who in July had relieved General William S. Harney in command of the Department of Oregon in the aftermath of the "Pig War" (San Juan Island Controversy), ordered Brevet Major William N. Grier with a squadron of dragoons onto the Boise Road to provide additional protection to the emigrants moving over that portion



Nineteenth-century publishers often pandered to the public's lurid interest in Indian misdeeds. Above is the title page of a turn-of-the-century "boy's" book from which the illustrations to this article were taken.



The savagery of the frontier was sometimes exaggerated, but often real. Between 1846 and 1856, an estimated 700 whites were killed by Indians in the Oregon Country.

of the Oregon Trail. As a result, most of the summer passed without additional problems.

On September 1 Wright issued an order that all troops in the field were to return to their stations at Fort Walla and Fort Dalles. The military had been informed that the last of the year's emigrants had passed what was considered to be the final danger point on the Oregon Trail. There seemed to be little left for the soldiers to accomplish, and snow would soon start blocking the mountain passes. Colonel Wright traveled to New York, and on September 20 he was pleased to be able

to inform the adjutant general at army headquarters there that as a result of the last two years' military operations, the emigrant routes in the Oregon Country had been rendered "perfectly safe" for travelers, although he still felt that an army post should be established near old Fort Boise. As Wright penned this report, he was unaware that just a few days earlier one of the worst massacres in the history of the Oregon Trail had taken place.

Ironically, Major Grier and his two companies of dragoons spent several weeks in the area where this occurred,

protecting the main body of emigrants. Just before the tragedy, Grier found no Indians in force anywhere along the trail, nor even any evidence of their having been numerous in the vicinity. Told that there were no more travelers in the rear, he believed that all had passed the danger areas, so when he received Wright's order, he returned with his command to Fort Walla Walla.

Unknown to Grier, a party of 44 persons remained on the trail—17 men, 4 women and 23 children. With their eight ox-drawn wagons and 100 head of stock, they had safely completed the long pilgrimage over the plains on their way to the Willamette Valley. On most of the journey they traveled with a large train headed for California. After leaving the Portneuf River they were accompanied for six days by troops dispatched by Lt. Col. Marshall S. Howe—from Fort Hall—along the south bank of the Snake River to a point three days' travel above Salmon Falls, where their escort left them. Four discharged soldiers joined the party at the Portneuf.

The emigrant party then consisted of Elijah Otter, his wife and 10 children; Joseph Myers, wife and 5 children; Alexis Van Orman, wife and 5 children; and David Chase, wife and 3 children. The remainder of the group was composed of nine unattached males and the four ex-soldiers.

At Salmon Falls, about 140 miles down the Snake River from the mouth of the Portneuf, the travelers for the first time encountered Indians who were threatening. For the next few days, except for the theft of two yoke of oxen and the discovery of the body of a murdered member of the train which preceded them, all was quiet as the little caravan moved onward until it reached a point about 50 miles below Salmon Falls. Here the trail crosses Castle Creek near its entry into the Snake. About a mile farther west, at approximately noon, September 9, 1860, the wagon train was suddenly surrounded by a large band of Mountain Snakes or Bannocks, shouting, screaming, and attempting to stampede the cattle. Their number had been estimated at as high as 100, most of them on foot. They were well armed with guns, bows and arrows, knives, and spears.

The emigrant party formed a corral of their wagons about a hundred rods from the river. The Indians then made signs of friendship and indicated that they wanted something to eat. When they had been fed, they permitted the caravan to move on. As soon as the corral was broken up and the travelers had reached a nearby spot less suitable for defense, the Indians began an attack in earnest. The emigrants formed a new corral and put up a spirited defense. Under a rain of bullets and arrows, it was not long before four of their men, Lewis Lawson, Judson Cressey, Charles Kishnell and William Ottley, were killed and several persons wounded. There were casualties among

the Indians as well. During the "heat of the engagement" the four discharged soldiers mounted their horses and galloped away. In his subsequent report, Colonel Wright commented: "I have learned that the party originally would have probably made a successful defense against the Indians, for they appear to have fought desperately, but for the base desertion of four ... of the men, who mounted on the best animals, embraced the first opportunity for escape. Thus abandoned, the re-



The Indians' hit-and-run tactics made it difficult for settlers to defend themselves along the Oregon Trail.

maintaining men were too weak in numbers to defend the women and children."

After 36 hours of continual fighting, the emigrants, being out of water, broke up the corral and tried to reach the river to alleviate their thirst. By this time their cattle and oxen were unmanageable because of hunger, thirst and arrow



Expeditions to hunt down raiding Indians and search for massacre survivors were sent out from posts such as Fort Walla Walla. These treks could be long, arduous—and often fruitless.

wounds. A withering fire from the Indians now forced them to abandon their wagons and attempt to flee. Joseph Myers' brother, John, was killed as the corral broke up and Elijah Otter and his daughter, Mary, were both killed as they tried to leave their wagon. Mrs. Otter and 3 of her 10 children, refusing to leave, were captured by the Indians and killed. With 11 of their party now dead, the remainder, 18 of them small children, escaped in the night while the Indians were occupied plundering the train, dividing up the livestock and burning the wagons. Over the next 10 days these people made their way on foot, carrying the smaller children, to a point on the Owyhee River about three miles from the

abandoned Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Boise. Here they encamped and built shelters of willow and grass.

The attacking Indians followed them for four days, whooping and yelling much of the time. In their new camp, it was not long before the survivors found Indians watching them and lighting signal fires. Those who later entered the camp seemed to be from a different band of Shoshones.

In the meantime two brothers, Joseph and Jacob Reith, who also fled when the wagons were abandoned, set out westward from the camp in an attempt to reach Fort Walla Walla for help. They overtook the four discharged soldiers the following day and traveled with them up the Malheur

River to the foot of the Blue Mountains where they lost the trail. Three of the soldiers attempted to cross the mountains but were attacked by the Indians near the headwaters of the John Day River, and two of them, Shaumberg and Murdoch, were killed. The survivor, Henry Snyder, traveled day and night for a week, finally reaching the camp of a George E. Cole on Willow Creek, 100 miles east of Fort Dalles, bringing the first news of the disaster. He was in a desperate condition, exhausted, incoherent, almost starved, and initially thought to be the only survivor.

Meanwhile the Reith brothers and the fourth soldier, Charles Chaffee, returned to the main road where it crosses the Malheur River. Here they encountered an elderly survivor named G. Munson and one of the late Mrs. Otter's sons by a previous marriage, Christopher Trimble. This boy, although only 11 years old, was said to have killed several Indians in the fight at the corral. He and Munson had pushed ahead of the main party, which they reported was in dire straits, in yet another effort to obtain assistance. Chaffee killed his horse and butchered it and left most of the meat with young Christopher, who took as much as he could carry back to the camp on the Owyhee. Munson and Chaffee proceeded to the Rum River where they "gave out" and decided to remain, try to catch some salmon, and await the rest of the party. The Reiths continued on until they reached the Umatilla Indian Agency. They arrived there October 2 in a state of complete exhaustion, having subsisted on wild berries and some fragments of meat from the dragoon horse.

The evening of the Reiths' arrival the agent in charge of the agency, Byron Dawes, sent out two mounted men with a pack animal, and the next day he followed it with a wagonload of supplies. After eight days these men returned, weary and discouraged. They had seen footprints of women and children but no survivors.

The Indian Department lost no time notifying the army of the disaster, and on October 4 at Fort Dalles, Captain Frederick T. Dent, the brother-in-law of Ulysses S. Grant, received an order from Colonel Wright to command an expedition to be fitted out at Fort Walla Walla to proceed to the site of the massacre, assist any survivors he might find, and if possible punish the murderers. Dent reached Walla Walla October 9 and two days later was able to move out with 60 dragoons under Second Lieutenant Marcus A. Reno, 40 infantrymen, mounted on mules, under Second Lieutenant R. H. Anderson, and a well-equipped pack train under Mr. T. Wright. Jacob Reith and Assistant Surgeon L. Taylor accompanied the search party. It took Dent six days to reach the Powder River, where, dissatisfied with his slow progress, he sent Reno with 40 lightly burdened men to scout ahead in

the vicinity of Burnt River, while Dent followed with the main body of troops.

On the evening of October 19, on a small branch of Burnt River, Reno encountered Munson and Chaffee, almost naked, without fire and starving. He clothed and fed them, left a small detachment to care for them, and pushed rapidly onward as far as the Malheur River. Having found nothing further of interest, he went back to a camp he had established on the Burnt River. As he was returning he discovered fairly fresh tracks of women and children, so he hurried on although daylight was fading. Within two miles of where the road left Burnt River he came upon a ghastly scene. "Gleaming in the moonlight, dead, stripped and mutilated, lay the bodies of six persons." After three weeks at the Owyhee camp these people had gone ahead of the other



One of the most feared Indians,
Sioux Chief Sitting Bull.

members of the party, fearing they would be murdered by the Indians if they remained in the camp. They appeared not to have been dead more than four to six days. The throats of Alexis Van Orman, his 17-year-old son, Marcus, and Samuel Gleason had been slashed. Their bodies were pierced with numerous arrows. Mrs. Abigail Van Orman had been whipped, scalped and "otherwise abused." Two Otter boys were killed with arrows. Reno buried the bodies.

Since Lieutenant Reno had noted prints of children's bare feet among the moccasin tracks, he hoped they might lead him to the four younger Van Orman children, who were believed to have been taken captive by the Indians. He followed the trail but soon lost it on the bank of the Snake River. These children, Eliza, Minerva, Lucinda and Reuben, ranged in age from 8 to 14 years.

Because the deaths of the people whom Reno found had occurred fairly recently, Dent felt there might still be hope of finding survivors, so he dispatched Lieutenant Anderson and 35 men with light packs to search carefully the area between the Malheur and Owyhee rivers. On the evening of October 24, on the banks of the Owyhee River, Anderson found 10 emigrants alive in their makeshift camp and the remaining 5 dead. After "anxious consultation and prayer . . . those still alive were keeping life in them by eating those who had died." Four children who died were devoured first. Later, the putrifying remains of one of the men were disinterred and were in the process of being cooked and eaten when the rescue party arrived.

When Dent appeared on the scene the next day, he described the living as "skeletons with life in them; their frantic cries for food rang in our ears incessantly." They had been stripped of their clothing by the Indians and left to perish. Those still alive were Joseph Myers, his wife Mary, and their five children, Elizabeth Chase, her daughter Mary, and 13-year-old Emeline Trimble, the older sister of Christopher. "The dead in camp (consumed)" were David Chase, Sr., two of his young sons, Elizabeth Trimble and an infant of Mrs. Otter. Just before Dent's arrival, the body of 11-year-old Christopher Trimble had been found a short distance beyond the Owyhee. He had volunteered to stay with the Indians in their camp three miles away, so that he could arrange for salmon to be taken occasionally to the survivors. The Indians demanded personal possessions, articles of clothing, firearms and ammunition in payment for these transactions. Two weeks before the rescue the Indians heard the emigrants discussing their fading hopes for rescue by the soldiers. The word "soja" apparently alarmed them and led them to break camp and depart, killing the boy before they left. "His body had been much disturbed by the wolves." Anderson buried

the remains found in the camp and those of young Trimble.

The survivors were carefully fed; officers and men shared clothing and blankets with them. Litters and panniers were constructed for their transportation. An express was dispatched to report the rescue to Major Enoch Steen, the commander at Fort Walla Walla. By this time the surrounding hills were covered with snow, and when the party set out for Fort Walla Walla on October 27, it was in a heavy storm of rain and sleet. With the weather closing in, saving the lives of those the army had rescued became all-important, and there could no longer be any thought of pursuing the murderers or searching for the kidnapped Van Orman children.

The march over the Blue Mountains was a weary and painful one, with snow falling much of the time. At the Grande Ronde River the party encountered the ambulances and wagons sent out from the fort with an abundance of



Grim and determined, Chief Standing Bear of the Poncas.

clothing, blankets, provisions and other comforts contributed for the emigrants by the "officers, ladies, laundresses, and men of the post." Even forage for the worn-out animals was included.

When the command reached Fort Walla Walla November 7 without further loss of life, Dent expressed his thanks to all who had participated in the rescue. "To *their* zeal, skill, and energy, I attribute our success, and to *their* humanity, the fact that we have brought into this post, alive and safe, the wrecks of fellow beings we found on the banks of the Owyhee and Burnt rivers." The final count showed that of the party of 44 emigrants, 11 were killed with the train at the corral, 7 were killed along the road, 5 died and were eaten, 2 men were killed in the mountains, and 4 children were taken prisoner, a total of 29. There were 15 survivors, the 12 rescued by Dent and the 3 who made it on their own. This doleful tale is only matched in the annals of pioneer tragedies by the fate of the Donner party in 1846. It will also be noted that the events here described took place not far from the site of the better-known massacre of the Alexander Ward party in 1854 on the banks of the Boise River.

After Colonel Wright received Dent's report he agreed that Dent's prompt return with the survivors had been the proper decision. Wright assured the adjutant general that every effort would be made to rescue the four prisoners when melting of the deep snow now blocking the mountain passes made searching possible. He pointed out the difficulty his men would have even then in tracking down and punishing elusive, warlike, well-armed nomads.

Except for its part in the rescue, the army was subjected to considerable criticism for its role in this affair. Much of the information which the public received through lurid and sensational accounts in the newspapers came from one of the survivors, Joseph Myers, who with his family had gone to Salem, to be with another of his brothers. Myers became increasingly critical of the army, and later of his fellow emigrants, with each succeeding interview. Myers put much of the blame on Colonel Howe, who, he said, was disliked by the emigrants, prejudiced against them, and contemptuous of their fear of the Indians. The Indians, Howe said, would cause the travelers no trouble if they were kept from coming near the caravan. Ill feeling was caused when Howe arbitrarily intervened in an argument which took place at the Portneuf camp concerning two oxen loaned by Munson to Van Orman in return for board, and which he wanted back when he considered changing his destination from Oregon to California. Following this incident, Myers says Colonel Howe gave a party one evening and invited some of the women, who declined to attend. Myers asserts that Howe

became enraged at this and therefore refused to furnish them with a military escort, although he later relented and let them have a lieutenant and 22 men, but only for the first six days of travel. Myers also said the four ex-soldiers who joined the party at the Portneuf were actually deserters.

Quarrels would inevitably have occurred during this whole lengthy ordeal, but Myers, as the only surviving head of family who lived to tell the tale, is less than charitable in his comments regarding his fellow travelers. He implies criticism of Van Orman in the matter of the oxen and later accuses him of refusing to let Miss Trimble accompany him when he led his group away from the camp on the Owyhee. He tells of Otter trying to surrender and make a deal with the Indians just before they shot him. He is particularly critical of the Chases. Mr. Chase's death he attributes to gorging himself on salmon. The fact that Mrs. Chase lost two of her three children he blames on her selfishness. He says she ate too much herself and starved her children, believing it was better than having the parents die and leaving the children "to the mercy of the wolves." Mr. Myers boasted of saving his own wife and five children and quoted his wife as saying that they should all stay alive as long as possible because she believed Providence, in response to their many prayers, would yet deliver them.

Thirty-one years later Emeline Trimble, now Fuller, was encouraged to publish her reminiscences. At the time of the rescue this 13-year-old girl was the sole survivor of the original 12 members of the Otter family. She had made her way to the camp on the Owyhee with some of the other members of the emigrant party, barefooted, carrying in her arms her one-year-old sister and leading four of her little brothers and sisters. They traveled mainly at night and hid by day, subsisting on wild vegetation, two of their dogs, and an emaciated stray cow they found. She gives a heart-rending account of her search for her brother Christopher, after his final disappearance.

She felt they might have made their way to Fort Walla Walla, but for the entreaties of Joseph Myers who protested that he could not travel so fast. She had few fond memories of the Myers family, the only one in which every member was spared. She says it was not prayer but greed which saved them, that the Myers family shirked all the labor of gathering fuel and sustenance, and stole the carefully divided rations belonging to others when they were out of the camp.

After her arrival at Fort Walla Walla she stayed with the family of Lieutenant Anderson until a cousin came for her from Salem. After this she stayed with relatives in Linn County, Oregon, and attended school. She always spoke kindly of her treatment by the residents of the various communities in which she lived after her rescue. In 1863 she married John A. Whitman. After his death she went back to



Just like in the movies, settlers did “corral” their wagons to fend off attack, often their best defense against arrows and bullets.

Wisconsin and married Melvin Fuller. This marriage lasted only four years, but in spite of this she seems, for the most part, to have led a happy and prosperous life.

During the two summers which followed the massacre, three separate expeditions were sent out from posts in Washington and Oregon to attempt to find the Van Orman children. None was successful. A few survivors of the massacre are said to have accompanied the troops on at least one occasion, hoping they could identify some of the Indian culprits. Attempts were also made by civilians to organize rescue expeditions, but these failed to materialize for lack of funds and support. On one occasion a party of Nez Perce Indians was sent to attempt to locate the children.

In August 1862, a Mr. Zachias Van Orman appeared at

Fort Walla Walla. He was a resident of Oregon and the brother of Alexis Van Orman, who with his wife and oldest son had been slain in the massacre. For two years Zachias Van Orman had been seeking his brother's other four children. This time Van Orman planned to accompany an expedition onto the emigrant road commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Rueben F. Maury. While he was waiting at the fort a friend of Van Orman's arrived at the post from the east. He had seen the children in Cache Valley, Utah, but had been unable to rescue them because of the enormous ransom demanded by the Indians. Accordingly, the uncle of the children changed his plans and made his way to Camp Douglas at Salt Lake City, where he enlisted the aid of Colonel Patrick E. Connor, who had established the post that summer.

The Mountain Snakes had again been on the rampage. Emigrants and settlers had been killed, mail and telegraph stations attacked, agents murdered and horses stolen. These happenings had kept Connor's troops busy. Then Van Orman located a band of the Bannocks under Chief Bear Hunter in Cache Valley where they had been holding the children. However, by this time, only the ten-year-old boy remained, his three sisters having died in captivity.

On November 20, Connor dispatched Major Edward McGarry with 60 men to rescue Reuben Van Orman. McGarry's orders stated that if a careful search failed to locate the boy or obtain his release, he was to bring to Camp Douglas three principal men of the Bear Hunter's tribe as hostages. He was also to investigate whether any of these Indians were guilty of complicity in the massacre, and bring any he believed involved to Camp Douglas for trial. "You will not fire upon the Indians unless you find it necessary to the proper execution of your instructions."

McGarry marched to Cache Valley, where on November 22 he met Zachias Van Orman, who informed him that Chief Bear Hunter and 30 or 40 of his tribe were encamped about two miles distant. At 1 a.m. McGarry left his horses under guard in the nearby settlement of Providence, advanced to the Indian camp on foot, and found that all but two squaws had departed. Returning to where he had left his horses, at 8 a.m. he was attacked by 30 or 40 Indians. He ordered his men to mount and kill every Indian they saw.

After a two-hour skirmish, Chief Bear Hunter rode up with 20 or more of his warriors under a flag of truce. He said that Reuben had been sent away a few days earlier when the Indians learned of the approach of the troops. McGarry demanded the immediate delivery of the boy and seized Bear Hunter and four of his braves as hostages until this was accomplished. Bear Hunter sent three of his men to bring in the boy. At noon the next day they returned with Reuben, who after two long years in captivity was turned over to his uncle. The hostages were released. Three Indians had been killed in the skirmish and one wounded, without any casualties among the soldiers.

When Reuben was brought in, only his blond hair and blue eyes suggested his race. With his darkened skin, dressed and bedaubed with paint like an Indian, he more closely resembled his captors than his rescuers. He appeared to be in good physical condition, but hardly seemed to appreciate the efforts of his liberators, which, as far as he was concerned, had simply interrupted two years of wandering with Chief Bear Hunter's tribe. In fact he is said to have acted "like a regular little savage" when reunited with a member of his family, fighting, kicking and scratching as the paint was

washed from him. There could be no doubt that his sudden reconversion to white civilization must have come as quite a shock to this impressionable child. At the same time one can imagine the feelings of his uncle who had spent two years and over \$5,000 trying to find him.

General George Wright, who was now in command of the Department of the Pacific, sent his commendation to Connor and McGarry for their successful performance of the delicate task of rescuing Reuben Van Orman. It does not seem too much to say that the courage, dedication and persistence of the boy's uncle are beyond praise.

Zachias and the boy remained for several months in Utah, with the uncle employed by the quartermaster department at Camp Douglas at times and at others serving as a scout for Colonel Connor. In the latter capacity Zachias Van Orman participated in what he later referred to as "The Slaughter on Bear River."

Unfortunately, depredations by the Mountain Snakes had continued until Connor, with 200 soldiers of the Third Regiment of Infantry, California Volunteers, and the Second California Volunteer Cavalry engaged 300 warriors of the same tribe of Bannock Shoshones in battle January 29, 1863, on the Bear River, in what two months later would become Idaho Territory. The battle took place in bitter, subzero winter weather and deep snow. Two hundred twenty-four Indians were killed, including Bear Hunter and two other prominent chiefs. Connor lost 15 men killed and 53 wounded, of whom 1 officer and 6 enlisted men later died. Many of the men suffered from frozen feet. This was one of the few pitched battles against Indians, involving large forces on each side, fought during the Civil War. For this victory Connor received the congratulations of General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck and was promoted to brigadier general.

When last heard from, Zachias and Reuben were encountered in the autumn of 1864 by soldiers from Fort Boise on an expedition up the Snake River to Salmon Falls, and employed by their commander as guides and interpreters. Much later the uncle went to Chico, California, but in 1896 was back in Douglas County, Oregon, at which time he was applying for a pension. In his letter of application he refers to the rescue of his nephew but gives no clue as to what happened to the boy later. Did he return to the family home in Wisconsin? Did he accompany his uncle to California? Did he stay in Oregon? It would be of interest to learn what the future held in store for Reuben Van Orman.

Dr. Carl Schlicke, a Spokane surgeon, is president of the Eastern Washington State Historical Society. An earlier version of this paper appeared originally in the Pacific Northwesterner, publication of the Spokane Corral of The Westerners. Dr. Schlicke is the author of a biography of Colonel George Wright.

COLUMBIA

THE MAGAZINE OF NORTHWEST HISTORY • SPRING 1987



History Commentary 2

Reaching out to new readers with *Columbia*.

By John McClelland

Who Was that Lady Your Town Is Named After? 3

Information gleaned from *Place Names of Washington*.

Centennial Hall of Honor 6

The Washington State Historical Society will honor 100 by 1989.

When History Was News 8

News from the prospective "Territory of Columbia," 1853.

When Washington Had an Income Tax 10

Today's tax debates are nothing new.

By Philip Roberts

The Wilkes Exploring Expedition in the Pacific Northwest 17

"America's Cook" explores Oregon Country.

By David Buerge

Massacre on the Oregon Trail 33

The emigrants were nearly to their home in the Northwest when disaster struck.

By Dr. Carl Schlicke

On Exhibit: The Lost Voyage of Lapérouse 44

Columbia Reviews 45

Recent books of interest on Northwest history.

Edited by Dr. Robert Carriker

History Album 48

Rare or unusual photos of our region's past.

Front cover: Flagship of a famous expedition, the *Vincennes* cruises off the coast of Antarctica under the command of Lt. Charles Wilkes. Back cover: Among the first items in the Smithsonian's collections was this Northwest Coast Indian mask brought back by members of the Wilkes Expedition in 1842. For more on the voyage, see page 17. Inside cover: Judge Thomas Burke, "the man who built Seattle," is one of the inductees into the Washington State Historical Society's Centennial Hall of Honor. For others, see page 6. Also, at the U. W.'s Burke Museum, named in the judge's honor, is an exhibit worth viewing; see page 44.