

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

## SITE OF UTTER PARTY MASSACRE

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The encounter of the Elijah Utter Party of forty-four emigrants with hostile Indians on September 9, 1860, has evolved into the major documented tragedy inflicted by Indians upon Overland Trail travelers. This incident is also one of the rare occasions when Indians not only attempted but sustained a prolonged assault on encircled emigrant wagons. During the siege, several of the Utter party managed to escape, but they ultimately faced further deaths and personal hardships before being rescued by a military expedition along the banks of the Owyhee River some weeks following the encounter. Since that time, confusion concerning the location of the site has existed.

Some of the twelve survivors were able to give a general description, and subsequent military reports and contemporary newspaper accounts corroborate their recollections. All reports place the site somewhere below Salmon Falls, and that has been the only undisputed description for some time. The location of the site received a good deal of attention through a series of articles in the Boise Idaho Statesman (July 17-August 21, 1921) written by Miles Cannon. His research placed the site just west of Sinker Creek in Owyhee County. His identification can be found on current United States Geological Survey map publications.

Recently found evidence now locates the site near Castle Creek, a few miles east of Sinker Creek. Henry M. Judson, an 1862 Oregon-bound emigrant, made the following notes in his diary:

4 Sep 62 About 12 o'clk we reach Castle Creek so called from some singular looking rocks having the appearance of old dilapidated castles and other ruins--soon Capt K's train arrives and Corrals near us--After remaining an hour & a half we are ordered to hitch up & drive on a mile or so for better grass . . . we comply & find grass higher than our heads & just abreast of the Castle rock--on the other side of the corral runs the creek a small crooked stream . . . .

5 Sep 62 I should have mentioned yesterday that it is said the Indians two years ago besieged a party of 30 or 35 men on the very spot on which we were corralled & killed all but 3 after a 3 day fight--some report seeing nearly a whole skeleton on the ground--I myself saw a skull & probably could have found more by searching . . . . [Henry M. Judson, Diary of 1862, Omaha to Oregon. MS 953, Nebraska State Historical Society]

Previous to their campsite near Castle Creek, Judson and his

group were part of a large encampment of emigrants and military personnel on the Bruneau River. The groups intermingled freely, and it is most likely that the members of Judson's train heard about the 1860 event from the soldiers. In addition, the site not only yielded physical evidence just two years following the incident, but also fits the description of the area given by the survivors.

Another emigrant in Judson's party, Sherlock Bristol, corroborates a Castle Creek location. Bristol noticed a lot of "charred remains of wagons, the bones of cattle and horses, and the skulls of murdered men and women" about a mile after crossing Castle Creek. Later he met a member of the Van Zant family, who survived the massacre and told Bristol a tale of horror that he published in 1887. Aside from G. W. Abbott's Umatilla Agency report, dated October 30, 1860, identifying Elijah Utter's battle site as "one hundred rods from Snake river," other contemporary accounts offer little information concerning the exact site location.

Between Indian Cove and a long stretch of trail above Givens' Hot Springs, only a few emigrant road segments qualify for Abbott's riverside location. These are a section north of Bruneau Sand Dunes, another lower Bruneau segment, three points near Grandview, a Jackass Butte segment, and a Castle Creek-Poverty Flat emigrant road bend where Judson and Bristol reported finding their 1862 evidence. Miles Cannon's Sinker Creek site, while only a mile from the Snake River, fails to meet Abbott's specifications. On that account, it always was suspect.

Since Judson's and Bristol's site is slightly west of Castle Creek, all other possibilities between Indian Cove and Castle Creek are excluded. No other plausible location, aside from a Castle Creek-Poverty Flat site, satisfies Abbott's and Judson's description.

#### CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

A number of survivors' accounts attracted a great deal of attention and created a bitter controversy late in 1860. Some military authorities gained unpleasant notoriety from this incident, and practically no attempt was made to understand Indian reactions that account for native opposition to emigrant travel through southwestern Idaho. Captain Frederick T. Dent (brother-in-law of Ulysses S. Grant) led a relief expedition that helped restore a badly tarnished army reputation arising from failure to protect westbound emigrants. Different reports provided conflicting information that soon got exaggerated. An example is found in an account from San Francisco which circulated widely in December, 1860. Many such stories--often of emigrant tragedies which never happened at all--became popular at that time. Hostilities against Indians, whose losses from white attack greatly exceeded emigrant casualties, were a natural

outcome of such accounts and incidents. Both sides suffered severely from armed clashes, as the following reports indicate.

Edward R. Geary, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Portland, Oregon, to Colonel George Wright, Commander of Department of Oregon, Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, October 4, 1860:

The melancholy intelligence, from sources entitled to credit, has just reached this Office of the murder by the Digger Snakes of a party of forty-five Immigrants at a point below the Salmon Falls of Salmon River. A Mr Shrieder, supposed to be the only survivor of the Company, made his escape and after subsisting for seven days on wild berries, succeeded in reaching the camp of Mr Geo E. Cole\* on Willow Creek in an almost famished state on the night of the 30th ultimo.

This tragic event must have occurred soon after Major Grier's command set out on their return, and is another striking evidence of the stealthy and covert movements of these savage marauders and murderers.

Humanity, the obligation of the Government to the citizen and the general prosperity of Oregon and Washington, demand that prompt and vigorous measures be taken to inflict summary chastisement on these miscreants and for the future security of immigrants and the frontiers.

There is reason to believe that there are other parties of immigrants still on the plains and exposed to danger. I have also serious apprehension for the safety, not only of the Warm Spring Reservation, but also of that on Wild Horse Creek, and of the settlements in that vicinity, and would most respectfully and earnestly press on your consideration the importance of so disposing of the military forces of the neighboring posts as to avert, if practicable further disasters to the lives and property of our citizens, and of the friendly Indians who have the solemn guaranty of treaties for their protection.

I enclose you a slip from the "Advertisor" of

this morning, relating to the massacre.  
 [Oregon Superintendency of Indian Affairs,  
 Letter Book 6, pp. 174-175. Records of the  
 Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of  
 the Interior. Record Group 75, microcopy No.  
 N-2, Roll No. 8, Hereafter sited Oregon  
 Superintendency.]

\*Geo. E. Cole (Democrat-Washington) elected  
 to Congress, 1863, appointed Governor of  
 Washington in 1866.

Edward R. Geary, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Portland,  
 Oregon, to A. B. Greenwood, Commissioner of Indian Affairs,  
 Washington City, D.C., October 4, 1860:

It is my painful duty to communicate to you,  
 that reliable intelligence has reached this  
 office of the massacre of a large company of  
 immigrants near the Salmon Falls of Snake  
 River by the Digger Snakes. The company  
 consisted of forty-six persons--men women and  
 children--en route for Oregon, of whom  
 forty-five are supposed to have fallen  
 victims to savage barbarity. Mr. Shreider  
 alone escaped and after enduring the greatest  
 privations and travelling day and night--for  
 a whole week, succeeded in reaching the camp  
 of Mr. Geo. E. Cole on Willow Creek about 100  
 miles East of the Dalles in Middle Oregon.

The command of Major Grier /2 companies of  
 Dragoons/ spent several weeks in the region  
 where this tragedy is alleged to have  
 occurred without finding the Indians anywhere  
 in force or discovering evidence of their  
 being numerous in that vicinity. Supposing  
 the immigration to have generally, if not  
 entirely, passed the region of peril, he  
 returned with his command to their quarters  
 at Fort Walla Walla. Scarcely had his return  
 been accomplished, before the occurrence of  
 this barbarous slaughter of our citizens, who  
 after accomplishing their long pilgrimage  
 over the plains, were destined to fall by the  
 murderous hand of the relentless savage, on  
 the confines of the country of their  
 destination.

I may here also state, that the command of  
 Major Stein had only a few days returned to

Fort Dalles from his campaign into the Snake Country in the vicinity of Harney (Malheur) Lake, before the aggressions of these marauders were recommenced on the Warm Spring Reservation, and forty horses, belonging to the friendly Indians at that point, driven away.

Apprehensions are now seriously entertained by Agent Dennison, that an attack by a large body of these marauders is impending, and that unless military protection be speedily afforded, the reservation will be desolated.

I have already communicated with Col Wright--commanding the Department--in regard to these frontier troubles, and have no doubt his experience and energy will prompt him at the earliest moment practicable to make such a disposition of the forces as will prevent further disaster and punish these miscreants.

[Oregon Superintendency, pp. 176-177.]

Edward R. Geary, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Portland, Oregon, to George H. Abbott, Sub Indian Agent, Umatilla, Oregon, October 10, 1860:

As you are the Office of the Indian Service most convenient to the scene of the late massacre of a large party of Immigrants by the Snake Indians, which is said to have occurred about 90 miles west of the Salmon Falls, you are directed to use all proper efforts to ascertain whether any of the immigrants have escaped, and to use all required endeavors in such case to complete the rescue of such unfortunate persons and afford them aid.

I do not think it calculated to promote the object for you to accompany the expedition. You will however hold yourself in readiness to meet any emergency that may arise, and are authorized to act in the premises without awaiting further instructions from this office.

Col. Wright informs me, that if at any time, military aid may be required for the protection of the Umatilla Reservation, it may be readily summoned from the Post at Fort Walla Walla. [Oregon Superintendency, p.

180.]

G. W. Abbott, Umatilla Agency, 30 October 1860:  
The train consisting of eight wagons and forty-four souls was escorted by troops from the camp on Port Neuf river to a point about three days' travel above Salmon Falls. From the camp at which the troops started on their return, to the point at which the Indians stopped the train, nothing of importance occurred, although the attitude of the Indians at Salmon Falls was threatening. The Indians attacked the train on the 9th of September, about noon, some fifty miles below Salmon Falls, and one hundred rods from Snake river. The train was corralled, and the immigrants defended themselves about thirty hours, in which time four men were killed and some of the party wounded, as were also some of the Indians.

Want of water compelled the Indians to break the corral and try to reach the river, when the fire of the Indians became so destructive as to drive them from their wagons and force them into a precipitate flight. Then Elijah Utter, who had been wounded previously, received a second and mortal wound, and his daughter Mary was shot while getting out of the wagon. The father and daughter were left dying, and Mrs. Utter and three children, two girls and a boy, refused to leave them, and they fell into the hands of the savages.

Gressey, Lawson, Aulsley, and Keshner, were killed before the corral was broke, and John Myers immediately after.

The party thus decimated escaped from the Indians, who were too busy plundering the train to follow them. But the next day the Indians were seen watching them, and signal fires were lighted.

Four of the discharged soldiers who had joined the train at Port Neuf left the train in the heat of the engagement, mounted and attempted to make their escape. The Keiths left the party at the moment of abandoning the train, and came up with the discharged soldiers the next day, and travelled with

them till they struck the foot of the Blue mountains, where the road they were following, being that up the Malheur, was lost. They, with one of the discharged soldiers, returned to the main road where it crosses the Malheur, where they found a man (Monson) and a boy; the boy one of the Utter family. These two told them that they had travelled with the main party up to five days previous, when they left them in a destitute condition, but they expected them to reach the Malheur in a few days.

The discharged soldier killed his horse and the party prepared the flesh, and left the boy with it at the Malheur, while the four pushed on to Rum river. Salmon being plentiful and easily taken in the stream, two of the party stopped to fish until the main party should arrive. The two Keiths then pushed on to the agency where they arrived in a very sorry condition and greatly exhausted, on the 2d of the month, just twenty-two days after the massacre. The three discharged soldiers who attempted to cross the Blue mountains high up the Malheur were attacked by Indians on what is supposed to be the headwaters of John Day's river, which point he had reached at a critical moment, as starvation and thirst were fast doing their work.

Mr. Dawes, who was in charge of this agency during my absence (it was previous to my arrival here), sent two men, well mounted, with one pack animal, on the night of the arrival of the Keiths, to travel day and night, to furnish immediate assistance to such as might be found, and the next day a wagon started with supplies for all, and to bring in the exhausted.

The advance party went down to Rum river about forty miles, and near to the point at which the two were left to fish, without meeting any one. They found tracks of women and children, apparent, some of whom wore shoes; and, thinking that they had passed the party, they started on their return, and took great care in searching the country, but

failed to find any one. They arrived here on the eighth day worn out and discouraged, having travelled night and day, hoping to see the fires lighted by the sufferers by night.

Captain Dent, 9th infantry, commanding a detachment of troops, left his camp at the foot of the Blue mountains, about five miles from this agency, on the 14th of the month, en route to the scene of the massacre. He is a prompt, energetic, and efficient officer, and is actuated by a proper spirit, as are also the officers and men under him; and if it is in the power of man to accomplish aught for the benefit of any of the survivors of the party, if any exist, he will do it. I sent Jacob Keith, who is now in my employ, with the expedition. I have this day sent an express to Walla-Walla to ascertain if any intelligence has been received at that point from Captain Dent, and will give you the result in this communication.

This is a most sad affair, but I will refrain from comment, and confine my report to facts as they are developed. The foregoing particulars of the massacre I get from the Keith brothers, and the fate of the two discharged soldiers is given by Snyder. I send you a list of the names of the emigrant party.

Edward R. Geary, Portland, November 7, 1860 [House Document 46, 36th Congress, 2d sess.]:

Captain Dent found those whom he had the good fortune to rescue in the most forlorn condition. They were in a state of perfect nudity, having been stripped by the savages and left to perish. For ten days they had subsisted on the bodies of the dead. When discovered, on the 27th of October, near the bank of a small stream, they were in a state of extreme emaciation, their bones almost protruding from their skin. On seeing their deliverers, the women and children fell on their knees, and in the most piteous accents implored food. But I will not pain you by attempting a further recital of sufferings not to be imagined by any who have not been overtaken by a similar calamity. A thrill of

horror and of the deepest sympathy vibrates through the whole country, and the universal voice demands that the protection of the government no longer withheld from our citizens in a district so often and so deeply stained with the blood of the emigrant.

Edward R. Geary, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Portland, Oregon, to A. B. Greenwood, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington City, D.C., November 7, 1860:

It is at length in my power to communicate authentic information in regard to the heart-rending tragedy of the ninth of September, to which I referred in my letter to your office of the 4 ult. This terrible disaster occurred about fifty miles below Salmon Falls on the Immigrant route to Oregon. The company consisted of forty-four persons--seventeen men and twenty-seven women and children--of whom fifteen, after privations seldom paralleled in the annals of human sufferings, are known to survive and have been rescued.

Of the others, the larger number are known to have fallen in their gallant defense, which lasted for thirty-four hours, against an overwhelming force, or in their efforts to escape when compelled to abandon the protection afforded by their wagons. Two men were overtaken and slain near the head of John Day's river. If any of the missing still survive, it is feared they are in captivity to the most cruel and brutal monsters that wear the human form, and are enduring indignities and tortures from which death would be a most welcome refuge.

The names of the survivors are Snyder a discharge soldier who succeeded in reaching the camp of Mr. Cole, as stated in my former letter, Jacob and Joseph Keith, who found their way to the Umatilla Agency and Mr Munson, Mr Jeffery, Joseph Myers, wife and five children, Mrs Chase (wife of Daniel Chase) and one child and Miss Trimble--twelve persons--rescued by the command of Capt Dent of the Army.

Capt Dent found those whom he had the good

fortune to rescue in the most forlorn condition. They were in a state of perfect nudity, having been stripped by the savages and left to perish. For ten days they had subsisted on the bodies of the dead. When discovered on the 27th of October near the bank of a small stream, they were in a state of extreme emaciation, their bones almost protruding from their skin. On seeing their deliverers the women and children fell on their knees, and in the most pitious accents implored food.--But I will not pain you by attempting a further recital of sufferings, not to be imagined by any who had not been overaken by a similar calamity. A thrill of horror and of the deepest sympathy vibrates through the whole country, and the universal voice demands that the protection of the government be no longer withheld from our citizens in a district so often and so deeply stained with the blood of the emigrant.

This terrible affair has occurred not far from the scene of the horrible massacre of the Wards and their party in the autumn of 1854, a detailed account of which as well as of other outrages by the same savage perpetrators, will be found in the correspondence of this office, on the files of the Indian Bureau.

It is now demonstrated that no adequate protection can be given to the Immigration to this coast, short of the establishment of one or more military posts in the heart of the Snake Country, at points whence the routes of travel, can be constantly guarded, and the several wintering places of the Indians driven by the snows from the mountains, can be readily reached. These Indians should not be permitted to escape punishment for their past cruelties, and must be taught to respect our power, which they now hold in contempt.

I have no doubt that the importance and necessity of adequate military protection to the Immigrant routes to Oregon & Washington will be strongly urged by the present head of this military Department, and that the energetic efforts of the Indian Office will

be directed to the attainment of the same object. Without it, immigration by land to this country from the Atlantic States will virtually cease, every enterprise tending to its development languish and untold losses, social, moral and commercial, result.

Enclosed herewith is a copy of the report of Sub Agent Abbott and of a letter to that office from Capt A. J. Smith U.S.A.

#### Copy of Additional Enclosure

List of the names of the Immigrants of the train attacked by the Snake Indians.

Elijah P. Utter,	wife and ten children						
Joseph Myers,	do	"	five	do	Some of the young		
Daniel Chase	do	"	three	do	ladies were from		
A. Manorman	do	"	five	do	twelve to twenty		
Samuel Gleason					years old		
Munson							
Louis Lawson							
Judson Gressey							
Jacob Keith							
Joseph Keith							
John Myers							
Charles Keshner,	Disch Soldier from Camp at Port Noeuf						
William Alltry	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Shamberg	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Snyder	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Murdock	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Jeffey	"	"	"	"	"	"	"

[Oregon Superintendency. pp. 193-195.]

O. C. Harcum, Oregon Argus (Oregon City) November 10, 1860, p. 2, c. 3:

The details are of the most heart-rending character. They were in a perfect state of nudity--having been stripped by the Indians and left to perish. For ten days previous to their discovery they had subsisted upon human flesh the bodies of those who had perished.

Mrs. Chase had fed upon the dead body of her husband.

A private letter says, that on the eve of the 27th Oct. an officer with a detachment in advance of the main party, found near a small stream the woman and children naked, in a state of starvation, and greatly emaciated, so much so that their bones almost protruded through the skin. The women and children, on seeing

their rescuers fell upon their knees and by the most piteous wailings implored food. The stout hearts of the soldiers was softened to the most touching emotions of pity, which was immediately followed by dire revenge towards the red skins.

On receiving their intelligence at the Fort the sensation felt was such as humanity alone can experience, the conduct of Maj. Stein the officer in command, was prompt, and every comfort of the fort which could be transported was quickly dispatched to the scene of suffering. The wives of the officers purchased every description of clothing requisite for the women and children of the train. A physician with medicine, &c., accompanied the supply train.

More full accounts will be given when the train arrives. Meantime I trust the people of the Valley will suspend their judgement upon the cause both remote and intermediate of this dire calamity.

Pacific Christian Advocate (Portland), November 13, 1860, in Pioneer and Democrat (Olympia), November 23, 1860, p. 2, c. 3-5:  
The Late Salmon Falls Massacre--Statement of Mr. Joseph Myers, One of the Survivors.

At our request, Mr. Joseph Myers gave us an account of the late shocking Snake river massacre and of the subsequent travels and rescue of the survivors, which we took down as follows:

There were fifty-four persons in the company. Col. Howe sent an escort of twenty-two dragoons with our company from Portneuf river, seven miles this side of Fort Hall. The escort were furnished with only twelve days rations and were to escort us six days and return, which they did. We desired Col. Howe to give us an escort farther, but he said there would be no trouble; that the immigrants were in no danger if they would keep the Indians away from their camp and not allow them to come too near. [This seems to us almost like irony--Ed.] He said there were troops on the road beyond Salmon Falls. Col. Howe had furnished an escort for the California train; but for what distance I do not know. Col. Howe was generally disliked by the immigrants.

After the escort left the company, two weeks transpired before the attack. The attack was made between nine and ten o'clock A. M. on the 8th of September.-- There were

about one hundred Indians, most of them on foot. They first came around the train, whooping and yelling, probably to stampede the cattle. We then corralled and defended ourselves. The Indians then desisted and made signs of friendship, signifying that they wished something to eat. As many as came were fed. They made signs to us that we might pass on to the river. In doing this, when we reached an eminence which exposed us and furnished the Indians the cover of sage brush, they commenced a general firing upon us with arrows and rifles. We again corralled as soon as we could. Before we had fully done this and got our oxen secure, three of our men were shot down viz: Lewis Lawson, William Utley, and \_\_\_\_\_ Kishmal, a German. We defended ourselves as well as we could; the fighting continuing through the day. During the day we saw several of the Indians fall. It was believed that twenty or more of them were killed the first day. The Indians kept shooting at the train through the night, mostly with arrows; occasionally with rifles. Their random shots did not do much harm, except to wound and irritate the cattle and horses, which were without grass and water all the day and night. The fight was renewed in the morning and continued nearly through the entire day, as on the previous; one of our men, Judson Cressey, being killed.-- About an hour before sundown, the train agreed to leave four wagons and contents as booty for the Indians and start on, hoping this would satisfy them, and that while they were ravaging these the company might escape with the remainder. This plan was attempted without success. The Indians paid no attention to the deserted prey, but swarmed about the train like bees, attacking it with renewed activity. The company drove on as fast as they could, but the cattle were so ravenous after sage brush that they could not be got along, and in the meantime, the firing of arrows and rifle balls by the Indians was actively continued. Before we started the last time from the corral, four young men were detailed, mounted and armed, to go in the van of the train and open the way for the wagons. They were discharged soldiers from the post at Portneuf. They were well armed with rifles and revolvers, which with the horses, belonged to the train. Instead of assisting the immigrants, they immediately fled. Their names were Snyder, Murdoch, Chambourg and Chaffee. Snyder, it is said, reported two as killed by the Indians. He and Chaffey are living. With these horsemen two left on foot, viz:

Jacob and Joseph Reith. These were the two men who

brought word into the settlement of the conditions of the immigrants, and Jacob Reith returned from Captain Dent's command for their relief.

At about dusk we left our cattle and wagons, as we found that we could do nothing with the Indians. After driving out of the corral, my brother was shot down by my side. The Indian who shot him was not more than ten rods off, in the sage brush. I saw him as he was drawing upon us and shot him, but not until he had fatally wounded my brother. I saw the Indian roll over dead. When we were finally leaving the wagons, I helped Miss Utter out of the wagon and was setting her down, when a rifle ball passed through my coat and two shirts, grazed my body and killed her. She spoke some after being shot; said that she had got her death blow; that she was killed, &c.

Mr. Utter made signs of surrendering to the Indians; proposing a treaty, and while doing so he was killed. Mrs. Utter refused to leave her husband, and three of her children remained with her. One of them, a boy of five years, was immediately seen to fall. Mr Vannorman and his family, Mr. Chase and his family, and myself and mine left the wagons and cattle and hastened on on foot. After we had left our wagons the Indians fell back and we traveled on all night until about daylight.

All the provisions saved from the wagons was a loaf of bread, secured by Mr. Chase. At morning we camped under the bank of the river and stayed there all day. Some of us had some fishhooks in our pockets, and the ladies made lines with spool-thread they had. We caught some fish. The Indians had dogged our path and were howling about our camp. We supposed they saw us.

We traveled at night and lay by by day until we had traveled some sixty or seventy miles, when we became too weak to carry the children further, and were obliged to build wigwams, which we did as well as we could, with willows. Here we lay by entirely. This was on the Owyhee river, about three miles from Fort Boise, then deserted. Before reaching our final camp, we killed and ate two dogs which followed us, and about six miles before reaching that camp a very poor emigrant cow met us, which we killed and ate. By mixing the beef with rose-buds and parsley we made it last us two weeks. We made two wigwams. Mr. Vannorman and family and a young man, two of Mrs. Utter's children, Miss Trimble and her brother, and two sons of Mr. Utter and an infant child of Mrs. Utter's were in one wigwam; Mrs. Chase's family and mine were in the other. A few days after we camped we saw Indians

camped on Snake river some three miles from us. They were fishing. They brought us salmon, for which we exchanged some of our clothing and ammunition.--This was the only way we could obtain it. At first they would come thus and exchange us salmon every three or four days. They called themselves Shoshones. We found herbs, frogs, and muscles along the river which we gathered or caught and ate.-- About two or three weeks after we camped, Mr. Chase died, probably, as we supposed, from over-eating salmon. Ten days after this Elizabeth Trimble died from starvation; four or five days afterwards, Susan Trimble, her sister, died; the next day Daniel Chase died, and two days after him his brother, Albert, all from the same cause. The living were compelled to eat the dead to preserve their own lives. It was a subject of much and anxious consultation and even the prayer before the eating of the dead was finally determined upon. This determination was unanimous. The flesh of the dead was carefully husbanded and sparingly eaten to make it go as far as possible. Thus the bodies of four children were disposed of. The body of Mr. Chase was exhumed and the first meal from it cooked and about to be eaten when relief came.

The Indians had come and carried away our guns; two from Mr. Vannorman; one from Mr. Chase, and one from me. They also took Mr. Vannorman's blanket from him, and they did it somewhat roughly.--At this time we had already traded off some of our clothing for salmon. After the Indians left, Mr. Vannorman said he was going to take his family and leave; "For," said he, "if we do not, the Indians will come tomorrow and strip and kill us." He and his family left our camp that day about noon. They traveled on to Burnt river, as it afterwards appeared. When the command reached there they found six of the bodies killed by the Indians. Four of the children were not found. It is supposed they are now captives among the Indians. [See pp. 16-24 for more information on the fate of the Van Orman children.] The six bodies found were those of Alexis Vannorman and wife,--the latter was scalped,--their son Mark, Sam'l Gleason, and Charles and Henry Utter. The last was about twelve years old, the others were adults. Besides Mr. Meyers' family, consisting of himself, wife and five children--the oldest ten years and the youngest one year old--Mrs. Chase and daughter and Miss Trimble were rescued; also, between the camps, in a very emaciated condition, Chaffey and Munson--twelve in all.

About six miles before reaching our final camp, Mr. Munson and Christopher Trimble, the latter a boy of eleven years, were sent forward as an express to the settlements. They went to Burnt river where they saw Jacob and Joseph Reith, who had taken a wrong road, and were now getting back to the right one. The Reith boys and Chaffey and Munson went on and sent back Christopher Trimble to inform us of their having gone forward for relief. Chaffey and Munson gave out and were afterwards rescued. After getting back, Trimble volunteered and went with the Indians to their camp on Snake river, to stay. After being with them some days he came with them to our camp, when we traded with them for salmon. While he was with us, I enquired of him how far it was to their camp. He said about three miles. I asked him how far it was after crossing the river before their trail was struck. He said but a short distance, and the trail was plain. He inquired why I asked him? I told him if the soldiers came to our relief we would want to come for him. The word soldier, which the Indians seemed to understand, excited their curiosity and they soon left our camp and never returned.--After waiting in vain nearly two weeks without seeing them, Miss Trimble went to the river and called loudly for her brother, without getting any response or seeing him. The next day Mrs. Chase and Mr. Myers went to the river to find the Indians and trade for more salmon. They could not find them. The next day Mr. Myers went again, alone, and fired several shots across the river towards their camp and halloed loudly, but could not obtain any answer.--He concluded they had gone. On returning to camp, he discovered a track where the wolves had dragged a body. Supposing it might be that of a deer and that he could thus get food, he followed the track a short distance and found two locks of human hair, which resembled Christopher Trimble's. He took it to camp and Miss Trimble recognized it as her brother's.--When the soldiers came they were shown this track, and pursuing it, they found the body of Trimble.

From the first attack until relief came was forty-four or forty-five days. The saved were not, as has been represented, entirely without clothes, but they were but scantily dressed. Mr. Myers' loss is over \$2000.--He is of course entirely destitute. Mrs. Chase and child and Miss Trimble are at Walla-Walla.

The Dalles correspondence, November 12, to the Portland Daily

Advertiser as quoted in the Puget Sound Herald (Steilacoom),  
November 23, 1860, p. 2, c. 3

The train was composed of forty-two persons, and a great majority of them were women and children. Nothing transpired of importance until they reached Fort Hall. An old gentleman named Munson loaned Mr. Vannorman two oxen, on condition of his boarding with him through the route. When they arrived at Fort Neuf old Munson changed his mind to go to California, and demanded his oxen or at least complained to Col. Howe. The colonel rode down to where the train was camped, and very arbitrarily demanded or commanded the oxen to be delivered to Mr. Munson. This naturally caused an ill feeling on the part of the emigrants towards him. That evening, or the following one, Col. Howe gave a kind of party, and asked the women of the train to attend. Some of them refused, and he, Col. Howe, insisted, and even advised some of the ladies to go in opposition to the wishes of their husbands: yet they refused. Some went, and Col. Howe to avenge the pique, swore they should have no escort. However, he changed his mind a little, and did give them an escort, but only for six days, which brought them just to where danger was to be apprehended. Col. Howe did however, give a sheep train an escort by the California route, which never was considered half as dangerous as the Oregon road. Again, it is true that the soldiers at Fort Neuf apprehended danger, and said that 'that train was doomed,' and the lieutenant commanding expressed his opinion to that effect; yet he could not violate his orders, they were strict and to the point. Six days only were they to escort the emigrants. The troops came a distance of 110 miles from Fort Neuf and abandoned the emigrants to their fate. The Indians were even then at hand; but let me tell the remainder in the language of one of the saved: "After the soldiers left us, I felt very bad, as the indications were ominous. One lady expressed her belief that she would not go much farther. True for her; she was killed next morning, together with her husband and three children. This occurred two weeks after the soldiers left us. The Indians visited us every day. We had four soldiers with us, but they were deserters, and left us. One of them was killed in our presence, and another, named Snider, took his money and papers and is supposed to have made off with his companions. After they had left, the Indians made a rush, and cutting the wagons covers, shot their arrows through the openings. Several were killed in that manner. One boy killed eight or ten Indians with his rifle, but was

himself afterwards killed. We had to abandon the wagons, and from that time we had no provisions for forty-five days, until we were discovered by the troops. Four of the party were captured by the Indians; three of them were girls and one boy. One of the girls was thirteen years. I do not know if they are alive or not; they were carried beyond Snake river.

We traveled ninety miles from the place of massacre to where we were encamped when found. We were then subsisting on a dead body. The Indians at that place gave us salmon for our clothes. We thought some of the Indians engaged in the massacre were among them. When we arrived at the place of massacre we found bones hung on trees and written upon them a notice to the effect that a train was ahead thirteen days; that one of their men had been killed that morning and warned us of danger. Three of the children died of starvation. We had made up our minds to kill one of the little boys next day for food, if not rescued; he is here now. The bones of children who died were scattered about. The dead body of one of the men was partially devoured; his wife partook of a portion [sic].

"When Capt. Dent went into the little willow camp we had erected, the children hung on him begging for food; 'bread,' 'bread,' they cried. The soldiers threw themselves down and wept, and it was as much as Capt. Dent could do to restrain them from giving food to us.

We got a little first, and in a short time we were able to move around. We are all saved now."

Oregon Argus (Oregon City), November 24, 1860, p. 1, c. 5-6:

. . . The Indians first attempted to stampede the stock, but did not succeed. The train immediately 'corralled' for defense--had a favorable position, but no water. The Indians, finding they could accomplish nothing, threw down their arms and made friendly signs--came up, and made signs for something to eat. We fed many of them, and they appeared to be satisfied, and made signs for us to go on to the water, that they were friendly. So we started toward the river. After we got out of our strong position they commenced on us, but we expected some kind of treachery, and were on the look-out for them. Before we got corralled and our cattle chained, two of our men were shot down, Utley and Lawson. The attack commenced about 10 A. M. and lasted till the night of the 9th. Two more of our men were killed, Kichnell and Judson Cracey. It was very

warm weather, and we were all nearly famished for water, so we hitched up; we left four wagons, and considerable things in them, thinking that would satisfy them. We were compelled to go to water some how. We had been hemmed up there two days and one night without a drop of water, and the cattle were getting very uneasy. The loose stock had been driven off by the Indians, but we had our teams tied on the inside of the corral. What we left to the Indians did not seem to satisfy them at all. While they had us hemmed up, we killed not less than 25 or 30 of them; it was certain death to an Indian if he showed his head, for we were all pretty good marksmen--but they were too many for us. The Indians would come right up to the wagons, cut holes in the covers, and shoot their arrows in at the women and children--but few of those who were so bold as to thus come up got away without getting a shot. Chas. Utter (a lad) shot five Indians as fast as he could load and shoot; he was in the hindmost wagon.

Mr. Utter got wounded and could do nothing. We hitched up and started about sundown, but the cattle were so hungry we could hardly get them along, they would keep biting and reaching for every spear of grass.--We mounted four men on horses, Murdock, Shamberg, Sneider, and Chaffy--the two Reith boys on foot. The object of having these six men ahead was to keep the road open, and keep the Indians from closing in ahead, while we could get our wagons and families along. The Indians pitched in on all sides, and these men, instead of staying and helping us, put off as fast as they could go, without firing a shot, and left us to our fate. The Indians had a few guns and plenty of arrows. If those men had stayed with us, I believe we could have got through to water, and then we could have defended ourselves till we could get assistance. We kept getting along as fast as we could, fighting our way; it was getting dark; our help weakened; cattle hungry; it was slow traveling. My brother (John Myers) was driving the team, and I was walking along, with my gun and revolver, when I saw an Indian raise up behind a big sage bush and level his piece at one of us; I raised mine, but his gun went off first, and my brother fell dead without a struggle. The next instant I fired, and the Indian gave a whoop, jumped up, and fell dead. Mr. Utter attempted to treat with them, and made signs that they might have all if they would only spare their lives, but to no purpose. Mrs. Utter, two daughters, and a little son refused to leave their wounded parent; they stopped with him, the presumption is they were killed outright. We concluded to leave

everything and go on foot, as so many of our men were now gone and disabled that we could not get the teams along and protect ourselves at the same time. Mary Utter was in my wagon, and just as I was helping her out, a shot passed through my coat, just grazing the skin--the ball went into her breast, when she fell, but got up again, and cried out 'O, my God! I'm shot!' and called on some of the men to help her; two young men took hold of her and helped her along a little way, when she commenced sinking, and was getting helpless so they had to leave her; she was about 23 years old. I helped my family out of the wagon, and we all went on as fast as we could, traveling all night. We could see fires behind us, and suppose it must have been the wagons burning. We laid by in the day time and traveled at night, all afoot, and nothing to eat except one loaf of bread that Mr. Chase took out of the wagon.

We were well-armed, and an Indian dare not show his head. They would not attack us in the night, and they were afraid to come about us in the daytime. My wife carried the babe, about a year old, till she almost gave out, and I the next one; the others had to walk.--

The Indians followed us four days, but did not come in gun-shot, but kept up a yelling and whooping. It seems as though they meant to haunt us all the time, but they did not trouble us after that except to get on the hills and roll rocks down toward us. Finally they gave up the chase, and let us alone. We had nothing to eat, so we killed one of two dogs which followed us, and roasted and ate him. We caught fish in the streams when we could, sometimes with pretty good luck, some days not any. We would eat rosebuds and berries when we could get them; we ate snakes, lizards, and frogs, and muscles out of the streams; some times shoot ducks and geese; and if the Indians had not afterward robbed us of our guns, we could have made a living by killing game, which was tolerably plenty where we camped on Owyhee River. A wild stray cow came along--we made out to shoot her, and that lasted some time. We traveled in this way some eight or nine days, and were . . . entirely given out when we got to Owyhee River, so we stopped, and made us a house of willows and grass; we piled a lot of grass inside; we crawled into the hut at night; we had no blankets, and but little clothing. It was about the 17th of Sept., when we stopped traveling; we had then gone about 90 miles. There we stopped till Capt. Dent's party came, which was about the 25th of Oct., which makes it about 47 days from the time of the attack till Capt. Dent came up.

After we had been in camp on the Owyhee about three weeks, the Van Norman family, consisting of himself, wife, 5 children, and Samuel Gleason, Chas. Utter, Henry Utter, concluded to leave, and travel on as well as they could. They got together what provisions they could, and started. They refused to allow Miss Trimble to go with them. That is the last we heard of the Van Norman family, till Capt. Dent's party came. They found the Van Norman family on Burnt River, all murdered, apparently but a few days previous. Capt. Dent found all the bodies excepting those of four children, three girls and one boy; the eldest girl was about 15. It is supposed they were taken prisoners and probably are yet alive. The bodies were brutally beaten and scored with knives, and the arms of the woman were tied. While in camp, after the Van Normans left, we kept alive by hunting everything we could. The Indians would bring salmon to trade for any little things we could spare, such as needles, pins, the rags on our backs, till we were reduced to a state of nakedness. Mr. Chase ate too hearty a meal one day on salmon, which threw him into the hiccoughs; he died one night, we knew not when, and we buried him next day. After we had sold everything, the Indians refused to bring any more salmon unless we would give them our guns, which we did not wish to do, but they were determined to have them; so I buried my revolver and ammunition. The Indians took the guns, and gave us what salmon they pleased, and promised more, which they never brought. One of the Trimble boys volunteered to go home with the Indians, and do what he could to induce them to bring provisions to us. They used him very kindly--fed him, and gave him a place to sleep. He, in company with some of the Indians, would come over to the camp every few days, and bring salmon. One day, some one happened to mention 'soldier' in the conversation. The Indians at once seemed to understand the word; they straightened up, and murmured 'Soja,' 'Soja,' 'soja,' the word passing from one to the other, and a curious, devilish look seemed to pervade their countenances.--They went off, the boy following them, but he never returned. We waited, but no word from him; not an Indian after that made his appearance. They had been camped some three miles below, across the river; I went down one day opposite the place and saw a few wigwams, but no sign of any Indians. On the way back, I saw where something had been dragged across the path; I followed up the trace, hoping it might be where some animal had dragged a deer along, and that I might find a piece to take home. But I found nothing except

a lock of human hair, which I recognized as the boy's.

(Capt. Dent followed up this sign, and found a head, an arm, and some things showing the boy had been killed.) On my way home that day, I found the carcass of a horse that the wolves had deserted; I picked up a shank and took it to camp, and you may guess there was but little meat on it when the kiotas left it. We used that whole carcass; we burnt the bones and ate them, and the skins we roasted. When we could find a piece of a carcass, we made use of it; we were getting so weak that we could scarcely walk about. We ate weeds, grass, and anything at all we could find. Starvation was staring us in the face. Finally one of the children died; we cut it up and ate--and so on till we had eaten three of them. The mother help[ed] eat her own children. Mrs. Chase lost all her children but one. Some Indians came along one day and dug up Mr. Chase's body for the few rags it had on. We made up our minds to try and eat him--so we cut him in small pieces, a day's ration in a piece--but before we began roasting, Capt. Dent and party came along, just in time to save us from that awful meal! The body had been buried over ten day. We saved every one of our children, and Mrs. Chase might have saved hers, if she had not been so selfish; she lived too well herself and starved her child. She would scold my wife because we gave our children so much; she argued that the children should die first, that for us to die and leave our children to the mercy of the wolves--but my wife said she believed that Providence would yet deliver us, and that we should all try to keep alive as long as possible.--(Mrs. Myers says she would dream of making large loaves of bread--dream a great deal about piles and piles of something to eat.)

Mr. Meyers of Salem states that he did not get to Walla [Walla] in time to go out with Capt. Dent, and was spared the horrid sight. The survivors were nothing but skin and bone, and the children so weak they would tumble down when they tried to run. Their fingers were like birds' claws; eyes hollow-looking; cheeks sunken; they seemed to be half out of their senses; they would sit there and quarrel about who had the biggest piece of meat, and fuss about any little foolish thing. Some times they would be in fine spirits--talk about good old times, assistance coming, of their plans and prospects when they got into the settlements, &c.; then they would realize their true situation, and commence crying. When Capt. Dent came into the valley where the camp was, the first one he saw was Miss Trimble, who

had wandered off a few hundred yards, gathering something to eat. (She is the young lady who picked up an infant at the time of the massacre, and carried it along till it died; she also defended the wagon some time with an ax in hand.) Capt. Dent spoke to her and asked if she was hungry. 'No, sir, not much' 'Are you not afraid of the Indians?' 'No, sir'--she seemed to take every thing very coolly. She seemed to be half out of her mind. As soon as these poor, starved people saw the soldiers coming, they ran out and fell on the ground, crying that they were starving, and begging for something to eat. Those that were stout enough to ride were put on mules, and the others were carried on litters between two mules. They got into Walla Walla on the 31st Oct. Mrs. Chase and child are stopping with Capt. Dent's family, and Miss Trimble is stopping with Lieut. Anderson's family.

Len.

Oregon Statesman (Salem) November 26, 1860, p. 2, c. 5-6:  
Mr. Joseph Myers, one of the survivors of this misfortunate party, has arrived here with his family, and is being hospitably cared for by his brother and other citizens of Salem. The company consisted of forty-four persons at Ft. Hall. Col. Howe sent an escort of twenty-two dragoons to join them at the Portneuf, seven miles this side of the Fort. The escort was provided to accompany the party only six days . . . and return. The immigrants requested protection over a greater part of the road, but were informed that there were troops on the road below Salmon Falls. Col. Howe seems to have had some prejudice against the company, or rather to have had contempt for their apprehensions. So, after some sage advice as to how they should manage the Indians, he dismissed them, and after six days they saw no more troops.

Two weeks after the escort left them, they were first disturbed. On the 8th of September, about 10 A.M., one hundred Indians, mostly on foot, surrounded the train, whooping and yelling as if to stampede the cattle. A corral was formed of the wagons, and the Indians made signs of friendship, at the same time begging for something to eat. All who came into camp were fed. After some talking with them by signs, the company started on for the river. On a piece of high ground they became exposed to a fire from the Indians who had taken shelter in the sage brush, and were armed with rifles and bows. The train again corralled, and in

doing so, three men, Lewis Lawson, William Utley and a German named Kishmal, were shot down. The fight was then kept up in that place for the remainder of that day and night, and the following day, till within an hour of sundown. All this time the company was without water, and their cattle had become almost unmanagable from starvation and being wounded by arrows. On the first day, several Indians were killed; Mr. Myers estimates the number at about twenty. On the second day, a man named Judson Cressy was killed. Towards night, it was arranged that four men who had recently been discharged at Portneuf should be well armed and mounted and go in advance to clear the road of Indians and enable the train to get to the river. Four wagons and their contents were also left as a booty, which it was hoped would entice the Indians for a short time. But the whole plan failed. The Indians kept up their attack on the train, and the four soldiers (?) fled, with the horses and weapons belonging to the immigrants; leaving men, women and children to the mercy of the Indians. The names of these men are Murdoch, Chambourg, Snyder and Chaffee. The two former are said to have been killed by the Indians. At this time two men, Jacob and Joseph Rieth returned with Capt. Dent's command to search for the lost. After leaving the corral, the cattle could not be driven, on account of their hunger; and about dusk all left the wagon train and started on foot as best they could. Just as the attempt was made to drive off from the corral, Mr. Myers' brother was shot dead by an Indian about fifty yards distant. Mr. M. returned the fire and rolled the Indian over dead. As they were leaving the train, Mr. Myers helped a Miss Utter out of the wagon, when a rifle ball passed through his clothing and killed her. She spoke a few words; remarking that she was killed, &c. Mr. Utter proposed to surrender, and attempted a parley with the Indians, but was killed in doing so. Mrs. Utter refused to leave her husband, and she and her son, five years old, and two little girls, were all seen to fall by the shots of the Indians around the dead body of the husband and father.

Mr. Myers, Mr. Vannorman and Mr. Chase, with their families, started on foot and traveled till next morning. All the provisions they had was one loaf of bread secured by Mr. Chase. During the day they camped under the bank of the river, and some of the party having fish hooks in their pockets they caught a few fish. They supposed the Indians knew where they were,

but they were not further molested. By traveling at night and concealing themselves in the day time, they made some sixty or seventy miles when they became too weak to carry their children. They were then on the Owyhee river, about three miles from the old deserted post of Fort Boise. They built such a camp as they could of willows, and lay by. In the meantime they had killed and eaten two dogs that followed them from the train, and they also found a very poor cow that had been left by some previous train; she was killed and eaten. By mixing her flesh with purslain and rose-berries they subsisted for two weeks. After they had been encamped a few days, they were discovered by some Snake Indians, who brought them salmon to exchange for their clothes and ammunition. They returned to trade in this way several times; but at length became insolent and carried off four guns, and some other articles, without leave.

Mr. Vannorman, supposing that the whole party would soon be killed by this new band of Indians, started on with his family. It appears that he reached Burnt river and was there killed by the Indians; as six dead bodies were found there by Capt. Dent's command. Four of his children were not found, and it is supposed they are prisoners among some of the tribes in that vicinity.

The party at the camp subsisted about two weeks mostly on herbs, frogs and muscles, which they found in great scarcity along the river. Mr. Chase then died from over-eating of the salmon brought by the Indians. About ten days later Elizabeth Trimble died of starvation. Within a few days Susan Trimble, Daniel Chase and Albert Chase, all died the same terrible death. After much consultation and hesitation, those who remained alive resolved to eat the bodies of the dead, with the hope of preserving life till relief should come. The bodies of four children were thus disposed of; no more being used than was absolutely necessary to subsistence. The body of Mr. Chase had been exhumed, and a portion of it was about to be eaten, when the relief came. About six miles from the last camp, Mr. Munson and Christopher Trimble, a boy about eleven years of age, went forward, hoping to reach the settlements and send back help. On Burnt river they fell in with the brothers Rieth, who had missed the road and were just returning to it. The Rieths, Chaffee and Munson went on and sent the boy, Trimble, back to the camp. Chaffee and Munson gave out, but the Rieths reached the settlements. After

Trimble's return, he went to the Indian camp across the river, some three miles distant, and stayed there several days. He returned one day with them when they came to sell salmon, and in conversation with him the word "soldier" was frequently used in relation to the . . . word and never returned. Trimble went with them; it being arranged that he should be sent for as soon as any help arrived, and that he should visit them from time to time with the Indians. For two weeks neither he nor the Indians were seen, and the people at the camp shouted and fired guns, hoping to bring him or them across the river; but to no purpose. Mr. Myers subsequently found a trail where the wolves had dragged a body. Hoping it might prove to be the carcass of a deer, he followed it until he found some hair, which was recognized as that of young Trimble. Capt. Dent's party subsequently found his body.

The six bodies found on Burnt river were those of Alexis Vannorman and wife--the latter scalped--their son, Mark; Samuel Gleason and Charles and Henry Utter.

The rescued were Mr. Joseph Myers, his wife and five children, the eldest ten years, and the youngest one year old; Mrs. Chase and daughter, Miss Trimble and Chaffee and Munson, who gave out in attempting to come in for help. From the first attack until the arrival of the relieving party, was forty-four or five days.

Edward R. Geary, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Portland, Oregon, to A. B. Greenwood, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington City, D.C., November 27, 1860:

The late painful disaster in the Snake Country in which 29 persons--men women and children--have fallen by the hands of the savages, or perished by famine and other privations in their efforts to escape from their cruel enemies, accumulates the evidence of the atrocious character of the Snake Indians, to whom the communications of this office, have so frequently called your attention; and recent information from reliable and official sources evince that our relations with the interior tribes generally are on a precarious state, and that another Indian war will only be prevented by the most assiduous vigilance and care. In this aspect of affairs, the sum of \$20,000 for adjusting difficulties, preventing outbreaks and maintaining peace in this vast region, dotted over with a sparse population of emigrants, must be regarded as moderate.

It is now reduced to a certainty that gold exists in paying quantities in extensive districts of the interior of Oregon and Washington, and there is little doubt that at no remote day, thousands of our citizens will be found rushing to these new fields of enterprise and wealth. It will therefore be a policy worthy of a great and magnanimous nation, to promptly make such provisions in behalf of the Indians, as will secure them a desirable home on their Reservations, quiet their apprehensions, and secure their respect and goodwill.

If action in this regard, on a basis of liberality and Christian philanthropy, is postponed or neglected, desolating feuds and wars will result, mourning and death by savage hands will often spread the pall of gloom over our frontier settlements, and the extinction of the Indian race will speedily ensure.

I trust sir this subject--so deeply affecting the interests of both whites and Indians, a proper disposition of which may save the government millions of money, and the country scenes of desolation and blood--will receive your early attention, and prompt action. [Oregon Superintendency, pp. 202-204.]

The San Francisco Mirror, quoted in The Oregon Argus (Oregon City), December 8, 1860:

Horrors of a Cannibal Camp.--The faithful journalist is too often required to relate the horrible particulars of massacres, which, under a better administration of Indian policy, had not been. Reading and writing of these bloody tragedies, we are incensed and shamed that the stout-hearted men and women who voluntarily move back the frontiers, are abandoned by Government to butcheries, mutilation, or ravishment by savages. We have before related a recent massacre of immigrants on their way to Oregon. About the last of October an expedition went from Walla Walla to collect the dead and wounded. They found twelve out of forty still living, but naked and nearly starved to death. The poor, emaciated wretches had eaten up all the dead, save one! and upon that putrifying corpse they were about to commence their horrid carnival. The dead had been torn up out of the grave by their former companions, starving and mad. The cannibals were lying down to their dread feast, surrounded by bones and fragments of human flesh, and would never have risen from that feast of death. Great God! are they American men and women--the brave explorers of

untraversed woods--the outguards of civilization and religion, who are thus left to the mercy of savages and to eat one another, while millions are dealt out with prodical hands to lazy, loafing, lounging officials, whose offices are almost sinecures, and whose bodies and souls are not worth the scalp-lock torn from the lionhearted subduer of the wilderness? Shame to the country; curses for the driveling policy which will talk of war with powerful civilized nations, but which is unequal to the gigantic enterprise of building a miserable stockade fort here and there along the emigrant's road, to protect adventurous men from scalping, and feeble but brave hearted women from starvation and cannibalism.

#### ADVENTURES OF THE RESCUED IMMIGRANTS.

The plight of the four Van Orman children became a subject of much concern in Oregon and Washington territories. The Oregon Argus on December 22, 1860, noted, "The Late Massacre.-- The Walla Walla correspondent of Portland Times says there is a prospect for the rescue of the children who were taken by the Indians at the late massacre of emigrants. - He says: "Eagle of the Light," a Nez Perce, has just returned from the Snake country and there came with him four Snake Indians who informed the Indian Agent, Mr. [A. J.] Cain, that they knew of four children, members of that unfortunate party, that they were yet alive. Arrangements were made with them by which they agree to bring them in and accordingly left their squaws and returned to their country for that purpose." (p. 1, c. 2.)

Colonel George Wright, commanding officer of the 9th Infantry at Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, wrote the following letter to Governor John Whiteaker of Oregon on January 3, 1861:

Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of December 28, with respect to Mr. Thompson's proposed expedition into the Snake country and the rescue of the four children said to be in the hands of the Snakes. The subject of the investigation of the truth of the report with regard to these children and of their rescue, if they be in captivity, had from the first moment of the receipt of the intelligence attracted my warmest interest. Messengers dispatched by Major Steen, commanding the troops at Fort Walla Walla, and Mr. Cain, the Indian agent in that neighborhood, have been sent into the Snake country to ascertain if there be any children captives there. These messengers being Nez Perce Indians, known

to the Snakes, will not excite their suspicion, and being a small party and acquainted with the country, and not likely to encounter the hostility of the Snakes, they will probably be able to penetrate to the remote locations of the Snakes at this time, notwithstanding the rigor of the season. If the children be alive, they are, if possible, to obtain them by negotiation forthwith. At all events, they are to return and report the information acquired without delay. I have received no report of the return of this party, but hope to hear in a few days. Major Steen, an officer of high reputation for his knowledge of Indians and Indian warfare, and who has spent many years on the frontier and in campaigns in the Indian country, may be safely relied upon to achieve all that can be accomplished at this time. Besides the confidence I have felt in this, on the 18th of December I sent instructions to Major Steen to persevere in the search for the children, and to use all means in his power for their rescue. I shall not fail to take any other steps that seem necessary to secure this end. That the troops at Fort Walla Walla are to be relied on for any service that duty and sympathy for suffering call for is sufficiently evinced by their late successful expedition immediately after the receipt of the news of the massacre, the result of which was the rescue from death of twelve human beings. The necessity of bringing these helpless sufferers as soon as possible into the settlements prevented Captain Dent from prosecuting at the time further search and punishing the Snakes as far as practicable, although when he started on his return to Walla Walla he was amid the snows. An energetic campaign against the Snakes, to be commenced early and continued late, has been, as you have been informed, determined upon. The matter has been made the subject of correspondence with the authorities at the East. It is hoped that the necessary appropriations for the object and for the post at Boise will be made early. It is not seen that any useful result can be obtained by the proposed expedition of Mr. Thompson with twenty-five. You may rest assured that whatever can be done for the rescue of the children will be done by Major Steen. What he proves himself unable to achieve I doubt if others will be better able to accomplish as the circumstances now are.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part I, p. 430.]

A. J. Cain, Indian Agent, Lapwai, Nez Perce Reservation, Washington Territory, to Edward R. Geary, Superintendent of

Indian Affairs, Portland, Oregon, July 9, 1861:

The Nez Perce Indians unfortunately failed in their mission to obtain the children, if indeed they even attempted such an undertaking. Thompson's proposal, indicative of citizen concern, failed to materialize due to the lateness of the season, lack of funds and military support. The onset of the Civil War in April 1861 caused the cancellation of rescue efforts planned by the military.

One of the Snake, I dispatched for information of the Vanorman children captured by that tribe, has returned and reports the children murdered last fall: the Chiefs quarrelled about the possession of the little girl and then killed them a short distance from the scene of the massacre. This man also reports all the Snakes in "Council" near Salmon Falls and that some are for war, and some for peace, and say they heard a great many whites were coming across the plains this year who wanted to buy half of their lands, and that the Mormons expected a great many people to join them this year; that "Eagle from the Light" (Nez Perce Chief) was at fort Boise awaiting the result of this council: that "Shap-shese" (Snake)-- who was captured when a boy and raised by the Cayuse, and was compelled to flee to the Snake country on account of depredations in this country--is counseling for war; and that the Snakes and the Mormons are to have an understanding soon.

Of the hostility of all the Snakes there is no doubt; and I have long since been satisfied that "Eagle from the Light" was, on the part of the hostile Nez Perce, endeavoring to form a combination with other tribes for a war against the government; he was in the Snake country last year about the time of the emigrant massacre and the reports of his being killed by the Snakes were only circulated to conceal his designs. The Mormons have for a long time exercised an improper influence over the minds of the Indians with whom they have intercourse, and I am firmly convinced they are now taking advantage of our national troubles to incite a general Indian war. It is of the highest importance that peaceful relations should be preserved with the Nez Perce to prevent the entire success of these machinations.

The immediate interests of Oregon and Washington are dependant upon the development of the interior country and the overland routes, and as the people have always been too prone to lay all their misfortunes at the door

of the general government. I regard no sacrifice too great to maintain peace at the present time.

[Washington Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1853-74. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior, Record Group 75. Microcopy M-5, Roll No. 21.]

The following letter from Henri M. Chase to E. D. Pierce and the latter's reply indicate that even without military assistance civilian rescue efforts were still undertaken.

Washington Statesman (Walla Walla), November 29, 1861, p. 2, c.

3:

Walla Walla, Nov. 1st, 1861. Capt. Pearce Sir: Yours of Oct. 21st, asking for information concerning the children who are now captives among a band of Snake indians came to hand, and I have to say in answer that I will cheerfully give all the information which I possess on the subject. The children in question, were taken from the party of emigrants who were massacred on Snake River about eighty miles below the Salmon Falls in the Fall of 1860, and belong the family of Van Norman. There was no certain information gained as to their fate until I reached Salt Lake City in May last, at which time I called upon Col. B. Davies, the Sup't of Indian Affairs for Utah; who by special appointment authorized me to use all means in my power to collect information concerning them and if possible to recover them from their captors. I employed Mr. A. Huntington of Salt Lake, who has been a long resident of the Snake country and speaks the language of that tribe fluently.

He proceeded at once to the Indian country when he learned beyond a doubt that the children were held by the Goose Creek Indians, and passed the proceeding winter in the Thousand Spring Valley. I also had "talks" in the presence of Col. Davies with the principal men of the tribes of Southern Oregon and Northern Utah, who all confirmed this statement. I now made preparations for a journey among the Indians, expecting to get an escort from Fort Crittenden, but the troops were all ordered east. I now took the field with three men which was all that I was able to procure owing to the dangerous nature of the trip. I soon found that this party was too small, so I proceeded down Snake River towards this section of country. I saw a number of Snake on my route with whom I talked and made some presents, and endeavored to prevail upon them to desist from their murderous practices upon travellers, which they promised to do, saying that this "talk" was new to them. -This is a brief sketch of my operations in the Snake country. Now, sir, my opinion

based upon a twelve years experience of Indian character is, that the best and only way to recover the captive children is to enter the field early in the spring with a force of not less than fifty experienced men, and to take a quantity of Indian goods and with these goods to ransom or purchase them from the Indians. It would require, however, a man of sagacity, and intimate knowledge of Indian character to head the expedition. I am strongly in hopes that you will undertake this yourself and I would be sure of the result. It is only necessary for some man of known experience to take the lead in this matter, and crowds of ready hearts and hands would soon flock to his standard. - Owing to the unsettled state of affairs East, it is not probable that any U.S. force could be spared for this undertaking. But it would be better for any one taking this matter in hand to have special authority from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which I have no doubt could be procured. I forwarded some time since my reports to his office but as yet received no communication from the Department.

I remain, Sir,  
Your Ob't Serv't  
Henri M. Chase.

Walla Walla, Nov. 28, 1861.

H. M. Chase, Esq. - Sir: Yours of the 1st inst., has come to hand, and in answer to my former inquiries relative to the unfortunate captive children of the Van Norman family, your reply is not only satisfactory to my former confirmed opinion that those children were not yet retained by the Snakes, but sir, allow me to say that the indefatigable exertions on your part to obtain the requisite information relative thereto, does not only gratify and emulate in me a disposition to sue and every available means to recover them, but sir, it has been on your behalf a most praiseworthy and hazardous undertaking that will meet with a hearty response from every heart that possesses magnanimity to feel for suffering humanity, and is entitled to an eulogy that I shall not offer to give. Now, sir, in answer to your request that I should undertake the laudable expedition of recapturing those unfortunate children is the highest ambition to which I would aspire, and I shall say explicitly I will do it if I can get a response of a hundred men by the 1st day of May next. I do not endorse your plan of trading for those children with these natural savages who massacred their parents and whose blood cries for vengeance at your and my hands, but will, as policy may dictate, be

governed by circumstances entirely. I will in due time, make the necessary call on the citizens of Walla Walla and arrange the plan of operations as to make the rendezvous at this place and be ready to march by the 1st of May as above suggested.

Respectfully yours,  
E. D. Pearce.

In 1862, the military sent troops along the emigrant roads to provide protection for westward-bound travelers and at the same time punish the offenders of the massacre if they could be located.

W. H. Rector, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Salem, Oreg.: Sir: Will you please give me any information contained in your office as to what Snake Indians were the murders of the emigrants near Fort Boise in the Autumn of 1860. I desire to instruct the commanding officer of the expedition which will soon leave Fort Walla Walla for the emigrant road for the protection of emigrants to embrace any opportunity which may occur to apprehend those murderers if their identity can be established. Are you or your neighbors able to inform me where information on the subject can be obtained? If you know of any of that emigrant party who would be a suitable person to be employed in that capacity, I would endeavor to secure his services to accompany said expedition--or, preferably, any one having the most reliable information on the subject. I shall cause inquiries to be made at or near Fort Walla Walla, but apprehend difficulty in obtaining such information as I want.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
Benj. Alvord,  
Brigadier-General, U.S. Volunteers,  
Commanding District Headquarters District of Oregon  
Fort Vancouver, Was. Ter., July 8, 1862.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part II, p. 10.]

Brig. Gen. Benjamin Alvord, U.S. Volunteers, Commanding District of Oregon: Sir: Your favor of the 8th instant, soliciting information from the files of this office concerning the outrages committed by the Snake Indians upon emigrants near Salmon Falls in the fall of 1860, was received yesterday. I reply I have to say that the records of this office do not furnish the information which you desire, or which would materially assist you in your expedition. There is, however, residing in this city Mr. Joseph Myers, one of the survivors of that terrible tragedy. I have had a

personal interview with Mr. Myers, and he feels confident of his ability to identify some of the Indians engaged in the massacre wherever he should see them. One in particular he describes as being of medium size, rather slim, blind in one eye, with long hair, generally pulled down over the blind eye, with considerable beard, especially on the upper lip, another one of rather low stature and very fleshy. The Indian first described came to their camp on Rock Creek, beyond Salmon Falls, and followed the train until the attack was made, and remained during the entire attack, traveling in the night and fighting in the daytime. He is well prepared to give you full information on many points, and I am confident would be of great service to the expedition. He expresses a willingness to accompany the military, provided arrangements can be made for the support of his family during his absence. He is in indigent circumstances (having lost all on that occasion), with a wife and six children to support, five of whom were with him when the outrage was perpetrated. He refers me to two others, young men, Jacob and Samuel Reith, who are now somewhere in the Salmon River mines. They were also of the party. In connection with this subject I desire to say that an appropriation has been made for negotiating some treaty of friendship with the Snake Indians, and measures are now on foot to secure the Indians' consent to a meeting with an agent of the Government for this purpose. It is my earnest desire as soon as instructions are received from the Department to proceed at once to this work, and if possible prevent any similar occurrence. Should the instructions be received during the time this expedition will remain out I desire to avail myself of their protection. I will start within a week to visit the agencies east of the mountains, and will be pleased to call upon you and have a further interview concerning the matter.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
 Wm. H. Rector  
 Superintendent Indian Affairs, Oregon  
 Salem, Oreg., July 11, 1862

(Ibid., pp. 16-17.)

The Washington Statesman reported on August 2, 1862:

The Van Norman Children:--Vansycle informs us that during his recent visit to the Grand Ronde Valley, he learned from emigrants from Salt Lake that the Van Norman children--a boy and a girl--are in Cache Valley, near Salt Lake City. The boy is about seven years of age and the girl eleven. Mr. Hall, one of the emigrant

party states that he saw them while out hunting stock which he had been herding at a Mormon ranch (p. 2, c. 1.)

Zachias Van Orman, the children's uncle, who had been attempting to locate the children, quickly made use of this newest piece of information.

Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, Headquarters  
District of Oregon, Fort Vancouver, Wash. Ter.: Sir:  
Inclosed I have the honor to transmit copy of a letter this day given to Mr. Z. Van Orman for Lieutenant-Colonel Maury, in command of the emigrant road expedition. A friend and relative of Mr. Van Orman has just arrived from the East, and has seen the children referred to. He attempted to buy them, but was unsuccessful, the Indians refusing to give them up except at very great price. Mr. Van Orman has arranged to take out with him the person alluded to, hoping to overtake Colonel Maury's command and secure his aid in the recovery of the children. Convinced that a public service will be secured in asking Colonel Maury's assistance to further this purpose, and trusting it will meet the approval of the commanding general.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
Justus Steinberger,  
Colonel First Washington Territory Infantry,  
Commanding Post. Fort Walla Walla, Wash. Ter.,  
August 11, 1862.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part II, pp. 61-62.]

Van Orman soon caught up with the troops and Lt. Col. Reuben F. Maury reported from Camp Bruneau on September 22, 1862, Nothing definite has been heard of the Van Orman children. Their uncle Z. Van Orman, has gone through to Salt Lake City. In this connection, I will mention that one Indian at the falls said that it was the Indians who live in the vicinity of Harney Lake who committed the massacre, and that the children were taken prisoners. Since then he had heard nothing of them, but had no doubt they had been killed.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part I, p. 167.]

Upon his arrival at Camp Douglas, Utah, Van Orman enlisted the aid of Colonel Patrick E. Connor. In a communication to Lt. Colonel R. C. Drum, Asst. Adjt. Gen., Department of the Pacific, San Francisco, California, dated December 2, 1862, Colonel Connor reported,

I have the honor to inclose a letter of instruction to Major McGarry and his report of the expedition upon which he was sent. The uncle of the boy, who is now at

this post, is a resident of Oregon, and as he informs me, has been in search of the boy for two years. Three sisters of his, who were captured at the same time, are dead. He also informs me that three expeditions had previously been sent out from Oregon for the recovery of the children, one of which was under the command of Captain Dent, of the Ninth Infantry.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part I, pp. 181-182.]

Maj. E. McGarry, Second Cavalry California Volunteers: Major: You will proceed this p.m. with a detachment of sixty men of your command to Cache Valley, at which point are encamped Bear Hunter's tribe of Snake and Bannock Indians, who, I am credibly informed, have in their possession an emigrant boy about ten years of age, whose parents were murdered last summer by Indians. The boy's uncle is at present at Cache Valley and will guide you to where the boy is. You will march by night and by a trail which will be shown to you by a guide who will accompany your command. Surround the Indians, if possible, before they become aware of your presence, and hold them prisoners while you send a part of your men to a valley about two miles from the Indian camp, where I am told, there is a large number of stock stolen from murdered emigrants, which, if you have reason to believe that my information is correct, you will drive to this post. You will search the Indian camp thoroughly for the emigrant, and if you should not find him you will demand him of the Indians, and if not given up you will bring three of their principal men to this post as hostages. You will also investigate their complicity in the massacre of last summer, and if you have reason to believe any of them are guilty you will bring all such to this post for trial. You will not fire upon the Indians unless you find it necessary to the proper execution of your instructions.

P. Edward Connor,  
Colonel Third Infantry California Volunteers,  
Comdg. District. Headquarters District of Utah,  
Camp Douglas, Utah Ter., November 20, 1862.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part II, pp. 228-229.]

Second Lieutenant Thomas S. Harris, Second Cavalry California Volunteers, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, District of Utah. Lieutenant: I have the honor to report that, agreeable to instructions of the colonel commanding the district, I left this camp on the night of the 10th instant and proceeded to Cache Valley, where I arrived about 11 p.m. on the 22d., a distance of 100 miles, where I was met by Mr. Van

Orman, the uncle of the emigrant boy you ordered me to rescue from the Indians; he informed me that Chief Bear Hunter was encamped with thirty or forty of his tribe, Shoshones, Snakes, and Bannocks, about two miles distant. I left the horses in the settlement called Providence in charge of a guard, and started about 1 o'clock for the Indian camp; the night was dark and cold, and we did not find the camp until the morning of the 23d. I then divided my command into three parties under Captain Smith, Lieutenant Conrad, and myself, with instructions to surround the camp and close in upon them at daybreak. I found in a tent two squaws; the Indians had all left that night, as I perceived that the fires in their huts were not extinguished. I then returned to where I had left the horses, at which place I arrived about 7 a.m. Captain Smith brought in one Indian, caught in trying to escape; I made a prisoner of him. About 8 o'clock a party of mounted Indians, I should think thirty or forty, armed with rifles, bows and arrows, made their appearance from a canon or a bench between the settlement and hills, about a mile from the settlement, and made a warlike display, such as shouting, riding in a circle, and all sorts of antics known only to their race. I immediately ordered my men to mount, divided them as before, sent Captain Smith to the right, Lieutenant Conrad to the left, and I took the center, driving the Indians into the canon; when I arrived at the mouth of the canon I halted for the purpose of reconnoitering; just at that time the Indians opened fire upon Lieutenant Conrad; I then ordered my men to commence firing and to kill every Indian they could see; by this time the Indians had possession of the canon and hills on both sides. I found it would be impossible to enter the canon without exposing my men greatly. I therefore re-enforced Lieutenant Conrad on the left of the canon, with orders to take the hill on the left of the canon at all hazards. About the time the re-enforcements reported to him Chief Bear Hunter made his appearance on a hilltop on the right, with a flag of truce (as I was informed afterward): I at the time took it to be a warlike demonstration; a citizen who heard his halloing came up to me and told me that the chief said they did not want to fight any more. I then ordered my men to cease firing, and told him to say to the chief if they would surrender and come in I would not kill them, which terms they acceded to. Chief Bear Hunter, with twenty or more of his warriors, then came in. I took them into the settlement, took Bear Hunter and four others that I thought to be prominent Indians and

examined them (through an interpreter) as to the whereabouts of the white boy, and ascertained that he had been sent away some days before. I told Bear Hunter to send some of his tribe and bring the boy to me; that I should hold the five as hostages until they delivered him to me. He dispatched three of his men, and they returned the next day about noon with the boy.

I then released Bear Hunter and the four others. I killed three and wounded 1 Indian in the fight. I was told by Bear Hunter than an Indian known as Woeber Tom, alias Utah Tom, communicated the information of our approach. In relation to the emigrant stock I was ordered to examine into and bring into camp, I could not find any such, and from the information I could gather I am of the opinion all or nearly all of the stock taken by the Indians last summer is now in the Humboldt country. I left Cache Valley on the morning of the 25th, and arrived at this camp on the afternoon of the 17th, without the loss or scratch of man or horse. It affords me great pleasure to report to the colonel commanding the good conduct of the command, and during the fight, which lasted about two hours, the officers and men behaved handsomely.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
Edward McGarry,  
Major, Second Cavalry California Volunteers,  
Camp Douglas, Utah, November 28, 1862.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. L, Part I, pp. 182-183.]

Zachias Van Orman reported the following circumstances concerning the massacre and capture and his involvement: my brother was emigrating to Oregon in 1860 and was massacred by the Indians. He lost in money and property about 6000 dollars and 4 of his children taken captive 3 girls and one boy the girls died of starvation in the goos creek Mountains near Snake River the Boy was Rescued by Major McGary in Chast Valley 100 miles north of Salt Lake and I was trying my best to rescue them all the time and government helped on all and evry occasion I spent too yers and over \$5000 dollars and I think the government would grant me an Indemnity...."

(Zachias Van Orman's Pension Application, Number 1269 [Oregon Historical Society], as quoted in Newell Hart, "Rescue of a Frontier Boy, Utah Historical Quarterly [Winter, 1965], 33:51-52.)

Both Major McGarry and Van Orman had a hard time recognizing the boy:

He was dressed and bedaubed with paint like an Indian

and acted like a regular little savage when given into our possession, fighting, kicking and scratching when the paint was washed from him to determine his white descent.

(Henry C. Haskin in the Napa County Reporter, December 20, 1862, quoted in Hart "Rescue," p. 54.)

Zachias remained in Utah for a while and served as a scout for Colonel Connor at the Battle of Bear River on January 29, 1863. During an expedition against the Snake Indians in the summer of 1864, Zachias, accompanied by his nephew, was employed as an interpreter and scout by Lieutenant Hobart. Colonel R. F. Maury noted this employment in his report to First Lieutenant John W. Hopkins, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, on September 17, 1864:

I have heretofore neglected to mention that Lieutenant Hobart while en route to Salmon Falls met Mr. Z. Van Orman, the uncle of the Van Orman children, with one of the children--supposed to be--(he obtained it, I think, through the Indian agent, Salt Lake, last winter), and employed him as guide and interpreter. His familiarity with their language, as well as personal knowledge of many Indians, makes him of great service.

[War of the Rebellion, Series I. Vol. L, Part I, p. 386.]

He later moved to Douglas County, Oregon, and still later lived at Chico, California. Whether his nephew stayed with him or was returned to relatives in Wisconsin is unknown. (Hart, "Rescue," p. 54.)

For a recent historical account which explains this incident in a more general context of emigrant and Indian relationships, consult John D. Unruh, The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 190-192.

Prepared by Larry Jones.

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