

THE ALMO MASSACRE

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Description of Topic

A monument sits beneath a pine dedicated to a memory. Or is it simply a legend, or maybe a folk tale? The inscription upon the monument reads:

Almo Idaho
Dedicated to the memory
of those who lost their lives in a most
horrible Indian massacre 1861
three hundred emigrants west bound
only five escaped.
Erected by S&D of Idaho Pioneers
1938

Did this wagon train and massacre really occur? If the story is true, it is one of the largest massacres to take place west of the Mississippi.

Justification

The story of the Almo Massacre is considered part of the history of Almo, Idaho. Since I grew up in Almo, it is also part of my history.

In Almo, there are the believers and the non-believers (believers are in the majority). I have always wanted to find out for myself what really happened and if this event did take place.

Literature Review

History of Cassia County and Burley (1952 Revised).

Contained an account of an attack that occurred at Almo Creek either 1861 or 1862. The party was attacked when the last wagon was some distance from water. On the fourth night of the attack, the guide and companion escaped and made their way to Brigham City. That same night five others escaped. The remainder of the emigrants were killed and buried in wells by the rescue party.

The history also contained an account of a party of twelve wagons and forty-nine emigrants from Iowa who were attacked in the fall of 1862. Col. Loveland was in command of the rescue party and he recorded rescuing thirty emigrants. There was another account of a party of fifteen men traveling east from California and Nevada who were attacked September 1862 near the City of Rocks. Nine men survived the attack.

It also mentions the annihilation of a band of Indians by Capt. Smith under orders from Col. Connor, at Connor Creek in 1864.

Our Pioneer Heritage 1959. Contained an account of Capt. Smith's party of forty-five emigrants who were attacked on Raft River. Four emigrants were killed and nine wounded. The teams and provisions were stolen by Indians. Three emigrants escaped and called upon Col. Loveland to rescue the remainder. The Colonel along with three others

found thirty survivors. This party could be the party of twelve wagons from Iowa that is mentioned in the History of Cassia County and Burley.

Idaho for the Curious a Guide 1982. Contained a copy of a dispatch from Col. Connor to Maj. McGarry ordering McGarry to destroy every male Indian in the vicinity of the City of Rocks. The author maintained that there were at least six skirmishes between emigrants and Indians near City of Rocks, but no more than eight emigrants were killed. He also related the account of John Hagerty found in the Deseret News 1860 and another account by John Comer found in the Territorial Enterprise 1862. He also discussed the City of Rocks, California Trail, Hudspeths Cutoff, and the Salt Lake Cutoff.

History of Box Elder County (1851-1937). Contained excerpts from an address given by John D. Peters on July 26, 1928. Peters told of a party of forty wealthy eastern emigrants who were massacred. The cause of the massacre was assumed to be the large herd traveling with the company. The party left the Oregon Trail and traveled down the Southern cutoff. They were attacked at Almo Creek by Chief Pocatello and his band. The emigrants dug in and fought the Indians for three days. After three days of fighting, three emigrants escaped and made their way to Bear River Valley. At Bear River Valley they were discovered in a herd house and taken to Bishop Nichols home. Peters names Mr. Durfee,

Sheldon Cutler, and Ezra Barnard as members of the rescue party who helped bury the dead at the scene of the conflict. (I have not yet been able to find an account by either of the three rescuers: Durfee, Cutler, or Barnard.)

Chief Pocatello: The "White Plume". Brigham Madsen discredits the accounts of the Almo Massacre and gives a geographical location of the Shoshoni Indians during this time period. Gives a reason for the frequency of attacks along the area by Chief Pocatello.

Utah Historical Quarterly. Again Brigham Madsen doubts the authenticity of the Almo Massacre. Lists reasons for the Indian uprising.

Pacific Northwest Quarterly. Gives another account of the Smith attack.

Six Decades Back 1936. William E. Johnston and his wife witnessed the arrival of two survivors at North Ogden during the autumn of 1861. Johnston and his future wife were 14 and 12 years of age at the time. The survivors were members of a party that numbered greater than 60 wagons and 300 people. A rescue party was sent. They found three more survivors at the narrows of the Raft River (E Y Ranch). The rest of the emigrant party was annihilated by the attacking Indians. Johnston received an Indian account of the battle from an old Indian years later.

Utah Geology Association 1984. Listed the criteria for a successful wagon route. It also discussed the geology of the City of Rocks and Granite Pass.

The Blackfoot Daily Bulletin October 1938. Contained the Indian account of the battle as related to Wm E. Johnston by his Indian friend Winecas. Winecas participated in the battle at the age of 16. According to the Indian, the emigrants took a wrong turn at American Falls. The emigrants were attacked by a band composed of Arapaho, Cheyenne, Ute, Shoshone, Bannock, Piute, Cayuse, and Owyhee Indians. (The possibility of this many tribes being in the area will be discussed later.) Before the attack, the Indians were camped one mile from the emigrant encampment. Only one emigrant escaped. The rescue party found all three hundred dead and buried the dead in dry wells. Johnston was ninety-one at the time he related the story (1938).

Deseret News Weekly (No. 31 vol. X, October 3, 1860.) Contains the eyewitness account of John Hagerty. He was a member of a party of twenty who were attacked by approximately 100 Indians. (No specific tribe is mentioned.) Hagerty was left for dead while the rest of the party escaped. The attack occurred September 7-9, 1860. The rescue party arrived September 12, 1860 from Fort Hall.

South Idaho Press (September 26, 27, 28, 1973.) Contained a series of articles dealing with the Almo Massacre. One article related a story told by Wm. E.

Johnston in which he placed the attack during 1862. Other articles contained interviews with the descendants of Bishop Nichols and Col. Loveland.

William Bruesch Memoirs 1987. This was a personal interview with Bill Bruesch in which he related information given to him by his grandmother Durfee (Jane Isabel Barker Durfee) in 1920. According to Grandmother Durfee there were five wagons and five people who were attacked. A man and a woman escaped to Brigham City. At this time (1860s) she was a young woman living on a ranch near Brigham City. (According to the Utah census of 1860, a Jane Barker is listed as living in Salt Lake County. I have not yet been able to prove if this is the above mentioned Jane. No other Jane is listed. Corresponding with this is the genealogy family group sheet of Henry Dennison Durfee who is the husband of Jane. In 1860 she gave birth to a daughter in Ogden, Weber, Utah.)¹

Bill had seen the breastworks and described the site as north of the present Arley Cahoon residence. Bill claimed that the massacre story (300 people) was started by Will Eames, Charlie Brown, and Johnston. Brown was editor of the Oakley Herald and wanted to interest people in the City of Rocks. Will Eames and Johnston were supplying Brown with

¹ Family Group Records of Curtis Durfee, Almo, Idaho (1989)

information. Will Eames was an old man and was starting to lose his memory.

Jim and Dorothy Sheridan Memoirs 1989. Jim is a grandson of Eddy Johnston. He believes that his grandfather was telling the truth in his accounts. Jim has in his possession the same account that is in Six Decades Back.

Jesse Lloyd Memoirs 1987. This was a personal interview with Jesse Lloyd. He stated that there was another site west of Levi Lloyd's field north of Tracy's alfalfa field. The burned wagons were on the way to Circle Creek.

Jesse learned from an old friend, Rex Edwards, that the grave of the baby from the massacre was located at Cedar Creek. Rex and his grandfather cared for the grave. Rex died before he was able to show the site to Jesse. (Descendants of Edwards have no knowledge of this story when asked.)

OUTLINE

Historical Background and Setting

Emigrant routes

Part I. The story handed down from generation to generation.

I. The Johnston memoirs

- A. Wm. E. Johnston
- B. Emigrant train
 - 1. Missouri to Almo
 - 2. Almo Creek
- C. Indians
 - 1. Following the emigrants
 - 2. Assembly at Indian Grove
- D. The attack
 - 1. Emigrant's defense
 - 2. Harassment by Indians
- E. Those who escape
- F. The rescue

II. Questions concerning the story

- A. Differences between the two reports of same witness
 - 1. Walgamotts' account of Johnston
 - 2. Blackfoot Daily Bulletin report of Johnston
- B. No solid information

Part II. Documented and verified accounts

- I. John Hagerty 1860 Deseret News Weekly
- II. John D. Peters 1861
- III. John Comer 1862 Territorial Enterprise
- IV. Loveland rescue 1862
- V. Group of fifteen men 1862
- VI. Interview of William Bruesch 1987
- VII. Interview of Jesse Lloyd 1987