

# "The Boys' War"

## A Study in Frontier Racial Conflict, Journalism, and Folk History\*

BY KENNETH WIGGINS PORTER

A LABEL attached to a horse's skull in the Grant County Museum, Canyon City, Oregon, bears the following statement:

This Horse head is off the Horse that the Indian was riding at the time of the Indian trouble at Izee Oregon, . . . in September [sic] 1898. The Indian was killed, and at the same time George Cutting was killed, and two Indians were wounded. The bullet here-to attached to the head was chopped out of a tree that Dean Officer was behind at the time he killed (shot) the Indian. This Indian's Horse was shot in the forehead, before the Indian was killed. This fight was on Dead Indian Creek, formerly known as Yellow Jacket Creek.<sup>1</sup>

Since historians conventionally treat the Battle of Wounded Knee, December 1890, as marking the end of Indian warfare in the United States, an observer with some knowledge of Indian wars in Oregon might be inclined to question the date on the horse's skull, to wonder whether 1898 might not be an error for 1878, the year of the Bannock-Piute invasion that ranks as Oregon's last important Indian war. But for at least a quarter of a century following Wounded Knee, armed encounters still occasionally occurred between bands of Indians and white groups that ranged from informal parties of settlers and cattlemen, through official posses, up to and including detachments of the U.S. Army. An examination of a history of Grant County, Oregon, and of Oregon newspapers for late October and early November 1898 (the month given on the label is an error) will reveal that an Indian fight, sometimes dignified with the title of "war," did actually take place so late in the century that the

news could appear in newspapers whose front pages were dominated by reports from Cuba and the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

TO UNDERSTAND this "last Indian fight in Oregon" it is necessary to explore the background of Indian-white relations in eastern Oregon for at least twenty years prior to the encounter. The Indian-fighting traditions of some Grant County settlers, indeed, went back a half century, to the Cayuse War which had resulted from the Whitman Massacre of 1847. In 1878 Bannocks from Idaho and Piutes from Harney County, Oregon, had invaded Grant County on their way north to persuade the Umatilla, Cayuse, Nez Percés, and other Indians nearer the Columbia River to unite with them in their desperate attempt to cast off the white man's oppressive yoke. These Indians were joined by "renegades known as Columbia river Indians, stragglers from tribes recognizing no reservation as home" but "formerly from Priest Rapids." During their movement through Grant County, the hostiles killed settlers and livestock and burned all buildings in their way. In an encounter with a scouting party on Murderer's Creek, they killed 19-year-old Elmer Oliver Aldrich and impaled and otherwise mutilated his

\* A much earlier and much abbreviated account of this episode, emphasizing its folklore aspects, was read at a meeting of the American Folklore Society, Denver, Colorado, November 20, 1965. For an extended note on authorities, see Appendix.

<sup>1</sup> Exact text of the label by courtesy of Howard A. Black, then curator of the museum; the bullet, however, has disappeared. After this article was written, the name of the museum was changed to the Herman and Eliza Oliver Historical Museum. Black has retired; his successor, Janice J. Justice, has continued to provide help and make available museum resources.

<sup>2</sup> *An Illustrated History of Baker, Grant, Malheur and Harney Counties* (Spokane, Wash., 1902), 413 (hereafter cited *Illustrated History*).

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body. They also killed two unsuspecting youths herding sheep between John Day and Dayville. Coming upon a herd of cattle belonging to Eminger (Billy) Stewart, they put these symbols of the white man's culture to death by torture while their owner watched helplessly from his hiding place in the rimrocks. Settlers, after concealing their bulkier belongings, took refuge in old mining shafts in Canyon City and returned only to find their homes burned and their livestock slaughtered or crippled.<sup>3</sup>

The settlers who suffered from this outbreak never forgot, and handed down their memories and animosities to their children. Settlers in the vicinity of Dayville, at the mouth of the south fork of the John Day River, and of Izee in southwestern Grant County, on the upper waters of that fork, are said to have "made war" on any Indians who subsequently attempted to hunt or fish in those neighborhoods. One settler was reputed to have made a practice of shooting, and hiding the body of, any Indian whom he caught out hunting or fishing alone.<sup>4</sup>

But the Indians did not allow the hostility of some settlers to prevent them from regularly traveling through the country in bands, the men hunting and fishing, horse trading and horse racing, the women gathering huckleberries, picking wool from barbed-wire fences, sagebrush, and dead sheep, and trading or selling articles they had made from buckskin. Some of the younger settlers who prided themselves on their ability as horsemen and judges of horseflesh were so indiscreet as to measure themselves in horse races and trades with these wandering Indians and apparently usually got the worst of it, which added to the hostility they traditionally felt for the "redskins." The Indians, on their part, were resentful at finding their favorite hunting and fishing grounds more and more cut up by barbed-wire fences and given over to houses and barns, herds of sheep and cattle, and cultivated fields—and perhaps they were also aggravated by the suspicious disappearance of some of their hunters. They allegedly expressed their antipathy, when sufficiently numerous or when the settlers were absent, few, or timid, by wantonly driving their large herds of horses—of which there were three to five for every Indian—through the hayfields, thus destroying or seriously injuring the crop upon which the settlers depended for wintering their stock.<sup>5</sup>

Late in October 1898, various frustrations and irritations caused these animosities to burst into brief but fierce flame. The Spanish-American War may have been an atmospheric factor: al-

though military operations were over, the front pages of all newspapers were still occupied by reports from Cuba and the Philippines, which constantly reminded the more restless and reckless of the Grant County youths that this "splendid little war" had ended without their having displayed their valor on the slopes of San Juan Hill, for early plans to organize a company of volunteers had come to nothing. Grant County, so far as the official record went, had contributed to the war against haughty Spain only one soldier—in a company of Idaho volunteers.<sup>6</sup>

Early in October, however, these restless youths were reminded of a traditional enemy closer to home than Cuba, when reports reached the Oregon press of a Chippewa Indian outbreak in Minnesota. To repress the uprising the Third United States Infantry had been called out, with the result that six whites were killed and fifteen wounded. The young men of Grant County remembered or imagined that members of the local bands of Indian hunters, horsetraders, huckleberry and wool pickers were descendants of those Indians who, twenty years before, had ripped their way through the Murderer's Creek region of the county, pillaging, burning, and killing; probably some of the older Indians had in fact participated in these atrocities. More recent episodes, such as horse trades and races in which young whites were convinced that they had been cheated and the hay crops trampled by Indian

<sup>3</sup> *Illustrated History*, 396-97, 743-48; George Francis Brimlow, *The Bannock Indian War of 1878* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1938), 127-32, 149; Herman Oliver and E. R. Jackman, *Gold and Cattle Country* (Portland, 1962), 46-47; Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Half-Sun on the Columbia: A Biography of Chief Moses* (Norman, Okla., 1965), 84-85. Grant County *Blue Mountain Eagle* (hereafter cited as *BME*), Feb. 14, 1959 (Oregon Centennial Edition), Sec. III, p. 4, col. 3, IV, p. 5, cols. 1-2, VI, p. 7, esp. cols. 6, 7; *BME*, May 31, 1962 (John Day Centennial Edition), Sec. I, p. 3, cols. 2-3, III, p. 3, col. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *BME* (Cent. Ed.), 1959, Sec. VI, p. 7, and (Cent. Ed.), 1962, III, p. 3, col. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver and Jackman, 47. Harold Lenoir Davis, in his Pulitzer Prize novel *Honey in the Horn* (New York, 1951; 1st ed., 1935), 282-83, also describes the activities of such a band of Indians. Black to KWP, Nov. 30, 1963; W. C. Stewart to KWP, May 16, 1964, which gives a traditional account of "The Boys' War" from the settlers' viewpoint, was published anonymously in Howard Black's column, "Old Timer Says," *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Freidel, *The Splendid Little War* (New York, 1962; 1st ed., 1958), 9; *Illustrated History*, 413.

<sup>7</sup> *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), Oct. 4-11, 1898 (hereafter in newspaper references the year will be assumed to be 1898).

<sup>8</sup> *Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed in the United States (except Alaska) at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, 52nd

horses, added to their indignation. The fuel for a conflagration was powder-dry and needed only a spark.<sup>7</sup>

THAT SPARK was furnished by contact between some of the rasher young men of Grant County and a small band of what were known only as "Columbia River Indians." In the common usage of the late 19th century, Indians so designated were for the most part members of a small tribe known as the Wa'napum, of the same Shahaptian (also Sahaptin) linguistic stock as the powerful Nez Percés. Prior to 1895, the chief of the Wa'napum had been Smohalla, the noted religious leader and prophet and founder of the "Dreamer" religion, who lived in a village at the foot of Priest Rapids in what is now Yakima County, Washington. Although the Wa'napum claimed Priest Rapids as their ancestral home, they had always refused to go on a reservation, and they roamed widely on both banks of the Columbia, fishing at Celilo and also, as we have seen, hunting, berrying, and trading far to the south. Smohalla had denounced farming as "tearing up the bosom" of their mother the earth, and condemned mining as "selling her bones"; these and other teachings had contributed to the intransigency of Chief Joseph's Nez Percés. The Columbia River Indians consequently had a special religious basis for antipathy toward white settlers and miners, in addition to the usual re-

sentment felt by Indians toward those who had occupied their hunting grounds.<sup>8</sup>

The small band of Columbia River Indians who in October 1898 were the flint to the white man's steel consisted probably of only five or six braves and the usual complement of women, children, and horses, but it was presided over by a leader known only as the "old chief," who was noted for his unusual hostility toward the whites. Possibly he had been one of the Columbia River Indians who had participated in the Bannock-Piute War of 1878 and had handed down to younger members of his band—some of whose fathers may also have been involved in this war—a tradition of militancy.

These Indians, at any rate, were camped in the hostile Izee country when they missed some of their horses. At first they thought they had merely strayed away, but after a search failed to locate the animals, the Indians concluded that the missing horses had been stolen, presumably by some of the neighboring whites. As a matter of fact what had happened—although the facts did not become generally known until many years later—was that a group of white boys riding around the range had come upon some of the Indians' horses grazing, with no herder in sight. Partly out of the resentment that one or more of them felt at having been bested in trades or races but principally as a joke, the boys "ran the horses over a ridge a few miles away" so that the Indians would have trouble in finding them.<sup>9</sup>

The Indians "became very much worried" over the missing horses. Their suspicions, for some reasons, centered on a "boy," otherwise identified only as a hired man of Dave Magill, whose ranch was a mile northwest of Izee. The Indians consequently visited the Magill ranch when all the men were absent (except, perhaps, for the accused, who, according to one account, had "retired to the barn"), and threatened to take the lives of those they claimed had "gotten away with their horses" unless the whites either returned them or paid for them; they also demanded the surrender of the hired man, pointed guns at the women and children, and in general behaved in an alarming and outrageous manner. Some time during the course of this dispute, the hired man may have shot at the Indians or fired his revolver in an attempt to frighten them, but, contrary to the reports that soon got out—that two and possibly three settlers, including the hired man or boy, had been shot—no one was killed or even hurt, and the disgruntled Indians eventually departed. When Magill and the other men returned and learned what had happened, they

Cong., 1st Sess., 1894, House Miscellaneous Document 340, pt. 15, p. 571 (Serial 3016). James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1892-93, part 2; Washington, D.C., 1896), 716-17, 735; Frederick Webb Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 30 (Washington, D.C., 1910), II, 602-603 (Smohalla), 614 (Sokulk or Wa'napum); Click Relander, *Drummers and Dreamers* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1956), *passim*; Verne F. Ray, "Tribal Distribution in Eastern Oregon and Adjacent Regions," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 40 (1938), 384-95. However, the term "Columbia River Indians" was also sometimes applied to nontreaty, non-reservation followers of Smohalla other than the Wa'napum. The Columbia River Indians, mostly of Shahaptian stock, should be, but not always are, distinguished from the Columbia Sinkiuse, or Columbias, a Salish-speaking people. See James H. Teit, "The Middle Columbia Salish," *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology*, Vol. 2 (1928), 89; Joel V. Berreman, "Tribal Distribution in Oregon," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, No. 47 (Menasha, Wis., 1937), 41.

<sup>9</sup> Herman Oliver to KWP, April 13, 1965; Lonnie Harrison to KWP, March 11, 1965; *Oregonian*, Nov. 3; *Heppner Semi-Weekly Gazette* (hereafter cited as *Heppner Gazette*), Oct. 28, Nov. 1.



John Day valley, Oregon, ca. 1886.

West Shore (May 1886)

were naturally enraged, but the older men, it is claimed, decided that since no actual harm had been done, it would be better to leave well enough alone.<sup>10</sup>

AN episode of the following morning—October 25—was potentially more serious and indeed led directly to the clash known as “The Boys’ War.” John Hyde, a rancher who lived a mile north-west of the Magill ranch, was out looking for a stray stallion when, on Tamarack Creek, several miles east of Izee, he encountered the band that, unknown to him, had recently invaded his neighbor’s place; the Indians were now moving along with their horse herd, which—or most of which—they had in the meantime recovered. According to a traditional account, when Hyde rode over to warn them against driving their horses through the hayfields, he met with a startlingly hostile reception. The old chief demanded that Hyde pay for horses which he claimed had been stolen—although one of the more pacific Indians told the rancher that the missing horses had been found—and tried to seize the bridle of the white man’s horse. When Hyde turned his mount out of the way, the angry old Indian sprang off his own horse and drew his pistol, demanding five dollars for the allegedly missing horses; at the same

time he clutched, this time successfully, at Hyde’s bridle. Frightened, the rancher’s horse reared and plunged, detaching the Indian’s grip, and Hyde immediately kicked the animal into a run, with the bridle hanging loose about its neck.

As the white man fled, the Indian sent a shot in his direction which, although possibly intended only to frighten, nevertheless passed uncomfortably close; according to a family tradition, indeed, the bullet grazed his lower lip! When Hyde got home and reported this encounter to some of his neighbors, he presumably also learned of the invasion of the Magill ranch; nevertheless, after

<sup>10</sup> *Illustrated History*, 454-55. Burns *Times-Herald*, Oct. 26, Nov. 2; Pendleton *Daily East Oregonian* (hereafter cited as *East Oregonian*), Oct. 29, quoting from a report in the *Grant County News* based on a story dated Canyon City, Oct. 27; *Heppner Gazette*, Oct. 28, Nov. 1; *Oregonian*, Oct. 27 and 28, Nov. 3; *The Dalles Weekly Chronicle* (hereafter cited as *The Dalles Chronicle*), Nov. 2; *The Dalles Times Mountaineer*, Nov. 5. It is possible that the “boy” or hired man was David Cutting. This mere possibility is based on two newspaper accounts. The *Oregonian*, Oct. 27 and 28, reported that a posse set out in pursuit of Indians who had “shot two settlers—David Cuttings [sic] and John High [sic: Hyde]” and the *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 1, reported that, prior to the departure of the posse, a white boy who had retired to a barn and fired off his revolver to intimidate the Indians was shot by them. Actually, no one was shot prior to the final encounter on Yellow Jacket Creek. However, the boy reportedly shot, and David Cuttings [sic], also reportedly shot, could have been identical, although it is perhaps more probable that the report that David Cutting

consultation, the 44-year-old Hyde and at least the older and soberer members of the group are said to have decided to let this unpleasantness pass also; the Indians were on their way out of the community, and there was no point in borrowing further trouble.<sup>11</sup>

But although the community elders are portrayed as behaving in a conciliatory fashion abnormal in frontier relations between whites and Indians, the young men of the Izee community—youths in their late teens and twenties who were resentful over horse trades and races and some of whom may have participated in the prank that led to the present trouble—speedily determined on a militant policy. Quite likely they were chafing under the feeling that they had never had the opportunity to display their valor, either against hostile Indians as their fathers and grandfathers had or against the arrogant Spaniards as their peers across the nation had in recent months. More practically, they had some reason to feel that, if permitted to get away with these recent outrages, the Indians would be encouraged on their next visit to behave even more offensively—to carry their invasions of ranch houses still farther, and to destroy more of the settlers' precious hay.<sup>12</sup>

The organization of a punitive expedition against the annoying band may have been facilitated by the existence in the community of an organization constituted for another purpose. Izee was a cattlemen's country, and at least as early as 1896—two years earlier—some of these cattlemen, to resist the inroads of encroaching sheepmen, had formed a group self-explanatorily named the Izee Sheep Shooters! Such an organization, necessarily made up of the more daring members of the community, could naturally have become either the nucleus of, or the best source of recruits for, an anti-Indian posse.<sup>13</sup>

had been shot was simply a confusion with the actual subsequent mortal wounding of his brother George.

<sup>11</sup> *Illustrated History*, 413, 484; *Oregonian*, Nov. 3; *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 8; Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964; Stewart letter, March 1, 1965 (contains information from Emil Hyde, John Hyde's grandson); Harrison and Oliver letters. Early newspaper reports commonly confused Hyde's encounter with the Indians with the episode of the previous day at the Magill ranch and sometimes with the subsequent Yellow Jacket Creek encounter; I have not troubled to record these erroneous accounts.

<sup>12</sup> Black letter; Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964.

<sup>13</sup> Phil F. Brogan and L. K. Phillips, *East of the Cascades* (Portland, 1964), 115-16.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart letters, March 1, 14, 1965; *BME*, (Cent. Ed.), 1959, Sec. 1, p. 7, cols. 1-2, IV, p. 5, cols. 1-2; Oliver and Jackson, 40; *Illustrated History*, 396-97, 454-55, 474.

<sup>15</sup> *East Oregonian*, Oct. 29; *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2.

Within this youthful group, the moving spirits seem to have been Dean and Charlie Officer, members of a prominent Grant County family that was extensively intermarried with other such families. Their grandfather, James Officer, of Irish ancestry, had been born in Tennessee about 1801, came to Oregon from Missouri in 1845 with his Kentucky-born wife and ten children, settled at Molalla, and fought in the Cayuse War. Two of his sons, Eli Casey (b. ca. 1831) and Robert (b. ca. 1837), had come to eastern Oregon at the time of the gold rush of 1862; the former had settled at the mouth of the south fork of the John Day, the latter at Izee near the head. In 1878 Eli Casey had been in the fight on Murderer's Creek in which young Aldrich was killed; his daughter Sarah Anne had married Eminger (Billy) Stewart, the rancher who had watched the hostiles destroy his cattle. Robert Officer—whose political sympathies may be surmised from his naming one of his sons Wade Hampton, after the Confederate general and post-Reconstruction South Carolina governor and United States senator—was the father of Dean and Charlie, who thus had a legacy of militancy and an Indian-fighting tradition which in Oregon alone went back half a century.<sup>14</sup>

THE young Officers set out on horseback from Izee about 6:00 P.M., October 25—the day of Hyde's encounter with the Indians—headed for Canyon City, Grant's county seat and metropolis, nearly forty miles to the northeast; they arrived about 9:30 P.M. and left shortly after, with two pack-horses loaded with ammunition. Dave Magill and his wife, the former Lona Officer, had apparently gone independently to seek assistance; together with Henry Snodgrass and a posse of citizens from John Day, they reportedly left for Izee about one o'clock, the morning of October 26, also with ammunition and guns. The appearance of the Magills in this militant group suggests that 38-year-old Dave Magill, at least, was not among the "older men" who, according to present-day tradition, were ready to overlook the recent invasion of the Magill ranch house.<sup>15</sup>

Early in the morning of October 26, a posse of nineteen young men was ready to take the trail, but since the sheriff, Newton Livingston, was still in Canyon City and thus unavailable to swear them in, it was probably a rather informal posse, such as took the trail after cattle rustlers in The Ox-Bow Incident; however, like the posse in that novel, it did include a deputy sheriff, Mart Welsh. The names of most of the other possemen

are neither recorded in the press nor preserved in community tradition; perhaps they were not very freely or publicly mentioned because the undeclared war that the posse brought about came to be regarded with less and less favor by the soberer settlers, who did not wish to encourage further recklessness by glamorizing the boys' deeds. However, newspaper accounts do preserve the names of some participants, in addition to Deputy Welsh and the Officer brothers. Another pair of brothers was George and David Cutting, whose father was David Cutting of the Izee community. George Cutting, however, was currently employed by Emil M. Scharff, a sheep-rancher of Monument, in northwest Grant County on the John Day's north fork, and had come over to the Izee section in search of horses; finding a posse being formed, he had joined it. Fred and Morris Mosier and Frank Duncan (Duntin?) were also definitely known to have been members of the posse. No other possemen are specifically mentioned in the newspaper accounts, and traditions are in total disagreement.<sup>16</sup>

But whatever the unofficial posse's exact membership, there is a general agreement that its average age was low, and it was because of the relative youth of these avengers and because their expedition allegedly did not have the wholehearted approval of their elders that the resultant encounter came to be known locally as "The Boys' War."<sup>17</sup>

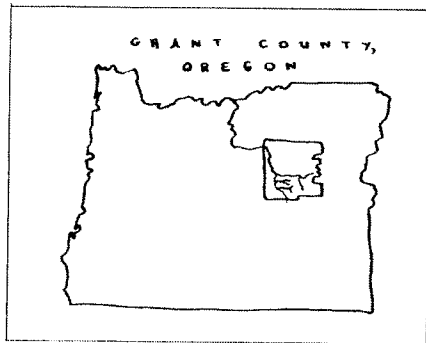
The posse's exact purpose is uncertain. One traditional account is that its members simply planned "to have it out with the Indians," another, that they intended to "drive" or, more mildly, "escort" them out of the community. One newspaper account says that a posse "started out to reprimand the Indians." Newspaper accounts, however, are in fairly general agreement that the posse's primary purpose was to arrest the Indian who had shot at John Hyde. Possibly the possemen were not entirely sure of what their intentions were if and when they caught up with the band and were prepared to be guided by circumstances.<sup>18</sup>

The posse had no difficulty in trailing the Indians, who were making no effort to conceal their movements and who probably numbered about twenty to thirty adults and children and perhaps as many as a hundred horses. They came up with them the morning of October 26 "in a parklike basin of large Ponderosa pines" about two miles upstream from where Yellow Jacket Creek (now Dead Indian Creek) enters the north fork of Deer Creek, a tributary of the John Day's south fork. The Indians were in their usual traveling forma-

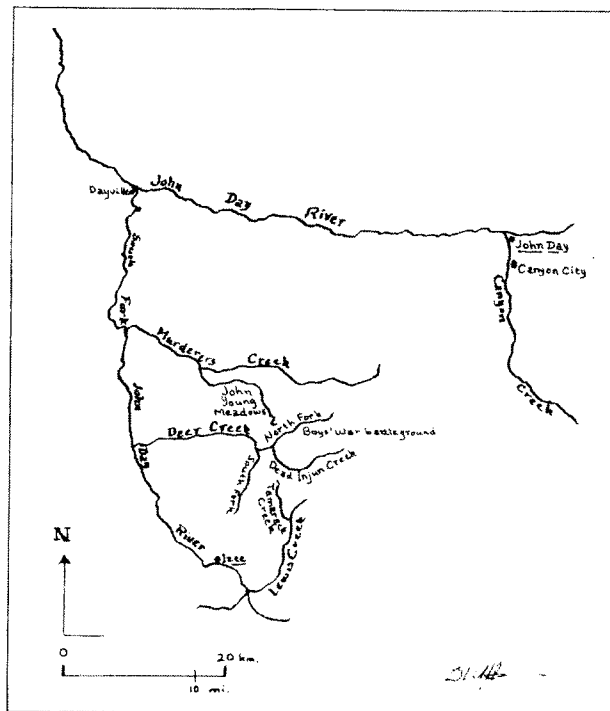
tion—scouts in the lead, women, children, and horses in the middle, and the main body of warriors behind—so that the nineteen possemen confronted a rear guard of three or four braves headed by the hostile old chief whose arrest they sought. The two parties eyed one another inimically for a few moments from a distance of about forty feet, and then Deputy Welsh demanded in the name of the law the "peaceable surrender" of the Indian who had shot at Hyde.<sup>19</sup>

ALTHOUGH outnumbered over three to one, the Indians had no intention of surrendering their chief to a posse from such a hostile community as Izee. They might well have expected, correctly or not, that the body of such a prisoner would speedily decorate a convenient tree limb. And the old chief, in any case, was too hostile and stubborn to surrender without a fight. Suddenly he dropped, Comanche-style, to the far side of his horse and opened fire. This first shot of "The Boys' War" struck George Cutting in his left arm and passed through it and on through his lungs. Simultaneously the other Indians and possemen sprang from their horses, took refuge behind convenient pine trees, and joined battle; the dismounting of two possemen, Fred Mosier and Frank Duncan, was facilitated by a volley from the Indians which shot their horses from under them.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The number in the unofficial posse is from the *Oregonian*, Oct. 28, and *Sumpter News*, Oct. 29. Information about the sheriff and evidence that he did not head the posse is from *Illustrated History*, 498-99; *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2; and Harrison letter. Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Ox-Bow Incident* (New York, 1940), chap. 2. Also see *Heppner Gazette*, Oct. 28; *Oregonian*, Oct. 27 and 28; *East Oregonian*, Oct. 29; *Illustrated History*, 514. In a letter dated March 1, 1965, for example, Wayne C. Stewart lists as possemen Henry Trowbridge, Eminger Stewart Harrison, Herb Angell and his brother, along with the Officers and Cuttings; but Lonnie Harrison, Eminger Stewart Harrison's son, who seems to have gotten most of his information from Mrs. Della Keerins of Izee, lists none of the above additions in his letter of March 11, 1965—but he *does* list John Hyde, his son Perry, Dave McGill (Magill), Johnnie Mosier, "A Man by Name Strickland," and Frank Harrison. Both David Magill, whose ranch had been invaded, and John Hyde, who had been shot at, would have had good reason to want to help punish the pesky redskins, but other present-day informants almost explicitly include Magill and Hyde among the older men, as distinguished from the boys, who were opposed to or unenthusiastic about the punitive expedition. There is, however, as we have seen, reason to doubt that Magill was one of those pacific "elders," viz., his presence, with his wife, Henry Snodgrass, and other unnamed citizens, in a heavily armed company which left for Izee at about 1:00 A. M., October 26. But this does not necessarily mean that all or any members of this group were in the Yellow Jacket



Memories of the Bannock-Piute War of 1878 and frequent damage to hayfields by horses belonging to wandering Indian bands kept animosities smoldering among settlers in Grant County; the Dayville and Izee communities were particularly hostile to Indians, and it was in Izee country that the prank was played that touched off "The Boys' War."



Young Cutting was speedily avenged. Dean Officer, unable to get a sight on the chief, who was "firing from a reclining position on the far side of his galloping horse," brought the horse down with a shot in the forehead, but the chief

continued to fire, using the dead animal for breastworks. However, one of his legs was exposed and one of the boys promptly put a bullet into the limb, which paralyzed it and prevented it from being drawn back into shelter. The boys then coolly proceeded to shoot the exposed leg to pieces. But the chief fought on with the desperate courage of an old gray wolf caught in a steel trap, continuing even after repeated wounds to use his rifle until it was empty and then drawing and firing his revolver until he was so weak from shock and loss of blood that its bullets were striking the ground near his side. Only when this weapon too was empty did it fall from his nerveless hand as the old warrior expired.<sup>21</sup>

Having disposed of the chief, the boys turned their attention to his followers. For a few minutes the close-range rifle fire was so withering that, according to local tradition, the pines behind which the fighters had taken position, although still standing as monuments to the battle, are long since dead from the bullets which then ripped their bark and wood, even though neighboring trees of similar age are still alive! Of the four or five surviving Indian warriors, badly outnumbered from the beginning and now disheartened by the death of their chief, two soon suffered wounds. They began to fall back through the trees and, seeing this, the young whites charged, whereupon the Indians cut their packs

Creek affair; since they left the John Day-Canyon City neighborhood three hours later than the hard-riding Officers, they may have arrived too late for the fight. As to some of the others on these lists, was Johnnie Mosier a third posseman of that surname or is this a confusion with Fred or Morris Mosier who definitely were in the fight? Whether or not John Hyde was in the posse, W. C. Stewart says definitely that his son Perry was too young but served in a sort of home guard. Stewart also lists Eminger Stewart Harrison as a posseman while the latter's son Lonnie does not mention his father but does include a Harrison named Frank, without indicating any relationship. It would, however, have been numerically possible for all those mentioned on the Stewart and Harrison lists, plus Henry Snodgrass, to have been on the nineteen-man posse, in addition to the eight we positively know were members.

<sup>17</sup> Black letter; Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964.

<sup>18</sup> Black letter; Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964; *Heppner Gazette*, Oct. 28, Nov. 8; *Oregonian*, Nov. 1 and 3; *Illustrated History*, 413.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964; *Oregonian*, Oct. 28, Nov. 1; *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964; *Oregonian*, Oct. 28; *East Oregonian*, Oct. 29; *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964; label on horse's skull in Grant County Museum; *Oregonian*, Oct. 28.

from their horses for greater speed and fled in disorder "toward the head of Murderer's creek, where they scattered, some going in an easterly direction and others toward the south fork of the John Day." The posse, whose thirst for gore and glory was by this time nearly satisfied, pursued for a time but soon gave up the chase and returned to Izee.<sup>22</sup>

The first and last battle in "The Boys' War" was over, and the time had come to bind up the wounds of the stricken, bury and mourn the dead, and boast of the deeds of valor. The boys had not won their victory unscathed. Young George Cutting, after being wounded, had pulled out of the action and, in company with Morris Mosier, started for Izee, but he became so weak that his companion left him near the trail, propped up against a tree, and hurried on in search of help. When a relief party found Cutting he was lying dead near a spring to which he had crawled. Apparently, however, none of the other possemen were even wounded.<sup>23</sup>

Exaggerated by distance and repetition, the reports of the skirmish on Yellow Jacket Creek and the events leading up to it, produced several days of confused excitement in Grant County and the adjacent territory, particularly, of course, in the Izee neighborhood, although newspaper readers remote from the scene of action may have gotten an even more serious impression of the situation than those closer at hand. Exaggerations and consequent excitement centered on the numbers of Indians engaged and allegedly killed and the danger of retaliation by other Indian bands. An early report numbered the Indian fighting men at twenty-five or thirty and the number killed in the first action at six or seven. The *Grant County News*, about noon of the day of the fight, reported that fighting was "still going on" and that medical assistance and "more armed men" were needed. "Hard fighting is expected," according to another report from Canyon City, "as the Indians are well armed." Dr. Ashford and Tom Morrison accordingly left Canyon City for Izee at 1:30 P.M. and were followed about half an hour later by a posse headed by the county judge, Joseph A. Laycock; other members were Elmer Overholt (a special correspondent for the *Grant County News*), Gary Cozad, Clyde Lockwood, and A. B. Hennessy. Finally, at 3:00 P.M. "Ed Luce's conveyance loaded with rifles and ammunition" left for the scene of action; its passengers consisted of Walter Brown, Attorney Wood, and Clay Todhunter, who headed the posse and to whom Justice Rulison had issued warrants for the arrest of any

surviving Indians involved in George Cutting's death.<sup>24</sup>

ON ARRIVING at Izee, however, the posses found "everything . . . quiet," at least for the time being. They also discovered that the number of Indians engaged had been considerably exaggerated, probably no more than five or at the most seven; however, early news reports were in general agreement that the warriors who participated in the fight had been "practically exterminated." The number of Indians killed was usually given as five, but a telegram from Sheriff Livingston, who had "come out to see about the fight," stated the Indian casualties as "two . . . killed, two wounded and two captured"—statistics too symmetrical to be credible, particularly since no other account mentions prisoners—while Dr. Ashford, who allegedly "responded to the summons from Cummings Creek . . . to attend wounded Indians," was quoted as saying that "three of the wounded will die, making the total of seven killed . . ." However, it is extremely doubtful that any wounded Indians remained at the scene of action in order to receive the ministrations of a white physician!<sup>25</sup>

Although the posses that left Canyon City for Izee the afternoon of the Yellow Jacket Creek clash found on arrival that there were no hostiles left to fight, Judge Laycock, the leader of one group, was able to furnish the community useful nonmilitary services. The long ride of seven hours had probably given him more than ample opportunity to consider some of the legal aspects of the affair. A group of young men, on their own authority, without obtaining warrants or being sworn in as deputies, had pursued and attempted to arrest an Indian, who, in resisting their somewhat dubious authority, had been killed, report-

<sup>22</sup> Stewart letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964; *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2; *Illustrated History*, 413.

<sup>23</sup> *Oregonian*, Oct. 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2; *Oregonian*, Oct. 27; *East Oregonian*, Oct. 29.

<sup>25</sup> *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2; *Oregonian*, Oct. 28; *Daily Eugene Guard*, Oct. 28 and 29; *Sumpter News*, Oct. 29; *East Oregonian*, Oct. 29 (one Indian killed and six wounded, three mortally); *The Dalles Chronicle*, Nov. 2 (five Indians killed); *The Dalles Times Mountaineer*, Nov. 5, (ditto); Harrison letter.

<sup>26</sup> One of these "Indian lovers" was Attorney Charles Erskine Scott Wood who, after serving as an officer in the U.S. Army against both Chief Joseph's Nez Percés and the Banocks and Piutes, had left the service, entered law, become a partisan of the redskins, and in 1892 and 1893 had even sent his eldest son, Erskine, to live for several months with Chief Joseph himself! See Edwin R. Bingham, "Oregon's Romantic Rebels: John Reed and Charles Erskine Scott



edly along with several others; more seriously, at least in the context of the 1890s, a young white man had also lost his life in the fracas. True, few white people in Grant County in particular or eastern Oregon in general would have been likely to see anything very wrong in the young men's behavior, but consideration had to be given to "Indian lovers" in Portland who would feel differently about the affair and who might attempt to give Grant County embarrassing publicity. The judge, consequently, took advantage of his presence to clean up the mess as much as possible by giving semiofficial sanction to a somewhat irregular action that had resulted in at least two deaths. According to his own account, as released to the press, "we proceeded to the battle ground and held an *informal* [italics mine] investigation. A disinterested [*sic*] jury of six men was impanelled"—according to another account "A coroner's jury exhumed the body of one of the Indians killed"—"and witnesses were sworn and examined as to the facts in the case. The evidence thus adduced showed" that the slain Indian

met his death at the hands of a deputy sheriff and posse, who asked for a peaceful surrender, and were answered by the Indians opening fire, killing one of their number . . . . The posse then returned the fire, killing several [*sic*] Indians. . . . The jury after hearing the evidence brought in an *informal* [italics mine] verdict in accordance with these facts and exonerated the posse.<sup>26</sup>

That a county judge should so hastily have summoned an unofficial jury which in an informal verdict had promptly and completely exonerated youthful possemen from all blame in the death of one or more Indians can be sufficiently explained by his position as a member and elected official of a white frontier community, but in this case it is also worth mentioning that the judge's wife was an aunt of young Dean Officer, who is credited with the major responsibility for

the chief's death, and that her brother-in-law was the "Indian hater" Eminger (Billy) Stewart.<sup>27</sup>

PROBABLY as early as the evening of the Yellow Jacket Creek fracas or at latest by the following day, the Izee settlers were aware that no further danger was to be feared from the band responsible for invading the Magill ranch and firing on John Hyde; it was now known that the warriors had never numbered more than half a dozen and that they had either all been killed or, if any survived, were scattered and in flight. A supposed new danger, however, now manifested itself, born of the state of general excitement caused by the recent events and probably nurtured by the exaggerations of some newspapers, namely, that some of the other numerous bands of wandering Indians in the neighborhood would join together to take vengeance for the deaths of their kinsmen. At first the mood of the settlers, as reported from Canyon City, October 28, was one of confidence:

Still great excitement prevails and settlers fear further trouble, as the number of Indians in the vicinity is increasing and they are well armed. Several settlers today telephoned to Baker City for a large number of rifles and more ammunition. They say they are able to take care of themselves and will easily subdue the Indians upon arrival of the firearms.<sup>28</sup>

Other news reports, however, lacked this note of self-confidence, commenting only: "Settlers have sent to Canyon City for more ammunition, stating that Indians are gathering around Izee in large numbers," to which some added: "the red men are . . . thirsting for revenge" and "an uprising is feared. The settlers are preparing for trouble."<sup>29</sup>

But also, according to somewhat later reports, the Izee settlers prepared for an attack by vengeful redskins not only by accumulating arms and ammunition but also by sending their families to places of greater safety. According to the usually moderate and cautious *Heppner Semi-Weekly Gazette*: "A general stampede was inaugurated by the settlers, and families were hurried from all directions to the larger towns." The most sensational of the surviving eastern Oregon newspapers which dealt with this episode, *The Dalles Weekly Chronicle*, declared, on the basis of an undated Canyon City telephone message to the *Baker City Democrat* (issue also undated), that "six wagon-loads of settlers from the Izee section"—probably, however, mostly women and children—had been brought to Canyon City because of "a big and general 'scare' among the people living in the thinly settled sections. Some of the men," reported this Columbia River paper, in

Wood," *PNQ*, Vol. 50 (1959), 77-90, esp. 80-81; Erskine Wood, "Diary of a Fourteen Year Old Boy's Days with Chief Joseph," *OHQ*, Vol. 51 (1950), 71-94. However, we have no record that C. E. S. Wood took any notice of the little Grant County war. *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 8 (from *Grant County News*, Nov. 3); *Oregonian*, Nov. 1 and 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Illustrated History*, 474; *BME* (Cent. Ed.), 1959, Sec. IV, p. 5, cols. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> *Burns Times-Herald*, Nov. 2, from *Boise Statesman*.

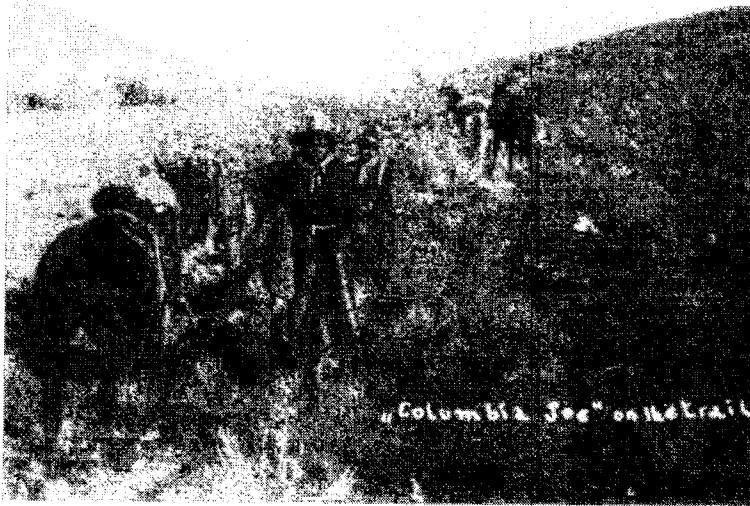
<sup>29</sup> *Oregonian*, Oct. 28, from a phone report from Baker, Oct. 27, based on a "special" from Canyon City; *Sumpter News*, Oct. 29; *Daily Eugene Guard*, Oct. 28 and 29; *The Dalles Chronicle*, Nov. 2, quoting a story from Canyon City, Oct. 28; *The Dalles Times Mountaineer*, Nov. 5 (same story, word for word, as in the *Chronicle*). The original story—except perhaps for the one in the *Sumpter* paper—was probably the one in the *Oregonian*, which the others used at first or second hand although sometimes with minor additional flourishes of a sensational nature.

language which must have made any of the "Izee boys" who may have read it contemplate another punitive expedition, "seem to be more badly frightened than are the women." However, The Dalles paper offered some justification or at least explanation for the reported panic, in addition to "the desperate and bloody battle on Deer Creek [sic]," viz.:

The fugitive settlers report that the Indians are gathering in the vicinity of Izee, and that the signal fires of the redskins can be seen every night on the mountains surrounding the settlements. From the current reports it is rumored that a shepherd was killed by the Indians last evening, at a point not far from Izee.<sup>30</sup>

the trail after the hostiles or, later, after the battle, when rumors of an Indian revenge-attack were most rife, arranged for the greater safety of their families; probably, however, in most cases they merely consolidated them in particularly defensible locations in the Izee community itself. As Lonnie Harrison, whose father *may* have been one of the Izee boys, puts it: "Most of [the] people moved in together during the scare." W. C. Stewart says that, at the time of the expedition, "the women of Izee gathered for safety" at the "old Hyde cabin . . . at the mouth of Poison Creek on the Izee road," guarded by some of the

W.C. Stewart



In the late 19th century, Columbia River Indians roamed through Oregon in small bands, hunting, fishing, and trading. Most, like Columbia Joe and his followers, were peaceful but could be provoked—as were the "old chief" and his five or six braves—into aggressive behavior.

Knox Collection  
Herman and Eliza Oliver Historical Museum

At our own remote period and in the absence of some of the more authoritative contemporary local newspapers, it is impossible to determine the extent, or even the existence, of the alleged "scare" and "stampede." Disclaimers of any such panic early appeared. Even *The Dalles Weekly Chronicle* reported: "Mr. Simpson, the telephone operator at Canyon City, informs us that the first report that went abroad last week regarding the Indian trouble in Grant County, was erroneous to a great extent and that . . . no particular Indian scare was experienced by the citizens around Izee." But The Dalles paper could not easily abandon the "Indian trouble" theme and added: "The affair has, however, stirred up bad blood between the settlers and the Indians, and more trouble may ensue [italics mine]."<sup>31</sup>

But there was undoubtedly at least a kernel of truth in these sensational reports. Certainly some Izee ranchers, either at the time when nearly a score of the settlement's young fighting men took

"small fry," including John Hyde's son Perry, who were too young to serve on the posse. But some of these "home guards" were sufficiently old and some of the women so young and attractive that the more conscientious guards found it difficult to keep some of their flightier companions at their lookout stations on the ridges, where they belonged! And probably a few ranchers did find it advisable during the period of greatest excitement to send their families to Canyon City, although the "six wagon-loads" may have been an exaggeration.<sup>32</sup>

The "signal fires" which reportedly could be "seen every night on the mountains" probably also had a basis in reality—but were the work not of revengeful redskins but of prankish youths who found the atmosphere of excitement enjoy-

<sup>30</sup> *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 1; *The Dalles Chronicle*, Nov. 5.

<sup>31</sup> *The Dalles Chronicle*, Nov. 9, referring to *Heppner Times*. See also *Moro Leader*, Nov. 9: "Frightened settlers are flocking in droves out of the Izee country . . . fearing more Indian outbreaks."

able and wished to keep it up as long as possible. Lonnie Harrison reports that two young men—Joe Rainville and another who Harrison says had been a member of the posse—“went up on the mountain and built some fires and made footprints around the camp and all the people thought the Indians had come back again.” The fondness for practical joking which, expressed in running off Indians’ horses, had set in motion the forces leading to the tragedy at Yellow Jacket Creek, was here finding a less harmful, but still annoying, expression.<sup>33</sup>

There had actually never been the slightest danger from Indians since the encounter of October 26—nor for that matter, after the old chief had located the missing horses and failed to extort a penalty fee from John Hyde, would there have been any danger from his little band had not the Izee boys decided to “teach the redskins a lesson.” The other Indian bands in the neighborhood were, indeed, much more frightened of the white posses that were roaming the country looking for “bad Indians” than the Izee settlers could possibly have been of them. They were reportedly “scared out of their senses by the wild reports and hurried into near towns for safety,” where they felt less exposed than in the open country to attack from the armed bands of angry young ranchmen who had already killed they knew not how many Indians. Columbia Joe and nine warriors, for example, on October 28 had come in to Prairie City on the John Day, east of Canyon City, to inform the whites of their peaceful intentions.<sup>34</sup>

Far from breathing out threats of vengeance, the Indians were mainly interested in “anxiously inquiring” about those “reported killed.” The *Heppner Gazette*, characteristically a voice of sanity amid the excitement, reported: “‘Big Mouthed’ Jim and ‘Blind Jim,’ with bands are on the John Day near Canyon City, and were in no way connected with the affray.” Even *The Dalles Weekly Chronicle* reported soothingly: “There are a few Indians on hunting expeditions in the Izee country, but these redskins are now perfectly harmless if they are not molested or imposed upon. The lawlessness has not extended beyond the small band of braves which was practically exterminated in the Deer Creek [*sic*] combat.” Nevertheless, as late as November 23, the Burns

<sup>32</sup> Harrison letter; Stewart letters, March 1, 14, 1965.

<sup>33</sup> Harrison letter.

<sup>34</sup> *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 1; Burns *Times-Herald*, Nov. 2 (from *Boise Statesman*).

<sup>35</sup> *Heppner Gazette*, Nov. 1 and 4; *The Dalles Chronicle*, Nov. 5; Burns *Times-Herald*, Nov. 23.



Herman and Eliza Oliver Historical Museum

Dean Officer—a family tradition of Indian fighting made him a leader of the Izee boys.

*Times-Herald* published a report of November 17 from Long Creek in northern Grant County that a “band of Columbias” was “enroute to Izee,” and though small in numbers, these Indians were “well-armed” and “presented a very war-like appearance.” Although they professed peaceful intentions—specifically, to persuade “all the Indians in Grant County to go home”—nevertheless, their refusal “to give their names gave rise to the suspicion that their mission” might be of “a revengeful nature . . . . It is believed by a majority of the residents in Southern Grant that there will be more trouble.” This, however, was apparently the last journalistic use of the already long overworked “Indian trouble” theme.<sup>35</sup>

As to the unhappy little band which had been “practically exterminated,” it had not suffered quite so severely as originally reported. The *Heppner Gazette* as early as October 28 had declared that “the reports current that six Indians were killed was [*sic*] idle rumor.” Judge Laycock, as early as October 29, had reduced the Indian casualty list to two killed—the Indian who had shot Cutting and another man—and one wounded, and a little later he further reduced it to “the Indian who had shot at Hyde . . . killed and one other . . . wounded.” Reported casualties of one dead and one wounded—shot in the

foot—soon became standard, although one report said that “the Indians claim another of their number is missing.” But whatever the exact number and character of the casualties from Yellow Jacket Creek, the little band which had there participated in the last Indian fight in Oregon had suffered severely in the death of its chief and, as it turned out, the wounding of about half of its other warriors; powerless to resist further, still less to retaliate, the Indians were by October 31 at the very latest “getting out of Grant county as fast as possible.” Settlers in Dayville, where the south fork of the John Day enters the main river, long remembered seeing the mournful little company pass through on its way back to the Columbia, with the chief’s dead body (which presumably they had recovered) tied across a horse.<sup>36</sup>

But what of the Indian who his companions claimed was missing? His fate furnishes a pleasant relief to this generally grim account of racial animosity and conflict. W. C. Stewart tells the traditional story. On the evening of the second day after the battle a lone Indian, wounded and on foot, appeared at the tent of Donald MacLennan, a native of Scotland, who was herding cattle on the John Young Meadows not far from the scene of the encounter. Shot through the upper leg, the Indian had lost his horse and become separated from his companions in the confusion of their defeat and flight and now, after hiding out for a time, was endeavoring to escape from this hostile neighborhood. However, although no bones were broken, he was so

weakened by pain and hunger that he had not been able to proceed farther. He frankly informed MacLennan, who had not heard of the fight, of what had happened, and the Scotsman, who lacked the American frontiersman’s traditional hostility for the aborigine, took him in, dressed his wound, and fed him, did not reveal his presence to a Canyon City posse that called by, and when he was able to travel gave him a horse and sent him safely home. Subsequently the Indian returned on several occasions to visit “Dollie” MacLennan, the white man who had proved such a friend in dire need.<sup>37</sup>

Probably, then, the posse’s score was one Indian dead and two wounded. To have completely routed the enemy or put out of action 50 percent of the enemy forces was an achievement comparable to some of the most serious actions of the American Civil War and would have entitled the Izee boys to apply to their own encounter John Hay’s famous description of the recently concluded Spanish-American War: “a splendid little war.” But, however “splendid” or however “little” these conflicts were, the men who died in them were as dead as if they had been killed at Gettysburg or Chancellorsville, on the Little Big Horn or in Chief Joseph’s fighting retreat. In retrospect, the relatives and friends of the two slain in the action on Yellow Jacket Creek—the young settler and the fierce old chief—may have wondered whether some possibly stolen horses, a near-miss from a pistol bullet, or even a few trampled hayfields were together worth the cost.

Canyon City, county seat and eastern Oregon metropolis, ca. 1898.

*Herman and Eliza Oliver Historical Museum*



## Appendix: A Note on Authorities

KNOWLEDGE of this episode is based essentially on (1) accounts in contemporary Oregon newspapers and (2) local and family traditions.

The newspaper accounts, unfortunately, are limited. Although in the autumn of 1898 numerous newspapers were being published in eastern Oregon, few files have survived. Particularly unfortunate is the disappearance of the files of the *Grant County News* (Canyon City), the paper published nearest the scene of action. Canyon City was almost entirely destroyed by fire the month after the affair and with it presumably perished the files of the local newspaper. A few stories from the Canyon City paper have, however, been preserved through use by the *Daily East Oregonian* (Pendleton), and *Burns Times-Herald*, and the *Heppner Semi-Weekly Gazette*. Moreover, numerous stories were phoned from Canyon City to various other Oregon papers.

Also most unfortunate was the disappearance early in the 1900s of newspapers published in Baker City, in the county just east of Grant, since we know that stories from Canyon City were regularly phoned to the *Baker City Democrat*. A few stories from this paper too have survived through reprinting. *The Dalles Weekly Chronicle* credited a story to it, and *The Illustrated History of Baker, Grant, Malheur and Harney Counties* (Spokane, Washington, 1902) based its account of the fight on then still surviving *Democrat* files.

The unavailability of the Baker City newspaper is, however, somewhat compensated for by the circumstance that several Oregon dailies, in-

cluding the *Oregonian* (Portland), the *Oregon Statesman* (Salem), and the *Pendleton Tribune*, apparently shared a correspondent in Baker City, judging from the virtually simultaneous appearance in these papers of identical stories with a Baker City dateline. These newspapers, indeed, may have had an arrangement with the *Democrat* to supply them with local news. Weekly newspapers, and some dailies, used the same stories a little later, either through the same correspondent or copying from an earlier published paper. But these stories do not include details that a more local newspaper would have presented. Since the *Oregonian* is the daily most generally available, I have not included specific references to other newspapers publishing identical stories.

Close in importance to the dailies among newspapers whose files have survived is the *Heppner Semi-Weekly Gazette*, published in Morrow County, just northwest of Grant. This paper, like the *Baker City Democrat*, got news by telephone from Canyon City. The *Gazette* gave the episode attention in a greater number of issues than any other surviving newspaper except the Portland and Salem dailies and is also distinguished for its avoidance of sensationalism and idle rumor.

Also very important is the *Burns Times-Herald*, Harney County, just south of Grant; as a result of telephonic communication with John Day (just north of Canyon City), it published an account of the fight the very same day as the action—earlier than any other known to me. A subsequent issue, which drew its information from the *Grant County News* and the Boise (Idaho) *Statesman* (the latter story bore a Baker City dateline), gave the exact time of each episode or of the reception of the news of it.

The *Daily East Oregonian* (Pendleton), published in Umatilla County just north of Grant, presented only one account of the affair, but it was drawn from the *Grant County News* with the detail to be expected from a local weekly.

*The Dalles Weekly Chronicle*, published on the Columbia River, in Wasco County, the third county northwest from Grant, also gave considerable, although belated, attention to the episode, but was as distinguished for sensationalism and inaccuracy as the *Heppner Gazette* was for the opposite qualities. Its comparative remoteness from the scene of the "war" as well, perhaps, as an editorial tendency toward sensationalism helps explain why its value is principally as an illustration of the fashion in which, under such circumstances, exaggerated rumors could come to be at least temporarily and locally accepted. Internal

<sup>36</sup> *Heppner Gazette*, Oct. 28, Nov. 1, 4, and 8; *Oregonian*, Nov. 1 and 3; *The Dalles Chronicle*, Nov. 9; Black letter. The exact number of casualties suffered by the Indians will always be somewhat uncertain. It is possible that, after inflating the casualties in the first flush of victory to five or more Indians killed or mortally wounded, the Oregon newspapers had doubts as to how such a holocaust would be regarded elsewhere and "reduced" them to something less than the actualities. If the Indians actually carried away the body of their chief, and if the dead body of an Indian was actually "exhumed" for examination by a coroner's jury, the suggestion that two Indians were killed would be strengthened. But a number of uncertainties and unlikelihoods are involved. It is doubtful that the Izee boys would have bothered to bury the body of a slain Indian for subsequent exhumation—the Indians themselves would not have had time to do so, even if they had not probably preferred another method of burial. And, of course, if it was the body of the old chief which the coroner's jury examined—assuming that it actually examined any body—his followers may have slipped back and rescued it still later.

<sup>37</sup> Stewart interview, July 1963, letter, May 16, 1964; *BME*, Aug. 27, 1964.

evidence suggests that it borrowed and then embroidered on stories from other papers. *The Dalles Times-Mountaineer* simply borrowed its one story on the episode from the *Chronicle*.

The *Sumpter News*, Baker County, published on October 29 a single story about the fracas which, although it resembles a longer story which appeared the previous day in the dailies, was probably derived from an independent source.

NUMEROUS other papers published accounts of the fight and its aftermath which add nothing to the information in, or the views of, the principal journals noted above and are obviously drawn, directly or indirectly, from earlier published accounts in the Portland, Salem, and Pendleton dailies. These papers sometimes so handled their stories as to give the impression that they were hotter off the griddle than was actually the case. The *Weekly Eastern Oregon Republican* (Union) was conspicuous in this respect. For example in the November 5 issue, it gave dates of October 28 and 29 to stories that the *Oregonian* dated from Baker City two days earlier. Sometimes the dates of episodes recounted were simply omitted, as when a story in the *Oregonian* for November 1 appeared without acknowledgment or dates in the above-mentioned Union weekly for November 12. I have not burdened my notes with such repetitious references.

These newspaper accounts, it is obvious, are of widely varying degrees of probable authenticity, depending on the dates of publication and to some extent the medium's degree of professionalism. Inaccuracy in reportage of the fight on Yellow Jacket Creek, its antecedents, and its aftermath was largely the result of the way in which word traveled. Excited visitors from Izee to Canyon City reported what they had heard at second and third hand, and their accounts were picked up by the representatives of the local weekly and also phoned by the telephone operator, a Mr. Simpson, to Baker City, Heppner, Burns, and probably other eastern Oregon communities. Baker City, in turn, phoned this information to dailies in Pendleton, Portland, and Salem, and the stories in these dailies were copied, with or without acknowledgment, by other Oregon dailies and weeklies as, to a lesser extent, were stories in the *Grant County News*, the *Baker City Democrat*, etc.

The earliest accounts of the difficulties in the Izee neighborhood were thus collected by untrained amateurs and distributed through a pro-

cess sometimes resembling the game of gossip. Such early accounts—and some of the later ones—are almost inevitably exaggerated, distorted, and frequently sensationalized. For example, the earliest accounts usually telescope the Indian invasion of the Magill ranch and John Hyde's later encounter with the band into a single episode that often includes aspects of the actual combat of October 26—with these elements, too, sometimes in incorrect chronological order. Such accounts also usually declare the hostile band exterminated or virtually so.

However, the *Grant County News* early in the afternoon of the clash dispatched a special correspondent to the scene of action, and reports dated from Canyon City as early as October 27 contained fewer errors; each subsequent day sieved out more of these until by October 29 the newspaper accounts were generally in agreement on a narrative which seems reasonably correct. Thereafter, exaggerations were principally confined to the supposed danger of retaliation by other Indians, and within two or three days the more responsible newspapers had abandoned this theme also, although as late as November 2 and 9, *The Dalles Chronicle* was publishing stories that repeated some of the exaggerations and sensationalism of earlier days.

Most newspapers mentioned above are now on microfilm in the newspaper room of the University of Oregon library in Eugene. However, in the early stages of this research I was privileged to use, in the Oregon Historical Society in Portland, the original copies of the *Oregonian*, the *Heppner Semi-Weekly Gazette*, and the two papers published in The Dalles. Copies of stories in the *Burns Times-Herald* I owe to Mrs. Dwight (Ethel E.) Hinshaw, copublisher, in the *Daily East Oregonian* (Pendleton) to J. W. Forrester, the editor, and Marilyn Cripes of the circulation department, and in the *Sumpter News* to the Baker Public Library. Numerous eastern Oregon editors have courteously informed me as to the state—usually unhappy—of their early files.

THE OTHER main source is tradition. When I first encountered this episode of Oregon frontier history, it lay sixty-five years in the past. While several of the "boys" of the Indian fight could easily have survived until then, apparently none did—at least none willing to be identified as a member of that historic posse. Possibly, however, the information on the label on the horse's skull in the Grant County Museum came from an actual participant; according to the curator, Howard A.

Black, it was dictated to C. W. Brown, former curator, "by a man that really knew the correct and true story."

Consequently, the traditional accounts come from members of what in the 1960s was the "older generation" of Grant County, who, when they were young, were told stories of the affair by members of what was then the older generation. A few people were able and willing to pass on their memories before these too were forever lost.

My principal traditional informant was Wayne C. Stewart, son of the Eminger (Billy) Stewart whose cattle were massacred in the Bannock-Piute War of 1878, and who says:

The story was told to me by the light of a buckaroo campfire at a camp in the nearby John Young Meadows when I was a boy of about ten years . . . not a great deal younger than the "boys" from Izee who wrote the last chapter in the long story of Indian wars in Oregon not many years before.

Stewart, in a conversation in July 1963 at the Grant County Museum and in several subsequent letters, presented a long and particularly valuable account of the fight and its antecedents, including vivid details not mentioned in any printed account. But Stewart's contributions did not end with traditions already in his memory; he also sought out and communicated to me traditions derived from members of other pioneer Grant County families and suggested still other persons with whom I might profitably communicate. Among those from whom he collected information was Emil Hyde, grandson of the John Hyde whose bloodless clash with the Indians led directly to the bloody encounter of the following day. He also directed me to Lonnie Harrison, son of Eminger Stewart Harrison, whose father was a youthful resident of Izee at the time of the fight and at least a possible member of the famous posse; Lonnie Harrison furnished me information derived both from his own family traditions and from the memories of Mrs. Della Keerins, of a well-known Izee ranching family.

Howard Black was able to gather information from knowledgeable visitors to the county museum; in conversations and letters he contributed several items of unique importance and suggested other informants.

The late Herman Oliver, Grant County rancher, former mayor of John Day, and coauthor, with E. R. Jackman, of *Gold and Cattle Country* (1962) contributed valuable information about the antecedents of the historic fracas. I owe to Jackman the introduction to Oliver that brought forth his informative letter, and to both

of them the indispensable Grant County background supplied by their book.

Although the skeleton and much of the flesh of the narrative could have been derived from newspaper accounts, much of the life and color comes from tradition; John Hyde fleeing on a bridleless horse, the old chief firing from the far side of his mount and the boys riddling his exposed leg, Donald MacLennan's humanity to the wounded Indian—all are entirely traditional. But traditional details that may have been inspired by filio-pietism call for particularly close inspection. Some present-day informants stress the Indians' bad conduct, adding details—such as the wanton destruction of hayfields—not found in newspaper accounts. Similarly, the later newspaper stories merely report that John Hyde was shot at; tradition has him wounded in the lower lip. One tradition exaggerates the number of Indian braves to exceed that of the whites and holds that the latter were completely surrounded and "the stage set for a massacre"!

BUT, on the other hand, the climate of opinion in regard to Indians has changed. Contemporary newspaper accounts describe the expedition against the Indians as a manifestation of indignation by an aroused community, but now, according to Oliver, "the locals are not very proud of the affair." Those willing to talk emphasize—possibly exaggerate—the circumstance that the posse was composed of reckless youths who acted against the advice of their elders. But one wonders if such a cleavage actually existed. And some of today's informants will flatly state that white boys *did* run off the Indians' horses, while the newspaper accounts merely state noncommittally that the Indians *accused* whites of horse-stealing.

Through the use of common sense and through checking against other sources, a good deal of usable and otherwise unavailable historical information can be recovered from traditional accounts. Certainly, much of the traditional material on "The Boys' War" seems to me at least as trustworthy as most of what appeared in print.

What is lacking in the material for this episode is evidence specifically from the Indians' viewpoint. This is not for want of attempts to obtain such information. I have written to numerous historical and anthropological authorities on the Indians of this region without discovering any who had even heard of the affair. And letters to Indians identified in the press as tribal leaders have—despite stamped, self-addressed envelopes

—drawn not a single reply. Official reports of Indian agencies in both Oregon and Washington, between 1898 and 1900 contain no mention of such a clash or of any Indian killed by whites in Oregon; their silence confirms my supposition that the Indians involved in this encounter were not under any agency, but it accomplishes nothing more. As in many, indeed most other episodes in Amerindian history, one must depend for information about the Indian side of the issue on unwilling, unconscious, or belated white testimony; in this case, there is testimony that reckless

white boys *did* contribute to the tragedy by driving off Indian horses, and there are descriptions by whites of the heroism of the old chief, whose desperate last fight resembles a scene from an Icelandic saga.

The most I can claim for this narrative is that from inadequate and frequently conflicting materials I may have arrived at a reasonable approximation to the actual events. Obviously, however, this episode furnishes little encouragement to the Rankean theory that history can actually be written "*wie es gewesen.*"

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## RECENT BOOKS IN REVIEW

*Seattle: Past to Present.* By ROGER SALE. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976. xx, 273 pp. Bibliography, index, illustrations, endpaper maps. \$12.95)

NOTED on the jacket as an interpretation of "the history of the foremost city in the Pacific Northwest," this book is an exhilarating critique of Seattle's birth, growth, sickness, health, promise, and fulfillment. In his preface Roger Sale echoes Murray Morgan's intention twenty-five years ago to write not a history or the history of the city but rather a book that would explain "One Man's Seattle." Urban historians may despair that *the* history—a history with a firmly impersonal perspective and a sternly quantitative discipline—never will get written.

So let them despair. One of the charms of this book is that Roger Sale has even pointedly ignored the canons of more formal urban history by giving slight consideration to the theories of how the railroads or the Alaskan gold rush or the Boeing Company made or unmade Seattle. More significant to him is what happened among its people within the city itself, and his devices for explaining this span a dazzling range—sharp demographic analysis to individual characterizations to lyrical descriptions of neighborhood development. Except for his last chapter, Sale's material is not especially new. But he brings to it a unique and refreshing burst of insight, intelligence, grace, and enthusiasm. He knows precisely what he is doing, for he is a literary critic and a self-critic of unusual perceptions. He has shaped here an expression of character and personality—his own and his city's—from which there is much to learn and much to enjoy. We are in the presence of both history and literature.

There is a contagious delight in Sale's repeated discovery that in the West the happy alternative to the company town was the city, and that Seattle is a real city and a good city. It is a real city because of its human resources, its diversities, its harmonies and dis-

harmonies, its history with an easy fit for the organic metaphor, for cities, he says, "are wholes, like organisms, like trees" (p. xi). He finds it a good city—in contrast to, say, Los Angeles—because from the earliest times it has had people who realized that they were building a city, people who shared an urban vision.

The first evidence of this is the life and the career of a founding father, Arthur Denny, who, rather than surrender the land to a single industrial barony, sacrificed a great deal to settle Seattle with people. As Roger Sale sees him, Denny founded a good city and a real city simply by being a decent person, by meeting his obligations to his family and his duties as a citizen. (Denny is compared at least in part to Brigham Young, yet Denny seems too taciturn, so grimly austere—he went through life carrying a needle and a thread in case one of his buttons fell off, and he wrote and spoke in the same fashion—that one wonders if the man can support so grand a bourgeois vision.) In any event, this city instinct was embraced in the next generation by R. H. Thomson, the great city engineer and hill regrader—even though, in Sale's interpretation, Thomson's often disproportionate enthusiasms moved him to regrade too many hills. This instinct became a vision of the common weal in men like Virgil Bogue, whose beautifully sensitive plan for urban development was defeated at the polls in 1912. Sale sees this defeat as a critical event, a sign of complex social fragmentation, a point beyond which the early harmony-within-diversity was no longer possible.

Sale's view is broad and generous. If Henry Yesler was avaricious, there is no satisfaction in dwelling on the dimensions of his greed. If Arthur Denny was a man of imperturbable frigidity, he did not imprint his city with his dour Victorianism. If the anti-Chinese riots were deplorable, they were remarkably lacking in violence. If Seattle appeared to lack sophistication, we see that it did indeed once have a superior system of public schools. An aura of urban health braced the lives of the extraordinary individuals whom Sale



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"The Boys' War": A Study in Frontier Racial Conflict, Journalism, and Folk History

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Hard way west = story form  
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