THE "ALMO MASSACRE" REVISITED

Brigham D. Madsen

The uses of history—real and fictional—are many. In this account of the history of the "Almo Massacre," a distinguished historian (now retired from the University of Utah) examines the creation of a dramatic event on the California Trail for quite modern purposes.

ON THE MORNING of October 17, 1938, the Sons and Daughters of Idaho Pioneers dedicated a monument in the southeastern Idaho village of Almo to commemorate a reported 1861 massacre by Native Americans of a party of emigrants.1 The marker, cut from a slab of stone, was about six feet in height and carved in the shape of the state of Idaho. It was erected in the local schoolyard, across the street from the post office. The monument, still in place, bears the following inscription:

ALMO IDAHO
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN A
HORRIBLE INDIAN MASSACRE 1861
THREE HUNDRED IMMIGRANTS WEST BOUND
ONLY FIVE ESCAPED
ERECTED BY S & D OF IDAHO PIONEERS
1938

But some residents of Almo and other towns in the area continue to have doubts about whether or not a slaughter of white emigrants ever actually occurred at this spot on the California Trail.

JOHN UNRUH'S COMPREHENSIVE study of overland migration offers a graphic picture of massacres by both emigrants and Native Americans during the years 1840-1860. The first recorded death of an emigrant occurred in 1845, and the year of greatest emigrant deaths at Native American hands is 1851, with sixty. In that and the succeeding year, seventy Native Americans died. In the twenty years that Unruh studied, a total of 362 emigrants and 427 Native Americans died in conflicts between the two groups.

Among other interesting observations, Unruh concluded that of the almost 400 emigrants killed during the years 1840 to 1860, about 90 percent died west of South Pass—chiefly along the Oregon and California trails on the Snake and Humboldt rivers. This area was home to the Bannock and to several branches of the Northern Shoshoni nation.2 No individual massacres of emigrants exceeded twenty deaths. Native Americans were usually more interested in capturing the valuable cattle and horses of the traveling white companies, although a few attacks had revenge and bloody slaughter as motives. While Unruh's work describes Native American assaults on emigrant parties and white massacres of Native Americans only for the twenty-year period from 1840 to 1860, additional research by the present author extends the coverage beyond 1860 to 1865—thus including the brutal Bear River Massacre on January 29, 1863, of 250 Northwestern Shoshoni by Colonel Patrick Edward Connor and his California Volunteers.3

Before finally examining the claim for the reputed Almo Massacre, it can also be instructive to describe briefly three of the most reported and most tragic killings of white emigrants by Native Americans in the period and area under discussion. In the first of these incidents, on August 20, 1854, an emigrant group under the leadership of Alexander Ward was attacked twenty-five miles east of Fort Boise. One of the thirty visiting Boise-Bruneau Shoshoni was shot after trying to steal a horse from the travelers. The remaining Native Americans attacked the whole party of whites, resulting in the eventual deaths of nineteen of the group. The women and young girls were ravaged and some burned alive by the attackers, who also confiscated five horses, forty-one cattle, and between $2,000 and $3,000 in cash. The Ward Massacre aroused Oregon settlers, who demanded that the Shoshoni responsible be exterminated, and troops were dispatched to capture the murderers.4

The second of these widely reported assaults occurred on September 9, 1860, at Henderson Flat, about two miles west of Castle Creek near the Snake River. Some Native American warriors attacked the

1Oakley Herald, October 6, 20, 1938.
Utter-Van Orman train of forty-four people traveling with eight wagons. Of particular interest in light of the later so-called "Almo Massacre" was the fact that the Native American marauders besieged the encircled emigrant vehicles for two days—an unusual tactic on the part of Native American war parties who ordinarily preferred sudden lightning assaults over protracted engagements. Twenty travelers were killed outright, five died later, and four children, three girls and one boy, were taken captive. The girls were never found; the boy supposedly was later discovered living with Chief Bear Hunter's band of Northwestern Shoshoni in Cache Valley, Utah, and was returned to his uncle. The Utter Massacre received wide publicity and engaged the attention of newspapers, Indian agents, and, of course, the U.S. military.5

A year before this incident, on August 31, 1859, a less serious attack occurred, in the number of emigrants slain but not in the tortures inflicted upon the victims. The Edwin A. Miltimore wagon train was assaulted about twenty-five miles west of Fort Hall and eight travelers were killed. The bodies were scalped and dismembered while one little girl had her legs cut off, after which she was forced to walk on the stumps before being put to death. Again, there was universal outrage among the white settlers and emigrants, and troops were sent to try and capture the murderers.6

While the three above episodes provide some detailed background of emigrant massacres by Native Americans, an even more important event for those trying to determine the historical accuracy of the "Almo Massacre" is the attention now being given to a massacre that took place on August 9 and 10, 1862, near a lava outcropping several miles west of present-day American Falls, Idaho. The site of this well-authenticated massacre is commemorated today as Massacre Rocks State Park, which has a museum, visitors' center, and professional staff of park rangers.7 One might well ask why this event, which resulted in nine emigrant deaths, receives such prominent notice today, whereas the reported deaths of many more people in the "Almo Massacre" receive hardly any notice at all.

Having spent perhaps too much time in establishing a necessary framework for consideration of the supposed "Almo Massacre," let us now try to determine the origin of this fabled event. An examination of the major early histories of Idaho shows that not a single one makes any reference to any Native American massacre at Almo Creek.8 Certainly the killing of 294 emigrants would attract enough attention to capture the interest of their authors.

The first mention of the "Almo Massacre" by any writer that this author can discover is in Charles S. Walgamott's Reminiscences of Early Days: A Series of Historical Sketches and Happenings in the Early Days of Snake River Valley. Walgamott included this story almost word for word in his more widely read Six Decades Back, as follows:

THE MASSACRE OF ALMO CREEK
Undoubtedly the greatest Indian disaster that ever

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2Unruh, The Plains Across, 195-196; Madsen, Shoshoni Frontier, 105-106.
3Brigham D. Madsen, Chief Pocatello: The "White Plume" (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 45-49, 126.
occurred in the Territory of Idaho, and probably in the entire Northwest when we consider the number slain, was the Massacre of Almo Creek in 1861.

Out of some three hundred persons, men, women, and children, only five—three men and two women—were known to have escaped the cruel death administered to them by the overwhelming band of Indians that had congregated for days in such great number that they were enabled to hold in siege a train of emigrants who were well-organized, well-armed and provisioned, and well-equipped with fine stock, drawing more than sixty wagons. Despite the magnitude of this onslaught, very little, if anything, has been written in regard to it. The only records rest in the memory of old people who lived at that time, or in the account as handed down from parent to child.

The writer visited this battlefield in 1875. Evidence of the conflict was marked plainly by trenches thrown up under each wagon as they were arranged in circles. Accompanying our party was an old trapper who gave us a detailed account of the tragedy. In the interval of fifty years that have elapsed, the memory can cut some funny capers, and in putting this story together the writer has taken considerable pains to verify what he believes he saw and heard on the subject more than fifty years ago.

The best informer was Mr. W. M. E. Johnston, who with his wife at present lives a mile south of Twin Falls. They were fourteen and twelve years of age, respectively, at the time of the massacre, and were living in the settlement of North Ogden. The impressions made on their young minds were stamped clearly.

They remembered the first man and woman who escaped from the besieged train and made their way to the settlement of Brigham, Utah, where a rescue party was dispatched to the scene. On their way they found, on Raft River, two women, one man, and a baby, who had escaped and had for several days existed on rosebuds as their only food. They remembered that the Indians returned and passed through the settlement displaying the scalps of their victims attached to the manes and bridles of their ponies. They recalled seeing a North Ogden blacksmith and a party going to salvage the irons from the burned wagons.

In 1872, eleven years later, Mr. Johnston visited the battlefield, and in 1887 the Johnston family moved to Almo Creek, securing land that partially covered the battlefield, which still bore evidence of the hard-fought battle. In leveling and plowing the ground for alfalfa Mr. Johnston uncovered numerous old guns and pistols.

Mr. Johnston speaks the Shoshone language well enough to be understood, and from an old Indian he was able to get the Indian version which is in part incorporated in the following story:

"THE INDIAN ACCOUNT"

"In the spring of 1861 an emigrant train left the Missouri River bound for California. It was equipped, as nearly as possible, with everything necessary to make safe the trip through an unsettled country infested with Indians. The train consisted of more than sixty wagons and some three hundred souls. Nothing is known of the early part of their trip until they reached the western plains where they were harassed by Indians whom they were able to keep at bay through their well-organized camp, their driving management, and their equipment of arms.

"This gave them added courage, and they looked on the Indians, who at first were small in numbers, with indifference, and sometimes they took shots at them at long range to keep them away, which angered the Indians. This, together with the natural

Massacre Rocks, before the site became a state park. ISHS 278A.
antipathy which they held for the white man, coupled with the desire to destroy the train and possess its belongings, caused a general uprising of the numerous Indians whose habitats were adjacent to the Oregon Trail.

"Indian runners were sent out and signal smokes were sent up. The place of concentration was to be Indian Grove some four or five miles south of Almo Creek. According to the Indian’s account, there was assembled here the largest number of hostile Indians ever known in these parts. Here they provisioned their camp with game meat, which was plentiful, and waited for the condemned train.

"The emigrants traveled in confidence over the Oregon Trail until they crossed the Raft River, where their guide headed them south over the Sublette Cut-off to the California road. They traveled peacefully for three short days without sighting Indians, and then camped for the night on Almo Creek, so named by the Indians, signifying “Plenty Water,” where now nestles the peaceful village of Almo. Here they took their usual precautions, made a corral of their wagons, placed strong guards over their stock, and slept peacefully, not knowing that an overwhelming band of bloodthirsty Indians were looking down on them from Indian Grove, a large elevated mountain bench, finely timbered, which even to this day retains its name.

"The outpost of the Indians watched with impatience the emigrants light their morning fire inside their wagon enclosure; watched the herdsmen drive their stock to camp to be harnessed for the day’s journey; and saw the line of defense being broken, each wagon falling into its allotted position in almost military precision. The Indians were in readiness. They were about to attack a foe much their superior in arms and ammunition. The Indians had few guns and small quantities of ammunition, but they depended on their greater number, their bows and arrows, and their well-planned mode of attack.

"They allowed the train, as it moved slowly southward from Almo Creek, to proceed until its rear wagon was some distance from the creek. Suddenly a prearranged signal was given by the Indian lookout, and Indians in great numbers emerged from their places of concealment where they had lurked in silence and secrecy. They completely surrounded the surprised emigrants who immediately gave orders for all wagons to be corralled with all stock inside the enclosure. This was accomplished in spite of the hair-raising yells of the bloodthirsty Indians who knew they had committed the first act of their contemplated tragedy. They had the emigrant train cut off from water, and the siege began. It was not to be a fight where man was given for man, but was fought in Indian fashion, each Indian protecting himself, reserving his ammunition, keeping the train in siege until the emigrants had exhausted their ammunition and were famished for water. A large portion of the Indians secretly retired to their camps at Indian Grove leaving only enough of their tribesmen to hold siege, and from protected points of vantage picked off with arrows or guns any emigrant that attempted to escape or get water.

"In relays, the Indians, day and night, harassed the whites with arrows, guns, and firebrands shot into the wagons, and otherwise terrorized them by yells, which were joined in by the entire Indian war parties. This was intended to impress on the minds of the confused emigrants the overwhelming majority of the Indians.

"The emigrants realized their condition, and under each wagon a trench was dug with the dirt thrown to the outside. The digging of a well was started in the hopes of getting water. This work was carried on feverishly until it proved disappointing. Men who undertook to bring water from the creek were shot down. Occasional shots from the Indians killed or badly wounded some white man, woman, or child, which threw the members of the besieged party into greater confusion and grief.

"The excitement grew intense as panic-stricken horses in their struggles broke their fastenings and ran frantically around the inclosure, while others in their attempt to break loose were snorting, rearing, and trampling the earth from which rose great columns of dust through which frantic women and children darted hither and thither in their aimless attempt for relief. This, with the constant yelling of the Indians and howling of their dogs, made a scene too wild and awful to contemplate.

"On the third day the stock was ordered turned from the enclosure. As they hastened for water, they were taken into the possession of the Indians. Little by little the fighting force of the train was reduced, and the remainder contemplated the inevitable. It was on the fourth night that the guide employed by the train gave up all hopes and planned his escape. He was accompanied by a young woman who had
displayed great courage and marksmanship. Under the protection of the darkness they crawled through the sagebrush, making their way to the mountain. After hours and hours of travel they found their way to the settlement of Brigham, Utah. In the after part of the same night one man and two women, one with a nursing baby, secretly stole from the doomed camp, crawling for miles on their hands and knees. The mother of the child, in her anguish and endeavor to keep in company with the others as they crawled through the brush, was compelled to take the garments of the child in her teeth and carry it in that manner.

"They were successful in making their escape, reaching a point on Raft River which was afterwards known as EY Ranch, where they lived on rosebuds and roots until found by a rescue party from Brigham, who sent them to the settlement and proceeded to the battlegrounds of Almo Creek to find the entire party slain and the wagons burned. The bodies of the unfortunate people were buried in the wells which they had dug."

This is the story, told well and in some very exciting detail. Did it really happen? or has the passage of many years and the romance of the California Trail permitted a fictional account of a supposed massacre to be translated into a monument erected in 1938 in the village of Almo, Idaho? This historian can only submit the results of over forty years of research concerned with massacres of emigrant parties within the sphere of Shoshoni and Bannock homelands.

The first notice of killings by Native Americans or whites along the western trails usually appeared in the frontier newspapers. For the Shoshoni of Snake River and the Great Basin the nearest journal was the Deseret News in Salt Lake City. The Walgammott account of the "Almo Massacre" does not give a precise date, only that it happened in 1861, a very strange lack when nearly all such incidents were reported by month and day. A careful search of the Deseret News for all of 1861 does not reveal any Native American attack at Almo Creek of the

magnitude of 300 emigrants and 60 wagons. There were assaults near City of Rocks during 1862, but none of any significance at all for 1861. Nor did the Sacramento and San Francisco newspapers, which kept careful track of Native American massacres along the California Trail, carry any mention of any "Almo Massacre" in 1861. When even the slightest Native American disturbance along the road received immediate notice from these various western newspapers, the lack of any reference to an affair at Almo Creek can only mean that there was no "Almo Massacre."  

Almost as prompt in recording Native American attacks were the agents of the Indian Service. Their reports and letters to state and national authorities described the assaults in as much detail as their information provided and usually called for action by the military commanders in immediate retribution. Years of research in the voluminous files of Indian agents' reports and correspondence held by the National Archives in Washington, D.C., as well as the records of the Bureau of Native American Affairs for the various western states and territories available on microfilm, have unearthed no documents in this vast assemblage of records to support the account of the "old trapper who gave us a detailed account of the tragedy" as described in Walgamott's story. A massacre involving the deaths of 294 emigrants would have engendered a massive amount of material concerning the event. There is none.  

Similarly, the records of the War Department, the various field commanders, and the state and territorial militias do not reveal any massacre at Almo. If any such outrage had occurred, the military would have been called in at once. For example, when the mail line between Sacramento and Missouri was threatened by Native American attack with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the national government mobilized some California volunteers under Colonel Patrick Edward Connor, who directed his troops in hunting down various bands of Native American warriors who had been involved in assaults on stage stations and emigrant parties. By May 30, 1863, the California troops had succeeded in killing 375 Native Americans in the Great Basin, but no massacre at Almo Creek was reported by the military as one of the causes of their relentless pursuit and slaughter of Shoshoni.  

The survivors of the reputed "Almo Massacre" also left no reminiscences or letters describing what would have been the most dramatic event of their lives. Contrast this with the Massacre Rocks affair, whose survivors have left us a plethora of material concerning their escape from the massacre and their descriptions of the horror of the incident.  

Finally, a researcher would expect to find among the historical records associated with Brigham City newspaper accounts, diary entries, and other materials concerned with the supposed rescue of the six individuals who escaped the "Almo Massacre." While there are some accounts of people from Brigham City going to the aid of emigrants who had been under Native American attack during the 1850's and 1860's, none exist that are concerned with the fabled cataclysmic massacre at Almo Creek. No matter where one searches, there are just no records of what could have been the bloodiest affair, with the most casualties, of any Native American massacre in the history of the entire American Far West.  

Certain inconsistencies are also evident in the "old trapper" or the "Indian Account" of the Almo engagement. Mention has already been made of the absence of the precise month and day for the attack. In addition, consider the final sentence in the Walgamott story: "The bodies of the unfortunate people were buried in the wells which they had dug." Envision the exhausted emigrants engaged for three days in digging wells within their exposed encircled enclosure all the while dodging bullets and arrows and supposedly taking occasional shots at their attackers. Then, at the end of the massacre, the rescue party from Brigham City buried the 294 bodies in "the wells which they had dug." Consider the size and depth of wells needed to accommodate the bulk of 294 bodies. Of course, the rescuers could have spent several days enlarging the wells, but this apparently minor matter is too easily dismissed by the storyteller.  

The question may well be asked at this point—have other Idaho historians adopted the Walgamott account since its publication in 1927 and 1936? Yes. Merrill D. Beal, a respected scholar of the region, incorporated the story in his History of South-eastern Idaho:
Perhaps the most horrible and wanton slaughter of all occurred a little south of Almo Creek in the summer of 1862. An emigrant train from Missouri with three hundred souls in sixty wagons was attacked from ambush by a large band of Bannacks. The train executed the customary corral movement, thereby holding their animals, but there was no water. For three days the Indians sniped away at their beleaguered victims, gradually reducing the number. The emigrants dug a well in a futile attempt to procure water. During the fourth night of the siege, the guide, accompanied by a spirited young woman, effected an escape. They reached Brigham City, Utah, where a rescue party was organized. This body of men hastened to the scene of death, only to find the entire party slain amidst the charred ruins of smoking wagons. One man, two women, and a nursing child, who had escaped and had kept alive by eating rosebuds and roots, were found in Raft River Valley.

The victims of red barbarity were interred in the well they had dug.

The story is not repeated in Beal’s later multi-volume history of Idaho, co-authored with Dr. Merle W. Wells. More recent histories of the state do not contain any references to an “Almo Massacre.”

This lengthy examination of the historical accuracy of the fabled Almo event may help dispel the myth surrounding the affair, which persists with remarkable tenacity. But the evaluation is incomplete without an explanation of how the monument to this “horrible Indian massacre” came to be erected in the first place. The Almo affair is inextricably linked to the Silent City of Rocks, which is located about three miles west by southwest of the village of Almo.

The City of Rocks has been of interest to students of the history of the American West since the first emigrants traveled the California Trail. Situated near where Idaho, Utah, and Nevada meet, this fabled geological formation of rock pinnacles was a prominent feature noted in travelers’ journals and diaries and was particularly important because it also marked the junction of the pioneer Salt Lake road with the California Trail. The “bizarre granite outcroppings” of the twenty-five-square-mile valley have been described as resembling “bath tubs, decaying temples, animals and personalities” and one remarkable feature has been called very similar to the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Recognizing the tourist possibilities of this natural scenic wonder, long-time editor Charles Brown of the Oakley Herald spent almost twenty years prior to 1938 publicizing the area. He hoped to attract visitors to the City of Rocks and, of course, to his town of Oakley, about fourteen miles north. Brown’s hopes of creating a national monument out of the site, to be maintained by the National Park Service, suddenly received a real boost in 1938 from an unexpected quarter. On August 4, Brown announced in his paper that the idea of a national monument has been endorsed by every member of Idaho’s congressional delegation; by Idaho’s governor, Barzilla W. Clark; by the Oakley and Twin Falls chambers of commerce; and by many newspapers, including Boise’s Idaho Statesman and the Salt Lake Tribune. Furthermore, President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt were to be invited to take part in a proposed tour of the City of Rocks.

By September 1, 1938, plans were far enough along that Brown could proclaim that the “First Annual Exploration of the City of Rocks” would take place in October and that many prominent people throughout the West were to be invited to participate in the grand celebration. An “Advisory Council Advocating National Monument at City of Rocks” was established with “Members in Five States, One Territory.” The list of advocates occupied three columns of space in the September 29 edition of the Oakley Herald. When Brown’s personal funds and those of the Oakley Chamber of Commerce were no longer sufficient to pay for telephone calls and postage, Brown reported on October 26 that “friends of the cause began to send in five-dollar checks to help buy postage stamps and typewriter paper.” The list of contributors took up one whole column of the October 6 issue. By this time, the “First Annual Exploration” had been

2Roberts-Wright, Oakley, 55; Beal, Southeastern Idaho, 26.
scheduled for October 17, 1938. To whip up enthusiasm, Brown announced that his paper and the Oakley Chamber of Commerce would contribute money for two $25 awards for the best essays "dealing with the proposed City of Rocks National Monument" and "the proposed South Side Extension Homesteads."\(^\text{14}\)

One might ask what homesteads had to do with the establishment of a national monument at City of Rocks or the erection of a marker for the fabled "Alma Massacre." The answer was everything, as Brown's articles and editorials indicated. In a report of September 29, the editor described the South Side irrigation project:

> The building of hold-over storage space to impound the millions of acre feet of water which in damp years go to waste over Milner dam—the building of this hold-over storage space would make possible the development of the proposed SOUTH SIDE EXTENSION HOMESTEADS. If water were provided, this tract of 150,000 acres, situated in Cassia and Twin Falls counties, would offer the finest homesteads in America. The SOUTH SIDE EXTENSION would combine with the Twin Falls and Minidoka projects to form the greatest body of irrigated land on earth.

Brown further explained that the proposed development met all the "conditions of an irrigator's dream." The slope of the land was steep enough to ensure good drainage but "not enough to cause the water to waste." The soil, twenty feet deep, would not sour and would require "just a fraction of the quantity used on most of the irrigated tracts of Idaho." And the project was close to "the finest recreational areas of Idaho."

In the midst of his campaign to sell the merits of the South Side Extension, Brown was forced to blast the Burley Chamber of Commerce. That body was to choose two representatives to the National Reclamation Association at Reno, Nevada, October 11-13—there to promote a North Side extension project to be irrigated by water from storage dams on Snake River. This perfidy on the part of the Burley people Brown denounced "after several trips to the dictionary." He insisted that 90 percent of the residents of Cassia County favored the South Side project and not one north of the Snake River, where the "stingy" land was not fit for farming at all.

Such defensive arguments and polemics for the South Side homestead lands were nearly always accompanied by articles concerned with the City of Rocks and the "Fight for [the] National Monument." The two supported each other and soon a third, although lesser, project became a part of the promotional fervor to make the town of Oakley the "Queen City of the West." But the raising of a monument to commemorate the "Alma Massacre" was the inspiration of another local newspaper editor, Byrd Trego of the *Daily Bulletin*, at Blackfoot, Idaho. Trego, as publisher of the *Bulletin*, soon established a reputation for his interest in the pioneer history of southeastern Idaho. His newspaper articles under the title "Fifty Years of Local History" were soon being quoted by other more professional historians.\(^\text{15}\)

Trego joined the crusade to make the City of Rocks a national monument by agreeing to serve on the Advisory Council. In mid-September of 1938, he visited Oakley as a guest of the Chamber of Commerce, explored the City of Rocks, and spoke at a public meeting in the Oakley High School. He urged the citizens of the town to publicize the City of Rocks as a drawing card for tourist trade to the area. Charles Brown ended his report of the speech...
by noting that Trego intended to write a series of newspaper articles "on non-political" subjects."

In his thank-you note to Brown for the favors shown during his visit to Oakley, Trego announced, "I want to get my story of City of Rocks and the battle at Almo Creek written in time to publish before October 17, so it will arouse greater interest in attending the event." He then described his visit at Twin Falls with W. E. Johnston, who had visited the site of the Almo Massacre in 1868 and had described in some detail the massacre that had taken place seven years earlier. Johnston's description followed very closely his original account given to Walgamott in that author's 1927 and 1936 versions of the story. The Blackfoot editor ended his letter by suggesting that Johnston be appointed to "stake the locations" of the rifle pits dug by the emigrants beneath their wagons during the last stages of the fight: "He is the only one who can do it." Finally, Trego urged that the Almo shrine be marked before October 17 so guides could "be there to point out and explain the whole unhappy event."

In the same issue of his paper in which Trego's letter appeared, Charles Brown explained that the Oakley Chamber of Commerce had made arrangements for Johnston to visit Almo Creek to set up appropriate markers. The editor added, W. E. Johnston was a young lad [then 14 years of age and 91 in 1938] living at North Ogden, Utah, at the time of the Battle of Almo Creek. He recalls seeing Native Americans (who had taken part in the battle) go by his home. He came to Almo a few years after the tragic occurrence, and still remembers details as to trenches.

In a series of seven articles published in the Daily Bulletin from October 1 to 11, Trego fulfilled his promise to Brown and described in imaginative detail the reputed "Almo Massacre." He devoted his first chapter to a description of the City of Rocks and the second to a brief overview of the "battle of Almo," which he compared to Custer's Last Stand and the Battle of the Alamo in Texas. In Chapter III, Trego followed the mythical emigrant party from the Missouri River to Almo Creek, although he admitted knowing little of the journey across the Plains because "who they were, what the party was called or who were their leaders is all a blank so far as the writer can learn." He spent a major part of that chapter explaining how the white emigrants committed numerous "outrages" against the Native American tribes through whose homelands they traveled by firing indiscriminately at various tribesmen. The tribal leaders of these Native American nations decided to join their forces in retaliation and to wipe out the entire party of 300 men, women and children.

Trego's creative authorship expanded the original story related by Walgamott with further details about the role played by W. E. (Eddy) Johnston. In Chapter V, the Blackfoot editor explained that Eddy had obtained much of his information about the Almo affair from his Bannock Indian friend, Winecus, who had participated in the massacre when only sixteen years of age. Winecus refused to give Eddy Johnston any detailed description of the Almo engagement until both men were middle-aged. By that time disclosures had revealed how Colonel Patrick E. Connor's California Volunteers had, on January 29, 1863, slaughtered Shoshoni men, women, and children at Bear River near Preston, Idaho. Winecus thus felt free to express himself about Almo because, Trego explained, "time had toned down the differences and the liabilities of anything being revived and done about it." The editor also thought that Northwestern Shoshoni Chief Pocatello of notorious fame had "probably participated in the battle at Almo."

Trego's final two chapters dealt with the details of the Almo Massacre. Again, he followed closely the Walgamott narrative but with some wild imaginative differences. According to Trego, "Tribesmen from the Cheyennes, the Utes, the Shoshones, the Bannocks, the Plutes, the Cayuses, and the Owyhees" were involved in attacking the emigrant party. Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of western Native American tribes would recognize this unlikely combination as nonsense. Added the Blackfoot editor: "It seemed to the emigrants that the whole country had suddenly turned into Indians and they were all yelling, riding, shooting and ducking."

As one compares today the accounts written by Walgamott and Trego, their fictional stories display excellent writing skills on the part of both authors, although the latter writer allowed his inventive ability freer range in adding fantasy minutia. For example, Trego tells us the beleaguered travelers
dug two wells, one thirty feet deep, the other ninety; the final attack occurred on the fourth day; and all 300 victims were buried in the two wells. There were no survivors, with the possible exception of one man who escaped to Brigham City to return with a body of Mormon "Minute Men." They "buried the dead in the dry wells."\(^{21}\)

Having met his commitment to tell his version of the Alma Creek story, Trego now looked forward to joining with Charles Brown and other Oakley leaders in the First Annual Exploration of the City of Rocks. Brown announced on October 6 that "dedication exercises for a monument marking the Battle of Almo will be held in Almo the morning of 'exploration' day, October 17." The ceremonies were scheduled to be completed in the morning so that all could join the City of Rocks visit in the afternoon. The citizens of Almo hoped that Governor Barzill W. Clark would speak at the unveiling of their monument. The City of Rocks program was set to begin at 2:30 p.m. with a banquet to be held at 7:00 p.m. in Oakley followed by a dance at Rainbow Hall. Four thousand letters had been sent out to prominent people throughout the western states inviting their participation.\(^{12}\)

Throughout the hullabaloo for City of Rocks, the Almo Massacre, and an expanded tourist trade, the Oakley people certainly did not lessen their efforts in behalf of the South Side Extension irrigation project. In fact, as today's reader follows the enthusiastic articles in the Oakley Herald of September and October, 1938, it soon becomes obvious that the inauguration and completion of the homestead reclamation extension was the principal reason for the excitement. The establishment of the City of Rocks as a national monument, important as it might have been to the farmers of the Oakley area, nevertheless took second place behind the wish for development of the 150,000 acres of arid land north of the town. The Almo Massacre came in a distant third, just an additional reason for attracting public attention to the South Side Extension and the City of Rocks.\(^{26}\)

To counter any support for an irrigation project north of Snake River, editor Brown conducted a poll of his readers. The balloting revealed that 88 1/2 percent of the people preferred the "SOUTH SIDE EXTENSION" over any "NORTH SIDE EXTENSION." In recognition of the fact that most of the people of the region were members of the Mormon Church, Brown was able to get a statement from D. R. Langlois, president of the Burley Stake of the L.D.S. Church, "I think like The Herald that it is a betrayal of the interests of this community to work for the North Side interests when such a fine body of land lies undeveloped at our very door."\(^{23}\)

When the great day arrived for the "invasion" of the City of Rocks, Mother Nature sent a storm of rain and snow to the area that considerably reduced the crowd from the 5,000 Brown had enthusiastically expected. Senator William E. Borah sent his regrets, but Senator James P. Pope and Governor Clark were in attendance as were other notables, including the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park and a representative from the Union Pacific Railroad. Pope spoke in favor of national monument status for the City of Rocks and "also stated that it is folly to permit the tract of 150,000 acres of rich land north of Oakley to remain undeveloped." Governor Clark also "stated that he would continue to work for the development of the 150,000 acres of sagebrush land north of Oakley." These two politicians recognized the chief purpose of the celebration.\(^{25}\)

Other participants did make the City of Rocks the main attraction while the Almo Massacre was never even mentioned by Brown in his full-page description of the day's events. On an inside page, there was a brief account by reporter "Jack Tooth and His Donkey" of their "exploration" of the City of Rocks. The journalist concluded his article by writing that he then went "on to Almo where a photograph was taken of the monument. . . ." The Sons and Daughters of Idaho Pioneers apparently dedicated their marker to the fabled massacre with a much smaller crowd in attendance than that which congregated at the Silent City.\(^{24}\)

O\over FIFTY YEARS after the events at Oakley, what has happened to the three projects advanced by its citizens to develop agriculture and tourism for the area? While World War II interrupted the grand design for the South Side Extension, by 1948...
wells were being dug to tap underground sources instead of surface water from the Snake River. A 1989 report by the United States Geological Survey revealed at least 500 active wells in the Oakley Fan area in western Cassia and northeastern Twin Falls counties. Ironically, the Oakley Fan region extends north from its apex at that town to encompass much of what, in 1938, were called the South Side Extension and the North Side Extension projects. The fears of Charles Brown that people from north of the Snake would appropriate water that rightfully belonged to Oakley people were dissipated as both regions tapped into the mighty aquifer under their feet. The new problem as noted by hydrologists was that during the 1945-1979 period, “subsurface outflow declined from 327,000 acre-feet per year to 215,000 acre-feet per year.” Recent efforts have been made to try to recharge artificially the aquifers in the Oakley area.18

The City of Rocks remained unrecognized until 1988, when the National Park Service established the area as “The City of Rocks National Reserve.” The new memorial is administered from the Twin Falls office of the National Park Service.

As for the never-happened “Almo Massacre,” it is still marked by the monument erected in Almo village in 1938. The dedication ceremony was just a small part of Oakley’s effort to obtain financial help for the South Side Extension and to acquire national monument status for the City of Rocks.

To the Sons and Daughters of Idaho Pioneers, the marker carried much more significance. Byrd Trego’s narrative of the fabled event seems to have outlived the version by Walgamott—at least according to the Daughters of Utah Pioneers’ Cassia County Company, whose recent book, *A Pause for Reflection*, bases its account on Trego’s story as told to W. E. Johnston by the Bannock warrior, Winecus.19

What should the people of Almo and the surrounding area do about a historical marker to a non-existent event? One recommendation would be to remove this embarrassment and replace it with a monument commemorating the birthplace of Chief Pocatello, a renowned leader of the Northwestern Shoshoni whose name has been adopted by one of the leading cities of Idaho. Pocatello was born about 1815, a member of the Grouse Creek group of Northwestern Shoshoni, and the village of Almo is a logical and fitting place for a monument to be erected in his memory. It would reflect historical accuracy and would give the citizens of Almo a distinction in which they could express honor and pride.

*"A Pause for Reflection*, 64-66.