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The Legend of the Almo Massacre: Ostensive Action and the Commodification of
Folklore

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Science

in

American Studies

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J. Adam Floyd

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Introduction

The following thesis is based on the role a legend plays in establishing and influencing a sense of identity and reality within a community and area, in this case the legend is of a massacre occurring in Almo, Idaho in the early 1860s. I found this legend of the Almo massacre while looking for an excuse to rock climb in the nearby City of Rocks National Reserve. I explored the Almo legend through interviews, historical documents and books and came to think that the Almo legend played a critical role in defining a sense of local reality for Almo, Idaho, both in the past and present. As time went on and I became more acquainted with the Almo legend and involved with the community, I came to realize the implications of the Almo legend were far more complex than I originally imagined. What follows is a description of both what I found in exploring the Almo legend and what I think it means.

The community of Almo, Idaho, is an interesting mixture of old and new. Almo lies in the southern portion of the state, a mere eight miles from Utah's border and roughly thirty miles from the Nevada border. Roads enter into Almo from the north, south, east and west; however, the main lifeline for both tourists and travelers to reach Almo, and for locals to reach the county seat of Burley, Idaho, is via the road that enters Almo from the north, which was only paved in 2009. The blend of wilderness, ranches and small communities that surrounds Almo is crisscrossed by small dirt roads running in every direction. Today, Almo has two stores that offer basic groceries, but all of the residents must travel at least fifty miles to Burley, Idaho, to reach a grocery store of any size. Because of the isolated geographical nature of the place and the close-knit nature of

the community, Almo exudes a feeling of isolation and instills a sense of self-reliance among its inhabitants. The influence of the Church of Latter Day Saints, or the LDS Church, is evident, and Almo is interconnected with the plethora of surrounding farms and communities through faith, culture, family ties and social events.

The geological formations known as the City of Rocks, which lie just west of Almo, were named by the emigrants on the California Trail who admired the geological formations of granite as they passed through the area. Today, the City of Rocks is known for its beauty, ecology, historical value (mostly relating to the California Trail), and its rock climbing. Visitors to this national reserve are the main reason for the small number of commercial establishments in Almo, many of which offer varied services including car repair, rooms for rent, basic grocery and camping items, and restaurants. Most of the businesses in Almo lie on the road shown in Figure 1, bisecting the town from north to south; the National Park Service (NPS) visitor's center lies several hundred yards south of the post office. Several kinds of visitors frequent the park, from campers to historians to birdwatchers, but especially prevalent are the rock climbers, who tend to be an always present force when the weather allows. While it would seem that local residents always enjoyed the proximity of the City of Rocks, from the 1930s on there were many attempts made by groups of local, regional and statewide people and politicians to get a NPS designation for the City of Rocks, something that was finally accomplished in the late 1980s.

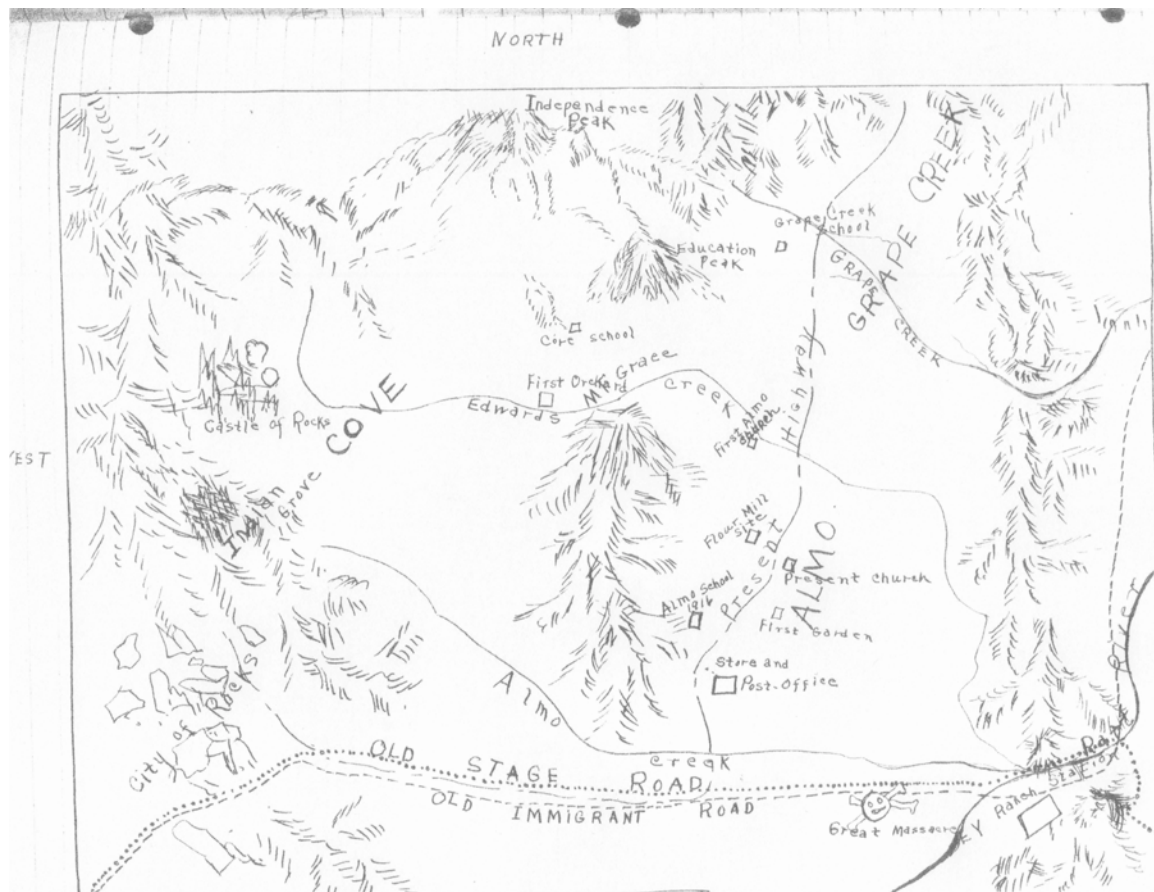


Figure 1. Hand drawn map of Almo area, ca. 1936.

The City of Rocks National Reserve, as created by the U.S. Congress in 1988, comprises over 14,000 acres and encompasses an amalgamation of granite formations including spires, domes, batholiths and boulders. One factor that really sets the town of Almo apart from the other communities in the area is the fact that the majority of the over 100,000 annual visitors who come to the City of Rocks National Reserve enter through the east entrance of the Reserve and pass through Almo on the only existing paved road. While it is possible to enter the City of Rocks National Reserve through entrances on the east or west side, due to the quality of the paved road leading into Almo and the services

offered there, the majority of visitors choose to pass through Almo and thus enter through the east entrance. Almo is also the home of the visitor's center, offices, and maintenance shed for the Reserve.

Brief History of Almo and the Surrounding Area.

Notwithstanding the occasional trapper and the Shoshone and Bannock tribes who frequented the area surrounding present day Almo, the first major white influence in the area came in the form of the California Trail. It is estimated that between 1840 and 1869 close to a quarter of a million emigrants passed through or just beside the City of Rocks on the way westward.¹ Accounts of the westward journey via emigrant journals were short and sweet, often merely noting water, temperature, grazing, and speed conditions to an astonishing, and sometimes boring, degree. The City of Rocks, visible from the Almo area, was a welcome relief and point of interest on the trail, as is noted by the number of journal entries mentioning it, in part because the City of Rocks generally offered some of the last quality water and grazing before a treacherous stretch of the trail, as well as the beauty and city-like appearance of its domes, spires and towers. The City of Rocks was also a place where emigrants left their names, notes, messages for friends coming later, and even inquiries to find spouses, by writing on the rocks with axle grease. Thus some of the most notable formations in the City of Rocks are known today as Register Rock and Camp Rock, which are easily accessible from the road and host numerous emigrant signatures and messages.

The main California Trail route, cutting southwest through the City of Rocks, was

¹ "City of Rocks National Reserve Visitor Center Video," National Park Service (Seattle: 2010.)

joined just south of Pinnacle Pass on the southern boundary of the City of Rocks by the Salt Lake Alternate trail. At the time, Salt Lake City offered a place to conduct major repairs and resupply in the case of faulty planning or an accident on the trail. Before Salt Lake City was founded in 1847, supply and repair possibilities were available at trading posts along the California Trail, but none was as comprehensive as the services Salt Lake City provided. Salt Lake also offered a refuge to wait out the long, cold western winters if the emigrant party was running too late in the season to make the high mountain passes of the Sierras.



Figure 2. The two trails merge within one mile of the City of Rocks. Map courtesy of the NPS.

Permanent settlement in Almo began with homesteaders from Utah moving north, with some of the earliest arriving in the early 1870s into the Raft River Valley. The 1870s and 1880s were a difficult time in Western history, with record droughts and winter snowfall and extreme temperatures plaguing agricultural and livestock interests throughout the Intermountain West. A local website for Almo that gives a short history

of the area noted that due to the harsh winters and droughts, especially in the 1880s, overgrazing became rampant, and that one local ranch that branded 38,000 calves in 1885 branded a mere sixty-eight calves six years later.² Living in the Almo area in its early years was certainly a life filled with work, worry and woe.

How I Found the Almo Legend

My initial goal was to find a topic I could research and possibly make the focus of my thesis while allowing me to spend an ample amount of time camping around and, most importantly, rock climbing on, the beautiful granite formations that lie within the “City.” In the time that followed, however, I spent countless days in Almo and the City of Rocks living, working, and interviewing people, as well as spending countless hours reading letters, books, articles, papers, and even handwritten histories that related to Almo and the surrounding area. I grew to know who was who in town, which dog belonged to which house, and developed a knowledge of the history of the legend that often thwarted my attempts to explain it to others, just as often as it helped. One of the main reasons for focusing on three accounts that I have chosen in this thesis is the fact that through such in depth research I came to learn that I knew so many different versions and initially didn’t want to leave any of them out; finally, however, I realized that not all of them could fit within the confines of this thesis without confusing the very points I wanted to make.

The Almo Legend has led me on a search that granted me the ability to spend a massive amount of time in the area and was probably one of the best decisions that I have

² “Almo Idaho History!,” Almo Creek, accessed February 19, 2011, <http://www.almocreek.com/history/>.

ever made as it allowed me to become intimately acquainted with both the stunning beauty of the area and the wonderful people I have met. I first encountered the legend of the Almo massacre in particular through a paper written by Jay Ward and hosted by the website for Almo, [almoidaho.com](http://www.almoidaho.com). While the paper contains no date, a study of the time line related within the paper places its origin about 1961 or 1962.³ Ward, a visitor to the area, relates an account of the massacre as given to him by the local historian, who in turn is reading from a manuscript by an unknown author. The summarized legend states that a wagon train of emigrants in the area of present day Almo was attacked by a large group of Indians, and, except for a few escaped survivors, all were killed. While I didn't yet understand the complexity and depth that I would find in the legend, as well as its importance within the community, I did like the idea of such a great excuse to do a lot of climbing while I was exploring the significance of the legend.

Once I was able to spend time in the City of Rocks and Almo, I became increasingly interested in the legend, and the graduate folklore courses I had been taking in the past year, from Native American literature to folklore theory and fieldwork, were helping me to hone my attention and research skills. In the fall of 2009, while often spending three to four days of each week in the Almo area camping, hiking and rock climbing the surrounding granite domes and spires, I interviewed several community members who had been introduced to me by the National Park Service staff and spent my time researching the legend at the NPS headquarters as well as the Utah State University library and Special Collections department.

In the spring of 2010 I continued my research and began drafting my thesis. At

³ Jay Ward, "The Almo Massacre," *Almo Idaho*, N.p.: n.p., n.d.
http://www.almoidaho.com/mdb/files/7/library/Histories/1256530351_ALMO%20MASSACRE.pdf

first I theorized that the legend of the Almo massacre both in the past and at present was playing an integral part in both the formation and maintaining of a collective value system that was specific to the community of Almo. Then in the summer of 2010 I gained employment as a seasonal ranger working and living in Almo and the City of Rocks National Reserve. I wanted to take a break from my thesis, relax, read plenty of good books and do a lot more climbing, but I also knew that living in Almo would help to further my understanding of the community and the legend. Working with locals and outsiders as well as observing the interactions occurring within and between the various groups, I gained a greater understanding of the legend and its complex role within the community, which is certainly different from my original hypothesis. I came to find that while the legend of the Almo massacre did play an integral part in both the formation and maintenance of a collective value system that was specific to the community of Almo, among both locals and outsiders the importance of the legend and the perspective associated with the legend became more diverse and dynamic, especially in the last twenty years.

I hope to examine this legend through two sets of folkloric methodology, both of which I found in previous folkloric works that were influential in my research and understanding of the legend of the Almo massacre. While I will examine both of these guidelines in detail later in this thesis, I will present a brief explanation here. The first set of guidelines comes from the work of Bill Ellis and Linda Degh in their investigation of ostensive action, or action or enactment that results from folkloric elements. I first came upon the concept of ostensive action when describing a pattern of enactments centering on the legend that I had noticed to a member of my thesis committee, who identified

them as possibly being ostensive actions. The second methodology is a form of literary analysis as seen in Barre Toelken's article "Folklore and Reality in the American West," which appears in the book *Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures*. In this article, Toelken uses literary analysis to analyze the legend "Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail," which shares a number of similarities with the legend of the Almo massacre.

In my analysis of the Almo legend, three major versions and subsequent ostensive enactments of the legend will appear in chronological progression, from oldest to most recent, to make up the body of this thesis. While there are other ostensive enactments relating to the legend, including a late 1950s radio reenactment which I was unable to procure, these three each seem to embody their time period and its subsequent value system best. Each version and subsequent enactment builds upon the previous enactment and each can be seen as succinctly befitting and expressing the cultural values and attitudes of the community of Almo and surrounding communities of the time period in which it is enacted. Along with a description of the three enactments, each section will include research on various topics such as Native American and emigrant relations, which will help to provide context for the legend and the cultural value systems that it reflects.

Summary of the Legend

The legend of the Almo massacre, by selecting the details shared by the majority of the different versions, can be summarized as follows. According to the legend, between 1859 and 1862, an emigrant wagon train some 300 people strong and consisting of about sixty wagons was traveling west on the California Trail. Just before reaching the

City of Rocks in southern Idaho, the wagon train was attacked by a massive group of Indians. The wagons were circled and the livestock were brought inside the corral of wagons. Having carefully planned the attack, the Indians cut the emigrants off from their water supply and settled in for a siege. After several days, and with their water supply dwindling, the emigrants had dug one or several deep wells, none of which yielded water.

The legend states that several emigrants, usually between two and five, escaped by crawling through the sagebrush in the night. These eventually reached a ranch, or other settlements in Utah, and help was sent in the form of the U.S. military or a local militia. All of the emigrants were dead and the wagons and livestock stolen or looted by the time the rescue party reached the scene. The bodies of the emigrants were buried in the dry wells that had been dug by the emigrants while under siege.

There exist a host of variations relating to this legend, but these are the characteristics the majority of the variations share. Regardless of the version, initially both the local population and all of the early written histories about the area apparently believed this legend to be true, leading it to be commemorated by a large concrete monument in Almo, Idaho, erected by the Sons and Daughters of Idaho Pioneers in 1938 (see Fig. 3). Today, the most prominent markers in the town of Almo are the granite sign at the visitor's center for the City of Rocks National Reserve and the concrete memorial in the shape of Idaho that commemorates the legend of the Almo massacre. The monument sits in the heart of the town, directly across from the one-room schoolhouse and the Tracy General Store, which was founded in 1895. The monument still stands today and states, "Almo, Idaho, dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives in a most horrible Indian massacre, 1861. Three hundred immigrants west bound, only five

escaped. Erected by S & D of Idaho Pioneers 1938.”

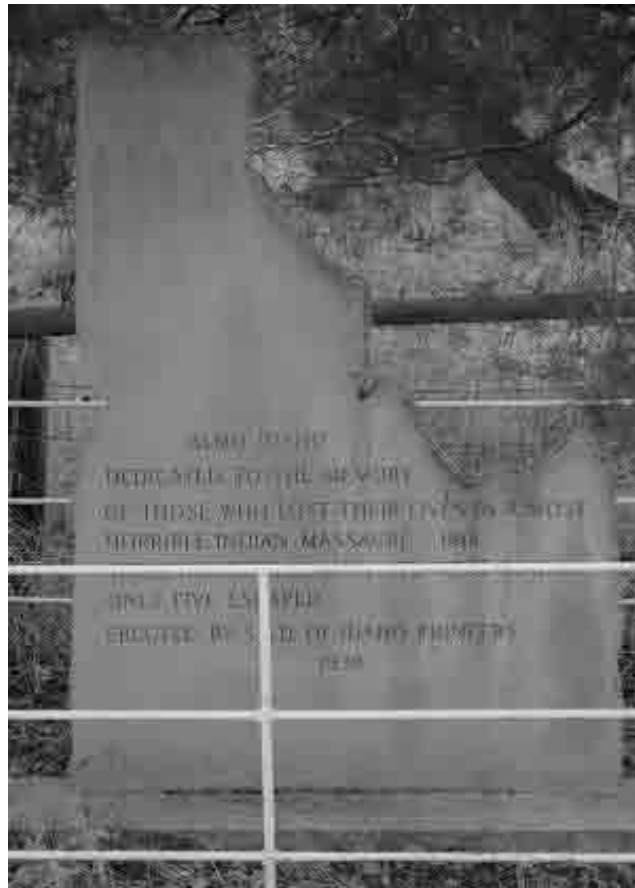


Figure 3. Photo by author.

Ostensive Action and Legendry

Jan Brunvard in his book *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* discusses the functions that folklore and legends play in society in general. Brunvard describes that passing on information orally, from one person to the next, is the core of folklore and that “In this stream of unselfconscious oral tradition the information that acquires a clear story line is called *narrative folklore*, and those stories

alleged to be true are *legends*.”⁴ I would contend that just as folklore in general adapts to the ever-changing world and culture around it, so especially do legends and the way in which people draw meaning from and interact with them. Brunvard, when discussing the basic principles of legends, notes that a legend often has certain “stable” elements such as it is continually told, often within a common group, and that it has recognizable patterns and motifs. He goes on to say,

The corollary of this rule of stability in oral tradition is that all items of folklore, while retaining a fixed central core, are constantly changing as they are transmitted, so as to create countless “variants” differing in detail, style and performance technique. Folklore, in short, consists of oral tradition in variants.⁵

I believe that in analyzing the legend of the Almo massacre the importance of variation can be focused on two major elements when it comes to noting what meaning the legend conveys to the community: first, when it was told and to whom; and second, how it was enacted. Forms of enactment in the Almo legend range from telling the legend, to constructing the monument, to children's games deriving from the legend, and even reenactments of the massacre itself. In this analysis of the Almo legend I will focus on three enactments that I believe best display the core values it reflected and how the legend functioned differently through time and for different people. The first enactment was a group of children playing in earthen works attributed to the legend, the second was an amateur historian leading various groups of tourists in a string of cars imitating a wagon train and presenting to them the legend of the Almo massacre, and the third was a historical reenactment of an Indian attack that was similar to the legend of the Almo massacre.

⁴ Jan Brunvard, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (New York: W Norton and Company, 1981), 1.

⁵ Brunvard, 3.

Brunvard recognizes that folklore, unlike fields like history, does not hold that historical validity is the only important element in regards to oral traditions like legends, and that “Legend study is the most revealing area of such research because the stories that people believe to be true hold an important place in their worldview. ‘If it’s true, it’s important’ is an axiom to be trusted, whether the lore really *is* true or not.”⁶ It is my belief that it is not the historical validity of a legend that gives it its importance within the community but rather how, when, and by whom it is told or enacted. In the first chapter of his book, *Aliens, Ghosts and Cults: Legends We Live*, Bill Ellis states that “Legends more than any other form of oral discourse are subject to communal composition and performance, and the specific interests of one group, which determine to a large extent the text being narrated.”⁷ The telling of a legend signifies that what is being said has value; if not, it would not be told. That value can range from merely entertainment to reinforcement of shared or individual ideas and values. Ellis notes that the folklorist Daniel R. Barnes finds that in the telling of legends and particularly urban legends part of the function is that both the teller and listeners are generally forced into the “role of interpreters” and discussion which touches on the meanings of the folklore can often follow the telling of a legend or urban legend; this would seem significant when examining the Almo legend as participants should also be expected to reinforce the core values the legend represents with discussions as well.⁸

Both Linda Degh, especially as noted in her 1983 article “Does the Word ‘Dog’ Bite,” and Bill Ellis have worked extensively with the principle of ostension. While both

⁶ Brunvard, 2.

⁷ Bill Ellis, *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 9.

⁸ Ellis, 89.

Dégh and Ellis have developed a complex and meaningful conception of ostension, including identifying several highly specific forms, in analyzing the Alamo massacre I believe that the most pertinent form of ostension applied to this legend is simply what can be termed “ostensive-action.”⁹ A simple definition of ostension by Bill Ellis is “*Ostension* proper involves the literal acting out of a legend” but that “often what we see is some form of action that suggests the legend but does not fully enact it.”¹⁰ Ostensive action, for the sake of this thesis, can be roughly defined as engaging in a form of action that closely resembles, or is influenced by, a predating legend. Ellis poses a wonderful albeit gruesome example as it relates to Halloween: urban legends describing the handing out of Halloween candy that were purposefully tainted predate the actual finding of such candy.¹¹ Upon hearing the urban legend, some children tainted their own candy in order to create a stir in the community and some sinister parents believed the urban legend would be an adequate cover for them to hurt their own children by mimicking the action described in the urban legend. Similarly, when urban legends about satanists circulated, teenagers would often go out and imitate these urban legends by leaving scenes that matched urban legends in order to cause a stir with the community and especially, it seems, local law enforcement.

In his chapter “Ostension as Folk Drama,” Ellis cites an example of mostly urban campers who “voluntarily give up modern comforts to live for a while in an imaginative re-creation of the ‘frontier’ world . . . by means of which the sense of a single community

⁹ Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, “Does the Word ‘Dog’ Bite? Ostensive Action: A Means of Legend-Telling,” *Journal of Folklore Research*. Vol. 20, No. 1 (May, 1983), pp. 22.

¹⁰ Ellis, 162.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

is formed, united against the real discomforts and reputed dangers of 'the woods.'"¹² I think that just like such ostensive action helps campers to form a "sense of single community," ostensive behavior relating to the legend helps to reinvigorate Almo's community identity by expounding on the dangers and hardships faced by previous people in the same geographic place, as well as their ability to survive in that place. Ellis cites the role ostensive action often takes in a ritual practice called legend-tripping.¹³ By engaging in legend-trips, adolescents can help to explore and define the world around them. Often legends and urban legends act as a type of fodder to build a background for the legend-trip, such as the need to investigate somewhere that is considered scary, supernatural or both. While I will discuss legend-trips and ostension in more detail in the next section, I feel that both Alice Jane Durfee Rice in the first section, and Newell Dayley in the second engage in a form of legend-tripping. The final enactment that I focus on, however, takes the form of what Ellis would call "high drama;" whereas the first two enactments involve a similar level of engagement from everyone involved, I would contend that the third enactment as organized by Al Dawson involves what Ellis describes as several "complex scripted dramas involving multiple rehearsed incidents and roles" where there is a defined separation between spectators and actors.¹⁴

Barre Toelken, like Brunvard, notes that often the perception of truth in a legend can be an indicator of its importance as he ascertains that the legend of the Almo massacre is "an interesting example of culturally created truth."¹⁵ I found the method of

¹² Ellis, *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults*, 165.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁵ Barre Toelken, "'Folklore and Reality in the American West,'" in *Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures*, ed. Barbara Allen and Thomas J. Schlereth (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 21.

literary analysis Toelken uses in his article “Folklore and Reality in the American West” to analyze the legend of “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” well fitted to the legend of the Almo massacre, as both legends take place during the Oregon and California Trails and involve issues and fears resulting from emigrant and Native American interactions during the same time period. Toelken also notes,

The legends and lies I have referred to here are factually problematic only on the most superficial level; seen more fully in their operational cultural contexts, they function the way good imagery and poetic diction do in literature generally: to convey and dramatize more fully those abstract matters which cannot be well articulated and reexperienced in any other way.¹⁶

Although I will more fully develop the methodology of literary analysis that I will be using to analyze the legend of the Almo massacre in the next section, it is worth noting that I believe that Toelken’s particular perspective regarding legends and their interpretation as seen in his article “Folklore and Reality in the American West” is paramount in framing my understanding of legend and its functions. I found that both Toelken’s style of literary analysis and the questions he asked in his analysis of “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” to be insightful and relevant when used in my analysis of the legend of the Almo massacre. A more complete explanation of his methods and findings as well as my own are included in the next section of this thesis. In analyzing the three enactments that follow here in chronological order, one is able to see the way in which the legend of the Almo massacre reflected the collective value system and needs of the various communities it was enacted by at the particular time it was enacted.

¹⁶ Ibid, 26.

Enactment One : Alice Jane Durfee Rice

Children's Games and Collective Cultural Values

The first of the three ostensive actions that I will present is an account of an ostensive enactment in the form of children playing. This enactment is taken from an account by Alice Jane Durfee Rice, whose family moved to the Almo area in the 1880s when Rice was nine; I found the transcript of the interview that includes her accounts on a website for the town, of Almo, almoidaho.com.¹⁷ I believe this account to be a transcribed interview, as it includes notes of tape number and side number, but I am unsure of exactly who recorded it, when it was recorded and why they are missing from the written transcription. While no date is available for when the interview occurred, the last date mentioned in the interview is 1943, so I am assuming that this interview transpired in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Rice mentions in the interview that she has 37 grandchildren and 53 great grandchildren, and that she was born in 1872. Burial records show that she died in Almo in 1973.¹⁸

The transcript that includes Rice's account is rather large, encompassing seventeen single spaced pages. In her interview, Rice discusses a plethora of various

¹⁷ Since I first viewed the website, the websites domain has expired making the documents unavailable to the public, I do, however, have a copy.

¹⁸ "Alice Jane Durfee Rice," *Wake Family History*, Accessed February 04, 2011.
<http://www.xmission.com/~wake/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=I592&tree=wake>.

experiences and accounts of events, which seems to be comprised of several topics, the most voluminous two being discussion of LDS community, events and ideas, and specific interactions of her or the community with the local Native American population. Rice presents a brief account of the Almo legend as she knew it before she mentions how she and her playmates used to play on the earthworks left from the legendary massacre. Her version of the legend is actually short as many go and is presented here in its full form because the version is one of the more unique versions that I have come across in my research. My analysis of her enactment will discuss why I feel it is so unique. I am also presenting the text as close to the original as possible to avoid interrupting the flow, and only interrupting to clarify meaning where necessary.

The Indians were hid up in the City of Rocks and they could watch the emigrant road and they saw an emigrant [wagon] train riding along on the emigrant road and they sent their braves down on the Almo Creek so they [the emigrants] couldn't camp close to that. And they had to camp out on the flat and the Indians were almost surrounding them and they went to building embankments around to protect themselves. They could have whipped the Indians but they couldn't get to the creek to get water and they had plenty of food and the rest of the Indians came down and they surrounded them all around and they [the emigrants] tried to dig wells but they was watched to closely and the Indians every time they would start to dig wells they would shoot at them with arrows. So they got so thirsty they had to come out and try to fight their way through and so the Indians massacred the whole train of immigrants but some of the men volunteered to go for help. Some went toward Yost [a small community ten miles south] and others toward the City of Rocks. And they were all caught and killed. There was one man and his son and his wife and he was a young man not long married and he put his little son on his back and told him to cling tight and to keep still. He and his wife crawled toward where most of the Indians were and they got away and spread the alarm and when the soldiers came, when they got here they didn't find a thing except charred wagons and the tongues of the wagons and the Indians had gone and all the emigrant train was either massacred or some taken prisoners. They didn't know what happened to all of them of course. They didn't find many bodies and they would be mostly men. They captured all the rest and took them with them. Years after when we came here why the embankments were still there where they had built to protect themselves. I as a girl used to go down there on horseback and run around and around there on that bank and then get down in the pit and pretend the Indians was after us and we would get so frightened we would get on our horses and scoot for home. The banks were still there then and was taken up after that by two or three men and they plowed it over and they found wagon tongues, and one or two tomahawks that was there, they are still finding little pieces of iron when they plow

there. We came here in 1880 my father came here in 1879 and bought a place - John Stines, he [Rice's father] was working for a gentleman and he bought his place and there was about 10 families when we first moved here. Others soon came.¹⁹

It would seem that Rice is engaged in a form of ostensive enactment, a legend-trip, by playing and imagining that “they” (I am assuming this to be her and other children) were being attacked by the Indians while taking refuge in embankments that were thought to have been remnants from the Almo massacre. In the entry for legend-trip in *American Folklore: an Encyclopedia* Bill Ellis describes the legend trip as “A ritual; teenagers hear a legend about uncanny events said to occur at a particular spot, then visit the site to test the legend.”²⁰ While Ellis focuses on urban legends, often describing the legend-trip as containing automobiles, horror stories and what may be seen as inappropriate behavior for teenagers, he believes that legend-trips have a three part structure. First, members go to the supposed location of the legend, second, “members of the group will dare each other to act out the part of the legend said to put them into danger,” and third, the members will discuss what their perceptions are of what really happened.²¹ While Rice and her playmates don’t have cars, they do have the “Old West” equivalent, horses, and from her description it would seem that the activity she describes does fulfill at least two of the three parts as Ellis describes them. First they journey to the site of the legend, and secondly they would imagine the “Indians was after us” thus putting themselves into “danger” and then getting frightened enough to flee on horseback

¹⁹ Alice Jane Durfee Rice, “A History of Alice Jane Durfee Rice,” *Almo Idaho*, N.p.: n.d. 16.
http://www.almoidaho.com/mdb/files/7/library/Histories/1256525393_RICE,%20ALICE%20JANE%20DURFEE%20HISTORY.pdf. Website currently down due to expired domain.

²⁰ Ed. Jan Brunvard, *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 439-440.

²¹ *Ibid*, 339-440.

for home.²² It is highly possible that even though it wasn't mentioned in the interview Rice and her companions would have then shared their experiences, therefore completing all three parts.

Like many of the variations of the legend, Rice's version includes the immigrants digging a well and constructing "embankments." By enacting the legend on a site that suggests the validity and scale of the legend, I contend that Rice was able to gain a sense of connection and understanding of the place and time in which she lived, as well as past experiences of that place. While an important part of the legend-trip is establishing a sense of believability regarding the legends associated with legend-tripping, I would contend that as the Almo legend was considered to be historically accurate in Rice's childhood, the implications of enacting the legend would carry even more weight than a legend-trip in which there is doubt about the legend-trip's authenticity. Children's imaginations play a highly active part in constructing their worldviews, and playing "cowboys and Indians" in embankments actually thought to be from an Indian attack could only heighten the sense of fear and excitement associated with the game and the reality of the past.

When Rice first moved to Almo, there were only ten or so families living there. Almo lies in a beautiful valley with juniper-covered mountains rising to the east and west, but water is a precious commodity and, even with modern technology, raising crops and livestock requires a great deal of effort and work. In Rice's day, Almo must have been a hard and work-filled existence as the first families tried to succeed in a new and remote outpost. Just as Barre Toelken, in his article "Folklore and Reality in the American West," notes that often the folklore of the West displays the knowledge of the

²² Rice, 16.

difficulties that made up daily life rather than the romanticized idea of plentiful bounty, and that when looking at the songs of children who had grown up the pioneer West, “there is a distinct note of irony, sarcasm, and bitterness,” I would contend that the folklore of Rice and her companions might reflect the harsh and sometimes unforgiving nature of the world surrounding them.²³ Rice’s childhood would have corresponded with an era of drought, harsh winters, and terrible overgrazing that, as I mentioned in my introduction, began in the mid 1880s. In Jay Ward’s paper, “The Almo Massacre,” one local, Bert Tracy, in describing how the town seems to neither grow nor shrink, told the joke, “If you wear out a pair of shoes you can’t make enough to buy another pair so you can get away.”²⁴ Just as Barre Toelken notes that folklore is often reflective of the harsh nature of emigration and settlement in the West, so it seems Bert Tracy’s joke hints at the struggle associated with life in Almo.²⁵

Emigrant and Native American Interactions

Not only did Rice grow up in a West that required a great deal of work and effort, it was also still a West with an active local Native American population. Much of Rice’s interview discusses those interactions, both positive and negative, and I believe it is worthwhile to place these within the context of other emigrant and Native American interactions and how they came to be broadcast and understood among settlers in the West. It is worth noting that the emigrants who traveled west represented their interactions with Native Americans on the California and Oregon trail in a peculiar way.

²³ Toelken, 17.

²⁴ Ward.

²⁵ Toelken, 17.

Journals and diaries from emigrants note interactions with Native Americans regularly; however, they are often short accounts and accompanied by a lack of detail as compared with notes regarding things like distance traveled, location of water sources, and grass quality and quantity. However, when said emigrants wrote letters and memoirs and books about their journeys, Native American interactions began to appear much more often. John Unruh, in his book *The Plains Across*, contends that this discrepancy is because writers generally want to please their audience by presenting them with things they will be interested in; hence the number of Native American encounters is rendered more often and with more detail in writings intended for others rather than personal accounts like diaries and journals.²⁶ I would believe this to be true in regards to oral interviews as well and could imagine that peaceful and polite interactions between locals in Almo and any Native Americans in the area, or descriptions of daily life, would be less likely to come up in an interview, compared to a more interesting story involving conflict and tension between the settlers and Native Americans.

The information circulated during the time span surrounding the Oregon and California trails regarding the Native American population, usually in the form of guidebooks and leaflets, was also highly diverse, contradictory and often confusing. Some guide books for emigrants planning to take the Oregon and California trails suggested hiring Indian guides to help find the way, Indian pilots to cross goods over treacherous rivers, as well as touting the benefits of trading and acting sensibly with the native population.²⁷ On the other hand, leaflets circulated among departing wagon trains told terrible tales of woe and hardship to emigrants who didn't "put the Indians in their

²⁶ John Unruh, *The Plains Across* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 156.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

place.”²⁸ Emigrants were often so jumpy from reading and hearing of such incidents that imagined Indian attacks often led to constant panics, generally at the beginning of the journey. Some of these panics led to emigrants shooting others in their own parties, other parties, livestock, wildlife, and even ominous looking trees and bushes. One emigrant’s journal noted that when they first started on the trail, youths and scouts would repeatedly come storming back into camp claiming an Indian attack was imminent, or in progress, which would then throw the whole wagon train into a panic. One wagon train after an abundance of terrifying false alarms at the beginning of their journey west felt the best way to combat their unrealistic fear was with humor, as the greeting amongst them became “An Indian Battle! and the whites victorious!”²⁹ In fact, Unruh would even state that noting the “Indian threat” became an almost required part of the emigrant story of the Oregon and California trails.³⁰

It would seem that for Rice the legend of the Almo massacre would be even more important and influential than it would be for later generations of Almo. As a child Rice was still living in the “Wild West” where the local stage coach was robbed for its gold shipment and locals had regular interactions with their Native American neighbors, some positive and some not. It is important to remember that the collective value system in which Native Americans were seen as inferior was common in the western community, and legends such as the Almo massacre, by presenting the Native Americans as sneaky and fighting unfairly, helped to validate this mentality. Twice in the transcript Rice presents a story that her mother would tell her about growing up in Ogden, once mentioned as her favorite story her mother told and again at the end of transcript where

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 176.

³⁰ Ibid., 177.

Rice introduces the story by saying, “My faith promoting experiences have been many times enriched by stories my Mother [sic] told me of which the following is one.”³¹ In this story an “old” Native American Chief, Little Soldier, approaches her parents’ homestead to complain about the treatment of the Native Americans by the settlers:

Little Soldier came into their [Rice’s parents’] presence that night and he said he felt very bad in here (indicating his chest). He said that he and his people were nothing more than dirt under the feet of the white men; that they were treated like dogs and he was complaining bitterly with respect to the attitude of the whites towards his people. He said they had taken their guns and maybe soon they would starve; that papoose heap hungry. They tried to explain to him that it was their own fault, that if they would cease their trouble-making with the settlers that he knew would, [sic] as it was their policy, treat them right and to be kind to them. [sic] All at once the Mother of this family (my grandmother) had the spirit of the occasion come upon her and she arose and by virtue of the gift of tongues which came to her she spoke to Little Soldier in the Shoshone tongue. She explained to him something with respect to his people and his ancestors. She told him in simple language of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and if they would be faithful and honor God and keep his commandments that they would yet become a white and delightsome people. He pushed up (Mother’s) brother’s sleeve and said:

‘Indian some day like that white. She no talk, Great Spirit talk through her.’ They asked him what Grandmother said. He said she told him that his people came across the Great waters, that through disobedience they became dark, that a boy was told where a book was hidden in a hill that told about his people. He said ‘Me feel good.’ The power of the utterance had such influence upon the old Chief that he shook hands with all of them and took his departure promising that he would do his best to avoid trouble between his people and the settlers in the future.”³²

In Rice’s account of this interaction with local Native Americans, we are presented with not only a chief, the noblest of an inferior group who is considered culturally inferior, but one who also admits that he himself is the source of the conflict and, further, that he is spiritually inferior to the emigrants, who are chosen by God. This passage presents an ideology that seems to be manifest in the legend of the Almo massacre, which paints the Native Americans as inferior, both culturally and spiritually, as well as suggesting that

³¹ Rice, 16.

³² Ibid., 17.

the Native Americans' own actions are at the root of their ill treatment by the settlers. While I am not, nor do I claim to be, an expert on LDS religious traditions, it would also seem that the particular doctrine presented in Rice's account also helps to portray the Native Americans as solely responsible for their being inferior, because "through disobedience they became dark."³³ Thus it is no fault of the settlers that they are "forced" to mistreat or displace the Native Americans, but rather it is the Native Americans' own faults, both in the past and in the present. Barre Toelken notes that in "Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail" the Native American chief is portrayed as "the aggressive party, moving into the white camp and potentially intruding on the integrity of a white family, even though historically it was the whites moving into Indian territory and intruding on Indian social structure – intimations of guilt projected as blame."³⁴ Here the LDS theology of the time allows Rice's family to remove the guilt associated with the maltreatment of the Native Americans and place the blame for their maltreatment and perceived inferiority on not only the actions of Little Soldier and his tribe, but on their ancestors as well. It would seem that the legend of the Almo massacre has even more relevance for early residents like Rice, as opposed to later generations, because of their regular interactions with the local Native American community.

Selective History and Collective Reality

Clyde A. Milner II in his 1987 article "The Shared Memory of Montana Pioneers" discusses in depth how emigrants to early Montana produced two histories, one of boredom and relatively peaceful meetings with Indians in their journey to and early days

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Toelken, 20.

in Montana, and their later writings for others which highlighted the constant vigilance and action required to combat the threat posed by Indians. The main account discussed by Milner is taken from the journals and later memoir of Harriet Sanders, an early emigrant and eventually prominent woman in Montana politics and social circles. I would contend that by studying the experience of Sanders, someone who presented her experience in writing first for herself, and then later writing a separate account for the public that deals with the same time period and some of the same subject matter as the Almo massacre, there is the ability to gain a greater perspective into the overall creation of such a narrative in general, as well as the Almo massacre in particular. In Sanders' journal, there is not a single journal entry that related to a situation involving Native American conflict; there is, however, an entry in her journal that discusses an Indian saving an emigrant woman who was being swept away by the Snake River. Yet, when it came time to write her memoir in 1897, thirty-four years after she arrived in Montana, numerous Indian conflicts are noted, and the event at the Snake River, which she wrote about at length in her journal and called the "narrowest escape that we had thus far experienced" is never mentioned.³⁵ This concept seems particularly valuable when examining the Almo massacre, as there were several Indian attacks in the area during the years of the California Trail, but none as largely scaled as that suggested by the legend with its over 300 emigrants slaughtered. It is also worth noting that early residents like Rice had regular interactions with the local Native American community, not all of which were pleasant. It does seem that Rice focuses only on negative interactions, and I would contend that highlighting negative interactions with Native Americans like the legend of

³⁵ Clyde A. Milner II, "The Shared Memory of Montana's Pioneers," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 37, no. 1 (Winter 1987), 8.

the Almo massacre not only provides the listener with the “quintessential” pioneer experience but also provided a sense of racial and moral superiority among settlers and their ancestors that allowed them to simplify the complex settler and Native American relationship and validate the actions of settlers in relation to Native Americans.

While it might seem outrageous that such incongruities exist in these differing accounts, both Toelken and Milner present compelling arguments pertaining to the power of collective construction of reality and its influence over the retrospective past. Harriet Sanders would elaborate in her memoir about the immediate and severe threat emigrants faced from the jealous Indians laying in ambush, but that “in the end, however, the pioneers conquered the wilderness and transformed it into a land of peace and plenty.”³⁶

While the Native American threat doesn't appear to be nearly as dangerous as Sanders presents it, according to Milner, for pioneers, by facing said dangers as Indian attacks and sometimes massacres, the land was turned from “wilderness” to “civilized,” and thus “the pioneers ultimately became new natives in what they considered a new land.”³⁷

Milner goes on to assert that “in this way, the shared identity of pioneers could be maintained *along* with the idea of cultural and even physical conquest. Such self-serving, ethnocentric bias permitted the pioneers, and those who followed them, to justify their own emigration and settlement.”³⁸ I would contend that just as Harriet Sanders’ account provides a “true” western scene that appeals to the thrilling images of the West, the legend of the Almo massacre also appeals to the same perceptions and images of the West, providing a backdrop for the unruly and savage nature of the pre-civilized Almo that can later be compared to the desirable and “civilized” Almo that was seen to be

³⁶ Milner., 6.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

created through traits like hard work, bravery, and spiritual superiority to name a few.

It is by presenting the Indian as a concrete physical obstacle, standing in the way of “civilization” being created, that emigrants and their descendants can further validate their own emigration and experience. I would also contend that while other obstacles were ever present. Sanders mentions sickness, storms, and stampedes just to name a few. Indians represented a physical threat that is somewhat different from the rest. While a hail storm, drought, or fever presents threats to an agrarian way of life, there is little an emigrant could do to control such events. Indians, however, presented a physical threat that could be largely removed from the settler’s daily lives, via the U.S. military and the reservation system, as it had been by the time Sanders was writing her memoir and Rice was giving her interview. In fact, Rice, in her recounting of her early life at Almo, notes the difficulties of farming and how swarms of locusts were ravaging the years crop.³⁹ So while elements such as drought, harsh winters and overgrazing, all problems severely affecting the Almo of Rice’s childhood, were basically unavoidable, when looking at the conflicts that occurred with the local Native American population at the time, the community could look to the legend of the Almo massacre in which almost three hundred people were supposedly killed and see how much better the current situation was, since the land had been settled and “civilized.”

“Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail”

Barre Toelken in “Folklore and Reality in the American West” discusses a legend that I feel shares a series of similar characteristics with the Almo massacre: both take

³⁹ Rice, 13.

place in a historically similar time, both deal with Western emigration, and both deal with the complex issues arising from emigrant and Native American relations in the West.

The legend identified as “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” is one whose variants have been recorded from a host of descendants of western-bound emigrants. Basically, in the legend an Indian male appears in the emigrants camp when they are on the trail. Most often this Indian is a chief who is awestruck by a young blond emigrant girl, although sometimes it is a boy; the girl is usually the grandmother of the legend's tellers. The chief bargains with the father of the girl, often offering more and more horses, blankets or other goods in trade for the child, before the father explains that he would not sell or trade his daughter or son for any offer and the chief finally leaves. Some versions of the legend have the chief leave a token for the child, such as a thimble, which the tellers of the legend still have. While scholars believe that the legend is not historically accurate, it is the value of why it is told and what that telling communicates that offers a glimpse of the legend’s real value. In his analysis of this legend, Toelken questions,

Why do so many honest people insist that the event occurred, that it occurred in their family, and that the narrative is worthy of being repeated? If we assume that it is like a compendium of data, then we should ask the kinds of questions that produce literary insight: what kind of story is it, and what does it mean for those who tell it? What are its images and logical assumptions? What are its internal realities, seen from the standpoint of the culture that tells it?⁴⁰

When using this system of analysis, Toelken goes on to list five major functions, many of which are either analogous or the same as the functions that emerge from the Almo massacre legend when the legend of “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” is analyzed in this way. They are summarized below:

1. The legend and its main character’s relationship help to establish a tie with

⁴⁰ Toelken, 19.

being descended from an early pioneer of the area, a factor that plays an important role as Toelken says “early arrival provides an important pedigree, and attempts have been made to define a pioneer as someone who came before the railroad or who came by wagon, thus shutting out later arrivals from semisacred status.”⁴¹ “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” flaunts the fact by noting that Grandma was on the wagon train.

2. The legend strongly reinforces the white-perceived stereotype that Native American men find white women very attractive, especially those with blond hair and blue eyes, as the Native American is seen as being smitten with the girl. Also, the Native American is often the older man or “dark other” who pursues the younger “innocent” white female, projecting what Toelken identifies as the “racial fear of *them* projected as sexual threat to *us*.”⁴²

3. As opposed to emigrants cutting across, using, and eventually settling on Indian lands or lands adjacent to Indian lands, instead the Indian is seen in this legend as the invading “aggressive” party “moving into the white camp and potentially intruding on the integrity of a white family.”⁴³ This image helps to mitigate feelings of guilt associated with events such as pushing the Native Americans out of the land that they inhabited first, the land they were given as reservations, and the exceptionally poor treatment they received in general.

4. The image of the man deciding the fate of the women in his family reinforces the collective social norms of Euro-American culture. Toelken comments that “fathers make the decisions for their daughters; men are the suitors (even when they are feared); family patriarchs may play a joke (pretending to sell a child), but their final role is to

⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

⁴³ Ibid.

defend family propriety and cultural expectation.”⁴⁴

5. In all the variants the Indian is almost always a chief. It would seem that if there is to be an interaction between whites and Indians, the white version has more excitement to it if the Indian party, who are considered to be “inferior” people, is in some way representative of the highest status in their culture. Barre Toelken puts it well when he writes, “stories of 'how Grandma was almost sold to Chief Joseph' have a ring to them that would be lacking in 'how some Indian guy got interested in my grandma.’”⁴⁵

Literary Analysis of Rice’s Version of the Almo Legend.

I believe that, like “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail,” the legend of the Almo Massacre, here the specific version given by Rice in her interview, can also be examined and interpreted to determine what significance and role this legend plays in the shared value system of the culture it emerged from. Toelken observes that, “vernacular expressions work in at least two ways: they grow out of, and give voice to, a culture's abstract and generally unorganized (not *disorganized*) value system; and, when performed, they touch off other emotional responses which relate to the value system.”⁴⁶

I would contend that the physical enactment of Rice’s version of the legend, in the form of children playing in the earthworks, showcases its importance to the community. By examining this version of the Almo massacre in a similar manner as Toelken examined “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail,” I believe that the legend of the Almo massacre performs three major functions:

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

1. While most legends in a location seem to relate to the descendants of that legend, the Almo massacre is somewhat different because the wagon trains passing through didn't stop and settle; rather they pushed on to the greener pastures of beautiful California. Yet, the telling of the legend helps to establish a sense of the wild savagery that existed in Almo, both before the early days of settlement and during. Just as Milner found that Montana settlers' narratives that focused on Native American conflict helped to validate the settling of a place by transforming "wilderness" into "civilization," the legend of the Almo massacre serves as a means to compare the uncivilized and savage Almo of the past to the now cultivated and civilized Almo, thus validating the actions taken by the settlers of Almo.⁴⁷

The idea of civilization was crucial to the ideology of settlers; just as the Montanans felt they had succeeded in changing the wilderness to civilization, so did the community of Almo, perhaps even more so, as their community was one of unified spiritual pursuit and as others who were not as spiritually superior had not been able to survive simply passing through. While interviewing one local man, he told me that the wagon train described in the legend was comprised of Missourians who had all persecuted Mormons in Missouri; this concept was also included in a copy of a letter I was given to provide an explanation for the massacre. Perhaps in a place like Almo here the idea of God's grace and justice is even more prominent. By showing how much the pioneers improved the place, and how terrible it was before hand, the legend helps to mitigate the feelings of injustice and assuage guilt for taking land from and treating poorly the Native Americans. Toelken comments that legends like the Almo massacre help community members to make defining choices including, "whom they are willing to

⁴⁷ Milner, 6.

shoot, how they define land ownership and water rights, and how they will distinguish between such delicate issues as settlement versus land theft.”⁴⁸

Another detail presented in Rice’s account that helps to conjure the image of the savage West of old is the image of one of the survivors being a young child: “There was one man and his son and his wife and he was a young man not long married and he put his little son on his back and told him to cling tight and to keep still. He and his wife crawled toward where most of the Indians were and they got away and spread the alarm.”⁴⁹ Here the audience is shown the tenacious spirit needed here, because it is not only trappers and soldiers that have to deal with a brutal and adventurous reality, but even the family, forced to carry their child on their back to survive the attack and make it in the West. Perhaps this image is even more evocative to members of the LDS faith because these images reflect the strong LDS value of family. This image, in its even more heart wrenching form, is represented in a later variant as a mother carrying her baby to safety by gripping its clothes in her teeth while crawling through the sagebrush, a powerful image of the brutality of the pre-settled Western wilderness.

2. Rice's narrative and her remembrance of the earthen works is also tied to the material remnants that are central to her version of the legend. Just like the thimble that an Indian chief might leave with the emigrant family to commemorate his desire for “Goldilocks,” the earthen works serve as physical reminder and authenticator for the historical validity of the legend. Many of the early versions of the legend note the earthen works that were left by the massacred party, and it would seem that surveyors of the area in the late 1800s also noticed them, as they were described in the *Idaho: Facts*

⁴⁸ Toelken, 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

and Statistics Concerning its Mining, Farming, Stock Raising, Lumbering and Other Resources and Industries, published in 1885 by the Territorial Controller, stating that “three miles north of the City of Rocks, are the remains of rifle pits and earth-works,... to mark the place where a whole train of emigrants were massacred by [Chief] Pocatello and his warlike followers in 1862.”⁵⁰ These are most likely remnants from an Indian attack, as Almo specifically and southern Idaho generally played host to a number of Indian attacks during the years of the Oregon and California trails, none of which, though, seems to have come close to the scale suggested in the Almo massacre.⁵¹

Also mentioned in Rice’s account are the items discovered while plowing in the area: “They found wagon tongues, and one or two tomahawks that was there, they are still finding little pieces of iron when they plow there.”⁵² The fact that this was the main route of the California trail certainly points towards an abundance of artifacts, and the discovered items become more and more detailed as variants of the legend develop over time. By the time that Rice was giving the interview in the 1940s, the earthen works would have been plowed over, and in order to better support the narrative she is presenting, she gives a description of material artifacts found on the site, which are supposed to point to the historical validity of the event and help to cement the author’s reputation as an honest spokesperson of history and good storyteller.

3. The legend helps to reinforce common perceptions of Native Americans as “inferior” and the right of emigrants and settlers to treat them poorly, even subduing them on a large scale. The description of the battle tactics used by the Native Americans in Rice’s version are described as “sneaky,” and are presented as less than honorable, as the

⁵⁰ James L. Onderdonk, (San Francisco, A.L. Bancroft & Company), 83.

⁵¹ Idaho State Historical Society, “Almo Massacre” *Reference Series*, no.232. Revised Feb 1971, 4.

⁵² Rice, 6.

emigrants “could have whipped the Indians but....” they were cut off from water and shot with arrows when they tried to dig wells, until out of dire need for water the emigrants tried to fight their way out and were massacred. Such selection of details points to the notion that if it were not for numbers and unsavory tactics, the emigrants, who were seen as obviously superior to the Native Americans, would have beaten the Native Americans in a “fair” fight. Just as in the story Rice related about Little Soldier, the Shoshone Indian chief, the legend of the massacre helps to develop and sustain a feeling of superiority, which is crucial to a complex Western ideology and helps to deal with issues like the guilt associated with the general mistreatment of the Native Americans.

Enactment Two: Newell Dayley

1950s-1960s Tourism

Dayley, like Rice, seems to have engaged in a form of ostensive action similar to a legend-trip, the main difference being where Rice and her companions are youthful and seem to be more energetic, Dayley's legend-trip has a more mature and composed nature, devoid of becoming frightened and fleeing the area. I found the information about the Almo massacre given by Newell Dayley to be significant enough to include here for several reasons. Unlike Rice, whose parents actually were among the first to settle the town of Almo, Dayley represents a liminal perspective. While he is closely acquainted with Almo and its residents, he is not a community member, and thus his status is that of an outsider. Yet he understands much of the mentality of the area and people like Alice Jane Durfee Rice. His family were Mormon settlers who arrived in Oakley in the late 1870s. As a child he had regular interactions with the Native American community, and he was even a sheriff's deputy where he rode a horse, carried a gun and was involved in shootouts with robbers. I would contend, however, that perhaps the most influential element in shaping Dayley's perspective is that of the time in which he gave his interview. While Rice's account seems to be from the 1940s, by 1968 when Dayley gives his account of the Almo massacre legend, the "Wild West" image appears to be well-cultivated. This can be seen in a 1950s radio play of the Almo legend, in which

actors presented a grueling tale including screams and gunfire in the background.⁵³ In addition, Dayley's interview includes several other suspenseful tales that seem to reflect the "Wild West" image of the era, including him kicking down a log cabin door before shooting several bandits, stories about the local outlaw Diamondfield Jack, and shooting a cattle thief's hat off of his head from more than a hundred yards away to get him to stop.⁵⁴

Al Dawson, an amateur historian and writer from Burley, Idaho, interviewed Newell Dayley in his Oakley, Idaho, home in 1968. Dayley, who was born in 1881, would have been roughly 87 years old at the time and covered a host of topics in the interview that dealt with past events in northern Utah and southern Idaho, including a good deal of information about the legend of the Almo massacre. Dayley's interview is sometimes hard to follow for several reasons. Often without notice, Dayley will jump back and forth when describing the various groups he had taken through the area, which often leaves the reader wondering exactly which group he is discussing.

While it is hard to figure the exact dates of the ostensive actions relating to the legend of the Almo massacre that Dayley describes in the interview, it would seem that most of the events mentioned would have occurred in the mid-1960s. One factor that I feel important in analyzing this variant of the legend and its significance within the community is that neither Dayley nor Dawson is from Almo, so this is an ostensive action in which the legend is co-opted to suit the purposes of the outsider. As previously noted, Dayley is from the town of Oakley, Idaho, while Dawson is from Burley, Idaho, which is the county seat. Oakley lies on the west side of the Albion Mountains, the mountains that

⁵³ "Town Marker Commemorates Massacre That Never Happened," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio. (February 16, 1994.)

⁵⁴ Newell Dayley, Interview by Al and Lillian Dawson, Transcript, January 28, 1968. 20, 29, 31.

hold the City of Rocks. Oakley is an agricultural community like Almo but is a much larger town, having a small downtown area as well as one larger grocery store. Some details about the history of Oakley and its attempt to gain NPS designation for the City of Rocks are helpful in creating a context in which Dayley's role in telling his version of the legend makes more sense.

Attempts to designate the City of Rocks as a National Park or Monument began in the 1930s, and interest in accomplishing that seems to have waxed and waned so that every ten years or so another push from county and regional groups as well as Idaho lawmakers in general made the issue prominent again. Oakley is a medium-sized town that is still much larger than Almo, and it was the residents of Oakley who felt that they would benefit the most financially from the National Park Service designation. When the first attempts to receive designation occurred in the 1930s, there was no paved road that led directly to the City of Rocks. Everyone from the local newspapers to both local and state politicians, and most of the citizens of Oakley themselves, assumed that, being the bigger town close to the City of Rocks and also being situated closer to the county seat of Burley, they would receive federal funding to pave a road from Oakley to the City of Rocks when it received National Park Service designation. Further, historian Brigham Madsen has noted that in the 1930s it was hoped that the park designation would also influence the federal allocation of funding for a massive agricultural irrigation project on the Oakley side of the Albion Range, and that by playing up the Almo legend, the City of Rocks was more likely to get attention and thus National Park Service designation.⁵⁵ Oakley also had more businesses and infrastructure so it was simply assumed that they

⁵⁵ Madsen, Brigham. *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian*. (Salt Lake City, Signature books, 1998), 368.

would become, as they styled themselves, the “Gateway to the City of Rocks” (see figure 4).⁵⁶

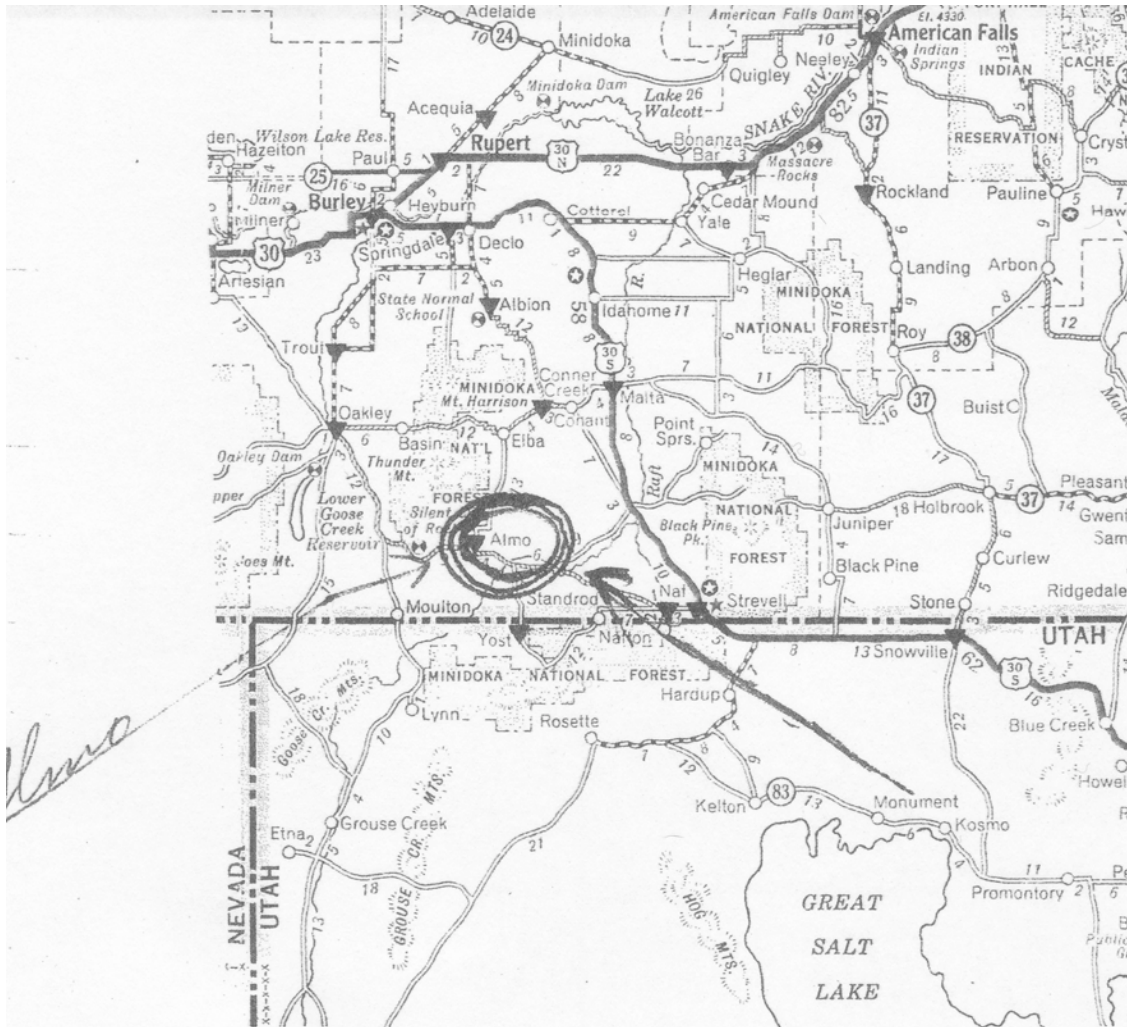


Fig. 4. Regional map taken from “A History of Almo, Idaho” by Bemus Ward, 1936. Utah State University Special Collections.

Dayley begins his account of the legend by establishing two things, his credentials, and the context for the massacre. First he notes that he is well acquainted with the

⁵⁶ “Roads to Proposed National Monument Promised by Governor Barzilla W. Clark: Crowd of Two Thousand Greets Governor in Oakley, City of Rocks and Murtaugh,” *The Oakley Herald*, May 26 1938. n.p. (byline reads “Oakley – Where the Soil is Twenty Feet Deep.”)

location of the legend of the Almo massacre, but also that he had a good relationship with the local man who owns the said land on which the massacre had ostensibly occurred and thus supposedly had first hand knowledge of its details:

Dayley: I had been all over that ground [massacre site], Pete Cahoon, I was well acquainted with him, and he told the things he picked up on there when he homesteaded on that area. And I had been out to the old wells where they had dug and tried to get water. Anyway, it was three hundred [emigrants], that was one of the best qualified outfits of sixty wagons and three hundred people, that ever left Independence, Missouri. And they were well equipped, every way, and after they go out on the plains a ways, and begin to come in contact with the Indians, the Indians you know, would scout along and watch these plains and every time they [the emigrants] got a chance, They'd pop one [an Indian] off. And they did that all the way along. Well that began agitating this tribe and that tribe until it got to a point where they were ready to fight.

In the interview, Dawson then asks if Dayley is insinuating that the emigrants were shooting Indians along the trail. And Dayley elaborates:

Dayley: Yes, and they came to Almo creek and crossed the creek and camped... and they formed a circle like pioneers did in those days for protection. And the Indians waited until they pulled away from that creek about a mile and then they made the attack. They [the emigrants] was away from water and they [the Indians] made their attack and they [the Indians] held them for three days. Well, the horses were in the ring and they [the horses] got panicky on account of thirst and they were killing about as many children as Indians... They [emigrants] decided to try [dig] for wells... They'd hit that granite and couldn't go any further. And so they just choked to death and fought it out 'till there were three, I think [sic] that got away. There were two men, one woman—four, two men, one woman, and a baby.

Then he goes on to provide further details about the survivor's escape:

And that woman took part of her dress and wrapped it around that baby and she carried that baby by her teeth and crawled on her hands and knees until they got far enough away that they were sure that the Indians wouldn't get them and then . . . the survivors raise the alarm and the "militia" comes, but finds the whole wagon train dead.

Dayley, like any well-developed storyteller, continues to elaborate on the details of the legend in order to convince the audience of the legend's authenticity. The image of the woman carrying her baby by her teeth as she crawls through the sagebrush seems

particularly vivid. In an attempt to establish more credentials as a believable teller, Dayley goes on by noting his relationship to the main proponent of the legend who homesteaded on an area in Almo where could at the time still be found the earthen works believed to be part of the legend of the Almo massacre:

Dayley: Now the story that was told by Mr. Johnson, [William Johnston]⁵⁷ I have that [story about the massacre] here [in written form] . . . Well, he formed a companionship with an Indian when they were kids and he got the story from this Indian. I knew Johnson, I knew him as well as I know you. I knew he wouldn't lie about it.

Dayley goes on to note even more details which are used to validate not only him as a storyteller and amateur historian but to bolster the historical validity of the legend itself. This segment also includes an explanation of how the supposed artifacts from the massacre came to be found or removed, in an effort to explain why they are unavailable today:

Dayley: They ran out of Iron, they came from Ogden and hauled all that iron in there and worked it over. I talked to the blacksmith that did it, that worked a lot of that iron over... and he told me about working that iron over that came from the massacre... and Pete Cahoon, he was attending the Normal School [a local teacher's college] at that time and he picked up lots of stuff. He told me of picking up an old cap and ball six-shooter and the hammer was back, primer all ready to go. It was rusted, you know, so it wasn't dangerous and he took all that stuff over to the museum at the Normal [school] and the doggone building burnt down and they lost it all.

After establishing his credentials as a teller of the legend, Dayley goes on to describe how he had taken a tour of cars, some seventy-five in number, and had them circle up in a mock wagon train before handing out information about the legend of the Almo massacre and giving a presentation about it:

⁵⁷ Dayley is referring here to William Johnston an original settler of Almo, and a main early proponent of the legend. Johnston was interviewed by Charles Walgamott whose article was both the first printed version, and still to this day the most detailed. Johnston's account included a version that was purportedly given to him by a Shoshone friend.

But I, that one year here, has been four or five years ago [1963-64], I took twelve hundred people through that country in one year. You can believe it or not. In one bunch I had seventy five cars that went down through there, we went through the rocks, we ate lunch at the rocks, had a big picnic there and looked all around through there and then we went to the Almo massacre. Now, I knew Pete had died, but I knew Mrs. Cahoon... Well what I wanted to do, now, I wanted to pull into the field and she [Mrs. Cahoon] said you just go ahead and do as you please. So when we got down there I had the fellow that was leading, when I dropped out I told him what to do and they just made a big circle, that seventy-five cars right around in a big circle and I made a little talk there and passed out the literature on the massacre. The whole thing, well I had three or four sheets of different versions of it, you know... then when you get to Connor Creek there was another massacre there right on the south side of Cassia Creek. That was a small one but that was one time Indians was caught off guard. They [the Indians] were off the water at that time, and old General Connor, [A military detachment under orders from then Colonel Connor, but not including Connor] he got them, he killed them all. That was when he killed not only the men, but he killed the squaws and he killed the kids. But they [a group of local businessmen, politicians and a reporter] wouldn't stop long enough for me to give her [reporter] that story.⁵⁸

Physical Evidence

In giving his version of the Almo massacre, Dayley works very hard to establish not only the credibility of the legend but himself as a teller, even though, or perhaps because, he is an outsider. In his introduction to *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, Jan Brunvard discusses the idea of validity in legends and, in particular, urban legends. Brunvard notes, "Legends are folk history, or rather quasi-history. As with any folk legends, urban legends gain credibility from specific details of time and place or from references to source authorities."⁵⁹ That concept could be applied to most forms of legends and would include concrete specific details. Dayley begins his account of the Almo massacre by bringing up elements of the legend that serve a similar purpose to those of Alice Jane Durfee Rice in creating a sense of validity. In contrast to Rice's earlier version, however,

⁵⁸ Dayley, 36-38.

⁵⁹ Brunvard, 3.

Dayley presents more detailed descriptions of the physical evidence that is assumed to validate the historical accuracy of the legend. It is worth noticing that where Rice describes minimal artifacts found near the massacre site (“they plowed it over and they found wagon tongues, and one or two tomahawks that was there.”⁶⁰) Dayley's version includes far more context, detail and suspense. Further, Dayley alerts his interviewer to the fact that he is personally acquainted with two main sources of information about the legend, Pete Cahoon and the blacksmith, and that he himself had examined the “wells” that had been dug by the emigrants in their futile search for water and he himself had been “all over that ground.” Also interesting is the way in which he presents his relationship with the blacksmith, listing what company he worked for, where they had been located, and his [Dayley's] status in working with the blacksmith, “He [blacksmith] came out here a year later and was manager of the old Snake River Implement Company. . . . and I strung buggies for him and he told me about working that iron over that came from that massacre.”⁶¹ Dayley spends more time than Rice in providing details to stress the validity of his account because he is an outsider to the Almo community and has to establish himself as acquainted with the place and history in a way a local would not have to in order to establish credibility. The time that it would seem he has invested in his reputation and tours also points to the fact that as a story teller, Dayley wants to be seen as a good one. Just as the thimble in “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” helps the listener to physically relate to the legend, so the mass of details Dayley provides helps the listener to have a clear picture of what exactly happened in the legend and why Dayley and especially the tour groups should believe that the legend is true.

⁶⁰ Rice, 6.

⁶¹ Dayley, 35.

The suspenseful details in this account are also much more prominent than those in Rice's account. Whereas Rice merely states that they found some wagon tongues and a couple of tomahawks, Dayley describes how his friend Pete Cahoon “told me of picking up an old cap and ball six-shooter and the hammer was back, primer all ready to go.”⁶² This image of the pistol, primer in, hammer back, seems to be much more evocative of the sense of emotional imagery that western culture, especially as influenced by Hollywood, associated with the idea of the dangerous Indian attack. The listener probably needed little help to imagine a scene reminiscent of such Hollywood Westerns where an emigrant, surrounded by the chaotic sensory overload of an Indian attack, had his pistol hammer back ready to shoot, while defending the wagon train, but is overwhelmed and killed before being able to fire off the last round. By developing a more detailed account, Dayley is able to better confer not only the image of the legend itself but the cultural values which it represents.

City of Rocks and Oakley Tourism

Toelken notes that with legends there is a “strong inclination to select and intensify topics which satisfy (or excite) cultural expectations as the driving forces behind such legendry.”⁶³ I would argue that Dayley is willing to seek out more knowledge about the legend, develop a highly detailed version of the legend to tell, and to facilitate a physical enactment of the legend because the legend of the Almo massacre does in fact engage a set of shared cultural values and expectations, just as Toelken explains. Dayley tells his interviewer that “I took twelve hundred people through that country in one year.

⁶² Dayley, 38.

⁶³ Toelken, 22.

You can believe that or not.” He is obviously proud to be a part of the local effort to showcase the history and beauty of the area, and just as the residents of Oakley see themselves as “gateway to the City of Rocks.” Dayley takes the tourists on a type of mature legend-trip, where they can enact a portion of the legend by recreating a “wagon train” with their cars. While they probably were not frightened enough to jump in their cars and head for home as Rice was, it would seem that Dayley can help the tourists to better imagine the scene the legend presents. I would contend that Dayley sees the Almo massacre as a way to highlight the history of the whole area and present a thrilling tale to passing tourists. In his article “Tall Tales and Sales” Steve Siporin notes how

recycled folklore is used to attract individuals to an area in the hope that, as tourists, potential home buyers, investors, and consumers of all stripes, these individuals will spend money and thereby benefit the local economy. . . . It is not news that a region can be made attractive to outsiders through evocation of its distinctive traditions--or that the resulting revenue can be enormous.⁶⁴

While Siporin is mainly discussing tall tales, it would seem that other folkloric elements like legends would also apply to this theory of economics called “the multiplier effect,” in which people traveling to see something in a region also tend to spend money there on things such as food, gas and places to stay; thus Siporin argues that the use of things like tall tales might have been one of the “*traditional*” ways to market a region.⁶⁵ I would contend that by presenting the legend of the Almo massacre to tourists, Dayley is presenting them with a more “colorful” and “authentic” Western image of his area, “marketing” it as a destination site.

The co-opting of folkloric elements is nothing new, however. Jeannie Thomas in her article “Ride ‘Em, Barbie Girl: Commodifying Folklore, Place, and the Exotic”

⁶⁴ Steve Siporin, “Tall Tales and Sales,” in *Worldview and the American West*, ed. Polly Stewart, Steve Siporin, C.W. Sullivan III, Suzi Jones (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000), 90.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

discusses the “marketing of folkloric themes.”⁶⁶ Whereas Siporin discusses how folkloric elements can be used to bolster a regional economy by making its traditions attractive to tourists, Thomas focuses on how commercial interests “commodify” folklore for financial gain. Briefly, Thomas defines commodified folklore as “folklore and folkloric themes translated into marketable objects.”⁶⁷ In order to be viewed as commodified folklore, Thomas sets up two major qualifiers, that the object must have “folk antecedents” and be mass produced to sell or promote.⁶⁸ While it would seem that the pseudo-legend-trip Dayley organizes is not meant for immediate financial gain, the legend could certainly be seen as part of a regional movement to promote the area and gain NPS status and reap the economic rewards that would accompany such status. While I don’t know if Dayley’s use of the legend to promote the region would classify as mass produced, Thomas recognizes that “Frequently, the West has been constructed as a romantic and exotic place. This is the West constructed for tourists to gaze upon.”⁶⁹ And what would the image of the “Wild West” be without cowboys and Indians, and more specifically a battle. It is worth noting that the Western cowgirl and Native Americans are two themes that also happen to appear often among the variations of Barbie.

The legend of the Almo massacre, while obviously being closely associated with the town of Almo, is also associated with the California Trail, and as the town of Almo did not exist during the time of the California Trail and since the City of Rocks is the most notable local geographical feature associated with the California Trail, it is no

⁶⁶ Jeannie Thomas, “Ride ‘Em, Barbie Girl: Commodifying Folklore, Place, and the Exotic,” in *Worldview and the American West*, ed. Polly Stewart, Steve Siporin, C.W. Sullivan III, Suzi Jones (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000), 65.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 76.

wonder why Dayley chooses to tell the legend after a foray into the City of Rocks, as the legend is a thrilling tale and highlights the importance of the City of Rocks. Dayley has obviously put a good deal of work into his “tours.” Whether he received any compensation for giving them is unclear, but the planning and the effort put forth attests to the fact that Dayley took pride in his task, and the number of tourists he identifies as being part of these tours points to the fact that there was interest in the area and its history. Just as Barre Toelken notes that folklore is often used to play to cultural expectations, I would argue that Dayley co-opts the legend of the Almo massacre in order to provide tourists with the stereotypical images of the “Wild West” that they want.⁷⁰ By co-opting the legend of the Almo massacre, Dayley commodifies the legend to try and increase interest in the area surrounding the City of Rocks as well as the City of Rocks itself, which would bolster tourism and, subsequently, bolster the Oakley economy.

Literary Analysis of Dayley’s version of the Almo Legend

Again, following Toelken’s methodology, I would argue that the ostensive enactment of the legend as organized and later narrated by Dayley can be shown to have four major functions, ranging from validating emigrant settlement for people like Dayley, to providing a promotional element to the area’s history that was marketable.

1. Just as in the early account given by Rice, the legend as Dayley tells it provides details that paint a gruesome picture of the harsh and trying conditions that existed in the Old West. I would argue that painting the geographical location as a chaotic and tumultuous place, devoid of order and civility, is an easy way to validate the

⁷⁰ Toelken, 22.

settlement of the land and cope with the feelings of guilt associated with usurping Native American land. Just as Rice did, Dayley had ancestors who had settled early in the area, and, as Toelken notes, legends and the collective cultural values they portray can help to “distinguish between such delicate issues as *settlement* versus *land theft*,” thus mitigating issues of guilt relating to land theft.⁷¹

2. Dayley's account is even more focused on providing details and using material evidence and personal experience to make his account seem more historically accurate than Rice's account. These details range from the reason for why there is no iron left over from the burnt wagons to more explanation for the wells being there and how they were later dug up. Even the image of the pistol found with its hammer back ready to fire serves to develop and expand the legend. Due to the dramatic nature of the images and the core values associated with the legend, having a listener believe the event had actually transpired could only have served to develop Dayley's reputation as an amateur historian, storyteller and overall good tour guide.

3. The idea of tourists pouring in from all over to marvel at the City of Rocks was a tantalizing idea for residents of towns like Oakley. Being the headquarters or entrance to a national park or monument was assumed to bring better roads, money into local businesses, and simply more prominence for the town itself in the region. It is my belief that in co-opting the local Almo legend, Dayley hopes to impress the tourists he is guiding, especially through appealing to images and stories that are sure to excite the audience by focusing on a topic that is a focal point of cultural interest, as well as emigrant and Native American conflict in the Old West. Although it is possible to reach the City of Rocks National Reserve via Oakley today, it is certainly the slower and

⁷¹ Ibid., 21.

rougher of the two options, and consequently very few tourists come this way. I am unsure as to exactly how and why Almo was chosen to host the visitor's center and offices for the City of Rocks, perhaps because of its closer proximity to the Reserve, but the decision must have come as a serious let down to the Oakley residents who had for so long imagined themselves as the "Gateway to the City of Rocks."

4. The perception of Native Americans as inferior to whites, as it was in Rice's account, is also an important element of the legend as Dayley presents it. While he describes the same tactics of Native American strategy that Rice does, of leading the emigrants away from water and thus forcing the livestock to trample emigrants in the corralled wagons, it is the attention and focused detail given to the legend that really highlights this. Who helped to decide the itinerary for Dayley's tours and especially what to focus on and what to ignore is unclear from Dayley's account; however, one thing is clear. Dayley was well aware of another massacre, the Connor Creek massacre, which occurred a mere 25 miles northeast of Almo and on the route Dayley was taking his tour. So even while another local massacre existed, in fact a historically accurate massacre of the U.S. military massacring Native American men, women and children, the group didn't find a visit to this site important enough to fit it into their itinerary. It is my belief that this incongruity is representative of the cultural bias that attributed the Native Americans as inferior to whites, even in the late 1960s, as well as the fact that the predominantly non-Native American tourists were more interested in hearing accounts of Native American "savagery" as compared with accounts of white "savagery" against Native Americans, and the guilt associated with such knowledge.

While not in his account of the legend, Dayley does later comment in the

interview on how the whites took the land from the Native Americans, and that he feels the reservation system is an unfortunate outcome. However, he follows this by explaining that he has a “scientific” magazine article that testifies to the fact that Native Americans used to be white, and that the article supports the Book of Mormon, which also claims that Native Americans were once white but were made “red” because of a series of transgressions and sins.⁷² This reasoning again seems to be a convenient way of assuaging guilt by showing how Native Americans had the chance to be white but were punished because of their decisions, thus validating their inferiority, utilizing the same doctrine used by Rice’s parents and grandparents. For Dayley it would seem that not only the legend of the Almo massacre supports the common Western concept of the time that Native Americans were inferior to whites, but that Dayley finds an LDS doctrine to support the idea of Native American inferiority. The LDS doctrine not only supports the idea of Native American inferiority from a spiritual and supernatural perspective but also tends to assuage the guilt of settlers and their ancestors by projecting the image of Native Americans and their actions as the sole root of all of their problems. During the settlement of LDS communities like Almo and Oakley and for the ancestors of these settlers, it is easy to see how the LDS doctrine of Native American inferiority combined with the Almo legend could help to deal with the guilt and stress associated with the complex pioneer and Native American interactions at the time.

⁷² Dayley, 41.

Enactment Three: Al Dawson

1971 “Saga of the Silent City of Rocks” and Selective History

In the fall of 1971, a one time event titled the “Saga of the Silent City of Rocks” was held to commemorate the release of 500 City of Rocks commemorative silver medals. This plan was proposed and organized by the then-president of the Cassia County Historical Society, Al Dawson. The saga included events such as a reenactment⁷³ of a wagon massacre, a reenactment of the shootout at the OK Corral, musical troops, Indian dances, a stage coach robbery, and an appearance by the Idaho Lieutenant Governor, Jack Murphy. One notable difference is that the massacre enacted at the “Saga of the Silent City of Rocks” did not portray the usual legend of the Almo massacre, with its 300 emigrants, but rather reenacted a smaller Indian attack that was reported in the *Deseret News* on the 3rd of October 1860.⁷⁴

The saga seems to be directly linked with the want to increase tourism in the area and especially through the establishment of a national park or monument at the City of Rocks. Interest to have the City of Rocks designated as a national park or monument by the National Park Service seems to have waxed and waned so that roughly every ten years a movement would be started to push for designation. In the 1970s,

⁷³ I am calling this particular event a reenactment rather than enactment because it differs in two main ways from Dayley and Rice’s enactments. First, there is a defined division between players and spectators, which is an important role in establishing high drama according to Ellis, and second, the players are following a prescribed series of actions while wearing specific regalia relating to the event.

⁷⁴ Dawson, Al. "City of Rocks Has Historic Past." *Southern Idaho Press*, March 10, 1971.

commemorative medallions for the City of Rocks that had been made by the Franklin Mint were issued, the Saga of the Silent City of Rocks occurred, and later in the decade the NPS did several studies and started a process to designate the City of Rocks before local concerns about ranching rights shut it down. It was in this atmosphere of optimism regarding the creation of a national park or monument in Cassia County that Al Dawson and many others were actively promoting the area through various means, especially via the commodification of “Wild West” themes.

It would seem that a natural progression of ostensive action as related to the Almo massacre is observable in the three accounts chosen here in two major ways, the first being that the ostensive action becomes more complex as time goes on, and the second being that the people engaging in the ostensive action are more and more distant from Almo, both geographically and by family ties. While the other forms of enactment like Rice’s legend-tripping and Dayley’s pseudo-legend-trip seem to have been more informal and communally enacted, Dawson’s saga has a distinct separation between spectators and players, as well as roles that are complex and scripted. The importance of commodifying the image of the “Old West” through an Indian massacre in the saga is evident in the time and effort used to create Dawson’s enactment, as the complexity and theatrical nature of it could be considered what Bill Ellis would term high drama.⁷⁵ By reviewing the way in which Dawson represented the history of the area in his articles, his views on the economic future of Cassia County, and the reenactment itself, I hope to provide context and to further my argument that Dawson was fundamental in creating what was the most co-opted, complex and commodified version of the Almo legend to have appeared at that time.

⁷⁵ Ellis, 168.

The Enactment and Newspaper Articles

One of the main differences between the information available about Al Dawson's enactment and the previous two enactments is the form the information is available in. While both Rice and Dayley were interviewed and their accounts of the Almo legend were a part of these interviews, the information regarding the "Saga of the Silent City of Rocks" and its enactment has to be pieced together from a series of local newspaper articles. Unfortunately, a specific description of the enactment is not discussed in any one article, yet there are many other articles, mostly written by Al Dawson, which together provide a decent summary of this third enactment and a rather detailed portrait of how Dawson thought about the Almo legend.

One newspaper article, showing a picture of Boy Scouts dressed as Indians, estimated that over 5,000 people attended the saga.⁷⁶ The reenactment, pieced together from several sources including newspaper articles, can be summarized as follows. A small wagon train passing through the City of Rocks is ambushed by the Boy Scouts dressed as Indians. One of the emigrants escapes and summons the U.S. Cavalry, played by an Idaho Army Reserve unit, who come in and rout the Indians. One news clipping summarized the reenactment as such: "The program also included a dramatic attack on the wagon train complete with all the trappings – pioneers in authentic clothing, Indians (the Order of the Lost Arrow) in full war paint, and the cavalry rescue."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "Ringside View." N.p.: n.d., n.p.

⁷⁷ "City of Rocks Attracts Many," *Southern Idaho Press*. July 12, 1971. n.p.

The Idaho State Historical Society *Reference Report* no. 232.

I believe that the usual portrayal of the legend of the Almo massacre was not used in the saga because of the publication of the Idaho State Historical Societies *Reference Series* no. 232 concerning the authenticity of the legend of the Almo massacre. The *Reference Series* suggested that the legend was historically inaccurate and that the legend was instead an amalgamation of details gleaned from several smaller massacres that had been reported to have occurred in the area but with the scale of the massacre being highly exaggerated. What makes this fact important is that the group organizing and coordinating the “Saga of the Silent City of Rocks” that constitutes this third enactment was the Cassia County Historical Society, who certainly knew about the *Reference Series* and its findings. The then-president of the Cassia County Historical Society, Al Dawson, who had also interviewed Newell Dayley in 1968, was the author of several weekly columns about local history in the local paper based out of Burley, Idaho, including one column in March of 1971, highlighting the *Reference Series* and its findings.⁷⁸

In his March, 1971, article discussing the *Reference Series*, Dawson mentions that “Perhaps because of the geographical formation of giant rocks, it [the City of Rocks] became a natural location for Indian ambush attacks.” He goes on to say that “stories, some of them folklore, have told of redmen savage depredations in this area,” before

⁷⁸ Al Dawson. "City of Rocks Has Historic Past." *Southern Idaho Press*, March 10, 1971. n.p.

noting that “recently, however, after years of research, the Idaho State Historical Society has uncovered documentary evidence of many heretofore unknown chapters in the history of the ‘Silent City.’”⁷⁹ This discussion by Dawson seems problematic because, while Dawson goes on to spend a great deal of space discussing accounts of the “at least six major Indian massacres at this location,” not including “skirmishes,” he never divulges the primary reason the *Reference Series* was published, which was to specifically highlight the historical inaccuracy of the legend of the Almo massacre.

Dawson seems to infer, even while not discussing the legend of the Almo massacre specifically, that the Indian attacks are new information that help to showcase the violent nature of the area’s past. This is slightly problematic from a historical perspective, however, because some of the attacks he uses to convey this violence are ones taken from the *Reference Series* that had been shown to be historically inaccurate, facts Dawson was apparently uninterested in sharing with his audience as he presents them as accurate historical accounts. I would argue that while the main focus of the *Reference Series* report was to highlight the historical inaccuracy of the legend of the Almo massacre, Dawson had two major motivations to co-opt the eighteen-page report to present his own perspective of the past: the first being to avoid contradicting himself and calling his reputation as a historian into question as he had often touted the legend as true in his columns. In addition, Dawson wanted to present and maintain a “colorful” picture needed to attract tourists to the area by providing an “authentic” Western image.

Tourism

⁷⁹ Ibid.

I would argue that just as Dayley co-opted the legend for his own purposes, so, too, did Dawson. Highlighting the historical inaccuracy of the legend would negatively affect Dawson's aim to promote Cassia County, of which Almo and the City of Rocks are a part, as a tourist destination. One souvenir program for the saga is sponsored by the Ponderosa Inn, whose logo proclaims "Cassia County: Crossroads of the Pioneers," which clearly demonstrates the western-themed marketing for the area.⁸⁰ In his weekly column, "Around Town," which was published the same day as his article about the *Reference Series*, Dawson notes that the City of Rocks being chosen to have a commemorative coin "corroborates the belief of many of us that the most colorful Western history happened right here in Cassia County."⁸¹ Dawson then goes on to note how the increasing popularity and knowledge of the City of Rocks outside the region is a great accomplishment and that there will be "national and worldwide distribution [of the medallions]. It should be a shot in the arm to the future tourist trade in this area – that is if we can fully capitalize on the publicity."⁸² Both of these articles also note that the "Saga of the Silent City of Rocks" was approaching and that everyone should turn out for it, which I would argue is Dawson's attempt to "fully capitalize on the publicity" of the medallions. Just as Steve Siporin discusses the economic impact of folklore, and specifically tall tales, on an area, it would seem that for Dawson the commodified image of the "Wild West" is that much stronger and more marketable if it contains images of emigrant and Native American armed conflict.⁸³ Not only would it be more marketable with conflict, but Dawson also introduces an outcome of emigrant Indian conflict far

⁸⁰ Souvenir Poster "Saga of the City of Rocks: 1841 – 1971 : in commemoration of the City of Rocks Medal issued June 1, 1971."

⁸¹ "Around Town," Al Dawson. *Southern Idaho Press*. March 10, 1971. n.p.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Siporin, 90.

more desirable as well as familiar among his audience, where rather than 300 white emigrants being massacred, we have a small wagon train saved by the white cavalry, who then route the Indians.

The stereotyped image of the West that emigrant and Native American conflict brings to mind was obviously, at least in Dawson's mind, a valuable commodity that could be used to promote the region surrounding the City of Rocks and subsequently benefit its economy. However, it would seem that to publicly acknowledge in his columns that the legend of the Almo massacre was historically inaccurate just before presenting a reenactment of a "historically accurate" massacre might have been too hard for Dawson's readership to swallow. Dawson apparently understood this as he circumnavigated publicly acknowledging that the legend of the Almo massacre was not historically accurate both in his writings before and in the reenactment during the saga while still providing a "massacre" that could represent the same concepts and meanings that the legend of the Almo massacre did when it was still considered historically accurate. In dealing with the principle of ostension, Linda Degh noted "that fact can become narrative and narrative can become fact;"⁸⁴ it would appear that here the narrative has become so important that when its "fact" is called into question, another factual account is produced that can continue to support a particular perspective of Western reality.

An integral part of the commodified value of the legend of the Almo massacre appears to be the public's perception of the legend as historically accurate. Jeannie Thomas notes in her definition of commodified folklore that the folklore must exist

⁸⁴ Degh, 29.

before the commodified version is created.⁸⁵ I would contend that here, as the historical accuracy of the legend becomes suspect thus endangering the legend's commodified value, Dawson substitutes it with an "authentic" massacre that represents most of the same core values as the legend of the Almo massacre did and thus salvages some of the legend's commodified value. It is certainly plausible that, at least from Dawson's perspective, without an Indian massacre Cassia County might not have had the "most colorful Western history" and thus might then be less inclined to experience economic growth.⁸⁶ Dawson simultaneously recognizes both the economic advantages of the Almo massacre and its possible economic drawbacks due to the questioning of its historical validity. In response, Dawson finds a way to substitute a historically accurate account that projects many of the same concepts, such as Native American "savagery," while projecting ideals such as white superiority even more as the whites beat the Indians in his reenactment.

⁸⁵ Thomas, 66.

⁸⁶ Dayley.



Figure 5. Boy Scouts dressed as Indians pose for a pre "saga" photo shoot. This image appeared in the main Al Dawson article discussed.

Literary Analysis of Dawson's Version of the Almo Legend

I would contend that the reenactment Dawson chose to incorporate into the "Saga of the Silent City of Rocks" was not the narrative generally considered to be the Almo legend; instead it acts as a sort of surrogate for the Almo legend because the questions raised about the historical accuracy of the Almo legend had lessened the Almo legend's commodified value. I hope that my presentation of Dawson's unwillingness to publicly

denounce the Almo legend as false, and his willingness to present a carefully edited version of historical happenings to support his perception of the past, will help to show the significance of the cultural and economic values the legend contains as well as its impact on the communities in which it circulates. I believe that the reenactment of the Indian massacre presented in the “Saga of the Silent City of Rocks” helps to reinforce some of the values seen in the versions of Dayley and Rice, while some values, like the importance of establishing the legend’s authenticity, are obviously left out. I am only presenting two major functions of the legend as seen in the reenactment as I believe that they are the main values presented in this version outside of the commodification of the legend. Considering both the articles predating the presentation of the “Saga of the Silent City of Rocks,” since Dawson not only wrote the articles but organized and orchestrated the saga and its enactments, I would argue that two major values may be derived from the enactments and the accompanying writings.

1. Once again Native Americans are presented as being inferior to the white people. This value presents itself in both the fact that the Indians lose this particular battle, when an actual army unit dressed in period clothing rides in to save the day, and in the dress of the “Indians,” as they all wear the full headdresses and ornamentation befitting a chief or person of importance in Native American culture, therefore emphasizing even more the superiority of the emigrants since they were able to overcome the best of the enemy. Just as Barre Toelken notes that “Goldilocks on the Oregon Trail” always involves a chief, and a famous one at that, here we have a host of chiefs, powerful men in their culture, who get rounded up and beaten by the U.S. Military when they

confront emigrant pioneers.⁸⁷ So rather than presenting the same old Almo legend, here the whites are ambushed, but with the help of the cavalry are able to win and “put the Indians in their place.”

2. This enactment continues to project the image of the violent “other,” Native Americans attacking the “innocent” families in the wagon train. This image helps to further the idea of the right of emigrants to settle and bring “civilization” to the land, thus mitigating the guilt associated with land theft and helping to secure the notion of land settlement. Just as Milner notes in reading the memoirs of emigrants and the importance the memoirs place on emigrant Indian conflict, here Al Dawson is able to satisfy his spectator’s expectations by presenting an image of the violent other. Ironically, Dawson notes that one of the “chiefs” pictured is a local Boy Scout of the “exclusive” Order of the Lost Arrow, who is descended from a family that “was one of the first to settle in Cassia County.”⁸⁸ One article quoted the Idaho Lieutenant Governor, Jack Murphy, as praising the Cassia County Historical Society for putting on the saga before “adding one of the side effects [of the saga] is the reminder of the struggle and suffering which went into building the nation, state and county.”⁸⁹ So here the politician was able to make a direct link between the bounty of the present on a county, state and national scale, and the struggles and hardships, like Indian attacks and massacres, “our” ancestors had to endure to create such a great “civilization.”

⁸⁷ “Pioneer Saga Slated July 10,” *Southern Idaho Press*, June 29, 1971.

⁸⁸ Dawson, Al. “Around Town.” *Southern Idaho Press*, March 10, 1971.

⁸⁹ Herrmann, Jerry. “5,000 Attend City of Rocks pageant.” N.p.: July 7, 1971. n.p.

Conclusion

Controversy Surrounding Brigham Madsen's Paper

Perhaps the easiest way to imagine the evolution of the Almo legend is to imagine three concentric circles. In the very center is Rice, the second circle contains Dayley, and the third has Dawson. The center of the circle represents the least of three things: distance from Almo, commodification, and complexity. We begin in the center with Rice, a resident of Almo, who didn't use the legend for economic gain and who engaged in a simple form of adolescent legend-tripping. Moving outward we have Dayley, who lived in Oakley and whose family homesteaded there in the 1870s. He told the legend to incoming tourists to bolster the tourism experience, and his enactment involved planning and a number of people. In the outermost ring we have Dawson, who lives in the county seat of Burley and doesn't mention his specific ancestors. He orchestrates a massive publicity event for the area as a potential destination, and his reenactment is high drama with a division of spectators and players, which requires a great deal of planning. Just as the legend morphed and changed with each of these differing enactments, I will introduce one more phase centered on the Almo legend that brings us to the current day. The fourth ring or phase occurred when a prominent historian from Utah helped to thrust the legend into brief national attention, resulting in the Almo legend becoming a rallying point for various outside groups who disliked what they felt the Almo legend stood for.

Hopefully, I have presented an adequate case for how the legend of the Almo massacre played a role in both Almo and the surrounding communities from the 1880s until the 1970s. What I have not yet discussed is another event that has significantly

altered the current nature of the legend by clearly demonstrating the conflict arising from how various groups perceive the legend differently. While the *Reference Series* report of 1971 certainly stated that the legend of the Almo massacre was not historically accurate, the controversy surrounding the report, if there was any, seemed to have been mild, at least publicly, judging from the small number of news articles and printed materials that even discussed the controversy. However, when the noted Western American historian Brigham Madsen wrote a paper denouncing the historical accuracy of the Almo legend in the early 1990s, a severe controversy sprang up, which was covered nationally through various articles, the syndicated radio program “All Things Considered” that airs on *National Public Radio*, as well as later receiving a chapter in James Lowen’s book *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. It would seem that the national interest in the legend and the ensuing controversy surrounding it is a clear indicator of the importance of the legend and the values that people attached to it, both locally and nationally.

I believe that several factors contributed to the controversial nature of the much more publicized denouncement of the legend as not “true”; the main factor in catapulting the local legend into the national spotlight, however, seems to be the changing nature of the general public’s perspective of the past. When the *Reference Series* of the 1970s was published, the general public was still much more inclined to believe the worst of Native Americans and were less likely to question the validity of a legend that portrayed them badly; however, the general public of the 1990s was perhaps more aware of the injustices of the Old West, and with the exposure to schools of thought like post modern history, the legend of the Almo massacre represented an antiquated and bigoted viewpoint to

many. Gone were the days when all of the blame for purported frontier violence could automatically be associated with Native Americans.

An excerpt from Brigham Madsen's memoirs *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian* seems to be the best way to provide some context for this chapter in the history of the Almo massacre, as it was written several years after the initial controversy and Madsen obviously seems to have put a great deal of thought into the controversy itself. Madsen explains that he initially became involved in researching the legend because people who inquired at the Idaho State Historical Society about the historical validity of the Almo legend were referred by the Society to inquire with Madsen. After enough calls and letters Madsen eventually decided to probe deeper into the matter and then publish his findings in *Idaho's Yesterdays*, a publication of the Idaho State Historical Society. Madsen notes in his memoirs:

My research confirmed my early suspicions that there was no Almo massacre... I met the National Park Service Director of the City of Rocks National Reserve who asked me to send him a copy of my conclusions. He hoped to mobilize public sentiment perhaps to give the embarrassing monument a decent burial and remove it from the entrance [Almo, ID] to the City of Rocks Reserve. Shortly I received a letter from him indicating that he had passed out several copies [of Madsen's paper] . . . and their [residents of Almo] reactions were totally negative and perhaps even hostile. He thought it better to dispense with any meetings for the present "to let the dust settle." Myths die hard. After over fifty years of belief in the Almo Massacre, the Almoites were not ready to give up their only claim to some historical distinction.⁹⁰

Madsen also writes that he left a copy of his paper with the Almo storekeeper of Tracy General Store, who then mailed him a letter saying, "I was told by my employer you are a relative of Chief Pocatello who was responsible for the raids in this area. I'm wondering if this is true and if this had led or influenced your decision about the

⁹⁰ Madsen, 368.

Massacre?”⁹¹ It should be noted that at this time both the Tracy store, the only store in Almo, and the NPS headquarters handed out leaflets that presented the legend as an authentic historical event. The Tracy store continued to hand out these leaflets for many more years to come.

Madsen felt that the zeitgeist of both the national public and the community of Almo were best described by two people interviewed by Bob Mims for an Associated Press article on the Almo legend controversy. Mims found that the chief historian for the NPS had no problem with Madsen's scholarship or conclusion, but that the “historian for the National Park Service in Almo 'is not ready to relegate to the realm of fiction the stories told by great-grandparents who settled in the area in 1878.’”⁹² So, while the chief historian in Washington D.C. had no problem with the idea that the Almo legend was historically inaccurate, the family ties of the local historian made the claim of historical inaccuracy much harder to accept. Madsen himself not only wanted to prove the legend did not occur but wanted the marker erected to commemorate the monument to be destroyed, and he suggested erecting a new monument in its place to Chief Pocatello, who was thought to be born some twenty miles south of Almo, in the Grouse Creek Mountains.

It is instructive here to not that Madsen actually basis his assessment of the Almo Massacre as historically inaccurate on the lack of information about the supposed massacre that should have occurred at the time. There are no diaries or journals, newspaper reports, state or territory records, or military records that mention a massacre that comes close to approaching the size of the Almo Legend. The military records and

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 369.

newspaper articles are particularly important as all of the records that were created during the American Civil War, which is when the legend takes place, were combined into a massive collection encompassing seventy volumes and known as *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Letters and correspondences of the officers in southern Idaho and northern Utah were all catalogued and printed here, and had there been a massacre of such size some mention would surely have been included here. Further, newspapers of the time were often so hungry for news of Indian attacks that if it was unavailable they would make it up, so it is highly unlikely that a story of this magnitude would escape their notice had there been any hint at all. Thus was Madsen's reasoning when he declared the Almo Massacre historically inaccurate.

Historical accuracy aside, what is of interest to this thesis and its examination of the role legends play in helping to determine community values, is the emergence of what I believe may be the folkloric kernel on which the legend of the Almo Massacre is based. What follows is a brief discussion of some of the events occurring around the time the Almo Massacre supposedly occurred that may well have led to its evolution into a full blown legend. It is interesting to note that details often included in the Almo Legend may have emerged from an article printed in the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, often remembered for its most famous correspondent Samuel Clemens, who adopted the pen name Mark Twain while working in Virginia City. While there is no direct link to Clemens as the author, the false Indian attack story did emerge a mere month after his arrival in town; who can resist imagining that the Almo Legend was in part begun by the infamous Mark Twain? This folkloric kernel was later seen in what may be the first

published account of the massacre an address copied into the book, *History of Box Elder County* in 1928.⁹³ The speaker who gave the account, John D. Peters, gives an account of the legend with only 40 people being killed, rather than 300. At about this same time, Charles Shirley Walgamott presented a highly detailed and sensationalized account of the Almo Massacre that appeared in multiple newspapers in which 300 people were killed. Perhaps we are watching the evolution of a legend through time, whereas Peters's version in the *History of Box Elder County* shares the same number of people involved as the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* account as well as the same sequence of events, whereas Walgamott's account contains more people, and a similar sequence of events, but with far more detail and background.

While Madsen's scholarship seems to be impeccable, his understanding of the importance and connection of the legend to the community seems rather naive, and his notions that "Myths die hard" and that "the Almoites were not ready to give up their only claim to some historical distinction" seems somewhat harsh when noting the complex role that folklore in general and legends in particular can play in constructing and maintaining community identity and collective cultural values. In fact, it seems there is a sense of shock in his memoirs that the "Almoites" weren't more thankful, as if he was expecting them to greet him with open arms and thank him for dispelling such an appallingly racist local tradition.

Are "All Things Considered?"

Perhaps it is in the radio segment from *All Things Considered* that the importance

⁹³ The version of the book is uncertain, as my information comes from a photo copy of an older version of the *History of Box Elder County*.

of the Almo legend along with the reason for the controversy surrounding Madsen's paper are best seen, as in this edited radio news segment the locals get to voice their own concerns and opinions. The following excerpt was taken from an NPR transcript I requested in the spring of 2010; the show was aired on the 16th of February 1994. Here the interviewer, Howard Berkes, is asking several local residents about the Almo legend and its importance.

MS. BEALES: What I remember is what my grandfather told me. They burned the wagons and killed everybody they could, and stole the horses. Only five escaped. Those were the ones that lived on berries and roots and things until they got back where there was civilization.

BERKES: [interviewing] Does it mean a lot to the community here?

ALMO RESIDENT: Sure. That's, you know, all a part of what Almo is.

MS. BEALES: Yes, and everybody believed it. They never for one second, ever, thought it wasn't true. It gives us an appreciation of what our ancestors maybe have gone through to give us a home we have today and the comforts we have. . . .

MS. BEALES: I think we're willing to admit that perhaps the number was incorrect. Maybe there wasn't 300, but something happened here, and we don't feel like an outsider should come in and want to just tear everything apart that we've believed in for years.

ALMO RESIDENT: Especially because he [Madsen] wants to remove the monument.

MS. BEALES: Does he want to remove that?

ALMO RESIDENT: Sure.

MS. BEALES: Isn't that ridiculous? We don't want other people to tell us that we're complete fools to keep this monument. It's sort of an insult. . . .

BERKES: [speaking to the radio audience] Matson [sic] suggests the Almo story was embellished, and the monument installed to help promote the area in the 1930s. Local boosters sought a government-sponsored irrigation project. They also wanted National Park status for skyscraping granite spires outside Almo, called the Silent City of Rocks. The people of Almo aren't giving up on the story. They've launched a search for diaries of the survivors, and they're searching for a woman who visited the town a few years ago, claiming to be the descendant of a survivor. Kathleen Durphy [sp], a descendant of one of Almo's first settlers, and a ranger at the City of Rocks National Reserve, says the massacre story won't die.

KATHLEEN DURPHY, Descendant of First Settlers: There will never be a change in the story.

BERKES: [interviewing] What if it turns out not to be true?

MS. DURPHY: It'll still be a story that is told.

BERKES: [interviewing] What would it mean for this community, or for you, for the monument to be taken away?

MS. DURPHY: I think that would be like tearing your arm or a leg off and throwing it away. I think if you took it away you'd take a part of Almo away.⁹⁴

I would like to identify two major factors that I believe help to explain the reason for the controversy, outside of the deep shared cultural values that have been previously discussed, many of which are mentioned by the Almo community members interviewed in this radio program. First, there is the credibility of the community and the ancestors that founded it being questioned; just as Dayley and Rice go out of their way to establish a sense of credibility as storytellers but also to present the legend as accurate, so did most residents of Almo at the time of the controversy. Questioning the validity of the legend called into question the reputation of the people who tell it, both past and present. Community, cultural and family ties are very strong in Almo, and people take pride in an agricultural way of life that hinges on ranching. Locals take pride in their individual and collective reputations for honesty, and many arrangements are still sealed with no more than a handshake. Losing face and not being considered honest carry serious ramifications in a community like Almo that is interconnected in so many ways, so it is obvious why one's credibility being called into question is difficult for locals.

In the Fall of 2009 I interviewed Phyllis Tracy, whose family had opened the Tracy General Store in 1895 and who had run the store before retiring. She still believes the legend to be true and was still actively seeking information to prove it after the controversy. While interviewing Tracy about the legend, I learned that through marriage

⁹⁴ "Town Marker Commemorates Massacre That Never Happened" *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio. February 16, 1994.

she was related to William Johnston, the main early proponent of the legend from whom Charles Walgamott had written the most detailed account of the legend, and that she had often spoken to Johnston about Almo's history and the legend.⁹⁵ As I interviewed her, Tracy pointed out of her window and showed me where the "trenches" left from the massacre had once appeared and said that Johnston had told her he had plowed them over because they made him so sad he couldn't stand to look at them. By questioning the validity of the legend, there is a perception that originators and propagators of the legend are liars, a concept that is a hard pill for most people in Almo to swallow. There is a huge distinction between thinking of your relatives and community as bigoted liars, rather than seeing them as promoting the remembrance of a substantial historical event that has since been forgotten. The short clips and news stories developed by the media, who were outsiders in Almo, couldn't have helped things as they often left out information regarding the Indian attacks that did occur in the area, and rather presented the Almo legend as completely fabricated, which could have made the community feel as if it was being stereotyped as unintelligent and backward. This is especially important as residents of Almo often feel a great connection with one another, as almost everyone can relate to the other community members, both past and present, through family ties, friends, or even religious events.

Second, I believe there is also a strong insider-outsider element that aids in coloring the controversy. Almo, like many other small, tight knit communities, has a social order, a way in which people interact and engage with each other, and being thrust into the national spotlight, and by an outsider no less, is sure to ruffle some feathers. As one resident interviewed in the NPR program comments, "We don't want other people to

⁹⁵ See footnote 57 for more background on Walgamott's written account.

tell us that we're complete fools to keep this monument. It's sort of an insult.”⁹⁶ I would think that wanting to defend the credibility of not only one's self, but also one's community, would be a normal reaction to a blanket criticism of an entire community. One resident even concedes that she would be willing to accept that fact that the massacre did not occur on the scale of 300, as the monument stated, but did occur on a smaller scale. While Dawson ignored the fact that many of the reports of Indian attacks were not historically accurate to promote his own view of the past, the NPR program is similarly misleading because it only presents a short quote from Madsen acknowledging that in 1862 some smaller attacks occurred. This statement and lack of other context surrounding the Almo legend seems somewhat misleading as a host of Indian attacks occurred in the area from the early 1840s until the end of the California and Oregon Trails, which would help to foster understanding for why the Almo legend came to be. It would appear that the news story from *All Things Considered* tends to play on the idea of rural people as being out of touch and uneducated rather than painting a more complex picture of the Almo legend and the community. This perception would only aid the feeling of defensiveness and betrayal in a community like Almo, as the national media seems willing to cast them into a stereotyped role to sell a story, just like they are being accused of stereotyping Native Americans, which then further fuels the controversy.

Conclusion

It is obvious that folklore, and especially legends, plays an active and engaging part in helping to define, shape and support collective cultural value systems within the

⁹⁶ *All Things Considered*.

communities in which they are used. It is my belief that the legend of the Almo massacre clearly expresses such a value system. Moreover, it is my contention that in engaging this legend through ostensive enactments, the local community has reinforced and reiterated the importance of the value system through its enactments of the Almo legend. Barre Toelken when discussing legends stated that “They [legends] need to be treated as expressions of shared value which are poetic in their formulation, cultural in their meaning, and historical in their impact upon people’s actions.”⁹⁷

Just as Dayley and particularly Dawson co-opted the legend of the Almo massacre to increase the “color” and interest in their region, since the controversy surrounding the Almo legend that Madsen’s declaration of inauthenticity precipitated, the most likely groups to speak publicly about the legend are those who feel the legend represents a set of antiquated and racist core values that they disagree with. After working and living in Almo for five months in the summer and fall of 2010, I asked many friends and colleagues what role the legend played in their lives, if any. The people I asked ranged in ages from their twenties to their fifties, and all were intimately connected with Almo, mostly having grown up there. Each one replied that they couldn’t recall having heard someone talking about the legend within the community in a long time. In fact, most expressed the fact that they were more interested in problems and joys that existed in their day-to-day lives, like ranching and making ends meet rather than defending the legend. They felt that while the legend was important to some members of the community, almost all of them older, it was not an important part of their lives.

It is no wonder that the younger generations of Almo feel a sort of disconnect with their most prominent local legend, as it isn’t very local anymore. Today, Almo

⁹⁷ Toelken, 26.

tends to take the blame for a legend co-opted and utilized by a series of outsiders who were really interested in what the legend could provide for themselves, but whose actions always come back to Almo. For example, while the name of the legend retains its connection with Almo, Dawson was able to make his own version of the legend for his own reasons that spread its value to a broader area. So, because the Sons and Daughters of Idaho Pioneers erected the monument to the Almo legend in 1938, no matter who co-opts the legend for their own use, it is the residents of Almo who are held accountable because of the monument's existence.

Perhaps this disconnect from the legend relates in large part to the negative attention paid to Almo during the controversy. Neither "Morning Edition" in their radio program, or James Loewen in his book *Lies Across America* "What our Historic Sites Get Wrong", noted the fact that numerous Indian attacks had occurred in the area, or cited the evidence that pointed to the occurrence of such attacks; rather they focused solely on the fact that the legend was "false." I would contend that the media even preyed upon stereotypes of rural people as backward and unintelligent, helping to fuel both controversy and resentment among the locals. Perhaps, too, this loss of the legend's importance in locals' lives relates to the nature of time and of a loss of connection with the early tellers of the legend. What is interesting is who now devotes time and energy to the legend.

In my experience working with the public in Almo as a seasonal ranger, it was opponents of the legend who today are more outwardly engaged with the legend. I met several tourists passing through who inquired about it, having already heard that it was false and wanting to know when the monument would be torn down. I even encountered

two vans with a group of Native Americans from the Shoshone-Bannock Reservation in Fort Hall who had traveled to Almo to meet with park representatives on another issue. I noticed someone in the group taking a photo of the monument and pulled over to speak with them. We had a wonderful discussion, and they told me that they had just been to a conference where one of the presentations was focused on the monument to the Almo massacre, the negative stereotypes it represents, and its need to be destroyed. Perhaps as time goes on the legend will become more important to the outsiders; perhaps it will become more important to the younger generation of Almo as well in one way or another. For now one thing does remain, the large concrete monument commemorating the legend still resides in the very heart of Almo, where it waits for future generations to decide its fate.

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