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Blood on the Marias

The Baker Massacre

By Paul R. Wylie

On the morning of January 23, 1870, troops of the 2nd U.S. Cavalry attacked a Piegan Indian village on the Marias River in Montana Territory, killing many more than the army's count of 173, most of them women, children, and old men. The village was afflicted with smallpox. Worse, it was the wrong encampment. Intended as a retaliation against Mountain Chief's renegade band, the massacre sparked public outrage when news sources revealed that the battalion had attacked Heavy Runner's innocent village—and that guides had told its absent commander, Major Eugene Baker, he was on the wrong trail, but he struck anyway. Remembered as one of the most infamous incidents of the Indian Wars, the Baker Massacre has often been overshadowed by the better-known Battle of the Little Bighorn and has never received full treatment until now.

Author Paul R. Wylie plumbs the history of Euro-American involvement with the Piegans, who were members of the Blackfoot Confederacy. His research shows the tribe was trading furs for whiskey with the Hudson's Bay Company before Meriwether Lewis encountered them in 1806. As American fur traders and trappers moved into the region, the U.S. government soon followed, making treaties it did not honor. When the gold rush started in the 1860s and the U.S. Army arrived, pressure from Montanans citizens to control the Piegans and make the territory safe led Generals William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip H. Sheridan to send Baker and the 7th Cavalry, with tragic consequences. Although these generals sought to dictate press coverage thereafter, news of the cruelty of the killings appeared in the New York Times, which called the massacre “a more shocking affair than the sack of Black Kettle’s camp on the Washita” two years earlier.

While other scholars have written about the Baker Massacre in related contexts, Blood on the Marias gives this infamous event the definitive treatment it deserves. Baker’s inexact command at the spark of violence, but decades of tension between Piegans and whites set the stage for a brutal and too-often-forgotten incident.

Paul R. Wylie, a retired attorney and now an independent researcher and writer, is author of The Irish General: Thomas Francis Meagher. He lives in Bozeman, Montana.
Photographing Custer’s Battlefield

The Images of Kenneth F. Roachen

By Sandy Barnard

In the 140 years since the defeat of George Armstrong Custer and his troops at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, scholars and other visitors have combed the site of today’s Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument for evidence that might clarify the controversial events of June 1876. In Photographing Custer’s Battlefield, Sandy Barnard, an expert on Custer and the Little Big Horn, presents the work of the site’s most dedicated photographer, U.S. Fish and Game agent Kenneth F. Roachen (1888–1976), revealing further mysteries of the battlefield and showing how it has changed.

Barnard opens by introducing readers to Roachen, who spent the last phase of his career and his retirement years in Montana, where he made his personal mission from the 1930s to the 1970s to photograph what was then called Custer Battlefield. Among Roachen’s most useful images are his photographs of the Crow’s Nest, the Meares, and Girard’s Knoll—places whose precise locations have long been debated. He also made a series of pioneering aerial photographs of the Little Big Horn and its surrounding landscape.

When paired with Barnard’s modern-day photographs, maps, and thorough analysis, Roachen’s images provide valuable information for visitors to the monument as well as for historians, biologists, engineers, and other government employees who interpret, preserve, and protect the battlefield and its surrounding terrain. In addition to showing sites associated with the fighting, Roachen’s photographs depict mid-twentieth-century roadwork, archaeological surveys and restorations, and construction of the visitor center, park housing, and maintenance facilities. Barnard’s matching photographs, taken in 2002 and 2003, help to identify additional subtle but significant landscape modifications.

The numerous debates surrounding the Battle of the Little Big Horn have made on-the-ground evidence especially important. Roachen’s photographic legacy, explored here in more than 900 historic and contemporary images, offers fresh insight into the battlefield’s ever-changing landscape, helping visitors old and new to better understand the history beneath their feet.

Sandy Barnard, a retired journalism professor at Indiana State University, is author or coauthor of numerous books on the Battle of Little Big Horn, including Where Custer Fell: Photographs of the Little Bighorn Battlefield Then and Now.
The American Cowboy
The Myth and the Reality
By Joe B. Frantz and Julian Ernest Choate, Jr.

The cowboy, America’s most popular folk hero, appeals to millions of readers and commands a vast audience on country radio, television, and at the movies, but what exactly is a cowboy? Illustrated with Erwin E. Smith’s great cowboy photographs, The American Cowboy reveals the real, dyed-in-the-wool cowboy as a heroic being from the American past, who richly deserves to be understood in terms of reality, instead of myth.

Joe B. Frantz was Professor of History at the University of Texas and a prolific author of Texas and western history.
Julian Ernest Choate, Jr., was Professor of English, David Lipscomb College, Nashville, Tennessee.

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264 PAGES, 5.5 × 8.5
16 B&W ILLUSTRATIONS
U.S. HISTORY
"Hang Them All"
George Wright and the Plateau Indian War, 1858

By Donald L. Cutler

Foreword by Laurie Arnold

Col. George Wright’s campaign against the Yakima, Spokane, Coeur d’Alene, Palouse, and other Indian peoples of eastern Washington Territory was intended to punish them for a recent attack on another U.S. Army force. Wright had once appeared to respect the Indians of the Upper Columbia Plateau, but in 1858 he led a brief war noted for its violence, bloodshed, and summary trials and executions. Today, many critics view his actions as war crimes, but among white settlers and politicians of the time, Wright was a patriotic hero who helped open the Inland Northwest to settlement. "Hang Them All" offers a comprehensive account of Wright’s campaigns and explores the controversy surrounding his legacy.

Over thirty days, Wright’s forces defeated a confederation of Plateau warriors in two battles, destroyed their food supplies, slaughtered animals, burned villages, took hostages, and ordered the hanging of sixteen prisoners, seeking the reasons for Wright’s turn toward mercilessness, Cutler asks hard questions: If Wright believed he was behaving in accordance with established rules, why were his executions so gruesomely theatrical and cruel? How did he justify destroying food supplies and villages and killing hundreds of horses? Was Wright more violent than his contemporaries, or did his actions reflect a broader policy of taking Indian lands and destroying Native cultures?

Stripped of most of their territory, the Plateau tribes nonetheless survived and preserved their cultures. With Wright’s reputation called into doubt, some northwesterners questioned whether an army fort and other places in the region should be named for him. Do historically based names honor an underserving murderer, or prompt a valuable history lesson? In examining contemporary and present-day treatments of Wright and the incidents, "Hang Them All" adds an important, informed voice to the continuing debate.

Donald L. Cutler, retired from a career in banking and finance, is an independent historian of the Columbia Plateau and Pacific Northwest. Laurie Arnold (Lakota Band, Colville Confederated Tribes) is Director of Native American Studies and Assistant Professor of History at Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington.
On August 25, 1938, twenty-five-year-old Ben Dickson and his fifteen-year-old wife Stella Mae robbed the Corn Exchange Bank in Elkton, South Dakota, making off with $3,187.64. Two months later they hit a bank in nearby Brookings for $17,502—after waiting two hours for the bank teller to open while the bank’s manager went on processing loans for customers. Unfortunately for these two small-time outlaws, the FBI was in short supply of public enemies at the time, and a newly minted Bonnie and Clyde was exactly what J. Edgar Hoover needed to stoke the agency’s public relations machine.

Retrieving the Dicksons from the fog of history and the hype of the FBI’s “Most Wanted” narrative, The Ballad of Ben and Stella Mae tells the story of a damsel and a dandy small-town girl and her petty criminal husband whose low-key crime spree became, as True magazine proclaimed, “The Crimson Trail of Public Enemies One and Two.” This book follows Stella Mae and Ben from their troubled beginnings in Topeka through the desperate adventure that led the FBI to them as a dangerous and nationwide manhunt that ended in betrayal and bloodshed: Ben dead, shot in the back outside of a hamburger joint in Forest Park, Missouri, and Stella Mae, a juvenile, put away, for years.

The Dicksons first captured Matthew Cecil’s imagination as a teenager in his hometown of Brookings, where their bank robbery became the stuff of legend. When, many years later, their file turned up in his research into the FBI, the tale of their exploits—and exploitation at the hands of J. Edgar Hoover—proved irresistible. Readers of this Depression-era story, recall how our grit and tenacity, glory, will find it no less compelling.

Matthew Cecil is professor and director of the School of Communication at Wichita State University. He is the author of Hoover’s FBI and the Fourth Estate: The Campaign to Control the Press and the Bureau’s Image, also from Kansas.

“Cecil highlights how J. Edgar Hoover’s selfish PR interests and influence only amplified the tragedy that was the Dicksons’ lives. . . . The definitive narrative about Ben and Stella Mae, and an invaluable history of a little-examined aspect of the FBI’s 1930s anti-crime publicity effort.”

Douglas H. Wallin, author of Hoover’s War on Guns and The FBI’s Origins

“Cecil’s well-told account, bolstered by his deep knowledge of the FBI, should be of real interest to Kansas and regional readers.”

Virgil Denny, editor of John Brown to Bob Dole: Movers and Shakers in Kansas History
From Guns to Gavels
How Justice Grew Up in the Outlaw West

Bill Neal

Our criminal justice system—and how it evolved on the frontier—is often overlooked in many histories of the West. In this volume, Bill Neal cleverly weaves detailed facts about actual isolated incidents into an adventure told through the drama of the yarns of those bygone days. Neal narrates the story of a 13-year-old boy, who, in 1885, strikes out on his own, becomes an outlaw and dies by the gun many years later—well into the 20th century. This interesting book offers the historian a rich read that is enhanced by period photos of the actual subjects and locator maps of the anecdotal tales. You’ll find this a fascinating take on Old West history.
—True West

When a thirteen-year-old boy strikes out on his own in 1885, leaving his Civil War-ravaged Mississippi homeland for the wild Red River borderland between North Texas and Indian Territory, the American West is a land beyond the reach of the law. Crime thrives in the absence of law officers, courtrooms, judges, and jails. Vigilante justice, the posse, and the hangman’s noose fill the void. But by the time the young man—now a veteran outlaw—dies by the gun in 1929 after a tempestuous career, the Old West has been largely tamed, its official legal systems firmly in place.

Veteran defense attorney and prosecutor Bill Neal takes readers from Mississippi to the frontiers of West Texas, Indian Territory, New Mexico Territory, and finally the frozen Montana wilderness through a series of linked, true-life tales of crimes and trials. Tracing the struggles of incipient criminal justice in the Southwest through an engaging progression of outlaws and lawmen, plus a host of colorful frontier trial lawyers and judges, Neal reveals how law and society matured together.

As a practicing criminal lawyer, Bill Neal spent more than four decades frequenting county courthouses in West Texas and hearing tales of sensational crimes and celebrated trials of bygone years. A two-time winner of the Rupert N. Richardson Award, Neal has garnered honors from the National Association for Outlaw and Lawmen History, the West Texas Historical Association, the Writers’ League of Texas, and the Western Writers of America. He and his wife, Gayla, live in Abilene, Texas.

2008 Rupert N. Richardson Award
2009 North Texas Book Festival Award
Powder River

Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War

By Paul L. Hedren

The Great Sioux War of 1876–77 began at daybreak on March 27, 1876, when Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds and six cavalry companies struck a village of Northern Cheyennes—Sioux allies—thereby propelling the Northern Plains tribes into war. The ensuing last stand of the Sioux against Anglo-American settlement of their homeland spanned some eighteen months, playing out across more than twenty battle and skirmish sites and costing hundreds of lives on both sides and many millions of dollars. And it all began at Powder River.

*Powder River: Disastrous Opening of the Great Sioux War* recounts the wintertime Big Horn Expedition and its singular great battle, along with the stories of the Northern Cheyennes and their elusive leader Old Bear. Historian Paul Hedren tracks both sides of the conflict through a rich array of primary source material, including the transcripts of Reynolds’s court-martial and Indian recollections. The disarray and incompetence of the war’s beginnings—officers who failed to take proper positions, disregard of orders to save provisions, failure to cooperate, and abandonment of the dead and wounded soldier—in many ways anticipated the catastrophe that later occurred at the Little Big Horn.

Forty photographs, many previously unpublished, and five new maps detail the action from start to ignominious conclusion. Hedren’s comprehensive account takes Powder River out of the shadow of the Little Big Horn and reveals how much this critical battle tells us about the army’s policy and performance in the West, and about the decade soon to follow.

Paul L. Hedren is a retired National Park Service superintendent residing in Omaha, Nebraska. He is the author of *Fort Laramie and the Great Sioux War* and *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle: How the United States Army Waged War on the Northern Plains, 1870–1877*. 

*The battle that anticipated the catastrophe at the Little Big Horn*
Available from the National Ranching Heritage Center

Getting By in Hard Times: Letters from the Pitchfork Ranch, 1938–1939
By Scott White

This book provides a rare look at the day-to-day details of running the Pitchfork Ranch during the late 1930s. Letters of brothers Eugene F. Williams and J. Gates Williams and of Virgil V. Parr illuminate the great challenges faced by the ranch owners and managers at a time when the rest of the country was trying to recover from the Great Depression and severe drought.

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Life in the Saddle: Cow Country Cowboy Stories
By Scott White | Foreword by Red Steagall | Illustrations by Bob Moline

What is so special about cowboys? The movies made the American cowboy into a larger-than-life character, but in reality, a cowboy’s life is full of hard work, long days, and low pay. It is these stories that are presented in this book. The anecdotes, family histories, and personal accounts will please anyone in search of real Western history as it was lived.

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Law on the Last Frontier

*Texas Ranger Arthur Hill*

S. E. Spinks

During investigations ranging from the simple theft of 34 porcelain toilets to the tragic cases of murdered peace officers, Hill made his mark as an honorable and adventurous ranger. His lone pursuit of thieves, gamblers, murderers, bank robbers, and drug smugglers makes for good reading, and his insight into the operations of the modern Texas Rangers is a commendable bonus. Spinks did her homework on this one, and the final product is well worth the effort.—*True West*

In a career forged in the saddle on scout duty along the Rio Grande, Arthur Hill witnessed dramatic changes from 1947 to 1974. Whether inspecting brands, deterring smugglers of everything from cattle to candelilla wax, or giving chase on horseback across merciless terrain—often into Mexico—Hill found himself immersed in a world that straddled centuries as well as cultures. Promotion to sergeant of Ranger Company B in 1957 took Hill to Dallas, where he brought his brush-country methods to bear on urban crimes. Yet after only a year, and despite the opportunity for advancement to captain, Hill knew his place and heart were back in the Big Bend, where rampant drug trade was altering his beloved border irrevocably from an existence that had remained the same for hundreds of years. From the Lone Star Steel strike, the KKK, and the “Dixie Mafia” to problems of drug-running and illegal immigration, Arthur Hill’s life as a Texas ranger illuminates both the present and the past.

**S. E. Spinks** has had a lifelong fascination with Texas and Western history. *Law on the Last Frontier* is the culmination of four years of research in archival collections across the state as well as in Hill’s personal papers. An active member of the Former Texas Rangers, Spinks lives with her husband and sons in New Braunfels, Texas.