

Native Peoples in Northern California:**Bitter Memories at Round Valley**

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"One day a white man came into the Valley riding a horse. He went to the central camp of the Yuki tribe.... The Indians were amazed at seeing their first white man and horse, and being naturally friendly people gathered round to see what had arrived in their midst. They were not long in learning this strange creature had the power of a `Devil' for he pointed a stick at them and a big noise and smoke came out of it and an Indian died with a hole in his chest. Devils were to be disposed of, and this one was no exception. No one knows what disposition was made of his body, but he had committed his last murder."

A Yuki legend of the first white man in Round Valley

The first inhabitants of Round Valley in the northeastern corner of Mendocino County called themselves Ukomno'm--Valley People. They built villages at places called Red Ground, Wide Hill, Cool Water, Short Creek, and Tule Point. They traded and married with other tribes who spoke the same language.

They lived by hunting, fishing and gathering. Deer, quail, salmon and trout were popular. Acorns from several species of oaks were ground with a mortar and pestle to provide soup, mush and bread. Tales of famine, which are common among other native people, were rare among the Yuki.

The name Yuki actually comes from the Nomlaki people who lived on the other side of large mountains. When the first non-Indian explorers came west through the Sacramento Valley they asked the Nomlaki "who lived beyond the mountains?" The Nomlaki answered "Yuki" which in their Wintu language means "enemy" or "thief."

In May 1854, Frank Asbill and others were traveling through the Coast Range looking for a route from Petaluma to Weaverville, a route that could be used to ship supplies to the gold miners who were now flooding the state. On May 15, while gathering up his horses, Frank Asbill spotted beautiful Round Valley. He gathered up his men and rode into Round Valley where he proceeded to kill 40 Yuki Indians.

A bronze plaque has been placed by the state of California to mark the spot where Frank Asbill "discovered" Round Valley. It doesn't mention the massacre that happened later that day. The plaque, spotted with bullet holes, was stolen several years ago. It was eventually recovered from the Alameda County Flea Market, where it was being sold as junk.

GENOCIDE IN THE GOLDEN STATE

As European Americans invaded Round Valley a genocidal war of extermination was underway against the Native Peoples of California. The first governor of California, after the U.S. government seized California from Mexico in the War of 1848, called for a "war of extermination" against the Indians and said that their complete destruction was "the inevitable destiny of the race."

In 1848 gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill and white Americans started flooding into California. Within three years more than 200,000 spilled across the Sierras in a frantic rush to reach the gold fields. Even the remote portions of the state became overrun with non-Indians seeking to log timber, ranch and farm. This disrupted the Indians' food supply. Logging mills, for example, kept salmon from going upstream, and ranchers fenced in land where Indians had gathered food for hundreds of years.

In 1850 California passed the "Act for the Government and Protection of the Indians." This act allowed any white settler to force any Indian found to be without means of support to work for him. Since Indians could not testify against white people in court, almost any Indian could be seized as a virtual slave under this law. Many settlers didn't even bother with the law and purchased Indian children outright. Many fortunes were made off the sale of Indian women and children. An editorial in the *Marysville Appeal* illustrates this practice: "But it is from these mountain tribes that white settlers draw their supplies of kidnapping children, educated as servants, and women for purposes of labor and lust...there are parties

in the northern portion of the state whose sole occupation has been to steal young children and squaws ...and dispose of them at handsome prices to the settlers who...willingly pay \$50 or \$60 for a young Digger to cook or wait upon them, or \$100 for a likely young girl."

In order to clear the way for white settlement, the U.S. Senate in 1853 authorized three commissioners to negotiate treaties with the Indian tribes in California. Eighteen treaties were negotiated with the California Indians. The Indians negotiated in good faith and bartered away millions of acres of land in exchange for the U.S. government's promise of protection and lands with adequate water and game to sustain them and their way of life. These lands would have contained about 7.5 million acres, or 7.5 percent of the land area of California. The Indians began moving to their new lands only to find out that the Senate had refused to ratify their treaties.

At the same time as they rejected the treaties, the Senate appointed Edward Beale to be in charge of Indian policy in California. Beale quickly developed a new plan for dealing with California's Indians. His plan was to have a "system of military posts" on government-owned reservations. Each of these reservations would put into place a "system of discipline and instruction." Beale wrote that the cost of the troops would be "borne by the surplus produce of Indian labor." No treaties were to be negotiated with the Indians, instead they would be "invited to assemble within these reserves."

The reservations that Beale proposed and which were established in California were different in important respects from reservations that had been set up in other parts of the country. These California reservations were to be on U.S. government land and there was no recognition of any land ownership rights on the part of the Indians. Also, the Indians were not even granted nominal rights to control their own affairs. They were to be directly under the control of U.S. troops. The California reservations could more accurately be called concentration camps.

In 1856 Nome Cult Farm, which later became the Round Valley Reservation, was set up in Round Valley. The government thought that Round Valley's isolated location and geography made it an ideal place to put thousands of Indians. Although the whole Valley was initially claimed by the government, settlers in the area quickly claimed the best land, tore down fences and let their cattle graze on the land set aside for the reservation. Indians who worked on the reservation received only six ears of corn to eat per day. Indians at Round Valley were used as private labor for the agents in charge of the reservation.

Indians on the reservations were hired out to settlers to work as pack animals. A settler reported that in 1857: "About 300 died on the reservation from the effects of packing them through the mountains in the snow and mud...They were worked naked with the exception of deer skins around their shoulders...They usually packed 50 pounds if they were able..."

The reservations were supposed to protect the Indians from slave-raiders. However, Indian women and children on Nome Cult Farm were in more danger of being kidnapped into slavery because they were now concentrated together, which made it easier and more convenient for the slavers. An employee of Nome Cult Farm who arrived on the reservation in 1858 stated, "In coming to the valley, on the first occasion, I met a man with four Indian boys taking them off, and the third time I came on the trail, I met a man taking off a girl."

RIVER RANGERS

Many powerful forces around the state openly called for the extermination of the Indians. The *Yreka Herald* stated its position clearly: "Now that general hostilities against the Indians have commenced we hope that the government will render such aid as will enable the citizens of the north to carry on a war of extermination until the last redskin of these tribes has been killed. Extermination is no longer a question of time--the time has arrived, the work has commenced, and let the first man that says treaty or peace be regarded as a traitor." Other papers voiced similar sentiments.

One employee at Nome Cult Farm described the extent of the actions against the Indians of the area, "In 1856, the first expedition by the whites against the Indians was made and they have continued ever since..there were so many of these expeditions that I cannot recollect the number; the result being that we would kill, on an average, 50 or 60 Indians on a trip and take some prisoners, which we always took to the reserve; frequently we would have to turn out two or three times a week."

Public policy clearly supported the genocide of the Indians. A California law in 1851 gave settlers the right to organize

vigilante groups and hunt down Indians and permitted them to submit claims to the state for their expenses. In 1851 and 1852 the state legislature authorized claims totaling over \$1 million.

Municipal governments offered bounties for Indian scalps. Shasta City in 1855 offered \$5.00 for every Indian head presented at city headquarters. One resident wrote about how he remembers seeing men bringing mules to town, each laden with eight to twelve Indian heads. A community near Marysville in 1859 paid bounties "for every scalp or some other satisfactory evidence" that an Indian had been killed.

One militia which operated in Mendocino County was the Eel River Rangers. This militia was formed after a horse belonging to Serranus Clifton Hastings was killed, allegedly by starving Indians, in April 1859. Hastings was a wealthy rancher, the first Chief Justice of California's Supreme Court, and had been elected attorney general in 1851. He petitioned his friend, Governor Weller, of the need to organize a company to drive the Indians out of Mendocino County.

The company was organized under the command of Captain Walter Jarboe. Jarboe's orders to his men were to "kill all the bucks they could find and take the women and children prisoner, and if they caught sight of an Indian, never lose him as long as they could follow his track." In reality, the company spared few of the Indians, killing women and children. Unarmed Indians looking for food were surrounded and shot.

A Lieutenant described a typical raid: "We...traveled in the night until we saw the fire of an Indian Rancheria which we surrounded when day was breaking and waited until near sun up before we attacked and killed 20, consisting of bucks, squaws and children, and also took two squaws and one child prisoner; those killed were all killed in about three minutes...we found in this rancheria no sign of depredation having been committed by these Indians."

In a report to Governor Weller, Jarboe describes his actions during the first three weeks of December, 1859, during which time he burned Indians alive in their huts and in four separate encounters shot 7, 32 and 10.

The Eel River Rangers were disbanded in January 1860. In his final report Jarboe estimated that in less than five months he fought the Indians "23 times, killed 283 warriors, the number of wounded was not known, took 292 prisoners, sent them to the reservation." On April 12, 1860 the state legislature approved \$9,347.39 for "payment of the indebtedness incurred by the expedition against the Indians in the County of Mendocino organized under the command of Captain W. S. Jarboe in 1859." California Governor Weller wrote a letter to Jarboe congratulating him for doing "all that was anticipated" and giving his "sincere thanks for the manner in which it [the campaign] was conducted."

There were many, many other massacres carried out during these bloody years. Some of the more well known are the Clear Lake Massacre, Blood Run Creek Massacre, and the Massacre at Bloody Rock.

The Indians that survived the massacres were driven by horse-riding whites with bullwhips from their villages to Nome Cult, a passage remembered as "The Death March." A Pomo elder described his grandmother's story in the *Albion Monitor* newspaper, "They herded them like cattle, like animals. Old people couldn't make it, couldn't keep up and died on the road. [When I was a boy] they talked about it, they would talk about what happened on the road and they would cry, go all to pieces. It was misery, it was hardship. It was death."

One account of the Death March was told to a Pomo woman by her great-grandfather: An old woman, unable to keep the pace, begged to be buried there on the trailside, her favorite basket at her side. Another elder remembered that mothers killed their own babies rather than see them die a slow death on the March.

This is how seven peoples, the Konkow Maidu; Little Lake and other Pomo people; Nomlaki; Cahto; Wailaki; Pit River; and Yuki have come to live together in Round Valley.

RESISTANCE

One of the myths about the Native People of Mendocino County is that they did not organize resistance to the genocide that was being conducted against them. The battles were almost always unequal, with the whites having vastly superior weapons and the Indians were never able to unite as a group against them. These are some examples of the resistance from the book *Genocide and Vendetta*:

- During the first year of Nome Cult Farm, the Yuki Indians rebelled. The head of the reservation wrote: "some of the Nome Cult Indians twice surrounded our quarters, threatening our lives and killing some stock. In resisting them we were forced to kill many of them which stopped their proceedings."
- On December 9, 1859 a band of Yuki gathered in Long Valley and challenged some of Jarboe's men. When the Indians were attacked, they filled the air with a continuous stream of arrows and war cries. They tried to kill all of the whites. They were unsuccessful against the guns of the whites and all of the Indians were either killed or wounded. Several of Jarboe's men were injured.
- In 1861 a band of Wailaki succeeded in obtaining rifles and becoming proficient in their use. They became known as the "Gun Indians." In September of 1861 these Wailaki attacked the settlers in Round Valley, killing a large number of horses and cattle. In retaliation the settlers attacked a Wailaki village at Horse Canyon, killing 240 Wailaki, including many women and children. This massacre became known as the Blood Run Creek massacre because so many Indians were killed that the creek became red with the blood of the victims.
- Further north in Humboldt County there was widespread resistance. One of the most active was Chief Lassik's band, which succeeded in driving the settlers out of their territory in southeastern and southwestern Humboldt County. Chief Lassik and his band were captured in 1862, but were able to escape from the Smith River Reservation. After escaping, he headed south along the Klamath River and "stirred up discontent and revengeful feelings." Although Chief Lassik was finally caught and killed in 1863, for over one year he was able to carry on a campaign of resistance against the settlers.

Prior to contact with non-Indians it is estimated that there were about 310,000 American Indians living in the state of California. The deadly mission system imposed by Spanish colonialists and missionaries had taken the lives of tens of thousands of Indians. But the mission system did not reach into many areas and remote valleys like Round Valley. As California fell under U.S. domination, in a relatively short period of time from 1830 to 1890, the Native population of California declined from approximately 245,000 to 16,000. During the worst decade, between 1845 and 1855, the rate of decline was incredible. In less than 10 years the Indian population fell from 150,000 to approximately 50,000. One historian wrote that what the government did to the California Indians was "as close to genocide as any tribal people had faced or would face on the North American continent."

THEFT OF THE LAND AND DESTRUCTION OF THE CULTURE

In the years after the most brutal killing ended, the American society concentrated on stealing away the little land that was put aside for the Indians on the reservations and destroying their culture. Through various forms of theft and fraud white settlers took control of most of the valley land throughout the 1870s and 1880s. White ranchers became rich fattening their cattle illegally on Indian land and selling it at inflated prices to the Indians. A visitor to the valley described what would happen when someone complained about the settlers stealing the land: "If a witness against them could be neither coaxed nor terrified into silence, he got a bullet and the local magistrate made a perfunctory investigation."

When Congress passed the Dawes Severalty Act in 1887, which provided for allotment of reservation land to individual Indians, it became clear that about 60 percent of the reservation lands had been lost to the white settlers. Whereas there were supposedly 102,118 acres prior to allotment, only 42,163 acres were actually allotted. The land was dispersed in a checkerboard fashion to make it impossible for Native People to combine their small parcels.

Many Indian people lost most of their land in later years through various types of fraud, through non-payment of taxes, or they were forced to sell it because white settlers ran them off their own property.

There were also systematic efforts to destroy the culture and history of the Native Peoples. Ministers were brought in to run the reservation and "civilize the savages." One minister instituted a pass system--all Indians had to have a signed pass to leave the reservation. Native People found off the reservation without a pass were brought back by the military. A congressman who visited Round Valley in 1874 found that the minister in charge whipped the Indians, that the Indians were poorly fed and forced to work for very little in return. He concluded that the reservation system was little better than slavery.

Youth were forced to attend reservation schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Children were prohibited from wearing Indian clothing or speaking their native language. Those who were caught breaking the rules were severely

beaten.

JIM CROW IN MENDOCINO

Jim Crow segregation was the rule in Mendocino County up until the 1960s. A middle-aged Round Valley resident remembered the days of segregation. "We couldn't go in restaurants, we couldn't go in barbershops, we couldn't buy alcoholic beverages. I suppose we could vote and our men could go off to war, but we couldn't go into the court or have witnesses testify on your behalf. We weren't allowed to have government jobs until the 1960s."

The shocking and bloody history of the Round Valley Indian Reservation and Mendocino County are events that continue to be felt in the lives of the Native People in Round Valley. "I believe that what we are dealing with in Bear Lincoln's case has its roots firmly in the past," says Phil DeJong, one of Bear Lincoln's attorneys. "We need to confront the issue of how the white community deals with the Round Valley Indian people and other Native American Indian communities in the area. We can't heal the past unless we address the present."

Sources used for this article include:

Genocide and Vendetta: The Round Valley Wars of Northern California by Lynwood Carranco and Estle Beard. University of Oklahoma Press, 1981.

Indians of California: The Changing Image by James Rawls. University of Oklahoma Press, 1984.

Testimony of Lester J. Marston (testimony from a motion in Bear Lincoln's trial)--available on the internet along with other information on the Bear Lincoln case at <http://www.monitor.net>.

This article is posted in English and Spanish on Revolutionary Worker Online

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