



## ***Mountain Sky Area***

Rocky Mountain Annual Conference  
Yellowstone Annual Conference  
of The United Methodist Church  
**Bishop Elaine J. W. Stanovsky**

Bishop's Sand Creek Massacre Blog

Entry #6

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### **The United Methodist General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns visits the Site of the Sand Creek Massacre, September 22, 2010**



My first visit to Sand Creek, wearing a ceremonial shawl, a gift from JuDee Anderson and the Sheridan, Wyoming UMC.

Photo courtesy Ginny Underwood, UMCOM

The Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns met at University Park United Methodist Church, Denver. I joined as they journeyed to the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. I gained new perspective on the Methodist presence and shaping influence in Colorado. Not only was the Massacre led by John Chivington, an ordained Methodist minister, who left the ministry to fight the Civil War – but the very mission of Methodists to Colorado in 1859 broke treaty. The Ft. Laramie Treaty of 1851 promised two things: to protect eastern Colorado and parts of Kansas, Nebraska and Wyoming as Indian land and to provide a right of way for pioneers headed west to pass through. Forts were established along the pioneer trails to keep pioneers safe along the trail, and to prevent them

from settling in Indian country. Once gold was struck in 1858, the terms of the treaty were ignored. Indians who attacked settlers were protecting rights they had been guaranteed. Early Methodists came with the gold rush, in violation of the treaty. Until 1861, when the Treaty of Fort Wise reduced protected Indian land to 1/13 of what was designated in 1851, our churches, our schools, our libraries were part of a movement to settle land that had been given to Indians by treaties. For the first time I understood that “skirmishes” among settlers and Indians in this territory at that time were among people who had a right to be here and those who did not.

### **Alexa Roberts, National Park Service, shared about the history of the Site**

The site of the Massacre was in private ownership ever since the treaties were extinguished one by one. It was used for cattle grazing and farming. In 1909 a group of veterans involved in the attack took the train to Kit Carson, Colorado to try to locate the site for a reunion. They couldn't identify where the Massacre had occurred.



The Cheyenne and Arapaho people have been going on personal pilgrimages since at least the 1930s. In the 1930s people fleeing the dust bowl collected wagonloads of stuff from the site. In 1950 a philanthropist group and the Colorado Historical society placed a small memorial marker on a bluff overlooking Sand Creek. [Stanovsky note: The marker refers to the Massacre as a “Battle Ground,” one lingering reminder of the tendency over the years to minimize the atrocity of this historic event, and to cast it as a Civil War battle.]

Over the years several attempts were made to locate the site of the village where the troops attacked. Finally in 1998 federal legislation was adopted to locate the site. The descendant tribes, the State of Colorado and the National Park Service worked together for 18 months to identify the site for official designation. They drew on multiple sources: archeology, history, aerial photography, geomorphology and Tribal oral history.

The archeology effort involved finding artifacts – bullets, clothing, domestic items, metal, arrowheads, and horse tack. These things were coming out of the ground. We were holding them in our hands. It was a powerful time.

The collection of oral history focused on painful stories that survivors had passed down through generations. People did talk about those histories. The stories were told in the

context of prayer. A tribal member recorded oral histories, translated them and took them back to the person interviewed to confirm his understanding and translation.

The Sand Creek Massacre site is alive. It's like a beating heart.

In 2000 the report was sent to Congress, identifying a 5 by 2 mile area of national significance and suitability.

In 2007 the Secretary of the Interior established the Sand Creek National Historical Site. The Dedication of the site was the largest gathering ever in Kiowa County.

It was hard for people in the local community to come to grips with the fact that one thing they would be known for a massacre. But the community became very supportive and welcoming of the site. There have been no Native People in the area since the Massacre.

### **Descendants**

Northern Cheyenne descendants of the Massacre came from Lame Deer, Montana: Reginald Killsnight, Sr., Reginald Killsnight, Jr., Otto Braided Hair. And members of the Native American Ministries group from the Sheridan, Wyoming United Methodist Church: JuDee Anderson and Elsie Saunders. We heard of the lasting effects of the Massacre. Key tribal chiefs were killed. The Peace Chiefs were discredited. 150 years later tribal people are still trying to recover from the cultural trauma inflicted. How could the Church help?

- *We are trying to create a National Historic Landmark at the site of Silas Soule's death. He was an Army Captain who refused to let his troops participate in the Massacre. Later he reported the atrocities he observed to his superiors. He was murdered a few months later on the streets of Denver.*
- *You could lobby for the reparations to survivors that were approved in 1865 to be paid.*
- *You could help us protect our land from coal and methane development.*
- *You could support the Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run on the anniversary of the Massacre each November 29.*
- *You could encourage people to return artifacts and remains from the Massacre.*
- *Are you aware of descendants of John Chivington?*

On the bus ride back to Denver I invited everyone to help me celebrate my birthday on October 12 and invited Commission members to help me celebrate by supporting the Spiritual Healing Run in November.