



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 #7

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November 24-27, 2010. 11th Annual Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run.

Wednesday, November 24, 2010.

We'd prepared our sons a year before for a very different family Thanksgiving celebration in 2010. Walker and Micah flew in from Seattle. Axel and his girlfriend, Emily, arrived from Oakland. We swooped down on DIA about 8 pm, picked them up, and headed east on I-70 to Limon, Colorado. Checked into the Comfort Inn, where others were already snuggled into their rooms for the night. Gift bags were in each room for each person, with water, snacks and socks – provided by Limon United Methodist Church. Our sons were impressed by the thoughtfulness.



Thursday, November 25, 2011.



A car caravan left for the site on a sunny, hopeful plains morning. It was bitter cold – 3°F – and windy, though sunny. At the parking lot at the site, we distributed colorful stocking caps and gloves and orange wedges along with apple slices. It was a meeting of Cheyenne, US Parks Department and other friends. David Halaas, former Colorado State Historian, was on hand. And Pat, a woman who is descended from a member of the cavalry. She comes every year. Pipe and tobacco ceremonies proceeded. Chanting. Painting the runners and other participants for protection. Smudging with sweet grass smoke. The first runner carried a bald eagle head on a staff. The runners ran around the top of the hill overlooking Sand Creek four times and then took off down the road toward Eads. We all shouted them up, women ululating. Otto Braided Hair, instructing the runners reminded them that the purpose of the run is spiritual healing. It is not a race. All along

the route, there is a leader who carries the eagle staff. Other runners follow. Runners take turns resting in the van between running segments. It is all rather informal, while at the same time sober.



At Eads High School family of Parks Service staff and other volunteers prepared a vast turkey dinner for all participants. The runners arrived to shouts and cheers. After a leisurely dinner with much talk around tables, introductions, speeches, appreciations, we climbed back into cars for the drive back to Limon. Pike's Peak punctuated the plains just as it did for trappers, prospectors and settlers crossing the plains 150 years ago and longer.

Friday, November 26, 2010.

Friday morning we gathered at Limon UMC for breakfast of sausage gravy on biscuits and fruit salad. I was invited to lead the devotional time. I read scripture, offered prayer and read the resolved paragraphs from the United Methodist apology for the Sand Creek Massacre, adopted by the General Conference in 1976 in Denver. Then leaders were recognized and appreciated and gifts were given. JuDee Anderson, from Sheridan UMC in Wyoming, helped me compile and allocate gifts. I gave northwest Indian mugs, sweet grass and cedar that Micah and Walker brought from Seattle. More hats and gloves for runners. We presented a red Killer Whale blanket to Joe Big Medicine, Southern Cheyenne, and a Pendleton for Otto Braided Hair. Walker made the presentations.

Hurtful words: *RECONCILIATION* and *APOLOGY*

Even as the gifts were being given, several people let me know that they would like to talk with me later. The language of "reconciliation" and "apology" in the 1976 statement was a problem. I have much to learn. Afterward, Joe Big Medicine sat me down. At a previous run, at Riverside cemetery, he had expressed concerns about the language of apology and reconciliation. Joe explained that "reconciliation" implies that you can fix the past. There is no way to fix what happened to the people in the massacre. Later I would also learn that reconciliation implies that there was once a good relationship that can be restored. But there was never a good relationship

in the beginning. Also, there is no real “apology” unless it is both offered by the offending party and received by the offended party. Only the Keeper of the Arrows can accept an apology on behalf of the Cheyenne. Joe’s wife is the daughter of the Keeper of the Arrows. When United Methodists voted in 1996 to issue an apology for the atrocities committed at Sand Creek, they failed to offer it for acceptance by the Keeper of the Arrows. The church can’t just adopt some words that it says are an apology. There has to be a relationship. I acknowledged this, changed my language to acknowledge that the past cannot be changed, and committed to working for a better future. The descendants of the Massacre prefer the word **HEALING** for the relationships we are seeking to enter and the work we hope to do together.

The second day of the run began along a dirt road. Again blessing, face painting and smudging. Runners run. Other participants drove ahead to prepare a picnic lunch at the gazebo in Agate, some miles down the road.

While waiting for the runners to arrive, a concern arose about parking in Denver. Runners would stay at a downtown Denver hotel that night that was charging \$24 per vehicle for parking. I called around, located Rev. Mike Dent, senior pastor of Trinity UMC in downtown Denver, at a family Thanksgiving celebration in Texas. Mike made some calls and arranged for free parking in the church parking lot overnight.



After the runners arrived and everyone enjoyed lunch, most participants drove to downtown Denver.

At 7 pm dozens of local people as well as Northern Arapaho from Wyoming and more participants from Oklahoma joined a candlelight vigil at the outdoor medicine circle at the Denver Art Museum. Drumming. Introductions and honoring speeches.

Saturday, November 27, 2010.

The third cold, bright morning we gathered at Riverside Cemetery at the grave of Captain Silas Soule. A color guard raised the 1864 American Flag and the white flag of surrender – as flown by Black Kettle at Sand Creek. Speeches, introductions. Honoring of Captain Silas Soule, who held his troops back from participating in the Massacre, and sent a report of the events to Congress, leading to a congressional investigation and denunciation of the massacre. He was gunned down by supporters of Chivington in Denver, in April, 1865.



Blessings, painting, smudging. Runners run to the Colorado State Capital, where public officials read declarations and welcome runners. Dennis Gallagher, Denver Auditor, speaks every year.



Byron Strom, great grand nephew of Silas Soule, next to plaque. Photo courtesy Carol Turner

SILAS S. SOULE

At this location on April 23, 1865, assassins shot and killed 1st Colorado Cavalry officer Capt. Silas S. Soule. During the infamous Sand Creek Massacre of November 29, 1864, Soule had disobeyed orders by refusing to fire on Chief Black Kettle's peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho village. Later at army hearings, Soule testified against his commander, Col. John M. Chivington, detailing the atrocities committed by the troops at Sand Creek. His murderers were never brought to justice.

On the route from Riverside Cemetery to the Capital, we paused at 15th and Arapaho, where a plaque honoring Silas Soule was dedicated near the site of his murder. Byron Strom, a descendant of Soule's, was present for the dedication.



Colorado State's Complicated Acknowledgment

At the foot of the State Capitol is a Civil War memorial and statue. It lists Sand Creek as a Civil War battle. Beneath the statue a plaque was placed by State Senate action in 1999 explaining the controversy surround Sand Creek and acknowledging the error of including it as a Civil War battle.



The controversy surrounding this Civil War Monument has become a symbol of Coloradans' struggle to understand and take responsibility for our past. On November 29, 1864, Colorado's First and Third Cavalry, commanded by Colonel John Chivington, attacked Chief Black Kettle's peaceful camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians on the banks of Sand Creek, about 180 miles southeast of here. In the surprise attack, soldiers killed more than 150 of the village's 500 inhabitants. Most of the victims were elderly men, women, and children.

Though some civilians and military personnel immediately denounced the attack as a massacre, others claimed the village was a legitimate target. This Civil War Monument, paid for by funds from the Pioneers' Association and the State, was erected on July 24, 1909, to honor all Colorado soldiers who had fought in battles of the Civil War in Colorado and elsewhere. By designating Sand Creek a battle, the monument's designers mischaracterized the actual events. Protests led by some Sand Creek descendants and others throughout the twentieth century have since led to the widespread recognition of the tragedy as the Sand Creek Massacre.

This plaque was authorized by Senate Joint Resolution 99-017.

A community lunch was hosted at Trinity United Methodist Church to conclude the run. It was an emotional and spiritual stretch for descendants of the Massacre to receive the warm, friendly hospitality that is familiar to United Methodist Churches. Trinity UMC was Chivington's home church for most of his life, and, unrepentant for the atrocities at Sand Creek, his funeral was held there in 1894. This history continues to cast a long shadow over the relationship between the church and descendant tribes.