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The Massacre That Never Happened

Part 2 of 2

Elbridge Gerry to the Rescue

by Fred Leich

*"The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
Gang aft agley (Go often astray)"
— Robert Burns 1785*

The secret alliance of six Plains Indian tribes (Cheyenne, Arapaho, Sioux, Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache) had chosen the morning of August 22, 1864 to launch a coordinated and simultaneous attack against the entire Colorado Territory frontier. Colorado City, Denver City, all white settlers along the Front Range from Pueblo to the Wyoming Territory border (Wyoming Territory did not achieve statehood until July 10, 1890.), and all white inhabitants of the Platte River basins. Their objective: "Kill all white men on the Colorado Frontier" (In the Native American lexicon, all non-Indians were "white men" regardless of skin color or gender)

For well over a year the 1,000 warrior strike force had been stockpiling guns and ammunition and strategizing over just how they would perpetrate the massacre. The timing was perfect. At this time in of year, millions of buffalo still remained in Bayou Salado (now South Park) where the prairie buffalo assembled annually to escape harsh conditions found in the parched Platte and Arkansas River basins. Small groups of armed warriors from all the buffalo hunting tribes were commonplace on all the trails this time

of year. The fact that over 100 of these small warrior groups began migrating east to Point of Rocks on Beaver Creek, Colorado (the strike force mustering point) went virtually unnoticed. With half the Colorado Cavalry hundreds of miles away on the Kansas frontier, and believing all telegraph traffic in and out of Denver, stage stations and military outposts along the Emigrant Trails were to be silenced, success was all but guaranteed. And so, early on 22 August 1864, having already maneuvered into strike position the preceding night, 1,000 mounted warriors, divided into small kill squads and rode toward their assigned targets. Then, as the warriors proceeded against their prey, a disturbing pattern began to develop. Every remote homestead and settlers cabin was vacant. One by one the strike force warriors came to the realization that all the white families along the Front Range and the Platte River Basin, had been warned. Not only had they been warned, there was evidence that they had just recently been warned. The Indian strike force knew from experience that the settlers would congregate in easily defended locations where an attacking force was destined to receive heavier losses than the defending force. Plains Indians would not attack under those conditions. The attack was

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Old Colorado City Historical Society

'Preserving the past for the future'

1 South 24th Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3319

http://www.occhs.org (719) 636-1225

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WEST WORD Editor c/o OCCHS**1 South 24th Street****Colorado Springs, CO 80904-3319**or Don Ellis - spiderwort@pcsys.net

SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS THE 15th OF EACH MONTH

MISSION

Revised August 2012

The Old Colorado City Historical Society is a nonprofit volunteer organization established to recognize the historical significance and unique culture of original Old Colorado City and early El Paso County which includes the present and future history of today's greater Westside neighborhood.

This organization perpetuates the preservation and display of artifacts and archival materials, encouragement of research, education of the children and the community, through the membership and the operation of the Old Colorado City History Center at 1 South 24th Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

MEMBERSHIPS

Memberships are welcome at any time. Membership renewals are due on the anniversary date of the initial membership. Members receive the *West Word* newsletter, discounts, local meetings and programs.

Annual membership classifications are:

Individual	\$ 25	Business	\$ 75
Family	\$ 35	Lifetime	\$250

Funds from a Lifetime membership are placed into an Endowment Fund to be used only for projects approved by two-thirds of the membership. Only the interest will be used for current expenses. We welcome gifts to this fund, which will be credited to the donor or as a memorial.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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MEETINGS

The OCCHS Monthly Meeting & Program is held each month, except June, July, and August. The History Center opens half an hour before the meeting for refreshments and visitation. Everyone welcome.

WELCOME ~ NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS

Rosemary Ault

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Richard Dailey

Betsy Evans

Tracy and Karston Gluck

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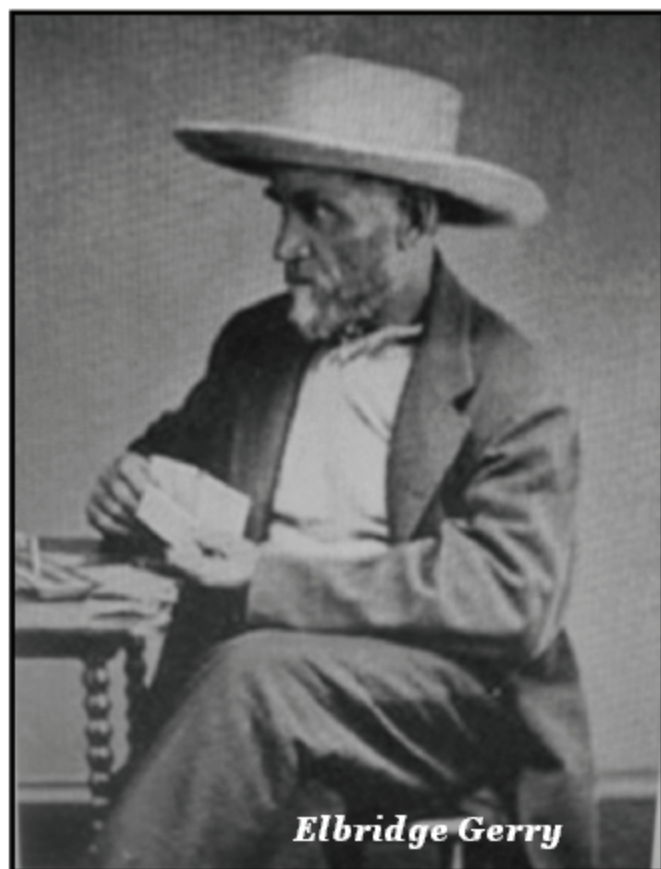


Massacre from Page 1

called off and the Indians retreated to their original mustering point where, before disbanding, they strategized over what to do next.

What went wrong? --- Had the Indian strike force not been called off, it would have experienced very heavy losses. The whole operation was predicated on the element of surprise, and the element of surprise had been lost.

On the 17th of August 1864, two Cheyenne Indian chiefs, "Long Chin" and "Man-shot-by-a-Ree" (Ree being a nickname for the Arikaree tribe) entered the compound of Massachusetts-born and well educated Elbridge Gerry. Gerry was a well known horse rancher and Indian trader who lived at the confluence of the Platte River and Crow Creek, 10 miles east of Greeley, Colorado. The chiefs advised Gerry to flee with his wives and children (Gerry was a polygamist and over his lifetime had been married eight times to Native American women). The chiefs explained that a six-tribe attacking army, spearheaded by the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers under their chief Tall Bull, was about to launch a devastating attack designed to annihilate all white men, women, and children on the



Elbridge Gerry

Colorado Frontier.

Elbridge Gerry was one of the very few white men in Colorado who were respected and trusted by both the Plains Indian tribes and the United States Government for whom he served as a special agent with the Office of Indian Affairs. Just one year earlier Gerry, with gifts for Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian Chiefs, traveled 600 miles throughout Colorado Territory in an attempt to bring Cheyenne Dog Soldier Chief Tall Bull, White Antelope, and Left Shoulder to the peace table. Gerry finally caught up with them at Point of Rocks on Beaver Creek in Colorado (mustering point for the attack that was in planning), but, needless to say, was unsuccessful in securing their cooperation.

Gerry did not flee with his family as advised to do, but rather saddled up and with his Cheyenne companion Spotted Horse, rode directly to Territorial Governor Evans's home 70 miles to the west in Denver, arriving there at midnight August 19, 1864. The two night riders had only stopped along the way to warn settlers and change horses. So grueling was the ride, fatigue and exposure overcame Spotted Horse and he died one day after making the journey.



Tall Bull

Upon receiving Gerry's warning, Evans took full advantage of the fact that, since August 11, 1864, he had a full Army cavalry plus infantry regiment in at his disposal. Despite the fact half of his cavalry was performing duty on the Colorado Territory / Kansas border, he still had a significant fighting force to thwart the Indian attack (A fully manned regiment contains 1,000 soldiers-- Cavalry, Infantry and artillery units.) Evans quickly summoned Col. John Chivington, commander of the regiment. Together they telegraphed all military units and settlers that could be contacted by telegraph, warning the settlers and ordering the soldiers to assemble outside of Denver City. The soldiers were told they would be defending Denver City and to prepare to fight a large Indian force. Evans and Chivington dispatched riders to warn all the settlers and military personnel who could not be contacted by telegraph. Residents of Colorado City received the warning the afternoon of August 21, approximately 18 hours before the attack was to begin. An eyewitness wrote, "The following day, small bands of Indians appeared along the whole eastern frontier of El Paso County, but their raid was a failure,...." "Many settlers and ranchers along the Front Range further from Denver, received their warning just hours before attacking Indians closed in on their home sites.

Following the failed Indian attack and plan to massacre Colorado Territory's frontier citizens, Elbridge Gerry was hailed a hero and to this day bears the title, "The Paul Revere of Colorado."

In March 1865 John Evans, while testifying to the Congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War investigating the Sand Creek Massacre, testified that: "Had the plan of the Indians been carried out without previous notice to the settlers, it would have resulted in the most wholesale and extensive massacre that ever has occurred in this country."

Epilogue

It is the opinion of this author that although the majority of Colorado Frontier residents would have perished had they not received Elbridge Gerry's warning, I do not believe the

residents and settlers near Colorado City would have been among the victims. There are three reasons:

(1) Two weeks before the planned 22 August attack, when residents of Colorado City captured the six Cheyenne braves reconnoitering Old Colorado City, the town took immediate action to protect and defend themselves. Within days of the incident, a stockade was constructed surrounding the Anway Hotel in Colorado City. It was made from green, fire resistant Ponderosa Pine logs, 15 feet long and 12 to 15 inches in diameter. The encampment was provisioned to withstand a prolonged attack. Women and children were required to repair to the stockade every evening until the threat of attack subsided (in this case well into October 1864).

(2) A large Ute village existed just outside of Colorado City along Fountain Creek. The Utes coexisted well with the white inhabitants of Colorado City and were arch enemies of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Sioux. There is a high probability the Utes would have allied themselves with the residents of Colorado City and helped them fend off any attack (the Utes were one of the few Native American tribes who on occasion sided with white men against renegade Indians from their own tribe who did not honor treaties agreed to by their chiefs.)

(3) Warriors of the nomadic Plains tribes also were the hunters of their tribes and had already missed valuable hunting opportunities preparing for the August assault. If they expected to have enough food for the coming winter, they would have had to break off the engagement in order to hunt in the near future.

Fear in the minds of Colorado Territory Frontier inhabitants resulting from this failed attack was undoubtedly a major factor leading to the Sand Creek Massacre two months and one week later. It must have precipitated a "kill them before they kill us" mentality.

Sunday, July 17, Noon - 5:00 P.M.

Tunnel Tales II

*- A Guided Walking Tour
around Old Colorado City*

- Small guided groups
- Chose your tour time
- 5 tour stops
- New stories
- Characters give the stories/history of each site
- Booklet with maps and historic information

** No entrance to tunnel areas **

Reservations:

- At the History Center
1 S. 24th. Street
Cash, card, or check
- By phone, 636-1225
Credit card

\$25 per person



"Learn the History, Live the Fun."

SPECIAL JUNE PROGRAM:***"Kansas City Monarchs"***

Friday, June 24

6:00 P.M.

Presented by: Phil Dixon

Phil Dixon from Kansas City will present a special event program on the KANSAS CITY MONARCHS—a professional African-American baseball team who played our own Colorado Springs African-American baseball team in 1934. Phil is the author of nine books on the history of Negroes in baseball.

We will also have a short pre-presentation of organ music played by one of our board members. This 1800's pump organ is a new donation from the Blakke family, Westsiders for decades.

OCCHS members free, others \$5.00

DON'T MISS THIS SPECIAL EVENING.

Doors open at 5:30 P.M.

SEATING IS LIMITED.

**AUGUST REMINDER:*****Founders' Day***

Sunday August 14

***Featuring The Colorado Frontier Army Band******1:00 - 1:30 P.M.******2:30 - 3:00 P.M.******Dave Hughes telling the story of Anthony Bott******1:30 - 2:30 P.M.*****Sponsored by: Pikes Peak
National Bank**

'Tis the Season May Treasurer's Report

Spring and summer starts the season when our volunteer members pick up the pace working on our major fundraisers, those events that keep the lights on and the building running smoothly: Territory Days, Tunnel Tales Two, and Crafters are right around the corner. We are also working on our next Haunted Histories and have a few new characters that will be haunting us this year and teaching Old Colorado City History. This year it looks like we will be meeting Anthony Bott's sister! Our venues for our Holiday Tour are all lined up and ready to go. We have two new surprises this year. Thanks to our volunteers.

John Anderson has scheduled multiple hikes and lectures again this summer and we see a light at the end of the tunnel for completion of his second book, Rankin Scott Kelly.

We ask that you support our many events; they are only successful with member support.

If you have any questions regarding the finances of OCCHS, please do not hesitate to call me at 331-1786.

Checking Account	\$ 22,514.73
Endowment Account	\$116,903.17
Savings Accounts	\$ 14,910.14
Bookstore Account	\$ 6,126.75

Respectfully,
Suzanne Schorsch
Treasurer



DONATIONS NEEDED!

Your help is needed with the landscaping project for the west and north sides of our building! Right now, most of this area between the building and the sidewalk is just dirt with a few bulbs. The Board has approved attractive rock xeriscaping with some drought tolerant plants. This area is used all summer for Saturday crafter booths with much foot traffic from Farmers' Market.

Our goal is \$1,800 to cover the cost of labor, materials, and plants. When making a donation, please indicate that the funds are for the "landscaping project". Mail, come in or phone with your donations of checks, cash, or a VISA charge. We thank you!

The Old Colorado City Historical Society's Board of Directors meets regularly the second Monday of each month at 1:00 P.M. at the

Old Colorado City History Center, unless otherwise announced.

Interested visitors are always welcome at the Board meetings.



**The next Board meeting will be June 13
at 1:00 P.M. at the Old Colorado City History Center**

OLD COLORADO CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80904-3319

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June / July Calendar

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Old Colorado City History Center

1 S. 24th Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904 - (719) 636-1225 - <http://www.occhs.org>

Museum Hours: Tues. thru Sat. 11 - 4 Free Admission. Donations greatly appreciated.