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Newspaper Articles

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Automatic Zoom

INDISCRIMINATE MASSACRE OF INDIANS. WOMEN and CHILDREN BUTCHERED.

29th, 1860.

A report was brought from Eureka on Sunday morning, that during the night nearly all the Indians camping on Indian Island, including women and children, were killed by parties unknown. A few loaded canoes bringing the dead bodies to Union on their way to Mad river, where some of the victims belonged, confirmed the report. But when the facts were generally known, it appeared that out of some sixty or seventy killed on the Island, at least fifty or sixty were women and children. Neither age or sex had been spared. Little children and old women were mercilessly stabbed and their skulls crushed with axes. When the bodies were landed at Union, a more shocking and revolting spectacle never was exhibited to the eyes of a Christian and civilized people. Old women, wrinkled and decrepit lay weltering in blood, their brains dashed out and dabbled with their long gray hair. Infants scarce a span long, with their faces cloven with hatchets and their bodies ghastly with wounds. We gathered from the survivors that four or five white men attacked the ranches at about 4 o'clock in the morning, which statement is corroborated by people at Eureka who heard pistol shots at about that time, although no knowledge of the attack was public. With the Indians who lived on the Island, some thirty from the mouth of Mad river were staying, having attended a dance on the evening previous. They were all killed with the exception of some few who hid themselves during the massacre. No resistance was made, it is said, to the butchers who did the work, but as they ran or huddled together for protection like sheep, they were struck down with hatchets. Very little shooting was done, most of the bodies having wounds about the head. The bucks were mostly absent, which accounts for the predominance of female victims.

On Monday, we received a statement from our Senior, at Eureka en route for San Francisco. He says: "About 9 o'clock, I visited the Island, and there a horrible

"Indiscriminate Massacre of Indians, Women and Children Butchered" by Bret Harte

Feb. 29th 1860 The Northern Californian, Union (present day Arcata), CA

This article describes the attacks of Indian Island on February 26, 1860. To date, it is the first article that directly serves as evidence of the events of that day. The article was written by journalist Bret Harte who, at the time, wrote it without the permission of his boss, Stephen G. Wipple, who was out of town. After the publishing on the 29th, in the Northern Californian, Harte had to flee to San Francisco due to threats on his life. The animosity towards Native Americans was so overwhelming that even reporting on their massacre was deemed punishable by death.

Citation

FULL TEXT TRANSCRIPTION BELOW

"Our Indian troubles have reached a crisis. Today we record acts of Indian aggression and white retaliation. It is a humiliating fact that the parties who may be supposed to represent white civilization have committed the greater barbarity. But before we review the causes that have led to this crowning act of reckless desperation, let us remind the public at a distance from this savage-ridden district, that the secrecy of this indiscriminate massacre is an evidence of its disavowal and detestation of the community. The perpetrators are yet unknown. The people of this county have been long-suffering and patient. They have had homes plundered, property destroyed, and the lives of friends sacrificed. The protection of a Federal force has been found inadequate and when volunteer forces have been raised and the captured savages placed on reservations, by some defective screw in the Federal machinery, they have escaped. They have returned to their old homes. Old outrages have been renewed. The friendly Indians about the Bay have been charged with conveying arms and ammunition to the mountain

tribes and receiving slaughtered beef as a reward. A class of hard-working men who derive their subsistence by cattle raising have been the greatest sufferers, and if in the blind fury of retaliation they spare neither age or sex, though they cannot be excused a part of the blame should fall upon that government which places the responsibility of self-defense on the injured party. If your government says, virtually, 'Protect yourselves,' it cannot consistently find fault with the manner. Justice demands that we should show thus much in explanation. We do not extenuate. If the deed was committed by responsible parties, we will give place to any argument that may be offered in justification. But we can conceive of no palliation for woman and child slaughter. We can conceive of no wrong that a babe's blood can atone for. Perhaps we do not rightly understand the doctrine of 'extermination.' How a human being, with the faculty of memory, who could recall his own mother's gray hairs, who could remember how he had been taught to respect age and decrepitude, who had ever looked upon a helpless infant with a father's eye - could with cruel, un pitying hand carry out the 'extermination' that his brain had conceived - who could smite the mother and a child so wantonly and cruelly - few men can understand. What amount of suffering it takes to make a man a babe-killer, is a question for future moralists. What will justify it, should be a question of present law. It is the 'beginning of the end.' It will not be strange if these separate tribes are gathered into a burning focus on every trail. It will not be safe for the white man to travel alone. Every tree may hide some wretched and revengeful father. A spirit has been raised that nothing but blood will appease. An 'irrepressible conflict' is really here. Knowing this, was it policy to commence the work of extermination with the most peaceful? And what assistance can be expected from a Legislature already perplexed with doubts and suspicion, in the face of the bloody record we today publish? A report was brought from Eureka on Sunday morning, that during the night nearly all the Indians camping on Indian Island, including women and children, were killed by parties unknown. A few loaded canoes bringing the dead bodies to Union on their way to Mad river, where some of the victims belonged, confirmed the report. But when the facts were generally known, it appeared that out of some sixty or seventy killed on the Island, at least fifty or sixty were women and children. Neither age or sex had been spared. Little children and old women were mercilessly stabbed and their skulls crushed with axes. When the bodies were landed at Union, a more shocking and revolting spectacle never was exhibited to the eyes of a Christian and civilized people. 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The bucks were mostly absent, which accounts for the predominance of female victims. On Monday we received a statement from our Senior, at Eureka en route for San Francisco. He says: 'About 9 o'clock, I visited the Island, and there a horrible scene was presented. The bodies of 36 women and children, recently killed, lay in and near the several ranches - they were of all ages, from the child of but two or three years to the old skeleton squaw. From appearances, the most of them must have been killed with axes or hatchets - at the heads and bodies of many were gashed as with such an instrument. It was a sickening and pitiful sight. Some 5 or 6 were still alive and one old woman was able to talk, although dreadfully wounded. Dr. Lee, who visited them and dressed the wounds of those live, says that some will recover if properly cared for.' It is not generally known that more than three bucks were killed - though it is supposed there must have been 15 or 20. It is thought that the bodies of the men were taken away by Indians early this morning as four canoes were seen to leave the Island. On the beach south of the entrance it is reported that from thirty to fifty were killed. It is also reported, that at Bucksport, all were killed that were there. I passed in sight of them about 11 o'clock and saw the ranches on fire. It is also said that the same has been done at the several ranches on Eel river. No one seems to know who was engaged in this slaughter, but is supposed to have been men who have suffered from depredations so long on Eel river and vicinity. It is said that some jerked beef, about 100 lb., was found in one of the Indian ranches on Indian Island and on south beach. Indian Island is scarcely one mile from Eureka, the county seat of Humboldt county. With the exception of the conjectures that the Indians on the Island offer aid and assistance to the mountain Indians, they are peaceful and industrious, and seem to have perfect faith in the good will of the whites. Many of them are familiar to our citizens. 'Bill' of Mad river, a well known and rather intelligent fellow, has proven a faithful ally to the white men on several occasions and - has had his wife, mother, sister, two brothers and two little children, cruelly butchered by men of that race whom he had learned to respect and esteem. Some of the victims lived a few hours after having been brought up to Union. A number of citizens visited the scene where the canoes were unloaded; and it is but justice to the community and simple humanity to say, that the general expression was one of deep sympathy with the miserable sufferers, and honest, deep and utter abhorrence of the act of wanton brutality, and its perpetrators.

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Automatic Zoom

"Horrible Massacre of Indians at Humboldt Bay." The Placer Herald, March 3, 1860: p. 2, col. 1.

Horrible Massacre of Indians at Humboldt Bay.

The S. F. *Telegram* of Tuesday last has the following particulars relative to a massacre of Indians in and near the vicinity of Humboldt Bay:

It appears that a party of farmers and graziers residing around the bay, annoyed at the frequent instances of running off stock by the Indians, formed a secret society for their extermination.

On Sunday morning, Feb. 26th between 3 and 4 A. M., a party of about thirty men from Eel river crossed over to Indian Island, and massacred some forty Indians, men women and children—butchering them with axes and knives. Indian Island is situated in the bay opposite Eureka, and is about a quarter of a mile from the latter place. Eight or ten Indians escaped the massacre, and made their way to Eureka, where they placed themselves under the protection of the citizens.

"Horrible Massacre of Indians at Humboldt Bay" by Unknown

March 3rd 1860 The Placer Herald, Auburn, CA

A newspaper article that describes the attacks on Indians in Humboldt County including the Indian Island massacre. It provides the details of the event on that Sunday morning when about thirty men swam to Indian Island and murdered (what they claim to be) about forty Indians. It is stated that there were eight to ten survivors that arrived in Eureka seeking safety. Interestingly, this article sympathizes with the victims; it places emphasis on the bodies that were left for dead while the murderers were searched for. It also claims that the citizens of Eureka were bitter about the event and wanted the attackers punished.

[Citation](#)

FULL TEXT TRANSCRIPTION BELOW

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Automatic Zoom

"Indian Massacre." Weekly Humboldt Times, March 3, 1860: p. 2, col. 2.

Indian Massacre.
 The rancheria on Indian Island was attacked on Saturday night by an unknown party of men and, with the exception of three or four that escaped, the whole tribe, with many Mad River Indians stopping there, were killed.
 It may be well imagined that this unexpected attack on the diggers so near town, accompanied with such a terrible and indiscriminate slaughter, produced considerable excitement here on Sunday morning. In the midst of it, news reached town that the ranches on South Beach had also been attacked the same night, and the whole number of diggers there, exterminated. Since then it is reported that a considerable number of Indians on Eel river were killed the same time. The ranches at Buckenast and

"Indian Massacre" by Unknown

March 3rd 1860 Humboldt Times, Eureka CA

This newspaper article discusses an attack on Indian Island by local white men, resulting in the indiscriminate slaughter of the entire tribe at the rancheria, as well as several "Mad River Indians" passing through. It goes on to address the massacre as a seemingly coordinated attack, identifying several other attacks on villages (names listed within) that occurred on the same night. The viewpoint of the author implies some sympathy towards the killing of defenseless women (squaws) and children, however, that murder of indigenous men was considered justified in the protection of the settlers' homes and families. It provides estimates on the death tolls & locations, while simultaneously pleading that no further violence occur towards those deemed vulnerable and defenseless.

[Citation](#)

"Indian Matters." Weekly Humboldt Times, April 14, 1860: p. 2, col. 2.

Indian Matters.
 Since the recent massacre on this Bay the Indians on the coast between Mad river and Eel river, have not inhabited their houses, with but few exceptions. A majority of those living about the lower end of the Bay, and some of the worst ones on the coast, have been fed and quartered at Fort Humboldt, by order of Major Raines, and, as we suppose, at Government expense. The Mad river Indians were afraid to live at their ranches and were a source of annoyance to the people in the vicinity of Union. Under this state of affairs, and fearful of further violence to the Indians, Col. Buel, Agent of the Klamath Reservation, was communicated with and solicited to remove the Indians from the Bay to the Klamath. With his

"Indian Matter" by Unknown

April 14th 1860, Humboldt Times Eureka, CA

This article describes the initial movement of surviving Wiyot members in the aftermath of the Indian Island Massacre. It addresses the transfer of a mixed Native American tribal populations around the Humboldt Bay, referred as "Indians of the Bay", from Fort Humboldt in Eureka to the Klamath Reservation. The article serves as a timeline, quoting the number of transactions and communications between Colonel Buel, the man in charge of the Klamath Reservation and Major Raines, who was in charge of Fort Humboldt. One interesting point from this article is that the US government, "built houses (within Humboldt Bay area) for the purpose of removing Indians". This further shows our country's hostile mindset towards the eradication the Native American population and the progression of settlers. It shows that Native populations were deliberately being cleared and transferred from forts to reservations so their land would be left for colonization.

[Citation](#)

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Humboldt, told Major Raines, the nature of his business and asked for the Indians in the Fort. The Major very affectionately told him - that the Indians didn't want to go, a conclusion no doubt arrived at through a promise that they would be fed at Government expense where they are. Col. Buel returned to this place entertaining about the same opinion of Maj. Raines as the people of this county generally do. In order that the blame may rest where it properly belongs in case of further difficulty with the Indians on this Bay, and clear the Indian Department, Col. Buel addressed Major Raines a note, which was delivered to him by Sheriff Van Nest. As an abrupt refusal to answer was given to the bearer of the note, some citizens of Eureka addressed the following note to Col. Buel requesting a copy of his letter to Maj. Raines.



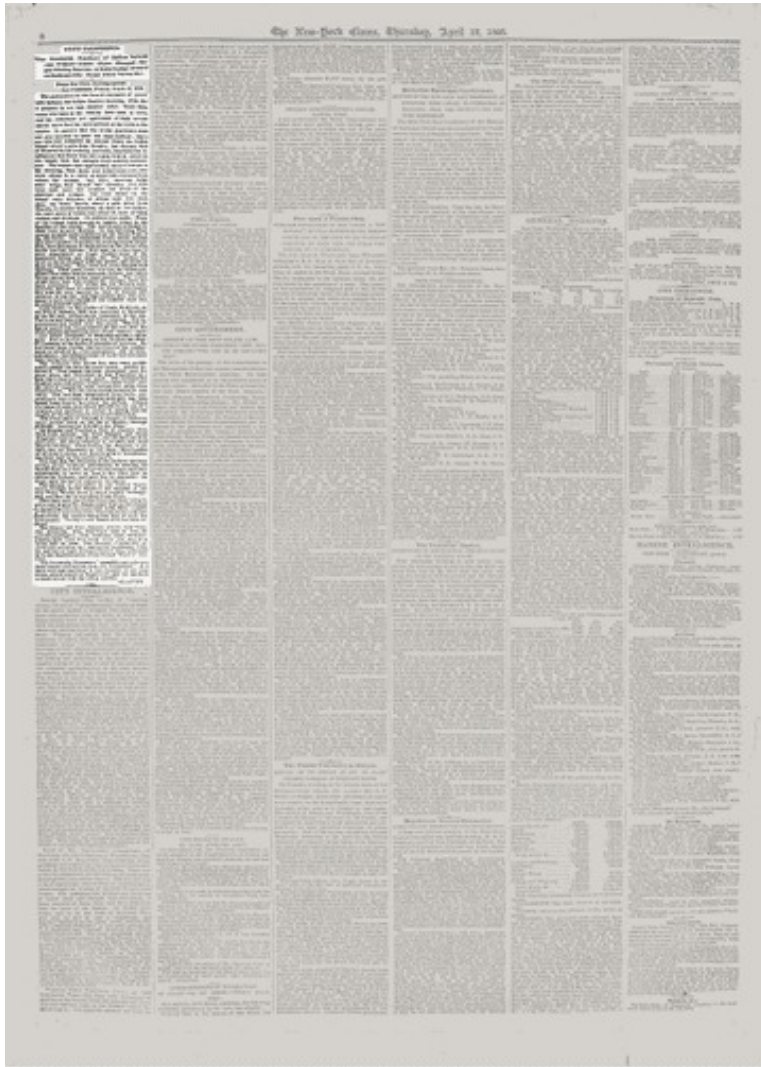
"Island of Tears" by Shaun Walker

This article was published in the Times-Standard and looks at the steps taken by the Wiyot people to memorialize the horrors of 1860. The picture shows the stand of cypress trees still found today on Indian Island.

FULL TRANSCRIPTION BELOW:

A grove of trees on Indian Island, home to a healthy group of egrets, stands silhouetted against a setting sun west of Eureka. The grove is just south of the site of a merchant funded massacre of Wiyot, Hoopa, Mattole, Bear River and Chilula tribal women and children in 1860. Other villages around Humboldt Bay suffered the same fate over a two day period.

[Citation](#)



FROM CALIFORNIA.; The Humboldt Butchery of Indian Infants and Women-Jacob Elyea Hanged Bogus Mining Stories A Solid Ledge of Gold at Jacksonville Items About Town, & c.

This article from the New York Times was published in San Francisco on Friday March 16th, 1860. The article details the brutal murders that took place on Indian island. The author states that 2 hours before the same group of whites had killed 58 Indian women and children. They then go on to explain how the men came at 6:00 am and killed the three men sleeping on the island in a cabin and then brutally killed the women and children while they slept. They also claim that the following Wednesday 40 more Indians were murdered on the South Fork of the Eel River and a few days following that another 35 on Eagle Prairie.

FULL TRANSCRIPT BELOW:

SAN FRANCISCO, Friday, March 16, 1860.

The particulars of the horrid massacre of peaceable Indians, one bright Sunday morning, (Feb. 25,) I detailed in my last steamer letter. Since then, many who were in the vicinity have been in town, and the coherence and agreement of their several stories show that we have arrived at the truth in the matter. It appears that the brutal murderers were not over-anxious to meet the male Indians; that a spy who had attended an annual dance on Indian Island (about a mile from Eureka, the County Seat of Humboldt) the evening previous, conveyed the intelligence that there was not a gun, bow or arrow on the

island, that the savages were entirely defenceless. The whites then approached, about 6 o'clock in the morning, fired upon and killed three men, who were asleep in a cabin at some little distance from where the women lay, then, entering lodge after lodge, they dirked the sleeping, and with axes split open and crushed the skulls of the children and women. The total killed on the island were fifty-five, of whom only five were men. On South Beach, about a mile away from Eureka, in another direction, an hour or two before, the same party of whites had killed 58, most of them women and children. No defence was made. Many of the women were making an honest living in the families of the whites. The half-breeds pleaded for their lives in good English. On the following Wednesday 40 more were butchered on the South Fork of the Eel River. The Humboldt Times, which justifies this short method of getting rid of disagreeable neighbors, says that many of those killed on Eel River were bucks and bad fellows. Still later, by a few days, 35 were slaughtered on Eagle Prairie -- total of the butchered within one week, 188. The victims had lived on terms of peace with the whites, and relied on them for security. They were not even charged with thieving. Their great crime was that the whites suspected that some hostile mountain Indians had taken refuge among them when hard pressed. The names of the brave men who brained the children have not been published. One writer for the Bulletin says, however, that there is a fellow in Eureka who boasts that with his own hatchet he slew 30 women and children in one day, and that another man who professes to have been captain of the outlaws says that he alone killed 60 infants.

[Citation](#)

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