

EVENTS

honor their memory

CHINESE MASSACRE MEMORIAL PLANNED IN HELLS CANYON

November 11, 2011

This year (2012) will mark the 125th anniversary of the massacre of as many as 34 Chinese gold miners in Hells Canyon at what is today named Chinese Massacre Cove. A memorial to the miners is being developed and will be dedicated at the site next June.

“We cannot give the victims justice after so many years, but we can honor their memory,” said R. Gregory Nokes, chair of the Chinese Massacre Memorial Committee.

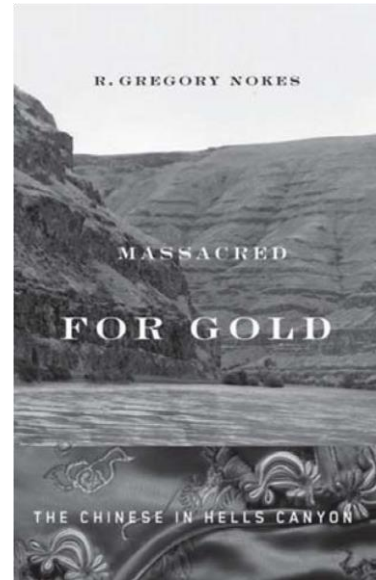
The massacre was the worst of the many crimes committed by whites against the approximately 300,000 Chinese who immigrated to the American West in the 19th century in search of work. The Chinese helped build the railroads, worked in mines and salmon canneries, cleared land, and engaged in many other pursuits.

No one was held accountable for the massacre, although evidence pointed to a gang of seven northeastern Oregon horse-thieves and school boys. Three were found innocent at a trial

in Wallowa County. Three others fled and were never caught. A seventh turned state’s evidence and wasn’t charged.

The massacre was the subject of Nokes’ 2009 book, *Massacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon*, published by Oregon State University Press.

Lyle Wirtanen, co-organizer with Garry Bush of the annual Chinese Remembering gathering in Lewiston, said the memorial will be a granite stone marker of approximately four by five feet with engravings in three languages: English, Chinese, and Nez Perce. The English wording will read:



34 Chinese gold miners were slaughtered by a gang of outlaws at Deep Creek on the Snake River, at the border between Idaho and Oregon.

*Chinese Massacre Cove
Site of the 1887 massacre of
as many as 34 Chinese gold miners.
No one was held accountable.*

The memorial will overlook the Snake River at Deep Creek on the Oregon side of Hells Canyon, not far from walls built by the Chinese miners who worked at the site until they were ambushed, robbed, and killed in May of 1887. The United States Board of Geographic Names

officially named the location Chinese Massacre Cove in 2005.

Wirtanen said the committee plans to have the memorial installed and ready to dedicate at the fifth Chinese Remembering gathering next June 21-22. Following a program in Lewiston the first day, the group will travel to the site by jet-boat on June 22 for the dedication and a healing ceremony.

Wirtanen said as many people will be welcome as can be accommodated at the site. More information on the project and the conference, including a video, is available on the website, www.chineseremembering.org. The project has been approved by the U.S. Forest Service.

Coincidentally, plans for the memorial coincide with a national campaign called the 1882 Project, supported by major Chinese American organizations, to get an official apology from Congress for the 1882 Exclusion Act. The act barred additional Chinese laborers from entering the country and was the first such law to exclude a specific group on the basis of race. It wasn't lifted until 1943. The Senate has approved the apology; the House is yet to act.

Chuimei Ho, vice chair of the memorial committee, said there is a direct connection between the Exclusion Act and the outbreak of major violence against the Chinese that occurred after the act was passed.

"Partly because they felt sanctioned by the 1882 Exclusion Act, the terrorists and murderers involved in much anti-Chinese violence actually came to believe that they were heroes helping to rid the nation of social evils," Ho said.

The Chinese Massacre Memorial Committee: Greg Nokes, chair; Chuimei Ho, vice chair; Ben Bronson; Garry Bush; Bill Hall; Patricia Keith; Craig Lesley; Alan Pinkham; Bettie Luke; Rich Wandschneider; Priscilla Wegars; Lyle Wirtanen.

More background information about the massacre is available at these websites:
<http://www.rgregorynokes.com/about.html>;
http://www.cinarc.org/Violence.html#anchor_67

Chuimei Ho Chinese in Northwest America
Research Committee www.cinarc.org

The Massacre

The outbreak of anti-Chinese violence in 1885 and 1886 had been politically motivated. Much of it was organized by loose groupings of labor unions under the leadership of the Knights of Labor. The Deep Creek Massacre, by contrast, seems to have been motivated chiefly by a desire for gold, although the events of 1885-6 undoubtedly helped to convince the perpetrators that they could get away with it.

34 Chinese gold miners were slaughtered by a gang of outlaws at Deep Creek on the Snake River, at the border between Idaho and Oregon. Some of the horror was captured in a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State in February 1888, by the Chinese Minister, Chang Yen Hoon (Pinyin: Chang Yinheng). Chang reported that "*three bodies of Chea-po's party were found floating down the river ... and upon a search being made further, they found Chae-po's boat stranded on some rocks in the bar with holes in the bottom, bearing indications of having been chopped with an axe, and its tie-rope cut and drifting in the water ... and on examining the three bodies, found a number of wounds inflicted by an ax and bullets. The bodies of the others that had been murdered have not yet been found*"

In June 2009, 2010, and 2011, the editors took part in river trips organized by the Historical Museum of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho, to visit the massacre site. Several of the participants knew far more about the massacre than we, including Greg Nokes, one of the world's leading researchers on the subject. Those interested should look at Nokes' website, <http://www.rgregorynokes.com>, and at his book: R Gregory Nokes, *Massacred for Gold, The Chinese in Hells Canyon*, Oregon State University Press, 2009.

A marker of native Snake River granite will be placed at the site of the 1887 massacre at Chinese Massacre Cove, near stone walls built by the Chinese miners who lived, worked, and were murdered there.

The granite marker will be transported to the site overlooking the cove. It will be approximately four by five feet, with the following inscription in three languages, Chinese, English, and Nez Perce:

Chinese Massacre Cove Site of the
1887 massacre of as many as 34
Chinese gold miners
No one was held accountable

Chinese Massacre Memorial Project

A memorial to the nearly three-dozen Chinese gold miners massacred in Hells Canyon on the border between Idaho and Oregon in 1887. Our Chinese Massacre Memorial Committee plans to have the memorial in place to dedicate at the next Chinese Remembering Conference in Lewiston, Idaho, June 21-22, 2012. It is well past the time to honor the victims. Nothing can fully compensate for such a heinous crime, but we can remember those who perished. We need your help.

Chinese Massacre Cove is a five-acre federally designated site at Deep Creek on the Oregon side of Hells Canyon, sixty-five miles south of Lewiston, Idaho. This is where a gang of northeastern Oregon horse thieves ambushed and killed as many as thirty-four defenseless Chinese miners and threw their bodies into the Snake River. Some of the bodies floated north to Lewiston where the crime was discovered.

The area was part of the traditional homeland of the Nez Perce until Chief Joseph and his Wallowa band were forced out in 1877.

The massacre in the remote canyon was the worst of the many crimes committed by whites against the Chinese immigrants who came to this country in the latter decades of the 19th century to work as miners, railroad-builders, and at other pursuits.

Subsequently, the editors made a case for the idea that a contemporary burst of rebuilding and rededicating the Beuk Aie Taoist Temple in Lewiston, fifty miles downstream from Deep Creek, was meant to commemorate the massacre.



Lewiston Chinese Cemetery

However, the crime was little known until two authors wrote about it: Craig Lesley in *River Song* in 1999, and R. Gregory Nokes in *Massacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon* in 2009.

The crime was more than just a robbery. The killers could easily have taken the gold without the slaughter. But the fact they killed the Chinese made it also a savage act of racial hatred.

No one was ever held accountable for this grave injustice. While some of the alleged killers were put on trial, a jury let them go.

Many of the hundreds of people who have attended our Chinese Remembering conferences in Lewiston— which have included a trip to the massacre site— have urged us to develop a memorial. Now is the time.

We will be doing fund-raising for this project, and will need your help. Our goal is to have the memorial in place to dedicate at the next Chinese Remembering conference in Lewiston June 21-22 in 2012. Be sure to check this site for updates.

Background on past Chinese Remembering conferences can be found on the Chinese Remembering page at www.massacredforgold.com The primary sponsor of Chinese Remembering is Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston

A second book on the massacre has now been published: Dana Hand's *Deep Creek: A Novel*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. Dana Hand is in reality the pen name of a two-person team of well known teacher-writers from Princeton University, Will Howarth and Anne

Matthews. For more information, see <http://www.dana-hand.com>.

Massacred for Gold, The Chinese in Hells Canyon by R. Gregory Nokes, is the first authoritative account of the long-forgotten 1887 massacre of as many as 34 Chinese gold miners in Oregon's Hells Canyon, the deepest canyon in North America.

The killers were an improbable gang of horse-thieves and schoolboys in northeastern Oregon's remote Wallowa country. Even though the killers were known, and one confessed, no one was ever convicted of the crime. A cover-up followed and the crime was all but forgotten for the next 100 years, until a county clerk found hidden records in an unused safe.

Massacred for Gold traces the author's long, personal journey to expose details of the massacre and its aftermath to understand how the crime was kept in the dark for so long.

The massacre was the worst of the many atrocities committed by whites against the Chinese who immigrated to the American West in the 19th century to mine gold and build railroads. Nokes examines the once-substantial presence of Chinese laborers in the interior Pacific Northwest, describing why they came, how their efforts contributed to the region's development, and how often mistreatment and abuse were their only reward.

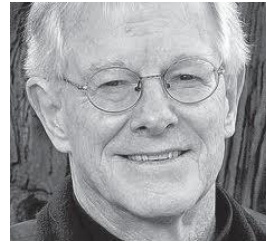
Nokes discloses previously unknown details of the massacre, told against the background of the Chinese experience in the American West. He also includes the history of the Wallowa country, once the homeland for Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce until they were forced to leave in 1877, igniting the U.S.-Nez Perce war.

"This is an important book. Meticulously researched and engagingly written, *Massacred for Gold* should be required reading in the American West. Sadly, it took more than 100 years for someone to give this massacre the relentless attention and indignation it has always

deserved, but Gregory Nokes has finally done it."

—Jim Lynch, author of
The Highest Tide and Border Songs.

About R. Gregory Nokes



Nokes first wrote about the murders of Chinese miners in 1995. His article, "A Most Daring Outrage, Murders at Chinese Massacre Cove, 1887,"

appeared in the Fall 2006 issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. His reporting on the subject has resulted in a formal designation of the massacre site as Chinese Massacre Cove.

Nokes retired in 2003 after 43 years in journalism, including 25 years with The Associated Press and 15 years with The Oregonian in Portland. While with The AP, he was stationed in New York, San Juan, Buenos Aires and Washington, D.C., where he served as both an economics and diplomatic correspondent. He traveled to more than 50 countries during his career. Nokes graduated from Willamette University and attended Harvard University as a 1972 Nieman Fellow. Since retiring, he has embarked on a second career as a writer and lecturer on the experience of immigrant Chinese in the Pacific Northwest. He lives with his wife, Candise, in West Linn, Oregon.

"Greg Nokes' diligent and persistent historical research creates in "Massacred for Gold," both a local and national context for the murder of thirtysome Chinese men near Deep Creek, Oregon, in the spring of 1887. It also makes clear why all the young murderers went free. Nokes describes two tragedies, then, one of rapacity; the other, of a community's willful denial of its past. Nokes' book, therefore, is an act of citizenship as much as it is a commendable work of history."