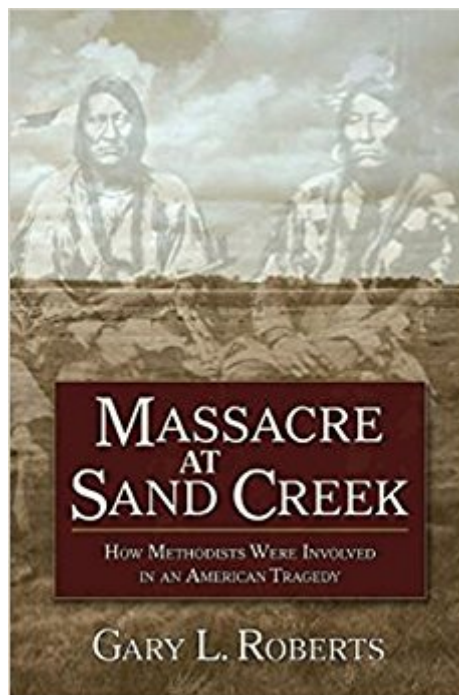


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# Massacre At Sand Creek: How Methodists Were Involved In An American Tragedy



## Synopsis

Sand Creek. At dawn on the morning of November 29, 1864, Colonel John Milton Chivington gave the command that led to slaughter of 230 peaceful Cheyennes and Arapahos-primarily women, children, and elderly-camped under the protection of the U. S. government along Sand Creek in Colorado Territory and flying both an American flag and a white flag. The Sand Creek massacre seized national attention in the winter of 1864-1865 and generated a controversy that still excites heated debate more than 150 years later. At Sand Creek demoniac forces seemed unloosed so completely that humanity itself was the casualty. That was the charge that drew public attention to the Colorado frontier in 1865. That was the claim that spawned heated debate in Congress, two congressional hearings, and a military commission. Westerners vociferously and passionately denied the accusations. Reformers seized the charges as evidence of the failure of American Indian policy. Sand Creek launched a war that was not truly over for fifteen years. In the first year alone, it cost the United States government \$50,000,000. Methodists have a special stake in this story. The governor whose policies led the Cheyennes and Arapahos to Sand Creek was a prominent Methodist layman. Colonel Chivington was a Methodist minister. Perhaps those were merely coincidences, but the question also remains of how the Methodist Episcopal Church itself responded to the massacre. Was it also somehow culpable in what happened? It is time for this story to be told. Coming to grips with what happened at Sand Creek involves hard questions and unsatisfactory answers not only about what happened but also about what led to it and why. It stirs ancient questions about the best and worst in every person, questions older than history, questions as relevant as today's headlines, questions we all must answer from within.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gary L. Roberts, Emeritus Professor of History, Abraham Baldwin College, Tifton, Georgia, respected historian of the American West and the Sand Creek massacre in particular, has published on a variety of topics related to frontier violence and Sand Creek in particular. He has consulted with the National Park Service, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribe of Oklahoma, the Northern Arapaho Tribe of Wyoming, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana, and the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church concerning Sand Creek.

Important book especially for Methodists and for anybody who cares about the history of the US and this country's need for truth and reconciliation

Found this useful in understanding the gravity of our Methodist heritage.

I felt finally the truth is told. Very factual. It will be interesting what will be said at the A General Conference.

Excellent well researched history of this sad event.

This is an extremely well-researched book. Commissioned by the United Methodist denomination to uncover the role of certain Methodist leaders in the infamous Sand Creek Massacre, it is a compilation of information provided by representatives from both the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes, as well as national historical site curators and historians. Every important fact and photograph is carefully annotated and documented. The first few chapters were a little difficult to muddle through, as it was mostly an apologetic for the volume and an explanation of why and how it was written. It is something of an extended Acknowledgements section of the book, if you will. Once you get past that, it's a bit more interesting. Reading the historical background of the concepts of the Doctrine of Discovery, introduced by the Catholic Church by the end of the 15th century and the subsequent idea of Manifest Destiny that drove early settlers in the United States made me more than a little ashamed of my Western European heritage. The author asserted that these superior attitudes of whites toward Native Americans was a strictly Anglo-Saxon trait; however, I believe that Europeans in general had this mindset. It caused them to regard indigenous people of the Americas and other

continents as either lower lifeforms or obstacles in the way of their goal to acquire more land and resources. It was particularly interesting, as well, to learn of the difference between what the author referred to as a typically Western "linear" concept of history and civilization, versus the Native American view of history as a "circular" phenomenon. It sounds like so much of the conflict between whites and red men was due to this antithetical view of human events, as well as the perception of "otherness" between the two different cultures. Unfortunately, Methodists and other Christians were tainted by the view that Indians were wild or savage. They seemed more concerned about assimilating them into Anglo culture to avoid conflict rather than really transforming their lives through the Spirit of God. Native peoples were rightly reluctant to adopt a religion that its own adherents were loathe to live up to. Why would they want to know a God that they were told loved them, when His representatives really didn't care about them as people? And when Methodism became increasingly political and material, it was even less attractive. Reading about the secretive march of Chivington to Sand Creek and the details of the monstrous attack of the American soldiers against the peaceful band of Indians camped there was really tough. It's chilling to read how so many of the men under the Colonel's command were happy to murder and mutilate women and children--even those who surrendered to the troops--thanks to the inflammatory speech of Chivington that reminded them of "the murdered women and children [of white settlers] whose blood saturates the sands of the Platte [River]" (p. 134). It was also sad how few men--including officers--opposed Chivington's bloody scheme. It vividly shows how savage the "civilized" white men could be! The fact that newspapers, politicians and others were able to praise Chivington and his men for their means of handling the "Indian problem" in the West was also disheartening, as was the amount of time it took for the government to launch and complete an investigation into the matter. The background information about John Chivington, the US Army Colonel who attacked the men, women and children at Sand Creek, and John Evans, the governor of the state of Colorado at the time, is very revealing. Both were ambitious men, more concerned about making a name for themselves and advancing their agendas than in promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though Methodist ministers, both were devoted Freemasons--an association discouraged by the church because of its anti-Christian doctrine. The author did not mention this, but I know from personal research that Freemasons--including the Sons of Liberty who instigated the Boston Tea Party, and the Texans who defended the Alamo--are quite frequently prone to take up arms in a conflict rather than choose the path of peace. Both men--particularly Chivington--paid dearly in later years for their involvement in the Sand Creek affair. The book indicts not only the two men mentioned above, but also the Methodist Episcopal Church and society in general. One telling remark is that "The

Methodist Episcopal Church became a reflection of society instead of a mirror for society" (p. 234). The denomination became infected with the prevailing ideas and attitudes of the time, rather than affecting people with the ideals and teachings of the Bible. They never once formally reprimanded Chivington for his attack on the Indians or disciplined him for later excesses. Instead, they allowed him to continue preaching, while completely unrepentant and insistent of his justification for his actions at Sand Creek. Because it is so scholarly, this book can be a bit dry at times. However, anyone interested in history would find it interesting. I think it is especially suitable as a text book for a Native American studies course at a university. It would also be an excellent resource, both as a primary source document and for its bibliography for anyone doing research on the subject. It is not a quick read, nor an easy one, but it is worth the investment of time to read this informative book.

In late 1864 the US Army under the command of Col. John Chivington attacked a village of peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians. The attack resulted in the deaths of two hundred and thirty Indians. The story of that sad event has been told many times and it stands as one of the grossest violations of Native Americans during the period of the old west. Gary L. Roberts, author of several books on the history of the Old West (including a great biography of Doc Holliday), presents a different take on the battle. Roberts examines the event in the context of role played by the Methodist Church. Both the governor of the Colorado territory and Chivington were members of the church, with the latter begin a minister in the church. The reader who desires a direct account of the Sand Creek massacre would probably do well to search out some of the other books on the battle before reading this one. The author includes an overview history of the Methodist Church's interactions with and views of Native Americans. The lives of Gov. John Evans and Col. Chivington are discussed in detail (as are their post event careers). These subjects form the bulk of the book and are interesting reading. And there is an interesting chapter on Methodists and the "Indian Question." Ultimately, all three (Chivington, Evans, and the Church) must be seen as products of their times and need to be understood in that light. Roberts does all this with an even hand, it would be easy to resort to condemnation, but he keeps an even keel, which I appreciate. This book began as a report for the Methodist Church on its historical relation to Native Americans and the event, and it does get a little ponderous, especially in the introduction and the first chapter where there are discussions of word usage and the historical method. Nevertheless, these chapters are important for understanding how the narrative proceeds, and I would recommend them for a view into how historians "work." This book is, perhaps, not the best introduction to Sand Creek, but for those seeking to understand how the event fits into the culture and history of the times (and especially the Methodist Church), it is a

worthy read. I would add that I received a complete copy (not an unfinished advance) and the book does not have an index, which is needed.

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