

—Breckenridge, Bull and Bush, Denver and Rock Bottom. Other pubs have sup- largest brewpub in terms of production the spiritual epicenter of the state's micro-

A barrel contains thirty-one gallons. Microbreweries dispense their products to the public through liquor retailers, tap rooms, or brewery restaurant sales. A regional brewery has a capacity of between 15,000 and 2 million barrels annually. A contract brewery is an enterprise that hires an outside company to produce its beer. The contract brewery then markets and distributes the beer.

<sup>3</sup> Denver voters elected John Hickenlooper as their new mayor in 2003.

At sunrise on November 7, 2003, members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes started a long journey. They planned to run, in shifts and in groups large and small, from the Sand Creek Massacre site near Eads in southeastern Colorado to Denver. The journey would take them from their ancestral homeland to the state capital, reversing the route Col. John M. Chivington's command took 139 years earlier before attacking a peaceful Indian village of some 500 people, mostly women, children, and old men. The runners endured miles of fatigue, pain, and joy to honor the victims and survivors of the massacre, heal a multigenerational trauma, and educate younger members of the tribes and the general public.

When the runners arrived at Riverside Cemetery in Denver three weeks later, they held another sunrise ceremony. This time, they honored two junior Army officers who disobeyed Chivington's order to attack the village and later condemned the slaughter in private letters and public testimony. About two weeks after the massacre, Captain Silas Soule and Lieutenant Joe E. Cramer had written vivid and disturbing letters to Major Edward W. Wynkoop, the commanding officer at Fort Lyon. Scholars assumed that these letters, though mentioned briefly in another source, had been lost.

The historians were—to their delight—wrong. In response to the outrage expressed in federal hearings by Soule, Cramer, and others, the U.S. Congress condemned the attack as a massacre in 1865 and promised reparations to the survivors. The promise was not kept. Then, 136 years later, Congress took up the evidence again.

David Fridtjof Halaas, the Colorado Historical Society's chief historian from 1990 to 2001, facilitated the publication of the letters and spoke to Congress in favor of a bill establishing the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. Now the museum division director for the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center, Halaas coauthored *Cheyenne Dog Soldiers: A Ledgerbook History of Coups and Combat* and the acclaimed *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent, Caught Between the Worlds of the Indian and the White Man*.

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# Written in Blood: The Soule-Cramer Sand Creek Massacre Letters

—Gary L. Roberts and David Fridtjof Halaas

At ten o'clock on the evening of April 23, 1865, Provost Marshal Captain Silas S. Soule and his bride of three weeks stepped out of a Denver theater. Suddenly, down the street, they heard gunshots. Leaving his wife behind with friends, Soule pulled his revolver and ran to investigate. As he approached the Lawrence Street Church near F (later Fifteenth) Street, two blue-clad soldiers with pistols drawn jumped from the darkness and opened fire. Although taken by surprise and mortally wounded, Soule squeezed off a shot before falling to the street, dead.

The killing shocked Denver, for Soule—who as provost marshal was responsible for maintaining order among military personnel in town—was well-known and popular. His marriage to Hersa Coberly had received considerable attention in the city's newspapers, and his even-handed enforcement of the law had earned him the respect of soldiers and civilians. Yet, since his arrival in Denver in January, repeated attempts had been made on his life, and the day before his death he told friends he expected to be murdered. Why did assassins target this popular Army officer? The answer lay in his relationship to his military superior, Colonel John M. Chivington, and the Army's recent attack on Black Kettle's Cheyenne village at Sand Creek in southeast Colorado Territory.

On November 29, 1864, three great events of the Civil War were transpiring: General William Tecumseh Sherman was moving through Georgia on his march from Atlanta to the sea; General John M. Schofield was preparing for an assault by Confederate forces under General John B. Hood at Franklin, Tennessee; and General Ulysses S. Grant was holding

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position in Petersburg, Virginia, in a costly siege that had already taken thousands of lives. On that same morning, half a continent away, Colonel Chivington led U.S. volunteers in an attack on a Cheyenne and Arapaho camp at Big Sandy Creek—Sand Creek to history. By contrast to the great campaigns of the Civil War, the Sand Creek incident seemed little more than a skirmish, its casualties trivial by comparison to the mass slaughter then taking place on eastern battlefields. Yet in a matter of months, the Sand Creek Massacre became the subject of two congressional investigations and a military commission hearing, disgraced Colorado's greatest military hero in the eyes of the nation, and unseated its governor.

This remarkable series of events came about largely through the efforts of a few junior officers in the First Colorado Cavalry who were outraged by the atrocities committed at Sand Creek—the soldiers killed and mutilated over 160 Indian men, women, and children. More than any others, they forced upon the American consciousness an awareness that what occurred on that frigid November day was not a battle—but a massacre.

Historians long have suspected that immediately after Sand Creek, two of these officers, Soule and Lieutenant Joseph A. Cramer, played a critical role in the initiation of the investigation when they wrote letters documenting the atrocities committed there. These letters, long thought



Robert Lindneux's 1936 interpretation of the Sand Creek Massacre features an American flag and a white flag of surrender flying over Chief Black Kettle's lodge.

destroyed or lost forever, suddenly surfaced in the summer of 2000. In them, Soule and Cramer not only provide graphic detail of the massacre but also provide new knowledge regarding the tragedy itself.

Soule and Cramer respectively commanded companies D and K of the First Colorado U.S. Volunteer Cavalry. In 1864, the First was a regiment divided against itself, with its imposing commander, John Chivington, the primary focus of contention. The split originated in a quarrel between Chivington and the regiment's commander, Colonel John P. Slough. Following the First's involvement in the 1862 Battle of Glorieta Pass in New Mexico, the troops had stopped the Confederate advance toward the Colorado gold fields. Slough resigned, believing he had been the object of an assassination attempt during that campaign. Slough went east and received a commission as brigadier general; Chivington took command of the First and of the Colorado Military District. The bad feelings in the First continued as Colonel Samuel F. Tappan, the regiment's second in command, became embroiled in his own dispute with Chivington.

In the summer of 1864 tensions between white settlers and native tribes of the central plains provoked an Indian war that interrupted overland travel and created panic in the Colorado settlements. To put down the uprising, Territorial Governor John Evans secured permission from the War Department in Washington, D.C., to raise a regiment of U.S. volunteers for one hundred days' service. But even as Evans and Chivington promoted enlistments into the new regiment—the Third Colorado—the Cheyennes and Arapahos made a peace overture at Fort Lyon, Colorado, prompting post commander Major Edward W. Wynkoop to lead an expedition to the Smoky Hill River, where he conferred with tribal chiefs and persuaded them to accompany him to Denver to meet with Chivington and Evans. During the September 28, 1864, parley at Camp Weld, Evans, although surprised and clearly irritated by the Indian initiative, directed the chiefs to surrender to military authority if they truly wanted peace. In turn, Chivington told the Indians that if they wanted to submit to the government, they should lay down their arms and give themselves up to the post commander at Fort Lyon.

Wynkoop returned to Fort Lyon convinced that peace was at hand. Soon, several Cheyenne and Arapaho bands responded to Chivington's instructions and moved to the fort. This embarrassed Evans, who openly wondered what to do with the hundred-day volunteers. He had lobbied

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Captain Silas S. Soule

hard for troops, arguing that an all-out Indian war threatened not only Denver but all of Colorado. Was he now to tell Washington officials that he had panicked, that the Indian war had all been in his mind? Peace also threatened Chivington's grandiose ambitions; he had hoped an Indian campaign would renew his reputation as a soldier, win him a brigadier's star, and provide a stepping stone for a seat in Congress.

Events now moved quickly. In October, Evans left Denver for Washington. At the same time, military officials of the Upper Arkansas district relieved Wynkoop from command at Fort Lyon—the fort lay within their jurisdiction—and named Major Scott Anthony as his replacement. Against Upper Arkansas district orders but in compliance with Chivington's injunction at Camp Weld, Wynkoop had accepted the surrender of several Arapaho and Cheyenne bands and issued them rations. This thoroughly muddled affairs at Fort Lyon. Wynkoop firmly believed the Indians had surrendered, thus entitling them to government protection. The new commander, Scott Anthony, hardly knew what course to follow but finally ordered all the Indians to move over to Sand

Creek forty miles distant and there join Black Kettle's Cheyennes. When he received further orders from his superiors, he said, he would send word to Black Kettle and the other chiefs.

At this juncture, with the Third's one-hundred-day limit fast approaching, Chivington made a desperate decision to move against the surrendered Indians on Sand Creek. Marching his troops under a cloud of great secrecy, Chivington reached Fort Lyon on the morning of November 28 and immediately threw a tight guard around the post. He then announced his intention to attack Black Kettle's peaceful village. Both Captain Soule and Lieutenant Cramer numbered themselves among the pro-Chivington clique, but Chivington's announcement shocked them. Both men had accompanied Wynkoop to the Smoky Hill and had parlayed with the chiefs there. Both had gone to Denver to attend the Camp Weld Conference. Both were at Fort Lyon when the tribes responded to Chivington's invitation to give themselves up. In fact, Soule had innocently informed Chivington that the Indians had come into the fort, thus unwittingly alerting his commander to Black Kettle's whereabouts.<sup>1</sup> And both Soule and Cramer had protested when Wynkoop was removed from command at Lyon.<sup>2</sup>

Now, both vehemently objected to Chivington's order to attack Black Kettle's village, arguing that the government had guaranteed the Indians' safety. Both joined Chivington's expedition with the understanding that only the hostile Cheyenne Dog Soldiers on the Smoky Hill River would be attacked and that peaceful Indians would not be molested.

When Chivington's forces attacked Black Kettle's village at dawn on November 29, both Cramer and Soule refused to fire their weapons and both received severe criticism for their actions. Afterward, both so loudly expressed their disapproval of Chivington's behavior at Sand Creek that Major Anthony voiced concern for their safety.

Captain Soule's letter, just discovered, to Major "Ned" Wynkoop follows:

Ft. Lyon, C.T.

December 14, 1864

Dear Ned:

Two days after you left here the 3d Reg't with a Battalion of the 1st arrived here, having moved so secretly that we were not aware of their approach until they had Pickets around the

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Post, allowing no one to pass out. They arrested Capt. [William] Bent, and John Vogle, and placed guards around their houses. They then declared their intention to massacre the friendly Indians camped on Sand Creek. Major Anthony gave all information, and eagerly joined in with Chivington & Co, and ordered Lieut. Cramer, with his whole Co to join the command. As soon as I knew of their movement I was indignant as you would have been were you here, and went to [Lt. James D.] Cannon's room, where a number of officers of the 1st and 3d were congregated, and told them that any man who would take part in the murder, knowing the circumstances as we did, was a low lived cowardly son of a bitch. Capt. Y. J. Johnson [commander, Company E Third Colorado Regiment], and Lieut. [George H.] Harding [Hardin, First Colorado Cavalry] went to camp and reported to Chiv, [Maj. Jacob] Downing, and the whole outfit what I had said, and you bet hell was to pay in camp. Chiv and all hands swore they would hang me before they moved camp, but I stuck it out, and all the officers at the Post, except Anthony backed me. I was then ordered with my whole company to [accompany] Major A[nthony].—with 20 days rations. I told him that I would not take part in their intended murder, but if they were going after the Sioux, Kiowa's [sic] or any fighting Indians, I would go as far as any of them. They said that was what they were going for, and I joined them. We arrived at Black Kettles and Left Hand's Camp, at day light. Lieut. [Luther] Wilson with Co's. "C," "E," & "G" [First Colorado Cavalry troops which had come to Fort Lyon with Chivington and were not part of the Lyon battalion] were ordered in advance to cut off their herd. He made a circle to the rear and formed line 200 yds from the village, and opened fire. Poor Old John Smith and [Private David] Louderbeck [Louderback], ran out with white flags, but they paid no attention to them, and they ran back into the tents. Anthony then rushed up with Co's "D" "K" & "G," to within one hundred yards and commenced firing. I refused to fire, and swore that none but a coward would, for by this time hundreds of women and children were coming towards us, and getting on

their knees for mercy. Anthony shouted, "Kill the sons of bitches." Smith and Louderbeck came to our command, although I am confident there were 200 shots fired at them, for I heard an officer say that Old Smith and any one who sympathized with Indians, ought to be killed and now was a good time to do it. The Battery then came up in our rear, and opened on them. I took my comp'y across the Creek, and by this time the whole of the 3d and the Batteries were firing into them and you can form some idea of the slaughter. When the Indians found that there was no hope for them they went for the Creek, and buried themselves in the Sand and got under the banks, and some of the bucks got their Bows and a few rifles and defended themselves as well as they could. By this time there was no organization among our troops, they were a perfect mob—every man on his own hook. My Co, was the only one that kept their formation, and we did not fire a shot.

The massacre lasted six or eight hours, and a good many Indians escaped. I tell you Ned it was hard to see little children on their knees, have their brains beat out by men professing to be civilized. One Squaw was wounded, and a fellow took a hatchet to finish her, she held her arms up to defend her, and he cut one arm off, and held the other with one hand, and dashed the hatchet through her brain. One Squaw with her two children, were on their knees, begging for their lives, of a dozen soldiers, within ten feet of them all firing—when one succeeded in hitting the Squaw in the thigh, when she took a knife and cut the throats of both children, and then killed herself. One old Squaw hung herself in the lodges—there was not enough room for her to hang and she held up her knees and choked herself to death. Some tried to escape on the Prairie, but most of them were run down by horsemen. I saw two Indians [take] hold of one anothers hands, chased until they were exhausted, when they kneeled down, and clasped each other around the neck and were both shot together, they were all scalped, and as high as half a dozen taken from one head. They were all horribly mutilated. One woman was cut open, and a child taken out of her, and scalped.



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White Antelope, War Bonnet, and a number of others had Ears and Privates cut off. Squaws snatches were cut out for trophies. You would think it impossible for white men to butcher and mutilate human beings as they did there, but every word I have told you is the truth, which they do not deny. It was almost impossible to save any of them. Charly Aubobee [Arkansas Valley pioneer and rancher Charles Autobees] saved John Smith and Winsers [Charles Windsor, post sutler] squaw. I saved little Charley Bent. Geo Bent was killed.<sup>3</sup> Jack Smith [Interpreter John Smith's mixed-blood son] was taken prisoner, and murdered the next day in his tent by one of [Lt. Clark] Dunn's Co. "E." I understand the man received a horse for doing the job. They were going to murder Charlie Bent [William Bent's youngest mixed-blood son], but I run him into the Fort. They were going to kill old Uncle John Smith, but Lt. Cannon and the boys of Ft. Lyon, interfered, and saved him. They would have murdered Old Bents family, if Col Tappan had not taken the matter in hand. Cramer went up with twenty (20) men, and they did not like to buck against so many of the 1st.<sup>4</sup> Chivington has gone to Washington to be made General, I suppose, and get authority to raise a nine months Reg't, to hunt Indians.<sup>5</sup> He and Downing will have me cashiered, if possible. If they do I want you to help me. I think they will try the same for Cramer, for he has shot his mouth off a good deal, and did not shoot his pistol off in the massacre. Joe has behaved first rate during the whole affair. Chivington reports five or six hundred killed, but there were not more than two hundred: about 140 women and children and 60 bucks. A good many were out hunting buffalo. Our best Indians were killed. Black Kettle, One Eye, Minnemic [Minimic], and Left Hand.<sup>6</sup> Geo Pierce of Co "F" was killed trying to save John Smith. There was one other of the 1st killed, and nine of the 3d all through their own fault. They would get up to the edge of the bank and look over, to get a shot at an Indian under them, and get an arrow put through them. When the women were killed the Bucks did not seem to try and get away, but fought desperately. Charly Aubobee [Autobees] wished me to write all about it to you.

He says he would have given anything if you could have been there.

I suppose Cramer has written to you, all the particulars, so I will write half. Your family is well. Billy Walker, Col. Tappan, Lou Wilson, (who was wounded in the arm) start for Denver in the morning. There is no news I can think of. I expect we will have a hell of a time with Indians this winter. We have (200) men at the Post—Anthony in command. I think he will be dismissed when the facts are known in Washington. Give my regards to any friends you come across, and write as soon as possible.

Yours &c  
(signed) S. S. Soule

Lieutenant Cramer wrote his letter to Major Wynkoop five days later:

Ft. Lyon, C.T.  
December 19, 1864

Dear Major:

This is the first opportunity I have had of writing you since the great Indian Massacre, and for a start, I will acknowledge I am ashamed to own [acknowledge] I was in it with my Co. Col. Chivington came down here with the gallant third, known as the Chivington Brigade, like a thief in the dark, throwing his Scouts around the Post, with instructions to let no one out, without his orders, not even the Commander of the Post, and for shame our Comd'g. Officer submitted. Col. Chivington expected to find the Indians in camp below the Com[mand]—but the Major Comd'g told him all about where the Indians were, and volunteered to take a Battalion from the Post and join the Expedition.

Well Col. Chiv. got in about 10 A.M. Nov. 28th and, at 8 P.M., we started with all of the 3d, parts of "H" "C" and "E" of the First, in com'd of Lt. Wilson [and] "K" "D" & "G" in com'd of Major Anthony. Marched all night up Sand [Creek], to the big bend in Sanday [sic] about 15 or 20 miles, above where we crossed on our trip to Smoky Hill and came on to Black Kettles village of 103 lodges, containing not over 500 all told,

350 of which were women and children. Three days previous to our going out, Major Anthony gave John Smith, Lowderbuck [sic] of Co. "G" and a Gov't driver [Richard Watson Clark], permission to go out there and trade with them, and they were in the village when the fight came off. John Smith came out holding up his hands, and running towards us, when he was shot at by several, and the word was passed along to shoot him. He then turned back, and went to his tent, and got behind some Robes, and escaped unhurt. Lowderbuck [sic] came out with a white flag, and was served the same as John Smith, the driver the same. Well I got so mad I swore I would not burn powder, and I did not. Capt. Soule the same. It is no use for me to try to tell you how the fight was managed, only I think the Officer in command should be hung, and I know when the truth is known it will cashier him. We lost 40 men wounded, and 10 killed. Not over 250 Indians mostly women and children, and I think not over 200 were killed and not over 75 bucks. With proper management they could all have been killed and not lost over 10 men. After the fight there was a sight I hope I may never see again. Bucks, women and children were scalped, fingers cut off to get the rings on them, and this as much with Officers as men, and one of those officers a Major, and a Lt. Col. Cut off Ears of all he came across—a squaw ripped open and a child taken from her, little children shot, while begging for their lives, women shot while on their knees, and with their arms around soldiers a begging for their lives, and all the indignities shown their bodies that ever was heard of, things that Indians would be ashamed to do. To give you some little idea, Squaws were known to kill their own children, and then themselves, rather than to have them taken prisoners. Most of the Indians yielded 4 or 5 scalps. But enough! for I know you are disgusted already. Black Kettle, White Antelope, War Bonnet, Left Hand, Little Robe, and several other chiefs were killed. Black Kettle said when he saw us coming, that he was glad, for it was Major Wynkoop coming to make peace. Left Hand stood with his hands folded across his breast, until he was shot saying: "Soldiers no hurt me—soldiers my friends."

One Eye was killed: was in the employ of Gov't as spy: came into the Post a few days before, and reported about the Sioux, were going to break out at Learned [Fort Larned, Kansas], which proved true.

After all the pledges made by Major A—to these Indians and then to take the course he did. I think no comments are necessary from me, only I will say he has a face for every man he talks [to]. The action taken by Capt Soule and myself were under protest. Col. C— was going to have Soule hung for saying there were all cowardly Sons of B—s; if Soule did not take it back, but nary take back with Soule. I told the Col that I thought it murder to jump them friendly Indians. He says in reply: Damn any man or men who are in sympathy with them. Such men as you and Major Wynkoop better leave the U.S. Service, so you can judge what a nice time we had on the trip. I expect Col. C— and Downing will do all in their power to have Soule, [Lt. Chauncey M.] Cossitt and I dismissed. Well, let them work for what they damn please, I ask no favors of them. If you are in Washington, for God's sake, Major, keep Chivington from being a Bri'g. Gen'l, which he expects. I will send you the Denver Papers with this. Excuse this for I have been in much of a hurry.

Very respectfully,  
Your Well-wisher  
(signed) Jos. A. Cramer

[the following is a postscript]

Jack Smith was taken prisoner and then murdered. One little child 3 months old was thrown in the feed box of a wagon and brought one days march and there left on the ground to perish. Col. Tappan is after them for all that is out. I am making out a report of all from the beginning to end, to send to Gen'l Slough, in hopes that he will have the thing investigated, and if you should see him, please speak to him about it, for fear that he has forgotten me. I shall write him nothing but what can be proven.

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Major I am ashamed of this. I have it gloriously mixed up, but am in hopes I can explain it all to you before long. I would have given my right arm had you been here, when they arrived. Your family are all well.

(signed) Joe A. Cramer

The Soule-Cramer letters—only recently discovered in a family trunk—greatly enhance our understanding of Sand Creek and related events. First, they validate much of the testimony taken during the congressional and Army hearings. They establish the presence of white flags in Black Kettle's village—claimed by many witnesses but strongly denied by Chivington supporters, both past and present. They confirm that the officers in command lost control of their troops and allowed the Third Regiment to disintegrate into a mob. They confirm that rank-and-file soldiers, as well as staff officers—notably Major Hal Sayre and Lieutenant Colonel Leavitt Bowen—mutilated the dead, taking scalps and body parts as trophies and souvenirs. They confirm that a baby was placed in a wagon feedbox and later abandoned beside the road. They confirm that a soldier killed a pregnant woman and cut her unborn child from her body. They confirm that the officers of the Fort Lyon battalion reacted angrily to Major Anthony's decision to join Chivington's expedition to Black Kettle's village. They confirm that Charley Autobeas, an important Arkansas Valley rancher, saved the life of interpreter John Smith during the fight. And the letters confirm Chivington's ambition and his threats directed against both Cramer and Soule.

The letters also provide critical new evidence and enlarge the understanding of Sand Creek.

First, they shed light on the exact site of Black Kettle's village. Cramer said the command "marched all night up Sand [Creek], to the big bend in Sanday ... and came on to Black Kettle's village of 103 lodges. ..." This supports the accuracy of maps drawn by the Cheyenne mixed-blood George Bent, which place the village in the big bend of Sand-Creek.<sup>7</sup> It also confirms Cheyenne oral tradition, which holds sacred the southernmost big bend of Big Sandy Creek, located in present Kiowa County, Colorado. Moreover, Soule's letter provides information on the fight's logistics. Most historical studies have placed Black Kettle's village immediately on the bank of Big Sandy, but Soule makes it clear that the Fort Lyon battalion, which approached the village from the high bluffs

south and west of the village, opened fire while they were still a hundred yards from camp. This suggests that the village lay farther away from the creek bank than commonly supposed.

Second, the letters reveal that the officers and men of the Fort Lyon battalion united in their condemnation of the Sand Creek action. They not only establish that Soule and his entire company did not fire during the fight, but they also reveal for the first time that Cramer refused to fire, and they imply that Lieutenant Cossit held his fire as well. The letters further establish that Lieutenant James D. Cannon, backed by twenty men of the First Colorado, saved John Smith's life after the fight. They also point to an armed "face off" between the veteran First and the "Hundred Dayzers." The letters reveal, too, that Colonel Samuel Tappan intervened to save the lives of William Bent and his family at Bent's ranch after the fight, backed by a detachment of the First led by Cramer. The



The Cheyenne and Arapaho delegation at Camp Weld in Denver, September 28, 1864. Kneeling in front, from left, are Major Edward W. Wynkoop and Captain Silas S. Soule. Seated are, from left: White Antelope, Bull Bear, Black Kettle, Neva, and Notanee.

Standing, from left, are: unidentified soldier, unidentified, John Smith, Heaps of Buffalo, Bosse, Dexter Colley, and unidentified. Several weeks before this conference, Wynkoop, Soule, and 120 soldiers gathered at Smoky Hill with the chiefs.

There, Wynkoop convinced the Indians to meet in Denver with Territorial Governor John Evans and Colonel John Chivington to discuss peace. Chivington directed the chiefs to surrender to Wynkoop at Fort Lyon, but Chivington instead effected a double-cross and attacked the unsuspecting Indians at nearby Sand Creek.

newfound letters additionally show that the officers of the First held Major Anthony in utter contempt for his eagerness to join Chivington's expedition.<sup>8</sup>

The letters contain other previously unknown information. They indicate that both John Smith and Private Louderback waved white flags to stop the advancing troops and establish the peaceful character of the village. And they indicate that Black Kettle and other chiefs initially thought the approaching soldiers had come not to war but to confirm the peace established at Fort Lyon and Camp Weld by Chivington, Evans, and Wynkoop.

Beyond providing graphic detail of the massacre and its aftermath, the Soule-Cramer letters are important because they became the cornerstone of the government's investigation into Sand Creek.

For two weeks following the massacre, Chivington kept his expedition in the field in a fruitless attempt to locate Little Raven's Arapahos. When he finally abandoned the search on December 6, Chivington left his troops and hurried to Fort Lyon where he bragged that Sand Creek would bring him a brigadier general's star. The column reached Fort Lyon four days later. Cramer accompanied the Third as far as Bent's ranch, where the Third again threatened the old trader and his family. Here, Cramer told Captain Theodore Cree—a strong Chivington supporter—that he intended to expose Sand Creek for the massacre it was.

At the same time, others began efforts to effect an investigation. Indian agent Samuel Colley and his son, Dexter, and John Smith, father of Jack Smith murdered at Sand Creek, prepared evidence to present to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington. On December 9, two days after news of Sand Creek reached Denver, Stephen S. Harding, the territory's chief justice, wrote Secretary of the Interior John P. Usher warning that Chivington's victory might be tainted. These reports and others reached important Republican officials, but without confirmation from the military itself, they remained purely rumor and speculation.

Then came the Soule-Cramer letters.

To be sure, junior officers carried little influence outside their own regiments. But both men knew Major Wynkoop, their former commander, who now had close ties to district and department headquarters. Their real conduit, however, was Colonel Tappan, a witness to the November 28 Fort Lyon confrontation between Soule-Cramer and Chivington. Tappan

exerted great influence through his friend General John P. Slough, the former commander of the First Colorado now stationed in Alexandria, Virginia, and who was a favorite of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.

Soule wrote his letter to Wynkoop on December 14, noting that Tappan would leave for Denver the following day. Two days later, an unidentified officer of the First wrote to General Slough declaring Sand Creek to be a massacre. The letter with a Denver postmark was apparently—but not conclusively—written by Tappan. Cramer composed his letter to Wynkoop on December 19, saying he was preparing a detailed report for Slough.

Wynkoop's movements at mid-December are unclear. After his recall from Fort Lyon he had been assigned to command at Fort Riley, Kansas—Upper Arkansas district headquarters—but he left there sometime in December to go over to Fort Leavenworth and defend his actions before departmental commander General Samuel R. Curtis. When he returned to Fort Riley he received word of the Sand Creek affair and became enraged. The Soule-Cramer letters had arrived by then, along with official reports, and Wynkoop immediately forwarded a copy of Cramer's letter to Hiram P. Bennet, Colorado's delegate to Congress. On December 31, the new district commander, General James Ford, doubtlessly influenced by the Soule-Cramer letters, ordered Wynkoop back to Fort Lyon to assume command and investigate the "Chivington Massacre."

Wynkoop's report on Sand Creek, combined with supporting affidavits, pushed both Congress and the military to act. On January 10, 1865, the House of Representatives passed a resolution calling on the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the [Civil] War to investigate the Sand Creek affair. The Senate followed with a resolution withholding the pay of the Third until hearings had been held on Sand Creek. And on January 30, Delegate Bennet wrote to General Slough, asking him for a copy of Cramer's report, and specifically mentioning Cramer's letter to Wynkoop, which he had received. "I propose to show Chivington in his true colors," Bennet said.

When the military commission convened in February, Soule was called as the first witness and his testimony provided the basis for the case against Chivington and the Third. Cramer, who followed Soule on the stand, methodically and carefully gave damning testimony concerning Chivington's actions at Sand Creek. More testimony corroborated the claims made by Soule and Cramer.



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On April 20, the commission adjourned to allow Chivington time to prepare his case. Three days later Soule was murdered on the streets of Denver.

When the military commission reconvened, Chivington presented a series of depositions, including one which accused Soule of theft, drunkenness, and cowardice. In Soule's defense, documents were placed into the record confirming that Soule believed he would be killed because of his anti-Chivington testimony.

At this point in the hearing, the military captured one of Soule's killers, Charles A. Squier. Squier quickly escaped, however, and the arresting officer, Lieutenant James D. Cannon—who had also testified against Chivington—was found dead in his hotel room, a victim of poison.

Soule's killers disappeared and never faced prosecution.

As to Joseph Cramer, despite testimony designed to portray him as a vindictive subordinate out to discredit his commander, his steadiness and integrity proved too great for the charges to be believed. Yet Cramer's life—like Soule's—was tragically short. In August 1864, he had been thrown from his horse. The injuries he sustained to his liver and stomach plagued him for the rest of his life; indeed, complications from the fall forced him to interrupt his testimony before the Sand Creek military commission. He continued, however, to serve in the First Colorado until November 19, 1865, when he mustered out in Denver. Soon he left Colorado and with his wife settled in Solomon, Kansas, a farming community in Dickinson County. In 1870 voters elected him sheriff, but he served only briefly. He died December 16, 1870, age thirty-one.

The remarkable Soule-Cramer letters never became part of the public record of the original investigations, and after the two congressional committees and the Judge Advocate General's Office released their reports, the letters disappeared to history. The sole evidence pointing to their existence was in Hiram Bennet's letter to Slough.

Their reappearance in the year 2000 caused a sensation. That July, U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado, an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and a Sand Creek Massacre descendant, introduced a congressional bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in Colorado. Senate Bill 2950 was referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation.

Two weeks before the scheduled hearing on September 14, Linda Rebeck of Evergreen, Colorado, brought to the Colorado Historical Society letters written by her great-grandfather, Marl L. Blunt, who settled in Colorado in 1859. Included in the packet were materials related to Sand Creek, including manuscript copies of the Soule-Cramer letters. Rebeck had recently discovered the letters packed away in a trunk in her mother's attic. Society officials immediately recognized their importance and with Rebeck's permission contacted Senator Campbell, who read excerpts from the letters during the Senate hearing and entered their full contents into the Congressional Record. The effect was immediate. Senator John Warner of Virginia, who attended the hearing, rose to say that never in his tenure in public office had he heard such moving—and disturbing—testimony. *The Denver Post*, *Rocky Mountain News*, and newspapers across the country ran front-page stories on the Sand Creek letters.

The Soule-Cramer letters suddenly were the subject of a fast-breaking news story. But even more importantly, they helped push the Sand Creek bill through the Senate and House. On November 7, President Clinton signed the bill into law.

In the winter of 1864–65, the Soule-Cramer letters helped to launch investigations which exposed the Sand Creek affair as a massacre. One-hundred and thirty-five years later, those same letters helped ensure that Americans would never forget the horror and crime of what occurred on the Big Sandy that bleak November dawn of 1864. The power of the letters, then and now, lies in their simple honesty, their moral outrage, and the determination of two young men who wanted to see justice done.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Captain Soule wrote Colonel Chivington on October 11 and October 17, 1864, advising him of the situation at Fort Lyon.

<sup>2</sup> When Wynkoop departed Fort Lyon, he carried two letters praising his course of action with the Cheyennes and Arapahos, one signed by the officers under his command and the other signed by prominent ranchers and citizens in the Arkansas Valley.

<sup>3</sup> George Bent, the son of William Bent and his Cheyenne wife, Owl Woman, suffered a wound at Sand Creek but did not die. He escaped to the Smoky Hill with other survivors. A month later, he joined the Dog Soldiers and fought with them in the full-scale war against the whites that followed Sand Creek.

<sup>4</sup> This episode apparently occurred after the Sand Creek expedition was over.

## Written in Blood: The Soule-Cramer Sand Creek Massacre Letters

Colonel Samuel F. Tappan chanced to be at Fort Lyon when Chivington's command arrived on November 28. He had just returned from a trip to Washington, D.C., where he had met General Ulysses S. Grant. Tappan was Chivington's old foe dating back to the early days of regimental organization. He took careful notes of all conversations between Chivington and the Fort Lyon officers.

<sup>5</sup> Chivington clearly hoped to win a brigadier general's star from the engagement. He boasted about it at Fort Lyon after Sand Creek. Actually, his commission in the Army had expired before the massacre. Upon his return to Denver, he asked to be relieved as commander of the Colorado Military District. The Army acquiesced, which ironically removed him from the reach of the military when charges were brought against him concerning his actions at Sand Creek.

<sup>6</sup> Chivington's troops killed many chiefs at Sand Creek, including White Antelope, War Bonnet, Standing-in-the-Water, Yellow Wolf, Old Little Robe, and One Eye. However, Black Kettle and Minimic escaped. Left Hand, the Arapaho chief, suffered a mortal wound at Sand Creek but died in the Smoky Hill villages.

<sup>7</sup> See David Fridtjof Halaas, "All the Camp was Weeping: George Bent and the Sand Creek Massacre," *Colorado Heritage*, summer 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony would himself become a critic of the Sand Creek affair. He justified himself on grounds that Chivington had deceived him, and that he joined the expedition believing that it would move against the villages on the Smoky Hill Trail. Later in life, he would defend his role and insist that the village at Sand Creek included hostiles.

