

THE AMADORIAN

A Publication of the Amador County Historical Society

"Preserving the past and present for tomorrow"

Fall 2020 – Vol. 13, No. 4

President's Corner

Dear Fellow ACHS Members:

By the time you read this, the Ledger will have announced that the Amador County Museum was voted "Best Museum" in our county by our residents. Thank you to all who voted for our museum. Hopefully this will bring in more visitors to the museum.

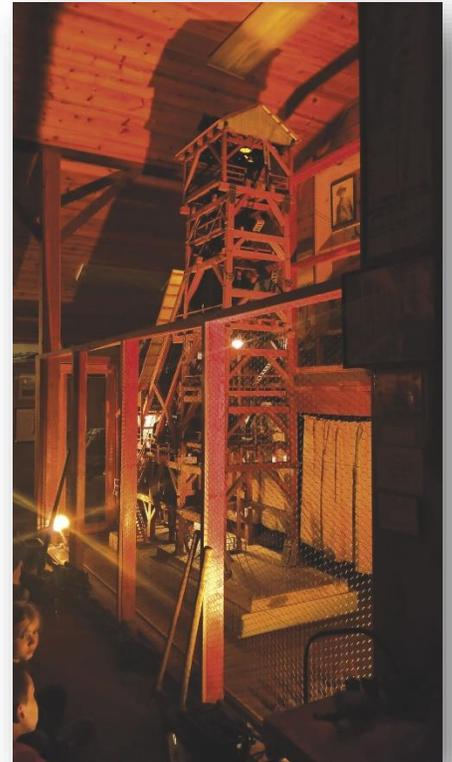
Talking about the museum, we are happy to announce that the museum and Mine Model are now re-opened. Our hours are Friday – Saturday from 11 AM – 3 PM. Mine Model tours are at 12 PM and 1 PM. We are always receiving new artifacts. Come and see what is new since you were last there. If you have never been in the Mine Model, you should make a point of seeing this very interesting and informative display.

We are looking forward to being able to plan new events and continue our fundraising efforts soon. In the meantime, don't forget about **Giving Tuesday on December 1, 2020**. With Christmas coming up soon and people ordering presents and anything else on Amazon, sign up for **Amazon Smiles** or **Amazon Prime Smiles** and .5% of your purchases can be contributed to ACHS at no cost to you. We won't get rich on this, but if everyone does sign up, all those little bits can add up. So far, with just a few doing it, we have made \$49.37 since June. Stay safe and happy holidays.

Best Regards,

Cathy McGowen

President, Amador County Historical Society



The Amador County Museum and Mine Model are now open Friday – Saturday, 11 am – 3 pm. Mine Model tours are at 12 pm and 1 pm.

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A Blast from the Past

With Christmas coming soon, did you ever wonder what Christmas was like in Amador County in 1895? Here is a little insight from *Logan's Alley, Volume V, pages 285 & 286* by Larry Cenotto.

Christmas then it seems was a more community and neighborhood event. The adults made certain no child went without a present or sweets. Louis Henry Abramofsky, German-born, in his Jackson "grocery house," sold doll buggies, toy wagons, drums, velocipedes, albums and much more. In Amador City, "Santa Claus's headquarters" (also known as the Keystone Supply Co.) offered a special prize if you could guess the number of prunes in a box on its counter. The Brinn Brothers in Sutter Creek gave away of box of French mixed candies to every child in town.

The festivities at Aetna School (near today's Highway 40 and Middle Bar Road) featured a tree, candy or present for every child, and little Jerry Kanes's recitation of "A Christmas Morning."

In Volcano, the grand ball Christmas Night, featured Becker's orchestra and entertainment in the Methodist Church.

The Butterfly Glee Club harmonized at Buena Vista's Norris Hall. There, on Christmas Eve, Santa Claus appeared with a heavily loaded tree filled with popcorn balls and candy which the little folks quickly emptied. In Pine Grove, the Christmas tree was well attended, with many nice presents for the little ones. Nine little imps were dancing about the fireplace talking about Santa when there was a rap, and lo, Santa himself walked in.

The Christmas entertainment at Spring Valley, west of Plymouth, was a success with another tree laden with presents for the children. Two little girls dressed in white and decorated with holly and cedar, acted as fairies and distributed the gifts.

The newspaper reported that the Browns on Church Street, where the museum is now housed, cleaned two turkeys a couple days before Christmas and hung them on the back porch. Early Christmas morning they went to fetch the birds and discovered one missing. "A Democrat must have stolen it," Judge Brown, a Democrat himself asserted, with, however, this sardonic twist: "If the thief had been a Republican he would have taken both." Some things never change.

Happy holidays and merry Christmas to all!!

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A Victorian Holiday Greeting Card

Tragedy Spring

The following is the second of several installments being published in *The Amadorian* from the article "*Tragedy Spring and the Opening of the Gold Rush Trail*" by Frank Tortorich.

In this issue the Mormons in California start the journey to the Salt Lake Valley and discover the tragedy at Tragedy Spring. Below are sections of first-hand accounts taken from diaries written by the pioneers listed below. Spelling errors from the diaries are not corrected.

STARTING THE JOURNEY TO THE SALT LAKE VALLEY

Henry William Bigler:

April 1848. The next day Sunday the 9th prity much all the boys come together to talk over matters and things in regard to makeing arrangements for going up to the Great Salt Lake and come to some understanding when we should make the start &c and the decision was that all be ready by the first of june except 8 who was ready and expected to start with an express the next Saturday through I believe to the States. It was further decided that we send out a few men as pioneers before that time to pioneer out a route across the Sierra Nevada and if possible find a much nearer way than to go the truckey route and shun Crossing the Truckey River 27 times as we were informed by Mr. Brannan we would have to do if we went that route and very deep and rapid.¹

It seems logical that the group sought information from any source possible for an alternative to the Truckee River Route. Most early day wagon trails were originally Indian trails, then trapper trails, and finally improved for wagons.² So, it is logical that the company would scout existing Indian trails, which proved to be the correct decision.

In the spring of 1848, a group of Mormons³ consisting of 45 men,⁴ one woman,⁵ 17 wagons, two brass canons purchased from Sutter, along with 150 oxen and 150 horses and mules,⁶ assembled in a valley just east of Placerville that Bigler called "Pleasant Valley." It retains the name today.

One member from the group went about six miles farther up the trail to build a corral to hold the 300 animals while waiting to begin their journey. He told the others "this place looks like a park."⁷ His name was James Sly "Sly Park," and serves as a recreation area today. (*cont'd on page 4*)

¹ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," , 148.

² Eight emigrant trails usually followed rivers and were so named, i.e. Truckee River Route. Additional reading: LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and Fur Trade of the War West, Vol 1* (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2000).

³ This first group of discharged battalion members, with a few other Mormons who had not accompanied the Battalion, to head east became known as the Holmes-Thompson company. Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*, 204.

⁴ Five non battalion members were included in that count. Rickett, *Mormon Battalion*, 222.

⁵ Melissa Coray, wife of William Coray.

⁶ Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*, 205.

⁷ Gudde, 113.

Bigler:

(July) the 5th, made an early start still keeping to the divide and by 9 am we roaled up to the front camp Here they concluded to stop a few days as they found a nice little valley (though about 2 miles on the south to the waters of the Mocozyamy⁸) for our stock and to send out some men to examine the route and look for three of our company viz. Browett, Allen & Cox who had left our camp on the 25th of june to look out a pass while the company was gathering as yet we had not heard anything -from them and the camp began to feel uneasy about them, accordeingly we sent out ten men to look for them while the rest of us took the stock down into the little valley which we called Slys Park after one of our men who found it and there built a couple Corrals and awaited the return of the ten men who returned on the 14 of july and reported they seen nothing of the 3 men neither any signs after passing a certain point they discovered a pass but it would have to be worked.⁹

Azariah Smith:

Wednesday July the 5th... Brother Danial Browett, Ezra H. Allen & Henderson Cox have gone over the Mountains, to find the best pass, ...¹⁰

THE DISCOVERY OF THE GRAVE

Bigler:

(July) 17th to day we had bad road and a great deal of brush to cut broke an axil tree -- made 8 or 10 miles and campt at leek Spring¹¹ a fine spring with plenty of grass and leeks about it¹²

Smith:

Tuesday, July the 18. ...This afternoon those men that went ahead (this was another group of men, not the 10 who went in search for the three scouts), saw some Indians, with clothing on which resembled those of Brothers Browett, Allan and Cox. They also saw a place where they suspect that they are killed and buried.¹³

Bigler:

Tues 18th ... While myself and 4 others went to work the road which we did for about ten miles and as we were returning to Camp we found where we supposed our pioneers had campt by a large spring runing from the mountain into the Mocozyamy¹⁴ and near where they had their fire was the appearance of a fresh grave some of us thought it mite be (cont'd on page 5)

⁸ Irene Dankin Padden, ed., *Journal of Madison Berryman Moorman:1850-1851* (San Francisco, California Historical Society, 1948), 84. entry of September 22, 1850, "... The Co[n]sumnes, commonly called McCosma..." 23.

⁹ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 152,

¹⁰ David L. Bigler, ed., *The Gold Discovery Journal of Azariah Smith* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 125.

¹¹ Leek Springs holds that name today.

¹² Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 152.

¹³ David L. Bigler, ed., 127.

¹⁴ Bigler mistaken this drainage as Cosumnes River, but it is the Mokelumne River drainage.

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an indian grave as near it was an old wickey up,¹⁵ but the more we looked at it the more we felt here lay the 3 men. (They returned to Leek Springs to report) ...that night for the first we put out camp guard.

*We. (July) 19th. Roaled out from leek spring had hard heavy pulling the road very rocky in places, broke our new axil tree and in passing over a snow bank Mr. J. Home's wagon broke down makeing only 5 or 6 miles and encampt at a spring near the fresh grave deterring to satisfy ourselves it was soon opened, we were shocked at the sight there lay the three murdered men robbed of every stitch of clothing lieing promiscuously in one hole about 2 feet deep. two of them were lieing on their faces Allen was lieing on his back and had the appearance that an ax had been sunk into his face and shot in they eye **the blood seemed fresh still oozeing from their wounds** when we came to examine around about we found arrows lieing plentifully on the ground meny of them bloody and broken examineing still closer the Rocks were stained with blood, and Mr. Allens purse of gold dust lieing about a rod from the grave the gold was still in the sack ... he had attached a buckskin string of sufficient length so as to put it over his head and around his neck and letting the purse hang in his bosome inside his clothes ...¹⁶*

Addison Pratt (no date noted):

*We commenced to open this (grave) at once and at the bottom to our great horror and dismay, we found the bodies of our three friends, divested of every article of clothing and exhibiting marks of terrible violence. One of the bodies had a withe¹⁷ around the neck indicating that the man had been killed some distance from the spot and that the withe had been used to drag the body to the grave. On a closer examination of the ground, we found some blood stained stones with lots of hair adhering to them. We naturally concluded that these stones had been used in breaking in the skulls of the murdered men. In the grass we found a buckskin bag containing some gold dust and some coin. It had been suspended from the neck by a buckskin string and from the position in which it was found and the blood and truskots (tussocks) on it we concluded that the wearer was in the act of defending himself and in defending himself had received the blow on the back of the head and neck which cut the string and held the man to the ground. As the murderer took off his clothing, the bag most likely slid into the grass and as the act was undoubtedly committed in the **night**, the bag was left undiscovered by the savages.¹⁸ (cont'd on page 6)*

¹⁵ A wickiup is a "tent" made of branches. This was about 80 yards south east of the spring and grave is near a granite boulder with six bedrock mortars. The evidence suggests this site was an Indian summer camp.

¹⁶ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 153. Emphasis added.

¹⁷ A withe is a rope made of natural plant material.

¹⁸ Norma B. Ricketts, *Tragedy Spring and The Pouch of Gold* (Sacramento, California: Ricketts Publishing Company, 1983), 20. Emphasis added.

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Bigler:

Thurs 20th ... We cut the following inscription on a Balsam fir that stood near the grave. "To the memory of Daniel Browett and Ezra H. Allen, Henderson Cox who were supposed to have been murdered and buried by Indians on the night of the 27th of June,¹⁹ A.D. 1848"²⁰ We called this place tragedy spring.²¹

This inscription and the journal entries above contain troublesome words that might cause one to pause with questions. Well, maybe, it is only this author who took pause.

The troublesome words are **supposed, murdered, night** and the date of **June 27**.

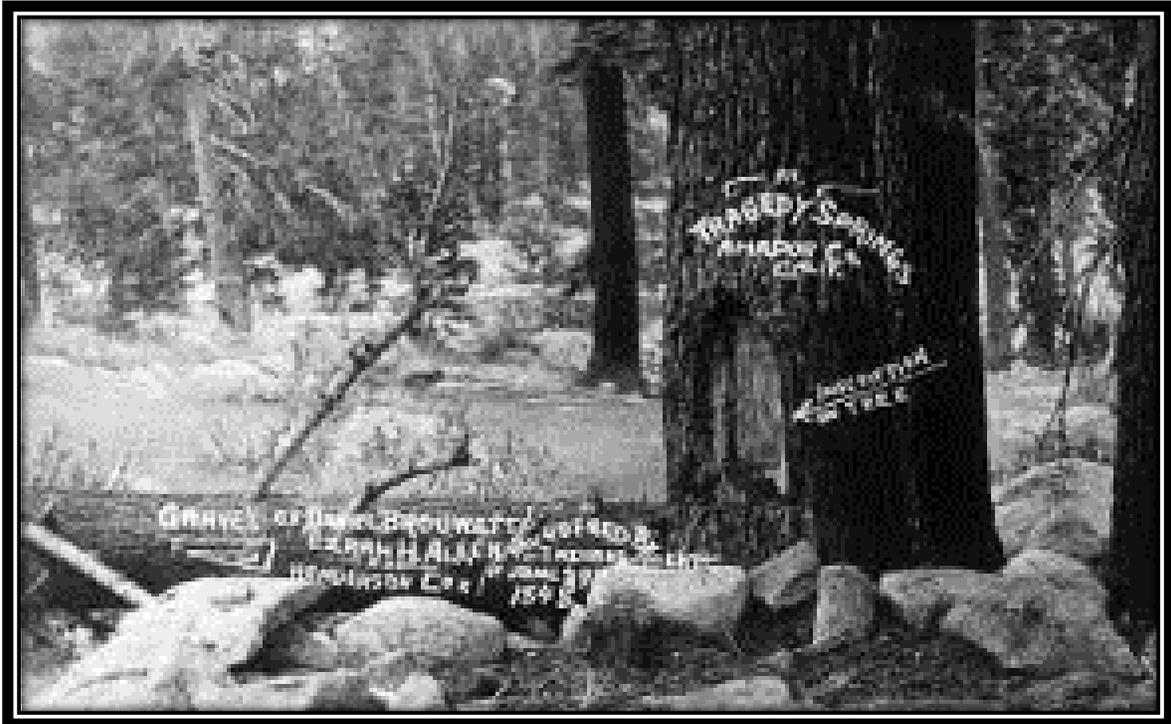


Photo taken circa late 1920s Author's collection

(cont'd on page 7)

¹⁹ June 27, 1844 is the day that the founder of the LDS church, Joseph Smith was killed.

²⁰ Notice Bigler quotes the inscription with "A.D." however, the A.D. was not included in the inscription on the tree.

²¹ Utah Quarterly, "Bigler," 154. Emphasis added.

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THE QUESTIONS

My first question regarding the inscription focuses on the word “**supposed.**” Why was the word “supposed” used in this context? Does “supposed” refer to the word “**murdered**” or “**it was Indians,**” or **the time of day (night),** or the **death date**?

To me, the word “supposed” was used because it was unclear what had happened or when the killing took place.

Further exploration shows this word “supposed” is also used numerous times in the journals, mostly by Smith in another context. It is a commonly used word, and its intent and contextual meaning may never be known.

Let us take a closer look at the date: “**27 of June 1848.**”

The tree inscription designates the killing occurred on 27 June 1848, three-weeks before the discovery of the grave on July 19.

Why would they specify the supposed date of the death as June 27?

Could it be that they chose the date of “June 27” because it was on that day in 1844 that the founder and prophet of the LDS church, Joseph Smith, was martyred in the Carthage jail?²² After all, only four years had passed since this momentous event in their lives, and it was the death of Smith that triggered the Mormon migration of 1846. Could it be that they chose the same death date as Joseph Smith to honor these three men?

The next question is how would they know the event took place at **night**? It certainly was not the night of June 27; reasoning to follow.

So, could they have been referring to the **night** on July 17? It could not have been the night of July 18 because that was the day on which Azariah Smith wrote of seeing Indians wearing the clothing of their brethren.

Addison Pratt’s journal mentioned “a buckskin bag containing some gold dust & some coin” found in the grass near the grave. Suppose that the gold pouch was neither seen nor taken by the Indians because the killing took place at “night” and the Indians did not see it? Of the three journals, Pratt and Smith are the two that mention the event taking place at “night.” Could Smith suppose the event took place at “night” in his rather imaginative narration of the killings?

Could it be that the inscription specified “night” because of Pratt’s conclusion along with Azariah Smith’s fabricated recreation of the event? Examination of Smith’s story is to follow.

In Bigler’s journal of July 19 he relates “**blood seems fresh and is still oozeing from their wounds.**” Research shows that blood does not ooze three weeks after a person is killed. One forensic scientist stated that blood congeals within six hours, depending on the conditions. (*cont’d on page 8*)

²² Preston Nibley, ed., *History of Joseph Smith: By His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1901), 325. www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

Another medical opinion is offered by Dr. Roger Blair.

I know nothing about forensic medicine, I am skeptical that blood was oozing after several days--or even beyond a few hours. Once the heart stops, there is neither arterial nor venous pressure to drive the blood any farther. Thereafter, blood coagulates rather quickly at the wound site and sporadically throughout the circulatory system--a mix of clots and liquid blood. There might be some clear serous fluid that might ooze from the subcutaneous tissues at the wound site for a while, but I would think no active bleeding. I am more inclined to think that what Bigler took to be oozing or fresh blood might have been clotted blood from the skin that was diluted and became fluid by the snow as the corpses were dug up. Or, perhaps more likely, manipulating the bodies out of the grave dislodged superficial clots in the wounds and there was some drainage from deeper vessels that had not completed coagulation yet. Mere speculation.²³

From reading hundreds of journals, most wagon trains started to roll out about 7:00 a.m. In the mountains wagon travel averaged about one mile per hour and Bigler states they made only five or six miles.

Assuming they left Leek Springs at 7:00 a.m. on July 18, making five or six miles would place them at the grave around noon, provided they moved along without difficulty. But that does not seem to be the case. They broke an axle tree and Holmes' wagon broke down. This would add considerably more time to travel the five or six miles, so they most likely arrived in the afternoon.

With the above information about "oozing blood," more mystery is added to the actual time, or even day, of the killing. So, what was it that Bigler observed or even remembered that he observed when he wrote about oozing blood? His journal entry about the event was probably recorded hours or even days later. It also should be noted that Bigler is the only one to write about oozing blood.

Darrell Cruz, a Washoe Tribal Member:

In those days no Washoe would ever touch anything from a dead person. The Washoe believe all possessions are to be destroyed or buried with the owner. Washoe did not bury with a mounded grave site and there was no marker. And even with the limited white contact they would have enough wherewithal to disguise the grave and not leave it so obvious. I also think the place where the killing occurred was a habitation site and Washoe would not want foreigners anywhere near their living space; I wouldn't.²⁴ Based on the above information, could it be that the three men were still alive and held captive by the Indians, stripped of all their possessions, then killed by the Indians and buried?

The Washoe are a Hokan speaking people distinct from the neighboring tribes. Washoe territory extended from Honey Lake, California to the north, south to Sonora Pass California, and east from the
(cont'd on page 9)

²³ Dr. Roger Blair, Radiologist in Pendleton, OR., email to the author. January 13, 2020. Roger is a founder and past president of Oregon-California Trails Association.

²⁴ Darrel Cruz, Director of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office/Cultural Resources Office of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, email exchange with the author on April 8, 2020.

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Pine Nut Range in Nevada to the west slope of the Sierra Nevada with Lake Tahoe as the center of the Washoe world.

The Washoe occupied the Tragedy Spring area during the summer months for about 10,000 years, hunting and fishing and harvesting plants in the local area and moved to lower elevations during the harsh winter months.²⁵ This becomes more complicated and generated more questions as the research continued.

The Bigler group did not open the grave until the following day, July 19, with “blood still oozing from their wounds,” according to Bigler. So, what accounts for this time gap when it has been suggested that after six to eight hours blood no longer oozes?

Dr. Blair makes a reasonable assumption that the moving of the bodies could have dislodged blood clots, giving the appearance of oozing. This will go down as another unsolved mystery.

Recall they discovered what they thought was a grave on July 18, the same day Smith reports that some of the men saw Indians wearing the clothing of the three dead men. So, would not the killings have to have taken place on or before July 18?

Smith:

Thursday July the 20th

*Yesterday we travailed about eight miles when we came to the place where the Brethren were **supposed** to have been killed and thrown into that hole, and covered with dirt by the Indians. After examining till we were sure that they were all three there, we again covered them up, and searched to see what we could discover, and found Brother Allens purse with some upwards of a hundred dollars in it. The manner in which they were **supposed** to have been overcome, and killed, were thus. They were **supposed** to have stoped there to camp for the **night** and some Indians came, and in a friendly way stayed with them; and the Brethren not thinking that they were thus cruel, was not attall afraid of them, **as they had been working a great deal in the Mountains, with them through the winter.**²⁶ Thus not suspecting them, they layed down, as they **supposed** in safety [and] after they had got fast asleep, a body of Indians crept up on them from behind the rocks, which were thick, and poured a heavy shower of arrows on them, and before they could gather their arms, in time to defend themselves against their enemies; they were killed on the spot. From the appearance of things Brother Allen got his six shooter, and got behind a big rock to protect himself. But there being so many Indians, they rushed upon him and mashed him in pieces with rocks, where the purse was found, which was covered with blood. There were a great many arrows also picked up which were covered with blood.²⁷ (cont'd on page 10)*

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²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ According to Darrel Cruz, the area near Pleasant Valley is known as a winter camp for the Washoe people when they could not get home because of the snow.

²⁷ David L. Bigler, ed., 127. Emphasis added.

Notice how often Smith uses the word **“supposed.”**

Now this would be quite a story if Smith witnessed the entire incident as it happened. However, he was not even with the Bigler group at the time they opened the grave but joined them shortly after.

Even more questions come to mind.

Why was the grave so close to a known Indian camp? As Cruz noted, would Indians (or anyone else) bury the dead in their living space?

Could it be that when the killings took place the Indians took great haste to “hide” the bodies and leave because they knew there were more heavily armed men coming along the footpath?

And in such haste to leave, they did not take the time to pick up their arrows. It is written in the journals that some of the arrows were broken. But then again, would not Indians pick up all arrows as it was hard work to gather and assemble all the components to make them and normally would not have left them?²⁸

MURDERED

This word “murdered” has always been troublesome. Washoe Indians are not known as a warrior people. I do not believe it was murder. I do think Washoe killed these men, but perhaps in self-defense.

White men of that time had little respect for or trust of Indians. Many considered Indians to be less than human and were leery or even afraid of them. Likewise, Indians might be leery or afraid of white men they did not know.

Could it be when the three men came upon the Indian camp that both sides were startled, becoming defensive? Perhaps shots were fired with the result being the Indians defeated these three men. These Indians knew there were other white men soon to follow. It is unknown if any Indians were killed or wounded. Previously Smith stated some Indians were seen wearing the clothing resembling those of their three scouts. Likewise, these Indians saw the group and according to Smith, even helped them create the trail for wagons. This supports the assumption that Indians left the killing site in haste, and it was not as an act of murder. Leaving in haste could also be the reason they placed the men in a close-by ground depression, covering the bodies with dirt and quickly leaving the area. If it was an aggressive act of vengeance, Indians might have traditionally left the bodies exposed for the animals to ravage.

From the Mormons perspective, the word “murdered” might have been on their minds. The reason for the white men’s possessions being taken by Indians was because the clothing, guns, and animals were of great value to Indians. At that time the Washoe people had not learned to ride horses.²⁹ The horses, however, would have been a source of food.

In the next issue of *The Amadorian* – Frank Tortorich continues questioning what might have happened to the three men buried at Tragedy Spring. www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

²⁸ Darrel Cruz, Washoe, Interviewed by author, 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

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Your generous donation will help build the New Livery Building which will replicate the California-style of rural agricultural buildings. Learn more at www.amadorcountyhistoricalsociety.org

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*Board Meetings are held on the 3rd
Wednesday of each month at 3:00 p.m.
225 Church St., Jackson
(Amador County Museum)*

Members and friends are invited to attend.

ACHS Mission Statement

The society was formed for the purpose of identifying and preserving items of historical interest of Amador County for its residents and the general public and to educate and increase public awareness while at the same time enlisting public support for historical preservation in Amador County.

The Amador County Historical Society has also partnered with the Recreational Railroad Coalition Historical Society in owning and operating the Amador Central Railroad, a great part of the county's history.

***Welcome to
new members:***

**Evan Bass
Lisa Cenotto
Sarah Ladd
Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Little
Virginia Manner**

Newsletter Editors

Cathy McGowen, Hazel and Jeffrey Powell

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