DESERT TRACKS

Newsletter of the Southwest Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association
June 2005

From the editors

We have recently taken on the editorship of *Spanish Traces*, the publication of the Old Spanish Trail Association. There is much common membership between OSTA and SWOCTA, and the organizations have common goals, strengths and weaknesses. We ourselves are committed to the promotion of *all* of the old trails of western expansion, with a special interest in the southwestern routes, and we see the new editorship as a contribution towards that end. We intend to continue editing *Desert Tracks*, as well.

The 12th Annual OSTA Conference, on June 17-19, 2005, in Las Vegas, NV, will be held in conjunction with the Partnership for the National Trails System's 10th Annual Conference. *Community Connections for the National Trails System* is the joint conference theme. The talks and field trips at the OSTA conference, and also the possibility to engage in discussion with members of other trail organizations about challenges and problems common to all, should be of considerable interest to the SWOCTA membership. We encourage you to attend. For information, visit the website at http://oldspanishtrail.org/assn/conference.shtml.

In this issue, we give two reports on the SWOCTA Trail Turtles' mapping trip, held in February 2005. The first, by Rose Ann Tompkins, gives an overview of the trip, its goals and accomplishments. The second, by Richard Greene, gives a detailed on-the-ground look at the section of the trail between the Rio Grande and Soldiers Farewell. The Turtles are writing up the results of the mapping that they have done over more than ten years on the southern emigrant trail. The new book is sure to stimulate increased interest in the trail, its development, and its preservation. We include a review of the new book, *The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival*, by Brian McGinty. This book is well-researched and scholarly and tells an exciting story. We report on our own travel to explore sites associated with the McComas Massacre, which occurred near Silver City near the end of the trail era. And we conclude with an interview with Margot Mifflin, a scholar who is working on a biography of Olive Oatman.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Treasurer's Report

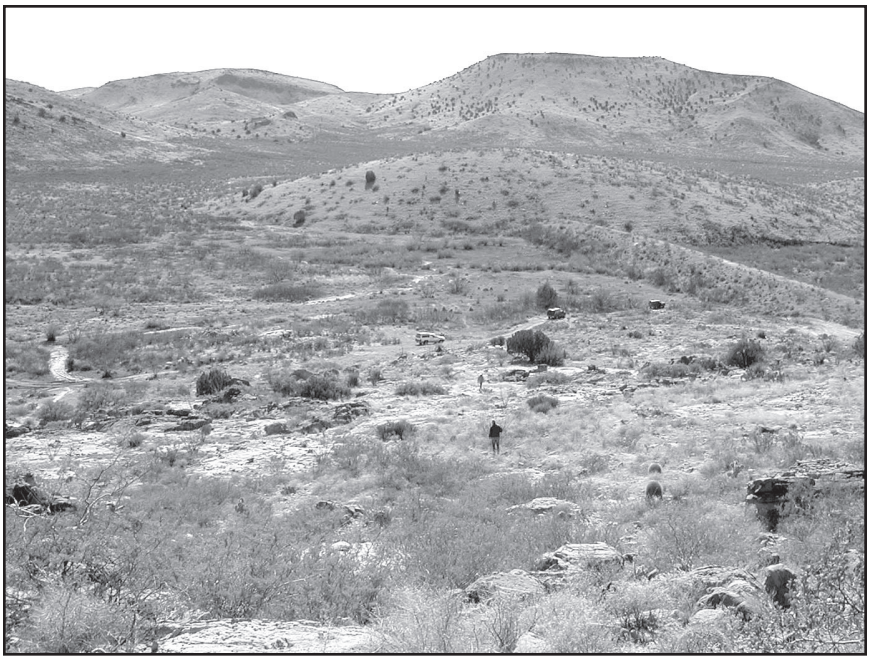
As of May 4, 2005, the SWOCTA treasury contains $709.24. Since the beginning of 2005, income has been $10 (dues from a new member). Expenses have been $58.81, for copying and postage.
The officers decided not to ask for dues this year since we did not feel that the treasury needed more money. A couple of members sent their dues in anyway and these were returned to them. We do accept dues from anyone who is not a member of the chapter and wants to become a member. In the future, if the officers feel that additional funds are needed, we will inform the chapter membership via the newsletter.

Harland Tompkins, Strongbox Custodian

Trail Turtle Re Tread

by Rose Ann Tompkins

The usual spring mapping week was modified. We decided to take another look at the route from the Rio Grande to Soldiers Farewell in New Mexico. The purpose for the "re tread" was twofold. This was an area that we mapped before the dither in the GPS was turned off and we wanted more accurate readings. In addition, the Turtles are in the process of putting the last twelve years of mapping into a report or book and the early work was done while we were still in the learning process. We also want to be able to give readers an idea of what the emigrants saw as they traveled. Since mapping consists of a lot of looking down, it was time to do some looking up and out.



West end of Cooke's Canyon. The trail is partly under the ranch road. A detention dam, which bisects the trail, is on the right. *Photo by Rose Ann Tompkins*

Percha Dam State Park, south of Truth or Consequences, was our meeting spot. Eleven participated in all or part of the week. While two were walking the trail, covering the same ground as the emigrants and trying to see it as the emigrants would have seen it, the others did support work. Several looked at an alternate route that left the Rio Grande. While the emigrants that were traveling south from Santa Fe left the river at what we call Hunter's Draw, those who came north from El Paso left the river in the vicinity of what was later Fort Thorn. The two routes joined west of Foster's Hole, a landmark mentioned by a number of diaries. We realized that most diaries of those coming north along the river did not mention going to Foster's Hole. Good evidence for an alternate trail was found and partially mapped.

Cooke's Canyon was the first area we mapped those many years ago [February, 1995, as recorded in *Desert Tracks*, March 1995]. Armed with more knowledge and improved techniques, we had a better look at it this time. However, as we moved closer to the Mimbres River, we encountered a locked gate where there had not been one before. The next day we found more locked gates. We were not able to get into Cow Springs and had to move on to the Soldiers Farewell area where the week ended.

The trail walkers found they were not able to keep up the pace of the emigrants, even without all the wagon train chores to do. They attributed it to the fact that the trail is not the "highway" it was then, easy to follow due to those who had blazed the way. It has returned to its natural state and if there is no obvious swale, it is hard to stay on course.

Erratum

Whatever Happened to Baby Harry: The true story of the first child born to an officer's family at Camp Apache, Arizona Territory.
By Melissa Ruffner.

Primrose Press
P.O. Box 2577
Prescott, AZ 86302
28 pages.
Softcover. $12.95 (including shipping and handling).

SWOCTA Spring Mapping Trip: Walking in the Footsteps of the Emigrants

by Richard Greene

This trip was about "the book," "the dither" and the observations made in emigrant dairies. Rose Ann and Marie have prepared a draft of the proposed book *SWOCTA Mapping of the Southern Emigrant Trail: The Trips of the Trail Turtles.* To enhance the book, the Turtles are trying to see and feel the trail as recorded by the emigrants. Using information from emigrant diaries, we have identified the daily stages (sections of the trail traveled in one day) of the wagon trains. A key goal for the trip was to walk over the same stages and record our impressions and observations for inclusion in the book. Ken and Pat White, Tracy DeVault and I have volunteered to write up certain stages. On this trip Tracy and I were responsible for the six stages going west from the Rio Grande to Soldiers Farewell Mountain.

The GPS system was originally controlled by the military and had an error factor built in for national security reasons. The error factor became known as the "dither." A few years ago the military removed the error factor as technology moved on. A second goal for the trip was to take current GPS readings to correct those that we had taken prior to the removal of the dither.

Rose Ann Tompkins, Tracy and Judy DeVault, and Marie and Richard Greene met in Las Cruces prior to the mapping trip to look at Joe Allen's field notes on the trail between the Rio Grande and Fort Cummings. This work is part of a BLM project. Charles Townley arranged for Allen's files to be available at the library at New Mexico State University at Las Cruces, where Charles is on the faculty. After visiting the library, we took a trip to check into the location of Fort Thorn and the ruins of a stage station.

The mapping group met on Tuesday, February 15, at Percha Dam, south of Truth or Consequences, NM. The Turtles on this trip included Tracy and Judy DeVault, Richard and Marie Greene, Brock and Levida Hileman, Rose Ann Tompkins, Charles Townley, Cam Wade, Ken and Pat White. We missed the other regulars: Don Buck, Dave Hollecker, and Neal and Marion Johns.

February 15. Stage 1: The Rio Grande to Foster's Hole

Our plan was that while Tracy and I walked this 12-mile stage, Rose Ann would lead the others to see and map the parts of the trail that could be reached by driving. Tracy and I would meet the rest of the group at Foster's Hole. All were welcome to hike with us, but nobody did-- which proved to be a smart move on their part!

Judy and Marie drove Tracy and me out to find the entrance of Hunter's Draw. We remembered from an earlier trip that with the Rio Grande on the left of the road, we would cross a sandy, dry wash and a house would be nearby. Also, we could look up at the mesa and see the unique strata that William Hunter, an 1849 emigrant, wrote about in his diary. We would have to

Cooke's Spring. This spring was heavily utilized during trail days. The spring was later covered with this structure by the railroad. Fort Cummings is located nearby. *Photo by Cam Wade.*

cross private property to get to Hunter's Draw. It was several years since we had been there, and there are new houses. We got permission from the owner of one of the houses to cross his fence into Hunter's Draw. We easily found Hunter's Draw (there was rust all over) and walked up to the top, seeing the well-remembered power lines. We went down the steep slope of Powell's Hill and into the sandy expanse of Berrenda Wash where the trail vanished. We followed Tracy's GPS track. We walked forever to get to the end of the Jaralosa Dam and finally found the trail on a ridgeline. The trail was generally easy to follow, but it did disappear occasionally.

Rose Ann had provided maps showing the location of the trail. Tracy marked and numbered waypoints on the maps: as long as the trail was going straight, the waypoints could be spaced as far apart as desired, but anytime there was a divergence the waypoints were spaced as close as necessary to keep us on the trail. Tracy then entered the numbered waypoint coordinates into his GPS, and via the "Routes" and "Go To" programs he could easily keep us on track. However, putting the coordinates into the GPS was a real chore.

Massacre Peak. This peak in Cooke's Canyon was named for an Indian massacre which occured there. A mass grave is seen in the foreground. *Photo by Rose Ann Tompkins*

It should have been easy to hike the 12 miles to Foster's Hole to meet a deadline of 4-5:00 p.m., but we got to Foster's Hole and the group camp at 6:00 p.m. We had diligently pushed on all day and were surprised at the slow progress. We could not settle for just hiking in the general direction – we wanted to know we were hiking the actual trail. Also, Tracy was dictating his observations into his digital recorder, and I was making reference notes for the book. This slowed us down more than we thought. We would have to rethink our hike mileage for future stages.

While we were 7-8 miles away we were in radio contact with Judy and Marie. We were surprised at getting good reception at such a distance; Marie's radio supposedly had only a 5-mile range. We kept in contact all the way to Foster's Hole.

The group had camped about a quarter of a mile beyond Foster's Hole at Jug Canyon. It was dusk when we climbed down and up Jug Canyon and over intervening ridges to get to the group. As it was so late and the rest of the group had been parked for awhile, the tired hikers chatted briefly, and with a chilly wind blowing and darkness upon us, we all headed for our vehicles and bed. It was 6:30 p.m.

February 17. Stage 2: Foster's Hole to Gregg Springs

We enjoyed a spectacular sunrise, but it clouded over and began sprinkling before 8:00 a.m. with the wind picking up as well. Since an abnormal level of rainfall had occurred recently in AZ and NM, we wondered about the state of the backcountry roads we would be driving on. Fortunately, the roads were fine, and we only encountered occasional muddy stretches. The weather was overcast, but that made for good hiking conditions.

Foster's Hole is on a ranch and our group had got permission from the cowboy living at the ranch house to visit the Hole and explore the trail. We drove through the wire gates to start our hike and mapping. Rose Ann led her group to investigate an alternate trail, and Tracy and I began our hike to Gregg Springs. Initially we did not see any trace where, according to the map, the trail intersected the ranch road, but walking through a flat pasture that had good grass (no doubt due to the wet season) we came across a swale and rust on rock.

John Chaffin's Grave. Pat White explores the only marked grave in the Cooke's Canyon area. Cooke's Peak is in the background. *Photo by Cam Wade.*

The swale disappeared quickly. Round Mountain was the landmark we headed for. Just before a fence line, we discovered more rust, and we saw Rose Ann's group beyond, searching and finding the junction of the alternate and main trail.

After meeting with us, Rose Ann's group went on, and we continued our hike. There was no doubt that we were on the trail. Walking through the grassy meadows and with Tracy's waypoints, we encountered rust, two square nails, a couple of cartridge cases and old cans. Then the trail disappeared into a flat, sandy, grassy meadow about two miles from the highway. Tracy used his GPS to figure out that we were two miles from the highway, but I doubted it because I could clearly see power lines by the road, which I could not believe could be seen from two miles away. Tracy was right, as was proven by the long time it took to cover those two miles. Judy and Marie stayed in radio contact and when they saw us, they moved the vehicles to where we came out.

We had lunch with Marie and Judy by the highway. Tracy's knee was hurting, so instead of hiking around Round Mountain, we drove to the stone house/windmill where Rose Ann's group was gathered. Everybody drove to our campsite in the vicinity of Gregg Springs.

The road had some eroded areas and mucky spots but nothing we couldn't handle. Rose Ann drove Tracy and me so that we could hike back on the trail to the campsite. We easily found a great section of trail--it was like a highway and there was plenty of rust to see. By 4:00 p.m. we were back in camp.

Our campsite, while clear enough for us to park in, was in soft ground. It was a chilly evening, and we had showers on and off all night.

February 18. Stage 3: Gregg Springs to Cooke's Spring

The decision was made to drive closer to Hadley Draw where the trail crossed a dirt road rather than continue the hike from where we left off yesterday. We drove back to the highway. Even with the overnight showers, the dirt roads were easy to deal with. We got on the road to Deming and turned on to a dirt road (a road sign with "Flying Y" on it), stopping at the point where our GPS indicted that the trail crossed the road. Tracy and I started our hike to Cooke's Spring while everybody else drove to Fort Cummings/Cooke's Spring.

It was a great day for hiking. Before Hadley Draw, the trail came and went, and at Hadley Draw we spent some time finding where the wagons went down. The cut was obvious – there were large rocks covered with rust. We retraced the trail back to the dirt road to where we had started. Hadley Draw was wide and long and covered with hip high grass. Tracy's GPS kept us on track, but there was no evidence of trail in the draw. We came out of the draw where there was a stock tank in the bottom beside a two-track road and a big water tank at the top of the draw. On the top we finally found the trail which came and went until it joined a dirt road. We ended up practically in the backyard of the Hyatt Ranch, and we could see the ranch buildings as we crossed over fences. The ranch is in the shadow of Cooke's Peak, and nearby we could see the ruins of Fort Cummings and the area of Cooke's Spring. As we came over a hill we saw Cam driving from the ruins, and we chatted with him over the

radio. We also radioed the camp where everybody was hanging out. We got to the campsite by 4:00 p.m. Tracy went into camp while I went to GPS Cooke's Spring and some mortar holes by the campsite.

We were camped within a rock-walled enclosure – like an old corral. It was large enough to hold all of us. There was an old campfire with wood scattered around. There was no wind, and it was unanimous that we should have a campfire. It was 7.45 p.m., a late night for us, when we shoveled dirt on the ashes and went to bed. We had only hiked five miles today – hard to believe, considering the number of hours we walked.

February 19. Stage 4: Cooke's Spring to the Mimbres River

It was another beautiful sunrise, with the sun shining on Cooke's Peak. We had enjoyed a cool night. Shortly after 7:30 a.m. we broke camp and drove into Cooke's Canyon. Soon after entering the canyon we stopped briefly to look at some inscriptions (initials only) hidden behind some bushes. The dirt road was rocky and rough as we drove on to stop in the shadow of Massacre Peak where there was a group of graves. We used the divining rods and watched the magic as the rods moved over the graves. In the same area was a mass grave. If you go through Cooke's Canyon, go no further than the first detention dam (Starvation Draw) in order not to miss the mortar holes by the road. Hike up to the cliffs on the north side to see many more mortar holes and a fine collection of petroglyphs. We spent an hour at this spot. Also, near the road were fine grooves in the bed rock.

The group split up and Rose Ann took her group to the second detention dam to search for trail while Tracy and I began our hike from just beyond the first dam. We walked a nice section of trail to the second dam and passed the solitary juniper--truly a grand specimen and the only tree in the area--this was a well-remembered landmark from previous trips. We hiked through sandy and bushy terrain where we lost and found the trail before arriving at the dam where Marie and Judy waited for us. We drove on to lunch with the rest of the group.

After lunch, while Rose Ann's group continued to search the area, the DeVaults and Greenes drove on to a cairn beside the road where Tracy and I hiked an incredible section (200 yds) of trail that ended at the junction of several roads where Judy and Marie parked. We hiked alongside a ranch road looking for trail and headed for a spot on the map called the Butterfield Windmills. Rose Ann's group caught up just as the weather started to turn nasty – a gusty, chilly wind and black clouds had moved in. As it was getting late in the afternoon, we decided to drive on and check out the Class 1 sections of trail that we had mapped on an earlier trip. We drove past the windmills and got on to a muddy road by a fence line. We headed for the Mimbres River until a locked gate stopped us. On a muddy road with an impending storm, we decided to return to the county road to Deming. We barely made the County road when the storm broke – we had showers and a lightning show.

In Deming, the group checked into the Grand Hotel ($42/room). It was old, comfortable, and in the process of being refurbished. Charles Townley had been in contact by cell phone and met us here. Charles is president of SWOCTA and we continue to refuse his resignation. He said something about going to China --a likely story! Dinner at the "Si Senor" restaurant was worth

Petroglyphs in Cooke's Canyon. *Photo by Ken White*

the wait. We had plenty to eat and it was inexpensive. Charles mentioned that he would be willing to take us to two unique places in Deming: a cactus garden run by an interesting Hungarian and a place where "you could not find better Chinese artifacts in all of the U.S." It was a late night for us. We went to bed dog tired.

February 20. Stage 5: Mimbres River to Cow Springs to Soldiers Farewell

The morning brought more of the same weather as yesterday evening – a chilly wind and dark clouds. This was going to be our last day. Charles took Rose Ann and Levida to see the Chinese artifacts and cactus garden. Then, Charles and Levida drove to Cow Springs, meeting Ken, Pat and Brock at the I-10 exit. The gate at the Cow Springs ranch was locked, so most left for home.

The DeVaults and Greenes looked for Mimbres Campsite. All dirt roads shown on the map, as far as City of Rocks State Park, which might have led us to the Mimbres, were padlocked. What Brock had mentioned to us about ranchers and the BLM locking gates to prevent unnecessary traffic from tearing up wet and muddy roads was certainly proving to be the case. Given the bad weather and the locked gates, the DeVaults and Greenes decided to head for Cow Springs. Tracy took photos of the turbulent Mimbres as it swirled under the highway bridge. This was the first time we've seen water in the Mimbres. At the I-10 Gage exit, we met Charles Townley and decided to go to Soldiers Farewell. We turned off I-10 at the Separ exit to go to the Thorn Ranch and Soldiers Farewell. Charles had no problem in his Chinook camper driving down the dirt roads to the Thorn Ranch. At the ranch we met Oscar Pena, the ranch foreman; it had been about five years since we had last seen him. He told us that, while we were welcome, some of the ranch roads were bad from all the rain and that there would be a roundup tomorrow. When we mentioned having being locked out of Cow Springs, Oscar said that the Cow Springs Ranch had a new owner.

We drove to where a dirt road led us to an intersection with the trail. Marie and Judy shuttled vehicles to the ranch and waited there for the hikers to complete their trail hike. Tracy, Charles and I hiked as far as Bessie Rhodes Mountain when time became a factor, and we turned off just before Soldiers Farewell Mountain to get to the ranch. There was not much evidence of the trail – just a lot of sandy soil, bushy vegetation and gullies. A gully heading west and lying in a low flat area might have been where the trail lay. Interestingly, our hiking speed from Bessie Rhodes back to the ranch was better than 3mph – because we were hiking without looking for trail. We arrived at the ranch at 4:15. We thanked Oscar for allowing us to hike and use the ranch and left for home.

We will have to return to do the stage from Mimbres to Cow Springs for the book. Hopefully, the locked gates will be gone.

Mimbres River. Although it ran during emigrant days, it is usually dry now. The wet weather this winter had caused it to flow relatively heavily. *Photo by Tracy DeVault*

Book review

***The Oatman Massacre*:**
A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival.
By Brian McGinty.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005.
288 pages. Hardcover; $27.95

Reviewed by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Ever since Royal B. Stratton's *Captivity of the Oatman Girls* appeared in 1857, the Oatman massacre and captivity has been one of the most famous and dramatic captivity stories in the history of the American Southwest. Surprisingly, however, Brian McGinty's book, *The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival*, is the first full-length scholarly analyses devoted solely to the background, development and aftermath of the tragedy. McGinty, an independent scholar specializing in American history and law, puts to rest many of the myths perpetuated by Stratton's sensationalized story and brings new information to Oatman studies. Especially significant is his research on the various Indian tribes that came in contact with the Oatmans while they were in the southwestern desert and his history of the boy prophet James Colin Brewster and the group of dissident Mormons who followed Brewster down the Santa Fe Trail towards the "Land of Bashan" at the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers.

The Oatman Massacre is a narrative history. An engaging storyteller, McGinty traces the Oatman family from their origins in New England, through New York and Ohio to Illinois, where they joined the Mormon church. Roys Oatman with his wife and seven children left Independence, Missouri, in a wagon train led by James C. Brewster, a young member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Brewster's disagreements with the church leadership in Salt Lake City had caused him to break with Brigham Young and lead his followers to California. Whereas Stratton's book ignores the fact that the Oatmans were Mormons, McGinty provides his readers with a discussion of the Oatmans' connection first to Joseph Smith's Latter Day Saints and then to the Brewsterites. According to McGinty, "The history of the Oatmans cannot be written without taking account of Brewster's church" (10).

There were fifty people in Brewster's nine-wagon party. The emigrants followed the Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to New Mexico. Dissension caused the group to split near Santa Fe. Brewster headed north, and Roys and several other families took the southern route through Socorro, Santa Cruz, and Tucson. Part of the company resolved to stay in Tucson, and the rest proceeded down the Santa Cruz to the Gila and the Pima villages. The Oatmans left the Pima villages to make the trip alone down the Gila into California. On February 18, 1851, a band of southwestern Indians attacked the family on a cliff overlooking the Gila River. All of the family was killed with the exception of two daughters, Olive (aged 16) and Mary Ann (aged 10) and a son, Lorenzo (aged 14). Lorenzo was clubbed and left for dead and the attackers took the girls captive. Although the attacking Indians have never been indisputably identified, by including a description of the Indians who inhabited the Gila River area in the mid-nineteenth century and the territories they occupied, McGinty is able to argue convincingly that they were most likely Tolkepayas, or Western Yavapais.

After about a year, Olive and Mary Ann were traded to a Mohave Indian community. Dispelling the misinformation and anti-Indian bias that have plagued the Oatman story since the publication of Stratton's book, McGinty explores the extent to which the two girls may have adapted to life among the Mohaves, including the possibility that they were accepted into the household of a Mohave chief and admitted into full membership in the tribe. Mary Ann died during a year of bad drought. While it is difficult to establish the year of her death on the basis of historical records, McGinty estimates, based on the use of dendrochronological tests, that she died sometime between the spring and early summer of 1855.

Olive survived and was ransomed in 1856 by the United States Government at Ft. Yuma where she was reunited with her brother. On Olive's return to white society, Royal B. Stratton published the Oatmans' story. Olive spent eight years touring and talking about her ordeal on the lecture circuit, telling of her experiences and thrilling audiences with her Mohave chin tattoos. Later, she married and moved to Sherman, Texas. McGinty provides an account of both Olive and Lorenzo Oatman's

lives to the time of their deaths shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. He concludes his book with a discussion of the influence of the Oatman story on the history of the Southwest.

Although Stratton's book remains a major source, and many of the other documents cited in his book (such as Major Heintzelman's Report, Kroeber's articles, the Pettid collection, etc.) have also been used in past Oatman research, an important strength of McGinty's book is the new sources he employs. He supplements the standard sources with geneological research, letters from recently uncovered family collections, newspaper and other accounts contemporary to the event, the many articles written about the Oatmans over the last 150 years, and extensive background material on southwestern Indian ethnology and LDS church history, to give a thoroughly researched, scholarly account.

The Oatman Massacre: A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival is a welcome addition to the rapidly growing field of captivity narrative studies. Anyone interested in the history of the American Southwest should read this book.

Olive Oatman

On the Lordsburg Road

by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Introduction

On March 27, 1883, Judge Hamilton C. McComas, a prominent citizen of Silver City, along with his wife and son, Charlie, were traveling by buckboard from Silver City to Lordsburg, in the southwestern corner of the New Mexico Territory. Chato's band of Chiricahua Apaches attacked them at the mouth of Thompson Canyon in the Burro Mountains. They killed the judge and his wife and kidnapped Charlie. Soldiers and local citizens failed to find any trace of the six-year-old boy. Although today the McComas tragedy is only a footnote in the history of the Indian wars in the Southwest, the event was a nationwide sensation at the time and had a lasting impact on the lives of the Apaches.

The McComas tragedy occurred at the very end of the trail era. Although the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe and Southern Pacific railroads had just recently connected to make a transcontinental southern route, stage and freight trails were still in use to connect such towns as Silver City to the railheads in Lordsburg and Deming. The Indians, who had so tormented the earlier emigrants, ranchers and miners along the southern route, were still unrestrained.

In his book, *Massacre on the Lordsburg Road: A Tragedy of the Apache Wars*, Marc Simmons explores the McComas story from every possible angle. We found Simmon's book so interesting that we decided to take a trip to the area to investigate the 1883 murder.

The story

In 1880, McComas went to the New Mexico Territory to look into the mining business. He settled in Silver City where he established a law practice. In March 1882, he brought his family out from Missouri. They lived in the Exchange Hotel until McComas bought a house at Sixth and Hudson.

On March 27, 1883, at 2 p.m., the judge, his wife and six-year-old son, Charley, set out from their home in a rented buckboard for a trip to Lordsburg. They left their two daughters, Ada and Mary, with friends. On the night of March 27, they stopped at Mountain Home, a roadside hostelry about 17 miles south of Silver City. Another lodger at the inn that evening was John Moore, the Grant County assessor. According to Simmons, the discussion over dinner was about raiding Apaches and whether or not they posed a threat to travelers on the Lordsburg Road. The McComas party left Mountain Home at 9 the next morning. Moore, the assessor, followed about 45 minutes later.

In 1883, the Lordsburg Road did not follow the route that N.M. 90 does today, but veered off west through Thompson Canyon. Several hours after leaving Mountain Home, the judge and his family had passed through the canyon and were just a mile beyond its western mouth, having a picnic under a walnut tree, when they were attacked by the Apache raiders under the leadership of Chato.

Evidence at the scene suggests that Judge McComas was shot in the buckboard but leaped out to return the fire of the Apaches in an attempt to protect his wife and child before he was mortally wounded. Juniata was dragged from the wagon and bludgeoned to death. The Apaches stripped the bodies of McComas and his wife and took their guns and ammunition, the surviving horse, Juniata's dress, and the little boy. Before leaving the scene, they ripped up the judge's business papers and piled them on his naked back.

A short time later, Moore arrived at the murder site. He rode back the way he had come to spread the alarm. Soon afterwards, 19-year-old Julius Caesar Brock, a hunter and prospector, came upon the bodies along the roadside. He had passed through this very place earlier in the day and had shot a hawk in the walnut tree near where the bodies were found.

Army troops under General George Crook pursued the Apache raiders. So did Captain James F. Black's Shakespeare Guards, a militia unit formed in the mining town and stagecoach stop south of Lordsburg. On May 15, 1883, Crook's Apache scouts attacked a camp of Apaches in Mexico's Sierra Madres. Nine of the Apaches, including an old woman, were killed. Many of the others escaped into the mountains. Some of the Apaches who survived that assault said that Charley McComas was among those who fled into the mountain wilderness. But Jason Betzinez, an Apache warrior and cousin of Geronimo, tells a different story in his book, *I Fought With Geronimo*. Betzinez was not at the Sierra Madre camp when it was attacked, but he said Apaches who were there told him that a warrior named Speedy, mad with grief because his mother had been shot to death during the fight, killed Charley with a rock.

Charley McComas became a matter of national concern for some years after the incident, but his body was never found and his fate remains a mystery.

Our Trip

About 14 miles east of Silver City on State Highway 152, we passed one of the world's largest pit mines, the Santa Rita copper mine. The earliest mining activity in the area, conducted during the era of Mexican control, occurred here. We stopped at an observation point located next to the highway to get a view of the activity that produces over 300 million pounds of copper annually. It was mining that brought McComas to the Southwest, so this was an appropriate introduction to the area.

We arrived in Silver City in the early evening and got a room at the Palace Hotel. Built in 1882 as a bank, the building is now a hotel with eighteen rooms on the second floor, each room decorated differently.

Situated in a natural bowl off the south flank of the Pinos Altos Range, Silver City was once an Apache Indian campsite. However, after silver was discovered in the area in the spring of 1870, it became a tent city for thousands of miners. Within less than a year, over eighty buildings had been built and the town became the supply center for area mining camps. In 1871, it became the Grant County seat. When the boom ended in 1893, instead of becoming a ghost town, Silver City survived and directed its efforts to shipping and cattle.

The next morning after breakfast at A.I.R. Coffeehouse on 112 W. Yankie Street, we headed for the Silver City Museum at 312 W. Broadway. The museum is housed in the restored 1881 Mansard/Italianate home of H. B. Ailman. It gives the history of the city and region and contains collections relating to mining and Native American pottery. A local research library is also available to visitors. The archives include information relevant to the McComas massacre.

Next, we walked a few blocks to the site of the McComas home at Sixth and Hudson streets, near the present Silver City post office. A marker next to a utility meter and beneath a large, shady tree designates the spot where the brick, one-story McComas house once stood. According to Marc Simmons, Judge McComas bought the house for his family on Dec. 18, 1882. The McComases would only live in it for a few months.

Mouth of Thompson's Canyon. *Photo by Jon Lawrence*

We returned to our car and drove out to Fort Bayard, ten miles east of Silver City. Named in honor of General George D. Bayard, who died from wounds received in the Battle of Fredericksberg in 1862, Fort Bayard was established in 1866 to protect the mines. Under the command of Lieutenant James Kerr, it was manned by hundreds of Buffalo Soldiers who fought with distinction and participated in the chases for Geronimo and Victorio, and most importantly, as it concerns our story, for the lesser known figure Chatto. Ten minutes after the McComases left Silver City for Lordsburg, Captain William Thomspson with two companies of the 4th Cavalry left Fort Bayard. In an attempt to cut off the Apaches who were raiding inside New Mexico Territory, they marched through Silver City and followed the tracks of the McComas buckboard toward the Burro Mountains.

We drove through the post. It is now used by the New Mexico Department of Public Welfare to care for elderly and handicapped patients, and few traces of the original fort remain. On July 5, 1976, the fort's cemetery was designated as a National Cemetery. It is still in use today.

We returned to Silver City. Using the walking tour map we had picked up at the Silver City Museum, we explored the historic LaCapilla neighborhood and the historic buildings in the business district. Our tour included the site of the Exchange Hotel on the corner of Hudson and Spring streets. This is where McComas took up lodgings when he first arrived in Silver City. The Stock Exchange Corral where he rented a buckboard and team when he needed to visit mining properties was just across the street.

We ate dinner at Diane's at 510 N. Bullard Street. Known for its use of fresh ingredients, homemade cooking, and bakery specialties, the restaurant was listed in the *New York Times* Travel Section as "the place to eat in the Southwest." We enjoyed Diane's Chicken Penne Pasta: Garlic, olive oil, green zucchini, yellow summer squash, and roasted chicken tossed with penne pasta and parmesan.

The next day we drove down Hudson Street and out of Silver City towards the town of Lordsburg, 44 miles to the south. Like the McComases, we brought along

Old Hotel at Shakespeare, NM. *Photo by Jon Lawrence*

a lunch for a roadside picnic. We pulled over at the road marker for the McComas "Incident," about twelve miles south of town. An earlier version of the marker was called the "McComas Massacre" marker, but this was changed to "incident" so as not to offend modern sensibilities.

We drove off the highway and onto a dirt road that led past Knight's Peak. Situated in the next canyon south of Thompson Canyon, Knight's Ranch provided lodging for travelers, when they were crossing the Animas Valley. The road twisted and turned. As we lurched over the bumps and ruts and rocks, we were glad that we were in our four-wheel drive vehicle and not in a buckboard.

After a dozen miles or so we arrived at the mouth of Thompson Canyon. The canyon is now in private hands, with a locked gate where the forest road hits it at the south end. The massacre site is in the *No Trespassing* area. According to Marc Simmons, the location of the tree is a little less than a mile from the western mouth of the canyon. Using our binoculars, we looked over the barbed wire fence for the walnut tree where the Apache raiders killed Judge H.C. McComas and his wife, Juniata, and carried off their 6-year-old son, Charley. We tried to see the scene as the McComases would. Although we weren't standing at the actual site, we were nearby and close enough to imagine the disaster and tragedy that occurred here. This is beautiful country and very secluded, populated only with ghosts and a few cattle. It must have looked similar to the McComas family in 1883. We found ourselves moving back in time.

The following day, we drove south to Shakespeare, a historic mining town two and a half miles south of Lordsburg. To get there, we took the Main Street exit from I-10 at Lordsburg and turned south on NM 494. Shakespeare was founded in the 1850s as Mexican Springs, a stagecoach and watering stop on the immigrant trail to California. About 1856 the Army placed a building here to serve as a relay station on the Army Mail line between Ft. Thorn on the Rio Grande and Ft. Buchanan, south of Tucson. In 1858 an adobe Butterfield stage station was located here when the company established a route south of its main line. And in 1867, the National Mail and Transportation Company renamed the town Grant and made it a stage stop as well. In the 1870s, after a silver strike, it grew to 3,000 people and as many as 200 buildings and the town's name was changed to Ralston. In 1879, other mine promoters changed the name of the town to Shakespeare. Shakespeare was almost abandoned by the time Frank and Rita Hill purchased it in 1935. They are both buried on a hill overlooking the town. Today less than a dozen structures dating back to the frontier period are still standing and Rita and Frank's daughter, Janaloo Hill, and Janaloo's husband, Manny Hough, make up the town's entire population. Manny gave us an informative tour of the place, at the end of which Janaloo met us and autographed several of her books for us. According to Marc Simmons, an effort is underway to have the State of New Mexico purchase Shakespeare as an historic site.

Nestled in the foothills at the end of the Pyramid Mountains, Shakespeare has a significant role in our tragedy. The town was Judge McComas's

destination when he first came to New Mexico from Missouri. Although the extent of his interests in the Shakespeare Gold and Silver Mining and Milling Company is unclear, his purpose for going to New Mexico was, at least in part, to represent the company. At some point his role of representative shifted to developer in his own right. And when word of the McComas massacre arrived in Shakespeare, the Shakespeare Guards under the command of Captain James F. Black, went after the raiding band of Apaches.

Ruins of Mountain Home. Burro Mountain Ranch, Silver City, NM. *Photo by Jon Lawrence*

Returning north on Highway NM 90, we turned west on Tyrone/Thompson road and then drove seven miles on a county maintained road to the Burro Mountain Homestead gate. Today this campground has short and long term RV sites, most with full hookups. There is also a historic guest lodge.

Using Janaloo Hill's book, *The Ranch on Whitewater Creek*, we located the ruins of Mountain Home, across Whitewater Creek from the road. A regular stop for stagecoaches on the stage line between Silver City and Shakespeare, the former hostelry is in an idyllic setting. On March 27, the McComases arrived here after dark, spent the night, and continued their trip to Lordsburg after breakfast the following morning. We found the remains of a wall and rubble, including bricks, porcelain chards, and some metal remnants.

Leaving the site of Mountain Home, we followed the Tyrone/Thompson Road toward the upper end of Thompson Canyon, but we were blocked by a locked gate where the road splits off to Highway 90. We followed forest roads back to the highway and returned to Silver City.

As we sat at our favorite table in Diane's we could hear the hum of the Friday evening traffic on Bullard Street. The sun had finally set and there was a tiny sliver of a moon in the sky. For three days we had been following the historical tracks of H. C. McComas, and now we were back in the present. We were as intrigued with the judge's history as we were when we began our trip. Maybe even more so. Most puzzling was "why"? What prompted the judge to take his family into such danger on the Lordsburg Road? Of course, we will probably never know.

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Interview with Margot Mifflin

Margot Mifflin is a journalist who has written about books and women's issues for the *New York Times*, *Salon*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Lehman College in New York and the author of *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo* (Juno, 1997), a feminist history of tattoo art. Her interest in tattoo art led to her current focus on the life of Olive Oatman, whose biography she is writing. We interviewed Margot on February 9, 2005, in a telephone conversation between Nyack, NY, and Irvine, CA. The interview focuses on what she has learned while working on her new biography of Olive Oatman.

DT (*Desert Tracks*) Could you tell us a little bit about the book you're writing?

MM (Margot Mifflin) It's a biography for a general interest audience. I'm really interested in Olive Oatman as a historical first. She was not the only white captive to live with Indians--there were hundreds, even thousands, of captives – but she was the only one who carried the physical evidence of her Indian identity back into the white world with her, in the form of her facial tattoo. The tattoo is really the thing that sets her apart. She also has a very dramatic story, from the actual attack, in which most of her family was killed, to living with the Mohave and learning about their culture. She was the only white to be immersed in Mohave culture for years, and this happened just before the onset of their near-extermination.

For me, the question of whether she married a Mohave or not (something that has been alleged over the years) is not central to her case—it's what her life was like with the Mohave and how she adjusted once she returned. Most of what's been written on her focuses on her captivity. I'd also like to tell about her experiences while she was on the lecture circuit, whether she believed the derogatory things she said about the Mohave, and her life as a married woman in Texas. And I'm interested in her personally, because she did suffer from some kind of depression in her adult life.

DT If you could ask Olive Oatman a question about her experiences, what would it be?

MM Along with the question of "Did you want to return?", I would ask whether her difficulty in later life was a result of post-traumatic stress as a result of the massacre, or if it was rooted in regret for having left her Mohave family, or both.

DT Oakley Hall[1] put an Olive Oatman character in his historical novel *Separations*. In the novel, the Oatman character didn't want to come back. She was really intimidated when she was dragged back to the white world.

MM There are a lot of books and stories that were inspired by Oatman that I've discovered in this process. Two of them are romances. One of them, *So Wide the Sky* is by Elizabeth Grayson, who says it's based on the Oatman story; she's unabashed about that. Then there's Nora Roberts, one of whose books is sold something like every eleven seconds. Her novel *Lawless* is about a half-Apache man who hitches up with an eastern lady, so it's a reversal of the Oatman plot, but it has similarities to the Oatman story. Also, Elmore Leonard wrote a story called "The Tonto Woman" which is based on Oatman and appears in a collection of his stories with a photo of Oatman on the cover. The photo is not credited, and it's not identified as Oatman, but it's clearly her. Strangely, in addition to the chin tattoo, they've added paint to her cheeks.

DT There is even a *Death Valley Days*' episode about the massacre! The cavalry officer who helped Lorenzo in the search for his sisters was portrayed by Ronald Reagan.

MM The sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer made an 1859 sculpture called "The White Captive." It's in the Metropolitan Museum.

Margot Mifflin

Palmer's daughter said it was inspired by Oatman. And the California painter Charles Nahl did a painting called *Massacre of the Oatman Family* in 1856.

DT What about more scholarly works?

MM A book just came out titled *María Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*. There's an essay in it called "Rescuing the Past, the Case of Olive Oatman" by Andrea Tinnemeyer. Tinnemeyer argues that Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton based her protagonist on Olive Oatman. Ruiz de Burton was a Mexican American author who grew up in California. She lived in San Francisco at the time that Olive Oatman was being ransomed. She knew Olive's story and was involved in the media. Her novel is about a Mexican Indian captive who lives with a New England family, and the culture clashes that ensue.

Another recent book is by Doris Clark, an Oatman descendant. Her work started out as a genealogy, but she dug up some really good original documents and put them into a book called *The Oatman Story*. It's not scholarly or well documented, but she has some great material. By contrast, Kathryn Derounian Stodola, who edited the Penguin anthology *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, has done meticulous scholarly work on Oatman and written essays about Oatman's celebrity with an emphasis on how her story was filtered through her biographer, Royal Stratton.

Hands down, the best new book I've seen on Oatman is by Brian McGinty, *The Oatman Massacre:A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival*, coming out in May, 2005, from the University of Oklahoma. McGinty has done serious, wide-ranging research, and his book is really fresh—it sorts out the various tribes involved and offers a broader Indian perspective on the story than anything that I've seen. It raises new questions; a lot of amateur Oatman scholarship repeats the same questions and recycles the same language.

DT Is McGinty's book a biography, too?

MM His book is about the Oatman family, not about Olive *per se*, and it's a scholarly analysis.

DT We are aware of several collections of material on the Oatman story, for example the collection at the El Monte Museum and the Pettid collection in Arizona. Are we correct in assuming that there is a collection in Sherman, Texas? Also, it is our understanding that Lorenzo Oatman ended up in Red Cloud, Nebraska. Is there a collection of material in Red Cloud?

MM There is some material in Sherman, and while I haven't been there, I don't think there's much. There is also some material in Nebraska. Genealogical and historical societies in several towns and cities in Arizona, California and New York have Oatman information. I have in my research file a list of nearly 100 museums and historical societies that relate to Oatman, her family or her period.

DT Is there any correspondence in the extended Oatman family that might be useful to your research?

MM Yes. There are two relatives I've found who promised to share information, then simply vanished. One is in California and has a suitcase of things relating to Olive that was passed down through the family. If I remember correctly, the name of the other is Robin Brown, but I believe that whatever she has was published in Doris Clark's book. I'm hoping they both resurface at some point. I've done genealogy research on the Fairchilds in Michigan and found little beyond census documents -- no letters or diaries.

DT We are interested in the way you use material from non-professional historians. For example, Stodola mentions that you have to be careful in using the Pettid collection in Arizona. Could you speak to that issue?

MM As Stodola has said, the Pettid[2] collection is an interesting case. Pettid actually wrote a complete book that was never published. For some reason, he threw out his notes. I asked Peggy Larson, who worked with him as his assistant, what he did with his sources, and she said that they are just not there. He didn't keep them. I'm going to have to try to verify what I can, and then do what Stodola did: clarify that I'm quoting him or referencing him as a seemingly reliable source, even though his sources aren't documented. Pettid had a bit of Stratton in him: he overwrote, and said things

like "the weather was fickle as a woman." But he also added some interesting color about local history and plant life in the various areas he described.

Regarding sourcing, the same holds with Doris Clark, whose book is not well documented. The good thing is that she Xeroxed a lot of material and put it directly into her book, so you can see original letters and documents.

DT We have a number of questions about the Oatman story. The first: What was Roys Oatman's relationship to the Brewsterite party? We have heard that both he and his wife, Mary Ann, had abandoned the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Mormon Church. What encouraged him to join this marginalized sect? Did he join it only for the purpose of traveling with a wagon train that was headed in the "right" direction . . . toward the gold fields of California?

MM The Oatmans were originally Methodists. McGinty explores this in his book. He doesn't say exactly why and when they converted to Mormonism, but the town where they lived in the late 1840's--La Harpe, Illinois-was a Mormon stronghold. I found a diary of Mary Ann's cousin, which tells of Roys arguing with Mary Ann's father about who they were going to follow as the new Mormom leader after Joseph Smith's death. Ros wanted to follow Sidney Rigdon to Pittsburgh, while his father-in-law was going to Utah with Brigham Young. And Roys, who apparently could be very hot-headed, told the old man that that if he (Sperry) went west, his family's throats would be cut by Indians—somewhat ironic considering what happened to Oatman's family.

By the time the family left for the west, Roys was riding around the countryside preaching and trying to round up people for the trip. He already had the religion. On the other hand, Lucy Oatman's friend Susan Parrish, who was the woman who wrote "Following The Pot of Gold at the Rainbow's End in 1850," said her family was going specifically to find gold, though her father claimed to be searching for Bashan as well. So, not everyone on the journey was religious. They organized it as a religious exodus, but they needed everybody they could get to join the wagon train. I'm not even sure that Royoyce's religion survived the trip, because there are hints that at some point during the journey he abandoned the religious idea and just wanted to find gold. But that's hard to verify.

The destination of the wagon train was revealed to them by Brewster's prophecy. Brewster was reviled by the other Mormons. He was only eleven when he had his first revelation. Joseph Smith thought he was a phony. Smith actually made a statement saying, "We have lately seen a pamphlet written and published by James Brewster purporting it to be one of the lost books of Esdras, and we consider it to be perfect humbug." The Mormons excommunicated the Brewsterites in 1837. So Brewster never got the recognition of Joseph Smith. But he still pushed on and went west. And he's the one who had the idea of going to the mouth of the Colorado River. He said it was beautiful and warm, and I'm sure that, as an excommunicated Mormon, it helped that it was 600 miles from Salt Lake City. It probably seemed like a nice place for him to start his own club, so to speak. But in the end, it was a dry, barren and basically horrible place, and no one from the original train settled there.

DT It is our understanding that it was Kroeber[3] who first identified the Yavapai as the Indians responsible for the Oatman massacre and not the Apaches. Is it possible that his informant was wrong? Are there any other sources of information on this issue?

MM It is possible that this is wrong. McGinty maps out the possibilities in his book, explaining that the Yavapais lived closest to the site of the massacre, but he also theorizes it could have been other tribes and says the question can't be settled definitively. The Mohave identification is obviously much simpler.

This brings up the one thread I want to pursue: the Mohave connection. I want to talk to Mohave scholars or Mohave who can discuss their nineteenth-century cultural traditions to get a sense of Olive's life and place among them. I've asked Pamela Munro, a linguist at UCLA, a number of questions about words that Olive used or words that were used to describe her when she was with the Mohave. For example, Olive was called "*Spantsa*." That was her nickname. It has always been translated as "rot womb," as in "rotten womb." I asked

Munro whether this was the case, because if it does mean "rot womb," and Olive was at a marriageable age when she was with the Mohave but she didn't have children, and then she grew up and adopted a child, maybe she was barren and couldn't have children. The name could confirm her infertility.

DT That would imply that she had had sex with a Mohave and they found out that she was barren.

MM Which might also imply that she had been married, although there was no formal marriage ceremony for the Mohave. But it all falls apart for the following reason. Monroe told me that the name literally translates not as "rot womb" but as "rotten vagina." She theorized that the nickname wouldn't really be about fertility. It would be about hygiene. She pointed out that the Mohave were really hygienic and bathed every day, unlike whites, who didn't. Not to get too crude, but they may have thought when they got her, "She's kind of skanky," and gave her the nickname because she didn't smell great. Or she might have been menstruating when they got her. It doesn't really work with the fertility theory.

DT Does Pam Munro know the Mohave language?

MM Yes, she compiled a Mohave dictionary that's useful in analyzing some of the words that are coming up in my research. I see McGinty has also used it. There are other interesting examples of relevant Mohave customs. People have said that Olive always put her hand to her chin when she met someone new. That seems to make sense because she was most likely embarrassed about her tattoo. But then I read in Kroeber that the Mohave have a compulsive tendency to cover their chin, which is a gesture they often made. Now it's unclear to me whether she did that because she was tattooed or whether she did that because she had become Mohave.

DT The article by Kroeber, who interviewed a Mohave at the turn of the 20th century…

MM Musk Melon.

DT Musk Melon claimed that the Oatman sisters were well treated by the Mohaves. Do you agree with that? Were they treated like slaves or were they treated well?

MM By all accounts I've seen, they were well treated. My theory about the Oatman sisters is that the Yavapais were cruel to them and treated them as slaves, but the Mohave took them in order to help them. Tribes had various reasons for taking captives, from vengeance to simply building up their own community. Supposedly Olive and Mary Ann were taken in by the Mohave at the prompting of the chief's daughter. Olive said that they were adopted, and so did Musk Melon in that interview. He said that he lived a few hundred yards from where the Oatman sisters lived, that they were happy and that the chief said things like "They're one of us, so treat them well." There are many stories indicating to me that they were considered family. Their Mohave mother cried when Mary Ann died. She gave Olive food when they were starving, even though she could have given it to her own children. The two sisters were given a little plot of land and a garden and like Mohave women, they were able to plant crops. And the Mohave resisted her ransom.

DT Were the Oatman sisters' facial tattoos the same as Mohave women's facial tattoos? Or as Olive herself claimed when she went on the lecture circuit, were they "slave marks" so that if the Oatman girls ran away, any other tribe would recognize them?

MM The tattoo was supposedly done as a way of insuring that they would get into heaven, and it was given to everyone. The Mohave apparently believed that if they weren't tattooed they would descend into a rat hole. The tattoo wasn't, at least not by any reliable account that I have found, a slave tattoo. When I was in Arizona recently I interviewed a Mohave elder, Llewellyn Barrackman, the former chairman of the tribe, who said the girls' tattoos were no different from anyone else's. He saw the tattoos on people himself when he was a child.

Royal Stratton[4] perpetuated some of this negativity about the Mohave. He saw the potential in using Olive's story, and used it to deride Indians, whom he detested himself. His racism is vicious, not only in her book but in some of his other writings as well. There are sermons that still exist that he gave over the course of his career where he made it clear that he believed that it was the whites' privilege under manifest destiny to stamp out the Indians and continue westward to take the land

Although in her lecture notes Olive says the Mohave lived crudely in some ways, she never says they were mean. I think she had to say negative things about them to indicate that she wasn't really one of them. Once you were captured by Indians and returned to white society, you couldn't really say, "I wanted to stay." You'd be reviled by your own society, and it was just unladylike. But, despite the fact that it was socially suicidal to be an "Indian lover" in that period, Oatman made it as clear as she could that she was among family with the Mohave.

DT Are meanings attached to specific Mohave tattoos? For example, Olive had tattoos on her arms as well as on her face. At home we have a lithograph of a Richard Kern painting of the Mohave village, from the Sitgreaves expedition.[5] In the drawing the women have some simple facial tattoos, but they have no tattoos on their arms. Did the different tattoos mean different things?

MM The tattoos were largely decorative, not symbolic, and the shape of the face determined the design. For example, they valued a long face, so someone with a long face was given vertical lines to make it appear even longer. As for the arm tattoos, I think they came as a package with the chin tattoos, but the arm tattoos were only for women. The arm tattoo involved either one or two vertical lines. Interestingly, the same package exists among the Maori in New Zealand—chin and arm tattoo, called *moko,* though the chin tattoo was (and is—the practice continues) specific to women. The arm tattoos that I saw when I researched this there a few years ago were more complicated than simple lines.

DT In 1854, the Whipple[6] railroad survey brought many whites to the Mohave area. Why do you think they didn't hear about the captive girl?

MM I've wondered about that too. She may have looked enough like a Mohave that they didn't notice her because she blended in. Or they may have hidden her with or without her consent. I think it's more likely that she looked like an Indian at that point and passed as one. This could easily be true considering that when she was ransomed they thought that they had the wrong person because they thought that she *was* an Indian. She was tanned and tattooed and they'd dyed her hair with mesquite. But McGinty raises a very interesting point about this: she doesn't mention the Whipple party in *Captivity of the Oatman Girls,* nor does she mention being away from the Mohave for any period. It's a vacuum in her story, which suggests she left it out for a reason: she had a chance to reconnect with whites and didn't take it. If she'd been hidden against her will, it would have fit with her story and added even more drama; if not, she wouldn't have advertised that she stayed willingly.

DT It appears that you believe that she didn't want to return.

MM Olive was with the Mohave for four years, a fairly long time, at a formative age. Joseph Heard's book *White into Red* tries to quantify the reasons for and patterns of assimilation by white captives into Indian culture, using age, culture, education and so forth as variables. No clear pattern emerges, but Heard does say that after twelve years of age, most captives increasingly resisted assimilation. Oatman was 13 when she was taken, but she had four years with the Mohave, lost her native language almost completely, and believed she had no family left. She didn't know her brother Lorenzo had survived the massacre. All that, combined with the fact that the Mohave treated her as family—her mother wailed when she was sent back—leads me to believe she was fully acculturated and didn't want to return.

DT Tell us what you've learned about her return to American society.

MM A couple of people have said that when she was ransomed there was a woman who came back with her. Some say it was a Mexican captive, and others believe that it was her Mohave sister, Topeka. But I don't think there was any woman with her—Musk Melon doesn't mention it in his account. It was just the Indians who accompanied her on the journey who were all male. I don't know how the story that she had a Mohave sister with her got started; perhaps it was twentieth-century folklore and not so much period information. Perhaps, because Topeka accompanied her back from the Yavapais region, this got conflated with her ransom.

In any case, the striking thing to me is to think of her coming out of this beautiful valley where she lived with the Mohave, fishing, swimming, horseback riding, and, except when the drought occurred, enjoying a rich life. Then she was marched to Fort Yuma, a desolate, understaffed and undersupplied army outpost with almost no women, except prostitutes, that was blazing hot and sinfully ugly. There's a double irony here: this was the site of both her return to "civilization" and the location of Bashan, at the juncture of the Gila and the Colorado rivers, that Brewster had so romanticized.

DT When she got to El Monte, didn't the hotel keeper there and the cousins from Oregon compete for the right to tell her story?

MM After Olive's ransom, her cousin Harvey Oatman went to El Monte, where she was living with some of the members of the original wagon train, the Thompsons. There wasn't a struggle about who would tell her story but rather about who she should stay with—Ira Thompson didn't see why Harvey just appeared on the scene when he hadn't tried to find Olive or help Lorenzo previously. But Harvey persuaded Olive and Lorenzo to go back with him to Phoenix in Oregon Territory. That was where they met Stratton. It was a Deadwood-type town that had just been started. Harvey was running a hotel called The Oatman Hotel, which must have been pretty flashy for its era. There's a local diary that describes a light show there where images of Europe were projected on the walls of the hotel by burning lime—thus the term "limelight."[7] Apparently this was a big draw for the hotel at the time. Harvey had four children. His wife died giving birth to the fifth, and then he just disappeared. He took off and nobody ever knew what happened to him, though he turned up years later in Arizona to mark the gravesite.

I found a letter sent to Olive and Lorenzo, after they left Phoenix with Stratton, from Harvey's brother Harrison. He sounds like a real character; he is very funny. He writes about living in his cabin when his wife was sick and was staying with relatives and friends. He gives a great blow-by-blow of what kind of bumbling bachelor he was without his wife there. He describes how he put his dishes in the sink and only washed them at the end of the week. It's fun to get a little taste of what this character was like. He calls them "Len n Olive" and the letters indicate they were all close. The Oatmans had apparently chided him for not writing and he responded with something like "Let's not accuse each other, let's express the same feelings in writing we expressed in person."

DT Have you found new sources of information on Olive's later life?

MM I've stumbled on a few—mostly journals and letters. The most notable new piece of information that I've found is on Stratton. It was from a journal by a man who lived in Phoenix at that time, who said that Stratton was preaching there, and that when his wife was in either Portland or Eugene, he got one of his parishioners pregnant. Apparently it went to trial in the church. I've had no success in finding any evidence of the trial. I'm just basing this on the journal entry that I've read. And it turns out that, at the end of Stratton's life when he was back east and preaching in Massachusetts, he had another scandal in which he was charged with both bribery and adultery, though the charges weren't proved. He left his post as minister after this accusation was batted around for two years. Stratton seems to have had a history of impropriety. Because these two incidents marked the beginning and end of his career, you have to wonder what his relationship with Olive was like.

DT Especially when they were on the lecture circuit together!

MM Yes. And Olive lived with his family for a while on the East Coast. They stopped communicating about the time she got married.

DT We have seen a transcript of the lecture that Olive gave that is in the San Bernardino County Museum. Do you have transcripts of other lectures?

MM As far as I know, just that one transcript exists. Bowling Green University has the original, in her handwriting. I got a copy of it and compared it with the one that's floating around, which is probably the same one that you saw. I was hoping that there was something in the original that wasn't transcribed, but the transcription looks pretty true.

You can see Stratton's hand in the lecture notes and in the book. He was very flowery in his speech. There's a clear distinction between the tone that Olive used in her letters, which is flat and declarative, and the tone she used in the lectures and in the book. Stratton really manipulated her story and injected his own style into it.

DT In Lynn Galvin's article, "Cloudwoman, the Life of Olive Oatman," there's a photograph of Olive where she's wearing a dress that has the same markings as her tattoos. She must have done this to advertise her lectures.

MM I think that reinforces the notion that, with Stratton, Olive promoted her story; the dress was clearly designed to mimic the tattoo pattern. You can see in the lecture transcripts how she withheld information to entice people to buy her book. She'd say, "You can read more about this episode in my book." They sold photos of her at her lectures. There are enough photos of her around today to suggest that she must have sold a lot of them on the lecture circuit. A few years ago one sold on Ebay for over $2000.

My theory is that until she met her husband, she worked with Stratton and was willing to promote her story because that was her meal ticket. As a single woman with no family, she had no other way to provide for herself. Certainly Lorenzo was having trouble supporting himself. He was unskilled and had never finished school, and he also had no family. He was just doing manual labor while she was in captivity. You see in their early letters how fractured their writing skills were.

DT Where was Lorenzo while she was on the lecture circuit?

MM He started out with her on the East Coast, then went back to Illinois and married a girl who lived on the farm next to the aunt and uncle that they had stayed with earlier, the Abbotts. I think it became clear that Olive was the star. There was at least one lecture where Lorenzo was along or where he spoke, but he dropped out early on and went back to the farm, married, and moved to Nebraska. And then he opened a hotel. Olive was with Stratton for seven years while she was lecturing, from 1857 to 1865, and then she met John Fairchild. They married and moved to Texas. So the coincidence seems to be that her lecture career ended when she got married. And her husband burned all the copies of her books he could get his hands on.

DT Lorenzo's hotel was in Red Cloud, Nebraska, wasn't it? That was where Willa Cather [8] lived.

MM Apparently Cather was a customer. Somebody sent me a bill or receipt of hers, proving that she frequented his restaurant. I haven't been out there, and I don't know whether there is anything in her letters or journals about this.

DT Is there any correspondence between Lorenzo and Olive when he was in Red Cloud and she was in Texas?

MM I haven't seen letters from him from Nebraska. I saw one she wrote to one of her relatives, complaining that Lorenzo didn't write, and saying that she hadn't heard from him in two years. I don't know what he was up to, but there is an unconfirmed bit of gossip that I want to pursue: Doris Clark claims that Lorenzo had a secret family. She says that she has tracked down relatives who are descended from Lorenzo through another woman, other than his wife Edna. He and Edna had four children, I think, but only one survived. Clark says that she has interviewed women who say Lorenzo was their grandfather or great-grandfather.

DT And does she say that this relationship happened in Illinois or in Nebraska?

MM In Nebraska. That may explain why he was out of touch with Olive.

DT There is an original letter from Lorenzo to his family members in Illinois in the El Monte Historical Society Museum. Have you seen this letter or others like it?

MM Yes, I've seen some that he wrote after the massacre, telling what happened. I find it really sad. He says things like "You haven't written me." I can't

figure out why the family wouldn't have tried to help him after the massacre. He spent all those years in California and nobody from the family ever came after him, the poor guy.

DT We've heard that when Olive was in Texas she wore a veil to cover her face. Is there any truth to this?

MM Yes. Even in her obituary they mention that she wore a little veil.

DT Did her husband try to have her tattoos removed?

MM People have said that, but I haven't seen any convincing evidence of it in writing. I think this is just a rumor. I don't think that in those days they would believe that they could remove a tattoo.

DT Did Mamie, Olive's adopted daughter, die shortly after Olive?

MM No, she lived into old age. Olive died in 1903. John Fairchild lived a few years after Olive and then died in bed. That's when Mamie moved to Michigan where she got married and started her own life. Mamie had a daughter whom she named Olive, but sadly the child died within a couple days of birth.

DT Earlier you mentioned that Olive suffered depression later in her life. Where did you hear about that?

MM In her letters to her aunt and uncle, Asa and Sarah Abbot in Illinois. They became like parents to her after her ransom. She corresponded with them over the years, saying things like "I'm so nervous. I've been feeling badly lately. I have terrible headaches." And she mentioned that her eyes hurt. Some of the letters have news in them about Mamie. In one she tells about Mamie's 16th birthday and her piano lessons. There was one point when Olive left Texas and went to a spa in Canada, the Springbank Hotel. It was a combination hospital/spa where they used mineral cures. She went for months, for some kind of therapy, and she was actually bedridden there for a month. All this came from a letter from her husband to her aunt and uncle saying she was going and that she would be okay. But it clearly wasn't just a vacation. It was some sort of treatment she was undergoing.

I've tried really hard to find correspondence that would shed more light on Olive's personality, but so far I haven't succeeded. Olive sent a photo to a friend named Abby Taylor, in Phoenix, Oregon, addressing her as "my sister," so they must have been close, but I haven't found any return correspondence. There was someone in Oregon who said that Olive looked wrecked, that she looked much older than her years, and that she never smiled. But that is inconsistent with what other people said. In most of the photos she looks fine, if a bit stern. Obviously the tattoo was a bizarre marking, especially in its day, but with that aside, Olive looked like any girl or young woman of her era, at least to me, in the photos that I've seen. But psychologically, she was clearly in pain.

SW Wasn't this kind of stress common for captives who returned to white society? We've recently read the book *Comanche Bondage*[9] about two women who were captured in Texas in the 1830s. When the women were returned, they both soon died, presumably due to the hardships they had suffered.

MM I know it is the case for some of the women captives in Stodola's *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*. There are definitely a few women in there who were never normal or happy again when they returned. And in some instances, it was because they didn't want to return, but in others, it seems as though they had trouble adjusting or had post-traumatic stress. Some of these cases are documented in Heard's *White into Red*. Some never readjusted. One, who couldn't even remember white culture because she'd been taken so young, adjusted with no problem. Some went back and forth between the two cultures. Some became Indian haters. One readjusted but claimed he loved his Indian mother better than the white mother he was returned to. There's no pattern, except that people who lived longer among Indians generally had more trouble reassimilating.

To me, Olive is such a tragic character, even though she's a survivor. She kept losing family over and over again. First, her family was killed on the trip west. Then the Yavapai took her. After a year, she was traded

to the Mohave. She lost her sister Mary there, which was another major adaptation. And then four years later, she was ransomed back and she had to leave her Mohave family behind. She wrote letters to her aunt in Illinois saying that she mourned her lost mother, but you can imagine that she probably mourned the loss of her Mohave mother and sister as well.

End Notes

1 Oakley Hall is the author of short stories, novellas, libretti, over twenty mainstream novels, including *Apaches*, *The Downhill Racers*, and *Separations*. His novel *Warlock* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and was made into a feature film. For many years he was director of the writing program at the University of California at Irvine.

2 According to Derounian-Stodola (1994), Edward J. Pettid was an amateur researcher who accumulated information on the Oatman Massacre.

3 A. L. Kroeber was an ethnographer of Mohave culture who took a great interest in the Oatman captivity. His article in the *California Historical Society Quarterly* was based on interviews with Mohave who were alive at the time of the Oatmans' captivity.

4 Royal B. Stratton was a charismatic clergyman from New York. His three editions of the Oatman narrative appeared in 1857 and 1858.

5 The Sitgreaves Expedition, including the artist Richard Kern, visited the Mohave villages in late 1851.

6 In 1854, Lieutenant Amiel Whipple led the U.S. War Department Railroad Survey across the Mohave Valley and traded with the Mohave.

7 An intense beam of light was created by the oxidation of lime.

8 Willa Cather is Nebraska's most noted novelist. She moved with her family to Red Cloud, Nebraska, at the age of ten. The town is featured in six of her twelve novels.

9 In *Comanche Bondage* Carol Rister edits the 1839 narrative of Sarah Ann Horn. Leaving Dolores in the wake of the Alamo and Goliad disasters, the Horn family and their neighbors, including a Mrs. Hill, headed toward Matamoras when they are captured by the Comanche. Horn and Hill were later ransomed and returned to Missouri.

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Film Reviews

Ulzana's Raid

Written by Alan Sharp, *Ulzana's Raid* was directed by Robert Aldrich in 1972. It is set in Arizona during the 1880s. Experienced scout McIntosh (Burt Lancaster) and idealistic U.S. Cavalry Lieutenant DeBuin (Bruce Davison) set out from Fort Lowell to catch a group of Apaches who have left the San Carlos Reservation. Their chieftain, Ulzana (Joaquin Martinez), leads the renegades. The film focuses on the opposing views of the two men regarding the Apache atrocities: McIntosh is realistic while the youthful lieutenant is morally outraged.

Geronimo - An American Legend

This 1993 Western, directed by Walter Hill, tells the story of the white army who came to remove Apache warrior Geronimo (Wes Studi) from his land and the struggles the Indians put up in order to keep their land. When the film begins, in 1885, Geronimo and his Apaches have just made peace with the U.S. government and have moved to the San Carlos Reservation. However, after he witnesses broken promises, injustice and violence against his people, he escapes with about fifty of his followers and begins guerrilla warfare. General Crook (Gene Hackman), commander of U.S. Army forces respects Gernomio and knows that his force of 5,000 troops isn't enough to catch the Apaches. He seeks the help of Lt. Charles Gatewood (Jason Patric) and Indian hunter Al Sieber (Robert Duvall). Together with young Lt. Britton Davis (Matt Damon) they attempt to capture Geronimo.

Matt Damon's character, Lt. Britton Davis, was based on a cavalry officer of the same name. Davis, who joined the troops as a young man fresh out of West Point, wrote a book in 1929 about his experiences entitled *The Truth About Geronimo*.

Director Walter Hill was a fan of Robert Aldrich. Interesting to note is that one of characters in the movie is a Mexican named Ulzana (played by actor Victor Aaron), the title character in the 1972 film *Ulzana's Raid*.

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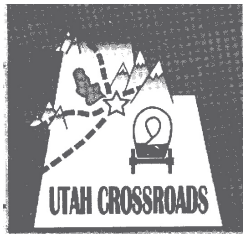

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