

blow and saved the child. He folded it in his blankets and carried it to Weaverville, and gave it to Mrs. Harper, the wife of J.H. Harper; one of the others, saved in a similar manner, was brought to town and was given to the wife of Captain Dyer, and afterwards brought to Humboldt County.

Captain Dyer was the brother of David Dyer, now postmaster at Bayside, Humboldt County. Only one of the attacking party was hurt, and he but slightly wounded with an arrow. Old man Anderson was terribly avenged. The Trinity Indians were completely annihilated, and there was no more trouble with Indians for several years. The volunteers got part of the cattle back, and W.T. Olmstead was owner of part of the stolen cattle, and furnished a man by the name of Meredith for the fight. Twelve years after, I hunted cattle over the battleground. Part of the bones still lay bleaching on the plains; skulls and arm and leg bones were scattered over the ground in all directions.³⁹

The following year, in 1853, also in Northern California, yet another massacre was to occur. At Yontoket, where approximately one hundred and fifty more human beings died than at Hayfork. Yontoket lies along the Smith River. Here for thousands of years the Tolowa people have prayed and conducted their religious ceremonies. This is their Center of the World, the holy shrine that holds their essence and uniqueness. In order to keep a crucial balance between all things of heaven and earth, like the neighboring tribes, they prayed "around the world" to renew it and to thank God for life.

In the fall of 1853, after they had harvested and stored their food for the coming winter, the Tolowas gathered at Yontoket. They had come to thank the Creator for their bountiful harvest and pray that health, strength and fortune would come to all mankind. Meanwhile some citizens from Crescent City formed a "company" and dressing like soldiers, they ringed the sacred village. The Tolowas were praying to a universal spirit for beauty and order when they were suddenly attacked. In this attitude, they were decimated.

A Tolowa man tells the story with deep sadness, years later:

The whites attacked and the bullets were everywhere. Over four hundred and fifty of our people were murdered or lay dying on the ground. Then the whitemen built a huge fire and threw in our sacred ceremonial dresses, the regalia, and our feathers, and the flames grew higher. Then they threw in the



The Yontoket Village site, where the notorious massacre occurred, as it looks today. The lily pond, once red with the blood of the people, bears silent witness to the brutality of the invaders.

In 1853, Yontoket Village, uniquely described in ritualized song, remained the center of the religious and political world of the Tolowa people, as it had been for countless thousands of years. Attempts by the invaders to exterminate the Tolowa people between 1853 and 1857 succeeded in reducing their numbers, but their culture survives, and the people have endured.

Photo by Jim Regan

babies, many of them were still alive. Some tied weights around the necks of the dead and threw them into the nearby water.

Two men escaped, they had been in the Sacred Sweathouse and crept down to the water's edge and hid under the Lily Pads, breathing through the reeds. The next morning they found the water red with blood of their people.⁴⁰

What was the official account of the massacre? A.J. Bledsoe, a lawyer at Smith River, wrote in his *History of Del Norte County*, 1881:

After the punishment of the Indians at Battery Point, a large number of the survivors removed to a rancharia near the mouth of the Smith River, known as the Yontoket Ranch. But the feeling in Crescent City against them was too intense to subside without a further punishment being administered.

A company was formed, and procuring a guide who had some knowledge of the country, they with difficulty, made their way through the forests, and arriving at a point near the ranch, prepared for the attack on the Indians. Of the manner in which the attack was made, no authentic information can be obtained. It is well known, however, that the fight ended in a disastrous defeat to the savages, a large number being killed, while the whites escaped with little or no loss.⁴¹

Unbelievably, the Tolowas were attacked again the following year at Achulet, which was located south of Yontoket. They had gathered here because Yontoket had been destroyed and perhaps, because their memories and their tears were yet too close. In a recurring nightmare, hundreds of people were murdered all for the "crime" of taking a horse! But let the whiteman give the account:

Opposite the Strain Ranch on Lake Earl in Del Norte County was an Indian village called Achulet by the whites because of the name of the headman living there . . . the Indians of the area and the whites were involved in a good deal of trouble. One of the Indians had stolen a horse belonging to a white man.

This was too much for the white people who forgot about their sale of liquor to the Indians, the fact that whites had taken the Indian women for immoral purposes, had beaten the Indians whenever it suited them, and had squattered and seized the Indian's land and game. The Indians had to be punished for the taking of this one horse, and the whites organized a party