

BEAR RIVER INDIAN MASSACRE OF 1863

Taken from book, Preston Thomas, written by his son, Daniel Thomas.

[Preston Thomas](#) (1814-1877) & Sarah Ann Jane Morehead (1817-1902)

President Young put his hand on his shoulder and said, "*Brother Preston, we will put you in as Bishop and leave you here. Go back to Lehi and get your family.*" When he returned to Lehi he "yoked" up his oxen and gathered together his possessions, which seemed to consist mainly of his family, and some cattle and a few horses, and began the pilgrimage." Maria Foscue and her children stayed behind in Lehi. She had three at this time, but on the 26th of February 1861, Maria Augusta was born.

To make the trip to Franklin, which was about 126 miles, required two weeks. The settlement was located on Cub River at the mouth of Maple Creek Canyon about one mile north of the present Utah-Idaho line. Later it was named Franklin in honor of Franklin D. Richards, one of the then Mormon apostles. The winter of 1860-1 was a severe one. The snow fell deep and it was extremely cold. Not much in the way of provisions, either for man or animals was available and the people were in need. But they lived through it. Maria Hadlond gave birth to her first son whom they named Pinckney Preston. The name Pickney was taken from Charles Coatsworth Pinckney of South Carolina, who was prominent in national politics, being at different times U. S. Senator, Secretary of State and Ambassador to France. The Thomas and Pinckney families were neighbors and close friends in the Carolina.

During the summer of 1862 **Preston Thomas** built a home in Franklin for his family on the north side of Main Street - just across the street north of the present Latter Day-Saint chapel and about where the Hall of Relics now stands (1941). Other families joined the colony and laid the foundations of a permanent town. It is the oldest permanent settlement in the State of Idaho. Some mining camps were located earlier than Franklin, but they "pinched out" and never were permanent.

During all this time there were "Indian troubles." **Bear River Indian Massacre of 1863** The people had to build a fort as protection against the attacks by the Indians. The Snakes and Blackfeet were the principal Indian tribes. They were much more quarrelsome and savage than the Indians in Southern Utah. They carried on their conduct until the Government was forced to come to the defense of the settlers. In the winter of 1863, while Preston Thomas was still Bishop in Franklin, Idaho, Colonel P. Edward Connor, with a number of soldiers from Camp Douglas at Salt Lake City were sent to "clean out" these Indians.

The Indians were lodged in a box canyon where a creek now called Battle Creek is located north of Franklin. Daniel Thomas says, "My mother, who was then at Franklin with father, many times has told me the whole story in detail of this great battle. Colonel Conner slept at father's house the night before the battle. It was early in February. The snow was deep and the temperature well below zero. Next morning the Colonel asked father for two young men to act as scouts to guide the Colonel to the hideout of the Indians. Father appointed as these guide Will Head and Tom Smart, two young and vigorous frontiersmen

Upon arriving on the south brink of the box canyon down which Bear River wends its way from Northeast to Southwest, the tents of the Indians could be seen on the farther side of the canyon where Battle Creek connects with the river. After the Indians had been pointed out, the Colonel thanked and dismissed the scouts who thereupon turned, gave their horses the spurs and shouted, "Success to both parties!" This angered the Colonel and when he returned to Franklin after the battle, the boys, having been warned by their friends, kept out of the way until the Colonel had left for Salt Lake City.

In his official report, Colonel Conners said, I, immediately ordered Major McGarry to advance with the cavalry and surround the Indians before attacking them. I remained a few minutes in the rear to give orders to the infantry and the artillery. When I reached the field I found Major McGarry had dismounted the cavalry and was engaged with the Indians who had sallied out of their hiding places, on foot and horseback with fiendish malignancy were waving the scalps of white women, and had challenged the troops to battle. As it was impossible to entirely surround them on account of the nature of the ground, a flanking movement was executed.

The battle lasted from daylight until ten o'clock." The official statement of the battle was: Troops in the expedition, 400; Soldiers killed in action, 16; Soldiers wounded in action, 49; Indian warriors killed, bodies counted, 224; and Squaws and papooses captured, 160. These squaws and papooses were immediately liberated. In addition, the command destroyed 70 Indian lodges and captured 175 head of horses. The statement was made by a non-combatant observer that the bodies of 368 Indians were counted upon the field of battle. No doubt some of these were squaws. At first, Colonel Connor ordered his men not to shoot the squaws and children, but they got in between the soldiers and the men attempting to form a breastwork for the Indians, and finally the Colonel ordered the soldiers to kill everybody. This resulted in a dreadful slaughter. It was reported that only 19 of the warriors escaped, and that among these were Chiefs Sand-

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