

# Why a Massacre?



Bent's New Fort  
Santa Fe National Historic Trail

The Semmens Family  
Santa Fe Trail Association  
National Park Service

*I saw the American flag waving and heard Black Kettle tell the Indians to stand around the flag. I also saw a white flag raised. These...were in such a conspicuous position they could not have been missed.*

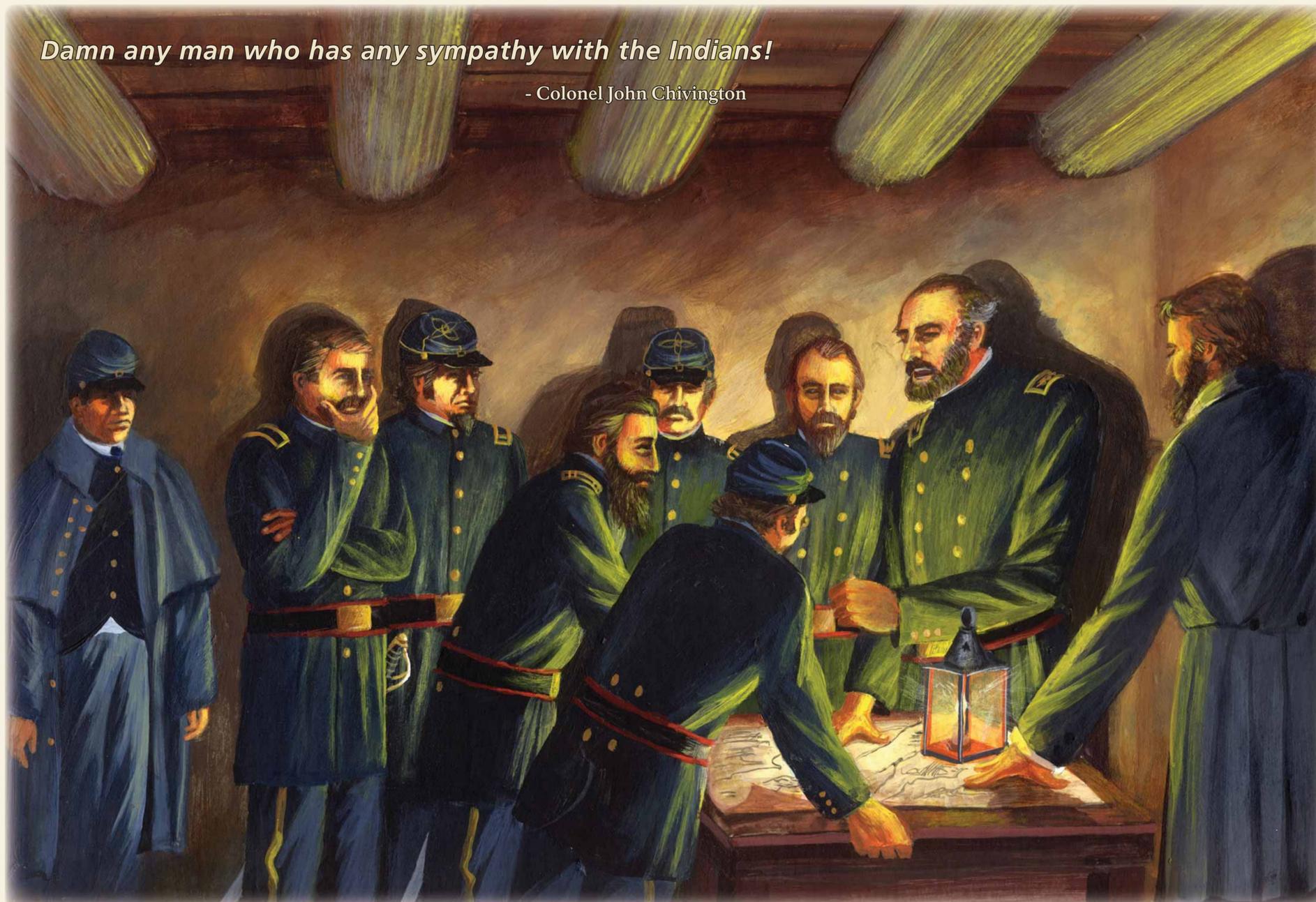
- Robert Bent, son of William Bent and Owl Woman

William Bent believed that peaceful relations between whites and Indians were “good for business.” By the fall of 1864, his Cheyenne and Arapaho friends were camped 40 miles north at Sand Creek on a reservation established by the US government. When Colonel

John Chivington and several hundred US volunteer cavalymen marched into Fort Lyon (formerly Bent’s New Fort) that same year, he announced that his job was to lead troops against “hostile” Indians.

Fort Lyon’s officers assured him the Cheyenne and Arapaho were peaceful and protested Chivington’s proposed attack. Instead Chivington convinced officers to go on a campaign against “hostiles” at Smoky Hill River, 25 miles north of Sand Creek. Late on November 28, 1864, he marched 675 cavalymen north. At daybreak, they arrived at Sand Creek. When Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle saw the soldiers, he raised the US flag and a white flag of truce. Chivington ignored the gesture and the attack began.

While some Fort Lyon soldiers refused to fire, others murdered nearly 200 Indians—then scalped and mutilated the dead. Some 200 more were wounded. An outcry arose and congressional investigations into Chivington’s actions ensued, but no charges ever materialized. The massacre forever changed Anglo-Indian relations and the Cheyenne and Arapaho people’s way of life.



*Damn any man who has any sympathy with the Indians!*

- Colonel John Chivington

In a room before you, they met to discuss the fate of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians at Sand Creek. The meeting was held in the Post Quartermaster, First Lieutenant Chauncey M. Cossitt’s office at the Fort Lyon Commissary.

Left to right: Private Evander Light, First Lieutenant Joseph Cramer, Second Lieutenant William Minton, Captain Samuel Cook, First Lieutenant Chauncey Cossitt, First Lieutenant Joseph Maynard, Major Jacob Downing (back view), Colonel John Chivington, and Major Samuel Colley.