

MR. CARP

(Tearing down a long held belief and forcing a town to face its past.)

When I was a boy growing up in Big Cherry. I used to hear that story in Sunday School. And you all remember we used to re-enact the battle, perform it, get in our little costumes and act out all the parts at the Heritage Festival. "Here is your future." Well, God help me, I got curious. And I got it in my head to go looking for that story. I looked online and I found a couple of little things here and there, but I couldn't find anything specific about Otto Pym, so I wrote a couple of emails. I wrote one to Deborah Farmer's great-grandkids but I never heard back. So I wrote an email to the U.S. Army and I'll be darned if a month later they didn't write me back. Said yes, they had a record of Otto Pym, and in fact, he had been given the Medal of Honor. And I thought, well, there's all the proof of the story anyone would ever need, and it made me proud, like I was still that little boy thrilling to the adventures of Sergeant Otto Pym. But then one other thing they wrote caught my eye, it said that Otto Pym was one of twenty soldiers to receive commendations for their part in the Battle at Mackie Creek. And I thought "Twenty?" That doesn't jibe with the story of eight horse soldiers I'd heard all my life. That got me thinking I should dig into it a little further. And I had a devil of a time finding anything else about it. And finally my daughter-in-law said, "Have you tried talking to any Native Americans?" I pretty much laughed in her face. But then I got terrifically embarrassed. It was so obvious. And it truly had never occurred to me. Well ... turns out the library at the junior college over in Grassland has an archive of local Native history. I'm sorry I have to get into this at all. But some things need doing. And here we are. So strap in. This is an oral history, transcribed in 1942 ... The girl who took down this history is named Shannon Red Star, and she is transcribing a story told to her by her grandmother, a woman who was at the Battle at Mackie Creek. And her name was Makawee ...