



**HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE
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VISITING FELLOWS WORK-IN-PROGRESS SEMINAR SERIES

***Oral Tales and Paper Trails: James William Forsyth on the U.S.
Indian Frontier***

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**Tuesday, 27 February, 2007
at 4.00pm**

Theatrette, Old Canberra House, ANU

James William Forsyth is known primarily for being in charge of the United States Seventh Cavalry at Wounded Knee Creek when, in December 1890, between two and three hundred Miniconjou Lakota were killed. Forsyth was suspended and investigated over his and his regiment's actions at Wounded Knee but quickly exonerated and reinstated to his former position. Forsyth is possibly the only officer to attain the rank of Brevet Brigadier General during the Civil War, and Major General at retirement whose career has not been extensively researched and represented. Perhaps the controversy following the Wounded Knee Massacre and the assumption that there would be insufficient material precluded this project, but published historical material, archival records, and, in particular, a private collection of documents now ensure that this is not the case.

In this paper I will concentrate not on the published record but on certain leads which I have followed – the 'oral tales' of my title – and the evidence found in archives which support them. On the 'paper trail' I'll be paying particular attention to material gathered from American Indian census reports, the family tree compiled by the people of the Lummi Indian Reservation, and Forsyth's letters to members of his family over the length of his career.

Dr Susan Forsyth is an independent scholar, freelance book indexer, and Associate Fellow of the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex. Her main interests are in American Indian literature, history and politics and she is currently working on a military biography of James William Forsyth, who was in charge of the Seventh Cavalry at the Wounded Knee Massacre. During the Civil and Frontier Wars Forsyth was Aide to General Philip Sheridan, and a companion of George Armstrong Custer. Susan Forsyth's publications include *Representing the Massacre of American Indians at Wounded Knee, 1890-2000* Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press; "*I heard this story from the Indians*": *Oscar Howe's Wounded Knee Massacre*, ARARA, 3; 'Writing Other Lives: Native American (Post)coloniality and (Auto)biography' in Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray, eds (2000) *Dislocations: Comparing Postcolonial Literatures*, London: Macmillan.

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