

# The Mountain Meadows Massacre

An Interview with Will Bagley  
Conducted By Deborah and Jon Lawrence

This interview appeared in *Violent Encounters: Interviews on Western Massacres* by Deborah and Jon Lawrence and is reprinted by permission of University of Oklahoma Press. The book is available from [www.oupres.com](http://www.oupres.com) or by calling 800-627-7377.

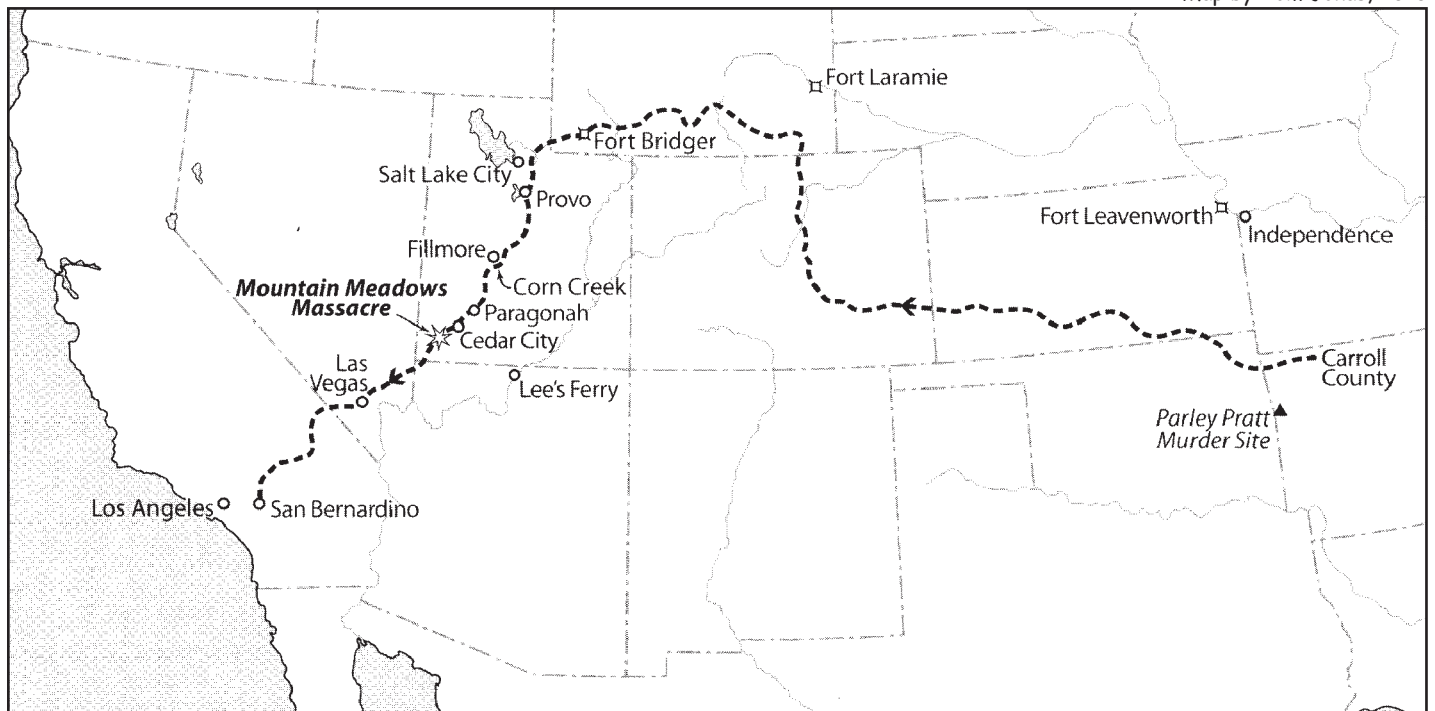
The Fancher-Baker party consisted of emigrants from Arkansas who were traveling to California in 1857. At the Mountain Meadows site in southern Utah, they were massacred by a party of Mormons from nearby settlements. This was the most violent incident associated with the emigrant trails.

Throughout the summer of 1857 the Mormon settlers in Utah were anticipating the arrival of federal troops under the command of Albert Syd-

ney Johnston. The troops were sent to establish the authority of the U.S. government in Utah Territory, in the face of what was perceived to be Mormon defiance. The Mormon citizens feared another replay of the events in Missouri and Illinois that had led to their exile to Utah.

An unusually large wagon train, the Fancher-Baker party included some 130 emigrants, mostly from Arkansas, over a thousand head of cattle, and 200 horses. They arrived in Utah in the late summer of 1857 and decided to take a southern route to California, the wagon road from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles. As they traveled through Provo, Nephi, and Fillmore, they encountered hostility from the local Mormons, who sought to prevent them from grazing

Map by Tom Jonas, 2010



The route followed by the Fancher party from Carroll County, Arkansas, to the Mountain Meadows Massacre site in southwestern Utah. The eastern portion of the route coincides with the Cherokee Trail. The trail from Mountain Meadows to San Bernardino was the Salt Lake-Los Angeles wagon road, which coincided with the Old Spanish Trail. Adapted from Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*.

Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society

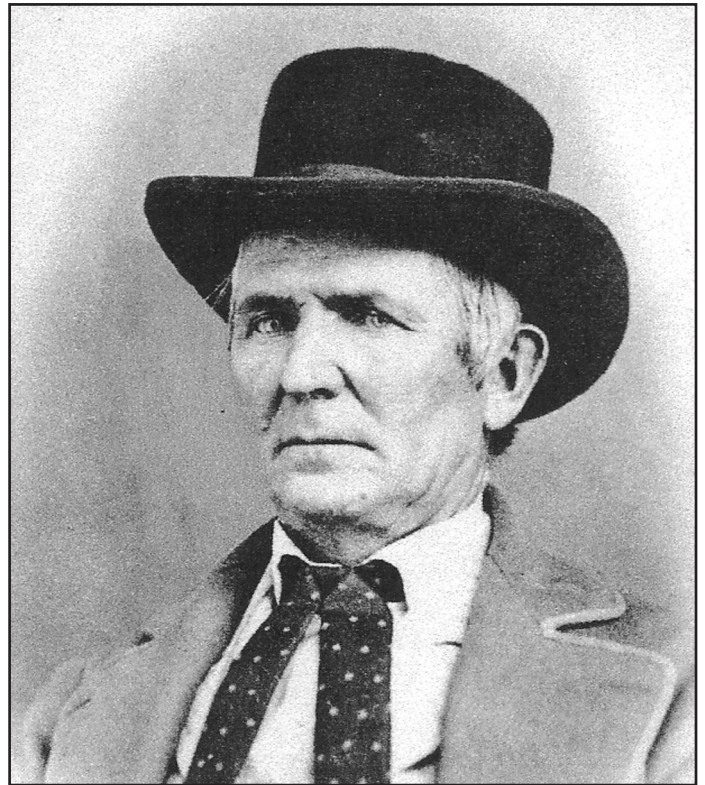
their cattle and refused to sell them provisions. The Mormons also resented the emigrants because Parley Pratt, a beloved Mormon leader, had recently been murdered in Arkansas.

When the Fancher party arrived in Cedar City on Friday, September 4, the Mormon settlers in the area refused to sell them food. The caravan then reached the Old Spanish Trail (their road to southern California), went through the village of Pinto, and passed by Jacob Hamblin's crude summer ranch house on Meadow Creek at the northern end of Mountain Meadows. The weary emigrants intended to graze and rest their stock at the meadows before undertaking the long stretch of desert that lay ahead.

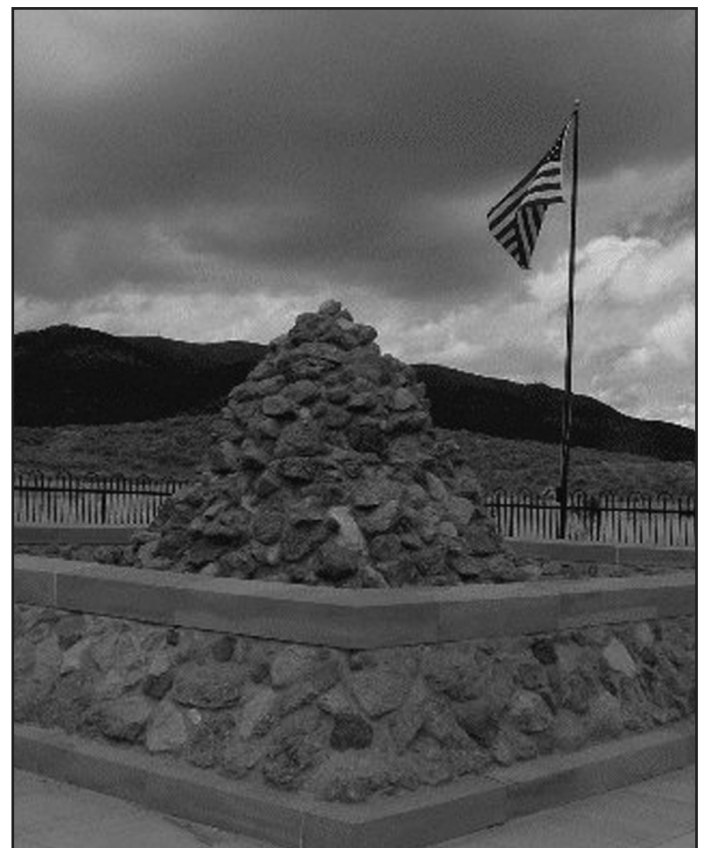
On the morning of September 7, 1857, Mormons from Cedar City and nearby areas disguised themselves as Indians and opened fire on the Fancher camp from a nearby arroyo together with their Southern Paiute allies. After a four-day battle and siege, the Mormons, under the leadership of John D. Lee, pretended to come as rescuers under a flag of truce. All the members of the wagon train were marched into the field about a mile from their campsite and—with the exception of seventeen children under the age of seven—were massacred. These seventeen children were taken into Mormon homes. The remains of the victims were hurriedly thrown into shallow depressions and ravines and subsequently scattered over the immediate area by storms and wild animals.

On May 20, 1859, Major James Henry Carleton and his men, who were sent to investigate the massacre, buried bones from thirty-four skeletons in a grave and erected a rude conical monument. It was surmounted by a red cedar cross with the carved inscription: "Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord." The U.S. Army forces at Camp Floyd helped return the seventeen children to relatives in Arkansas.

Investigation of the massacre was delayed by the Civil War. After several abortive attempts to bring the leaders of the massacre to justice, John D. Lee was arrested, tried, sentenced to death, and executed in 1877.

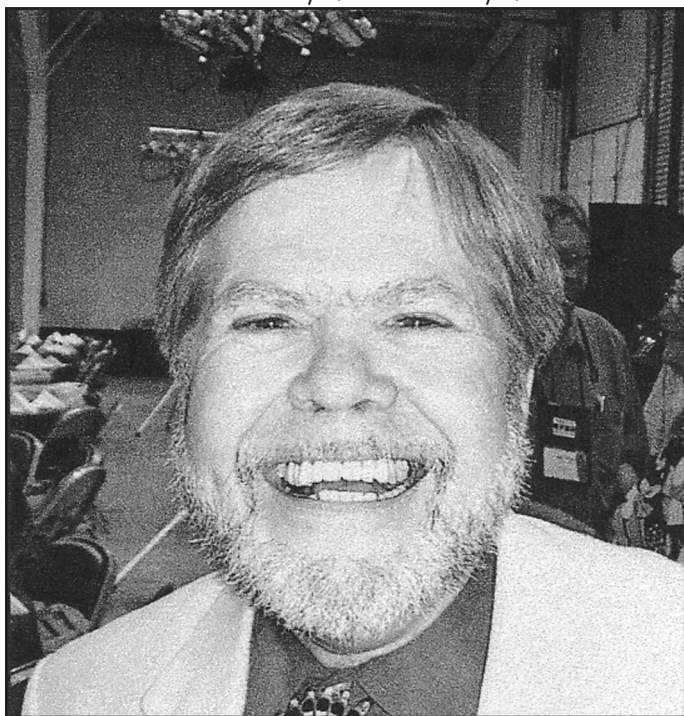


**John D. Lee in late 1857, shortly after the Mountain Meadows Massacre.**



**Mountain Meadows Monument**

Courtesy of the University of Oklahoma Press



**Historian Will Bagley**

Will Bagley is an independent historian living in Salt Lake City, Utah. For a number of years, he wrote the "History Matters" column for the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Since 1997 he has been series editor of the Arthur H. Clark Company's *Kingdom of the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, a prize-winning multi-volume documentary history currently consisting of ten published volumes. In 2003 Bagley's book *Blood of the Prophets*, which is the topic of this interview, won the best book award from Westerners International, the Caughey Prize from the Western History Association, and the Caroline Bancroft History Prize from the Denver Public Library.

*Blood of the Prophets* was followed by *Innocent Blood: Essential Narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (2008), a collection of key primary sources about the massacre that Bagley co-edited with David Bigler. Bagley's current project is a four-volume series titled *Overland West: The Story of the Oregon and California Trails*. The first of four volumes, *So Rugged and Mountainous: Blazing the Trails to Oregon and California, 1840-1848*, was published in 2010. The Utah Arts Council recently awarded its publication prize to the manuscript

of the second volume, *With Golden Visions Bright before Them: The Oregon & California Trails and the Creation of the Mining West, 1849-1852* (due to be published Spring 2012 by the University of Oklahoma Press).

Bagley describes himself as a "heritage Mormon" whose ancestors were among the early pioneers to Utah. We interviewed him in a telephone conversation between Salt Lake City, Utah, and Irvine, California, on October 22, 200

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**DJL (Deborah and Jon Lawrence):** What inspired you to take on Mountain Meadows as a book project?

**WB (Will Bagley):** I was hired to do it. I had been reluctant to tackle the subject because I knew that the sources were so problematic. In fact, a lot of the so-called evidence about the massacre was actually created years later, while solid contemporary evidence was destroyed, so the problems with the evidence were immense. In April 1995 an ad appeared in the *Salt Lake Tribune* looking for a historian to do two years' research on the Fancher party. Thirty-five people applied for it, and I got it. It's one of the reasons that I consider myself the world's luckiest historian.

When I began the research I thought it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to go beyond the conclusions that Juanita Brooks reached.<sup>1</sup> The summary of her conclusions in her book *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* is really a masterpiece. Mormon historians like to say that she vindicated Brigham Young, but she did nothing of the kind—she said Brigham Young and George A. Smith "set up social conditions that made it possible." All the heated debate over whether Brigham Young was directly responsible for the atrocity is in many ways a distraction: once you determine who was morally responsible for the crime, what else do you need to know? Brooks concluded that the evidence indicated Young had not ordered it and would have stopped it if he could, but she stressed that this was

based on the evidence available to her at that time, whereas the LDS church had hidden an enormous amount of material from her. As Brooks turned up more evidence on her own, she held Brigham Young directly responsible for the massacre. She believed that "John D. Lee would make it to heaven before Brigham Young."<sup>2</sup>

But I still thought that it would be very difficult to push the story beyond two obvious interpretations. One, to put it quite simply, is that it was a conspiracy to murder and that the Fancher party was doomed from the moment it entered Utah. The subsequent cover-up and all the lying and obfuscation about the crime certainly support this conclusion. The other interpretation is that it was simply one damn thing after another. I'm very much a one-damn-thing-after-another historian: events often cascade out of control and what starts out seemingly with a clear objective often winds up a complete muddle. There's certainly evidence to support both arguments. I didn't believe that I would find definitive evidence that would allow me to pick between the two alternatives. And I knew that people would say, "All the evidence against Brigham Young is circumstantial. There's no smoking gun; there's nothing that proves anything." Well, in fact, you wouldn't expect that. The orders for such actions were generally couched in either code words or very ambiguous phrasing. I certainly didn't expect to find orders from Brigham Young to kill the Fancher party. So I really was very surprised when I learned how Eleanor Pratt got to Utah,<sup>3</sup> and suddenly it was clear to me what had happened.

**DJL:** At the OCTA [Oregon-California Trails Association] 2005 Conference in Salt Lake City, you stressed the importance of the fact that Eleanor McLean Pratt was rushed to Salt Lake in time for the Pioneer Day celebration by none other than Porter Rockwell.<sup>4</sup> Can you expand on this: how does it function as compelling evidence?

**WB:** That the circumstances of her arrival were so effectively hidden for generations con-

vinced me her presence in Utah was the catalyst for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. The fact that it was Porter Rockwell who brought her to Utah was buried so deeply that even my dear friend Harold Schindler, who spent forty years turning up everything available on "Port," never learned about it.<sup>5</sup> But when I saw an entry in Elias Smith's 1857 journal that noted Rockwell's arrival on July 23, 1857, with the widow Pratt, I was amazed. All of a sudden I knew what had happened. Although I'm very much a one-damn-thing-after-another historian, the discovery that such a telling fact had been so carefully suppressed convinced me that the massacre was a conspiracy. I'm sure the Mormon church's historians will argue that Eleanor's arrival was an insignificant detail, but it wasn't: it gave away the ball game.

**DJL:** So the compelling evidence is not simply that Rockwell brought her to Utah but that they covered it up.

**WB:** At the trial of John Peter Zenger in 1735, which helped establish a free press in America, Andrew Hamilton made an astute observation: "The suppressing of evidence ought always to be taken for the strongest evidence."<sup>6</sup>

Why do you suppose Mormon diarists tore so many pages from their 1857 journals? Why are so many documents and letters missing from Mormon records? Somehow I don't think it's because they vindicate Brigham Young in a case that has his fingerprints all over it.

So it's the cover-up. And that, I think, is the key to really understanding the Mountain Meadows Massacre. You can support either thesis; but when historians try to come up with an interpretation of history, it should be the one that is simplest and answers the questions most consistently. Well, the thesis that the Mountain Meadows Massacre was a calculated, ordered mass murder is easy to support because all the subsequent actions fit that pattern. But the thesis that, no, one thing led to another, Brigham didn't want it to happen, and he sort of sent orders down to stop it, but then af-

terward he had to protect the guys who had done it raises question after question. And the enormous lie that was manufactured to protect Brigham Young is an indictment all by itself. His alibi is just too complicated and convoluted—and often silly—to be believable.

**DJL:** Since you wrote the book, have you learned anything significantly new about the history of the massacre?

**WB:** I've been working on a documentary history, *Innocent Blood: Essential Narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre*, with David Bigler.<sup>7</sup> He's indexing it right now, so it will be out this fall if not sooner. New materials—newspaper reports, items hidden in previously unavailable Mormon documents, and the sudden opening of the Brigham Young Collection at LDS Archives—have produced a lot of surprises. We've turned up new information on some of the story's most colorful characters, such as songwriter George Armstrong Hicks and Montana pioneer James Gemmell.<sup>8</sup> Most surprisingly, we've come up with direct evidence of the systematic bribery and corruption that Mormon officials used to obstruct justice. We arranged the documents in chronological order, and it is remarkable how unambiguous that makes the story. If you look at the sequence of how the story grew and was manipulated and how the cover-up worked, you begin to see the actual machinations that made it happen. It makes it very difficult to buy the "Well, we'll never know what happened" approach. The documents show that what happened was no mystery.

**DJL:** So it's not so much that you've got new documents but that you put them together in a more compelling way.

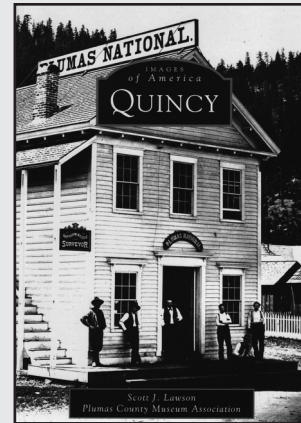
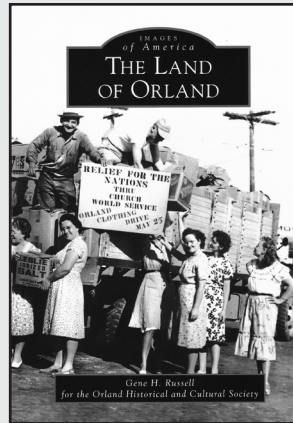
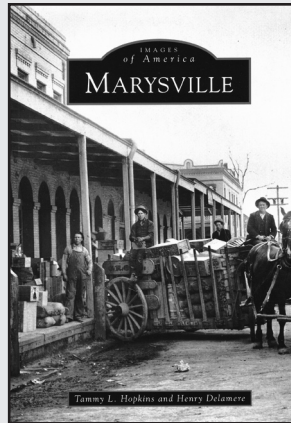
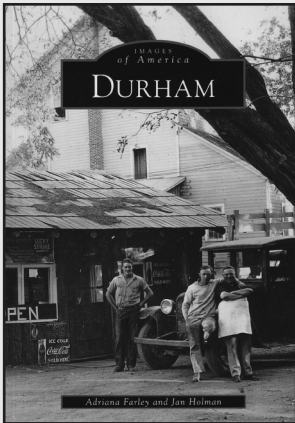
**WB:** No, the book includes much material that was unknown or suppressed before David and I started working on the awful tale, and it presents several Paiute voices that have never been heard before, so it will be new to most historians. We are presenting the hard evidence itself, rather than trying to write an

interpretive history where you have to adhere to a strict set of rules, acknowledge other possibilities, and question any kind of a certainty. I'm very pleased that the hostile reactions to *Blood of the Prophets* validate that I did achieve my goal, which was to tell the story and let it speak for itself. I said in the preface that I would hold my own personal opinions until the very end, and I think that the conclusions expressed in the afterword to *Blood of the Prophets* are more than justified by the evidence. It's the simplest explanation of the crime. And I defy anybody to come up with one that is more consistent and doesn't require ignoring critical evidence.<sup>9</sup>

**DJL:** Carleton's report seems to have the basic outlines of what happened.<sup>10</sup>

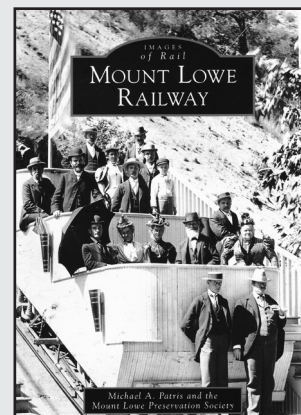
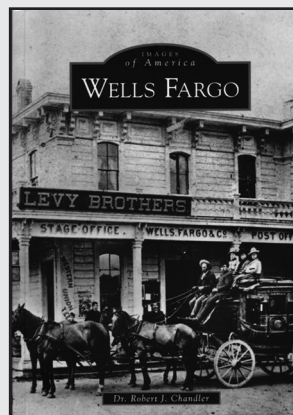
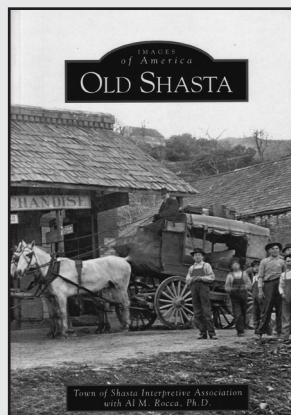
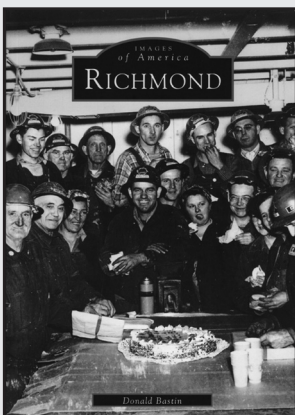
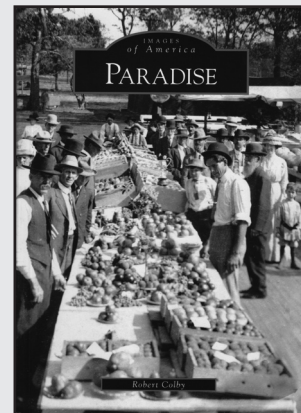
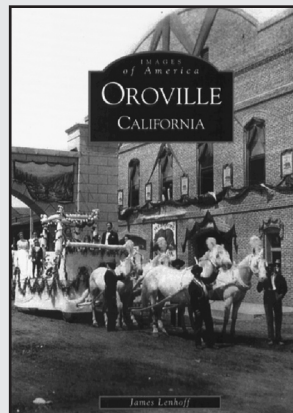
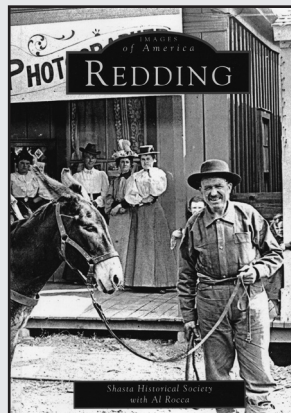
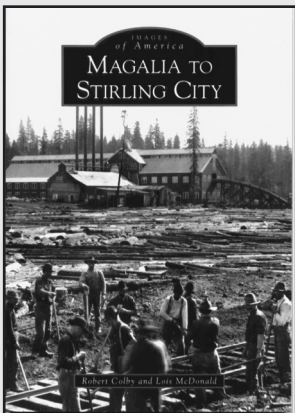
Given official prevarication and the veil of silence surrounding the murders at the meadows, how did Carleton reach such a comprehensive overview so early, and what were his sources?

**WB:** Hal Schindler once said to me, "Murder will out." You don't commit a mass murder and have everybody remain silent about it. It was such a horrific act that there were decent men who were appalled at what happened—as were the vast majority of the Mormon people. When the federal authorities showed up in southern Utah in 1859, these men confessed, telling what they had seen and done. The very best evidence that we have on the massacre comes out of the reports of Major Carleton, Marshal William Rogers, and Judge [John] Cradlebaugh, because their inquiries were the closest to the time of the massacre.<sup>11</sup> Eyewitness accounts by Americans passing through southern Utah in 1857 also showed up in the newspapers. If you want to know what happened at Mountain Meadows, you need to look at this early evidence. The name of John D. Lee appeared in the *New York Times* with the details of the massacre in July 1858.<sup>12</sup> Now, part of the Mormon explanation of the cover-up is that Brigham Young just never knew who did it or what happened. Well, if it was in the *New York Times* and was then published in Salt Lake in the *Valley Tan*, it's silly to pretend that he didn't know what



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was happening.

**DJL:** Did Carleton and Cradlebaugh cite their sources?

**WB:** Carleton named names, and Cradlebaugh named his sources when doing so wouldn't get them killed. He indicated that most of the men who confessed to participating were so terrified that they came in the middle of the night when they hoped they wouldn't be seen. Some men also came up from the south to Camp Floyd, the army camp; they seem to have brought some of the first reports. It's not clear whether they participated in the massacre, but some of the informants did. It was foolish of the Mormon leaders to believe that they could keep such a secret. It was too horrific an act and there were too many decent people involved for them to keep this dark and evil secret forever.

**DJL:** *Lee's Mormonism Unveiled* is a fascinating account of the early history of the church, the kinds of religious experience common to LDS and members of other churches of that era, and early Mormon history (Haun's Mill, Nauvoo). At the same time, Lee obviously distorts his own culpability at Mountain Meadows. How did you use such information?

**WB:** *Lee's Confession* is really two books. Lee's autobiography, which only runs up to 1848, is one of the most reliable and excellent sources on early Mormonism. There are few other documents that capture the feelings and the passions of these people.

**DJL:** He even he talks about the Mormon culpability in the Missouri "Mormon Wars."<sup>13</sup>

**WB:** And his *own* culpability. [Laughs] I stand in awe of the *Confession of John D. Lee*. Here's a book in which the protagonist admits that he engineered the murder of 120 people, most of them women and children. He accepts responsibility for running the show. But at the same time he somehow manages to make you feel sorry for him. In all of Lee's writings, right

down to his journals, it's always, "Poor, pitiful me. I'm such a nice guy, and the world just treats me badly." [Laughs] "People are always taking advantage of me. Nobody appreciates my true righteousness." It's comical—or at least very black humor—if you step back and look at it.

**DJL:** You suggested that the second book starts in 1848. Did his lawyer play a big role in editing that part of the autobiography?

**WB:** That's quite controversial, but I don't believe it for a minute. There's no break in style and I believe that the story in *Life and Confession* is John D. Lee's story—a lot of it's a lie, but it's the lie that Lee settled on after trying out many alternatives. The notion that it was all made up and inserted by William Bishop is contradicted by the surviving evidence.<sup>14</sup> Juanita Brooks also believed that Lee wrote the massacre account. Apparently the manuscripts were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake, so the best evidence that would let us settle the question definitively no longer exists. But there were people at the time who, in response to the charges that Bishop had written it, did look at the manuscript and compare it to the finished book; they said that the confession was in John D. Lee's handwriting. And as the *New York Times* commented when it reviewed the book, it was "hastily put together, and has every mark of being the work of an uncultivated mind, but its very roughness only adds to the credibility of what it vouches for."<sup>15</sup>

**DJL:** Could you clarify the distinction between the pre-1848 and post-1848 parts of the book?

**WB:** The pre-1848 material is not about mass murder; it is Lee simply telling the chronicle of his righteous work for the Kingdom of God. He ran out of time and wrote his account of the massacre, with a few reports of his life in Utah, not long before his execution, and he wrote several different versions of it. I was able to turn up two basic newspaper accounts,

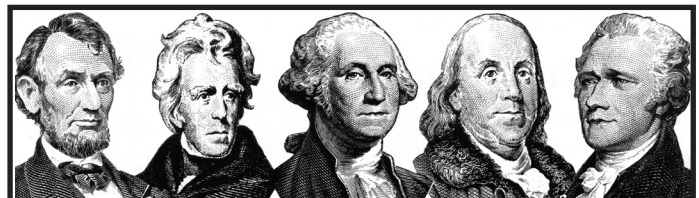
both of which differ in slight but significant ways from the one that was published in the book in about May 1877.

The book's purpose was to create a story that portrayed Lee as a sympathetic, even heroic, victim. And to do that, he could not admit the most significant fact about the massacre: that it was organized and executed by the Mormons under the direct command of John D. Lee. If Lee had told the truth and said, "Oh yeah, me and my friends went out and recruited the Paiutes, then we attacked the party and killed them all," it would have been an invitation for a lynching.

Lee had a different purpose: he wanted to shift blame to anyone else who was available. Partly, he shifted blame to George A. Smith and Brigham Young, but the key victims of his blame shifting were the Southern Paiutes. Now, in 1876 and 1877, when he was being tried, there was a tremendous fear and hysteria about Indians in the United States. Right before Lee's first trial, Custer had died at Little Bighorn. But the notion that the Paiutes could attack and overwhelm a wagon train, and in the meantime intimidate their Mormon neighbors into doing something the Mormons didn't want to do, is simply preposterous. It denies the nature of the Paiute people, their style of warfare, and the basic power equation between the Mormons and the Paiutes. The Mountain Meadows Massacre was not caused or directed by the Paiutes. It was an operation organized, orchestrated, and executed by Mormons.

Lee also tried to blame the crime on the victims, by suggesting that their atrocious behavior brought it on them. No one outside of Utah believed that the emigrants had poisoned pools, wells, springs, flowing creeks, and ox carcasses when the stories appeared shortly after the massacre. When the first report appeared less than a month after the murders, the *Los Angeles Star* wrote, "We can scarcely believe that a party traveling along a highway would act in the manner described, that is to poison the carcass of an ox, and also the water, thus endangering the lives of those who were coming after them."<sup>16</sup>

As I began looking closely at the "Evil Emigrant Stories," as I call them, they became increasingly silly—especially the ones invented years after the fact. I once heard a Mormon historian do a paper trying to prove that the Fancher party included the Missouri Wildcats. This relied on Thomas Cropper's reminiscence, which was written seventy years after the event.<sup>17</sup> The memoir, which is quoted by Brooks, described an event that led to the Gunnison Massacre in 1853, not the Mountain Meadows Massacre four years later.<sup>18</sup> So it was clear in this particular case that it was a conflation. All the conflicts that had happened in southern Utah between Mormons and emigrant parties—and there were many of them—were conflated and tacked onto the Fancher party. Unfortunately, most of the contemporary record of what the party actually experienced was



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destroyed. The emigrants' documents were destroyed in the massacre, and the Mormon journals that would have documented their presence were destroyed. David Bigler found the only one that specifically mentions the Fancher party, the Pitchforth diary.<sup>19</sup> All the rest of the stories about the evil emigrants were concocted. The Missouri Wildcats do not appear in the historical record until 1873. Believe it or not, most of the horrific stories of the emigrants' behavior date from the 1890s. This is not credible historical evidence.

The new materials that surprised me most were the narratives of the surviving children. The best of them is by Nancy Saphrona Huff, who was five or six years old when the massacre happened. Her account was published in 1875, which means that the huge publicity from

Sue Staton, Muskogee, Oklahoma



Nancy Saphrona Huff

Lee's trials and execution had little chance to infect her story of the massacre. You can see the influence of this publicity on the stories of the other survivors. But Huff's version is simple and direct and powerful. As I look at the children's narratives, they have something that none of the accounts of the perpetrators, or of those that were making up excuses, had. They have consistency. Virtually every one of

the survivors mentions seeing "Indians" go to the creek at Hamblin's ranch, wash off their paint, and become white again.<sup>20</sup> For me that was one of the most surprising and satisfying products of my research. It gives voice to these people. It provides evidence to the surviving families that their kin had done nothing wrong but show up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**DJL:** We agree. We think that one of the strong points of your book is the sympathy that you show for the Fanchers.

**WB:** And I hope that there is also sympathy for the perpetrators. One element of the story that I was very surprised and pleased to be able to present was the letters from the murderers themselves, trying to find some sort of spiritual solace. George Spencer, who became a schoolteacher in St. George, wrote an impassioned letter to a church leader in southern Utah: it wound up in the Brigham Young Collection. In it he pleaded for spiritual advice and help. I later learned from Ken Sleight, a descendant of Spencer who is a legendary character on the Colorado River and is the model for Seldom Seen Smith in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, that Spencer killed himself.<sup>21</sup> These men were essentially thrown away. They'd done the bidding of their leaders, but they were betrayed and abandoned.

So I hope that the book does justice to three groups of people who have been vilified and abused unjustly—the victims themselves, the Paiute nation, and the decent men who got caught up in this event and followed orders, sincerely believing that they were doing God's work.

**DJL:** We are curious as to why the Fanchers were so unvigilant when they arrived at Mountain Meadows. Didn't they face a lot of conflict before arriving there that would have put them on their guard?

**WB:** The contemporary record makes it clear that there were conflicts over grass, which would be absolutely credible because of what we know about overland travel and conditions in Utah. Every party that went through southern

Utah had a hard time. The journals very consistently express relief to get out of Utah, especially when they went through southern Utah, because the hostility was so blatant and the government was so authoritarian. Many emigrants commented on how decent the individual Mormons themselves were but complained about how the authorities would use laws to run the equivalent of a frontier speed trap. People could be arrested for swearing on the territorial road or for letting their animals graze on private ground or even on public ground. There were many, many ways that the Mormons would extort money out of visitors, and they applied them very cleverly. So the conflicts were much more extensive than the Mormon records might pretend.

**DJL:** Given the hostility they faced in Utah, why do you think that the members of the Fancher party were relaxed enough at Mountain Meadows that they didn't even bother to circle their wagons or post scouts in the area? The Mormons were close enough to hide in the surrounding bushes and watch the Arkansans set up their camp.

**WB:** That was something that puzzled me very much. How do you explain the fact that the Fanchers hadn't even formed a wagon corral? It led me to do something I'm very reluctant to do, which is to look at the facts and then to speculate. And I'm very adverse to speculating. There are real problems in figuring out how the massacre happened. As I got more and more into this research, I learned that the Mormons' initial plan was not to attack at Mountain Meadows but rather to attack the train as it was making the descent from the Santa Clara plateau down into Santa Clara Canyon. You can still see today where the old wagon trail went down the hillside; it's very steep and treacherous. I believe that if they'd carried out their plan and attacked the train when it was strung out in that situation, they could have started with a party at either end; by the time the two attacking parties got to the middle, there would have been no survivors

who could have given an account. Why did Lee decide to abandon that plan and do something else? And why would the Fanchers not have organized some sort of defensive camp?

Another question was, when did the Fancher party get to Mountain Meadows? In the Mormon accounts, the Fanchers arrived there several days before the attack. I'm not sure whether this inaccuracy was because people's memories were bad or whether it's another diversion inserted into the historical record. But, in tracking the chronology of the Fancher party's locations, there are two reliable sources on where they were when. On August 15 they were just north of Nephi, Utah, which we get from Samuel Pitchforth's diary; ten days later, on August 25, they had traveled about eighty miles south to Corn Creek near the Indian farm. They were traveling very slowly: they were going about eight miles a day. So we can see how slowly they had been traveling from Salt Lake. That would be consistent with their desire to get their cattle ready to make the crossing of the Mojave Desert and with the fact that they didn't want to get there in September when it was too hot. The later they reached the Mojave—ideally in late October—the more advantageous it would be for them. Based on that, I tried to figure out where they camped as they went down to southern Utah. Despite the very contradictory and sometimes dishonest reports of when the Fanchers arrived in southern Utah, I concluded that Jessie N. Smith, who was a Mormon official, was accurate in saying that they arrived at Red Creek [present-day Paragonah] on September 3.

The chronology really is an important way to interpret all this. David Bigler did the first real analysis of "when they got where." A critical question is when the Fancher party arrived in Cedar City. We have many reports that the Fanchers were in Cedar City on a Friday. That tracks to September 4. Cedar City is thirty-five miles from Mountain Meadows. These people, after they camped with George A. Smith and his Indian allies on August 25, suddenly upped their pace from about eight miles a day to about twelve and a half miles a day—and that last push was even faster.

**DJL:** They were frightened.

**WB:** They seemed to be very concerned about what they had seen. When they got to Cedar City, there clearly was some sort of conflict. What exactly it was, I was unable to tell from any of the sources. The Mormon accounts of the Fanchers' depredations in Cedar City are told years later and are completely inconsistent; nobody tells the same story. I think the Mormon authorities took hostile action that created some sort of conflict between the emigrants and the locals, but even the LDS church's historians now admit that, whatever it was, it was over in a few hours. The trouble could have been over the grass, or where they could camp, or swearing. But then what happened the next two days? On Saturday they pushed hard to get as far away from Cedar City as they could, and on Sunday they made a second big push so that in two to three days they went thirty-five miles. For a well-organized train in good terrain that would not be a hard pace, but this was tough terrain, and it's clear that they were making a special effort. I believe that this effort is the key to understanding why there was no wagon corral. Groups of wagons pulled into Mountain Meadows late on Sunday, so that it was dark before everybody was into camp. They felt that at last they had gotten away, that they were now outside of the main Mormon settlements. They must have felt that they were beyond the main threat. Because otherwise they would have made the extra effort to fort up. When Lee saw how vulnerable they were, he changed his battle plan and attacked the next morning.

**DJL:** You state in your preface that the massacre is a "watershed event" and the most disturbing episode in the history of the LDS church. Yet there seems to be much in the story that is relevant to the more general history of the trails. Can you speak to this?

**WB:** It's the singularity of Mountain Meadows that makes it such a difficult event for

historians. Historians are very reluctant to criticize an ethnic group or especially a religion. The Mormons had such a hard history of being unfairly treated and even persecuted that it is difficult for historians, especially non-Mormon historians, to step back and say, "This conflict really was about religion and politics." Nevertheless, the Mormons did something on the trail that nobody else ever did. The Mountain Meadows Massacre couldn't have happened anyplace else; where else in the West would a substantial body of white people dress up as Indians and attack a wagon train? There were white criminals who disguised themselves as Indians, but those were simply criminal operations.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the action was backed up by the Nauvoo Legion, the territorial militia. That's what makes it difficult to relate Mountain Meadows to the broader trail experience.

On the other hand, it's easy to appreciate how important the Mormons were in the history of the trails. Once the Mormons were in Utah, they provided huge advantages as well as big problems to overland emigrants. They offered travelers the chance to take a break. And, for the first time, there was a place on the trail where emigrants could resupply. Remember, when early emigrant trains tried to buy flour at Fort Bridger or Fort Hall, or even Fort Laramie, the traders would just laugh at them because they didn't have any flour. But once you had an agricultural community of very hardworking, determined pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley, they were able to provide pretty much anything the emigrants needed. It was a symbiotic relationship. The Mormons arguably couldn't have succeeded without the physical, material support that the emigration brought to them, especially in 1849. Furthermore the Mormons were very good pioneers; they opened up several trails and were very significant in the evolution of the overland wagon road.

Remember, the Mormons had come to Utah to establish a Kingdom of God, an independent theocracy. The nature of their religious passions and beliefs dictated that conflict with the federal government, which had its own notions about who was going to govern the Great Basin, was inevitable, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre

was the product of that collision. You can see these conflicts come to a head in 1857 when the federal government felt compelled to send the army to Utah to reassert its authority. This was a function of this confrontation—and Brigham Young's decision to close the overland road and stage a horrific Indian "massacre" is part and parcel of that struggle.<sup>23</sup> It's significant because it shows how difficult it is for a democratic republic to deal with a religious theocracy. The consequences of not dealing with it can be horrific events, like the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

**DJL:** It also could be viewed as a precursor to the Civil War, where we fought over secession. It was really a kind of secession.

**WB:** Oh, it was, absolutely. I just came across a statement by Daniel Boorstin in which he calls it America's unsung and inglorious first civil war, which is exactly what it was.<sup>24</sup>

**DJL:** What new information did you get from your interviews with the descendants of the Arkansas emigrants? In what ways did they contribute to your understanding of the Fancher-Baker party?

**WB:** The survivors' families preserve a feeling and a passion about this that impressed me most of all. They still have a sense of loss about what happened and a bafflement as to why it happened. I once had a Fancher family member, who was a Disciple of Christ, a very devout evangelical Christian, ask me, "What did these people"—meaning the emigrants—"do wrong that God would punish them?" I said, "They didn't do anything wrong, except be in the wrong place at the wrong time." But there's still, among the descendants, a puzzlement as to how and why this could happen.

**DJL:** A book that we really like is Judith Freeman's *Red Water*. Based on your research, how close to reality is Judith Freeman's take on Emma, Rachel, and Ann Lee, the three narrative voices of *Red Water*?<sup>25</sup>

**WB:** I think the book is inspired. But that's not an unbiased opinion. I helped Judith with the research, and I gave her the memoir of Ann Gordge Lee (who, I like to say, was the last thirteen-year-old that John D. Lee ever married). Freeman's novel fascinates me, because, as a historian, I'm so constrained by certain rules. There are very clear boundaries that surround what we can do. Whenever you speculate, whenever you step over those boundaries, you almost always, almost inevitably, get into serious trouble. As a historian, you have to stick with the evidence. You have to seek that most consistent, dispassionate answer. But that also tends to discount a lot of life that is very hard to quantify through historical evidence: feelings, social position, the differences between men and women in the West, the complicated nature of Mormon polygamy, the realities of how life worked in America's most successful theocracy. One of the revelations in *Red Water* that I thought was most revealing was that, in the story, Ann Gordge Lee only knew how to read the Deseret alphabet, the alphabet that Brigham Young created.

**DJL:** We saw the alphabet at This Is the Place Heritage Park in Salt Lake City.

**WB:** Allegedly Brigham Young promoted it to simplify English spelling and make it easier to teach. Some of the published academic studies of the Deseret alphabet raise the possibility that it had another purpose besides simplifying spelling: it was to control what people could read. If people could only read the Deseret alphabet and if all that was published in the Deseret alphabet was the *Deseret News*, the *Book of Mormon*, and the Mormon scriptures, that would mean you wouldn't have to worry about people going off and reading a bunch of things that might disturb them or that might give them ideas that you didn't want them to have.

**DJL:** This comes up in academic writing?

**WB:** Oftentimes they'll say, "People have

proposed this, but it's just not true." Well, it is true. Of course it's true. Brigham Young was definitely obsessed with control and power, and he didn't put all this cockamamie system together just to simplify spelling. It did have that other purpose. It's silly to ignore it. But it was only when I read Judith's use of that fact and saw how it shaped Ann Gordge Lee's world that I really came to understand what a potent interpretation it is. By creating a character that has that limitation, Judith is able to show how real it would have been. Simply to ignore that, as one of the historical alternatives, is dishonest. She also was able to capture the passions and the feelings and, more than that, the struggle between these English and American pioneers and their environment. They had come out of humid, green climates, and they were suddenly dumped in the middle of the Great Basin in one of the harshest environments in the world. It was an incredible ordeal.

**DJL:** Last June we visited Lee's Ferry, Arizona, where we spoke with Allen Malmquist, the U.S. Park Service interpreter who discovered the "Lead Scroll" on January 22, 2002.<sup>26</sup> What is your opinion regarding the authenticity of the artifact? If it is authentic, what do you think would prompt Lee to write his confession on lead rather than, say, paper?

**WB:** Did Allen express an opinion?

**DJL:** No, he did not.

**WB:** Well, the problem with the artifact is that it has no provenance. When I first heard the story, I thought that this was an obvious fraud. We have no explanation of how it wound up on the floor in the rat droppings. Without a good knowledge as to how it got there, it's very hard to have any sort of definitive opinion about it. But, despite my initial skepticism, when I read the text, I thought, "Oh, my God, that's John D. Lee." So far, the hard scientific analysis has shown one thing, which is that the scroll appears to be made using lead that came from a

mine that closed around 1870. The mine was used again after 1980 or so, but this lead seems to be an artifact of the nineteenth century.

**DJL:** Mark Hofmann was very good at making historically accurate forgeries.<sup>27</sup>

**WB:** But Hofmann didn't do this; his ex-wife assured me of this. My take on the "Dead Lee Scroll" is that, if it's a fake, they'll prove it. History is too complicated to create an artifact 150 years later that doesn't include some fatal flaw. The Drake's Plate that all the experts in the 1930s authenticated didn't stand up to modern metallurgical analysis.<sup>28</sup> And, in fact, the Clampers, who actually perpetrated the fraud, had pretty much published and announced that they did it very soon after the joke got out of hand, if anybody had been paying attention. So if the scroll is a forgery, it is likely the forgers will be unable to keep the secret, because otherwise what's the point? If they never get credit for it, why go to all that trouble? At the same time, I think that the text sounds authentic. There are Mormon handwriting experts that disagree with me, but I think that what's on the scroll itself is exactly what John D. Lee would have wanted to leave behind. Using a metal plate is something that would be very attractive to a nineteenth-century Mormon. But until we know where it came from, well, we'll never know. One thing is, you'll never prove it's authentic. All you can do is prove that it's a fake. But if it is a fake, I think they'll prove it.

**DJL:** One of the most important goals of trail organizations such as the Oregon-California Trails Association is to help preserve key trail sites. What is the status of the preservation of the Mountain Meadows site?

**WB:** Mountain Meadows is a critical example of how a very important historic site is being threatened by our modern consumer society. There are vacation homes going up all over it, and there may be a golf course there someday. It would be a crime against history to transform that haunted spot into another trashed Ameri-

can landscape. Here the nation's obligation to its past is in danger of being derailed. Part of the problem is that the subject makes the leaders of the Mormon church so nervous that they want to control it. They've done that in part by buying up a good bit of the property. They seem to have control of a significant amount of the immediate site. What they need to appreciate is that this historical site is important for reasons that extend beyond the interests of the Mormon church. If the massacre had never happened at Mountain Meadows, I think it's entirely likely it would already be a National Monument, simply because it was such a significant historical place. It was so important in the history of the Spanish Trail, in the story of the emigration to California, and in the pioneering of the Southwest. It was highly praised by John C. Frémont, had an influence on trappers and explorers, and preserves dozens if not hundreds of ancient archaeology sites. The fact that the largest violent loss of life in the history of the Oregon-California Trails took place at Mountain Meadows means that the federal government should assume responsibility for the site and should protect it and help maintain its historic integrity. The

trick will be for the leaders of the LDS church to realize that it is in their best interest to have a third party manage the site. If they simply stand by and let the place be trashed, they'll look as if they're calloused and indifferent to anyone's history but their own.<sup>29</sup>

**DJL:** Do you have anything to say in conclusion?

**WB:** Yes. The inescapable fact about the Mountain Meadows Massacre is that there's a dark question that looms behind all these studies: "Did Brigham Young do it?" I don't think that is the most important question about the massacre. The most important question is, what can we learn from this event about human nature? For me, the most difficult question is, what makes decent men commit horrific crimes? Mountain Meadows is an especially troubling example of that because these men were so completely convinced that they were doing God's will. I gave a series of talks in Arkansas last fall and I finally came up with a statement that summarizes my conclusions: "God save us all from men doing God's work."

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Mountain Meadows, Utah, as it appears today

## End Notes

1. A noted Utah historian, Juanita Brooks (1898-1989) is recognized for the integrity with which she examined the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Working in defiance of the local church leadership, she produced her two best-known books, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1950) and *John Doyle Lee* (1961). While she found no direct evidence for Brigham Young's involvement in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, she considered him an accessory after the fact, believing that he both set the stage for the event with his fiery rhetoric during the period of the Utah War and obstructed the subsequent investigation.

2. Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, pp. 357, 363. Mormon apostle George A. Smith (1817-75) was a cousin of the prophet Joseph Smith and a commander of the Nauvoo Legion in southern Utah. In John D. Lee's version of the story, Smith brought the orders to kill the Fanchers to southern Utah. On August 25 Smith and a mixed party of Mormons and Paiute Indians camped near the Fancher party at Corn Springs, south of Fillmore.

3. Eleanor McLean Pratt was the widow of the beloved LDS apostle Parley P. Pratt, who was murdered in western Arkansas in May 1857 by Eleanor's legal husband, Hector McLean. She had deserted him to join the Mormon church. Vengeance for Pratt's death was undoubtedly a motive for the murder of the Arkansas-based Fancher party.

4. Orrin Porter Rockwell (1813-78) was one of the early converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He served as bodyguard to both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. A controversial figure, he was the reputed Mormon "Destroying Angel," a notorious gunman and a religious zealot.

5. A writer at the *Salt Lake Tribune* for over fifty years, Harold Schindler (1929-98) is the author of *Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder* (1966) and other books on Mormon and Utah history.

6. Quoted in David M. Kennedy and Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Spirit: United States*

*History as Seen by Contemporaries, Volume 1: To 1877*, 12th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010), p. 101. John Peter Zenger (1697-1746) owned a newspaper that printed articles attacking William Crosby, the governor of New York. He was sued for libel and defended by Alexander Hamilton, who won an acquittal based on the argument that true statements cannot be considered libel.

7. David L. Bigler, former president of the Oregon-California Trails Association, is the author of the award-winning *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847-1896* as well as the editor and co-editor of a number of narratives by early Mormons, including *Innocent Blood: Essential Narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre* with Will Bagley.

8. George Armstrong Hicks became a Mormon while living in Nauvoo and came to Utah in 1852. In 1863 he was sent on a mission to southern Utah, where he learned of the involvement of local Mormon leaders in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. In two letters to Brigham Young, he questioned why John D. Lee and other Mormons who had been involved in the massacre and had innocent blood on their hands were still allowed to be local authorities in the church. In a very sarcastic reply, Young suggested that Hicks had participated in the massacre (which he clearly did not) and that a "rope round the neck taken with a jerk would be very salutary" as a remedy. Hicks was later excommunicated from the church. Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, 262-70.

James Gemmell was a Scottish immigrant who settled in Salt Lake City in 1849 and converted to the Mormon faith. He accompanied Judge John Cradlebaugh's investigation of the Mountain Meadows Massacre as a translator. In the early 1860s he moved to Montana, where he lived out his days. Gemmell's obituary included his story that he was in Brigham Young's office when Bishop Jacob Hamblin reported that the Fancher train was near Cedar City. Gemmell recounted that he heard Young say that if he was in command of the local militia he would wipe out the Arkansas train. See Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, 289-93.

9. Since the interview took place, LDS historians have issued an account of the massacre. It stresses that the event occurred in the context of extreme Mormon paranoia due to the approach of federal troops and that the plot to kill the emigrants was hatched locally but that the efforts of higher Mormon authorities (including Brigham Young) to prevent the disaster came too late to stop the slaughter due to slow communications. These authors also discount the existence of a cover-up, asserting that church leaders only learned the details of the massacre incrementally over time. In defense of this assertion, they note that Isaac Haight and other Cedar City church leaders were removed from their callings in 1859 and that Haight and John D. Lee were excommunicated in 1870. For a full account, see Walker, Turley, and Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*. For a brief version, see Turley, "The Mountain Meadows Massacre."

10. Commanding a troop of U.S. dragoons from California, U.S. Army Brevet Major James H. Carleton (1814-73) was the first federal officer to investigate the massacre. He visited the site in 1859, almost two years after the tragedy. In his report to Congress, he stated: "In pursuing the bloody thread which runs throughout this picture of sad realities, the question of how this crime, that for hellish atrocity has no parallel in our history, can be adequately punished often comes up and seeks in vain for an answer" (Carleton, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, 37).

11. William Rogers, a non-Mormon who ran a hotel in Salt Lake City, accompanied Judge Cradlebaugh's investigation as a deputy U.S. marshal. In letters to newspapers, he stated that he witnessed the confessions of participants in the massacre, who requested anonymity for fear of their lives. The letters are reprinted in Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, 213-18.

John Cradlebaugh (1819-72) came to Utah in 1858 as a district judge. He initiated the first investigation into the Mountain Meadows Massacre, asking General Albert Sidney

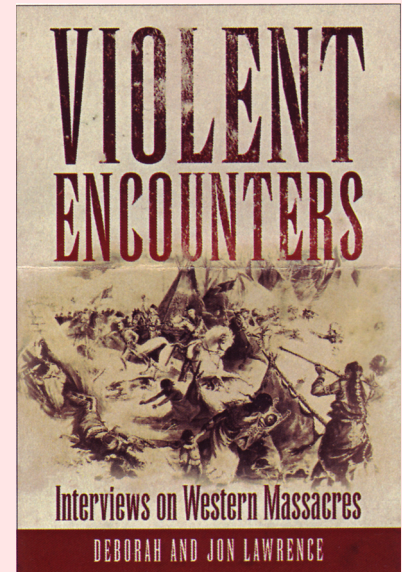
Merciless killing in the 19th century American West was not as simple as depicted in dime novels and movie Westerns. The scholars interviewed here, experts on violence in the West, embrace a wide range of approaches and perspectives and challenge both traditional views of western

expansion and politically correct ideologies.

The Battle of the Little Big Horn, the Sand Creek Massacre, the Battle of the Washita, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre are iconic events that have been repeatedly described and analyzed, but the interviews included in this volume offer new points of view. Other events discussed here are little-known today, such as the Camp Grant Massacre, in which Anglo-Americans, Mexican Americans, and Tohono O'odham Indians killed more than a hundred Pinal and Aravaipa Apache men, women, and children.

In addition to specific events, the interviews cover broader themes such as violence in early California; hostilities between the frontier army and the Sioux, including the Santee Sioux Revolt and Wounded Knee; and violence between European Americans and Great Basin tribes, such as the Bear River Massacre. The scholars interviewed include academic historians, public historians, an anthropologist, and a journalist.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence have also contributed several interesting articles to the *California Territorial Quarterly*, including a significant interview with gold rush historian J.S. Holliday.



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Johnston to provide troops to serve as a posse comitatus to arrest and hold the accused. He opened a grand jury inquiry into the massacre in March 1858 and accompanied the army to the site of the massacre. In an effort to appease the Mormons, territorial authorities successfully appealed to Washington to remove Cradlebaugh's authority to call out the army. The judge was shortly thereafter sent to a new post in Nevada, and the investigation was terminated. Cradlebaugh became Nevada Territory's first delegate to the U.S. Congress, giving a speech about the massacre before the House of Representatives on February 7, 1863. For details, see Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, chapter 7.

12. An adopted son of Brigham Young, John Doyle Lee (1812-77) converted to the Mormon faith in 1848 in time to participate in the Mormon War in Missouri. In the early 1850s he was sent to help develop the Mormon colonies in southern Utah. He became a U.S. government Indian agent in Iron County, Utah, and Mountain

Meadows came under his jurisdiction as the Fort Harmony militia major. Acting in these two roles, he became the central figure in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. In October 1870 Brigham Young excommunicated him from the Mormon church for his role in the affair. In an effort to escape arrest, Lee moved to a remote crossing of the Colorado River, where he established Lee's Ferry, which connected southern Utah with Mormon settlements in northeastern Arizona. Lee was arrested in November 1874 and was tried and convicted of murder. While imprisoned, he wrote "Lee's Last Confession" for a San Francisco newspaper (Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, 338-52). Later, working with lawyer William Bishop, Lee wrote his autobiography, *Mormonism Unveiled*. He was executed by a firing squad at the meadows on March 23, 1877. For a biography, see Brooks, *John Doyle Lee*.

13. On October 27, 1838, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs of Missouri issued an order to force Mormons out of Missouri or exterminate them.



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Three days later, a Missouri militia unit massacred eighteen men and boys who sought refuge in a log fort at Haun's Mill, a Mormon settlement in eastern Caldwell County, Missouri. A militia member justified his act of shooting a ten-year-old Mormon boy by saying "nits make lice." The history of the conflicts of 1838 between Mormon settlers and citizen militias in western Missouri and the ultimate expulsion of the Mormons to Illinois is treated in LeSeur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 162.

14. William Bishop was John D. Lee's lawyer in both the first and second trial. He was also Lee's literary executor and the editor of his autobiography and confession, *Mormonism Unveiled*.

15. "New Publications: Mormonism Unveiled; or, The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop," *New York Times*, September 17, 1877, 3.

16. "Horrible Massacre of Emigrants!!" *Los Angeles Star*, October 10, 1857, 2/2.

17. Some early writers about the massacre claimed that a group of young ruffians known as the Missouri Wildcats accompanied the Fancher train. These writers included Thomas Cropper, who was fifteen years old at the time of the massacre and was eighty-four when he dictated his autobiography, which contains significant errors and inconsistencies. For an extract, see Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, 400-402.

18. Captain John Williams Gunnison was in charge of the 1853 Railroad Survey of the 38th parallel. In August 1853 the expedition crossed the Rockies, following the North Branch of the Old Spanish Trail into Utah. On October 26, on the Sevier River near Sevier Lake, local Indians killed seven members of the party, including Gunnison and the artist Richard Kern. See Weber, *Richard H. Kern*, chapter 7.

19. An extract from Samuel Pitchford's diary is given in Bigler and Bagley, *Innocent Blood*, 107-108. The extract mentions efforts by Mormons to prevent the emigrants' cattle from grazing and destroying the local citizens' winter feed, requests by the Arkansas train to purchase flour, and the passage of an express rider conveying news about the emigrants from

Iron County to Brigham Young.

20. Brigham Young appointed Jacob Hamblin to be president of the Southern Indian Mission to the Paiutes on August 4, 1857. Hamblin's ranch was at the upper end of the meadows, about four miles from the site of the massacre.

21. Edward Abbey's comic masterpiece *The Monkey Wrench Gang* tells the story of a group of eco-raiders, who attack mining, lumbering, road building, and dam building sites in the Utah/Arizona wilderness. Seldom Seen Smith, a key character in the novel, is a polygamist "Jack Mormon" and a river runner and wilderness guide.

22. White desperadoes, sometimes allied with or dressed as Indians, harassed wagon trains on the overland trails, often stealing livestock from one wagon train and then selling to another. Many emigrants believed these "white Indians" were acting under orders from LDS leaders. The Fancher party itself was subject to such theft. See Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 47, 59-60.

23. The background to the Mountain Meadows Massacre was the so-called Utah War of 1857, during which President James Buchanan sent federal troops under the command of Albert Sydney Johnston to suppress a perceived rebellion by the citizens of Utah Territory. Apart from the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the confrontation was essentially bloodless. The war was ultimately resolved by negotiation, wherein the governorship of Utah was transferred from Brigham Young to a federal appointee, Alfred Cumming, and the army peacefully established a presence in Utah at Camp Floyd.

24. Daniel Boorstin's *The Americans: The National Experience* treats U.S. history during the period from the Revolutionary War through the Civil War.

25. Freeman's novel *Red Water* is told from the perspective of three of John D. Lee's nineteen wives: Emma, Ann, and Rachel. Juanita Brooks wrote of these women and Lee's other wives in her biographies *John Doyle Lee* and *Emma Lee*.

26. In January 2002 Allen Malmquist discovered a lead sheet buried under debris in the old "fort" at Lee's Ferry. The lead sheet, signed

"J. D. Lee," asserts that he acted at Mountain Meadows "on orders of Pres Young thro Geo Smith." Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, 383.

27. A disaffected member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Mark Hofmann was a skilled forger who murdered two people in Salt Lake City. He is currently serving a prison sentence at the Utah State Prison in Draper, Utah. His most famous Mormon forgery, the Salamander Letter, was purchased by LDS Bishop Steven F. Christensen in 1984 for \$40,000. Worrall, *The Poet and the Murderer*, chronicles Hofmann's life.

28. The Drake's Plate of Brass is a forgery that purports to be the brass plaque that Francis Drake posted when he landed in northern California in 1579. The hoax, initially perpetrated in 1936 by E Clampus Vitus (informally called the Clampers), a playful fraternity of California history enthusiasts, was successful for forty years.

29. During the commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the Mountain Meadows Massacre on September 11, 2007, a powerful local developer temporarily removed a nearby sign on State Road 18 that advertised forty-nine lots for sale at "Mountain Meadows Estates." See Havnes, "Housing Lots Sprout near Mountain Meadows Site." More recently the LDS authorities have begun to support the effort to create a National Monument at Mountain Meadows; for updates, see the newsletter of the Mountain Meadows Association at [www.Mtn-meadows-assoc.com](http://www.Mtn-meadows-assoc.com).

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### Additional Resources

See <http://1857massacre.com> for further historical information about the Mountain Meadows Massacre and video clips of historian Will Bagley and Fancher party family descendants discussing the tragedy.

The official LDS position on the massacre, as outlined in Richard E. Turley's article, can be found on the Internet at <http://lds.org> by entering "Mountain Meadows Massacre" under the menu "Search all LDS.org". The church still maintains its position that Brigham Young knew nothing about the massacre until after it happened.

In the summer of 2011, the Secretary of the Interior designated Mountain Meadows as a National Historic Landmark.