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**MONUMENTS AND MASSACRE: THE ART OF
REMEMBERING**

by

Lafe Gerald Conner

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**HONORS IN UNIVERSITY STUDIES
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in

History

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Monuments and Massacre

The Art of Remembering

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Honors Thesis
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*"What else is there, after all, besides memory and dreams, and the way they mix with land and air and water to make us all whole?"*¹

Robert Michael Pyle.

I

Rain transformed the dusty trail outside our trailer into a highway of sediments speeding and settling. Inside the trailer I pulled on my boots and raincoat while my dad slipped into a larger version of his own. Then, with my two brothers, we embarked in puddle play. Aimed at impeding the torrent, we employed any object; rocks, branches, wood chips, even our own wet boots and hands. Eight years old, maybe nine and I knew nothing about erosion or sedimentation, only that rain brought the stream and the stream brought puddle play.

I hold this memory, feeling its grainy texture between fingers of thought, rubbing and smearing it across my imagination. Smelled, tasted, and stretched into a thick ribbon.

~

Sunday night, the last of the wagon party pulled into the meadow after dark. Beside a small spring the Fanchers, the (Bakers, and their company set up camp. The feeling of relief that night came probably both from resting after a long day's journey and from the miles they thought they had placed between themselves and the Mormons. After an unpleasant month in the hornets' nest, this group of Arkansans was no doubt eager to escape Deseret.

The families made little effort to circle their wagons or form fortifications that first night on the great meadow, perhaps many went to bed early, and slept well, while the scouting party of Mormon soldiers and their Indian allies crouched in the hills and gullies.²

~

We planned to take the first half of Spring break to make our journey to the monument at Mountain Meadows. Diane agreed and we arranged to spend five nights with the in-laws. The first night, Friday, we stayed with Diane's brother David and his wife Carla. Carla cooked black

beans and brown rice, okra, fried manioc, and tofu with peas and tomatoes, everything seasoned with wonderful Brazilian spice; a mixture of what she learned from her mother, gathered from cookbooks, invented, or modified on her own. It was incredible, and in our two day stay I ate at least four platefuls.

In the evening after trying to take pictures of seagulls in the park, we watched home videos which Diane helped transfer to DVD. Some footage at the beginning shows David and his twin brother playing with their mom, while Diane's dad fought in Vietnam. Her dad, Wally, later dubbed Roxy's voice onto the footage of her and the twins, accompanied by the "Music of the Night" instrumental score from *Phantom of the Opera*; Da, Du, Da, Du, Da, Da Du Da Du Da...

Years pass in quick frames, Wally returned from Vietnam, had six more children, and grew out a beard. Not a long beard, his was trim and neat, dark whiskers. At one point David stopped the video, "Wow," he said, "I don't think I've seen my Dad that young in... forever."

~

"Since the Mountain Meadows Massacre occurred, and especially since the execution of John D. Lee for his part in it, we have tried to blot the affair from our history. It must not be referred to, much less talked about openly."³³ Juanita Brooks wrote these words, no doubt reflecting years of struggle and experience in a community purposely trying to forget the events she worked so hard to recall. She had no easy time piecing together, the best that she could, the real story of what happened, and that was her goal, to "view this tragedy objectively and dispassionately...in its proper setting as a study of social psychology as well as history."

I imagine her through tireless hours of archives and library vaults, days quickening to years as she, and the young women who worked with her, gathered journals and interviews from living pioneers in their community. In his book, *Blood of the Prophets*, Will Bagley included a

black and white photo of Juanita Brooks. She sits at a desk, open book in hand; fingers inserted deeply in the pages, her eyes look to her left, beyond the camera, as if no photographer existed in her study. Her short hair, round-marble earrings, add to the sweater, glasses and jacket she wears and give her a look which is distinguished, professional and scholarly. On the edge of her lips emerges a smile. In the opening pages of his book, Bagley made this acknowledgement to his predecessor: "Her intimate connections to the Mormon frontier and her encyclopedic knowledge of southern Utah's history made Brooks the best-qualified historian of her generation to tell this story, and she told it with integrity and heart."⁴⁴

~

The clearing where our trailer stood all those summers in the dust now welcomes the tiny bright leaves of low bush huckleberry that share the soil with elk sedge and pine seedlings. This habitat I know best in the world. After a childhood of wearing this dust, I am home here. Camp Loll. We left each summer in August then eagerly counted the months and days to the next June.

Mom taught us to identify the berries good for jam, though they rarely escaped our mouths after entering our hands. "Huckleberry Fever," my brothers and I called it with blue tongues and bright purple patches staining our fingers, lips, and palms. We learned many good things to eat in our hillside market. Wild strawberries; Dad knew just where to find them at just the right time. Bog Blueberries growing beside the lake and occasionally service berries, tasting like warm apples, also made the journey through my mouth and gut. We were visitors who learned to live in the place we called home.

~

Just passing through, the Fanchers joined with the Bakers, from Arkansas, as they settled down in the meadow to rest. Perhaps throughout the company dreams of California,

born of memory and story, visited these tired sleepers. Voices on the hill, too cold for crickets, campfire logs snapped to flame.

The first shots fell like hail on breakfast, Monday morning, September 7. Fifteen people hit, seven died immediately. On the East, at close range, the draw of Magotsu Creek concealed the Mormon soldiers, who dressed for battle in feathers and war paint. Bullets from Arkansans' guns struck the Mormons' allies. Two Piute war chiefs, Moquetus and Big'Bill, were injured, and at least one other Indian died.⁵ The initial attack was over in half an hour.

~

Later in the evening at David and Carla's, I study the *Liahona* in Cebuano. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints publishes the *Liahona* in fifty languages from Albanian to Vietnamese. Reading the Cebuano version helps me prepare for the Foreign Language Achievement Test I'll take tomorrow morning at Brigham Young University. David takes the magazine and tries to read it. Remarkably, he sounds pretty good, though not surprising considering he speaks Chinese, Spanish, and Portuguese. Several words David picks out, his eyes excited by the recognition; "Eskwelahan," just like school, and "Espiritu Santo."

I launch into a history lesson about the Philippines, circling around language; hundreds of years of Spanish colonization written into the language, or should I say languages of the nation. On the island of Leyte, where McArthur landed in the famous battle of Leyte Gulf, I learned Cebuano and Waray-Waray as an LDS Missionary. A mountain range, running east to west across the island, acts as natural barrier between the two dialects. North of the mountains the villagers speak Waray, while southern and western villagers speak Cebuano. A linguistic history emerges in the borrowing and remnants of words as in the distinction which remains between the two dialects.

Big cities bring together people from all parts of the Philippines. Going from house to house in the city we were just as likely to speak English or the national language, Tagalog, as either dialect. Responses to a common greeting decided the language of communication. "Kamusta?" we asked. "How are you?" The answer maybe came back, "Maupay" – Waray-Waray, or "Maayo" – Cebuano, or "Mabuti" – Tagalog, and sometimes "I'm okay."

The language tells the story of movement, immigrants and visitors.

~

"History is story," Will Bagley writes, "and this work [*Blood of the Prophets*] attempts to bring to life forgotten victims and heroes."⁶ Speaking about his book, his work, his "craft," Bagley says he wishes that it will "come to be appreciated as a service to [his] people and to history."⁷ He wants to tell the truth, "as honestly and as accurately as possible."⁸

I imagine Bagley, his six-year struggle to discover the truth of "what happened long ago at that isolated oasis in southwestern Utah and to understand why it happened."⁹ Because he feels so strongly about the craft of history, and his own integrity, "writing this story [was] like wrestling the devil with little prospect of victory."¹⁰ The first time I read that description, and the second, it seemed abstract to me, but now I feel some of what I believe he meant. Bagley's history seeks out the truth amidst lies. "Historians," he writes, "must reconstruct this event from the testimony of children, murderers, and passersby."¹¹

Bagley speaks of finding the "deeper truths" from the stories, truth about the attitudes and beliefs of the community of memory bearers. "Mountain Meadows lures its chroniclers into a maze of duplicity built by men who lied to save their very lives."¹² Their accounts are compelling, well told stories, especially John D. Lee's, from his court trial. I read portion of Lee's testimony in Juanita Brook's book. Hers was the first full account of the massacre I read. I

paused in my reading of Lee's testimony, so compelling I read the words again out loud to my wife, and then later that night I read them over the phone to a friend in Portland.

I here pause in the recital of this horrid story of man' inhumanity, and ask myself the question, Is it honest in me, and can I clear my conscience before God, if I screen myself while I accuse others? No, never! Heaven forbid that I should put a burden upon others' shoulders, that I am unwilling to bear my just portion of. I am not a traitor to my people, nor to my former friends and comrades who were with me on that dark day when the work of death was carried on in God's name, by a lot of deluded and religious fanatics. It is my duty to tell the facts as they exist, and I will do so.¹³

~

Last summer, at camp, I took a group of scouts from Los Angeles on a four day backpacking trip through Bechler Meadows. My first time to Bechler, I carried a waterproof backpacking map and a two feet by three feet piece of brown butcher paper modgedodged on one side. The slick, shiny coat dried flexible protecting the record of our journey. Along the trail I stopped, my pen working quickly, to sketch or quote some important discovery or event that I didn't want to forget. There are the sketches at Bartlett's Slough where the horse train passed us for the first time. The boys complained about wading through the mud, about dirt and mosquitoes. The same spot where, sitting in shade, I found the largest patch of ripe wild strawberries I've ever seen. Complaining stopped. Gathering instincts awakened by sweet red juices, I couldn't convince them to move on until every fleshy berry was gone. It reminded me of Mary Olive's poem:

August

When the blackberries hang
swollen in the woods, in the brambles
nobody owns, I spend

all day among the high
branches, reaching
my ripped arms, thinking

of nothing, cramming
the black honey of summer
into my mouth; all day my body

accepts what it is. In the dark
creeks that run by there is
this thick paw of my life darting

among the black bells, the leaves; there is
this happy tongue.¹⁴

~

The water of Cane Spring flowed outside the emigrants defenses. Penned inside the circle of wagons hastily drawn, the earth thrown in mounds beneath them for defense, bodies of the dead, inside, buried in shallow trenches. Some of the men left the enclosure to investigate the source of the shooting and soon found themselves engaged in another battle. The Mormons and their allies held the advantage, but the emigrants acted bravely, beyond the expectations of their attackers. The Indian's, promised an easy killing, and were upset at their casualties. The Mormons' "magic" had not protected them. Lee sent out a call for reinforcements and set guards to watch the spring.

~

Waking early I take a cold shower, a short one, because I don't know how the hot water at David and Carla's works, or even if they have any. Then settling on the floor in their living room, I practice relaxation, the ancient techniques I learned from Yoga Zone videos. I memorized the forms and the order of the beginners' workout. Ending in corps pose I lay on the carpet, palms facing upward toward the sky, releasing the tension in every muscle; breathing and relaxing.

Breakfast consists of black beans and brown rice, along with Brazilian spiced toppings

from the night before. By eight o'clock I pull out of their driveway, follow the freeway north to Provo, and take the exit on University Avenue. It turns into Main Street and crosses an overpass. The road, mostly empty, provides a quite gray path into town. Then I see, on the left side of the road, a statue, Brigham Young. I recognize him from the car in passing and pull into the parking lot at the Provo Library, the former Brigham Young Academy.

I cross the grass toward Brigham's statue, still twenty minutes before I need to check in to take the test. My arms shiver. I planned for a warm trip, not this cold morning. I forgot the camera and promise myself to stop here on the way home from southern Utah. Diane will like to see this anyway and Jensen, our son, always likes to stop and run around. I make a note to myself, to remind me, and put it in the open space beneath the car's radio.

~

There is no satisfaction in rehearsing the horrible details. The few known facts have been enlarged upon and colored by many different writers with many different purposes. My excuse for adding my name to the list of those who have given time and thought to this subject is the fact that I have some new material to present which should add to the general understanding of what went on and why.¹⁵

-Juanita Brooks

~

In Elementary my favorite toy, the parachute, required the entire class to play. A circle of tiny fists gripping and lifting sent the parachute in to the sky. We either pulled it quickly toward the ground catching a bubble of air beneath, or we lifted and waited, fingers holding tight as arms rose. With the parachute in the air some children could let go and run to find a new spot. The combined effort of peeling the parachute from the earth, like a shroud lifting, created an open space, or revealed one that already existed on the outside. To make room for the truth memories and histories need to be shared, engaged, exchanged, debated and tugged at from all

angles.

~

Throughout the week the number of Paiute participants decreased. They lost interest. Perhaps it was not their way to wait so long killing people who had already lost their cattle. If it were not for the poisoned ox the Paiutes never would have wanted to be there in the first place. Either the Indians were getting revenge because the emigrants gave them a poisoned ox or poisoned Corn Creek or poisoned a mule, or else the Paiutes were there because someone they respected asked them to be, promising them rewards in return. The emigrant party was rich in cattle and fine wagons, a fact both the Mormons and the Indians were well aware of.

Within months of the massacre, all kinds of sabotage stories spread throughout surrounding Mormon settlements. There had to be a reason for this "Indian caused" massacre, unless, the massacre was not Indian caused. The Mormons had reason enough for the attack. The emigrants, Mormons said, had come from Missouri and had persecuted the Latter-day saints there, even helped in the killing of their prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. On top of that, these Missouri roughians had hitched up a team oxen, calling them Brigham and Heber, after the church leader Heber C. Kimball. They drove the oxen through town, beating them and cussing, swearing to come back from California with an army and destroy the Mormons. At least that's the story that circulated through town.¹⁶

~

Spending the morning listening to Cebuano and marking scantrons, I feel happy that it's over. The test, I think, went pretty well. Leaving the Joseph F. Smith building on the BYU

campus, I carry a small composition note book, speckled with black and white, and a copy of *Blood of the Prophet*, which I've already renewed twice this semester. A thin spiral stairway leads to the east exit of the building. Climbing up from the basement I enter natural light, pass through a glass walled atrium, and into the open court yard. A fountain at the west end holds granite boulders cut smooth on some sides, left rough on others. The fountain itself is a large diamond with corners pointing North, South, East, and West.

Sitting on the east corner I pull out the pebble notebook and start to write my impressions. The shape and flow of the fountain causes a backwater eddy to form in the southern corner. Walking over to the north corner of the fountain I find that a six foot granite pillar obstructs the bursting sound of water and a little trickle from the stone that sounds peaceful, almost like filling a bath.

We approach a thing from different angles. The way we hear it, or see it, depends so much on where we choose to stand. I'm thinking about the massacre, about this journey I'm making with Diane and Jensen, in search of knowledge, and more than that in search of connection. I want to know more about the places I live in; to become familiar with the history of this state and its people, my people. Is there room in my community for this piece of our past? Should there be? I wonder, what is to be gained by acknowledging it? What will we lose? Is there room in me for this history?

I fish the corner of a yellow candy wrapper out of the southern eddy before leaving and take one last look at the bronze dedication plaque which reads:

“All truth cometh from the Lord. He is the fountain of truth.”

II

In St. George we visit James and Kelly. James, Diane's brother just before her in age, owns a plumbing business and lives in Bloomington. They have a cat. Jensen, our sixteen month-old son, chases the cat around the house, through Casey's and Erykah's rooms. We visit, a happy audience to Erykah and Casey, my niece and nephew. When Diane's father Wally and his wife Katherine arrive Wally asks if I've told them about the Mountain Meadows project.

"We're going to go up and see the Mountain Meadows Massacre monument," I say.

"We've been there." James says.

I want him to tell me about it, but I want to record his story on the Sony mini tape recorder I bought especially for this trip. "Just a second, I'll go get it," I say. But I don't find it in the car. I must have left it our room at Wally's. Without telling any one, I drive as fast as I dare. Grab the recorder, still unopened, slice the plastic packaging on my way through the kitchen, and fumble with the batteries as I jump back in the car.

At James' everyone is standing in the entryway ready to leave. At first I think their playing a joke on me for running away. But no, they really want to go. It's dinner time. I'm desperate. Wally sees my eyes, pleading. "Can you interview Wally later?" Katherine asks.

But...but... what if there is no later? I think. I want to say. Wally sees it, and James sees it. They humor me. Walking back into the living room, I unwrap the batteries, Wally opens the cassette tape.

~

Without water or food, almost without hope, the Fancher party held their ground as the fifth day of siege began. The Mormon men outside gathered and plotted a way to bring the

whole mess to an end. Some way to draw the emigrants out, they needed to get them away from their wagons, unarmed if possible. Perhaps Lee first framed the plan, though he claimed it was an order from above. Lee claimed he received a letter instructing him of the orders, delivered by Major John Higby of the Iron County militia and supposedly written by Isaac Haight, stake president and second in command of the Mormon troops. Lee said he tried to evade

The order, he felt it was wrong to follow he said: "I left the council, and went away to myself, I bowed myself in prayer before God, and asked Him to overrule the decision of the Council. I shed bitter tears, and my tortured soul was wrung nearly from my body by the great suffering." John D. Lee finished praying and went back to the council.

Philip Klingensmith, an LDS Bishop at the massacre, said that John D. Lee addressed the troops before going to meet the emigrants.¹⁷ Lee told the men what they were expected to do, how they would kill everyone but the small children, those too young to remember. Lee said he acted on orders from "headquarters" but did not say who exactly that referred to. He gave reasons for the murders, perhaps the same repeated afterward throughout the towns, perhaps the threat of war, or avenging the martyrs of their prophets.

Lee played his part by convincing the emigrants. He promised them safe passage back to Cedar City if they would leave their wagons and weapons behind. Desperate, the party agreed. The men, unarmed, followed the women and children who went ahead walking beside two wagons loaded with the young and the wounded.

My dad is a story teller. I can not count the nights throughout my youth when lying on my back on the cold dust I listened to my father's voice carry Chief Pocatello, Old Ephraim, Golden Steel, and the Little Green Man, across the burning Campfire nights. Hundreds, thousands of young boys and men at scout camp every summer heard and hear my father telling stories. He is a master of ambiance. Well respected for his craft, the artistry of voice, detail, and recollection.

Away from camp, dad tells stories in church cultural halls for eagle court of honors, in trainings and schools, and in special meetings. Truth in story consists of layers. There is the question of whether the story really happened the way he tells it, which is most often what's meant when people ask me later, "Was that story your dad told us true?"

"Sure," I almost always say, no matter how unbelievable the tale might be. There is the layer of the details; did the event really happen just the way it was described? This type of truth is always subjective. However, beneath the truth of details is a deeper truth, the meaning or lesson of the story, what the story attempts to teach us about real life. Some of Dad's stories teach nobility and courage. Chief Pocatello listened to the voice of the Great Spirit and saved the white boy so that later when young John Salmon grew up and became governor of the Idaho, and Colonel Connor came to destroy the Shoshone, Salmon remembered Pocatello and his people were saved. "Pocatello saved his people," I can hear my dad saying, his voice slowing, pausing for effect, "not because he was a great warrior, though he was, but because he listened to the voice of the Great Spirit."

The lesson of "Old Ephraim" is different. It is that people are capable of great destruction and therefore are endowed with great responsibility to protect. We have the capacity to destroy wonderful and powerful things, like the last of the great plains grizzly bears. Frank Clark shot the

bear just miles from where I live in Logan and today a monument stands on the spot where a group of boy scouts found the bear's remains, the burnt skull hauled away to museums and eventually to the special collections at Utah State, where it is displayed today in a glass case. The monument stands nine feet eleven inches tall, just like the bear.

~

After Juanita Brooks, the story of Mountain Meadows will never be the same. Like Bagley said, she was the best-qualified in her generation. She spent years digging through documents and journals. She knew the characters like few people ever will. A prolific writer, she completed a biography of John D. Lee eleven years after publishing her study of Mountain Meadows. In addition to editing Lee's diaries Brooks compiled the diaries of Hosea Stout. *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, however, the way she researched and wrote the story "cast her in a bad light in the minds of some prominent churchmen...After the book appeared, Juanita said she was 'branded as an apostate'."¹⁸

She remained active in the church and her faith in God remained strong, even if her leaders chose never to give her another church calling. She told the truth, the best she could, because she had to.¹⁹

As a child her dad told her something she never forgot. "I'm a cowboy," he said, "and I've learned that if I ride in the herd I am lost – totally helpless. One who rides counter to it is trampled and killed. One who only trails behind means little... It is the cowboy who rides on the edge of the herd, who sings and calls and makes himself heard who helps direct the course... So don't lose yourself, and don't ride away and desert the outfit. Ride the edge of the herd and be alert, but know your directions, and call out loud and clear."²⁰

~

We walk back into James' living room. Batteries and cassette find their place. We pause for a moment deciding whether to sit down. How long will it take, they wonder together? I don't care, I think, this is my chance! But it's dinner time, and not the ideal context for a long interview.

Working quickly, James tells about a trip he made to the site. About the massacre James says, "It was a pre-attack attack, sort of a self defense a pre-self defense... The Mormons heard there were people in the area looking to kill them and instead of waiting for them to be killed, they went ahead and killed them."²¹

I ask about the visit. Kelly's parents took them there. Her dad knows a lot about it. They saw the hills, where the emigrants were killed by the Mormons. This visit, six years ago, probably happened just about the time of the new monument's dedication.

I ask Wally to tell the story. He starts where I started nearly two months ago in Chris Conte's office. Before January of this year I had heard that there was such a thing as the Mountain Meadow Massacre but my knowledge ended there. I thought perhaps Mountain Meadows was like the Bear River Massacre that happened just North of where I live in Logan where the cavalry ambushed a band of Shoshone, murdering men, women, and children. I collect all of Wally's words:

You hear about Mountain Meadow Massacre and you think immediately, well who got massacred? Is this a story about Indians and the killing of pioneers? I remember when I first heard about that I thought who were the Indians that killed the pioneers? Then later to find out that in fact that the pioneers were people who were traveling to California through Utah in the eighteen hundreds... And then to find out that it was people who had already settled in southern Utah, pioneers, and they were mostly Mormons who dressed up as Indians, and had come across this party.²²

I'm enthralled in Wally's story, my gratitude I'm sure he sees, for humoring such an amateur. He continues, talking about the landscape, cold and wintry, big expanses of fields.

They were coming across an old trail, and that it was the trail that the early pioneers used when they were headed into the southern part of California... and what I had heard was that within this group, at least this is the terms they used to justify the attack, were in fact people who had threatened or had attacked the Mormon's when they lived in Missouri. Later I heard that a lot of these people were in fact from Arkansas, and there were some cases in Arkansas where things like that happened too. I also heard that there were some remarks made by different ones in the group against the Mormons, and so that of course incited groups as well. Later I heard that under the direction of Lee, John D. Lee, who was I think one of the organizers down here, sort of the person in charge. This group was attacked and they killed everybody except for the children that were too small to know anything and they adopted them. And they buried them in a mass grave.

This is better than I expected. Wally is performing the story for me, and I can't get enough, "I also recall," Wally continues uninterrupted,

Brigham Young was himself, here in the area and heard about that on his trek back to Salt Lake. He was very angered by this and he sent a group or something down here to try to investigate... I also heard that John D. Lee, who was the main guy, may have been the person picked as the person they were going to have shot, and he sort of said okay I'll be the guy, the fall guy if you will, and of everybody that was involved in that, of all of them that were involved in that, he was the only one ever brought to trial. He was shot as I recall. I remember seeing pictures of him sitting on his casket dressed up, and the people who were there, and so I don't think he was hung. I don't remember that.

"Was he shot?" Wally asks.

"I think he was," I say, because he was shot, and because I don't want to give away too much of what I know, I want to record the story as he recalls it.

So the grave was dug and they were out in some field, he had his hat on and his dark suit. You know he looked like a regular old guy, just one of the pioneers. But he was the fall guy. It's an unfortunate thing. It's unfortunate particularly for those pioneers.

Wally concludes his story, then shifting gears without a word from me, he tells about the church's response in subsequent years.

The LDS Church has tried to deal with an organization that was set up of all the people, the remaining relatives, if you will, and those people who found out what had happened. And those survivors and relatives of the Mountain Meadow Massacre, I think there's even a website or something out there for them. But there's still some anger about that, so they tried to get together. At one of these meetings the church made apologies and things like that to try to reconcile, to put at rest, and for the church to acknowledge that this did happen.

Even before that, one of our local writers, Juanita Brooks, wrote a book about this, and I understood that she had been excommunicated from the LDS church for writing that book, which basically pinpointed the organizational structure of the church. But you got to realize that the church never says, look we're going to go wipe out somebody; this just never was the policy of the church to do that. Still the organizational structure within a colony still comes within the church and so some of the blame has to go there, but the church apparently tried to take responsibility for that and deal it.

Wally speaks even toned, his voice and his manner matter-of-fact. I have one last question I pose before we part. "Do you remember anything about? Were there Indians involved, Native Americans involved?"

"I understand that there were not Native Americans involved, that they had just got dressed up. Interesting to find out if there were. I heard it was just the pioneers. Had you heard?" He turns the interview on me.

"I've heard both." Truthfully, but noncommittal, I answer. "And I think, that over time, I think, the, early on the role of Indians was really big, and I think over time people are saying that maybe they weren't even there, maybe they weren't even involved."

~

With the wagons loaded, the men were disarmed and escorted at gun point away from the protective circle of their wagons. They left the dead lying in bloody trenches, shallow graves soon to be disturbed by scavengers. Samuel McMurdy drove the first wagon carrying many of the small children, some guns and blankets. Samuel Knight followed in a wagon loaded with

wounded men.²³ John D. Lee followed behind McMurdy's wagon. He fell behind the women and children, still ahead of most of the men. For almost half an hour they crossed over mostly flat ground. The advanced party of wagons, children, and women passed over a slight rise nearing the edge of the mountain descent where the road passed through a corridor of thick scrub oak.

From behind Major John Higbee fired the first shot and shouted "Halt! Do your duty!" On that signal guns discharged, men fell, most of them downed by the first volley. Mayhem followed. Many victims pleading for their lives were gunned down or had their throats slit. Mormons in warpaint accompanied by whoever on the Paiutes remained rushed upon the women and children. Nephi Johnson was among those present to look over the carnage.²⁴

~

Driving to the site through Veyo I wish we could have taken the Cedar City way, the way I imagine the wagons came. But Wally is gracious for bringing us here and I don't want to ask him to drive hours off course. Besides, I don't even know if the road follows the old wagon trail.

I lean forward into the space near the driver's seat and talk between Wally and Diane about the journey and the essay, how my retelling of the story involves all of this. Every moment potentially significant from the first night watching home videos with David and Carla, to the interviews we conducted Sunday night, to this Tuesday morning, our last full day in St. George. Together, in the car, we talk about remembering.

Grabbing the tape recorder from my bag I catch the tail end of Wally's explanation of how technology has altered our memory. "The transformation of the visual," he says, the "evolution of our thinking through this period of time where you can tell stories, or there were

the written account of stories, and in some cases there were the pictures. But with the advent of photography, and movies and so forth, I think our memories have also altered, or shifted as a result of that.” He's hitting upon an idea I'd been thinking about. Wally put it very clearly into words. Talking about the way some people still remember in traditional ways, with story tellers, and now we have the visual people.

“Mountain Meadow Massacre one mile.” Wally reads the sign as we pass, but wait he says, “It didn't say massacre there. That's something right there. We got to write that down.” Grateful for the recorder I smile. “If they put massacre there you can believe that that would increase the number of tourists there,” Wally says.

As we turn off the main high way onto the narrow road that leads to the monuments Wally says, “So when I come here, because I am a visual person, I am one of those that have went to the other side, however you want to say it. And in this process when I come up here I will envision, and I already have, the first time I was here, a scene out of Patton where they've had this tank fight. And you know the music is part of it. I can't sing for anything but I can hear the music in my head. It something like this, with the horns dada da dada da da, dada da dada da, remember that? Something like that. And there's these buzzards.”

The experience of the movie adds to the experience of coming out to the site, and coming to the site now adds to the experience of seeing the movie. Crossing snow in four wheel drive I make a note to myself to rent the film.

~

Nephi Johnson lived after the massacre long enough to meet the young Juanita Brooks. Though at the time she was still single, Juanita Leavitt, and living in Bunkerville, Nevada. Her first Sunday in town she sat next to Johnson in church. She later described an attraction she felt

toward this “patriarchal old man, with his sharp blue eyes and long beard.”²⁵ Johnson must have also been taken by this strong, youthful school teacher because later that day he waited at her house for her to arrive. He wanted to give her a patriarchal blessing. She scribed his words, they weren’t many.

Nephi Johnson wanted Juanita Brooks to write his story. He wanted to tell what he had seen and done, and he wanted Brooks to be the one to write it for him. He asked her to, and she agreed. Time went by. She found herself busy with school and for whatever other reasons she never went to see him. Johnson fell ill and it was almost too late. He would not rest until she arrived. Standing beside her, old man Johnson's daughter announced that Miss Leavitt had come to do the writing for him. Johnson mumbled a short reply. Growing calm he rested. Juanita waited.²⁶

For two more nights Johnson lived in a delirious state, unable to free himself of the awful story that haunted his last hours on earth. “Blood, Blood, Blood!” Johnson yelled inside the house. Juanita Leavitt sat outside with a man called Uncle List. She asked what was the matter with Brother Johnson. He sounded like he was haunted. Uncle List told her that Johnson lived through the massacre. Johnson never lived to tell her himself, which she always regretted as over the next fifty years Juanita Brooks worked to piece the details of the story back together.²⁷

~

Wading through the snow, Jensen on my shoulders, Diane steps in every foot print I leave behind. Wally walks over to the coral to see where the bunnies hide in snow tunnels beneath bent over bushes. Down the banks of Magotsu Creek on a snow-covered asphalt path we cross over a wooden bridge and climb up the other side to the monument, a mass grave squared in black iron fence. Beside the enclosure an American flag flies in blue sky, above white snow. Plastic flowers

hang on the fence near the gate, I photograph them, bright orange and yellow.

The gate opens inward with a twist of the handle. Entering we stand beside a stone and mortar concrete wall, also square, covered in snow, and enclosing a pile of stones eight or nine feet high. Uncovering a plaque mounted on the wall, at first I use my feet, scrapping the snow and ice with the side of my sneaker. The light powder brushes easily away. I run my warm hand over the course ice that remains, tracing with my fingertips the chiseled letters.

Finally legible beneath its frozen coating, I read the words into the tape recorder. "The Mountain Meadows Massacre Grave Site Memorial," the title, bold across the top, "built and maintained by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints out of respect for those who died and who were buried here and in the surrounding area following the massacre of 1857." Then on the bottom line the date of commemoration, "dedicated September 1999."

~

The few children that survived were hauled away from the field of their silenced families. They were taken into the house of Jacob Hamblin, Rachel Hamblin received them. She remembered all her life seeing the tattered children with the blood of their parents still wet on their clothes.²⁸

John D. Lee, with the help of Cedar City Bishop Phillip Klingensmith, distributed the children to homes throughout the settlement. Rachel Hamblin kept three young sisters with her. The fourteen other children spent the next two years in Mormon homes, mostly isolated from their surviving siblings and friends. None of the survivors were more than six years old.

Back in the killing fields John Lee, John Higbee, and Philip Klingensmith spoke to those assembled. They commanded their troops that the whole affair must remain hidden from

*the world, even from their wives and friends. They agreed upon a story and laid the responsibility for the killing on the Indians alone and made villains of the victimized emigrants?*²⁹

~

Context, like I learned in my first folklore class at the university, refers to the setting in which the story is told. When gathering folklore our instructor taught us to note the external attributes of the tradition, where it takes place, and when, and how, as well as the tradition itself.

~

I stood on stage in the Bullen Center's ballroom. The room is built on three levels; a wide rectangular floor, a flat wooden stage, and a balcony encircling the stage, above and behind. The room is used for dance rehearsals and the walls are lined with mirrors and wooden bars to grip and stretch on. It was the annual Loggers' Ball and wild game dinner. The forestry club had combined these events with a talent show. I told stories about bears and I fit them to the crowd. I even inserted the dean as one of the main characters. It made for big laughs and later he and I became good friends because of it.

Stories sometimes entertain, sometimes instruct. The teller, who realizes this, can make the stories work for them. By manipulating the depth or the details, they play the crowd, evoking both imagination and memory.

~

There are really four monuments to the massacre that represent this memory for the communities of descendants and visitors who come to this place to remember. In May 1859 Company K of the 1st Dragoons piled stones over the deceased's' weathered bones. Company K, under the command of Major James Carleton, provided the military escort for southern district

Judge John Cradlebaugh who went to investigate the massacre. Reverently Carleton and his men gathered what remained of the Fancher party and retired them in a mass grave. They carved into a slab of granite a message they hoped the world would never forget: "Here 120 men, women and children were massacred in cold blood early September, 1857. They were from Arkansas."³⁰ Atop the cairn of locally gathered stones the soldiers erected a wooden cross with the epitaph, "Vengeance is mine and I will repay saith the Lord."³¹

Brigham Young visited the site of the massacre in the spring of 1861. He read the epitaph and, as recorded in local legend and in the detailed diaries of Wilford Woodruff, when Brigham Young read the words he said "it should be, Vengeance is mine and I have taken a little."³²

Juanita Brook's grandfather, Dudley Leavitt, often recited this tale to his children. Leavitt stood near the bold prophet of the Lord when he said those words out loud, "Vengeance is mine, and I have repaid." Then without another word, their leader raised his powerful hand, his right hand, to the square. "He didn't give an order... In five minutes there wasn't one stone left on another. He didn't have to tell us what he wanted done," Leavitt recalled, "[They] understood."³³

The monument may have been reconstructed within a few years time. Three years after Brigham Young's visit to the meadows the traveler Lorenzo Brown recorded in his journal that he passed the stone monument at mountain meadows, and he read the inscription on the wooden cross. His description of the cross and the monument varies from the one recorded by Wilford Woodruff three years earlier. "On one side of the cross is inscribed Mountain Meadows Massacre," Brown wrote, "and over that in smaller letters is vengeance is mine & I will repay saith the Lord. On the other side Done by the officers & men of Co. M Cal. Vol. May 27th & 28th 1864. Some one has written below this in pencil. Remember Hauns mill and Carthage Jail..."³⁴

~

Beside the black iron gates that surround the new monument today a wooden fence separates the open land from the visitors trail. Across the field of snow I run light footed as a rabbit or deer, my piercing feet lay fresh tracks. I near a pile of stones. Tracks wave in and out of the mound. I imagine that this is the pile of stones gathered and placed by Carleton's men.

I run further across the field. Wally calls to me from the car. He's eager to get back, to move on, and to see the other monuments on the hill. I want to find some sign of the battle, the spring I envision where the emigrants unloaded their wagons the first night in the meadow, perhaps even the ruts of their wagon wheels across the land. Only snow. I take pictures I'll study later to recall the scene in detail. I'm north of the iron gate. The American flag displays the lack of wind. My tracks and rabbit tracks circle below the small hill I stand on. Invisible beneath the snow are the stories, the history of events in this place.

I want to dig into it. Into the earth. Into the truth. The history in my hands like fresh soil, living, or better yet immutable as stone. I am here so briefly, Wally calling me, my life calling me to move on, but here I want to pause, to remember. I come to this place as a traveler, as a visitor, I come to this memory as a stranger. Yet it is a memory borne in my community, borne in our blood, in our past, in the traditions passed from murderous fathers to forgiving daughters and sons.

But it's a memory we have refused to own.

Some say this spot of land is cursed. Others believe it is holy, sacred ground. I imagine that I put my hands to earth and listen through my frozen fingers to the flood of all that has come before. To the generations that moved over this land, and to the land that moves over generations. Something about our relationship to the places we live, to the places we come to as we travel, something about it touches me, grounds me. I stand in place with a fuller knowledge

of who I am. In the embrace of a historical place, holding the memory that this land carries, I listen for the cry of their blood, their blood crying from the ground for vengeance. I listen. A haunting echo, and in the moment I am unable to face it. I run, run back down the hill, past the pile of stones and intertwining paths, past the wooden fence, and at the iron gate I raise my son onto my shoulders, taking hold of his tiny wet hands.

~

If the soldiers' cairn was rebuilt it was not maintained. Photographs from the first decades of the twentieth century take by Josiah Gibbs show a small remnant. Water was eating away the land. Erosion threatened to wash the memories, the evidence, away. Much of the spot where the emigrant party had camped found its way into Magotsu Creek. Across the field unearthed bones became exposed again to this harsh land.³⁵

Then in August of 1932 William R. Palmer, a local LDS Stake President directed a group of volunteers, seventy-three men, who constructed a wall of stone around the grave that marked the site of the first attack on the encamped wagons. He raised money for the project even though church leaders told him he should leave the place alone. Carefully he led the work of placing stones to stop the erosion from the creek.

Dedication ceremonies held for this new monument took place on September 10, 1932. Palmer explained to a gathering of nearly four hundred people his motives in restoring the site. He did not want to commercialize or advertise this tragedy. Respect for those mistreated dead prompted him. "No living person is responsible in any way for what happened here," Palmer said. He was a man ahead of the times. Moving ground to try and right a terrible wrong.

Juanita Brooks attended the ceremony that day, her watershed study still eighteen years from publication. That day she was not yet Mrs. Brooks, but she rode to the meadow with Will

Brooks, the local post master, and her future husband. She recalled feeling a great desire that day to set things right even if it were only in her own life; to let go of “bitterness, or revenge, or scorn.”³⁶ The feeling may have been there in the hearts of the assembly to reconcile the past, but there was too much still unknown, too much had been hidden, buried and washed away. The monument displayed a bronze plaque with a description of the massacre:

In this vicinity September 7th, 1857, occurred one of the most lamentable tragedies in the history annals of the West. A company of about 140 emigrants from Arkansas and Missouri led by Captain Charles Fancher, enroute to California, was attacked by white men and Indians. All but 17 small children were killed. John D. Lee, who confessed participation as leader, was legally executed here March 23rd, 1877. Most of the emigrants were buried in their own defense pit. This monument was reverently dedicated September 10th, 1932, by the Utah Pioneer Trails and Landmarks association and the people of southern Utah.³⁷

~

The monument which stands on the spot today is void of responsibility. Inside the iron-gated monument the plaque I uncover in the snow says simply that the emigrants “died and were buried here.” The truth, not easily set in stone, remains elusive.

One mile back up the road we arrive at a paved pathway through the snow. Here we follow in other foot prints, now crusted in ice. Wally walks with us and we stop together to read the interpretive signs. Obviously new, I don't believe Wally has seen them before on previous visits. These signs tell the story in more detail. They are not on Church owned property. As I see it, that's really the reason for the monument on the hill overlooking the valley. The church, in the spring of 1965, bought two and a half acres of land; where the wagon battle took place, where the soldiers buried the remaining bodies they found in 1859, and where the monument had been built in 1932. Seven and a half acres are managed by the Government. The Parks association that manages the hillside site, commissioned the creation of a sign plaque. Along the asphalt trail,

beneath a juniper tree, the sign tells the story. "Complex animosities and political issues intertwined with religious beliefs motivated the Mormons," it reads, "but the exact causes and circumstances fostering the sad events... at Mountain Meadows still defy any clear or simple explanation."³⁸

The sign describes the initial attacks and the plot to draw the emigrants out of their fortifications. Of the final slaughter the sign reads: "In a matter of minutes fourteen adult male emigrants, twelve women, and thirty-five children were struck down. Nine hired hands driving cattle were also killed along with at least thirty-five other unknown victims."³⁹

~

I become silent as we approach the top of the hill. The memory is a little too close for me to speak. On a level spot overlooking the valley stands the fourth monument. Descendants of the surviving children met with descendants of John D. Lee in July 1988. The errors of the 1932 monument became the main topic of discussion. Descendants of John D. Lee felt misrepresented, and the Arkansans were not clearly identified.⁴⁰ Plans were laid to erect a new monument of granite from Little Rock, Arkansas, engraved with the names of the victims and the survivors.

Beside the Arkansas granite, on the hillside overlooking the valley, three interpretive markers explain the history of the meadow. September 15, 1990, this monument was dedicated. President Gordon B. Hinkley, then the first counselor to Ezra Taft Benson, participated in the dedication. Many people in attendance at the ceremony that day expected President Hinkley to admit the church's responsibility for the massacre, he did not.⁴¹

Many people criticized the markers on the hill. The language of the markers was too passive: "In Memorium," it reads, "In the valley below, between September 7 and 11, 1857, a company of more than 120 Arkansas emigrants led by Capt. John T. Baker and Capt. Alexander

Fancher was attacked while en route to California. This event is known in history as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.”⁴² The markers don't identify the attackers. Historian James Loewen, in his book *Lies Across America: What our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, pointed out that using the word massacre “guarantees that most tourists will infer that Native Americans did the grisly work.”⁴³

~

Leaving the site of the massacre Diane passes out the granola bars and veggies we packed for the trip. We stop at Diane's grandmother's grave. She was buried in November beside her husband. I cross the snow to the grave stone, and read into the small Sony microphone, the names and dates of their lives. The marker had a picture of a person fishing from a boat, which Grandpa J.C. loved to do.

A monument can only hold so much memory, a fact or two, which may be useful if they are correct, and evidence that once someone cared about this spot of ground or some events that transpired here.

I remember Grandma in much more detail. Not like cold stone, she was warm and loving. I remember sitting beside her in Sunday School, looking down into her face beside me. Her hands rest on her lap, like bullfrogs filled with air, only soft and dry, pink flesh. She laughs and her round glasses push against her round cheeks. She bounces as she laughs, and I am happy beside her.

III

We spend our last night in St. George with Diane's friends Marissa, Robyn and Kevin. Our son, Jensen, plays with their kids and with the cats. Over dinner we talk about the project that brought Diane and I to St. George. It's not the main topic of conversation, but somehow we come around to it. "Wasn't Brigham Young responsible for the Massacre?" Kevin asks.

"That's a hard question to answer," I say. Brigham Young made sure that no tangible evidence survived that could expose his role in it. The execution of John D. Lee was not the least of the cover up. But the question is hard to answer for reasons deeper than evidence. I'm not sure that I really want to know. The deeper I dig into this memory the harder it becomes to face. At first I approached it with excitement, the same morbid fascination that keeps television news corporations in business. The testimony of John D. Lee, given as he stood on trial for the massacre, grabbed hold of my mind and for days that was all I could think about. Saturday after Saturday I retreated to the new university library, to the breezeway on the third floor where I sat in warming light, pondering over the story's reconstruction. Remembering these events became something I lived with, waking in the mornings to my cold cereal, after only four or five hours of sleep from late nights spent reading and taking notes.

Over time I grew comfortable with the story. It no longer shocked me. I could accept that a band of war-painted white men led an attack on a passing train of emigrants, that they tricked the emigrants into trusting submission and brutally murdered them. I even grew accustomed to the image of crimson blood, spilt from the bodies, clotting in dust and drying black like fresh tar on ochre stems of mountain bunch grass. But I wrestled so long with confronting the real cause behind the murders.

Bagley wasted no words. He made no attempt to protect participants, console his readers or justify this church led action. He drove straight to what he believed to be the heart of it. The massacre happened to fulfill a sacred promise. The Mormons made a covenant to atone for the blood of their prophets who were slain.

~

Church leaders, including Brigham Young knew about the massacre almost as it happened. They had encouraged the military excitement that had nearly all the men in southern Utah marching through the streets and drilling in the hills.

George A. Smith visited southern settlements in August 1857. He wore a dark, curly wig. His round face turned red with excitement as his voice boomed from the pulpits stirring the troops. His speeches on that tour came from the two hats he wore as apostle in the church and as colonel in the Nauvoo Legion.

All across southern Utah people waited for the word, poised in preparation for the defense of Zion. Smith said that one word was enough, that the people were willing at any moment to touch fire to their homes, and hide themselves in the mountains, and to defend their country to the very last extremity.⁴⁴ Smith surprised even himself by the words he spoke in the congregations he addressed just weeks before the massacre.

Though Brigham young did not visit southern Utah at this time he sent a letter along with Smith to give to the bishops. In this letter church members were commanded to keep their grain and ammunitions, to sell or trade nothing with their "enemies." Some legends persist of people who were punished for such little infraction as giving an onion to passing emigrants.

In the midst of this melee, Isaac Haight called a special meeting. The men, who meet on Sunday afternoon August 6th, discussed the Fancher party passing at that time through the southern settlements along the California trail. Ostensibly some offence committed by the emigrants needed to be dealt with, surely the meeting had both a religious and military air. The Lord led these Gentiles into Mormon hands and the Mormons were prepared to strike a blow, both showing their might and settling a score.⁴⁵

'The council sent James Haslam to Salt Lake City with a message for Brigham Young. But the southern saints had already determined not to let the party get away.

John D. Lee did not attend that meeting in Cedar City. The following day Isaac Haight summoned Lee to meet him in the town square. Lee left his home in Harmony. Haight wanted to have a long talk with him so they "took some blankets and went over to the old Iron Works, and lay there that night so that [they] could talk in private and safety."⁴⁶

According to Lee, that night Isaac Haight informed him of the council's decision to murder the emigrants, convincing him that "those in authority in the church would approve of the destruction of the emigrant train, if it could be done by the Indians."⁴⁷

One week before the fateful meeting in Cedar City, acting upon the recommendation of Brigham Young and George A. Smith, Jacob Hamblin, newly appointed president of the Southern Indian Mission, led a group of Paiute chiefs to Salt Lake City.⁴⁸ Hamblin and his company arrived in Salt Lake City on September 1, 1857. That night they met with Brigham Young. Young served the United States as superintendent of Indian affairs for the Utah Territory. It was his job to "control the Indians" in order to give emigrants safe passage

through the territory. However, when he learned that President James Buchanan was sending an army under the command of Colonel Albert Johnston to invade Utah, Brigham young chose to strengthen the alliance with the Indians and stand against the Union.

Their meeting lasted about an hour. Before ten or twelve southern chiefs Young laid out his plan to stop migration over the southern trail. Kanosh from Corn Creek was there, and Ammon from Beaver Creek, the presumed leader of the Ute Nation, Youngwuds came from Harmony with Tutsegasbit, the Paiute head chief.⁴⁹ Tutsegasbit and Youngwuds and perhaps other attendants with Brigham Young in Salt Lake participated in the massacre one week later.⁵⁰

~

So what does it mean? I want to ask as I stand before a statue of the Prophet Brigham at the Provo Library. Brigham Young in bronze, shoulders thrown back, feet staggered, poised in action. "Like a lion ready to pounce," Diane says, when I ask her what she thinks of it. In his right hand he holds a cane, but not for support.

~

Juanita Brooks did not place direct responsibility for the event solely on Brigham Young. She reached the conclusion that Church leaders "set up the social conditions which made [the massacre] possible."⁵¹ Brigham Young, she believed, "did not order the massacre, and would have prevented it if he could," but he "was accessory after the fact... he knew what happened and how and why it happened."⁵²

"The complete – the absolute – truth of the affair can probably never be evaluated by any human being," Brooks wrote, "Yet bringing it into light in its proper setting has had some

rewards.” For her one reward came when John D. Lee, who was excommunicated from the church in 1871, had all the rites and privileges of church membership reinstated, more than a hundred years after the massacre.

Brooks came up against many obstacles from her contemporary church leaders as she tried to learn more about the massacre. Near the end of her book she says this about her experience:

In their concern to let the matter die, they do not see that it can never be finally settled until it is accepted as any other historical incident, with a view only to finding the facts. To shrink from it, to discredit any who try to inquire into it, to refuse to discuss it, or to hesitate to accept all the evidence fearlessly is not only to keep it a matter of controversy, but to make the most loyal followers doubt the veracity of their leaders in presenting other matters of history.⁵³

~

When church leaders saw no other way out, they decided to sacrifice John D. Lee. He was facing his second trial, it was 1876. The first, the year before, had never given a verdict. Lee's first defense was divided. Two of his lawyers wanted the investigation to end with Lee and two wanted to prove that he acted under the command of his military and church officers. The prosecution wanted to drive the case all the way to the top, to pin it on Brigham Young.

Before the second trial began church leaders made some arrangements. If Lee were found guilty and executed then the investigations would end. Brigham Young convinced several witnesses to come out of hiding in order to testify. Many had participated in the massacre: Nephi Johnson, the interpreter, Phillip Klingensmith, former Bishop of Cedar city, and Samuel McMurdy, one of the wagon drivers during the final attack. The trial lasted six days. Lee was convicted by an all Mormon jury. Lee faced execution. His appeals were denied.

*No one else was implicated.*⁵⁴

~

We arrive home in Logan on Wednesday night. The following morning I walked to the University, passing the LDS temple. Crossing beneath the hill I still wondered... I prayed... I wanted help making sense of it all. I wanted to understand the massacre, and I wanted to understand my church, the organization, the doctrine, and secrets I never learned in Sunday School. I am certain however, that the church I belong to today, the LDS church in 2006, is not the same church it was in 1857. Their time is a foreign landscape, which we can explore.

It is a mistake to try and project the wisdom and values of our time back into the past as if we expect all people who have ever lived to have understood them. In this way we make villains, flat and static characterizations of complex people. Brigham Young was not a one sided man. He did many good things for his people. He lived as he thought best, serving, as he believed, his God and his fellowman.

The world I live in today is not the world they were born in two hundred years ago. Still, I can't help but wonder and I think it is useful to evaluate, how parallels from their time can be seen in our world today, where the work of death continues to be carried out in many parts of the world, in the name of God, by a lot of "deluded and religious fanatics."

Considering what went on in the mountain meadows of southern Utah is a journey through internal landscapes of my own beliefs and ideals. I ask myself where I would be, if I lived in that time, in 1857, September with the army approaching and with my unquestioning faith in my church leaders. We have all been driven from our homes for the last time, seen our prophets murdered by mobs. Where would I be, if asked to carry the gun? Could I level it and fire, believing I was doing it for Zion, for the Kingdom, for my God and for salvation?

~

“Mormons are still hard put to confront the massacre,” wrote Levi Peterson, the biographer of Juanita Brooks. “If good Mormons committed the massacre, if prayerful leaders ordered it, if apostles and a prophet knew about it and later sacrificed John D. Lee, then the sainthood of even the modern church seems tainted. Where is the moral superiority of Mormonism, where is the assurance that God made Mormons his new chosen people? For many, these are intolerable questions and they arouse intolerable answers.”⁵⁵

~

*Not everyone agreed to the killing. In Cedar City, at the meeting where Isaac Haight, the stake-president, reminded his followers of their covenant to avenge the prophets, and they would do it in defense of Zion. Laban Morrill opposed the council, so did Terry Liston, and so perhaps did others who were confronted with the choice, and refused. Some even spoke out against the decision to attack the emigrants.*⁵⁶

~

Are there any heroes in a tale like this, with so many victims, perpetrators, outsiders, onlookers, and over lookers? Is there anything that redeems this past? Anything that we can live with?

I’m exploring this place, a landscape of history, taking notes, making a map, and as I wade through the muck I look for the sweetness, for the berry patches, because they make life livable, allowing us to accept and endure the past, in doing so we become familiar with ourselves. Who was it that said history is the ingrained substance of the present?

Today the LDS church president, Gordon B. Hinkley, has done something to acknowledge and honor this portion of our past. He led the church in support of reconstructing

the 1999 monument. He engaged in conversation with descendants from all sides. He said that no one knows what really happened that September, he did not say all he knew, but he at least has admitted that it did happen. Hinkley believes the ground where the emigrants' bodies lie is sacred. He treats the place with reverence and respect.

I think about the historians who have worked so hard to bring these dark deeds into light. Juanita Brooks gave her life to it, and I feel to thank her, and to thank Will Bagley. Both have been my companions, my guides, in this journey. Last January, in Chris Conte's office, when we worked out the plan for this project, I never imagined where it would take me, where it has taken me. Into landscapes I lived all my life so close to and yet have never really known.

The truth is here with us but finding it requires engagement, conversation, discussion and debate. Finding the truth takes commitment, time, integrity and desire, because it has to be searched out and dug for with our fragile human hands. Even then we can never hold all the truth, completely. Remembering is what we do. We recall the past and try to make sense of it. Remembering is an art and an act of community, because nothing is truly remembered unless it is shared.

¹ Robert Michael Pyle, *Chasing Monarchs*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 149.

² This braid is the story of the massacre as I would tell it, a composite of the accounts gathered and interpreted by Juanita Brooks and Will Bagley. Throughout the essay this section may be recognized by the unique font. The term "hornets nest" used to describe the state of Deseret was Bagley's invention. The participation of the Indians has been a hotly debated topic. Juanita Brooks believed that the Indians alone, but encouraged by the Mormons, led the first attack on the emigrants: "Lee's statement that the original plan was to stir up the Indians to attack seems to be true. The Mormons were brought in later when it became evident that the Indians alone could not commit the crime" (p95). Will Bagley makes it pretty clear from a variety of sources that the Indians were involved, however, he places the leadership in Mormon hands from the beginning. One Paiute captain, Jackson, said that the Mormons were painted (Bagley, 122).

³ Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadow Massacre*, (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, new edition fourth printing, 1970), xix.

⁴ Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), xiii.

⁵ The participation and role of Native Americans in the massacre is one of the most debated points. Will Bagley gives the names of the two injured "war chiefs," *Blood of the Prophets*, 123. I wonder that in all the accounts I've come across there is no mention of any Mormons injured in the initial attack, perhaps they did arrive later, more likely they were in leadership positions sending others to hold the more dangerous posts.

⁶ Bagley, xviii.

⁷ Ibid, xix.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, xv.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, xvii.

¹³ Brooks, 83. She quotes from John D Lee, *The Life and Confessions of John D Lee, the Mormon*, (Philadelphia Barclay and Co . 1877), 241.

¹⁴ Mary Oliver. *American Primitive*, (Boston Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 3.

¹⁵ Brooks, xxi.

¹⁶ The story of the poisoning of Corn Creek, or the poisoned oxen (or mule), that supposedly enraged the Indians and justified their attack on the emigrant train is obviously locally established folklore. It may have no bearing in truth. Will Bagley thinks these stories are ludicrous, complete lies, obviously inventions of the murderers after the fact. Bagley compares several differing accounts of the poisoning story (106-110 discusses the poisoned spring story, other poisoning accounts are examined throughout the book). Juanita Brooks accepted that there was a group of "Missouri wildcats" who attached themselves to the Baker-Fancher Party, and that the actions of these rough men, as well as their attitudes towards the Mormons contributed to the massacre. If these emigrants had been of a milder disposition, Brooks believed, they may have escaped alive, even though local conditions were so volatile (219). The wealth of the emigrants, seized after the massacre was distributed by John D Lee among participants, much of the cattle may have been auctioned off, and some money went to the Indians (Brooks, 162).

¹⁷ Basing off of the testimony of Philip Klingensmith, who was present at the massacre, Will Bagley speculates about the role of Major Lee in the plotting and the murder. (Bagley, 142) The testimony of Klingensmith appears as Appendix IV of Juanita Brook's book, 238-42.

¹⁸ Davis Bitton and Leonard Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 122-3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 124.

²¹ James Brazzeal of Bloomington, Utah, interview by author, 12 March 2006, tape recording.

²² Wallace Brazzeal of Bloomington, Utah, interview by author, 12 March 2006, tape recording.

²³ These names were given by Juanita Brooks. Samuel Knight gave a sworn affidavit of his version of the massacre, which Juanita Brooks knew of but the first presidency of the LDS church would not let her see Will Bagley also identified Samuel Knight as on of the wagon drivers.

²⁴ The accounts of what happened in those gruesome moments comes from the testimony of these men who were present, from Phillip Klingensmith, the first to tell the story publicly in a legal affidavit early in 1870, and from Nephi Johnson, who testified in John D Lee's trial, also Samuel McMurdy testified against Lee. (Brooks, 69-96)

²⁵ From Juanita Brooks's memoir, *Quicksand and Cactus: A Memoir of the Southern Mormon Frontier*, (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1982); quoted in Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*, p 348.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bagley, 159; quoting from James Henry Carleton, *Special Report of the Mountain Meadow Massacre, by J. H. Carleton, Bevert Major, United States Army, Captain First Dragoons* (57th Congress , 1st Sess , House Doc. 605, serial 4377).

²⁹ Juanita Brooks envisioned this solemn meeting, as "some fifty grim, silent men awaited the arrival of then: commanding officers. They had already agreed on a number of things, the most important of which were the story they would tell their shocked neighbors and the stand they would take before an outraged nation" (96). Will Bagley recited Nephi Johnson's account that after they had buried the dead, "the men formed a half circle to hear a great many speeches." John D. Lee spoke, and so did William Dame, Phillip Klingensmith, John Higbee, and Charles Hopkins. They praised God, and thanked Him "for delivering their enemies into their hands." The officers stressed the significance of the event, and the privilege it was for these men to participate in avenging the blood of the prophets. "The men closed the circle" they solemnized the covenant, never to tell what they had done or seen, "Lee recalled the men unanimously voted to kill anyone who divulged the secret." The only one they could tell without danger to their lives was Brigham Young. Bagley, 158; Quoting from Nephi Johnson's testimony in Josiah Gibbs, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*. (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Tribune Publishing Co., 1910), 51, and from William Bishop ed., *Mormonism Unveiled; or the life and confessions of the late Mormon Bishop, John D Lee*, (St. Louis Bryan, Brand & Co , 1877), 247-8.

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- ³⁰ Bagley, 229. Quoting from J. H. Carleton, *Special Report*.
- ³¹ Brooks, 182; quoting from the diaries of Wilford Woodruff under the date of May 25, 1861, held in the Archives of the LDS church historian, Salt Lake City.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Brooks, 183; quoting one of her grandfather's sons who was quoting his father, Dudley Leavitt. All three of Leavitt's sons verified that their father repeatedly retold this account.
- ³⁴ Brooks, 183; quoting from the journal of Lorenzo Brown.
- ³⁵ Bagley, 351.
- ³⁶ Ibid, quoting Levi Peterson, *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian*, (Salt Lake City University of Utah Press and Tanner Trust Fund, 1988), 84-85.
- ³⁷ Brooks, 221.
- ³⁸ Will Bagley discussed the ownership and history of the site in detail in the epilogue of *Blood of the Prophets*, 363-82. Interpretive sign, Mountain Meadows Monument site, viewed by author 14 March 2006.
- ³⁹ Interpretive sign, Mountain Meadows Monument site.
- ⁴⁰ Bagley, 368.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 367-70.
- ⁴² Ibid., 370.
- ⁴³ Bagley, 371. Quoting from James W. Loewen, *Lies across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: New Press, 1999), 94.
- ⁴⁴ Bagley, 84, drawing from the reports in the *Deseret News* 23 September 1857.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 53-9.
- ⁴⁶ Brooks, 77. Quoting from John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; the Life and Confessions of John D Lee*, 218).
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Bagley, 112. The conversations that took place during their visits with "the great Mormon chief" remained a mystery to Juanita Brooks. She never gained access to the minutes of their meeting. However, Will Bagley did. A short note taken by Dimick Huntington, who acted as interpreter for the meeting when Brigham Young gave all the cattle of emigrants who crossed the southern trail to California to the Indians, thus Young gained their allegiance. Bagley calculated that in order for the massacre to take place when it did, the perpetrators had to begin planning sometime around the first of September.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 113.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 128.
- ⁵¹ Brooks, 219.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Brooks, 217-8. Here she also refers to a specific incident where she tried to visit with President David O. McKay, the church leader had recently been given several signed affidavits from participants in the massacre that had been kept in southern Utah by Judge David H. Morris. At the church office building she was refused entrance to see President McKay. Later J. Ruben Clark, one of McKay's counselors, read the records and decided that Brooks should not be allowed to see them (See foot note 9 for pages 217-8).
- ⁵⁴ Extensive discussion of the trials of John D. Lee and the decisions and involvement of church leaders can be found in Brooks, 191-8.
- ⁵⁵ Levi Peterson, "Juanita Brooks: Historian as Tragedian," *Journal of Mormon History*, 3 (1976) 47-54, Will Bagley quoted from page 52 in *Blood of the Prophets*, 381-382.
- ⁵⁶ Brooks, 54. Family legend says that Morrill's life was in danger because of the stand he took against his officers. The night of the meeting, on his way home, Morrill felt impressed to travel a different way. He avoided two men who waited to attack him. From the Journal of Laban Morrill, typed copy available in the Brigham Young University Library. (Brooks 53-5).



LDS monument at Mountain Meadows dedicated September 1999



Wally, Diane and Jensen at the 1990 monument built by the descendants of survivors and Mormons



Jensen and I with statue of Brigham Young