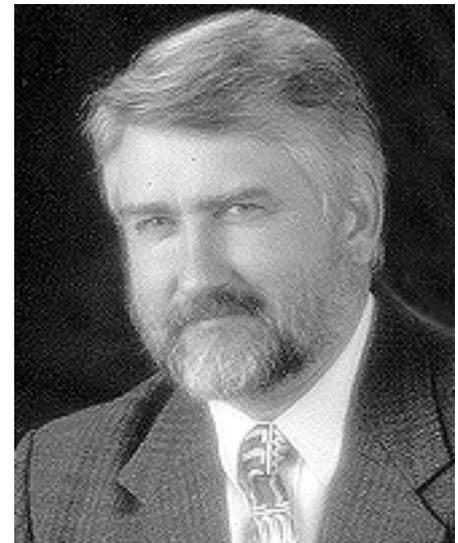


## Shining New Light on the Mountain Me

### ◀ 2003 CONFERENCE

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Gene Sessions

August 2003

### Shining New Light on the Mountain Meadows Massacre

**Editor's note:** This is a transcription of a FAIR Conference presentation by Gene Sessions. As with most transcriptions, this one includes artifacts of speech that are not always included in written material. There are also a couple of places where the original recording was inaudible; those have been marked as such.

This is a very serious subject, I'm charged with talking to you a little bit about the Mountain Meadows Massacre and what's happening these days with the literature on the subject.

I think most of you have seen, if not all of you, have seen a tremendous upsurge in publications on this atrocity. Hard to tell exactly why that has happened. I think there are a number of ways to understand that. One is that increasing attention came upon the state of Utah because of the Olympics; there were numerous mainstream national publications that paid much more attention to Utah and Mormonism than normally do. You may have seen some of the articles that appeared pretending to be balanced views of the state and Mormonism.

Some of you may have noticed in magazines like *The New Yorker* that, in that particular case as I recall, an 11-page article on the state—six pages devoted to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and two pages to polygamy, the rest about the state of Utah and its wonders.

This event has become in recent years something that a lot of people know about who didn't know about it before. Part of the reason for that is President Hinckley who, in 1998, decided to build a new monument at the Meadows on the spot of the original army cairn that held the partial remains of 34 victims buried there by the army in May of 1859; and I want to get back to that story in a minute but I'm trying to outline for you a few reasons in my mind that this has gained so much attention recently.

Another reason of course is the publication of Will Bagley's book. Will began work on his book well before the Hinckley initiative on the Meadows. He was employed by a former Mormon in California who, frankly, wanted to pin the Massacre on Brigham Young. He put an ad in the Salt Lake Tribune asking for applicants to write a new history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and in the course of interviewing several who applied (inaudible) except for Br. Bagley. Will was, by his own words to me—this is first hand words—the only one who said that he could and would pin it on Brigham Young. So Will was hired, he quit his job at Evans and went to work full-time writing a new history which was published by the University of Oklahoma Press last year.

I must tell you up front (you can throw tomatoes or whatever you want at me) that I was one of the readers that the University of Oklahoma Press sent a manuscript and I recommended publication because I believed very strongly and still do that Br. Bagley had done intense research and that it was fairly exhaustive. He solved whatever he could see and looked very deeply, plumbed very deeply, to find much information that Juanita Brooks did not have when she published her landmark book in 1950. And so I was impressed with that and recommended that the Oklahoma Press publish the book but I cautioned the Press that it was an anti-Mormon polemic and that I did not agree with Will's conclusions and we'll talk more about that some more here if time allows.

His book did very well in the first printing, it was very quickly into a second printing, and then shortly after all the hoopla over his book which ascribes the motivation of the murderers to Brigham Young ordering these people killed to avenge not only Joseph and Hyrum but also Parley P. Pratt who had been murdered in Arkansas the May before the Mountain Meadows Massacre occurred in September—by the way on September 11. The anti-Mormons on the web are making a whole lot out of that right now—the two atrocities happening on the same day and so on all committed by mad fanatics, religious fanatics.

In any case, we could probably waste the whole time here talking about why there is so much interest today in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. I grew up in Ogden, Utah. The

first time I heard about it was from a Catholic classmate who was feeling pressure at having to take Utah history in the seventh grade which really turned out to be half a year of Sunday School (laughter) and his parents who to immunize him against Utah history told him about the Mountain Meadows Massacre and I was told about that when I was in the 7th grade and I dismissed it and later in high school heard about it again, went to my seminary teacher who said, 'It's a lie, it didn't happen,' and pretty much forgot about it until I was a history student and found out that it did indeed occur.

So I think there's been a long period since the execution of John D. Lee in 1877 where Mormons would just as soon not talk about this and successfully did not. But beginning in 1990 when President Hinckley supported the building of the monument up on the hill there, if you've been there, the Dan Sill Hill monument which has all the names of the people we know were killed there; and then in 1999 when a second monument was built at the bottom of the draw on Church property with Church funds suddenly it became alright to talk about that and so there's much discussion in Mormon circles about the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

I've been invited to speak in stake priesthood meetings on the subject. I'll never forget one evening, a chapel packed as full as this room and more, I was supposed to speak for forty-five minutes and was there with them for an hour and forty-five minutes; and finally had to say that I was tired and wanted to go home! The Institute director at Weber called his staff together and had me give them a two-hour presentation on this so they'd know about it.

So it's okay now to talk about this but let's be honest, for years and years, this was a subject that we just didn't talk about and when we did we either said, 'Well that was John D. Lee and a bunch of renegade Indians,' or we'd try to ascribe it to some external force rather than to face the fact that some 50 Mormons taking orders from local ecclesiastical leaders actually went out and tricked these 120 people out of their encampment with a white flag and then proceeded to murder them in cold blood with the exception of 17 small children.

So it's a very, very hard thing to discuss especially if you're a Mormon and especially as I know some of you are descended from people who were involved in this.

But anyways, we could talk about the history—I've got my own perspective on this. I think most of you know the great historian Carl Becker said (this was pre-feminist days) "every man is his own historian," I guess we could say 'every person is his or her own historian.' And we all have to make up our own minds about what happened there that week.

It's an awful story, you can't put a smile face on it. This was cold-blooded murder of innocent people. Occasionally someone will come up to me and say, 'Well don't you think they

deserved it?' And, no I don't think they deserved it. I don't care how many of the stories you believe about whatever the immigrants did to get killed, nothing they did came anywhere close to justifying the murder of little children and the oldest child saved was six-years and 11 months old. Everyone older than that was murdered. In fact most of the murdered people were women and children. So there's no justification. Even if you wanted to make some justification for killing the men, it breaks down pretty fast. It's just- there's no justification for the murder of these people.

So it's an ugly, ugly story.

Then we get to the place where, alright what are we faced with today in 2003 as non-Mormons and ex-Mormons and anti-Mormons and others take a look at this story and try to make sense out of it? I think you also, in this group are much more aware than I am, there are a lot of people out there who find not only Mormonism to be abhorrent but find religion itself to be not healthy at all, in fact not benign but dangerous.

I have not had a chance to read Krakauer's book *Under the Banner of Heaven* but it's getting lots and lots of attention. It's selling like hotcakes, particularly in the east and California where people are more aware of Mormons and it is a sensational story about the Lafferty case. The message seems to be there, as I've talked with friends who have read it and read the reviews, that religion-organized religion, in this case Mormonism-can and too often is dangerous and a bad thing rather than just something that if you're not religious you might want to ignore.

So we've got a big problem here as historians and in your case, if you want to defend Mormonism. I'm a practicing Mormon, I don't smoke, drink or chew or go with girls who do (laughter). I give of my excess income once a month to the guy with the suit on at Church and so forth. So I'm with you to a point.

But as a historian, our job is to let the chips fall where they may and I've looked at this story for many years, long before I became involved in the Mountain Meadows Association in 1998 so I've been involved in this whole mess for the last five years and I think I know what happened there.

I don't agree with Will Bagley. I certainly don't agree with Sally Denton. Her book outsold Bagley's book in a couple of weeks; I'm sure Will's hurting over that. Denton's book is just trash frankly. The first chapter is about stuff that I know about first hand and I barely got through it with my stomach contents intact. But, it sells well and I'm getting e-mail from people all over the country because I'm on our website linklist, all the e-mail that people write into the Mountain Meadows Association's website I get their message and dozens and dozens of people writing in and saying, 'I just finished Sally Denton's book.' One man

said, 'I hope that the American people within the next ten years wake up and drive the Mormon Church out of existence.' Two sentences in his message: 'I just finished Sally Denton's book' and then 'let's drive them out of existence.'

It's pretty hard to look at this story without having revulsion against the men who did it. I don't have ancestors who were there. Mine were here in Utah but they were all up north, and some of you who have ancestors who were there, it's awful! And, I must tell you that I become very angry when people want to excuse what these men did.

Do I understand why they did it? I think I do. But I still don't excuse it and I've got a friend with whom I spent hours and hours and hours discussing the Mountain Meadows Massacre—he's a non-Mormon who has read voluminously on the subject and it's interesting to get his perspective. And he doesn't agree with Bagley or Denton.

We have a similar view of what happened but... I don't know, I'm trying to make you see this is just not fun. It just isn't fun. I've told my wife who was about to divorce me over it sometimes, 'I wish (a) that it had never happened, and (b) that since it did I don't know about it.' I mean I really wish ignorance on myself which being a college professor makes me something of a sinner! Ignorance is bliss (the old cliché).

What I'd like to do for a few minutes and then we'll open this up to questions is refer you to a particular incident that occurred—well two instances that occurred—that I think puts a perspective on how the non-Mormon/anti-Mormon quote/unquote or slash/slash—whatever you want to call people—how they view this.

In October 1998 I was invited with the rest of the Mountain Meadows Board—including descendants of the Bakers and the Fanchers and the Dunlaps and others—to visit with President Hinckley in the Church office building. President Hinckley was with us for about fifty-five minutes. It was an amazing event. He talked about his history with the mass graves, taken to the Meadows the first time in 1947 by his father; they walked the ground silently, shed tears. President Hinckley said he walked away knowing that this was a sacred place and so he had a feeling for the incident.

And then in 1998, President Hinckley was at Dixie College to dedicate the pioneer camping ground there on the campus, asked his folks to take him up to the Meadows, was ashamed at the condition of the Church property there. Called us together to say, 'What do you want to do?' and the result was we built this beautiful monument down there that some of you I'm sure have seen and I hope most of you have seen. It is a replica of the original cairn that the army constructed over the rifle pit where 34 partial remains were chucked in May of '59.

In the course of preparing to put that new monument there, we made every effort in the Association to discover where the remains were because we knew that cairn had migrated a bit over the years—farmers had knocked it down, vandals had carried off rocks and so forth. Brigham Young ordered it knocked down once according to Dudley Leavitt, he was there with a party in the 1860s and they came up to it and he ordered it destroyed.

So we were worried that there were bones that we might discover and the descendants of the Bakers and the Fanchers and others had made it very clear that they did not want that to happen. So we did a lot of cores. We had an archaeologist from BYU, Shane Baker, come down and do some cores to try to find the- whatever graves might be there. Long story made short, he missed. He (inaudible) the grave by six inches and the second scoop of the backhoe dug them up. That was on August 3, 1999.

This resulted in a firestorm of activities. The remains, and all kinds of confusion about what state law had to say about these things, the sheriff came immediately and pronounced it was not a recent murder site, so it was an archaeological site and et cetera.

Eventually the remains wound up in BYU. I saw them just a few days after they were brought to BYU for the public archaeology folks to try to make some sense out of what they had. The partial remains, they found 29 individuals. We've known for years that some of that grave had washed away and we've had accounts of farmers seeing bones sticking out of the ground and so forth.

So anyway, eventually because the BYU people didn't have the people to take care of it they transferred the cranial matter to the University of Utah where an archaeology graduate student (now has her Ph.D.) Shannon Novak was commissioned to take a hard look at the cranial material to see what she could determine from the cranial matter.

In the meantime, the descendants in Arkansas became very angry. They wanted them re-buried immediately and enormous pressure began to come upon us in the Association to try and keep this whole thing afloat—to get the Church and the state and whoever else we could to get those bones back in the ground—so we worked hard to get that done.

And finally, the week before the dedication of the new monument which was to take place on September 11, a Saturday, 1999, a man in Harrison, Arkansas named J.K. Fancher who is friends with Dixie Leavitt the governor's father, got on the phone and called Dixie and said, 'Your son's got to intervene.' So the governor called the state archaeologist and within a few hours the bones had been removed from the University of Utah and brought altogether and on Friday morning, the day of the funeral that had been scheduled for the bones, they were brought to St. George and brought to a funeral parlor where they were placed in four small little caskets and buried that afternoon in a Baptist funeral.

You should've heard all the Mormons there trying to sing "Amazing Grace." Then the next day you should've heard all the non-Mormons trying to sing "We Thank Thee O God for a Prophet." There was some humor.

Anyway and the end of that story is; then the story is that in March of 2000, a yellow journalist by the name of Chris Smith at the Salt Lake Tribune (he's not; his skin's not yellow it's what he does) published a three-part series in which he announced rather bald-faced (he knew better) that the bones were full of secrets that would have been revealed if the archaeologists had been allowed more time with them and that the Mormon Church conspired with the governor, who was a descendant of one of the killers. (Although the governor's ancestor claims that he was just a picket rider, most of the people who were there were just there. Picket riders, eh? Didn't do anything!) That the bones were then, under this conspiracy, quickly replanted.

The Associated Press and every other wire service in the world picked that up and here's the message that went out to the world and which is now in all these books (Krakauer's book, Denton's book, et cetera): The bones came out of the ground, they were revealing the nasty truth that the Mormon Church didn't want out there and so the Mormon Church conspired to get them buried quickly so those truths could not be revealed.

That bit of misinformation has been enormously damaging. It is one of those myths that all of you who understand history know how these things happen shows up in one book and pretty soon a graduate student puts it in his dissertation and pretty soon it's in ten other books and pretty soon it's the truth.

So the "truth" is, my friends, that we had twenty-nine partial remains that were going to tell us the Mormons—not Indians—killed these people and because the Mormon Church didn't want that information out it conspired to get those bones buried quickly in order to hide the truth. That is the "truth" now.

And if you want to stand up in front of a crowd like I've done over and over again and try to persuade folks that isn't the truth—you're wasting your time. But let me tell you in just a couple of sentences how you don't have to take my word that it's not the truth.

In 1859 of May of that year, Major Carleton came up out of California with a bunch of guys. They'd met some other guys from Camp Floyd who were already there. And Carleton, surveyed the remains that were strewn all over the Meadows by wolves and wolverines or badgers or whatever they are. Major Carleton said this; it's on our website,<sup>1</sup> it's everywhere. It's been public record for 144 years: "...nearly every skull I saw had been shot through with rifle or revolver bullets."

So what truths were there in the bones? Well were they smokers? Did they; were they malnourished? What did they eat? It didn't tell us who killed them any better than we already knew. Who killed them? Who had guns in Iron County in 1857? Who? The Mormons. Did Carleton's sentence tell how they were killed? Yes, a *coup de grace*, they were shot in the head. So the idea that there was a new truth here, that the Church had to be afraid of is just hogwash.

And secondly, it is also hogwash there's (in 10 minutes on the phone you can demonstrate this) J.K. Fancher is not a Mormon. He's a distinguished citizen of Harrison. He has no sympathy for the Mormon Church. He's a lateral descent of Alexander Fancher. He'll tell you, 'I called Dixie and said, you better get your son to bury those bones or there's going to be hell to pay.' That's how it happened. And Mike Leavitt called the state archaeologist and said, 'Turn them over to those people so they can bury them or there's going to be trouble.'

But the truth is not the truth anymore because Chris Smith said otherwise and so forth.

Let me get to the last incident. I was not in favor of the Olympics. You say, 'So what?' Well what the 'so what' is, is as soon as I saw everybody celebrating about the Olympics and as soon as I heard from my president at the University that we would be dismissing classes so they could use the ice sheet there for something called curling my wife and I began to save our money and our sky miles and planned a trip to Maui for twenty-two days (laughter) figuring that, 'Hey it's the last chance I'll ever have to go to Maui in February in my racket unless I take a sabbatical and even then I probably won't be able to.'

So we were in Maui, and the second day before we came home, the Olympics were over. We were coming home on Tuesday, it was a Monday, I think the closing ceremonies were on Sunday. I'm sitting on the beach and this very piece of-whatever it is-rings. (Laughter) It rings and it's John Hollenhorst, Channel 5 News, and he says, 'Hey what do you think of this lead sheet they found down at Lee's Ferry?' I said, 'What lead sheet?' He says, 'Where have you been man?' I say, 'In Maui, I'm still in Maui.'

Well you're all familiar with the lead sheet and my friend Steve Mayfield here and I have had a lot of conversations. I don't know if you'll be able to see this. You've probably seen this and some of you may not be able to see this real well, but here's a pretty poor rendition of what this-but anyways here's what the thing looks like and a park service worker at Lee's Ferry before the Olympics found this thing in a building at an old fort there. Steve tells me they're pretty sure it was put where they found it in about 1998 or '99, something like that. Right Steve?

It's an old piece of lead; recent metallurgical studies have shown that it was mined in the (inaudible) Ozark Plateau in southern Missouri not far from the homeland of the massa-

cred people before 1865. The script on it, in case you haven't seen it, and I--this is my own attempt to try to copy it (Steve's done better work) and his friends, George Throckmorton and others, says that basically, 'Lee's at the Paria River. It's January of 1872, he's sick, he's tired, he knows he's going to be taken pretty soon but he doesn't really care--he'll take the blame, he doesn't fear death. Brigham Young through George A. Smith ordered this done.'

Well of course this created an enormous media frenzy, 'smoking gun,' 'boy this is it, now we know for sure, Lee admits it' and so on. Well somebody right away, one of my friends, wrote and said, 'Well didn't Lee say that in the *Confessions of John D. Lee/Mormonism Unveiled?*' and the answer is yes but nobody paid any attention because everybody knew his lawyer wrote that book. Got any lawyers in here? We won't go further with that. (Laughter) But we'll say this, I think you know that Lee's lawyer was working *pro bono* 'almost.' The second trial, his deal with Lee was, 'I'll defend you but I get your book and the rights to your book.' And then he had the book for several months after Lee's death and no one doubts that he manufactured much of what's in the latter part of it because it's so inconsistent with the rest of his work.

Anyway, long story made short, I jumped in really quickly and said, 'It's a hoax.' And my reasons were (inaudible) handwriting analysis, my reasons were that the message is inconsistent with Lee's diary at the same time. He was at the Paria but he was not saying stuff like this. In fact the day after this was supposed to be written Lee went on a five-day horse-packing trip with one of his sons looking for the location for a new ranch and was really looking forward to it. He'd just finished two houses, he put a (inaudible) in one of them and he had everything going for him at that moment--he really thought he was out of the woods and he was okay.

And if you read the rest of his diary, and six months on either side, he's very defensive about Mountain Meadows. If anybody suggests Brigham Young does it he calls them a damn liar, I could tell you some specific incidents but I read very carefully the whole journal and six months on either side when I finally got home. I told Hollenhorst from Maui that I thought it was a hoax and he read it to me over the phone, I said, 'That's not Lee. It just isn't Lee.'

Well later on--misspellings are another issue--later on, Steve and his friends in the criminal justice/criminology racket did handwriting analysis and so on and found it entirely inconsistent with Lee not only when he wrote on paper but when he writes things scratched into rocks and things like that--it's just completely different.

He used ampersands instead of the word "and;" he didn't use the dashes. This hoaxster tried to imitate his double line of capital letters, didn't notice that Lee only did it on the verticals instead of; and did not do it on the horizontal so it's a clumsy hoax.

Well, I bring this to your attention because to this day more than a year later people like Sally Denton and numerous others are still blowing this all over the place as the 'smoking gun' despite the fact that I think people like Steve and his associates and people in my end of things, historians like the late Dean May, he and I talked this a lot, are just utterly bemused that anyone with a brain in his head could continue to think that this is a genuine historical document. And there's always the chance that it is, but if it is, boy there's an awful lot of things we've got to explain to believe that it is.

Now why is this? And I'm going to conclude with this. I find it enormously amusing that people who hate Mormons and who hate Mormonism believe that the best way to attack Mormonism is to attack somebody like Brigham Young. This may not be a popular thing to say but I think one could very easily look at what happened at Mountain Meadows—what really happened at Mountain Meadows. It wasn't a conspiracy; there was no order from Salt Lake to kill these people. What really happened at Mountain Meadows may call into question some other flaws that existed in the nineteenth-century Mormon Church; other flaws that exist in the way decision-making took place and so forth and make criticism that way. But for some reason people from Bagley to Denton to Krakauer and whoever else—Chris Smith; the web is full of this invective. The only thing they can do to satisfy their bloodlust is to go after Brigham Young on this. It seems to me stupid. If I were one of those people, so what? A conspiracy manipulated by a rotten guy like Brigham Young, it seems to me much less damning than if you try to call attention to some other things that may have been going on in Mormonism at the time that will allow ordinarily decent men to commit such a crime.

Anyway the point is I think for you folks and your interest, this is a good example it seems to me of how people can pick up a piece of history, some of it accurate—much of it inaccurate—twist it, turn it just a little bit. It becomes a powerful tool and there are literally thousands of people out there now who reading these books think they now understand the real nature of nineteenth-century Mormonism and nothing could be further from the truth.

And by the way Steve has a whole bunch of photographs where the Lee lead sheet was found and pictures of the location, the man who found it, better pictures of it other than I showed you, so Steve I'm sure you wouldn't mind afterwards if people want to come up and ask you questions about it.

The information just continues to come in—Steve nod your head or shake it if I'm right or wrong—is that this is a very, very bad clumsy hoax but nobody wants to believe that outside of Mormonism. Everybody wants desperately for this to be. We've got a former Mormon who is now a born-again Christian secretary down the hall from me and I was preparing some materials a year ago to give a talk and she came in and she saw that and she said,

'Oh wow that's great can I have copies of all that?' I said, 'Well, I'm sorry Carol; it's a hoax.' And she said, 'You're kidding.' That brought her down to tears!

I don't know what else you'd like me to say about that except that, and my own belief is, let me summarize this way—that looking at incriminating statements, corroborating those incriminating statements the participants made for years afterwards, looking at other evidence that is incontrovertible—this was a bad decision made by local leaders. One bad decision followed by another. It's like you teach your kids: you tell a lie, you've got to tell another lie to cover up the lie you just told and another lie to cover up the lie that you told to cover up the first lie. It goes on and on and on and that's what happened that week in September of 1857 in Cedar City.

But I'll also mention to you that the Glenn Leonard, Richard Turley and Ron Walker book is as I understand it finished. Some of you may have better information on that? Glenn Leonard, the Church Museum Director; Ron Walker from BYU; and Richard Turley, the Director of the Archives of the Church—they have had full access to everything the Church has including the Jenson papers, including the Morris affidavits and so on that neither Bagley nor Brooks were allowed to see and Denton didn't even come to Salt Lake to ask if she could see.

And those materials, by their promise in public, will be available for the public to peruse when their book has been published will actually mean (inaudible) and I've had the privilege of seeing much of that manuscript and I'm enormously impressed with what those men are doing. I think it's going to be an honest, painfully accurate depiction of what happened there and the cascading series of bad decisions and events that led to this horrible atrocity committed by Mormons with the help of the Paiutes.

I also believe without any question, even though the Paiutes might deny loudly that they were involved, that there indeed were. At the beginning of the attack; at the beginning of the week somewhere in the neighborhood of three hundred Paiutes—there may have been only a handful left by the end of the week when the actual murders took place—but they were involved from the beginning and anyone who suggests otherwise is just missing enormous amounts of evidence.

So that's my view; and I also believe, when I was reading Will's manuscript, that if you accept his thesis then you have to deny that just about everything we know about what happened down there. It doesn't make any sense in light of what we know happened that week: the decision-making process, the people who were involved, all that has to be just entirely ignored if you believe that it was a conspiracy hatched in Salt Lake and conveyed there by George A. Smith.

So that's my own personal view on it. I hope this is the kind of presentation you were hoping for, I wasn't really sure exactly what you wanted from me today but I think that summarized it pretty well.

**Q:** I'm sorry but I've come to this discussion very late and I just want to know what is the evidence or non-evidence that there were rapes, that there were women and children who were seriously harmed before they were murdered?

**SESSIONS:** Okay most scholars I respect don't think there were such events occurred, unless there were Paiutes who took people away from the scenes of the killings. And the main reason that we don't believe any of those stories is because it happened so fast. One scholar—Robb Briggs from California who has done a really fine study of this from the point of view of an attorney—made this statement which is kind of chilling. He said, 'Whatever you say about the Mountain Meadows Massacre it was really carried out well. It was timed beautifully, it was carried out with precision, there was correlation. They wiped them out in just a few minutes and there wasn't time for any of that to happen.' So those who suggest that I think they're going to have to revisit their thinking. I don't accept the accounts of those kinds of events for me are specious. That doesn't say they didn't happen, but it doesn't seem to be likely at all.

**Q:** My question relates to Brigham Young's involvement. Is there any; does the historical evidence vague enough that the connections to Brigham Young are based primarily on your bias? I mean just taking those vague events and if you're against Mormonism well okay then maybe we can jump to this conclusion, or is it pretty much just bad research?

**SESSIONS:** Some of all of that. In the case of Will Bagley, he started with the premise that Brigham Young ordered it done and that's been suggested for years.

Let me tell you this, if you go to Arkansas today and talk to the descendants—and I know dozens of them now—they all believe Brigham Young ordered it done. They all do and they're; when you say well why did he order it done? They almost all of them believe it was done for greed. That Brigham Young was in a tough spot, and the Mormons were poor and this train comes through with all this money and cattle (inaudible) killed for their money.

So if you decide that at the beginning obviously, and then you can go back and find—'Oh aha! See, oh yeah, see?' And that's what, in my view, Bagley did. And I tried to change his mind about that for years as he was working on the book, I was pretty good friends with him and we took a couple of trips to the Meadows together, and we had a lot of time to sit in the car together. And I could see him making that very mistake you decide upon.

As far as evidence, again, on the first of September Brigham Young met with a bunch of

Paiutes; sub-chiefs brought up to Salt Lake by Jacob Hamblin. Dimick Huntington wrote in this journal (he was in the meeting) that Brigham Young said, 'You can have the cattle on the California road.' And Bagley makes a lot of that as a smoking gun kind of thing. In fact at one time he thought that was going to make his book. But as it turns out he also told the Utes that, he also told the Shoshone that. He was trying to get the Indians on his side in the coming Utah War; he thought there was going to be a big fight. Other than that, I don't know of any verifiable evidence at all that Brigham Young ordered that.

The only other piece of the story that might suggest that he did is that just before the massacre happened, George A. Smith was sent on a long speech-making trip through Southern Utah. We don't know a lot of what he said in his speeches. We know about some of what he said but they were tough speeches about standing up to the army and the Americans and it was incendiary. And so, there are those who think that Smith was sent down there with that kind of invective and then when he got done with his speech, he'd pull a stake president or a few bishops aside and say, 'And by the way don't hesitate to kill anybody you can.' But that's all speculation.

I think most scholars who are honest about this, the trail doesn't lead to Brigham Young—it just doesn't in my view at all.

**Q:** For anyone who is interested in the context that this all took place, read Gene's book on his biography of Jedediah Grant.<sup>2</sup> It's an excellent background to all of this.

**SESSIONS:** It's out of print.

**Q:** Go find it. I certainly agree with your assessment of Bagley's book. As I read it I found it is all this prodigious research but Will just can't seem to say probable, I mean, he always says *probable* when he should say *possible* if not definite. His bias would get in the way.

What would your advice be to a roomful of LDS apologists when they are confronted with the argument that, okay, and this is argument certainly Brooks made and certainly Bagley made that, whether or not Brigham Young ordered it done, he was involved in the cover-up. What's your advice?

**SESSIONS:** I don't think there's a way to apologize for that because frankly, he was. And I think if you want to apologize for it, the only thing you can do is say, well let's figure out why he committed the cover-up—and he did.

In my view if the Civil War hadn't happened, you and I might not be here today and the Cougars might not be playing football because the momentum generating in Arkansas in

1860 for example, to come out here and do a full scale investigation was getting really intense. Then the Civil War happened and the whole thing just went away and it wasn't until the early '70s that it kicks back up again and by that time the crime is 15 years old and so yeah, there was a cover-up and it was done well.

In fact some people like Will like to point to statements Brigham Young made in the aftermath, like it had to be done and, when Dudley Leavitt in his diary described the tearing down of the monument there was a cross on it that quoted the Bible that, "Vengeance is mine...saith the Lord"<sup>3</sup> and Brigham Young said, according to Leavitt, 'It should read, "Vengeance is mine, and I have taken some." Bagley makes a big thing out of that as well.

Now that's all part, in my view, of the cover-up. He had to put forth this rhetoric that said, 'Keep your mouths shut. This had to happen.' But, it's clear to me from other accounts that we have of Brigham Young in late '57-early '58 that he was furious about it. As you know he knew how to swear and he used a lot of nasty words to describe how mad he was that this had occurred.

The Lee family tradition on... (I'm positive some of you are in the Lee family. They're everywhere.) The Lee family tradition is that when Lee went to tell Brigham about the event, Brigham already had some inkling that his worst fears were true and that it had been done by Mormons and not the Indians.

But he was very, very angry. And then in the aftermath of that meeting with Lee, he was despondent for days. We've got solid evidence for that. Then his reaction was, and to answer your question, well we've got to keep under- this would kill the Church. This is going to set the Church back, this could destroy it. So, surely, he did an excellent cover-up. The only thing he could do was say was there a good reason for it and if you were a practicing Mormon well, to save the Church. I guess that's the best-

**Q:** Why did the massacre happen?

**SESSIONS:** In my view there's one word that tells you why and the word is fear; these guys were scared. All the settlements had been pulled back, Cedar City was ordered to stand. It was the last major settlement between here and California going on the southern route. There were a couple of little, you know, Harmony and there were a few people living down in Washington down that way-but Cedar was it. There were six hundred people in all of Iron County between Parowan and Cedar City. These people were absolutely scared to death. They had been hearing for years the wind over the passes that the Californians were going to come and wipe them out.

You want to have a great (inaudible) if you're interested in this. You want to see how

blessed you are to just get the anti-Mormon stuff that's out there now. Pick up the *Sacramento Bee* for the 1850s—hardly a week goes by that in that paper, there isn't an editorial saying, 'We need to raise an army and go wipe the Mormons off the face of the earth.' And the folks in Cedar were scared, in my view, out of their minds that that was exactly what was going to happen.

On Wednesday, some militiamen who were coming out—the massacre happened on Friday—on Wednesday night some militiamen were coming out to- they were told when they were rounded up they were going to go out and bury some people that got killed by the Indians and some of them were coming out and near Pinto Junction they came upon three people from the party making their way back to Cedar City for help.

And not knowing what's going on, they killed them. They fired on these people. They killed young William Aiden who was, had been a Mormon and was leaving with the party to come to California. Two of these guys, there are various accounts, some say two got away there— or one got away, anyway at least one got away. They killed all three of them eventually. But on Wednesday when only one got away they were just convinced that he made it back to the wagon circle and were telling them, 'This is not Indians, this is Mormons.'

And I don't doubt at all that that was the final straw that broke the camel's back. The decision was made the next day to kill them and it was made out at the Meadows; and Major Higby reported in various accounts, 'Kill everyone who is old enough to tell the tale.' And Mormons interpreted that as people at the age of accountability so they tried to pick the kids who looked like they were under eight to save, and killed the rest.

So in my view it was naked fear—they were just scared to death that these guys were going to go on to California and report that Mormons had attacked them and this would bring them in a mob out of California. That's my view and the view of many other historians as well.

**Q:** First of all who do they think did the lead sheet, is that still linked to Hofmann?

**SESSIONS:** Steve? You can come up here. Steve's done a lot more work on that than I have.

**STEVE MAYFIELD:** First of all, it's alright. As Scott mentioned, at Sunstone this next week on Thursday morning, the forensic examination that was done on the scroll and the background will be presented by George Throckmorton and myself. So that's okay. First of all, does anybody not recognize George Throckmorton? George Throckmorton is a trained forensic document examiner; he's presently the manager of the Salt Lake City Police Crime Lab where I work. He is also one of the two forensic document examiners that exposed the Mark Hofmann forgeries and he was invited by the Park Service to look at the scroll.

Now back to your question, who did it and if it's a forgery which to get to the end—yes it is. I can give you a hundred dollar answer or the ten-cent answer and they're both the same!

Who did it? I don't know. Like Brother Keller said, 'I don't know. We don't know.' Part of my presentation next Thursday will be discussing the possibilities that Hofmann did it or not. After the discovery of the document last year, KSL TV and Deseret News asked Jack Ford down at the State Prison to, 'Ask Mark.' And so Jack Ford who is the PR man for the State Prison system, and who says he does this on a monthly basis where he'll go over and ask Mark, 'Will you talk to the press.' And he says, 'No,' and he comes back and says, 'Sorry.'

So he, on behalf of the press went and asked Mark, 'Did you have anything to do with the scroll? Yes or no question.' And Mark's answer was, 'I have nothing to say about it at this time.' That's where it stands. I wrote a letter two weeks ago to Mark asking him the same question and it came back to me with a stamp on it. We cannot deliver without his full booking name and number, like you know, this famous guy in prison and they don't know where he is (laughter). The letter came back okay so. Come to Sunstone and we'll discuss the matter.

**SESSIONS:** Linda Sillitoe who did the book *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders* and now works at Weber in our library and I had a long chat. I asked her what she thought and she initially thought it could very likely be Mark. You may ask, 'Well gosh he's been in the slammer since '86-7, but there was, Steve right? The possibility that it was put there...

**MAYFIELD:** What I have here is a photocopy. In 1988-89, Mark Hofmann attempted suicide—this is the second one which they took him out to the hospital. At that time he was in the hospital in Salt Lake they did a shakedown in his cell. That's basically where they search for things. They came across a one-page piece of paper on stationary from the prison in which Mark had listed: 'Mormon and Mormon-related autographs I have forged' and on the other side was 'Non-Mormon forgeries' and down near the bottom he has listed 'John D. Lee.'

You start asking anybody who have dealt with the forgeries says, 'We have nothing that we are aware of that—John D. Lee.'

This was in '89. So when this comes up, the right reaction is, when you find something like this where was Mark and has he ever been down there? Now the problem you have down there at the Fort, down there at Page, one of the investigators, Farnsworth, says, 'In their investigations, the background- his whereabouts, (inaudible) information that he was ever down in that area.' I've even asked Mark's ex-wife Doralee the same thing, she said, 'No, he's never been down there.' So if he had anything to do with it he did not most likely did

not put it down there.

**SESSIONS:** Okay. Thanks Steve. The point that I was going to make was that Linda said, 'Well if they ask him, he'll say I don't have any comment about that.' And I said, 'Well that's too bad.' Which is what he said. And then she said, 'But it wouldn't matter if he said yes or no, you still wouldn't know! (Laughter) So that's the fix we're in with Hofmann.

I don't think...somebody said, 'Oh it was probably done by Will Bagley.' (Laughter) We disagree about a lot of things, in fact we're not really very close anymore because he got angry because I was telling the story about, 'I can pin it on Brigham Young' I guess. But I don't think...I really don't think so.

**Q:** I'm just wondering how well Will Bagley's book has been received in the historical community?

**SESSIONS:** Depends on who the historical person is. Dave Bigler who is a former Mormon, born-again Christian thinks it's the best thing that's ever been done or will be done. Dean May, who died a few months ago who was the Dean of Utah History in the state I believe (inaudible) Thomas Alexander, the two of them probably share that title, have little regard for it. Tom's comment to me was, 'This is history by rumor.' And so it depends who you talk to about it.

**Q:** You said that it was fear basically that caused the September 11 executions. They were afraid the wagon trains would get back to California and say it was the Mormons. But what caused the initial attack that started off the whole thing?

**SESSIONS:** Good question. As I was answering the other question I realized I was skipping past that.

There was a meeting held on Sunday, the High Council met, and the initial decision was not to attack and there had been a lot of trouble with these folks coming down the road and the same motivation, it seems to me, was involved: 'If they get to California and tell the Californians how weak we are and how poorly defended we are, we're in big trouble.'

I think that also provoked the initial attack. There was a sense of anger at these folks for what they'd done but there was also this sense of, 'Gosh, if they get out of here and tell the folks in California, 'Yeah we went through there and we can do whatever we want. We think they're poorly armed, they're poor, they're living in 10x10 dugouts--no problem.'"

See Brigham Young's gamble was, and you know this in the Utah War, that he could bluff

his way through to a good conclusion. Will (inaudible) he thinks Brigham Young thought that Christ was going to come and save us from the mob and that's part of his thesis but most historians think he was trying to bluff his way by convincing people that the Indians were with us; that we had...we were well armed. That anybody who comes in here we're going to use them up and the Fancher party knew that was all a lie and if they got to California, same thing.

**Q:** You mentioned about a book that is just completed and will be coming out very soon on this and, by Greg Turley? I mean he's-

**SESSIONS:** There are three scholars.

**UNIDENTIFIED:** It's going to be awhile.

**SESSIONS:** Is it?

**UNIDENTIFIED:** From what I understand the final manuscript will be in the spring so it will be some time after that.

**SESSIONS:** Okay, for those of you who can't hear, that the final manuscript appears to be still being done.

I met with those guys and did a commentary at Kirtland in May at the Mormon History Association—they were predicting then (inaudible) summer and I assumed it was done. I think they were finding more material and wanted to make sure they were very complete in what they're doing.

**Q:** I haven't finished my question- because you know, I had briefly stopped (inaudible) Turley and some information, wanted to make sure that it was being utilized. Can you tell us who had, (inaudible) writing this book?

**SESSIONS:** It's defensive. The Church came to the conclusion with Bagley's book that there had to be another version of the story that the Church brought forth. My advice to them was to bring in a non-Mormon scholar, for example, (inaudible) a highly respected historian in Arkansas. They chose not to do that. I think that was a (inaudible) mistake but, to make up for that they have announced rather loudly that, 'Here's our book, once you've read it, everything we looked at is available.' It will be really hard for those guys to tell any lies even if they were inclined to do so.

**Q:** Don't you think there will be a lot of good information and, like, for us that are here now

to not really form any conclusions until we—if we have a sincere interest in wanting to know what really is happening—to get a hold of that book and read it?

**SESSIONS:** I'm telling everyone—friend or foe alike—hold your judgment until you read their book and it's going to tell, I think, a very close story to the truth.

**Q:** What were the three authors again?

**SESSIONS:** [Glen] Leonard, [Richard] Turley, and [Ronald] Walker.

Thank you.

## Update

**Editor's note:** The following information was provided by Gene Sessions on February 6, 2007:

When I spoke at the FAIR Conference some time ago on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, I talked about a good friend from Arkansas named J.K. Fancher. J.K. read the transcript of my speech on the FAIR Web site and contacted me to correct a couple of statements I made about his role in the 1999 reburial of remains at the Meadows. I indicated in my remarks that J.K. "is no friend of the Mormons." I only meant by that remark that he is not a Mormon apologist and on the other hand is certainly a concerned member of the victims' family. J.K. definitely is a friend to the Mormon people and has spent his life kindly and positively relating to Mormons and participating in bridging the gap between Mormons and descendants of the victims of the Massacre.

I also reported false information I had received that J.K. had been involved directly in getting Governor Leavitt to release victims' remains for reburial at the Meadow on September 10, 1999. J.K. tells me categorically that he was not involved in that fashion at all and asked me to post a correction on the FAIR site that would fix this bit of mythmaking I had unwittingly perpetuated.

In spite of this

correction to that detail of the story, I stand by my contention that the bones were reburied quickly to satisfy the wishes of their kin and not to hide the truths they might reveal about the Massacre.

Anti-Mormons continue to report that the Church conspired with the State and the Mountain Meadows Association to get the bones quickly back into the ground because they threatened to tell a more damaging version of what happened. This is a blatant falsehood that has become accepted history. Thank you for allowing me to correct these statements.

—Gene Sessions

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Brevet Major J.H. Carleton, *Special Report on the Mountain Meadow Massacre, U.S.A. May 25, 1859*. (last accessed on 9 December 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Gene Allred Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (University of Illinois Press) 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:19.

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