

# Mountain Meadows Massacre

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**By Dave LeFevre**

**Description:** The Mountain Meadows Massacre in 1857 is perhaps the most tragic event in Latter-day Saint history. A large group of emigrants passing through Utah were murdered by Church members in the Cedar City area. The reasons behind the murders are complex. While understanding them does not justify or condone their actions in any way, it does help us appreciate the situation that could lead otherwise good people to make horrible choices. That is the story of Mountain Meadows.

## Introduction

Richard E. Turley Jr.:

“Mountain Meadows Massacre is arguably the worst event in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in the state of Utah. For that reason it’s been a topic that’s been very uncomfortable for many people to talk about. We felt that in order to face this topic head-on and in order to make it more comfortable for people to talk about, to promote healing, we just had to face it. We had to uncover all the facts wherever we could find them and then let the evidence tell the story for us. Only by facing this story head-on, directly, could we finally expect to get to a point where real healing could take place.”

(<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/additional-resource/interviews-with-authors-of-massacre-at-mountain-meadows>)

Elder Henry B. Eyring, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“The truth, as we have come to know it, saddens us deeply. The gospel of Jesus Christ that we espouse abhors the cold-blooded killing of men, women, and children. Indeed, it advocates peace and forgiveness. What was done here long ago by members of our Church represents a terrible and inexcusable departure from Christian teaching and conduct.”

(<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mountain-meadows-massacre>)

May 1859, Brevet Major James Henry Carleton came to Mountain Meadows with the charge to bury the bones. With Jacob Hamblin’s help, who lived at the north end of the meadow, he found the bones of 32 who had become disinterred, probably by wolves who dug them up, scattered around the valley. Hamblin told them he had buried 120. They buried the bones in a grave dug at the site of the encampment, and piled stones on top of it twelve feet high, adding a 12-foot cross that said, “Vengeance is mine: I will repay saith the Lord.” Then also carved on a stone slab: “Here 120 Men, Women, and Children, were Massacred in cold Blood, in Sept., 1857. They were from Arkansas.”

Investigating the events while he was there, he concluded that the Mormon story that the Indians had done it was false, and said:

“The idea of the melancholy procession of that great number of women and children—followed at a distance by their husbands and brothers—after all their suffering, their watching, their anxiety, and grief, for so many gloomy days and dismal nights at the corral, thus moving slowly and sadly on up to the point where the Mormons and Indians lay in wait to murder them; these doomed and unhappy people, literally going to their own funeral; the chill shadows of night closing darkly around them, sad precursors of the approaching shadows of a deeper night; brings to the mind a picture of human suffering and wretchedness on the one hand, and of human treachery and ferocity upon the other.”<sup>1</sup>

Later he also wrote to another officer, “I would to God that General Clarke with an adequate force, and with his hands unfettered by red tape, could have the management of those *damned* Mormons just one summer, and that ‘I could be there to see.’ Major, it is no use to talk or split hairs about that accursed race. All fine spun nonsense about their rights as citizens, and all knotty questions about Constitutional Rights should be solved with the sword. Self preservation, the *first* law, demands

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<sup>1</sup> Walker, Turley, and Leonard, *Massacre*, 5.

that this set of ruffians go out from amongst the people. . . . Give them one year, no more; and if after that they pollute our soil by their presence make literally *Children of the Mist* of them.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Environment

Persecution had followed Joseph Smith all his life—in Kirtland, Missouri, and Nauvoo. The Saints had been driven from their homes and lost all in both Missouri and Illinois, and had seen state militia kill their beloved Prophet.

Leaving Nauvoo behind, the Saints settled in the Great Basin area starting in July 1847, and founded Salt Lake City and soon many other cities in the area. Almost from the beginning, though, Mormons were at odds with the federal government in how the new Utah territory should be run. Eight members of a US army group were killed by Indians in 1853 but a local jury (Latter-day Saints) dismissed most of the charges, arousing suspicions of collaboration. In December 1854, soldiers and citizens got in a fight when soldiers began wooing local young women. When the soldiers left, 100 Mormon women went with them. Judges and surveyors sent by the government had strong disagreements with locals; Utahs charged them with corruption and the government officials went back to Washington complaining of belligerence and lawlessness.

Fundamentally, Mormons came to Utah to find autonomy and peace and felt like the government officials were taking away their ability to self-govern. But the territorial system of the time gave them few rights, treating them more like colonies. Clashes between government officials and locals took place in *all* territories at this time, not just in Utah. But the Saints’ desire for independence and distrust of government officials accentuated the problems.

In 1856-1857, Brigham Young realized that many of those who had come west had slackened and launched a great reformation among Church members. People were called to repentance through a ‘home teaching’ program, and local authorities even went into people’s home to search them for evidence of sinful behavior. This kind of extreme behavior was especially manifest in southern Utah, away from the tempering eye of leaders in Salt Lake. But the reformation had the desired effect—Church attendance was up, tithing was increased, and more people entered into polygamous marriages, a benchmark of faithfulness for many in that day.

It was polygamy that caused the most problems for the Saints as they lobbied for statehood in Washington. James Buchanan, elected president in 1856, won on a platform that was against slavery and polygamy as the “twin relics of barbarism,” and was determined to rid the country of both. Accordingly, on 28 May 1857, Buchanan’s administration declared Utah “in a state of substantial rebellion” and sent the military to get things under control, including replacing Brigham Young as governor and putting the territory under military control.

On 29 May 1857, the Saints learned of the tensions in Washington from John Bernhisel and George A. Smith, who had come from the east. They did not yet know about the army, but knew that the federal government planned to replace Brigham Young. When the next mail arrived from the east, it came with the terrible news that Parley P. Pratt, one of the Twelve, had been assassinated in Arkansas. Parley had married as a plural wife Eleanor McLean, a women estranged from her husband (a drunk who beat her) and who had joined the Church in San Francisco. Parley had gone east on Church business but also with her to try and reclaim her children, who were in the care of her parents. Unfortunately, he encountered Hector McLean, Eleanor’s ex-husband. Pratt was arrested, but because he had broken no laws, he was released by the judge. However, the next day, Hector and some friends attacked him and Hector shot and stabbed him, then shot him one more time for good measure. Pratt died later that day, 13 May 1857. Because it happened in Arkansas, many assumed the Mormons would have their revenge, and for a long time it was a standard excuse for the massacre.

## The Utah War

It was the ten-year anniversary of the Saints coming to Utah—24 July 1857—and Brigham Young decided to celebrate in style. Hundreds gathered at Silver Lake up Cottonwood Canyon for a two-day celebration. They had much to celebrate. After two years of drought and grasshoppers, 1857 was looking to provide a good harvest. At the lake, there was dancing, fishing, and hiking in the cooler mountain temperatures. Brigham Young and others gave celebratory speeches, they fired canons in celebration, and everyone enjoyed themselves. Until in the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup>, when five horsemen arrived with news that

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<sup>2</sup> Walker, Turley, and Leonard, *Massacre*, 5.

as many as 2,500 government troops were on their way to Utah with a new governor and orders to put down the Mormon rebellion. In addition, all federal mail had been cancelled, so communications with the government were cut off. The army was led by General William S. Harney, a man with a reputation for extreme violence and torture. Counseling with other leaders, Young and others feared a return of mob violence like they had experienced in Missouri and Illinois—but this time they determined to resist.

Returning to Salt Lake City, Young and others decided to declare martial law, store up as much food as possible to be able to resist a siege, and stop selling food, ammunition, and other needed supplies to passing emigrant trains. On 2 August, his first sermon after the news, Young declared, “Woe, woe to those men who come here to unlawfully meddle with me and this people.” He promised that God would protect his Saints. Heber C. Kimball said, with some humor but more spunk, “Send 2,500 troops here . . . to make a desolation of this people! I have wives enough to whip out the United States.” The leaders saw this as perhaps the beginning of the end. Brigham said, “The time must come when this kingdom must be free and independent from all other kingdoms...Are you prepared to have the thread cut to-day?”

The plan was not so much to fight but to follow a scorched earth policy. If the army approached, the Saints would burn Salt Lake and other cities to the ground, and take all the food and animals into the hills and hide. The army would find nothing to eat and no place to sleep except the wilderness. The second part of the plan was to partner with the Indians. The Mormons had already worked hard to have good relations with the natives, but now Brigham Young wanted to enlist their help in harassing the army as it approached. He hoped they could be enough of a pest to annoy them and slow them down.

Daniel H. Wells was the commander of the Utah militia. Following Brigham Young’s lead, he issued orders for local militias to drill, get their guns ready, and rally the people to the cause. They were to report people who gave grain or other supplies to “any Gentile merchant or temporary sojourner.” But most important, they were cautioned to “Avoid all excitement, but Be ready.”

George A. Smith was an apostle and Church Historian at this time. He was also the leader of the effort to settle southern Utah and had family in Parowan, and was the military commander of the south part of the territory. He left Salt Lake in early August on a mission to spread the word of preparation all through the south. Traveling through all the various Mormon settlements of the day, he preached the same message—save your grain and ammunition and don’t deal with the Gentiles. He told of the coming army and told them to be prepared to flee into the mountains with their families, livestock, and food supplies, burning everything behind them. “We will haunt them as long as they live,” he promised, “unless they live longer than we do.” Then more sternly he concluded, “I say damn the man who feeds them; I say damn the man who sympathizes with them; I say curse the man who pours oil and water on their heads. . . . We must trust in God, for if we trust in any one else, we shall find ourselves the losers.”

## The Train

In 1857, thousands were heading west, more than any year previously. Most were off to California. In the aftermath of the gold rush, which started in 1848, there were thousands in California who were settling in to farm and raise cattle, an especially profitable business. Many took large herds to the west to either sell right away for a quick profit, or start a ranch for a long-term business. One such group was a collection of families from Arkansas, led by Captain (John) Jack Baker. Baker’s sons had been to California already and had good success selling beef. Returning home, they determined to bring the whole family along and convinced many others to join them as well. Jack took the lead. They were bringing hundreds of head of cattle and a large number of wagons and supplies—a very well equipped train. They joined shortly with another group led by Alexander Fancher. Fancher had been to California already three times and was a seasoned traveler. He brought four wagons and about 200 cattle, along with \$2000 in cash to get started in the west.

The parties more or less traveled together along the route, leaving Arkansas on the Cherokee Trail until arriving at South Pass in June, then Fort Bridger in July, and finally Salt Lake City on 3 August 1857. They hoped to buy provisions and ammunition in Salt Lake, but because of the recent war alert, few would sell to them except some fresh produce that wouldn’t store and small amounts of flour. This was a cause of friction that only grew as the party went south. They seemed to have temporarily joined up with some rough men from Missouri who harassed the Saints (which later played into the justifications for the

massacre) but that didn't last long as the Baker-Fancher group were mostly peaceful ranchers. The wild Missourians seem to have gone on the northern route to California while this group determined to take the more familiar (to them) southern route.

While waiting in Salt Lake, a few other smaller groups heading south joined the train, bringing the total up to about 140. Fancher was the clear leader. The road south mostly followed the same route I-15 does today—Provo, Nephi, Fillmore, Beaver, Paragonah, Parowan, and Cedar City. From Cedar City, there were two roads south. Most took the more western route through Pinto and Mountain Meadows because there was plenty of grass for grazing livestock. The other route went through Harmony and down to Washington (St. George was not founded until 1861).

At each stop along the way, the emigrants tried to buy supplies but were mostly turned down. Places to graze cattle were now closely guarded by the Mormons—the last time Fancher and others had been through, southern Utah was mostly empty, but the recent settlements put pressure on the limited resources. Conflicts arose in several cities as the train tried to get food, graze their animals, and the like. In Provo, they were escorted out of town by the militia; In Payson, they were greeted by large numbers who urged to keep moving. In Fillmore, the angry emigrants began to issue threats, and local leaders had to hold people back from fighting. By the time they got to Cedar City, their frustration was very high.

Somewhat ironically, at Corn Creek (just south of Fillmore), the group crossed paths with George A. Smith returning from his preaching mission in the south. The two groups camped about fifty yards apart. With Smith was Jacob Hamblin, who would later play a role in the massacre. Smith spoke with them and later said they were nice enough but used bad language and rough conversation. Hamblin directed them to Mountain Meadows, where he had his home and which was the best place to rest their animals before moving into the desert south. At least some of the train had already passed through the Meadows before on previous trips. It was here that the odd incident with a dead cow or ox happened, which later led to charges that the emigrants had poisoned the water and thus poisoned some local Indians. The likely cause was just some kind of disease (anthrax?) in the animal, which may have got in the water when it died, and did poison the Indians who ate some of the meat. But it's simply not possible for the train to have carried enough poison to have done what some accused them of. Still, the incident left a mark and was remembered later as part of the justification for the Indians being angry with the train.

Arriving at Parowan, the city was once more inhospitable and refused to deal with the outsiders. A few defied the ban and sold them flour and other supplies, but it was not nearly enough. They were quickly harassed by the local militia, under the leadership of the military commander, mayor, and stake president William H. Dame. Dame was thirty-eight years old at this time. He was perceived as an honest, kind, and hardworking man. Meanwhile, rumors were starting to fly that another army was coming up from California in the south, and another might come out of the hills east of the settlements. Everyone was suspicious and nervous.

Finally, the emigrants arrived at Cedar City, the largest city in the southern settlements at this time. Founded as an iron colony just a few years previously, Cedar City has quickly grown to about 1,000 people, but it was still very rugged and rural. Most lived in or near the fort, which had a main square in the middle where all business was done. The leader in Cedar City was Isaac C. Haight. Haight was a long-time Church member and had been one of Joseph Smith's body guards that destroyed the Nauvoo expositor and went with him to Carthage jail. He went with Parley P. Pratt as they explored southern Utah in 1849-1850 and longed to settle in the area. He served a mission in England, brought back a large group of converts and \$37,000 in tithing and funds. Finally in 1853, Brigham Young sent him south to live and he settled in Cedar City to run the iron company. Haight was 44 in 1857.

Living on the edge of civilization, these frontier settlements were full of fear and rumors about war, troops, and "Meri-Cats" as the Indians called people from America. One of the bishops of Cedar City was Philip Klingensmith, who had heard from people coming south about the tensions the current emigrants had triggered in other settlements, including the poisoning at Corn Creek. Haight and Klingensmith were feeling defensive against the Fancher party before it even arrived.

Finding a farmer outside of town willing to sell them wheat, the group brought it into town to be ground into flour at the mill. The miller asked as payment a cow, an exorbitant price. This angered the emigrants, who swore and threatened (according to reports) to harm and kill the citizens of the town if they didn't get their grain taken care of. They were also upset that they couldn't buy needed supplies at a local ironworks store. It didn't help that they were able to buy some local alcoholic beverages and were drinking the whole time they were waiting and shopping. They went to Haight's house and loudly

complained to him about the whole situation. Later some remembered that one or more men claimed to have been in the mob that killed Joseph and Hyrum or that drove the Saints from Missouri. People claimed that the emigrants threatened to join the coming army and help kill the Mormons again.

Whether these actual words were said or not, tensions were clearly high and the Cedar City Saints felt threatened in some way. However, nothing the emigrants said or did could ever justify what happened next. As a result of their threats, Haight ordered John Higbee, the town marshal, to arrest and fine them for their actions. But there were too many of them for Higbee to control. The men left town angrily, but not before they killed two chickens and took them with them. When the woman who owned the chickens confronted them, a man pulled a gun on her and told her to back off. The men had thus broken and defiled the law, but insulting and threatening a woman was the last straw for many—the code of honor in western society at that time simply required a response.

We only have the Cedar City side of the story—and one that was self-justifying and given many years later. We do not have the emigrants' side. However, under the circumstances, we can certainly empathize with their frustration at being low on food, grain, and other needed supplies, expecting to be able to purchase them in Utah (and having plenty of money and goods to trade) but mostly being unable to do so. Their very ability to get to California was being threatened. It is not hard to imagine that in their state, they could have felt justified in some theft or at least threatening remarks to get something of what they desperately needed.

## The Plan

The leaders at Cedar City debated what to do about the group. In retrospect, they all later said they should have just turned the other cheek and let them go. But in the heat of the moment, they felt like a response was required of these men who had broken the law and harassed their women. It's important to note that while threats were made, no one was harmed, and the laws broken were not serious ones. But the threats felt very real and immediate to a group of people isolated, living under threat of war, and deeply concerned for their own safety.

They asked William Dame in Parowan what to do. Dame was the resident military commander (with George A. Smith in Salt Lake). Haight wanted to use the militia to go to the camp and arrest the men but needed Dame's permission. Dame took counsel with his leadership and sent the reply: they have injured no one, so let them alone. If they commit acts of violence, then inform me and we will take action.

Haight did not accept this counsel, believing that Dame was out of touch with the threat he was facing. He called his own council. Haight appears to have understood Brigham Young's counsel about using the Indians more directly—don't hold them back from attacking Meri-Cats. Since he did not want to directly defy Dame, he determined to use the Indians instead to attack the emigrants. His leadership agreed (though some dissented) and determined to arm the Indians and charge them to go after the emigrants—not to murder them, though some might be killed in the attack—but with the goal of taking away their livestock as a punishment. The best place would be the canyon leaving Mountain Meadows, where there was a steep decline and a narrow canyon. The Indians could easily hide, attack quickly, and get out before the company could do anything. Such attacks were not uncommon in the area and travelers had to always be on the lookout. It seemed like a good plan.

The one person required to pull off his plan was John D. Lee. John was also a long-time Mormon and like Haight, had served as one of Joseph Smith's body guards, then Brigham Young's. Over the years, Young and Lee developed a close relationship, finally resulting in Lee becoming Young's adopted spiritual son (a common ecclesiastical relationship at that time). Young sent Lee south right away and though his quick temper and loose tongue got him in trouble several times, he was a good pioneer and a hard worker and did much good in southern Utah. He was sent to Harmony to work with the Paiute Indians there and build relationships, which he did well, though he didn't do well with other missionaries who finally moved their headquarters to Pinto, a few miles away, to avoid too much contact with him. His job became to teach the Indians how to farm, and he settled into that role. He was 44 when he got the request from Haight to come to Cedar City—his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday was the day before the first attack.

While waiting for Lee, Haight sent other men to spy on the train and start the conversation with the Indians, including Higbee and Klilngensmith. All parties returned to Cedar City on Saturday, 5 September, though Lee arrived the night before, at which

time Haight had a private talk with him, describing the abuses of the emigrants and outlining his plan. Lee agreed that a response was needed but warned that once the Indians got started, it would be hard to keep them from killing many in the party. Haight determined that he was not concerned about that, because that would be on the heads of the Indians, not his own. He emphasized that no whites should be part of the attack, or at least known to be part of it. Later both men said the other was the more aggressive in this conversation; however, neither suggested backing down or stopping the whole thing (though Lee claimed at one point that he was forced to obey Haight and Dame, who were his superior military officers).

Haight also later enlisted Nephi Johnson, an Indian interpreter, to help rally the Indians in the north while Lee went south. The Indians were offered guns and powder to perform the attack and the promise of plunder when it was over—clothing, guns, horses, and cattle. They convinced the Indians that these people were enemies and would kill the Indians if given the chance. The Indians in the end agreed, but only if Lee led them in battle. Seeing no alternative, he agreed. To secure his support, they took Lee's adopted Indian son, Lemuel, hostage until the battle was over. Lemuel was thus a distant witness to whole affair.

## The Attack

On Sunday, 6 September, his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday, Lee returned to Harmony and got help lined up there, both white and Indian. When one man questioned the orders (which Lee explained during a talk he gave in the Sunday service), he explained the threats of the party to the people of Cedar City and compared it to Missouri and Illinois. When that didn't work, he threatened the man. He asked for a sustaining vote and got it from the majority, who were convinced mostly because Lee said Haight and Dame were behind it. He gathered the Indians, put on his best military outfit, and marched off toward the south end of the Meadows at about noon. Along the way, they recruited more Indians, with Carl Shirts as his interpreter. Some of the whites with Lee decided to go along and watch, and came along later.

Meanwhile, in Cedar City, Haight held a council on Sunday afternoon. He recounted the threats of the emigrants and coming of the army, tying the two together. Several were stunned, and even more so when they discovered that Dame in Parowan had said to leave them alone. The chief opposition came from Laban Morrill, a member of the high council. He challenged Haight to ask Brigham Young what to do first and all agreed to follow that suggestion. Morrill went home thinking that the council process had worked and saner heads had prevailed. Haight seems to have sent two men to tell Lee to wait, but they took their time, not thinking the attack was going to happen for several more days anyway, because the emigrants were not nearly ready to leave the Meadows.

But for whatever reason, Lee decided not to wait until the company moved further south, but decided to move forward with the attack Sunday evening while they were still camped near the spring at the south end of the meadows. Later he blamed it on impatient Indians, saying he could not hold them back. But witnesses claimed it was him leading the charge. The plan was to attack before dawn on Monday, while they were still sleeping. The Indians would creep up from the south and then rush them. But for some reason, they delayed the attack after getting in position, and people were up starting fires and making breakfast. Some of the dogs starting barking, alerting them to the danger. Lee tried to take out one of the herdsman on the edge of the camp, but his gun misfired and the man ran, alerting the camp. Lee had to chase him down and shoot him in a tent. Surprise was mostly lost, and while a few were killed, most quickly pulled the wagons into a circle and make a quick defense, firing back and killing some of the Indians.

During the attack, the two messengers from Cedar City arrived at the Hamblin ranch at the north end of the Meadow. They could hear the gunfire and realized it was too late. Learning from Elliot Willden, who was staying at the ranch, that two of the party had gone north looking for pine tar for the wagons, the two men followed after them. They killed one instantly by shooting him in the head, but the other escaped and returned to the emigrant party, somehow getting through the Indian defenses. Now all the Arkansas party knew that white men were involved in the attacks, not just Indians.

When the Indians pulled back, the emigrant party chained their wagon wheels together and dug deep pits behind the wagons, creating a strong wall around their makeshift fort. Then they dug another ditch in the middle to keep people down and out of the line of fire. They buried their dead within their wagon-fort and tended the wounded. They had enough food but no longer had access to water or sanitation, and were quickly running out of ammunition.



The Indians were angry—they had braves killed and wounded and had no plunder to show for it. Even Lee had narrowly escaped, with a bullet hole in his hat and sleeve. Assessing the situation, Lee realized he could not be successful without help. He left the Indians to watch the party, saying he would be back with reinforcements. He soon met Carl Shirts who had been sent south to get help. He had 150 more Indians and the other white men who followed after Lee.

## The New Plan

Haight learned later on Monday about Lee's failed attack from an Indian messenger. This was not the plan he had conceived; he didn't know what to do. He sent one rider, Joseph Clewes, to the Meadows to confer with Lee. Clewes' letter told Lee to back off, get the Indians away, and protect the emigrants from further harm. Another rider went north to get counsel from Brigham Young, though the letter to Young only spoke about an Indian attack. This second rider was James Haslam, a young carpenter and musician. Both men took off quickly. Haslam's ride was amazing—he was told he had four days to go 500 miles to Salt Lake and back. When he stopped at Parowan, Dame gave him a letter saying that all bishops and military commanders should supply him with whatever horses and supplies he might need.

Meanwhile, Dame, now knowing at least that there had been an attack, determined to send aid to the victims. He sent messengers to Haight to determine the situation, but Haight was vague, just saying he had heard the rumors of an attack. In reality, Haight had already sent a group of militia to the Meadows, under Higbee's command. On the way, they encountered two men from the emigrant group who had escaped to get help at Cedar City. After pretending to listen, they opened fire, killing both. Their instructions were clear—damage control at all costs.

On Tuesday morning, before Lee returned, the Indians had again attacked the emigrants, wounding more on both sides and killing one Indian, but successfully stealing about 200 cattle. Lee said he told them not to attack any more, but they thought it was ridiculous, and attacked again that evening. Later, however, the Indians claimed that Lee led them in the Tuesday night attack.

At this point, the emigrants clearly knew the Mormons were involved. Some argued that the attackers should wait out the emigrants—they would have to come out for water or kindling for fires, or would finally surrender before starving. The Cedar City group, who had killed the two men they encountered, assessed the situation and headed back to Haight to report, leaving the others at the Meadows to sit and wait.

Higbee reported the messy situation to Haight. People had died and the train knew Mormons were involved. If the emigrants were allowed to continue to California, the Cedar City men would all pay a steep price. In fact, they feared for the lives of the entire community. More travelers would soon be coming through the Meadows and soldiers could be very close. They had to act fast. Haight rode north to Parowan to confer with Dame.

Dame called a council and Haight told of the emigrant situation but without implicating anyone from Cedar City. They all concluded to send away the Indians, gather up as much stock as possible, and see the emigrants on their way. But after the council, Haight pulled Dame aside privately and gave him the true story. Haight told Dame, however, that most of the emigrants were already dead, killed by the Indian attacks. Convinced that the consequences of this being known were too great, Dame gave the order to kill the remaining members of the party.

Haight went back to Cedar City and called out the militia. Publicly they appeared to say they were going to bury the dead, but all took their guns and their shovels. Now Haight called on Nephi Johnson, who wanted nothing to do with the whole affair at this point. Johnson said he was forced to go by military orders but others objected and stayed behind, so his story is confusing. The men left Cedar City about noon on Thursday.

At almost the exact same time, James Haslam arrived in Salt Lake City and entered Brigham Young's home. He read the letter from Haight, told Haslam to sleep for an hour and come back. His reply has survived:

Dear Brother,

Your note of the 7th inst is to hand. Cap Van Vliet acting Commissary is here having come in advance of the army to procure necessities for them. We do not expect that any part of the army will be able to reach here this fall. There is only about 850 men coming, they are now at or near Laramie. A few of the freight trains are this side of that place,

the advance of which are now on Green River. They will not be able to come much if any farther on account of their poor stock. They cannot get here this season without we help them, so you see that the Lord has answered our prayers and again averted the blow designed for our heads.

In regard the emigration trains passing through our settlements we must not interfere with them until they are first notified to keep away. You must not meddle with them. The Indians we expect will do as they please but you should try and preserve good feelings with them.

There are no other trains going south that I know of if those who are there will leave let them go in peace. While we should be on the alert, on hand and always ready we should also possess ourselves in patience, preserving ourselves and property ever remembering that God rules. He has overruled for our deliverance this once again and he will always do so if we live our religion, be united in our faith and good works. All is well with us.

May the Lord bless you and all saints forever.

I remain as ever your Brother in the Gospel of Christ.

Haslam immediately set out for his ride back to Cedar City.

## The Massacre

The Cedar City militia arrived Thursday night at the Meadows with the new orders. Higbee said that Haight and Dame had given them. They were to lure the emigrants out and destroy them all, except the youngest children who were too young to tell tales. If the Indians could not do it alone, then the militia was to help. Nephi Johnson interpreted, and the Indians agreed to the plan. They then explained the plan to the other men at the Mormon camp. Objections were raised but Higbee explained that it was either the emigrants or them—they could see no other way out of this, and feared their own families' safety now from the army and the US government.

They also all agreed that they would cover up the whole affair, blaming the attack solely on the Indians and hiding their own role. Because this plan was approved by their leaders, many later said they felt compelled to obey.

The men determined to only shoot the men in the company, leaving the women and children for the Indians. Somehow, this made it a little easier for them.

About 10:00am on Friday morning, 11 September, about 50 militiamen moved toward the emigrant camp under a white flag. They drove several wagons. One man approached and told the emigrants they were there to deliver them. With a sign from him, Lee approached. It's not known who the emigrant man was. Fancher was dead and the Bakers were both severely wounded. Lee entered their enclosure and saw how they had suffered, with wounded and starving people all around him. He explained the plan, saying that it was the only way to pacify the Indians. The smallest children and all the firearms would be loaded in the wagons, along with the wounded, which would go first, followed by the women and older children. Finally, the men would exit, marching next to the militia. They would lead them back to Cedar City and safety.

The emigrants clearly thought this a very strange plan, and several raised questions and fears. They did not trust these men at all. Lee did his best to assure them but they remained suspicious. In the end, however, they agreed to the terms. With no water, little ammunition, or any way to escape presenting itself, they seemed to have little choice.

They loaded the wagons with guns and children and wounded. Lee walked with the wagons. A man on horseback then led the women and older children out. Finally, the men and teenage boys and militia began their march north. There were about two dozen of them left at this point. The militia outnumbered them 2 to 1 at least. It was about mid-afternoon at this point.

The group walked about two miles and were by now spread out over almost a mile of trail. The Indians were waiting behind trees and bushes at the appointed place. Higbee was supposed to give the order but said nothing as they passed the agreed upon location. The Indians were forced to scurry along under cover, trying to keep up. The plan was about to become harder to do, if not impossible. Lee was angry at Higbee for delaying. Finally, Higbee turned his horse around and yelled, "Halt!" which was the signal. The men immediately turned and fired at the man closest to him. They were only 4-5 feet away and



most fell on the first shot to the head. Some refused to fire and wept instead. Survivors were quickly chased down and shot by men on horseback. All but one were dead within 20 steps.

At the same time, the Indians came running from their hiding places and fell upon the women and children. Nephi Johnson was with them and gave the word to begin. Some used guns but most used knives and rocks or clubs. Lee led the killing of the wounded in the wagons, using rifle and pistol. He probably killed five or six himself. A few of the older children ran to the hills and the Indians had to track them down; it took much of the rest of the afternoon. They also checked those on the ground to make sure all were really dead. In the end, about 120 people total died.

The small children were taken away in the wagons to the Hamblin Ranch. Some of them were wounded, one very severely, eventually losing her arm. The children were shortly taken into Cedar City and cared for by Mormon families there. In spite of the order to only keep those who couldn't tell tales, many of the children remembered the experience vividly, and testified later in court. There were 17 surviving children all told. Within two years, federal officials came and claimed them all, returning them to family members in Arkansas.

With the party all dead, the Indians and some of the militia started looting the bodies and eventually the camp. Higbee, Klingensmith, and Lee were among those that claimed watches, money, jewelry, and more. The Indians took the clothes, stripping most of the bodies naked, and also took many of the animals. The militia finally put a guard on the wagons and most of it was driven back to Cedar City later, and divided up or sold there.

The express rider, James Haslam, rode furiously and arrived at Cedar City Sunday morning with Brigham Young's letter. He delivered it directly to Haight, who read it, broke down, and wept like a child. "Too late, too late," was all he could say.

## The Aftermath

It took quite an effort to calm down the Indians once they got them riled up. They continued to attack other groups the rest of that year, to steal cattle and horses, and the folks in Cedar City found themselves working hard to create a safe passage for other groups going through the area, sometimes having to steal, trade, or persuade to get animals back from the Indians who had taken them from other emigrant groups.

The militia did use their shovels to bury the bodies but did it hurriedly and not well, and other groups passing through saw bits of clothing, hair, and other things. Soon wolves were digging up the bodies and people would find bones in various stages of decay scattered about. Jacob Hamblin, who lived at the north end of the Meadow, reburied many of them.

The next spring, the army did come and a new governor was installed, and while there was tension and many fled Salt Lake for points south when the army marched through, there was no war and no burning of homes. (This is the time, though, that the Salt Lake temple was buried, then uncovered, only to find the foundation was cracked, and they had to start over.) President Buchanan came under much fire for the whole affair and it contributed to his being a one-term president and Abraham Lincoln getting elected in 1860.

The cover-up blaming the Indians seemed to work at first, but soon the whispers began and people talked. As the story unfolded through newspaper interviews, leaks from locals, and government investigations, it became clear to all that Mormons had been involved and the Indian story was only partially true. One newspaper in San Francisco wrote:

The blood of American citizens cries for vengeance from the barren sands of the Great Basin. The insulted dignity of the nation demands retribution from their infamous murders. Virtue, Christianity, and decency require that the vile brood of incestuous miscreants who have perpetrated this atrocity shall be broken up and dispersed. . . . This must bring them into speedy conflict with the United States—and this insures their final extermination.

Many other papers made similar calls and hatred of the Saints was never higher.

The Church investigation clearly found Mormons were involved and to blame, and action was taken privately against many members, including losing positions of trust in the Church and military. John D. Lee and Isaac Haight were both released from their callings and were excommunicated, but not until 1870. William Dame retained his position in Parowan, somehow managing to divert blame to Haight. But because of the tensions between the government and Utah and the loyalty among Church members, no one reported their findings to federal officials nor did they cooperate. However, there was enough

information leaking out that some began to piece the story together. With the start of the Civil War, very little attention was paid to Utah for many years.

In 1874, there was a change of the judicial system in Utah, and new federal judges were installed replacing local ones. John D. Lee and others had gone into hiding many years previously, but on 7 November 1874, while visiting family in Panguitch, he was arrested. Other men were also charged and arrested, including Kingensmith, who decided to turn state's evidence to avoid prosecution. The trial resulted in a hung jury, mostly because the prosecution tried to implicate Brigham Young but the evidence was insufficient. But in a second trial in 1877, the story coalesced around Lee, who was blamed for the whole thing in the government's case. Lee was found guilty, and on 23 March 1877, was led to the Meadows itself, where he sat on his coffin while a firing squad killed him.

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