

Mountain Meadows Massacre and the Mormon Smear - by SL Cabbie

Recovery from Mormonism (RfM) discussion forum.

Recovery Board : RfM

Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear...

Posted by: SL Cabbie ()
Date: September 28, 2010 03:58AM

As I look back on more than ten years of posting on RFM, the single factor that led me to this site was curiosity over LDS History, specifically the Mountain Meadows Massacre. In 1999, the church had financed construction of a new memorial at the site, and the Salt Lake Tribune had run a story about the scandal when some of the victims' remains were uncovered by a back hoe.

At the time I knew very little about MMM even though the late Harold Schindler was a family friend, and he and my grandfather had co-founded a local Western History group. I did know it was a sensitive subject among Mormons, and perhaps it was not having anyone to discuss it with that kept me from exploring the subject further.

That situation has changed substantially, of course; two weeks ago I stopped into Will Bagley's office to share some information with him, and in addition to thanking me for posting links to his material here, he paid me a compliment that still has me blushing (I won't repeat it because the trollish sorts will just take it as a red flag).

Friendships with Will, Steve Benson--I'd followed his troubles with the church as well in the media--Simon Southerton, and a host of others have been among the benefits I've accrued as a member of this community.

Anyway, when I came here, I was probably the furthest thing from an "anti-Mormon" in terms of wanting to vilify the LDS culture. Even though I hated the influence of the LDS Church on Utah politics, I'd just spent a number of years in therapy with a TBM therapist who helped me immensely with issues attendant to sober alcoholism, and he's still a valued friend.

I had read "No Man Knows My History" as well as Taylor's "Nightfall at Nauvoo," and I had little respect for Joseph Smith, but I did regard Brigham Young as a powerful figure in history I felt deserved my grudging admiration.

I offer that as evidence that I came here with essentially an open mind. Bagley's "Blood of the Prophets" hadn't been published yet, so I started by reading Brooks' "The Mountain Meadows Massacre" and "John D. Lee: Zealot, Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat." I followed that with a trip to the Tanners, picking up LeSuer's "The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri" and John D. Lee's "Confessions."

About that time the 2002 Ex-Mormon Convention came up, and Will was featured along with Simon Southerton and Sandra Tanner. I had him sign a first edition of "Blood of the Prophets," and I began devouring everything I could read on the subject.

For the newer sorts, here's Will's presentation at that Conference along with links to all of the books mentioned above.

<http://www.salamandersociety.com/interviews/willbagley/>

<http://www.amazon.com/John-Doyle-Lee-Pioneer-Scapegoat/dp/087421162X>

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/606280.The_Mountain_Meadows_Massacre

http://www.utlm.org/booklist/titles/confessionsofjohndlee_ub006.htm

<http://www.amazon.com/1838-Mormon-War-Missouri/dp/0826206263>

<http://www.amazon.com/Blood-Prophets-Brigham-Massacre-Mountain/dp/0806134267>

Obviously I've made substantial progress since reading these original works, a situation that was probably foreshadowed when I published a modest letter debunking a claim that "It was never proven that any Mormons besides John D. Lee were involved in the Mountain Meadows Massacre." My phone rang the next morning; it was a woman in Southern Utah thanking me for what I'd written. She claimed--and I have every reason to believe her--that she was descended from the Fanchers but had joined the LDS Church. She also said she had some family documents which showed Alexander Fancher had made two trips through Utah--at least one via the "Southern Route"--prior to the doomed 1857 trek. I confirmed the truth of her claim a few months later when I read Will's book.

Moving on, one challenge I've encountered in my research is what I've come to term "Mormon smear." Quite frankly, LDS historians, many of whom I've concluded are only writing badly biased historical fiction, only have to characterize an author as a "rabid anti-Mormon," and they consider their task of dismissing them as accomplished.

Here's a sample involving two prominent 19th century victims of the Mormon libel machine, J.H. Beadle, and Wm. Wyl (Wilhelm Wymetal). The latter interviewed William Law in the following, which appeared in the Salt Lake Tribune in 1887. The Law interview was one I read early on (he was someone I was familiar with), and it's been a favorite link of mine to post because his voice is so credible and authentic.

The William Law Interview: <http://mrm.org/topics/documents-speeches/interview-william-law>

Now consider the following in what passes for academic scholarship at BYU . . .

<http://byustudies.byu.edu/showtitle.aspx?title=6272>

>Without an introduction or overview, however, the reader knows little of the context or background of the interview. Given the strong antipolygamy sentiment in America, the anti-Mormon bent of interviewer Wilhelm Wyl, Law's bitter opposition to the Prophet Joseph Smith, and publication of the interview in an openly anti-Mormon Salt Lake newspaper, it comes as no surprise that Law's recollections were predominately negative.

And another, quoting no less than Richard Bushman...

<http://www.josephsmithspolygamy.com/26Accusers/WilhelmWyl.html>

>Biographer Richard L. Bushman provided this assessment of Wyl: "[He] introduced a lot of hearsay into his account of Joseph. Personally I found all the assertions about the Prophet's promiscuity pretty feeble. Nothing there [was] worth contending with." L.D.S. General Authority, B. H. Roberts, assessed: "[Mormon Portraits] follows very much in the style and tone of Bennett's exposé, and severer criticism than this could not be passed upon it."

Wyl, whose real name was Wilhelm Wymetal, published "Joseph Smith, The Prophet, His Family and Friends," and excerpts are available here.

<http://olivercowdery.com/smithhome/1886WWyl.htm>

A brief biography of Wymetal is available on Wiki in German, but more significant are the following character references from, among others, the Territorial governor of Utah, and Chauncey G. Webb, who oversaw the construction of handcarts during that infamous episode in LDS history.

>Dr. W. Wyl, a representative of the Berliner Tageblatt, and who is commended to me from a high personal and official source as a "highly cultivated and thoroughly reliable gentleman," has for four months assiduously labored in the investigation of the questions involved in Mormonism. I am satisfied that he has given the subject careful study, and is therefore qualified to write advisedly of the situation, past and present.

>Respectfully,
>ELI H. MURRAY,
>Governor.

>"I have been thoroughly acquainted with the Mormon Church for over fifty years. I attended grammar school with Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio, in the winter of 1834 and 1835, and assisted in teaching Joseph Smith, the prophet, English grammar. I witnessed the history of the Church in Kirtland, Ohio, in Caldwell and Davies counties, Mo., in Nauvoo, Ill., and in Salt Lake City. I was intimately acquainted with Joseph Smith and his family for eleven years, also with all the leading men of the Church down to the present time. I have been thoroughly acquainted with the system and all the important facts of the history of the Mormon Church. In many interviews during March, April and May, 1885, I have given all the facts within my knowledge to Dr. W. Wyl, who wrote them down in shorthand. I think Dr. Wyl has enjoyed the best facilities for obtaining a thorough knowledge of Mormon History, and I look forward to his intended publication with great interest."

>C. G. WEBB.
>SALT LAKE CITY, May 14, 1885,

One "anti" did offer his testimony as well, none other than William Godbe, founder of the "Godbeites" Movement.

>We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we know that Dr. W. Wyl, a German author and correspondent, has worked very earnestly for months to collect facts from a number of witnesses living in Salt Lake City, relating to the history of Mormonism. We believe that Dr. Wyl has done his work in a thoroughly honest and truth-loving spirit, and that his Book will be a valuable addition to the material collected by other reliable writers.

>W. S. GODBE, H. W. LAWRENCE, E. L. T. HARRISON. SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH TER., April 28, 1886.

Dr. Wyl's own introduction can be read by scrolling down to page 10, where he takes his critics to task for characterizing him as being in league with Satan, and I think he makes a persuasive case for his claims.

J.H. Beadle suffers similarly at the hands of Mormon detractors. It was Beadle who arranged for William Hickman to make his confessions that became the basis for "Brigham's Destroying Angel."

<http://www.amazon.com/Brighams-Destroying-Angel-Confession-Disclosures/dp/0766163385>

A number of individuals, including one LDS attorney who also doubles as an apologist as well as a descendant of Hickman's who maintains a website, have insisted Beadle "fabricated" the murder charges that Hickman laid at Brigham Young's feet. However, one of the books Bagley and I discussed in the conversation that began this treatise was Robert N. Baskin's "Reminiscences of Early Utah." Baskin would later rise to become Chief Justice of the Utah Supreme Court after statehood was achieved.

<http://signaturebooks.com/?p=444>

My copy has become dog-eared from late night re-reading sessions, but the following is noteworthy:

>"Hickman confessed to me that he personally knew of thirteen persons having been murdered, some by him, and others by various Danites; that at one time he murdered a man by the name of Buck at Brigham Young's behest. Hickman's statement of this affair is substantially the same as given to me, in fuller detail..."

(p. 150)

I think this adequately debunks the following that Jeff Lindsay attributes to Hugh Nibley...

<http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/wildbill.shtml>

>"Nobody had been able to pin anything on the Mormons until 14 years later, when Bill Hickman came to the rescue with his thrice-welcome 'confessions'... a long and lurid catalogue of blood in which every major crime committed in Utah is mechanically and unimaginatively pinned on Brigham Young.... Hickman, as we shall see, never dreamed of such a thing until Beadle put him up to it... Beadle was a professional purveyor of scandal... we believe that those tales are Beadle's invention... The patent absurdity of the 'Confessions' becomes apparent on the most superficial investigation and grows with every monotonous episode.... The Hickman

stories were not true." (Sounding Brass, 1963, pp. 254, 256, 263–65)

As I said, very bad and biased historical fiction... Lindsay also quotes Nibley as wondering why, if the Danites actually existed, they never killed Hickman for violating his oaths...

Nibley's deserved reputation for scurrilous scholarship is untarnished with this one. There were few men in Utah willing to take on Bill Hickman if firearms were involved.

A last link to one of Beadle's pieces describing events at Mountain Meadows clearly demonstrates that any claims of "anti-Mormon" bias are thoroughly unwarranted. The following, written in 1870, gives an accounting of the attack on the Fancher/Baker party that is entirely consistent with Brooks and Bagley's accounts. Yet it even suggests Brigham Young probably didn't give the order to destroy the emigrants wagon train.

<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/roughingit/map/morbeadle.html>

>"One question remains: Did Brigham Young know aught of, or give command for this massacre? The strong probability of course, is, that he did not."

On that one, I disagree (as does Will Bagley), but then Beadle erroneously has Brigham Young crying when he heard the news of the emigrants fate; in fact, it was probably William Dame.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 09/28/2010 04:00AM by SL Cabbie.

[Mormon Smear... and obfuscation](#)

Posted by: Soft Machine ()
Date: September 28, 2010 05:31AM

Great stuff, Mr SLC.

I particularly loved your juxtaposition of the link to the Wm. Law interview (which is couched in terms of compassion by both interviewer and interviewee) and the BYU review, which does everything it can NOT to talk about the real meat of the matter, even giving us a paragraph on the book's colour and binding, not to mention the nitpicking about the whereabouts of his sources.

Indeed the reference to the location and ownership of Law's diary could even be interpreted as a slightly sinister, veiled threat...

After all, if TSCC got hold of that diary, can we be sure they wouldn't destroy it?

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Twinker ()
Date: September 28, 2010 10:24AM

Loved this, SLC, although I'm going to have to read it several more times to absorb the info as it is dense, rich, and full of stuff to explore.

Thanks for your posts which are always enlightening!!

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Lilith ()
Date: September 28, 2010 11:04AM

Thanks Cabbie...this is why I still visit the board after ten years, too.

[Holy moly, Cabbie](#)

Posted by: Jesus Smith ()
Date: September 28, 2010 01:52PM

That's quite the list. I'm a slow reader, so it will take me a lifetime to get through all those articles/books. But I will keep this as a reference pointer.

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: bobcat ()
Date: September 28, 2010 03:44PM

SLCabbie is a stone-damn genius, a veritable walking reference book of Mormon history. He always cites precise references for his commentaries, not just on the RFM board, but in other websites in which he has commented.

Hugh Nibley's writings are easily dismissed, as he probably has a team of researchers, doing very little of the work himself. If he actually did the research, he wouldn't be in Morg for long. The truth is too startling to anyone with a conscience.

Keep up the insightful postings, SLCabbie!

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Bombadilgirl ()
Date: November 10, 2013 01:23PM

Been searching this site for past posts on MMM because after extensive reading on the subject – Bagley, Brooks, Backus, and Lee, I decided to read the apologetic work from Leonard, Turley and Walker. Right away in the preface they admit their bias in their interpretation of the sources, " ...we believe that most testimony about the massacre – whether Mormon or non-Mormon contains

a great deal of truth, except at times when men and women speak of their own roles or those of close associates and family members." Then the authors go on to admit they left 3 to 4 times the documents available "...on the cutting room floor." After reading that, wonder if the book is worth my time. Anyone read it?

[It Was a Chore, But Yes, I Finished It...](#)

Posted by: SL Cabbie ()
Date: November 10, 2013 03:14PM

I've been meaning to post a review for a year now (with Will Bagley encouraging me on with an e-mail saying "Take no prisoners!"). I'll see if I can find some time since I'm taking a sabbatical from this silly political site that's been overrun by trolls, and what might be worse, do-gooders seeking to "fix" the problem.

The substance of the authors' disclaimer is worth noting; Bagley notes that the church investigation, conducted long afterwards (I'll have to look up the particulars) consisted of individuals asking the murderers themselves about the killings... Still, you'll have to read it at some point to be considered "credible"; my take is that it's no worse than William Wise's book on the subject. The "don't miss" work I haven't read yet is Shannon Novack's "House of Mourning."

An old friend of mine who's a bishop these days offered me a copy of the Turley-Walker-Leonard book, and I sent him a thanks-but-I've-got-the-T-shirt note along with some links elsewhere.

Drop me a line at SL_Cabbie@yahoo.com if you want a little more...

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Ishmael ()
Date: September 29, 2010 12:04AM

Thanks for your hard work, Cabbie.

Had a long ride with you today, and if I had to pay a cash fare, I would be broke.

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Shummy ()
Date: June 24, 2015 04:32PM

Folks, I'm no fan of digging up old threads

However...there are hidden treasures that actually merit anachronistic disinterment.

[honk]

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Dave the Atheist ()
Date: June 24, 2015 11:03PM

the thread police are going to have your hide !

[MMM...PPP...and the guilt of BY](#)

Posted by: jw the inquizzinator ()
Date: September 29, 2010 12:19AM

good stuff cabbie,

Will's "a-ha" moment when he pieces together the "express" ride Eleanor Pratt got to Utah after the murder of PPP and her riding next to Orrin Porter Rockwell as he came "thundering down into Emigration Canyon in that buckboard"....I love it.

That really pieced it together for me and I believe sparked the order given by BY to murder the Fancher Party.

That and the actions of BY and the rest of the SLC boys after the massacre (e,g, not returning the surviving children, not burying the dead, etc)....I don't know how anyone could not see the facts.

And the recent apologetic work (Massacre at Mountain Meadows) that tries to exonerate BY....pathetic.

The guilt of the LDS Prophet...and his successors (including the current royal family) is beyond obvious....it's disgusting,

Hail to the Prophet indeed....to think a university stands in his name...a mass murderer, a liar, a criminal.

Edited 2 time(s). Last edit at 09/29/2010 12:21AM by jw the inquizzinator.

[JW, You're Another Who's Contributed Mightily...](#)

Posted by: SL Cabbie ()
Date: September 29, 2010 01:59AM

Shoot, I haven't been able to work up to reading the church-financed "rebuttal," and I know you managed your way through it...

Right now, I'm waiting until it comes out in paperback, and I fully expect to be swilling down the Pepto bigtime when that time comes...

For me, the issue of BY's guilt probably boiled down to realizing that I found it inconceivable that 40-60 faithful Mormon PH holders would cold-bloodedly attack a wagon train made up of mostly women, teenagers, and children without knowing explicitly that the orders originated from Salt Lake City. And as Will also pointed out, the emigrants arrived in Cedar City on Friday Night, departed quickly, and there's no way the inhabitants there could've been provoked to murderous rage in that short of a time frame. Nor could the initial attack have been coordinated quickly enough to have been launched on Monday morning fifty miles away.

Will's "other book" on MMM, "Innocent Blood" (co-authored with David Bigler), details just how thoroughly George A. Smith--who left Salt Lake for the Southern settlements just as the Fancher train arrived in the valley--"poisoned the well" with claims the Arkansans had participated in the murders of Joseph and Hyrum and concocted other inflammatory tales calculated to fuel the fires of homicidal rage.

<http://www.nextag.com/Innocent-Blood-Essential-Narratives-607940547/specs-html>

Oooh, I just found another little jewel of his...

<http://www.mountainmeadowsmassacrefoundation.org/documents/MMMF%20References/reference%20103%20bagley%20&%20BY.pdf>

>Early on I realized trying to "prove" anything about this appalling crime would only prove that I was an idiot. The evidence has been so corrupted--suppressed, destroyed, and fabricated--it's hard to determine the date the murders took place, let alone trace all the ins-and-outs of the conspiracy behind the crime. Writing a polemic trying to blame Brigham Young would be self-defeating, just as writing an apologia to clear his skirts would ultimately have to justify murder. Instead I tried to tell the story as honestly and accurately as possible and let the readers make up their own minds about who ordered the slaughter of more than 80 women and children--and why.

Will appears to have adopted the same course as Beadle and Wyl, and his critics have tried to tar him with the same brush their forefathers used on them in the 19th century.

[Re: JW, You're Another Who's Contributed Mightily...](#)

Posted by: rt ()
Date: October 08, 2010 03:19AM

Cabbie,

I have two hardcover copies of the Turley, Leonard & Walker piece (Amazon mishap). I'm willing to send you one free of charge, provided you point out its flaws to me when you read it. Send me an e-mail if you're interested: mormonisme(at)gmail.com (note the -e before the @).

[My "A-ha moment" re: MMM](#)

Posted by: Twinker ()
Date: September 29, 2010 01:30AM

According to Bagley's chronology, the wagon train is attacked at dawn on Sept. 7. Haslam departs CC that same day a "little past four o'clock in the afternoon".

Now imagine that conversation just after the wagon train has been attacked but fought back stronger than they expected. What do you think they tell Haslam his errand is about? Did they lie to Haslam? Ya' think Haslam didn't know the wagon train had already been attacked? Did Haslam lie to BY? Or was Haslam's message to BY that they failed in the initial attack, "what the hell do we do now?"

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: get her done ()
Date: September 29, 2010 10:59AM

You are quickly becoming the second Steve Benson of the lord. This was an excellent toast with excellent references. Thank you so much.

[Let's Top This Again With A Contemporary Example From MA&D...](#)

Posted by: SL Cabbie ()
Date: October 08, 2010 02:08AM

Reading about the General Con just doesn't do anything for me these days (although I recognize and honor people's need to discuss and dissect it in minute detail). So I slipped over to the MA&D Board, and there was this thread dissin' Charles Larsen, the author of "By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus."

<http://www.mormonapologetics.org/topic/51589-hugh-nibleya-prostitute/>

>Charles Larson, the anti-Mormon author of such great works as "By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus" and "Destroying Angel" tells of the real story of Hugh Nibley, as well as BYU's counterpart to FARMS...RANCHS. It is diatribes like Larson's that should illustrate rather clearly why the LDS apologetic community has virtually ceased to take him seriously.

Included is a short, embedded YouTube vid showing a very short segment of Charles' presentation at the 2009 Exmormon

Conference. Regrettably, I missed this presentation (too early in the morning). I'm listening to an audio of it as I type this, and I invite RFM readers to evaluate author Larson's character based on this presentation...

http://exmormonfoundation.org/files/media/2009Conference/low/2009Exmo_Saturday_Morning_CharlesLarsen_low.mp3

The MA&D crowd, including Daniel C. Peterson, certainly cannot be accused of abandoning the practices of their forbearers...

We, however, recognize Larsen as another of the giants we've been permitted to number among our own as ex-Mormons...

Wow! If you haven't hear it already, be sure to listen to the entire audio, including his description of being Mark Hofmann's prison guard...

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: snb ()

Date: November 10, 2013 01:40PM

Nothing but respect. This was a great read.

[Thank You, It's an Old Thread, But One I'm Proud Of...](#)

Posted by: SL Cabbie ()

Date: November 10, 2013 02:55PM

Another semi-regular poster who's a retired history teacher who's published several books pointed me to a prestigious history blog (I won't name it because my post was under my own name, although I think it has vanished despite being on the "front page" for a time), and I put forth some information taking aim at one of Mormonism's most sacred cows.

The results were predictable (with the editor of the site having my back); a number of the faithful called me names and questioned my "methodology," while several others spoke of what "notorious liars" Mormons were...

J.H. Beadle and Wilhelm Wymetal (Wm. Wyl) were our "spiritual forebearers," in this area (Bancroft just "bought the party line," IMHO), as was John Hyde, whose online book I just read this last year.

And I'm just a lightweight compared to David Bigler and Will Bagley (and of course the late Brigham Madsen).

Speaking of Madsen, this is an excellent volume he edited, the reminiscences of Robert N. Baskin, an early mayor of Salt Lake City and later a justice on the Utah Supreme Court after statehood had been achieved.

<http://signaturebooks.com/2010/02/reminiscences-of-early-utah/>

We've got some plans in the works for a lunch this week with Will Bagley and a couple of us other Outer Darkness regulars, so I'll bring back a return-and-report.

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: toto ()

Date: November 10, 2013 03:18PM

Thanks for sharing your wisdom and knowledge, Cabbie. Love you, dude.

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: reuben ()

Date: November 10, 2013 05:10PM

"Please! This is supposed to be a happy occasion. Let's not bicker and argue over who killed who." Gordon B. Hinkley, at the dedication of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, quoting the King of Swamp Castle, from Monty Python's Holy Grail.

[Re: Oh Man, That Ain't History; That's Mormon Smear... \(long\)](#)

Posted by: Shummy ()

Date: June 25, 2015 12:34AM

Wouldn't be the first time Dave.

They can't get rid of me that easily.

Same would be true for the Cabster.

Thanks for the bump before the thread is summarily closed.

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