

Identifying the Sites at Mountain Meadows

A New Look at Old Sites on Mountain Meadows: Historical Topography, by Morris A. Shirts and Frances Anne Smeath (Cedar City, Utah: Southern Utah University Press, 2002), 71 pages.

Reviewed by M. Guy Bishop, Woods Cross, Utah.

This slim volume is intended by its publisher to inaugurate a series of monographs devoted to the study of the infamous 1857 massacre of over 100 emigrants by misguided Mormons and their Indian allies in southern Utah. The massacre was initially treated by historian Juanita Brooks in *Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1950) and, more recently, by Will Bagley in *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002). The current volume, centering upon the historical topography of the massacre, looks at "site issues": 1) Where at Mountain Meadows did the emigrant train camp? 2) Where were they attacked? 3) Where were they killed? 4) Where were they buried? and 5) What marks their graves?

Morris A. Shirts, professor and eventually Dean of the College of Education at Southern Utah University at Cedar City, dedicated his scholarly life to the history of Iron County, Utah, the scene of the atrocity. Shirts commenced work on this monograph at the urging of amateur historian and writer V. Lee Oertle of Beaver, Utah, and some of the descendants of the ill-fated California-bound emigrants who were massacred at Mountain Meadows. At the 1988 dedication of the new monument marking the events that had taken place at the site some one hundred and thirty years earlier, Oertle, the amateur historian, and Shirts, the college professor, began discussing their joint passion. The two men shared a compelling commitment to historical accuracy. In their view, the neglected aspects of the Mountain Meadows Massacre were the actual sites where the events had occurred. Following Shirts's passing in 1997, Frances Anne Smeath, a professional writer from Springville, Utah, completed his monograph.

The current volume and Will Bagley's definitive treatment of the massacre will doubtlessly be compared by future readers. Such a comparison may be blatantly unfair to this

volume, for the two books were written with totally different purposes in mind. *A New Look at Old Sites* is a limited monograph on site issues bearing upon the carnage while *Blood of the Prophets* is intended as a broad, sweeping coverage of the event.

Unfortunately, Shirts's passing some years before this monograph appeared and the publication dates of the two books (both 2002) rendered it

impossible for the monograph to incorporate any insights from Bagley's work. Still, it should not be discounted as extraneous by students of the atrocity. Helpful, though limited, insights can be gained from *A New Look at Old Sites*. It does adequately meet its purpose of examining the site issues of the massacre. But this reviewer sees only a limited audience for the monograph.

Charismatic Leader and Organizing Genius

Joseph Smith, by Robert V. Remini (New York: Viking Books, 2002), 190 pages.

Reviewed by Paul Guajardo, Associate Professor of English, University of Houston.

In this biography of Joseph Smith by a non-Mormon historian, we have a short, readable, mostly chronological narrative that presents Joseph Smith and Mormonism as the products of a particular historical period. A professor emeritus from the University of Illinois, Robert Vincent Remini has written extensively about Andrew Jackson and what he calls "The Second Great Awakening." In this new book, he brings this perspective to bear on the life of Joseph Smith. Remini views or interprets most early nineteenth century events through this lens—a practice that is often enlightening, sometimes limiting. Certainly, the ethos of the times influenced Joseph Smith, but perhaps not as much as Remini thinks. He is sometimes guilty of *post hoc*,

ergo propter hoc (Y follows X, therefore X caused Y) reasoning. For example, in discussing the Word of Wisdom, Remini comments, "Joseph was obviously influenced by the rising activities of the Temperance Union, whose membership . . . agitated for total abstinence from all alcoholic beverages" (pp. 103-4). Maybe, maybe not. Remini's hypothesis does not account for the Word of Wisdom's injunction against tobacco, nor for its vegetarian bent, decidedly not popular at the time:

"And it is pleasing unto me that they [flesh of beasts and of fowls] should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine" (D&C 89: 12-13).

Remini also attributes the law of consecration to the spirit of the age:

"Communitarianism was rampant in antebellum America. A number of experiments in communal living emerged. . . ." (p. 97).

This approach discounts revela-