

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