

# YEARNING FOR NOTORIETY: QUESTIONABLE AND FALSE CLAIMANTS TO AMERICA'S WORST EMIGRANT MASSACRE

Melvin J. Bashore

Benjamin Franklin purportedly offered some counsel for those wanting to be remembered long after they are dead and buried: “Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.”<sup>1</sup> Sage advice. But for many, if not most people, their writing talents or life events doom them to being remembered on little more than census rolls and tax lists. In the annals of history, most will never be mentioned in so much as a footnote. Even that widely sought-after but short-lived fifteen minutes of fame eludes most people, and only a small circle of friends and family will hold them in remembrance after they die.

The thirteen individuals discussed in this article, for the most part, enjoyed only fleeting celebrity. Their stars flickered for just the shortest of moments in obscure newspaper articles. The moment of fame they achieved really was not for anything which they themselves either wrote or accomplished, but was almost wholly for what they claimed to have done. They latched on to the coattails of the infamous Mountain Meadows Massacre. Only in so doing could most of this ragtag bunch hope for even the tiniest glimmer of fame.

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1. Although this quotation is attributed to Franklin in many compilations, the source has not been found.

More than a dozen people linked themselves—some as survivors, some as perpetrators, and others as witnesses—to this heinous crime. But why? Some were outright charlatans, others were confused, and one did it as publicity for his anti-Mormon lectures. Their claims ranged from honest mistakes to outright bald-faced falsehoods. Taken together, they form a collection of oddities and oddballs circling the periphery of America's worst emigrant massacre.

The first and perhaps the only person in this motley crew who might receive attention from historians of the massacre was a genuine criminal. Will Bagley mentioned him in both of his books on the massacre, *Blood of the Prophets* and *Innocent Blood*.<sup>2</sup> While John D. Lee was in the Beaver jail during his second trial, he was duped by an imposter, Richard Sloan. Sloan, known by the name "Idaho Bill," conned Lee into thinking that he was one of the surviving children of the massacre.<sup>3</sup> He had convinced Lee that he (Sloan) was a son of Alexander Fancher and, in fact, had been harbored in Lee's own house after the massacre. Sloan convinced Lee that he was Christopher "Kit" Carson Fancher, whom Lee had called "Charley," until the lad was taken from Lee's home by Jacob Forney to be returned to relatives in Arkansas.

It is difficult to pin down the facts about Sloan. He gave different stories about his past at different times. In 1875, he told a reporter for the *Cheyenne Daily Leader* that he was born in American Falls on the

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2. Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 310–11; David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, eds., *Innocent Blood: Essential Narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2008), 349, 351.

3. Although published newspaper reports state his name was William Sloan, court records and correspondence written by John D. Lee attest that his name was either unknown or was Richard Sloan. The author thanks Chad Foulger for help in the matter of Sloan's name. Will Bagley correctly named him Richard Sloan in his books.

Snake River (then in Oregon Territory) in 1843. He said that he had spent the bulk of his life “in the mountains and on the Pacific Coast.”<sup>4</sup>

After being convicted of leading a band of outlaws who robbed the Desert Spring stage station, Sloan was sentenced to a ten-year prison term for that crime. In 1877, after he was moved from the Beaver jail to the Utah Penitentiary in Salt Lake City, Sloan was interviewed by Jerome B. Stillson, a Salt Lake correspondent for the *New York Herald*. Clothed in prison garb and unshaven, Sloan told Stillson that he had been raised in Kansas City, Missouri, and had been born about 1850. Thus, in the short space of two years, he had told reporters two distinctly different stories about his past.

Like other desperados living on the edges of the frontier, Sloan could spin an imaginative tale. As he told Stillson one intricate detail after another that he claimed to have remembered about the massacre and his tenure lodging in Lee’s home in Harmony, the reporter became ever more doubtful. Despite Stillson’s skepticism, Sloan held his ground, resolutely sticking to his story.

He showed Stillson a copy of a letter that Lee’s wife, Caroline, purportedly gave him, then just a seven-year-old boy, to hold in safe-keeping. In the letter, supposedly written by Brigham Young, the Church president as much as admitted ordering the massacre. When Sloan talked, one implausible story after another issued forth so that Stillson concluded it was a bunch of “fol-de-rol” and that he agreed with the man who warned him that Idaho Bill was “as freakish and slippery a scamp as there is in all this Western region.”<sup>5</sup>

Sloan had hoped to use his information about the massacre as a bargaining chip to get out of prison, but his inventive stories proved to be nothing but fabrications. When Stillson asked Sloan where he

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4. “Idaho Bill, the Scout and Guide of Colonel Carpenter’s Expedition, Arrives in Cheyenne,” *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, May 10, 1875, [4].

5. “Idaho Bill, One of the Captive Children, Tells His Tale,” *New York Herald*, May 17, 1877.

could find the original of the damning Brigham Young letter to prove that Sloan's copy was not simply a forgery, Sloan told him that it was in southern Utah but refused to be more specific. "I'm in here for ten years," he explained, "and that letter is the only thing . . . that I've got to help me in all this world."<sup>6</sup>

His efforts to bargain his way out of prison came to naught because his claims were not credible. In fact, Sloan's father wrote prosecutors to "see if anything could be done to save" his son from prison, and in so doing, officials knew early on that Sloan's claims were bogus.<sup>7</sup> Idaho Bill met a violent end just a few years later at the hands of his own father-in-law at the latter's ranch near Evanston, Wyoming. His attempt to influence the history of the massacre failed.

Sloan wasn't alone in falsely claiming to be a child survivor of the massacre. The second of our thirteen individuals was William Garrett, living near Oak Hill, Missouri, in 1879. At that point, he claimed to have been ten years old when he and his six-year-old sister, Malinda, were taken by the Indians "after they had butchered his parents" at Mountain Meadows.<sup>8</sup> They were purportedly held captive by the Indians for twenty years until soldiers liberated him from the Sioux after the Battle of Little Big Horn. He claimed that his sister had married Red Cloud, a renowned Sioux chief, and had at that time three children by him. History records that Red Cloud was married to only one woman—and it wasn't Garrett's sister, Malinda. Red Cloud and his Indian wife, Pretty Owl, were married for more than fifty years.<sup>9</sup>

Garrett also failed to explain how he was harbored for twenty years by Sioux Indians when it had been Paiutes who participated in the attack at

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6. "Idaho Bill Killed," *Deseret News*, Jul. 20, 1881, [385].

7. "Idaho Bill's Ruse," *Pioche Weekly Record*, Apr. 14, 1877.

8. "At Mountain Meadow[s]," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Mar. 27, 1879: [2].

9. Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 43–44.

Mountain Meadows. He also didn't comment on how he was permitted to survive as a ten-year-old when none of the other surviving children were more than six. He even claimed to have witnessed Brigham Young pay Indians for scalps of white men on a visit he made to Salt Lake with the Indians. He contended that the Mormon prophet's actions in doing this would have given the Indians an incentive to murder non-Mormons.

Although his claims are easily disproved more than a century later, they would have had appeal in the years immediately following John D. Lee's execution when newspapers had been filled with the sensational aspects surrounding the massacre. By inserting himself into the Mountain Meadows Massacre, being held captive by a tribe involved in Custer's last battle, and by making a scandalous assertion about Brigham Young, he received publicity for his business providing Indian healing skills—for he contended he had been adopted by the tribe's medicine man.

Just a few weeks later, Garrett was in Detroit, Michigan, but by then he was evidently going by the name of George Anderson. In all other general respects, Anderson's story mirrored the tale spun a month before in Missouri by William Garrett. He told a newspaper reporter that he had been held captive by the Sioux, was a witness to the Mountain Meadows Massacre when he was fifteen years old, and on a visit to Salt Lake City saw Brigham Young pay Indians for "the scalps of men, women and children." He reiterated that he had been adopted by a medicine man and had become a healer of great skill in the tribe, which gave him the name "Sequoah, the pale face medicine man."<sup>10</sup>

The Pale Face Medicine Man traveled from town to town, plying his healing skills and purporting to be the "only Indian Medicine Man and Complete herbalist in the States." He didn't claim to "be infallible, or to know everything, or to cure everything, or to cure everybody," but he attested that he had enjoyed "unparalleled success" in treating

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10. "A Strange Experience," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, May 31, 1879, 1.

from five to six thousand people each year.<sup>11</sup> His terms for receiving his healing treatments: cash only. He claimed to be particularly adept at curing female maladies using Indian “Botanical remedies.” “If the doctor cannot cure you he will tell you so,” ads touted.<sup>12</sup> If his claims to having healing skills in any way matched his claims about his personal past, likely few people were healed by him.

Three years later Garrett/Anderson appeared again under yet another name. In 1882 a questionable, swarthy character arrived in Waupaca, Wisconsin. Calling himself Orta Camp, he recited stories similar to those told by William Garrett/George Anderson, aka the Pale Face Medicine Man. He told people that he “had been stolen at the Mountain Meadow[s] massacre.” While three years earlier Garrett had said that his sister, Malinda, had been one of Red Cloud’s wives, Orta Camp claimed that he actually was “the famous Red Cloud.” He also claimed to have carried Custer’s slain body from the battlefield. The story spun by Garrett/Anderson is so similar to that recited by Orta Camp, it suggests Camp was yet another pseudonym of Garrett/Anderson.

One of the first people Orta Camp chanced to meet in Wisconsin was Willard Camp, a local citizen who lived near Waupaca. Willard Camp told Orta that, eighteen years earlier, his brother had been stolen from the family. Orta seized this family tragedy and announced to Willard that he was indeed the long-lost brother. Orta set up speaking engagements in the area, taking in \$125 one night in Waupaca at twenty-five cents a head. But people’s suspicions were raised when his stories about being Willard Camp’s long-lost brother didn’t add up. There was a seven-year difference between when Orta first said he had been stolen at the Mountain Meadows Massacre (1857) and when Willard Camp’s brother was taken (1864). One reporter candidly denounced Orta as

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11. “The Pale Medicine Man of the Ogallalla Sioux Indians [advertisement],” *Fort Wayne Weekly Sentinel*, Dec. 17, 1879, [7].

12. “Sequoah, The Pale Face Medicine Man of the Ogallalla Sioux,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, Jun. 3, 1879, [4].

a “humbug” of the first order and a swindler. “It may be that he tells the truth in every particular,” wrote the reporter, “but it is my candid opinion that his whole story is false.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to jailbird Richard Sloan and Pale Face Healer (Garrett/Anderson/Camp), seven others claimed to be either child survivors of the massacre or escapees. An unnamed man said to be living in Ogden in 1897 claimed to have hidden “himself in [the] bushes” when he was but a boy during the massacre.<sup>14</sup> Upon being arrested for making moonshine in 1878 in Missouri, Peter Stivers announced that he “was one of the few who escaped with their lives” from the massacre.<sup>15</sup> Others who claimed to have survived the massacre included E. J. “Wild Curly” Bartlett, James E. Wood, Daniel Conklin, Alexander Grant, and John M. Robe.<sup>16</sup> None of these men were among the emigrants known to have been attacked at Mountain Meadows.<sup>17</sup>

Although those who claimed to be child survivors of the massacre are strange—and some even downright ludicrous—the motivation of men who claimed that they had been perpetrators in the killing are mystifying. The government had successfully prosecuted and executed John D. Lee in 1877 for his role in the massacre and had been hunting for and amassing evidence against other known participants. Given

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13. “Believed to Be Bogus,” *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 17, 1882, [3].

14. “Mountain Meadow[s] Massacre,” *Maysville [Kentucky] Evening Bulletin*, Dec. 30, 1897, 2.

15. “Telegraphic,” *Decatur Daily Republican*, Dec. 2, 1878, [4].

16. See “Wild Curly Is Dead [E. J. Bartlett],” *Mitchell Daily Republican*, Oct. 31, 1889, [2]; “Pioneer Wood Goes Over Divide [James E. Wood],” *Oakland Tribune*, Mar. 12, 1910, 8; “Hero in Potter’s Field [Daniel Conklin],” *Denver Tribune*, Nov. 5, 1903, [6]; “After Many Years [Alexander Grant],” *Richmond Times*, Mar. 16, 1902; and “An Old Trunk [John M. Robe],” *Delphos Daily Herald*, Jul. 27, 1894, [4].

17. See “Appendix A: The Emigrants” in Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 243–49.

that climate, what kind of thinking would motivate a person to confess to having been one of the killers? Yet at least three men made public statements claiming they had participated in the massacre. Their false confessions are puzzling, if not bizarre.

In the world of criminal law, while false confessions seem to make little sense, they occur with some degree of regularity. Recent research has found that up to one-fourth of all DNA exonerations involve innocent prisoners who confessed to crimes they did not commit. Some false confessions, known as pliant false confessions, are made by people who are induced to escape from the stress of a police investigation by confessing. Another type of false confessions are those made by highly vulnerable suspects who, through the process of suggestive interrogation tactics, actually come to believe that they committed the crime.

The type of false confessions made by the three men discussed here fall into a third category: voluntary false confessions. Research has shown that this kind of confession usually happens in notorious, high-profile crimes, of which the Mountain Meadows Massacre is an example. Criminal psychologist Saul Kassin offers several reasons why innocent people might make a voluntary confession. They include “a pathological need for attention or self-punishment, feelings of guilt or delusions, the perception of tangible gain, or the desire to protect someone else.”<sup>18</sup> A “need for attention” seems to be the best explanation for these three men.

Outside of Los Angeles in 1882, Charles Wilkins<sup>19</sup> murdered a man during a highway robbery. It was the cold-blooded killing of a complete

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18. Saul M. Kassin, “False Confessions: Causes, Consequences, and Implications for Reform,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, no. 4 (2008): 249.

19. When he commits his crime in California in 1861, he gives his name as Charles Wilkins, the name by which he was known until he was hanged. I researched all Charles Wilkinses in Mormon records. I’m not absolutely certain, but I believe he may have been a son of George and Selina Collins Wilkins who sailed aboard the *Ellen Maria* in 1861, arriving in New Orleans. His parents died



stranger who had kindly agreed to give Wilkins a ride in his wagon. After the killing, Wilkins fled north but was captured in Santa Barbara. He confessed to the murder and to other crimes including cattle rustling in southern California in the early 1860s.

He told law officers that he had been born in England and his parents were Mormons then living in Salt Lake City. He told them that he had, as he phrased it, been “in the ‘Mountain Meadow Massacre,’ where he got \$5000 or \$6000, and that with that money he and others went to the State[s] and had a spree.”<sup>20</sup> His confession to having taken part in the massacre appears to be merely a bit of empty boasting; but his slaying of the kindly driver, not of his massacre participation, so excited the people in Los Angeles where he was returned to face charges that they lynched him before he could be tried.

While he is easily dismissed as a massacre participant, his other assertions about his English birth and family are more difficult to track. He told 1860 US census takers who found him in San Luis Obispo, California, that he had been born in New York, not England. Listed in that census with several others in the county jail as a convict, he gave his age as twenty-two. He had been convicted of assault with a deadly weapon, sentenced to two years’ incarceration, and was being held in the county jail prior to being taken to the state penitentiary. He escaped from the San Quentin penitentiary during a celebrated prison break in mid-1862. Like other sociopathic criminals, Wilkins was prone to boasting and padded his resume by falsely claiming to have begun his wanton killing career at Mountain Meadows.<sup>21</sup>

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and he and his orphaned siblings arrived in Utah in 1852. FamilySearch has this Charles dying in California in the 1920s, but there is no source documentation.

20. “Old Times,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1887, 10.

21. Biographical information about Wilkins was obtained from William B. Secrest, “The Man Who Escaped,” *True West*, Nov. 1996, 12–16, and *ibid.*, Dec. 1996, 12–16.

The eleventh sociopath, Asa O. Boyce, was another California bad man who claimed to have begun his life of crime by taking part in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Unlike the enigmatic Charles Wilkins, Boyce's ties to Mormonism and his pedigree are easily traced, but like Wilkins, Boyce's crimes took him to the California state prison at San Quentin.

Asa O. Boyce's family joined the Church in Canada and lived for a time in Nauvoo. Asa, then a teenager, traveled with his family to Utah, arriving there by 1850. They settled in Hobble Creek in Utah County but by 1855 had moved south to Fillmore where Asa's father, Peter, got a job as a government employee at the Corn Creek Indian farm. In 1856 Peter Boyce tried to stop the emigrants in the Turner and Dukes trains, following on the heels of the Fancher company, from trading with the Indians when they passed through Corn Creek. It was Peter Boyce who also told people that he thought these passing emigrants might have poisoned an ox which caused the deaths of Indians and others. While the elder Boyce had a tangential tie to the massacre story, his son Asa had no connection whatsoever.

Asa had married and started a family in Fillmore in 1855 but by 1860 was living in Folsom, California. He reared five children in and around northern California. When he was about sixty-five, he was convicted of robbery and sentenced to serve a fifteen-year sentence at San Quentin. In the 1900 US Census, he was enumerated with other inmates of the state prison. At the time of his arrest in 1897, law officers suspected that he was planning to commit a murder, which they had foiled by arresting him. The old residents of San Mateo County deemed him capable of any crime as he had a long career of "all-round lawlessness."<sup>22</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* article that reported Boyce's arrest mentioned one bit of information that might shed light on his boast of being a perpetrator in the massacre. Boyce said that he arrived in California a few

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22. "A Destroying Angel," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 14, 1897.

years after the massacre “with a companion named Morse” who “was taken back to Utah by a United States Marshal in 1877 to testify” at Lee’s trial. This was Gilbert Morse, a brother-in-law of John D. Lee, who left Utah in 1860 in a company of apostates.<sup>23</sup> He was subpoenaed to testify at Lee’s trial in 1876, but prosecutors decided not to put him on the stand, ostensibly because his testimony would probably be discounted by Mormon jurors.<sup>24</sup> Boyce misremembered the year that Morse was called to testify, but seemed to be accurate in other respects. He likely learned details about the massacre from his friend Gilbert Morse.

It is baffling that both Boyce and Charles Wilkins would make false confessions about participating in the massacre at the time of their arrests since in the climate of anti-Mormon sentiment, such confessions could only aggravate bias against them. But they were not alone in falsely boasting of killing the emigrants. However, not as much is known about the twelfth man, who purportedly also made similar claims. All that remains of his story is found in his obituary. When George W. Mattos died, the report of his death stated that he “had a part in the Mountain Meadow massacre.”<sup>25</sup> Why that false detail was placed in his obituary is puzzling.

While neither claiming to be a victim nor a perpetrator of the massacre, the thirteenth and last person in this odd parade could, in fact, be characterized as a certifiable lunatic: former-Mormon William Jarman, a British convert who became “one of the most notable anti-Mormon lecturers of his generation.”<sup>26</sup> On November 19, 1880, Jarman delivered a presentation in the Brooklyn Tabernacle which he entitled “Mormonism Uncovered.” He had been invited to speak by this

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23. John D. Lee, Journal, Sep. 27, 1860, in Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848–1876*, 2 vols. (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1955), 1:274.

24. “Gilbert Morse,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Sep. 28, 1876, [4].

25. “Wyoming Pioneer Dies at Age 97,” *Billings Gazette*, Sep. 16, 1932, 2.

26. Ardis Parshall, “Jack the Ripper Mormons,” *Keepapitchinin*, May 24, 2012, <http://www.keepapitchinin.org/2012/05/24/jack-the-ripper-mormons/>.

Presbyterian congregation's pastor, T. Dewitt Talmage, a gifted orator, crusader, and clergyman. Only two months earlier, Talmage had delivered a denunciation of Mormonism that Jarman later published in one of his anti-Mormon tracts.

At this stage in his life, Jarman was forty-three. He had been a polygamist, had married and divorced several times, and had escaped from what his first wife labeled a "Lunatic Asylum" in Devonshire, England.<sup>27</sup> He spoke and showed photographs on a canvas screen to a standing-room-only audience in the church for nearly two hours.

Jarman stepped to the speaker's platform "carrying an armful of books, newspapers, bows, arrows, and manuscripts." With great flair, he threw a pair of gloves onto a chair and told the audience, "I am going to 'andle this subject without gloves!" He denounced polygamy and Mormon temple ordinances before launching into an exposé of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. "Here are a bow and arrow from Mountain Meadow stained with blood," he asserted. With a dramatic flourish, he held up the arrow and asked, "What shall I say of the young girl, 16 years of age, from whose body this arrow was taken?" Jarman's claim of having an actual bow and arrow from the massacre is almost certainly false. The *New York Times* reporter covering this event deemed it one of the strangest exhibitions ever presented in that church building. In his estimation, the pictures Jarman showed weren't fit to use as advertisements for a low-class museum and were enough to "make a horse laugh." As for the lecture, he deemed it "funny" and without factual merit.<sup>28</sup> Although the standing room-only event was, apparently, free to the public, it was announced that Jarman hadn't even told one fourth of that which he knew about Mormonism. In another week, Jarman

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27. Maria B. Jarman Ford, "Who Is Mr. Jarman?" Letter from his first wife, extract from the *Barnsley Independent*, Sep. 17, 1887.

28. "Odd Sights in Talmage's," *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1880.

would lecture again, but then an admission fee would be charged. This particular lecture was to whet appetites of a future paying audience.

For decades after the massacre, that event was a magnet for opportunists who linked themselves to its notoriety for personal gain. Whether as a bargaining chip to get out of prison, a marketing ploy to attract clients, adding spice to a lecture, or simply as a way of getting attention, the claims made by this unusual cast of characters surpass exploitation and twisted psychological motives so that the massacre remained in the collective memory of the nation for decades.