Hell in the Promised Land:

Drought and the Mountain Meadows Massacre

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From September 7 to 11, 1857, hell came to the Promised Land. Between those days Mormon militiamen and several Paiute Native Americans attacked a wagon train leaving no survivors. On September 12, 120 bodies of men, women, and children lay bloody and lifeless, baking under the Utah sun. The gruesome scene spread across the valley of Mountain Meadows, Utah. The Baker-Fancher Party met their fate.

A month earlier in August of 1857, the Baker-Fancher party stopped in Salt Lake City en-route to California to resupply their caravan. In Salt Lake City, the party decided to turn south to follow the Old Spanish Trail through Nevada. On September 7, they reached Mountain Meadows, a famous stop for migrants in southwestern Utah. Mountain Meadows hosted streams, springs, and rolling pastureland; a fine place for a large wagon train to make camp for a few days before making the trek across the deserts of Nevada.

The event that took place in mid-September, 1857 became known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Mormon militiamen from Iron County killed 120 members of the Baker-Fancher party, sparing the lives of several small children. Different perspectives offer different reasons as to what drove the Mormon Militia to attack the passing emigrants. Rising tensions between the US Government and Mormons, radicalized Mormon preaching against non-believers, and suspicion that the party of emigrants committed offensive acts to the Mormons settlers all factor into event. With these human factors entering into the discussion, we must question where non-human elements factor into the massacre. The environment is often relegated to the periphery of the Mountain Meadow Massacre. But upon a closer look, we can see that the environment is more central to the tragic tale. Drought conditions pushed the violent events of the Mountain Massacre in motion.

This essay argues that drought from 1855 to 1857 in Southwestern Utah lit the fuse that lead to the violent acts committed by Mormon militiamen upon the Baker-Fancher Party. The drought and erratic weather negatively affected southwestern Utah, especially Iron County. Matters were only made worse with the Baker-Fancher Party and their cattle passing through the struggling county. These issues came to a head in Mountain Meadow when a militia from Iron County ambushed the emigrants from Arkansas.

Scholars have been attracted to studying the Mountain Meadows Massacre due to its mystery and controversy. The scholarship on the Mountain Meadows Massacre focuses on the social tensions and motives behind the violence. In 1950 historian Juanita Baker published *The Mountain Meadow Massacre* which became the foundation of the Mountain Meadows historiography. Her work opened the wound on a sore spot in Mormon history. In recent years, scholars revisited and reinterpreted Baker's work. In 2002, Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets: Bingham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows,* published by University of Oklahoma Press, met acclaim by the academy and the literary community, but criticism from Mormon intellectuals. Bagley argued that Bingham Young had played a role in the incident, territory Brooks did not wander into. [1] In 2008 Richard Turley, Ronald Walker, and Glen Leonard collaborated on *Massacre at Mountain Meadows,* published by University of Oxford Press. Turley, a historian of the Latter-day Saints, and Walker and Leonard, historians at Brigham Young University, took a balanced approach that "would not be primarily a response to prior historical writing."[2] Turley, Walker, and Leonard discuss the three main narratives of the

[1] Robert D. Crockett, "A Trail Lawyer Reviews Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets*," *The FARMS Review* 15, no. 2 (2003): 199-254, accessed April 2, 2018, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1457&index=11

[2] Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008),* x.

Mountain Meadows Massacre. One camp views the Mormon Militia as vigilantes protecting their land from the Baker-Fancher Party who committed "outrages during their travels;" a second perspective views the Mormon Militiamen as radicals who killed the innocent; the third is a more balanced view that "navigates the extremes"[3]

This essay is not concerned with getting to the bottom of "who shot first" or if Brigham Young ordered the massacre in secret. Rather than fitting into one of these narratives, this essay takes a step back to look at larger environmental issues contributing to increasing social tensions. In doing so I draw and expand upon different interpretations of the Mountain Meadows Massacre looking at the environmental aspects of the chronology previous scholars present. I seek explain how drought and resource scarcity pushed the violence in Mountain Meadows into motion.

Background

The mid-nineteenth century was an era of human movement and rising temperatures in the United States. Settlers left their homes in the east to start new lives out west. Some were pulled to the west, while others were pushed. At the same time, the Northern Hemisphere was climbing out of the Little Ice Age and seeing hotter, drier weather patterns. These larger occurrences clashed in Mountain Meadows. Social factors pushed the Mormons pushed west to Utah, economic incentive pulled the Baker-Fancher Party west, and the drought conditions brought them together in violence.

The mid-nineteenth century marks a period of tension between the Mormons and their neighbors, as well as with the US Government. Their practices coupled with their growing

[3] Walker, Turley Jr., Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, xii-xiii.

population did not sit well with their neighbors. Numerous conflicts arose between Mormons and their neighbors from their founding to the 1840s when tensions broke, and violence erupted in Nauvoo, Illinois.[4]

In June of 1844, a mob murdered founder of the Latter-Day Saints Joseph Smith in Illinois. A year later non-Mormons destroyed Mormon property in Nauvoo, growing tensions between the Later-day Saints and non-believers. To avoid further violence, Brigham Young and other church leaders decided to head west. In 1846, the first Mormon pioneers began to make their pilgrimage to a new promise land.

The pioneers set forth across the Midwest. Through Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming, the Mormons' mass exodus became entrenched on the landscape as the Mormon Trail and its off-shoots meandered across the plain states like a river and its tributaries.[5] Passing such iconic landforms like Scott's Bluff, Chimney Rock, Independence Rock the Mormons made their way west and then turned south to the Salt Lake Valley. Along the way, Mormon established stations to aid travelers.[6] The establishment of aid stations along the way helped poorer and less able emigrants to make the journey across the plains. By 1847, the first Mormon pioneers landed in the Salt Lake Valley ready to make a new life in the Promise Land.

The Baker-Fancher Party moved west for different reasons. The wagon train left northwest Arkansas in the spring of 1857 for California. The original party left with around 150

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[4] Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict: 1850-1859* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960), 1-20.
[5] For an in-depth look at the Mormon trail and its variants through Nebraska see Stanley B. Kimball, "Mormon Trail Network in Nebraska, 1846-1868: A New Look." *Bingham Young University Studies* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 321-36. Accessed April 3, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43043994.
[6] "The 1846 Trek," Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail-National Park Service, accessed April 2, 2018, https://www.nps.gov/mopi/learn/historyculture/history1.htm

people, forty wagons, and a large herd of cattle and horses adding and dropping numbers along the way. They were pulled to California on the promises of cattle wealth.

The Baker-Fancher Party included wealthy cattlemen with connections in California along with other families looking west for new lives. Anthropologist Shannon Novak notes in her biocultural history of the Baker-Fancher Party, *House of Mourning* that the wagon train consisted of two larger social networks with the Fancher family provided a "bridge between these two large parties."[7] The Fancher family saw potential for supplying beef to the bustling mine communities in California.[8] By driving a large head of cattle west, the Fancher family could capitalize on a new market and live out the promises the American West held.

Historians also note a group of "Missouri Wildcats" riding with the Baker-Fancher Party. These Missouri Wildcats held anti-Mormon sentiments and became a liability for the Baker-Fancher Party.[9] These rough characters proved to be problematic for both the Mormons and the Baker-Fancher Party.

The Baker-Fancher party reflect the larger story of migrants moving to the west. It is estimated that nearly 350,000 people went west in this period.[10] The Baker-Fancher Party followed ruts left by migrants who came before them searching for Promised Land of cattle wealth, not religious freedom. While people were migrating west, temperatures began to rise.

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[7] Shannon A. Novak, *House of Mourning: A Biocultural History of the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 37.
[8] Novak, *House of Mourning*, 32.
[9] Moorman, *Camp Floyd and the Mormons, 127.*
[10] Novak, 51.

A climactic shift occurred in mid-nineteenth century. From the fourteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, the Northern Hemisphere experienced what is called the Little Ice Age. Many scholars pin the final year of the Little Ice Age down in 1850. After 1850, things began to heat up. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed hot summers and erratic winters that intensified the arid landscapes of the American West. Water sources drying up, hotter temperatures, and unpredictable winters made life for migrants and early homesteaders much more difficult, especially in the Great Basin.

The Promised Land

Utah is rugged country. To the southeast lies the iconic red landscapes of the Colorado Plateau. The Rocky Mountains thrust upwards in the northwest. The Great Basin occupies in the western half of the state. Like the larger landscape of Utah, many different physical geographies clash in southwestern Utah. The Mojave Desert, the Escalante Desert, the Southern stretch of the Wasatch Mountains, and the far eastern tip if the Southern Nevada Basin meet Southwestern Utah.

The ecoregions in southwestern Utah are largely defined by two different categories. One being a shadscale-dominated saline basin, an arid landscape with salty soils and sagebrush dotting the landscape. The second most common region is a sagebrush basin. This ecoregion is a bit less arid than a shadscale-dominated Saline Basin, but still quite dry. This ecoregion boasts

perennial grasses and sage. [11] In short, the road to Mountain Meadows passes through expansive, hard landscapes.

These rugged landscapes along the Old Spanish Trail shift at Mountain Meadows. Mountain Meadows falls into a woodland-and-shrub covered low mountain ecoregion.[12] This landscape is a wetter, higher in vegetative biodiversity, and topographically more rugged that it's surrounding regions. Here vegetation and water sources abound amidst the surrounding desert. The Spring Creek, Dan Sill Creek, and Magotsu Creeks flow through the valley bringing life to the valley. The Abe, Blue, and Hiway Springs, amongst other unnamed springs, bubble up to the surface. The rolling grassland is ample for grazing. The conditions worked together to create an oasis-like space for migrants on the Old Spanish Trail to rest before pressing west across the Mojave Desert.

In an *Ecology* article from 1929, conservationist Walter P. Cottam investigated Mountain Meadows and the changes in its ecosystem in "Man as a Biotic Factor Illustrated by Recent Floristic and Physiographic Changes at the Mountain Meadows, Washington County Utah." Cottam pieced together what Mountain Meadows might have looked like in 1842 and in 1851 based off of primary source accounts. He then describes how the site looked years after the massacre. In 1842, Cottam uses a quote from Captain John C. Freemont describing the area as "rich in bunch grass, and fresh with numerous springs of clear water."[13] In 1851, the Mormon missionary Parley P. Pratt is quoted by Cottam saying "the meadow lands were spread out before

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[11] For a full map of these ecoregions and their definitions I reference see: "Ecoregions of Utah", Environmental Protection Agency, accessed April 2, 2018, ftp://newftp.epa.gov/EPADataCommons/ORD/Ecoregions/ut/ut_front.pdf

[12] Ibid

[13] Walter P. Cottam, "Man as a Biotic Factor Illustrated By Recent Floristic and Physiographic Changes at the Mountain Meadows, Washington County Utah," *Ecology* 10, no. 4 (October, 1929): 361, accessed April 12, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1931143.

us like a green carpet richly clothed with a variety of grasses and… It was moistened with springs."[14] The picture of Mountain Meadows in the 1840s and early 1850s is one of serenity.

How did this look landscape look in the years between 1851 and 1857? Reconstructive climate data reveals intense drought conditions in Utah from 1855-1857 coming off of several years prior of more normal years. Tree-Ring reconstructions focused on summer temperature patterns in the American West provided by climate scientist K.R. Briffa, P.D. Jones, and F.H. Schweingruber argue that the intermountain region, especially the southwest experienced warmer than usual summers in the 1850s.[15]

These tree-ring reconstructions are further qualified when looking at the North American Drought Atlas.[16] The North American Drought Atlas uses the Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) to base drought conditions. The PDSI is set up based around zero being a normal year and anything below zero is a drought. Anything above zero is considered to be wetter conditions. In 1854 the data reads that Southern Utah was at positive one to positive two PDSI, a decent year for precipitation. In 1855, things changed. The reconstructive data shows a drop to a negative one on the scale. In 1856 the PDSI showed conditions down to a negative two, a moderate drought. In 1857 a negative five, which is a classified as an extreme drought.[17]

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[14] Cottam, "Man as a Biotic Factor," 361-62.
[15] K.R. Briffa, P.D. Jones, and F.H. Schweingruber, "Tree-Ring Density Reconstructions of Summer Temperature Patterns across Western North America since 1600,"*Journal of Climate* 5, no 7 (July 1992): 746. Accessed April 12, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26197107.
[16] The North American Drought Atlas is an interactive HTML web database that allows users to pick a region based off of tree-ring reconstructed drought grid points and view both time series data and annual maps with drought information. For this paper I used both the time series data as well as the annual maps. "North American Drought Atlas," Ed Cook and Paul Krusic, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the National Science Foundation, accessed April 3, 2018, https://iridl.ldeo.columbia.edu/SOURCES/.LDEO/.TRL/.NADA2004/.pdsi-atlas.html
[17] "How do I Measure Drought?" National Drought Mitigation Center-University of Nebraska, accessed April 2, 2018, http://drought.unl.edu/ranchplan/DroughtBasics/WeatherDrought/MeasuringDrought.aspx

Based on the reconstructive climate data, we can speculate that the desert portions of the landscape around Mountain Meadows were hellish. In times of drought shadscale, which dominates much of the Great Basin areas that the Baker-Fancher Party passed through, experiences decline.[18]

Mountain Meadows must have felt the drought conditions. The lush grasses and abundant springs described by Pratt in 1851 looked much different from 1855 to 1857. Though the grasses may have been dried out and water sources left to a trickle, Mountain Meadows still offered more to migrants than the surrounding areas.

The drought the mid-1850s helped bring the events that played out at Mountain Meadows together. For the recently settled Mormons, it sequestered plant growth and limited pastureland for livestock to graze making living conditions hard in an already tough place. For the Baker-Fancher Party it made traveling across the Great Basin much more difficult. Drought created a competition over resources between the two groups and challenged notions of abundance in the Promised Land.

In the Wake of the Flood

The first group of Mormons arrived in Salt Lake from the Midwest in July of 1847.[19] As more Mormons arrived in Utah groups detached from the Salt Lake Valley to explore and

[18] Kern Ewing and James P. Dobrowolski, "Dynamic Die-off in a Salt Desert Plant Community," *Journal of Range Management* 45, no 2. (March, 1992): 194, accessed May 2, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4002783
[19] Harold Schindler, *In Another Time: Sketches of Utah History* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1998), 27.

establish their own communities across the Utah Territory. Some of these communities formed on the basis of economic promise. One such place lies in southwest Utah: Iron County.

Prior to Mormon settlement, travelers along the Old Spanish Trail noted the mineral richness of Iron County in previous years. In October of 1849 the abundance of minerals caught the eye of devotee Charles C. Rich.[20] Within months an exploratory group from Salt Lake City surveyed the land. In 1850, Mormons settled Iron County in hopes of economic success.

The establishment of settlements in Iron County focused on resource extraction and manufacturing of iron goods. Settlers formed the town Cedar City, named after the abundance of junipers which were thought to be cedars, as its center.[21] In her chapter on the history of mining in Iron County, Janet Burton Seegmiller details the creation of infrastructure and mines across the county. She describes the initial boom in Iron County stating that the early industry extracted 50 tons of ore and produced a variety of goods to be shipped to Salt Lake City.[22] A series of environmental disturbances halted the economic boom in Iron County in the mid-1850s.

In 1853, a massive flood from a cloudburst laid waste to infrastructure and pathways to the mines in Cedar Canyon. The Coal Creek flood wiped away the economic lifeblood of Iron County. Burton Seegmiller notes that "three feet of water inundated the ironworks…leaving 10 inches of mud inside the furnace and buildings."[23] With the mines gone and the ironworks in shambles, efforts shifted from production to rebuilding what the flood damage in Cedar City.

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[20] Janet Burton Seegmiller, "Iron County," in *From the Ground Up: A History of Mining in Utah,* ed. Colleen Whitley (Louisville, CO/Logan,UT: University of Press of Colorado/Utah State University Press, 2006), 198. Accessed April 2, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt4cgn2r.15
[21] "History," Cedar City, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.cedarcity.org/308/History
[22] Burton Seegmiller, "Iron County," 200.
[23] Ibid, 200

A year later, conditions did not improve. Iron County experienced a cruel and unrelenting in 1854. The weather shut down production furnaces and iced-over waterwheels.[24] Once again, erratic weather took a toll on Iron County. Intense droughts and more brutal winters followed until 1857. The horrible conditions spurred food shortages.[25] A traveler passing through Cedar City in 1856 described the poor conditions of the town and the hostile residents.[26]

By 1857, drought, harsh winters, and empty pantries had beaten down the people of Iron County. Some inhabitants moved elsewhere while who stayed grew increasingly protective over resources and suspicious of outsiders. Mother Nature stung Iron County and its leadership felt it the hardest.

One must wonder what was going on in the mind of prominent Cedar City figure, Isaac Haight. In 1853, the year of the Coal Creek Flood, the Desert Iron Company put Haight in charge the ore operation.[27] Haight made his way through the ranks in Iron County and by 1857, he held multiple leadership positions in Iron County, including the militia leader.[28] The destruction of infrastructure by floods, the shortage of food, and drought had to have frustrated Haight. The environment was challenging his leadership.

How could the Promise Land be rejecting its chosen people? The flood and winters halting production coupled with the scarcity of resources from drought made the conditions ripe for violence. In his book, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History*, historian Brian Fagan

[24] Ibid, 201.
[25] Ibid, 201
[26] Walker, et al, 129-130.
[27] Ibid, 59.
[28] Ibid, 59.

states that the "insufficiency of food [is] a powerful motivator of human actions."[29] With idle hands and hungry stomachs, the drought motivated the Iron County residents to be protective over what little they had left.

Hungry Mouths and Heavy Hooves

Edward Abbey, famed environmentalist and lover of the Utah deserts, once called cattle "hooved locusts." Abbey was referring to the impact cattle grazing had on public land. Though his phrase is a little bit harsh, Abbey had a point. Cattle require a lot of resources and compact soil along the way. With previous scholarship focusing on the Baker-Fancher Party humans, we have to ask about the role of animals they were traveling with.

The Baker-Fancher Party left Arkansas with a hundred head of horses, and close to a thousand head of cattle.[30] The Baker-Fancher Party's cattle required additional resources and affected the land they passed through. From the perspective of the Mormon settlers, the Baker-Fancher Party traveled through their Promise Land with "hooved locusts."

From Arkansas the party headed north to catch the Oregon Trail. The party hooked on to the famous trail and made their way west. In early August the emigrants reached Salt Lake City to a less than warm welcome. Salt Lake leaders grew weary of large wagon trains during the 1850s. Historian Norman Furniss states that "the Gentile in Utah felt that he was living in an

[29] Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xiv.
[30] Walker et al., state around 900 head of cattle, Moorman states 1000 head of cattle. Walker, et al., 245, Donald R. Moorman, *Camp Floyd and the Mormons: The Utah War* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 127.

atmosphere stifling to his liberties."[31] Not only did non-Mormons feel unwelcome, but their animals too.

In 1851 Salt Lake leadership enacted a law that prohibited animals from being in Salt Lake proper. Emigrant livestock over grazed and compacted soils around the new Mormon capital. Historians Ronald Walker, Richard Turley, and Glen Leonard describe how an attaché from the city would greet emigrants with livestock outside of Salt Lake City to be "piloted through town to herd grounds outside the city."[32] The law reflects the fears of resource scarcity brought on by the drought and the influx of migrants.

The drought from 1855 to 1857 hurt Salt Lake City. The dry conditions left livestock under fed and weak. Mormon leadership saw the mammoth herd of the Baker-Fancher Party as a threat to resource stability in times of drought. Walker, Turley and Leonard note how Utahans during the 1850s grew increasingly "protective of pasture land."[33] In Salt Lake, officials routed the Baker-Fancher Party's livestock to the designated herd grounds. In addition to their grazing lands, the people of Salt Lake protected their own provisions. They denied grain for the Baker-Fancher horses and mules and sold them meager provisions.[34]

The tensions between the Baker-Fancher Party and the Mormons continued to grow. The Missouri Wildcats, the rough and rude cowboys attached to the wagon train, did not help these negative feelings against the migrant party from Arkansas. Their negative outlook on the Later-day Saints grew more intense as a result of the denied supplies.

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[31] Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict*, 16.
[32] Walker, et al. 91.
[33] Ibid, 91.
[34] Moorman, 128.

Upon leaving Salt Lake, the larger Baker-Fancher Party broke up. Shannon Novak states that several families in the party took alternative route, while the remainder turned south on the Old Spanish Trail.[35] The emigrants and their cattle made their way south across the dry landscape with grumbling bellies.

Mid-August, the Baker-Fancher Party stopped outside of the small town of Nephi. At Nephi, the cattle roamed across the pastureland outside of town. This alarmed the mayor of Nephi and he promptly rode out to meet the party. Nephi mayor Josiah Miller urged the wagon train to get off the land because it degraded their grazing supply for the upcoming winter.[36] The migrants stayed put and departed south the next day, leaving a bad taste in the mouth of the Mormons.

The migrants from Arkansas kept trudging south and in late August stopped for water at Corn Creek. The creek offered much needed water for the thirsty group and their cattle. While at camp the Arkansans met prominent Mormon missionary, Jacob Hamblin. The Later-day saints held Hamblin in high regard as a missionary to the Native Americans and as an explorer.[37] Hamblin suggested the migrants stop in Mountain Meadows, south of his homestead, before trekking across the Mojave.[38]

Despite the friendly interaction between Hamblin and the Baker-Fancher Party tensions continued to grow. After the Baker-Fancher Party left the creek, several Pahvants Native

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[35] Novak, 157.
[36] Walker, et al., 110.
[37] See Todd Compton's "Civilizing the Ragged Edge: The Wives of Jacob Hamblin," *Journal of Mormon History* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 155-195, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23289589 and Charles S. Peterson's "Jacob Hamblin, Apostle to the Lamanites, and the Indian Mission," *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 21-34, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23286026 for more on Jacob Hamblin and his ventures in southern Utah.
[38] Novak, 157. Walker et al., 70.

Americans living in the area fell ill after drinking from the creek. Some in the area accused the Baker-Fancher Party of poisoning the creek my putting a dead cow near its banks.[39] A letter newspaper detailing the Mountain Meadow Massacre published in the *Los Angles Star* describing how the Baker-Fancher Party "put strychnine in [a dead cow], for the purpose of poisoning the Indians."[40] This dispatch illuminates misconception of scientific knowledge at the time. People understood the cattle carried some sort of disease, but it was the wrong one. In *Massacre by Mountain Meadows,* Walker, Turley, and Leonard attribute the poisoning back to anthrax being passed from the cattle to the water then to human bodies.[41] The Corn Creek incident caused the Mormon to see the hooved locusts as plague-bearers in the Promised Land.

Word traveled across southern Utah about the poisoning and the Baker-Fancher Party's reputation further worsened. The hooved locusts and the presence of the Missouri Wildcats gave the Baker-Fancher Party a bad name. The wagon train arrived in Cedar City in early September to residents giving them the cold shoulder by the denying trade and provisions.[42] This did not bode well with the Missouri Wildcats. Violence broke out between the Wildcats and Cedar City locals. The hateful rhetoric espoused by the Missouri Wildcats lead to the rumor among the townsfolk that one of them owned the gun used to killed Later-day Saint, Joseph Smith. [43] This rumor further fanned the flames rising in Iron County.

Departing from the drama in Cedar City, the Baker-Fancher Party camped a few miles outside of town later that night. At camp the migrants dismantled fences for firewood and let

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[39] Walker, et al., 119-20.
[40] J. Ward Christian, "Horrible Massacre of Emigrants!! Over 100 Persons Murdered!! Confirmation of the Report," *Los Angeles Star*, October 10, 1857, accessed May 1, 2018, http://mountainmeadows.unl.edu/archive/mmm.news.las.18571010.html
[41] Ibid, 119-24.
[42] Ibid, 130.
[43] Ibid, 135.

their cattle roam into pastures to trample and graze on Mormon claims. [44] These actions by the Baker-Fancher Party furthered the animosity growing between them and the Mormon settlers.

The following morning the migrants packed up and kept on the trail. On September 6, 1857, 120 members of the party arrived to Mountain Meadows. The Arkansans, low on moral and provisions, finally found solace in Mountain Meadows. Before them laid water, grass, shade, and no signs of Mormons. The Missouri Wildcats, who had furthered troubles for them along the way, departed from the party after the scuffle in Cedar City.[45] The migrants let their herd roam free around the oasis. The Baker-Fancher Party finally could relax for before crossing the Mojave into California. They did not know their fate lurked in the hills of Mountain Meadows.

The Mormon's protective nature over grazing land reflects the effect cattle have on arid landscapes. A 2014 rangeland ecology study by desert ecologists at the University of Sydney stated that arid and semi-arid ecosystems are "sensitive to vegetation, soil, and habitat damage by heavy grazing…particularly in areas that have been evolutionarily devoid of large herbivories."[46] The arid landscape was especially fragile given the drought conditions.

With the extensive calorie burning of overland travel, we can assume the Baker-Fancher Party's cattle were famished. According to Rick Rasby, Associate Dean of Extension at University of Nebraska, a cow weighing between 1,100 and 1,300 pounds consumes 1.8 to 2.0 percent of their weight on dry matter in low quality forage conditions on average. The migrant's cattle traveled in below low quality forage conditions given the drought in an already arid

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[44] Ibid 131.
[45] Moorman, 133.
[46] Anne S.K. Franke, Glenda M. Wardle, Chris R. Dickman, and Aaron C. Greenville, "Habitat- and Rainfall-Dependent Biodiversity Responds to Cattle Removal in an Arid Woodland-Grassland Environment," *Ecological Applications* 24, No 8 (December 2014): 213, accessed April 28, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24432291

landscape. One can imagine the anxious livestock, noses to the ground, searching for what little they could get mouths on to continue lumbering under the hot Utah sun.

In addition to grazing down flora, the hooves of Baker-Fancher Party's cattle left their mark on the land. These marks went beyond a visible hoof-print and into an invisible disturbance. The Baker-Fancher Party's cattle traipsed over cryptogamic soil crust negatively affecting the ecological heath of the desert.[47] Cryptogamic crust appears throughout the Great Basin and is important to halting erosion and helping to feed desert plant life.[48] When the fragile crust is disturbed the microorganisms are harmed and cannot perform their job keeping the desert ecologically healthy. These impacts further degraded the drought-stricken landscape.

The Baker-Fancher Party's cattle took grasses from local livestock and trampled soil along the Old Spanish Trail. In the height of the drought, the cattle created both social and ecological problems. Mormon settlers in Southern Utah saw the hooved locusts maiming their Promised Land and were ready to defend it at all costs.

End of Days

While the Baker-Fancher Party trekked to Mountain Meadows, leaders in Iron County discussed how to handle the emigrants. Under the influence of orders given by Brigham Young urging Utahans to shun emigrants in response to the growing fear of war with the US Army and scarcity of resources, Isaac Haight and other Iron County leaders decided to ambush the Baker-

[47] David C. Anderson, Kimball T. Harper, and Ralph C. Holmgren, "Factors Influencing Development of Cryptogamic Soil Crusts in Utah Deserts," *Journal of Range Management* 35, no. 2 (March 1982): 184, accessed May 2, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3898386

[48] Jim Dunne, "Cryptogamic Soil Crusts in Arid Ecosystems," *Rangelands* 11, no 4 (August 1989): 180-81, accessed May 2, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4000349

Fancher Party for their wrong doings. [49] The Iron County Militia enlisted several Paiute Native Americans to help carry out the massacre. In the process, some decided to dress as Paiutes during the attack. Shannon Novak draws a parallel between this and how patriots dressed as Native Americans in the Boston Tea Party. She states that "like their revolutionary ancestors, Mormons would 'play Indian' as a part of an attempt to construct a new identity, separate from their nation of origin."[50]With different identifies, the Mormon Militia could carry out the attack without worsening the looming tensions with the US Army.

Gun shots rang out on the morning of September 7, 1857. The weary migrants circled their wagons in hopes to protect themselves from the fire. The violence continued for the next four days. On the final day, militia leaders sent a decoy to the beaten-down travelers to cut a deal for safety. Out of desperation, the Baker-Fancher Party agreed to the terms set by the militia attaché.[51]

On September 11, 1857, the remaining migrants were stripped of arms, broken into groups, and lead away from their wagons under the false guise of safety. The militia began to wreak havoc on the emigrants once they were at their most venerable state sparing no survivors. The decision to kill all of the emigrants stemmed from fear of word getting to the US Army in a time of tense relations. Over the course of the day 120 men, women, and children were brutally murdered. Some small children were taken away to live with new Mormon families. The oasis of Mountain Meadow was now a killing field.

[49] Walker, et al, 137.
[50] Novak, 176.
[51] Walker, et al. 190-99

Within a month, word of the massacre broke out Utah. A newspaper article from the *Los Angles Star* ran on October 3, 1857 discussed the rumor of a massacre in Utah. The article stated that an emigrant party had been "cruelly massacred on the road between the last settlements in Utah Territory and the boundary of this State."[52] The news over the massacre spurred investigation into the event and by the US Army in 1859.[53] The attention to the event spurred increased anti-Mormon sentiments across the country.

In May of 1859, the Army arrived in Mountain Meadows under the command of Major James Henry Carlton to bury the bodies.[54] The outbreak of war in 1861 shifted the Army's attention from Utah to the newly founded Confederate State of America. It would take more than a decade for investigations of the Mountain Meadow Massacre to continue and justice to be brought to the perpetrators.[55]

Conclusion

Today, Mountain Meadows still sees travelers passing across its landscape. Visitors driving along Utah Highway 18 can pull off the road to visit cairn and memorial stones dedicated to the victims of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. The point of interest for road trippers is a far cry from the violent days in September of 1857.

The relationship between drought and the Mountain Meadows Massacre illuminates a larger relationship between social disruption and climate. Drought in the mid-nineteenth century

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[52] "Rumored Massacre on the Plains," *Los Angeles Star*, October 3, 1857, accessed May 1, 2018, http://mountainmeadows.unl.edu/archive/mmm.news.las.18571003.html
[53] Moorman, 143.
[54] Novak, 177.
[55] For more on the trails see Robert Aitken and Marilyn Aitkin's "Mountain Meadows Massacre," *Litigation* 33, no. 2, (Winter 2007): 57-62. Accessed May 1, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29760625

spurred resource scarcity that made living in Southern Utah tough. Erratic weather and drought made life hard on people living in Utah, especially in economically depressed Iron County. Baker-Fancher Party and their cattle only exacerbated the problems. Mouths, hooves, and disease of the cattle passed through landscapes of sacristy and desperation to only make matters worse. These environmental factors made social tensions tighter until they snapped in Mountain Meadow on that fateful and violent day.

Studying the Mountain Meadow Massacre and drought reveals the importance of the natural world in human events. Unseen things like microorganisms tucked away into crusty soil to seen things like a thousand head of cattle traipsing across the dry Utahan expanse played a role in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Historians need to continue looking to the natural world, both seen and unseen, to see where the environment fits into our stories. Historian Donald Worster claims that "climate is volatile and chaotic; as it shifts so do the terms of terms for human societies."[56] The story of Mountain Meadows is no exception to Worster's claim. The volatility of drought manifested itself through the volatility of humanity bringing hell to the Promised Land.

[56] Donald Worster, "A Long Cold View of History: How Ice, Worms, and Dirt Made Us What We Are Today," *The American Scholar* 74, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 64, accessed May 1, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41222916

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