

# **Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site Master Plan Proposal**



**Historic Sites Committee  
16 December 2008**

## ***Background***

In one of the most tragic episodes in Latter-day Saint and Western American history, Southern Utah settlers and some Paiute Indians under the direction of local Latter-day Saint leaders killed about 120 California-bound emigrants at or near Mountain Meadows in September 1857. In order to preserve and protect the site, to memorialize the victims, and to encourage a spirit of healing and reconciliation among those affected, in recent decades The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Church) has purchased several parcels of land associated with the massacre and worked with other stakeholders to improve interpretation and access to the crucial sites associated with the massacre. These efforts include:

- Working with the state of Utah to assist descendant groups to erect a memorial to the victims at a Mountain Meadows overlook known as Dan Sill Hill.
- Constructing a new monument at the siege site that incorporates portions of the 1859 rock burial cairn.
- Stabilizing the bank of Magotsu Creek and spanning it with a bridge to provide access to the monument.
- Installing visitor facilities at the massacre monument site, including a walking path and a restroom.

Since 1975, Mountain Meadows has been recognized by the federal government as a National Historic District (Site No. 75001833). The district, which covers a total of 3,000 acres held by multiple owners, was named to the National Register of Historic Places for its significance as a major campsite on the Old Spanish and California Trails and as the scene of the tragic massacre that took place there.

## ***Properties***

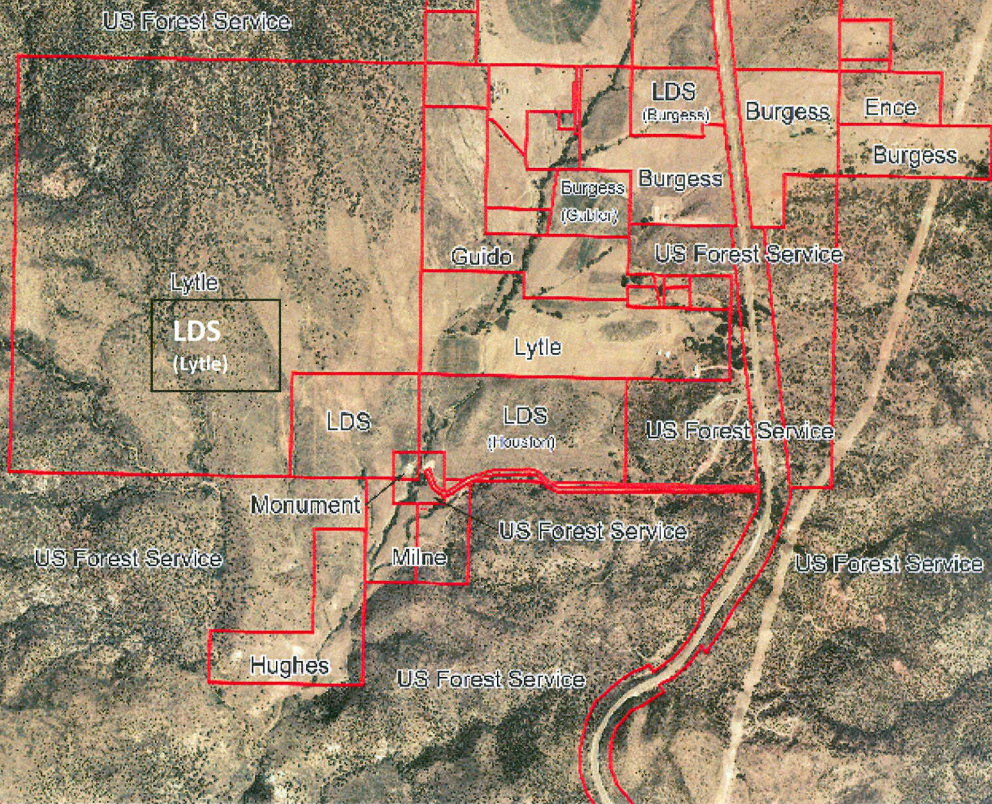
Mountain Meadows includes properties owned by the Church, the federal government, and private parties as reflected in the property map on the next page. The properties governed by this master plan are Church-owned and for the purposes of this document are collectively referred to as the Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site. The following three parcels are involved:

**Siege and Monument Site:** In 1965 the Church purchased 2.5 acres in the lower Meadows at the location of the emigrants' campsite, the initial siege, and the burial place for the remains of some of the victims. The site features a rock cairn, originally built over a mass grave by the U.S. Army in 1859 and reconstructed with modifications by the Church in 1999. The Church has acquired additional acreage (by land and acquisitions) surrounding the monument for a total of approximately 42 acres in this area, which includes the possible location of John D. Lee's execution. A restroom was installed near the monument in 2007.

**Site of the Massacre and Burial of the Men:** In 2007 the Church purchased sixteen acres (Burgess acquisition) at the site where it is believed most of the emigrant men were massacred and originally buried. It is also the likely location of one of the 1859 U.S. Army re-burials of scattered remains and perhaps other graves.

**Buffer Property:** In 2008, the Church purchased 600 acres of grazing land (Lytle acquisition) near the massacre monument site in order to deter a potential residential development in the area. This acquisition adds to an earlier purchase of seventy-five acres from the Houston family to form a buffer zone around the monument.

## Mountain Meadows Monument Property Ownership Map



### Other Properties

The following properties are not owned by the Church and are not governed by this master plan. However, these properties contribute significantly to the preservation and interpretation of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic District. The Church seeks to maintain good working relationships with the owners of the following properties at Mountain Meadows:

**Memorial on Dan Sill Hill:** In 1990, the Church, the State of Utah, and the descendants of both the victims and the perpetrators joined forces to erect a memorial honoring the victims of the massacre on a hill overlooking the lower Meadows on property owned by the U.S. Forest Service. The memorial lists the names of many of the victims, and includes interpretive panels that identify the Old Spanish and California Trails and relate the basic events of the massacre. In a spirit of reconciliation, the 1990 memorial committee chose not to explain the reasons for the massacre or to identify the perpetrators. This gap in the interpretive program naturally raised numerous questions among visitors, and interested parties later produced two interpretive panels that were added along the walkway to the monument, providing further context for the massacre. The memorial is currently leased to the State of Utah and is maintained by the Utah State Department of Parks and Recreation.

**Access Road & Parking Lot:** Access to the Massacre Monument is along a graded road that crosses Forest Service land and is currently maintained by Washington County. The monument parking lot is also located on Forest Service land.

**Buffer Property North of the Monument:** Approximately ninety-seven acres abutting Church property to the northeast of the massacre monument are currently owned by the Lytle family. The Church has a right of first refusal on this property, which can be exercised should the owners decide to sell.

**Site of the Massacre and Burial of the Women and Children:** The probable site where the women and children were massacred and originally buried is located on farmland approximately 1.5 miles north of the massacre monument along the California Trail (possibly on the Cottam property).

## ***Governance***

The Church-owned properties at Mountain Meadows are administered by the Historic Sites Committee of the Church. Maintenance is coordinated through the Church's St. George Utah Dixie Facilities Management Group.

## ***Stakeholders***

The Church consults with the State of Utah, the U.S. Forest Service, and groups representing descendants of the victims (the Mountain Meadows Association, the Mountain Meadows Massacre Descendants, and the Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation) to coordinate plans for the maintenance, management, and future development of the Church properties.

## ***Management Objectives***

The guiding objectives in managing the Church-owned properties are as follows:

- Honor the memory of the massacre victims.
- Protect human remains from desecration and unauthorized intrusion.
- Preserve the historic character, solemn dignity, and natural setting of the burial sites.
- Document sufficient reliable historical information to preserve essential knowledge of the site.
- Provide reasonable public access to the burial sites.
- Interpret the key events of the massacre through monuments and historic markers.
- Establish a buffer zone around the monument site through the acquisition of key properties to prevent development.

## ***Guiding Principles for Improvements and Future Development***

Any improvements and future development of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site will be in accordance with the following principles:

- As the final resting place for the victims of this tragic massacre, the site will be afforded respect, dignity, solemnity, and protection.
- The spirit of contemplation and the sense of place evoked by the natural setting will be preserved and nurtured.
- The sacred character of the site, especially for the descendants of the victims, will be respected.

- Reasonable public access will be provided to key sites for reflection, mourning, and healing.

### *Interpretive Plan*

The Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site is currently interpreted for visitors through the following media designed for the site's two primary audiences of descendants and other visitors:

- Monuments that honor and memorialize the victims of the massacre.
- Historic markers that interpret the key events of the massacre and place it in its historical context.

### *Message Design*

The following Purpose and Key Message Statements represent the core values and messages which should be communicated at the site:

#### *Purpose Statement:*

The Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site memorializes the victims of the September 1857 massacre promulgated by Latter-day Saint settlers. Making known the truth about this painful episode is essential for understanding, reconciliation, and healing. Visitors will understand that all associated with the massacre—the victims, the survivors, the perpetrators, and their descendants—have suffered as a result of the fateful decisions that led to the massacre, but that peace and reconciliation can be achieved.

#### *Key Messages:*

1. **Honor:** Honoring the victims of this tragedy ensures that their memory will continue on into the future.
2. **Remembrance:** Acknowledging this painful episode leads to greater understanding, compassion, and the resolution that such an event should never happen again.
3. **Reconciliation:** The efforts to memorialize and honor the victims of the massacre have brought together descendants of both the victims and the perpetrators, as well as representatives of the Church, in a spirit of grief, respect, forgiveness, and healing.

# Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site Development Proposal 16 December 2008

Plans for development of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site include the following:

## *Recognition*

- Continue to pursue heightened federal recognition for the Mountain Meadows Massacre Historic Site through designation as a National Historic Landmark.

## *Property Maintenance*

- Preserve the properties immediately surrounding the massacre monument and the site of the massacre and burial of the men by:
  - Maintaining the current monument, fences, walkways, restroom, and other facilities.
  - Seeking cultural resource review by licensed professional archeologists for any proposed improvements to the site immediately around the massacre monument or at the site of the massacre and burial of the men that might include significant ground disturbances.
  - Inviting descendants of the massacre victims to be present during work that might include significant ground disturbances.

## *Property Acquisitions*

- Verify the location of the massacre and burials of the women and children through historical and non-invasive archeological research and pursue either the acquisition of the subject property or a right of first refusal on the same.
- Purchase the additional Lytle property as a buffer zone, if it becomes available.

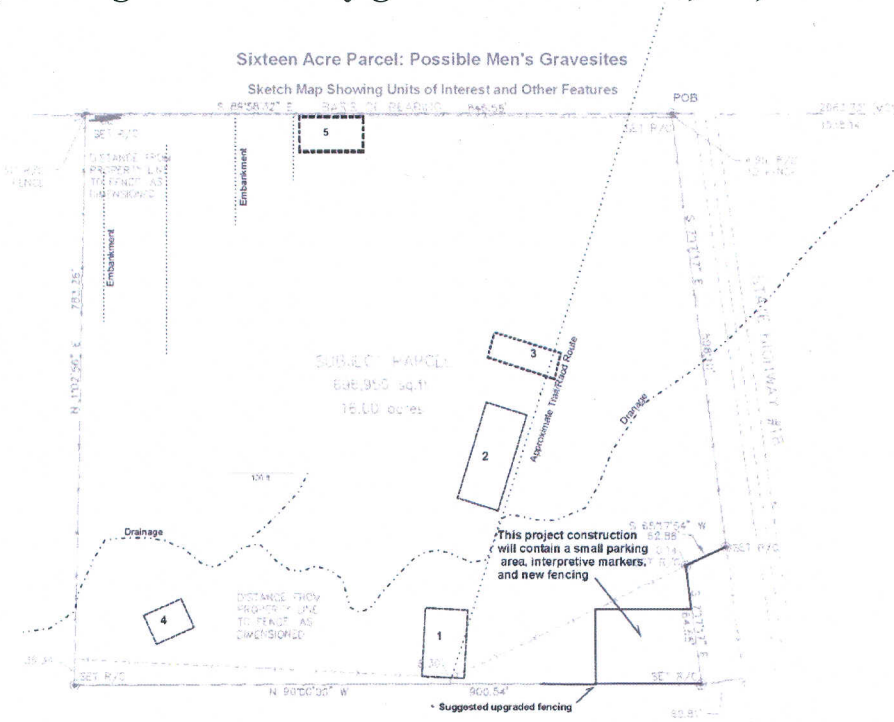
## *Property Development*

- Work with descendant groups and other stakeholders to review interpretive markers and determine if they need to be updated.
- Erect additional fencing at the current monument site to deter vandalism and to keep cattle from grazing within the landscaped area around the monument.
- Proceed to develop a plan for development at the site of the massacre and burial of the men that may include a car pull-out, fencing, flood control measures along the existing wash, and historic markers, and other visitor amenities (see attached development plan and map).

# Site of the Massacre and Burial of the Men Development Plan



**Map of Site of the Massacre and Burial of the Men  
(showing areas of likely ground disturbance, 1-5)**



Note: Location of parking lot has been moved slightly north due to access requirements.