

Mountain Meadows dedicated

Massacre site now recognized as national historic landmark

By David DeMille

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WASHINGTON COUNTY — The Southern Utah site of a notorious pioneer-era massacre has been dedicated as a national historic landmark.

Descendents of the 17 known survivors of the Mountain Meadows Massacre have been working for decades with the government and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to protect the site, where a territorial militia made up of Mormon pioneers massacred 120 members of an Arkansas wagon train on Sept. 11, 1857.

On Sept. 11, the 154th anniversary of the attack, several hundred visitors, including many of the descendants, visited the site for an official dedication ceremony, with music, prayers and reflection.

Located in a rolling valley 30 miles north of St. George, the site is already open to public viewing but the new designation comes with added protections and federal oversight that guarantees public access and requires public input before any attempts at construction or development in the area.

For the descendants, who have formed three separate

organizations dedicated to the site and to telling the history of the massacre, it also comes with a sense of completion.

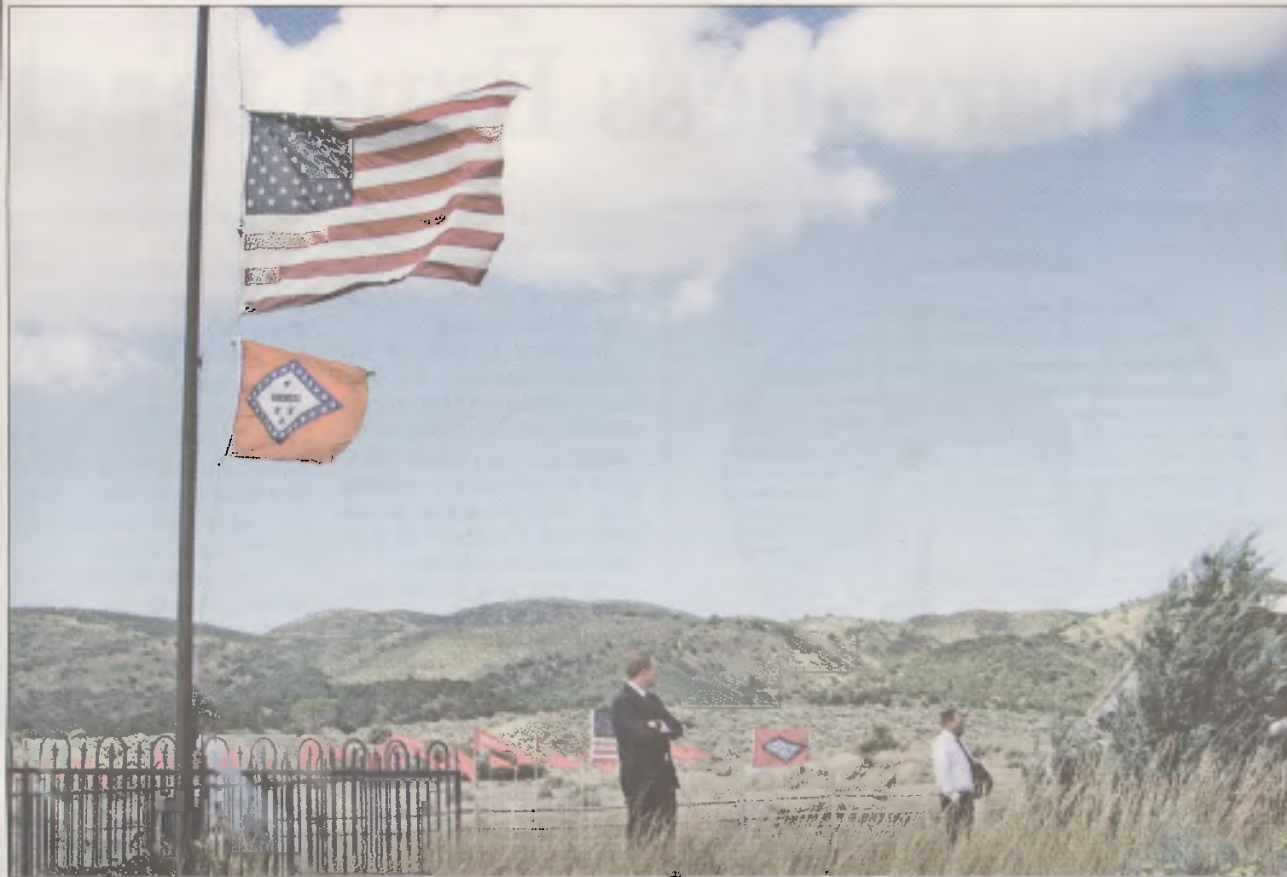
“So many people, so many years — and it all comes together today,” said Terry Fancher, a descendent of one of the survivors and president of the Mormon Massacre Association.

Cheri Baker Walker, the great-granddaughter of Captain John T. Baker, one of the leaders of the wagon train, said it was gratifying to see the monument receive the attention it deserves. When she first visited the site in the 1970s, it was poorly kept and she was saddened by the lack of attention, she said.

“Today, standing by this monument, I have a much better feeling than when I first came here,” she said.

The descendant groups have worked hand-in-hand with LDS Church leaders, who have purchased most of the property around the site in order to preserve it, and who on Sunday issued another apology on behalf of the church members who perpetrated the attack.

Richard Turley, assistant church historian for the LDS church, explained how the California-bound wagon train



The Mountain Meadows Massacre site in northern Washington County, where 120 pioneers were killed by a Mormon Militia in 1857, has been designated as a national historic landmark. PHOTOS BY DAVID DEMILLE / ST. GEORGE NEIGHBORHOODS



ABOVE LEFT: Descendants of the survivors of the Mountain Meadows Massacre returned to the Southern Utah site Sunday for a dedication ceremony. The federal government has designated the site, where 120 California-bound pioneers were killed by a Mormon militia in 1857, as a national historic landmark. ABOVE RIGHT: Richard Turley, assistant church historian for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, explains Sunday the history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

was besieged Sept. 7. When Mormon militiamen offered protection for the wagon train members and started to escort them through the Mountain Meadows valley, they turned on the pioneers and opened fire.

The attack left 120 dead, mostly women and children, who were shot, stabbed and

beaten to death.

As he related the story, Turley issued an apology on behalf of the church for the actions, explaining that “no one alive today is responsible for this horrific crime but we are responsible for how we respond to it.”

“We cannot change what happened,” he said. “But we

can remember and honor those who were killed here.”

The massacre was the center of controversy almost from the beginning, a violent culmination of the friction between LDS members and other pioneers at the time.

For decades, church leaders asserted that American Indians

committed the act, raising the ire of the descendents of the 17 young children who survived.

The valley includes several mass gravesites and monuments — and including a new one that opened Sept. 11 where it is believed the men and older boys in the wagon train were killed.