

REMEMBERING JUANITA BROOKS

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Friday, June 3, 2022, St. George, Utah

Juanita Leavitt was born in Bunkerville, Nevada on January 15, 1898. Her parents were Henry Leavitt and Mary Hafen. (Wikipedia) They soon realized that their child was very bright. By the time she was five years old she asserted herself dramatically. She was outspoken about her Sunday School teachers and she was impatient with her father's cattle herd. He had her ride with him and tried to help her understand that the herdsman must ride some distance in a circle around the animals. Juanita wanted to ride right into the herd and get them to obey her. Henry gradually helped her to understand and she came to terms with him.

Juanita continued her schooling at Bunkerville High School, graduating first from the two-year program and next from the four-year one. That allowed her to teach students in the first two years of high school. During that time she concluded that she should be writing articles for women's magazines and already had two of them accepted. Her father insisted that women's magazines were not worth her effort and invited her to write a biography of her grandfather, Dudley Leavitt. He had been directly involved in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, one of the most controversial issues in Mormon culture. Henry knew the project would be challenging but significant.

Juanita dated Ernest Pulsipher, a classmate, and they married after high school. They were soon expecting their first child. Unfortunately, Ernest was diagnosed with cancer and died before their son was born. Juanita named their son after his father, Ernest. Her relations with her in-laws were uncomfortable, however, and she decided to move to St. George to teach the first two years at Dixie College. She was quickly aware that she had more talent than she was able to use there. She decided to attend Brigham Young University in Provo, taking her son with her. She graduated with a degree in history and literature and was hired to teach the third and fourth year students.

A major issue she faced was that much had already been written about the massacre but it was intensely biased. The LDS Church leaders were so concerned about the subject that they kept the church archives in Salt Lake City totally confidential. This meant Juanita would have to wander about searching for actual documents about what happened in the crisis near Cedar City.

While teaching history and literature at Dixie College Juanita decided to write the book about Dudley Leavitt which she published in 1942. The research for that book made it very clear that someday someone had to write a history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre that was unbiased. Fawn McKay Brodie and others had written about that topic from an ultra-critical viewpoint. Some General Authority Church leaders had written books defending the members role in the massacre. Juanita read the papers from both sides and decided that if she wrote the biography or about the massacre, it had to be unbiased.

During her time teaching, the college president came to her and offered her a sabbatical fellowship, which she accepted. She attended Columbia University, learned how to write objectively and earned a masters degree. Returning to Dixie she began writing. After much time and experience she attempted to write about the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

In 1933 Juanita resigned her position at Dixie College to marry widower William Brooks, Sheriff of Washington County and soon-to-be Postmaster of St. George. They established a family with Will's four sons and Juanita's son. Eventually they added three sons and one daughter. She served as the stake Relief Society President of 35 wards from Bunkerville to Kanab. She invited all of the sisters to search for their family journals, type copies of them, and search for any information of the massacre or the building of the St. George Temple. These copies were then duplicated to be used by others and provided many new sources of information.

Juanita received communication from the Huntington Library in California. They had heard of the Relief Society collection of family journals. The library made an agreement with Juanita to make the copies and create an archive of the journals. Juanita visited the library and was stunned to discover all of the papers of John D. Lee. Working with them she published three books written by John D. Lee. Soon details began to emerge about the massacre. Ettie Lee, one of John D. Lee's family, had organized the Lees into 600 families and helped Juanita get started.

Juanita knew the challenges she was going to face when she started writing about the event and needed an editor. She had heard of an acclaimed editor, Dale Morgan, who worked in the Utah Historical Society archive, and had published four books on Utah History, including one on Great Salt Lake. As a side note, Morgan was deaf. They got to know each other serving on the board of Utah Historical Society. She read his books and wrote him a request letter, asking him to be editor of her drafts of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. This was a turning point in her life.

She spent at least two years writing the first draft. Dale sent it back noting 75 sections that had to be improved. Juanita was overwhelmed. She would have to write a whole new manuscript. After two years of redrafting from the beginning, she sent the second draft to Dale. She was very impressed with his editing. He returned the manuscript with about 30 items that needed reconsideration. She revised more and a year later returned it. The document came back quickly with only about 15 notations. Again, working quickly she made revisions, and it came back with only five changes. The fifth draft was on its way to Dale and he wrote back with only five changes. He said this draft was equivalent to a Ph.D. manuscript, and that it must be published, but not in Utah. It was worthy of a national publisher such as Harvard, Yale, Chicago, or Stanford. She was awestruck at the praise. If they received a manuscript from Juanita Brooks they would say, "Who in the world is Juanita Brooks? She hasn't published anything. Her name will never sell any books?"

In the meantime, Dale Morgan changed his employment and was the archivist at California Tech University. Juanita wrote to him and said she had no access to Harvard, Yale, Chicago or Stanford and they didn't know her. Morgan responded that he would take care of it. At Cal Tech he had come to know the major institutions on the Pacific Coast. He made a copy of the manuscript and took it to Stanford where he knew several people at the college press. They wrote back and said what he expected--they didn't know Juanita and weren't interested. He reminded them of their policy made by five people on the board who are major scholars who read each publication and then made a recommendation. He told them to follow the procedure and give a copy to the scholars to read. They did this and definitely wanted to publish the book.

Now the publisher had a real challenge—he must approve the book but didn't have the funding to publish it because the author was virtually unknown. Juanita received an approval letter from the publisher with the stipulation that she help raise the money to get it published. Juanita turned to Ettie Lee and the Lee family organization. They agreed to order 600 copies of the book and sent \$6 per copy to Stanford.

A very interesting issue arose -- the LDS church excommunicated John D. Lee. The Church let Stanford know that "excommunication" must not be mentioned. The book was printed without this detail.

Eight years after her first book, the first edition of *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* was published in 1950 and quickly sold out. A second edition was printed with one additional sentence on the last page stating the excommunication of John D. Lee. The Church leaders didn't even notice that line and Juanita avoided intense criticism. Later

issues were published and one came just after the Church withdrew Lee's excommunication, which was then noted.

The turning point had been reached. Juanita continued to write 10 more books, edited four books, and published many more articles. She received an honorary doctorate from Utah State University. She was influential for setting the example for "new" Mormon History. This was a movement among at least 100 scholars dealing with Mormonism. She died in August 1989 at age 91.

Some of her publications include:

Dudley Leavitt: Pioneer to Southern Utah (1942)

The Mountain Meadows Massacre (1950)

John Doyle Lee: Zealot Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat (1961)

Uncle Will Tells His Story (1970)

Frontier Tales: True Stories of Real People (1972)

History of the Jews in Utah and Idaho (1973)

On the Ragged Edge: the Life and Times of Dudley Leavitt (1973)

Emma Lee (1975)

Jacob Hamblin: Mormon Apostle to the Indians (1980)

Quicksand and Cactus (1982)

On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861 (editor, 2009)

Journal of the Southern Indian Mission: The Diary of Thomas Brown (editor, 1972)