

## **American Indians Tell Their Side of Utah's Story**

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A History of Utah's American Indians

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In 1960, homes on the Washakie Farm, on which Shoshone had lived for decades, were burned to the ground by the landlord, the LDS Church, so the land could be sold.

Despite reports written by whites claiming otherwise, Paiute oral tradition long supported a view that Paiutes did not take part in the infamous Mountain Meadows massacre in 1857.

Not until 1997 did the state of Utah officially recognize marriages performed by American Indian religious leaders as legally valid.

Such bits of information are peppered throughout *A History of Utah's American Indians*, written mostly by American Indians, and although much of what is in the book comes from sources written by whites, such as *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* by Juanita Brooks and *The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre* by Brigham Madsen, the book is by far the most extensive accumulation of American Indian views about their own history in Utah ever published. In many ways, the book can stand as a companion volume to *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *An Indian History of the West* by Dee Brown, the groundbreaking book published three decades ago.

*A History of Utah's American Indians* is an outgrowth of Utah's statehood centennial in 1996 and the sesquicentennial of Mormon settlement in Salt Lake valley in 1997. (It is distributed by Utah State University Press.) At the heart of the book are six long chapters, each focusing on one of the tribes long associated with the state: Northwestern Shoshone, Goshutes, Paiutes, Northern Utes, White Mesa Utes and Navajos. Such compilations are bound to be uneven, but each section has its own useful revelations, its own insistence that the tribe be treated with cultural respect, its own historical horrors to relate.

Mae Parry, who has dedicated much of her life to recording the history of her people, the Shoshone, conducted interviews among those whose homes were burned at Washakie. She quotes Alice Pubigee: "Although my home may have looked like a shack to some people, it was my home." And she quotes Amy Timbimboo recalling the reaction of Minnie Woonsook, who

had died: "Her feelings were just like the rest of the burned-out Indians. There was weeping and sorrow. She had nowhere to go."

Gary Tom, a Paiute, and Ronald Holt, an anthropology professor at Weber State University, provide useful detail to understanding the Indian version of the Mountain Meadows massacre. Most accounts relate stories of Paiutes and Mormons combining to murder more than 100 members of a California-bound wagon train. Paiute oral tradition disputes that, arguing that the killings were done entirely by Mormons and that allegations that Paiutes took part stem from attempts by Mormons to, in effect, frame the Indians so the Mormons would not be blamed.

They quote from a 1998 interview with an elderly Paiute, Clifford Jake, who as a youngster did chores for an elderly man: "I used to chop wood for the old man Isaac Hunkup and his sister. . . . He was telling me a story, telling me what they see and what they hear also. And the Mountain Meadow massacre and Paiute didn't know anything about what was taking place over there. They were calm and quiet. They didn't know nothing about nothing." (Recently uncovered archaeological evidence at Mountain Meadows, discovered after the book was written but before it was published, seems to indicate that all of the killings were committed by whites.)

A concluding chapter by Robert S. McPherson, who teaches history at the College of Eastern Utah, outlines continuing problems Utah Indians face. In addition to noting that only within the past four years has the state been willing to recognize marriages performed by Indian religious leaders, he provides a list of other insults that today's Indians have endured in the state, including a decision in Box Elder County in 1997 to open a garbage dump 20 miles west of Brigham City on land the Shoshones said was a tribal burial site.

An "Indian Placement Program" started by the LDS Church in 1954 led to thousands of Indians, from 32 tribes, being raised in Mormon homes. The program was widely denounced; McPherson writes, "Spokespeople from various tribes began accusing the program of cultural genocide, as a prisoner exchange for free labor, and as a violation of the Indian Child Welfare Act." Because of the protests, by the early 1990s the program had, for all practical purposes, died.

A History of Utah's American Indians will be, for many readers, an enlightening book. At the points it adds information not reported or underplayed in works written by whites, it is a valuable addition to understanding how Utah's white population has treated and often continues to treat the people who occupied the land when those whites arrived.