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Reviews

The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre. By Brigham Madsen. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985. 285 pp. \$19.95 Cloth.

Madsen's thesis is that too scant attention has been paid to one of the largest massacres in history: the annihilation of Northwestern Shoshoni on the Bear River on January 29, 1863, just north of the Mormon settlements in Cache Valley, Utah. Close to 250 men, women and children were mowed down by Colonel O'Conner's U.S. Army troops, the "California Volunteers." Compare the totals, says Madsen, with better-known massacres: Sand Creek (Cheyenne)—130; Camp Grant (Apache)—150; Wounded Knee (Sioux)—146. More than half of the band that was camped there were killed in an action that Madsen calls "unnecessary and cruel," (pp. 222-23), but "probably inevitable" (pp. 22-23).

The Bear River massacre has been ignored for two reasons, says Madsen: newspaper coverage at the time was minimal because the Civil War captured the nation's attention; and western historians have given the weight of their attention to the history of whites, not Indians. In part, this emphasis derives from a peculiar Mormon perspective: "a Mormon tendency to perceive themselves as being isolated from the rest of the nation and its citizens" (p. 176).

The Shoshoni Frontier can be considered, then, part of the new tradition of "revisionist history," in which events are re-examined for a significance that has been hitherto lost, and for a more interactive view of Indian-white relations. Too much attention has been focused on the "Walker and Black Hawk" wars of the 1850s, says Madsen (p. 131). A shift must be made to the real "theatres of action": Pyramid Lake, on the western portion of the Emigrant Road, and the Bear River/Cache Valley region on the east. Western and Northwestern Shoshonis along the

Emigrant Road were not the helpless, degraded, ineffectual opponents that the "Digger" stereotype would have us believe, and the Bear River massacre was not an anomaly, but rather occurred as part of a series of historical developments in Utah deriving directly from Indian anger and resistance.

Shoshonis, Bannocks and Paiutes reacted with increasing force against the destruction and confiscation of their resources caused by Mormon settlement and various mining, trading, and trafficking activities along the Fort Hall, Humboldt River, and Pony Express roads. Emigrant travel along the Humboldt totalled hundreds of thousands by 1863; it was predictable that Indians' resources would be depleted; starvation and desperation would ensue; and conflicts would result. Madsen documents all of this in admirable detail, and thus the book is much more than the story of a massacre.

Madsen is critical of reports that Mormons were behind many of the Indian raids along the Emigrant Road. He regularly points out, throughout the book, that despite claims at the time that Mormons were participating in the raids, and were even leading bands of Utes, Bannocks and Shoshonis in them, there is no solid evidence of Mormon involvement. It is puzzling, says Madsen (p. 119), that Mormon settlers were also being raided, if Mormons were truly participants. Witnesses at the time could only attest to the fact that they saw "White men disguised as Indians." Documentation of the whites' ethnic and religious affiliation was entirely lacking. Thus, it seems, the question of Mormon involvement in Indian raids remains open.

Two more points worth noting are Madsen's critical exposé of motivations and deportment of Patrick O'Connor's "California Volunteers," and the observation that the identity and virtual existence of the Northwestern Shoshoni has been expunged from the historical record. O'Connor and his California Volunteers in Nevada and Utah bear a striking resemblance to Brigadier General James Carleton and *his* California Volunteers in New Mexico and Arizona. Relegated to insignificant outposts in the middle of the Civil War, both sets of military adventurers sought recognition and glory in the next best thing to killing traitorous Confederates, and that was: snuffing out Indians, or at least teaching them a lesson, to make the West safe for settlement.

O'Connor, on a less grand scale than Carleton, saw his mission as making the West safe by eliminating the Indians as a sig-

nificant factor in any way he could. Carleton was obviously unsuccessful; today there are 180,000 Navajos, only 120 years after their confinement at Bosque Redondo. In contrast, O'Connor's effect was more devastating. For example, we find no reference—not even in the index—to Northwestern Shoshonis in the recently issued *Great Basin* volume of the *Handbook of North American Indians*. Despite the existence of a separate treaty with the "Northwestern Shoshoni," treatment of the Cache Valley, Bear River, and "Weber Ute" Shoshonis as a separate adaptation during the historic period was editorially deleted from the *Handbook's* chapter on "Treaties, Reservations and Claims," and was subsumed under the ethnographic designation "Northern Shoshoni." Despite their importance in history, the Northwestern Shoshoni virtually disappeared from the record, despite the fact that the Mormon Church did eventually attract about 300 individuals back from the Fort Hall Reservation to a Church-run reserve in the Cache Valley, which Madsen documents in another excellent work, *The Northern Shoshone* (Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho, 1980).

A somewhat perplexing aspect of Madsen's treatise is his ambivalent portrayal of Brigham Young. For example, Madsen finds a concordance between the arrogant ideology of Mormons and that of non-Mormon pioneers regarding Indian land tenure and ownership as "a gross imposition" (p. 29), and the fertile valleys as belonging to "those who could use them" (p. 83). But he depicts Brigham Young as "farsighted and realistic," in that he "understood that the Indian way of life had to be reconciled to the expansionism and colonization of whites and that teaching the tribesmen to settle down as farmers meant that Mormon occupation of some of their lands was actually a benefit, as they learned from their white neighbors how to plant and plow" (pp. 47–48), however specious the viewpoint may seem today (p. 50). Yet later on, (p. 72) Madsen calls Brigham Young's responses in the Indian situation "inconsistent and opportunistic (because) Young based his next move on the success or failure of his last response." Thus, in the end, the Mormons' actual social relationships with local Indians remains something of an enigma even for Madsen. From Fort Churchill on the west to Camp Floyd on the east, emigrants, Mormons and Indians all play ambivalent roles vis-à-vis one another; only the role of the U.S. Army troops is unequivocal: they are punishers, blunderers, opportunists.

There are a few things with which one might want to argue in Madsen's book. For example, although the inference is probably justified, one must ask how Madsen imputes the emotional motivation of "anger" to Shoshonis along the Humboldt Trail (pp. 14, 57) without any clear statement from the Shoshonis themselves. And my meticulous search of nearly 100 emigrant diaries, as well as secondary sources, makes me question Madsen's reference to "the many trading posts" (p. 20) along the Humboldt Trail that "were hangouts for both White and Indian bandits." Prior to construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, there were only two permanent trading posts east of Ragtown (Fallon); all others were temporary, makeshift affairs consisting of this or that entrepreneurial emigrant selling from his wagon tailgait, or an occasional serendipitous series of transactions at one of the Overland Mail or Pony Expressway stations.

However, these points are minor. Madsen has thoroughly searched the National Archives for letters and documents of the Office of Indian Affairs, diaries in the Yale University and Bancroft libraries, as well as published secondary sources. In addition, he has combed the archives of two important newspapers published at either end of the Fort Hall-Humboldt Road: The *Sacramento Bee* and the *Deseret News*. The result is a meticulously documented history of Indian-white relations in a previously ignored area that by far was the scene of the most intensive Indian-white contacts in the Great Basin between 1846 and 1868: the emigrant roads and mail routes that pierced the heart of Shoshoni country. *The Shoshoni Frontier* is thus a welcome expansion of detail on the comprehensive work of the late John Unruh in *The Plains Across* (University of Illinois Press, 1979), and is of immense value to those of us concerned with constructing a full ethnohistory of the Great Basin.

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Churchmen and the Western Indians, 1820-1920. Edited by Clyde A. Milner II and Floyd A. O'Neil. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. 264 pp. \$19.95 cloth.

Many collections of essays suffer from uneven quality, disparate references, and topics too diffuse to constitute a cogent theme.