

To: Philip F. Notarianni, Director
Utah Division of State History/Utah State Historical Society

From: Richard E. Turley Jr.
Brian D. Reeves
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Re: William Edwards affidavit

Date: 30 August 2010

This letter will summarize the LDS Church's investigation of the 1924 William Edwards affidavit, and conclusions as to its authenticity.

By way of background, the Spring 2010 issue of the *Journal of Mormon History* included Polly Aird's review of David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, *Innocent Blood: Essential Narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark, 2008). She wrote: "The editors might also further explore whether the William Edwards affidavit . . . is a forgery, for it was acquired by the Utah State Historical Society from rare manuscripts dealer Mark Hofmann before he was known to be a forger." In the wake of Aird's comment, Gary Topping, who worked at the Historical Society when the document was acquired, recalled:

It's been a long time, but I'm pretty sure I got the document from Lyn Jacobs, who got it from Hofmann. . . . I decided just to put a note in the cataloguing that the source of the document was Mark Hofmann and let the buyer beware. Apparently that note didn't make the transition when USHS switched to online cataloguing. That's the way my dim memory has it, anyway.¹

We had previously accepted the William Edwards affidavit at face value. It is cited in Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Edwards's name appears in the appendix as a massacre participant. After reading Aird's comment, we became concerned about the document's questionable origin and decided to take a closer look. It is a one-page affidavit, dated 14 May 1924, sworn before notary public F. E. Woods in Price, Utah, and includes a notary seal.²

¹ Gary Topping to Will Bagley, Polly Aird, Richard E. Turley Jr. et al., email, 12 May 2010, copy in our possession.

² William Edwards was born 21 October 1841 in Bewdley, Worcester, England. His family left England in 1850 and reached Utah in 1853. They moved to Parowan in 1857 or 1858 and to Beaver County in 1859. They helped settle Greenville in 1860, where William lived the rest of his life. He married Ellen Miller 8 April 1861. William served as bishop of the Greenville Ward, 1898–1913, and died 24 April 1925. "Former Bishop of Greenville Buried," *Deseret News*, 30 April 1925; William Edwards, biographical sketch, June 1919, Church History Department, biographical

The Edwards affidavit claims, “In September of 1857 your affiant resided at Cedar City, Iron County.” Other sources suggest that the Edwards family moved to Parowan—not Cedar City—in 1857 or 1858.³ No Parowan residents are known to have been at Mountain Meadows at the time of the massacre.⁴

The affidavit also states that Edwards “was but 15 years of age at the time of the said Massacre . . . he and a few others who were nearly as young would not have been permitted to accompany the men if a battle were foreseen.” This statement is also problematic, because there were no Cedar City residents at the massacre “who were nearly as young” as Edwards. The youngest known participants from the Cedar City area were Daniel Macfarlane (20), John Urie (22), Benjamin Arthur (23), Nephi Johnson (23), and Elliott Willden (23). James Pearce (18) and Columbus Freeman (19) were teenagers, but they traveled to the Meadows from the Washington settlement. Furthermore, of the white massacre participants listed in *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, William Edwards was the only one who was not enrolled in the Iron Military District of the territorial militia.⁵

Many of the assertions in the affidavit reflect information found in widely available books, particularly William W. Bishop, ed., *Mormonism Unveiled; or The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee; (Written by Himself)* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877);

sketches, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah; Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901–1936), 3:623–24. Fredrick E. Woods was born 23 March 1861 in Brandon, Vermont. He married in about 1889. “He was admitted to the Bar in Nebraska in 1886 but moved to Utah in 1890.” He practiced law in Provo, Salt Lake City, Castle Dale, and Price. He served as a judge for the Seventh Judicial District, 1921–1922. In the early 1930s he and his wife moved to Los Angeles. “F. E. Woods Given Second Judgeship,” *Price (UT) News Advocate*, 17 March 1921, copy at Utah Digital Newspapers, <http://digitalnewspapers.org/> (accessed 26 May 2010); “Official Election Returns for Carbon County, November 7, 1922,” *News Advocate*, 16 November 1922; “T. E. Woods,” *Deseret News*, 6 May 1933.

³ William Edwards, biographical sketch, June 1919. His obituary states that the family moved to Parowan “at the time of the move south” (spring 1858). William’s father, Samuel, and his plural wife had a daughter born in Parowan on 23 June 1858. Family group record for Samuel James Edwards and Holly Jane Tingle, www.familysearch.org (accessed 25 May 2005).

⁴ William Barton, statement to Andrew Jenson, 25 January 1895, in Richard E. Turley Jr. and Ronald W. Walker, eds., *Mountain Meadows Massacre: The Andrew Jenson and David H. Morris Collections* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), 71. Columbus Freeman, “though listed on Parowan militia rolls in June 1857 . . . may have gone to the Meadows from Washington, where his parents and siblings were living.” Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 257.

⁵ See Appendix C in Walker, Turley, and Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, 255–64; William H. Dame, “Organization of the Iron Military District,” June 1857, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Muster Rolls for Iron Military District, 10 October 1857, Utah Territorial Militia Records, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City.

and Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1950).⁶

According to *Mormonism Unveiled*, a couple of days before the massacre Lee sent a messenger—“either Edwards or Adair, (I cannot now remember which it was)”—to Cedar City with a request for reinforcements at the Meadows. A list of massacre participants near the end of the book identifies George Adair Jr. and “—— Edwards. Cedar City.”⁷ The sketchy reference to Edwards provided a silhouette to which a bright and devious person could add enough detail to loosely match existing historical accounts. Mark Hofmann excelled at such work, evidenced by his forgery of the Charles Anthon transcript and other documents.⁸

Tracking provenance became another key piece to the Edwards puzzle. Polly Aird suggested that the Utah State Historical Society acquired the document from Mark Hofmann, but its catalog record contained no donor information at the time of her review. Brandon Metcalf, who joined the LDS Church History Library staff earlier this year, worked closely with our peers at State History and Utah State Archives to look for clues. They conducted thorough search of available records, including prior catalogs. In a series of State History files, Metcalf found a quarterly report for April–June 1983 that stated: “The Library acquired some interesting items from a manuscripts dealer this quarter. . . . they include a deposition made in the 1920’s by William Edwards, one of the participants in the Mountain Meadows Massacre.” In the same quarter the library also acquired from this unnamed dealer letters by historian Charles Kelly, “a legal document signed by the outlaw Matt Warner, a draft of one of the territorial laws of Utah signed by W. W. Phelps, Willard Richards, and Brigham Young, and the papers of George Montgomery Scott.” A finding aid for the Scott papers confirmed that they were acquired from Mark Hofmann in June 1983.⁹

We also sought the help of forensic document examiner George J. Throckmorton. The Division of State History kindly supplied us with a digital image of the Edwards document and allowed us to borrow the original for testing purposes. Utah State Archives provided two known signatures

⁶ For instance, according to the Edwards affidavit, “affiant accompanied about 30 men and older boys to Mountain Meadows.” In *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232, John D. Lee named twenty-four men who arrived at the Meadows, plus “some others whose names I cannot remember.” The Edwards affidavit states: “We were told, an Indian massacre of a [*sic*] emigrant train had been consummated, and our services needed to bury the dead.” This is similar to a John M. Higbee statement quoted in Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, 172: “Savages . . . had killed all the emigrant company and if Mormons wanted to bury them they could. . . . a dozen or more of as honorable good citizens as lived in the country volunteered and started at once to go and bury the dead.” See also Daniel S. Macfarlane statement quoted in Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre*, 178.

⁷ *Mormonism Unveiled*, 229, 379.

⁸ See George J. Throckmorton, R. C. Christensen and Richard H. Casper, *Motive for Murder: The Bombs, the Mormons and the Salamander* (Salt Lake City: The Authors, 2005), 186–90.

⁹ Utah State Historical Society, Library Quarterly Report, April–June 1983, p. 3, Utah Department of Community and Culture, Division of State History, Library Files, 1970–1990, Series 3353, box 17, Utah State Archives; Division of State History, Register of the George Montgomery Scott Papers, <http://history.utah.gov/findaids/B00128/B0128.xml> (accessed 15 July 2010).

of F. E. Woods, 1922, from case files of the Carbon County Court, where he served as a district judge. In LDS Church History Library collections we located four letters that Edwards wrote to church leaders, 1902 and 1908, while serving as bishop of the Greenville Ward.

After comparing the signatures on the affidavit with other documents and conducting additional forensic tests, Throckmorton concluded that the affidavit is not genuine. Edwards's signature "is a partial 'traced-forgery'" based on his 2 April 1908 letter to Joseph F. Smith. Both the Edwards and Woods signatures were made more deliberately than is customary and "showed tremor and hesitation," which "frequently appears when someone attempts to imitate or simulate another person's writing style." Finally, "the ink on both . . . had been exposed to an artificial aging process, to make them appear older than they really are."¹⁰

Throckmorton referred us to Peter Tytell, another forensic document examiner, who specializes in typewritten works. After examining a digital image of the Edwards affidavit, Tytell concluded that it "was prepared with a version of Royal Standard Elite style type that was not available until 1950, over a quarter of a century after the 1924 date on the Affidavit."¹¹

We will correct on our website (<http://mountainmeadowsmassacre.org/>) our mistaken usage of the forged William Edwards affidavit. When a revised edition of *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* is published, we will also make corrections in it. Thanks to Polly Aird for raising an important issue and to the individuals and institutions that helped to unmask another Hofmann forgery.

¹⁰ George J. Throckmorton to Richard E. Turley Jr., 9 August 2010, copy in our possession.

¹¹ Peter Tytell to Richard E. Turley Jr., 23 August 2010, copy in our possession.