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LDS Church issues apology over Mountain Meadows

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CEDAR CITY — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints issued a long-awaited apology Tuesday for the massacre of an immigrant wagon train by local church members 150 years ago in southwestern Utah.

Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve read the church's statement on assignment from the church's governing First Presidency during a memorial ceremony at the gravesite of some of the massacre victims at Mountain Meadows, about 35 miles northwest of St. George.

The statement also places blame for the Sept. 11, 1857, massacre on the local church leaders at the time and church members who followed their orders to murder some 120 unarmed men, women and children.

"We express profound regret for the massacre carried out in this valley 150 years ago today, and for the undue and untold suffering experienced by the victims then and by their relatives to the present time," Elder Eyring said.

"A separate expression of regret is owed the Paiute people who have unjustly borne for too long the principal blame for what occurred during the massacre," he said. "Although the extent of their involvement is disputed, it is believed they would not have participated without the direction and stimulus provided by local church leaders and members."

Seventeen children survived the massacre that culminated a four-day standoff between local Mormons and a wagon train of Arkansas immigrants making its way to California.

Elder Eyring said that research by church historians, who are writing a book about

Young's message "conveying the will and intent ... not to interfere with the immigrants arrived too late."

The research also found that the "responsibility for the massacre lies with the local leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the regions near Mountain Meadows who also held civic and military positions and with members of the church acting under their direction."

Several hundred descendants of the victims traveled across the country to attend Tuesday's ceremony. Many of them had sought an apology from the church since the dedication eight years ago of a monument marking the burial site of some victims.

Some have also petitioned the church to transfer to the federal government stewardship of the monument and surrounding lands the church has purchased to preserve the site that church President Gordon B. Hinckley has described as sacred ground.

In addressing that proposal, Elder Eyring said, "The church has worked with descendant groups ... to maintain the monument and surrounding property and continues to improve and preserve these premises to make them attractive and accessible to all who visit. We are committed to do so in the future."

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