

That same day, Brigham Young telegraphed an odd appeal to President Hayes asking him to appoint a commission to investigate the massacre and punish the offenders. His wire was as much a challenge as it was a serious proposal, since federal officials in the territory were skeptical that anything would ever come of such an investigation. If nothing else, the Lee trials made it clear to the rest of the nation that the Poland Act, however well intended, had failed to break theocratic control of Utah's judicial system.

BRIGHAM YOUNG, TELEGRAM TO RUTHERFORD B. HAYES,

31 MARCH 1877, LDS ARCHIVES.

Petition—To His Excellency Rutherford B. Hayes President of the United States

I see by the New York Herald & press of the country generally that John D Lee who has recently been executed for his participation in the crime known as the Mountain Meadow Massacre has made a statement which if true directly implicates me as accessory after the fact by implication makes me liable as an accessory before the fact. I have before now publically [stated] that I was & had been at all times ready to render [any] aid I could to bring to justice the perpetrators of that great crime & especially did I on more than one occasion proffer my services & influence to the late Governor Cumming my successor in office to aid in obtaining the evidence necessary to furnish the guilty ones. These proffered services whatever they may have been worth have never been accepted. In view of the magnitude of the offense I now most respectfully ask you as the chief magistrate of the great nation in justice to the people who inhabited this Territory at that period if you have the power & if not to call the attention of Congress to the matter when it meets in June to appoint a commission fully authorized to investigate that inhuman slaughter & with jurisdiction to try & punish the offenders thereof.

With demand for answers unabated, Young at last relented and spent the last evening in April fielding questions from a *New York Herald* correspondent, probably E. N. Fuller. Also taking part were Young's second counselor, Daniel H. Wells, Apostle George Q. Cannon, and John W. Young. The three offered a rich assortment of evasions, misleading statements, and falsehoods. Among other things, Young said that blood atonement was equivalent to capital punishment, which was not how it was described in his sermons on the topic; claimed the emigrants first traveled north to Bear River and then laid over in Utah for six weeks before heading south, which was physically impossible; and took the opportunity to malign the victims. Wells said the emigrants were not even in the territory when George A. Smith headed south on 3 August.