

UTAH

Indians' role in massacre disputed

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Forrest Cuch

CEDAR CITY — On the eve of the 150th anniversary of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, a state official told descendants of massacre victims Monday that the LDS Church needs to stop associating the Paiute Indians with the slaughter of 150

Forest Cuch, executive director of the Utah Division of Indian Affairs and a member of the Ute Tribe, praised members of Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, saying he appreciates how "they won't let the myth (surrounding responsibility for the massacre) die. You are striving for the truth, and it has to come forth sooner or later."

The foundation is one of two groups of massacre victims' descendants seeking federal stewardship of the Mountain Meadows site, owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was local leaders of the church in the Cedar City area who ordered the massacre by LDS militiamen, a fact that has long been discussed by historians but only acknowledged publicly by the church in recent months.

For years, many blamed local Indians as the planners and perpetrators.

Today's anniversary ceremony — which includes the foundation as one of three different groups of descendants, along with representatives from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — will begin at 10 a.m. at Mountain Meadows.

Cuch said while several authors have written books about the massacre, "What about a book about the cover-up and the more recent actions that have taken place? I challenge someone to take that on. I'm too busy to write it because I'm writing my own," about the history of American Indians.

Cuch said he's tired of hearing that Paiute Indians were involved with the massacre every time culpability is publicly discussed.

"This afternoon I was interviewed out here by Channel 5 — which is owned by the LDS Church. In that interview, I said there seems to be a significant amount of evidence to suggest that Paiutes were not perpetrators, and if they were involved, it would have been one or two. That doesn't constitute a tribe or a band, for that matter," he said.

"So what happens — later this afternoon, a partner and I were watching the Channel 5 news and they state once again that this involves the Mormon militia and their Indian allies," he said. "When you own the media, you can pretty much

Even so, Cuch said, "The LDS Church has got to stop making that association. They're constantly associating the Mormon militia with the Indians. Instead, say there were 60 members of the Mormon militia and two Paiute Indians.

"They need to stop perpetrating that association because we are already villains in history. We continue to be villainized in history."

Cuch said American Indians understand wars and massacres, as they have been victims of many, including the Bear River Massacre in 1863 near the northern Utah border. Approximately 240 Utah Indians were killed by the California militia, he said.

"Massacres are certainly nothing new to us," he said. "So why is this so important to someone like me?"

Cuch detailed the history lessons he learned in school throughout his youth. American Indians were either cast as villains or simply ignored altogether. That one-sided portrayal of history — always from a white perspective — did harm to his self-worth, he said.

It wasn't until he got to high school that he was told about the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

"That was a real punch in the head. I was told the Indians attacked and killed the settlers, the women and the children. They didn't say anything about the Mormon militia," he said. "I hadn't heard the other side. Just like I was told (as a child) that the Pilgrims only discovered 'wilderness,'" instead of Indian inhabitants.

"You start doubting yourself and your family and wondering, 'Who are we and why do we do things like that?'... I hadn't heard the other side so, in my head, all we did was stand in the way of progress and attack people."

Cuch said he wants young people of all backgrounds to understand the truth about history, particularly concerning American Indians — that they welcomed the Pilgrims and fed them so they wouldn't starve to death that first winter in New England.

people die. But he didn't — he showed them where the food was. Why isn't he a founding father in our history books?"

American Indians have fought in every war "in a greater proportion than any other ethnic group in the country and we continue to fight for it."

Those facts are vital, he said, because "it's important for the truth to prevail. Only through the truth can hearts heal and heroes rise to the fore."

One-sided history warps thinking and sows the seeds of self-doubt and — for some — self-destruction when self respect is not fostered with the whole story, he said. By reading as much as he could about American Indian history once he graduated from college, "I found my way out of it. I found the truth and it made me whole and complete.

"I join with you in striving for the truth and may we stay joined to continue to accomplish great things," he said. "May our efforts have the blessing of God."

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