

ANNA JEAN BACKUS. *Mountain Meadows Witness: The Life and Times of Bishop Philip Klingensmith*. Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1995; Western Frontiersmen Series 25; xxiv; 302 pp. Illustrations, portraits, photos, map, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$32.50.

Reviewed by Lawrence Coates, Professor of History, Ricks College.

After one hundred and thirty-nine years, and even after the 1990 reconciliation that occurred with the dedication of the monument at the massacre site near Cedar City, the Mountain Meadows Massacre still evokes a wide range of emotions. Early in life, Anna Jean Backus was troubled by this tragic incident after her mother told her that her ancestor Philip Klingensmith was involved in the massacre. Anna's mother warned her, "Never tell anyone [he] is your great grandfather" (15). Driven by a desire to unlock the mysteries surrounding this man, Backus embarked on a quest to uncover his life, even though her mother cryptically claimed that her own mother was not Philip's actual daughter, but that "he only raised her" (16).

Anna Jean Backus has contributed to unraveling some of the secrets of Mountain Meadows. She also has argued that her "grandmother, Priscilla Klingensmith Urie, was one of the surviving children of the massacre . . . [and] was raised by Philip Klingensmith and his third wife, Betsy, in the Mormon faith" (16). Most of the book focuses on the life of Philip Klingensmith. Klingensmith interests Mormon historians because he was an eyewitness to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, was accused of complicity in the affair, and testified at John D. Lee's first trial. He was also involved in caring for the children who survived the massacre and in placing them in homes.

Backus creates a framework for each chapter by quoting some of Klingensmith's testimony at John D. Lee's first trial, then draws from numerous other sources to fill in many missing details of Klingensmith's life. In trying to establish the facts, Backus uses numerous long quotations from letters, diaries, journals, newspapers, autobiographies, and secondary sources, but these are often used without critical analysis of the source. In chapter 13, for

example, Backus relies on articles written in the twentieth century by survivors of Mountain Meadows, who were only three and five years old at the time of the massacre. While Backus's diligent research provides a good road map to many valuable sources, she fails to deal with several major discrepancies between Klingensmith's testimony and what other sources claim happened.

Backus has a difficult time with Klingensmith's reticence to say much about the placement of surviving children after the massacre. She simply says, "Philip may have forgotten where the children were placed; perhaps he did not know which children had been gathered up and taken back to Arkansas because of his years of hiding out" (161). She makes it clear that he was given the task of finding homes for the children, yet his testimony reveals very little about their placement in various homes. If Klingensmith did keep one of the children, as Backus claims, he may have had personal reasons for saying very little about them. His reluctance to divulge information on this topic again raises questions about how much of his testimony at the trial, as well as that of other witnesses, can be taken at face value.

Backus's research provides interesting circumstantial evidence for the possibility of a link between Priscilla and the Alexander Fancher family, but more evidence must be found to make this connection conclusive. For example, photographic comparisons are notoriously unreliable forms of evidence.¹

Despite its weaknesses, this book offers new insights. Backus's story of Klingensmith after the massacre, her appendixes, and the bibliography will prove useful.

NOTE

¹For example, basing their identification on extensive photographic comparisons, two anthropologists claimed that Anna Anderson was, without doubt, the Grand Duchess Anastasia. Later DNA testing proved the claim to be false. See Robert K. Massie, *The Romanovs: The Final Chapter* (New York: Random House, 1995), 190; Josie Glausiusz, "Anastasia, Nyet," *Discover* 16 (January 1995): 99.