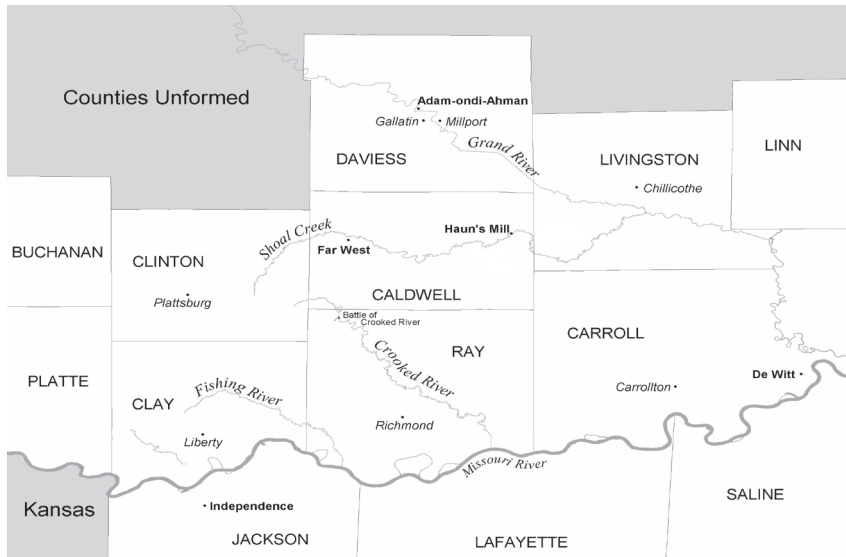

The Haun's Mill Massacre and the Extermination Order of Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs

Alexander L. Baugh

On the afternoon of October 30, 1838, the most lamentable and tragic episode of the Mormon-Missouri War took place at an isolated Mormon settlement in eastern Caldwell County known as Haun's Mill. Seventeen Latter-day Saint civilians were killed and another fourteen wounded by an extralegal force composed of over two hundred men acting under the leadership of Thomas Jennings of Livingston County. The circumstances relating to the events, and the tragic loss of life inflicted by these county regulators upon a non-threatening and almost entirely defenseless community, illustrate the extremes to which the public majority would go to remove an unwanted religious minority from their society.

To understand why the attack occurred, it is imperative to know that the massacre was one of seven major confrontations or campaigns of the 1838 Mormon-Missouri War that included the following conflicts: (1) the confrontation between Mormons and Missouri vigilantes in Daviess County, including the intercession by regional militia (August through mid-September); (2) the Latter-day Saint defense of the Mormon population residing in Carroll County against county regulators, and the response of the regional militia to the disturbances (August through October 10); (3) the expulsion of the non-Mormon residents of Daviess County by Mormon militia (mid-October); (4)

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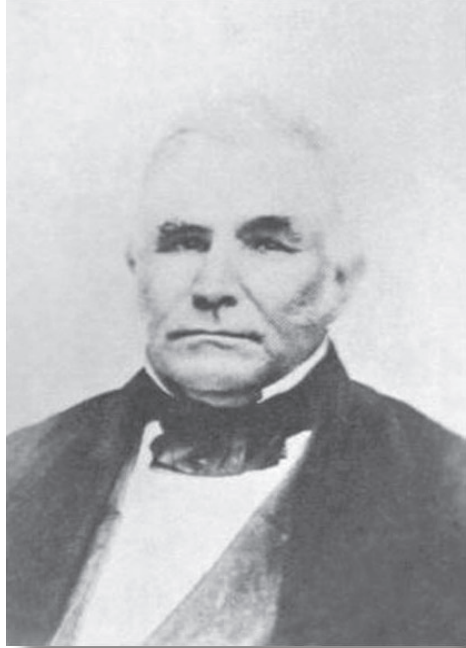
Map of Missouri's northwestern counties in 1838. The Mormon settlement of Haun's Mill was located on Shoal Creek approximately sixteen miles east of Far West. Map courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.

the encounter between Mormon and Missouri militia at Crooked River in Ray County (October 25); (5) the attack on the Mormon settlement of Haun's Mill by Missouri vigilantes (October 30); (6) the Mormon defense of Far West against vigilante and state militia forces (October 28–31); and (7) the Mormon surrender and the military occupation conducted by authorized militia (November 1–29).

The Haun's Mill attack had its genesis in the events that took place in Daviess County in October (number 3 above). Following the expulsion of the Latter-day Saints from De Witt in Carroll County, vigilante forces assembled in Daviess and commenced pillaging and burning a number of isolated Latter-day Saint homes and harassing Mormon settlers. To counter such actions, Mormon defenders made the decision to take aggressive action against their antagonists, most of whom were harbored in Millport, Gallatin, and the Grindstone Fork region. On October 18, these settlements (which included only a few structures) were burned by the Mormons, but no life was taken. Fearful that vigilante forces would retaliate, Mormons living in outlying regions of the county moved into Adam-ondi-Ahman for protection. Meanwhile, non-Mormon settlers also abandoned their homes and fled into nearby Livingston County, situated to the east.

News of the Mormon activities and operations conducted against the local inhabitants in Daviess County reached Governor Lilburn W. Boggs at the state capitol in Jefferson City by October 26. The governor, already prejudiced against the Latter-day Saints and one who believed the Mormons were fully to blame, immediately called out state troops to march to Daviess to reestablish control and assist the displaced citizens in restoring them to their homes. John B. Clark of Howard County was given command of the overall operation.¹

Significantly, because of the routing of Captain Samuel Bogart's company from Ray County by Mormon militia at the Battle of Crooked River on October 25 (number 4 above), the invasion of Daviess County by the state militia did not take place as planned. On October 27, Amos Rees and Wiley C.



Lilburn W. Boggs, date unknown (ca. 1850s). The image was taken by Lukins & Co. photographers of Lakeport, California. After relocating to northern California in 1846, Boggs lived in Petaluma, Sonoma, and Napa, California, until his death in 1860. Photograph courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

Williams arrived in Jefferson City to inform the governor of Bogart's defeat. Upon learning of the most recent events in the civil conflict, Boggs decided to take more aggressive action. In issuing new orders to General Clark, he wrote, "I have received by Amos Rees Esq. of Ray county and Wiley C. Williams Esq. one of my aids, information of the most appalling character which entirely changes the face of things. . . . Instead . . . of proceeding as at first directed to reinstate the citizens of Daviess in their homes, you will proceed immediately to Richmond and then operate against the Mormons." Included in the orders were the infamous words, "The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State."²

Generally, historians examining the Missouri period of Mormonism have concluded that the attack made by the Livingston militia on the Haun's Mill community was associated with the October 27 extermination order of Gov-

Head Quarters of the Militia
City of Jefferson
Oct 27 1838

Sir
I am the order of this morning to you directing you to raise 400 mounted men to be raised within your division I have received by Amos Kes Esq of Ray & Mit. the following information of the most appalling character which entirely changes the face of things and places the Mormons in the attitude of an open and avowed defiance of the laws and of having made war upon the people of this State your order are therefore to hasten your operations with all possible speed The Mormons must be treated as enemies and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary for the public peace their outrages are beyond all description If you can increase your force you are authorized to do so to any extent you may consider necessary I have just issued orders to Major Genl Willock of Marion Co to raise 500 men and to march them to the northern part of Daviess and then unite with Genl Donphow of Clay who has been ordered with 500 men to proceed to the same point for the purpose of intercepting the retreat of the Mormons to the north. They have been directed to communicate with you by express, you can also communicate with them if you find it necessary Instead therefore of proceeding as at first directed to re-visit the Atizans of Lewis in their homes you will proceed immediately to Hickman and then operate against the Mormons Brig Genl Parks of Ray has been ordered to have four hundred of his Brigade

Executive Order of Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, October 27, 1838, often referred to as the "Extermination Order," or the "Exterminating Order." Image courtesy Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri.

ernor Boggs—that the commander, Thomas Jennings, upon learning of the injunction, believed it gave him authorization for such an assault. Such a conclusion is based simply on the premise that since the exterminating order was issued on October 27, and the attack at the mill occurred on October 30, the massacre was apparently connected to the governor's injunction. For example, in his multi-volume history of the Latter-day Saints, Elder B. H. Roberts wrote that the “butchery was doubtless the first fruits” of the order. Further, “In history the Haun's Mill massacre will stand as an incident in direct sequence of the issuance of Governor Boggs' Order of Extermination.”³ Leland H. Gentry took a less definitive stance but still believed there was a connection, concluding, “While it cannot be shown for certain that [Thomas] Jennings took his sanctions from Boggs' Order, it must be admitted that certain facts argue strongly for it.”⁴ Alma Blair, a Community of Christ historian, wrote that at the time the massacre occurred, news of the exterminating order, being “widely known,” was therefore a leading factor in the decision to move against the outlying Mormon settlement.⁵ In her biography of Joseph Smith, Donna Hill also attributed the action to the edict.⁶ In the first edition of their comprehensive history of the Latter-day Saint movement, Mormon historians James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard state that the conflict was “part of an apparent effort to literally carry out the governor's extermination order.”⁷ In the second edition published in 1992, the authors omitted the sentence. However, the narrative still suggests that the massacre occurred as a result of Boggs' order.⁸ Finally, Stephen C. LeSueur suggests that the attack possibly occurred as a result of the mandate, but he does not take a position on the issue.⁹

An examination of the sources indicates that there was no connection whatsoever with the governor's directive. There is evidence that the attack by the county regulators upon the LDS community was actually a response or a retaliatory strike directed against the Mormons because of the raids they conducted against local vigilante leaders and settlers living in Daviess County during the latter half of October. In short, their objective was to make the Mormons “pay” for their most recent activities in Daviess—which payment would be in the price of human blood. In writing about the Missourians who carried out the tragedy at Haun's Mill, nineteenth century Missouri historian Return I. Holcombe wrote:

Nearly all of the men were citizens of Livingston County. Perhaps twenty were from Daviess, from whence they had been driven by the Mormons during the troubles in that county a few weeks previously. The Daviess County men were very bitter against the Mormons, and vowed the direst vengeance on the entire sect. It did not matter whether or not the Mormons at the mill had taken any part in the disturbances which had occurred [in Daviess]; it was enough that they were Mormons. The Livingston

men became thoroughly imbued with the same spirit, and all were eager for the raid, . . . feel[ing] an extraordinary sympathy for the outrages suffered by their neighbors.¹⁰

Ellis Eames (also Ames), a Latter-day Saint living near the mill at the time of the massacre, said that the Mormons were on relatively friendly terms with their non-Mormon neighbors until the problems erupted in Daviess County in mid-October. He wrote, "All things continued to move on well; the inhabitants behaved themselves very friendly and purchased good[s] from [us] and used [our] mill[s] for grinding and sawing. This continued until the disturbances broke out up in Daviess county, when I observed from the[ir] conversation that they did not like the proceedings of our brethren."¹¹

Historical sources show that plans were being made to attack the Mormon settlement even before the October 27 extermination order. Around October 25, a band of approximately twenty men headed up by Nehemiah Comstock, one of three captains who led the attack five days later, rode into Haun's Mill and demanded that the Mormons turn over their guns and weapons. Fearing repercussions if the ruffians' directives were not met, most of the men reluctantly complied. As soon as the anti-Mormon band made their departure, messengers were dispatched to Mormon families living along Shoal Creek that hostile bands were active in the area and to be on guard.¹²

Anti-Mormon raiders also accosted Mormon companies traveling through the area en route to Far West. Abraham Palmer stated that while passing through Livingston County, his company was surrounded by a mob consisting of thirty-eight men who abused them and then took the only three rifles they had before allowing them to pass on.¹³ William H. Walker's wagon company was stopped in the same area. Every wagon was searched and robbed of all its firearms and ammunitions. Then, as if the attack on the Haun's Mill had already been planned, they were warned that if they proceeded any farther, they would all be killed.¹⁴ Another Mormon company led by Joseph Young, an older brother to Brigham Young, received even harsher treatment. Young's party, composed of some ten families, had almost reached Caldwell County when they were confronted by a Livingston band headed by Thomas R. Bryan (the county clerk), his brother Jefferson Bryan, William Ewell, and James Austin. "We were taken prisoners by an armed mob that . . . demanded every bit of ammunition and every weapon we had," wrote Amanda Smith. "We surrendered all. They knew it, for they searched our wagons."¹⁵ The raiders then took them back a distance of five miles to a location known as Whitney's Mills, where they placed them under guard and detained them for several days. After finally being released, they proceeded on to Haun's Mill where they arrived two days before the attack.¹⁶

After confiscating what weapons they could from both Mormon settlers and immigrants, vigilante leaders next sent messengers to the Mormon community, proposing that the two sides meet to bring about terms of reconciliation. "The mob . . . sent word to us that they wished to meet a committee of our people and have an understanding of each other's movements and expressed their wish to live in peace and friendly terms with us," wrote Ellis Eames.¹⁷ The Mormons were more than willing to oblige, recognizing they were at a distinct military disadvantage—having only a limited number of weapons, as well as being outnumbered due to the addition of the vigilantes from Livingston, Daviess, and other surrounding counties. Accordingly, David Evans, Jacob Myers Sr., and Anthony Blackburn were selected to represent the Mormons in the discussions. Sources indicate that the mill's leaders negotiated with leaders of several vigilante groups on different occasions. One meeting was held at the Myers settlement situated a few miles east of Haun's Mill. Here the three Mormon delegates arbitrated with Samuel E. Todd, Zachariah Lee, Isaac McCroskie, Thomas R. Bryan, and William F. Ewell, all from Livingston County.¹⁸ About this same time, by means of a messenger, President Evans deliberated a truce with Nehemiah Comstock, at which time both parties agreed to abandon their military organization.¹⁹ Finally, at least two meetings were held at the home of Oliver Walker, with local citizens representing the non-Mormon settlers living among the Mormons in Fairview township in



The Haun's Mill Massacre painted by Danish-born nineteenth-century Mormon artist C. A. Christensen as part of the Mormon Panorama.

Caldwell County; and a third meeting was probably held with members of this same group on the day of the attack.²⁰ In each of these exchanges, both sides agreed to leave the other alone and live peaceably.

There is historical evidence, however, that the attempts made by the vigilantes to confiscate the Mormons' weapons, followed by the peace negotiations, were actually part of the overall plan of the Missouri regulators to ensure the eradication of the Mormon community. By disarming the Latter-day Saints, both those living in the area as well as those traveling through the region, the vigilantes would leave the Mormons defenseless, making it possible for the attack on the community to take place with minimal resistance, while at the same time reducing the risk of their own casualties. The pretended truce was conducted so the Mormons would be led to believe that they had nothing to fear and that an attack was not likely to occur.

The vigilante leaders made their *final* plans to attack the community on Monday, October 29.²¹ Although this was after Boggs issued his executive order on October 27, it would have been impossible for copies of the governor's mandate to be conveyed from Jefferson City to the two commanding major generals in the field—David R. Atchison (who was being replaced by Major-general John B. Clark) and Samuel D. Lucas, both of whom were encamped with their troops on Log Creek about seven miles south of Far West—and then those same orders conveyed to Livingston County in less than two days. Significantly, Lucas wrote that he and Atchison did not receive word of the extermination/removal order until sometime during the day of October 30, the very day of the massacre.²² Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that either of the two commanding generals, Atchison, who was somewhat sympathetic to the Mormons, or even Lucas, who was bitterly anti-Mormon, would have used the exterminating order to authorize Jennings to move ahead and annihilate the Haun's Mill community. Notably, even the Latter-day Saints at Far West did not learn of Boggs' directive until October 31.

Put simply, Jennings and his men acted on their own, without military authorization, and without knowledge of the governor's policy toward the Mormons as outlined in the October 27 directive. As one local history explains, "Colonel Jennings made the attack on Haun's Mill on his own responsibility, without orders from Governor Boggs, or other superior officer, although it is said that the Governor fully approved what was done afterward."²³

Notes

1. Lilburn W. Boggs to John B. Clark, 26 October 1838, in *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &C. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; And the Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the*

State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, on the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State (Fayette, Missouri: Boon's Lick Democrat, 1841), 62–63 (hereafter cited as *Document*).

2. Lilburn W. Boggs to John B. Clark, 27 October 1838, in *Document*, 61.

3. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century 1*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 1:483.

4. Leland H. Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri From 1836–1839," PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1965, 306.

5. Alma R. Blair, "The Haun's Mill Massacre," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1972): 63.

6. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1977), 235–36.

7. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 127.

8. See Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (2nd ed.), 136–37.

9. Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 163–64.

10. Return I. Holcombe, "The Haun's Mill Massacre: An Incident of the 'Mormon War' in Missouri," in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 6, 1887, n.p.; also in Joseph Smith III, and Heman C. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 4 vols. (Independence: Herald House, 1967), 2:227. Holcombe, who wrote this narrative under the pen name of Burr Joyce, was a late nineteenth and early twentieth century historian who wrote several county and local histories of communities and locales in Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota. Walter B. Stevens, a noted Missouri state historian, later stated that Holcombe was the most noted researcher and writer of the Mormon experience in Missouri. See Walter B. Stevens, *Centennial History of Missouri: One Hundred Years in the Union, 1820-1921*, 6 vols. (St. Louis: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), 2:115–16. Leland H. Gentry incorrectly identified him as "Reburn" Holcombe. See Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri," 290.

11. Ellis Eames (sometimes Ames), Reminiscence, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, October 30, 1838, 11, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. The entry in the *Journal History* incorrectly gives his name as Ellis Eamut. Eames and his wife Olive later affiliated with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

12. See *Journal History*, 12-13; also David Lewis, Autobiography, manuscript, 11, Church History Library; and Isaac Leany petitions in Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 266–67, 486. Jacob Foutz wrote that besides taking their guns and threatening to burn the mill, they also took some of their horses and cattle. See Foutz petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 694.

13. Abraham Palmer to W. Taylor and S. A. Taylor, June 26, 1839, manuscript, 2, Church History Library.

14. William H. Walker, *The Life Incidents and Travels of Elder William Holmes Walker and His Association with Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (n. p.: Elizabeth Jane Walker Piepgrass, 1943), 6.

15. Amanda Barnes Smith, Reminiscence, in Edward W. Tullidge, *Women of Mormonism* (New York: n. p., 1877), 121. See also Amanda Barnes Smith, Statement, in Emmeline B. Wells, "Amanda Smith," *Woman's Exponent* 9, no. 21 (April 1, 1881): 165; Amanda Barnes Smith petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 538; also in Joseph

Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed., B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 3:323–24 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*); and Merrick petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 505 Johnson gives the spelling as Myrick, whereas most sources give it as Merrick. Joseph Young gives a similar description of their treatment in his petition. See Joseph Young petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 721–24. A slightly different version of Young’s petition appears in the *History of the Church*, 3:183–86. Young’s narrative was the first eye-witness account of the Haun’s Mill massacre to be published, and it is the most frequently cited primary source cited in secondary literature on the subject. For an examination of the Joseph Young narrative see Alexander L. Baugh, “Joseph Young’s Affidavit of the Massacre at Haun’s Mill,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 188–202.

16. Joseph Young petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 721; also *History of the Church*, 3:183. Nathan K. Knight wrote that they actually escaped from their captors after they became drunk and fell asleep. See Knight, “Extracts From a Statement of Nathan K. Knight,” in *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties, Missouri, Written and Compiled From the Most Authentic Official and Private Sources, Including a History of Their Townships, Towns and Villages, Together With a Condensed History of Missouri; a Reliable and Detailed History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties--Their Pioneer Record, Resources, Biographical Sketches of Prominent Citizens; General and Local Statistics of Great Value; Incidents and Reminiscences* (St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1886), 157. See also Knight petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 260.

17. Eames, *Reminiscence*, 12.

18. Eames, *Reminiscence*, 12–13.

19. Holcombe, “The Haun’s Mill Massacre,” 226. Holcombe stated the agreement with Comstock was reached on October 28. Margaret Foutz, a young girl at the time of the massacre, wrote that Evans met personally with Comstock. See Margaret Foutz, “Narrative of the Haun’s Mill Massacre,” in Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*, 170.

20. See Leany petitions in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 267, 486. It was probably one of these two meetings with the Caldwell non-Mormons that David Lewis was referring to when he wrote, “A short time previous to the massacre at Shoal creek, we made peace with the mob characters living near us. . . . We met them and an agreement was entered into between us, that we would live in peace, let others do as they would.” David Lewis, “Narrative of the Haun’s Mill Massacre,” in *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 10 (August 1840): 147.

21. Holcombe, “The Haun’s Mill Massacre,” 227; see also *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties*, 147.

22. Samuel Lucas to Lilburn W. Boggs, November 2, 1838, in *Document*, 72; also Samuel Lucas to Lilburn W. Boggs, November 5, 1838, in *Document*, 71.

23. Carrie Polk Johnston and W. H. S. McGlumphy, *History of Clinton and Caldwell Counties, Missouri* (Topeka and Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Co., 1923), 240. While detained as a prisoner following the Mormon surrender, Levi Richards asked a Missouri official if the men who massacred the Mormons at Haun’s Mill were called out under the governor’s orders or were mobbers. He was told they were the latter. See Richards petition in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 328. In a newspaper article appearing less than two weeks following the massacre the reporter wrote, “We understand that the company engaged in the attack at Splawn’s [Haun’s] creek, was not attached to any division of the army, but was fighting on its own hook.” *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis, Missouri), November 12, 1838, 2.