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## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

Troubled Trails: The Meeker Affair and the Expulsion of Utes from Colorado. By Robert Silbernagel.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xg5c45t>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 37(3)

### ISSN

0161-6463

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### Publication Date

2013-06-01

### DOI

10.17953

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sexual orientation, race, and nation studies. The editors' introduction offers an important preamble, situating their own work within an historical current that has mingled "Gay Power" and "Red Power" from coterminous origins in the civil rights movements of the 1960s. As an exemplary affirmation of scholarly activism, their collaboration represents a manifesto for social justice today.

Grace L. Dillon

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**Troubled Trails: The Meeker Affair and the Expulsion of Utes from Colorado.** By Robert Silbernagel. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011. 304 pages. \$24.95 paper.

This is a purposeful history of the 1879 incidents at the White River Agency in northwest Colorado, frequently referred to as the "Meeker massacre." Journalist Silbernagel writes a conventional and well-documented account of a complex event. Much has been written about this episode, but nonetheless the author creates a convincing and insightful retelling of this fated affair. Unlike Peter Decker's recent treatment of the subject in his 2004 book, *"The Utes Must Go!": American Expansion and the Removal of a People*, and earlier works by Robert Emmitt and Marshall Sprague that examine military and political dimensions, Silbernagel's journalistic approach puts a human and cultural spin on the players in this drama as he investigates incentives, innuendos, and power struggles.

Central to an understanding of the plight of the Utes in western Colorado is the tragedy at the White River Agency. The White River Agency was a remote and isolated agency on the western slope in northern Colorado Territory, nearly 100 miles north of the Uncompahgre Valley. On September 29, 1879, Nathan Meeker, a sixty-two-year-old newspaperman turned neophyte White River Indian agent, who earlier had founded Greeley, Colorado in 1870, was killed by a group of Utes who were fed up with his lack of respect for their culture. The Indians killed him for withholding provisions and annuities, forcing them to farm, and for compelling federal troops to trespass onto the Ute reservation. After the massacre, Meeker's wife Arvilla, daughter Josephine, and three others were abducted by a small group of White River Ute men. These acts essentially sealed the fate of the Utes in Colorado.

Meeker had borrowed money from Horace Greeley, the *New York Tribune* editor and stockholder, to establish the *Greeley Tribune* newspaper in his utopian town at the confluence of the Platte and the Cache La Poudre Rivers in northern Colorado Territory. To pay his debts, Nathan Meeker took an

assignment as Indian agent to the White River Agency in 1878. The White River band of approximately 700 was determined, perhaps more than any other band, to hold onto their Native ways of the horse and the hunt.

Part of what makes this story so intrinsically engaging is that the heroes, heroines, and villains of this drama knew each other well. Colonel Thornburgh's troops, who were attacked when they crossed the Northern Ute reservation boundaries, were not strangers to the White River Ute. All involved parties knew that Nathan Meeker had called in the military because he asserted that his life was in danger. At the White River Agency, the Meeker family hired Utes to work in their home, Josephine Meeker set up a school for Ute children, and Arvilla Meeker ministered to the sick. The location was remote and daily activities were observed by all.

The treatment of the topic is neither theoretical nor military. Rather, the author combines his expertise as a journalist with his geographical interest in the route taken by the Ute and their white captives (women and children) from the White River Agency to their release point on the Grand Mesa. For the white women and children, the captivity was a twenty-three-day ordeal; the consequences for the Northern Ute were eternal.

Silbernagel deciphers nuanced inconsistencies that he has discerned by means of his thorough examination of numerous primary and secondary sources. The breadth of his comprehension of the labyrinthine events in autumn of 1879 is impressive, and the author's introduction to the personalities of the players is insightful. As he examines the ambitions, agendas, and motives of the players, the reader learns about the pithy but frequently obscure nature of Indian-white relations. Silbernagel's description of the relationship between Nicaagat (Jack) and his captive Josephine Meeker is particularly revealing, and epitomizes the tangled and very human complexity of late-nineteenth-century colonialism. Two strong-willed folk from very different worlds attempted to fathom the trajectory and sequence of events that had spiraled disastrously out of control. Neither of them lived more than three years after the events of September 1879.

Nathan Meeker, who has frequently been presented as simply a sanctimonious villain, is also thoroughly examined. Was he saintly and paternal, naïve, deceitful and conniving, or some combination of the above? Silbernagel entreats his reader to recognize that portraits of historical figures are not convincingly painted with a broad brush, even as he documents Meeker's position that the essence of the American Indian was inferior and immature.

The chapters devoted to women were stimulating. Josephine Meeker, She-Towitch aka Susan or Shawsheen, and sixty-four year-old Arvilla Meeker, central figures in the dramatic unfolding of the story, are revealed as complex, strong-willed, independent women. The examples of eloquent speech, balanced

perspectives, kindness, and thoughtful behaviors are well presented. Given the paucity of primary documents, Silbernagel's dissection of the materials is noteworthy; furthermore, his inclusion of Ute oral histories is impressive.

I also appreciated his treatment of the issue of the possible rapes ("outrage") of the women captives. Silbernagel neither avoids the issue nor sensationalizes it. He considers the question in the light of a Victorian worldview, the fallout for the women, the consequences for nineteenth-century Utes, and considers twenty-first-century Ute perspectives as well. Comparing the unfair assumptions about how all Indians behave to other similar attitudes, he writes, "It was the same as if a black man had been accused of assaulting a white woman in the Old South. The women's statements were evidence enough, and denial from the suspects was given no credence whatsoever" (118). And while I wish he had made mention of the "medical examinations" of the women, I nonetheless found his discussion provocative. The epilogue provides insight into the cupidity of Coloradans. Revenging the treatment of white women was surpassed by their delight in Ute removal from most of the state. I appreciated that the author was unperturbed by his pro-Indian position.

Areas where I found the narrative remiss include the author's numerous use of citations from Josephine Meeker's hurriedly written and very problematic personal account, *The Brave Miss Meeker*. While this book is an important source, Silbernagel should have informed his readers in advance of its controversial nature, since many don't read footnotes. Academically, I found the chapters titled "Trail Section 1-4" to be distracting; they detracted from the book's narrative flow of the book. These personal memoir chapters tell of how Silbernagel, family, and friends traversed the "troubled trail" that Arvilla and Josephine Meeker, Sue Ellen Price, and her two children traveled. Some of the minutiae of these chapters might be of minimal interest to non-Coloradans. The detailed maps *do* provide an interesting addition to these chapters.

Additionally, an investigation of the myth, metaphor, and traditions of the Ute could have been used to substantiate the author's insights. For example, the fascinating thrice-told-or-more story of Nicaaget and the red (or green) wagons might have been more fully elucidated by reference to traditional Ute beliefs and folklore. Nicaaget uses the true story of the promised wagons to illustrate Meeker's character as a liar and an agent who could not be trusted. In a nutshell, Meeker promised the Utes wooden wagons to haul poles and for use in farming. Red wagons were delivered, but, according to Meeker, were too large for the Utes' small ponies. Nicaaget asserts that they were better built than the green wagons that replaced the red ones, which were retained for use at the agency. To add insult to injury, the Utes eventually had to return the green wagons to the agency.

Commissioners and agents heard the story as a complaint about the color of the wagons. They, like Meeker, did not understand that they were in Ute country; furthermore, whatever was given to Indians was a result of treaty obligations, not United States government generosity. I also believe that Nacaaget employed traditional Ute narrative motifs to make the point that Meeker could not be trusted; these motifs are at the foundation of the core Native value of honesty.

As a resident of Greeley, Colorado, and a cultural anthropologist who is familiar with and profoundly interested in the incidents before and after the Meeker “massacre,” overall I found Silbernagel’s treatment of the event refreshing. When I read a book that I learn something from, and am provoked to rethink old questions, I am satisfied. As a seamstress, I just want to comprehend how Josie fashioned an elegantly tailored wool suit from worn Indian blankets while on the run with her Ute captors.

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**Trust in the Land: New Directions in Tribal Conservation.** By Beth Rose Middleton. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011. 352 pages. \$35.00 paper.

It is a tragic coincidence that, just as American Indian nations are asserting their long-suppressed rights to self-determination over their lands and resources, they are required to confront evolving threats to their homelands due to climate change. Given the urgent nature of today’s ecological situation, a book devoted to analyzing how legal conservation tools can be used to advance tribal political, economic, cultural, and ecological goals is very timely indeed.

Beth Rose Middleton’s *Trust in the Land* is, on one hand, a very practical volume describing how certain legal and institutional arrangements can be used to consolidate the tribal land base, protect tribal natural resources, and obtain access to and restore sites that are not located on tribal lands. On the other, Middleton’s historical and theoretical framing of the book, as well as her contextual remarks and analysis throughout, make it more than just a how-to manual for tribal conservation specialists and their non-Native allies. Middleton approaches her subject—the use of conservation easements and the role of land trusts in various contexts throughout Indian country—through the lens of environmental justice, and in particular environmental justice for Native people. Middleton therefore weaves an understanding of tribal peoples’ distinctive historical and cultural claims and relationships to their lands into