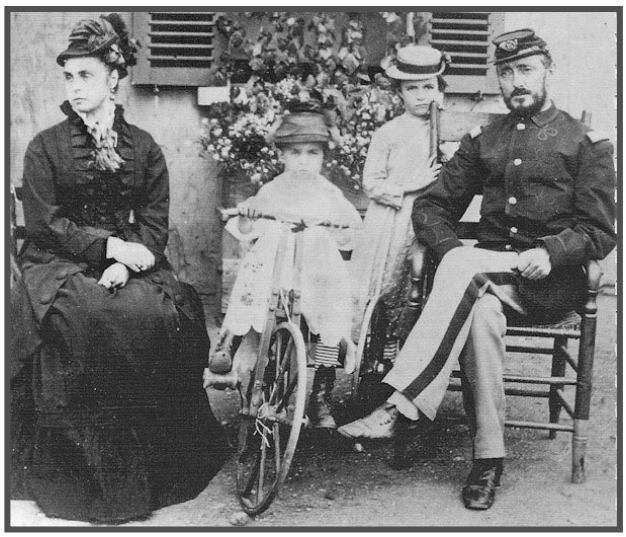
FORT GARLAND MUSEUM
A Condensed History – Part 2

LIFE AT FORT GARLAND



Many officers brought their families to live at the fort, and artifacts of domestic life were unearthed there more than a century later.

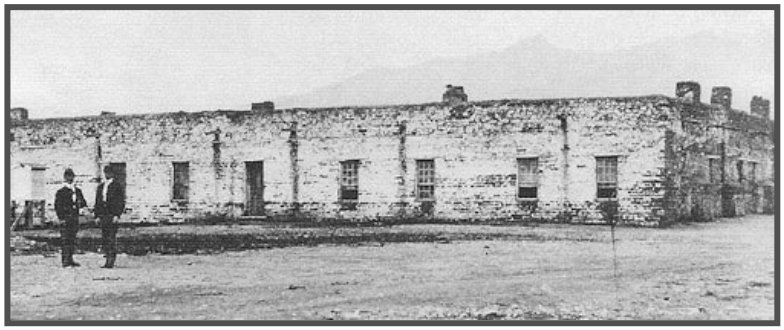
Living Quarters ... The fort's modest, utilitarian layout offered essentially two degrees of comfort, depending on a man's rank. The commandant's quarters featured several rooms at the center of Officer's Row. He had his own kitchen, parlor, office with a fireplace where business could be conducted, a dining room, and rooms for his wife and children, if they had accompanied him. The commandant supplied his own furnishings, including furniture, curtains, and china, if he wanted his dwelling more homelike. Only the multi-roomed dwellings along Officers' Row featured south-facing windows, which caught the low-angled winter sun, and in summer lay in the shade of cottonwoods ringing the parade ground.

The accommodations for the noncommissioned officers and enlisted men, on the other hand, provided only the barest of necessities. Inside the barracks for both cavalry and infantry, on the fort's east and west flanks, Spartan simplicity ruled, especially in the early days. Two men shared a bunk and nearby racks for their uniforms. Gun racks circled the upright cedar pillars supporting the sod-heavy wood roof above. An open fireplace at one end of the long barracks provided precious heat, while wall-mounted oil lamps offered dim light on cold winter nights.

Lining the north side of the parade ground, the enlisted men's barracks are shown on the south side.

For those who had committed a serious offense, accommodations could be harsh indeed. The fort's jailhouse cells, one observer wrote, were "nothing but large wooden boxes, only ventilated by a small opening in the roof. No means are provided for heating them, & when occupied in the winter, prisoners suffer severely with cold."

Daily Routine ... For the rank-and-file, daily life at Fort Garland was shaped by the commandant's personal discipline and outlook and the mundane demands of survival. Routine ruled. Each day repeated the same patterns as those at other western forts: reveille about daybreak, cavalry stable duties, breakfast, then



Designed and built to sustain a garrison in the valley's extreme conditions, Fort Garland continued its primary work of vigilance and readiness. It was an honorable, physically difficult life characterized by long periods of boredom punctuated by occasional calls to action.

chores such as cleaning, weapons, upkeep of the buildings, clearing the *acequias*, and cutting wood. Then came military drills at 10:00 A.M., "dinner" at 11:30 A.M., more chores, another drill at 1 :55 P.M., stable duties at 3:00 P.M., parade assembly before sunset, supper, and taps at 8:30 P.M. Army regulations for 1863 stated that cleanliness and order should prevail. Men were to keep their hair short, their beards trimmed, and bathe once a week. They paid a laundress to wash their uniforms and the company cobbler to fix their boots.

Over its twenty-five-year life span, Fort Garland expanded from its original design to accommodate the garrison's marching band, the families of officers, and civilians employed at the fort as teamsters or laundresses. Workrooms, storage facilities, and stables also were added between 1860 and about 1875.

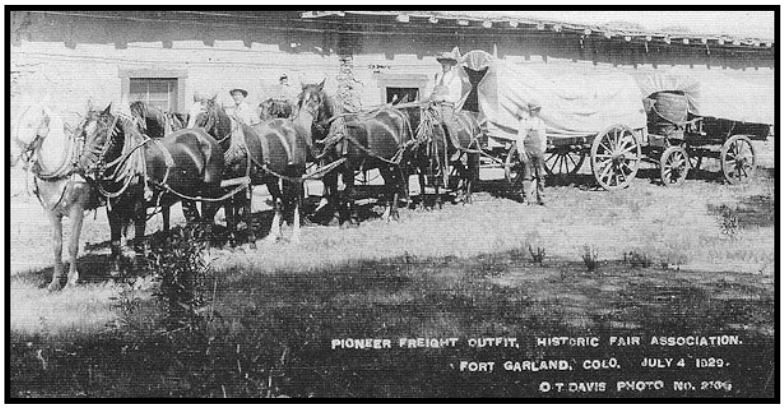
Men of the Fort ... With the commandant's permission, enlisted men could earn additional pay working "extra duty" jobs such as serving as officers' orderlies or as cooks, teamsters, laborers, tailors, carpenters, or stable watches. The commandant himself dealt with a near-constant flow of communiqués from his superior officers at Fort Union, Fort Leavenworth, and Washington, D.C. The fort's ranking officer wrote comprehensive monthly reports on his post's condition, the number of men ready to fight, and men who were sick, imprisoned, or had deserted. Because the primary commander frequently led detachments into the field or tended to duties in Taos, Santa Fe, or Fort Union, he might be absent for as much as a month or more, requiring the second ranking officer to take charge.

Various companies served at the post over its quarter-century lifespan. They included ethnically diverse companies like the largely Hispano First New Mexico Volunteers (1862-63 and 1866-67) and so-called Buffalo Soldiers of the Ninth Cavalry (1876-79), an exclusively African American unit led by Anglo officers. The Anglos who made up the bulk of the fighting force at Fort Garland over time were far from a homogenous group. A substantial proportion

hailed from European countries such as England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Denmark, and some were from Canada. Many foreign-born recruits could not speak English or find jobs in America and saw enlistment as a means of survival. The Army often assigned them to remote garrisons like Fort Garland. Enlistees also came from more than a dozen states. Their ages ranged from late teens to late forties. Apart from the career soldiers, recruits represented every trade and occupation, from the farm to the factory.

There is one pleasant feature about Fort Garland. The log and adobe houses of the rancheros do not in the least exceed the Spartan limit of a few chairs, a table, and a chromo in the matters of decoration or luxury. But the officers contrive to crowd many significant little [bits] of refinement into their incommodious quarters, notwithstanding the difficulty of obtaining anything except the mere necessities of life. The rooms are in some instances carpeted, with buffalo-robes and bear-skins, while the walls are adorned with guns and relics of the chase.

---W. H. Rideing, 1873



The scene above is an early twentieth-century reenactment, but it accurately captures a common scene at the fort during its heyday. Sustaining the fort's garrison required eye-opening logistics. Estimated supplies for a year included 52 tons of beef, more than 24 tons of bacon, a ton of ham, 86 tons of flour, 13 tons each of cornmeal and sugar, 7 tons of coffee, 3 tons each of rice and hominy, 1½ tons of dried potatoes, a ton of dried vegetables, 2,200 gallons of molasses, 1,500 gallons of vinegar, 160 bushels of beans, and 100 pounds of salt. Other items included 400 gallons of common whiskey and 100 gallons of bourbon.

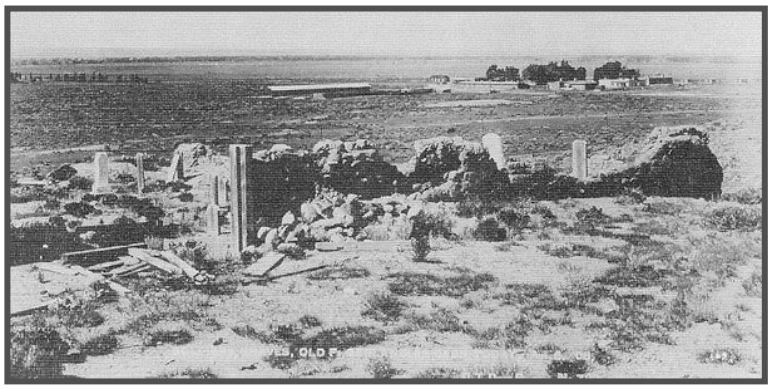
Feeding a Regiment ... Fresh stock, grain, and hay came through brokers from the valley's Hispano *placitas*, which multiplied during the 1850s and 1860s. Those settlements included San Luis de Culebra, San Acacio, and others just south of the fort, as well as hamlets on the Conejos River across the valley such as Guadalupe, San Jose, and San Rafael. Fort Garland thus created a local market for cattle, grain, flour, and produce raised in the San Luis Valley. In later years, after the rail-road arrived in 1877, the fort also acted as a point of procurement for products like beef and potatoes to be sent to Fort Union and other points outside the valley. Until 1877, advertisements requesting bids for supplies in Santa Fe and Taos appeared in both Spanish and English—and quartermasters learned to deal in corn and wheat by the fanega, a traditional Spanish measure equal to 11/2 bushels. Eventually, nearly every contract for corn, hay, wood, and charcoal went to Anglo businessmen, who settled the valley in increasing numbers after the Civil War and the subsequent arrival of the railroad. This did not help bridge the cultural divide between local Hispanos and Anglos—vestiges of which remain to this day.

Many staples also arrived through the Army's own distribution system. Here, again, cultural differences—and tastes—came into play. In New Mexico, flour came from red wheat, and its dark color—often combined with impurities—appalled Anglos accustomed to fine-grained white flour. In March 1868, Commandant Maj. Hugh Fleming wrote to demand "good Saint Louis flour" for his men. "The wheat is gathered and tramped out on the ground," he said,

"generally by sheep or goats; then scraped up, winnowed, and sent to the mill." He added, in a bitter joke: "Some calculate that our flour is composed of one-third wheat, one-third earth, and one-third manure."

Then to the accompaniment of excellent music by 4 native performers, all gave themselves up to the enjoyments of the dance. The senoritas in their best array, the soldiers in their well brushed uniforms made as fine an assemblage as could be seen anywhere, and notwithstanding the frequent visits which custom sanctioned to an adjoining room where the drinkables of all kinds were afforded, the most perfect good order and decorum prevailed.... Again and again did the unwearied dancers respond to the flowing music of the slow waltz,... all unconscious of the lapse of time, the night sped on till the drums at reveille (day break) awoke them from their trance. After a hearty breakfast the visitors began to return home, long to remember the celebration of Washington's birthday. To judge by the many expressions of "Muy! Muy! bonito fandango," as they left, our Mexican friends at least were of the opinion that it was the [ball] of New-Mexico.

---C. H Alden, February 29, 1860



To the northeast of the fort, a graveyard held the remains of soldiers who perished on duty - at least until 1883 when they were removed to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. To the east of the fort are the company stables, rarely seen in other photographs.

The Good, the Bad, and the Dreary ... Life could be many things at Fort Garland depending on one's outlook. Recalling his service at the post fifty years later, a leader of the Fourth Cavalry in 1879-80, J. Parker, wrote: "In spite of drills, life was not all drudgery. Men pursued deer and duck hunting, horse racing, foot races." They played cards, even built a primitive gymnasium. "At night," Parker said, "it was cold on the mountain plateau, but in our fireplace great pition logs crackled, throwing out an aromatic odor." Dr. Munn, post surgeon, led a singing group; some officers read "to improve their minds by study"; and at least twice, military bands that were stationed at the fort provided musical diversion.

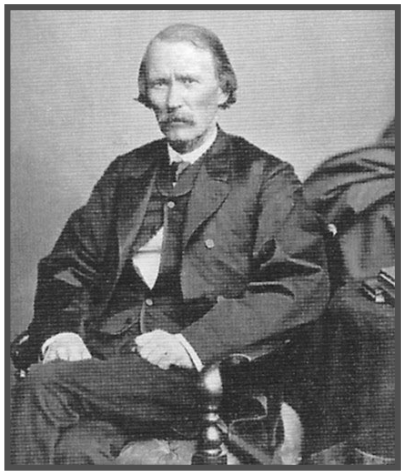
But life at the fort could be dreary and dangerous too. In 1861, preparing for Civil War action, the men under Maj. Daniel P. Whiting, Tenth Infantry, came from hastily gathered volunteers. They had little or no military garb, and one company found itself in extremely short supply. Guard duty at the open corners of the fort exposed sentries to icy blasts of wind, and the company's men had to take turns using one coat. Major Whiting, a stickler for regulation, demanded to know if the same man was standing guard every night. His orderly, Pat Ford, is said to have replied, "No, be jabbers, but the same coat kivers the whole company now." The situation hadn't changed much twenty years later. Writing home in 1879, Micah John Jenkins lamented: "It is so infernally cold. The men are sick, half of them; one died today of pneumonia and another is expected to die hourly. Poor devils."

THE FORT AND THE UTES

Ute warriors

People of the Shining Mountains ... Ute culture is dominated by family units, which in historic times formed close-knit, autonomous bands, each led by an individual who displayed the respected qualities of wisdom, courage, and physical prowess. The many bands of the tribe included major ones that played a role at Fort Garland: the Capote in the San Luis Valley, the Muache along the Front Range, the Weminuche in the San Juan Mountains, and the Uncompahgre in the Gunnison River country. The Utes' autonomy and lack of hierarchal authority would plague Anglo-Ute relations in the Fort Garland era.

Commander Kit Carson ... The increasingly menacing mood of many Ute bands and their intermittent raids on ranches and settlements in the San Luis Valley brought none other than the legendary Kit Carson to Fort Garland, where he served as commander from May 19, 1866, to October 28, 1867.



Commander Kit Carson

He came with the highest recommendation. Maj. Gen. John Pope, commander at Fort Union, had written to his superior officer, Lt. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman of Civil War fame, that Fort Garland was the most important post on the Ute frontier. Furthermore, Pope wrote: "Carson is the best man in the country to control these Indians and to prevent war if it can be done. He is personally known and liked by every Indian of the bands likely to make trouble." Carson arrived at the fort with four companies of New Mexico Volunteers, many of them Hispanos—men whose valor he knew and could trust.

Upon taking command, Carson filed a report on the fort's location, natural resources, and its buildings and their condition. Though the celebrated trapper, guide, and Indian fighter could barely pen a crude note, he had the assistance of his adjutant, James W. Tanfield. Carson found the post, he wrote, "in Very bad Condition, Attributable in my opinion only to Culpable neglect of the Comdg officers." The new commandant emphasized the fort's important role in maintaining peace among the region's cultures and factions—but only if it were properly garrisoned. Carson estimated that within fifty miles of the post ranged three bands of Utes, numbering 800 warriors, and Jicarilla Apaches with another 250 fighting men. "To restrain this large body I have but a Command of Some 60 Men," he stated. "This is inadequate for the proper protection of Government property Alone." Given the Utes' desperate situation, he warned, they were close to war, and he needed two companies of cavalry, one of infantry, and a battery of light artillery to handle the job.

At Garland Carson kept an open house, exercising the most unbounded hospitality to all visitors and passers-by... [including] the Ute Indians, of whom he had such powerful influence that no trouble ever took place when an appeal could be made to him.... It was a study to see him sitting, surrounded by them rolling cigarritos and passing the tobacco around, all the while laughing, joking, talking Spanish, or Ute tongue, with such abundant gesticulations and hand movements, that it seemed to me he talked more with his hands and shoulders than with his tongue.

—Dr. George Gwyther, post surgeon

Carson and the Utes ... The Southern Utes were destitute and starving, and they pointed to a treaty concluded in October 1863 that required them to give up prime hunting grounds in exchange for annuities that included livestock, horses, and other aid. The U.S. Senate had ratified the treaty, but the government had failed to honor its provisions. That fall, Sherman himself visited Fort Garland to meet with Carson and see firsthand whether a new treaty could be forged to stop the Utes from committing depredations to keep themselves alive.

By October 1866, Gov. Alexander Cummings of Colorado Territory reported to D. N. Cooley, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, that the Utes were poverty-stricken, many of them going without clothing. The Indian agent for the Southern Utes had dispensed food to stem widespread starvation, Cummings wrote, and Carson requested permission to do the same at Fort Garland. To maintain the overall peace, Ute chief Ouray brought his band to Fort Garland, and Carson offered whatever gifts he could to confirm their friendship.

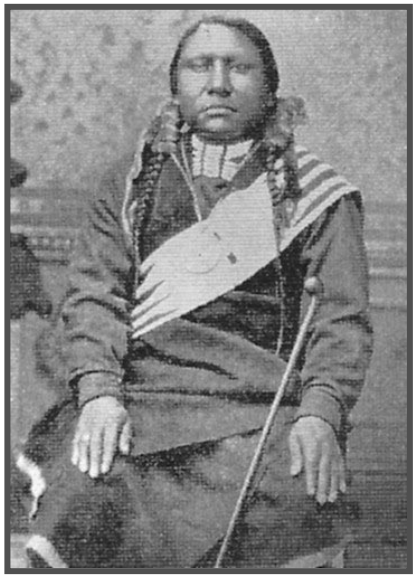
Carson spent the winter of 1866-67 at home in Taos, already suffering from ailments that would end his life soon after he resigned his post in October 1867. In his wake, however, he left a peace between Utes and others in the valley that lasted more than a decade, from 1867 to 1879. In large part, this was a result of his friendship with Chief Ouray, which developed out of trust and mutual respect for each other's honesty and courage. That friendship helped to forge and maintain peace in southern Colorado in the 1860s and 1870s, even after Carson's death in 1868.

He was handsomely dressed in buckskin richly ornamented with beads.... He is...honest and reliable, and it was greatly owing to his influence with the tribe that the late outbreak did not involve all the Ute Nation.

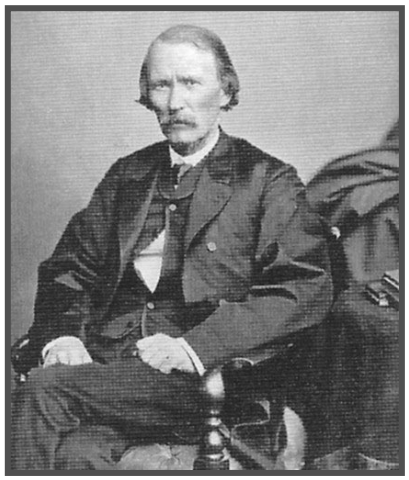
Eveline Alexander, on meeting Ouray in October 1866.

In person Carson was remarkable, being not more than five feet four inches high, with a long body and [bowed] legs....[He had] long, thin hair reaching to his shoulders, ...small, keen, bright, gray eyes Land] gave you the impression of a man whose wits were in careful training.

—Dr. George Gwyther, post surgeon



Born in Taos, New Mexico, **Chief Ouray**(1833-1880) was the son of a Jicarilla Apache mother and an Uncompahgre Ute father. Well-built, he stood five feet seven inches, with a broad handsome face and long hair tied in two braids. He learned to speak excellent Spanish and some English, as well as Ute and Apache. As a teenager he joined the Tabeguache band of Utes in southern Colorado, distinguishing himself as a leader. His patience, diplomacy, and a desire for peace between his band and non-native settlers led the U.S. government to deal with him as representative of all Ute bands during treaty negotiations in the 1860s and 1870s. Such a distinction was foreign to the autonomy of the seven major Ute bands and, at times, he faced jealousy, even an attempt on his life.



Born in Kentucky, **Christopher "Kit" Carson** (1809-1868) moved with his family to Missouri as a toddler and in 1826 fled an apprenticeship to join a Santa Fe–bound wagon train. His career over four decades included trapping, hunting, guiding, exploring, and alternately fighting various Indian tribes or securing peace with them. His action against the Navajos resulted in the eventual displacement of more than nine thousand Indians and their incarceration at the Bosque Redondo. Nineteenth-century whites, whose image of him came from dime novels that made him a legend in his lifetime, hailed Carson as a courageous defender of the right of the superior race to settle western lands. But Carson thought of his campaigns against Indian tribes as merely defensive - never as wars of extermination.

Buffalo Soldiers ... In 1875 the San Juan Prospector, assured that peace was finally at hand, proposed that Fort Garland had outlived its usefulness. That judgment, however, was premature. The following year, Fort Garland's soldiers intervened between Utes and miners in the La Plata gold region, and in 1877 the same garrison played a role in removing miners from Ute reservation lands in the San Juan Mountains. In both cases, the troops who rode forth included African Americans of the Ninth Cavalry. These men became known as Buffalo Soldiers, an appellation bestowed by southern Plains Indians who linked the soldiers' tightly curled black hair to the matting between a buffalo's horns.

Buffalo Soldiers participated in the typical drudgery of fort life, which included repairing adobe barracks, clearing the *acequias*, and shoring up critical supplies. These soldiers' "extra duty" also included pacing new recruits through their drills or working as cooks, orderlies, stable watchmen, and teamsters. In 1878, Pvt. Francis Redmond, a Buffalo Soldier, served as assistant teacher at the fort's school.

Following the Civil War, in which 186,000 black soldiers served the Union, Congress authorized six regiments of black troops with white commanders, the Ninth Cavalry among them. They came from varied backgrounds and included former slaves, sharecroppers, teamsters, bakers, and cooks. Some sought advancement or education by enlisting. Most were single or left their families behind. These companies were organized in the East and then dispatched to distant western posts. Buffalo Soldiers in the freshly minted state of Colorado (established in 1876) served at Fort Lyon, Fort Lewis, and Fort Garland.

Latter-day historians have pointed out the irony of the proud Buffalo Soldier who, having recently been freed from slavery fought the continent's indigenous peoples to make way for largely white settlers. Such contradictions are the stuff of history. Regardless of modern ruminations, the African American soldiers of the time dispatched their duties with pride and zeal.

Surrounded by stretches of dreary sage-brush stands Fort Garland, looking southward down the valley. It is not a fort which could resist a siege, not even an attack from a few mounted Indians; it must have been intended simply for barracks; a few rows of low, mud-walled buildings placed in a sort of a hollow square with openings on three sides; a little plat of green grass and a few cotton-wood trees in the center; two brass field-pieces pointing vaguely to the south; a score or so of soldiers' houses outside; some clothes-lines on which red shirts, and here and there a blue coat, were blowing; a United States flag fluttering on the flag-staff one soldier and one sergeant; that was all we saw in the way of defenses of the San Luis Valley.

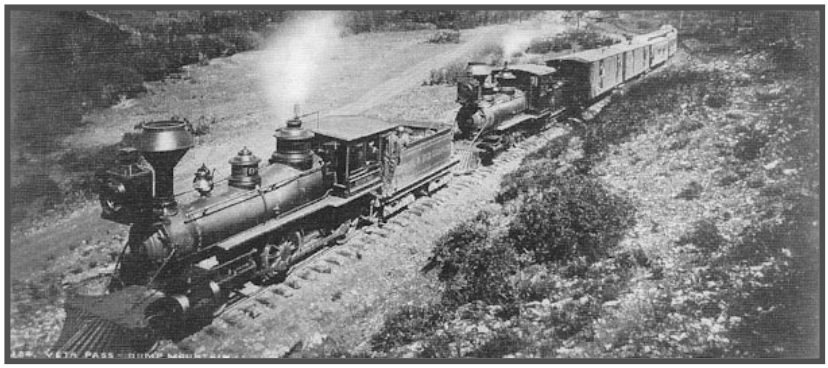
- Helen Hunt Jackson, 1877

In 1880, the Utes, who had occupied much of western Colorado for centuries, were forcibly removed to reservations in Utah and confined to small areas of land in southwestern Colorado. Ouray had clearly grasped the harsh realities facing his people and tried through diplomacy to address them.

Ute Removal ... A Congressional resolution in 1877 required the Secretary of War to protect western Colorado's incoming white miners and settlers from the Utes, who remained angry about the government's failure to honor provisions of the 1873 treaty. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote: "There is no doubt that Fort Garland, as a protection to the frontier, has ceased to be of use, because miners have filled up the country and mountains to the north and west for more than a hundred miles."

The peace in Colorado was shattered on September 29, 1879, when Utes who had been forced to accept a settled, agrarian lifestyle killed Indian agent Nathan Meeker and eleven others at the White River Agency in northwest Colorado. The incident raised the specter of all-out war, exacerbated by the influx of miners into the last redoubt of the Southern Utes in the San Juan Mountains. Suddenly, the garrison at Fort Garland expanded to fully fifteen companies, most of which had to live in tents outside the venerable rectangle of adobe buildings through a brutal snowy winter. Within a year, however, the Utes were militarily escorted out of their centuries-old central Rockies home—and directed to sagebrush reservations in eastern Utah or smaller reservations in southern Colorado, which they occupy today.

FORGOTTEN CROSSROADS



Less than ten years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, narrow-gauge lines were spreading throughout Colorado Rockies, opening up the mountainous interior to miners, settlers, townspeople, and tourists.

Railroaded ... By the time the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG) crossed Sangre de Cristo Pass in 1877, the Utes had lost the San Luis Valley—though not yet the plateau country of the Western Slope. That August, the railroad's western terminus was the freshly minted Garland City—a bustling town that mushroomed in a few weeks a half-dozen miles away. The next spring, the D&RG reached the military post. Though the railroad presaged Fort Garland's demise, for now it brought a welcome supply of white "Saint Louis flour" for the men. When the railroad bridged the Rio Grande, with its west bank terminus the town of Alamosa, Garland City's upstart buildings were placed on flat cars and taken to the new site. The old adobe Fort Garland—once "the forerunner of civilization" in the valley—had become an anachronism, a vestige of an earlier era.

By this time, the railroad had made a wide variety of goods, long considered luxuries, available to enlisted men and their families. Officers and some soldiers were able to bring their families to live with them at the fort. Their children had toys, even bicycles, for diversion. The frontier was gone.

The fort's lease, signed July 17, 1856, had provided use t of the land and its resources to the Army for twenty-five years, at a cost of one dollar per year. By the time the lease expired on June 30, 1882, William Gilpin, Colorado's first territorial governor and a visionary of Manifest Destiny, had become a valley landowner. He secured all rights to the Sangre de Cristo grant—requesting, and receiving, $100 per month in lease payments from the Army.

Taps ... In a move that had been anticipated for at least a decade, General Sherman advised R. T. Lincoln, Secretary of War, on October 16, 1882, that Fort Garland was "obsolete and ought to be abandoned." The last commandant, he said, should "dispose of all the buildings and materials which cannot be moved." On November 30, 1883, Capt. Javan B. Irvine, 22nd Infantry, ordered the American flag lowered from its lofty perch and marched his men to the

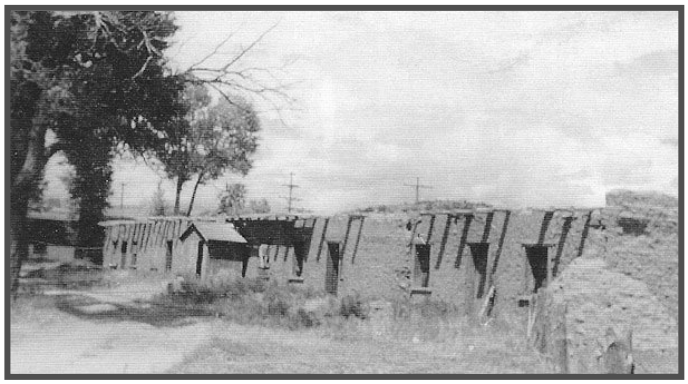
D&RG station for their journey to Fort Lewis in Durango. The living were now gone—and, soon, too, would be the dead. The U.S. Army paid to have all soldiers, excepting those with close family ties to the valley, disinterred from the fort's cemetery and moved to their final resting place at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

As a military post and vanguard on the frontier—and as host and witness to people and events that shaped the region—the life of Fort Garland as a U.S. Army post came to an end.

Fading to History ... The complex of buildings left by the U.S. Army in 1883 looked considerably different from the freshly built post garrisoned in 1858. Periodic expansions and additions had made the compound sprawl a bit. Over the years, outbuildings were added and eliminated, according to need.

In 1862, a long building constructed parallel to, and west of, the infantry barracks had housed shops for a carpenter and a blacksmith, storage rooms, and a mess hall for non-commissioned officers. By the end of the 1860s a hospital had been constructed just north of Officers' Row. (It didn't last long.) East of the fort, across present-day U.S. 159, the garrison had added a substantial corral, bordered on its south flank by offices and storage rooms for the post's quartermaster. In the 1860s the men also developed a six-acre garden for fresh produce, a sometimes frustrating endeavor, for in 1869 grasshoppers decimated it.

In 1877 Assistant Quartermaster J. W. Bean found the condition of the post to be acceptable, considering its age and construction. Of course, throughout the fort's life, its men had fought to keep stores from spoiling, mice from storerooms, and roofs from leaking. An inspector in 1879 remarked that "the post is built of adobe with dirt roofs, a delicate material requiring constant attention to preserve it from leakage and decay during the wet season. To put these old buildings in thorough order would require a far larger outlay of labor and material than I am prepared to recommend unless the post is to be regarrisoned."



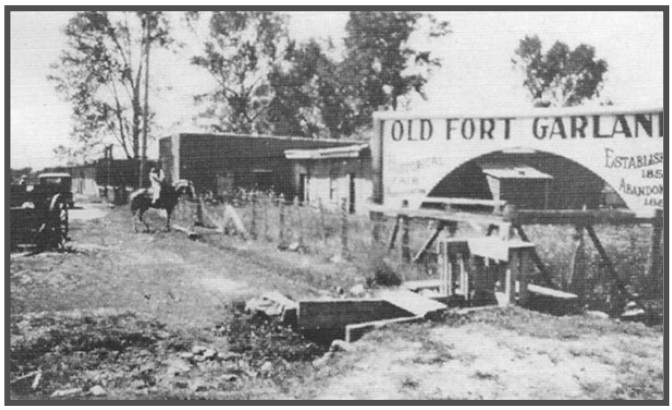
Telephone poles behind the west wall of the cavalry barracks stand as mute reminders that Fort Garland had entered a new and neglectful period but the end of the 1920s saw the birth of a museum.

A Forgotten Outpost ... Over some thirty years, the country surrounding the fort had been transformed from a seemingly empty tableau inhabited by Utes, crossed by Spaniards, explorers, and trappers, and scoured by wind, to a veritable bustle of modest hamlets, sprawling ranches, and, with the arrival of the railroad, a reliable freight and mail connection with the outside world. In the fort's immediate vicinity homesteaders like Tom Tobin, and an occasional officer and his family, had built several small ranches.

The six-square-mile military reservation reverted to the Trinchera Estate, which had acquired the land from William Gilpin and his partners. Meanwhile, the adobe buildings continued to be used as both living quarters and commercial establishments. For a time, Billy Carson, Kit's eldest son, operated a store in the old hospital building.

Over the course of the next half century, the fort passed through several hands. The Trinchera Timber Company rented the fort's core buildings from 1912 to 1915, when William H. Meyer purchased the buildings and moved into the former commandant's quarters. A decade later, upon Meyer's death, the property fell to Josefita Lascano, Meyer's housekeeper. She, in turn, sold the property to D. E. Motz, a station agent for the D&RG. Upon Motz's transfer to a new station two years later, the property reverted to Lascano, who considered razing the buildings to sell any useful materials that remained.

THE MUSEUM

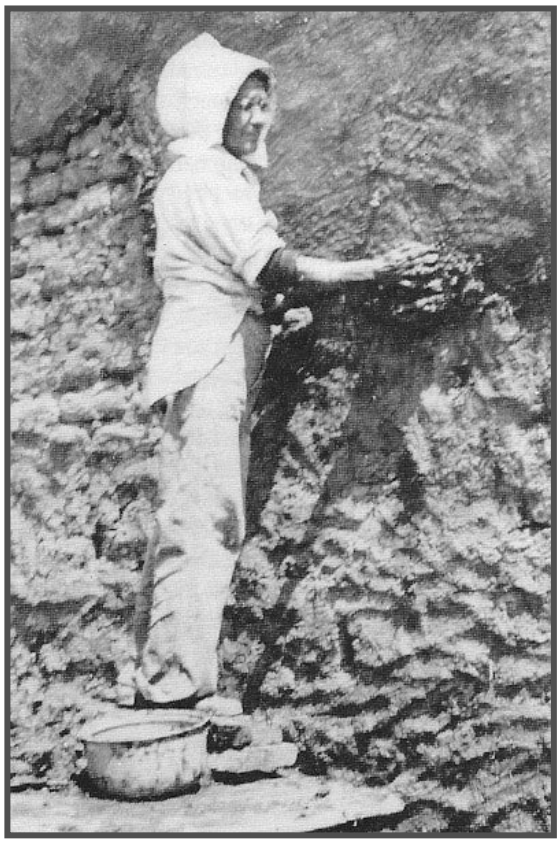


The museum began life as a property of the Fort Garland Historical Association.

Revival ... In May 1928 concerned citizens of Costilla and Conejos counties, many of them members of the local Masonic order, formed the Fort Garland Historical Fair Association to preserve the site. The name derived from their idea that the fort might serve as a place for future county fairs. A core group of officers in the fair association included Luther Bean, F. E. Grimwood, and Charles Woodward, a local attorney who provided legal advice, and Frank Spencer of Adams State Normal School, who guided preservation efforts.

The group set about seeking support, approaching both the Colorado Historical Society and the National Park Service, without immediate results. Undaunted, it sold five-dollar shares in the association to ranchers, farmers, and business-people in the San Luis Valley to keep an option on the property and to maintain its buildings, which they rented for revenue. On July 4, 1928, the group held a celebration and even re-erected the post's intricate flagstaff at the direction of Henry Meder, a musician who had served at the fort from 1873 to 1876. Making speeches in both Spanish and English, the association won widespread support and purchased the fort in 1929, just as America entered the Great Depression. The Walsenburg chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution donated a bronze plaque, installed in 1930.

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s the fair association struggled to pay the fort's property taxes, determined to see the site honored and preserved. In 1944 Luther Bean assumed the role of regional vice president for the Colorado Historical Society, representing the San Luis Valley's six counties. Bean presented his pitch on the fort to Edgar McMechen, then curator of Colorado's state museum, as well as state historian LeRoy Hafen and the president of the Society, John Evans, grandson of the second territorial governor. The elder Evans had visited the fort in 1863 to forge an agreement with the Utes known then as the "12 year peace."



The reconstruction work on the fort buildings required careful supervision. The adobe bricks were made as they were made in I858—the mud being molded in forms and placed in the sun to bake. After the adobes were set in place, the walls were plastered inside and out with a coat of the same adobe material.... Women were employed to work the mud into the crevices and give the walls a smooth surface. This they did with their hands, alone, just as it has been done in the Southwest United States for centuries.
Rosamund Slack. in *Old Fort Garland*.

Prelude to Restoration ... The Colorado Historical Society expressed interest in obtaining the old fort, and on June 8, 1945, the Fort Garland Historical Fair Association transferred it to the people of Colorado. McMechen assessed the property nearly a century after its construction. The buildings' heavy spruce roof timbers were sound, though roof and walls needed repair. Alterations made after the fort was abandoned included plank floors in the barracks, which were then rotting, wooden peak roofs, and corner buttresses that had been added to the barracks. The commandant's quarters had been reroofed with shingles, though the original roof remained intact underneath. Many of the fort's features no longer existed: The hospital building had been razed, and fences, privies, corrals, and firing ranges were gone.

McMechen also documented a living testament to the soldiers and Hispanos who had built and occupied Fort Garland. The rows of cottonwood trees that ringed the parade ground, planted by the garrison in the late 1850s, still rustled in the breeze and shaded Officers' Row. But the trees were dying, McMechen noted, and needed to be replaced.

Living Past ... In the 1950s the Society opened the fort to the public. A full century had passed since pioneer Hispanos settled the San Luis Valley, and their safety and survival, along with others, had required the construction of this lonely western outpost. Yet, looking back on the past century of rapid change at Fort Garland, it's also possible to regard all that time in just the blink of an eye. Listening to the wind battering the large flag over the parade ground, one can almost hear the clatter of long guns as young soldiers come to attention, the ancient Spanish songs and lyrics of adobe craftsmen, or the quiet conversations between Chief Ouray, a consummate Ute statesman and patriot, and the old trapper and Indian fighter Kit Carson in the commandant's quarters.

Unearthing Clues ... Even the ground speaks. In the 1990s, archaeologist Anne Bond, material culture curator at the Colorado Historical Society, sought to locate the fort's missing buildings, assess artifacts scattered across empty fields, and explore the remains of latrines where noncommissioned officers discarded revealing bits of trash, such as broken toys, pocket knives, bits of uniforms, even whiskey bottles—items that help paint a more intimate

portrait of daily life at the fort.

Perpetual Outpost … Fort Garland began as an isolated outpost that preceded settlement, housed the men and women who brokered peace between disparate peoples in the region, played a crucial role in the Civil War in the West, and remained garrisoned until the Utes bade farewell to their beloved valley. Today the fort, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, hosts a variety of interpretive events that touch upon this rich history. Thousands of visitors pass between and among its walls, seeking to understand their past and pondering its relevance to their future. Rescued from oblivion by local residents who cherished that opportunity, Fort Garland remains a humble adobe outpost at the base of Sangre de Cristo Pass. But it also stands as a symbol of cultures and peoples in conflict, accommodation, and mutual interaction throughout the history of the American Southwest—at least for those who pause to listen to its story.

Text and photo source: *Fort Garland Museum, A Capsule History and Guide*, A Museum of Colorado Historical Society … www.coloradohistory.org … 29477 Highway 159, Fort Garland, CO 81133. Photographs are from the collection of the Colorado Historical Society.