

“Particularly New Mexico’s Monument”:

Place-Making at Fort Union, 1929-2014

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the conception, planning, creation, and management of Fort Union National Monument (FOUN) in northeastern New Mexico. Over approximately the last eighty-five years, writers, bureaucrats, boosters, and the National Park Service (NPS) have all been engaged in several different kinds of place-making at FOUN: the development of a written historical narrative about what kind of place Fort Union was (and is); the construction of a physical site; and the accompanying interpretive guidance for experiencing it.

All of these place-making efforts make claims about why Fort Union is a place worthy of commemoration, its historical significance, and its relationship to local, regional, national and international contexts. The creation and evolution of Fort Union National Monument as a memorial landscape and a place for communion with an imagined past—in short, a site of memory and public history—is only the latest chapter in a long history of migration, conflict, shifting ownership, and land use at that site. I examine the evolution of a sense of place at Fort Union in two broad time periods: the twenty-five years leading up to the monument’s establishment, and the seven decades of NPS management after it was created.

Taken as a case study, the story of FOUN raises a number of questions about the basic mission and meaning of NPS as a cultural institution and educational organization; how the agency conceptualizes and “talks about” Native Americans and the Indian Wars; the history and practice of public history; and how best to address sites like Fort Union that seek to historicize America’s imperial past.

DEDICATION

For my parents

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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW:
A CONTESTED LANDSCAPE



Figure 1: Santa Fe Trail Ruts, Fort Union National Monument, August 2011
(Source: Author photo)

This is a story about a place where the immensity, the weight, the sheer *immediacy* of the landscape make it seem to rear up and threaten to fall right over on top of you. It is lonesome, and beautiful. In summer, the endless cobalt sky and dazzling high-altitude Rocky Mountain sunshine frame a golden carpet of short-grass prairie, uninterrupted by the sight of modern buildings, the sound of cars, or the distractions of development—all increasingly inescapable features of the modern American west. At night, a gleaming spray of stars stretches from horizon to horizon, unchallenged by the

feeble noise and light pollution of the town of Las Vegas, New Mexico, thirty miles to the west.

Its beauty can be harsh as well. Summer thunderheads stack up to impossible heights, frowning blackly before unleashing fat bolts of lightning across the sky, and with alarming frequency, toward the ground. In winter, the wind's murmur rises to a scream, blowing dry powdery snow sideways as temperatures and visibility plummet past zero.

But a human presence is also visible here. Distant houses and a few scattered fences point to cattle ranching as among the uses of this land. Santa Fe Trail ruts and a single winding ribbon of asphalt mark the earth. Hundreds of crumbling adobe ruins sprawl in silence over a gentle rise in the terrain as the Mora River basin climbs toward the Turkey Mountains. Even before we approach the ruins, even before we read the weather-beaten signs scattered among them, we know that this is a place with a story.



Figure 2: Mechanics Corral, Fort Union National Monument, August 2011
(Source: Author photo)

The place we are visiting has been the site of successive waves of use, occupation, confiscation, resistance, and ownership for centuries. The main constant in its history has been change, from the first intermittent indigenous presence in the area, to tentative trickles of Spanish settlement, to the transformative influx of goods, wealth, and people brought by the Santa Fe Trail, to the American invasion of 1846, to the creation and spread of a massive military outpost, its eventual abandonment, and the struggle over the land in the resulting vacuum. Each epoch saw various parties asserting, whether explicitly

or implicitly, a different vision of what kind of place this is: a way station; an agricultural community; an Army base; a speculative investment; a cattle ranch. These competing ideas, and the traces they left behind, make up layers of change that have defined this contested landscape.

In its newest iteration, this place has taken on a reflective character, as its current owners have sought to read the landscape out loud for the benefit of those relatively few hardy travelers who visit it. While the land today sees only a tiny fraction of the stream of humanity and capital that crossed it during its heyday, it now attempts to fill the void they have left with messages of its own. Since 1954, an outpost of the National Park Service (NPS), Fort Union National Monument, has defined this locale, and it is with this latest guise that we are most concerned here.

To assess the origins of this place, as well as its function, this dissertation explores new ground at the intersection of several bodies of literature spanning several disciplines, including history, geography, and cultural studies. At the most basic level, my subject, Fort Union National Monument (FOUN),¹ is a public history site, and so the evolution of that field (as a profession, a discipline, and an ideology) forms the broad background of this work. My perspective on the theory and practice of public history draws from the multidisciplinary literature addressing ideas of memory, space, and place, all of which inform my analysis of the single most important American public history

¹ For ease of reading and space considerations, throughout this study I will use the NPS four-letter park identifier code (“FOUN”) to refer to Fort Union National Monument. For the same reasons, I will interchangeably refer to FOUN as a monument, park, site, and unit, although I am aware of the differing administrative and legislative significance of those terms.

institution—the National Park Service—and that agency’s intervention into the history of tourism in New Mexico in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Public History: From Profession, to Social Movement, to Academic Discipline

In the decades before the Civil War, American museums, historic preservation groups, and state and local historical societies began to produce and engage with public representations of the past, avocational rather than professional efforts which centered on the lives of elites in the service of resurrecting and deploying a progressive, patriotic, and positive version of American history.² Such dilettantism was increasingly defined as separate from the ongoing professionalization of university-based academic history and the establishment of professional history associations around the turn of the twentieth century. With the founding of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1884, historians began to define the criteria determining who was (and therefore, who was not) a historian. By the 1920s, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) was established as the baseline qualification for professional status. As a result, the members and leadership of the AHA by 1927 were composed almost exclusively of university professors.³ At first, local, amateur, and other practitioners of history were welcomed into the ranks of AHA, but

² Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman, *Restoring Women’s History Through Historic Preservation* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Patricia West, *Domesticating History* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1999); Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Kevin M. Guthrie, *The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Nonprofit’s Long Struggle for Survival* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996); Sally Foreman Griffith, *Serving History in a Changing World: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 2001).

³ Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 149.

academic historians increasingly narrowed their methodology, discounting such objectionably “unscientific” and “feminine” pursuits as preservation, local history, and oral history.⁴

However, even before the professionalization of history limited its definition to academic history studied in universities, the increasing role of government in American life pushed the development of what would eventually be called public history in a different direction. As early as the 1830s, government-sponsored expeditions to the west began to establish a legitimate place for scientific and technical expertise in government. These early roots of public history were cultivated by the creation of national parks and monuments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the resulting birth and development of the National Park Service after 1916. Public history would finally, fully flourish in the years after World War II, when an emphasis on historical research among several branches of the federal government—especially the military—greatly increased the number and distribution of government historians. Furthermore, professional public historians who lacked formal training in historical methodology saw an expansion of opportunities to practice their craft with the increasing focus of the federal government on cultural resource management, driven by the National Historic Preservation Act and the NPS’s Mission 66 program, among other initiatives. The solidification of history’s place as a skill valued and supported by the United States government was accompanied by the professionalization of state historical organizations,

⁴ Denise Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) 3-4, 32; Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 209.

archives, and museums. In the postwar period, public history became a widespread professional practice.⁵

These established ranks of professional public historians had achieved critical mass by the mid-1970s, when a series of ideological shifts and practical realities would bring about a reunion between the estranged public and academic branches of historical practice. Worldwide political and social movements in the 1960s and 1970s challenged established structures of race, class, gender, and colonialism, and were reflected in a radicalized academy and a diminished belief in older traditions of authority in the process of scholarship. Soon, academic historians began to embrace the notion of history practiced “from below.” Public history was an ideal outlet for these new impulses, wherein instead of claiming authority historians saw their mission as facilitating the creation of history in collaboration with the public.⁶

Intellectual curiosity and ideological motivations alone, however, were not sufficient to spur academic rediscovery of public history. The 1970s also saw its own iteration of the perpetual academic “job crisis,” and many academic historians involved with the founding of the public history discipline saw it as a means to obtain gainful employment for their students. These impulses were most clearly visible in the founding

⁵ Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History*, 149, 163; Edwin C. Bearss, “The National Park Service and Its History Program: 1864-1986: An Overview,” *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 1987): 10–18.

⁶ Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 11; Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 11.; Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), xxiv. Ronald J. Grele, “Whose Public? Whose History? What Is the Goal of a Public Historian?,” *The Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1981): 47–48; see also Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xxii.

of *The Public Historian* in 1978, followed by the establishment of the first public history graduate program at the University of California at Santa Barbara the following year and the founding of the National Council on Public History in 1980. Despite its extensive history, academic public history enthusiasts were eager to proclaim the arrival of “a many faceted new field.”⁷ The move into academic circles signaled a more self-conscious turn in public history, characterized by constant revision and questioning of the intellectual and moral bases of the practice—turning the focus toward the *process* of making history as much as the product itself. Tellingly, public history, in this iteration, was increasingly defined as “the employment of historians and the historical method *outside of academia*.”⁸

Not everyone was happy with these developments. Longtime public historians practicing in the federal government were frustrated by what they saw as the new academic programs’ ignorance of their profession’s long history and practical necessities, and soon formed their own separate professional association, the Society for History in the Federal Government.⁹ From this standpoint, the 1970s “professionalization” phenomenon was really a resurgence of academic historians into a field which had been doing just fine on its own.¹⁰

⁷ G. Wesley Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (October 1, 1978): 4.

⁸ Robert Kelley, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects,” *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (October 1, 1978): 16. Emphasis mine.

⁹ James B. Gardner and David F. Trask, “Serving Time in the Trenches: David F. Trask, Public Historian and Federal Historian,” *The Public Historian* 22, no. 2 (April 1, 2000): 9–27.

¹⁰ Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment*, 8.

Indeed, the reunion of the professional and academic strains of public history has been a rocky one at times. Academic historians have been slow to accept the legitimacy of public history practice, believing that its contact with the un-insulated wider world threatened ideals of objectivity or rigor, which led to periodic debates in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.¹¹ However, public historians also sought to address what they saw as deficiencies in academic historical training that left many graduates ill-equipped to convey historical meaning outside the university setting. Furthermore, some public historians saw themselves as taking up the torch of historical scholarship from an increasingly insular and elitist academic practice.¹² Under this understanding, public history began to claim an increasing share of historical authority, and “a central role in fulfilling the profession’s responsibility to engage society in understanding the past.”¹³

Despite these challenges, the academic turn in public history has borne fruit in the form of an influx of new ideas and methodologies. Postmodernism and memory studies became increasingly important in public history in the 1990s.¹⁴ The notion of cultural landscapes and theories of “place” have helped public historians better understand

¹¹ See, for example, David Thelen et al., “Roundtable: Government-Sponsored Research: A Sanitized Past?,” *The Public Historian* 10, no. 3 (July 1, 1988): 31–58; Otis L. Graham et al., “Roundtable: ‘The Ideal of Objectivity’ and the Profession of History,” *The Public Historian* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 1991): 9–23; Theodore J. Karamanski, “Reflections on Ethics and the Historical Profession,” *The Public Historian* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 127–133; Rebecca Conard, “Public History As Reflective Practice: An Introduction,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (February 2006): 9–13.

¹² David A. Clary, “Historic Preservation and Environmental Protection: The Role of the Historian,” *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (October 1, 1978): 63.

¹³ Patricia Mooney-Melvin, “Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition,” in Barbara J. Howe and Emory Leland Kemp, *Public History: An Introduction* (Malabar, Fla.: R.E. Krieger, 1986), 6.

¹⁴ David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 7–23; Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History: And Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

historic sites and how they acquire, negotiate, and transmit meaning.¹⁵ However, public historians have in general shied away from the highly theoretical approaches characteristic of many academic traditions in favor of “the nuances and contexts of practice.”¹⁶ More recent scholarship has begun to focus on practice again, bringing to bear more sophisticated academic insight on the development of a distinct methodology for public history, reflecting a belief that “*where* it is practiced is less important than *how* it is practiced.”¹⁷

This study reflects recent trends in the field by taking up some of these new theoretical approaches to the study of public history, and focusing them on one of the oldest and most important settings in which American public history has been practiced: the National Park Service.

The National Park Service

The representations of the past that the National Park Service creates and maintains around the national parks, monuments, and historic places that it cares for constitute some of the most important material that Americans use to understand their

¹⁵ Linda Flint McClelland, “Imagery, Ideals, and Social Values: The Interpretation and Documentation of Cultural Landscapes,” *The Public Historian* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 1991): 107–124; Janene Caywood, “Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J. B. Jackson,” *The Public Historian* 26, no. 1 (February 1, 2004): 157–159.; Howe and Kemp, *Public History*; James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, *Public History: Essays from the Field* (Malabar, Fla.: R.E. Krieger, 2004).

¹⁶ Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (February 2006): 19.

¹⁷ Noel J. Stowe, “Public History Curriculum: Illustrating Reflective Practice,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (February 2006): 42. Emphasis in original.

nation's past, and themselves. "The National Park Service," stated the authors of a recent report on the state of history in the agency,

is nothing short of the conservator of our nation's origins and of its triumphs and struggles: the historic places the agency documents, preserves, and interprets instruct us on the course of American history and encourage lifelong learning. By holding many of the places where our American heritage has been forged, the National Park Service has great potential to make a substantial difference in public historical understanding, education, engagement, and civic discourse. In many places, it already does.¹⁸

This central status of NPS history, and the symbolic role the agency occupies in the formation of American national identity, have their roots in the early decades of the 20th century, when the new agency first began to engage with American history. After several decades of slow growth of the park system, mostly limited to large "natural" parks in the West, the Antiquities Act of 1906 spurred a subtle re-orientation of the American government toward also preserving the human past.¹⁹ Following the establishment of NPS in 1916, the management of natural resources increasingly came into tension with impulses to preserve and protect cultural resources.²⁰ The government re-organization of the New Deal and the 1935 Historic Sites Act quadrupled the number of sites for which the agency bore responsibility, many of them battlefields or other

¹⁸ Anne Mitchell Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington, Ind.: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 1.

¹⁹ David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation and Nature Conservation* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006).

²⁰ Charles B. Hosmer, "Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service," *The Public Historian* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 25–38.

historic places.²¹ The resulting scramble to develop a “more or less complete story of American History” yielded a positive and progressive intellectual and policy tradition that established the overall framework of public history practice as it “shaped the nation’s historical landscape for the rest of the twentieth century.”²²

At the most basic level, NPS’s great influence stems from the fact that, beyond simple historical narratives, it also preserves and interprets special *places*. Verne Chatelain, the first chief historian of the agency, stated in 1935 that

The conception which underlies the whole policy of the National Park Service in connection with [historical and archaeological] sites is that of using the uniquely graphic qualities which inhere in any area where stirring and significant events have taken place to drive home to the visitor the meaning of those events showing not only their importance in themselves but their integral relationship to the whole history of American development.²³

The dynamic connection described by Chatelain between, on the one hand, the material reality of the locales NPS manages and, on the other, the narrative and interpretive history it creates to make those sites legible to visitors (which NPS historian Barry Mackintosh has described as “the basic rationale for its involvement with such areas”²⁴) shows us that the creation of a national park is, at its heart, an exercise in creating, or “making,” a place. As David Glassberg has noted, “public histories provide

²¹ Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, “To Preserve the Nation’s Past: The Growth of Historic Preservation in the National Park Service during the 1930s,” *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 1987): 19–49.

²² Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 163.

²³ Quoted in Barry Mackintosh, “The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation,” *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 1987), 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

meaning to places,” and the process by which that meaning-making occurs within NPS forms another piece of the broad background for this study.²⁵

The history of the National Park Service and its individual units are most often recounted internally, in official NPS documents, which tend to focus on administrative, bureaucratic, and policy frameworks at the federal level as well as changes over time “on the ground” in individual parks.²⁶ Other works examine movements or initiatives, such as Mission 66, in terms of their effects on local environments.²⁷ Similar treatments of other topics like NPS’s conceptualization of nature, or its dealings with Native Americans, move between the micro and macro levels, without fully exploring the connections between them in many cases.²⁸ While many of the above referenced studies examine the history of the NPS in terms of its management, organizational structure, role in communities, interpretive strategies, and the messages contained therein, relatively few works have attempted to understand the interrelated nature of historical narrative, cultural

²⁵ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 20.

²⁶ See, for example, Horace M. Albright and Robert Cahn, *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913-33* (Salt Lake City: Howe Bros., 1985); Harlan D. Unrau, George F. Williss, and United States, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s* (Denver: National Park Service, 1983).

²⁷ Sarah Allaback and United States National Park Service, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1999); Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, n.d.).

²⁸ Philip Burnham, *Indian Country, God’s Country: Native Americans and the National Parks* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000); Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

landscapes, historical interpretation, and administrative, organizational, and bureaucratic structure.²⁹

In the case of FOUN, both an Administrative History and a Historic Resource Study were produced in the early 1990s, and while each provides a wealth of historical information about Fort Union and the NPS management of the site, they are restricted by the limitations of their genre, which is subject to NPS guidelines, needs, and expectations.³⁰ This study hopes to use its distinct—though perhaps equally limiting—disciplinary allowances to update those works and to expand upon their scope by including perspectives and methods from other areas of history and public history.

My analysis of Fort Union National Monument owes much to several theoretical and methodological approaches: theories of space and place, cultural landscapes, studies of memory and commemoration, and issues of national identity formation. However, such abstract concepts are at their best, I venture, when grounded in firm historical evidence, and so I will apply them via a close reading of the materials produced by travel writers, boosters, newspaper editors, park administrators, rangers, historians, and others over the site's lifetime. I hope to unpack the layers of meaning embodied in the site itself and its memory among those responsible for creating it, and the results of their efforts.

²⁹ However, there are examples of Administrative Histories that do a fine job of connecting these issues, such as: David E. Whisnant and Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Small Park, Large Issues: De Soto National Memorial and the Commemoration of a Difficult History* (Atlanta: National Park Service, 2008); Jerome Greene, *Stricken Field: The Little Bighorn Since 1876* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008); and Joan M. Zenzen, *Fort Stanwix National Monument: Reconstructing the Past and Partnering for the Future* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

³⁰ Liping Zhu, *Administrative History: Fort Union National Monument* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1993); Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1993).

As a case study, Fort Union National Monument offers the opportunity to observe the place-making process on several levels, including the larger context of the development of NPS history nationwide, the agency's evolving approach to interpretation and management, especially in the southwestern United States, and the sense of place it cultivated as it created an example of what French historian Pierre Nora has called "lieux de mémoire," sites rich with messages about national history and identity.³¹

Furthermore, despite FOUN's relatively low profile, (the site ranks in the bottom one percent of NPS sites by visitation with roughly 10,000 visitors per year³²), the historical Fort Union remains a site of great significance in both regional and national contexts. According to military historian Durwood Ball, the U.S. Army in the nineteenth century "envisioned itself as the sharp edge of Manifest Destiny," and Fort Union helped it to fulfill this role over four decades as it evolved in response to social, economic, and cultural changes.³³ I hope that this study will make a contribution to our understanding of how that edge, or at least its memory, has been kept sharp long after the last company left the fort behind.

In summary, the National Park Service's historical units constitute a broad representation of the public history of the American landscape: by interpreting locations deemed historically significant—creating and adding meaning to them—NPS is in the business of making space into place, and thereby creating public memory. In this project,

³¹ Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³² National Park Service, "Annual Park Recreation Visitation (1904 - Last Calendar Year)," [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year), accessed February 5, 2016.

³³ Durwood Ball, *Army Regulars on the Western Frontier, 1848-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xiii.

I utilize a combination of theoretical approaches to issues of memory, space and place in order to analyze Fort Union National Monument as a site of place-making and the construction of collective memory.

The Study of Memory

Historians have frequently drawn a sharp distinction between history and memory, imagining the former as a reliable form of objective knowledge about the past, and the latter as subject to social forces and hence “constructed, not reproduced.”³⁴ However, as David Lowenthal points out, this dichotomy is not as stark as it appears, since “all history depends on memory, and many recollections incorporate history,” a connection that demonstrates the way that each can be “distorted by selective perception, intervening circumstances, and hindsight.”³⁵ Such connections have informed the increasing study of memory by historians in the past several decades, and the resultant complication of older ideas about historical truth and objectivity by what historian Kerwin Klein has called “postmodern reckonings” that portray “historical consciousness as an oppressive fiction.”³⁶

This theoretical stance owes much to philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, one of the first theorists of memory as a social construction, and the work of such advocates of “people’s history” as Raphael Samuel, who argued that history is “a social form of

³⁴ David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1, 1989): 1119.

³⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xxii.

³⁶ Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* no. 69 (January 1, 2000): 145.

knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.”³⁷ Indeed, the task of identifying and analyzing collective memory as separate from that of individuals is a challenging proposition that remains difficult to resolve.³⁸ Efforts to understand and contextualize collective memories, also, have revealed that individual memory and family histories carry greater traction than any imagined national or collective memory.³⁹

As important as the relationship between individual and group memory is the relationship between the remembered past and the urgent present. For this reason, literary scholar Michael Rothberg defines collective memory as “the relationship that such groups establish between their past and their present circumstances.”⁴⁰ As David Thelen argues, collective memory in the United States is no exception, constructed “not in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the contexts of community, broader politics, and social dynamics,” as Americans “reshape their recollections of the past to fit their present needs.”⁴¹ This insight is especially pointed when considering the way that national parks and monuments arise from the interaction of local and national interests.

³⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Translated by Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 8.

³⁸ Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (May 1, 2002): 179–197.

³⁹ Roy Rosenzweig and David Paul Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

⁴¹ Thelen, “Memory and American History,” 1118.

As memory moves from individual recollections of the past to those shared by groups seeking to negotiate their circumstances in the present, it passes into the status of public memory, which in historian John Bodnar's definition is "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand its past, present, and by implication, its future."⁴² With such high stakes, it is no surprise that public memories frequently come into conflict with one another in a contest to shape a nation or group's "ethos and sense of identity."⁴³ The questions of what constituted the identity of northern New Mexico, both past and present, were of vital importance as the eventual FOUN took shape in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

One mode of navigating this unstable and contested terrain is the examination of a "diverse and shifting collection of material artifacts and social practices,"⁴⁴ which has become an increasingly important feature of public history scholarship and practice in recent decades. In the 1990s, memory studies began to gain prominence in the field of public history, in part because they offered a cross-cutting analytical tool that constituted, in David Glassberg's words, "a common intellectual foundation for the diverse enterprises taught and practiced under its name."⁴⁵ Glassberg's *A Sense of History* was one of several works in public history published in the 1990s and 2000s that

⁴² John Bodnar, "Bad Dreams About the Good War," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. Greg Dickinson et. al., (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 140.

⁴³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2011), 13.

⁴⁴ Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," 130.

⁴⁵ David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 8.

demonstrated the traction of memory studies in the field, as scholars continued to use the concept of memory to illuminate a variety of facets of the past and its place in public life.⁴⁶ Others investigated the pernicious uses of memory, which can be a tool to “trivialize and distort culture” according to the demands of the “dominant ideology of any given period.”⁴⁷ The examination of the physical presence of memory in cultural landscapes has also proven fruitful as a tool to gain insight into the production of collective identity and illuminate power relationships.⁴⁸

Space and Place

The “frameworks” of collective memory, as Maurice Halbwachs has argued, are “the imaged and concrete representation of events or persons localized in time and space.”⁴⁹ These frameworks, however, are unstable and constantly shifting. Raphael Samuel argues that “memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force; that it is dynamic—

⁴⁶ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 56; David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “Abraham Lincoln’s Birthplace Cabin: The Making of an American Icon,” in Paul A. Shackel, *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 240-254; see also <http://www.nps.gov/abli/index.htm> (accessed June 13, 2014).

⁴⁷ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 5, 13; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 282; Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making Of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Martha K. Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 3; Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 174.

what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important as what it remembers.”⁵⁰

Theories of memory are especially applicable to this project because the mechanism by which they are developed depends upon strategies of place-making, in which meaning is assigned to a particular location through perception and experience. NPS is the principal organization charged with ascribing meaning to Fort Union through the process of interpretation, which has resulted in what literary theorist and historian Edward Said referred to as “imaginative geographies.”⁵¹

By thinking of place as defined by cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, we can better understand the connection between place and memory. According to Tuan, all place-making must entail the recollection of past experience in order to give it meaning—place is defined by people, and it also plays an active role in the way people define themselves. Place is not just individual, though: it is also a distillation, the result of combining many individual components to make a smaller, but more potent, accumulation that retains some essence of them all. Geographer E.C. Relph calls place “a concentration of our intentions, attitudes, purposes and experiences.”⁵²

According to Tuan, place is a meaningful limitation of space, a “pause” which is determined not only by its physical properties as perceived by our five senses but by the interplay of our experience with the cultural and, critically, the historical context in which it is located.⁵³ It is only when experience and time intersect that place is created. And so

⁵⁰ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, x.

⁵¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 54-55.

⁵² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); E.C. Relph, “The Essence of Place,” in *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 43.

⁵³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 198.

we can see that the recollection of the past depends upon a fusion of space and time, in order to create memory. This transformation, while described briefly here, actually unfolds over long stretches of time—decades, centuries, even millennia—and this study seeks to illuminate only one small portion of the total place-making process at what we know today as FOUN: the creation and evolution of the monument itself.

(Mis)remembering Conflict: the “Indian Wars” in Public History and Memory

The specific historical and memorial context that NPS has sought to address in its project of place-making at Fort Union is the United States’ expansion into what would become the American Southwest in the second half of the nineteenth century. This focus tasks the unit with interpreting two broad themes: the development of the Santa Fe Trade and increasing westward expansion, and the impact of these events on the native Hispano and Native American⁵⁴ populations of the regions entered.

Despite the burgeoning and well-established literature on space, place, and memory, which has been put to productive use, for example, in examining memories of the Civil War, the public memory of the Indian Wars remains a relatively under-examined topic. With the exception of the misadventure of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer and the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn, most of the conflicts between the Army and Indians in the latter half of the nineteenth century have not been examined in

⁵⁴ For reasons of simplicity, throughout this dissertation, I will use the term “Hispano” to refer to the Spanish-speaking residents of northern New Mexico, many of whom consider themselves ethnically distinct from other Hispanic people. I will also use interchangeably the terms “Native American,” “American Indian,” “Indian,” and “Native,” although I realize there are a multitude of considerations about which of those terms to use in any given context. See John M. Nieto-Phillips, *The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004) and Michael Yellow Bird, “What We Want to Be Called: Indigenous Peoples’ Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Identity Labels,” *American Indian Quarterly* 23:2 (1999).

terms of their lasting presence in American historical consciousness, and on the land itself.⁵⁵ Indeed, while monuments, memorials, and National Park Service units devoted to commemorating these conflicts are scattered throughout the American West, relatively few of them have received intensive treatment from historians—academic or public—concerned with exactly *how* and *why* they have developed the way they have.

The specific region treated by this study is no exception to this general rule. Indeed, the scholarly historical literature on the contemporary events surrounding the Army's conflicts with and removal of indigenous peoples from what became the Southwestern United States is extensive, and includes numerous recent examples of cutting-edge scholarship.⁵⁶ However, only recently have scholars begun to incorporate the contributions of academic subfields and methodologies such as public history, memory, and space and place in their analyses of those sites which seek to commemorate or historicize these conflicts.⁵⁷ More generally, NPS has for decades commissioned periodic internal assessments of the nature of historical practice in the agency, which are aptly summarized and expanded upon in a recent joint report published with the Organization of American Historians, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the*

⁵⁵ Michael Elliott, *Custerology: The Enduring Legacy of the Indian Wars and George Armstrong Custer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Jerome Greene, *Stricken Field: The Little Bighorn Since 1876* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Pekka Hämmäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁵⁷ Notable exceptions include: Jerome Greene and Douglas Scott, *Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008); and Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

National Park Service (2011). Common among these studies is the observation that historical interpretation at NPS sites is often problematic or even faulty, a failing whose root causes are often unaddressed or at best attributed to specific administrative issues such as understaffing, shrinking budgets, or inadequate training.⁵⁸

My study treads some of the same ground, but also seeks to understand the nature of historical interpretation at FOUN as a phenomenon whose genealogy (for better or worse) includes not only the foibles of NPS management, but also its historical moment, and its rootedness in place. For this reason, I begin by articulating the relationship between the historical development of northern New Mexico, and the intervention into it made by NPS's policies, their implementation, and their results in the form of a national monument.

Thesis: Place-Making and Memory at Fort Union

The goal of this study is to show how NPS engages in place-making to create public history and public memory—of the Santa Fe Trade, Westward expansion, and the Indian Wars—through the examination of a single case study. My ultimate goal is what Pierre Nora describes as:

a history less interested in causes than in effects; less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions and in the interaction of those commemorations; less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time, in the disappearance and reemergence of their significations; less interested in “what actually happened” than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise*, 3-7.

⁵⁹ Nora, *Rethinking France*, xxiv.

Fort Union National Monument is a *lieu de mémoire* that combines ideas about the place itself with an idea about its location in (or outside of) time—it is a site of memorialization, and also a site in which memory is constituted. I argue that FOUN looks and functions the way it does because of the complex interplay between its various forms of historical meaning. Taken together, these constitute a certain kind of memory about the historical Fort Union, which raises a number of questions about the basic mission and meaning of NPS as a cultural institution and educational organization; how the agency conceptualizes and “talks about” Native Americans and the Indian Wars; and larger questions about the cultural legacy of settler colonialism, Americans’ memories of indigenous peoples, and the history and practice of public history.

Over approximately the last eighty-five years, writers, bureaucrats, boosters, and NPS have all been engaged in several different kinds of place-making at Fort Union National Monument: the development of a written historical *narrative* about what kind of place Fort Union was (and is); the construction of a *physical* site; and the accompanying *interpretive* guidance for experiencing it. All of these place-making efforts make claims about why Fort Union is a place worthy of commemoration, its historical significance, and its relationship to local, regional, national and international contexts.

The combined goal of these differing techniques of historical meaning-making is to create an authentic place where visitors can experience the past. They range in form from a focus on the emptiness, solitude, and “unspoiled” nature of the landscape, which is said to evoke the historic era; the ruined buildings; costumed or uniformed interpreters; signs and exhibits; educational and promotional literature; even the re-shaped land

itself—all of which attempt to summon an ideal form of communication between present and past.

Perhaps appropriately, given the constantly shifting material reality of the historical Fort Union itself, contemporary conceptions of it have undergone a series of changes. From the 1930s, when the Monument was first being proposed as a site of memory, through early attempts to interpret the site in the 1950s, to the shifting and contradictory interpretations—some more complete and incorporative than others—which have taken place since, the interpretation of Fort Union is an example of a memory which is “historically conditioned, changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment... far from being handed down in the timeless form of ‘tradition’ it is progressively altered from generation to generation.”⁶⁰ This question of the varied nature of memory at FOUN, and the reasons driving its evolution, are critical because, according to David Thelen, “In a study of memory the important question is not how accurately a recollection fitted some piece of a past reality, but why historical actors constructed their memories in a particular way at a particular time.”⁶¹

The process of manufacturing a place at Fort Union took a significant turn in the 1930s, when a small group of New Mexicans sought to attract tourist dollars to revive their state’s flagging economy. Through a variety of strategies, they succeeded in changing the status of the land upon which Fort Union had sat from one kind of place—a cattle ranch—to another—a memorial landscape. Since 1954, this ongoing transformation

⁶⁰ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, ix.

⁶¹ David Thelen, *Memory and American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

has been managed primarily by the National Park Service, which has combined public history and memory in the creation of yet another place: Fort Union National Monument.

This study assesses the construction and deployment of these various ways of making place, and their role in the development of collective memories, through an examination of the conceptualization, planning, creation, and management of Fort Union National Monument from the late 1920s through the present day. The guiding questions for this dissertation are: why does Fort Union National Monument look and function the way it does? What messages about place have been built into it, what kind of memory do they express, and how have they changed over time?

My thesis consists of two broad points. First, that the creation of Fort Union National Monument as a memorial landscape and a place for communion with an imagined past—in short, a site of memory and public history—is only the latest chapter in a long history of migration, conflict, shifting ownership and use, and imagined place at that site. These waves of change in the Mora River Valley intensified with the assertion of United States military and political control in the mid-nineteenth century, but the overall trend was one of constant overlay and revision. The establishment of FOUN transformed the land upon which it now sits into a memorial landscape that reflected the changing social, political, and economic context of northern New Mexico during the middle decades of the 20th century. After a long period of contentious negotiation, that memorial landscape was given form by way of the bureaucratic structure of the National Park Service, the country's chief caretaker of public historical sites of memory.

My second broad point is that the way in which the NPS engaged in conceiving, planning, implementing, and managing the new national monument has gradually

evolved in the seven decades of the agency's presence. Decisions made even before the park was formally created held great weight in determining its eventual shape and function. The initial plans carried out very early on under Mission 66 are also critical in explaining why the site looks and works the way it does today. The intervening decades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s all saw various shifts and modifications to this stance as the Park Service's ideas about what kind of place Fort Union was and is increased in sophistication and sensitivity, but it was not until the mid-1990s that the agency chose to truly grapple with the narrow and exclusionary nature of its work. The result of that shift, however, has been limited, a struggle that demonstrates the difficulty of confronting decades of established interpretation, regardless of how inaccurate or "biased," and raises questions about the best way to address sites like Fort Union that seek to historicize America's imperial past.

Chapter Overview

In the remainder of this introduction and the first two chapters, I examine the changing uses of the landscape in which the present-day Fort Union National Monument is located. In the pages that follow, I briefly survey the long history of competing notions of the utility of the land as various groups resisted, and were eventually displaced by, successive waves of newcomers with different ideas about what constituted its best use. The end result of these centuries of change was the solidification of the Union Land and Grazing Company's (UL&GC) claim to the area as a cattle ranch and investment property.

Chapter One describes the initial unsuccessful attempts of prominent Las Vegans and the Region III staff of the National Park Service to transform an agricultural landscape into a memorial one, a public-minded goal they hoped would attract tourists and stimulate the local economy while paying tribute to the heroic conquest of the frontier. Despite this early setback and an interlude imposed by the NPS's struggles to survive during World War II, the resolve of the UL&GC to keep its land private in the face of demands that it become public eventually crumbled before mounting public pressure and the invocation of state power in the form of eminent domain. This story, in which Fort Union National Monument was finally established, forms the core of Chapter Two.

The next four chapters examine the nature of NPS's management of the landscape after assuming control in 1954. I argue that since that time the agency has been engaged in place-making, a multi-faceted process of imposing meaning on the landscape in order to articulate ideas about its value and significance. Chapter Three discusses the initial efforts to establish the park and its basic physical and interpretive outline in the first five years of its existence, efforts which would set the tone for the succeeding decades of management and interpretation and prove difficult to change when the agency decided it was time to do so. Chapter Four traces the eight years following the dedication of the park in 1959, during which time NPS further refined and solidified its notion of Fort Union as place through new research and interpretive additions, and increasingly became aware of the need to enhance both these areas. In Chapter Five, I discuss the result of NPS's desire to connect more closely with visitors through the medium of historical reenactment, as FOUN staff increasingly turned to living history activities to provide a

more exciting and accessible connection to the past, an effort that I argue came at the expense of responsible resource management and historical accuracy. Chapter Six examines the eventual course correction FOUN staff made in the 1980s and 1990s, as the unbalanced nature of the park's focus—which prioritized romantic notions of frontier heroism over the perspectives of Native Americans and Hispanos—led them to revise its interpretive mission. These changes were driven by the establishment of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail in 1988 and an increasing awareness of the unsatisfactory nature of Western public history, particularly its treatment of Native American history.

However, in the past twenty years since FOUN first began to articulate a new sense of place at Fort Union, there has been only halting change to the historical narrative and interpretive offerings to reflect this evolution. Despite its specifically articulated intentions to move past its “old” methodology, the basic historical and interpretive narrative at Fort Union has proven difficult to leave behind. NPS has engaged in a number of increasingly sophisticated studies of the natural and cultural resources at the park, and in the 2000s embarked on a still-uncompleted effort to revise the museum exhibits to reflect a notion of “multiple perspectives” in telling the story of Fort Union, but this attempt to impose a new narrative on the park has been only partially successful. The preceding five decades of place-making at Fort Union have resulted in a persistent notion of the heroic frontier which when challenged has proven a remarkably durable feature of the interpretive message of the park and its sense of place. The Coda addresses this problem, attempts to identify its causes, and offers some thoughts on the fundamental problem faced by not only FOUN, but practitioners of Western public history in general, and the NPS in particular.

First Settlements

New Mexico has long been a place where cultures converge, endure conflict, undergo change, and create community. The Santa Fe Trail, which passed through Fort Union, was emblematic of this varied and contested history. It began as an American Indian trade route connecting many distinct Plains and Puebloan cultures centuries before the first Europeans arrived around 1600 and adopted it as a path for trade, and for exploring terrain they intended to claim as their own.

Human settlement in the Mora River valley dates back as far as approximately 1,000 CE, as predecessors of Puebloan communities arrived in the area amidst a general trend of indigenous eastward migration from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The first permanent Native American settlement occurred at Pecos Pueblo around AD 1100, and persisted until approximately the fifteenth century, when the arrival of the Jicarilla Apache forced them back into the mountains to the west. For the next several centuries, the land was used as a way station and campsite as part of a complex dynamic of raiding and trading between Plains tribes, Puebloan cultures, and Spanish settlers in the region. The Comanche intensified but did not upset this balance of interaction when they arrived in the early 1700s, and by the mid-eighteenth century they had established themselves as the largest and most militarily and economically dominant group in the region. Spanish settlement was mostly confined to the area nearer to Santa Fe, but after the signature of treaties with the Apache and Comanche in the 1780s, more and more land grants began to

take root to the east of Pecos. San Miguel del Bado was established in 1794, and settlement and trade increased substantially.⁶²

The Mora Land Grant

In the early 1800s, a small group of Hispano settlers struggled to establish a settlement in the Mora Valley. Conflicts with Plains Indian tribes and competition with traders and trappers meant that the Mora settlement was slow to solidify, but by 1818, they had eked out enough of a foothold to request a local church, and in 1835, they petitioned the Mexican government for recognition of their ownership claims. In October of that year, the settlers, who by that time totaled seventy-six families, celebrated the establishment of the *Merced de Santa Gertrudis de lo de Mora*—the Mora Land Grant. The grant, which encompassed over 827,000 acres, was described as bounded by the Rio Ocate to the north, the Rio Sapello to the south, the Aguaje de la Yegua to the east, and the Estilerro to the west. In accordance with typical land-grant practices, each settler received an individual parcel, and the remaining (much larger) areas of the grant were designated as common land.⁶³

⁶² Peggy A. Gerow, *Archeological Resources Inventory and Evaluation: Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico* (Office of Contract Archaeology, University of New Mexico, August 2012), 7-22; David E. Stuart, Rory P. Gauthier, and Thomas W. Merlan, *Prehistoric New Mexico: Background for Survey* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 305, 310, 316-318; James H. Gunnerson, *Archeology of the High Plains* (Denver, Colo.: USDA Forest Service, 1989), 109; Marc Simmons, "Settlement Patterns and Village Plans in Colonial New Mexico," *Journal of the West* 8, no. 1 (January 1969), 7-21; James L. Moore and Jeffrey L. Boyer, "Living on the Northern Rio Grande Frontier: Eleven Classic Period Pueblo Sites and an Early Twentieth-Century Spanish Site near Gavilan, New Mexico," (Santa Fe, N.M.: Museum of New Mexico, Office of Archaeological Studies, 2009), 19-43.

⁶³ Clark Knowlton, "The Mora Land Grant: A New Mexican Tragedy," *Journal of the West* 27, no. 3 (July 1988), 59-73; Robert D. Shadow and María Rodríguez-Shadow, "From 'Repartición' to Partition: A History of the Mora Land Grant, 1835-1916," *New Mexico Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (July 1, 1995); Malcom Ebright, "The Coyote Creek State Park: History of Title and History of the Guadalupita and Mora Land Grants," New Mexico Commission for Public Records, January 13, 2009.

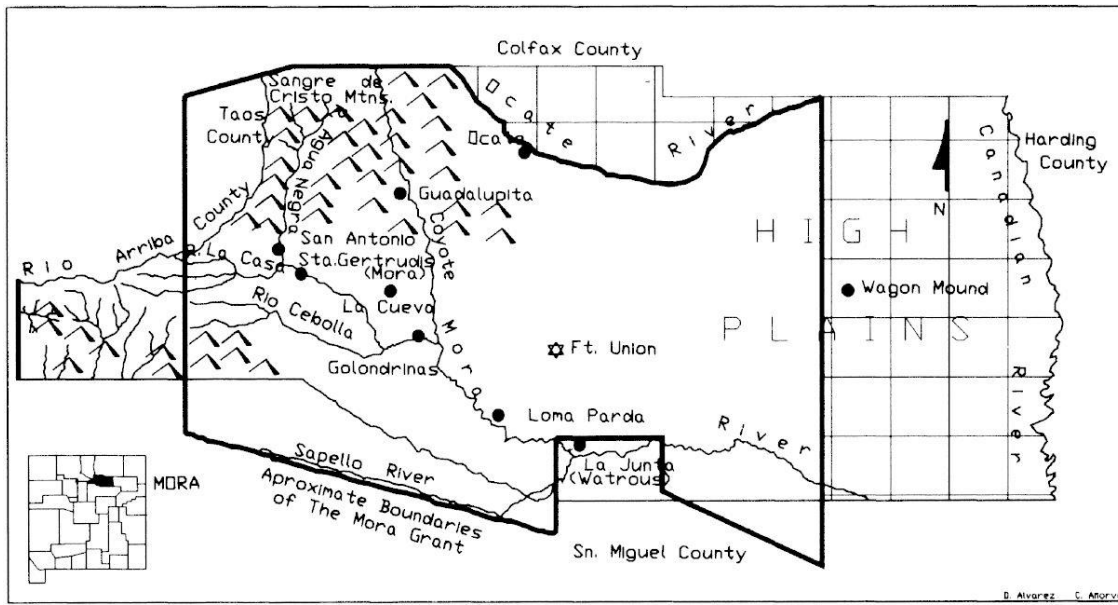


Figure 3: Mora County and the Mora Land Grant
 (Source: Shadow and Rodriguez-Shadow, "From 'Repartición' to Partition," p. 260)

The Mora Valley offered several advantages: centrally located between the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the beginnings of the Great Plains, settlers were able to subsist on hunted, cultivated, and traded goods. The increasingly robust Santa Fe trade offered economic opportunities to the grantees in the form of markets for their agricultural products and employment opportunities as guides or teamsters. For several decades, the area saw steady population growth, and several new communities were founded on the grant. By 1846, the inhabitants totaled nearly one thousand.⁶⁴

These opportunities also came with risks, however. The Mora settlements' proximity to the trail meant frequent conflict with traders, travelers, and tribes. As a result, its largest settlement, the village of Mora, acquired a defensive shape, with

⁶⁴ Knowlton, "The Mora Land Grant," 60; Ebright, "The Coyote Creek State Park," 7.

buildings clustered around central, easily defensible positions. Mora's fort-like structures would prove valuable in 1847, when American forces arrived in the area at the forefront of the United States' occupation of New Mexico in the early days of the U.S.-Mexican War.

American Invasion

The United States' 1846 invasion of New Mexico shattered the region's centuries-old balance of cultures, forcing negotiation and adaptation by all parties. Though the policies by which the Army was tasked with managing this newly acquired territory were often conflicting and inconsistent, their overall purpose remained the same: to facilitate the incorporation of the present-day Southwest into the United States—in short, to get and hold the land, and to make it American.

The inhabitants of the Mora villages mounted one of the most significant uprisings against U.S. occupation. A group of villagers led by Manuel Cortez, spurred by news of the recent revolt in Taos and anxious to rid their lands of the invaders, attacked and killed an unfortunate group of Santa Fe traders in January 1847. The rebels managed to successfully fend off eighty U.S. soldiers sent to restore order several weeks later, killing the U.S. commander in close-quarters fighting among the houses. Their success was short-lived, however. Reinforcements arrived a week later, and many of the ringleaders of the resistance fled into the mountains as 200 soldiers overran Mora and

burned many of the fields and buildings to the ground. Sporadic resistance continued for another year before the Army considered its control of northern New Mexico complete.⁶⁵

After the conclusion of the war, Colonel Edwin V. Sumner received orders to “revise the whole system of defense” of the Territory, which he accomplished by removing the troops from the towns (Sumner described Santa Fe as a “sink of vice and extravagance”) and “stationing them more towards the frontier and nearer to the Indians.” Sumner began working on the location of a new military post. Having noted the area’s abundant natural resources during the initial invasion of New Mexico in 1846, he selected an area adjacent to Wolf Creek in the Mora River Valley.⁶⁶

Sumner sought to create a place that was defined in opposition to its local context—away from the supposedly corrupting influence of the Hispano population of New Mexico, and into the homeland of the local Apache, Navajo, Comanche, and Ute people in order to better prosecute military campaigns against them. First built in 1851 at the convergence of the two branches of the Santa Fe Trail in northeastern New Mexico Territory, Fort Union was for most of its forty-year period of activity the largest United States military installation west of the Mississippi River and a key piece of the American Army’s presence on the Southern Great Plains.

⁶⁵James W. Goodrich, “Revolt at Mora, 1847,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 1972); Carlos R. Herrera, “New Mexico Resistance to U.S. Occupation During the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848”, in David Maciel and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, *The Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 23-42.

⁶⁶Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1993), 244.

American Control

Once Sumner had decided to relocate the troops of the Ninth Military Department from their stations in cities and towns across the territory, he selected land on the John Scolly or La Junta land grant and leased one square mile, location to be specified later, from its owners. The Scolly Grant had been approved by the Mexican government in 1843 on the condition that the inhabitants begin cultivation within eighteen months or forfeit their claim. Failing to do so because of the threat of Texan invasion, they reapplied in 1844 and 1846 for a smaller parcel which they intended to be non-conflicting with the already existing, much larger Mora Land Grant to the north. The Scolly Grant was not formally confirmed until after the U.S.-Mexican War, when Congress in 1860 determined its size to be five square leagues, but once again did not determine its location. Neither the Mora Grant nor the Scolly Grant were surveyed until years later, and their respective locations, and any overlap, remained undefined. Alexander Barclay, a former head of the trading post at Bent's Fort, bought some of the land in the Scolly Grant in March 1848 and constructed a trading post with the goal of later selling the buildings to the government, but the Army declined this opportunity for several years.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Robert W. Frazer, "The Battle for Fort Union: Barclay and Doyle vs. the Army," *La Gaceta*, no. 8 (1984): 1-12.

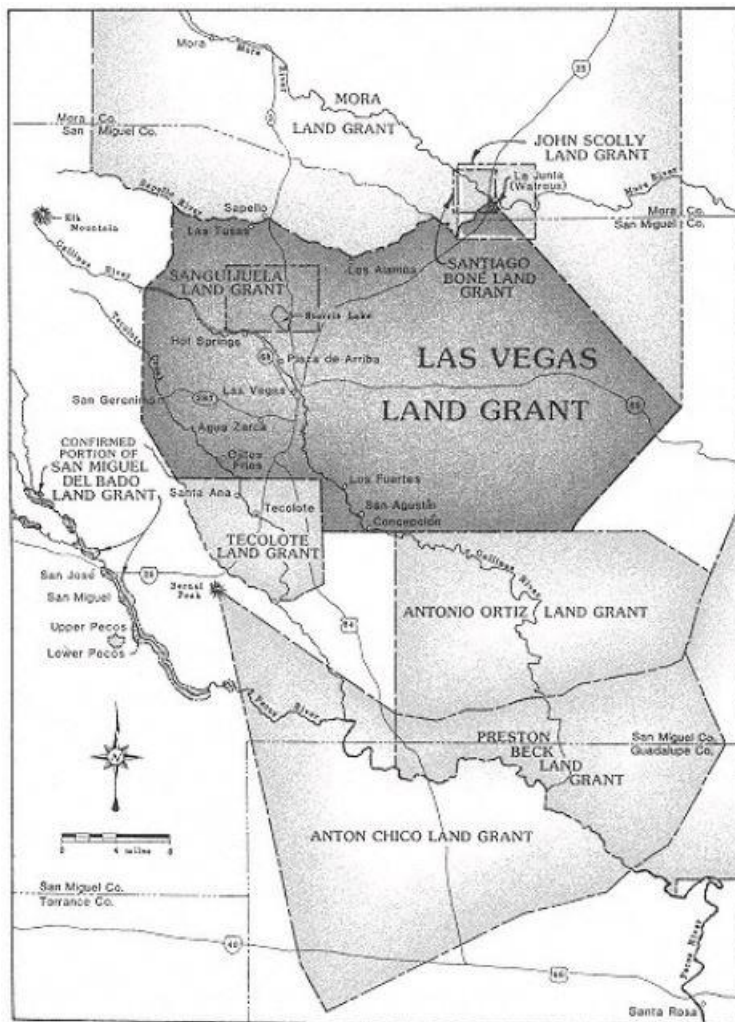


Figure 4: The Las Vegas Land Grant and Vicinity
 (Source: Malcom Ebright, *Land Grants and Lawsuits*, p. 88)

Barclay enlisted a partner investor, Joseph B. Doyle, his son-in-law. The two clashed with commanding officers at Fort Union over issues including water rights, the Army’s attempts to suppress the whiskey trade near the post, and most importantly, Sumner’s enlargement of the military reservation from one to eight miles square in May 1852. Barclay presented his concerns to Sumner in the form of a letter citing his “public and private duty to endeavor to repel the exhibition of undue authority and

unconstitutional aggression.” In October 1852, Barclay and Doyle filed suit in the Taos district court to resolve the land dispute. The trial lasted until September 1853, at which time the court found in favor of the traders and confirmed their title to the land upon which the post sat. In March 1854 the Army signed a lease for sixteen square miles of land from Barclay and Doyle. When formal surveys were completed in 1892, the Scully Grant was confirmed to be outside the boundaries of the Fort Union reservation, even the sixty-four square miles that Sumner had claimed in 1852, making the entire lawsuit unnecessary.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Frazer, “The Battle for Fort Union,” 15-17.

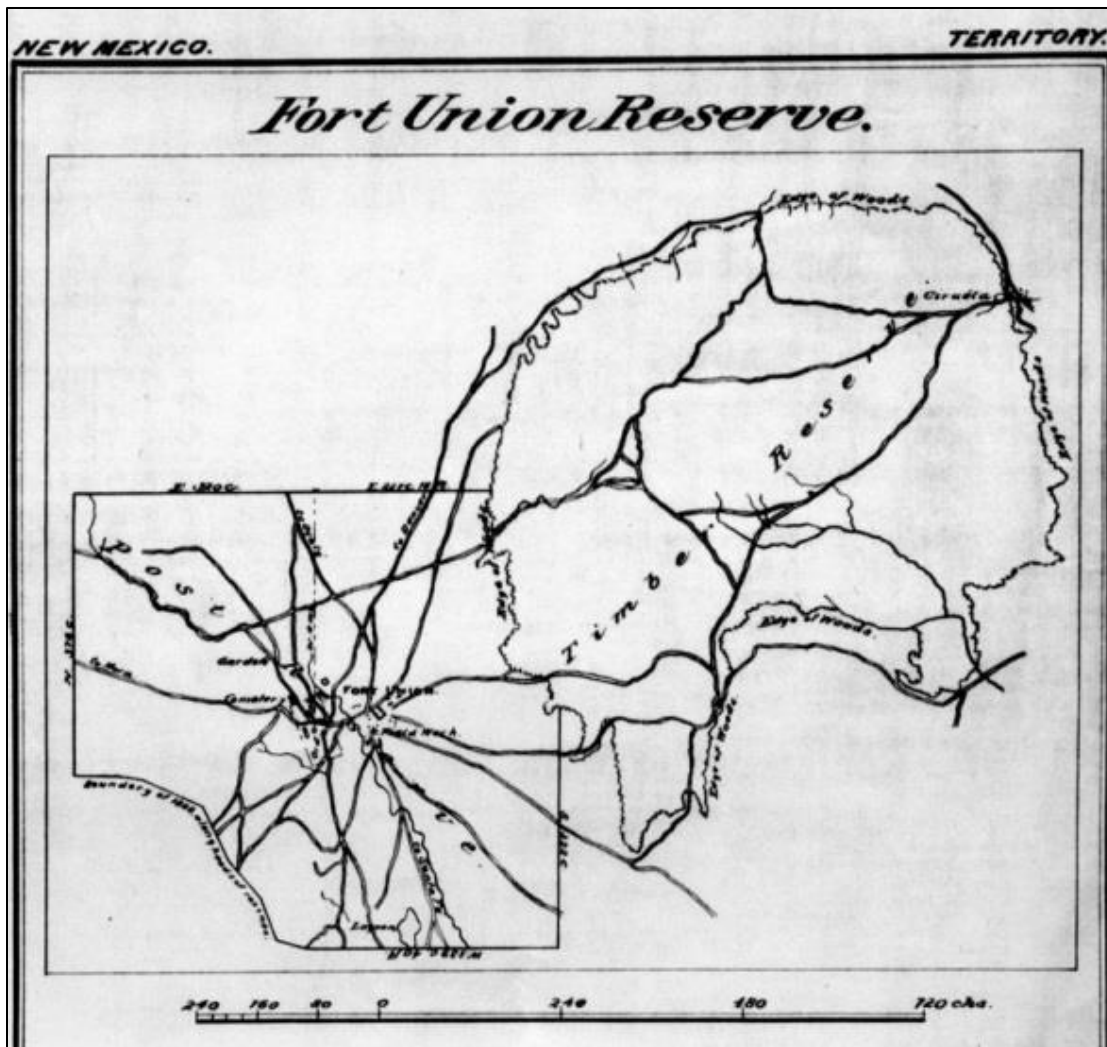


Figure 5: Fort Union Reserve and Timber Reserve, c. 1868
(Source: Fort Union National Monument photo files)

Notwithstanding its somewhat shaky real estate status, Fort Union fulfilled a vital role for the Army. As the regional Quartermaster Depot, it received trade goods and freight from the East and redistributed them to several dozen other forts throughout the territory. In its role as an armory and supply center, Fort Union both facilitated and intensified the challenges facing the inhabitants of this newest piece of an increasingly imperial America. Local people, including New Mexican Hispanos and American

Indians, saw their lifeways and cultures permanently altered by the presence of the Army, as well as the innumerable entrepreneurs, opportunists, pioneers, families, rascals, and adventurers who accompanied it.

The effect of Fort Union on life on the Mora Land Grant was generally salutary, as increased demand for natural resources by the Army provided additional marketing opportunities for local residents. The stabilizing presence of the military also brought an end to the cycles of conflict and raiding by Native Americans that had continued to constrict settlement and development. Both in its initial founding and throughout its lifetime, Fort Union was conceived by its military planners as part of their civilizing mission to the region, but from the start it was clear that even this expression of military might would be subject to debate and disagreement, even over its very right to exist.⁶⁹

Befitting this turbulent period of New Mexico history, the fort underwent several physical changes during its lifetime. During the 1850s, the First Fort Union existed as a relatively small collection of unpeeled log and adobe buildings huddled near the base of the bluffs on the western edge of the valley. In 1861, the Second Fort Union was built as a large star-shaped earthen fortification in order to protect its supplies and personnel from Confederate invaders from Texas. Once the threat of Civil War had passed, construction began on the Third Fort Union in 1863, and this huge array of adobe buildings, corrals, and warehouses served for the next three decades until the Army abandoned the fort, its role obviated by the arrival of the railroad and the relocation of local Indians to Bosque Redondo and other reservations—the closing of the frontier.

⁶⁹ Ebright, “Coyote Creek State Park,” 8.

system and its notoriously inadequate system of documentation.⁷¹ As historian Malcolm Ebright has noted, “With this network working against their interests, it was no wonder that Hispanic land-grant settlers, unfamiliar with Anglo laws and language and often not aware of court proceedings involving their land grants, had little chance of protecting their property.”⁷²

As part of the attempt to untangle the long and contested history of land ownership in its new territory, Congress appointed a Surveyor General of New Mexico in 1854. The task of reconciling the informal and communitarian structure of New Mexican land ownership with Anglo-American economic and legalistic rationality proved to be a formidable task. The Surveyor was charged with gathering evidence of title and land claims and adjudicating land ownership. The Mora settlers petitioned for confirmation of their ties to the land, and the Surveyor affirmed their claim in 1859. Congress quickly ratified this decision, and the grant was formally surveyed in the summer of 1861. The grant’s massive size and rugged terrain stymied the surveyors, however, and the General Land Office was unable to define a clear boundary until 1871.⁷³

Despite these early successes, the history of the Mora Land Grant involved many instances of deprivation of local landowners, primarily Hispanos, of their property, and a general transformation of the type of land use in the area from a “corporate and

⁷¹ Phillip B. Gonzales, “Struggle for Survival: The Hispanic Land Grants of New Mexico, 1848-2001,” *Agricultural History* 77, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 293–324; David L. Caffey, *Chasing the Santa Fe Ring: Power and Privilege in Territorial New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

⁷² Ebright, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico*, 40-41.

⁷³ Surveyor General of New Mexico, Plat of Mora Grant, Survey #150087, August 5, 1871.

communal” style to a more “highly individualistic” one.⁷⁴ The group of speculators—many of them Santa Fe Ring members—who began purchasing portions of the Mora Land Grant in the 1860s included numerous powerful individuals: Thomas B. Catron, U.S. District Attorney and later Senator from New Mexico; Stephen B. Elkins, Territorial Delegate; Samuel Smoot, a prominent land speculator; E. N. Darling, United States Surveyor; and T. Rush Spencer, then Surveyor General of New Mexico.⁷⁵

In 1865, Elkins and Catron had their attention drawn to the substantial promise and abundant resources of the Mora Grant when Elkins received as payment for a legal defense a share of the grant’s communal lands from a resident. The two men began buying up shares and, to facilitate the transfer of the land to free and clear ownership, applied for a formal patent from the Government Land Office in 1871. After some controversy over the western boundary of the grant and the eventual exclusion of the Fort Union reservation, the patent was issued to the original seventy-six grantees (sixteen of whose shares had been acquired by Catron and Elkins) in 1876. The speculators quickly filed suit to partition the common lands of the grant from the individual holdings, a process that did not exist in the Spanish land ownership system and which would have the effect of transferring the previously communal lands on the grant to the speculators.⁷⁶

The efforts of Elkins and Catron to solidify individual control of the entire Mora grant, including the traditional common areas, represented an important change in the conceptualization of this landscape, from a traditional New Mexican norm based on land-

⁷⁴ Knowlton, “The Mora Land Grant,” 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁶ Ebright, “Coyote Creek State Park,” 9.

grant tradition to a more explicitly capitalistic point of view that focused on private property and which used the law as a means to enforce that viewpoint.⁷⁷

However, in recent decades, scholars have noted that the history of land grant adjudication in New Mexico also includes instances of local resistance and appropriation of American legal norms to preserve community land rights and ancestral ownership. As geographer David Correia has noted, the distinction between American and New Mexican land ownership systems is not as clear-cut as it first appears, and is insufficient to explain the patterns of dispossession in territorial New Mexico. Instead, a specific sequence of local events and power relations, which cut across racial and political lines, were at work in the numerous cases of adjudication.⁷⁸ The Mora Land Grant's partition exemplifies the particular, rather than generalized, nature of this change in land ownership and use. Local landowners managed to prevent the wholesale acquisition of their lands by outsiders and speculators and maintained a proportion of their traditional holdings. Furthermore, wealthy Hispano landowners known as *patrones* took advantage of opportunities to privatize commons and obtain large landholdings at this time as well.

In Mora, these instances of resistance took physical form as the *Gorras Blancas* vigilante group cut fences and destroyed property. However, the resistance to encroachment on the Mora Land Grant more often attempted to use the new territorial legal system for the residents' own purposes.⁷⁹ The local residents, who counted among

⁷⁷ Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow, "From 'Repartición' to Partition," 261.

⁷⁸ David Correia, "Land Grant Speculation in New Mexico During the Territorial Period," *Natural Resources Journal* 48 (Fall 2008): 927-947.

⁷⁹ The partition lawsuit was filed jointly in 1877 by Elkins and local *patron* Vicente Romero. Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow, "From 'Repartición' to Partition," 278.

their numbers both Anglo and Hispano settlers, made formal protest to the partition suit, and asked the court to stop these “hungry sharks” from dissolving and profiting from their hard-won community.⁸⁰

The trouble the Ring members faced in obtaining this particular parcel of land, especially in comparison with the ease with which they gained control of other areas of the territory, proved too much. After several years of court battles with the hundreds of claimants to the Mora Land Grant, Elkins, Darling, Smoot, and Spencer withdrew from the partition suit. Between 1882 and 1893, the speculators sold their interests to Benjamin F. Butler, the Civil War political general and prominent Massachusetts politician, and his son-in-law, Major General (and provisional Governor of Mississippi during Reconstruction) Adelbert Ames. The untangling of these various interests proved to be its own long and litigious affair. In September 1890, Darling sued Butler, who he alleged had purchased his one-quarter interest with a reversion clause, by which if Butler failed to sell the land within six months, the title would return to Darling. Instead, having never sold the land, Butler offered to purchase it himself, but never followed through on his payments. Darling demanded payment, and also “that Gen. Butler account for his management of the land” before the parties eventually reached a settlement.⁸¹

In the midst of these transfers, in 1885, Butler established the Union Land and Grazing Company, a New Jersey corporation, as a land speculation entity, “in order to cultivate, improve, sell, or otherwise convey” land in Colorado and New Mexico. Several other Anglo claimants in the partition suit also established cattle ranches around this time,

⁸⁰ Knowlton, “The Mora Land Grant,” 65-67; Ebright, “Coyote Creek State Park,” 11.

⁸¹ *New York Times*, “Suing General B.F. Butler,” September 17, 1890.

taking advantage of the good grazing conditions on the plains east of Las Vegas and easy access to rail transport for their stock. This was a common tactic employed by speculators in territorial New Mexico seeking to more easily pool resources and attract investors.⁸²

The last troops left Fort Union on February 21, 1891. For the following several years various caretakers, only two or three in number, were responsible for the crumbling buildings at the post. In the years following the Army's abandonment of the post, there was considerable deterioration of the structures and other materials left behind, to the point that the Army sent a quartermaster department official to the site in 1892 to survey the damage. The inspector reported that much of the reusable material such as doors, windows, pipe, lumber, and brick had been removed from many of the buildings and had found its way into various structures owned by local residents of nearby Loma Parda, Watrous, and Las Vegas. Furthermore, an entire rail car of scrap metal had been sold off and shipped to Albuquerque by two of the appointed caretakers. The quartermaster inspector concluded that the dismantling of the post had been taking place for several years before its final abandonment, and that the Army should divest itself of responsibility for the remaining property as soon as possible.⁸³

Not all the deterioration of the fort was caused by humans, however. The ephemeral nature of the wood-and-adobe construction of many of the buildings meant that even during the Army's occupation of the site, constant repairs were needed to prevent the buildings from melting into the ground. Genevieve LaTourrette, an officer's

⁸² Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow, "From 'Repartición' to Partition," 271-72; Correia, "Land Grant Speculation in New Mexico," 935.

⁸³ Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest*, 666-668.

wife, wrote that “Toward the latter years at Fort Union, the quarters needed renovating badly....Roofs were leaking in the quarters to the extent that we went around with umbrellas.”⁸⁴

Solidifying the UL&GC Claim

Following Butler’s death in 1893, the remaining plaintiffs in the partition suit (the Butler heirs, Ames, and Catron) attempted to sell their stake in the land but were unable to agree on terms or selling price, and eventually divided their interests in 1899. Catron kept twenty-three shares of the original seventy-six, potentially equivalent to 250,000 acres (from which he and his son would later fruitlessly attempt to turn a profit) and the Butler-Ames family received thirty-six shares, theoretically equivalent to 350,000 acres south of the 36th parallel. The Butler and Catron claims were only “theoretical” for two reasons. First, those sums included many of the supposedly unoccupied common lands which were in fact occupied by individuals, who constituted the other claimants in the partition suit. While the speculators had a claim to eighty or ninety percent of the grant on paper, the situation on the ground was a different story. Second, because the partition suit was still uncompleted, the percent ownership interest held by each party did not refer to any particular parcel of land, only a quantity. In the end the UL&GC’s holdings would prove to be significantly smaller than these original claims, although still quite

⁸⁴ Genevieve LaTourrette, “Fort Union Memories,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 26, No. 4 (October 1951): 283.

substantial, a result of the imposition of a legal fiction upon the realities of settlement and occupation.⁸⁵

The UL&GC, despite the pending lawsuit, claimed ownership of its holdings on April 1, 1894. The buildings at Fort Union proved a quandary for their new owners almost immediately. In January 1895, the company entertained the idea of leasing the structures to “an eastern doctor” as a sanitarium. The contract included a reversion clause which stated that if the contract holders failed to convert the buildings to their new use within six months, the land would return to the company. Apparently, this reversion clause was executed as the sanitarium was never built.⁸⁶

In the early years of the new century, Adelbert Ames moved to solidify his family’s claim to the land. He settled the outstanding lawsuits with Ring members and in 1913 the UL&GC filed a successful suit against Marcos Salas, a local grazer with a competing claim to the lands vacated by the Army, thereby solidifying the company’s title to 73,734 acres that included the former Fort Union military reservation.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Shadow and Rodriguez-Shadow, “From ‘Repartición’ to Partition,” 280–283.

⁸⁶ The use of reversionary clauses in their land dealings was something the UL&GC was familiar with as Butler had acquired the land from Darling by ignoring a reversionary clause. See Donald Mawson, “Fort Union National Monument: Its Origin, Development, and Administration,” (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1961), 8.

⁸⁷ Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow, “From ‘Repartición’ to Partition,” 271-72.



Figure 7: Adelbert Ames, c. 1865 (Source: National Archives and Records Administration, ARC ID# 527085) <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/527085> (Accessed January 27, 2016)

Ames then turned his attention to the lingering lawsuit aimed at partitioning the common lands of the Mora Grant. After years of inactivity, the suit was revived in 1915, for reasons that remain unclear. In December 1915, the suit, by then known as *Union Land and Grazing Company v. Arce*, was finally settled. One provision of the settlement included the formal recognition of numerous existing claims, including those of the residents who had protested against the “sharks.” The court decided in the residents’ favor, and the original privately-held portions of the grant (as well as some areas of the common lands which had been privatized in the 1870s and 1880s as locals realized they were at risk of being lost) were segregated from the common areas by local committees appointed by the court for that task. Also among the list of “exceptions” denoted by the

judge were the claims of several large cattle ranches on the eastern portion of the grant, including that of the UL&GC, which totaled approximately 130,000 acres. The suit would determine the fate of only those sections of the Mora Land Grant's common lands which had never been privatized, still a sizable amount of acreage.⁸⁸

Because a full untangling of all the poorly documented competing claims to common lands on the grant proved impractical, the settlement also provided for the public auction of several thousand acres of the remaining common-land portion of the Mora Grant, with the proceeds to be distributed among the shareholders. This outcome had the effect of settling the question of the common lands' disposition in favor of the speculators, who were the only ones wealthy enough to purchase the land, and who thereby had the ability to keep the price low. The common areas of the Mora Land Grant would be privatized. The UL&GC's local representative, E.B. Wheeler, purchased 27,000 acres of the lands south of the 36th parallel at the February 1916 auction.⁸⁹ The UL&GC then purchased 14,520 of Wheeler's acres on the eastern plains of the grant, and he sold the rest (approximately 2,000 acres) to private individuals between 1916 and 1930.⁹⁰

Despite their long struggle to gain ownership, the Ames-Butler family remained absentee landowners for the first several decades of their possession. Even before the settlement, the family had hired Wheeler in 1897 to manage the land and represent the

⁸⁸ Carmen Arce was one of the original settlers of the grant. The suit involved hundreds of petitioners, reflecting the many descendants of the original 76 grantees; Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow, "From 'Repatriación' to Partition," 283–285.

⁸⁹ In 1934, Wheeler was forced to quit-claim 11,000 acres of his purchases in the western and central part of the grant to local occupants because the resurvey of the boundary line placed them within public, not Mora grant, land—a bitter outcome that would color his later interactions with the NPS.

⁹⁰ Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow, "From 'Repatriación' to Partition," 285-290.

family in local business affairs, and made only occasional visits to the property.⁹¹ By the 1920s, the land had become a new kind of place, a speculative investment that was leased as grazing land for sheep and cattle. Wheeler served as caretaker, and it appeared that the decades of dispute over the land had finally concluded. However, as the 1920s gave way to the 1930s, the latest economic transformation of northern New Mexico, especially nearby Las Vegas, would bring new pressures to bear, seeking yet another new use of the land and adding another layer to its already-dense sense of place.

⁹¹ In 1960, the owners of the Fort Union Ranch (the UL&GC) brought a quiet title suit with all the named former owners of the Mora Land Grant and their successors. No objections were heard by the court, and the Fort Union Ranch's possession of the land was firmly established on a permanent basis.

CHAPTER 1

"A TREASURE TROVE OF HISTORY": PAST, PRESENT, DISTANT, AND LOCAL,

1929-1941

The story of Fort Union National Monument is inextricably intertwined with the story of the community of Las Vegas, located approximately thirty miles west of the park. The residents of Las Vegas led the initial grassroots efforts to preserve the remains of the fort, and the desire among some of its most prominent residents to do so arose from the historical development of the city and the economic conditions it was facing at the time.

In the 1920s, Las Vegas experienced a fundamental re-shaping of its economy. In response to the economic crisis facing the community, local leaders conceived of a campaign to boost the fledgling automobile tourism industry through the creation of a new tourist attraction nearby. The proposed national monument would attract new visitors, this time in automobiles rather than mule-drawn wagons, but the elites of Las Vegas hoped the result—an influx of people and prosperity—would be the same as during the time of the fort's original activity at the height of the Santa Fe Trade.

This effort initiated with a local interest in preserving Masonic history, but was quickly amplified by the state of New Mexico's growing interest in promoting itself as a tourist attraction. The push for a national monument eventually made its way to the National Park Service (NPS), but the agency remained skeptical of the site's historical value and had to be persuaded by local boosters and state government representatives to reconsider it for inclusion in the park system.

Once NPS was finally convinced to take an interest in Fort Union, it incorporated many of the same ideas of romantic frontier heroism and an exotic Old West that had characterized the first local promotional efforts, and further developed them into its fundamental ideas about the site's historical significance, and how best to tell that story. The federal government's initial interest spurred the development of a statewide cause as New Mexico government officials worked to encourage the establishment of a monument.

However, early negotiations with the owners of the land, the Union Land and Grazing Company (UL&GC), revealed that they were simply not very interested in parting with a large piece of their hard-won holdings, located directly in the center of a working cattle ranch. While discussions with the company would impact the spatial character of the eventual FOUN in important ways, they would ultimately fall tantalizingly short of the ultimate goal of establishing a national monument.

A Changing Community

The area that would eventually become the city of Las Vegas was attractive to Native American settlement due to its location near a reliable water source, the Gallinas River. Local indigenous groups used the area as a camping and trading spot, and there is evidence of agricultural production by Puebloan groups as early as 1000 AD.⁹² The entrance of Spanish explorers changed the social and economic dynamic of the region, but in limited fashion at first. While more than a dozen expeditions passed through the area between 1581 and 1808, there was no permanent Spanish settlement in the area until

⁹² James H. Gunnerson, *Archeology of the High Plains* (Denver, CO: USDA Forest Service, 1989).

the end of the eighteenth century, when San Miguel del Bado was founded to the south of present-day Las Vegas. In 1821, grantees from San Miguel del Bado ventured north to establish a satellite community on the banks of the Gallinas, but persistent raids by Native American tribes prevented settlement. In 1835, a new wave of settlers successfully obtained a land grant of around 500,000 acres, and a small farming and grazing community was founded and named after the grassy bottomlands along the river: *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Las Vegas Grandes*. The first eighty years following its settlement were ones of near-constant growth in Las Vegas. The flourishing Santa Fe Trade brought new migrants and goods in a constant stream on their way to Santa Fe, with ancillary economic benefits for the new “gateway to Glorieta,” which soon became one of the most prominent towns of New Mexico’s territorial era.⁹³

The American entry in 1846 affected Las Vegas first out of all New Mexican communities, and the city’s central plaza was the site of General Stephen Watts Kearney’s famous proclamation of the United States as the liberator of New Mexico from Mexican tyranny and the predations of Indians. Despite this change in New Mexico’s sovereignty, the American presence had a positive effect on the town’s economic fortunes. Additional capital and immigrants from the United States, as well as a relatively smooth political transition, meant that Las Vegas was more prosperous than ever in the decades following the Civil War.⁹⁴

⁹³ Lynn Perrigo, *The American Southwest: Its Peoples and Cultures* (New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 7-10; Lynn Perrigo, *Gateway to Glorieta: A History of Las Vegas, New Mexico* (Boulder, CO: Pruett, 1982).

⁹⁴ Milton W. Callon, *Las Vegas, New Mexico: The Town That Wouldn’t Gamble* (Las Vegas, NM: Las Vegas Daily Optic, 1962).



Figure 8: Bird's Eye View of Las Vegas, N.M., 1882
 (Source: Library of Congress Geography and Map Division:
<http://lcn.loc.gov/75694741>)

The single biggest spur to Las Vegas's development, however, was the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railroad, whose tracks arrived in town from the east in 1879. The eastern side of town was the primary beneficiary of the new investment and capital. The 1880s saw a large increase in railroad tourism, including a unit of the Fred Harvey hotel empire, and this growth led to the placement of several territorial institutions in Las Vegas in 1893: the territorial university (later New Mexico Highlands University) and the State Hospital for the Insane. Tourism was also driven by the first

Rough Riders' Reunion in Las Vegas in 1899, which drew over 10,000 visitors. Other western shows and rodeos remained a fixture of city life for decades.⁹⁵

This introduction of new groups and economic forces had an effect on the city's spatial aspects as well. The Hispano, German, and Jewish merchant families who prospered from the Santa Fe Trade's growth remained located on the west side of town, which retained an architectural form reflecting its Spanish plaza-and-church organization. The new arrivals, many of whom were Anglo-American and associated with institutions such as the military or the railroad, colonized the eastern half of the city, which was laid out in a grid pattern indicative of Eastern styles of development. This spatial separation reflected political and racial segregation as well, and the two communities incorporated separately—East Las Vegas in 1888, and West Las Vegas in 1903. It was not until the 1960s that the city would be fully unified under a single government.⁹⁶

The AT&SF railroad constructed a resort near the hot springs northwest of town, and built a spur line to a 270-room hotel, which the Fred Harvey Company later purchased, renamed the Montezuma, and re-opened in 1882. The hotel burned several times before eventually closing in 1903. Meanwhile, however, other railroad tourism

⁹⁵ Elmo Baca, "When the Railroad Came - Las Vegas," in Ree Sheck, ed., *Railroads and Railroad Towns in New Mexico* (Santa Fe: New Mexico Magazine, 1989); Perrigo, *Gateway to Glorieta*, 20-41.

⁹⁶ Chris Wilson, *Architecture and Preservation in Las Vegas, Volume II: New Districts, New Developments* (Las Vegas, NM: Citizens' Committee for Historic Preservation, 1982); Eileen Rojas, *Cultural Intersections and Historic Preservation: A Study of Las Vegas, New Mexico*, (M.S. in Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania, 1998), 58-71; Jeffrey S. Smith, "The Plaza in Las Vegas, New Mexico: A Community Gathering Place," in Daniel Arreola, ed., *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

ventures flourished, the first of which was the Castaneda Hotel which opened in Las Vegas in 1899.⁹⁷

The city underwent major growth between 1898 and 1913. These good times were curtailed, however, by the construction of a railroad cutoff from Clovis to Belen in 1905, which meant that most trains would bypass Las Vegas. The full effects of this change were slow to develop, and through statehood in 1912 the community remained vibrant. In time, however, it became clear that with the re-routing of the railroad, Las Vegas was denied the sustained economic development driven by tourism and travel that other Southwestern cities were beginning to enjoy.⁹⁸

To fight these trends, the Las Vegas Commercial Club was organized in 1901, and in 1923 was converted into the Chamber of Commerce. The group was active in local affairs, as it became apparent that residents and businesses would need to advocate for their town's continued relevance and economic survival. The Chamber and other service clubs participated in road-building initiatives to encourage the development of tourism-related businesses.⁹⁹

Still, the Great Depression was disastrous for Las Vegas, as the commerce and tourism industries crumbled, compounding the economic challenges the city faced with the departure of capital that the Santa Fe Trail and the railroad had provided for generations. A series of severe local droughts harmed the agricultural and ranching

⁹⁷ Marta Weigle, Frances Levine, and Louise Stiver, *Telling New Mexico: A New History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 236-239.

⁹⁸ Perrigo, *Gateway to Glorieta*, 37-39.

⁹⁹ Architectural Research Consultants, Inc., "City of Las Vegas Comprehensive Master Plan," (Las Vegas: City of Las Vegas, 2011), III-24.

economies. As the community began the painful transition from a mercantile and shipping economy suffused with riches from the Santa Fe Trade and the railroad to one focused on the institutional and service sectors, residents realized that in order to attract tourists back to Las Vegas, they would need to take an active role in its promotion.¹⁰⁰

Auto Tourism in the Southwest

As the availability of automobiles increased nationwide (American car ownership tripled between 1920 and 1930, to twenty-three million, nearly twenty percent of the American population), interest grew in providing motorists with opportunities to navigate the highways of the country. Auto tourism was an important part of the Las Vegas economy in the 1920s, as the Fred Harvey Company established its first “Indian Detour” motor excursions between that city and Albuquerque in 1926. The notion of automobile tourism which aimed to connect visitors with the exotic, frontier past of the West was a familiar one in Las Vegas by the 1920s.¹⁰¹

The rise of automobile tourism in the 1920s and 1930s was a transformative development for Western communities, many of which were still reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. Auto travelers needed fuel, food, shelter, and other services as they traversed the vast distances between western towns. The increasing numbers of lucrative tourists led communities to take ever-greater steps to attract them and their dollars, and the result was a change in the nature of tourism itself. The new auto tourism

¹⁰⁰ Perrigo, *Gateway to Glorieta*, 41-50.

¹⁰¹ Diane Thomas, *The Southwestern Indian Detours: The Story of the Fred Harvey/Santa Fe Railway Experiment in Detourism* (Phoenix: Hunter Pub. Co., 1978), 117–121.

also encouraged local people to explore attractions near their own communities, supplementing the ranks of the long-distance travelers who had characterized rail travel. The automobile opened travel to a larger swath of middle-class Americans, who sought recreation and experience in addition to the cultural and intellectual stimulation that elite travelers had craved before them. Touring by car encouraged a more intimate and extended experience of place, and offered the chance to make deeper connections.¹⁰²

The expanding National Park Service, seeking to unify its disparate and increasing units into a coherent system, responded to these changes.¹⁰³ By the early 1930s, the NPS had realized that exploding southwestern tourism meant it needed a regional office in Santa Fe, as the Region III office in Oklahoma City was simply too far away. The agency's first two directors, Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, supported the development of auto tourism during their respective tenures. The "democratization of travel" enabled economic growth, and the relationship between those seeking to establish new attractions in their communities and the expansion-minded NPS was a mutually beneficial one, lending legitimacy to local attractions while building the cultural authority of the NPS through the historical and cultural associations of the places that joined the system.¹⁰⁴

"In changing circumstances," writes historian Hal Rothman, "national parks function as anchors, sources of employment and revenue that keep communities and

¹⁰² Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 148-149.

¹⁰³ Larry M. Dilsaver, *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1994), Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁴ Kerwin L. Klein, "Frontier Products: Tourism, Consumerism, and the Southwestern Public Lands, 1890-1990," *Pacific Historical Review* 62, no. 1 (February 1993): 39-71.

regions afloat.”¹⁰⁵ The desire of the people of Las Vegas to create a national park near their community was an effort to throw out just such an anchor into a tempestuous sea of changing economic conditions.

First Stirrings of Preservation

From the start, the campaign to preserve Fort Union was a collaborative local affair that drew upon various segments of the community. These efforts were motivated by a desire for the preservation and reverence of the fort’s connection to local Freemasonry, but they were, from the beginning, also an attempt to drive economic development in the region by taking advantage of the growing national trend of automobile tourism. This dual motivation—memorialization and money—would remain at the heart of the efforts to establish the monument during the entire long and complicated process.

Local Freemasons, who had been prominent members of the Las Vegas community since Chapman Lodge No. 2 was founded at Fort Union in 1862, led the effort to bring additional tourism to Las Vegas via historic preservation. The Masonic lodge moved to Las Vegas in 1867, and occupied a succession of increasingly prominent quarters in town. The dedication of a new stone building on Douglas Avenue in 1894 was the occasion of a large community celebration and by 1903, Masonic membership

¹⁰⁵ Hal Rothman, “A History of National Parks and Economic Development,” in Gary E. Machlis and Donald Field, eds., *National Parks and Rural Development: Practice And Policy in The United States* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000).

constituted “a ‘Who’s Who’ of the eminent local businessmen and professional men of that era.”¹⁰⁶



Figure 9: “Overview of Ruins,” Fort Union, c. 1920 (Source: Photo Book F, Image #1836, CCHP Photo Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University)

On January 12, 1929, Chapman Lodge No. 2, located in East Las Vegas, informed four of its members that they had been “named by the Worshipful Master, as a committee to act in conjunction with the Booster Club and others of this City, having as their aim to establish ‘Old Fort Union’ as a National Monument.”¹⁰⁷ The committee got to work, and soon recruited other organizations in the drive to establish a monument. The local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution provided a conduit to advance the

¹⁰⁶ Perrigo, *Gateway to Glorieta*, 172; George L. Machen, “Brief History of Union Lodge No. 4, Wagon Mound, New Mexico,” *The New Mexico Freemason* 2, No. 9 (September 1937): 3-8.

¹⁰⁷ John Bell to W.J. Lucas et al, January 12, 1929, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

community's goal to the level of the state legislature. In September of that year, the State Regent of the DAR wrote committee chair W.J. Lucas, a local attorney, and asked whether "the matter of old Fort Union [had] been taken up with Senator Cutting?" She also mentioned that she would be soliciting "Mr. Davis, Secretary of the National Old Trails Association" for help.¹⁰⁸ The DAR were also working with New Mexico State Representative J.M. McMath of Raton, making this a state as well as a local effort.

The efforts of Las Vegans soon gained traction among state lawmakers in Santa Fe, who in turn agreed to petition Congress. The state legislature's resolution clad the effort to establish a national monument in the language of commemoration and historical significance:

WHEREAS, In 1851 the United States Government established in the present county of Mora, State of New Mexico, a military post, Fort Union, which was for forty years the military headquarters and base of supplies for the Army of the Southwest, and, WHEREAS, This Fort is located on the Comanche Trail, the Santa Fe Trail, and the California Gold Trail, and was a strategic point during the Civil War, and, WHEREAS, many of our noted military figures were at some time during their career assigned to duty at Fort Union, and, WHEREAS, these buildings are falling into decay, thereby risking the loss of a spot rich in historic lore, and WHEREAS, the New Mexico Chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, including the Stephen Watts Kearney Chapter of Santa Fe, have unanimously endorsed the movement started by the Las Vegas service clubs to preserve and maintain Fort Union as a National Monument, and have requested the Legislature of the State of New Mexico to memorialize the President and Congress of the United States on this subject, Now, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the legislature of the State of New Mexico respectfully memorializes and petitions the Congress of the United States to set aside this historic site and to preserve and maintain Fort Union as a National Monument; and, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That copies of this memorial be sent to the President of the United States and to the presiding officers of the Senate and House of

¹⁰⁸ Andrews to Lucas, September 1, 1929, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

Representatives and to the Senators and Representative of the State of New Mexico.¹⁰⁹

New Mexico U.S. Representative Albert Simms responded in April 1930. Simms's H.R. 11146 called for the study of several historic properties in the area, including Glorieta Pass, Pigeon Ranch, Apache Canyon and Fort Union. The resolution authorized "studies, investigations and surveys" of historic sites by the Secretary of War "for the purpose of preparing and submitting to Congress a general plan and such detailed projects as may be required for property commemorating such battle fields and adjacent points of historical and military interest."¹¹⁰

Even though Simms's bill was doomed to die in committee, it did succeed in spurring action by the War Department. Lt. Col. H.L. Landers was assigned to make a survey of battlefields and other historic properties across the West later that year. Landers visited Fort Union in September 1930 and discussed its potential with Las Vegas committee chair W.J. Lucas. Newspaper coverage noted the interest of the Santa Fe Railroad and the Daughters of the American Revolution in the fort's preservation, and Landers reported that he expected to make a favorable recommendation for Fort Union's establishment as a "national monument."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ New Mexico, Joint Resolution Petitioning the Congress of the United States and the President of the United States to Set Aside Old Fort Union Located in Mora County, State of New Mexico as a National Monument. Law of 1929 (Santa Fe, New Mexico), 430.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Congress, House, H.R. 11146, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 72:6139; *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, April 5, 1930.

¹¹¹ "Official of War College Inspects Old Fort Union," *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, September 16, 1930.

New Mexico Tourism

At the same time, the state of New Mexico was also working to attract automobile tourism in an attempt to boost its economy, and the kind of development Las Vegas was proposing fit neatly into the state's goals and ongoing activities.

In August 1929, the New Mexico State Highway Department published "Roads to Cibola," a pamphlet guide for motorists which featured members of New Mexico's growing artist community, including painters, poets, photographers and writers.¹¹² The publication proved popular, and the state produced more than 170,000 copies over four printings in its first two years. Some of the photographs were also contributed by the NPS. "Roads to Cibola" was the first publication to describe the scenic beauty and historical significance of the ruined Fort Union and its tourist value. The fort had been "a bustling, busy place with long wagon trains coming in daily over the Santa Fe Trail...while the broad parade ground was a constant scene of colorful activity." However, after years of neglect, "Fort Union sits silently in the sun, its walls crumbling, its chimneys poking into the air like a forest of brick trees...A square mile of ruins awaits the traveler who would visit one of the most historically important spots in the Southwest. A Trip on U.S. 85 which does not include the old fort is not complete in possibilities."¹¹³

¹¹² Marta Weigle, *Alluring New Mexico: Engineered Enchantment, 1821-2001* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 104.

¹¹³ Gustave Baumann et al., *Roads to Cibola: What to See in New Mexico and How to Get There* (Santa Fe, N.M.: New Mexico State Highway Commission, 1929).

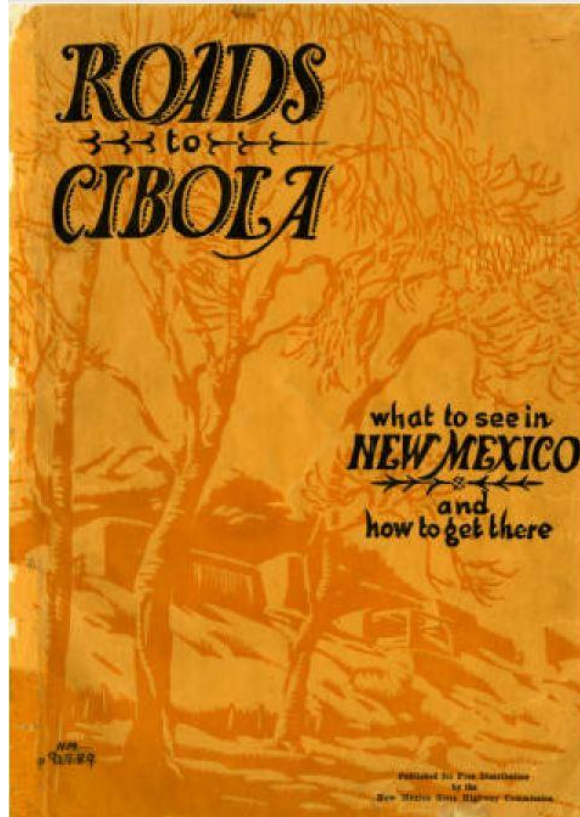


Figure 10: “Roads to Cibola,” New Mexico Highway Department, 1929
(Source: University of New Mexico Digital Collections
<http://econtent.unm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/Books/id/5903>)

Another important tool for the state as it attempted to increase tourism and recreational development was *New Mexico*, the state’s “Recreational and Highway Magazine,” which began as the *New Mexico Highway Journal* in 1923 but soon expanded its focus to general tourism matters. An immensely popular and widely read publication, *New Mexico* featured the state’s “literary, historical, conservationist and artistic leaders.” It was one of the first state magazines established in the United States and would feature

Fort Union numerous times in the years leading up to and following the establishment of FOUN.¹¹⁴

The August 1931 edition of *New Mexico* included an article by Withers Woolford entitled “Old Fort Union: The Ruins Are a Treasure Trove of History.” Woolford’s tale of travel to Las Vegas centered on his contact with a mysterious, aged informant, who claimed to be a Santa Fe Trail migrant and former soldier at the fort. “Whether the old gentleman was a rank romancer or was sticking to the truth and nothing but the truth,” he wrote, “we did not know. It mattered little. After listening to the story, we had to see the Fort.”

Soon enough, the travel writer was on his way to the “rapidly disintegrating” ruin, whose “tumbling walls suggest something of the power and dignity that were vested in the fort in the days when it was the sovereign point of government for an area that comprised approximately one-third of the present United States.” The ruts of the Santa Fe Trail were physical reminders of the heroic history of Fort Union, “Cut hub-deep in the mirezing [sic] adobe... an open document for all who will to read. Their ditchlike tracks are a lasting reminder of the hardships and suffering that ended with the reaching of this haven of safety.” The trail ruts were “great scars that mother earth will carry for many years as a reminder of the heroic days of the trail.”

Woolford described a feeling of connection with the past that the visitor to Fort Union, communing directly with its physical reality, experienced: “After spending a day in Fort Union, we hurried back to Las Vegas, carrying with us thoughts of heroes...of the

¹¹⁴ Gerald Thompson, “New Mexico History in ‘New Mexico Magazine’: An Annotated Bibliography (Part I),” *Arizona and the West* 17, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 245–78.

citizens and soldiers who had labored here to spread the arm of civilization beyond the river valleys until it encompassed the furthestmost corner of the Southwestern deserts.” The significance of the place was beyond question, and its central function was also clear: to maintain “order in a country infested with marauding tribes, and [bring] into that land the first suggestions of the new civilization that was growing up in the fast developing United States.”¹¹⁵ Heavy on romance and nostalgia, Woolford evoked a kind of historical memory of Fort Union that proved influential on early NPS conceptions of the site, and typified what would become a central tenet of calls for its preservation: that the ruins conveyed a deep and meaningful connection to a romanticized Old West, peopled by heroes.¹¹⁶

Building Interest

Although the effort to establish a monument made little progress during much of the 1930s, Fort Union remained present in the awareness of local people, as more and more residents of Las Vegas and nearby communities began to support the proposed monument. Local newspapers such as the Las Vegas *Optic* included “Old Fort Union” among its list of local attractions. The fort’s significance was rooted in the fact that “at least one-third of the United States Army” had been stationed there, in order to “protect

¹¹⁵ Withers Woolford, “A Treasure Trove of New Mexico History is The Ruin of Old Fort Union,” *New Mexico Magazine*, August 1931, pp. 153-159.

¹¹⁶ Woolford’s article was reprinted verbatim in the April 1933 edition of *The Totem Board*, a periodical published by Ernest Thompson Seton’s Woodcraft League of America. For background on Seton and the Indian College of Wisdom, see Historic American Building Survey no. NM-182, “Indian Village (Seton Village)” c.1995. This article was sent to Kittredge Wing by a ranger at Lassen Volcanic National Park in 1957, an interesting resurrection of a legendary account of Fort Union’s history and significance which arrived at the same time as interpretive preparations were taking place. Williams to Wing, February 15, 1957, Fort Union National Monument File 653, Folder 147.

the settlers of the southwest against the raids of the Indians.” A visit to Fort Union offered the chance to experience the past, with the visitor enjoying a connection with “some of the greatest military leaders in our nation’s history...officers who made themselves famous during the Civil War.” Local theater groups produced plays and dramas set at Fort Union, and the Las Vegas Historical Society gave lectures on “Fort Union, the center of all traffic and business in New Mexico a few decades ago.” The ruins remained a popular recreation destination for local Las Vegans, who traveled to the site to experience a communication with the past: “The period of Indian raids and scalplings is easily brought to the imagination, when one views the barracks, mess hall, stone jails, and water system of Fort Union.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ *Las Vegas Optic*, April 15, 1932; “Old Fort Union to be Topic of Talk Before History Group Tonight,” *Las Vegas Optic*, March 28, 1933; “Play a Success,” *Las Vegas Optic*, August 12, 1933; “Recreational Facilities at Vegas Great,” *Las Vegas Optic*, April 18, 1934.



Figure 11: Ruins of Fort Union, August 1931. Note Second Fort earthwork in foreground and Santa Fe Trail ruts throughout area (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

Meanwhile, political organizing continued. The Chamber of Commerce reached out to the director of the Oregon Historic Trail for advice on how to appeal to the public, and used its connections with the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce to continue advocating for the monument with federal and state officials.¹¹⁸

These continued calls for action proved effective on several occasions in the early 1930s. In February 1932, New Mexico Rep. Dennis Chavez wrote to NPS Director

¹¹⁸ *Las Vegas Optic*, August 3, 1933; DeHuff to Albright, October 6, 1933, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA-CP), Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

Albright, advising him of “an endeavor under way to have the Old Fort Union (an old United States fort of great historical interest) made into a national monument.” Chavez asked Albright to recommend that the Interior Department take action to support this effort.¹¹⁹ NPS Acting Director Arthur Demaray replied that the NPS had “as yet no official record of such a movement,” but added that the agency had “great interest” in the history of New Mexico and desired that significant places “be preserved for their great value to posterity.”¹²⁰

New Mexico Senator Bronson Cutting requested a status update on “the matter of the rehabilitation of Old Fort Union, New Mexico” on October 9, 1934.¹²¹ A week later, NPS Director Arno Cammerer replied that the Historical Division had begun studying the history of the fort, and had been convinced that “Fort Union was one of the most outstanding of western frontier forts in the early part of the nineteenth century,” eligible “under certain conditions” for national monument status. Cammerer identified the ownership of the land as a potential roadblock, however, and stated that adequate funding and Federal ownership would be prerequisites for any action, appealing to Cutting for assistance in sorting out the matter.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Chavez to Albright, February 16, 1932, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹²⁰ Demaray to Chavez, February 19, 1932, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹²¹ Cutting to Cammerer, October 9, 1934, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹²² Cammerer to Cutting, October 16, 1934, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

Cutting contacted the Las Vegas-San Miguel Chamber of Commerce (LVSMCC), which provided background information on the property's owners. LVSMCC Secretary Conway identified the Butler-Ames family of Lowell, Massachusetts as the owners and advised that the local caretaker, Captain E.B. Wheeler, had recently made overtures to potential buyers, but was not inclined to give the land to the government as a gift. Conway estimated the size of the parcel at 80,000 acres, and related that a legal description would be forthcoming for NPS review and selection of part of the property for the monument. Conway also vowed to bring in local groups including state officials, historical societies and other organizations "to call out the Army, Navy and Marines and by moral persuasion induce a gift of the property in order that it might become a National Monument and be preserved to the people forever."¹²³

Cutting continued his correspondence with NPS, and in March 1935 Demaray wrote to him that the agency's efforts to study and obtain Fort Union were continuing. Demaray stated that NPS believed the fort's "chief significance is centered in its relationship to the larger story of the Santa Fe Trail itself." NPS's ongoing attention to "the great overland routes" meant that Fort Union would likely be preserved as part of a series of historic features relevant to the history of the Santa Fe Trail, including the construction of roadways between them "to give to the visitor a true picture of the nature, extent and importance of these great highways."¹²⁴

¹²³ Conway to Cutting, October 22, 1934, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹²⁴ Cutting to Cammerer, February 28, 1935 and Demaray to Cutting, March 12, 1935, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

First NPS Site Visit

In December 1935, Superintendent Roger Toll of Yellowstone National Park was dispatched to study Fort Union, gather information about its history, and make recommendations about its possible inclusion in the National Park system. Toll was uniquely well-equipped to evaluate the potential park, as a twenty-year veteran of the service and field assistant to the director. He had been engaged for several years in investigations of possible additions to the system across the United States. Among his contacts in Las Vegas was the Chamber of Commerce, which provided him with a letter of recommendation to local residents.¹²⁵ Toll visited the site and also compiled a series of documents and notations about the fort, its history, and its significance.

Toll's travel notes described the state of the fort on his December 14th visit: "Monument buildings built of adobe brick, burned brick, local timber (some sawed, some hand-hewn), and some dressed stone. Wrecked not by weather but by use of wood and bricks in local buildings. Roofs removed. Crumbling inevitable. Buildings extend for 0.4 miles." Toll also noted that Joe Martin of the LVSMCC said Captain E. B. Wheeler, the manager of the property, was "very bitter against [the] government."¹²⁶ Toll included in his report numerous photographs of the fort buildings and the Santa Fe Trail ruts surrounding it. He also attached several documents: an excerpt from "Roads to Cibola," Woolford's 1931 "Treasure Trove" article, a short synopsis of Santa Fe Trail history, and

¹²⁵ Martin to Haley, December 13, 1935, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P63, Box 8.

¹²⁶ Notes on Proposed Fort Union National Monument, March 24, 1936, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P63, Box 8.

excerpts from two history texts: W.H. Davis's *New Mexico and Her People* and W. A. Bell's *New Tracks on North America*.

Although Toll's untimely death prevented him from completing his report, he did leave behind handwritten notes which provide some insight into his thoughts about Fort Union as a potential park unit.¹²⁷ Toll was not overly impressed with the ruins, stating they were "not very romantic nor historical." He traced Fort Union's main importance to the Santa Fe trade, and downplayed its significance in both the Indian Wars and the Civil War. Ultimately, Toll recommended that while the Santa Fe Trail was worthy of preservation, it was "unnecessary to establish national monuments along it."¹²⁸ In March 1937, the NPS Advisory Board agreed with Toll's recommendation and declined to recommend Fort Union for national park status, and instead advocated "development as a State or local park."¹²⁹

Meanwhile, the NPS historical branch was continuing its initial research on Fort Union. Historian Edward Steere of the Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings, under the guidance of Chief Historian Verne Chatelain, had begun researching the fort's history in November 1934, and completed his study in 1938. Entitled "Fort Union, Its Economic and Military History," the paper explored Fort Union's history and summarized its

¹²⁷ The visit to Fort Union would be among Toll's last, as he and NPS natural resource management pioneer George Wright were killed in a car accident on February 25, 1936. See Sharon A. Brown, "Roger Wolcott Toll, 1883-1936" in *National Park Service: The First 75 Years; Biographical Vignettes*, ed. William H. Sontag (Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1990).

¹²⁸ Notes on Proposed Fort Union National Monument, March 24, 1936, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P63, Box 8.

¹²⁹ NPS Advisory Board Summary Cards, Fort Union National Monument: March 1937, NPS Office of the Chief Historian.

importance.¹³⁰ Steere traced the essential chapters in its history to its role in the Santa Fe Trade and Civil War, and remained convinced that “the military history of the post is incidental” to the much more important “great forces of which the flowing [Santa Fe Trail] traffic is only a visible expression.” This was the first comprehensive history of Fort Union produced by NPS, and Steere’s conclusions were similar to those of Toll: while the fort had some significance, “the subject of the Santa Fe trade is of far greater magnitude historically.”

Steere described the Santa Fe trade as a primitive trade (comparable to “age-old traffic between the Levant and Hither Asia”) which was “collateral” to the development of modern, steamship-driven trade on the Mississippi. The establishment of Fort Union was a product of the immediate post-U.S.-Mexican War context which presented the Army with two particular challenges. First, this was the first new territory acquired by the United States “in which a civilized native population manifested any degree of opposition to the transfer of allegiance.” Also, local Native American groups “had seldom felt a restraining hand from either the Vice-royalty [of Spain] or the Government of Mexico.” The irascible Hispano and Indian populations, combined with the astronomical costs of overland transport and supply, necessitated the creation of Fort Union.

Thus, according to Steere, Fort Union’s chief task in the first decade of its existence had not been protection or surveillance of the Santa Fe Trail, but a less glorious job: conflict with Native tribes. To add insult to injury, he claimed that it had not been able to perform that limited duty effectively: poor policy, listless organization, and inept

¹³⁰ Edward Steere, “Fort Union, Its Economic and Military History,” Report for the National Park Service, 1938, National Park Service Southwest Regional Office Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

tactics meant that “a pitiful handful of poverty stricken nomads” had managed to “dictate” the strategic direction of the entire Army in New Mexico Territory for most of the 1850s. However, due to the relatively small number of “nomad marauders,” and the huge volume of well-equipped and armed traders on the Trail, the unregulated Indians did not pose much of a real threat to disrupt its traffic.

The Santa Fe Trail only became an important focus for Fort Union’s commanders upon the outbreak of the Civil War, and it was not until after that conflict had ended that the military would learn how to effectively assert control over the Plains tribes. For Steere, Fort Union’s role in the conflict at Glorieta Pass was a secondary one to the Colorado Volunteers who met and turned back the Confederate forces. In the final calculation, Sibley’s campaign had been a failure because of insufficient supply, not Union might at Glorieta, a campaign “lost in Missouri—not in New Mexico.”

Because he believed that Native Americans had little to do with the Santa Fe Trade, either in terms of resistance or participation, and because its role in the defeat of the Confederacy in the West had been tangential at best, Steere believed that Fort Union had obtained its “first and real importance” as a “temporary expedient” used as a center of supply for the Army, which helped lower its astronomical expenditures on overland transport. This role was short-lived, however. The fort’s importance after 1866 declined precipitously, and once “the advancing railroad had begun the process of rolling up the Trail” its relevance disappeared entirely.

The picture of Fort Union that emerged from Steere’s report was at odds with many of the contemporaneous and later accounts of its history and importance. Far from being a “guardian of the Santa Fe Trail” or a base of heroic military exploits against

dangerous Indians, Steere described a backwater “civil trading center” that enjoyed only a brief period of strategic value, an occasion to which it utterly failed to rise. Despite the fact that it had been “intimately concerned with the political and economic shifts” that buffeted the New Mexico Territory in the 1850s and 1860s, Steere’s conclusion was that Fort Union had simply never been a particularly significant place.¹³¹

Not Taking “No” For an Answer

Despite the NPS’s initial reluctance to move forward with a new national monument, over the next several years local residents and leaders continued to push for one, and worked with NPS Region III staff to persuade the central NPS offices in Washington, DC to reconsider.

In March 1937, George Collins of NPS Region III in Santa Fe wrote to NPS regional historians in Oklahoma, describing his efforts to build up a collection of material on Fort Union, “that tremendously absorbing old place.” Collins described his office’s efforts toward a report “with the thought that Fort Union of all such places in the Southwest is so outstanding that it should be preserved in national monument status,” due to the fort’s “excellent” setting for portraying “the atmosphere of the Old Santa Fe Trail.” Collins claimed that the fort had been “overlooked” but urged his colleagues to remedy

¹³¹ Steere to Chatelain, November 19, 1934, NPS Harpers Ferry Center (HFC), Park History Collection, Cultural Resources Bibliography: FOUN, Box 1.

this condition.¹³² Historian Maier replied that while he was unconvinced of the “major historic importance” of the site, there might be room for NPS interest in the future.¹³³

In December 1937, NPS Associate Historian William Hogan informed a War Department official that “In connection with our Historic Sites Survey, we are also preparing reports on Fort McKavett (Texas), Fort Union (New Mexico), and Fort Bowie (New Mexico).”¹³⁴ That same month, other NPS officials in DC were receptive to interest expressed by Region III in establishing Fort Union as an NPS site: “It is very pleasing to the writer to hear of active interest in Fort Union by your office. Probably it will be possible to follow your work through Mr. Lee of the Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings, with whom this office has considerable contact.”¹³⁵

R.H. Faxon of the Raton Chamber of Commerce wrote to Region III’s Collins on April 7, 1937 providing a history of Fort Union and an update on its present condition. The ongoing deterioration of the fort (which he called “a pretentious affair”) was cause for concern among local residents, and Captain Wheeler’s “not too friendly attitude” was an obstacle. Faxon did mention, however, that Wheeler was open to the prospect of an entrance road from Highway 85 to the fort and to “make some adjustment” regarding the site of the ruins. Faxon advised forming a “memorial association” to help with the

¹³² Collins to Maier, March 30, 1937, National Archives and Records Administration, Denver, Colorado (NARA-Denver), Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹³³ Regional Officer to Collins, April 13, 1937, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹³⁴ Donald Mawson, “Fort Union National Monument: Its Origin, Development, and Administration,” Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1961, 10.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

process. He noted that artifacts were present at the fort, and that some local residents had amassed significant collections of these.¹³⁶

Faxon also wrote to Ronald Lee of NPS in Washington, DC, inquiring whether any work had been done on Fort Union, or if the site was to be studied or further action taken.¹³⁷ Acting Assistant Director Francis Ronalds replied that the site was on a list to be studied but had not yet been addressed due to funding and staffing issues.¹³⁸ Faxon continued to follow up, writing in November 1938 that “the implications of this site are such that it would appear that NPS might feature the place quite significantly.”¹³⁹ Lee replied on December 30 that the agency was “very interested in seeing Fort Union preserved and I assure you we will cooperate with the local groups and the State to the fullest extent of our power.”¹⁴⁰

First Negotiations

Even before NPS had come around to the position of local boosters and Region III staff that the national monument was a worthwhile goal, NPS personnel began preliminary negotiations with E.B. Wheeler, the resident caretaker, who was not favorably disposed to dealings with the government. Roger Toll noted during his visit in

¹³⁶ Faxon to Collins, April 7, 1937, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

¹³⁷ Faxon to Lee, November 12, 1937, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹³⁸ Ronalds to Faxon, November 17, 1937, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹³⁹ Faxon to Ronalds, November 1, 1938, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁴⁰ Lee to Faxon, December 30, 1938, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

December 1936 that Wheeler had been “very bitter” against the federal government due to a dispute over timber cutting on the company’s land, apparently as a result of inaccurate surveying. Wheeler’s claim for restitution had made its way through the House and Senate, but been vetoed by President Roosevelt.¹⁴¹ However, during early negotiations, NPS officials were able to bring him around by promising certain material benefits as part of the land deal, and by collaborating with the state-level Coronado Cuarto Centennial Commission (CCCC) as a negotiating partner.¹⁴²

After a “reconnaissance investigation” of the ruins to establish the boundaries of the proposed park and delineate the right of way for the access road that would be needed, a team of NPS and CCCC representatives headed by Region III Director Hilary Tolson, NPS’s lead negotiator at this early stage, met with Wheeler in his Las Vegas office to discuss details of the proposed land deal. The arrangement that emerged would set the tone for negotiations over the next year, and contained the key provisions of the company’s demands. Wheeler agreed to recommend that the UL&GC donate approximately 1,100 acres which would include the ruins of the Third Fort and First Fort/Arsenal, as well as a 200-foot wide right-of-way to link Highway 85 to the site. The

¹⁴¹ Notes on Proposed Fort Union National Monument, March 24, 1936, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P63, Box 8.

¹⁴² The national organization commemorating Coronado’s exploration of the Southwest was also involved in the planning for the monument. Following on New Mexico’s lead, in 1939 several other states (Arizona, Texas, Colorado, and Kansas) had appointed their own commissions to plan for the commemoration. Congress approved the creation of the United States Coronado Exposition Commission and pledged funds to the effort. New Mexico Senator Clinton P. Anderson was appointed the head of the national organization in recognition of his advance work on the New Mexico state-level effort. The national USCEC was involved in the publication of historical retrospectives of Spanish exploration, supporting the establishment of monuments and museums across the region, and putting on conferences, pageants, festivals, and an elaborate re-enactment of Coronado’s *entrada* into the region (personally requested by Roosevelt in 1939). See James F. Zimmerman, “The Coronado Cuarto Centennial,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (February 1, 1940): 158–62.

company also agreed to grant a scenic easement of size to be determined later on each side of all roadways built.¹⁴³

In exchange, the company required that the deed include a reversionary clause so that “if at any time the land is not used by the United States as a national monument or reservation, the title shall revert to The Union Land and Grazing Company or to its successor.” Wheeler also demanded that a caretaker’s residence furnished with free electricity and water be constructed “in or near the Monument administration-residential development area,” and connected by a road to the rest of the site. Finally, the ULGC desired the construction of fencing to keep cattle out of the ruins, and several underpasses built beneath the access road to allow circulation of stock on the grazing land.

In a follow-up letter, Tolson explained that a formal survey would be needed, and would begin after June 1. He expressed the government’s appreciation for the land donation and any help in finding artifacts of the fort which had been salvaged by local residents, and asked Wheeler to reply with his approval so that a “definite understanding” could be struck.¹⁴⁴

Wheeler replied a few days later, confirming most of Tolson’s specifications as established during their “very pleasant interview,” but also included a few concerns: that the separation between the main monument area and the arsenal would present visitors “with an open invitation to drive over other parts of the range.” Wheeler expressed hope that visitors to the site would be “confined to lines of the Fort Union and Arsenal areas.”

¹⁴³ Charles Richey, Field Report, May 10, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁴⁴ Tolson to Wheeler, May 29, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

These vague fears about unfettered public access to the company's private land would later develop into more elaborate concerns. Nevertheless, Wheeler seemed to be trying to entice the NPS with the promise of additional historic artifacts: "several relics of the old fort have been mentioned as possibly being available as interesting exhibits." Wheeler closed on an optimistic note: "you may rest assured that the donation of the two areas, aggregating around one thousand acres will be favorably recommended by me to the Board of Directors."¹⁴⁵

It is unclear at what point Wheeler began to relay information regarding the potential NPS deal to the owners of the ranch in Massachusetts, but from later communications it is apparent that he may not have had the authority to make the number and specificity of promises that he did at this stage of the negotiations. In any event, the Region III staff and officials of the CCCC felt secure enough to begin exerting pressure on state elected officials and the central NPS offices to establish the national monument.

On May 18, 1939, Tolson reported to Washington that the CCCC had recommended Fort Union as a national monument, and that the site's "outstanding historical qualities, background, and remains" meant that Region III should conduct a report and investigation. He relayed Wheeler's reassurance that the company would donate the land should it be designated a national monument by Presidential proclamation, but warned that delays could result in the loss of the site to vandalism, and urged a prompt response. He concluded that "it is urgently recommended that...it be

¹⁴⁵ Wheeler to Tolson, May 24, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

submitted for classification and approval for establishment as a national monument at the Advisory Board's next meeting.”¹⁴⁶

Before long, influential politicians at the state and federal levels began to take interest in the project. CCCC director Clinton P. Anderson (a rising New Mexico politician who would serve in the House, Senate, and as Secretary of Agriculture during the Truman administration, and who was also a Freemason) wrote to New Mexico U.S. Representative (and future Governor of New Mexico) John J. Dempsey on May 19th. Anderson reported that the Commission had struck an agreement with the UL&GC for a donation of 1,200 acres of land around the fort as a “National Military Monument.” The deed and plat, Anderson wrote, were being drawn up and soon to be submitted to NPS for approval. Anderson asked Dempsey for support for the effort as “The Monument means a great deal to New Mexico. In addition to creating a tourist attraction equaled only by the Carlsbad Caverns, the new monument will mean over a million dollars in material, labor and supplies during its preparation.”

Anderson detailed Fort Union’s size and strategic importance to the Santa Fe Trail and the Civil War, and its association with famous figures such as Kit Carson, George Crook and Nelson Miles. “It would take a good size book to recount even a portion of the history of Fort Union,” Anderson concluded. “Suffice to say that modern historians declare it to have been the most important post between the Mississippi and California; the Guardian of the Santa Fe Trail!”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Tolson to Acting Director, May 18, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁴⁷ Anderson to Dempsey, May 19, 1939, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

The support for the proposed monument soon spread through New Mexico's Congressional delegation. On May 23, Senator Carl Hatch wrote to NPS director Arno Cammerer making the case for Fort Union as a national monument. "This particular area," Hatch wrote, "means a great deal to the entire Southwest." Hatch made a nearly identical appeal to Cammerer based on the history and significance of the fort as had Anderson in his letter to Dempsey a few days earlier. He claimed that "volumes could be written about the history of Fort Union," and expressed his hope for a speedy establishment of the monument.¹⁴⁸

On June 1, 1939, New Mexico Governor John E. Miles wrote to Tolson to express his happiness at the pending agreement with the UL&GC, and relayed that "many of us have for years recognized the tremendous historical value of Fort Union." The governor noted that previous attempts to establish a monument had been "fruitless" and expressed his "sincere hope that the National Park Service will do everything within its power to expedite the establishment of the Fort Union National Monument."¹⁴⁹

Miles also made his support for the monument publicly known. During a trip to Roswell, he credited the CCCC with concluding the primary negotiations and having asked for NPS survey of the site. Miles also announced that a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was planned. "Historians long have pointed to the importance of preserving

¹⁴⁸ Hatch to Cammerer, May 23, 1939, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁴⁹ Tolson to Miles, June 6, 1939, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996..

Fort Union,” he said. “As the guardian of the Santa Fe Trail for almost 40 years, it was the center of many historic events during the last half of the 19th century.”¹⁵⁰

On June 5, Wheeler visited Tolson in Santa Fe to discuss details of the proposed monument. The men agreed that the scenic easement surrounding the roads would be 500 feet, not 300, in which area only livestock grazing could take place. The western boundary of the main parcel was set as the east bank of Wolf Creek, and a connector road to the First Fort Union and Arsenal would extend from the northern edge of the main parcel. Tolson promised to submit surveys and drawings for Wheeler’s review before final documents were elevated up the NPS chain.¹⁵¹

Wheeler wrote Tolson on June 7th to try to reduce the width of the right-of-way between the two parcels by one-half to 100 feet, and to have the scenic easement on that road removed altogether. Tolson agreed to the reduced right-of-way, but insisted on the 300-foot scenic easement to prevent the construction of concession buildings, as “such intrusion in the old Fort Union picture would be most undesirable.”¹⁵² Aesthetic concerns were also part of preliminary NPS surveys conducted by NPS engineers and landscape architects. On June 8th, a team measured the boundaries of the six-mile entrance road and boundaries of the site. During a follow-up investigation a few weeks later, they

¹⁵⁰ *Roswell Dispatch*, “Proposal for National Monument,” June 2, 1939.

¹⁵¹ Tolson to Wheeler, June 5, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁵² Tolson to Wheeler, June 10, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

recommended lengthening the curves of the road toward a more “flowing alignment,” which was “well related to the topography.”¹⁵³

On June 14th, Tolson wrote to Cammerer explaining the still-urgent nature of the negotiations. He noted that the state of New Mexico did not have title to the land, and that Wheeler was adamant that the state not acquire it. Wheeler instead insisted that the USA take title and manage the land, and that “if the offer of the Union Land and Grazing Company is not accepted, the Fort Union ruins will be demolished and the area added to the grazing lands of that organization.” Tolson again urged that the acquisition be considered by the NPS Advisory Board. He also advocated submitting the proposal to establish the monument to President Roosevelt via the Bureau of the Budget. Tolson estimated \$12,000 as the annual administration and maintenance costs, much of which he believed could be recouped via entrance fees. Tolson urged “special consideration” of the issue by the Washington offices of NPS.¹⁵⁴

NPS Special Report Recommends FOUN

In June 1939, the Region III Office produced a “Special Report Covering the Proposed Fort Union National Monument.”¹⁵⁵ This document, authored by NPS staff located closer to the proposed monument (both geographically and in terms of the economic and administrative context they worked in) articulated a very different opinion

¹⁵³ Charles Richey, Field Report, June 8, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁵⁴ Tolson to Acting Director, June 14, 1939, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

¹⁵⁵ Neasham, Aubrey. *Special Report Covering the Proposed Fort Union National Monument* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1939).

on the importance of Fort Union, and its worthiness of national monument status, than previous NPS studies. Their vision of Fort Union's history and significance would win out over the distant dismissals of NPS officials from other regions.

The *Special Report* laid the foundation for an initial understanding of Fort Union that portrayed it as significant due to its history as a place of protection and defense, and a facilitator of trade and development. The ruins' physical characteristics—their size and the fact they still remained visible—were also important aspects of the site's suitability for preservation, and told “an eloquent story” of life and culture in the “Old West” in a place whose “national significance is without question.”¹⁵⁶ The ruins, furthermore, enjoyed a relatively untouched status: “In no way have these structures or the site been altered, restored, or modified, with the exception of deterioration through destruction, vandalism, and some erosion.”¹⁵⁷

The historical narrative appended to the report, authored by Region III Student Technician Henry Woods, made a strong case as to why Fort Union was worthy of preservation. In addition to asserting Fort Union's determining role in the development of the Santa Fe Trail, it was also cast as the “vital point in the territory's defense,” and an enabler of westward expansion, which brought trade and economic development to the region.¹⁵⁸ Woods characterized Fort Union's origins in a similar way as had Edward Steere just a year earlier, noting the civil unrest and Indian raids that led to a general state of near-chaos in the years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. However, far from

¹⁵⁶ Neasham, *Special Report*, 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

being a backwater, Fort Union soon became “the largest and most important post in New Mexico, supply depot, departmental headquarters, and primary objective of the Confederate invasion, [which] influenced immeasurably the history and development of the most famous of all western routes, the Santa Fe Trail.”¹⁵⁹

Despite the United States’ very recent entry to the region, Woods emphasized its role as one of defense against “the Indian and the invader,” as though these local cultures were entering US territory instead of the other way around. New Mexico was a “strange” land which the United States had conquered. The local Hispano and Native American inhabitants (who Woods characterized as “indolent, aesthetic, [and] carefree” and “sinister...fierce, capable and unrelenting,” respectively) were obstinately opposed to the benefits brought to the region by the “driving, restless, material-minded Anglo-Saxon.”¹⁶⁰ The civilizing mission of Fort Union, irrationally resisted by its targets, bolstered the case for its significance.

Woods concurred with Steere’s assessment of the futile nature of the Army’s early Indian campaigns, which were interrupted by the Civil War’s eastward pull of military attention, men, and material from the Territory. However, Woods paid much closer attention to the role of Fort Union’s troops and supplies in the defeat of the Confederates at Glorieta Pass, as it became “the vital point in the territory’s defense,” and “retention of this post spelled the difference between victory and defeat.” His greatest departure from Steere, however, came in his treatment of the post-Civil War history of the fort, as he detailed the numerous campaigns that were supplied and commanded from

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Section II, p.2

the fort, especially under General James Carleton. According to Woods, the “Indian menace” was not resolved until the 1880s, when “a new trail of steam and steel was pushing its way into the west,” effectively extending the period during which Fort Union had been a relevant feature in New Mexico. After the fort’s abandonment, “the center of military activity in New Mexico during the most colorful era of her history was left to vandals and oblivion.”¹⁶¹

To the staff of Region III, Toll and Steere’s denigrations notwithstanding, these factors left no room for doubt as to the significance of Fort Union, and the Santa Fe office “urgently recommended that Fort Union be established as a national monument by Presidential proclamation.”¹⁶² The report declared that Fort Union fit into several themes of national history, including “Political and Military Affairs, 1830-1860,” “The War Between the States, 1861-1865,” “Westward Expansion and the Extension of National Boundaries, 1830-1890” because of its role in “Indian warfare [and] its protection of the territory of New Mexico from attack and invasion,” “Means of Travel and Communication” for its connection with the Santa Fe Trail, and “Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture to 1890” due to the Santa Fe Trade’s economic impact.¹⁶³

The authors noted that “the museum possibilities at Fort Union are unlimited” due to its broad sweep of history and the numerous artifacts that had been collected and remained available.¹⁶⁴ The authors recommended that a Civilian Conservation Corps

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Pt. II, p. 42

¹⁶² Ibid., 16.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

camp be established to accomplish the initial tasks of “road building, clean-up, excavating, and stabilizing, and building the necessary administrative, exhibit, and custodian’s quarters.”¹⁶⁵ They expressed appreciation for the role of the UL&GC in the site’s preservation since “the fact that the property has been under one ownership has meant some protection,” and noted the intended “donation” of 1,200 acres including the main fort ruins, the Arsenal, a right of way between Highway 85 and the fort, and a right of way between the two fort areas.¹⁶⁶ The site was particularly suitable because “most of the other National Park areas in New Mexico are within a day’s automobile drive from Fort Union.”¹⁶⁷

Critically, the 1939 report recommended that “no attempt should be made to restore or reconstruct the buildings of Fort Union, because of the evidences of past material culture which are contained therein.”¹⁶⁸ This approach to preservation, of only maintaining the ruins to slow their decay and not to reconstruct them, has been NPS’s approach ever since, and continues to define the interpretation of the site today. However, the report’s optimistic portrayal of the ruins’ condition and its underestimation of the effort needed to maintain them would haunt the service for decades.

Region III’s *Special Report* proved an effective articulation of Fort Union as a worthwhile place to establish a new National Monument. At its November 1939 meeting,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 16.

the NPS Advisory Board agreed, and passed a motion “that Fort Union be declared of national significance.”¹⁶⁹

Slowing Things Down

After the first summer of negotiations, plans for the monument were complete by late August 1939. Maier sent copies of the deed to Wheeler for signature by the UL&GC’s Board of Directors.¹⁷⁰ All signs seemed to point to a quick establishment of the monument that fall, but disagreements over logistics and the type of commemoration that would characterize the site proved hard to resolve.

On November 2, Andrew Marshall, the son-in-law of Adelbert Ames and acting head of the family’s legal affairs, wrote Wheeler on behalf of the UL&GC board. Marshall advised that while the Board was in general agreement with the deed and maps Wheeler had forwarded from the NPS, it desired several “clarifications of the provisions as drawn.” Most importantly, the board took issue with the idea of the United States having the ability “to reconvey the property to any party whatever. The land is to be conveyed upon the condition that if the United States ceases to use, maintain and administer it as a National Monument the property shall revert to The Union Land and Grazing Company.” They also suggested that the location and design of the house to be built for the UL&GC’s caretaker be determined in consultation with Wheeler, and that the roads and fences built by NPS in the course of construction allow unfettered

¹⁶⁹ NPS Advisory Board Summary Cards, Fort Union National Monument, November 7, 1939, NPS Office of the Chief Historian.

¹⁷⁰ Maier to Wheeler, September 13, 1939, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

“ordinary” use of the site. Finally, the directors made a firm request that the monument include “some fitting tablet or monument” commemorating Benjamin Butler, “on account of the great interest” he had shown in the area. Marshall closed with an assurance that the board hoped to arrive at an acceptable deal with NPS, and that a revised deed incorporating their demands would be submitted for approval promptly.¹⁷¹

NPS officials visited the site and agreed that the caretaker’s house should be located outside the monument to keep it out of sight of visitors, and Wheeler agreed on a location immediately outside the boundary. The house would be located 400 feet northwest of the northeastern boundary of the main fort parcel (#1), about seventy-five feet outside the border of the monument. Wheeler pronounced himself “perfectly satisfied” with the location, as the views of the ruins of the third fort and Arsenal were “magnificent,” the main ranch was clearly visible, and drainage was good. NPS was satisfied that the residence would be out of sight to visitors and inconspicuous.¹⁷²

NPS’s response to the UL&GC Board’s requests were mixed. On December 9th, Region III staff drew up a budget for the requested ancillary improvements (the caretaker’s house, fences around the monument, underpasses, and surfacing for the roads), which would be completed as a project of the Public Works Administration. However, they were reluctant to accede to the UL&GC’s request for a memorial to Benjamin Butler, who “never served at this post and may not even have seen it during its occupancy.” They feared that Butler’s prominence might “overshadow” the other

¹⁷¹ Marshall to Wheeler, November 2, 1939, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service,, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁷² JH Veale, handwritten field report, attached to Maier to Tolson, December 5, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

generals who were more central to the history of Fort Union, and pointed out that if the government would be paying for the land via the PWA project, it could not be considered a true donation from the UL&GC. Region III left the question of the insertion of the Butler memorial clause in the final deed up to Washington, but left no doubt as to their position on the matter. Finally, they advised that the reversion clause had been left out of the deed, since the definition of “fee simple” title required that title to the lands be transferred “wholly unqualified by any reversion, condition, or limitation.” They claimed to have agreed with Captain Wheeler that the reversion clause was not needed, but it was somewhat unclear whether the caretaker had agreed to this deletion, or simply to refer the matter to the UL&GC board. The separate NPS parties seemed to be on the same page, but discrepancies had emerged due to their individual, conflicting dealings with Wheeler, whose “memory, in his eagerness, does not always serve him well.”¹⁷³

On January 15, 1940, E. K. Burlew, acting Secretary of Interior, submitted the plans for the monument to John Carmody, head of the Federal Works Agency, for review before presentation to President Roosevelt. Burlew reported the support of Governor Miles, the New Mexico congressional delegation, and the NPS Advisory Board. Burlew asked for the establishment of the monument under the provisions of the Antiquities Act, and provided a thumbnail sketch of the fort’s history that emphasized its role in the protection of the Santa Fe Trail against “the depredations of frontier Indians.” Burlew gave the monument’s size as 837.367 acres, and noted that if the monument was not established soon, the UL&GC would “restore the area to its former range-like character.”

¹⁷³ Maier to Tolson, December 9, 1939; Tolson to Maier, December 11, 1939; Maier to Tolson, December 14, 1939, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

The total budget from the PWA would be \$98,000, of which \$13,500 would be compensation for the land and \$84,500 would be used over three years for “physical improvements” including an administration and museum building, roads, facilities, fences, parking, and staff quarters. If the funds were not granted, the plan was to solicit them from outside sources and use CCC labor to make do. Burlew estimated \$12,000 as the annual operating budget, which would be covered entirely by entrance fees.¹⁷⁴

This proposal was not favorably received. Less than a year earlier, President Roosevelt had written the Secretary of the Interior instructing that any establishment or enlargement of national monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906, just as those proposed under the Historic Sites Act of 1935, should be submitted through the Bureau of the Budget before “making any commitments.” The reason for this was that the Administration desired to review the costs of establishing and operating any new units. The large amount of funding needed for the proposed monument was too big to pass muster.¹⁷⁵

Tolson, in Washington for the final push, relayed the bad news back to Santa Fe, writing that it was “very doubtful” that PWA funds would be forthcoming for the monument, and that there were no other likely sources of Federal funding available. He proposed to renew negotiations with Wheeler upon his return to New Mexico in February to see if the UL&GC would donate the land. He also suggested asking a member of the

¹⁷⁴ Burlew to Roosevelt, January 15, 1940; Burlew to Carmody, January 15, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁷⁵ Roosevelt to Secretary of Interior, May 17, 1939, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

state's congressional delegation to sponsor a bill authorizing the funds to purchase the land, with the use of CCC labor to make the initial improvements.¹⁷⁶

On February 24, Faxon of the Raton Chamber of Commerce wrote Ronald Lee of the Historic Sites Commission in Washington to inquire about the status of the effort. Faxon emphasized the “wealth of history” at Fort Union and wondered if there would be “some CCC implications” forthcoming.¹⁷⁷ Demaray replied that the effort had encountered “a few unforeseen problems” and advised patience. He referred Faxon to Region III headquarters in Santa Fe for more details.¹⁷⁸

Tolson's work on alternative forms of funding the project proved fruitful. He wrote to Demaray on March 20, reporting that he had convinced the CCCC's Clinton Anderson and Governor Miles to pledge six thousand dollars from the state's federal highway fund toward the purchase of the UL&GC land. The state of New Mexico would therefore need to take title of the land before transferring it to the USA. Miles, Anderson, and Dempsey were all enthusiastic about the proposal as “it will constitute permanent accomplishment in New Mexico out of Coronado Cuarto Centennial.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Tolson to Maier, January 22, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁷⁷ Faxon to Lee, February 22, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁷⁸ Demaray to Faxon, March 15, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁷⁹ Tolson to Director, March 20, 1940, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.



Figure 12: “Ruins of Fort Union, man showing inside of one of the rooms, July 1939”
(Source: Palace of the Governors Photo Archives,
New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe.
<http://econtent.unm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/acpa/id/6273>)

Despite the setback, the *Las Vegas Optic* remained optimistic in a March 25 editorial. The editors felt sure a decision would come soon, a good thing since without prompt action the “crumbling ruins” would “disintegrate into dust and again become part of the rolling prairie, and with it will disappear the visual part of some of the most colorful history of the Southwest.” Fort Union was worthy of preservation, the writer claimed, because it “started progressive civilization” by “beating back the frontier” and protecting Santa Fe traders making their way through “the wilderness which once gripped the vast expanse of the Southwest” while beset by “the ravages of renegade Indian tribes

and roving bands of outlaws.” The monument was a fitting accomplishment for this “history-loving nation” and would “mark epic-making events of this territory.” The paper chastised its readers for the current state of affairs: “Some shame should be felt by New Mexicans that Fort Union has been permitted to waste away until only the foundations and bleak, weather beaten stumps of walls remain of the once sturdy fort. Preservation ought to have been undertaken years ago. Mistakes of previous generations, however, must be overlooked...” The *Optic* anticipated that the acquisition of the land was a key issue in the process, but “that slight obstacle ought to be hurdled easily.” The outcome would be beneficial for the area, as a “tourist attraction” would bring visitors, but the editors cautioned against “commercialization of the historic fort,” counseling only “preservation and restoration of the ruins.”¹⁸⁰

Presidential Approval

G.A. Moskey, the NPS’s Chief Counsel, wrote Tolson on March 27, approving of the State-Federal land transfer Tolson had proposed. He also advised, however, that the State of New Mexico might not have the statutory authority to make such a transfer, and suggested that “to avoid embarrassment” it would be wise to enlist the local US Attorney’s Office to review the deal. In any event, Moskey wrote, the Department of Justice would need to review the title transfer before closing. He cautioned that the USA could not acquire any land with “any cloud upon or infirmity in title.”¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ *Santa Fe New Mexican*, “A National Monument,” March 25, 1940.

¹⁸¹ Moskey to Tolson, March 27, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

Tolson and his team met with Wheeler on April 4th to discuss the revised plans, and the caretaker agreed to recommend that the UL&GC directors donate the land, a charitable act that would be a fitting “memorial to Major General Butler.” The government agreed to construct the approach road, complete with underpasses and fencing, and to “promptly” develop the site including water, electricity, sewer, and phone connections to serve new administrative, museum, and residence buildings. Tolson estimated these costs at around \$100,000, and promised that the government’s activities would not interfere with the UL&GC’s grazing activities. NPS anticipated the establishment of a CCC camp to do the initial work, and that the government would spend about \$10,000 annually to administer the site. Tolson provided Wheeler with written details of the government’s planned development as well as a draft proclamation for his employers. “No better way could be found to preserve the memory of Major General Butler,” Tolson wrote, “than the establishment of a monument area of national historical significance which will provide patriotic, perpetual inspiration, education, and enjoyment to thousands of people.”¹⁸²

On May 9, 1940, Demaray submitted a revised request to Roosevelt for establishment of the monument reflecting the new arrangement. The revised letter indicated that the UL&GC would donate the land, the state Highway Department would build the approach and connecting roads before transferring title to the United States, and PWA funds and labor would be used to make the initial improvements.¹⁸³ However, the

¹⁸² Tolson to Director, April 5, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996; Tolson to Wheeler, April 6, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

¹⁸³ Demaray to Roosevelt, May 9, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

proposal did not include the planned caretaker's house for Wheeler, which NPS counsel had declared outside the agency's statutory authority to build.¹⁸⁴

Acting Regional Director Bernard Douglas wrote Wheeler on May 31 to inform him of this change. He assured Wheeler the UL&GC would be offered connection to the electrical and telephone lines installed for the park, and permitted use of the monument's roads, but that "legal limitations and lack of funds prevent the construction of a residence by this Service." Douglas thanked Wheeler for "the fine spirit of cooperation you have tendered to us in working out the Fort Union proposal."¹⁸⁵

On July 6, Roosevelt approved NPS's request to proceed with the establishment of the monument. He emphasized several conditions: that the operating costs for the monument would stay within the fees collected from the public, that his approval did not constitute further approval for other initiatives, and that the conveyance to the United States follow the procedures the Secretary had outlined in his May 9 letter.¹⁸⁶ On July 11, Tolson informed both Wheeler and Maier of the President's approval, and began drafting the proclamation to establish the monument.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Lee to Tolson, November 18, 1939, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁸⁵ Douglas to Wheeler, May 31, 1940, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁸⁶ Roosevelt to Secretary, July 6, 1940, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

¹⁸⁷ Tolson to Maier, July 11, 1940; Tolson to Wheeler July 11, 1940, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

Slamming on the Brakes

On July 19, at Wheeler's suggestion, Tolson wrote Marshall, explaining the efforts made thus far and outlining the proposed deal. Tolson told Marshall that the proclamation was being prepared, and offered to meet him in New York, Boston, or Washington to review the proposal.¹⁸⁸ Marshall replied via telegram asking that the NPS "do nothing further towards proclamation or other proceeding to establish monument," as contrary to Wheeler's assurances, the UL&GC Board had not agreed to donate the land or the right of way under the proposed conditions. He also mentioned that further discussion would be needed regarding the caretaker's house, "and other features omitted from latest suggestion from your dept."¹⁸⁹

On July 26th, Tolson (who had by now assumed the title of Associate Director of NPS and was based in Washington) wrote Wheeler conveying the contents of Marshall's telegram and seeking to clarify the holdup. Tolson claimed that the caretaker's house had been dropped from the deal when it was understood that the NPS would be unable to either buy the land for the caretaker's house or to build the structure, and that "the Monument's establishment in memory of General Butler" had been the provision switched into the deal as a substitute. He asked that Wheeler intervene with Marshall to make clear that the deal as submitted to the UL&GC had been correct.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Tolson to Marshall, July 19, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

¹⁸⁹ Marshall to Tolson, July 23, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁹⁰ Tolson to Wheeler, July 26, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

Wheeler's angry reply of July 29th clearly explained the reasons for the delay. He reported that the UL&GC's board "has AGREED to do NOTHING" due to the NPS's bad-faith removal of the caretaker's house from the deal. Wheeler claimed to have informed Tolson of this fact at a recent meeting in Santa Fe, and that he had agreed merely to "RECOMMEND an OUTRIGHT DONATION, IF" the NPS would agree to the roads, fences, phone service to the ranch buildings, and other improvements. The Board had proven unsympathetic, apparently, and no additional negotiations would be forthcoming from him: "this is as far as I can go."¹⁹¹

Marshall sent a telegram to Tolson on August 26 suggesting a meeting in Boston. He noted that even if the NPS agreed to the road and other improvements, it was "essential to have absolute condition in deed that if government ceases to use and maintain property solely for national monument title will revert to corporation and its successors." This reversion clause reflected the UL&GC's core position, which was that "use of land by others would create [an] intolerable situation for remaining lands." The reversion clause, not the caretaker's house, was the bedrock principle the company was unwilling to concede.¹⁹²

Wheeler attempted an indirect end-run around the NPS on September 14, when he wrote to Governor Miles outlining the situation. Wheeler said the UL&GC was "at a standstill with Washington" over the negotiations. He placed the blame on the NPS for "refusing to accept our donation with a reversion condition," which was necessary since

¹⁹¹ Wheeler to Tolson, July 29, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹² Marshall to Tolson, August 26, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

“should the property fall into the hands of third parties, lying as it does, practically in the middle of a stock range, a situation might and probably would ensue which would be absolutely intolerable to owners and operators.”¹⁹³ Miles replied noncommittally, but under his leadership, the state of New Mexico was continuing to promote auto tourism, including Fort Union.¹⁹⁴

In September 1940, the Coronado Cuarto Centennial Commission published *New Mexico: A Guide to the Colorful State*, a tourist guide compiled and edited by more than sixty members of the WPA’s Federal Writers project. The volume included twenty-five motor tours visiting all of the state’s most important attractions, and covered historical, economic, cultural, and artistic aspects of life in New Mexico. The University of New Mexico provided editorial support and published subsequent editions. The guide described Fort Union, noting its great size and the “Masonic buildings” among its “desolate appearance.” The fort’s role as a supply center and troop base formed its principal importance as “the heart” of the military establishment in the area, and visitors could experience a taste of the frontier by viewing its “stark chimneys.”¹⁹⁵

Wheeler continued to hold off NPS officials through the fall. He wrote to Region III Supervisor of Historic Sites Aubrey Neasham on October 11 that no news had been received “from the East,” and advised him that he had appealed to Governor Miles.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Wheeler to Miles, September 14, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

¹⁹⁴ Wheeler to Neasham, October 11, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

¹⁹⁵ Writer’s Program of the Work Projects Administration in New Mexico, *The WPA Guide to 1930s New Mexico* (University of Arizona Press, 1989), 234.

¹⁹⁶ Wheeler to Neasham, October 11, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

The UL&GC sent formal notice to NPS of the impasse on October 21. Marshall (who was busy with other legal cases, he said, which explained the slowness of the company's response) advised that the UL&GC remained steadfast that the reversion clause be incorporated in the deed, and that a separate formal agreement be made for the roads and fencing. "It seems clear, therefore," Marshall wrote, "that in order to make any progress these conditions will have to be known by us to be acceptable to the government." Marshall reiterated the "intolerable" condition of third-party ownership of a parcel of land in the midst of the company's stock range, and that this central location also meant the access roads to be built were "absolutely essential" as part of the deal.¹⁹⁷

Tolson wrote Region III Acting Director M. R. Tillotson on October 23, informing him that he would be meeting soon with Marshall, and that while "no great difficulty should arise" with the roads, fences, and underpasses, he would have to meet with the NPS's attorneys "to see what can be done to meet the wishes of the UL&GC" on the reversion clause.¹⁹⁸ After nearly a year and a half of negotiations, the UL&GC had effectively stopped the process by insisting upon the reversion clause. While NPS could take solace in the fact that they had succeeded in opening a direct line of communication to the landowners, they had new hurdles ahead of them to meet their demands.

¹⁹⁷ Marshall to Tolson, October 21, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

¹⁹⁸ Tolson to Tillotson, October 23, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

Settling the Reversion Question

Department of Interior Chief Counsel George Moskey sent Tolson model language for use in negotiations with the UL&GC on October 26 which promised the NPS would use the land only for the monument, but avoided an explicit reversionary mechanism:

“TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said premises above-described, and all the privileges and appurtenances thereunto belonging and in any way appertaining, unto the party of the second part, or its assigns, forever, for the purpose of establishing and administering the said premises, pursuant to the Act of Congress approved June 8, 1906 (34 Stat. 225), as a national monument, to be designated as the ‘Fort Union National Monument’ in the proclamation of the President establishing said premises as a national monument. The premises so conveyed shall be used by the party of the second part exclusively for national monument purposes.”¹⁹⁹

This was necessary because the proposed monument had originally been considered a candidate for establishment under the Antiquities Act, which allowed the President to declare and protect “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.”²⁰⁰ The Act’s origins in a time of widespread looting and desecration of archeological and natural sites meant that it was primarily seen as a defensive preservation measure, addressing problems once they had sprung up. The Antiquities Act was also conceived of, and often used as, a “back door” measure of conservation that allowed agencies and presidents to avoid an intransigent

¹⁹⁹ Moskey to Tolson, October 26, 1940, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

²⁰⁰ “An Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities,” Public Law 209, U.S. Statutes at Large 34 (1905-1907): 225.

Congress in establishing new areas.²⁰¹ Fort Union seemed a good fit for the Antiquities Act since it was apparent that the rapidly deteriorating buildings were nothing if not threatened, and their status as ruins made them ideal candidates for an act which focused more on the archaeological than the historic past.²⁰² However, the Antiquities Act required free and clear title to properties before they could become monuments. When places proposed for protection were located on private or unclaimed land, the Act required that the land be “relinquished to the Government” and accepted by the Secretary on behalf of the United States on a fee-simple basis.

Tolson met with Marshall on October 28th and the two reviewed the deed and legislation for the establishment of the monument. Marshall reiterated that the board of the UL&GC insisted upon the reversion clause being inserted in the deed of transfer for the title, even though Tolson noted that the Antiquities Act would not allow for a transfer of land if the donor “insists upon retaining an interest in it.” Tolson consulted with the Interior Department Solicitor’s Office, Assistant NPS Chief Counsel Lee, and two attorneys from the Attorney General’s office. The men decided that the Antiquities Act requirement of clear title meant the reversion clause could not be included in a transfer deed under that piece of legislation. However, the attorneys informed the NPS officials that the Historic Sites Act of 1935 was broad enough to accommodate this request.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Robert W. Righter, “National Monuments to National Parks: The Use of the Antiquities Act of 1906,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (August 1, 1989): 281–301.

²⁰² Ronald F. Lee, *The Antiquities Act of 1906* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1970); David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006).

²⁰³ Tolson to Tillotson, November 9, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

While the Antiquities Act allowed for Presidential authority to declare sites historic and protected, the Historic Sites Act went even further, declaring that “it is a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.” As such, an important feature of the Historic Sites Act was that it empowered the bureaucracy of the Department of Interior with greater leeway in identifying, surveying, researching, acquiring and managing potential additions. In particular, the Secretary was granted much more flexibility in the acquisition of property, which could be accomplished “by gift, purchase,” or any other mechanism “satisfactory to the Secretary.”²⁰⁴

Marshall informed Tolson that the UL&GC board would approve moving the transfer under the Historic Sites Act, if it came with a formal commitment to the road and fencing improvements. Marshall also stated that the board desired that site be “established as a memorial to Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler,” complete with “a suitable memorial plaque to that effect” to be installed, with the wording approved by the UL&GC board. Tolson agreed, and noted that the transfer under the Historic Sites Act would not require a Presidential proclamation, but simply an order of the Secretary of the Interior—Moskey was already at work preparing the necessary documents.²⁰⁵

The change of the enabling statute from the Antiquities Act to the Historic Sites Act allowed the NPS to address the UL&GC’s concerns over the reversion clause and preservation of mineral rights beneath the proposed monument by including them in the

²⁰⁴ “An Act: To provide for the preservation of historic American sites, buildings, objects, and antiquities of national significance, and for other purposes,” Public Law 292, U.S. Statutes at Large 49 (1919-1936): 666.

²⁰⁵ Tolson to Tillotson, November 9, 1940, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189; Tolson to Moskey, November 9, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

final deed which turned the land over to the government. However, it also meant that the effort to establish Fort Union National Monument, instead of requiring only the stroke of the President's pen, would instead have to make its way through the Congressional process, opening it up to a greater degree to the push and pull of national, state, and regional politics.

Tolson informed Marshall of the NPS's acquiescence to the company's demands, and confirmed the UL&GC's willingness to donate the land under the Historic Sites Act, with the reversionary clause, improvements, and Butler memorial provisions intact. This was the final confirmation that the UL&GC's demands had been completely met, and it seemed that the final hurdles had been cleared.²⁰⁶

The deed included the reversionary clause, stating that the NPS would return the land to the UL&GC if it ceased to "use, maintain, and administer the said property" as a national historic site, and the NPS agreed to erect "a memorial plaque in memory of Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler, bearing an appropriate legend reciting that the national historic site is established as a memorial to him." Acting NPS Chief Counsel Lee informed Tolson that the memorial plaque's inclusion in the Secretary's proposed order was "unusual but not improper," and approved its submission to the Secretary of Interior.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Tolson to Marshall, November 9, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

²⁰⁷ Draft Deed, November 1940; Lee to Tolson November 19, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

Tolson sent the proposed deed and draft Secretarial order to Marshall for his review on November 20. Wheeler received copies of the draft documents as well, and wrote a congratulatory note to Tolson on November 26 that “it looks like smooth sailing” as “there should be no argument even, on [the Board’s] account.”²⁰⁸

Grinding to a Halt

However, NPS heard nothing from the UL&GC over the holiday season. Tolson sent a polite but insistent note to Marshall on January 6th asking for a status update. He also wrote Wheeler the same day, adding that he “had hoped to write to you again, before this date, furnishing you with some specific information regarding the establishment of the Monument,” but that nothing had been heard from the UL&GC and Marshall.²⁰⁹

Wheeler wrote back a week later with news of the death of “Mrs. General Adelbert Ames who was either mother or in-law to all of them,” and speculated that the “general up-set” caused by this turn of events was responsible for the delay. He added that “I believe that you will soon get action on Fort Union matters,” but admitted that he was only speculating based on the correspondence Tolson had shared with him.²¹⁰

On February 19th, Wheeler relayed Marshall’s account of the reasons for the delay: “There are so many pressing things to be done in connection with Mrs. Ames’ estate, and there is so little enthusiasm in the family about making this gift to the

²⁰⁸ Tolson to Marshall, November 20, 1940; Wheeler to Tolson, November 26, 1940, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

²⁰⁹ Tolson to Marshall, January 6, 1941; Tolson to Wheeler, January 6, 1941, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 42.

²¹⁰ Wheeler to Tolson January 13, 1941, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

government, that that matter has had to be postponed somewhat to await the doing of more important things. However, I shall give my attention to it as soon as I can. We are considering this matter and I shall have to write to you again soon, about the description which [NPS] have sent purporting to cover the land which they ask us to give.”²¹¹ Tolson replied that he remained hopeful Marshall would “give the proposed Fort Union National Historic Site matter his attention soon.”²¹² The delay, however, dragged into summer.

On July 11, 1941, Faxon of the Raton Chamber of Commerce wrote Region III for a status update, noting it had been a year since the project had been authorized, and that his understanding was that the “NPS had the project in hand.” Region III staff put him off with vague assurances that the project was “still under negotiation,” and that “the next step is really up to the Boston people.”²¹³

Ronald Lee, Supervisor of Historic Sites for the Department of the Interior, wrote to Tolson in August about a brief encounter he had with Wheeler in Santa Fe. Wheeler, Lee wrote, “was under the impression that the Union Land and Grazing Company was about ready to act on the Fort Union land transfer.” Lee noted that his understanding was that “a death in one of the families intimately interested in the area and connected with the company” was the reason for the delay. Lee asked for an update from a frustrated

²¹¹ Wheeler, Tolson, February 19, 1941, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

²¹² Tolson to Wheeler, March 10, 1941, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

²¹³ Faxon to McColm, July 11, 1941, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

Tolson, who scrawled a handwritten reply that while he had no new “data regarding this matter,” he would write Wheeler again to ask for yet another update.²¹⁴

Certainly, the death of Mrs. Ames, the matriarch of the family and its considerable wealth, constituted a heavy blow. However, Blanche Butler Ames had not, in fact, died at the end of 1940, but a year earlier, on December 26, 1939, at the family’s vacation home in Ormond Beach, Florida.²¹⁵ For reasons that are unclear, none of the UL&GC representatives mentioned this until after NPS had completed its negotiations and cleared all of the company’s required prerequisites to the land transfer. Whether or not Mrs. Ames’ death was as disruptive an event as the UL&GC claimed, its effect on the monument negotiations, which had seemed tantalizingly close to completion, was the same: it put a halt to them by early 1941. Soon, NPS would be engaged in an extended period of fighting for the agency’s survival in the hard times of World War II, and the preservation of Fort Union would be put on indefinite hold.

Even though the monument had not been established during the first two years of negotiations, several principles had emerged which would shape the eventual FOUN. First, the basic spatial aspects of the park were set: the UL&GC’s resistance limited the proposed park to two islands of land, connected by a thin strip of road to each other and to the outside world. The effect of this limitation of the Army’s original, much larger holding, had the effect of focusing the area to be memorialized to just the ruins of the

²¹⁴ Lee to Tolson, August 13, 1941, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

²¹⁵ Smith College Libraries (Sophia Smith Collection), “Ames Family Papers: Biographical Note” <http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss358.html> (Accessed January 9, 2016); New York *Times*, “Mrs. Adelbert Ames: Widow of Civil War General Dies in Florida at 92,” December 28, 1939.

First Fort Union, Arsenal, and Third Fort Union. This focus on the ruins themselves reflected Region III's ongoing project of preserving mostly prehistoric archaeological sites during the 1930s and 1940s, and the belief that they held didactic value by nature of their deteriorated state.

In January 1940, Neasham published an article in the *Region III Review* entitled "Save the Ruins!" He argued against the idea of restoring ruins to their historic state, in order to "get away from the idea of deceiving the public." He quoted John Ruskin's idea that a ruined building carried a greater didactic purpose than a rebuilt one, and argued that a restored building constituted nothing more than "an illusion" which was "not only artificial and unreal, but scientifically unsound." Such reconstructions could mislead the public in the present and the future, who might believe them to be authentic. He carefully defined the differences between preservation, reconstruction, and restoration, and put forth the idea of preservation as striking a balance between the three values, with museum exhibits and signage to help the public "visualize the historic setting." "The historic building," Neasham declared, "is to be touched as little as possible, with only a minimum of repair or stabilization work." Following this principle would help to forge "a bond of unity between the past, the present, and the future which, in essence, will be an evolution of historical reality."²¹⁶

The second key aspect of the future FOUN established in early negotiations was the basic historical context being used to understand the site and why it mattered. Steere and Woods's reports, despite their differences, both placed Fort Union in a larger story of progress. These narratives were reflected in Neasham's July 1939 article in the *Region III*

²¹⁶ Aubrey Neasham, "Save the Ruins!" *Region III Review*, January 1940.

Review about the “Cavalcade of the Southwest,” a sweep of history covering four centuries since “the white man” had been active in the region. Neasham turned the reader’s attention to an “inspiring and dramatic parade” of history passing through the historic sites the Park Service was charged with caring for. “Before our vision,” wrote Neasham, “pass in turn the stolid Indian, the Spaniard and the Frenchman, permanently leaving their marks in a land little known and often bewildering; and finally the citizens of Mexico and the United States, later comers, who through revolution, purchase, and war are able to expand in the directions and to the degree ordained by what some termed “Manifest Destiny.”²¹⁷

The outline of this narrative was also visible in Neasham’s January 1941 article, “The Southwest.” He traced the “thrilling” history of the region, which he wrote “seemed to have been waiting for the era of American control.” Development and migration forced conflict with Native Americans, whose “resistance to the white man was a logical move.” The military posts established to support this decades-long battle now served as “grim reminders that a large percentage of the battles fought by the United States Army during the second half of the 19th century was in the Southwest.” The Civil War and the arrival of the railroads signaled the end of the early development and stabilization of the region. “This land occupied successively by the Indians, Spain, Mexico, and the United States still holds an individuality and independence of its own,” Neasham wrote. “In so doing, however, it has contributed to the making of a nation.”²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Aubrey Neasham, “Cavalcade of the Southwest,” *Region III Review*, July 1939.

²¹⁸ Aubrey Neasham, “The Southwest,” *Region III Review*, January 1941.

Finally, the first moves toward a national monument in northeastern New Mexico included a clear idea of the nature of the visitor experience that could be expected there. Withers Woolford's travel writing and the state of New Mexico's promotional literature promised a visit to Fort Union that offered a unique, authentic encounter with the past via the nostalgia and romance inspired by its impressive physical attributes. Furthermore, a wide variety of boosters, writers, and bureaucrats had agreed that the fort was a threatened resource of great historical significance, valuable not only for its didactic function but the economic benefit it promised. Even though it was still many years of effort away from achieving its status as an officially recognized special place, by 1941 Fort Union had acquired the basic characteristics that would eventually compel its preservation.

CHAPTER 2

“OUR HERITAGE IS IMPORTANT”: INVOKING THE STATE, 1942-1954

The effort to create a national monument at the site of the ruins of Fort Union was delayed during World War II as the NPS's priorities shifted from expansion to self-preservation. Wartime demands for consumptive use of public lands and resources meant that in most cases, efforts to create new park units were put on hold. The few exceptions to this rule were those places that had already seen the fundamental arrangements for their establishment completed by the time war broke out. Fort Union, still owned by an unwilling seller who had proven determined to resist even the most accommodating stance the NPS could offer at the time, was forgotten for approximately eight years by the agency.

NPS's interest would be revived, once again, by local Las Vegans whose motivation for establishing the monument was sharpened by what they perceived to be an imminent threat to the ruins themselves. In response, local leaders increasingly asserted ownership over the site of the fort, eventually assigning it “hallowed” status, which forbade its destruction and demanded its preservation as a special place. In effect, the change in land use at Fort Union began in advance of the formal transfer of ownership, as more and more local people began to imagine it as a place of reverence and memory and not as a piece of private grazing land.

The struggle to effect this change was protracted, however, befitting the long history of disagreement that preceded it. Power shifted among the participants in the debate—local Las Vegans, the UL&GC, and the local, state, and federal governments—until the state's confiscatory power of eminent domain was brought to bear, forcing the

UL&GC back to the negotiating table and in the end making the transfer a reality. The result was the creation of yet another kind of place on the land upon which the ruins sat. This time, a private, speculative, and agricultural parcel of land would be changed into a driver of tourism and economic development in the form of a public site of communion with the past.

The story of the final phase of the struggle to create Fort Union National Monument demonstrates that places are not made at random. Rather, the assignment of human meaning to a space embodies and reflects agendas, priorities and political realities. As NPS critic Robert Righter has written: “[T]he idea that the democratic process moved with perfect purpose toward the creation of national parks... simply was not the case.”²¹⁹

World War II: An Existential Challenge

During World War II, NPS was faced with an existential threat: calls for the consumptive use of park resources and lands in support of the war effort. NPS officials were forced to resist these attempts, in “a battle for survival as intense as at any time since the Park Service’s inception.”²²⁰ These struggles were not new territory for the agency, which had periodically fended off such demands since its inception in 1916, but their volume and intensity grew as the conflict escalated in Europe and the Pacific, and peaked in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

²¹⁹ Robert W. Righter, “National Monuments to National Parks: The Use of the Antiquities Act of 1906,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (August 1, 1989): 301.

²²⁰ Janet A. McDonnell, “World War II: Defending Park Values and Resources,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 4 (November 1, 2007): 16.

In June 1942, Director Newton B. Drury's annual report to the Secretary of the Interior outlined the dire circumstances facing the agency and its management philosophy during the war. "Visitation has declined, many activities have been curtailed or deferred, and the Service has faced the necessity of adapting itself to rapidly changing conditions," Drury wrote.²²¹ Nearly ten percent of NPS employees were transferred into the armed services or war agencies in the first year of the war alone.²²² The agency's budget was cut by over fifty percent between 1941 and 1945, and staffing levels dropped from approximately 5,000 to 1,500 in the same period.²²³ Recognizing the dire circumstances facing the agency, Drury made a case for the parks as a valuable part of American society and advocated for their preservation, while maintaining a tone of conciliation and practicality. NPS, he noted, had an "obligation to harmonize its activities with those relating to the war, aiding wherever possible, and striving to hold intact those things entrusted to it—the properties themselves, the basic organization trained to perform its tasks, and, most important of all, the uniquely American concept under which the national parks are preserved inviolate for the present and future benefit of all of our people."²²⁴

²²¹ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1942, 159.

²²² National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1942, 180.

²²³ McDonnell, "World War II," 19; National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1945, 207.

²²⁴ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1942, 159.

With attendance in decline and pressure mounting from war agencies, NPS was forced to acquiesce to the use of its resources. Parks were repurposed as training sites and places of recreation, recuperation, and sanctuary for millions of returned soldiers, but the service resisted other, more damaging exploitative uses such as mining and timbering that would permanently harm unique or irreplaceable natural and cultural resources.²²⁵

Such tense times meant a halt to the large number of planning and construction activities aimed at expanding the system which had characterized the NPS of the 1930s.²²⁶ Drury also instituted a hiatus on the Park Service's promotion of domestic travel and recreation, given wartime shortages of gasoline and rubber.²²⁷ In his words, the agency was "not looking upon the war program as an opportunity to expand."²²⁸ Nonetheless, the system continued to add new park service units and millions of acres of land to the system throughout the war years.

The controversy over the establishment of Jackson Hole National Monument, which some members of Congress decried as an excessive land-grab, required Drury to emphasize the Park Service's conservative approach to acquisition. He claimed that the

²²⁵ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1942, 163-66.

²²⁶ Harlan D. Unrau, George F. Williss, and United States, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s* (Denver, CO: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, 1983).

²²⁷ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1943, 205-207.

²²⁸ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1942, 160 and 168-9. Units added during the war years included: Andrew Johnson National Monument (April 27, 1942), Jackson Hole National Monument (March 15, 1943), Thomas Jefferson National Memorial (April 13, 1943), George Washington Carver NM in Missouri (July 14, 1943), Franklin Delano Roosevelt NHS (January 15, 1944), Big Bend NP (June 12, 1944), Harpers Ferry NHP (June 30, 1944), Richmond National Battlefield Park (July 14, 1944), and Fort Frederica NM (August 30, 1945). See <http://www.nps.gov/news/researchlinks.htm>, accessed April 8, 2015.

NPS aimed only to include “areas superlative in their own fields of scenery, natural science, or history,” and that the agency focused on “quality rather than quantity, and upon the national rather than the local significance of the areas acquired.” Drury pointed out that hundreds of proposed units had been considered but not added to the system in the preceding decade, and that hundreds more still awaited study.²²⁹

One of the main justifications Drury used was the important role of parks, as “physical reminders of its past heroism and military exploits,” in building American pride during the conflict, a more important role for the resources the agency protected than if they were simply converted to fuel or war material.²³⁰ This tactic worked: while park service units suffered from reduced funding and staffing, leaving many areas in poor condition at the war’s end, the overall outcome was the preservation of the idea of national parks as unique and valuable resources for all Americans.²³¹

The period immediately following the war continued to challenge NPS as visitors poured back into the parks at greater-than-pre-war levels, stressing the underfunded and under-maintained facilities. The overwhelmed agency, deprived of the CCC labor which had been critical for its maintenance and improvement efforts before the war, was barely keeping its head above water. Vandalism and destruction of park resources were rampant in the immediate post-war years, as inadequate staffing made it impossible for NPS to

²²⁹ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1944, 211-213; National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1946, 340.

²³⁰ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1942, 166.

²³¹ McDonnell, “World War II,” 32.

properly supervise its assets.²³² The war also took a toll on the Park Service's staffing in the areas of information and interpretation. "Funds for 1947," wrote Drury, "are nowhere near sufficient to afford information or interpretive services that park visitors or the public as a whole are entitled to receive."²³³ New units were not being authorized by Congress immediately after the war, and most added at the time had been previously authorized.²³⁴

Pressures for consumptive use did not end with the war, either. As Drury made clear in his 1946 annual report, "the desire to log virgin timber or to utilize minerals, forage, and water does not die when these resources are embraced within park or monument boundaries."²³⁵ The balance of pressure in this era was decidedly against the removal of productive land to protected status; in fact, the exact opposite was true. It is no surprise, then, that the Fort Union acquisition, which would have converted a working cattle ranch to a monument, was temporarily scuttled. In Drury's reports to the Secretary between 1941 and 1948, Fort Union did not appear among the list of projects and new park areas that were near completion or critical candidates for preservation. It was clear that NPS's priorities lay elsewhere, and the planning process for the monument was put on hold for the duration of the war and its aftermath.

²³² National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1946, 307-309; National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1947, 323-25.

²³³ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1946, 331.

²³⁴ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1946, 340.

²³⁵ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1946, 322.

The impoverished and besieged condition of the parks continued through the early 1950s, when Director Conrad Wirth's Mission 66 initiative would finally gain enough political traction to halt the slide of park conditions and funding. Due to the crisis faced by NPS during and immediately after the war, the effort to establish Fort Union National Monument would have to be driven once again from the local level.

Reviving the Effort: Patriotism and Money

On July 30, 1946, the Las Vegas *Optic* published a lengthy editorial on "Our Historic Heritage," which described the importance of maintaining traditions in the interest of "teaching and perpetuating Americanism." The editors described a meeting held in Las Vegas of the American Pioneer Trails Association (APTA), which hoped to "keep alive and productive much of the traditions of Americans' earliest contacts with the Spanish-Mexican people of the Southwest."

The representatives of the APTA had praised the southwest as a particularly revealing region, "both in written records and of remaining relics of the first adventurers who opened the way for subsequent re-colonization of the Southwest." Las Vegas, in this telling, marked the "geographical separation" of American and "Spanish-Mexican" exploration and settlement of new lands, and was the site of Santa Fe traders and Kearney's proclamation of 1846. Soon thereafter, "at Old Fort Union, the United States Army set up its principal military garrison from which troops were moved to extend the sovereignty of our government throughout New Mexico."

The editors lamented Las Vegas's lack of progress in documenting this rich history, and called for "our civic organizations" to "accept the challenge and commit a

particular effort” to doing so. This duty was not only moral, but civic, as “the chance to exploit the early history and remaining historic relics for a commercial profit” was a valuable one. The editorial made an urgent call for the citizens of Las Vegas to follow the example of other western communities and make use of its historic assets to attract tourism and the benefits it would bring.²³⁶ Despite building enthusiasm for a preservation-based booster effort, however, it was several years before concrete progress occurred. Las Vegans would turn to state and federal institutions for help, especially as it became clear that the opportunity offered by the ruins of Fort Union was in danger of disappearing once and for all.

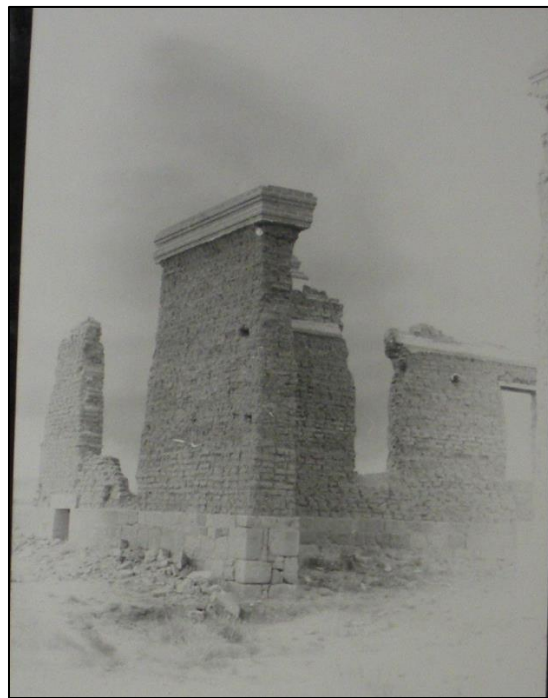


Figure 13: “Ruins of Fort Union,” c. 1950. Photographer: Elmer Schooley.
(Source: New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections,
Photographic Survey of Las Vegas, Image #1101)

²³⁶ Las Vegas *Optic*, “Our Historic Heritage,” July 30, 1946.

In February 1949, NPS Region III archaeologist Erik Reed learned from J.W. Hendron of the New Mexico Tourist Bureau (a former NPS employee) about “an active new effort in connection with Fort Union, New Mexico.” Reed noted that some Las Vegans, “primarily the Masonic organization,” were attempting “to acquire the site of Fort Union for park purposes and will very probably push it for National Monument status.” Senator Clinton Anderson, “himself a Mason,” would be the logical choice to lead the effort in Washington, but he had not yet been approached on the matter. Hendron told Reed that M. Baker Warden of Albuquerque was a “leader of the movement to acquire Ft. Union.”²³⁷

A few months later, Boaz Long of the Museum of New Mexico traveled to the fort to investigate rumors that the UL&GC planned to demolish the remaining buildings. Over a period of several tense days in June, Las Vegans attempted to track down Roger Reed, the new manager of the UL&GC ranch, who was reportedly planning to raze the remaining walls and fill in the cisterns and wells on the site, which he considered hazardous to the cattle. The search was unsuccessful, however, and numerous chimneys and walls were destroyed soon thereafter. The partial demolition of the historic fabric was a spark that motivated community leaders to step up their preservation efforts, as it was clear they were now operating under a very real state of emergency. Days after the demolition, the Las Vegas-San Miguel Chamber of Commerce (LVSMCC) voted to

²³⁷ Reed to Director, February 23, 1949, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 10, Box 2996.

appeal to the state and federal governments for assistance, and to contribute funds to the cost of making the area safe for tourists and cattle.²³⁸

On June 21, Lewis F. Schiele, secretary of the LVSMCC, wrote letters to Anderson and New Mexico's other Senator, Dennis Chavez. Schiele relayed that Las Vegas was "very much concerned over the impending fate of Old Fort Union." He informed the Senators that the UL&GC had "let a contract to fill some open wells and cisterns with dirt and rubble in order to eliminate a hazard to life and limb," and that "it is felt that this move is a beginning toward razing the remaining ruins and removing all trace" of the fort. The LVSMCC offered to pay for safety measures which would forestall the destruction, since due to Fort Union's important role in the Santa Fe trade and "the winning and holding of this vast southwestern territory, for the United States, it would be a 'crying shame' for it to be lost to posterity." Schiele suggested that the USA acquire and restore the site as a national park or monument, and offered to support that effort in any way possible.²³⁹

Las Vegas also reached out directly to the landowners. E. N. Thwaites of the LVSMCC's Fort Union National Monument Committee contacted Andrew Marshall on June 22, 1949 to inform him of the revived preservation efforts and to re-open negotiations, which had been stalled for eight years. Thwaites emphasized that "the setting up of a formalized and regulated monument would in all probability cause them less bother and damage from intrusion and trespass than is currently the case." He closed

²³⁸ Liping Zhu, *Fort Union National Monument: An Administrative History* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1992), 21.

²³⁹ Schiele to Anderson, June 21, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

by saying the Chamber “urgently solicit your co-operation in the matter and request that you advise, at your earliest convenience, the terms and arrangements under which the area containing Fort Union could be obtained for utilization as a public monument.”²⁴⁰

NPS Re-Enters the Picture; UL&GC Resistance

Both Anderson and Chavez forwarded Schiele’s letter to the Public Buildings Administration, which passed it to NPS. Hilary Tolson, Assistant Director of NPS and stationed in Washington, DC, replied to both men in separate letters on June 25 that “this is a project in which the National Park Service has been keenly interested.” He informed the Senators of the progress he and other supporters had made before the war, up to the point of the draft proclamation and deed, but noted that “the War, however, interrupted further progress in this direction, and funds and personnel were not sufficient during the years that followed to permit us to complete all of the projects on which we were working at that time.” Tolson requested Region III Director Minor R. Tillotson to work with Schiele and the UL&GC “with a view to determining the possibility of preserving the ruins of Fort Union according to the plans under consideration in 1940.”²⁴¹

On July 19, Tillotson wrote to the NPS director’s office with the news that “our entire Fort Union file apparently disappeared.” He requested a copy of the file for duplication in order to carry out Tolson’s directives.²⁴² A few days later, he contacted

²⁴⁰ Thwaites to Tolson, June 22, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁴¹ Tolson to Chavez, July 8, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁴² Tillotson to Director, July 19, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

Schiele, who had written him two weeks earlier. He stated that NPS had been “distinctly interested” in Fort Union for some years, and filled him in on the background of the 1938-1939 studies recommending establishment and the negotiations, which “were not completed or successful before the entrance of the United States into the war, since which event it has not been possible to proceed very actively with proposed new areas in general.” Tolson forwarded the 1939 plat and pledged the NPS’s willingness to assist with the LVSMCC’s “present program for the preservation of Fort Union,” and his hope to resume negotiations.²⁴³

Reed and Regional Chief of Land and Recreational Planning Milton McColm traveled to Las Vegas on August 17 to discuss the current situation with Schiele, and to visit the ruins. They discovered that “considerable further deterioration has occurred since 1939-40.” They estimated that of the eighteen chimneys standing in 1939, nine had been knocked down. Nevertheless, Fort Union was “essentially of undiminished significance, with a still impressive array of ruined structures.” In their meeting with Schiele, the NPS officials learned that Roger Reed, the new UL&GC manager—Wheeler had died “some few years ago”—was “distinctly antagonistic toward any ideas to make Fort Union an area available to the public.” Reed had refused the LVSMCC’s offers of gratings to cover wells and cisterns, and making matters worse, “the attitude of Mr. Andrew Marshall of Boston is said now to be unfavorable.” McColm and Reed concluded that since the USA was “hardly in a position to carry out now the rather

²⁴³ Tillotson to Schiele, July 22, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

extreme requirements which were tentatively agreed to 10 years ago,” the situation was “evidently hopeless, as far as any local action here is concerned.”²⁴⁴

Tillotson concurred that the prospects for further action were “rather discouraging,” and suggested that Tolson renew his contact with Andrew Marshall, “indicating the considerable interest in the project by Las Vegas people and the senators from New Mexico,” in hopes of resurrecting the negotiations.²⁴⁵

Thwaites of the LVSMCC also wrote Tolson on August 19, explaining his appeal to Marshall from two months previous had gone unanswered and asking for guidance, since he believed that “very little review and revision would be required” to bring the project to conclusion, and the Chamber was “anxious” to see it carried out. Thwaites sent copies of his letter to the entire New Mexico congressional delegation, as well as Boaz Long of the New Mexico State Museum, Director Joseph Bursey of the state Tourist Bureau, and Tillotson in Santa Fe.²⁴⁶

US Representative Antonio Fernandez informed Thwaites that Marshall had contacted several members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation and asked them to “oppose any efforts on our part to create a national monument.” Apparently, Marshall had indicated that “he would not sell at any price any of the land,” and was “absolutely opposed to the creation of a monument.”²⁴⁷ Thwaites thanked the

²⁴⁴ McColm to Director, August 18, 1949, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

²⁴⁵ Tillotson to Director, August 18, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁴⁶ Thwaites to Tolson, August 19, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁴⁷ Fernandez to Thwaites, August 24, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

representative for his help and added that he found Marshall's actions "to say the least, disconcerting."²⁴⁸

Considering Condemnation

The UL&GC's determined resistance spurred NPS and local leaders to consider another route. Rather than negotiation and persuasion, they broached the idea of forcing the company to surrender the land via the use of eminent domain for the first time.

Tolson wrote Thwaites on Sept. 2 in a discouraged tone. He said that the prospects for the monument had become "remote and there is a real threat that the remaining historical evidences of significant interest may now be destroyed or disintegrate unless some protection is given to them in the near future." He repeated the NPS's commitment to the site, which was "of undiminished significance," and pledged that the agency would proceed if it could only obtain the land as proposed. Tolson wrote that NPS had held out hope that "public-spirited citizens in the Las Vegas vicinity" might purchase the land and donate it to the USA, but that condemnation seemed to be the only remaining avenue. However, even if condemnation authority could be obtained, this was an undesirable course of action since the land would still have to be paid for. Funds for the state or federal government to purchase the lands were not available, unless they could be donated by those same civic-minded people. Condemnation on the Federal level was furthermore complicated because it required an act of Congress, and NPS was "not

²⁴⁸ Thwaites to Fernandez, August 29, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

in a position to know whether there is wide enough public support throughout the country” for such an act.²⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Reed and Assistant Chief Historian H.E. Kahler visited the site on September 13. Unable to approach the ruins close-up due to the weather, which had turned the road to mud, the men visited with Lewis Schiele of the LVSMCC. They reported that “the situation continues to seem hopeless” with regard to federal action, but that according to Schiele “there would theoretically be the possibility of acquisition by the State of New Mexico through condemnation proceedings.” The NPS men had also visited Long of the State Museum, who had intimated that funding for condemnation might be available, but they received “no very definite answer.” “Clearly,” Reed wrote, “nothing is being done.” He announced his intention to continue discussing the issue with the State Tourism Bureau, however, which he saw as a potential ally. These conversations proved fruitful, and the state agency began considering a state park or monument as a possible alternative to a federal one.²⁵⁰

For the time being, however, any progress on the transformation of Fort Union from agricultural land to commemorative monument was limited to the symbolic and rhetorical. Local residents continued to articulate and enact a vision of Fort Union as a special place, deserving of reverence and even pilgrimage.

²⁴⁹ Tolson to Thwaites, September 2, 1949, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

²⁵⁰ Reed to McColm, September 26, 1949, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41; Zhu, *Administrative History*, 22.

Imaginative Occupation of Space

On July 22, 1950, Chapman Lodge and Union Lodge in Las Vegas produced a “Brief History of Ft. Union” to orient their members during a Masonic tour of the fort. The one-page document described “the Cradle of Freemasonry in the Southwest,” and acted as the first interpretive guide to Fort Union. It oriented the visitors and described notable features (“directly ahead of you,” “to your left”) visible from the road immediately south of the hospital building. The tour, after parking on the parade ground, proceeded to viewings of Officers Row, the enlisted quarters, and, in the distance, the Arsenal and cemetery. Las Vegas thespians performed a popular drama set at Fort Union, “A Rose upon the Altar,” in the center of the group of buildings, near the “Paymasters vault.” The guide noted that the “old cisterns and wells have been filled in as a safety precaution,” and marked the location of the “Geodetic Marker, worth seeing for its old fashioned descriptions.”²⁵¹ The Freemasons of Las Vegas, even though the prospects for creating a formal monument were dim, had already begun to enact their preferred vision of Fort Union as a special place with interesting and important sights to offer.

This view was echoed in the December 1950 issue of *New Mexico* magazine, which included an article on “The Fort that Won the West” by Audrey Simpson, a resident of Las Vegas. Simpson described the ruined fort, “stand[ing] deserted and dead under the slowly circling buzzards and a clear sky.” She described the fort’s former glory as “an extremely important place on the map of the wild territory of New Mexico,” and

²⁵¹ Wm. C. Russell et al, “For Your Information, a Brief History of Ft Union,” July 22, 1950, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.

marveled at the “melting” adobe ruins, which offered visitors the chance to spot “a real mirage” before it faded away “like Fort Union.”

Simpson explained Fort Union’s origins to counter the costly depredations of “the five wild, raiding tribes—the Utahs, Kiowas, Navajos, Apaches, and Comanches,” which had led “the people, Congress, and the traders” to demand its construction. The vast quantities of supplies passing through the post helped it achieve its goal of “subduing” Native tribes until economic forces caused its shutdown in 1891. The fort’s usefulness did not end with the railroad’s arrival, however, but continued as it lent building materials to local residents: “‘And why not?’ they say. ‘Nobody cares about the old fort. If we use some of it we are preserving it. We aren’t vandals. We are relic hunters. We love the old things of the fort, where others who had charge of them once cared nothing for them and left them to ruin.’” For Simpson, Fort Union was not simply a relic of a bygone era but a part of the modern communities surrounding it.

The article closed with a romantic view of a departed, heroic past, which was tragically uncommemorated: “[T]here are only memories left today—a few gaunt walls and chimneys and memories of war-whoops and high-wheeled wagons and hard-riding, fast shooting men in blue who fanned out from Fort Union to help make New Mexico a peaceful place to live.”²⁵²

The allure of Fort Union, then, was still being built, even as local boosters continued to advocate for the site as a valuable tourist attraction that offered an authentic,

²⁵² Audrey Simpson, “The Fort that Won the West,” *New Mexico Magazine*, December 1950.

unique connection with the past. Newspaper articles frequently touted the “scenic beauty” of the area and promoted tourist itineraries that included a stop at the ruins.²⁵³

New Players

In 1951, the idea of Fort Union as a special place began to strike a chord among influential individuals beyond the Las Vegas booster community. James Arrott, a retired industrialist from Pennsylvania who had recently purchased a ranch in nearby Sapello, took an interest in local history. He began collecting material related to Fort Union and made contact with NPS Region III staff in the course of his research. Arrott soon became one of the chief supporters of the effort to preserve Fort Union.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Las Vegas is Hub for Scenic Beauty of Area,” August 2, 1951.

²⁵⁴ Arrott to Reed, January 20 and February 13, 1951, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

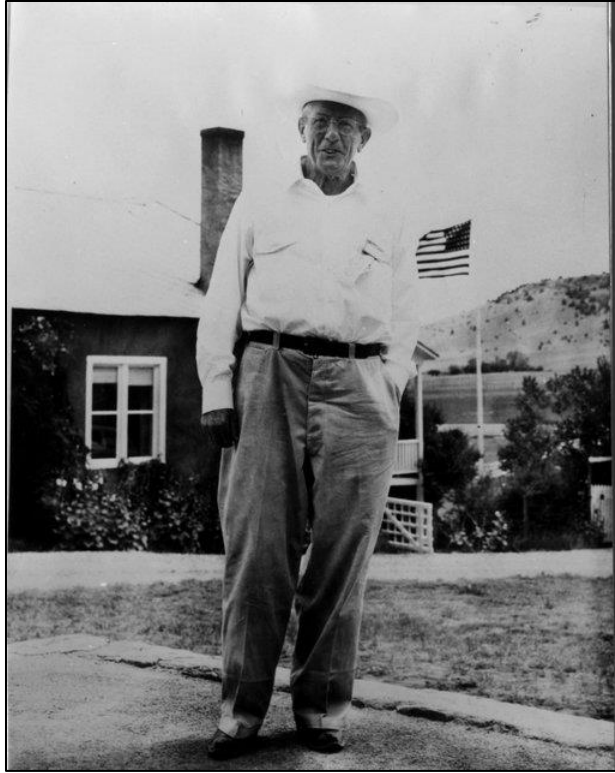


Figure 14: James Arrott (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

NPS continued its outreach efforts to promote the preservation of Fort Union. Tillotson presented to the Santa Fe Rotary Club on June 14, and at the same meeting Edward Gaston of the National Commission for Preserving Historic Places spoke on behalf of Fort Union as a valuable asset in need of protection. Tillotson explained the previous efforts to acquire the site and that “the difficulty was mainly in the acquisition of the necessary lands.” The appeal resonated with several attendees, who met separately after the presentation. Lincoln O’Brien, owner and editor of New Mexico Newspapers, advised that he had “personal and social relationships with Mr. Andrew Marshall, Jr., of Colorado Springs...and he seemed to be quite optimistic that through his connections he could change the expressed attitude of Mr. Marshall and his company.”²⁵⁵ O’Brien noted

²⁵⁵ Tillotson to Director, June 19, 1951, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

that Andrew Marshall, Sr., was “somewhat withdrawing from active management,” and that it would be best to target his son in future negotiations. Andrew Marshall, Jr. (known as “Andy”), would be the principal figure conducting the company’s side of the negotiations henceforth.

O’Brien made plans to fly to Colorado Springs to “soften up” Marshall later that summer, in hopes of convincing the UL&GC to part with the land one way or another—if the company could not be persuaded to make a donation, O’Brien offered to organize “a committee of local citizens...[to] try and raise the money for the purchase of that land.” His efforts were to be kept confidential for the time being, as “any release of news before we have Mr. Marshall on our side would prejudice our case.”²⁵⁶ This expansion of support beyond NPS and government officials and into the social realm occupied by the landowners represented a major milestone and a distinct difference between the prewar and postwar negotiations.

Starting the Gears of Legislation

This new level of social and political connection paid off almost immediately. Within a month, O’Brien contacted US Representative John Dempsey and informed him that “the money is at hand to acquire the necessary lands if it is certain that the monument would be established.”²⁵⁷ Dempsey coordinated with NPS Director Demaray, who related that “unless the owners can be persuaded to change their minds, it will, of course, be

²⁵⁶ O’Brien to Tillotson, June 20, 1951, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁵⁷ Demaray to Tillotson, July 16, 1951, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any civic group to purchase the necessary lands.” The director raised the possibility of condemnation as an alternative method of acquisition, but Dempsey declined to pursue that route for the time being. Instead, he worked with the Department of Interior to draft a bill to acquire the land via purchase with the voluntary participation of the UL&GC.²⁵⁸

Interior officials stressed that since the project would require substantial funding, and due to recent criticism of Presidential proclamation of monuments in recent years, “it would seem desirable that the Fort Union National Monument should be established by legislation in order to provide an unquestionable basis for future requests for appropriations, and in order to obviate any criticism of its establishment.” The prewar decision to establish Fort Union via the Historic Sites Act was therefore confirmed, and Interior drafted a bill for Dempsey to introduce and sent him a copy in August 1951.²⁵⁹

Dempsey introduced H.R. 5139 on August 13, 1951, proposing the establishment of the monument. The bill authorized the Secretary of Interior to acquire “by donation, or he may procure with donated funds, the site and remaining structures of Old Fort Union, together with such additional land, interests in land, and improvements thereon.” The bill also affirmed the basic scope of the prewar negotiations by capping the total size of the monument at 1,000 acres.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Demaray to Dempsey, June 29, 1951, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁵⁹ Interior to Dempsey, July 30, 1951, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, House, John J. Dempsey's bill to authorize the establishment of the Fort Union National Monument, in the state of New Mexico, and for other purpose; to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, H.R. 5139, 82nd Cong. 1st sess., Congressional Record 97:9913.

The bill was taken up by the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives, which asked Interior for its opinion on the bill. On August 30, the Secretary of the Interior, Oscar L. Chapman, submitted his favorable report to the Bureau of the Budget. Chapman stated that the land would be acquired either “by donation or with donated funds,” and stated his confidence that the deal would take place if the legislation passed. The annual budget for the new monument was estimated at \$17,000. The stated rationale for the acquisition was Fort Union’s importance in “counteract[ing] the depredations of the northern Apache and the Ute Indians and to protect the Santa Fe Trail.” Fort Union, the secretary wrote, “played an important part in establishing permanent United States rule in the Southwest,” comparable to the role of Fort Laramie on the Oregon Trail. The historic ruins, “row after row of adobe, brick, and stone walls marking the site of the old fort,” were “a very worthy addition” to the ranks of the national monuments.²⁶¹

The legislative mechanism to establish a monument was in place, but it would be months before full hearings were held. In the meantime, local efforts at re-shaping Fort Union into a site of commemoration continued.

Hallowing the Ground

Since the late 1940s, when Masons from Las Vegas and Wagon Mound had revived their interest in preserving Fort Union, the two lodges had begun holding annual meetings at the site to commemorate their founding. Buoyed by the accelerating support

²⁶¹ Secretary to Lawton, August 30, 1951; Report to Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, August 30, 1951, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

for a monument, the September 1951 gathering was the largest yet. Over 300 members and guests attended the celebration, which included speeches, the ceremonial erection of a replica flagpole, and a “barbecued elk supper.” Invited guests included Brigadier General Hunter Harris of the 49th Army Air Division from Roswell, as well as high-ranking members of the New Mexico National Guard. Representative Dempsey and Lincoln O’Brien were in attendance, as well as the editor of *New Mexico* magazine, George Fitzpatrick, and numerous NPS officials from Region III.²⁶²

Brigadier General Harris’s keynote address declared Fort Union’s important past as well as its relevance to the present. Fort Union, Harris declared, was a place where “the freedoms for which our founding fathers fought” were carried to the Southwest. He drew a direct connection between the soldiers of Fort Union and troops fighting in the ongoing conflict in Korea: “They are fighting for freedom of a people. Freedom of speech...freedom from want...freedom from fear.” Harris provided a detailed account of the training and war effort for the Korean War, which he tied to the historic Army: “Although the terms pertaining to aircraft might be unfamiliar, the theme of our message here today would, I am sure, have been well understood by the soldiers of old Fort Union. For in 1851, as well as 1951, their mission here might have been tersely expressed in three words—‘Peace through strength.’”²⁶³

²⁶² Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “100th Anniversary,” September 7, 1951.

²⁶³ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Old Fort Union Scene of Ceremonies on 100th Anniversary,” September 10, 1951.



Figure 15: Centennial Celebration, September 10, 1951, *Las Vegas Daily Optic*

Harris’s speech dovetailed with NPS’s evolving stance at this time—the initial years of the Cold War—which was more explicit than ever about its role as a source of patriotic feeling and national pride. The areas the agency managed, according to Director Demaray, provided “profound value...in times when our fundamental beliefs are challenged and threats to the peace of the world hang over us, they help to strengthen our loyalty to and love of our country and our will to defend it courageously and unselfishly.”²⁶⁴ Among the most important of these assets were the NPS’s historical and prehistorical areas, where the agency saw “History written on the land.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1951, 313.

²⁶⁵ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1951, 323.

The *Optic* approved of the ceremonies, given that “Fort Union has long been neglected and there are few physical remains of the once staunch buildings which signified [the] military might of the pioneer west,” but it also lamented the fact that the ruins were “no longer an attraction for tourists to view.”²⁶⁶ The paper’s coverage of the event relied on romantic imagery—the “dead” fort had been temporarily brought back to life by the presence of the Masonic assembly, and the journey to the fort constituted a passage back in time, as the dust trails from the auto caravan evoked the passage of wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail. The *Optic* thus agreed that Fort Union, as “historic ground,” was a valuable reminder of the past, “saturated in the old west atmosphere.” “While we must be forward looking in our actions and thinking,” wrote the editors, “we should not overlook and forget the past. Our heritage is important and the deeds of men who have traveled life’s span should not be forgotten.”²⁶⁷

The September meeting also inspired action by NPS attendees. Region III’s Preston P. Patraw informed Washington that the situation at Fort Union was dire. Many of the buildings were still standing, but showed “evidence of rapid and accelerating deterioration,” including “comparatively recent and deplorable evidence that a bulldozer was used to destroy” some of the historic fabric. Patraw expressed his belief that “every year of delay in stabilizing the ruins will see increasing quantities of the standing walls

²⁶⁶ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Centennial of Fort Union to be Observed with Saturday Ceremonies,” September 7, 1951.

²⁶⁷ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Historic Ground,” September 10, 1951.

disappear.” Most importantly, he took the celebration as “evidence of deep local interest in and support for the Fort Union National Monument project.”²⁶⁸

Shortly thereafter, Lincoln O’Brien made good on his promise to bring Marshall back to the negotiating table. He took Marshall on an aerial survey of the ruins on October 12, after which the men made an “exploratory” visit to the NPS offices in Santa Fe. Marshall regretted the UL&GC’s previous “stuffy” posture on the monument proposal, but expressed the company’s desire not to “appear uncooperative or obstructive.” The UL&GC’s chief objection, more than the loss of the land, was that “a roadway would seriously interfere with the circulation of the range cattle, and that an influx of tourists would greatly increase the hazard of grass fires.” Patraw informed Marshall that the NPS Advisory Board’s approval of the monument and the rapid deterioration of the ruins lent urgency to the effort, but he reassured Marshall that underpasses and fire prevention would be part of any agreement.²⁶⁹

Clearly, the burgeoning sense of Fort Union as a special, even venerated, place via its association with Cold War reverence for a military engaged in an existential struggle for American ideals was having an effect. Little progress ensued through the rest of the fall and winter, but in January, Representative Dempsey announced that he intended to push for approval of his pending resolution. The *Optic* hailed this

²⁶⁸ Patraw to Director, September 13, 1951, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

²⁶⁹ Patraw to Director, October 12, 1951, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189; Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Monument Proposal Given Study,” October 13, 1951.

announcement as “pleasing news” but drew attention to the “involved proposition” of resolving the land ownership question and actually restoring the crumbling ruins.²⁷⁰

“Keep Reminding Them”

The *Optic* continued to support the monument legislation as an economic development initiative. “Keep Reminding Them,” the editors wrote on January 24. The paper listed two items of importance for the local economy: a bill to construct a municipal airport capable of accommodating larger military and commercial aircraft; and the Fort Union bill. These measures, the paper wrote, were “vital to residents of this section,” and called upon them to write or wire their congressional members urging their passage.²⁷¹

Marshall met with several local leaders at Las Vegas on February 5. Those attending included Patraw from NPS; Gordon Melody, State Senator for Las Vegas; members of the Chamber of Commerce’s Fort Union Committee, and other local officials. All of the invited guests were members of the Masons, and as Patraw later pointed out, this was “with the idea of impressing upon Mr. Marshall the fact that the project had support not only locally but throughout the state by the Masonic organization and by other organizations.” Marshall’s opening statement, which Patraw thought was intended to “sell” the Las Vegans against the idea of the monument, was consistent with his earlier protests: the UL&GC was worried about range circulation, fire danger, and “theft of range cattle.” While Marshall quickly acquiesced to the idea that circulation and

²⁷⁰ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union,” January 8, 1952.

²⁷¹ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Keep Reminding Them,” January 24, 1952

theft could be easily addressed, he clung to the idea that fire constituted an insurmountable risk and demanded indemnification from the government against it.

While the government was unlikely to approve such an arrangement, the local representatives agreed to look into the possibility of an insurance policy as part of the deal. Marshall agreed to speak with the UL&GC board, but Patraw worried that this might be a “futile gesture.” When the possibility of condemnation proceedings was raised, Marshall vowed to resist them. Asked whether the UL&GC would expect compensation for the land or would be willing to donate it outright, Marshall replied that compensation would be expected. “Subsequent discussion,” wrote an exasperated Patraw, “failed to develop any estimated figure of cost.” It was clear that the UL&GC remained very resistant to the transfer, and would continue to create obstacles to prevent it.²⁷²

After a second round of negotiations at the Masonic temple in Las Vegas on February 12, NPS and Marshall managed to agree on several provisions to assuage the UL&GC’s worries. The result was a nearly identical proposition to the prewar agreement. The proposed monument would include five parcels totaling just over 872 acres. A 300-foot scenic easement would help retain a “park-like character” to the area, and underpasses below the approach road from Highway 85 would address the question of cattle circulation. NPS also would provide fire protection in the form of resident fire-fighting squads and equipment, firebreaks and close control of public access. The agency offered to send a representative to the next UL&GC board meeting to address any

²⁷² Patraw to Tillotson, February 20, 1952, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

questions.²⁷³ Marshall replied a month later that he was reviewing the proposal with the board and would have an answer for NPS “within a reasonably short time.”²⁷⁴ The *New Mexico Freemason* reported optimistically on the proposed deal and implored the 11,000 New Mexico Masons to support it.²⁷⁵

On May 12, the UL&GC board held a meeting at its headquarters in Jersey City, New Jersey, and proposed several revisions to its Certificate of Incorporation, apparently intended to provide the company with additional flexibility should partition or sale of its land holdings be required. The main alteration was the addition of nineteen new “objects and purposes for which said Company is formed.” These included the company’s original purpose of land speculation and acquiring agricultural and grazing land in the United States, but also branched out into livestock breeding and trade, slaughtering operations, oil/gas/mineral exploration, construction, “any manufacturing, mercantile, trading or commercial business of whatever character and description (except the banking business),” real estate, trademarks and patents, stock and bond trading, borrowing money, mergers and acquisitions, aiding and guaranteeing other companies, creating and managing new companies—including transfer of assets between itself and new

²⁷³ Tillotson to Marshall, February 20, 1952, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁷⁴ Marshall to Tillotson, March 26, 1952, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁷⁵ *The New Mexico Freemason*, “Fort Union,” March 1952.

companies. The directors also provided for fifty thousand shares of common stock in the company. The changes were effective on December 17th.²⁷⁶

Editor George Fitzpatrick, who had attended the September centennial gathering, authored a piece in the May edition of *New Mexico* entitled “Fort Union—Shrine of History.” Accompanied by photos of the crumbling ruins and an aerial shot of the site, the article conveyed a sense of authentic communion with the past achieved through the fort’s unique and irreproducible physical presence. Fitzpatrick’s visit to the fort, which he called “hallowed ground,” included visions of dragoons “riding out to quell an Indian uprising,” ghostly echoes of the regimental band and shouting soldiers, and the imagined firing of the cannon. The article relayed colorful stories of fur traders engaged in a tense standoff with Comanches “preparing to move in for the final kill” on a wagon train. The visitors could “almost see” the mules and foul-mouthed teamsters.

Fitzpatrick credited the Masons and other Las Vegas boosters with the initial efforts toward preservation, and described Dempsey’s pending bill. “Why,” he asked, had “the magnificent old military post” been “allowed to melt down to adobe mud again?” The answer was simple: the UL&GC, who Fitzpatrick derided as “absentee ranch owners.” The article put pointed pressure on the company, claiming that its concerns about fire and circulation had been addressed, and that only the passage of the Dempsey bill stood between Las Vegas and a tourist bonanza.

Fitzpatrick closed with an elegiac call for action: “Today the wide prairie, once alive with the comings and goings of the military and the covered wagons passing close

²⁷⁶ Union Land & Grazing Company, Certificate of Amendment of Certificate of Incorporation, December 17, 1952, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

by on the Santa Fe Trail, is a sea of grass. Only the ruts of the trail, the gaunt chimneys, and the crumbling walls are symbols of yesterday. But theirs is a story that will be repeated, and repeated again, as long as men cherish deeds of heroism and courage and the traditions of a growing America.”²⁷⁷

Tillotson wrote Marshall for an update on May 23 and sent him a copy of Fitzpatrick’s article.²⁷⁸ The pressure on the UL&GC to sell—from Las Vegas leaders, NPS, and the wider community of New Mexico boosters and elites—was mounting.

The UL&GC Staves off Confiscation

The progress made in early 1952 was not enough to secure the cooperation of the UL&GC. On May 29, the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee of the House held hearings on H.R. 5139. Dempsey, Marshall, and NPS Chief Counsel Jackson Price all testified. Dempsey began the proceedings by submitting letters of support from the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Masonic Order. He then addressed the UL&GC’s opposition to the bill, which he attributed to their absentee ownership. Dempsey stressed that the bill only granted the government authority to negotiate with the company on the proposed monument, and that there was “nothing contemplated in the way of condemnation.” He emphasized that the bill required no funding from the Federal

²⁷⁷ George Fitzpatrick, “Fort Union—Shrine of History,” *New Mexico Magazine*, May 1952.

²⁷⁸ Tillotson to Marshall, May 23, 1952, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

government, and that the monument would require only a handful of staff—expenses would be recovered via entrance fees.²⁷⁹

Testifying in opposition, Marshall’s opening statement cast the UL&GC as a victim in the process, and lamented that “we are in the unpleasant position of appearing selfish and uncooperative on this bill.”²⁸⁰ Marshall enumerated several reasons for the UL&GC’s opposition to the monument. First, he pointed out that Fort Union was an insignificant “replacement center” as opposed to the site of an actual battle, and that “it was not a fort with battlements of the type we feel would really be of interest to people who might want to come to see it.”²⁸¹ He pointed out that visitors were already permitted to view the ruins, but that “the usual lack of sense of responsibility of the casual tourist” meant that the ranch had to send out a worker to inspect the site after outsiders left for evidence of fire, vandalism, or littering. Increased numbers of people would only exacerbate the threat.²⁸²

Marshall further explained that the bill would place the UL&GC “in a position of being subject to far greater pressure from a public opinion point of view, and I am being completely candid now.” The bill, he worried, would make the UL&GC a pariah in the community, a “stick-in-the-mud.”²⁸³ The committee chair, Rep. Lloyd Bentsen, asked: “What is your fear of negotiation as provided for in this bill? Why can you not just say

²⁷⁹ House of Representatives, Hearings Before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Subcommittee on Public Lands, H.R. 5139, May 29, 1952, 11.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

no?” Marshall replied, “We do say no.” The UL&GC, he explained, would gladly donate the land to improve area tourism were it adjacent to Highway 85, but its position in the center of the company’s holdings was unacceptable.²⁸⁴

NPS Chief Counsel Price faced a grilling from the committee regarding the project’s cost. Price estimated that the access road would cost around \$65,000, and that a staff of three would be required for site management. Price emphasized that “we plan no restoration. There may be some stabilization of the ruins there and for a period of five years it will probably run around \$5,000 a year.”²⁸⁵ He stated that Fort Union was of similar importance to Fort Laramie in Wyoming, and that it had “a very great position in the military history of the southwestern area.” Committee members pressed the issue of cost, but Price was unable to adequately answer their concerns about sufficient operating revenues from entrance fees: “We just have not any idea what the visitation would be.”²⁸⁶

The committee would not accept this answer, and became further irritated by Price’s inability to provide specifics on what kind of structures NPS would need to build to support the park staff. “Do you not think then,” Representative Harrison asked, “this proposed bill should be cut off until such time as the department has given some study to it and come up with some figures on what it will cost the people? Money in this country is short. You come up here without any facts and figures merely to add to the holdings of the department, and I cannot see it.”²⁸⁷ The committee refused to go further on the

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 30.

measure without assurance of what, exactly, NPS would be committing to build, and what it would cost—the members worried about having the money from local New Mexicans go toward a project that was not completely thought out, much less funded. Representative Wayne Aspinall stated, “I, for one, do not want to be in the position of looking like I am authorizing something and giving something to the people of New Mexico and then finding out later that what we have done has been misleading.”²⁸⁸ The matter was tabled as the members left to attend the House session in progress, marking the end of H.R. 5139, which would see no further discussion and die in committee.

Despite this setback, monument supporters continued to boost the project. The *Optic* promoted the bill even as it languished in legislative limbo, and credited the Masonic order for pushing the effort forward. The paper pointed out the apparently insurmountable matter of obtaining the land, but remained hopeful for a satisfactory outcome.²⁸⁹ The Las Vegas Chapman Lodge held its fourth annual celebration and barbecue at the fort on August 23. Patraw addressed the attendees and provided an update on the progress toward the proposed monument.²⁹⁰

Playing Hardball

Las Vegans also succeeded in moving support forward at the state level. They obtained the support of Everett Grantham, candidate for governor, who pledged to “do all

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁸⁹ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union,” May 29, 1952.

²⁹⁰ Stapp to Patraw, August 17, 1952, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

that I can to obtain title to this land, so that the ruins of this once historic fort can be preserved for posterity.”²⁹¹

On February 4, Baker Warden of Las Vegas informed NPS Region III personnel that a new bill was being drafted in the New Mexico Legislature that would authorize the state to acquire the needed land via condemnation and transfer it to NPS.²⁹²

Representative Antonio Sanchez of Solano was the principal author of the bill, which wound its way through the legislative process during the month of February.²⁹³ The *Albuquerque Journal* covered the progress of the legislation. On March 8th, the paper reported that “the state of New Mexico would greatly expand its interest in historical and natural sites” if the Fort Union bill were to pass. The bill was originally written to allow the state to acquire any abandoned military reservation in the state, but later amended to only apply to the Fort Union parcel.²⁹⁴

The final text of House Bill No. 297 authorized the New Mexico State Park Commission to acquire the “Old Fort Union Military Reservation” and the needed rights-of-way as “a state park to be administered, reconstructed, preserved, developed and beautified by the state park commission or its successor.” The acquired land would then be turned over to the USA “for the purpose of administering, reconstructing, preserving,

²⁹¹ Graham to Warden, September 4, 1952, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁹² Patraw to Tillotson, February 4, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

²⁹³ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Bills Being Prepared,” February 5, 1953; *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Bill Set For Hopper,” February 16, 1953.

²⁹⁴ *Albuquerque Journal*, “Many Bills Call for Historical and Park Sites,” March 8, 1953.

developing and beautifying” it. The state was authorized to acquire a total of 800 acres “by purchase, gift or condemnation.”²⁹⁵

While the bill passed the House easily, it ran into opposition in the Senate’s Public Lands and Livestock Committee, which gave it a “do not pass” report on March 12th. Despite testimony from Las Vegas residents, Marshall’s objections to the bill during the committee hearings—supported by Horace Hening of the New Mexico Cattle Grower’s Association—carried the day. Hening opposed the precedent to be set by the appropriation of private land. “The committee didn’t like the idea of taking a private company’s property and of building a road across it,” declared committee Chairman John Morrow of Colfax. The bill, according to the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, was “marked for death.”²⁹⁶

The *Optic* bristled at the news: “the land, owned by out-of-state interests in any case, is not as valuable by far as a monument would be.” The paper dismissed the Cattle Grower’s Association’s objections as “not of weighty influence,” given the unique status of Fort Union.²⁹⁷

The following day, Senator Gordon Meloy of Las Vegas parlayed this resentment of non-resident landowners into a new hearing in the Public Lands and

²⁹⁵ New Mexico, An Act Authorizing the State of New Mexico through the State Park Commission or Its Successor to Acquire by Purchase, Gift or Condemnation for State Park Purposes the Old Fort Union Military Reservation Including the Cemetery and Rights of Way Used and to be Used in Connection therewith, Located within the Mora Grant, County of Mora, New Mexico; Authorizing the Reconstruction and Beautification of Such Area; Providing for the Administration of the Same; and Authorizing Agreement or Conveyances with or to the United States of Such Area. Law of 1953 (Santa Fe, New Mexico), 607-9.

²⁹⁶ *Santa Fe New Mexican*, “Fort Union Restoration is Marked for Death,” March 12, 1953.

²⁹⁷ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union,” March 12, 1953.

Livestock Committee. Melody informed the committee that “none of the stockholders in the Union grazing firm are residents of New Mexico,” that NPS had agreed to address the UL&GC’s objections with regard to fire protection, and that sufficient compensation for the land would be raised by the people of Las Vegas. Significantly, Melody amended the bill so that the use of eminent domain would apply only to this specific case, assuaging opponents’ worries over precedent. The committee reversed its decision and reported the bill out to the Senate.²⁹⁸

The vote of the full legislature was a close one. “I don’t like their bill,” said Majority Leader Murray Morgan of Otero. “I think it is a very bad thing to give any commission set up in the recreational field such power...I can’t go along with conferring the power of eminent domain on something like the park commission.” Even after Melody explained the limited nature of the eminent domain power, Morgan replied: “I don’t care. Somebody owns that land, and although I don’t know the owners, they apparently don’t want to sell it. Besides, I don’t know that Fort Union was ever a great military fort. I just thought that was where the soldiers kept their baled hay.” Senator I.N. Curtis, of Catron, summed up the sides in the debate. “I’m for the cattlemen,” he said, “and that bill isn’t.” However, economic development and tourism won out over agricultural interest in the end, and after a contentious debate, the bill passed, 18-13.²⁹⁹

The *Optic* celebrated the bill’s passage, giving credit to the numerous supporters of the monument effort over the years. “Turning Fort Union into a shrine,” the editors

²⁹⁸ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Bill Salvaged; Goes to Floor of Senate,” March 13, 1953.

²⁹⁹ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Monument Bill Passes Senate and Goes Up to Governor, March 16, 1953.

wrote, “is not an impulsive idea. It has been proposed for years by citizens interested in preserving historic sites in the southwest.” The paper applauded the legislators who “ramrodded it in the Senate.”³⁰⁰ Governor Edwin Mechem signed the bill on March 20. The *Optic* could not resist a little gloating over the “bitterly opposed” landowners and cattle interests. Despite the good news, the editors advised local leaders that “they must not rest on their laurels,” but dive into the fundraising campaign to compensate the landowners.³⁰¹

The NPS was notably absent from the state legislative process. Although they knew about the bill when originally proposed, Tillotson and the Regional Office staff appear not to have been aware of its resurrection and progress after the initial “do not pass” recommendation. On March 25, Tillotson advised NPS Director Conrad Wirth of the bill’s success, noting the central role of “local Masonic and other people and organizations,” who planned to begin raising funds “with the intention of using the condemnation authority of the Act if necessary to force the Union Land and Grazing Company to sell.”³⁰²

The New Mexico bill represented a change point for the monument’s prospects— with this authorization, the tone of the negotiations, while still friendly (the bill provided for most of the cattle company’s desired concessions, including fire protection and the erection of fences and underpasses to protect the company’s cattle), had taken a significant turn. It was clear that the proposed Fort Union National Monument enjoyed

³⁰⁰ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Monument,” March 17, 1953.

³⁰¹ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Monument,” March 21, 1953.

³⁰² Tillotson to Wirth, February 27 and March 25, 1953, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

strong support at the state as well as the local and federal government levels, and it was now apparent that the UL&GC would need to turn its efforts toward determining how, not whether, the new monument would come to being.

Coming Back to the Table

Once the bill was signed, local boosters began making arrangements for the acquisition. The LVSMCC established planning, negotiation and financing committees to manage the transfer process. Arrott was appointed head of the Planning Committee, and he immediately began discussions with Marshall, in hopes that “lands might be acquired by negotiation without recourse to the condemnation authority.”³⁰³

In response to the passage of the New Mexico bill, Representative Dempsey renewed his push for federal legislation, which he had re-introduced in January with identical wording as HR 1005 but which had lain dormant since. He informed Interior Secretary Douglas McKay of the new developments on the state level, and asked for a favorable report on his bill.³⁰⁴

On May 6, NPS Region III staff visited the ranch and met with Marshall, who agreed that the UL&GC “would not again exert pressure to defeat in Congress a bill authorizing the creation of a Fort Union National Monument.” Despite his weakened negotiating position, Marshall impressed the visitors with his courtesy and good nature.

³⁰³ Patraw to Wirth, April 2, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁰⁴ U.S. Congress, House, A bill to authorize the establishment of the Fort Union National Monument, in the state of New Mexico, and for other purposes, H.R. 1005, 83rd Cong. 2nd sess., January 6, 1953; Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Dempsey Presents Monument Status Fort Union Bill,” January 6, 1953; Dempsey to McKay, April 6, 1953, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 2210.

He outlined the UL&GC's concern over the possibility of the NPS abandoning the site and "undesirable tenants" taking over the property. He asked again for the inclusion of a reversionary clause, but the NPS representatives doubted one would be possible. However, they assured Marshall that the likelihood of the NPS abandoning the site was "extremely remote," considering that Fort Union was "the most logical point to commemorate...the Santa Fe trade."

Marshall also raised the question of mineral rights, expressing concern that oil or gas drilling might take place beneath the monument, and expressed his desire to alter the route of the access road, the placement of which he claimed the Company had "never been consulted" on, as E.B. Wheeler had "greatly exceeded his authority" during negotiations before the war. Finally, he declared that the Company's preference would be to retain title until transfer directly to the federal government, and regarded "with great disfavor" the idea of using the State of New Mexico as an intermediary. The NPS reps also met with Stapp of the Chamber of Commerce, and reminded him that they expected to remain neutral during the negotiations between the Chamber and the UL&GC over the land transfer.³⁰⁵

On July 16th, Marshall visited the NPS offices in Santa Fe. He reiterated the UL&GC's desire for the reversionary clause, and produced copies of correspondence between Andrew Marshall, Sr., and Hillary Tolson, including the November 1940 proposed deed which included the reversionary clause. Marshall insisted that "this single

³⁰⁵ Miller to Tillotson, May 8, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

consideration must be settled” before the board would agree to proceed with negotiations.³⁰⁶

In a follow-up letter, Marshall wrote that “unlimited public access imposes on us a serious burden of risk and inconvenience in our ranch operation,” and noted that the reversionary clause was permissible under the Historic Sites Act. He also asked that “no mineral exploration or development whatever should be performed in the area turned over.” He characterized these requests as “crucial” and as “prerequisites” to further discussion.³⁰⁷

Marhsall’s skillful deployment of NPS’s past concessions on these matters proved effective. Tillotson, after “no amount of argument [had] sufficed to convince [Marshall] or his Board of Directors” that the reversion clause was unnecessary, agreed to recommend its inclusion in the enabling legislation, as well as the stipulation prohibiting oil and gas exploration under the monument. He noted the “cordial” relations between Marshall and the Chamber of Commerce, and that it appeared most remaining difficulties had been surmounted, pending the community’s raising funds to satisfy the UL&GC for its “damages” in the form of the lost land.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Miller to Tillotson, July 20, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁰⁷ Marshall to Miller, August 10, 1953, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

³⁰⁸ Tillotson to Wirth, August 26, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

Evaluating Western Forts

Meanwhile, NPS was busy solidifying its support for Fort Union as worthy of monument status among several other Western forts currently under consideration. In November 1953, Region III Historian John Littleton completed “Frontier Military Posts of the Southwest” at Assistant NPS Director Ronald F. Lee’s request for the NPS Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments. Littleton’s report demonstrated a more nuanced and complex understanding of Fort Union’s history than previous studies, and sought to place it in a more local and regional context. He paid closer attention to the Army’s role in Native American campaigns, but hewed to the established NPS belief in the fort’s chief significance: the Santa Fe Trade and the Civil War.

Littleton’s study construed the term “Southwest” broadly, and included information on the military’s activities from Louisiana to Utah “in order that the whole range of frontier military development might be shown.” Still, only posts “which were frontier in character” and “which played the most significant part in the development of the Southwestern frontier” were considered worthy of NPS status. The Army, Littleton wrote, was a kind of police force, tasked with protecting the Santa Fe trade and frontier settlements, but also regulating the liquor trade, preventing “inter-tribal wars” and settler encroachment on tribal land, as well as “punish[ing] the Indians for depredation against the Whites.” Littleton characterized the military as a “guardian” as well when involved in the business of resettling tribes on reservations. He also mentioned the strong social, political, environmental, and economic impacts of the Army in the communities it touched.

With regard to Fort Union itself, Littleton relied upon several central themes to make the case for its importance. The fort had been important due to its proximity to the Santa Fe Trail, and as a supply base, constituting “a city within itself and a lively social center.” Littleton mentioned the Confederate designs on the fort in 1862 and its role in “various Indian campaigns along the frontier.” The report noted the “impressive ruins of adobe walls, the stone guard-house, and numerous brick chimneys” which remained visible.

In his conclusion, Littleton recommended to the NPS Advisory Board that Fort Union appeared “more adaptable...for historical purposes of interpreting the frontier phase of American life on the national level” than Fort Bowie or Fort Davis. “Fort Union,” Littleton wrote, “because of its location on the Santa Fe Trail, is a logical spot for telling the story of this great artery of nineteenth-century overland transportation. It also has impressive ruins which show the gigantic proportions of this frontier military establishment. It was the largest of the three here mentioned—one of the largest in the West—and a supply center for numerous minor posts within a radius of 500 miles.”³⁰⁹

Littleton’s report received a favorable response from NPS Chief Historian Herbert Kahler, who agreed with Littleton’s conclusions that the three forts were the best suited to NPS consideration. However, he also advised that the Advisory Board would desire to have a single candidate put forward as the best option. Kahler disqualified Fort Davis on the grounds of its comparatively minor importance and Fort Bowie due to its inaccessibility. Fort Union, by contrast, had ample physical remains left and offered an

³⁰⁹ John O. Littleton, “Frontier Military Posts of the Southwest” (Santa Fe: National Park Service, November 1953), NPS Office of the Chief Historian.

opportunity to interpret the Santa Fe Trail. The area was “quite accessible” and would see large visitor numbers from Santa Fe. Finally, Kahler stated that “Fort Union is better known” than either of the other forts, and recommended it as “the choice of the Service.”³¹⁰



Figure 16: Fort Union, Warehouse Buildings, c. 1953
(Source: NARA, RG 79, General Records: Administrative Files,
1949-1971, Entry P-11, Box 2210)

Clearing the Final Hurdles

On October 29, a favorable report on the proposed deal arrived from Washington. NPS Director Wirth noted that NPS had “considered carefully” the UL&GC’s demands. The desired amendments to HR 1005 had been included which would allow NPS to

³¹⁰ Kahler to Lee, November 13, 1953, NPS Office of the Chief Historian.

accept the land with the reversionary clause included as well as the prohibition on mineral exploration. “These limitations and conditions,” Wirth wrote, “are consistent with our policies and would not embarrass our administration of the area. In fact, they would provide a measure of protection.” Wirth supported the new access road route as well. He noted that if HR 1005 passed, the eminent domain power of the state of New Mexico would not be needed after all. Wirth then raised the issue of the budget for the new park. He attached estimates of \$522,400 for the needed physical improvements and an annual operating budget of \$17,000 (not counting an additional \$5,000 per year for “ruins stabilization in interest of visitor safety and to prolong life of ruins”). Any financial support from local organizations, Wirth noted, “would be an important consideration in favor of” the monument’s establishment and “would no doubt carry considerable weight with the Congress as well as with the Bureau of the Budget.” The budget estimates included funding lines for a Superintendent, a “historical aid,” and a seasonal ranger, as well as maintenance and upkeep workers. A proposed “Administration Building” would include an “information room,” but the plan made no direct mention of museum exhibits or signage. The 6.5-mile access road represented the bulk of the initial improvement cost, at \$300,000.³¹¹

Tillotson conveyed Wirth’s “unequivocal agreement” with the UL&GC’s demands to Marshall on November 10.³¹² Marshall replied a week later that the new plans “pretty well clear the way as far as we are concerned” and gave approval to have them submitted to Washington. He expressed his hope that the promises made by NPS

³¹¹ Wirth to Tillotson, October 29, 1953, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

³¹² Tillotson to Marshall, November 10, 1953, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

would be either incorporated into the bill or otherwise formally recorded to avoid any “possible misunderstanding” in the future. Marshall also gave the go-ahead to begin the campaign to raise money to be paid to the UL&GC as damages. Privately, Tillotson expressed doubts about the level of funding the community would be able to raise, but expected it would be just possible.³¹³

The *Optic* trumpeted “Way Cleared to Make Ft. Union Monument” on November 24. It generously described the UL&GC as benefactors of the community who “recognize the great value that National Monument will contribute to the economy of this section and despite damage to property were willing to make the sacrifice.” An editorial the same day celebrated the “excellent news, not only for the northern part of New Mexico, but for the entire state.” The paper was glad that “misunderstanding and lack of concrete efforts” which had prevented earlier establishment of the monument had been overcome, and congratulated the UL&GC and Marshall for their “generous move.” James Arrott also came in for singular praise, as did Chapman Lodge No. 2.³¹⁴

With the final agreements made, Region III Assistant Director Hugh Miller wrote Dempsey on December 11 and provided a “Statement Concerning the Interest of the Masonic Lodge in the Proposed Fort Union National Monument.” Miller excerpted the May 1952 “Shrine of History” article from *New Mexico* magazine crediting “Uncle Billy” Stapp’s speech on the Fort at a lodge meeting for spurring local interest. Miller noted that “the Army brought Masonry to the Southwest” and that Fort Union was worthy of the

³¹³ Tillotson to Wirth, November 10, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 56; Marshall to Tillotson, November 18, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³¹⁴ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Way Cleared to Make Ft. Union Monument,” November 24, 1953.

title of “Cradle of Free Masonry in the Southwest.” Miller’s letter also detailed the initial improvement costs, which would be spread out over a decade. The NPS could “make a beginning with considerably less than that” but required the funds for the roadway immediately.³¹⁵

On December 18, Interior Secretary Orme Lewis submitted the Department’s report on HR 1005 to the Bureau of the Budget for approval. Lewis stated that the land would be acquired without cost to the United States, and that the annual budget would be \$17,000. Lewis confirmed the \$52,000 annual cost of physical improvements, which would take place over ten years.³¹⁶

The State of New Mexico, just as it had before the war, agreed to fund the cost of building the access road from Highway 85. On January 5, W.J. Keller of the United States Bureau of Public Roads informed Patraw that “there is now complete informal agreement that the State will build” the access road as part of its State Federal Aid System funding. The commitment of state/federal funds was formalized in March. Patraw suggested that NPS remove the \$300,000 cost of the road from its budget estimate as it “would make the estimated cost for the whole project look considerably better.”³¹⁷ He was right, and the budget passed muster without incident.

³¹⁵ Miller to Dempsey, December 11, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³¹⁶ Lewis to Dodge, December 18, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 56.

³¹⁷ Patraw to Director, January 6, 1954, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, box 2210; Miller to Tillotson, March 5, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

Having obtained approval from the Bureau of the Budget, the Department of Interior sent a favorable report on HR 1005 to the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee on January 15th. The report called attention to the rapid deterioration of the site caused by weather and cattle grazing, and recommended stabilization and preservation of the site as a monument. Interior's request stated Fort Union had been built "to counteract the depredations of the northern Apache and the Ute Indians and to protect the Santa Fe Trail." It explicitly compared Fort Union's role in the Santa Fe Trail to that played by Fort Laramie (established as a national monument in 1938). The Fort's ruins were estimated to contain much potential "educational and inspirational value," especially via their association with famous military leaders.³¹⁸

The *Optic* cheered the local preservation efforts, noting that "until recent months not many residents of the state were aware that the ruins of old Ft. Union still existed." The fort's significance in New Mexico and Southwestern history meant that it was worthy of preservation. "It is fitting in this atomic age," the paper wrote, "to also remember the past as well as planning for the booming future."³¹⁹ On February 2nd, Senator Clinton Anderson introduced SB 2873, which contained the same language as Dempsey's HR 1005 and was referred to the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.³²⁰ On February 16th, Interior sent its favorable report to Hugh Butler, chair of the

³¹⁸ Wormser to Miller, January 15, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³¹⁹ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, "Of Historic Importance," January 25, 1954.

³²⁰ U.S. Senate, A bill to authorize the establishment of the Fort Union National Monument, in the State of New Mexico, and for other purposes, SB 2873, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, February 2, 1954.

committee, in advance of the final hearings on the bill—the last remaining step in the establishment of the monument.³²¹

Hearings, Round Two

Hearings on the bill took place on February 19th before the House Interior and Insular Affairs Subcommittee on Public Lands. Dempsey began the proceedings by mentioning that the access road had been sited in accordance with the UL&GC's wishes and would be funded by the state of New Mexico. C.O. Erwin, State Highway Engineer of New Mexico, confirmed the state's role in constructing and maintaining the road. The opposition by the UL&GC which had been present at previous hearings was no longer an issue, as the company had agreed to sell its land for the "very small sum" of \$20,000 for one thousand acres.

Andy Marshall testified on behalf of the UL&GC, and concurred that "a meeting of the minds that will let us go ahead with the project" had taken place, but he did offer a correction to Dempsey's statement that the land would be purchased from the company. Instead, he stated, the land would represent a "joint contribution, in effect, by the people of the community and the ranch." The UL&GC would donate the land to the government, and the \$20,000 the company was to receive from the community would be "payment for the handicaps that we will run into in the operation of the ranch over a period of years by the fact of this road going through our pastures, but it is in no sense a payment for the land itself." Marshall said that the company would require "five times that amount" for a

³²¹ Interior to Butler, February 16, 1954, National Archives and Records Administration, Denver, Colorado (NARA-Denver), Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

straight sale. He also emphasized the need for language in the final bill that would allow the Secretary to accept the land with a reversionary clause included.

NPS Director Wirth also testified, but his offer to provide historical background on the Fort was quickly dismissed by the committee members. Wirth confirmed that NPS would only take possession of the ranch once the formal transfer had been completed, and that the total operating budget would be \$17,000 annually with \$225,000 needed for physical improvements. Wirth also emphasized, in response to committee inquiries, that the site would be “very accessible” as soon as the road was built. The committee inserted an amendment into the bill allowing for the reversionary clause and the scenic easements on each side of the road so as not to have, in the words of Representative Wesley D’Ewart, “billboards and hot dog stands and stuff like that along this highway.” Having been amended, the bill was unanimously reported favorably to the House.³²²

The legislation passed the House on March 15, 1954. The next day, it moved to the Senate and was referred to that body’s Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. The committee requested, and received, clarification from NPS on the meaning of the scenic easements, and the agency explained that they were necessary in order to “prevent objectionable uses such as the erection of billboards, hotdog stands, and other similar uses of the land that detract from the public benefit and enjoyment.”³²³

Dempsey was pleased by the progress of the bill, and stated that “its passage by Congress will do a lot of good for New Mexico, especially the area around Las Vegas” as

³²² U.S. Congress, House, Hearings, H.R. 1005, Before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, 83rd Congress, 1st Session, February 19, 1954.

³²³ Tolson to Butler, April 23, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 56.

a result of increased tourism.³²⁴ Anderson attempted several times to obtain a formal hearing, but the committee was preoccupied with other matters, and the bill was eventually referred out to the full Senate without a hearing on June 9th.³²⁵ The *Optic* reported “jubilant” backers of the proposal in Las Vegas.³²⁶ The bill passed six days later and went to the White House for President Dwight Eisenhower’s signature. On June 28, 1954, Public Law 429, Chapter 401 authorized the Secretary of the Interior to acquire “the site and remaining structures of Old Fort Union.”³²⁷

The *Optic* celebrated the occasion, and envisioned “a substantial increase in tourist travel to Las Vegas and northern New Mexico.” The paper quoted the head of a new local organization, Fort Union, Inc., which would manage and facilitate the campaign to raise funds for the land purchase. The new organization’s president, Ross Thompson, predicted “a major tourist attraction” with resulting benefits for Las Vegas. Fort Union, Inc. wasted no time in rolling out their statewide fundraising campaign.³²⁸

Fort Union, Inc.

Fort Union, Inc. had been formed more than six months earlier, a direct outgrowth of the Chamber of Commerce. Two Chamber committees—negotiating and finance—

³²⁴ Las Vegas *Daily Optic* “Dempsey Sure Ft Union Bill Will Be Enacted,” June 9, 1954.

³²⁵ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 25.

³²⁶ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Ft Union National Monument Measure Goes to President,” June 15, 1954.

³²⁷ Act to Authorize the Establishment of the Fort Union National Monument, in the State of New Mexico, and for Other Purposes, Statutes at Large vol. 68, pt. 1, 298 (1954).

³²⁸ Las Vegas *Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Monument to be of Big Value to Las Vegas,” June 29, 1954; *Albuquerque Journal*, “Ft. Union Backers Plan Statewide Financial Drive,” June 30, 1954.

completed their groundwork and researched the desirability of an organization that could solicit tax-deductible contributions from donors.³²⁹ The group was composed of local leaders and intended to handle the fund-raising needed to compensate the UL&GC for the land. Its well-connected members met with Representative Dempsey to discuss the State's construction of the access road and hoped to elevate their desire to the governor.³³⁰ The final piece of the FOUN puzzle—money to buy the land—would be guided into place by local and state elites, as had been the case for much of the process.

The twelve incorporators all hailed from Las Vegas (except James Arrott, whose ranch was located in Sapello), and consisted of business owners, chamber officials, and community leaders. Governor Edwin Mechem and Congressman Dempsey were also listed as incorporators. The organization's Articles of Incorporation explained the intention of the group. Fort Union, Inc.'s purpose was "to perpetuate for public educational purposes the memory of Fort Union...and to encourage research into the history of Fort Union and New Mexico; and to promote and encourage the publication and dissemination of literature relating to Fort Union." The group created a board of directors and officer positions. The men gathered in Las Vegas on December 22 and executed the Articles, and the corporation was recorded by the state Corporation Commission on January 6, 1954.³³¹

At the organization's first meeting on January 11, the members selected Ross Thompson, an executive with Public Service Company (the local electric utility) as

³²⁹ Arrott to Donnelly, April 12, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 190.

³³⁰ Miller to Tillotson, December 23, 1953, Fort Union National Monument File 681, Folder 189.

³³¹ Articles of Incorporation, Fort Union, Inc., December 22, 1953, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 195.

President, Arrott as Vice President, and Lewis Schiele of Standard Dairy as Secretary and Treasurer. The organization also selected W. A. Keleher as its Vice President and Historical Consultant and Alex Barnes as Vice President in Charge of Publicity. Honorary Vice Presidents included Governor Mechem, Congressman Dempsey, and former NPS director Horace M. Albright. At the same meeting, Fort Union, Inc. also organized a statewide pledge drive to raise the \$20,000 to pay the UL&GC. The group agreed to wait for formal passage of Dempsey's establishment bill before beginning solicitations, but did set out its overall strategy and decision to elect "a chairman who is enthusiastically interested in this project and who has the time and energy to devote to an active campaign."³³²

The committee organized to head up the donor campaign, headed by Arrott, outlined its plan to raise the \$20,000. "It was decided," recalled Arrott, "that this project should obtain its funds from the northern portion of New Mexico." The planned donations were allotted to various groups and communities. "Northern New Mexico Masonic Organizations" would contribute \$5,000, as would the people of Las Vegas. Another \$12,000 would come from other communities in the region, including Mora, Taos, Santa Fe, Watrous, Wagon Mound, Raton, Albuquerque, Clayton, and Cimarron.

The members also selected regional vice presidents located in a variety of northern New Mexico communities, including Wagon Mound, Park Springs Ranch, Solano, Taos, Raton, Mora, Cimarron, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque. The group also undertook to organize a campaign committee in Las Vegas which would be chaired by Highlands University President Thomas Donnelly "as it was primarily an educational

³³² Thompson to Mechem et al, January 11, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 195.

campaign and that it would fit in very nicely with the activities of Highland University.”³³³

Fort Union, Inc. members were active in the community in the spring of 1954 as the monument bill made its way to completion. Arrott visited the NPS offices in Santa Fe on March 2nd. “Very friendly and bubbling with enthusiasm,” he shared the non-profit’s plans for fundraising and obtained copies of the planned budget for the park. On March 4th, Baker Warden spoke to the “ladies of the Fort Union Pilot Club” about the plans for the monument. The ladies offered some of their “various relics and souvenirs” from the fort that could be part of a museum in the future.³³⁴

Making Arrangements on the Ground: Laying Things Out, Closing the First Fort

The preparations for the monument, in addition to the negotiations over the ownership of the land, also involved preliminary decisions on its spatial characteristics.

On September 21st, 1953, Region III Landscape Architect Jerome Miller and Historian Littleton visited Fort Union, accompanied by Marshall and the LVSMCC’s Schiele, to site the proposed new access road. The route they chose would require only four cattle guards rather than seven, and “the ruts of the historic Santa Fe Trail are plainly visible through most of the length of the new line; in fact the modern road can follow the historic alignment almost exactly.” Miller believed it would be possible and desirable to include some of the Santa Fe ruts within the easement associated with the road. Crucially,

³³³ Arrott to Donnelly, April 12, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 190.

³³⁴ Miller to Tillotson, March 5, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

Marshall suggested—and the NPS representatives agreed—that “public use of the west unit would not be encouraged.”³³⁵

On November 6th, Patraw sent a new drawing for Marshall’s review, showing the parcels to be included in the transfer, which totaled 836.8 acres. The drawing indicated four total parcels: the Third Fort ruins, the First Fort/Arsenal area, and two long strips of land surrounding the location of the proposed road to Highway 85. The connector road between the two main parcels had been eliminated because, as Patraw noted, “we do not wish to encourage visitor use of this area and the lack of improved access would be to our advantage.” This change, which effectively cut off the First Fort ruins from public view except on rare occasions, would have important effects on the ability of the NPS to interpret the entire resource in future years.³³⁶

While the bill languished in the Senate committee, Region III staff were busy conducting more field visits to the proposed monument and making plans for the physical improvements. On April 8th, 1954, Tillotson, Miller, Littleton, and several other staffers visited the ranch. They confirmed the location of the access road, and began discussing the location of the planned “public use building.” One initial idea was to renovate the hospital building, but its highly deteriorated state made this unrealistic. The group decided upon the “most practical” location for the visitor center: “somewhat beyond the hospital and just south of Barracks Row” in order to provide ease of access on foot for visitors to the main fort, hospital, and Second Fort earthworks. The southwest corner of

³³⁵ Miller to Tillotson, September 24, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³³⁶ Patraw to Marshall, November 6, 1953, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

Parcel #1 was identified as the ideal location for residential and utility structures. The questions of how best to protect or restore the ruins were “especially vexing ones because of the unstable nature of the remaining adobe walls of the buildings.”³³⁷

The ongoing activity around the park’s probable establishment encouraged Regional Landscape Architect Miller to write to Fort Laramie and request copies of their Master Plan, Theme of Development, Park Operations Prospectus, and the Interpretation sections of the Development Outline for that park. Miller recalled that “layout and planning problems are similar at the two areas” and that Fort Laramie’s example could help with the planning for Fort Union.³³⁸ Fort Laramie complied soon thereafter and sent the requested materials.³³⁹

A return field visit took place on April 23. Now joined by Archaeologist Reed and the US Bureau of Public Roads’ Keller, the men checked over the access road plans. They also discussed the location of the visitor center. The hospital was again floated as a possible solution, but discarded because any public use building would have to serve the purpose of collecting entrance fees, and so “should be located as close in to the ruins as would be feasible so that cars could be parked in this location and the visitors proceed to the ruins through such a building as a control point.”³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Cornell to Tillotson, April 19, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³³⁸ Miller to Region II Director, April 12, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³³⁹ Krueger to Tillotson, April 19, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁴⁰ Cornell to Miller, April 30, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 613, Folder 196.

In July, the Region III Division of Landscape Architecture produced its first rendering of the planned approach road, circular drive and parking area, and the location of the proposed visitor center. The drawing also included a “self-guiding foot trail,” which would include interpretive stops at 16 locations, including barracks, storehouses, kitchens, and guardhouses—all the basic logistical areas of the Third Fort Union as it had existed during its busiest period.

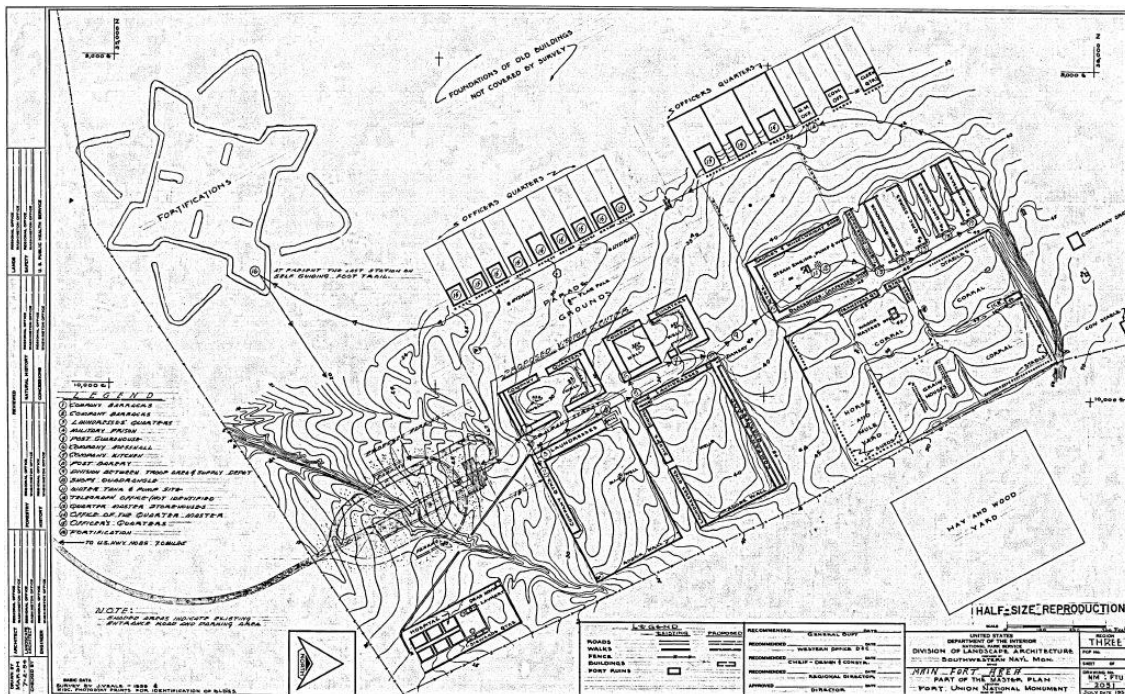


Figure 17: “Main Fort Area, Part of the General Development Plan, Fort Union National Monument,” July 1954, Drawing NM-FTU 2051
(Source: NPS Electronic Technical Information Center)

The plan was close to what would be the finished product—the proposed visitor center was located even closer to the ruins than the final building’s location, only a few dozen feet south of the nearest adobes, and north of the hospital ruins.³⁴¹ These initial NPS planning efforts would dominate the agency’s concept of Fort Union as a site of

³⁴¹ Drawing NM-FTU-2051, July 1954, NPS Electronic Information Technical Center.

historical interpretation for the rest of its tenure. The tight focus on the Third Fort ruins, and the daily lives of its inhabitants, would prove to be the chief concern for NPS historians, rangers, and interpreters for decades.

This plan also represented an important shift in the way visitors would experience Fort Union. Before NPS took over, visitors were essentially free to come to the site, trespass, and wander the ruins in whatever way they saw fit. Now, they would be oriented and controlled as NPS told them what was important, and how to experience it. No longer were visitors completely free to impose their own imaginings in their search for connection with the elusive past among the silent, crumbling buildings.

The postwar effort that finally established Fort Union National Monument brought with it several new ideas about what kind of place it would commemorate, as well as the reinforcement of existing concepts. The monument's physical attributes began to take firm shape with the confirmation of its basic size, and the decision that only limited rehabilitation work would take place on the crumbling adobe ruins rather than full-scale reconstruction. The access road would lead visitors to the Third Fort parcel, but the removal of the connector road would limit public entry to the First Fort ruins or any of the rest of the original military reservation. This constriction would influence the NPS's interpretive choices at the site in coming decades.

The way in which visitors would experience those parts of the site that the negotiation process and its inevitable compromises had left available to them was also solidifying as final preparations for its establishment took place. An authentic communion with the past was still the center point of a trip to Fort Union and the basic

rationale behind its establishment, an orientation that had been cemented by the informal commemorative processes led by Las Vegas Freemasons via their occupation of the site in the early 1950s.

Finally, the narrative history supplying the framework for an understanding of the historical Fort Union underwent several important stages of evolution in the postwar period. The fort's military past was yoked to powerful contemporary Cold War ideology, which had been projected backward in time so that the soldiers of the nineteenth century were remembered as protectors of freedom in the same way as American troops fighting the Soviet Union's proxies around the world. This association afforded the site an increased historical significance, and also provided an uncomplicated heroic narrative of the Army's campaigns against Native Americans, a story which would define histories of Fort Union for decades.

CHAPTER 3

“AN INVESTMENT IN THE PAST”: CREATING A MEMORIAL LANDSCAPE, 1954-1959

Once Fort Union National Monument had been formally established by Congress, there were several immediate tasks to be completed, and raising the \$20,000 needed to compensate the Union Land and Grazing Company was the first one at hand. The boosters and elites of Las Vegas, headed by the members of Fort Union, Inc., adopted several rhetorical strategies to encourage local people to support the effort. In public announcements and advertisements, they relied upon a message of investment in the community as well as an appeal to citizens' sense of patriotism and reverence for the past. This approach proved successful, raising significant funds from Las Vegas residents, but the State of New Mexico also played a central role in financing Fort Union National Monument (FOUN).

Meanwhile, NPS embarked on its first attempts at managing the sprawling collection of crumbling adobe buildings it had inherited, but the administrative constraints imposed upon the agency limited its options in addressing the ruins' advanced state of decay. As a result, the first, clumsy attempts at preservation actually proved damaging to the historic fabric and drove home how difficult a task its preservation would be.

The monument's first Superintendent, Kittridge Wing, in collaboration with NPS officials in Santa Fe and Washington, embarked on several interpretive projects: a walking trail, accompanying tourist guides, and a visitor center and museum. These features, and the subtle orienting features they contained, would be defining

characteristics of the visitor experience at FOUN for years to come. By the time of the monument's formal dedication in June 1959, the essential contours of a new memorial landscape had been set. The ceremony, which linked the heroic Cold War military present with the nineteenth-century Army's exploits, exemplified the initial wave of NPS place-making at Fort Union.

Selling FOUN: "As strategic now for tourism as it once was for defense"

In the months after the monument had been authorized, NPS officials remained skeptical about the ability of Las Vegas to quickly raise the necessary funds to compensate the UL&GC. They anticipated some delay in the process, and Washington advised Region III Director Tillotson to remain somewhat aloof from the campaign, as "there is often a great lag in enthusiasm and follow-through once the enabling legislation has been obtained."³⁴²

However, the citizens of Las Vegas wasted no time in claiming their hard-won prize. The *Optic* anxiously anticipated the new attraction, whose significance went beyond the local: FOUN would preserve "the starting point from which the so-called Yankee culture and civilization were developed in the Southwest." A statewide fundraising effort was appropriate, since "Fort Union doesn't belong to Mora or San Miguel. By its very name it is a place of national significance, and it is particularly New Mexico's monument, one that will benefit all the state."³⁴³

³⁴² Lee to Tillotson, August 17, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁴³ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "Fort Union Monument," July 6, 1954.

Fort Union, Inc., led the local campaign, which kicked off with a celebration in Las Vegas on September 15. The campaign leaders urged support for the monument due to its important history as “a symbol of New Mexico’s heritage from the area’s fight to throw off years of tyranny,” but also because it promised immediate financial benefit. Highlands University President Donnelly encouraged attendees to “consider their contributions an ‘investment’ rather than just a donation,” one that would contribute to the well-being of the local economy via increased tourism. He estimated 100,000 annual visitors, “meaning a great increase in tourist business here.”³⁴⁴

The campaign also made use of well-designed and well-written appeals to the residents of Las Vegas, which were delivered on custom letterhead stationery. The image at the top of the page gave a clue as to what kind of historical meaning the monument was expected to contain. Two Native horsemen, armed with lances, gazed down from an agave-strewn mesa at a wagon train in the valley below as another Native horseman brandishing a rifle rode toward the wagons. The legend “On the Old Santa Fe Trail” graced the top of each page.³⁴⁵

Boosters circulated a one-page flyer that implored, “Let’s Save Old Fort Union,” which was “possibly New Mexico’s most important and interesting historical site.” The new monument would “benefit everyone who visits it, to say nothing of the additional tourist business.” The UL&GC payment was “a small sum indeed” compared to such benefits, as the state’s “only primarily historical National Monument” could expect

³⁴⁴ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Workers Start Campaign To Raise Funds For Old Fort Union Monument,” September 15, 1954.

³⁴⁵ Thompson to Miller, August 10, 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41. Within a few months, the organization had begun utilizing new, more professional letterhead that included an image of the fort ruins.

100,000 visitors per year. “Don’t consider your contribution merely a gift,” the organizers advised. “Consider it more as an investment—an investment in the past for the future of everyone in Las Vegas.”³⁴⁶ In addition to targeting businesses and ordinary citizens, the campaign reached into the youngest demographics. Schoolchildren donated pennies, and received small cards as tokens of appreciation which read, “I helped save Old Fort Union.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Fort Union, Inc., “Let’s Save Old Fort Union,” September 15, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 164.

³⁴⁷ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 26.

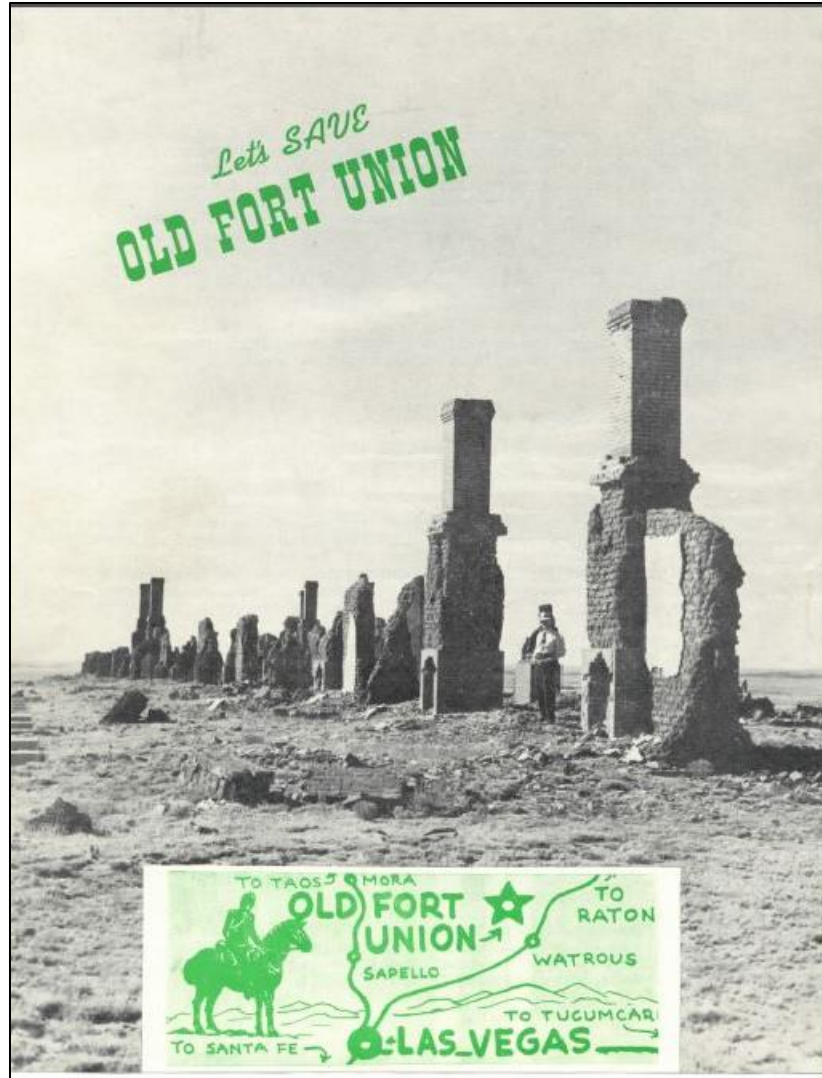


Figure 18: “Let's Save Old Fort Union,” Fort Union, Inc., September 1954
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Archives, File 597, Folder 164)

This language of investment went beyond the metaphorical. Fort Union, Inc. commissioned Lynn Perrigo of the Highlands University History Department to develop a “prospectus” of information for business owners as prospective donors. Perrigo’s history of the Fort emphasized its role in “defense against the wild Indians of the Plains” and the Civil War, its impressive size in the post-bellum period, and the many notable

military personnel who had served or visited there. “Thus History Attests to the Importance of Fort Union,” the brochure intoned.

The prospectus called attention to the fact that “the location is as strategic now for tourism as it once was for defense,” with many other attractions in easy driving distance. The NPS’s plans for development and their impact in the form of increased visitation and media coverage meant that “Fort Union will attract a large initial investment and will receive intensive publicity.” As “the first *historical* monument in the state,” FOUN could be expected to draw similar numbers as historic forts in the eastern U.S., which averaged 134,000 visits in 1953. Fort Laramie, which Perrigo thought “hardly as significant and picturesque,” drew a paltry 25,000 visitors that year, which Fort Union would surely surpass.

Perrigo’s closing sales pitch deftly wove together local pride, national patriotism, and self-interest:

“Therefore, we solicit your contribution toward the \$20,000 needed for payment of damages to the ranch owners who are donating the extensive site and right-of-way. In effect, we are soliciting your investment—in the preservation of a great historic site for future generations; in the encouragement of the historical studies which will follow; in the resultant stimulation of patriotism for the millions who will visit this monument, and in the profitable expansion of business—YOUR business. Donations deductible from income tax.”³⁴⁸

Fort Union, Inc. also spearheaded an extensive letter-writing campaign to businesses across the state and region, including Standard Oil and other companies in Texas. The letters, accompanied by a copy of the prospectus, appealed to corporate

³⁴⁸ Fort Union, Inc., “A Prospectus, describing the importance of the historic site, its strategic location, its approval as a National Monument, plans for its development, and the commercial value of the project,” October 1954, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

donors' sense of duty, nothing that because their company "with your fine representation in New Mexico and particularly in this area, stands to directly benefit from the anticipated influx of tourists because of this attraction, we feel confident that you will wish to join in making a substantial contribution to this project."³⁴⁹ Thompson even sent solicitation letters to members of the New Mexico Congressional delegation. Although both campaigns proved fruitless, they showed that Fort Union, Inc. was willing to cast its net wide in the search for donations and support.³⁵⁰

Initial results were promising. By its first annual meeting in January 1955, Fort Union, Inc. had raised a total of \$9,645 from a variety of private local contributors, mostly members of the Chamber of Commerce and Masonic organizations across northern New Mexico.³⁵¹ However, the most promising news was that the State of New Mexico's Highway Department had authorized the Mora County Board of Commissioners to pledge \$11,000 of the state's federal highway funding—over half the total payment the UL&GC required. The monies would be used to pay for a right-of-way for the access road in the event private donations proved insufficient. These funds were in addition to the \$300,000 the state had donated to build the road itself.³⁵² Wirth made special note of these efforts in his 1955 Annual Report: "Sponsors made good progress

³⁴⁹ Thompson to Paret, December 17, 1954, and Turner to Nichols, December 22, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 190.

³⁵⁰ Thompson to Anderson, April 6, 1955, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 190.

³⁵¹ Minutes, First Annual Meeting of Fort Union, Inc., January 7, 1955, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 184.

³⁵² Treasurer's Report, Fort Union, Inc., September 30, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

toward provision of lands and road rights-of-way for the proposed Fort Union National Monument in New Mexico, which was authorized by Congress in 1954.”³⁵³

In addition to direct appeals for donations, Fort Union, Inc., members made arguments for the site’s historical importance and worthiness of preservation. In *New Mexico Sun Trails* magazine, James Arrott published an article entitled “Fort Union: Queen of the Western Forts.” Arrott’s history of the “gallant, historic” ruins relied on romantic imagery of a disappeared West and emphasized the heroic nature of settlers and soldiers. Fort Union, Arrott wrote, was “no ordinary western fort.” As the “focal point of United States Army activities in the Southwest,” it provided supplies and weapons to numerous other forts in the region. The post-war period “brought new fame and glory to Fort Union” as the Army conducted campaigns against local tribes in order to make the southwest “safe for the settler, who with his family was pushing back the old frontier.”

Arrott also discussed the life of the land after the Army had departed. “Here again,” he wrote, “the modern romance of old Fort Union continues.” General Benjamin Butler’s acquisition of the land and its transformation into a high-quality ranching operation meant that “where the soldiers of the old Army and Indians once fought is now the grazing land of fine herds of sleek Hereford cattle.” The lands had been offered, “a gift from the owners,” to the NPS. The resulting park would be a truly magnificent achievement:

“The dream of many public-spirited citizens is about to be realized. Future generations of America will receive a heritage of which they can be proud. The most important point on the Santa Fe Trail will be preserved for all time as a historical shrine. The National Park Service, as custodians, will

³⁵³ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1955, 357.

do all possible to give future Americans a true picture of our Indian fighting army, the stage coach drivers, the Santa Fe freighters and traders, and finally the American settler in his rugged frontier days.”³⁵⁴

By mid-1955, less than a year into the campaign, the entire “damages” fund had been raised. A total of \$10,000 came from donations—half from Las Vegans, half from other New Mexicans—and the State of New Mexico provided another \$11,000 for the right-of-way (including \$1,000 for another landowner whose parcel it would cross). On August 24, Thompson delivered two checks—one from local residents and one from statewide donors—totaling \$10,000.³⁵⁵ Fort Union, Inc.’s strategy of combining patriotic reverence for the frontier army with the language of investment and self-interest proved effective. The vision of a historical shrine that would also bring new riches and traffic captured the imagination of residents of northern New Mexico, who ensured the monument’s last remaining roadblock was quickly cleared away.

Transferring the Land

Despite this remarkable achievement, the UL&GC was less than enthusiastic. In April 1955, Andy Marshall visited Region III headquarters, where the fact that the State had stepped in to purchase the right-of-way was revealed to him for the first time. Perhaps still smarting from the heavy-handed tactics that had forced him back to the negotiation table, Marshall “immediately became quite upset” and “felt that all past efforts toward establishing the monument were out the window and that we would have

³⁵⁴ James Arrott, “Fort Union: Guardian of the Santa Fe Trail,” *New Mexico Sun Trails*, June 1955.

³⁵⁵ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 26.

to start all over again.” Taken aback by his fury, the NPS staffers explained that the donations had been insufficient to satisfy the \$20,000 price tag and that, in any event, in order for the State to construct the access road it would need ownership of the right of way. The entire deal appeared to be on tenuous ground if the UL&GC would not agree to deed the right of way to the state.

By way of compromise, Marshall suggested that the right of way be deeded directly to the Federal government and that the NPS could then grant it to the state. Region III’s new director, Hugh Miller (Tillotson had died a few months earlier) agreed to this idea and Marshall’s attorney began to draft the deed.³⁵⁶

Meanwhile, planning for the access road continued, chiefly between NPS and the US Bureau of Public Roads (USBPR). Herbert Keller of the USBPR met with Miller in late March and the two discussed the right-of-way location, which would be sited so that it encompassed some of the Santa Fe Trail ruts alongside its route. The men also agreed that while Mora County would acquire the road’s 150-foot right of way, NPS would also obtain a 300-foot scenic easement on either side of the road.³⁵⁷

NPS continued negotiating the final transfer details with the UL&GC. The company revived its concerns about fire danger, cattle circulation, and the erection of unsightly billboards. Somewhat paradoxically, the company also worried about the amount of restriction the scenic easement would place on the ranch operations. By early June, however, these problems had been satisfactorily addressed, and Miller forwarded a

³⁵⁶ Treasurer’s Report, Fort Union, Inc., September 30, 1954, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191; Miller to Miller, April 14, 1955, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁵⁷ Miller to Keller, March 22, 1955, Fort Union National Monument File 613, Folder 196.

draft deed for review by Marshall and the UL&GC board, which soon gave its approval.³⁵⁸

On June 16th, the UL&GC executed a deed turning over Parcels 1 and 2, which totaled 720.6 acres, to the United States. The deed reserved to the UL&GC the mineral rights in the land conveyed, with a provision that the surface of the lands not be disturbed without consent of the Secretary of Interior, and the reversion clause long sought by the company was included. Mora County took possession of the right-of-way for the access road in accordance with state law, which required counties to acquire rights of way as a prerequisite for State Highway construction. This mollified the UL&GC's resistance to the State of New Mexico taking any of the land rights directly.³⁵⁹

Interestingly, the land transfer appeared twice in the NPS Director's annual report for 1955-56, described once as a "donation" and once as having been "purchased by private subscription and donated to the Federal Government."³⁶⁰ While this may have simply reflected a typographical inconsistency, it showed the dual nature of the land transfer, which was in effect both a donation and a purchase.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 26.

³⁵⁹ Indenture Deed, June 16, 1955, Mora County Clerk (via email). In the fall, when work began on the road itself, there was some confusion when it was discovered that the State did not possess the right of way, which was a requirement for 100% federal funding. However, the scenic easement bracketing the road, which had been granted to NPS, served as a substitute for a right-of-way, and construction was soon underway. See Miller to Tillotson, November 22, 1955 and Tillotson to Harthorn, December 12, 1955, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁶⁰ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1956, 324.

³⁶¹ Wirth submitted a draft order establishing the monument for the Secretary's review on February 16, and McKay signed the order on March 29. Wirth to McKay, February 16, 1956, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41. The notice was published in the Federal Register on April 4. Notably, while the proclamation listed the two parcels of

The final land transfer hurdles cleared, Miller wrote to Lewis Schiele to congratulate Fort Union, Inc. on its success in helping realize what he felt would be “one of the largest tourist attractions in northern New Mexico.”³⁶² While the members of Fort Union Inc. were pleased with their accomplishments thus far, they intended to “continue to act in a research and publicity capacity...in the development of this Monument into the finest attraction in the State.” In the short term, the organization turned its attention to the planning and promotion of the opening ceremonies, scheduled for the following summer.³⁶³

Opening FOUN

Residents continued to do their part to support the fledgling unit. As the opening ceremonies approached, Las Vegans reminded one another that establishing and opening the monument was only part of the job—they would need to continually build support for their new attraction by encouraging visitors to see it. *Optic* columnist Walter T. Vivian cautioned that “it is up to Las Vegans and other northeastern New Mexicans to do a lot of boosting for the old ruins so that travelers will know about the fort and make plans to stop over for a look see.”³⁶⁴ The *Optic*’s editorial board echoed these sentiments a few

land totaling 720.6 acres, it did not include the paragraphs which specified the mineral and reversionary clauses. United States Department of the Interior, “Order Establishing Fort Union National Monument,” April 4, 1956, Federal Register, vol. 21 (1956), No. 66, p. 2208.

³⁶² Miller to Schiele, November 9, 1955, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁶³ Schiele to Miller, November 14, 1955, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

³⁶⁴ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “It is Taking a Bit of Doing to Get Fort Union Open,” May 11, 1956.

days later, noting that “National Monuments, statistics reveal, have a tremendous drawing power and Fort Union is expected to get its share of visitors.” It was, however, “up to residents of northern New Mexico in general and Las Vegas in particular, to boost the monument.”³⁶⁵

Residents took up the challenge. In the June 1956 edition of *New Mexico* magazine, Las Vegas writer C. Vivian Shearer portrayed the historic fort as an engine of commerce, which “protected and promoted the development of the land and the well-being of the people within its range of influence.” After a glamorous history, the ruined chimneys stood “silently brooding over mounds of earth which used to be the adobe walls around the rooms they once warmed.” The new monument would “continue to breathe loyalty and inspire patriotic allegiance to the flag waving from its mast” among the 100,000 to 150,000 visitors expected each year.³⁶⁶

Several Las Vegas businesses also sponsored an advertisement in the same issue, cheering the return of Fort Union following “65 years of mellowing neglect.” The fort’s historic role in keeping “the five tribes of marauding Indians on the defensive” and the “ruins, ruts and relics” were surefire tourist enticements. The open, natural atmosphere, which had remained unchanged since “the days of the buffalo, the Indians and the horse cavalry,” had been revived by a new attraction, so that “local history lives again in its historic remains.”³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union,” May 14, 1956.

³⁶⁶ C. Vivian Shearer, “New Mexico’s Newest National Monument,” *New Mexico Magazine*, June 1956.

³⁶⁷ Business Firms of Las Vegas, “Fort Union: Bastion of the Old Santa Fe Trail,” *New Mexico Magazine*, June 1956.

The opening ceremonies for the new monument and the access road, State Highway Route 477, took place on June 8, 1956, on the new road about a mile south of the Fort. Fort Union, Inc.'s Ross Thompson presided as Master of Ceremonies. High school marching bands provided musical accompaniment for the more than 600 local residents and visitors who turned out to await the arrival of Democratic Governor John Simms and his Republican challenger in that fall's election, former Governor Edwin Mechem (one of the original incorporators of Fort Union, Inc.). Both politicians made stump speeches and praised the local collaborative efforts to build the monument. Andy Marshall, unable to attend, sent a letter describing his gradual realization that "having the fort as a national monument was really important to the people of San Miguel and Mora counties." Regional Director Miller predicted the new "highway to history" would repay the state for its cost "many times" in the form of tourist dollars.

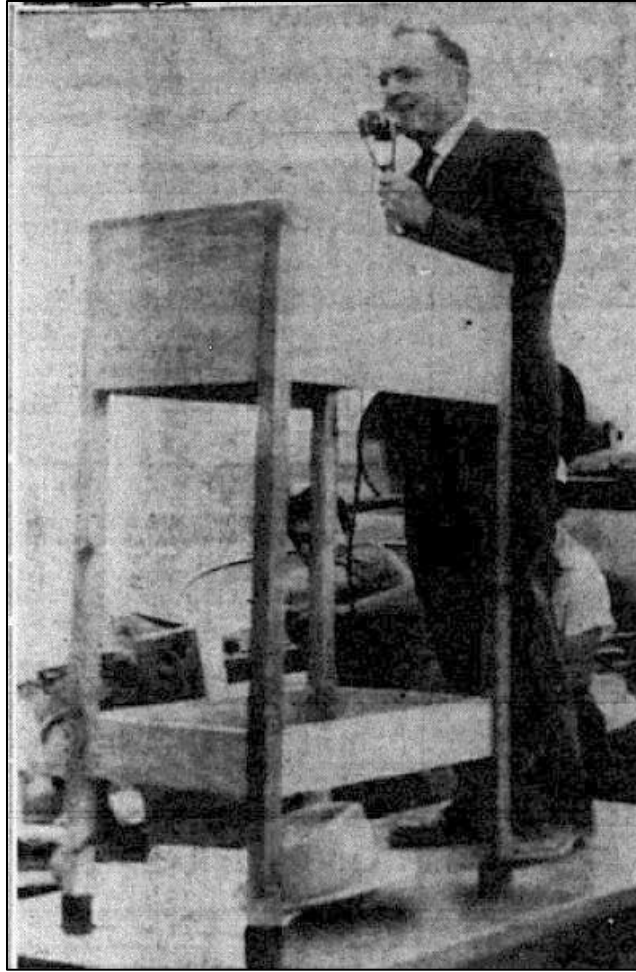


Figure 19: NPS Region III Director Hugh Miller at FOUN Opening Ceremony, June 1956
(Source: Las Vegas *Optic*, June 8, 1956)

Once the speeches were over, Governor Simms cut the ribbon with an “old Fort Union sabre,” the first artifact entered in the museum collection, officially opening the highway. The attendees then drove into the parking area to visit the ruins, only to be deterred by a large thunderstorm. Just a few hardy visitors actually made the trip through the fort. Among the spectators was Billy Stapp, a prominent Las Vegas Freemason and

one of the first local residents to renew the efforts toward the fort's preservation following World War II.³⁶⁸

The *Optic* covered the ceremony extensively. Several articles detailed the fort's history, including features on Colonel John Chivington's heroism during the Civil War, the Santa Fe Trade, a full list of all thirty-five post commanders, the impact of the sutler's store on the local economy, the danger of Indian conflicts, and Lydia Spencer Lane's "women's view" of life at the fort. Numerous advertisements from local businesses celebrated the opening and urged residents to "Boost—Advertise—Fort Union." Some took a creative approach to tie the site's history to modern business. The Owen Shillinglaw Fuel Company juxtaposed a picture of a crumbling Fort Union fireplace with one of its new Iron Fireman SelecTemp furnaces.³⁶⁹

Boosting continued in the monument's first year open. Fort Union, Inc., threw itself into its new role as a publicity and marketing organization, distributing promotional literature, guiding tours, and publishing a series of commemorative postcards. One of their first brochures encouraged visitors to visit the "historic triangle" formed by Las Vegas, Taos, and Raton, "country of the mountain man, the Spaniard and the soldier." The modern motorist visiting the area would discover that "good roads have replaced the ruts, dust and mud of the old trails, and pleasant modern cities offer accommodation to the traveler."³⁷⁰ On May 28, 1957, Fort Union, Inc. became the official designated

³⁶⁸ Wing to Wirth, June 8, 1956, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75; *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "Fort Union Officially Opened," June 8, 1956.

³⁶⁹ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "Fort Union Officially Opened," June 8, 1956.

³⁷⁰ Fort Union, Inc., "Visit Fort Union National Monument in the Historic Triangle" (brochure), 1957, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 181.

cooperating association of the monument, and began printing publications, maps, and postcards for sale in the visitor center.³⁷¹

The *Optic* published an editorial reviewing the area's resources so that residents could more effectively "make the most of what we have." Among the climate, dude ranching industry, State Hospital, and Highlands University, Fort Union National Monument stood out for its "unlimited" potential to drive tourist traffic. The paper urged Las Vegas to "sell ourselves on the value of the monument and then sell the rest of the country."³⁷²

Las Vegas businesses once again took up the challenge, and in the May 1957 edition of *New Mexico* magazine, published two advertisements for the fort "where law and order in the West began." This "military headquarters for all points west" was "now under official supervision," and visitors could learn about its role in protection of the Santa Fe Trail.³⁷³ *New Mexico Masons* also featured the fort in the March-April 1957 edition of the *New Mexico Scottish Rite Bulletin*, noting the central role of Masons in the fort's preservation, which was expected to pay off in the form of "better than 25,000 visitors a year."³⁷⁴ Local businesses produced tourist brochures and advertisements in various venues and publications.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ Annual Report of Interpretive Services, January 9, 1957, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1958, Box 7.

³⁷² *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "With What we Have," April 4, 1957.

³⁷³ *New Mexico Magazine*, May 1957.

³⁷⁴ L.A. Gillett, "Old Fort Union," *Scottish Rite Bulletin*, May 1, 1957.

³⁷⁵ Hastings to Richardson, May 27, 1958, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1958, Box 13.

In June 1957, the *Optic* celebrated the one-year anniversary of the monument, which the editors assessed as “a successful one.” The ruins had been cleaned up and “the task of restoring some of the buildings is progressing nicely.” The paper praised those tourists who were “travelling leisurely and not out vacationing to see how many miles can be placed on an automobile during two weeks.” Las Vegas, the editors wrote, should continue to “boost travel” to the monument, and visit it themselves.³⁷⁶

Steen's (Rejected) Alternative Vision

As logistical preparations and promotional efforts moved forward, NPS began to turn its attention to just what sort of monument it would offer to the public. The agency's first attempt to articulate FOUN's fundamental interpretive framework and philosophy came in the fall of 1955, when Region III Archaeologist Charlie Steen produced two reports on the problems in preserving and interpreting Fort Union. Steen expressed the “sense of futility” he had experienced on a recent site visit due to the rapid disintegration of the ruins and generally poor condition of the site. He noted only eight chimneys remained, all of which were unlikely to survive the winter. “I do not know,” he wrote, “what we can do to preserve the remaining walls of the site nor how to evaluate the various structures.” Steen seemed thoroughly overwhelmed at the huge task before the agency to return the site to visit-able quality. This sense of emergency led him to recommend as quick a renovation as possible. “If we accept the responsibility of administration of Fort Union as a national monument, then we must feel obligated to attempt to preserve the ruins as completely as possible and as quickly as possible,” he

³⁷⁶ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, June 10, 1957.

wrote. “If measures to preserve them are not taken immediately, we shall be placed in the unpleasant position of undertaking the preservation of the fort then standing by to watch it wash away. This is not idle talk.”

The first task, Steen wrote, was “an intensive clean-up” focused on the hospital, company area, and post, to remove fallen wall and other debris from inside the building footprints. Steen made no mention of analysis of the material removed, or attempts to retrieve artifacts from the gathered debris. He did, however, propose a “specimen storage room” in the plans for the administrative and museum building for handling metal and bulky objects.

The initial clean-up would be followed by a two-year program of “excavations and stabilization.” Two archaeologists would supervise the work of fifteen or so laborers and dump truck drivers to clear the rubble from buildings and make their outlines apparent, stabilizing walls with steel rods and plates and using “a soil-cement mix” to shore up walls and fill cracks. The overarching goal was to stabilize those walls which could be kept from eroding further, at least for a few years’ time. “Perhaps by then,” Steen hoped, “someone a little smarter than I will know what to do to keep an adobe wall from eroding.”

Contrary to his usual stance against reconstruction of historic buildings, in this case the archaeologist felt it was appropriate because “we are about to inherit a mess, and it is a mess which will rapidly become worse.” According to Steen, the walls themselves were less important than what they represented: “Fort Union is of interest because it represents an era and not because of any single important event which might tend to create an aura of sacredness around its crumbling adobe bricks. So, let us not argue too

long about tearing down a wall, and re-building, on the very firm foundations which exist there, a replica, or facsimile, of the structure which once stood at the spot.”

Steen also made preliminary recommendations for an interpretive philosophy that would set the tone for the new park. He believed that the “two stories which should be told at Fort Union National Monument concern the Army (organization, activities, supply) and the Santa Fe Trail (international trade, organization of caravans, conduct of trade, troubles with Indians, etc.).” In the museum itself, the exhibits would tell “the story of the Santa Fe Trail and...the military operations in general.” His exhibit outline told the fort’s story in five chapters: three on the Santa Fe Trade, one on the Civil War, and one on the post-bellum period. Steen’s plan emphasized Fort Union’s role in larger contexts, but made little mention of its role in Indian fighting, especially outside the context of the Santa Fe Trail.

To portray these stories, Steen proposed to employ laborers (clad in replica 1870s Army uniforms) to rebuild several structures for use as park infrastructure. Their work would be “a part of the Fort Union exhibit” to call attention to the construction method and give visitors the chance to see the entire sweep of the buildings’ lives, from construction, to curing, to completion, to ruins. Each new building would house exhibits showing artifacts and displays about its use. “In such a manner,” Steen suggested, “we could slowly install exhibits to show all phases of military life as it was at Fort Union.” He requested aerial documentation of the recent reconstruction work at Bent’s Old Fort as an example.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ Charlie Steen, “Development Outline For An Interpretive Program At Fort Union,” October 1955, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center; Steen to Dick, November 29, 1955, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41.

In the end, Steen's ideas were not fully adopted. Per his recommendation, the basic orientation of the site's historical narrative centered, for the time being, on the dual story of the nineteenth-century Army and its connection with the Santa Fe Trade. However, the arrival of a full-time superintendent and the bureaucratic demands of Mission 66 meant that the way the agency attempted to convey that story—the method by which it would make FOUN a place—turned out to be significantly different from Steen's vision of a transparently reconstructed site that pulled back the curtain on the process of its creation.

Mission 66 Planning

On December 6, 1955, FOUN's first superintendent, Kittridge Wing (accompanied by his wife, Anna), arrived on site. Wing, formerly of Bandelier National Monument, had served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army during World War II. The Wings, who Regional Director Miller described as “thoroughly sincere, straightforward, and dependable,” worked closely with NPS Region III and Washington, DC staff on the initial development of the monument.³⁷⁸ The work the Wings undertook in FOUN's early years reflected the values and principles of Mission 66, a ten-year program to remake the run-down and underfunded park system as a modern institution capable of handling the huge boom in visitation that followed World War II.

Region III's initial Mission 66 report on Fort Union indicated that previous planning for the park was “inadequate for immediate needs and certainly [does] not

³⁷⁸ Miller to Marshall, December 19, 1955, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 41; Zhu, *Administrative History*, 27.

reflect or include any Mission 66 thinking or approach.” Camping, lodging, and concessions were thought to be less important than “protection and interpretation,” which were top priority.³⁷⁹ NPS Historian Roy Appleman, a member of Wirth’s Mission 66 committee, concurred and summarized the tasks for the new monument in his January 1956 overview of the region: “There is a very big research and planning job to be done preliminary to drawing up a prospectus for the area... what should be undertaken and what not will be the big problem here.”³⁸⁰

Wing’s recommendations on the “preliminary development needs” of the new unit included an entrance sign; a small “reception center” for displays and literature; toilets so as to avoid “some distressing interludes this summer”; a flagpole; about forty interpretive “label-signs” leading visitors on a “reasonable circuit of the ruins (app. 4000 ft.)”; an interpretive brochure; safety fencing and signage around fragile or dangerous walls and chimneys; and two house-trailers for summer quarters. Wing proposed to prepare all the interpretive signage and material himself, with assistance from his wife.³⁸¹

He also advocated that stabilization and restoration begin immediately, “with the object of re-creating a semblance of the original scene for the benefit of visitors” via “a program of interpretation using visitor tours, museum exhibits, and descriptive leaflets.”

³⁷⁹ Miller to Director, September 15, 1955, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 40, Box 6.

³⁸⁰ Roy Appleman, “Review of Mission 66 prospectuses,” January 11, 1956, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 40, Box 6. Emphasis in original. Appleman served for 35 years with NPS, and was a key player in both the Historic Sites Survey and Mission 66. See William Sontag, *The National Park Service: The First 75 Years* (Philadelphia, Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1990).

³⁸¹ Wing to Miller, January 24, 1956, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1.

Wing anticipated “twenty or thirty thousand” visitors in the first year, rising to 100,000 by 1966, each of whom would need two hours or so “to grasp the dual story of the frontier Army post and the way-station on the Santa Fe Trail.” The site’s large size, broad history, and consequent public interest necessitated a major investment by the NPS in the form of walking trails, utility infrastructure upgrades, a visitor center, employee quarters, and ruins stabilization.³⁸² The unit’s personnel needs included a Superintendent, Historian, Clerk, three seasonal Ranger-Historians, and a maintenance worker.³⁸³

Wing echoed Steen’s recommendation of reconstructing one of the barracks buildings, which would include administrative offices and storage, a lobby, museum, and a room restored to its original historic conditions. Visitors would pass through this building before embarking on their tour of the ruins. Wing preferred this “ambitious notion” for several reasons—its location would be “warm” and “inviting” to visitors, was centrally located, and would “whet the curiosity” of visitors who would pass several ruins before reaching it. The barracks, to Wing, represented the “heart of the military operation” and so would connect visitors with an authentic experience of the past they sought.

³⁸² The monument sat on land which had never been connected to any electrical or water infrastructure. Wolf Creek, which flowed only intermittently, was the only nearby source of surface water. In July 1956, USGS conducted a groundwater survey and determined that a well was the most practical solution. The well was drilled in August 1957. In July, the Rural Electrification Administration began work on the power line that would connect the Monument to the electrical grid. At the end of September, the W. H. Elliot Company of Albuquerque began work on the park staff housing in the southwest corner of the monument. The buildings were completed at the end of March 1958. In the spring of 1958, the water and sewer systems were completed and operational, and by February 1959, telephone services were in place. Mawson, “Fort Union National Monument,” 42; Douglas Croy, “Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico: The First Twenty-Five Years” (MA Thesis, New Mexico Highlands University, 1984), 33-34.

³⁸³ Wing to Garrison, February 12, 1956, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 40, Box 6.

The Washington, DC office approved Wing's initial plans, but cautioned him and the rest of Region III to proceed carefully with ruins stabilization because "a Congressional committee report on the area specifies that no reconstruction will be done." This cast a long shadow over the idea of reconstructing one or more of the original buildings for use as a visitor center, and ensured that instead, a new structure would be built.³⁸⁴

Wing modified his plans in response, and offered ideas for a new building, which he believed should be centered at the south end of the parade ground, "showing off the symmetry and spaciousness of the opposing lines of the old buildings, while capturing the fine view of the mountains." He preferred this location because it would fit more seamlessly with the aesthetic and organizational scheme of the military post it was dedicated to commemorating.³⁸⁵

The various recommendations solidified in the final Mission 66 prospectus, approved in May of 1957, which constituted the first comprehensive statement of FOUN's purpose, goals, structure, and function. At its heart, the monument was a physical reminder of "a vital period in American history: the time of frontier advance and the conquest of the West," especially the Indian Wars and the Santa Fe Trail. Its location in a "broad lonely valley" gave "the imaginative visitor" the opportunity to experience "the drama of frontier history."

³⁸⁴ Scoyen to Miller, February 13, 1956, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 40, Box 6.

³⁸⁵ Kittridge Wing, "Comments on the Public-Use and Interpretive Center, Ft. Union," January 31, 1956 and Wing to Miller, February 28, 1956, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1.

The site's outstanding resources to tell this story were the ruins, the Santa Fe Trail ruts, and the "atmosphere, made up of setting, history, the forces of nature, and the widespread evidence of man's prolonged and busy life here." The report emphasized the "highly perishable" nature of all three resources, which required "control of visitor traffic and behavior" for their preservation. Wing recommended steps be taken to protect the fort from "its enemies time and weather," as well as visitor impacts. Controls on the anticipated 100,000 visitors by 1966 were centered on ensuring safety and preventing souvenir hunting. The site's design would channel tourists to the Visitor Center for fee collection and prevent vehicles from driving into the ruins.

Wing described a typical visitor's itinerary: a stop at the reception desk, a tour of the ruins ("the visitor's first thought is to explore"), a viewing of some preservation efforts to help visualize the fort's former appearance, and an examination of interpretive displays and exhibits to "fill out his knowledge of the background of history," including "the wherefores of the Army operation." The interpretation would center on the experience of walking the ruins, where displays (or numbered posts corresponding to self-guiding pamphlets) would be located, with special attention to the "most impressive" and "tallest" remaining structures.

The museum exhibits would need "considerable study" before being installed, and would require significant display space in the visitor center. Despite the dim prospects, Wing still recommended at least one reconstructed building to show the nature of the territorial architecture. He also identified a more rigorous knowledge base of Fort Union's history as a priority, since "almost no research has been done." The new staff would need cooperation from a historical society and other NPS staff in order to gather a

comprehensive understanding of the fort’s history and produce a “well-rounded” interpretation.³⁸⁶ The outcome, Wing wrote, would be that “visitors will gain knowledge of Army life on the frontier, and will take away an appreciation of the colorful background of our modern Southwest.”³⁸⁷

Placing the Visitor Center

One last critical decision in the initial physical place-making at FOUN remained: deciding where to put the new buildings, especially the visitor center. In June 1956, a group of senior managers from the Region III office visited the site for a “field investigation of master plan problems,” principally the location of the new visitor center—there was “considerable difference of opinion” regarding its ideal placement. At this meeting, the NPS men also decided that for reasons of both policy and practicality, the idea of reconstructing one of the buildings for this purpose should be finally, fully abandoned. Regional Landscape Architect Jerome Miller advocated strongly against Wing’s proposed location of the visitor center at the immediate south end of the parade ground, which he thought would be a jarring interruption of the “feeling of loneliness and impending danger which may have been felt in those earlier days.”³⁸⁸

Regional Director Miller, however, advocated for Wing’s position in a letter to the NPS’s Western Office of Design and Construction (WODC), which was responsible

³⁸⁶ Kittridge Wing, “Mission 66 Prospectus, Fort Union National Monument,” April 13, 1956, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 41, Box 7.

³⁸⁷ Kittridge Wing, “Mission 66 Prospectus brief,” November 25, 1957, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1.

³⁸⁸ Miller to Canfield, June 6, 1956, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1.

for the master plan for the new monument. Miller contended that placing the visitor center away from the parade ground would confront the visitor with “only a confusion of rather unimpressive ruins.” By instead putting the building at the south end of the parade ground, along its axis, it would remain outside the original structures but also allow “better, more convenient, and more economical means of visitor control.” Furthermore, by entering the site through the parade ground, visitors would immediately “perceive the orderly plan of the fort, and its magnificent extent,” arousing their native curiosity and enthusiasm.³⁸⁹

On July 2nd, historian Appleman made his first visit to Fort Union. He praised the “wholly natural setting,” which permitted one to imagine the country as it had appeared in the 1820s or 1850s—“an authentic look at the Old West.” The visitor center, Appleman felt, should be built immediately west of the hospital, where NPS had already located several temporary trailers and an informal parking area, so as not to “intrude a modern tone into the main vistas of the majestic ruins” from the parade ground. He also pointed out that building in the parade ground location would mean destroying numerous Santa Fe Trail ruts, which he considered “as valuable historically as the adobe ruins themselves.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁹ Miller to WODC Chief, June 6, 1956, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1. NPS’s design and construction offices had been consolidated in 1954 into the Eastern Office of Design and Construction (EODC) in Philadelphia and the Western Office (WODC) in San Francisco. These offices oversaw development of master plans and construction projects for parks, which increased greatly during the boom period of Mission 66. Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2000), Chapter 6.

³⁹⁰ Appleman to Chief Historian, July 24, 1956, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry 40, Box 6.

On July 9, Wing sent his impressions for the new building to be used as part of WODC's planning process. He preferred a Territorial style architecture structure (modeled after one of the officer's quarters or the never-built Post headquarters), small enough to be unobtrusive when seen from the parade ground, but which would still "afford maximum surveillance of the fort" from the NPS office's "commanding position."³⁹¹ In late July, crews finished constructing wire fencing enclosing the Third Fort ruins, with the Arsenal parcel following a month later. Wing noted that this occasion marked "the final exclusion of stock and the beginning of recovery of the grasses from recent overgrazing."³⁹² The fencing project represented an important step: the formal separation of the monument by a physical boundary constituted the point at which the *de facto* land use formally changed from ranching to commemoration.

In December, the final plan settled the visitor center location question in Appleman and Jerome Miller's favor. The building was sited at the northern terminus of the new parking area, due west of the hospital, approximately 500 feet south of the ruins on the axis of the company street. The residential and utility areas remained out of sight of the historic buildings, tucked beneath a rise in the southwest corner of Parcel No. 1. Wirth signed off on the final plans on December 26, and the location of NPS structures at Fort Union was set.³⁹³

³⁹¹ Wing to Miller, July 9, 1956, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1.

³⁹² Zhu, *Administrative History*, 28-29.

³⁹³ "General Development, Part of the Master Plan, Fort Union National Monument," Drawing NM:FTU 2052-B, December 26, 1956, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

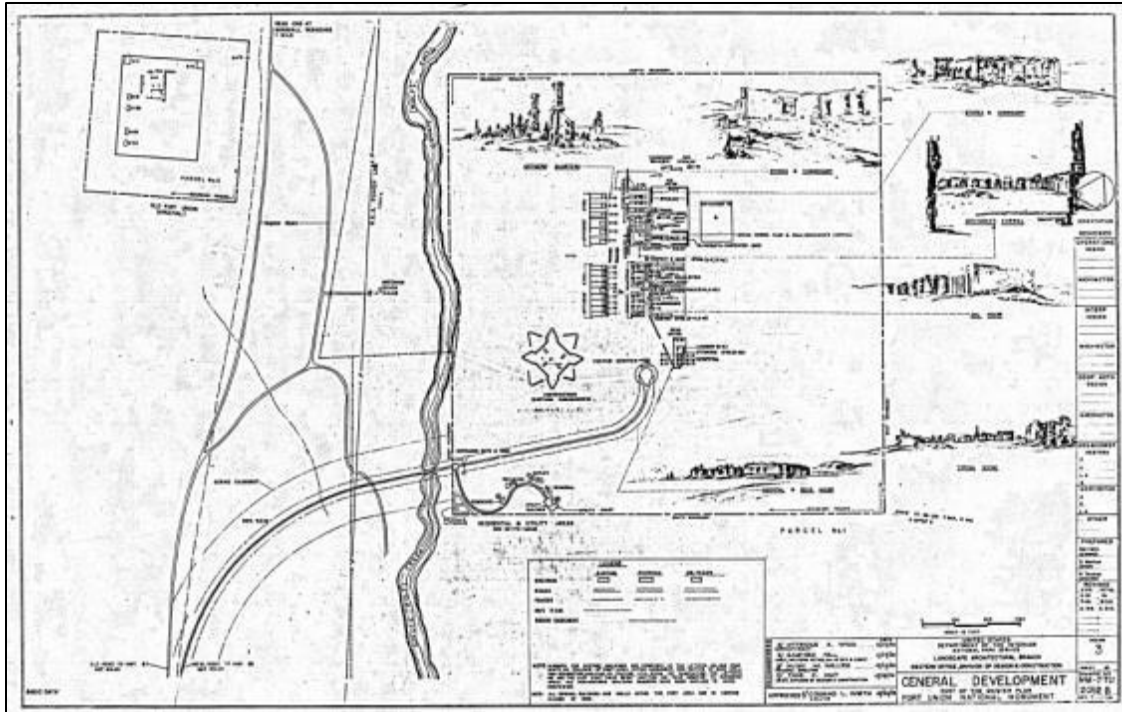


Figure 20: “General Development, Part of the Master Plan, Fort Union National Monument,” December 26, 1956. Note placement of Visitor Center south of Third Fort Ruins and NPS staff housing at southwest corner of large parcel.
 (Source: NPS Electronic Technical Information Center)

The questions of where to locate the visitor center, and how to build it, were important ones. Their ultimate answer—placed back and away from the historic structures, and using new construction rather than repurposing fort buildings—reflected NPS preferences of the era. On the one hand, the more distant location would keep the agency’s presence “subordinate to the park landscape.”³⁹⁴ At the same time, the carefully designed and situated visitor center would act as a control point, effectively forcing visitors to follow the prescribed method of experiencing the site. This corresponded with the role of the Visitor Center under Wirth’s Mission 66 philosophy. As the “hub” of

³⁹⁴ Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers*, 213.

informational and interpretive services, Wirth wrote, the visitor center was the place where “the park visitor learns what to do and what to see.”³⁹⁵

This didactic purpose would be admirably fulfilled by Fort Union National Monument’s planned structure, which would orient visitors and provide them background information preparing them to experience the ruins. This orientation focused visitor attention on the largest, most visible artifacts—the ruins of the Third Fort Union, which embodied the period of the frontier Army’s greatest activity, significance, and military power. Despite not being located on the parade ground, by its position along the axis of the company street—squared up and in line with the original military buildings—the visitor center would orient the visitor to the Third Fort’s rectilinear grid layout.

First Interpretive Steps

Even though the planning process for the visitor center was still underway, Wing and his wife had begun interpretive work almost as soon as they arrived on site in order to have some facilities available by the time of the opening ceremonies. The first tasks they set themselves were ways for visitors to experience the ruins themselves via an interpretive trail and accompanying literature.

During the spring of 1956, the Wings laid out a walking path through the ruins which took visitors to the various buildings, marked with signs identifying them. The choice of a self-guided walking tour as the primary way of experiencing the ruins was a product of both their great size (the path covered nearly a mile), and contemporary NPS

³⁹⁵ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1958, 287-289.

realities of scarce personnel to provide guided tours.³⁹⁶ The six-foot trail, which followed a path nearly identical to the one visitors walk today, was completed by June, with forty interpretive signs or markers placed along it. Visitors followed along via a “Guide to Fort Union Trail” handed out in the visitor center, which when paired with the historical pamphlet gave “a well-rounded story.”³⁹⁷ “Guide to Fort Union Trail” provided information about the various buildings that visitors encountered as they strolled through the ruins. The narrative contained mostly information about daily life at the fort, with small jokes and asides about the bad food and other minor indignities that plagued the otherwise surprisingly comfortable and orderly existence of the fort’s residents.³⁹⁸ Anna Wing designed the cover illustration, which showed a spectral bugler behind the ruined buildings.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1956, 311.

³⁹⁷ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 38-39; Kittridge Wing, “Annual Interpretive Report,” January 6, 1957, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1958, Box 7.

³⁹⁸ “Guide to Fort Union Trail,” June 1956, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

³⁹⁹ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 47.

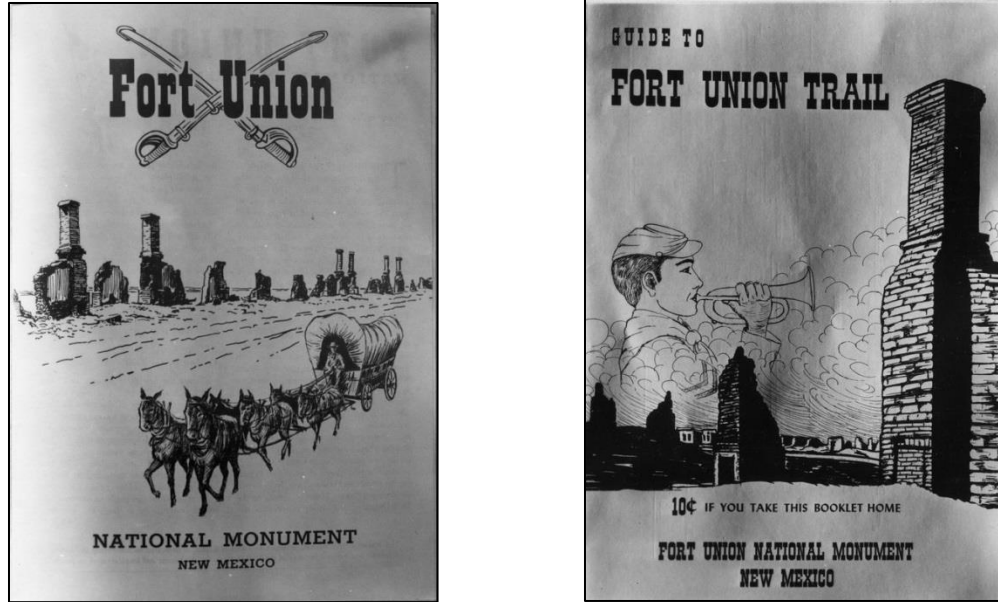


Figure 21: Fort Union National Monument historical pamphlet and Guide to Fort Union Trail, 1956
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Library)

Much of the language in the historical pamphlet was recycled from previous reports that had been developed during the legislative process and other publicity efforts. The story of Fort Union told in the pamphlet emphasized its role in conflicts during the 1850s with Native tribes in connection with the Santa Fe Trade. A section labeled “Indian Wars” told how, after the Civil War, the fort “returned to its earlier mission of Indian fighting, supported by many subordinate posts.” Unlike previous histories, Native Americans were not cast as ruthless savages but had instead been provoked by the “depredations of the buffalo hunters and settlers,” resulting in a “flood of violence.” Notably, the guide ascribed the “pacification” of the region to forces outside the Army’s control: the death of the buffalo, not the heroic soldiers of Fort Union, had been the reason for the end of these conflicts, and the fort slipped into obscurity as the railroad arrived. Once again, Anna Wing drew the cover illustration of a mule-drawn covered

wagon passing in front of the ruins of Officer's Row. "Fort Union" was rendered in old-fashioned western typeface with two officer's sabers crossed, blades up and out, behind it.⁴⁰⁰

Over 10,000 visitors came to Fort Union in the first six months after the opening ceremonies. Although the offerings were "barely adequate," Wing reported that public reaction had been "uniformly favorable."⁴⁰¹ Just in time for the June 1956 opening ceremonies, rudimentary museum exhibits, consisting of a few photos and maps, were installed in the temporary visitor center and a ten-foot display cabinet for artifacts found during excavations was erected. Although it included no explanatory text, this was the first formal display exhibit at the fort, and Wing noted that in combination with the walking trail and brochures, the monument had achieved a "good historical atmosphere."⁴⁰²

After the opening, the Wings began planning the permanent museum exhibits. In the initial proposal, Wing noted that while the ruins were impressive in their own right, "they are by no means self-explanatory," and necessitated an exhibit that would convey the "pageant of history" that had characterized the fort in its heyday. Because of the unscheduled nature of visitation (and some visitors' reluctance to venture into the ruins during bad weather), a museum was key to transmit the meaningful information that

⁴⁰⁰ "Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico," 1956, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

⁴⁰¹ Kittredge Wing, "Annual Report of Interpretive Services," January 9, 1957, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1958, Box 7.

⁴⁰² Wing, "Annual Report of Interpretive Services," January 9, 1957; Zhu, *Administrative History*, 47-48.

visitors sought. This would require objects, maps, photographs, and interpretive text to fully explain the significance of the site and its main story: “a history of Army operations on the Southwestern frontier.”

He suggested a museum with a total of thirty-one exhibits grouped around the most important stories Fort Union had to tell: the history of the Army’s presence in the area; the Santa Fe Trail; “Indian Wars of the 60’s and 70’s, with the part played by Fort Union;” garrison life; Spanish and Mexican “colonialism;” and “the local scene” including climate, biology, and topography. He also suggested the inclusion of a three-dimensional model of the fort, a cannon or replica, and a rack displaying the flags of all units that had been stationed at Fort Union.

Visitors would encounter paintings by Western artists such as Frederic Remington or Charles Schreyvogel, a large map of the region, and photos of the fort’s commanding officers, as well as a large statement of Fort Union’s significance, immediately upon entering the visitor center. After being greeted by NPS staff, they would proceed into the museum. The exhibits would cover such subject matter as armaments (with separate exhibits for infantry and cavalry equipment, artillery, shoulder weapons, handguns, and ammunition), daily life at the fort, strategy and tactics of Indian Wars and Civil War battles, two “uniformed manikins,” and half a dozen exhibits on the Santa Fe Trail.

Wing carefully considered the layout of the museum—while more “popular” exhibits would be located nearest the lobby, those which required “more contemplation or study” would be located at the “quiet end of the room.” There would be three outdoor interpretive exhibits located at the Mechanics’ Corral, the Commanding Officer’s

residence, and the Second Fort. “Representative” Santa Fe Trail wagons would be scattered throughout the ruins.

After minimal feedback from regional staff (Reed rejected Wing’s suggestion of an account of the monument’s establishment, “because the stuff on this at [Tumacácori National Historical Park] bores me so”), the prospectus was sent on to Washington and the WODC.⁴⁰³ Roy Appleman was the first reviewer in the Washington office. His report, submitted March 22, emphasized that due to the lack of reliable research that had been performed on Fort Union, any museum installations would need to be done on a temporary basis pending further investigation. He suggested cutting the number of exhibits to twenty—reducing the number of displays on weapons and equipment from seven to one or two, and deleting entirely exhibits on unit organizational charts, the manikins, and a panel on colonial Mexico.⁴⁰⁴ NPS Chief of Interpretation Ronald Lee wrote Miller on June 5, approving Wing’s plan but incorporating Appleman’s recommendations: the museum exhibits would be temporary pending further research and the number of exhibits would be limited to twenty.⁴⁰⁵

The alterations to Wing’s plans were in line with the general trend in NPS museum theory away from the traditional explicatory “book on the wall” approach to a

⁴⁰³ Kittridge Wing, “Museum Prospectus, Fort Union National Monument,” January 1957, Fort Union National Monument File 646, Folder 1; Wing, “Museum Prospectus, Fort Union, February 19, 1957, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Cultural Resources Bibliography: FOUN, Box 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Appleman to Chief Historian, March 22, 1957, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Cultural Resources Bibliography: FOUN, Box 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Reed to Director, June 13, 1957, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Cultural Resources Bibliography: FOUN, Box 1.

more appealing, impressionistic or minimalist style which considered exhibits as “introductory rather than narrative.”⁴⁰⁶ Instead of telling the whole story, the “orientation” planned into the visitor center was expected to bear some of the narrative burden. FOUN’s museum would incorporate elements of both traditions, blending detail with larger images designed to catch visitors’ interest.⁴⁰⁷

These important initial developments were put on hold in January 1958, when at only thirty-eight years of age, Anna Wing died of a heart attack. Soon thereafter, Wing requested a transfer away from Fort Union. After burying his wife in the Pioneer Cemetery at Grand Canyon National Park (where he would join her forty-one years later), he took a new position as assistant superintendent of San Juan National Historic Site in Puerto Rico.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1986), 49.

⁴⁰⁷ The museum planning took longer than expected, as throughout 1958 and 1959 Appleman continued to provide completely revised interpretive text, to the chagrin of the Region III and WODC staff. The back-and-forth lasted until April 1959, at which time a last ditch-effort by Appleman to greatly expand the length and detail of the exhibit labels was resisted by WODC, who saw them as “an attempt to be complete that dulls a point” and could jeopardize the desired “friendly” visitor reaction. Reed, Hastings, and Mawson strongly concurred, pointed out Appleman’s text was entirely too long, and recommended using the current draft for the exhibits to be installed in time for the dedication ceremony in June. The museum plans were finalized at last, and WODC’s Western Museum Laboratory staff traveled to the site and scrambled to install the exhibits before the dedication, finishing on June 12. See Appleman to Jenkins, March 19, 1959 and Jenkins to Hastings, April 7, 1959, NPS HFC Museum Division Exhibit Development and Graphic Research Files, MDR 8, Drawer 1; Annual Narrative Report (supplement), July 11, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

⁴⁰⁸ Mawson, “Fort Union National Monument,” 48.



Figure 22: Kittridge Wing (left) and Homer Hastings, the first two Superintendents of FOUN (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

Wing's replacement was Homer F. Hastings, a fifty-year-old former teacher from Colorado. Hastings was already a twenty-year NPS veteran who had begun as a seasonal ranger at Carlsbad Caverns National Park and eventually risen to the position of superintendent at several national monuments: Montezuma Castle, Walnut Canyon, Chaco Canyon and, immediately before coming to Fort Union, Aztec Ruins. Hastings arrived on April 3, 1958, and served as superintendent for the next thirteen years, guiding the monument through the rest of its formative period.⁴⁰⁹

The Woodward Report

An important component of the final museum planning beyond the exhibit text and images was the question of which artifacts would be displayed. For help, Region III staff turned to Arthur Woodward, a scholar of Western and military history who had

⁴⁰⁹ Mawson, "Fort Union National Monument," 51; see also Hastings to Downey, April 21, 1965 and Hastings to Florsheim, January 24, 1967, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files 1965-1967, Box 8.

worked at the Heye Museum of the American Indian in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum as a historian and archaeologist. Woodward was tasked with writing an extensive history of the fort and its material culture to fill the research gap noted by Appleman and Wing and help in the preparation of museum exhibits.⁴¹⁰ WODC, Region III, and FOUN staff consulted with Woodward throughout the museum planning process.

The 265-page final report covered the broad sweep of Fort Union's history, beginning in the early sixteenth century with the arrival of Europeans in northern New Mexico. Woodward's chapters centered on conflict and exchange, in the form of Native-European and New Mexican-American conflicts, the U.S.-Mexican War, and the Santa Fe Trail. The history of the fort itself was divided into four parts by decade, and focused on the commonalities between Fort Union and the numerous other southwestern forts of its era—Fort Union's history, Woodward wrote, was "the history of all such posts." Therefore, he believed, its interpretation should be "somewhat generic in its scope," focusing on "common denominators of the military history of the entire western frontier." One of the clearest commonalities among all forts was the monotonous nature of garrison life, which took a central part in the FOUN museum displays.

Woodward did, however, advocate focusing on the specific history of Fort Union as it fit into its overarching context. Surveying the four decades of the fort's activity, he declared that conflicts with Native Americans and the opening of trade with Mexico were "more directly the reason for the establishment of Fort Union and therefore should receive more detailed treatment." The way to create a connection with the past,

⁴¹⁰ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 48-49; see also Arizona Historical Society, "Woodward, Arthur, 1898-1986," http://www.arizonahistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/library_Woodward-Arthur.pdf, accessed July 17, 2015.

Woodward wrote, was through the use of objects found at the fort, which he called “three dimensional exhibits.” These authentic physical artifacts would offer visitors a more comprehensive connection with Fort Union’s past in a way that text or images could not.

A nearly 500-page appendix catalogued a vast array of items relating to life at the fort. Again, Woodward chose the most representative items that represented their period of manufacture or use. He was not concerned with the location of objects at the fort itself (a “generic not stratigraphic” approach), because “it does not matter where an 1884 cartridge is found” so long as it could be determined that it dated to 1884. There was therefore no provision for replica items in his plans, and a piece of equipment or weaponry that dated to the appropriate period but came from another location or collection was acceptable. Woodward’s approach of focusing on objects meant that the interpretation at the site would revolve around material culture that related to two broad topics: individual “minutiae of army life” and the practice of making war.⁴¹¹

Despite the abundance of artifacts that had been unearthed at the site (by 1960, the collection had grown to more than 7,000 pieces⁴¹²), there were not enough representative items to satisfy the scope of the planned exhibits. Therefore, Woodward recommended acquiring artifacts from private collectors across the west. He visited several individuals during research for his report, and NPS Region III also sought donations.⁴¹³ Hastings continued to seek artifacts for donation to fill out the museum

⁴¹¹ Arthur Woodward, “Fort Union, New Mexico—Guardian of the Santa Fe Trail,” 1958, NPS Western Archaeological Conservation Center (WACC), FOUN Files, Folder H08.

⁴¹² Zhu, *Administrative History*, 49-50.

⁴¹³ Woodward, “Museum Plan,” July 31, 1957, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Cultural Resources Bibliography: FOUN, Box 1.

collection, and Woodward and Appleman also corresponded with or visited private collectors in various locations across the country who specialized in military weapons and equipment from the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴¹⁴

Some donations came from local Las Vegans, but the largest group came from a private collector, Francis Timoney of Colorado Springs, who donated fifty pieces of military weaponry, ammunition, cavalry equipment, insignia, uniforms, tack and saddle in early 1959. The items were in excellent condition, and park staff eagerly accepted the donation and wrote Timoney with their appreciation. The Timoney items, along with another fifty that had been collected from the ruins during excavation, were forwarded to the WODC for incorporation into the exhibits.⁴¹⁵ As the park began to receive donations and collect artifacts via the ruins stabilization and excavation, there were few acceptable storage options. After the stone guardhouse and the town of Valmora's recreation hall proved insufficient, the objects were placed in the garages of the staff housing buildings.⁴¹⁶

Later, Wirth wrote Timoney in appreciation of his generosity and the remarkably good condition of the donations. These items, Wirth noted, would allow visitors and researchers to understand "the part our military establishment played in bringing order and safety to that then wild region." He also appreciated the expertise Timoney rendered

⁴¹⁴ Hutchins to Hastings, October 14, 1958, NPS WACC, FOUN Files, Folder G04.

⁴¹⁵ Hastings to Timoney, January 17, 1959, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 75; Hastings, "Annual Narrative Report," May 26, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

⁴¹⁶ Croy, "Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico," 52-53; Hastings, "Monthly Report for October 1959," November 3, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 653, Folder 147.

as a consultant in the planning of the exhibits. The knowledge Timoney imparted would have been unavailable otherwise, Wirth noted, and his “authoritative” input was of great benefit to the monument’s interpretation.⁴¹⁷

Woodward’s report, both in its historical focus and its approach to artifact selection, proved influential. The idea of dull garrison life punctuated by heroic warfare became a central conceit in the FOUN museum planning, and the resultant need to collect artifacts illustrating that story led to the incorporation into the museum exhibits of the views of private collectors who shared that vision.

Final Preparations

As the dedication ceremony approached, FOUN historian Donald Mawson completed an updated “Guide to Fort Union Trail,” which was published by Fort Union, Inc., and ready for distribution in February 1959. The sixteen-page booklet replaced the initial brochures developed by the Wings for the 1956 opening ceremonies, but relied on much of the same historical narrative. The brochure recounted Fort Union’s history in two main themes: the Civil War and its role in “maintaining the law in the Southwest,” both before and after the war. The fort’s soldiers were engaged in fighting Indians who were a “continuing source of trouble” and “ravaged caravans.” Kit Carson and other soldiers from the fort were involved in seeing the Navajo, Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribes “crushed,” and helped end the “Indian menace.”

⁴¹⁷ Wirth to Timoney, June 14, 1959, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 75.

The booklet guided visitors through the ruins in a prescribed order, and provided short background descriptions of the various buildings and areas they would encounter. The journey began with an 1877 map of Fort Union to help the visitor picture its historic appearance, and focused on the use of each building in day-to-day camp life in an attempt to evoke the “bustling” nature of the fort during its heyday. The trip through the ruins encouraged the visitor to experience a connection with the past through physical cultural artifacts. Reflecting the still-nascent state of research, the guide included language (“may,” “hard to say,” “probably,” “we believe”) which expressed an uncertainty about the past that would not persist in future interpretation. The final pages of the booklet gave some brief consideration of overarching issues that caused the establishment of the fort, but for the most part that background material was left to the museum exhibits and the historical information available in narrative form elsewhere. This booklet went through two printings, and at least 10,000 copies were distributed to visitors over the next two years.⁴¹⁸

The 2,000 square foot Visitor Center was completed in February, adorned with a large sign declaring “THIS IS A MISSION-66 PROJECT.” The flat-roofed structure included brick coping around the roof line in the Territorial style, as well as white square

⁴¹⁸ “Guide to Fort Union Trail,” February 1959, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection; Annual Interpretive Report, January 9, 1961, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 88. During the guide’s editing, the Regional Publications Officer suggested including the “long effort by residents of Las Vegas, N. Mex., and vicinity to gain national recognition for the old Fort.” The NPS History Branch in DC rejected this insertion as they “fear[ed] to include it might set a precedent.” The Regional Office concurred, fearing that such recognition would lead to “a demand for similar recognition” from “less deserving” individuals. Hastings reluctantly agreed, citing his opinion that “the Las Vegas residents made a most unusual and concerted effort to have the fort made into a National Monument” and that it was unfortunate that they would be deprived of the recognition they deserved. See correspondence: March 20, 1959, July 13, 1960, and July 27, 1960, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 90.

columns on the porch and elliptical headed double-hung windows on the north side. Region III staff soon determined that while Fort Union had been a reflection of Territorial style, it was probably not the originator of that style, and that its buildings had been designed by workers from the east imitating Colonial style buildings which they knew from back home.⁴¹⁹ Nonetheless, the visitor center blurred the line between the historic fabric and the new, modern NPS additions. By adopting the archaeological style of the fort, the Mission 66 facilities would accomplish the goal of subtle orientation and the desire of Wing and Steen to give visitors a better sense of how the fort had looked.



Figure 23: Visitor Center, 1959
(Source: NARA, RG 79, General Records: Administrative Files 1949-1971,
Entry P-11, Box 186)

Just before the dedication, picket fencing extending from the sides of the Visitor Center was installed, resurrecting a historic feature (photos showed that there had been

⁴¹⁹ Visitor Center images, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 186 ; Steen to Hakala, February 5, 1959, NPS HFC, Museum Division Exhibit Development and Graphic Research Files, MDR 8, Drawer 1.

similar fencing delineating the various parts of the fort in the 1870s) while at the same time acting as a control on visitors to ensure they passed through the visitor center.⁴²⁰

These fences were an important part of orientation and control. Visitors previously could approach the ruins from any direction (although nearly everyone would have come from Highway 85 to the south), and could enter them in whatever way they liked. Now, the visitor's path was locked in: drive on the road, park in the lot, enter the building, receive information, and then proceed through the ruins according to the guide. Annual reporting by park staff in early years of the monument indicated that ninety percent of early visitors followed the prescribed routine at the fort, first entering the visitor center for information and then proceeding into the ruins.⁴²¹

The unit's 1959 annual report noted that "the interpretative facilities which answer the demands of Mission 66, the museum prospectus, and—most important—the visiting public, at Fort Union are now complete." The basic outlines of FOUN had been set. However, Hastings noted, "this is not to imply that since the interpretation plan and program is complete, that it will become an inactive program. To the contrary, it will remain very much alive and continue to grow and expand under greater research and the findings which come to light through this research."⁴²²

⁴²⁰ Annual Narrative Report (supplement), July 11, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

⁴²¹ Wing, "Annual Interpretive Report, 1957," January 2, 1958, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1958, Box 7.

⁴²² Mawson, "Annual Report on Information and Interpretive Services, 1959," January 16, 1960, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 88.



Figure 24: Aerial View of Third Fort ruins facing north, showing placement of Visitor Center, c. 1959 (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

First Stabilization of the Ruins

The question of what exactly visitors would see once they left the visitor center, however, was also an ongoing development. The early years of FOUN saw NPS struggling to decipher the best method of preserving hundreds of thousands of square feet of adobe ruins, which by their very nature were constantly in danger of washing away.

From the time NPS became involved in ruins preservation in the early 20th century, the techniques favored by the agency reflected prevailing methods in the archaeology community: cement capping, soil application, bracing, and anchoring. However, by the 1930s, the agency was interested in preserving ruins via “a transparent, waterproof coating which could be sprayed on the walls.” In October 1940, a special Director’s Committee on Ruins Preservation convened in Santa Fe. Discussions led by Jesse Nusbaum, Erik Reed, and other Region III staff led to a report that recommended a

more systematic approach to ruins preservation that would replace the traditional methods of cement capping.⁴²³

After the disruptive experience of World War II, in the 1940s and 1950s, NPS worked with private industry and university researchers to determine the best method of applying chemical compounds to preserve ruins. Silicone, acrylic, plastic, and cement were all considered and deployed at various times. Each method, however, soon showed its limitations which were exacerbated by the varied and sometimes harsh climate conditions in which the ruins were located. NPS experts, however, felt confident that these problems would soon be overcome: “The basic deficiency is material... It is very probable that superior methods of application will quickly follow the development of suitable materials.”⁴²⁴

This focus on a chemical solution which would be less “invasive” than the predominantly physical means of preservation the agency had used to that point would dominate the Service’s ruins preservation philosophy for the following forty years. The early ruins preservation regime at FOUN reflected this move toward chemical treatments, an interpretive and management approach which persisted for decades.⁴²⁵ Initial excavation work began in August 1956 under the direction of NPS archaeologist George

⁴²³ National Park Service, “Report of the Director's Committee on Ruins Stabilization: September 27-October 2, 1940, Santa Fe, New Mexico” (Perris, CA: National Archives at Riverside, 1940). This solution was some time in coming, however. In the 1960s and 1970s, NPS continued to rely upon silicone and resin treatments that turned out to be actively harmful to historic adobe ruins in many cases, even if properly applied (which they often were not). By the 1990s, the use of cement on original historic fabric had been banned and treatments that were closer to the original construction methods became preferred.

⁴²⁴ Jim Trott, “Ruins Preservation: Pre-Columbian and Historic Ruins Preservation in the Arid Southwest.” *CRM Journal* 20:10 (1997), 46-50.

⁴²⁵ Roland Richert and Gordon Vivian, *Ruins Stabilization in the Southwestern United States* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1974).

Cattanach. These early efforts toward preservation and stabilization of the ruins would ensure that the walls remained standing, but had dire effects on the availability of archaeological data for future generations.⁴²⁶

The first task the stabilization workers undertook was basic cleanup: hauling away rubble which covered the interior of many of the buildings, collecting stray roofing tin, and removing other debris. Cattanach also began experimenting with different physical and chemical methods to protect the walls from erosion, including steel reinforcing rods and silicone waterproofing treatments. In the first summer, the crew made progress on the commanding officer's residence and cleared several hundred feet of flagstone sidewalk, but Cattanach was forced to lay off workers by October as funds ran out and the weather deteriorated. He continued to experiment with adobe treatments during the winter months.⁴²⁷

The following spring, stabilization resumed, and Cattanach adopted a triage strategy: buildings that still had more than half of their original material would be first in line for preservation. Cattanach and Wing figured that a smaller number of more-complete buildings were more compelling to visitors than a larger number of adobe stubs. The sheer size of the project meant that preserving all the structures was simply impossible.⁴²⁸ In May 1957, the stabilization project began incorporating the method of capping the adobe walls with soil-cement bricks to halt erosion—the project would use

⁴²⁶ Arrott to Van Horn, August 14, 1956, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

⁴²⁷ Wing, "Monthly Report for October 1956," November 7, 1956, Fort Union File A2823.

⁴²⁸ Wing to Miller, April 14, 1957, Fort Union File A2823.

more than a thousand of them that summer season alone.⁴²⁹ Wing's first Annual Report called the ruins stabilization efforts "the only outstanding achievement at Fort Union this year." He praised Cattnach's efforts to retain the remaining chimneys and to explore new stabilization techniques which would preserve the ruins "quite permanently."⁴³⁰

When Appleman and Region III staff visited in October 1957, they continued the triage approach. While the overarching goal was to preserve as many of the ruins as possible, the group came to consensus that "there will be no restoration or reconstruction of any structure now, and none will be undertaken in the future except under special consideration and decision." Critically, Appleman suggested using the overburden that had been excavated from the areas around buildings and walkways to halt erosion in various spots around the fort. Workers implemented his suggestions over the next several seasons, ensuring that the archaeological data contained therein would be irretrievably lost.⁴³¹ The early "archaeological" work gravely damaged the integrity of the site by removing an immense amount of physical evidence. At the same time, this approach endangered a crucial aspect of NPS's desired sense of place—a "lonely" location on the plains where the past could be imagined—by restoring a more orderly appearance to what had been an overgrown, rubble-strewn ruin.⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Mawson, "Fort Union National Monument," 43; Cattnach, "Stabilization Report," May and July, 1957, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

⁴³⁰ Wing, "Superintendent's Annual Report, 1957," June 30, 1957, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

⁴³¹ Appleman to Miller, January 29, 1958, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1958, Box 2; Rex Wilson, "Archeology and Everyday Life at Fort Union," *New Mexico Historical Review* 40:1 (January 1, 1965), 55-64.

⁴³² While by all accounts the NPS workers were pleased with the results of their efforts, and management and Regional office leadership concurred, it was clear that the most basic salvage archaeology techniques had not been followed, a fact that would not be discovered for many years. In 1992, Cattnach and Wilson



Figure 25: Officer's Quarters, c.1955 (left) and c.1960. Note removal of infill material around foundations. (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

The destructive nature of the excavations at Fort Union appears to be mostly a product of unlucky timing. The discipline of historical archaeology was still in its infancy in the late 1950s, and while NPS had demonstrated a commitment to archaeological preservation for years (“The Service has been vigilant,” Wirth wrote in his 1962 Annual Report, “to prevent destruction of archeological remains that might be lost through construction in areas of the system”), it appears that the excavations at Fort Union were undertaken in a spirit of “cleanup” rather than preservation. They were therefore not conceived in the same way as archaeological work elsewhere, most of which followed

recalled that that “the emphasis on the work at Fort Union was stabilization,” and Wilson “was emphatically told by Park and Regional Office administrators that he was not to excavate, that he was simply to ‘clean up’ and make the structures safe for visitors.” Frances Levine and William Westbury, *A History of Archeological Investigations at Fort Union National Monument* (National Park Service Southwest Regional Office, Santa Fe, 1990), 3-4, 142. Ironically, in May 1958, Hastings emphasized in a speech to the Las Vegas Archaeological Society that anyone finding artifacts should “make an exact notation of the site of the finding and then call an expert” since “much damage is done by enthusiastic amateurs.” *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Archaeological Society Hears Homer Hastings,” May 8, 1958.

conventional procedures of excavating, cataloguing, and preserving artifacts. It appears that many NPS managers conceived of FOUN as a historic site rather than an archaeological one, and so did not afford the artifacts the same delicate treatment as pottery or other prehistoric items.⁴³³

When winter ended the second season of excavation, Cattnach used the down time to plan additional works for the spring thaw. In 1958, stabilization focused on excavation of buildings and improvements to the visitor trail. The expanded crew of twenty-one workers removed hundreds of cubic yards of dirt from the interiors. In August, Cattnach was transferred to Mesa Verde National Monument and Rex L. Wilson arrived the following month to replace him.⁴³⁴ In February 1959, Wilson estimated the total standing adobe walls at the fort to be about 61,000 square feet (per side, for a total of approximately 122,000), extending about 1.2 miles in length.⁴³⁵ Despite the extensive work that had taken place, the adobe continued to wash away, and so during the 1959 season workers began applying soil-cement adobe bricks to cap the walls, and then spraying them with a waterproofing substance, DC 772.⁴³⁶

The use of additional bricks and chemical sealants to slow the rate of deterioration demonstrates that even though NPS was committed to no “reconstruction” of the ruins at Fort Union, nonetheless its efforts to “stabilize” them amounted to the same thing. The

⁴³³ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1962, 92-93.

⁴³⁴ Mawson, “Fort Union National Monument,” 47-52.

⁴³⁵ Wilson to Steen, February 19, 1959 and Wilson to Hastings, February 23, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 639, Folder 187.

⁴³⁶ Annual Narrative Report (supplement), July 11, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

disorderly historic fabric was removed, and replaced in many places with new material, resulting in a thoroughly controlled and managed landscape, instead of the “melting” or “disappearing” ruins that had been the hallmark of Fort Union before the agency took over. This constant manufacture of new material to replace the disappearing historic fabric became the defining approach to the historic ruins at FOUN.

Dedication

On the afternoon of Sunday, June 14, 1959, FOUN’s dedication ceremony drew local and national attendees to an event that, much like the annual Masonic celebrations at the site and the opening ceremony held three years earlier, incorporated elements of patriotic military display, boosterism, and pageantry.

Promotional efforts had begun well in advance, and accelerated as the date of the ceremony approached. Fort Union, Inc., printed and distributed posters for display in local businesses and worked with media to promote the event. Highlands University journalism professor Harry Lancaster wrote and distributed stories to national publications including *Reader’s Digest*, *National Geographic*, and the Chicago *Tribune*.⁴³⁷ He wrote an editorial in the *Optic* which colorfully described the fort’s history and its rebirth as “New Fort Union,” which was bringing the area to life again.⁴³⁸ Lancaster also issued a plaintive request for editorial interest in the monument to newspapers around the state. He pointed out the dramatic nature of Fort Union’s history,

⁴³⁷ Lancaster to Editor, November 8, 1958, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191; *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union to be Dedicated in 1959,” November 17, 1958.

⁴³⁸ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Adobe Walls Live Again,” June 16, 1959.

which he claimed “had everything... frontier post guarding the Santa Fe Trail, Indians and wagon trains, troubles during the Civil War... Why the television people haven’t discovered it, I don’t know.”⁴³⁹

The festivities kicked off with a luncheon at the Castaneda Hotel in Las Vegas, after which about 1,000 cars carrying approximately 4,000 visitors made the trek to Watrous and up the entrance road to the monument, where a speaker’s platform and PA system had been erected about 100 yards north of the newly built visitor center.⁴⁴⁰ Fort Union, Inc.’s Ross Thompson again served as master of ceremonies, as he had at the opening three years earlier. He welcomed the visitors and paid tribute to the many contributions of the recently deceased James Arrott.⁴⁴¹ Major General John Jolly of the New Mexico National Guard and Brigadier General Robert Charlton of the Colorado National Guard were the guests of honor, and United States Air Force Brigadier General William C. Kingsbury from Walker Air Force Base in Roswell represented the Department of Defense.⁴⁴² George Stracke of the Grand Lodge of New Mexico offered the invocation, a fitting tribute to the central role that Masons had played in the fort’s establishment.⁴⁴³ The Twelfth Air Force Band provided an opening concert, but just like

⁴³⁹ Lancaster to Editor, November 8, 1958, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

⁴⁴⁰ Thompson to Wing, June 15, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191; Hastings to Director, July 2, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 680, Folder 180; Annual Narrative Report (supplement), July 11, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

⁴⁴¹ On March 6, Arrott died at his home in Sapello. Fort Union, Inc. passed a “resolution of respect” honoring Arrott’s numerous contributions to the organization and recognizing his “lofty vision.” Fort Union, Inc., “A Resolution of Respect,” March 11, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

⁴⁴² *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Ft. Union Dedication Set for This Sunday,” June 11, 1959.

⁴⁴³ “Fort Union Dedication Program,” June 14, 1959, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

in 1956, a sudden thunderstorm erupted just as they were beginning to play, ruining instruments and delaying the ceremony half an hour. About 100 late-arriving cars turned around and left when the rain came up.⁴⁴⁴

The remaining attendees soon witnessed a booming flyover by four F-100 Super Sabre jets, cutting-edge fighter-bombers that were among the Air Force's first supersonic aircraft, and a significant facet of American air power worldwide in the opening decades of the Cold War. The demonstration continued as more than 100 soldiers from Battery B of the 726th AAA Battalion of the New Mexico National Guard raised the colors and fired a booming salute from the unit's 105mm howitzer. The stirring spectacle provided an object example of the awesome technological power of the modern military juxtaposed with the gritty reality of the frontier army, melding the two forces' heroic efforts in "defensive" wars against less-technologically advanced peoples.⁴⁴⁵

Superintendent Hastings's welcome address also noted the contrast between the current "jet age" and a monument honoring infantry, cavalry, and Santa Fe traders who traveled by foot or animal. He closed with an appeal for more visitors, and noted that "our objective is to preserve Fort Union so that the children who are here may someday return with their children and so on through many generations."⁴⁴⁶ Lieutenant Governor Ed Mead spoke next, and asked visitors to try to carry on the "courage and stamina" of the frontier garrison.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Thompson to Wing, June 15, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

⁴⁴⁵ Hastings to Director, July 2, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 680, Folder 180.

⁴⁴⁶ Hastings, "Words of Welcome," June 14, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 680, Folder 180.

⁴⁴⁷ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "Fort Union Dedication Made Between Showers," June 16, 1959.



Figure 26: FOUN Dedication Ceremony, June 14, 1959
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

NPS Director Conrad Wirth introduced the keynote speaker, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Roger Ernst, who expressed his pleasure at being able to make “a double-barreled job” of dedicating the visitor center and the monument at the same time. Ernst noted the appropriateness of the military’s attendance at the dedication, since the monument was “a memorial to the fighting men who came out here and won the West.” He cast Fort Union’s importance as not simply local or regional, but national: “it is no local museum, but a part of the fabric of our Nation’s history.” Ernst’s speech aptly summarized the presiding conception of Fort Union National Monument at the moment of its dedication: a memorial that honored the heroic western Army for its gallantry,

sacrifice, and above all its accomplishment of “winning the West.”⁴⁴⁸ After the festivities, guests were offered guided tours of the monument by Hastings and other park staff.

On the occasion of this “once in history event,” the *Optic* published a twelve-page supplement to the June 14 paper, entitled “OLD FORT UNION 1891,” similar to the one it had produced for the original opening. The material was principally composed of recycled articles on the fort’s history that had been printed in the special edition of June 8, 1956 to commemorate the monument’s opening ceremonies. Once again, local businesses ran advertisements congratulating the NPS and local community. They also took the occasion to compare their role with the one Fort Union had played in New Mexico history and economic development. One typical ad noted that “Ft. Union played an integral part in the winning of the old west—Just as Public Service Company of New Mexico is playing an integral part in serving the NEW west!!!”⁴⁴⁹ The cover of the special supplement showed a large aerial photo of the ruins, accompanied by a poem which encapsulated the contemporary understanding of Fort Union and the western Army of the nineteenth century: a noble, civilizing, and defensive force whose legacy lived on in the ruined adobe walls.

The silent chimneys stand as sentries must have stood
And the old adobe walls still hug the lentilwood.
No bugle sounds to disturb the sleeping ghost
Of this once hustling frontier post.
Gone, but not forgotten, are the men whose boots knew the dust;
Whose throats knew a thirst and whose iron now knows the rust.
Hard by Coyote Creek as Sumner picked the site

⁴⁴⁸ Department of the Interior Information Service, “Remarks by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Roger Ernst at Dedication of Fort Union National Monument and Visitor Center, New Mexico, June 14, 1959,” Fort Union National Monument File 680, Folder 180.

⁴⁴⁹ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, June 16, 1959.

That they would build; where they would work and if they had to...fight.
Schooners on the trail all came by this old fort
And in the hills the Utes would consort...
While on the plains the Apache or Comanche would draw the dragoons report...
It was all in a days' work or sport.
No more are the gates open to the stalwart of the plains;
To commerce or settlers' pains.
No longer is the fort so brave as to stand the onslaught of nature as it must...
And the adobe is returning from whence it came as have her men with whom she
held the trust."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁵⁰ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "Old Fort Union 1891," June 16, 1959.

potential profitability. The booster language of Fort Union, Inc. and other supporters reinforced this narrative notion of place.

NPS, for its part, was also busy enshrining these values into the physical and imaginative sense of place at FOUN. The agency worked to build a memorial landscape that included several layers. A physical sense of place arose from decisions about what to build, and where to build it, that reflected the agency's preferred story of the heroic frontier Army, as well as a focus on treating the adobe ruins in a way that ensured their continued presence as physical conveyors of historical meaning, however manufactured.

The interpretive scheme at FOUN that emerged from its early existence was one that subsequent managers would struggle with in coming years. The walking trail, tidied-up ruins, museum exhibits, and accompanying literature all painted a traditional western history narrative that before long would seem inadequate to attract the levels of attendance and economic benefit that boosters and NPS staffers sought.

CHAPTER 4

“PERHAPS TEN PERCENT OF WHAT IT COULD AND SHOULD BE”:

IMPROVING FOUN, 1959-1967

Following Fort Union National Monument’s dedication in the summer of 1959, NPS managers turned their attention to supplementing their admittedly scant knowledge of the site’s history and significance. Even though many of the most critical interpretive decisions—the physical layout of the site, the content of the museum exhibits, and the prescribed nature of the visitor experience—had already been determined, there was still work to do. In the first eight years of operations after the dedication, NPS further refined and supplemented its interpretive offerings, both in content and in delivery method.

During the 1960s, NPS rangers and historians, as well as outsiders, worked to craft a more complete narrative history of Fort Union, too. Starting with Robert Utley’s 1962 Historic Sites Survey report, the historical narrative surrounding the fort began to place greater emphasis on its history of Indian campaigns. While the traditional understanding of Fort Union based around its role in Santa Fe Trail history and the Civil War remained important, there was a growing focus on the Army’s removal of Native Americans to reservations via military action. Fort Union, Inc., in its new role as an auxiliary organization supporting the park, played an important part in supporting the writing and distribution of these new stories.

While these interpretive and narrative refinements were taking place, site managers continued to struggle with the problem of maintaining the adobe structures. They tried several alternative methods of preservation, none of which offered satisfactory solutions. Before long, NPS staffers decided that the evocative nature of the ruins—their

ability to transport visitors to the past with only minimal mediation—was less powerful than had been claimed during the push to establish the monument. It became apparent that the somewhat ad hoc interpretation and the “dull” nature of simple signage and brochures were unsatisfactory. The resulting push for more organized and direct engagement with visitors in search of an authentic connection with the past culminated in the creation of the site’s Interpretive Prospectus in 1967, which would launch the park into its next era of interpretation.

New Stories

In late 1959, Region III historian Robert Utley requested the opportunity to write an edition of the NPS Historical Handbook series on Fort Union. The material would be drawn from his ongoing study of the Santa Fe Trail for the Historic Sites and Building Survey (which had been revitalized as part of Mission 66⁴⁵¹) as well as the Arrott Collection, a large assortment of military records that the late booster had retrieved from the National Archives and donated to New Mexico Highlands University.⁴⁵²

Utley’s final Historic Sites report pointed out that Fort Union was an ideal site to interpret the history of the Santa Fe Trail due to the presence of the ruins as well as ruts of both branches of the Trail. While Utley had set out simply to identify and contextualize those ruts, his research led him to material “that revealed new or hitherto unappreciated facets of Fort Union’s role in the story of the Santa Fe Trail.” The fort,

⁴⁵¹ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1960, 278; Barry Mackintosh, *The Historic Sites Survey and National Historic Landmarks Program*, (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1985), 33.

⁴⁵² Bill to Wirth, November 6, 1959, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records 1953-1961, Box 91.

Utley concluded, “was not a passive spectator of the history flowing by on the Santa Fe Trail,” but rather “played a direct, active, and vital part in the drama” by cutting and maintaining new roadways, providing military freight service, and conducting military patrols and escorts of Trail travelers and mail shipments. While events such as the Civil War had some bearing on troop movements and assignments, in Utley’s telling the various Indian “uprisings” and resultant campaigns were by far the most important chapter of Fort Union’s history.⁴⁵³

Utley published an article in the *New Mexico Historical Review* in January 1961 that summarized his findings. “Fort Union owed its birth to the Santa Fe Trail,” Utley wrote. However, “it was not, as usually assumed, conceived as the ‘guardian of the trail,’ although this turned out to be a major role.” Instead, Utley claimed, the fort had been chiefly a supply depot to support the far-flung and ill-supplied forts of New Mexico Territory. He noted that in the 1850s military excursions were mostly limited to mail escorts, but that in the 1860s, “the mountain Indian menace, the fear of Confederate attacks on freight caravans, and the vital need of assuring a continuous flow of provisions to Union forces in New Mexico led to escorts of freight trains.” The same need to protect shipping was the impetus for campaigns against Indians in the decades that followed. This vital task was successfully completed, and by the mid-1860s, the Trail was essentially safe. Later campaigns were unrelated to the protection of the Trail, but did “crush the power of the tribes on the southern plains.” For Utley, the Army’s main task in New Mexico in the nineteenth century was not protecting the territory from Confederates,

⁴⁵³ Robert M. Utley, *Fort Union and the Santa Fe Trail: A Special Study of Santa Fe Trail Remains at and near Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 1959).

or even general Santa Fe Trail monitoring, but rather an offensive campaign against Native Americans, a far cry from earlier histories of Fort Union.⁴⁵⁴ Utley's report was well received by NPS Chief of Interpretation Ronald Lee, who praised Utley for making a complex subject seem clear, and widely distributed the report among NPS staff.⁴⁵⁵

Utley revised and expanded his research into the *Fort Union Handbook*, which was published in December 1962.⁴⁵⁶ His history adopted a triumphal narrative that described FOUN as a place of conquest and dominance, commemorating “the achievements of the men who won the west.” Fort Union's chief historical context as defined by the *Handbook* centered on the United States' “imposing [its] institutions on the patterns of life” of the local New Mexican population, and the process of Manifest Destiny, “tearing down the Indian barrier that...barred the paths of westward expansion.”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁴ Robert M. Utley, “Fort Union and the Santa Fe Trail,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 1961).

⁴⁵⁵ Lee to Regional Director, February 19, 1960, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records 1953-1961, Box 82.

⁴⁵⁶ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Book Now Available,” December 17, 1962.

⁴⁵⁷ Robert M. Utley, *Fort Union National Monument* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1962), 1.

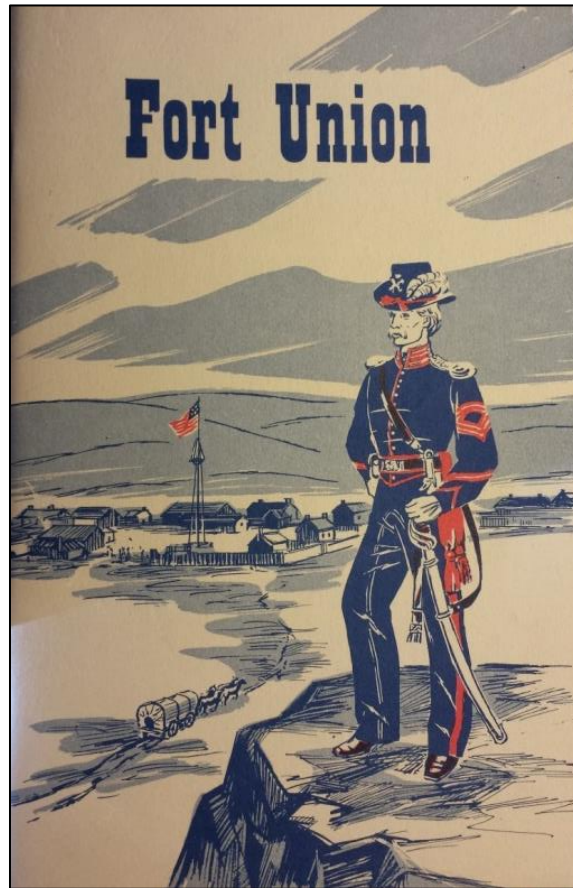


Figure 28: *Fort Union Handbook*, 1962

In Utley's account, the fort's military history provided its primary significance, especially campaigns against local Native American groups which aimed to "crush the hostiles," who were "raiding unchecked" and "striking viciously at the Santa Fe Trail and the eastern fringes of New Mexican settlement."⁴⁵⁸ These exercises of American military power radiated outward into the surrounding landscape, effectively placing the fort at the center of the region's history. This represented a significant change: previous histories had emphasized the fort's role as one part of the larger sweep of Santa Fe Trail history

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

and geography, and spent most of their time focused on daily life at the fort. While this context remained part of Fort Union’s history in Utley’s work, the conflict between the Army and Indians—expressed in dramatic, even bellicose terms—began to take on greater weight. The “conquest” of local Indians was now the most important part of the Fort Union story.

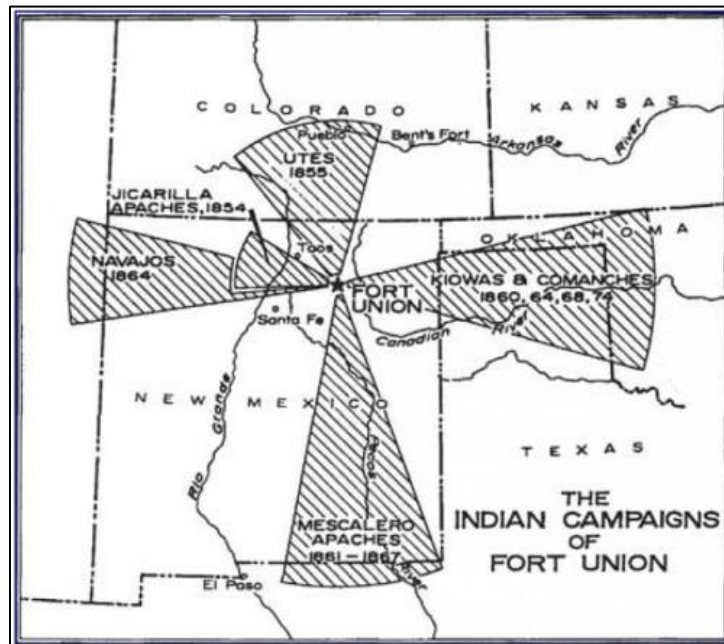


Figure 29: “The Indian Campaigns of Fort Union.” (Source: *Fort Union Handbook*)

The new emphasis on Fort Union’s Indian Wars history appeared in other works. In April 1962, Fort Union, Inc. printed 425 copies of Arrott’s “Brief History of Fort Union,” a speech he had delivered at Highlands University in July of 1957, for sale in the monument store. The booklet cover depicted mounted soldiers escorting a supply wagon, an image that summarized the content of Arrott’s talk. He briefly described the background of the Santa Fe Trail and the U.S.-Mexican War, but spent most of his

narrative on Fort Union's Indian campaigns against the Navajo, Jicarilla Apache, Ute, and Mescalero Apache.⁴⁵⁹

Fort Union, Inc., played a role in the dissemination of these new stories about the fort's history by covering printing costs and supplying copies for sale at the monument's gift shop. The organization also supported the creation and spread of other works, written by non-NPS authors, that echoed the new turn in narrative, and placed stories in company newsletters and magazines across the state.⁴⁶⁰ In 1960, the group commissioned a twelve-page booklet on Fort Union's history by Lynn Perrigo of the Highlands University History Department, which was inserted in Chamber of Commerce mailings sent out nationwide.⁴⁶¹ The organization spent several hundred dollars annually on printing and publication of brochures, postcards, and other materials for sale in the visitor center.⁴⁶²

Fort Union, Inc.'s activities in supporting FOUN extended to physical improvements, too. The organization purchased and installed the first highway signage directing traffic to the fort: a nine-by-nine foot wooden sign featuring crossed cavalry sabers, placed at the junction of Highway 85 and State Highway 477. Such support from a cooperating association for its local park was not unique: Wirth noted over fifty such

⁴⁵⁹ James W. Arrott, *Arrott's Brief History of Fort Union* (Las Vegas, NM: Fort Union, Incorporated, 1962).

⁴⁶⁰ Montgomery to Ward-Anderson Printing Company, September 24, 1962, Montgomery to Rydal Press, October 1, 1962, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191; "Fort Union: Guardian of Destiny," *Shamrock* magazine (Shamrock Oil Company), Summer 1965; Dudley Lynch, "Return to Fort Union," *The Atom*, December 1965, NARA-Denver, RG 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files 1965-1967, Box 59.

⁴⁶¹ John Montgomery, "Annual Report of Cooperating Association, 1960," Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

⁴⁶² Montgomery, "Annual Report of Cooperating Association, 1960," Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191; Hastings, "Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1960," NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 186.

relationships nationwide, which “contributed \$169,941 for aid to the National Park Service for research, equipment, books, and materials used in the interpretive program.”⁴⁶³ However, a 1961 NPS audit did note that the Las Vegas group was “unique among organizations associated with the National Park Service” in that it predated the NPS unit with which it was associated.⁴⁶⁴ NPS formally recognized Fort Union, Inc.’s important role in supporting the new monument when the group requested that a photograph and plaque be installed in the Visitor Center in tribute to James Arrott (“His untiring efforts did much to make this National Monument a reality for those who enter here”). Wirth approved the plaque, but not the photograph, noting that such commemorations of individuals were usually discouraged by NPS policy.⁴⁶⁵

As its partner monument continued to develop, and many of its original members died or moved away from Las Vegas, Fort Union, Inc., began to explore the possibility of merging the organization with the Southwest Monuments Association (SWMA). Members thought their goal of publishing material for sale to support park operations would be better executed by combining with the SWMA’s existing infrastructure. The merger of the two organizations took place in September 1963, with the directors noting that “the initial objective of Fort Union, Inc., the facilitation of the establishment of Fort

⁴⁶³ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1962, 91.

⁴⁶⁴ Robert Barry, “Fort Union Incorporated, Financial Audit, Books and Records, Calendar Year 1961,” May 29, 1962, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 195.

⁴⁶⁵ Thompson to Hastings, September 15, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191; Hastings to Thompson, October 28, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 1258.

Union National Monument, has been accomplished.”⁴⁶⁶ By the time of its dissolution, Fort Union, Inc., in addition to its critical role in FOUN’s establishment and promotion, had printed and offered for sale tens of thousands of copies of nearly two dozen items at the monument store, including information about the fort itself written by NPS staff, primary document collections, maps, postcards, pictures, and slides. The contribution of the people of Las Vegas extended well beyond the hard work required to establish the monument, and provided a critical incubating function as the unit got off the ground.⁴⁶⁷

In July 1959, Chris Emmett informed the Santa Fe *New Mexican* that he was approximately halfway through a planned two-volume study of Fort Union, tentatively entitled *Fort Union: Ultimate Arbiter of Three Peoples*. Emmett, a retired Southern Pacific Railway attorney and avocational historian from Texas, had been recruited by Arrott in the fall of 1956 to serve as an adviser to Fort Union, Inc., and charged with writing a comprehensive history of Fort Union using the extensive military documentation in the Arrott Collection at Highlands University. Emmett planned to focus on “the tremendous influence of Fort Union on the economic, political, and military growth of the state.”⁴⁶⁸ Emmett’s book, *Fort Union and the Winning of the Southwest*, was completed in March 1965, and went on sale in Las Vegas and the monument store.

⁴⁶⁶ Fort Union, Inc., “Resolution,” September 16, 1963, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 195; Fort Union, Inc., Meeting Minutes September 16, 1963, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 184.

⁴⁶⁷ Fort Union, Inc., “Annual Report of Cooperating Association,” January 15, 1963, Fort Union National Monument File 597, Folder 191.

⁴⁶⁸ *Santa Fe New Mexican*, “Genial Ex-Texan Takes on Task of Recording History of Fort Union,” July 6, 1959; *Handbook of Texas Online*, “EMMETT, CHRISTOPHER,” (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fem02>), accessed May 30, 2015; *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Light Heartedness Said To Be Man’s Finest Characteristic,” July 7, 1959.

The completed volume followed through on the author's promises: Emmett relied exclusively on the internal correspondence and records of the Army to produce a dense, minutely detailed account of the activities of the military at Fort Union, essentially free of context or broader understanding of its history outside these daily operations. The forward, written by W.S. Wallace of the Highlands University Library, summarized its basic message: "The inevitability of the eventual domination by the United States of the southwestern portion of this country is brought out in the following pages. The instrument used finally to achieve this was the military. And the story of the military operations concerning the Southwest is the story of Fort Union."⁴⁶⁹

NPS also discouraged narratives that did not fit its preferred history of Fort Union and FOUN, even those dealing with the monument's creation. In 1966, Eastern New Mexico University Professor of English June West authored an account of the creation of the monument focused on Arrott's role. Her story of "The Moving Spirit of Fort Union, Incorporated" described the negotiation process and Fort Union, Inc.'s early role in FOUN's development.⁴⁷⁰ Superintendent Homer Hastings's review of West's manuscript was fairly critical. He thought she had not sufficiently credited the UL&GC for its cooperation in establishing the monument, and contended that the company's donation had been a charitable act, "in the public interest." He urged West to revise her account in order to render the report "more acceptable to the Union Land and Grazing Company

⁴⁶⁹ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, "New Book About Fort Union," March 10, 1965; Chris Emmett, *Fort Union and the Winning of the Southwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), ix.

⁴⁷⁰ B. June West, "James West Arrott, The Moving Spirit of Fort Union, Incorporated: Another Chapter in the History of Fort Union, New Mexico," 1965, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files. June West may have been related to Arrott, whose middle name was West.

officials,” and concluded that due to its narrow “field of interest,” the monument would not stock it for sale in the store.⁴⁷¹

The SWMA published an updated historical pamphlet in 1967, which epitomized the shift away from the Santa Fe Trail and toward the Indian Wars. Its cover replaced Anna Wing’s hand-drawn mule wagon and ruins with the insignia of the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen. The booklet touted the same “impressive memorial to the men who won the West” and “drama of the frontier” as previous editions, but displayed a greater focus on the fort’s role in combating “warlike tribes menacing the mountain villages to the north and infesting the desert stretches of the Santa Fe Trail to the east.” While earlier versions had described these conflicts as stemming from Native responses to “the depredations of the buffalo hunters and settlers,” the new brochure focused on “the Indian menace,” which arose as opportunistic tribes flooded into the power vacuum caused by the Civil War. The new brochure also afforded greater space and detail to the specific campaigns of the Army against tribes, and claimed their effectiveness was what had “brought peace at last to the southern Plains,” whereas earlier versions had credited “hunger caused by the extinction of the southern buffalo herd.”⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Hastings to West, August 15, 1966, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 51.

⁴⁷² “Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico,” (interpretive pamphlet), June 1967, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

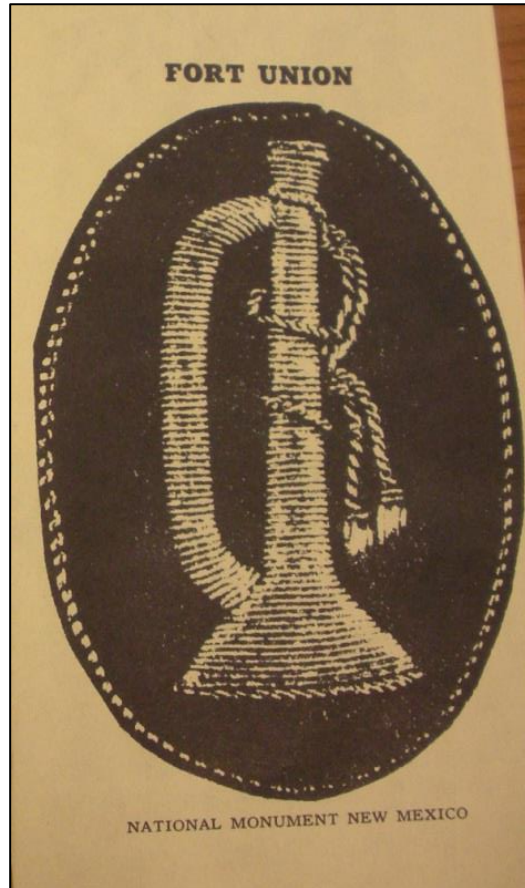


Figure 30: Fort Union National Monument pamphlet, 1967
(Source: NARA-Denver, RG 79,
General Administrative Files, 1965-67, Box No. 57)

Not everyone was on board with the new narrative, however. In a 1966 report on the post hospital, Ranger Julian Vigil lamented the incomplete nature of much research into Southwestern history. He compared the state of the field to a picture, “in a few parts somewhat detailed, in others hazy, in most next to being blank.” Vigil’s disillusionment extended to histories of Fort Union in particular, which he said “seem to have [been] written to prove that a Fort Union existed and that its soldiers fought in and somehow won the Civil War and killed many Indians from neighboring and distant tribes.” He

questioned the unerring focus on “bravery and salvation” and declared that many of the histories of the fort written to that point had been composed “through bravery-colored spectacles.”⁴⁷³

Expanding Interpretive Methods

FOUN staff also turned a critical eye to the state of the park’s interpretive offerings. A few days following the dedication ceremony, they began to reflect on what they had accomplished to that point, and to look for ways to make improvements. Despite a few small needed revisions, Hastings wrote, “the museum is the best on this subject we have ever seen and has already proven itself, in our estimation, a real contribution to the story of Fort Union.”⁴⁷⁴ Nonetheless, he asked historian Donald Mawson, ranger Patricio Quintana, and archaeologist Rex Wilson to review the interpretive offerings at the site and report their impressions.

Mawson’s review found the offerings “adequate,” with the exception of artifact storage capacity. He mentioned a need for additional museum exhibits in the future, but overall found them “excellent,” despite “some experts who are disturbed with some of the technical details of the museum.” Mawson and Quintana suggested corrections to these minor details, which concerned the labeling of various items, the route taken by Colorado Volunteers on their way to Fort Union and Glorieta Pass, and the precise layout of the Santa Fe Trail. Both suggested aesthetic improvements in line with visitor comments,

⁴⁷³ Julian Vigil, *Some Notes on the Fort Union Hospital*, December 7, 1966, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

⁴⁷⁴ Hastings to Miller, June 18, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 1207.

including substituting “new” or “bright” replica items for others which were of a more weathered appearance.⁴⁷⁵ Wilson also found the museum satisfactory, but thought the color scheme for several exhibits “depressing,” “dull and uninspiring,” and some of the layouts “prosaic.” Quintana echoed most of these concerns and also noted the need for improved traffic flow in the museum, which he found otherwise “superior.” All three men noted that the picket fence installed near the parking area was doing a fine job of “funneling” visitors to the visitor center.⁴⁷⁶

Clearly, the managers of FOUN believed the content of the interpretation at the site was satisfactory, but that its presentation could be more lively or engaging. This sense that the monument needed to do more to draw visitors in was a constant concern in the years following the dedication, as attendance lagged well behind the inflated figures that had been used to promote its creation, averaging a little over 10,000. One of their first tasks was the development of additional wayside exhibits to aid in the interpretation of the self-guided trail through the ruins. The topics to be covered in the new waysides were the First Fort, which was “somewhat slighted” by the current guidebook; Santa Fe Trail ruts, which would be represented on an aerial map to relate their scale; and illustrations of civil and military buildings to help visitors in “visualizing the actual life at the post during the active period.”⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ Quintana to Hastings, August 13, 1959 and Mawson to Hastings, n.d., NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 2; Mawson to Hastings, September 1, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 646, Folder 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Mawson, Wilson, and Quintana, “Comments on Visitor Center,” August 13, 1959, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 2.

⁴⁷⁷ Smith to Carpenter, September 10, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 1258.

In August 1961, an NPS “Committee on Interpretive Standards,” led by Appleman and Utley, visited Fort Union. After a typical tour and examination of the guidebook and visitor trail, Appleman made several suggestions for new signage that would take the more extensive information found in the trail guide and place it on signs in the ruins, since in his opinion, “many people do not read the leaflets [but] they will read the markers.” He also recommended upgrading the signage on Highway 85 leading to the fort, which he predicted would “double” visitation. Appleman found the setting inspiring: “The grand sweep of view of this still primitive appearing country where the high plains meet the mountains is a joy in itself.”⁴⁷⁸ He made numerous small suggestions and corrections to signage and exhibits, but overall the committee was pleased, calling the museum “one of the best and most pleasing” anywhere in the NPS system.⁴⁷⁹ Once again, FOUN’s basic interpretive offerings seemed sound, but required additional promotion in order to attract the visitors they deserved.

The 1962 National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings included a short section (the authors referred to Utley’s 1959 report for full detail) describing Fort Union and its role in the history of the Santa Fe Trail, as well as an assessment of the NPS efforts there. The narrative claimed that the fort had been as important as Santa Fe, if not more so, as it had “kept the Santa Fe Trail open during its most dangerous period.” The monument at the time was “the most important center of Santa Fe Trail interpretation in existence,” characterized by its “ghostly” ruins, which allowed the visitor to imagine the busy post as

⁴⁷⁸ Appleman to Chief, Division of Interpretation, August 31, 1961, NPS HFC, Museum Division Exhibit Development and Graphic Research Files, MDR 8, Drawer 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Hastings to Miller, August 26, 1961 and Appleman to Hastings, September 14, 1961, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Boxes 82 and 88.

it had existed in the nineteenth century as it oversaw the “lifeline of civilization.”

However, the survey team noted that the site suffered from remote location and low visitation, and recommended using the prominent Santa Fe Trail ruts visible from the access road as a “lure” to bring visitors to the monument.⁴⁸⁰

Hastings and Region III staff took this advice to heart, and considered the addition of several new attractions to increase visitation. Among their first suggestions were the erection of an observation tower for viewing the Second Fort and the installation of an audio system, which would produce “a most convincing effect of both life and nostalgia throughout the post.” Region III Museum Curator Franklin Smith identified a series of bugle and trumpet calls to correspond to the rhythms of daily fort life, as well as a recording of full retreat parade from the 1870 time period. The songs would be selected from Libby Custer’s *Following the Guidon*, and would include the Seventh Cavalry’s famous “Garryowen” march as well as other songs and signal calls. The added soundtrack, Smith believed, would create “a reasonably complete reconstruction of an aural section of the everyday life of Fort Union.” The audio system had been first broached several years earlier by Utley, who suggested broadcasting bugle calls in the ruins “to create the atmosphere of a middle 1800[s] military post” while keeping the speakers “out of sight and yet not away from hearing of the visitors.” Several regional office staff visited the fort with a borrowed trumpet to test the aural soundscape in

⁴⁸⁰ National Park Service, “The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings: The Santa Fe Trail,” 1962, Fort Union National Monument File 613, Folder 196.

various locations and evaluating the effects, which were clearly audible throughout the fort even in a light wind.⁴⁸¹

Hastings and Mawson had also researched, built, and installed a replica flagpole on the parade ground, and made plans to add a mountain howitzer to the monument's interpretive offerings. The viewing platform, since it constituted an obvious intrusion on the historic atmosphere of the Fort, was rejected by Region III personnel. The apparent inconsistency—rejecting the observation tower but approving the audio system and the flagpole—reflected the basic interpretive scheme: historic material could be resurrected and imposed on the landscape, but only in a way that obscured its artifice. Any obvious visual evidence of the present was unacceptable.⁴⁸²

To encourage local interest and visitation, FOUN staff prepared and delivered interpretive slideshows for groups and clubs both at the fort and in surrounding communities, part of a growing emphasis among NPS units at the time on multimedia presentations. Hastings assembled and delivered several presentations over a number of years to audiences including Highlands University, the State Hospital, the Mora-San

⁴⁸¹ Reed to Hastings, February 26, 1959, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records 1953-1961, Box 88; Smith to Reed, March 9, 1959, NPS HFC, Museum Division Exhibit Development and Graphic Research Files, MDR 8, Drawer 1; Hastings wrote the Regional Office in April 1965 and asked about the short nature of some of the bugle calls, an advance tape of which he had received. Regional Museum Curator Smith replied that “authenticity is king” and that the calls as recorded were similar to what the troops would have heard at Fort Union, despite Hastings’ concern that some of them were “uncertain and wavering instead of rich, full-blown, emphatic notes.” Hastings to Smith, April 5, 1965, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-67, Box 55.

⁴⁸² In 1958, Hastings and FOUN historian Donald Mawson decided that the construction of a replica flagpole to replace the missing one on the parade ground would not violate their directive against reconstruction. Mawson conducted research in the Arrott Collection and sought out the correct proportions of a replica flagpole. The 65-foot pole was installed in June of 1959, and a 10 by 19 foot flag was flown on Sundays and holidays. Annual Narrative Report (supplement), July 11, 1959, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 75.

Miguel Electrical Cooperative, middle and high schools, the American Legion, Masonic Lodges, and service clubs including Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions.⁴⁸³

The first talk, “Fort Union’s Place in the National Park System” ran through seventy slides and recounted some of the notable park units “dedicated to the physical, mental, and moral delight of this and future generations.” Hastings described “the fort that won the West,” built “to enforce law and order” in New Mexico Territory.⁴⁸⁴ A children’s talk, subtitled “Adventure at Fort Union,” included a dialogue between two seventh graders, an unnamed “Boy” and “Girl” who recounted their school trip to the monument, and the lessons they learned from a ranger about the fort and its history (most of which differed little from the main, non-children’s slide presentation). “Boy” handled most of the detailed slides on weapons and equipment, but “Girl” also relayed some information about the prowess of the frontier army. They also repeated the ranger’s admonitions to treat the park with respect and restraint and avoid littering or molesting animals.⁴⁸⁵

“Fort Union Sidelights” began with an image of the Highway 85 entrance sign and took audiences on a virtual tour of the site that traveled along the approach road, passing through the First Fort, Arsenal, and Second Fort before arriving at the Third Fort.

The NPS excavation work and the temporary visitor center showed the transition to

⁴⁸³ National Park Service, Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior, 1962, 82; Croy, “Fort Union National Monument,” 56.

⁴⁸⁴ Hastings to Director, November 26, 1962, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 1497.

⁴⁸⁵ Homer Hastings, “Fort Union’s Place in the National Park System,” November 26, 1962, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 1497.

modern management. “Sidelights” concluded with a sunset view of Fort Union and an elegiac comparison of the historic and modern militaries:

“Today the horse cavalry lingers for some as a fond memory while the unmechanized foot soldier is fading into the limbo of oblivion. The inclusion of Fort Union in the National Park System helps preserve the era when brawn was as necessary as intellect, and when men must match their strength against that of animals to settle the West and establish law and order in an untamed land... When thundering jet planes leave ephemeral crosses in the sky, we recall the progress in military development from the snail’s pace of horse power to the lightning speed of jets. We wonder if the next one hundred years will bring such change as has been seen since Fort Union was established in 1851.”⁴⁸⁶

The slide presentations were only one part of the park’s growing publicity efforts in the 1960s, which included “personal calls and news releases,” a Spanish-language illustrated talk, and a Spanish translation of the site brochure. Staff strove to deliver them with a “friendly and courteous” approach while retaining “complete visitor control.”⁴⁸⁷

When they succeeded in drawing visitors to the site, these new approaches were effective. One visitor described her visit: “Although Fort Union has not been restored, as we walked through the ruins both of us felt the ghosts of the past become very real.” This connection with the past had the desired effect of evincing patriotism in the visitor: “In our opinion Fort Union holds all the charm and interest equal to the Ruins of Old World Civilization and to us is vitally more important because it is a part of our own history.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Homer Hastings, “Fort Union Sidelights,” November 26, 1962, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P11, Box 1497.

⁴⁸⁷ Hastings to Regional Director, July 27, 1965, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files 1965-1967, Box 8; *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Home F. Hastings Spoke and Showed Slides,” April 27, 1965.

⁴⁸⁸ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Fort Union Has Seventh Birthday,” April 3, 1963.

In 1964, monument staff installed a twelve-pounder mountain howitzer they had received from Andrew Johnson National Monument in the museum, which formed the basis of a new exhibit entitled “Artillery in the West.” The exhibit featured an artistic rendering of the November 1864 Battle of Adobe Walls in which such a gun had proven “decisive.” The label copy relayed a story of Native people referring to the howitzer, which fired explosive shells, as “the guns that shoot twice.”⁴⁸⁹ One of the few alterations or additions to the museum exhibits in its history, the howitzer and attendant signage demonstrated NPS’s willingness to make additions to the interpretive offerings that contributed to the site’s evolving sense of place as a site of Indian Wars commemoration and also offered a little additional excitement.

⁴⁸⁹ Smith to Western Museum Laboratory, August 4, 1964, Fort Union National Monument File 646, Folder 5.



Figure 31: “Artillery in the West” exhibit and 12-pounder mountain howitzer, FOUN Visitor Center, c.1964 (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

There were a few examples of NPS’s pulling back the curtain on its interpretive process. In April 1965, new reinforced waysides—fifty in all—were installed in the ruins. These stone pillars, inlaid with “metalphoto” signage, showed historic photographs and schematics of the buildings. A few also featured cutaway images of the ruins, indicating the various steps that had been taking to stabilize them. This frank admission of the artifice of the “historic fabric” served to demonstrate the NPS’s mission to protect the resource, but also gave a glimpse into the process of public history and historic preservation—visitors were not supposed to believe the structures had survived in their

current condition, but rather to understand that they were a product of both historic resources and modern intervention to preserve them.⁴⁹⁰

The improvement effort also applied to the general management of the unit. The park's first Master Plan was completed in September 1964. A more comprehensive planning document than had been completed to this point in the monument's history, it included a thorough assessment of all resources, with a focus on the natural features of the park and a clear articulation of its purpose and objectives as they related to the larger NPS structure. This was the most professional assessment of the monument yet, and served as a bridge between an almost avocational approach to public history and a new management style, still in its very early stages, that was increasingly methodical and "scientific." The plan evoked both the memory of the Indian Wars and veneration of military heroism in its articulation of the monument's purpose:

To preserve the remains of a United States Army post that stood on the Santa Fe Trail and figured prominently in the advance of the American frontier into the Southwest and in maintaining Federal control of the Southwest during the Civil War. Also to preserve something of the face of the Old West...For the imaginative visitor, the West offers few spots more redolent of the drama of frontier history than Fort Union.⁴⁹¹

The trail guide visitors used on their walks through the ruins came in for a new edition in 1966, and was further revised in 1967. The new text, more smoothly written but without the historic photos that had been part of earlier versions, reflected the evolving historical narrative and interpretation. Under a cover featuring crossed cavalry

⁴⁹⁰ "Fort Union National Monument, Sign and Wayside Exhibit Plan," April 27, 1965, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

⁴⁹¹ Homer Hastings, "Master Plan of Fort Union National Monument," September 15, 1964, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

sabers, the guide encouraged visitors “not to think of [Fort Union] as the film-maker’s typical stockaded post, its tiny garrison besieged by screaming Indians...the western forts were not defensive works. They were an offensive weapon, a base of operations from which the soldier rode forth to meet his enemy.” A new cover image in 1967 superimposed Private Neils Larsen of the Sixth Cavalry (whose descendant had recently donated several images and documents) over the ruins. The introductory text described the fort’s various roles in “the fulfillment of our country’s Manifest Destiny” and invited visitors to “step back a little in time when the Indian menace was real, teamsters’ whips cracked, and the soldier’s life varied between monotony and danger.”⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² “Fort Union Trail,” 1966, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275; “Guide to Fort Union,” April 1967, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Anthropology Files, Box 9, File 340.

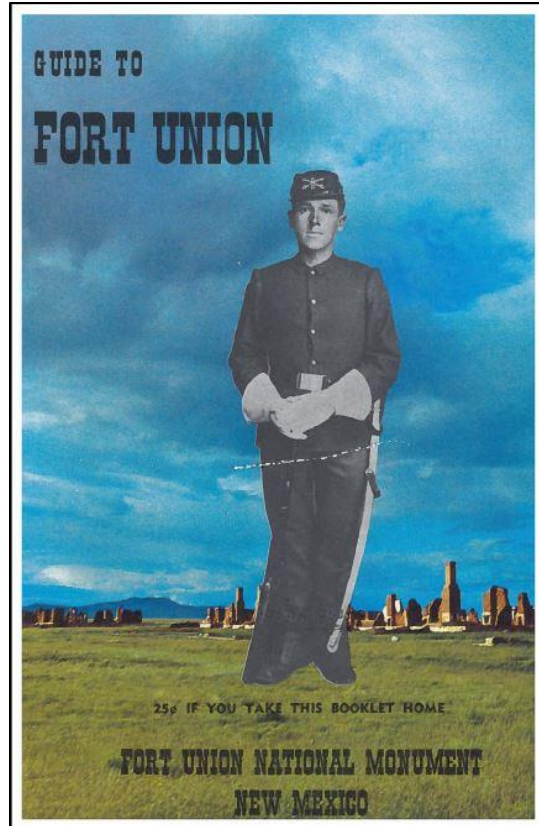


Figure 32: “Guide to Fort Union,” 1967
(Source: NPS Western Archaeological Conservation Center, Southwest Regional Office Anthropology Files, No. 126, Box 9, File 340)

Research

While the park’s efforts to improve its interpretive offerings moved forward, FOUN staff engaged in extensive research to shore up their understanding of the site, which they acknowledged was “perhaps ten percent of what it could and should be.”⁴⁹³ For several years, these efforts proceeded on an ad hoc basis, but by the late 1960s, the base of historical resources and references available to monument staff had grown considerably.

⁴⁹³ Dale Giese, “Resource Study Proposal,” April 14, 1964, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

FOUN's historian Donald Mawson took most of 1960 on educational leave to pursue a Master's degree in History at Hardin-Simmons University in Texas. His thesis chronicled the establishment and initial operations of the monument. During his absence, seasonal rangers, Hastings, and other staff provided the interpretive services.⁴⁹⁴ Mawson returned from his graduate studies in February 1961, but transferred to Tumáacacori National Monument shortly thereafter. He was replaced by Dale Giese, who transferred in from Carlsbad Caverns National Park in June. Giese also soon began a Master's degree in history, receiving release time from his ranger duties to attend courses at Highlands University.⁴⁹⁵

While his staff increased their skills in historical research and writing, Hastings sent numerous requests for information on Fort Union history, including the location of historic features, organizational structures, and other topics, to Utley at Region III and staff at the National Archives.⁴⁹⁶ From these sources and ongoing research in Las Vegas on the fort's history, Hastings had a "fact file" and photograph collection organized "with future growth in mind."⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Annual Interpretive Report, January 9, 1961, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 88.

⁴⁹⁵ Annual Report of Information and Interpretive Services, January 4, 1962, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 88.

⁴⁹⁶ Hastings to Utley, March 2, 1960, Utley to Hastings, March 7, 1960, Hastings to Utley, March 8, 1960, and Hastings to Reed, March 10, 1960, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 82.

⁴⁹⁷ Annual Report of Information and Interpretive Services, January 4, 1962, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 88. This cataloguing effort would be useful for future interpretive planning, and the fact file is still a well-used interpretive resource at the monument today.

The topics of study went beyond the academic. In spring 1958, maintenance workers had unearthed four skeletons during excavations for the residential areas in the southwest corner of the main parcel. The remains were sent to NPS's Southwest Archaeological Center for analysis.⁴⁹⁸ In June 1960, Hastings received archaeologist Christy Turner's report on the provenance and identity of the bodies. Turner concluded that the four individuals, whose race he assessed to be "a combination of North American Indian, Spanish, and possibly Negro," (a combination he said "could be called 'Mexicans' in the sense of multiple racial admixture characterized in the Southwest") had been shot from face-on at indeterminate range. All were males between twenty and thirty years old in good health.⁴⁹⁹ However, Turner did not offer any speculation about the formal reason or circumstances of the men's death, leading Steen to tell Hastings, "You now have a full-fledged mystery to solve."⁵⁰⁰

After several years of fielding individual inquiries from FOUN staff, Utley drew up a Resource Study Proposal for travel to the National Archives "to acquire the solid base of historical source materials on which to found the planning of all programs with historical aspects." The FOUN historian would travel to DC for three months' research to supplement the "incomplete collection" gathered by Arrott and housed at Highlands

⁴⁹⁸ Hastings to Southwestern Archaeological Center, October 9, 1961, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 82.

⁴⁹⁹ Turner to Hastings, June 8, 1960, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 82.

⁵⁰⁰ Steen to Hastings, June 10, 1960, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 88. This "mystery" was addressed in several subsequent reports by NPS researchers, but it was not until 2013 that historical archaeologists Catherine Spude and Doug Scott settled the question of the identities of the men in the grave. See Spude and Scott, "NAGPRA and Historical Research: Reevaluation of a Multiple Burial from Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico," *Historical Archaeology* 47:4 (2013), 121-126.

University. Utley expected this additional documentation totaling “several thousand” documents would “provide necessary data for present and future museum and development planning, historic structures rehabilitation, personal interpretive services, publications, and updating of [the] historical base map.”⁵⁰¹

However, before the research trip could be completed, Giese resigned and left to attend the University of New Mexico in pursuit of a PhD in History. Nicholas Bleser, who had worked as the park’s administrative assistant for several years, filled his position as historian.⁵⁰² Bleser had been engaged in informal historical research on his own for some time, exploring the ruins of the First and Second Forts and reporting his findings on building locations and functions to Hastings. His approach, while methodical, often relied on speculation and supposition—he cheerfully admitted in one report that “there really isn’t one shred of proof for any of this.” Bleser nonetheless made detailed surveys of various structures, comparing historic sketches with the extant ruins. After several years of this ad hoc investigation, however, it was becoming clear that a more formal research effort was required.⁵⁰³

In the winter of 1966-67, Hastings and Bleser submitted requests to Region III for a series of research tasks aimed at improving their understanding of the resource. Bleser noted that “we desperately need an organized, logical, approved research program here;

⁵⁰¹ Utley, “Resource Study Proposal,” August 11, 1964, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

⁵⁰² Hastings to Assistant Director, October 17, 1966, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 51.

⁵⁰³ Bleser to Hastings, September 30, 1965, NPS WACC, FOUN Files, Folder G09.

our total knowledge of Fort Union is sketchy and scattered.”⁵⁰⁴ These research projects focused on excavating, surveying, and cataloguing the ruins, conducting aerial surveys, and archival research to determine the significance of what they found on the ground. They proposed studies of the First and Second Forts, the Arsenal, the Sutler’s Store, and a survey of additional fort features located outside the present boundaries. Hastings warned that “the longer these features remain outside our protection the quicker will be their deterioration.”⁵⁰⁵ Later that year, Bleser conducted extensive research in the Arrott Collection at Highlands University and added several hundred documents and artifacts to the monument collection from that archive and private donors.⁵⁰⁶

Treating the Ruins

While the story of Fort Union continued to evolve, FOUN staff were still struggling with the best method of preserving the vast adobe ruins that constituted the park’s basic physical resource.

⁵⁰⁴ Bleser to Rickey, May 24, 1966, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

⁵⁰⁵ Hastings to Regional Director, August 8, 1966, Hastings to Assistant Director, Resource Studies, October 17, 1966, Hastings to Regional Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, November 28, 1966, Annual Report of Information and Interpretive Services, January 12, 1967, Appleman to Hastings, July 25, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Boxes 51 and 56.

⁵⁰⁶ Bleser, Annual Report of Information and Interpretive Services, January 15, 1968, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files 1965-1967, Box 56.

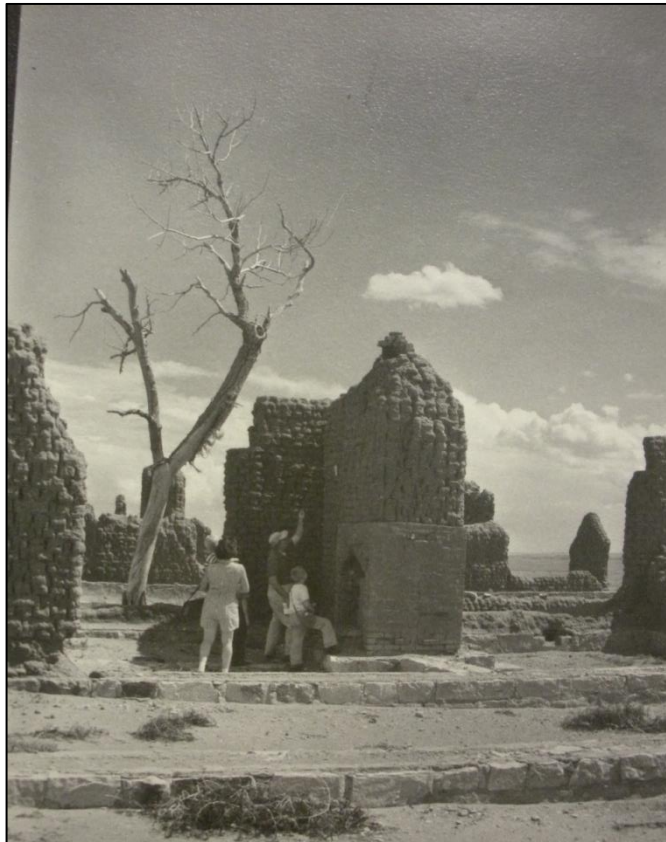


Figure 33: Visitors at FOUN, 1959
(Source: NPS Harpers Ferry Center, Park History Collection, Image 59-58-930)

In May 1960, Hastings wrote former FOUN archaeologist Bruce Cattnach at the latter's new post at Mesa Verde National Park, inquiring whether there had been "a restriction imposed by the Bureau of the Budget against reconstruction of any of the Fort." Cattnach replied that he had been told that the "clean-up and stabilization funds" could not be used for reconstruction, but was not sure of the origin of that rule.⁵⁰⁷ Hastings continued to pursue the question, writing the Regional office for information on

⁵⁰⁷ Hastings to Cattnach, May 4, 1960, Cattnach to Hastings, May 26, 1960, Fort Union National Monument File 613, Folder 196.

whether reconstruction was permitted. Wirth replied in March that this approach was indeed forbidden, citing the May 29, 1952 hearings at which NPS attorney Jackson Price had stated “we plan no restoration” for the ruins at Fort Union. Wirth declared that “the Committee was left with the understanding that there would be no historical restoration or reconstruction of Fort Union structures for historical and exhibit purposes.”⁵⁰⁸

Resigned to the fact that they were limited to half-measures to maintain the monument’s tangible connection to its past, FOUN employees continued to seek ways to slow the ruins’ disappearance. They tried silicone, epoxy, and polyurethane treatments of the adobe ruins to arrest their rate of decay. By the end of the 1960 summer season, the excavations, rehabilitation, and stabilization of all walls was complete, and only minor touch-ups were needed the following year. Undertaken on a “worst come, first served basis,” this project focused on preserving the most visible remnants of the fort: the chimneys and fragments of brick copings atop the officers’ quarters buildings. The workers gave top priority to the five remaining chimneys, which were the most prominent features retaining some semblance of a recognizable building rather than crumbling walls. They tried to match historic colors, shapes, and textures in order to “simulate a weathered appearance” by adding pigment and brushing the walls to add texture. A silicone waterproofing agent, “Silaneal 772,” was applied to all the walls to prevent erosion.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Wirth to Miller, March 9, 1961, Hastings to Miller, January 23, 1961, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence and Planning Program Records, 1953-1961, Box 82.

⁵⁰⁹ Rex Wilson, “Rehabilitation of Historic Structures, 1956-1960, Final Report,” Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.



Figure 34: Stabilization of Officer's Quarters, c.1960
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

Excavations continued, and “the massive and sterile overburden was removed with a small bulldozer whenever it was practical to do so,” with the resulting “dirt and debris” dumped in a nearby arroyo. The excavations carried out below this level still netted thousands of artifacts, which together gave information on “the everyday lives of a late nineteenth-century people.” FOUN archaeologist Wilson also noted the great cache of historic material found in the privies, which he described as “a common denominator

on the frontier.”⁵¹⁰ The initial stabilization had cost \$100,000 and required four summers, with the result that the walls were not only stabilized, but their form and arrangement were set for the purposes of the monument—future efforts would require only maintaining the existing setup, and adding additional excavations and rehab when possible or necessary.⁵¹¹

Despite these initial efforts, however, several more walls collapsed in early 1963 during a heavy windstorm. While the ongoing stabilization efforts appeared to be protecting the ruins from moisture, the high winds continued to knock down significant sections of the walls, which NPS officials feared were at risk. One proposal, originally floated by Historic Structures Architect Charles Pope of the WODC, advocated “reinforcing the walls with steel and wire mesh, uniting them to their original thickness, and plastering the exterior surface, thus restoring the original texture and color of the walls without undertaking a complete restoration of entire buildings.” The group settled on a “systematic program of temporary bracing of threatened walls” using bolts and anchoring cables, which began in the 1964 season.⁵¹²

By the fall of 1965, all walls had received silicone treatment. However, it soon became apparent that this solution was doing as much harm as good. While the silicone waterproofed the adobe and prevented it from washing away, it also trapped moisture inside the walls. This stranded water would freeze during cold weather, shifting and damaging the structure, and also caused rotting and softening in hot weather. The silicone

⁵¹⁰ Wilson, “Archeology and Everyday Life at Fort Union,” 60.

⁵¹¹ Wilson, “Final Report,” 6.

⁵¹² Reed to Miller, April 4, 1963, Fort Union National Monument File 613, Folder 196.

was also white in color after application, an adverse effect on the treasured historic atmosphere and original appearance of the ruins. Monument staff consulted with University of Arizona archeological preservation experts, who recommended using more natural materials. The Post Hospital served as an experimental section in which a new technique of strengthening the walls with a mixture of sandstone, adobe paste, and epoxy resin was tested. It was soon clear that this treatment was superior to the silicone method.⁵¹³

In 1966, Region III Archaeologist Charles Steen advised that FOUN try a new preservation treatment material, Pencapsula, which had been developed specially for NPS by the Texas Refinery Corporation. Pencapsula was a polyurethane resin, which when applied with garden sprayers would penetrate into the adobe, strengthening the walls and increasing their resistance to water. Initial experiments with Pencapsula were failures, however, as the substance caused excessive shrinkage and undesirable discoloration of the walls as it dried. Steen visited in July and derived a new procedure which combined the two chemical applications: workers would patch the walls with a mixture of soil and sand, apply a coating of silicone while the treatment was still wet, then overlay Pencapsula and mineral oil after the silicone dried before finishing with a final coat of silicone. The outcome was firmer, more water-resistant walls, which would hold up better in rain and wind.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 57.

⁵¹⁴ Hastings to Regional Director, May 16, 1966, Hastings to Steen, July 18, 1966, Steen to Hastings, August 1, 1966, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 53.

The new technique was a success. Steen published an article in the March/April 1967 issue of the NPS Park Practice Program's publication, *Grist*, lauding the approach and providing detailed instructions for the application of Pencapsula at other sites.⁵¹⁵ FOUN staff expanded the use of Pencapsula in 1967, applying it to all the adobe surfaces and even to ruined wagons and carts placed among the ruins. One of the most positive aspects of Pencapsula was that, unlike steel rods or braces, it lent the appearance of the ruins not having been preserved, and instead "frozen" in a state of perpetual, unfinished decay.⁵¹⁶

A similar approach of obscuring the hand of maintenance applied to the walking trail. The asphalt path installed in the late 1950s was in disrepair by 1967, as the harsh conditions and native weeds had cracked and heaved the pavement. A new trail was planned, following the same route, which incorporated nearly all flagstone, some original but most of which was gathered from nearby ranches or purchased in Las Vegas.⁵¹⁷

Developing an Interpretive Prospectus

Despite the large expense and effort devoted to preserving the ruins, NPS officials demonstrated a growing belief that they were inadequate to tell the story of FOUN, especially its newest iteration which emphasized the dramatic Indian Wars. In August 1965, an NPS committee reviewing the rehabilitation and reconstruction, planning, and

⁵¹⁵ Charlie Steen, "Preservative Agent for Adobe and Other Materials," *Grist* 11:2 (April 1967), 6-8.

⁵¹⁶ Barrel to Thomas, August 17, 1967, Thomas to Barrel, August 25, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Box 53.

⁵¹⁷ Bleser, Annual Report of Information and Interpretive Services, January 15, 1968, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 56.

interpretive efforts of several NPS units consisting of western forts visited FOUN and made a number of management and interpretive suggestions.⁵¹⁸

The visitors noted that Fort Union was “the outstanding example” of western fort interpretation, “a credit to the Service and...one of the most successfully displayed areas in the System.” However, the committee did have some suggestions as to how the park could improve its interpretation. They advised that visitors were diverse and ranged from very young to very old, with levels of interest ranging from boredom to fascination. “Interpretive development,” they wrote, “need not pander to the former, nor seem impoverished to the latter.” The goal was “an overall development which will appeal to, and be comprehensible by, the indifferent and the poorly informed, as well as instructive and stimulating to the eager and more learned.”

The committee members noted that while ruins were a valuable asset, they were limited to telling the story of “how the buildings looked and how they were used.” Historic structures were not sufficient to tell broader stories, because “in the very nature of the thing, an historic structure does not speak of decisive or influential events that may have happened within a radius of hundreds of miles in a wilderness area, controlled by the fort and the military might it represented...These aspects of the fort story will have to be told elsewhere and by other media.” For these reasons, all forts needed an interpretive

⁵¹⁸ Led by historian Appleman, the team visited Fort Laramie NHS (Wyoming), the proposed Fort Larned NHS (Kansas), Bent's Old Fort NHS (Colorado), Fort Union NM (New Mexico), the proposed Fort Bowie NHS (Arizona), Fort Davis NHS (Texas), and Fort Smith NHS (Arkansas).

program and visitor center, and the committee recommended that an interpretive prospectus be developed to address “gaps” in the interpretation.⁵¹⁹

In response, FOUN staff began working on a new interpretive prospectus, which constituted the unit’s new philosophy. The goal of the interpretive program, they wrote, would be to “explain the acquisition and development of the Southwestern frontier,” to “stimulate the imagination of the visitor” to understand life at the fort “in order to facilitate understanding of those earlier Americans whose lives touched and were touched by the Fort Union story,” and to provide “detailed information” about the area’s history.

The “Fort Union story” that the interpretive prospectus sought to explain adhered to the park’s new narrative structure: the three forts’ overarching motivation was “the Indian,” and his impact on settlement and trade. The First Fort focused on “patrol and escort duty on the Santa Fe Trail,” the Second Fort repelled Confederate invasion, and the Third Fort represented the frontier Army in full flower, and was mostly notable for the wide array of daily-life activities that took place there. Bleser, the document’s principal author, noted that while the ruins excavation and museum exhibits represented significant accomplishments in the park’s first years, “the weakest and most neglected portion is that concerned with interpretation in the ruins.” This focus on the resource itself as the weak link in the interpretive chain meant that the number, scope, and sophistication of the signs placed among the ruins would need to substantially increase, as would the role of monument staff in facilitating the desired connection to the past.

⁵¹⁹ Roy E. Appleman, “Western Military Forts: Report of Committee to Review Western Forts’ Interpretive Development Programs,” November 1965, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275, 7.

A hypothetical visitor to the new FOUN would progress through four interpretive stages. The first stage would occur during the visitor's approach to the ruins from the entrance road, catching tantalizing glimpses of it that became clearer, larger, and more focused as he approached. Bleser recommended adding scenic pull-outs so that the ruins could be viewed in progressively majestic fashion, set among an unspoiled historic landscape.

Stage two would take place in the museum, where the visitor arrived "ready for conscious interpretation." The popular and high-quality didactic materials found therein were to be left unchanged. For the third stage, the visit into the ruins themselves via the walking trail, Bleser recommended a total of 103 wayside displays, divided between simple identifying labels for buildings and engraved reproductions of historical photos from the National Archives. Bleser also recommended audio stations playing a recorded script detailing the history of less immediately visible topics such as the Santa Fe Trail and the First Fort.

The final stage of visiting Fort Union consisted of returning to the desk and encountering documents and artifacts, spurring a physical connection to the past, gained by engagement with the senses. The hot sun on a visitor's back, the wind, the sound of bugle calls, a fluttering flag, ruined wagons, and the vast expanse of prairie would all combine to send them on a "journey to the past." To accomplish this goal, no rebuilding of the fort structures should take place; rather, "reconstruction must arise in the mind of the visitor, with assistance from two elements: the mood generated by the ruins themselves and subtle stimuli provided by the Service."

The most important additional “stimulus” Bleser recommended in order to “bridge the gap between past and present” was the live demonstration of firearms by costumed interpreters, which would provide “a fitting exclamation point” to the visit. All these interpretive goals would be facilitated by the fact that Fort Union was not well known and remotely located; therefore, visitors would arrive unburdened by “erroneous impressions” of the fort’s past, and hungry for knowledge—this desire “to be informed” meant that visitors amounted to a blank slate.⁵²⁰

The draft of the prospectus passed through the Regional Office (which praised its “innovative approach”) to Washington.⁵²¹ Regional Chief of Interpretive and Visitor Services Robert Barrel praised the document’s move toward “a much more first-person active kind of interpretation,” focused on “human interest vignettes” along with rifle demonstrations and a revised circulation pattern on the interpretive trail. “It seems to us,” Barrel wrote, “that we are striving toward an interpretation with feeling, with personalities, with drama, with humor.”⁵²² DC officials were enthusiastic that the new interpretive orientation would help Fort Union move past its “neat, quietly interesting and adequate layout” which unfortunately relied upon an unsatisfying, “third person passive” approach.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Nicholas J. Bleser, “Interpretive Prospectus, Fort Union National Monument,” September 1967, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Folder 127.

⁵²¹ Barrel to Hastings, May 19, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 55.

⁵²² Barrel to Hastings, August 3, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 55.

⁵²³ Sagan to Beard, July 24, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 55.

The goal of the interpretation at Fort Union as expressed in the 1967 interpretive prospectus was to stimulate the imagination of the visitor in order to transport them into the past. The various stimuli provided by the NPS would act as a catalyst to take people to an encounter with an imagined history that would be inescapably authentic for being delivered via their own bodies and minds. To create this direct connection with the past, staff at FOUN would increasingly rely in subsequent years upon a new method of creating a direct connection with the past: historical reenactment and living history.

In the first eight years of FOUN's existence, its managers had examined its offerings and found them lacking. Unsatisfied with the memorial landscape that had been created by the site's initial caretakers in the years leading up to its dedication, they worked to craft a new, more dramatic narrative that focused on the Indian Wars, with their high-stakes drama, as a more central part of Fort Union's history than the relatively staid Santa Fe Trail context that had dominated earlier histories of the place.

In response, FOUN and Region III staffers worked to expand the scope and delivery of their interpretation, upgrading signage, brochures, museum exhibits, and interpretive talks delivered to visitors. They also explored new methods of preserving the adobe ruins that formed the core of the site's tangible, visible physical reminders of the past. They conducted new research in archives and acquired dozens of new resources to improve their ability to deliver an authentic connection to the past to visitors.

However, these efforts to subtly tweak the nature of place at Fort Union were not enough. The changes advocated by the 1967 Interpretive Prospectus were aimed at appealing more directly to visitors and moving beyond the static, impersonal experience

of walking through crumbling buildings with only a thin brochure as an accompaniment. In the next era of place-making at Fort Union, the NPS would add a critical ingredient to the monument's sense of place: people.

CHAPTER 5

“A FORT OF PEOPLE INSTEAD OF BRICKS”:

HEYDAY OF LIVING HISTORY, 1968-1980

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the managers and staff of Fort Union National Monument began to experiment with a new method of interpretation: the use of staff and volunteers in period dress demonstrating skills and techniques from the past. The practice of living history was gaining in popularity across various units of the NPS at the time, and FOUN’s earliest forays into the world of reenactment actually predated these trends by some years. The shift into living history, which soon became the central focus of the interpretive offerings at the monument, was met with interest and approval by the public, and attendance increased significantly.

Visitors and interpreters alike found the practice of living history fun and engaging, and believed it created a more substantial, truer connection with the past than signage and brochures, narrative accounts, or even the adobe ruins themselves could offer. FOUN staff responded by steadily expanding the number and scope of reenactment activities through the mid-1970s. At the same time, the monument was making adjustments to its other interpretive offerings that echoed the turn from a disembodied, third-person, didactic approach to one that increasingly favored more intimate stories and colorful portrayals of individuals. The use of wayside audio stations incorporating dramatic historical fiction accounts brought the presence of people into the adobe ruins, as visitors could now hear voices “from the past” as they perused the silent, crumbling walls.

After a few years, however, it became apparent both at FOUN and throughout NPS that in the pursuit of entertainment value, some degree of historical accuracy had been sacrificed. By the late 1970s, monument staff realized that their focus on living history and first-person accounts had detracted from other areas of responsibility, namely the state of historical research and the condition of the adobe ruins themselves. The program was scaled back and by 1980 the park was still offering costumed reenactment, but in a more limited fashion that reflected a trend of readjustment across the Service.

FOUN staff identified a number of lacunae in their understanding of the site's history, and proposed to increase their knowledge through a number of new studies. At the same time, it became clear that the various chemical applications used to arrest the deterioration of the adobe were not working, and in fact were making things worse in some cases. This state of "emergency" led to special funding and resource allocations in an attempt to stabilize the walls, but via a new approach of augmenting the historic material with new adobe where necessary, effectively substituting aesthetics in place of pure authenticity in the quest to capture the past.

NPS Moves into Living History

Before the 1960s, NPS rarely employed living history as an interpretive strategy. "Limited recreations of historical activities or processes" were explored in some instances, mostly "Indian dances" or craftwork in the 1930s and glassmaking and firearms demonstrations at a few scattered parks in the East and in California in the 1940s. By 1959, however, interest in living history was growing. NPS Director Conrad Wirth reluctantly agreed to permit "high-quality pageants and re-enactments...provided

inspirational and interpretive benefits are derived.” The “dignity” of these performances was paramount, and Wirth discouraged “colorful but inaccurate spectacle” which threatened historical accuracy. Only nonprofit organizations could conduct re-enactments, and NPS would not support the productions financially or, in most cases, allow them to be held inside park boundaries.⁵²⁴

However, between 1961 and 1965, the Service’s attitude changed as military and firearm demonstrations held during Civil War centennial activities proved wildly popular. In 1965, NPS director George Hartzog broke sharply with the tradition of reluctant engagement with living history when he pledged to rebuild and reopen Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site as an operating trading post and not “another dead and embalmed historical area.” Under Hartzog’s leadership, a large-scale proposal for dozens of “historical farms” was followed by a directive from the national office in 1967 that “all regions experiment with interpreters in period dress.”⁵²⁵

Some site administrators were loath to abandon the traditional NPS uniform, with its hard-won air of authority and trust, but Hartzog insisted on the expansion of the program and by 1970, NPS was publishing a guide to living history programs, which numbered 114 by 1974. A service-wide evaluation praised the way “these innovative approaches have greatly enhanced visitor appreciation and substantially improved the quality of NPS interpretation.”⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Wirth to Field Offices, February 12, 1959, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1; Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 54.

⁵²⁵ Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 59.

⁵²⁶ William C. Everhart, *A Report on National Park Service Interpretation* (Harpers Ferry, VA: National Park Service, 1973), 34.

Living history was especially well-suited to sites whose historical integrity had been compromised. As interpreters at Fort Caroline NHS pointed out when questioned on their use of “inappropriate” reenactment techniques, “What do you do to bring the visitor a little closer to the story of your site, when the major historic resource [the fort] is missing?”⁵²⁷ The answer for many units, including FOUN, was to increasingly utilize costumed interpreters to demonstrate for visitors an idea of what the past had looked, sounded, smelled, and even tasted like.

Early Living History at Fort Union, 1961-65

Even before the widespread adoption of living history by NPS, FOUN staff had been experimenting with the practice. In May 1961, the Santa Fe Trail Caravan visited Fort Union. Organized by the U.S. Highway 56 Association and the Kansas Historical Society to mark the 100th anniversary of Kansas statehood and the 140th anniversary of the opening of Santa Fe Trail, the traveling pageant included more than 150 actors in period dress. The caravan traveled mostly by trucks along highways on their way to Santa Fe to attend that site’s designation as a National Historic Landmark, but dismounted and paraded through towns along their route. The caravan visited Fort Union and made an impressive display of historical atmosphere, to the point that the *Optic*’s reporter thought that “it wouldn’t have taken much imagination to hear a ghostly bugle call floating across the parade ground.”⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ *In Touch*, 20:1 (July 1977), 19 (Quoted in Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*).

⁵²⁸ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Visitors Impress Ft. Union Officials,” May 29, 1961; Kansas State Historical Society, “Kansas Historical Notes,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Autumn 1961), https://www.kshs.org/publicat/khq/1961/1961autumn_notes.pdf (Accessed September 22, 2015).

Perhaps inspired by the romantic and picturesque effect of the Caravan, FOUN historian Dale Giese began planning occasional demonstrations of “frontiersmen” to visit the park on horseback in order to “give visitors a sense of frontier life.” Giese also arranged for park staff, dressed in Army uniforms, to give weapons demonstrations for visitors, which proved popular.⁵²⁹ In March of 1962, monument staff and members of Fort Union, Inc. participated in a reenactment of the Battle of Glorieta Pass as part of the state’s Civil War Centennial celebrations.⁵³⁰

Another early living history performance took place in September 1964, when a group of Boy Scouts were treated to a performance by Giese and Louis Clayton, a Highlands University student and Civil War collector. Clayton rode out from behind the hospital as Giese was relaying information about that structure, “surprising” the ranger, and the pair recited a dialogue detailing Clayton’s experiences on a campaign against a group of “red devil” “Navajoe Indians” in 1874. Clayton stayed completely in character, relaying details of combat and daily fort life, which he characterized as “monotonous,” although there were opportunities for diversion in the form of gambling, drinking, and dances. Echoing the ongoing bellicose turn in FOUN’s historical narrative, Clayton opined that “one of the best ways to fight [Indians] is to destroy their homes, food, and horses to force them to return to their reservations.” This performance received an official commendation from Acting Regional Director George Miller, who called it the “sort of

⁵²⁹ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 54-56; National Park Service, *Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior*, 1962, 96.

⁵³⁰ *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Battle Anniversary to be Celebrated,” March 23, 1962.

imaginative interpretation [that] can certainly bring to life the story that otherwise echoes hollowly through the ruins of the old Army fort.”⁵³¹



Figure 35: Living History Demonstration, September 1964
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

Expanding Living History at FOUN, 1966-69

These early successes soon inspired additional living history activities. In April 1966, the monument celebrated its tenth anniversary and the fiftieth anniversary of NPS with an open house. The day’s activities included tours and refreshments, capped off with “cavalrymen in period uniforms” giving firearms demonstrations including “Colt’s

⁵³¹ Dale Giese, “Special Program,” September 10, 1964, Miller to Hastings, September 18, 1964, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Correspondence Files 1953-1961, Entry 219, Box 1.

famous cap and ball pistol.” These demonstrations, delivered with park staff’s personally owned period weapons, were a hit, and visitors responded with “spontaneous applause.”⁵³²

Shortly after replacing Giese as historian, Nick Bleser noted that in comparison to exciting living history demonstrations, signage and museum exhibits did a poor job of fully immersing visitors in the past. NPS staff would need to further intermediate the visitor experience via living history in order to “enliven the guided tours and to encourage more visitors to take advantage of them.” The park’s goals for 1967 included the procurement of more and better replica firearms for demonstrations.⁵³³ These props would help FOUN staff increase visitor engagement by more directly engaging their senses, in order to give them the impression of actually experiencing the past instead of merely reading or seeing its depiction in interpretive media.

FOUN Superintendent Homer Hastings requested that the park be allowed to purchase and demonstrate period firearms for two main purposes: first, to encourage visitors to visit the ruins despite the imposition of a 50 cent fee which would go into effect in April; and second, to provide “a spectacular visual aid.” He claimed that the firearm demonstration was “not intended to bring the ruins to life, for the ruins create a mood that sparks creativity in the mind of the imaginative visitor,” but rather to create “a tangible bridge that links the visitor with history; the exclamation point at the end of a walk through the past.” The demonstrations functioned, Hastings reported, as “a catalyst,

⁵³² *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, “Ft. Union Will Have Open House,” March 25, 1966; Bleser, “Annual Report on Informational and Interpretive Services,” January 12, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 56.

⁵³³ Bleser, “Annual Report on Informational and Interpretive Services,” January 12, 1967.

unleashing a flood of questions that reflected a renewed and vigorous interest in the history of Fort Union, the Southwest, and the United States.”⁵³⁴

In the 1966 and 1967 summer seasons, staff expanded the demonstration programs to include new NPS-purchased replica firearms, including a Model 1862 Remington .58 caliber rifle nicknamed “Zouave.” Park staff cast the minie balls used in the demonstrations and sold them to the public as souvenirs. Demonstrations were given upon visitor request, usually near the end of a visit. The firing area was located about thirty-five yards north of the visitor center next to the interpretive trail, with a sand trap target area about twenty yards away. The interpretive staff were to obey military protocol in handling and firing the weapon for reasons of authenticity as well as safety. Bleser anticipated visitor questions about the weapon’s range and recoil, since “many of the adult male members of your group will have at some time handled an M-1 Garand rifle” during their military service. Interpretive staff would exploit these men’s personal, contemporary experience to create a richer connection with the past.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Hastings to Miller, January 29, 1967 NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 55. Emphasis in original.

⁵³⁵ Bleser, “The U.S. Rifle Model 1862, Remington, Caliber .58: A Safety Manual for the Firing Demonstration at Fort Union National Monument,” April 18, 1968, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.



Figure 36: Rifle Demonstration, c.1967
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

A trip to NPS's Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia for a Firearms Demonstration and Safety Course inspired additional improvements. Hastings requested that interpretive staff be permitted to wear period dress full-time. The request was granted, and in 1968 Bleser began wearing an 1883 infantry uniform along with his own period clay pipe, pocket watch, and handle-bar moustache.⁵³⁶ The costume proved popular with visitors, and Bleser also enjoyed the experience: "the children's comments really make life really worthwhile."⁵³⁷ One notable departure from the otherwise strict

⁵³⁶ Hastings to Director, October 20, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 55.

⁵³⁷ Bleser, "Annual Report on Informational and Interpretive Services," January 12, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 56.

accuracy that FOUN staff claimed they aspired to was that “nearly all” of the rifle firing demonstrations conducted in 1968 were performed by a female ranger, Lois Emrick, raising the question of whether spectacle or education was the greater priority.⁵³⁸

Hastings and Bleser’s early living history efforts met with praise from the Washington, DC offices of NPS. Doug Hubbard, Deputy Assistant Director of Interpretation, expressed his staff’s appreciation for FOUN’s “enthusiasm and willingness to experiment” after Bleser sent them a sample of his homemade hardtack. Assistant Director of Interpretation Bill Everhart concurred, and praised Bleser’s development of “a program that is ‘just right’ for Fort Union. It has flair and interest, as well as scholarship, and we are sure that it is not only a hit, but also an enlightenment, for all of your visitors.”⁵³⁹

In the 1969 season, the replica rifle was fired over 700 times, for an audience of about 7,000 visitors altogether.⁵⁴⁰ These small-caliber events led to a desire for ever-greater spectacle. Bleser’s mostly-serious proposal to keep a dozen live mules in a corral outside the visitor center was rejected by regional office staff, who were “not convinced we can keep the people from molesting the mules (innocently or otherwise) and getting

⁵³⁸ Bleser, “Annual Report on Informational and Interpretive Services,” January 12, 1967, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1965-1967, Box 56.

⁵³⁹ Hubbard to Miller, July 30, 1968, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 138; Everhart to Hastings, December 24, 1968, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 137.

⁵⁴⁰ Bleser to All hands, September 10, 1969, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 137.

kicked or bitten.”⁵⁴¹ He also recommended acquiring a working replica cannon to be placed on the parade ground and used for demonstrations: “wouldn’t it be fun to crack off a blank round or two on the Fourth!?”⁵⁴² This request would eventually be granted, and cannon demonstrations soon became a permanent part of living history at FOUN.

Bleser’s report on the Living History Program for the 1969 season declared it to be of “outstanding” effectiveness: “instead of a million dry words describing the past, there it is, talking to you.” He concluded that “period costume projects are costly, time-consuming, and worth every penny.” Acknowledging that the success of such programs hinged on the personality and enthusiasm of those delivering them, Bleser claimed that “a billion dollars cannot replace the look of awe on a child’s face as he stands confronted by the 19th century talking to him. History really can be fun.”⁵⁴³

Bleser was transferred to Fort Davis in late 1969. His replacement, Roy Beasley, elected to continue the replica uniform tradition and ordered his own costume, that of an 1876 First Sergeant of the 15th Infantry, Company C.⁵⁴⁴ Even though he was gone, Bleser’s efforts had a lasting impact on the early stages of FOUN’s living history program. In an interview at his new post, he explained his philosophy: “You must remember that visitors are individuals, and what they get out of coming here is for them

⁵⁴¹ Bleser to Hastings, March 31, 1969, Hastings to Kowski, April 16, 1969, Kowski to Hastings, May 7, 1969, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 138.

⁵⁴² Bleser to Regional Curator, August 9, 1969, NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Museum Division Exhibit Development and Graphic Research Files, MDR 8, Drawer 1.

⁵⁴³ Hastings to Kowski, August 29, 1969, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 137. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴⁴ Hastings to Kowski, January 28, 1970, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 137.

unique and singular. They may feel like a human blob of meat waiting to be processed, unless you help them by going out of your way to seek out their questions... Keep in mind that living history is ‘Telling it like it was,’ and the more you learn, the better you can portray life like it really was.”⁵⁴⁵

Full Focus, 1970-75

By 1970, living history had become a central focus of FOUN’s interpretive strategy. The new orientation was codified in the monument’s Historical Research Management Plan. In addition to the ruins, the document’s main authors, Emrick and Bleser, identified “intangible” historical resources at the park, which included the “mood” that arose from its remote location and setting. These “intangible” resources, however, even in concert with the aura of the ruins, were insufficient to fully connect visitors with the past: “without mental recreation of people and their daily existence the ruins remain empty, lacking meaning or reality.”

The typical visitor experienced a soaring imagination, but “unfortunately it soars in the direction of erroneous romanticized impressions gathered from fiction.” Visitors expected a log stockade based on their experiences with television or movies. “We must have the means,” the authors stated, “of channeling and directing that soaring imagination along the paths of truth and reality to a better understanding of his heritage. Truth is our objective, honesty our weapon, and research provides the ammunition.” Their method of choice for delivering historical content, living history, needed a firmer grounding in historical research, and so the authors proposed several research projects aimed at adding

⁵⁴⁵ Jean Bullard, “Frontier Fort Davis,” *NPS Newsletter*, 8:7 (April 16, 1973), 3.

“depth” to the broad outlines of the site’s history. The monument’s collection of documents and books, and the artifacts gathered from the setting provided “the skeleton for the flesh of research” that would fill out the necessary details about the specific realities of the fort.⁵⁴⁶

The 1970 summer season was another successful one. Monument staff sought to capture “the flavor as well as the fact of Fort Union” in order to construct for the visitor “a Fort of people instead of bricks.” Visitors reported that the “strangely dressed” staff members had successfully evoked a connection with the past that transcended the deteriorated state of the historic ruins: “to these people Fort Union becomes more than just walls standing in an open valley.” Despite this pleasing aesthetic, FOUN historian Beasley acknowledged that “accuracy has been our biggest problem in formulating [our] living interpretation programs,” and requested additional coordination and training from NPS central offices.⁵⁴⁷ While living history was effective in engaging visitors with some idea of an imagined past, it was unclear whether that version had all that much to do with the historical Fort Union.

In January 1971, after thirteen years of service as Superintendent, Hastings retired. His successor Claude Fernandez, a veteran of World War II and longtime member of the staff at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, did not share his enthusiasm for

⁵⁴⁶ Nicholas J. Bleser and Lois R. Emrick, “Historical Research Management Plan, Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico,” February 1970, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 9, Folder 340.

⁵⁴⁷ Hastings to Director, Harpers Ferry Center, September 23, 1970, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 137.

living history.⁵⁴⁸ In the summer of 1972, regional office staff (many of whom had never been especially supportive of the reenactments) recommended that since no reconstruction work was permitted at the park, “living demonstrations should not be considered as a part of the interpretive program. Instead the use of ‘ghost props’ such as wagon wheels, blacksmithing equipment, etc., can be strategically placed around the ruin to add to the ghostly aura and help tell the story of Fort Union.” The rifle demonstration was discontinued in 1972 due to safety concerns and the staff’s feeling that it was “incongruous with the ‘ghostly ruins’ atmosphere of the fort.” The reviewers did, however, approve “the use of local military troops [in] drilling performances in the parade ground...as an excellent way to commemorate special historic events.” However, this return to the original idea of Fort Union as a quiet place populated chiefly by the spirits of the past and not their living embodiments proved only a temporary diversion.⁵⁴⁹

Fernandez transferred to Chamizal National Memorial in June of 1973. His replacement, Ross Hopkins, arrived in July from the Denver Service Center, where he had previously served as a planning specialist. Under his direction, FOUN would revitalize and greatly expand the scope of its living history program. An aficionado of military history, Hopkins later recalled that because of the nature of his new post, his decision to focus interpretation on a “dynamic living history program” was only “natural.”⁵⁵⁰ Material support for the revival came from the Southwest Parks and

⁵⁴⁸ Bob Hoff, “Hispanic Heritage Month 2003: Two Men Serving Others, Same Last Name,” *Carlsbad Caverns National Park, Canyons and Caves* 30 (Fall 2003), 7-8.

⁵⁴⁹ Frank Kowski, “Operations Evaluation of Fort Union National Monument, June 21-22, 1972,” NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

⁵⁵⁰ Ross Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1973,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275; Zhu, *Administrative History*, 56.

Monuments Association, which provided nearly \$6,000 toward “uniforms, clothing, equipment, firearms, and other articles” for the program.⁵⁵¹

From 1973 to 1975, living history totally dominated the focus of FOUN’s interpretive staff. Bolstered by the addition of new workers via the Volunteers in the Parks (VIP) program and seasonal employees, the demonstrations expanded in scope and number. Special events including International Student Day, Veterans Day, the Rough Riders reunion, Boy Scout excursions, and “Las Vegas Day at Fort Union” drew crowds of over a thousand people, including many first-time local visitors.⁵⁵²

The park advertised the program as giving visitors the opportunity to discover “costumed interpreters working on projects of the same type and in the same manner as people at Fort Union did in the last half of the 19th century.” A flyer touting the living history demonstrations to locals in Las Vegas and Raton featured a dragoon’s dress cap and asked “What was it like to live on the frontier? Visit Fort Union National Monument and See!”⁵⁵³ The park also made extensive outreach efforts, appearing in period dress at parades and dedication ceremonies in the area, and conducting a weekly radio program in Las Vegas. The Southwest Regional Office heavily promoted the fort through print, radio, and television media.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1973.”

⁵⁵² Zhu, *Administrative History*, 57-58.

⁵⁵³ Living History Flyer, April 1975, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵⁵⁴ Ross Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1974,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

Visitors arriving at the park in the mid-1970s were not disappointed. The whole staff dressed in period clothing for the entire summer, and on weekends in the spring and fall, including the maintenance workers. This “repersonalizing interpretation” included actors aged nine to seventy-one and portrayals of diverse ethnic groups in order to bring out “the tricultural flavor of the Southwest.” Female reenactors wore “long dresses, aprons and bonnets,” and male employees dressed as soldiers “representing the highlights of Fort Union’s history.” Park staff portrayed privates from four different regiments, and female employees acted out the roles of “army wives, and civilian ordnance and quartermaster department employees.” A cavalry horse and mounted trooper of the Sixth Cavalry were new additions to the 1975 program.⁵⁵⁵

The demonstrations took place in a wood and canvas shelter structure “like those used by soldiers and their families when no permanent post quarters were available,” and included preparation of “historic” recipes such as hardtack, coffee, pinto beans, and sow belly, which visitors were invited to sample. Staff demonstrated sewing, gardening, blacksmithing, toy making, and other tasks, including military ones such as making cartridges and cartridge bags. Topics of interpretive talks included histories of various military units, “Frontier Medicine,” “Social Life” and “Military Discipline.”⁵⁵⁶ The fort held its first wedding since the 1880s in June 1975, when two volunteers, Susan Love and Paul Shampine, were married in a period-dress ceremony.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1975,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

⁵⁵⁶ Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1974,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

⁵⁵⁷ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 57.

In the 1974 summer season, the park had increased its collection of firearms to include several additional carbines, rifles, and pistols, as well as a functional six-pounder field gun. The male park staff conducted firing demonstrations using blank ammunition, and staff posed for photographs among the ruins in period dress, acting out gunfights and taking shelter behind the wagons in the Mechanics Corral.⁵⁵⁸



Figure 37: Living History Activities, 1970s
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

Visitors continued to respond positively. Nearly 600 interpretive presentations took place to over 16,000 visitors in 1974, in addition to forty offsite presentations to about 18,000 people.⁵⁵⁹ Nearly all the visitors to the park experienced some sort of direct

⁵⁵⁸ Ross Hopkins, "Current/Past Living History Weapons Demonstrations," June 1974, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-73, Box 349.

⁵⁵⁹ Hoff to Kowski, October 21, 1974, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-73, Box 349.

interpretive programming from the staff, which generated not only increased interest but a longer average length of stay among visitors—up to six hours in some cases.⁵⁶⁰ The reenactments received positive reviews from as far away as the *Denver Post*, which quoted visitors who felt they had “relived [sic] at old Fort Union.”⁵⁶¹

“For many people,” Hopkins informed the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, “the step into the past provides an enjoyable respite from the twentieth century.”⁵⁶² However, the superintendent’s planning notes indicated that strict period accuracy or relevance to Fort Union was perhaps less important than visitor appeal. “Any authentic task that needs to be done in support of the L.H. program that can be done in public view, without modern tools, should be considered,” Hopkins advised his staff. Shopping lists often referred to “old timey” items needed for demonstrations, or “old looking” tools that would fit visitors’ expectations.⁵⁶³

Mothballed and Reinstated, 1975-80

By the mid-1970s, the initial excitement generated by the success of living history was beginning to wear off as some within NPS considered the costs that had accompanied it. Assistant NPS Director Robert Utley summarized the growing discomfort of many NPS historians in the 1974 *In Touch* newsletter. “I fear that we have let the public's enthusiasm for living history push us from interpretation of the park's

⁵⁶⁰ John Jarrell, “Fort Union Lives Again,” *New Mexico Magazine*, May 1975.

⁵⁶¹ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 57.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ “Living History Materials,” 1975, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

features and values into productions that, however entertaining, do not directly support the central park themes,” Utley wrote. The problem was worsened by the degree to which “fun” living history made an outsized impression on visitors, and could actually undermine the educational mission of many units by focusing on the wrong aspects of their history. “We are obsessed with showing what everyday life was like in the past,” Utley claimed, “. . .but most of our historic places are not preserved because of the everyday life that occurred there.” A focus on day-to-day activities, however well-executed, meant that visitors were not “well served by our interpretive program.”⁵⁶⁴

Ironically enough, Nick Bleser himself voiced his agreement from his position at Tumacácori National Historical Park, arguing that the din of interpreters and visitors was in danger of drowning out the special nature of some historic places: “I am personally convinced that we still need areas in the Service that allow visitors the freedom and privacy necessary to arrive at their own conclusions. Perhaps they'd prefer to walk with ghosts in silence for a change.”⁵⁶⁵

The costs of living history in terms of resource management were becoming clear at FOUN, too. New staff spent much of their time attending living history and other training courses in Santa Fe, Denver, and Harpers Ferry during the winter and fall months of 1974. Between these demands and the living history program, planning and other interpretive work fell down the priority list.⁵⁶⁶ In the early 1990s, former FOUN ranger Robert Arnberger recalled that he had not been in favor of the living history emphasis at

⁵⁶⁴ Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 66.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁶⁶ Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1974,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

the time. He believed that unlike other NPS units where historic structures had been reconstructed, Fort Union was an inappropriate place for living history because it was exclusively ruins, and that it soon became a “circus” atmosphere, which he only reluctantly supported.⁵⁶⁷

The damaging effects of living history and reenactment even threatened to reach into the historic materials held in the park’s artifact collections. Staff drafted the monument’s first Scope of Collections statement in September 1975, and discounted the need for strict historical accuracy in a fashion that recalled Arthur Woodward’s earlier lack of concern for provenance. While FOUN artifacts were expected to conform with the major historical themes of the park, “a physical connection with Fort Union within the forty year span of its existence is not necessary for a specimen to be useful in understanding or documenting some portion of the Fort Union story...in short, what should or should not be collected cannot be based on arbitrary dates.”⁵⁶⁸

This nonchalance led to a contentious exchange between FOUN staff and Regional Curator David Brugge over the monument’s proposed collection policy. The FOUN staff pushed to be allowed to accession reproduction items as part of their museum collection and to use historic artifacts as part of living history demonstrations. Brugge strenuously protested this suggestion as against NPS policy, and surmised that any use in living history programming “would be conducive to excess wear and tear on

⁵⁶⁷ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 58.

⁵⁶⁸ “Fort Union National Monument, Scope of Collections Statement,” September 18, 1975, Fort Union National Monument File 646, Folder 10.

the object.” Hopkins tersely responded a few days later that the unit would take no further action on the development of a collections policy.⁵⁶⁹

Amid this context of discontent, the ultimate factor in halting FOUN’s headlong rush into living history turned out to be a fairly basic one: money. In response to direction from the Southwest Regional Office, Hopkins ordered the program suspended in early 1976. That year’s budget greatly increased funding for ruins preservation, but it cut support for the seasonal and VIP staffers who had provided the energy for the living history program. The horse barn and shelters were dismantled, and the period uniforms were placed on display in the museum. FOUN staff were instructed to focus all their attention, energy, and funding to rehabilitation and preservation of the ruins.⁵⁷⁰

There was also evidence that not all of the monument’s potential audience was thrilled with the brand of historical reenactment taking place at FOUN. In March 1976, several interpretive staff participated in a Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage reenactment event which traveled across the state following the Santa Fe Trail. The event met with “harassment” by protestors from the Chicano political movement La Raza Unida in Las Vegas. This and other protests led park staff to consult with FBI field agents to discuss “security problems.”⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Hoff to Brugge, March 2, 1976, Brugge to Hoff, March 5, 1976, Hopkins to Brugge, March 15, 1976, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-73, Box 332.

⁵⁷⁰ Hopkins, “Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1975,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275; National Park Service, “Fort Union to Mothball Living History Program,” 1976, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-73, Box 352.

⁵⁷¹ Hopkins, “Superintendent’s Monthly Report,” March 1976, Fort Union National Monument File 677, Folder 193.

The monument's June 1976 Statement for Management, a "general framework for directing park operations," reflected the need for a more balanced approach. Brief statements of significance focused on the fort's role in supply and Santa Fe Trail protection, and emphasized its natural setting in a "broad lonely valley, with few modern intrusions—a scene that provides a matchless historic setting for a frontier military post." This context was used to determine the park's Management Objectives. They were to protect the resource by continuing to develop stabilization and preservation techniques; work productively with the UL&GC to comply with all agreements with the company, preserve structures outside the park boundaries, and gain additional visitor access to the First Fort/Arsenal site; protect the "environmental quality" of the area; and "provide a balanced interpretive program, which emphasizes the significance of this historic military post, and the relationships between the Indian, Spanish, and Anglo people who lived the story."⁵⁷²

Staff at the unit and regional level also began to realize that the urgent need for research on Fort Union's history went beyond that performed in support of living history. A Historic Structures Report on the Third Fort Union based on Region III Research Historian Dwight Pitcaithley's National Register of Historic Places nomination was underway by 1977. Several assessments of the state of research at FOUN recommended new or revised studies on such additional topics as "the Indian and Fort Union" and "the reasons for the existence of Indian-white conflicts," including "the history of Spanish-Indian conflicts and Spanish-Indian raiding and trading patterns, the importance of

⁵⁷² "Fort Union National Monument, Statement for Management," June 1976, Fort Union National Monument File 661, Folder 12048.

raiding in Plains Indian economics, and the military and diplomatic policies towards Indians pursued by the U.S. Government earlier in the nineteenth century.”⁵⁷³

The shift away from living history had some drawbacks. Park visitation decreased by a total of fifteen percent in the 1976 and 1977 seasons, but even more significant was a huge reduction in the number of visitor contacts made through living history presentations offsite and at special events. In 1975, 582 “interpretive programs” were offered to a total of 29,175 people. In 1976, only 241 events took place for a total of 3,108, a nearly ninety percent drop. The declining visitation, Hopkins felt, was “due primarily to the moth-balling of our previously successful interpretive living history program efforts both onsite and offsite.”⁵⁷⁴

However, living history was not completely dead at FOUN. Once an emergency stabilization program for the ruins had been completed, FOUN staff was permitted to renew their living history work by new Southwest Regional Director John Cook, a supporter of the practice, albeit in a contained fashion. In March 1978, Cook requested clearance from the State Historic Preservation Office for a number of planned activities for the living history summer season. The park hoped to set up a number of temporary items in the area immediately northwest of the visitor center, including benches and an area for cannon demonstrations, as well as a new “interpretive shelter” of canvas and

⁵⁷³ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form: Fort Union National Monument” (National Park Service, August 1977); Jane E. Scott, “Fort Union National Monument, Overview of Historical Research: Annotated Bibliography and Recommendations for Future Studies,” December 1978, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 13; Jane E. Scott, “Fort Union National Monument: Review of Planning Documents,” December 1978, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 2, Folder 192.

⁵⁷⁴ Hopkins, “Superintendent’s Monthly Report,” January 1977, Fort Union National Monument File 677, Folder 193.

wood framing, a “soldier camp” and a garden plot. From now on, however, activities would huddle closer to the obviously modern visitor center and facilities than previous efforts, and would avoid directly engaging the ruins themselves.⁵⁷⁵

An excited press release in May 1978 trumpeted the return of the living history program, which Hopkins said was “designed to make the Fort Union story come alive. We want our visitors to see, and perhaps experience some of the day-to-day activities in the lives of the people who lived at this important post on the Santa Fe Trail.” The release noted that interpreters were attending a “Camp of Military Instruction” at Fort Laramie NHS and would “return to Fort Union better equipped to tell the story of nineteenth century military life” after drilling in the heat and eating meager soldier’s rations for a week. Once again, a sense of place centered on an authentic connection to the past via the bodies of interpreters and visitors would be forged at the monument.⁵⁷⁶

As part of the new exhibitions, the unit purchased a replica period handgun and made it available for visitors to touch. Ranger Hoff reported that visitors were pleasantly surprised to be allowed to handle an item, and that it was an effective “icebreaker to open conversations with park interpreters.”⁵⁷⁷ The connection with the past seemed even stronger when experienced through a simulacrum, but the seductive nature of that connection was increasingly apparent to NPS interpreters. Marcella Sherfy of the WASO History Division pointed out the central illusion of living history: “Even having steeped ourselves in the literature of the period, worn its clothes, and slept on its beds, we never

⁵⁷⁵ Cook to Merlan, March 13, 1978, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 9, Folder 339.

⁵⁷⁶ “Fort Union Gears Up for Living History,” May 30, 1978, New Mexico Highlands University Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 1, Folder 5.

⁵⁷⁷ “Gun Replica for Visitor Instruction,” *Grist* 22:3 (June 1978), 3.

shed [present] perspectives and values,” Sherfy wrote. “And from those perspectives and values, we judge and interpret the past. We simply cannot be another person and know his time as he knew it or value what he valued for his reasonsTime past has, very simply, passed.⁵⁷⁸

The inadequate nature of living history at FOUN was driven home during a visit by Interpreter Specialist Douglas McChristian, himself an Army veteran, in August 1978. McChristian performed an inspection of the costumed interpreters, critiquing the accuracy of their outfits and even the fit of their clothes. He found the interpretive talks given by rangers “too technical, too philosophical, and too superficial. They do not help visitors understand the Fort Union story.” McChristian “questioned the validity of having weapons demonstrations here,” which he thought inappropriate, and suggested that the staff instead focus on “related Fort Union incidents.”⁵⁷⁹

It seemed the old magic could not be fully recovered. In addition to a growing acknowledgement of living history’s shortcomings, FOUN also saw an ebb in its effectiveness as a tool for driving visitation. Attendance declined in 1979 and 1980, exacerbated by high fuel costs and a sluggish economy. From the early 1980s onward, the living history program at FOUN took a more limited approach. One-off events and demonstrations replaced the use of living history throughout the summer season, and placed less emphasis on “lifestyle” activities, which new NPS guidelines issued in 1980 considered inappropriate. The guidelines also encouraged a greater sense among

⁵⁷⁸ In Touch, 13 (May 1976), 5. (Quoted in Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*)

⁵⁷⁹ Hoff to Hopkins, August 19, 1978, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

interpreters of the manufactured nature of living history, and a more self-conscious acknowledgement of its artifice.⁵⁸⁰

Individualizing Other Interpretation

In addition to its growing focus on individualized stories via living history, in the 1970s FOUN increased its emphasis on the human experience in the interpretive media that guided visitors' up-close encounters with the ruins themselves. One of the first steps in this change was the installation of the long-discussed audio system to reconstruct the historic soundscape of the fort. In the summer of 1970, speakers were placed on the eastern edge of the parade ground and played bugle calls throughout the day, corresponding with the daily routine of the post in the 1880s.⁵⁸¹

In May 1973, Fernandez noted the failings of the original bugle sound equipment and recommended that "the trial period has ended and it is time to begin use of a high quality sound system." The existing audio equipment was replaced with two elevated loudspeakers located among the ruins against a section of historic wall on the parade ground, connected via an underground cable to the visitor center. The result was a much more pervasive soundscape, audible from every portion of the fort.⁵⁸²

Additional aural interpretation came via audio devices installed in the metalphoto wayside signs located among the ruins. In 1969, Bleser oversaw the installation of the

⁵⁸⁰ Lary M. Dilsaver, *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 203-210.

⁵⁸¹ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 58; Hastings to Shumann, June 26, 1970, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 138.

⁵⁸² Fernandez to Brown, May 3, 1973, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 9, Folder 339.

new signs, which played recorded narration at the touch of a button relaying much of the standard information about the site from the Trial Guide. In relatively dry, third-person language, the script pointed out the various buildings of the fort, focusing on the everyday activities that took place there and the quartermaster depot's supply trade. "In the latter part of the nineteenth century," the stations declared, "this whole area was bustling with the business of getting men ready to fight the Indians." By the fort's closing, "forty years of stubborn warfare had finally loosened the grip of the Indian upon his native land—now it was safe for settlers who had only themselves to cope with."⁵⁸³

In June 1972, during a "management appraisal" of the monument, Regional Office personnel concluded that the staff appeared to be "managing the area very well," and commended them on the visitor experience, from the "anxious" anticipation of the ruins caused by their "ghostly atmosphere" to the "unhurried serenity" of the area. However, the audio programming in the ruins themselves they deemed "sterile, too long, and verbose." They recommended that these stations be replaced with smaller, "mosaic" audio programs featuring voice actors interpreting soldiers and other historical characters, which would "relate to the visitor as voices out of the past and help him become more personally involved with the ruin."⁵⁸⁴

FOUN staff took the recommended shift from third- to first-person perspective to heart, and in 1974 Ranger Bob Arnberger composed new scripts for the audio stations. Instead of a didactic approach, the new signs told an interlinked story about Fort Union's

⁵⁸³ Allen to Hastings, July 2, 1969, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 138.

⁵⁸⁴ Frank Kowski, "Operations Evaluation of Fort Union National Monument, June 21-22, 1972," NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

past which strove for the same entertainment value being offered at the living history exhibits. While officers and educated individuals spoke proper English, low-ranking soldiers and civilians spoke in a kind of folksy, “Western” patois that seemed straight out of an episode of television dramas like “Gunsmoke.” Conversational and evocative of a bustling frontier post full of activity, the waysides told the story of patrol and protection of the Santa Fe Trail and daily life at Fort Union through the voices of those who had lived there.⁵⁸⁵

The first audio station, located at the Second Fort, centered on an “old, grizzled, and very experienced Indian Wars soldier” regaling a new recruit with tales of fighting Indians and Confederates. The Commanding Officer’s quarters portrayed a conversation between officers discussing the route of a patrol, and warning to “be on the lookout” for Kiowas and Comancheros. At the quartermaster depot, a sergeant described the various goods heading to different forts and supplying the patrol. A teamster arrived at the warehouses and after dropping off his shipment headed to Loma Parda “ta wash tha dust outa my craw—and do some dancin with some a them gals!” Enlisted men looked forward to a patrol breaking the tedium of their daily life while nursing Loma Parda hangovers in the barracks. A deserter, a murderer, and a Comanchero commiserated over their plight in the prison. The hospital cared for injured Santa Fe traders and soldiers.

The NPS interpretive staff at Harpers Ferry commended the scripts, noting that “unlike many dialogue messages we see, [Arnberger] has avoided giving his characters historical data to spout. The characters are natural and are saying ‘natural’ things.” They

⁵⁸⁵ Arnberger to Krepela, January 15, 1974, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-1973, Box 350.

made only minor edits, but did suggest more variety of accents so that not all the characters would “sound like Gabby Hayes playing hooky from a bad John Wayne movie.”⁵⁸⁶

Harpers Ferry also suggested the addition of two audio stations that provided general historical information in both English and Spanish. These stations placed greater focus on the Native Americans and Hispanos who “inhabited these lands for centuries before traders from the United States arrived” and whose “heritage still contributes to the rich culture of the great Southwest.” The two cultures, however, were not exactly equitably portrayed. While the Hispanos’ “rich Spanish heritage” and “independence and ingenuity” was still part of the modern Southwest, “the arrival of the first Europeans shattered the Indians’ culture so forcefully they have never truly recovered.” The heroism of New Mexico Volunteers in early Indian campaigns and the Civil War echoed through the past.⁵⁸⁷ As the first instance in which these cultures had received distinct treatment recognizing their importance in the Fort Union story, these waysides represented an important change point, if only in those signs that included bilingual interpretation.

The final tapes arrived, and the new audio features were installed in March 1974. The eight audio stations accompanied a total of twenty-eight other interpretive signs, most of which simply presented a historic photograph or floor plan of the building in question with its name and date. The interpretive panels were mounted on pedestals of

⁵⁸⁶ Krepela to Hopkins, March 12, 1974, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-1973, Box 350.

⁵⁸⁷ Arnberger to Krepela, February 18, 1974, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-1973, Box 350; Interpretive Pedestal Code System (and photos), December 13, 1974, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

stone and adobe that blended into the ruins' construction materials. A welcoming sign invited visitors to “step back in time” to a June morning in 1874.⁵⁸⁸



Figure 38: Wayside Exhibit, 1974 (Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

The first-person, historical-fiction approach to the audio scripts was revised and expanded in 1980, including some revision of the “corny” (in Doug McChristian’s words) 1974 scripts. The exhibit plan paid careful attention to the specific uniforms and equipment that would be shown on characters, contained historical photographs of the buildings being viewed, and explained their specific functions. The new wayside exhibits

⁵⁸⁸ Allen to Hopkins, April 16, 1974, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1971-1973, Box 350.

were installed and operative (replacing the existing, non-functioning audio stations) by July 1981.⁵⁸⁹

In a new exhibit on the second Fort Union, a New Mexico Volunteer, “Pedro,” described building the earthwork. Harpers Ferry again urged that some of the more theatrical elements of the dialogue be toned down. Accents, for example, should not be aggressively “Western”: Harpers Ferry personnel recommended merely the “addition of ‘a’ to infinitives and dropping of the terminal ‘g’s” in order to impart an “1870 ‘sound’ to the narrative.” The staff also urged that Pedro’s voice “not reflect sing-song ‘Frito Bandito’ accent.” Instead, they advised a more “typically Spanish” accent for the nineteenth century New Mexican characters, “rather than later Mexican and ‘Chicano’ influence.” However, such care to avoid stereotypes was only partially successful. In the final script, Pedro spoke a pidgin English rife with grammatical errors and tortured pronunciation.

Other wayside scripts in the Third Fort sought to emphasize its sophisticated construction, great size, and its residents’ family and social life, especially “problems encountered by young officers and their wives in frontier army posts.” An audio recording portrayed a conversation between Lieutenant John Hill, his wife Rebecca, and their “older, Irish-born” maid, Judy. John and Rebecca spoke correct English in Eastern accents, but Judy spoke in a heavily accented Irish brogue (“Oi seen hit meself...”) as

⁵⁸⁹ Clark D. Crane, “Superintendent’s Annual Report and Administrative History, 1980,” NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11. These signs were still present in the ruins as recently as 2013. The initial entries in the plan, later deleted and never installed, were waysides located along Route 477 on the way to the monument aimed at giving “general geographic and early history interpretation, and to provide initial ‘all-over’ impression.” This “panorama of history” would address Indian, Spanish, Mexican, Santa Fe Trail, and Army history via illustrations of members of each group.

they discussed the poor and crowded living conditions even among officers, and the trouble keeping domestic help when soldiers clamored to marry them.

The Married Enlisted Men's Quarters focused on the "harsh rigors of frontier living" endured by soldiers and their families. A new audio script portrayed a conversation between an enlisted soldier's Hispano wife and an Anglo officer's wife. The appearance of the women was intended to be authentic, modeled on the hairstyle and dress of Elizabeth Custer. "No Hollywood 'cowgirl' getup!" admonished the plan. The conversation between the women was intended to portray "relationships which existed between women on military outposts within limitations of 'rank' and social 'class.'" The higher-ranking Captain's wife remained reserved but courteous to the lower-ranking private's wife and daughter as they discussed her husband's stay in the post Hospital.⁵⁹⁰ The 1980 additions to the audio waysides continued the infusion of living human stories, told in their "own voices," that characterized the living history era of FOUN's interpretation, and reflected that era's troubled relationship between entertainment value and historical accuracy.

⁵⁹⁰ Raymond S. Price, "Fort Union National Monument, Wayside Exhibit Plan," March 1980, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

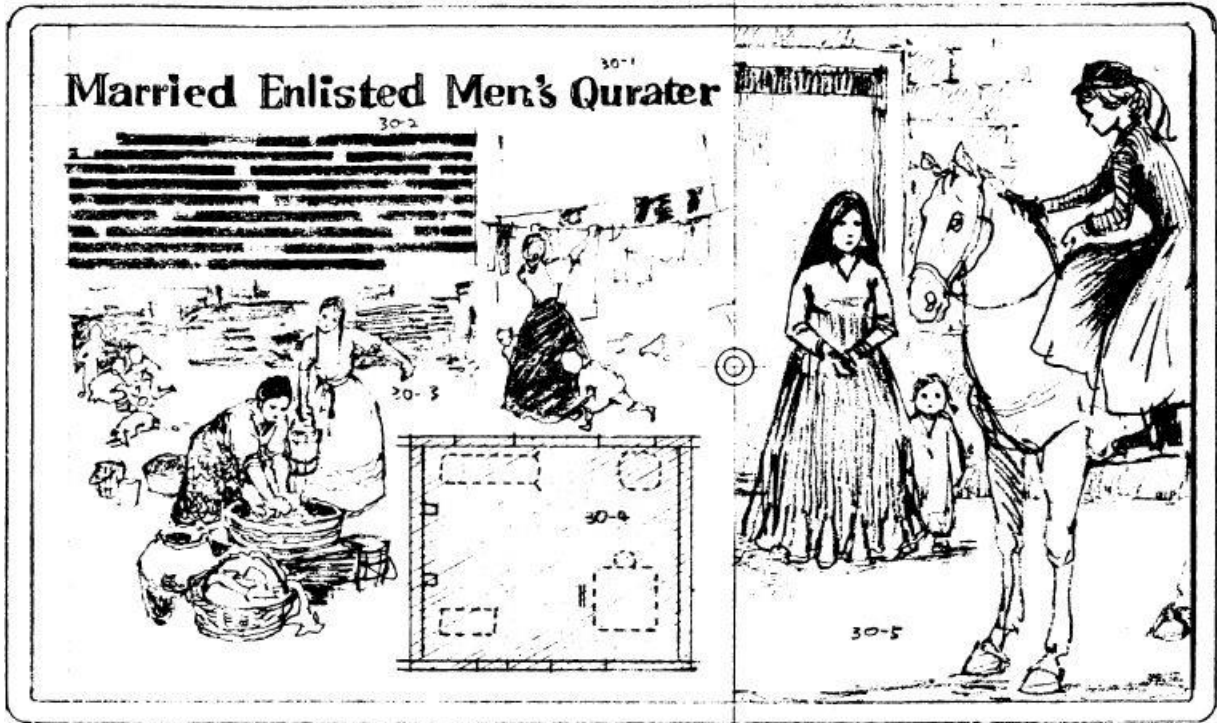


Figure 39: 1980 Wayside Exhibit Plan—Married Enlisted Men's Quarters
 (Source: NPS Electronic Technical Information Center)

Only one significant revision of the park's interpretive literature took place in this era: a new brochure, issued in 1972 and revised in 1975.⁵⁹¹ The buff brown cover retained the Mounted Riflemen bugle insignia from previous editions, and the historical overview of the fort was mostly unchanged from the 1967 version, with only minor rephrasing of the previous text focused on Indian fighting and to a lesser extent the Civil War and Santa Fe Trail. The main change, however, was an evolution in the aesthetic presentation of the material. The 1967 brochure had included a single small Frederic Remington illustration mixed in with the images of the historic buildings and the current ruins, but by 1975 the new brochure devoted a full half page to a Remington painting of a

⁵⁹¹ The 1967 Trail Guide was re-issued in July 1976, essentially verbatim ("Indian menace" and all). "Guide to Fort Union," 1976, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 9, Folder 340; Hopkins, "Superintendent's Monthly Report, July 1976," Fort Union National Monument File 677, Folder 193.

cavalry unit, replacing the aerial views, maps, and sketches of the 1967 and 1972 editions. As a result, the focus shifted more clearly toward fictionalized representations of the individuals who had lived at Fort Union, in all their colorful detail.

The 1975 brochure also dealt with the modern realities of NPS management. One section discussed with the park's rehabilitation efforts, and frankly admitted that "no completely adequate solution has been found," despite the silicone, steel reinforcement, and concrete treatment applications that NPS had tried. The back fold featured an image of an Officers' Row building indicating the repointed fireplace, stabilized chimney, and re-set foundations, an image that evoked both the distant, crumbling history of Fort Union and the substantial investments of time and money that NPS was putting into recreating it—an amalgam of the recent and distant past.⁵⁹²

A Revised Preservation Approach

While the interpretive and narrative aspects of place-making at FOUN continued their foray into costumed reenactment, the tangible physical resources of the site continued to decline. The preservation approach featuring the polyurethane resin Pencapsula that the monument had settled on in the mid-1960s appeared to have arrested the decay of the ruins for a time. In fact, by 1968 Southwest Region Chief of Operations James Eden proposed its widespread adoption at "a large number of areas within this Region." However, the Southwest Archaeological Center's (SWAC) Roland Richert pointed out that NPS lacked a comparative understanding of Pencapsula's effectiveness, as measurement of the ruins had not taken place at the beginning of stabilization.

⁵⁹² "Guide to Fort Union," 1975, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

Richert also acknowledged that the NPS had no idea of the long-term effects of the interaction between the polyurethane resin sealant being applied to the ruins and the salt and alkaline content of the adobe walls. To determine those effects would require “sophisticated, qualitative and quantitative chemical tests, measurements and observations which we are neither equipped nor financed to perform.” An earlier version of the product had been applied to walls at Casa Grande with “unsightly” results, and pilot programs at Fort Bowie, Pecos, Fort Davis, Bent’s Old Fort, and Tumáacacori had yielded mixed results.

Since the resin was a proprietary product of the Texas Refinery Corporation, Richert wrote, “we are pretty much in the dark as to its chemical components, physical make-up and intrinsic value.” He and Eden recommended an “exhaustive analysis” of the product. The Chief of the SWAC, Chester Thomas, concurred and added that “the thing to remember about Pencapsula is that it is far from a cure-all, but it is the best preservative we know of in the treatment of walls made of porous materials that deteriorate rapidly when exposed to weathering.”⁵⁹³

Meanwhile, results on the ground at FOUN were proving unsatisfactory. A clearly frustrated Hastings wrote regional headquarters in July 1969 requesting a systematic study of the ruins’ deterioration rate and the best method of preserving them. The SWAC’s previous replies had been “not at all helpful” in this regard, and Hastings’ growing bureaucratic duties kept him from creating proper records of the triaging and maintenance process on the over 100,000 square feet of walls. Inadequate funding and

⁵⁹³ Eden to Richert, July 31, 1968, Richert to Eden, August 15, 1968, Thomas to Miller, August 16, 1968, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 135. Emphasis in original.

staffing were also problems. Hastings begged for help in protecting the ruins, which were continuing to deteriorate despite the stabilization treatments.⁵⁹⁴

Later that year, Hastings formally proposed a Historical Resource Study to investigate “the efficacy of various materials recommended for the preservation of adobe brick and/or earthen walls and the techniques of application.” He admitted that there had been “little attempt at accurate long-range evaluation of results” of the “piece-meal” attempts at ruins preservation. Hastings was not at all confident that Silaneal or Pencapsula were sufficient long-term solutions, and proposed to see if there were better products for the purpose. He also suggested a study of the fort’s architectural styles via historic photographs and measurements of the ruins for reference purposes.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁴ Hastings to Kowski, July 12, 1969, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 135.

⁵⁹⁵ Hastings to Kowski, December 30, 1969, NARA-Denver, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, General Administrative Files, 1968-1970, Box 135.



Figure 40: Officers' Quarters, c. 1970
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

However, Hastings' pleas went unanswered. It was around this time that it became fully apparent that, despite two decades of NPS attempts to preserve the original historic adobe, it was simply impossible to do so. Once chemical preservatives had proven unable to deliver on their promise of freezing the ruined walls in their exact state of decay at the time NPS acquired the site in the mid-1950s, the preservation strategy shifted to maintaining the *appearance* of the ruins, by whatever means proved most effective. Over time, the relative proportion of replacement adobe and patching material slowly overtook the amount and extent of original wall surface. The critical question, as the goal changed from material authenticity to aesthetic authenticity, was no longer *how* to accomplish the task as much as it was *how many resources* could be committed to it.

Regional Archaeologist Gary Matlock's 1972 site review exemplified this change. He praised the work of FOUN staff in ruins stabilization, given their limited resources

and staffing. The walls had undergone little decrease in size in the twelve years since the end of intensive rehab efforts, and most damage had been limited to the rounding of wall tops by erosion. In contrast to the alarmed assessments of previous officials, Matlock thought that the capping, mortar application, and Silineal treatments had been effective, since they had kept the ruins in relatively attractive and stable condition, regardless of what proportion of them were the original adobe. However, the budget the monument received was inadequate to keep pace with the rate of erosion, and so he recommended additional funding and doubling the temporary maintenance staff.⁵⁹⁶

In September and October of 1973, the Arizona Archeological Center sent a team led by George Chambers to conduct stabilization on the stone foundations. Chambers' team tested various materials on the walls and found that the best recipe for mortar was a combination of quick lime, masonry cement (half Portland cement and half hydrated lime), washed sand, and adobe soil. The mixture was ideal except for its color, which was pinker than the original construction. The capping and core-filling of adobe walls totaled about 2,300 linear feet, and about 4,500 square feet of wall surface. The workers (most of whom were Navajo) re-set the stone foundations of all the officers' quarters buildings and reinforced them with cement, giving them an almost-new appearance.⁵⁹⁷ The technique of chemically coating the walls was still part of the maintenance program, but staff increasingly realized that the addition of new adobe material and physical bracing to keep them upright were equally important.

⁵⁹⁶ Frank Kowski, "Operations Evaluation of Fort Union National Monument, June 21-22, 1972," NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

⁵⁹⁷ Hopkins, "Annual Superintendent's Report for 1973," NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

Hopkins, in a memo recounting the ruins stabilization status, noted that the application of Pencapsula had been revealed to have “created more damage than protection.” The water-resistant layer where the spray penetrated would “spall off because of weathering—and another layer of the original wall would be lost.” Maintenance workers pointed out the relatively good condition of the Arsenal buildings and accounted for the difference by their never having been treated with Pencapsula. The current regimen used Silaneal and a replacement formula for broken or fallen adobes. “Our operations are pretty simple,” Hopkins noted, “but they appear to be better than sitting on our hands—or wringing them.” In October 1975, maintenance crews began applying “ureabore soil sterilant” around the adobe ruins to prevent plant growth and foundation damage. This treatment continued for at least the next two summers.⁵⁹⁸

The new approach was no panacea, however. The 1976 Statement for Management pointed out that “engineering and technological data has not reached a point where adequate preservation measures can be accomplished to effectively stabilize and protect the existing ruins of varied military structures that cover nearly 100 acres in the monument.”⁵⁹⁹ As a result of the ongoing deterioration of the ruins and the lack of fundamental understanding of how to preserve them, an “emergency repair” study was approved in July 1976, which would conduct preservation and stabilization work on many Third Fort buildings, including “installing pipe drains inside building foundations; masonry repair and capping the foundations; and straightening and anchoring the adobe

⁵⁹⁸ Hopkins, “Superintendent’s Monthly Report,” November 1975, Fort Union National Monument File 677, Folder 193.

⁵⁹⁹ “Fort Union National Monument, Statement for Management,” June 1976, Fort Union National Monument File 661, Folder 12048.

walls,” in addition to brick repointing and flagstone walkway rehabilitation. The program was funded for five years at \$75,000 annually, and provided for at least ten seasonal laborers each summer, the largest levels of funding and staffing for ruins maintenance since the initial cleanup efforts in the late 1950s.⁶⁰⁰ FOUN’s preservation approach was used as a model among Southwest Region units, and the park sent its maintenance specialists to other parks including Bent’s Old Fort in the late 1970s to observe and advise on adobe ruins preservation techniques.⁶⁰¹

In January 1978, the park gained approval for a “Third Fort Stabilization” project to take up where the emergency work left off, focused on “installing drain systems in each historic building foundation; stabilizing or rebuilding, and capping, all foundation remains; pointing all foundations and brickwork; capping and spraying all adobe wall remains; and spray-treating all wooden structural remains.”⁶⁰² By the end of the decade, the ruins had resumed their place at the center of management attention at FOUN. In July 1979, the monument’s Resources Management Program listed as its main project the continued stabilization and preservation of the adobe ruins. The document described promising current efforts in this area, but advised that additional research and funding was necessary. The park’s goal was to improve the ruins to the point where only minimal annual maintenance would be necessary to keep them in a consistent state.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Jane E. Scott, “Fort Union National Monument: Review of Planning Documents,” December 1978, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 2, Folder 192.

⁶⁰¹ Hopkins, “Superintendent’s Monthly Report,” February and April, 1977, Fort Union National Monument File 677, Folder 193.

⁶⁰² Scott, “Review of Planning Documents.”

⁶⁰³ R.J. Hoff, “Fort Union National Monument, Resources Management Plan,” July 1979, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 2, Folder 187.

In January 1980, Hopkins addressed what he considered to be the most significant “threats” to FOUN. Neither air pollution, water pollution, nor “aesthetic degradation” other than occasional low-flying aircraft were considered significant threats, but removal of specimens by visitors and erosion and deterioration of resources were of concern. Hopkins assessed the overall threat level as minimal, but did point out that the adobe ruins’ continued deterioration was the biggest problem his unit faced (several more large sections of wall collapsed in 1979 and 1980).⁶⁰⁴ “Without continuation of the current cyclical ruins stabilization project (due to end in FY 80),” he wrote, “the cultural resources will rapidly be lost.” It was clear that NPS had committed itself to an ongoing intensive process of preserving the ruins for as long as it managed the site, the extent of which the agency finally seemed to grasp.⁶⁰⁵

In July 1980, Hopkins was reassigned to Saguaro National Monument.⁶⁰⁶ Shortly thereafter, Fort Union National Monument and Capulin National Monument were consolidated into a single management unit in order to “reduce administrative costs coupled with a more efficient operation of the areas.” As a result nearly the entire maintenance and preservation staff was furloughed from November 1980 until May 1981, along with numerous other personnel from both units. Preservation work resumed in May

⁶⁰⁴ Clark D. Crane, “Superintendent’s Annual Report and Administrative History, 1980,” NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11.

⁶⁰⁵ Hopkins to Cook, November 20, 1979, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 2, Folder 194.

⁶⁰⁶ “Hopkins to Saguaro,” *Courier* 3.10, September 1980.

1981 with a smaller crew of seven laborers.⁶⁰⁷ While this administrative change was only temporary, it marked the end of the heyday of living history at FOUN. In succeeding decades, staff would revise their understanding of the monument's story, and how to tell it, in accordance with evolving standards of resource management and changing historiography.

In the 1970s FOUN interpreters and managers decided that the most effective method of creating an authentic connection with the past—a sense of place—was not via the crumbling adobe walls or staid interpretive material developed by their predecessors. Instead, they sought to use the bodies and stories of people, visitors and interpreters alike, to convey a more real sense of history “as it really was.” A not-insignificant bonus effect was the exciting and even “fun” nature of this role-playing experience, which focused on individuals, whether real or fictional, who could tell the story of the past in their own words. As was the case at many NPS units at the time, this dynamic approach was seductive to visitors as well as staff, and attendance soared.

Within just a few years, however, FOUN staff, like many of their NPS colleagues, began to understand that despite all the enthusiasm and enjoyment living history had provided, it also came at a cost. The agency's long-standing goals of educational accuracy, dignified reverence for the past, and careful resource protection all suffered in the pursuit of campfire beans and cannon fire. The relentless, carnival atmosphere of

⁶⁰⁷ Clark D. Crane, “Superintendent's Annual Report and Administrative History, 1980,” NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11; National Park Service, “Busy Month at Fort Union,” June 1980, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 2.

living history was discarded in favor of more limited duration and broader themes. As the park re-adjusted its focus in the late 1970s, bureaucratic changes meant that before long, place-making at FOUN would shift its primary location again, and seek to engage the imaginations of visitors in ways that were both new and traditional.

CHAPTER 6

“TO OFFSET PAST OMISSIONS”:

RECONSIDERATION AND EXPANSION, 1980-1994

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the fundamental sense of place at Fort Union National Monument underwent several important changes. The monument’s managers began to think more holistically about the cultural landscape for which they were responsible, and took steps to include natural resources as part of the interpretive scheme. They also renewed their focus on the crumbling adobe walls, whose preservation continued to be an intractable problem. The solutions they settled on completed the shift from a focus on preserving the original adobe material to preserving the *form* of the ruins, which were increasingly thought of as important components in creating visitors’ connection to the past.

This expanding scope also included changes in the way the site would describe the significance of the historical Fort Union, and its relationship to the natural and human environments in which it had existed. Soon, historians and interpreters began to scale back the Indian Wars-centered interpretation of Fort Union’s history in favor of a more “defensive” role, in which it had been a place of refuge instead of offensive attack—a stance more reminiscent of the earliest planning and promotion efforts of the 1930s and 1940s.

This general trend was given a boost in the mid-1980s as efforts to establish the Santa Fe National Historic Trail gained momentum. NPS and FOUN in particular began to focus more clearly on that portion of Fort Union’s history, and it soon became the heart of the site’s interpretive offerings, which despite the lessons of the 1970s continued

to revolve around the practice of living history. In line with overarching trends in historiography and public history, the park also began to re-evaluate the way in which it presented Native American and Hispano history. Park and Regional staff produced new studies that gave increasing, albeit circumscribed, attention to the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups, a new commitment to “balanced” interpretation that was reflected in the site’s 1994 Interpretive Prospectus.

Evolving Ideas about Resources

After its merger with Capulin Mountain National Monument (CAMO) in July 1980, FOUN was no longer an independent administrative unit. Instead of a superintendent, FOUN would have a Unit Manager under CAMO’s Superintendent, Clark Crane, and Carol Kruse arrived to fill that role in December of 1980.⁶⁰⁸ A twenty-two-year NPS veteran, she had most recently served as chief of interpretation at Canaveral National Seashore in Florida. Her background experience included work as a park naturalist, reflecting her academic training in zoology.⁶⁰⁹ The focus during Kruse’s tenure was on assessing the cultural and natural resources of the monument and planning its more effective management. The planning documents developed in the early 1980s reflected a growing professionalization of NPS resource management techniques. They showed that the agency was committed to caring for natural resources as much as cultural ones, even in historical parks, and began to display a broadened sense of Fort Union’s

⁶⁰⁸ Clark D. Crane, “Superintendent’s Annual Report and Administrative History, 1980,” NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11.

⁶⁰⁹ “Fort Union for Kruse,” *Courier* 4.2, February 1981.

history as well. At the same time, FOUN's managers articulated a sense of alarm about the state of the site's cultural resources, which were, once again, in danger of being lost.

In 1982, Kruse authored a list of "Threats to the Monument," the most dire of which was the "physical deterioration of primary historic resources," especially the adobe ruins. "The Monument does not know whether the techniques and materials currently being used are the most effective ones possible," she wrote. "We also do not know whether preservation work in progress will actually attain its goal of preserving the remaining structures of historic Fort Union." In the tradition of FOUN managers before her, Kruse pleaded for systematic research on which preservation techniques worked best.

Kruse also pointed out problems with the historical narrative, which seemed not to resonate with local New Mexicans, most of whom were Hispanos. She lamented the fact that "local people rarely visit the Monument, are not interested in planning the area's future, and do not place high value on the resource." Increased engagement with schools, civic groups, and other organizations was needed: "we must go out into the community." This problem also affected the preservation work because, according to Kruse, maintenance staff (nearly all of whom were local Hispanos) did not appreciate "the significance of their work." This relative disinterest in the history of the fort led to poor craftsmanship. Kruse suggested adding historical education and interpretation targeted at maintenance staff to increase their awareness of and respect for Fort Union's importance.⁶¹⁰

⁶¹⁰ Kruse, "Threats to the Monument," 1982, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 9, Folder 342.

The Resources Management Plan completed by CAMO's Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management, James Vukonich, in April 1982 reflected some signs of change in the historical narrative. The plan identified management priorities and offered a range of solutions to address them. Along the way, Vukonich attributed Fort Union's significance to its role in supply and protection of the Santa Fe Trail, the Indian Wars (during which "local inhabitants, as well as Santa Fe Trail travelers, looked to the soldiers of Fort Union to protect them from the warring factions of the Jicarilla Apache, Ute, Navajo, Kiowa, and Comanche tribes"), and the Civil War. The fort was a "point of defense and protection," whose role centered on "law enforcement and protection for area inhabitants." The plan also called for an expansion of FOUN's interpretive themes, to include information on "inter-cultural relationships."

Vukonich also noted that current management choices were "based on historic data alone, without consideration of natural processes and populations." As a result, the natural resources of the fort had been totally ignored despite their "obvious" impact on the historic resources, and without inclusion of this data, "there is a danger of losing both natural and historic resources." This danger was especially apparent in the deterioration of the adobe walls and stone foundations. The staff's ignorance of "effective means" of preserving adobe meant "ruins preservation work at FOUN is ineffective and sometimes inadvertently destructive." The preservation process was ad hoc, dependent on "funding available, rather than condition of the historic resource." In consequence, the unit lurched between short-term solutions, which created "a variety of non-historic appearances, and in some cases, have resulted in increased deterioration of historic material." Vukonich advised more careful attention be paid to preserving the historic *appearance* of the ruins,

whether or not that was achieved with fully authentic methods. His main concern was that visitors be presented with the impression of a historic fort, with no obvious signs of reconstruction or artifice.⁶¹¹

In 1982, Dwight Pitcaithley and Jerome Greene of the Southwest Regional Office completed a Historic Resource Survey of the Third Fort Union, the first systematic survey of the ruins. The resulting document retained a basic understanding of Fort Union as a dominant place, but also began to include more information regarding its relationship with the local populace that went beyond recent narratives of violence and control. Pitcaithley and Greene described the Third Fort Union as “an imposing collection of territorial style military buildings” which “imparted a heightened sense of determination and purpose, of stability, and of permanence.”⁶¹² Fort Union, in this telling, was mostly defined by its role in regulating the Santa Fe Trail, and appeared as a stationary, “commanding” figure in a shifting landscape.⁶¹³ However, the authors also cast Fort Union in less combative language than previous histories: the Fort’s primary purpose had been to provide “protection” and “shelter” for Santa Fe Trail traffic, and to facilitate the distribution of supplies to other posts.⁶¹⁴ Campaigns against Native Americans and the conquest of New Mexico were only tangentially recounted in the text.

⁶¹¹ James Vukonich, “Resources Management Plan and Environmental Assessment for Fort Union National Monument,” 1982, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

⁶¹² Dwight Pitcaithley and Jerome A. Greene, *Historic Structure Report: The Third Fort Union, 1863-1891* (Denver: National Park Service, 1982), 8.

⁶¹³ Pitcaithley and Greene, *The Third Fort Union*, 7.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

The 1982 study also contained elements which indicated Fort Union's intertwined relationship with, and dependence upon, the local community. Pitcaithley and Greene emphasized the Army's constant maintenance of the endlessly deteriorating Fort, which they saw as a consequence of the lack of local (Hispano) labor in its design and maintenance. Another significant aspect of Fort Union's history was its New Mexico Territorial architectural style, which developed during the late nineteenth century as violence in the area subsided and defense gave way to an engagement with the larger society, a relaxation of tensions which had perceptible effects on building techniques, including larger windows, exterior porches, and other features. Furthermore, the strategic changes necessitated by shifting conditions among the United States, New Mexicans and Native peoples "directly affected the form and use" of new buildings constructed after this time, which were smaller in size and began to include other, non-military structures.⁶¹⁵

The unit's increased attention to its historical and contemporary local contexts continued as staff began work on a new General Management Plan in February 1983. The plan aimed to build on the planning efforts of the mid-1970s and early 1980s in order to "research and evaluate an information base, integrate old and newly identified issues, and formulate implementable strategies for achieving management objectives." As the first comprehensive plan for FOUN's natural and cultural resources, it represented the monument's new, more holistic management style, which strove to more fully acknowledge the natural and social landscapes in which it was set, a different sense of place than previous eras, which had focused primarily on the historic resources. Unlike

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

Figure 41: “Historic Resources Outside Boundaries,” General Management Plan, Fort Union National Monument, 1985 (Source: NPS Electronic Technical Information Center)

The February 1985 final document took into account the public’s suggestions, which aligned with staff’s goals to only refine the existing interpretation and management priorities at FOUN, which they saw as “largely mature,” instead of reinventing them. The plan found the interpretive status of the park largely satisfactory, based on a ninety-one percent approval rate from visitor surveys, but due to its “disproportionately low visitation levels,” improvements were still needed. The authors suggested adding new subthemes to the overarching interpretive framework of “Westward Expansion,” including the relationship between the three versions of Fort Union and the Santa Fe Trail and the “socioeconomic importance of the forts,” especially on “White-Indian” and “Anglo-Hispanic” relationships. The Fort’s history and significance were only slightly changed from previous efforts: Fort Union had been necessitated by “the development of the Santa Fe Trail,” which needed a facility to “guard” it from Indian attacks, in order to make the area “safe for ranching, farming, and other occupations” that enabled the development of New Mexico.⁶¹⁷

Management also formally acknowledged, for the first time, that the goal of permanent preservation of the adobe walls was unrealistic and ultimately futile. Previous efforts to find a permanent preservation strategy had proven unsatisfactory for the adobe ruins as well as the Santa Fe Trail ruts. “While non-historic adobe veneer will be used to preserve historic original adobe cores as long as possible,” the plan stated, “unless new

⁶¹⁷ “Fort Union National Monument, General Management Plan,” 1985, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

technological breakthroughs occur, the National Park Service recognizes the eventual loss of all original adobe walls.” A rear-guard action to make the most significant resources last as long as possible remained the strategy.

How to accomplish this goal, however, remained a difficult question:

A major issue is whether the appearance of the historic scene should continue to be preserved through the application of adobe veneers, replacement adobes, etc., and perhaps targeted to the most significant resources, or whether the original historic adobe walls should be preserved as long as possible without the introduction of nonhistoric veneers and replacement fabric. A definite need exists to find a strategy that fulfills the congressional intent ‘to preserve and protect’ yet addresses the constraints of the resources.

Ultimately, managers settled on the use of a thin layer of new, matching adobe to maintain the original mass and extent of the walls, preserving the “outline or form” of the ruins, if not their material.

In the 1985 General Management Plan, FOUN’s managers realized two central inadequacies of previous efforts: the deterioration of the ruins and the unbalanced nature of interpretation. In response, from the mid-1980s forward, FOUN would be a place that was defined by the authentic aura of the ruins, which would allow visitors to experience a different past, one located in a place of “defense and protection.” This less confrontational characterization of the United States’ invasion and occupation of the region soon began to open a narrative and imaginative space in which to tell the stories of the people who had been affected by it.

Expanding Interpretation

The interpretive methods at FOUN remained relatively consistent in the years following the site's return from an almost exclusively living-history orientation. Living history, while still an important part of the visitor experience, was mostly limited to special events. However, in the 1980s, the *content* of those presentations began to change. The role of Fort Union in the history of the Southwest shifted slightly, leaving behind the most bellicose and aggressive characterizations that had dominated the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, the fort was increasingly portrayed as a defensive feature, which aimed to protect settlers and travelers, a more similar sense of place to that originally conceived by early NPS planners and advocates for the monument.

Despite the continued use of living history in FOUN's interpretation, the pressures of the administrative merger, reduced funding, and limited personnel resources forced staff to substitute the daily, standing demonstrations with an event-centered approach. Instead of costumed interpreters at the fort full-time, FOUN would hold individual living history events. CAMO Superintendent Crane instituted the first reduction, and Kruse continued the approach under her leadership.⁶¹⁸

Despite the lessons of the 1970s about the way that context-free demonstrations of everyday life could obscure penetrating questions about the past, between 1981 and 1986, the park held large special events featuring living history activities. Some of the events repeated the missteps identified just a few years earlier by focusing on easily digestible but questionably accurate depictions of everyday life. A press release touting the 1986

⁶¹⁸ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 61; Clark D. Crane, "Superintendent's Annual Report and Administrative History, 1980," NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11.

Founders' Day celebrations advertised the living history programming as “requiring less imagination” than traditional interpretation because it would engage visitors' senses including smell, sight, taste, touch, and hearing.⁶¹⁹ Flyers for the event invited visitors to “experience the life of a soldier in the 1800's!!!!!!!”⁶²⁰ The immersive excitement promised to allow visitors to “visit the past this summer!”⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹ National Park Service, “Fort Union Celebrates its 135th Anniversary,” May 8, 1986, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 7.

⁶²⁰ Founders Day materials, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 6.

⁶²¹ Living History flyer, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.



Figure 42: Founder's Days advertisement, 1986 (Source: New Mexico Highlands University Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 6)

The festivities included “drills, flag ceremonies, and guided tours” as well as “adobe making, hardtack baking, scrub board washing, butter churning, horse shoeing, and other routines of frontier life.” Many demonstrations were delivered by park volunteers, whose ranks swelled to nearly two dozen in the mid-1980s. The living history demonstrations were eventually consolidated into a single two-day event, “Fort Union Days,” held in July to commemorate the founding of the First Fort in 1851. These events, which the park promoted widely across the New Mexico media, remained popular—

living history had not lost its appeal, and thousands of visitors came to experience the past.⁶²²

The park's written interpretive materials reflected a burgeoning shift in historical narrative before the living history activities did. A two-page leaflet published in the early 1980s described Fort Union as "symbol and substance of national power in a vast new acquisition far removed from the eastern heartland." However, the text also admitted that Fort Union's chief meaning was not to be found in its Indian campaigns, but rather in its supply role. Old habits die hard, though, and the brochure strove to explain this rather prosaic function in a poetic time. "Without the men who processed supply orders, counted stock, cared for animals and wagons, packed freight, and then hauled it to the far posts," the brochure noted, "there would have been neither posts nor battles." However reluctantly, the brochure inserted a small measure of conceptual distance between Fort Union and the Indian campaigns its troops supported by focusing more on the site's logistical responsibilities.⁶²³

Even the document that most clearly exemplified the interpretive orientation of the 1960s received a small measure of revision. Utley's *Fort Union Handbook* was reprinted in 1984, and continued to be the best-selling volume in the bookstore. However, the cover of the new version replaced the previous illustration of a dragoon with a photo of a broken wagon axle and wheel in front of the wall of the Mechanics' Corral. Several replica Army items including a rifle, saber, glove, and cap were draped on the wheel. The

⁶²² Clark Crane, "Superintendent's Annual Report," 1982, 1983, and 1984, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 21; Founder's Day Flyer and Agenda, July 1987, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 5.

⁶²³ "Fort Union," Interpretive Pamphlet, c. 1984, NPS WACC, Southwest Regional Office Files, Box 4, Folder 360.

effect was a removal of some of the drama of the individual stories of the Indian Wars, while retaining a measure of their romance. Once again, it appeared, ghosts would populate Fort Union.⁶²⁴



Figure 43: *Fort Union Handbook* versions 1962 and 1984
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Library and author personal collection)

This change in tone also appeared in a new site bulletin in March 1984, which featured a large Nick Eggenhofer painting of a wagon train as its principal illustration. The text was shortened from the previous version, and included separate discussions of the Santa Fe Trail (featuring a map of the trail and a diagram of a freight wagon) and the three Fort Unions with historic photos and drawings. Fort Union, in this telling, was the

⁶²⁴ Clark Crane, "Superintendent's Annual Report," 1984, NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11.

“Defender of the Southwest,” which had “brought peace to the southern Plains.” A new three-dimensional illustration of the Third Fort developed by Harpers Ferry (see Figure 6, page 40) was the main feature on the reverse fold side, replacing the Fredric Remington cavalry painting, and the text once again emphasized construction methods and building functions.⁶²⁵

These minor shifts preceded the most important change in interpretation, which was inspired by a growing movement to recognize the historical significance of the Santa Fe Trail. In 1986, New Mexico Representative Bill Richardson introduced H.R. 4794 to create the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. While the first iteration of the bill died in the Senate due to private landowners’ opposition, Richardson revised and re-introduced it two years later, and in 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed it into law.⁶²⁶ This new focus on the Santa Fe trade as a defining chapter in the nation and region’s history and NPS’s leading role in interpreting it led FOUN staff to increase their emphasis on a broader approach to telling the site’s history. In 1987, shortly after Kruse departed to take a new position as superintendent of Tonto National Monument, Southwest Regional Director John Cook separated FOUN and CAMO into their original independent administrative units.⁶²⁷ A few months later, Douglas McChristian arrived from the regional office as FOUN’s new superintendent. McChristian was an expert in military history whose NPS career also included stops at Fort Davis NHS and Fort Laramie NHS

⁶²⁵ Fort Union National Monument, Site Bulletin, March 1985, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection. This is essentially the same site bulletin in use at the monument today.

⁶²⁶ *New York Times*, “Paying Homage to Historic Role of the Santa Fe Trail,” September 29, 1986; U.S. Congress, Public Law 90-543, “An act, to establish a national trails system, and for other purposes,” *United States Code*, Volume 16, Sections 1241-1251.

⁶²⁷ Zhu, *Administrative History*, 43.

and several studies of the frontier Army. Among his first tasks was to participate in planning activities for the proposed Santa Fe National Historic Trail in 1987.⁶²⁸

For the next several years, the ongoing living history demonstrations began to focus more and more on Santa Fe Trail history. The July 1987 Founders' Day celebrations took as their theme "Soldiering on the Santa Fe Trail" in conjunction with NPS's increased focus on the trail that year.⁶²⁹ The following summer, the fort held a day of living history activities focused on "The Santa Fe Trail, the Early Years," including a lecture on "the Hispanic influence on the trail and its commerce" as well as a "Mexican 'Trail' dinner."⁶³⁰

One ancillary effect of this change in focus was a decrease in the amount of interpretive attention given to day-to-day activities such as cooking, although they did continue to appear in some events. For the most part, however, these diversions gave way to lectures and demonstrations that paid more attention to the military history of Fort Union as it related to the Santa Fe Trail. Annual symposia featured scholars and historians to discuss the fort's past in a regional context, and the park stepped up its community partnership efforts, providing special events, interpretation, and research opportunities for the people of Mora and Watrous.⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ "Superintendent's Annual Report, 1987," NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

⁶²⁹ Founders' Day 1987 materials, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 7.

⁶³⁰ National Park Service, "Summer Season Still Going Strong at Fort Union," August 17, 1988, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 2, Folder 8; "Superintendent's Annual Report, 1988," Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

⁶³¹ "Superintendent's Annual Report, 1989," NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 21.

McChristian departed in May of 1988 to become historian at Custer Battlefield National Monument. His replacement, Harry Myers, came from a post at Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial in Ohio.⁶³² Six months into Myers's tenure, regional office staff visited the park to conduct a "management, operations, and internal controls evaluation." The resulting report was positive overall, but made recommendations for improvement in several areas, including to "as soon as possible, move living history away from explosions, toward quartermastering, the main story [at] Fort Union." This overt instruction to focus more on Santa Fe Trail history and less on the Indian Wars exemplified the growing shift.⁶³³



Figure 44: FOUN Ranger T.J. Sperry and Santa Fe Trail reenactor, 1990
(Source: Fort Union National Monument Photo Files)

⁶³² "Superintendent's Annual Report, 1988," Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

⁶³³ Eldon Reyer et al, "Management, Operations, and Internal Controls Evaluation, Fort Union National Monument," May 26, 1989, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files, 178.

One result of the increased attention to the Santa Fe Trail history of FOUN was a greater engagement with Hispano history. Interpretive plans for the 1990 season aimed to increase “public awareness of the major role played by Hispanic New Mexicans in the operation of both Fort Union and the Santa Fe Trail.” Founders’ Day 1990 included living history demonstrations that portrayed, for the first time, the predominantly Hispano New Mexico Volunteers. These changes soon met with widespread approval: the Southwest Region recognized FOUN for “best interpretive program” in 1991, while annual visitation reached a new all-time high of 22,300.⁶³⁴

New Spaces, New Stories

Not long after renewed attention to the Santa Fe Trail led FOUN interpreters to look to broader, more nuanced histories of Fort Union for inspiration, NPS began to grapple with the legacy of the voyage of Christopher Columbus as the 500-year anniversary of that event approached. The agency was forced to examine the question of to what degree the arrival of Europeans in the New World was an event worthy of celebration, which raised wider concerns over how best to interpret instances of cultural contact and conflict that its sites commemorated. There were also notable changes taking place at the time in the way that historians wrote about the settlement of the American West.

In the fall 1990 issue of *Interpretation*, NPS leaders and historians discussed best practices for cross-cultural communication, the need to involve Native Americans in park

⁶³⁴ Harry Myers, “1990 Annual Report,” NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 21; Myers, “1991 Annual Report,” NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

planning efforts, and the need to entertain multiple “cultural perspectives.” Southwest Regional Director Cook called for “a special sensitivity to the values of the indigenous people” among NPS workers engaged in “managing Indian parks.” Cook explained that NPS “has had both a positive and negative track record over the years,” succeeding in its general mission of preservation but often falling short in taking into account native naming conventions or land management practices. Moving forward, he declared it was imperative that NPS “live within the context of a different perspective and to achieve managerial compromises that strike a balance for all the people concerned.” Cook’s article signaled the perceived need for interpretation at places like FOUN to incorporate narrative balance to establish a “level playing field” for competing histories. This approach would increasingly define the site’s interpretive philosophy in coming years, but would prove difficult to enact in practice.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, at the same time that these trends were taking shape, FOUN and Southwest Region staff focused on re-examining the history of Fort Union. In many cases, the new narratives they produced tended to emphasize the contributions of previously understudied groups to the history of the fort, including women, African-Americans, and local Hispanos. These new stories pushed the overarching historical narrative in new directions, but also remained mostly consistent with the basic orientation of the Fort Union story, most notably by continuing to disregard the voices of Native Americans and declining to interrogate the logic of conquest.

Ranger Eve Smith published an article in the April 1987 NPS *Courier* on “The Women of Fort Union.” Smith’s article focused on the fact that “Fort Union’s story is

more than a battle cry. It is the story also of the women who travelled the Santa Fe Trail into an unsettled land, and passed through the fort..." She recounted the experiences of Susan Magoffin, Lydia Spencer Lane, Frances Boyd, and other women whose lives were characterized by hardship, danger, and drudgery, but also moments of contentment and even joy. Officers' wives were "adaptable, pure, domestic, usually submissive, and always a lady." However, the "less esteemed" lives of laundresses and enlisted men's wives were "cramped" and difficult. This inclusion of one marginalized group did not mean a reconsideration of the fundamental project of colonialism by which "the west had been won," however.⁶³⁵

In the late 1980s, the park produced a two page pamphlet on the Ninth Cavalry, which was comprised of African-American troops. The brochure highlighted the "prejudice and bigotry" faced by these soldiers in their service throughout the West, including Fort Union. Conflicts between the Army and the Apache and Utes in the late 1870s were blamed on "white opportunists and dishonesty in the Indian Bureau." The story praised the exceptional service of the Buffalo Soldiers, whose record "equals, and in many ways, exceeds those of white units." Accompanied by Frederic Remington illustrations of a San Carlos Apache and black soldiers, the brochure summarized the sacrifice of black troops: "Long ignored by a thankless nation, these men endured years of hardship under the stars and stripes they carried, furthering the 'Manifest Destiny' of a

⁶³⁵ Eve Smith, "The Women of Fort Union," *Courier* 32:4 (April 1987), 4-6.

people who didn't want them, and establishing themselves as an undeniable part of our American heritage."⁶³⁶

In December 1990, Ranger Frank Torres completed a report on "New Mexico Volunteers and the Civil War in the Southwest." The seventy-five page report, which Torres intended "to offset past omissions," discussed "Hispanic contributions to New Mexico's war effort as well as the impact that the Civil War had on the lives of the Hispanos." Marshalling an array of sources, Torres set about to correct the history of the New Mexican Volunteers during Fort Union's period of significance against what he saw as a legacy of prejudiced, even bigoted, historical accounts.

Torres retold the history of the American invasion of New Mexico from a New Mexican perspective, including the vast changes brought about by the U.S.-Mexican War and their impacts on the daily lives of local residents. Describing the service of New Mexico Volunteers in early Indian campaigns, Torres claimed that accusations of incompetence had "clouded the true picture" and "unjustly dishonored many of the native [Hispano] soldiers." The poor battlefield performance of New Mexico Volunteers was attributable to racial prejudice, poor equipment and supply, delayed pay, and inadequate training. He firmly rejected accounts that impugned their courage: "cowards did not hold the settlements against marauders for centuries and still survive...it is a matter of language that gives this view of history."

The Hispano labor that built the Third Fort Union was essential in creating an entity that "protected the mails, engineered roads, supplied ammunition, and kept open

⁶³⁶ Buffalo Soldiers pamphlet, 1988, New Mexico Highlands University, Special Collections, Diana Stein Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.

the frontiers of New Mexico for the advance of the homesteader.” Hispanos fought in Kit Carson’s campaigns against the Navajo, Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche because of the hundreds of years of conflict and bloodshed that preceded them—they were a people with a history that existed outside that of the United States.⁶³⁷ Torres’ report was a thorough rehabilitation of the New Mexico Volunteers’ image, and one that set the foundation for a new mainstay of interpretation at FOUN. From the early 1990s forward, the New Mexico Volunteers were honored as brave and competent soldiers worthy of portrayal by reenactors, who had previously interpreted US Army regulars.

Southwest Region staff also explored new parts of Fort Union’s history. In 1993, Laura Harrison and James Ivey completed their study of the First Fort Union, Arsenal, and Second Fort Union, which painted a picture of Fort Union as a powerful presence in the New Mexican landscape but also tied to, and even dependent upon, its local economic and cultural context.⁶³⁸

Harrison and Ivey asserted that Fort Union’s chief importance was as “a symbol of Federal Dominance in New Mexico [and] a defensive point during the Civil War,” reflecting the need for a military “presence, defense and, when necessary, offense.” This role derived from the fact that “at the time, the northern tribes of Apache and Ute Indians were causing problems.” The document built upon Fort Union’s networked status to make claims about the extent of its power, which extended beyond New Mexico Territory

⁶³⁷ Frank J. Torres, “New Mexico Volunteers and the Civil War in the Southwest,” December 1990, Fort Union National Monument Library Collection.

⁶³⁸ Laura E. Soullière Harrison and James E. Ivey, *Of a Temporary Character: A Historic Structure Report of First Fort, Second Fort, and the Arsenal and Historical Base Map: Fort Union National Monument, Fort Union, New Mexico* (Division of History, Southwest Cultural Resources Center, Southwest Region, National Park Service, Dept. of the Interior, 1993).

and was influential in “the entire West.”⁶³⁹ The narrative retained some aspects reminiscent of the 1962 Utley *Handbook* as well, particularly in its description of the Fort’s conflicts with Native Americans, which “reached in all directions through the Indian Campaigns” and “all along the Santa Fe Trail both as a supply and destination point and through the protection function of the fort.”⁶⁴⁰

However, according to Harrison, Fort Union was also “a point where several cultures met, worked, cooperated, and had conflict.”⁶⁴¹ She emphasized how the Third Fort had assumed a sort of hybrid form: “by interpreting the army regulations and orders, [and] studying what worked for local people, the architecture of Fort Union took shape.”⁶⁴² The report also emphasized contemporary accounts of the First Fort Union that referred to the post as a “village,” set apart from the local community but still incorporating social and cultural elements of it.⁶⁴³ Notably, the connection between Fort Union and its local context was one that included only Hispanos—Native Americans did not figure in the site’s history except as mostly undifferentiated enemies of the Army and New Mexicans alike.

⁶³⁹ Harrison and Ivey, *Of a Temporary Character*, 3.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 32, 35.

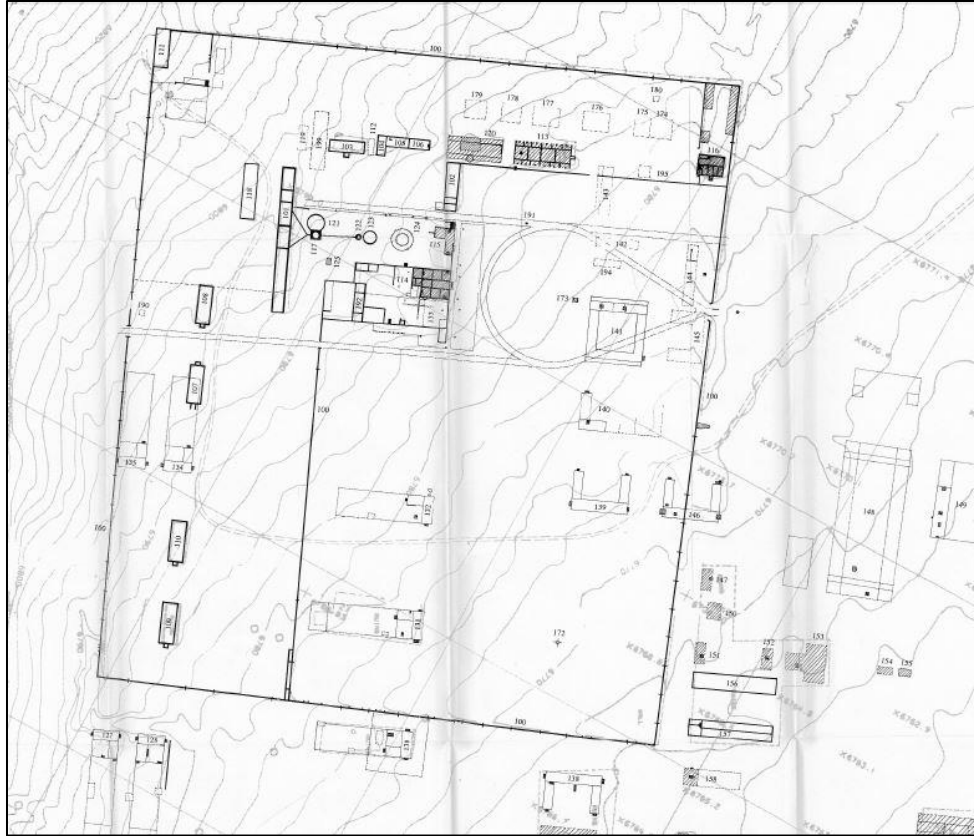


Figure 45: Historical Base Map of First Fort Union/Arsenal and Shoemaker “homestead,”
Of a Temporary Character

Central to the understanding of Fort Union elaborated in the report were the improvements and modifications made to the structures and the military reservation on which they were situated. The best example of this dynamic was the report’s description of the Arsenal, built on the ruins of the First Fort in 1863 and directed by Military Storekeeper William Shoemaker for over thirty years, which contained “amenities such as shade trees, a duck pond and fountain, all surrounded by a fancy wooden fence.”⁶⁴⁴ Also, Harrison noted the spatial arrangement of the Arsenal’s buildings was somewhat irregular for a military facility: “Instead of the usual rectangular parade ground and neat

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

rows of surrounding structures, Shoemaker's layout of the large adobe wall, teardrop-shaped drive and subordinate structures adjacent to the main house had a civilian design."⁶⁴⁵ According to Harrison, these personal touches resulted in a space that was decidedly different from not only the military buildings at Fort Union, but other structures of a similar type throughout the west: "Considering that [Shoemaker] lived longer at Fort Union than anyone else, it is understandable why his installation was unique in western military construction: he homesteaded."⁶⁴⁶ In spaces like the Arsenal, it was possible to see manifestations of an alternative power and spatial dynamic that arose *within* the military context and further complicated understandings of the power relations between the fort and its local context.

In December of 1993, after five years of work, historian Leo Oliva completed his massive Historic Resource Study, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest*. This comprehensive study of the fort would be utilized for decades by park staff as the authoritative text on the military history of the site. Oliva, a longtime scholar of the Santa Fe Trail and western forts, gave considerable attention to Hispanos' role in the Army at Fort Union, but relied primarily on military records and paid scant attention to the views of Native Americans.⁶⁴⁷

The renewal of interest in the region's history extended beyond Fort Union itself—the new prominence of the Santa Fe Trail led to studies of that era from new perspectives. Another NPS report, *Comerciantes, Arrieros, y Peones: The Hispanos and*

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁴⁷ Leo Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 1993).

the Santa Fe Trade (Merchants, Muleteers, and Peons), by Southwest Regional Office historian Susan Boyle, provided a re-consideration of the Trail. Boyle, a social historian, clearly acknowledged that most previous studies had focused “exclusively on the route between Missouri and Santa Fe, the activities of American traders and freighters, and the period prior to the Mexican War.” She determined to take a new approach to the Santa Fe Trail which aimed to broaden its geographical reach to include Mexico, California, New Orleans and even Europe, demonstrating that “this was but one segment of a complex network of commercial operations.”⁶⁴⁸ The document’s cover page neatly illustrated this new international consideration.

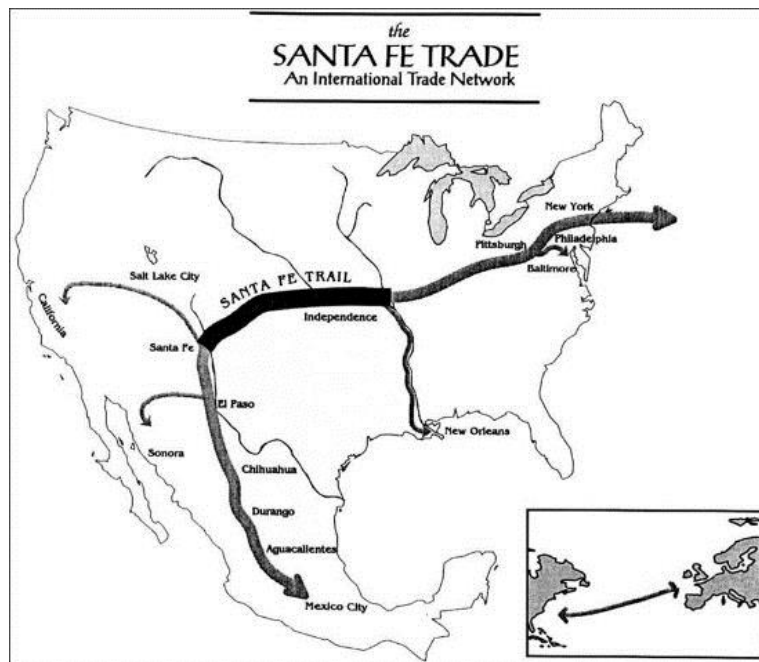


Figure 46: Cover Page, “The Santa Fe Trade,” showing local, national, and international contexts

⁶⁴⁸ Susan Calafate Boyle, *Comerciantes, Arrieros, y Peones: The Hispanos and The Santa Fe Trade* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 1994), ix.

The Boyle study also focused on “how cultural and socioeconomic conditions in New Mexico contributed to the development and success of the Santa Fe Trade,” ascribing a level of power and influence to the local population previously only rarely seen in NPS’s work on the era.⁶⁴⁹ She aimed to delineate the “commercial networks” of local Hispano traders that included Anglo and other populations, not the other way around.⁶⁵⁰

The effect of these new histories was to fundamentally change the idea of what kind of place Fort Union had been, and therefore what kind of place a monument commemorating it should be. In its earliest conceptions, NPS and others had written of Fort Union as a place that was important due to its association with the recently departed past that had defined and benefitted northern New Mexico—the Santa Fe Trail. Once the agency took control of the site, however, the main focus of its historical accounts of Fort Union shifted, incorporating a greater focus on the Indian Wars, even though none of the battles or campaigns that the stories described had taken place at the fort itself. The somewhat indirect connection between the historicity of Fort Union and the more dramatic and thrilling Indian Wars narrative did not matter. The kind of place that emerged from these accounts was an offensive one, whose importance stemmed from its association with episodes of violent conquest. NPS’s Indian Wars visions of Fort Union privileged an understanding of it as a place of dominance and static control over local Native American and Hispano populations.

⁶⁴⁹ Boyle, *Comerciantes*, ix.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the dominant narrative of Fort Union changed again. Driven by trends in western historiography that aimed to return non-Americans to the story of the west and the bureaucratic recognition of that impulse in the designation of the Santa Fe National Historical Trail, NPS historians writing about FOUN began to resurrect the site's original meaning as a post on the Trail, whose function was to "defend" or "protect" travelers and traders from the depredations of Native groups. The effect was a more complex Fort Union story that conceptualized the site in terms of its effects on and relationships with local people, especially Hispanos, who emerged as slightly more complex individuals than the caricatures that had appeared only sporadically before. Native Americans, however, did not fare as well, remaining the faceless, stereotyped foils for Army heroism that had populated earlier histories.

In sum, despite these historiographical and managerial changes, the expansion and change that took place in the NPS's historical imaginings of FOUN was limited. Fort Union was now thought of as connected to its local context, but only in terms of those who had been absorbed, however unwillingly, into the American imperial project after 1848. Native Americans, who continued to resist American hegemony during the period of the fort's activity, were not afforded their own perspective on FOUN, and remained essentially outside the narrative NPS was crafting in the early 1990s.

Re-Valuing the Ruins

While this partial expansion of the imaginative and narrative senses of place at FOUN was taking place, the site's managers were also increasingly interested in the role of its physical cultural resources in the process of place-making. Leadership realized that

the cultural assets of the monument were in grave danger of disappearing, and continued to search for adequate solutions to preserve them. The stakes were high because of the sense of place that the adobe engendered—even more than the original planners’ “ghostly” places of quiet contemplation or the raucous, populated scene that characterized the 1970s, the ruins were now thought of as generative of an authentic connection with the past through their material characteristics, not just through the imagination of the visitor or the didactic materials that NPS placed among them. This idea of the ruins as worthy of preservation not simply out of obligation but because they possessed an ineffable quality of historical meaning reflected the ongoing changes in sense of place around FOUN.

The methods of ruins stabilization and preservation changed during this time period, as well. Regional Architect David Battle advised the park to return to the use of traditional adobe construction methods to stabilize the walls instead of the silicone and cement that had been used since the 1950s. Ruins preservation in the 1981 season focused on a “return to the use of original materials in adobe and foundation work, rather than the cement and chemically stabilized material used in past years,” a focus on buildings “whose condition constituted major safety hazards to employees and/or visitors,” and treatment of buildings whose “entire identity” was in danger of being lost.⁶⁵¹

Another critical maintenance activity was a study to determine the best method of erosion prevention for the Santa Fe Trail ruts located in the park. Melody Webb of the

⁶⁵¹ Clark Crane, “Annual Report for 1981,” NARA-CP, Record Group 79: Records of the National Park Service, Entry P17, Box 11.

NPS Division of History noted that this constituted a “threat of loss of primary resource,” since “without the trail the fort would not have been built.” Webb noted that “nowhere else the ruts of the Santa Fe Trail maintain such integrity in conjunction with a historic fort built to protect the trail’s travelers.” She urged immediate study of the problem before the ruts were completely erased.⁶⁵²



Figure 47: Fort Union, 1984

(Source: Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Eduardo Fuss Photograph Collection, <http://econtent.unm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/fuss/id/615>)

From 1984 to 1987, the monument staff fought a constant back-and-forth battle to preserve the remaining walls as weather caused collapses which maintenance crews rushed to correct. Nonetheless, it was apparent that the preceding decades had, at the very least, maintained the basic extent of the ruins’ size and scale. A 1984 survey found that 125,336 square feet of adobe surface remained, only about a two percent decrease in size

⁶⁵² Maintenance Job Work Orders, 1977-1982, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

since the 1954 acquisition of the site.⁶⁵³ Renowned adobe specialist Buzz McHenry visited the park in 1987 and made recommendations for improved building techniques and better sources of mud for making adobes. A structural engineer from the Denver Service Center supplied specifications on bracing walls to improve their stability.⁶⁵⁴

Despite these advances, resources remained scarce. Park staff requested and received special funding for preservation planning and remediation—\$80,000 annually for three years.⁶⁵⁵ The outcome was the monument’s Preservation Plan, completed in May 1988. The overall goal was to preserve the ruins in a way that corresponded to the park’s purpose and mandate, to establish a clear order or hierarchy of “site defining characteristics” to be targeted, and to ensure that the information presented could be clearly implemented by park personnel.

To “graphically depict the apex of land use,” the planners recommended that the Third Fort ruins receive top priority. “This was a large and complex facility serving the New Mexico territory,” the authors wrote, “and the remaining ruins help to communicate that message.” This was the main concept that the preservation plan aimed to convey through the sense of place generated by the physical structures. The “character defining elements” of Fort Union were those elements which made it a “special place” and which conveyed the truth of its historical significance and function. These elements included

⁶⁵³ In 1959, archaeologist Rex Wilson had estimated the standing walls at 61,000 (one-sided) feet, meaning that the total square footage had remained essentially the same throughout NPS’s management of the site. Wilson to Steen, February 19, 1959 and Wilson to Hastings, February 23, 1959, Fort Union National Monument File 639, Folder 187.

⁶⁵⁴ Douglas McChristian, “Annual Report for 1987,” NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

“scale and proportion,” “space and order,” “mass and volume,” “rhythm,” and “texture and color.” By experiencing these spatial and material qualities of the ruins, visitors would gain “a total appreciation and better understanding of military life at Fort Union.” This acknowledgement of the importance of the ruins’ physical characteristics as a vital contribution to the sense of place at FOUN was an important change point for the park’s resource management philosophy—a natural outcome of the shift, dating back to the 1970s, away from chemical preservatives to keep the original adobe intact and toward a closer focus on the ruins’ essential form and shape.⁶⁵⁶

In one sense, the essential sense of place created by the ruins was undamaged. Even though much of the original material had been lost and replaced with new adobe, the physical space the ruins created and the messages they contained were alive and well. Not everything had survived, however. In June 1992, anthropologists Frances Levine and William Westbury completed a study of the early preservation efforts of the late 1950s and early 1960s. They concluded that the early excavations, although they had succeeded in preventing the loss of many adobe walls, had come at a price: the destruction of the archaeological record, which would have been “of immense value to the historian, historical architect, historic archaeologist, and park interpreter concerned with presenting the fort to the public.” However, they also conceded that the job done by Cattnach and Wilson accorded with their instructions, which were to stabilize and “clean up” the ruins so that visitors to the newly opened park would have something to see. The authors recommended an increased commitment to archaeological study as part of the park’s

⁶⁵⁶ “Preservation Plan for Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico,” May 1988, NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

resource management and interpretation, an approach that FOUN's managers would adopt in the coming decades.⁶⁵⁷

The 1994 Interpretive Prospectus

In January 1994, the monument's Interpretive Prospectus was revised for the first time since the late 1960s, when the sense of place that FOUN's managers strove to create had taken a turn into a more belligerent narrative focused on the violence of the Indian Wars and the daily lives of the soldiers and civilians who fought them. The new prospectus, by contrast, reflected the changes of the intervening decades but also maintained some of the long-standing interpretive and historical messages that had characterized FOUN's planning from the start.

Visitors would approach the site from the south, their first glimpses of “a Stonehenge-like smudge” on “the vast open arid landscape” enticing their curiosity in a fashion reminiscent of Withers Woolford's exploration of the mysterious “treasure trove of history” in 1931. The Mission 66 visitor center would “funnel” people into the ruins, where via signage and living history they would gain “historical and sociological context for Fort Union and the Santa Fe Trail” as well as “an intimate glimpse into the daily lives of the people who once lived and worked at the Fort.” The ruins themselves would convey both an ineffable quality of the past and concrete data on the fort's structure and function, blending the romance of the early travelogues to this forgotten place and the cultural landscape theory that informed recent NPS assessments.

⁶⁵⁷ Frances Levine and William Westbury, *A History of Archeological Investigations at Fort Union National Monument* (National Park Service Southwest Regional Office, Santa Fe, 1990), 3-5.

The overall purpose of FOUN by 1994 was “to interpret the role of the Santa Fe Trail and Fort Union in the development of the American Southwest by the United States.” The park would discuss the Santa Fe Trail as “an important international highway of commerce key to the development of the American Southwest and an avenue of military and commercial supply.” This theme would be developed with a contextualized account of the trail’s pre-1821 history, and its impact on the region as part of a “larger trail network of the Southwest and Northern Mexico.” FOUN’s message would focus on the role Fort Union’s inhabitants had played in “provid[ing] security” for the Trail, the Civil War, and in “military campaigns against several American Indian tribes.” The endlessly popular details of individuals’ everyday lives at Fort Union would inspire larger questions about the U.S. Army’s operations in the southwest at the time and the dynamics of “social structure” and “community.” Similarly, the “social and economic impacts” of Fort Union on the local landscape would be a central factor.

In service to the idea of “multiple perspectives,” however, these changes would not all be characterized as positive, and the interpretation would also “discuss the trail as an avenue of American cultural and economic invasion.”

In short, the story of Fort Union would not be told in the same way as before. Now it would include “American Indian perspectives on the invasion of the Southwest by Hispanic and American settlers and the military campaigns waged against the American Indian cultures to support this invasion,” while also lauding the heroism of the New Mexico Volunteers. The goal, then, was to honor and revere the several perspectives on the past of the many groups affected by Fort Union. However, the prospectus did not identify any new sources of historical research to be done, nor new scholarship that

would provide a base for building this interpretation. The chief interpretive mechanism, the 1959 museum exhibits, were deemed largely satisfactory in their content, needing only some stylistic changes to better reach modern audiences. Given the incomplete expansion of the interpretive and narrative histories of Fort Union which still excluded the voices of Native Americans even though they had begun to incorporate those of Hispanos, the extent of the changes in the fundamental sense of place at FOUN was still an open question.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ “Interpretive Prospectus, Fort Union National Monument,” January 18, 1994, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

CODA

“AN AUTHENTIC AND PREMIER SETTING TO RECREATE AND REFLECT ON A BYGONE ERA”: THE NEW FOUN, 1994-2014

In the past twenty years, the managers of Fort Union National Monument have striven to achieve the goal, first articulated in the 1994 Interpretive Prospectus, of a more balanced and inclusive interpretive message. The stories and perspectives of Native Americans and Hispanos, once thought ancillary to the history of the United States Army in territorial New Mexico, have been considered increasingly necessary to articulate a rounded, more complete sense of place at Fort Union. Over the past two decades, NPS has engaged in a number of sophisticated studies of natural and cultural resources at the park, expanded and made more nuanced its stated understandings of the site's significance, and in the 2000s embarked on a still-uncompleted effort to revise the museum exhibits to reflect a notion of “multiple perspectives” in telling the story of Fort Union.

However, fulfilling this goal has also been challenging. While the planning documents and new interpretive offerings that FOUN managers have created take some steps to further integrate new voices and new perspectives, much of the essential historical and interpretive narrative at the park remains overwhelmingly focused on the military history of the site and the everyday lives of the soldiers and civilians who lived there in the nineteenth century. The preceding fifty years of place-making, and the monument that they have created, have proven durable in the face of these proposed reconsiderations.

In this section, I examine the ways in which FOUN has expressed its new interpretive and historical focus, and the steps it has taken to inscribe that philosophy onto the park's physical, narrative, and imaginative senses of place. I also offer some thoughts on why those attempts have been only partially successful, and the questions they raise about the nature of monumental space, the promise and peril of living history, the question of reconstruction and the problem of materiality, and the persistent difficulty of interpreting histories of conflict in the American West.

Achieving Stability

By the late 1990s, FOUN staff had settled on a preservation approach that ensured that Roger Toll's initial, terse assessment of the adobe ruins' fate in 1935 ("Crumbling inevitable.") would prove incorrect. From 1992-1995, the University of Pennsylvania held a series of historic archaeology and preservation summer field courses at the monument, as students and professors studied the ruins and their past treatment in order to devise new preservation methods.⁶⁵⁹

The Penn students and faculty produced a Preservation Action Plan in 1996 that drew upon the expertise of the university's Architectural Conservation Laboratory to develop a comprehensive array of assessment and treatment methods including capping and coating of walls. The plan acknowledged that the soil-cement adobes used since the 1950s as stopgap preservation tools were at the end of their useful lives, and causing

⁶⁵⁹ Myers, "Annual Report, 1994" NPS HFC, Park History Collection, Park Historic Reference Files: FOUN, Box PHR-275; Division of Conservation, Southwest Regional Office, "Emergency Plaster Stabilization Report, Fort Union National Monument, October 1994," NPS Intermountain Regional Office, FOUN Files.

problems with water penetration and the “coving” or deterioration of the original, non-cement-based adobes below them.

The new materials to be applied needed to match the permeability and hardness of the existing walls to ensure uniform deterioration. Since duplicating the original adobes was cost- and time-prohibitive, the team recommended “lime-modified adobes” which would closely replicate the historic materials. “Shelter coats” consisting of a loose mix of soil and sand were applied with a pressure sprayer and by hand. This coating deteriorated rapidly, requiring frequent reapplication, but would protect the underlying historic layer. It also had the advantage of closely matching the adobes in appearance and texture. Maintenance teams built test walls to evaluate the effectiveness of various mixtures of adobe and shelter coat materials, and devised a monitoring system to determine the rate of erosion using pins inserted in the walls.⁶⁶⁰

CRM, the NPS’s technical Cultural Resource Management journal, featured Fort Union in its 1997 edition. Architectural Conservator (and Penn student) Anne Oliver, one of the drafters of the new preservation plan, contrasted it to previous efforts, noting its “emphasis on active research and the implementation of the results; on interaction between all groups involved; and on the working nature of the document, which will be revised and appended as preservation strategies are refined in the future.”⁶⁶¹

Bob Hartzler, one of the graduate students, was offered full-time employment at the park in 1997, and assigned to expand the pilot program to “investigate and evaluate

⁶⁶⁰ Anne Oliver and Robert Hartzler, “Working Preservation Action Plan for the Adobe Ruins at Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico: Implementation Project Final Report,” June 1996, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

⁶⁶¹ Anne Oliver, “A Preservation Action Plan for Fort Union,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 20:10 (1997).

the condition of our historic structures and recommend preservation treatment.” He also consulted with other parks in the region with similar resource preservation challenges. In the 1997 preservation season, crews implemented the new plan: over 10,000 adobes were installed atop the Third Fort ruins, replacing the original caps applied in the 1950s. The project continued for several years and soon became the normal approach to preservation as the relative number of walls classified as “unstable” continued to decrease.⁶⁶²

Although the park’s funding for adobe preservation was reduced in 2002, the preservation crew increased the length of the season (March through December) and by utilizing more “traditional methods” managed to finish shelter coating over 115,000 square feet of adobe wall and manufacture and install 3,500 adobes, completing the capping project. This methodology has defined the approach to preservation at FOUN ever since, and the park’s 2014 Foundation Document declared that via an “ongoing park effort,” the ruins were “stable” and in “good condition.”⁶⁶³

Expanding Interpretive Frames

In the past twenty years, FOUN has also seen advancements in its narrative and imaginative senses of place as park staff have worked to increase their knowledge and interpretation of a broader sense of Fort Union’s history. These changes reflected the need, identified in the 1994 Interpretive Prospectus, for a more balanced scheme, but also broader changes across NPS. In the 1990s, the agency sought to expand its interpretive

⁶⁶² Fort Union National Monument, Annual Reports 1997-2002, NPS Technical Information Center.

⁶⁶³ Fort Union National Monument, Annual Report 2002, NPS Technical Information Center; Fort Union National Monument, Foundation Document, June 2014, http://www.nps.gov/foun/learn/management/upload/FOUN_FD_FINAL.pdf, accessed January 3, 2016.

efforts, and to increase its focus on historical research as a fundamental building block of those offerings. Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley stated that NPS had “largely lost contact with the profession of history outside the agency,” and soon, collaborations with the Organization of American Historians produced a revised thematic framework and a more rigorous approach to creating historical content.

Pitcaithley articulated his vision of a new NPS interpretive methodology: “In the future, interpretive materials, perforce, will be less omniscient in their approach and will suggest a greater sense of the complexity of the past...History does not possess only one truth, but rather many truths—and we contribute to the public’s knowledge about history, and the special places we manage, by presenting a past with multiple views and differing, even conflicting, interpretations.”⁶⁶⁴ The managers of FOUN took these instructions to heart, and in recent years have produced or commissioned a number of new studies on previously underemphasized aspects of Fort Union’s history, developing the background knowledge necessary to let those other voices speak.

The park’s 2006 Ethnographic Overview (completed by staff of the University of New Mexico’s Spanish Colonial Resource Center) was intended to more firmly establish the significance of Native American and Hispano communities in the history of the fort. The document argued that like many western forts, “the history of Fort Union has tended to be [told] from a military perspective at the expense of the multicultural significance of

⁶⁶⁴ Dwight Pitcaithley, “The Future of the NPS History Program,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 20:7 (1997), 7.

the area and the dynamic influences that various ethnic groups brought to the region.”⁶⁶⁵

To counterbalance this approach, the Ethnographic Overview emphasized the way that Fort Union was experienced and used by its inhabitants and visitors—members of the military but also non-combatant Euroamericans, Hispanos and Native Americans.

Hispanos, through their service as “soldiers, volunteers and as suppliers, interpreters, packers and guides,” contributed to a shift in the military’s policies and objectives in the territory, especially in its interactions with Native Americans. The comancheros and ciboleros, whose relationship with the Army was more fraught, posed a challenge that caused adaptation by the fort’s administrators. Critically, Hispano laborers at all three Fort Unions made an indelible impression on the landscape in the form of the built environment.

Native Americans’ stories were harder to tell, because their voices remained “missing from the material.” Nonetheless, the authors declared, “Native Americans were directly affected by Fort Union's presence, but were not passive participants in the fort's policies directed towards them; in many cases they played a direct role in how those policies were developed and implemented.” Native Americans interacted with the fort in contexts of the military (fighting both with and against Army troops), trade, and social exchange.

The authors claimed that, far from being only victims of American power deployed through the instrument of Fort Union, American Indians actually acted upon it and forced cultural change. As a result, “Fort Union evolved from a traditional military

⁶⁶⁵ Joseph P. Sánchez, Jerry L. Gurulé, Larry V. Larrichio and Larry D. Miller, *Fort Union Ethnographic Overview* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 2006), 1.

outpost into a cultural mosaic.” The authors focused on the movements and oral histories of those groups whose documentary presence was less obvious than the Euroamerican and military populations to show how “Fort Union quickly became an integral part of a culturally diverse region.”⁶⁶⁶ The main thrust of the report was to demonstrate that despite a large increase in personnel, material and expenditures after the Civil War, Fort Union remained a small feature in a larger cultural landscape, just as dependent on the local context as it had been previously, regardless of its evolution into a larger, more “permanent” place.⁶⁶⁷

Park staff also conducted more intensive research on Hispano history and brought it into the central narrative, completing a historical theme study on the service of Hispano soldiers in 2005. Their conclusions asserted that New Mexican volunteers both benefited and suffered from American influence in the region, as economic advancement was tempered by racial prejudice and mistreatment. Overall, however, “The relationship was two-ways. Both profited from each other's needs and offerings. In the end, the relationship between the two was linked by the lasting heritage they gave to the area.”⁶⁶⁸

The importance of Hispano history to FOUN has become even more visible in recent years in the living history practices that still form the core of its interpretive offerings. The demonstrations, greatly expanded in 2004 with special NPS funding, take up a significant portion of the unit’s budgetary and interpretive resources. These reenactment activities, to which FOUN management is “totally committed,” constitute a

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁶⁸ Joseph Sanchez, Jerry Gurule, and Larry Miller, *Hispanic Soldiers of New Mexico in the Service of the Union Army* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 2005).

clear reminder of the New Mexico Volunteers' honored military service as the actors, many of whom are local Hispanos, wear period uniforms and speak entirely in Spanish.⁶⁶⁹

Revising the Museum Exhibits

The Native American perspective is more difficult to capture via living history due to a rightful wariness of cultural appropriation or insensitivity, and so FOUN's commitment to incorporating Native voices into its interpretation has surfaced in a different project: the revision of the fifty-year-old museum exhibits, a process which has also led the park to a general reconceptualization of what was and is important about Fort Union and how best to tell that story.

First, however, it was necessary to determine which Native American tribes had been historically associated with Fort Union. In January 2006, Stephen Lekson and Brenda Kaye Todd of the University of Colorado Museum completed the monument's Cultural Affiliation report in compliance with NAGPRA regulations governing the human remains discovered at the fort in 1958. The authors concluded, based on historical research, review of previous studies, and new osteological analyses, that three of the individuals were of Native American ancestry and one was of European ancestry.

⁶⁶⁹ Fort Union National Monument, 2004 Annual Report, NPS Electronic Technical Information Center; Fort Union National Monument, Service-Wide Interpretive Report, 2004, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center files.

However, they classified all four as Native American due to similarities in the manner of their deaths and burial.⁶⁷⁰

The second part of the study attempted to identify the “most likely” culturally affiliated tribes with the remains, and by extension with Fort Union. The authors concluded that the Jicarilla Apache, Navajo, Ute Mountain Ute, Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne-Arapaho and Mescalero Apache fit that bill, with a “secondary” list that included other Plains tribes.⁶⁷¹ By 2007, the staff was ready to begin the museum exhibit revision process, and the park held a two-day planning meeting with representatives of the Navajo Nation, Jemez Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache Nation, and Southern Ute Tribe in August of that year. Several key concepts of the tribes’ input on future planning efforts emerged from the meeting. Central among them was the persistence of Native American presence in the area, expressed by the phrase “we were here, and we are still here,” and the need to allow tribes to “tell their own stories, from their own perspectives, in their own voices.”

Initial funding arrived in March 2008, and two months later, park staff and volunteers met with the Intermountain Region’s Office of Interpretation and Education to develop a Museum Concept Plan to more effectively interpret Fort Union’s history in line with the new inclusive vision. The group articulated the five Primary Interpretive Themes for Fort Union, which emphasized “diverse cultural encounters,” “the profound impacts

⁶⁷⁰ Stephen Lekson and Brenda Kaye Todd, “Cultural Affiliation at Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico,” January 2006, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files. These findings were challenged by historical archaeologists Catherine Spude and Doug Scott in 2013. See “NAGPRA and Historical Research: Reevaluation of a Multiple Burial from Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico,” *Historical Archaeology* 47:4 (2013), 121-126.

⁶⁷¹ Lekson and Todd, “Cultural Affiliation,” 4.

that the concept of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion had on inhabitants of the area and still has on their descendants today,” and the “authentic and premier setting to recreate and reflect on a bygone era” that FOUN could offer.⁶⁷²

In December 2008, the museum plans were part of a new Comprehensive Interpretive Plan (CIP), itself derived from additional consultation meetings that gathered the “input of affiliated tribes and pueblos, key stakeholders, resource experts, and park staff” over the previous two years. The meeting generated a new set of “statements of significance” which provided a capsule summary of how the monument’s history and meaning were to be conceived. The statements of significance included many of the traditional ideas about Fort Union’s history that had been articulated from its earliest days: its “authentic historic setting,” its connection to the Santa Fe Trail, its role in the Civil War and Indian Wars, and the part it played in “strengthen[ing] US rule, presence, and influence in the American Southwest.” However, new language also discussed the “landmarks and sacred sites” of Native Americans found nearby, and the economic transformation of nineteenth-century New Mexico. The CIP also articulated what its visitors desired from a trip to FOUN: “19th-century military life, ambience, and material culture...an authentic, historically accurate, and interactive experience to bring the fort to life.”⁶⁷³

Building on the ideas developed for the 2008 CIP, the park held initial planning meetings to conduct a “Value Analysis Workshop” with exhibit designers and

⁶⁷² Fort Union National Monument, Museum Concept Plan, May 2008, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

⁶⁷³ Fort Union National Monument, Comprehensive Interpretive Plan 2009-2013 (December, 2008), Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

interpreters in April 2010. The clearly stated problem was that “The 50 year old exhibits produced in the Mission 66 Era are narrow in perspective, and the design, technology, and content now outdated.” The new exhibits would incorporate input from Native American and Hispano communities, and “reflect a more comprehensive interpretation of Fort Union.” Their content would be improved to “reflect scholarly research, accuracy, and multiple perspectives associated with the site.” The park worked with Fort Lewis College, Arizona State University and Harpers Ferry to develop the plan over the next few years, and the new exhibits are scheduled to be installed in 2016.⁶⁷⁴

The expanded, inclusive FOUN is reflected in the park’s 2014 Foundation Document, which brings together the Statements of Significance and Interpretive Themes to articulate the unit’s purpose and fundamental orientation: to “preserve the historic remains and setting of Fort Union and its inextricable link to the Santa Fe Trail” and interpret the fort’s “role in westward expansion in the Southwest.” This interpretive stance necessarily includes periods of time outside the forty-year era of the fort’s activity, and therefore “the multiple perspectives of the cultures that contributed to, and were affected by, the fort.” Also included in the Foundation Document is a very lengthy list of traditionally associated tribes and park stakeholders, describing the park in relation to a much broader community of interest than any previous document. Clearly, FOUN’s managers are committed to the idea of a broader base of historical and interpretive authority, which extends beyond the institutional boundaries of NPS.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷⁴ National Park Service Value Analysis Workshop: Fort Union National Monument (FOUN) Visitor Center Exhibits, April 21-22, 2010, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

⁶⁷⁵ Foundation Document, June 2014.

The Problem of Living History

Despite these admirable examples of fulfilling the promise of the 1994 Interpretive Prospectus and NPS's general commitment to more balanced and inclusive history, there are still some aspects of FOUN's current sense of place that reflect the older, less welcoming ideas that defined its early interpretive offerings. One example of this incomplete transformation is the park's focus on living history.

The current Foundation Document describes FOUN as "totally committed" to the living history program, which is an "integral part" of its operations. Indeed, the park offers numerous living history demonstrations each year, both at the fort and in nearby communities and special events. Most of the reenactors interpret the New Mexico Volunteers, and as noted above their portrayal is respectful and venerative of these individuals' sacrifice.

However, the potential problems of living history are as true today as they were in the 1970s, when NPS officials first began to realize that they often came at a price. The topics of living history and historical reenactment have been the subject of a number of scholarly investigations, which have increased in recent years as questions about the cultural work and theoretical implications of the practice have grown alongside its popularity.⁶⁷⁶ Certainly, today costumed interpretation of the past is a significant cultural phenomenon, due to its supposed creation of a "more intelligible and shapely" mode of

⁶⁷⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

history.⁶⁷⁷ However, there is still much debate as to whether historical reenactment is a useful method of conveying information about the past or an inescapably anachronistic exercise that simply reflects the mores of the time in which it is performed—“merely the present in funny dress.”⁶⁷⁸ Regardless of whether they are authentic or not, the power of these simulacra is undeniable, as is the fact that visitors to historical sites enjoy and seek them out, making them a major driver of attendance at FOUN and many other sites.⁶⁷⁹

Even beyond the problem of accuracy, however, is that of the moral contours of the practice of living history: the question of *which* aspects of the past are summoned by this sorcery can be a troubling one. The freedom offered by its detached, performative nature and what historian Vanessa Agnew calls its “ahistoricity” create a conceptual space in which less considered visions of the past can thrive, where actors and audiences can indulge in otherwise unacceptable attitudes, including the “embrace of warfare and various other forms of violent subjugation.”⁶⁸⁰

Such a powerful form of imagining the past can be inherently divisive. The tendency of living history to “privilege a visceral, emotional engagement with the past at the expense of a more analytical treatment” has the advantage of increasing viewers’ perceived understanding of and identification with the individuals being portrayed.

⁶⁷⁷ Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb, eds., *Settler and Creole Reenactment* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 1.

⁶⁷⁸ Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

⁶⁷⁹ Ian McCalman and Paul Pickering, *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

⁶⁸⁰ Vanessa Agnew, “What is Reenactment?” *Criticism*, 46:3 (Summer 2004), 334.

However, the balance is not always even: because it lacks the objectivity built into more formal modes of scholarship, living history can engender “a sympathetic identification with one group of people” which “almost inevitably entails taking a critical distance from the perspective of some other group.”⁶⁸¹

Viewed through this lens, FOUN’s emphasis on living history may be working against the park’s desired transformation of its sense of place. The costumed interpreters honor Hispano soldiers through their portrayal, implicitly asking visitors to respect and, in an important sense, to *side with* them. This question of sides, of course, cuts both ways. The New Mexico Volunteers did not only fight against the Confederates, but were also frequent participants in the Indian Wars campaigns fought out of Fort Union. Venerating their service, however respectfully, therefore erects a barrier to sympathizing with their opponents: Native Americans, who are not similarly represented. The living history that forms the centerpiece of the “new” FOUN’s interpretation seems less progressive when one considers the question, essentially unaddressed by the site, of who was on the other end of all that thrilling black powder.

Missing the Forest for the Trees

The sense of something missing, of an incomplete story, extends into other interpretive messages at FOUN. In 2011, NPS historian Dick Sellars called attention to the way in which the interpretation at Fort Laramie National Historic Site focused on the quotidian experience of soldiers and civilians without interrogating their broader context,

⁶⁸¹ Alexander Cook, “The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History,” *Criticism*, 46:3 (Summer 2004), 487-496.

obscuring the reason for the Army's presence in a blizzard of details. The visitor to Fort Laramie, Sellars pointed out, was not told much about *why* the soldiers were there in the first place, nor asked to consider whether their presence was a good thing, thereby absolving the site from a need to grapple with the morality of the Indian Wars. These larger questions were screened from public consciousness by voluminous information about the fine points of soldiers' lives—the clothes and equipment (including weapons) they used, the food they ate, and their daily (non-combat) activities.⁶⁸²

This distracting function of military minutiae is also at work at Fort Union National Monument, where a focus on the everyday lives of soldiers remains a chief concern in the site bulletin, wayside exhibits, and even in the new museum plans. FOUN also enjoys an added layer of insulation against troubling moral questions via its emphasis on the fort's apparently innocuous supply role. The logistics of invasion, despite how critical they were to the United States' imperial project, are expressed at FOUN as value-neutral, allowing visitors to honor the Army without having to wonder what all those beans and bacon would enable the soldiers to actually *do* once they marched out of the fort's confines.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸² Dick Sellars, "War And Consequences: The American Indian Movement Vs. The National Park Service At Fort Laramie," April 25 and 26, 2011, <http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2011/04/war-and-consequences-american-indian-movement-vs-national-park-service-fort-laramie8003>, accessed June 30, 2014.

⁶⁸³ The tenacity of the unspoken, unquestioned logic of conquest is not just a subtext behind the interpretive offerings at FOUN, but present in official documents the park has submitted to the government codifying the significance of Fort Union. In December 2012, contract archaeologist Peggy Gerow updated the park's National Register of Historic Places nomination, describing Fort Union's broad history in terms that departed little from its traditional Eurocentric narrative. Fort Union's "role in the conquest of the American frontier" was its chief historical significance. The location of the fort was a response to "the Indian problem," which continued until "the frontier had been tamed." Peggy Gerow, "National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Fort Union National Monument, Mora County, New Mexico," December 19, 2012.

FOUN's focus on everyday life is understandable: it aims to convey relatable, universal themes that most people can understand and connect with, using interesting examples of (more or less) authentic material culture. Certainly, an aversion to what historian Edward Linenthal has called "America's indigestible stories" is not unique to FOUN, or even western forts, and it is not an easy task to confront.⁶⁸⁴ Michael Kammen has noted "the American inclination to depoliticize the past in order to minimize memories (and causes) of conflict." This tendency leads us to compartmentalize, and "selectively remember only those aspects of heroes' lives that will render them acceptable to as many people as possible."⁶⁸⁵ The details of nineteenth-century life are particularly attractive, in the end, because they offer "history without guilt," a heritage that "suffuses us with pride rather than shame."⁶⁸⁶

Indeed, these traces of the old, military-history focus on Fort Union remain effective. The monument conducted a visitor study in July 2010, which found that ninety-four percent of visitors were pleased with the park's overall quality. Furthermore, ninety-one percent rated the 1959 museum exhibits as "good" or "very good." Notably, less than five percent of visitors were from Mora or San Miguel counties.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁴ Michael Welsh, *A Special Place, A Sacred Trust: Preserving the Fort Davis Story, Administrative History, Fort Davis National Historic Site* (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 2001); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (UNC Press Books, 2009), 214.

⁶⁸⁵ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 701.

⁶⁸⁶ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 688.

⁶⁸⁷ A. Blotkamp, N. C. Holmes, and S. J. Hollenhorst, "Fort Union National Monument Visitor Study, Summer 2010," Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/SSD/NRR—2010/402/106206, National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Despite their popularity, NPS has declared its desire to balance these memories of a sanitized “heritage” with a rigorous, unflinching practice of history and thereby “integrate into these same national narratives more problematic aspects of our national stories, ones that offer opportunity for somber reflection and an antidote against coarse triumphalism and preening ethnocentrism.”⁶⁸⁸ The visitor experience at FOUN makes clear that this goal is not yet achieved, and while the task seems daunting, a concrete example of just such a successful effort does exist. A reluctance to portray the broader patterns behind the more gripping, inspiring, or beautiful details of history has been overcome by the agency before, in its effort to revise the interpretation of Civil War sites in the mid-1990s to more clearly identify slavery as the war’s cause.⁶⁸⁹ To similarly reinterpret the Indian Wars with a clearer focus on their broader causes, contours, and consequences will require a similar level of commitment.

“Monument to a Young America”

Perhaps the predominant piece of interpretive media at FOUN today, which best encapsulates the site’s current sense of place, is the fifteen-minute film shown to visitors upon their arrival in the audiovisual room just off the lobby of the visitor center, which was expanded in 2006. As elsewhere in the park’s current interpretation, “Fort Union: Monument to a Young America” reflects the “new” FOUN in its inclusion of Hispanos and Native Americans as part of its story: Native resistance to the United States is

⁶⁸⁸ Edward T. Linenthal, “The National Park Service and Civic Engagement,” *The Public Historian* 28:1 (February 1, 2006), 123–29.

⁶⁸⁹ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “Barbara Kingsolver and the Challenge of Public History.” *The Public Historian* 21: 4 (1999), 9–18.

classified as “understandable,” and the honorable service of the New Mexico Volunteers is a major piece of the narrative. More than any other articulation of place in the site’s history, the film seeks to truly tell Fort Union’s history from “multiple perspectives.”

However, “Monument to a Young America” falters in spots. The film relies upon somewhat stereotypical images of Native Americans set to foreboding, dramatic “Indian” music that relegates them to the past, and no Native people’s words or voices make their way into the narrative. The radiating power and violence of Fort Union’s Indian campaigns are depicted with a diagram strikingly similar to the one found in the 1962 Fort Union Handbook. The amusing or endearing rhythms of daily life at the fort and the heroic triumph of Union forces at the Battle of Glorieta Pass leave little room for questions about the moral valences of the United States, the Army, or the invasion of the southwest. The goal of multiple perspectives is achieved, but the question of precisely what those perspectives are focused on remains elusive and blurry, difficult to answer in a way that accords with the more inclusive stance that the park desires to evoke.

The dissonance evident upon viewing “Monument to a Young America” stems from its evocation of two competing desires: on the one hand, to honor the heroism and importance of the frontier military while on the other, to respect the people who were most impacted by it. This mismatch pervades the sense of place at FOUN today. I do not mean to suggest, however, that this problem is due to some kind of failing on the part of FOUN or NPS staffers, or even those entities’ easily faulted bureaucratic shortcomings. Rather, the conflicting points of view on display at FOUN today are rooted in the nature of what kind of place, or more accurately, what kind of space, it has become.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁹⁰ Service-Wide Interpretive Report, 2006, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center files.

Monumental Space and the Problem of Materiality

Why do these competing senses of place—more evocative of FOUN’s early history as a simplistic, triumphal memorial landscape—persist, despite the more nuanced and inclusive vision that is NPS and FOUN’s stated preference? The answer may have to do with the fact that while NPS has been engaged in the last sixty or so years in the project of *place-making*, it has simultaneously been creating a particular kind of *monumental space*. As art historian Kirk Savage has written, a monument can “never be entirely nonpolitical or nondidactic..[it] must assign a meaning,” and the meaning embedded in FOUN is at odds with some of the more recent articulations of what it should be. According to Savage, monumental space is also defined by its “fixity,” and this limited historical focus, oriented to one understanding of Fort Union among many, is the defining feature of the visitor experience at the monument.⁶⁹¹

The issue at FOUN is that its main historic and cultural resources—the ruins of the Third Fort Union—do not leave much space to really interpret the past from “multiple perspectives.” The material reality of the ruins—their impressive size and great complexity, and the inescapable fact that *they are the reason the park exists at all*, thereby implicitly the most important features of the landscape—work against the perception of other, comparatively dim “perspectives.” The US Army is the only entity whose past is actually visible, albeit in ruined form, and therefore obscures the perspectives of Native Americans and Hispanos, whose traces on the landscape are less obvious.

⁶⁹¹ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, DC, The National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 43.

Furthermore, the Park Service's choice to focus its preservation and interpretive efforts on the Third Fort Union rather than the First or Second forts, while understandable given the exigencies of budgets, bureaucracy, and those areas' relative states of disrepair, also has important consequences for what kind of place is possible at FOUN. By privileging the Third Fort Union, which existed during the Army's period of greatest strength and power, alternative narratives of a more contingent, less inevitable past are obscured.

For example, during the period of the First Fort Union, the Army (and the United States) had a much more tenuous hold on New Mexico Territory, as Hispano and Native American resistance to American occupation had not yet been completely stamped out. Similarly, the Second Fort Union could easily represent a time when the United States' hold on the region was again threatened, this time so gravely that the fort's commanders felt the need to dig themselves into the earth as a feared enemy approached.

Neither of these poorly-built and temporary versions of Fort Union, however, are very much in sight at the park today. While NPS's decision to make a place that most clearly evokes a victorious, powerful Army was not exactly intentional—the difficulty of access to the First Fort parcel for NPS personnel and visitors alike resulted from the challenging negotiation process to acquire the site at all—it is worth noting that, purposeful or otherwise, the result of this focus is a particular kind of place, one that in its very bones commemorates conquest and subjugation, in however bowdlerized format.

The monument's fundamental orientation, much like the limited sympathy engendered by the living history practiced among its walls, exerts a powerful pull on visitors. The re-shaped land, the lovingly tended ruins, the wealth of narrative and

interpretive information—all combine to form what Tony Bennett has called an “exhibitionary complex,” a discourse of power that seeks to “place the people—conceived as a nationalized citizenry—on this side of power, both its subject and its beneficiary.” As a corollary to this message, “primitive peoples” are portrayed as its “counterpoints, representing the point at which human history emerges from nature but has not yet properly begun its course.”⁶⁹² A sense of place shot through with the idea of triumphant US power imposed upon an undeveloped and savage landscape has proven remarkably durable at FOUN.

This message, built into the structure and function of the visitor experience, helps to explain both the nature of these vestigial understandings of the past, as well as their persistence, as a manifestation of the discourse of colonialism to “always reaffirm its value in the face of an engulfing nothingness.”⁶⁹³ FOUN, as experienced by the visitor, is not just a museum, and not even just monumental space, but an explicitly (and implicitly) colonial version of those institutions.

By privileging an understanding of Fort Union as a place of dominance and static control over the local Native American and Hispano population, some parts of NPS’s interpretation of Fort Union act as “a mechanism for re-inscribing nationalist narratives in the popular imagination.”⁶⁹⁴ As a result, when people whose histories do not align with these overarching messages—for instance, the Native American and to a lesser degree

⁶⁹² Bennett, Tony. “The Exhibitionary Complex.” *New Formations* No. 4, Spring 1988, p. 92.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁹⁴ Joanne Maddern, “The ‘Isle of Home’ is Always on Your Mind: Subjectivity and Space at Ellis Island Immigration Museum,” in Tim Coles and Dallen J. Timothy, editors, *Tourism, Disaporas and Space* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 154.

Hispano residents of New Mexico—visit a site like this, their initial response may very well be one of revulsion or mistrust. This is not necessarily a heroic place for them, and no quantity of revisionist messaging or earnest promises is likely to change that fact, rooted as it is in the materiality of place.

This dilemma is not unique to Fort Union, and bedevils the numerous places in the American west that preserve and commemorate the apparatus of empire. Scarce resources, local political and economic context and preferences, a reliance on sometimes flawed sources, and the inescapable need to *preserve what is there* all mean that many historical sites, museums, and monuments suffer from incomplete or inaccurate interpretive offerings.⁶⁹⁵

The relative importance of the physical presence of the past—the actual material reality of a place, and not just the stories told about it or the printed materials visitors use to experience it—is even more clear when comparing FOUN to the changes over the last several decades at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (LIBI). At LIBI, even less visible evidence of the historic site it commemorates exists. For decades, a single obelisk stood atop Last Stand Hill as a tribute to the tragic sacrifice of the heroic Seventh Cavalry, sufficient to obscure alternative understandings of the site based in the perspectives of the Native American combatants. It was not until Native activists began to agitate for a reinterpretation of the site that change was made, which came decades later in the form of a physical addition to the site’s landscape: the Indian Memorial placed nearby as a tribute to the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho participants in the

⁶⁹⁵ Bob Pahre, “Patterns of National Park Interpretation in the West,” *Journal of the West* 50:3 (Summer 2011), 7-16.

battle. To “balance” the monumental space in question required a change on the ground to shift the site’s currents of meaning away from a simple commemoration of Custer and his men.⁶⁹⁶

Ruins and the Question of Reconstruction

It may be the case that the goal of “multiple perspectives” at a place like FOUN is somewhat unrealistic—the layers of place at the site are so dense, with such a firm perspective built into them, that it is simply impossible to balance these competing views without a serious re-making of the tangible, primary historic resources, which is contrary to the values of historic preservation and cultural resource management that NPS and other cultural institutions follow. To truly incorporate Native American or Hispano perspectives in an equitable way in accordance with its stated goals, the site’s managers would need to create some permanent, visible evidence of those groups’ roles in the story of Fort Union.

However, this is much easier said than done. Generally speaking, NPS has been reluctant to embrace reconstruction for most of its history. With few exceptions, the agency prefers not to build what some critics have called “expensive, life-size toys” in the historic places it cares for, and so the likelihood of constructing a new, non-historic feature at a remote and infrequently visited unit seems small indeed—NPS is not much given to experimentation.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Jerome Greene, *Stricken Field: The Little Bighorn Since 1876* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 226-238.

⁶⁹⁷ Barry Mackintosh, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice.” *CRM Bulletin* Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 1990), 5-14; Dwight Pitcaithley and Richard Sellars,

Furthermore, while Fort Union’s enabling legislation does not specify whether reconstruction of the fort buildings is permitted, managers at the unit and regional level have chosen throughout its lifetime to adhere to the promise made by NPS General Counsel Jackson Price at the May 1952 congressional hearings that the agency “plan[ned] no restoration.” This stance is unfortunate, especially since in context of the hearings, Price’s promise was a response to pointed questions about the cost of the proposed monument, not the issue of whether reconstruction or restoration would be appropriate. This determination *not* to rebuild structures at FOUN had the effect of committing the site’s managers to the Sisyphean task of preserving melting adobe ruins for decades, with predictably expensive and at times ineffective results.

As NPS historian Barry Mackintosh has pointed out, the question of whether to reconstruct historic buildings that have fallen into disrepair has been a topic of debate for some time among NPS personnel. Most often, the question of whether to rebuild a deteriorated site hinged upon the push-and-pull between local interests, who more frequently desired reconstructions as more effective tourist attractions, and NPS professionals, who resisted such uses of historic sites. The result tended to depend on which of the two sides held the most political and bureaucratic sway in any given instance.⁶⁹⁸

Nevertheless, the decision not to rebuild has consequences. FOUN, while it appears “authentic” because it has not been reconstructed in the sense of rebuilt walls or

“Reconstruction: Expensive, Life-Size Toys?” *CRM Bulletin* Vol. 2, No. 4 (December 1979), 6-8; William Hunt, Letter to the Editor, *CRM Bulletin* Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 1990), 3.

⁶⁹⁸ Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1986).

complete structures, is nevertheless a reconstruction. Ruins are never just ruins, but rather something fundamentally oriented; a product of decisions.⁶⁹⁹ The subtle pushing that they do is obscured by their “ruined” state, which allows the visitor to believe that she has come upon them in a state of decay, rather than careful curation and management. What you see at FOUN is not simply an artifact of the nineteenth century—it is also inescapably an artifact of the twentieth century, which is constantly updated and given new life.

The practice of preservation has its own inbuilt messages as well.⁷⁰⁰ By focusing on the ruins of the Third Fort Union as worthy of keeping, and investing significant amounts of time, effort, and money into ensuring they remain visible—that they retain some of their power as a mark upon the landscape—NPS is sending the implicit message that the Army’s history is important and worthy of veneration. While the overall interpretive message at Fort Union National Monument has evolved past that original, simplistic understanding of the meaning of the place, the fundamental fact remains, and will continue to do so as long as the walls are still standing.

Significantly, the “new” FOUN’s historical narrative of significance does not include much in the way of reflective description of the history of NPS management of the land. The museum exhibit plans do include a single display touching on the “post-Army” period of the site’s history, but one wonders whether that is enough given that both the UL&GC’s ownership of the land for cattle grazing and the NPS management of

⁶⁹⁹ Frank Matero, “Placemaking at Coronado State Monument: Edgar Lee Hewett’s Feat of Clay,” *Journal Of The West* 50: 3 (Summer 2011), 21-30.

⁷⁰⁰ Thomas Guthrie, “History, Preservation and Power at El Morro National Monument: Toward a Self-Reflexive Interpretive Practice,” *CRM Journal* 7:1 (Winter 2010), 46-67.

the site—each of which lasted approximately six decades—were longer in duration than the forty-year period of “significance” of Fort Union itself.

Were the NPS to adopt a more self-reflective stance, more open to a frank discussion of the contingent, constantly shifting nature of public history, perhaps its stated mission to leave behind “omniscient” declarations about the past could be more effectively enacted at Fort Union. With such a willingness to intervene into the subtexts that its management of historic sites has created, perhaps a disruption of FOUN’s powerful, reactionary sense of place would be possible in the form of an alteration of the visible landscape. There is reason for hope in this area, and a perceptive and workable action plan to “mobilize the distinctive civic power of place-based history” has already been created in the form of the joint OAH/NPS report, *Imperiled Promise*, in 2011.⁷⁰¹ All that remains is for NPS to take up these and other recommendations, and there are examples of excellent, thoughtful, cutting-edge NPS interpretation—what the authors of *Imperiled Promise* refer to as “lamps along the path”—that suggest these broader changes may not be as far off as one might think.

New Stories for Fort Union

In the meantime, absent such material interventions, the challenge at FOUN remains: how to deal with the past in an honest way. NPS today routinely consults, on a government-to-government basis, with affiliated Native American groups as part of the interpretive planning process. As noted above, FOUN’s efforts in recent years to revise the outdated visitor center museum exhibits include just such a consultation, and tribal

⁷⁰¹ Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise*, 26-29.

representatives have consistently expressed a desire to incorporate “new stories” that include such concepts as genocide, massacre, and atrocity into the proposed exhibits. Doing so, they believe, would yield a reconciliatory experience, re-opening old wounds via a frank recounting of the violence of the frontier, and then seeking to “heal” them through reflection.⁷⁰²

This approach is visible in the park’s newest Comprehensive Interpretive Plan, completed in December 2012, which laid out FOUN’s key interpretive and educational missions. These included aiding visitors “to explore their own intellectual and emotional connections to the natural and cultural resources that comprise shared heritage.” Interpretive services would accomplish this through “the format of *story*,” a concept increasingly embraced by historians, academic and public alike.⁷⁰³

One of the most salient features of public history that differentiates it from academic history is that public historians share authority as a matter of course during their work, and in a robust way that goes beyond simply “negotiating interpretation.”⁷⁰⁴ Above all, public history is a collaborative process requiring cooperation among historians, but also with “outsiders” and members of the public. In contrast to the lone figure of the academic scholar (itself an increasingly problematized trope), public historians rarely work in isolation, and more commonly as part of a team with others who may or may not be historians. Even the independent scholar, if producing public history

⁷⁰² “Draft Notes, Tribal Consultation for Fort Union NM Exhibits,” October 27-28, 2010, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

⁷⁰³ Fort Union National Monument Comprehensive Interpretive Plan, Fiscal Years 2012-2016, December 15, 2012, Fort Union National Monument Visitor Center Files.

⁷⁰⁴ Rebecca Conard, “Public History as Reflective Practice: An Introduction,” *The Public Historian* Vol. 28, No. 1 (February 2006), 11.

work, is always in conversation with his audience, and must maintain “an attitude that embraces a respect for audience,” while understanding that he does not have “exclusive rights to interpret the past but share[s] authority with the public in the process of doing so.”⁷⁰⁵

This sincere commitment to collaboration in all its forms means that the audience(s) of public history shape its texts, whether they are museum exhibits, land use histories, legal depositions, or government policy documents. Even in professional settings in which audience might not appear to be of great import, such as corporate history, a practicing public historian must be aware of the norms and rules of her environment and able to shape her output to match, and often challenge, the expectations of those for whom it is prepared. This means a dependence, to a much greater degree than is normal among non-public historians, on the tools of creating, capturing, and conveying meaning to audiences. As NCPH President Marianne Babal noted, the importance of good stories, or “sticky history,” in effectively conveying important information cannot be overstated.⁷⁰⁶ This is a critical insight, and means that the product of public historians’ work must be both “history” and something else. That ineffable “something else” is shaped by public historians’ inheritance and transformation of one of the oldest forms of human communication: storytelling.

Still, it is tempting to dismiss the power of story, and I must admit to some degree of professional and personal skepticism toward this approach. What power can

⁷⁰⁵ Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 177.

⁷⁰⁶ Marianne Babal, “Sticky History: Connecting Historians with the Public,” *The Public Historian* 32, no. 4 (November 1, 2010), 80.

something as simple as stories wield against the imposing structure of the physical world, especially once it has been re-made and directed along a single narrative path?

However, in recent years, scholars have noted the importance of narrative, especially the creation of alternative histories, in addressing the settler colonial past. Australian scholar Lorenzo Veracini notes that “the role of historians in contributing to institutional and judicial readjustment has in some cases been decisive, and historians...have in some cases made history by literally (re)writing it.”⁷⁰⁷ Veracini and others hold up the example of such settler colonial societies as South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand that have achieved some measure of reconciliation through a re-assessment and re-orientation of their national histories.

It may be the case that in the United States, the same kind of change is possible in the contested, responsive, and negotiated historical narratives that are the product of public history, but the process is slower and more incremental due to the relative lack of political power wielded by formerly excluded groups here as compared to other countries. Nonetheless, despite the somewhat unsatisfying nature of incremental change, I believe there is possibility in the slow and halting percolation of the New Western History into public history that we can see taking place at Fort Union.

Some of the most eloquent, recent commentaries on the power and promise of story have come from William Cronon, who has passionately argued for a renewed

⁷⁰⁷ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107.

commitment among historians to narrative as a vital tool for disseminating knowledge:

“Nothing we do is more important.”⁷⁰⁸

For now, in pursuit of a sense of place that does not revive and reenact the violence of colonial conquest and its resonances in the present, perhaps this is all we have. Perhaps the best we can do at places like Fort Union National Monument is to pick the right stories, and tell them to one another, again and again, in hopes that they might reveal to us those things that the power of place seeks to obscure.

⁷⁰⁸ William Cronon, “Presidential Address: ‘Storytelling,’” *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (February 2013), 6–7. Emphasis mine.

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