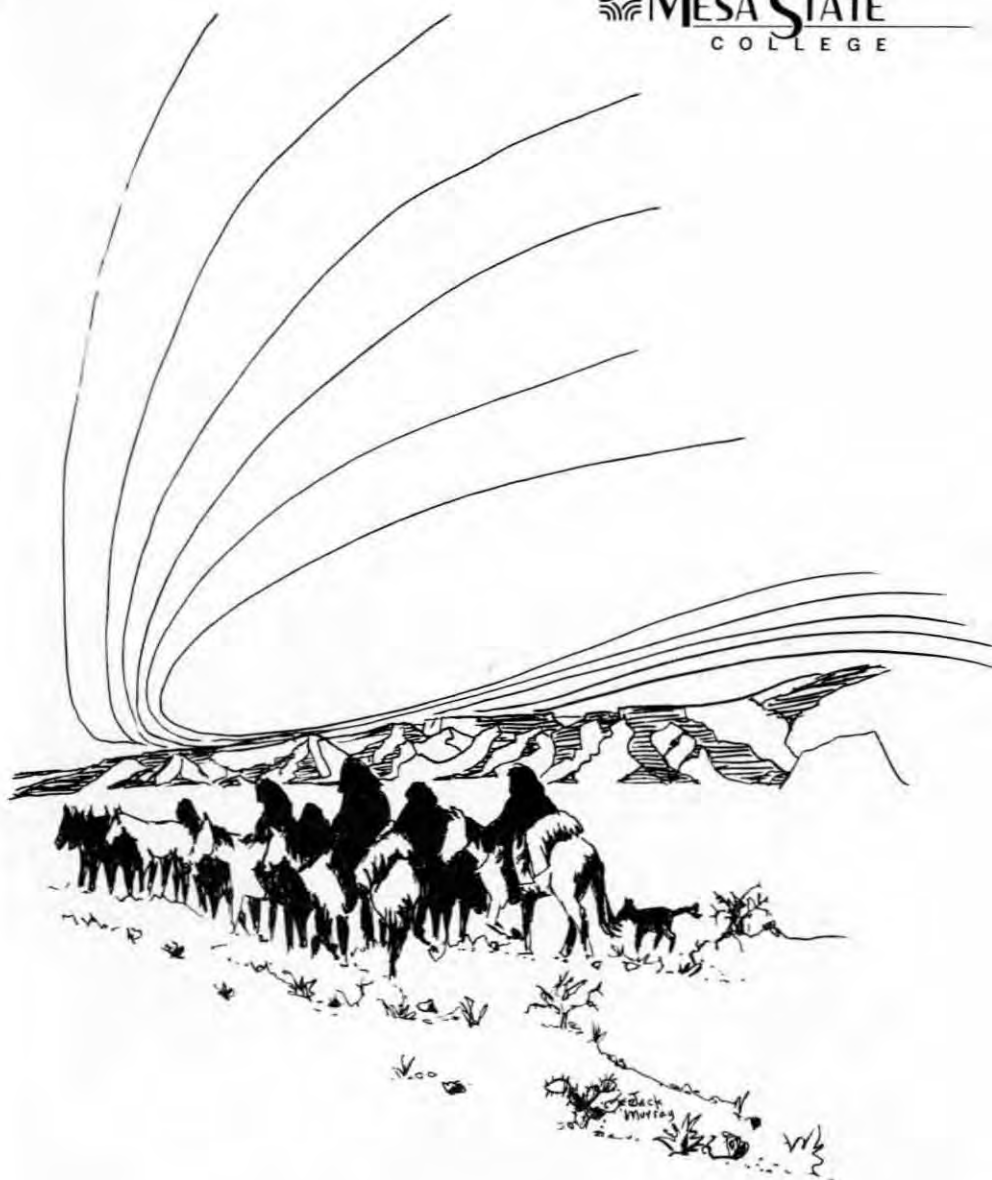


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**FORT CRAWFORD:  
A SYMBOL OF TRANSITION**

By  
DR. CHRISTIAN J. BUYS

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Christian Buys would like to thank Richard Sims for his lecture, "A Matter of Convenience: The Politics of Relocating the Ute People," (Museum of Western Colorado, December 13, 1991), which helped him gain a broader view of the events surrounding the removal of the Utes from the Uncompahgre Valley.

Judy Prosser Armstrong efficiently directed the author to photographs of the Utes in the Museum of Western Colorado's Photographic Archives.

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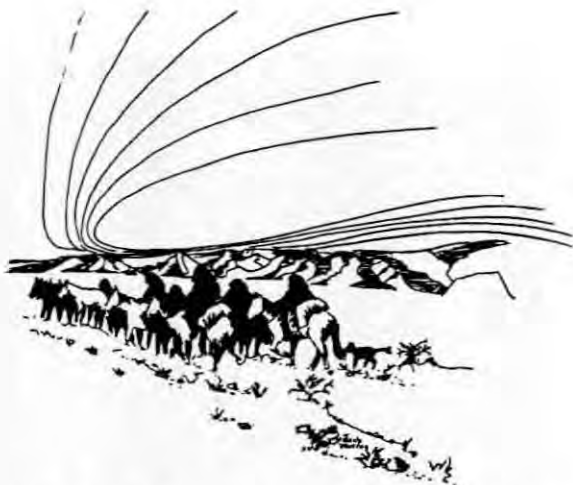
(Fort Crawford)

Nov 8<sup>th</sup> 1886.

Colorado.

Canton West. of Uncompahgre.

(Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department)  
*Looking east toward Fort Crawford in the Valley of the Uncompahgre (1886).*



### Fort Crawford: A Symbol of Transition

On December 30, 1890, Fort Crawford fell victim to the "act to provide for the disposal of abandoned and useless military reservations."<sup>1</sup> Was Fort Crawford a useless fort on a useless military reservation? Less than a decade earlier, every—or so it seemed—settler, miner, and businessperson on Colorado's Western Slope equated their chances for survival with the establishment of a fort in the pristine Uncompahgre Valley between Ouray and Montrose.

What caused such a precipitous plunge in Fort Crawford's usefulness? Ultimately, it was the displacement of a nation. Thus, Fort Crawford's demise shared an etiology common to the demise of many forts in America. Indeed, although little-known and scantily documented, the history of Fort Crawford is a microcosm of American history. And these days, when Christopher Columbus's hero-image swirls in a maelstrom of controversy; a *National Geographic* cover story reads "1491, America Before Columbus"; a *Newsweek* cover story reads "1492 - 1992, When Worlds Collide"; Congressman Ben Nighthorse Campbell calls for a change in name of the Custer Battlefield National Monument



because it is deemed an insult to all Indians; and clergy from Juneau's Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, and Presbyterian churches hold a special service to "humbly ask the natives' forgiveness" for the blunders of the Catholic and Christian missionaries, it is no longer easy to be unbiased and dispassionate about American history in general, and Western forts in particular.

Current American archaeological orthodoxy maintains that at least three cultural entities have come and gone in the narrow Valley of the Uncompahgre in this great Western basin.<sup>2</sup> More than ten thousand years before the steel-gray clouds of smoke from Fort Crawford's chimneys partially obscured the majestic mountains to the south and southeast, small bands of ancient hunters, called Paleo-people, migrated south astride the rushing river that cuts through the center of this thirty-five-mile-long and on-the-average twelve-mile-wide valley. They stayed only long enough to hunt and butcher game. Several millennia after most of the Paleo-people stopped frequenting the valley, other ancient hunting bands, called Archaic-people, followed in their footsteps, camping and building fires on many of the same knolls near the river. They trekked south in the winter and north in the summer, seeking warmth and game respectively, but they did not move on. Based on their pithouses and the warmth-giving qualities of their rudimentary hearths, these hunter-gatherers stayed in this spectacularly beautiful valley during even the severest winter months. Indeed, smoke rising from the Archaic-people's hearths signaled the beginning of what archaeologists describe as a "continuity in lifestyle over many thousands of years" that persisted while other better-known cultures, Anasazi and Fremont horticulturalists flourished on the peripheries of the Uncompahgre Valley. Then, about five hundred years ago, this extraordinarily long-lived archaic culture, which had struck a near ideal balance with the valley's environment, started to fracture into rival bands. The weaker bands were either enslaved or driven out of the valley—so flush with game and fish—by the stronger

bands, now known as the Confederated Ute Tribes, or more commonly, the Ute nation. Thus, on a clear night, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Ute nation's fires flickered in the valley which they named "Uncompahgre" after its hot springs. And during a cold winter day in the valley, their columns of smoke partially obscured the rugged snow-capped mountains to the south and southeast.<sup>3</sup>

While the foregoing overview is based largely on archaeological conjecture, the following account of the circumstances that ultimately led to the removal of the Ute nation from this unique valley is not. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Spanish, who occupied numerous settlements in what is now California and several southwestern states, often owed their survival to the friendliness of various indigenous nations. In return, the Spanish shared and traded their highly prized horses with local populations who, in turn, traded them to other more distant indigenous nations. Spanish horses impressed the Utes enough that they traded and raided judiciously to acquire more of them. Still, it was not until the latter quarter of the eighteenth century that Spaniards actually set foot in the Uncompahgre Valley. In 1776 two Franciscans, Fray Silvestre Velez de Escalante and Fray Antanasio Dominguez, led an expedition through the valley. The Utes, now accomplished horsemen, gladly let these curious Spanish interlopers ride through their paradise. By the middle of the nineteenth century, different newcomers sought permission to pass through their valley. These people impressed the Utes with another European curiosity: guns. So once again the Utes traded and raided judiciously to acquire guns, this time with neighboring nations—as well as the growing number of newcomers whom they allowed to journey through their valley. And just as the Utes had mastered the horse in a relatively short time, they rapidly became regarded as expert riflemen too.<sup>4</sup>

The Utes did not fare so well, however, at harnessing the rapaciousness, infectious diseases, and liquor of these new for-

eigners. For this round of interlopers, mostly descendants of Europeans who had settled in Eastern America, turned out to be harbingers of a tidal wave of immigrants with starkly different beliefs, immunities, and values. Early on the Utes, a loose and frequently unsettled alliance of several tribes, including, among others, the Uncompahgre—also known as Tabeguache or Montrose; White River; Southern—comprising the Capote, Muache, and Weeminuche; Uintah; and Yampa, barred settlements in their land which extended well beyond the reaches of the Uncompahgre Valley (to the high plateaus to the north, to the mountains to the south and southeast, and to the great wooded mesas to the west), but welcomed trade with these new foreigners, called Americans.<sup>5</sup> Soon, however, the Utes realized these mostly fair-skinned people sought more than animal skins for their trinkets, liquor, and guns. They wanted Ute land: the mountains for mining, the valleys for farming; moreover, they had the numbers and the weapons to take it.

During the 1840s, as a clear signal for Americans with an eye on their lands, the Utes burned Antoine Robideau's trading post at the confluence of the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Rivers, the only post in the Uncompahgre Valley. Then on Christmas day in 1854 the most populous and influential Ute tribe, the Uncompahgre, joined the Northern Apaches, the Jicarilla, and gave notice of their resolve to defend their domain by killing fifteen men, capturing a few women and children, and destroying the small American settlement of El Pueblo along the Arkansas River in central Colorado. In response, Brigadier General John Garland wrote on January 31, 1855: "I have determined to place in the field a force of about 400 regulars and volunteers, with orders to carry the war into the Utah country."<sup>6</sup> And so he did. In a letter dated May 31, 1855, he wrote that it gave him "great satisfaction now to report a triumph over these Indians seldom if ever equalled in the U.S."<sup>7</sup> Specifically, Colonel Tom Fauntleroy led a night attack against the Utes and Apaches near present-day Cochetopa Pass. They killed forty warriors, cap-

tured six children—with no mention of women—thirty-five horses, a number of weapons, and numerous buffalo robes. When pursuing these bands a few months earlier, Kit Carson, a scout for the U.S. Military, mentioned that he came upon a small stream strewn with the remains of Utes who had died of a smallpox epidemic the year before.<sup>8</sup>

During the next three decades a rapid succession of treaties, the discovery of ores in the adjacent mountains (present day San Juans), depredations involving the White River Utes, and finally, the establishment of Fort Crawford shrunk the Ute nation's realm from nearly eighty million acres to small parcels of land of less than two million acres in present-day southern Colorado and northeastern Utah.<sup>9</sup> These events culminated in the expulsion of the Utes from the Valley of the Uncompahgre.

Adhering to the early land treaties proposed a multifarious dilemma. Based on the political maneuvering of both sides after the first few hostile encounters in the 1850s, it became clear that neither the majority of the Utes nor the Americans wanted war. Both Ute and American military strategists knew that if the Utes decided to make a determined stand against the Americans, it would result in a long and bloody war. It also became clear that the influx of miners from the Pikes Peak Gold rush in the early 1860s threatened Ute territory. In 1862, in an attempt to head off any major conflicts, a new Ute leader from the Uncompahgre, simply called "Ouray," traveled to Denver to work out a treaty with the Colorado territorial governor. In return for promising to remain peaceful and to respect American laws, Ouray negotiated a generous treaty "guaranteeing them [Utes] the Gunnison-Uncompahgre drainage country *forever* [author's emphasis]."<sup>10</sup> Further, the government would provide substantial annuities to the Utes, including the immediate delivery of five Virginian stallions to breed with their ponies.

Although the Territory of Colorado kept few of its promises to the Ute nation, it at least proved to be consistent. For example, in 1863 even Governor Cummings admitted that the



(Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department)  
*American Troops stand at attention on Fort Crauford's parade grounds under the command of Major George K. Brady.*



*A delegation of Utes, including Ourray and his wife, Chipeta, pose with government and military dignitaries during one of their treaty-negotiation trips to Washington, D.C.*

(Photo courtesy of Museum of Western Colorado)



(Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society)  
*Chief Ouray's superior intelligence, tact, and foresight probably saved the Ute nation from complete annihilation.*



provisions of the previous treaty went unfulfilled. Worse, the few annuity goods which did appear during the previous year proved "disgracefully worthless, rotten, and disgusting, and might reasonably have been made the ground of revocation of the treaty."<sup>11</sup> During negotiations Ouray constantly reminded the Americans that the Utes once had plenty of game—buffalo and antelope too numerous to count. But since the coming of the Americans, game was scarce and many Ute people were reduced to starving beggars. Nevertheless, in 1869, Ouray, who emerged as the Chief of the Uncompahgre and a formidable multilingual statesman, tried again. He journeyed to Washington, D.C. and negotiated yet another treaty involving over sixteen million acres of land to be set aside permanently for the entire Ute nation. The idea was to turn the Utes' heads from hunting, fishing, and trading to raising stock and farming. For a few years it appeared as though matters might work out between the Utes of the Uncompahgre Valley and the Americans from the East. But in the early 1870s came the discovery of gold and silver ores in the San Juans. From then on the fate of the Ute Nation became clear. Americans usurped every acre of Ute land in the ore-bearing San Juans and the easily irrigable, thus productive, Uncompahgre Valley.

By 1873 Chief Ouray must have realized that the Utes had no chance to prevent the ubiquitous newcomers from overrunning much of their homeland. For during this year he momentarily delayed the inevitable and probably avoided war by ceding, via yet another treaty, four million acres of the mineral-rich San Juan region to the Territory of Colorado.<sup>12</sup> This did not endear Ouray to many of his more militant fellow Utes who wanted to fight the Americans for every square inch of Ute land. Never mind the Americans' money and promises, they protested—all lies as proven by the perfidy perpetrated in past treaties. Nevertheless, as best history can judge Ouray's actions and abilities, he alone probably saved the Utes from complete annihilation.

By the late 1870s not even Ouray proved capable of preventing incidents that the Americans used as fodder to break



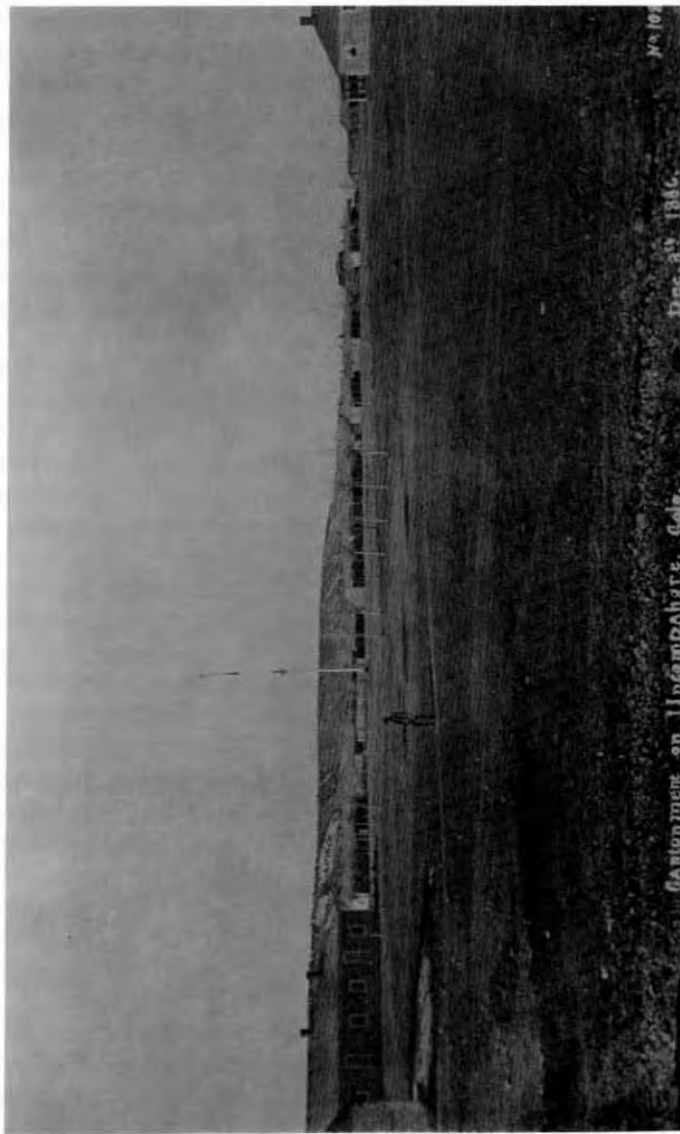
their latest treaty. With the "Utes must go!" campaign reaching a fever pitch in the Denver newspapers and the governor of the newly formed state of Colorado exclaiming that unless removed by the government, the Utes "must necessarily be exterminated,"<sup>13</sup> the Ute Nation was doomed. That the incidents—the White River Utes' participation in the battle against Major Thornburgh's command at Milk Creek and the massacre at the White River Agency in the fall of 1879—were certainly provoked by the rigid personality and puritanical philosophy of the Indian agent at the White River Agency failed to concern the Americans.<sup>14</sup> Nor did it matter that the Uncompahgre Utes, who resided in the Uncompahgre Valley over one hundred miles south, had nothing directly to do with the bloody five-day battle, or the death of the agent and ten other agency personnel, or the abduction of the agent's wife, daughter, and three other women. A tremendous public clamor arose among new Coloradans to rid "their entire state" of all Utes. A clamor that subsided only after most of the Utes were, in fact, forcibly removed from Colorado. As an indication of the Americans' resolve, they dislodged the entire Ute nation within a year after the depredations of the White River Utes. Their main instrument for banishing the Utes from the Uncompahgre Valley turned out to be the Cantonment on the Uncompahgre—later known as Fort Crawford.<sup>15</sup>

Immediately following the Ute uprising of 1879 the United States formed a three-person commission, including Chief Ouray, to conduct hearings on the insurrection at the White River Agency. The hearings began in November 1879, in the Uncompahgre Valley at the new Los Piños Agency, headquarters of the Uncompahgre Utes. By January 1880, the commission held over forty hearings, but issued neither immediate recommendations nor identified specific culprits in the White River Agency massacre. Meanwhile, in anticipation that the Utes would be sent to a reservation, bold and greedy Americans who planned to jump Ute land set up camps bordering the entire valley. The build-up of American camps caused legitimate fears of war. Emotions already ran

high on both sides because of the recent uprising at the White River Agency and the obvious reluctance of the Uncompahgre Utes to leave their land—they protested strongly that they should not have to leave because of another tribe's actions. Soon the situation became so volatile that General William T. Sherman believed a large military presence was necessary to keep the peace. He asked the Secretary of War for \$100,000 to establish a "considerable post, one that will insure peace in all that region."<sup>16</sup> The Secretary promptly concurred. Thus, in the spring of 1880 Colonel R. S. Mackenzie, along with six companies of the 4th Cavalry moved from Fort Clark, Texas, to Fort Garland, Colorado near present-day Alamosa. Nine companies of infantry joined Mackenzie at Fort Garland, then rapidly marched over Cochetopa Pass—the site of the original Los Piños Agency—arriving at the new Los Piños Agency in the Uncompahgre Valley on May 31, 1880. This show of force served to squelch simultaneously rumors among the Utes that the Americans might enter the valley by force and rumors among the Americans that the Utes, even if ordered, would refuse to leave. In any case, on July 21, 1880, Mackenzie's troops established a supply camp on the west bank of the Uncompahgre River four miles north of the Los Piños Agency, seven miles south of present-day Montrose. They named it the Cantonment on the Uncompahgre.<sup>17</sup>

At first Mackenzie's command, almost fifteen hundred strong, found itself constantly on the march, either holding back impatient American land-jumpers or making a show of force to increasingly restless bands of Utes. Originally intended to serve as a temporary supply camp or depot, the function of the Cantonment on the Uncompahgre broadened after treaty negotiations with the White River, Southern, and Uncompahgre Utes in August, 1880.

Each treaty became valid only after "three-fourths of the adult male members of said confederated bands shall agree to and sign said agreement."<sup>18</sup> The White River Utes reluctantly agreed to vacate their reservation in Colorado and settle upon



*The Cantonment on the Uncompahgre (1886).*  
(Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department)

"agricultural land" on the Uintah Reservation in Utah Territory. In return for leaving their homeland, among other general financial and grazing considerations granted to the White River nation as a whole, each head of family received one hundred and sixty acres and each single Ute over eighteen years of age eighty acres. With a similar agreement in hand and similar grief in their hearts, the Southern Utes resettled upon the "unoccupied agricultural lands" on the La Plata River in New Mexico. Lastly, the Uncompahgre Utes, after begrudgingly ratifying a comparable treaty, were to vacate the Uncompahgre Valley to "settle upon agricultural lands on the Grand River, near the mouth of the Gunnison River, in Colorado, if a sufficient quantity of agricultural land shall be found there; if not, then upon such other unoccupied agricultural lands as may be found in that vicinity and in the territory of Utah."<sup>19</sup> When Ouray died on August 24, 1880, the Uncompahgre Utes withdrew their ratification of the treaty. This came as no surprise since it had taken every ounce of Ouray's negotiating skills and energy—what little he had left given his severe case of Bright's disease—to obtain the required number of signatures in the first place. Predictably, with the sophisticated and stately Chief Ouray no longer running interference for them, the Uncompahgre Utes fell victim to an unscrupulous American, Otto Mears. Able to converse in Ute and Spanish, Mears, one of the "Indian" Commissioners of the Interior Department who held the fate of the Utes in his hands, crisscrossed the Uncompahgre Valley collecting Ute signatures, usually X's, to the tune of one or two dollars a head until he had bought the required three-quarters needed for final ratification of the treaty.<sup>20</sup>

The Uncompahgre Utes quickly realized Commissioner Mears, one of the premier capitalistic entrepreneurs in the San Juan region, had deceived them into signing away their land. The treaty did not call for their final removal until the summer of the following year, allowing the Utes plenty of time to do something about it. As a result of the immediate and widespread hostility among the Uncompahgre Utes, the purpose of the Cantonment

on the Uncompahgre suddenly became to control and to ultimately transfer the "recalcitrant Uncompahgre Ute Indians" to a legally designated reservation "subsequent to the White River Agency Massacre."<sup>21</sup>

Large-scale hostilities in winter were unlikely, so Mackenzie returned to Fort Garland with most of his cavalry and infantry, ordering Major Joshua Fletcher and about two hundred and fifty men to remain in the valley and commence construction on the new post. Mrs. Winifred Pollock Fairfax, daughter of Captain Otis W. Pollock, who was stationed at the Cantonment on the Uncompahgre, recorded that, "Most of the first winter at the Cantonment was in tents. The weather was so cold that the officers had to be up and down all night stoking the Sibley stoves to keep their families from freezing to death, and oftentimes where there had been a snow-storm they would find the cots covered with snow."<sup>22</sup> By the time warmer temperatures began to melt the snows in the valley in the spring of 1881, over forty buildings had been completed and several occupied. Then, before the main trails had a chance to dry, General Mackenzie, along with six troops from the Fourth Cavalry and four companies of infantry, trudged back into the valley.

The Army's mission remained the same: to remove the Utes from the Uncompahgre Valley. But the Uncompahgre Utes' destination changed to Utah Territory, at the junction of the White and Green Rivers. Finally, on August 23, 1881, the Indian Commissioners of the Interior Department ordered the exodus to begin. Shocked and dismayed at the Machiavellian machinations that arbitrarily changed the stated terms of the treaty, and with the preeminent Ouray's coercive powers only a fading memory, the Utes simply refused to budge. All along the Uncompahgre Utes understood that they would reside at the junction of the Grand (Colorado) and Gunnison Rivers, the site of present day Grand Junction, not in some parched high desert in Utah Territory. Obviously, the Americans wanted the land adjacent to the junction of these two great rivers for themselves. That Commis-

sioner Mears appeared to be one of the main instigators of the change in location intensified the already explosive situation.

Nevertheless, Mackenzie had his orders. Straightaway he assembled the troops at the Cantonment and summoned the main Ute Chiefs to the parade grounds. There, during an early afternoon in late August, 1881, he told the Ute leaders that they had twenty-four hours to decide whether or not to move peacefully, or by force. It was their choice.

"The next day the Indians submitted and pledged themselves to go quietly and at once," read a report filed later by General Pope; ". . . they moved off in a day or two thereafter peacefully, but manifesting the greatest grief and regret at being obliged to abandon, in this manner, the homes of the tribe for so many years."<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Fairfax recalled that she was standing at the door of her home on the post, watching the long, dismal procession pass by "in single file, Indian style, all day long, the horses drawing the travois."<sup>24</sup> Even one of the Indian Commissioners, A. B. Meacham, expressed remorse for the forced removal of the Utes from the valley. All along he had steadfastly opposed kicking the Utes out of their homeland.<sup>25</sup> History has left no personal testimonies regarding the emotions of the Utes. Perhaps that is best, because mere words would have surely fallen short of describing their pain.

But not everyone felt bad. General Pope also reported that, "the whites who had collected, in view of their [Utes] removal, were so eager and so unrestrained by common decency that it was absolutely necessary to use military force to keep them off the reservation until the Indians were fairly gone . . ."<sup>26</sup> A jubilant Commissioner Mears rode with the military escort. And of the exodus the Ouray Times wrote:

*"Sunday morning the Utes bid adieu to their old hunting grounds and folded their tents, rounded up their dogs, sheep, goats, ponies and traps, and took up the line of march for their new reservation, followed by General Mackenzie and his troops. This is an event that has long and devoutly been prayed for by our people. How joyful it sounds and*



*A small band of Utes migrating, perhaps to a reservation, evoke poignant memories of lands lost.*  
(Photo courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society)



*with what satisfaction one can say, 'The Utes have gone.'*"<sup>27</sup>

Altogether, nearly 1,500 Uncompahgre Ute men, women, and children; 8,000 ponies; 10,000 sheep and goats; hundreds of wagons with food, clothing, and equipment; and hundreds of travois of tepees made the 350-mile trek to Utah Territory.<sup>28</sup> Two last desperate acts occurred during the deportation. Only a few hours into the march, Chief Colorow and several dozen of his men suddenly charged at a portion of the large military escort, but a barrage of cannon and rifle balls screaming harmlessly overhead quickly dissuaded the Chief and his warriors. They reined up their horses and joined the column winding its way toward the newly—perhaps cruelly—named "Ouray Reservation" in Utah Territory. Later, shortly after fording the Grand River, a Ute by the name of Cojo unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Otto Mears.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, in less than two days the Utes involuntarily vacated the valley of the hot springs where their ancestors' roots reached down through thousands of years. Although it is impossible to know for certain, the rate of reoccupation was probably the fastest the valley had ever experienced. Not five months later, on January 7, 1882, the *Denver Post* quoted Otto Mears: "I doubt if there is a decent site for a ranch in either the valleys of the Uncompahgre, Gunnison, or Grand rivers that has not already been taken up."<sup>30</sup> American towns of Grand Junction, Montrose, Delta, Dallas, Ridgway, and, once again, Ouray, sprouted and grew like wild flowers—even in the throes of winter.

With the threat of the Utes entirely removed from the Uncompahgre Valley, the Army promptly reduced the garrison at the Cantonment to four companies of the 14th Infantry under Lieutenant Colonel Henry Douglass, which relieved Mackenzie's original garrison from the 23rd Infantry in October 1881. Life at the post quickly settled into monotonous daily routines: drills, rifle practice, workouts in the gymnasium, building construction, building maintenance, guard duty, and so forth. In an attempt to beautify the grounds some of the officers' wives planted flower



gardens and lined the parade grounds with young cottonwoods. For the troops, occasional hunting expeditions into the sportsmen's wonderland in the nearby mountains helped break up the routine, as did hosting social functions, called "hops," in the camp headquarters, the largest building in the cantonment.<sup>31</sup>

Rumors of the Uncompahgre Utes jumping their Ouray and Uintah Reservations and attacking the new residents of the Uncompahgre Valley persisted among the Americans. In the summer of 1882, the black troops of the 9th Cavalry rode into the cantonment as, according to one local, a "show of force," but no confirmation of that intent can be found. To the contrary, that same year General Pope recommended that the post actually be abandoned: "I think it will be but a short time before we can safely abandon the cantonment on the Uncompahgre, which even now only serves to give confidence to the settlers in that region, who are more or less excited by imaginary apprehension of hostilities with the Utes who have been placed on a reservation in Utah far to the west of them."<sup>32</sup>

Local settlers tried to counter Pope's recommendation for abandonment by submitting a steady stream of petitions to Governor Grant, Senator Teller, and the Secretary of War. For example, one petition submitted to Governor Grant on May 15, 1883, and signed by the seventy-two leading citizens of Grand Junction read:

*The undersigned citizens of Grand Junction have heard with regret that the U. S. troops are ordered out of Western Colorado. We respectfully submit that they be retained until a permanent post can be established in Grand River Valley where they can be comfortably and cheaply quartered. The proximity of Colorado settlements to the Ute Nation renders such a step necessary as a proper measure of precaution and protection. We respectfully ask your Excellency to intercede promptly to have the order for the removal of the troops rescinded.*<sup>33</sup>

Three days later Governor Grant forwarded the petition to Senator Teller who immediately passed it on to the Secretary of War. Apparently, this petition and others like it proved politi-

cally effective. On March 12, 1884, the President of the United States formally declared the establishment of the Cantonment on the Uncompahgre. So the troops remained at their post. That the post would continue to contribute to the local economies probably had not been missed by the petitioners. For instance, during 1884 a local freighting outfit serving several Western Slope towns reported shipping 756,688 pounds of merchandise to the cantonment.<sup>34</sup>

On December 15, 1886, the Cantonment's name was changed in honor of Captain Emmitt Crawford. Everything else remained basically the same at the fort. The saw mill on an adjacent mesa kept producing rough lumber; the cottonwoods bordering the parade grounds grew a little taller; a steam engine located near the west bank of the Uncompahgre River continued pumping water for drinking and cooking; the shooting gallery barely muffled the sound of repeating rifles; plans for a new two-story hospital ward started to take shape; the irrigation canal overflowed with water; locals sold the fort huge amounts of wood, hay, and straw; and the frequency of social hops remained about the same. Understandably, the morale of the troops remained low. Seemingly nothing but military action—a most unlikely prospect since the Utes remained peaceable in Utah Territory—would be able to bolster the troops' low spirits. A few of the troops even grumbled about the name change. Sure, Captain Crawford lost his life earlier that year of "wounds received near Nacori, Mexico, while in pursuit of Geronimo,"<sup>35</sup> but the secretly ordered campaign had been protracted and muddled, and Crawford died when mistakenly shot by Mexican soldiers. Earlier it seemed logical that the cantonment would be named after General Mackenzie, but according to military records he resigned his commission in 1882 and the next year went insane.<sup>36</sup>

On August 24, 1887, six years to the day since the Utes slowly and sullenly filed past the Fort, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad chugged past Fort Crawford for the first time. The passengers on the train saw a fort in poor repair with fewer than



(Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department)  
*Fort Crawford's officers's quarters in the winter of 1886. A few of the cottonwoods bordering the parade ground still stand.*



*Quarters of Co. G, 10th Infantry, Capt. Kelton, Cantonment on Utesprings, Aug. 5<sup>th</sup> 1874. No. 103*

(Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library Western History Department)

one hundred officers and men quartered there. Although the number of officers and men increased to one hundred and sixty under the command of Captain Lacey from April 1889 until December 1890, the physical appearance of Fort Crawford deteriorated significantly. Simply put, the federal government finally refused to sink more money into a post with negligible strategic value. It seemed even the Army could think of nothing else for the troops to build or maintain at Fort Crawford or in the immediate vicinity. Mercifully, on April 10, 1890, the War Department directed the troops to be withdrawn from Fort Crawford as soon as "suitable accommodations for them (could be found) elsewhere."<sup>37</sup> On December 31, 1890, the last troops departed unceremoniously from the fort, signaling the end of a nearly decade-long pork-barrel.

A caretaker watched over the remaining buildings until most of them were sold at public auction to local people in the valley and in the town of Montrose. The new two-story hospital ward was split in half, then sold separately. Today both halves still serve as proper homes in the valley—as well as eerie reminders of Fort Crawford.

A little more than a mile south of Montrose on U. S. Highway 550 the State Historical Society maintains a small Ute Indian Museum. On the grounds is Ouray-Chipeta Park where Chipeta, Ouray's wife, is buried, while Ouray's grave is on the Southern Ute Reservation in Ignacio. If one drives another three miles south and pulls off the highway in front of the Fort Crawford historical marker, also erected by the State Historical Society, one can look across the cultivated fields and see a few aged cottonwoods, the very same planted on the edge of the Fort Crawford parade grounds in 1881.

Thus, for the past century a new resident population has inhabited the Uncompahgre Valley. Indeed, the sources for this article were gleaned from documents written by Americans or descendants of Americans, all members of the population that successfully usurped the valley from the Utes. Lest this sound

unduly biased, basing articles on the written legacy of victorious populations tends to be the norm for historical writing and research.

Although possible, it is doubtful that the present-day inhabitants will occupy the valley for as long as the Utes and their ancestors did. Several centuries from now new occupants with new written histories will reside in the valley. Long since, the Americans will either have been driven out or simply disappeared for reasons beyond their current cares or imaginations. What will distinguish the American occupancy to a future wave of newcomers?

Some speculate that the polluting of the environment will become the American's legacy. Their vast numbers—over thirty thousand in the Uncompahgre Valley alone—compared to the Ute population of a few thousand, seems incomprehensible. Even today the smoke from their chimneys obliterates the nearby mountain ranges several days of the year. Their toxic wastes flowing from mines in the mountains kill the fish in the Uncompahgre River, which they dammed about twenty miles south of the old Fort Crawford, and their chemical fertilizers promise to completely exhaust the once fertile soil. Currently, a large new "Western theme park" in Ridgway, just above the dam, promises to bring even more people and pollution to the region. Perhaps as a result of these activities in combination with their large numbers, the Americans may someday be dubbed the "Polluter-people."

Others argue that this will prove to be an inept prediction and an even poorer label, because more and more Americans are beginning to clean up their beautiful valley. Besides, archaeologists, the one small group truly interested in past occupants of the valley, tend to write most of the history and, therefore do most of the labeling.

After a millennium or two pass by what physical evidence of American occupancy will archaeologists find in the valley? One thing is certain: nothing of Fort Crawford—symbol of the recent cultural transition—will remain. Most likely, archaeolo-



(Photos courtesy of author)  
*Both halves of Fort Crawford's hospital ward now serve as proper homes south of Montrose.*



(Photo courtesy of author)

*Planted along the edge of the Fort Crawford parade grounds in 1881, these few aged cottonwoods remain.*



gists will still find scattered lithic material left by the Paleo-people, Archaic-people, and the Utes. But these bits of worked stone will pale in comparison to the numerous and rapidly disintegrating hard-surfaces bequeathed by the long-departed American inhabitants. These people, newcomers might say, devoted themselves to hard-surfacing the valley: witness the foundations of their dwellings and meeting places, their towns, their transportation routes, their recreational areas, and many of their ceremonial areas. It seems plausible, then, that future archaeologists may label Americans as the "Paver-people." And how long did the Paver-people live in the spectacular Valley of the Uncompahgre? Not even long enough, archaeologists may write, to change its name.



(Photo courtesy of author)

*Modern graffiti suggests that Fort Crawford's role in the removal of the Utes from the Uncompahgre Valley continues to be a sensitive matter.*

Dr. Christian J. Buys is a professor of psychology at Mesa State College. He has written numerous articles in fields of psychology, nautical archaeology, and Colorado history.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Orders from the Secretary of War, December 30, 1890, Fort Crawford Collection, Colorado Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup>Steve Cassell, *The Archaeology of Colorado* (Boulder, Colorado, Johnson Books, 1983), 91, provides interesting data regarding the prehistoric human occupation of the Uncompahgre Valley.

<sup>3</sup>P. David Smith, *Ouray: Chief of the Utes* (Ouray, Colorado, Wayfinder Press, 1986) offers informative written and photographic material about the Utes.

<sup>4</sup>Cassell, 191-196; and Ernie Rose, *Utahs of the Rocky Mountains: 1833-1935* (Montrose, Colorado, Montrose Daily Press, 1968); also Buckley Bangert, "Uncompahgre Statesman: The Life of Ouray," *Journal of the Western Slope*, 1 (Spring 1986), 1-74 are excellent sources for general and specific information regarding the displacement of the Ute Nation. See also: Jan Pettit, *Utes: The Mountain People* (Boulder, Colorado, Johnson Books, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>Bangert, 10.

<sup>6</sup>Rose, 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>11</sup>Bangert, 24.

<sup>12</sup>Rose, 68.

<sup>13</sup>Accounts of the White River Utes' role in the Meeker Massacre and the ambushing of Thornburgh's command are detailed in the author's "Accounts of the Battle at Milk Creek: Implications for Historical Accuracy," *Essays and Monographs in Colorado History*, 4 (1986), 59-80, of which quotes were taken from Elmer R. Burkey, "The Thornburgh Battle with the Utes on Milk Creek," *Colorado Magazine*, 13 (January 1936), 90.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>The history of Fort Crawford (the Cantonment on the Uncompahgre) has been treated well by Major John H. Nankivell, "Fort Crawford, Colorado: 1880-1890," *Colorado Magazine*, 11 (March 1934), 61-62.

<sup>16</sup>Herbert Hart, *Old Forts of the Far West* (Seattle, Washington, Superior, 1965), 54.

<sup>17</sup>Nankivell, 54-56.

<sup>18</sup>Rose, 64.

<sup>19</sup>Bangert, 66-68.

<sup>20</sup>Rose, 55.

<sup>21</sup>Robert B. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Historic Forts: The Military, Pioneer, and Trading Posts of the United States* (New York, MacMillan, 1988), 105.

<sup>22</sup>Nankivell, 60.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>25</sup>Rose, 62.

<sup>26</sup>Nankivell, 60.

<sup>27</sup>T. Don Brandes, *Military Posts of Colorado* (Fort Collins, Colorado, The Old Army Press, 1973), 56.

<sup>28</sup>David Fishell, "Fort Crawford: Boon for the Settlers," *Daily Sentinel*, 23 December 1979, and "Fort Crawford's Namesake, GJ's Founder Unrelated," *Daily Sentinel*, 15 July 1984. These articles contain popularized renditions of Emmitt Crawford's death as well as overviews of Fort Crawford's rise and fall. Muriel Marshall, "Sky Island - The Military Road," *Delta County Independent*, 8 September 1983, highlighted tasks created to keep the troops at Fort Crawford occupied.

<sup>29</sup>Smith, 194.

<sup>30</sup>Frances and Dorothy Wood, *I Hauled These Mountains in Here* (Caldwell, Idaho, Caxton Printers, 1977), 173, provides data on the economic impact of the fort.

<sup>31</sup>Marshall, 8.

<sup>32</sup>Nankivell, 61.

<sup>33</sup>Three petitions protesting the removal of troops from Fort Crawford were from the Colorado Historical Society in the Military Affairs File. All three petitions were from Grand Junction.

<sup>34</sup>Wood, 173.

<sup>35</sup>Roberts, 105.

<sup>36</sup>Nankivell, 63.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

H. Elaine Lindgren. *Land In Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota*. Fargo, North Dakota: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1991, pp. 300.

Women's history is in transition, going from ground-breaking to back-breaking. The first generation of scholars, 25 to 30 years ago, asked the basic questions which opened up the field. Since then, a host of historians—usually female—bravely attempt to address the expansive voids exposed by the pioneers in the discipline. It is a difficult task, making heard the voices of women from the past. Too often, the only evidence of their existence is gleaned from a painstaking collection of letters, diaries, and oral histories. The fruit of this, however, is a better understanding not only of women's history, but also of our perspective on Americans and their beliefs today.

*Land in Her Own Name* is an excellent example of a book that challenges one of our most cherished myths: the frontier. In the preface, Lindgren discusses the prevalence of the notion that men were sturdy, freedom-loving individuals who thrived on the primitive conditions in the west while their frail partners longed for the conveniences of civilization. Lindgren's research of government records from nine North Dakota counties indicates that women represented between six and twenty percent of the total number of people who filed homesteading claims between 1880 and the early 1900s. This book captures the experiences of over 300 of them; women who took the initiative to go west on their own.

Why did these women homestead? Traditional history explains the phenomenon by assuming that women were circumventing the laws that prohibited a family from having more than one homestead, or that single women tried to improve their prospects for matrimony by becoming landowners. Lindgren's analysis of the letters and diaries of the women reveals that these situations were rare; women were, in fact, often homesteading for the same reasons as their male counterparts. One of the first

motives was the longing for adventure, followed by a desire to be close to other homesteading family members. Often women filed claims hoping for a sound investment. Frequently they developed a strong romantic attachment to the land—it represented a place of deep meaning from their youth since some of the land was still held by their descendants.

*Land in Her Own Name* covers all aspects of women's homesteading, from the motives that drove them to the problems and joys of their everyday lives. Lindgren uses a lively mixture of narrative with numerous excerpts from the written record as well as incorporating interviews with fifteen of the original homesteaders. The women recount stories of prairie fires, sod busting, building shacks, neighborliness—tales we have heard before, but from different voices. Their tone is down to earth: these women may remember their adventures with some excitement, yet they somehow seem to have taken it all in stride.

The homey prose of the homesteaders is matched by Lindgren's matter-of-fact style. The author mainly restricts herself to being the vehicle for organizing and articulating the women's experiences. The departures from this are in the preface and in chapter seven, "The Gender Factor." The latter is Lindgren's discussion of bias, containing her analysis of the "syndrome" of the way that western women were perceived: through the themes of marriage, madness and marginality. This is a rather broad thesis, which requires much more than a chapter to substantiate.

The book is readable and attractive, with 200 sepia photographic reproductions that show the women and their homes. It contains thirteen tables and a large appendix listing names and statistics about all the women in the study. There is only one thing missing: a good map of North Dakota for readers not familiar with the state. The book will be valuable as a source for other women's historians, but it is general enough to be of interest to anyone who enjoys reading about the settlement of the west.

*Land in Her Own Name*, however, leads to a bigger question: how can we change our overall view of the homesteading/ frontier experience? Lindgren's book, like many others currently being published, paints a picture comparable to a patch of prairie wildflowers—lovely in itself, but one longs for more. The field awaits a great historian who can somehow synthesize the Old and the New and create a realistic vision of the past that will preserve our romance for the west.

Pamela Farina  
History Student  
Mesa State College

Julie Jones-Eddy, *Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado*. New York: Twayne Publishers. 1992. xiv + 252 pp.

Illustrations, maps, index. Afterword by Elizabeth Jameson.

*Homesteading Women* is a study of women who lived in northwestern Colorado during the first half of the twentieth century. Based upon interviews with fifty women aged 54 to 95, author and editor Julie Jones-Eddy organized the results of her oral history venture into a fascinating portrait of rural Western life from a female perspective.

This book is a powerful antidote for those who insist that the frontier abruptly ended near the turn of the century in either 1890 or 1900. As increasing numbers of Western historians have observed, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have more rather than less in common. Homesteading, isolation, and deprivation remained common experiences for northwestern Colorado's population well into the twentieth century. Only with the arrival of good paved highways, air travel, and television did the modern age begin to intrude upon this region.

The author, a native of the region and descendant of homesteaders, used her community ties to gain access to her subjects. She asked each interviewee thirty-eight questions ranging over such topics as childhood experiences, education, health, diet, social life, courtship, marriage, child-rearing, and work outside the home. For most of her subjects, homemaker and ranch helpmate constituted the primary occupation. Jones-Eddy did interview a small sampling of town dwellers and women who worked as schoolteachers, librarians, and other traditional occupations in the female sphere. Everyday life for most women resonated several common themes: hard, back-breaking work, strong economic contributions to the family, and an astounding degree of resourcefulness were almost universal characteristics. From the perspective of more than fifty or sixty years, most of the women expressed few regrets over the course of their lives.

While one might quibble with some of Jones-Eddy's organizational schemes or editing, the book effectively evokes an era that is all but lost to historical memory. However, the study's title, *Homesteading Women* may be rather misleading. The book does not address the historical debate over the numbers of actual female homesteaders. The women interviewed were not disciples of Eleanore Pruitt Stewart who in 1914 sounded a call for more women to file for homesteads as a vehicle to economic independence.<sup>1</sup> Most of the women were brought to the region by families seeking opportunity in a region that well into the twentieth century had only been lightly touched by Anglo-American settlers. Growing into young women, most married, raised families, and remained in this huge, isolated region, contributing to its transformation into a stable, though still overwhelmingly rural part of Colorado. *Homesteading Women* should be of interest to any Western Slope readers or students of women's history fascinated by an era that is chronologically close, yet seems more distant everyday.

Steven C. Schulte  
Department of History  
Mesa State College

<sup>1</sup> Elinore Pruitt Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).



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