



Historic Ranching Complexes on the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site

A LOOK AT SHEEP AND CATTLE RANCHING
IN SOUTHEASTERN COLORADO



Inside front cover

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FRONT COVER IMAGES:

TOP LEFT: *Herding Sheep in the Mountains of Colorado, 1934.*

TOP RIGHT: *Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site canyon*

BOTTOM: *“Round Up” from the Aultman Collection*

By:

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This publication is dedicated to Robert (Bobby) Hill, 1939–2011

The following has been adapted from an article written about Bobby by Susan Galentine upon his retirement from civilian service with the Department of the Army, Fort Carson, CO.

Bobby Hill was a hell of a storyteller. With a twinkle in his eye and a devilish smile, he made a listener want to pull up a chair and lean in closer.

And what stories he had to tell. His childhood growing up on what is now the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site, sounds more like a Western novel, including property disputes involving gunfire, raising cattle on what was at times very inhospitable terrain, and a love of the land that was palpable when he spoke about it.

On March 31, 2005, Bobby retired as the PCMS Facility Manager after 22 years of civil service. He cared for the PCMS like it was his own, as well a part of it used to be. Hill's relationship with the Army, and how he came to work for them, was an unusual story in-and-of itself, but his goal upon retiring was to return to what he loved the most—being a cattleman.

His 500-acre homestead was then far more modest than it was when

the Army acquired his 7,000-acre ranch in 1983, but he looked



forward to taking care of the family's horses and cattle with his wonderful wife, Joella, and help from three sons and their families.

Having lived most of his life in the area of PCMS, Bobby lived a full and colorful life, rich with memories that he recalled fondly, and often. Names of long gone ranchers come vividly to mind as he retold stories of his cowboy days or of his family. He knew the PCMS as a boy, when cows grazed the landscape, and long before tanks crawled across the land. Bobby grew up learning to respect what the land gave and took away, and even learned to work through the pain of losing his own land to the Army, going on to work for the institution that took what meant the most to him.

Bobby first met Tom Warren in 1983, the Fort Carson Director of Environmental Compliance and Management at that time. As consummate stewards of the land, the two were to forge a strong friendship during many trials and tribulations, including natural disasters and political strife. "Bobby Hill is a one of a kind, a special part of a limited edition rare breed," Warren once said. "He is a friend, mentor and confidant. He can be

COWBOY ENVIRONMENTALIST COWBOY ENVIRONMENTALIST

(and, yes, there is a distinction)

both as hard and immobile as an old rusty horse shoe and as soft and gentle as a newborn doe-eyed calf. He can make you cry and laugh with gut wrenching emotion all during the same story."

With his intimate knowledge of the land, Bobby was an ideal candidate to care for the PCMS. "I ran it like a ranch," said Hill. "If I didn't know how to fix something, I'd call someone." He enjoyed working with the soldiers who rotated through the PCMS during their training. "I always got along with the soldiers. I knew they were here to serve and protect our country."

"My memories of Bobby are not singular, pinpointed moments that others might have," explained Caron Rifici, a PCMS program manager. "I think of Bobby and it's kinda like one big pleasant memory all rolled up and held together by a steady stream of laughter, a mischievous grin, a calming presence, kindness, honesty, hard work, a good and decent person, an honorable man, and someone who genuinely cared." By "sharing his knowledge of raising cattle, the range, the landscape at PCMS, the windmills, the plants, the wildlife...I just can't think about Bobby without smiling."

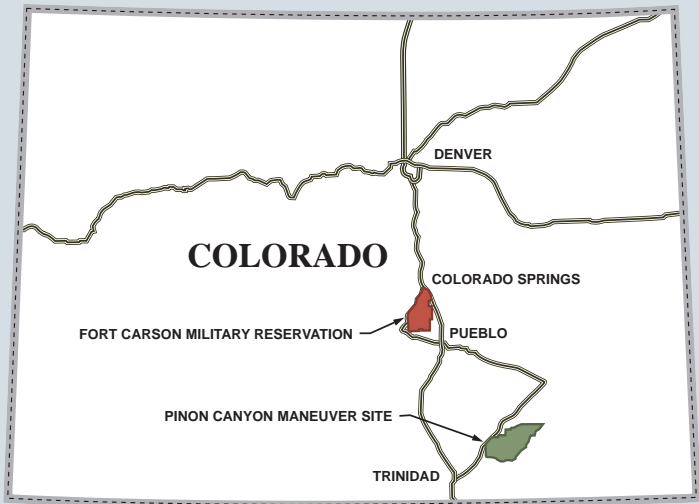
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*I came across this article as I was contemplating how to approach this dedication. As it spoke well to a man who had forgotten more about the land and land management than most of us could ever hope to know, I decided to adapt it for use in this publication. A quote from me in the article summed up my relationship with Bobby by asserting that "he was a tire changer, guide, mouse trapper, snake killer, etc... but most of all, he was a friend, confidant, and counselor. Someone I knew I could count on." Bobby Hill passed away on April 9, 2011. Although he's no longer with us, the following words spoken by Tom Warren at Bobby's retirement party still hold true today. "He will be sorely missed, but never far from our fondest thoughts."*

*Pamela Miller  
Cultural Resources Manager  
Fort Carson and the PCMS  
July 1, 2013*

HIS CHILDHOOD  
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In 1983, Fort Carson, a United States Army installation, acquired the lands that became the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site (PCMS) in order to prepare troops for potential combat deployments during the latter period of the Cold War. The PCMS occupies 235,638 acres in Las Animas County, Colorado. Prior to acquisition, the land supported large grazing operations and isolated homesteads, but since acquisition, ranching and residences have been discontinued on the installation.

As required by law, Fort Carson has endeavored to identify, evaluate, and protect significant cultural sites on the PCMS. Within the PCMS, thousands of sites have been identified that contain physical evidence for historic and prehistoric occupations. Knowledge gained from these sites has contributed greatly to what is known about the history of this region of Colorado.

This publication presents a brief history of settlement and sheep and cattle ranching in southeastern Colorado, and examines how the local practices evolved from ranching and settlement patterns in the American Southwest. Ethnicity and architecture are also discussed. Then, working from a broad landscape to a focused region,

THOUSANDS OF SITES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED THAT CONTAIN PHYSICAL EVIDENCE FOR HISTORIC AND PREHISTORIC OCCUPATIONS.

five ranching complexes on the PCMS are placed within this historic context. The architecture of these sites was fully recorded: Big Arroyo Ranch (a.k.a. Shaw Homestead), Big Canyon / Crowder Ranch (a.k.a. Arnet Homestead), Biernacki Ranch (a.k.a. Gregory / LePlatt Homestead), Red Rocks Ranch (a.k.a. Elliott Homestead), and Sharps Ranch (a.k.a. O.T. Clark and Munes Homesteads / Lockwood Camp). The project involved detailed documentation of these

ranches with historic research, measured architectural drawings of key buildings and structures, and archival-quality photographs. Three additional ranches, Burson Camp, Baldwin Ranch, and Big Arroyo (Walters) Ranch, were documented with data collection and archival-quality photographs. These layers of information provide for a richer and more accurate retelling of the area's historic ranching period and the people that participated in it.

Although modern dictionaries provide several definitions of the terms, throughout this publication, the term *Anglo* will be used to mean a white person born in America, and the term *Hispanic* will refer to a person from a Spanish speaking country, particularly in central or South America. The use of the term Euro-American, defined as an American with family roots in Europe, would include individuals born in Spain, thus confusing matters.

Ranching and Cowboys: Myth and Reality

Over the course of the 20th century, the number of Americans engaged in ranching declined. This is particularly true in the American West, where the popular narrative of the rancher and cowboy was born. Despite this trend, ranching and cowboys still hold the fascination of Americans and foreign visitors, precipitating nostalgia for a romanticized way of life that has been commercialized through tourism and experiential opportunities, such as vacationing on a dude ranch. This is not to say that the portrayal of the hardships involved in ranching and being a cowboy in the Old West have been misleading or subverted by all media portrayals. Rather, the hardships feed into the American myth of rugged individualism that still motivates people to believe in America as a land of opportunity, where self reliance, initiative, and hard work would lead to success.

The myth of the Old West cowboy and rancher has been one of the longest running narratives of American society. The public fascination with cowboys and ranchers followed on the interest in the West that developed during the

THE MYTH OF THE OLD WEST COWBOY AND RANCHER HAS BEEN ONE OF THE LONGEST RUNNING NARRATIVES OF AMERICAN SOCIETY.

Indian Wars. Americans consumed a steady stream of headlines about battles and the accomplishments of men taming the frontier. The failure of Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the successes of Kit Carson in dealing with tribes

in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, and incidents between American settlers and Indians, were widely publicized to capture the American imagination. Although the threat of large-scale conflict with Indians was over by the end of the 19th century, the lives of ranchers and cowboys were filled with other hardships and challenges that attracted the interest of the public. Monumental events, such as cattle drives and wars over open range grazing rights, were two themes that attracted public attention.

The American fascination with cowboys and ranching grew substantially during the years between World War I and World War II. In this period, numerous periodicals and radio programs perpetuated the romantic notion of cowboy life. Perhaps the image of a self assured, independent,





and capable individual was what Americans needed to see to weather the hardships of the Great Depression. Regardless, this period represents the fluorescence of the cowboy narrative.

Perhaps no individual had as much to do with the popularity of the cowboy myth during this period as a native-born southern Coloradoan. Arthur R. Mitchell was born on his father's ranch just west of Trinidad and spent the first two decades of his life in ranching, at a time when being a cowboy meant days spent in the saddle covering vast expanses of land. Following service during World War I, Mitchell studied art in New York, where he spent the next 20 years painting over 160 covers for a number of western-themed fiction magazines. The popularity of Old West cowboys and ranching continued after World War II, as first movies and then television seized on the popularity of these themes.

Although romanticized notions of cowboy life and ranching in the West have basis in truth, authors and filmmakers tend to focus on

## THE AMERICAN FASCINATION WITH COWBOYS AND RANCHING GREW SUBSTANTIALLY DURING THE YEARS BETWEEN WORLD WAR I AND WORLD WAR II.

the rare and exciting experiences of life, rather than the routine. Ranching and the cowboy way of life were, and still are, a hard, strenuous existence that some might still call monotonous.

The life of a rancher required many chores, often conducted twice a day. If he had the means, the rancher would hire cowboys to help with these; if not,

he would wear both hats. Chores would include checking the corrals or barn, hauling or pumping water into troughs, and riding across the range to make head counts and checking on each animal's condition. Animals might be moved between pastures, or driven to a railroad siding for shipment. Fences had to be kept in good repair. In southeastern Colorado's semi-arid climate, there was rarely enough rain to produce adequate forage. Additional feed might be needed to ward off starvation. A few ranchers were successful in cultivating hay, cane, or corn along the Purgatoire River valley, but these crops could not be depended upon from one year to the next. Missing animals had to be accounted for: was a calf lying somewhere sick, or injured, or dead? Livestock might have been doctored on the spot, or taken back to a corral for treatment or quarantine. Dead carcasses had to be examined

to determine the cause of death, and sometimes predators had to be hunted down and killed.

The earliest settlers on what became the PCMS located in drainage bottoms or near a spring. Ranchers seeking to use this land would acquire title to a water source, sometimes a spring that they would fence in, and then allow their cattle to graze on public land. Sheds and animal pens might be built in remote locations so that the cowboys could seek shelter or store supplies far from the main ranch. The number of homesteaders gradually increased through the 1910s, and each fenced their land with barbed wire to keep other people's cattle out. This practice slowly ended the open range.

Ranchers depended on winter snows and spring thunderstorms to bring moisture to this semi-arid region. Without these, the prairie could not produce fresh green grass. But weather in Colorado can be unpleasant, if not dangerous, especially if you are working from the back of a horse. Blizzards, the spring wind storms, and hail and lightning from thunderstorms were conditions to contend with as you went about your daily chores. Calving often occurred in early spring, and ranchers would sometimes need to provide assistance to the cow or calf. Failure could mean not only the loss of an animal, but the loss of your ranch.

TOP:  
*Dipping cattle for ticks, lice, and the like, Denver, ca. 1900-1910.*

BOTTOM:  
*Rescuing lost colt in winter, Colorado, 1968.*







TOP:  
*James Shaw, who  
homesteaded Big  
Arroyo Ranch,  
shown with the  
skull and hide of  
the wolf he shot,  
1922.*



CENTER:  
*Field kitchen  
of Box Ranch,  
John Arnet, cook,  
1927.*



BOTTOM:  
*Harvesting hay in  
the Purgatoire Valley,  
ca. 1890-1910.*



TOP:  
*Cutting tips  
of calf horns,  
eastern Colorado,  
ca. 1890-1900*

CENTER:  
*Branding cattle,  
probably in  
eastern Colorado,  
ca. 1880-1900.*

BOTTOM:  
*Pulling a calf, to  
help a cow give birth.*





# Diversity in Early Ranching Practices

The popularized image of ranching in the West does not fully represent the lives and experiences of all ranchers there. Ranching practices differed due to cultural and environmental factors, with two main traditions evolving. The first of these, the Latin-American tradition, was brought north into the American Southwest by settlers from Mexico in the late 1500s. This tradition was subsistence based, and did not rely on store-bought goods. People gathered natural resources off the land, such as wild greens and firewood, to support themselves and to send back to their villages. While horses, cattle, and goats were raised for personal use, it was sheep that formed the basis of ranching in New Mexico. The Spanish introduced sheep to the Americas in 1492, and the Churro breed, imported by Don Juan de Oñate in 1598, was favored because of its hardiness, good wool, and meat qualities.

The Latin-American tradition was generally an open range system and involved the seasonal movement of workers and their livestock in order to access good grazing land. The sheep were tended by shepherds or *vaqueros* [shepherds on horseback] at all times, to ensure that they did not damage crops or fall prey to predators. Typically, the sheep were rounded up and penned at night for protection. The herds were often wintered near permanent settlements in the lower elevations along water courses, where the climate was milder, and then moved to higher altitude summer pastures, fol-

lowing the availability of grass. If the same areas were returned to regularly during seasonal movements, people would invest the effort to construct small structures to provide shelter. One-room buildings and rock walls, used to create wind-blocks or pens within rock shelters, represent these early practices, and were common throughout the Southwest and southeastern Colorado.



New Mexican Churro Sheep.

Sheep were the basis of the *partido* system, a type of share-cropping arrangement in which the *patrón*, usually a rich village elder, would lend sheep to a borrower for a set period of time. Every year the borrower would repay the *patrón* a pre-determined number of sheep, as his herd increased in size. While the purpose of the system was to allow those with few sheep to build their own herds, sometimes the borrower became permanently indebted to the *patrón* due to misfortune, such as Indian raids or animal deaths.

TOP:  
*Burros loaded with firewood, Santa Fe, ca. 1888-1896.*

CENTER:  
*Herding sheep in the mountains of Colorado, 1934.*

BOTTOM:  
*Horses at ranch in Chama, New Mexico, 1977.*





As the land around a settlement was claimed and villages grew, people were forced to look farther afield for grazing opportunities. The initial settlement of Colorado by Hispanic families from New Mexico began with the seasonal movement of herds north through the Rio Grande Valley by 1842, though they were initially driven back by the Utes. Settlements along the Purgatoire River in the 1860s and 1870s included Cordova Plaza and the Dolores Mission Church on the land of Damacio Lopez, located just east of the PCMS boundary. Early Anglo sheep ranchers in the Purgatoire River valley included Isaac Van Bremer, who began his ranch in 1868 along the Hogback, a basalt dike, or ridge, that runs through the southern portion of the present-day PCMS. Lyman Plimpton and the Elwell Brothers ran sheep in Red Rock Canyon in the 1870s, before the land was filed on by homesteaders. Sheep ranching was the dominant industry in the county through 1900. Patróns could amass herds of sheep numbering in the thousands, but this success was rarely portrayed in western movies.

The large-scale cattle ranching popularized by media during the 20th century is the Anglo-Texan livestock tradition. Raising cattle was an adaptation to the environment of southern Texas. This system owes its origins to settlers from the eastern Mexican provinces, who occupied the gulf coast and areas along the major rivers of southern Texas in the mid-1700s. These settlers brought with them a tradition that was more commercial

than the Latin-American ranching style, with connections to markets in the major population centers of Mexico. Raising cattle for sale, rather than sheep for subsistence, brought an influx of money that allowed for the purchase of life's necessities and the growth of wealth. But as herds grew, so did the need for land.

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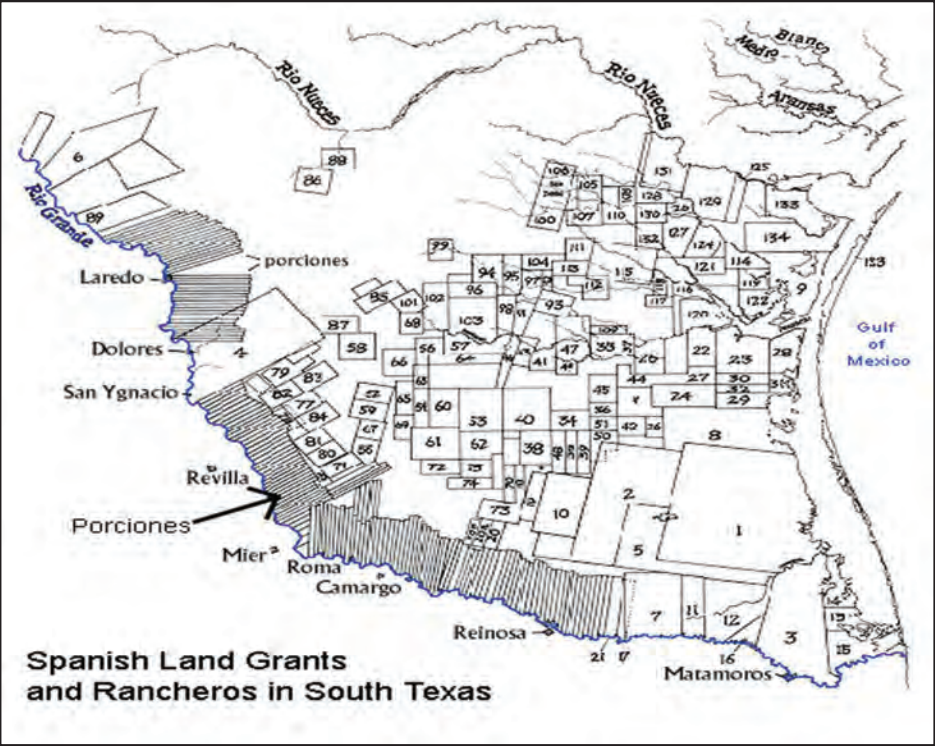
The land grant system in southern Texas consisted of long, narrow plots running away from a river, which provided each household enough water for domestic use and some irrigated agriculture, but only minimal livestock ranching. Large herds of cattle could not be supported on these narrow grants along the river, so in response, ranchers sought and were awarded larger land tracts in the more arid brushland away from the rivers. There, they dug wells and dammed arroyos to capture water for the cattle herds.

Part of the Anglo-Texan tradition included the *hacienda*, an estate and a method of managing landholdings and resources as a money-making endeavor. The headquarters of the

hacienda was located near a reliable water source and served as the administrative and social hub of the organization. It was a defensive fortification for protection from Indian raids, and a place where the owner of the grant, the patrón, and his employees lived. The hacienda system evolved into a closed community where the employees and their families owed allegiance to the patrón, who provided for their physical and spiritual needs. Depending on the size of the landholding, the vaqueros, who managed the patrón's herds, could spend days away from the hacienda tending cattle.

The earliest example of the Anglo-Texan tradition in southern Colorado may date from the 1830s, when oxen, actually castrated bulls, and small herds of cattle were being moved along the Santa Fe Trail with immigrants and vendors. Oxen were used to pull the wagons. The traders at Bent's Fort, located near present-day La Junta, would replace two worn-out oxen with one in good shape, and thus their herds and wealth grew. In the 1840s, the U.S. Army ordered 500 "beeves" from the Bents' to supply Kearny's Army of the West, en route from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

THE EARLIEST  
EXAMPLE OF THE  
ANGLO-TEXAN  
TRADITION IN  
SOUTHERN COLO-  
RADO MAY DATE  
FROM THE 1830S.





# Cattle Ranching on the Southern High Plains

Cattle were first introduced to America in the 1490s by Christopher Columbus, and other early settlers imported them as well. In Texas, cattle ranching was largely confined to the eastern plains, and ranchers used the hacienda system. Over time, a few stray cattle managed to find their way to the southern Great Plains, where they thrived and bred, evolving the unique traits of the Texas Longhorn.

Civil War veterans returned home to Texas to find a suffering economy, due to repressive reconstruction policies. To make a living, a few enterprising men seized upon the opportunity presented by the vast herds of wild cattle in western Texas, eastern New Mexico, and southeastern Colorado. In 1866, the period of great cattle drives began with the round up of wild herds in southern and western Texas, which were then driven north to railheads.

Four main trail systems were developed in the latter part of the 19th century: the Shawnee (1840s), Goodnight-Loving (1866), the Chisholm (1867), and the Western (1874). The Goodnight-Loving trail relied on protection from strategically positioned military posts, and

circumvented the Indian Territory by driving cattle west into New Mexico and then north to Denver. Cattle drives on this trail system would have passed through southern Colorado, possibly stopping at springs on the PCMS.



Cowboy Springs, located in Red Rock Canyon, was so named by archaeologists because of the historic inscriptions found on two rock faces. Some of the many names carved into the rock have the date “June 1888” and cattle brands associated with them. These likely relate to a single cattle roundup that stopped at the spring in 1888. Long-time area resident Bobby Hill indicated in 1999 that many other inscriptions have been lost over time to the

elements. Gary Hill, Bobby's brother, related that the residents knew this area as Soft Water Spring.

By the 1870s, west Texas was becoming the domain of cattle barons who amassed extensive landholdings, some up to a half million acres. The land ownership of many operations was actually much smaller, but because of strategic purchases that secured the limited water resources in the region, ranchers were able to control vast sections of public rangeland on which their cattle grazed for free. Without access to water, a competitor's range would not support cattle for long, and settlers would have to go to the considerable expense of drilling a well, or else haul in water to a cistern.

Following this model, large ranching operations arose throughout the western plains during the 1870s and 1880s. The JJ Ranch, with headquarters in Higbee, was the largest cattle operation in southeastern Colorado at the time. Begun in 1869, the operation tied up almost a million acres of grazing land within a decade, yet the company owned title to only about 18,000 acres, having acquired rights to the water sources in the area. Portions of what is now the PCMS were utilized by the JJ Ranch.

RIGHT:  
*Portion of a historic rock art panel at Cowboy Springs. The panel contains names, dates, and brands, some of which are most likely related to cattle drives through the area.*



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As stock populations grew and put greater stress on the ranges, large operations began to enclose public land with the recently invented “devil’s rope,” or barbed wire. This led to conflict with other ranchers who used the same range, or were accustomed to moving cattle through a particular area, and with settlers who sought to claim homestead land in the same region. Episodes of violence broke out across the Great Plains as the days of the open range came to an end in the 1890s. Although some fighting occurred in southeastern Colorado, including the Purgatoire River area, local incidents appear to have been over resources rather than the “sheep vs cattle” retaliation

seen on the other parts of the southern plains.

The most famous range war incident in the PCMS area was in 1882. The Prairie Cattle Company, a Texas firm owned by Scottish investors, had purchased the JJ Ranch in 1880. They were accustomed to controlling most of the region’s rangeland. Noting that three Hispanic homesteaders, Lorenzo Abeyta, Antone Salas, and Juan Cordova, were grazing a rival’s sheep on their land, they sent cowboys to burn their homes and provisions, and 4,000 sheep were killed. Abeyta was also ordered to be killed, though the cowboys did not succeed. The Hispanics had small homesteads, but they owned

## EPISODES OF VIOLENCE BROKE OUT ACROSS THE GREAT PLAINS AS THE DAYS OF THE OPEN RANGE CAME TO AN END IN THE 1890S.

prime grazing land in drainage bottoms, with access to water, and thus controlled some of the adjacent public land.

Beginning in the mid-1880s, the Federal government cracked down on the illegal fencing of public land. One of the worst offenders in southeastern Colorado was the Prairie Cattle Company, who had enclosed about one million acres. The second largest operation in Las Animas County was the Bloom Land and Cattle Company, founded in 1884 and headquartered in Thatcher. By buying up water sources they were able to exert control over the range without fencing.

The Las Animas county tax assessment rolls show that in 1880, the number of cattle nearly equaled the number of sheep in the county, and were considerably more valuable. However, drought and blizzards in the late 1880s reversed this trend, and by 1900, there were nearly four times as many sheep as cattle. Over time though, cattle ranching became more prominent, especially on what is now the north end of the PCMS, while sheep were raised to the south, such as at Brown’s Sheep Camp in Van Bremer Arroyo. This does not mean that all Hispanic sheep ranchers were driven out by Anglo cattle ranchers, as is so often portrayed in historic media accounts of the range wars

in the West. Rather, tending sheep was more labor intensive, so many ranchers changed over to cattle around the turn of the century. Labor demands also shifted to other industries, such as coal and steel production, and later to supply efforts and enlistment during World War I and World War II. Eventually, the remaining sheep operations in the Purgatoire River region switched over to cattle. Smaller ranches and homesteads were consolidated to support larger cattle herds.



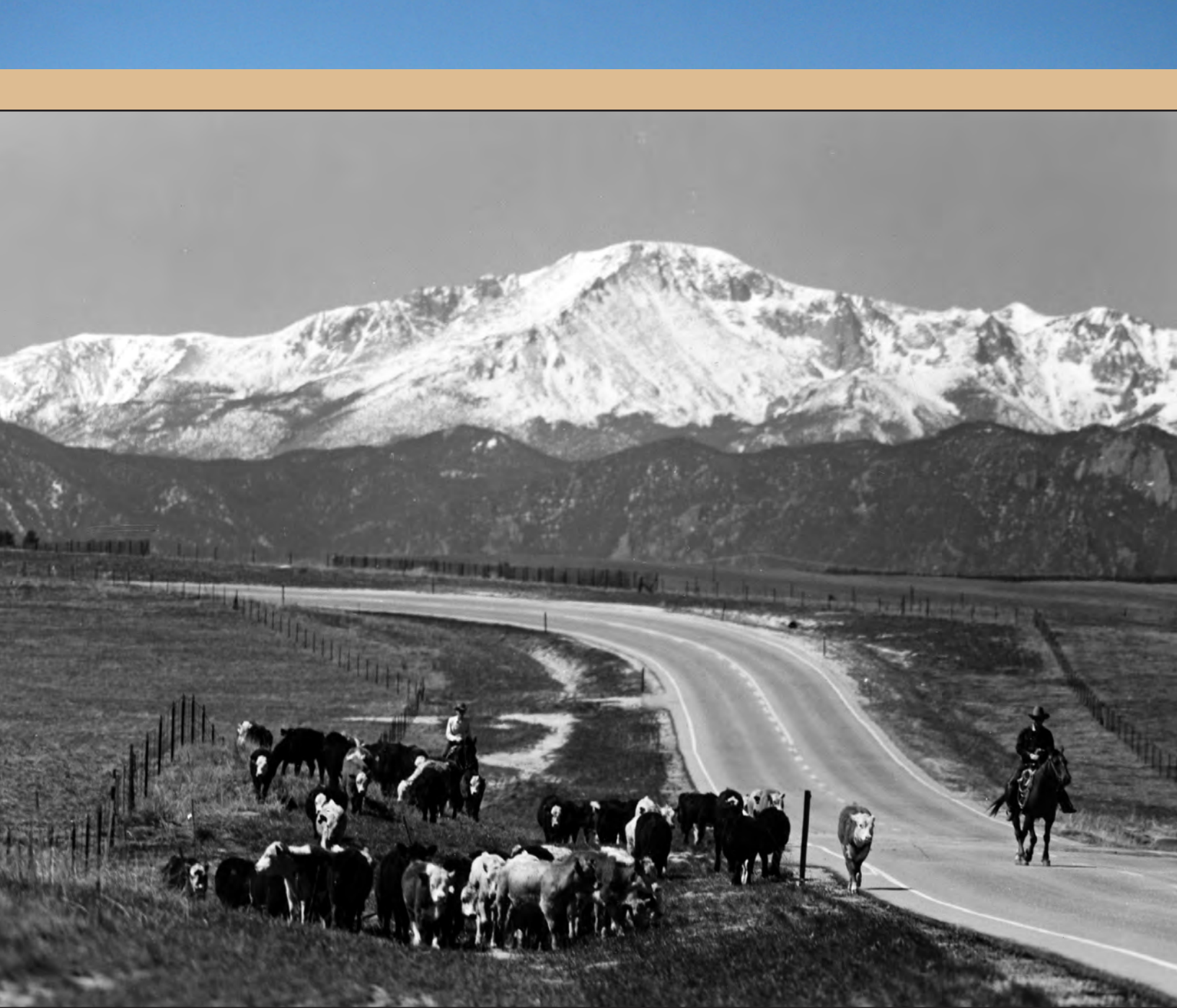
ABOVE:  
*J.B. Dean and family at Smith Canyon of the JJ Ranch, 1889.*



ABOVE:  
*Cowboys from the Prairie Cattle Company in camp, ca. 1900.*







ABOVE:  
Herding cattle along Colorado Highway 83 in 1973, the only remaining “open range” to move livestock between pastures. Note the fenced off private pastures on both sides of the highway. Pikes Peak is in the background.



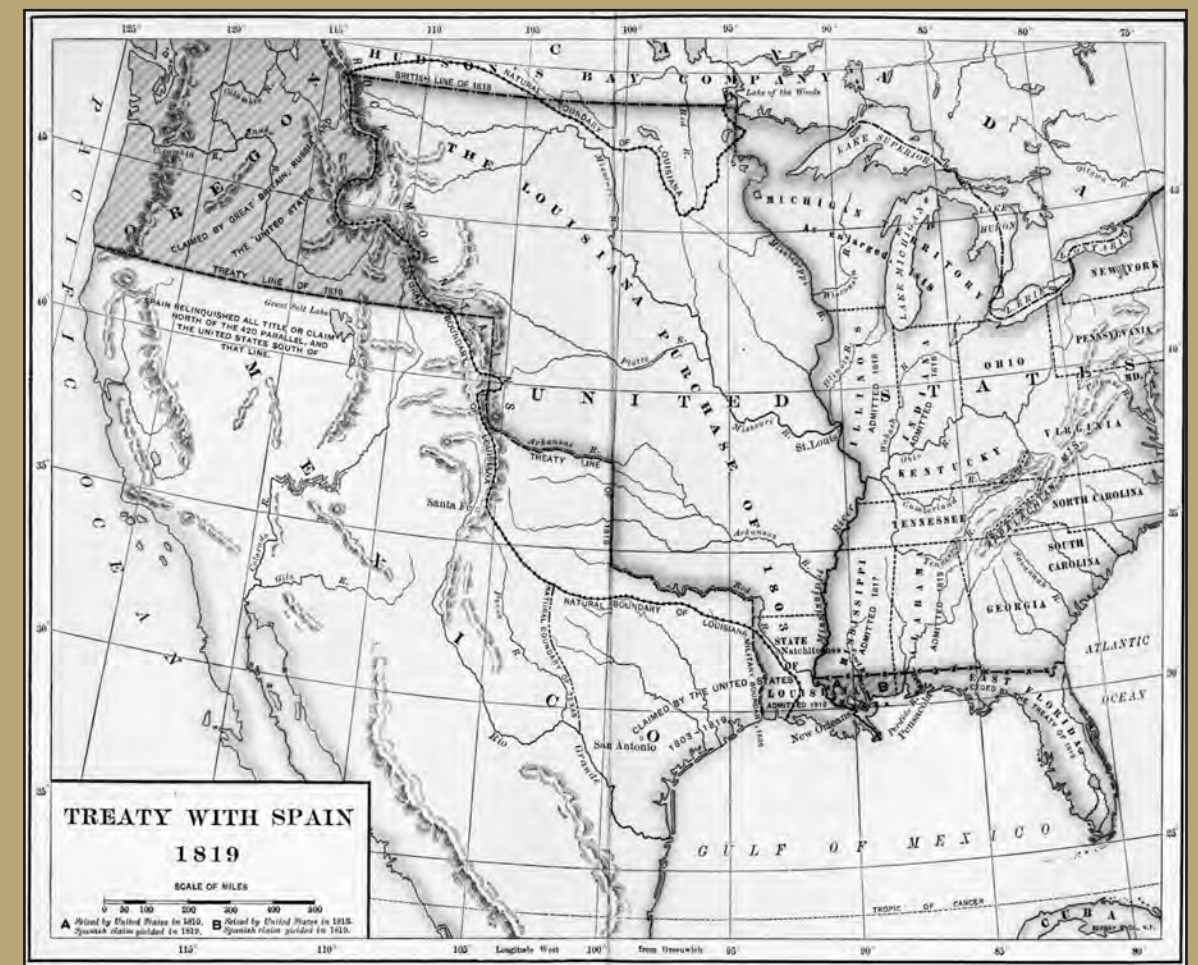
## Early Land Acquisition in the American Southwest

Long before the arrival of cattle and sheep ranchers and homesteaders to southeastern Colorado, the land was the home of Native American tribes. Indigenous groups have occupied the Purgatoire River valley, one of the only permanent flowing water sources on the plains of southeast Colorado, for millennia. Archaeological sites have been found that date back over 10,000 years. At present, thirteen modern Native American tribes claim cultural affiliation to land owned by the

Army in southeastern Colorado, meaning that they historically occupied the land or passed through during seasonal migrations.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES  
HAVE BEEN FOUND THAT DATE  
BACK OVER 10,000 YEARS.**

The United States government gained control of the lands that later became the state of Colorado between 1803 and 1848. Recognizing that ownership of the territory was vested in the Native Americans that inhabited the region, they negotiated treaties or fought wars to bring those tribes to the treaty table in order to acquire the lands. This





eventually resulted in Native American groups giving up title to the lands and being removed to reservations or Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

Spain, and later Mexico, had a different approach to relationships with indigenous peoples. Spain laid claim to that land in present-day Colorado, south of the Arkansas River and including what is now the PCMS, in 1706. Native groups were viewed as citizens, subject to Spanish rule. Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, and inherited the New Mexico Territory. They also did not recognize indigenously owned lands, but saw these as property of the state, which could be awarded as grants to acceptable parties for settlement. In the 1840s, Mexico was concerned enough about American expansion to issue almost 100 land grants along the northern frontier to prevent American encroachment. Most of these were grants made to Mexican citizens, who were expected to make improvements on the land, encourage others to settle, and protect the land from foreign attack, on behalf of the Mexican government. The grantees were to foster community growth and promote the communal life that had developed within New Mexico.

The Las Animas, or Vigil & St. Vrain, Grant is particularly relevant to the establishment of settlements and ranching in southeastern Colorado. The grant was awarded to Cornelio Vigil and Ceran St. Vrain on De-

cember 8, 1843, and included more than four million acres in southeastern Colorado, to include all of what is today the PCMS. While a Mexican citizen, Ceran St. Vrain was also a partner in Bent, St. Vrain & Company, which developed a monopoly

**SPAIN LAID CLAIM TO THAT LAND IN PRESENT-DAY COLORADO, SOUTH OF THE ARKANSAS RIVER AND INCLUDING WHAT IS NOW THE PCMS, IN 1706.**

on trade along the Santa Fe Trail beginning in 1833, with the establishment of Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River, near modern-day La Junta, Colorado. Almost as soon as the grant was issued, Vigil and St. Vrain assigned a share to their American partner, Charles Bent.

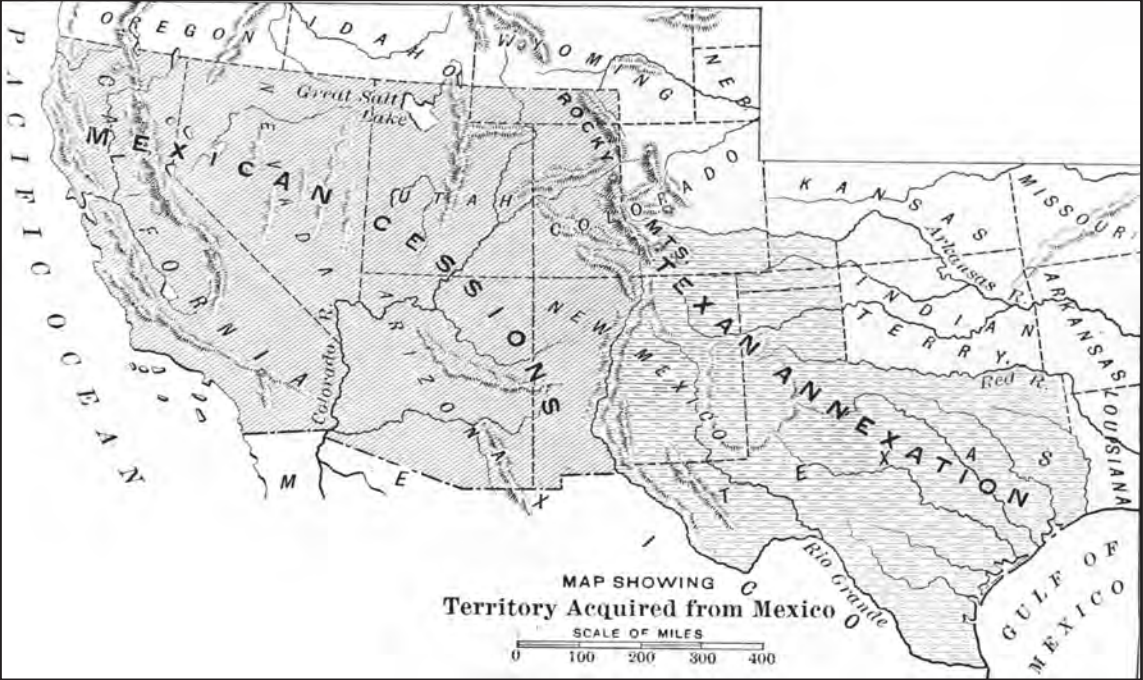
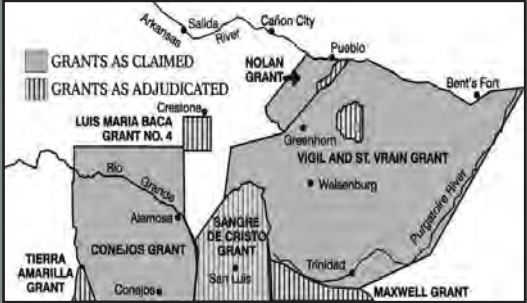
Raising livestock was one of the major enterprises of Bent, St. Vrain & Company. Their land grant allowed the company to establish ranches along the trail from which herds could be managed. The cattle were driven to markets in New Mexico, to U.S. railheads in the east, west to California, and north to Denver. Prior to obtaining the grant, the company had operated only on the north, or American, side of the Arkansas River. After the grant, two prominent ranches were established to the south: the Purgatory Ranch

at the confluence of the Purgatoire and Arkansas rivers, and Gray's Creek Ranch at the confluence of Gray's Creek and the Purgatoire River, about four miles east of Trinidad. It is unclear if the company ever tried to entice settlers to the grant.

After adding the territory south of the Arkansas River to the United States in 1848, the government attempted to verify the grant claims as stipulated in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It quickly became clear that more land had been assigned or sold than existed in the grant. Combined with the lack of settlement in the area, in 1869, the U.S. Congress reduced the size of the Las Animas Grant to less than 100,000 acres and tried to assess which claims to honor. This created chaos and uncertainty over land ownership. Only a minority of claims on the original grant and its subdivision were ever validated, and the final resolution of the situation was not reached until 1898.

It is interesting to note that the reduction of the Las Animas Grant was initiated in 1869, after the U.S. government had passed the Homestead Act, the Pacific Railroad Act, and the Morrill Act, all of which made public lands available to encourage settlement and development in the West. The claim reduction provided nearly four million acres of land for homesteading. The unsettled nature of the claims on the grant likely slowed settlement in the region between the 1860s and late 1880s.

**RIGHT:**  
*Map showing original and adjudicated Mexican Land Grants in Colorado.*



**MEXICO GAINED INDEPENDENCE FROM SPAIN IN 1821 AND INHERITED THE NEW MEXICO TERRITORY.**



# Settlement in Southeastern Colorado

The first permanent settlement in southeastern Colorado was San Luis, established by Hispanics from northern New Mexico in 1851. Then, in 1859, Gabriel Gutierrez homesteaded along the Santa Fe Trail, near the Purgatoire River where it emerges from the foothills onto the plains. Felipe Baca staked out a homestead nearby in 1861, and returned the next year with other families to found the town of Trinidad. American settlers also moved into the region, adding to the town's population. From this

center, Hispanic family-oriented plaza communities, known as *placitas*, spread along the Purgatoire River valley, with 38 *placitas* established by the 1870s. Some of these, like Tijeras and Hoehne, grew into tiny towns. Trinidad was incorporated in 1866, and by 1900, had a population of 5,345.

Into the 1870s, settlement in southeastern Colorado was focused along the major drainages, including the Purgatoire, Apishapa, and Huerfano

BELOW:  
*Bents Old Fort National Historic Site.*



THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT GAINED CONTROL OF THE LANDS THAT LATER BECAME THE STATE OF COLORADO BETWEEN 1803 AND 1848.





rivers, as well as the Santa Fe Trail, which followed the Arkansas River for part of its route. Between 1871 and 1878, the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail was rerouted from its earlier course near modern Highway 350, closer to the canyon heads on the west side of the Purgatoire River. Thus, settlers and ranchers on what is now the PCMS received regular stagecoach service, and easier access to supplies, mail, and transit. With the completion of the railways between La Junta and Trinidad, and along the Front Range in the late 1870s, more towns sprang up in southeastern Colorado and the number of settlers grew.

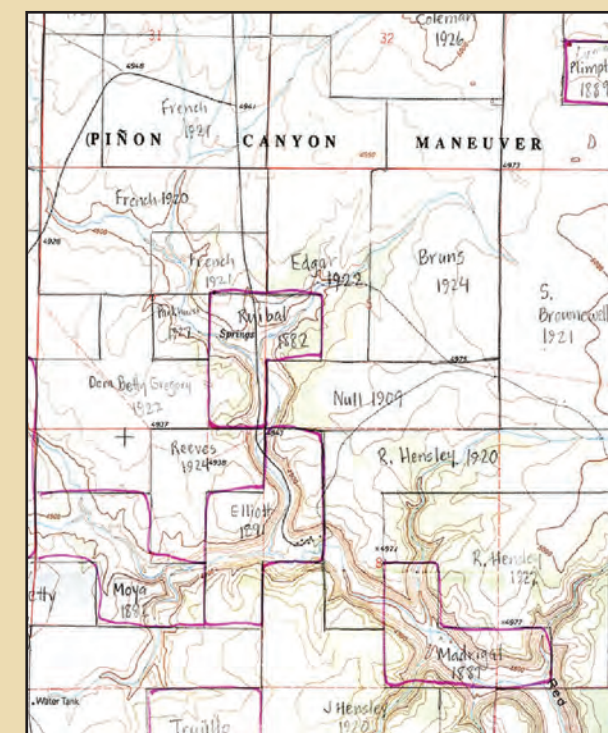
Economic and environmental concerns also had an affect on settlement. From the mid to late 1880s, drought and extreme blizzards, after years of overgrazing, led to large losses for ranchers and a loss of investor confidence. Added to this was the financial crisis of 1893 caused by railroad speculation that limited available credit. These factors made it hard for the large ranch operations to find investors. In 1894, Colorado's economy, like that of many other states, was battered by the Wilson-Gorman Act, which dropped the tariffs on many of the goods produced in Colorado, including wool. These issues led many homesteaders and small ranchers to give up and sell out in the 1890s. More

promising opportunities were available in the burgeoning coal and steel industries in Colorado and northern New Mexico. However, this depopulation of southeast Colorado resulted in an increase in the acreage of successful ranches, as they were able to purchase the lands of those leaving.

The Las Animas county tax assessment records show landowners, and the number of acres owned, broken down by township, range, and section, thus allowing an examination of the property that later became the PCMS. In 1880, there were 22 "PCMS" landowners holding an average of 160 acres each, the typical homestead size. The population peaked between 1884 and 1886 with over 60 landowners, and by 1890, there were again only 22, but each with an average of 850 acres. Some of those listed in 1884-86 may have been homesteaders who had not yet patented their land, but were dutifully paying taxes. When times grew difficult, they may have abandoned their land or sold out. By 1900, 27 landowners held an average of 1,200 acres each, and by 1910, there were 28 landowners, each with an average of 1,400 acres.

Between 1910 and 1930, a new wave of homesteading occurred, following passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act in 1909

INTO THE 1870S,  
 SETTLEMENT IN  
 SOUTHEASTERN  
 COLORADO WAS  
 FOCUSED ALONG THE  
 MAJOR DRAINAGES...  
 AS WELL AS THE  
 SANTA FE TRAIL.



LEFT:  
 Portion of the PCMS  
 area showing successful  
 homestead claims. Note  
 that most homesteads  
 date to either the 1880s  
 (outlined in red) or  
 1920s, the two major  
 periods of settlement  
 in the region.

and the Stock Raising Homestead Act of 1916. The 1909 act doubled the amount of property that could be claimed in some western states from 160 to 320 acres. The 1916 act allowed an additional 320 acres of land to

be claimed for stock raising in regions where agriculture was not feasible, though the claimant had to have proven up a local homestead as well. Southeastern Colorado saw a few good years of rain in the 1910s,

and dry land farming seemed like a viable lifestyle. Commodity prices were increasing, and there was a popular theory that the rain would follow the plow, and that cultivation would permanently alter the local

FROM THE MID TO LATE 1880S, DROUGHT AND EXTREME BLIZZARDS,  
 AFTER YEARS OF OVERGRAZING, LED TO LARGE LOSSES FOR  
 RANCHERS AND A LOSS OF INVESTOR CONFIDENCE.



climate. That, of course, would not be the case. Most of these later patents were made on dry prairie land, as any parcel with water had already been claimed. On the prairie claims, windmills, wells, and cisterns were essential as there was no surface water.

The county assessment records also show where the landowner lived. In 1910, 12 of the 28 landowners were residing on their “PCMS” parcel, but the majority were living in small towns nearby, such as Thatcher, Model, or in Trinidad. By 1920, there were 81 PCMS area landowners, half living on site. The population peaked in 1930 with 334 landowners, 84 of whom lived on the

PCMS acreage; more than half of the absentee landowners lived outside of Colorado. These trends suggest that many landowners remained just long enough to prove up their claim and then left, leasing or selling their land to settlers and ranchers who remained, or to outside investors.

Surprisingly, the Dust Bowl and Great Depression that occurred between 1930 and 1940 do not seem to have been as devastating to the region as was seen in other parts of the southern plains. It is amazing that in 1940 there were still 267 landowners on land that would become the PCMS, 64 of whom resided there. Presumably, the extensive drought

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BETWEEN 1910 AND 1930, A NEW WAVE OF HOMESTEADING OCCURRED, FOLLOWING PASSAGE OF THE ENLARGED HOMESTEAD ACT IN 1909 AND THE STOCK RAISING HOMESTEAD ACT OF 1916.



ABOVE:  
*Large wool processing facility in Huerfano County, early 1900s.*



ABOVE:  
*Colorado cattle ranch, probably southeastern Colorado, ca. 1890-1920.*





and collapsed economy led some to abandon their claims or sell their land. Successful ranchers were again able to purchase these parcels and expand. For example, the Rourke Ranch, situated just outside the PCMS on Comanche National Grasslands, lent money to neighbors during the Great Depression and acquired their lands when the loans could not be repaid. This led to an exponential growth of their holdings from around 5,000 to over 25,000 acres during a single decade.

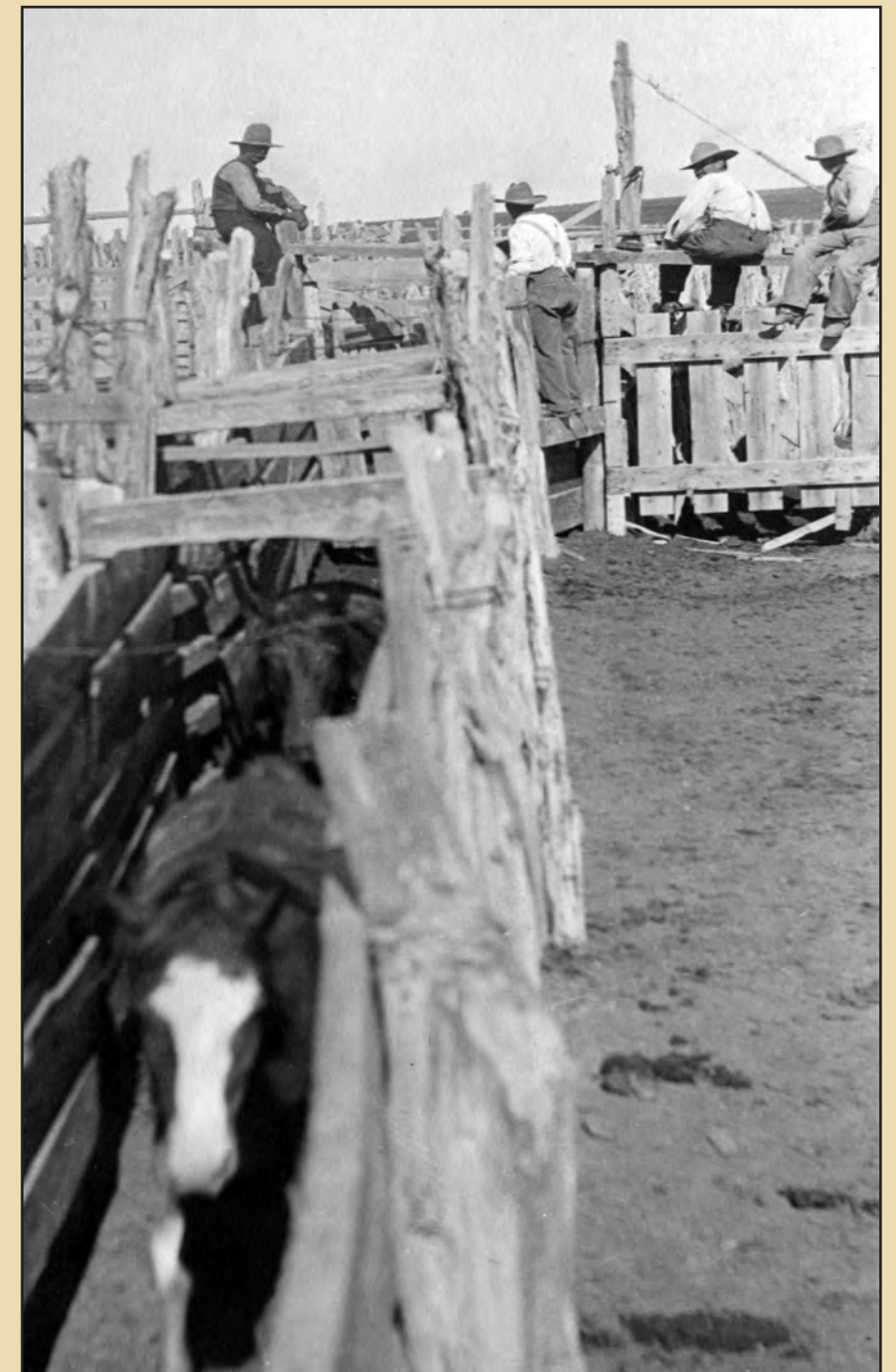
In addition to purchasing land from people leaving the area, ranchers were able to increase their holdings by having employees file claims, helping them prove them up, and then purchasing the claim once it had been patented. There appear to be a number of such instances documented in the PCMS area, either involving single cowboys working for ranchers, or extended family groups amassing land. However, other than the JJ Ranch and its successor, the Prairie Cattle Company, no large ranching operations developed in or around the PCMS again until the Great Depression. The largest of the local cattle operations was the Bloom Land and Cattle Company, owner of the Circle Diamond Ranch, headquartered at Thatcher, which

followed the old model of controlling access to land by owning the water. While the company only owned a thousand or so acres, it was able to graze its cattle across a broad area of public land in the PCMS area because it owned the water sources.

After World War II, ranches continued to increase in size to accommodate more cattle. The increase in livestock prices over the years did not keep up with the cost of living, labor, and equipment costs, so in order to operate a ranch that would pay the bills, or increase a rancher's standard of living, growth of the ranch was necessary. Herd size is directly linked to grazing land, and the situation is particularly acute in southeastern Colorado. The number of animals that can be supported on the semi-arid grasslands of the region is small when compared to the eastern Great Plains. The tall grass prairie of eastern Oklahoma takes four acres to support an animal for a year, while in southeastern Colorado, it may take from 35 to 80 acres, depending on precipitation trends. To produce the same number of animals as an Oklahoma rancher, and thus have a similar income and lifestyle, a Colorado rancher requires 10 to 20 times the acreage.

AFTER WORLD WAR II,  
RANCHES CONTINUED  
TO INCREASE IN SIZE  
TO ACCOMMODATE  
MORE CATTLE.

BELOW:  
*Cowboys of the Circle-Diamond Ranch working colts in corrals, ca. 1927.*







THE NUMBER OF ANIMALS THAT CAN BE SUPPORTED ON THE SEMI-ARID GRASSLANDS OF THE REGION IS SMALL WHEN COMPARED TO THE EASTERN GREAT PLAINS.



ABOVE:  
*Moving sheep to mountain pastures on modern highway in Colorado.*



## Ethnicity and Architecture

In many areas of the West, including much of Colorado, ethnicity and other identity differences lead to segregation, distrust, discrimination, and even conflict during the settlement period between about 1860 and 1900. There were instances of violence based on ethnicity in southeastern Colorado, but these seem to have been isolated incidents. For the most part, there was a pattern of cooperation between ethnic groups in the region.

Marriage was a common situation that integrated ethnic groups, and many early American settlers in Colorado took Native or Hispanic women as wives. William Bent strengthened his relationship with the Native people through his marriage to Owl Woman, the daughter of a Cheyenne chief. But that was not the only marriage variation. A census of the population taken in what is now the state of New Mexico in 1790 recorded Spanish, Indian, *mestizo*, *coyote*, *mulato*, *genizaro*, *color quebrado*, and *lobo* as ethnic groups. Each term denotes a variation in the ethnicity of the individual and shows a long history of intermarriage, either by choice or by force. A Spanish person was born in Spain. An Indian

was a Native born person. A *mestizo* was a person of European (often Spanish) and Native American parentage. A *coyote's* father was *mestizo*

literally means broken color. There was no category on this census for Anglos or Hispanics.

A CENSUS...TAKEN IN WHAT IS NOW THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO IN 1790 RECORDED SPANISH, INDIAN, *MESTIZO*, *COYOTE*, *MULATO*, *GENIZARO*, *COLOR QUEBRADO*, AND *LOBO* AS ETHNIC GROUPS.



*The Null House.*

and his mother a Native. A *genizaro* was a Native who had been captured by a warring tribe and sold to a Spaniard living in the Southwest. *Mulatto* was defined as a person with “mixed” parentage, one being African American, while a *lobo* had one parent who was African American and the other a Native. *Color quebrado* is an ill-defined term that

Business liaisons were also made between ethnic groups. Felipe Baca, an early settler and founder of Trinidad, partnered with Spruce Baird in a ranching operation that ran both sheep and cattle. Baird, born in Kentucky in 1812, was of Scottish descent. Baca was born in New Mexico in about 1828. He and other Hispanic leaders from Las Animas County, like Casimiro Barela, were practical and inclusive thinkers who represented the interests of both the Hispanics and Anglos in their communities.

Ethnic boundaries were not rigid in southeastern Colorado. Many families were made up of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds who melded knowledge, beliefs, and practices in their daily lives. One can imagine that the services or food found in a town such as Trinidad would have been very multi-cultural. In addition to the Hispanic and Anglo settlers, and the intermarriage of these groups with the Native Americans, the coal mines of the Raton Basin drew





miners from as far away as eastern Europe as early as the 1880s. As the town of Trinidad grew, the expression of each culture in the town's architecture reflected its varied origins.

When archaeologists and architectural historians evaluate a historic building, or the remains of one, they can speculate on the ethnicity of the builders based on elements of the architecture. Homes made of adobe may reflect a Hispanic or Pueblo Indian origin, while those made of milled lumber were more likely built for Anglos. However, such generalizations are not often productive when discussing southeastern Colorado because of the ethnic mixing of her people.

Richard Carrillo, an archaeologist who has studied Colorado Hispanic culture extensively, relates that many Hispanic informants told him that a typical home circa 1900 consisted of a two-to-three room linear structure made of adobe, with a kitchen on one end and one or more bedrooms. Initially, these rooms would all have had exterior doors with doorways between the rooms becoming more common at a later time. Linear room plans were common in southeastern Colorado at this time, occurring singly or aligned around plazas. The remains of Madrid Plaza, built in 1863, seem to show a number of adobe linear room units, with a possible breezeway between two of them. This covered breezeway, an architectural feature connecting two rooms, is known as a *zaguan*.

An enlightening example of ethnic mixing in architecture is the Baca House in Trinidad, a two-story house with a widow's walk and Greek architectural details. The house was constructed in 1870 for John Hough, a successful merchant, and whether out of re-

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spect for his Hispanic neighbors, in recognition of the advantages of Hispanic building traditions, or simply due to costs, the house was built of adobe, an economical and locally available material. In 1873, the house was purchased by Felipe Baca and furnished with Victorian furniture befitting a prominent family of the time.

On the PCMS, single-room structures are the most common building plan of all the architecture evaluated, with linear room plan units being second. Although adobe construction was prevalent in some areas of Colorado in the late 1800s, stone was used where it was readily available. Where water is scarce, adobe was not always practical, as making adobe bricks takes a lot of water. While there is a good argument for linear-plan buildings being of Hispanic origin, assigning ethnicity

to a single-room building is more problematic. A single room was the minimum requirement to prove up a homestead dwelling and this design was built by homesteaders of all ethnicities.

There are a number of documented cases of early ranch houses on the PCMS built for Anglos using Hispanic construction methods. The use of Hispanic labor and the lack of trees in the region may have been the greatest factors influencing the choice of building materials. For example, the original residence of Underwood Rogers at what is today known as Brown's Sheep Camp was an adobe linear room plan, with a *zaguan* and a side gabled roof of exposed log rafters and beams known as *vigas* and *latillas* - Hispanic traits. Other linear plan units with *zaguan*s include the Marguerite Arnet and Asa Haines Homesteads, and the Mary Doyle claim.

In addition to linear room plans, Carrillo indicates that other Hispanic architectural traits found in southeastern Colorado include structures with south-facing entryways and corner fireplaces, rectangular building plans, cairns that might have supported *ramadas*, modified rock shelters, cliff walls incorporated into structures, outdoor ovens or *hornos*, juniper post corrals and an absence of associated outbuildings. In contrast, structures built by Anglos were more likely to be square, have fireplaces centered on a wall, and have numerous outbuildings and corrals to support ranching activities. The traits typically associated with Hispanic sites, such as a

RIGHT:  
*Ruins of a  
zaguan structure  
at the Hispanic  
La Placita Site.*



ON THE PCMS, SINGLE-ROOM STRUCTURES ARE THE MOST  
COMMON BUILDING PLAN OF ALL THE ARCHITECTURE  
EVALUATED, WITH LINEAR ROOM PLAN UNITS BEING SECOND.





corner fireplace, are also present in a number of residences built for Anglos, including the Wilford Riley homestead in Big Water Arroyo. Incorporated rock shelters and cliff walls occur within the homesteads of Marguerite Arnet, John Sanders Cross, Mary Doyle, Mosby Lee, and at Bier-nacki's Ranch, and rock faces have been used in the construction of stock pens at Red Rocks and Sharps Ranches. Vertical logs plastered with mud, a Hispanic construction technique known as *jacal*, were used to build the bunk-house at Red Rocks Ranch and the main house at Cross Ranch, among others.

Since the earliest Hispanic settlements in the Purgatoire River valley were in the bottomlands, east of the PCMS on the Comanche National Grasslands, the opportunity for a comparison of early architecture on the PCMS between that which was built for Anglos and for Hispanics is limited. One site associated with Hispanic residents is La Placita, named for the plaza-like c-shaped arrangement of stone structures that overlook a portion of Red Rock Canyon. The primary residence features a *zaguan* and corner fireplace, with an impressive sidewalk that leads into the central clearing. There is a second single-room residence and numerous outbuildings, though

this trait alone does not point to either an Anglo or a Hispanic settler, as each adopted architectural traits from the other. Rock art graffiti on the building exterior shows that it was built, and abandoned, before 1898. The site lies on a section line and patent records show that the earliest claim for any of the associated land was by a rancher named John Ryan in 1900, which clearly post-dates the building of La Placita.

There is significant architectural variation at homestead sites and ranches across the PCMS. Some of this is temporal, especially on ranches that were occupied for long periods of time and repeatedly renovated. Three residential structures at Brown's Sheep Camp span the site's 100-plus year occupation, beginning with the 1882 residence with a *zaguan*, the adobe and wood frame residence built before 1918 and remodeled in the 1940s, and the 1970s trailer house, which has been removed. The Big Canyon/Crowder Ranch was occupied by the Arnet family for 80 years. Present are four residences and seventeen outbuildings which exhibit a variety of architectural types and construction materials, including adobe, *jacal*, stone masonry, logs, milled lumber, cement block, railroad ties, telephone poles, vertical planking, and natural rock outcrops. Cor-

ral systems on the PCMS seem to embrace a frugal and practical approach to construction, regardless of owner ethnicity, and were commonly made of juniper posts and barbed wire tied into natural outcrops or man-made rock walls. Commercial materials would have been accessible after completion of the nearby railroad line in 1878, including bricks manufactured in Trinidad. While milled lumber is present at some early homesteads, in the form of doors and window frames, the transport of bricks via rail and wagon to homesteads on the present-day PCMS would have been expensive, and only a few have been found, usually used in fireplace construction.

On the PCMS, architecture and ethnicity are a dynamic pairing. It is important to look at all levels of available data, land patents, tax records, and the material culture the inhabitants left behind, to interpret who built and occupied a structure. Most settlers and ranchers utilized the architectural technology developed by the Hispanic population over centuries of occupation in the Southwest, regardless of their ethnicity. They used the building materials that were at hand. Stone, adobe, and juniper posts were often reused or modified from earlier construction to meet their needs.

BELOW LEFT:  
*Marcus Null homestead.*



BELOW RIGHT:  
*Corner fireplace, Reid homestead.*



MOST SETTLERS AND RANCHERS UTILIZED  
THE ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY  
DEVELOPED BY THE HISPANIC POPULATION  
....REGARDLESS OF THEIR ETHNICITY.



THERE IS SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTURAL  
VARIATION AT HOMESTEAD SITES  
AND RANCHES ACROSS THE PCMS.



ABOVE:  
*Structure on an Anglo ranch  
incorporating a bedrock shelf.*

## Early Communities on the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site

Although individuals may have established early homesteads or ranches in the PCMS region, it is the effort of small groups forming communities that is remembered. One of the earliest settlements, Red Rocks, was situated in the Purgatoire River valley at its confluence with Chacuaco Canyon. According to Dr. Michael Beshoar, a prominent Trinidad historian who settled there in 1869, the first residents of Red Rocks were Mr. Climer and Juan B. Cordova, who arrived in about 1867. Cordova was born in New Mexico in 1825 and became the patrón of the Red Rocks settlement, later known as Cordova Plaza. The 1874 patent for his homestead lists eight tenement houses, with 100 acres under cultivation and fencing as improvements.

North of the Cordova Plaza, several Anglos settled in the Bent Canyon area. Stephen Conroy, a stage driver on the Santa Fe Trail, established a ranch in 1867, which later became the Bent Canyon Stage Station. While their own ranch was being built at the mouth of Bent Canyon in 1869, Eugene Rourke and his wife lived at the station. Bent Cañon became the name of the diffuse community centered on Rourke's cattle ranch in the Purgatoire River bottom, complete with a post office and general store. In 1876, the residents received mail delivery six days a week.

Dr. Beshoar indicated that the Red Rocks area had 450 residents in 1874, but that number had dropped to 200 by 1882. It seems that the name of the community changed from Red Rocks to Bent Cañon

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THAT IS REMEMBERED.



*Lower Minnie Canyon at the Purgatoire River.*

as modern services were added at the Rourke Ranch, though the distribution of settlers in the area may not have changed. The population decline may not represent the failure of people to survive on the landscape, but rather reflect a change from the prominent Hispanic communal land ownership settlement

style to individually owned ranches of increasing size.

A mile or so north of the Rourke Ranch, Lorenzo Abeyta, son-in-law of Trinidad founder Felipe Baca, made a claim for land in the river bottom in about 1869. He was followed by Damacio Lopez and eleven other families who settled just to his north at the confluence of Minnie Canyon and the Purgatoire River in 1871. Oral history interviews conducted with Lopez's son Elfido indicate that these settlers worked communally to clear fields and construct irrigation ditches. The Dolores Mission church was built by Damacio Lopez and served this community.

The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed men and single women over the age of 21, who were or intended to become citizens, to claim 160 acres of land. Each prospective homesteader had to live on their land for five years, make improvements, and cultivate the soil for that term. Many of the original settlers in the Bent Cañon community were Hispanic. Rather than work for the patrón to obtain land, they would claim adjacent parcels in the Purgatoire River bottom. Neighbors surely helped each other with planting and harvest, but the dispersal of settlers over a distance of several miles likely changed the community dynamics, perhaps accounting for some of the



population decline. Since only limited bottomland was available, some of the early settlers may have left to file on land elsewhere.

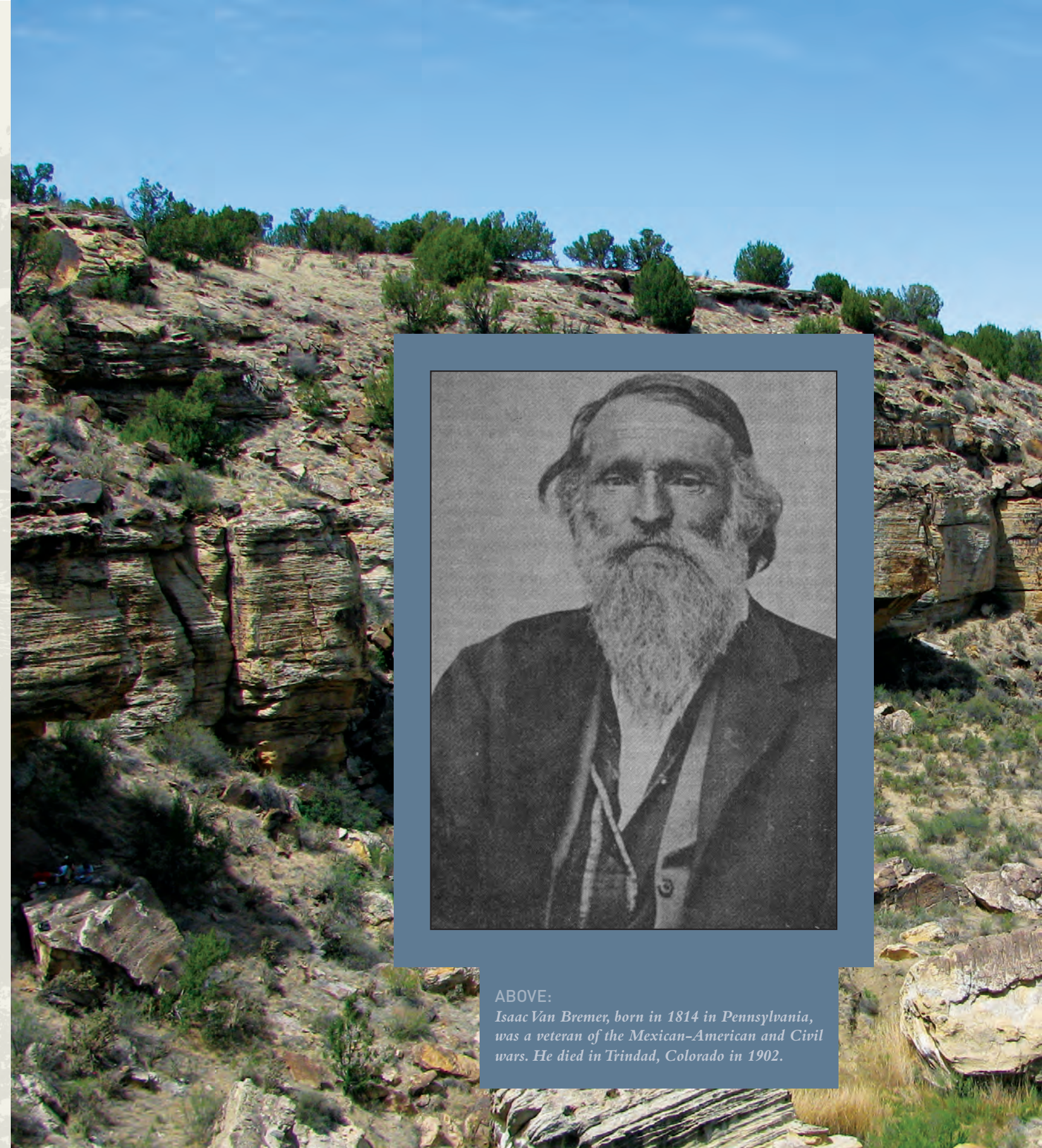
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From the mid-1870s through the 1880s, Colorado's initial wave of industrialization spread along the Front Range. Trinidad was located between Denver and Santa Fe, in the heart of a massive coal belt. As such, the city attracted railroads, coal mining, and other industries that needed labor to operate. This opportunity attracted both Colorado residents and immigrants to the Trinidad area. Some of the initial settlers of Red Rocks may have left to take advantage of these economic opportunities.

Another early community, named Alfalfa after the crop cultivated there, developed along the Purgatoire River south and east of the present-day PCMS. One of the earliest settlers of that region was Isaac Van Bremer, who in 1867 established a homestead and began raising sheep just east of the basaltic dike known as the Hogback. An early stage route passed his spread and continued south, following the river into Trinidad. Other communities, such as Thatcher, Tyrone, and Earl, grew up along the Santa Fe Trail (modern Highway 350) after the Santa Fe Railroad was completed in 1878.



*Rourke Ranch.*



ABOVE:

*Isaac Van Bremer, born in 1814 in Pennsylvania, was a veteran of the Mexican-American and Civil wars. He died in Trinidad, Colorado in 1902.*



# Stage Routes on the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site

The Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail followed the often-dry Timpas Creek drainage. To better serve the ranchers and homesteaders settling near the Purgatoire River, the stage line was rerouted in 1871 to run between the heads of the canyons where geologic conditions allow springs to occur. Barlow, Sander-son & Company built stage stations at Lock-wood Canyon and the Hogback in 1871, and managed the Bent Canyon Stage Station.

In 1872, Mortimer Slate claimed land where the Lock-wood Stage Station had been built. Ac-cording to his pat-ent, he constructed a square twenty-four foot wide two-room dwelling of logs, a corral, and a large stable. There was a spring in the area, and Slate hoped to establish a dairy operation. Re-ceiving the patent for this parcel in 1875 made it the earliest suc-cessful land patent on the PCMS, though several 1874 patents were issued to Hispanics living in the Purgatoire River bottom just off the PCMS. Slate purchased mili-tary scrip, granted to a Cherokee

Indian named Warrior Blackbird for service in the War of 1812, and used this to obtain this 160-acre parcel. In 1877, Slate sold his claim to his business part-

a number of the area's large ranching concerns, including the owners of Brown's Sheep Camp and the JJ Ranch.

## THE STAGE LINE WAS REROUTED IN 1871 TO RUN BETWEEN THE HEADS OF THE CANYONS WHERE GEOLOGIC CONDITIONS ALLOW SPRINGS TO OCCUR.



Purgatoire River valley.

ner, James Benson, who man-aged the Bent Canyon Stage Station. Shortly thereafter, the stage line ceased operating the route because the newly com-pleted rail lines into Trinidad made it obsolete. Between 1877 and 1885, the Lockwood claim and its spring were owned by

On the 1871 route, a stage station was built at a gap in the west end of the Hogback. A *Las Animas Leader* ar-ticle mentions that the station suffered a fire and was abandoned in 1875. In April 1882, Underwood Rogers settled on 40 acres of land in Van Bremer Arroyo with a “tumble down deserted house, and old stage station, deserted seven years”. He made a preemp-tion claim and paid \$50 for this parcel in December 1882. His patent states that he made \$400 worth of improvements, includ-ing the construction of a house, barn, cor-ral and well. Within days of filing his claim, Rogers sold the parcel to Samuel Taylor Brown who may have employed him. Brown continued to amass land along the arroyo and developed a very successful sheep ranching operation, later known as Brown's Sheep Camp. Brown's son-in-law, Julius C. Gunter, was elected Governor of Colorado in 1916, and acquired ownership of the ranch in 1917.

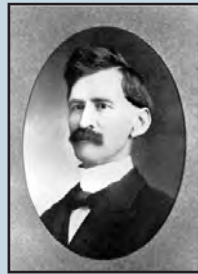
BELOW:  
Original 1880s residence at Brown's Sheep Camp, remodeled at a later date to enclose central breezeway.





BELOW LEFT:  
*Julius Gunter*

BELOW CENTER/RIGHT:  
*Brown's Sheep Camp.*



BROWN'S SON-IN-LAW, JULIUS GUNTER, WAS ELECTED GOVERNOR OF COLORADO IN 1916, AND ACQUIRED OWNERSHIP OF THE RANCH IN 1917.

## Land Use on the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site

When the history of land use on the PCMS is examined, all roads lead back to ranching. Although some individuals proved up and operated small subsistence homesteads successfully, it is the larger ranches that endured for decades, having gained control of thousands of acres of land. While researching the historic ranches of the PCMS, methods of amassing land emerged. The first dates from the 1870s and the days of the open range, when strong-arm control of the springs meant control of the rangeland. As homestead laws were better enforced, ranches succeeded by buying or forcing out the Hispanic homesteaders who had patented sites with springs. The third method was for a large family unit to claim adjoining homestead and stock land parcels, often with the requisite households being clustered together on a section line. Lastly, ranch managers might assist an employee with claiming homestead land to help them gain independence, though this was often simply coercion that allowed the rancher to obtain more land once the patent was issued.

Land ownership in the PCMS area in the 1870s was very dynamic. County tax assessment records suggest that some ranchers were leasing land. As homesteads were settled and patented, many were being sold soon after the title was granted. Tax records show that only seven of the landowners who paid taxes between 1878 and

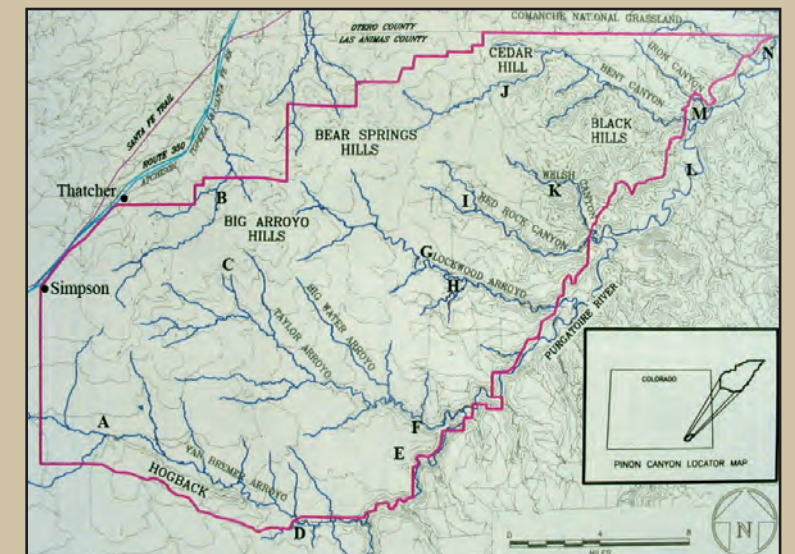
1880 still owned or controlled their land in 1890, by which time there were twenty-two landowners on the PCMS. The success of the ranchers depended upon acquiring the springs.

There are several springs near the head of Red Rock Canyon where the Elwell Brothers, J.P. and Ed-

win, established a sheep ranch in 1873. Their flocks had grown to 7,000 sheep by 1877, at which point they sold their interest in the land to the Plimpton Brothers. Lyman and Eugene Plimpton also owned several thousand sheep, and in 1882 were taxed for their use of land valued at \$9,145, though the specific parcels were

### Early Homesteads and Ranches:

- |                          |                                 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A-Brown's Sheep Camp     | H-Sharps Ranch                  |
| B-Big Arroyo Ranch       | I-Elliott/Red Rocks Ranch       |
| C-Burson Camp            | J-Leyva/Baldwin Ranch           |
| D-Van Bremer Ranch       | K-Plimpton/Mary Doyle Homestead |
| E-Big Canyon Ranch       | L-Cordova Plaza                 |
| F-Biernacki Ranch        | M-Rourke Ranch                  |
| G-Lockwood Stage Station | N-Lopez Plaza                   |





not named. The Plimptons did not prove-up a homestead in Red Rock Canyon, but perhaps acquired some of the Hispanic homesteads. They ultimately lost most of their land due to failure to pay the taxes. The Bloom Cattle Company purchased one of these springs sometime before 1886, and a portion of the Plimpton land was homesteaded by Alexander Elliott in 1883, establishing what became known as Red Rocks Ranch.

In 1889, Lyman Plimpton purchased 40 acres of public land

containing a spring in upper Welsh Canyon, a few miles north of Red Rock Canyon. Although there are no structural remains present on Plimpton's claim, the adjacent parcel patented by Mary Rourke Doyle in 1903 bears structures that predate her claim. Given that ranchers of the time typically controlled water sources and used the surrounding public land at their will, it is almost certain that the older structures on the Doyle claim represent Plimpton's homestead.

ALTHOUGH SOME INDIVIDUALS...OPERATED SMALL SUBSISTENCE HOMESTEADS SUCCESSFULLY, IT IS THE LARGER RANCHES THAT ENDURED FOR DECADES...



Plimpton/Doyle Homestead.

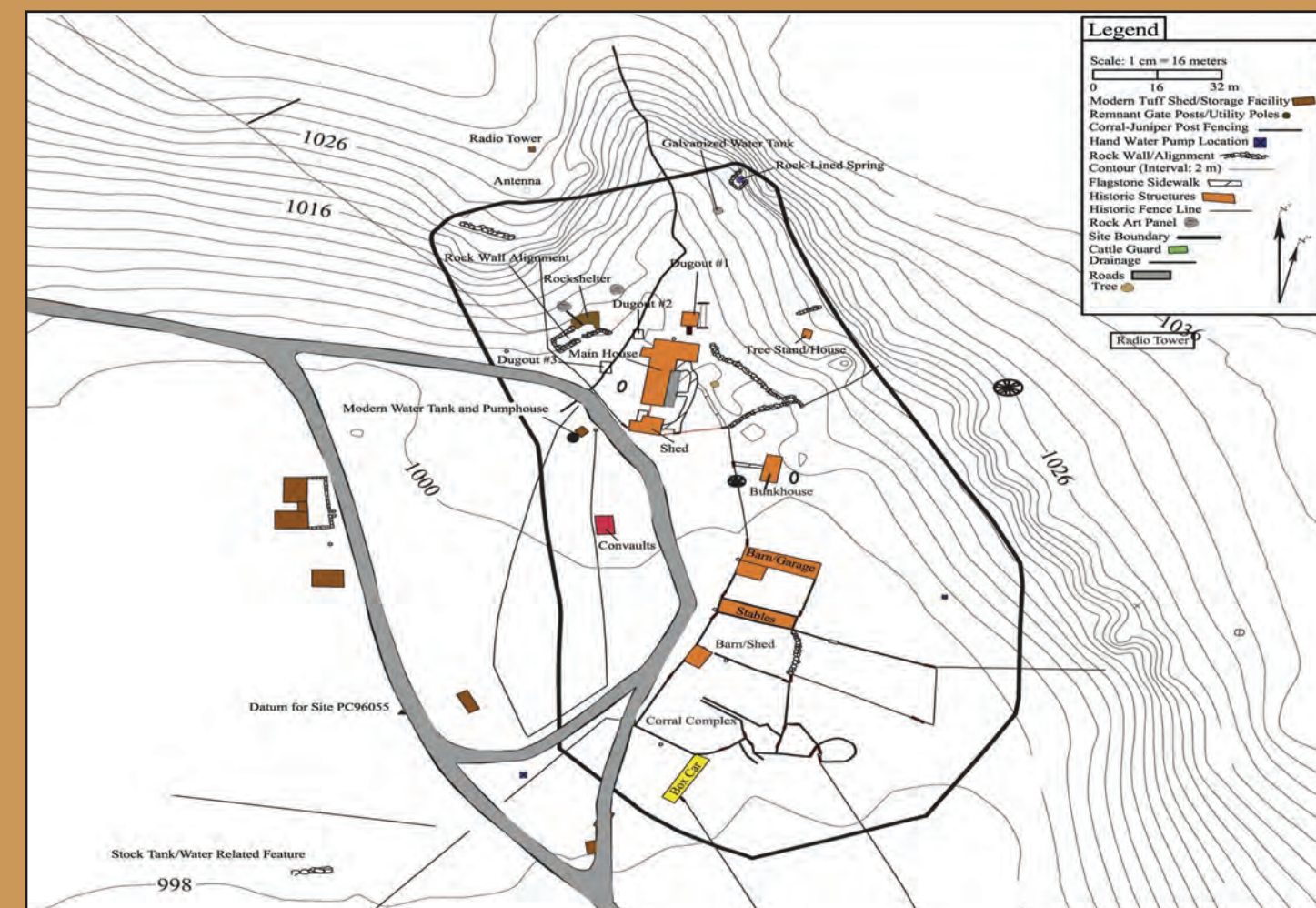
## Sharps Ranch

Sharps Ranch, also known as the Clark Homestead and Lockwood Camp, is located in a wide floodplain section of Lockwood Canyon. There is a spring in the canyon wall above the main house. A portion of the ranch parcel was patented in 1882 by Rafael Ma. Munes, who settled there in 1875 and built a *jacal* house, irrigation ditch, and corrals. By 1886, the land was owned by Ozias Taylor Clark, Sr. and his partner and brother-in-law Worley

T. Moore, who ran cattle. By this date they had also acquired the Hispanic homesteads and springs of Juan Trujillo and Cresantos Moya at the head of Red Rock Canyon, Miguel Alerez and Juan Campos in Lockwood Canyon, and Slate's Lockwood Stage Station.

Clark served as vice-president of the Southern Colorado Stockman's Association and as Sheriff of Las Animas County. He was also the manager of the Bloom Cat-

tle Company, based in Thatcher just west of the PCMS. Clark and Moore, and their families, filed for eight homestead and stock land patents focused around the original Munes parcel, creating a large family ranch holding. By owning the nearby springs, acquired from Hispanic homesteaders, they controlled an even greater area of rangeland. Clark and Moore employed several cowboys who would later prove-up their own homestead land on the PCMS, among them Alexander





Elliott and Moses Stevens in Red Rock Canyon, and John Hughes and John Sanders Cross in Lockwood Canyon.

Ruth Clark and her husband Guy McDaniel operated the Lockwood ranch until 1938, when it was sold to a number of parties before Vernon Sharps bought it in 1963. Sharps Ranch consists of a collection of twelve buildings. The five-room main residence was once

two separate linear structures with a porch/breezeway in between (similar to a *zaguan*). The structures were joined together in about 1920 and other later additions occurred. A long time resident said that the adobe portion of the residence dated to 1876, making the ranch one of the oldest with standing architecture in the region. The main house and a small shed to its south have low, curved-gable roofs. Other early structures on the ranch include the

large wooden barn/garage and the stable, both made of adobe brick and stone.

THE ADOBE PORTION...  
DATED TO 1876, MAKING  
THE RANCH ONE OF THE  
OLDEST WITH STANDING  
ARCHITECTURE IN  
THE REGION.



LEFT TOP:  
*Wood barn/garage.*

LEFT BOTTOM:  
*Adobe and stone stable.*

RIGHT TOP:  
*Main residence.*

RIGHT BOTTOM:  
*Shed.*



SHARPS RANCH, ALSO KNOWN AS THE CLARK HOMESTEAD AND LOCKWOOD CAMP, IS LOCATED IN A WIDE FLOODPLAIN SECTION OF LOCKWOOD CANYON.





# Red Rocks Ranch

Red Rocks Ranch, also known as the Alexander H. Elliott Homestead, is located at the confluence of two major tributaries in upper Red Rock Canyon. Elliott was born in Illinois in 1841 and may appear on the 1860 census as a carpenter in Central City during the gold rush, just prior to establishment of the Colorado Territory in 1861. He was a cattle rancher in the Bent Cañon community in 1879. Elliott worked as a cowboy at Ozias Clark’s ranch in Lockwood Canyon for several years before making a homestead entry on this land in 1883. He received his patent in 1891, developing a cattle ranch. Elliott lived here until about

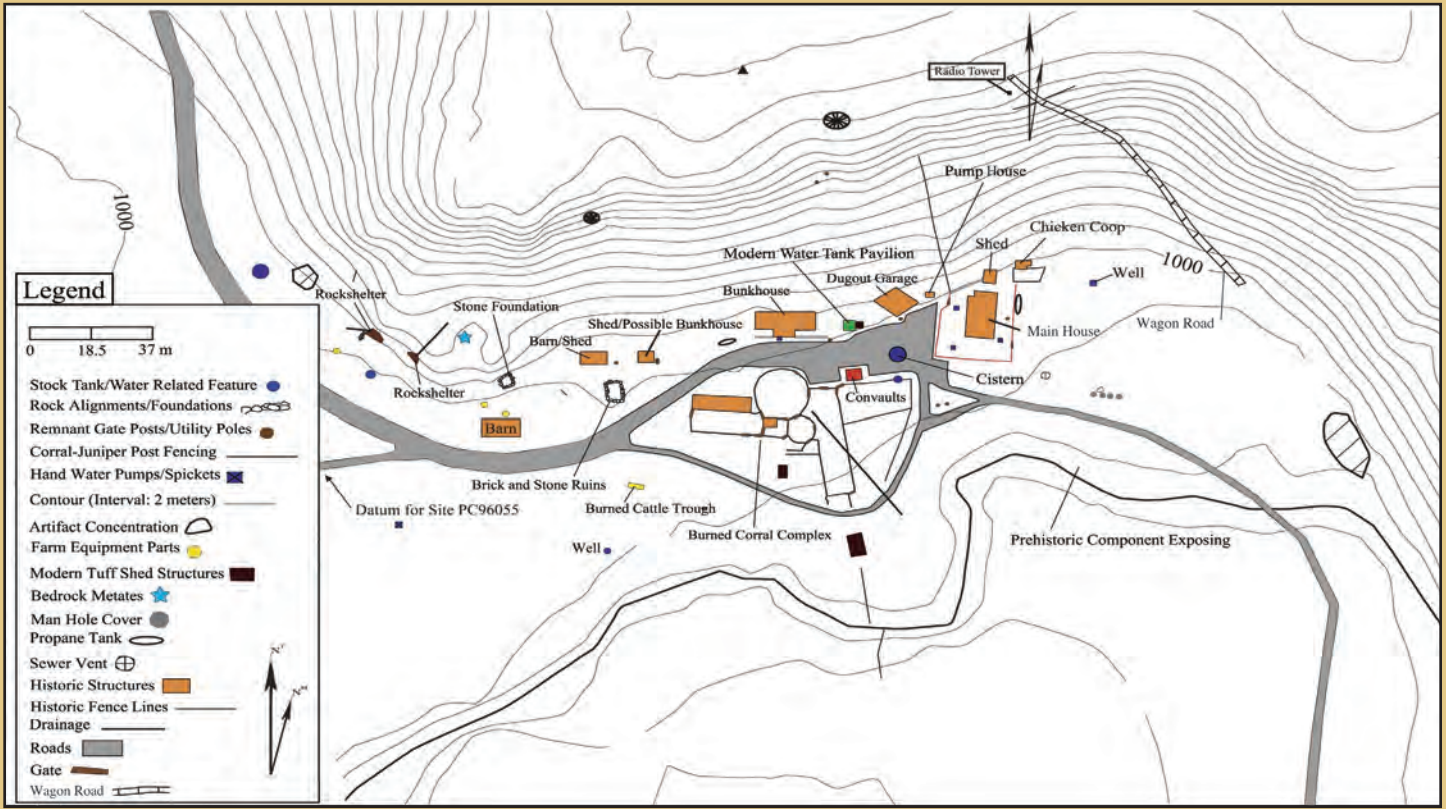
1912. After changing hands a few times, Arlyn “Sam” Kitch bought the ranch in 1926, and it remained in his family for 53 years.

Red Rocks Ranch is one of the oldest standing ranches in the region. There are ten historic structures of various construction, a corral system, and a number of historic rock wall pens. The main residence shows a number of additions, with an adobe brick section added to the original stone construction. Behind the main house is a stone chicken coop with a roof of juniper *vigas* and *latillas*. The three-room bunkhouse is constructed of adobe brick and *jacal*, and based on patent

data, represents Elliott’s original residence on the site. A barn attached to the main corral was lost during the 2011 Bear Springs wildfire, but the rest of the structures were saved by fire crews.



Stone structure with hand cut juniper vigas and latillas built around 1891. Possibly a residence later modified into a chicken coop.



TOP:  
Main residence of stone built around 1891, with a later adobe brick addition.

CENTER:  
Three-room adobe brick Bunkhouse built around 1891. The left half of this structure appears to have once been a stable.

BOTTOM:  
A barn-stable complex built around 1880. The structure was constructed of milled lumber with a stone footer. This structure burned in 2011.



RED ROCKS RANCH IS ONE OF THE OLDEST STANDING RANCHES IN THE REGION.





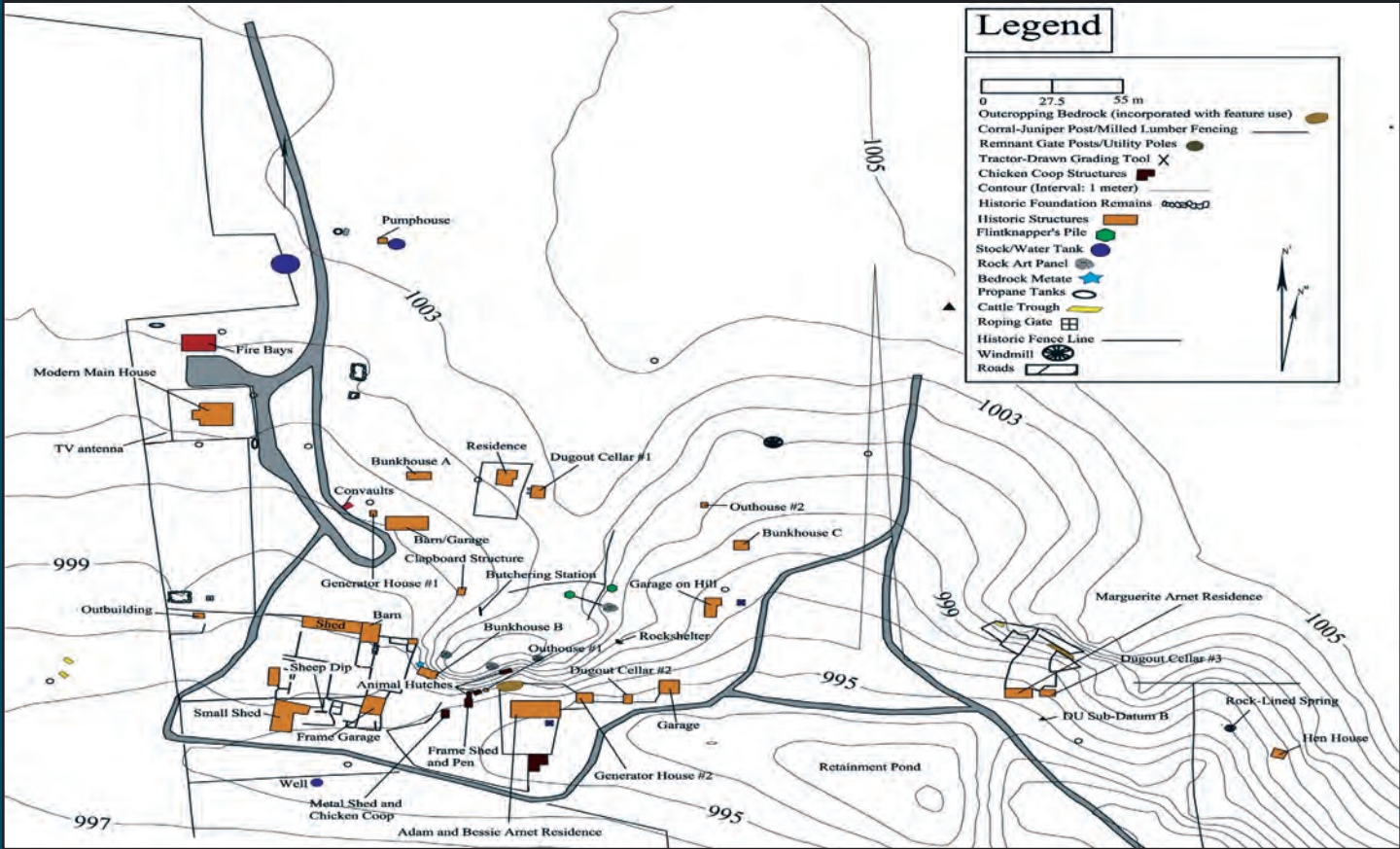
# Big Canyon / Crowder Ranch

Big Canyon / Crowder Ranch, also known as the Arnet Homestead, is located one mile west of the Purgatoire River at the head of an intermittent stream that drains into Big Canyon. Adam Arnet was born in France, immigrated to Michigan with his mother and siblings, and came to Colorado in 1896. In 1900, he worked as a cook for a number of large ranch outfits, including the Bloom Cattle Company and Brown's Sheep Camp. Adam's mother, Marguerite, filed on this homestead land in 1909, and a linear room plan stone house with *zaguan* was built for her. Bes-

sie Cassidy filed on an adjacent 320 acres of land in 1915, and married Adam Arnet in February of 1916, moving into a two-room *jacal* house on her parcel. By making this claim while she was still single, the Arnets amassed more land and formed a larger ranching operation. The family began running sheep, but switched to cattle when they could no longer afford to hire shepherds. Adam had financial difficulties during the Great Depression and assigned some of his land to his children to protect it from foreclosure. Margaret Arnet, who married Jack Crowder, received the Big Canyon property

from her father, and the Crowders lived there from 1954 until 1983.

The architecture on the ranch consists of 21 buildings and structures, 16 of which contribute to its historical character. The initial residences show Hispanic architectural traits, but the abundance of outbuildings show that this was a working ranch, not a subsistence homestead. The Government Land Office records show fifteen patents issued to Adam Arnet, his mother, his wife, and his brother John's family between 1908 and 1946 for homesteads, desert land, stock raising and cash entries.



BELOW:  
*Marguerite Arnet residence, built circa 1905, showing a linear two-room plan with a low roof covered with soil and cactus.*



THE ARCHITECTURE ON THE RANCH  
CONSISTS OF TWENTY-ONE BUILDINGS  
AND STRUCTURES, SIXTEEN OF WHICH  
CONTRIBUTE TO ITS HISTORICAL CHARACTER.





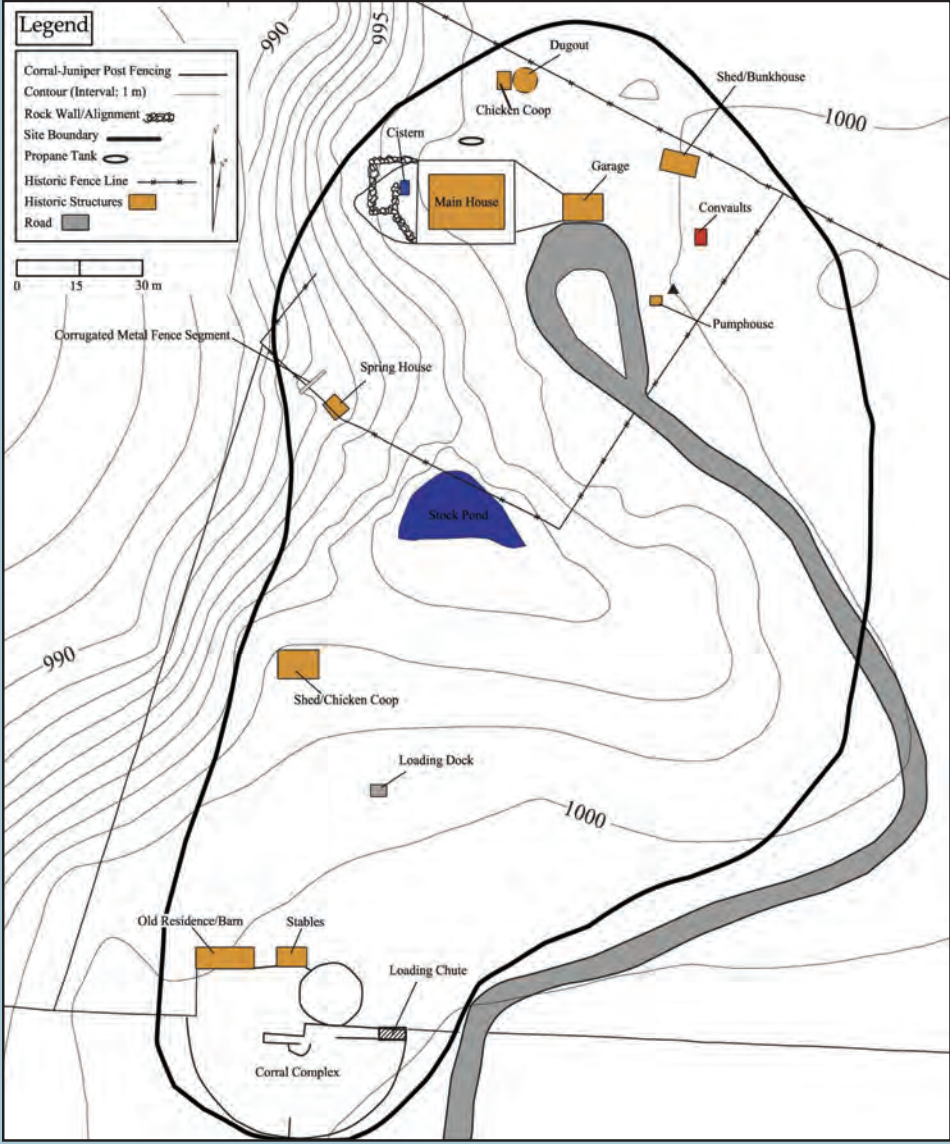
# Biernacki Ranch

Biernacki Ranch, also known as the Gregory / LePlatt Homestead, is located along the rim of Taylor Arroyo near its confluence with the Purgatoire River. The ranch house is on property patented by Henry E. Gregory in 1905. His mother Sarah Gregory was widowed and brought her eight children from Missouri to Colorado in the early 1900s, settling near her brother-in-law Asa Gregory. Nine Gregory family members obtained homestead land in Las Animas County, including several adjacent parcels on the PCMS. Asa's sons were business partners and in-laws with the LePlatts. Together, these families ran a large cattle operation. Henry's land was

sold to the LePlatts in the 1920s and then to Glenn "Bull" Watkins in the 1930s. The ranch was later purchased by LeRoy and Edna Biernacki who ultimately owned over 18,000 acres when the land was acquired by the Army in 1983.

The ranch contains nine historic structures of various construction, one collapsed dugout, a reservoir, and a corral system. The 1905 land patent notes that the original structures on the site were a fourteen-foot square stone residence, two stables, a reservoir, and a cellar (dugout). The seven-room main residence of the ranch was built in three episodes based on architectural evidence, with the original stone portion becoming the northeast corner bedroom. The last building episode was completed in the 1930s by the Watkins family.

THE 1905 LAND PATENT NOTES THAT THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURES ON THE SITE WERE A FOURTEEN-FOOT SQUARE STONE RESIDENCE, TWO STABLES, A RESERVOIR, AND A CELLAR (DUGOUT).



TOP:  
1923 Main residence and stone garage, with old stone chicken coop in background to right.

CENTER:  
Older wooden residence covered with corrugated metal siding.

BOTTOM:  
Stone chicken coop with collapsed dugout at right.





# Big Arroyo Ranch

Big Arroyo Ranch, also known as the James Shaw Homestead and Bobby Hill's Ranch, was a homestead settled by James H. Shaw in August 1899 in the Big Arroyo Hills. Shaw built a two-room adobe house on his claim that measured fifteen feet square. He appears on the 1900 census near Thatcher as a farmer. In June 1904, he built another house on his property – a four-room house, with porches on two sides. This second house still stands today. Shaw also constructed a corral system, stables, a chicken house, two wells, a wind-mill, and a cellar. He obtained an additional 480 acres of adjacent

stock land in 1921 and ran about 300 head of cattle on his place. Witnesses on his patent included O.T. Clark and Kelsey Cross, both affiliates of the Bloom Cattle Company in Thatcher. In about 1922, Shaw appears to have defaulted on a mortgage. Robert Hill, Sr. bought the property and operated a ranch on it from about 1924 until 1942.

He worked at Red Rocks Ranch and the Bloom Cattle Company's Circle Diamond Ranch, and ultimately sold the ranch to Arlyn Kitch, his Red Rocks employer. Kitch had amassed 84,000 acres of land in the PCMS area by 1930. After his death in 1962, his son Paul managed the land until it was sold in 1979.

**BIG ARROYO RANCH, ALSO KNOWN AS THE JAMES SHAW HOMESTEAD AND BOBBY HILL'S RANCH, WAS A HOMESTEAD SETTLED BY JAMES H. SHAW IN AUGUST 1899 IN THE BIG ARROYO HILLS.**



# Burson Camp

Burson Camp, located on the prairie at the head of Taylor Arroyo, was patented in 1922 by Marcos Salas. His patent describes improvements including a house, barn, reservoir, two stock sheds, grazing land, and some wire corrals. There was a good spring on his land. The original house was a stone one-room dwelling with a low, curved-gable "boxcar" roof, which was added onto later. By 1940,

former Colorado Governor Julius C. Gunter owned the property and it was part of the Brown's Sheep Camp complex. Gunter sold the parcel to Ben Gutierrez, who used the homestead as one of five camps to house shepherds

who were looking after his large herds of sheep. The structure is standing today.

**THE ORIGINAL HOUSE WAS A STONE ONE-ROOM DWELLING WITH A LOW, CURVED-GABLE "BOXCAR" ROOF, WHICH WAS ADDED ONTO LATER.**





# Baldwin Ranch

Baldwin Ranch was established in 1918 at the mouth of Stage Canyon as the homestead of Felipe Leyva, a Hispanic rancher from New Mexico. The stage road through Bent Canyon would have passed by the immediate area. The ranch includes a two-room house of stone masonry, to which a third room was added on the north-east side at a later date. Leyva also constructed a stone barn, wagon shed, and several corrals. This

land was purchased by Eugene H. Rourke in 1920. The Rourke Ranch, based in the Purgatoire River bottom since about 1870, focused their ranching operation along Bent and lower Welsh

Canyons. The property was purchased by Charles Baldwin in 1971.

BALDWIN RANCH WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1918  
AT THE MOUTH OF STAGE CANYON AS THE  
HOMESTEAD OF FELIPE LEYVA, A HISPANIC  
RANCHER FROM NEW MEXICO.



# Summary

The earliest ranches and homesteads in the Purgatoire River valley, along with that land that became the PCMS, were established in the late 1860s by both Anglo and Hispanic settlers. Although there were instances of groups or individuals who did not get along, the general picture is one of cooperation and adaptation shown by livestock ranching practices and architecture, and in their integration through marriage and commerce. The Purgatoire River valley offers a look at settlement in the American West by a community drawing strength from its multi-ethnic background. Based on an evaluation of the structures on the PCMS, the single most important factor to the success of a residence or ranch appears to have been access and control of water.

The work of recording and documenting the historic ranches of the PCMS remains an ongoing process, and this publication represents just one contribution to the preservation of the region's historic resources and heritage. The Selected Studies list included in this publication shows some of the technical reports that were consulted during archival research. The reader should find most of these available by contacting the Interlibrary Loan Department of their public library.



THE EARLIEST RANCHES AND HOMESTEADS IN THE  
PURGATOIRE RIVER VALLEY, ALONG WITH THAT LAND  
THAT BECAME THE PCMS, WERE ESTABLISHED IN THE  
LATE 1860S BY BOTH ANGLO AND HISPANIC SETTLERS.



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Front Cover, “And there they go-with our flowers,” Call Number ARL 123.<sup>1</sup>

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Pages 5 to 6,  
1928, Second April Number, *Ace-High Magazine* cover with artwork by A.R. Mitchell.<sup>3</sup>  
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Page 7, “Branding and dipping cattle,” Call Number X-21382.<sup>1</sup>

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Page 9, “Clipping a cow’s horns,” Ida Welker Collection Album, Scan #:20003363, Identifier 93.495.52.<sup>2</sup>

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Page 11, “Chama, Colorado and Church,” Photograph by Myron Wood, © Pikes Peak Library District, Image #: 002-3149.<sup>5</sup>

Page 11, “The Wood Carriers of Santa Fe,” Photograph by J. L. Clinton, © Pikes Peak Library District, Image #: 353-11180.<sup>5</sup>

Page 13, “Spanish Land Grant and Rancheros in South Texas.”<sup>7</sup>

Page 14, Major Cattle Trails, Map of cattle trails. US government National Park Service website at [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/pro prospector/images/map2.jpg](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/pro prospector/images/map2.jpg).<sup>6</sup>

Page 16, JJ Ranch, Agriculture-Ranches-JJ, Scan #:10030665, Identifier 95.200.877.<sup>2</sup>

Page 17, Prairie Cattle Co., Occupation-Cowboys-Camps, Scan #:10031825, Identifier PH.PROP.2695.<sup>2</sup>

Page 18, “Colorado 83 with Pikes Peak,” Photograph by Myron Wood, © Pikes Peak Library District, Image #: 002-1293.<sup>5</sup>

Page 19, “Treaty with Spain, 1819,” Albert Bushnell Hart, LL.D., The American Nation Vol 14 (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1906) Downloaded from Maps ETC, on the web at [http://etc.usf.edu/maps \[map #02335\]](http://etc.usf.edu/maps[map #02335]).<sup>8</sup>

Page 21, Map of Mexican Land Grants in Colorado, *Colorado Central Magazine*: No 94, page 22.<sup>9</sup>

Page 21, “Territory Acquired from Mexico, 1848,” Edward Eggleston, The Household “History of the United States and Its People (New York, NY: D.Appleton and Company, 1898) Downloaded from Maps ETC, on the web at [http://etc.usf.edu/maps \[map #01247\]](http://etc.usf.edu/maps [map #01247]).<sup>8</sup>

Page 22, “Bent’s Old Fort National Historic Site,” Sally Pearce, Colorado Department of Transportation (cleaned up and color-corrected by Howcheng) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BentsFort.jpg>.<sup>6</sup>

Page 23, “Trinidad, Colo. 1882 county seat of Las Animas County,” Beck & Pauli, lithographers. Created by Stoner, J. J. : Library of Congress Geography.<sup>6</sup>

Page 25, “Homestead Claims” map.<sup>10</sup>

Page 26, Wool Processing Facility, Trinidad Collection, Scan #:10041491, Identifier 88-341.331.<sup>2</sup>

Page 27, “Colorado cattle ranch,” Creator(s) McClure, Louis Charles, Call Number MCC-2410.<sup>1</sup>

Page 29, Working Colts, Trinidad Collection, Scan #:10041488, Identifier 84.193.47.<sup>2</sup>

Page 30, “Carson,” Creator(s) Wolle, Muriel Sibell, Call Number X-4639.<sup>1</sup>

Page 31, “Null House.”<sup>11</sup>

Page 35, “Null House.”<sup>11</sup>

Page 35, “Reid fireplace.”<sup>10</sup>

Page 38, “Rourke Ranch”. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Colorado, 36-OD.V,7A-1.<sup>6</sup>

Page 39, “Isaac Van Bremer”, *Rocky Mountain News*, December 1, 1902, Page 1.<sup>6</sup>

Page 42, “Brown’s Sheep Camp.”<sup>10</sup>

Page 42, “Julius Gunter”, 21st Governor of Colorado, at [www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives](http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives).<sup>6</sup>

Page 44, “Plimpton homestead.”<sup>10</sup>

Back Cover, Cowboys of the Bloom Cattle Company Circle-Diamond Ranch, Agriculture-Ranching-Cowboys, Scan #:10041490, Identifier 84.193.74.<sup>2</sup>

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Selected Studies

As part of the cultural resource surveys carried out on the PCMS after acquisition by the Army, studies of the history and oral history of the region were conducted (Carrillo 1990; Friedman 1985). This research focused particularly on Hispanic and American settlement, and identified over fifty historic sites with architecture that needed evaluation. The condition of these structures ranged from ruins, with just portions of a stone foundation visible, to buildings that had been maintained and occupied into the early 1980s. The historic architectural evaluation of forty-nine of these sites was subsequently completed in 1986, and the report recommended seven homesteads as eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (Hayes and Bastian 1986). In 1989, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) recordations were completed for these seven historic properties (National Park Service 1989). The HABS documentation included data sheets, measured drawings, and large-format photography. In 1999, further architectural and archeological research was conducted at Brown’s Sheep Camp (Hunt et al. 1999).

Additional studies related to historic ranching sites of the region include inventories to locate and evaluate unrecorded sites (Carrillo et al. 1996), studies of stage stops that were later incorporated into ranches (Carrillo et al. 1993; Hardesty et al. 1995), further field-testing and documentation (Church 2001; Church and Henderson 2009; Clark 2003; Corbett 2003; Hunt et al. 1999; McLain 2007; Owens 2009), an extensive oral history project (Loendorf and Clise 1997), and two video-documentaries (Chomko et al. 1992; Harper 1996).

The reader may wish to consult these reports to gain a greater understanding of ranching life in southeastern Colorado.

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Inside back cover

BACK COVER IMAGE:  
*Cowboys of the Bloom Cattle Company’s Circle Diamond Ranch: Clockwise from top left—Albert Lopez, Tony Marpin, Tom Russel, Kitch Lavender, and Joe Lopez. Photo by Arthur Mitchell, 1969.*



