

Desert Tracks

Publication of the Southern Trails Chapter
of the Oregon-California Trails Association

June 2019



Pierre's Site
A Chaco Outlier in Danger from Oil and Gas Development

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the Oregon-California Trails Association*

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On the cover:
Pierre’s Site
photo courtesy Paul Reed

From the Editors

In this issue of *Desert Tracks*, we include an interview with Mark Santiago coupled with a review of his recent book, *A Bad Peace and a Good War: Spain and the Mescalero Apache Uprising of 1795-1799*. In the interview, Santiago, who is the director of the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces, discusses the relations between Spaniards and Native Americans in the northern frontier of New Spain in the 1790s. While most historians have described the period after 1790 as relatively peaceful, Santiago asserts that the Mescalero Apaches' raids on the Spanish beginning in 1795 were widespread and sustained. According to Santiago, Commandant General Pedro de Nava retaliated with coordinated attacks against the Mescaleros, which constituted one of the largest ongoing operations in northern New Spain.

When the ill-fated Donner-Reed Party journeyed west in 1846, they took the Hasting's Cutoff which led to a disastrous trek across the Great Salt Lake Desert. The difficulties they encountered there resulted in splits within the group and loss of cattle and precious time. Instead of the promised two-day journey of over 40 miles, the 80-mile ordeal took six days. Because of the delay, when the emigrants reached the Sierra Nevada Mountains, they became trapped in heavy snowfall near Truckee. We include in these pages an article by Chapter member Dan Talbot entitled "The Last Assault on the Salt Desert" in which Talbot describes his efforts from 1985 to 1987 to trace the emigrants' route across the salt flat. The site was subsequently flooded, so Talbot was most likely the last person to cross the Salt Desert following the Donner-Reed route.

Tracy DeVault and Rose Ann Tompkins have contributed a report on a group search for "Murderer's Grave" near Kenyon's Station, a stagecoach stop of the Butterfield Overland Mail that was located along the Gila River in Arizona. The site was originally named after an accused murderer who was executed there by trail travelers in the 1850s. They also provide a report on the group's mapping trip of the Lordsburg Playa, a large alkaline lake in southwestern New Mexico.

In addition to a review of Mark Santiago's *A Bad Peace and a Good War*, we include a review of Jean Johnson's *Grit and Gold: The Death Valley Jayhawkers of 1849*. Although thousands of gold seekers rushed overland to California in 1849, very few Argonauts took the Death Valley route. The Jayhawkers were part of this group that became known as the Death Valley '49ers. In *Grit and Gold*, Jean John provides an in-depth study of their ordeal.

Our new Chapter president, Mark L. Howe, has degrees in anthropology and history and is currently the cultural resources specialist at the International Boundary and Water Commission in El Paso. In a brief greeting to Chapter members, he expresses his excitement about his new role, a position that he hopes will allow him to increase our Chapter's membership and cooperation with other trail organizations, schools, and agencies.

Brian Dillon has contributed an obituary of Robert Chandler, a retired senior historian for the Wells Fargo Bank History Department, whose specialties included the express business, stage coaching, Gold Rush monetary systems, and California in the Civil War.

We are increasingly concerned about the preservation of trail sites and other historic sites in the West. Indeed, we encourage our readers to send us articles and information relative to preservation to be included in future issues. In these pages we include a letter from Paul Reed of Archaeology Southwest concerning the threat of oil and gas development on historic Chaco Canyon outlier ruins. And our friend Robert Montoya of Taos recounts the controversy regarding a New Deal mural in San Francisco that is under attack. The arguments are similar to those of the recent disputes about Confederate monuments, but in this case concerns the treatment of Native Americans and Blacks.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Brief Notes

In the December 2018 issue of *Desert Tracks*, we included a picture of R.D. Keever with an actor whom we identified as Sam Elliott. Keever points out that the actor in that picture is actually Buck Taylor. Our apologies, R.D.!

Tom Ashmore has notified us that a compendium of his trail research titled *The Butterfield Trail through the Concho Valley and West Texas* is now available online at http://cvassanangelo.org/uploads/ARCHEOLOGICAL_INVESTIGATIONS_GRAPE_CREEK_STATION.pdf.

The 2019 OCTA Convention in Santa Fe, NM, is being hosted by the Southern Trails Chapter. Register online on the OCTA webpage: OCTA-Trails.org. Under the News and Events menu, click on Upcoming Events and then scroll down to find the meeting announcement. There is also a call for volunteers on the chapter website: southern-trails.org.

Dr. Robert J. Chandler, 1942-2019

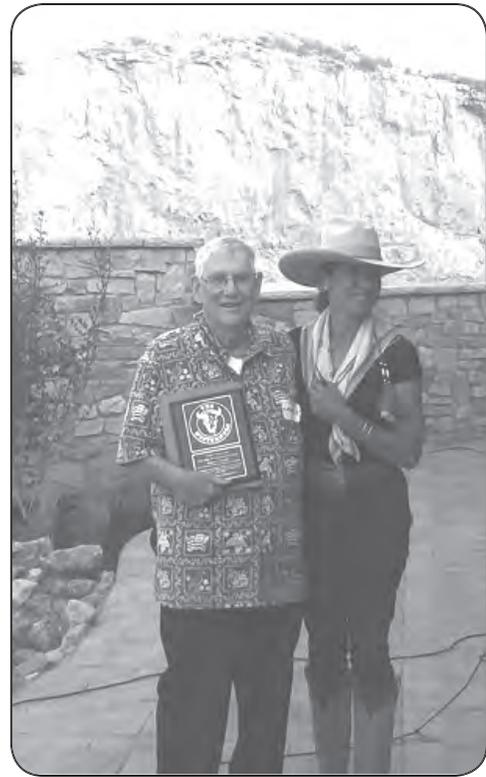
Robert “Bob” Chandler was born in Utah, spent much of his childhood in Hawaii, and attended Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. He earned his Ph.D. in history at the University of California, Riverside. From his 1978 dissertation on *The Press and Civil Liberties in California During the Civil War* and during and after his 32 years as Senior Research Historian for Wells Fargo Bank at its San Francisco headquarters, he wrote more than 60 articles on California and Western American topics in different scholarly journals. Chandler was a mainstay of the *California Territorial Quarterly* and helped guide its progress through a quarter-century of high-quality historical publications. Bob was also the author of a half-dozen full-length books running the gamut from university-level introductory texts to beautifully illustrated biographies.

Bob was a dogged and imaginative researcher, a talented and compelling lecturer, and a tireless, effective, and prize-winning writer. His interests were varied, encompassing not just economic, political, and military macro history, but also a wide range of micro historical topics, including numismatics, banking, stage-coaching, ethnic minorities, international postal history, and California during the Civil War.

Bob was the Sheriff of the San Francisco Corral of the Westerners five times. In 2018 he was accorded Westerners International’s greatest honor when he was proclaimed a Living Legend. He was also a most enthusiastic Clamper, the X-Noble Grand Humbug of Yerba Buena #1, the Mother Lodge of *E Clampus Vitus*.

Bob and I were best of friends and his passing leaves a great hole in my heart and in my life. His ashes were spread by a select group of family and friends on the waters of his beloved San Francisco Bay. A week later, a memorial celebration was held at Bob’s place, attended by family, friends, and admirers. The paeans to our missing comrade were heartfelt, if not always reflective of strict sobriety. A few days later, Bob’s final tribute took the form of a 21-gun salute rendered by my own Boy Scout Troop. Bob cannot be with us today, but he is still all around us, no farther away than the nearest bookshelf.

Brian Dervin Dillon



Robert Chandler receiving the Westerners International Coke Wood Award for historical writing from WI Chair Bonney McDonald in September 2018.

This article is a short excerpt from a full-length obituary in the Spring 2019 issue (No. 294) of the *The Branding Iron*, the publication of the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners.

Greater Chaco Canyon Landscape Threatened by Oil and Gas Development

A few miles north of Chaco Canyon lie the remains of an ancient outpost known as the Pierre’s site. It was undoubtedly an imposing and impressive place several centuries ago. Built atop a towering butte, it would have been visible for many miles. At night, great fires would have urged weary travelers onward, while sending a powerful message of warning to the unwelcome. Even now, at sunset, for example, or when the wind rises, it is an evocative and powerful place.

Yet, in the modern era, it has become a different kind of outpost. For this is where the intensive oil and gas development that has completely transformed and overtaken

so much of northwestern New Mexico over the last few decades begins to taper off. And this is where the landscape that is visible from Chaco Canyon – and which likely appears much as it did at 1000 CE – begins.

This is also the landscape that the archaeological community, along with leaders from all 19 of New Mexico’s pueblos and the Navajo Nation, want set aside from future oil and gas development. It consists of federal lands within 10 miles of the national park, along with several adjoining tracts that harbor significant cultural sites. It is a modest request, when one considers that more than 90 percent of federal lands in the northwestern New Mexico have already been leased for development. In fact, the federal lands around the canyon are some of the last unleased and undeveloped lands in the entire region.

Moreover, the landscape surrounding Chaco Canyon is extraordinarily important from a cultural standpoint and is without question deserving of protection. Archaeologists have identified thousands of sites within the area, including villages, roads, and shrines, many of which were built by Chaco inhabitants. This landscape forms the connective tissue that binds everything together – the canyon with its famed, multi-story great houses and the vast network of roads and villages that fans into adjoining states. If we allow oil and gas development to occupy and fragment this landscape, then it all falls apart.

Last month, New Mexico’s entire congressional delegation – Senators Udall and Heinrich and Representatives Lujan, Haaland, and Torres Small – reintroduced legislation that would set aside federal lands within this area from future oil and gas leasing. I wholeheartedly support this bill. It is a necessary and essential first step in preserving the archaeological record of the greater Chaco landscape. I thank our delegation for its vision and commitment to this tremendous place.

But more is needed in order to spare the heart of the Greater Chaco Landscape from encroaching development. First and foremost, the administration must honor repeated requests from tribal leaders and withdraw lands surrounding Chaco Canyon from future oil and gas leasing. Second, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) must finish the long-awaited joint management plan for the area. This plan must be based on a rigorous viewshed and soundscape analysis and must include significantly stronger protections for cultural resources, as well as local residents, including limiting the location and scale of development. Third, the BLM and BIA must commit to meaningful consultation with all the affected tribes. Finally, the BLM must provide stakeholders, including the tribes, local residents, the National Park Service, and the archaeological community, with a more robust role in the decision-making process for proposed development around Chaco Canyon.

Paul Reed, Archaeology Southwest

From the Chapter President

As your new OCTA-Southern Trails Chapter (STC) president, I would like to introduce myself. I am the Cultural Resources Specialist at the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) in El Paso, Texas, where I work with all the trails traversing the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Just recently I discovered that my great-grandmother came from Indiana by covered wagon to Nebraska around 1880. My cousins plan to send her trip diary to Travis Boley for inclusion in OCTA’s trail diary collection.

As president, I will try to double our chapter membership, and I ask for your help in this ambitious project. I am also committed to increased cooperation with other trails organizations, universities, and local, state, and federal agencies. At a recent meeting of the Society for Historians in the Federal Government, I made many connections which I hope will help promote interest in OCTA and the Southern Trails.

I look forward to seeing you at the OCTA Annual Convention this September 3-7 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Please volunteer to help out if you can.

Mark Howe

Grit and Gold: The Death Valley Jayhawkers of 1849

Jean Johnson

Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2018.

ISBN: 978194385977.

272 pages, hardback, \$34.95.

Although thousands of gold seekers rushed overland to California in 1849, less than 100 Argonauts took the Death Valley route. The Jayhawkers, a group of young men from Knox County in western Illinois, were part of this group that became known as the Death Valley '49ers. In *Grit and Gold*, Jean Johnson provides an in-depth study of the Jayhawkers' journey from Illinois to the goldfields and also reconstructs their interactions with other groups and individuals that shared their desert ordeal, including the Bug Smashers, the Towne Boys, and the Wade/Brier party.

Leaving western Illinois in April 1849, the emigrants travelled through Iowa and then followed the trail along the north side of the Platte. In the Platte Valley, some of the men formed a brotherhood that they called the "Jayhawkers." After traversing South Pass, they angled off toward Salt Lake City where the Mormons told them it would not be safe to take the northern route over the Sierra Nevada to the gold fields. The story of the Donner Party tragedy of 1846 was still fresh in the minds of the emigrants and it was already October, so it didn't take much to convince the Jayhawkers and several other groups to take the southern route along the Old Spanish Trail and cross at the south end of the Sierras.

Jefferson Hunt, a former captain in the Mormon Battalion, agreed to guide more than 100 emigrant wagons southward towards Los Angeles and then north to the goldfields. When they reached the Beaver River in southern Utah, Hunt led the train west along a route he had never before travelled in order to cut some miles off the trip. After getting bogged down in the Escalante Desert where no water could be found, some of the wagons resumed the original plan, which was to continue with Hunt onto the Old Spanish Trail near Cedar City and follow it to California. Most of the group, however, lost confidence in their guide. The emigrants were shown a fraudulent map that showed a short cut with sufficient water for them to go directly to Walker Pass in the southern Sierra Nevada. This convinced most of them to split from Hunt

and travel directly westward. About 30 of the Platte River Jayhawkers, the Bug Smashers, four families, and various independent men left the Hunt train near the present day town of Enterprise, Utah. They passed through southern Nevada where they split into smaller groups, but within a five-day period during the 1849 Christmas season, they all entered Death Valley via Furnace Creek Wash. Here they split into two groups, with a small group heading south. The primary focus of Johnson's book is on the journey of the northern group, which included the Jayhawkers.

The day before Christmas, the Jayhawkers left Travertine Springs and followed Furnace Creek into *terra incognita*, Death Valley. After crossing the Panamint Mountains and entering the Panamint Valley, most of the travelers turned south, passed by Walker Pass, and entered the Mojave Desert in what was the worst part of their ordeal. At the southern end of the Antelope Valley, they entered Soledad Pass and crossed the San Gabriel Mountains to the head of the Santa Clara River, where they were rescued at Rancho San Francisco.

One of the strengths of Johnson's book is her narration of the ordeals of the journey, including several nearly disastrous stampedes of oxen. Her descriptions of the onset of extreme hunger, thirst, and physical debilitation as the emigrants travelled through the Nevada-California deserts are graphic and harrowing. Desperately hungry and thirsty, the emigrants had to kill their oxen for food even when the oxen were sick and so weakened that their bones had no remaining marrow. At several points during the trip, the travelers abandoned their wagons, made packsacks for their belongings, and walked. Without question, their experience in the Nevada-California deserts was one of the very worst suffered during the Gold Rush, and *Grit and Gold* brings the experience to life.

Another great strength of Johnson's book – and indeed, a major focus of the book – is her documentation, as precisely as currently possible, of the actual routes taken by the different emigrant parties. For Johnson, the determination of the Jayhawkers' route relies on more than primary sources alone, but on a combination of written documents, oral history, and present-day knowledge of the Death Valley landscape. The exact route of the Death Valley '49ers is still disputed, but Johnson attempts

to correct past errors when she can and explains the conflicting viewpoints when no definitive conclusions can be drawn. Providing background and context for her primary materials, Johnson adroitly compliments her narrative with excerpts from reminiscences. The maps also help the reader make sense of the many springs, passes, and peaks that are referenced.

Johnson's sources include manuscripts, Jayhawker scrapbooks, letters, newspaper articles, William Lewis Manly's *Death Valley in '49*, and material written during Jayhawker reunions. The diaries that she uses include the daily journals of William Lorton, a '49er who travelled in the same wagon train as the Jayhawkers from Illinois to southwestern Utah, and the diaries of Sheldon Young, who became a Death Valley Jayhawker. No armchair traveler, Jean Johnson does on-site research as well. Her knowledge of Death Valley enables her to draw her own conclusions as to the emigrants' descriptions of the landmarks they saw, the places they camped, and the trails they took. She includes photographs, maps, detailed endnotes, an excellent bibliography, and a useful index.

The book is organized into nine chapters, each section documenting a stage of the Jayhawkers' journey. An afterward provides details regarding the Jayhawkers' lives once they had survived their harrowing Death Valley experience. Because the book follows several groups who split up and reunited at various times, it can occasionally be confusing. And, since the focus is primarily on the Jayhawkers, the reader is forewarned that he/she will not learn the fate of all of the Death Valley 49ers. However, we found that there is much online material that resolves these minor problems.

Jean Johnson's *Grit and Gold* is richly documented, fascinating in content, and well written. The book adds a great deal to the primary sources on Death Valley literature. It is a story for professional historians and casual readers alike. Johnson is to be commended for drawing our attention to this exciting and often neglected slice of gold rush history.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

A Bad Peace and a Good War: Spain and the Mescalero Apache Uprising of 1795–1799

Mark Santiago

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8061-6155-6.

Pp. xii, 248. Hardcover, \$32.95.

Borderland scholars have long argued that after the implementation of Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez's policies of 1786, the Interior Provinces of New Spain's northern frontier experienced three decades of relative peace between the Apaches and the Spaniards. *Apaches de paz*, living in *establecimientos de paz* (peace establishments) near Spanish presidios, remained at peace and raiding from outside Apache groups was minimal. According to Gálvez, "A bad peace with all the nations who ask for it will be more beneficial to us than the efforts of a good war." However, Mark Santiago argues that from 1795 through 1799 the hostility between the Mescalero Apaches and the Spaniards was so bad that it could be categorized as a long-lasting war. The scarcity of records detailing the Apache lands outside the Spanish frontier has long obscured the violence that occurred in the region. In *A Bad Peace and a Good War*, Santiago attempts to fill the void by telling the story of the Mescalero War of 1795-99 and setting it in the context of the ongoing Spanish attempts to contain Apache aggression. Santiago asserts that General Pedro de Nava y Porlier's campaign against the Mescaleros was "the most sustained Spanish military operation along the northern frontier throughout the entire eighteenth century" (7).

The first half of Santiago's book is an extended discussion of the background history that led to the war of 1795-1799. The main focus is on the Mescalero and Lipan Apaches. These Apaches lived in west Texas, eastern New Mexico, and in the adjoining provinces of northern Mexico. Following a brief treatment of the origin of the eastern Apaches, Santiago discusses their initial resistance to Spanish intrusion as well as their early attempts to establish peace with the Spaniards. These efforts followed in the wake of highly destructive Comanche attacks on Apache villages.

In 1772, the Spanish crown issued a set of regulations that established a unified military command over New Spain's northern frontier. Colonel Hugo O'Connor was appointed

as the first commandant general. O'Connor established a line of presidios and forts across the northern frontier, and in 1773 he began to attack Apaches in their homeland. He implemented the policy of deporting captured Apaches. Those Apaches who refused to remain at peace and who continued to raid and wage war against the Spaniards were taken as prisoners, bound, and sent in *colleras* (chain gangs) south to central Mexico and on to Cuba to serve sentences of forced labor. As discussed in Santiago's previous book, *The Jar of Severed Hands: Spanish Deportation of Apache Prisoners of War, 1770-1810* (U. Oklahoma Press, 2011), this policy had a devastating effect on the Apache population. Despite these aggressive actions, however, the Spaniards were not able to stop Apache raiding on the northern frontier during O'Connor's tenure.

O'Connor was replaced by Teodoro de Croix in 1777. Croix increased the strength of the troops, erected a second line of defense behind the presidial cordon, and attempted to forge alliance with Indians who were enemies of the Apaches. Because war between Spain and England was imminent, Croix was ordered in 1779 to reduce Spanish hostilities toward Apaches and attempt to foster peace. Croix adopted a velvet glove/mailed fist approach: those Apaches who settled near Spanish presidios, grew their own food, and assisted the Spaniards in their conflicts with other Apaches, would receive food rations and assistance in housing and farming, as well as opportunities for trade with the Spaniards and protection from the Comanches. Those who did not do this would be attacked and killed in their remote villages, and those who were captured would be deported. This policy was the origin of the *establecimientos de paz*. In 1785 the king appointed Bernardo de Gálvez as viceroy of New Spain. Conde de Gálvez formulated a series of policies, the *Instructions for the Governing of the Interior Provinces of New Spain*, which in effect formalized Croix's velvet glove/mailed fist policy. Rather than attempting to contain the Indians through warfare, Gálvez sought to make them dependent on Spanish welfare.

In 1790 Pedro de Nava became commandant general of the Eastern Provinces of New Spain. Convinced that he could create a system of peace establishments that would encourage Apaches to settle down and forgo raiding, he encouraged Mescaleros living in the mountains beyond New Spain's northern frontier to join the *Mescaleros*

de paz residing near El Paso, Presidio San Elizario, and Presidio del Norte. Nava sent out search and destroy missions designed to compel Indians who did not join the *Mescaleros de paz* to be deported in *colleras* to Veracruz and Havana. After four years of co-ordinated Spanish raids into Mescalero lands, Pedro de Nava felt that he had limited the Apaches' ability to attack the Spanish settlements in the Interior Provinces. Unfortunately, France declared war with Spain in 1793, which led to cost-cutting measures throughout New Spain. In late 1794, Nava responded by diminishing food rations to the Apaches and restricting trade between the *Apaches de Paz* and the Spaniards.

This new policy, along with a growing Apache dissatisfaction with the Spanish, led to the 1795-1790 war. The war began when Mescaleros annihilated two detachments of Spanish soldiers. Such a defeat was intolerable to the Spaniards. The second half of Santiago's book is a detailed military history of the Spanish response, in which continual search and destroy missions coupled with deportation gradually brought a semblance of peace to new Spain's northern frontier.

A historian and director of the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum, Santiago bases his narrative on a new examination of archival Spanish documents, such as the communications of Pedro de Nava. The book gives the reader an appreciation of what the Spanish military faced on the northern frontier during the late 18th century. *A Bad Peace and a Good War* makes a valuable contribution to an important issue in borderlands history, namely, the effectiveness of the presidios, the peace establishments, and the deportations in subduing the Apaches over the extended period of Spanish control from 1779 to 1821.

Santiago is not only a careful researcher, but he tells a compelling story. The characters, such as Pedro de Nava y Porlier and Antonio de Cordero y Bustamante, are colorful and the events of the war make exciting reading. We recommend *A Bad Peace and a Good War* to both scholars and to general readers interested in Southwest borderland history.

Deborah and Jon Lawrence

The Mescalero War An Interview with Mark Santiago

*conducted and edited by
Deborah and Jon Lawrence*

The director of the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Mark Santiago is a leading expert on Spanish military relations with Indians in northern New Spain in the late 1700s. He is the author of *The Red Captain: The Life of Hugo O’Conor* (1994), *Massacre at the Yuma Crossing* (1998), and *The Jar of Severed Hands* (2011). We interviewed Santiago in Las Cruces on March 5, 2019, focusing on the background to and the consequences of the Mescalero War of 1795-1799, as related in his recent book *A Bad Peace and a Good War*.



Mark Santiago.
photo by Dawn Santiago

Deborah and Jon Lawrence (DJL): Beginning in the 16th century, Spanish policy formally banned ill-treatment of Indians and stressed the formation of peace agreements with enemy Indians. Why and how, despite these policies, did violence against the Indians continue? Did the Regulations of 1772¹ deviate from past precedent by authorizing an offensive war against non-Christian Indians?

Mark Santiago (MS): Yes and no. From the 16th century onwards, the crown did mandate good treatment of the Indians. But there were methods for the Spaniards to engage in all kinds of operations against recalcitrant

Indians. The way around the mandate was to declare the Indians rebels or apostates so that a war of fire and blood – *la guerra de fuego y sangre* – could be waged against them.

What changed in 1772 in part had to do with the expulsion of the Jesuit order in 1767.² Earlier, the “reduction” of Native peoples occurred primarily through the auspices of the mendicant religious orders – the Jesuits, the Dominicans, and the Franciscans. The acculturation of the natives by the religious was the primary method of directed cultural change. The military was seen as secondary; it was viewed as a way to coerce the Indians and protect the efforts of the religious. With the expulsion of the Jesuits, there was a transition during which the military was elevated above the religious. Directed cultural change became a matter of state – and the most efficient arm of the state was the military.

In 1772 there was an attempt to coordinate the military across the Interior Provinces, where before it had been sporadic and piecemeal. This led to the establishment of what was essentially a military government for the entire northern frontier. The expulsion of the Jesuits and the establishment of this new military system moved in parallel with the so-called Bourbon reforms³ during which the Spanish government centralized its power. This was in reaction to Spain’s losses in the Seven Years’ War.⁴ The Spanish realized that another war with Britain was inevitable. They had suffered a humiliating defeat in the Seven Years’ War, and they were determined to strengthen their defenses so that the losses that had occurred – the loss of Havana and the Philippines – would not be repeated. As part of this militarization of the Spanish empire, a new viceroyalty was founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the captaincy generals of Venezuela and Havana were reinforced. There were also bureaucratic changes, for example to get better taxation, but it all had a military purpose to it.

Now the whole point of the Spanish empire was to get silver back to Spain – to some extent from Peru, but mostly from Mexico. And the Spaniards believed that the British, and later the Americans, might attempt to attack central Mexico and take over the mines.

DJL: So they needed to have a buffer against the British on the north?

MS: Very much so. At this time, the mines were in Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas, which lie just below the Interior Provinces. So they had to protect the Interior Provinces because all the silver came up through there. Following the Seven Year's War, Spain acquired Louisiana from France so they did have a partial buffer, and New Mexico and Texas became secondary buffer zones. But they needed to strengthen control of the Interior Provinces because if the mines were lost, everything was lost. It was in this context that they appointed a commandant general for the Interior Provinces.

DJL: That was when Hugo O'Connor stepped in.⁵

MS: That's right. The new policies for treatment of the Indians and the reorganization of the presidios were tied into this great militarization of the empire that started around 1772. The launching of offensive operations really began with O'Connor. He was the first commandant inspector of the Interior Provinces. Teodoro de Croix later became commandant general of the Interior Provinces, a more elevated position.⁶ Where before the presidios were scattered and designed to protect missions and mines, now they were reorganized into a line of presidios with the idea that they were going to project power.

DJL: But they were not designed to block the Indians from going south and they weren't intended to make up a wall. They were bases of operations. And the Indians easily got around them, right?

MS: Right, it was not a Hadrian's Wall and the Indians easily got around the presidios. They were 80 to 100 miles apart. And, of course, the Indians knew that. If the presidios' garrisons joined together, they could hit the Indians when they were coming back up with their booty, and maybe if they were lucky they could catch them on the way down before they broke through the line of presidios. But what was most important was that the presidios allowed the Spaniards to penetrate into the Indian zone. O'Connor stated very clearly, as did

the commandant generals who come after him, that if the Indians had to deal with invasions of their own lands, they were going to have less time to invade Spanish lands. That was the key purpose of the presidios.

DJL: How many men were stationed in a presidio, and how did that number change over time?

MS: Initially in 1772, there was a standard garrison of approximately 50 men including officers, which was what most presidios had in the late 17th century. Over time the standard number rose to about 75 for most of them. A few key presidios in strategic locations had up to 144 men.⁷ When O'Connor was first appointed commandant inspector, he had about 1,000 men altogether. Over time he increased that to about 1,300 and Croix increased it to about 2,000. By the 1790s when Nava was there,⁸ there were perhaps 3,000 men. But that number included soldiers all the way from the Californias to Texas, a huge area. There were more soldiers stationed in one fort in Cuba than all the Spanish soldiers from San Francisco to New Orleans.

DJL: The Spaniards recruited Indians and armed them so they could help them fight other Indians. Did these Indians live in the presidios with the Spanish soldiers?

MS: Yes. Previously to 1772, the Spanish used Indian auxiliaries. The Indians were never referred to as "soldiers," which reflected racial attitudes. Many of the presidios were near or next to missions, so they often recruited missionized Indians on an as-needed basis. When O'Connor came in, they begin to use the Opata Indians who lived in the Sierra Madre of eastern Sonora and what is now the western part of the state of Chihuahua.⁹ They were mountain people and they were very warlike. At that time, the Opata were Hispanicized to a certain extent and today they are no longer a distinct ethnic group in Mexico because they have been mestizo-ized. The Spanish begin to assemble groups of ten Opata, calling them "scouts," and stationed them in the presidios. That went on from 1775 to 1788 or so. In 1788, they stopped designating them as scouts and they congregated them, forming two presidios of Opata soldiers and another presidio of Pimas Altos from Sonora. Their officers and NCOs were Spanish, but they were regular soldiers, even though they were Indians.

DJL: Which presidios had these Indian soldiers?

MS: Bacoachi and Bavispe in eastern Sonora had the Opata. The presidio at Tubac, which was re-established as an Indian presidio after the Spanish moved Tubac to Tucson, had Pimas. They renamed it *San Rafael de Buena Vista*, but it was at the same site as the earlier Tubac presidio. So they had three companies of Indian infantry, foot soldiers, who were regular soldiers in the army

DJL: Wasn't it unusual for Spaniards to use Indians as soldiers?

MS: Not in the borderlands. In the rest of Mexico, Indians were forbidden to bear arms – Mexico had a very racialized hierarchy. But on the northern frontier, there was a break from the social norms of the rest of Mexico. It happened because they needed Indian allies.

DJL: In 1786, Bernardo de Gálvez¹⁰ issued policy recommendations that promoted an iron fist/velvet glove approach to the Apaches. The fist entailed offensive military campaigns to the point of exterminating Apaches if necessary and deporting any captive belligerents. The glove involved offers of peace, gifts, and rations to give Apaches incentives to lay down their arms, settle near Spanish military forts on *establecimientos de paz*,¹¹ and agree to aid the Spanish in campaigns against other Apache groups. How did this policy evolve?

MS: The whole idea of peace by purchase started with the Chichimeca War of 1550-90.¹² These were highly recalcitrant Indians and the Spaniards used the mailed fist and the velvet glove approach – the combination of gift giving and bribery to get them to settle down and acculturate and military force if they didn't. So there was a precedent for that policy. In the 18th century that began again. During the periods of O'Connor and Croix, there were informal attempts to negotiate. If the Apaches said they would make peace, the Spanish would grant it to them. The 1786 regulations of Gálvez were explicit in saying that if the Indians requested peace it was to be granted. The Spanish kings were Catholic Christians, and they had the idea that you

should always give the Indians the benefit of the doubt. If they say they will make peace, you take them at their word, even when the soldiers on the ground doing the fighting were against such a policy. They saw the Apaches making peace and then breaking out and continuing to raid.

The policy of peace by purchase was nothing really new. Gálvez gets credit for being the first to really enunciate it and for thinking ahead. He became viceroy of Mexico basically because his uncle José de Gálvez was the first minister of the Indies.¹³ He was given great authority over the Interior Provinces. Where earlier the commandant general had been more-or-less independent of the viceroy, when Gálvez became viceroy, he got direct control. He set up the new policy but then he died right away.

After Gálvez died, they broke the commandancy generalship into two, with an eastern half headed by Ugalde and a western half headed by Ugarte.¹⁴ While these two commanders were supposed to work in tandem, they didn't: they were rivals and they competed. Ugarte tried to follow Gálvez's instructions but Ugalde didn't – he only followed the policy when it suited him. Whereas under O'Connor and Croix there had been a single unified policy, now there wasn't since at the highest level there was a split in the command structure. The Apaches were able to manipulate this confusion of power.

Ugarte and Ugalde eventually were replaced, with Pedro de Nava in the west and Ramón de Castro in the east. The same thing happened: they competed and followed different policies.¹⁵ Then Castro was recalled – he became governor of Puerto Rico. Nava was given total control of the area, and beginning about 1790, there was a return to a unified command structure. Nava had seen in the west that the *establecimiento* system, the reservation system, worked. He began to try to expand it farther to the east. He was moderately successful, and by 1791 he had about ten *establecimientos* that were working well with a couple thousand Apaches stretched out across the region. He began to write regulations for how they should be run, how to deal with the Apaches, etc.¹⁶ Nava was able to bring coherence back to what Gálvez really wanted.

DJL: When did the reservations get established?

MS: In 1780, Teodoro de Croix built a place called *Nuestra Señora de la Buena Esperanza* (Our Lady of Good Hope) outside of Presidio del Norte.¹⁷ He had buildings constructed for the Apaches and gave them fields for planting. They tried this for a year or so, but it never got off the ground. The river flooded, a smallpox epidemic hit, and the Apaches left. Then Croix was sent to Peru, so the reservation idea died stillborn.

Beginning around 1785, a little bit before Gálvez, there were other attempts by the Apaches to make peace. This was mainly in Sonora and in western Chihuahua – at Janos, San Buenaventura, Tucson, and Fronteras. When the Apaches asked for peace, the Spanish responded, “Well, you have to hang around here.” The Spaniards didn’t go to the level of constructing buildings for the Indians like Croix did, but they allowed them basically to be in the area. The Apaches had to live outside the presidio. They could live in their own structures, but they had to be in a designated area.

DJL: Did they have to live with other Apache groups that they didn’t want to affiliate with?

MS: Not necessarily. They usually came in with Apaches from allied rancherías. For example, Western Apaches settled outside of Tucson in the 1790s. Many of them stayed until the 1860s.¹⁸ There were no Chiricahuas there because Western Apaches don’t get along with Chiricahuas. The Chiricahuas who settled near presidios were mainly in Chihuahua, although some were in Sonora at Fronteras, Bacoachi, and Bavispe. Even though there were rivalries among them, these Chiricahuas at least knew each other.

Farther to the east, outside El Paso and Presidio del Norte, were the Mescaleros. And even farther east there were Lipan. The Spanish made *establecimientos* with the Apaches in the area from which they came. They did not mix Western Chiricahua with Western Apaches or Chiricahuas with Lipans.

There were periods – for example, during the Mescalero War – when the Spanish had Chirichauas go to Presidio del Norte and El Paso to keep an eye on the Mescaleros who were getting antsy. The Spaniards were very adept.

They played different Apache groups off against each other, and they did this with individuals. They knew, for example, that the head of one ranchería did not like the head of another, so they gave the first leader some goods or privileges that made the second one jealous. Then the Spaniards would say to the second, “Look, you have to come over to us if you want these privileges.”

DJL: To what extent did the Apaches intermingle with the Spanish? Did they intermarry?

MS: They intermingled to some extent, but usually didn’t intermarry. The Spaniards gambled with the Apaches; they used them in campaigns; they gave them clothing, food, and horses. In the late 1790s, a Franciscan priest wrote a report to the king in which he talks about how the reservations were working.¹⁹ Friar Bringas was aghast at the acculturation that was happening. He wrote about how the Apaches were gambling and learning to curse in Spanish. Apache women were becoming promiscuous. He was horrified by this, feeling that the Apaches were becoming corrupted by the soldiers and the settlers. As an aside, Bringas reported that the Apaches in Tucson were much more chaste, much more religious. The Apaches there greeted each other with *Ave Maria santísima* (Hail Mary most holy). He liked that behavior, which he was contrasting with what he saw in Bacoachi. I should mention that I first got an account of the Mescalero War in Bringas’ report.

Of course the religious orders thought that the reservations were not working at all. They felt that the dealings with the Indians should be given to the missionaries so that the Apaches could be culturally directed to become good Catholics. But from Nava’s point of view, the reservation Apaches were more or less under the control of the military and it didn’t matter if they became Catholic. The military just cared that they wouldn’t go off and murder anybody.

DJL: The Spaniards incorporated Mexican Indian groups into what became a mestizo society. Did any of the Apache groups become mestizos?

MS: There is a speculation that there was a small group of Apaches, perhaps 20 or 30, that survived until the 1930s in the Sierra Madres in what would now be Sonora. They

were either killed or absorbed by local people. Probably a number of the Apaches in Tucson were absorbed into the Tucson society. But as a whole, none of the mixing that happened with other Native peoples – like the Yaquis and the Pimas – occurred with the Apaches.

The Spanish system is based on the idea that the Indians would become members of Spanish society. This may be at the lowest levels, but it is nevertheless within the society. The American system is the exact opposite: the Indians will always be apart from the society. To a large extent, that is why on American reservations these tribal identities remain. In much of Mexico and Latin America, those tribal identities don't persist because the Indians eventually were absorbed by the larger population.

DJL: The Mescalero War that is the topic of your book took place when the Gálvez policy and the system of *establecimientos* had just been established. After an initial period of quiet, Mescaleros resumed active raiding. Over the next five years, the Spaniards responded with the mailed fist, with offensive operations. But as earlier, they used Indian allies in their operations. This leads to the question: What role did the Comanches have in the Mescalero War?

MS: From the Apache point of view, they had a big effect. Whatever the Spanish did, the Mescaleros always had to look over their shoulders because the Comanches were up there in the north. The Comanches were expansionists who were trying to maintain a monopoly on the southern buffalo plains that the Apaches – especially the Lipan and Jicarillas, which were buffalo cultures – relied on. The Mescaleros were in a transitional ecological zone. They could hunt and gather in the mountains and desert basins like the Chiricahuas and Western Apaches, but they also had access to the buffalo plains. So they had a mixed economy. They got the name “Mescalero” because they harvested mescal agave, which is partially edible. So at different times of the year they went into the mountains and deserts to harvest natural foods. They also sowed some corn. But at other times of the year, they went to the plains to hunt buffalo.

The Apaches were initially in control of the southern buffalo plains. But through trade with the so-called nations of the north – the Wichita and Caddos – the Comanches were able to get firearms and gun powder. So very quickly between 1720 to about 1750 the Comanches began to have pronounced military superiority over the Apaches.

The Spaniards attacked Apache homelands in the Big Bend area up into what would now be eastern and central New Mexico. If the Apaches fled from the Spanish into the buffalo plains, they were in danger from the Comanches. There were several instances of Apaches fleeing from the Spaniards only to be demolished by the Comanches. It was a bad time to be a Mescalero or a Lipan. So while the Comanches didn't have a direct role in the war, they constricted the ability of the Mescaleros to react to Spanish attack.²⁰

DJL: What did you learn about the deportations of Apaches in the borderlands when you were researching *A Bad Peace and A Good War* that you didn't know when you wrote *The Jar of Severed Hands*?

MS: In writing this book I learned that in a number of cases of deportation in the 1790s, the Apaches in the *colleras* were clearly Mescaleros. In particular this was true of one of the more interesting stories that I wrote about in *The Jar of Severed Hands*, where a group of Apache women managed to escape from a *collera* that was sent out in 1799.²¹

DJL: Were the Mescaleros ever able to get their people back?

MS: I never found any instances of the Mescaleros doing that. There are instances that I refer to in *Jar of Severed Hands* of Chiricahuas negotiating for their relatives' return. While the Spanish made a fairly sincere attempt to return the captives, some had already died and some were in Cuba so they couldn't get them back. The Apaches were more successful when they began to negotiate before their relatives were shipped to Cuba. Once they were shipped to Cuba, it was pretty much over.

DJL: Do you think that there are descendants of deported Apaches still in Cuba?

MS: Not as any recognizable group. There are possibly individuals who melded into Cuban society. There are instances of slave uprisings or runaway slaves where it is clear that the leaders were Apaches.

DJL: Where did you learn that you can identify Apaches in rebellions in Cuba?

MS: From a dissertation by Paul Conrad, a graduate student at UT Austin, that concerned topics similar to those I wrote about in *The Jar of Severed Hands*.²² In the early 1800s, a governor of Cuba said, “We don’t want any more Apaches because they are causing trouble here.” But the Crown continued to send them there because they didn’t want those Apaches returning to their homelands. So the way to prevent the Apaches from escaping and going back north was to put them on an island where they could never escape.

DJL: How successful was the effort to subdue the Apaches in the long run? In particular, did the *establecimientos de paz* function well during the period of Spanish control from 1800-1821 or did the Spaniards continue to carry out large-scale campaigns against the Apaches?

MS: Overall, Spanish efforts were quite successful. By the early 1790s, there were reservations spread out over northern New Spain with approximately 2,000 Apaches. This was out of a total of 10,000 to 15,000 Apaches overall.²³ So something like a fifth of them had more or less become acculturated. The policy seemed to be working well from 1791 through 1795, but then there was the outbreak of the Mescalero War. The Spanish had to resume offensive operations until the Mescaleros calmed down again. From 1800 to at least 1810, things went fairly well. There were still offensive operations, but they tended to be regional, not large scale operations. The Mexican War of Independence began in 1810. Many of the Spanish soldiers were diverted to fight the insurgents. Father Hidalgo was captured and killed, and Morelos, who took over the insurgency, was killed in 1815. While the embers of the Mexican Revolution seemed to have been extinguished along the northern frontier, American filibusters were

coming into Texas. Although there were great strains on the system, it survived. One indication of this is that there were more *colleras* – several that went at least to Chihuahua, one to central Mexico, and one in 1816 to Cuba. So there was still activity and the system seemed to be working.

The system really didn’t break down until after Mexican independence,²⁴ and even then the remains of the reservation system lasted for another decade. In part this was because the Apaches wanted to keep the system going because they were benefiting from it. After Mexico achieved independence, money was not available, not just for the Apaches but for anything that needed to be done. Governors were fighting among themselves. More and more Americans were coming in, and there were the rumblings of Texas independence. So it became chaotic. Throughout the 1820s, the Mexicans noted that there were still Apaches trying to come in and make peace. There still were battles, but after the Apaches were beaten, they would say, “Let’s go back to the old way.” Several of the peace establishments still continued, at Janos, Bacoachi, and Tucson. The ones at Tucson stayed until the 1860s as a separately identifiable group called *Apache Mansos*.²⁵ After 1831, open war broke out with the Apaches and the Comanches, and the system broke down completely.

DJL: What are your primary sources, and did you find significant differences in the types of information you found in the archives in Spain, Mexico, and the U.S.?

MS: A few of the presidio records have survived. These are reports from the men on the ground. The post records went to headquarters in Chihuahua or Arispe. The superiors at headquarters, for example Nava, then forwarded reports to Mexico City. These were copied, condensed, and bundled with other reports and sent to Madrid or to Seville. The farther from the field, from the local to the imperial, the more general the reports became.

The archives in Spain usually include records that have gone through several scribes, and most of them are summaries. The Archivo General de Simancas in Spain tends to be the official military archives while the Archivo General de las Indias (AGI) are the imperial archives of all of Spain’s holdings. The Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City is the archive for the viceroyalty of New

Spain; it includes records from the military headquarters in Chihuahua and Arispe. Archives kept at the post, like in Janos, can now be found at the University of Texas, El Paso (UTEP); the University of Texas, Austin; and the University of Arizona. The Ciudad de Juarez Archives are at UTEP and UT Austin. Many of the things that are available in the United States are local church records such as baptisms and marriages. For example, Sul Ross State University has the archives of the church at Ojinaga.

DJL: Are these archives online so that you don't have to travel to Spain?

MS: Yes, which is a big reason that I can afford to do this work. The Portal de Archivos Españoles in Spain is an open database that has many records online as does the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico. Some records that aren't available online are available in the States on microfilm – for instance, UC Berkeley has a very large collection from AGI in Spain in that form. The University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, UTEP, and the University of Arizona have copies of records from Mexico City. For the American student, it saves money to be able to look up material in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, as opposed to having to go to Spain or Mexico City.

DJL: Richard and Shirley Flint²⁶ told us that many of the colonial records are written in cursive with no punctuation and inconsistent spelling, making them very difficult to translate.

MS: It drives historians crazy. Concerning spelling, the Spaniards wrote the Indian names phonetically, so that sometimes the name was written one way, sometimes another. But if you see the different names in several documents, you can begin to understand that they represent the same person. Very often the Spaniards would give an Apache a Spanish name, for example “Francisco.” But this could cause confusion, and there's even an instance where Pedro de Nava ordered his men, “Don't give them all Spanish names. Write their Apache name down because there are 15 ‘Franciscos.’”

DJL: What do you recommend as the good secondary

sources for what we have been talking about today?

MS: For general background, David Weber's books. His book *Bárbaros* gives a continental-wide perspective for the Bourbon era in the New World. John Kessel's books are also very good as background and Juliana Barr's *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman* is a very good book with a Texas focus. Max Moorhead's books that came out in the late 1960s and early 70s – *The Presidio* and *The Apache Frontier* – are excellent and definitive. They have really stood the test of time. They are the fount for a lot of what I did and others have done more recently. Sara Ortelli wrote *Trama de una guerra conveniente: Nueva Vizcaya y la sombra de los apaches (1748-1790)*, where she convincingly argues that many of the depredations that the Apaches have been blamed for were actually done by a mixed group of Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans who had a very intricate system for cattle and horse stealing throughout southern Chihuahua. Sometimes they would use the Apaches and sometimes the Apaches would use them. She contends that much that was occurring was for social reasons and it really didn't have much to do with the Apaches.

DJL: Your book includes excellent maps and reports of specific battles. Clearly you have a good understanding of the terrain.

MS: I grew up in Arizona and I've lived in New Mexico for almost 20 years now. I've been to Texas and northern Mexico numerous times, and I've been to many of the places that I've written about. When the reports concern Presidio del Norte, or El Paso, or Hueco Tanks, I know what they are talking about. It certainly helps to know the geography. If someone is from the East, they may miss the reality of the vast spaces of the Southwest. And it helps to be familiar with the environment. If you have ever been in Arizona when it is 122 degrees out, you know what that is like. It doesn't matter if you are an Indian, an Anglo or an Hispanic person. I think that some of the insights that I may have come from having lived here.

DJL: What are you working on now and did it come out of this recent book?

MS: Yes, some of it did. I am working on an overview

of the presidio period, but I am focusing on particular stories that are more personal, more evocative of what life was like. I am trying to find one of two stories from every decade from about 1700 to 1810 or 1820. I have a number of them filled in. My goal is to have an overview of Spanish military policy during that period, but to also highlight it with a particular story from each era.

DJL: We are very interested in the more personal aspect of the Indian wars. When we were reading Julianna Barr's *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman* and Gary Clayton Anderson's *The Indian Southwest*, we got the strong impression that there were records, perhaps mission records, where you could really see how these people were living and what they were suffering. There must have been an enormous amount of suffering – sometimes drought, sometimes an enemy. Is there a way to get a sense of how they were actually living?

MS: For most records, the authors were not interested in day-to-day human interest stories. They were interested in the success of an operation or in saving people's souls. Documents with the personal touch are few and far between. A lot of the personal records come from the reports of the missions, the settlements, or the presidios. They were dealing with the Indians on a daily basis. Of course, many of these reports are census, baptismal, or marriage records and, like our records today, they simply give the facts. "She was 21 years old. She died." But it is possible sometimes to extrapolate. You can see birth rates, mortality rates for children, marriage rates, and burial rates over the course of time. Then you can make general assumptions. You have to assemble a lot of material and then extrapolate, but even when you are able to do that and see something about the Indians' lives, it is always going to be through the lens of an outsider looking in. Even the most sympathetic Spanish missionary or Spanish soldier writing about an Apache will not have the same understanding as the Indian he was writing about.

You *can* get a sense of the Apaches' culture, their lifestyles, how they saw things. How they fought, how they viewed war, how they regarded the Spaniards. And it is possible to follow individuals. The same individuals

often appear in narrative reports. "This particular Apache came in and talked to us about peace." And you can follow individuals in ration reports. The *establecimientos* kept records of the men and sometimes the women who came in. "This month they received some cigars, a uniform, and a hat." But these are rare occurrences.

DJL: There is a huge similarity between the way the Spaniards approached the Apaches and what the American military did after the Civil War to all Indian groups. For example, with the Comanches, the U.S. military basically hounded them to death until they came in.

MS: How does a nation state deal with nomadic or semi-nomadic raiders who are so mobile that they cannot be attacked as you would a nation state? Well, you take away their ability to feed themselves, to survive. Nava realized that. Many of the Spanish successes in the Mescalero War came about both by harassing the Apaches directly or by destroying the Mescaleros' ability to feed themselves. In the book, I relate the story of a battle out near Devil's River in Texas (128-131). It was not a very big battle and many of the Mescaleros got away, but there is a listing of what the Spanish took. It is clear that the Mescalero camp had just had a successful buffalo hunt and that they were getting ready for the winter. The buffalo meat was going to last them for the next six months. But the Spanish come in and ran them off and took everything they had. They lost their horses, their weapons, their tepees, and all of their food. They had literally only the clothes on their back. They were out there in the middle of nowhere between the Comanches and the Spaniards. How were they going to live? God knows what happened to those people.

Notes

1. The New Laws of the Indies, issued by the Spanish Crown in 1542, were designed to prevent mistreatment and exploitation of indigenous people of the Americas. The *Reglamento* of 1772 laid out a plan for the presidios of the northern borderlands of New Spain. The new regulations were based on a report by the Marqués de Rubí who had carried out an inspection tour of the *Provincias Internas* from Sonora to Texas. Amongst other changes, the regulations called for an alignment of presidios along a defensive cordon as a prerequisite to carrying out offensive war against the

- Apaches. Rubi's inspection is recounted in Elizabeth John's *Storms Brewed*, Chapter 14. A translation and an extensive treatment of the Reglamento of 1772 is given in Brinckerhoff and Faulk, *Lancers for the King*; see also Chapter 3 of Moorhead's *The Presidio* and Weber's *Barbaros*, 148-151.
2. King Charles III expelled the Jesuits from Spanish controlled territories in 1767, leaving a vacuum that Dominicans and Franciscans rushed to fill. For an overview of the expulsion and its background, see Mörner's "The Expulsion of the Jesuits" and Weber's *Barbaros*, 109-115.
 3. After the Spanish Bourbon King Philip V (1700–1746) acceded to the throne, he and his successors attempted to reorganize the military, commercial, and administrative structures that they had inherited from their Hapsburg predecessors. These policy changes, known as the Bourbon Reforms, sought to regain control over transatlantic trade, curtail the church's power, decrease the power of local elites in the colonies, and strengthen the power of the crown by creating clear lines of authority. For background on the Bourbon reforms, see the Introduction in Weber's *Barbaros*.
 4. The Seven Years' War (1756–63) – in North America, the French and Indian War – involved clashes between Britain and its Bourbon enemies France and Spain as well as conflict between Prussia and its opponents Austria, France, Russia, and Sweden. By the Treaty of Paris (1763), Spain gave Florida and Menorca to Britain and returned territories in Portugal and Brazil to Portugal in exchange for British withdrawal from Cuba.
 5. In 1771, Hugh O'Connor (1732-1779) took command of the northern frontier and conducted large campaigns against the Apaches. He was Irish by birth, and his flaming red hair prompted the Apaches to call him the "Red Captain." For a biography of O'Connor, see Santiago's *The Red Captain*.
 6. In 1777, Teodoro de Croix (1730-1792) was named commandant general of the new Provincias Internas. During his tenure, he built up a more extensive military establishment over the entire northern frontier, in part by reorganizing the presidial line and buttressing forts with a secondary line of fortified towns. The standard history of Croix is Alfred Barnaby Thomas's *Teodoro de Croix*. See also Moorhead's *Presidio*, Chapter 4, and Santiago's *Jar of Severed Hands*, 49-53.
 7. The constitution of the presidial companies is detailed in Chapter 7 of Moorhead's *Presidio*.
 8. Pedro de Nava ((17?-18?) served as commander in chief of the unified Interior Provinces for ten years (1793–1802). As such, he was the main Spanish military commander of the Mescalero War. His administrative unit stretched from the Californias to Louisiana. When dealing with the Apache peace establishments, Nava emphasized gifts over trade. In *Presidio*, Moorhead summarizes Nava's instructions for dealing with the Apaches (261-265).
 9. For background on the Opatas, see Spicer, 91-104.
 10. Bernardo Vicente de Gálvez y Madrid (1746-1786) arrived in New Spain as a part of the entourage of his politically powerful uncle, José de Gálvez Gallardo. In 1769, he was commissioned as commandant of military forces in Nueva Vizcaya and Sonora. He became governor of Spanish Louisiana in 1779; during the American Revolution, when Spain sided with the Americans, he successfully fought the British on the Mississippi River and the Gulf Coast. Early in 1785 he was asked to serve as viceroy of New Spain; he died shortly after issuing his new peace policy. A recent biography of Gálvez is *Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution* by Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia. The Instructions of 1876 are discussed in Moorhead's *Presidio*, 100-108; Weber's *Spanish Frontier*, 228-230; and Santiago's *Bad Peace and a Good War*, 45-47.
 11. *Establecimientos de paz* are discussed extensively in Babcock's *Apache Adaptation*, as well as in Santiago's *Jar of Severed Hands*; see also Weber's *Spanish Frontier*, 233, and Kessell's *Spain in the Southwest*, 311.
 12. Fought in the present-day Bajío region, the Chichimeca War (1550-90) was Spain's longest and most expensive war campaign against any indigenous people in the Americas. It is considered to be a continuation of the Mixtón War, which had begun eight years earlier. The Chichimeca War is the topic of Chapter 1 of Naylor and Polzor's *The Presidio*, Vol. 1.
 13. One of the major figures behind the Bourbon Reforms, José de Gálvez y Gallardo (1720 – 1787) served as Visitador General (inspector general) in New Spain (1764–1772). He was later appointed to the Council of the Indies (1775–1787).
 14. Juan de Ugalde (1729–1816) was commanding general of the eastern Internal Provinces from 1787 to 1790, and Jacobo de Ugarte y Loyola (17??–1798) 1786) was commandant general of the western Internal Provinces from 1786 to 1790, when he was replaced by Pedro de Nava. Max Moorhead's *The Apache Frontier* relates the history of Ugarte's interactions with the

- Apaches. The conflict between Ugarte and Ugalde is treated throughout Moorhead's book; see also Chapter 4 of Santiago's *A Bad Peace and a Good War*.
15. In *The Jar of Severed Hands*, Santiago relates that Castro was attacked by Lipan Apaches during a peace parley, which increased Castro's antagonism towards the Apaches (178-180).
 16. Nava's regulations for the reservations are recounted in Moorhead's *Presidio*, 261-265.
 17. The *Buena Esperanza* reservation is discussed in Babcock's *Apache Adaptation*, 63-65 and 87-91; see also Santiago's *Bad Peace*, 42-43.
 18. Around the turn of the 19th century, the *Apaches Mansos*, or friendly Apaches, settled in the Tucson area where they enjoyed beneficial relationships with the Spanish and Mexican military as well as with Tucson valley settlers. James Officer's *Hispanic Arizona* discusses several cases of their co-operation with the military authorities.
 19. Friar Diego Bringas' 1796-97 report relates what had happened in the Pimeria Alta region of Sonora and Arizona since Father Kino's day; the report includes recommendations for increased missionary activity. See *Friar Bringas Reports to the King*.
 20. Santiago discusses specific Comanche attacks on Apaches on pages 39-42 of *A Good Peace and a Bad War*. For general background on the Comanches, see Hämäläinen's *Comanche Empire*.
 21. The escape of Apache women from a *collera* is reported on pages 187-190 of Santiago's *Jar of Severed Hands*.
 22. Awarded the Lathrop Prize, Conrad's dissertation "Captive Fates" chronicles the history of Native Americans captured by Euroamerican settlers in the Greater Rio Grande River Basin. Currently a professor of history at the University of Texas, Arlington, Conrad is working on a book project titled, "Captive Fates: Displaced Apache Indians in Colonial North America and the Caribbean."
 23. For a similar assessment, see page 2 of Babcock's *Apache Adaptation*.
 24. In *The Presidio*, Moorhead speculates that the pacification program collapsed earlier, during the last years of the Spanish Empire (112-114), while Babcock, in *Apache Adaptation*, argues for a later date for the ending of the *establicimiento* system (6-7).
 25. See note 18.
 26. Shirley Cushing-Flint and Richard Flint have been

leading the field in groundbreaking documentary research on the Coronado expedition for more than 25 years. Their most recent book, *A Most Splendid Company: The Coronado Expedition in Global Perspective*, will be reviewed in an upcoming issue of *Desert Tracks*.

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New Deal Mural “Life of Washington” in Danger

A group of students, educators, and artists is recommending a New Deal-era mural depicting 13 scenes from George Washington’s life be removed from a high school in San Francisco. In 1936, Victor Arnautoff¹ painted his fresco entitled “Life of Washington” at Washington High School as part of a Works Progress Administration project undertaken during the New Deal. One of the panels presents Washington gesturing westward toward a group of explorers who are walking past the body of a dead Indian. (The image is depicted on the back cover of this issue.) In another controversial scene, slaves are working in the field at Mount Vernon.

Supporters of the mural, which include the George Washington High School Alumni Association, New Deal scholars, and art historians, see the mural as a history lesson. Susan Ives, spokeswoman for the Living New Deal, a nonprofit at the University of California at Berkeley dedicated to preserving New Deal public works, said it was a “misinterpretation” that the mural was racist and said it could be used as a teaching tool in the school’s curriculum. Robert W. Cherny, an emeritus professor of history at San Francisco State University and the author of *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, asserts that Arnautoff, a social realist, was critiquing Washington: “Arnautoff was a major artist, an artist on the left who was being very critical of Washington for owning slaves, and he was critical of the genocide of Native Americans.” According to Gray Brechin, project scholar of the Living New Deal at the University of California, Berkeley, “It’s not a matter of erasing art, it’s erasing history itself.” Opponents of the mural – including the school board president, Native Americans, Blacks, and students – say it presents minorities in an undignified light, and consequently, they find it distressing.

A 13-person committee has recommended by a 10 to 1 vote to whitewash the historic mural. The fate of the mural is now in the hands of the school district’s Board of Education and superintendent Vincent Matthews.

Robert Montoya

¹ Arnautoff came to America from Russia in the 1920s. He studied with muralist Diego Rivera. He was the technical director of the Coit Tower murals. (The 1934 grand opening of the towers was delayed because communist symbols such as a hammer and sickle had been incorporated into the artist’s depiction of California life.) Arnautoff was a Stanford University art professor from 1938-1962.

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The Last Assault on the Salt Desert

text and photos by Dan Talbot

My interest in the Great Salt Lake Desert began in 1984 in the Salt Lake County Library at Magna, Utah, where I came across a book titled *Salt Desert Trails* by Charles Kelly. First published in 1930, it told the story of the Donner-Reed Party's trek across the Salt Desert in 1846, about a year before the Mormons came to the Salt Lake Valley. The book sparked an interest that led me to spend the next three summers in Utah doing research on the Donner Party and their trail. My goal was to follow the Donner trail across the Salt Desert.

I would like to start with some history. In 1827 Jedediah S. Smith became the first white man to traverse this wild, unknown country. He was forced to eat mule meat or die of starvation on this desert. One of the first expeditions to experience the vast 80-mile stretch of barren salt flats was Captain John C. Fremont's Party in 1845, with Kit Carson as guide. It was also crossed in the reverse direction during the following year by the Clyman-Hastings group. These early explorers were well prepared and consequently had very little trouble compared to the Donner-Reed Party.

The Donners and the Reeds, well-to-do farming families, left their farms and homes in the Springfield, Illinois, area to start a new life in California. Contemplating joining a west-bound caravan, they arrived at Independence on May 11, 1846, with good wagons and strong oxen. Here they first met the Breen family, whose members later became a part of the ill-fated Donner Party. The Donner-Reed group left Independence on May 12. On the morning of May 19, they arrived at the camp of Colonel William Henry Russell and were accepted into his caravan by unanimous vote. While passing through Kansas, Sara Keyes – the mother of Margaret Frazier Reed, James F. Reed's wife – died. She was buried near the town of Manhattan, Kansas.

On July 3, the emigrants arrived at Fort Laramie where they stayed over to get supplies and celebrate Independence Day. Here they met the Clyman-Hastings-Hudspeth Party who were going east. They were

convinced by Lansford W. Hastings to take the Hastings Cut-Off. He said they would save 300 miles and that the Salt Desert was only 40 miles across. In fact, it was 80 miles without water or feed for the animals. Jim Clyman, a seasoned and trained mountain man strongly advised against this route, saying it would be safer to go by way of Fort Hall north of the Great Salt Lake. His advice fell on deaf ears. Hastings promised to guide them safely across the new cut-off – a promise which was never kept.

Near the end of July the caravan reached a point on the Little Sandy, a branch of the Green River in Wyoming, where the Oregon Trail makes its bend toward the northwest. This is the "Parting of the Ways." Here a decision had to be made as to which route each party would take. On July 20 the actual "Donner Party" was organized. They left the Oregon Trail and took the left fork to Fort Bridger. Hastings had promised to wait for them there and guide them over the new route. Upon arriving at Fort Bridger, however, they learned that Hastings had gone ahead with the Young-Harlan Party. He had left a message for the Donner Party to follow his group's trail.

Heading west from Fort Bridger, the Donner Party crossed into today's Utah and came down Echo Canyon. On August 3 they arrived at the Weber River Crossing near today's Henefer. There they found a letter from Hastings asking them to wait at the crossing for him to return. He also stated that Weber Canyon was almost impassable and he would show them a better way through the Wasatch Mountains.

James Frazier (J.F.) Reed knew they couldn't waste any time so he and two companions set out to overtake Hastings and if possible bring him back to fulfill his promise. Reed returned alone eight days later. He had overtaken Hastings at the south shore of the Great Salt Lake, but Hastings refused to return. He said that he would only go back to a ridge and point to a canyon he thought would be a good route.

Hacking their way through the canyon at a rate of one mile per day, the emigrants were met by the Franklin Ward Graves family, the Jay Fosdick family, and John Snyder, all of whom joined their train. Now their group was comprised of a total of 87 people, including the other families (the Breens, Eddys, and McCutchens) that had joined the

Donner-Reed Party at the Parting of the Ways. Finally, after traveling for nearly 30 days from Fort Bridger, they reached the Jordan River in the Salt Lake Valley. It was now September 3, 1846. The summer was gone, and it was still a long way to California. The Great Salt Desert, the Humboldt Sink, and the Sierra Nevada Mountains remained to be crossed.

The group had made their way around the south end of the Great Salt Lake near the Black Rock Beach when their progress was interrupted for a day by the death of Luke Halloran, an ailing consumptive, who was traveling with the Donners. He was buried beside the newly made grave of Mr. Hargrave, a member of the Young-Harlan Party. Their next stop was a place called Twenty Wells (Grantsville, Utah), where they found plenty of cool fresh water and feed for the animals. As time was precious, they proceeded on as soon as possible. Skirting around the Stansbury Mountains and across today's Skull Valley to the southwest, they found another spring at the foot of the Cedar Mountains. Unknown to them, this would be the last water for 80 miles.

They packed their wagons with what they thought to be an ample supply of grass and water and started for the pass in the mountains. From the summit they could see a vast desert valley stretching endlessly to Pilot Peak where the next water could be found. Proceeding on, they came to a long low hill (Grayback Hills); after ascending to the saddle, they received their first glimpse of the Salt Desert proper, an enormous, desolate expanse of sand, salt and mud.

Virginia Reed Murphy, the daughter of J. F. Reed, describes their crossing of the desert:

It was a dreary, desolate, alkali waste, not a living thing could be seen; it seemed as though the hand of death had been laid upon the country. We started in the evening, traveled all that night, and the following day and night – two nights and one day of suffering from thirst and heat by day and piercing cold by night. When the third night fell and we saw the barren waste stretching away apparently as boundless as when we started, my father determined to go ahead in search of water. Before starting he

instructed the drivers, if the cattle showed signs of giving out to take them from the wagons, and follow him. He had not been gone long before the oxen began to fall to the ground from thirst and exhaustion. They were unhitched at once and driven ahead. My father coming back met the drivers with the cattle within ten miles of water and instructed them to return as soon as the animals had satisfied their thirst. He reached us about daylight. We waited all that day in the desert looking for the return of our drivers, the other wagons going on out of sight. Towards night the situation became desperate and we had only a few drops of water left; another night there meant death. We must set out on foot and try to reach some of the wagons. Can I ever forget that night in the desert, when we walked mile after mile in the darkness, every step seeming to be the very last we could take! Suddenly all fatigue was banished by fear; through the night came a swift rushing sound of one of the young steers crazed by thirst and apparently bent upon our destruction. My father, holding his youngest child in his arms and keeping us all close behind him, drew his pistol, but finally the maddened beast turned and dashed off into the darkness. Dragging ourselves along about ten miles, we reached the wagon of Jacob Donner. The family were all asleep, so we children lay down on the ground. A bitter wind swept over the desert, chilling us through and through. We crept closer together, and when we complained of the cold, Papa placed all five of our dogs around us, and only for the warmth of these faithful creatures we should doubtless have perished.

At daylight Papa was off to learn the fate of his cattle, and was told that all were lost except one cow and an ox. The stock, scenting the water, had rushed on ahead of the men, and had probably been stolen by the Indians, and driven into the mountains, where all traces of them were lost. A week was spent here on the edge of the desert in a fruitless search. Almost every man in the company turned out, hunting in all directions, but our eighteen head of cattle were never found. We lost our best yoke of oxen before reaching "Bridger's Fort" from drinking poisoned water found standing in pools, and had bought at the fort two yoke of young steers, but now all were gone, and my father and his family were left in the desert, eight hundred miles from

California, seemingly helpless. We realized that our wagons must be abandoned. The company kindly let us have two yoke of oxen, so with our ox and cow yoked together we could bring only one wagon, but alas! not the one which seemed so much like home to us, and in which grandma had died. Some of the company went back with Papa and assisted him in caching everything that could not be packed in one wagon. A cache was made by digging a hole in the ground, in which a box or the bed of a wagon was placed. Articles to be buried were packed into this box, covered with boards, and the earth thrown in upon them, and thus they were hidden from sight. (Murphy, 273-275).

The rest of Reed's wagons and possibly some of those belonging to other members of the party were left stuck in the mud 30 miles behind. The abandoned wagons included Reed's Pioneer Palace Car. This was a specially built wagon with a door on the side. It had an upper level for sleeping and the lower level contained a cook stove. Reed had this wagon built for the comfort of his mother-in-law, Sarah Keyes.

On November 2, 1849, Captain Howard Stansbury of the U.S. Topographical Engineers crossed the desert on mules. He recorded the following in his journal:

During the night we passed five wagons and one cart, which had stuck fast in the mud and been necessarily left by their owners, who, from appearances, had abandoned everything, fearful of perishing themselves, in this inhospitable desert. Great quantities of excellent clothing, tool chests, trunks, scientific books, and in fact, almost everything, both useful and necessary on a journey of this kind, had been left strewn over the plain. Many articles had not even been removed from the wagons. The carcasses of several oxen lying about on the ground satisfactorily explained the whole matter. In attempting to cross the plain, the animals had died from exhaustion and want of water, and the wagons and their contents had, of course, to be abandoned.

The remains of some of the abandoned wagons were seen by Charles Kelly when he tried to cross the desert



Taking infrared photos from the ultralight.

in 1929. In 1936, Dr. Walter M. Stookey succeeded in crossing the Great Salt Desert after several unsuccessful attempts. He too saw the remains of wagons and brought parts of them back with him. Since that time, to my knowledge, no one had completely crossed the Salt Desert.

To fulfill my goal to follow the Donner trail across the Salt Desert, I made my first venture in June 1985. Accompanied by my wife Geri and her parents Mr. and Mrs. T.U. Hutchison, I drove completely around the desert and the Great Salt Lake in a four-wheel drive vehicle. From this experience, we discovered it would be impossible to cross the desert in a four-wheel drive. More planning would have to be done.



Infrared photo of wagon tracks in the salt.

The following summer my wife and I returned with my ultra-light aircraft. I flew over parts of the desert and took infrared photos that revealed the old trail. We had also

brought along a custom-built dune buggy which seemed to do very well on the barren mud flats in the dry part of the summer. We went out on the trail in the buggy, but when we returned, there was a sign on my camper door saying: "Do not lift ultralight off – this is a F -16 strafing area."

We knew the desert would be flooded soon due to the Great Salt Lake Pumping Project's attempt to lower the level of the lake. The lake had been rising for the past several years and had reached the highest level on record, flooding the nearby railroads and highways. Accompanied by my wife, I made my first attempt to actually cross the desert on the Donner trail in July 1986. After reviewing the infrared photos and finding the old trail on the west side of the desert, we decided to go from west to east. We crossed the first nine-mile stretch of mud flats to Silver Island and then made our way over Donner-Reed Pass. We continued another eight miles, passing Floating Island where we noticed the mud was quite soft. My wife and I were apprehensive, so we turned around and headed back.



Elwin and Jerry Talbot at the spot where the Reeds left their wagons.

My next attempt was in August 1986 with my brother E.L."Sam" Talbot. We started at Silver Island and headed almost due east on the Donner trail. After traveling eleven miles, the last two on soft ground, we came to a mound of sand. Here we saw particles of rust, wood, and bone fragments. These must have been from a wagon and oxen left on the desert many years before. Leaving the buggy there, we walked about two miles farther into the desert, passing two more sand mounds

and stopping on a third one. I believe these mounds covered the wagons left in the desert by J.F. Reed in 1846. The sand, over the years, had gradually drifted around them as they weathered and disintegrated into the ground. Each of these mounds had signs of rust and wood scattered about.

While walking back to the buggy we noticed the tracks made by the caterpillar Dr. Stookey had used 50 years earlier. There were places where we saw what we believed to be wagon tracks in the salt. In *Salt Desert Trails*, Charles Kelly writes:

The old trail lay before us glittering in the sun. Here were no ruts, to be sure – the surface was perfectly smooth and level – yet the trail stretched away to the West as plainly as though the pioneers had passed only last year. The surface of the desert here consists of several layers of fine silt, some light gray, some dark gray, and some nearly white. At a depth of about twelve inches lies a layer of white crystals of sodium sulfate, several inches in thickness. Beneath this again is more gray silt, the whole saturated with salt. The narrow tires of the emigrant wagons cut through these various layers of silt, bringing to the surface sometimes darker and sometimes lighter material. Then, when melting snows of winter or occasional summer showers cause this level surface to be covered with a shallow film of water for a short time, the salt and lighter sediments gradually settle and fill these old ruts, leaving the surface perfectly smooth, but making a distinct discoloration which remains permanently. Thus it happens that each individual wagon track, unless merged with another, is still plainly visible on the surface of the desert, and the main trail, where wagon followed wagon, lies like a white ribbon streaming toward the West.

Dr. Stookey also mentions seeing wagon tracks plus foot prints of men walking beside their teams. In his book *Fatal Decision*, he writes:

We had not advanced more than a mile into this part of the desert before we began to discover abandoned materials that had been left behind. These consisted mainly of fragments of wagons and various pieces of household furniture, all in rather advanced stages of decay or disintegration. Some of these materials appeared to have been just cast off in order to lighten

the loads; others had evidently been cached and partly covered or buried for protection.

At this point Stookey had not reached the spot where Reed had left his wagons and we, going the other direction, had not arrived at the location that he described. Our interest being greatly increased, we wanted to go on, but with our vehicle two miles behind, we decided to turn back.

If on schedule, the Great Salt Lake Pumping Project was due to start pumping in February 1987, and my summer vacation was coming to an end. This meant we would have to try again the following summer if the water permitted. My brother Sam and I checked the area again in June and in July of 1987 and found it to be too muddy. By the third week in August it had dried out some, despite the storms which had occurred. It was "do or die," so to speak. The Pumping Project water was already on its way at one million gallons per minute.

In August 1987, our final expedition was underway. I was assisted by Sam and my younger brother Jerry W. Talbot. It was the middle of the third week of August. It was a hot 90 degrees. This time we were going to try the crossing from the east side, starting at Grayback Hills. There were still signs of the old trail on the west side of these hills coming down from a low pass. From there to the edge of the first mud flat, the trail has been obliterated, as this was the site of an old WW II bombing range.

Taking a line of sight across the bombing range to Pilot Peak, we proceeded to the west. Our first obstacle was a mud pond, which we crossed with little difficulty. Next came some sand dunes that hardly slowed us down. The second mud pond looked good, so we proceeded to cross, when to our surprise, we found the middle of the pond to contain oozing mud. The engine started to labor and the buggy began to lose speed. I dropped it in a lower gear, poured on the coal, and with a prayer we made it across.

The next set of sand dunes were somewhat larger, but they gave us no trouble. The desert here was scattered with small bushes surrounded by sand drifts. After ascending another set of dunes, we could see a large flat about five miles across.

At the far edge of this flat we could see what looked like a large group of men mounted on horses galloping toward us at full speed. Many early travelers across this desert had similar experiences. The following is a quote by Edwin Bryant, one of nine men mounted on mules who crossed the Salt Desert a few weeks ahead of the Donner-Reed Party:

During the subsidence of this tempest there appeared upon the plain one of the most extraordinary phenomena, I dare to assert, was ever witnessed. I had dismounted and was walking several rods in front of the party. Diagonally, in front, appeared the figures of a number of men and horses. Some of these figures were mounted and others appeared to be marching on foot. Their faces were turned toward us and at first they appeared as if they were rushing down on us. Their apparent distance was not correspondent, for they seemed nearly as large as our own bodies, and consequently were of gigantic stature. At first view I supposed them to be a small party of Indians. I called to some of our party to hasten forward, as there were men in front, coming towards us. Very soon the fifteen or twenty figures were multiplied into three or four hundred, and appeared to be marching forward with the greatest action and speed. I then conjectured that they might be Capt. Fremont and his party returning to the United States, I spoke to Brown, who was nearest me, and asked him if he noticed the figures of men and horses in front. He assured me that he did, and that he had observed the same appearances several times previously, but that they had disappeared. It was then for the first time, so perfect was the deception, that I conjectured the probable fact that these figures were the reflection of our own images by the atmosphere, filled as it was with fine particles of crystallized matter.

Since we were not mounted on horses or mules, I have to assume this mirage was caused from something other than a reflection. As we became nearer, it began to disappear. In the distance, at the edge of the last set of sand dunes, there was a row of small bushes. The bushes, magnified by heat waves, looked many times larger, and appeared to move like galloping horses.

We next encountered a vast, barren salt plain, almost perfectly smooth and level, which extended for many miles. This is said to be the most desolate place in the continental United States. There was not a sign of life for the next 20

miles. On the far edge of this flat salt plain, Floating Island and Silver Island can be seen with Pilot Peak towering behind them. The salt plain was soft but the buggy tracks were very shallow so we continued on. The salt was so smooth we could travel at speeds of 60 mph or more. Moving along toward Floating Island at a high rate of speed, we felt the apprehension that so many others had mentioned.

Then the engine started to misfire. This surprised me, for I keep it in top condition and had checked it very carefully before leaving. Then I felt a fine mist of moisture on my arm. I held my hand out, and immediately it was coated with wet salt. With this I knew we were in dangerous territory. I tried to make a long sweeping turn without losing too much speed. I could feel the buggy being forced to the side and then it broke loose and started to spin around on the slippery floor of the desert. To lose momentum would surely leave us stuck in the soft mud, many miles from help. I shifted to a lower gear, and with a light throttle, managed to keep in motion. Luckily, we ended up heading back the way we came. At the first sign of solid ground, we stopped to plan our next move.

After some discussion we decided to leave the Donner trail, bypass the muddy area, and then pick up the trail again near Floating Island. This we did without any further misfortune. At Floating Island we were able to ascend a ridge where we could see out over the area we had bypassed. It was flooded with water from the Great Salt Lake Pumping Project. Another week later our attempt to cross the salt desert would have been in vain. The area that was flooded is where we had found the remains of the J.F. Reed wagons one year earlier. Fortunately, Utah archaeologists were able to excavate that area in September of 1986. (For their report, see Hawkins and Madsen's *Excavation of the Donner Reed Wagons*.)

About ten miles from Floating Island, the trail enters a pass in the Silver Island Range and then continues across another nine mile mud flat. At the end of this flat, near the foot of Pilot Peak, is the spring at which the Donner-Reed Party camped while searching for their oxen. Following the Donner trail across this last

section of the Great Salt Desert was fairly easy going until we were about three miles into the mud flat. We were traveling about 60 mph when I spotted a washout about two feet deep. I slammed on the brakes, but it only caused us to skid and go sideways. I was afraid we would hit the wash sideways and roll, so I released the brakes and hit the wash head on at nearly 50 miles per hour. Luckily the opposite bank was sloped. We hit the bank hard and completely left the ground. As we came down the tires sank deep into the mud. It cost us precious time, but as the mud was not very soft, we were able to continue on. The last several miles to the spring was fairly easy going. We had crossed the desert in less than five hours!

Because of the Great Salt Lake Pumping Project we were, most likely, the last party to follow the Donner-Reed trail across the Great Salt Desert.

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The Hunt for Murderer's Grave and Other Sites

Tracy DeVault and Rose Ann Tompkins

During a history outing this April, Tracy DeVault, Richard Greene, Greg McEachron, Rose Ann Tompkins, and Mike Volberg investigated four areas of the Southern Trail.

Our first stop was the Wellton Pioneer Museum in Wellton, AZ. We had heard that the museum has copies of aerial photos taken along the Gila River during a government project in the 1930s. The current director did not know anything about the photos, but she indicated that she would keep an eye out for them as the museum personnel went through items in storage. We enjoyed the well-arranged and informative museum, and then spent the rest of the day at the site of the Gila Ranch Stage Station, north of Gila Bend. The site has been totally destroyed due to the construction of an irrigation canal, leaving only pieces of old glass, metal, and cartridge shells in mounds of earth created by earthmoving equipment.

The next day, Tracy, Greg, and Mike looked for the site of Murderer's Grave. In later years it was known as Kenyon Station, a stop on the Butterfield Trail. This site is located along the Gila River about 15 miles northwest of Gila Bend. On November 29, 1849, Robert Eccleston recorded the following in his diary:

We soon came to the river, watered our horses, & turned back to meet the waggon. I took a different turn to the way we came & struck on an old camp where the first thing that attracted my notice was a grave. I next saw a paper pasted on a board and nailed to a mesquite. Near, other boards scribbled on lay around. On a head board of the grave was written, or rather cut in with an knife "Elijah Davis, Ark', Sept 5th 1849." The paper read thus (some one full of mischief had torn part of it off, but I found stuck near),

The history or account of the two persons interred here. They both came from Johnson county as teamsters. Geo. W. Hickey drove Mark Lee's team & Davis drove Jno. W. Patrick's team. About 100 miles back they changed places.

They arrived here on the 4th inst, and on the 5th they were both herding oxen about 1¼ miles above here when they commenced quarrelling about something of no importance. Hickey struck Davis and they got to fighting. Davis whipped Hickey whereupon Hickey, after getting up, stabbed near the shoulder, the knife entering some of the cavities of the heart. He died in twenty minutes. Hickey was arrested by order of the emigrants generally, there being several companies on the ground, & tried by a jury of 12 men who found him guilty of murder in the 1st degree & was sentenced to be shot, which was done in the following manner. A ticket was placed in a hat for each man, all blank but twelve, who were to shoot. 12 guns were loaded, 6 with powder & balls & 6 with blank charges, & all loaded secretly. They all fired at a signal given from one grave to another (about ten steps) & several balls entered the region of his heart. He died immediately.

(Signed) C. Mitchell¹

As this occurred south of the Gila River, the site was still part of Mexico in 1849. Justice was not available in the usual sense of the word, so the emigrants took the law into their own hands to take care of the situation.

Our previous research indicated that the site lies in the flood plain of the Painted Rock Reservoir. Over the years it has been inundated many times, but our crew of amateur archaeologists felt we might be able to find the site. It was a mile hike through very rough vegetation from the cars to the area near the river. The hike out and back included wading through a swamp of standing water that was 12 inches deep in places. A few remnants were found, but nothing to definitely indicate that there were either graves or a station at this location. Hopefully, other technologies can be used in the future to give better results.

Midway through the trip, Tracy returned Rose Ann to her home in Chandler and picked up Richard. The group then set up at Willcox. Mike and Greg had arrived in the area earlier, exploring on the west end of Doubtful Canyon.

The next two days were spent mapping across the Lordsburg Playa in western New Mexico. Our group has been wanting to map the trail across the playa for a number of years. This area is hard to access, but several years ago,



Mike, Tracy, and Greg head out for the Gila Valley; the green vegetation bordering the river can be seen in the distance. The mountains are on the north side of the river, which was U.S. territory at the time of the murder. *photo by Rose Ann Tompkins*



Out on the Lordsburg Playa, Greg holds the Hostetter bottle. The embossing on the side says, “Dr. J. HOSTETTERS STOMACH BITTERS.” *photo by Mike Volberg*



Google Earth image of the Lordsburg Playa with waypoints from several mapping trips superimposed. *courtesy Tracy Devault*

we found a way across the railroad tracks near Lordsburg that led us to “Eccleston’s Ridge.” Eccleston called it “Fireplace Rock.”

Friday, October 19th. . . The train moved briskly & we soon reached a ridge of rocks. . . I built a fire at the west end of the ridge, where we found plenty of dry wood. It was pleasant to a fine fire & we lay off quite comfortably. The stone is of a substance like plaster. From the natural shape of our fireplace, I have taken the liberty of calling it Fireplace Rock.²

We have been to this area three times. On this trip we found we were able to drive across the playa, which gave us access to the central part of this 12-mile stretch. The highlight of our mapping across the playa was Mike’s discovery of a Hostetter bottle. The bottle had contained a mixture of alcohol, sugar, aromatic oils, and vegetable bitters – a 19th-century cure for stomach complaints.³

The group spent the next day near where we thought the trail from Dunn Spring Point to the San Simon River

crossed the Portal Road south of San Simon, Arizona. Mike and Greg found a number of solder-construction cans that were about where we expected the trail to be. As trail evidence, these cans are highly suspect, and we did not find any other trail evidence.

Tracy and Richard headed home the next day. Mike and Greg returned to the trail crossing of the Portal Road but did not find anything more.

Notes

1. *Overland to California on the Southwestern Trail, 1849, Diary of Robert Eccleston.* Edited by George P. Hammond and Edward H. Howes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950, 216-217.
2. *Ibid*, 178-179.
3. *Jacob and David Hostetter - Dr. J. Hostetter’s Celebrated Stomach Bitters*, posted 30 Oct 2018 by Ferdinand Myer, V. (<https://www.peachridgeglass.com/2018/10/jacob-david-hostetter-dr-j-hostetters-celebrated-stomach-bitters/>)

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