

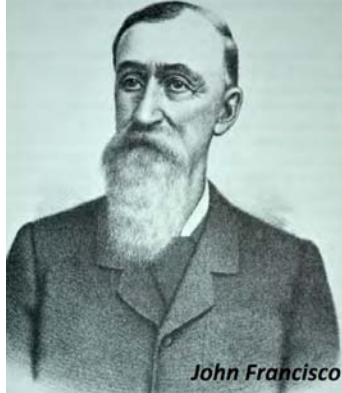
Francisco Fort & Museum



History:



The town is at the base of the Twin Mountains known as the Spanish Peaks. The peaks were originally called the “Wahatoya” (double mountains) by the Comanche. They believed that the mountains were the home of the rain Gods.



Until the formation of Colorado territory on February 28, 1861, Huerfano County was part of Mora County, New Mexico territory.

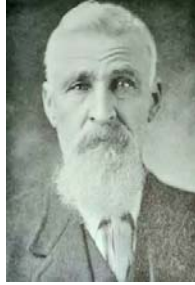
On December 8, 1843 Cornelio Vigil and Ceran St. Vrain petitioned Governor Armijo to develop a four-million-acre area. They were granted the land until the early 1860's when the courts decided that they had not developed the land as required, and that they had broken the original agreement. The amount of land was reduced to 9,700 acres by the U.S. Congress.



Henry Diagre

“Urban Legend”:

Native Americans were hired by Spanish explorer Juan De La Cruz to mine for gold in the peaks, because he was afraid to visit due to the “Demons” of the peaks. The Native Americans were rumored to have been attacked and killed by the “Demons” when they attempted to remove the gold from the area. De La Cruz and his party collected the gold and continued to Mexico. They were also killed by the “Demons” and the gold was returned to the peaks.



Hiram Vasquez

Colonel (honorary title) John Francisco (1820-1902) and Judge Henry Diagre (1832-1902) formed a partnership to purchase the land under the Vigil – St. Vrain Land Grant (48,00 acres) in 1860 for \$37,710. They built Francisco Fort in 1861-1862 to supply mining camps with products from farming and ranching. The design of the building was to help prevent attacks from Native Americans. There were rumors that the Fort is actually a previously existing Fort that was rebuilt.

The first Spanish fort was rumored to have been built by Lt. Pedro Villasur in 1720, but there are no records to confirm this.

Henry Diagre served one term as county treasurer in 1873 -1877, Judge and County Deputy Sheriff/Assessor 1886, County Judge for two terms and Mayor of LaVeta two times.

FORWARDING AND COMMISSION
THOMAS FIELD ISAAC W. HILL
FIELD & HILL
Forwarding and Commission
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL
General Merchandise
DEALERS IN
HEADQUARTERS :
La Veta, Colorado
BRANCH HOUSE: :
South Pueblo, Colorado

Would respectfully inform their patrons of the removal of their branch outfitting and forwarding house from Churcharas, Colorado, to La Veta, Colorado, the present terminals of the Denver and Rio Grande railway.

La Veta, being the most accessible point to all parts of Southern Colorado, especially the San Juan mining districts, would advise goods marked: "Care of F. & H., La Veta, Colorado, via D. & R. G. R'y."

Sept 1 1876

Ad for the General Merchandise Store

In 1870 Henry Diagre hired Hiram Vasquez and his crew to improve the road across Chuchara pass for wagon use. They believe that it was a toll road until it was paid for.

The first Post Office was opened in 1871 and they named it "Spanish Peaks", J.J. Hanley was the first Postmaster.



Bear paw-print in adobe tile

In 1863 under the employment of Francisco and Diagre, Hiram Vasquez rode from Fort Lyon in the Arkansas valley with troop reinforcements to save eighteen men under attack at Fort Francisco.

The town was laid out in July 1876, when the only building on the site was the well-known plaza of Colonel J. M. Francisco, who had resided there for about eighteen years.

A list of the principal businesses from the Denver Daily Tribune on 012-04-1877:

- 7 – General Dealers
- 2 – Forwarding and Commission
- 1 – Drug Store
- 2 – Groceries
- 2 – Stationary Stores
- 1 – Baker
- 1 – Hardware and Tin shop
- 2 – Hotels
- 3 – Restaurants
- 4 – Corrals and Feeding Stables
- 3 – Blacksmith and Wagon shops
- 2 – Barber shops
- 10 – Saloons and Billiard rooms
- 2 – Doctors
- 2 – Lawyers

A Schoolhouse had just been completed and the Baptists are building a church

Over the years the Fort has had many different faces, it has been:

- The Plaza Hotel of Andrew Francisco

- General Store
- Telegraph Office
- The Headquarters of Field & Hill Outfitters
- A Grainery
- Town Hall
- Private residence
- Museum
- Practice room for the LaVeta Brass Band
- Doctors office
- Apartments (until the 1940's)

Huerfano Herald November, 25 1880

Seven families and several bachelors are living in the Plaza



Making new bricks during restoration

Stories from the area:

11-13-1913 - Colorado Transcript

Sixth Man confesses

The coal miner's striker member and officers who were directly implicated have made full confessions of the ambush and killing near town of three mine guards and automobile driver and the wounding of a non-union miner... The six men are being held incognito by the military authorities

04-04-1915 Colorado Transcript Golden

Pueblo, CO – Eighteen minutes from the time the case had been given to the jury in the District Court here acquitted seven LaVeta miners charged with the murder of Luke Terry, a chauffeur. It is said to be the quickest verdict ever returned in a case of equal importance in Colorado. Four men were slain in the battle that led up to the trial, but the trial was for the death of Terry alone.... The defendants were Marcus Martinolich, Pete Rich, Charles, Ed and Dan Richards, Frank Kroupa and Charley Sheppard.... All live at LaVeta. Upon their return to their homes they will be arrested immediately on indictments returned recently by the Huerfano Grand Jury and charging them with the slaying of R.G. Adams another member of the automobile party.



Piano in Museum

10-14-1874 – Colorado Springs Gazette

Notice to Railroad Contractors

Proposals will be received until Friday, October 27, at noon at the office of the Secretary and Treasurer of the Union Contract Company, Colorado Springs, for grading of the road-bed for the Denver and Rio Grande Railway, from LaVeta to the summit of Sangre De Cristo Range, about

fifteen miles, thence down the Sangre De Christo Creek, to the mouth of Wagon Creek, about ten miles, thence to a point near Fort Garland, about ten miles...



10-14-1874 - Colorado Springs Gazette

A contract has been concluded between the Denver & Rio Grande Railway Company and the firm of Carlson, Orman & McMurtrie of the grading extension of the railway from LaVeta to Fort Garland, work will be commenced immediately.



Blacksmith Shop

12-4-1876 – Denver Daily Times
Notice to Contractors

Wanted: 260,000 of lumber

In 1877 the Denver Rio Grande Railway Company completed the narrow gauge railroad through a right-of-way to the plaza for a town site that was donated by Francisco & Diagre.



Grain display

In March 1882 it was discovered that the town had not been properly incorporated by Colorado law, they held a special election to fix the issue.

12-15-1905 Alamosa Journal

“Judge Lynch” holds Court at LaVeta

...”(John) Leonard is a coal contractor, dividing his time between LaVeta and Denver. It appears that his success of operation coal mines near LaVeta is the cause of his now being close to

death as the result of a beating and hanging. He worked for the Great Western Coal Company and no doubt was modern in thought and deed in developing the great veins of coal that LaVeta is noted for. This, reports state, bred jealous among local men and mob law was dealt out in unlimited quantity for Leonard. He was beaten terribly and hung by the neck, but was taken down before dead by a few that possibly remembered that Our Savior was crucified through jealousy. Huerfano County Justice will now have the opportunity to redeem itself from any errors of the past.



Historic view of LaVeta

The Ritter Schoolhouse:

The original site of the 1876 schoolhouse (now located at the museum) was three miles east of LaVeta. Hiram Baker, John Denton and neighbors cut logs from the nearby forest and hauled them to the site to build the one-room schoolhouse.



The Blacksmith Shop

In 1897 the schoolhouse was deemed to small and was sold to the landowner, John Ritter, for \$4.25 and a larger school was built. The Ritter Ranch used the schoolhouse for storage and a bunkhouse. It was completely abandoned in 1960 and fell into disrepair before the family donated it to the museum. Ritter district 16 schoolhouse was built around 1876 and was originally known as Grandview and then changed to Kincaid until 1890 when the property was sold to the Ritter's.



Dining room display in the Museum

12-28-1876

Suicide at the Saloon

LaVeta, December 21

A man named John Rogers, a Scotchman by birth committed suicide her to-day, by poison, and died at 12:00 pm. ... went to Bowman's Saloon, where he drank considerable, but appeared to be jovial and pleasant to everybody. At about ten o'clock P.M. he went to Dr. Washington's drug store, and procured a vial of laudanum, after which he returned to the saloon and sat down, placing his head on the table, and was apparently in a drunken sleep. When time came to close up, his friend and the bar-keeper tried to rouse him from his stupor, but their efforts were ineffectual, and they made him a bed on the floor, where his friend also laid down beside him. Early this morning Night Watchman Disney, going into the Saloon, noticed his condition, and not being able to rouse him, proclaimed him dead. Medical aid being called restoratives were applied which revived him, but all efforts to resuscitate him were in vain. He never regained consciousness and died a stranger in a strange land, shortly after noon. His friend says he attempted to take his life in the same manor last summer at Dodge City. The supposition is that financial embarrassment was the cause of the rash act.



Carts at the Museum

10-19-1876 Colorado Chieftain

Starting A Graveyard

George Huno, a Frenchman... Told he had been engaged to a young lady over in the San Juan country and on the evening before they were to be married, his sweetheart went out and stayed all night in another man's cabin. "After that", he said "of course I didn't like to marry her" ... The proprietor of the hotel retired to his apartment for the night, he called into Huno's room and found him very comfortable... when he was about ready to leave, Juno asked him very abruptly if the citizens had yet started a graveyard in LaVeta, and being informed that they had not, Huno told that that he had walked all the way from Silverton to start one for them and that he would be the first corpse, and that he would be ready before long. At about five o'clock the proprietor went into Huno's room to see how he was getting along and found him dead in his bed.



Display in Museum

7-28-1877 Colorado Springs Gazette

Lynching at LaVeta

The jail guard at this place was overpowered last night by a villigance committee, and Marcus Gonzalez, the murderer of the Brown's, taken from custody and lynched to a telegraph pole in the public square. The murder, which occurred near this place in November last, was one of the most brutal recorded in the annals of crime, and aged couple being the victim and money being the incentive. Gonzalez went into the house of the unfortunate family and asked to stay overnight, and killed Mr. Brown while he was caring for his horse. Returning to the house the wretch killed Mrs. Brown and left their daughter, Mrs. Rice, for dead, obtaining the paltry sum of four dollars for his butchery. The murderer escaped to New Mexico, but was hunted down by Detectives and brought back here for trial, and upon preliminary examination was positively identified by Mrs. Rice, who, point to Gonzalez, said: "you are the man who murdered my father and mother and nearly killed me." He was also suspected of several other murders. The lynching took place at 11 p.m. About seventy-five men participated. They were quiet and orderly but determined.



Post Office Display

5-13-1915 Howell Herald

Jailed on Charge of Baby's Murder

LaVeta – Robert Baldwin, who was recently released from the Colorado Springs State Penitentiary on a pardon a year ago, was arrested and charged with choking his baby daughter to death with a handkerchief. He was taken to Walsenburg and placed in the County Jail.



Display of typical fort room

The Saloon:

This is a recreation of a classic 1800's Saloon using vintage pieces.



The Saloon

Mining Museum:

This Museum features a collection of Mining and Medical antiques.

The Blacksmith:

This is a recreation of a classic Blacksmiths using vintage pieces

The museum opened in 1957 when the two rooms in the east wing were opened to the public, followed by two more later that year. The museum was officially dedicated in 1958 with seven open rooms.

The Mining museum was opened in the 1980's

In 200-2001 the Colorado State Historical Society provided a Grant of \$160,000 that was used to renovate the museum. The project included stripping of the tin room and the west wing had its wiring upgraded. Other funding came from the local Rotary Club.



View of fort from courtyard

Interesting Facts:



The School House

The Fort is the only complete adobe Fort in the state of Colorado



Example of original adobe wall

LaVeta means “The vein” in Spanish

The U.S.G.S. states that there is a 20.452 % chance of a major earthquake within fifty miles of LaVeta in the next fifty years. The largest recorded in the area was a magnitude 5.3 in 2011.

During the 2001 renovation new adobe bricks were being dried overnight. A bear walked over the soft bricks in the middle of the night, one with a paw print is now on display.



Religious display in Museum

In 1986 the Plaza was placed on the National Register of Historic Places



Mining Museum

In 1864 Colonel Francisco wrote a book about Tom Tobin who had just helped kill two men who were considered to be the first American serial killers

Reported Paranormal Activity:

- People have reported seeing a “floating lady” in the west wing. This has become a very common story on ghost hunting websites
-
- A piano in the west wing of the Fort has been reported to play when people walk by
-
- A ghost carrying candles has been seen throughout the Plaza
-
- An antique rocking chair has been seen rocking without anyone in it
-
- Unusual EMF readings have been reported where a Phantom woman has been seen
-
- Flickering lights have been reported throughout the building

Ghost Hunters visit the Museum:

In the first video from the team “Jessie” has a video camera and is heading into the main room of the Saloon. Above “Brandon’s” right shoulder a light is seen to flicker and then disappear. As “Jessie” gets farther into the room they say that it was just the wall that had nothing reflective on it.

A Closer look: As the camera person passes the person to look at the location of the light, they turn to the left and go to a completely different area than where the light was coming from. It was a reflection of the infra-red light on the camera reflecting on a piece of glass.

They had several other pieces of “evidence”, but all of them were caused by confirmation bias or misunderstanding of what they were doing.



Native American Display

Our Investigation:

July 6, 2013

4:30 p.m. – 9:00 a.m.



The Chair reported to rock by itself

Using eight video cameras we monitored the entire west wing – There was nothing unusual during the 16.5 hours that we recorded.

Over the entire monitoring period, the temperature changed from 79 degrees at the beginning to 76 degrees at the end, with no unusual changes for the duration.



Meters near reported “hot-spot”

In an area near the religious display there was an area that EMF readings would vary from 1 – 4 milligauss. This was determined to be caused by the Wi-Fi coming from the Library. This accounted for the “unusual” readings recorded by past Ghost hunters



The phantom piano – We discovered that anytime someone would walk by with heavy footstep in the right area of the walkway, the vibrations would cause the strings in the piano to vibrate and cause sounds. The piano was in disrepair and did not take much to make this happen.



Cameras used during our investigation

The phantom rocking chair – We did witness the chair rocking on its own. This was caused by the same kind of vibration that made the piano make noise.

Reports of flickering lights – This is a building that has gone through countless remodels and wiring changes/updates, it has bad wiring.

Audio – Other than the regular city noise and the fact that there is a family living at the end of the west wing of the Fort, there were no unusual sounds. The alarm system does make an occasional beep, which if one was looking for a ghostly answer, might be able to misinterpret as something else.



Our base location