



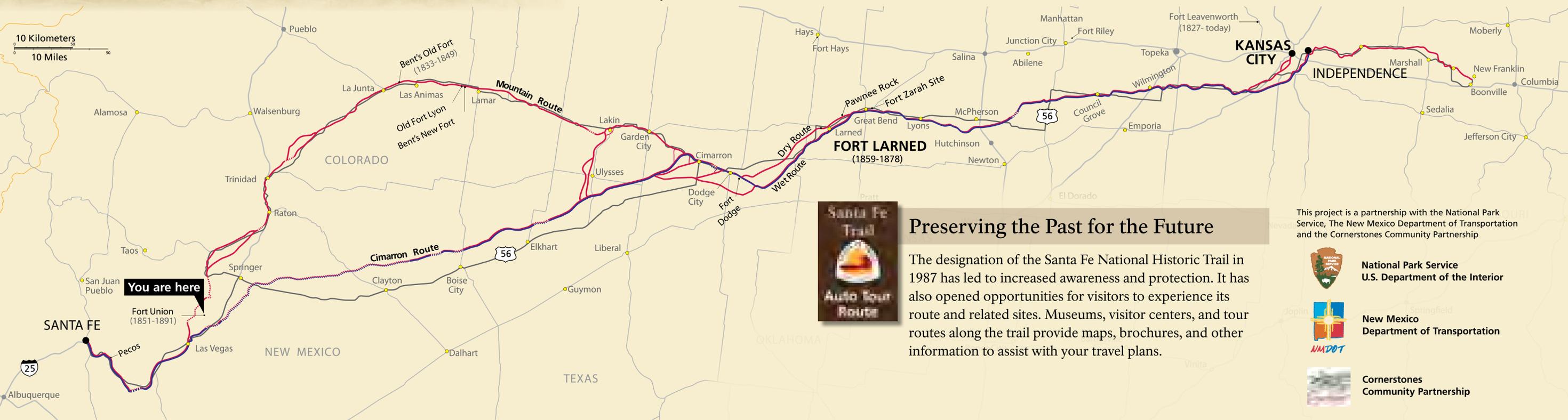
Santa Fe Plaza

From International Highway to International Heritage

After Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail developed as an international commercial highway connecting Mexico with the United States. It stretched 900 miles from its eastern terminus at Franklin, Missouri to its western terminus at Santa Fe. Both American and Mexican traders traveled the trail to create new markets and commercial opportunities. When the U.S.-Mexican War ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, commercial freighting along the trail increased, largely due to the need to supply a new system of U.S. military southwestern forts.

By 1880, the iron rails of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad largely replaced the use of the well-worn ruts of the Santa Fe Trail.

Today, wagon-wheel ruts, historic buildings, sites, and landmarks that capture both the trail and an era, mark the length of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. Federal, state, and local agencies, private citizens, and non-profit organizations together protect the remains of the Santa Fe Trail.



Preserving the Past for the Future

The designation of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail in 1987 has led to increased awareness and protection. It has also opened opportunities for visitors to experience its route and related sites. Museums, visitor centers, and tour routes along the trail provide maps, brochures, and other information to assist with your travel plans.

This project is a partnership with the National Park Service, The New Mexico Department of Transportation and the Cornerstones Community Partnership

- National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
- New Mexico
Department of Transportation
- Cornerstones
Community Partnership

Intersection of History

The Santa Fe Trail and Fort Union

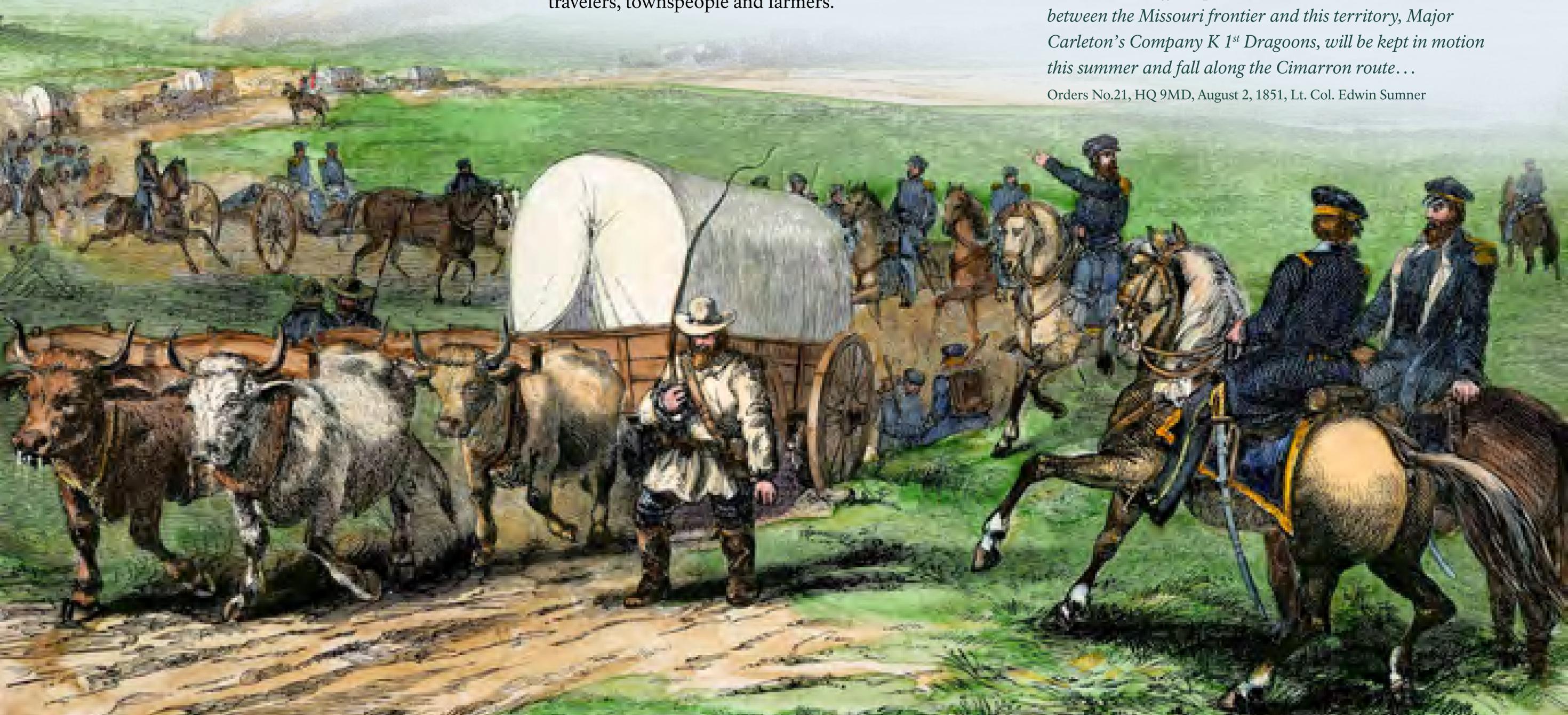
On the hillside in front of you, the wagon ruts of the Santa Fe Trail bear silent witness to the passage of time and offer evidence of nations moving east and west. When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the flow of trade goods increased to and from the United States.

The end of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848 expanded the interests and obligations of the United States. As American Indian tribes and Mexicans defended themselves against the invasion of their homeland, concerns for personal safety increased among settlers, traders, merchants, travelers, townspeople and farmers.

To protect its new U.S. territory and extend its influence and security to travelers on the trail and to newly arriving American settlers, the United States established Fort Union in 1851.

... in order to afford protection to travel and commerce between the Missouri frontier and this territory, Major Carleton's Company K 1st Dragoons, will be kept in motion this summer and fall along the Cimarron route...

Orders No.21, HQ 9MD, August 2, 1851, Lt. Col. Edwin Sumner



A New Community Sprouts Roots

The low line of trees to the south marks La Junta (the junction) of the Mora and Sapello Rivers. It is also known as La Junta because its location is where the Cimarron and Mountain Branches of the Santa Fe Trail joined.

Arriving with the U.S. military and Fort Union, American merchants and Protestant missionaries founded Tiptonville on the Santa Fe Trail near La Junta (renamed Watrous after the arrival of the railroad). Tiptonville became an important western staging area for the Santa Fe Trail, serving much the same function as Council Grove, Kansas at its eastern end.

Travelers met here to exchange information on trail conditions, verify water resources and dangers on the trail. For eastbound wagon trains, Tiptonville was an important place to weigh the merits of the faster Cimarron Branch of the Santa Fe Trail against the 100-mile longer Mountain Branch.

The increasing numbers of Anglo settlers, missionaries, and merchants, along with the establishment of Fort Union, hastened the process of Americanization of the former Mexican Territories including the New Mexico Territory.

Watrous
(La Junta)

Tiptonville



Samuel B. Watrous House, Watrous, NM



W.D. Tipton House, Tipton, NM



W.D. Tipton Barn, Tipton, NM

Lasting View

The landscape before you has changed little over time. It remains remote and quiet, with little visible evidence of human influence, bending mainly to natural processes. Lying in the transition zone between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, the landscape is rich with wildlife and prairie grasses. The Sangre de Cristos, formed as precambrian rocks were faulted upward, and sedimentary layers bent up abruptly to form this range.

The Turkey Mountains present more than a passing resemblance to an eroded volcano in the Ocate volcanic field, with more than 50 cinder cones. Although the Turkeys are not volcanic, they have lava flows around their base.

The water table is shallow, despite the scant 15 inches of rain annually, most of which falls during summer thunderstorms. Harsh spring winds, warm summers and cold winters influence the balance of a delicate environment.



Dakota Sandstone

An uplifted layer of ancient seabed deposits, this stone was used as a crucial weather-resistant building block in the construction of Fort Union. Its porous nature enhanced its capacity to store water.



Graneros Shale

A fine-grained mudstone, washed out from the surrounding hills, fills the valley floor to a depth of about 150 feet. It was an excellent source of clay for making the sun dried adobe bricks used at the fort and community.



Forest

The tree covered slopes, rising 2000 feet above the plain, provided lumber used in the fort's construction. Their cooler temperature and increased moisture offered a summertime recreational destination for fort inhabitants.

Sangre de Cristo Mountains (Blood of Christ)

Often snow covered, they are the most southern of the Rocky Mountains, rising to an elevation of 13,161 feet at Wheeler Peak near Taos, New Mexico.

Black Mesa (Black Plateau)

This is the remains of an ancient lava flow that covered much of the area. At this location, it covered the Dakota Sandstone as a dark-colored cap rock.

Cerro Pelon (Baldy Peak)

A cinder cone volcano, rising to an elevation 6,266 feet, is part of the same volcanic activity that created the Black Mesa lava flow.

Turkey Mountains

The Turkey Mountains are blanketed with Piñon, Oneseed and Rocky Mountain Junipers, Mountain Mahogany, Ponderosa Pine and the Wavyleaf and Gambel Oaks. These common New Mexico woodlands occur on warm, dry mountain slopes, mesas, and plateaus.

FORT UNION NATIONAL MONUMENT

Short Grass Prairie

Primarily composed of blue-gamma grass and buffalo grass, these grasslands provided a lush environment for antelope, deer, and elk.

Water on the Prairie

Water is in short supply on the prairie and any source of water is valuable to plants, animal life, and humans.



Tides of Change

Like surging tides upon the shore, a procession of human cultures has influenced this region. Each new wave of people left unique impressions on the landscape and each other.

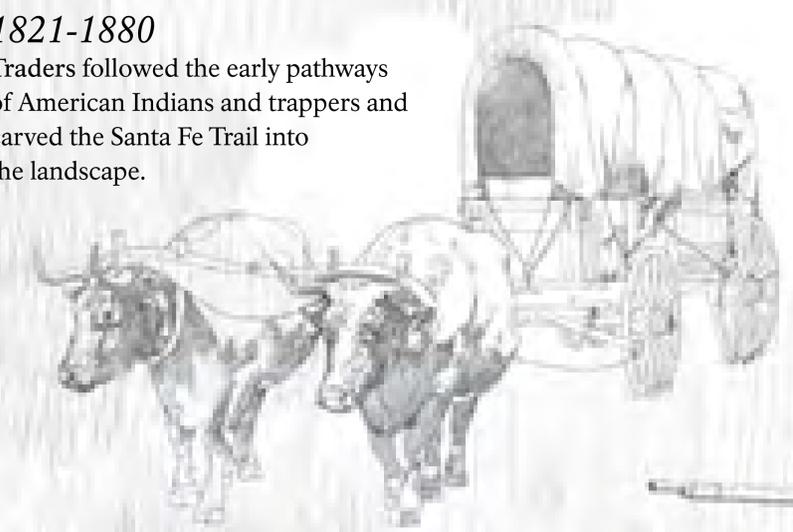
1800-1900

American Indians followed prairie game and seasonal crops of wild plants. They used these rivers, mountains, and valleys to define the boundaries of their world, leaving little evidence of their passing. Descendants in New Mexico today still consider this their homeland.



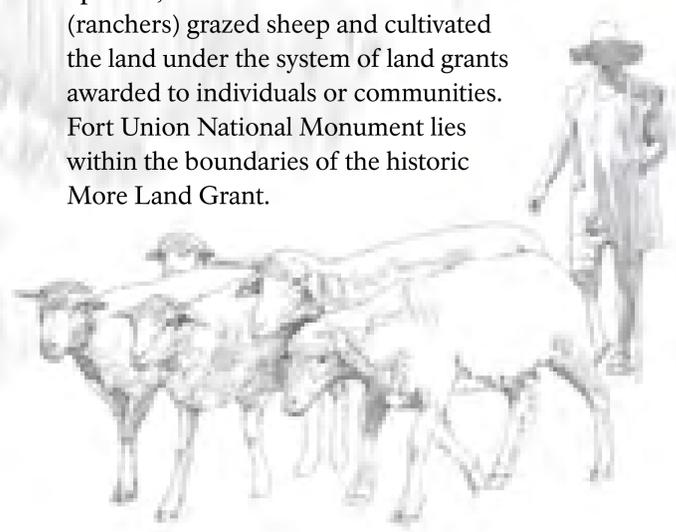
1821-1880

Traders followed the early pathways of American Indians and trappers and carved the Santa Fe Trail into the landscape.



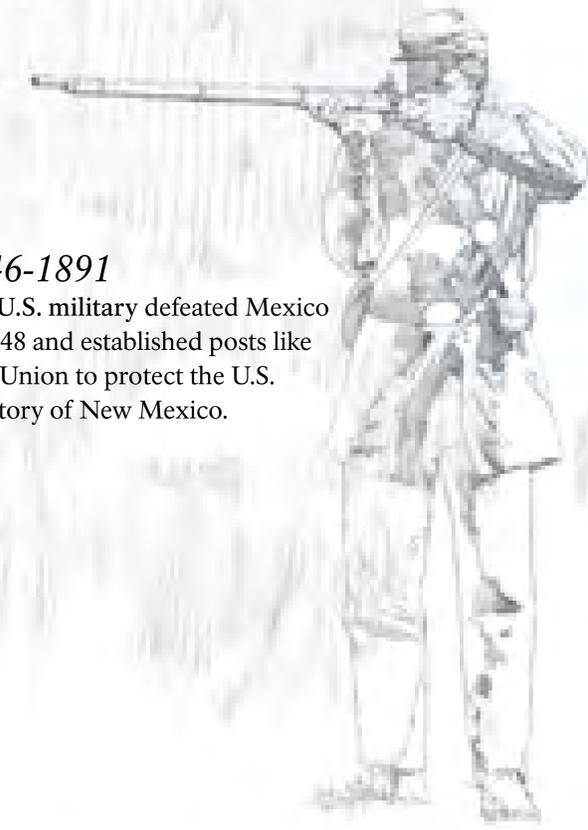
1821-1848

Spanish, then Mexican rancheros (ranchers) grazed sheep and cultivated the land under the system of land grants awarded to individuals or communities. Fort Union National Monument lies within the boundaries of the historic More Land Grant.



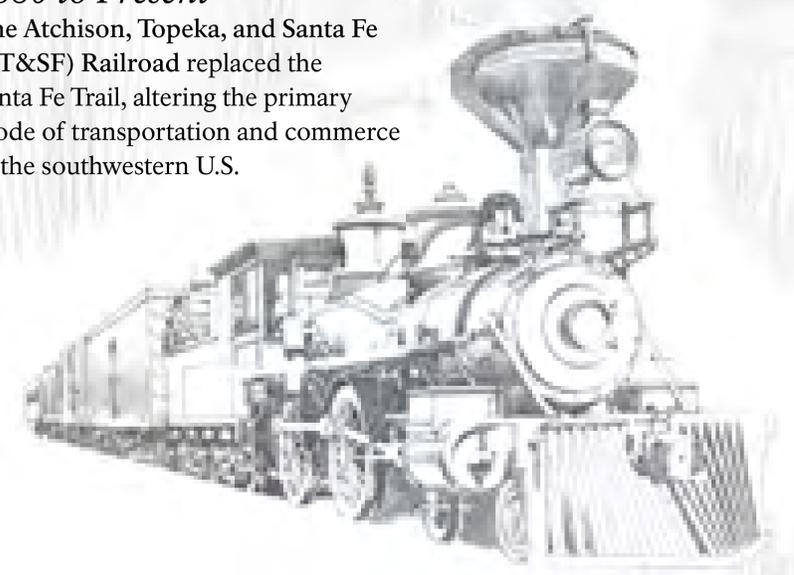
1846-1891

The U.S. military defeated Mexico in 1848 and established posts like Fort Union to protect the U.S. Territory of New Mexico.



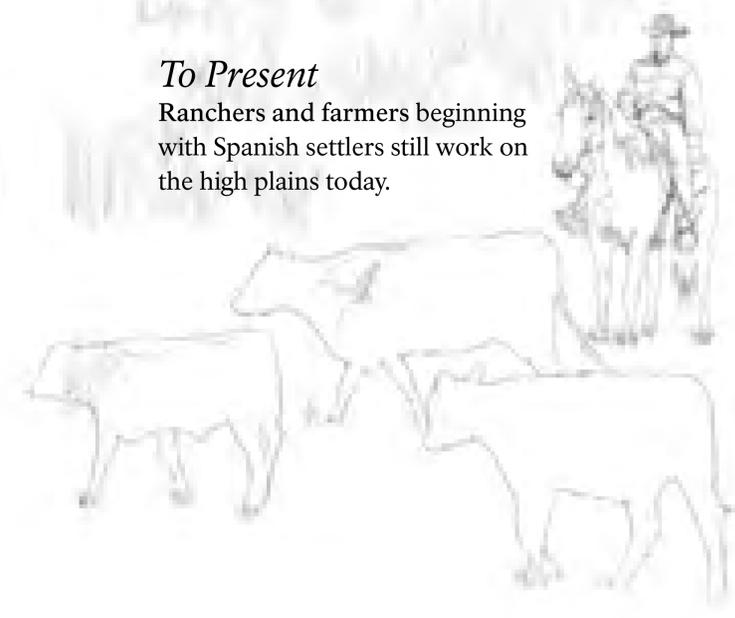
1880 to Present

The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railroad replaced the Santa Fe Trail, altering the primary mode of transportation and commerce in the southwestern U.S.



To Present

Ranchers and farmers beginning with Spanish settlers still work on the high plains today.



A Show of Strength

In 1848, the U.S. Secretary of War ordered Lieutenant Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, as commander of the Ninth Military Department to “revise the whole system of defense (sic)” in the New Mexico Territory. The immediate goal was to move U.S. troops out of towns and closer to the American Indian presence in the territory. Accordingly, Sumner established Fort Union on July 12, 1851, near the junction of the Mountain and Cimarron Branches of the Santa Fe Trail. The location seemed ideal, and conveyed a clear presence of the power of the United States government.

In the distance, you can see remaining structures of Fort Union. When active, the fort comprised a 44,000 acre military reservation. Its remote location required that the fort be large enough to be self-sufficient in sustaining troops and associated civilians.

The grass is very abundant and of excellent quality and wood plenty in the neighborhood. There are many springs of clear, cold, water in the vicinity and this valley is in short by far the most desirable portion of country I have seen since leaving Missouri.

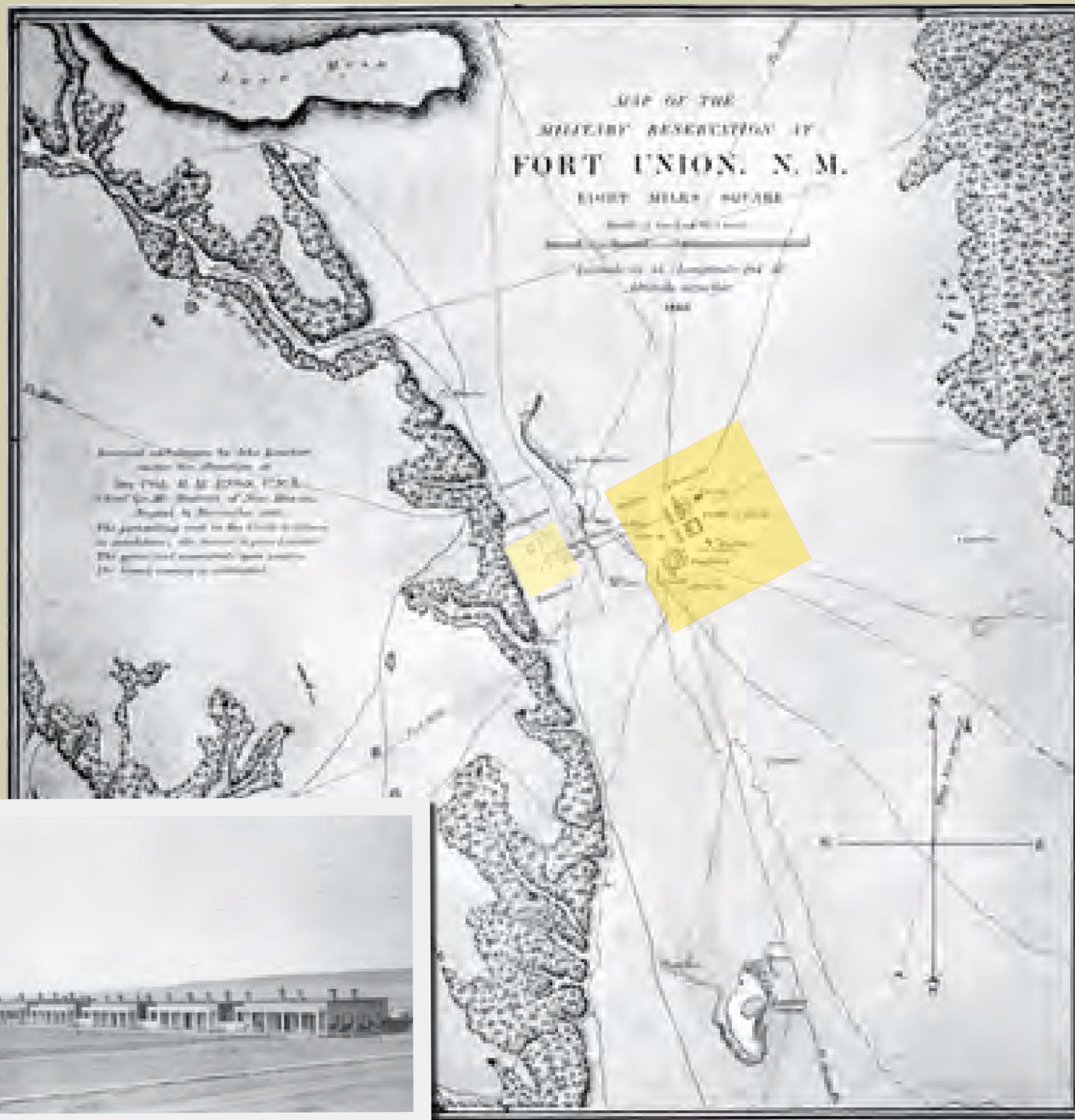
Journal of Captain John Pope, July 12, 1851.



Scene in front of officers quarters Fort Union circa: 1887.



Officers Row, Fort Union



At 721 acres, Fort Union National Monument comprises less than 2% of the original 44,000-acre military reservation established in 1851.