

[A short time ago I stood on U. S. Highway 54]

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Old Timers Dictionary

In

Detail

A short time ago I stood on U.S. Highway 54 talking to some friends, at a point, where tourists cross the boundry line from La Tuna, Texas to Anthony, New Mexico.

"Just watch those cars whiz from one state to another," said an old-timer. "I bet they don't know when they cross the line."

"Well, if they don't," spoke up an old lady, 'the Port of Entry officials will make 'em pause long enough to take notice."

"Is it true," I asked a man called Bob, "that the desert east of Anthony was once covered with grass?"

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"It sure was lady. The cattlemen around these parts used to graze their cattle on it. And Anthony was known as the 'Refugio Grant.' It was filed as the 'Refugio Grant Colony,' December 17, 1869. There wasn't any bridge across the Rio Grande in them days. Me and my old horse forded that stream many a time."

"I still believe there's gold in the Franklin mountains," said another old-timer, pointing at the mountain range east of town. "Some of the old mining men around here claim that Mt. Franklin conceals many a lost treasure. Now there's that legend about some Indians--want to hear it?"

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"Yes," I answered, "and that one about Anthon's Anthony's peak, too."

"Oh, you mean Anthony's nose. The only thing I know is that the mountain was named in honor of St. Anthony, the patron Saint of youth," 2 he said.

"Thanks," I replied, "that's more than anyone else has told me."

"I guess I'd better get started on that legend," he said. "You see, lady, I got this story from one of the early settlers, and he got it from a very old Mexican. Along about 1851, when James S. Calhoun the first Governor of New Mexico was in office, Indians were as thick as ants. One bright day six Indians on horses and carrying several boxes of gold were seen up there in the mountains near the Anthony gap. That was the last seen of them till several years later--than they were dead."

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"Were they the same Indians?" I inquired.

"They must have been, for there were exactly six human skeletons and six horse skeletons. Whether they were robbed then murdered, or murdered after they hid the gold, nobody knows. And they weren't certain just how they were murdered, but it wasn't hard to guess. For not far away, but scattered in different directions, they found several arrows, which were identified as belonging to the fierce apaches. Well," he said, glancing over his shoulder and starting down the highway, "I'm in an awful hurry. My wife sent me to the grocery two hours ago, and there she comes."

There are several versions of the legend of the six Indians. Some of the old-timers say there were five Indians, and that they carried sacks of gold. James S. Calhoun: First Governor of New Mexico was appointed under the regular territorial government. He was inaugurated as governor on March 5, 1851, and during his term of office had a great deal of trouble with Indian uprisings. At an earlier date, 1849, he was Indian agent for New Mexico. He died in the month of May, 1852, en route to Washington.

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"I wonder if any of you know the story of Cimarron Kate?"

"Yep." The man we call Bob took it upon himself to answer. "I've been in her cave and dug around considerable, but I ain't found no cache. She was a woman bandit and the leader of a gang of outlaws. I've been told that she hung around here about 1854. One day she got wind that the Wells Fargo Express was bringin' a big shipment of gold bullion through the valley. Well, her and her gang hid out in the mesquite, and suddenly, swooped down on the express, shot the driver, and took all the gold their broncs could carry."

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"Where did they take it?" I asked.

"Well, they was aimin' to get to her cave and had just about reached it when a posse, hot on their heels, opened fire. The bandits returned the fire and kept the posse busy till Kate hid the gold and made her escape. They fought a hot battle and every darn outlaw was killed. The cave is close to the spot where the battle took place, that's why they call it the Cimarron Kate cave." he said.

"Judge," I said, turning to a tall man who had just joined us, "I wish you'd give me your version of Doniphan's expedition, and the battle of Brasito, near old Fort Fillmore."

"Is that all?" His eyes twinkling, for I had called on him before.

"No," I confessed. "First I should like to have you tell us what you think of New Mexico and our highway, or U.S. Highway 54."

"Very well. As far as climate is concerned, I don't know of another state in the Union that equals New Mexico. It is without doubt a land of enchantment, and they couldn't have given this road a more fitting name than the Broadway of America. For it is a route over which savage tribes and civilized nations have traveled for ages. Look at that." He pointed to the Organ mountains northeast of us.

"Oh, how beautiful!" I exclaimed.

"Perfect coloring," the judge agreed. "Now you know why the western writer, Jean Manlove Rhodes, called the Organs, 'Rainbow Mountains.'"

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"That's where the Hermit of the Hills spent part of his life," said the old Lady. In fact he died in the Organs. I forget how the story goes, but it's worth hearing. Don't fail to have someone tell it to you."

"Thanks," I replied. "A lady in Old Mesilla has promised to tell me about the Hermit. He used to visit with her parents."

"Have I ever told you that one about the engineer and the Organs?" asked Bob.

"I don't believe you have," I answered.

"Well," he began, "this engineer was one of them big guys from the East. One day he stared at the Organs and said: 'There's a greap piece of engineerin' work w itin' up there for some man. If holes were drilled in them pipes at the correct angle, this valley would be flooded with soft, sweet, music, every time the wind blew.'

"Well," Bob continued, "I thought that engineer was poco loco. (little crazy). So I said: 'Mister the job's yourn, 'cause I don't know anybody around here with enough energy to turn the trick. And I recon you don't know how much wind we've got here. I'm afeared we'd get too much pipe music.'"

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"Now, Judge, it's your turn," I said.

"Oh, yes." He wrinkled his brows in thought a moment; then proceeded to tell his story; "The battle of Brasito, or Little Arm, took place December 22, 1846. In the same year, but,

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prior to the battle, General Kearny took possession of Santa Fe, and set up an American government. Kearny was Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan's superior officer. Then Kearny went to California, and two months later, Col. Doniphan started south to meet General Wood at Chihuahua, Old Mexico.

"Col. Doniphan and his missourians had suffered many privations on their march across the desert. Footsore and hungry, they stopped at the town of Dona Ana, where they found not only food and water, but also Lieut. Colonel Jackson and Major Gilipin with their detachments.

"On Christmas eve morning the whole command, baggage and all, were headed for El Paso. Doniphan's men had endured hardships and their clothes were in pretty bad condition, but they were happy and sang and joked all the way. Some of them voiced a wish that they would have a battle on Christmas day.

"Finally they sighted the beautiful Organ mountains, and after eighteen miles of hard travel, called a halt at Brazito, where on the east side of the Rio Grande, the Colonel pitched his camp. His men were soon scattered in all directions, looking for wood, water, and fresh grass for their horses. Suddenly some of the soldiers saw an unusually large formation of dust in the direction of El Paso. In less than a quarter of an hour the whole camp was one hum of excitement.

"Several of the advance guard, galloping their horses at full speed, dashed up to the Colonel shouting at the top of their voices: 'The enemy is advancing upon us!' Following this announcement, the officers began to snap out commands and orders; the bugler blew assembly; the soldiers sent up a shout of joy; discarded their wood, grass, and water and grabbing 6 their rifles fell into line. Those boys were so thrilled at the prospect of a battle on Christmas day that they began to sing, filling the valley with the stirring tune of "Yankee Doodle Went to Town". In modern language, they went to town all right, and how!

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"The Missouriians were no sooner in line, when General Ponce de Leon with thirteen hundred strong, flanked Colonel Doniphan's men on the left and right. The Mexican General had about five hundred regular Dragoons and eight hundred volunteers. The peacock's feathers were dull by comparison to the Dragoons' uniforms of scarlet-trimmed green coats, tall caps with brass ornaments and stately plumes. Their trousers were a vivid blue, and the bright afternoon sun made their highly polished lances and swords fairly sparkle.

"Just before the battle took place General Ponce De Leon sent a messenger, bearing a black flag, up to the American lines. And Colonel Doniphan sent an interpreter to meet the messenger. The messenger told the interpreter that General Ponce De Leon wished the American Commander to appear before him. Looking the messenger straight in the eye the interpreter replied:

"If your General wants to talk peace, tell him to advance to the American lines.'

"Then the messenger got hot, too, and retorted likewise, telling the interpreter that the Mexican soldiers would break the American lines and take their Commander by force.

"Take him!' challenged the interpreter.

"With a vile oath, sending the Americans to perdition, the messenger jerked his horse around and was gone like a flash. At this point Colonel Doniphan used a bit of strategy that worked like a charm. He acted uncertain about the next move and held his men back. Thinking that the Americans were afraid the Mexicans charged the American lines in full force. The battle waxed hot and furious, for about thirty minutes, but the Mexicans were soon routed and retreating toward El Paso."

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At the battle of Brazito, which took place near old Fort Fillmore, seventy-one Mexicans were killed and fifty wounded. The Americans had eight wounded, but none killed. The chief object of the Mexican advance was to prevent the Americans from marching on to Chihuahua to enforce the American troops under General Wood. Following the battle the American soldiers tossed their hats above their heads with a victorious shout, crying: "On to Chihuahua!"

The Missouriians made quite a contrast to the gay Dragoons. Some of them were not even mounted, and their nondescript clothes could hardly be called uniforms. Their beards, hair, and mustaches had not been touched by a barber for months. And the majority of them wore coon-skin caps at a rakish angle.

Alexander W. Doniphan: Born in Mason County, Kentucky, July 8, 1808. First Regiment, Col. Missouri Mounted Volunteers. Commanded the American forces at battle of Sacramento. One of the greatest American lawyers. Idol of Western Missouri. Died at Richmond, Missouri, August 8, 1888.

The Battle of Brazito was told to the writer by an old timer.

* Battle at Temascalito. (Called by Col. Doniphan Battle of Brazito).

Fort Fillmore

(Taken from George Griggs' History of Mesilla Valley)

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Fort Fillmore, named after President Fillmore, was situated at Brazito, 40 miles above El Paso. When the military posts at Dona Ana and El Paso were abandoned, Fort Fillmore was established September 23, 1851, having been chosen as a better defense position than the two abandoned forts.

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The post was occupied by Company H of the 1st Dragoons and Companies E and K of the 3rd Infantry. Fort Fillmore was abandoned by Union troops July 26, 1861, and fell into the hands of the Confederates. It was reoccupied by a Union force August 11, 1862, and held until November 13, 1862, when it was again abandoned.