

Old Fort Still in Service



THE OLD MILITARY POSTS of Utah have a special glamor of their own, recalling as they do, a day not so far gone when the citizens depended upon the blue-coated figures of Uncle Sam's men to protect them in this alien territory. Most of these posts are mere relics of the past but there is one which still holds the semblance of its old glory and its old utility.

It is Ft. Duchesne, out in Duchesne County. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, migration to the west grew to astounding proportions and the attendant troubles with the In-

Town Of the Week

having died not so many years ago. agency offices, and the employes on duty.

After the Meeker massacre, the government made a treaty with the three tribes—the Uintahs, Ourays and Uncompahagres, whereby they would move from Colorado to Utah and keep the peace for twenty years.

It was to look after these tribes and keep them from fighting among themselves that Ft. Duchesne was established in 1888. The buildings at Ft. Thornberg were torn down and the lumber moved to the site of the new post where it was used for stables and outbuildings. The barracks and officers quarters were made of new lumber and painted gray.

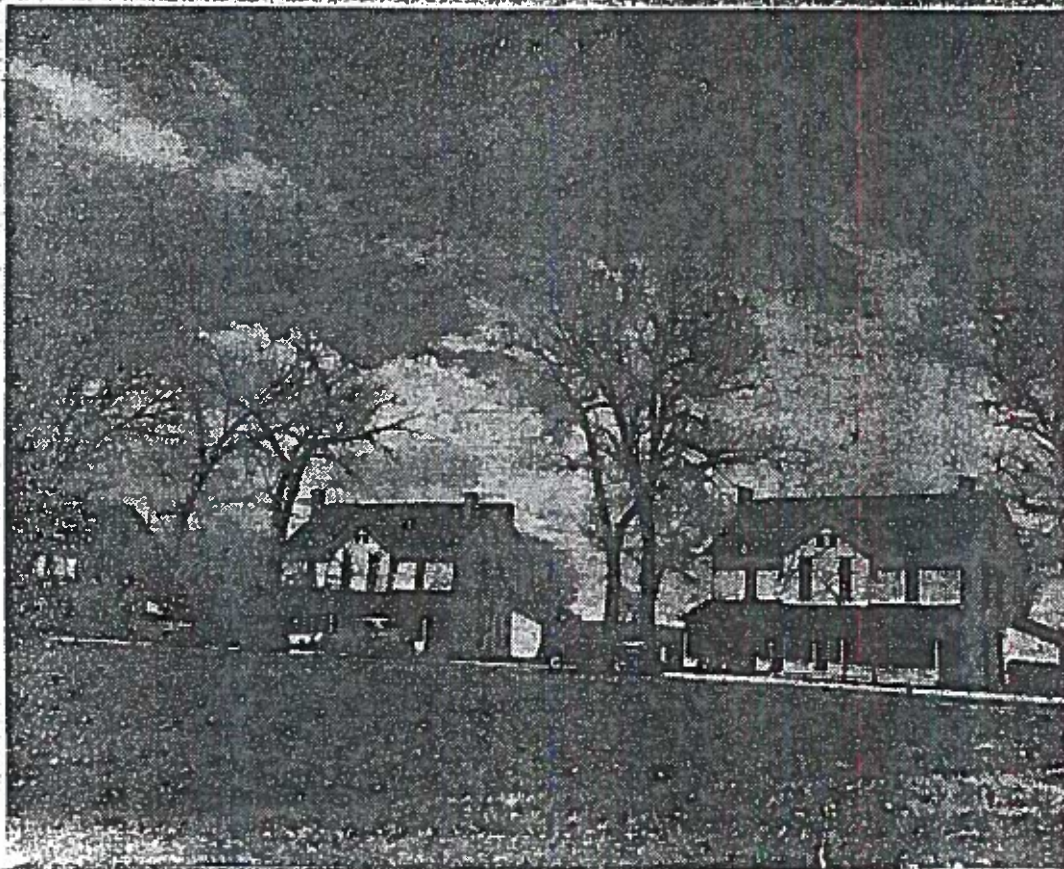
The buildings were placed in a circle, facing a circular parade ground.

THE FIRST SOLDIERS to be stationed here were the 9th Cavalry, Negro. These made a brave showing in their blue uniforms and brass buttons and doubtless greatly impressed the Indians. There was never any real battle after the soldiers arrived, though in 1891 the Utes planned to fight and the community was filled with alarm. The cavalry rode out in battle array only to meet the Indian chief, carrying a white flag of truce and ask-

One notable difference from the older times is the fine modern hospital for the Indians built on the site of the old fort. This building with its land- scape and outbuilding all arranged in a neat and compact group is one of the finest Indian hospitals in the country. Completed in 1937, it is adequately staffed and equipped and does an excellent job of caring for the Indians on the reservation.

ANOTHER CHANGE is in Wong Sing's store, which is now a modern GCA establishment on the highway just north of the old site. Not so many years ago, a small square building with a roof reminiscent of the Orient, far from any house or community catering to the Indians of the area with a stock that was claimed to be worth nearly a million dollars.

Wong Sing, who has become a legend in the region, came to America as a little boy and drifted about the Pacific Coast



dians became a matter of national concern. The verdant Ashley Valley, which was attracting settlers from Colorado as well as from the settlements in Utah, lay right in the center of the land occupied by the Uintah Indians. To protect the Pioneers in this area, old Ft. Thornburg was erected and maintained by Uncle Sam in the early 80's.

THE SETTLEMENT AT VERNAL was the most important in the Ashley Valley. South and east of this settlement in Colorado lay Meeker, a tiny community in the very heart of the Indian land.

About 1888 the Indians rose against Meeker, the Indian agent, and massacred him and

ing for a parley. In 1898 the Negro soldiers were withdrawn to fight in the Philippines. They were ordered to sell their blankets, overcoats and heavy underwear, as these things would not be needed in the tropics. This was a great opportunity for the settlers and the days of the sale were lively ones.

The parade ground became a scene of animation, with the farmers in their tightly fitting jeans, their wives and daughters in bright, full calico dresses, the Indians in their bright blankets and the soldiers in their uniforms.

This same Ninth Cavalry won fame at the battle of San Juan Hill and the early settlers who are still alive remember with pride the Indian

area, working for relatives. He finally became a laundryman, and when the fort was established, he was given the job of laundryman to the soldiers.

SOME OF THE OLD settlers can remember seeing Wong Sing go down to the Uinta River to get the water for his washing. He carried his pails slung from a pole across his shoulders. This always amused the small boys, who would yell taunts and gibes at the silent Oriental, quietly going about his work.

When the soldiers left in 1912, Wong Sing started a little store at the post, but soon became dissatisfied with the location and purchased a little shack that stood where his famous store later developed.



EAST MEETS WEST—The modern store of Wong Sing stands on highway from Roosevelt to Vernal. The store's beginning is romantic chapter in Basin story.

his wife and daughter. Meeker had heard rumors of the Indian uprising and had sent to Ft. Thornburg for aid. "Watermelon Jane," a squaw who worked for the Meeker family, knew what her employer had done, and warned the Indians.

So, before the soldiers could arrive, the Indians killed the whole Meeker family.

WATERMELON JANE DIED in 1917, and others of the Indians who took part in this affair lived out their lives on the reservation, some of the oldest

tions that existed between them and the troops when they were at Ft. Duchesne.

WHITE SOLDIERS replaced the Negroes and these remained until 1912, when the government decided it was useless to maintain an army post there. Most of the soldiers left, never to return, but a few married local girls and settled down to become Utah farmers.

Today, the buildings still stand almost exactly as when they were first erected, but now the "Fort" is headquarters for the Reservation Agency, and the buildings house the

Wong Sing was killed in an automobile accident in Parley's Canyon some ten or twelve years ago, and his nephew, who had been helping him, took over the store, moving it to the modern building on the highway only a few years ago.

Quietly, among its old trees, the fort stands a little off the highway, little noticed by the cars that speed past. But in its time it played an important part in the settling of the west, and even today it still goes on unobtrusively with its work—a different work, but an important one.