OTERO COUNTY COLORADO



Holly Sugar Smoke Stack
circa 1906

CHERAW | FOWLER | LA JUNTA
MANZANOLA | ROCKY FORD | SWINK
and the onetime community of HIGBEE

OTERO COUNTY COLORADO

Otero County in southeastern Colorado is known for its farming and ranching, its melons and chilies, and its communities along the Arkansas and Purgatory Rivers. Named for Miguel A. Otero, member of a prominent Hispanic family and founder of the county seat, the county has within its borders the towns of Cheraw, Fowler, La Junta, Manzanola, Rocky Ford, Swink, and the site of the unincorporated community of Higbee. All these towns are notable, but the town of La Junta is conspicuous for having the second largest cattle market in the United States.

Otero County was carved out of the original Bent County in 1889, along with Crowley, Lincoln, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Prowers Counties. La Junta was its original county seat.

Passing through its upper tier are U.S. Highway 50, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, the Arkansas River, and traces of the old Santa Fe Trail. Each day, Amtrak's Southwest Chief passenger trains, east- and westbound, stop in La Junta, and over 30 freight trains roll through.

In addition to the historic sites named in the following pages are museums, parks, homes, post offices, libraries, and fairground stables that are listed in the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties and National Register of Historic Places, including the most important: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site along the Santa Fe Trail.

FOWLER

The Fowler Park School represents the evolution of the town of Fowler over a period of 100 years. In 1901, the first school building was constructed on this site. A fire in 1905 caused damage to the original building, and a second fire destroyed the building to the point the whole building had to be replaced. Rebuilding was completed in 1910. This new



Fowler Park School

building was occupied for 93 years until School District R4J gave it to the town of Fowler. When the building was vacated in 2003, students moved to a new school on West Grant Avenue in the fall of that year.



Located at 401 South 6th Street, Park School's 1905 and 1908 sections were built in the Romanesque Revival style popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, using red brick that survived the 1905 fire. Later phases of construction display a simpler design with steel stairs and Battleship linoleum flooring. Placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2006, Park School was listed because of its distinctive architectural characteristics and its association with the development of the town of Fowler and Otero County.

HIGBEE

The Higbee Cemetery is located 20 miles south of La Junta along Otero County Road 804, 1½ miles west of U.S. Highway 109. Established sometime in the 1860s, its oldest grave (1869) is likely that of Robert Henry Whatley, who had served in a California Federal cavalry unit during the Civil War.





Civil War Soldier's Grave

Higbee was settled in the "Purgatoire River Valley" ("The River of Lost Souls in Purgatory"). The earliest inhabitants left petroglyphs pecked into the desert-varnished faces of boulders that dot the slopes of bluffs in the area. Settlers built stone and adobe homes, barns, schools, churches, and walls, and dug irrigation canals by hand. One of these was nine miles long, which gave the locale another name: "Nine Mile Bottom." Small farms and homesteads developed, and produce was sold to Trinidad and Fort Lyon, near Bent's New Fort.

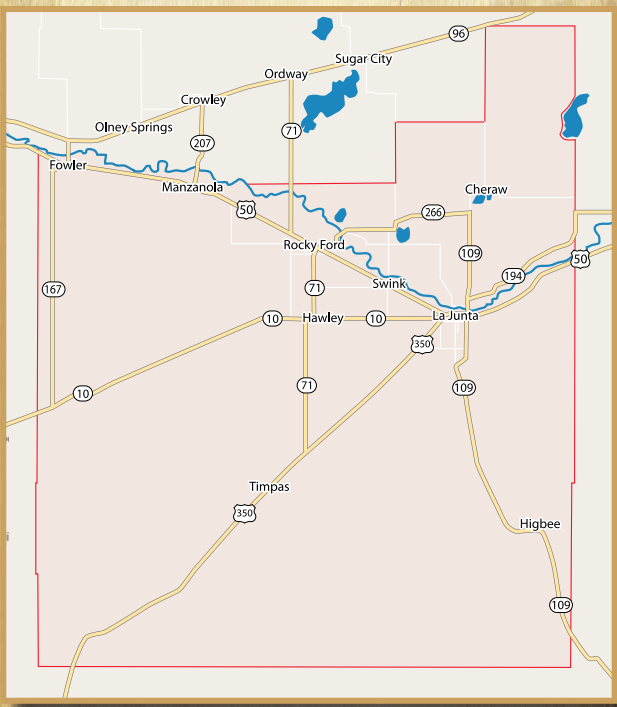
Burials in this cemetery, continuing today, are strictly limited to residents of Higbee, their descendants, and their close kin, Anglo and Hispanic. Grave markers recount the history of Higbee, widely known

HIGBEE

as the location of the headquarters of the famous J J Ranch, begun in 1870 by the Jones brothers, of Scot-Irish heritage, who drove cattle up from Texas.

Many of those buried here are direct and lateral descendants of Christopher "Kit" Carson, the famous pathfinder, frontiersman, mountain man, and army officer, as well as others whose names are prominent in the settling of Otero County and southeastern Colorado. Trustees of the cemetery are the Higbee Get-together Club, a women's organization. Founded December 27, 1923, the organization is still strong, overseeing maintenance and upkeep of facilities. The cemetery was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2012.

Map of Otero County Area



LA JUNTA



Wickham House

As the Santa Fe Railroad moved west from Kansas to Southeastern Colorado, food and shelter were needed by the workers. The Wickham House—a frame house of practical frontier construction—was built in Granada, Colorado, in 1873 when Mrs. Nancy Wickham ran it as a boarding house, providing meals for railroad workers. This very house was placed on a flatbed railroad car that followed rail construction in its steady progress toward La Junta, where it arrived in 1875. It is thought to have been the first wooden house in town, all others being adobe, brick, or stone.

In La Junta, Mrs. Wickham continued to serve meals at the house located near where the BNSF depot stands on the north side of 1st and Colorado Avenue. The Wickham House was never a boarding house in the truest sense of the word, being a place for meals to be cooked and eaten but offering no sleeping accommodations. Its four small rooms are believed to have included the kitchen, a dining room, parlor, and bedroom. Workers had to eat outside. In 1886, a dining room belonging to the famous Fred Harvey chain came to La Junta with all of its advertised conveniences. In response, Mrs. Wickham moved her house a half mile west, and there she continued to serve meals.



In February of 1881, the year the town of La Junta was incorporated, Mrs. Wickham's daughter Ida was to marry

Lee Charles Gillen. The Methodist minister in Las Animas, 20 miles away, was to perform the ceremony, and all railroaders and cattlemen there were invited. Then a flood washed out the tracks between the towns with the bride and groom-to-be in La Junta. What to do? The Santa Fe's chief dispatcher said, "Marry them by telegraph!" An attorney said it would be legal, so the wedding was conducted by Morse Code with the couple and minister standing in their respective stations.

Today, the original telegraph, their marriage license, and the Wickham House can be seen at the Otero County Museum at 2nd and Anderson in La Junta, where the house was moved a century later because of its important role in the foundational history of La Junta and the region. It was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2007.



Sciumbato House and Store

The Daniel Sciumbato house and grocery store sits in its original location, now within the perimeter of the Otero County Museum at 218 Anderson in La Junta. In 1901 Sciumbato purchased a two-room adobe house with 16-inch-thick walls constructed between 1876 and 1900, to which this native of Rizzuto, Italy, added a wood building in 1908 and a brick building in 1910 as his family grew. There came to be four small rooms upstairs and three rooms on the first floor behind the grocery store that extended forward to the street.

The store and home are part of the Otero County Museum and open to the public. They are furnished as a store and home, and tours are given explaining the history of the building, its role in La Junta history, and the business and living conditions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

As soon as they were old enough, all six of the Sciumbato children helped in the grocery store. Using a horse-drawn wagon, Mr. Sciumbato hauled produce from local farms to sell, and they delivered groceries. Sciumbato ran the store until his death in 1942, at which time Mrs. Sciumbato and son George took over the business. After his mother's death in 1947, George and a sister continued to run the business for a number of years, and until 1974 some inventory was maintained in the small neighborhood store. After George's death in 1974, the building and its contents were sold, the store left empty, and the house sold.

In 1984 the store and home were sold to the Otero County Museum, where it may be seen by the public. That same year the Sciumbato Store was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2007 it was listed in the Otero County Historic Register.



The DAR Arch at Bent's Old Fort

The most famous historical site located in Otero County is the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, located on the Arkansas River 11 miles northeast of La Junta on U.S. Highway 194. It is accompanied by an equally important landmark on the highway, an arch erected in 1930 by the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution.

The original fort, established by William and Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain in 1833, was the most famous trading post on the Santa Fe Trail (1821 – 1870), the only major trail dedicated to commerce from the eastern United States into Mexico. Originally beginning at Franklin, MO, it carried American-made goods across 800 miles of plains and mountain passes, in heavily laden ox-drawn wagons, to Santa Fe, NM, where Mexican-made goods began the return trek. The Bents and St. Vrain located the fort

where they did because of lucrative trade with the large numbers of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians who followed the great herds of buffalo along the Arkansas River.

For approximately 16 years, the fort offered safety, repairs, comforts, and trade goods to traders, travelers, mountain men, Indians of several tribes, explorers, and military columns. Because the border between the U.S. and old Mexico was just yards south of the fort across the Arkansas River, trade with Mexicans was convenient until 1846 when the war with Mexico began. However, it was never an embattled fort, unlike most nineteenth century forts; it was a place of business and relative peace.

Many famous people visited the original fort, reconstructed on its exact "footprint" by the National Park Service in 1976. Visitors to the fort included fur trade era frontiersmen and trappers, notably Kit Carson. Because the National Park Service rebuilt the fort where it stood historically, visitors today can walk exactly where these stalwarts walked. Rebuilding relied heavily on archeological digs of the 1950s and '60s and an iconic drawing of the fort made by James Abert, mapmaker with Col. Stephen Karney's army marching to war with Mexico in 1846.

From 1926 until 1954, when the fort site was deeded to the state of Colorado for use by the state's Historical Society, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) protected what remained of the old fort. Beginning in 1906, these women were the most prominent and effective guardians of the fort's land and foundations, which were succumbing rapidly to theft of building materials, weather, and roaming cattle. In 1960, it became the property of the National Park Service.

In 1930, the La Junta Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution had this large gateway constructed to call attention to the historic fort site, and for 40 years, visitors to the site walked or drove through the arch. Its framework is steel, to which is affixed a body of river rock and mortar, which has remained unaltered and structurally sound for over 85 years. Only the sign "Bent's Old Fort" above the opening has been repaired. When the reconstructed fort opened in Colorado's Centennial year, 1976, the entryway was moved to its present location. The arch was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2013.

MANZANOLA



Manzanola School

The Manzanola Junior / Senior High School, located at 301 South Catalpa, was completed in 1925. The building was constructed in an eclectic style with Classical influences. Built entirely of tan bricks, the building features large arched windows with exaggerated keystones, a flat roof, parapet walls, and unbroken pediments above the library and auditorium doors.

In addition to its historic significance and role as one of the centers of the community, the Manzanola Junior/ Senior High School is significant for its association with architect Temple Hoyne Buell (1895-1930), who designed the building. It was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2006.

Following service in World War I, Buell moved to Denver for tuberculosis treatments. He designed over 300 buildings in Colorado, and commissions included the Denver Paramount Theatre, Lincoln Park, and numerous schools around the state. Buell is best known for designing the Cherry Creek Shopping Center at East First Avenue and South University Boulevard, which is considered one of the first pedestrian shopping malls in the country.



The Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia University, where Buell earned his M.S. in Architecture, is named in his honor.

ROCKY FORD

The bronze casting of a happy baby elephant head, on display at the Rocky Ford City Library, 400 South 10th Street, is faithfully cast from a terra cotta original created in 1948 by the renowned Walt Disney animator and sculptor Ira Blaine Gibson, a native of Rocky Ford and 1936 graduate of Rocky Ford High School. The sculpture was part of a fountain donated by Gibson to the Rocky Ford Greenhouse "for the enjoyment of children, and the fountain was a favorite of generations of local children and adults. Today, the terra cotta sculpture, shown in the photograph, is in possession of its Rocky Ford owner. The one-of-a-kind elephant sculpture at one time sprayed water out of its trunk into a goldfish pond below.



Gibson Elephant

During the Depression, young Gibson showed promise as an artist, and his mother suggested sending some of his drawings to the Disney Company. In response, his application to join its team of artists was accepted, and he enrolled as an apprentice animator.

Gibson was responsible for many of the Animatronic animals and statues for which Disney parks are famous. These include the Jungle Cruise and Pirates of the Caribbean rides and shows. He drew Mickey, Donald, and Pluto and graduated to do animation for five feature films: "Song of the South," "Peter Pan," "Alice in Wonderland," "Sleeping Beauty," and "101 Dalmations." Blaine Gibson, the young artist from the little town of Rocky Ford, sculpted the famous statue of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse welcoming visitors to Disneyland in California. His original fired clay elephant head was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2015.

Gibson passed away in 2015. His family is commended for their support, as they have contributed the bronze recasting in honor of his body of work.

ROCKY FORD

The First Presbyterian Church, 303 South 9th Street, called by its congregation today the CommUNITY Presbyterian Church, was dedicated to public worship at a service in 1907. Constructed at a cost of $25,000, including furnishings, at the time it was labeled "the finest piece of church architecture in any of the towns and cities of the Arkansas Valley, including the city of Pueblo," and the sanctuary was said to be "the most artistic in the state."



First Presbyterian Church

In the beginning, every exterior wall displayed a stained glass window, including a stained glass dome 18 feet in diameter above the sanctuary, a rose window, and stained glass windows depicting "Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane," and Christ inviting children to "Come Unto Me." The dome and all of these windows remain, although some have been relocated to inside walls in more recent years.

To the left in the sanctuary are the choir loft and Kimball pipe organ with 571 pipes. This two-manual "theatrical" organ was dedicated in 1920 as a memorial to "the loyalty, bravery and sacrifice of our soldiers who served in World War I"; plaques honor other hometown servicemen in succeeding wars through the Vietnam War.

The church was rededicated in 2007, its centennial year. It was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2009. According to church records,



ROCKY FORD

"The superstructure is of gray manganese pressed brick with pebble glazed finish." Gothic arched corridors extend along the north and east fronts, forming spacious entrances to the building. The church architect was J. C. Fulton of Uniontown, PA, who specialized in church architecture, and the builder was S. A. McDonald, who afterward moved his business to Rocky Ford from Denver. The artists in stained glass, on record, were Arnold and Locke of Brooklyn, NY.

Rocky Ford's first settlers arrived in 1878, two years after Colorado became a state. The town was incorporated in 1887. A former Presbyterian Church building—constructed on this site in 1891—was the first house of worship erected in Rocky Ford.



White School House

The White School House, sometimes called "The Little White School House," in Rocky Ford was constructed in 1877 and served as a center for community activity as well as an educational establishment. Located at 407 North 12th Street, it was a place of important meetings of the time. Although first just a square building measuring only 15' x 15', Sunday School meetings, church box socials, and political and literary meetings were held there. The original building, planned for 15 to 18 students, was constructed of adobe and had weatherboarding on the outside, which was painted white, giving the building its name.

The meeting to organize the Methodist Church was held in the White School House; the first Catholic Mass in Rocky Ford was celebrated there; and Rocky Ford held its first election there in 1887 when the community voted to incorporate and George Washington Swink was elected Rocky Ford's first mayor.

The school house was enlarged in 1896 when the

ROCKY FORD

Rocky Ford Sugar Factory was under construction and more people were coming to town. The expanded building has two stories, a floor area measuring 30' x 28', a wooden porch in back, and a wooden balcony with a fire escape, also in back.

"The Little White School House" ceased to serve as a school and place for public gatherings in 1898, when it was moved to its present location. In subsequent years, the small building was used as a rental house and then as a medical clinic. It was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2008.

Other Otero County Information

In addition to the historic sites discussed in this brochure there are many significant historic sites that are listed in the State and National Register. These include

- Segments of the Santa Fe Trail
- The Koshare Kiva Museum and City Park both located in La Junta
- The Santa Fe Railway Depot in Manzanola
- The Adobe Stables and octagonal Art Building, located on the Arkansas Valley Fairgrounds, which is the location of the oldest continuous county fair in Colorado
- The beautifully restored Grand Theatre in Rocky Ford
- The 500 acre Vogel Canyon

For a complete list and copies of many of the register nominations, please visit www.historycolorado.org/oahp/otero-county.

SWINK

The smoke stack of the Holly Sugar Processing Plant discharged smoke and steam from boilers that powered all phases of sugar beet processing to create sugar crystals. It stands just northeast of Swink on U.S. Highway 50. Constructed in 1906, this 230-foot-tall stack was a single part of the massive processing plant. From a base just over 62 feet in circumference, the monolithic pillar tapers as it rises and—visible for miles in every direction—it appears to be no less than Otero County's Washington Monument.

It is certainly a monument to, and reminder of, an industry that for three quarters of the 20th century was one of the most important enterprises in Southeastern Colorado. The American West provided sugar for the United States, the greatest sugar consuming nation in the world, and beets grown in the Arkansas Valley had the highest sugar content of any in the world.

The town of Swink was named for Senator George Washington Swink, a leader in the development and processing of farm products in the area. Soon, Swink became a large community with many businesses. The plant closed in 1975, and the smoke stack was placed on the Otero County Historic Register in 2014.



Holly Sugar Smoke Stack

OTERO COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

This brochure is a publication of the Otero County Historic Preservation Advisory Board, established by the Otero County Board of Commissioners. The board is tasked with assisting county residents in nominating and recommending sites to be listed in the County Register of Historic Places to the Commissioners, identifying historic sites and districts, providing information concerning preservation, restoration, rehabilitation and reuse, supporting educational efforts about historic preservation, assisting with preservation projects, and any other such work requested by the Commissioners.

- A historic or cultural resource is typically at least 50 years old
- It can be a building, structure, object, site, district, or landscape, such as a park or a homestead
- Its significance may be associated with history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, a historic event, or a person
- To be listed, a resource should retain a high degree of historic integrity related to its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and sense of place.

Listing in the County, State, or National Registers is an honorary designation, which places no restrictions on the owner of private property. No Otero County, Colorado State, or Federal listing is done without full written consent of the property owner.

The OCHPB can be reached through the County Commissioners' office, 13 West 3rd Street in La Junta 81050, 719-383-3000. Additional information may be found at www.oterogov.com.

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