

BY SHELLEY THOMPSON



Dearest Annie

LETTERS FROM FORT SELDEN

Soldiers stationed at one of New Mexico's forts in the mid-1800s experienced a medley of emotions. Records of fort life indicate long periods of inactivity and boredom punctuated by bursts of mayhem and terror. In between these extremes, men—and sometimes women, too—did what people often do in such circumstances: they drank, smoked, gambled, fought, and messed around, wreaking personal havoc all too human and all too final.

Some also passed the time by re-examining their beliefs and, in the process, found themselves changed forever by their experiences.

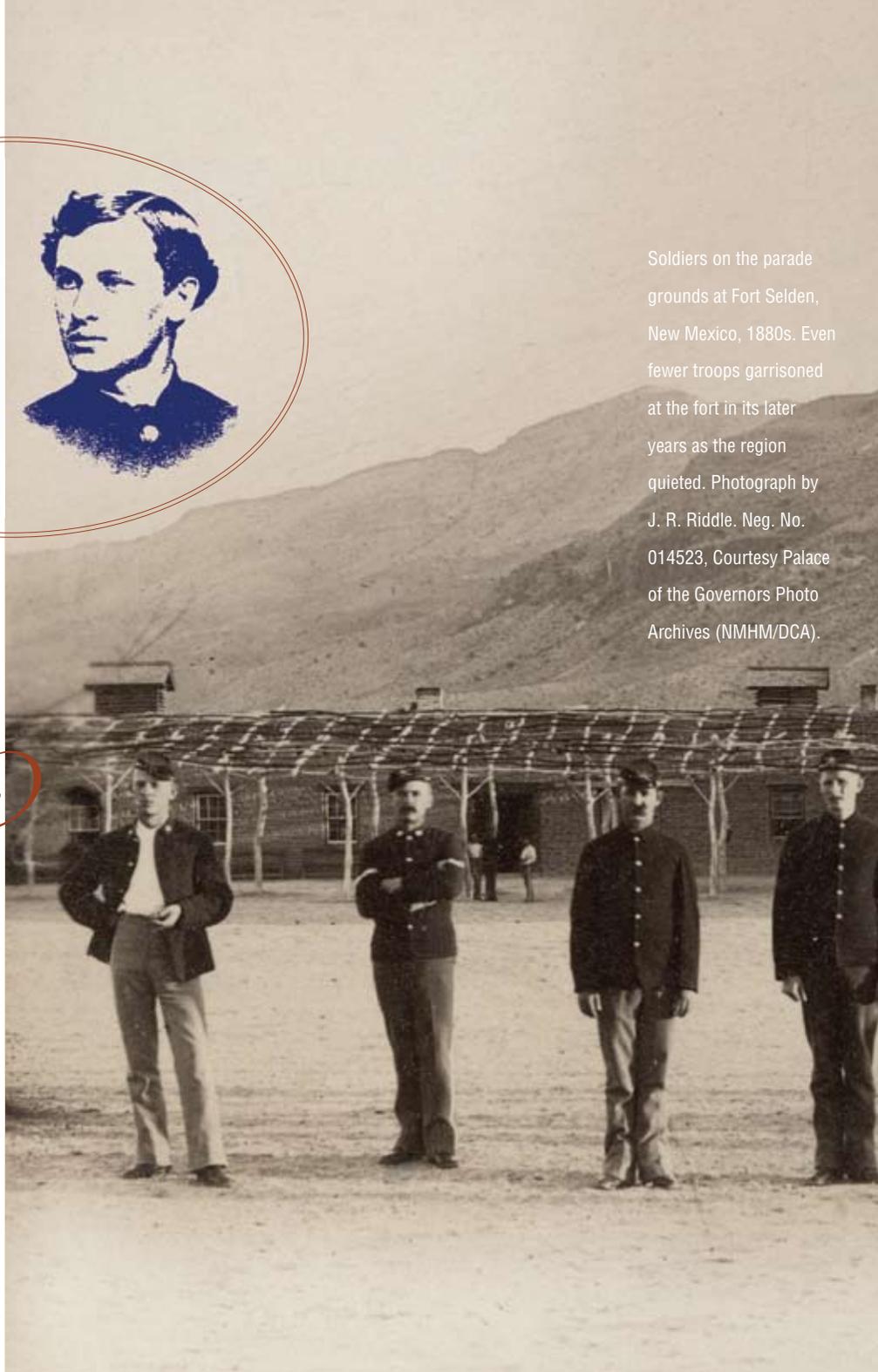
So it was in the long days that turned into years at Fort Selden, one of a series of forts established in New Mexico to protect American interests during a period of aggressive expansion by trappers, settlers, miners, and merchants. Their shared destiny was resisted by local Apache tribes. Though the coveted terrain over the valleys and mesas of southwestern New Mexico was tough, the threats to the US Cavalry and Infantry were tougher still. Yet, more harm was caused by the debauchery within than by Mescalero Apaches defending their homelands and hunting grounds. According to post records, in the twenty-five years that Fort Selden was active, only three soldiers were killed in action against Native Americans.

In collections at modern-day Fort Selden State Monument are copies of a remarkable series of letters written by James Henry Storey that detail life at the western forts, 1862–67. During Storey's five years of US military service, assignments took him to Fort Leavenworth, Fort Lyons, Fort Union, Fort Cummings, Fort McRae, and Fort Selden, where the lieutenant composed many revealing letters and served at the same time with the famed Buffalo Soldiers of the 125th.

In 1998 Storey's letters were provided to Fort Selden by a descendant, Priscilla G. Maulsby of Alpine, Texas, who wrote: "The letters and papers tell a remarkable tale of a most unconventional education during a turbulent period in American history. In reading Great-grandfather's letters, I was struck by the amount of violence and, indeed, of human cruelty, he saw first-hand at a very young and impressionable age." (Records indicate that Storey, said to have a light complexion, gray eyes, and light hair, may have lied about his age and may have been only fifteen years old when he enlisted).

The following selected excerpts are from letters to his sweetheart—Miss Annie Cheshire of 1313 Fulton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York—for whom he had myriad nicknames and abiding feelings. In written words Storey revealed himself to her as in no other correspondence. It was to her he returned a changed man, save for his love for her.

ABOVE: Miss Annie Cheshire and James Henry "Harry" Storey. Images courtesy of Priscilla G. Maulsby of Alpine, Texas.



Soldiers on the parade grounds at Fort Selden, New Mexico, 1880s. Even fewer troops garrisoned at the fort in its later years as the region quieted. Photograph by J. R. Riddle. Neg. No. 014523, Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA).

To Annie

*'Tis said that "absence conquers love"
And though the world is wise
And say's wise sayings every day
That we dare not despise
Yet I will prove this one is false
And by example show
A loved One may be far away
And love still stronger grows*

*James H. Storey
Camp Curtis Noyes
Jamaica [Long Island, New York]
Jan 8th, 1863*

—Found in an envelope marked "Our dear old Flag" that contained a piece of the flag and a lock of light brown hair tied in a blue ribbon.

Fort Cummings, New Mexico
August 20th 1866

My Dear Child;

I arrived here safely yesterday afternoon in the midst of a terrific thunderstorm. I left my command when within ten miles of the post and although the storm was very grand, as the lightning flashed and thunder rolled from peak to peak, I didn't enjoy it much. It is gloomy traveling in this country alone, especially during a heavy storm near the dreaded *Cooks Canyon* where every few rods a pile of stones mark the resting place of some poor fellow, a victim of the Apaches. Before me is the *Scalp* (used as a *haversack*) covered with thick long black hair, Bow, Quiver, and Lance of an Apache Brave killed by the Quartermaster of this post a short time ago. I intend to get the scalp if possible, to send to the L. I. Historical Soc.—but I am afraid it would shock the “Lo the poor Indian” fellows of the Society. I was a little on that style when I first came here, but I have got bravely over that, and if they could see and hear what I have seen and heard in this country, they would be of my mind. The seven hundred graves in this Canyon speak louder than words. Two years ago, when this fort was established, the little plateau within a mile was a perfect bone yard. I love Indians like the Devil. I have been kept awake for two nights with my Carbine and Revolver by my side (sorry it was not Annie!) and my pockets full of Cartridges. Raining like the very “Diabolo” (Mex. for deuce!) the heavens (not starry either) for my canopy. Best fun I've had for a year! Who wouldn't be a soldier on the frontier! Fine place for a man with a large family, very healthy, although “hair” is scarce. I prefer a wig in this place. I traveled from Selden to Cummings with 5 wagons and 19 Beef Cattle. Made the 65 miles in 24 hours, 40 miles without water. Lost two head of Cattle on the way. The Indians scarcely ever attack during the night. They are very superstitious. They say, “At night, the Evil spirit is abroad, the eye of the Great Spirit is closed. He does not see them and they cannot succeed if the Evil spirit is abroad.” Their time for attack or surprise is just before dark or about day break. But I will close my Indian news. I know I have already wearied you, but I cannot write “anything else” and I detest love letters (although I love to get them). Two more nights with my saddle for a pillow and I will be home once more. I leave tomorrow before day break for Selden . . .

Love and a kiss for Ma and Myra. Love and Regards to everybody.
With *much* love and any quantity of paper kisses
(very cheap) I am Darling Annie, Yours, Harry



Fort Selden, New Mexico
October 3rd, 1866

Dearest Annie:

The stage arrived much sooner than I expected the other night and I was obliged to complete my letter before I had half finished. I profited by your advice and wrote to Enders today. I have had the “blues” today. The “crowd” were all on a spree day before yesterday and had not recovered from the effects today, all inside, sick. I have felt lost all day. I will have to go on the War path after “Poor I's” in a few days or I shall have an incurable fit of the blues. Nothing like a ten or fifteen days scout for that complaint . . .

The Commanding Officer is going on a sixty days scout in a few days. I expect to go with the party. We will travel west by north and pass through a country of which little is known. Trappers report that there is any quantity of Gold on a river, supposed to be the Sacramento. Miners that went there, never returned, but we calculate to go there with one hundred men, punish the Indians, and return (some of us). I like the idea of going where the “pale face” has never been.

It is long after Taps, so I will close for tonight.
—“Buenos Noches” mi Caro Annie. Yours, Harry



October 4th, 1866

Dearest Annie,

I have just received your welcome letter of September 12th. Received no official news or orders by this mail. You wish to know what I was on Court Martial for? Why to try enlisted men for getting drunk, etc.—(the men, you must know, are not supposed to get drunk) and sentence them to hard labor, imprisonment, or stoppage of pay.

Love to Ma, Jule, Radie, Myra, Maddie, Mrs. B—and Pa. Regards to everybody. I remain,
Ever Yours, Harry

Fort Selden, Territory of New Mexico
October 18th, 1866

My Dear, Darling Annie;

Your dear letters of September 23rd and 26th were received today. I humbly beg pardon for my neglect in not writing last week, but much to my disappointment I received no letter from my dear girl, so I vowed I would not write until I heard from her. Very ungenerous, was it not? You cannot imagine how glad I was to receive your letters today. It is now quite late. I have just escaped from some of the fellows, who are bound to have a time tonight. I have taken off my blouse, put on my slippers, and seat myself to have a quiet smoke and chat with my Darling, but what to say I cannot tell. Oh, Annie Dear, if I could but see and talk with you for a few hours, what would I not give. I occasionally get disgusted with this life. You have no idea, my dear child, what a life we lead. It is a continual round of dissipation. It is the only pleasure!! we have (if it can be called a pleasure). I often think if I could but see and embrace you once more, I could die happy.

As you know, Annie Darling, I sometimes think I will never see your dear sweet face again. I expect I will remain in this country just long enough to get knocked over by some [Indian] in one of my rambling tours and that will be the last of a sad Storey.

I have made two visits to Las Cruces and La Mesilla since I last wrote. I attended the church at Cruces on Sunday last. Was introduced to the Padre (priest) who by the way is quite a character, Sunday evening I went to the Fandango and played Monte with him. Just imagine a priest praising God in the morning, Sunday at that, and gambling in a public room in presence of a crowd, Sunday evening. The old man is one of the most inveterate gamblers in the Territory, his congregation think nothing of it.

We have had quite an exciting time during the last four or five days. We had a visit from the Paymaster and as a natural consequence, gamblers flock around the post. Three men have been shot in three days, two were buried yesterday. I have been on Boards of Survey for several days and being junior member have to record the proceedings, which gives me but little time to myself.

The Apaches stole a lot of horses yesterday one mile from the post. The Ute tribes have declared war. They attacked Co. G 3rd Cavalry in the Raton Mountains near Trinidad a few days ago. Loss 1 man killed and 2 wounded Cav. 13 Indians killed. The Utes are a powerful, well-armed and good fighting tribe. If our grand moguls do not make peace with them and give them what they want, we will have such an Indian War as we have not had in this century. Regards to everybody.

With much love and kisses without number,
I remain My Darling little Wife Ever your own, Harry



Fort Selden, New Mexico
October 23rd, 1866

My Dearest Darling Little Wife:

A horrible tragedy occurred at the post yesterday, which resulted in the death of two of our Officers. You will remember I mentioned in a previous letter that while crossing the plains I messed with Mrs. Warner, wife of Lieut. Warner of my Company. Warner suspicioned for some time past that Lieut. Fred Hazelhurst of my Regiment was too intimate with his wife. He watched them closely and found that his suspicions were but too true. He accordingly sent his wife to the States a week ago yesterday and applied for a bill of divorce. Yesterday morning Johnny (Warner) called me into his room, locked the doors and handed me three letters addressed to his wife, written by Fred Hazelhurst, in which he calls her his darling Julia, and says he will resign in January and meet her soon after. He denounced Warner and threatened to ruin him. Warner seemed very much affected, said he had taken the letters from the mail the night before and as my name was mentioned in the letters, asked my advice. I advised him not to take any extreme measures in the matter and he promised me he would not, as the letters would enable him to obtain a divorce without any trouble. (continued next page)



He then went with me into my room and smoked for a few minutes. He then went out, saying he wished to see the Colonel. About 12-1/2 o'clock I heard several pistol shots next door in the Colonel's quarters. As I was "Officer of the Day" I rushed out to ascertain the cause. Upon reaching the door I saw Warner rushing out of the room, and Hazelhurst standing in the door with a pistol in his hand. Just as I reached him, he fired. I pushed him aside and begged him to get out of the way as I feared Warner had gone out to attempt to again get into the room by the back door. Hazelhurst exclaimed, "Oh my God, Storey, I am killed." As he was able to stand without a support, I supposed he was not badly hurt, so I went after Warner. Just as I turned the corner of the building, I came across him. Poor fellow, he was just breathing his last—shot through the heart.

Hazelhurst lived until five this morning. I remained with him all night, poor fellow. The officers did not have much sympathy for him and thought he had but got his deserts. I could not see the poor fellow die without a white face around him, so I remained with him to the last. Do you blame me, Darling. He repented before he died and I think 'tis well with him.

Fred was but 23, a reckless devil may care fellow, and a better hearted fellow never lived. We have sat together at the mess table since we have been at this post and I miss him very much. Warner was 28, a real good fellow but a man of no depth of mind. He had been Quartermaster and Commissary of Subsistence at this post for five or six weeks. A lot of us were together a few nights ago. Warner gave the following as a toast:

Then stand to your glasses steady Here's a health to the Dead already
This world is a world of lies Three cheers for the next man that dies.

Poor fellow, he little thought he would be the next one. We buried them this afternoon, side by side. I commanded the funeral escort for Hazelhurst. A few yards march with muffled drums, three volleys over the graves, and that was the end of two men who might have lived for years to come, but for the perfidy of one woman.



Fort McRae, New Mexico
October 13th, 1867

My Dear Friend Annie:

I left Selden for the States on the 7th inst. but on my arrival at Craig was ordered to take command of this deserted post, is it not too bad. I expected to be in Washington on the 1st of December but it's just my usual fortune to be disappointed. I arrived here on the 11th from Fort Craig. It is very lonely. I am the only Officer at the Post and my only associates are the Sutler and Hay Contractors.

Fort McRae is a small post, about 45 miles south of Fort Craig, near the Rio Grande, built for the protection of the travel across the "Jornada del Muerto" (Journey of Death). The springs here are known as the "Ojo del Muerto" (Spring of Death) and before this post was established many a poor fellow received his death wounds from "poor Lo" lurking in the thick Chapparal around the spring. I have twenty-three men, eleven armed and equipped as Cavalry. Stray Indians are continually seen in the vicinity of the post.

Last night (Sunday, I believe!!), I had quite an exciting time. I had been reading until about 10 o'clock, when I thought the dogs were making an unusual noise. I stepped to the door. After watching some time I saw two dusky figures crawling towards my corral. I quietly went to the quarters and aroused the men. With four men I "crawfished" to the opposite side of the corral, but they were too sharp for me. They probably noticed my movements and made tracks for the canyon. Their moccasin tracks were plainly visible this morning. Several hundred captive Navajos recently effected their escape from the Reservation at Fort Sumner; if they attempt to return to their country they will probably pass through this Canyon (providing they can do so) so I have to be on the lookout continually—In a few days I intend taking a small party into the next Canyon (4 miles) and attack a small party my men report having seen there day before yesterday.

My friend Lieut. Williams, 5th U.S. Infantry, was killed by Indians in Colorado a few days ago, poor "Holy Joe." The last time we met, he said he had a presentiment that he would be jumped by Indians. He little expected he would be so suddenly cut off, but such is a soldier's life. Today all is life and gaiety. Tomorrow we embrace mother earth.

. . . I expect to be relieved here before the 1st November, when I expect I will surely "strike the States Trail." Do not answer this. It is very doubtful where I will be, one month from this time. I will write occasionally, and keep you posted as to my whereabouts.

Love to Ma, Jule and Myra. Regards to all enquiring friends.

I remain Truly Your Friend,
J. Henry Storey



In December 1867, James Henry Storey (then at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas) was discharged from service and returned to New York. Priscilla G. Maulsby writes in her preface to these letters: "Obviously the Storey story doesn't end in 1867. James Henry returned to Brooklyn, where he continued his efforts to secure an appointment to West Point. He appears to have worked briefly, and unhappily, as a printer; later, he became a records clerk for the Department of Health. His pursuit of Annie was fortunately much more successful than his efforts to pursue a military education. They were married on July 21, 1870, in Trenton, New Jersey, and they lived for the rest of their lives in Brooklyn, where James Henry Storey had a career with the Customs Service, rising from Inspector to become Collector of Customs for the Port of Brooklyn."

Fort Selden was decommissioned twenty-three years later, but not before its soldiers saw action associated with Geronimo, in the final years of the Apache Wars; the early years of young Douglas MacArthur, whose father was commanding officer from 1884–86; and a reorganization and consolidation of six western forts under the orders of then Lieutenant General William T. Sherman. The men there also served under a change in policy, the same one Lieut. Storey had attempted to implement and for which he once was chastised: Soldiers of Fort Selden were forbidden to frequent a nearby town to carouse and carry on in bad behavior unbecoming a military man. His victory and vindication came two years after he was discharged. A year later Harry married his dearest Annie.

Storey's devotion to Annie was matched by his willingness to again serve his country in times of war, though he was never recalled to duty. In 1898 he offered himself should volunteers be needed "in the event of war with Spain." In 1916 Storey again volunteered and was thanked by the Adjutant General's Office, Albany, New York, for his "prompt and patriotic offer in response to the call for troops" should more be needed. ■



Company G, 8th Cavalry unit stationed at Fort Selden in Box Canyon, New Mexico, 1871–3. United States Army Signal Corps. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 155008.

Shelley Thompson is director of the Marketing and Outreach Departments at the Museum Resources Division. She also is the general manager of *El Palacio* and a longtime site steward for the Santa Fe National Forest and New Mexico SiteWatch. Read more about Fort Selden in *A Bridge to the Past: Special Anniversary Edition 1931–2006*, by Eliza Wells Smith. Notes from a reconnaissance led by J. Henry Storey can be found in the Winter 2008 archives at elpalacio.org