



# **THE BUGLE CALL**

**Quarterly Newsletter of the Fort Bayard**

**Historic Preservation Society**

**July 2025**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Each summer, we have the opportunity to celebrate Fort Bayard's birthday on or near August 21<sup>st</sup>, the anniversary of its founding by the 125<sup>th</sup> Colored Infantry in 1866. Appropriately, the nation also marks July 28<sup>th</sup> each year as "National Buffalo Soldier Day". Watch your emails and local media for announcements about this year's celebration, which will take place on August 2. More details are found in the article below.



We will be making more improvements to the museum building soon, as we have acquired new carpet stair treads to replace our aging interior step coverings. The duplex immediately to the south of the museum is also being upgraded with improvements that we hope will allow us to open it to the public over the coming couple of years. Funds provided by the New Mexico legislature, through the efforts of local lawmakers and the Village of Santa Clara, will help bring those improvements to fruition.

We continue to add more interpretive signs to the grounds of Fort Bayard, plus replacing weathered signs that deteriorate under our brilliant Southwestern sun. If you haven't examined the signage lately, I urge you to do so, as we are always seeking to provide more information about this wonderful local resource.

I would also like to acknowledge the donations of both money and work by our supporting members. We continue to receive generous contributions that enable our mission to keep the stories of Fort Bayard alive. Thanks to all of you who give of your time and money to make our work possible.

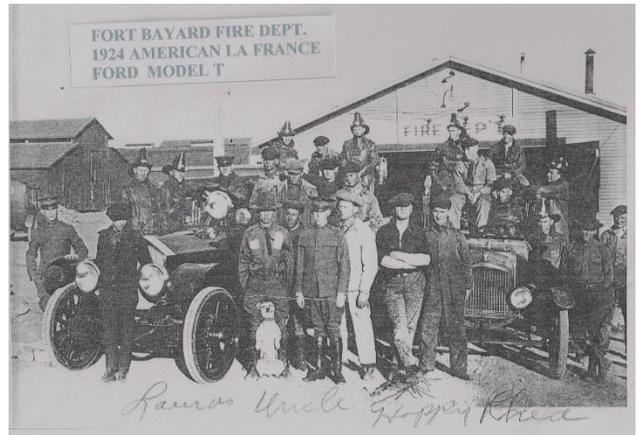
And finally, on behalf of the entire organization, I want to send out get well wishes to members Kathryn McCarroll and Ron Hildebrand who have been under the weather. We wish a speedy recovery to both of these valued members!

*Doug Dinwiddie*  
*President, FBHPS*

## UPCOMING CELEBRATION OF BUFFALO SOLDIERS' DAY AND FORT BAYARD'S 159th BIRTHDAY

On Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, FBHPS will celebrate national Buffalo Soldiers' Day (July 28<sup>th</sup>) and Fort Bayard's 159<sup>th</sup> birthday (August 21<sup>st</sup>). The combined commemoration will take place at the New Deal Theater on the southeast corner of the Fort Bayard parade grounds at 2:30 pm.

In recognition of the firefighters who continue to battle wildfires in our area, the theme of this year's event is "Fort Bayard Fire Departments Over the Years," presented by volunteer fireman and FBHPS Board member John Baker. Admission is free and donations are welcome.



Fort Bayard Fire Department, circa 1924

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### VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER

#### JOHN BAKER

We are happy to recognize John Baker as our featured volunteer in this issue of *The Bugle Call*. Since becoming a member of our group just a few years ago, John has proven himself to be an energetic, dependable, and reliable addition to our ranks. Retired from a long stint as an employee of the U.S. Forest Service, local mining operations, and as a professional firefighter, John still serves as a member of the Arenas Valley Volunteer Fire Department. He has devoted many hours to Fort Bayard as a handyman, movie host, museum tour host, and general helper with nearly every event that our organization presents.



John has been a great help in installation of new interpretive signs, building maintenance, and a whole host of other projects. He also serves as a member of our Board of Directors and he demonstrates a "can do" attitude that is highly valued by our group. Thanks for all you do, John!

## THE FORT BAYARD STORY

Dr. John Bell is leading a project to collect oral histories of persons who worked and/or lived at Fort Bayard during the hospital era. We will publish one of these interviews in each issue of *The Bugle Call*. (Stories are edited for space and clarity.)

### JOHN KISHBAUGH INTERVIEW Fort Bayard Resident 1966-1998 Part Two

*As told to Dr. John Bell*

*(Note: Part One was published in the April 2025 issue)*

After graduation from Cobre High School in 1976, I was employed elsewhere for a short period. The next year, Ms. Lowe, a nurse with a large family who was also a widow who lived and worked at Fort Bayard, influenced me to apply for a temporary job through the government-sponsored CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) program. This eventually led to a permanent job in Maintenance.

I lived in the nurses' quarters much of my single adult life. The nurses' quarters were built during the era when Fort Bayard was a U.S. Army Tuberculosis Hospital in the early 1900s and was originally only for single ladies. By the 1970s it housed both men and women. The men occupied the second floor, and the women occupied the first floor. There were several musical therapy interns (primarily females) under the direction of Mick Coons who also lived there. There was a community bathroom and kitchen. The rent was \$45 monthly and there was no charge for utilities.



Undated photo of Fort Bayard  
Nurses' Quarters

Eventually I moved to a quieter place. I subleased the second floor of one of the officer quarters. The primary lessee lived on the first floor. He paid the same rent as he did when living at the nursing quarters.

In 1992, I married Ana Vasquez. After our marriage, we lived in two different homes. The first home was the duplex brick building east of the 1923 hospital and south of the New Deal Theater. My wife and I and our young family lived in half of the building, quarters number 213B. I erected a wooden cross-hatched fence at this home to keep my daughter, who was a toddler, from wandering. I have been told that this is the only building still standing that dates back to the "military fort," which would make it the oldest building at Fort Bayard. However, I do not have accurate records to confirm that.

Later, we lived in the house that Dr. Harrison had once occupied. This house is about 2 blocks east of the officer quarters. The rent for the Harrison house was \$90 monthly.

One of my most enduring memories as an adult working at Fort Bayard is the patients' death and burial. Many of the patients at Fort Bayard were elderly end-of-life patients from southwestern NM, and often from Grant County. These patients usually had loving families that cared for them and arranged for customary memorial services for their loved ones.



John Kishbaugh, on the steps of the Fort Bayard Museum

However, many patients were from other parts of the state. Often, they had mental conditions but were not eligible for continued care at the state hospital but were not able to live alone. Sometimes there were no concerned family members, or they had family members who could not care for them. Some had no history of their past at all.

Other patients had disabling head and spine injuries. Some were permanently damaged from motor vehicle accidents, prolonged brain anoxia, and some were in a chronic vegetative state. There were some Mexican nationals and others who were Native Americans from reservations.

There were also some patients transferred from Fort Stanton when it closed. These individuals had abnormalities from birth, and had spent their entire lives in institutions. When they died, often there was no family to notify. They were buried in the Fort Bayard Memorial New Mexico Cemetery, sometimes referred to as the "paupers' cemetery."

Being in the Maintenance department, I was a big part of this burial program. There was a backhoe and an air compressor at Fort Bayard, but the machinery was not always reliable, and the ground was never pliable, containing many stones. So, we

always kept one or two graves dug in advance to avoid a crisis in grave space if there were several sudden deaths. Caskets were made on-site and stored. Funerals were held either the day of death or the following day. Patients were not embalmed, but there was a walk-in cooler. The service was brief and depended partly when the priest or pastor was available to speak. Attendance was usually limited to Fort Bayard staff. Particularly, the hospital social workers attended. I felt it was my responsibility to attend as often as my work would allow.

Eventually this system was discarded when state money became available. Morticians were called, and patients were properly embalmed. The walk-in cooler was purchased by a local mortician.



Undated photo of the old Fort Bayard Memorial Cemetery

Patients were allowed and encouraged to work if they were able. It is hard to imagine today, but patients moved in and out of the hospital freely and sometimes worked unsupervised depending on their capabilities. I do not know if patients received a stipend for work. However, they were allowed extra cigarettes.

One patient that I remember vividly is a man named Cuchilla. He worked tirelessly, long hours every day no matter the outside conditions unless staff prohibited him. He particularly prided himself on keeping the cemetery spotless. The only problem was if the piles of weeds mounted, he would light a fire with his cigarettes and burn them. The smoke would then cause someone to become alarmed and call the fire department. The fire department would call Maintenance to extinguish the fire. Maintenance eventually just had to check on him and burn the weeds multiple times a day. After his death, his hat was hung indefinitely in the motor pool, and I often wonder if it is still there.

I am very proud of my accomplishments at Fort Bayard Medical Center. I always showed a deep respect for the dying and dead that were forgotten by the rest of society. I dug the graves of many forgotten patients. I also helped and respected the patients who worked on the grounds to improve Fort Bayard. These patients/workers were largely unappreciated.

I built a roof on the original rock wall tank, and with others built the roofs on the smaller and medium-sized houses at Fort Bayard. I even built the frame for the screen door to the porch of what was the Commander's home but is now the museum.

In 2002, I concluded my work at Fort Bayard, retiring after 26 years with the state. Our 2 children are now grown. I lived at Fort Bayard in five different houses, first with my parents and siblings, then living there as a young adult bachelor. Finally, I lived there with my wife Ana and our children, for a total of over 30 years. We moved to our property on the Mimbres in 1998, although I was still working at the fort.

*Interviewer's Note: Thank you, John Kishbaugh, for all you have done to make Fort Bayard and Southwestern New Mexico a better place. We have the deepest respect and appreciation for you and your family.*

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## HISTORIC CHARACTERS OF OLD FORT BAYARD

### Humanity Found in Tragedy: The Maria Phelps Story

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Frederick Phelps of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry was joined by his young wife Maria at Fort Bayard in 1871. They became parents to a daughter in November 1871, and Maria gave birth to a baby boy in early 1874. Only weeks later, Maria became suddenly and fatally ill, leaving behind her grieving husband, the baby, and the other small child. The Lieutenant was granted emergency leave to take the children to relatives in the East, but tragically the baby died early in the journey, and was buried at Fort Union north of Santa Fe.

Stunned by the twin disasters, Lt. Phelps also fell ill, and required almost a year of medical leave to regain his health. He was able to rejoin his unit at Fort Bayard in 1875. When he visited his wife's grave in the fort cemetery, he was astonished to see that her simple wooden cross had been replaced with a brick tomb, set on a granite foundation, and surrounded by a white picket fence. A wooden sign on the tomb identified Maria and her date of death. When he spoke with Captain Steelhammer, the fort's commander, Phelps was surprised to learn that prisoners from the fort jail had asked his permission to construct the tomb, which they did on their only days off from hard labor, which were always Sundays. Puzzled, Phelps was able to talk with one of the prisoners, and learned that they wanted to repay Maria's personal kindness to them.



Maria Phelps' Grave at Fort Bayard

Unbeknownst to Lt. Phelps, Maria had provided the prisoners with food and drink while they toiled near the officer's quarters, and even gave them some of her husband's tobacco—all the while keeping a sharp lookout for Frederick, lest he discover her generosity.

Today, Maria's resting place is marked only by a unique headstone, and is one of thousands of graves at Fort Bayard National Cemetery. The fate of the tomb and picket fence is not known. Though the special tomb is gone, thanks to the 1950 publication of Lt. Phelps' memoirs in the *New Mexico Historical Review*, this story of kindness on a dangerous frontier lives on.

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## RECENT ACQUISITION

### Torsion Balance Pharmacy Scale

This *torsion balance pharmacy scale* is one of dozens of artifacts recently donated by Mrs. Lequita Lett. The items were used in a pharmacy operated by Mrs. Lett's father-in-law and husband in the town of Bayard for many years. This type of scale was highly accurate and has long been an important tool for pharmacists for centuries in preparation of prescriptions where precision measurement is vital. Pharmacists operating at Fort Bayard's medical facility over the years would have been very familiar with this type of equipment.



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## ARTIFACT OF THE ISSUE

### Hand-Held Laundry Plunger

Before the advent of washing machines powered by electricity, the drudgery of doing the laundry was facilitated by a number of specialized tools. One of those was this type of device, which allowed the laundress or launderer to agitate clothing in wash tubs, helping to remove the grime more effectively. The bell-shaped metal end, perforated with holes on the inside, manipulated the water with more force, intensifying the cleaning process. Donated by FBHPS members Martin and Julie Miller.



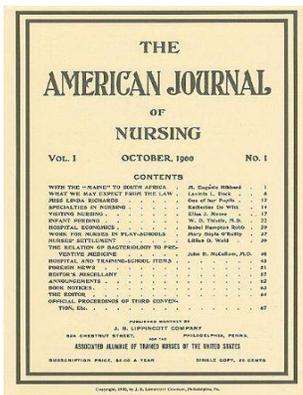
## A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING, 1921

*The letter below was published in 1921. It lovingly offers a glimpse into the life available to the public health nurses assigned to Fort Bayard, including the modern facilities, amenities, and recreational opportunities.*

From *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 21, No. 11, August 1921, pp 814-815

Dear Editor: I remember, while attending the Convention of the American Nurses' Association in Atlanta, a year ago, sitting next to a chief nurse at one of the meetings and asking her the usual question, "Where are you from?" The reply was, "Deming, New Mexico." "Oh," I said, "Away down there!" That was about all I knew of it, and I never thought that I would ever see that far-away place. The unexpected always happens in the Government service, and with what blank dismay I read my orders, a few months later, for Fort Bayard, fifty miles from Deming.



I spent the year previous to starting westward in the Carolinas, and the trip through Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas was most interesting. From the lovely foliage of North Carolina to the lowlands of Louisiana, then again into the mountains and across the desert, then a rise again to 6,040 feet above sea level. To one who has never been on the desert, the vastness seems almost overwhelming, and she begins to realize nature's real beauty. Just at first one's most conscious feeling is one of smallness and loneliness. I began to wonder how far away Fort Bayard was. El

Paso is the last large city one passes through, then the Rio Grande is crossed and one is in New Mexico. At Bayard, an ambulance met me and we started on a ride which was just a little more desert, and again I wondered. "Where is Fort Bayard?" Very soon in the distance, I saw red roofs and lovely green trees and in a very few minutes the hospital grounds.

The hospital is a small town in itself, having a population of over 2,000, with 216 buildings, a school house, amusement hall, hotel, post exchange, laundry, commissary, and, of course, the Red Cross houses. The reservation consists of twenty-three square miles, having within its confines farms, orchards, and a forest reserve. The patients are wholly tuberculous and, as we average over 900 at all times, we are very busy.

Our nurses come from all parts of the country, and, with a few exceptions, as is always the case, are contented girls. For those who enjoy outdoor life every opportunity is

offered. A great many of us have our own horses. We have our own corral and are able to purchase forage at a nominal price. Such wonderful trails for riding! There are good roads for those who like to gallop, and mountain trails at their best through the canyons for the more venturesome. Some are excellent campers; saddlebags are filled, extra gunnysacks tied on, and away we go. Our riding habits and "fiery steeds" perhaps would not pass muster in Central Park, but, oh, the good times we have! Girls who have always just "dressed up" when off duty, soon get the outdoor habit here and in a short time are found to be the proud owners of horses, and are leading the crowd, with coffee pots and frying pans dangling from their horses' saddles.



For those who do not care for riding, there are picnics, dancing once a week, and movies every night. Our commanding officer, Colonel Whitledge, has no equal, we think. Although we try not to bother him any more than we can help he is always ready and willing to help us out in our troubles (and there are very few of them), and to advise us and to look after our welfare. We have an excellent mess at our own quarters, and can have all the food for picnics and parties that we want.

The quarters are comfortable and more improvements are to be made this summer in the matters of sleeping porches, and a house for night nurses, also a tennis court. We are isolated. I shall not try to deny that fact, but I have lived in many a city that did not offer a bit more amusement.

Our nearest town is Silver City, eleven miles away, and the Colonel gives us the best transportation the station affords. We have never lost our annual leaves. Los Angeles is just 24 hours' ride and El Paso is but 150 miles distant. The opportunity to get home by accompanying a patient comes once in a while. Five nurses have gone in that way this year. One does not know how good it is to get away from a city and to see how much there is of interest in a place like this until it is tried.

I came here in August, last year. To be uncomfortable on account of heat is unknown. I have never slept without a blanket, even indoors, from the day I landed. And such weather! One can plan months ahead to go anywhere. Every morning our eyes open to the glorious sunshine.

Come to New Mexico for a year, you city girls. You will never regret the move. Join the U.S. Public Health Service, which does more for its nurses than does any other organization. We still take care of "The Boys."

Fort Bayard, N.M.

A.P.C.

## MOVIE SERIES TO CONTINUE IN THE FALL

Mark your calendars! After a summer break, we will resume our movie series in September. This fall, the theme will be "Classic 'Whodunits' from the Golden Age of Movies, 1941-1971." All movies are FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. Concessions (popcorn, candy, beverages) are available at a nominal price. Donations are always welcome.

If you've ever wanted to see a classic movie that you may have missed out on before, or want to enjoy a favorite film again, please join us at the Santa Clara Armory on Thursday evenings! Doors open at 6:30 pm; the movie starts at 7:00 pm.



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|--------------|---|
| September 4  | The Maltese Falcon (Humphrey Bogart)                        |
| September 11 | Double Indemnity (Fred MacMurray, Barbara Stanwyck)         |
| September 18 | The Postman Always Rings Twice (John Garfield, Lana Turner) |
| September 25 | The Big Sleep (Bogart and Lauren Bacall)                    |
| October 2    | Dial M for Murder (Ray Milland, Grace Kelly)                |
| October 9    | Rear Window (James Stewart, Raymond Burr)                   |
| October 16   | Bad Day at Black Rock (Spencer Tracy, Ernest Borgnine)      |
| October 23   | North by Northwest (Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint)            |
| October 30   | Cape Fear (Gregory Peck, Robert Mitchum)                    |
| November 6   | Wait Until Dark (Audrey Hepburn)                            |
| November 13  | Bullitt (Steve McQueen)                                     |
| November 20  | Duel (Dennis Weaver)  |

## MUSEUM SUMMER HOURS NOW IN EFFECT

With the arrival of warmer weather, we are pleased to announce that the museum is now open on both Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 2 pm.



New artifacts have been added to our growing collection, so please be sure to stop by our museum any weekend and bring your family, friends, and out-of-town guests. Admission is always free, although donations are gratefully accepted. And remember, members who present their membership card will receive a 10% discount on all gift shop purchases.

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## MONTHLY MEETING AND CONTACT INFORMATION

The FBHPS meets the second Wednesday of every month from 10 am-12 pm at the Santa Clara Armory. Please join us! We welcome ideas from all members.

You can also actively engage in our operation by volunteering your time as a tour guide, collections curator, living history performer, building and grounds worker, or records keeper and researcher. Training will be provided as needed.

### **FBHPS Officers:**

Dr. Doug Dinwiddie, President  
Cecilia Bell, Vice President  
Becky Dinwiddie, Treasurer

Denise Singleton, Secretary  
Dr. John O. Bell, Village of Santa Clara  
Liaison

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