

- **Royal Red St. Vrain-Bransford**
(Abt.1827 – 1886)

Royal Red was a Sioux Native American woman born into an important Oglala-Teton family about 1827.

Her brother was the famous Chief Red Cloud; her nephew was Crazy Horse. She was married/traded in 1840 at age 13 to Marcellin St. Vrain, majordomo of Fort St. Vrain in Colorado Territory. Traveling up and down the mountain route of the SFT, her life spanned 5 decades across Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. After Marcellin abandoned her in 1848, she and her 3 children (Felix, Charles, Mary Louise) spent time at Bent's Fort before brother-in-law, Ceran St. Vrain, took them to his home in Taos, NM. It was in Taos where she became friends with Felipe and Delores Baca, two of the earliest settlers of Trinidad, CO. When Ceran moved to Mora, NM, Red followed and lived 10 years in Mora where she would marry William Bransford. They would have 7 children (Alex, Jeff, Ann, Virginia, Francisca, William, Charles). The Baca family was living in nearby Guadalupita, and at their suggestion the Bransford family moved with them to help settle Trinidad, CO. Not long after their arrival Red and William began operating a boarding house, where they rented several jacals or small residences on the property to visitors. Red soon became known for her good cooking and brought in a steady stream of paying customers. The Columbian Hotel that currently stands at First and Commercial Street in Trinidad was built on the site of the old Bransford boarding house. That corner marked where the newer route of the Santa Fe Trail climbed up the hill from the Purgatoire. Commercial Street was then known as Bridge Street because the newer route of the Santa Fe Trail followed the north side of the Purgatoire and required crossing the river. Eventually, a bridge had been built near the Baca hacienda to facilitate the crossing. At the corner of Bridge and Main Street, this newer trail met the original route that came into town along Main Street. For many years, Main Street was simply known as the road from Wootten's Toll Road to Gray's Ranch, an important settlement located just outside of town. Bransford's successful business ventures allowed him to purchase property outside of town in San Francisco Canyon, about 20 miles outside of town. Several Hispano families already lived in the canyon, as well as a Captain Snyder, who was friends with William Cody. Red's grandson, William Sopris, later recalled that visitors to the ranch included William Cody, whom Red had known as a young girl in Wyoming and at Fort St. Vrain. One particular visit involved Cody enlisting Red to accompany him on a parlay with the Utes and Cheyennes. Cody was stationed at Fort Lyon at the time and the Indian Wars were in full swing in the West. The two tribes planned to meet up with the Apaches and Comanches from the south to rise in revolt. Cody and Red rode out in search of the tribes to avoid further conflict. Accompanying Red and Cody was a small Ute boy who worked on the ranch and had been raised by Red. Somehow Cody managed to find the two tribes and



Red was able to convince them, at least temporarily, against an uprising. Grandson William also recalled a Saturday morning when he and Red walked to a spot near where the Animas Street Bridge is located at today. Red asked her grandson to dig a hole, then lit a fire and staked some poles so they could smoke several pieces of buckskin she had brought with her. They stretched the hides over the fire. The skins eventually would become a fancy buckskin suit for William, complete with fringe and beading that Red did herself. When finished, Red had stitched beads to read W.S. " S. W." down the center. When Bransford asked her why she had done it that way, Red's response was, "These two letters (S and W) are the same so they should be together." William recalled wearing the outfit in a Trinidad Fourth of July Parade. The outfit that Red lovingly made for her grandson eventually became part of a rotating exhibit at the El Pueblo Museum in Pueblo, CO (it is housed permanently in Denver). Red was known to many associated with the SFT including the Bent brothers, Uncle Dick Wootton, Kit Carson, John C. Fremont, and Lucien Maxwell. She became a devout Catholic, and after Mr. Bransford passed away, she lived her final days with her friend Delores Baca in "the Baca House." Shortly after 7:00 p.m. on April 12, 1886, Red St. Vrain Bransford passed away at the age of 59 at the Baca home. She is buried in Trinidad Catholic Cemetery.

Royal Red and Red Cloud's mother was Walks as She Thinks, the sister of the famous Sioux chief, Smoke. Decades-long speculation on whether Red was actually related to Chief Red Cloud was recently put to rest with DNA testing, which proved that Red's descendant, Christine St. Vrain Fischahs, is indeed related to Chief Red Cloud. Further ancestral research led to the discovery of Red and Christine's link to Old Chief Smoke, one of the most important figures in the tribe's history. Smoke was one of the original Oglala head chiefs who co-founded the tribe's Oglala name. And it was Chief Smoke who divided up the tribe into western and eastern factions after his cousin Bull Bear failed to overthrow Smoke as the leader. Interestingly, Red was also directly related to Chief Crazy Horse via Smoke's wife, White Cow Woman, who was Crazy Horse's grandmother. David Lavender, Bent's Fort. ((Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press). 309. Francis W. Cragin, Early Far West Notebook (The Francis Whittemore Cragin Collection, Colorado Springs, Pioneers Museum), IX, 38-40. David F. Halaas & Andrew E. Masich. Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent. (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2004). William R. Sopris, "My grandmother, Mrs. Marcellin St. Vrain," Colorado Magazine, XXII (March, 1945). 63-68. United States 1860 Census. Mora, NM Archdiocese of Santa Fe Book 1, 1855-1860. New Mexico Baptisms Santa Gertrudis of Mora. Grays Ranch, about four miles up the Purgatoire River, was located on the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail just east of Trinidad, where the road to Denver split from the Santa Fe Trail. At one time, John Hatcher ran a way station for the Bent St. Vrain Company until Indian raids forced his departure in 1847. For a time, Grays Ranch was the main settlement of the area, housed the post office, and vied with Trinidad to become the county seat. During the 1860's, the Ranch was also a stage station for Barlow, Sanderson & Company. José E. Fernández. The Biography of Casimiro Barela, translated by A. Gabriel Meléndez. (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2003). 8-9. Morris F. Taylor. Trinidad, Colorado Territory. (Trinidad, CO: Trinidad State College, 1966). A.R. Mitchell Personal Notebook, Trinidad Historical Society. Carlos Sandoval, in his dictation to Mitchell, stated that Red died at the home of Baca.