



Richens Lacy “Uncle Dick” Wootton (1816 – 1893)

Richens Lacy Wootton was born May 6, 1816, in Mecklenberg County, Virginia. He headed west to Independence, Missouri, in 1836. There he took a job with a wagon train run by Bent, St. Vrain & Co., headed for Bent's Fort in present-day Colorado. Soon thereafter, he became a mountain man, trapping and trading among the American Indians and traveling the West. By 1840, trapping had become far less profitable and Wootton took a job at Bent's Fort as a hunter, scout, and freighter. In 1846 during the Mexican-American War, he scouted for the U.S. military. He briefly operated a buffalo ranch near present-day Pueblo, Colorado, raising both buffalo and cattle. In 1859 Wootton signed the incorporation papers for the city of Denver. In 1866 he settled near Trinidad on land leased from Lucien Maxwell and obtained franchises from the territorial governments of Colorado and New Mexico to build a toll road over Raton Pass, improving 27 miles of the toughest part of the Santa Fe Trail. He erected a tollgate in front of his house and charged \$1.50 for 1 wagon or buggy and 25 cents for a horseman. He always allowed Indians to use the road free of charge. His home also served as a stagecoach stop. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad bought the right of way from Wootton in 1878 and continued the railroad to Santa Fe in 1880, ending the era of the Santa Fe Trail. “Uncle Dick” died in 1893 in Trinidad, having outlived all but one of his wives and 17 of his 20 children, and is buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Trinidad, Colorado.