

RIFLE'S BLAST FROM THE PAST

RIFLE HERITAGE CENTER

P.O. Box 1882, Rifle, CO 81650
Museum Address: 337 East Avenue, Rifle

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November is here and with it our first snow of the season. November is national Native American Heritage Month so this newsletter will focus on some information on Chief Ouray and his wife Chipeta. October was a busy month for the museum with local school groups of eighty students, the Chili Cook Off, a visit from a group from senior housing, a work day to protect our vintage clothing, a tour by the Four Rivers historical group, and the Hunters Expo at the visitor's center. All of this before the official closing on the 17th of October. Please take time to say thanks to every board member and volunteer for making the 2015 season a success. George Pearson, Newsletter Editor

Ouray was born near Taos, New Mexico on the clear night of November 13, 1833 during the Leonid Meteor showers. The meteor shower was taken as an omen and Ouray was given his name with eans "the arrow" in the Ute language. His father was a Jicarilla Apache named Guera Murah who had been adopted by the Utes and his mother was an Uncompahgre Ute. His boyhood was spent in New Mexico where he learned to speak Spanish and English along with the native language of the Apache and the Ute. He often worked with Spanish sheep herders in the area of Taos. By age eighteen he came with his father to Colorado where his father had become the leader of the Tabeguache (Uncompahgre) Utes. During this time with his father he became a warrior fighting against the Kiowa and Sioux. When his father died in 1860 he became the leader of the Tabeguache Ute band at the age of twenty seven.

Ouray's first wife was named Black Mare and she died shortly after giving birth to a son. The son's name was Queashegul and his father called him Parso, which means "apple" in Ute. He called him this due to his rosy cheeks. Ouray married again in 1859 to Chipeta (White Singing Bird), who was 16 at the time and a Kiowa Apache adopted by the Utes. The two of them continued to raise the child. Then during a hunting trip to Northern Colorado, Parso was abducted by Sioux warriors and was never seen again. It is said by historians that Ouray grieved for the boy the rest of his life.

In April of 1863 Ouray was selected to be a part of the Ute delegation to travel to Washington D.C. to meet with President Abraham Lincoln. Ouray (30) and Chipeta (19) traveled to Washington D.C. for the meeting with Lincoln, the commander and chief of the most powerful army in the world at the time. It is not known if Lincoln was impressed with Ouray's language skills or impressed with his persona, but Lincoln chose to recognize Ouray as the Chief of the Utes and presented to him a silver-handled ebony walking cane. This was Lincoln's custom in meeting with other heads of state. Lincoln also presented him with a Lincoln peace medal along with the other delegates. Lincoln must have been unaware that the Utes did not have Chiefs, only band leaders, and this special recognition would cause hardship for Ouray, even to the point of assignation attempts in the future. The delegation was able to work out a treaty with the government that gave the Utes all of western Colorado from the continental divide west to the Utah border, north to Wyoming, and south to New Mexico.



Ouray with the Lincoln cane, delegation sash, and Peace Medal.



Ouray with the Lincoln cane and Peace Medal.

With the discovery of gold in Western Colorado it became clear to the government that a new treaty was needed, so again Ouray and Chipeta traveled to Washington D.C. On February 5, 1868 they met with President Andrew Johnson, who treated the couple to a tour of the White House. The new treaty, called the Brunot Agreement, caused the Utes to give up the mining districts of Western Colorado.

The treaty did not last and Ouray and Chipeta once again traveled to Washington D.C. in January of 1872. They met with President Ulysses S. Grant at the White House. Assurances were given, but did not last. The couple returned in October of 1873 to again meet with Grant. Much was discussed and promised, but little done by the U.S. government.

On September 29, 1879 the Meeker-Ute uprising occurred. Ouray had no part in the uprising, but again the government sought him out as the leader of the Utes. He and Chipeta would return to Washington D.C. on March 6, 1880 to testify to Congress. While there, the couple was called to the White House to meet with President Rutherford B. Hayes. After the meeting, Hayes stated that Ouray “was the most intellectual man I’ve ever conversed with.” Ouray tried this hardest to save some of the Ute lands, and it is probably due to his influence that the Southern Ute and Mountain Ute reservations exist today. However, he came home defeated because despite his best efforts, the Northern Utes were moved out of Western Colorado and the millions of acres of land were opened to settlement, including the Rifle area. Ouray and Chipeta returned to Colorado where Ouray died, it is said, of a broken heart (he had Bright’s disease - a form of kidney disease) on August 24, 1880 near the Los Pinos Indian Agency in Southern Colorado. According to Roland McCook, a Ute spokesman, Ute legend is that the Lincoln cane and the Lincoln Peace Medal were buried with him.



Ouray and Chipeta

Chipeta moved with the Northern Utes to Utah and was active in the tribe. She was summoned to Grand Junction, Colorado by President William H. Taft to help with the celebration of the opening of the Gunnison Tunnel. She rode with Taft in the motorcade and traveled with him on his special train car.

Chipeta died on the reservation in Utah in August of 1924. It is hard to imagine what she thought of a life where she was treated as royalty by five presidents. We are honored to have items in the museum from this distinguished couple.

THANKS TO VOLUNTEERS

Thanks for all the hard work to make the 2015 year so successful.

UP COMING EVENTS:

November 14, 2015 from 2:00 to 4:00 PM and the library: VINTAGE COINS AND WHAT YOUR COINS ARE WORTH BY GEORGE PEARSON at the Rifle Branch Library t

December: A CHRISTMAS CAROL Victorian Style at the Rifle Branch Library time and date tba

2015 MEMBERS LIST

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NEEDED ITEMS FOR DISPLAY

RIFLES: WANTED ANY KIND OF RIFLE FROM AN AIR RIFLE, TO HUNTING RIFLE, OR A SHOT GUN. We want your family's rifles to display and document the family heritage.