

## John Van Deusen DuBois (1833 – 1879)

John Van Deusen DuBois was born August 7, 1833, in eastern New York to Evelina Van Deusen and Henry Alexander DuBois, the eldest of seven children. Following a familial line of military men, which included Revolutionary War soldiers, John graduated in 1855, tenth in his class of thirty-four from West Point. By 1857, John was a 24-year-old 2nd Lieutenant stationed at Fort Thorn (near present-day Hatch, New Mexico) and involved with the Gila-Apache Campaign as commander of Company K Regiment of Mounted Rifles. Unlike trappers, traders, and merchants, John did not arrive in the Southwest by traveling the Santa Fe Trail. Instead, he came to Texas via the Gulf of Mexico and subsequently was posted to Fort Thorn. In 1858, John



was posted to Fort Union, and on February 3, he was "detailed with twenty-three men to escort the mail party" eastbound on the Santa Fe Trail. It was a routine, if not a tedious assignment at the time, but since John had never been on the trail, he described the event in his journal. Santa Fe Trail aficionados will recognize the portion of the trail that John was on as the Cimarron Branch (encompassing travel through New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Kansas). Their first stop was "at a point of timber eight miles from the post" to load firewood for the trip. John next recorded that they "arrived in camp at Burgwin Springs sometime after dark with as drunken a set of men as I ever saw." The following day, at the Rock Crossing of the Canadian River, John was excited to see herds of antelope. The next night they camped at "Willow Creek near Apache Spring," and on February 6, they reached Rabbit Ear Creek. John made camp at "Enchanted Spring," also known as Upper Cimarron Spring and Flag Spring, where he declared it to be "the only pretty spot I had seen since leaving Fort Union." He arrived at the Cimarron River, rested an hour, and made camp at Middle Spring (near present-day Elkhart, Kansas). Here, "the mail party collected around my fire at night & being quite jovial were some alleviation to the cold & snow." The following day, they crossed 18-mile ridge and "saw our first buffalos." At a place called "the barrels," John said it was a point that "only runs above ground in a few places," and some trail travelers had sunk barrels into the sandy bed of the stream to collect that precious commodity - water. On February 11, John had breakfast at Sand Creek, "stopped again about midday to hunt buffalo" again to dine and encamped near the Battle ground," where in 1843, "a fight took place between the Texians & New Mexicans before either belonged to the United States." John said, "where we stopped to hunt buffalo is a place called the Boneyard where a train of over three hundred animals was once all frozen to death in one night." The next day, they reached their destination at the crossing of the Arkansas River, where they waited for the mail from the east to arrive. The return trip west followed the trail back to Fort Union. In addition to traveling the Cimarron Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, John spent time on the southern portion of the trail encompassing Las Vegas, Tecolote, and Santa Fe. He either knew or was familiar with many of the famed Santa Fe Trail names. Some he was impressed with, others not so much: Lucien Maxwell and his ranch, Ceran St. Vrain with his advice and wagon trains of corn, Kit Carson as Indian Agent (and Kit's brother, Ed Carson), Charles Bent (whom he describes as a "notorious liar"), Col. Magoffin's party's with "very pretty black-eyed senioritas," and more. John went on to serve as a Union soldier in the Civil War. After the war, he was detailed to frontier duty once more, where he served in New Mexico from 1866-1870, and Arizona, Nebraska, and Wyoming before his retirement in 1876. John died July 31, 1879, age forty-six, at Greenport, Columbia County, New York.

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Respectfully submitted: Christine St. Vrain Fischahs

Note: John Van Deusen DuBois is my 6th cousin (through the Van Deusen line). John is unique in that his personal written journal has been not only been preserved, but is published in "Campaigns in the West, 1856-1861, The Journals and letters of Colonel John Van Deusen Du Bois." In it he describes, among other things, his life as a soldier at Fort Union, and his duties as a mail escort east and west on the Santa Fe Trail. While many historians look to his journal for accounts of military campaigns, it is his record of the Santa Fe Trail that appeals for membership in the Santa Fe Trail Association Hall of Fame. My previous accepted nominees have all been related to the St. Vrain family, and it is delightful to branch out to include other family members that have connections to the Santa Fe Trail.