

Teresita Sandoval: Southern Colorado Pioneer

When people hear the words *pioneer* and *fort*, images of covered wagons and shelter from attack often come to mind. Most people have never heard of Maria Teresa Sandoval, but she was one of Colorado's first pioneers. She played a big role in the early years of Fort El Pueblo. Sandoval first came to the area from northern New Mexico. She helped settle an area along the Arkansas River near what is now Pueblo, Colorado. At that time, the area was part of what was called the New Mexico Territory. Hispanics, American and French fur trappers, and Indians from many tribes met at Fort El Pueblo. Men and women alike worked hard to build this fort that became the crossroad of many cultures. Teresita Sandoval was one of them.



Teresita, Barclay's wife. A water color by Alexander Barclay, November, 1853.

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Young Lady of Taos

Teresita Sandoval was born in 1811 in Taos, New Mexico. The tiny village was a distant outpost at the northern reaches of Mexico. Founded in 1617 by Spanish explorers, Taos was the home of Pueblo Indians and Mexican settlers when Teresita was young. It was also a place where many traders stopped on their way to Santa Fe, Bent's Fort, and other destinations.

Moving On

When she was seventeen, Teresita Sandoval married Manuel Suaso. By the time she was twenty-three, she was the mother of four children: Juana, Cruzita, José, and Rufena. The following year, the family moved to Mora, New Mexico, to settle a parcel of land they had received as a grant from the Mexican government. They stayed here for several years, but Sandoval's life was about to take a turn.

While in Mora, Teresita Sandoval met a man named Matthew Kincaid. He was from Kentucky, but he was also a Mexican citizen with his own land grant in the area. Sandoval and Kincaid decided to leave Mora with her children and move north to the American side of the Arkansas River. They raised livestock, corn, and other crops on their homestead.

Into Indian Territory

In 1841 the Sandoval-Kincaid family moved to the new trading post called Fort El Pueblo. The fort was built by George Simpson, Alexander Barclay, James P. Beckwourth, and Joseph Doyle. Simpson married Sandoval's eldest daughter, Juana, and Doyle later married her second daughter, Cruzita. From the very beginning, Sandoval and Kincaid helped build and run the fort. It was a busy place. Trappers and traders, settlers, and Native Americans all met to negotiate and do business within its walls.

Buffalo hides, fur pelts, jewelry, metal tools, and food exchanged hands in this remote frontier village.

An Eventful Life

Adventure at the fort was endless. Teresita Sandoval knew and worked with some of the most famous characters on the western frontier. Mountain men Jim Bridger, “Uncle Dick” Wooten, Kit Carson, and the celebrated African-American-Crow warrior, James Beckwourth, were all part of the scene. Life here was filled with hard labor, extreme weather, and retaliation by the many Plains Indian warriors defending their traditional hunting grounds. Sandoval faced these trials with bravery born from true



pioneering spirit. Like other women of her time, Sandoval was just as important as the many men who received credit for pioneering settlements in the West.



Sangre de Cristo Range, looking toward the San Luis Valley

New Horizons

A few years after moving to the fort, Matthew Kincaid headed to California with the couple's nine-year-old son, Juan. This signaled a new beginning for Sandoval. In 1843, she and British trader Alexander Barclay moved together to a new settlement called Hardscrabble, about twenty-five miles northwest of Pueblo. Five years later, Barclay and the Sandovals moved south near Mora, New Mexico, where

Barclay was building his own fort. The Mexican-American War was drawing to a close in 1848. Barclay hoped to sell his Fort Barclay to the United States government, but the newly victorious U.S. built their own Fort Union a few miles away. Sandoval and Barclay soon parted.

Casa Blanca

Finding herself on her own once more, Teresita Sandoval joined her daughter Cruzita and son-in-law Joseph Doyle at Casa Blanca, their ranch in the Arkansas River country. Here she stayed for the rest of her life. When Doyle died and left the ranch to Cruzita, Sandoval took control of the property. She prevented the valuable lands from falling into the hands of rival cattlemen. Shaking her fist at anyone who eyed her daughter's land, Teresita Sandoval remained virtually independent to her last days. She died in 1894 after a long life of toil and achievement. A pioneer in every way, Maria Teresa Sandoval was one of Colorado's many little-known women who helped pave the way for generations to come in the West.

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Adapted from "The Frontiers of Teresita Sandoval," by David Fridtjof Halaas, *Colorado History NOW*, October, 1997.

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Fictional account of Teresita's life.