



The Sun River Valley Historical Society was formed in 1977 with the goal of preserving the history of the Sun River Valley and its remaining original structures including the buildings and military cemetery at historically important Fort Shaw.

The SRVHS is a 501c3 organization. We are not funded by any governmental agency. Our funding largely comes from memberships and donations from our loyal supporters. We also have for sale two history books published by SRVHS, and our on-site gift shop offers a great selection of books as well as t-shirts, historical postcards, and fort memorabilia.

You can also make tax exempt donations and endowments in memory of loved ones. Your generous support has enabled us to complete several important projects at the fort.

These included the replacement of roofing on the Bakery and the Duplex building and the period correct replacement of a wall in the Duplex that had completely collapsed.

Volunteers, both singly and in groups, are welcome to help us with restoration, maintenance and hosting visitors. Four Boy Scouts have used projects at the fort to achieve their Eagle status, and several youth and church groups have contributed their labor.

It has been our objective to restore the interior of the buildings as closely as possible to their appearance in the 1870s. This includes structural restoration of their walls and ceilings as well as displaying furnishings and artifacts in a museum setting that in so far as possible allows visitor interaction, making them educational as well as display attractions.



This adobe wall had collapsed and fallen away from the building. It was reconstructed using the existing brick along with others found on site. They were mortared in with crushed adobe to give the original appearance. The entire project is period correct, accomplished with original materials and construction techniques.

We use these methods so much as possible in all our restorations.

We welcome visitors!

Our walking tour is available at any time. Tours of the complete site for groups, families or individuals may be scheduled in advance. In 2025 we will host open house from June until September on the third Saturday of the month from noon until six.

Educators and students- and that most certainly includes home schoolers grade five and over- are welcome. You may contact us to set up a program for your class that features presentations on the fort and the Sun River Valley along with a tour of the buildings we have restored, and if you wish of the Military Cemetery. Please be aware that at least one of the restored buildings is not heated in the winter.



Regimental Commander's Quarters



Duplex Officers' Quarters



Military Cemetery



Restored Commander's Parlor



Restored Duplex Bedroom



Placing flags for Memorial Day

**You may schedule tours by email- SunRiverHistSociety@gmail.com
or by calling:
Burnette, 406-965-3025 or 406-899-6064
John, 406-231-8771
Rita, 406-899-2587**

Welcome to the fort!



Boy Scouts aiding in restoration of the military cemetery.



One of our fund raisers is an annual rummage sale that takes place in September



Each Memorial Day the American Legion presents a flag ceremony at the cemetery.



Missus Burnette- re-enactor at the 150th anniversary of Fort Shaw celebration in 2017



Memory Tower and Fort Shaw Indian Industrial School Girls' basketball team monument



The VCCA National Rally and Tour joined us for day of tours and picnicking in 2024

Why do we do it?

Dick Thoroughman was a resident of the Sun River Valley who devoted a large part of his life to the preservation of Fort Shaw, especially its military cemetery, and the history of the Sun River Valley. He was a volunteer historian and a valued member of the Sun River Valley Historical Society.

The following was part of a document he submitted to the Montana History Foundation in 2016.

During the period in American history defined as the Indian Wars, 1866-1890, there were twelve (12) military posts constructed in what was then Montana Territory. Fort Shaw was the third of these posts coming after Fort C. F. Smith and Camp Cooke. It was situated on the historic Mullan Road some four (4) miles west of one of Montana's earliest and most historic settlements Sun River Crossing. The site for the post was selected in September of 1866, with construction starting the following April.

In operation for more than twenty-four (24) years it was called the most important fort built in Montana. During its years of operation it served as the headquarters post for the Military Department of Montana and was the regimental headquarters for the 13th, 7th, 3rd, and 25th United States Infantry Regiments.

During the Indian Wars there were three (3) major military campaigns in Montana Territory with soldiers from Fort Shaw involved in each. These included the Piegan Campaign of 1869-1870, the Sioux Campaign of 1876, and the Nez Perce Campaign of 1877.

Fort Shaw was a large post in terms of construction when compared to the standards of the era. Built to house a garrison of 450 men and officers with officer's row, company barracks, post hospital and administration building all fronting a 400' x 400' parade ground. A large sutlers post was located just to the east of the fort complex.

The primary building material was adobe blocks poured along Adobe Creek 1½ miles south-east of the fort and lumber was milled at a large steam powered sawmill from timber that had been floated down the Sun River from Frenchman's Gulch.

As a military post Fort Shaw saw the last of its soldiers leave on December 10, 1891. The following year it became the Fort Shaw Indian Industrial School, a non-reservation school, and over the next eighteen (18) years saw more than 2,000 students go through the school from tribes all over the Pacific Northwest and from as far away as Alaska Territory. From 1908 until 1925 it was the headquarters from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and during this time it also became the location of a public grade and high school. During WW II, it was used as a Prisoner of War Camp housing some 400 German prisoners of war many from the vaunted Afrika Corp.

Signed,


Richard Thoroughman