

BLUFF HISTORY TOUR

A Walk Through Time

1. Cemetary Hill – Looking out from this Ice Age cobble bar, time and space spread before you. To the east lie the Rocky Mountains and the San Juan headwaters. To the south the river bounds the northern edge of the Navajo Reservation. That pink wedge of sandstone to the west is the Mule Ear, rising at the outer edge of the geological event of known as the Monument Up warp. Immediately to the west, Cottonwood Wash runs south from the Abajos and Ute Country. The locals—hunters, gatherers, aboriginal farmers, Piauxes and Utes, bears and coyotes—have always traveled this route from the river to the highlands.

For the Bluff pioneers this terrace above the river offered the most sensible place to bury their dead. On the edges of the fenced and marked plots are more mounds of river cobbles, the often unnamed graves of the cowboys, Indians, and uranium workers. Locals from all of the cultures that share this corner of the world are still buried here.



2. Barton Cabin - These joined cabins are all that remains of the fort that was used from 1880 to 1897 to protect the newly-arrived pioneers from the supposed threat of outlaws and natives. Eventually, the settlers left their rough-cut cabins behind for permanent houses. The well at the Barton Cabin, named for its builders, Joseph Barton, provided the first community water supply.

3. Meeting House – A replica of the original structure used as a school, church, dance hall, and gathering place built in 1880 and torn down in 1894.

4. Kumen Jones House (1890's) – The transition from stockade-style fort to two story homes, from encampments to full-fledged town, did not take long. (By 1897 Bluff could boast the 13-member San Juan Orchestra.) Homes like this one showcase the fine craftsmanship that typifies Bluff stonework, evident in the intricate chisel marks and complex corners. The house was built by pioneer Kumen Jones. One of his wives, Mary, studied midwifery, a valuable avocation in this remote quarter.

5. Bluff School/Jail (1896) – Bluff's first permanent school was an imposing structure with a belfry, gabled roof, arched windows, and, in the 1930's a hardwood floor you could roller skate on. Much reduced in size and grandeur, the hand-hewn stone building was later used as a tow-cell jail, a library, and the town office.



6. Hyrum Perkins House (1890's) – Sarah Perkins Barton, 1896: “I loved my childhood home at the end of the Cottonwood shaded little green town nestled on the sandy banks of the river beneath the red sandstone cliffs that surrounded it. One of the joys of my young life was to tramp freshly the greening fields and cobble-stoned hills to garner spring's first blooming fragrant flowers and myriad [sic] colored pebbles, then rest for an hour in the leafy coolness of an over-hanging big limb of a huge tree on the bank of a marshy frog inhabited pool.”



7. Decker House (1898) – Pioneers James and Anna Marie Decker and their 11 children needed a bit of room. Over its long life this grand edifice earned many tales. (One old-timer remembers the “two Dutch fellows” who lives her in the fifties, making “rotgut wine by the barrel.”) Standing amid venerable cottonwoods, the house still gives a sense of early life in Bluff.

8. Lemuel Redd House (1890's) – Lemuel Redd was one of Bluff's original settlers and San Juan County's first assessor. Like so many Bluff houses The Redd place used sandstone quarried from nearby canyons; cliffs and masonry walls bear the same blush of color. Note the tall chimneys, arched windows, and sizable slab windows.



9. Platt Lyman House (1890's) – The Lyman family dates back to the original pioneer colony in Bluff. The generous lot size around this home is a reminder that Mormon township planning called for orderliness, open space, and a roomy one dwelling per gross-acre.



10. Willard Butt House (ca. 1897) – Butt, a county sheriff, opened the county's first steam powered sawmill, which may be the reason he built with lumber rather than stone. The restores of the home discovered artifacts of everyday life inside the walls, under floors—handmade mud bricks used as insulation, coin tokens from a New York store, war loan pamphlets, jar lids, Christmas tree lights, a tiny metal bell, toys, and loads of buttons.



11. Four Gables House (early 1890's) – Also known as the Jens Nielsen House and Mill, Home of the Nielson's first wife, Elsie, planter of Bluff's mulberry trees. In the 1950's the second story of the brick house was removed, leaving the first story as four small apartments. Its current owner used old photographs to rebuild the structure into a close approximation of the original Nielson home.

12. Jens Nielson House (1880's) – Nielson was Bluff's first LDS Bishop and long-lived entrepreneur and patriarch. Of Danish birth, he traveled across the plains to Salt Lake City in a Mormon handcart company.

13. Calf Canyon Bed and Breakfast (1997) – New and old in harmony: the place translates the classic elements of vernacular architecture into a handsome modern home. You'll see a masonry remnant of the old Twin Rocks Market on the northeast corner. Xeriscaped yards like this one, using native and other drought-tolerant plants, make sense in a desert climate.

14. Adams House (1890's) – Turn-of-the-century stonemasons used local rock to full advantage. Thick walls kept the structure cool in summer, insulated in winter. During a long state of disrepair, one corner of this house calved away from the rest of the building. The owner rebuilt it block by block.



15. Scorup House (1904) – John Albert Scorup spent most of his time tending a cattle operation that extended from the Abajos to the Colorado River. While Scorup lived in range camps in the company of cowhands, often six months at a time, this grand house kept the lives of his six daughters behind lace curtains, genteel and civilized.

16. Lovace House (mid-1890's) – From “rubble” in a canyon to the stolid walls of grand homes, who crafted the local sandstone into building blocks? Apparently Nick Lovace, who once lived here was a master stonemason. His house may have once resembled the Nielson house (map tour 12), But it was rebuilt to present form after a fire destroyed the second story.

17. Jones Farm – The Jones Farm continues an agricultural tradition that stretches back to Anasazi times. To preserve this heritage, in 2001 the Bluff City Historic Preservations Association acquired a conservation easement for the farm, preserving it in agriculture in perpetuity.

18. St. Christopher's Mission (1942) – From its beginning this Episcopal mission has embodied a blending of cultures, where Christian and Navajo beliefs accommodate on another. The mission also brought school and health services to the Navajo and played a key role in the fight against tuberculosis in the 1950's and 1960's.

