



# **Commander and Builder of Western Forts: The Life and Times of Major General Henry C. Merriam, 1862-1901**

*Jack Stokes Ballard*

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During his thirty-eight-year career as a military officer, Henry Clay Merriam received the Medal of Honor for his service in the Civil War, rose to prominence in the Western army, and exerted significant influence on the American West by establishing military posts, protecting rail lines, and maintaining an uneasy peace between settlers and Indians.

Historian Jack Stokes Ballard's new study of Merriam's life and career sheds light on the experience of the western fort builders, whose impact on the US westward expansion, though less dramatic, was just as lasting as that of Indian fighters such as Custer and Sheridan. Further, Merriam's lengthy period in command of black troops offers a study in leadership and important understandings about the conditions under which African Americans served on the Western frontier.

During the course of his service, Merriam crisscrossed the country, from Brownsville, Texas, to the Pacific Northwest and Vancouver Barracks, serving in eastern Washington, California, and Denver.

Drawing extensively on the many letters and records associated with Merriam's long army career, Ballard presents his service in a wide range of settings, many of which have become the stuff of Western history: from conflict with Mexican revolutionaries on the Rio Grande to the miners' riots in Coeur d'Alene.

Ballard's careful research provides a vivid picture of the military's role in the westward expansion.

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