

# Arkansas River Post Was First of Many Erected in the Days Long Before Denver Was Established

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Charles Bent, one of the brothers who founded Bent's fort on the Arkansas river, was speaking with five companions on their way to Taos in January, 1848.

"I am sure there is no danger," Bent said. "As civil governor of New Mexico I feel safe in visiting my family; as safe as in Santa Fe. The plot to recapture New Mexico failed last year."

Bent was speaking to Stephen Lee, sheriff of the county in which Taos was located; J. W. Neil, circuit attorney; Cornelio Vijiil, prefect of the county; Narcissus Baublen, son of the judge, and Pablo Jarmillo, active in the county's affairs.

The same confidence was expressed more or less by the others, though they knew the embers of the rebellion late in 1847 still smoldered. They reached the home of Bent in Taos in safety. They were in conference when a large band of Mexicans and Pueblo Indians attacked the residence. There was a valiant fight made by Bent and his five companions, but all were killed.

## Bent Pioneer Builder In Rocky Mountains

The slaying of Bent removed one of the forceful men of the West and one of the real pioneers of the present state of Colorado.

Bent doubtless was confident that from his wide acquaintance in New Mexico and his known popularity that he was safe. He had operated wagon trains over the Santa Fe trail into Santa Fe and was known as one of the founders of Bent's fort. In 1846, when General Kearney conquered New Mexico, he had named Bent governor, knowing the qualifications of the man for the place. The Bents originally were from St. Louis.

Bent's fort will ever live in the history of Colorado and of the Rocky Mountain states. Coupled with it are other forts or posts of fur trappers that also will figure in Western history. The motor tourist interested in the beginning of settlements in the Rocky Mountain region can visit these sites today. There are ruins of some of them still standing. This history is not only of Colorado but of the onward march of civilization in the United States that culminated in the founding of Denver in November, 1858, followed by gold discoveries in Colorado that opened this entire region to settlement.

## Bent's Fort Outpost Of Civilization

The fur trading forts followed the Spanish explorations and formed a link between the civilization of the Spaniards in present New Mexico and Old Mexico with trappers and traders north into Canada.

Charles Bent, with his brothers William, Robert and George and Ceran St. Vrain were the real pioneers. They were trappers from the northwest country who came down into this country in the early '20s, settling on the upper reaches of the Arkansas River and trapping. In 1826 they built their first fort, a stockade, on the river between present Pueblo and Canon City.

In 1828 they moved down the river about 12 miles west from the present town of Los Animas and built the first Bent's fort, which was completed in 1832. It was called by them "Fort William," for the brother, but

it became known only as "Bent's fort." The inclosure was 180x135 feet with walls four feet thick and 15 feet high. Bastions 30 feet in height rose from two corners and were armed with cannon, while there were many portholes thru which a musket barrel could be pushed to repel an attack.

## St. Vrain's Fort

### Center of Denver Region

Bent's fort stood as the outpost of civilization, the center of all fur activities for the Rocky Mountain region. In 1852 it was abandoned and Bent's new fort was moved farther down the river near the present town of Prowers. It was sold to the government in 1859 as a military post.

In 1837 St. Vrain built his fort west of present Platteville and it became to the northern regions what Bent's was to the southern. There was a weekly express service maintained between the two forts, the route crossing the site of Denver.

Ruins of St. Vrain's fort still are visible. The adobe walls were 14 feet high and the inclosure was 100x125 feet with bastions diagonally opposite. Fremont and other explorers made it their objective, and here Kit Carson and other famous trappers were familiar visitors. It was the connecting link for the trappers from Fort Laramie, in Wyoming, to the south and the Spanish settlements. Here in 1911 the D. A. R. erected a monument, St. Vrain later was a pioneer merchant in Denver, in 1859.

## Other Fur Posts

### In Northern Colorado

In 1836 Lieut. Lancaster P. Lupton, becoming interested in the fur business, resigned from the army and established his fort in 1837 near the town that now bears his name. The post was variously known as Fort Lupton and as Fort Lancaster. Portions of the post still are maintained on the Ewing ranch. It also had a bastion. The place was abandoned when Parkman passed in 1846, but in the late '50s and early '60s was reoccupied as a stage station, and was a refuge of pioneers from the Indians.

Trappers fort, as it has been termed, was just beyond Fort Lupton. Little known of its history. It was

in ruins when Fremont saw it in 1843. In 1924, Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen, historian of the Colorado Historical Society, unearthed a corner of its foundation. Fort Vasquez was just beyond Trappers and was established in 1837.

Forts Lupton, Vasquez and Trappers lie along the Denver paved road to Greeley and St. Vrain is only a short distance west of Platteville.

## Roubideau Built

### First Post on Western Slope

Fort Roubideau, or Robideaux as the name is sometimes spelled, was built sometime in the late '30s near the present city of Delta, but was destroyed by the Utes shortly after its establishment. Roubideau was a fur trader and is said to be the first man to bring wagons over the Sangre de Cristo range. He crossed by Mosca Pass, also called Roubideau Pass in old histories in honor of him. Gunnison and Marcy each mentioned the site of this post in their travels.

Fort Pueblo, from which the city derives its name, was built in 1842, after a small fort of a similar name had been built five miles west of Bent's, in 1839.

Fort Davy Crockett was in Browns Hole near Browns Pass, in the northwest corner of present Moffat County. It was known among the trappers as "Fort Misery," because of the scarcity of provisions.

## U. S. Army Builds

### Fort Massachusetts

The first U. S. army post in present Colorado was Fort Massachusetts, six miles from Fort Garland. It was an outpost for protection of New Mexico from the Utes, and built in 1852. It was the outstanding government post

of the Rockies in those days. It was abandoned in 1858 when Fort Garland was built. All the upper part of the Rio Grande Valley was a part of New Mexico until Colorado was admitted as a territory in 1861. Kit Carson was one of the commanders of Fort Garland in the '60s.

In 1858 when the government bought Bent's new fort it was named Fort Wise, but during the Civil War its name was changed to Fort Lyon, because of Wise's activities in the Confederacy.

## Old Camp Weld

### Now Part of Denver

Other military posts include Camp Weld, in which is now a part of West Denver, built in 1861 and home of the First Colorados. The officers' quarters still stand at W. Eighth ave. and Vallejo st. The First Colorados defeated the Confederate army at the battle of Apache Canon and La Gloria, thereby saving Colorado for the Union. Fort Sedgwick was erected in the fall of 1864 during the Indian uprising, a mile west of old Julesburg, on the South Platte River, near Ovid. Fort Latham was founded in 1862, 12 miles east of Greeley, as a protection for the stage coaches and immi-