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Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

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### Report from Bent's Old Fort: Historical Sources

La Junta Tribune Democrat

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**BENTS OLD FORT***La Junta & Tribune Democrat, 7-28-66, p.4, c.3*

A series by William Featherstone, superintendent

*Fort's Bent's Fort*

## HISTORICAL SOURCES

Considering the 16-year duration of the Bent Period, it seems at first remarkable that so few individuals saw fit to record their impressions of the structure. Out of numerous documents examined there emerged a total of but 25 sources that could be considered to have been written by primary informants; that is, those who were there. However, when you realize that at least 60% of those who could qualify were nomadic Indians, and a large number of the remainder were illiterate trappers hunters and Mexican laborers, it is perhaps remarkable that even 25 were found.

The 25 sources range from the highly questionable reminiscences of George Bent to the rather meticulous drawings and measurements of Lt. James W. Abert. They range over a time period almost as long as the Bent Period itself. Generally, the sources fall into three categories, with those associated with the United States Army doubling those of the other two—travelers and employees. 22 of the 25 sources provided their information by on-the-spot renderings either in journals, letters, sketches, or notes, the latter being used as the basis for books published within a short time of their visit.

The earliest source is Colonel Henry Dodge, U. S. Army. He visited Bent's Fort in the summer of 1835 while in command of an expedition to meet with the Indian tribes of the region. His observations are recorded in a report of the expedition filed the same year. Captain Lemuel Ford and Lt. G.B. Kingsbury, both with the Dodge Expedition, kept Journals upon which the report was based.

James Hobbs was a young man who was held captive by the Comanches and was ransomed by William Bent, probably in 1838. Hobbs described the incident in a book published some 37 years after the event.

English traveler Thomas J. Farnham visited Bent's Fort in August of 1839 en route to Santa Fe. His articles were published in the New Orleans Picayune between December 1839 and October 1841.

While the archeologist examined the structural remains of Bent's Fort these last three years, the historian was searching out these sources of information, and both are necessary to tell the story of Bent's Fort today.