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Bent's Old Fort

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BENTS OLD FORT



A series by William Featherstone, superintendent

ARTIFACTS RECOVERED AT THE FORT SITE

Over two years ago Archeologist Jackson W. Moore Jr., began laying bare the walls and floors of William Bent's old fort. Interesting as it was to see these historic parts of the big adobe building, it was of even greater interest to observe the items which his crew of "diggers" found buried in a century of accumulated dirt. Those artifacts which we know came from the Bent period help tell the story of the Fort.

Take, for instance, the water pump piston and casing which were found in one of the west rooms. It was still in the well which was placed centrally in a basement room. Here was a good protected source of water, especially well situated if the Fort had ever undergone an attack.

In this same well was also found a 10-inch grinding stone, one which had probably been operated by a treadle arrangement to sharpen knives.

In another of the rooms on the west side there was a pit which yielded a variety of objects -- the remnants of seven flint-lock rifles, some charred barrels with cloth-wrapped bungs, and a few plum seed dice, made by painting spots on the seeds.

Though doors were burnt to nothing when Bent abandoned the Fort in 1849, some of the hardware remained. Moore found large padlocks, cut nails, iron pintles (part of a hinge) and brass door knobs.

Many horse, mule and ox shoes were found. Determining which of these were from the Bent period, and which were dropped in that spot many years later, requires all the skill that an experienced archeologist like Mr. Moore can bring to the job.

Mealtime at Bent's Fort could have been downright civilized, for broken pieces of many kinds of decorated dinnerware were found. Especially attractive were some copper-lustre cups and bowls and a large blue feather-edge platter which came from Bent's own quarters at the southeast corner of the Fort. All of the dinnerware was of English rather than Spanish origin, and all of second line quality -- stuff that would stand the hard trip along the trail.

Thousands of small glass trade beads were found, and a few that measured up to an inch long. Buttons of many kinds were found, including those made of bone and pewter. It is possible some were of military origin.

Hundreds of fragments of clay pipes were found. Though no whole pipes were recovered, we have been able to cement some of the pieces into their original form again. Smoking must have been a popular pastime, and pipes were used as trade items.

One of the fixtures in the watchtower was a telescope, and parts of it were found by Mr. Moore's crew.

Mr. Moore is spending this winter sorting and evaluating these artifacts of which there must be some 100,000. The thought occurs to us that some local residents might have items they found at this site many years ago which possibly might date from the Bent period. If any were minded to bring them to the Park for evaluation, Mr. Moore would be glad to give his opinion as to their value to the Park's collection.