

University of Northern Colorado

## Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

---

Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

---

### Report from Old Bent's Fort

La Junta Tribune Democrat

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/beol>

---

# BENTS OLD FORT

Forts. Bents Fort



A Series by Robert E. Davidson, Historian

## THE MAIN CORRAL

Although Bent's Fort always enjoyed friendly relations with most Indian tribes in the area, this did not mean that the herds of cattle and horses grazing in the vicinity were immune to raiding parties. On the contrary, so constant was this threat that the owners found it necessary to provide a certain amount of security for their animals. Protection was provided in three ways: a watchtower high atop the fort for scanning the countryside, armed herders to watch the animals, and a large walled corral for night-time protection.

Since all evidence of the corral was obliterated many years ago by the farmer's plow, we must rely almost completely on diary accounts and the sketches of Lt. James Abert for clues to its exact location and appearance. Although his sketches provide priceless details, his written description is surprisingly brief: "On the west side is the cattle yard, which is surrounded by a wall so high as effectually to shelter them. The coping of the wall is planted with cacti, which bear red and white flowers."

Ceran St. Vrain, himself, added a few additional details in a letter dated July 21, 1847. "On the west side of the fort, outside the main walls, was the horse corral. It was wide as the fort and deep enough to contain a large herd. The walls were of adobe, eight feet high and three feet thick at the top. To prevent anyone climbing in by night, the tops of the corral walls had been thickly planted with cactus.

"This plant grew so luxuriantly that in some places the leaves hung over the walls . . . and gave efficient protection against any living thing that might wish to surmount the wall . . ." This novel use of native vegetation as a hindrance to uninvited intruders is particularly notable since it preceded the introduction of barbed wire by quite a few years.