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Bent's Old Fort

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Report from Old Bent's Fort

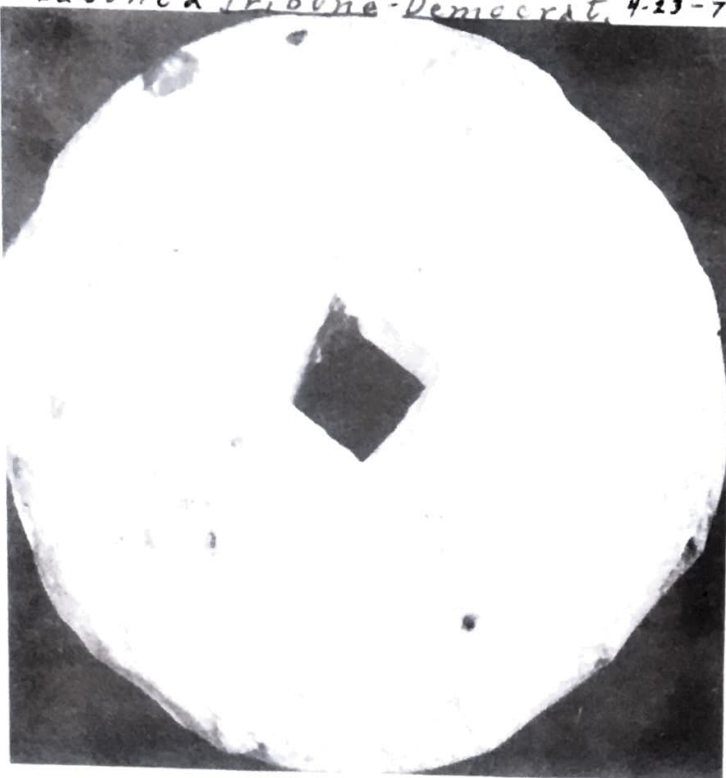
La Junta Tribune Democrat

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BENTS OLD FORT

A Series by Robert E. Davidson, Historian p. 4

La Junta Tribune-Democrat, 4-23-70

**GRINDSTONES**

Today, as in Bent's time, woodworking craftsmen will testify for the need of sharp tools in their trade and although powered by electricity, our modern grinding wheels differ little in basic principle from the crude, hand-powered models used at the fort. An example of the type of grindstone used by the fort's carpenter was provided for us in 1965 during excavation of the building.

The sandstone quarried for such grindstones, whether they were homemade or factory made, was carefully selected for its fine-grained, even texture. Once chiseled into shape and provided with an axle it could then be mounted vertically on a myriad of frames whose size and shape were limited only by the ingenuity of the builder. Two basic varieties, however, predominated: those turned with a crank and those propelled by a treadle. While larger specimens of the former usually required the power of two men, a small treadle machine needed only a single operator.

Once set in motion, the turning stone had one other requirement: its surface had to be continually lubricated with water. This was often performed by the grinder in a two man operation, as he simply poured water from a cup in one hand and held his work in the other. A single workman, however, would either drip water onto the stone from an independently suspended container or provide an adjustable water trough through which the stone would skim as it turned.

The grindstone was an indispensable fixture of every isolated American home from the earliest settlements at Jamestown until the Industrial Revolution when synthetic stones and electrical power made them obsolete. While they were used, however, their sturdy, but simple design characterized the nature of human existence throughout our struggling nation. Hopefully, this legacy of integrity and strength will never disappear as a standard by which we judge the quality of today's world.