

University of Northern Colorado

Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

\$2.3 Million for Bent's Fort

La Junta Tribune Democrat

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

\$2.3 Million for Bent's Fort

La Junta Tribune Democrat, 9-26-74, p.1 Fort (by name) Bent

President Gerald Ford has signed legislation authorizing \$2.3 million to be spent for reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, a famed landmark on the Santa Fe Trail near La Junta.

The legislation, introduced into the Senate June 27 by Sen. Peter H. Dominick, R-Colo., and in the House of Representatives by Rep. Frank E. Evans, D-Colo., culminates years of effort by the Colorado Centennial-Bicentennial Commission and the State Historical Society of Colorado. The historical society's board of directors has passed resolutions over the years urging Congress to fund reconstruction of the fort.

Restoration of Bent's Fort is one of the more than 200 proposals throughout the State of Colorado which have been endorsed as Bicentennial projects by the Colorado Centennial Bicentennial Commission.

The Commission secured a congressional appropriation of \$335,000 for planning two years ago. Then earlier this year, Lorna Hart of Denver, a member of the Commission's Heritage Council, traveled to Washington, D.C. to push for introduction of the reconstruction funding legislation.

A spokesman for the National Parks Service in Denver, which owns the 178 acre site, located about eight

miles east of La Junta, said his agency will advertise for contractors with experience in adobe construction and negotiate a contract. Northern New Mexico is one of the few areas of the country where buildings are still being constructed with adobe bricks.

Many other obsolete building techniques will have to be resurrected as 1970's craftsmen set about making hand-hewn beams and roof supports and wrought-iron hinges like those manufactured by the pioneers to build the original structure. The fort had but one glass window, made with glass imported from the East, and a similar one will be included in the restoration.

However, one concession will be made to modernity and practicality in order to extend the life of the reconstruction. Bricks within the walls which cannot be seen will be made of "stabilized" adobe — adobe mixed with cement.

The National Park Service said work will begin next spring, and will be completed within 12 to 18 months — in time for celebration of the nation's Bicentennial and Colorado's Centennial.

The original fort was built in 1833 by Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain. The site was selected

on high ground on the north bank of the Arkansas River, near where the Santa Fe Trail crossed the river into Mexico. It was a trading post for the Indian trade and was a favorite stop for wagon trains en route to and from Santa Fe.

The main building was two stories high and had 26 rooms. Facilities included a carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, gun shop and a main trading room where the Bents met to do business with Indians and fur trappers.

Activity at the fort reached its peak in 1846, the year that the United States invaded Mexico, using Bent's Fort as a jumping off point for the campaign against Santa Fe and California.

However, trade declined markedly thereafter. William Bent, depressed over his brother's murder during an Indian uprising in Taos, N.M., and angered by the Army's refusal to buy the fort from him for a military post, vacated his great mud castle on the Arkansas in 1849 and blew it up with gunpowder. The ruins deteriorated rapidly, and the 1921 Arkansas River flood swept over the site, destroying what was left.

The property was established as a national historic site in 1960 and intensive archaeological studies have been under way in the foundations since that time.