

University of Northern Colorado

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Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

Colonel Would Not Haggle

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Colonel Would Not Haggle Over

Roman Nose Ruled Over Larger Domain Than Some Kings

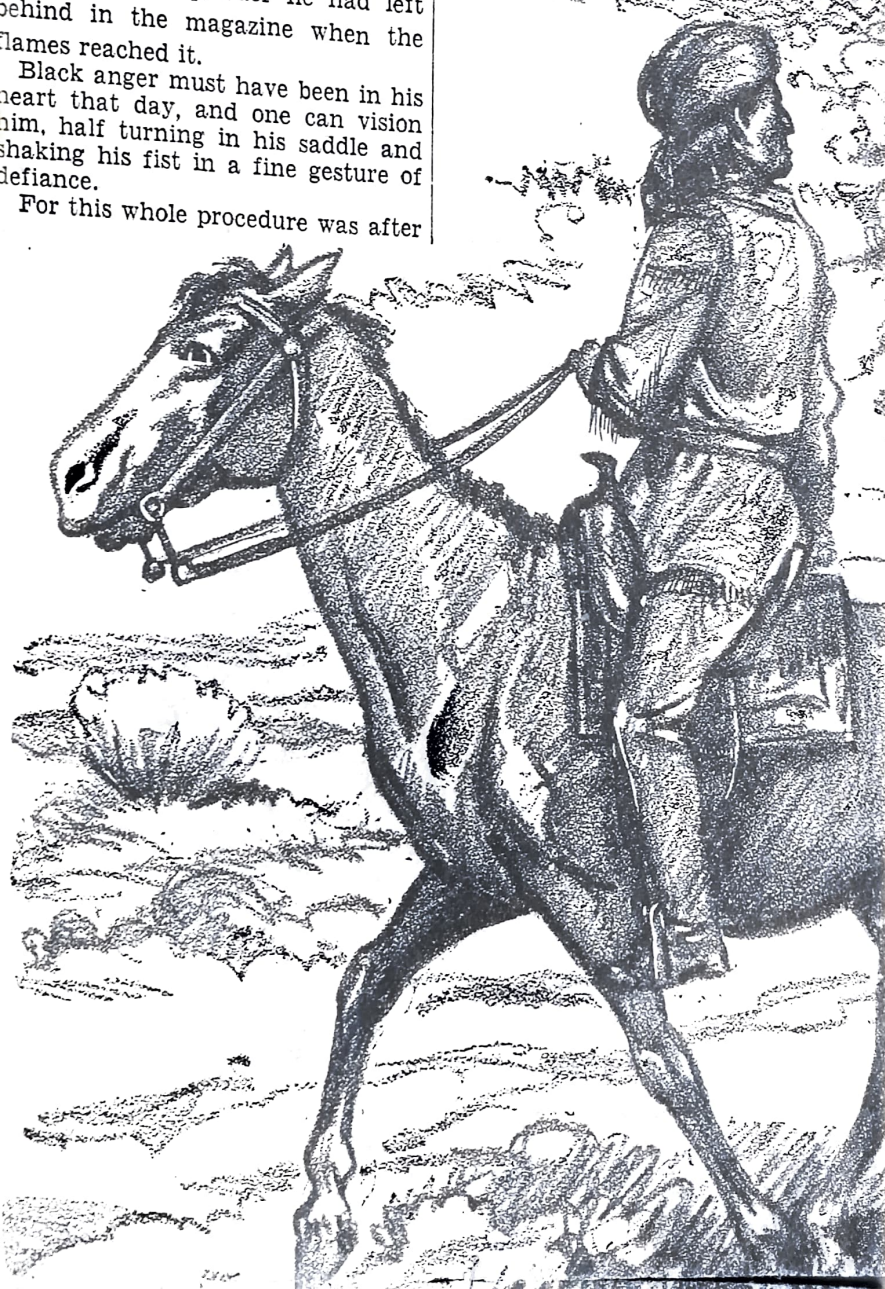
BY WALDEN E. SWEET


One likes to remember Col. William Bent, "Gray Hair," and sometimes "Roman Nose," the Indians called him, riding out that day from his fort, and looking back to see the flames he had set blazing behind him.

His ears were waiting for the dull thunder of the powder he had left behind in the magazine when the flames reached it.

Black anger must have been in his heart that day, and one can vision him, half turning in his saddle and shaking his fist in a fine gesture of defiance.

For this whole procedure was after





all a gesture, a fine blazing gesture of a sturdy, staunch man.

When the fort was finished in 1822 it was named Fort William in honor of William Bent, who was the leading spirit in the Bent enterprises. The name did not stick, however. Through the length and breadth of the fur empire it became known as Bent's Fort, or more affectionately, Old Fort Bent.

In the 20 years that followed, it was a famous place. There it passed the drama of the fur trade and the conflict of the history of the Trans-Mississippi West.

There its portals passed trappers and traders, the famous mountain men, five trappers, explorers, adventurous early travelers, Indians and soldiers.

Bent Unchallenged Ruler of Principality

One could have stood atop its walls and watched the whole pageant of the fur trade and the wilderness-breaking pass by.

In those 20 years William Bent had been something more than a king. He was unchallenged ruler of a principality that was far broader than half the petty kingdoms across which the plumed generals launched armies and spilled blood.

William Bent was a ruler by the divine right of commerce, and it must be regarded as not the least of his feats, that out of the barren plains of eastern Colorado, which was part of what the light little East was pleased to call the Great American Desert, he built up by his courage and his directorial genius a business, which in its best years ran to \$100,000 annually.

By this it may be guessed that the anger in Bent's heart that day he left his fort forever must have been incited somewhat with a deep regret.

and the trade goods and clean out ceremonial military operations. As the campaign became more vigorous the government saw it as a desirable military post and entered into negotiations with Bent to purchase it.

Whatever may have been Bent's sentimental attachments to the post he did not let these outweigh more practical considerations. With shifting of Indian tribes he felt it would be better to have a post farther down the Arkansas and so he was willing to sell and fixed his price at \$18,000.

Now Bent was a man of the most forthright character and it must be remembered that he had been something of a king.

Kept American Flag Flying Above Fort

He had maintained an American flag flying over the gateway of his fort in the years when the government had no troops in the country.

He was also a man who was accustomed to fixing his own prices, and it must be said that he enjoyed the reputation among the Indians of being a fair man.

In consequence when the government tried petty haggling with him and attempted to squeeze his price down to \$12,000, he abruptly terminated the negotiations. It was then he ordered the evacuation of the post.

He ordered his men to load aboard the heavy wagons the bales of furs

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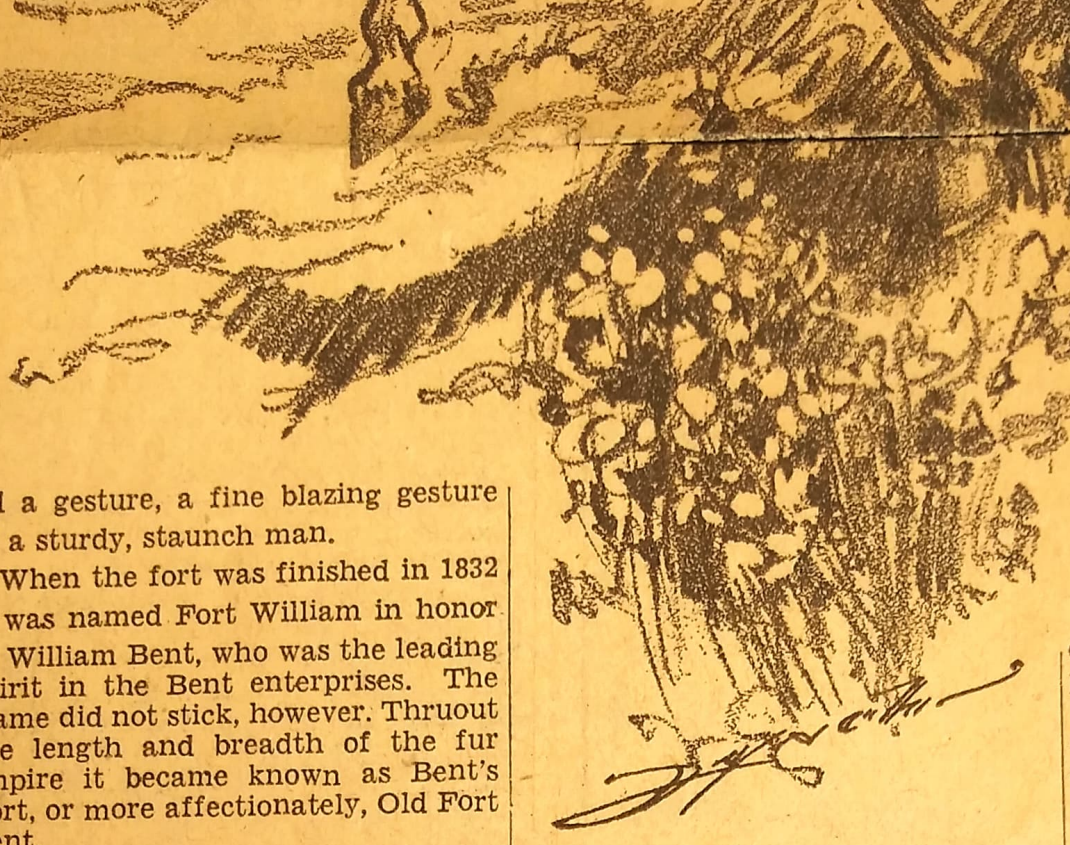
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