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Bent's Old Fort

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### Report from Bent's Old Fort

La Junta Tribune Democrat

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**BENTS OLD FORT**La Junta Tribune-Democrat. 8-21-69.Forts.  
Fort Bent

p. 4

A Series of Robert E. Davidson, Historian  
**EL PUEBLO – UNSAVORY COMPETITOR**

Although William Bent's trading operation was generally characterized by fair dealing and limited use of whiskey, others in the region were not as restrained or foresighted in their activities. One such questionable operation was El Pueblo trading post located 60 miles to the west. Information available today indicates that it was probably the best example of unscrupulous white traders at their worst.

Built by Messrs. George Simpson, J. B. Doyle and Alexander Barclay in the early 1840s, the adobe structure stood near the site of an earlier unsuccessful post established by John Gantt and Jefferson Blackwell ten years before. The new structure, although somewhat smaller, resembled Bent's Fort very closely, including round bastion towers and a central plaza. The similarity no doubt resulted from the fact that Barclay had previously been employed by Bent as a trader. It seems, however, that El Pueblo was not as well constructed and Francis Parkman, in 1846, described it as a "wretched species of fort, miserably cracked and dilapidated."

The uncomplimentary reputation acquired by El Pueblo was centered around its owners' uncontrolled dispensing of liquor to both trapper and Indian alike. As a result, it attracted the patronage of the unseemly elements from both groups. Charles Bent became very angry about this demoralizing activity and wrote the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1843 complaining that "there are several renegade Americans, who have built houses on the Arkansas river . . . This [Pueblo] is also a harbor for all Mexican traders . . ." In a later note he suggested that "the only mode to put a stop to the liquor trade from Mexico, is to establish a military post." Bent's advice went unheeded.

The source of El Pueblo's bountiful supply of whiskey was Simeon Turley's famous distillery located near Taos. The harsh nature of this brew is evident from the name by which it was known to all – "Taos Lightning" and frequent pack trains, threading their way through the Sangre de Cristo Pass kept the trading post well supplied. The only bright spot in El Pueblo's generally disreputable existence occurred in 1846 when a party of Mormon immigrants decided to winter near the post. History, however, fails to record what effect this group of staunch abstainers had on the post's alcoholic consumption.

Despite their free use of whiskey, the owners never seem to have offered a serious competitive threat to Bent's Fort and the three gentlemen abandoned their business in the early 1850's. Barclay and Doyle were undismayed, though, and teamed up to build a new adobe post near Fort Union, New Mexico. Running true to form, Army records reveal that the two gentlemen continuously ran afoul of Post Commandants by attempting to illegally sell whiskey to their troops.