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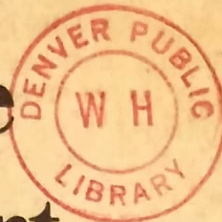
Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

National Park Service to Help Rebuild Old Fort

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National Park Service to help rebuild old fort

Fort Bent's fort

By LE ROY BOYD

BENT'S OLD FORT (C-SJ) — For almost 200 years Uncle Sam has been building such new things as canals, post offices, Navy yards and Army posts, highways and, lately, the Pueblo Dam.

At the same time the good old Uncle has kept busy restoring historic landmarks. Among them have been the first homestead at Beatrice, Neb.; Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia and now Bent's Old Fort located on Colorado 194 between Las Animas and La Junta.

This second category has been mainly undertaken by the National Park Service (NPS). And Bent's Old Fort is a NPS project.

NPS has been working on plans for the reconstruction of William Bent's famous trading post which had a great influence on the history of the western high plains. Involved in the planning have been NPS personnel in Washington, Omaha, Denver, San Francisco and those stationed here.

An archeological dig has been completed to determine the exact outlines of the old fort and soil tests have been conducted. Decisions have been reached which determine the old fort will be rebuilt as near exactly as the original as possible. Hopes have been expressed that the project will be completed in time for the U.S. Bicentennial observance. In fact, a target date for the job has been set for July 4, 1976.

This date almost coincides with Colorado's first Centennial on Aug. 1, 1976. NPS officials have said the two celebrations will be combined here if the recon-

the center of the post plaza has also been moved out.

Dr. Wilfred Logan, NPS archeologist from the historic preservation department of the Denver Service Center, was here to check further the outlines of the fort. He was being assisted by Ray Mundell and Robert Nickel from the Midwest Archeology Center in Lincoln.

Logan said Robert Leonard, a graduate student at Colorado State University, will be the site archeologist this summer.

Top NPS men from national, area and regional NPS offices will visit the site during the year to check on the progress of the project.

Russell L. Jones, a native of Uteville in Baca County, is the construction superintendent. Right now he has only a few men on his crew but others, including local residents, will be added in the next few weeks.

Since the original fort was built of adobe the same material will be used for the reconstruction.

Jones' first task is to clear the site down to the old rock foundations so that the fort can be rebuilt from the ground up just as three partners did on the original fort 142 years ago.

The frame structures that were built to protect some excavations made during the first archeological dig have been removed. The low, adobe three-foot walls raised following that dig and capped with concrete are being removed with heavy equipment.

The fort was originally started in 1833 by brothers

Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain as a center for trade with the Indian tribes of the plains. St. Vrain had trading interests elsewhere in Colorado and apparently was never here for any great length of time. Charles Bent was later appointed governor of New Mexico during the Mexican War and was killed in an uprising at Taos.

William Bent eventually became recognized as the sole owner of the fort which sometimes was known as William's Fort. Later it was called Bent's Old Fort after Bent moved down the Arkansas River to build a new fort of stone.

Bent's Old Fort was not built all at once as a single project. Additions to the original structure were always being made. Most of the labor at that time was by hand. If William Bent could return from his grave in the Las Animas cemetery he no doubt would be amazed at the way things are done now.

In 1926 the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) acquired legal title to five acres of land on which the old fort was located. The DAR transferred the title to the state in 1954 for the State Historical Society. On Oct. 31, 1961, Colorado gave a deed to the site to the United States which placed it under the jurisdiction of the National Park Site. The NPS has declared the place Bent's Old Fort Historic Site.

Although the reconstruction working now been roped off can still see much especially as start going up