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Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

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### Bent's Old Fort

Colorado Country Life

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## Bent's Old Fort

By Web Allison  
Field Editor

Bent's Old Fort was built in 1833 by Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain, where one branch of the Santa Fe Trail turned south toward Santa Fe.

It enclosed about 2½ acres, resembled a European fortress with its two enfilading bastions, but probably served a more important purpose as a trading post, a gathering spot for mountain men, for conflabs with the Indians with whom the Bents and St. Vrain had great confluence. St. Vrain later established a branch of the Fort on the South Platte to offset competition.

For 16 years the three men managed a private trading empire out of their stronghold stretching from Texas into Wyoming, from the Rockies into middle Kansas. A historian wrote, "They were mighty men whose will was prairie law, who could sway whole tribes, who knew

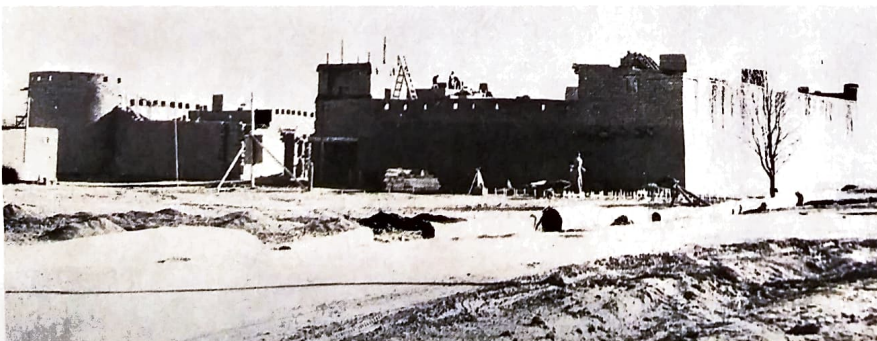
Indians and Mexicans as few others did."

William Bent destroyed the Fort and moved to another location in 1849, after white emigration — bringing cholera — weakened the Indian tribes.

Until the early 1960's, the site was held by the State Historical Society, when it was taken over by the National Park Service. The Bicentennial offered the opportunity to completely rebuild the Fort from the foundations up, at a cost of about \$1¼ million. Work is scheduled for completion in May. Official estimates of visitors this year is 150,000. Unofficial, a quarter of a million.

It will be operated as a "Living History Program" with employees in period costume, authentic artifacts for sale, domestic livestock pastured around the Fort, etc.

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