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Bent's Old Fort

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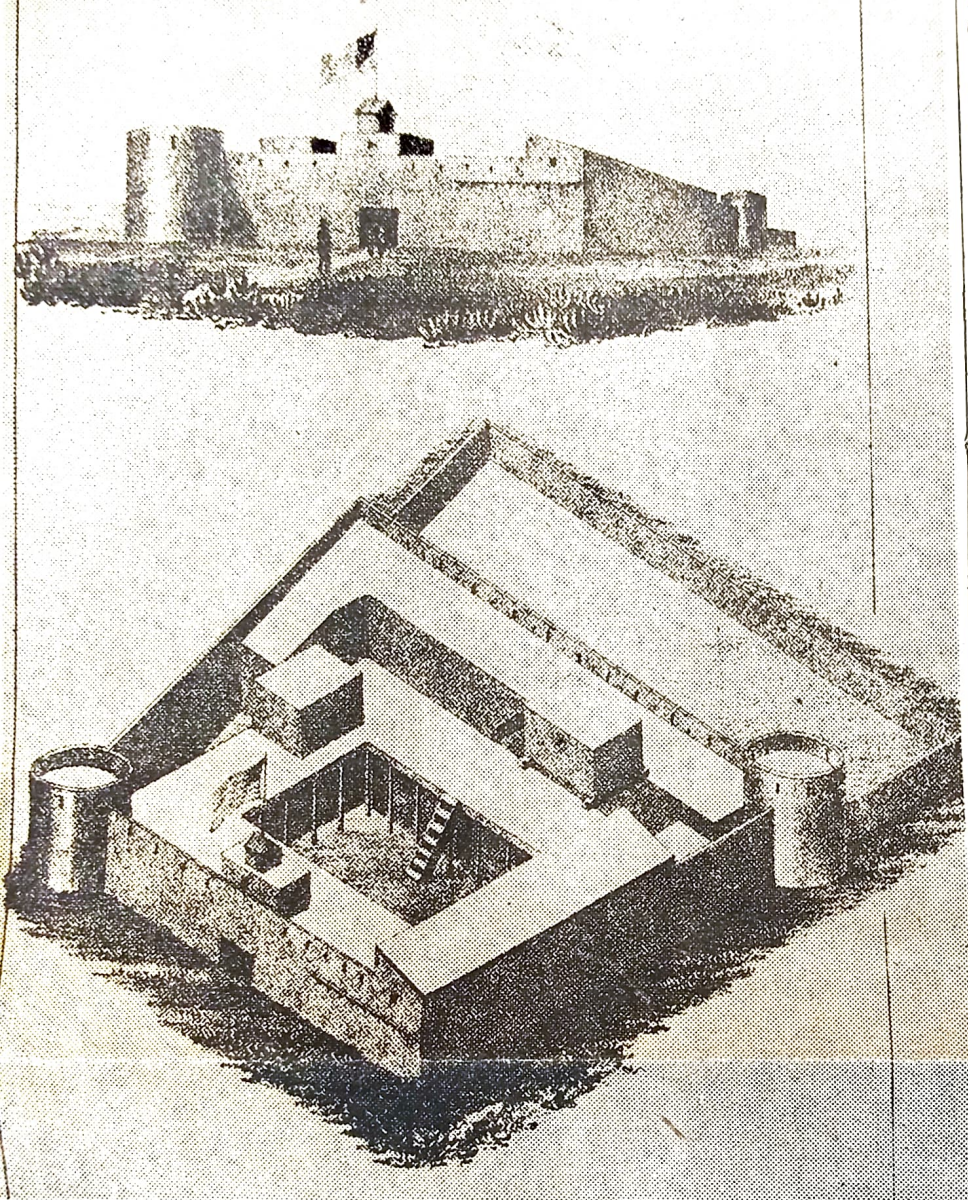
Two Year Study Sheds Light on Fort

Rocky Mountain News

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2-Year Study Sheds Light on F

AMN 7/5/65 p. 28 Fort Bent's Fort



Contemporary drawings of Bent's Fort, made in 1845 by an Army lieutenant. They throw much information on the design of the outpost and will play a part in planning the reconstruction. (From the Library of Congress.)

By W. T. LITTLE

Rocky Mountain News Writer

BENT'S OLD FORT, July 4—The land in and around the site of this historic frontier outpost near present-day La Junta has produced 170,000 artifacts, throwing important new light on Western life in the 1830s and 1840s.

Two years of archeological exploration by the U.S. National Park Service is drawing to a close. The work has produced a treasure trove of objects ranging from tiny colored Indian trading beads and pieces of clay pipes to remains of flintlock rifles and a wooden and leather pump.

The valuable items are now

being cataloged and will eventually find their way into a museum that will be an important part of the reconstructed fort.

Top Attraction

Details uncovered in the excavation work will be turned over to Government architects for the fi-

nal planning on rebuilding the old outpost.

The construction is scheduled to begin late next year and will be completed by the summer of 1968, according to Dwight E. Stinson, acting superintendent of the 178-acre national historic site being developed by the National Park Service.

Residents of the Lower Arkansas Valley are convinced that Bent's Old Fort—as distinguished from Bent's New Fort, a later-day trading post—is destined to become one of Colorado's prime tourist attractions, and perhaps second only to Mesa Verde in historical significance.

Even with rough digging work still under way and little to be seen except some of the uncovered foundations and trenches where excavations have occurred, the site will attract 30,000 or more visitors this year, Stinson said. It will greatly increase when the fort is reconstructed and open to tours.

When the restoration is completed, the fort and surrounding ground will look as it did in the period of 1833 to 1849 when it flourished as the important center of a vast trading empire that stretched from Texas into Wyoming, and from the Rocky Mountains to mid-Kansas.

Native Grasses

Native grasses will be planted on the reservation. Parking will be confined to the walled corral of the fort, where the wagon teams and livestock were kept.

Archeological explorations at site began in the fall of 1963, a few months after the National Park Service acquired the fort site and surrounding ranch land.

Under Archeologist Jackson W. Moore Jr. and his laboratory assistant, Arnold Rogers, a crew of diggers underwent a month's training in exploration work. They have literally combed the fort and surrounding land on an inch-by-inch basis. Their painstaking efforts have produced results far beyond the original hopes of the Park Service.

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Buttons, hubs from wheels of covered wagons, a coffee grinder, wine bottles, pieces of china that once must have been the pride of a frontier housewife, combs, bullets, a clay jug and hundreds of other items have been uncovered and are now being cleaned, studied and cataloged in the site's laboratory.

No References Found

Two skeletons, uncovered below the floor level of one of the fort's rooms, provide an intriguing mystery.

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Cursorry studies failed to show whether the bones were those of white men or Indians. Many Indian tribes frequented the post in its years of operation, primarily the Cheyennes, but also including Arapaho, Ute, Comanche and Kiowa tribes. It was rare indeed when tepees were not standing outside the walls.

Construction began on the walls in 1832. The fort's builders, Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain, all from prominent St. Louis families, had earlier built a small trading post near the present city of Pueblo.

But, they were not satisfied with the location and sought a better one. The fort's site was chosen because it was near good hunting grounds and it was on

the mountain ranch of the Santa Fe Trail.

According to research by the National Park Service, more than 100 Mexican people were employed in making the adobe bricks. Americans were also employed in cutting timber and fashioning the roofs, doors and gates. By 1833, the massive and impregnable mud fortress stood completed in the midst of the unbroken prairie.

(Next: Life at Bent's Fort)