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Bent's Old Fort

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Bent's Old fort

National Park Service

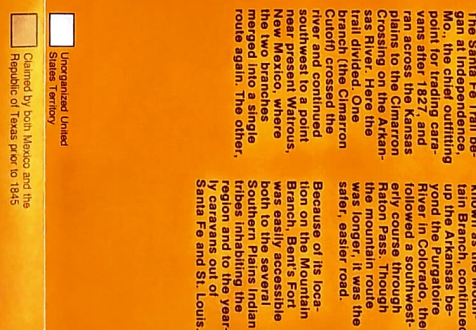
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Bent's Old Fort on the Arkansas River in southeastern Colorado

The partners who form—whose existence de—
Charles Bent, the son

whose existence depended on friendly relations with the Indians and Mexicans and upon suppression of competition. By skill and subtleties, the young man, William B. Ewing, achieved greater influence among the Indians than rival traders. Of the numerous tribes trading with the company, the most important were the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho, whose hunting grounds were the Fort St. Vrain site.

White Man" to the Cheyennes, saw that relations continued as friendly as they were before the fort was es-

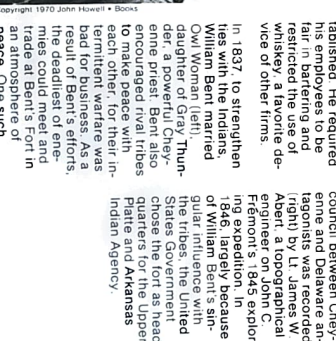


—Matthew C. Field, 1840

prairie law, who could sway whole tribes, who knew Indians' actions as few others did. "Yet, however, as they were, they were," he wrote. "They were destined to be overwhelmed by the events beyond their control. Relations between Mexico and the United States had long been strained. With the approach of armed conflict in 1846, the Federal Government designated the adobe trading post as the advance base for Stephen Watts Kearney's invasion of New Mexico. As the war progressed, Government wagon trains congregated there in ever-increasing numbers. Government cattle overgrazed nearby pastures. Military stores piled up in the fort, and soldiers, teamsters, and artisans occupied the rooms.

The steady flow of soldiers across the Plains during the Mexican War, together with the influx of settlers, goldseekers, and adventures that came later, fouled the watering places, wantonly used up precious wood, and frightened away the bison. Bent, St. Vrain and Company was caught between the millstones of resentful Indians and invading whites. When Indian warfare commenced seriously in 1847, the days of rich trading were gone. The death of Charles Bent in a revolt in 1850, the sharp decline in business, and the departure of St. Vrain for New Mexico virtually destroyed any chance William Bent might have had to maintain operations. The final blow came in 1849 when cholera, most likely brought by emigrants, spread through the tribes. Bent, disillusioned and disappointed, loaded his family and employees into wagons and fled. Whether he or Indians sent for it will probably never be known. It is left for a smoldering monument to Manifest Destiny.

council between Chyenne and Delaware antagonists was recorded (right) by Lt. James W. Abert, a topographical engineer on John C.



Bent's Old Fort

National Historic Site
Colorado

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

An Invitation to Explore

Bent's Old Fort has been reconstructed as accurately as possible to its appearance in 1845-46, when Bent, St. Vrain and Company was at the zenith of its power, both commercially and politically. The furnishings of the several rooms are both antiques and reproductions. As you walk through the fort, keep in mind the various uses to which it was put and the people who lived, worked,

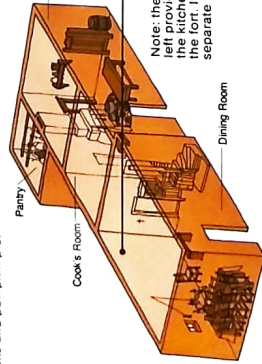
and visited here. Make your own visit one of discovery and you will be amply rewarded. Feel free to spend as much time as you want and don't hesitate to ask questions of the uniformed park employees as well as the costumed interpreters. When you leave, we hope that you will have learned something of the unique contribution this trading post made to the opening of the West.

Cook's Room

Black Charlotte, the fort cook, and her husband, Dick Green, lived in the room just off the main hall. The Greens had been Bent family slaves in Missouri. Charlotte was sent to the Spanish Peaks for her slacks and pumpkin pie.

Dining Room

This room, the largest in the fort, was used by traders, trappers, hunters, and all employees. On occasion elaborate fare was provided, but a table laid with a white cloth. One traveler used knives and forks here for the first time in 50 days.



Note: the drawing at left shows the location of the kitchen area inside the fort. It is not a separate structure.

Bastions

These "little towers" on the fort's exterior were one 19th-century visitor to liken Bent's Fort to a medieval fortress. The bastions, arms were used as storage for fack and agricultural equipment.

Traderoom and Council Room

Fort — presumably for sale to trappers and travelers, and for use by William Bent, George, remembered, prices were set between the trader and representatives. Peace talks were occasionally held here, and Susan Magoffin mentioned its use as temporary sleeping quarters for a large number of men.

William Bent's Quarters

There are actually two rooms here. William Bent's quarters were in the Eastern-style fireplace room. One traveler referred to the room as "the owners' room." The owners' room was a Spanish colonial place where terms and prices were set between the trader and representatives. Peace talks were occasionally held here, and Susan Magoffin mentioned its use as temporary sleeping quarters for a large number of men.

Blacksmith and Carpenter Shops

As the principal outfit of American civilization on the southern frontier, Bent's Old Fort offered a variety of kinds of accommodation to travelers. By 1846 the fort was a small institution. Employing about 60 persons, it required the services of numerous tradesmen: blacksmiths, cooper, carpenters, and gunsmiths. Lt. James Albert, who stayed at the fort for

Mexican Quarters

Traders from Santa Fe and Taos remained in the fort for supplies. Bent's wife assisted in the day-to-day operation, cleaning and cooking. The company employed trappers on a regular basis. The company was obligated to turn their catch over to the

Trappers Quarters

Many of the mountain trappers who came to the fort for supplies were "free trappers" — independent souls who paused here just long enough to get supplies, furs and sample the "civilized" life before they were off again for another year's supplies. The company also employed trappers on a regular basis. The company was obligated to turn their catch over to the

Military Quarters

When Kearney's Army arrived in 1846, it brought with it evidence of the rigors of the trail. Sick with dysentery and scurvy alone. Six would die here. When complete descriptions of those unable to travel were left behind to convalesce.

Susan Magoffin's Quarters

Susan Magoffin, when her husband spent her 19th birthday here in 1846. She lost a baby during her brief stay. Mrs. Magoffin's room — like the adjoining four — was on the first — usually shared by travelers and fort employees. Most of these rooms were small and sparsely furnished, if at all.

Billiard Room

Ranking second in popularity for the billiard and tobacco was gambling, and the billiard room was, at once, the most unusual feature of Bent's Fort. The love of gaming seems inherent in our very nature. Lewis Garrard te marked the original billiard table (the one in the room now is a reproduction) for temporary storage of military supplies.

Warehouses

This second in popularity for the storage of furs and trade goods during the winters in the spring these stores were emptied as trading expeditions departed to the surrounding Indian tribes, and wagon loads of furs set out across the plains for St. Louis. For a brief period in the 1840s this area was used for temporary storage of military supplies.

Administration

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site is 13 kilometers (8 miles) west of Santa Fe, 24 kilometers (15 miles) west of Las Animas on Colo. 194. Both towns are served by the Santa Fe, Fort Collins and Santa Fe Railroad and by Continental Trailway buses. La Junta is also served by Amtrak. The site is adjacent to the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The superintendent's address is 35110 Highway 160, Fort Collins, CO 80501-8523.

Note: rest rooms are located beyond the parking area near the rear bastion.