

Bent's Old Fort

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Bent's Old Fort
National Historic Site
La Junta, Colorado

Traditional Holiday Celebration December 4 –5, 2015



Frontier Holidays

Over 70 living history volunteers bring to you the annual “Traditional Holiday Celebration”, based upon the written accounts of frontiersmen and women who dared to live and work in the wilds of America. Christmas and its spiritual meaning penetrated beneath the rough exterior of these rugged men and women. Even strangers to formal religion felt the season’s mood. Most everyone found a way to make the holidays memorable. Modern visitors will become a part of the simple pleasures of the day alongside the Bent and St. Vrain Company employees, Plains Indians, trappers, explorers and Army.

Enter the Past

The year is 1846. You are travelling along the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail. Your travel has been rough as winter weather has moved over the plains. Ahead is an adobe castle, the fur trading post of Bent, St. Vrain & Company. Its walls echo with the sound of work, human voice, and merriment. As tired as you are from your journey and as eager as you are to keep moving down the trail, you detour your trek and head for the welcoming gate of the fort. You hope for the chance to warm yourselves by a fire, replenish supplies, enjoy human company that may provide word of the war in Mexico, and possibly find a spot to bed down for the night. You are entering the trading fort of Bent, St. Vrain & Company (known better as “Fort William on the Arkansas” or “Bent’s Fort”) as those inside prepare for the holiday season.

Look for the Differences

The Christmas and December holiday seasons of the 1840s, especially in the forts of the American fur trade, were much different than the “traditions” we now associate with the season. Christmas trees were not yet common in most Eastern households and rarely found in the West. Much of the holiday celebration in fur trade forts was limited to welcoming the holiday with gun fire, drinking, spontaneous dancing, remembrances of home, eating, visiting with friends and the exchanging of gifts. Witness how each of the different groups of people at the fort celebrate the holidays.

What is Living History?

Living history is the portrayal of people and cultures of the past. By utilizing artifacts, reproductions, and extensive research, the living history interpreter creates a representation of an historic character that allows the audience to interact with our past through a tactile experience and not just through the written word or demonstration.

Can you interact with the Interpreter?

Yes! Interaction with the character is encouraged. Remember, the character is portraying a particular time and will recognize nothing past the depicted point in time. Here are some suggestions of the types of questions you might ask: What brought you here to Bent’s Fort? What skills and abilities do you have? What are you hoping for in years to come? What’s the word from Mexico? What were the holidays like back home for you? What do you miss the most living and working here?

December 4-5 Evening Candlelight Tours – Reservations Required

Advanced reservations can be made by calling (719) 383-5026 for the candlelight tours. Space is very limited. The fort comes alive with the spirit of the season. Fort workers, Plains Indians, travelers, soldiers and Mexicans families all celebrate the Yuletide in their traditional ways.

December 5 Daytime Scheduled Activities:

9:00 am	Fort Opens
9:30, 11:15 am, 1:00 pm	Toy making – build an authentic toy with your kids – carpenter shop
11:00 am – 4:00 pm	Wagon rides – through the woods and to the river – front of fort
1:00 pm	Taffy pull – stick your fingers in and pull it out – plaza
2:00 pm	Piñata break – authentic piñatas will be busted open by the kids – plaza
2:15 pm	Yule Log hunt – search for the elusive Yule Log and if you find it, ride it “home” – plaza
3:00 pm	Yule Log christened and music – front of fort
4:00 pm	Fort Closes – park reopens at 5:00 pm for Candlelight Tours (reservations required)