

The Excavation of Bent's Fort Otero County, Colorado

By HERBERT W. DICK

Upon acquiring the site of Bent's Old Fort, through a deed from the Daughters of the American Revolution of La Junta in 1953, the State Historical Society desired, if possible, to obtain a better knowledge of the ruins of the old fort in order that plans for future restoration might be pursued. Therefore, a plan was worked out with Trinidad State Junior College, Trinidad, Colorado, by which the excavation of the fort's foundations was made from June 20, 1954, through July 23, 1954, under the technical direction of Dr. Herbert W. Dick of the Anthropology Museum of the college.

All workers participated on a volunteer basis, laboring "in the broiling sun when the official temperature was as high as 106 degrees F." An expedition camp was set up on the north side of the fort in a small triangular plot. It consisted of five tents for the personnel and a tarpaulin strung over a rope ridge for the kitchen. Water was hauled from a farm about one mile distant. Mrs. Martha M. Dick, wife of Herbert W. Dick, with the excellent aid of Mrs. Rosalie Templeton, managed the camp and cooked. Later, Mrs. Dick inked the main map and typed the report of the excavation work.

Dr. Dick says that full credit for the success of the operation is due the following excavators: Messrs. Jerry Bair and Earl Templeton, Denver; Charles Borders and Irven Schick, Trinidad; Robert Drummond, Pueblo; Alvin Parrish, Akron; Bradley White, Boulder, Colorado; and Robert Komerska, Tucson, Arizona.

In his report, Dr. Dick also expresses special thanks to Mr. Harry Reese, then secretary of the La Junta Chamber of Commerce, who arranged business details; Dr. John Johnston, through whose land the expedition passed; Mr. George Cosand, whose advice and knowledge were very helpful; Mr. Joseph B. Roos for the fine aerial photographs, and his skilled pilot, Mr. Al Schedlbauer; Mr. and Mrs. Alec Dorsch, who supplied artesian water; and Mr. Oakley Wade of Las Animas for his keen interest and historical perspective.

Mr. and Mrs. Al Miller, he says, were very helpful in pointing out the stagecoach road to Kit Carson. Mr. Miller also was instrumental in arranging for the back-filling of the site after excavations were completed so that the foundations would be protected. Mr. Don Hamilton of the Citizens Utility Company furnished a small bulldozer and operator to do the back-filling, a job of replacing, in five hours, dirt that took five weeks to excavate.

Dr. Dick also acknowledges the "help of dozens of other persons, both in La Junta and Las Animas, and that of James T. Forrest, former Curator, and Mr. Maurice Frink, present Executive Director, of the State Historical Society."

Because of the limitations of printing space it has been necessary for our editorial staff to condense Dr. Dick's report. Detailed measurement tables of rooms, doorways, fireplaces and adobe bricks have not been included. The scale drawing duplicates most of the data on these. The full report is on file in the State Historical Society, Denver.

As will be noted, some of the measurements reported by Dr. Dick's party are at variance with some of those of Lt. J. W. Abert who recorded that "the walls, as measured on September 8, 1846, were 14 feet high; the bastions, 18 feet. The front gate was 7 feet high and 6½ wide. The east wall measured 137 feet, the north wall, 178."

Some discussion undoubtedly will arise over statements made by some writers in the past relative to the "east gate." According to Dr. Dick's findings, the east gate probably was built during the stagecoach period of the fort's history, as there was no tangible evidence of it connected with findings related to the earliest period.

Although much has been written about Bent's Old Fort, undoubtedly much work can still be done concerning its history. Just when this most famous fort was built apparently is still a matter of discussion. Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen, Historian Emeritus of the State Historical Society of Colorado, made an exhaustive examination of available materials relating to the date of the building of the fort and published an article in *The Colorado Magazine*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April, 1954), entitled, "When Was Bent's Fort Built?" Dr. Hafen said, in part, "Bent's Fort, the large adobe structure which was the most famous fur trade post of the Southwest, was erected on the north bank of the Arkansas about ten miles northeast of present La Junta, Colorado. . . . Many conflicting statements have been made as to the date of founding of this adobe post, and also regarding one or more stockades said to have been constructed in the region prior to the erection of the adobe fort."

After carefully citing and discussing many references to the beginning of Bent's Fort, Dr. Hafen concluded: "As indicated above, contemporary historical sources on the founding of Bent's Fort are almost non-existent, and far from so definitive as we would like. But unless and until some fugitive contemporary record is happily discovered, we shall have to depend on the extant primary sources, and these indicate that Bent's Fort was built in 1833."

Perhaps a letter which was written by Ceran St. Vrain, which was found by Mrs. Cresswell Taylor, can be considered that "fugitive contemporary record." In the *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, Saint Louis, Vol. 11, No. 1 (October, 1954), Mrs. Taylor contributed an article, "Charles Bent Has Built a Fort." In this article she quoted a letter written by Ceran St. Vrain, St. Louis, Missouri, July 21, 1847, to Lt. Col. Eneas Mackay, U. S. Army, in which he offered to sell to the government the "establishment known as 'Bent's Fort' on the head waters of the Arkansas River." Wrote St. Vrain: "Bent's Fort was established in 1834 by the late Charles Bent and the undersigned for the purpose of trading with the several tribes of Indians in its vicinity."

Mrs. Taylor also quoted in her article a letter written by William Laidlaw to Pierre Chouteau, under date of January 10, 1834, in which he said in part: "I understand from the Sioux that Charles Bent has built a Fort upon the Arkansas for the purpose of trade with the different bands of Indians. . . ."

Did Laidlaw make an error in using "1834"? Was St. Vrain exact with his date?

So much for historical data at present. We now present our condensation of the technical report made by Dr. Dick and his excellent crew of volunteer assistants.—*Editor*.

INTRODUCTION

Location. The site of Bent's Old Fort is on the north side of the Arkansas River, seven miles east of La Junta, Colorado, in eastern Otero County.¹

The foundations are several hundred yards north and west of the present river channel, and 30 feet above the channel on a terrace of yellow brown clay. Small out-croppings of limey shale were instrumental in protecting this rise of land from being eroded by the river. The river makes a broad turn on the south side of the fort, swinging from an east direction to a northeast direction. At an earlier date the river channel was parallel with the east wall of the fort. Alfalfa fields bound the fort on the west and south side, and grazing pasture bounds it on the east and north. The grazing area is an older part of a river channel. It has the characteristics of formerly being a marsh fed by springs of ground water, according to old timers in the area, and river back-water. The soil is a black mud with much organic material. Much of the meadow is covered with a coarse grass and tamarisk, the latter a recently imported plant.

The Fort, 4,000 feet above sea level, is located on the south side of a broad, U-shaped valley, two miles in width. The valley has been cut by the Arkansas River to a depth of 200 feet. If one knows precisely where to look, a notch can be seen in the sandhills on the north side of the valley. The notch is the deeply eroded groove of the stage road from Kit Carson, and leads to Bent's Fort.

Objectives. The main objectives of the excavation were to outline the foundations of the fort so that an accurate map could be made; to ascertain all details of the occupation of the fort at various periods; to collect, record, and preserve all artifacts found; and to put permanent points of reference for future location of walls and features. If the foundations were now completely destroyed by flood they could be accurately placed in their former position by our survey.

EXCAVATION

Procedure. When we began our excavations no walls remained above the surface. The generalized quadrangle shape of the old fort was evident by the low adobe mounds ranging from one to four feet in height.

Adobe structure excavation is a pleasant type of work, in that rocks are not present to disrupt shoveling and troweling. On the

¹ The following description of the monument land on which the Fort is situated is in the abstract belonging to the State Historical Society: "A part of the SW¼ of Sec. 14 and of the NW¼ of Sec. 23, Twp. 23 S., Rg. 54 W., containing 4.41 acres of land more or less, situate and being in the county of Otero, Colorado."

other hand, sun-dried mud bricks tend to melt if not protected from moisture, and are then difficult to trace.

The north outside wall foundations of Bent's Fort were easily discernible at the tops of the mound. Everywhere else they were covered by a veneer of melted adobe at varying depths. In most instances the veneer was not over six inches in depth.

A wide bladed, flat shovel was used to scrape off the surface of the mound. One-inch cuts were taken until the tops of adobes were exposed. They were then swept with a broom until the edges of the walls could be ascertained. A six-inch pointing trowel was used to excavate downward along the edges of the walls. The wall trenches were 18 inches to 24 inches in width, and were excavated to the first floor level. Excavations below floor level were made where it was deemed necessary.

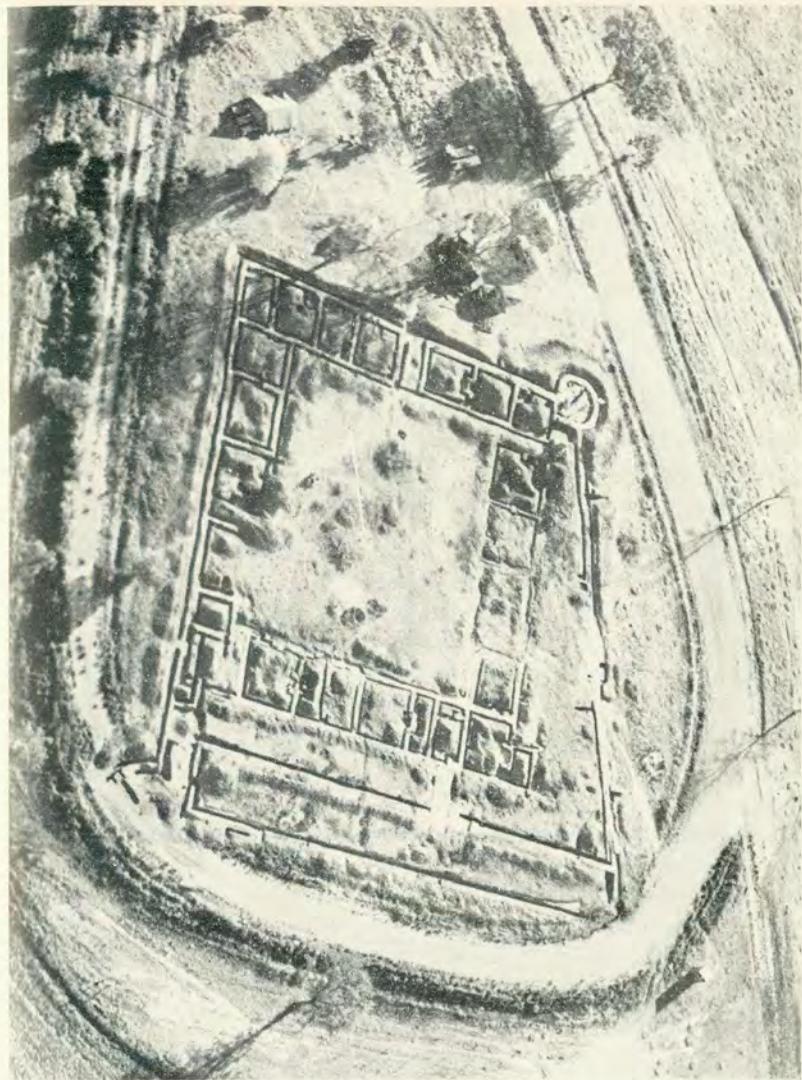
Great care had to be exercised along the walls to preserve bits of plaster that adhered to them. Usually troweling was commenced several inches from the wall. The differential drying of the wall and loose soil, the latter drying more rapidly, separated the two, and the soil could be peeled away without disturbing the wall surface.

The excavation proceeded in the following order: (1) outlining the outside of the quadrangle walls; (2) outlining the north interior rooms; (3) outlining the west interior rooms; (4) outlining the south interior rooms; (5) outlining the east interior rooms; and (6) miscellaneous re-checking of problems.

Exposing the walls served another unintended purpose. The exposed walls had an excellent chance to dry thoroughly after many years of dampness. This re-hardened the adobes so that their future durability has been greatly increased. The loose earth fill in the trenches along the sides of the walls will aid in drainage from the walls. With the much lowered water table in the valley, because of pumping, the walls should retain less moisture than in previous years.

We were extremely fortunate that no rain fell while the walls were exposed. Twelve hours after the back-filling of all trenches, at the end of the season, a heavy three-inch rain fell that could have easily destroyed most of the exposed walls.

Bent's Fort. Bent's Fort can best be described geometrically as a quadrangle—a four-cornered figure. Although the four outside protective walls were of varying lengths and two corners were not right angles, the rooms built inside the protective wall enclosed a rectangular courtyard with all corner angles being right angles. A round structure, a tower, was found at the northeast corner.



AIR VIEW OF EXCAVATION WORK—BENT'S OLD FORT, 1954

extending outward from the junction of the north and east protective walls. A remnant of a tower was uncovered at the southwest corner.

Inside the main walls, foundations of 24 rooms, a large rectangular pit and a well were uncovered. The north and west rooms used the main protective wall as their back wall. The south and east rooms were built away from the main protective wall with a

separate back wall of thinner width. In speaking of the back and front of the rooms, the front is regarded as that part of the building facing the courtyard or plaza.

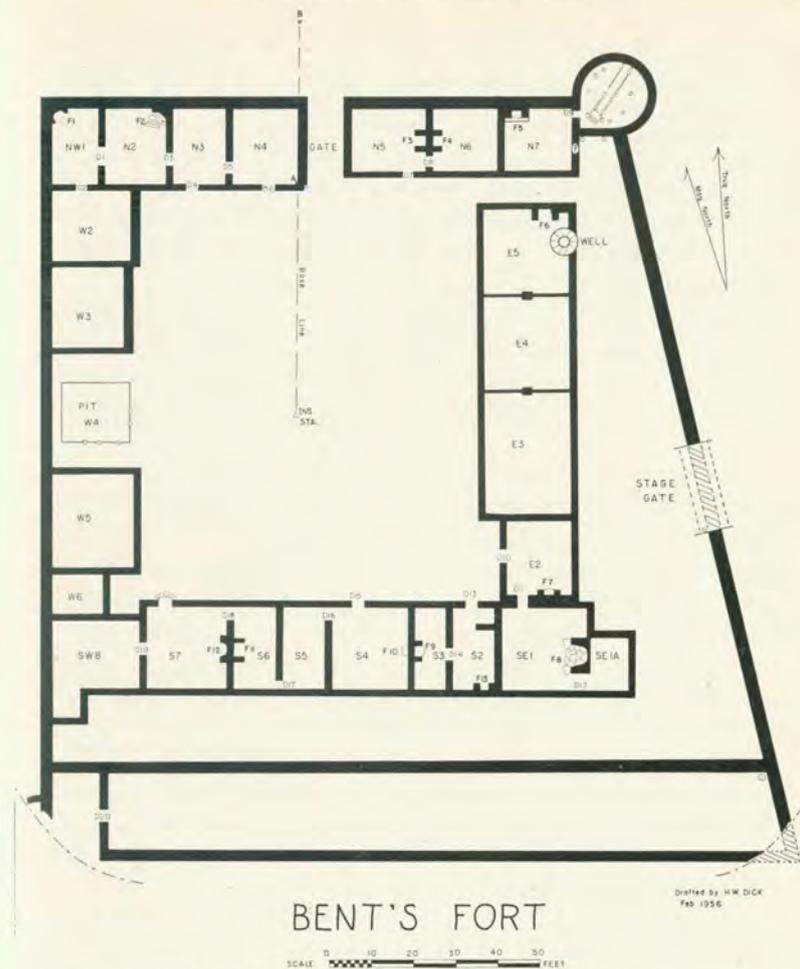
For convenience in recording, each room and the pit was given a number relating it to its position around the court-yard. The rooms located on the north side of the court-yard beginning with the room in the northwest corner are numbered NW1, N2, N3, N4, Bent's Gate, N5, N6, N7 and NE Tower. Those located along the east side of the court-yard, beginning with the southeast corner room and running north, are numbered SE1, SE1a (partitioned area), E2, E3, E4 and E5. Rooms located along the south side of the court-yard, running west from room SE1, are numbered S2, S3, S4, S5, S6 and S7. Rooms located along the west side, running south from room NW1, are W2, W3, W4 (pit), W5, W6, SW8, and SW Tower (destroyed by road around site).

Outside Protective Wall. The two types of walls in the fort can be readily distinguished by their thickness. The outside protective walls are thicker than those used for rooms and partitions.

The outside walls had a thickness of three adobe brick widths. The outside walls have suffered some erosion, reducing the maximum thickness of the walls. It is conjectured that the outside walls were originally close to 3.0 feet thick and that their present variations are caused by weathering while previously exposed.

The outside south protective wall is paralleled by a wall of similar thickness (inside south protective wall), 18.8 feet to the north. These two walls appear to have formed an elongated compartment with the only opening uncovered in the excavation being in the west end, a doorway 3.0 feet in width. It is possible that the foundations have melted down to such an extent that no doorways or gates are discernible in the length of the wall. More exploration is needed in this compartment. It is conjectured that this area might have been roofed and used for bulk storage.

The outside wall measurements do not include the corral walls which are an extension of the east and west walls, according to Lt. J. W. Abert's map (1845-46), owned by Mr. F. Rosenstock, Denver, Colorado. The corral walls extend, according to Abert's map, 150(?) feet beyond the outside south protective wall. The juncture of the walls in the southeast corner and the tower in the southwest corner has been obliterated by a graded road around the fort. The corral walls lie in what is now an alfalfa field, and have probably been destroyed by leveling and plowing. There is still a possibility that a trace of these foundations exists. Most of the corral area lies in private property.



The length of the north protective wall from the northwest corner to its junction with the northeast tower is 122.4 feet. Projecting this wall in an imaginary extension through the northeast tower to its junction with the east wall, we get 132.5 feet, 4.5 less than Abert's measurement on the Rosenstock map. It is through the center of the north wall that Bent's original gate opened. The opening is 8.1 feet wide, with room N4 on the west side and room N5 on the east side. The east wall of the gate is 1.7 feet in thickness, and the west wall of the gate is 1.9 feet in thickness. This difference is probably due to differential weathering.

The east wall from its junction with the northeast tower to the junction with the inner south wall is 150.0 feet. The estimated

length to its junction with the outer south wall is 168.8 feet, which can be regarded as the total length of the wall, not including the corral wall. An opening in the east wall, 65.0 feet from the juncture of the east wall with the northeast tower, appears to be a gate with a prepared surface and several posts placed in position for a gate. The gate, difficult to trace, appears to have been about 22.0 feet in width. It is conjectured that this was placed here after the fort was reoccupied after Bent's abandonment. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

The outer south wall from the southeast corner to its estimated junction with the southwest tower is about 170.0 feet. Because both south corners have been ravaged by road building, it is impossible to figure the exact length. The inner south wall measures 159.2 feet.

The west wall, from the right-angle northwest corner to the junction with a single adobe remaining in the southwest tower, is 150.0 feet.

The highest remaining portion of the outside wall is about 4.5 feet near the junction of the tower wall with the north wall. Along portions of the east wall the depth was 0.5 feet.

The Rooms. Four sets of rooms form a quadrangle surrounding a court-yard. The north-south length of the quadrangle is 98.0 feet. The east-west width is 82.0 feet.

The best preserved rooms are those on the north side. The rooms on the east side are almost obliterated; only a smoothed adobe floor remains to mark their presence. All of the rooms show careful planning in that they are uniform in width and arrangement around the court-yard.

Mr. Louis Swink, 94 years old (1954), of Swink, Colorado, visited the fort while it was being excavated in June, 1954. He had some information concerning the fort, but was very cautious in all of his statements about the placement of various features in the fort. His statements, however, were proven to be correct after excavation. He stated that at the age of 14 he visited the fort in 1874 with a cowboy named Charlie Todd, while both were on a round-up in the region. Mr. Swink remembers the fort as being occupied by some soldiers. He states that there were gates in the east and south sides, and the north gate had been closed. He remembers that the west and north sides were in repair, and most of the people lived in the north rooms. He remembered the towers and that they had loop holes in the top. He could remember no rooms along the south side at that time. He also spoke of the fort being used in later times as a cattle corral of sorts, and previous to that being used by a stage company.

North Rooms. The walls of the north rooms facing the court-yard and the partition walls measured 1.6 feet in width. The room walls on either side of the gate measured almost 2.0 feet.

The doorway between rooms N2 and N3 had been sealed by adobes, and a wooden door sill was still in place. The doorway between rooms NW1 and W2 had been sealed and plastered over in room NW1.

Most of the rooms contained fragments of plaster with a white-wash covering. A one-half inch thick patch of mud plaster covered with a three-eighths inch coating of white plaster was found in the southwest corner of room N2.

Excavations in the southeast corner of room N3 revealed three fairly distinct periods of occupation.

Interpretation	Surface
1954	2 inches—recent earth wash of disintegrated adobe.
Cattle period	7 inches—Manure, cow bones mixed with adobe.
	3½ inches—Adobe fill (washed)
Stagecoach period	2 inches—Remains of wooden floor—square nails in place around wall. (Later floor.)
	12½ inches—Adobe fill.
Bent's period	2 inches—Packed adobe floor. (Bent's original floor.)
	Native soil—Yellow limey clay.

A circular pit 22 inches in diameter, containing charcoal and pieces of iron slag, had been excavated in fill in N3, 7½ inches above Bent's floor and 3½ inches into the yellow limey clay below Bent's floor. It is conjectured that someone had built a small forge for temporary work after Bent's abandonment and before the succeeding occupation. Inasmuch as there was no shattering of the adjoining walls or ground around the pit, it is unlikely that the pit was formed by an explosive.

The good condition of the north rooms indicates that they were occupied long after Bent abandoned the site. Remains of wooden flooring above what is conjectured as being Bent's adobe floor appear in rooms W2, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6 and the northeast tower.

East Rooms. The east set of rooms, four in number, presents some of the most interesting data for the site. All show evidences of burning. Mounding is completely lacking in the central sector of this tier of rooms. The area was compacted by automobiles entering the quadrangle from the east travelling to the granite marker located near the northeast tower and facing southwest. The walls of rooms E3, E4 and the north end of E2 are almost completely obliterated. These rooms were traced by following the edges of the fire-baked adobe floors. The floors and walls have been baked by an extreme heat, probably from burning roofs. It is probable that the northeast tower roof was destroyed by conflagration at the same time. The floor of the tower was covered with burned cottonwood timbers and roofing debris 1.0 feet in depth.

Room E4 is partitioned on the north and south from rooms E3 and E5, respectively, by very narrow walls 0.8 feet in thickness. Remains of pilasters are present in the center of both the north and south walls. It is possible that these walls were placed here during Bent's occupation subsequent to the original building of these rooms and that rooms E3, E4 and E5 originally formed a single large room.

It is most likely that these rooms were Bent's trading compartments. Numerous trade beads were thoroughly embedded throughout the clay floors with the main concentration in rooms E3 and E4. A gun flint was found embedded in the floor of room E4.

Stage Gate. At some period after the abandonment of the fort, it is conjectured, the east rooms were razed and the material thrown into the abandoned pit on the west side of the quadrangle. In the trash of pit level IV, burned adobes, charcoal and fire-baked plaster similar to remnants in rooms E3 and E4 were found. It is conjectured that these rooms were leveled to allow passage of vehicles into the quadrangle through a gate in the east outside wall. A gate opening 22.0 feet in width was constructed after Bent's abandonment of the fort.

The Well. A water well was found in the east side of room E5. It was probably a later addition. Part of the excavated east rim was found to have been cut through the east wall. The well was constructed with meticulous care. The edges are sharply defined. The excavation for the well was 6.0 feet in diameter. Flat limestone slabs were carefully fitted without mortar to form a round, excellently executed orifice, 2.0 feet in diameter in the center of the circular excavation. No part of the well structure

projected above the floor of the room. The well had been filled with trash and the opening covered with limestone slabs.

The well was cleaned by our crew to a depth of 13 feet, at which depth water seepage stopped further progress. Because of the lack of work space, this work was accomplished by hand without the use of an instrument larger than a six-inch pointing trowel. Bits of metal, tin cans, wood and bones were found in the first four feet. The lower excavations produced bits of iron wagon parts, and hundreds of animal bones, mostly sheep, with occasional cattle, dog, and cat bones. At the 12.0 foot level, bones diminished greatly in number. A single whole cow skull was found at the 13.0 foot level. With further cleaning and flushing, it is possible that this well can still be used.

Evidence indicates the well was placed here after the room was destroyed. A subsequent break in the original wall and inside plaster of the room, plus the lack of any burned remains in the well, lends credence to this opinion.

Because so little wall height remained, no doorways have been found in rooms E2, E3 or E4; nor fireplaces in rooms E3 or E4.

In a partially conjectural historical reconstruction of these rooms, derived from excavation evidence, the story is as follows: The rooms were originally constructed in accordance with a basic plan. They functioned as trade rooms during Bent's occupation. At the time of his abandonment of the site, they were burned and possibly explosive charges were used, although there is no direct evidence for this. The destruction included the northeast tower. Another group, upon occupying the site after Bent's abandonment, constructed a gate through the central part of the outside east wall (possibly partially destroyed by Bent), and, in making a stage or wagon road into the quadrangle, used the debris of the damaged east rooms to fill the storage pit (W4) on the west side. The well was constructed after Bent's abandonment. The tower shows reconstruction also. Stratigraphic cross-sections of the pit (W4), the NE tower and room N3, indicate a hiatus of unknown length between Bent's abandonment and the second occupancy. Little effort towards reconstruction or preservation was evident in the site in the sporadic third occupancy period. After abandonment by the second group of occupants, the fort gradually fell into complete disrepair. Photographs taken between 1900 and 1910 show some walls standing to a height of five feet. There is some question as to whether the well construction falls into the second or the third occupancy period.

South Rooms. Nine rooms are included in this series. The rooms were easily traced as far as room S7, after which point the rooms had been largely destroyed. Imprints of wagon wheels appear in the almost non-existent north walls of rooms S6 and S7, indicating that in some late period a road might have led through the fort at this point.

The east wall of room SE1 formed the backwall of the largest fireplace (F8) in the site. It is possible that room SE1 served as a kitchen. Broken porcelain dishes were scattered around the fireplace. Room SE1A may have been a pantry. All rooms but S5 contained fireplaces.

Room S2 contains a short partition running east-west. In the small space between the partition and the north wall, there were the bottom iron hoops of a wooden barrel, and a large earthenware jug. A hand-wrought iron axe was found in the center of the barrel hoops. The wood no longer remained. This partitioned area might have been a water storage unit or an inside commode.

The wall plaster and color washes on the walls of these rooms were quite spectacular. As an example, the walls of rooms S6 and S7 had been covered with no less than six separate colored coatings from 1/16 to 1/36 of an inch thick. Three colors were most used, white, red and yellow. The white is a gypsum plaster; the yellow, limonite or yellow ochre; and the red, hematite or iron oxide. In most instances the preceding color was covered with a thin veneer of adobe before the next coat of color was applied.

An indentation through the north wall in the northwest corner of room S7 probably represents the remains of the basal portion of a chimney for second-story rooms.

The south rooms show no evidence of burning.

West Rooms. The walls of the west rooms were almost impossible to trace south of the pit (W4). Excavations in the southwest corner were some of the last to be made in the site.

The lack of doorways except through the north wall into room NW1 is not easily explained. Perhaps the walls had disintegrated to the point where doorways could not be found, or it is conjectured that these rooms were used for storage, with access only through the ceilings by ladders or stairs from upper story rooms. The presence of a pit that was possibly used for cold storage lends credence to the storage use. Other factors to be considered in these conjectures are the lack of colored plasters on the walls and lack of fireplaces. It is possible that room W2 may have been used as a living unit in conjunction with room NW1.

Whether the storage pit was constructed during the Bent period or at some later time will have to be considered in the light of the following stratigraphic information:

Present	Surface	
Hiatus	Compacted adobe—washed in material. No artifacts, no ash	0.7'
Cattle period	Manure—(humus)	0.3'
Hiatus	Compacted adobe—occasional artifact	0.4'
Stagecoach period	Loosely compacted debris. Iron (in great quantity) numerous mule shoes, several ox shoes, occasional horse shoes, nails.	
	Adobe blocks, burned adobe and white plaster.	1.6'
	Glass Dead cattle, articulated Wood, charcoal—Slag and gravel	
Hiatus	Compacted—yellow clay soil. cave-in from upper sides of pit. Occasional dark (humus) adobe block, charcoal	2.0'
Bent level	Occasional piece of metal. Floor (sack impressions)	

The rectangular pit, about one-half excavated, contains a story if it can be interpreted correctly. Large posts about six inches in diameter, probably four to a side, half of their diameter placed into the yellow native-soil walls, were used to hold up a roof. The only remains of posts were molds in the walls. Two posts appear to have been placed near the center of the east wall. It is probable that some type of entrance was constructed on the east side.

The problem was to determine if the pit was first excavated by Bent or during some later occupation. The interpretation we have placed on it conforms rather favorably with the stratigraphy of room N3, already given, and of the northeast tower.

It is conjectured that the pit was excavated sometime during Bent's occupation. The excavated earth had been disposed of, as no mounding was present around the edges. Sometime during the latter part of Bent's occupation or after the abandonment of the fort, the pit structure disintegrated, and became partially filled. The occupation of a new group, presumably the stagecoach people, used the pit as a place for convenient refuse disposal, probably dumping into it some of the room debris from the east rooms

destroyed by Bent. The material appears to have been placed in the pit during the operation of constructing the east gate and the roadway through the east rooms into the court-yard. A period of abandonment is again indicated. The increasing use of the fort for cattle is noted by the layer of manure. This is covered by a relatively recent layer of adobe.

There are no evidences of burning in any of the west rooms.

Although eyewitness accounts are often suspect, it is pertinent to mention Mr. Charles L. Seeley's account of the Bent's Fort occupation in his publication, *Pioneer Days in the Arkansas Valley in Southern Colorado and History of Bent's Fort*, 1932, p. 20. His statement agrees rather favorably with the excavated evidence.

"There is one curious thing about this story of the blowing up of Bent's Fort, namely, that none of the old time cattlemen and early settlers who came in after Bent moved out ever believed it. The fort was still standing when they came, and was used for many years as a stage station until the arrival of the railroad. I have talked with a good many early settlers, and the most plausible version of the story I can get is that Bent wanted to destroy any powder remaining at the fort, whether his own or stored there by the government, to keep it out of the way of the Indians and Mexicans. It is probable the powder was stored in a single room surrounded by thick adobe walls. It is probable that Bent set afire a fuse to touch it off and an explosion followed, but the damage was small, being confined to the four walls of the magazine. As there was nothing to burn, the fire could not spread very far. To the extent Colonel Bent was concerned, the old fort might as well have been destroyed, for we have no record that he ever used it again. We do know that the fort stood after being abandoned by Bent for 20 years or more with but little change. When finally abandoned as a stage station, the elements in the form of wind and weather soon wrought havoc with the structure and it went down fast. The walls were still standing when I saw the place in 1877, at which time the cattlemen were using it as a corral."

Northeast Tower. A single circular structure, possibly representing the foundations of the guard tower that stands out so prominently in descriptions, models and drawings of Bent's Fort, was found to be one of the best preserved features of the fort. A similar tower placed diagonally across the compound in the southwest corner, according to records, could not be found. The modern road-way placed around the site seems to have destroyed all but a single adobe block. We will have to limit our discussion to the single tower.

The inside diameter of the northeast tower measured 16.0 feet. The walls, 2.2 feet in width, are slightly smaller in width than the other exterior walls. A trench, 0.8 feet in width and 0.8 feet in depth, runs east-north-east through the center of the floor. The sides of the trench were partially lined with flat limestone blocks. A rectangular block of limestone covered the southwest end of the trench. The length of the trench, stopping short of the southwest

corner, was 15.7 feet. It extends to the northeast wall. Neither end could be traced through the walls. The purpose for this trench is not known. It is possible that it served as a courtyard drain, with the southwest end having been filled sometime after Bent's occupation. This feature had been filled with debris from the burned tower roof, and had never been cleaned out. We also considered the possibility that it might have been used as a well drain, but there was no evidence for this.

The tower shows definite evidence of burning. The floor was covered with a layer of charred cottonwood beams to a depth of 0.6 to 0.8 feet. Charred bark still adhered to some of the timbers.

The stratigraphy of the tower is as follows:

	Surface	
Stagecoach period	Sterile adobe fill (wooden floor)	2.0'
	Small adobe blocks	0.3'
	Sterile adobe fill	0.6'
Bent's Period	Charcoal (adobe floor)	0.6'

Miscellaneous Features.

South Corridor. Problems exist concerning the purpose of the corridor 15.0 feet south of the court-yard rooms. Here is a space 18.0 feet in width and 160.0 feet long, enclosed by two thick walls running in an east-west direction. Both walls butt against the east outer protective wall and at the west end are joined by a wall containing a doorway entrance (D20) into the southwest corner. No doorways appeared in the walls along their entire length.

Fireplaces. The 13 fireplaces found can be divided into two types: 1. wall fireplaces (11),—those having the jambs at right angles to the back of the hearth; 2. corner fireplaces (2),—those with the hearth placed diagonally across the right angle formed by the junction of two room walls.

Cattle Period Posts. A number of vertical posts, not placed on the main map of this report were found in the southwest corner in and around rooms W5 and W6. The posts are of juniper and average about 0.5 foot in diameter. They were placed to form a solid wall, each touching the other. They are thought to be of the cattle period, manure being quite thick among them. A double set of juniper posts was placed immediately south of room S2. Inasmuch as these posts were placed in the tops of and between adobe walls, it is probable that the walls had long been in ruin when this feature, possibly a loading chute, was constructed.

Corral. In museum models and some publication drawings, the south corridor area described above has often been erroneously depicted as the Bent's Fort corral. The corridor area is depicted on Rosenstock's Abert map of 1845-46, and also south beyond this a walled compound with what appears to be a wide gate in the east wall near the northeast corner. This latter feature was probably Bent's corral. On Abert's map near the southwest corner is the figure "150?", possibly indicating the southward extension of the corral. The east and west walls are continuations of the outside protective walls that surround the buildings. Bent's corral area is now a privately owned alfalfa field. Although we did not have time to run test trenches, it is possible that fragments of the corral walls might be found near the northeast edge of the field. This area appears to be least disturbed.

SUMMARY

The main objectives of this report are concerned with outline excavation and mapping the features uncovered in Bent's Fort. Interpretation and conjecture have been based upon the facts at hand. With the full excavation of the site, additional information will be forthcoming. Important areas requiring additional work are the space between the east rooms and the east protective wall; the area between the south rooms and the south corridor; the south corridor itself; the southwest tower; the court-yard for porch or veranda posts; and trenching for the corral walls.—(Although the foundations might be all but missing, subtle soil changes could provide evidence for this feature.)

The evidence is that there were three occupations of the fort in the following order: (1) Bent's period, (2) Stagecoach period, and (3) Cattlemen period. In terms of structure changes, the following stages can be listed: (1) Initial building, (2) Renovation, and (3) Deterioration. To project the future, it would not be amiss from the museum standpoint to have exhibits concerning all three phases.

The main damage to the fort at the time of Bent's abandonment was the destruction of all the east rooms and the northeast tower. All show destruction at least by fire, with the consequent reconstruction being limited to a wooden floor over debris in the tower, the excavation of a well in room E5, and the removal of the wall debris from rooms E3 and E4.

The rooms on the north, west, and south, with the exception of the pit (W4), appear to have been used for some time after Bent's abandonment.