OAHP1403
Rev. 9/98

COLORADO CULTURAL RESOURCE SURVEY

Architectural Inventory Form

Official eligibility determination
(OAHP use only)
Date _____ Initials _____
____ Determined Eligible- NR
____ Determined Not Eligible- NR
____ Determined Eligible- SR
____ Determined Not Eligible- SR
____ Need Data
____ Contributes to eligible NR District
____ Noncontributing to eligible NR District

I. IDENTIFICATION

1. Resource number: 5OT.1728
2. Temporary resource number: N/A
3. County: Otero
4. City: La Junta
5. Historic building name: Bent's Old Fort (Reconstructed)
6. Current building name: Bent's Old Fort (Reconstructed)
7. Building address: 35100 State Highway 194 East, La Junta, CO 81050
8. Owner name and address: National Park Service, Intermountain Region, P.O. Box 25287, Denver, CO 80225

II. GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

9. P.M. 6th Township 23S Range 54W

   SE ¼ of NW ¼ of NE ¼ of NW ¼ of section 23

10. UTM reference

    Zone 1 3; 6 3 7 7 9 7 mE 4 2 1 1 4 5 9 mN

11. USGS quad name: Hadley, CO

    Year: 2022 Map scale: 7.5' X 15'____ Photocopy of appropriate map section attached: ☒

12. Lot(s): N/A Block: N/A

    Addition: N/A Year of Addition: N/A

13. Boundary Description and Justification: Bent's Old Fort was reconstructed in 1976 and is a noncontributing feature to the Bent's Old Fort National Historic Landmark (administratively listed in 1960) and to the National Register (NR)-listed Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (5OT.149, listed in 1966 and 1985). The current survey seeks to evaluate the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of the reconstructed fort. The resource boundary is constrained to the footprint of the reconstructed fort, consisting of approximately 1.76 acres. The resource boundary includes the attached main corral to the southwest.

III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

14. Building plan (footprint, shape): Irregular Plan
15. Dimensions in feet: Length 290 feet X Width 135-175 feet
16. Number of stories: 1-2

17. Primary external wall material(s): Other Wall Material
    If other wall material, please describe: Adobe block clad in render; Concrete masonry unit (CMU) block clad in concrete

18. Roof configuration: Flat Roof
    If other roof configuration, please describe: Side-Gabled (Watchtower)

19. Primary external roof material: Wood
    If other roof material, please describe: Concrete

20. Special features: Tower Facade Treatment Chimney

21. General architectural description: Bent's Old Fort (Fort) is a reconstructed, irregular plan, one-to-two-story, Pueblo Revival Style of building erected in 1976. The reconstructed fort rests on a concrete foundation lined with ninety-pound roofing felt to better conform to the fort's irregular shape. The concrete foundation primarily features an applied oil and turpentine finish for hardening and sealing. In administrative areas, the concrete floor has been covered with hardwood, tile, and/or carpet. The fort's roof is a complex system, comprised of hand-hewn vigas set in a concrete bond beam with supporting latias; straw; insulation; three inches of reinforced, lightweight concrete; a roofing membrane; and a gravel topping. The fort's walls feature adobe block core created in a rammed earth block machine by Admode of Cañon City and clad in render. The natural adobe bricks originally used for surfacing the walls were manufactured by Reed and Sons of La Junta. The bricks originally used to construct the fort were 18 inches long, 9 inches wide, and 4 inches thick, resulting in walls that are approximately two feet thick and 15-20 feet tall. Interior plaster and other finishes were selected based on archaeological fragments and best practices at the time of reconstruction. The exterior walls were later covered by CMU blocks clad in concrete to aid in reinforcing the adobe core.

    The fort's main entrance is on the primary (north) elevation through a double wood door sheathed with metal and nail studs framed by a viga and a single wood post. There is a squared watchtower over the main entrance with a mostly flat roof punctuated by a small side gabled roof with wood shingles and exposed rafters; the side gabled projection exhibits three-lite, independent, wood windows on the east and west elevations. Glass panes were not observed in either watchtower window. Wooden gutter spouts (canales) project outward from the adobe parapets of the watchtower. There are two additional entrances to the fort: a double wood door sheathed with metal and nail studs on the east elevation that grants access to the inner corral, and a double wood plank door with metal strap hinges along the south elevation that opens onto the wagon house, originally used to shelter horse-drawn wagons and now used for administrative purposes. The fort's inner compound features myriad fixed-pane, wood frame windows on the interior with varying lites and wood muntins (a minimum of one to a maximum of 12 lites were observed). Window glass appears to be hand blown or produced to appear wavy as 19th Century glass would have looked. As the building is reflective of a prior 19th Century fortification, there are no exterior windows on the lower story, and only one exterior window on the upper story: a four-lite, fixed pane, wood window on the upper story of the primary (north) elevation. Defining architectural characteristics include the thick exterior walls, lack of exterior windows, and two-story round bastions at the northeast and southwest corners. Bent's Old Fort is comprised of four functional areas: a compound, wagon house, and inner corral within the defensive walls, and a main corral due south featuring low adobe perimeter walls topped with cacti. An explanation of each area follows:

    - **Compound** - comprised of a rectangular core of approximately 29, one-to-two story rooms surrounding a graveled courtyard, or placita – the compound is the core of Bent's Old Fort. The four rows of rooms around the placita were assigned various functions. The public rooms, including the council room, the store, and the dining room, are on the south. The smithy, carpenter shop, and offices are on the west. Storerooms are located on the north, while living quarters and trade rooms are stationed on the east. The compound features wood staircases, wood interior doors with strap metal hinges, and several fireplaces and chimneys, some of which feature chimney pot extensions. Pine and cottonwood were acquired from several sources in Colorado and New Mexico for use in the reconstruction of vigas, doors, windows, and stairs. Timbers were dried and cured on site and finished with tools such as broad axes and hand adzes that would have been available in the 1830s to ensure that finished surfaces are visible for the public display. The rectangular compound is approximately 125 feet wide and 140 feet long.

- **Inner Corral** – the inner corral to the east of the compound is a wedge-shaped area that lends the fort its irregular shape. It is approximately 130 feet long and 10 feet wide at its narrowest point (near the northeast bastion, which has a diameter of 20 feet), expanding to 40 feet at its widest point to the south.
- **Wagon House** – south of the compound is an irregular plan building that was formerly a wagon house, and currently houses administrative offices, storage space, restrooms, and a bookstore. The wagon house (20 feet by 92 feet) is adjacent to the southwest bastion, which has a diameter of 26 feet. A 15-foot-wide alleyway separates the compound and inner corral from the wagon house.
- **Main Corral** – the rectangular main corral is southwest of the wagon house and south of the bastion. It is approximately 150 feet by 140 feet and features associated sheds and walls to provide protection for wagons and livestock. The lower walls around the main corral (west, south, and east elevations) are covered with cacti, used historically as a protective measure.

22. Architectural style/building type: Pueblo Revival
23. Landscaping or special setting features: The reconstructed fort rises above Colorado's Eastern Plains in rural La Junta and is bounded by the Arkansas River to the south and west, State Highway 194 East to the north, and agricultural properties to the east. Surrounding vegetation includes saltgrass, cottonwood, tamarisk, cattail, and willow.
24. Associated buildings, features, or objects: The resource boundary encompasses the footprint of the reconstructed fort. However, there are several nearby buildings and structures that are located within the boundaries of the Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (5OT.149). The reconstructed fort (5OT.1728) is also located within the site's boundary; however, it is a noncontributing feature. Nearby non-public administrative and storage buildings operated by the National Park Service (NPS) and a visitor parking lot and amenity area on site, are located approximately 1,100-1,700 feet to the northwest of the reconstructed fort. A cemetery is located approximately 260 feet north of the fort, along with a stone arch approximately 1,950 feet north-northwest of the fort.

IV. ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

25. Date of Construction: Estimate: N/A Actual: 1976
    Source of information: Multiple - See Item 36.
26. Architect: Ken R. White Company
    Source of information: Multiple - See Item 36.
27. Builder/Contractor: Mershon and Gimeno
    Source of information: Multiple - See Item 36.
28. Original Owner: National Park Service
    Source of information: Multiple - See Item 36.
29. Construction history (include description and dates of major additions, alterations, or demolitions):

    Construction of the new fort by NPS began in 1975 and was completed in 1976. The new fort was envisioned to be an "authentic" and modern reconstruction of the original fort rather than an "accurate" representation of the fort that was built in 1833 by brothers Charles and William Bent, and abandoned by William in 1849. Often, the "design of the new structure diverged from the evidence available on the appearance of the original fort to meet modern 'safety, engineering, or maintenance' needs" and "despite these 'modifications,' it was believed that the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort was 'a historical project with the maximum authenticity.'" (Kelleher, 1998, 32-33) Although archaeological excavation of the site in the early 1960s found evidence of the 1833 fort's foundational footprint, construction of the building above grade was based on limited documentation. In 1968, NPS managed to obtain an 1846 sketch of the fort which included several interior and exterior details that were previously unknown. Even so, architectural data was still limited, leaving approximately forty percent of the new fort to be constructed based on speculation. The new fort was built on the foundation of the old fort as it was in 1846, and the exterior envelope was

constructed of stabilized adobe brick clad in adobe render. Yet in an effort to reduce immediate and long-term costs and maintenance, the reconstructed fort's walls and roofs utilized a mixture of Santa Fe adobe and contemporary masonry design. Over time, stucco was applied over the adobe render before the exterior walls were later "repaired" utilizing CMU block and cementitious stucco. Because of this hybrid design, special attention was required for the structural continuity, finishing, and drainage of the walls and roofs. Other design alterations to the fort consisted of stabilized adobe core walls, coping, and interior plaster, concrete foundation, floors, and roof decks, masonry bond beams, insulation and water proofing, glass windows, radiant heating, exhausting ventilation, plumbing, lighting, and power. These changes to the design aimed to improve the durability of the new fort to last over 100 years, yet historical records indicate significant engineering and design failures, some of which include the application and accelerated erosion caused by incompatible materials, as well as above- and below-grade water issues. These issues have also jeopardized the authentic appearance and experience that NPS aimed to portray of the original 1833 fort.

The structural integrity of the reconstructed fort began to fail before the fort was completed and later dedicated on July 28, 1976. The reconstructed fort, even with its modern materials and design, struggled with similar issues identified with the original 1833 fort. Historical records indicate that that William Bent abandoned the original fort in 1849 due to a series of personal tragedies (the 1847 deaths of his wife, Owl Woman and his older brother and business partner Charles Bent), disruptions to the business model of the fort and the region resulting from the US-Mexican War. Its location relative to the Arkansas River threatened the fort with flooding every spring, and the severe wind and rain common to the climate of the area deteriorated the unprotected adobe at a rapid pace. By 1853, William Bent finished construction of a "new" fort to the west and travelers along the Santa Fe Trail describe the 1833 fort in "ruins." Similarly, historical records show that the reconstructed fort, even with its modern design methods, continues to suffer from similar issues identified with the 1833 fort. The reconstructed fort was hampered by time constraints in construction, political pressure, the geographical climate, poor construction, and subpar patch work that has been compounded over five decades. Current issues identified in the structure of the reconstructed fort include failures of the adobe brick, plaster, roofs, wood structural members, and metal conduit. A 1998 report titled, *The Lessons of Bent's Old Fort and Fort Union Trading Post: Archeology, Reconstruction, and Interpretation* by Rodd L. Wheaton, detailed the shortcoming of the fort before and after construction was completed:

> *Though the archaeology clearly indicated the adobe wall construction, it was deemed appropriate by the architects to improve on tradition. Concrete footings and foundations were poured and topped with stone masonry coursing to receive the adobe block in several wythes. The core was constructed of reinforced adobe, which unfortunately proved very fluid in wet conditions. This reinforced adobe, which also did not hold up well in compression, tended to slump when wet eventually forcing the facing wythes out at the base and causing the adobe veneers to fall away. Use of metal ties failed between the wythes because there had been no provision for bonding adobe blocks and no realization that the soils would rapidly corrode any metal. Such was also the fate of electrical conduits in walls and radiant heading in earthen floors.*
>
> *Water was introduced into wall systems because of the "historic" use of cottonwood logs which, like sponges, soak up water. As cottonwood cures, the grain twists and check which acts as a water conduit. This was further complicated by having concrete bond beams supported on rete columns set into the adobe walls. The bond beams were poured around the cottonwood roof vigas unlike traditional adobe construction where vigas are simply set not the adobe masonry. With the use of concrete, replacement has been a nearly impossible task. Although with good intentions, the architects created a maintenance nightmare that extended through the construction details, the mechanical details, and down to the application of adobe plaster on the wall surfaces.* (Wheaton, 1998, 4)

Shortly before the reconstructed fort was dedicated and opened on July 28, 1976, a severe storm moved through the area, causing considerable damage to the initial layer of adobe render and exposing issues related to water drainage and long-term maintenance woes:

> *Initially, it was considered that the structure would be replastered on an annual "interpretive" basis much in the traditional manner of adobe maintenance of the southwest. However, several weeks before dedication of the fort, in 1976, a horrific rain storm demonstrated just how vulnerable not only the plaster, but the adobe walls, as well, really were. The damage was significant, and the cost of repair was equally significant. This disaster began to set the tone for all future maintenance as it was realized that annual replastering was out of the question for the park staff. A long series of quick fixes were instituted that only in the past few years have been reversed slowly by the park's present administration.*
>
> *As ideas such as annual replastering fell by the wayside, other issues arose with the monolithic building. Repairs were continual as the adobe veneers collapsed. All sorts of magic elixirs were conceived, concocted, and tried to stabilize the adobe as a permanent, "maintenance free" exhibit. All failed... And, there continual water problems: infiltration through the vigas, rising damp, and rising water tables that have filled excavated storage pits under rooms. Roofs have been replaced numerous times to eliminate the combination of built-up roofs and compacted soil which were also the victim of mixed technologies.* (Wheaton, 1998, 4)

Post-construction design analysis also highlighted the inherent flaws of the reconstructed fort such as the reinforced concrete bond beams, which didn't account for easy replacement of viga tails as they deteriorated over time. The placement of the viga tails themselves were not period correct, nor were they pressure treated to resist the demanding weather environment of the area. As such, the viga tails exhibited signs of accelerated rotting. Cottonwood beams and support column bases are also composed of incompatible materials. There are several areas where the horizontal joints of cottonwood beams are not properly supported directly underneath vertical columns. Material incapability was also evident. Contact between the adobe mud materials and metal conduit and piping under the flooring resulted in the abandonment of these utilities due to excessive corrosion. Furthermore, sheet metal flashing along the vertical surfaces of the roofing also exhibited a high amount of corrosion. Additionally, the original Bituthane roofing began to fail almost immediately after the fort was reconstructed. Historical records indicate that the material was "fragile and vulnerable to degradation by the sun. Bituthane was a new product on the market in 1976 and relatively untested... there was a problem of incompatibility with the corrosive adobe mud in contact with the sheet metal flashing." Overall, the high cost of maintenance and upkeep of the new fort in the years after its completion led to a push for finding alternative materials that were more resistant to climatic and structural factors. Yet, these changes gradually weakened the "accurate" design of the reconstructed fort.

Throughout the late-20th Century, various facility managers continued to address design issues and material deterioration. The plaster exterior walls underwent several changes throughout this time including the replacement of the unamended plaster with amended plaster that utilized various materials and stabilizers. Historical records show the exterior walls along the west and primary (north) elevations of the fort were noted as being in a higher state of degradation compared to the south and east elevations. This is evident within an 1992 maintenance repair plan stating that:

> *The unprotected adobe of the reconstructed Fort has proven to be incompatible with the local climate which is characterized by intense spring and summer rainstorms with driving winds. Severe erosion of the exterior natural adobe plaster and natural adobes forced a massive, nearly complete re-plastering effort prior to the dedication of the Fort. The wind-driven rainfall was a major factor in the failure of the adobe plaster. The exterior walls of the Fort that have suffered the greatest degradation are the north and west, because this is the direction of the prevailing winds and most of the storms. The collapse during the first two years of portions of the natural adobe exterior wythe can be attributed in part to erosion by weather. The reconstruction design did not adequately address the problems of the local climate, partly owing to the absence of an architectural data section in the 1966 Historic Structure Report.* (Wilson and Lyons, 1992, 5-6)

In addition, the design and materials used to construct the exterior walls of the fort were found to be inadequate. This is evident when the same 1992 plan stated:

> *The system used for tying together the wall wythes has not been effective in producing a stable wall. Records indicate that the wythes of adobe were so unstable during construction that bracing was required. The inner wythe of Portland cement-stabilized adobe 6 is tied to the outer wythe of natural adobe with modem sheet metal tie strips. This tie system failed due to rusting and lack of bonding with the natural adobe. A better tie design would have used adobe string courses and mud infill to create a monolithic wall, as in traditional adobe masonry wall construction. With such a monolithic wall, however, the difference in thermal expansion and contraction between the natural adobe and the stabilized adobe would cause some differential movement which could be problematic. Additionally, if the Fort had been designed in accordance with traditional, monolithic adobe wall construction principles there would have been more solid mass to resist erosion.* (Wilson and Lyons, 1992, 8)

Maintenance records between 1976 and 1979 show that the west exterior was replastered shortly after construction was completed. During that same timeframe, the north wall was replastered three separate times. However, these changes proved to be temporary solutions as the re-plastering process failed to withstand accelerated water damage or enhance its bond to adobe brick. Alternative, non-compatible materials were tested on the north exterior wall including plastic coatings, and nail metal lath coated in plaster but, similarly, these failed to be a better weather erosion or maintenance prevention solution. By the early 1980s, the adobe block and render began eroding from the inside out. In an attempt to stabilize the exterior walls of the reconstructed fort, CMU block was utilized along several elevations and clad in cementitious stucco. From 1984 through 1987, the roof was slowly replaced with a Bidim roofing system, composed of a 100% polyester fiber material laid on hot asphalt. Later, a Brai roofing system was used over the administration area and rooms 122-134. This system demonstrated a moderate amount of success and by the late-1980s, the south promenade roof and northeast bastion were replaced with the same materials. Wood walkways also deteriorated throughout this period and were replaced or, in some cases, removed entirely. Stone masonry located above vigas of the second floor of the plaza space were also removed during this timeframe.

In the early-21st Century, a mud plaster assessment by Pat Taylor, Inc. indicated that "All of the exterior adobes have been replaced by an 8 inch CMU with the exception of the northwest terreon which was replaced by the amended asphalt adobe and the south two with [wythe] wall that had the 4 inch solid block installed over the unamended traditional adobe with [wythe]."(Pat Taylor Inc., 2014, 3) In addition, areas that included eight-inch CMU blocks were grouted for reinforcement while areas of four-inch CMU were solid poured. The CMU blocks were clad in cementitious stucco. However, the veneering of the north, east, and west facades with CMU necessitated a widening of wall foundations and significantly increased the overall thickness of the exterior walls, resulting in a dramatically altered outward visual appearance in relation to exterior proportion and surface treatment. The exterior walls of the new fort were also reinforced by sandstone to form a 12-inch base. The sandstone provides splash and drainage protection between the walls and the fort's foundation. The fort's parapets were also modified several times as they bore the brunt of degradation due to weathering. However, even with recent repairs, the CMU block and cementitious stucco cladding over the adobe block and render began to fail. Coupled with the sinking of the fort due to the high-water table and unpredictable climate (e.g. hail, rain, wind, snow), the compressive weight load of the fort's materials, the exterior wall began to fall outward while the inner wall began caving inward. As a result, the tensile strength of the exterior walls have become a major concern for the short-term stability of the building. Additionally, the bottom six inches of flooring and foundation have been compromised, and wicking has occurred due to exterior wall failures and flooding of the plaza over time. Within the interior space, numerous door openings and doors have been widened, and utilities under the floor have been abandoned. Several window and door openings show signs of replacement materials due to the incorporation of modern, square-cut lumber to repair elements that were originally composed of rough-cut timber. The roof in the plaza has been set back by three feet to better expose the vigas as they have become increasingly deteriorated. During the same time, a cistern feature at west end of the Wagon Alley was buried in part due to its association with a failed canale and reinterpretation of the original archeological feature.

In the early 2020s, the second floor of the building was closed to the general public due to structural degradation. The reconstructed fort also lost several features including the staircase to the northeast bastion, the boardwalk to the southwest bastion, the second story portals to the St Vrain's and Billiards

rooms, and the ramada at Wagon Alley, due to poor replacement of features over time. Additionally, several crack monitoring devices were installed in various interior spaces of the building to monitor continued deterioration of the fort's structural system. Extensive cracking and wall gaps have been identified as the building continues to collapse both inward and outward due to the building's weight, incompatible materials, and geographical weather patterns. Some walls have shifted to the point that they yield evidence of 4-6 inches of hollow gaps. The exterior walls also show signs of severe erosion within the last two or three months due to rain, hail, and snow damage, chipping, and large holes, which has exposed decades worth of failed "repair" work.

30. Original location: ☒ Moved: ☐ If yes, enter date of move(s): N/A

V. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

31. Original use(s): Museum
32. Intermediate use(s): Museum
33. Current use(s): Museum
34. Site type(s): Building
35. Historical background:

The original Bent's Old Fort, constructed in 1833, was one of the most important trading posts of its day, and had associations with the fur trade, Native American relations, mountain men, and the United States military, among others. Abandoned and partially destroyed by explosives in 1849, the original fort was largely reduced to ruins by the early-20th Century. Materials from the fort were pilfered and used to construct nearby buildings, and the fragile adobe walls were no match for weather, wind, and time. Anxious to see a site of national importance lost to time and the elements, the La Junta chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) placed a commemorative marker on the site in 1912. In 1921, the ruins that remained were destroyed when the Arkansas River flooded. Nonetheless, in 1926 the DAR purchased the land that the original fort rested on from the Bent's Fort Land and Cattle Company, and then landscaped the site and erected a more prominent monument. The goal of the DAR was to ultimately rebuild the fort, but the organization was unable to do so or make other improvements to the site due to financial and planning constraints. In 1954, DAR transferred ownership of the Bent's Old Fort site to the Colorado State Historic Society (today's History Colorado). The state conducted a series of archaeological investigations at the site under the supervision of Dr. Herbert Dick of Trinidad State Junior College and completed archival research to better understand the history of the site. Ultimately, just like the DAR, the Colorado State Historic Society felt that the fort should be reconstructed, but the undertaking proved too costly to make it a reality. In 1957, the society delineated the presumed footprint of the original fort using low walls of adobe bricks, but that was the extent of their reconstruction efforts.

That same year, at the behest of the Colorado State Historic Society, Senator John Carroll of Colorado inquired about the possibility of a site takeover by the NPS. Senator Carroll learned that Bent's Old Fort was on a list of sites to be investigated under the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, which would ultimately produce a list of sites considered nationally significant. Following the investigative survey, the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments determined which of the recommended sites (if any) were appropriate for inclusion in the National Park System. The Advisory Board determined that Bent's Old Fort was indeed nationally significant, but not because of its archaeological potential and intermittent ruins. Instead, it was the site's association with the Santa Fe Trail and westward expansion that were viewed as exceptionally important. As such, the site would serve more as a "commemorative and interpretive historic site than one that would preserve historic resources." In 1960, Congress authorized the establishment of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, and development alternatives were explored by the National Park Service's Midwest Regional office in Omaha, Nebraska.

In the early- to mid-1960s, plans for the site once again became centered around a reconstruction of the fort. The NPS proposed to keep costs down by combining administrative offices, a visitor space, and educational exhibits inside the fort as opposed to housing these facilities separately and operating the fort solely for interpretation. A master plan developed in 1963 reiterated reconstruction of the fort as the goal and called

for a large-scale archaeological excavation and additional archival research to help the NPS determine the exact appearance of the original fort. Although there were different ideas about the placement of administrative offices and a visitor center (incorporated into the fort itself or housed within a separate building), there was little pushback within the NPS about the idea of reconstruction itself. The archaeological investigation and the first part of a historic structures report were completed in 1964. The historic structures report advocated for a reconstructed fort and discussed the merits of a full-scale reconstruction as opposed to preservation of archaeological remnants in situ but cautioned against such an effort until additional archaeological and historic research could be conducted. Part two of the report, completed in 1965, presented an analysis of all the research and studies that had been conducted up to that point, concluding that conflicting information would necessitate a lot of "educated guesses" when it came to reconstruction. Nonetheless, the report still found that reconstruction of the original fort was crucial to interpretation of the site and should proceed.

The feasibility of the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort was studied intensively over the next few years. The NPS Committee to Review Western Forts visited Bent's Old Fort and several other proposed or existing parks under NPS management in August 1965, issuing guidance on reconstruction shortly thereafter that stated that an area that is predominantly in ruins should be "governed by a policy of stabilizing the ruins with no reconstruction or restoration." (Kelleher, 1998, 20-21) However, owing to the almost total destruction of Bent's Old Fort, the Committee did not feel that it qualified as a "ruin," as most of its remains were largely below grade. Thus, reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort remained on the table. The reconstruction of the fort was analyzed thoroughly in a report produced by the Committee in 1965, which noted that "the central problem, on which everything else turns, is whether to reconstruct Bent's Old Fort." (Kelleher, 1998, 20)

The four-person fort committee was evenly divided for and against reconstruction, and their views offer insight into two prevailing camps of thinking within the NPS and cultural resource management professionals in general at that time. The committee members who opposed reconstruction felt that the site should be preserved as an archaeological site, and that reconstruction would completely obliterate any original building fabric or sense of place the fort remnants retained. On the other hand, the members supporting reconstruction argued that the only way to make the site viable or "worthy" of being a unit of the NPS was to reconstruct the fort, arguing that the archaeological remnants of the fort were so minor and uninspiring that only visitors with a very robust imagination would be able to envision how the fort would have looked in its heyday. Interestingly, the proponents of reconstruction offer the following rationale advocating not just for a reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, but for the use of reconstructions throughout the National Park System:

> *There is good evidence from all parts of the country that the American people, those who visit historic and other places of interest, like reconstruction and restorations of buildings. A model can never take the place of a full-scale replica. Service policy has been perhaps a bit backward about embracing reconstruction where it alone will serve the interpretive need and constitutes the best of all media in reaching and informing the public. Bent's Old Fort is an outstanding example of such a need. Where reconstruction does best serve the objective of presentation and interpretation in an area, and where it is directly related to the structure or object which caused the Congress to authorize the establishment of an area in the first instance, as is the case in Bent's Old Fort, then the matter of whether to reconstruct or not to reconstruct is primarily a matter of need, and not of economy.... it is a matter of irreplaceable need at Bent's Old Fort.* (Kelleher, 1998, 23)

The committee members supporting reconstruction also mentioned in their report that reconstruction had been the stated goal of the NPS since the master plan for Bent's Old Fort was approved in 1963, and to back down from those plans could result in political pressure on the Park Service. Additionally, they argued that reversal from the master plan would also be discourteous to the Colorado State Historical Society, which had planned to reconstruct the fort before turning the site over to the NPS when the projected cost became too high.

Throughout the 1960s, NPS employees associated with reconstruction efforts of Bent's Old Fort or general preservation across the United States expressed a seemingly unwavering optimism about the benefits of

reconstruction as a means of historic preservation. Reconstructions were viewed as a way to provide visitors with a meaningful heritage experience because reconstructed buildings and structures provided a physical space for interpretation of historic sites and were viewed as more impactful than ruins or sites where there were no extant features. Reconstruction, it was argued, was the only way to truly experience Bent's Old Fort and to know what it felt like to approach the small but sturdy adobe fort rising out of the plains. This preservation ethos is decidedly different than most ideas about best practices in cultural resource management expressed in the present-day and it is indicative of the way the historic preservation movement has evolved over time. Later on in the design process, reconstruction proponents and planners emphasized that the "prime objective is the historically authentic reconstruction of the Fort, providing the visitor with a time space trip back to the life of the Fort as it existed in 1846." (Kelleher, 1998, 28) However, in the pursuit of "authenticity," proponents of the project failed to recognize that reconstruction of the fort amounted to a "twentieth century contrivance, and no matter how 'authentic' a reconstruction was built, it could not transport visitors back in time, nor even give them this impression." (Kelleher, 1998, 29) Further, detractors to reconstruction argued that "By adding a modem architect's version of imperfections, and living history actors, the Park Service was creating something more akin to an entertaining show than an educational experience at a site that holds a place of national significance in the history of the United States." (Kelleher, 1998, 29)

NPS discussions regarding this same notion are also evident within internal memorandums dating to the mid-1960s. An NPS Committee to Review Western Forts interoffice memorandum dated August 8 and 9, 1966 between Roy Appleman (WASO; Chairman), Ed Bierley (WASO; Museum Curator), Jerry Wagers (Instructor; Mather Training Center), and Raymond Gregg (NPS retired; Non-voting advisor), questioned the historic validity and interpretive value of the site if reconstruction commenced:

> *The discussion developed along esthetic rather than monetary lines. That is, there was some question over whether the Director would be able to go before Congress with a request for a sizable amount of funds to construct what would obviously be a modern structure within a simulated historic frame. It was pointed out that the proposed structure would serve the administrative and interpretive needs of the area -- a Visitor Center in effect - but this was believed to be merely a further deviation from the historic scene. As this line developed, Bierley began to enter in with remarks on the inspirational value of the ruins and that the visitor would gain some form of mental exhilaration from viewing them having been already prepared by a highly skilled interpretive program "somewhere else," which was taken to mean a Visitor Center.* (Appleman, Bierley, Wagers, and Raymond Gregg, 1966)

Ultimately, the committee consisted of a 50/50 split regarding the subject of reconstruction. Even so, historical records during the period suggest that the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort did not meet considerable opposition until reconstruction commenced. The project also received political pressure from both federal and state officials to complete the reconstruction in time for the upcoming Bicentennial celebration of the United States and Colorado's Centennial celebration. Overall, the primary issues regarding the initial phase of reconstruction were concerns relating to the projected costs and determining whether to create a freestanding visitor center and administrative area or fold them into the reconstructed fort.

The reconstruction effort was bolstered in 1968 by the discovery of measured drawings of the original fort made by Lieutenant (Lt.) James Albert, an Army topographical engineer who arrived at the fort in 1846 and spent several months there recuperating from an illness. During his time there, he documented the fort and included many details in his drawings that aided reconstruction, such as the layout of rooms and the fort's dimensions. These sketches contained previously unknown or unconfirmed details about the interior and exterior of the fort and were incorporated into site plans along with the findings of three years of archaeological investigations carried out on site. Funding was stalled within the NPS for several years due to concerns about the cost of reconstruction and continued maintenance, but not about the act of reconstruction itself. In the early 1970s, a Master Plan/Interpretive Study and Furnishings Study were completed. Further progress was made in 1972 after Colorado Senator Gordon Allot advocated additional funding for the project. As a result, Congress appropriated $50,000 for the preparation of construction

drawings, completed by the Ken R. White Company of Denver. For the next few years, the project continued to move forward in a piecemeal fashion.

Funding for the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort was allocated to the NPS in January 1975, and the Denver firm of Mershon and Gimeno was selected as contractor. Principal Emil Gimeno contributed specific knowledge of traditional building techniques and materials necessary to complete the project. Masonry foreman Russ Jones was selected as the contractor's superintendent and taught construction methods to the adobe-layers on site. Lead carpenter and mason Tilio Romero of Taos brought a group of experienced workers with specific expertise in adobe construction and historic wood tools used in the original construction. Construction drawings incorporated historic archival research and structural data gathered during archaeological investigations of the previous decades. Excavation of the site was done under the supervision of Robert Leonard of Colorado State University (CSU). Although the reconstructed Fort was interpreted as a "restorative" effort, the project necessitated the destruction of a majority of the original and limited, extant ruins (consisting of the foundation) of the 1833 fort. Of three in-site adobe remnants identified during the planning process as eligible for preservation, only one, consisting of hearthstones, were durable enough to survive excavation.

Shortly before the commencement of project work, a letter in April 1975 by Colorado Governor Richard D. Lamm to NPS Regional Director – Rocky Mountain Region, Lynn Thompson reinforced the governor's support and stance pertaining to the project:

> *As we enter the Centennial-Bicentennial Era in Colorado, historic preservation efforts take on added significance. Protecting and preserving our historical treasures is a difficult and costly enterprise. Consequently, very few structures are ever reconstructed. Bent's Old Fort, however, is a site which does warrant reconstruction... Some might argue the value of maintaining the remnant ruins of the original structure. However, it seems more value to reconstruct, as authentically as possible, the entire structure to serve as a living educational experience for generations to come.* (Lamm, 1975, 1)

On May 28, 1975, reconstruction work officially began. To reduce both immediate and long-term costs and maintenance, the walls and roof of the reconstructed fort utilized a mixture of traditional Santa Fe adobe and modern masonry techniques. Special consideration was given to the structural continuity, finishing, and drainage of the walls and roofs. Other design alterations to the fort consisted of stabilized adobe core walls, coping, interior plaster, concrete foundations, concrete floors, concrete roof decks, masonry bond beams, modern insulation, water proofing, glass windows, radiant heating, exhausting ventilation, plumbing, lighting, and power. The exterior envelope of the building utilized stabilized adobe brick covered in adobe render. Throughout the late-1970s, this material proved to be laborious and costly to maintain every year. This resulted in stucco being applied on top of the adobe render and subsequently, incompatible materials consisting of CMU block and cementitious stucco being added to the walls. Further issues arose during construction due to time constraints, geographical climate, and poor construction quality. Some of the identified problems pertained to unstable adobe block wythes, inadequate bracing, rusting of tie straps, bonding failures, material erosion, and drainage problems. As a result, even with its modern materials and design, the reconstructed fort began to fail from structural integrity and material durability issues before construction work was ever completed. This became apparent after a severe storm moved through the area shortly before the fort's dedication, causing the initial layer of adobe render to sustain considerable damage, highlighting its inability to endure the natural climate of the area. In addition, the storm drew attention to considerable water infiltration problems as vigas transferred water to the interior spaces of the building, and exposed flooding issues that were compounded by the high water table located under the fort. Although quick repairs were made to the fort in time for its dedication on July 28, 1976, these issues ultimately foreshadowed the ongoing challenges the NPS would face in maintaining the site over the coming decades. It also served as a hindrance to the "authentic" vision that reconstruction proponents attempted to portray.

After the fort opened to the public, post-construction design analysis revealed several inherent flaws in its construction. One major issue was the use of reinforced concrete bond beams, which failed to accommodate for the easy replacement of viga tails as they deteriorated over time. Additionally, placement of the viga tails were not period correct and they were not pressure-treated to withstand the region's harsh weather, leading to accelerated rotting. The cottonwood beams and support column bases were constructed from

incompatible materials, and in several areas, horizontal joints of the cottonwood beams lacked proper support directly beneath the vertical columns. Material incompatibilities were also evident, particularly with the metal conduit and piping beneath the floors, which corroded from contact with the adobe mud. Similarly, sheet metal flashing along the vertical roofing surfaces deteriorated due to exposure to the same adobe materials. Furthermore, the original Bituthane roofing began to fail almost immediately after the fort's reconstruction. In the years and decades following the fort's completion, the high cost of maintenance and upkeep prompted efforts to find alternative materials more resistant to the challenging climatic conditions and structural demands. These alternative materials, in turn, undermined the "authentic" design of the reconstructed fort.

Various facility managers worked to address persistent design flaws and material deterioration at the fort throughout the late-20th Century. In particular, the design and materials of the exterior walls were found to be inadequate, prompting multiple attempts to repair and stabilize them. Initially, the unamended plaster on the exterior walls was replaced with amended plaster, which incorporated various stabilizers to improve durability. By the late-1970s, the west wall was replastered, and the north wall had been replastered three times. However, these changes proved to be temporary fixes, as the replastering failed to withstand water erosion or improve adhesion to the adobe brick. Alternative, non-compatible materials were also tested on the north wall. This involved the utilization of plastic coatings and metal lath nailed into place and coated with plaster. These solutions similarly failed to prevent weather erosion or improve structural longevity. By the early-1980s, the adobe block and render were beginning to erode from the inside out. In response, CMU block was utilized along several elevations and clad in cementitious stucco in an attempt to stabilize the walls. The roof was gradually replaced with a Brai roofing system which demonstrated moderate success in preventing water intrusion, and by the late-1980s, the south promenade roof and northeast bastion were similarly replaced. Over time, wood walkways deteriorated and were either replaced or removed entirely. Stone masonry located above the vigas on the second floor of the plaza space was also removed to address structural concerns. These ongoing efforts to repair and reinforce the fort further highlight the continuous challenge of balancing authenticity with the practical need for durability and long-term maintenance.

In the early-21st Century, a mud plaster assessment by Pat Taylor, Inc. indicated that "All of the exterior adobes have been replaced by an 8-inch CMU with the exception of the northwest terreon which was replaced by the amended asphalt adobe and the south two with wall that had the 4 inch solid block installed over the unamended traditional adobe with." (Pat Taylor Inc., 2014, 3) The areas with eight-inch CMU blocks were reinforced with grouting, while the four-inch CMU sections were solidly poured. However, the veneering of the north, east, and west facades with CMU necessitated a widening of wall foundations and significantly increased the overall thickness of the exterior walls, resulting in a dramatically altered outward visual appearance in relation to exterior proportion and surface treatment. The foundation of the reconstructed fort had been further reinforced with concrete, and the base of the exterior walls was strengthened with a 12-inch layer of sandstone, which provided splash and drainage protection between the walls and the foundation. The fort's parapets, which endured significant weathering, were also modified several times to address degradation. However, even with these repairs, the CMU block and cementitious stucco cladding began to fail. Compounding this, the sinking of the fort—caused by the high-water table and the area's unpredictable climate (e.g. hail, rain, wind, snow)—along with the compressive load of the adobe, CMU, and concrete materials, caused the exterior walls to tilt outward while the inner walls buckled inward. As a result, the tensile strength of the exterior walls became a major concern for the fort's short-term stability. In addition to these structural issues, the bottom six inches of the flooring and foundation were compromised, with wicking occurring due to exterior wall failures and repeated flooding of the plaza over time. Inside, concrete was applied over the false floors, and several door openings and doors were widened. To mitigate further damage, the roof over the plaza was set back by three feet to better expose the increasingly deteriorated vigas. In the early 2020s, the second floor of the building was closed to the public due to severe structural degradation. Crack-monitoring devices were installed in several interior spaces, revealing extensive cracking and gaps, four to six inches in some areas, as the building continued to collapse both inward and outward. These issues were exacerbated by the weight of the building, incompatible materials, and the erosion caused by the region's harsh climate. In 2024, the exterior walls began to show signs of severe erosion, further exposing decades worth of inadequate repairs.

Although reconstruction of the fort was an ambitious project, historical records highlight that the process of reconstruction lacked both hindsight and forethought, and suffered from incomplete historical data, overzealous project deadlines, budget cuts, and unsatisfactory repair work for over four and a half decades. The project serves as a case study regarding future intent, methods, and execution of a reconstruction project. Robert Utley, a former NPS Chief Historian, Director of Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP), Assistant Director for Park Historic Preservation, and Deputy Executive Director of the President's Advisory Council, expanded upon this notion during a personal interview on June 17, 1986:

> *I guess I had got briefly into it in proposing Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, as a national historic landmark. The Washington staff very much opposed that because Fort Gibson was a reconstruction. My counter was that it was a good reconstruction. People could look at it and see what was there then, as they couldn't if it wasn't standing. That was still the thought in my mind when I went to Washington and Bent's Fort came up. Roy, who was my principal deputy, was all for reconstructing Bent's Fort, and so was I. When the opportunity arose to get congressional backing, we manipulated the paper in such a way that the authorization came about. So, I am in some measure responsible for the reconstruction of Bent's Fort. It wasn't until six to eight years later, when we became immersed in writing policies, and when we were going out through the System under Director Walker's initiative to try to sell those policies—not as something that ought to be adopted but something that had been adopted and had to be carried out—then is when I and everybody around me became very vocal and vehement about reconstructions.*
>
> *We had a bad experience with reconstructions. Fort Vancouver cost lots of money and didn't add much to the scene there. Bent's Fort cost a lot of money and had turned out to be a construction disaster. Washing away in every rain.*
>
> *There's an insidious thing about reconstructions that goes beyond what I've mentioned, and that is that it goads the Park Service to put inordinate emphasis on interpretation in the sense of entertainment, instead of in the sense of making the resource (which is the Justification for a National Historic Site) understandable and meaningful to the visiting public. My feeling has always been strongly that the purpose of interpretation in the Park Service is simply to make the resource, whether it's historic landscape or historic fabric, meaningful to the public, give them an appreciation and an understanding of it. Any interpretation that gets between that resource and the visitor becomes entertainment. And it's human nature to want to say, "Look at me," instead of "Look at the resource"... At Bent's Fort you don't see any original resource. You see something that we, the Park Service, have created...* (Utley, 1986, 62 & 14)

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VI. SIGNIFICANCE

37. Local landmark designation: ☐ Yes ☒ No Date of designation: N/A

    Designating authority: N/A

38. Applicable National Register Criteria:

    ☒ A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history;

    ☐ B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;

    ☐ C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

    ☐ D. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

☒ Qualifies under Criteria Considerations A through G (see Manual)

☐ Does not meet any of the above National Register criteria

39. Area(s) of significance: Politics/Government Education

40. Period of significance: 1976

41. Level of significance: ☐ National ☒ State ☐ Local

42. Statement of significance: The site is located within the confines of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Landmark (administratively listed in 1960) and Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (5OT.149). Resource 5OT.149 is primarily an archaeological site significant under NRHP Criterion D related to prehistory or history. Some of its individual archaeological components were disturbed by the reconstruction of the fort. The reconstructed fort (5OT.1728) does not contribute to the Bent period (1830-1880) or the 1976 period and therefore, is noncontributing to the National Register-listed resource (5OT.149).

    Bent's Old Fort is a reconstructed historic structure built in 1976 and is not yet 50 years old. As specified in the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (NR Bulletin 15), reconstructed historic buildings and properties that are less than 50 years of age "shall not be considered eligible for the National Register" unless they contribute to historic districts that meet Criteria A-D or if they embody any of the National Register Criteria Considerations (A-G). The reconstructed Bent's Old Fort does not contribute to an established or potential historic district that is significant under Criteria A, B, C, or D. However, the resource is individually significant under NRHP Criterion A, Consideration G in the areas of Politics/Government and Education.

    Criterion A: The resource is eligible under NRHP Criterion A in the areas of Social History, Politics/Government, and Education. Within the area of Politics/Government, the 1976 reconstruction represents the culmination of efforts of a preservation movement that began in 1912 and perhaps even earlier, starting with a grassroots movement helmed by the Daughters of the American Revolution that was picked up by the State of Colorado and championed all the way to the national stage by the NPS. All three key stakeholders involved with the fort in the 20th Century independently aspired to reconstruct the fort, which was eventually carried out by NPS. In addition, the project included federal and state government involvement who envisioned the fort to be reconstructed in time for the Bicentennial celebration of the United States and Colorado's Centennial celebration. The reconstructed fort also embodies evolving ideas pertaining to the historic preservation movement in the United States throughout the 1910s-1970s, both within the agency responsible for its reconstruction and in the preservation community at large. The evolution of the project included numerous archaeological investigations and many years of historic archival research, and new information was consistently applied in refining the architectural form and appearance of the reconstructed fort. Its completion signaled a shift in ideas about reconstruction inspired as much by concerns over cost as by debates about historic authenticity. The resource is further significant in the area of Education, as a site built for public engagement. As such, the resource possesses significance under NRHP Criterion A.

    Criterion B: The resource is not significant under NHRP Criterion B. The reconstruction of the fort was due to the culmination of several groups including the DAR, Colorado State Historic Society, NPS, state officials including senators and governors, and federal government officials from 1912 through 1976. Although the NPS was the lead entity involved in completing the reconstructed fort, historical records indicate that a multitude of people and groups contributed to the planning and reconstruction of the resource over time. As such, the resource is not associated with a particular person who is ultimately responsible. Therefore, the resource does not possess significance under NRHP Criterion B.

    Criterion C: The resource is not significant under NRHP Criterion C. Although the reconstructed fort was built directly atop the footprint of the original structure—which was uncovered via decades of archaeological investigations and historic research—and the fort was initially reconstructed using traditional materials, the reconstructed fort began to fail before it was ever completed. Throughout the planning, construction, and post-construction analysis of the resource, historical records reveal that the reconstructed fort suffered from the overambition of both political and reconstruction proponents, incomplete historical data, poor knowledge of the geographical area, climatic challenges, problematic construction, overzealous project deadlines, budget cuts, and unsatisfactory repair work for over four and a half decades. Even before the

reconstruction of the fort was completed and later dedicated on July 28, 1976, severe structural issues were identified in its construction and necessitated immediate repair. The reconstructed fort, even with its modern materials and design, struggled with similar issues identified with the original 1833 fort. Post-construction design analysis highlighted inherent flaws including reinforced concrete bond beams, which didn't account for easy replacement of viga tails as they deteriorated over time; non-period correct viga tail placement or treatment; incompatible material for cottonwood beams and support columns bases; improper placement of horizontal joints of cottonwood beams underneath vertical columns; material incapability due to corrosion from adobe mud materials; and the corrosion of sheet metal flashing along the vertical surfaces of the roofing. Stabilization measures applied to the exterior walls also failed due to the use of non-compatible materials, resulting in the adobe block and render eroding from the inside out. CMU blocks clad in cementitious stucco were utilized to reinforce the failing exterior walls, yet by the turn of the 21st Century, the compressive load of the adobe block, CMU block, and concrete—coupled with the sinking of the fort due to the high-water table and unpredictable climate (e.g. hail, rain, wind, snow)—caused the exterior wall to gradually fall outward while the inner wall caved in. As a result, severe erosion of the exterior walls is evident throughout the resource and the tensile strength of the walls have been compromised, jeopardizing the stability of the building. Additionally, the foundation has been compromised, and wicking to the floor has occurred due to exterior wall failures and flooding of the plaza over time. The roof in the plaza has been set back over three feet to better expose the vigas as they've weathered. Additionally, extensive cracking and wall gaps are present as the building continues to collapse under the pressure of its immense weight and due to erosion from climatic forces. Several walls yield evidence of 4-6 inches of hollow gaps. Because of the resource's immediate and long-term design and structural failures, the resource is not a feat of engineering, and as such, it does not possess significance under NRHP Criterion C.

Criterion D: The resource is not significant under NRHP Criterion D. The reconstruction of the fort in 1976 resulted in the destruction of the original foundation of the 1833 fort. As a result, it is unlikely that historic materials will be discovered. Additionally, the resource does not contain new information that would advance contemporary knowledge of building construction. Therefore, the resource is not significant under NRHP Criterion D.

(a) A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance

> **Consideration A:** The resource does not possess architectural or historical distinction as a religious property. The resource was constructed in 1976 and is not associated with a religious individual or group of historical significance. As a result, the resource is not significant under Consideration A.

(b) A building or structure removed from its original location, but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event

> **Consideration B:** The resource was constructed in 1976 directly atop the footprint of the original 1833 fort. As such, the original 1883 foundation was destroyed by the reconstructed fort. The reconstructed fort was a combined effort of multiple individuals and companies orchestrated by the NPS. Although the resource continues to inhabit the same location in which it was constructed over four and a half decades prior, the resource does not possess significance under Consideration B.

(c) A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his productive life

> **Consideration C:** Historical records did not yield evidence suggesting that the resource is associated with the birth or grave of a historical figure of exceptional significance since its completion in 1976. As such, the resource does not possess significance under Consideration C.

(d) A cemetery that derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events

Consideration D: Historical records did not yield evidence that the resource is a cemetery or possesses graves of persons of transcendent importance. Therefore, the resource does not possess significance under Consideration D.

(e) A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived

Consideration E: The resource is not an accurate representation of the original 1833 fort. Likewise, the resource is not a feat of engineering and as result, the resource does not possess significance under Consideration E.

(f) A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance

Consideration F: The resource is a reconstruction of a former fort that inhabited the site from 1833-1849. Although federal and state government officials envisioned the reconstructed fort to serve as a commemorative monument for the Bicentennial celebration of the United States and Colorado's Centennial celebration, the fort's inaccurate design and materials negatively impacts the resource's commemorative or symbolic intent. Therefore, the resource does not possess significance under Consideration F.

(g) A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance

Consideration G: The resource is less than 50 years of age and is significant under Consideration G in the areas of Politics/Government and Education. Therefore, the resource possesses significance under Consideration G.

43. Assessment of historic physical integrity related to significance: The resource no longer retains sufficient integrity to convey significance under NRHP Criterion A. While it maintains integrity of location—having been reconstructed on the foundation of the 1833 fort—and setting—remaining in a rural landscape—the resource lacks integrity in design, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling relevant to the 1976 period. The fort was reconstructed in an era of shifting reconstruction philosophy and an emerging notion that historic authenticity would create an interactive experience for visitors to travel back in time to how the fort existed in 1833. However, backed by the NPS and local, state, and federal officials, the reconstruction moved forward with modern architectural materials and methods prioritizing visitor entertainment and self-serving obsession toward historical accuracy over educational interpretation aimed at broad audiences. Over the years, this included appropriation of Native American and Mexican cultures in all aspects of public outreach and programming often without required Tribal consultation. The fort's reconstruction faced several challenges, including incomplete historical data, ineffective construction techniques, time constraints, and was plagued by overambition. As a result, the reconstructed fort is best described as a "modern structure within a simulated historic frame," which undermines the objectives and values set forth during the 1960s and 1970s preservation efforts. Construction flaws and subsequent modifications have further degraded its historic physical integrity. This includes the incorrect placement of viga tail ends, incompatible materials used for cottonwood beams and column bases, and improper placement of horizontal joints beneath vertical columns, all of which contribute to visual misinterpretation of the structure. Likewise, the use of CMU blocks clad in cementitious stucco to stabilize the adobe walls has altered the expression of the fort's exterior façade. In addition, the sinking of the fort due to the underlying water table—along with an unpredictable climate (e.g. hail, rain, wind, snow)—has caused exterior wall instability and significant material erosion. These aspects have compromised the fort's character and expression, and it is no longer reflective of the social, governmental, or educational history it attempted to portray at the time of its construction. As a result, the resource has lost integrity of design, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling, and its modern character cannot evoke either an authentic nor an accurate sense of 19th Century Frontier life. For these reasons, the resource does not retain sufficient integrity to convey significance under NRHP Criterion A.

VII. National Register Eligibility Assessment

44. National Register eligibility field assessment:

    ☐ Eligible ☒ Not Eligible ☐ Need Data

45. Is there National Register district potential? ☒ Yes ☐ No

    Discuss: The resource is located within the boundary of the NR-listed Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (5OT.149). The site was NR-listed in 1966 and again in 1985. Resource 5OT.149 is primarily an archaeological site, and some of its individual archaeological components were disturbed in the reconstruction of the fort. The reconstructed fort (5OT.1728) does not contribute to the Bent period (1830-1880) or the 1976 period and therefore, is noncontributing to the National Register-listed resource (5OT.149).

    If there is National Register district potential, is this building: ☐ Contributing ☒ Noncontributing

46. If the building is in existing National Register district, is it: ☐ Contributing ☒ Noncontributing

VIII. Recording Information

47. Photograph numbers: 5OT.1728_1 to 5OT.1728_33, and 7 reference photos

    ☒ Digital Files at: Pinyon Environmental, Inc.

48. Report title: N/A

49. Date(s): February 17, 2025

50. Recorder(s): Cameron Weishoff; with supplemental information from Thomas J. Wilson; Poppie Gullett

51. Organization: Pinyon Environmental, Inc.

52. Address: 3222 South Vance Street, Lakewood, CO 80227

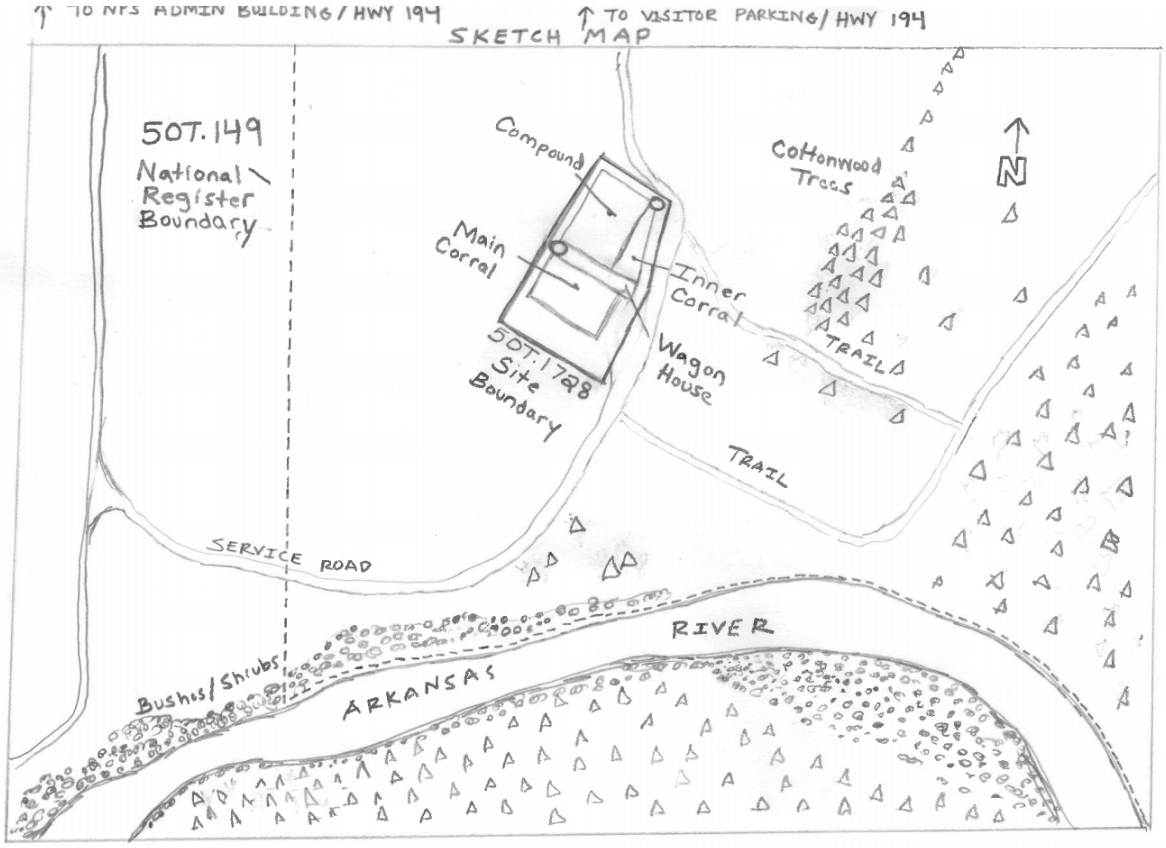
53. Phone number(s): 303.980.5200/weishoff@pinyon-env.com

NOTE: Please include a sketch map, a photocopy of the USGS quad map indicating resource location, and photographs.

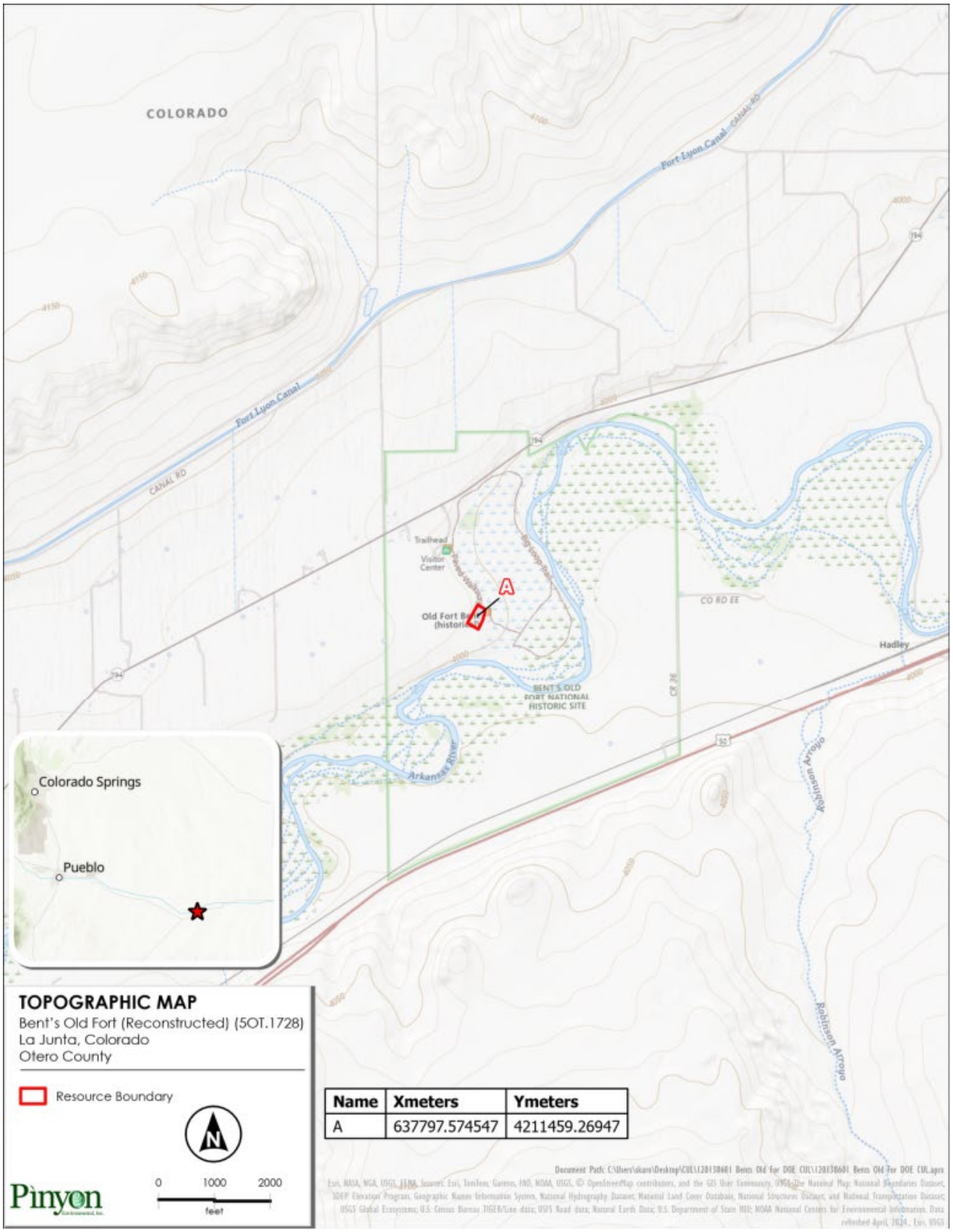
Sketch Maps


Compound
Inner Corral
Bent's Old Fort
Historic Site
Outer Corral
Wagon House
SKETCH MAP
Bent's Old Fort (Reconstructed) (5OT.1728)
La Junta, Colorado
Otero County
National Register District Boundary
(5OT.149)
Resource Boundary
N
0
100
200
feet
Pinyon
Arkansas River

(Hand Drawn)


↑ TO NPS ADMIN BUILDING / HWY 194
↑ TO VISITOR PARKING / HWY 194
SKETCH MAP
5OT.149
National Register Boundary
Compound
Main Corral
Inner Corral
5OT.1728 Site Boundary
Wagon House
Cottonwood Trees
N
TRAIL
TRAIL
SERVICE ROAD
RIVER
ARKANSAS
Bushes/Shrubs
Δ = cottonwood trees
= shrubs/bushes
Bent's Old Fort (Reconstructed)
5OT. 1728
* Not to Scale – See computer generated Sketch Map
* 5OT.1728 is considered non-contributing to 5OT.149
Tom Wilson
8/18/2020

Topographic Map



Name	Xmeters	Ymeters
A	637797.574547	4211459.26947

Site Photographs

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_1

Description: Looking at the primary (north) elevation of the resource.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_2

Description: View of the primary (north) and west elevations of the resource.

View: South

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_3

Description: Looking at the west elevation of the resource. Note the material transition in the center of the elevation.

View: Southeast

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_4

Description: Detailed view of the southwest bastion. Note the erosion of the exterior wall, exposing the inner core of the wall.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_5

Description: Looking at the far-right side of the west elevation.

View: Southeast

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_6

Description: Detail view of the Main Corral space.

View: North

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_7

Description: Looking at the south and east elevations of the resource. Note that the Main Corral is located behind the exterior wall.

View: North

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_8

Description: Looking at the east elevation of the resource. Note the concrete exterior wall separating from the inner adobe wall on the far-left side of the photo.

View: North

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_9

Description: View of the auxiliary entrance to the Inner Carrol. The main entrance features identical doors.

View: Northwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_10

Description: Detail image illustration the various layers of exterior wall over time. Note the degraded state of the interior wall space.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_11

Description: View of the east and primary (north) elevations of the resource.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_12

Description: Note the considerable cracking of the exterior wall of the northeast bastion.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_13

Description: Looking at the interior of the plaza from the lower level of the resource.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_14

Description: View of the interior plaza from the lower level.

View: East

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_15

Description: Looking in toward the plaza from the second floor.

View: Northeast

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_16

Description: Looking at the exterior wall erosion of the billiard room on the second floor.

View: South

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_17

Description: Additional photo illustrating the severe erosion of the exterior wall. Note that the nail was formerly flush with the exterior wall.

View: Detail

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_18

Description: Context view of the resource from the upper level of the southwest bastion.

View: Northeast

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_19

Description: Additional photo showing the erosion along the exterior wall of the southwest bastion.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_20

Description: Detail photo showing vigas and latias in the ceiling construction.

View: N/A

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_21

Description: Note the severe erosion of the interior wall.

View: N/A

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_22

Description: Sample interior entryway and door.

View: Southwest

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_23

Description: Example of a four-lite window. Note the wall cracking around the frame.

View: Detail

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_24

Description: Another example of window showing a six-lite window.

View: Detail

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_25

Description: A third window example without lites.

View: Detail

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_26

Description: Interior exhibit example of resource.

View: Interior Detail

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_27

Description: Interior space of the trade room.

View: Interior Detail

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_28

Description: An interior view of the auxiliary entrance to the Inner Carrol. The main entrance features identical doors.

View: East

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_29

Description: Photograph illustrating the damage to exposed vigas on second level of plaza.

View: North

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_30

Description: Photograph illustrating an improperly placed joint.

View: N/A

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_31

Description: Interior photograph showing severe cracking of interior wall.

View: N/A

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_32

Description: Photograph illustrating exterior wall damage due to recent snowfall in November 2024.

View: West

Photo Number: 5OT.1728_33

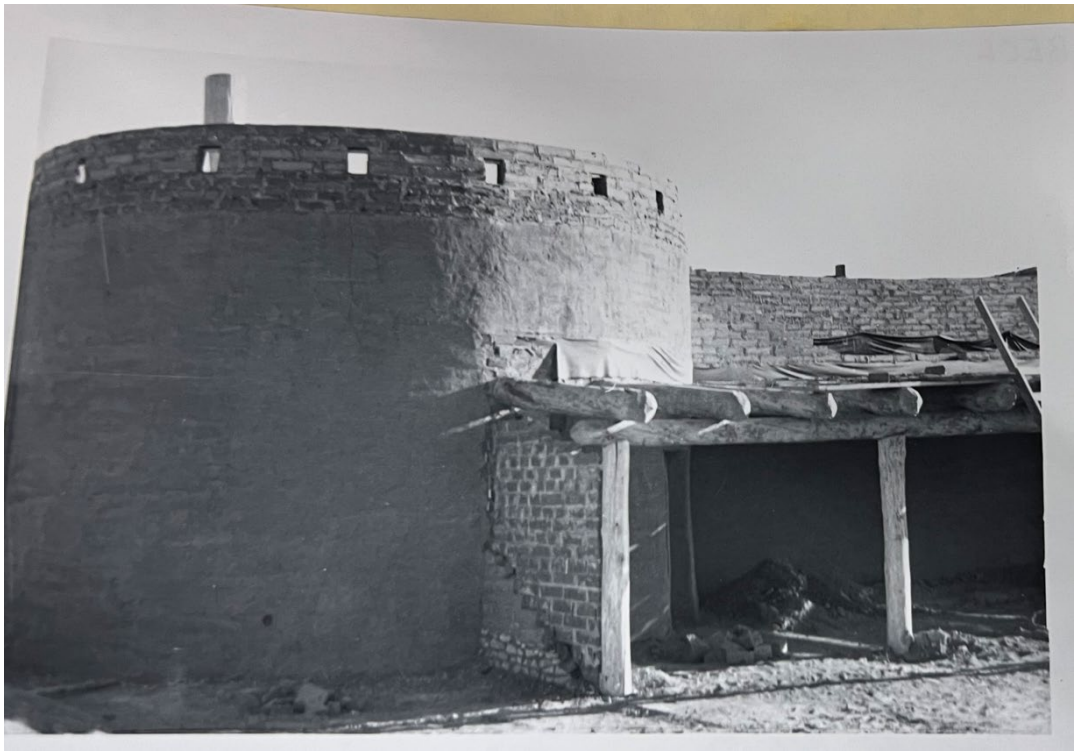
Description: Additional photograph illustrating exterior wall damage from recent snowfall in November 2024.

View: West

Reference Photo 1

Description: Historical photo of the original foundation of the 1833 fort before the reconstructed fort was erected. Photograph states, “Ruins of fort before reconstruction. NW side, quarters, well room, storage rooms, and shops in background.” Photo dated May 30, 1975

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent’s Old Fort



Reference Photo 2

Description: Historical photo of the southwest bastion under construction. Note the exposed adobe bricks. Photo dated: 11/5/1975.

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent's Old Fort

Reference Photo 3

Description: Historical photograph illustrating the construction of the southeast inner corral and entrance gate with catwalk. Photo dated: 12/18/1975 Note that this catwalk was later removed.

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent's Old Fort

Reference Photo 4

Description: Historical photograph dated 1/15/1976. Photograph states, "Belfry to the right of the main entrance."

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent's Old Fort

Reference Photo 5

Description: Detail photograph illustrating the staircase joining the promenade roof. Photo dated 1/15/1976 Note that the stone above vigas has since been removed.

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent's Old Fort

Reference Photo 6

Description: Historical photographs showing damage and repair work to chimneys. Photos dated: 1988.

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent's Old Fort

Reference Photo 7

Description: Photographs illustrating erosion and damage in various areas around the reconstructed fort. Photos Dated: 1996

Source: National Park Service Archives – Bent's Old Fort