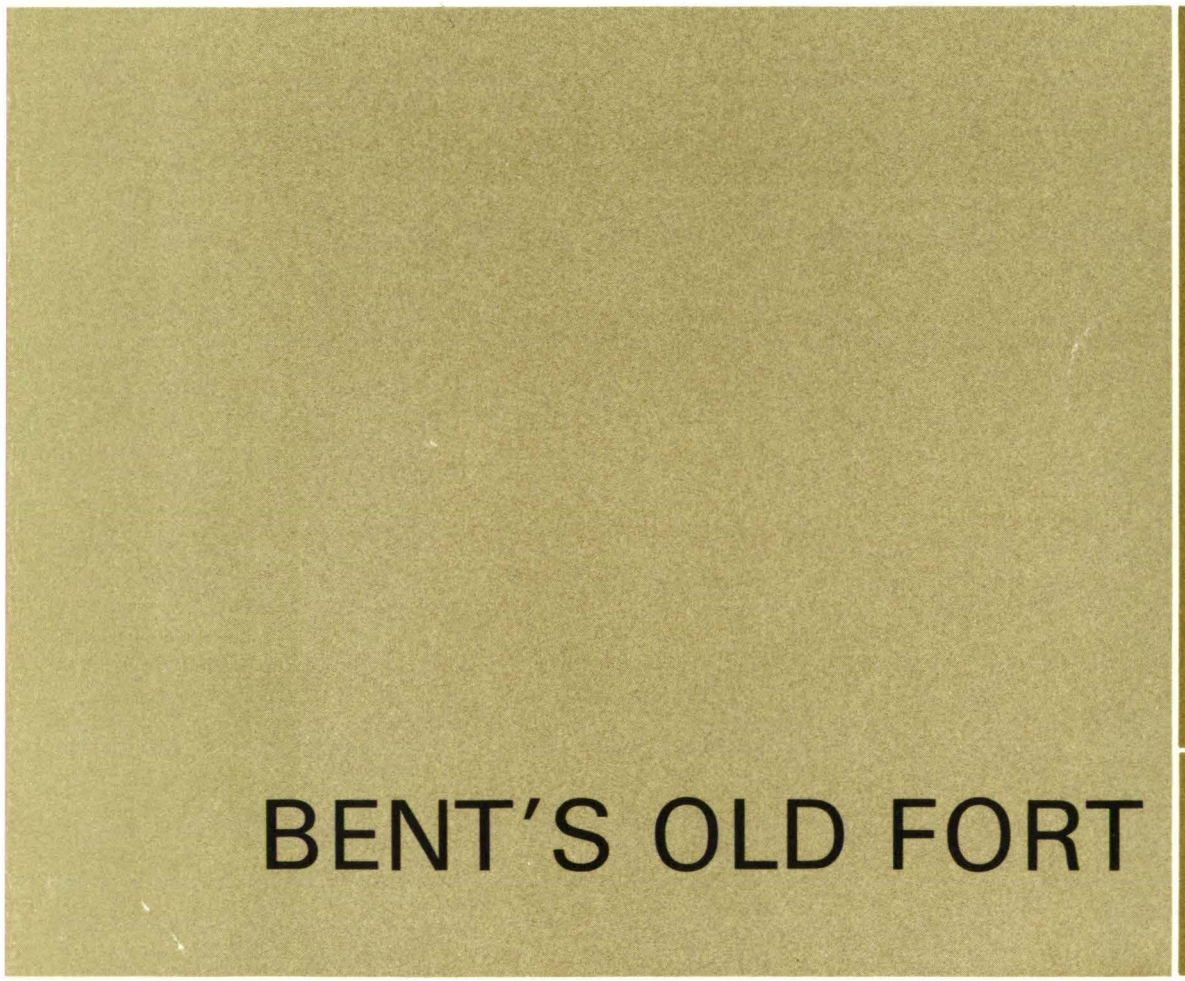
master plan
interpretive prospectus
development concept

draft
march 1975



BENT'S OLD FORT

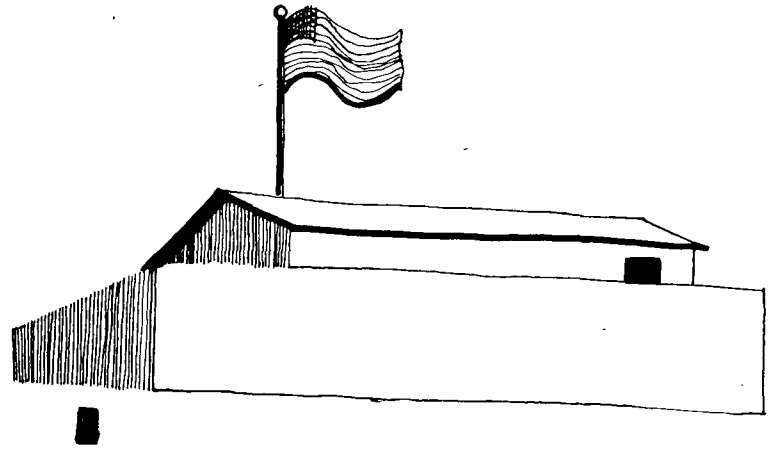
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE / COLORADO

This planning publication has neither been approved nor disapproved. Its purpose is to provide planning information for further consideration and discussion, and it may undergo considerable revision.

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1975—677-167/38

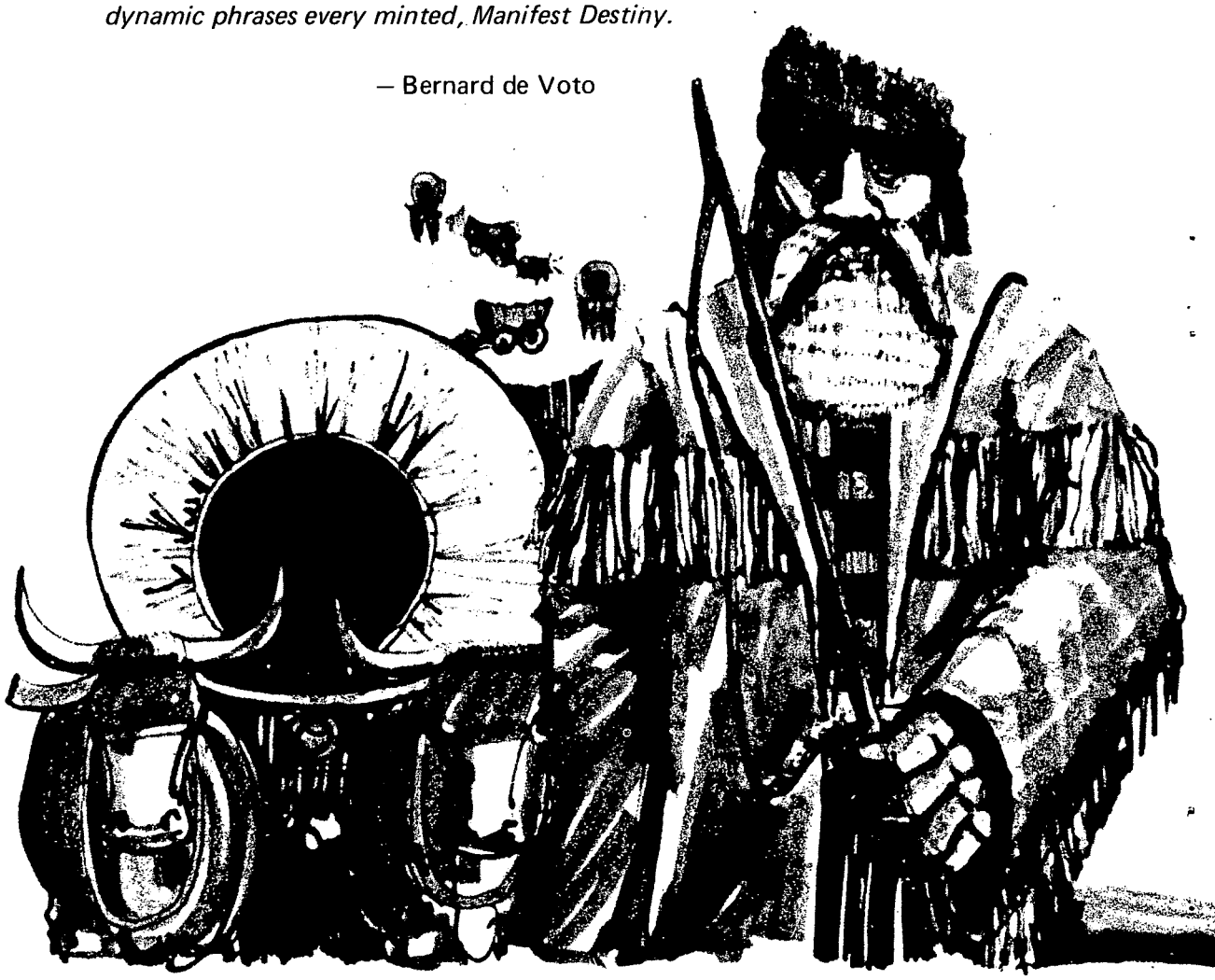
417/D-828



Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site/Colorado master plan/interpretive prospectus/development concept

Americans had always devoutly believed that the superiority of their institutions, government, and mode of life would eventually spread, by inspiration and imitation, to less fortunate, less happy peoples. That devout belief now took a new phase: it was perhaps the American destiny to spread our free and admirable institutions by action as well as by example, by occupying territory as well as by practicing virtue. . . . For the sum of these feelings [was found] one of the most dynamic phrases every minted, Manifest Destiny.

— Bernard de Voto



CONTENTS

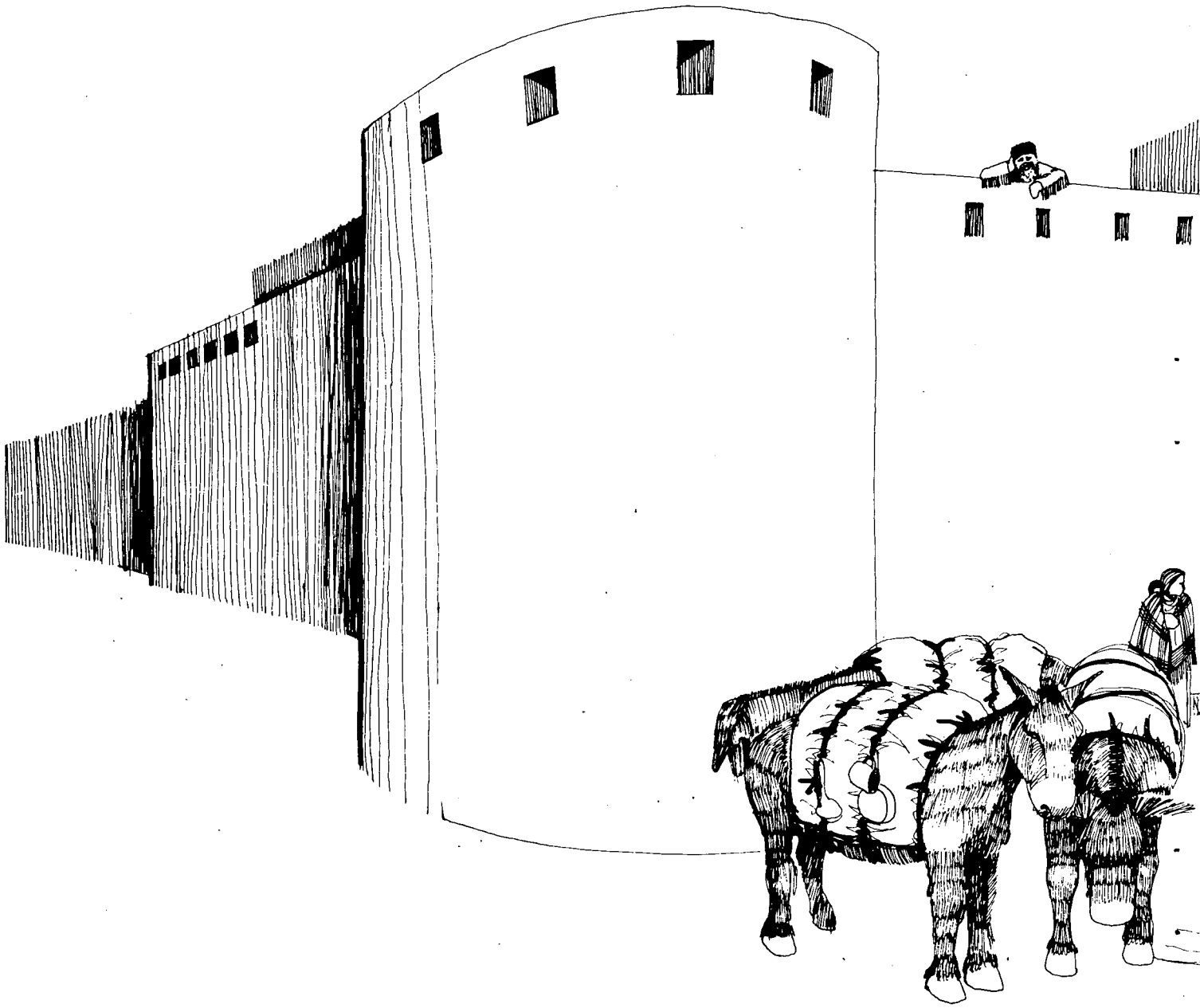
BENT'S OLD FORT: AN INSIGHT INTO WESTWARD EXPANSION 1

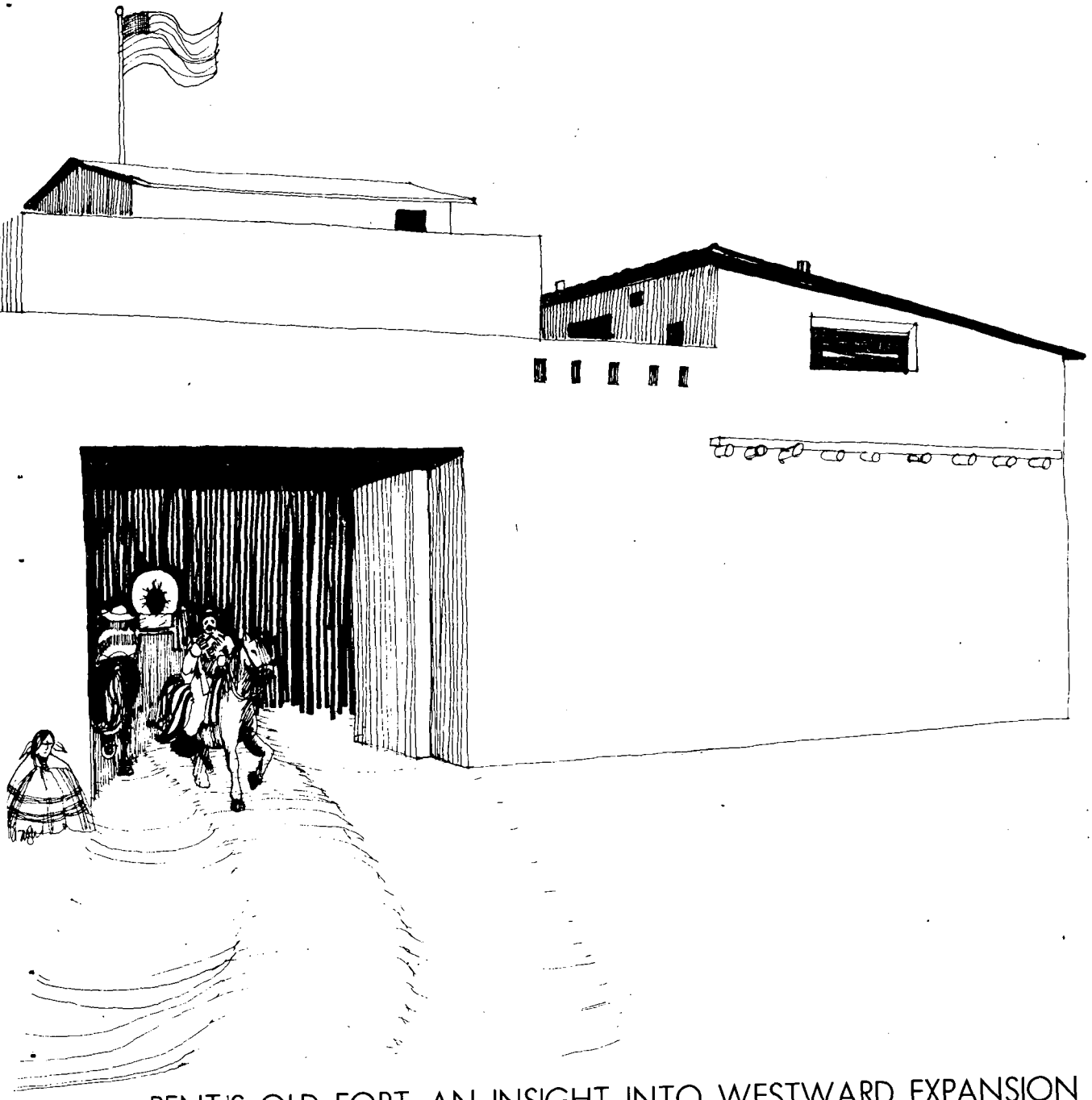
THE FORT THROUGH TIME 9

PROPOSALS 23

management 25
development 29
interpretation 33

APPENDIXES 47





BENT'S OLD FORT: AN INSIGHT INTO WESTWARD EXPANSION

The 1963 master plan for Bent's Old Fort contains an admirable statement about the fort's historic significance. It is worth quoting, and reading with care. Its words are carefully chosen.

> Built in 1833-34 as the mountain-plains extension of St. Louis-based American commerce and fur trade into the Southwest, Bent's Old Fort was for 15 years the frontier hub from which American trade and influence radiated south into Mexico, west into the Great Basin country (and beyond to the Pacific), and north to southern Wyoming. Bent's Old Fort, until abandoned in 1849, was the most important commercial port-of-call and depot between Independence, Missouri, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, on the mountain route of the Santa Fe trail. The fort was the major operational base for American traders and trappers in the southern and central plains and mountains of the west.
>
> The Historic Site was also the southwestern outpost of American cultural penetration and influence, and was the principal contact point between the white citizens and government and the Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Northern Apache, Kiowa and Comanche Indians.
>
> American military activity was first extended into the southwest to protect the Santa Fe trade and overland trail travel, and Bent's Old Fort often served as the southwestern pivot of such Army operations. General Stephen W. Kearny's Army of the West launched its penetration into Mexico from Bent's Old Fort in 1846; and from the ranks of the Fort's owners and employees evolved much of the early American leadership in the southwest. Bent's Old Fort was the forward bastion of American expansion into what is now the southwestern one quarter of the continental United States.

As the 1963 master plan suggested, Bent's Old Fort is a site of primary significance in western history. It is, in fact, one of three sites within the National Park System that together attest to the major elements of westward expansion in the United States: exploration – ~~Fort~~ Union Trading Post; colonization – Fort Laramie; and economic imperialism – Bent's Old Fort. As a point of synthesis for these elements, Jefferson ~~National~~ Expansion Memorial rises at St. Louis in tribute to the phenomenon of expansion they produced in 19th-century America.

Herein, the Park Service has a lustrous collection – the crown jewels with which it can interpret all the facets and phases of the movement that made this Country a continental nation. The significance of all other sites with the same theme pales in comparison. Legends in their own time, these three forts have become even more legendary in ours. Their individual contributions to the continental drive should, in each case, provide the overriding point of view for their development and interpretation.

The historian, listening to voices from the past, hears a prosaic tale. But he hears it in the amphitheater of time, where deeds that once seemed mundane often become profound in retrospect. So it is with the tale of Bent, St. Vrain and Company, and its fort. These partners were merchants whom time made economic imperialists in their own day, if not in their own words. Now, time has also made them major participants in the American conquest of the Southwest.

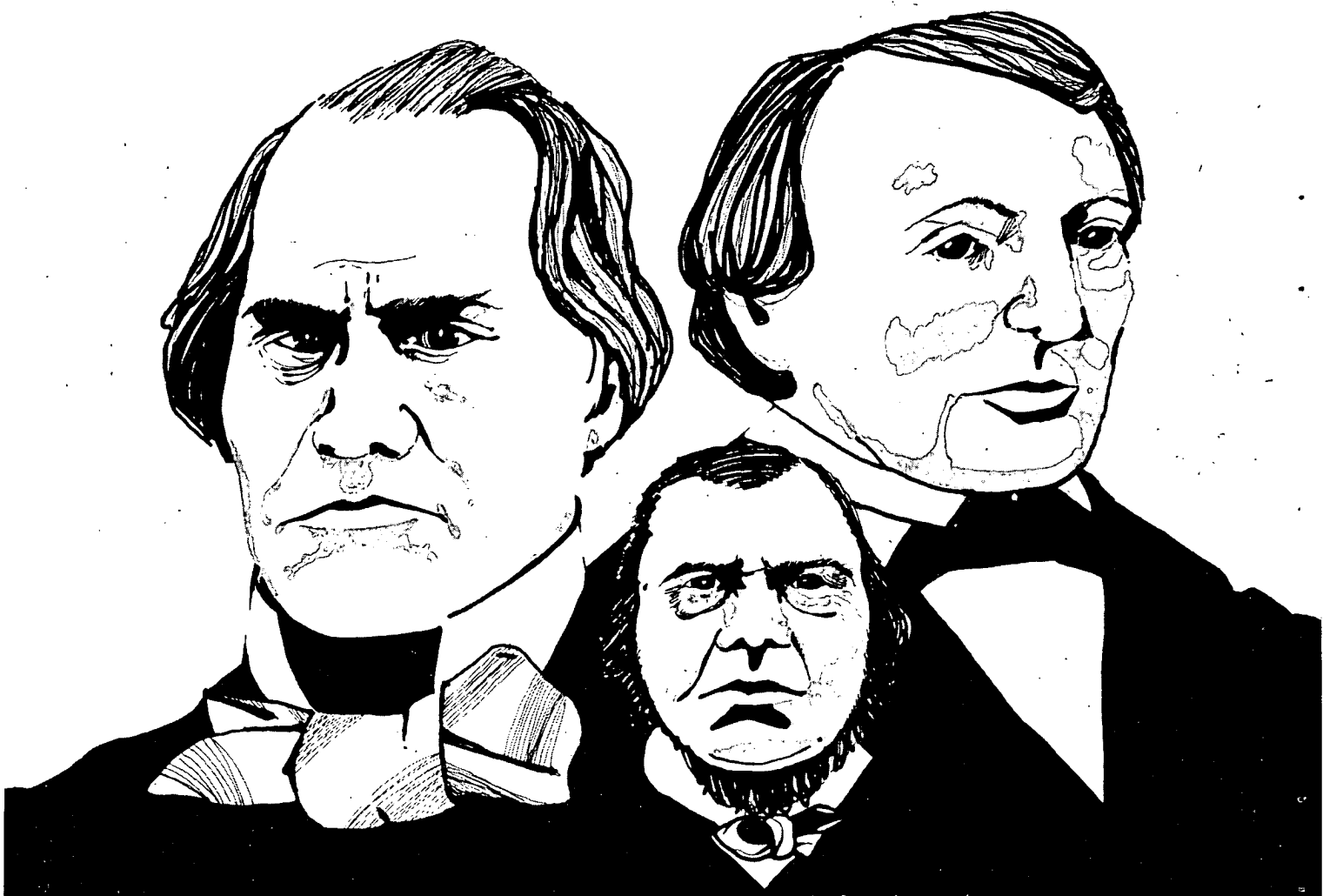
We may never know the dreams, the will, the curiosity, the greed, the calculation, the cussedness, that made men in history do what they did to become instrumental in shaping the world as we know it. For whatever reasons, the founders of Bent's Old Fort set out to make money, which drew them to the Santa Fe trade, just then taking shape and promising heady rewards. They had failed too often in previous ventures to be called born businessmen. It was chance – most likely – that brought them together to form a combination of talents, interests, and wills: a business partnership that would grease the wheels for their Country's future.

Their wagons were among the first to bring the goods of advancing American technology into bucolic Santa Fe. For the Bents and St. Vrains this transaction meant wealth in the form of bullion and livestock; for their Country it began the wooing of the Mexican Southwest – a courtship based on manufactured goods.

To aid their trade and improve upon their scheme, they built a fort as near to Santa Fe as international boundaries would allow. The site of the fort was carefully selected, for the partners saw they might drink from three springs. Situated somewhat off the shortest route to Santa Fe, it lay athwart a long-used Indian crossroads, where tribes from north, south, east, and west often ranged in search of their own life goals. Now they would come in search of Bent and St. Vrain goods as well, with skins and robes to enrich the company coffers. Then, too, free trappers still took furs in the mountains near the fort (joined soon by fort employees), clinging to a dying lifestyle that more and more required support from manufactured goods. Animals, furs, and coins soon piled high at Bent's Fort — the harvest of a three-cornered economic empire.

In that time, in that land, however, it was not enough to find the source of riches. Indian tribes were mercurial, and economic loyalty was a concept unknown to them. Worse yet, the Mexican Government mistreated American trade at Santa Fe, the enthusiasm of its citizens notwithstanding. Mexico City's skepticism was abundantly justified. Consumer dependence may have been an unfamiliar idea there, but official efforts to discourage the trade are certain indications that its threat was recognized. Economic and material linkages between peoples are strong — so strong they often erase the artificial boundaries that diplomats labor hard to establish, and governments declare war to maintain. Appropriately, the partners' response to both of these problems was diplomatic: two Bent brothers married into the people who were their customers at either end of the business, buttressing the bond of economic association by becoming family.

They were powerful men then, dominating the trade with Mexican Santa Fe, and capable of bringing order to the chaos of Indian tribal affairs. Their word was law along the trail, and in much of the Southwest. Little wonder that emissaries and armies of their Nation sought their counsel and cooperation, at this time when cultural pressure in the United States was pushing at boundaries, when the whole of the continent looked too small to contain the greatness of the American idea and the energy of her people. At first, probing governmental "survey" expeditions got their briefings at Bent's Fort; ultimately, Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West was launched upon its path of conquest from the great adobe fortress on the Arkansas River. The fact that Santa Fe fell before them with scarcely a struggle is scant surprise; it had been softened for surrender by the economic and diplomatic penetration of Bent, St. Vrain and Company, and Charles Bent's gubernatorial appointment was the company's reward.



Economic imperialism – did it just happen? Was it only fortuitous circumstance that brought these men together at this time and place – and made them conduct their affairs in a fashion that was just right to further the achievement of their Nation's cultural and political goals? Is history just happenstance? Perhaps – but maybe not.

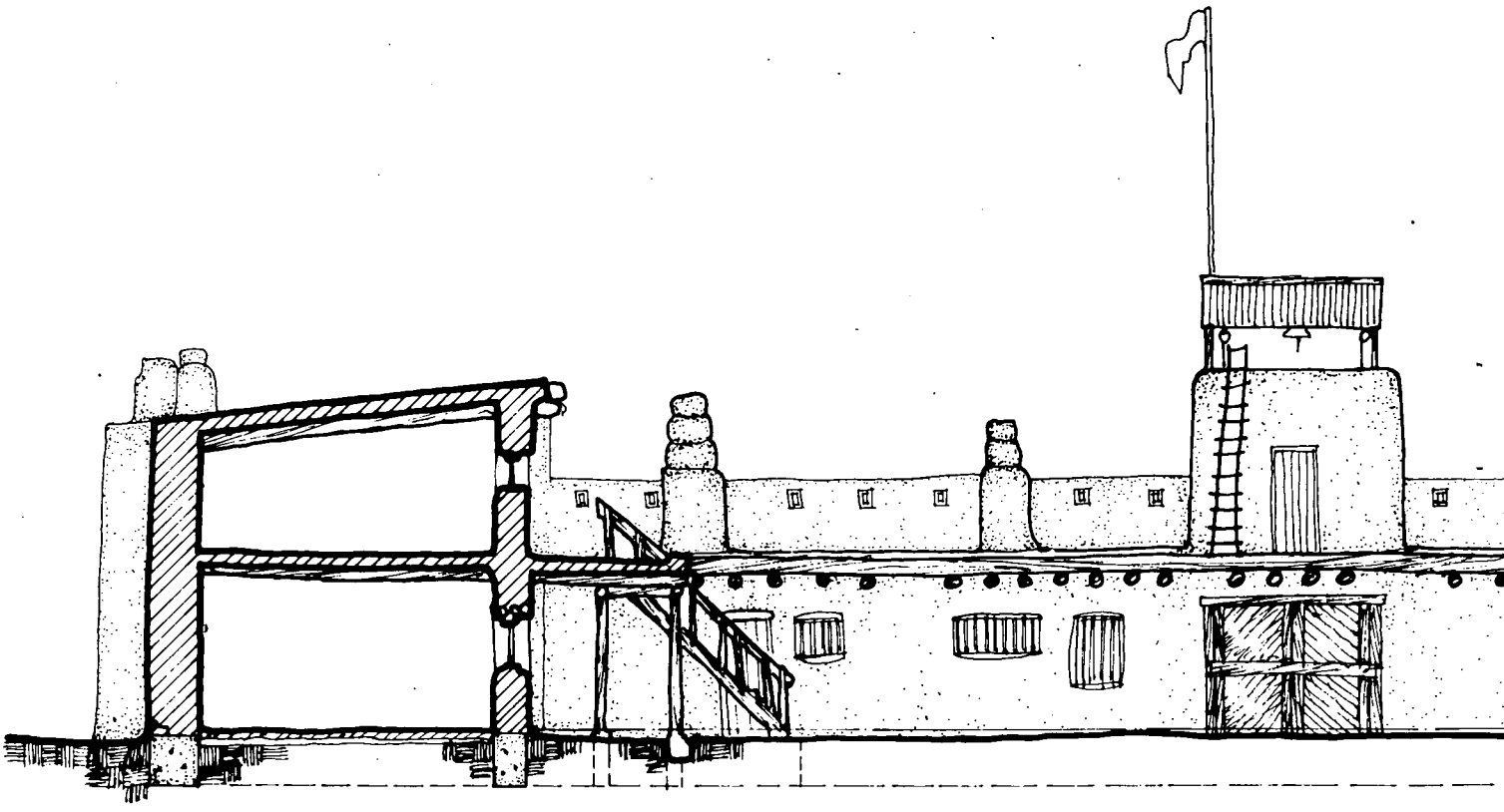
John T. Hughes, a schoolmaster and private in the First Missouri Mounted Volunteers in 1846, remembered a tale that, he said, was "doubtless more beautiful than true."

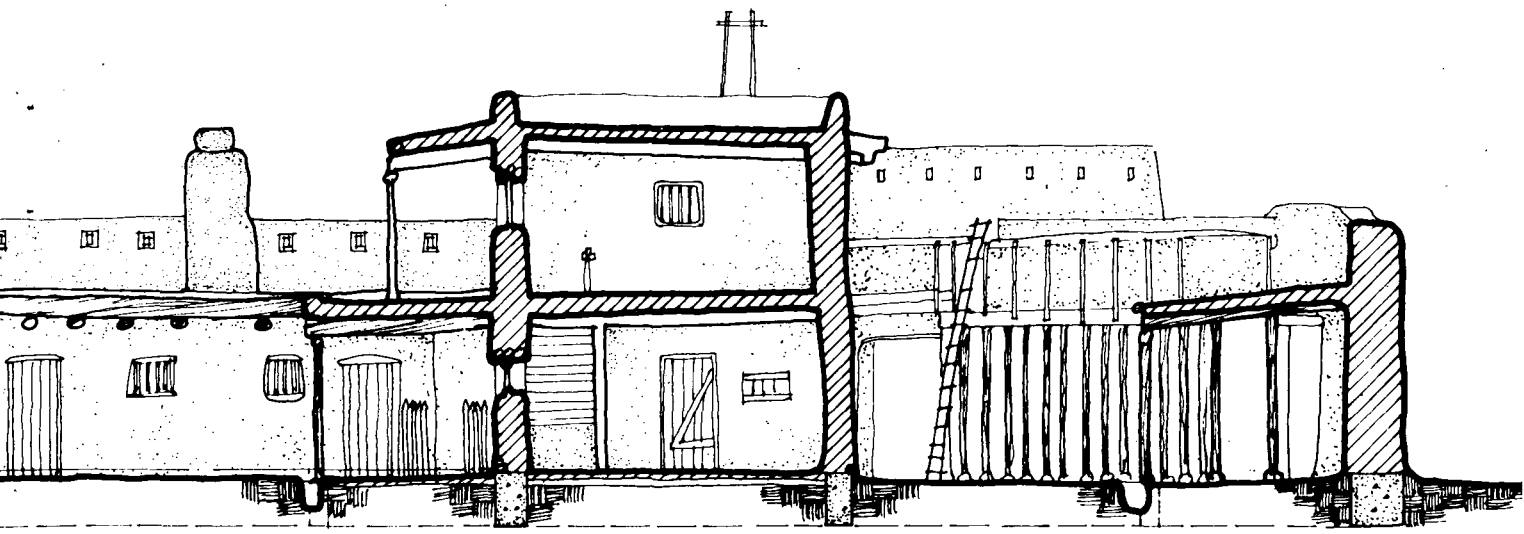
> Early in the spring of 1846 . . . a prairie thunderstorm overtook a party of traders who were returning to Independence, Missouri from Santa Fe. When it passed over, the red sun had sunk to the prairie's edge, and the traders cried out with one voice. For the image of an eagle was spread across the sun. They knew then that "in less than twelve months the eagle of liberty would spread his broad pinions over the plains of the west, and that the flag of our country would wave over the cities of New Mexico and Chihuahua."

Bent's Old Fort can become an invaluable educational resource, serving to help Americans understand the forces that shaped their Country. Many books impart this knowledge, but people retain facts only when the learning process is given impetus by sensual stimuli. The vast disparity between a mental cataloging of history and the development of a perceptive feeling for a part of the past is bridged by places — such as Bent's Old Fort.

The real fort is gone, but its immediate setting remains essentially unchanged. Using basic knowledge and a piece of unspoiled land on the banks of the Arkansas River as starting points, a reconstructed, repopulated Bent's Fort can be made to "live" again, to provide visitors with unforgettable insights into the saga of the opening of the American West.

* Bernard de Voto, *The Year of Decision* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), p. 3.





THE FORT THROUGH TIME

By the close of the American Revolution, New Spain's northern frontier stretched from eastern Texas to the Pacific, effectively barring would-be intruders from rich Mexico. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, explorers crisscrossed the Great Plains. After them came fur traders – the vanguard of American expansion into the west. Some pursued the beaver into the northern and central Rockies, while others pressed southwestward into the southern plains and lower Rockies, seeking both the Indian fur trade and trade with the Mexicans.

When word reached the Mississippi Valley in 1822 that Mexico had thrown off its Spanish shackles, merchants lost no time in testing their information. Several parties from Missouri set out at once for Santa Fe, where they sold their goods for handsome profits. Some traders were stopping at Taos, and some expeditions were pushing on into Mexican territory to trade with Indian tribes there. Their success encouraged others, so that by 1824 the Santa Fe trade was well established.

The main trail to Santa Fe began at Independence, Missouri, the chief outfitting point after 1827, and ran across the plains of Kansas to the Cimarron Crossing on the Arkansas River. Here the trail divided. One branch crossed the river and passed over the Comanche-infested Cimarron Desert to a point near Las Vegas, New Mexico, where the two branches merged into a single route again. The other, the Mountain Branch, continued up the Arkansas to Timpas Creek in Colorado, then followed a southwesterly course through Raton Pass. Though the mountain route was longer, it was the safer, easier road.

Among the first to become interested in trading with the Indians and Mexicans were the brothers Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain, the sons of two prominent St. Louis families. It was the booming Mexican trade of the 1820's that turned their eyes to the southwest.

After gaining some solid experience in the Upper Missouri fur trade, the three men transferred their operations to the Arkansas River, where they built a small stockade near what is now Pueblo, Colorado. The next year, 1830, they formed the partnership of Bent, St. Vrain and Company. Charles Bent was responsible for arranging credit in St. Louis and purchasing and forwarding goods to New Mexico. William Bent oversaw all Indian trade. St. Vrain, and later Charles Bent, marketed goods in New Mexico.

The concept of a great trading establishment on the Arkansas River came from Charles Bent soon after formation of the partnership. To hold – and exploit – this territory, he knew that they would need a central fort as powerful as those along the Missouri River. The partners pondered well the best location for so great an investment. Yellow Wolf, a Cheyenne chief, influenced the Bents by pointing out that the fort should be built close to both the bison country and the hunting grounds of several southern plains tribes. Finally, the brothers chose a spot on the north bank of the Arkansas, about 12 miles west of the mouth of the Purgatoire River. This placed them just north of the New Mexico boundary, close to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Commanche, and Kiowa, and well within range of roving bands from other tribes. The location also facilitated the company's business, because its trading caravans could go on to New Mexico without leaving the Mountain Branch of the trail.

William Bent started work on the fort sometime in the late 1820's or early 1830's. He built with adobe, both because it was fireproof and because there was little timber available on the plains for so large a structure. As more than 100 Mexican laborers made mud bricks, Americans hauled in timber for roofs and gates. Gradually a building took shape that could be described by a later visitor as one that "exactly fills my idea of an ancient castle." By 1833, the massive impregnable mud fortress stood completed in the midst of an unbroken prairie.

From their location in the heart of the plains, the Bents and St. Vrain for 15 years managed a private trading empire stretching from Texas into Wyoming, from the Rockies to middle Kansas. Beyond this, they had major commitments in the Santa Fe trade proper: large mercantile stores in Taos and Santa Fe, and yearly caravans that traversed both the Cimarron and Mountain Branches of the trail. Charles Bent's marriage to the daughter of an important Mexican family in Santa Fe securely anchored the company's New Mexican base. The partners became "mighty men, whose will was prairie law, who could sway whole tribes, who knew Indians and Mexicans as few others did."

William Bent, resident manager of the fort, received his trade goods from two sources: from St. Louis, caravans brought wagonloads of beads, cloth, ammunition, and other items prized by the Indians. These were exchanged for bison robes and other peltries either at the fort or in the Indians' camps, where they were carried by company agents. From New Mexico, Charles Bent and St. Vrain sent horses, blankets, and silver, items obtained by barter at the stores the two men operated in Taos and Santa Fe. Part of these goods were traded at the fort, then the rest were sent on to Missouri with the pelts and robes collected during the season. Within a few years, Bent, St. Vrain and Company had built up a profitable business whose existence depended upon friendly relations with the Indians and Mexicans — and upon suppression of competition.

Bent, St. Vrain and Company met competition head on. When other companies tried to tap the Indian trade by establishing posts on the South Platte, St. Vrain built a trading post in their midst. The new fort, a branch office of Bent's Fort, succeeded in maintaining the company's ascendancy in that region. Rivals soon learned that competing with the Bents was not the quickest road to profits.

Applying skill and subtleness, the Bents achieved greater influence among the Indians than rival traders. Of the numerous tribes trading with the company, the most important were the Southern Cheyennes, upon whose hunting grounds Bent's Fort stood. William Bent, "Little White Man" to the Cheyennes, saw that they continued to remain as friendly as they were before the fort was established. He required his employees to be fair in bartering and restricted the use of whiskey, a favorite device of other firms.

In the mid-1830's, Bent married Owl Woman, the daughter of Gray Thunder, one of the most influential of the Cheyennes, thus receiving the faith and good will of that powerful tribe. He also encouraged peace among all the tribes, for their intermittent warfare hurt business. The deadliest of enemies could trade at Bent's Fort in an atmosphere of peace.

As the principal outpost of American civilization on the southwestern plains, Bent's Fort was a fairly self-sufficient institution. Employing about 60 persons, it required the services of numerous tradesmen: wheelwrights, carpenters, gunsmiths, and blacksmiths. Many nationalities were present, causing one visitor to remark that he thought he "heard at one time as many as six different languages – French, Spanish, German, English, Comanche, Arapahoe – a perfect Babel of a place." Among the better known figures of the West employed at the post at one time or another were Lucien B. Maxwell, Thomas O. Boggs, Baptiste Charbonneau, and Kit Carson.

After long winters in the mountains, trappers brought their furs to Bent's Fort and stayed to spin yarns, gamble, and celebrate. They came with Indian wives and halfbreed children, not only to dispose of their catch, but also to purchase supplies and visit with old friends in the only place in the region where they could get outfitted for a new season.

Because of its location in the heart of the Indian country, the fort was a natural spot for intertribal councils and meetings between the southern plains Indians and the U.S. Government. In 1835, troops under Colonel Henry Dodge met near Bent's Fort with chiefs of several tribes to discuss depredations that had taken place on the Santa Fe Trail. Five years later, at a great peace council held 3 miles below the fort, major tribes – including the Cheyennes and Comanches – feasted, danced, and exchanged presents purchased from William Bent. The Indian peace concluded at this council was never broken. In 1846, Bent's Fort was chosen as headquarters for the Upper Platte and Arkansas Agency, a move that took advantage of both the fort's location and William Bent's singular influence with the Indians.

Powerful as the Bents and St. Vrain were, events beyond their control were destined to destroy the company. Relations between Mexico and the United States had long been strained over the Texas question. By 1836, after colonizing Texas, Americans had successfully revolted against Mexico. The next year, the United States extended diplomatic recognition to the Republic, and the Texans quickly petitioned for annexation to the United States, aggravating an already tense situation. When annexation was finally ratified

in 1845, Mexico viewed it as an act of war. Anticipating armed conflict, the United States designated Bent's Fort as the advance base for the invasion of New Mexico – the adobe trading post was soon to become the rendezvous for General Stephen Watts Kearny's invading Army of the West.

The long-expected war opened on May 13, 1846. Two months later, Kearny arrived at the fort with a force of 1,650 dragoons and Missouri volunteers. Close behind rolled some 300 wagons of Santa Fe traders, which Kearny's column to all appearances was protecting. They stayed until early August, then they pushed southward on their mission of conquest.

In August 1846, after 17 days on the Mountain Branch, Kearny's army marched unopposed into Santa Fe and raised the American flag over both that city and, symbolically, all of New Mexico. The Bent's Mexican market was destroyed, but Charles Bent stayed, and became the territory's first governor.

After Kearny's army left Bent's Fort, Government wagon trains congregated there in ever-increasing numbers. Government cattle overgrazed nearby pastures. Quartermaster stores piled up in the fort, and Government soldiers, teamsters, and artisans occupied its rooms. Thus, Bent, St. Vrain and Company, which had supplied the outpost for military expansionism, was called up again, this time to provide a convenient substitute for the fort the War Department had failed to build.

The steady flow of soldiers across the plains during the Mexican War, together with the influx of settlers, goldseekers, and adventurers that came later, irrevocably changed the Great Plains. Watering places were fouled; precious wood was wantonly used; bison were frightened away from accustomed haunts. The company was caught between the millstones of resentful Indians and invading whites. Indian warfare commenced seriously in 1847, and from then on, the days of rich trading were gone. Meanwhile, Charles Bent was killed in a revolt in Taos. This blow, together with the sharp decline in business, destroyed the firm. St. Vrain departed to New Mexico, probably after selling his interest in the fort to William Bent.

The final blow to Bent's Fort came in 1849, when cholera, probably brought by immigrants, spread through the tribes. What little trade had remained dwindled to a standstill. William Bent, disillusioned and disappointed, had had enough. After loading his family and a few employees into wagons, he set fire to the storerooms and powder magazine, and abandoned the fort. What had been the center of a giant commercial empire was left a smoldering monument to Manifest Destiny.

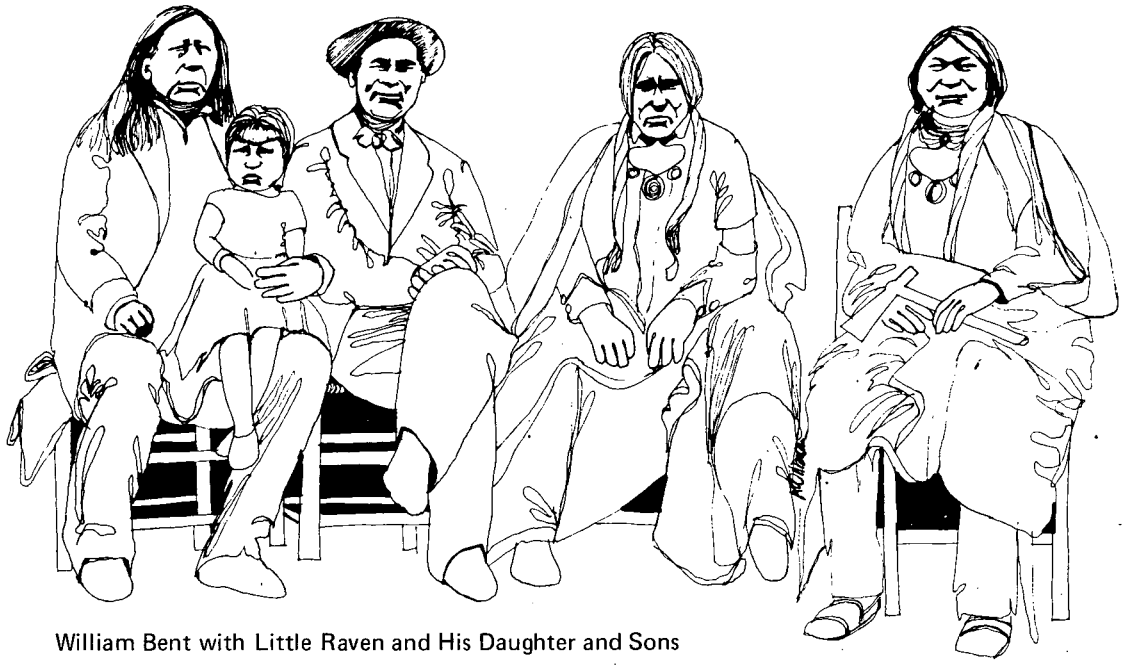
Bent moved 38 miles down the Arkansas to Big Timbers, where in a temporary stockade, he attempted to revive the Indian trade. In 1852-53, he built the large stone post that became known as Bent's New Fort. Trade never returned to its prewar volume, but Bent stayed in business until the eve of the Civil War. Then, after leasing the new fort to the Army, he retired to his ranch on the Upper Purgatoire.

William Bent's work of destruction at Bent's Fort was more symbolic than substantial. By 1861, after a decade of disuse, the fort's rehabilitated adobe walls sheltered a stage station — the principal stop on the Barlow & Sanderson stage, mail, and express route between Kansas City and Santa Fe. Here the superintendent/general manager lived for a time, and the company maintained a general repair shop. After railroads replaced the stagecoach, the buildings served as cattle corrals. Gradually, the fort collapsed and disintegrated. Some of the adobe bricks were probably removed by ranchers and found their way into other buildings in the vicinity. As late as 1915, part of the old walls were still standing. Elsewhere, only mounds outlined the fort's dimensions.

In 1920, after nearly 70 years of disuse and relentless assault by rain, wind, and hail, the site of Bent's Old Fort was acquired by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Their intent was to restore the structure, but a lack of funds prevented them from realizing this objective, and for more than 30 years, the group simply protected the ruins from total destruction and appropriately marked the site.

In 1954 the State of Colorado acquired the site with similar intentions, but they, too, were unsuccessful in resurrecting what had by then become little more than a foundation outline.

Hopes of long-time fort enthusiasts were up again in 1963, when the National Park Service assumed responsibility for the site. Perhaps, finally, the adobe walls of the fallen bastion would rise again!

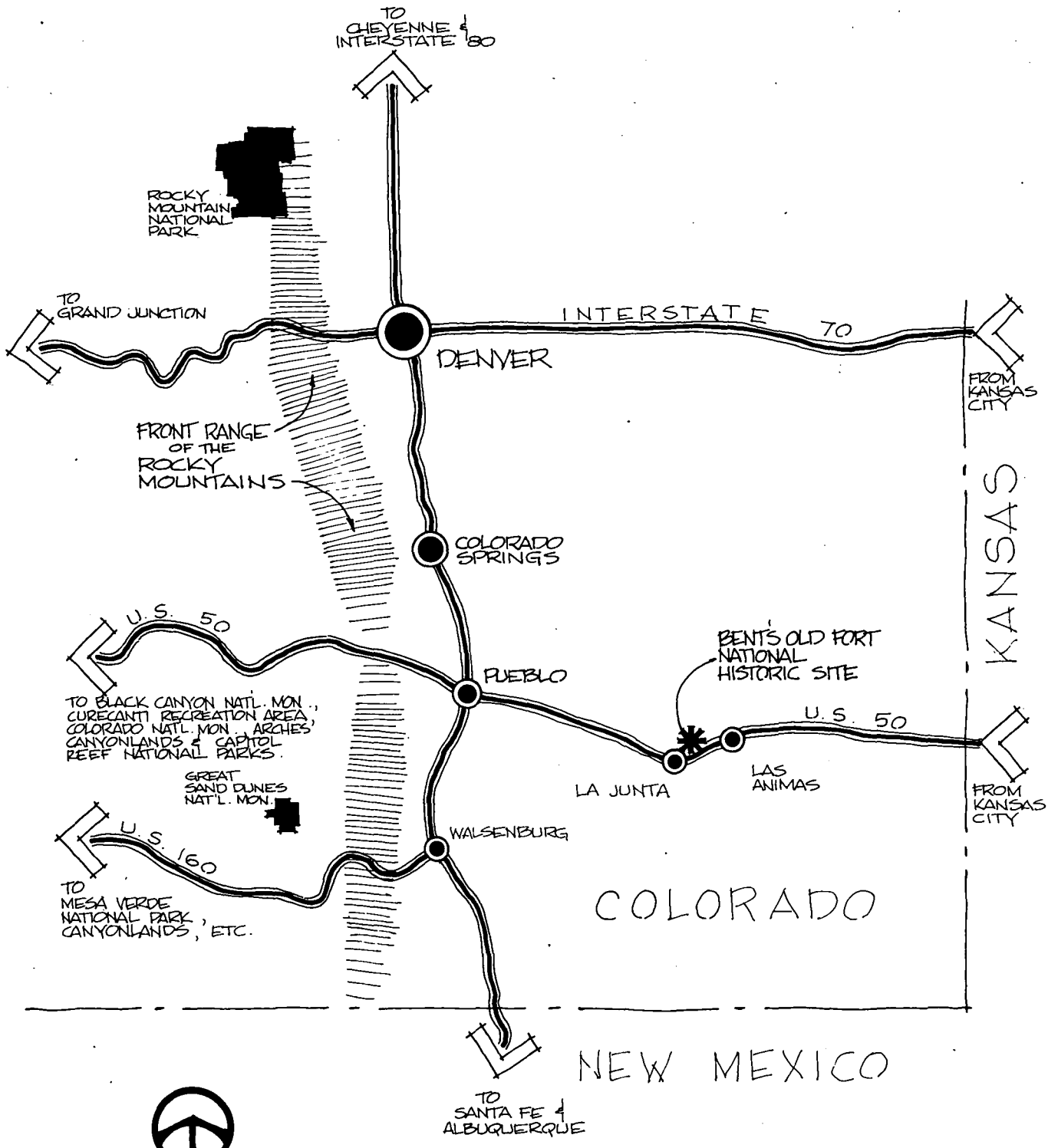


William Bent with Little Raven and His Daughter and Sons

Very little of the "Great American Desert," upon which Bent's Old Fort was a lone outpost, still displays the ineffable expanses that distinguished the plains as a barrier as formidable as the mountains. Today, the fort does not sit amidst a vast virgin prairie, but fortunately for the visitor, enough of the region's old quality remains to silently stimulate an imaginative perception of the fort's historic setting.

This western segment of the Great Plains is one of the least populated regions in the Country. For long stretches, only a patchwork of stock fences and cultivated fields clearly evidences man's presence. Now part of Otero County, Colorado, whose 1,200 square miles contain only 23,523 people, the fort site lies 8 miles east of the nearest city, which is La Junta, population nearly 10,000. Pueblo, a city of 97,000, lies 65 miles to the west, and Denver, the nearest major metropolitan area, lies 165 miles to the northwest.

The Arkansas River, on its way to the Mississippi from the snowy slopes of the Rockies, now supports irrigated farming in its broad shallow valley, where truck farming, hay growing, and cattle feeding are the predominant activities. On the adjacent arid rolling hills and plains, dry farming and stock grazing are modifying what was once a sea of grama and buffalo grass prairie.



THE REGION

BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

417 | 20,000
NOV 74 | DSC

In contrast with the nearby mountain land to the west, most of the country in the region is under private ownership, containing only a few scattered tracts of Bureau of Land Management land.

Paralleling the Arkansas River, and providing primary access to Bent's Fort, U.S. 50 from Kansas City represents a direct westward route to the Rocky Mountains and the rich recreational resources of western Colorado and Utah. Interstate 25, connecting Denver and Santa Fe along the foot of the Rockies, is a more heavily traveled route, but it is nearly 75 miles from the fort, and north/south travelers making such a detour will be among the highly motivated, until such time as the reconstructed fort becomes more widely recognized as a major tourist attraction.

The fort is the only unit of the National Park System in the immediate region, but it is not the only major tourist attraction. A group of La Junta Explorer Scouts known as the Koshare Indian Dancers have become famous by performing traditional Indian dances throughout the United States and Canada. Their dances and their museum displaying a collection of Indian artifacts are said to attract 150,000 visitors a year to their "Kiva" in La Junta.

Although the population of the three-county region surrounding the fort actually decreased during the past 10 years, one should not glibly assume that the park's rural setting is safe from encroachment. Nearby towns, perhaps in response to out-migrations, are moving to shift their traditional agriculture-based economies to more diversified industries. If the predictions of a Pueblo-to-Denver front range megalopolis are only partially fulfilled, the site's all important quality of remoteness could be lost forever. Even today, noise generated by traffic on U.S. 50, jet aircraft, and trains presents an annoying distraction in this vulnerable enclave of the past.

The Park Service has carried out archeological research at the fort, and has maintained protective and interpretive personnel there to accommodate visitation. Costumed interpreters conducting regularly scheduled programs make the park one of the Service's many "living history" areas. In 1972 the park recorded 25,671 visitors even though little significant development had yet been accomplished. The majority of visitors are members of families on vacation and come sometime during the period of June through September.

A self-guiding tour over a trail around the fort's central plaza is now the major feature of the park program. The tour begins at a small interpretive shelter, and supplementary exhibits are displayed in a small structure adjacent to the superintendent's house. Access to the ruins is gained over a low-standard road that follows the route of the old stage road that

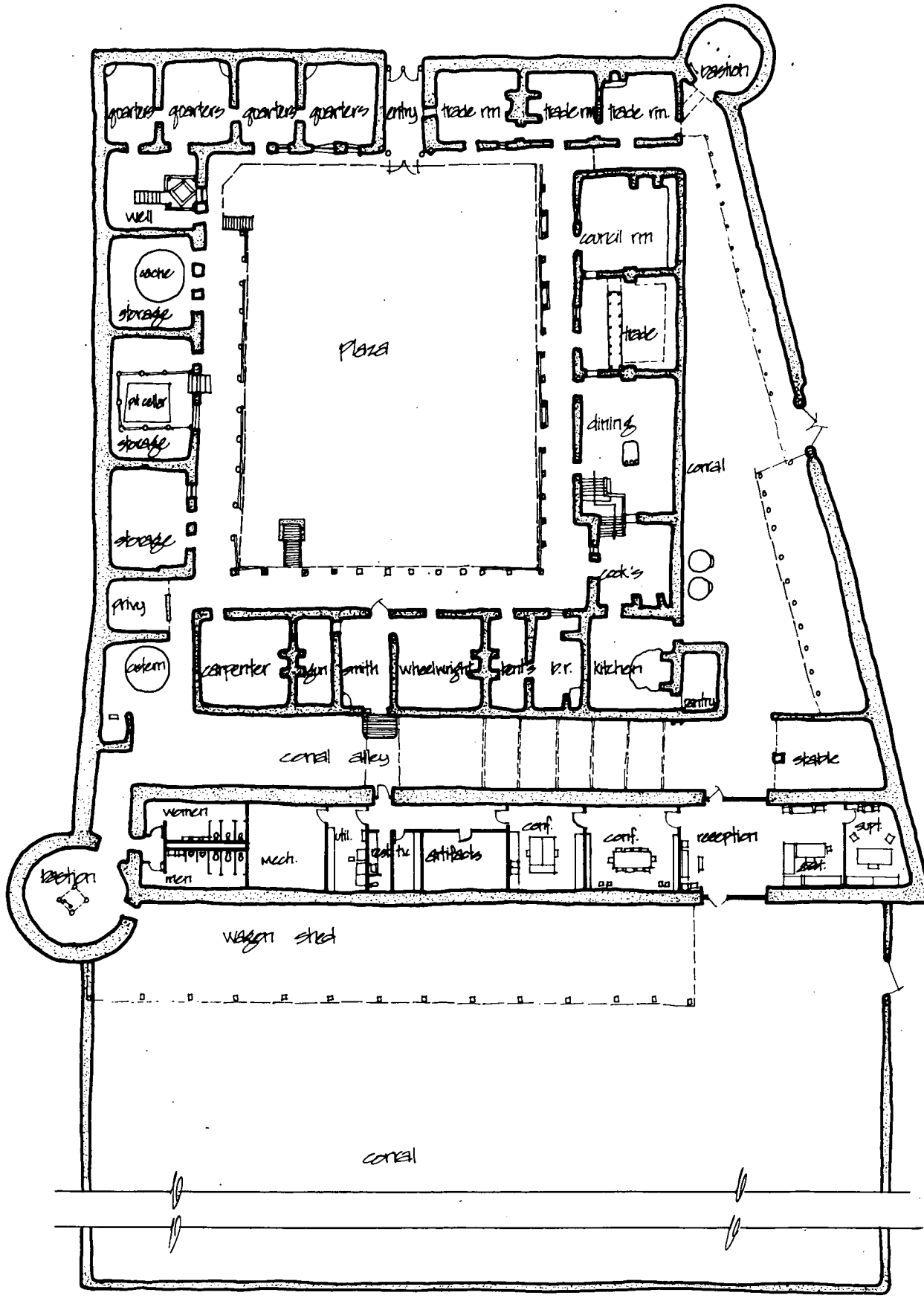
traversed the site in the 1880's. It terminates at a small parking area adjacent to the ruins. The excavated ruins have been partially covered by low protective structures. A trailer serves as a contact station and park administrative office at the entrance to the site.

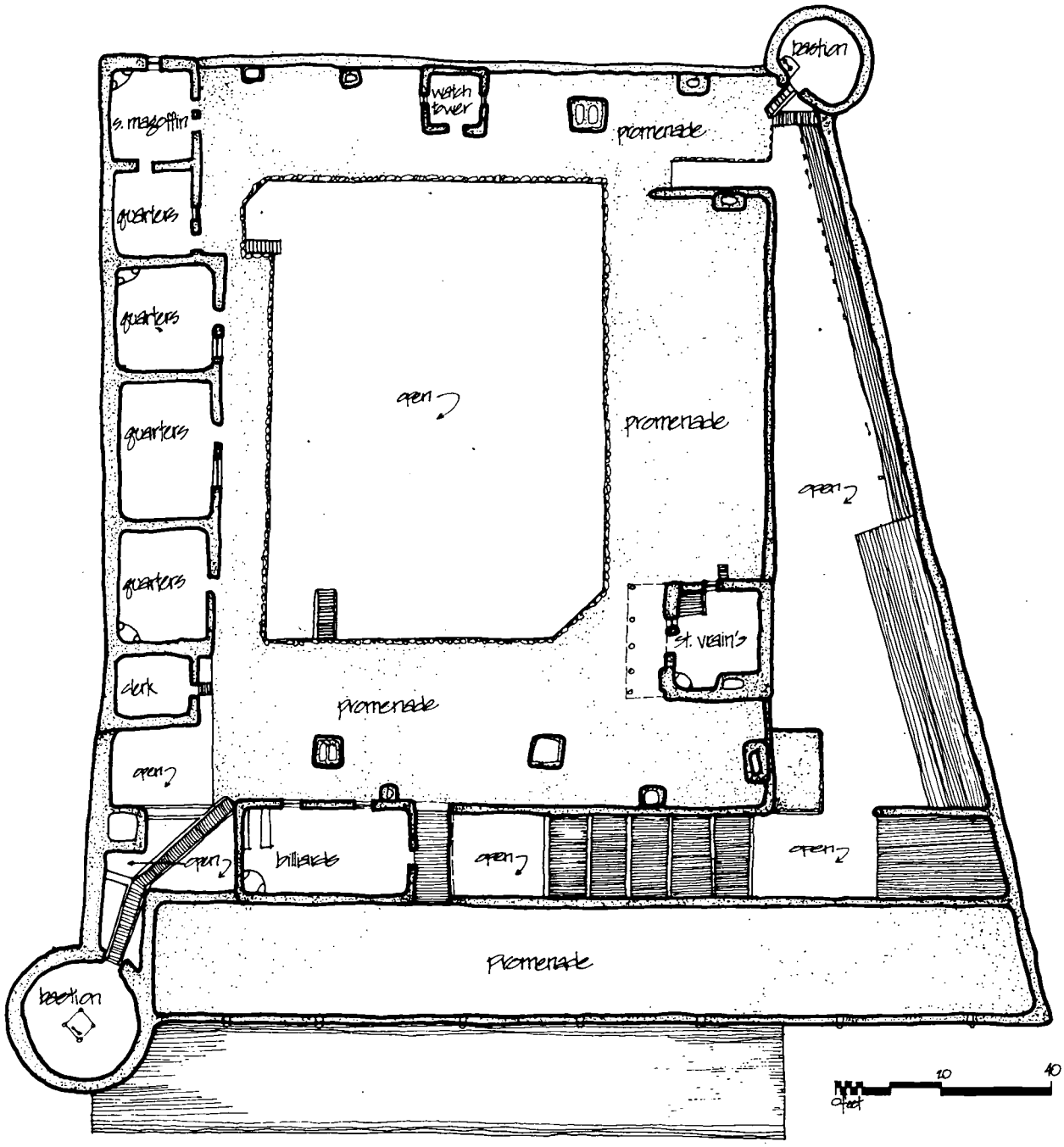
The natural aspects of the historic site are perhaps as valuable as the scant adobe remains. A sweep of views outward from the fort spanning more than 180 degrees is ultimately contained by groves of water-loving cottonwood and willow clustered along the sinuous course of the Arkansas. This important natural screen forms a setting that is thought to be similar to that which surrounded the fort when it was first built. In the 1840's the trees served as an essential source of firewood. Today they help to insulate this fragile scene from the 20th century.

The river has changed course somewhat since the fort's heyday, but it is still a vital element of the historic scene. Situated on the edge of a low terrace within several hundred feet of the river, the fort has been threatened more than once by flood waters. In the Great Pueblo Flood of 1921, much of the then-remaining original adobe walls collapsed. Past plans of the Corps of Engineers to channelize the river in the vicinity of the fort have been dropped, partly due to the objectionable impacts such action would have on the historic scene. Currently, channelization is not planned to extend past La Junta.

The flat plain surrounding the fort still displays stands of blue grama, buffalo grass, and a few of the other low-growing plants that were associated with the Bents' time, but post-period exotic weeds have encroached upon this land as a result of its being heavily grazed, terraced for irrigation, and subsequently releveled by bulldozers. Controlling the invasion of the exotic tamarisk shrub from the riverbank onto the floodplain has been a constant management concern.

The site is surprisingly rich in wildlife, and they are subtle contributors to the integrity of the historic scene. Coyotes still lurk in the grass in broad daylight and offer up their wild yelping serenades after dark. Hawks and eagles still soar majestically overhead, descending now and then to snatch up a scurrying rodent or to come to rest in the branches of a cottonwood. Mule deer and whitetail deer roam the floodplain, and the beaver, once the mainstay of the fur trade, probably is as abundant as it ever was along the river. Racoons, skunks, and muskrats frequent the riverbanks, and even a bobcat is seen occasionally. Further graced with the dulcet music of quails, meadowlarks, bobwhites, and mockingbirds, the site is still an excellent stage for the wilderness drama that it represents.


quarters
quarters
quarters
quarters
entry
trade rm
trade rm
trade rm.
bastion
well
cache
storage
Plaza
council rm
trade
pit cellar
storage
dining
corral
storage
cook's
privy
cistern
carpenter
wagon
smith
wheelwright
tent's
b.r.
kitchen
pantry
corral alley
stable
women
men
mech.
util.
tool
artifacts
conf.
conf.
reception
supt.
bastion
wagon shed
corral


bastion
watch tower
promenade
s. magoffin
quarters
quarters
quarters
quarters
clerk
open
open
open
open
open
open
St. Vrain's
billiards
promenade
promenade
bastion
10
40
feet

PROPOSALS

MANAGEMENT: PRESERVING HISTORICAL INTEGRITY

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS

If time and progress could be brought to a standstill in the region where Bent's Fort lies so comfortably today, the present boundaries of the national historic site could be considered quite adequate. But man's propensity to change his natural surroundings makes this idea seem ludicrous, and the 178 acres of the historic site seem meager. The sparsely developed farmlands now surrounding the fort are benevolent neighbors, but there is no guarantee that these lands will not be more intensively developed for agricultural use or that industrial, commercial, or residential uses will not be introduced. Similarly, there is no assurance that the cottonwoods lining both banks of the Arkansas will remain in place and in good health to continue to provide a beautiful backdrop around half the park's perimeter and effectively buffer traffic noise from U.S. 50.

About 150,000 visitors per year can be expected when development is complete. When the fort is fully developed and becomes a well-established stop on vacation tour routes, it seems certain that the incentive to develop visitor accommodations near the historic site will increase significantly. If this sort of development were to proliferate along U.S. 50 or Colorado 194, the resultant visual intrusion would unacceptably compromise the fort's integrity as a "wilderness outpost." It is therefore proposed that certain non-Federal lands near the fort be designated as a historic preservation zone, to be

protected through the purchase of scenic easements or acquisition in fee. Approximately 7 acres of this land are State owned, and could possibly be preserved through a memorandum of agreement.

COOPERATIVE MEASURES

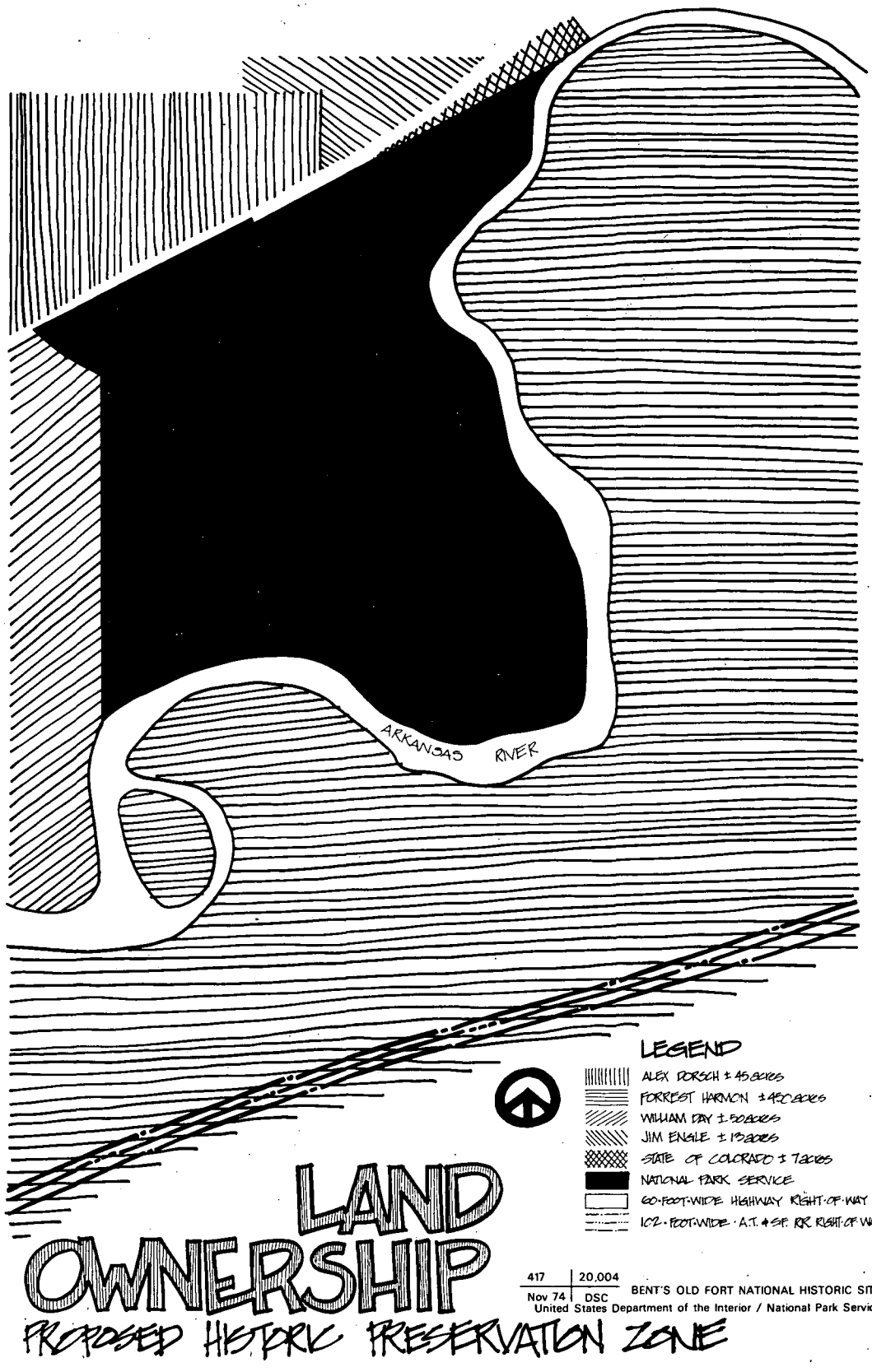
To further strengthen the future integrity of the reconstructed fort, certain agreements with other agencies will be essential. Perhaps the most critical need in this regard relates to both the positive and negative influence of the site's most notable natural asset — the Arkansas River. The Arkansas has threatened the fort with flood waters more than once. Yet, when it was proposed to channelize the river in the vicinity of the fort, historians reacted with an outcry. It seems apparent that the National Park Service and the Corps of Engineers need to agree on means of ensuring the protection of both the fort and the quasi-historic flow of the Arkansas through the site, subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Executive Order 11593, and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

A great deal of effort will be expended in the future to make the visitor to Bent's Fort feel as though he has stepped back in time: the reconstructed fort, period furnishings, costumed interpreters, special programs, and absense of 20th-century artifacts will all combine to create a great illusion. But how easily that carefully constructed illusion could be shattered by a screaming jet aircraft a thousand feet overhead! Today, military planes frequently intrude upon the site in this way — they must not in the future. Flight levels and patterns in the vicinity of the site must be strictly regulated to assure that the eagle and the hawk are the fort's only free-flying aerial distractions.

Finally, Park Service managers must maintain relationships with State and local governments to encourage the continuance of surrounding land uses that are compatible with the fort's historic setting.

LAND CLASSIFICATION

In compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, all lands included within Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The entire site will be managed as a historical (class VI) area of the National Park System, in accordance with Park Service administrative policies for such areas.

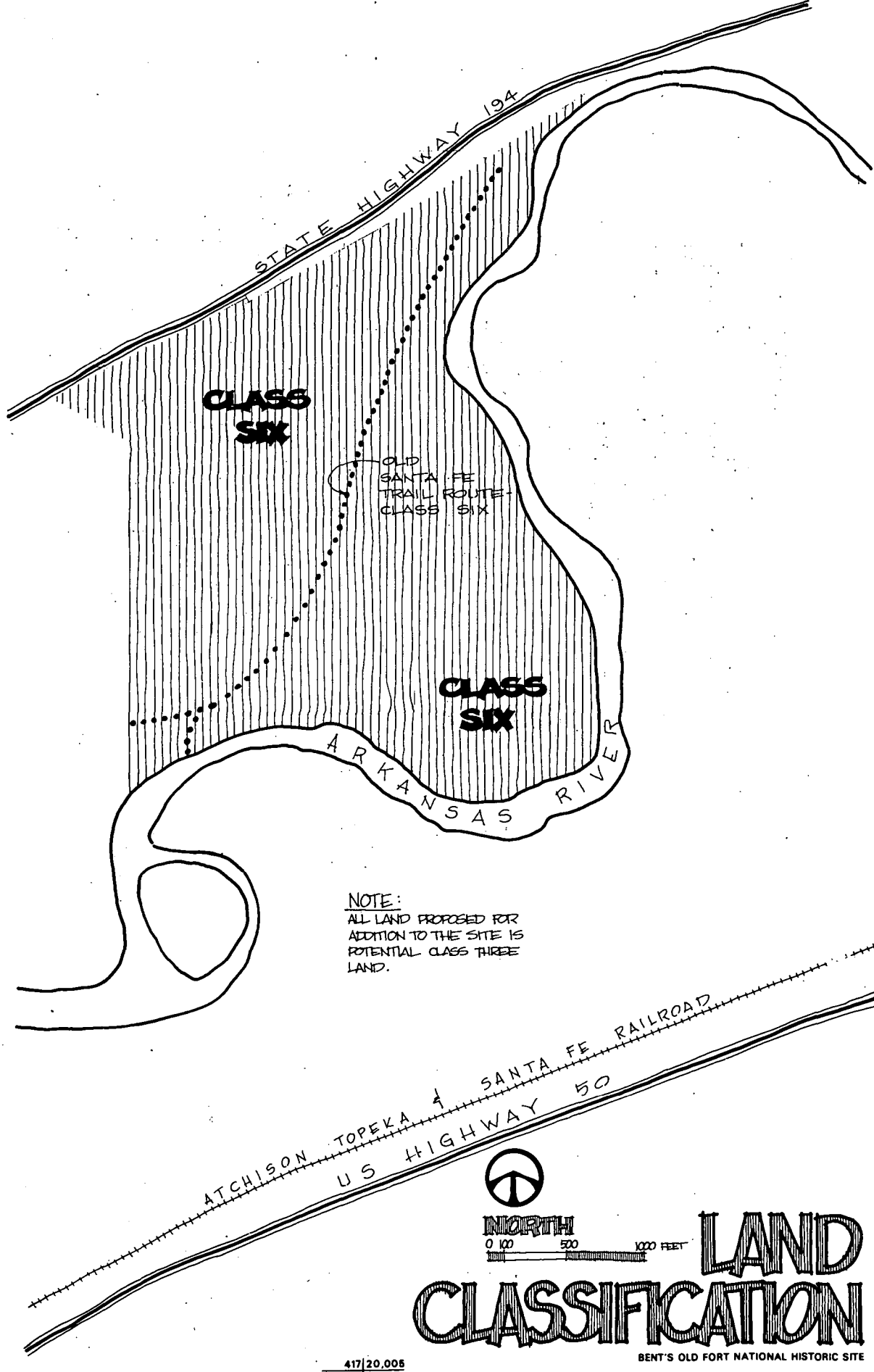


LAND OWNERSHIP

PROPOSED HISTORIC PRESERVATION ZONE

417	20,004
Nov 74	DSC

BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service



LAND CLASSIFICATION

BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

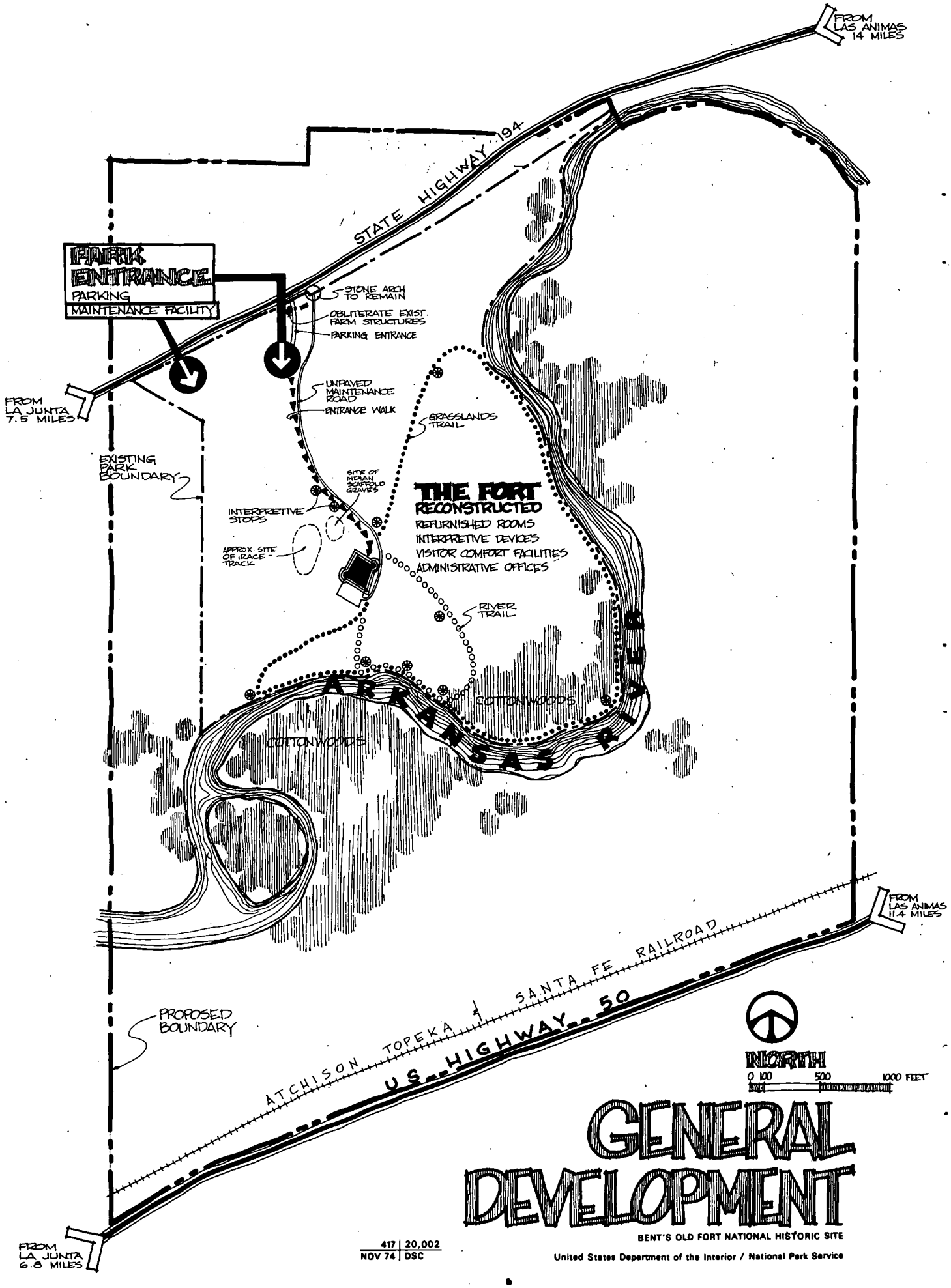
417|20,005
NOV 74|DSC

DEVELOPMENT: CREATING A TRANSITIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Bent's Old Fort will be reconstructed as completely and accurately as possible to its 1840 appearance. The reconstructed fort should stand stark and lonely on the plain — alive, but isolated and austere — in order to recreate the historic feeling of the fort's providing the first and last haven between Independence and Santa Fe. Accordingly, the National Park Service will plant only a minimum of contemporary development on the historic site.

In the future, visitors and park employees arriving at Bent's Fort will leave their cars in a peripheral parking area near the historic Santa Fe Trail, and walk that trail ¼ mile to the fort's gate. Because the parking area, which will eventually accommodate 100 cars, will be situated in a topographic depression, visitors can leave it and the rest of the modern world behind as they cross over an intervening swell in the prairie and see the fort for the first time, as it looms up before them.

An emergency phone will be situated at the parking area trailhead to provide direct communications with personnel inside the fort. Also, the low-standard road along the old stage route will be maintained to allow emergency and necessary maintenance vehicles to drive up to the fort, but this road will normally be blocked by a locked gate, and only in exceptional cases will anyone be allowed to enter it. Those occasional vehicles that are parked inside the reconstructed compound will be hidden from view in the corral.



GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

417 | 20,002
NOV 74 | DSC

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

Thus, although the fort will be accessible in reality, it will be isolated in appearance.

Outside the reconstructed fort walls, the only additional development will be trails and related interpretive signs. The primary entrance trail from the parking area should be considered an interpretive approach, imparting to the visitor a strong impression of the fort's historic environment and isolation. It will be designed to join the 1881 stage road, and to pass within viewing distance of the probable site of the old racetrack, the Edward Dorris grave, and the Santa Fe Trail ruts. Small wayside signs will interpret the stage road, racetrack, graveyard, and ruts, briefly explaining these features and artistically depicting them in historic times, when appropriate. These signs will be designed to hug the ground so that they will intrude as little as possible upon the vista.

Two loop trails will be developed to take visitors on self-guiding walks from the fort to the Arkansas River and along the Santa Fe Trail. The trails will probably need to be stabilized in some fashion (hopefully not asphalted), and appropriate stops will be designated in their paths, perhaps by limestone flags carved to indicate the point of interest. Because the trails are calculated to encourage contemplation as well as to provide information, seating will be provided at some stops — but only where it can be made from natural materials that will not interfere with the scene. On the riverbank, a downed tree can be planed to form a bench, or a chunk of limestone can be smoothed and shaped on top to make a seat; but no seating will be placed in prairie environments.

All of the farm buildings now situated at the park entrance will be obliterated. The stone arch erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution to mark the entrance may be maintained for the time being, as a monument to their important contribution to the preservation of the site. Whether the arch remains or not, a new entrance sign will be needed to proclaim the park's name, cite the time period of its ascendancy (1833-1849), and suggest its historic character by a phrase such as "Trading Post on the Santa Fe Trail" — and, of course, to designate the park as a unit of the National Park System, within the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. The sign's designers should consider the possibility of also incorporating the bronze DAR plaque that is now part of the arch.

Obviously, managing the fort for public use will require service by modern utility systems, which must be carefully designed and placed. Power and telephone lines will be buried. Because of the fort's close proximity to the river, the sewage-disposal system will be designed to carry waste materials out of the park, or to its periphery, for processing.

INTERPRETATION: TELLING THE STORY

THE RECONSTRUCTED FORT

A completely and accurately reconstructed Bent's Old Fort will provide the touchstone for interpretive development: a re-created setting to be respected, reflected, and revitalized by the interpreter's devices. Important rooms in the fort will be authentically refurnished and "lived in" to convey the quality of life and the character of the people who populated the fort at its zenith, while other rooms will be used for the presentation of audiovisual programs created to carry the burden of interpreting the fort's history and significance. The fort's many small rooms will provide a splendid opportunity for in-depth treatment of the many facets of the fort's highly complex story by allowing six audiovisual programs, rather than just one, to be shown. Such treatment will also create a variety of experiences and permit the pleasure of their unexpected encounter.

Certain portions of the reconstructed fort have also been reserved for administrative use and visitor comfort.

Visitors will ordinarily tour Bent's Fort on a self-guiding basis, using the park minifolder as a source of information about what is where and when it occurs. As they pass through the main gate, visitors can help themselves to the folder, which can be displayed in a rack on the passage wall or in a stand situated in the center of the passage. Personnel will not be required at this station; questions and confusion can be handled by interpretive personnel on duty throughout the fort.

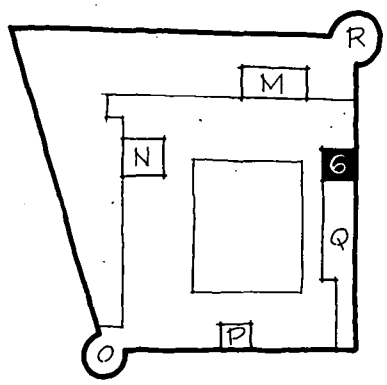
THE AUDIOVISUAL PROGRAMS

In six of the fort's rooms, six different short audiovisual programs will treat the six subject areas important to comprehending the history and significance of the fort:

The Bent, St. Vrain and Company Trading Operation. This program, the primary theme-piece, should tie together all of the other programs and the reconstructed fort by explaining the three-cornered-trade structure of the Bent and St. Vrain enterprise and the role that the fort played in it. It should provide the basic frame of reference for understanding the events, the participants, and the purposes of the whole operation. The partners' involvement in diplomatic and governmental

THE AUDIOVISUAL PROGRAMS

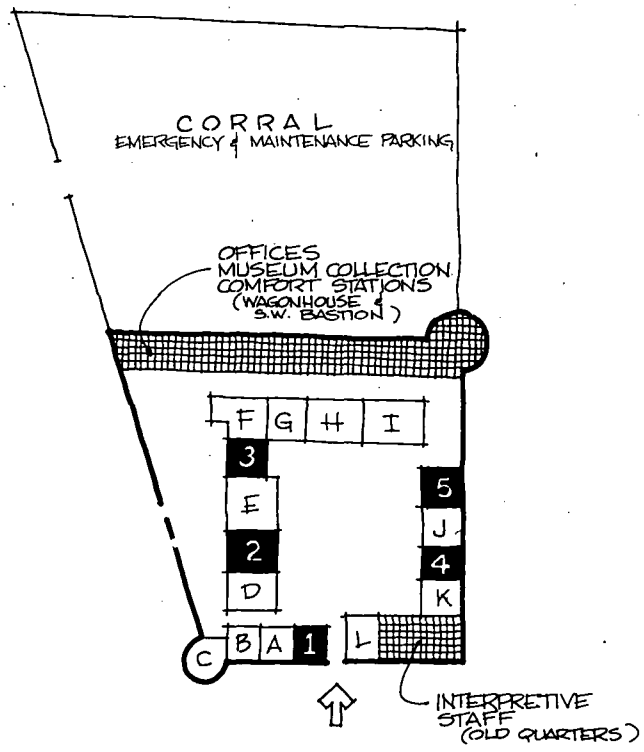
1. THE BENT, ST. VRAIN & CO. (TRADE ROOM)
2. THE SANTA FE TRADE (STORAGE ROOM)
3. THE INDIAN TRADE (COOK'S ROOM)
4. EXPLORATION (STORAGE ROOM)
5. THE MEXICAN WAR (STORAGE ROOM)
6. PERSONALITIES (QUARTERS)



SECOND FLOOR

THE REFURNISHED ROOMS

- A TRADE ROOM
- B TRADE ROOM
- C NORTHEAST BASTION
- D COUNCIL ROOM
- E DINING ROOM
- F KITCHEN
- G BENT'S QUARTERS
- H BLACKSMITH
- I CARPENTER
- J STORAGE ROOM
- K WELL
- L QUARTERS
- M BILLIARD ROOM
- N ST. VRAIN'S QUARTERS (CONJECTURAL)
- O NORTHEAST BASTION
- P WATCH TOWER
- Q QUARTERS
- R SOUTHWEST BASTION



FIRST FLOOR

NOTE:
PLANS ARE NOT TO SCALE.

THE FORT

BENT'S OLD FORT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service

417 | 20,003
NOV 74 | DSC

affairs in Santa Fe, and in relations between Indian tribes, should be strongly suggested, but need not be thoroughly explored. Essentially, then, the program should identify the commercial enterprise carried on from this place, and touch upon the subthemes only enough to introduce them, and to suggest to visitors that there is more to find out about this story.

The Santa Fe Trade. This program should be devoted to describing the history of this unique trade, with particular reference to the motives, activities, and contributions of Bent, St. Vrain and Company. The program can be a fairly definitive piece on the subject, but it should constantly emphasize the Bents' role as it points out the impacts of this trade upon Mexican citizens in the Southwest, the United States' relations with Mexico, the course of the Mexican War, and the ultimate conquest of the Southwest.

The Indian Trade. Again using the partnership as a focus, this program should describe the Indian tribes with whom the Bents did business. It should carefully explain the relationship the partners maintained with these people, and the role they played, both individually and as a business concern, in regulating intertribal affairs and the Indians' conduct in their contacts with other Americans. Furthermore, it should explore the motives of the partnership in establishing such an active role. The other side of this relationship should also be addressed: the Indians' increasing trade dependence and the impact of the trade upon Indian culture. The audience should receive the impression of the ubiquitous presence of Indians at the fort.

Exploration. The subject of the fourth program comes from the fact that, in its early years, Bent's Fort was something of a magnet for both official and unofficial exploration and sightseeing parties out to view and penetrate the West. Among the important figures of exploration who called at the fort were J. W. Abert and John C. Fremont. In those early days, however, every military man who led a party to the fort or beyond, and every trapper or tourist, was an "explorer," whose written or verbal accounts were translated into the maps of the West. Virtually all of these people came at one time or another to Bent's Fort, which served as a kind of clearinghouse for information and a way station for travelers. The program should be developed to point out the importance of such information to the conquest of the Southwest by the Army in 1846, and to its subsequent settlement. Particular attention should be paid to personalities in this piece.

The Mexican War. This country's war of conquest should be extensively treated. The operations of Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West should, of course, have maximum exposure, with the focus on the Army's convergence at the fort prior to its campaign of conquest. But the larger background of the war should also be developed, and a considerable effort should be made to explain the interest of the United States in Mexican territory — to place the war in national and international perspectives regarding politics, economics, diplomacy, and most of all, popular will. An equally strong effort should be made to accurately define the role of the Bent and St. Vrain brothers in the diplomatic maneuverings and actual prosecution of the war.

Personalities. This segment should develop as human beings the major figures associated with the fort. It is not enough to say that the program should provide biographical material about the Bents and St. Vrains, although this it should do. Beyond this, it should also strive to give visitors a clear picture of the men themselves — of their personalities, their relationships with one another, their life views, and their ultimate destinies.

Because of the programs' multiplicity, and the great variety of other activities available for visitors at the fort, there can be some flexibility in the length of time each program runs, and the time factor can be determined in some measure at least by subject-matter requirements. The programs should be activated by the visitors themselves, on a demand basis.

A variety of stylistic approaches should be taken for these programs. Some might be motion-picture films, others sound-slide programs. Some might be in color, some in black and white. Some might employ original art work, others contemporary historic illustrations (of which there are many in these subject areas), while still others might be developed using live actors in speaking or pantomime roles. The point is, there should be variety in the programs so that visitors, instead of suffering from a surfeit of single style, will enjoy an element of surprise in the character of each program, as well as in their unexpected encounter with it. Audiovisual artists should seek the stylistic approach that is most suitable to the subject.

The rooms in which these programs are shown (noted on the floor plan) will be historic in their interior restoration and refurnishing. Seating will, in

all cases, be provided by available furnishings within the historic rooms and will consist of such things as kegs, homemade benches and stools, and piles of buffalo robes.

THE REFURNISHED ROOMS

A substantial amount of refurnishing should be done at Bent's Fort to convey the quality of life there during the historic period, and to provide opportunities for visitor participation in some of its historic activities. The period for refurnishing should be 1845-46, the time just before and including the arrival of the Army of the West at the fort in July 1846. Bent, St. Vrain and Company was at the zenith of its power at this time, both commercially and politically, and the Mexican War represents its climax contribution to the history of our Country. After the war, the fort's history is one of decline.

Rooms to be refurnished (noted on the floor plan) should reflect their historic occupancy and use. The trade rooms, the northeast bastion, the council room, the dining room, the kitchen, Bent's quarters, the blacksmith shop, the carpenter shop, a storage room, the well room (the pump used to draw water was found during archeological investigations), one employee quarters, and the plaza will be refurnished on the ground floor. The billiard room, the row of quarters in which Susan Magoffin stayed, and both bastions and the watchtower over the main gate should be refurnished on the second level.

Every effort should be made to allow visitors to walk freely through the rooms and thoroughly examine their furnishings. Inasmuch as most objects will probably be reproductions, room barriers can be avoided.

The plaza should be equipped with a sound system, over which tape-recorded snatches of authentic period music and background sounds of voices and work can be played sporadically.

In instances where the original foundations have survived, efforts should be made when possible to display and interpret them within the framework of the refurnished structure. The best possibilities for this exist in the well room, the northeast bastion, and the kitchen. The preservation and display of these features will be extremely difficult in view of the fact that the fort is to be reconstructed on site. Reconstruction and historic architects should work cooperatively with exhibit designers to find effective solutions. This endeavor is important not only to the integrity of our reconstruction, but also to the reinforcement of the fact that this fort is a reconstruction — a fact that will need to be made clear in all park publications.

Interpretive personnel will be stationed or circulating throughout the refurnished historic environment, garbed and cast as the following people:

William Bent	Charlotte, the Bent's famous black cook
A clerk for the company	A blacksmith
A Mexican laborer	A carpenter
A Mexican woman	A Southern Cheyenne Indian
A mountain man (free trapper)	

The clerk, blacksmith, carpenter, Indian, and cook will be permanently stationed in the rooms appropriate to their roles, where they will demonstrate the historic activities associated with their skills. Charlotte, for example, should cook and bake, using authentic materials and methods, and producing authentic products such as her famous pumpkin pies, fresh bread, taffy (visitors could pull?), tortillas, pemmican, and French pastries. Bent's Fort was a gourmet stop! The blacksmith and carpenter could combine their talents to repair wagons parked in the plaza, or they could pursue their own special crafts: making furniture, tools, hardware, nails, and ox, horse, and mule shoes. The clerk will staff the trade room, serving at the same time as sales person for park publications and souvenirs, which will be sold to visitors in the historically refurnished sales room setting. The Indian might lounge around the fort walls or gate, play games, race his horse, or shoot a bow and arrow, while serving to introduce visitors to the site. All of these individuals should talk informally with visitors about life at the fort and their own activities and historic functions.

The surrogates for William Bent, the Mexican laborer and his wife, and the mountain man will be circulating interpreters, ranging on both levels of the fort to speak with visitors and provide assistance in a responsive fashion. All may wish to headquarter in some area, and all should have some activity to occupy their time: the Mexican laborer and his wife could work out of one of the employee quarters, he busying himself with repair and maintenance work, and she baking, washing clothes, and sewing; the mountain man could work the fur press and make jerky in the plaza; and Bent could frequent his quarters and the gate, and supervise his personnel. But they should concentrate on circulating freely, and they should be prepared to talk with visitors about the entire story of the fort and its interpretive opportunities, and about matters of practical concern such as other nearby sites of interest, accommodations, and comfort stations. In other words, these four people will provide information and orientation services for the fort's visitors, as well as acting as interpreters. They will, further, be the personnel assigned to guided tours.

Animals should be present in and around the fort to complete the "refurnishing." Horses, chickens, cattle, oxen — all would have been present, plus, almost certainly, domestic animals such as dogs and cats.

THE TRAILS

The River Trail, the shorter route, will be devoted primarily to interpretation of the river's biotic communities, its hydrology, and its geology. Emphasis will be placed upon the historic character of the river, its changes since historic times, its flooding characteristics, and its uses in the 20th century, and upon historic native plants and animals that are still present (beavers work this bank, and cottonwoods grow).

The Grassland Trail will be developed chiefly to permit visitors to walk along the Santa Fe Trail. It will also be designed, however, as a pleasure walk affording exciting vistas of the restored fort. Historic features and associations will dominate interpretation on this trail, but because the route will overlap the River Trail for a short span, some environmental interpretation will be included as well.

Both trails may serve the park's environmental study programs, which will be worked out in cooperation with local schools. The River Trail, currently in the process of nomination as a national environmental study area, may be intensively developed for this purpose.

PUBLICATIONS

Government Publications

Bent's Old Fort is the subject of two Government publications: a large illustrated folder, and a self-guiding-tour folder.

The first should be discontinued in favor of a standard minifolder, to be dispensed free to all park visitors, giving them all the basic information they need to visit the park. Its text should include background information about the site, which could be condensed from material in the large folder, but the greatest portion of its space should be reserved for self-guiding-tour material illustrating the fort's floor plan and suggesting a tour route to guide visitors around the facility. The interpretive uses of the fort's rooms should be identified, as well as their historic character and association.

The tour folder should be completely redone to serve as a guide to both the River and the Grassland Trails. It should contain maps of both trails and textual material related to the trail markers that will be placed at features of interest. The folder should be visually complementary to the historic scene (this does not mean, necessarily, the use of old-timey faces, but has more to do with color, layout, and style of illustration). Whenever possible, quotes from historic witnesses should be used to augment the interpretive text by providing historic perspective and life. Bent's

Fort had a happy number of literate visitors, many of whom left fascinating descriptive passages behind.

A minimum of signs will be used both in the fort and on the trails, so the text of the folders will be extremely important. The trail folder should be developed to communicate the trails' interpretive themes. Illustrations drawn from historic materials should be used abundantly in the folders.

Three publications for the historical handbook series should be planned for the park. The first should be a comprehensive, richly illustrated, relatively scholarly narrative of the history of the Bent, St. Vrain and Company's operation at the fort. This sale publication should be designed for visitors who may wish to investigate the subject more completely and at greater leisure.

The second and third books for this series should be devoted to the fort's subsequent history as an overland stage station (1861-81), and as a facility used by open-range cattlemen (1881-85). Both subjects could be treated in a single publication (*The Later History of Bent's Fort*), but their separation is recommended because specialization is likely to attract a greater number of prospective readers. The Division of Publications should make the final decision in this matter. In either case, it is recommended that the two or three handbooks be designed to be complementary in size, style, and binding, so that they could be acquired as a series, perhaps contained in an attractive slip case.

An administrative history should be prepared and published to document the course of the site's preservation.

Other Publications

A considerable variety of printed material exists in the subject area of Bent's Fort, and even monographic material is becoming less rare. David Lavender's *Bent's Old Fort* is readable, but now dated and subject to criticism by some historians. Volume 1 of Nolie Mumey's *Old Forts and Trading Posts of the West* treats Bent's Fort at some length, and is generally considered to be excellent, but is now, also, somewhat dated by virtue of subsequent research. Robert A. Murray's pamphlet *Citadel on the Santa Fe Trail* is a recent and excellent work, but is general in scope, being designed for popular interests. (As a matter of fact, this publication might be stocked at the park in lieu of a handbook until that series is produced.) The State Historical Society of Colorado has published Jackson Moore's report on the National Park Service archeological project at Bent's Fort, a fairly comprehensive history of the place, narrative in character.

The time may now be ripe for a definitive interpretive history of Bent's Fort. The Office of History and Historic Archeology is urged to evaluate this matter, and to proceed with encouraging the production of a manuscript by a recognized and talented scholar if it sees fit.

A book for children exists, Wyatt Blassingame's *Bent's Fort, Crossroads of the Great West.* It is well illustrated and well written, appealing to elementary-school-age children. A similar publication for young adults should be produced. Also, a game or coloring book would be invaluable in meeting the need for a publication for very young children.

SALES

The trade rooms of Bent's Fort will serve in their historic capacity, as the park's sales area. In this unique environment of an Indian trading post on the Santa Fe Trail, visitors should have the opportunity to purchase from a "clerk of the company" meaningful publications and souvenirs. There should be no line of demarkation between contemporary sales items and historic refurnishings (except that the clerk will not sell the refurnishings!). Some of the material suggested for souvenir sales would be highly complementary to the refurnished room; other material would be frankly 20th century. All sales material should be displayed in a fashion compatible with the historic room, and sales operations should be conducted in historic fashion.

The park currently stocks the following items at its small sales facility: postcards, stationery printed with a view of the fort, seven historical titles related to the park's theme, one volume on natural history of the vicinity, and one children's book. All of these items should continue to be offered.

Stock should be expanded to include all of the publications noted above, together with as many other significant titles as can be accommodated. In selecting such works, preference should be given to eye-witness accounts available in reprint; Philip St. George Cooke's *The Conquest of New Mexico and California,* Lewis Garrard's *Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail,* Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies,* Stella Drumm's *Down the Santa Fe Trail,* and Charles L. Camp's *James Clyman* should all be offered. Few of these books are carried in the average bookstore, and fewer still are to be encountered in most public libraries outside the West. All represent enormously rewarding reading.

A greater variety of postcards might be carried, particularly when the fort has been reconstructed and refurnished. Slides should be added to the offerings then, too, as well as photographic film.

The trading rooms can offer a wide variety of souvenirs other than publications. The list is nearly endless, and need be limited only by interest and discretion. Any or all of the objects produced by the demonstrators in the course of their interpretive work, such as handwrought nails, stools, and beef jerky, can be sold. Other material that would have been for sale by the Bents in these rooms would, most likely, still have considerable appeal: hanks of beads, Green River knives, French hat blanks, clay pipes, canoe knives, iron dutch ovens, crimped tin cups, sheepskins, blankets, and flintlock rifles.

COLLECTIONS

Museum collections at Bent's Fort will consist of the material recovered during the archeological projects, and material acquired for the purpose of refurnishing the reconstruction.

The southeast bastion will serve as the museum collections storage and workroom. It should be supplied with water. The collections will be available for viewing by visitors upon request, but will, in general, be considered study collections for use by scholars and staff.

Archeological material resulting from the National Park Service investigation has been cataloged or evaluated, and assigned field-collection status. It has, for the most part, had appropriate preservation treatment, although some metals present preservation problems, and should be sent to the Museum Lab at Harpers Ferry for further treatment. The lab should consult with the park regarding funding and scheduling.

The entire collection should be maintained at the park, and should be entered on the National Register of Historic Places, as required by law and Park Service policy.

Material resulting from the 1954 archeological project sponsored jointly by the State Historical Society of Colorado and Trinidad State Junior College was divided by the two sponsoring institutions and has been retained by them, half of it at the historical society's headquarters in Denver and half of it at the junior college in Trinidad. National Park Service

archeologists have examined the collection and report that it contains little of importance and has been neither preserved nor cataloged. If offered, the material should be accepted by the National Park Service, housed at the park, selectively cataloged and preserved, and protected by entry on the National Register of Historic Places.

Remains of the original fort foundations will be largely lost when the reconstruction is completed (although some will be preserved in situ). Architects and curators should cooperate to salvage and preserve significant elements of the original fort, when possible, prior to reconstruction. One or two of the limestone column supports around the plaza could be lifted out and given preservation treatment; sections of the original adobe could be similarly saved and added to the park collections.

Objects for the refurnished rooms should be acquired only after completion of appropriate furnishing plans. Most material will be reproduction, and perishable items such as fabrics and furs should be acquired in duplicate, as recommended by the Branch of Museum Operations. All refurnishing material should be cataloged.

No museum objects should be acquired that relate to the fort's post-Bent period. The park has been storing a Concord coach, the property of the city of La Junta, which was once used by the Overland Mail and Express Company on a run between Atchison, Kansas, and Denver, Colorado. The specimen is a fine one, and it relates, if only by association, to one of the later chapters in the fort's history. This is not, however, sufficient justification to add it to the park collection. The coach would have no use in the interpretive program except, perhaps, on special occasions. The park should continue to cooperate with the city by encouraging and assisting in the coach's preservation and by providing storage as long as convenient.

Collections of natural history materials may be made as appropriate or needed by the environmental study program. Such collections need not be considered permanent, and need not be cataloged unless the park staff so desires.

Bent's Fort has a small working research library and photographic file. These should be maintained at the park, and expanded as needed by the interpretive staff. The picture file is well organized and cataloged, and needs only to be kept current. The small library needs to be cataloged, and it is recommended that the park explore the possibility of securing professional assistance for this project from the local public or junior-college library staff.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND TOURS

Guided tours will be offered at Bent's Fort on a reservation basis for school groups and other special parties – anyone who wants one, in fact. The four circulating interpreters (William Bent, the mountain man, the Mexican laborer and his wife) will ordinarily conduct these tours.

School tours should be emphasized at the park. The park staff is urged to work cooperatively with the boards of education of the various nearby communities to ensure that school children have the opportunity to visit the fort, have adequate pre-visit orientation, and come at a time when the fort's history can make a meaningful contribution to their academic programs.

The opportunities for special programs at the reconstructed fort are enormous. While there will be no large formal amphitheaters, none are needed. The land lends itself beautifully to informal gatherings of large groups of people: while summer days can be hot, summer evenings are often cool; temporary platforms and grandstands can be set up with ease; the fort plaza will provide a delightful situation for small group programs, and the large corral could accommodate larger groups. Architects should keep the desirability of using these areas in this fashion in mind when designing utilities; power should be readily available for audiovisual use throughout the reconstruction.

Suitable dates for special programs that would interest both visitors from afar and the local community are as follows: June 3, the date of the park's establishment; August 25, the date of establishment of the National Park Service; July 4, a day that was vigorously celebrated in historic times at the fort; September 1, the date the Becknell train embarked upon the first journey over what was to become the Santa Fe Trail, and also the date on which stage coach service through Bent's Fort was discontinued; and July 28-30, the dates on which the Army of the West reached Bent's Fort. The list could go on. The point is that many, many occasions associated with the history of the fort can provide interesting themes for special programs.

Types of special programs that might be undertaken are equally varied. The park could participate with local organizations in undertaking some of these, while others might be generated entirely by the Park Service. The historic racetrack could be reactivated for informal racing contests in the tradition of the races held there in historic times; horseback or wagon caravans could ride sections of the Santa Fe Trail; nearby Army units might be involved in programs commemorating the Army of the West; La Junta's famous Explorer Scout Troop, the Koshare Indian Dancers, could present programs in the plaza;

Indian festivals and craft fairs could be worked out with the appropriate tribes, most of which now live in Oklahoma (their camps used to be situated near the fort with regularity, and could be again); La Junta's Mexican community, perhaps, has groups or individuals with talents and skills typical of their culture who should be asked to develop programs reflecting their people's role in the history of the fort; and then, of course, the staff itself could organize film festivals in the large corral. Smaller evening programs of music or lectures (on the fort's history and its collections) could take place in the plaza, and evening lantern tours of the facility would be extremely effective.

As usual, the opportunities for the park to serve its visitors and neighbors in this fashion need be limited only by staff time and enthusiasm.

RESEARCH

Exhaustive archeological research has been completed on the site of Bent's Fort. Other areas of the park have been investigated and found archeologically sterile, while yet other zones remain to be surveyed. Jackson Moore's archeological report is completed, and an archeological status map should be programmed to provide guidance for future planning and development.

Former Park Service historian Dwight Stinson has completed major portions of the historic structure report, but this work should be reviewed to ensure that it is sufficiently complete to permit development of construction drawings.

Furnishing plans will be required for those portions of the fort that are to be refurnished. These should be done concurrently with construction drawings, and the drawings should not be completed or approved until the furnishing plans have been completed.

The park should submit forms to secure a historical research management plan. This document will survey all available research material for the fort and its history, will evaluate gaps, and make recommendations for projects to fill them. The historian undertaking this plan is urged to give particular attention to one project: that which would resolve the matter of the Bent's involvement in diplomatic or undercover activities associated with interests of the United States Government prior to the Mexican War.

Before grounds restoration occurs, a historic landscape study should be undertaken to analyze how the grounds surrounding the fort appeared in 1840.

APPENDIXES

A: MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

B: LEGISLATION

C: PLANNING TEAM

A: MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The following management objectives were prepared by the manager of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site to state park management's needs and goals relative to this master plan.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT

Staffing will be carried out consistent with the objectives generated by the park's master plan and interpretive prospectus.

Existing employee housing will be removed from the park. When personnel are no longer in residence, regularly employed guards and alarm systems will be used to protect the fort.

Wastewater will be treated and disposed of on site. Solid waste will be disposed of outside the park boundary, through a cooperative agreement with adjoining communities.

A cooperating association outlet will continue to make publications and other educational materials available to the public.

Good relations with the townspeople and the historical societies of La Junta and Las Animas will continue to be fostered and maintained, because these citizens played an important role in the park's establishment and retain a personal interest in its development.

Professional building fire-protection will be provided by the city of La Junta, a community situated 8 miles west of the historic site. An effective alarm system will be installed in the reconstructed fort.

The boundary of the area will be adjusted to secure control over both sides of the river and to prevent probable commercial development on the north side of Colorado 194.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Prior to further development, a cultural resource inventory and an assessment (archeological survey) will be implemented for all areas not previously evaluated.

Development for any purpose will be preceded by exhaustive archeological investigations when it involves locations not yet fully explored.

Artifacts recovered from the archeological excavation will be preserved for future display and study.

A historic resources management plan will be prepared to guide vegetation management aimed at reestablishing conditions similar to those that prevailed 130 years ago. This management will include controlling or removing post-period exotic species.

Livestock typical of the historic period will be reintroduced to the scene.

VISITOR USE

The historic fort will be reconstructed as authentically as possible, and it will be displayed and used as a historic structure. The reconstructed fort will serve as the visitor center.

Following reconstruction of the fort, interpretation services should center around living history demonstrations employing interpreters in period dress.

The history of this region is the main interpretive theme. The reconstructed fort will be the primary medium for communicating this story, and its programs will be developed to present a broad understanding of the Bent firm's activities in the West and their contributions to national expansion, frontier settlement, culture, and growth. Interpretive subthemes include the following:

The fort's importance in the western fur trade.

The Santa Fe Trail commerce with Spanish settlements of the Rio Grande Basin and Old Mexico.

The position and use of the fort as an outpost of American influence on the north bank of the Arkansas River, on the very border of Mexico during the Mexican War.

Relations with the southern plains Indians.

The march of Kearny's Army of the West to the Rio Grande and the conquest of New Mexico and California.

Minor themes for interpretation will involve ecological relationships and the environmental influences exerted upon the fort today and in the past.

B: LEGISLATION

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

Establishment authorized.....Act of June 3, 1960

An Act Authorizing the establishment of a national historic site at Bent's Old Fort, near La Junta, Colorado, approved June 3, 1960 (74 Stat. 155)

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Secretary of the Interior shall acquire on behalf of the United States, by gift, purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, such lands, interests therein and improvements thereon, as the Secretary may deem necessary for the purpose of establishing a national historic site at the site of Bent's Old Fort on the Old Santa Fe Trail, located in Otero County, Colorado, approximately seven miles east of La Junta, north of the Arkansas River.

SEC. 2. (a) The property acquired under the provisions of the first section of this Act shall be designated as the Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site and shall be set aside as a public national memorial to commemorate the historic role played by such fort in the opening of the West. The National Park Service, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, shall administer, protect, and develop such monument, subject to the provisions of the Act entitled "An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes", approved August 25, 1916, as amended and supplemented, and the Act entitled "An Act to provide for the preservation of historic American sites, buildings, objects, and antiquities of national significance, and for other purposes", approved August 21, 1935, as amended.

39 Stat. 535. 16 U.S.C. 1 *et seq.* 49 Stat. 666. 16 U.S.C. 461–467.

(b) In order to provide for the proper development and maintenance of such national historic site, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to construct and maintain therein such markers, buildings, and other improvements, and such facilities for the care and accommodation of visitors, as he may deem necessary.

Appropriation.

SEC. 3. There are hereby authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act. (See 16 U.S.C. § 461 note [Supp. II].)

C: PLANNING TEAM

Doug Nadeau, Team Captain
Denver Service Center

Phil Dittberner, Environmental Specialist
Denver Service Center

Nan Rickey, Interpretive Planner
Denver Service Center

John Patterson, Manager
Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

Publication services were provided by the graphics and editorial staffs of the Denver Service Center. NPS 828