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Bent's Old Fort

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Fort Bent Was Stopping Point for Famed Pioneers of the West

Pueblo Chieftain

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Ft. Bent Was Stopping Point For Famed Pioneers Of West

Although much has been written about the history of Bent's Fort, it seems a shame that Col. William Bent did not keep a register of the men who worked for him and of the traders and guests who stopped to partake of the hospitality and protection of the fort.

Designed by Charles Bent, brother of William, the fort was built at the expense of the Bent, St. Vrain Co. about 10 miles east of present-day La Junta on the north bank of the Arkansas River sometime between 1829 and 1832. Named in honor of William, overseer of the fort and later resident-manager for the company, it remained there until 1849 when it was destroyed by William, who then had acquired full ownership of the company. It was moved down the river about 40 miles east to the Big Timber area, and built of stone on the site that old Chief Yellow Wolf of the Cheyenne Indians originally had advised the Bents' and St. Vrain to build.

Had a register been kept, a book would reveal the signatures of important men in the history of the West. First would have been Charles Bent, whose foresight influenced the building of the fort. He became the first military governor of the New Mexico territory after

the campaign of Stephen Watts Kearney, was murdered by a mis-guided group of inebriates in Taos, N. M., and was a great-uncle of Montana's famous cowboy artist, Charles Russell.

KIT CARSON THERE

On the register would be Bent's brother-in-law, Col. Kit Carson, whose fame need not be explained to Coloradoans. By coincidence, Col. Carson's obituary in The Pueblo Chieftain preceded that of William Bent's by almost an exact year; Carson, May of 1868 and Bent, May, 1869.

Names of William Larimer and son would appear. They stopped over on their journey to present-day Denver. Dr. Marcus Whitman, famous missionary and physician who had been compelled to travel far to the south to avoid danger from the rampaging Sioux, stopped at the fort on his way east to save his mission. Among the trappers and traders would have been Richard Lacy (Uncle Dick) Wotton, who had come west as a young man with a Bent, St. Vrain Co. convoy, and William S. (Old Bill) Williams, who is said to have severely beaten James Beckwourth for cheating the Indians on a fur trade. From the army would be Kearny, William Gilpin, John

Charles (Pathfinder) Fremont, who blamed Williams for losing a Fremont party in the high Rockies, and Lancaster P. Lupton, who left the Army and founded Fort Lupton. Also, John Gunnison, whose name was taken for a Colorado city, county and river, and Lucien Maxwell who married the daughter of Carlos Beaubien. Maxwell proved title to the Beaubien-Miranda land grant in the U. S. Supreme Court, and sued by the children of Charles Bent for the one-sixth share Bent claimed of the grant.

Friends of William Bent were Charles Goodnight, John Evans and Thomas Fitzpatrick, the first Indian agent in the Arkansas Valley and one of the most honest of all.

Had a register been kept, it would have been invaluable if only for the signatures of those famous men. Not as invaluable, however, as were Charles and William Bent to the Arkansas Valley. William Bent's ideas, ambitions and desires for the future of the Indians, had they been followed by the Federal Government, would have made the Indians a self-sustaining and independent agricultural group at least 70 years ahead of the time that the Government did attempt to remove them from Federal wardship.