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Making History: Reconstructing Historic Structures in the National Park System

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**MAKING HISTORY:
RECONSTRUCTING HISTORIC STRUCTURES IN THE
NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM**

Michael James Kelleher

A THESIS


in

Historic Preservation


**Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

MASTER OF SCIENCE

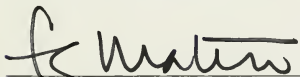
1998



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Introduction

In 1992, the United States Congress authorized the addition of Manzanar National Historic Site to the National Park System. The site of a Japanese internment camp during the Second World War, Manzanar is clearly historically significant, but as a historic site that will be visited by large numbers of people, this area in the California desert offers few remains of what was a temporary facility. The many barracks in which the Japanese internees lived were all removed in 1945, leaving only their foundations. As the central physical element of the historic internment camp, would it be appropriate to reconstruct one of the barracks for the purpose of interpreting Manzanar to the public?

Questions such as this led me to examine the issue of reconstructing non-extant historic structures in the National Park System. It was quite surprising to find out the extent to which the National Park Service has been involved in reconstruction, although the agency does not have any reliable number or list of the reconstructions under its care. Going deeper into this project, I realized that the Park Service's early experience with reconstructions has been fairly well documented, particularly by Charles Hosmer and Dwight Pitcaithley. What remained relatively unexamined was the recent period from the 1960s to the present, in which this agency was involved in quite a few major reconstruction projects. This would seem to imply that the Park Service continued to be relatively open to the use of reconstructions, as it was in the 1930s when such projects were often referred to as "restorations." However, it also appeared there were a number of people within the agency who felt that reconstruction is an inappropriate treatment for historic sites, and is not even a true form of historic preservation. What then did the Park

Service's recent experience with reconstructions mean? Was the agency still operating as if the Colonial Williamsburg model, which included and indeed embraced restorations and reconstructions, was the norm? Or, had its staff come to reflect the wider field of historic preservation, in which reconstruction is increasingly seen as an inappropriate treatment for historic resources?

To gain an understanding of the Park Service's recent experience with reconstructions, I examined the agency's planning documents and internal correspondence related to this topic, as well as articles and books written by its staff. In addition, I have been fortunate to receive assistance from several current and former Park Service officials, David Hollenberg, Barry Mackintosh, Richard Sellars, Robert Utley, and Rodd Wheaton. I am grateful for their opinions on the reconstruction issue, as well as their advice on how to approach this topic.

Why Reconstruct? Interpretation and Historic Sites in the National Park System

Why reconstruct a building that once stood but not longer does? Why destroy the last authentic remains of a historic structure, in order to construct a modern facsimile of it? For the National Park Service, the answers stem from its experience with historic sites, much of which not been solely about preserving historic resources, but also educating the public about American history. According to Park Service Bureau Historian Barry Mackintosh, who has spent over twenty years dealing with the agency's history and preservation policy, the

basic rationale for the Service's involvement with historical areas has been interpretation, not preservation. Historical areas have typically been added to the national park system not from a desire to preserve intrinsically valuable resources, but to communicate various aspects of America's past to the public. The preservation of their resources is usually a means to this end rather than an end in itself.¹

If historic sites in the National Park System are valued more for their interpretive potential than the importance of the resources they contain, it is easy to understand why the Park Service has been willing to actually destroy authentic historic resources in order to carry out a reconstruction. After all, a few foundation walls are often difficult for the public to understand and do not tell as compelling a story as an intact structure, even if it is only a modern one made to look old. This also explains why sites that have hardly any historic resources to speak of have been added to the National Park System, because if such sites were scenes of important events or are associated with significant aspects of American history, they represent opportunities to tell these stories. To facilitate the

¹ Barry Mackintosh, "Interpretation: A Tool for NPS Expansion," (unpublished manuscript, 1991), 3, personal files of Barry Mackintosh, National Park Service (hereafter Files-BM).

created with such educational and inspirational goals, and where numerous restorations and reconstructions were carried out to assist this interpretive function. When the Park Service became the federal government's primary manager of historic sites in the 1930s, it based its preservation practices largely on those established by Colonial Williamsburg, and added new historic sites to the National Park System that would inspire and educate the public about certain aspects of American history. The historian John Bodnar has written of this approach to historic preservation, in which "education and inspiration could be best achieved through a selective or symbolic presentation of the past. Thus, each site within the system would have to carry an important thematic burden if visitors were to be properly impressed. This was more than simple preservation...."³

This approach to the Park Service's management of historic sites was formalized with the creation of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings in 1935, which identified sites for possible inclusion in the National Park System. Under this system, historic sites were seen as possible additions to the system if they would help interpret important themes such as founding the republic or building a new nation. Interrupted by World War II, this survey was carried out again in 1959 with a particular emphasis on westward expansion, which was thought to be under represented in the National Park System. As a result, several western fort sites came under consideration, even though

systems of roads to give visitors access to natural features, as examples. See Richard W. Sellars *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

³ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 177. On the influence of Colonial Williamsburg, see: Charles Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949, Volume 1* (Charlottesville: University Of Virginia Press, 1981); and Dwight Pitcaithley, "Pious Frauds: Federal Reconstruction Efforts During the 1930s" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, St. Louis, Missouri, 1989), Files-BM.

there was little left of what were originally built to be temporary structures. In the case of Bent's Old Fort, Colorado, or Fort Union Trading Post on the border of North Dakota and Montana, the only remains of these historic structures were below grade foundations, with little for visitors to see or the Park Service to preserve. However, because these forts played important roles in the history of the American west, they were considered good interpretive opportunities for the Park Service to build museums, or even reconstruct the forts. This approach to adding historic sites to the National Park System continued after the survey of 1959, and was the basis of the National Park Service Plan of 1972 and the National Park Service Thematic Framework of 1994. Both identified thematic areas of American history that should be represented by sites in the National Park System, thereby allowing the Park Service to identify sites that should be acquired so a fuller historical picture could be conveyed to the public. These new plans reflected a broader concept of American history, often referred to as the "new social history," taking into account issues of race, class, and gender, and moved away from the traditional approach that focused on nation building, westward expansion, and military engagements. However, even with this broader focus, by delineating historical themes that should be represented in the National Park System, historic sites were still primarily tools for interpretation rather than historic resources that should be preserved.⁴

⁴ See: Bodnar, 181; Ronald A. Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers* (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future, 1984), 130-131, 136-148; Hosmer, 529, 545; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 610-611; and Barry Mackintosh, "The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation," *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 53-54.

With a focus on interpretation at its historic sites, the Park Service has actively engaged in restoring and reconstructing historic structures for interpretive purposes. Although these are related treatments for historic resources, and in certain situations the line between them is sometimes unclear, reconstruction is usually viewed as more extreme and intrusive. This is reflected in the standard on restoration and reconstruction adopted by the Park Service in 1937, which said: "Better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than reconstruct." Despite this sentiment, in the 1930s, which was probably the most active period for developing of historic sites in the National Park System, the agency undertook a number of extensive "restoration" projects that often involved a good deal of reconstruction. In fact, the frequency with which Park Service officials have used variations on the term "restore" to describe what would more fittingly be called reconstructions, is rather troubling, because at times it demonstrates a failure to fully recognize the extreme nature of these projects. Actual historic resources are restored, whereas reconstruction means new construction. Although in some instances a restoration may involve so much new material that it may border on reconstruction, many of the Park Service projects that have been called restorations involved no original material, and were entirely new construction.⁵

Park Service reconstruction projects carried out in the 1930s, often with the assistance of labor supplied by the Depression era public works programs, included the reconstruction of earthworks on the Yorktown battlefield in Virginia, huts at the Revolutionary War encampment of Morristown, New Jersey, industrial structures at the

village of Hopewell, Pennsylvania, a ceremonial chamber inside an Indian earth mound at Ocmulgee National Monument, Georgia, and ceremonial Indian kivas at Aztec and Bandelier national monuments in New Mexico. Perhaps the most significant reconstruction of the period, Wakefield, George Washington's birthplace in Virginia, was not carried out by the Park Service, but was turned over to this agency soon after its completion by a private group, which, it was soon learned, constructed the new building on the wrong site and at the wrong scale. With the exception of Wakefield, most reconstructions during this period were relatively small or medium sized features within larger historic sites, but they still drew the ire of critics who used terms such as "illusion," "artificial and unreal," and "pious frauds" to describe them.⁶

This unease with reconstructions led to the adoption of the "better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than reconstruct" standard, but the number of reconstructions and heavy-handed restorations carried out in the 1930s attests to the Park Service's conflicting desire for the most effective interpretation possible. One document from this period, *Park and Recreation Structures*, written by architect Albert Good and published by the Park Service in 1938, demonstrates this conflict. Good understood the educational and inspirational benefits of reconstructions, and wrote: "There is substance to inspire solemn retrospection in the reconstructed hospital and huts that were soldiers' barracks at Morristown in the War of the Revolution." He also

⁵ Quoted in Albert H. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures* (1938; reprint, Boulder, Colorado: Graybooks, 1990), 187.

⁶ Quoted in Hosmer, 598, 953. On reconstructions in the 1930s, see: Hosmer *Preservation Comes of Age*, volumes 1 and 2; Pitcaithley, "Pious Frauds: Federal Reconstruction Efforts During the 1930s;" and John C. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933-1942: An Administrative History* (National Park Service, 1985), 110-116.

believed that restorations and reconstructions staffed with living history actors “achieve reality and vitality by reason of careful attention to every detail in surroundings and furnishings....[and] minutiae of the period highlight the illusion.” Such historical displays had the effect of “bringing authenticity to something out of the past” and stimulating an “interest in history.” However, Good recognized the danger that reconstruction and restoration often improve on history and made things appear “more glamorous” than they actually were. More importantly, he believed that in many cases, preserving meager but authentic ruins could be more important than restoration and reconstruction, as “misguided efforts in so-called restoration have forever lost to us much that was authentic, if crumbling....[while] the faint shadow of the genuine often makes more intelligent appeal to the imagination than the crass and visionary replica.” It was this recognition of both the positive and negative aspects of restorations and reconstructions that led the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments to recommend, and the Park Service to adopt, relatively loose standards on these treatments that said: “In attempting to reconcile these claims and motives, the ultimate guide must be the tact and judgement of the men in charge.”⁷

Despite the often high professional capabilities of the people in charge of determining the treatment of historic resources in the National Park System, interpretation often won out over preservation and the Park Service has been involved in a number of restorations and reconstructions that involved the manipulation and destruction of authentic historic fabric. Examples abound, including the wholesale

⁷ Good, 185-187.

demolition of entire city blocks in downtown Philadelphia in the 1950s to remove nineteenth century buildings thought not to contribute to the eighteenth century interpretive focus of Independence National Historical Park, only to be followed by the reconstruction of a number of eighteenth century buildings. Similarly, in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, where John Brown led his famous raid in 1859, numerous buildings have been destroyed while others have been altered in what were often called restorations, but which involved the removal and replacement of so much original fabric with new construction that many such projects were actually reconstructions.

This cycle of destruction and reconstruction occurred in Philadelphia and Harper Ferry from the 1950s through the 1970s. However, both historic sites demonstrated a change in the approach to historic preservation that included reconstruction as an appropriate treatment. At Independence National Historical Park, a proposal to reconstruct Benjamin Franklin's house was rejected in 1969, after it was determined there was not sufficient information on the appearance of the structure to insure a reasonably accurate facsimile. Such a level of information had become a requirement for the Park Service in 1968, when the agency first replaced the "better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than reconstruct" standard with a more specific policy requiring that reconstructions only be "authorized" when the following conditions are satisfied:

- (a) All or almost all traces of a structure have disappeared and its recreation is essential for public understanding and appreciation of the historical associations for which the park was established.
- (b) Sufficient historical, archaeological, and architectural data exist to permit an accurate reproduction.

(c) The structure can be erected on the original site or in a setting appropriate to the significance of the area, as in a pioneer community or living farm, where exact site of structures may be identifiable through research.⁸

Because these new policies had denied the opportunity to reconstruct Franklin's house, which was the type of interpretive display often favored by the Park Service, there was grumbling by officials involved with this project that they were too "hard-and-fast," thereby removing the opportunity for those involved to exercise their own "judgement." As a result, there would be less of an opportunity to consider reconstruction for historic sites that had important "interpretive or aesthetic value." In response, Ernest Connally, Chief of the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, said that this was indeed the intent of these policies, and they should "be made even firmer, to prevent any possible misinterpretation by someone eager to reconstruct a vanished historic structure."⁹

Despite these new policies, in the 1970s four structures adjacent to the site of Franklin's house were reconstructed, which involved the complete removal of the nineteenth century facades of these buildings, and their replacement with reconstructed eighteenth century facades. However, because the eighteenth century party walls between these connected structures were left intact, this was considered a "restoration." At Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the Park Service was involved with a similar

⁸ National Park Service, *Compilation of the Administrative Policies of the Administrative Policies of the Historical Areas of the National Park System*, (Washington, D.C.: 1968), 23.

⁹ Chief, Division of Historic Architecture, to the Chief, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, October 13, 1969, Independence National Historical Park file, Park History Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Independence-PH); Members, Special Committee on Historic Preservation, to the Director, November 4, 1969, Independence-PH; Chief, Office of Archaeology

project when the “restoration” of several buildings back to their appearance during the period 1859 to 1865 led to major changes to the historic fabric of the town, including the nearly complete demolition of three buildings and their subsequent reconstruction. However, unlike the situation in Philadelphia, after a review of the Harper Ferry project it was noted that this “had been predicated on earlier (1960s) decisions to restore them,” which was a possible violation of agency policy in the 1970s. The individual making a report on this review, historical architect Hugh Miller, stated: “It is not generally felt that this severe intervention was necessary to preserve the basic qualities of Harpers Ferry and the reconstruction of these buildings was in contradiction of current philosophies for preservation of the historic fabric of historic buildings and ambience of historic sites.” It was therefore recommended that the park redefine the “preservation needs of the resource” and assure that any future interpretive related development “be strongly oriented towards preservation.”¹⁰

The comments regarding the more restrictive use of reconstructions in the National Park System suggests that by the 1970s, the Park Service had undergone a change of opinion, as well as policy, on these interpretive tools. Although reconstructions were officially frowned upon as early as the 1930s, they continued to be used to carry out the interpretive goals of the Park Service. As was the case at Harpers Ferry, this included “restorations” that were actually “reconstructions.” But, how much

and Historic Preservation, to the Associate Director, Professional Service, January 20, 1970, Independence-PH.

¹⁰ Assistant Chief Historical Architect to Chief Historical Architect, November 24, 1978, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park file, Park Historic Architecture Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Harpers-PA). On the reconstruction of the structures related to Franklin's

did the agency's views of reconstructions actually change? In the 1970s, the Park Service carried out two of the largest reconstructions it had ever undertaken, Bent's Old Fort, Colorado, and Fort Stanwix, New York, which were not simple soldiers' huts or earthworks, but full forts, complete with interiors and furnishings. In another situation, the agency decided against an earlier proposal to reconstruct part of Fort Smith, Arkansas, and to preserve and display the remains of the fort instead. However, in that case, little was said about a new approach to reconstruction, and advocates of reconstruction at other sites simply felt it was unnecessary there. Then, there is the case of Fort Union Trading Post, on the border of North Dakota and Montana. This a more complicated situation, in which a number of high level Park Service officials were opposed to reconstruction, but internal dissension over this issue helped abet a Congressional directive that the agency reconstruct the fort. In this case, it appeared that by the 1970s there was a strong degree of new thinking on this issue, but opposition to reconstruction was just as often linked to issues of funding as it was to the new philosophy of historic preservation mentioned in regards to the destruction and reconstruction that occurred at Harpers Ferry.

What follows is an examination of the recent experience of the National Park Service with reconstructions, as well as an attempt to understand how the agency may have changed in this regard since the 1970s, which was probably the most active period in its history of reconstructing vanished historic structures.

house, referred to as the Market Street Houses, see Constance M. Greiff, *Independence: The Creation of a National Park* (Philadelphia: Heritage Studies, Inc., 1985), 394-395, 427-428.

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Colorado

Standing along the Santa Fe Trail from 1833 to 1849, in what is today the southeastern part of Colorado, Bent's Old Fort is considered to have been one of most important trading posts and centers of the fur trade in the American west. A frequent gathering point for mountain men, fur traders, and Indians, it was also a stopping point for trading caravans travelling from Saint Louis to Santa Fe and emigrants moving westward. In 1849, the Bent brothers abandoned and destroyed their adobe fort, before constructing a new one at another location along the Santa Fe Trail.

The effort to commemorate and eventually preserve the site of Bent's Old Fort is thought to have begun in 1912, when a historical marker was placed on the site by the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In 1926, the DAR purchased this land from a local cattle company, landscaped the site, and erected a more prominent marker. In an article on the history of the site, Merrill Yates, a former National Park Service historian who was involved in the agency's work on the site, wrote that in this early period, the DAR hoped to rebuild the fort. Unable to undertake a reconstruction, nor even more modest developments, in 1954 the site of Bent's Old Fort was transferred to the Colorado State Historical Society. Although this organization was also incapable of spending much on the site, in the summer of 1954 a local college undertook the first formal archaeological excavation to find out what remained of the fort. According to Yates, this furthered calls from local citizens to rebuild the fort, which was usually referred to as a "restoration." One dissenter from local opinion asked why not preserve the ruins of the fort rather than "counterfeiting" it through reconstruction?

Like the DAR, the State Historical Society was unable to reconstruct Bent's Old Fort, although in 1957 low walls of adobe bricks were built to delineate the outline of its walls.¹¹

With what appeared to be no possibility for the state to reconstruct Bent's Old Fort, in 1957, at the suggestion of the State Historical Society, Colorado Senator John Carroll inquired about the National Park Service taking over the site. The following year, he received word from the Park Service that Bent's Old Fort would be included among those sites investigated by the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. Under this program, which had last been carried out prior to World War II, Park Service staff would study various historic sites and make recommendations to the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments on those sites that could be considered nationally significant. Ultimately, it would be up to the Advisory Board to determine if the site of Bent's Old Fort was appropriate for inclusion in the National Park System.¹²

The federal Advisory Board did indeed find the site of Bent's Old Fort to hold exceptional historical value, not because it held exceptional historical remains of the fort, but because of its association with the Santa Fe Trail and America's westward expansion. In other words, it was a more commemorative and interpretive historic site than one that would preserve historic resources. In 1960 Congress passed legislation authorizing the establishment of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, and the Park Service's Midwest Region, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska, carried out a study of the possible

development alternatives for this historic site. Although it did not formally propose the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, the region noted that because the fort's "exact location, outlines and appearance have been accurately determined," there was "a good opportunity for restoration of sufficient of the fort's setting to facilitate interpretation." This would not seem to imply the fort was to be reconstructed, but that the area could be made to appear as it may have during the nineteenth century. However, a reconstruction was under consideration, because in June of 1960 the Park Service was already discussing which region would best be able to manage a fort constructed of adobe.¹³

By 1961, the Park Service's plans for the development of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site centered upon a reconstruction. In a publication produced by the Midwest Region, under whose management it was decided the site should come, it was said there was enough historical and archaeological information on the appearance and structure of the fort to allow "a full scale reconstruction." Furthermore, the "impressive external appearance of such a reconstructed fort in a restored setting of even a modest area would, it is felt, add greatly to visitor appreciation and understanding of the site." At that time, in order to keep down the cost of such an undertaking, only a few spaces within the reconstructed fort would be "furnished as authentic fullscale exhibits," while much of the interior would serve as a modern visitor center and provide office space.¹⁴

¹¹ Merrill J. Yates, "From Ruin to Reconstruction, 1920-1976," *The Colorado Magazine* 4, no. 4 (1977): 58-67.

¹² *Ibid.*, 71-72.

¹³ "Bent's Old Fort Proposed National Historic Site," 1960, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site file. Cultural Resources Bibliography Repository, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (hereafter Bent-CRB); Chief, Division of Interpretation, to the Director, June 23, 1960, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site file, Park History Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Bent-PH.)

¹⁴ Regional Director, Region Two, to the Director, March 17, 1961, Bent-PH.

The reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort was the preferred development alternative for the historic site from almost the beginning of the Park Service's involvement in 1960, until the reconstruction was actually undertaken in 1975. Several times during this period the cost of reconstruction almost derailed the project, but few questions were asked about the propriety of reconstructing the fort. However, the treatment of the fort's interior was debated, as some within the Park Service wanted to cut costs by using a portion of it as a visitor center and administrative area, which would preclude the need to construct a separate building. Others felt that the optimal interpretive use of a reconstruction would be to have all of it, interior and exterior, have the appearance of the original nineteenth century fort.¹⁵

In 1963, the Park Service took ownership the site of Bent's Old Fort and prepared a master plan that had reconstruction as the agency's goal. The following year, a large archaeological excavation was undertaken to provide information on the form and appearance of Bent's Old Fort, which, along with historical research, would be necessary to make reconstruction possible. In 1964, the agency also completed the first part of its historic structures report on the fort. This report stated that a reconstructed fort would be the "optimum interpretive facility" for the site, and the "best and most practical way" to convey the significance of the Bent's Old Fort to the public. Prepared by historian Dwight Stinson, archaeologist Jackson Moore, and architect Charles Pope, the report

¹⁵ When asked in an interview if alternatives were considered for the display of the remains of Bent's Old Fort, former Park Service Chief Historian and Assistant Director for Park Historic Preservation, Robert Utley responded: "Not to my knowledge. If so I never knew about it." See Richard W. Sellars and Melody Webb, *An Interview with Robert M. Utley on the History of Historic Preservation in the National Park Service, 1947-1980*, Southwest Cultural Resources Center Professional Papers No. 16 (National Park Service: 1988), 64.

presented a proposal that would allow for the preservation of roughly ninety percent of the archaeological remains of the fort. To accomplish this would require a system of “footings and posts” that would support a “vener,” or partial reconstruction of only the exterior of the fort, without destroying the remains, which would be made accessible to the public. However, [a]uthentic reconstruction in adobe blocks” was also proposed because it would present the “truest picture” of the old fort. On the negative side, this would present high costs to maintain the adobe that would be worn away by the elements. Like the earlier master plan for Bent’s Old Fort, the historic structures report was supportive of reconstruction, but only after additional archaeological and historical research provided sufficient evidence on the appearance of the fort.¹⁶

Part two of the historic structures report was completed in 1965, and provided an analysis of the historical and archaeological material then available on Bent’s Old Fort. While it was believed there was sufficient information on the exterior of the fort, no definitive information on all the interior spaces had been found. Because only “bits of information” were available, it was thought that when the fort was reconstructed it would be necessary to “make educated estimates” on the location and use of sections of the interior. Similarly, discrepancies between sources, several of which could not “even by the liveliest stretching of piece-meal information, be logically reconciled,” led to the conclusion that “extensive” alterations on which there was little information had been made to the fort over the course of its life. Despite this inability to pin down the appearance and use of parts of Bent’s Old Fort, the historic structures report characterized

the Park Service's decision to reconstruct as an "extraordinary" measure that was "essential" to interpreting a site that was a "flat, barren area with no auxiliary features of interest."¹⁷

When part two of the historic structures report was submitted to the Director of the National Park Service by the Midwest Region, it was noted that it had the "unanimous and enthusiastic support" of the staff at the historic site, as well as the regional office. The Regional Director, Lemuel Garrison, a Park Service veteran who had begun his career in 1933 as a ranger in Sequoia National Park, commented: "Although the plan for reconstruction is a bold one, we are convinced that it is feasible and would have decided impact on visitors." As for alternatives such as preserving the archaeological remains of the fort in conjunction with interpretive exhibits in a modern visitor center, Garrison believed these "schemes would result in features of little visitor interest." Therefore, an "adobe fort itself is the heart and soul of the entire interest in this area, and its substantial reconstruction to historic appearances seems to be the only logical effective approach."¹⁸

The strong pro-reconstruction opinion held by the Regional Director was similar to that of the Superintendent of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, William Feathersone. When a Park Service committee formed in 1965 to examine the

¹⁶ "Historic Structures Report, Historic Reconstruction, Bent's Old Fort, Part 1," 1964, 1, 5, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site file, Park Historic Architecture Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Bent-PHA).

¹⁷ "Historic Structures Report Part II, Reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site," 1965, 60, 86, ii, Bent-PHA.

¹⁸ Regional Director, Midwest Region, to the Director, December 11, 1964, Bent-CRB. Garrison's career with the Park Service included a period as Superintendent of one of the first historic sites added to the National Park System, Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Pennsylvania, where he served from 1939 to 1941. During this period, the park underwent an extensive "restoration" that included a good amount of reconstruction. On Garrison's career, see his autobiography *The Making of a Ranger: Forty*

interpretation of several historic fort sites looked at Bent's Old Fort, the Superintendent offered his opinion that the "[e]xhibition of the pitifully meager" remains of the fort was not "of sufficient size for the visitor's imagination to fill in the missing parts."

Featherstone did not believe these remains could be successfully interpreted through exhibits in a modern visitor center. Instead, the "startling appearance of this 19th Century Fort [sic] on a landscape not much different from the contemporary one, will, in itself be of more interpretive value than that which a modern visitor center, intruding on the landscape, could ever afford." While the Superintendent clearly held the image of the historic Bent's Old Fort standing alone on the plains as an inspiration to visitors, his comments fail to differentiate a reconstruction, which would be just as "modern" an intrusion on the landscape as a 1960s style visitor center, from the original fort. To reconstruct Bent's Old Fort was not to return the nineteenth century fort to its original site, but to build a modern version of it.¹⁹

The committee to which Superintendent Featherstone wrote these remarks, the Park Service's Committee to Review Western Forts, visited Bent's Old Fort and six other existing or proposed units of the National Park System in August 1965, in order to report on the development and interpretive plans for these sites. As a result of its work under Chairman Roy Appleman, a historian in the Park Service's Washington office, the committee developed several guidelines for the sites it visited. These included a guideline on reconstructions that stated: "An area that is predominantly in ruins, rather

Years with the National Parks (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1983). On the restoration of Hopewell Furnace, see volume two of Hosmer, 1036-1037.

¹⁹ Superintendent, Bent's Old Fort, to Chairman Roy Appleman, Fort Study Committee, September 8, 1965, in "Committee Report on Western Military Forts," 1965, Appendix C, Bent-CRB.

than characterized by intact surviving structures, should be governed by a policy of stabilizing the ruins with no reconstruction or restoration.” The example given for the application of this guideline was Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico, where the remains that should be preserved included partial walls, foundations, and chimneys. In the opinion of the fort committee, this did not apply to Bent’s Old Fort, the remains of which were mainly below grade foundations.²⁰

The reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort dominated the report prepared by the Committee to Review Western Forts in 1965, taking up nearly a third of its 172 pages. Here, it was definitively stated: “The central problem, on which everything else turns, is whether to reconstruct Bent’s Old Fort.” The committee noted that despite the Park Service’s commitment to reconstruction since the approval of the historic site’s master plan in 1963, the estimated construction costs led Park Service Director George Hartzog to postpone the start of construction, which had been planned for the 1966 to 1967 fiscal year. As to how the agency should proceed, the four-person committee was divided evenly, with Appleman and H. Raymond Gregg, a former interpretive specialist acting as a consultant to the Midwest Region, for reconstruction, and Jerry Wager, another specialist in interpretation, and Ed Bierly, a museum curator, against.²¹

In the fort committee report, Ed Bierly provided an extensive explanation of his and Wagers’ reasons for opposing reconstruction. He wrote that the “physical remains of Bent’s Fort, to us the real reason the site had been preserved and acquired by the NPS, would be totally obliterated by reconstruction on the site! This means that people who

²⁰ “Committee Report on Western Military Forts,” 1965, 8, Bent-CRB.

want to get close to history by standing amid the ruins had better do it before the bulldozers arrive.” Why were these meager ruins more important than a new fort? Because, for Bierly, “standing amid the ruins...and seeing the very blocks of adobe that Bent’s Mexican laborers laid one upon the other, established in me much more a feeling of immediacy with that period than any [National Park Service] Design Office reconstruction could ever hope to. Isn’t this the feeling we’re trying to achieve?” He understood that because this was just one person’s reaction to the site, it was, perhaps, “a more slender reed to lean on” as an argument regarding reconstruction than those of budgeting and the need to develop attractive visitor facilities. However, Bierly clearly felt that preservation of the meager ruins of Bent’s Old Fort was something the Park Service should consider.²²

In contrast to the opponents of reconstruction who served on the forts committee, the supporters believed that this was the “only way in which the area can be made to have meaning and to be worthy of status as a unit of the National Park System.” They held that the destruction of the foundation of the fort by reconstruction was justified because “there is not enough original material left to give any impression of what the fort was like...[in] fact there is so little left of the original fort that only a person with exceptional knowledge of the fort and an unusual power of visualization could recreate in his mind’s eye an image of Bent’s Old Fort.” These proponents of reconstruction, Appleman and Gregg, not only argued in support of reconstructing this fort, but for the use of reconstructions throughout the National Park System, proclaiming:

²¹ Ibid., 20, 79.

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. This interest and acceptance of reconstructions is shown at places like Williamsburg and Sturbridge Village, and at such places as Appomattox Courthouse in the National Park System where the Service has reconstructed the McLean House and the Courthouse as essential to round out the historic scene. Reconstruction at Independence National Historical Park, where there are many surviving original buildings, has been most acceptable. 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.²³

These proponents of reconstructing Bent's Old Fort envisioned a new fort that contained the visitor center and administrative facilities, along with a number of period rooms furnished to appear as they may have in the original structure. They pointed out that reconstruction had been the "stated intention" of the Park Service since the Bent's Old Fort master plan was approved in 1963. If the agency was now having second thoughts about the cost of reconstruction, then it should not have accepted the site when it was offered by the Colorado State Historical Society, which wanted to reconstruct but turned it over to the Park Service when the cost became prohibitive. To back away from reconstruction would result in political pressure on the Park Service, including possible Congressional action. In addition to issues of politics, Appleman and Gregg

²³ Ibid., 82-84.

unequivocally stated their view, which probably reflected those of many in the Park Service in regards to Bent's Old Fort, as well as reconstructions in general, that

the fort should be reconstructed because it is desirable and necessary to provide a meaningful visitor experience....A reconstructed Bent's Old Fort will have the physical reality to give opportunity for impressive interpretation. Its existence will give strong visual meaning to the area—it will be a magnet for visitation, and there will be something more than an undistinguished river terrace at the place, which otherwise would be little different from thousands of surrounding acres. A shining new visitor center by itself, and nothing more, however cleverly it might display a few feet of adobe within its modern structure, can never project the picture of Bent's Old Fort and its place in the western wilderness as a bastion of American commerce on the Southwestern frontier....Let us keep in mind this picture of a small adobe fort standing in the wilderness...and then let us recognize the need to rebuild this fort to make the picture come true for those living in our own time and on into the future....It should not be overlooked that there is nowhere in the [National Park] System, nor is there likely ever to be, another historic structure, whether original, restored, or reconstructed, like Bent's Old Fort, should it be rebuilt....It may be stated with full confidence that a reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort would constitute a unique educational, architectural, and historical exhibit of top rank in the United States. This alone argues powerfully for its reconstruction.²⁴

The staff of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site was in full agreement with Appleman and Gregg's argument for reconstruction. The park historian, Dwight Stinson, put together a briefing paper on this issue, which included his opinion that "to display the remaining ruins of the Fort (even if they were in good condition) would not be in keeping with the high standards of the [National Park] Service." Furthermore, he believed that "no matter how ingenious an interpretive program is devised...it will be a miserable substitute" for a new fort. It was Stinson's understanding that the staff of Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site had given "no serious consideration" to anything other than

²³ Ibid., 86-87.

reconstruction. Therefore, since the establishment of the park in March 1963, “all developmental activities have been directed toward the goal of reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort.”²⁵

The findings of the Committee to Review Western Military Forts was generally well received within the National Park Service, and the guidelines set out in its report were supported by the various offices within the agency. As for the issue of Bent’s Old Fort, the fact that the committee was split on whether reconstruction was the appropriate action to take did not lead to a reconsideration of this issue, as the Park Service remained “committed to reconstruction, if economically feasible.” The question that was yet to be answered was whether the interior of the new fort would serve as a visitor center and administrative area, or a separate facility would be constructed. Furthermore, there was the issue of the type of materials to use in the reconstruction; adobe was the preferred material, but concrete blocks covered with stucco was being considered in order to bring down the cost. One year after the fort committee conducted its study, the Park Service’s final decision on reconstruction hinged on these fiscal issues.²⁶

The process of deciding upon the form a reconstructed Bent’s Old Fort went on for almost two years after the fort committee submitted its report to the Park Service in November 1965. During this period, three alternatives for the site were considered: a full exterior and interior reconstruction with modern visitor facilities located elsewhere; a full

²⁴ Ibid., 89-91.

²⁵ Historian, Bent’s Old Fort, to the Superintendent, Bent’s Old Fort, September 7, 1965, “Committee on Western Military Forts,” 1965, Appendix D, Bent-CRB.

²⁶ Assistant Director, Operations, to the Regional Directors, Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest Regions, July 8, 1966, Bent-CRB; Acting Regional Director, Midwest Region, to the Chief, DCSSC, September 1(?), 1966, Bent-PH.

exterior reconstruction with a combinations of a partial interior reconstruction sharing space with modern visitor facilities; and a hybrid of these two approaches that would have a modern visitor center with “some form of a reconstructed fort” that was not clearly defined. In the end, it was determined that a complete exterior and interior reconstruction should be carried out, with modern visitor and administrative facilities located in a separate structure. When the Director Hartzog announced this decision in August 1967, he said the Park Service would “reconstruct Bent’s Old Fort as a historic structure, with the greatest degree of historical authenticity possible, and to display and use it as such.” By placing the modern visitor facilities elsewhere, it was felt that this project would “not sacrifice or violate historical values in the reconstructed fort, which in the first place can be justified only on the grounds of historical values that will be presented and preserved.”²⁷

The curious language used by Hartzog to describe a reconstructed fort was similar to that used by Superintendent Featherstone two years earlier. While neither probably believed that to reconstruct Bent’s Old Fort was to create an actual nineteenth century fort, their words seem to indicate that they, and others in the Park Service with similar opinions, did equate a reconstruction with something historically authentic. To say the Park Service will reconstruct Bent’s Old Fort as a historic structure and “use it as such,” implies that with the original fort one, a Park Service facsimile is almost, if not just as good. Furthermore, if a reconstruction could be made and used “as a historic structure,”

²⁷ Harthon L. Bill, Acting Director, to Gordon Allot, April 28, 1967, Bent-PH; Director, to the Regional Director, Midwest Region, August 16, 1967, Bent-PH.

of course this would preclude any thought of preserving the authentic, but meager remains of the actual fort.

Despite a final decision on the form of the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, the Park Service was still developing plans for the actual construction work, including the collection of documents and other material regarding the appearance of the fort. In 1968, planning was greatly advanced when a Park Service historian was able to view a collection of sketches made by a visitor to Bent's Old Fort in 1845, which were in the possession of an art dealer. These drawings showed several interior and exterior features of the fort, and included details previously unknown. In addition, 1968 also saw the completion of the final report on three years of archaeological excavations carried out at the historic site. However, budgetary restraints continued to delay a reconstruction that would eventually cost over \$2 million dollars. With reconstruction delayed indefinitely, the Park Service attempted to preserve the adobe remains of Bent's Old Fort, which had been exposed by the archaeological excavations, and allowed to deteriorate when it appeared that reconstruction was imminent.²⁸

In his account of the events surrounding the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort, Merrill Yates concludes that the delay in this project was partly due to a difference of opinion within the Park Service over whether the fort should be reconstructed. However, it does not appear he is implying that an internal debate on the propriety of reconstruction took place. Rather, it was an issue of the cost of reconstruction and continued maintenance that led to the delay. Only after Colorado Senator Gordon Allott pushed for

²⁸ Regional Director, Midwest Region, to the Director, December 13, 1966, Bent-PH.

Congressional appropriations for the reconstruction in 1972 were things moving again. This led to an initial appropriation of \$50,000 to allow the Park Service's new design and construction division, the Denver Service Center, to begin work on the reconstruction plans. The preparation of the actual construction drawings was contracted to a private architectural firm in Denver, the Ken R. White Company.²⁹

Progress on Bent's Old Fort was further hampered by the piecemeal manner in which appropriations for the project were obtained, but nonetheless, it moved forward until reconstruction was completed in 1976, in time for the celebration of the American Bicentennial. During this period, several documents on Bent's Old Fort were produced that through their use of language provide examples of how the Park Service perceived reconstructions. One document, the 1973 development concept plan for Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, provides particularly interesting insights on this concept of reconstructing a fort that had been demolished over one hundred years earlier. Developed by the National Park Service and its consultant, the Ken R. White Company, the development plan includes plans and elevations of the new fort, as well as statements on the interpretive use of the reconstruction. At the outset, it was stated 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" (emphasis added). To accomplish this feat of time transportation, modern uses such as the visitor center and administrative offices would "be concealed within the Fort to minimize the 20th century intrusion on to the scene." This was also referred to as minimizing the "physical and

²⁹ Mattes, 93-96.

esthetic impact upon the site of 20th Century man, his activities, and his contrivances.” In other words, the “reconstructed Fort should stand stark and lonely on the plain,” as it did in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, by having the reconstruction “as authentically built and furnished” as possible, show “imperfections” in its construction, and staffing it with “costumed” Park Service personnel referred to as the “cast,” it was thought the reconstruction would become “a living museum.” These statements demonstrate a failure by the planners to recognize that a reconstructed fort is 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. By adding a modern 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.³⁰

A version of the interpretive plan drawn up for Bent’s Old Fort National Historic Site in 1975 continues the vision of the 1973 development plan, and demonstrates what appears to have been a belief that the demolished nineteenth century fort could somehow be brought back for modern visitors. The language used in this plan is revealing, and includes the statement: “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 point, 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.” In fulfillment of this vision, 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 [Missouri] and Santa Fe. Accordingly, the National Park Service will plan only a minimum of contemporary development on the historic site....Thus, although the fort will be accessible in reality, it will be isolated in appearance.

To accomplish this effect, once visitors left their cars at a parking area located at the entrance to the site, they would walk along a trail to the fort, thereby "imparting...a strong impression of the fort's historic environment and isolation."³¹

Like the earlier development plan, the interpretive plan for Bent's Old Fort uses language that appears to demonstrate a failure to recognize that the reconstructed fort is a contemporary development. To keep the modern intrusions away from the fort does not make it more authentic, nor does it make the past "live again." Similarly, the short walk along a path that leads from the parking area to the reconstructed fort will not demonstrate the isolation of this place and the hardships of those who reached it in the nineteenth century over that Santa Fe Trail. Further questionable concepts are that Bent's Old Fort would be "reconstructed as **authentically** as possible, and it will be displayed and used as a **historic** structure" (emphasis added). While documents regarding the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort regularly misused term such as authentic, which were periodically pointed out by agency officials who recognized this error, in this interpretive plan, there appears to be more than a simple misuse of words. Here, it was made clear that the reconstruction would be treated as if it was itself a historic structure. It should be

³⁰ National Park Service and Ken R. White Company, *Bent's Old Fort* (1973), pages B2, D2, E2, E3, G1, Bent-PHA.

³¹ "Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site: Master Plan, Interpretive Prospectus, Developmental Concept" (draft), 1975, 7, 29, 31, Bent-PHA.

noted that this document on the reconstructed fort included the assertion that “enough of the region’s old quality remains to silently stimulate an imaginative perception of the fort’s historic setting.” Perhaps “imaginative perception” was a better way to describe what planners intended the visitor experience at Bent’s Old Fort to be, rather than a some form of time space trip. No reconstruction or living history actors could bring people back in time, but could only help stir their imagination. This phrase regarding the remains of enough of the “old quality” of the region around Bent’s Old Fort also raises a two questions: If the landscape could give visitors an idea of the fort’s setting, was reconstruction necessary? Could the preservation of a portion of the original remains, coupled with the landscape, been enough?³²

As the new master plan for reconstruction was being prepared in 1975, Robert Utley, the former Chief Historian of the National Park Service who was then Assistant Director for Historic Preservation, took the opportunity to point out faults in some of the assumptions made within the Park Service about this project. For one thing, he made it clear that despite the evidence available on the appearance of the fort, the new “construction will inevitably be a 20th-century contrivance,” which must be acknowledged in the master plan through a determination of the degree of accuracy that is possible in the reconstruction. Furthermore, he found the “language” used in the draft master plan to be “frequently awkward,” particularly the misuse of the terms “restore” and “restoration,” when the project at hand was a “reconstruction.” Utley also pointed out that “authentic” can not be used to describe a reconstruction, stating: “‘Authentic’

³² Ibid., 17, 49.

refers to the real thing; the best a reconstruction can be is accurate.” In the course of his long career with the Park Service, Utley often pointed out the inappropriate language used in discussions of reconstruction, in which Park Service officials sometimes confused the accuracy of these new structures with the authenticity of the original. Despite such criticism, he was an avowed supporter of the reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort, as well as other reconstructions, and later described himself as having been “all for interpreting the story, with preservation a secondary consideration.” It would only be after he witnessed the excesses of these reconstruction projects that Utley would change his outlook on the issue.³³

In addition to the interpretive plan for Bent’s Old Fort, as Assistant Director for Historic Preservation, Utley had objections to the intention of Park Service architects to give the walls of the reconstructed fort a “crude appearance” when the archaeological evidence seemed to indicate they were “skillfully laid up.” In response, John Luzader, Chief of Historic Preservation for the Denver Service Center, provided Utley with an explanation of the process used to mediate differences of opinion between Park Service personnel on the appearance of the structure. The result was to reach what Luzader called the “most accurate reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort.” This process, as described by historical architect George Thorson, was one in which conflicting archaeological and historical information led those involved with the design of the reconstruction to “use conjecture based on comparative data and [their] own professional judgement.” At times, 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. Despite these “modifications,” it was believed that the reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort was “a historical project with the maximum authenticity.”³⁴

These issues of the accuracy of the reconstruction, and the degree of conjecture it was based upon, came up again as the work was underway the following year. In May 1976, the Park Service’s Wilfred Logan visited the site and reported on what he believed were “a number of features in the reconstruction that range from merely objectionable on one hand to out-and-out historical and archaeological inaccuracy on the other.” Primarily, he felt that elements within the fort made it look “too much Spanish New Mexico and Taos Pueblo,” while the original was built for Anglo fur traders. For example, elements like an adobe staircase and wood ladders looked more fitting for an Indian pueblo than a fort. He also objected to a chimney purposely made to look imperfect that was “sufficient to provoke amusement.” Recognizing that these were “minor” inaccuracies, Logan believed nonetheless that their “cumulative effect...mars” the reconstruction and will “mislead” the public. In response to such questions about the appearance of the structure, several elements within the fort were altered. Despite the necessity of these changes, the Denver Service Center’s John Luzader defended the

³³ Assistant Director, Park Historic Preservation, to the Assistant Director, Development, January 24, 1975, Bent-PH; Sellars and Webb, 33; Barry Mackintosh, “The Case Against Reconstruction,” *CRM* 15, no. 1 (1992): 18.

³⁴ Assistant Director, Park Historic Preservation, to Manager, Denver Service Center, April 18, 1975, Bent-PH; Chief, Historic Preservation Division, DSC, to Assistant Director, Park Historic Preservation, August 8, 1975, Bent-PH; George Thorson to John Luzader, August 8, 1975, Bent-PH.

“excellent quality of the design decisions made in connection with Bent’s Fort,” while acknowledging the “problems inherent in a reconstruction of this type.”³⁵

The inaccuracies and amusing features in Bent’s Old Fort did not disappear with the alteration of a few elements of the structure in 1976. Two years after the site opened to the public, a writer for the magazine *Americana* marveled that thanks to the National Park Service the fort had “again risen to command the historic Santa Fe Trail,” and took particular interest in wood treated with alcohol to make it appear aged, a staircase on which each tread had a depression to give the appearance of years of use, and special light bulbs that flickered like candles. In this article, historical architect George Thorson, who had earlier defended the reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort as having “maximum authenticity,” again noted that the “final planning [of this reconstruction] inevitably included a certain amount of speculation and second-guessing.”³⁶

Although visitors might delight in the attention to detail at Bent’s Old Fort, cultural resource management professional have come to be concerned about the speculative elements of these and other elements in the reconstruction. In 1993, the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation suggested that the Park Service’s management of the site better allow the public to “be fully aware that the fort was a reconstruction and that some elements of the building are less historically correct than others.” Proponents of reconstructing Bent’s Old Fort, as well as other structures, have expressed similar concerns. Rodd Wheaton, the Assistant Regional Director of the Park

³⁵ Wilfred D. Logan to John Luzader, May 24, 1976, Bent-PH; “Bent’s Fort Alterations,” June 4, 1976, Bent-PH.

³⁶ Elaine Freed, “Bent’s Old Fort: Rebuilt from the Ground Up,” *Americana* 5, no. 6 (January/February 1978): 36-41.

Service's Intermountain Region, the successor to the Rocky Mountain Region, commented that "most of it is inaccurate in detail," and Robert Utley, the agency's former Chief Historian, believes Bent's Old Fort to have been "a very flawed project" that appears to have become "a stage set for living history programs and demonstrations." Douglas Comer, a Park Service archaeologist who worked on the excavation of this historic site, has written of Bent's Old Fort as a kind of nirvana for historical reenactors clad in buckskin. But, he notes that this reconstruction does not portray the "dirt, the bad smells, the noise, the illness, the danger and uncertainty, the coarseness and brutality" of life at a nineteenth century frontier fort, and thereby "panders to the nostalgia for a lost paradise" that can often be found in these history buffs. Park Service historian Richard Sellars has a similar view of this desire held by reenactors, as well as some Park Service interpreters, to create an "image of the past." In doing so, they often forget that while Bent's Old Fort "may to some degree reflect the past...it is not *of* the past," and may be closer to "pure entertainment" than historic preservation."³⁷

The presentation of a nostalgic, entertaining image of history is one of several problems inherent in reconstructing a historic structure, as are those of conjecture and accuracy. For one, how will the Park Service treat (i.e. both maintenance and interpretation) such structures, as contemporary building made to look like those from earlier periods, or as if they are historic structures themselves? If, as the Park Service claims, it strives to make it clear to visitors that these are reconstructions, much of the

³⁷ Claudia Nissley, to Michael D. Snyder, June 30, 1993, Bent-PH; Rodd L. Wheaton to the author, March 24, 1998; Robert Utley to the author, April 11, 1998; Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formations, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of

language used in its planning of Bent's Old Fort would suggest otherwise. At times, it appeared that the agency was actually attempting to construct an "authentic" nineteenth century fort, rather than an "accurate" representation of one. In a 1975 letter to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Park Service said it would "administer the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort in a manner consistent with recognition that the reconstruction merits the identical regard it would be entitled to if it were the original structure and consistent with recognition that with the passage of time its significance will be enhanced." How can the reconstruction merit the identical regard as the authentic fort? When it says that the reconstruction will become more significant with time, is the Park Service implying that it will become, like Colonial Williamsburg, a significant historical resource in its own right? Should the Park Service be concerned with this before even commencing with the reconstruction, or should the agency simply treat the new fort like the interpretive tool it claims it to be?³⁸

Regardless of its intentions for Bent's Old Fort, this reconstruction ended up having serious consequences for the National Park Service. Almost as soon as it was completed, rain began to wear away the adobe walls, and by 1978, one agency official characterized the condition of the fort as "deteriorating very rapidly." An expensive restoration of this reconstruction was necessary and maintenance costs have continued to be high. This led to what may be the source of the most serious and sustained opposition to reconstructions within the National Park Service, as some agency officials began to

California Press, 1996), 257; Richard West Sellars, "Why Take a Trip to Bountiful—Won't Anaheim Do?" *Landscape* 30, no. 3 (1990): 17-18.

³⁸ Lynn H. Thompson to Robert Garvey, Jr., March 10, 1975, Bent-PH.

question the expenditure of large sums of money on these projects while the preservation of authentic historic structures was not adequately funded.³⁹

³⁹ Chief, Cultural Resources Management Division, to the Acting Chief, Office of Programming and Budget, June 8, 1978, Bent-PH; Sellars and Webb, 33, 62-63.

Fort Stanwix National Monument, New York

Fort Stanwix National Monument, located in Rome, New York, a small upstate city, was the site of the historic fort of the same name, which played a role in halting the advance of British forces from Canada in 1777. Historic Fort Stanwix was abandoned by American forces and demolished after the Revolutionary War, and the modern city of Rome grew up on its site. The United States Congress authorized the establishment of a national monument on the site of Fort Stanwix in 1935, although it did not become a unit of the National Park System until 1973. In that year, the National Park Service began to reconstruct the fort for the celebration of the American Bicentennial.

When first considered by the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments in the 1930s, the site of Fort Stanwix was deemed to be of national significant based upon the role the fort played in the Revolutionary War. However, because it was located in the urban center of Rome and had been so altered by modern development, it was felt that to establish a historic site managed by the National Park Service would be “unwise or impracticable.” Instead, the Advisory Board recommended the placement of a historical marker. Despite the sound basis for this judgement, it was pointed out at the time that this did not comply with the intention of Congress when it authorized Fort Stanwix National Monument in 1935.⁴⁰

The issue of Fort Stanwix arose again in 1962, when the Advisory Board considered the site for a second time and concluded that the findings of 1938 were correct. As explained to an unhappy New York Congressional delegation, the site had

been so “obliterated” as to make it impossible to “recreate the historic setting” of the fort. At this time, the National Park Service pointed out that when Congress authorized Fort Stanwix National Monument in 1935, neither the Advisory Board, nor the standards the Board would use for the selection of national historic sites, had yet to be established. Studies of the site carried out by the National Park Service in 1938 were the basis of the Advisory Board’s negative decision on Fort Stanwix, and similar studies made in 1955, 1958, and 1962, led to the most recent such finding. When considering the site in 1962, the Advisory Board placed Fort Stanwix “in the category of ‘lost’ historic sites, the remains of which have long been obliterated and its historical integrity destroyed.” If it was any consolation to those New Yorkers who hoped that the Park Service would take over the site, it was formally designated a National Historic Landmark.⁴¹

Despite the objections of New York’s Senators and Congressman, it appeared in 1962 that the issue of a national historic site where Fort Stanwix had once stood had been put to rest. However, by 1976, the National Park Service would be managing Fort Stanwix National Monument, complete with a fort that had miraculously reappeared. How this happened began innocuously enough, with an urban renewal project in Rome, New York that included an effort to develop the historic resources of the area. In 1964, John Hurley, Executive Director of Rome’s Urban Renewal Agency, wrote the National Park Service to ask for advice on the city’s ideas for its historic resources. A response came from Ronald Lee, Director of the agency’s Northeast Region, headquartered in

⁴⁰ Francis S. Ronalds to the Director, December 21, 1938, Fort Stanwix National Monument file, History Collection, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (hereafter Stanwix-HC).

Philadelphia. Lee suggested that the city undertake an archaeological excavation to uncover the remains of Fort Stanwix, show the outline of the fort on the ground, and establish a museum with artifacts and exhibits on the fort. As for a proposal for the city to reconstruct one of the fort's bastions and several buildings that would have stood inside its walls, Lee pointed out that this would be very costly, and that such a project would not necessarily attract enough visitors to cover the cost of reconstruction incurred by the city.⁴²

Archaeological work at the site of Fort Stanwix was carried out as part of Rome's urban renewal project in the summer of 1965, with the financial assistance of the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, a forerunner of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Because of its advisory role, the National Park Service was included on a large sign put up on the site to list those agencies and individuals involved in the project. The excavation went rather well, with a large amount of information on Fort Stanwix uncovered, and the prospects for developing the area as a public historic site along the lines suggested by the Park Service seemed good. The Housing and Home Finance Agency was particularly pleased with the project, and in August 1965 it was reported that the Regional Administrator of the agency was so "enthusiastic" that he was going to "see" Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall about

⁴¹ John A. Carver to Jacob K. Javits, July 2, 1962, Stanwix-HC; "Statement on Fort Stanwix and Oriskany Battlefield, in New York State," August 6, 1962, Fort Stanwix National Monument file, Park History Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Stanwix-PH).

⁴² Ronald F. Lee to John R. Hurley, June 2, 1964, Stanwix-HC; Ronald F. Lee to John R. Hurley, August 11, 1964, Stanwix-HC.

having the National Park Service take “over the area as authorized by Congress in 1935.”⁴³

Exactly how the National Park Service came to be directly involved in managing Fort Stanwix is not clearly explained in the available documents, but it can be assumed that there was political pressure from the New York Congressional delegation, which included the powerful Senator Jacob Javits. Robert Utley believes the Northeast Region abetted this local sentiment, and as it was often prone to do, may have gone against the position of the Park Service’s Washington office, which he recalls did not think this urban site was a fitting one for reconstruction. As for the unavailability of this difference of opinion in the documents on Fort Stanwix, Utley has said, “[a] lot of this probably never found its way into the documents that were preserved.” In any event, the Park Service’s preliminary study of the site stated that a “revival of local interest” in Fort Stanwix led to a number of meetings between the agency, Congressman Alexander Pirinie, and representatives of the city of Rome. Then, in November 1965 a Park Service official visited Rome to collect information to evaluate the possibilities for developing a Fort Stanwix national historic site. The following year, the Park Service issued its preliminary plan for Fort Stanwix, which stated that in order for the agency to take over the site the city would have to acquire the necessary land, demolish existing modern structures, and donate the property to the federal government. As for the development of the site by the Park Service, the reconstruction of Fort Stanwix, which was referred to as having the fort “completely restored” in the plan, could be considered only after

additional archaeological and historical work was carried out, and cost estimates were made.⁴⁴

By 1967, the National Park Service had prepared the *Master Plan for Fort Stanwix National Monument*, which, had yet to become a physical reality because the Advisory Board on National Parks had determined in 1938, and again in 1962, that the site lacked historic integrity. The language used in the master plan is particularly interesting, as it appears to show the Park Service to be somewhat uneasy with taking on the role of developer and manager of this site. Although it does not repeat earlier statements about the site's lack of historic integrity, the master plan hints at the roundabout way the proposed Fort Stanwix National Monument came to reach this point, and clearly states that the Park Service came to be involved at the "request" of local officials. The plan did not actually recommend the fort be reconstructed, but provided for that potentiality, which was dependent upon a decision by the city of Rome that this action should take precedence over the "preservation" of several buildings on the site. Furthermore, a rather remarkable statement was included in this master plan written in preparation for a possible reconstruction, when it said:

The historic preservation movement has matured in the years since 1935. Its interests, once concerned almost exclusively with preserving "colonial" houses, forts, and battlefields, have broadened to include preservation of 19th and even 20th century houses, and of sites and structures important in the development of industry, commerce, transportation, the arts, and indeed every facet of our society.

⁴³ John R. Hurley to Ronald F. Lee, May 14, 1965, Stanwix-HC; Resource Studies Advisor to the Regional Director, June 11, 1965, Stanwix-HC; Resource Studies Advisor to the Regional Director, August 4, 1965, Stanwix-HC.

⁴⁴ Robert Utley to the author, April 11, 1998; "Fort Stanwix National Monument Project, Preliminary Boundary and Development Study Report," 1966, 1, 5, Stanwix-HC.

This plan, in a sense, does not reflect the new and broader concept of preservation. It provides for the creation of Fort Stanwix national monument and for the development required to make that monument effective. It does so at the expense of three 19th century structures included in the Historic American Buildings Survey, another structure reputed to be the oldest house in Rome, and a number of commercial and institutional structures, all of which must be moved or demolished if the national monument is to be created. The people of Rome, acting through their city government, will decide whether the national monument is worth this price when they decide whether or not to donate the Fort Stanwix site to the Federal Government."⁴⁵

In the *Master Plan for Fort Stanwix National Monument*, it appeared as if the Park Service was making it clear that the decision to destroy the historic buildings on the site of the fort would be made outside the agency. More significantly, the agency seemed to be saying that reconstructing the fort would not be its favored approach to the site given the new approach to historic preservation. Included in this document was an image of the outline of Fort Stanwix imposed over an aerial photograph of downtown Rome, New York. Whether it was intended to or not, this image displayed the absurdity of the proposal to level several city blocks and have this eighteenth century fort reappear, and demonstrated how this outdated concept of historic preservation may have been faulty. It must be remembered that this document was completed only a year after the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, which formally established in law the new, broader concept of historic preservation explained in the master plan itself.⁴⁶

Again, it remains unclear if the language in the Fort Stanwix master plan was representative of the Park Service's official position on reconstructing the fort, or more accurately expressed the opinions of those individuals who prepared the document. In

any event, the master plan had to be approved by the highest levels of the agency. Despite any misgivings it any have had about reconstructing Fort Stanwix, with the master plan for the national monument completed, the Park Service, with its commitment to professionalism, went about the task of putting together the information necessary for the reconstruction be as accurate as possible. From the outset, this required a great deal of historical research, as not much was known about the fort. In fact, so little information was available that historian Roy Appleman, Chief of the Park Service's Branch of Park History Studies, complained of the "far-reaching commitments" made in the Fort Stanwix master plan, which was prepared at a time when there was not nearly enough information to determine if the fort could be reconstructed, or how much this might cost. "Here again," he believed, the Park Service had put forth a proposal long before such a thing should have been considered, a judgement that was seconded when the Park Service published several of the historical reports on Fort Stanwix in 1976. In the foreword to this volume it was stated that the "Fort Stanwix master plan, approved on March 14, 1967, called for the reconstruction of the former fort—premature perhaps, for studies that would indicate the feasibility of the proposal had not been made." Such statements could be said of several cases in which the agency reconstructed a historic structure.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ National Park Service, *Master Plan for Fort Stanwix National Monument* (1967), 5, Stanwix-HC.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁷ Historian to the Chief, Branch of Park History Studies, August 21, 1968, Stanwix-PH; Chief, Branch of Park History Studies, to the Chief Historian, August 21, 1968, Stanwix- PH; National Park Service, *Fort Stanwix: History, Historic Furnishings, and Historic Structure Reports* (Washington, DC: 1976), v.

Following approval of the master plan, in 1968 and 1969 planning for Fort Stanwix National Monument went ahead as if the goal was clearly reconstruction. Historical research carried out at this time did not appear to have been done simply to find out more about the fort to interpret it better, but to provide information to allow a reconstruction. As for the historic buildings that stood in the way of a reconstructed fort, Joseph Waterson, Chief of the Park Service's Division of Historic Architecture, stated that "a decision must be made that development of Fort Stanwix take precedence over" their preservation. He advocated they be moved to another site, out of the way of the fort.⁴⁸

The Park Service advocated moving the historic structures off the site of Fort Stanwix rather than destroy them, and the city of Rome agreed to move two buildings, while commencing with the demolition of approximately seventy other properties in order to get the development of the national monument moving. It was the hope of the community that the project would be completed in time for the American Bicentennial celebration. With the buildings gone, from 1970 to 1972 the Park Service undertook an extensive archaeological excavation of the site in order to learn more about the structure of the fort, which would assist in reconstruction. For some involved in the development of Fort Stanwix National Monument, the collection of archaeological information was seen as simply a means to support reconstruction. When it appeared that the architects preparing reconstruction plans were no longer receiving structural data from the

⁴⁸ J.E.N. Jensen to Alexander Pirinie, September 23, 1968, Stanwix-PH; Associate Director, Planning and Development, to the Assistant Director, Policy Analysis and Programming, February 27, 1969, Stanwix-PH; Chief, Division of Historic Architecture, to the Chief, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, July 9, 1969, Stanwix-PH.

archaeologists, the Director of the Denver Service Center, the arm of the Park Service that oversaw large construction projects, suggested that those involved “re-examine” the continued funding of that part of the project. Park Service architects and historians were both dissatisfied with the amount of information they had on the structure and appearance of Fort Stanwix, and held a meeting on the issue at the site in June 1972. All concerned advocated an expanded historical research effort, without which, wrote historian Harry Pfanz, the “percentage of authenticity supported by factual data will probably be low. If fifty percent authenticity is achieved we shall indeed be fortunate.” Additional funding was made available for historical research on Fort Stanwix, and a historic structures report was completed in 1974.⁴⁹

The *Interpretive Prospectus, Fort Stanwix National Monument*, which was the plan for how the site would be interpreted to the public, was also completed in 1974. In a sense, this document said that interpretation as it is usually thought of at historic sites, i.e. exhibits, films, and historical talks, was unnecessary at Fort Stanwix. At this site, where several blocks at the center of a modern city were cleared, an extraordinary form of interpretation was taking place in the full reconstruction of the fort. An aerial photograph of the reconstruction underway showed a massive construction project and demonstrated just how bold an action this was; an action equated with the construction of the original Fort Stanwix. As the interpretive plan stated:

The dominant feature of the park must be the reconstructed fort. Its visual impact *is* interpretation, albeit unspoken and unaccompanied. For the

⁴⁹ “Fort Stanwix Project Moving” (editorial), *Rome Daily Sentinel*, 16 August 1969: n.p.; Director, Denver Service Center, to the Director, Northeast Region, May 19, 1972, Stanwix-PH; Acting Supervisory Historian Bears to the Manager, Historic Preservation Team, June 22, 1972, Stanwix-PH; Chief, Park History, to the Director, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, July 10, 1972, Stanwix-PH.

purposes of the park and its story, the entire site should be carefully planned so that the walls and bastions of the reconstruction say, without competition or interruption: "This was a stronghold – a fortified place so effective and so large in its protection of great numbers of men that invaders could not safely go around it, leaving its power intact to threaten their rear or flank." In the midst of a 20th-century city, the unencumbered glacis, the moat, the walls, and the ravelin will all communicate this important military insight, and should be allowed to do so of their own integrity, without self-conscious assistance through other developments."⁵⁰

The reconstruction of Fort Stanwix was completed for the Bicentennial and opened for public visitation. Despite the interpretive vision for Fort Stanwix presented by the Park Service, a visitor to the reconstructed fort may come away with a different experience. This reconstructed eighteenth century fort sits in the midst of an urban area. Modern buildings rise around it, making the fort seem strangely out of place, as if, caught in a time warp out of science fiction, it fell from the sky, landing here and crushing a few blocks of the city of Rome, New York. Interpreters, costumed as Revolutionary War soldiers, add to this sense of time gone askew. Plans for Bent's Old Fort used time warp type language to explain the purpose of that reconstruction. In a somewhat different sense, that was accomplished at Fort Stanwix.

The reconstruction of Fort Stanwix remains a rather curious episode in the Park Service's experience in the 1970s. On the one hand, the agency uses language that makes it appear that this reconstruction was somehow an authentic eighteenth century structure, and people visiting it could feel as if they were traveling back in time. On the other, individuals within the agency who prepared the master plan were somewhat uncomfortable with a reconstruction that required the demolition of a part of downtown

Rome that included historic structures. Perhaps this demonstrates that there was a degree of change in the opinions of some agency officials when it came to reconstructions, but for others, these continued to be very effective, thus appropriate, interpretive tools, even if they were more akin to a Hollywood film, or even Disneyland. When asked in an interview about interpretive planning in the National Park System, he responded that in his opinion the 1970s witnessed a “living history craze,” during which interpretive planners saw historic sites as “stage settings on which to create interpretive presentations.” A completely reconstructed eighteenth century fort is the perfect set.⁵¹

⁵⁰ National Park Service, *Interpretive Prospectus, Fort Stanwix National Monument* (1974), 4, Stanwix-HC.

⁵¹ Sellars and Webb, 66-67.

Fort Smith National Historic Site, Arkansas

The site of two nineteenth century forts on what was then the western frontier, the first Fort Smith was established in 1817 to keep the peace between the Plains Indians and those tribes forcibly settled in the region from the southeastern United States. In 1838, a second, larger Fort Smith replaced the earlier structure, and served as a base of operations to supply and command the frontier posts further to the west, until it was closed by the War Department in 1870. In subsequent years, Fort Smith was demolished, and a portion of the land was turned over to the City of Fort Smith. The land that remained in the hands of the federal government became the site of the courthouse in which served Federal Judge Issac Parker, a prominent figure in the lore of the American west who sought to impose order on the frontier by sentencing “outlaws” to hang. By the turn of the century, this land was also turned over to the City of Fort Smith, which used the courthouse for other purposes until it was restored and opened as a museum in the 1950s. One other building, the commissary from the second Fort Smith, the only part to have survived, also became a museum.

Unlike those sites where the National Park Service was led to reconstruct a historic structure, either by its own actions, outside political pressure, or a combination of the two, at Fort Smith National Historic Site the agency was able to overcome outside pressure and maintain internal solidarity against reconstruction. This began in 1955 when Director Conrad Wirth informed an inquiring United States Senator that the site

had been so changed that it “would be almost impossible to carry out any reconstruction or development that would bring to life the image of the old frontier post.”⁵²

Fort Smith was included in the Historic Sites Survey of the late 1950s, which determined that the site of the fort was nationally significant because of the role Fort Smith played in the history of the American west. This led the Park Service to study the feasibility of including the site in the National Park System, which led the determination made in 1960 that the historic site could be “suitable” for inclusion in the system if a number of modern intrusions were removed. Fort Smith National Historic Site was authorized by Congress in 1961, and the Park Service proceeded with plans for its development. This included the preparation of a 1963 master plan, which stated that the “fort will not be restored, but consideration will be given to restoring one of the two blockhouses as a vantage point to view the exposed outlined walls of the fort.” A 1964 version of the master plan more definitely allowed for some form of reconstruction, but made it clear that the major aspect of the site would involve “stabilizing ruins of important structures...[and] reconstructing lost features only when essential to providing a meaningful education experience.” At this time, the reconstruction of a single blockhouse was still being considered.⁵³

Despite early proposals to limit possible reconstruction at Fort Smith to a single blockhouse, and have the interpretation of the site rely on the exposed outline of the

⁵² Conrad L. Wirth to John L. McClellan, February 15, 1955, Fort Smith National Historic Site file, Park History Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Smith-PH).

⁵³ Regional Director to the Director, April 26, 1960, Fort Smith National Historic Site file, History Collection, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (hereafter Smith-HC); “Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Fort Smith National Historic Site, Mission 66 Edition,” June 1963, Smith-HC; “Master Plan of Fort Smith National Historic Site,” 1964, Smith-HC.

second fort, the reconstruction of even more parts of both the first and second forts was promoted by residents of Fort Smith. However, as archaeological excavations of the site were carried out in the mid-1960s, it became clear to the Park Service that the remains of the second fort were substantial enough to leave them exposed without any reconstruction. When the special committee that reviewed several western military forts in the Park System considered Fort Smith in 1965, it found that the site “should not be compromised” by a reconstruction, and favored the display of the outline of the fort. Similarly, in 1968, Park Service historian Ed Bearss, who was researching the history of Fort Smith, wrote that although enough archaeological and historical evidence existed to justify a partial reconstruction, the remains of the fort uncovered by excavations possessed “a high degree of integrity.” Therefore, he recommended that the Park Service’s Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation “oppose a reconstruction.” Soon after Bearss made his recommendation, Ernest Connally, Chief of the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, responded to a query from the Director’s office about plans for a possible reconstruction of Fort Smith. Connally informed the Director that despite the existence of archaeological and historical evidence that would make a reconstruction possible, the Park Service had never made a serious proposal to reconstruct the fort because it had not determined that this was necessary to interpret the site.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ “Committee Report on Western Military Forts,” 1965, 150-151, Fort Smith National Historic Site file, Cultural Resources Bibliography Repository, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (hereafter Smith-CRB); Historian Bearss to Chief, Branch of Park History Studies, February 21, 1968, Smith-PH; Chief, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, to the Executive Assistant to the Director, February 28, 1968, Smith-PH.

As Park Service plans for the development of Fort Smith National Historic Site continued, the agency determined that not only was a reconstruction unnecessary for the interpretation, but not enough information on the appearance of Fort Smith actually existed to even attempt an accurate reconstruction. When it became apparent to civic leaders in the City of Fort Smith, as well as members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation, that agency had no intention to reconstruct anything, they began to ask questions about the future of the historic site. By the 1970s this developed into relatively strong pressure on the Park Service, and people in Arkansas saw a reconstructed Fort Smith as an important element in their State's celebration of the American Bicentennial. Disregarding the fact that its earliest plans for Fort Smith had included a proposal for a limited reconstruction, the Park Service's response to this pressure was that it knew of "no proposal to reconstruct" the fort. As the year 1976 came closer, the Fort Smith Bicentennial Commission appealed to United States Senator John McClellan to inquire about the possibility of reconstruction. To this, Park Service Director Ronald Walker provided a thorough response, explaining that the agency worked under certain policies that "have as their purpose the perpetuation of authentic remains of our Nation's history." It was further explained that a reconstruction could only be "authorized" when it was "essential for public understanding" of a historic site, and information would "permit an accurate restoration." These criteria were not intended to prohibit reconstructions, but were "based on the philosophy that the National Park Service has a duty to be as absolutely factual as possible in its presentation of history to the public." Therefore, in light of the fact that the Park Service did not feel there was enough evidence to

reconstruct the fort, it was better “to present to the public a 100 percent accurate ruin than a 25 percent accurate reconstruction.”⁵⁵

To deal with community dissatisfaction with its plans for Fort Smith, the Park Service went to great lengths to provide opportunities for local residents to comment on its plans for the site. In September 1974, a team of Park Service officials working on a new Fort Smith master plan met with representatives of various organizations from the community, and found that almost all wanted to see the first fort that stood on the site reconstructed. When given the explanation that there was not enough evidence to accurately reconstruct the fort, Bill Brown, Chief of the Division of History, explained that “[t]his was viewed by reconstruction proponents as a bunch of bureaucratic obstructionism, and its was made pretty plain that they would resort to the Arkansas [Congressional] delegation on this matter.” In response, Park Service officials proposed that a competent historical architect “evaluate” all the available historical and archaeological material to determine if, in Brown’s words, “it would be possible to make an authentic reconstruction.” Not surprisingly, Arkansas Governor Dale Bumpers pushed for reconstruction, but it gave the Park Service hope when the Governor said he wanted “an authentic job.”⁵⁶

Pressure on the Park Service to reconstruct the first Fort Smith intensified in the period leading up to the Bicentennial, and fell particularly hard on the agency’s Southwest regional office, which was located in Santa Fe and under whose administration

⁵⁵ Ernest Allen Connally to John Paul Mammerschmidt, March 31, 1972, Smith-PH; Ronald H. Walker to John L. McClellan, June 12, 1974, Smith-PH.

⁵⁶ Chief, Division of History, to the Southwest Regional Office Directorate, September 27, 1974, Smith-PH.

Fort Smith National Historic Site came. Even the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer, whose office was part of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, wrote to the Regional Director to recommend “that reconstruction of the first Fort Smith would provide the badly needed enhancement of the Fort Smith National Historic Site.”⁵⁷

The strategy of the Park Service in regards to the possible reconstruction of the first Fort Smith was to turn the issue of the lack of evidence on the appearance of the fort over to a number of professionals, both inside and outside of the agency. If they determined there was enough evidence to permit an accurate reconstruction, any such proposal would still have to “run the gamut” of the planning and review process. This would have to include a determination by the Park Service of the “desirability of reconstruction,” as well as input required from the state historic preservation office and the federal Advisory Board on Historic Preservation. Through this process, the Park Service apparently believed that it might be possible to convince the community that a reconstruction was unwarranted.⁵⁸

At the time that the Park Service undertook the evaluation of the historical and archaeological data on the first Fort Smith, relations with the local community were characterized as “delicate.” Therefore, it was deemed necessary to have a local authority on Fort Smith included in the evaluation. The Park Service asked Clyde Dollar, a historian at the University of Arkansas who had been involved in planning for the development of Fort Smith National Historic Site for several years, to take part. Even

⁵⁷ Robert M. Utley to Dr. Curry, October 29, 1974, Smith-PH; William E. Henderson to Joseph C. Ruenburg, Jr., October 8, 1974, Smith-PH.

⁵⁸ “Proposal for Reevaluation of Evidence on First Fort Smith’s Appearance,” (undated), Smith-PH; “Can the First For Smith Be Authentically Reconstructed?” (undated press release), Smith-PH.

with this local contribution, those evaluating Fort Smith determined there was “insufficient architectural data to allow an accurate reconstruction,” and that reconstruction was not “essential to public understanding” of the site. This did not go over well with residents of Fort Smith, and in his response to the findings of the evaluation, the Chairman of the Fort Smith Bicentennial Commission stated: “I am not prepared to accept the findings of the feasibility study.” In the opinion of one Park Service official, “any negative answer, no matter how thoroughly documented, would be unsatisfactory” to the people of Fort Smith. Rather than an actual evaluation of available evidence, they actually expected “an all-out new research effort that would attempt to justify the proposed reconstruction.” However, working in the Park Service’s favor was the response by Arkansas’ United States Senator, Dale Bumpers, who as Governor had stated that he was in favor of an accurate reconstruction. Bumpers held to this opinion, and wanted an “evaluation” of Fort Smith that was both “thorough and proper.”⁵⁹

Following the negative evaluation of the proposed reconstruction, the Fort Smith Bicentennial Commission informed United States Representative John Hammerschmidt about the full reconstruction of Fort Stanwix, New York, which was being carried out by the National Park Service in preparation for the nation’s Bicentennial celebration. The Representative inquired of the Park Service the difference between that project and the situation at Fort Smith. To this, the agency responded that “sufficient documentary material exists to permit a high degree of accuracy in the reconstruction of Fort Stanwix,”

⁵⁹ Clyde D. Dollar to Joseph C. Rumburg, Jr., November 25, 1974, Smith-PH; Joseph C. Rumburg, Jr. to Jim Williams, December 2, 1974, Smith-PH; Jim W. Williams to Joseph Rumburg, December 9, 1974, Smith-PH; Dave Battle to Smokey Moore, January 3, 1975, Smith-PH; Dale Bumpers to Joseph Rumburg, January 24, 1975, Smith-PH.

and because there were “no significant remains” of the fort “a reconstruction was judged necessary if visitors were to understand and appreciate” the site.⁶⁰

In response to public concern over its decisions regarding Fort Smith National Historic Site, the Park Service agreed to consider new information on the appearance of the fort that Clyde Dollar, the University of Arkansas historian, might be able to turn up through additional research. Despite finding new information that could help the Park Service interpret Fort Smith, after several months of research, Dollar found no additional evidence concerning the construction or appearance of the fort. In a report on his findings, Dollar made several strong statements against reconstruction. He stated that to do so with “major gaps in our knowledge of the physical appearance” of Fort Smith “would require...turning hypotheses into unchangeable reality and surmises into visual appearance. I am of the opinion that this would be an exercise in historical fabrication.” Furthermore, Dollar felt that to reconstruct, which would require the destruction of the actual remains of the original structure, would be “an irrevocable act” that would be truly “detrimental” to the site. In conclusion, the historian stated: “Even if a great deal of architectural information were known about the building, I would be hesitant to recommend such destruction or alteration of the existing foundations.”⁶¹

In May 1976, Robert Utley, the former Chief Historian of the National Park Service, who was then serving as the Assistant Director for Park Historic Preservation, met with the staffs of the Arkansas Congressional delegation to discuss Clyde Dollars’ findings, as well as the larger issue of reconstructing Fort Smith. In his report on the

⁶⁰ Russell E. Dickerson to John Paul Hammerschmidt. April 4, 1975, Stanwix-PH.

meeting, Utley stated that it had been made “abundantly clear” that “strong local pressure” continued to be placed upon these members of Congress to have the fort reconstructed. In response, Utley discussed the “philosophical and budgetary reasons” the Park Service was opposed to such a course of action, and “stressed” the study by Dollar, “in whom the residents [of Fort Smith] repose particular confidence.” With both Dollar and the Park Service saying there was insufficient evidence for a reconstruction, Utley told the Congressional staff: “A reconstruction would be mostly conjecture and, in truth, be simply another of the phony forts that are springing up along out transcontinental highways.” Despite Congressional interest in the alternatives to reconstruction proposed by the Park Service, it was revealed to Utley that if their Arkansas constituents could not be mollified, Senator McClellan might introduce legislation before Congress that would direct the Park Service to reconstruct Fort Smith. To this, Utley responded that the Park Service would have to oppose any such legislation since a reconstructed Fort Smith would be “demonstrably lacking” accuracy. Furthermore, the Park Service could count on the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the “historic preservation community in general,” to be highly critical of such legislation.⁶²

At a second meeting with Congressional staff, Utley was asked to search Park Service records “for any indication of a commitment, stated or implied, to reconstruct” Fort Smith. After determining that no such commitment had been made, Utley was informed that the Arkansas Congressional delegation would support the preservation and

⁶¹ Clyde D. Dollar, “The First Fort Smith Report: Addendum 1975,” 1976, Smith-PH.

display of the remains of Fort Smith rather than its reconstruction. However, they asked that Utley attend a public meeting in Fort Smith to explain the Park Service's position to their constituents. Based upon press reports of this meeting, held on June 28, 1976, and attended by the Arkansas Congressional delegation, Utley gave a bravura performance and won a "vote of confidence" for the Park Service's plans for Fort Smith. In his remarks, Utley told the audience quite bluntly that to reconstruct the fort with so little evidence about its appearance would be "like a Cecil B. DeMille Hollywood production...that would perpetuate a fraud on the American public." He implored the residents of Fort Smith to "recognize for all practical purposes the fort is gone.... You can't bring Fort Smith back. Let us be content with remnants," which, after all, are "real." When questioned by the public, Utley admitted that the Park Service had given in to "political pressure" and reconstructed other sites, despite issues of their authenticity and accuracy. "The National Park Service's skirt are not all that clean," he said. Utley quoted an article from the *Philadelphia Enquirer* on another reconstruction, proposed for Independence National Historical Park, which stated: "We [America] are building lies about the past, and if we care for what we have that is real-we may not have to reconstruct lies for our children." In conclusion, Utley said of a reconstructed fort: "Is this what the people of Fort Smith want? You would end up with some high conjecture. In other words, a phony fort, a fraud, an untruth. These are hard words, but that's the way it is."⁶³

⁶² Assistant Director, Park Historic Preservation, to the Associate Director, Legislation, May 26, 1976, Smith-PH.

⁶³ Assistant Director, Park Historic Preservation, to the Associate Director, Legislation, May 28, 1976, Smith-PH; Associate Director, Park Historic Preservation, to the Associate Director, Legislation,

Following the meeting at which Utley spoke, the Park Service won public support for its plans for Fort Smith National Historic Site. Although some still held out the hope that one day the fort might be reconstructed, most comments received from the public showed, in the words of Senator Dale Bumpers, “that the city of Fort Smith is now united in their support” of a historic site without a reconstruction. As Robert Utley put it, “most now understand the pragmatic, if not the philosophical, reasons for avoiding one.”⁶⁴

The plan for Fort Smith National Historic Site that the public came to support involved the acquisition of additional land for the existing, although relatively small park, which allowed all of the area that had been part of the historic Fort Smith to be included in the historic site. Other land was also be added to “preserve the historical integrity of the site” from modern development. Rather than reconstruct any non-extant structures, the Park Service would preserve the foundations of the fort, restore the two existing historic structures, the courthouse and commissary, and construct a new visitor center.⁶⁵

The process the Park Service went through to arrive at the final development plan for Fort Smith National Historic Site could be a model for how the agency deals with political and community pressure to reconstruct a historic structure. Except for some early proposals for a partial reconstruction, Park Service officials were generally unified in opposition to reconstruction and supported a plan to preserve the remains of Fort

June 2, 1976, Smith-PH; Robert M. Utley to John L. McClellan, June 11, 1976, Smith-PH; Manny Gamallo, “Historic Site Plans Heard,” *Southwest Times Record* (Fort Smith, Arkansas) 29 June 1976, n.p.; “Reconstruction of Fort Smith Would Be Fraud, Official Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 June 1976, 1; Sellars and Webb, 34.

⁶⁴ Chief, Division of Cultural Resources Management, to the Chief, Office of Legislation, July 1, 1976, Smith-PH; Joseph C. Rumburg, Jr. to John L. McClellan, July 2, 1976, Smith-PH; “Good News From Historic Site” (editorial), *Southwest Times Record* (Fort Smith, Arkansas) 4 July 1976, n.p.; Dale Bumpers to Joseph C. Rumburg, Jr, July 9, 1979, Smith-PH; Robert M. Utley to Jerry L. Russell, July 9, 1976, Smith-PH.

Smith. Their effort to stave off pressure for a reconstruction was assisted by the determination that sufficient information on the appearance of the fort did not exist, as well as a governor, and later senator, who appears to have wanted an accurate reconstruction, not the fraud that Robert Utley spoke of. However, the early proposals for a partial reconstruction could have led to a different outcome. Had the Arkansas Congressional delegation used the existence of the Park Service's own determination that a reconstruction was appropriate, it could have put more pressure on the agency, or introduced legislation that directed the Park Service to reconstruct Fort Smith. Then, the authentic remains of the fort might have been destroyed in the course of a reconstruction, which is what occurred at both Fort Stanwix and Bent's Old Fort. Furthermore, the early reconstruction proposals may have led to disagreement within the Park Service over the direction the development of Fort Smith should have taken. This, we shall see, occurred in the case of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, where disagreement within the Park Service led to a reconstruction despite some of the strongest opposition to reconstructing a historic structure ever encountered within the agency.

⁶⁵ "Master Plan/Development Concept Plan, Fort Smith National Historic Site," 1976, Smith-PH.

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota and Montana

From 1829 to 1867, Fort Union Trading Post stood on a bluff near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, serving as one of the principal hubs of the fur and Indian trade in the American west. Constructed by French Canadians for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, Fort Union consisted of a number of buildings within a log stockade. A major meeting ground for Indian and Anglo cultures, the trading post was often visited by notable figures such as George Catlin and John James Audubon. With a decline in trade by mid-century, Fort Union Trading Post was abandoned in 1867, and most of it was used as salvage material by the United States Army, which was constructing a new military post nearby.

In 1959, the National Park Service's National Historic Sites Survey identified the site of Fort Union as having national significance because of the trading post's prominent role in the history of the western United States. The Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments approved this finding in 1961, and the site came under consideration for addition to the National Park System. The following year, the National Park Service recommended that the site of Fort Union be acquired by the federal government and become a national historic site.

As it began its involvement with Fort Union Trading Post, the National Park Service saw the possibility of reconstructing this fort that had been demolished in 1867. A 1962 report on the site's potential for addition to the National Park System, prepared by the agency's Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska, stated that the archaeological excavation of the site, along with historical information, "would permit a

very accurate reconstruction of the fort to be carried out.” Despite the potential for reconstruction, this was “deemed too costly,” perhaps because of the site’s remote location, and the region recommended only the partial reconstruction of the stockade and display of archaeological features, along with exhibits in a modern visitor center. Officials in the Park Service’s Washington headquarters were receptive to the proposals of the regional office, but specified there should be no “commitment” to reconstruct the fort in order to maintain “complete flexibility” for the agency to develop the site. By 1963, when Congress was considering legislation to authorize Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, the Park Service’s plans centered upon the display of remains of the fort that might be found during excavations. The reconstruction of a portion of the stockade and construction of a modern visitor center were intended to compliment what was for the most part an archaeological site.⁶⁶

The legislation authorizing Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site was passed by Congress in 1966. That year, the Park Service prepared a master plan for the site that showed a change in direction from the archaeologically based historic site, to one that relied on the reconstruction of vanished structures. The new plan had as its “primary management objective” the “partial” reconstruction of the fort (which was interchangeably referred to as “restoration”), including the entire stockade, two defensive bastions, the main gate and adjoining structures, and the Bourgeois House, which was the

⁶⁶ “A Proposed Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site,” 1962, 3, 13, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site file, History Collection, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (hereafter Union-HC); Assistant Director, Resource Planning, to the Regional Director, Midwest Region, October 12, 1962, Fort Union National Historic Site file, Park History Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Union-PH); John A. Carver, Jr. to Wayne N. Aspinall, June 5, 1963, Union-PH.

main structure within the original trading post. The Park Service did not propose to reconstruct the entire fort because of the cost of such a project, but also because a lack of information on the appearance of all parts of this complex precluded the “complete authenticity” of a full reconstruction. Then why reconstruct at all? Because, even a partially reconstructed trading post would “create a good visual impression, providing the visitors with an exceptionally vivid historical experience.”⁶⁷

What happened to the Park Service’s plans to limit reconstruction to a portion of the stockade wall, which would have given more visual definition to a large, level site consisting of below grade ruins? Paul Hedren, former Superintendent of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, has written that both the reconstruction proposals of 1962 and 1966 were “predictable” responses by the Park Service when it was confronted with interpreting “so barren a site.” However, in an account of the events leading up to the reconstruction of Fort Union Trading Post offered by Rodd Wheaton, a historical architect who was deeply involved with this project, the Park Service “bowed” to the will of the citizens of North Dakota and Montana, who wanted a more complete reconstruction. As Wheaton has pointed out, at Fort Union the Park Service was “operating in the spirit of the times” in which it also promoted the reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort and Fort Stanwix during this period of the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ “Master Plan of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site,” 1966, 11, 20, Union-HC.

⁶⁸ Paul L. Hedren, “Field Notes: Why We Reconstructed Fort Union,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* (August 1992): 350; Rodd Wheaton, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: Decision Within Documentation,” (paper presented to the Association for Preservation Technology, 1985), 5, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site file, Park Historic Architecture Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Union-PHA).

The influence of public and political pressure on the Park Service is commonly cited in discussions of reconstructions within the National Park System. Such external pressure has indeed been the case at a number of these sites, perhaps most notoriously when a member of Congress persuaded the agency to reconstruct Fort Caroline, a sixteenth century French Huguenot fort in Florida, just a few years before it planned the reconstruction of Fort Union. In the case of Fort Caroline, the original site of the fort had been washed away by a river, and the Park Service constructed a scaled down facsimile on another site, complete with concrete clearly visible within what are supposed to be earthen walls. The questionable accuracy and poor construction of Fort Caroline led Park Service historian Barry Mackintosh to comment: "The reconstruction was such an obvious fake that no one could mistake it for the original--perhaps its only virtue." Similarly, in 1965 a member of Congress from Washington, Julia Butler Hansen, began a several year crusade to have the Park Service reconstruct Fort Vancouver, a nineteenth century trading post constructed by the Hudson's Bay Company. After work was begun by the Park Service to support a reconstruction, in 1969 historian Robert Utley commented, somewhat bitterly: "The Service had decided long since against reconstruction. But Mrs. Hansen decided for it and that is the current...objective." Fort Union Trading Post is often sited as another example where the decision to reconstruct was not the Park Service's, but was imposed upon it by Congress. Ultimately, this was the case, and in 1985 Congress passed legislation directing the agency to reconstruct. But to get to that point, the cause of reconstruction was abetted by the failure of the Park

Service to be consistent in its position on the site, and reconstructions in general, as well as its failure to speak with one voice on the future of Fort Union Trading Post.⁶⁹

The Park Service's first planning document on Fort Union Trading Post, the 1962 study on the proposed historic site, put forward the idea that reconstruction was possible, although it would be too costly. This early mention of reconstruction by no means meant the agency was destined to take this course of action. As discussed earlier, reconstruction was also an alternative in the early proposals for Fort Smith, Arkansas, but through force of a strong argument against reconstruction, and internal unity, the Park Service was literally able to fend off external political pressure to reconstruct. In the case of Fort Union Trading Post, the situation was less clear, as it appears there were differences within the Park Service over the reconstruction question, particularly between the agency's Washington and regional offices.

Internal differences played a role in Fort Union as early as 1965, when Park Service Director George Hartzog and members of his staff testified before Congress on the establishment of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site. As recounted by Roy Appleman, a historian in the Division of Interpretation, when testifying before the House, the Park Service officials mentioned no proposal to reconstruct the fort. One of the Representatives who sponsored the bill, James Battin, made it clear that he thought a reconstructed fort would be a good tourist draw for the region. But another, Representative Rolland Redlin, commented that the purpose of the historic site was "not

⁶⁹ Mackintosh, "The Case Against Reconstruction," 17; Robert Utley to Ernest Connally, March 11, 1969, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site file, Park History Program, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. On the reconstruction of Fort Vancouver, see Jane T. Merritt, *The Administrative History of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site* (National Park Service: 1993).

to rebuild the fort as such.” During testimony before the Senate, in response to questions concerning plans to reconstruct the fort, Assistant Director Howard Stagner said the Park Service did not intend to reconstruct the fort. Instead, it wanted to develop the site along the lines of Jamestown, Virginia, where the remaining foundations of the historic structures were exposed and interpreted for the public. Despite the Park Service’s intention not to reconstruct, during his testimony Roy Appleman gave his opinion that the foundations of Fort Union were not as extensive as those found at Jamestown and would probably be of “limited interest” to the public. As told by Appleman: “I stated it was my view that the American public was becoming interested in full scale replica reconstructions of historic structures, particularly of small scale establishments similar to that of Fort Union, and that full scale replica reconstructions offered the best means of interesting and informing visitors.” He then “suggested” that the answer to the “question of reconstruction, partially or in entirety,” be delayed until archaeological and historical research could determine how much evidence existed regarding the appearance of the fort. It was Appleman’s understanding that it was then left to the Park Service to determine whether there was enough information for an “authentic replica,” and how much such a development might cost.⁷⁰

If the stated intention of the Park Service was to expose and interpret the foundations of Fort Union Trading Post, it seems odd that Roy Appleman would testify before members of Congress who were predisposed toward reconstruction that the American public preferred these replicas to viewing archaeological remains. In the

opinion of Robert Utley, who was Chief Historian at the time this testimony was given, Appleman's "interest was primarily in interpretation" and the visitors' appreciation of the significance of historic sites, which led him to be "all in favor of reconstructions." This is evident in the positions Appleman took when he served on the Committee to Review Western Forts in 1965: was a strong supporter of reconstructing Bent's Old Fort, as well as the lone member of the committee to favor some form of reconstruction at Fort Smith, Arkansas. If Appleman's 1965 Congressional testimony was intended to make the same point about Fort Union Trading Post, that reconstruction should be considered, he may have been successful, as the issue was by no means put to rest. The next year, the agency prepared plans for the partial reconstruction of the fort.⁷¹

While Roy Appleman may have been in favor of reconstructions, according to Robert Utley, he "also believed passionately in the value of exhaustive research." So, when the 1966 master plan for Fort Union Trading Post proposed a partial reconstruction, Appleman thought the Park Service had not done a thorough enough job of obtaining archaeological and historical information to make this determination. Before it could positively say that it intended to reconstruct, he believed the agency should complete its research on the fort. Such work was subsequently carried out, including the completion of a historic structures report in 1968, and archaeological excavations at the site between 1968 and 1972. As was the case with some of its other reconstruction projects, the Park Service carried out these excavations primarily to facilitate the reconstruction of Fort

⁷⁰ Roy E. Appleman to the Chief, Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services, November 16, 1966, Union-PH.

⁷¹ Sellars and Webb, 26, 62; Roy E. Appleman to the Chief, Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services, November 16, 1966, Union-PH.

Union, not for the larger purpose of collecting information on the life of the trading post. Within the Park Service, there was criticism of the manner in which these excavations were carried out. Writing about the project several years later, historical architects Richard Cronenberger and Rodd Wheaton have said this work did not contribute as much as it could to the goal of reconstruction, as it was poorly planned and incomplete. Furthermore, the architects felt the archaeologists working on the project were unable to understand the architectural information that could be found in the remains of the fort, which would be of great use in a reconstruction. However, one Park Service official clearly felt the work was contributing to the goal of reconstruction. Writing on the progress of the excavations in 1970, historian Erwin Thompson stated that this was “an excellent case study of history and archaeology assisting each other and contributing to architecture and interpretation.” In fact, he believed the plan for a partial reconstruction did “not do justice to the site,” and the Park Service should consider reconstructing the “greater portion of the fort.”⁷²

Thompson expressed his opinion on the expansion of the reconstruction of Fort Union Trading Post four years after the Park Service adopted the master plan for the site, and two years after archaeological work had begun. This would appear to imply that a great deal of new information on the appearance of the fort had been found (it had not), and the historian could justifiably call for an expanded construction. However, Thompson should probably have been rethinking the plans for Fort Union Trading Post in

⁷² Sellars and Webb, 26; Richard J. Cronenberger, “Fort Union: Reconstruction of a Nineteenth Century Robe and Fur Trading Post on the Northern Plains” (unpublished manuscript), 1989(?), 1, Union-PHA; Wheaton, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: Decision Within Documentation,” 7-8, Union-PHA; Erwin Thompson to Wilfred M. Husted, June 18, 1970, Union-PH..

a much different way, because in 1968 the Park Service adopted new administrative policies for the management of historic sites that set what appeared to be a stricter standard on reconstruction. Prior to 1968, the Park Service had not been operating on a strict policy for the treatment of historic structures, but on a standard adopted in 1937 that said: "Better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than reconstruct." The new policy went much further, requiring that reconstructions only be "authorized" when the following conditions are satisfied:

- (a) All or almost all traces of a structure have disappeared and its recreation is essential for public understanding and appreciation of the historical associations for which the park was established.
- (b) Sufficient historical, archaeological, and architectural data exist to permit an accurate reproduction.
- (c) The structure can be erected on the original site or in a setting appropriate to the significance of the area, as in a pioneer community or living farm, where exact site of structures may be identifiable through research.⁷³

In light of the new, stricter policy on reconstructions in the National Park System, one would have thought that the proposal for Fort Union Trading Post would have been reassessed and perhaps altered, to resemble the original plan for the site that relied on the display of archaeological remains. In fact, the Park Service did formally reassess its plans for Fort Union in the 1970s. This was not done primarily in response to the new management policy on reconstructions, but because agency reorganization transferred management of the site from the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, to the new Rocky Mountain Region, headquartered in Denver. This gave the Rocky Mountain Region the opportunity to prepare a new master plan for Fort Union in 1974.

The region's new plan for Fort Union Trading Post was still predicated upon a reconstruction. Public support for reconstruction may have played a role in the development of the plan, but statements made by the region and its staff suggests that there was a fair degree of support within the Rocky Mountain Region for reconstruction. For example, when the General Management Plan for the historic site was being drawn up by the region in 1976, it sent a briefing statement to the Park Service's Washington office to make officials there aware of its "recommended position" regarding reconstruction. In this document, the region put forth its view that over the course of several years, the Park Service conducted a number of studies on the alternatives to the development of Fort Union Trading Post, and "[e]ach study has basically come to the same conclusion of reconstruction." The region held that reconstruction was "critical to the interpretation of the site...and for the benefit and appreciation of the general public. Without a reconstructed fort the National Park Service should then consider removal of the area from the [National Park System]....Without a reconstruction it is not considered feasible to develop a visitor center and attempt to interpret a barren site." Therefore, after "considerable" input and "interaction" among the public, the staff of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, and regional staff, the Rocky Mountain Region concluded that the fort should "be reconstructed to the extent practical."⁷⁴

⁷³ Barry Mackintosh, "To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice," *CRM* 13, no.1 (1990), 7; *Compilation of the Administrative Policies of the Administrative Policies of the Historical Areas of the National Park System*, 23.

⁷⁴ Chief, Division of Planning and Design, Rocky Mountain Region to the Associate Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, September 8, 1976, Union-PH; Briefing Statement, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, September 1976, Union-PH.

In contrast to the views on reconstruction coming from the Rocky Mountain Region, staff in the Park Service's Washington headquarters were less supportive of reconstruction, or even outright opposed to it. One such strong opponent was historian David Clary, who, in a note to Chief Historian Robert Utley, wrote: "Perhaps I can persuade you to my philosophy on such matters as Ft. Union and Bent's Old Fort. While the Servicewide priorities in historic preservation are a key consideration, I still believe that the misleading and destructive aspects of a reconstruction like the one proposed at [Fort] Union militate decisively against doing it at all." He added: "At one time, we had interpreters who accepted the challenge of a difficult job. I wonder where they are now[?]" Clary seems to imply that when the Park Service reconstructs, it is taking the easy way out rather than developing imaginative interpretive programs that could help the public to understand and appreciate a site such as Fort Union Trading Post, which has few historic remains. Furthermore, in his desire to "persuade" Utley of his "philosophy" on Fort Union Trading Post and Bent's Old Fort, Clary was attempting to go beyond the bureaucratic objections to reconstructions that were based upon management policies and issues of funding. Instead, he was objecting to the basic concept of reconstructing vanished historic structures. This is one of the few Park Service documents in which philosophical opposition to reconstruction is raised. Fittingly, it was addressed to Robert Utley, who played such a major role in the development of historic preservation policy in the Park Service, and would soon have a change of heart on the reconstruction issue.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ David Clary to Robert Utley, July 12, 1974, Union-PH.

Throughout much of the 1970s, when he served as the Park Service's Chief Historian, then Director of the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, and finally Assistant Director for Park Historic Preservation, Robert Utley was not an opponent of reconstruction. Although he would later change his philosophy on this aspect of historic preservation, Utley did not oppose plans to reconstruct Fort Vancouver, Washington, and was a strong proponent of reconstructing Bent's Old Fort, which may be why David Clary felt it necessary to add that he was philosophically opposed to reconstructing Bent's Old Fort, as well as Fort Union, in the note to his boss. If Utley did have problems with reconstructions at this time, it was mainly because these new structures were expensive to build and maintain, while authentic historic structures were not receiving adequate funding. Despite his support for certain reconstructions, the historian did not think one was appropriate at Fort Union Trading Post, as the site had been interpreted through other means and could continue in this fashion. In addition, there was the great cost of the project, as well as continued maintenance, which was just becoming an issue with the newly reconstructed Bent's Old Fort. Therefore, when the Rocky Mountain Region sent its 1974 master plan for Fort Union to Washington for review, Utley commented that neither Congress nor the Park Service expressed an intention to reconstruct the fort when the historic site was authorized in 1966. At that time the agency proposed that only "part of the stockade" be reconstructed, which Congress apparently understood and accepted.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Sellars and Webb, 33; Assistant Director, Park Historic Preservation, to the Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, October 11, 1974, Union-PH.

Like Utley, other highly placed officials in the Washington office of the National Park Service did not recognize a need to reconstruct Fort Union, particularly when the cost was estimated at over \$8 million. As a result, further study of the issue caused a delay in planning for the site between the adoption of the master plan in 1974 and the development of the General Management Plan for the historic site in 1976. Noting the public support for reconstruction, members of Congress made it clear to the Park Service that they favored this approach, while the Park Service responded that it already had a “backlog” of construction projects in the National Park System. Similarly, as the Rocky Mountain Region was preparing the General Management Plan for Fort Union, Associate Director Raymond Freeman informed the Regional Director that the region would have to provide the “most persuasive justification” for an \$8 million reconstruction project when “funding was inadequate to care for genuine historic fabric” in the National Park System. Therefore, the region must prepare “an analysis of the relationship of this particular project to the management policies regarding reconstructions,” and would have to demonstrate that no other interpretive approach would do. Freeman explained that a failure to provide such an examination of reconstruction would fail to convince those “who may detect a discrepancy between our professions and our practice.”⁷⁷

At this time, the Park Service was operating under even stricter policies on reconstructions, which had been adopted in 1975. The new policies sought to increase the protection of archaeological remains and stressed that reconstruction is only

⁷⁷ Acting Associate Director to the Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, September 24, 1976, Union-PH.

appropriate when there are no other means to interpret a site. These policies only allowed reconstruction when:

1. There are no significant preservable remains that would be obliterated by reconstruction.
2. Historical, archaeological, and architectural data are sufficient to permit an accurate reproduction with a minimum of conjecture.
3. The structure can be erected on the original site.
4. All prudent and feasible alternatives to reconstruction have been considered, and it is demonstrated that reconstruction is the only alternative that permits and is *essential* to public understanding an appreciation of the historical and cultural associations for which the park was established.⁷⁸

Despite Associate Director Freeman's September 1976 message regarding the management policies, by November, a second Associate Director, John Cook, was complaining that the Rocky Mountain Region was seeking funding for reconstruction but had yet to demonstrate that reconstruction was acceptable under the Park Service's management policies. Until the agency determined reconstruction was "justified by policy, feasible, and appropriate," Cook recommended that it "do nothing to promote or advance this proposal." Apparently there was a fear that the activities of the region would make it more difficult for the Park Service to make a decision on reconstruction according to its own policies without interference from Congress or the public. This was demonstrated by a January 1977 letter from the Acting Director of the Park Service to North Dakota Congressman Mark Andrews, one of the strongest proponents of reconstruction. The letter stated that the agency's "policies are designed to subject proposed reconstruction to the most rigorous scrutiny....because reconstructions are not

⁷⁸ Quoted in Mackintosh, "To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice," 7.

genuine historic structures,” and take funding away from the preservation of those that are. The Acting Director explained that in order for the agency to authorize a reconstruction, it must determine that there is enough information on the appearance of the original fort, and is “essential” to the interpretation of the site. Therefore, the Rocky Mountain Region had been directed to make such a determination.⁷⁹

When completed in 1976, the General Management Plan for Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site was poorly received by several different program divisions within the Park Service’s Washington office. The Chief of the Cultural Resources Management Division, Harry Pfanz, “strongly” recommended against approval of the plan because it did not show that a reconstruction would meet agency policies. In particular, it failed to demonstrate there was “sufficient evidence to permit an accurate reconstruction,” address alternatives to the interpretation, or justify spending \$8 million for a reconstruction that would destroy the remains of the original fort. Pfanz believed that if agency’s management policies were properly applied to Fort Union, it would be clear that this plan was “unwarranted” and the site could be adequately interpreted through other means. Vernon Dame, the Chief of the Division of Interpretation, felt there was indeed enough information to carry out an accurate reconstruction, but was also of the opinion that there were other interpretive “alternatives that at least deserve a trial” before a reconstruction was carried out. He added that the regional office was feeling “very strong” political pressure to reconstruct the fort. The Chief of the Cultural Resources Management Division, Ross Holland, objected to language in the General

Management Plan that gave the impression “reconstruction of the fort is a forgone conclusion.” He was especially unhappy with the region’s proposal to reconstruct the fort in stages, as more evidence on the various structures within became available through archaeological and historical work. Holland believed this an “unwise” approach that could lead to inaccuracies, and thought it best to delay any commitment to reconstruct the fort until more complete information was available and it was truly determined that no alternative existed.⁸⁰

The critics of the General Management Plan for Fort Union Trading Post pointed to the failure of the region to show that the proposed reconstruction met all of the Park Service’s policy requirements. But, at least equally important was the high cost of the project and the inadequate funding of historic preservation. In fact, the restrictive policies on reconstruction that the Fort Union Trading Post plan failed to comply with were put in place to a great extent to deal with what was seen as the continuing problem of proposals for expensive reconstructions while there was a shortage of funding for the care of authentic historic structures in the National Park System. Furthermore, the General Management Plan for Fort Union was being reviewed at the time that the Park Service was dealing with the high cost of maintaining one of its most recent reconstructions, Bent’s Old Fort, on which the adobe walls were being worn away by the elements. With these factors in mind, the Park Service’s Washington office informed the

⁷⁹ Associate Director, Management and Operations, to the Chief, Office of Legislation, November 18, 1976, Union-PH; William J. Briggles to Mark Andrews, January 24, 1977, Union-PH.

⁸⁰ Acting Chief, Cultural Resources Management Division, to the Acting Assistant Director, Planning and Development, March 24, 1977, Union-PH; Chief, Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services, to the Assistant Director, Planning and Development, May 5, 1977, Union-PH; Chief, Cultural

Rocky Mountain Region that its management plan failed “to make a convincing case for committing substantial funding to the development and operation of a reconstructed fort, particularly in view of the importance of focusing our limited resources to stem the progressive deterioration of the original historic resources we are committed to preserve.” Therefore, the region would have to show that all other alternatives for interpretation had been considered and rejected before a reconstruction would be considered appropriate.⁸¹

The impasse between the regional and Washington offices led to a special “field review” of Fort Union in September 1977 in order to reach a “consensus” on the reconstruction question. Despite the various critics of the General Management Plan for Fort Union, a consensus of sorts was reached and a version of the plan was approved. This document proposed that the different structures within the fort be reconstructed as evidence about their appearance came to light. At the time, there was sufficient evidence for the accurate reconstruction of the stockade wall, and, with what one Park Service document described as “minor conjecture,” two defensive bastions. To continue reconstruction, additional archaeological and historical work was required. As he had before, Ross Holland, Chief of Cultural Resources Management, objected to the plan, which he believed made it seem that reconstruction was a “foregone conclusion” even though the necessary research on the site had not been completed. Furthermore, he objected to the proposal that the elements of the fort be reconstructed in a piecemeal fashion as more evidence on their appearance became known. Holland believed that as

Resources Management Division, to the Assistant Director, Planning and Development, November 18, 1977, Union-PH.

⁸¹ Mackintosh, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice,” 7; Acting Deputy Director to the Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, May 9, 1977, Union-PH.

the structures about which a great deal was known were reconstructed, the Park Service would be left with a number of structures “about which progressively less is known.” Rather than use its professional judgement as to whether or not these could be accurately reconstructed, he envisioned “pressure” being exerted on the agency “to carry on with the reconstruction in order to ‘round out’ the historic scene.” Holland did not specify whether he thought this pressure would come from outside the Park Service, or inside as well.⁸²

Following the Park Service’s approval of the General Management Plan for Fort Union Trading Post, concerned members of Congress who were displeased with this halfway measure began to put pressure on the agency. Finally, at the urging of representatives from North Dakota and Montana, Congress directed the Park Service to make a final determination on reconstruction. This was accomplished by inserting language in the National Park and Recreation Act of 1978, mandating: “That the Secretary [of the Interior] is directed to study the possible reconstruction of the historic remains of Fort Union, and the Secretary is further directed to transmit to the Congress, within one year of this Act, a recommendation on the reconstruction of the fort based on historic documentation.”⁸³

To meet the Congressionally required study of Fort Union Trading Post, in 1979 the Rocky Mountain Region assembled a group of specialists in various cultural resource disciplines to study the historical and archaeological information on the fort. Headed by

⁸² Acting Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, to the Assistant Director, Division of Planning and Development, August 8, 1977, Union-PH; Chief, Cultural Resources Management Division, to the Assistant Director, Planning and Development, November 18, 1977, Union-PH.

historical architect Rodd Wheaton, the Regional Historic Preservation Team was given the task of reviewing architectural information on the structures within the fort and preparing what were called “preliminary architectural drawings” for each. The region would then use these drawings as a “sound basis for making a decision concerning reconstruction.” In the course of this study, in May 1979 the historic preservation team met at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site with additional Park Service staff and state historic preservation officials from North Dakota and Montana to examine the site and discuss reconstruction. A report on the meeting shows that it focused upon the question of how much of each building could be accurately reconstructed. Only one building, the Bourgeois House, could be fully reconstructed with a great degree of accuracy. Less information was available on other structures, which could only be partially reconstructed with an acceptable level of accuracy. One was the Indian/Artisan’s House, for which it was reported there was “little documentary evidence.” Nevertheless, the Regional Historic Preservation Team was “relatively confident of the design” and believed it could be reconstructed. Another building, the Dwelling Range, was considered the one about which the “least [was] known,” so it could only be “partially reconstructed” with a simple “frame and a roof.” Similarly, because of a lack of information on the Store Room, in a reconstruction the “rear of the building will have to be almost all conjectural.” During the meeting, Rod Wheaton presented a “partial reconstruction plan,” in which the exterior of four structures would be fully reconstructed, including the Indian/Artisan’s House, and two would be partially

⁸³ Quoted in “Task Directive: Reconstruction Study, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic

reconstructed with a “frame and roof.” The architect explained the purpose of reconstruction was to portray the “scale” of the site, while it would be made clear to visitors what was accurate and conjecture. Wheaton declared that Fort Union Trading Post would not look like the movie set that the reconstructed Bent’s Old Fort had become.⁸⁴

In its final report, the *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis*, the Rocky Mountain Regional Historic Preservation Team “recommended the partial reconstruction of Fort Union.” Completed in September 1979, this report included a number of drawings showing how certain buildings could be fully reconstructed, while others were only partial frames that showed a structure’s scale. The team felt this would allow “visitors to experience the presence of the fort and appreciate the scale, number, and purpose of the buildings...while ensuring that the level of reconstruction of any structure will match the amount of known data for that structure.” Other alternatives had been considered, including no reconstruction, which the team admitted would be “most in consonance with National Park Service policy” on reconstruction. However, because partial reconstruction was possible, this was “rejected.” Instead, partial reconstruction was thought to be a “reasonable” approach, given that the general management plan and most other Park Service plans for Fort Union were predicated on some form of reconstruction.⁸⁵

Site,” February 1979, Union-PH.

⁸⁴ “Task Directive: Reconstruction Study, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site,” February 1979, Union-PH; Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation, Rocky Mountain Region, to the Superintendent, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, June 5, 1979, Union-PH.

⁸⁵ National Park Service, *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis*, (1979), 3, 4, 33, Union-HC.

After the Rocky Mountain Region concurred with the fort analysis and submitted it to Washington, Ross Holland, then serving as the Assistant Director for Cultural Resources, made it clear that he did not agree with the findings in this document, and thought the Regional Historic Preservation Team had gone beyond their mandate. Rather than recommend one way or the other on reconstruction, they were only to determine if it was possible. Holland felt the study of alternatives to reconstruction carried out by the Rocky Mountain Region for this study and earlier plans was “totally inadequate” and did not conform to the Park Service’s management policies. He also proposed that an alternative such as the “ghost buildings” used in lieu of reconstructing Benjamin Franklin’s house in Philadelphia, could be considered for Fort Union. Therefore, the Park Service should revise this study before submitting it to Congress.⁸⁶

Ross Holland voiced his displeasure with the Fort Union findings in correspondence he sent to a number of people within the Park Service. In one memoranda, he stated that not only he, but Dave Dame, Chief of Interpretation, Harry Pfanz, Chief Historian, and Hugh Miller, Chief Historical Architect, were opposed to reconstructing Fort Union Trading Post, which “would be a mistake tantamount to the reconstruction of Bent’s Old Fort and [Fort] Vancouver.” In another, Holland stated that both the cultural resources and interpretation divisions opposed reconstruction, which would be the “height of stupidity and irresponsibility to expend so much of the taxpayers’ money.” He contended that past reconstructions by the National Park Service “have generally turned out badly and proved to be maintenance burdens out of proportion to

their usefulness as interpretive devices.” There were alternatives to interpreting historic sites at which there were few remains of structures, “if we but use our imagination.” Holland believed the Park Service “had good policies regarding reconstructions, and we should follow them. Reconstructions do little but support the romantic view of history.” Furthermore, there were “many truly historic structures” that were not adequately maintained. Despite such protests, the National Park Service submitted the *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis* to Congress with its recommendation for partial reconstruction. However, in his letter to Congress that accompanied the report, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior did not recommend reconstruction, saying instead that it was “feasible.” Pointing to the high cost of reconstruction at a time that the National Park System had more pressing funding needs, the Department of the Interior did not recommend Congress fund a reconstruction at that time.⁸⁷

For the time being, the Park Service was able to delay the reconstruction of Fort Union Trading Post. But, as local pressure for reconstruction grew in North Dakota and Montana, as well as among those states’ Congressional delegations, the agency found itself forced to face its earlier pro-reconstruction statements on Fort Union. This put the Park Service in the awkward position of promoting a reconstruction that officials in its upper levels felt to be against its own policies. In 1981, the Park Service submitted its General Management Plan for Fort Union to the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for its review, as required under the National Historic Preservation Act of

⁸⁶ Assistant Director, Cultural Resources, to the Chief, Office of Legislation, October 12, 1979, Union-PH.

⁸⁷ Ross Holland to Jim Tobin, October 15, 1979, Union-PH; Ross Holland to Peter Grove, November 21, 1979, Union-PH; Bob Herbert to Walter F. Mondale, November 23, 1979, Union-PH.

1966. However, when the Council said it would only agree to the reconstruction proposal if the Park Service could explain how this conformed to its own policies on reconstructions, the agency withdrew its plan from consideration. In 1985, when it appeared that Congress would direct the Park Service to reconstruct Fort Union, it went to the Advisory Council again, only to find it concerned with the failure of the Park Service to properly consider alternatives to reconstruction, which would destroy the archaeological remains of the fort. The Park Service responded that it could not consider alternatives because Congress was on the verge of mandating that it reconstruct. In the end, the Advisory Council could not agree with the Park Service's plan for Fort Union, despite the agency's claim that a full archaeological excavation would "mitigate" the destruction of the remains of the fort. In this difference of opinion with the Park Service, the Advisory Council was particularly concerned with this course of action because it would be carried out by the agency that was the "prime conservator of historic properties in the Federal government." However, because the Council was only an advisory body, this did not prevent the Park Service from going ahead with its plans for Fort Union, and a partial reconstruction of the trading post was erected on the site between 1985 and 1991.⁸⁸

In October 1986, people gathered at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site for a solemn ceremony. On that day, archaeologists were removing the final remains of the foundation of the Bourgeois House, which had been the central building within the historic trading post. During the ceremony, archaeologist Thomas Thiessen gave a brief

speech in which he noted that those gathered on that “sad day” were there “to pay homage and bid adieu to the last physical vestiges of a building that was of paramount importance” in the history of the American west. After speaking briefly about the history of the building, Thiessen concluded:

We know not for certain when the Bourgeois House was first constructed, but there can be no doubt about the date of its demise, for we—you and I, friends—have participated in its final obliteration today. All that remains is a hole in the ground where the cellar once existed, but even it will soon be no more. No longer even a ruin, the Bourgeois House will live on only in our memories, in the archaeological record of its physical remains...and in the reconstruction of its exterior facade that will soon rise on the location of the original structure....Hail and farewell great building!⁸⁹

How had the Park Service come to the point where one of its employees was mourning the loss of the remains of a historic structure and celebrating the construction of a facsimile of its facade? The historical record is not entirely clear, and statements made by several individuals involved with Fort Union suggest varying interpretations among Park Service officials. Ross Holland, who, as Assistant Director for Cultural Resources at the time the *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis* was completed, believed the Rocky Mountain Region went well beyond its appointed task and endorsed partial reconstruction of the fort when it was simply supposed to find whether or not reconstruction was possible. In doing so, and in the approval of this report by the Park Service’s Washington office, he most probably believed the agency was giving Congress the means with which to require it to reconstruct Fort Union. In contrast, former Fort Union Trading Post Superintendent Paul Hedren has written that the region was directed

⁸⁸ Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, to the Associate Director, Cultural Resources, February 6, 1986, Union-PH; Cynthia Grassby Baker to William Penn Mott, May 14, 1986, Union-PH.

⁸⁹ Thomas D. Thiessen, “Requiem for an Edifice,” *Confluence News* (Friends of Fort Union Trading Post newsletter) 1, no. 5 (Winter 1986).

to make such a recommendation for or against reconstruction. Furthermore, he believes the Park Service missed the opportunity to propose an alternative to reconstruction, and could have brought public and Congressional opinion around to support the development of one of the “world-class” interpretive centers for which it was known. Instead, officials within the agency “stood divided” on the reconstruction issue, arguing over the management policies that in Hedren’s words “opposed, but never prohibited reconstruction.”⁹⁰

Historical architect Rodd Wheaton has provided an opinion similar to that of Hedren on the reconstruction debate. He too wrote that the Park Service “was not asked if Fort Union should be reconstructed, it was asked if it could be reconstructed.” Seeing the task given the Rocky Mountain Region in this light, the team that performed the reconstruction analysis “discounted” the alternative of no reconstruction and recommended partial reconstruction, because there was information available on a fair amount of the fort. As Wheaton characterized it: “Interpreting the site’s status quo could not be justified to Congress considering the amount of data available....Yes, the National Park Service could reconstruct Fort Union Trading Post, partially but innovatively.” Rodd Wheaton has recently explained his opinion on the situation leading up to the reconstruction of Fort Union as largely the making of the Park Service’s Washington office, which “simply dropped the ball” when it said alternatives to reconstruction should be explored but did not help develop any (Robert Utley counters that this was not the job of the policy oriented Washington office, but that of the regional offices and the planning

⁹⁰ Hedren, “Field Notes: Why We Reconstructed Fort Union,” 351-352.

and design oriented Denver Service Center). This led to the Rocky Mountain Region being “saddled” with the reconstruction analysis and the preparation of the construction drawings for the actual reconstruction. Proudly, Wheaton says: “We took the task on and did it regardless of opposition. This was our responsibility and we did it with a great deal of enthusiasm. It was a great project and we had fun doing it as well.” It should be added that he also admits there was support for reconstruction in the Rocky Mountain Region after the Park Service was mandated to do so, which is supported by statements made by Richard Cronenberger, another historical architect involved in the project.⁹¹

Support for reconstructing Fort Union Trading Post did indeed exist in the Rocky Mountain Region, as well as elsewhere in the National Park Service, which contributed to the agency ultimately reconstructing the fort. Robert Utley has cited the role of the “big constituency” for reconstructing Fort Union within the Park Service, including the Director of the Rocky Mountain Region, who he believes worked directly with members of Congress to surpass opposition to reconstruction in the agency’s Washington office. Two archaeologists who worked on the excavation of the site, William Hunt and Lynelle Peterson, saw this very clearly, and have written that throughout much of the period the Park Service was involved in Fort Union “pressure to reconstruct continued both from inside and outside” the agency. They cite the Rocky Mountain Region’s preparation of the *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis* with its reconstruction recommendation as an example of this internal support. Other planning documents prepared by regional offices

⁹¹ Wheaton, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: Decision Within Documentation,” 7, 11; Rodd. L. Wheaton to the author, March 24, 1998; Robert Utley to the author, April 11, 1998; Regional Historical Architect, Rocky Mountain Region, to the Chief Historical Architect, October 6, 1989, Union-PHA.

support this theory as well. The 1966 and 1974 master plans proposed partial reconstruction, as did the 1976 General Management Plan.⁹²

Despite the existence of these pro-reconstruction plans, it would not be fair to give the impression that the reconstruction of Fort Union came about because of the regions, while the Park Service's Washington office was a bastion of strong opposition to reconstruction. Historians Roy Appleman and Erwin Thompson both strongly supported reconstruction and were in positions of influence in Washington to make their opinions heard. Beyond those who actively supported reconstruction, there is also the failure of those who opposed it to make a convincing argument within the Park Service. Although Congress could always (and in this case did) override the agency's position, even reconstruction supporters such as Wheaton and Hedren contend the Park Service could have done a better job of opposing reconstruction and offering alternatives for Fort Union. Furthermore, although the Park Service's management policies and funding priorities worked in favor of those opposed to reconstructing Fort Union Trading Post, the agency still adopted several pro-reconstruction plans before it appeared there was any kind of sustained effort to stave off reconstruction. While not a formal, or organized anti-reconstruction effort, by the time the Fort Union general management plan was being reviewed in 1976, it appears that Chief of Cultural Resources Ross Holland, along with allies in the Washington office, were forcefully advocating an anti-reconstruction position. This opposition coalesced around the time the *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis* was completed in 1979, but by then it may have been too late. By allowing the

Rocky Mountain Region to prepare the reconstruction analysis, then submitting it to Congress with the reconstruction recommendation, the agency basically handed the reconstruction issue to this office that displayed its pro-reconstruction bent over the course of several years.

Following the completion of the *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis* and the submission of this document to Congress with its recommendation for reconstruction, in December 1979, two Park Service historians, Richard Sellars and Dwight Pitcaithley, criticized the agency for its practice of reconstructing non-extant historic structures. Writing in the Park Service publication *CRM*, they presented what remains one of the strongest anti-reconstruction arguments made within the agency, and faulted opponents of reconstructions for not acting forcefully enough to prevent the Park Service from continuing what they believed was an outdated practice. In doing so, Sellars and Pitcaithley summed up the failure of the opponents of reconstruction to stop this from occurring at Fort Union Trading Post, stating: "Seldom...do Park Service representatives make articulate, sustained, and persuasive arguments against proposed reconstructions."⁹³

⁹² Robert Utley to the author, April 11, 1998; Lynelle A. Peterson and William J. Hunt, Jr., *The 1987 Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post: Archaeology and Architecture* (National Park Service, 1990), 1.

⁹³ Richard Sellars and Dwight Pitcaithley, "Reconstructions: Expensive, Life-Size Toys?" *CRM Bulletin* 2, no.4 (December 1979): 6.

The Controversy over Fort Union Trading Post: Harbinger of Change?

Before the Park Service actually began to reconstruct Fort Union Trading Post, several of its archaeologists recommended that the agency not reconstruct on the actual site of the fort, but on an adjacent area in order to avoid destroying this unique archaeological resource. However, this was rejected because it did not conform to the Park Service policy requiring that a reconstruction be on the site of the original structure. Although building on site would destroy the archaeological remains of the fort, as the Park Service explained to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, it intended to undertake a major archaeological excavation prior to reconstruction in order to learn all it could about the site. This, the agency argued, would mitigate the adverse impact of reconstruction, namely the destruction of the authentic remains of the fort. However, after the excavation was carried out and actual reconstruction began, Park Service archaeologists protested that the agency was not providing the necessary funding to analyze the “staggering” amount of material collected. One such protest by Frances Calabrese, Chief of the agency’s Midwest Archaeological Center, included one of the harshest critiques of the Park Service’s reconstruction of Fort Union, which destroyed “one of the most significant historic resources in the United States.” Pointing to the inconsistent nature of a project that sought to reconstruct the fort but did not thoroughly examine those authentic artifacts that could shed light on its history, he took the Park Service to task for

having destroyed an irreplaceable archaeological resource in the interest of architectural accuracy and historical association. We seem to be willing to reconstruct a mere facade of the buildings that once stood at the Fort, but not willing to reconstruct and interpret the lifeways of the diverse people

who occupied and interacted in them. This seems a shallow and superficial way to interpret the significance of a major aspect of the historic expansion of the United States, not to mention the moral implication of destroying an irreplaceable resource without the proper follow-up studies required by...the policies of our own agency."⁹⁴

Such strong criticism of reconstruction from someone within the National Park Service is rarely found in the agency's records, although, as Robert Utley said about Fort Stanwix, much criticism that did exist "probably never found its way into documents that were preserved." In those documents that do exist, most critics based their opposition to reconstruction upon the cost of a proposed project, or its failure to adhere to Park Service policies. Such was the case with much of the criticism of Fort Union, as when Ross Holland and his allies in the Washington office expressed their opposition to the project, but did not question the basic concept of reconstruction as much as they complained that the Rocky Mountain Region failed to properly consider alternatives for the site.

The lack of strong statements of opposition to reconstructions raises the question of how much the opinions of those within the agency have changed in regards to this issue. The management policies on reconstructions clearly underwent a change in the period from the late 1968 through the 1970s, but this did not stop the Park Service from advocating some of the grandest reconstructions it has ever undertaken, and justified them as necessary for interpretation. It was only after the Park Service was faced with a growing number of expensive reconstruction proposals in the mid-1970s that it began to question them more seriously, and finally adopted policies in the 1980s clearly stating that the agency "does not endorse, support, or encourage the reconstruction of historic

structures.” This would suggest that the issue of funding reconstructions while authentic historic structures were inadequately maintained may have been a major, if not the major, impetus behind the agency’s more restrictive policies, as well as the opinions of some of its staff. This is not to say that there were not those who were truly troubled, if not outright opposed to reconstructions, on philosophical grounds. But if it had not been for the issue of funding, these individuals might not have been as successful in imparting the Park Service with a measure of their beliefs.⁹⁵

In a recent article, historian Barry Mackintosh contends that the “increasingly restrictive” policies on reconstructions adopted by the Park Service in the 1970s were largely a response to the number of proposals for costly reconstructions the agency had to contend with throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Early in the 1960s, the Park Service reconstructed Fort Caroline, Florida, in response to pressure from a member of Congress. Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s, the agency had to deal with Congressional pressure to reconstruct Fort Vancouver, Washington, and Fort Scott, Kansas, which it eventually succumbed to at both sites. Although the Park Service successfully fended off pressure to reconstruct Fort Smith in the 1970s, it put a great deal of effort in reconstructing Bent’s Old Fort, and with varying degrees of enthusiasm reconstructed Fort Stanwix and several minor structures at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, including the Market Street Houses, the Graff House, and the City Tavern. Despite its support for a number of these projects, Bent’s Old Fort became a maintenance

⁹⁴ Chief, Midwest Archaeological Center, to the Associate Director, Cultural Resources, January 13, 1989, Union-PH.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Mackintosh, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice,” 7.

catastrophe into which the Park Service sank a great deal of money, and the agency began to see the fiscal drawbacks of reconstructions at a time when funding was not sufficient to care for authentic historic structures.⁹⁶

The role funding played in changing the opinions of Park Service staff toward reconstructions can be seen in the experience of Robert Utley, the agency's former Chief Historian and Assistant Director for Park Historic Preservation. For much of his career with the Park Service, which began in 1957, Utley described himself as "all for interpreting the story, with preservation a secondary consideration." He attributed this to the influence of Roy Appleman, the Park Service historian who advocated the reconstruction of Bent's Old Fort and Fort Union Trading Post. Utley's views on preservation were later influenced by Ernest Connally, the Chief of the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, who was more preservation minded than Appleman, as well as passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, which formally recognized there was more to historic preservation than battlefields and the houses of prominent people. However, when it came to reconstructions, the cost of these projects was an overriding concern for Utley, particularly in the 1970s, a period that witnessed a sort of reconstruction frenzy in preparation for the Bicentennial. As a result, the Chief Historian and others in the Park Service were becoming, in Utley's words, "philosophically" opposed to spending money "on creating something...from the ground up, while we left existing structures...to fall down," and the Park Service adopted stricter standards on reconstructions. This issue of the cost of reconstructions was included in

Utley's 1976 article in *Historic Preservation* titled "A Preservation Ideal," which was partly a response to the effect the Bicentennial celebration was having on historic preservation. Hardly mentioned reconstructions, Utley did complain about the "hucksterism" and "juvenile impulse to recreate history" that was widely seen during this period, but primarily targeted this at living history and interpretation gimmicks. While reconstructions could easily be considered gimmicks, Utley reserved his comments on this issue to a short passage that included the statement: "As if preservation of the real thing were not diluted enough, we try to recreate that which has vanished and (if such is possible) that which never existed at all. The former is dubious at best in these days of skyrocketing costs and austere budgets....." Although as Utley put it, his views later "hardened...on the whole question of reconstruction" and he became more deeply opposed to them, the issue of cost remained a major concern. Fifteen years after leaving the Park Service, he took one of his successors as Chief Historian, Ed Bearss, to task for supporting reconstructions that "are damnably expensive in this time of galloping deficits and money-starved parks and that they do sometimes have the unhappy effect of destroying original historic resources—fabric, landscape, or both." In response, Bearss pointed out that Utley once thought they were not "all that bad."⁹⁷

In his opposition to reconstructions, Robert Utley appears to have begun with a concern over their cost, but broadened his philosophy to include a concern with the destruction of historic fabric and the propriety of recreating historical features. As an

⁹⁶ Mackintosh, "To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice," 6-7.

institution, the Park Service also appears to have begun rethinking its policies on reconstruction in response to their cost, and later became concerned with their destructiveness, as well as their propriety. However, the degree to which the agency actually sees reconstructions as inappropriate is unclear.

Cost may actually be the overwhelming factor in the Park Service's official stance on reconstructions. This was suggested in a recent draft of a memorandum from the Associate Director for Cultural Resources, Kate Stevenson, written in response to a reconstruction proposal for which the agency appeared to support the "basic reconstruction objective." Despite this, the Associate Director said the Park Service's "inability to properly care for its many genuine historic structures has led us to adopt preservation funding priority criteria that virtually prohibit new reconstructions." Even Rodd Wheaton, a proponent of reconstructions, would agree with this, as he has recognized that reconstructions "are expensive to maintain when genuine historic structures often need funding for maintenance."⁹⁸

Funding may have been a major factor in the Park Service's new policies, as well as unofficial attitudes on reconstructions, but there were deeper, more philosophical changes underway as well. William Hunt, the Park Service archaeologist who directed the excavation of Fort Union, observed that the agency's reconstruction policies "evolved" in the 1970s, as it adopted a "new ethical standard" that placed the preservation of the remains of historic structures above their reconstruction. Proponents

⁹⁷ Sellars and Webb, 12, 33, 62-64; Robert Utley, to the author, April 11, 1998; Robert M. Utley, "A Preservation Ideal," *Historic Preservation* (April-June 1976): 40, 44; Robert M. Utley, to Edwin C. Bearss, November 23, 1992, File-BM; Bearss to Utley, December 1, 1992, File-BM.

of reconstructing Fort Union recognized this as well, and Fort Union Superintendent Paul Hedren saw this as a period in which the Park Service took a “negative” view of reconstructions as a “new preservation ethic had evolved, particularly at the Service’s Washington level.” He believes this resulted from questions about the accuracy of reconstructions, as well as a concern that these projects were “were funded at the expense of preserving original fabric elsewhere.” Historical architect Rodd Wheaton took a similar view, in which the Park Service’s “earlier reconstruction enthusiasm” was “tempered” by a combination of the issues of “capital investments, annual maintenance, and new policy direction” that was incompatible with reconstructions.⁹⁹

This new approach to preservation was indeed a factor behind the opposition within the Park Service to reconstructing Fort Union Trading Post, and could be detected in those critiques of the project made by Ross Holland and others. But, this was not strong enough for some in the agency who faulted opponents of reconstruction for not making a forceful enough argument against them. This occurred in a very public manner after the Park Service submitted to Congress the Rocky Mountain Region’s *Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis* report, which included a recommendation to partially reconstruct the fort. In December 1979, Richard Sellars, Chief Historian of the agency’s Southwest Region, and Dwight Pitcaithley, Chief Historian of the North Atlantic Region, published a brief article titled “Reconstructions: Expensive, Life-Size Toys?” in *CRM Bulletin*, a

⁹⁸ Associate Director, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, to the Field Director, Midwest Area, July 1995 (draft), File-BM.

⁹⁹ William J. Hunt, Jr., (letter to the editor), *CRM Bulletin* 13, No. 1 (1990): 3; Peterson and Hunt, 1; Hedren, “The Reconstruction of Fort Union Trading Post: A Cause, A Controversy, and A Success,” *Journal of Interpretation* 13, no.1 (1989): 10; Hedren, “Field Notes: Why We Reconstructed Fort Union,” 350; Wheaton, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: Decision Within Documentation,” 5, Union-PHA.

Park Service publication on cultural resource management. What was remarkable about this article was that it was probably one of the strongest, if not the strongest, statements against reconstructions made within the Park Service since the issue was first hashed out by the agency in the 1930s. It dealt not only with the Park Service's experience with reconstructions, but the larger issue of their place in historic preservation.

In "Reconstructions: Expensive, Life-Size Toys?" Sellars and Pitcaithley made it clear that among a number of problems with the concept of reconstruction, the "most obvious" was that these modern "structures are not historic. Reconstructions, while they may be accurate, are never authentic....Because they reflect modern values and perceptions, because they are built with modern techniques, and because they possess no structural link to the past, reconstruction are marked with an absence of historic integrity." Therefore, it was a mistake for the Park Service to believe it could "'improve' a historic site through the introduction of nonhistoric elements." To do so was to often destroy historic material, which was the antithesis of what the authors understood to be the agency's mandate to preserve historic resources. In fact, Sellars and Pitcaithley believed the Park Service often displayed an "insensitivity to historic fabric," which was demonstrated by the agency's penchant for reconstructions and heavy-handed restorations. While recognizing that external political pressure was often placed upon the Park Service to reconstruct, the authors contended: "Seldom...do Park Service representatives make articulate, sustained and persuasive arguments against proposed

reconstructions.” In a clear reference to Fort Union Trading Post, they added that alternatives to reconstruction are often given “little, if any, consideration.”¹⁰⁰

Beyond taking the Park Service to task for its reconstruction practices, in an argument that reflected the extensive history celebrations of the American Bicentennial period, but also seemed to predict the impact of the growth of the heritage industry in the 1980s and 1990s, Sellars and Pitcaithley stated:

The gradual accretion of reconstructions under Park Service management tends to detract from the Service’s truly significant and authentic cultural resources. Reconstructions, regardless of ownership, are not unique. Any private or public organization can erect a “historic structure.” Indeed, reconstructed historic villages are proliferating across the United States. As a commercial enterprise, history can indeed be a big business. As these reconstructions increase, the distinction between authentic survivors of the past and imitations of the past becomes less clear. The Park Service’s collection of unique, original, and nationally significant structures becomes confused and watered down by the continued addition of non-unique, nonhistoric reconstructions.

In conclusion, the authors believes that while the field of historic preservation had moved away from the “Williamsburg syndrome,” and became “more sophisticated in approach, more sensitive to and appreciative of original fabric,” the National Park Service clearly lagged behind.¹⁰¹

Several letters written in response to the strong anti-reconstructionist statement by Sellars and Pitcaithley were printed in *CRM*, of which, only one fully supported their arguments. In this letter, Harry Butowsky, a historian in the Park Service’s Washington office, followed up on the link between Park Service reconstructions and what would later be referred to as the heritage industry, asking: “If reconstructions are accepted as

¹⁰⁰ Sellars and Pitcaithley, 6-8.

necessary, then is not history a commodity that can be manufactured like any other commodity? What is the purpose of our historical parks? Are they to be theme parks depicting this generation's image of the past, or are they to be parks which contain and reflect the genuine remains of the historic era they are designed to depict?" Butowsky compared an attempt to reconstruct a historic structure that no longer stands with a historian who wants to "recreate" a lost historic document. But, just as historians would not think to "fill in the gaps with conjecture" of this type, "historic preservationists must not recreate something that never was."¹⁰²

In both the initial *CRM* article, and the supporting letter, the authors questioned whether reconstructions were actually part of the National Park Service's mandate to preserve the nation's cultural heritage. However, other responses published in *CRM* all stated that this was in fact a part of the agency's job to not only preserve historic sites, but to interpret them for the public. Charles Bohannon, an archaeologist in the Park Service's Pacific Northwest Region, held that the "blanket condemnation" of reconstructions was "unwarranted....[as] there are surely instances where reconstructions are desirable and justifiable." Furthermore, he believed they misunderstand the "role of the National Park Service and of what constitutes cultural resources." To begin with, Bohannon believed the Park Service was charged with preserving cultural resources for the public's "enjoyment" of them, which implies that reconstructions are valid at sites managed by the agency because they offer greater public enjoyment than those that offer little but the foundations of historic structures. As for the preservation of these

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

foundations, which Sellars and Pitcaithley argued should be preserved rather than destroyed by a reconstruction, Bohannon held that such resources “are not nationally significant of themselves,” and expressed puzzlement with those who would elevate such “historic fabric to the status of the True Cross.” Lastly, Bohannon took issue with the assertions that the field of historic preservation had advanced beyond Williamsburg, and reconstructions were “passe” concepts that pandered to the public’s desire for a more entertaining form of historical education. He found this to be “an elitist attitude” held by people who seem to have forgotten that the “client” of the National Park Service is the “public.” Bohannon did not advocate that the Park Service operate theme parks, but he believed “[t]here is a middle ground.”¹⁰³

Another to take exception to Sellars and Pitcaithley’s view of the Park Service’s need to preserve historic fabric rather than reconstruct was Rodd Wheaton, the historic architect who headed the Rocky Mountain Region’s analysis of reconstructing Fort Union. He pointed out that the legislation establishing the National Park Service did not charge the agency with preservation, but with conservation. For Wheaton, conservation “implies wise use,” which means the Park Service can “improve a historic site by means of a reconstruction.” Here, he took a view similar to that of Bohannon, in which the primary goal of the Park Service in its management of the National Park System should not be preservation, but to provide for the “enjoyment” of the public.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Harry Butowsky (letter to the editor) *CRM Bulletin* vol. 3, no. 2 (June 1980): 1.

¹⁰³ Charles F. Bohannon, (letter to the editor), *CRM Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (June 1980): 10.

¹⁰⁴ Rodd L. Wheaton, (letter to the editor) *CRM Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (June 1980): 10.

In contrast to these strongly pro and con responses to the “Reconstruction” article, Barry Mackintosh, a Park Service historian in Washington, wrote a response that may have been more representative of the opinion many in the agency held about reconstructions: They are generally not deemed appropriate, but can be acceptable in certain cases. Mackintosh, who had worked at several units of the National Park System that included reconstructions, which he referred to as “pseudo-resources,” was generally sympathetic to the anti-reconstructionist views expressed by Sellars, Pitcaithley, and Butowsky, but held that “[u]nder certain circumstances...[they] may be warranted.” However, he pointed to the National Park Service’s management policies, which had “highly restrictive” criteria for reconstructions, and added that in a time of limited funding, they “must be given very low priority.” But in the end, Mackintosh concluded: “Insofar as our mission is preservation, reconstruction is none of our business.”¹⁰⁵

While he may have declared that reconstruction is none of the Park Service’s business, Barry Mackintosh has also said more recently that historical “[i]nterpretation is a complex business,” and as it is part of the Park Service’s management of historic sites, interpretation may justify the limited use of reconstructions. For Mackintosh, this should usually be reserved for filling in gaps made by missing structures in a historical complex such as Appomattox Court House, where the Park Service reconstructed two buildings to complete the historic scene of this nineteenth century village where Lee surrendered to Grant in 1865. However, he would not extend this justification to those “isolated primary attractions” such as Bent’s Old Fort, Fort Stanwix, or Fort Union Trading Post.

¹⁰⁵ Barry Mackintosh (letter to the editor), *CRM Bulletin* 3, no.3 (September 1980): 15.

Recognizing that this is a personal judgement, and others might find reconstructions less justifiable in historic complexes where they are given an air of authenticity, Mackintosh believes that in certain situations policy can not determine the appropriateness of reconstructions, instead “aesthetic judgement comes into play: some reconstructions fit, others ring false like bad theater.”¹⁰⁶

As the Bureau Historian for the Park Service, Barry Mackintosh has observed that despite the existence of policies on reconstructions, the agency will continue to deal with reconstruction proposals that are supported both inside and outside the Park Service, and will have to contend with the judgement of those making decisions on such issues within the agency. For example, just after the Park Service adopted policies that clearly moved away from reconstructions, in the 1980s William Mott, the new Director, believed they were legitimate interpretive tools, and even attended the dedication of the first building reconstructed at Fort Union Trading Post dressed in buckskin. Not only did he propose reconstructing an Indian pueblo at Pecos National Monument, New Mexico, as well as the stockade at Andersonville National Historic Site, Georgia, the site of the infamous Civil War prison camp, but the Director also became directly involved in revising the agency’s policies on reconstructions. As recounted by Mackintosh, who was involved in this process, Mott saw the policies that discouraged reconstructions as representative of the “elitist” concerns of preservation professionals rather than the interests of the public. One of the Director’s concerns was that the policies that required sufficient information

¹⁰⁶ Barry Mackintosh, “Some Thoughts on Reconstruction,” (unpublished manuscript, 1991), File-BM; Barry Mackintosh, “The NPS Experience with Reconstruction,” *Proceedings of the Canadian Parks Service Reconstruction Workshop, Hull Quebec, 11-13 March 1992* (Park Canada, 1992), 34-35; Mackintosh, “The Case Against Reconstruction,” 17-18.

on a structure to permit “accurate” reconstructions and restorations could be used to prevent such projects that would benefit interpretation. As a result, the policies were altered to require “sufficient data,” which it was thought was less restrictive. Commenting on the revision to the reconstruction policies under Director Mott, Barry Mackintosh said that he thought them to still be restrictive, and would allow reconstructions only when “warranted.” While he disagreed with Mott’s view that historic sites in the National Park System were primarily interpretive resources, the historian concluded that this was “a legitimate viewpoint that we need to consider and even accommodate to the extent that we can without undue violence to our ‘purist’ principles.”¹⁰⁷

Views such as those of Director Mott, in which the interpretive role of the National Park Service is given primary consideration, continue to be held by many within the agency. Rodd Wheaton has remained a staunch supporter of reconstructions, and took part in a public debate on the issue with Barry Mackintosh at Bent’s Old Fort in 1991, where he argued reconstructions were legitimate interpretive tools. In fact, Wheaton believes “it is incumbent on the Service to provide, as deemed appropriate, reconstructed resources that meet the interpretive needs of the park visitor, not solely the preservation concerns of cultural resource specialists.” As for the preservation and display of the foundations of historic structures, he contends this “is not necessarily the most desirable in terms of visitor satisfaction.” Similarly, exhibits in a visitor center that show what a historic structure may have looked like are “not as exciting” as a full-scale

reconstruction. Despite his desire to make historic sites more interesting and easy to understand, Wheaton does not want to create fantastic visions of the past, but to present reconstructions that are both “accurate and authentic.” To do so, it must be made clear to visitors what parts of a reconstruction are based upon a great deal of documentation and thought to be accurate, and what parts are more conjectural. In the case of Fort Union Trading Post, where the partial reconstruction approach was an attempt to avoid conjecture, Wheaton contends that he and the other planners of the fort gave “sensitive consideration to what was unknown.” As a result, they were able to design a structure that was far more accurate than earlier reconstructions, several of which, including Bent’s Old Fort, he feels “were figments of the imagination based on minimal supporting documentation.”¹⁰⁸

Another proponent of reconstructions is Paul Hedren, who believes they are an important means for the Park Service to interpret historic sites. As for those in the agency who oppose reconstructions as “crass manipulations” of historic sites, Hedren contends that they should remember the “client” of the Park Service is not cultural resource management professionals, but the public, to whom “abstract” ruins may be difficult to interpret. Former Chief Historian Ed Bearss holds a similar view of reconstructions as legitimate interpretive tools for the Park Service. After a long career as a historian in different parts of the agency, including the period in which he conducted research on Fort Smith and recommended against reconstructing it, Bearss served as the

¹⁰⁷ Mackintosh, “To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct: An Overview of NPS Policy and Practice,” 7; Bureau Historian, to the Regional Historian, North Atlantic Region, May 1, 1989, File-BM.

¹⁰⁸ Wheaton, “Considering Reconstruction as an Educational Tool,” 16, 18; Rodd L. Wheaton to the author, March 24, 1998.

agency's Chief Historian from 1981 into the early 1990s. As a believer in what he has referred to as the "primacy of our interpretive mission," he was a consistent supporter of reconstructions, including Fort Union Trading Post. After visiting the site in 1991, shortly after the reconstruction was completed, Bearss commented:

As an interpretive feature, the reconstruction is in a class by itself, a masterpiece. What was an important archaeological site before 1985 has become a world-class educational site. For those who bemoan the destruction of an archaeological resource, I would point out that the Service's interpretive educational mission at sites such as Fort Union Trading Post can be justified as equal to or greater than its preservation mission.

When asked about this site in an interview, Bearss responded: "Why would anyone want to visit Fort Union Trading Post before the reconstruction?" Without the reconstruction, he thought it a barren, undistinguished site that the public would find hard to understand. Although some of his colleagues in the Park Service, such as Robert Utley, may have changed their opinion of reconstructions, Bearss remained an unrepentant proponent. After Paul Hedren published an article on the reconstruction of Fort Union Trading Post in 1992, Bearss wrote to congratulate him for "defending it against the naysayers."¹⁰⁹

In contrast to Ed Bearss, his successor as Park Service Chief Historian, Dwight Pitcaithley, has an altogether different view of reconstructions, on which he has commented: "It is a curious topic and one, I believe, the National Park Service has not fully come to terms with." Pitcaithley, co-author of the "Reconstructions: Expensive

¹⁰⁹ Hedren, "The Reconstruction of Fort Union Trading Post: A Cause, A Controversy, and a Success," 10-12; Hedren, "Field Notes: Why We Reconstructed Fort Union," 353; Edwin C. Bearss to Robert M. Utley, December 1, 1992, File-BM; Chief Historian to the Associate Director, Cultural Resources, July 31, 1991, Union-PH; National Park Service History Division, "A Conversation With Edwin C. Bearss," (1992), 69; Chief Historian to the Superintendent, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, November 2, 1992, Union-PH.

Life-Size Toys?" article, takes a much more restrictive view than his predecessor on the manipulation of historic resources for interpretive purposes. During a presentation before a recent Park Service training program on cultural resource management, the Chief Historian spoke at length about the legacy of Colonial Williamsburg, which he thinks hangs over the Park Service and caused it to favor restoration and reconstruction over the more conservative preservation of historic resources. Despite this tendency to intervene in historic fabric, Pitcaithley contends that the adoption of the "better preserve than repair, better repair than restore, better restore than reconstruct" standard in the 1930s means that the Park Service's "mandate is very clearly for preservation," not reconstruction.¹¹⁰

When Dwight Pitcaithley began working for the Park Service in the 1970s, the change in the agency's reconstruction policies was already underway, partly in response to a concern over funding reconstructions at the expense of authentic historic resources, but also because of the transformation of the opinions held by agency veterans such as Robert Utley and Ross Holland. But the arrival of individuals such as Pitcaithley, as well as Barry Mackintosh, who also joined the agency at this time, has also influenced its practices in regards to reconstructions, and historic preservation in general. This was a period in which preservation was being redefined by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and academic study of issues related to preservation and heritage was just beginning.

¹¹⁰ The training program Cultural Resources for Managers was given at the National Park Service's Stephen Mather Training Center, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in September 1997. Notes on the proceedings are in the possession of the author.

These cultural resource management professionals (a new term that came into use during this period as well) could not help but be effected by these developments, and took the larger and evolving field of preservation into account in their management of historic sites, which is reflected in their attention to ideas and opinions outside the Park Service. Such was the case when Dwight Pitcaithley commented on preservation plans for several buildings in Harpers Ferry, and said the Park Service could not make this town appear as it had in the 1860s, and it would be a mistake to create a historic “scene that never existed.” To further his point, Pitcaithley quoted from David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country*: “When a past we depend on for heritage and continuity turns out to be a complex of original and altered remains enlarged by subsequent thoughts and deeds, if not an outright sham, we lose faith in our own perceptions.” Few previous documents included such statements, which proponents of reconstructions might see as overly academic and elitist. Similarly, in correspondence with his former boss, Barry Mackintosh sent Robert Utley a copy of Ada Louise Huxtable’s 1992 article “Inventing American Reality,” in which the architectural critic takes the historic preservation community to task for having “replaced reality with selective fantasy” through its heavy-handed restorations and reconstructions. On this, Utley commented; “I predict that her article will have wide influence in the preservation world if not in the more narrow world of the Park Service.”¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Robert Utley to the author, April 11, 1998; Chief, Cultural Resource, National Capital Region, to the Superintendent, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, June 18, 1992, Harpers Ferry File-PH; Barry Mackintosh to Robert M. Utley, Decemer 11, 1992, File-BM, Utley to Mackintosh, February 19, 1993, File-BM; Ada Louise Huxtable, “Inventing American Reality,” *The New York Review of Books*, (13 December 1992): 24.

The narrow world of the National Park Service has expanded, and has come to include more people with advanced degrees who hold conservative views on historic preservation and cultural resource management that some might consider overly academic, or even elitist. Despite the presence of these professionals, the agency is still made up of a variety of individuals with diverging views, many of whom believe in the primacy of the Park Service's interpretive mission and are more accepting of the recreation of historic scenes through heavy handed restorations and reconstructions. This aspect of the agency was visible during a recent Park Service training program, Cultural Resources for Managers, which was held at the agency's Mather Training Center in September 1997. Throughout this course, which was attended by a variety of Park Service staff, a recurring issue was the exceedingly central role interpretation plays in the agency's management of cultural resources, particularly historic structures. The course was organized and officiated by Richard Sellars, a senior historian in the Park Service's Santa Fe office, who was co-author of the "Reconstructions: Expensive Life-Size Toys?" article. Sellars takes a dim view of the manipulation of historic sites for interpretive purposes rather than, as he wrote in the journal *Landscape*, "allowing them to speak for themselves." He believes this manipulation can be so great that historic sites "may become completely contrived," like those where the Park Service removed all actual traces of historic structures in order to reconstruct facsimiles. For Sellars, "the greater the intervention at historic places, the greater the manipulation. And the greater the manipulation, the greater the contrivance."¹¹²

¹¹² Sellars, "Why Take a Trip to Bountiful—Won't Anaheim Do?" 17-18.

Throughout the Cultural Resources for Managers program, this conservative view of the preservation of historic resources was presented by Richard Sellars and Dwight Pitcaithley, while several speakers presented a more liberal, interpretation driven view of the Park Service's preservation goals. One such individual, Douglas Faris, Superintendent of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park in Maryland, presented a proposal for a highly intrusive restoration to several structures and the associated landscape in a section of the park. The reason for this, he explained, was to have the area reach its "full interpretive potential" by recreating its appearance in an earlier decade, which he believed would make the resources more understandable to visitors. Other, less intrusive options for the site were not viable in the Superintendent's opinion. During another presentation, several Park Service interpretive specialists, including Michael Watson, Superintendent of the Mather Training Center, Dave Dahlen, the center's head of interpretive training, Dave Larson, the interpretive specialist for the Washington region, and Cindy Kryston, Deputy Superintendent of Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, spoke about interpretation helping preserve historic resources. Their discussion focused upon how interpretation can instill historic resources with a sense of importance in the eyes of visitors, who will in turn support their preservation. When Richard Sellars asked about altering resources to enhance interpretation, all responded that they prefer the resources to retain their integrity, but there were some circumstances in which their manipulation was justified because it could enhance the interpretation of a historic site. As the discussion went deeper into this topic, it appeared these interpreters would support increasingly intrusive manipulations of

historic resources. When it came to the issue of reconstructions, Dave Dahlen spoke of his admiration for the Fortress of Louisberg National Historical Park in Nova Scotia, a massive fort and town reconstructed by Parks Canada. In response to a question about the authenticity of such a site, and its “Disneyesque” qualities, Dave Larson summed up the justification for this approach to “preservation” when he responded: “But what of all the great interpretive moments [at the fort] and the visitors’ new interest in history?” In contrast to this Park Service official who sees interpretive benefits in reconstructions, as part of a recent study of historic sites, two scholars who have written extensively on this topic observed that the Fortress of Louisberg may actually “be regarded as a theme park in that recreation is well catered for, with costumed employees, quasi-traditional taverns and opportunities to purchase heritage oriented tourist merchandise.”¹¹³

Like most people in the Park Service, the proponents of reconstructions take pride in this agency, as well as the National Park System, both of which are unique institutions that preserve the natural and cultural patrimony of the nation. However, they might not like to face the fact that as the so called “heritage industry” expands, those historic sites in the National Park System that include reconstructions or other recreations of historical scenes, are becoming like so many other sites on the heritage tourism trail. The growth of the heritage industry has led some critics to observe that as the number and variety of tourist destinations based on historical themes and images expands, it becomes more difficult to discern authentic historic resources from the contrived. These historical attractions include an array of sites such as historical villages modeled on Colonial

Williamsburg, marketplaces like the South Street Seaport, or even theme parks such as the proposed Disney's America, which was touted by the Walt Disney Company as an entertaining and educational amusement park based upon a historical theme. As the number of such places increases, and they more frequently adopt the same techniques used by the Park Service to recreate historical scenes, the authentic historic resources in the National Park System, and elsewhere, may be devalued as the public becomes immune to the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic, the real historic structure and the reconstruction.¹¹⁴

The National Park Service understands that many visitors to its historic sites often do not realize that reconstructions are not authentic historic structures. A study of visitors to Bent's Old Fort carried out by the Harpers Ferry Center, the agency's interpretive design division, found that even when told that the fort was a reconstruction, many people found it difficult to understand this concept. According to Park Service archaeologist Douglas Comer, the staff of Bent's Old Fort recognizes this, and despite their enthusiasm for the interpretive and educational opportunities the reconstructed fort represents, admits that the nature of the site "raises some difficult ethical questions."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Cultural Resources for Managers, see previous citation.; G.J. Ashworth and J.E. Turnbridge, *The Tourist-Historic City* (London: Belhaven Press, 1990), 156.

¹¹⁴ The growing literature on this topic includes: Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994); Erik Cohen, "Contemporary Tourism-Trends and Challenges: Sustainable Authenticity or Contrived Post-Modernity?" in *Change in Tourism: People, Places, Processes*, ed. Richard Butler and Douglas Pearce (London: Routledge, 1995); Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

¹¹⁵ Comer, 277.

Like many contemporary Park Service professionals, Douglas Comer is troubled by the presence of reconstructions in the National Park System, and has written that when this agency fails to preserve authentic historic resources and attempts to recreate the past, it “erodes the trust the public has learned to feel for the National Park Service and the integrity of its historic sites.” Because this sentiment is reflected in Park Service policy and opinion, the agency has not been involved with a major reconstruction project since it was directed by Congress to reconstruct Fort Union Trading Post. However, the anti-reconstructionists understand that any time a community calls for the Park Service to reconstruct a vanished historic structure, this can lead to Congressional intervention, and a proposal to reconstruct can often be abetted by the many proponents of reconstruction within the agency. Because of this reality, when a number of Park Service officials met in 1991 to discuss deleting references to reconstruction from federal historic preservation legislation in order to “discourage unwarranted reconstruction projects,” they concluded that to do so would probably have no real effect on the situation. Instead, the Park Service “should do all it properly can to call attention to the demerits, expense, and misguided priorities of inappropriate reconstructions.”¹¹⁶

When the issue of deleting references to reconstruction in legislation was discussed within the Park Service, the officials involved did not conclude that the agency should discourage all reconstructions, just those that are “inappropriate.” But the propriety of reconstructions is open to personal judgement, and despite official policies and individual opinions, the Park Service is sure to face many more proposals to

reconstruct vanished historic structures. Whenever this occurs, those within the agency who might be inclined to support reconstruction should ask themselves if the recreation of history is actually the mission of the National Park Service.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 262; Chief Historian, to the Associate Director, Cultural Resources, January 11, 1991, File-BM.

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