

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0300594 DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED OCT 24 1975  
DATE ENTERED JAN 2 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Bent County Court House

AND/OR COMMON

Bent County Court House

2 LOCATION

Bounded by Carson and Bent aves, 7th + 8th Sts.

STREET & NUMBER Carson Avenue on west, Bent Avenue on east,  
8th Street on south, 7th Street on north

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Las Animas

VICINITY OF

Number 3

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Colorado

Bent

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

X PUBLIC

X OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

X BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

X GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

X YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Bent County

STREET & NUMBER

Carson Avenue on west, Bent Avenue on east, 8th Street on south, 7th Street on north.

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Las Animas

VICINITY OF

Colorado

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bent County Court House

STREET & NUMBER

Same as under #2 above

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Las Animas

Colorado

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Court House is of red brick with extensive beige colored stone trim (silica sandstone) all of which is original.

The roofing is presently a non-descript light gray asphalt shingle but the original was painted standing-seam metal with rather delicate cast iron railings on the flat portions (now removed). The entire metal cornice (4 sides) has been removed.

The windows are double hung wood in wood frames with stone surround and sills.

The basement walls are rusticated stone (silica sandstone) above grade and rough dressed stone below grade.

Over the years various unfortunate elements have been added to the building including: a large brick vault on the south side; wooden basement entry shelters on the north and west sides; some questionable railings; the ubiquitous window air conditioners; brick in-filling in the south-west corner open tower; metal fire escapes; and miscellaneous wires and hooks.

The style is best described as Victorian Institutional with Romanesque arches and window heads. The main roof is modified mansard with the lesser roofs being mostly hipped.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		<u>Historic</u>		

SPECIFIC DATES Corner stone laid July 4, 1887. Architect and Superintendent, Holmberg Bros. Contractors, Boulder, M. F. Reilly & B. Bradley.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bent County Court House was built and furnished between November, 1886 and March 12, 1889. It has been in continuous use as a court house since that time.

Bent County, named for Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River near Las Animas, was organized by legislative enactment of the State of Colorado in February, 1870. Originally it was 84 miles wide and 108 miles long, but in 1889 it was carved into six counties, Prowers, Kiowa, Otero, Cheyenne, Lincoln, and Bent.

The land for a new court house was given to Bent County by the Honorable James C. Jones, as he is named on the cornerstone of the building. Mr. Jones came to Nine Mile Bottom on the Purgatory River in 1869. There, he and his brother, Peyton Smith Jones, founded the JJ Ranch, one of the oldest and largest cattle ranches in Southeastern Colorado. The Jones Brothers did much to improve the quality of stock and methods of feeding stock in the area.

In 1875, Jim Jones came to West Las Animas; and in 1878, he bought his brother's interest in a mercantile store there. Later, after Las Animas was founded, he owned a livery stable on Carson Avenue across the street from the site for the new court house. In 1890, he built a commercial building in La Junta, 20 miles west of Las Animas.

Block number 119, Las Animas, Colorado, was deeded to James C. Jones by A. L. Marie, Commissioner of Deeds for Las Animas, on September 30, 1886. The consideration was \$112.50.

On February 18, 1887, Jones deeded the block to Bent County in return for \$1.00. The instrument says, "This deed made upon condition that the Court House of Bent County about to be built and for which Bonds were voted in November 1886, shall be built and maintained thereon. And if the said Court House shall not be erected and maintained thereon then this deed shall be null and void and the said Block shall revert to the grantor".

At this time, 1887, the county commissioners chairman was Jacob Weil. He was a native of France, and a partner of Jim Jones in the mercantile business. The other commissioners were Luke Cahill, a former Fort Lyon soldier and Bent County cattleman, and Avery Turner. Mr. Turner was train master for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, stationed at La Junta. He was a civil engineer, and had attended Cornell University, in New York State for three years.

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Records Bent County Court House, Las Animas, Colo., in office of County Clerk & Recorder-Commissioners Record Book #1; File of Deeds; and Record of Deeds, Book 70, Page 89.  
History of the Arkansas Valley, Colorado, 1881. O. L. Baskin & Co., Historical Publisher, Chicago; Reproduction by Unigraphic Inc., Evansville, Indiana, 1971. "History of Bent County" by Charles W. Bowman.

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY A city block. 400'x300'--120,000 square feet, app. 3 acres.  
 UTM REFERENCES Longitude 38° west  
Latitude 103° north

A	13	65	150	42	142	20	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING				NORTHING
C					D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE Langdon E. Morris, Jr., A.I.A.  
E. Frances Keck DATE 5-20-1975  
 ORGANIZATION \_\_\_\_\_  
 STREET & NUMBER 1869 South Pearl Street TELEPHONE (303) 744-6178  
701 Grace Avenue (303) 384-2702  
 CITY OR TOWN Denver, Colorado 80210 STATE \_\_\_\_\_  
La Junta, Colorado 81050

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE [Signature]

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer, Colo. DATE May 6, '75

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE <u>1/2/76</u>
Attesting	
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE <u>12/31/75</u>
ATTEST: <u>[Signature]</u>	
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED OCT 24 1975

JAN 2 1976

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

Other county commissioners involved in the court house building and furnishing, 1886 to 1889, were M. H. Murray, cattleman from south of Las Animas; H. M. Fosdick Jr., farmer and cattleman from the Manzanola-Fowler area; R. O. McClain from the Apishapa River and Timpas Creek areas; and J. C. Vroman, cattleman and farmer from the Rocky Ford-Manzanola area. Mr. McClain raised short-horn cattle, horses, hogs and poultry.

The contract to build the Bent County Court House was let to M. F. Reilly and B. Bradley on April 4, 1887. The architect and superintendent was Holmberg Bros., address unknown. The cornerstone for the building was laid July 4, 1887 by the King Solomon Lodge, No. 30, of the Masonic order.

The old court house burned to the ground January 10, 1888, with arson suspected. Work on the new court house was pushed as rapidly as possible. On March 12, 1889, the furniture was inspected and accepted by the county commissioners, and the court house was ready for use.

The building contract price, with changes and additions, was \$48,580. Sub-contracts and furnishings brought the cost to \$58,429.

The contract for the furniture went to A. H. Andrews and Co. of Chicago Illinois. Furniture for the upstairs court room, a jury room, and six downstairs offices were of antique oak. Most of the furniture is still in use today in the court house.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

A remarkable structure, unique in this region because of its four open corner lanterns of stone, it has the solid dignity and the visual strength appropriate but not always present in a county courthouse. In spite of defacements suffered over the years by well-meaning officials, the architecture is so compelling that the building's visual impact remains undiminished - albeit considerably less elegantly than in its original form. Although absolutely symmetrical, it is far from dull, with its long facades broken by repeated set backs, a wonderfully interesting roof line, and those open corner towers with their arches silhouetted against the sky. That the architects have succeeded in producing architecture, rather than merely a building, can not be disputed.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

PROPERTY Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: COLORADO, Bent

DATE RECEIVED: 3/09/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST:  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/24/01  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 76000546

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Additional Documentation Accepted**

RECOM. / CRITERIA

REVIEWER

DISCIPLINE

TELEPHONE

DATE

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

*Accept*  
*Edson Beall*  
*Historian*  
*3/22/01*

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

AD  
76-546

Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

Section number 1/2/5/6 Page 1

The purpose of this additional documentation is to recognize the existence and significance of additional buildings within the boundary of the 1976 National Register listed Bent County Courthouse.

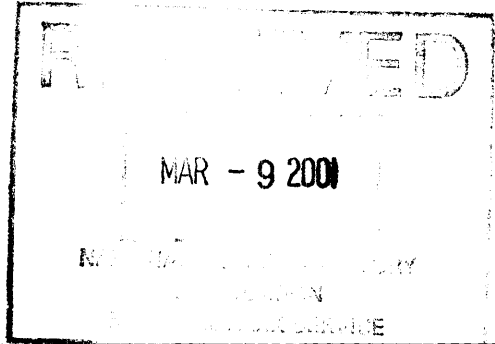
**Section 1 - Name of Property**

Historic name: Bent County Courthouse and Jail

**Section 2 - Location**

Street & number: 725 Carson Avenue

**Section 3 - State/Federal Agency Certification**



As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Georganna Cortez State Historic Preservation Officer 2/16/01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Office, Colorado Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**Section 5 - Classification**

Number of New Resources within Property  
Buildings Contributing - 1 Noncontributing - 2  
Total Contributing - 1 Noncontributing - 2

**Section 6 - Function or Use**

Historic Functions: Government/courthouse  
Government/correctional facility

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

Section number 7 Page 2

**Narrative Description**

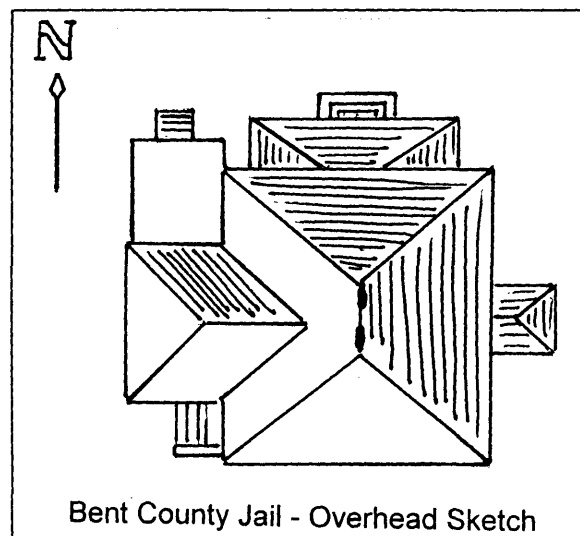
The 1902 Bent County Jail is a two-story brick building with raised basement which occupies the center of the north part of the Courthouse Square. The well-groomed courthouse grounds in Las Animas occupies the south side of the big curve on US Highway 50 (Ambassador Thompson Blvd.). The Bent County Courthouse and Jail complex consists of two brick and stone buildings standing in close proximity to one another. A concrete walk links the southwest jail entry to the north elevation entrance to the courthouse. The connection allowed the direct transfer of prisoners from the jail to the courtrooms. The remainder of the block contains a two-car brick garage and a one-story brick extension building.

The jail is an irregular plan (approximately 30 ft. X 40 ft.), red brick building on a raised, beige sandstone basement with extensive sandstone trim surmounted by a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. A brick chimney rises through the roof on the south elevation. The quarry-faced sandstone basement with its beaded mortar joints terminates in a dressed water table. Red brick pilasters with tan brick bases and corbeled capitals occupy all the building's corners. A three-course band of tan brick forms a belt course between the first and second-floor windows. The window openings have sandstone sills, and on the second-story the sills join a sandstone belt course. A corbeled tan brick belt course runs across the top of the second-story windows and the pilaster capitals. A course of dentils surrounds the building below the soffit.

The north elevation contains the main entry located off an enclosed, half-hipped roof porch with Tuscan columns which spring from a brick half-wall with sandstone coping. The porch is accessed by a five-step concrete stair with metal railing. To the west of the main entry is a secondary entry in a one-story, flat-roofed brick addition. The centered entry is flanked on each side by a one-over-one window and is accessed by a six-step concrete stair with metal railing. The second-story windows are one-over-ones covered by metal security bars. Two windows are evenly spaced above the porch and a third window is centered in the jail's west wing.

The west elevation of the wing contains a small basement window, two first-story windows, one second-story window and a gutter downspout. The west elevation of the main building contains a stairway to secondary entry and a single second-story window.

The south elevation contains two basement windows, two first-story windows, and three second-story windows, one of which is on the building's west wing. Another downspout runs along the western-most portion of the main building and a steel fire escape accesses the second-story cell area.



Bent County Jail - Overhead Sketch



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3

Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

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The east elevation contains a small one-story restroom wing with hipped-roof. The wing has a single small window on its north elevation. The east elevation of the main building contains a small basement window, two first-story windows, and two second-story windows, the latter being covered by metal security bars.

The basic interior configuration of the jail remains original. The wood floors are original although some have been covered with linoleum and tile. A few partition walls were added over the years. The second floor contains jail cells that were in use until the spring of 2000. The first floor was used as the sheriff's living quarters and kitchen until 1995. The basement contains several rooms used to process prisoners.

During the past 98 years various changes have been made to the building. The most significant change was a one-story, north elevation entry addition. Some windows have been replaced, a metal fire escape added, some interior partitions erected and kitchen facilities upgraded and replaced.

The building retains sufficient integrity to convey its historical association with the overall history of the courthouse complex. The jail closed in 2000, no longer able to meet federal standards for the housing of prisoners.

The brick, hipped-roof, two-car garage and the one-story, brick, gable-roofed extension building were both constructed after the period of significance and are considered to be noncontributing.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
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Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

Section number 8 Page 4

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**Significance**

The 1902 Bent County Jail is a significant part of the Courthouse Square complex in the areas of social history, and politics and government. The jail served as the county's processing and holding facility for 98 years. In that role it was directly linked to the judicial and social history of the adjacent courthouse.

The development of Bent County was typical of eastern Colorado. The establishment of county government included a court for the administration of justice. The accommodation of those awaiting trial and those sentenced to serve time for transgressions necessitated the erection of a county jail. The Bent County Jail, with its sheriff and staff, operated in partnership with the courthouse to maintain law and order in Bent County during the twentieth century.

In addition to its many short-term residents, the jail served as the home for many sheriffs and their families. Among these was Sheriff Dan Gates. Gates was elected sheriff in 1927 and immediately moved into the jail living quarters with his family. His wife cooked meals for the prisoners and gained a reputation for the quality of her cuisine. Their son, Ken, helped in the election campaign by singing political slogans. Ken assisted his father with the duties of sheriff, established a reputation as a country and western signer, and also became known for his imitations of a Las Animas cowboy named Cedar Jack. Local lore has it that Cedar Jack, who lived south of Las Animas and spoke with a heavy drawl, cut cedar trees during the week to make posts. On Saturdays, he regularly brought a wagon load to town for sale, hit the saloons, became inebriated, then arrested, and ending up spending Saturday nights in the Bent County Jail. This course of events insured that he would be on hand Sunday for one of Mrs. Gates great chicken dinners. Some say he planned it that way, so he would have at least one good, and free, meal a week. Mrs. Gates raised her chickens in a coop behind the jail.

Ken Gates is credited with starting the Las Animas Santa Fe Trail Parade in 1934, known as the longest continuously running high school event in the United States. After graduation, Ken went to college but soon left to become a singer/actor in California where he sang with the Sons of the Pioneers. Under the stage name Ken Curtis, he went on to co-star in the long running TV series "Gunsmoke" where he played the role of "Festus"—a character said to be based on Cedar Jack.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

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**Bibliography**

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Bent County Commissioner's Records.

Betz, Ava. *A Prowers County History*. p 225, 380 Prowers Co Historical Society 1986

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Keck, Francis. *History of Otero County*. 1997.

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Hurd, Rex. Past Las Animas resident. Writings. Public Library.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *Field Guild to American Houses*. Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1984.

**Form Prepared By**

Name/title: Judy Thomeczek

Organization: Supporters of Colorado Preservation

Date: September 1, 2000

Telephone: 719-456-1296

Street & number: PO Box 387

City or town: Las Animas

State: CO

Zip: 81054

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

Section number \_\_\_ Page 6

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**Photograph Log**

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-8 except as noted:

Name of Property: Bent County Jail  
Location: Las Animas, Bent County, Colorado  
Photographer: Judy Thomeczek  
Date of Photographs: 9/20/2000  
Negatives: Possession of the photographer

Photo No.                      Photographic Information

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- 1 East and north elevations; view to the southwest.
- 2 West and south elevations; view to the northeast.
- 3 North elevation; view to the south.
- 4 Jail and courthouse; view to the southwest.
- 5 Courthouse in left foreground, jail in center background, extension building in right background; view to the northeast.
- 6 Jail in center foreground, garage in left foreground, extension building in right foreground, courthouse in right background; view to the southwest.
- 7 First-floor kitchen.
- 8 Second-floor stair detail.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Bent County Courthouse and Jail  
Bent County, Colorado

Section number \_\_\_ Page 7

Sketch Map

