

PH0087483

Form 10-300  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Colorado	
COUNTY: Weld	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 70.9.05.0015	DATE 9/30/70

**1. NAME**

COMMON: Fort Vasquez Site

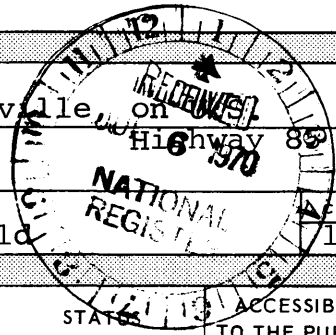
AND/OR HISTORIC: Fort Vasquez Trading Post Site

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: 5,500 ft. south of 4821 Bench Mark, Platteville on Highway 89

CITY OR TOWN: Platteville vicinity

STATE: Colorado CODE: COUNTY: Weld CODE: 123



**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME: State Historical Society of Colorado

STREET AND NUMBER: 200 Fourteenth Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Denver STATE: Colorado CODE: 05

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: State Museum

STREET AND NUMBER: 200 Fourteenth Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Denver STATE: Colorado CODE: 05

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY: Fort Vasquez Overall Map of Archaeology

DATE OF SURVEY: August 1966  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: State Museum of Colorado

STREET AND NUMBER: 200 Fourteenth Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Denver STATE: Colorado CODE: 05

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Colorado

COUNTY: Weld

ENTRY NUMBER: 70.9.05.0015

DATE: 9/30/70

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Visitors to the Fort in 1839 and 1840 viewed the trading post as being quite substantial. Within it were living quarters, a barn, storage areas, and stalls for conducting trade. The walls were described as being pierced by rifle ports for defense. Guard towers located on two corners of the post also served as defense installations. Contemporary records cite the approximate dimensions of the trading post. The walls were described as being twelve feet high and constructed of adobe. The fort was approximately 100 feet square. The original foundations were sandstone.

Today, the site is occupied by a visitors' center and exhibit area, and a WPA reconstruction. Within the visitors' center are exhibited items pertaining to Colorado's early fur trade as it related to the Vasquez trading post. The WPA structure is not considered to be very authentic. Fortunately, it does not occupy the exact site of the original post, being aligned a few feet to one side of the original foundations. Because of these facts, a historical archaeology project has been undertaken to establish the exact dimensions of the fort, as well as recovering items of historical interest for exhibit at the center. This archaeological project has been underway since 1963, when the visitors' center was proposed. It continues today, providing an accurate picture of the fort's physical nature.

Note: Only the site of the Fort Vasquez trading post is being nominated for inclusion on the Register. Neither the WPA reconstruction nor the Visitors' Center are being considered as applicable to the list.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) c. 1835

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal          | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric         | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic            | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | <u>Development of West</u>                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture         | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture        | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications      | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation        |   |  | _____   |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

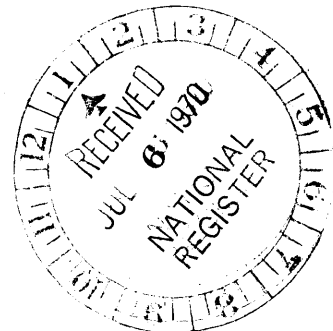
Built circa 1835, the "Fort" was in reality a trading post designed to carry on trade with Indians along the South Platte River. Louis Vasquez and Andrew Sublette, both mountain men, were the originators of the adobe and sandstone post.

Such things as nails, knives, food, cooking implements and "Taos Lightning" (whisky) were brought in by wagon to the Fort for exchange with the Indians. The chief commodity of the Indians was buffalo, hides and robes. Other items of trade were occasional beaver skins and gold dust.

Vasquez and Sublette sold Fort Vasquez in 1840 or 1841, due to the heavy competition imposed by trading forts located nearby, also on the South Platte.

Today, a visitors' center and a nearby WPA restoration of the trading post are maintained by the State to tell of "Colorado's early fur trade and of the mountain men" who ventured into business matters. In addition, the State is conducting archaeological research on the original foundations to better determine the physical nature of Fort Vasquez.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Fort Vasquez" pamphlet by staff of State Historical Society of Colorado

The Colorado Magazine by the State Historical Society of Colorado, Vol. 27, pp. 163 and 171, Vol. 35, p. 159

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
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NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **less than ten acres (1 acre)**

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Robert Fink, Assistant to the Director**

ORGANIZATION: **State Historical Society of Colorado** DATE: **1/14/70**

STREET AND NUMBER: **200 Fourteenth Avenue**

CITY OR TOWN: **Denver** STATE: **Colorado** CODE: **05**

12 STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name *Stephen H. Hart*  
**Stephen H. Hart**

Title State Liaison Officer

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

*Ernest Allen Connally*  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
**SEP 30 1970**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

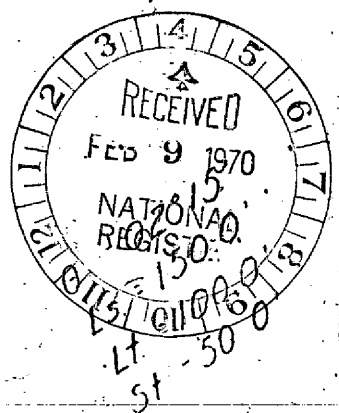
ATTEST:  
*William J. Kurstog*  
 Keeper of The National Register

**JUL 27 1970**  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

13/515300/4499140  
 12-8-75 wnh  
 SEE INSTRUCTIONS

S1/4 SEC. 30  
T.3N, R.66W.

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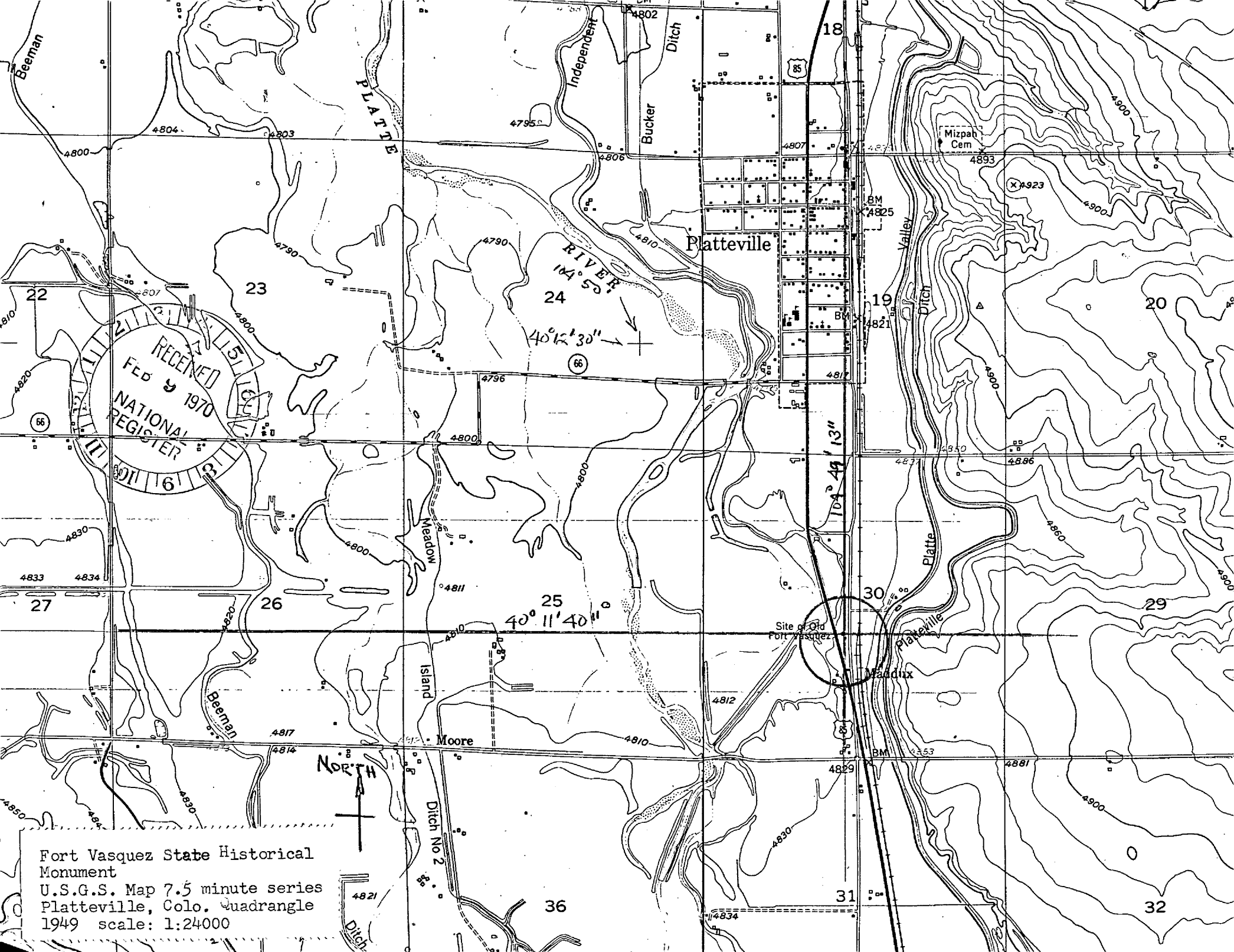


DEPT. OF HIGHWAY  
STATE OF COLORADO

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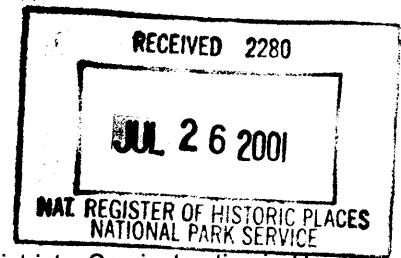


Fort Vasquez State Historical Monument  
U.S.G.S. Map 7.5 minute series  
Platteville, Colo. Quadrangle  
1949 scale: 1:24000

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

AD  
70-169



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Fort Vasquez Trading Post

other names/site number Fort Vasquez; Fort Vasquez Museum; 5WL568

2. Location

street & number 13412 U.S. Highway 85 [N/A] not for publication

city or town Platteville [N/A] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Weld code 123 zip code 80651

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.)  
Georgiana Contiguetta State Historic Preservation Officer July 18, 2001 Date  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper _____	Date of Action _____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other, explain <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	<u>Additional Documentation Accepted</u>	<u>9/9/01</u>

Fort Vasquez Trading Post

Weld County, Colorado

Name of Property

County/State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
1	2	objects
2	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: trade (archeology)  
Recreation and Culture: monument/marker

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: museum  
Recreation and Culture: monument/marker

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: adobe fort

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Sandstone  
Gravel  
walls Adobe  
roof Wood  
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)



Fort Vasquez Trading Post

Weld County, Colorado

Name of Property

County/State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Commerce
- Archeology/Historic – non-aboriginal
- Exploration/Settlement
- Architecture
- Politics and Government
- Social History

**Periods of Significance**

- 1835-1842
- 1932-1958

**Significant Dates**

- 1835
- 1842
- 1937
- 1958

**Significant Person(s)**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

Vasquez, Pierre Louis

**Cultural Affiliation**

Euro-American

**Architect/Builder**

Works Progress Administration

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record
- # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Colorado Historical Society

Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Name of Property

Weld County, Colorado  
County/State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** .66 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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4. \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Hoskinson, Director, Fort Vasquez Museum  
organization Colorado Historical Society date 11/3/2000  
street & number 13412 U.S. Highway 85 telephone 970-785-2832  
city or town Platteville state CO zip code 80651

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name State Historical Society of Colorado  
street & number 1300 Broadway telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Denver state CO zip code 80203

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Weld County, Colorado

Section number 5-7 Page 1

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**CLASSIFICATION**

This nomination includes the previously listed Fort Vasquez Site. The site was listed in the National Register on September 30, 1970. The resource count in the original nomination consisted of a single contributing site.

**DESCRIPTION**

Fort Vasquez Trading Post includes the historic archaeological site of an 1835 fur-trade fort, a 1932 Colorado Historical Society monument, and the 1935-1936 Works Progress Administration (WPA) reconstructed adobe fort. The commemorative monument marks the site of Fort Vasquez; the WPA walls partially surround the site.

The property sits on a low plateau that overlooks the South Platte River valley. North- and southbound lanes of U.S. Highway 85 enclose the 1.039-acre Colorado Historical Society property that includes Fort Vasquez Museum and the .66-acre historic site, as illustrated in the Sketch Map. A Colorado Department of Transportation paved parking area lies north of the site; the museum building, another paved parking area, and a Colorado Department of Revenue Weigh and Check Station are south of the site and structure. All are within the median strip of a four-lane highway, one mile south of Platteville, Colorado.

Across the highway to the west is a pasture with cottonwood trees that mark the old riverbed. Longs Peak and the Rocky Mountains provide a pastoral backdrop. The Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way, a farmhouse, cropland, and a low ridge provide the view east of the highway. Industrial, commercial, agricultural, and residential development, all within the Urban Growth Area designated by the Town of Platteville, are within one-half mile north of the fort; south of the museum and weigh station are agricultural, commercial, and residential uses. The Town of Fort Lupton is eight miles south.

Landscaping around the structure is confined to the southwest corner of the historic property where a single locust tree shades the Fort Vasquez Museum highway sign. A granite-type rock marks the site's southwest corner. Nearby are three small gooseberry bushes, two multi-floral rose bushes, and two yucca plants. No other landscaping is near the adobe structure except for a variety of short grasses watered only by rainfall.

Although no surface remains of the 1835 Fort Vasquez Trading Post exist, foundations for the adobe structure lie beneath the plaza of the reconstructed fort. When WPA workers built Fort Vasquez in the 1930s, they used the adobe ruins to make bricks for the new fort and, thus, eliminated all surface evidence of the original trading post.

After the State Historical Society of Colorado assumed ownership of the property in 1958, the Society initiated plans to construct a museum to interpret the fur-trade era. In 1963, the first archaeological tests completed at the site cleared the museum area for construction. *Colorado Magazine* published a preliminary report of this work in 1964. Archaeologists found enough evidence near the reconstructed fort to justify excavations during 1966 and 1967. This work determined that portions of the original Fort Vasquez Trading Post remained intact beneath the surface. In addition to discovering artifacts associated with an 1830s fur-trading post, the team located the foundations of several rooms and the west exterior wall. Since this foundation was eight to 12 feet inside the WPA west wall, the archaeologists concluded that the WPA workers offset the new fort eight to 12 feet west of the original east and west walls. They were unable to find evidence of north or south foundations and concluded that these walls stood on the remains of the originals. Although the Colorado Historical Society received written reports of work completed in 1966 and 1967, they were not published.

A final series of excavations began in fall 1968 and continued through July 1970. *Colorado Magazine* published the results of this work in 1971. This report stated that the original fort was oriented 5.1 degrees west of true north and suggested that there was an attempt to orient the original structure along a north axis, as indicated in

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Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Weld County, Colorado

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Figure 1 WPA FORT OVERLAID ON 1835 FORT.

Source: James Judge, "Archaeology of Fort Vasquez," *Colorado Magazine* (Summer 1971), 185.

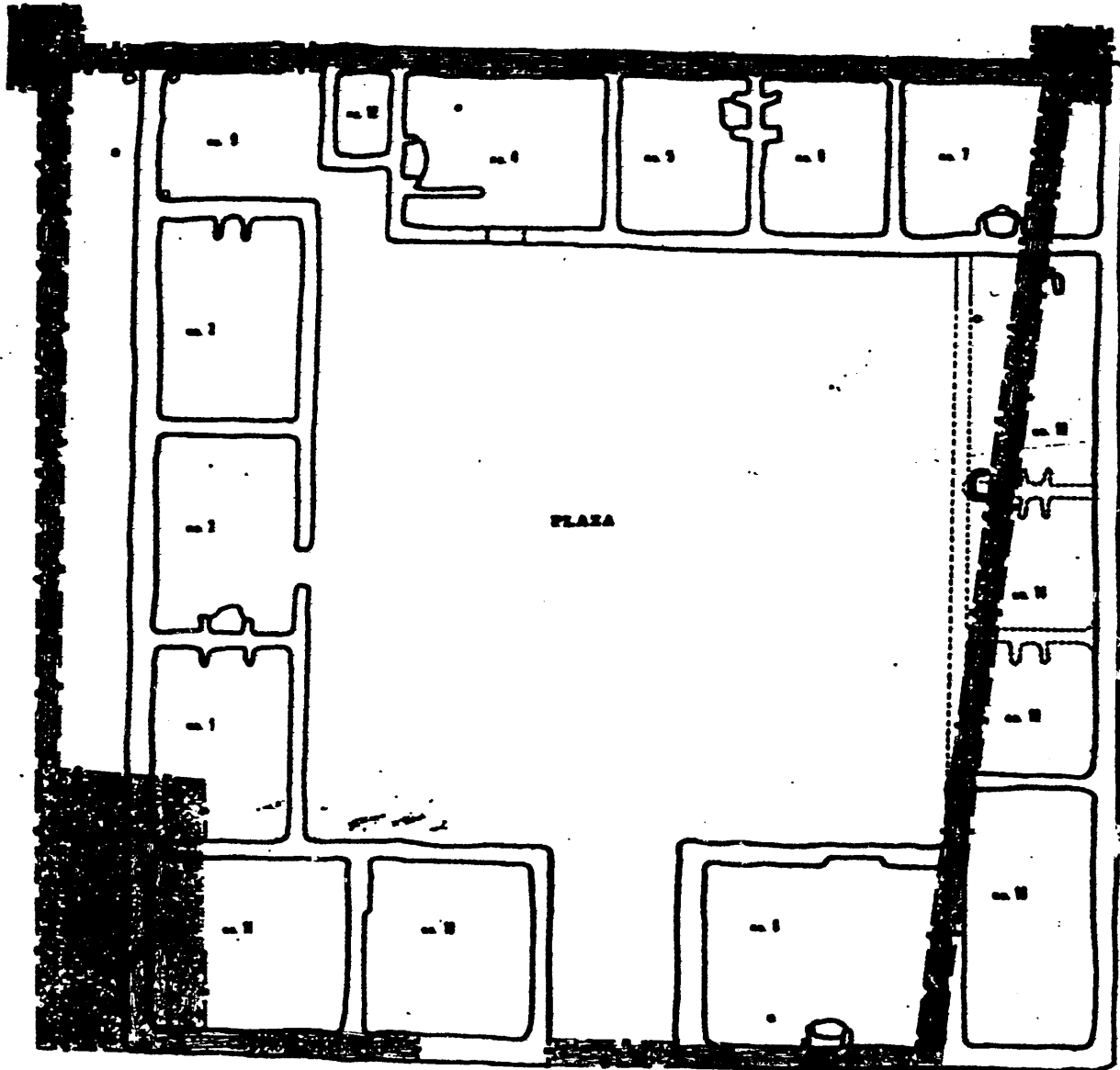
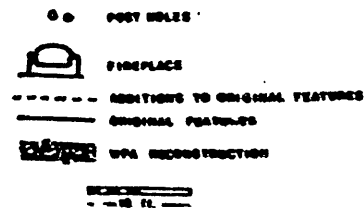


FIGURE 1  
EXISTING AND  
ORIGINAL WALL  
OUTLINES



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Continuation Sheet**

Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
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Figure 1. Tests of adobe material also revealed that the reconstructed fort contained more rocks and pebbles than the original structure. The main walls of the original fort measured 100 feet from east to west and 98.5 feet from north to south. The exterior walls measured 26.5 inches in thickness at the base.

The article reported that the main gate to the original fort was centered on the south wall and was 14-foot wide, but a second four-foot wide entrance was 13 feet from the northwest corner to allow occupants an alternative exit. Crews found no evidence of adobe-based towers, although post holes located in the northwest corner of the fort suggested that a wooden platform tower may have been constructed in that area. The report also concluded that rooms surrounded the plaza on the south, west, and north sides.

As many as eleven rooms and one small storage area made up the original fort as illustrated in the *Colorado Magazine* report, shown by Figure 2. Rooms averaged about 300 square feet. Floors were four- to six-inches lower than the plaza level. All but three were equipped with fireplaces placed along the walls in the Anglo tradition. Analysis of the artifacts enabled the archaeologists to assign possible uses for each room. Evidence of a blacksmith shop, trade room, living quarters, kitchen, pantry, dining area, storage area, and corral were consistent with the needs of the remote supply depot built in Cheyenne and Arapaho territory.

Heavy disturbance along the east portion of the fort by the WPA crews and subsequent highway construction obliterated large portions of the site in this area. The 1971 archaeological report suggested that this area was structurally altered and reoccupied after its initial abandonment in 1842. During the fur-trade period, this area may have been used as a livestock corral and for hay storage.

A WPA reconstructed adobe fort surrounds most of the site of the original fort, as indicated in Figure 1. An architectural conservator described the current condition of the walls in "The Fort: Condition Assessment, Drawings, and Photo Documentation", completed as part of the *Fort Vasquez Museum Concept Development Plan* published in 1999. The condition assessment chapter in the development plan stated that the walls are oriented to the cardinal directions with the main entrance centered on the south side. The east wall is approximately 15 feet from the east barrow ditch; the distance from the west wall to the west barrow ditch varies from approximately five feet at the northwest corner to approximately 20 feet at the southwest corner. The site is relatively flat with less than a two-foot elevation difference. The actual distance above sea level is 4,825 feet.

The fort's WPA adobe walls are approximately 100-foot long on the four sides that enclose a trapezoid. The north and south walls are parallel, but the east and west walls are not. The east wall intersects the north wall at an angle of approximately 80 degrees; the west and north walls intersect at between 85 and 90 degrees. The walls are straight in plan with the exception of the west wall; the two halves are straight but one angles away from the other at approximately midpoint.

The WPA walls vary between six- and seven-foot tall; the lower four feet are two-foot four-inches thick, and the upper portions are approximately one-foot thick. Courses of headers and stretchers make up the lower, thicker portions; and header courses finish the upper, thinner portions of the adobe walls. A horizontal concrete cap covers the lower walls at the transition to the upper, thinner walls on the west, north, and east; the resulting shelf is interpreted as a firing ledge. Firing portals are located above the firing ledges. An adobe wall projection at the southeast corner has a similar concrete cap, shown in Photographs 2 and 6. The WPA also placed concrete caps to protect the tops of all the walls, as shown in the 1937 photograph in Article 1. Only the southeast corner cap remains.

An adobe pier eight-foot tall and approximately three-foot square defines the southeast gate entrance. A matching southwest pier and a 22-foot section of wall collapsed during high winds in April 2000. The damage is shown in Photographs 1 and 6. This wall and pier will be reconstructed as part of the museum's annual adobe stabilization project.

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Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Weld County, Colorado

Figure 2 LAYOUT OF 1835 FORT VASQUEZ

Source: James Judge, "Archaeology of Fort Vasquez," *Colorado Magazine* (Summer 1971), 186.

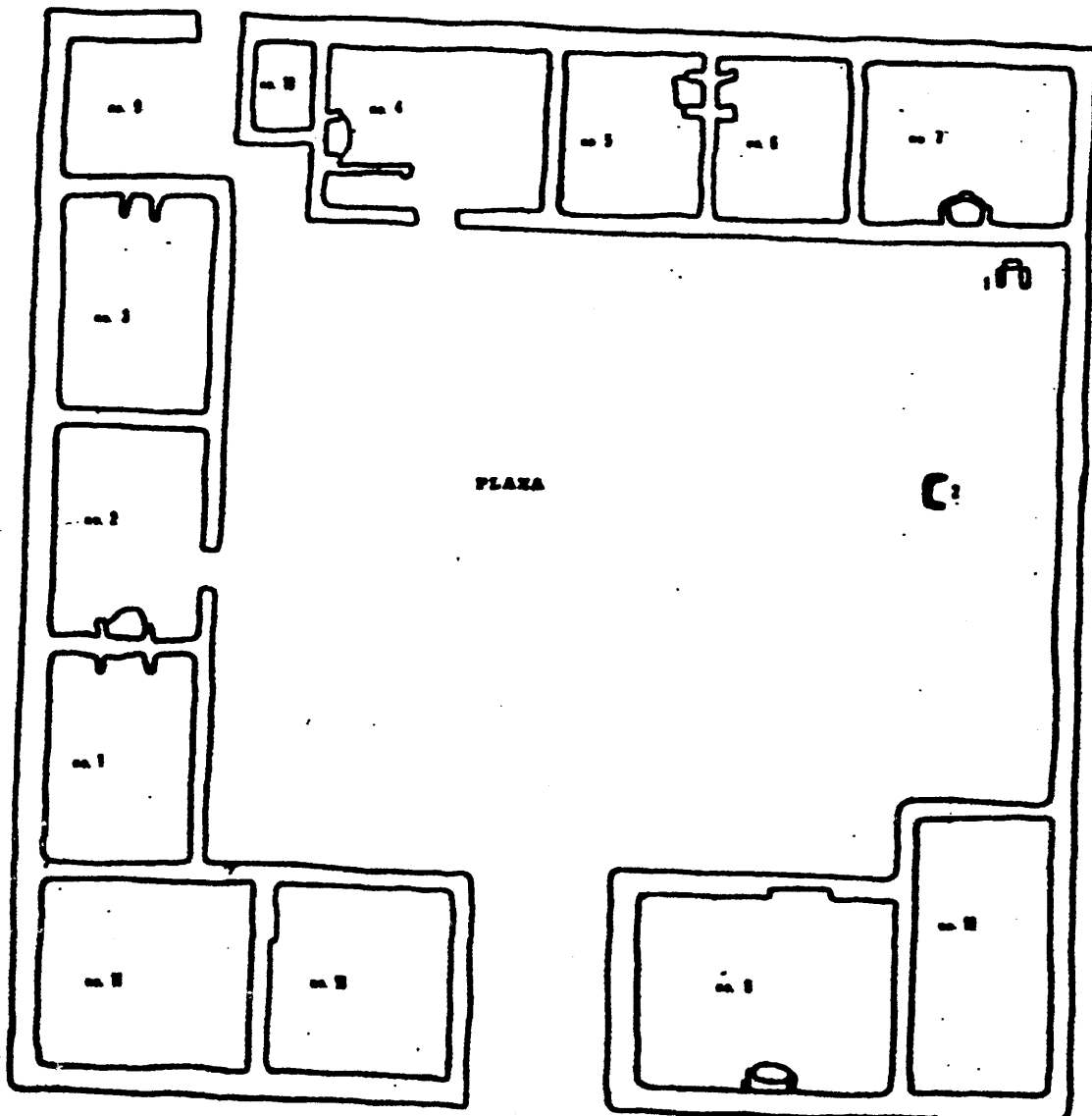


FIGURE 2

ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION

— ORIGINAL FEATURES



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Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Weld County, Colorado

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In the southwest corner inside the fort, a concrete foundation, remains of walls, and chimney ruins, shown in Photographs 1 and 7, are the only evidence of the caretaker's quarters built by the WPA. The completed quarters are shown in Article 1 that reports about the 1937 dedication ceremony.

"Sacrificial" mud plaster protects all wall surfaces. Over time, erosion from wind and moisture thinned the layers in some places. Narrow gaps between the concrete firing ledges allowed water to run down the surface of the walls and damaged the stucco covering and adobe bricks, as shown in Photograph 8. Replacement bricks inserted into similar damaged areas during the summers of 1999 and 2000 filled the gullies and helped stabilize the WPA structure.

Towers are located at the northwest and northeast corners, and are nearly 10 feet tall, as shown in Photographs 3, 4, 5, and 8. The floors of the towers are raised approximately two feet above the elevation of the enclosed grade. An automobile collided with the northeast tower and demolished it and a section of wall in 1976; in 1994, an AmeriCorps crew rebuilt the fallen tower and wall. New shed-type tower roofs constructed of one-by-six-inch pine boards and supported by six-inch diameter peeled pine logs were installed in 1999 and 2000, as part of the adobe stabilization project. They replicate the collapsed roof on the northwest tower that posed a safety hazard. Wall projections at the southeast and southwest corners approximate the height of the corner towers.

Foundations have not been documented, but archaeologists suggested the WPA foundations consisted of trenches two-feet deep and two-feet four-inches wide filled with gravel and sometimes rock.

Two-feet south of the southwest exterior wall is a commemorative monument, as shown in Photographs 1, 6, and 7. Attached to the monument is a State Historical Society of Colorado bronze plaque dated 1932. A short description of the site's significance is cast in raised, capital letters. A thin layer of stucco covers the monument. It is four-feet six-inches tall, two-feet six-inches wide, and one-foot six-inches deep. A three-inch steel "eyelet" projects from the tapered marker top. The monument appears to have been reset at some time since it sits off center on its concrete base.

Seven-feet six-inches south of the southeast exterior wall is a seven-feet six-inch tall, five-feet four-inch wide non-contributing wooden sign mounted on two posts, as shown in Photographs 2 and 6. The weathered sign is painted dark brown with white, engraved lettering. It recognizes the work of the Colorado State University Archaeology Club for completing the final excavations at Fort Vasquez between 1968 and 1970.

A non-contributing pole gateway remnant near the northeast tower marks an entrance to the museum property that is no longer in use.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Fort Vasquez was listed in the National Register in 1970 as an archaeological site. The purpose of this new nomination is to recognize not only the archaeological significance of the site but also the importance of the property for its later use as an interpretive area, including the "reconstruction" of the fort by the Works Progress Administration.

The property meets National Register Criterion A in the area of commerce for its association with Western fur-trade during the period 1835-1842. Fort Vasquez Trading Post, constructed in 1835, was the first permanent structure built on the South Platte River. Fur-trader Pierre Louis Vasquez and his partner, Andrew W. Sublette, established the adobe outpost to encourage commerce with the Plains Indians. After the enterprise failed in 1842, the fort began a long, slow process of deterioration.

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Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Weld County, Colorado

Section number 8 Page 6

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The property meets National Register Criterion B in the areas of commerce and exploration/settlement for its association with founder Pierre Louis Vasquez, an experienced mountain man who explored the West in the service of various fur companies. He made significant contributions to the fur-trade industry and exploration activities in what later became Colorado. Vasquez was associated with the fort from 1835 to 1841.

The property meets National Register Criterion D in the areas of commerce and architecture because excavations yielded valuable information about the construction of the fort and its use as a regional fur-trade center during the 1835-1842 period of significance. Few documents reveal specific information about the fort's day-to-day operations or its overall appearance, but archaeological excavations between 1963 and 1970 provided valuable facts about these activities. There is potential for additional information.

The property is eligible under Criterion A in the areas of social history, and politics and government, for its use as an interpretive site illustrating Colorado's role in the fur-trade industry. Important interpretive activities occurred on the site beginning in 1932, when a bronze plaque was cast for a monument erected at the site. Site interpretation expanded significantly with reconstruction of the fort as a WPA project in 1935-1936. Rebuilding Fort Vasquez was one of a number of history-related projects undertaken by the WPA in Colorado during the Great Depression.

Nearly one-hundred years after the founding of Fort Vasquez, increased awareness about the outpost's significance encouraged local people to seek ways to preserve its memory. With financial assistance from the federal Works Progress Administration, Weld County, and the Town of Platteville, local workers rebuilt Fort Vasquez using an architectural plan based on the memories of an early South Platte Valley pioneer who visited the fort in 1850 and again in 1859. The second period of significance begins with erection of the first interpretive marker and ends with the 1958 transfer of the property from Weld County to the State of Colorado when U.S. Highway 85 became a four-lane. Although the period of significance extends slightly into a time less than fifty years ago, the 1958 transfer of the property to the State Historical Society of Colorado represents an important change in the property's history and thus meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration G.

Finally, the property is eligible under Criterion C for its architectural significance as a successful evocation, at least in terms of popular acceptance, of a fur trading fort using adobe construction. Though the WPA incorporated existing information about the original fort into its plan for the reconstruction, the new fort was not built as an exact replica of the original. The WPA fort is not nominated as a reconstruction of the original, and, therefore, the structure does not need to meet the requirements of Criteria Consideration E for reconstructed properties. Rather, the new fort is eligible for its own architectural significance dating from its 1935-1936 period of construction as an example of the use of traditional adobe building practices adapted to stereotypical Western frontier fort design. The WPA fort reflects more the contemporary thinking of what a "historic" fort ought to look like than it does on a reliance on the limited historical record and on-site ruins.

**FUR-TRADE INDUSTRY**

The U.S. government regulated the fur-trade industry through the factory system beginning in 1796 by establishing outposts where the government would exchange goods with the Indians for pelts. When Congress abolished the factory system in 1822, traders were no longer in competition with government factors. Entrepreneurs, such as Andrew Henry and Gen. William H. Ashley, took advantage of this opportunity and sent brigades of men to trap beaver in the Rocky Mountains. Louis Vasquez joined Ashley's men in 1823.

Vasquez, twelfth child of Benito and Julie Papin Vasquez, was born in St. Louis on October 3, 1798. At age 12, his father died. Little is known of his childhood, although his letters, often written in French, reveal an educated man who held deep affection for his family. After Vasquez joined Gen. Ashley's fur-trading company, he spent many years trapping and trading in the West.



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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Weld County, Colorado

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In December 1834, a letter from Fort Convenience places him with Andrew Sublette on the South Platte River opposite the mouth of Vasquez Fork (now known as Clear Creek). In 1835, the partners relocated downstream several miles and built Fort Vasquez, their adobe fur-trading post. Fort Vasquez and similar outposts built in the region, such as Bent's Fort and Fort William (later known as Fort Laramie), acted as central supply depots for manufactured goods offered in exchange for buffalo robes. The robe trade had outpaced beaver pelts in importance by the mid-1830s.

Once the partners obtained a license in July 1835 to trade with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, they immediately returned to the South Platte with a supply of goods. By November 1835, their financier, Robert Campbell, informed his partner, William Sublette, that 50 lodges of Cheyennes were camped on the South Platte near Fort Vasquez. Sublette and Campbell also were responsible for building Fort William (Fort Laramie).

Vasquez and Sublette strategically placed their fort along Trappers' Trail midway between Bent's Fort and Fort William (Fort Laramie). Fort Vasquez was the third adobe fur-trading post built in the region in as many years. Bent's Fort was built on the Arkansas River in 1833, Fort William (Fort Laramie) at confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers in 1834.

Competition increased when three additional adobe fur-trade forts were built within a ten-mile radius of Fort Vasquez: Fort Lupton, Fort Jackson, and Fort St. Vrain. Low prices received for pelts caused by decreased demand for beaver and buffalo, along with repercussions from the Panic of 1837, forced Vasquez and Sublette to sell the business to the firm of Locke and Randolph in 1841.

The new owners abandoned the fort in 1842 and left Vasquez and Sublette responsible to their creditors. Vasquez vowed to repay the debt, and in 1843, joined his friend, Jim Bridger, to establish Fort Bridger Trading Post, now in southwestern Wyoming. They supplied emigrants who traveled the Oregon Trail until they sold Fort Bridger in 1855. Vasquez then retired to his farm near Westport, Missouri, where he died in 1868.

Few contemporary written accounts of life at Fort Vasquez exist. Diarist E. Willard Smith provides a description of operations at Fort Vasquez during the 1839-1840 season. He accompanied Louis Vasquez's supply train along the Santa Fe Trail and then north to Fort Vasquez in 1839. Smith gives only a sketchy description of the adobe fort, but soon after their arrival in September, he accompanied a group of Vasquez' men with trade goods to Brown's Hole, now in northwestern Colorado, to spend the winter. In the spring of 1840, Smith and the traders returned to Fort Vasquez. He and seven of Vasquez' men then launched a Mackinaw boat loaded with pelts for a voyage down the South Platte to return to St. Louis.

In another account, mountain man James Beckwourth dictated his experiences, including those at Fort Vasquez, to his biographer in 1856. He said that in 1838 Vasquez had hired him to accompany the supply train from Independence, Missouri, to Fort Vasquez, where he was employed as a trader. Upon their arrival, Beckwourth remembered erecting buildings within the fort, including a barn later filled with hay. In 1840, Beckwourth left Fort Vasquez and joined the traders at Fort St. Vrain.

Only through the work of archaeologists have these sparse written descriptions increased knowledge about operations at Fort Vasquez. The final round of excavations, as reported in *Colorado Magazine* in 1971, fulfilled the primary goals set out by the State Historical Society of Colorado. The Society wanted to learn more about the original structure, and the location and uses of the various rooms. Without the work of student archaeologists enrolled in summer field schools at Colorado State University in 1969 and 1970, there would be no systematic documentation of the below-surface existence of Fort Vasquez. The teams were frustrated by the site-damaging construction work that took place in certain areas in the 1930s and 1950s, but they were still able to reveal the foundations to rooms, locate entrances, and find evidence of fireplaces. Uses for the rooms were established through preliminary analysis of artifacts found. The artifacts attributed to the 1835-1842 period of significance included beads, bone, buttons, ceramics, metal, nails, and pipes. The final analysis of these artifacts is a project anticipated

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for the future to improve interpretation of the site. The 1971 report also noted the lack of evidence to support claims by some authors that Locke and Randolph abandoned the fort under siege in 1842.

Shortly after abandonment, passers-by, including Francis Parkman in 1846, noted the adobe ruins as they traveled along the South Platte, but they did not identify these remains as Fort Vasquez. Later, the site may have been used as a military bivouac, pony express stop, or stage station. Vasquez revisited the trading post in 1858 with his nephew, A.P. Vasquez, and the pair registered adjoining 160-acre claims, including the fort property, in the St. Vrain County, Territory of Nebraska, Claims Club Book, precursor to Weld County, Colorado, records. No transfer of title has been found; the first official owner of the property was John Paul, who filed his claim in 1864. In the meantime, the ruins offered temporary shelter for travelers, such as D. C. Oakes, who spent one cold, drizzly night camped in one of the rooms at Fort Vasquez before continuing to Denver in April 1859. Later, early South Platte Valley settlers reported using the fort as a school, church, and post office.

**FORT VASQUEZ AS AN INTERPRETIVE SITE**

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the fort was in ruins but it continued to beckon curious travelers on their way to or from Denver. The roadway crowded dangerously close to the east wall ruins, but it was a convenient distance for the adventurous to make quick stops and imagine earlier times. Historian Elliott Coues described the site and its history after he and Colorado Gov. Alva Adams paid a visit in 1898. F. W. Cragin recorded the site in 1910 with notes and photographs (see Historic Photos 1 & 2). In 1924, LeRoy R. Hafen explored Fort Vasquez shortly after he began his career as historian for the State Historical Society of Colorado. By this time, William and Pearl Hoffman Perdieu and Ethel Hoffman, who owned the site and named their property, Fort Vasquez Ranch, expressed interest in preserving the history of Fort Vasquez.

Official recognition of the site's significance first came in 1932 when the State Historical Society cast a bronze plaque to mark the ruins. (Scholarship later determined that the plaque recorded an incorrect founding date of 1837. Trading license documentation proved the actual date was 1835, but the monument stands uncorrected.) Additional recognition for the site came in 1933 with Hafen's article "Mountain Men: Louis Vasquez" published in *Colorado Magazine*.

Beginning in 1934, the Platteville Community Club, an organization of local businessmen, spearheaded an effort to reconstruct Fort Vasquez and create a museum to interpret early days along the South Platte River. They hoped the project would preserve the memory of the fur-trade era, provide employment for local workers during the Great Depression, and encourage travelers to spend more time in the Platteville area. As a first step on September 21, 1934, Pearl Perdieu and Ethel Hoffman deeded the site of Fort Vasquez to the Weld County Board of Commissioners. At the urging of the Platteville Community Club, the commissioners then applied for project assistance through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Reconstruction planning began under this National Recovery Administration (NRA) program until 1935, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared NRA unconstitutional. WPA filled the void left by NRA and FERA.

Congressional legislation enabled the WPA to respond to the needs of the nation's unemployed and to boost local economies by underwriting projects, such as rebuilding Fort Vasquez. Weld County submitted a project application to WPA on July 24, 1935, and reported that under FERA, project planning had been completed and some materials had been purchased. To justify the reason for the work, the commissioners wrote: "Old Fort Vasquez is a point of great interest. This project proposes to rebuild Fort as nearly as possible to its original construction. All necessary material including the forms for blocks and straw has been purchased by Sponsor under F. E. R. A." The application requested \$2,839 in federal funds with the sponsor contributing \$500 to provide work for 59 workers. Financially, the project seems insignificant when compared with a federal expenditure of \$100 million for 5,000

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projects completed in Colorado between 1935 and 1943, as reported by Stephen Leonard in *Trials and Triumphs: A Colorado Portrait of the Great Depression*.

In the eyes of the Platteville community, however, project completion was an important milestone. They moved a cabin, once used as "courthouse" at the Town of St. Vrain, St. Vrain County, Territory of Nebraska, onto new foundations directly south of the reconstructed fort. The Platteville Community Club intended to establish a museum in the cabin, but in 1937, the building provided additional housing for the caretaker's family. The museum project did not materialize. (After Weld County transferred ownership of the property to the State Historical Society of Colorado, the log structure was moved to the parking area north of the fort to make way for museum construction. In the early 1970s, the cabin was moved to Centennial Village in Greeley, Colorado.)

Dedication of the reconstructed fort on August 2, 1937, drew a crowd of 2,000 people to celebrate its completion and the paving of a new alignment for U.S. Highway 85 west of the property. Local historian Judge George H. Bradfield was the keynote speaker at the event, and he recounted the early history of the fort and Weld County. George East, chairman of the Platteville Community Club, gave credit to George Burbridge, who had visited the fort as a boy in 1850 and 1859, and was able to describe its appearance to the WPA builders. Many people from South Platte valley pioneer families received recognition during the festivities.

The designers of the WPA fort utilized a trapezoidal plan rather than the rectangular plan of the original fort. Limited visible remains at the site likely guided the layout of the reconstruction. No evidence indicated the existence of corner towers on the original fort. It may be assumed that these were included in the WPA design as being typical of Western fort construction. The same is true of the rifle ports and firing ledges which line the inner side of the fort's walls. The concrete caps on the tops of the walls and firing ledges represent WPA attempts to provide protection to the underlying adobe construction. The inclusion of a caretaker's quarters within the new fort further illustrates the concessions made to the practical over the historic. The result was a popular historical and interpretive structure that effectively combined traditional adobe construction with a design and finish compatible with contemporary conceptions of the Western frontier fort. While more recent archaeological investigation has demonstrated many errors in the WPA design, the reconstructed fort conveys much about prevailing architectural history of the 1930s.

The caretaker family took up residence in the adobe rooms and cabin in September 1937. By April 1939, these accommodations proved less than adequate, and efforts were made to provide better housing. Apparently the caretaker moved on, because various local groups cared for the property during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1951, Platteville and Gilcrest service and youth organizations mounted a clean-up effort at the fort.

When the community learned of plans to convert U.S. 85 into a four-lane highway in the 1950s, key local individuals, including Fern Miller, superintendent of the U.S. Mint in Denver, took steps to preserve and protect the historic site by repairing the adobe walls (see Historic Photos 3 & 4). The Weld County Board of Commissioners transferred title to the Colorado Department of Highways on December 31, 1957, in anticipation of the road-building project; on February 10, 1958, the State Historical Society of Colorado received the property and initiated development plans. After the four-lane highway opened, a *Denver Post* article reported that within ten years "23 million Americans are expected to pass the old fort to be reminded of the mark Vasquez left on the Western frontier." Through the efforts of the Platteville community and the Colorado Historical Society, improvements to the property included landscaping (see Historic Photo 5). A 1964 aerial view demonstrates the relationship between the highway and the historic property (see Historic Photo 6). Always near a busy thoroughfare, Fort Vasquez continues to draw travelers.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The site includes the north two-thirds of the 1.039-acre property owned by the Colorado Historical Society. The north boundary is approximately 50 feet north of the historic structure. The east and west boundaries are U.S. Highway 85 rights-of-way. The south boundary is approximately 30 feet south of the historic structure.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The nomination includes all the land historically associated with the fort that retains its physical integrity during the periods of significance.

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**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

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

Name of Property: Fort Vasquez Trading Post  
Location: Weld County, Colorado  
Photographer: Susan Hoskinson  
Date of Photographs: November 8, 2000  
Negatives: Fort Vasquez Museum, 13412 U.S. Highway 85, Platteville, CO 80651

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Photographic Information</u>
1	Exterior panoramic view of south entrance to WPA fort, monument, April 2000 wall damage, and partial wall of caretaker's quarters in southwest corner of fort.
2	Exterior view of southeast section of WPA fort, non-contributing sign, and pier with WPA concrete cap.
3	Exterior view of northeast tower with new wooden roof and north exterior wall, one-half plastered August 2000.
4	Exterior view of northwest tower with replacement roof, north and west exterior walls, and museum and weigh station in background.
5	Exterior view of southwest section of WPA fort, west wall, and northwest tower.
6	Exterior view of southwest section of WPA fort, monument, and damage.
7	Interior view of southwest wall, including collapsed wall ruins and remains of caretaker's quarters.
8	Interior view of west wall and northwest tower, including evidence of eroded adobe walls caused by water seeping through gaps in concrete firing ledges and erosion repairs completed during Summer 2000.

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HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



Historic Photo 1. F.W. Cragin 1910 view of ruins from east side looking northwest.



Historic Photo 2. F.W. Cragin 1910 view of ruins from southeast corner looking northeast.

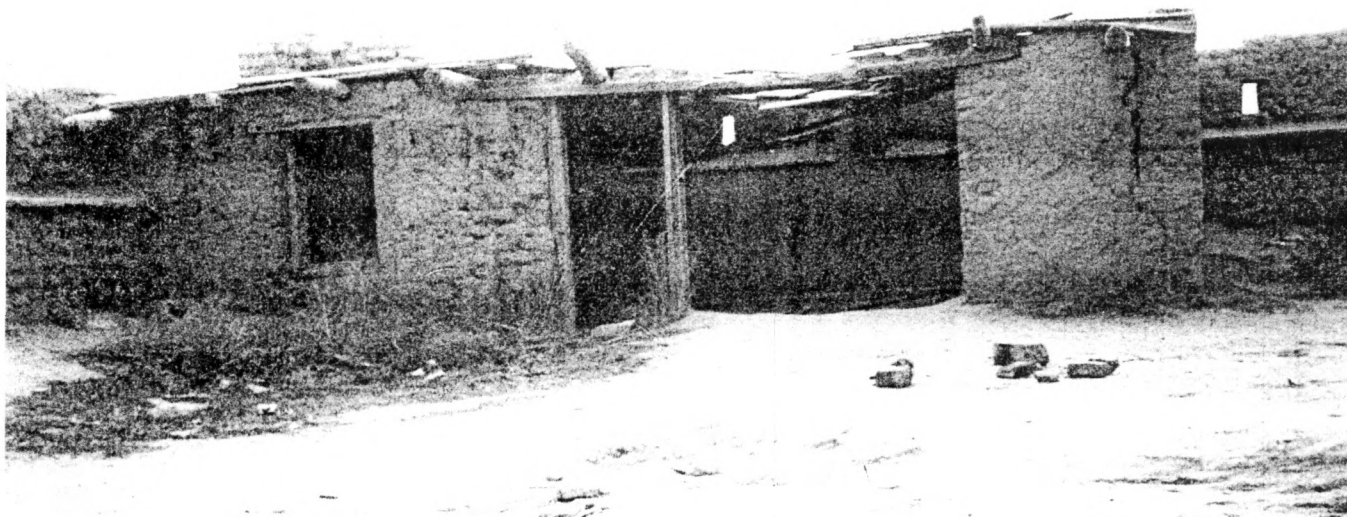
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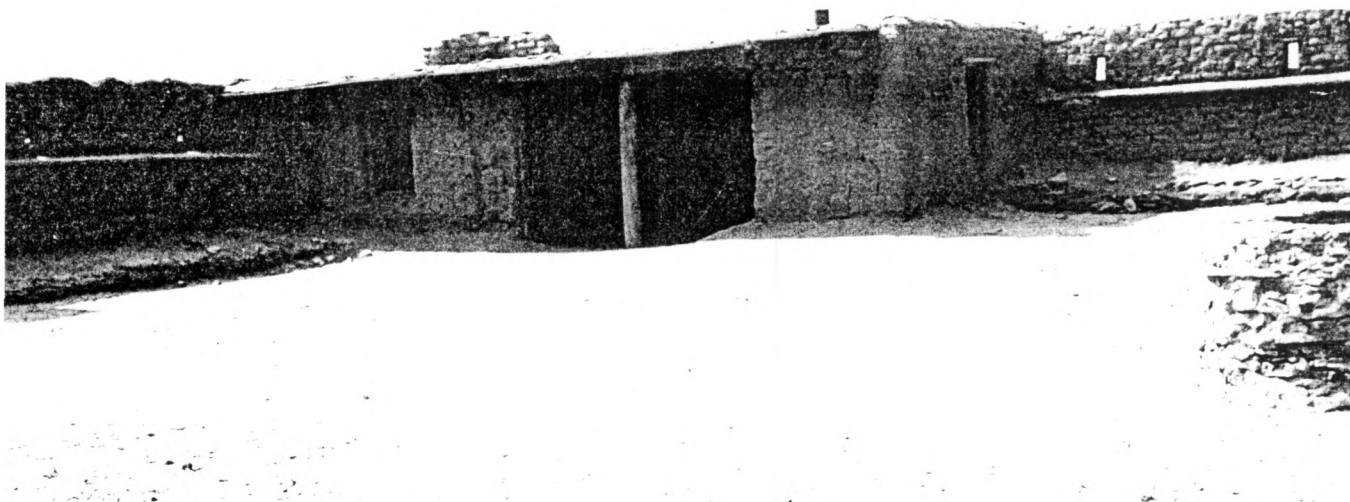
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**HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**



Historic Photo 3. John Lett 1957 view of remains of caretaker's quarters looking to the southwest.



Historic Photo 4. John Lett 1958 view of caretaker's quarters after repairs by community volunteers.



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**HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**



Historic Photo 5. John Lett 1964 view of southwest corner with recently planted locust tree; view to the northeast.

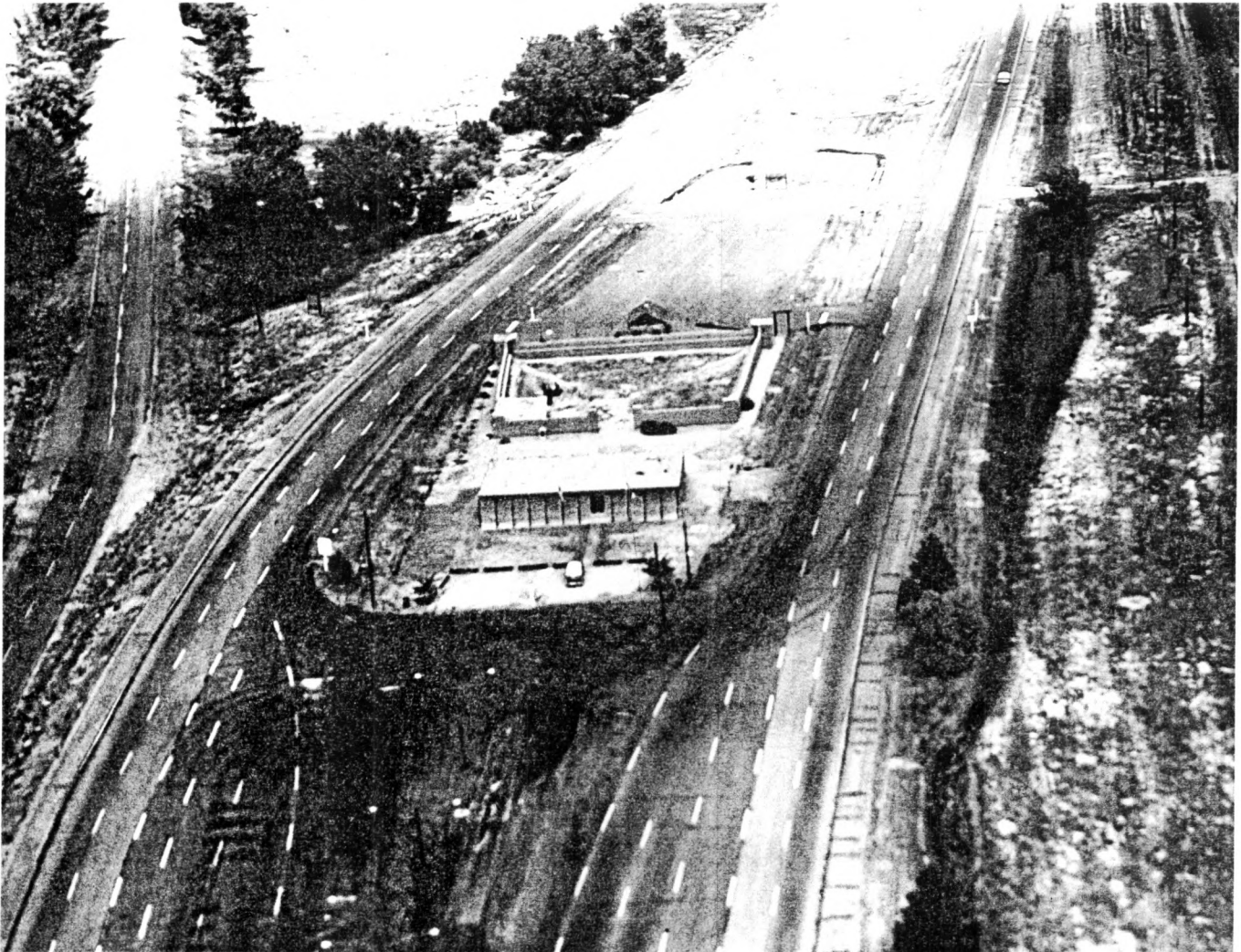
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HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



Historic Photo 6. Aerial view of property after construction of museum building in 1964.

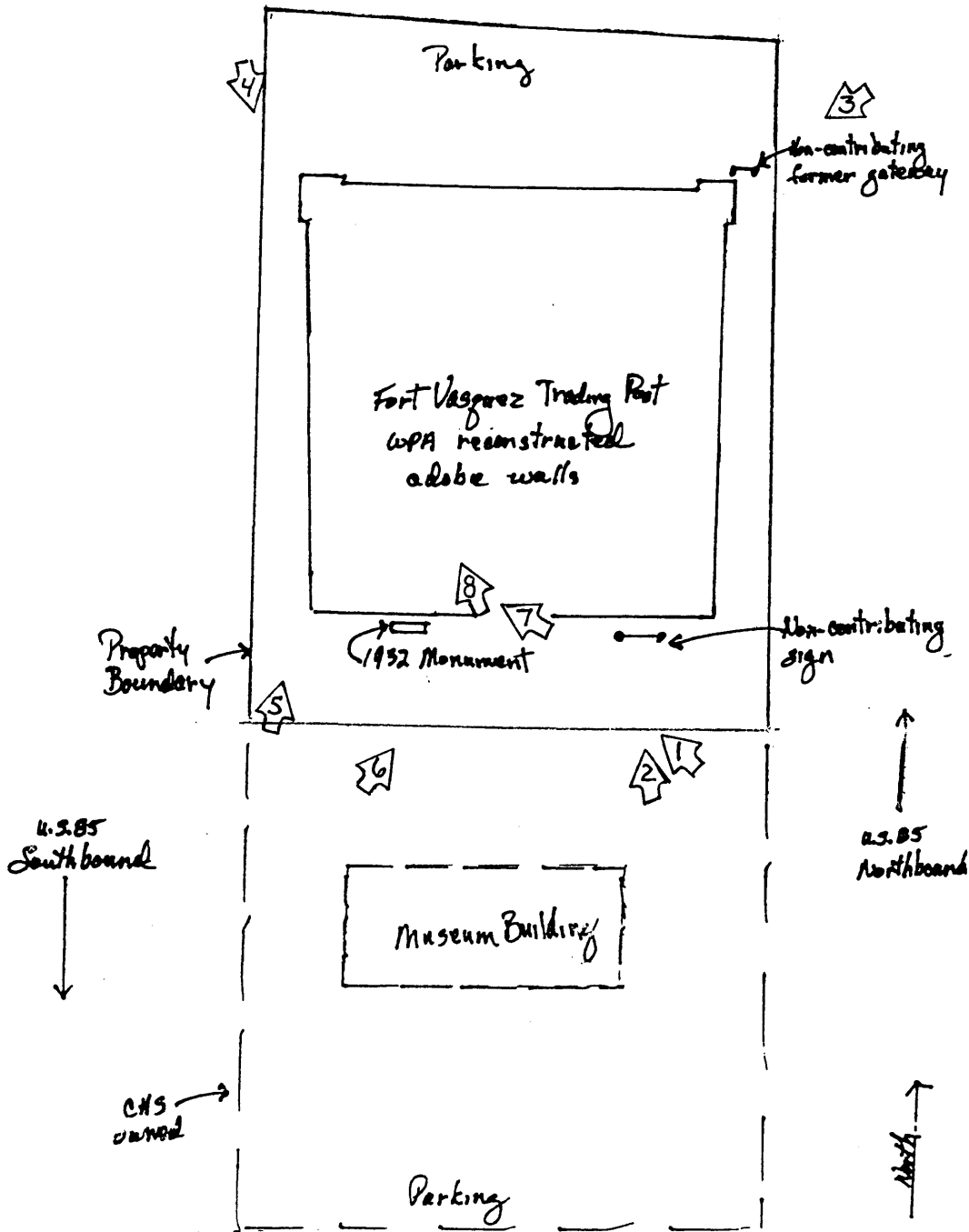
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SITE SKETCH MAP AND PHOTOGRAPH VIEWS



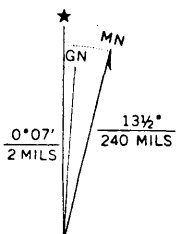
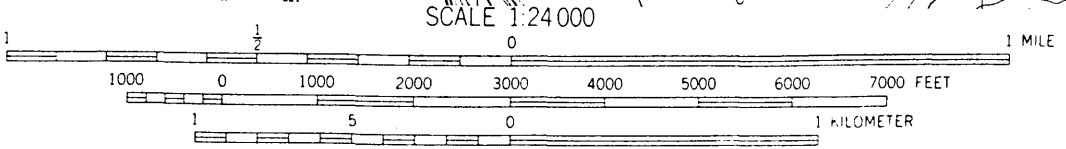
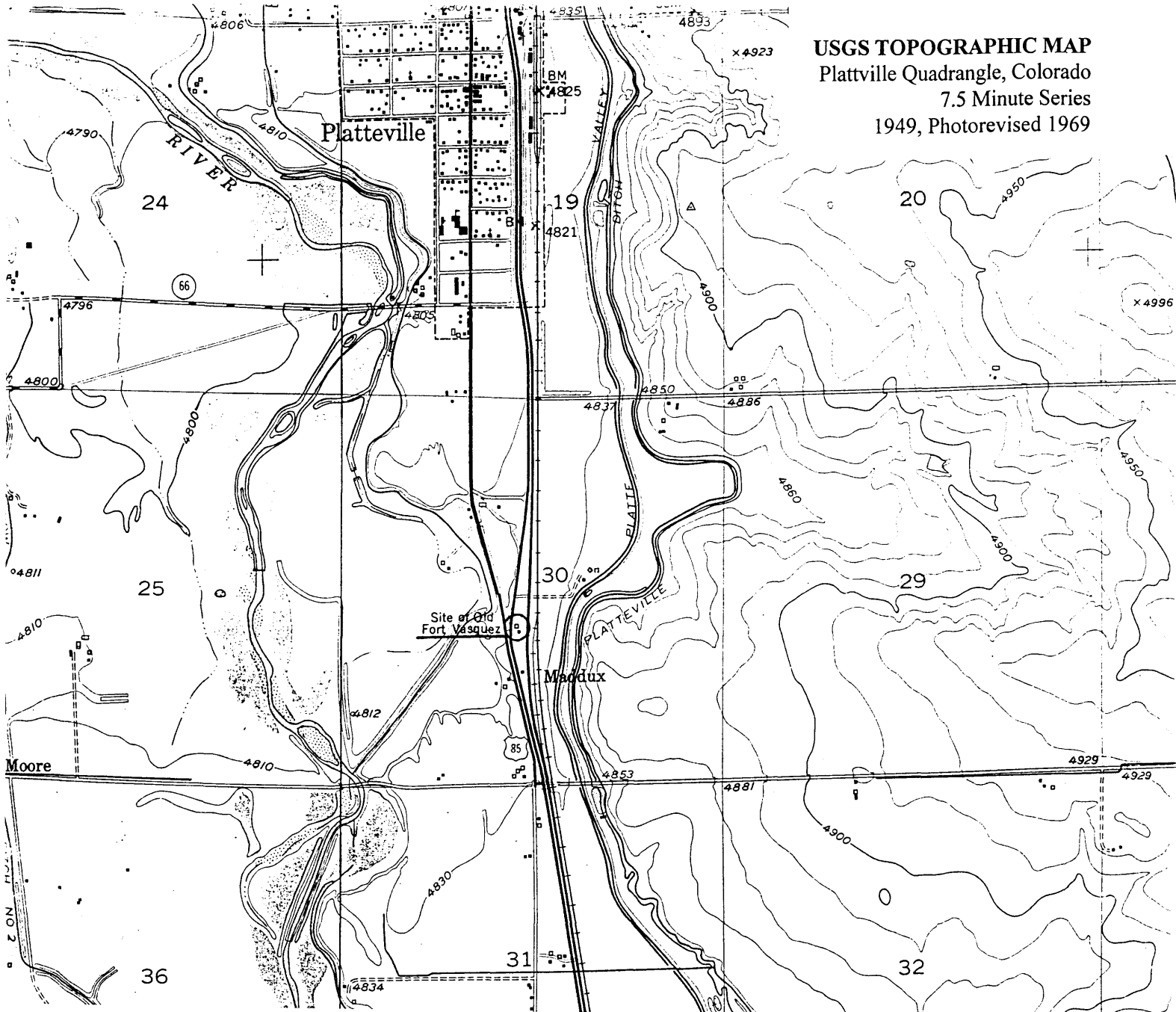
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USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP  
Plattville Quadrangle, Colorado  
7.5 Minute Series  
1949, Photorevised 1969



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

UTM GRID AND 1969 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET