

**Bent's Fort: Trade in  
Transition**

## **Bent's Fort: Trade in Transition**

How did family relationships influence trade relationships on the southern Colorado plains?  
What role did Bent's Fort play in the westward expansion of the United States?  
What does the story of Bent's Fort suggest about the relationship between trade and war among American Indians and Colorado settlers?

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## Standards Addressed

A quick-glance overview of social studies standards that teachers might address in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and high school using the resources in this set.

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### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

#### History:

- *Standard 1.1:* Organize and sequence events to understand the concepts of chronology and cause and effect in the history of Colorado
- *Standard 1.2:* The historical eras, individuals, groups, ideas and themes in Colorado history and their relationships to key events in the United States

#### Geography:

- *Standard 2.1:* Use several types of geographic tools to answer questions about the geography of Colorado
  - *Standard 2.2:* Connections within and across human systems are developed
- 

### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

#### History:

- *Standard 1.1:* Formulate appropriate hypotheses about United States history based on variety of historical sources and perspectives

#### Geography:

- *Standard 2.1:* Use geographic tools to analyze patterns in human and physical systems
- *Standard 2.2:* Conflict and cooperation occur over space and resources

#### Economics:

- *Standard 3.1:* Economic freedom, including free trade, is important for economic growth

#### Civics:

- *Standard 4.1:* Analyze elements of continuity and change in the United States government and the role of citizens over time
  - *Standard 4.2:* The place of law in a constitutional system
- 

### High School

#### History:

- *Standard 1.1:* Use the historical method of inquiry to ask questions, evaluate primary and secondary sources, critically analyze and interpret data, and develop interpretations defended by evidence

#### Geography:

- *Standard 2.2:* Explain and interpret geographic variables that influence the interactions of people, places and environments

#### Economics:

- *Standard 3.1:* Government and competition impact markets

## Overview Essay

In 1853, William Bent stood on one of the few gently rolling hills available in otherwise harsh canyon country. Miles of good pasture lay to the south and the east. The hill would give him and the staff of Bent's New Fort a good position to look out over their livestock. The pastureland was bordered to the south and the west by the Arkansas River, here so heavily-wooded that it had the name "Big Timbers."

A wealthy man in charge of a trade empire that stretched from Texas to New Mexico, Bent knew better than to let the seeming oasis at Big Timbers lull him into complacency. Bent, St. Vrain and Company, founded by William and his brothers Charles, George, and Robert as well as Ceran St. Vrain, established Bent's Fort near present-day Las Animas, Colorado as early as 1832. This was disputed territory, part of the shifting border between the United States and Mexico. Two other nations, the Cheyenne and the Arapaho, were recent migrants to the area after being pushed southwest by the Sioux, themselves uprooted by United States settlements in their old territory. Still other tribes like the Kiowa, the Pawnee, Shoshone, and the Apache resisted the encroaching military and economic buildup in the region.

But the largest, most stable power along the U.S./Mexico/Texas border was undoubtedly the Comanche. "Comancheria," as their territory came to be known, used economic relationships, and sometimes the threat of force, to control an area spanning from the middle of Texas to the middle of Kansas and extending into Colorado and New Mexico. While Mexico, the United States, and Texas officially claimed all of Comancheria as their own, in reality these governments held almost no power not granted by the Comanche and their allies. Conquest and control, then, was a question of who would fight for it – either by force or persuasion.

Of all traders along the Santa Fe Trail, William Bent proved himself the most adept at navigating this rotating series of military battles and international conflict. As more people from the United States streamed to the West and new territories shifted, so, too, did the economic concentration of the Bent, St. Vrain and Company empire. Furs sent east to the company offices in Missouri provided the backbone, but the fur market had plenty of competition from all over the North American continent. The company quickly diversified: The Santa Fe Trail, the Oregon Trail, and numerous other migration routes brought soldiers and families through the area.

All of these people needed to be fed and housed. They needed horses and mules. With multiple trading forts, Bent, St. Vrain and Company could adapt: as one route became less popular, they shifted employees and goods to other outposts. With multiple tribal alliances, they provided a steady stream of food from a wide variety of native sources like jackrabbits and cactus (even if it wasn't always appealing to people used to the refined diet of the East). Food that kept well, like hardtack biscuits, could always keep away starvation. As travelers increasingly looked to Bent's Fort along the Arkansas River as a stable location, they brought commercial goods with them. Craftsman could command far more money for a wagon tongue or a saddle on the Arkansas. Traders packed their wagons full with anything from metal bars for making nails to blacksmithing equipment and tools. They tied extra mules and horses to the back. Any good that couldn't be made along the trails would be scarce, and could be sold for an inflated price.

This economic activity could only occur if the fort could ensure peace, at least in its immediate presence. Traders had to be sure that they would arrive with their goods as well as their limbs intact. Any conflicts and shooting would have to be done far away from the Fort's comfortable adobe walls. The Bents were not ignorant of the need for military might, however, and so they also allied themselves with Christopher "Kit" Carson, an internationally-famous fighter of Native American tribes.

In Carson's early life, he observed both European Americans and Native Americans fight, kill, and mutilate each other. His father died early and he received no formal education, though he learned to read and write later on. He left his family at the age of fourteen and drifted west, soon becoming wrapped up in the changing landscape. Kit Carson held a special dislike for the Comanche and Kiowa, and made a reputation as a ruthless soldier in the battles to claim the West for the United States. At the same time as he became known as an "Indian hater," he married and loved an Arapaho woman who died and a Cheyenne woman who left him. Carson worked for peace, but was not hesitant to resort to violence, starvation, and other brutal tactics to enable the United States and his employers to gain control over the American Southwest. Because his reputation far exceeded his actual wrath and hatred, the simple fear of provoking Carson would keep the Bent, St. Vrain and Company safe from most threats. In return for providing this security, he found in the Bent family the close-knit and stable relationships he had missed his entire life.

Bent, St. Vrain and Company enforced this carefully balanced peace on the strength of their relationships – both economic and personal. The Bent family had been greeting the United States at each new expansion for generations: Family lore had it that Silas Bent Sr. was a member of the Sons of Liberty and took part in the Boston Tea Party in 1773, and in 1806 President Thomas Jefferson appointed Silas Bent Jr. to help survey the newly-acquired Louisiana Territory around St. Louis, Missouri.

Most of Silas Jr.'s children were born in St. Louis, and this generation would in turn have influence across the globe. All of the Bent brothers except Silas III went to the Purgatoire River to establish a stable fur trade fort designed to network with their connections in St. Louis. (Silas III joined the U.S. Army. In 1852 he sailed across the Pacific with Commodore Matthew Perry to open a trade route between Japan and the United States).

Ceran St. Vrain, too, had influence in St. Louis. His parents were French aristocrats who came to the city fleeing from the French Revolution, and when the United States bought the city as part of the Louisiana Territory, the St. Vrains easily connected with people like the Bents. Later on, Ceran's youngest brother Marcellan would join Bent, St. Vrain & Company and manage Fort St. Vrain on the Platte River.

The Bents and St. Vrains adapted to the shifting borders around them and sometimes played an active role in the process. In mid-nineteenth century, they heavily influenced United States expansion into the southwest and the capture of the Mexican state of Santa Fe de Nuevo México. Bent's Fort served as the most prominent landmark on the Santa Fe Trail's northern Mountain Route. William Bent's policy of peace and neutrality was intended to welcome (and profit from) travelers of all backgrounds, though he and the company were undeniably allied with the United States and the Cheyenne-Arapaho tribe.

From the point of view of the Mexican government, however, Bent's Fort was at once a tempting strategic target and a refuge for citizens of the Republic of Texas, a territory Mexico still claimed. Mexico

took steps to protect against two foreseeable events: The United States annexation of Texas, which happened in 1845; and the Mexican American War, which lasted from 1846-1848.

Since its independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico experienced political instability; some Presidents favored a military buildup and a strong federal government, while others limited expansion to the northeast and believed the country could not withstand a direct invasion. American President James K. Polk secretly sent Representative John Slidell of Louisiana to Mexico City to buy Texas and California, but when the plot was discovered, Mexicans viewed selling their northern holdings as a form of betrayal. Any government figure that argued for peaceful negotiation and compromise with the United States became a traitor, and so the U.S. increased its military buildup.

When rumors hit the Santa Fe Trail that Mexican governor Manuel Armijo's army was marching on Bent's Fort, General Stephen Kearny rode from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, with 2500 troops. Bent's Fort would have been a strategic target for Armijo, but he lacked the military force to fight through all the tribes allied with Bent's Fort and then overcome the hundreds of emigrants, military, scouts, and mountain men that streamed in and out of the Arkansas River Valley. Acting on the incorrect assumption that Armijo had the backing of the Mexican federal military, Kearny's troops found Bent's Fort intact and thriving. They went south to Santa Fe, expecting at any time to meet Armijo. With such a large show of force against Armijo's tattered and disorganized government, Kearny took possession of Santa Fe de Nuevo México for the United States without bloodshed.

Charles Bent became the new Governor of New Mexico Territory, only to be assassinated in the Taos Massacre of 1847. That same year, William Bent's wife, Owl Woman, died in childbirth. The blended families of Kit Carson and Thomas Boggs started the first permanent town along the Arkansas River near what is now La Junta, Colorado. Marketed as an alternate location to Bent's Fort, Boggsville must have provided some comfort to William Bent and he became close to Kit Carson in particular.

In 1849, a cholera epidemic killed a large percentage of the Southern Cheyenne and began the end of the Comanche's dominance. Bent's Fort was deserted. Boggsville handled the freight in the area, and the fur trade was in decline. William Bent abandoned the fort and moved his family to the Cheyenne wintering grounds at Big Timbers, while he took over Fort St. Vrain and bought out the St. Vrain brothers. In 1853 he returned to Big Timbers and built Bent's New Fort, but the Bent family did not see it as home. Bent's remaining two wives, Yellow Woman and Island, left him and he spent more and more time away from the Arkansas River Valley.

Bent's children now came of age to run the new fort, but the territory was in turmoil: The military built Fort Wise near the new fort, and treaties condensed the Cheyenne and Arapaho into smaller and smaller territories. At the Sand Creek Massacre north of Big Timbers, the U.S. Army forced William's son Robert to guide them to the Southern Cheyenne camp where most of his siblings lived. William Bent and Kit Carson negotiated the resulting treaty in 1865, but the tribes lost so much ground that they viewed it as unfair. Bent's sons, Charles, George, and Robert, joined the Dog Soldiers and continued to fight the United States. Charles was killed by an Indian scout.

When Josefa Carson came close to expecting the couple's eighth child in 1868, Kit Carson came to Boggsville to care for her. When she died in childbirth, Kit Carson followed her a month later. William

Bent left the West entirely for Kansas City, Missouri; he married Adaline Harvey in April of 1869, then died in May. In July, Robert reportedly died with the Dog Soldiers at the Battle of Summit Springs, near Sterling, Colorado.

George Bent spent two years with the Dog Soldiers before he tried negotiation. At first he was successful, but the Cheyenne and the Arapaho had come to distrust the United States and their agents after decades of losses. Whereas William Bent's political skills once earned him the title of Colonel on one side and Subchief on the other, now it was no longer possible for a Bent to live between the two worlds. Eventually George felt alienated from both parts of his heritage.

The work of Bent, St. Vrain and Company is still seen in the modern landscape of the Southwest. Historic sites and museums from Missouri to New Mexico reconstruct and preserve many of the same Bent landmarks that guided traders from Missouri to Santa Fe. Bent's Old Fort is now a National Historic Site. In Platteville, Colorado, Fort Vasquez (run by competing trappers) has been rebuilt and Fort St. Vrain is marked nearby. Bent's New Fort, now just an outline of the stone walls, is part of private ranchland. Boggsville and Kit Carson's original grave have been preserved. Historians debate whether Kit Carson was a hero or a villain.

By the time William Bent abandoned his new fort for Missouri, the Arkansas River Valley he had known so well had changed to meet the demands of the Pikes' Peak Gold Rush and Colorado Territory. Today, his old fort has been rebuilt according to original archived plans. John Carson, one of the fort's rangers, walks through the grounds wearing the same excited expression seen on photos of his great-grandfather, Kit. The Arkansas River Valley has been built up, and U.S. Highway 50 now runs along the part of the Santa Fe Trail that William Bent once made safe for wagon trains. The Cheyenne and Arapaho nation now practices democratic elections. While the Bent and St. Vrain brothers would find southeast Colorado radically changed from the land they knew, they would also see their work and family reflected throughout the landscape.



## 1 / Growing the Border

### The Louisiana Purchase and Missouri Territory

#### Citation

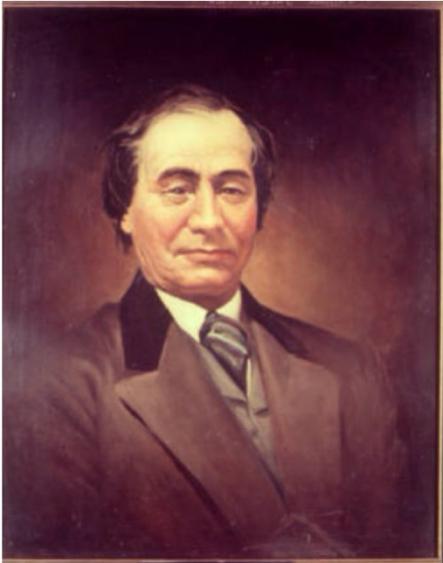
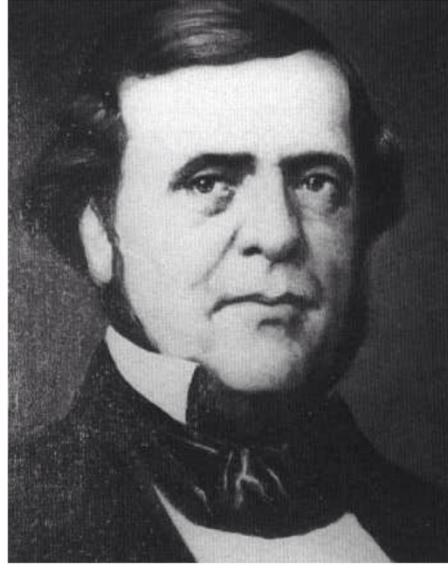
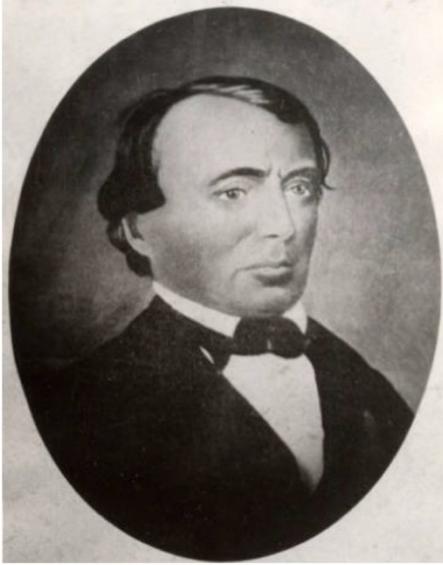
Carey, Mathew. *Missouri Territory, formerly Louisiana*. 1814. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C.; American Memory Collection. <http://www.loc.gov/item/2001620467/>

#### Annotation

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Territory from Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France. The United States paid \$15 million (\$9,610,000,000 in today's money) for 828,000 square miles. The sale freed France from the cost of maintaining large territories in North America, and it allowed Napoleon to turn his attention and resources toward launching a massive military campaign against Great Britain. In turn, the Louisiana Purchase moved the United States closer to spanning the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. By the time this map of the territory was published in 1814, this idea came to be known as Manifest Destiny.

In 1806, Silas Bent Jr. moved his family from the new state of Ohio to Louisiana Territory. As the principal deputy surveyor, he gathered information, maps, and field reports describing the new acquisition. In 1812, parts of Louisiana became the Missouri Territory.

This map shows the Louisiana Purchase area and includes the disputed territory that would later become Oregon and Washington. Mathew Carey, the cartographer, used the Arkansas River as the southern boundary due to a dispute over lands that now make up the southern Colorado plains. Silas's son Charles, 15 years old in 1814, showed a keen interest in the maps and reports that passed through the Bent household. He felt the possibility of this image and the others Silas and Mathew compiled for President Jefferson – definition, a good idea of the rivers and mountains and people within Missouri Territory, but also mystery and adventure. Within ten years Charles would be an experienced fur trader along the Green River, and successful enough to co-own the Missouri Fur Company.



## 2 / Growing the Border

### Bent and St. Vrain Families

#### Citation

Upper left: Charles Bent, portrait, date unknown. William A. Keleher Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Published at the New Mexico Centennial Project, New Mexico Digital Collections, <http://econtent.unm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/keleher/id/17>

Upper right: Love, C. Waldo. Ceran St. Vrain portrait. 1930s, Works Progress Administration. Housed in History Colorado Center, reference ID H.6130.35. Published in "Fort St. Vrain thrived briefly but closed mysteriously." *Intriguing Faces and Places from Colorado's Past*. April 24, 2010. <https://caturner.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/ceran-st-vrain.jpg>

Lower left: Love, C. Waldo. William Bent portrait. 1935, Works Progress Administration. Housed in History Colorado Center, reference ID H.6130.13. Published in "William Bent: Frontiersman." *Colorado Virtual Library*. February 19, 2015. <http://coloradovirtuallibrary.org/content/william-bent>

Lower right: Owl Woman, drawn by Lt. James Abert, 1846. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owl\\_Woman#mediaviewer/File:Owl\\_Woman.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owl_Woman#mediaviewer/File:Owl_Woman.jpg)

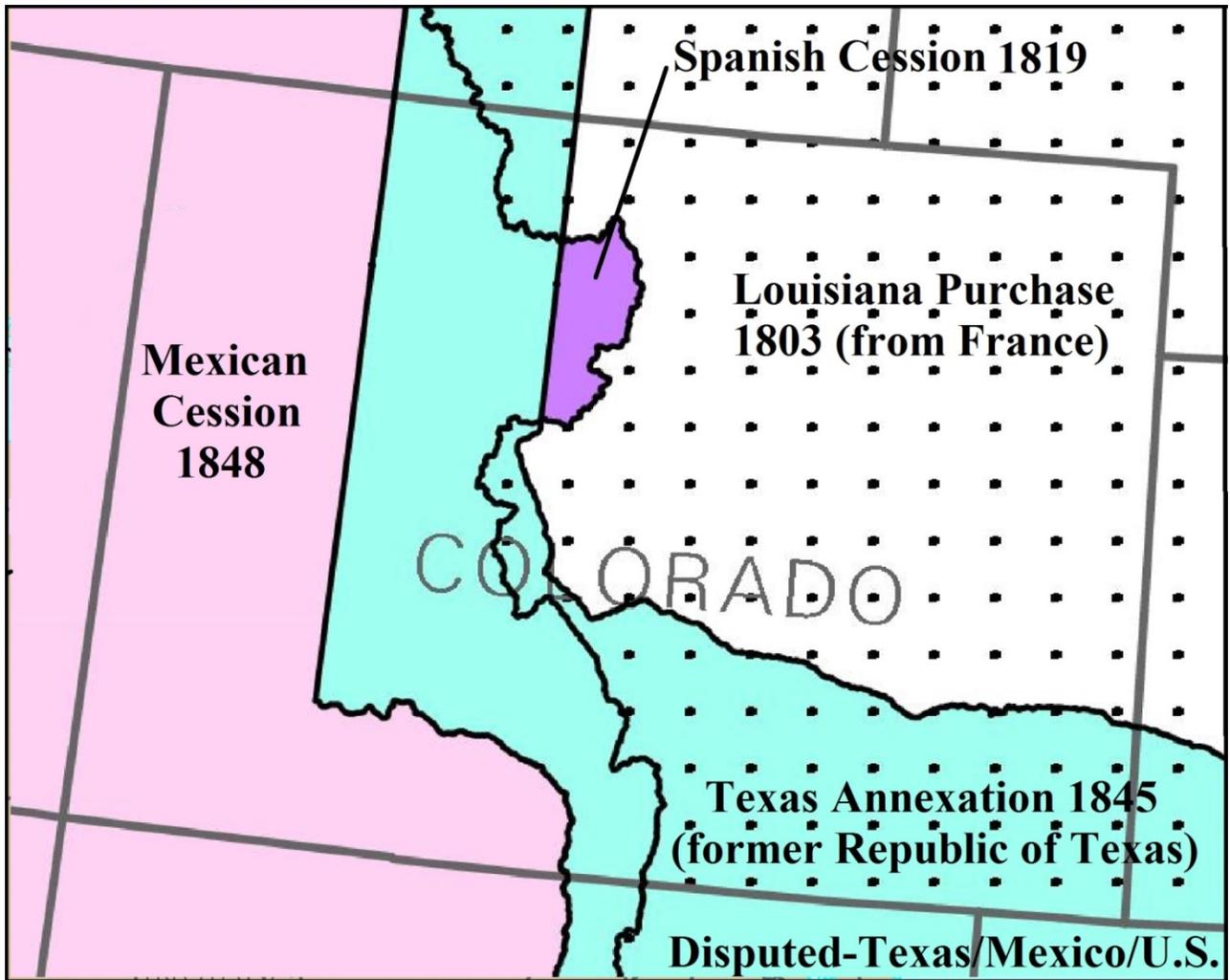
#### Annotation

The Bent and St. Vrain families grew to include the Southern Cheyenne, Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs, and Kit Carson. The tendency to push change in the families started before the American Revolution. Silas Bent Sr. belonged to the Sons of Liberty. In 1771, the Sons of Liberty poured tea into Boston Harbor and attacked British merchant ships to protest British rule and taxation. Family lore held that Silas Bent Sr. was likely one of those protesters.

Silas Bent Jr.'s work as a surveyor in Ohio and then Louisiana Territory drew his family further West. When he was appointed a justice in Missouri Territory's Supreme Court, his oldest son Charles already continued the tradition in the northeast of the territory. But the competition already crowded the market. Two fur companies, William Ashley's Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the American Fur Company run by John Jacob Astor, dominated the Green River territory in what is now Wyoming. Charles's own Missouri Fur Company felt squeezed, and he looked for a new business, a new territory, and new partners. When the Bents went into business for themselves, they chose the untapped market of the U.S.-Mexico border. Native American tribes dominated the area and intimidated most of the traders, but the Bents planned on using negotiation and forming bonds with the tribes. Charles Bent already had a reputation for fearlessness – or foolhardiness; he drove a Missouri Fur Company caravan worth \$250,000 (nearly \$6,500,000 today) through a Kiowa attack. Greater risk would hopefully bring a greater reward.

Possessed of the confidence and charm that came from a lifetime navigating different cultures along a changing border, the Bent brothers went into business for themselves. They partnered with another set of siblings, Ceran and Marcellan St. Vrain, French aristocrats whose parents fled the French Revolution. The Bent brothers represented a family legacy of changing, shaping, and defining the United States

borders as they moved West; the St. Vrain family experienced the borders changing around them. These two perspectives would complement each other as Bent, St. Vrain and Company would play a significant role in shaping the American Southwest.



### 3 / Growing the Border

## Colorado's Changing Borders

#### Citation

United States Department of the Interior, United States Geological Survey. Detail of *Territorial Acquisitions* in the National Atlas of the United States of America. 2005.  
[http://nationalmap.gov/small\\_scale/printable/images/pdf/territory/pagetacq3.pdf](http://nationalmap.gov/small_scale/printable/images/pdf/territory/pagetacq3.pdf)

#### Annotation

What is now the state of Colorado has gone through many geographical and political changes. Parts of the state have been under many different nations. From 1598 to 1821, the San Luis Valley and the southwestern quarter were part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, a massive Spanish colonial territory. As the Spanish expanded north, they established the state of Santa Fe de Nuevo México. The French controlled the northeast until 1803, when they sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States.

In 1819, the Adams-Onís Treaty between Spain and the United States granted the U.S. control over the Arkansas River area. In 1821, Mexico won independence from Spain. The new country noticed that the maps used to redraw the Adams-Onís borders contained multiple inaccuracies, and Mexico once again claimed much of the northeastern state of Santa Fe de Nuevo México including the land up to the Arkansas River. Mexico and the U.S. would dispute this territory until 1836, when the Republic of Texas claimed both independence from Mexico and a good part of the Mexican state of Santa Fe. Mexico, Texas, and the United States would argue over who owned the area until the 1848 Mexican Cession. It wasn't until the Pikes Peak Gold Rush in 1858 that Colorado started to form as a separate territory. Cobbled together from parts of Kansas, Utah, Nebraska, and New Mexico Territories, Colorado finally defined its rectangular shape in 1861.



## 4 / Growing the Border

### Bent's Fort and the Border

#### Citation

Burr, David H. "United States and Part of Adjacent Countries." Detail. *The American Atlas, exhibiting the post offices, post roads, rail roads, canals, and the physical & political divisions of the United States of North America*. London, John Arrowsmith, 1839. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C.; American Memory Collection. <http://www.loc.gov/item/2001620467/>

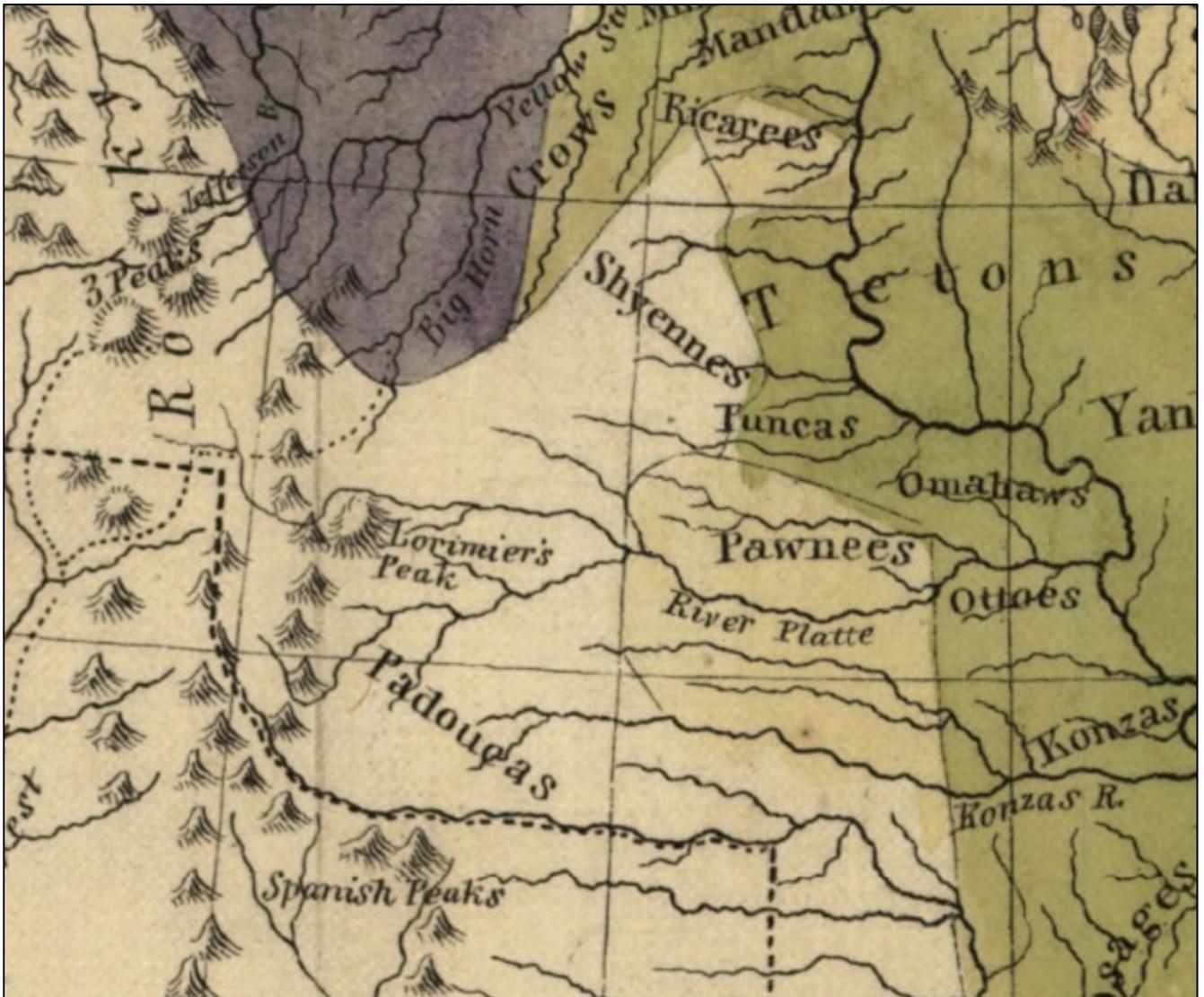
#### Annotation

By 1839, Bent's Fort was an important landmark on the Arkansas River and the United States-Mexico border. The Bents and St. Vrain had been able to work with the Cheyenne and Arapaho to live in relative peace. This peace encouraged fur traders, merchants, and eventually goldseekers and prospectors to rely on the Mountain Route of the Santa Fe Trail and pass through the Fort. Bent, St. Vrain and Company encouraged employees to live at their forts with their families, and this proved a significant advantage over competing forts in the area.

This map shows the Arkansas River and Santa Fe de Nuevo México border area before completion of the Mountain Route. The principal route at the time is shown to the south as the Wagon Road to Santa Fe. Along the Arkansas River on the United States side, there are four notable landmarks.

"Choteau Island" was an illegal trading post set up by the Choteau Brothers. All United States trading with Native American tribes required a permit – illegal traders disrupted politics between the tribal nations and destabilized the western United States, which made travel along the trails more dangerous and increased the burden of military involvement. When the Choteau Brothers failed to get their permit, they set up their post anyway just west of the Osage reserve in what is now the Oklahoma Panhandle.

Further upriver, the "Chienne Village" is the Cheyenne tribe's wintering ground at Big Timbers, Colorado. Gantt's Fort, west of Bent's Fort, was the first trading post in what is now Pueblo. Built near the western Bent, St. Vrain and Company stockade, John Gantt and William Bent soon abandoned the area. While the Pueblo area had the right access to water and pasture and had some protection from the mountains, every other tribe and trading outfit felt the same way, and forts and posts tended to be short-lived and subject to repeated attack. At any given time a fort had to fear attack by or between the Shoshone, the Ute, the Jicarilla Apache, the Plains Apache, isolated Mexican settlements, and numerous other tribes.



## 5 / Growing the Border Cheyenne Territory

### Citation

Gallatin, Albert. "Map of the Indian Tribes of North America, about 1600 AD along the Atlantic, & about 1800 AD westwardly." Detail. *Pendleton's Lithography*, American Antiquarian Society, Vol. 2, 1836. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C.; American Memory Collection. <http://www.loc.gov/item/2002622260/>

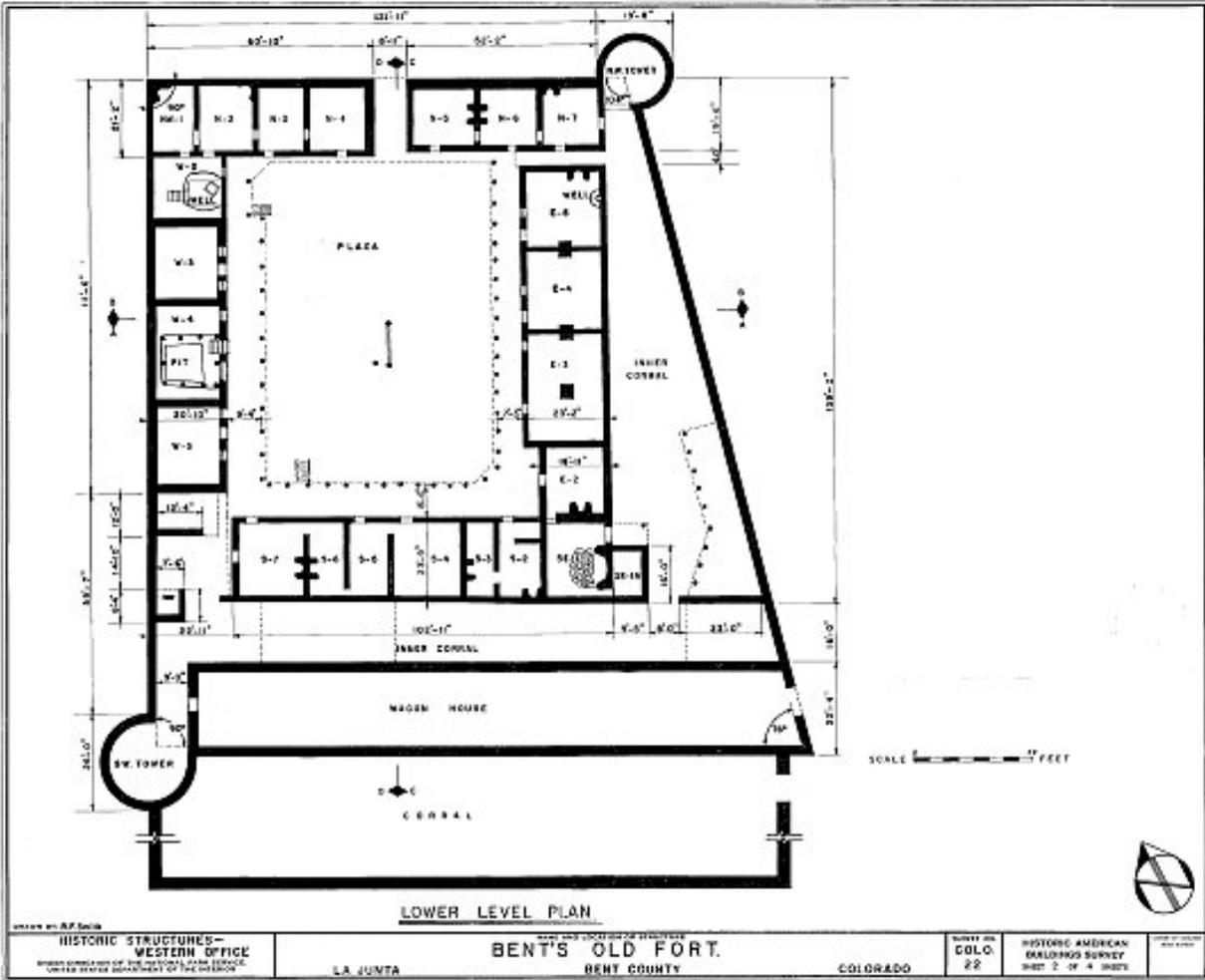
### Annotation

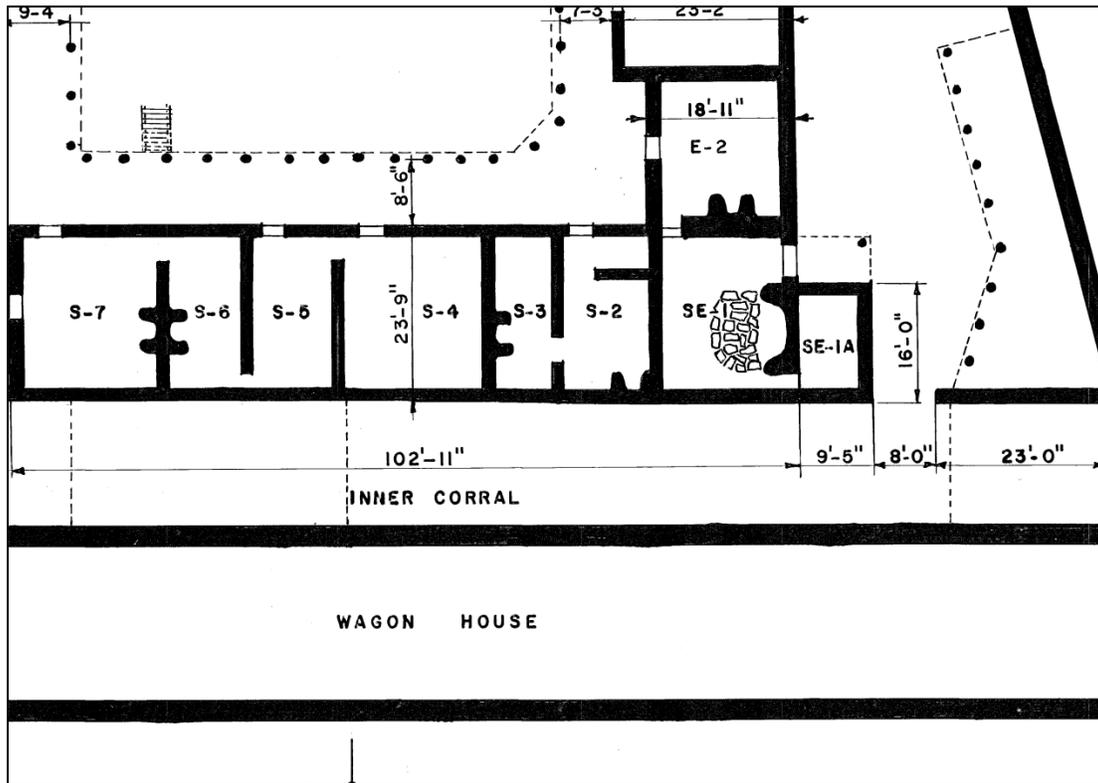
Albert Gallatin's map of the western tribes uses their known locations around 1800. Originally from Wisconsin, the Cheyenne people moved west and south as other tribes were displaced from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. At this time the "Shyennes" were in what is now northern Wyoming, and soon afterwards they would split into northern and southern bands. The Southern Cheyenne arrived in the Arkansas River Valley around the same time as Bents and St. Vrain's started their first fur trading posts. The "Padoucas" that lived north of the Arkansas River moved further south into Mexico. In the 1900s, anthropologist George Bird Grinnell determined that the Apaches were the real identity of the Padoucas.

The Cheyenne called themselves *Tsitsistas*, or "the people." When the Arapaho formed an alliance, the two tribes also used *Heévâhetaneo'o* or "roped people." These words came from the Algonquian language family, which the Cheyenne shared with the Cree and Blackfoot tribes.

As French trappers encountered Native American tribes in the 1700s, they tended to use the first names they heard – which were usually in other languages and given by other tribes. Thus the tribe was first known by the Dakota Sioux word *Šahíyena*, which probably meant "little Cree." To the French, this sounded like "chienne" meaning dog. Like many tribes the Cheyenne did use dogs for protection, food, and trade, so the French thought the name was logical.

All of the Bent brothers felt at home with the Cheyenne, but William Bent became particularly close to White Thunder, one of the leaders of the Cheyenne at a place called Big Timbers. In 1833, the Cheyenne advised the Bents to build a permanent trading fort on a patch of marshy, low land along the Arkansas. Bent's Fort became the center of the new Bent, St. Vrain & Company. White Thunder respected William Bent's goals and outlook, and he asked William to marry his daughter Owl Woman. Later, after he was made a subchief, Bent was asked to marry Owl Woman's two sisters as well. Owl Woman would always be central to life at Bent's Fort, but William also understood that a Cheyenne subchief often took multiple wives. Accepting this sign of White Thunder's respect meant a powerful bond between his family and the Southern Cheyenne.





## 6 / Travel & Trade

### Bent's Fort Floor Plans

#### Citation

Historic American Buildings Survey. *Bent's Old Fort*. 1965. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/co0001.sheet.00002a/>

#### Annotation

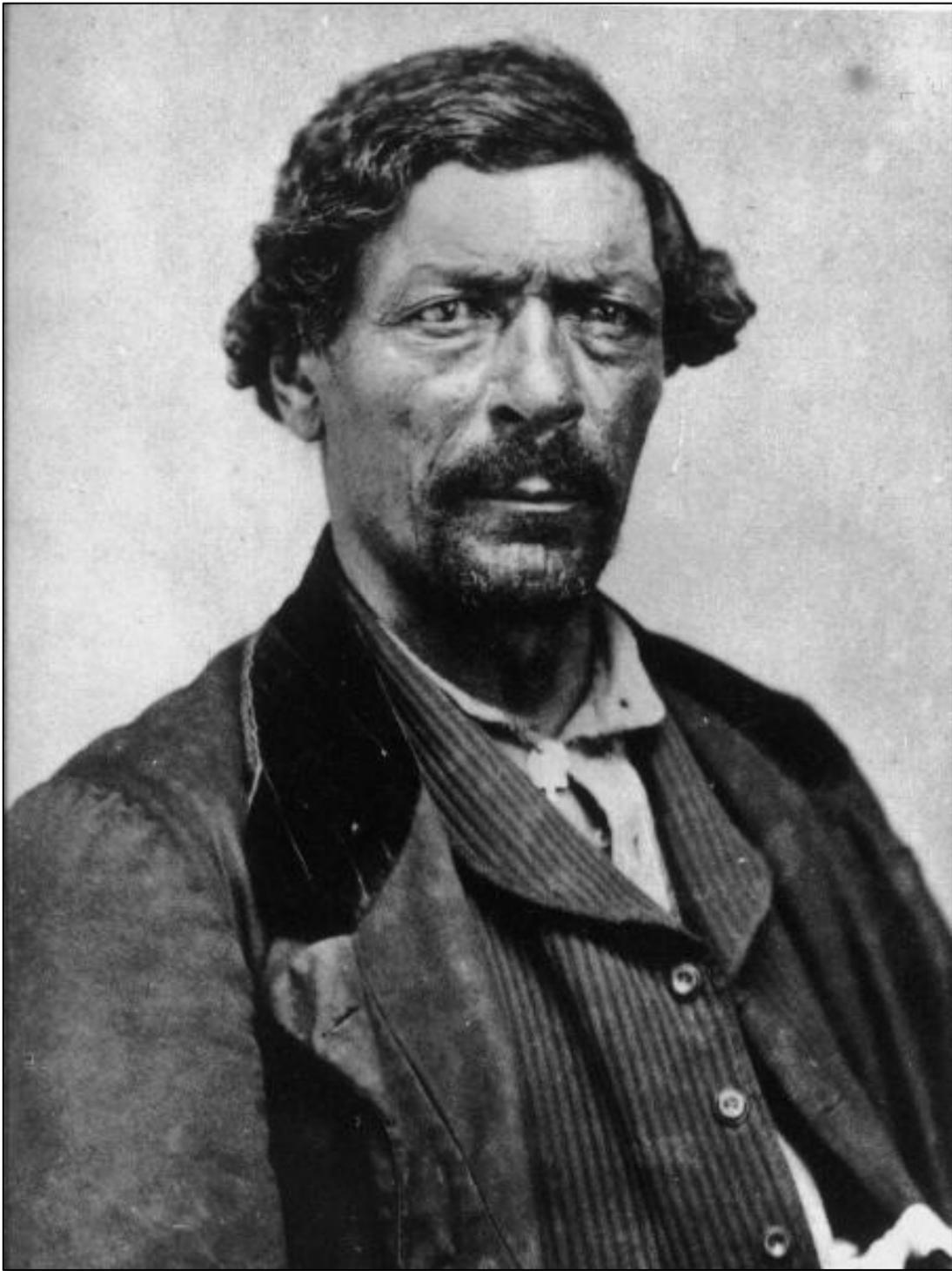
Based on 1846 drawings by Lt. James Abert and decades of archaeological surveys, this floor plan of Bent's Old Fort was used to help reconstruct the historic site. Animals were corralled within the exterior walls to prevent theft and livestock raids. In the lower left corner, a blacksmith shop kept horses well maintained. Owl Woman and sometimes her mother Tall Woman had rooms next to the blacksmith shop, but the Bents all preferred to stay in a paperbark lodge built in the plaza. Ceran St. Vrain kept rooms on the second floor.

The Bents brought a small family of slaves, the Greens, to cook and maintain the grounds. Andrew and Dick Green handled general chores and maintenance, and ensured that travelers had their needs met. Charlotte Green, Dick's wife, was the true attraction and she became well-known all along the Santa Fe Trail. Along with Owl Woman she served as the self-described Lady of Bent's Fort. She cooked meals as elaborate as supplies allowed, held constant dances and balls, and threw parties for high-ranking military personnel such as General Stephen Kearny.

Home-cooked food and lively entertainment packed Bent's Fort with visitors from every background. Owl Woman and Tall Woman encouraged the Bent children to experience everything the Fort offered. The sight of children running around implied a personal endorsement of the Fort's safety and security.

Fort Saint Vrain adopted the same policy. Ceran St. Vrain's younger brother, Marcellan, moved to the Platte River outpost in 1840 with his Sioux wife, Red. She, too, called herself the Lady of the fort. Just as Charlotte Green made her reputation on food and parties and Owl Woman provided a family atmosphere, Red chose to make her mark on Bent and St. Vrain with her garden. Red lived at Fort Saint Vrain with her three children until Marcellan abandoned the family in 1848. William Bent temporarily moved the company's central operations there in 1849. Red moved to New Mexico, closer to Ceran St. Vrain's new headquarters. A Bent's Fort employee, William Bransford, followed close behind, and they were soon married.





## 7 / Travel & Trade

### Fur Trappers and the Bent, St. Vrain and Company Network

#### Citation

Photo of James P. Beckwourth, c. 1860. Found in Beckwourth, James P. *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, and Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856. <https://user.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/beckwourth/>

#### Annotation

Though William Bent was a trader, he shared some traits in common with the mountain men and fur trappers Bent & St. Vrain hired: the ability to blend in with tribes, constant reinvention to adapt to different environments, and a belief that the West allowed greater freedom from the more rigid social conventions in the East.

Jim Beckwourth, one of the most famous mountain men, worked for Bent, St. Vrain and Company near Fort St. Vrain. Beckwourth constantly reinvented himself and told outlandish stories about his background, but it is certain that he was a freed slave; that he fought alongside the Crow; and he became a respected warrior prior to joining the fur trade.

Fort St. Vrain was an important northern link in the Bent, St. Vrain and Company network. Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River was the company's hub from 1833. William Bent had a stockade near what is now Pueblo in 1834. Charles Bent started a storefront in Taos and Santa Fe, then a part of the Mexican state of Santa Fe de Nuevo México, as early as 1828. Another fort built at Adobe Walls in 1834 was in territory disputed by the United States and Mexico. In 1836, Adobe Walls became part of the Republic of Texas. William Bent's goal with the Adobe Walls post was not a relationship with Texas or Mexico. He hoped instead to open talks with the Comanche and Kiowa, two tribes that avoided Bent's Fort and their Cheyenne and Arapaho enemies. Later on, Bent would be able to negotiate a peace between these tribes at Bent's Fort.

In 1837, Ceran St. Vrain built Fort Saint Vrain along the Platte River near the competing Fort Vasquez. The network's reach extended far around the forts and trading posts. The Bents and the St. Vrain hired hunters, trappers, traders, and scouts to roam the west. From the lone fur trapper to the busy Bent's Fort, the entire network fed into a large retailer in St. Louis and, later, Independence, Missouri.

The network allowed the company to control trade and supply at every level, and many other competing forts eventually folded or merged with Bent, St. Vrain and Company. Fort Vasquez faded and soon went bankrupt. Today Fort Vasquez has been rebuilt and serves as a museum in Platteville north of Denver. The site of Fort St. Vrain has a marker west of Gilcrest. Though there is an abandoned farmstead and stable closer by, nothing remains of the fort itself.

Cheakone

On Board the Poygan from the Ricara village  
August 20<sup>th</sup> 1806

Sir

Your present situation with the Indians gives me some concern - I wish now that I had advised you to come on with me to the Illinois where it most probably would be in my power to put you in some way to do something for your self - I was so engaged after the treaty had concluded to go down with Johnson as his Interpreter, that I had not time to talk with you as much as I intended to have done - You have been a long time with me and have conducted your self in such a manner as to give my friends & your own who accompany you that long dangerous and fatiguing visit to the Pacific Ocean and back seems to be greater reward than for their attention and services on that visit than we had in our power to give - ~~with me~~ ~~as his~~ ~~at the~~ ~~best~~ ~~as to~~ ~~your~~ ~~little~~ ~~son~~ ~~(my~~ ~~boy~~ ~~Brother)~~ you will know my fondness for him and my anxiety to take care of him as my own child - I wish now to tell you if you will bring your son ~~with~~ ~~me~~ I will educate him and treat him as my own child - I do not forget the presents which I make to you and shall now repeat them that you may be certain - Cheakone if you wish to live with the white people, and will come to me I will give you a piece of land and furnish you with some corn & hogs - if you wish to visit your friends in Monticelli I will let you have a horse, and your family shall be taken care of until your return - if you wish to return as an Interpreter

## 8 / Travel & Trade

### Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau

#### Citation

William Clark. Letter to Toussaint Charbonneau, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1806. Box 11, Folder 15, Clark Family Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. Published and text excerpt on <http://www.sacagawea-biography.org/letter-from-clark-to-charbonneau/>

#### Annotation

Among the scouts and trappers contracted to Bent & St. Vrain, Marcellan added Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau. To many people worldwide, Charbonneau was a living symbol of the exploration of the West. He was born to Sacagawea, a Shoshone raised by the Hidatsa, and French trapper Toussaint Charbonneau on Lewis & Clark's 1803-1806 expedition through Louisiana Territory.

While diarist William Clark had little use or respect for Toussaint Charbonneau, he was affectionate towards Sacagawea and Jean-Baptiste. In his own journals, Meriwether Lewis notes on February 11, 1805: "about five o'clock this evening one of the wives of Charbono was delivered of a fine boy. it is worthy of remark that this was the first child which this woman had boarn and is common in such cases her labour was tedious." William Clark assisted with Jean-Baptiste's birth, and later he wrote to Toussaint pleading to be allowed to raise him, calling him by his Shoshone name, "Pomp":

*As to your little Son (my boy Pomp) you well know my fondness of him and my anxiety to take him and raise him as my own child ...If you are desposed to accept either of my offers to you and will bring down you Son your famn [femme, woman] Janey had best come along with you to take care of the boy untill I get him ...Wishing you and your family great success & with anxious expectations of seeing my little danceing boy Baptiest I shall remain your Friend, William Clark"*

Eventually Toussaint accepted William Clark's offer, and after Toussaint abandoned his family Jean-Baptiste was raised by William Clark and his wife Julia Hancock. When Julia died, Clark married her sister, Harriet Radford. Charbonneau was now surrounded by at least ten adoptive siblings, some of them from Harriet's first marriage. Pomp worked for Bent & St. Vrain first at Fort Saint Vrain from 1840-1842, then out of Bent's Fort until the end of the Mexican-American War. When General Stephen Kearny took his infantry through Bent's Fort on the way to Santa Fe in 1846, Charbonneau was the natural choice for scout. Not only was he considered a gifted navigator, the two men knew each other: Kearny was married to Harriet's daughter Mary Radford.



Dollar Coin, United States Mint, Pressroom Image Library.  
[http://www.usmint.gov/downloads/pressroom/2014\\_NA\\$1\\_Prfl\\_O\\_2000.jpg](http://www.usmint.gov/downloads/pressroom/2014_NA$1_Prfl_O_2000.jpg)

In 2000, the United States released a dollar coin depicting Sacagawea and Jean-Baptiste. Jean-Baptiste is the youngest person to appear on U.S. currency.

Source 9

"GOING IT ALONE."—One of the Santa Fe prisoners, a Mexican named Martias Dias, arrived in this city a day or two since, having made his escape from the calaboose in Santa Fe in April, and then travelling the entire distance to Independence, Mo. across the prairie without a soul to accompany him!

According to his own story he was at first liberated after the other prisoners were sent on towards the city of Mexico, as were also several other Mexicans who accompanied the expedition as servants.—One of them had some ill-will towards Martias, and manifested it by informing the authorities that he was a regular Texan soldier, and had served a long time on the Mexican frontier with Col. Hays in his spy company—a statement which was strictly true.

Upon this he was arrested, and confined during the winter in the calaboose at Santa Fe. In April, through some friends he obtained tools, and finally succeeded in digging out of his prison. By keeping hid in the day time, and travelling altogether at night he succeeded in reaching Taos, suffering greatly for want of food. At this place he took, without leave, a horse and mule, and being an excellent woodsman, and knowing the course towards the great Missouri trail he took that direction, and finally found it before reaching Bent's Fort, high upon the Arkansas. All the while he was without any other food than roots and herbs, had no arms, and with hardly clothes to his back.

On one occasion, some thirty or forty Indians discovered him and made chase, but being on foot they were unable to overtake him. On reaching Bent's Fort he obtained a supply of provisions and resumed his journey, finally reaching Independence, Mo. after a journey of twenty-six days. If his story is correct, he is probably the first traveller who has ever "gone it alone," across the immense prairies of the West; and how he escaped starving to death, or being picked up by the Comanches or Pawnees is almost a miracle.

Martias informed us that he heard it reported by his guard, at Santa Fe, that the traitor Lewis, had been driven from Chihuahua by the foreigners there, several attempts having been made to take his life which were unsuccessful. He had gone in the direction of the Pacific, where he was known, and was probably at Senora. Lewis was well known at Chihuahua, having lived there several years previous to 1836—the year he first came to Texas.

*N. O. picapune.*

## 9 / Travel & Trade

### Fugitive at Bent's Fort

#### Citation

"Going it Alone." *Camden (South Carolina) Journal*, June 29, 1842. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Collection*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.  
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042796/1842-06-29/ed-1/>

#### Text

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## Annotation

Bent, St. Vrain and Company set up their most profitable fort near the Arkansas River at a time when multiple nations laid claim to dwindling parts of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. This account of Martias Dias shows a more personal side to international espionage along the international border.

In 1841, the year Martias (sometimes Matias) Dias joined the Texan Santa Fe Expedition, Bent's Fort allowed safe haven to Mexican nationals, United States military, and partisans of the Republic of Texas. Texas was an independent nation from 1836 to 1846. Texas claimed possession of the Colorado plains south of the Arkansas River, the San Luis Valley, and much of northern and eastern New Mexico. Mexico became independent of Spain in 1821 and also claimed this territory as they waged war against the Republic of Texas. The United States increased its military presence as a succession of presidents starting with Andrew Jackson attempted to find a political means to annex Texas – with an eye towards all the disputed territories in the American Southwest.

As a part of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition, Dias placed himself on the side of the Republic of Texas – a political liability on the border. Comanche and Pawnee, two of the many Native American nations with informal borders overlapping these claims, took up arms against the Republic. Surrounded by Mexicans, Americans, Comanche, Pawnee, and other hostile partisan groups, Dias was fortunate to find Bent's Fort – the one place that would have welcomed him. As his narrative indicates, he was not surprised to find himself accused of espionage and imprisoned in Santa Fe. The expedition consisted of heavily-laden merchant wagons surrounded by Republic soldiers. These wagons added to the expedition's value as a target, and when they lost their Mexican guide, the Texans wandered into the canyon country at San Miguel, New Mexico. There, General Dimasio Salazar surrounded them and brought them to Mexican Governor Manuel Armijo.

"The traitor Lewis" refers to the expedition's translator and captain, William D. Lewis. Some Texan historians still believe Lewis betrayed his men, but it is more possible that he saved their lives even as he sacrificed his reputation. Lewis accurately realized that the expedition had no chance to fight, and once they were lost in the New Mexico canyons being taken prisoner was one of the better options available. Armijo transferred the prisoners to Mexico City (excepting Dias, who escaped), and in April 1842 the United States negotiated for their return. Today most historians blame Texan President Mirabeau Lamar for its failure.



ARRIVAL FROM SANTA FE—RUMOR OF OTHER ARRESTS.—Mr. Upton's party of traders arrived in Independence a few days since. With them came an express to Mr. St. Vrain, one of the partners, now in this city. The letters to Mr. Vrain were mailed by the express, on reaching Independence, and at this writing have not been received. From the tenor of a note written by the bearer of the despatches and forwarded by a boat, we learn the following particulars:

Mr. Charles Bent was at Taos, and for some cause, which is not explained, he and all the Americans at Taos were arrested by the Mexicans, and sent to Santa Fe. Orders had also been issued, calling in all the Mexicans in the employ of Messrs. Bent and St. Vrain, several of whom were employed in and about the Fort, and in hunting excursions.

It appears from the note we have

alluded to, that an express had reached there in three days, distance about 200 miles, and the express to Mr. St. Vrain, left the Fort three days after Mr. Upton's party left, overtook and came in with that party. From the faithless character of the Mexicans in that quarter, now, doubtless stimulated by their recent success over the Texian expedition, it is more than probable that the Messrs. Bent and St. Vrain will have to teach them a lesson to keep them in their proper place.

## 10 / Travel & Trade

### Mexico Retaliates

#### Citation

*The Radical*. Bowling Green, Mo. June 11, 1842. Newspapers.com, 2015.  
<http://www.newspapers.com/image/49674373>

#### Text

ARRIVAL FROM SANTA FE – RUMOR OF OTHER ARRESTS. – Mr. Upton's party of traders arrived in Independence a few days since. With them came an express to Mr. St. Vrain, one of the partners, now in this city. The letters to Mr. Vrain were mailed by the express, on reaching Independence, and at this writing have not been received. From the tenor of a note written by the bearer of the despatches as forwarded by a boat, we learn the following particulars:

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#### Annotation

Information traveled slowly and haphazardly on the plains, but on occasion Bent, St. Vrain & Company could push through notes with a great deal of speed. This newspaper article from the Bowling Green *Radical* is about the arrest of Charles Bent as Mexico strengthened its position around Santa Fe, but it is also about how traders and journalists uncovered vitally important facts.

The Dias story of the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition was published two weeks after this article, but took place months before. As the Dias story filtered through newspapers all over the United States, eventually it went to the *Camden Journal* in South Carolina. By April, May, and June of 1842, the Dias story was interesting but not breaking news. Papers could afford to run it when they had the space.

By contrast, Mexican arrest of Charles Bent in Taos, his transfer to Santa Fe, and Mexican orders to all nationals to cease activity with Bent, St. Vrain & Company were all items of urgent attention. Charles

Bent was in Taos ostensibly to establish trade relationships, but all U.S. nationals in Mexico at this time were commonly suspected of espionage and plots to undermine the Mexican presence in what is now New Mexico. By harboring Dias and anyone else fleeing from the Mexican government, Bent's Fort intended to place itself outside national border squabbles – but on such a contentious border, Bent, St. Vrain & Company could not reasonably expect to be immune from the power struggle. Dias's treatment of Bent's Fort as a welcoming haven may have pushed Mexican Governor Armijo to retaliate against the Taos Americans, whom he already suspected.

As Charles Bent transferred to the Santa Fe prison, Bent's Fort faced constriction of its trade network, available workers, hunters, and trappers, its position as a political oasis, and worse – one of its principal partners could be transferred to Mexico City, imprisoned for life, or executed for espionage and treason. The rest of the Bent brothers along with Ceran St. Vrain were in Missouri managing the hub of their network. Marcellan St. Vrain managed the trappers and traders at Fort St. Vrain in what is now Platteville, Colorado. The managers at Bent's Fort at the time were likely three slaves: brothers Andrew and Dick Green, and Dick's wife Charlotte, along with William Bent's wife Owl Woman (Cheyenne name Mis-stan-stur) – then busy with newborn Robert (Octavi-wee-his) Bent and toddler Mary (Ho-ka) Bent. Kit Carson had been supplementing security and food at Bent's Fort throughout 1841, but when Charles Bent was imprisoned, Carson was acting as a scout in John C. Frémont's expedition across South Pass in Wyoming. The chaos of the Santa Fe Trail and the West at large meant that at a crucial time, with Charles Bent languishing in a Mexican prison, Bent's Fort had a power vacuum. While the Bents placed every confidence in the Greens and in Owl Woman, politically a Cheyenne woman and three slaves would never have the influence required to negotiate with the Mexican government.

The express letters intended for Ceran St. Vrain and William Bent arrived in three days, one rider frequently changing horses and galloping along the Santa Fe Trail. While the *Radical* guesses the distance at 200 miles, Bent's Fort was in fact over 550 miles away from Independence.

In 1842, post offices did not use mailboxes. Instead, letters and cables sat in the open at the post office waiting to be picked up. A reporter would probably not be allowed to open letters meant for someone else, but journalists commonly held letters up to the sunlight to try to make out text, and any notes on the outside of a packet of letters would be obvious. Here, the *Radical's* reporter has heard of the reports of unrest in Taos. He has also probably gotten a few details by intercepting the Fort's own messenger, since reporters often hung out at the post office or telegraph office waiting for news of something important. Thus, the *Radical* likely spread the word of Charles Bent's imprisonment and the Bent's Fort prohibitions regarding Mexican nationals before William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain could pick up their correspondence.



## CHAPTER III.

Tuz Estampeda—Fort Bent—Lieut. De Courcy—Arapaho Chief—March resumed—The army passes the Desert—An adventure—Spanish peaks—Half Rations—Return of De Courcy—Doniphan's speech—Arrival at Las Bagas—Priest of San Miguel—Mexican Prisoners—The Pecos Ruins—Traditions and Legends—Anticipated Battle of the Canon—Capture of Santa Fe—Gen. Kearney's Speech—Camp Rumors, &c.

HAVING on the 29th crossed the Arkansas and encamped in the Mexican territory, about eight miles below Bent's Fort, a greater degree of vigilance became necessary, to guard against the cunning of those Ishmaelites of the desert, the Comanches, whose country we had unceremoniously invaded, as well as to prevent surprise by the Mexicans themselves. Our encampment was therefore laid out with the most scrupulous regard to military exactness.— A strong picket and also camp guard were detailed and posted. Our animals being much fatigued by long marches, it was deemed advisable to rest and recruit them some two or three days. They were, by order of the Colonel, turned loose upon the prairie to graze, under a strong guard, a few of them only being tethered. At first, a few of them took fright at an Indian, or perhaps a gang of prowling wolves, which by degrees was communicated to others, until the whole *caballada* took a general *estampeda*, and scampered over the plain in the most furious manner. This was a scene of the wildest and most terrible confusion. A thousand horses were dashing over the prairie without riders, enraged and driven to madness and desperation by the iron pickets and the lariats which goaded and lashed them at every step. After great labor, most of them were recovered, some of them thirty and some of them fifty miles from camp. About sixty-five of the best of them were irrecoverably lost.

Fort Bent\* is situated on the north bank of the Arkansas, six hundred and fifty miles west of Fort Leavenworth, in latitude 38° 02' north, and longitude 103° 03' west from Greenwich. The exterior walls of this fort, whose figure is that of an oblong square, are fifteen feet high and four feet thick. It is a hundred and eighty feet long, and one hundred thirty-five feet wide, and is divided into various compartments, the whole built of adobés, or sun-dried brick. It has been converted into a gov-

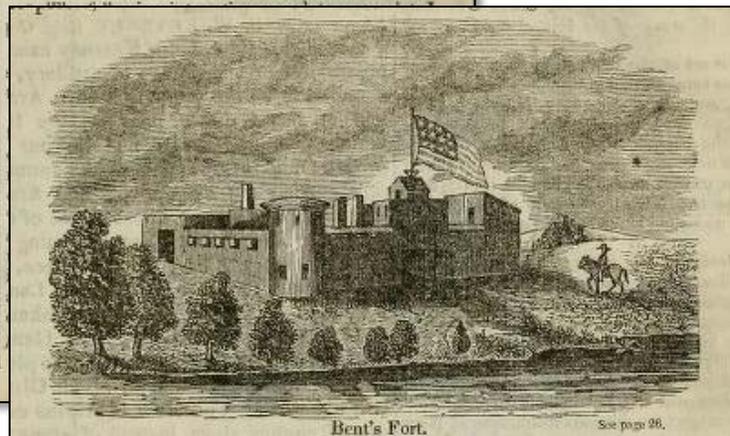
\* See page 33.

ernment depôt. Here a great many of the government wagons were unloaded and sent back to Fort Leavenworth for additional supplies. Here also the caravans of traders awaited the arrival of the army, thenceforward to move under the wing of its protection.

While in this encampment on the 30th, Capts. Reid and Waldo, of the volunteers, and Capts. Moore, and Burgwin, and Lieut. Noble of the 1st dragoons, with their respective commands, rejoined the army, having vainly pursued Speyers and Armijo, who, it was supposed were endeavoring to supply the enemy with ammunition and arms. About this time, Lieut. De Courcy was dispatched with twenty men with orders to proceed directly through the mountains to the valley of Taos, and having ascertained the intentions and disposition of the people, to report to Col. Kearney on the road to Santa Fé as soon as practicable. Having received his instructions, this pacificator set forward on the 31st, prepared for either of the alternatives, peace or war.

Here it was that the Chief of the Arapaho tribe of Indians visited our camp to see the American commander, and look at his "big guns." With astonishment he expressed his admiration of the Americans, signifying that the New-Mexicans would not stand a moment before such terrible instruments of death, but would escape to the mountains with the utmost dispatch.

August 1st we moved up the river and encamped near Fort Bent. Here, by order of the colonel commanding, Dr. Vaughan of Howard, assistant surgeon, was left in charge of twenty-one sick men, who were unable to proceed further, and had been pronounced physically unfit for service. Of this number some died,† some



Bent's Fort.

See page 26.

## Battleground: Bent's Fort

### Citation

Hughes, John. *Doniphan's Expedition: Containing an account of the conquest of New Mexico...* J.A. & U.P. James, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1847. Internet Archive. [https://archive.org/details/doniphansexpedit00hugh\\_2](https://archive.org/details/doniphansexpedit00hugh_2)

### Annotation

The success of Bent's Fort also made it a target. Mexico did not build near its U.S. border. The country had troubled relations and a constant state of war and tension with the Native American tribes that still dominated the Arkansas River. Once Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, its ability to support risky, far-flung settlements declined. In the Mexican state of Santa Fe de Nuevo México, power and profit were concentrated in the city of Santa Fe. North of the Arkansas River border, Bent, St. Vrain and Company's ability to negotiate with the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and other tribes gave the Fort a major competitive advantage.

As the United States moved west and the Republic of Texas attempted to send troops to Santa Fe, Governor Armijo raised troops to defend Mexico – but the remote state had little support from Mexico City. When he realized a border war with the United States was imminent, he wrote to Mexico City for more troops. The government promised to send them – then did nothing. Armijo himself was partially to blame: Severe corruption, land fraud, and his treatment of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition prisoners made him a political liability. The United States used Armijo's corruption as a reason to invade Mexico, and news reports encouraged public support and army enlistment by exaggerating and sometimes fabricating reports of Armijo's supposed cowardice and greed.

The United States needed a villain, and Armijo's corruption was a fine enough excuse. Mexico needed a scapegoat for its failure to protect its northeastern state, and the United States provided one. Because both sides of the Mexican-American War blamed Armijo, we still do not know much with certainty about his conduct aside from well-documented cases of land fraud. In the summer of 1846 newspapers reported that the army of Santa Fe de Nuevo México was headed to Bent's Fort with the intention of invading it and using its position against the United States.

**THE SANTA FE EXCURSION.**--We see it stated that Gen. Kearney will make a stop at Bent's Fort, until Col. Price's regiment comes up. We are astonished that he attempted to set out at all, until he had some one to do his "head-work." When Col. "Head-work" joins Gen. Kearney, the whole force will amount to about 3,200 men. If the Mexicans of northern Mexico, fight as bravely as those of the south did, there will be something more than "head work" to be done.

## 12 / Travel & Trade

### Kearny's March

#### Citation

"The Santa Fe Excursion." *Boon's Lick Times*, Fayette, Missouri. August 1, 1846, p. 2. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016957/1846-08-01/ed-1/seq-2/>

#### Annotation

The rumors that Governor Manuel Armijo's army marched toward Bent's Fort were probably not true. Armijo had been abandoned by the Mexican federal military and his requests for additional troops to protect Santa Fe de Nuevo México went ignored. His army was small, and the northern and eastern portions of the state teemed with enemies: Americans in the disputed territory and too many hostile tribes to count from the San Juan Mountains to the Sangre de Christos. The constant military presence of both the United States and the tribes friendly to Bent's Fort would have easily repelled an attack; and Armijo's troops would have had to fight through other hostile tribes to get to the Arkansas River. The Comanche, the Cheyenne, the Arapaho, and the United States all had formal treaties, and the Apache had been hostile to Mexico since their first encounters with the Spanish in 1692. At best the state army was exhausted from years of conflict with Texas and constantly trying to protect attack from the tribes on multiple fronts.

Still, without knowing Armijo's true numbers or intent, the United States sent a force of 2500 cavalry under General Stephen Kearny. If, as the article said, Santa Fe would fight just as the other areas of Mexico, then a large army was a smart preventive measure. The rumors were a good excuse to invade Santa Fe de Nuevo México and capture the entirety of the Santa Fe Trail. Known as "Kearny's March," the trek eventually took the army from Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, to Santa Fe, to California. Part of this force, a group of Mormon soldiers who hoped for better treatment by the United States in exchange for their service, started from Council Bluffs, Iowa. The route of the Mormon Battalion stretched nearly 2,000 miles and is the longest infantry march in history.

Not only did Kearny's troops find a secure and peaceful Bent's Fort, pursuing a supposed aggressive attack from Armijo's troops revealed that the state was too disorganized and underpowered to put up even a token resistance. Because Armijo immediately became a polarizing and vilified figure after Santa Fe, historical accounts and interpretation from all sides disagree on what he did next. Each option is possible: Armijo may have surrendered. He may have tried to negotiate. He may have attempted to persuade his troops to make a stand against an overwhelming force and a certain loss. But Kearny took the area without firing a shot, and Mexico arrested Armijo on charges of treason. Later Armijo was acquitted, but both sides regarded him as a corrupt traitor. The real resistance in New Mexico would be delayed, but when it emerged, it would carry grave consequences for everyone in Bent, St. Vrain and Company.

### New Mexico.

From the St. Louis Republican, March 20,

The New Era of last evening contains a letter from Fort Bent, dated on the 1st February, which corroborates, in all essential particulars, the news heretofore received of an insurrection in Taos and the murder of Governor Bent and many others. This letter puts an end to the hope entertained here that the report might have been exaggerated or unfounded. We have already published an account of the suppression of an insurrection at Santa Fé, the plot having been timely discovered, and the disclosures made by the prisoners. But this letter leads us to suppose that there was another popular outbreak, and that it extended all over New Mexico. The writer says that a "general insurrection," happening about a month after the discovery of the first abortive one, had taken place, and that all the Americans who could be found were massacred and their property plundered. These representations make us exceedingly anxious to hear from that quarter. We cannot believe that the Mexicans have been able to make much head against our troops in Santa Fé, but they may (if assisted, as this letter states, by the Pueblo Indians) have been able to destroy a vast amount of property and to sacrifice many lives in their assaults upon weaker points. An express from Santa Fé, which may soon be expected, we suppose, ought to give us full particulars in regard to this insurrection.

BENT'S FORT, February 1, 1847.

Sir: By an express from Santa Fé en route for Fort Leavenworth, I avail myself of writing you, giving such rumors as we are in possession of, which, from corroborating accounts from other quarters, and from other circumstances, we believe well founded, (by 'we' meaning all at the Fort.)

On the 27th ult. a party of men in the employment of Bent, St. Vrain & Co. arrived from the Ponil, (an establishment of the Company this side the mountains, about one day's travel from Taos,) which they were driven by the Mexicans on the evening of the 24th. There was at the place a great number of mules and horses, beef cattle and working oxen, belonging to the United States and the mounted volunteers, the former of which were driven off, with 200 head of the beef cattle on the first dash.

As near as I can learn as to time, (on the 21st of January,) a general insurrection broke out in New Mexico, and all the Americans that could be got hold of were massacred. The affair was so planned as to have the revolt simultaneous at their various points of concentration. So far as we have heard, there has been a general destruction of life and property.— In Taos, Charles Bent, Stephen L. Lee, Ellitt Lee, and many other Americans whose names have not as yet transpired, were massacred. Charles Town made his escape from Taos on a mule, and went to Turley's, eight miles above, which place he left after giving the alarm, and has not since been heard of, and is presumed to have been killed or to have perished in the mountains. A Mr. Albert, who lived with Turley, and made his escape from there, states that when he got off, all were killed (eight) except Turley and an old Frenchman—Charles Ortobus among the slain. The Pueblo Indians were concerned in the massacre. The Americans have indiscriminately been killed and plundered of their property. George Long is the only one I have heard of who has escaped. Him they robbed of everything he possessed. At first I had heard that Elliott was saved by the Priest, but yesterday I saw a letter in which it was stated that he was afterward killed, and I am fearful that this last account is too true.

## 13 / Travel & Trade Rebellion in Taos

### Citation

“New Mexico.” *New York Daily Tribune*, New York. April 2, 1847, p. 2. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Collection*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.  
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1847-04-02/ed-1/seq-2/>

### Excerpt

As near as I can learn as to time, (on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January,) a general insurrection broke out in New Mexico, and all the Americans that could be got hold of were massacred. ... So far as we have heard, there has been a general destruction of life and property. – In Taos, Charles Bent, Stephen L. Lee, Ellitt Lee, and many other Americans whose names have not as yet transpired, were massacred. ... A Mr. Albert, who lived with Turley, and made his escape from there, states that when he got off, all were killed (eight) except Turley and an old Frenchman – Charles Ortobus [Autobeas] among the slain. The Pueblo Indians were concerned in the massacre. The Americans have indiscriminately been killed and plundered of their property.

### Annotation

Bent, St. Vrain & Company no longer carefully cultivated the appearance of neutrality where Mexico was concerned. William Bent accepted the title of Colonel in the U.S. Army and personally escorted the troops south into Mexico. After Kearny captured the territory, Charles Bent became territorial governor of New Mexico. Bent’s Fort hunter Kit Carson, already nationally famous as an explorer and fighter of hostile tribes, scouted for the military all the way to California. Carson and Charles Bent married two sisters, further cementing their partnership. Charles’s stepdaughter, Rumalda, married a well-liked trader named Thomas Boggs. William Bent and Owl Woman expected her fourth child, while his other wife Yellow Woman and their son Charles traveled between the Fort and the Cheyenne wintering grounds at Big Timbers. The military buildup meant big business at the Arkansas River Fort, while General Kearny sent detachments of troops north past Fort St. Vrain. For a few years, the Bent empire expanded and thrived.

Many of the Mexican people living in the conquered territory welcomed the United States. The Bents had a good reputation. They not only worked with and hired Mexican hunters and trappers, Charles Bent had long lived in the city of Taos and managed his own trade posts there and in Santa Fe. When the federal Mexican government banned citizens from working with the fort, this cut off an important source of income. Armijo’s well-publicized issues with fraud made enemies of much of Santa Fe de Nuevo México.

This good reputation could not quiet growing resentment against U.S. soldiers. Stories of military abuse spread, many of them with some truthful basis. In January 1847, partisans around Taos, a coalition of Puebloan people and Mexican loyalists, rebelled against American control. Some tribes distrusted the United States and believed American control would lead to their removal. Landowners from Colorado's San Luis Valley and the Sangre de Cristos believed that they would be cheated out of their territory. Both groups were, in the end, right to be worried. The more extremist members formed their own army led by former Taos mayor Pablo Montoya.

The first strike, on January 19, 1847, provoked the anger of multiple military forces on the New Mexican rebels. A Puebloan group led by Tomas Romero broke into the Bent house and killed Charles Bent in front of his family, Kit Carson's family, and Thomas Boggs's family. Romero's group left, and the women and children dug through the adobe walls to escape. Romero and his followers then targeted more officials from the U.S. territorial government, destroyed the Carson house, and killed Carson's and Bent's brother-in-law. Later they joined up with Montoya's army, which now numbered 1500.

Ceran St. Vrain immediately responded with 65 sympathetic New Mexicans, mountain men, and Cheyenne and Arapaho soldiers chosen by the tribes to avenge Charles Bent. The United States sent 300 troops from Santa Fe. Though this coalition was badly outnumbered, they were better-equipped. By February 5<sup>th</sup>, with few losses to the United States and St. Vrain, all of Montoya's army was either dead, captured, or surrendered. The United States arrested Montoya and Romero along with most of the officers and charged them with treason.

The resulting trial barely pretended to be fair. One of the judges was the father of one of Romero's victims. St. Vrain was the interpreter. George Bent was the jury foreman. One of St. Vrain's soldiers, Lewis Garrard, wrote that the trial was a mockery of justice. John Fitzgerald, a US Army private, murdered Tomas Romero and admitted that it was his own act of personal revenge. Fitzgerald was never charged. The rest of the leadership of the Taos Massacre, including Montoya, were hanged.

While the remaining groups in the revolt continued to fight, their best chances at success had to come early on in the campaign. Without most of their army, they could manage only the occasional small ambush victory. The Taos Revolt ended a few battles later in July.

This article shows a three-month delay between Charles Bent's assassination and the first news to reach the East. The war and the winter both slowed the pace of information. New Mexico was essentially cut off in all directions for all but the hardiest scouts. Kit Carson, fighting on the California front, did not hear of his family's danger until he returned to Taos in the spring.



**FROM FORT MANN.**—News from Santa Fe to the 16th ult., has been received.— Col. Gilpin was at Fort Bent, preparing to anticipate an attack on him threatened by a combined force of Comanches and Mexicans who had concentrated at a point 250 miles South. An express had been sent to Fort Mann, for Company B and a section of artillery, also for Lieut. Tuttle. The latter, however, was not overtaken before reaching Fort Leavenworth. The order on Fort Mann it was feared could not be complied with, for lack of teams, &c. All of the horses except a dozen or so, had perished; also nearly every mule. Only about one hundred oxen remained of the 800 taken out with the trains.

Col. Gilpin was anxious to move forward by the middle of February. A detachment left Fort Mann under command of Lieut. O'Hara, on the 24th of December, to escort a sutler's train to Fort Bent. On the 23d, every man in the detachment refused to obey orders and deserted the Lieutenant. Col. Gilpin has ordered a Court Martial in the case. At Fort Bent, there was an inadequate supply of provisions, and the cavalry was in bad condition. Efforts had been made to provide supplies from Taos, but in vain.—(St. Louis Union.

## 14 / Travel & Trade Cut Off

### Citation

"From Fort Mann." *Democratic Banner*, Bowling Green, Missouri. Feb 14, 1848, p. 2. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.  
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89066057/1848-02-14/ed-1/seq-2/>

### Annotation

Though the Mexican-American War officially ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, the aftereffects dragged on for decades. The Comanche's peace with Bent's Fort was tenuous, but the tribe's willingness to accept U.S. occupation was nonexistent. A group of Comanches merged with the few Mexican holdouts 250 miles south of Bent's Fort along the southern route of the Santa Fe Trail. The war and increased hostilities from the tribes discouraged traders and disrupted the flow of supplies from Missouri. At the other end of the Trail, New Mexico had a food shortage.

The Santa Fe Trail had a power vacuum. Most of the older influential figures who dispersed the power along the Mountain Route were either ill, dead, grieving, governing New Mexico, or focusing on business concerns elsewhere.

The United States took steps to control the routes through the military. Major William Gilpin, who 15 years later became Colorado's first territorial governor, mounted the Santa Fe Trail Expedition from Bent's Fort. There and at Fort Mann in Kansas, the infantry and cavalry suffered through the winter of 1847-1848 with almost no supplies. It was not until the end of the war and the 1849 California Gold Rush that the supply chain regained some stability, though increased hostilities with the Apache tribes prevented the trail from operating at its former peak.

**IMPORTANT FROM SANTA FE.**

*Alarming Indian Depredations—Americans Murdered—Fort Bent Burnt—The Command Supposed Massacred—Great Political Excitement, &c.*

ST. LOUIS, Sept. 29, P. M.

Mr. James Brown, the Government Freight Agent, arrived here last from Santa Fe. He was 20 days on the way.

He reports trade at Santa Fe generally dull particularly in dry goods, though groceries were in good demand.

Two Americans were murdered by the Apache Indians, at Los Vegas, on the 5th September. The Indians stole twenty Government horses at the same time.

When about two hundred miles this side of Santa Fe, Mr. Brown was attacked by a party of 100 Arrapahoes, who robbed him of every thing. The next day they gave him back some mules and left him to pursue his journey.

On the way Mr. Brown met a party of California emigrants, who supplied him with provisions and other necessary articles.

Col. Alexander was in command at Santa Fe when Mr. B. left.

Col. Washington, at the head of all the available force, had gone in pursuit of a large body of hostile Indians.

Major Beel still continued stationed at Taos.

Major Stein recently had a skirmish with the Indians and was wounded.

A band of Cheyenne Indians, a short time since, surrounded and burnt Bent's Fort. Wm. Bent, and several men who were in charge of the fort are supposed to have been massacred by the Indians, as nothing has since been heard of them.

Mr. B. passed several California traders, who had suffered more or less from the depredations of the Indians.

At Walnut Creek he met Col. Monroe, in command of 250 dragoons and infantry, en route for Santa Fe.

The Indians were every where evincing hostile demonstrations and becoming quite troublesome.

Grass was plenty on the plains, and the teams appeared to be getting along well.

Considerable excitement prevailed at Santa Fe, in consequence of an attempt being made to get up a convention to form a State government.

## 15 / Travel & Trade

### Destruction of the Fort

#### Citation

“Important from Santa Fe.” *Sunbury American*. Sunbury, Pennsylvania. October 6, 1849, p. 2. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.  
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026403/1849-10-06/ed-1/seq-2/>

#### Excerpt

A band of Cheyenne Indians, a short time since, surrounded and burnt Bent’s Fort. Wm. Bent, and several men who were in charge of the fort are supposed to have been massacred by the Indians, as nothing since has been heard of them.

#### Annotation

William Bent lost a brother and business partner in the Taos Revolt. Months later, Owl Woman died in childbirth. Bent named the child, a girl, after his late sister Julia. Her Cheyenne name, Um-ah, meant “Talking Woman.” Yellow Woman and Island were still married to Bent, but they disliked the fort. They took over care of William Bent’s children permanently and moved them to Big Timbers.

In 1848 and 1849 he started to abandon the fort on the Arkansas. William Bent’s attentions were spent with the remains of his family, buying out the St. Vrains, and moving to Fort St. Vrain along the Platte. St. Vrain himself moved to New Mexico. Kit Carson was in Washington lobbying for issues in California and in New Mexico anxiously tending to his family and Charles Bent’s survivors. The 1849 cholera epidemic caused emigrants to stay away, and many now preferred the trading post upriver run by the Carsons and the Boggs.

When a traveler saw the smoking remains of Bent’s Fort in the summer of 1849, rumor spread fast along the Santa Fe Trail that the Cheyenne burned it down and killed everyone inside. This was based on paranoia and fear about Native Americans rather than any real understanding of the fort’s relationship with the tribe, and the article reports a list of attacks by hostile tribes. Upon seeing Cheyenne with items from the Bent family, their massacre would seem all but confirmed in a region subject to attacks by the Apache tribes, Kiowas, and Comanches.

But the Bent family, which in fact lived with the Cheyenne and had done so off and on for over a decade, was still very much alive. In reality, William Bent himself removed his possessions, blew up the fort to prevent the army and scavengers from claiming it, then burned down the rubble with the help of his Cheyenne friends. He moved the central operations of his trade business to Fort St. Vrain, and awaited his next move and the fate of the Cheyenne.



## 16 / Travel & Trade

### Bent's New Fort

#### Citation

Big Year Colorado. *Bent's New Fort*. 3 photographs. February, 2014, near Gilcrest, Colorado.

#### Annotation

In 1849, cholera swept through the Arkansas River Valley and killed half of the Southern Cheyenne including Owl Woman's mother, Tall Woman. Migrants kept away from Bent's Fort out of fear of the epidemic. Illness weakened the Cheyenne political structure, and the Dog Soldiers effectively became a separate band. Bent felt increasingly alienated from his fort and the land around it, and started warning travelers that the land offered nothing but heartbreak and loss.

During these years of loss, William Bent, Thomas Boggs, and Kit Carson each turned to their remaining family. Carson and his wife Josefa took care of Charles Bent's children and nursed the wounds Ignacia Bent suffered in the Massacre. William Bent and his surviving family joined the remaining Southern Cheyenne. In 1853, he built Bent's New Fort a few miles away and in 1854 he built a lodge outside for Island and the children. They hated the new fort, which lacked the warmth of adobe. Owl Woman and Tall Woman made the old fort welcoming, friendly, and an endless source of entertainment for the children. This new place seemed harsh, not just because of the stone walls but because of who was not in it.

**The Western Mountaineer,**  
PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

A. D. Richardson, George West, Thos. W. Knox,  
EDITORS.

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(Editorial Correspondence of the Mountaineer.)

**Letter from Bent's Fort.**

BENT'S FORT, ON THE ARKANSAS, Sept. 15th 1860.

We arrived on Thursday night, after a pleasant trip of five days. Commissioner Greenwood has been here for a week, accompanied by his son and a son of Secretary Thompson of the Cabinet. The prospect of making a satisfactory treaty, or, in fact, a treaty of any kind is extremely doubtful, and our visit will probably prove a bootless one. No Indians are here, except a few Cheyennes and Arapahoes, and the others will not, or at least do not, come in. "Gray-Head" of the Arapahoes was sent out a few days since to call in recruits from the ranks of the red-skins, but the Kiowas took him and now hold him in durance vile.

A party of Comanches are encamped thirty miles from here and want to come in and consummate a treaty, but there are hardly enough of them to make it hold. The Apaches have not shown their faces, and probably will not. The Kiowas are *non est*. It is doubtful whether Judge Greenwood, or any one else except a few old mountaineers, could effect anything with them. They might possibly be induced to come in were it not for the troops that are stationed here.

Judge Greenwood is compelled to leave here in about a week, to meet the Kaw Indians in Eastern Kansas, on the 5th of October; while at least a month, say the knowing ones, would be required to effect a satisfactory treaty here. Again, it will be found difficult to select a spot for aborigines to settle upon. Bent insists upon having the whole Fontaine Qui Bouille reserved for the Cheyennes, while the Arapahoes want all the Arkansas country above this point. Of course the settlers will object; and if any arrangement is made, the Indians will probably be put over on the Republican, or in some other locality where they will not interfere with "our manifest destiny."

The work on Fort Wise is progressing rapidly, and it will be one of the finest military posts in the far West. Two or three hundred men are at work on the stables; the walls of stone are two feet in thickness, and will be a good defense against Indian attacks. Sutlers' goods to the amount of \$100,000 have arrived on the ground. The officers and *attaches* of the command occupy a part of Bent's Fort for the present. Thirteen wagon loads of goods for the Indians have arrived, but if there is no treaty there will be no presents. The large number of workmen and visitors give the vicinity of the fort a peculiarly lively and animated appearance.

T. W. K.

## DAILY EVENING NEWS.

PUBLISHED EVERY EVENING (SUNDAYS EXCEPTED) BY

**NEWS PRINTING COMPANY,**

### Indian Treaty.

Maj. Knox, Hon. B. D. Williams, Col. Boon, and several others, returned last night from the scene of the recent Indian "talk" at the Big Timber, on the Arkansas river. Mr. Williams, and Mr. Knox, have favored us with some news of interest. Upon the arrival of the party from this city, they found Commissioner Greenwood already on the ground. A large delegation of the Arapahoes were also present, and six Cheyennes. Provisions and presents were distributed to the Indians assembled, and two or three days later about a dozen of the principal Chiefs of the Cheyennes came in, when the talk was held, and resulted in the Arapahoes and Cheyennes agreeing to cede their whole country, except a reserve bounded as follows: Beginning at the Arkansas river, opposite the mouth of the Big Sandy, thence up the river to the last crossing of the 38° of north latitude, thence west on that line to a certain point from which a due north line will cross the Arkansas river, at a point five miles below the mouth of the Huertano; thence north on said line to the Big Sandy, near its source, thence down that stream to the place of beginning.

The area of the reserve is something over six hundred square miles. The Indians express a wish to settle down, and have farmers and teachers sent among them, to instruct them in the arts of civilization. The treaty will be perfected at Washington, and forwarded with as little delay as possible, to the Indians for ratification. We believe the whole country will rejoice at this result, as it will no doubt put a stop to all the petty depredations we have suffered at the

hands of our Indian neighbors.

A few warriors led by Sartac, one of the Kiowa Chiefs, visited the Council ground.— They say they wish to be at peace with the whites, that they were some time ago attacked by a company of U. S. troops, who killed two of their warriors and captured sixty horses. In retaliation, their war party had visited the settlements, killed two men— Rice and Pierson no doubt—and stole about sixty horses and mules, which makes them even, according to their custom.

Now they are willing to call it even and live in peace. They are at present on the head waters of the Smoky Hill or the Republican.

"Old Woman's" band of the Camanches was also represented, and expressed friendly feelings. Col. Bent has resigned his agency. Dr. Culver was left temporarily in charge of the Indian goods which he will distribute.— A new agent will be appointed, and the prospect now is, that Col. Boon of our city will be chosen for that responsible position.

Work is progressing rapidly on Fort Wise. A very advantageous site has been chosen. The present force is four companies of troops.

## 17 / Travel & Trade

### Crowded Plains

#### Citation

Knox, Thomas W. "Letter from Bent's Fort." *Western Mountaineer*, Golden, CO. September 20, 1860. P. 6-7. Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection. <http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/>

"Indian Treaty." *Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, CO. Sept. 27, 1860. P. 2. Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection. <http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/>

#### Excerpt

*Western Mountaineer:*

Bent insists upon having the whole Fontaine Qui Bouille reserved for the Cheyennes, while the Arapahoes want all the Arkansas country above this point. Of course the settlers will object; and if any arrangement is made, the Indians will probably be put over on the Republican [River], or in some other locality where they will not interfere with "our Manifest Destiny."

*Rocky Mountain News:*

The area of the reserve is something over six hundred square miles. The Indians express a wish to settle down, and have farmers and teachers sent among them, to instruct them in the arts of civilization. ... We believe the whole country will rejoice at [the treaty], as it will no doubt put a stop to all the petty depredations we have suffered at the hands of our Indian neighbors.

#### Annotation

The large numbers of permanent settlers and goldseekers rushing into the Pike's Peak region created tension with the tribes that achieved some harmony with Bent's Fort. By 1860, many prospectors and merchants believed they no longer depended on the goodwill of the tribes to survive. The trappers and mountain men who married into Native American society would become eccentric or uncivilized. William Bent and Kit Carson were still respected, but Bent grew frustrated with the abuse of the Cheyenne and the Arapaho.

The Bent's influence waned further after the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, in which Colorado's volunteer infantry kidnapped Robert Bent and forced him to lead them to the Cheyenne camp north of Big Timbers. The infantry then attacked, and George Bent barely escaped with his life. The tribal heritage and connections that served men like the Bents became a liability under U.S. control, and their children became "half-breeds."

As the unorganized Pike's Peak region turned into Colorado Territory, newspapers in 1860 debated where their loyalties should lie: with the mountain men and tribes who had tolerated the isolated settlements? Or the leadership in the new boomtowns who often expressed a willingness to get rid of the tribes and anyone else who proved inconvenient to profit? Armed with an eyewitness perspective, Thomas W. Knox criticized how the concept of "manifest destiny" encouraged an attitude of entitlement over lands already promised to the tribes. Alternate proposals meant to preserve something of the old ways of life, proposed by William Bent, might have worked.

The *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver interpreted the situation differently, blaming the groups present at the treaty for attacks committed by separate bands – or even other tribes. Though Thomas Knox is one of the sources, the *News's* interpretation of the same event seems quite different. While Knox employs light sarcasm criticizing contemporary policy towards the tribes, the *News* uses the same tone to undermine the idea that the tribes have a truly peaceful nature. While Knox writes of alternate proposals and resistance to the treaty, the *News* presents a version in which the Cheyenne and Arapaho welcome the abandonment of their culture and grounds for smaller territory and "civilization." In the 1860s the tribes would be held responsible for increasing attacks carried out by the separate Dog Soldiers in the northeast. In the newly powerful eyes of the city builders and territorial leaders, one tribe was as good as another – all of them were in the way of "Manifest Destiny."





## 18 / The Fort Today

### Preserving the Fort

#### Citation

Big Year Colorado. *Boggsville*. April 28, 2012. Lochbuie, Colorado.

Big Year Colorado. *Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site*. May 10, 2012. Lochbuie, Colorado.

#### Annotation

The historic sites associated with the Bent's Old Fort legacy illustrate many different ways to interpret history. Denver's History Colorado Center uses modern museum technology to bring the home of William Bent and Owl Woman alive. Some buildings from Boggsville remain, as does Kit Carson's original gravesite, and the property is open for tours. In Texas, the Adobe Walls fort was the last of William Bent's empire to stand; Kit Carson defended it against a coalition of Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache in 1864 at the First Battle of Adobe Walls. By the time the Comanches attacked again in 1874, civilians had turned the fort into a small settlement. Today it is a ghost town.

At Bent's Old Fort, living history interpreters dress in 1840s clothing and demonstrate blacksmithing or food preparation. Sam Arnold's The Fort Restaurant in Morrison, Colorado, is a partial replica and serves the type of wild game that the Bents and the Cheyenne hunted. In the 1970s, DC Comics named a superhero after Owl Woman, though the character is Kiowa and bears little resemblance to the Lady of Bent's Fort.

Historic sites associated with Bent, St. Vrain and Company include:

1. La Junta, Colorado: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site
2. Las Animas, Colorado: Boggsville - original gravesite of Kit Carson and Maria Josefa Jaramillo Carson
3. Las Animas Cemetery: gravesite of William Bent and Owl Woman
4. Near Hasty, Colorado: Bent's New Fort (private land)
5. Near Hasty: Fort Lyon/Fort Wise
6. Near Eads, Colorado: Sand Creek National Historic Site
7. Near Lamar, Colorado: Big Timbers (Cheyenne wintering ground)
8. Pueblo, Colorado: El Pueblo History Museum (near Bent's short-lived fort)
9. Near Gilcrest, Colorado: Fort St. Vrain (marker)
10. Platteville, Colorado: Fort Vasquez
11. Near Sterling, Colorado: Summit Springs Battlefield
12. Taos, New Mexico: Governor Charles Bent House
13. Taos, New Mexico: Kit Carson Cemetery – gravesites of Maria Ignacia Jaramillo Bent, Kit Carson, Maria Josefa Jaramillo Carson
14. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Santa Fe National Cemetery – Charles Bent gravesite
15. Mora, New Mexico: Saint Vrain Cemetery – graves of Ceran and Marcellan Saint Vrain
16. Kansas City, Missouri: Seth E. Ward Homestead (originally built by William Bent)

17. Adobe Walls (Bent, St. Vrain and Company Fort), near Stinnett, Texas

## **Additional Resources**

### **Firsthand Accounts**

- Bent, George. *Life of George Bent Written From his Letters*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 1968.
- Carson, Kit. *Kit Carson Autobiography*. 1858. Published 1966, University Press of Nebraska, Lincoln.
- Hughes, John. *Doniphan's Expedition: Containing an Account of the Conquest of New Mexico...* J.A. & U.P. James, Cincinnati, Ohio., 1962.
- Magoffin, Susan. *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.

### **Nonfiction**

- Athearn, Frederic. *Land of Contrast: A History of Southeast Colorado*. Bureau of Land Management, Denver, 1985.
- Brotemarkle, Diane. *Old Fort St. Vrain*. Boulder, CO: Platteville Historical Society, 2001.
- Lavender, David. *Bent's Fort*. Doubleday: Garden City, N.Y., 1954.
- Grinnell, George Bird. *The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1972.
- Groom, Winston. *Kearny's March: The Epic Creation of the American West, 1846-1847*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2011.
- Hurd, C. W. *Bent's Stockade Hidden in the Hills*. Las Animas, CO, 1960.

### **Young Adult Books**

- Beckwith, Cheryl. *William Bent: Frontiersman*. Filter Press, Denver, 2011.

### **Cookbook**

- Arnold, Sam. *Eating up the Santa Fe Trail: Recipes and Lore from the Old West*. Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001.

## Teaching Strategies



General Instructional Strategies for using primary sources in classrooms followed by grade-level-targeted suggestions for essential questions, inquiry questions (including writing prompts and discussion starters), activities, and assessments aligned to specific state academic standards for 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and high school.

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### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

#### Essential Questions:

- How can primary sources help us learn about the past or create more questions about our state's history?
- Why did people of various cultures migrate to and settle in Colorado?
- Why did settlements and large cities develop where they did in Colorado?
- What social and economic decisions caused people to locate in various regions of Colorado?
- How does the physical location of Colorado affect its relationship with other regions of the United States and the world?

#### Inquiry Questions (writing prompts or discussion starters):

- Throughout history, different tribes and countries have claimed ownership over the region where Colorado lies. How has this change of ownership shaped the state? (Primary Sources 3 and 5)
- Bent's Fort was located on the banks of the Arkansas river at the intersection of several countries' territories. What are some reasons that Bent considered this an attractive location for his business? (Primary Source 4)
- Bent's fort provided a safe haven to peoples from many different political backgrounds. Do you think Bent was acting as a traitor or a peacemaker? Could economics have motivated Bent to extend asylum to these peoples?
- Document 15 claims the Cheyenne were responsible for the destruction of Bent's Fort. Explain the irony of this false accusation.

#### Activities:

##### *Warm up/quick activities*

- Create a timeline of Bent's Fort and the Arkansas River Valley. Include important dates in regards to the United States dealings with Spain and Mexico, Indian treaties and battles, as well as the creation and changes to Bent's Fort (old fort, new fort, bombing and burning, etc.) Pull information from sources: one, three, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen
- Using a blank Colorado map, have students place Bent's Fort in its original location using gridline coordinates, then add in the physical features of the region. Next, using source three, have students lightly define and shade regions of Colorado according to their former affiliations (Texas, Mexico, Spain, France). Finally, using a current political map (or road map), ask them to add present day human features to the area.

**Assessments** (aligned to specific state academic standards for your grade level):

- The timeline from activity one perfectly assesses the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade History Standard One. “Standard 1. Organize a sequence of events to understand the concepts of chronology and cause and effect in the history of Colorado.” To expand, have students find photographs or other images of the peoples involved to put on the timeline.
- Using the students’ maps from activity two, ask students to describe three ways in which people have shaped or changed this region since the days of William Bent. This activity can be used to assess Colorado 4<sup>th</sup> grade geography standards one and two.

## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teaching Strategies

### Essential Questions:

- How did westward expansion and the expansion of economic opportunity impact Native peoples?
- How do geography and the notion of borderlands impact the culture of the different people living in the American Southwest near Bent's Fort?
- Explain the basics of supply and demand and how Bent's Fort and the Santa Fe Trail was a critical component of the economics of westward expansion.
- How does Thomas Jefferson's dream of an agrarian republic and the purchase of the Louisiana territory in 1803 relate to Bent's Fort?
- What are the lasting social, political, and economic effects of Bent's Fort as seen in Colorado and the American Southwest?
- What was the role of Bent's Fort during the U.S. - Mexico War and how was the fort a symbol of the conflict? How was Bent's Fort a symbol of what the future would be for the United States, Mexico and the American Southwest?
- What lasting cultural exchanges that occurred because of Bent's Fort that are evident in Colorado today?

### Inquiry Questions (writing prompts or discussion starters):

- What makes a good fort? Did you ever build a fort as a kid? What was it like? What would the ideal fort look like?
- What is necessary for a business to be successful? What factors must be considered for a business to be successful? If you could start any business what would you sell or what product would you offer? Who would you go into business with?
- How have economics and conflict led to expansion in the United States?
- Based on what you know about manifest destiny, was Bent's Fort a place of common ground between Native peoples, Americans and Mexicans? Or was Bent's Fort a symbol of American expansion and imperialism?
- Based on the documents provided, what was life like for the people living in Colorado in the mid 1800s? Be sure to give as many specific details as you can.

### Activities:

- Conduct a web quest (information for how to create one can be found [here](http://webquest.org/index-create.php) (<http://webquest.org/index-create.php>) - or another short research assignment getting the basics of the fur trade, The Santa Fe Trail, Bent's Fort, Sand Creek Masaacre, Kit Carson, mountain men, and the Mexican/American War. The background information will give students key academic vocabulary as well as a basic understanding of history relating to Bent's Fort.
- Define the following terms: Manifest Destiny, arid, topography, geology, supply, demand, culture, and trade.
- Complete a map of the United States from the early American Colonies through the 1900s and draw and label the different ways land was acquired on the North American continent. For some spice and entertainment, listen to *James K. Polk* by They Might Be Giants. In addition, include in the assignment a mapping component that maps the route of the Santa Fe Trail. For example, see this map of the Santa Fe Trail as a resource or reference.

- Divide the class into groups of 3-4 and read different sections of diaries/journals and accounts from Kit Carson and the many expeditions he led, you can find them [here](http://www.santafetrailresearch.com/research/kit-carson-trinidad-freighting.html) (<http://www.santafetrailresearch.com/research/kit-carson-trinidad-freighting.html>) and [here](https://archive.org/details/daringadventures00frich) (<https://archive.org/details/daringadventures00frich>). Once in groups, students will read an excerpt in their group and then read the passage to the class in order. Questions to consider: What stuck out most to you? How did Kit Carson influence western culture? Was Kit Carson good for America? In addition, for supplemental reading check out Hampton Sides' book *Blood and Thunder* (<http://www.amazon.com/Blood-Thunder-Carson-Conquest-American/dp/1400031109>). The book provides interesting narrative on the life of Kit Carson, specifically, how relationships and friendships forged business in the West and at Bent's Fort.
- Take a field trip to [The Fort](http://thefort.com) (<http://thefort.com>) restaurant to experience food and culture that is authentic to the time period. If you can't go to the restaurant, use the menu to as a way to learn about food on the Santa Fe Trail, Bent's Fort and in Southwest Colorado. In some situations it could be done to combine with a foods class to prepare authentic food and discuss how food is something that brings cultures together. To continue the conversation and the learning, or as a way to start the lesson, students could listen to a [TED](http://ideas.ted.com/what-americans-can-learn-from-other-food-cultures) (<http://ideas.ted.com/what-americans-can-learn-from-other-food-cultures>) talk about food and culture.
- Conduct a westward expansion and trading simulation in which the class is divided and roles are distributed. The different roles given might be American, Native American (Pawnee, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Comanche), Mexican, fur trader and various other specific roles. Each group of people must research their role and decide what their priorities are for survival in in the West. Furthermore, each group must discuss why they are at Bent's Fort and what they will trade and what they need to trade for. For ideas or an example of how to do a simulation watch this [video](https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/using-simulation-in-the-classroom) (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/using-simulation-in-the-classroom>).
- Bring in a guest speaker such as a mountain man re-enactor to tell tales of the fur trade in Colorado and the West.
- Writing assignment: Which two documents resonated most with you? Why?

#### **Assessments:**

- Have students create a 3-D fort similar to Bent's Fort using whatever materials they would like. Have them explain the symbolism of the fort and explain and define its critical components of the fort. For example, the clay adobe walls symbolize the coming together of cultures the way that water mixes with clay and is molded into something more... Furthermore, use analysis and symbols to explain how Bent's Fort was illustrative to the expanding and changing west, and illustrative to Colorado and its role in the west.
- Based on the documents provided and what you know about Bent's Fort, have students write authentic diary entries as if they were traveling the Santa Fe Trail and stopped at Bent's Fort. Write at least five diary entries that are time period authentic and include references to trade, Native Americans, the fur trade, conflict with Mexico, friendship, death and love.
- Hold a debate or Socratic Seminar using this central question: Was Bent's Fort good for America? Was Bent's Fort good for Mexico? Was Bent's Fort good for Native Americans? What is the lasting legacy of Bent's fort socially, politically, and economically?

## High School Teaching Strategies

### Essential Questions:

- How did family relationships influence trade relationships on the southern Colorado plains?
- How did U.S.-Mexico relations and the Mexican-American War affect the success of Bent's Fort?

### Inquiry Questions (writing prompts or discussion starters):

- Why do people immigrate to new frontiers? What are the push and pull factors? What modern day examples are similar?
- What does the term manifest destiny mean and how is it related to Bent's Fort?
- What economic factors contributed to Bent's Fort's success on the frontier?
- What are the differences and similarities between internal and external (out of the country) migration? Were migrants to the nineteenth century West moving inside their own country or not?
- What are the essential parts to any fort? How does geography play a role?

### Activities:

- To address the geography standards: Using the map in document one and a present day map, identify the regions or states of the U.S. that were part of the Missouri Territory.
- To address the history standards: use document eleven write down the perils faced by the writer and his companions. Have students pick 3 and explain how we have mitigated many of these hazards in the modern world?
- How do documents nine, then, and thirteen reveal the growing tension between the United States and Mexico at this time?
- Explain how the economics (in terms of natural resources and scarcity) of the frontier led to the creation of Bent's Fort.
- After reading documents nine, ten, or eleven please complete the 5 W's of the article (who, what, when, where, and why). Also do you detect any bias? If so, cite a quote and explain.
- Using the documents that contain maps, are there any locations that do not have a fort that might be ideal for one? Explain using topography and trade routes.

### Assessments:

- Using documents one through five and seven through eight, have students write a short-constructed response to the following question: Examine the documents and connect the ways the geography of Bent's Fort was able to bring these diverse peoples in contact.
- To meet standards in history, economics, and geography: Explain the economic, political, and social reasons for the Mexican-American War. Use evidence from primary sources to explain how Colorado and Fort Bent were part of this larger conflict.
- After reading either documents twelve, thirteen, or fourteen, have students complete the 5 W's of the article (who, what, when, where, and why). Ask students whether they detect any bias? If so cite a quote and explain.
- Using documents nine through fifteen, create a historical fiction in which students think about what it would have been like to be alive during the Bents time. Have students cite documents and at least five events to demonstrate they understand the events happening at that time.