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BUSINESS IN THE BORDERLANDS: BENT, ST. VRAIN & CO., 1830-1849

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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To My Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

During the 1830s and 1840s, a unique set of economic, social, political, and environmental factors contributed to the rise and fall of Bent, St. Vrain & Co. as the preeminent American trading firm in the Southwest Borderlands. Between the company's founding around 1830 and the destruction of Bent's Fort in 1849, the Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain conducted a wide-ranging, multifaceted trade with the United States, Mexico, and the Native American tribes of the Southern Plains. Geographical and political isolation made it imperative for the partners to adhere to a strict set of social and economic protocols, especially the cultivation of business patronage and intermarriage with their clients. The most important factor in the company's strategy was the weak presence of the State – either American or Mexican – in the borderlands. The weakness of the State simultaneously presented the partners with both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, they were in a precarious position - unable to call upon the American government for protection, they went out of their way to avoid alienating the powerful tribes of the region. On the other hand, the weakness of the Mexican State allowed the Bents and St. Vrain to circumvent national trade laws, become smugglers, and acquire land grants, all of which alienated the nationalist faction in New Mexico. The arrival of the American State in the borderlands in 1846 set in motion a chain of events that ultimately brought down the company. The conquest of New Mexico unleashed a wave of violence that destroyed the conditions that had allowed the partners to prosper. By 1849, Bent's Fort – the symbol of company power – went up in

flames, abandoned by its proprietors. Far from the centers of State power, Bent, St. Vrain & Co. flourished for nearly two decades. American expansion rendered the company's position within the borderlands untenable.

Introduction

During the 1830s and 1840s, Bent, St. Vrain and Company (hereafter Bent-St. Vrain) became the most prominent American trading firm in the Southwest Borderlands due to a unique set of geographic, economic, and political factors.[1] By studying the activities of Bent-St. Vrain, historians can gain a better understanding

[1] Borderlands literature is enormous, and defies precise categorization. Studied by historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, political scientists, sociologists, and literary critics, the field of borderlands study has spawned its own, enormous, argot. Theorists speak of "borderlands," "bordered lands," middle grounds, native grounds, alienated borderlands, coexistent borderlands, interdependent borderlands, integrated borderlands, intermediate borderlands, outer borderlands, infant borderlands, adolescent borderlands, adult borderlands, declining borderlands, defunct borderlands, quiet borderlands, unruly borderlands, rebellious borderlands, zones of interaction, "membranes of contact," metropoles,
peripheries, linear borders, zonal borders, paradigms of power, paradigms of negotiation, spheres of influence, strategic borderlands, nonstrategic borderlands, and ecumenes. The only common denominators seem to be that borderlands are places of both violence and accommodation, as well as zones of interaction where people consistently utilize to border to benefit their own interests either by calling upon national power or ignoring it as the situation dictates. Were I to define "borderlands," I would chose Elizabeth Jameson's definition. She calls them "zones – sometimes around borders – where diverse peoples come together to mingle." They can be social, political, or economic – or all three at once. Furthermore, she notes that they assume importance proportional to the group in question. I also appreciates David Thelen's characterization of "borderlands" as "not so much impenetrable barriers as wide and interactive places where people live everyday lives." Those interested in borderlands theory should consult Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History" *American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 814-841; Adelman and Aron, "Of Lively Exchanges and Larger Perspectives," *American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 1235-1239; Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 2 (Fall 1997): 211-242; Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan, *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); especially their chapter, "On Frontiers: The Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire in the Americas," 3-15; Elizabeth Jameson, "Dancing on the Rim, Tiptoeing Through Minefields: Challenges and Promises of Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 75 (February 2006): 1-24,(the Jameson quote comes from page 5); Kent G. Lightfoot and Antoinette Martínez, "Frontiers and Boundaries in Archaeological Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 471-492; Oscar Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Bradley J. Parker, "Toward an Understanding of Borderlands Processes," *American Antiquity* 71 (2006): 77-100; David Spener and Kathleen Staudt, "The View from the Frontier: Theoretical Perspectives Undisciplined," in *The U.S. Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities*, eds. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998): 3-34; and Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, "Nation, State and Identity at International Borders," in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 1-30.

of how businesses operated west of the Mississippi River. Traditionally, chroniclers have viewed Bent-St. Vrain as an exemplar of American domination, a fist in the wilderness, and a self-conscious forerunner of Manifest Destiny. In order to achieve economic success, the partners tapped into a continent-wide network of markets and suppliers. They utilized family bonds to cultivate a strong socioeconomic network that included Missouri merchants, Native American tribes, and Hispanic New Mexicans. The key determinant in their business strategy, however, was the lack of strong national authority – either American or Mexican – in the borderlands. The inability of the United States to exert a powerful economic or military influence in the region both forced the partners to tread lightly in local Native American politics while simultaneously allowing them to circumvent national trade laws in order to stymie rival white traders. Mexico's weak hold on her northern frontier also placed the Bents and St. Vrain in both an advantageous and perilous position. In a manner similar to John Sutter in California, Bent-St. Vrain abided by Mexican laws when it suited company interests, and ignored them when it did not. Furthermore, like Sutter the acquisition of land grants and participation in the Indian trade had the potential to weaken further Mexico's position in the region, a fact that enraged Mexican nationalists. Resentment built through the 1840s and culminated in the violence of the Mexican-American War. The extension of the American state into the borderlands destabilized local power structures and led to the violence that ultimately doomed the company in 1849. In

the absence of a strong state presence, Bent-St. Vrain flourished. Once the United States caught up, Bent-St. Vrain withered and died.[2]

This is primarily the study of how one American trading firm conducted business in an unstable borderlands environment. Bent-St. Vrain presents a unique opportunity for historians to analyze the ways in which the Market Revolution unfolded in the trans-Mississippi West. The base of the company's operations was geographically isolated, yet simultaneously enmeshed in continental networks of trade. On the one hand, the Bents and St. Vrain utilized many important techniques similar to those practiced by eastern businessmen. The partners recognized the usefulness of strategic diversification. They kept keen tabs on consumer tastes and trends, and supplied themselves accordingly. Bent-St. Vrain also tapped into vast networks of supply and credit. They recognized that in order to succeed they needed the economic patronage of well-connected urban merchants, especially those in St. Louis. Finally, when the opportunity presented itself, the partners played a willing role in less reputable, and often illegal, economic interactions with their customers. In all these ways, business on the frontier resembled the well-established practices of easterners who sought to maximize their profits as the Market Revolution penetrated every region of the country.[3]

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[2] For an interesting parallel description of how state power affected business on the Mexican frontier, see Albert L. Hurtado, *John Sutter: A Life on the North American Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006); and Kenneth N. Owens, ed., *John Sutter and a Wider West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

[3] For a fine recent survey of the Market Revolution see John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Perhaps the best work on the shadowy side of American capitalism during the antebellum years is Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

The lack of a powerful state presence differentiated borderlands businessmen from their brethren in well-settled areas of the United States, however. The weakness of a strong military or regulatory presence in the Southwest presented more opportunities for regional entrepreneurs to participate the shady practices such as gunrunning and liquor smuggling. Most importantly, the potential for violence was more prevalent in the West than in other parts of the country. Accommodation to Native American trade and social protocols, for example, was not only a way to corner trade, but just as importantly was a way to stay safe. Surrounded by powerful tribes, and unable to call upon military aid, the partners trod carefully in order to survive. The weak presence of the Mexican state also presented Bent-St. Vrain with both opportunities and challenges. Cooperating with New Mexicans who resented their central government, the Bents and St. Vrain became both legitimate traders and eager smugglers. At the same time, they made use of intermarriage as a trade strategy. However, their actions in procuring land grants and in the Indian trade alarmed Mexican nationalists who viewed the company as a potentially disruptive political and economic force in the region. As the partners continued to enmesh themselves in local business and politics, tensions escalated throughout the 1840s. Finally, when the United States extended its reach into the Southwest Borderlands and began its attempt to integrate the region into the rest of the nation, expansion undermined the carefully constructed political and socioeconomic system that had allowed Bent-St. Vrain to prosper. The annexation of the region by American forces set off a chain of violent events that ultimately

destroyed the company. Thus, while the potential for economic rewards in the borderlands was high, the potential for violence was equally so.

Some time during the late-1820s or early-1830, Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain formed a business partnership that lasted for nearly two decades. Residents of St. Louis, both men were experienced traders and fur trappers. As the monopolistic American Fur Company tightened its grip on the Missouri River fur trade, Bent and St. Vrain turned their attention to the expanding business opportunities opening up on the northern frontier of Mexico. By the end of the 1820s, the men combined their small, independent operations. In the middle of the 1830s, they, along with William and George Bent, oversaw a diverse, and expanding business operation. By participating in the fur trade, Indian trade, and Santa Fe trade, the partners insulated themselves against an economic downturn in any one of these respective ventures. Around 1832 they began construction of a large adobe trading post on the north bank of the Arkansas River. Bent-St. Vrain was comfortably established by 1834, and prepared to expand its operations even further afield.

Because the partners accommodated themselves to Native American trade practices and social protocols, business with local Indian groups formed the backbone of Bent-St. Vrain's operations. As the fur trade declined in the late-1830s, the partners turned increasingly to commerce in buffalo robes. In this venture, cooperation and adherence to native trade and social protocols was essential to the success of the partners. Indian hunters gathered the buffalo hides,

which their women turned into marketable robes. Wise traders, the Bents and St. Vrain quickly learned, took their business to the Indians directly, paid scrupulous attention to their tastes as consumers, and understood the paramount importance of ritualized gift giving. Like many successful traders, William Bent married a woman from one of his client tribes. Marriage broadened the network of potential customers on the one hand, and assured the new in-laws a reliable supply of trade goods on the other.[4]

In the absence of a strong state presence, however, trade on the plains could be dangerous. Tribes and tribal alliances were in constant conflict with one another. Raiding for war honors, increased social status, and material gain was endemic. Although marriage into the Cheyenne tribe guaranteed Bent-St. Vrain a reliable source of trade, it is probable that such an alliance also circumscribed their

[4] The literature on the Indian trade, kinship, and intermarriage is large. For trade, see Thomas W. Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indians Trade System," *Western Historical Quarterly* 90 (2003): 485-513; Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations, 1795-1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954); Alan M. Klein, "Political Economy of the Buffalo Hide Trade: Race and Class on the Plains," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians,* ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993): 133-160; David La Vere, "Friendly Persuasions: Gifts and Reciprocity in Comanche-Euroamerican Relations," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 71 (1993): 322-337; Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Indian Trader on the American Frontier: Myth's Victim* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1977); William Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the trans-Mississippi West to 1870," in *Handbook of the North American Indians,* ed. Wilcomb Washburn (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988): 4: 351-374. On marriage and kinship, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Michael Lansing, "Plains Indian Women and Interracial Marriage in the Upper Missouri Trade, 1804-1868, *Western Historical Quarterly* 31 (2000): 413-33; Tanis C. Thorne, "Marriage Alliance and the Fur Trade: Bent, St. Vrain, and Company, 1831-1849" (M.A. Thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1979); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

scope of business operations. Ties with the Cheyennes could alienate their traditional enemies, making it dangerous for company traders to venture east into Pawnee territory, or west into the Ute country. Most alarming was the conflict between the Cheyennes and Comanches. Comanche hostility to the Cheyennes blocked the southward expansion of company trade. Not until the tribes made peace in 1840 could the Bents and St. Vrain begin to trade in Comanchería. Yet, although the potential for continued interaction may have helped predispose the Comanches and Cheyennes to reconcile their differences, both groups had reasons for making peace that had little or nothing to do with the partners. Contrary to the arguments of historians writing in the first half of the twentieth century, the Bents did not call the shots on the Southern Plains. Local Indian groups interacted with the company when it suited their interests, and ignored it when they wished.

Accommodation and interpersonal relationships proved just as important in Missouri as in the Cheyenne villages along the Arkansas River. In order to function efficiently, Bent-St. Vrain also had to cultivate ties with the Missouri business community. Utilizing longstanding social and familial relationships, the partners relied upon the Missouri merchants to supply their western ventures and to market the products of their Indian trade. The Bents and St. Vrain lacked the economic clout to deal directly with wholesalers or fur dealers on the eastern seaboard, so they relied upon those in the St. Louis mercantile community who did. An arrangement with Pierre Chouteau, Jr., the city's best-connected trader, allowed the partners to import the goods necessary to their trade along the Arkansas and in

New Mexico. Chouteau also acted as salesman for the buffalo robes the company wagon trains brought east nearly every summer.[5]

The weak presence of the United States government on the Great Plains allowed the company to circumvent national laws in order to rid itself of the competition it faced from independent American traders and New Mexican merchants for control of the Indian trade. In response, the partners deviated from their generally accommodating business model. They complained loudly that these traders used alcohol to attract clients, in direct contravention of national law. However, to check this menace, the Bents and St. Vrain fought liquor with liquor. While self-righteously condemning the actions of the smalltime whiskey peddlers, the partners spent thousands of dollars smuggling their own supply of booze into Indian Country. Furthermore, the Bents did not shy away from using violence when they thought it would benefit business. In 1834, William Bent ordered a raid on a peaceful band of Shoshones encamped at the trading post of rival John Gantt.

[5] Historians of the period have long recognized the connections between the fur trade and larger continental and international markets. See T. Lindsay Baker, "From Beavers to Robes: Transition in the Fur Trade," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 23 (Spring 1987): 1-8 and (Summer 1987): 4-13; Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1947; Mariner Books, 1998); John E. Sunder, *the Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965). The two best examinations of these connections are Barton Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); and David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992). The best study of the fur trade in the Southwest is David J. Weber's *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971). Robert Glass Cleland's *This Reckless Breed of Men: The Trappers and Fur Traders of the Southwest* (New York: Knopf, 1950) is worth consulting, but is less useful than Weber. On the Chouteaus and their business operations see Shirley Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty that Ruled America's Frontier* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004); Jay Gitlin *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Stan Hoig, *The Chouteaus: First Family of the Fur Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

Bent's men killed and scalped a number of Shoshones, they also captured women and horses. This preemptive strike drove Gantt out of business. In the course of the Indian trade, then, Bent-St. Vrain mixed peaceful accommodation with chicanery and occasional violence to protect business.

Bent-St. Vrain complimented its Indian trade by doing business in New Mexico. Ceran St. Vrain first came to New Mexico intending to outfit the fur trappers who roamed the Southern Rockies. Charles Bent arrived in New Mexico in 1829 with a caravan of Santa Fe traders. As with the Indian trade, enterprise in New Mexico required the cultivation of a wide range of contacts at both ends of the Santa Fe Trail. The same firms who outfitted the Bents and St. Vrain for the Indian trade supplied the partners with the goods sought by New Mexican consumers. At the same time, the wisest American merchants formed connections in Santa Fe. American traders accommodated to local circumstances by learning Spanish and sometimes forming partnerships with Hispanic traders and merchants. However, there was a seamier side to the commerce of the prairies. Traders like the Bents and St. Vrain bribed customs officials and acquired reputations as smugglers. Yet even these shadier practices also represented a form of pragmatic accommodation by all parties involved. New Mexico relied heavily upon trade with the United States and when officials in Mexico City attempted to interdict this commerce with restrictions, embargoes, or prohibitively high tariff duties, officials in Santa Fe often ignored the directives of their superiors to the south. Bribery and arrangements with local government officials represented a case where the

exigencies of local circumstances trumped potentially harmful policies emanating from the national capitals.[6] In New Mexico, as along the Arkansas, the partners recognized the benefits of intermarriage with the local population. Unions with New Mexican women, church-sanctioned or otherwise, functioned like marriage to Indian women. Marriage had the potential to expand the circle of commercial contacts, both potential customers and suppliers. Although the Hispanic population of northern New Mexico was nowhere near as wealthy or powerful as the *ricos* living south of Santa Fe, let alone the dons of California, marrying into a prominent Taos family had its own benefits. New unions could bring political favors in

[6] Josiah Gregg's 1844 classic *Commerce of the Prairies* remains the best single account of the Santa Fe Trail. I have also consulted David Dary and R. L. Duffus. The best recent survey of the trade with New Mexico is by Stephen Hyslop. In the last twenty years, historians have begun turning more attention to the actions of Mexican traders and have sought to situate their activities within a market network spanning nearly the entirety of North America. The best work on the topic is Susan Calafate Boyle's *Los Capitalistas.* Other useful treatments include Sterling Evans, "Eastward Ho!" and the work of David Sandoval. Max Moorhead's *New Mexico's Royal Road* is old, but still very relevant to the study of the Santa Fe Trail. The best analysis of Missouri merchants and their connections to the Santa Fe trade and eastern markets can be found in the work of Lewis E. Atherton. See Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954); David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Knopf, 2000); R.L. Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1930);Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002). For Hispanic involvement in the Santa Fe Trade see, Susan Calafate Boyle, *Los Capitalistas: Hispano Merchants and the Santa Fe Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); Sterling Evans, "Eastward Ho!: The Mexican Freighting and Commerce Experience Along the Santa Fe Trail," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (Winter 1996-1997): 242-261; David A. Sandoval, "Gnats, Goods, and Greasers: Mexican Merchants on the Santa Fe Trail," in *The Mexican Road: Trade, Travel, and Confrontation on the Santa Fe Trail,* ed. Mark L. Gardner (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1989): 22-31; Sandoval, "Montezuma's Merchants: Mexican Traders on the Santa Fe Trail," in *Adventure on the Santa Fe Trail,* ed. Leo E. Oliva (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1988): 37-60. The best work on the Chihuahua Trail remains Max L. Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958). Lewis Atherton was the most thorough expositor of the connections between Missouri merchants and eastern businesses. See Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971); "Business Techniques in the Santa Fe Trade," *Missouri Historical Review* 34 (April 1940): 335-341; "James and Robert Aull – A Frontier Missouri Mercantile Firm," *Missouri Historical Review* 30 (October 1935): 3-27; "The Santa Fe Trader as Mercantile Capitalist," *Missouri Historical Review* 77 (October 1982): 1-12.

addition to the possibility of acquiring vast land grants. By the late-1840s, Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain had established themselves as leaders of a pro-American political and economic faction in Taos.

If Bent-St. Vrain's Indian trade brought the firm great profit, it also threatened to undermine the political stability of New Mexico. This is not to say that the company by itself caused New Mexico's weakened state by the time of the war with the United States. Nevertheless, the Bents and St. Vrain caused some officials in Santa Fe great disquiet. In the first place, Mexican nationalists viewed Americans like Charles Bent with deep suspicion. Rumors spread that the emigrant community had abetted attempts by the Republic of Texas to annex New Mexico in 1841 and 1843. More important, through trade with nomadic Indians like the Comanches, Utes, and Cheyennes, the company presented a threat to the security of the province. Critics such as the Taos priest Antonio José Martínez accused American traders like the Bents of supplying Indians with guns and alcohol. These customers, well armed and well-lubricated, raided across Mexico's northern frontier, burning, killing, raping, and stealing. Laden down with plunder, they returned to unquestioning American traders to dispose of the booty. Records indicate that the partners did import guns and alcohol into Indian Country, although it is impossible to determine the precise extent of the company's involvement in this shadowy borderlands economy. Furthermore, when critics like Martínez placed the blame for Indian raiding upon American traders, they disregarded the

fact that the Indians were autonomous actors with their own motives for acting as they did.[7]

[7] The literature dealing with the history of the Southwestern Borderlands from the perspective of Mexico is thin. David J. Weber's works remain the standard accounts of the period from 1821 to 1846. Also useful are Weber's *At the Edge of Empire*, "From Hell," and "Breakdown." Howard Lamar gives one of the best short accounts of the economic and political situation in New Mexico prior to the American conquest. Increased contact with Missouri traders, combined with a lack of attention from Mexico City gradually pulled New Mexico into the American sphere of influence. The best work on these tensions between profit and patriotism is Andrés Reséndez. Other useful treatments come from Janet Lecompte and Ward Allan Minge. Although every observer of Mexico's northern frontier observed that Indian raiding was a paramount reason for the instability of the region, only within the last decade have historians begun to examine the Indian groups themselves. Although authors like Minge, Daniel Tyler, David Weber, and Frank McNitt all point out that the Indians held the upper hand most of the time, these authors do not investigate the reasons behind the violence, nor the sources of native power. That trend is changing thanks to the recent work of historians like Julianna Barr, Ned Blackhawk, James Brooks, Brian DeLay, Pekka Hämäläinen, and Thomas Kavanagh. The most useful accounts of the Mexican Period are David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); *On the Edge of Empire: The Taos Hacienda of Los Martínez* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996); "'From Hell Itself:' The Americanization of Mexico's Northern Frontier, 1821-1846," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest: Essays by David J. Weber* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988): 105-116; "American Westward Expansion and the Breakdown of Relations Between *Pobladores* and *'Indios Bárbaros'* on Mexico's Far Northern Frontier," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest: Essays by David J. Weber* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988): 117-132; Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Janet Lecompte, *Rebellion in Río Arriba, 1837* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Ward Alan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1965). On older views of Indian-Hispanic interaction, see Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids, and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972); Daniel Tyler, "Mexican Indian Policy in New Mexico," *New Mexico Historical Review* 55 (April 1980): 101-120. Newer works on the same topic include Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Thomas Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). For work on the importance of marriage and intermarriage in New Mexico, see Rebecca McDowell Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy: Mexican-Anglo Intermarriage in New Mexico, 1821-1846* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1982); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Janet Lecompte, "The Independent Women of Hispanic New Mexico, 1821-1846," *Western Historical Quarterly* 12 (January 1981): 17-35; Marc Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives: A Family History* (Albuquerque:

The extension of American power into the Southwest during the war with Mexico simultaneously brought Bent-St. Vrain to the height of its influence and destroyed the company's long-term economic prospects. The success of the trade based out of Bent's Fort made the post a natural launching point for the invasion of New Mexico in 1846. Guided part of the way by William Bent, the Army of the West marched into Santa Fe in August without firing a shot, where General Stephen Watts Kearny proceeded quickly to establish a new civil government. Rather than accommodate local New Mexican politicians, Kearny made Charles Bent governor, and appointed other influential members of the pro-American faction to positions of authority. Discontent with the new regime – discontent that had deep roots – exploded in Taos in January 1847. Mexican nationalists and their Indian allies killed Charles Bent and a number of his associates before being ruthlessly subdued by an American force from Santa Fe. The death of Charles Bent and the extension of American power into the Southwest dealt Bent-St. Vrain a crippling blow. By late 1847, William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain had dissolved their partnership. The Mexican-American War led to increased traffic along the Santa Fe Trail. With the larger volume of travelers and animals, local Indians had

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University of New Mexico Press, 2003). Deena González takes a grimmer view, seeing more oppression than opportunity, see her work, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). The literature of intermarriage in California, which incorporates many of the same themes as intermarriage in New Mexico, is better developed. See María Raquél Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820-1880* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s-1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Louise Pubols, *The Father of All: the de la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, published for the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West).

to compete for rapidly dwindling natural resources. So many new arrivals led to increased violence, which made William Bent's trading operation untenable. Furthermore, his best clients, the Southern Cheyennes, suffered from disease and drought. Although Bent-St. Vrain rarely expressed any interest in the expansion of American influence in the Southwest, Manifest Destiny came anyways. When it came, it came as a disruptive intrusion, profoundly altering the worlds of the Bents, St. Vrain, and their associates, both Indian and New Mexican.[8]

The story of Bent-St. Vrain is, ultimately, a story of pragmatic adaptation in and to a complex and fluid borderlands world. Far from the centers of power, residents of the Southwest - Anglos, Hispanic, and native - sought to carve out their own space. They either ignored or accommodated directives from Washington and Mexico City as local circumstances dictated. Nevertheless, the Southwest Borderlands were not unattached to larger trends and markets. The economic success of traders like the Bents and St. Vrain depended upon sustained contact with people, places, and markets far beyond the upper Arkansas River and Santa Fe. The company conducted business at the intersection of trade networks that spanned much of the North American continent. Goods and persons flowed back

[8] Although rarely examined as part of the story of Bent-St. Vrain, the interplay between the Southern Plains environment and its inhabitants is admirably treated in Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991): 465-485; Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* and "The First Phase of Destruction: Killing the Southern Plains Buffalo, 1790-1840," *Great Plains Quarterly* 90 (2003): 101-114; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James E. Sherow, "Workings of the Geodialectic: High Plains Indians and Their Horses in the Region of the Arkansas River Valley, 1800-1870," *Environmental History Review* 16 (1992): 61-84; Kevin Sweeney, "Thirsting for War, Hungering for Peace: Drought, Bison Migrations, and Native Peoples on the Southern Plains, 1845-1859," *Journal of the West* 41 (Summer 2002): 71-78; Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998); and *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

and forth over long-established trade routes stretching east through Missouri to Atlantic port cities, west over the Old Spanish Trail to California, north to the Platte and Missouri rivers, and south along the Camino Real deep into the Mexican interior. Thus, while local custom and circumstances informed the decision making process of borderlands residents, they could not escape or ignore their connections to the larger world. The Bents and St. Vrain recognized the necessity of accommodation in this diverse environment, and they often adapted successfully.

Disparate peoples came together in the Southwest Borderlands, to trade and to establish kinship relations. However, enterprise in the borderlands could also be hazardous. The partners had to navigate the treacherous political waters of the Southern Plains and New Mexico. They could not dictate the terms of interaction. Yet, the ways they interacted with New Mexicans and Indians caused great unease to those seeking to keep the northern frontier attached to Mexico. Suspicion was rampant, charge and countercharge flew back and forth. The war between the United States and Mexico, and the Taos Revolt of 1847 demonstrated the limits of accommodation in the borderlands. Cooperation, judiciously combined with illegal activity, had build Bent-St. Vrain's business enterprise. Violence destroyed it. Thus, the borderlands of the Southwest were a place of great opportunity and, ultimately, great danger for the Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain.[9]

[9] On borderlands as places of negotiation and adaptation see, for example, Amy Turner Bushnell, "Gates, Patterns, and Peripheries: The Field of Frontier in Latin America," in *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*, eds. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2002): 15-28; David G. McCrady, *Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Shelia McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); James

The source material for this project is scattered across the United States, literally from coast to coast. The nature of the source material raises an interesting issue, though. I endeavored to write the history of a business that left no records. No Bent-St. Vrain ledger books survive. Nor are there any consistently kept day-to-day records of life at Bent's Fort. Remarkably, however, the partners and their activities show up all over the place. Anyone traveling through the region gravitated to Bent's Fort, and those who were literate usually recorded some impression of the fort, the partners, and the business. The most sizable collection of material relating directly to the partners is a set of approximately eighty letters

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Muldoon, *Identity on the Medieval Irish Frontier: Degenerate Englishmen, Wild Irishmen, Middle Nations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); David Thelen, "Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History," *Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 432-462; Victor Zuñiga, "Nations and Borders: Romantic Nationalism and the Project of Modernity," in *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities,* eds. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998): 35-55. Bent-St. Vrain was also an enterprise that conducted business on a transnational scale. On transnationalism and the connections between the metropolis and the periphery, see Amy Turner Bushnell and Jack P. Greene, "Peripheries, Centers, and the Construction of Early Modern American Empires," in *Negotiated Empires,* 1-14; Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan, eds., *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire;* Michael McGerr, "The Price of Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1056-1067; Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Peter S. Morris, "Regional Ideas and the Montana-Alberta Borderlands," *Geographical Review* 89 (1999): 469-490; Ian Tyrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1031-1055. The literature of the U.S.-Mexico border has provided some of the most promising examples of transnational history. These include Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine: the History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007); Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008); Miguel Tinker Salas, *In the Shadow of the Eagles: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Two fine collections of essays which take a transnational approach to the borderlands are Benjamin H. Johnson and Andrew Graybill, eds., *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

composed by Charles Bent and addressed to the United States Consul in Santa Fe, Manuel Alvarez. These letters deal primarily with issues regarding New Mexico. More scattered are the glimpses of the company's business operations that appear in the ledger books of Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and his St. Louis associates. Regrettably, the records are often incomplete: a letter here, a brief mention there, a promissory note, an insurance policy, or an invoice. Therefore, I have constructed my analysis of how Bent-St. Vrain ran its business largely based upon what historians know of other, better-documented trading companies. Whenever possible, I have supplemented this broad discussion with examples specific to the company. I feel confident in this approach because I have read nothing to indicate that Bent-St. Vrain was in any way an atypical western company, either in their trade with the Indians or in their commerce with Missouri and Santa Fe. Finally, although this project takes a tentative stab at incorporating Mexican and Indian views of the company, I am not an ethnohistorian nor have I done more than dip a toe into the Mexican Archives of New Mexico. This narrative centers upon Bent-St. Vrain primarily, although I have attempted to situate their activities in as broad a context as possible.

This dissertation consists of fourteen chapters. The introduction lays out the methodology and historiography. Chapter one gives a brief discussion of the history of the Southern Plains and Rockies from before European contact to the "opening" of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821. This broad treatment seeks to illustrate the wide range of trade and social networks predating the construction of Bent's

Fort. Rather than originators, the Bents and St. Vrain grafted themselves onto a web of trade that had existed for centuries. Chapters two and three trace the early exploits of the Bents and St. Vrain. By analyzing their activities up to 1834, we can see that they entered the borderlands with a wide range of business experiences and a host of eastern contacts to facilitate the establishment of their company. Chapters four through six deal with Bent-St. Vrain's Indian trade, the company's immersion in the world of Southern Plains Indian politics, and its contest with rival American traders along the South Platte River. Chapters seven and eight cover the company's trade with New Mexico over the Santa Fe Trail, as well as the larger continental business connections that facilitated this commerce. Chapters nine through eleven discuss the increasingly tense relationship between the company and their New Mexican neighbors. Chapters twelve through fourteen are a chronological assessment of the conquest of New Mexico and the declining fortunes of Bent-St. Vrain between 1846 and 1849. Rather than bringing enhanced prosperity, the American conquest of New Mexico helped undo the company. Furthermore, I demonstrate the ways in which politics, war, disease, and environmental degradation undermined both the tribes of the Southern Plains and William Bent's struggling business. The history of the Southern Plains does not end when William Bent abandoned his Arkansas River post in the summer of 1849, nor does the story of the region's economic dynamism begin with the completion of Bent's Fort around 1834. The story of the region is far broader, and much, much older.

Chapter 1 - Peoples in Motion, Trails to Everywhere: The Southern Plains to 1821

When the Bent brothers entered the upper Arkansas River Valley, they found a region with a well-established history as a crossroads of economic exchange and geopolitical confrontation. Interregional trade between the plains tribes and the Pueblo world long predated the Spanish *entradas* of the sixteenth century. The Spaniards, as well as later native arrivals like the Comanches and Cheyennes, grafted themselves onto preexisting trade networks, moving hides, buffalo meat, crops, textiles, pottery, and slaves back and forth throughout the region. By 1821, the Mexicans and these tribes traded over a network of trails stretching in every direction: east to the Mississippi River, west to the Pacific Ocean, north towards Canada, and south into the Mexican interior. The upper Arkansas Basin was also a fluid political borderland. Neither Spain nor Mexico could not control the region. Comanches and Cheyennes warred over it. Americans like the Bents sought to carve out their own autonomous space within it. The region's economic potential was great, but its politics were unsettled. Exploitation of its resources required shrewdness and tact. Around 1830, Bent-St. Vrain entered a borderland already contested by the Spanish and Native Americans for nearly three hundred years.

American traders like the Bents utilized a network of Indian trails that crisscrossed the Great Plains, a system linking the tallgrass prairies to the rest of the North American continent west of the Mississippi River. Persons and goods from

the Mississippian civilizations, Rio Grande Pueblos, the Missouri River villages, the Columbia Plateau, and Canada passed through the Southern Plains. Most trails followed rivers and streams, crossing the high dividing ridges between the drainages, leading trading parties from waterhole to waterhole. The ease of travel along natural highways like the Arkansas River Valley kept Native American peoples in constant contact, contact that facilitated the spread of beliefs, goods and services. The route of the future Santa Fe Trail, the artery that connected the Bent's and New Mexico to the Missouri frontier, was old centuries before Coronado. As early as 1000 A.D., the point where the trail first met the Arkansas River, in present-day central Kansas, was a trading point for Hopewellian farmer-traders and their counterparts from the Pueblos of the Rio Grande. While no group may have traveled the full length of the route from its terminuses at either end of the plains, the east-west trail was well known.[1]

Ancient roads also connected the villagers of the upper Rio Grande with the civilizations of northern Mesoamerica. Although goods never found their way to the upper Rio Grande in substantial amounts, the trade with Mexican city-states benefited outlying frontier trade centers like Casas Grandes in northern Chihuahua and the Hohokam towns of the Gila River Valley. From these trade hubs, luxury goods and agricultural technology filtered north and west. Turquoise from the

[1] Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 27; Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West Before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 302; Donald J. Blakeslee, *Along Ancient Trails: The Mallet Expedition of 1739* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), xv-3; William Brandon, *Quivira: Europeans in the Region of the Santa Fe Trail, 1540-1820* (Athens: Ohio University Press), 1-8.

mines around Cerrillos, New Mexico found its way to Sonora, the Pacific Coast, and the edges of Mexico's central valley. By the fourteenth century, the decline of Casas Grandes reoriented the patterns and directions of trade: Mesoamerican products shifted primarily to Sonora, while the Puebloan peoples began looking towards the nomads of the Southern Plains.[2]

Trade between the Plains and Pueblos accelerated around the year 1400, solidifying a link between the two regions that continued well into the nineteenth century. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Athapaskan peoples from the Northern Plains and Rocky Mountains began following bison herds driven south by the onset of the Little Ice Age. In the Rio Grande villages, these hunters found a ready market for their surplus bison products. Trade intensified in volume during the next two centuries and by 1600 the Pueblo agriculturalists and Plains hunters were interdependent. Located closest to the bison herds, Pecos, the easternmost Pueblo, reaped the largest share of the lucrative plains trade. Although Taos and Picuris, located higher in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains challenged Pecos for this commerce, Pecos remained the primary gateway to the Plains until the early 1800s.[3]

Trade relations between the Plains and New Mexico developed symbiotically. Each group specialized in products the other found necessary for

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[2] William B. Carter, *Indian Alliances and the Spanish in the Southwest, 750-1750* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 26-28, 61-65.

[3] Carter, *Indian Alliances*, 31, 47, 53, 68-9, 74-5; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 160. The village of San Miguel del Vado replaced Pecos in the mid-nineteenth century as the primary outfitting point for trading expeditions onto the plains, primarily the Llano Estacado of west Texas. For a fuller account of the later New Mexico-Plains relations, with special reference to Pecos, see John L. Kessell, *Kiva, Cross, and Crown: The Pecos Indians and New Mexico, 1540-1840* (Tucson: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1986), 359-411; Carter, *Indian Alliances*, 68.

survival. Rio Grande Pueblos, and later Hispanic New Mexican settlements, provided carbohydrates in the form of grains and vegetables, while nomads traded protein in the form of buffalo meat. As long as New Mexican agriculturalists remained at peace with the nomads, the fields of the Rio Grande river valley proved a reliable source of garden products, which offset the occasionally unpredictable nature of the buffalo hunt. On the other hand, the expanding population of New Mexico gave the plains hunters a dependable market for meat and the hides necessary for winter clothing, bedding, and export.[4]

Not all of the interregional trade was licit, however. Despite proclamations by Spanish authorities banning such activities, contraband in the form of guns, liquor, stolen livestock, and captives flowed from the Plains to trade fairs at Pecos and Taos, and from the New Mexican settlements eastward.[5] While some of this trade took place at government-sponsored fairs, the rest of it occurred in informal,

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[4] Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, War: Contrasting Forms of Intertribal Relationship Among the Historic Plains Indians," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians,* ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 101; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47; Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations, 1795-1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), 30; Ross Frank, *From Settler to Citizen: New Mexican Economic Development and the Creation of Vecino Society, 1750-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 32. It bears mentioning, however, that extreme lack of buffalo products for trade, resulting from either drought, the irregular migration of the herds, or intertribal conflict could lead to nomadic raiding on New Mexican settlements in order to secure grains and vegetables. See Frank, *Settler to Citizen,* 33; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 225.

[5] For information on the contraband trade between New Mexico and the Plains see, Brooks, *Captives and Cousins,* 48-51, 62, 120, 220; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count,* 287; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 42; Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System," *Western Historical Quarterly* 29 (1998), 505; Thomas Kavanagh, *The Comanches: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 127; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 196; David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 10, 30.

unsanctioned gatherings at places like Ojo Caliente, Abiquiu, Las Trampas, Las Truchas, and Chimayo. Legal strictures did little to prevent this illegal trade. For example, in 1746 Governor Joaquín Codallos y Rabal banned the Comanches from trading at Taos and threatened any Taoseño who attempted to trade with the Comanches with death. The decree had no tangible effect. Prohibitions against selling guns to Plains Indians went unenforced, as did the ban on slave trading. When nomadic Indians stayed away from the New Mexican settlements, Hispanic and Pueblo traders went to them. The area near Bent's Fort had long been a site of trade between parties from New Mexico and Indian bands. The Purgatoire River valley provided a convenient path from the Arkansas River to the vicinity of Taos, and Hispanics referred to the trade site in the vicinity of the fort as 'La Nutria,' the place of beaver.

Although New Mexican authorities and villagers attempted to harness the economic potential of the Plains trade, they could do little to secure their borders against Indian or potential European incursions from the north and east. The Plains presented New Mexico with a paradox: they could be a rich source of hides, foodstuffs, and ideas. However, the grasslands were also a source of death, chaos, and robbery.[6] The rising power of the Comanches throughout the eighteenth century, coupled with the potential of French intrusions from Illinois and Louisiana, kept New Mexico's political borderlands in a constant state of upheaval. By the late-seventeenth century, French incursions on the eastern edge of the prairies forced New Mexican officials to direct more attention to the north and east

[6] Kessell, *Kiva, Cross, and Crown,* 359.

of Santa Fe. From the perspective of Spanish policymakers, the activities of LaSalle in Texas, his lieutenant Henri Tonty on the Arkansas, and the probes of nameless traders from Illinois represented a potential threat to Santa Fe and, by extension, the rich silver mines of northern Mexico.[7]

Between 1720 and the 1750s, rumors about Frenchmen meddling with the plains tribes, as well as the arrival of straggling bands of French traders in New Mexico itself heightened Spanish fears and reinforced the tenuousness of their own border defenses. In addition to the French threat, New Mexico suffered grievously from Indian raids during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Not until the late-1780s did the Spanish reach a peace agreement with the Comanches, the most powerful tribe in the region. The Comanche Peace with New Mexico held, more or less intact, into the 1840s. Peace with the Comanches allowed Spaniards to resume exploration east and north. One party, led by Pedro Vial, eventually approximated

[7] Brandon, *Quivira*, 131, 192, 253; Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 147; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 328. The earliest Spanish expeditions from New Mexico traveled parts of the Indian trail network that eventually became the Santa Fe Trail. In 1541 Coronado traveled east from New Mexico, and across the Texas Panhandle before turning northeast. The expedition reached the villages of the Wichita Indians-the mythical Quivira- at the crossing of the Arkansas River in central Kansas. Between Coronado and Oñate's occupation of New Mexico, at least two parties launched illegal exploring and colonization expeditions north. Sometime around 1595, a group led by Francisco Leyva de Bonilla and Juan de Humaña, ventured into Kansas, and possibly as far north as the Platte River. Somewhere between the Arkansas and Smoky Hill rivers Indians wiped out most of this party. In 1601 a survivor of this attack led Governor Oñate on a return trip to Quivira. Oñate traveled east from Pecos to the Canadian River, then northeast to the Cimarron and the Arkansas before returning to New Mexico. His party took with it eight wooden carts, the first 'wagons' to travel a part of the Santa Fe Trail. It is also possible, though not conclusive, that the governor sent expeditions north into Colorado in search of the source of the Rio Grande. See Waldo H. Wedel, "Coronado and Quivira," in *Spain and the Plains: Myths and Realities of Spanish Exploration and Settlement on the Great Plains,* eds. Ralph H. Vigil, Frances W. Kaye, John R. Wunder (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1994), 46-61; Ralph H. Vigil and John R. Wunder, "Spanish Exploration in the Great Plains: A Timeline," in *Spain and the Plains*, 10-12; Herbert Eugene Bolton, "Preliminaries to 'Spanish Occupation of Texas, 1519-1690," in *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands,* ed. John Francis Bannon (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 102; Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 82; Phil Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier: Spanish Explorations in Colorado* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1998), 11-17.

the entire length of the Santa Fe Trail from New Mexico to Missouri. However, by the earliest years of the nineteenth century, Americans replaced the French as the greatest potential non-Indian threat to the security of Spanish New Mexico.[8]

New Mexico's economy grew modestly between 1609 and 1821. Links to southern markets were crucial to the survival of the isolated colony. While the balance of goods flowed up the Camino Real into Santa Fe, New Mexico exported sheep, blankets, buffalo robes, piñon nuts, and slaves.[9] Still, high prices and

[8] In 1706 an expedition commanded by Juan de Ulibarrí set out from Taos. Ulibarrí traveled over the Raton Pass, northeast to the Arkansas- the route later known as the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, which linked Bent's Fort with New Mexico- before descending the river as far as the present-day Colorado-Kansas border. Here he heard rumors of French activities among the Pawnees a week's travel to the east. Spanish authorities failed to act directly upon this information until 1720 when Pedro de Villasur marched north to check the possible French advance. Pawnee and Oto Indians surprised and thoroughly routed the Spanish force near the confluence of the Platte and Loup Rivers in Kansas. The loss of nearly fifty men was a stinging defeat for the Spanish. The Villasur disaster, combined with intensified Comanche raiding meant that for much of the rest of the eighteenth century New Mexican officials could do nothing to establish a meaningful presence on the plains. Although rumors abounded that French soldiers acted in concert with the Pawnees and Otoes, there is no evidence for this – French authorities seem to have been just as surprised by the stinging Spanish defeat as the officials in Santa Fe. In addition to rumors, occasional French trading parties from Missouri made it as far as Santa Fe. The Mallet brothers led the most famous of these expeditions; it arrived in New Mexico in 1739. Only the restoration of peace with the Comanches in 1786 allowed Spaniards to travel freely again on the Southern Plains and Arkansas. The most widely-traveled explorer was Pedro Vial, a Frenchman in the Spanish employ, who traveled from San Antonio de Bexar to Santa Fe in 1786-1787, from Santa Fe to Natchitoches and back in 1788-1789, and from Santa Fe to St. Louis and back in 1792-1793. This last trip followed closely the route that became the Santa Fe Trail. In addition to expeditions east, many Spaniards, often unlicensed traders from frontier communities like Taos, journeyed north into the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado. Other traders, as well as occasional military expeditions, journeyed as far north as the Platte River during the early years of the nineteenth century. For Ulibarrí see Brandon, *Quivira,* 145; Thomas E. Chávez, "The Villasur Expedition and the Segesser Hide Paintings," in *Spain and the Plains,* 94; Vigil and Wunder, "Timeline," 14. On the Villasur Expedition and its defeat see Blakeslee, *Along Ancient Trails,* 76; Brandon, *Quivira,* 172-173; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count,* 211; Vigil/Wunder, "Timeline," 15-16; Weber, *Spanish Frontier,* 169-171. Regarding the Comanche and Spanish exploration and trade see Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier,* 155; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count,* 386-387; and Weber, *Spanish Frontier,* 235. The best source for Vial's travels is Noel M. Loomis and Abraham P. Nassatir, *Pedro Vial and the Roads to Santa Fe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), especially 262-287, 316-407. For Spanish exploration and trade in southern Colorado and the Platte see Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier,* 30-55 and 174-175.

[9] The scale of such exports to the south did not impress many American merchants. Observing New Mexico, veteran Santa Fe trader James Josiah Webb wrote that, "A look at the resources of the

usurious credit rates, combined with the inability to obtain goods from non-Spanish markets hampered the development of an autonomous New Mexican economy. By 1821, the residents of the far north were primed to welcome American traders like the Bents. The opening of the frontier to this commerce slowly shifted the province's economic orientation away from Chihuahua and Mexico, and east towards Missouri and the United States.

Supply caravans set up to furnish the colony's missions provided the first outlet for the north-south trade. Shortly after the Crown took over administration of New Mexico in 1609, it began to subsidize the resupply of the regional missions. Technically, these caravans were authorized to supply the Franciscans alone. However, they provided the fundamental means of communication and supply for New Mexico during the seventeenth century.[10] Under ideal circumstances, the caravans traveled to Santa Fe once every three years, with planners allotting six months to travel north, six months to dispose of the goods, and six months for the return trip. However, departures were inconsistent, and colonists sometimes went six or seven years without seeing the caravans from the south. This trend of official neglect continued into the Mexican Period; New Mexicans rarely held the

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country was not encouraging. The only products, beyond the immediate needs of the people, were wool (which would not pay transportation), a few furs, a very few deerskins, and the products of the gold mines." See James Josiah Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*, ed. by Ralph P. Bieber with an Introduction to the Bison Book edition by Mark L. Gardner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995),. On the other hand, Josiah Gregg, the preeminent contemporary chronicler of the Santa Fe Trail, noted that, "The New Mexicans are celebrated for the manufacture of coarse blankets, which is an article of considerable traffic between them and the southern provinces, as also with the neighboring Indians, and on some occasions with the United States." Gregg wrote that New Mexican textiles were an acceptable substitute for the famous serapes and blankets woven in the northern Mexican city of Saltillo. Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. by Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 148.

[10] Max L. Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 32.

attention of administrators in the national capital for long. By the 1760s and 1770s, direct trade with Chihuahua became the primary means of supplying New Mexico, until the establishment of trade with the United States in 1821.[11]

The Chihuahua trade accelerated during the mid-eighteenth century in response to the northern advance of New Spain's mining frontier. Growing up around rich silver mines, Chihuahua, Parral, Guanajuato, and Durango gave New Mexican colonists a market for local products. Sheep constituted the largest single export from New Mexico to the southern cities. Although the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 checked their growth, New Mexican flocks expanded rapidly during the early-1700s in conjunction with the expanding mining frontier. As the scale of supply and demand grew, the trade took on a more complex shape, with regularly scheduled caravans, called *corodones* or *conductas,* leaving New Mexico. New Mexican sheep barons also relied upon specialized wool retailers in Chihuahua and other cites to dispose of their product and fill specific purchase orders. A few families, centered on Albuquerque, rapidly grew to dominate the New Mexican export trade in general and the sheep business in particular. By one estimate, the Armijos, Chávezes, Oteros, and Yrizarris controlled eighty percent of the colony's exports.[12]

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[11] Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road,* 32-43; David J. Weber, *On the Edge of Empire: The Taos Hacienda of Los Martínez* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 11.

[12] Weber, *Edge of Empire,* 11; John O. Baxter, *Las Carneradas: Sheep Trade in New Mexico, 1700-1860* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), ix, 6-7, 11, 42, 55, 63; Susan Calafate Boyle, *Los Capitalistas: Hispano Merchants and the Santa Fe Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 10, 43. However, Heather Trigg points out that, due to the small scale of agricultural endeavors, most New Mexican production and exchange took place on the local or intraregional level. She writes that, "the regional market was not dominated by a single center, such as Santa Fe, but rather consisted of a number of small centers….Since New Mexico's *estancias*

Despite their modest success on the regional level, New Mexican businessmen labored under the twin burdens of distance and Spanish trade policies. In an effort to protect domestic markets and maximize profits, the Crown forbade all trade with foreigners. Because the preponderance of goods reaching the frontier flowed through the port of Veracruz to Mexico City, and north to regional distribution centers like Chihuahua, before finally reaching New Mexico. In addition to the costs of shipping over such long distances, frontier consumers faced monopolies, price-fixing, excise taxes, and high credit rates. Due to these factors, the price of goods often quadrupled between Veracruz and Santa Fe.[13] Chihuahuan merchants quickly monopolized the New Mexican trade. A key factor in Chihuahua's dominance was the fact that hard currency was in woefully short supply in New Mexico. Because of the specie shortage, northern frontiersmen purchased most of their goods on credit, pledging future flocks or harvests as collateral. Such disadvantages meant that New Mexicans would quickly take advantage of the situation if new suppliers and markets became available. Such opportunities presented themselves in the first years of the nineteenth century, as American traders made tentative forays towards Santa Fe. Although Spanish

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were small-scale, they did not have the capital to participate in the long-distance imperial trade or the quantities of commodities that warranted the cost of export." Heather Trigg, *From Household to Empire: Society and Economy in Early Colonial New Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 65; see also 115-116, 134.

[13] David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 123.

officials greeted the Yankees coolly, by the time of Mexican Independence frontier residents readily embraced the opportunity for such contact.[14]

Despite the fact that many of the first expeditions to Santa Fe from the United States ended in incarceration or deportation, American traders viewed New Mexico as a potentially lucrative market and the New Mexicans themselves as enthusiastic consumers of American products. Consistent attempts to breach Spain's economic blockade around her northern provinces began in 1804. In that year, William Morrison, a merchant from Kaskaskia, Illinois sent his employee Baptiste LaLande to Santa Fe to scout out future trade prospects. LaLande never returned to the United States.[15] The arrival of Zebulon Pike, a United States military officer, and his men in 1807 caused Spanish authorities great consternation. Ordered to explore the Red River country, Pike's company arrived at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in the late autumn of 1806-1807. After tramping about in the Sangre de Cristos, Pike built a stockade on the Conejos River in Spanish territory. Spanish soldiers arrested Pike and his men, and marched them to Santa Fe. From the capital, authorities escorted the Americans deeper into Mexico before deporting them back to the United States. Pike's private letters and his official reports caused a stir among Americans seeking economic opportunities

[14] Boyle, *Las Capitalistas*, 7-8; Sterling Evans, "Eastward Ho!: The Mexican Freighting and Commerce Experience Along the Santa Fe Trail," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (1996-1997), 246; Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 122.

[15] For a general discussion of American expeditions to Santa Fe from 1804 to 1821 see David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 55-73; R.L. Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 19230), 32-66; and Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 3-32. On Morrison, LaLande, and Durocher specifically, see Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail,* 33 and Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 36-7.

in the Southwest, spurring more attempts to trade with Santa Fe culminating with William Becknell's expedition in 1821.[16]

[16] For the most complete treatment of Pike's New Mexico expedition see Eugene Hollon, *The Lost Pathfinder: Zebulon Montgomery Pike* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 101-157; see also Isaac Joslin Cox, "Opening the Santa Fe Trail," *Missouri Historical Review* 25 (1930), 30-66; Loomis and Nassatir, *Pedro Vial and the Roads to Santa Fe*, 237-239; and Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail*, 32-54. Duffus writes regarding Pike's reports on New Mexico that he "frankly anticipated an American invasion of Mexico in the near future. He saw signs, he was sure, of Mexico's coming independence," and that Pike "described no land of dreams. He gave statistics [concerning the economic potential of trade with New Mexico]," see Duffus, 50, 53. Jacques Clamorgan followed Pike to New Mexico in 1807. Funded by Missouri fur trader Manuel Lisa, Clamorgan made his way up the Platte River with three Frenchmen, a slave and four mules. From the Pawnee villages on the Platte the party turned south to Santa Fe. Spanish authorities allowed the seventy-four year old trader to continue south to Chihuahua to dispose of his goods. Clamorgan returned to the United States via Texas and Natchitoches. Loomis and Nassatir write that he had "the distinction of being the first American trader to earn profits on a trip to Santa Fe." See Loomis and Nassatir, *Pedro Vial and the Roads to Santa Fe,* 248. It is interesting to note the involvement of Manuel Lisa in Clamorgan's enterprise. The trader's backing of Clamorgan was based on the long-held assumption that expeditions from the Missouri River could easily reach Santa Fe from the north. The idea that the sources of the Missouri River rose close to Santa Fe came from the well-established geographical wisdom of the time. British geographers, for instance, held that all the major rivers of the North American West had their headwaters in the same general vicinity – a height of land somewhere in the interior. Once travelers reached the height of land it would be a relatively simple matter to follow the drainage south to New Mexico. John Logan Allen writes that, "The idea that the Missouri and the Rio Grande sprang from the same source become from this time (1670s-1680s) a dominant fixture in geographical lore." One of the charges of the Lewis and Clark expedition was to explore the Yellowstone River in hopes it might lead south to Santa Fe. Following his backing of Clamorgan, Lisa continued to trade and explore the drainages of the Missouri River in hopes of finding an easy route south. Well aware of the potential threat from the Missouri River Spanish authorities made some attempts to monitor the northern frontier of New Mexico. In 1818 an expedition under Josef Charvet traveled north along the Front Range of the Rockies all the way to the Platte River in search of rumored American activity. In 1819, the government established a temporary post on a tributary of the Huerfano River in present-day southern Colorado for the same purpose. On the geographical misconceptions regarding the Missouri and Santa Fe see John Logan Allen, *Passage Through the Garden: Lewis and Clark and the Image of the Northwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 9, 23, 332. The quote is from page 9. See also Loomis and Nassatir, *Pedro Vial,* 67-8. On the Spanish expeditions of 1818-9 see Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier,* 181-2. In 1809-1810 Joseph McLanahan, Reuben Smith, James Patterson, Manuel Blanco, and three slaves also reached the capital. Authorities jailed them and then deported them back to the United States in 1812. See Loomis and Nassatir, 249-250. In 1812, American traders Robert McKnight, Samuel Chambers, and James Baird, along with a pack train of six mules reached Santa Fe. They were arrested and imprisoned in Chihuahua until their release in 1821. In the years following their release, Chambers and Baird reentered the Santa Fe trade, although Baird became a Mexican citizen and settled in El Paso. McKnight became a freighter, traded with the Apaches, and became involved in copper mining at Santa Rita del Cobre in southwestern New Mexico. Between 1815 and 1817, Jules DeMun and Auguste Pierre Chouteau trapped and traded along the Front Range of the Rockies in the general region of Bent's Fort. Spanish authorities eventually arrested and deported this party as well. On McKnight, Baird and Chambers see Duffus, *Santa Fe Trail,* 59-60; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 21-2; and Loomis and Nassatir, *Pedro Vial,* 254. On Chouteau and

If any American deserves the title "Father of the Santa Fe Trade," William Becknell of Missouri warrants that distinction. Becknell's 1821 trip to Santa Fe established regular annual contact between New Mexico and Missouri. His salt business failing, and deeply in debt, Becknell placed an ad in the *Missouri Intelligencer* announcing a trading and wild horse catching expedition to the western prairies. Becknell's decision to move on to New Mexico was a calculated gamble. Although he knew the stories of imprisoned American traders, he had also heard rumors that Mexico had recently declared independence from Spain. Independence might mean new, trade policies.[17] Becknell and a small party departed Missouri on September 1, 1821. They traveled west along the Arkansas River, turned south near the Rockies, and reached Raton Pass in late-October. They crossed the pass into New Mexico, and met a contingent of soldiers on November 13. From the troops, Becknell learned of Mexican independence and the willingness of New Mexicans to trade with the Yankees. The Americans reached Santa Fe on the sixteenth, where they quickly disposed of their goods. Having sold out his stock, Becknell returned to Missouri for more. The majority of his men remained in New Mexico, possibly trapping beaver during the winter of 1821-1822. Becknell turned a two thousand percent profit on his modest investment of $3,000. Upon his return to the United States, he became a booster

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DeMun see Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail,* 61-4; Loomis and Nassatir, *Pedro Vial,* 256-7 and Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 45-7.

[17] In his biography of Becknell, Larry Don Beachum notes an ironic connection between the McKnight and Becknell expeditions: McKnight also set out for Santa Fe on the hopes that the province would become independent, the McKnight party travelled upon hearing news of Hidalgo's uprising. Becknell set out upon news of Iturbide's revolt. On Becknell's financial problems and the decision to go west see Larry Mahon Beachum, *William Becknell: Father of the Santa Fe Trade* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1982), 21-24, and Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail,* 68-9.

for trade with Santa Fe.[18] Although others had long before demonstrated the viability of an overland route to Santa Fe, Becknell proved that the venture could be profitable. Most important, the New Mexicans welcomed trade with the United States. Josiah Gregg wrote that, "The favorable reports brought by the enterprising Captain, stimulated others to embark in the trade."[19] The events of 1821 marked the beginning of an intensified relationship between Mexico's northern frontier and the far west of the United States, a relationship that Bent-St. Vrain took full advantage of a decade later.

From the early1700s until the middle of the nineteenth century, anyone seeking the main chance on the Southern Plains had to confront the most dominant military and economic power in the region: the Comanches. New Mexico's economic fortunes and frontier security hinged upon good relations with the tribe. During times of peace, goods flowed back and forth between the Rio Grande settlements and the plains. When peace collapsed, no frontier settlement was safe. In addition to trade with New Mexico, the Comanches played an integral role in linking together the native economies of the trans-Mississippi West. However, their vast horse herds – the source of their economic power – drew northern rivals

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[1818] Beachum, *Becknell,* 39. See also pages 8-28; Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail,* 73-8; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 37-43; and Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 54. All manner of apocrypha arose surrounding Becknell's exploits. The most notable of these relates to his return from New Mexico with news of his trip. The story goes that upon reaching Missouri he dumped a bag of Mexican silver on the sidewalk, cut it open, and let the gawking crowd watch the silver coins roll about, word of Mexican riches spread like wildfire from this event. Another story regards his 1822 expedition. The legend goes that, while crossing the Cimarron desert, his party, driven to desperation by thirst, cut the ears of their mules and sucked the blood to quench their parched throats. Beachum finds both stories highly suspect, see pages, 32, 36-7. Josiah Gregg relates the blood-drinking story in *Commerce of the Prairies,* 14.

[19] Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 13.

closer to the Arkansas River. The arrival of the Cheyennes in the 1820s marked the beginning of nearly two decades of intertribal conflict over the region. American traders like the Bents insinuated themselves carefully into a complex political and economic borderland where native peoples held the upper hand.[20]

It took only a generation for the Comanches to establish their dominance over the Southern Plains. A Shoshonean people originating in the Great Basin, the ancestors of the Comanches migrated east into the Rockies before venturing onto the plains. During the late-seventeenth century, Comanche bands split off from their Shoshone relatives. Turning south along the Front Range, the Comanches followed the bison herds, drawing closer to the region's most reliable source of horses: New Mexico. With the help of the Utes, the Comanches quickly mastered the equestrian, nomadic lifestyle. Soon the Ute-Comanche alliance was hammering New Mexico's northern frontier, dominating the region by the 1720s. During the same decade, the Comanches also turned their attention east. They clashed with the Apaches over access to the river valleys critical to the maintenance of horse herds. The Apaches, a semisedentary people, made an easy target for well-mounted Comanche war parties. By the end of the decade, the Comanches held a firm grip on the upper Arkansas River Valley. With the Apaches out of the way, the Comanches turned their attention back to New Mexico and Spanish Texas. Relations with New Mexico fluctuated between war and peace from 1760 into the

[20] For a broad survey of Comanche history from about 1700 until 1821 see Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 204-250; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 18-140; Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 63-192.

1780s. When peace cam, it held into the 1840s. Meanwhile, the Comanches continued their campaigns against native opponents: the Pawnees and Osages to the east, Apaches to the south, Navajos to the west, and the Cheyennes and Arapahos to the north.[21]

Comanche preeminence on the Southern Plains rested upon economic as well as military power. By driving the Apaches out of the Arkansas Valley, the Comanches established themselves as the preeminent traders of the region. They tapped into the long-established plains-Rio Grande trade, bringing buffalo hides, meat, horses and captives to the trade fairs at Taos and Pecos. Their position along the Arkansas also allowed the Comanches to establish broad trading ties with other Indian groups throughout the Great Plains.[22] Comanchería was the southern anchor of the plains trade system. The Mandan and Hidatsa villages of the Missouri River formed the northern axis. From the upper Arkansas River Valley, Comanche horses and mules flowed north and east in exchange for guns, metalwork and textiles. Because of their domination of the Southern Plains trade networks, the Comanches often controlled the flow of important products like guns and horses. Through the control of such crucial technology, they held the regional balance of power until someone could displace them.[23]

The vast Comanche horse herds were the lodestone that drew native traders and raiders to the upper Arkansas. Although meat and hides constituted a large

[21]Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 384; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 21-28, 31-37, 47-55, 74-106, 117-140; Kavanagh, 178.
[22] Hämäläinen, "Western Comanche Trade Center," 495-6.
[23] Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 72, 168-70; Hämäläinen, "Western Comanche Trade Center," 487-501; Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 177, 181.

portion of Comanche trade goods, their horse herds formed the backbone of the tribe's economic wealth and military power. The river valleys of Comanchería were crucial to the growth and maintenance of the tribal herds. The Arkansas River marked a critical environmental dividing line. North of the river, year-round horse husbandry was difficult. The harsh plains winters, especially north of the Platte, cut deeply into the herds of tribes like the Crows, Blackfeet, Lakotas, and Cheyennes. Winters along the Arkansas were mild by comparison, a pivotal factor in the rapid natural increase of the Comanche herds. However, natural conditions and the equestrian wealth they produced attracted raiders from the Northern Plains. The potential for their own horse wealth drew the Cheyennes south towards the Arkansas in the early-nineteenth century. Rather than simply acting as intermediaries between the Comanches and the Missouri River villages, the Cheyennes hoped to carve out their own autonomous space within the region.[24]

Over the course of nearly a century, the Cheyennes transformed themselves from a woodlands people into equestrian nomads. Around 1680, they began to move west towards the Mississippi River from their home in the Mille Lacs region of Minnesota. It is impossible to state definitively why the Cheyenne migration began, but it most likely came about because of military pressure from the Chippewas, Crees, and Assiniboins. By the 1770s, the woodlands refugees settled

[24] Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 37, 70-1; "Western Trade Center," 497. It is important to note that even along the Arkansas, the climate could be extreme. James Sherow writes that, "Even though it was not the most difficult place on the High Plains to tend horses, the Arkansas River Valley proved a trying environment for its inhabitants to keep their herds." Winters could be deadly, and drought was an ever-present threat. See James Sherow, "Workings of the Geodialectic: High Plains Indians and Their Horses in the Region of the Arkansas River Valley, 1800-1870," *Environmental History Review* 16 (1992), 68. On the Comanche 'trade barrier' see Jablow, *Cheyennes and Plains Trade Relations*, 24.

along the Sheyenne River in North Dakota. Here, they first acquired horses but not firearms.[25] Despite the entry of the horse into Cheyenne culture, they maintained a semi-sedentary lifestyle throughout most of the eighteenth century. The horse allowed them to supplement agricultural harvests with seasonal buffalo hunts. However, disease and Sioux incursions forced the Cheyennes west again. Around 1800 the lure of better trade opportunities and access to bison herds drew the Cheyennes further south and west across the Missouri, towards the Black Hills, where they completed their transition to nomadism.[26]

During the early years of the nineteenth century, the Cheyennes warred, allied, and traded with their plains neighbors. When they first entered the plains, the Cheyennes were a small group, militarily incapable of challenging larger tribes like the Blackfeet or Sioux. Cheyenne vulnerability forced them to seek out allies. By the late-eighteenth century, they formed an indissoluble bond with the Arapahos.[27] This new alliance commenced to war with the Shoshones, Utes, Kiowas, Crows, and Blackfeet over lucrative trade routes. The Cheyenne's relationship with the most powerful tribe on the northern plains, the Sioux, was

[25] When the Cheyennes first came to the Plains they were without horses. All of the other plains tribes had their own herds. George Bent recalled that the Arapahos, Kiowas, and Crows each had traditions claiming that they provided the Cheyennes with their first horses. Bent concluded that the Cheyennes probably received some horses from each group. George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 20-1.
[26] Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 6-9; E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Cheyennes: Indians of the Great Plains* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), 5-6; Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 306; John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 25-6; West, *The Contested Plains*, 68-70.
[27] The Arapahos preceded the Cheyennes on the plains. Interaction between the two groups dated back to their years as neighbors along the Sheyenne River. By 1781, the Arapahos ranged as far west as the Big Horn Mountains. Pressure from Sioux forced the Arapahos west to the Missouri and into the region around the Black Hills. Around 1800 they established themselves on the Cheyenne River southwest of the Hills, and by 1812 ranged along the North Platte. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, 17-19.

more complex. Sioux expansion up the Missouri and to the southwest of the river displaced numerous groups, including the Cheyennes. In addition to forcing the Cheyennes towards the Black Hills, the Sioux attempted to displace them as the middlemen between the Arikara villages of the Missouri River and the western plains tribes. Sioux pressure from the east pushed the Cheyennes up against the Kiowas, forcing a confrontation for control of the Black Hills. Cheyenne military prowess displaced the Kiowas, pushing them south. However, the Sioux kept coming, and the Cheyennes eventually abandoned the Black Hills for greener pastures south of the Platte River.[28]

The Cheyenne migration onto the Central Plains put them in an advantageous economic position. They became the prime movers of goods between the northern plains tribes and the Comanches to the south. The Cheyennes were perfectly positioned to take over the venerable role of plains trade middlemen. Through their contacts with the agricultural villages of the Missouri River, they obtained guns and manufactured goods filtering south from Canada. The Comanche herds along the Arkansas supplied the demands of the northern tribes.

[28] There is some dispute over whether the Sioux drove the Cheyennes from the Black Hills by force, or whether the Cheyennes abandoned them willingly. Indian Agent Joshua Pilcher wrote to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, William Clark, regarding the Sioux-Cheyenne relationship. He informed Clark that the Cheyennes, "being in amity with the Sioux of the Missouri, ranged over the same country, in common with the Sioux, but in consequence of jealousy and difficulties inseparable from Indians when different tribes occupy the same hunting grounds, the Cheyennes abandoned the country to the Sioux some years ago," Joshua Pilcher to William Clark, September 15, 1838, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm, reel 884. Although the two groups eventually became fast friends, they continued to clash intermittently until the 1830s. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, 13, 15, 19; George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 5; Hoebel, *The Cheyennes*, 6-9; Jablow, *Cheyennes and Plains Trade*, 56; Moore, *The Cheyennes*, 78-9, 90, 93; West, *The Contested Plains*, 76; Richard White, "The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of American History* 25 (1978), 333-4.

The Cheyennes skillfully inserted themselves between the two poles of trade. They acquired large numbers of horses from the Comanches, either through trade or raiding. Driving these horses north, the Cheyennes exchanged them for European products at trade fairs around the Black Hills and along the Missouri. Guns and manufactured goods then flowed south. A member of Major Stephen Long's 1819-1820 expedition to explore the Great Plains noted with amazement the extent of this north-south trade and the Cheyennes' role in it. He wrote that the Cheyennes "had been recently supplied with goods by the British traders on the Missouri, and had come to exchange them…for horses. The Kiawas, Arrapahoes, etc., who wander in the extensive plains of the Arkansa and Red river, have always great numbers of horses, which they rear with much less difficulty than the Shiennes, whose country is cold and barren." However, migration further south to the Arkansas River had the potential to put the Cheyennes in an even better position.[29]

The vast buffalo herds of the Southern Plains and the demand for horses pulled the Cheyennes toward the Arkansas. According to George Bent's recollections, a band of Blackfeet travelers first relayed to the Cheyennes the news of the vast mustang herds ranging between the Platte and Arkansas. The men of

[29] On the role of the middleman in general, and the Cheyennes in particular, see Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," 103-4;Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 108-9; Dan Flores, "Bringing Home All the Pretty Horses: The Horse Trade and the Early American West, 1775-1825," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 58 (2008), 14; Hoebel, *The Cheyennes,* 73-4; Jablow, *Cheyennes and Plains Trade,* xvii, 15, 16, 24, 27; Moore, *The Cheyenne,* 31-2; 71, 91-2; Sherow, "Geodialectic," 67; Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870," in *Handbook of American Indians,* ed. Wilcomb Washburn (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988), 4: 351, 353, 355; West, *Contested Plains,* 71, 82. The quote is from Edwin James, *An Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, Performed in the Years 1819, 1820,* in *Early Western Travels,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1905), 1: 502.

the Hairy Rope Clan, the best mustang catchers in the tribe, led the move south of the Platte in 1826. This new migration resulted in a permanent split within the tribe into distinctive northern and southern bands. Establishing themselves among the wild horse herds gave the Cheyennes direct access to the horses craved so desperately by their northern neighbors. The herds could also provide the animals necessary to support the Cheyennes' own expanding population. Gaining control over the Arkansas Valley could give the Cheyennes and their Arapaho allies the same benefits the Comanches gained from the region: easy access to far-flung markets, a salubrious environment for horse husbandry, and a bountiful supply of wild game. The Comanches, however, would not give up the upper Arkansas without a fight. The coming struggle over the region would test the diplomatic competence of Bent-St. Vrain during the 1830s.[30]

The Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain did not enter a vacuum when they came to the Arkansas River Valley in the early-1830s. Although their company quickly became a major force, the partners had to play the region's political and economic games according to longstanding rules and alongside well-established players. Success or failure would often depend upon how well Bent-St. Vrain adapted to their surroundings. These men traveled ancient trails to markets already centuries old. They established multiple trade connections. They married into

[30] Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes*, 19, 21; Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 116-7; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 475; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 33, 42; Jablow, *Cheyenne and Plains Trade*, 64; Sherow, "Geodialectic," 65, 67.

local societies. They became earnest, if not always enthusiastic, participants in the triangular geopolitical maneuverings of American, Mexican, and Indian interests. Over the course of two decades, the partners reaped large profits and ascended to the pinnacle of regional politics, only to be destroyed by their own success. But, before the Bents and St. Vrain could attempt to become masters of their own destiny, they had to serve a decade-long apprenticeship in western enterprise along the banks of the mighty Missouri River and among the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains.

Chapter 2 - Apprenticeship in Western Enterprise: The Bents and St. Vrain to 1828

The Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain spent roughly ten years learning how business operated in the trans-Mississippi West. In the process, they discovered a number of things. The Bents and St. Vrain learned the importance of maintaining close ties with the St. Louis business community. Silas Bent, patriarch of the clan, was an associate of the city's leading French merchants, while St. Vrain clerked for others. After 1824, St. Vrain used his connections to help underwrite his own expeditions in the Southwest. By the time Bent-St. Vrain formed, the partners had enough practical experience to know the importance of economic diversification. The company had an interest in three different businesses: the fur and robe trade, the Santa Fe trade, and the Indian trade. By 1830, the partners had served apprenticeships in the first two enterprises and stood poised to enter into the third. Finally, both Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain learned leadership and organizational skills - Bent on the Santa Fe Trail and St. Vrain with the fur trapping brigades. Thus, in the 1820s the partners gained the practical experience as western entrepreneurs that enabled them to build a highly successful company that lasted for nearly two decades.

Although not a member of the St. Louis aristocracy, Silas Bent, patriarch of the clan, was not a man without means or connections. Born in Rutland, Massachusetts, in the 1760s, he moved to the Ohio frontier in the late-1780s, settling at Marietta in 1788. During the 1790s, he moved to Wheeling, Virginia,

where he studied law. While in Wheeling, he married Martha Kerr. Their first son, Charles, was born November 11, 1799. Besides practicing law, Silas ran a store, and worked as a surveyor. Both his legal training and his surveying skills helped him advance rapidly. He became an associate judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Washington County, Ohio, before moving the family to the Louisiana Territory in 1806. The move came because of his appointment as the territory's principal deputy surveyor. In 1808, he became auditor of public accounts for the St. Louis district. In 1809, he was appointed presiding judge of the Court of Common Pleas in St. Louis. He served on the bench with local French powerbrokers Bernard Pratte and Auguste Chouteau. President James Madison appointed Silas to the Missouri Superior Court in 1813, a position he held until 1821. Following Missouri's admission into the Union in 1820, Silas became a state senator, and clerk of the St. Louis County Court.[1] While not a local grandee, Silas's important civil positions allowed his family to live comfortably.[2] Records indicate that he owned a fine home, a few slaves, and a small flock of sheep. His modest wealth and the public positions he held made it imperative for his sons to get an education.[3] The story goes that Charles attended Jefferson College in Canonsburg,

[1] Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 20-25 (hereafter cited as "Resource Study"); A.C. Bent to George Bird Grinnell, December 17, 1909; George Bird Grinnell Papers, Bizzell Memorial Library, Microfilm, Reel 41 Frame 1; Ralph Emerson Twitchell to Grinnell, March 24, 1913; Grinnell Papers, Reel 41 Frames 27-8; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1954; Bison Books, 1972), 18-20. All subsequent pagination from Lavender in the dissertation derives from the 1972 Bison Books edition.
[2] Gardner, "Resource Study," 24.
[3] Silas Bent and his wife Martha had eleven children: seven sons, of which Charles was the eldest, and four daughters. While Charles, William, George, and Robert entered the Indian and Santa Fe trades, John Bent was a prominent attorney and socialite in St. Louis. Silas, Jr., the youngest, was a

Virginia. Although he never graduated, family lore says Charles studied mathematics and medicine. Another story says that he graduated from West Point, but this is a myth.[4]

The St. Louis of Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain's boyhood was the center of the western fur trade. Anyone looking to make their fortune in furs had to contend with the Missouri Fur Company, and its driving personality, Manuel Lisa. Active on the Upper Missouri since the early-nineteenth century, Lisa served as point man for Missouri Fur (organized in the winter of 1808-1809) in the same region. His success inspired conservative St. Louis merchants to risk investment in this potentially lucrative market. Those who did not invest in the Missouri Fur Company risked getting locked out altogether.[5]

The Lisa company's fortunes fluctuated wildly during its sixteen-year existence. Initially, all went well. In 1809, the company established two posts, one on the Missouri River at Cedar Island, and another at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Bighorn rivers. From this latter base, company trappers moved into the heart of some of the richest beaver country in the West, the Three Forks region of the Missouri River. Following Lisa's death in 1820, the partners planned

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naval officer who served with Matthew Perry in Japan, and gained some notoriety in local scientific circles for such lectures as "Thermometric Gateways to the Pole." Dorcas Bent married Lilburn Boggs, later governor of Missouri, but she died shortly after the marriage and well before Boggs became governor. See George Bird Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," *Kansas Historical Society Collections* 15 (1919-1922), 29; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 18.

[4] Gardner, "Resource Study," 20, n.18; Adjutant of the United States Military Academy to George Bird Grinnell, March 12, 1913; Grinnell Papers, Reel 41 Frame 24; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 24-5.

[5] On Lisa's early years, see Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West,* 2 vols. (New York: F. P. Harper, 1902; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 1:114-9, 127. The quote comes from page 140; William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 208.

for another grand push up the Missouri. In the fall of 1821, the company established Fort Benton, at the mouth of the Bighorn. From Fort Benton, company trappers again probed the Three Forks country. Initially, all went well. However, disaster struck in 1823 when Blackfeet ambushed the main brigade commanded by Robert Jones and Michael Immell. Both Jones and Immell died during the fight. The company lost two valuable field commanders, and nearly $16,000 in fur. These losses, increased competition from John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, and trouble with the Arikara Indians, forced Missouri Fur back to the lower river again. By 1824, the company was bankrupt.[6]

Charles Bent got his first lessons in business as an employee of Missouri Fur. Although he may have been clerking for Missouri Fur as early as 1818, the first definitive date for his presence on the Missouri River is 1824. On May 13, James Kennerly, a company employee at Council Bluffs wrote, "2 Keel Boats arived from upper Missouri of the M.F. Co. – The 2 McDonels, Been, Bent & Papin….Mr. Bent presented us with 10 Buffalow Tongues of good quality."[7] Bent's role in the company is unclear. Although he may have served with Jones and Immell, there is no direct evidence for this.[8]

Former Missouri Fur men, including Charles Bent, formed Pilcher & Company in 1825.[9] Why Bent became a partner is unknown, as is his day-to-day

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[6] Chittenden, *Fur Trade,* 1:141-151; John E. Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher: Fur Trader and Indian Agent* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 40-1, 59; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 43.
[7] 'Diary of James Kennerly, 1823-1826,' 69, ed. Edgar B. Wesley, *Missouri Historical Society Collections* 6 (1928-1931): 41-97
[8] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 31.
[9] The other partners included Lucien Fontenelle, Andrew Drips, and William Vanderburgh. All would have notable careers as mountain men. See Harold Dunham, "Charles Bent," in *The*

role in the new concern. Perhaps he demonstrated his clerking abilities while employed by Missouri Fur. More probable, though, he used his family connections to come up with a share of the initial startup capital for the company, which totaled $7712.82.[10]

Pilcher & Company fell apart by 1827. There was simply too much competition on the Missouri. Trying to squeeze into the spaces left by the Western Department of the American Fur Company was difficult. In addition to the Astor behemoth, Pilcher and his men sparred with Ashley's company, as well as numerous independent French outfits based in St. Louis. Pilcher was stretched perilously thin – three hundred employees covering a thousand miles of river. In addition to logistical problems, credit - an absolute necessity in the fur trade - was tight. As the American Fur Company continued its inexorable march towards monopoly on the river, Pilcher had two options: absorption by the AFC, or abandoning the Missouri and plunging into the Rocky Mountain trade. Pilcher chose the latter, and failed miserably.[11]

A disastrous 1827 Rocky Mountain expedition bankrupted Pilcher & Company, forcing its partners to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The Pilcher & Company caravan left the summer rendezvous with a paltry twenty packs of beaver, hardly enough to keep the company solvent.[12] By autumn, Pilcher &

Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 2: 31 (cited hereafter as *MMFTFW*); Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 61. .

[10] Lavender, *Bents Fort*, 43; Gardner, "Resource Study," 28.

[11] Lavender, *Bents Fort*, 31; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 64-5.

[12] J. P. Cabanné to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., September 23, 1828, Chouteau Collection, Microfilm, Reel 14 Frame 826 (cited hereafter as CC).

Company ceased to exist.[13] They "have broken up," J.P. Cabanné wrote Pierre Chouteau, Jr. Cabanné indicated that some of the partners, and "Perhaps Charles Bent," wanted to return to the mountains.[14] However, if they went back, they would not return as independent traders, but as employees of the American Fur Company.

Despite the failures of Missouri Fur and Pilcher & Company, Bent's years of employment were not wasted, for he had gained important insights into the inner workings of the fur trade. How much he learned from his own observation and how much he learned from Pilcher is impossible to say; but Charles would have been wise to observe the man's experiences. Pilcher had seen the fur trade from all angles. In St. Louis, he learned how to unload, handle, and store furs properly, as well as the methods of auctioneers and buyers, as well as the vagaries of banking, credit and finance. Courting Eastern outfitters or their Missouri subsidiaries was also crucial. Playing up longstanding familial or business acquaintances could mean the difference between a timely loan and bankruptcy, between marketing the year's haul of peltry in New York and watching it rot in a St. Louis warehouse. Furthermore, unstable markets in Missouri, New York, and Europe could cut deep into annual profits, while reliable merchants and wholesalers were critical to success. These were some of the lessons Charles Bent would have obtained, both from his father, and from his employment by the fur companies. With the Missouri

[13] On the 1827 expedition, see Dunham, "Charles Bent," 32-3; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 48, 83-7; Sunder 65-6; Pilcher to Eaton, in *Message of the President*, 8-9. On the possibility of William Bent accompanying his brother see, Samuel P. Arnold, "William Bent," in *MMFTFW,* 6: 63.
[14] Cabanné to Chouteau, October 14, 1828, CC, Reel 14 Frame 898.

River blocked by Astor, the Bent brothers turned towards the burgeoning markets of northern Mexico to seek their fortunes.[15]

Ceran St. Vrain's family held an even higher place in St. Louis society than that occupied by the Bents. His grandfather, the Chevalier Pierre Charles de Hault de Lassus de Luzière, was a royal councilor to Louis XVI until the destruction of the monarchy during the French Revolution. Ceran's uncle, Charles de Hault de Lassus served as lieutenant governor of the Louisiana Territory from 1799 until 1803. Jacques Marecellin Ceran de Hault de Lassus de St. Vrain, Ceran's father, a former French naval officer, immigrated to North America in 1795, and settled in St. Louis. Jacques also held numerous minor civic positions, and speculated in land grants. On May 2, 1796, he married Marie Felicite. The couple settled at Spanish Lake in St. Louis County. Here, Marie gave birth to Ceran St. Vrain on May 5, 1802. Jacques died on June 22, 1818. Following his father's death, Ceran entered the fur business.[16]

After his father's death, Ceran lived for a time in the home of Bernard Pratte, a prominent St. Louis merchant and fur trader. Pratte had excellent connections within the city's French mercantile community, most notably through marital ties to the Chouteau family. Such ties were crucial to anyone hoping to succeed in the St. Louis fur trade. Not only did the Chouteaus have deep pockets,

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[15] Dunham, "Charles Bent," 33; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 28, 34.
[16] Harold Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," in *MMFTFW*, 5:297; Gardner, "Resource Study," 31-2 (the quote is from p. 31); Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 49; Paul Augustus St. Vrain, *Genealogy of the Family of Delassus and St. Vrain,* 14, 19, in History Files, #97, 'Ceran St. Vrain," New Mexico State Records Collection and Archive, Santa Fe (there are no page numbers in St. Vrain's account, rather the family members are listed numerically).

refined social skills, and a keen business sense, their extended family was enormous. Most of the city's upper crust was related in some way to the family. Anyone seeking to get into business solicited investment capital from the Chouteaus. Ceran's new guardian was one of these Chouteau partners. A one-third owner in Berthold, Chouteau and Pratte, Bernard was a pivotal player in the fur trade. In 1822, Astor's American Fur Company established the western branch of its empire in St. Louis, buying pelts from Pratte's company, and acting as an occasional outfitter in return. In 1823, Jean Pierre Cabanné joined Berthold, Chouteau, and Pratte; the new company took the name Bernard Pratte & Company. By 1827, the company became the sole western agent for American Fur, further solidifying its position within the business.[17]

Ceran learned the fur trade from Pratte. Entering the business in December of 1822, Ceran clerked for nearly two years. His name appears frequently in the Bernard Pratte & Company ledger books. The charges were generally petty - $1 for a pair of gloves, for example –sometimes larger. On October 25, 1823, his name appears alongside a charge of $31.87 for shoes, drab cloth, and thread. However, his time as a clerk was short-lived. While the exact circumstances surrounding the decision are unknown, by the fall of 1824, Ceran St. Vrain quit the employ of Bernard Pratte & Company. Mounted upon a "fine saddle," and

[17] ShirleyChristian, *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty that Ruled America's Frontier* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004), 225, 252-3, 263; Jay Gitlin *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 21, 107.

partnered with Francois Geuṛin, St. Vrain set out for New Mexico. He had worked for Pratte for nearly two years, earning a modest $20 per month.[18]

The American fur trade in northern Mexico was in its infancy when the young man left St. Louis. By late 1821, several groups of Americans trapped the New Mexican frontier.[19] Although eastern market prices fluctuated according to consumer tastes, the rivers of the Southwest offered an inviting target for fur trappers. Portions of the country, particularly the well-watered Gila River Valley, were prime beaver country. The most notable advantage of trapping in the Southwest was the weather. On the Northern Plains and in the Rocky Mountains, trapping operations ceased during the winter. The comparatively mild climate of the desert Southwest made trapping a year-round endeavor. Fanning out along the riverbanks, men might set eight traps in a day's work, the lucky ones bringing in four or five beavers a day. These "hairy bank notes" weighed at least one and a half pounds. After skinning the beaver, the trapper stretched the pelt out to dry thoroughly. Once dry, camp attendants pressed the pelts into bales of sixty or so; these "packs" weighed close to one hundred pounds. At the height of the fur trade, prime pelts fetched between four and six dollars per pound. Known as "drab" beaver, the pelts of the Southwestern rodents were lighter in color than those of their northern relatives. The product sold well on the New York market. "Drab

[18] St. Vrain Account, Book D of Bernard Pratte & Company, May 1823, CC, Reel 1 p. 69; Ibid., October 23, 1823, Reel 1 p. 185; Ibid., August 18, 1824, Reel 1 p. 359. St. Vrain received the balance of his wages from the company on August 22, 1825. See Ibid., August 22, 1825, Reel 3, p. 143.

[19] David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 53, 57, 64.

Beaver pays better than any article from your country," wrote William B. Astor wrote an associate in 1824.[20]

The institutional weakness of the Mexican state on the northern frontier often placed American trappers in an ambiguous legal position. Some Mexican officials took a dim view of the fur trade, creating a dilemma for authorities in Santa Fe. Most of New Mexico's trade derived from the United States, whether furs, textiles, or manufactured products. When policy makers in Mexico City issued directives restricting the activities of the Yankee merchants, or trappers, the New Mexicans could either submit to these edicts or ignore them and continue trade as usual. From the point of view of frustrated American traders, there seemed little consistency in Mexican trade policy, which oscillated from free trade on the one hand to arbitrary impositions, duties, and arrests on the other. In 1824, for example, authorities in Mexico City issued an edict banning Americans from trapping in New Mexico and the surrounding regions. From 1824 to 1826, however, governors Bartolomé Baca and Antonio Narbona showed little inclination to enforce the law. Yet, in 1826, Narbona suddenly changed his mind, and tried to

[20] Robert Glass Cleland, *This Reckless Breed of Men: The Trappers and Fur Traders of the Southwest* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 10, 15, 18, 24, 27; Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wootton: The Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1957, reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 44-5; Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, the Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1933), 7; Weber, *Taos Trappers*, 83; Robert M. Utley, *A Life Wild and Perilous: Mountain Men and the Paths to the Pacific* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 104; the reference to "hairy bank notes" comes from Frederick Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 88; William B. Astor to O.N. Bostwick, November 11, 1824, NYC, CC, Reel 12 Frames 302-303. Other Eastern correspondence regarding Southwestern beaver can be found in Astor to Bostwick, October 30, 1824, NYC, CC, Reel 12 Frame 301; John Jacob Astor to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., November 17, 1829, CC, Reel 16 Frame 62. This latter letter reads, in part, "I will be glad to hear that you have bought largely of the Santa Fe Beaver you know it is generally not so good as Ashley's; but as the article is very high it will answer very well."

take steps to crack down on the American beaver men. These restrictions, combined with over-trapping on the Upper Rio Grande, forced Anglos northwest towards the Great Salt Lake, and southwest to the Gila River.[21]

Most American trappers chose the northern New Mexican village of Taos as their base of operations for both economic and political purposes. The Taos Valley was a natural trade location.[22] Located at the far northern edge of New Mexico's frontier, Taos offered American trappers a number of advantages. While trappers in the Northern Rockies sold their pelts and resupplied themselves at the annual summer rendezvous, men trapping the Southern Rockies and Southwest had the luxury of well-established towns like Taos, Abiquiu, and Santa Fe at which to market their goods and refit. If so inclined, trappers wintered among the comforts of civilization, with ready access to hot food, fiery whiskey, and female companionship.[23] In addition, Taos was far from the center of government in Santa Fe. Despite occasional efforts to patrol the border, the isolation provided by the surrounding mountains made it relatively easy for trading parties to enter the valley and dispose of their goods without paying duties. Smuggling was common, and it was normal for perpetrators to escape detection and punishment. For all these reasons, George Frederick Ruxton, an English traveler and keen observer of

[21] Weber, *Taos Trappers,* 62-79.
[22] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 59.
[23] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 59; Weber, *Taos Trappers,* 81.

mountain life, called the settlements of New Mexico "the paradise of mountaineers."[24] It was to Taos, that St. Vrain and Guerin headed.

St. Vrain and Guerin's venture into the business of outfitting trappers lasted less than a year. The men left St. Louis in November of 1824, and reached Taos after what St. Vrain called, "a long and trublesum voiage of five months."[25] Mexican officials at San Miguel del Vado took note of their arrival in late March. Governor Baca wrote the alcalde of San Miguel, ordering him to inform the new arrivals that they must first travel to Santa Fe to pay import duties on their goods. In addition, the Governor forbade the men from trapping. St. Vrain and Guerin had no intention of trapping. Rather, the partners counted on supplying the American trappers who used Taos as their base of operations. The realization that one could make more money from outfitting rather than trapping or hunting was an important lesson; Bent-St. Vrain made most of its profit trading, rather than fielding trapping brigades.[26]

From the beginning, St. Vrain recognized the necessity of the backing of the St. Louis merchants. In October 1824, he purchased $1413.27 worth of "sundries" from Pratte, who held a one-third interest in Ceran's ventures.[27] The partners' plans fell through quickly. St. Vrain informed Pratte, that after five weeks in Taos, "we have Sold but verry fue goods and goods is at a verry reduced price at

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[24] Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 93-4; George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 4.
[25] Ceran St. Vrain to Bernard Pratte, April 27, 1824 [1825], CC, Reel 12 Frame 537; Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," 298-9; Gardner, "Resource Study," 42; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 57, 60; Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 89.
[26] Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 90.
[27] Bernard Pratte and Company Book D, October 21, 1824, CC Reel 1 Page 399.

present." Despite the slow pace of business, Ceran hoped that once the trapping parties returned to Taos he could sell out his stock of goods to François LeClerc and Étienne Provost. If these plans failed, St. Vrain wrote that he intended to "buy up goods and articles" for a mule purchasing trip to Sonora. He was still optimistic that success in either enterprise would result in "verry profitable business." Whether St. Vrain outfitted trappers or traded for mules, he would do so without François Guerin. The two men dissolved their partnership, St. Vrain informed Pratte, "for reasons to tedius to mention." Guerin returned to St. Louis, bringing with him some mules and beaver pelts which he sold to Pratte.[28]

St. Vrain was not without a partner for long, however. After the dissolution of his partnership with Guerin, Ceran apparently worked alone for a short time. In 1825, he outfitted one or two Taos-based trapping parties. In July he wrote his mother that he had "equipt some men to goe trapping thinking it will be the most profitable for me I have Sold the greater part of my goods a verry good profit…the men that I have equipt is all the best kind of traders, if they make a good hunt, I will doe verey good business."[29] The leader of one of these parties was Thomas L. Smith. Reminiscing in the early 1860s, Smith told an interviewer that, "St. Vrain of St. Louis, a merchant of Taos," outfitted himself and nine other men for an expedition to the tributaries of the upper Rio Grande. The paths of Smith and St.

[28] St. Vrain to Pratte, April 27, 1824 [1825], Chouteau Collection, Reel 12 Frame 537. Pratte bought two mules from Guerin for $75 and 25 beaver pelts at a rate of $3 per pelt, see Bernard Pratte and Company Book M, May 23 and June 15, 1825, p. 79, 95.
[29] St. Vrain to Mother, July 1825, CC, Reel 12 Frame 600.

Vrain would intersect again.[30] St. Vrain also got a new partner, Paul Baillio. Prior to coming to New Mexico around 1824, Baillio worked as an Indian trader around Fort Osage. Their partnership lasted until 1828.[31]

In late 1825 and 1826, St. Vrain began trapping, backed by an old St. Louis acquaintance, Bernard Pratte's son, Sylvester.[32] During this time, Pratte financed three separate trapping ventures. Bernard Pratte & Company's entry into the Southwestern fur trade was auspicious. Although the company helped underwrite St. Vrain's first trip to New Mexico, Pratte had never sent men directly to the region. His son's arrival marked the first time a major fur company took the field in search of drab beaver.[33] The first party, consisting of twelve or thirteen men trapped the headwaters of the Rio Grande. Nothing is known of the second group. The third party, numbering about twenty men, headed for the country around Utah Lake, under the command of Ceran St. Vrain. No details about St. Vrain's first venture as the field commander of a fur brigade have survived.[34]

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[30] Smith had arrived in New Mexico in 1824, after a career as a trapper and trader among the Sioux and Osage. Basing himself in Taos, he led trapping parties north and west of the village. He also had the dubious distinction of constructing what was most likely the first American distillery in Taos, along with his partners James Baird, Samuel Chambers, and a man known only as "Stevens." Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 71-4. Smith's statement about St. Vrain is quoted from Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 91.

[31] Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," 299; Gardner, "Resource Study," 44-5; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 67; Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 101.

[32] For a short biography of Sylvester Pratte see David J. Weber, "Sylvestre S. Pratte," in Hafen *MMFTFW,* 6: 359-70.

[33] Utley, *Life Wild and Perilous,* 108.

[34] Gardner, "Resource Study," 45; Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 91. St. Vrain's life following his return from the Utah Lake expedition was also eventful. In the spring of 1826, he was back in Missouri, refitting for future expeditions. He also may have been residing permanently in Taos by the summer of 1826. In addition, he received a passport to trade in Sonora, although he never took the trip. Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," 300-1; Gardner, "Resource Study," 45.

While the intensification of American trapping efforts caused officials in Mexico City and Santa Fe consternation, St. Vrain and others took advantage of the inability of the regional government to restrict their activities. The vast spaces of the northern borderlands, combined with the lack of a strong Mexican military presence, made it easy for Americans to operate without legal sanction. There were many ways to get around the restrictions. Trappers banned from entering territory west of New Mexico acted as if they were returning to the United States, then, once well beyond the reach of authorities, doubled back to the restricted areas. In addition, Americans might simply assert that they purchased furs from Indian groups or native New Mexicans, and then "legally" exported their haul back to the States.[35] Furthermore, the actions of New Mexican officials themselves were sometimes suspect. In 1826, four different American trapping brigades headed west and south from New Mexico towards the Gila River. Governor Narbona, ignoring his government's 1824-1825 orders prohibiting foreign trapping, secured passports for all of the groups. He even wrote Sonoran officials asking them to aid the Americans in obtaining licenses to trap that province. Narbona's actions are not readily explicable. Maybe the Americans duped him, promising that they would avoid areas not specifically enumerated on their licenses. Perhaps the Americans bribed Narbona. Finally, the governor might simply have recognized his inability to stop the Americans, and hoped that officials elsewhere would deal with the problem. However, soon after issuing passports, Narbona changed his

[35] Utley, *Life Wild and Perilous*, 104; Weber, *The Taos Trappers*, 156, 159-160.

mind, and wrote to officials in Chihuahua and Sonora, warning of the Yankee approach.[36]

The 1826 American incursion into the Gila River country aroused the ire of both Mexican authorities and local Indian groups. Sylvester Pratte intended to participate, but illness forced him to remain in New Mexico. Instead, he backed two parties, one under the command of Miguel Robidoux, the other under William S. Williams and Ceran St. Vrain. The bands planned to trap the Gila, San Francisco, and Colorado rivers. Throughout the trapping season, rumors and the observations of Mexican authorities placed the Americans all over the map, from the Zuñi villages to the copper mines at Santa Rita, to the vicinity of Tucson.[37]

Initially, these parties operated with official sanction from the authorities in Santa Fe. On August 29, 1826, the governor issued a passport to Williams, "Seran Sambrano," thirty-five men, and servants granting them the right to "pass to the state of Sonora for private trade." He further ordered that, "none are to offer any embarrassment on this march."[38] However, only two days after issuing the passports Narbona did an about face and wrote to the governor of Sonora, warning that one hundred men were about to descend upon the rivers of the province "to the known injury of our public treasury, in infraction of our laws." In the same letter,

[36] Ibid., 114-5.
[37] Gardner, "Resource Study," 46; Thomas Maitland Marshall, "St. Vrain's Expedition to the Gila in 1826," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 19 (1916), 255; Utley, *Life Wild and Perilous*, 106; Weber, *The Taos Trappers*, 112.
[38] Quoted in Marshall, "St. Vrain's Expedition," 253.

he lamented his inability to prevent their coming. He lacked the necessary cavalry, he wrote, to adequately patrol his own frontier.[39]

Narbona was not the only Mexican to take umbrage at the American presence on the Gila. From El Paso, James Baird wrote Mexican officials warning about the intentions of the trappers. Their presence, he claimed, constituted a great danger to Mexican interests. In the first place, the party's presence violated national laws banning foreigners from trapping in Mexican territory. Furthermore, not only would their actions potentially decimate the region's beaver population - "the most precious product this territory produces" - but every pelt exported to the United States meant money taken away from the Mexican treasury. The Americans were belligerent, Baird wrote. They displayed "such arrogance and haughtiness that they have openly said that in spite of the Mexicans, they will hunt beaver wherever they please," and that, "they are carrying powder and balls, in consequence of which no one is able to restrain them." Baird concluded that it was the duty of every loyal Mexican citizen to take any action necessary to protect the territorial and economic integrity of the republic.[40]

Baird's letter helped set in motion a flurry of communications between Mexican authorities denouncing the American trappers and ordering local officials to be on the lookout for them. St. Vrain's movements and day-to-day activities are largely a mystery. Undoubtedly, he and his men were near Tucson, trading with the Maricopa Indians in October of 1826. Although the Maricopas stole a number

[39] Quoted in Ibid., 258.
[40] Ibid., 256-7.

of blankets and mules from the trappers, the outnumbered Americans could offer little resistance. St. Vrain's party left the village when the Indians sent a courier to Tucson, alerting the commandant of the presidio to the American presence. The commandant sent eight men to investigate the situation. When the Mexicans arrived, the Indians reported that the trappers were gone, headed into the Apache country. The soldiers retired to Tucson. Other than that, few specifics are known. St. Vrain's men returned to New Mexico, where Pratte immediately began preparing another expedition for the fall. Pratte's second party, under Robidoux, fared far worse. Indians, either Apaches or Yavapais, killed twenty-seven of the brigade's thirty men.[41]

In the autumn of 1827, stung by the Robidoux disaster, Pratte organized an expedition to recoup his losses. Among those he recruited were a number of men bound to become famous in the annals of the western fur trade, including Old Bill Williams, Thomas L. Smith, and Milton Sublette. Ceran St. Vrain accompanied the party as clerk.[42] From Taos, they traveled north along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains until they reached the headwaters of the North Platte. Here the party divided. Thomas Smith set out on his own to trap the Big Sandy, where he met with some success, until a band of Arapaho Indians cut his trail. Rather than try to salvage his traps and pelts, Smith rode back towards the party's rendezvous

[41] Ibid., 257; Cleland, *Reckless Breed of Men,* 258; Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 121; Utley, *Life Wild and Perilous,* 106.
[42] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 74-5. For a brief introduction of the expedition see Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," 301-3; Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 169-172. A document in the Mexican Archives of New Mexico lists the men accompanying Pratte "to the borders of the Mexican Federation." Ceran is listed among the men simply as "St. Vrain." Manuel Martínez to Manuel Armijo, April 7, 1827, Mexican Archives of New Mexico, Reel 6 Frame 851.

point in North Park. Meanwhile, the main party trapped the headwaters of the North Platte, before turning west to rendezvous with Smith. Some time during the expedition, Pratte fell ill with an unknown malady. He died in North Park, sometime between September 1 and October 1.[43] St. Vrain took up his pen, "with a trembling hand," to inform the young man's father of the event. Ceran stayed by Pratte's side "until the Last moment of his Life, and all the assistance I could give him was of noe youse." Pratte did not suffer long. St. Vrain wrote that, "his Sickness Lasted but a very few days." Pratte's death momentarily staggered St. Vrain, who related that he had never felt such a dreadful sense of loss in his entire life. Still, he wrote Bernard, "it is usles for me to Dwell so Long on that unfortunate subject, it was the will of God." Even with Pratte's death, the expedition had to press forward.[44]

The rest of the expedition tested Ceran's leadership abilities. After the men "had bured unfortunate P.,"[45] St. Vrain took command of the expedition, at the "special request of the whole." Beyond the question of leadership, the trappers demanded to know who would pay their wages. St. Vrain gave "his solemn promise and declamation that so far as he had or should have some property or funds of the said deceased in his hands or possession, so far they should be respectively paid their several demands." The men assented and "cheerfully" the

[43] Here the statements of St. Vrain and the deposition of the expedition's trappers differ. St. Vrain told Bernard Pratte that Sylvester "departed this Life on 1st of September," while the trappers stated that he died "about the 1st of October." For specific references see below.
[44] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 75; Ceran St. Vrain to Bernard Pratte, September 28, 1828, CC, Reel 14 Frame 842; Statement of the Trappers, September 1, 1828, CC, Reel 15 Frame 929.
[45] St. Vrain to Pratte, September 28, 1828.

party continued to trap along the present-day Colorado-Wyoming border.[46] Tragedy continued to stalk St. Vrain's men. Indians ambushed the party while it worked the headwaters of the North Platte. Thomas L. Smith was the first to fall, struck by a bullet in the lower part of his left leg, near the ankle. By the time the battle ended, the trappers estimated that nine Indians lay dead. Minus Pratte and Smith's leg, which he amputated himself, St. Vrain led the party on to the Green River where it spent "the most vigurus winter" he could remember. In April, St. Vrain determined to return to the Platte and continue trapping. From there, he planned to head downriver to market their pelts in St. Louis. However, about five days' journey down the river, the men ran across a "large Indian trace." There was no way of knowing how large the Indian band was, or whether they were hostile. Furthermore, the party's ammunition was running low. Rather than risk a fight, the men turned south, arriving in Taos in late May.[47] The loss of Sylvester Pratte squelched any future interest the St. Louis firms had in fielding trapping brigades in the Southwest. From 1828 onward, small independent operators dominated the declining beaver trade.[48]

Shortly after their return to New Mexico, St. Vrain and his men fell afoul of authorities bent upon enforcing the laws that banned American trapping in the rivers of northern Mexico. Around May 20, authorities at Abiquiu arrested some of

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[46] Statement of the Trappers, September 1, 1828; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 76.
[47]Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 84; Statement of the Trappers, September 1, 1828; St. Vrain to Pratte, September 28, 1828.
[48] Utley, *Life Wild and Perilous,* 108; Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 173. The tragedy of Pratte's death affected more people than Ceran St. Vrain. Jean Pierre Cabanné wrote Pierre Chouteau, Jr., "Young Pratte's death affects me very much and I contemplate with the greatest sorrow the deep affliction of a family to whom we are all attached." Cabanné to Chouteau, October 14, 1828; CC, Reel 14 Frame 898.

St. Vrain's men, in possession of eleven beaver pelts. St. Vrain proceeded to Santa Fe to answer for the conduct of his men. The alcalde of Santa Fe, Juan Estevan Pino, demanded to know under whose license St. Vrain had acted. Ceran replied that he acted under Pratte's, but that he did not know the specifics of the arrangement with New Mexican authorities. Pino then inquired as to the whereabouts of the rest of the party's furs. St. Vrain was disingenuous. His men lost about 150 pelts in the Rio Grande, he claimed. Besides, his men were scattered throughout the province: three men remained on the Green, three more on the San Miguel, and one absent without leave. Perhaps they could account for the rest of the pelts. Pino's suspicions of foul play were well-founded, but with no evidence to convict St. Vrain of smuggling, he returned 32 confiscated traps and dropped all charges. In reality, St. Vrain had somehow disposed of the expedition's catch already; 1,636 pounds of beaver, which eventually sold for $5706.50.[49] This would not be the last time Mexican authorities rightly accused St. Vrain or the Bents of circumventing Mexican trade laws.

During the 1820s, the Bents and St. Vrain received their first lessons in western enterprise. The young men attached themselves to men with long experience in frontier commerce. The Bents and St. Vrain received a crash course

[49] Weber, *The Taos Trappers,* 171-2. Once the figures were tallied, the expedition lost money. Despite the sale of the beaver, the deposition of the trappers noted that the "Expenses made for going for Biver" totaled $6719.41 ½, for a net loss of about $500. True to his word, St. Vrain distributed the men's pay from Pratte's estate. Among those paid, Bill Williams received $29.67 ½, Milton Sublette received $919.02 ½, while St. Vrain's cut was $1910. 02 ½. From Pratte's estate, St. Vrain received, among other things, 16 ½ yards of scarlet cloth, 3 yards of blue cloth, 1 pair of gloves, a rifle, "1 Brass Pistol without lock," one rifle barrel, 7 mules, 8 horses, and 17 traps. Bernard Pratte sent someone to investigate the proceedings. In the end, the company upheld St. Vrain's decisions, and granted him a note for his balance. See Statement of the Trappers, September 1, 1828, Reel 15 Frames 935, 937; and Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 84.

in all aspects of the fur trade, from trapping to marketing and resupply. Most importantly, they recognized that any attempt to strike out on their own required the support and patronage of well-established St. Louis firms. Ceran St. Vrain also caught a glimpse of the ways in which the political weakness of the Mexican state both aided and restricted the actions of American businessmen in the region. On the one hand, when New Mexican authorities chose to ignore policies issued from Mexico City based on local economic self-interest, the two groups got along famously. However, when New Mexican officials chose to enforce national regulations that curbed commerce, trappers like St. Vrain conducted their business outside the law, with varied degrees of success. Over the course of the following years, the success of Bent-St. Vrain depended largely upon both the maintenance of economic ties to St. Louis and their ability to adapt to the ever-changing political and economic situation in New Mexico.

Chapter 3 - Nations, Roads, and Private Interests: Bent-St. Vrain, 1829-1834

Charles Bent learned a number of important lessons about business and politics from his first experience on the Santa Fe Trail in 1829. Most practically, he learned the craft of freighting on the High Plains: the route of the trail, the location of timber and waterholes, that oxen were a viable alternative to mules while crossing the prairies. In addition to these necessary skills, Bent learned important lessons about politics and the role of the state in the borderlands. The states, American and Mexican, failed to extend much of a reach over the region between the Missouri frontier and New Mexico. The vast sweep of country between Independence, Missouri and Santa Fe was largely a political no man's land as far as both governments were concerned. Indian tribes held sway, and traders learned to resist or accommodate them as the situation dictated, for neither government showed much of an inclination to protect trading caravans along the Santa Fe Trail. However, the lack of government control over the plains, especially on their western edge, presented traders like Bent with opportunities. Few troops and little official oversight made it easier to smuggle goods into New Mexico, a game that the Bent's and St. Vrain became adept at playing. Finally, Bent learned to appeal to national and regional interests in order to advance his own fortunes. Although he generally ignored American officials, Bent appealed to the government when it best suited his economic interests. It took Bent years to exploit

fully these opportunities, but in 1829, he recognized both the dangers and possibilities of borderlands commerce in an area of weak state presence.

Recognition of the geographical affinity and the economic profits that tied Missouri to New Mexico gained the attention of some American politicians from the 1820s through the Mexican-American War. However, with the exception of the 1829 expedition, the realization of the Santa Fe trade's potential by those in the halls of power did not necessarily translate into direct action by the government on behalf of the prairie merchants. Geography, the U.S. Consul in Santa Fe wrote to his superiors in 1843, predestined the strengthening of ties between his nation and Mexico. "The Geographical situation," Manuel Alvarez claimed, "and the interests of the two Republics, seem to me, to indicate that there should always be an intimate intercourse and relation between them." Despite the "uninhabitable and immense prairies that intervene between the state of Missouri and Santa Fe," the route between the two points was a natural corridor of trade, "the best upon the continent," he claimed. Water, grass, and an abundance of the "finest meats" ensured the success of the caravans plying the Mexican Road.[1] Over this trace, from Santa Fe, flowed a wealth of silver bullion, beaver pelts, and livestock. Every year, observers noted, "This trade is increasing in importance and profit." In 1832, Secretary of War Lewis Cass informed President Andrew Jackson that the Missouri-New Mexico trade measured approximately $300,000, a paltry sum by

[1] Manuel Alvarez to James Buchanan, July 1, 1843; Consular Dispatches, Santa Fe.

national standards yet a bonanza by frontier ones.[2] Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri emerged as the Senate's greatest champion of western interests. Keen to the needs of the Santa Fe traders, he exerted himself tirelessly to support a detailed survey of the trail, establish an American consulate in Santa Fe, and to provide military protection for the caravans through Indian country.[3]

In the absence of an American or Mexican military presence, the tribes of the Southern Plains presented the greatest potential threat to the safety of merchants along the Santa Fe Trail. Because of their vulnerable position, veteran frontier traders recognized the necessity of good relations with the region's Indian groups. A. P. Chouteau, for one, wrote the Secretary of War, that although "It is an acknowledged fact that the nearest and best route to Santa Fe is up the Arkansas River; the safety of navigation must however be secured by treaties with the Wild Indians or else the lives of traders would be in imminent danger."[4] However, as the volume of trade increased, so did the potential for violent conflict with Indian tribes. Some observers felt that the fault for the rising number of conflicts lay with the traders as well as the country's native inhabitants. Instead of cultivating useful trade relations, Josiah Gregg claimed, some traders went out of their way to antagonize Indians, even murdering them in cold blood. Such acts accomplished

[2] John Daugherty to Lewis Cass, November 19, 1831, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm, Reel 883; Lewis Cass to Andrew Jackson, February 8, 1832, in *Message of the President of the United States Concerning the Fur Trade and the Inland Trade to Mexico*, 22nd Cong., 1st. Sess. Sen. Ex. Doc. 90.
[3] Seymour V. Connor and Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Broadcloth and Britches: The Santa Fe Trade* (College Station: Texas A & M University Presss, 1977), 46-67.
[4] A. P. Chouteau to Lewis Cass, November 12, 1831, CC, Reel 19 Frame 48.

nothing but retributive raids by aggrieved tribesmen.[5] The further west the caravans went, the greater the risk of Indian raiding. Even if American troops accompanied traders to the international border, it was still two hundred fifty miles to Santa Fe, and Mexican authorities were unable to provide much in the way of aid and protection.[6] By 1829, the increasing frequency of raids along the western parts of the trail finally compelled the American government to act. For the first time, U.S. troops escorted the traders as far as the Arkansas River.[7]

Charles Bent's peers elected him captain of the 1829 Santa Fe convoy. The party was small by later trail standards. Estimates of its total makeup ranged from thirty-six to thirty-eight wagons, and sixty to seventy-nine men.[8] While encamped at Round Grove, the company came together to elect its officers. Typically, such occasions were scenes reminiscent of election days back East. The party gathered, and in true Jacksonian fashion set about debating the merits of each candidate. Stump speaking and impassioned harangues followed as adherents of each nominee

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[5] Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 10; Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 163, 165; Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 16; Paul Horgan, *Josiah Gregg and His Vision of the Early West* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979), 55.

[6] On military escorts and the need for mounted troops on the plains, see Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail*,25-27, 40; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 233, 240-1, 320; Thomas P. Moore to William Medill, May 14, 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm, Reel 884.

[7] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 165; Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail*, 26. For surveys of the 1829 expedition see Connor and Skaggs, *Broadcloth and Britches*, 80-6; Otis E. Young, *The First Military Escort on the Santa Fe Trail, 1829* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1952).

[8] William Waldo stated that the caravan had thirty-six wagons and sixty men; Philip St. George Cooke numbered thirty-seven wagons and seventy men; David Lavender mentions thirty-eight wagons and seventy-nine men. See William Waldo, "Recollections of a Septuagenarian," *Missouri Historical Society: Glimpses of the Past* 5 (1938), 73; Cooke, "Journal," in "Documents Relating to Major Bennett Riley's Escort of the Santa Fe Traders," transcript by Dale L. Morgan, Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, California, p. 9 (hereafter cited as Morgan Transcript); David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 95.

trumpeted their champion's qualifications. Bent's election was far less colorful. Another trader, David Waldo, nominated Bent for the post. The men of the party ratified the nomination by unanimous consent. Bent's election to the captaincy was a strange one, for Waldo had prior trail experience.[9]

Bent was responsible for setting the pace of the day's march, choosing a campsite each night, maintaining harmony and order among the men, and supervising the assignment of night watches and caravan defense.[10] However, the traders were an independent and unruly lot, often not well-disposed towards following orders. "Truly," Josiah Gregg wrote, "there is not a better school for testing a man's temper, than the command of a promiscuous caravan of independent traders."[11]

The typical Santa Fe caravan left the Missouri frontier in May, in order to take advantage of spring grass and to beat the humidity of the summer. After establishing their government, the party settled into a regular routine. The traders rose before dawn, ate, rounded up their stock, and hit the trail. At Council Grove, about 150 miles west of Independence, Missouri, the caravans stopped to lay in an

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[9] On electioneering, see Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 31. On Bent's nomination and election, see Philip St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army: Or Romance of Military Life* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1857), 42; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 96; Waldo, "Recollections," 73. Lavender points out that previous historians, notably George Bird Grinnell, took Bent's election as captain as evidence that the 1829 trip was not his first to New Mexico. However, such a contention is false. Besides, Lavender writes, "inexperienced men were sometimes made captains or head scouts without experience in the area of travel." Jedediah Smith is the most famous example of this; he captained an 1831 caravan to Santa Fe; see Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 408, note 6.

[10] Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 31; Young, *First Escort,* 75.

[11] Gregg, *Commerce,* 57-8. Such a firsthand account contradicts Bernard De Voto's assertion that, "This was the commerce of the prairies, not a migration of individualists, and the best procedures were enforced;" Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (Boston: Little, Brown Company, 1943; reprint, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 250.

extra stock of wood for the journey (principally for spare axles). In the evening, the freighters formed their wagons into a square and, if in hostile Indian country, secured the oxen and mules inside, while the men slept outside the improvised corral. This routine continued for approximately seven to eight weeks until the party reached Santa Fe. Parties returning from Santa Fe with lighter wagons often made the trip back to Missouri in around 40 days.[12]

Joined by four companies of the 6th United States Infantry, Major Bennett Riley commanding, the caravan departed for New Mexico in June. Except for a few cases of diarrhea, the expedition reached the international border without incident. Here, Riley halted, for he was under orders not to cross the Arkansas. However, he informed his superiors that he intended to wait along the river for the return of the traders from Santa Fe. In early July, the two groups parted ways.[13]

Once Bent's caravan crossed the international border on July 10, it moved beyond the legal reach of the American state, for Riley could no longer protect the traders. Aided by some Army teams and wagons, the entire party crossed without incident, and encamped on the opposite bank. The following afternoon, they continued south. Indians struck the caravan among the sand hills about six miles

[12] Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 23-60; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 45, 86; Susan Shelby Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847,* edited by Stella Drumm with foreward by Howard R. Lamar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 16;Edwin L. Sabin, *Kit Carson Days,1809-1868,* with an introduction by Marc Simmons, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 1: 16; Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail,* 19.

[13] Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail,* 25; Cooke, "Journal," Morgan transcript p. 13; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 98; Bennett Riley to Henry Atkinson, June 9, 1829, Morgan Transcript p. 54; Charles Bent and David Waldo to Bennett Riley, July 10, 1829, quoted in Young, *First Escort,* 179-80.

south of the border.[14] Before the traders crossed, Riley had advised them to stick together, and not to stray from the wagons. The traders took few precautions. Deep sands bogged down their wagons, making it difficult to maintain any semblance of order. Within a short time, the wagon train was spread out over the course of a mile. Despite Bent's precaution of dispatching sixteen men as an advance guard, William Waldo recalled that when the Indians struck, "our surprise was complete." Concealed in deep ravines throughout the sand hills, the attackers "seemed to spring out of the ground like swarms of locusts."[15]

The traders estimated their attackers at between four and five hundred mounted warriors. The Comanches had already killed and scalped one member of the advance guard, but before the Indians swept down on the wagon train, the traders brought a small cannon into use. The fire from the gun arrested the Indian advance. Meanwhile, the traders dug in for a siege. Charles then sent a party of nine men with a message urging Riley to come to their aid.[16]

Heedless of his orders not to cross the international border, Riley immediately put his men in motion, and the soldiers began crossing the river around seven in the evening. Although the Arkansas was nearly 600 yards wide and six feet deep in places, the troops crossed safely, and commenced a moonlit march to relieve the traders. The advance companies

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[14] Cooke, "Journal," July10-11, 1829; Morgan Transcript p. 15-6.
[15] Waldo, "Recollections," 64, 73; George Bent to George Hyde, June 27, 1914; George Bent Papers, Box 4 Folder 32, Coe Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (cited hereafter as GBP-Yale).
[16] Young, *First Escort*, 89-90; Waldo, "Recollections," 73-4.

reached the wagons after midnight. Cooke found the situation less threatening than Bent's men reported, estimating the number of Indians as "probably not greater than fifty." Apparently unaware of the arrival of Riley's men, the Indians prepared to attack again, but fell back after hearing the bugler sound reveille. Before withdrawing to the river, Riley's men accompanied the traders a few miles deeper into Mexico to make sure the immediate Indian threat was over.[17]

The traders attempted to convince Riley to accompany them to Santa Fe. The presence of the international border should not hinder the officer from acting further on their behalf, they contended. Bent and Waldo appealed to patriotism, precedent, national interest, self-interest, in an attempt to sway the officer. Cooke recorded in his journal that Bent "presented the Commanding officer a lengthy paper," begging him to carry on.[18] The petition is a remarkable document, overflowing with florid and unctuous prose. Beginning with the recognition of "the delicate ground" upon which Riley now stood – literally the soil of a sovereign nation – Bent pleaded with the major to reconsider. Another attack by the "hostile and ferocious" Indians seemed imminent. If they were this aggressive along the Arkansas, how much worse would they be the deeper the caravan traveled into Mexico? No matter that Riley's orders forbade him from crossing the Arkansas in the first place; Andrew Jackson had not let orders deter him from crossing into Spanish Florida to chastise the Seminoles. The traders went on to mix their own

[17] Young, *First Escort,* 98-101; Cooke, "Journal," July 11, 14, 1829, Morgan Transcript p. 16-8.
[18] Cooke, "Journal," July 14, 1829, Morgan Transcript p. 17-8.

self-interest with an appeal to Riley's emotions. They purchased their goods on credit, they declared. If the caravan did not go through, the traders would have nothing with which to pay off their creditors. Furthermore, relatives had invested in the enterprise. Failure could impoverish entire families, causing "our wives and children [to] be cast upon the cold charities of [a] friendless world." Riley need have no fear of arousing Mexican anger, the petitioners continued. After all, the United States played a pivotal role in Mexican independence by acknowledging the fledgling republic when the European powers refused to. Without a doubt, "the names of Washington, Clay and Jackson [are] as familiar to them as their own celebrated Hidalgo, Victoria and Guerrero." If an appeal to Mexican memory did not suffice, the authors of the petition pointed out, Indians raided New Mexico as well. Should the troops continue on, the citizens of Santa Fe "would receive you with open arms." The force of Mexican arms alone was insufficient to protect a trade that brought such benefit to the two republics. Finally, the petitioners gave Riley a history lesson. If the New Mexican authorities resented his presence, the officer need only remind them that Spanish and Mexican officials had violated the territorial integrity of the United States by crossing the Arkansas to parlay with tribes north of the river.[19] In this situation, Bent appealed to the American State to extend its power into the Southwestern Borderlands, even if it meant violating Mexican territorial sovereignty. Riley did not budge. The caravan proceeded to Santa Fe without his troops.[20]

[19] Santa Fe Company to Riley, July 13, 1829; Morgan Transcript, p. 43-6.
[20] Riley to Santa Fe Company, July 14, 1829, Morgan Transcript p. 47.

The Bent wagon train's Indian troubles did not end after the engagement in the Arkansas sand hills. William Waldo recalled that the party engaged in a forty day running fight with Indians, nearly to the outskirts of Santa Fe. Although augmented by a contingent of 120 Mexicans, American trappers eventually had to escort the caravan to Taos. From there, the traders moved on to Santa Fe.[21]

Not only was Bent anxious to avail himself of American aid when necessary, he hoped to obtain the aid of the Mexican state by arranging an escort of local troops on the return trip to the Arkansas crossing. Riley himself attempted to secure aid for the traders when he wrote Governor José Antonio Chavez that Charles Bent "is a gentleman of the first respectability in our own country" and urged Chavez to assist the traders on their trip north. Riley stressed the mutually beneficial nature of the prairie trade, and hoped that Chavez would "feel an equal interest with the United States, and give it [the caravan] all the protection and assistance in your power whilst in your territory." The threat of Indian depredations, the major warned, was still imminent; they had been "very outrageous on both sides of the Line, and my Government have determined to protect it [commerce] on this side of the line – I hope therefore that the Trade is of such importance to Mexico that it will induce your Excellency to adopt a similar

[21] Waldo, "Recollections," 64; Young, *First Escort,* 140-1. Lavender assumes that Ceran St. Vrain was among the rescuing party. Based on Lavender's assumption that Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain met during the winter of 1827-8 on the Green River, this was at least the second time the future partners met. Lavender bases this assumption upon the fact that St. Vrain was in Taos in July, and acted as a witness to a wedding. If fellow Americans were in danger, Lavender writes, St. Vrain would surely have been among those riding to their rescue; see Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 408, note 7.

course."[22] Chavez answered Riley's call to aid the traders. He wrote the American officer that he willingly offered Bent the "small resources" of the New Mexican government, and arranged for an escort under the command of Antonio Jose Viscarra, "one of the most outstanding and highly thought of military men in the Mexican Republic." Viscarra wrote to Riley that communication and cooperation between the United States and Mexico was crucial to the safety of commerce on the plains, an assessment Bent would have heartily agreed with at the time.[23] Viscarra, a body of about 200 Mexican soldiers and Indian auxiliaries, the traders, thirty American trappers, and a group of Spaniards expelled from Mexico, made up the body of the caravan on its return to the Arkansas.[24] Although Riley's column had left the Arkansas for the United States, a messenger from Viscarra's escort reached them before they got very far. The major returned to the river, and met the escort. After fraternizing with the Mexican commander and reviewing the Mexican troops and Indian auxiliaries, Riley and the traders headed back to Missouri, carrying goods valued at nearly $240,000.[25]

By the end of 1830, the Bents and St. Vrain put their decade's worth of experience into action, forming a partnership that lasted until the late-1840s. The year began with the men back in St. Louis, outfitting for the spring caravan to New

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[22] Riley to Chavez, July 10, 1829, Morgan Transcript, p. 40, 62.
[23] Chavez to Riley, September 17, 1829, Morgan Transcript, p. 49; Young, *First Escort,* 195; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 108-9; Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail,* 29-31.
[24] Cooke, "Journal," October 11, 1829, Morgan Transcript p. 30.
[25] Young, *First Escort,* 139-40; Cooke, "Journal," October 13, 1829, Morgan transcript p. 31;Harold Dunham, "Charles Bent," in *The Mountain Men and Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 2: 36 (cited hereafter as *MMFTFW)*; Sterling Evans, "Eastward Ho!: The Mexican Freighting and Commerce Experience Along the Santa Fe Trail," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (1996-1997), 252.

Mexico. St. Vrain continued to cultivate his longstanding ties with Bernard Pratte. During the spring of 1830, Ceran's name appears numerous times in the Pratte ledger books. He drew extensively on the company in April, wracking up a bill of $244.76 on the thirteenth, and signing a promissory note worth $2570.63, due in nine months. He also sold Pratte three mules, presumably purchased in New Mexico.[26] St. Vrain, along with Charles and William Bent, departed Missouri with the spring caravan. The party consisted of about 130 men, 60 of whom owned their wagons. It is possible that St. Vrain captained the party, and that he and Charles Bent were proprietors of their own wagons.[27]

The party reached Santa Fe on August 4. Along the Red River, a party of Mexican soldiers, under Viscarra rode out to meet the traders. Their object, St. Vrain wrote Pratte, "was to prevent Smuggling." The presence of the troops, "had the desired effeck," and they escorted the caravan into Santa Fe where the traders "all had to pay full duteys, which amounts to about sixty percent on cost." St. Vrain's wagon passed quickly through customs, but business, he wrote, was "verry Slow, So Slow that it was discureging, I found that it was imposible to meet my payments if I continued retaling." He sold his goods "hole Saile," instead. Upon reaching Santa Fe, Charles Bent applied for a passport and trading license to proceed to Chihuahua and Sonora. He received the license on September 27, 1830. However, it appears that instead of going further into Mexico, Bent returned to

[26] St. Vrain's Account, April 13, 1830, Book Q of Bernard Pratte and Company, CC, Reel 4; St. Vrain's Account, April 19, 1830, Book Q of Bernard Pratte and Company, CC; St. Vrain's Account, May 8, 1830, Book Q of Bernard Pratte and Company, CC.
[27] Dary, *Santa Fe Trail,* 124, note 2; Harold Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," in *MMFTFW* 5: 130; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 130.

Missouri after St. Vrain loaned Charles the use of a wagon.[28] Although St. Vrain's business had initially been "So Slow," he returned a decent profit on the trip. He sent 953 beaver pelts back to Pratte for sale, along with some mules. The pelts sold for $4.50 apiece.[29]

Following these transactions, Charles and St. Vrain discussed the possibilities of forming a permanent business arrangement. The prospects for trade in New Mexico were low during the fall of 1830. However, by keeping one foot in the Santa Fe trade and one in the fur trade, trade partners might succeed. The partnership between Charles Bent and St. Vrain made sense. David Lavender offers the best summary of the rationale behind Bent's thinking, "Charles, too, had learned a lesson: continual time on the trail precluded the profits a man might make if he were free to regulate selling according to fluctuating demands. Particularly was this true of a person operating on short-term credit; he had to dump his goods fast and return home to pay off his notes. The obvious answer, provided enough volume could be handled, was a partnership in which one member stayed in New Mexico while the other looked after transport."[30] In addition to his St. Louis contacts, St. Vrain had long experience in New Mexico. He spoke Spanish, and had friends in Taos and Santa Fe. Furthermore, he knew both the

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[28] St. Vrain to Bernard Pratte, September 14, 1830, CC, Reel 16 Frames 1068-9; Bent Passport, September 27, 1830, Hacienda Records, Comisaría Substituta, Aduan Nacional Territorial, Guías, MANM Reel 12 Frames 1140-3; Harold Dunham, "Charles Bent," in *MMFTFW,* 2:37.
[29] St. Vrain to Pratte, September 14, 1830, CC, Reel 16 Frame 1069; St. Vrain's Account, November 13, 1830, Book Q of Bernard Pratte and Company, CC, Reel 4. One observer noted that St. Vrain turned a 700% profit. However, he observed, such profits were not typical. "Believe that," he wrote, "out of a hundred and fifty, a hundred will break their necks. The trips to Mexico are the most dangerous there are." See Theodore Papin to P. M. Papin, February 24, 1831, CC, Reel 17 Frame 609.
[30] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 134.

mercantile and fur business. Bent understood the fur trade. He had proved himself a competent caravan captain, as well. Keeping one man in New Mexico to oversee business, while the other shuttled goods back and forth between Santa Fe and Missouri was a more efficient way to do business.[31]

Bent put the proposal of partnership to St. Vrain. The arrangement, St. Vrain wrote Pratte, "will be to our mutual advantage." Ceran bought half of Bent's trade goods for cash. While St. Vrain stayed in New Mexico to continue trading, "Mr. Bent goes to St. Louis for to bring to this Cuntry goods for him and my Self." St. Vrain also sent $600 and a number of mules with Bent, intended as payment to Pratte. Should Pratte not want the mules, St. Vrain wished his mentor to "doe me the favor to let Mr. Bent have them." Ceran hoped that, aided by his new partnership, economic prospects would improve. Money was "verrey Scrse," in New Mexico. Trade goods still sold low. Tariff duties remained "very hie." Nevertheless, the prospects for business were still better in New Mexico than in Missouri, and the new partners intended to tap into both ends of the trade.[32]

Records for 1831-1832 indicate that the new partners continued to strengthen their ties in both Missouri and New Mexico. In January 1831, Charles Bent took out his third license for trade with the Interior States of Mexico. As in previous years, it is difficult to tell whether he actually made the trip or not. If he

[31] Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," 5: 305; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 134.
[32] St. Vrain to Pratte, January 6, 1831, Typescript, Bent St. Vrain Family Papers, Folder 1, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. The first official documentary evidence for the new partnership dates to September of 1832, in the form of a dually-signed promissory note from Santa Fe. See Hafen, "When Was Bent's Fort Built?" 110.

did, it was a rapid one, for he was in Missouri by May.[33] The lengths to which St. Vrain went to enmesh himself in the Mexican side of the company's trade became apparent in February of 1831 when he became a naturalized Mexican citizen. In addition to his new citizenship, St. Vrain established a residence in Taos.[34] In later years, both Bent and St. Vrain linked themselves further to social and economic opportunities in New Mexico. They took common-law Mexican wives, resided in Taos, and cultivated contacts with powerful politicians and businessmen. Along with these contacts, citizenship gave St. Vrain access to vast land grants. Spring found Charles back in Missouri, outfitting wagons for a return to Santa Fe. During this time, he established a new Missouri connection with the merchant brothers James and Robert Aull of Independence, who provided Bent with the credit to make his purchases.[35] The 1832 caravan consisted of about 150 men, 70 wagons, and $140,000 in merchandise. Possibly, Bent acted as captain for the trip to New Mexico.[36] He returned to Missouri in the fall, bringing bullion, mules, and furs

[33] Bent Passport, January 5, 1831, Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations, Box 3 Folder 108, Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (cited hereafter as Ritch); Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 134.
[34] Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 201-2; Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," 306; David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 188; List of Naturalized Citizens, October 30, 1831, Misc. Communications Sent by the Governor, Reel 13 Frame 448, MANM.
[35] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 94. By November, Bent had wracked up a bill for $662.18 on his account with the Aull's. See James Aull to Edward Tracy, November 3, 1832, "Letters of James and Robert Aull," ed. by Ralph P. Bieber, *Missouri Historical Society Collections* 5 (1927-1928), 279.
[36] There is some dispute about this fact. For statements that Bent acted as Captain, see Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 215-6, and Duffus, *Santa Fe Trail,* 136.

accumulated by the partners over two years. The value of the goods totaled around $190,000.[37]

The scope of Bent-St. Vrain's business grew in 1833-1834. In addition to continued participation in the commerce of the prairies, they opened a store in Santa Fe, completed construction of an imposing adobe fort on the American side of the Arkansas River,[38] and took out their first license to enter the Indian trade.[39] Charles Bent continued to hold down the Missouri end of the company's business. He took out another loan from the Aull's before proceeding to St. Louis to continue outfitting. By May 1833, signs pointed to a profitable trading season. The Aull brothers wrote an associate that, "Captain Bent is taking out a large quantity of Goods this year, report says $40,000….I am inclined to think that the trade will be better this year than usual. The goods are in fewer hands, which must be a grate advantage."[40] The traders departed Missouri, with Bent again filling the role of captain, exercising nominal command over 70 to 80 wagons. The *Missouri Republican* reported that the party made slow time at the outset, suffering "very much from the badness of the roads, caused by …rains." Soldiers accompanied the traders to the Arkansas River, and from there the traders proceeded uneventfully to Santa Fe.[41]

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[37] Barry, *Beginning of the West,* 222; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 144.
[38] For the dating controversy surrounding the Bent's arrival on the Arkansas, and the building of their various posts, see below.
[39] On the store, see Dunham, "Charles Bent," 39. On the fort and license, see below.
[40] James Aull to E. Tracy, March 28, 1833, "Aull Letters," 279-80; James and Robert Aull to Gersham Compton, May 15, 1833, "Aull Letters," 280.
[41] Duffus, *Santa Fe Trail,* 136; Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 59 (cited

In the winter of 1834, the company legally entered the Indian trade for the first time. The United States government granted Charles Bent a trading license on December 14, 1834. The license gave the company wide latitude. The license was valid for two years. It applied to twenty-nine employees, operating out of Fort William, the company's new post. Their trading territory stretched from the north bank of the Arkansas, along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains all the way to the Black Hills of Wyoming. West, company traders could legally proceed to the Bear and Colorado rivers. The government authorized Bent-St. Vrain to trade with the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Kiowas, Snakes, Sioux, and the Arickaras. Bent posted a $2000 bond for good behavior, and listed the company's trading capital at $3877.28.[42]

By 1835, the company had established a three-cornered business scheme. By trading with Missouri, New Mexico, and the Plains tribes, profits from one part of the business could offset dips in the other. Furthermore, the company delegated its tasks. Charles continued plying the Santa Fe Trail, St. Vrain oversaw the New Mexican end of the business, and William took over as the company's primary Indian trader.[43] The construction of an adobe fortress and trading post along the Arkansas River, probably between 1832 and 1834, solidified further the presence of

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hereafter as "Resource Study"); Oliva, *Soldiers,* 36; *Missouri Republican,* July 12, 1833; Dary, *Santa Fe Trail,* 136-7.

[42] *Report from the Secretary of War, with an abstract of licenses to trade with the Indians in 1834, &c*. 23rd Cong., 2nd Sess. S. doc. 69, p. 3.

[43] On the division of responsibilities, see Dunham, "Charles Bent," 39.

the partners in the region. At the very latest, Bent's Fort was operational in by 1835.[44]

In order to establish themselves as the preeminent American traders on the Arkansas, the Bents first had to remove an established competitor: former United States Army officer turned trader, John Gantt. The Army had dismissed Gantt from service, alleging that he falsified pay reports. Following his cashiering, Gantt went west to become a trader. In 1831, he and a partner received a license to trade on the Snake, Columbia and Big Horn rivers. Trapping in the winter of 1831-2 went poorly, and Gantt traveled south into New Mexico hoping to buy mules and market his furs. From Taos, he wrote the governor a letter in which he laid out his plans

[44] The dates for these events are difficult to sort out. George Bent, source of so much information on the company, is maddeningly inconsistent in his dates. He writes, for instance, that "My father…traded with the Cheyennes and Arapahos long before Bent's Fort was built" (Bent to George Hyde, May 11, 1917, Box 4 Folder 41, GBP-Yale). Bent then goes on to give multiple dates for the Company's activities during it formative years: for the construction of the stockade, his dates range from 1826 to 1829 (Bent to George Hyde, April 14, 1908, Box 1 Folder 11; Bent to Hyde, March 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder 4, both in GBP-Yale; Janet Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," *Colorado Magazine* 41 (1964), 117. Bent also the construction of Fort William, variously, from 1827 to 1832 (Bent to Hyde, January 23, 1905, Box 1 Folder 3; Bent to Hyde, February 26, 1906, Box 1 Folder 4; Bent to Hyde, April 14, 1908, Box1 Folder 11, all in GBP-Yale). George Bird Grinnell asserts that the Bents reached the area in 1824, and spent the years 1828 to 1832 building Fort William. See George Bird Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," *Kansa Historical Society Collections* 15 (1919-1922), 29, 48-9; Hafen, "When Was Bent's Fort Built?," 115. Based on George Bent's testimony, George Hyde stated that the company built their stockade by at least 1826-7; see George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 42-3, 46. David Lavender suggests that the partners could have been in the area prior to 1829, but his dates for the construction of Fort William fall between the 1832-1834 range; see Lavender, *Bent's Fort*, 70, 406, note 3. Douglas Comer, in the most recent book on the Bents, says they were "actively trading on the Arkansas River" by 1828; see Comer, *Ritual Ground*, 92. LeRoy Hafen gives the date of the construction of Fort William as 1833; see "When Was Bent's Fort Built?," 119. Indirect evidence for the 1832-4 range of construction comes from contemporary sources, including José María Martínez to Santiago Abreu, December 24, 1832, Governor's Papers, Misc. Communications from Within New Mexico, Reel 14 Frames 620-3, MANM; William Laidlaw to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., January 10, 1834, Fort Pierre Letter Book B, CC, Reel 20 Frame 724. Adding further to the confusion is that fact that, "the earliest contemporary references to a Bent establishment on the Arkansas offer no clue that would help us determine exactly which post they refer to – the picket post or the adobe fort," see Gardner, "Resource Study," 79. For a detailed summary of all the dating controversies, see Mark Lee Gardner, "Resource Study," 78-90; Hafen, "When Was Bent's Fort Built?" 105-118.

for the establishment of trade on the Arkansas. Gantt's blueprint for trade, and the potential problems he foresaw, would apply to the future operations of Bent-St. Vrain as well. First, Gantt wrote that he hoped to see the day when the United States government established "a military post in a suitable site" on the Arkansas. Such a post, he noted, would protect commerce and communications between Mexico and the United States, as well as establishing and maintaining friendship with the Indians, especially the Comanches. Bent-St. Vrain, although not eager for the presence of the military, agreed with Gantt about the suitability of the Arkansas for a trading post, and his appreciation of cultivating close ties with the regional tribes. Gantt informed the governor that the northern communities of New Mexico, especially Taos, might easily provision such a post. In later years, the Company utilized Taos as such a base for resupply. Gantt closed by soliciting the opinion of the governor on his project. He wrote, "Your ideas concerning my proposed establishment of the post on the Napeste river, together with information on the laws which regulate intercourse with the Indians of this Republic, will be received by me with the respect which shall always characterize my actions in a foreign country." The Bents and St. Vrain would not be nearly as interested in Mexican opinions of their operations, nor in the technicalities of Mexican law.[45] Gantt shuttled from Taos to the Arkansas to the North Platte and back to Taos in 1832

[45] For information on Gantt's early career see Harvey L. Carter, "John Gantt," in *MMFTFW*, 5:101-2; Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," 111-15; Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 10; John Gantt to El Jefe Politico de Nuevo Mexico, February 20, 1832, Box 4 Folder 129, Ritch. Mark Lee Gardner speculates that Gantt wanted to establish himself on the Arkansas as a way to draw the Army to the region. If the army built a fort where Gantt suggested, he might be able to secure a lucrative contract as post sutler to supplement his own trading operations. See "Resource Study," 73.

and 1833. He began construction of a wooden stockade during the winter of 1832-3, possibly along the Purgatory River. Around the same time, he entered into the Indian trade.[46]

Gantt provided not only the model for Indian trading on the Southern Plains, imitated by the Bents, but also an incentive for them to enter the region permanently.[47] Although tradition ascribes to William Bent the honor of opening white-Cheyenne trade on the Arkansas River, that distinction goes to John Gantt. He should receive credit for being the first trader in the area to use wagons instead of mules to transport trade goods, and, more importantly, to recognize the ascendency of buffalo robes as the most lucrative product of the Indian trade. Bent-St. Vrain would use wagons as well. More importantly, the Bents and St. Vrain also recognized that they would make their fortunes trading for buffalo robes from the Cheyennes, rather than for beaver pelts from American trappers. Gantt also built the first adobe post in the region, an example the partners followed with great success. Finally, contemporary sources ascribe to Gantt the dubious distinction of being the first American trader in the region to use liquor to lubricate the wheels of the Indian trade, a practice Bent-St. Vrain would also occasionally

[46] For Gantt's presence on the Arkansas, see J. P. Cabanné to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., January 12, 1832, CC, Reel 19 Frame 360; Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," 115-6.

[47] Janet Lecompte argues that Gantt's success inspired the Bent's to settle down trading operations in the region. Mark Lee Gardner takes exception to Lecompte's claims. See Gardner, "Resource Study," 76-7. Whether or not Gantt provided the catalyst for the company's move north is, I believe, largely irrelevant. For reasons discussed below, the company had any number of incentives to build where they did, incentives that had nothing to do with another operator being there first. However, the company would eventually need to remove Gantt's competition.

follow. Once again, they took advantage of preexisting forms and networks of trade, forms that they would effectively exploit in the coming years.[48]

In July 1834, William Bent, frustrated with Gantt's competition, and probably eager to impress the Arapahos and Cheyennes, ordered his men to take action.[49] In commanding this attack, Bent deviated from the Company's general pattern of accommodation and cooperation with its clients. Bent's denunciation of the federal government is also indicative of a larger trend within the history of the Company – that of ambivalence towards the government and its policies. Throughout its history, Bent-St. Vrain damned and praised the United States government by turns. They called upon it when it suited their interests and denounced or ignored it when it did not. The Arapahos and Cheyennes descended on Fort Cass to attack a party of Shoshone traders. According to another source, "Bill Bent (who never did like Comanches and Shoshones)," told the Arapahos and Cheyennes that "he would buy" any horses taken from the Shoshones.[50] An unsigned eyewitness account goes into greater detail. The Shoshones had returned from a trading trip into the Comanche country. William Bent persuaded eleven of his employees "to assist him in attacking and defeating the Snakes." The eyewitness protested Bent's plan of action, pointing out that, "the step he was about to take was in my opinion an improper one and in all probability would not meet

[48] Carter, "John Gantt," 5:108-9; Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," 115-7; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 10-1.
[49] Arnold, "William W. Bent," 69-70; Carter, "John Gantt," 5: 109-110; Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," 118-120.
[50] Interview with Tom Autobees, November 8, 1907, quoted in Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," 120.

the views of the Government." Whereas Charles Bent called upon the power of the Government to aid him and his fellow traders in 1829, William Bent allegedly responded, "Damn the Government, I do it now any how." During the attack, Bent's employees killed three Shoshones, and wounded one. Friendly fire wounded one Arapaho. The attackers scalped the dead, took prisoners in addition to 37 horses, and "many other articles such as Kettles axes ropes etc." The next day, the victors divided their spoils "by lottery." William apparently justified the attack on the basis that he believed the Shoshones were responsible for the theft of Bent-St. Vrain mules from the vicinity of Taos. More likely, he simply saw an opportunity to rid himself of Gantt's competition, and as a way to impress his Cheyenne and Arapaho customers.[51]

Located just north of the U.S.-Mexican border, Bent's Fort was in a prime position to take advantage of the many trade opportunities available in the southwest borderlands. The Upper Arkansas Valley was an established crossroads of trade and interaction between the tribes of the Southern Plains.[52] In order to support an effective post, traders needed several things: grass for their stock, wood for fuel, water, and ready access to an easy river ford. The location of the fort, in a relatively sterile portion of the Arkansas Valley, later caused Bent-St. Vrain some difficulties. Although the Arkansas River provided water, the denizens of the fort eventually had to travel to the foothills of the Rockies to cut their timber, and send

[51] Richard Cummins to William Clark, June 19, 1835, quoted in Lecompte, "Gantt's Fort and Bent's Picket Post," 120; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 10.
[52] Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 285; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 141.

their herders miles afield to find forage for their stock. In the earliest days of the company, the Cheyenne chief, Yellow Wolf, attempted to get the Bents to move their operations miles downstream to the Big Timbers of the Arkansas. The Big Timbers, Yellow Wolf pointed out, had better shelter, grass, and wood. It was also closer to the buffalo range. In spite of these advantages, the Bents chose not to relocate. There could be a number of reasons for the decision. Perhaps the Company wanted to be able to take their goods on to New Mexico from the fort by way of Timpas Creek; establishing themselves at Big Timbers would have necessitated backtracking to the Cimarron Crossing in order to follow the Santa Fe Trail southwest into New Mexico. Finally, the location of the fort had access to water, timber, grass, and a good river crossing.[53]

In addition to the natural advantages, the fort's location planted the Bent-St. Vrain in an advantageous trading position with the Cheyennes and New Mexicans. One observer noted that the Bents specifically selected the location of the fort, "as a suitable site for a place of traffic with all the wild tribes of the desert." While another noted, years later, that the fort's proprietors, "carry on a brisk trade with the surrounding tribes."[54] The Upper Arkansas was one of the major crossroads of Indian Country in the trans-Mississippi West. Although the Comanches held the country south of the river, and the Cheyennes dominated the north bank, tribes like

[53] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 45; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 141-2.
[54] Abraham Johnston, Marcellus Ball Edwards, and Philip Gooch Ferguson, *Marching With the Army of the West,* ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1936),139; Francois des Montaignes, *The Plains; being no less than a collection of veracious memoranda taken during the expedition of exploration in the year 1845, from the western settlements of Missouri to the Mexican border, and from Bent's Fort on the Arkansas to Fort Gibson, via the South Fork of the Canadian – north Mexico and north-western Texas.* Edited and with an introduction by Nancy Alpert Mower and Don Russell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 61.

the Utes, Shoshones, and occasionally Crows visited or passed through the region.[55] In addition, a location closer to the mountains enabled the partners to siphon off any beaver pelts brought south to New Mexico. The fort straddled the route of the Old Trapper's Trail that led from Taos north all the way to Fort Laramie. Furthermore, the Arkansas River Valley offered an easy thoroughfare between the post and the Missouri frontier. Writing to Manuel Alvarez, Charles Bent reported that, "The rout up the Arkansas is not surpassed by any other natural road that I have ever traveled….the trip can be performed with loaded waggons in thirty-five or forty days."[56] Bent's Fort was also within easy travelling distance of Taos and Santa Fe. Taos was especially important to Bent-St. Vrain. In addition to being home to Ceran and Charles, the village provided a place to market their furs and some of their robes. Farmers from around Taos also supplied the majority of the post's agricultural goods. The traveling scientist Frederick Wislizenus wrote that, "Little expeditions go frequently to the former city (Taos), to barter for flour, bread, beans, sugar, etc." Access to Taos and New Mexico also allowed the company to link its trade to the Santa Fe Trail, either to head back to Missouri or south into Chihuahua.[57]

The large adobe fort on the Arkansas symbolized the permanency and power of Bent-St. Vrain within the region. The partners needed a large post to

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[55] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 141-2.
[56] Nolie Mumey, *Old Forts and Trading Posts of the West: Bent's Old Fort and Bent's New Fort on the Arkansas River* (Denver: Artcraft Press, 1956), 9; Enid Thompson, "Life in an Adobe Castle," in *Bent's Old Fort* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado, 1979), 11; Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, September 19, 1842, Box 2 Folder 57, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe.
[57] Montaignes, *The Plains,* 61; Frederick Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 141; Dary, *Santa Fe Trail,* 145.

accommodate the volume of trade they expected to conduct. The edifice would provide protection in case of Indian hostilities, and serve as a reminder to both small independent traders and the Mexican government that the company intended to brook no rivals in the Upper Arkansas Valley. "The appearance of the fort is very striking," George Frederick Ruxton wrote, "standing as it does hundreds of miles from any settlements on the vast lifeless prairie, surrounded by hundreds of hostile Indians, and far out of reach of intercourse with civilized man."[58] The fort itself was constructed of adobe bricks.[59] The walls reached to a height of over twenty feet. A single large gate with two doors provided the only means of entry. The courtyard was rectangular, measuring about 100 x 150 feet. A fur press stood at the center of the courtyard. Set directly into the walls facing the courtyard were numerous rooms. The fort had rooms for trading, storage, sleeping, eating, a blacksmith shop, a carpenter's shop, and a billiard room. A large corral, topped

[58] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 140; Matt Field, *On the Santa Fe Trail,* 143-4; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 181.

[59] Mark L. Gardner gives the most thorough description of the fort's architecture, see his "Resource Study," especially 145-70. For other accounts regarding construction and various architectural aspects of Bent's Fort, see George Bent to George Hyde, April 14, 1908, Box 1 Folder 11, GBP-Yale; De Voto, *1846,* 266; Thomas Jefferson Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory,* in *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 1:161-72; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah ad the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* with an introduction by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 42-3; George Rutledge Gibson, *Journal of a Solder Under Kearny and Doniphan, 1846-1847,* ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), 317-8; Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 38-41; Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-1, 32-2, ANC; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 146-8; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 46; Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail,* 60; Montaignes, *The Plains,* 61-2; Mumey, *Old Forts,* 24; Charles Pancoast, *A Quaker Forty-Niner: The Adventures of Charles Edward Pancoast on the American Frontier,* ed. Anna Paschall Hannum, with a foreward by John Bach McMaster (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930), 196-7; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 179-80; *St. Louis Reveille,* May 17, 1846; George A. Thorson, "The Architectural Challenge," in *Bent's Old Fort* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado, 1979), 105-16; Josiah Ward, "Historic Bent's Fort and Its Founders," January 11, 1920, *Denver Post,* Box 5 Folder (I) B: 73, Cragin Collection, Starsmore Center for Local History, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

with prickly pear cactus, stood attached to the rear of the fort. Sometimes accommodating over one hundred men at the height of the business season, Bent's Fort was the largest, strongest, most imposing structure between Santa Fe and Fort Laramie. The fort attracted visitors from all over the West. From it, the partners dispatched trading parties in every direction. Bent's Fort served as an entrepot for Indian, American, and Mexican traders throughout the Southwest Borderlands.[60] The post was an inviting beacon to some, a looming, ominous presence to others.

By the mid-1830s, Bent-St. Vrain prepared to put a decade's worth of frontier experience into practice on its own behalf. The partners spent the 1820s and early-1830s learning the lessons necessary for success in the borderlands. They learned the importance of establishing a broad base of business contacts in the East and New Mexico. They discovered the importance of diversification; spreading their men and capital over three different economic enterprises. Bent-St. Vrain grafted itself onto longstanding trade networks, stretching from Missouri to the Platte and deep into Mexico. The partners also learned to implore or ignore governments when it suited the company's interest. The lack of a strong state presence in the Southwestern Borderlands brought both risks and opportunities for Bent-St. Vrain. The Bents and St. Vrain would need to remember the lessons they learned, for the company was about to plunge headlong into a world of wide-ranging and volatile markets where successful participants utilized any means at their disposal to get ahead. Bent-St. Vrain used sex, citizenship, personal

[60] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 200.

friendship, accommodation, and occasional intimidation to secure their place in the often unstable world of the Southwest Borderlands.

Chapter 4 – Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and the Indian Trade

Bent-St. Vrain was rarely master of its own destiny on the Southern Plains. In the absence of a strong governmental presence to guarantee their physical safety, the partners took a pragmatic approach to business and politics, usually recognizing the necessity of accommodating themselves to preexisting conditions. To make money and stay alive on the Great Plains, the partners had to be adaptable. Whether dealing with Indian groups or Missouri businessmen, the partners recognized the necessity of acting within well-established parameters of commerce and politics. Keen attention to the needs of their Indian customers and cultivation of kinship ties helped assure Bent-St. Vrain the lion's share of the robe trade on the Southern Plains. However, until 1840, the ties they cultivated with the Cheyennes placed company traders at risk of retaliation from Cheyenne enemies. In order to succeed in the robe trade, the partners had to rely upon close cooperation with the Indians of the Southern Plains. The maintenance of peaceful trade and political relationships stemmed directly from the social ties cultivated between white traders and Indian producers. Lacking both the time and expertise to hunt and process the robes, the company relied upon its traders to procure robes directly from the Indians themselves. Through the exchange of gifts and the cultivation of marriage ties, the white traders and their Indian clients developed an interdependent relationship that drew the whites deeper into the maelstrom of Indian politics and the Indians deeper into the world of the white-dominated market economy.

Adherence to Indian social norms guaranteed the company the majority of the Southern Plains robe trade. But the ties the company formed with one group could lead to trouble with other groups, making it imperative for the partners to tread carefully.[1]

Although the company conducted most of its trade with the Cheyennes and Arapahos, its employees traveled everywhere to trade with numerous other Indian groups. By casting their net so broadly, Bent-St. Vrain sought to maximize their profits by doing business with all comers. However, their longstanding kinship ties with the Cheyennes sometimes placed their traders in precarious positions when trading with traditional Cheyenne enemies. In addition to the Cheyennes, Bent-St. Vrain's initial trading license included the Sioux, Kiowas, Snakes, and Arikaras. Company traders traversed much of the Great Plains in search of customers. William Bent and his employees operated from the Texas Panhandle in the south, north through Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, into Wyoming and possibly even the

[1] Tanis C. Thorne, "Marriage Alliance and the Fur Trade: Bent, St. Vrain and Company, 1831-1849" (M.A. Thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1979), 18; Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War: Contrasting Forms of Intertribal Relationship Among the Historic Plains Indians," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians,* ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 99; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 88; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 476; David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 22; T. Lindsay Baker, "Beaver to Buffalo Robes: Transition in the Fur Trade," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 23 (1897), 3; Alan M. Klein, "Political Economy of the Buffalo Hide Trade: Race and Class on the Plains," in *Political Economy of the North American Indians,* 147-8; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 205.

Dakotas.[2] The company had less success with the tribes to the west, but not for lack of effort. Attempts at trade with the Navajos were spotty.[3] The partners occasionally traded with the Utes, while also supplying other traders operating in Utah and western Colorado.[4] Possibly, the company also traded with the Apaches as far south as the Gila River.

Interdependency and adaptation characterized the trade between Indians and whites on the Southern Plains. Trade initiated deep changes in the material life of Plains Indians, the scale of their hunting and robe production, and in their social and economic organization. Even though the robe trade drew Indian groups into a larger economic world of forces beyond their control – supply, demand, credit rates, international markets, whims of fashion, and the like – a loss of complete economic autonomy did not automatically translate into degradation. Tribes did not lose their cultural and political sovereignty overnight, as a direct result of trade with men like the Bents. Rather, as Howard Lamar points out, the Plains tribes traded with whites for over one hundred and fifty years, "without a notable deterioration of their culture and strength."[5] Unscrupulous white traders, toting foofaraw and bad whiskey, did not dupe Indians into such exchanges. Rather, Indian groups assumed and often embraced change. They were shrewd traders and

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[2] Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 16; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 155.
[3] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 16; Abel Baker to Peter Sarpy and Henry Fraeb, April 1, 1839, Chouteau Collection, Reel 26 Frame 44 (hereafter cited as CC).
[4] On the Company's relations with the Utes, see below. On the Company supplying other Ute traders, see Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, October 31, 1842, William E. Sublette Collection, Box 3 Folder 3, Missouri Historical Society (hereafter cited as WLSP and MHS, respectively).
[5] Klein, "Hide Trade," 137; Lamar, *Frontier Trader,* 21.

judges of goods, selecting what they could use and incorporate into their traditional lifeways, discarding the rest.[6] Perhaps Barton Barbour best characterizes the nature of these interactions. He writes,

> The fur trade demanded mutual alliance among all participants: white men did not tan buffalo robes, and Indians did not make guns, steel knives, and so on. Interdependency percolated through every aspect of life, and it characterized North America's fur trade frontier almost everywhere. In time, that interdependency corroded and vanished, mainly because it did not conform to the United States' cultural and political imperatives. Still, the trade probably had dual effects: it made Indians' lives easier, but it also necessitated a reliance on exotic products from an alien, industrializing world.[7]

Successful Indian traders required a deep familiarity with, and often an affinity for, their clients. By cultivating trade, the company's employees hoped to cultivate peace. Economic and political stability on the Plains, the partners believed, redounded to everyone's benefit. Indians outnumbered the white traders at every turn. Because of this, pragmatism dictated policy. If trappers, traders, and Indians had always been hostile, business in the West would have been impossible. Indian traders navigated between two worlds. Bridging the gap required a nuanced understanding of geography, tribal politics, survival skills, trading acumen, facility with language, and adaptability. Traders dressed like Indians, ate like them, and lived with them.[8]

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[6] Dan Flores, "Bringing Home All the Pretty Horses: The Horse Trade and the Early American West, 1775-1825," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 58 (2008), 14; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xii; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 99.

[7] Barton Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 8.

[8] Thomas Jefferson Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Ananhuac and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory*, in *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 1:171.

In addition to cultural adaptability, company employees had to demonstrate tact and fairness to their clients. As businessmen and keen observers of human nature, the traders had to know how much to pay each client for their product, carefully maintaining consistent prices for items of similar quality.[9] William Hamilton, who traded with the Cheyennes in the early-1840s remembered, "A certain rule must be complied with in trading with Indians, which is that you must not pay one Indian…one iota more for a robe or fur of the same quality than you pay another. If you do, you ruin your trade and create antagonistic feelings throughout the village."[10] Traders such as Hamilton needed to know when to be aggressive, when to ignore insults and threats, which presents to give to which headman, when to be generous, when to haggle, and when to capitulate.[11]

Observers throughout the West generally recognized that the Bents knew the Indian business as well as anyone, and respected them accordingly. William especially, received praise for his competence. Although he occasionally went with company wagon trains to Missouri, he spent most of his time in Indian country, directing that aspect of the trade. Most of his clients thought him "fair and open in

[9] William Fulkerson to William Clark, September 30, 1837, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm Reel 884 (hereafter cited as UMA); "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge, to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," in *American State Papers, Military Affairs, v. 6,* 24th Cong. 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office), 141; Howard Roberts Lamar, *The Trader on the Frontier: Myth's Victim* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1977), 52; Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 4; Thomas W. Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 42, 44, 47, 79; Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 9.

[10] William Hamilton, *My Sixty Years on the Plains, Trapping, Trading, and Indian Fighting* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 11.

[11] Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1947; reprint, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1998), 140; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 181.

his dealings."[12] Even Kit Carson, revered by the public and mountain men alike for his knowledge of Indians, regarded William Bent as a superior trader.[13]

The company fort on the Arkansas River was the hub of its operations and a meeting place for trade. Although the company generally sent its traders to the Indian camps, Indians sometimes made the trip to the fort itself to trade. One observer noted that, "The trading posts or forts…are the hearts…through which the entire commerce of these western regions seeks a channel into distant countries."[14] During the trading season, the fort hosted a polyglot contingent of customers and employees. Travelers noted the presence of Cheyennes, Kiowas, Arapahos, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Mexicans, and mixed-bloods. Farnham left perhaps the most colorful portrait of the fort during the trading season.[15]

Because of their close relationship with the proprietors, Cheyennes and Arapahos sometimes gained entrance inside the fort's walls. Even these trusted clients were watched closely. However, the proprietors allowed only the most

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[12] George Bent claimed that, "Charles Bent was looked up to by all the Indians," who called him White Hat. Bent based this assertion on the fact that Charles was the oldest of the brothers (Bent to Hyde, April 14, 1908, Box 1 Folder 11, George Bent Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale (hereafter cited as GBP-Yale); George Bird Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," *Kansas State Historical Collections* 15 (1919-1922), 16;George Bird Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-2, George Bird Grinnell Collection, 1815-1938, Braun Research Library, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, MS. 240, (hereafter cited as ANC).

[13] Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians,* 78; Josiah M. Ward, "Historic Bent's Fort and Its Founders," clipping, *Denver Post*, January 11, 1920, Box 5 Folder (I) B:73, Francis W. Cragin Collection, Starsmore Center for Local History, Colorado Springs (hereafter cited as SCLH).

[14] Elliott West, "Great Dreams, Great Plains: Jefferson, the Bents, and the West," in *Thomas Jefferson and the Changing West: From Conquest to Conservation,* ed. James P. Ronda (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 162; Francois des Montaignes, *The Plains; being no less than a collection of veracious memoranda taken during the expedition of exploration in the year 1845, from the western settlements of Missouri to the Mexican border, and from Bent's Fort on the Arkansas to Fort Gibson, via the South Fork of the Canadian – north Mexico and north-western Texas,* eds. Nancy Alpert Mower and Don Russell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 67.

[15] Farnham, *Travels,* 1: 171-2.

select group of Cheyennes to spend the night inside the fort; the rest had to sleep outside the walls. Despite the volume of business they brought, the presence of Indian clients at the fort did not always please the employees. Company clerk Alexander Barclay, for instance, groused to his brother that, "we have been in the habit of allowing the whole Nation of Arapahos in at one and any time." Barclay objected to this practice because he felt it put the employees in danger. Not everyone trusted the Cheyennes and Arapahos as much as the Bent brothers did.[16] Still, the admittance of the Cheyennes and Arapahos into the fort to trade demonstrates the depth of trust between the two sides; showing favor to these groups further solidified trade ties.

Bent-St. Vrain also utilized smaller, temporary posts in their Indian trade. The use of these satellite posts made its easier for the company to conduct trade farther afield. Indians found these posts convenient for trade. In their use of multiple trading locations, the company was not unique. Rather, it followed a well-established pattern practiced by other traders, most notably American Fur.[17] Besides the main fort on the Arkansas, the company eventually established a post on the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle to serve the Kiowas and Comanches.[18] Fort St. Vrain, on the South Platte, serviced the Cheyennes,

[16] Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 90; Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 39, 55; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 181; Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, March 12, 1841, Box 1, Barclay Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.
[17] Wishart, *Fur Trade,* 64; John Daugherty to Lewis Cass, November 19, 1831, UMA. These sources refer to trade on the Upper Missouri, but the larger principle applies to Bent-St. Vrain.
[18] See below for more details on the company's trade with the Comanches and Kiowas.

Arapahos, and occasionally the Sioux.[19] By the spring of 1844, apparently, the company was using Fort St. Vrain only on a seasonal basis. Solomon P. Sublette wrote his brother William that the partners, "have evacuated their Fort on the Platte in the summer," and intended to use it only during the winter trading season. In addition to these posts, it is possible that the company established a temporary post at the Big Timbers, downriver from the main fort. Even if this reference is incorrect, traders frequented this popular Cheyenne wintering ground throughout the 1830s and 1840s.[20]

The company's Indian customers found it most convenient if traders came to their camps. Both employees and principals spent much of the year on the road. Alexander Barclay estimated that the partners were absent from the fort "about ½ and often 2/3 of the year."[21] By sending employees directly to the customers, the partners demonstrated their willingness to conduct business at the convenience of the Indians themselves. Such trips could be potentially hazardous. Because winter was the prime robe season, traders had to brave the frigid temperatures and icy winds of the Southern Plains to seek out the Indian camps. Furthermore, the hunting season for prime robes was short. If the Indians left the buffalo ranges to

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[19] Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 155; *Trinidad Daily Advertiser*, December 27, 1883, SCLH; Bent to Hyde, June 27, 1912, Box 3 Folder 18, GBP-Yale; Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 26; Obadiah Oakley, " Journal," in *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842*, eds. LeRoy R. and Anne W. Hafen (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), 49-50.

[20] Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, May 5 1844, Box 4 Folder 1; Sublette to Sublette, June 6, 1844, Box 4 Folder 2, both in WLSP; C.F. Ruff, "Notes of an Expedition to Santa Fe," July 21, 1846, C.F. Ruff Papers, Box 1, MHS; Bent to Hyde, February 4, 1913, Box 3 Folder 20, GBP-Yale; William M. Boggs, William Montgomery Boggs Narrative," Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 41-2 (Hereafter cited as Boggs-Yale).

[21] Barclay to Barclay, May 1, 1840, Barclay Papers.

bring their robes to one of the posts, they lost valuable hunting time. Everyone benefitted if the traders came to the villages. The Indians had the convenience of goods brought to their doorstep, while the traders garnered a larger haul of robes. The presence of Bent representatives in the Indian camps acted as a deterrent to small, independent traders.[22] Prior to departure, each trader met with the clerk in charge of provisioning the expedition. The men went over the list of trade items, gathered the goods from the fort's warehouse, and packed for the journey. The traders used wagons or mule trains to transport the goods and robes, depending upon the terrain they crossed.[23]

Once the traders reached their destination, they took up residence with their customers. William Bent could not be in every village at once, so he dispatched trusted traders to each major village within the range of the company's operation. Usually, the traders specialized in trade with a certain tribe, or even a certain band, with which they had established good relations. On occasion, a headman might request that the company dispatch a particular trader to his village.[24] If the traders came upon a village unannounced, they made camp on its outskirts and requested permission to enter the next day. Once the traders determined their clients were in

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[22] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 77; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 154; Mark L. Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty: Bent, St. Vrain and Company and the Robe Trade of the Southern Plains," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* (2007), 24.

[23] George Bent and Thomas Boggs each recalled the use of mule teams in the Indian trade. See Bent to Hyde, May 19, 1914, Box 3 Folder 31, GBP-Yale; Boggs, "Narrative," 18. Lewis Garrard and John Smith traveled by mule-drawn wagon to the Cheyenne camps during their winter trading season. See Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* with an Introduction by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 45.

[24] Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 209 (hereafter cited as "Resource Study"); Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 58.

the mood to do business, they entered the village with their wagons or mules. As a matter of course, they sought out the lodge of an important leader or elder for their residence. Lewis Garrard, trading at the Big Timbers with Company employee John Smith, wrote that they wished to stay in the lodge of the Cheyenne headman Lean Chief. "Without saying a word," Garrard recalled, "or going in the lodge first, we unsaddled in front of it, put our 'possibles' in the back part, the most honored and pleasant place."[25]

Before the actual dickering began, the traders had to demonstrate their generosity. This required a modest distribution of goods; a distribution, "on the prairie," as the saying went. Gifts were indispensable to establishing and maintaining trade relations. Giving gifts indicated the generosity of the traders. Niggardly employees risked the anger of their clients and potentially the complete loss of their trade. Presents given to Indian leaders cemented social ties – fictive kinship – with the Indian bands. Traders became "family," through this ritualized exchange. Those who failed to follow this protocol remained "strangers," outsiders under suspicion. However, even after establishing this relationship, company traders had to strengthen their ties to the different bands through the continued use of gifts and other material assistance.[26] Wise government agents and private

[25] Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton: The Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1957), 29; Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 58; John Daugherty to Lewis Cass, November 19, 1831, UMA; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 48. During another trading season, Thomas Boggs and William Bent kept their goods in the lodge of the prominent Cheyenne leader Cinemo, see William M. Boggs, "The W. M. Boggs Manuscript about Bent's Fort, Kit Carson, the Fur Trade, and Life among the Indians," ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado Magazine* 7 (1930), 49.

[26] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 157; Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 101; David LaVere, "Friendly

traders both recognized the necessity of gifts to the Indian trade. William Fulkerson wrote Superintendent William Clark from the Upper Missouri Agency that, "All Indians expect from persons who are going among them to do business, some presents to be made and as far as my knowledge extends of the Indian character, they never transact business with each other without presents first being made." Indian customers who did not receive gifts, Fulkerson noted, "were exceedingly disappointed….and much dissatisfied." Failure to distribute gifts meant the potential loss of trade – in Fulkerson's case, lost trade to the Hudson's Bay Company. He reiterated to his superiors that the Indians, "are very mercenary in their friendships, and small expenditures of presents will go far to secure their alliance and trade."[27] Company employees also knew the paramount importance of generosity and gift-giving. Lewis Garrard noted that it did not take much to gain the confidence of the Indians: a bit of tobacco, a little ammunition, or "our dear-bought Java at meal time." Compliance with Indian socioeconomic procedures, relatively small gestures sufficed to demonstrate the commitment of the company to fair dealing with its clients. Only after they had greased the wheels did they get down to business.[28]

Once the visitors ensconced themselves in a prominent place, trade began. First, a crier went through the village, announcing the presence of the traders, their wares, and the products they sought. During his stay at the Big Timbers with

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Persuasions: Gifts and Reciprocity in Comanche-Euroamerican Relations," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 71 (1993), 323-33; Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indians Trade System," *Western Historical Quarterly* 29 (1998), 510.

[27] William Fulkerson to William Clark, September 30, 1837, UMA.

[28] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 35, 60.

Smith, Garrard remembered one crier, with a "stentorian voice" announcing that he and Smith had brought tobacco, blankets, knives, and beads to trade for mules. The women brought their goods, usually buffalo robes, to the lodge where the traders stayed. Here, the Indian men swapped robes for goods selected from the trader's cache. The first robes that arrived generally set the price for future negotiations. Dick Wooton recalled that traders received one buffalo robe in exchange for "a good butcher knife," two robes for one pound of gunpowder, caps, and 60 bullets, two butcher knives for an especially fine robe, a beaver pelt for about thirty cents worth of goods, and "a nicely-tanned buckskin" for three bullets and three charges of powder. If the traders demonstrated their generosity and fairness, they earned respect among the tribe, status that they used in future visits.[29]

Hunting for this trade took place during the fall and winter, and targeted specific animals. Buffalo robes are at their prime between November and March.[30] Cowhides were especially prized, both for the making of robes for trade and for their use as lodge coverings. Dan Flores points out that Indian hunters targeted cows from two to five years old. Not only was cow meat tenderer than bull meat, but their hides were thinner and easier to process. Bull hides, on the other hand, were bulkier, and the hair not of uniform length. Indians used bull hides for

[29] Garrad, *Wah-to-Yah,* 50, 88; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 157; Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 26; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 78; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 31-2, 95. Comer gives the following price estimates: one buffalo robe purchased either sixty loads of shot, plus powder, two gallons of corn, three to four pounds of sugar, one pint of whiskey, one hank of beads, or one yard of cloth. One musket cost between six and ten robes (*Ritual Ground,* 156).
[30] Wishart, *Fur Trade,* 96; David Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Athens: Swallow Press and the University of Ohio Press, 1989), 31, 74; Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Comanches: Lords of the Southern Plains,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 55; Edward Douglas Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 50-1.

clothing, bedding, saddle blankets, and rope. Flores also notes that targeting cows specifically played a critical role in the overall reduction of the bison herds. Relying on case studies of other ungulates, he notes that, "removal of breeding females at a level that exceeds 7% of the total herd will initiate population decline." In addition to hunting for marketable robes, simply hunting for lodge coverings had the potential to cut deeply into the population of the buffalo herds. Conservative estimates state that it took fifteen hides to cover a lodge. Larger lodges required as many as twenty hides. In these ways, hunting for the white market economy helped to undercut the main source of subsistence for Plains tribes. George Frederick Ruxton was critical of the targeting of cows during the hunt. He wrote that such hunting was reckless. The native hunters "wantonly slaughter vast numbers of buffalo hides every year (the skins of which sex only are dressed), and thus add to the evils in store for them."[31]

Indian customers expected, and got, a broad range of trade goods from Bent-St. Vrain. Company traders marketed their wares at prices far above the wholesale cost. Shipping and freight rates, agents and traders pointed out, had much to do with the high markup of prices on the prairies and in the mountains.[32] Cloth products and blankets constituted the bulkiest part of the trader's inventory.

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[31] Grinnell, *Cheyenne Indians,* 1:226-7; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes,* 32; Flores, "Bison Ecology, Bison Diplomacy," 479-80; Boggs, "Boggs Manuscript," 66; George Bent to George Hyde, August 8, 1911, Box 3 Folder 15, GBP-Yale; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West, 106;* Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 24; Hilger, "Arapaho Child Life," 180.

[32] Harvey L. Carter, "*Dear Old Kit:" The Historical Christopher Carson, with a new edition of the Carson Memoirs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 62, note 66; Frank S. Edwards, *A Campaign in New Mexico with Colonel Doniphan* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1847), 38; William Jordan to William Clark, October 27, 1831, Letterbook, p. 336, Volume 6 Reel 2, William Clark Papers.

The company hawked the famous Hudson's Bay blankets, or American knock-offs. Navajo blankets, however, commanded the highest prices. These blankets, Rufus Sage wrote, "are superior in beauty of color, texture, and durability, to the fabrics of their Spanish neighbors. I have frequently seen them so closely woven as to be impervious to water, and even serve for its transportation."[33] The company provided goods for personal decoration as well: brass wires for bracelets, brass tacks used to decorate rifle butts, and rare abalone shells – which fetched up to four buffalo robes apiece.[34] However, it is the surviving company invoices, drawn on Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company, that provide the clearest glimpse into the shear magnitude and variety of the trade goods Bent-St. Vrain brought to their Indian clients. These items included belts of wampum, wampum shells, awls, thirteen "Battle axes," hawks bells, brass kettles, tobacco, sugar from Havana, coffee, "Scarlet Chief's Coats," bone-handled knives, powder horns, guns, looking glasses, finger rings, beads, "Red Cock Feathers," and on and on.[35] Trade had wonderful transformative powers: it turned horses and mules into wealth and prestige within the tribe, it turned robes into cloth or blankets, slaves into guns, powder, or iron tools. The robes and mules the Indians provided, the Bents turned into cash, credit,

[33] On woolens and blankets generally, see Boggs, "Narrative," 53-4; Sarah M. Olson, "Furnishing a Frontier Outpost," in *Bent's Old Fort* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado, 1979), 156-7; Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, 426-33, Ledger Z; Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, 76-89, Ledger DD, both in Fur Trade Ledger Collection, MHS; William B. Astor to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., August 30, 1833, Reel 22 Frame 403, CC. On Navajo blankets, see Sage, *Scenes*, 180; Boggs, "Boggs Manuscript," 50; Hamilton, *Sixty Years on the Plains*, 72-3.
[34] Boggs, "Narrative," 53-4; Boggs, "Boggs Manuscript," 49.
[35] Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, Ledger Z; Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, 426-33, Ledger DD, Fur Trade Ledger Collection.

and more clothes, guns, awls, and "Scarlet Chiefs Coats," in St. Louis and the markets of the east coast.[36]

Company traders did not dupe their clients into trade; the Indians were extraordinarily shrewd bargainers and keen judges of trade goods. Regarding Indian clients, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, William Clark wrote Senator Thomas Hart Benton,

> The Indians are peculiar in their habits; and, contrary to the opinion generally entertained, they are good judges of the articles which are offered to them. The trade is not that system of fraud which many suppose. The competition is generally sufficient to reduce the profits to a very reasonable amount, and the Indian easily knows the value of the furs in his possession; he knows, also the quality of the goods offered to him, and experience has taught him which are the best adapted to his wants….if our traders are unable to supply such articles as they have been accustomed to receive, they will resort to those places where they can be supplied.[37]

The Indians themselves requested the goods they wished the traders to bring, and the wise trader acceded to their demands. Those who ignored the wishes of their clients lost business. On one occasion, William B. Astor wrote Pierre Chouteau, Jr. regarding a shipment of trade goods. Indian customers had rejected the blankets Chouteau traders offered in trade. Astor wrote that he was sending a different shipment of blankets, "which we hope will produce articles to your satisfaction, and enable you to regain your good name with the Indians – we have also particularly requested that the little yellow point [blankets] be restored to its former

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[36] Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 88.
[37] Klein, "Hide Trade," 145-6; William Jordan to William Clark, October 27, 1831, Letterbook, p. 335, Reel 2 Volume 6; William Clark to Thomas Hart Benton, October 29, 1830, in *Message of the President of the United States, in answer to a resolution of the Senate relative to the British establishments on the Columbia, and the state of the fur trade, &c.,* 21st Cong., 2nd Sess. S.doc. 39, 8.

place in lieu of the Red and Green ones, so much disliked by the consumers."[38] Indian traders were masters at pitting one white trader against another in order to ensure the best price for robes and the highest quality trade goods. Keeping their clients happy required the company to go out of its way to maintain their business. For instance, Army officer James W. Abert witnessed Cheyennes at Bent's Fort "imposing upon the traders the obligation of feeding them." As thin as their resources were, the Bents had to accommodate, Abert noted that the company had to feed them, "or else lose the furs that the Indians may obtain in the fall." Abert concluded that, "instead of the Indians being imposed upon by the traders, it is they who impose upon the traders. If two or fifty should come they think that they all must be fed and that they have a perfect right to everything."[39]

The Indian clients submitted each trade item to intensive scrutiny before offering up their robes in exchange. Some observers, unfamiliar with Indian shrewdness, thought them fickle and indecisive. Lewis Garrard, a complete greenhorn, wrote that he and Smith often had to deal with "precise savages, who would look at and handle a blanket or other commodity before concluding a bargain." The traders had to, "praise, and feel, and talk of the article in question, and seal the trade by passing the long pipe as a balm to their fastidious tastes." The native clients often got the better part of the bargain, prompted howls of

[38] Wishart, *Fur Trade,* 81. David Lavender points out that Indians often preferred foreign made trade products, especially British goods, rather than domestically produced trade goods, Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 45-6. Astor to Chouteau, September 9, 1833, Reel 22 Frame 469, CC (emphasis in original).
[39] Klein, "Hide Trade," 149; Lamar, *Frontier Trader,* 22; James W. Abert, "Examination of New Mexico," 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 41, 424, 426; James W. Abert, *Western America in 1846-1847: The Original Travel Diary of Lieutenant J. W. Abert,* ed. John Galvin (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1966), 21.

indignation from the journals and reminiscences of company traders. Occasionally, they offered backhanded compliments to the discriminating tastes of their clients. Dick Wooton, for instance, wrote, "I don't know whether or not the Indian has descended from the Jew, but I know he has some of the same instincts in trade." Euro-American traders could also be shrewd and unscrupulous, though they stood a better chance of pulling off a boondoggle on unsuspecting white clients.[40] Clearly, the company traders had to accommodate to the tastes of their clients, and sometimes came out on the losing end of the trade. If Bent-St. Vrain had been unscrupulous and corrupt, rather than flexible and accommodating, they would never have seen the successes they did in the Indian trade.

Intermarriage with its Indian clients provided the company with expanded trade opportunities.[41] The principals of Bent-St. Vrain recognized early on the important connection between trade and intermarriage, and moved quickly to establish kinship ties with local Indian bands, especially the Southern Cheyennes. However, it is important to recognize the genuine affection that characterized many fur trade/trader intermarriages. Traders often mixed economic pragmatism with

[40] LaVere, "Friendly Persuasions," 331; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 77; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 95; Bryant, *What I Saw in California,* 112-3.

[41] On intermarriage outside the context of Bent-St. Vrain, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Families in Indian Country* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-18770* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980). Brooks discusses the company specifically in his treatment of slavery and kinship in the Southwestern Borderlands. The rest of these works do not apply specifically to Bent-St. Vrain, however, the themes and concepts they contain helped inform my discussion of the importance of kinship and intermarriage to the company.

love in their pursuit of profits and companionship.[42] In addition to creating a bicultural society in the trans-Mississippi West, intermarriage inserted the trader into a new set of socioeconomic relations. Linking oneself to an Indian band meant a greater potential for trade and access to new markets, while at the same time obligating him to provide for the needs of his new family group. The Cheyennes took marriage very seriously, for the decision to enter into a marital alliance with a white trader affected the entire family, immediate and extended, as well as at the larger band, and potentially the whole tribe itself. A well-made match between groups contributed to economic prosperity, social harmony, and political stability. In return for broader trade opportunities and female companionship, the trader's new in-laws expected reciprocity – gifts and continued access to a wide variety of trade products. None of these practices was unique to Bent-St. Vrain. Rather, they followed rules longstanding in Indian country. Keen attention to preexisting cultural norms, and accommodating themselves to the practices of the country, helped the Bents and St. Vrain become the most influential Indian traders on the Southern Plains during the 1830s and 1840s.[43]

Marriage introduced the white trader to a large set of new relatives. At the broadest level, the trader became an adopted member of the tribe. The next level of relations was that of the band, a series of extended families that spent much of the

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[42] Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 33; Farnham, *Travels*, 1: 257; Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 35.
[43]Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 80-1; William Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870," in *Indian-White Relations*, vol. 4, ed. Wilcomb Washburn (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988),351; Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 28-9; Fred Eggan, "Cheyenne-Arapaho Kinship," in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes*, ed. Fred Eggan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 58; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 46; Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 5-7; Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman*, 10, 55, 81.

year traveling and hunting together. Trade, marriage, religion, and war linked these bands together. The obligations of the trader extended from the immediate family to the extended family, thence to the band level, finally to the tribal level itself. William Bent's marriage, for example, proved the company's most important link with the Cheyenne tribe as a whole. Most of the company traders who intermarried had specialized relationships with a specific band. The trader acquired an entire new set of brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles. Reciprocity and mutual obligation linked the family members to one another, and they expected a new family member to fall into line. They expected the trader to demonstrate the same level of respect and support they showed one another. In exchange, the trader could avail himself of the resources, help, and respect of the entire family and band.[44]

Intermarriage proved mutually beneficial on many levels.[45] New in-laws often received goods at reduced prices, a guaranteed supply of trade goods, and sometimes access to otherwise restricted goods such as guns or liquor. Such perquisites raised the esteem of the family in the eyes of the band, and the esteem of the band in the eyes of the tribe. From this reliable source, Indians received the means to enhance their material well-being, and to expand their power and prestige at the expense of their neighbors.[46] The trader's wife also gained enhanced status. Thoughtful and indulgent husbands showered their new bride's with gifts. Some wives also had a less onerous work burden. James W. Abert observed the wife of

[44] Eggan, "Cheyenne and Arapaho Kinship," 37, 49, 83, 85; Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 10; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 46-9.
[45] Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 66.
[46] Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 12.

one trader at Bent's Fort. He wrote that, "Having a white man for her husband, she has not been obliged to work." Freedom from manual toils allowed her to keep herself in a beautiful and delicate state, Abert observed.[47] The traders also gained numerous advantages. In addition to an expanded clientele, they gained new allies. For, once they became kin – either fictive or real – their in-laws stood obligated to aid them with all of their own resources. Cultural norms dictated that each side share its resources freely. Traders also stood under the military protection of their new family members. Marriage to a native wife sometimes facilitated a greater understanding of Indian languages and social customs, allowing the trader to enhance further his status within the family, band, and tribe.[48] William Clark summarized the importance of the role of the trader in tribal societies when he wrote,

> The traders are generally married into influential families in the Indian country, and many of their men have Indian wives. The Indians look to them for supplies which are essential to their comfort and subsistence. The trader identifies himself with the band in whose country he is located, and in all disputes he espouses their case, partakes of their prejudices, and feels his own interest involved in theirs. There is a source of protection on one side, and of dependence on the other. The consequence of all this is, no important measure is adopted without the knowledge of the trader; and if his advice is not formally requested, it still influences the determination adopted at the public council fire.[49]

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[47] Josiah M. Ward, "Historic Bent's Fort and Its Founders," clipping, *Denver Post*, January 11, 1920, Box 5 Folder (I) B:73, SCLH; DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, 100; Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 12; James W. Abert, *Through the Country of the Comanche Indians in the fall of the year 1845: The Journal of a U.S. Army Expedition led by Lieutenant James W. Abert of the Topographical Engineers*, ed. John Galvin (San Francisco: J. Howell, 1970), 3.
[48] Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, xi; Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 11-12.
[49] William Clark to Thomas Hart Benton, October 29, 1830, *Message of the President Regarding British Establishments on the Columbia*, 26.

William Bent provides the best example of the ways in which company men integrated themselves in Indian society. In the first place, Bent chose his marriage partner wisely. His first wife, Owl Woman, was the daughter of White Thunder, the keeper of the medicine arrows, the holiest objects in the Cheyenne religion. To the extent that the Cheyennes had a tribal headman, White Thunder was it. He provided spiritual leadership as well as political acumen.[50] In Cheyenne culture, the wife's younger sister sometimes became a candidate to become a second wife. This sometimes was the case when the first wife died, as in William Bent's case. Also, the brother of a dead husband might take on responsibility for his sister in law.[51] Although these strictures were not universal within Cheyenne society, William Bent abided by these common practices. Around 1835, Bent married Owl Woman. When she died in 1846, he followed this tribal custom and wed her sister, Yellow Woman.[52] Bent also practiced seasonal matrilocality, generally spending

[50] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 186. On White Thunder's prestige, and the benefits it brought the Company, see David Fridtjof Halaas and Andrew E. Masich, *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent: Caught Between the Worlds of the Indian and the White Man* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004), 14-31. Gary Anderson notes that American traders among the Dakota also recognized the importance of selecting the daughter of an important man as the best way to maximize their influence. See, *Kinsmen of Another Kind,* 30. The company's most famous employee, Kit Carson, also established a brief marriage with an elite Cheyenne partner. Marc Simmons points out that Carson's second wife, Making Out Road, was a member of the Little Bear band, a very powerful Cheyenne group. He also writes that, "she was well connected at Bent's Fort," see Marc Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives: A Family History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 37. However, no other trader's marriage rose to the heights of William Bent's.

[51] Ford, "Summer Upon the Prairie," 303; Abraham Johnston, Marcellus Ball Edwards, and Philip Gooch Ferguson, *Marching With the Army of the West, 1846-1848,* ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1936), 139; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes,* 38, 45; Eggan, "Cheyenne-Arapaho Kinship," 61; Grinnell, *Cheyenne Indians,* 1: 153; Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life,* 196-7.

[52] Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 68; Bent to Hyde, March 9, 1905, Box 3 Folder 4, CC.

the winter living in their mother-in-law's village. This represented another way in which Bent adhered to Cheyenne marital customs.[53]

Company employees followed the lead of William Bent. Observers noted that many of the firm's traders had Indian wives and children. Ceran St. Vrain's brother, Marcellin, had numerous Indian wives and mistresses of different tribes. George Bent recalled that Marcellin married Pawnee Woman during his time as head trader at Ft. St. Vrain, on the South Platte. Pawnee Woman was an imposing figure, standing over six feet tall. Bent recalled, "she was strong and mean." Another traveler, passing by Bent's Fort, wrote that, "One of the St. Vrain's has two Sou squaws."[54] Numerous other employees took up residence with Indian women. The Company's best traders established marital ties with the Southern Cheyennes and Southern Arapahos. One of the benefits of driving John Gantt from the Arkansas River Valley, was that the company acquired the services of trader John Poisal, the husband of the sister of Arapaho chief Left Hand. Kit Carson married two different Indian women, one Arapaho and one Cheyenne. Dick Wootton had a relationship with an Arapaho woman. Charlie Autobees had relationships with women of both tribes. In addition, Autobees established contacts with the Utes and Apaches. John S. Smith became probably the company's most effective trader among the Cheyennes. Hiring on with Bent-St. Vrain in the late-

[53] Eggan, "Cheyenne-Arapaho Kinship," 61; Thorne, "Marriage," 23. George Bird Grinnell notes that, "William Bent's family often spent the summer…among the camps, moving from place to place and in autumn returning to the fort," ("Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 47).
[54] Bent to Hyde, December 29, 1913, Box 3 Folder 27; Bent to Hyde, October 12, 1917, Box 4 Folder 41, both in GBP-Yale. Again, this would be a reference to Marcellin. Pratt, "Diary," July 14, 1848, Beinecke.

1830s, Smith quickly acquired a facility with the Cheyenne language, and became an interpreter at Bent's Fort. As a trader, he married a Cheyenne woman and took up residence in her camp during the winter trading season. He also followed her band during the summer. Around 1842, Smith and his wife had a child together.[55] If not necessarily official company policy, intermarriage with the client base was a canny economic move.

Adaptability and accommodation to Native American consumer tastes and trade protocols was critical to the success of Bent-St. Vrain. Surrounded by powerful tribes, the partners and their employees had little choice but to dance to the tune called by their customers. Any perceived slight or unsavory transaction might mean lost business or possible violent retribution. In order to shore up their bottom line, the Bents and St. Vrain paid close attention to the goods desired by their customers. Most importantly, though, the traders utilized kinship as a way to strengthen both the social and economic bond between themselves and local Indian bands. Intermarriage created a web of mutually beneficial interdependence. Native consumers obtained access to a wide range of trade goods, often at preferential prices, while the traders acquired not only an extended network of clients, but also a new set of political allies. However, while these links might strengthen ties with one group, such alliances could alienate others. Such a situation required the

[55] Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 19-22; Bent to Hyde, February 19, 1913, Box 3 Folder 20, GBP-Yale; Stan Hoig, *The Western Odyssey of John Simpson Smith: Frontiersman and Indian Interpreter* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 42-4; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 45; Barclay to Barclay, March 10, 1840 and May 1, 1840, Barclay Papers; Harvey L. Carter, "John L. Hatcher," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 4: 126;

partners to tread carefully, for the Great Plains could be a dangerous place in which to do business.

Chapter 5 - War and Peace on the Great Plains: Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and Intertribal Politics

In order to maximize their trade profits, the Bents and St. Vrain had to navigate carefully the turbulent waters of intertribal politics on the Southern Plains. The company had a somewhat paradoxical political relationship with its customers. On the one hand, the presence of Bent's Fort as a trade market, and the company's insatiable demand for buffalo robes, contributed at least indirectly to the instability of the region, as tribes jockeyed for the most productive buffalo hunting territories. By virtue of William Bent's intermarriage with a prominent Cheyenne family, the partners established a strong bond with the tribe. However, such a relationship had the potential to place traders in jeopardy of attack by enemies of the Cheyennes, most notably the Comanches. On the other hand, both the partners and their clients came to recognize the necessary link between political peace and increased trade. The profitability of the robe trade, combined with tribal politics led to peace on the Southern Plains in 1840. Peace, too, had paradoxical consequences. The rapprochement between the region's most powerful tribes accelerated hunting efforts. The increased number of robes led to greater short-term prosperity for Bent-St. Vrain and its clients. In the long run, though, the increased hunting for American markets undercut the subsistence of the tribes on the Southern Plains.

The Great Plains was a violent, politically unstable region. Although intertribal conflict long predated the arrival of European and American traders, the arrival of outsiders wrought seismic shifts in the ways Indian groups hunted,

traded, raided, and organized tribal society.[1] Indian groups had numerous reasons for warring with each other. War brought glory and status. Raids called for counter-raids. Constant raiding shuttled horses, trade goods and captives from one end of the region to the other. Tribes fought over access to the hunting grounds and the horse pasturage necessary for group survival. The coming of traders like the Bents only intensified conditions and trends antedating their arrival.[2] When peace came, it was often fragile. At no time did peace prevail in all parts of the Great Plains. Even when tribes made peace with one another, it rarely outlasted the next, inevitable, horse or slaving raid.[3]

Wealth and leadership positions within Plains Indian societies was based upon status. War and raiding was one of the primary avenues to obtain wealth and status.[4] Regarding status, however, raiding cut both ways. The successful leader of a raiding or war party acquired the public acclaim and spoils to become an important man within the tribe. Unsuccessful leaders, on the other hand, lost status, and had a more difficult time organizing future expeditions.[5] Military action played a pivotal role in advancing in Comanche society. Raiders acquired the horses necessary to increase their hunting activities. The more buffalo they killed,

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[1] Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 9, 56. The quote is from page 56.

[2] Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War: Contrasting Forms of Intertribal Relationship Among the Historic Plains Indians," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians,* ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 122, 126; Richard White, "The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of American History* 25 (1978), 319-320; Stan Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 15.

[3] Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," 109.

[4] Bernard Miskin, *Rank and Warfare among the Plains Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1940), 2.

[5] Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare,* 32, 41;William M. Boggs, "Narrative," 57-8, Boggs-Yale.

the more hides they had for their women to process. More hides to process meant the desirability of more wives, often obtained through raiding other tribes or striking deep into Mexico. The more robes a Comanche man's wives processed, the more wealth he acquired. Acquisition of wealth allowed men to sponsor the raiding activities of ambitious, but poor, young men. These men, in turn, shared a part of their raiding spoils with their wealthy sponsor. Even men too old to ride the war trails benefited from raiding.[6]

More than anything else, horse raiding kept intertribal relationships in a state of flux. For the Cheyennes and Arapahos, horse theft was the pinnacle of achievement for warriors. Even more than killing an enemy, successful horse raiding brought recognition, acclaim, and status. Large horse herds were essential for trading and hunting. Groups with limited access to horses suffered accordingly in the trading markets of the trans-Mississippi West. Cheyenne men with horses, like their Comanche counterparts, could hunt more effectively and trade a larger number of robes with whites like the Bents. Well-mounted warriors raided far and fast, acquiring more spoils and honors, which they translated into economic and social prestige.[7]

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[6] Boggs, "Narrative," 57; Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Comanches: Lords of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 223, 267. War and marriage were linked in Cheyenne tribal society as well. The ability to take a wife usually required some status as a warrior. Men needed horses to pay the bride price, and the quickest way to build a personal string of ponies was through raiding. See George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 1: 134.

[7] Hoig, *Tribal Wars*, 34; Mary Inez Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life and Its Cultural Background* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 102; Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," 109-110; Richard White, "Animals and Enterprise," in *The Oxford History of the American West*, eds. Clyde A. Milner, II, Carol A. O'Connor, Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 240; Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of

Revenge stimulated raids as well. The loss of horses to enemies required counter-raids. Deaths suffered in battle prompted the organization and departure of the largest parties of warriors. Successful retaliation, the kind where warriors returned with enemy scalp locks dangling from their lances, brought closure for bereaved families.[8] This consistent cycle of theft and retaliation frustrated white policy makers. From his post at Bent's Fort, Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick informed his superiors of his unenviable and difficult position as peacemaker. "The law of retaliation," he wrote his superiors, "or some mode of remuneration in the shape of payment for the slain is the only law recognized by the nations of this country I have taken measures to put a stop to further bloodshed for the present – but when there is no law to punish individuals for committing depredations on other tribes…good fellowship must be in a very precarious state."[9] Furthermore, white observers noted that Indian raiders never thought of themselves as aggressors. In their view, retaliation was completely justified. Indeed, honor required retaliation. As long as Pawnees stole horses from Cheyennes, as long as Cheyennes attacked Pawnee hunting parties, the cycle continued.[10] In reality, there was more discipline to retaliation than white observers recognized. Avenging war parties seldom turned to theft as a goal. Conversely, horse raiders attempted to

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Oklahoma Press, 1963), 43; Grinnell, *Cheyenne Indians*, 2: 7; Bent to Hyde, October 22, 1908, Box 3 Folder 12, George Bent Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as GBP-Yale).

[8] George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 40; Grinnell, *Cheyenne Indians*, 2: 6.

[9] Thomas Fitzpatrick to Thomas Harvey, October 19, 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Platte Agency, Microfilm, Reel 889 (hereafter cited as UPA).

[10] On the Indian-as-aggressor, see William Hamilton, *My Sixty Years on the Plains, Trapping, Trading, and Indian Fighting* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 27.

avoid violent confrontation. However, it was not always necessary for warriors to retaliate against a specific enemy band, encampment, or even tribe. A Kiowa war party, for example, setting out to take revenge for a raid by Cheyennes, could satisfy their honor by taking the scalp of an Osage or Pawnee.[11] Still, this combination of single-mindedness and opportunism ensured the continuation of political instability into the 1830s.

The markets traders like the Bents provided, especially for buffalo robes, further destabilized Plains politics. Access to a wide variety of trade goods depended upon a consistently large harvest of buffalo. Although tribes had clashed over hunting territory for decades, if not centuries, the presence of American trading companies intensified the conflict over prime buffalo grounds. Every movement to secure territory brought tribes into tense, often violent conflict with one another. When resources became strained, erstwhile friends could turn into enemies. Direct access to trading outlets undercut symbiotic trade relations, as groups strove to cut out other tribal middlemen. Competition destabilized regional politics.[12]

The unpredictable, shifting patterns of buffalo migrations added further instability to tribal territorial politics. William Boggs recalled that, "in those days there was deadly hostility existing between the various tribes that inhabited the plains and mountain ranges adjacent to their hunting grounds, which they never

[11] Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare,* 29, 31.
[12] Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," 102-103, 110, 114, 123-125. The quote is from page 124. See also, Alan M. Klein, "Political Economy of the Buffalo Hide Trade: Race and Class on the Plains," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians,* 147.

permitted any of their enemies to trespass on."[13] Ironically, intertribal violence often protected the herds. Throughout the Plains there existed "neutral zones," or "buffer zones." In these areas, which often abutted the territory of several tribes, the herds flourished. Hunters entered these areas at their own risk, for war parties constantly crisscrossed these zones.[14]

Conflicts over hunting grounds on the Southern Plains intensified in the 1820s. The migration of the Cheyennes and Arapahos to the Arkansas River brought them into direct conflict with the Comanches and Kiowas. This migration south, created new contested zones. Between the Red River and the Arkansas River, conflict flared between the new arrivals and the Kiowa-Comanche alliance. Between the South Platte and the Arkansas, the Cheyennes and Arapahos clashed with westering Pawnee hunters, as well as mountain tribes like the Utes and Shoshones.[15] In 1835, a U. S. dragoon expedition reconnoitered the contested ground between the South Platte and Arkansas. Observers commented upon the richness and extent of the buffalo herds in the region; "the buffalo are very numerous in that part of the country," the official report concluded.[16] The abundance, one officer shrewdly observed, was due to raiding and military action. The region was, he wrote, "the theater of most of the petty wars among the different Indian tribes." Because of this, "it is seldom visited except by war

[13] Boggs, "Narrative," 57, Coe Collection.
[14] Klein, "Hide Trade," 140, 148; Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 61-62; White, "Winning," 335.
[15] Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 475.
[16] "Report of the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge, to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," in *American State Papers, Military Affairs, VI,* 24th Cong. 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1835), 140.

parties." The result of this constant warring, he concluded was that, "the buffalo, wild horse, elk, mountain sheep, antelope, and deer, here rove as lords and tenants of the soil, in comparative security."[17] The mission of the expedition was to bring about peace among the tribes of the Southern Plains. Peace, the officers predicted, "will be of immense advantage to these Indians, as they will have an extensive country opened to them, covered with innumerable buffalo, where they can hunt in safety without the fear of being attacked by enemies."[18]

Peace indeed allowed for the renewed exploitation of these neutral zones. The 1840 treaty between the Cheyenne-Arapaho alliance and the Kiowa-Comanche alliance opened the country south of the Arkansas. The country between the South Platte and Arkansas, and the buffalo grounds of the Republican, however, remained dangerous for some years.[19] For a time, peace generally brought increasingly safe travel and lucrative hunting. Political peace, Elliott West points out, placed increasing strain on the buffalo herds. "When the buffalo neutral zone vanished," he argues, "so did the bison. Unfettered hunting was followed by growing hunger, and peace led to war more bitter than ever….the buffaloes' dying and the Indians' statecraft and politics cannot be understood apart from one another. The fate of the

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[17] Lemuel Ford, "A Summer Upon the Prairie," in *The Call of the Columbia: Iron Men and Saints Take the Oregon Trail,* ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1934), 275; John C. Frémont made the same observation years later. He reported that the country between the South Platte and Arkansas rivers "is a war ground," see John C. Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life. Including in the Narrative Five Journeys of Western Exploration, During the Years 1842, 43-4, 1845-6-7, 1848-9, 1853-4. Together with a Sketch of the Life of Senator Benton in Connection with Western Exploration* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Company, 1887), 181.

[18] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 144.

[19] This was a result of increasing incursions by Eastern tribes removed to the Indian Territory. The decline of the Pawnees, due to increased incursions by the Sioux in the mid-1840s, made it safer for the Cheyennes to expand their hunting grounds to the region.

bison was initiated and complexly bound up with Indian emigrations."[20] In the short term, peace brought prosperity to Bent-St. Vrain, as their Indian clients increased their haul of buffalo. However, by the late-1840s, the peace that once seemed so promising began to undermine the financial stability of the company, as well as the material wellbeing of the region's tribes. The decline of the buffalo herds acted as one of the catalysts for the eventual dissolution of the Bent-St. Vrain partnership.

Conflict was especially intense between the Cheyennes and Pawnees.[21] Despite Lakota pressure from the north, and Cheyenne intrusions from the west, the Pawnees were aggressive in their defense of the buffalo grounds along the Platte and the Republican.[22] Bent's contemporaries reported on the connection between Cheyenne-Pawnee conflict and the creation of "neutral grounds," especially between the forks of the Platte and along the headwaters of the Kansas. The latter location, Rufus Sage wrote, "is considered very dangerous."[23] Observers noted

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[20] West, *Way to the West*, 62, 71. Contemporary observer George Frederick Ruxton commented on this phenomenon. "Every year," he wrote, "owing to the disappearance of the buffalo from their former haunts, the Indians are necessitated to encroach upon each other's hunting-grounds, which is a fruitful cause of war between the tribes." See George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 105-106.

[21] The Cheyennes also warred with the Arikaras, but to a lesser extent. On these conflicts, see Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 80; "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 143; Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF9, George Bent Papers, Denver Public Library (hereafter cited as GBP-DPL); Bent to Hyde, February 15, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF10, GBP-DPL.

[22] George E. Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 143-4; Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change Among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 152.

[23] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 138; Rufus B. Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies: or, Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years, with a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Condition, and the Different Nations Inhabiting Them* (Philadelphia: Baird, 1854), 276.

that the Pawnees, despite a lack of allies, seemed to war with everyone, frequently launching successful raids on Cheyenne, Sioux, and Comanches herds.[24] Cheyenne tradition says that the two tribes came into conflict from the moment the former group began its migration across the Missouri River. From the late-eighteenth century on, conflict was consistent. There is no evidence the two groups ever established a lasting peace. Rather, the Cheyennes took it as their mission to destroy these enemies.[25]

Conflict between the Cheyennes and Pawnees accelerated in the early 1830s.[26] Around 1829, the Pawnees wiped out a party of Cheyenne horse thieves, cutting up their bodies and dumping them into a creek. In retaliation, the Cheyennes moved against their enemies. During the 1830 fight along the Platte, however, disaster struck the Cheyennes. Prior to the fight, a Cheyenne medicine man named Bull tied the four arrows to his lance. During the initial charge, he spotted a wounded Pawnee, and rode forward to count coup. The crippled warrior dodged Bull's lance thrust, and wrenched the weapon from the medicine man's

[24] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 133; Richard Hill Graham and Sidney Smith, "Report of Journey to the Rocky Mountains," ed. John E. Sunder, *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 11 (1946), 46.
[25] Hoig, *Tribal Wars*, 109, 114; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 47; George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 72.
[26] There is dispute over the exact dating of the conflict. George Hyde gives the date as 1830, while George Bent says 1833. See Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 180; George Bent to George Hyde, no date, Box 3 Folder 3, GBP-Yale; Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF9, GBP-DPL; Bent to Hyde, February 15, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF10, GBP-DPL.

grasp. The Cheyennes rushed forward in an attempt to recapture the relics – without success. Mortified by the loss, they fell back in total defeat.[27]

While the loss of the arrows was a staggering blow for the Cheyennes, it dovetailed conveniently with attempts to restore peace on the Great Plains. Without their aid in war and hunting, the tribe would surely suffer. When the Pawnees captured the arrows, George Bent recalled, the Cheyennes, "lost their medicine power."[28] In 1835, the Cheyennes opened peace negotiations with the Pawnees. White Thunder traveled on foot to the Pawnee villages to beg for the return of the arrows. The Pawnees, sensing their advantage, demanded that the Cheyennes come to some sort of peace arrangement. As a result, the Pawnees returned one arrow to White Thunder in exchange for a promise to negotiate a peace at Bent's Fort in the summer of 1835.[29]

That same summer the United States government entered into the politics of the Southern Plains. Charged with restoring peace between the region's tribes, Colonel Henry Dodge, along with one hundred dragoons traveled up the Platte River to the Rocky Mountains before turning south to the Arkansas. At Bent's Fort, Dodge met with representatives of the warring tribes, and informed them of the government's wish for concord.[30] Although it is unclear the exact role the

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[27] Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF9, GBP-DPL; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 48-52; Peter J. Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row), 1:9-15.
[28] Bent to Hyde, February 15, 1905, Box 1, Folder FF10, GBP-DPL.
[29] Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF9, GBP-DPL; Bent to Hyde, December 18, 1913, Box 3 Folder 4, GBP-Yale; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 58. For the Pawnee version of the story, see Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 193.
[30] Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 76;Henry Putney Beers, "Military Protection on the Santa Fe Trail to 1843," *New Mexico Historical Review* 12 (1937), 125 note 46; Lemuel Ford "Journal of an

company played in the peace negotiations, they at least provided a venue for the talks, and possibly advice about the need for regional peace. At the very least, Ceran St. Vrain dined with Dodge, and provided accommodations for his officers.[31] After chiding their hosts for their previous aggressiveness, the Pawnees pressed Dodge to take up their case. He, in turn, made a speech to the assembly touting the mutual benefits of peace. The President, Dodge declared, "is desirous to be at peace with all his remote red children; he wishes you to smoke the pipe of peace with your enemies, and bury the hatchet of war."[32] Peace, the colonel argued, meant greater hunting opportunities along the Platte, "where there is buffalo in abundance."[33] Dodge reported to his superiors that both sides, "appear desirous of making a permanent peace," and that they agreed to meet for a mutual buffalo hunt on the Platte the following winter.[34] With the negotiations concluded, the former enemies exchanged gifts – the Cheyennes presenting the Pawnees with horses, the Pawnees giving the Cheyennes a number of guns.[35]

Expedition to the Rocky Mountains," ed. Lewis Pelzer, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (1926), 567.

[31] Ford, "Journal of an Expedition to the Rocky Mountains," 566; Ford, "A Summer Upon the Prairie," 293.

[32] Ford, "A Summer Upon the Prairie," 296; "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 135, 141, 142. The quote is from p. 141.

[33] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 141.

[34] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 143.

[35] Ibid., August 15, 1835, 143; Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF9, GBP-DPL. The peace proved short-lived. By the next summer, the Cheyennes and Pawnees were back at war. Conflict tapered off during the 1840s, the result of Pawnee losses incurred in Lakota raids, as well as the presence of smallpox along the lower Platte River. See Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain,* 1: 32-3; Hyde, *Pawnee Indians,* 200-1, 203, 223; White, *Roots of Dependency,* 201, 205. The Cheyennes also faced new opponents from the East, Eastern tribes removed to the Indian Territory. Well-armed trapping parties of Delawares and Shawnees sometimes clashed with the Cheyennes and Arapahos. On conflict with these groups, see David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 165; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 89-92; Frederick Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 39-40; Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 3 Folder 3;ibid., November 22, 1908, Box 3 Folder 12; ibid.,

The Cheyennes also faced enemies to the west, especially the Shoshones and Utes. Once again, much of the fighting centered on the headwaters of the Platte. However, the wanderings of the Utes and Shoshones as far south as the Arkansas brought them into conflict with the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Dodge reported that, "The whole route from the Platte to the Arkansas is frequented by large bodies of Blackfeet, Crow, Snakes [Shoshones], and sometimes Utes who live upon the waters of the Rio del Norte [Rio Grande], but frequently come through the mountain passes to steal horses from the Arapahos and Cheyennes."[36] Conflicts occasionally extended much further west; there is one report of the Cheyennes and Shoshones clashing near Fort Bridger in present-southwestern Wyoming.[37] The political situation on the Plains affected the fortunes of mountain tribes like the Utes. Conflicts between the Cheyenne-Arapaho alliance and the Pawnees and the Kiowa-Comanche alliance forced some Arapahos to encroach onto Ute lands. The Great Peace of 1840, and possibly the Pawnee decline, created a new dynamic. Now, with raiding opportunities to the east and south limited, the Arapahos focused

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January 21, 1911, Box 3 Folder 14.; ibid., October 3, 1911, Box 3 Folder 15, all in GBP-Yale; *Nile's National Register,* August 17, 1844, 16, 1; Frémont, *Memoirs*, 406; William M. Boggs, "The W. M. Boggs Manuscript about Bent's Fort, Kit Carson, the Fur Trade, and Life among the Indians," ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado Magazine* 7 (1930), 52-3; Theodore Talbot, *Soldier in the West: Letters of Theodore Talbot During His Services in California, Mexico, and Oregon, 1845-53,* eds. Robert V. Hine and Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 28;Bent to Hyde, February 6, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF9, GBP-DPL.

[36] Frémont, *Memoirs,* 187; Hyde to Grinnell, September 15, 1917, MS 5 Folder 51-3, George Bird Grinnell Collection, ANC; "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 140.

[37] Graham and Smith, "Report," 49.

their attention on the Utes, resulting in increasing numbers of incursions into the Ute country.[38]

The greatest challenge to Cheyenne domination of the Southern Plains came from the Kiowas and Comanches, south of the Arkansas River. Both groups were formidable warriors, and for over a decade, the conflict ebbed and flowed. Longtime plainsman Dick Wooton recollected that when the groups fought one another in the mountains, the Cheyennes and Arapahos were more successful. Fighting on the prairies, he claimed, favored the Kiowas and Comanches. Cheyenne tradition says that they and the Comanches "had been at war as long as anyone could remember." However, other sources indicate that the groups coexisted peacefully throughout the first half of the 1820s. Only by the late-1820s did conflict erupt.[39]

The vast horse herds of the Kiowas and Comanches attracted raiders from north of the Arkansas. Salubrious climate, access to fertile river bottoms, and consistent plundering of the rich haciendas of northern Mexico made these tribes the primary source for horses on the Southern Plains. While the herds made the

[38] Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 181.
[39] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 140; Hugh Evans, "Journal of Colonel Henry Dodge's Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," ed. Fred S. Perrine, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 14 (1927), 24; Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton: The Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1957), 104; George Bent to George Hyde, March 6, 1905, Box 1, Folder FF14, GBP-DPL. Berthrong and Hämäläinen write that the conflict did not begin until the late-1820s. See *Southern Cheyennes*, 81; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 164-5

Comanches rich, the horses also provided an inviting target.[40] Cheyenne oral traditions say that the Comanches and Kiowas had so many horses, "they could not herd them close to the villages." Ranging for miles on all sides of the camps, all but the finest Comanche horses roamed loose over the prairies. Despite such easy pickings, George Bent remembered that the bravest Cheyenne horse thieves crept into the heart of the Comanche villages to steal the fine war horses and buffalo runners picketed outside the lodges.[41] Cheyenne tradition says that a successful raid on Comanche herds by a party of Blackfeet convinced the Cheyennes to move south to the Arkansas. The Cheyennes, George Bent told George Hyde, "were very jealous," of the Blackfeet.[42] Contemporary white observers noted the consistent southward movements of Cheyenne raiding parties, as well as the large herds of stock they drove north from Comanchería. An officer traveling with Henry Dodge reported wrote that, "The Shians are now at war with the Camanches and Kioways, from whom they steal a vast number of horses and mules….war parties are constantly passing to and from one tribe to another."[43]

Despite their success in raiding enemy horse herds, the Cheyenne war record against the Kiowas and Comanches was less exceptional. The Comanches

[40] Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 40-1; Brian DeLay, "The Wider World of the Handsome Man: Southern Plains Indians Invade Mexico, 1830-1846," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007), 89; John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 86; Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations, 1795-1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), 67; Hoig, *Tribal Wars,* 91-2.
[41] Bent to Hyde, October 22, 1908, Box 3 Folder 12, GBP-Yale; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 42.
[42] Bent to Hyde, October 22, 1908, Box 3 Folder 12, GBP-Yale; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 41; George Bird Grinnell, "Cheyennes South of the Platte River, 1815-1820," MS 5 Folder 39, 27-8, ANC; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 33-4; Bent to Grinnell, April 25, 1918, MS 5 Folder 56-3, ANC.
[43] Ford, "A Summer Upon the Prairie," 298-9. See also "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 140; Hoig, *Tribal Wars,* 110.

and Kiowas were also capable of striking deep into Cheyenne-Arapaho territory, both for violent retaliation and for horse theft.[44] Comanche and Kiowa parties sometimes ranged as far north as the forks of the Platte. In 1836, the Cheyennes surprised a party of Kiowas on Scout Creek, about forty miles east of the site of Denver. The Kiowas fled to a stand of trees, and began erecting breastworks. The Cheyennes, unable to penetrate these defenses, fell back, allowing the Kiowas to escape.[45] Violence between the two groups accelerated in the late-1830s, with the Kiowa-Comanche alliance often holding the upper hand.

The years 1837-9 were particularly disastrous for the Cheyennes. As with their defeat at the hands of the Pawnees in 1830, religion played a pivotal role in the Cheyenne defeats. Some time after the loss of the medicine arrows, and White Thunder's unsuccessful attempt to recover all of them, the medicine man made new arrows. During the summer of 1837, a society of young, impulsive Cheyenne warriors, the Bow Strings, sought the blessing of the arrows to take the field against the Comanches. White Thunder demurred; the murder of a Cheyenne by a fellow tribal member some time before counteracted the power the arrows would give to the raiders. Rather than wait politely for White Thunder to conduct the proper ceremonies, the young warriors beat the old man with their quirts until he agreed to perform the necessary rituals. However, the medicine man informed the Bow String warriors that they stood no chance of success. Heedless of the warning, the

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[44] Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 42; Mildred Mayhall, *The Kiowas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 170.
[45] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 48; George Bent to George Hyde, February 15, 1912, Box 3 Folder 16, GBP-Yale; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 55-7; Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain,* 1: 28-9.

young men departed south. On the trail, they foolishly used up most of their arrows shooting at game. When they encountered the Kiowas along the Washita River, they were perilously low on ammunition. The Kiowas and their Comanche allies killed and scalped every one of the nearly fifty Bow String warriors.[46]

The following summer, the Cheyennes turned the arrows against the Kiowas and Comanches. Defeat stalked this expedition as well. Eager to avenge the defeat of the Bow Strings, Cheyenne warriors impulsively attacked a Kiowa encampment on Wolf Creek in present northwestern Oklahoma before White Thunder could properly conduct his arrow renewal ceremonies. Calling on a neighboring Comanche camp for aid, the Kiowas threw up breastworks. As at Scout Creek, the Cheyennes failed to penetrate the defensive works, and fell back. Although the Kiowas suffered heavier casualties, the Cheyennes paid a higher price; among the fallen was White Thunder, the most influential member of the tribe. These disasters, compounded by the annihilation of a party of Arapahos during the winter of 1838-9, reinforced the high price of war with the Kiowa-Comanche alliance.[47]

In addition to the heavy losses incurred in the late-1830s, the Cheyennes and Arapahos had sound economic reasons for coming to terms with their enemies south of the Arkansas. By 1840, the Bent's were firmly established as the most

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[46] DeLay, "Wider World," 105;Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes,* 45-7; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 72-4; Mayhall, *Kiowas,* 171; Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain,* 1:38-41.

[47] George Bent to George Hyde, January 23, 1905, Box 3, Folder 3, GBP-Yale; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes,* 82-3; Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes,* 59; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 79-81; Mayhall, *Kiowas,* 171; Benjamin R. Kracht, "The Kiowas and the Santa Fe Trail," in *Confrontation on the Santa Fe Trail,* ed. Leo E. Oliva (Woodston, KS: Santa Fe Trail Association, 1996), 31; Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain,* 1: 51-66.

powerful firm on the Southern Plains. Peace with the Comanches and Kiowas would allow the Cheyennes and Arapahos to safely expand their hunting operations, and the opening of the neutral buffalo grounds meant increased trade opportunities at Bent's Fort. Everyone on the Southern Plains knew the vast, largely untapped potential of market-oriented hunting between the Arkansas and the South Platte, but as long as war raged, intensive hunting remained risky. Peace also allowed the Cheyennes and Arapahos to take advantage of free and open access to the huge Comanche and Kiowa horse herds. The peace negotiations of 1840 were the culmination of a long series of setbacks for the Cheyennes – the loss of the medicine arrows to the Pawnees, enemy incursions from south of the Arkansas, the disastrous Bow String expedition, the stinging defeat at Wolf Creek, and the death of White Thunder. These factors, combined with the potential for vast economic opportunities, predisposed the Cheyennes to seek peace with their old enemies.[48]

The Comanches and Kiowas had their own reasons – political, military, and economic – for coming to terms with the Cheyennes and Arapahos. The traditional interpretation is that pressure from the east drove the Comanches and Kiowas into the alliance. The expansion of the Osages and other tribes from the Indian Territory initially disrupted Comanche trade, as well as sparking violent confrontation. The eastern tribes, well-armed with American guns, proved vigorous and determined opponents. However, by the mid-1830s the Comanches

[48] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 80; Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 77; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 73.

had established peace, albeit a tentative one, with their new neighbors in Indian Territory.[49] According to this older view, Texan incursions into Comanchería also played a determining role. In the years following their independence from Mexico, Texans often proved themselves aggressive expansionists. Well-armed, they probed the eastern margins of Comanche territory, sparking a cycle of raid and counter-raid. In the face of these conditions, the Comanches and their allies, needing guns and ammunition, reached out to their old enemies, hoping to tap the market at Bent's Fort.[50]

The Cheyennes and Arapahos posed a greater threat to the safety of western Comanche villages than did the Texans or Osages. As noted above, Cheyennes and Arapahos aggressively raided into Comanche territory in search of horses, plunder, and war honors. George Bent drew a direct connection between Cheyenne success stealing Comanche horses, and the coming of peace in 1840. He wrote that the former rivals, "have been at peace ever since the Cheyennes made it to hot for them in stealing horses…as many as 1000 head at a time."[51] The balance of these hostilities took place within Comanchería. Despite the fact that the Comanches and Kiowas demonstrated both their ability to raid far north of the Arkansas, and to

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[49] On the Comanches and the eastern tribes, see Hoig, *Tribal Wars,* 97; Thomas W. Kavanagh, *The Comanches: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 235; George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians,* 2 vols. (London: Published by the Author, 1841), 2: 43-4; DeLay, "Wider World," 90, 95.

[50] For the traditional argument that pressure by the Texans pushed the Comanches into peace, see Jablow, *Cheyenne and Plains Indian Trade,* 70, 72, 80, and Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 185-7. For a dissenting view, arguing that the Texans posed little threat to the western Comanche bands, see DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 80, 83.

[51] Bent to Hyde, January 23, 1905, Box 3 Folder 3, GBP-Yale; George Bent to George Hyde, January 23, 1905, Box 1 Folder FF8, GBP-DPL.

defeat soundly Cheyenne incursions south of the river, by 1840 peace seemed a better option.[52]

Although both sides were beginning to recognize the benefits of a rapprochement, the peace negotiations began largely by accident. Seeking to avenge their defeat at Wolf Creek, another Cheyenne war party headed south. On their way, they stopped at an Arapaho encampment along the Arkansas. Entering an Arapaho lodge, the Cheyenne raiders found themselves face to face with two Kiowa-Apaches who were visiting their Arapaho in-laws. This unexpected encounter prompted the Kiowa-Apaches to inform the Cheyenne warriors that the Kiowas and Comanches were willing to make peace. The Cheyennes replied that they had no power to make peace on the spot, but that they would return to their camps to deliberate. The price of peace, they told the Kiowa-Apaches, was the return of the scalps of the Bow String warriors, and a substantial gift of horses. The Cheyennes held council. Initially unable to reach a decision, they referred the matter to the Dog Soldiers, the most prominent Cheyenne warrior society. The Dog Soldiers deliberated, and came out in favor of peace. Kiowa tradition, however, says that the first peace overtures came from the Cheyennes. Suspicious of Cheyenne intentions, the Kiowas rejected the initial offer. When the Cheyennes made a second attempt, the Kiowas accepted their offer.[53]

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[52] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 49, 79. The quote is from page 79. See also DeLay, "Wider World," 106. The author also notes that a smallpox epidemic in the late-1830s might also have predisposed the Comanches and Kiowas towards the alliance. See *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 80.
[53] Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 72-3; Bent to Hyde, no date, Box 3 Folder 3; Bent to Hyde, June 5, 1914, Box 3 Folder 31; Bent to Hyde, August 3, 1914, Box 4 Folder 32, all in GBP-Yale; Mayhall, *Kiowas*, 89-92; James Mooney, *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 275-6; James B. Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West:*

The two groups established a firm and lasting peace sometime in 1840, along the banks of the Arkansas near Bent's Fort. Prior to the meeting, the Cheyennes eagerly descended upon the fort, seeking the trade goods necessary to cementing ties between allies. At the beginning of the negotiations, the Kiowas presented the Cheyennes with the scalps of the Bow String warriors; the Cheyennes refused to accept the proffered items, claiming that they would only resurrect painful memories. A vigorous round of trade and gift giving commenced. The Cheyennes, taking advantage of their connections with the Bents, provided the Comanches and Kiowas with blankets, cloth, beads, and brass kettles. The Comanches and Kiowas reciprocated with an immense gift of horses. Cheyenne tradition says that their new allies gave away so many horses that, "Even the unimportant persons received four, five, six horses."[54]

Peace brought both benefits and unintended consequences to all parties involved. Most importantly, families on both sides slept easier knowing that the violence that wracked the region for a decade was at an end. Both groups could now focus their attention on enemies elsewhere; the Cheyennes turned west, the Comanches south.[55] The Cheyennes and Arapahos gained access to the vast horse

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Personal Adventures of a Border Mountain Man; Comprising Hunting and Trapping Adventures with Kit Carson and Others; Captivity and Life Among the Comanches; Services Under Doniphan in the War with Mexico, and in the Mexican War Against the French; Desperate Combats with Apaches, Grizzly Bears, etc. etc. (Hartford: Wiley, Waterman, and Eaton, 1872), 39-40.

[54] Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes,* 63-9; Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain,* 1: 67-73. The quote comes from Powell, 1: 72. One alleged witness claimed that there was a lot of gambling and horse racing. The Comanches won so many races that they put the Cheyennes and Arapahos afoot. However, in a spirit of generosity, the victors returned the horses in order to maintain the peace. See Hobbs, *Wild Life,* 41.

[55] Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes,* 73. For Cheyenne-Arapaho incursions into Ute country, see above. Llewellyn and Hoebel point out that the peace of 1840 required warriors on both sides to

wealth of their new allies, while the Comanches and Kiowas tapped into a new source of white trade goods – Bent's Fort. Both sides agreed to share the territory along the Arkansas River, especially the valuable wintering ground at the Big Timbers, downriver from the fort.[56] From an economic standpoint, the most important result of the peace was an intensification of market-oriented buffalo hunting. No longer concerned about enemy reprisals, the new allies set about exploiting the vast herds that roamed between the Arkansas and the South Platte. The Bents and St. Vrain were most likely ecstatic, for increased hunting brought more trade opportunities and revenues. Furthermore, the company could now expand its operations into the previously closed areas south of the Arkansas. Peace allowed the traders to establish lucrative new trade connections with the Comanches and Kiowas, meaning a steady stream of robes pouring into Bent's Fort from north, east, and south. However, the opening of these neutral grounds had negative long-term consequences. With the risk of violence now gone, Indian hunters cut deeply into the region's herds. Peace brought increased opportunity, but also ultimately worked to undercut the subsistence and economic base of the

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seek out new targets. The need for horses and war honors remained critical to the social and economic advancement of young men on both sides of the Arkansas. See Karl N. Llewellyn and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Cheyenne Way: Conflict and Case Law in Primitive Jurisprudence* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 93. For increased Comanche raiding into Mexico as a result of the 1840 peace, see Jablow, *Cheyenne and the Plains Indian Trade,* 76; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 78-9; DeLay, "Wider World," 107.

[56] Moore, *Cheyennes,* 95; Jablow, *Cheyennes and Plains Indian Trade,* 75; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire,* 165; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 68, DeLay, "Wider World," 106.

inhabitants of the Southern Plains, both Indian and white. For the moment, however, all sides appeared pleased with the results of the negotiations.[57]

Under optimum conditions, peace and nonintervention in Indian politics characterized the trade policies of Bent-St. Vrain. Maintaining a respectful, healthy distance from Indian quarrels kept company traders safe. Nonintervention also allowed the principals to cultivate a guise of neutrality, ostensibly allowing them to do business with all comers. Favoring one tribe above another made travel and trade dangerous. George Bent recalled that, "As the company was trading with all the tribes and the tribes were often at war with one another, great care had to be taken by the company to avoid trouble. My father always ordered the men to keep out of the Indian quarrels and not to mix in when one tribe was fighting another." Throughout the 1830s, the Bents and St. Vrain strove, not always successfully, to observe intertribal politics with Olympian dispassion. The traders hoped to maintain Bent's Fort as a neutral middle ground, where all plains tribes could gather peacefully for trade. However, the close nature of the ties the Bents cultivated with the Cheyennes made it impossible for the partners to remain completely neutral. [58]

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[57] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 80; DeLay, "Wider World," 95-6; Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 483; Pekka Hämäläinen, "The First Phase of Destruction: Killing the Southern Plains Buffalo, 1790-1840," *Great Plains Quarterly* 90 (2003), 110; Hobbs, *Wild Life*, 43; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 199. Traditionally, historians have seen the Bents as the primary movers in bringing about peace between the two groups, see Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 124.

[58] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 182, 259; Tanis C. Thorne, "Marriage Alliance and the Fur Trade: Bent, St. Vrain and Company, 1831-1849" (M.A. thesis, University of California- Los Angeles, 1979), 17; *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 2, 1910, L. Bradford Prince Papers, New Mexico State Records Center and Archive, Santa Fe; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 71.

By becoming kin with the Cheyennes, by granting them a most-favored trade status, the company signaled its lack of neutrality to Cheyenne enemies, most notably the Comanches. The traditional story of the roots of the Comanches' resentment of the company comes from George Bent. Bent tells a story of his father and brother hiding a couple of Cheyenne horse raiders from a Comanche war party. When the Comanches found Cheyenne moccasin prints all over the area they demanded that the Bent's turn over the thieves. The brothers played coy, telling the Comanches that the Cheyennes were long gone, headed north. The ruse worked. The Comanches rode away, the Cheyennes escaped, and the prestige of the Bents increased. The only problem with the story is that it probably is not true.[59] Alliance with the Cheyennes exposed Bent-St. Vrain traders to reprisals as they journeyed throughout the Southern Plains in search of business.[60] In return for the large number of robes the Cheyennes traded to the partners, they required trade goods, including guns and ammunition. In a sense, by providing firearms to their main customers, the Bents undercut their chances of extending the scope of their trading operations beyond Cheyenne territory. The Cheyennes could easily turn the guns they obtained at Bent's Fort against the Comanches, Kiowas, Utes, and Pawnees. Should any of these groups trace the source of the weapons back to the Bents, their traders risked swift reprisals. Although arming the Cheyennes did not

[59] Bent gives variations of the story, adding details with each retelling. See Bent to Hyde, April 10, 1905, Box 3 Folder 4; ibid., April 13, 1914, Box 3 Folder 30; May 22, 1914, Box 3 Folder 31; June 5, 1914, Box 3 Folder 31, all in GBP-Yale. David Lavender retells the story in *Bent's Fort,* 128-9. On the historicity of the story, see Kavanagh, *Comanches,* 216. The author calls the story a "probably only semihistorical account."
[60] Thorne, "Marriage Alliance," 23.

always keep their rivals from seeking out trade at Bent's Fort, interactions between the groups along the Arkansas could be tense; fighting and theft within the vicinity of the fort was not uncommon before 1840.[61]

Violence often characterized the interactions between Bent-St. Vrain and the Pawnees. Dick Wooton recalled that the Pawnees caused the company much trouble. He wrote that they approached the fort under the guise of friendship. But, if they caught any employee alone, "his life wasn't worth a cent if they could get near enough to him to kill him," Wooton complained. On one occasion, he wrote, the Pawnees killed two herdsmen within site of the walls of the fort. Company wagon trains plying the Santa Fe Trail were not safe from Pawnee attacks either.[62] In September 1838, the Pawnees attacked a Bent-St. Vrain party traveling the Mountain Route of the Santa Fe Trail south to New Mexico. The Indians struck the men while they were encamped along a tributary of the Arkansas River. The caravan suffered one man killed and three wounded, in addition to the loss of their entire stock of merchandise. The following year, Big Soldier, the leader of the Pawnee band informed the tribe's agent that the attack had been a misunderstanding. He informed the agent that his men mistook the party for "Spaniards." The horses, mules, and merchandise provided a target too tempting to pass on, and the Pawnees attacked. Big Soldier expressed remorse for the mistake,

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[61] Powell, *People of the Sacred Mountain,* 1: 69; Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 14, 124, 171; Jablow, *Cheyenne and Plains Indian Trade,* 80; Kavanagh, *Comanches,* 216, 234. For theft committed by Indians on the Bents, see Frémont, *Memoirs,* 406; Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, February 2, 1844, Box 4 Folder 1, William L. Sublette Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

[62] Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 36; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* introduction by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 28.

lamenting the fact that, "these white men were not Spaniards, but my American brothers."[63] Following customary practice, the partners submitted a claim to the Office of Indian Affairs, demanding recompense for their losses. The losses, Marcellin St. Vrain reported, were extensive. The Pawnees made off with nearly three thousand yards of cloth, thirty-eight pairs of shoes, one hundred eighty yards of calico, ten pounds of musket balls, twenty five pounds of steel, nine mules, three horses, coffee, sugar, kettles, a camp axe, twenty-three buffalo robes, one rifle, twenty-five pounds of ink, and two "Latin missals" intended for the churches of New Mexico. The total loss came to $3,273.13.[64] However, Congress proved unwilling to act on the Company's claim. The attack, investigators pointed out, took place in Mexico. As a result, they noted, "When a trader leaves the United States, this government ceases to be responsible for any losses which may attend his adventures." Reimbursing American merchants for attacks on foreign soil, the investigating committee decided, would set a bad precedent.[65] Whether or not the ties between the Bents and the Cheyennes dictated Pawnee actions is uncertain, but the potential for conflict sometimes made travel, especially on the eastern edges of the Great Plains, hazardous for company traders and wagon trains.

Company relations with the mountain tribes – the Utes and Shoshones – were more ambiguous. The only documented case of preemptive violence perpetrated by Bent-St. Vrain against an Indian tribe was directed against the

[63] Big Soldier to John Daugherty, May 3, 1839, quoted in "Bent, St. Vrain and Company," 28th Cong. 2nd Sess. H.rp. 194, 5.
[64] "Bent, St. Vrain and Company," 3.
[65] Ibid., 1-2.

Shoshones at Fort Cass. Relations with the Utes could also be tense. From the point of view of the Utes, the Bents, as allies of the Cheyennes and Arapahos, looked suspicious. It is possible that, after the Great Peace, the Cheyennes and Arapahos, armed by the company, expanded the scope of their raiding west into Ute territory. Because of raids by the Plains tribes, the Ute trade was dangerous for white traders along the Arkansas River. The Bents first tried to trade with the Utes in 1839, and met with a chilly reception in their camps along the Uintah. Unable to dispose of any of their goods, the traders returned to Bent's Fort.[66] However, the following year, the Utes came to the fort to trade. Their presence unnerved clerk Alexander Barclay; "the Eutaw tribe were admitted into the fort in overwhelming numbers and to a man might have annihilated us at any preconcerted signal while we were engaged in distributing the different articles," he informed his brother. The Utes had the opportunity to strike a disastrous blow, yet they refrained, a shaken Barclay wrote.[67] After the initial tensions of the late-1830s and early-1840s, trade between the Utes and the company expanded slowly. Sometimes the Utes came directly to the fort to trade, while at other times, the partners dispatched their employees west to the country around Great Salt Lake. In the case of the trade between the Utes and Bent-St. Vrain, economic self-interest and the potential

[66] Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies*, 1: 166-70.
[67] Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 73; Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*, 183-5; Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of California Press, 1978), 160, 162 (the quote is from 160); Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, March 12, 1841, Box 1, Barclay Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

for new markets overcame the suspicion resulting from the alliance between the Bents and the Cheyennes.[68]

Largely because of their close ties to the Cheyennes, it took Bent-St. Vrain almost five years to establish trade relations with the Kiowas and Comanches south of the Arkansas River. It is possible that the partners urged the Cheyennes to curtail their raiding into Comanchería, hoping to establish peaceful trade relations. As early as 1835, sensing the vast economic potential of the Comanche market, William Bent traveled to the Red River in an attempt to open trade. Bent encountered a camp of about 2000 Comanches on the Red, and set about opening negotiations. Although his hosts treated him with kindness, Bent returned to the fort having failed to establish trade ties. A chronicler of the Dodge expedition recalled that Bent found the Comanches "very friendly disposed to the Americans." Peace, the officer observed, would benefit all the tribes of the region.[69]

The Comanches had their reasons for not opening a trade with Bent-St.Vrain. First, they had other markets. Auguste P. Chouteau, scion of the St. Louis trading family, had constructed two posts in Comanche territory – one at the mouth of Chouteau Creek, north of the Cross Timbers, and one on Cache Creek near the future site of Fort Sill. However, when Chouteau died in 1838, the posts closed, forcing the Comanches to seek out other markets, eventually including Bent's Fort. Perhaps most important, though, was the close ties the company

[68] Alexander Barclay diary, March 15, 1846, Box 1, Barclay Papers; *Missouri Republican,* June 25, 1846.
[69] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 78; Janet Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanche and Kiowa," *Colorado Magazine* 49 (1972), 273-4; "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 142, 145.

forged with the Cheyennes and Arapahos, ties that made it extremely difficult for the Comanches and Kiowas to trade north of the Arkansas, or for company traders to operate south of the river.[70] The marriage and trade ties the Bents cultivated with the Cheyennes made traders and company horse herds an inviting target for Comanche raiders. In the summer of 1839, for example, nine Comanches stole a herd of horses as it grazed close to the walls of the fort. Although the trading licenses issued to the partners in 1836 and 1838 included the Kiowas, there is no evidence that the Bents traded or built any permanent posts south of the Arkansas. However, as a result of the Great Peace in the summer of 1840, the principals took out its first license to trade with the Comanches.[71]

Even after the Great Peace, the company's initial relations with the Comanches and Kiowas were tense. In the spring of 1841, thirty-two Kiowas came to Bent's Fort, proclaiming themselves emissaries for both tribes. The messengers offered to make peace in exchange for a trade. As was customary, the traders distributed presents. At the council that followed the Kiowas, "said that the nation expected we would send them a white man to the village to confirm the sincerity of our avowed peace inclination." The Bents sent a trader with the Kiowas, but the new trade partners killed the man and stole his string of horses. Recognizing that such an action imperiled their chance to establish economic relations with the

[70] Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 84; Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanches and Kiowas," 274-5, 279; Bent to Hyde, May 18, 1918, Box 4 Folder 43L1, GBP-Yale.
[71] E. Willard Smith, "The E. Willard Smith Journal, 1839-1840," in *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842,* eds. LeRoy R. and Anne W. Hafen (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955),163; Sidney Smith, "Sidney Smith Journal," in *To the Rockies and Oregon,* 71; Obadiah Oakley, "Obadiah Oakley Journal," in *To the Rockies and Oregon,* 40; Farnham, *Travels,* 1: 71-2; Wislizenus, *Journey,* 141; Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanche and Kiowa," 275, 278-9.

company, the Kiowas took council among themselves, and agreed to return the body of the trader and an equal number of horses to Bent's Fort. An Arapaho brought news of the killing to the fort. Clerk Alexander Barclay wrote his brother in a rage, "As you may naturally suppose we heard of it with horror and a stern desire of retributive vengeance which will be very apt to be made if a good opportunity occurs even if we resort to their own weapon viz. treachery, indeed I shall feel justified if any reprisals becoming a party to expiate this flagrant aggression." Barclay continued, writing that he would never treat with the Kiowas again without a weapon close at hand. The partners, however, were willing to accept the tokens of peace offered by the Indians. Barclay hotly disagreed with the actions of his employers. His letter continued, "I am sorry to say the principals of this concern are too much disposed to put unlimited confidence in any Indians who come with overtures of peace," it was never safe to trust Kiowas or Comanches, Barclay concluded. [72]

The sentiments of the principals won the day, however, and the next fall they formally extended its trading operations into the Texas Panhandle, and constructed a log trading post on the Canadian River in the fall of 1842. The post did good business, mostly dealing in buffalo robes and livestock stolen from Mexico. Trade John Hatcher, who married a Kiowa woman, was the company's first permanent trader in the Panhandle.[73] The log post was so successful that the

[72] Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, March 12, 1841, Barclay Papers; Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanche and Kiowa," 280.
[73] Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanche and Kiowa," 281-3; Mayhall, *Kiowas,* 174-5; Mooney, *Calendar History,* 172, 281; Kracht, "Kiowas and the Santa Fe Trail," 31.

partners decided to build a more permanent adobe structure in the same area. By 1843, the Company trade with the Comanches was apparently profitable enough to offset any losses in other areas of their business. One observer wrote that, "The news from the Arkansas is that Bent & St. Vrain have done nothing, but look to their Comanche trade to bring them out, which, if report is true, will do so."[74] Some time in early 1845[75], Robert Fisher and John Hatcher constructed the adobe post twelve miles down the South Canadian, on a stretch of swampy, but well-timbered land near the mouth of Bent Creek. Ceran St. Vrain oversaw the trading operations of the new outpost, and for a time he was quite successful. Lieutenant James W. Abert, charged with scouting a path through Comanchería in 1845 remarked on the possibility that his party might meet "a large assemblage of Indians" awaiting the arrival of company wagons at the Panhandle post. By the spring of 1846, however, relations with the Comanches became so strained that Bent-St. Vrain abandoned its operations along the Canadian.[76]

The complexity of trade and politics on the Great Plains required Bent-St. Vrain to adopt a flexible range of actions to meet each challenge, actions that sometimes had unforeseen consequences for all groups involved. Eagerness to establish close relations with the Cheyennes placed Bent-St. Vrain traders in a precarious political position. By aligning themselves with the Cheyennes, traders

[74] W.D. Hodgkiss to Andrew Drips, March 25, 1843, Box 1, Drips Papers, MHS.
[75] In typical fashion, George Bent confused his dates. He wrote George Hyde that Bent-St. Vrain constructed the Panhandle posts in 1848. See Bent to Hyde, December 13, 1905, Box 3 Folder 4, GBP-Yale.
[76] Mooney, *Calendar History*, 283; Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanche and Kiowa," 285-6.

exposed themselves to reprisals from Cheyenne enemies. Only in 1840, when the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Comanches, and Kiowas recognized the mutual benefits of peace could company employees move with relative impunity and safety across the Southern Plains. When navigating the waters of intertribal politics, the Bents and St. Vrain recognized that success often required flexibility and a willingness to play by longstanding rules.

Chapter 6 - Rivals and Rapprochement: Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and the South Platte Trade

Bent-St. Vrain combined pragmatic alliance making with circumvention of national trade laws to combat the competition it faced from white traders along the South Platte and the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. Bent-St. Vrain was not without rivals for the robe trade on the Great Plains. A four-cornered contest, centered on the upper Platte River basin, flared in the late-1830s, forcing the company to reach an agreement with American Fur in order to drive the smaller operators from the field. Such an alliance was typical of the company's approach to conducting business with the large St. Louis firms. While Bent-St. Vrain lacked the economic clout to combat American Fur on anything resembling equal terms, the Missouri merchants recognized that competition with the Bents and St. Vrain served the best interests of neither firm. Competition reduced profits. Therefore, the two companies decided to ally with one another and divide the Great Plains between them. At the same time, the lack of a strong government presence in the region allowed Bent-St. Vrain to resort to illegal business practices when confronted by the small independent traders along the Platte and in the Southern Rockies. The company distributed liquor to its Indian clients in direct violation of federal law. Without the steadying regulatory hand of the state, Bent-St. Vrain responded to the threat of competition in both a practical and often illegal manner.

The center of American Fur Company operations on the Northern Plains was Fort Laramie, in what is now southeastern Wyoming. The location of the fort was key to the exploitation of the western fur and robe trades. The fort sat astride the main east-west route from St. Louis to the Rocky Mountains, and was the northern terminus of a trapper trail that ran all the way to New Mexico. From Laramie, the AFC could tap into trade with the Arapahos, Cheyennes, and Crows. By 1846, the young aristocrat Francis Parkman wrote that "Fort Laramie is one of the posts established by the American Fur Company, which well-nigh monopolizes the Indian trade of this region. Here its officials rule with an absolute sway; the arm of the United States has little force [here]." The presence of Laramie, backed by the financial power of St. Louis, meant that it made little sense for Bent-St. Vrain to extend its operations much further beyond the South Platte. By 1838, there were four adobe forts strung out along the South Platte within a dozen miles of each other.[1] Competition from Lancaster Lupton, Vasquez and Sublette, and the Chouteau-backed Sarpy and Fraeb forced the Bents to establish a permanent presence in the area. For a couple of years, the firms were at each other's throats, competing ruthlessly for the local Indian trade. Traveler Frederick Wislizenus noted succinctly that, "There is much rivalry and enmity," between the firms and their forts.[2] Bent-St. Vrain responded to the stress of competition in a fashion

[1] Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky-Mountain Life*, ed. Charles H.J. Douglas (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 99;LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1939), 26-7, 67; Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, Co., 1947), 52.
[2] LeRoy R. Hafen, "The Early Fur Trade Posts of the South Platte," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (1925), 334; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972),

typical of its monopolistic counterpart, the American Fur Company. Recognizing the futility of competition, the two companies divided the western trade between them in 1838. However, the problem of small, independent operators remained unsolved. In order to defeat these competitors, both American Fur and Bent-St. Vrain turned to the use of alcohol to secure their profits. The utilization of their Missouri alliances, combined with an unscrupulous distribution of liquor demonstrates the flexibility of Bent-St. Vrain trade strategy. When accommodation did not quell conflict, the partners turned to baser means to secure their western investments.

Bent-St. Vrain reached the South Platte late; the honor of first arrival goes to Louis Vasquez and Andrew Sublette.[3] It is possible that Vasquez reached the Upper Platte and constructed a post as early as 1832. However, evidence for this is sketchy, for an 1835 Army expedition reported no post in the area.[4] Even the dates on which Vasquez and Sublette formed their partnership are contradictory. LeRoy Hafen, who wrote more about the topic than anyone did, gave the dates of their partnership as 1835 and 1836, and the issuance of their trading licenses as 1835 and

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183-5; Frederick Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 137.

[3] Louis Vasquez was born in St. Louis on October 3, 1798. After receiving a decent education, he entered the fur trade. He went up the Missouri River with General William Ashley's disastrous 1823 expedition. Later, he possibly entered the employ of Ashley's successors – Smith, Jackson, and Sublette. Andrew Sublette was a member of one of the first family's of the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade. His brothers William, Milton, and Solomon all spent time in the trade. It is not clear when Andrew entered the business, although it is known that he fought at the famous Battle of Pierre's Hole in 1832. See, LeRoy R. Hafen, "Mountain Men - Louis Vasquez," *Colorado Magazine* 10 (1933), 15-17; LeRoy R. Hafen, "Louis Vasquez," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 2:328 (hereafter cited as *MMFTFW*); LeRoy R. Hafen, "Mountain Men - Andrew Sublette," *Colorado Magazine* 10 (1933), 180.

[4] Hafen, "South Platte Posts," 336-7.

1837.[5] Regardless of the exact date, it was not long before Vasquez and Sublette became successful. Their brisk trade with the tribes of the South Platte caused AFC officials at Fort Laramie to take notice. The Laramie traders complained that Vasquez and Sublette were succeeding at the expense of Company interests.[6] The partners carried on their business in typical fur trade fashion: they delegated responsibility. Sublette made numerous trips between the fort and Missouri, hauling robes east, and returning with supplies and trade goods. Trade took place both within the walls of Fort Vasquez and in the Indian camps themselves.[7]

The company's most (in)famous employee, and one of William Bent's harshest critics, was James P. Beckwourth. Beckwourth joined Vasquez and Sublette in 1838 or 1839, and immediately began trading with the Cheyennes along both the Upper Arkansas and the South Platte. His actions brought him into direct contact, and conflict, with the Bents.[8] Although his colleagues and rivals considered Beckwourth a champion liar, no mean feat among mountain men, his recollections provide an important glimpse into the less savory dynamics of the crowded South Platte trade. Almost immediately, he clashed with William Bent. As Beckwourth remembered it, the two traders entered a Cheyenne village around

[5] Hafen, "Louis Vasquez," 18; Hafen, "Louis Vasquez," 2:325.
[6] Hafen, "Fort Vasquez," 204-5.
[7] Hafen, "Andrew Sublette," 181. In the summer of 1839, E. Willard Smith joined a party of Vasquez and Sublette employees heading west. His journal entries indicate that the company was no tiny enterprise. Smith counted thirty-three men in the firm's employ – "French, Americans, Spaniards, and Half Breeds" – escorting four wagons laden with trade goods. See "E. Willard Smith Journal, 1839-1840," in *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842*, eds. LeRoy R. and Anne W. Hafen (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), 154-5.
[8] Delmont R. Oswald, "James P. Beckwourth," in *MMFTFW*, 6: 51-2; James P. Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, as told to Thomas D. Bonner,* ed. by Delmont P. Oswald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 422.

the same time. Beckwourth brazenly followed Bent into the lodge of the principal chief. Bent, "looked aghast," and whirled upon the rival trader. "My God! Beckwourth," Bent exploded, " how dare you come among the Cheyennes? Don't you know that they will kill you if they discover you?" Beckwourth, nonplussed by this veiled threat, brushed off Bent's comments, and proceeded to begin trading.[9] Allegedly, Beckwourth's success caused a great deal of consternation and jealousy among his rivals. Up on the North Platte, he made "profitable bargains" with the Cheyennes. His clients, he bragged, "thought me the best trader that ever visited them, and would not allow any other company to traffic with their villages." Such exclusivity "sorely vexed my rival traders." Beside themselves with envy and frustration, other traders attempted to murder Beckwourth, or so he claimed. The secret to his success, besides natural ability, Beckwourth recalled, was an odd combination of scrupulousness and strong whiskey. This potent formula reportedly allowed him to reap tremendous profits for Vasquez and Sublette. Despite Beckwourth's boasting, Vasquez and Sublette never outperformed the Bents. By 1840, the firm was bankrupt. During 1840 or 1841, they sold out to Lock and Randolph. The new company proved no more adept at competing with Bent-St. Vain than their predecessors, and quit the region in 1842. Ironically, Beckwourth entered the employ of Bent, St. Vrain and Company for a time. He recalled that during the summer of 1840, the partners dispatched him to the Laramie Fork where he did brisk business. There is no evidence that this story is accurate. Following his brief stint with Bent-St. Vrain, Beckwourth repaired to Taos, where he entered

[9] DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri,* 128; Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures,* 427.

into a new business partnership, returning north with one hundred gallons of liquor, "and a stock of fancy articles." The Bents, naturally, warned him against going north. Naturally, Beckwourth paid them no heed. Naturally, the Indians were overjoyed to see him. Inevitably, his haul of robes and pelts was large.[10]

Less successful at competing with Bent-St. Vrain was Lancaster Lupton. A classmate of Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston at West Point, Lupton saw frontier duty at St. Louis, Natchitoches, and Fort Gibson. In the spring of 1835, he accompanied a dragoon expedition to the Rocky Mountains. While on this reconnaissance, Lupton plied their guide, former Bent-St. Vrain rival John Gantt, for information on the fur trade. Lupton resigned his commission in 1836 over some intemperate remarks about his superior officers. Inspired by his conversations with Gantt, Lupton returned to the South Platte. In either 1836 or 1837, he constructed his own adobe trading post along the river, further muddling the trading situation. Known by turns as Fort Lancaster and Fort Lupton, the post was a rendezvous point for independent trappers in the region. The collapse of the fur trade forced Lupton to supplement his income through agricultural pursuits and livestock raising. By the early-1840s, John C. Frémont observed that Fort Lupton "was beginning to assume the appearance of a comfortable farm," complete with hogs, cattle, "different kinds of poultry," and "the wreck of a promising garden in

[10] Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures,* 437-8; Hafen, "Louis Vasquez," 18-19. Following the dissolution of their partnership, Vasquez went into business for a time with fellow mountaineer Jim Bridger. Following that, Vasquez kept store in Salt Lake City. He died in 1868, and was buried in Kansas City. Sublette likewise remained in the West. He acted as a trail guide and mounted rifleman during the Mexican-American War. Following the conclusion of the war, he went to California where he mined unsuccessfully, and got mauled to death by a grizzly bear in 1853. See Hafen, "Louis Vasquez," 19-21; Hafen, "Fort Vasquez," 209; Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures,* 453, 457-8.

which a considerable variety of vegetables had been in a flourishing condition," before flood waters ruined them. In 1840-1841, Lupton attempted to cut into the trade at Fort Laramie, constructing his own post within a mile or so of the fort. He later sold out to the firm of Pratte and Cabanné. Lupton apparently reached some sort of rapprochement with the Bents on the South Platte, because their rivalry did not seem to have been especially intense. In 1846-1847, he moved south to the community of Hardscrabble, on the Upper Arkansas, where he continued his trading and agricultural pursuits.[11]

In order to counter these rivals, Bent-St. Vrain constructed their own post on the river some time in 1837 or 1838. Initially called Fort George, trappers and traders generally knew it as Fort St. Vrain.[12] Ceran's brother, Marcellin, oversaw the post and trade in the surrounding country. Situated about a mile and a half below the mouth of St. Vrain Creek, the post was impressive. Its walls stood fourteen feet high, enclosing a space roughly 100x125 feet.[13] Marcellin St. Vrain was born on October 17, 1815, at Spanish Lakes, Missouri. He received two years of university education, before joining his brother in the western trade. He first came to Bent's Fort in or around 1835. Although never a full partner in Bent-St.

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[11]Anne W. Hafen, "Lancaster Lupton," in *MMFTFW*, 2: 207-216; Hafen, "South Platte Posts," 335-6;LeRoy R. Hafen, "Old Fort Lupton and Its Founder," *Colorado Magazine* 6 (1929), 222-5;Smith, "E.W. Smith Journal," 167-8; LeRoy R. Hafen and Ghent, *Broken Hand: The Life of Thomas Fitzpatrick: Mountain Man, Guide, and Indian Agent* (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1931), 145; John Charles Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life. Including in the Narrative Five Journeys of Western Exploration, During the Years 1842, 43-4, 1845-6-7, 1848-9, 1853-4. Together with a Sketch of the Life of Senator Thomas Hart Benton in Connection with Western Expansion* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Company, 1887), 176; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 184-5.

[12] George Bent to George Hyde, April 8, 1908, Box 1 Folder 11, George Bent Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as GBP-Yale).

[13] Hafen, "South Platte Posts," 335, 340-1; Hafen, "Fort St. Vrain," 242.

Vrain, he oversaw the operations at Fort St. Vrain until its close in 1845. As noted earlier, during the 1840s much of the fort's operations were seasonal. Like William Bent, St. Vrain married into Indian society. He married a Sioux woman, with whom he had three children. He also married a Pawnee woman; they had two children. In 1848, Marcellin left the West, allegedly because he had accidentally killed an Indian in a friendly wrestling match. Another source says he killed a Mexican muleteer, not an Indian. Probably, he returned to Missouri because of poor health. In 1849, he married Elizabeth Jane Murphy of Florissant, Missouri. He spent a brief period of time in New Mexico in the early-1850s, before returning to Missouri, where he died in 1871, allegedly by his own hand.[14] Situating a post along the South Platte allowed the company to tap into the trade of the northern bands of Arapahos and Cheyennes, who seldom made it as far south as Bent's Fort along the Arkansas. Trade with the Sioux, Crow, Pawnee, Shoshone, and Blackfeet was also possible from Fort St. Vrain. On at least one occasion, the partners dispatched an expedition north of the Laramie. Dick Wooton recalled that on this

[14] See Harvey L. Carter, "Marcellin St. Vrain," in *MMFTFW*, 3: 273-77; W. R. Sopris, "My Grandmother, Mrs. Marcellin St. Vrain," *Colorado Magazine* 22 (1945), 63-4; LeRoy R. Hafen, "Fort St. Vrain," *Colorado Magazine* 29 (1952), 251; Edwin L. Sabin, *Kit Carson Days, 1809-1868,* with an introduction by Marc Simmons, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1: 305. John C. Frémont remembered that St. Vrain was a gregarious host. In addition to providing stock for Frémont's expeditions, St. Vrain feted the explorer and his officers during their stay at the fort. See Frémont, *Memoirs,* 175, 183, 186-7; John C. Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1845), 31-2.

junket, during the winter of 1836-1837, he and his fellow traders acquired "as fine a lot of peltry as was ever gathered up among the Indians."[15]

Despite this foray north of the Platte, the partners recognized the futility of competing with the American Fur Company, or any trading concern supported by its resources. The third rival trading operation, Fraeb and Sarpy, had the direct backing of the Chouteaus. In addition to this financial muscle, the partners were experienced, competent traders. Henry Fraeb was well-known in the Rockies by 1829. He was one of the partners in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, successor to Smith, Jackson, and Sublette. After the RMFC folded, Fraeb probably made his living as an independent trapper. Peter Sarpy was born in St. Louis in 1805. His family were relatives of the Chouteaus. Sarpy served his trade apprenticeship with the Western Department of the AFC, becoming one of its most trusted traders.[16] Fraeb and Sarpy joined forces in the spring of 1837, with the blessing of Pratte, Chouteau and Company. The same year, the new firm constructed Fort Jackson on the South Platte. Pratte, Chouteau and Company extended the credit necessary for Fraeb and Sarpy to purchase trade goods. The St. Louis merchants also marketed the newcomers' robes and pelts. Similar to their new neighbors, Fraeb and Sarpy operated over an extensive swath of territory. Like their rival firms, they delegated responsibility. Fraeb stayed at the fort, while Sarpy worked the North Platte.

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[15] George Bird Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," *Kansas Historical Society Collections* 15 (1919-1922), 42; Hafen, "Fort St. Vrain," 241; Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton: The Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley, 1957), 32.
[16] LeRoy R. Hafen, "Henry Fraeb," in *MMFTFW*, 3:131-5; LeRoy R. Hafen, "Fraeb's Last Fight, and How Battle Creek Got Its Name," *Colorado Magazine* 7 (1930), 97-99; John E. Wickman, "Peter A. Sarpy," in *MMFTFW*, 4: 283-85.

James Robertson, a company employee, trespassed into Bent-St. Vrain territory, traveling as far south as the Arkansas. The modest success of Fraeb and Sarpy over two trading seasons caused the Bents and St. Vrain no small amount of disquiet. With the backing of St. Louis, it seemed distinctly possible that the partners might only increase the volume of their trade at the expense of Bent-St. Vrain. During the spring of 1838, Fraeb reached out the Ceran St. Vrain, offering to cooperate with the company. Fraeb wrote to St. Vrain asking him if he might transport some of the smaller firm's robes back to the Missouri markets. In exchange, Fraeb offered St. Vrain the use of "either my waggons or any of my oxen," on the condition that he "not leave any of our property by so doing." Unwilling, and unable to buck the Chouteaus, the Bents proposed to buy out Fraeb and Sarpy. In addition to buying up the entire inventory of Fort Jackson, the partners paid $336. 551/2 to its employees. The sale of the fort took place in July 1838, the formal transfer in October.[17]

Now rid of its most effective rivals, Bent-St. Vrain looked to define and solidify permanently its relationship with the Chouteaus regarding trade on the Plains. Ending the small-scale trade war on the South Platte was in the best interests of both parties. Needful of the Chouteau's capital and connections, the partners saw no need to antagonize the powerful firm. Reeling from the Panic of 1837, its trade on the Upper Missouri severely jeopardized by a massive smallpox

[17] Henry Fraeb to Ceran St. Vrain, April 13, 1838, Reel 25 Frame 587**,** CC; Wickman, "Peter A. Sarpy," 4: 286-292; Abel Baker, Jr. to Sarpy and Fraeb, April 1, 1839, Reel 26 Frame 43, CC; Hafen, "Fort St. Vrain" 243.

outbreak, the Chouteau's were also ready to deal.[18] Some historians speculate that Ceran St. Vrain, by virtue of his long relationship with Bernard Pratte, acted as the main broker for the deal. The agreement the two parties reached was brief and to the point, less than one full page, with no legal or business jargon. It is strikingly nonchalant, yet staggering in scope. On July 27, 1838, Bent-St. Vrain, and Pratte and Chouteau's Sioux Outfit promised, "not to enter into competition against each other in the business of the two firms or in any way interfere with their several interests in the business of the Indian trade." More specifically, the parties agreed that Bent-St. Vrain should not send its traders "to the north fork of the Platte and [the] Sioux Outfit shall not send to the South fork of the Platte." Cordiality did not come immediately, however. That winter, William Bent brazenly crossed the North Platte to trade with the Cheyennes. When a Chouteau employee reminded Bent of the contract, Bent replied brusquely that the Cheyennes were Bent-St. Vrain clients, and that as a senior partner, he could go wherever they went. After this affair, however, the two firms strengthened their mutually agreeable ties.[19] With this simple contract, the two largest trading companies on the Plains divided between them the heart of the trans-Mississippi West. Now, each was free to focus on consolidation and the elimination of all rivals. Although some wags referred to Bent-St. Vrain as the Southern Department of the American Fur Company, in

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[18] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 180.
[19] Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 96; Harold Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," in *MMFTFW*, 5: 308; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 193; Agreement Between Bent, St. Vrain and Company and the Sioux Outfit, July 27, 1838, Reel 25 Frame 731, CC; Frederick Laboue to P.D. Papin, December 15, 1838, Reel 25 Frame 1009, CC.

reality this was not the case. American Fur was preeminent north of the Platte, the Bents and St. Vrain south of the river. By the 1840s, the new partners were the most powerful companies in the West.[20]

When accommodation, gift giving, and the patient cultivation of familial ties proved too slow or inefficient, liquor greased the wheels of the Indian trade. Despite the hue and cry raised against the use of alcohol by reformers, military officers, Indian agents, and some traders, it flowed all too freely onto the Plains – south from Canada, west from Missouri, and north from New Mexico. Despite legislation from Congress banning the sale of alcohol in Indian Country, despite the efforts of frontier military officers to prevent smuggling and prosecute the perpetrators, the liquor trade continued to be a problem throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Distance, budgetary shortfalls, the ingenuity and persistence of smugglers, and the vast potential for profit undermined the enforcement of prohibition. Although the heads of the major trading firms, especially American Fur and Bent-St. Vrain, generally opposed the use of alcohol in trade, the stress of competition strained their scruples. When faced with revenue loss at the hands of small, independent operators, the partners fought liquor with liquor.

Despite its efforts, the government's success at halting the liquor trade was spotty, at best. In May 1822, Congress authorized military officers and Indian agents to inspect all trade goods entering the Indian country. A trader caught with liquor faced forfeiture of both his goods and the bond he put up for his trading

[20] Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 203; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 423, note 9; Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 115-16. The quote is from 116.

license. However, crafty traders could get around some provisions of the law. Most notably, the 1822 law allowed employers to bring some liquor into Indian Country, provided they used it only to slake the thirst of their boatmen. The result was predictable enough – the amount of liquor making its way up the Missouri River through this loophole was enough to incapacitate an entire armada's worth of boatmen. Finally, in 1832, Congress declared an absolute ban on liquor in Indian Country, and issued directives placing frontier officers on high alert to prevent smuggling. The law was almost impossible to enforce. Government officials were isolated, underfunded, and understaffed. The fur companies interested in using liquor were well connected and highly capitalized. Furthermore, the traders often had the sympathy of the local whites. Smugglers brought to trial for violating the liquor laws often had sympathetic juries. If the government dammed one river of booze, a dozen more flowed on, unchecked.[21]

Even where government agents were present, they were often unable to enforce the law. Observers noted that violation of the law, "is a daily occurrence, and perpetrated almost in the very presence of the government officers."[22] Along the Missouri border, for instance, there were simply too many unscrupulous distillers and traders to monitor. They, "hover along the frontier like ill-omened birds of prey," an official wrote his superiors in Washington. "The grog shops along the line in the State of Missouri furnish the Indians as much as they

[21] Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 198-204.
[22] George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 99.

desire….To expect an agent, alone and unaided, without any military force, to put a stop to all this, is preposterous."[23] Nevertheless, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in St. Louis urged his agents to be vigilant, to inspect as many trading caravans as possible. During the spring and summer, the departure of trading caravans for the Plains and Upper Missouri was a common occurrence, and superiors reminded their subordinates of their inspection duties. Those critical of both the liquor trade, and the efforts of the government to interdict it, scoffed at the efforts of military officers and Indian agents. Simultaneously, critics marveled at the audacity of the smugglers who openly flouted the law. The smuggling operations of many traders was the worst kept secret on the frontier, Rufus Sage complained. It was impossible, he noted, to conceal the organization of a trading expedition. News circulated for weeks in advance of departure. The smugglers brazenly loaded their liquid cargo in broad daylight, "under the very noses of government officers, stationed along the frontiers to enforce the observance of laws." Furthermore, Sage wrote, the traders sometimes waited days or weeks to depart, plenty of time for government action that rarely, if ever, came.[24]

The sheer immensity of western distances also undermined the efforts of government agents. An individual agent, responsible for hundreds, if not

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[23] Richard S. Elliott to Crawford, July 24, 1845, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1846*, 29th Cong. 1st Sess. H.doc. 2, 553.

[24] P. G. Randolph to William Clark, October 21, 1830, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Central Superintendency, Microfilm, Reel 2 Frame 346; J.F.A. Sanford to Andrew Drips, July 10, 1842, Box 1, Andrew Drips Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; Rufus Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies: or, Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years, with a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Conditions, and their Different Nations Inhabiting Them* (Philadelphia: Baird, 1854), 28-29.

thousands, of square miles of rugged terrain often labored in vain. Andrew Drips, for instance, pointed out the reality of the situation to his superiors in St. Louis. He was responsible, he wrote, for the entire country between the Yellowstone River and the North Platte. "These two points are so far from each other that it is impossible for me to keep a watch on both at the same time and particularly the latter when Liquor can be so easily introduced from the Spanish country [New Mexico] and the United States without any possibility of it being detected before it reaches its place of destination."[25]

Officials were often at their wits end as to how to deal with the problem. Few of the solutions they proposed seemed to make a difference. Revocation of trading licenses and forfeiture of the traders' bond seemed the most obvious answer. Scrupulous enforcement of licensing was also proposed. Proponents of this type of oversight argued that properly licensed traders were less likely to engage in the liquor business. Licensing implied a long-term commitment to the trade, and the careful cultivation of trade ties with Indian clients. Those with a permanent stake in the trade, observers pointed out, were less likely to pursue short-term profits. Rather than providing liquor and "urging the Indians to kill large quantities of buffalo and other game, to swell up their profits for any one year, they would rather keep a watchful eye over the game to secure themselves a handsome yearly profit….They would be interested in preserving the Indian from

[25] Thomas Harvey to William Crawford, July 9, 1844, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm, reel 884 (hereafter cited as UMA); Andrew Drips to Thomas Harvey, July 12, 1844, UMA.

dissipation and in keeping him at regular hunting."[26] Drips proposed enlisting licensed traders, and even Indians, to help destroy any confiscated liquor; "it is lawful to employ them and I advise you to do it," he wrote his subordinate Colin Campbell.[27] Careful inspections, bond forfeiture, loss of trading licenses, destruction of inventory, none of these could be completely effective as long as the potential profits from the use of liquor remained high. "The profits of the traffic are so great," the Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported, "that the risk of detection and loss of the article is, and will be incurred without hesitation; and the fine is of little or no effect."[28]

Indians could not handle their liquor, critics reported. Violence, social and moral degradation trailed in the wake of their drunken bacchanals. "I am every day more and more convinced of the ruinous effect that spirituous liquors have on the Indians of this country," John Daugherty wrote William Clark. Without complete prohibition, "the day is not far distant when they will all be reduced to the most abject misery ever inflicted by the hand of civilized man."[29] Alcohol removed any moral or social inhibitions the Indians may have had, George Frederick Ruxton complained. At worst, violence followed drunkenness. Reports of deaths, accidental and otherwise, were all too common. It was tragic, observers noted. The Indians awoke out of their stupor, and realized the immensity of their

[26] Harvey to Crawford, July 9, 1844, UMA; Richard Hill Graham and Sidney Smith, "Report of Journey to the Rocky Mountains," ed. John E. Sunder, *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 11 (1946), 52.
[27] Drips to Campbell, November 28, 1842, Box 1 Drips Papers.
[28] *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1846,* 29th Cong. 2nd Sess. H.doc. 4, 228.
[29] Daugherty to Clark, November 10, 1831, Letterbook, p. 374, Reel 2 Vol. 6,William Clark Papers.

actions. The male clients got so bad, James Beckwourth remembered, that the women and children, fearful of physical harm, fled their villages while the men reveled. However, even the women might become victims of "degradation," Lewis Garrard lamented.[30]

Traders like the Bents pointed out that the most egregious violators of the liquor laws were the small independent operators with whom the giants competed along the Platte, Missouri, and Arkansas. Government agents and the well-established traders laid the blame for this debauchery squarely upon the shoulders of the independent operators. "Such trade is *generally conducted* by persons of little or no capital," the Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported.[31] Andrew Drips was even more specific. He reported on "a nest of traders," located on the South Platte, who imported their whiskey from New Mexico. If their traffic continued unabated, Drips warned, licensed traders "will have to leave the country for they are not able to compete with those unlicensed peddlars."[32] Without the backing of the Missouri merchants, these traders relied upon the use of alcohol, and chicanery, to carve out their own piece of the lucrative robe trade. Using liquor was bad enough, the Bents and Chouteaus complained, but the independents often cheated their clients out of their full share of liquid trade goods. Strong whiskey, diluted over the course of trade negotiations often guaranteed high profits for the traders.

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[30] Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 74, 100; Hamilton to Harvey, July 5, 1844, UMA. Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures,* 444; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* with an introduction by A.B. Guthrie (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 77.

[31] *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844,* 28th Cong. 2nd Sess. S.doc. 1, 438.

[32] Andrew Drips Account Book, Undated entry (probably December 1843), Box 1, Drips Papers. For a discussion on the liquor trade along the Arkansas and in northern New Mexico, as it relates to Bent, St. Vrain and Company, see the following chapter.

The strongest alcohol came out during the initial trades. Once the client was well lubricated, traders proceeded to dilute, or even drug the liquor. Cutting the alcohol with water was the most effective method; three parts water to one part alcohol was a standard recipe, but sometimes the ratio rose to ten parts water to one part alcohol. Traders also thrust their hands into the cups while pouring the liquor, "in order that it may contain less." Occasionally, they filled the bottom of their cups with a layer of melted buffalo fat to maximize their profits.[33]

The independent traders, combined with the potential profits they plucked away, led the American Fur Company into its own pragmatic use of alcohol. Unrestrained use of liquor was bad trade policy, all the major companies – American Fur, the Bents, the Hudson's Bay Company – agreed on that. In times of sharp competition, though, they rolled out their own kegs, moralizing and high-minded platitudes notwithstanding.[34] The use of liquor by the monopolies, then, "usually coincided with episodes of intense trade competition and may have been more closely linked to the nature of competitive capitalism than to Indians' unquenchable thirst for the stuff."[35] Under ideal conditions, then, the large companies would not have made such extensive use of alcohol. But, until they

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[33] David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 71; DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri,* 374. For a discussion of these methods, see Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 90; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 159; Sage, *Scenes,* 85; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 74.

[34]Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 92; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie,* 86; Frémont, *Report, 1842-1844,* 40. Perhaps it is fitting that Andrew Drips, the government's main anti-liquor enforcer during the mid-1840s, had once been an AFC employee. His association with the Company, though, led to charges by its opponents that Drips favored his old bosses and demonstrated an unseemly readiness to crack down on their competitors.

[35] Barton Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 10.

could establish monopolistic conditions, they made free use of the liquor, all the while piously decrying such actions and pleading necessity.[36]

Like American Fur, the Bents and St. Vrain made use of alcohol when faced with competition. Pragmatism, and an eye towards the company's bottom line, dictated their use of liquor in the Indian trade. Although Charles Bent may have disapproved of the liquor trade in principle – and his contemporaries attested to his honest dealings - he had no desire to see the partners lose money to a motley collection of competitors. He did little to stop William from plying their native customers when he felt it necessary.[37] Bent-St. Vrain could hardly give up the liquor trade as long as they faced competition from the independents.[38] Contemporary records give some indication of the extent of the Company's alcohol use.[39]

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[36] Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 99, n. 24. George Bent recounts one incident where the AFC provided liquor to its Indian clients who then went on a major "Drinking Spree;" see Bent to Hyde, June 2, 1914, Box 3 Folder 31, GBP-Yale; Sage, *Scenes,* 69.

[37] Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 123; Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 92; Stephen J. Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 214; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 160. Lavender does write, however, that William Bent's actions might have mitigated the cheating and debauchery attending the use of alcohol in the trade. Bent apparently only opened his kegs once trading had finished; see *Bent's Fort,* 161. James Hobbs supports this contention. He claimed that Bent-St. Vrain traders "were respected as honest men, and would never furnish intoxicating liquors to the Indians for the purpose of making more advantageous bargains with them." See James Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West: Personal Adventures of a Border Mountain Man; Comprising Hunting and Trapping Adventures with Kit Carson and Others; Captivity and Life Among the Comanches; Services Under Doniphan in the War with Mexico, and in the Mexican War Against the French; Desperate Combats with Apaches, Grizzly Bears, etc., etc.* (Hartford: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1872), 19.

[38] Mark L. Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty: Bent, St. Vrain and Company and the Robe Trade of the Southern Plains," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* (2007), 26.

[39] Book EE, August 16, 1841, p. 6 Reel 9, in the CC indicates a sale of twenty-five barrels of alcohol from Laidlaw and Company in Liberty, Missouri to Bent-St. Vrain. With the freight charges for over 800 gallons of liquor, the total charge came to $528.45.

It is possible that government officials gave the Bents and St. Vrain special treatment regarding the importation of liquor into the West. The ledger records certainly attest to the size of the shipments that reached Bent's Fort. In the summer of 1842, J.F.A. Sanford wrote Andrew Drips, the official in charge of halting the liquor trade, that the Superintendent of Indian Affairs expected Drips to inspect every trading expedition leaving Missouri. Bent-St. Vrain, Sanford wrote, must "undergo the same rigid inspection and ordeal that the others are subjected to." He went on, "*we traders* never thought the Government in earnest when they spoke about Liquor – I hope you will teach us *now* that it is no longer a jest."[40]

Nevertheless, alcohol flowed. On the South Platte especially, where competition was the most intense. So many traders, crowded into such a small area, Robert Shortess lamented, debauched the Indian population. Drinking, E.W. Smith reported, was the most popular pastime among whites and Indians alike. More melodramatically, Rufus Sage wrote of the Platte forts, "Ah, thought I, were those bricks possessed of tongues, full many a tale of horror and guilt would they unfold, to stand the listener's 'hair on end,' and make his blood run cold! But, lost in silent unconsciousness, they refuse to speak the white man's shame."[41]

Like American Fur, with whom they divided the western trade, Bent-St. Vrain responded to the exigencies of competition with well-established methods. Monopoly and the best relations with the most powerful merchants of St. Louis

[40] J.F.A. Sanford to Drips, July 10, 1842, Box 1, Drips Papers (italics in original).
[41] Robert Shortess, "Robert Shortess Narration," in *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842*, eds. LeRoy R. and Anne W. Hafen (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), 104; Smith, "E.W. Smith Journal," 168; Sage, *Scenes*, 161.

might be rendered meaningless if ragtag competitors consistently violated the territorial sovereignty of the major companies. When the independents strayed into the bailiwick of the Bents, they responded with methods similar to those of their competitors. When conciliation and accommodation failed, the partners broke the law to protect their interests.

Chapter 7 – Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and the Sinews of Trade

The nature and structure of the fur and robe trades linked Bent-St. Vrain to persons, practices, and markets far beyond the Arkansas River Valley. The scope of the fur and robe trade was both national and international. In order for the Bents and St. Vrain to succeed in their corner of the West, they had to establish and maintain ties with St. Louis powerbrokers who, in turn, were linked to merchants and markets in New York, Boston, and Europe. In his study of Bent's Fort, Douglas Comer writes, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company owed its considerable success to the ability of the principals to understand, and to skillfully operate within, the emerging capitalistic market and the North American trading systems."[1] By themselves, the Bents and St. Vrain were ill-equipped to handle the costs, risks, and marketing strategies of the fur and robe trade. Of necessity, they relied upon those with the capital and knowledge of national and international markets and economic infrastructures to act on their behalf.

In this business, the longstanding ties the principals cultivated with the movers and shakers of the St. Louis business community paid off. Only through these men could Bent-St. Vrain gain access to trade goods flowing into St. Louis from around the nation and the world. Only through these men could the partners market their annual haul of beaver pelts and buffalo robes. In this way, the

[1] Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 28, 93.

economic development of the Southern Plains was directly linked to metropolitan investments and knowhow. Jay Gitlin writes,

> To be a successful merchant on this frontier, one needed good judgment, careful calculation, and connections. Procuring goods on credit in anticipation of next year's production of furs, skins, and robes meant establishing a reputation for reliability and integrity. Trust was crucial, but information was the key. Knowing about the conditions that would affect the market for all the goods being exported and imported required a network of correspondents….The fur trade was a global business. Letters and ledgers were as important as pelts. Good relations sustained trade, literally and figuratively.[2]

St. Louis merchants like Bernard Pratte and Pierre Chouteau, Jr., were keenly attuned to business conditions on the East Coast and in Europe, as well as those on the Upper Missouri and Upper Arkansas.[3] With a keen eye towards transportation costs, wholesale and retail prices, and the variety and quality of trade goods, these men tapped into global trade networks. The Chouteaus, in particular, took advantage of contacts in New York. American Fur Company insiders, like their in-law Ramsay Crooks, kept the family apprised of domestic and international market conditions. Examining the fur trade in this context, Bernard DeVoto concluded that, "in his goods as well as his markets the mountain man was deeply involved in world energies."[4]

Barton Barbour writes, trading posts like Bent's Fort acted as both "a regional collection and distribution center and a terminal point in a global

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[2] Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 16.
[3] Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier*, 5, 9; William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 47, 97.
[4] John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1965), 16. DeVoto's characterization also extends to traders like the Bents. See Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri,* 33.

enterprise."[5] Nearly everything the St. Louis traders provided the Bents and St. Vrain came from somewhere else. The shear scope and variety of the trade goods necessary for supplying Bent's Fort and trading with Indians and Mexicans is staggering. Three large company invoices extant demonstrate this fact. Between 1838 and 1840, Bent-St. Vrain ordered shawls, pantaloons, "Fancy Calico Shirts," powder horns, "Havana sugar," kegs of powder, pigs of lead, bags of rice, brogans, butcher knives, frock coats, wampum, blankets, "wool socks and caps," playing cards, candlesticks, fishing line, eyeglasses, awls, padlocks, brass nails, "Cane swords," vermillion, beaver traps, tobacco, coffee, violin strings, Epsom salts, bacon, tin cups, yarn, spades, raisins, tar, dried apples, "English percussion caps," fifty sets of ox shoes, yards of mosquito netting, pepper, indigo, two boxes of 8 x 10 glass window panes, "Dutch scythes," reams of "lined foolscap paper," hawks bells, "War and Scalping knives," soap, rum, quills, bank books, calomel, laudanum, saltpeter, castor oil, nitric acid, lancets, syringes, "blistering ointment," a silk umbrella, copper stills, two "Blow Horns," one "Table Bell," a case of "Principle Segars," and a book of naval history.[6] An examination of the Chouteau Collection reveals the wide range of sources for many of these trade products.

[5]Barton Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 18. Although Barbour is writing about the Upper Missouri here, the principal holds much the same for Bent's Fort. It is important to note some important differences, though. Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Outfit did business on a far grander scale than Bent, St. Vrain and Company. Fur and robe shipments from Fort Union affected decisions made in boardrooms as far away as New York, and market prices as far away as London and Leipzig. The pelts and robes originating from Bent's Fort were puny by comparison. Bent, St. Vrain and Company did not affect these larger markets. Rather, the larger market forces, combined with local circumstances on the plains and in New Mexico, dictated the profit margin for the Company. As a distribution point and a terminal of global commerce, however, Bent's Fort shared much with Fort Union, only on a much smaller scale.

[6] Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoices, 1838, Ledger Z, 426-33; July 24, 1839, Ledger DD, 76-89; July 21, 1840, Ledger DD, 76-89, Fur Trade Ledger Collection, Missouri Historical Society.

Sugar came from Havana, and sometimes from Louisiana. Beads came from Trieste and Vienna. The Chouteaus imported gunpowder from Delaware, and guns from Pennsylvania. Flour came from Louisville, whiskey from Cincinnati.[7] European beads, British woolens, Brazilian coffee, Cuban sugar, Chinese tea, German steel, Pennsylvania rifles, and Ohio whiskey - all flowed into Missouri before being loaded into Bent-St. Vrain wagons bound for Santa Fe, Taos, and Indian villages from the Big Timbers of the Arkansas to the South Platte and to the Ute country west of the Rocky Mountains.[8]

However, access to such a wide array of goods was often subject to the vagaries of credit, overhead costs, and the hazards of transportation. Missouri merchants provided the credit necessary for traders like the Bents and St. Vrain to purchase the woolens and brass kettles needed for trade, as well as the brandy and books that made life in a remote outpost more bearable. In turn, the western merchants relied for their credit upon firms on the eastern seaboard. The terms of credit extension sometimes made it difficult for western merchants and their customers to live up to the terms of their contracts. Eastern merchants extended credit to Missouri merchants for twelve months, and expected prompt repayment at

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[7] John A. Merk to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., July 18, 1833, Reel 22 Frame 132; William B. Astor to Bernard Pratte, July 12, 1832, Reel 20 Frame 71; Ramsay Crooks to Bernard Pratte, May 8, 1832, Reel 19 Frame 910; E. J. du Pont de Nemours and Company to Henry Chouteau, April 18, 1839, Reel 26 Frame 86; William B. Astor to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., January 14, 1833, Reel 20 Frame 982; Joseph Robidoux to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., March 23, 1829, Reel 15 Frame 141; Irwin Whiteman to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., March 6, 1832, Reel 19 Frame 706. All come from the Chouteau Collection (hereafter cited as CC).

[8] Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 61; Sister Marietta Jennings, *A Pioneer Merchant of St. Louis, 1810-1820: The Business Career of Christian Wilt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 40, 62, 200; Lewis E. Atherton, "James and Robert Aull – A Frontier Missouri Mercantile Firm," *Missouri Historical Review* 30(1935), 8.

the expiration of the term. If the western traders could not meet their obligations, expensive and complicated negotiations were necessary to formulate new terms and conditions. The Missouri firms, in turn, extended credit to their customers on a one-year basis as well. Failure by these customers to pay up placed western creditors at risk. Default meant higher rates for themselves, rates they in turn had to pass on to their western customers. Furthermore, the nature of the international fur and robe trade complicated matters further. The turnaround between the extending of credit recouping on the investment could take years. Goods extended on credit to a firm like Bent-St. Vrain might not yield a return for the Chouteaus for two or three years. However unwieldy the system might be, all parties involved recognized the necessity of doing business in this manner.[9]

Once they established their creditworthiness, Missouri merchants found that simply getting their trade goods to St. Louis and beyond was an expensive proposition. Goods coming from international markets were saddled with high transoceanic freight rates, in addition to American customs duties. Trade goods intended for the mountains and prairies reached St. Louis by water, often by a combination of canals and rivers.[10] Eastbound shipments of pelts and robes traveled to market by one of two routes. The simplest route was down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, thence to New York. However, the heat and humidity of the

[9] Kim M. Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise: The Commercial Origins of Regional Identity in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1850* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), xii, 133; Lewis E. Atherton, "The Santa Fe Trader as Mercantile Capitalist," *Missouri Historical Review* 77 (1982), 8; Barbour, *Fort Union,* 19.

[10] Barbour, *Fort Union,* 19; Atherton, *Frontier Merchant,* 68, 87; Atherton, "Mercantile Capitalist," 9; David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 107.

southern route sometimes damaged the products. The northern route took the Ohio River to Pittsburgh. From Pittsburgh, goods could go to the coast either by way of the Pennsylvania Canal, or to Buffalo via the Ohio Canal, and from their on to New York City along the Erie Canal. Such inland water transport could be expensive, and occasionally dangerous. Steamboat technology proved both a blessing and an occasional curse for western merchants. Beginning around 1820, steamboats played an indispensable role in the growth of Missouri's economy, and her trade and communication with the West. By the 1830s, writes Dorothy Dorsey, "the economies of towns and rural regions were definitely linked in an enterprising era of river 'ports' with their economic life centering in the agricultural hinterland and a growing river commerce." However, steamboat travel could be dangerous. Wrecks were an all too common occurrence along western waterways. In addition to the potential for the loss of life, steamboat wrecks threatened the profits of the fur trading companies. For example, in 1834 the steamboat *Citizen*, carrying two hundred packs of beaver pelts, broke its rudder. The crew had to unload the pelts, and repairs took nearly a month to complete. Such lost time, proprietors worried, might mean lower prices on the eastern seaboard. On another occasion, the steamboat *Empire* sank en route to Pittsburgh, with $10,000 worth of skins lost.[11] Merchants again had to pay for shipping, transferring the goods upon arrival, and

[11]David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 64-5; Foley, *Genesis of Missouri*, 245; Dorothy B. Dorsey, "The Panic and Depression of 1837-43 in Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 30 (1936), 134; William Clark Kennerly, *Persimmon Hill: A Narrative of Old St. Louis and the Far West, as told to Elizabeth Russell* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948), 168-9; John A. Merle to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., May 10, 1834, CC, Reel 23 Frame 526; J.F.A. Sanford to Pierre Chouteau , Jr., June 6, 1839, CC, Reel 26 Frame 469.

high insurance premiums.[12] Lewis Atherton estimates that these costs amounted to nearly one quarter of the total value of the cargo.[13] Considering these high costs, merchants marked up the prices accordingly. Atherton notes that, "merchants considered 75% to 100% to be a fair markup, 50% barely acceptable, and 25% as insufficient to keep a man in business."[14] Thus, by the time the beads, alcohol, and other goods reached their final destination, the prices had risen astronomically. Mountain prices were routinely from eighty to two thousand percent above wholesale.[15]

By the late-1830s, the beaver trade was in eclipse, and Bent-St. Vrain shifted its primary focus to buffalo robes.[16] Overly aggressive trapping during the course of the 1830s severely reduced the beaver population in the West. In addition, the whims of fashion were changing; silk hats came to replace beaver hats on the streets of New York, London, and Paris. Finally, the discovery of another

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[12] Bent-St. Vrain sometimes paid these charges themselves, rather than relying upon the Chouteaus to ship their goods. Entries in the Chouteau ledgers demonstrate this fact. For freighting, insurance, and storage charges, see Book EE, September 14, 1841, p. 32, Reel 9; Book HH, August 8, 1843, p. 49 Reel 10; Book HH, February 28, 1846, p. 219, Reel 10, all in CC.

[13] Atherton, "James and Robert Aull," 9; Atherton, *Frontier Merchant,* 87; freight rates for trade goods aboard steamboats consistently ran into the hundreds of dollars. See, for example, Cash Book HH, July 20, 1844, p. 110, CC Reel 10; ibid., July 16, 1845, 180, 182; ibid., August 15, 1845, 186. On one occasion, Bent, St. Vrain and Company paid $643.31, including $402.81 for freight, to the steamboat *Oceana.* See Journal EE, August 15, 1842, CC, Reel 9 p. 266.

[14] Atherton, *Frontier Merchant,* 142-3. See also Atherton, "Mercantile Capitalist," 4; Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise,* 53; Jennings, *Pioneer Merchant,* 30-1.

[15] On these prices, see Shirley Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty that Ruled America's Frontier* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2004), 253; DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri,* 30-1; Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri,* 36; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 45.

[16] David Lavender dates the shift to 1832-1833, when beaver prices in St. Louis plunged from $6 per pound to $3.50 per pound ; see *Bent's Fort,* 149. Bernard DeVoto points out that between 1833 and 1835 the Upper Missouri Outfit was deriving more profit from buffalo robes than from beaver ; see DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri,* 23, 242 and Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 200 (hereafter cited as "Resource Study").

aquatic rodent, the nutria of South America, provided hat makers with a less expensive substitute for beaver. However, the decline of the fur trade dovetailed conveniently with a boom in the overland trade with Santa Fe and the growth of steamboat traffic along the upper reaches of the Missouri River. The use of large wagons and steamboats allowed traders to begin dealing exclusively in buffalo robes, which were far bulkier and more difficult to transport. Pragmatically, Bent-St. Vrain threw itself headlong into the robe trade.[17]

The robe trade was big business in the West. The largest operator, the American Fur Company, made money on the sheer volume of its trade. The price per pound mattered little, for the Company sent huge numbers of robes down the Missouri River to St. Louis every year. However, as early as the 1820s and 1830s, some observers warned that the increase in hunting for the robe trade was placing increasing strain upon the bison herds. By the mid-1840s, on the Southern Plains, the herds could only be found at least one hundred miles from the Front Range.[18] Contemporary observers agreed that the number of robes shipped to market was staggeringly large. Writing of the Southern Plains, Josiah Gregg reported that, "It is believed that the annual 'export' of buffalo rugs from the Prairies bordering the 'buffalo range,' is about one hundred thousand; and the number killed wantonly, or exclusively for meat, is no doubt still greater, as the skins are fit to dress scarcely

[17] Wishart, *Fur Trade,* 162; Mark L. Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty: Bent, St. Vrain and Company and the Robe Trade of the Southern Plains," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* (2007), 22-3; T. Lindsay Baker, "Beaver to Buffalo Robes: Transition in the Fur Trade," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 23 (1987), 5.

[18] Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Buffalo: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105; Wishart, *Fur Trade,* 34-5; Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 58.

half the year."[19] Charles Kennerly estimated that, "Buffalo robes by the hundred thousand were brought down the Missouri into St. Louis."[20] John C. Frémont reported that western trading companies exported about 90,000 robes annually.[21]

The exact volume of the company's robe trade is difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy.[22] No record books survive. However, despite the lack of specificity, it is obvious that the trade was profitable. Had it not been a paying proposition, the principals would have abandoned it to seek out other pursuits. Compared to the robe trade on the Northern Plains and Upper Missouri, Bent-St. Vrain exports are negligible. Still, Bent's Fort was the largest and most influential trading post on the Southern Plains, and its partners exercised a great deal of influence with the tribes of the area.[23]

Once the employees returned from their trading ventures to the Indian villages, they sorted their haul, and loaded the robes onto wagons for shipment east. It is not clear whether or not the traders sorted the robes they received when they were out in the field, or whether they waited until returning to the fort to examine

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[19] Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 369.
[20] Kennerly, *Persimmon Hill*, 172.
[21] Frémont broke the numbers down in the following order – the AFC exporting 70,000; the Hudson's Bay Company exporting 10,000, and "All other companies," about 10,000; *Nile's National Register*, September 20, 1845, 19, p. 43.
[22] Ceran St. Vrain told one reporter that the Company exported 40,000 robes during its best years. Analysis of the estimated returns, however, reveals that St. Vrain's arithmetic was wildly optimistic; see Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 23. Clerk Alexander Barclay estimated that the firm made between $20,000 and $40,000 per year on the robe trade; see Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, May 1, 1840, Box 1, Barclay Paper, Bancroft Library, Berkeley. Mark Lee Gardner lists all of Bent, St. Vrain and Company's definitively known robe shipments; see Gardner, "Resource Study," 203-4.
[23] Gardner, "Resource Study," 221-2; Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 23, 29; David Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Athens: Swallow Press/University of Ohio Press, 1989), 77; Comer, *Ritual Ground*, 117.

them. Sorting by size and quality was crucial, however. It would be poor practice to try to foist subpar robes onto eastern clients. Once sorted and separated, the robes were folded and pressed into large bundles.[24] These packs measured, on average, two and a half feet long by twenty inches wide by eighteen inches tall. Each pack usually contained between ten and twelve robes, weighing from eighty to one hundred pounds total. Packs of calf robes were lighter in weight, and contained about twenty robes. Traders then bound the packs of robes with rawhide, manila cords, or hemp, before marking the outside of the pack to identify company ownership.[25] Once sorted, pressed, and bundled, the packs were ready for shipment to Missouri. For the most part, Bent-St. Vrain, and most other traders on the Central and Southern Plains, used wagons to haul their robes to market. Occasionally, however, the traders attempted to float their products downriver, especially along the Platte. Low water levels usually rendered this a wasted effort, and on a couple of occasions, the partners unsuccessfully attempted to float their robes down the river.[26] In a letter written to his brother while staying at Bent's Fort, Andrew Sublette observed that, "we have had a very mild winter and so little

[24] The sorting process was complex. Robes were divided according to winter and summer robes. The next division dealt with quality. Traders graded their robes as either first, second, or third quality. See Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 27.

[25] Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 26-7; Gardner, "Resource Study," 202, 216; George Bent to George Hyde, February 19, 1913, Box 3 Folder 20, George Bent Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as GBP-Yale); George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 181; Baker, "Beaver to Robes," 7; Sarah M. Olson, "Furnishing a Frontier Outpost," in *Bent's Old Fort* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado, 1979), 165-7.

[26] For the use of wagons see, Baker, "Beaver to Robes," 4; Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, May 5, 1844, Box 4 Folder 1, William L. Sublette Papers, MHS (hereafter cited as WLSP). On the use of boats see LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1939), 79.

snow it is believed by them that is most capable of judging that the boats with robes cannot get down the Platt this season. Messrs Bent and St. Vrain are going to take all of their robes down in wagons." Once the caravan reached the Missouri River towns, employees unloaded the wagons onto a steamboat. The principals then boarded the boat for the downriver trip to St. Louis. The wagons and men returned to a camping spot, where they awaited the return of the partners, supplies, and trade goods for the coming season. Once these arrived, the wagons were reloaded, and the company returned to Bent's Fort.[27]

Trying to assure the quality of the product on its way to market was critical to the success of robe traders. The confidence of the clients was paramount. Customers were not shy about complaining if they received shoddy goods, and the merchants who marketed the robes of traders such as the Bents instructed their agents to pay the strictest attention to quality control. Damaged robes potentially meant lost customers, and smaller operators like Bent-St. Vrain could not afford a bad name in the Missouri markets.

Any number of factors could damage the robes en route to the eastern markets. The New Orleans route, especially hot and humid, was notoriously hard on robes. Sometimes insects got into the robes, and upon reaching eastern markets, some merchants were dismayed to find their product full of holes. The buyers

[27] Andrew Sublette to William Sublette, April 18, 1844, Box 4 Folder 1, WLSP, MHS; see also Rufus Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies; or, Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years, with a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including Their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Condition, and Different Nations Inhabiting Them* (Philadelphia: Baird, 1854), 157; Bent to Hyde, September 1, 1917, Box4 Folder 42, GBP-Yale; Stan Hoig, *The Western Odyssey of John Simpson Smith: Frontiersman and Indian Interpreter,* paperback edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 61.

fortunate enough to make their robe and pelt purchases in St. Louis personally selected the wares they wished to buy. Customers in the East were not so lucky, and when they discovered damaged or subpar robes, they complained to Astor and his lieutenants.[28]

Word quickly reached the St. Louis merchants if their eastern counterparts found their products wanting. Sometimes, those on the western end of the trade failed to weigh their pelts and robes properly. John Jacob Astor, for instance, wrote Pierre Chouteau, Jr., complaining about that his shipment fell "very short in weight." Astor suspected fraud; "light weights, or the Beaver must have been put in a very damp place before it was weighed." He wished Chouteau to get to the bottom of the situation immediately. "The buyer," Astor chided, " is not much pleased with his bargain."[29] Shortly thereafter, Ramsay Crooks took Chouteau to task over a shipment of buffalo robes. The buyers in Boston refused to accept the shipment, Crooks complained. The robes Chouteau sent, "appear to be the refuse of the Upper Missouri collection of the year and have not been kept free from damp." Wet conditions had damaged the appearance of the robes, giving them, "a dead, or not lively, appearance." Crooks urged Chouteau to pay more attention to the storage of robes, especially in humid conditions. A couple of years later, a firm from Cincinnati made the same complaint against Chouteau, pointing out that the

[28] Baker, "Beaver to Robes," 7, 11; Edward Douglas Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 97, 99; Sunder, *Fur Trade of the Upper Missouri*, 34-36; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 106; John G. Stephenson to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., December 25, 1829, Reel 16 Frame 182, CC. Market whims could also dictate the pace and price of robe sales. On demand, or lack thereof, see William B. Astor to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., April 14, 1832, Reel 19 Frame 865; Astor to Chouteau, May 14, 1832, Reel 19 Frame 940; Astor to Chouteau, June 6, 1833, Reel 21 Frame 770. All letters are in the Chouteau Collection.

[29] Astor to Chouteau, November 18, 1829, Reel 16 Frame 54, CC.

buyer found the product "very inferior," and concluding that, "they will not sell in our market."[30]

In addition to heat and rodents, improper packing and sorting methods had the potential to drive off perspective customers. William Astor wrote Chouteau that inferior hogsheads allowed moisture and bugs to get into the robes, ruining many of them. Furthermore, the customers found calf robes among the shipment. "I am aware," Astor scolded, "it is now too late to ask more particular attention in packing the Robes, but, I beg you will bear in mind, that whenever calfskins are found among the Robes, it destroys confidence among our Customers who take them for what we represent them."[31]

For the Bents and St. Vrain a wide social and economic circle in St. Louis was critical to their success in western enterprise. The partners cultivated a wide array of contacts in St. Louis, where socialization and familial connections played a role as critical as business acumen when it came to marketing their products. As noted earlier, St. Vrain spent some of his youth living in the house of Bernard Pratte, while Charles Bent's father was acquainted with the Chouteau family through business and service on the bench. The Chouteaus used their broad connection with merchants and politicians to advance their family's interest, and the Company availed itself of the Chouteau's situation.[32]

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[30] Crooks to Chouteau, November 28, 1829, Reel 16 Frame 94-6, CC; Irwin and Whiteman to Chouteau, January 11, 1831, CC, Reel 17, Frame 47.
[31] William B. Astor to Chouteau, August 27, 1832, Reel 20 Frames 252-254, CC.
[32] Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850" *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 475; Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier*, 135; Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise*, 44.

Charles and William Bent also had family in St. Louis, some of whom moved within the city's highest social circles. At lavish parties, amidst saddles of venison, "great pyramids of spun sugar," and "candied oranges," the Bents danced until dawn in the same ballrooms as the Chouteaus, Cabannes, Prattes, Carrs, and Bertholds. Those were the days, Charles Kennerly wrote, when "The town was small enough…for people to know each other well."[33] Brother John Bent was a noted St. Louis attorney and skilled raconteur. Sister Dorcas married into the politically powerful Carr family, becoming the wife of Judge William Chiles Carr. Although Juliannah Bent died young, she bore Lilburn Boggs two children. Boggs went on to become governor of Missouri in the late-1830s, and the Boggs and Bent families remained close. In short, as David Lavender writes, the St. Louis Bents were "part and parcel of the old aristocracy of the town."[34] It is also safe to assume that Charles Bent utilized his connections with the Masonic Lodge in St. Louis to further his business interests, although the connection between masonry and business success cannot be quantified.[35]

Close business connections with the Chouteaus enabled Bent-St. Vrain to avail themselves of the resources and marketing expertise of one of the largest corporations in the United States at the time: the American Fur Company. From

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[33] Kennerly, *Persimmon Hill,* 178-9.

[34] William M. Boggs, "The W.M. Boggs Manuscript about Bent's Fort, Kit Carson, the Fur Trade, and Life among the Indians," ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado Magazine* 7 (1930), 46; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 25, 226. William Bent also used St. Louis friends to attend to family affairs. For instance, when sending his son George to school in St. Louis, William entrusted him into the care of trapper turned merchant Robert Campbell. Campbell also acted as a purchaser for Company robes ; see Bent to Hyde, September 1, 1917, Box 4 Folder 42; Bent to Hyde, April 25, 1918, Box 4 Folder 44 L2, both in GBP-Yale.

[35] Comer notes this possible connection. It is a reasonable conclusion, but investigators cannot prove it nor quantify it. See *Ritual Ground,* 207.

his offices in New York City, John Jacob Astor had continental ambitions. Following his Astoria debacle, Astor slowly expanded his operations from the Great Lakes, west towards the Missouri River. In 1822, Astor created the Western Department, a subsidiary of the AFC in charge of its westernmost affairs. In 1826, the AFC placed the Western Department in the hands of Bernard Pratte and Company. When Astor retired from the fur business in 1834, his successor Ramsay Crooks and the Chouteaus maintained the same arrangement. The AFC supplied and marketed the furs and robes brought out of the Western Department, in exchange for a commission. In 1839, Pratte, Chouteau and Company – successor to Bernard Pratte and Company – dissolved, and reorganized as P. Chouteau, Jr. and Company. Bent-St. Vrain did the bulk of its Missouri business with this latter concern.[36] Of Chouteau's company, Barton Barbour writes, "Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company's broad experience and excellent connections with foreign and domestic suppliers enabled them to provide goods of generally unimpeachable quality. The company also purchased goods in such quantities that it often received discounts not available to other merchants."[37]

Lacking a retail store in St. Louis and contacts with eastern merchants, smaller firms like Bent-St. Vrain had little choice but to deal with the Western Department. Each summer, the Bents sold their robes to the Chouteaus, who in turn sold the robes on commission to merchants throughout the country. Many of these sales took place on a small scale. Bent-St. Vrain robes often found their way

[36] Barbour, *Fort Union*, 21; Wishart, *Fur Trade*, 52-3, 162; Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 378-9, 392.
[37] Barbour, *Fort Union*, 32.

into national markets in dribs and drabs. For example, H.H. Cohen bought 83 summer robes at $1.50 apiece; another time Cohen spent $763.75 on robes; Samuel Sacks bought 54 number 3 robes for $81; H. Leitchenstein purchased 10 number 3 robes for $20; the Upper Missouri Outfit once bought a grizzly bear skin from Bent, St. Vrain and Company for $5.[38] Bent, St. Vrain and Company first began selling robes to Pierre Chouteau, Jr. in 1839. Prior to that, they apparently sold their robes to Powell, Lamont and Company, a rival of Chouteau's. The arrangement proved mutually beneficial. The robes brought by the partners from the Southern Plains augmented the Western Department's already gargantuan imports from the Upper Missouri. Bent-St. Vrain benefitted from the family's ability to tap into global networks of trade and supply.[39] The Bents and St. Vrain also utilized their contacts with Chouteau to purchase supplies, pay their employees, and take out small loans. For instance, Charles Bent once drew a draft for $1050 on Chouteau in order to pay back a debt he owed to the United States Consul in Santa Fe, Manuel Alvarez.[40]

From a careful examination of surviving sources, it is possible to provide a rough sketch of the size of the robe trade conducted by Bent-St. Vrain. The first reference to the Company's robe trade came in 1835, when a dragoon officer estimated that they bought robes from the Indians for twenty-five cents in trade

[38] See Ledger BB, July 26, 1841, p. 184, Reel 8; Ledger FF, June 24, 1842, p. 203, Reel 9; Ledger FF, July 19, 1842, p. 213, Reel 9; Ledger FF, July 2, 1846, p. 314, Reel 9; Ledger FF, July 7, 1846, p. 488, Reel 9, all in CC.
[39] Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 28; Gardner, "Resource Study," 219-220, 236.
[40] Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, October 22, 1841, Box 2 Folder 54, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archive, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as BRC and NMSRCA, respectively). For more on marketing, the volume of trade, and other financial interactions between the Bents and Chouteau, see below.

goods, and sold them in St. Louis for between $5 and $6. However, the same author also noted that, "the cost of transportation to and fro, together with the expense of keeping an armed force to protect the establishment, tends greatly to consume the profits arising from the trade."[41] In 1839, the company shipped an estimated 15,000 robes to St. Louis. An observer employed by Chouteau wrote that, "they have about 600 packs Robes and Ten Packs Beaver."[42]

The trade in robes accelerated in the 1840s. The 1840 season proved "remarkably successful" for the partners, as they brought another 15,000 robes and "a considerable amount of furs," in from the plains.[43] Specific numbers for 1841 are lacking, but correspondence indicates that the company had a solid year. William Sublette wrote William Drummond Stewart that, "Bent and Savery and Co. has just got in – the robe trade has been good this year." Charles Bent informed Manuel Alvarez that, "we made a fine trade last winter (1840-1841)," while the *Missouri Republican* reported that Bent's summer wagon train contained "a large lot of Buffalo robes and furs."[44] The most thorough record of sales comes from 1842, when the Company sold 2659 buffalo robes, 277 calf robes, 2319

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[41] Lemuel Ford, "Journal of an Expedition to the Rocky Mountains," ed. Louis Pelzer, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (1926), 566-7; Lemuel Ford, "A Summer Upon the Prairie," in *The Call of the Columbia: Iron Men and Saints Take the Oregon Trail*, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1934), 289; "Report of the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge, to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," in *American State Papers, Military Affairs, v. 6* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1835), 140.

[42] Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Association, 1972), 412; J.F.A. Sanford to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., June 1, 1839, Reel 26 Frame 463, CC.

[43] *Missouri Republican*, June 12, 1840; July 3, 1840.

[44] William P. Sublette to William Drummond Stewart, June 16, 1841, Folder 1, William Drummond Stewart Papers, photocopy, MHS; Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, April 30, 1841, Box 2 Folder 53, William Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino; *Missouri Republican*, June 12, 1841.

beaver pelts, and assorted other furs for a total of $15,935.73. The sales break down as follows: 972 #1 robes, 530 #2 robes, 70 #3 robes, 427 soiled #1's, 241 soiled #2's, 24 soiled #3's, 148 #1 summer robes, 189 #2 summer robes, and 58 #3 summer robes. The robes sold at $2.70 apiece, for a robe sale total of $2659. The company also sold 41 "Refuse and Half Robes," 97 #1 calf robes, 28 #2 calf robes, 67 soiled #1 calf robes, 32 soiled #2's, 45 #1 summer calf robes, and 8 #2 summer calf robes. The 277 calf robes sold at $3.371/2 , for a total of $346.25. Ironically, the sale of beaver pelts totaled more than the buffalo robes. The company sold 895 #1 beaver, 588 #2's, and 238 #3's, totaling 2319 at $3.371/2, for a sale of $7826.62. In addition, they unloaded 4 otter pelts for $9.50, one mink and one marten for $0.50, 100 muskrats for $5.31, and one "Grisley Bear" pelt for $2. Finally, Bent-St. Vrain sold 1668 buffalo tongues, valued at $4 per dozen, totaling $556.00. The grand total, as stated above, was $15, 935.73. [45] A Missouri newspaper reported that, "Yesterday morning a part of Messrs Bent and St. Vrain's company of Santa Fe Traders arrived here, bringing, as part of the proceeds of their labors and reward of their toils and privations, 283 packs of buffalo robes, 30 packs beaver, 12 sacks tongues, and 1 pack deer skins. Confusingly, though, William Sublette wrote William Drummond Stewart in the fall that, "Bent and Savery trade was good but they did not get it down." No numbers exist for the 1843 season, only conflicting accounts regarding the number of wagons the partners sent east. However, the trade must have been brisk, for Charles Bent wrote Manuel Alvarez

[45] See Skin Sales, Journal EE, 246, Fur Trade Ledger Collection, MHS; *Missouri Republican,* May 19, 1842; Sublette to Stewart, September 1842, Box 3 Folder 3, Sublette Papers.

in February 1843 that "our people are making a greate many robes." In the, fall, the *Missouri Republican* reported the arrival of eleven Bent - St. Vrain wagons. That summer, however, Philip St. George Cooke, on the other hand, stated that he encountered "five wagons of peltries," belonging to St. Vrain.[46] Eighteen forty-four was a good year; the partners sold 700 packs of robes, in addition to some beaver.[47] Sales plummeted to about 200 packs in 1845, before rebounding the following year. Charles Bent wrote Alvarez an enthusiastic account of the Company's trading in the winter of 1846-1847. St. Vrain, trading on the Red River, brought in 750 robes, and thought "his prospects for a good trade fair." William Bent was making "a good trade," unopposed by competition in a camp of 150 "lodges of Shyeanes." On the South Platte, Marcellin St. Vrain also traded without competition, where "the Indians had a great many Robes." George Bent reported that he had 1400 robes in storage at Bent's Fort. Bent crowed that, "at all the different villages Buffalo are plenty the Indians are surrounding dayly."[48] Records are lacking for the last three years of Bent's Fort, 1847-1849. In 1849, though, Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick wrote his superior that "two separate firms" on the Arkansas and South Platte brought in a combined 13,000 robes,

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[46] *Missouri Republican,* October 14, 1843; Philip St. George Cooke, "A Journal of the Santa Fe Trail," ed. William Connelley, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (1925), 86; Bent to Alvarez, February 15, 1843, Box 2 Folder 61, BRC, NMSRCA.

[47] Boggs, "Boggs Manuscript," 51; *Nile's National Register,* August 3, 1844, 16, p. 378; Barry, *Beginning of the West,* 522; Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, May 5, 1844, Box 4 Folder 1, WLSP, MHS.

[48] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 132; Theodore Talbot, *Soldier in the West: Letters of Theodore Talbot During His Services in California, Mexico, and Oregon, 1845-53*, eds. Robert V. Hine and Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 25. Citing the *St. Louis Republican, Nile's National Register* reported that Bent-St. Vrain brought in between nine and ten thousand robes in the summer of 1846; see July 4, 1846, 20 18, 276; Bent to Alvarez, no date (probably January 17 or 18, 1847), Box 1 Folder 1, BRC, NMSRCA.

totaling $39,000. "This would seem to be a heavy profit," he pointed out, "but when all risks and expenses are counted up, the profits are by no means so much as is imagined." It is likely that Bent-St. Vrain was one of these two firms. The memoirs of traders give some indication of the profitability of the trade, even if they often exaggerated. Dick Wooton exaggerated when he wrote that he could make his employers $25,000 in a single season. Smalltime operators also pecked away at the edges of the company's enterprise, usually with little success. For example, former employee Alexander Barclay sent 121 robes to St. Louis by wagon in 1846. Simeon Turley, the notorious whiskey distiller from Taos also dabbled in the robe business occasionally. Large overhead costs also cut into Bent-St. Vrain's profits. No matter how well the robe sales went, the partners still had to maintain an extensive payroll of traders, cooks, clerks, teamsters, wranglers, hunters, and construction workers. Livestock and wagons were another expense. Room and board in St. Louis, insurance on the robes, and lost revenue for damaged robes all reduced the profit margin. As noted earlier, due to the lack of detailed company records, it is impossible to determine how much these expenses set the partners back.[49]

The products Bent-St. Vrain brought into Missouri from the plains and mountains served a number of purposes in the markets of the Midwest and eastern seaboard. Bison products were used primarily for winter clothing in the United

[49] Thomas Fitzpatrick, to D.D. Mitchell, May 22, 1849, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Platte Agency, Microfilm, Reel 889; Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley, 1957), 32-3; Alexander Barclay Diary, March 22, 1846, Box 1, Barclay Papers; Simeon Turley to Jesse Turley, April 18, 1843, Folder 1, Turley Family Papers, MHS; Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 28-9.

States. The wealthy used buffalo robes as lap blankets for their carriages and sleighs. Robes also provided material for overcoats, mittens, gloves, boots, and hats.[50] Although traders like the Bents relied upon foreign markets to supply many of their trade goods, the market for buffalo robes never extended beyond the United States and Canada. Every year, the Chouteaus exported thousands of robes to Canada, but that was the extent of the foreign market. A project to provide buffalo robes for military coats in Europe fell through when sheepskin proved cheaper. The European markets snapped up the pelts of other American animals – deer, beaver, raccoon, and muskrat – rather than the robes of the large western quadrupeds.[51] In addition to the robes, buffalo tongues found a place in the market. Westerners relished all parts of the buffalo – hump ribs, the fleece, intestines, and the tongue. "Most every part of the buffalo is good eating," Thomas Boggs claimed. As with robes, packing tongues for transport was critical, for even well salted tongues could spoil before reaching market. Gourmands in St. Louis and the East relished the arrival of this western delicacy, and Bent-St. Vrain played a role in supplying this demand.[52]

The purchase of "sundries" by Bent-St. Vrain recurs repeatedly throughout the Chouteau records. Most of the time, the partners purchased these goods from other merchants and charged the purchases to their Chouteau accounts, redeemable

[50] Baker, "Beaver to Robes," 1-2; Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty," 23; Gardner, "Resource Study," 204.
[51] Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri,* 17; Baker, "Beaver to Robes," 4; Wishart, *Fur Trade,* 107.
[52] Boggs, "Narrative," 51, Boggs-Yale; Branch, *Hunting of the Buffalo,* 50; Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri,* 75. For Bent, St. Vrain and Company selling tongues, see Book EE, July 12, 1846, p.236, Reel 9; Book FF, July 1, 1848, p. 189, all in CC. The sales were for 306 and 25 dozen tongues, respectively.

at the next shipment of robes. These unexplained, miscellaneous purchases drained hundreds, even thousands of dollars out of the company's coffers. A sample of these sundry purchases indicates that the partners spent anywhere from $30.49 up to $3125.26. The average purchase ran into the hundreds of dollars.[53] At times, the purchases are enumerated. The partners purchased a corn mill from Thomas Meier for $8, a bullet mould and coiled rope from Chouteau.[54] Other business expenses had nothing to do with the purchase of blankets or kettles or syringes. The company charged travel expenses on their account with Chouteau, or to send documents to Washington, D.C.[55] The partners also availed the opinions of prestigious St. Louis lawyers like William Bates.[56] The Bents and St. Vrain also drew on Chouteau funds to support their high living while they sojourned in St. Louis. Expensive horses and carriages conveyed them about town, while they spent their evenings at the luxurious Planter's House hotel.[57] In addition, the Chouteaus generally acted as creditors for Bent-St. Vrain employees returned from the plains to Missouri. The men drew on the Chouteus to purchase small, though essential items, such as saddlebags, blankets, pants, shirts, shoes, and sometimes,

[53] For a partial listing of sundry purchases in the Chouteau ledgers see Book AA, July 23, 1837, p. 100 Reel 7; Book AA, July 24, 1837, Reel 7; Book BB, July 24, 1841, Reel 8, Book EE, June 30, 1842, p. 233 R 9; Book FF, July 6, 1842, p. 121 R9; Book FF, August 21, 1843, p. 433 R9; Book FF, August 13-14, p. 228 R9; Book FF, August 13, 1844, p. 299 R9; Book FF, July 19, 1845, p. 138, R9; Book FF, July 23, 1845, p. 362, R9; Book FF, August 7, 1847, p. 206, R9, all in CC.
[54] Book BB, July 21, 1840, p. 286, R8; Book CC, July 30, 1840, p. 6 R8; Book FF, October 27, 1843, p. 468, R9, all in CC.
[55] The company spent $75 on travel expenses for Ceran St. Vrain to go to New York. See Book HH, May 9, 1844, p. 96 R10. They also spent $48 for an unspecified "document to Washington." See Book HH, December 31, 1845, p. 211 R10, all in CC.
[56] Book HH, May 1, 1844, p. 95, Reel 10, CC. The opinion cost $10.
[57] Bent-St. Vrain paid $173 for the use of "Carriage and Horses," while William Bent ran up bills at the Planter's House. See Book HH, August 16, 1844, p. 117 R10; Book HH, July 6, 1844, p. 106, R10, in CC.

small cash advances. They took out these loans in the summer, the partners repaying the creditors in the autumn, after receiving the proceeds of their robe sales.[58]

Marketing robes, buying supplies, socializing, planning business strategy, visiting family and friends – St. Louis played a crucial role in maintaining and advancing the fortunes of the Bents and St. Vrain. Accommodating themselves to preexisting modes of doing business, as well as the cultivation and maintenance of important social contacts, was critical to the success of the partners. The ties the company established and maintained with the Chouteaus and the rest of the business community guaranteed that people, pelts, messages, and money flowed back and forth on an east-west axis, firmly tying the development of enterprise on the Southern Plains to that of Missouri and the rest of the nation.

[58] Small accounts such as these fill the Chouteau ledgers. See, for example, Ledger Book AA, pages 313, 327, 329, 330, Reel 8, CC.

Chapter 8 - To Santa Fe and Beyond: Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and Business along the Mexican Road

Like the fur trade, the commerce over the Santa Fe Trail between Missouri and New Mexico tapped into market networks that stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the port cities of the eastern seaboard – linkages that presented New Mexican authorities with both an economic and political conundrum. Mexican trade policy sometimes made it difficult for Americans to conduct business in Santa Fe. Sensing the tenuousness of the region's ties to the rest of the nation, the directives issued from policymakers in Mexico City intended to preserve the territorial and economic integrity of the country's northernmost frontier. At the local level, however, New Mexican officials often proved more willing to accommodate the Missouri traders, at times in direct contravention of national laws. When accommodation within the confines of legal market interactions proved difficult, traders and government officials took part in more shadowy economic ventures. When it suited their own interests, American traders like the Bents and St. Vrain adhered to the stipulations of Mexican trade laws. However, when these policies interfered with company business, the partners did not hesitate to smuggle trade goods into and out of New Mexico in violation of the law.

The stories and the silver that traders like William Becknell brought back from Santa Fe in the early-1820s caused Missouri merchants to take notice of the potential windfalls of commerce with New Mexico. By the middle of the decade, the trade was well-established, and border merchants experimented with the best

ways to obtain goods for the growing prairie trade. Although St. Louis businessmen gained some share of the market, most Santa Fe traders outfitted with merchants residing in western Missouri. Among the most prominent of these merchants was Samuel C. Lamme and Company, which had branches in Franklin, Liberty, and Independence. James and Robert Aull kept establishments in Lexington, Richmond, Liberty, and Independence. While men like Lamme and the Aulls ran diverse businesses, outfitting the Santa Fe traders was crucial to their profit margin, and the merchants moved quickly to establish trading ties with wholesalers located in cities along the eastern seaboard. American traders residing in Santa Fe took advantage of their connections with these western merchants, placing orders with the Missouri companies each year. Families like the Waldos and Glasgows, along with companies like Giddings and Gentry, serviced traders who chose to remain in Mexico year-round.[1]

In order to insure that they accommodated the tastes of their New Mexican customers, many Missouri merchants traveled east to select personally their stock of trade goods. While Baltimore and Philadelphia dominated the western wholesaling business during the 1820s and into the 1830s, by 1840 New York had secured a practical monopoly on the business. The most resourceful Missouri traders recognized that they could get better deals on better trade articles in the

[1] David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 84; Robert Glass Cleland, *This Reckless Breed of Men: The Trappers and Fur Traders of the Southwest* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 137; Lewis E. Atherton, "Business Techniques in the Santa Fe Trade," *Missouri History Review* 34 (1940), 335-6, 339; Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 63; James W. Goodrich, "In Earnest Pursuit of Wealth: David Waldo in Missouri and the Southwest, 1820-1878," *Missouri Historical Review* 66 (1972): 155-184, especially 157-68.

eastern cities than they could from local merchants operating in the St. Louis market. Wholesalers in New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia not only had strong manufacturing sectors themselves, but longstanding ties with European producers as well. Furthermore, wholesaling as a business was still practically nonexistent in western markets like Missouri. Traders like James Aull often made yearly purchasing trips east, leaving shortly after the New Year and returning in the early spring. Traveling by boat, they often stocked up at various markets before they even reached the coast. For example, in Pittsburgh, they purchased readily available iron products like stoves, axes, and plows.[2] Buying from the eastern firms was wise policy. A wider selection of trade goods, as well as liberal credit policies made the trip attractive to Missourians like the Aulls and Glasgows. Eastern credit for the Santa Fe trade was often generous – usually offered on a yearly basis with no interest for the first six months, and six percent if the account ran into the second half of the year. In the years before credit bureaus, western merchants relied on eastern contacts to provide letters of recommendation, endorsing their creditworthiness to the coastal wholesalers. Back in Missouri, the merchants extended credit to the Santa Fe traders in May. However, it often took two years before the merchants saw a return on their investment, a condition that

[2] Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 80-1; Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 86, 264; Leiws E. Atherton, "James and Robert Aull – A Frontier Missouri Mercantile Firm," *Missouri Historical Review* 30 (1935), 5; Dary, *Santa Fe Trail*, 109-10.

made it necessary for them to diversify their business endeavors beyond outfitting the prairie travelers.[3]

Western traders from as far away as El Paso del Norte and Santa Fe relied upon good relations with eastern bankers and merchants. For example, Edward Hoffman wrote John McKnight from El Paso, asking him to "procure a draft," redeemable in Philadelphia, New York, or Baltimore. Manuel Alvarez, a trader and the United States Consul in Santa Fe, usually did his banking in Philadelphia. However, in 1841, his partner David Waldo informed Alvarez that he had to go to the mint at New Orleans because of low water on Ohio. Alvarez also traveled east himself. A bill of purchase at Francis B. Rhodes and Company in New York City reveals the variety of Santa Fe trade goods offered by the eastern companies. Alvarez purchased $163.73 worth of goods from Rhodes, including buttons, combs, beads, toothbrushes, soap, thimbles, scissors, medicine, bugles, cotton goods, a gross of Jew's Harps, and nine packages of violin strings. Even the wagons that carried these goods over the trail to Santa Fe came from the east, especially the sturdy Conestogas manufactured in Pittsburgh. Costing an average of about $150

[3] Atherton, *Frontier Merchant*, 74-7. On the extension of credit to the Santa Fe traders, see Atherton, "James and Robert Aull," 18 and Atherton, "Business Practices," 341; on the occasional problems of trade, including lack of goods, see William K. Rule to David Waldo and David Jackson, April 17, 1832, Folder 1, Waldo Papers, Missouri Historical Society (hereafter cited as MHS). Sometimes the goods procured in the East did not suit the tastes of the Santa Fe merchants. For example, Charles Bent wrote Manuel Alvarez that, "Mr. Watrous complains of the Bleached Domestics I sent him being corse, they ware the finest I had, they are good heavy goodes, I judge from his letter that he wants no more at the price I sold them to him at therefore I shall sell to others I am offered a fraction more by others for the same goodes," the trader concluded. See Bent to Alvarez, December 7, 1842, Box 2 Folder 56, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as BRC and NMSRCA, respectively).

dollars, these prairie schooners were capable of carrying up to three tons of trade goods.[4]

From the eastern markets, trade goods flowed into the prairie ports of western Missouri, the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail. The main outfitting point shifted west with the increasing volume of trade between the 1820s and the 1850s. The first outfitting and rendezvous point for the Santa Fe traders was Franklin. In his classic travel account, *Commerce of the Prairies,* Josiah Gregg called Franklin "the cradle of our trade." Conveniently located along the Missouri River, the rich agricultural hinterland surrounding the town complimented its rise as the first major center of the Santa Fe trade. However, a disastrous flood in 1828 caused the town to slide into the Missouri, forcing its inhabitants to retreat to higher ground. Franklin remained an outfitting point into the 1830s, but by then the locus of trade had shifted west to Independence.[5]

Throughout the 1830s and into the 1840s, Independence remained the most advantageous outfitting and departure point for the Santa Fe traders. By 1832, following the construction of a landing on the banks of the Missouri, Independence became, in the words of traveler Thomas Jefferson Farnham, "the usual point of

[4] Edward Hoffman to John McKnight, April 8, 1844, typescript, Box 1 Folder 2, Santa Fe Trade Collection, MHS (hereafter cited as SFTC); David Waldo to Manuel Alvarez, April 20, 1841, Box 1 Folder 12, Manuel Alvarez Papers, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe; Bill of Purchase, May 6, 1844, Box 1 Folder 16, Alvarez Papers. On wagons and the Santa Fe trade see, Cleland, *Reckless Breed of Men*, 140; Katharine Coman, *Economic Beginnings of the Far West: How We Won the Land Beyond the Mississippi* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 84; Mark L. Gardner, *Wagons for the Santa Fe Trade: Wheeled Vehicles and Their Makers, 1822-1880* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), especially pages 13-6, 29, 59; Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 24; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 93.

[5] Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 22; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*,86, 99, 108-9; R. L. Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1930), 102; Jonas Viles, "Old Franklin: A Frontier Town of the Twenties," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 9 (1923), 282.

rendezvous and 'outfit' for the overland traders to Santa Fe and other Mexican states." During the late-1840s, George Frederick Ruxton found the town a lively place, full of "bustle and confusion," as traders and emigrants jostled each other in the crowded streets, purchased livestock, hired teamsters, and laid siege to local mercantile establishments.[6] Independence had much to recommend it as a rendezvous and outfitting point. New Orleans journalist Matt Field reported that the location of the town was "well chosen, salubrious, and has many advantages," compared to its eastern neighbors. The town was a natural transit point between waterborne traffic along the Missouri River from St. Louis, and overland traffic arriving from the Southwest. Fresh pasturage for the vast herds of livestock surrounded Independence. Furthermore, the town's merchants provided every service needed for the westbound merchant or emigrant, from food and dry goods to gunsmiths, coopers, and wagon repair. Independence held its preeminence until 1850, when steamboat captains began bypassing the town for landings like Westport, further upriver.[7]

These Missouri towns linked together a trade network than spanned more than half the length of the North American continent. They served as the western

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[6] Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 22-3; Eugene T. Wells, "The Growth of Independence, Missouri, 1827-1850," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 16 (1959), 34-5; Thomas Jefferson Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains, and in the Oregon Territory,* in *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 1: 46; George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 55.

[7] Matthew C. Field, *Matt Field On the Santa Fe Trail,* collected by Clyde and Mae Reed Porter, ed. John E. Sunder (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 61-2; Wells, "Growth of Independence," 33; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 113; Gardner, *Wagons for Santa Fe,* 31; Duffus, *Santa Fe Trail,* 105; Walker Wyman, "Freighting: A Big Business on the Santa Fe Trail," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (1931), 18.

terminus for trade goods transported along the great interior waterways from New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The prairie ports also became a transition point for trade goods flowing into Missouri from the Rocky Mountains and northern Mexico. Pennsylvania wagons, loaded with dry goods from New York met traders driving herds of mules laden with New Mexican wool and Mexican silver, as well as other wagons groaning under their cargo of buffalo robes gathered by Bent-St. Vrain along the Arkansas and Platte rivers.[8] Silver from the mines in Durango, Zacatecas, and Chihuahua had an especially salutary effect on the Missouri economy. Mexican silver helped stabilize Missouri's economy, even during the severe national economic downturns of the late-1830s.[9] The very nature of the exchanges the Santa Fe traders made, manufactured goods purchased on credit from merchants with eastern connections, exchanged for Mexican silver and mules, enmeshed men like the Bents and St. Vrain into a continental economy. Susan Calafate Boyle concludes, "By the 1850s the Santa Fe trade was linked to the commercial hubs in Mexico, the United States, and Europe, where commission merchants, wholesalers, and agents completed intricate transactions, which required advanced planning and information on prices and demand, a complicated credit

[8] William R. Bernard, "Westport and the Santa Fe Trade," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 11 (1905-1906), 556-7; Wyman, "Freighting," 17; Cleland, *Reckless Breed of Men,* 141; Sterling Evans, "Eastward Ho!: The Mexican Freighting and Commerce Experience Along the Santa Fe Trail," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (1996-1997), 255.
[9] Hattie M. Anderson, "Frontier Economic Problems in Missouri, 1815-1828," 2 parts, *Missouri Historical Review* 34 (1939-1940), 188; Marc Simmons, *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail: An International Incident, 1843* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1987), xviii; Dorothy B. Dorsey, "The Panic and Depression of 1837-43 in Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 30 (1936), 135-143 (the quote is from page 135).

system, coordination of various types of transportation, and considerable risk taking and entrepreneurial skills."[10]

The costs for an enterprise as far-flung as the overland trade with Mexico were sizable. Veteran trader Manuel Alvarez informed the Secretary of the Treasury, that freight costs alone were high. He estimated that the average cost of shipping a wagonload of freight, 4500 pounds worth of goods, from New York to New Mexico averaged close to $12 per 100 pounds. Combined with the flat duty rate of $600 per wagon imposed by Mexican customs officials, shipping and handling proved costly. Bent-St. Vrain and other sizable outfits had additional expenses to consider. The cost of wagons and livestock, salaries for their traders, hunters, and drovers, steamboat shipping costs, and insurance premiums all cut into their bottom line. However, the potential profits covered the expenses, and Company wagon trains plied the Santa Fe Trail nearly every year between 1830 and 1849.[11]

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[10] Lewis E. Atherton, "The Santa Fe Trader as Mercantile Capitalist," *Missouri Historical Review* 77 (1982), 12; Susan Calafate Boyle, *Los Capitalistas: Hispano Merchants and the Santa Fe Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), xiv. It is worth pointing out that Hispanic merchants utilized the same trading practices and the same markets to outfit themselves for participation in the overland trade. Like their American counterparts, merchant families from both New Mexico and the interior states of the republic traveled in person to eastern markets in order to bypass middlemen, and cultivated a cadre of business contacts that stretched from the core of Mexico itself to the eastern United States and the European markets. Their direct involvement in the Santa Fe and Chihuahua trades accelerated during the late-1830s, and by the mid-1840s Anglo observers noted that their Hispanic counterparts dominated the trade in many places. For the Hispanic traders, see Boyle, *Las Capitalistas,* especially xi-xiii; 42-67; Evans, "Eastward Ho," 249-251; William Clark Kennerly, *Persimmon Hill: A Narrative of Old St. Louis and the Far West,* as told to Elizabeth Russell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948), 172; David A. Sandoval, "Gnats, Goods, and Greasers: Mexican Merchants on the Santa Fe Trail," in *The Mexican Road: Trade, Travel, and Confrontation on the Santa Fe Trail,* ed. Mark L. Gardner (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1989), 22-6; Simmons, *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail,* xvii, 4-5; Wells, "Independence," 41-2.

[11] Manuel Alvarez to R.J. Walker, June 18, 1845, Alvarez Letterbook, page 50, box 7 folder 20, BRC; Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La

Although the costs of outfitting for a Santa Fe expedition could be high, the potential profits made the venture worthwhile for traders like Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain. As early as the 1820s and 1830s, frontier officials boosted the potential of the prairie commerce to their superiors in Washington. In 1831, William Clark wrote the Secretary of War that, "This trade may by proper means, be placed upon a footing more permanently useful than the mere acquisition of furs….The exchange of our cotton goods alone…for the articles already enumerated as received, from the Mexicans will give employment to thousands of our enterprising citizens." Even when traders sold their goods in Santa Fe for less than the going market price in Missouri, they still made money. Profits decreased slightly during the 1840s, rarely exceeding 40% on the investment, and sometimes as low as 10%. However, the number of traders and investors grew throughout the decade.[12]

The Bents solidified the economic ties between Missouri and Santa Fe when they acted as shipping agents for friends in New Mexico. Manuel Alvarez used the services of the Bent wagons. In 1844 the company took charge of 10,485 pounds of Alvarez's trade goods, including an iron safe, coffee, gunpowder, brandy, a valise, one hat case, and a saddle "to be delivered without delay in like good order and condition, at Santa Fe, New Mexico, the dangers of the Road and Fire only

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Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 221 (hereafter cited as "Resource Study").

[12] William Clark to Secretary of War, November 20, 1831, Letterbook/Letters Received, page 299, Microfilm, Reel 1, Volume 4, William Clark Papers; Seymour V. Connor and Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Broadcloth and Britches: The Santa Fe Trade* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1977), 22; Bloom, "New Mexico Under Mexico," 121.

excepted," according to the contract. The partners charged Alvarez nine cents per pound. The next fall they reached a similar agreement, this time for 10, 796 pounds shipped at $9 per 100 pounds, "the dangers of the Road and unavoidable accidents excepted, the goods being now in good order, are to be in the same order when delivered."[13]

The importance of the Santa Fe trade predisposed many New Mexican officials to accommodate the Americans, sometimes even at the expense of ignoring directives issued from Mexico City. The revenue generated by trade with the United States accounted for nearly seventy percent of the territory's budget by the 1830s. This money funded a gamut of New Mexican projects; it paid the salaries of many public officials and soldiers, as well as funding pensions for widows and orphans. Recognizing the isolation of New Mexico, and the sacrifices on behalf of the territory defending the frontier from Indian incursions, the Mexican government exempted the inhabitants from taxation to the central treasury from 1838 to 1845. The central government also exempted New Mexicans from the forced loans it occasionally levied upon the nation's population. In order to help fund frontier defense, the central government attempted to procure money from Chihuahua and Mazatlan for shipment to Santa Fe. However, these funds rarely reached New Mexico, forcing the territorial government to become even

[13] Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, August 14, 1844, Box 1 Folder 16; Shipping Bill, August 27, 1844, Box 1 Folder 16, Alvarez Papers; Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, October 10, 1845, Box 1 Folder 17, all in Alvarez Papers.

more reliant upon the American trade to fund the military, bureaucracy, and many social programs.[14]

Accommodation was a two-way street, however, and the most successful American traders attempted to play the game by Mexican rules. At the most fundamental level, communication was critical to the success of trade. In this regard, American traders bowed to local custom. Fluency in Spanish was a necessity for successfully conducting business. Traders like the Glasgows and the Bents were fluent in Spanish, allowing them to conduct their own business easily, and also to serve as middlemen between Mexican merchants and consumers, and their counterparts in the United States. Josiah Gregg noted simply that "As the Mexicans rarely speak English, the negotiations are mostly conducted in Spanish." It was in the best interests of Anglo traders to learn the language as quickly as possible, or at least to maintain cordial relations with bilingual residents. Americans who learned the language, journalist Matt Field wrote, became men "of great importance," in Santa Fe. Former company clerk Alexander Barclay considered entering direct trade with New Mexico in 1845, but only after he had "made some attainment of the Spanish language." Those without a working knowledge of Spanish were in an awkward situation trying to conduct business involving the Santa Fe trade. Samuel Wethered wrote Manuel Alvarez from Baltimore, complaining that "I have not been able to make out all your letter as it is

[14] On the economic situation in New Mexico and the importance of the Santa Fe trade, see Reséndez, *Changing Identities,* 120; Boyle, *Los Capitalistas,* 21; Ward Alan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1965), 105, 107-8.

in Spanish, you will please write to me on receipt of this and address me in my own language." Traders and politicians like Alvarez played a critical role as cultural mediators in the Southwestern Borderlands.[15]

Knowledge of Mexican consumer tastes was also critical to any successful trading venture. While the teamsters used their downtime to visit fandangos and try their luck at the gaming tables, most traders set up shop in the small stores lining the plaza. The American traders did little of their business in Santa Fe on credit. Rather, they purchased their stocks of goods with an eye towards the inexpensive tastes of the ordinary New Mexican consumer.[16] An examination of the customs lists and invoices of the traders demonstrates both the simplicity and variety of their inventory. Textiles were especially important. American traders imported calicos, handkerchiefs, gingham, aprons, crape, and ribbons. For the more discerning, and wealthy, they provided "fancy striped cashmere," silk, and black velvet. Aside from textiles and fabric, the list was almost endlessly diverse: butcher knives, chintz mugs, apothecary scales, bottles of snuff, turpentine, table settings, combs, vermillion, cloves, coffee, and a limited stock of guns and gunpowder. The Bents and St. Vrain were typical in the kind of merchandise they imported. Textiles made up the bulk of their most valuable imports into New Mexico. Customs receipts and trade passports indicate that Charles Bent imported

[15] Reséndez, *Changing*, 6; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 123; Gregg, *Commerce*, 80; Field, *On the Santa Fe Trail*, 213; Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, December 1845, Box 1, Barclay Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley; Wethered to Alvarez, March 27, 1844, Box 1 Folder 16, Alvarez Papers.
[16] Gregg, *Commerce*, 78; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 260, 263.

blankets, linens, flannel, buttons, lace, knives, caps, neckties, and handkerchiefs into Mexico during this period.[17]

Partnerships with Hispanic merchants also proved important to some American traders. Rather than competing against one another, some formed mutually beneficial business partnerships. Anglo merchants provided their Hispanic counterparts with contacts and introductions in the markets of Missouri and New York. Americans also acted as financial advisors and bankers for their new colleagues. Mexican traders sometimes reciprocated by navigating their partners through the Byzantine world of customs houses, tariffs, and trade licenses. As agents and translators, Mexican traders provided the Americans with crucial information and an entrée into markets stretching from Vera Cruz to Mazatlan, Acapulco to Santa Fe. The two groups extended credit to one another, traveled together, and sometimes married into each other's families.[18]

Cultivating these ties, and accommodating consumer tastes proved even more critical as American traders probed south, deeper into Mexico. American goods saturated the New Mexico market as early as 1826, forcing traders to seek new retail outlets further south along the Camino Real. Chihuahua was a natural

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[17] See, for example "Inventory of Goods," May 12, 1837, Box 1 Folder 2, SFTC; "Invoice of Goods," August 30, 1845, Folder 1, Turley Family Papers, MHS (copied from the William Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino). Customs Receipt for Charles Bent, February 23, 1842, Box 5 Folder 197, Ritch Collection; Guía Issued to Charles Bent, September 27, 1830, Hacienda Records, Comisaría Substituta, Aduana Nacional Territorial, Reel 12 Frames 1140-3, Mexican Archives of New Mexico (hereafter cited as MANM); Guía Issued to Charles Bent, October 8, 1829, in ibid., Reel 10 Frames 370-3, MANM.

[18] Reséndez, *Changing Identities,* 104; Evans, "Eastward Ho," 250; Samuel C. Owens, "Receipt for Money Recd. Of P. Harmony and Company," July 1, 1844, typescript, Box 1 Folder 2, SFTC; Gardner/Sandoval, "Gants, Greasers," 26-7; David A. Sandoval, "Montezuma's Merchants: Mexican Traders on the Santa Fe Trail," in *Adventure on the Santa Fe Trail,* ed. Leo E. Oliva (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1988), 43. Both direct quotes come from Reséndez.

market. Not only was the city much larger than Santa Fe, it boasted a richer hinterland, and an expansive clientele seeking both practical necessities and luxury goods. Between the early mid-1820s and mid-1840s trade with Chihuahua burgeoned from an average of $19,000 per year to nearly $90,000 annually.[19] American traders rented store space in Chihuahua and disposed of their goods, either at retail or at wholesale prices.[20] Although it is unknown whether they actually made the journey or not, Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain both received numerous passports to trade with the interior states of Mexico. Other men involved in trade along the Arkansas also apparently engaged in this trade on a limited basis.[21] Traders extended their reach beyond Chihuahua as well, traveling to Zacatecas, Hermosillo, Guanajuato, Durango, and the great trade fair at San Juan de los Lagos in Jalisco. Such activities, by both Anglo and Hispanic merchants, David Sandoval writes, "transformed New Mexican society from a Spanish imperial outpost to the gateway of international economic activity."[22]

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[19] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 263, 272; Max L. Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 63-5, 77; Boyle, *Los Capitalistas,* 28-31.

[20] Boyle, *Los Capitalistas,* 15, 18-9; Moorhead, *Royal Road,* 124-6, 139-144; Dary, *Santa Fe Trail,* 156.

[21] See Gardner, "Resource Study," 54-5; Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations, "Libro donde constan los registros de los pasaportes que presentan los Estrangeros y de los que expido este gobierno," Box 3 Folder 108, Ritch Collection. This document lists passports issued to Ceran St. Vrain in 1828 and to Charles Bent in 1830 and 1831. On the involvement of other local traders, see Simeon Turley to Jesse Turley, April 18, 1841, Folder 1, Turley Family Papers. Turley considered sending a shipment of robes and blankets "to the Lower Country."

[22] One of the best contemporary discussions of trade beyond Chihuahua is found in James Josiah Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847,* ed. by Ralph P. Bieber, with an Introduction to the Bison Book Edition by Mark L. Gardner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 229-252. See also Boyle, *Los Capitalistas,* 34; Simmons, *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail,* 7; Sandoval, "Gnats, Goods, Greasers," 22.

At the same time they cultivated more intensive economic contacts with American traders, the ties that held New Mexico and the northern frontier to the rest of the nation, began to weaken. While some nationalists in Mexico City attempted to integrate New Mexico more firmly into the national body politic, increased opportunities for trade and growing discontent with the central government caused many New Mexicans to reevaluate their true personal and regional interests. Such evaluations often translated into actions directly at odds with national policymakers.[23]

From the perspective of officials and merchants in Santa Fe, the actions of the central government often seemed at odds with local interests. At best, the national government ignored the frontier. At worst, bureaucrats from Mexico City only added to the considerable troubles the northern province faced. Confronted with an almost annual cycle of political unrest and revolution, officials in Mexico City paid little attention to the problems that inhibited frontier development. Complaints from Santa Fe about underfunded militiamen and the destruction caused by Ute and Navajo raiders rarely resonated with southern officials. Fed up with being ignored, New Mexicans often acted according to their own interests, even if such actions placed them at odds with directives from the national capital. They failed to communicate regularly with Mexico City, passed their own laws

[23] Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 3-4, 60, 117 (quote is from page 4).

without congressional approval, and often ignored tariff and import laws. The gap between national law and local practice grew.[24]

Americans like Charles Bent occasionally found themselves caught up in the political unrest that resulted from the resistance of New Mexican frontiersmen to actions taken by politicians in Mexico City. Discontent with the policies of Santa Anna's government exploded into open violence in 1837. In an attempt to consolidate power, the central government passed a series of laws designed to tie the frontier more closely to the rest of the nation. The most onerous piece of legislation rescinded New Mexico's exemption from direct taxes levied by the national congress. For years, in recognition of the burden New Mexicans shouldered defending themselves from Indian raiders, residents of the territory paid no taxes to Mexico City. Elevation to the status of a department within the republic nullified this exemption. Furthermore, Santa Anna placed an outsider, Albino Perez, in power as governor of New Mexico. Although Perez had a reputation as a competent military man, he was unfamiliar with the situation in Santa Fe. The new governor's questionable moral conduct, onerous new militia duties, and a disastrous 1836 campaign against the Apaches pushed New Mexicans into open

[24] Minge, "Frontier Problems," iv; Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 40-1. On territorial politics and the gradual estrangement of New Mexico from Mexico City, see also, Bloom, "New Mexico Under Mexico," 3; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, vol. 17 (San Francisco: History Company, 1889), 311-313;Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 163, 166; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 102, 109; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexico History*, 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1912), 2: 7-8; David J. Weber, "'From Hell Itself:' The Americanization of Mexico's Northern Frontier, 1821-1846," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest: Essays by David J. Weber* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 107, 109, 115; Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, xviii, 37, 153-5, 241; Donaciano Vigil to New Mexico Assembly, June 22, 1846, Box 5 Folder 233, Ritch Collection.

rebellion in 1837.[25] In the following weeks the New Mexicans defeated Perez in battle, captured him, beheaded him, and set up a new government. The new government lasted but a short time, before conservative forces under Manuel Armijo regained power.[26] Rumors circulated throughout New Mexico about who bore the responsibility for the violence. Some Americans blamed Armijo for masterminding the plot, while many Mexicans blamed foreign agitators. Apparently, both factions drew supplies from American merchants in New Mexico, including Charles Bent. Bent's actions landed him in prison in Taos. However, through bribery, bluster, and the threat to call upon his employees to ride south and burn the town, Bent gained his freedom. Regardless of their veracity, rumors of American involvement made many New Mexicans suspicious, and in the coming years further political discontent would heighten tensions between the two groups.[27]

Despite the predilection of New Mexicans for trade with the United States, authorities in Mexico City sometimes attempted to curb this commerce. On the one hand, Mexican officials sought to insulate domestic producers and manufacturers from foreign competition. In order to accomplish this, the government raised tariff rates, and restricted altogether the import of some items, such as gunpowder. Foreign affairs also played a role in the formulation of Mexican trade policy

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[25] Reséndez, *Changing National Identities,* 172, 176-7, 181-3; Janet Lecompte, *Rebellion in Río Arriba, 1837* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 11-17.
[26] The most complete account of the rebellion is Lecompte. See also Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 262-6.
[27] On the suspicions of American involvement see Lecompte, *Rebellion in Rio Arriba,* 61-2; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 192; Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 210.

regarding the northern frontier. The failure of the Texan invasions of 1841 and 1843 alarmed many officials, and in 1843, President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna issued a set of restrictive trade laws. In retaliation for Texan actions, he ordered the closure of customs houses at Taos, El Paso del Norte, and Presidio del Norte. Numerous items were added to the prohibited import list. Finally, in September foreigners were prohibited from entering the retail trade, although throughout 1843 Armijo permitted some exceptions to this rule.[28]

The correspondence of American traders indicates that both they and the population of New Mexico grew restive under the restrictions imposed by the Mexican state. Because of the new directives, no spring caravan left Missouri in 1844. For Americans willing to become Mexican citizens, the restrictions proved little enough to overcome. Those unwilling to naturalize faced a more difficult situation. James Josiah Webb had grown used to Armijo's lax enforcement of government issued tariff directives. Rather than enforce the rates specified by Mexico City, Armijo charged a flat rate of $500 per wagon. Furthermore, Webb wrote, "many goods contraband under the Mexican tariff were admitted by him and no examination made." Armijo's successor, Mariano Martínez de Lejanza, proved less accommodating. The new governor demanded $750 per wagon, and that the imported goods all "go through the customhouse with the formality of inspection."[29] However, Solomon Sublette wrote that Charles Bent paid $600 in

[28] Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 148, 151; Twitchell, *Leading Facts,* 2: 119; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 114-5, 118-9.
[29] Bloom, "New Mexico Under Mexico," 123; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 194, 200, 221; Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854*

import duties in the fall of 1844. Another certificate noted that he paid $100 in customs duties. Sublette's letter may be inaccurate. However, William Boggs later recalled that Bent had a great deal of influence with customs officials, and "could do much toward getting the exorbitant duties reduced on American merchandise."[30] Writing from Bent's Fort in the spring of 1844, Andrew Sublette apprised his brother William of the situation. A new governor "from the South," was on his way to unseat Manuel Armijo, Santa Fe remained closed to trade to all "except those that have become citizens and have Families resided in the country." He advised William not to try to trade in Santa Fe that year. The following month, Andrew wrote of rumors of discontent against the trade restrictions. "The port of Santa Fe is closed," he related, "and they have a new governor at present but it is the general belief that there will be a rebellion the citizens prefer Armijo." Samuel Wethered wrote Manuel Alvarez that he received much the same reports: the arrival of a new governor, restrictive trade laws, and that, "New Mexicans seem to be much vexed by Santa Anna's proceedings," as trader Samuel Owens reported.[31]

(Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 504; Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade,* 56, 80-1.

[30] Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, October 20, 1844, Box 4 Folder 3, William L. Sublette Collection, MHS; "Certificate of Customs Payment," December 26, 1844, Box 5 Folder 256, BRC; William M. Boggs, "The W. M. Boggs Manuscript about Bent's Fort, Kit Carson, the Fur Trade, and Life among the Indians," ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado Magazine* 7 (1930), 58; Harold Dunham, "Charles Bent," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 2: 45 (hereafter cited as *MMFTFW).*

[31] Andrew Sublette to William Sublette, April 18, 1844 and May 5, 1844, Box 4 Folder 1, Sublette Collection; Samuel Wethered to Manuel Alvarez, March 27, 1844, Box 1 Folder 16, Alvarez Papers; *St. Louis Daily Reveille,* May 29, 1844. As early as 1841, Charles Bent predicted that if anyone assigned by Mexico City replaced Armijo as governor, things would become more difficult for American traders. He wrote that, "I believe that a change will not be agreeable and more particularly if the new officers are to be sent from Mexico…that office should remain under the

Enforcement of these customs laws was often difficult, however, even under the best of circumstances. In the first place, Santa Fe had the only customhouse in New Mexico, despite the directive from the central government to construct another at San Miguel del Vado. Taos, long a center of smuggling activity, never had one of its own. Such a situation made it much easier for traders to avoid paying duties, as well as facilitating the import of contraband into the province. Compounding these problems, there were few customs agents. Those who did serve often lacked education and experience. Perhaps most importantly, however, New Mexican customs agents often accepted bribes to supplement their poor salaries. While Mexican nationalists labeled such activities traitorous, and American traders self-righteously scorned the avariciousness of customs officials, frontier agents acted in their own economic self-interest by conveniently ignoring the law. Strict enforcement might mean a drop in trade, and the loss of revenue from the American traders represented a potential body blow to the New Mexican economy.[32]

American traders fully accommodated themselves to this system of lax customs enforcement and became experts at bribery. Bribes and gifts simply greased the wheels of the Santa Fe trade. Handicapped by meager resources and pitiful wages, many customs house agents readily collaborated with the American

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control of Armijo and those that now manage it" (Bent to Alvarez, March 22, 1841, Box 2 Folder 51, BRC).

[32] Reséndez, *Changing National Identities,* 23, 119, 123; David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade of the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 158; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 77, note 17; Boyle, *Los Capitalistas,* 19; Weber, *Mexican Frontier,*124-5, 149.

merchants.[33] Traders Josiah Gregg and James Josiah Webb give the best accounts of the customhouse inspection routine. Prior to entering Santa Fe, the caravans dispatched an advance party to travel to the capital. These men secured supplies, arranged for accommodations for men and wagons, and visited the customs inspectors. The purpose of the visit to the customhouse, Gregg wrote, was "to obtain an agreeable understanding," with the inspectors. Upon arrival, the inspection was often lackluster; "it is rarely carried on with rigid adherence to rules," Gregg observed. The inspectors, motivated by their desire to promote trade and supplement their income, hardly ever opened all the parcels or checked the cargo against the manifest.[34] Webb elaborated, "As our whole interests were not under the protection of law, but subject to the will of one man, and being recognized and confessed contrabandists, it was necessary for the traders to start early and take a long and rapid journey ahead and see how the land lay." Webb gave a rough estimate of the amount of money needed to expedite the inspection process. Traders gave the officials "small loans" or "small presents" in order to avoid harassment. These payments ranged from $25 to $100 depending upon the value of the cargo. The trader claimed that the funds the inspectors and soldiers received were at least as great as the salaries their counterparts further to the south

[33] Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 149; Boyle, *Los Capitalistas*, 47; Minge, "Frontier Problems," vi-vii; Donaciano Vigil, *Arms, Indians, and the Mismanagement of New Mexico: Donaciano Vigil, 1846*, ed. David J. Weber (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1986), 47, note 7; Janet Lecompte, "Manuel Armijo, George Wilkins Kendall, and the Baca-Caballero Conspiracy," *New Mexico Historical Review* 59 (1984), 54.
[34] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 188; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 62, 79.

received. The leniency of the inspectors, Webb continued, significantly eased the financial obligations that burdened the Armijo administration.

Ceran St. Vrain had ample opportunity to pick up the finer points of smuggling from American residents of Taos like the mountain man Ewing Young, who had a dubious history of confrontation with Mexican authorities over the issue. St. Vrain may have been considering smuggling as early as 1830. That fall, he wrote Bernard Pratte in St. Louis that their wagon train encountered a mounted Mexican escort on the Red River. He informed Pratte that, "the object in coming out so fare to meet us was to prevent Smuggling and it had the desired effeck." The escort placed St. Vrain's wagons under guard until they reached Santa Fe, where "all had to pay full duteys, which amount to about 60 per ct on cost."[35]

By the early 1840s, Charles Bent had an unsavory reputation as a smuggler. In January of 1841, Mexican officials searched his home in Taos, on a tip they the trader was hiding contraband. Bent wrote Manuel Alvarez claiming that the tip came from an American living in the community, "a damd Lyer," Bent called him.[36] In 1842, the Departmental Treasurer warned officials in Taos to be on the lookout for Bent. Apparently, the trader was cagey, for the Treasurer cautioned the border guards to observe him "with much reserve in order not to give him any warning or advance notice that the Governor is aware of his activities." During the winters of 1842 and 1843, Bent, St. Vrain and Company employees smuggled goods *out* of New Mexico, in direct violation of a directive that banned the

[35] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 108; St. Vrain to Bernard Pratte, September 14, 1830, Microfilm, Reel 16 Frame 1068, Chouteau Collection.
[36] Bent to Alvarez, January 16, 1841, Box 1 Folder 44, BRC; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 14-15.

exportation of goods forbidden by the Mexican government. Evidence of such illegal activities is admittedly slight, but the implication of a letter from Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez indicates that, on some occasions, the former sought to avoid payment of import duties. On November 12, 1844, Bent wrote Alvarez from Taos that, "I received a letter from George Bent dated the 5th inst he was then at the foot of the mountain at the crossing of the las Animas with our waggons….You had better not mention that your have heard from the waggons for feare that an escort might be sent out before he leaves theas waggons." Such shady business practices allowed critics of the company to paint the Bents and St. Vrain as unscrupulous traders who self-consciously flouted the sovereign laws of New Mexico.[37]

Despite their consistent circumvention of Mexican import laws, American traders still griped incessantly about the discrimination, real and imagined, they faced at the hands of New Mexican officials. The first cause of American discontent regarded import duties. While New Mexican merchants had to pay duties, they usually amounted to half what the Yankee traders paid. Josiah Gregg complained that the Mexican tariff imposts were "extremely oppressive," to American businessmen.[38] Tariff discrimination figured largely in Consul Manuel Alvarez's correspondence with his superiors in Washington. In 1839, Alvarez and other merchants petitioned Armijo to lower the import duties. The governor denied their request on the grounds that these funds were the only way for the government

[37] The quote from the Treasurer comes from Minge, "Frontier Problems," 117, note 31; Janet Lecompte, "John Hawkins," *MMFTFW,* 4: 142-3; Bent to Alvarez, November 12, 1844, Box 2 Folder 63, BRC.
[38] Boyle, *Los Capitalistas,* 37-8; Evans, "Eastward Ho," 248; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 79.

to outfit its campaigns against Navajo raiders. The Mexican exemptions and the tariffs exacted from American merchants, Alvarez wrote the following year, were in direct violation of treaties signed by the two nations. Furthermore, wealthy New Mexicans fully exploited their advantages, traveling to the United States to purchase goods, thereby undercutting their Anglo competition. Inaction was not an option, Alvarez wrote, "should we submit quietly to this imposition, it would only induce the authorities here to proceed from one injustice to another until eventually the citizens of our country would be prohibited from even disposing of their goods in this Department." In 1842, Alvarez noted that the Americans still paid nearly double the import duties that New Mexicans did.[39]

The lack of redress from Armijo, combined with the increased success of New Mexican merchants in the Santa Fe trade, prompted American observers to search for some conspiracy to deprive them of their natural economic rights and privileges. Again, Alvarez led the charge. He placed the lion's share of the blame directly at the governor's feet. Armijo was behind the harassment and discriminatory policies, the consul claimed. Yet, the governor was too wily a political operator to get his own hands dirty. Rather, "he gives the cues to his subordinates," who, "completely dependent upon him, not only for their pay but also for their political existence," carried out an unofficial program of harassment. These cronies, Alvarez wrote indignantly, seized "upon the most trivial pretexts

[39] Alvarez et al to Manuel Armijo, December 2, 1839, Consular Dispatches, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as CDSF); Manuel Armijo and Guadalupe Miranda to Alvarez, December 3, 1839 in ibid.; Alvarez to Powhatan Ellis, January 10, 1840, Alvarez Letterbook pages 3-4, Box 7 Folder 20, BRC; Alvarez to Ellis, December 12, 1840, CDSF; Alvarez to Daniel Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF.

and excuses, to vex, harass, and oppress every one that is imagined to be in the way of the Governor."[40] All these petty actions, Alvarez feared, might add up to economic failure for American traders. Not only did Armijo seem to control everything that went on in New Mexico, but the actions and promptings of Mexican traders seemed to further erode the position of the Anglos in Santa Fe. The consul reported that these merchants whispered in the governor's ear, urging him to take unjust actions. "The leading object appears to be," he concluded, "to present the citizens of the United States in the most unfavorable light to the public, cherishing the idea of excluding us from the market of Santa Fe."[41]

Traders like Charles Bent were not averse to calling upon the power of the American state to come to their aid in New Mexico. Although only rarely interested in the extension of American influence into the Southwest, the Santa Fe merchants clothed their lobbying efforts in the robes of national economic interest. American traders faced other disadvantages aside from Mexican tariff duties. They paid duties twice, first on any trade goods imported from Europe, then again in Santa Fe. These payments forced the traders to raise the price of their goods, which made it difficult to compete with Mexican traders who paid lower duties for goods imported either through the New Mexican capital or port cities like Veracruz. American observers pushed Congress to adopt a Drawback Bill, reducing the duties Yankee traders paid on European imports. Such an action, "would entirely secure the entire commerce of the rich state of Chihuahua with parts of Sonora and

[40] Sandoval, "Montezuma's Merchants," 44; Alvarez to Secretary of State, July 1, 1843, CDSF.
[41] Alvarez to Daniel Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF.

Durango, thus augmenting our trade over the Prairies to two millions…annually, giving employment to from eight hundred to one thousand wagons."[42]

Furthermore, both Alvarez and Charles Bent wrote of the baleful effects of foreign influence over Mexican trade policy, and its potential consequences for the frontier economy. Alvarez wrote the Secretary of State that, "It is well known to those familiar with Mexican affairs that they are controlled by England," especially in the rich states of the interior. Charles Bent placed much of the blame upon the inaction and timidity of the American government. Mexican officials never harassed English or French traders for fear that their governments might retaliate, Bent claimed. American traders could expect no such protection at present. "We see daily the rights of American citizens violated most outrageously, for which none have been redressed," he complained to Alvarez. Further government apathy, the trader warned the consul, would be disastrous. American traders would have to abandon completely the market to French and English traders. Loss of the Mexican market would be disastrous for the Missouri economy, so reliant upon "the precious metals" of Mexico. On the other hand, should the government finally take action to redress the wrongs inflicted upon its citizens, trade would again flourish, and the western economy would remain on a sound footing. Alvarez's wish for decisive government action came true when congress approved a Drawback Bill. In 1845,

[42] Evans, "Eastward Ho," 250; *Niles' National Register,* "Missouri – Her Trade with Mexico," March 16, 1839, p. 37; Alvarez to Secretary of State, July 1, 1843, CDSF.

the longsuffering consul wrote James Buchanan, confidently predicting a large increase in American trade with Mexico's northern frontier.[43]

While the Santa Fe trade presented Americans with a tremendous economic windfall, the strengthening ties between New Mexico and the United States complicated the relationship between the Mexican state and the citizens of the northern frontier. In order to supply Mexican consumers, traders like the Bents and St. Vrain tapped into a market network that stretched from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic coast. Incapable of muscling into the wholesale supply business, Bent-St. Vrain established connections with prominent Missouri merchants in a manner reminiscent of the company's dealings with the Chouteaus and American Fur. Success on the Santa Fe end of the trade also often required accommodation to local strictures and circumstances. For the New Mexicans, the situation was more complex. As the province's economy drew closer to that of the United States, the Mexican state attempted to halt the process through the issuance and enforcement of stricter import laws. Northern frontiersmen often proved ambivalent to these instructions, and conducted business in a manner best-suited to local needs and interests. However, the disconnect between Mexico City and Santa Fe created an unstable situation. Although New Mexicans often proved accommodating to Yankee traders, any foreign threat to local autonomy had the potential to create an intense anti-American backlash.

[43] Alvarez to Secretary of State, July 1, 1843, CDSF; Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, April 20, 1843, CDSF; Alvarez to Buchanan, June 18, 1845, CDSF.

Chapter 9 - Texan Troubles: Bent, St. Vrain and Co. and the Filibusters, 1841-1843

Despite deep business ties, tensions between New Mexicans and Bent-St. Vrain escalated dangerously in the early-1840s. Mexico City's inability to incorporate the northern borderlands more fully into the nation left the frontier in an exposed position. In 1841, largely because of its own precarious political and economic situation, the Republic of Texas launched an expedition that intended to seize Santa Fe. Although the Texans proved unsuccessful, their actions placed Americans in the region in a precarious position. Threatened by a foreign power, New Mexicans suddenly found themselves intensely patriotic. Because of this nationalistic surge, the local population became extremely suspicious of traders like Charles Bent, whom they suspected of being in league with the invaders. Another attempted invasion in 1843 further soured relations between Hispanics and Anglos in New Mexico. The events of 1841-1843 laid the groundwork for the increasingly acrimonious relations between Bent-St. Vrain and Mexican nationalists in the coming years.

In 1841, political unrest again caused many in New Mexico to look with suspicion upon American traders like Charles Bent. Unlike the internal upheaval of 1837, this threat was international in origin. From the earliest days of its independence, the Republic of Texas struggled economically. By 1841, the Republic was broke, the national debt was astronomical, business and commerce stagnant. Eyeing the flow of goods between Missouri and New Mexico, Texan leaders began speculating about how they might divert the profits from precious

metals and livestock into the empty coffers of the Republic. Acting upon the assumption that the citizens of New Mexico would welcome annexation to Texas, President Mirabeau Lamar authorized an expedition to bring the Mexican territory into the Texan orbit. Poorly organized and ill conceived from the beginning, the march of the three hundred-man force fell apart before it even reached its destination. As the exhausted adventurers staggered into the province's easternmost villages, Mexican soldiers captured them easily, and marched them south to prison. Inglorious as the Texas-Santa Fe Expedition was, it planted seeds of distrust between the Anglo and Hispanic communities of New Mexico, seeds whose roots sank deep into the psyches of many Mexican nationalists by the time of the American invasion in 1846.[1]

Rumors of American collusion with the Texans swirled throughout New Mexico, leading to resentment, suspicion, and ultimately, violence. The Texan invasion made the position of United States Consul Manuel Alvarez especially hazardous. In addition to his activities as consul, Alvarez acted as a Santa Fe trader

[1] On the rationale between the expedition, see William Campbell Binkley, *The Expansionist Movement in Texas, 1836-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1925), 27-8, 50, 58-9; Noel M. Loomis, *The Texan-Santa Fe Pioneers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 6-7; Ward Alan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1965), 5, note 7. On the failure of the expedition, see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico,* works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, vol. 17 (San Francisco: History Company, 1889), 329; Loomis, *Texan-Santa Fe,* 11-65. There is also an intense historiographical debate regarding the intentions of the Texans and the willingness of the New Mexican population to submit to annexation. For sources arguing for Texan aggression and Mexican nationalism, see Bancroft, *Arizona and New Mexico,* 320-6; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexico History,* 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1912), 2: 70-3; Andrés Résendez, "An Expedition and Its Many Tales," in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*, eds. Samuel Truett an Elliott Young (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 141. For a discussion of events by Texan apologists, see George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition,* 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 1:14-16; William Campbell Binkley, "New Mexico and the Texas-Santa Fe Expedition," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 27 (1923), 85-107; Binkley, *Expansionist,* 61-2; Loomis, *Texan-Santa Fe,* 161, 168-172.

and confidant of Charles Bent, activities which alienated him from nationalistic New Mexicans. Although some within the American community undoubtedly welcomed the prospect of annexation, it is probable that most of the merchant community viewed the Texans as troublemakers, and feared that their actions would cause an anti-American backlash in New Mexico. Charles Bent, for example, warned Alvarez that reports of Texan movements circulated throughout northern New Mexico. On January 16, he wrote, "We have many reports…respecting Texas…I should like to know the truth if you have any authentic nuse from the interior respecting Texas." He also informed Alvarez that "five or six Americans" as well as some Shawnee renegades had left Santa Fe, intending to waylay a party of New Mexican traders. "You can aprize theas Gentlemen of this if you see proper," Bent concluded. On the twentieth, Bent requested Alvarez to secure "leters of security" from Armijo for all the American residents of New Mexico, evidently fearing a native backlash should the Texans invade.[2]

The stories Texan deserters told to Armijo heightened the anxieties of the American population, for the informants told the governor that numerous prominent Americans were in cahoots with the adventurers. "These false reports caused great exasperation in the public against the peaceable and unoffending American traders," Alvarez informed Secretary of State Daniel Webster, the following year. Not only did Texans spread rumors, but the consul accused the

[2] Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, January 16, 1841, Box 1 Folder 44, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archive, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as BRC and NMSRCA, respectively); Bent to Alvarez, January 20, 1841, BRC.

governor himself of telling tales in order to procure military aid form authorities in Chihuahua.[3] In order to prevent violence against Americans in Santa Fe and the surrounding communities, Alvarez requested Governor Armijo's aid, Guadalupe Miranda, to instruct local officials to protect the lives and property of the foreign residents. Armijo's secretary responded that all Americans, "shall be protected and respected, and that it shall not be permitted to any to persecute or insult them." However, should any American attempt to actively aid the invaders, "that person shall be held as an enemy, and shall be proceeded against forthwith conformably to law." The official advised Alvarez to make the American community aware of this directive. Two days later, Armijo forbid any Americans or other foreigners from leaving Santa Fe or New Mexico. Despite Armijo's directives, arrests of Americans took place throughout New Mexico.[4]

Americans and American sympathizers faced the potential for violent attacks because of their supposed collusion with the Texans. The American citizens of Santa Fe wrote a plaintive letter to the Secretary of State, in which they complained of the "innumerable insults, injustices, and unlawful oppressions, to which we are daily subjected," going on that such actions proved "clearly to us the inveterate feeling that this governor with many of his citizens have towards us." As the Texans drew closer, the concerned citizens claimed, the governing class began

[3] Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 71; Thomas E. Chávez, "The Trouble with Texans: Manuel Alvarez and the 1841 'Invasion,'" *New Mexico Historical Review* 35 (1978), 133, 135; Bancroft, *Arizona and New Mexico*, 320; Manuel Alvarez to Daniel Webster, February 2, 1842, Consular Dispatches, Santa Fe, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CDSF).
[4] Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 75; Alvarez to Guadalupe Miranda, September 14, 1841, CDSF; Miranda to Alvarez, September 14, 1841, CDSF; Manuel Armijo to Manuel Alvarez, September 16, 1841, CDSF; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 34-5.

to stir up the common folk against the Americans. The frightened Americans went on to claim that, "we consider our lives and properties in imminent danger; and it is our fear that long ere this shall have reached Washington we shall have been robbed and probably murdered."[5] An attack on Manuel Alvarez himself convinced Americans of the opposition they faced in Santa Fe. Shortly after Armijo took the field against the Texans, his nephew, whom the governor placed in charge of the Santa Fe garrison, rode his horse up to the front door of the consul's home. Along with a number or soldiers and townspeople, the officer entered the dwelling and confronted Alvarez, "whom they grossly insulted personally abused and wounded in the face," according to later testimony. Before the mob could proceed further, "some of the better disposed of the Mexicans," broke up the crowd. However, before leaving, Armijo's nephew, "stated in the public street and in hearing of a large multitude of the citizens that after these Texans he would return with his troops and destroy all us foreigners."[6] Crowds assaulted other Americans as well. Alvarez reported to Webster that a mob in Taos beat to death Francis Lecompte, a deaf-mute American citizen. The consul implored the secretary to take action. Inaction could prove fatal. He continued, "should no notice be taken of the grievances suffered by our citizens, and no satisfaction demanded, the American citizens not only of New Mexico, but throughout the Republic, will be more cruelly

[5] American Residents of Santa Fe to Daniel Webster, September 16, 1841, Box 1 Folder 9, BRC.
[6] Ibid. Alvarez gave multiple accounts of the attack, see Alvarez to Miranda, September 20, 1841, CDSF and Alvarez to Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF. See also Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez,* 76; James Josiah Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*, ed. Ralph P. Bieber with an introduction to the Bison Books edition by Mark L. Gardner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 263.

treated than heretofore, even by the class which now respects them, and the authorities of New Mexico encouraged by want of success in obtaining redress, will attempt greater excesses than those already committed."[7]

Americans residing near Taos also faced suspicion from locals. New Mexicans claimed that Charles Bent, John Rowland, and William Workman acted as point men for the Texan invasion. Prior to the invasion, President Lamar sent an agent, William G. Dryden, to make contact with Rowland and Workman, in an attempt to enlist their services to convince the New Mexicans to accept annexation. Although Workman's pro-Anglo sentiments were well known throughout northern New Mexico, and some suspected him of conspiring with the rebels in 1837, it is possible that Workman and Rowland had no idea of Lamar and Dryden's actions.[8] Regardless of Workman's actual sympathies, he faced intimidation from New Mexican authorities. Alvarez informed Webster that while Workman was away from his home in San Miguel del Vado, "his house was entered by the *Juez de Paz*, and his goods taken, because it was said he was a friend to the Texians." Workman and Rowland left New Mexico for California shortly thereafter.[9]

It is possible that New Mexicans fingered Rowland and Bent as co-conspirators as early as February of 1841. During February and March, Bent and Workman engaged in a running argument with Taos attorney Juan B. Vigil.

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[7] Alvarez to Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF.
[8] Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 72; Binkley, *Expansionist*, 62-4; for a short biography of Workman, see David J. Weber, "William Workman," *Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 7: 381-392, especially 386-7 (hereafter cited as *MMFTFW*).
[9] Chávez, "Trouble with Texans," 134; Alvarez to Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF.

Whether or not the controversy stemmed from Vigil accusing the men of preparing the way for the Texan invasion is unknown. However, the violence that followed the accusations Vigil made certainly did little to endear the two Americans to the local Hispanic population.[10] Around noon on February 19, 1841, Bent and Workman confronted Vigil, and demanded an explanation of his accusations against them. Bent "asked him how he dare meake such false representations against us," whereupon Vigil countered that he stood by the truth of his statements. Hardly had he finished speaking, "when Workman struck him with his whip," Bent informed Manuel Alvarez. Workman continued to beat the man with the whip for some time, before dropping it and commencing to pummel Vigil with his fists until Bent, "thought he had given him enough." Then, the trader pulled Workman off the Mexican.[11]

The same afternoon, the local magistrate summoned Bent to account for his actions. Vigil made "a great deal of talk and a good many threats…against the Justice and myself," Bent wrote. In particular, the lawyer threatened "to raise his relations and friends if the Justice did not doe him justice, according to his will." The judge ordered Bent remanded to prison, whereupon the trader began to argue his case. The judge eventually placed Bent under house arrest. The trader remained confined for two days, before being summoned to post bond. Eventually, the judge

[10] Thomas Chávez claims that Vigil accused Bent and Workman of preparing the way for the Texan invasion. David Lavender admits to uncertainty, pointing out that the only indication Bent gave for the trouble was that Vigil made false accusations against the two Americans. See Chávez, "Trouble With Texans," 134-5 and David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 210.
[11] Bent to Alvarez, February 19, 1841, Box 1 Folder 47, BRC.

suspended further proceedings against Bent, pending a review of the case by the governor. Although Bent heard the Vigil was making a personal trip to Santa Fe to present his case before Armijo, the American was confident Armijo would dismiss all charges. The American trader apparently sweetened the deal for Armijo, for he sent Alvarez one keg of gunpowder and ten pounds of coffee to present to Armijo. Bent fumed that although he "could posibly have had Vigil araned for trial for Slander," such a charge would bring him no satisfaction. Rather, he wrote Alvarez, "I had rather have the satisfaction of whiping a man that has wronged me than to have him punished ten times by the law, the law to me for a personal offence is no satisfaction whatever, but cowards and wimen must take this satisfaction."[12]

Nearly a month later, Bent was still railing against Vigil. Bent reported rumors that, before the lawyer left town, he had acquired a Bowie knife and "a pair of Horsemans Pistols," with the intention of sending "one heritic," Bent, to hell. The trader thought this boast somewhat odd, for he wrote Alvarez that he had encountered Vigil twice. The man was "as meak as a lamb," on both occasions. Bent later heard that Vigil intended to have him publically whipped. Should the man want further satisfaction, Bent and Workman were only happy to oblige. "If he is not satisfied with what he had of Workman I think W. would be right glad to settle the affair," the trader boasted.[13]

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[12] Bent to Alvarez, February 20-25, 1841, Box 1 Folder 48, BRC. On the coffee and powder, see Bent to Alvarez, February 26, 1841, Box 1 Folder 49, BRC. Four years later Bent was still procuring gifts for the governor. Unfortunately, in 1845, Bent had to write Alvarez, "pleas tell the Governor the horse I expected to get for him of St. Vrain is dead" (Bent to Alvarez, February 23, 1845, Box 2 Folder 66, BRC).

[13] Bent to Alvarez, March 15, 1841, Box 1 Folder 50, BRC.

It is possible that Bent did indeed seek further "satisfaction" against Vigil. On the night of March 20, four armed men approached the house where Vigil was staying. The barking of dogs woke Vigil, and he fled "nearly naked" across the plains to Rio Grande, "and laid thare all day," before making his way to the town of Cordova and from there back to Taos. Bent reported that Vigil requested an escort out of the country from the *alcalde.* Bent gloated that, "I think that Juan Vigil will be heartely tired of the valley of Taos…I think if he gets fairly away this time, he will be verry apt to creape away."[14]

Charles Bent and anyone associated with the company fort also came under suspicion. Authorities in Taos arrested Bent and brought him to Santa Fe for questioning. Alvarez intervened, and Bent was released. "The reason for his arrest," Alvarez wrote, "was said to have been a misunderstanding of the orders received by the officer in Taos from head quarters." Not even Americans coming into New Mexico from Bent's Fort were free from suspicion. Alvarez reported that Mexican officials arrested three Americans coming into New Mexico from the Arkansas on business. Despite the fact that, "they gave good references, and had done nothing against the laws of Mexico, nor could have been suspected as Texians….they were arrested, sent to Santa Fe, and there imprisoned," the indignant consul informed his superiors.[15]

The consul was a key component to the economic, social, and political pro-American faction Charles Bent helped create in northern New Mexico. Alvarez

[14] Bent to Alvarez, March 22, 1841, Box 2 Folder 51, BRC.
[15] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 217; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 44; Alvarez to Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF.

was well positioned to act as a go-between for the Bent interests and those of Governor Armijo. Alvarez was a remarkable figure in his own right. Born in Spain in 1794 he immigrated to Mexico in 1818. From Mexico, he traveled to Cuba and to the United States. Returning to Mexico, he opened a store in Santa Fe. In 1829, when the Mexican government evicted Spanish citizens from Mexico Alvarez headed for the mountains. He trapped as far north as the Yellowstone River, working in the employment of the American Fur Company and advancing to the position of brigade leader. By 1834, he was back in Santa Fe. In 1839, although not an American citizen, the United States government appointed Alvarez consul in Santa Fe. The Mexican government withheld official recognition at first, but allowed Alvarez to fulfill his normal consular duties.[16]

Alvarez's political position, his business acumen, linguistic skills, and knowledge of New Mexican society made him a natural partner for the Bents. Indeed, as a merchant, Alvarez never separated his economic interests, or those of the American community, from his responsibilities as consul. He did business freely with Charles Bent and other American merchants residing in New Mexico. Although Bent and Governor Armijo remained on something resembling friendly terms, neither man trusted the other, and both turned to Alvarez to act as a go-between. For his part, Bent sometimes informed Armijo, through Alvarez, of the news and rumors passing back and forth along the Santa Fe Trail. Armijo then sounded out Alvarez in an attempt to determine the accuracy of the reports sent

[16] Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 6-31; Harold Dunham, "Manuel Alvarez," in *MMFTFW*, 1: 181-197; Marc Simmons, ed., *On the Santa Fe Trail* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 7.

south by Bent. Although Alvarez's position did not guarantee the success of American business ventures, or even their complete personal safety, he took his duties seriously, and acted as a forceful advocate for American interests in New Mexico.[17]

One of the touchiest matters Alvarez dealt with was the murder of a number of Americans in northern New Mexico. Over the course of three years, the consul received outraged letters from Bent and other Americans demanding justice from Armijo. Alvarez forwarded these complaints to Washington, adding his own opinion that the American government take action.[18] Ironically, Bent's first complaint to Alvarez about murders near Taos dealt with an American. The trader, along with "the Foreigners living heare," sent a petition to Armijo via Alvarez urging the governor to try William Langford for murder. Langford's "crime is one of the most auteragiaus actes, and one that could not have bean comitted by any other than a hardened villian destitute of all fealling of humanity," Bent wrote. The bloodthirsty fiend might well kill again "to satisfy his inadinant thirst for blood," Bent warned. The man had threatened the lives of numerous residents, despite his incarceration.[19]

More typical, though, were complaints about the murder of Americans by the Mexican population. In December, 1840, an outraged Bent wrote of the murder

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[17] Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez,* 48-62; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 204; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 3.
[18] Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez,* 54-5; For a good survey of the legal ramifications of the murder of Americans in New Mexico, see Jill Mocho, *Murder and Justice in Frontier New Mexico, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), especially pages 96, 124-144, 144-56, 175-83.
[19] Bent to Alvarez, September 10, 1839, Box 1 Folder 39, BRC.

of an American citizen near Mora, "the fourth murder that has bean committed on American citizens within the past fue years, and as yet neather of the murderers have been punished." The local authorities seemed unwilling to dispense justice, thinking, Bent continued "that it is too much to put to death two or more men for the murder of one heritic." Bent raged on, should twenty Mexicans murder one American, "let us insist upon the whole being punished, and with nothing short of death." The authorities should confiscate the property of the murderers and sell it off at auction to defray any expenses incurred by a trial and execution. Alvarez's duty, Bent reminded him, was to report these outrages to the Mexican government in order to secure redress. Should the Mexicans balk, Alvarez should write directly to the American minister in Mexico City, "a man that will not be trifled with," Bent concluded.[20] Alvarez received another letter to the same effect from J. H. Lyman. Lyman complained that as long as Armijo was in power, no American could ever get justice from the government. Despite the killings, Armijo had done nothing, and the murderers "*are not punished,"* Lyman complained. Alvarez passed these concerns on to the American minister to Mexico, Powhatan Ellis. He had consulted with the governor, who promised that "he would use all diligence that justice should be administered," Alvarez reported. Still, he went on, "I cannot help but remark that between his saying and doings there is a very wide difference." Alvarez hoped that Armijo would remain firm, and make an example of the murderers, so that the population would realize that, "they cannot with impunity assassinate or at will and pleasure take the lives of free born American citizens."

[20] Bent to Alvarez, December 1, 1840, Box 1 Folder 42, BRC.

However, two years later, little changed. Armijo still refused to take action against those who killed Americans. Rather, the culprits, "were permitted more liberty than the peacable and unoffending American merchants," the consul wrote Daniel Webster bitterly.[21]

In 1843, another expansionist gambit by the Lone Star Republic again placed Americans in New Mexico, including Charles Bent, in a precarious position. The initial impetus for the 1843 expeditions came from Charles A. Warfield, son of a prosperous New Orleans family, with long experience trapping, traveling, and filibustering. Warfield proposed to raise a force to capture New Mexican territory. Sam Houston, overseeing a bankrupt nation, and itching to atone for its filibustering failures in New Mexican and along the Lower Rio Grande, gave Warfield a commission in August 1842. Charged with seizing Mexican property and goods along the Santa Fe Trail in territory claimed by Texas, Houston authorized Warfield to split any loot, half to the Republic, half to Warfield and the troops. Furthering Houston's enthusiasm were reports of New Mexican discontent with Governor Armijo and a willingness to accept Texan annexation. Upon receipt of his commission, Warfield traveled to New Orleans, thence to Missouri to begin recruiting men. Although he recruited better in the western portion of the state, not everyone was enthusiastic about his venture. Solomon Sublette, for one, wrote his brother William, expressing his concerns about Warfield's intentions. The Texan attempted to recruit Sublette, making him "a great many promises if I should go

[21] J.H. Lyman to Alvarez, December 7, 1840, Box 3 Folder 174, BRC; Alvarez to Powhatan Ellis, December 14, 1840, Alvarez Letterbook page 12, Box 7 Folder 20 BRC; Bent to Alvarez, January 30, 1841, Box 1 Folder 46, BRC; Alvarez to Daniel Webster, February 2, 1842, CDSF.

with him as a Left Tenant Colonel and pay but I would not join him for I was of the same opinion as you that he is for no good," Solomon concluded.[22]

Warfield's recruiting attempts in the vicinity of Bent's Fort placed company employees in a difficult situation. From the Platte River, W.D. Hodgkiss wrote Andrew Drips, "Mr. Charles Warfield now a colonel in the Texian Service is raising recruits at the Arkansas," and that, "he has been joined by many of the old mountain men…their intention is to waylay the Mexican party on the way to the States this Spring, the Mexicans will have a large amount of gold and silver and if they succeed it will render a vast service to the Texian cause."[23] Warfield did most of his recruiting at the South Platte posts. Rufus Sage encountered him at Fort Lupton. There, bearing a colonel's commission signed by Sam Houston, Warfield attempted to gather men to "annoy the Mexican frontier, intercept their trade," and force them to make peace on terms favorable to the Lone Star Republic. In exchange, Sage wrote, "Great inducements, by way of promises were held out," and a number of men consented to "rally beneath the banner of The Lone Star."[24]

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[22] Marc Simmons, *Murder on the Santa Fe Trail: An International Incident, 1843* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1987), 16, 18, 66-9; Larry D. Ball, "Federal Justice on the Santa Fe Trail: The Murder of Antonio José Chávez," *New Mexico Historical Review* 81 (1986), 1-17; Harry C. Myers, "Banditti on the Santa Fe Trail: The Texan Raids of 1843," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (1996-1997), 284; Binkley, *Expansionist,* 107; Nicholas P. Hardeman, "Charles A. Warfield," in *MMFTFW,* 7: 353-7; Solomon P. Sublette to William Sublette, October 31, 1842, Box 3 Folder 3, William L. Sublette Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (hereafter cited as WLSP and MHS, respectively).

[23] Simmons, *Murder,* 18; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 141, n. 82; W.D. Hodgkiss to Andrew Drips, March 25, 1843, Box 1, Drips Papers, MHS.

[24] Rufus Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies: or, Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years, with a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Condition, and the Different Nations Inhabiting Them* (Philadelphia: Baird, 1854), 244.

Warfield expected to rendezvous with the recruits near Bent's Fort in March 1843. However, only twenty-four men showed up when the colonel returned. Undaunted, Warfield marched south towards Point of Rocks, along the Santa Fe Trail, where he intended to rendezvous with the rest of the recruits, headed west from the Missouri settlements. When the men from Missouri failed to arrive, Warfield marched his tiny command west, into New Mexico. Near Mora, they attacked a camp of New Mexican buffalo hunters, killing three and driving off their herd of seventy horses. The *ciboleros,* however, pursued. They overtook the Texans, and drove off their entire horse herd. Dismounted and dejected, the recruits walked back to Bent's Fort and disbanded. Warfield headed south for Texas, only to meet another party of Texans encamped along the Santa Fe Trail.[25]

This band, under the command of Jacob Snively, also held a commission from the Texas government to harry any Mexican wagons passing through territory claimed by the Republic. Snively's men, described by one participant as "hardy Frontiersmen, inured to toil and danger, and the use of arms," marched west for the Santa Fe Trail on April 25, 1843, and arrived there on May 27. Four days later, Snively's scouts met the eastbound Bent-St. Vrain caravan. From the traders, the Texans learned that they had missed the "Chihuahua Carry Vans" by two months. However, they were expected to return in a little over two weeks. More importantly, Snively learned that Governor Armijo dispatched an escort of about 500 militiamen to the border to escort the caravan safely to Santa Fe. In order to

[25] Simmons, *Murder,* 66-9; Myers, "Banditti on the Santa Fe Trail," 284, 288; Sage, *Scenes,* 248-267; *Niles' National Review,* "From the West," July 22, 1843, 14, p.323.

check this new threat, Snively dispatched a portion of his command, under the direction of the newly-arrived Warfield, to meet the Mexicans. Warfield encountered an advance guard of one hundred men under Captain Ventura Lovato near Cold Spring, on the Cimarron River. A one-sided contest followed. The Texans killed eighteen Mexicans, wounded eighteen more, and captured sixty-two. The fleeing survivors made their way back to Armijo with the news. Distraught, the governor retreated to Santa Fe, leaving the Texans firmly positioned along the trail.[26]

What Snively did not expect, was the arrival of the United States Dragoons that accompanied the traders. Worried about the unrest the Texans caused along the trail, traders appealed to the government for an escort. In response to their request, Stephen Watts Kearny dispatched Philip St. George Cooke, with four companies of dragoons to escort the caravan. Cooke rendezvoused with the caravan at Diamond Spring on June 6. He found the traders of both nationalities uneasy. The Mexican traders especially, expressed "many fears of robbers, and a desire to be with us." Eight days later, Cooke encountered Charles Bent along with fourteen wagons and a herd of cattle, bound for Missouri. The trader informed the

[26] Binkley, *Expansionist*, 112-3; Otis E. Young, *The West of Philip St. George Cooke, 1809-1895* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), 114-5; Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 115; Simmons, *Murder*, 67; Myers, "Banditti on the Santa Fe Trail," 289; H. Bailey Carroll, "Steward A. Miller and the Snively Expedition of 1843," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 46 (1951), 267, 274-5, 278-81. For brief surveys of Cooke's encounter with the Texans, see also Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 41-52; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 376-9; Otis E. Young, "Dragoons on the Santa Fe Trail in the Autumn of 1843," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 32 (1954): 42-51.

officer of Armijo's march towards the border.[27] While marking time with Cooke, Bent awaited the arrival of St. Vrain, who had taken wagons back up the Arkansas to retrieve five stranded boatloads of robes and pelts. The trader arrived in Cooke's camp on June 22, bringing "important news for the caravan." St. Vrain informed Cooke that Snively and 180 men awaited the arrival of the caravan at Arkansas Crossing. The Texan told St. Vrain that "he intended to remain in the country; and would most assuredly capture the Mexicans and their wagons, wherever they went, whenever they separated from the escort." Furthermore, St. Vrain informed Cooke of Warfield's defeat of Lovato and Armijo's subsequent retreat, expressing his fears that the Texans would assuredly plunder the wagon train if Cooke did not accompany it.[28] Anticlimax followed. Overwhelmed by boredom, nearly half of Snively's men deserted. Cooke encountered the Texans at the end of June and curtly informed them that they were on United States soil, and engaged in illegal activity. The officer threatened to fire upon the Texans if they refused to give up their arms and disband peacefully. Snively had little choice. For the second time in three years, a Texan army, bound for New Mexico, failed ignominiously.[29]

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[27] Henry Putney Beers, "Military Protection of the Santa Fe Trail to 1843," *New Mexico Historical Review* 12 (1937), 133; Myers, "Banditti on the Santa Fe Trail," 284-5; Young, *West of Philip St. George Cooke,* 111; Philip St. George Cooke, "A Journal of the Santa Fe Trail," ed. William Connelley, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (1925), 79, 85.
[28] Young, *West of Philip St. George Cooke*, 112-5; Cooke, "Journal," 90-1; *Niles' National Register,* "Western Frontier," July 22, 1843, 14, p. 323.
[29] Young, *West of Philip St. George Cooke*, 123; Simmons, *Murder,* 69; Myers, "Banditti on the Santa Fe Trail," 291-2. For a pro-Texas treatment of the Cooke-Snively encounter, see Carroll, "Steward A. Miller and the Snively Expedition of 1843," especially 280-6.

Despite the failure of the Texans, suspicions once again swirled around the American community in New Mexico.[30] Rumors that the Texans planned to invade New Mexico from the vicinity of Bent's Fort found some credence with Armijo. He received word from Las Vegas that local officials had captured two "thieves," former employees of Bent-St. Vrain who seemed to possess an intimate knowledge of Texan intentions. Although unsure of the number of Texans, the prisoners informed the authorities that the filibusters were trading with Indians and biding their time until the caravan passed through. Given the general suspicion surrounding Americans in New Mexico, it is ironic that Charles Bent and Manuel Alvarez worked actively to keep Armijo apprised of the Texans' movements. From Taos, Stephen Louis Lee brought word from Bent of the Texan plans. Alvarez acted as the go-between, relaying Bent's information to the governor.[31]

Despite the information provided by Bent and Alvarez, New Mexicans remained uneasy about the potential of American collaboration with the Texans. Charles Bent complained about these suspicions in a letter to the consul. The native population looked upon the Americans "as intruders," he wrote. Only fear of the Americans' fighting ability kept the New Mexicans from committing "a great many more assassinations than there is," he claimed. Only direct action by the United States government on behalf of her citizens in New Mexico could guarantee an end to interethnic violence, Bent proclaimed. Although he fingered

[30] Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 100.
[31] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 140-1, 152; David J. Weber, "Stephen Louis Lee," in *MMFTFW*, 3: 185; Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 96-7.

the "rabble" as the main perpetrators of the violence, they were undoubtedly "excited…by some of the first citizens of the country."[32]

Bent's dissatisfaction with his Taos neighbors only escalated when they involved him in a frivolous lawsuit. Bent got into a dispute with a Taos resident named Antonio Montero. Montero brought suit against Bent for $800. Unable to dispose successfully of the case in Taos, Bent traveled to Santa Fe to take the issue up with Armijo. Despite the governor's assurance that Bent would have justice, the trader cynically pointed out that, "He has made very fair promises; how far these promises will be verified, time will show." There was little use in putting confidence in Mexican promises, he reminded Alvarez. Upon arrival in Santa Fe, Montero apparently stirred up the people against the American trader, "by slanderous reports," Alvarez informed the Secretary of State. The locals almost mobbed Bent, who fled Santa Fe by night for the Arkansas, although he later paid the fine.[33]

Further confirming Bent's fears of anti-American sentiment, violence erupted in Taos. When a crowd looted Charles Beaubien's store, local officials, including Padre Martínez's brother Pascual, did nothing to prevent it. Manuel Alvarez seconded Bent's opinion's in a letter to the Secretary of State. The actions of the Texans, "caused considerable excitement," among New Mexicans, the consul wrote. Rumors that prominent Americans were in league with the freebooters only intensified anxieties. Because of these suspicions, Armijo summoned a number of

[32] Bent to Alvarez, April 20, 1843, CDSF.
[33] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 234; Edgeley W. Todd, "Antonio Montero," in *MMFTFW,* 2: 260-3; Bent to Alvarez, April 20, 1843, CDSF; Alvarez to Secretary of State, July 1, 1843, CDSF.

Americans from throughout New Mexico to Santa Fe to undergo questioning, a process that "caused much trouble and vexation to many of our innocent and inoffensive citizens." Aside from violent reprisals, the actions of the Texans had a potentially crippling effect on commerce between Missouri and Mexico. Unless the government did something to restrain the "predatory bands of Texians…roving upon the Caravan route," American traders would lose business as Mexicans shifted their attentions to purchasing from the southern seaports and foreign traders. The actions of Warfield and Snively cost the American merchants $200,000 in trade, Alvarez concluded. [34]

Maneuverings by the Texans in 1841 and 1843 helped sew the seeds of discontent between rival nationalist Mexican and mercantile pro-American factions in Taos for the next couple of years. Nationalists, headed by Padre Antonio José Martínez, already suspicious of the Bents and St. Vrain, would accuse the American traders of business and political practices that threatened to undermine the sovereignty of an unstable Mexican state on the country's far northern border.

[34] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 233, 240; Simmons, *Murder*, 8; Alvarez to Secretary of State, July 1, 1843, CDSF; Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 124. After 1843, rogue parties of Texans continued to rove about the Southern Plains, causing disquiet for both Bent-St. Vrain and New Mexican officials. See Bent to Alvarez, March 4, 1846, Box 2 Folder 77, BRC.

Chapter 10 - Taos: Many Tender (and Tenuous) Ties

The alliances the Bents and St. Vrain formed in the frontier community of Taos heightened the tensions between the Americans and Mexican nationalists in the wake of the failed Texan invasions of 1841 and 1843. The partners recognized quickly the utility of marriage into prominent Taos families. Similar to the bonds the company formed with Native American groups, marital ties opened up new economic and political opportunities. Marriage expedited the citizenship process for some Americans, which could in turn lead to the acquisition of substantial land grants. What the Bents and St. Vrain saw as a tremendous opportunity, Mexican nationalists viewed as a potentially dire threat. The weakness of the Mexican state had left New Mexican in a precarious position, and the prospect of men like Charles Bent gaining access to millions of acres of land represented a further destabilization. In a similar manner, the ties the partners established in Taos might translate into political power. The ascension of a pro-American faction threatened further the hold of Mexican authorities on the territory north of Santa Fe. These interrelated issues – marriage, land, and politics – were the basis of the increased estrangement between the pro-American and pro-Mexican forces in the region around Taos.

Bent and his associates formed the nucleus of the foreign-born community that eventually challenged the nationalist faction for political and economic control of northern New Mexico. They also played a prominent role in the economic and

social life of the town.[1] The American clique comprised many men who married into local families. John Tharp, David Waldo, William Wolfskill, John Workman, and occasional Bent-St. Vrain employee Dick Wooton, all married Mexican women. Another Bent associate was Stephen Louis Lee. It is possible Lee came to New Mexico as early as 1824. Regardless, local authorities soon suspected him of smuggling, but proved nothing. He became a Mexican citizen in 1829, and likely continued trapping and trading. By 1838, Lee was one of the principal traders in Taos, making the occasional deal with Bent-St. Vrain, although he had an unsavory business reputation. He became a politician, landholder, and eventually sheriff of Taos, before his death in the 1847 Taos Revolt.[2]

Outside of St. Vrain, Bent's closest ally in Taos was probably Carlos Beaubien. A Canadian, Beaubien was one of a long series of French traders who entered the Southwest, beginning with the Mallet brothers in 1739. Multilingual, Catholic, and accommodating, Frenchmen like Beaubien settled easily into New Mexican society. Well-educated, Beaubien first came to New Mexico in 1826. The following year he married a local woman, Paula Lobato, with whom he had nine children. An increasingly prosperous merchant, he eventually became a

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[1] David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 175; Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 47; Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 67; Andrés Résendez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 123.

[2] Chavez, "New Names," 377, 379; David J. Weber, "Stephen Louis Lee," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 3: 181-187 (hereafter cited as *MMFTFW*); J.H. Lyman to Manuel Alvarez, November 29, 1840, Box 3 Folder 173, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archive, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as BRC and NMSRCA, respectively); Janet Lecompte, "Alexander K. Branch," in *MMFTFW*, 4: 61-67.

Mexican citizen and the *alcalde* of Taos. His receipt of a large land grant strengthened his ties with Bent, much to the chagrin of local Mexican nationalists. Beaubien played an important role in New Mexico following the Mexican-American war as well, acting as one of the territory's first judges under the new regime.[3]

Mexican nationalists rallied around Padre Antonio José Martínez, the parish priest of Taos, and scion of the most powerful native family in the Rio Arriba country of northern New Mexico. As with the pro-American faction, intermarriage knitted the Martínez's to other notable clans, including the Valdezes, Vigils, Jaramillos, Lovatos, and Trujillos. Unknown circumstances drew the Martínez patriarch, Don Severino, to Taos. Antonio José Martínez was one of the most remarkable New Mexicans of the period. Not initially destined for the priesthood, he married in 1812. However, his wife died fourteen months later, leaving Martínez with a baby girl. Rather than remarry, he decided to become a priest. New Mexico lacked educational opportunities, so Martínez traveled south to Durango, where he attended the Tridentine Seminary on scholarship. While in Durango, he freely imbibed the philosophies and nationalism of Mexican revolutionaries like Father Hidalgo. He returned to New Mexico in 1823, and took up duties as parish priest at Tomé, before moving on to Abiquiu. In 1826, the

[3] Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier*, 111, 120; Chavez, "New Names," 296; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The History of the Military Occupation of the Territory of New Mexico from 1846 to 1851 by the Government of the United States, together with biographical sketches of men prominent in the conduct of the government during that period* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Company, 1909), 267-9; Lawrence R. Murphy, "Charles H. Beaubien," in *MMFTFW,* 6: 23-35.

Bishop of Durango secularized the Taos parish, and Father Martínez became the local priest.[4]

Once established in Taos, the padre began a long and distinguished career of civil and religious service to the community. He served as a deputy to the New Mexico Departmental Assembly in 1831-32, 1837-38, and 1845-46. He began a preparatory school to train young men for the seminary in Durango - eventually eighteen alumni of Martínez's school became priests. He also operated New Mexico's only printing press from 1835 to 1847. A firm believer in social justice, Martínez became an outspoken champion of the local population. A long and rich oral tradition ascribes to the priest a reputation as "a kindly figure and defender of the Mexican people, worthy of the deepest respect." Martínez's nationalism, and his burden to speak out in behalf of the local Hispanic population put the priest on a collision course with Bent and Taos's foreign merchant faction.[5]

Charles Bent and Padre Martínez clashed bitterly over issues of trade and local politics. Economically, the priest opposed the trader because he alleged that the company corrupted the Indians. Martínez was not alone in accusing American traders like the Bents of selling guns and liquor to the Indians in exchange for captives and livestock stolen from New Mexico and the states further south. As a nationalist, Martínez viewed Bent and the Americans around Taos as a potentially

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[4] Weber, *Edge of Empire,* 45-54; Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier,* 121; Ray John de Aragon, "Padre Antonio José Martínez : The Man and the Myth," in *Padre Martínez: New Views From Taos,* ed. E. A. Mares (Taos: Millicent Rogers Museum, 1988),127; E. A. Mares, "The Many Faces of Padre Antonio José Martínez," in *Padre Martínez,* 23; Fray Angélico Chávez, *But Time and Chance: The Story of Padre Martínez of Taos* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1981), 27.

[5] Chavez, *But Time and Chance,* 35, 43, 49; Weber, *Edge of Empire,* 75; E. K. Francis, "Padre Martínez: A New Mexican Myth," *New Mexico Historical Review* 31 (1956), 268; Aragon, "Man and Myth," 129; Mares, "Many Faces," 18, 38 (quote is from 38).

disruptive political and social force, one that threatened to cut the already fraying bonds that held New Mexico to the rest of the nation. Politics was another arena of conflict. Elections in Taos proved hotly contested during the 1840s, and the faction with the most sympathetic officials in power stood to benefit at the expense of the other. Bent, in particular, spent a good deal of time grousing to Manuel Alvarez about the political influence of the priest's family, and the miscarriages of justice they perpetrated. Finally, the issue of land grants rubbed nerves raw on both sides. In an attempt to develop the isolated northern frontier, New Mexican governors like Manuel Armijo issued princely grants of land to ambitious citizens. When it became apparent that Charles Bent intended to expand his influence through land acquisition, Martínez vigorously opposed his actions. Thus, throughout the 1840s, the situation in Taos was often tense. Recriminations flew in both directions, as the factions jostled for political, social, and economic power. The actions of the Bents and St. Vrain, and traders like them, proved critical in this contest, for the manner in which they conducted their business had the potential to destabilize Mexico's northern frontier, a fact of which Martínez was only too well aware.[6]

[6] On the influence of the two factions, and the sources of conflict, see Harold Dunham, "Charles Bent," in *MMFTFW,* 2:44; Francis, "Padre Martínez," 269; Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 300; Mares, "Many Faces," 30-2; E.A. Mares, *I Returned and Saw Under the Sun: Padre Martínez of Taos: A Play* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 5, 40; Ward Alan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1965), 303-304; George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 186-190; Thomas J. Steele, "The View From the Rectory," in *Padre Martínez,* 83, 87; Weber, *Edge of Empire,* 74;David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 81.

The Bents and St. Vrain recognized the great economic and political potential of marriage into prominent Hispanic families in Taos. Marriage offered numerous advantages for both parties involved. American men, especially merchants, gained access to a wider range of customers, while the local New Mexican families gained political and economic influence through intermarriage with well-placed Anglos. While some men, like Ceran St. Vrain, became Mexican citizens, others did not. Citizenship allowed Anglos easier access to land grants, as well as the ability to conduct business during periods when the central government attempted to restrict commercial intercourse between the United States and Mexico. Charles Bent and St. Vrain both adhered to venerable local traditions regarding their marriage practices and living habits. However, while intermarriage strengthened the ties the partners formed with influential members of New Mexican society, such alliances only heightened tensions with the Martínez faction, as both groups vied for economic and political advantage throughout the 1840s. In this way, accommodation through intermarriage brought the partners the potential for both material advantage and the possibility for future conflict.

Intermarriage between Anglo men and Hispanic women often brought advantages to both sides of the union. This was especially the case around Taos, where nearly three-quarters of these unions occurred. Although documentation is scarce, it is reasonable to assume that the New Mexicans initially welcomed Anglo newcomers, so long as they adapted themselves to local cultural norms and caused no trouble for the authorities. Indeed, numerous newcomers attained positions of

power and authority, both formally and informally. Hispanic women proved valuable to Anglo men as mothers, companions, and lovers, as well as for the economic links they helped forge between the two communities.[7] Because of the high value New Mexicans placed on family life and reciprocity, most residents of the region were linked to one another through marriage or through godparenthood. Thus, American men who married local women tapped into an extensive political, social, and economic kinship network. Hispanic families also benefitted from the marriage. They acquired easier access to American trade goods. The New Mexican mercantile community also forged links to suppliers, creditors, and marketers, in the United States through their new in-laws. Even for those New Mexicans of a lower or modest standing, intermarriage provided them with an opportunity to augment their position within society.[8]

Marriage provided a path to Mexican citizenship, which, in turn, could facilitate broader economic opportunities for Anglos. During the late-1820s and early-1830s, numerous Anglo trappers and traders, tired of evading Mexico's economic laws, decided upon formal citizenship. Citizenship legitimized economic ventures previously illegal. Citizenship laws became more codified and specific over the course of the 1820s. The colonization law of 1823 was rather vague; it guaranteed civil rights to all professing Roman Catholics and well as streamlining

[7] Weber, *Edge of Empire,*65; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy,* 1, 39, 45 (quote is from page 1); Darlis Miller, "Cross-Cultural Marriages in the Southwest: The New Mexico Experience, 1846-1900," *New Mexico Historical Review* 57 (1982), 335-6.
[8] Lecompte, "Independent Women," 22; Résendez, *Changing National Identities,* 129-131; Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier,* 116; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy,* 17; Jill Mocho, *Murder and Justice in Frontier New Mexico, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 59.

the rules for land distribution. In 1828, the government passed an official naturalization law, which laid out the specific conditions for citizenship. To become a Mexican citizen, an individual had to have lived in Mexico for two years, be Roman Catholic, and have a record of good behavior. Although the law did not require marriage to a Mexican woman, many applicants believed such unions expedited the process, and they let officials know of their status.[9] In 1829, a spate of foreigners who would play prominent roles in the affairs of Taos became citizens. The list included Charles Beaubien, John Rowland, Antoine and Luis Robidoux, and Thomas Boggs. Ceran St. Vrain became a naturalized Mexican citizen in 1831. David Waldo provides a good example of the process Americans went through to become Mexican citizens. In 1831, he presented a petition to the *ayuntamiento* of Taos, requesting naturalization papers so that he could apply for citizenship. After his arrival in Taos, Waldo took notice of the "good organization and government of this Republic," and decided to become a Mexican citizen. He became a Roman Catholic, giving the local priest as a reference attesting to his faith and piety. Waldo, "of course," renounced allegiance to any other nation, and pledged to "bind myself to support effectively the constitution, decrees, and general laws of the United States of Mexico." Upon summoning witnesses to verify Waldo's truthfulness, and reviewing his memorial, the town fathers decided that the man's "ability and industriousness as a merchant are sufficient enough to insure him a decent livelihood," and that "his character and the way he has conducted himself and conducts himself is generally known to be politically, socially, and

[9] Weber, *Taos Trappers*, 176, 180; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy*, 27-9.

religiously upright and restrained." Therefore, they acquiesced to his request, paving the way for him to become a Mexican citizen.[10]

Not all New Mexicans saw advantages in intermarriage, however. Indeed, historian Deena Gonzalez argues that accommodating intermarriages were the exception, rather than the rule. She writes, "In their haste to accept intermarriage as examples of cultural unity, some scholars have overlooked the examples of social disharmony and raging turmoil."[11] Most prosaically, probably fewer women of elite status were of a marriageable age. As noted above, parents often played a pivotal role in approving perspective matches. Since the Spanish Period, many New Mexican parents objected vigorously to unions with those below their own socioeconomic and political status. Furthermore, by the 1830s and 1840s, the richest families in New Mexico had already consolidated enough economic power and foreign mercantile contacts on their own that they did not require kinship ties with Americans. There are no recorded instances of intermarriage between Americans and families like the Armijos, Pereas, Pinos, or Senas. Not everyone, then, sought or approved of intermarriage with the Anglo newcomers.[12]

The Bents, St. Vrain, and a number of their employees and associates saw the advantages of marrying into local families. American contemporaries of the

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[10] Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations, "Documentos por los cuales se han dado cartas de naturaleza al los individuals…," Box 3 Folder 113, William Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino (hereafter cited as Ritch). For Waldo, see "Petition to the Ayuntamiento of San Geronimo for certificate of good standing to obtain naturalization papers," July 12, 1831, Box 4 Folder 234; "Response to Petition," July 12, 1831, Box 4 Folder 234, Ritch.

[11] Deena J. González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40-1, 72, 74 (quote is from page 72).

[12] Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came*, 193, 233; Résendez, *Changing National Identities*, 128, 132; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy*, 18.

partners noted the kindness and attractiveness of their New Mexican wives. Lewis Garrard wrote of Charles Bent's wife, "Señora Bent was quite handsome; a few years since she must have been a beautiful woman – good figure for her age; luxuriant raven hair, unexceptionable teeth, and brilliant, dark eyes, the affect of which was heightened by a clear, brunette complexion." The young man also found St. Vrain's wife appealing, describing her as "a dark-eyed, languidly handsome woman."[13]

Charles Bent adhered to New Mexican folk marriage customs in the fact that he never received the clerical approval for his marriage. Apparently, he never even tried to legitimate the union. There might have been several reasons for Bent's failure to do so. Anti-Catholicism might have played a role. Perhaps he feared that marrying a Mexican woman would stigmatize him in the eyes of his family back in Missouri. Some time between 1832 and 1835, he began his union with María Ignacia Jaramillo. Twenty years old at the time she took up with Bent, Jaramillo was a widow with one child of her own. William Boggs, a Bent relative, recalled that Charles attempted to acculturate his wife to an Anglo lifestyle - living, dressing, and presumably speaking, like Americans. Bent and his wife had at least five children, two of whom, Juan Andres and Maria Virginia, apparently died during infancy. Their second child, Alfredo, was born February 14, 1837 and baptized the following day. Estefana Jaramillo was born August 3, 1839, and Maria Teresa on October 25, 1841. The baptismal register lists each child's father

[13] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 181, 168. For references to the family's kindliness, see William M. Boggs, "Narrative," 36, Boggs-Yale.

as "unknown," although their paternal heritage was well known throughout the community. The family's twenty-year-old Ute servant, Maria Guadalupe Jaramillo, was also baptized.[14]

Marriage to María Jaramillo and the obligations of godparenthood linked Charles Bent to several important families in Taos, including the Vigils, Lunas, Valdezes, and Luceros. Although folklore has it that the Jaramillos had a rich, aristocratic bloodline, the truth is less dramatic. The family was of the middling, respectable sort, not the Spanish aristocracy.[15] Attachment to the Vigil family proved especially important, for they wielded a great deal of influence in the region. María Jaramillo's mother, María Apolonia Vigil, came from a family with large ranching and farming interests in northern New Mexico. The Vigils also participated in the Santa Fe trade and politics. On the local level, Cornelio Vigil served alternately as alcalde, prefect, and probate judge, and also became a business associate of St. Vrain. The two men collaborated to receive the massive Vigil-St. Vrain Land Grant, of which they made Charles a one-sixth partner. María's cousin, Donaciano Vigil served as Territorial Secretary under Manuel Armijo, and became the acting governor of New Mexico following Bent's

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[14] Marc Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives: A Family History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 64-5; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 176-7; Boggs, "Narrative," 36; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy*, 11, 22; Nolie Mumey, *Old Forts and Trading Posts of the West: Bent's Old Fort and Bent's New Fort on the Arkansas River* (Denver: Artcraft Press, 1956), 6, note 6; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 72; Chavez, "New Names," 296. The baptismal records for the Bent children come from, *Taos Baptisms, Baptism Database Manuscript of Archives Held by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and the State Archives of New Mexico, Advance Printing June 22, 1999, database entry by Thomas J. Martínez,* NMSRCA. The entries are organized by name and date, rather than by page number. I would also speculate that, given the mutual antipathy between Bent and Padre Martínez, even had Bent sought to legitimize his marriage, he might not have wanted to deal with the priest.

[15] Simmons, *Kit Carson and HisThree Wives,* 55.

assassination in 1847. Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid served briefly as Lieutenant Governor after Armijo fled the province in the summer of 1846. Clearly, Bent's marriage brought him into close contact with local New Mexican powerbrokers, in addition to Taos's American community, which grew in strength and influence over the course of the 1830s and 1840s, much to the chagrin of the Martínez faction.[16]

Others associated with the company established liaisons with Mexican women. St. Vrain had a series of three mistresses, each of whom bore him a child. Charles Bent's brother George took María de la Cruz Padilla as a common-law wife, and they had two children together. Although both Bent and St. Vrain provided handsomely for their children in their respective wills, they were less than generous with the women in their lives.[17] The most famous intermarriage associated with Bent-St. Vrain was that between sometime employee - turned famous guide - Kit Carson and María Jaramillo's sister, Josefa. Carson most likely met Josefa while visiting his employers in Taos. Whether her parents opposed the match is unknown. However, unlike the Bents or St. Vrain, Carson converted to Catholicism and married her with benefit of clergy. As with those involved primarily in the Indian trade, the men of Bent-St. Vrain understood the potential

[16] Ibid., 57; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy*, 21-2; Tanis C. Thorne, "Marriage Alliance and the Fur Trade: Bent, St. Vrain and Company, 1831-1849" (M.A. thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1979), 27.
[17] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 72, Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 429, note 10; Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 40, 59.

advantages, socially, politically, economically, and physically, of associating themselves with the local female population. [18]

In terms of economic potential, intermarriage was critical to Anglos hoping to take advantage of New Mexico's generous land grant policies during the 1840s. Mexican land policy encouraged foreigners to become Mexican citizens and marry local women. While the social status of the women had little to do with the grants, and although only about ten percent of Anglo men who intermarried received substantial grants, men like Carlos Beaubien, Stephen Lee, and Ceran St. Vrain married or began cohabiting shortly before they received their grants.[19] Although the government never questioned whether Mexican citizens had foreigners or naturalized citizens for partners, citizenship expedited the process of obtaining the grant. Naturalized citizens or foreigners applying for grants in their own name faced a long wait while local authorities forwarded their petitions to Mexico City. Between 1840 and 1847, the government in New Mexico issued twenty-three land grants, most of them made by Manuel Armijo. Foreigners took advantage of the governor's largesse, and during the first half of the decade there was scarcely an application for a sizable grant that did not contain the name of a foreigner or naturalized citizen.[20]

Land grants formed a critical component of the Mexican state's attempt to defend and settle its isolated northern frontier. One thing the republic had was

[18] Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 40, 43, 64; Thomas W. Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 94.
[19] Résendez, *Changing National Identities,* 130; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy,* 32, 36, 38.
[20] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 306; Lamar, *Far Southwest,* 50; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 218.

plenty of land. However, what the frontier lacked was a large native population capable or willing to develop the land. Prior to the great grants of the 1840s, foreigners sometimes purchased small plots of land directly from Mexican citizens. Mexican policymakers hoped that native citizens or European migrants would settle on the frontier, acting as a check against local Indian tribes and an increasingly expansive United States. Yet, when the government failed to develop viable colonizing plans, local officials turned to private citizens. In addition to frontier development, governors like Armijo used land grants to curry political favor, pay off political debts, and keep the departmental bureaucracy functioning. Eventually, Armijo granted 31,000,000 acres of land to individuals, much of it abutting the international border at the Arkansas River. For Armijo, self-interest overlapped with national interest; he became a partner in two sizable grants. Still unable to attract much interest from native born Mexicans, Armijo turned to naturalized citizens like Beaubien and Lee to settle the northern frontier. Despite the amount of land Armijo granted, New Mexico failed to attract much migration. Furthermore, Armijo's willingness to grant lands to men like Beaubien and Ceran St. Vrain aroused the suspicion and ire of nationalists like Martínez. Land grants offered almost limitless economic potential for the Bent faction in Taos, but it also combined with complaints about their Indian trading ventures to deepen the rift separating the two groups.[21]

[21] Résendez, *Changing National Identities,* 37; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 306; Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 182-195; Marianne L. Stoller, "Grants of Desperation, Lands of Speculation: Mexican Period Land Grants in Colorado," *Journal of the West* 19 (1980), 25-7. Bent had a long interest in land acquisition and experience as a surveyor. A Mexican source lists his occupation, not as a

Controversy first arose over the lands granted by Armijo to Carlos Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda. Due to long association with Americans like Charles Bent, as well as accusations of smuggling, Beaubien sought out a well-connected native New Mexican as a partner. He settled on Guadalupe Miranda, who served as the Secretary of the Mexican Departmental Government in Santa Fe and as collector of customs. The two men argued for the grant based upon economics - should Armijo grant the application, they could begin ranching and agricultural activities in an area previously underdeveloped. The governor granted their petition on January 11, 1841. However, the anti-American sentiment roused by the abortive Texan invasion of 1841 forced Beaubien and Miranda to put their plans for development on hold. Not until two years later, in January 1843, did they take possession of their grant.[22]

Padre Martínez vigorously opposed Armijo's generosity on both ethical and political grounds. In the first place, the fact that Armijo received a one-quarter interest in the grant struck the priest as highly suspect. Perhaps more importantly, though, was the fact that Beaubien and Miranda deeded a quarter interest to Charles

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trader, but as a surveyor. See Relacion de los Estrangeros que existen en este Departamento, March 20, 1839, Box 5 Folder 174, Ritch.

[22] Sister Mary Loyola, "The American Occupation of New Mexico, 1821-1852," *New Mexico Historical Review* 14 (1939), 70; María E. Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and Conflict Over Land in the American West, 1840-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 31-3; Lawrence R. Murphy, "The Beaubien and Miranda Land Grant, 1841-1846" *New Mexico Historical Review* 42 (1967), 29-31; Lawrence R. Murphy, *Lucien Bonaparte Maxwell: Napoleon of the Southwest* (Norma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 34, 53-4. However, it bears pointing out that it is hardly possible that the men took possession of their grant as indicated in February 1843. Beaubien and Miranda were not even in the vicinity at the time of the alleged formal transfer. Furthermore, for the men to travel across over 200,000 square acres of territory in the dead of winter, marking boundaries, is highly improbable. Nevertheless, the official records say the formal transfer took place February 13, 1843 (see Stoler, "Grants of Desperation," 26; Montoya, *Translating Property,* 33-5; Murphy, *Maxwell,* 53-4).

Bent in return for beginning to develop the ranching interests on the new property. The priest pointed out that Armijo had no authority to grant land to foreigners. Since Bent was not a Mexican citizen, his involvement should have voided the entire transaction. Furthermore, the grant infringed upon the rights of local Pueblos, Jicarilla Apaches, and Mexicans who used the land for hunting and grazing. Upholding the rights of Beaubien and Miranda would severely curtail the ability of the local natives to subsist. The priest traveled all the way to Durango to present his case to the authorities. The government in Durango overturned the claim, a decision upheld at the local level by Governor Mariano Chávez. Beaubien and Miranda vigorously - and disingenuously - objected to the governor's decision. Bent had no interest in the grant, they claimed. They also grossly and intentionally underestimated the size of their new holdings, claiming the grant was only for 100,000 acres when in reality it consisted of nearly 2,000,000 acres. They also argued that Martínez's protest interrupted the economic development of the province's frontier. Their arguments bore fruit. In the winter of 1844 the provincial assembly decided that Martínez's accusations were invalid, and on April 18, 1844 Governor Felipe Seña upheld Armijo's original grant. Now secure from interference, Bent began a ranching settlement on the Ponil River. However, in December of 1846, the partners sold out their interest in the grant to another group of American investors.[23]

[23] Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 191-4; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 224-5; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 218-9, 246, 432, note11; Loyola, "American Occupation," 71; Montoya, *Translating Property,* 35-6; Murphy, "Beaubien and Miranda Land Grant," 32-8; Murphy, *Lucien Bonaparte Maxwell,* 57-61; Stoler, "Grants of Desperation," 27; "Contract Between Charles Beaubien, Charles Bent, and

Not all of Charles Bent's land dealings aroused the attention of the vigilant padre. In 1843 and 1844, the trader gained an interest in another land grant submitted by his partner, Ceran St. Vrain and Cornelio Vigil. Although a naturalized citizen, like Beaubien, St. Vrain recognized that attaching the name of an influential native New Mexican to the petition greatly strengthened his chances of success.[24] On December 8, 1843, the men wrote to Governor Armijo, stating that they desired to "encourage the agriculture," of the frontier. They had examined and registered the land encompassed by their petition – the valleys of the Huerfano, Apishapa, and Cucharas rivers to their junction with the Arkansas and Animas – with great care. Armijo's approval of their petition was all that was necessary for the development of an area containing "fertile land for cultivation," and "an abundance of pasturage and water."[25] The governor granted their request the next day, and on Christmas Day, 1843 Vigil and St. Vrain requested that the authorities in Taos act quickly to place them in formal possession of the land.[26] In March, Vigil and St. Vrain split up the interest in the new grant, conveying a one-sixth interest to themselves and to Charles Bent, Governor Armijo, Donaciano

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Guadalupe Miranda with D.D. Mitchell, Benjamin Walker, Dunham Spaulding, Thomas B. Hudson, and Joab Houghton," December 28, 1846, Jaramillo-Bent-Scheurich Family Papers, Box 8342 Folder 13, NMSRCA (hereafter cited as JBSFP). Although not dealing specifically with land grants, Janet Lecompte gives a good summary of Armijo's actions as governor in "Manuel Armijo and the Americans," 51-63. For court cases in the late-nineteenth century stemming from this grant, see Morris F. Taylor, "A New Look at an Old Case: The Bent Heirs' Claim in the Maxwell Grant," *New Mexico Historical Review* 43 (1968), 213-228.

[24] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 308; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 245; Stoler, "Grants of Desperation," 29.

[25] Cornelio Vigil and Ceran St. Vrain to Manuel Armijo, December 8, 1843, Blackmore Land Papers, Box 1 Folder 30, Document 0137, page 9, NMSRCA (hereafter cited as BLP).

[26] Vigil and St. Vrain to José Miguel Sanchez, December 25, 1843, Box 1 Folder 30, Document 0137, pages 9-10, BLP; Statement of José Miguel Sanchez, December 26, 1843, Box 1 Folder 30, Document 0137, page 10, BLP.

Vigil, and Eugene Leitensdorfer. Soon after this division, Charles's brother William began using the land to raise livestock and crops. However, by 1847, Indian raiders made such projects untenable. Had Martínez been aware of Bent's involvement, he most assuredly would have protested, but there is no record of his opposition to the Vigil - St. Vrain grant.[27]

In addition to land grants and the Indian trade, the Bent faction also clashed with the Martínez faction over control of local politics in Taos. Whether dealing with citizenship applications, land grants, or workaday courtroom procedures, allies in local government sometimes meant the difference between economic success and failure. As such, local political elections often became heated, with each faction pushing its own candidates. While Carlos Beaubien often sought positions on behalf of the American faction, Padre Martínez often boosted his brothers for local office. All these men had records of public service in Taos and beyond. Pascual Martínez served as a militia captain during the Texan invasion of 1841, and earned a commendation from President Santa Anna. Pascual also served as justice of the peace in Taos in 1845 and 1846. Santiago Martínez served as subprefect of

[27] "Title and Description," Las Animas Grant, Box 1 Folder 23, Document 129, BLP; Testimony of Christopher Carson, July 28, 1857, page 14, Box 1 Folder 30, Document 0137, BLP; Testimony of William A. Bransford, August 27, 1857, Box 1 Folder 30, Document 0137, page 15-6, BLP. Bent also had a one-sixth interest in the Sangre de Cristo Grant, awarded to Charles Beaubien's son, Narciso and Stephen Luis Lee in 1844. In 1890, Bents heirs sued for a piece of the profits from the sale of the grant. See Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 17; Contract Between Bent Heirs and George W. Thompson, March 17, 1890, Box 8342, Folder 51, JBSFP.

Taos in 1837, as an agent of the Mexican National Bank in New Mexico in 1839, in addition to at least one term in the New Mexico Assembly.[28]

Political rivalries that had simmered just beneath the surface during the first half of the 1840s reached a boiling point in 1846. Interestingly, prior to the antics of Snively and Warfield, Padre Martínez does not appear to have offered much opposition to Beaubien serving as justice of the peace in Taos. In 1842, Charles Bent wrote Alvarez that the priest actually seemed pleased with Beaubien's election, apparently taking, "the credit for himself for the appointment," although Bent found it hard to believe that the electors consulted the priest before the vote.[29] Any bipartisan feelings that might have existed in 1842 had disappeared by the time Beaubien ran for the same position in 1846. Bent spent a good deal of his correspondence with Alvarez during the winter and spring of 1846 ranting about the priest and his political machinations. Even elections for electors roused Bent's indignation. When the community held such an election Bent reported that the padre, "is exerting himself for his brother Santiago," boosting him as the only man in the Taos Valley competent enough to hold the position. The trader snidely remarked that the priest must have great intuitive powers, for before this time, "none before him have been able to discover theas hidden, Legal, qualitys," in Santiago. Initially, Charles also felt confident in Beaubien's chance to defeat whichever candidate the Martínez faction put up for justice of the peace. Bent took

[28] On the structure of local New Mexican government and the importance of friendly politicians, see Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 31, 52-3. For Beaubien's service, especially as alcade, see above. On the Martínez brothers, see Weber, *Edge of Empire*, 74-5.
[29] Bent to Alvarez, December 25, 1842, Box 2 Folder 60, BRC.

a great deal of pleasure in reporting that the priest, "is getting allarmed, he begins to doubt whether he will suxcead in getting one of his brothers ellected justice."[30]

By the end of March, the trader accused Martínez of actively "meddling" in the election process. "The Priest Martínez appears determined to suffer no one in authority heare unless he submit to be dictated to by the priest," Bent griped. Election of any Martínez to the position of justice of the peace could be potentially dangerous for the American faction, "for a great many think they are bound to say as the priest directs them," in their political actions. The trader continued, "The Priest will spair no meanes to injure me, but if he will attack me fairly publicly and above board, I am certain he will not accomplish his end, but underhandidly as he is no doing, wishing to make Cats Paws of the superior authorities, to doe his dirty work, if he can suxcead in this thare is no telling what he may accomplish." When Martínez eventually won the election, Bent cried foul.[31]

Tensions, so long pent up, exploded in Taos on May 3, 1846. That day, a mob attacked George Bent and his friend Francis Preston Blair in the town square. Blair, Charles wrote, "was in Liquor," and George was attempting to escort the intoxicated young man home, when the mob jumped them. Almost immediately, Charles pointed out that a number of "servants of the big famely" were involved in the attack, and pressed Alvarez to present the case directly to Armijo. As long as the Martínez faction was in the ascendency, acquiring justice for the beaten men

[30] Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 54; Bent to Alvarez, February 26, 1846, Box 2 Folder 74, BRC; Bent to Alvarez, March 4, 1846, Box 2 Folder 77, BRC.
[31] Bent to Alvarez, March 26, 1846, Box 2 Folder 80; Bent to Alvarez, April 8, 1846, Box 2 Folder 82, all in BRC; Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 54.

would be impossible. The local populace continued to make threats, and Charles warned darkly, that "if anything further is done heare I would not like to answer for the consiquences," before adding that, "I am much excited at this moment."[32] His subsequent May 3 letters to Alvarez added detail to the story. Bent continued to collect the names of the assailants, and noted that about thirty men took part in the beating. Furthermore, "Some of the ring leaders are the Priests and brothers servants, who I have no doubt will sustain them." Following the beating, the men continued to harass George and Blair. They gathered outside the former's house, insulting the men. Charles apprised the authorities of the situation, but expressed little confidence that they would take any steps to curb the abuse. Indeed, the justice, Charles wrote, refused to interfere "because it was Sunday." Furthermore, rumors reached the trader that authorities had informed the mob that they could do as they wished, without fear of reprisal. As a result, he reported that, "they are going about town drunk and singing and rejoicing in consiquence of thare victory."[33]

As Bent elaborated, he singled out Pascual Martínez as a prime mover in the attack, and begged Alvarez to present his complaint to Armijo for arbitration. The justice of the peace would take no actions against the mob. Bent's anonymous informant told the trader that Martínez had witnessed the whole event. Though the two men were "very much beaten," Blair suffering severe cuts to his head before

[32]Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 101; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 311; Bent to Alvarez, May 3, 1846, Box 2 Folder 86, BRC.
[33] Bent to Alvarez, May 3, 1846, Box 2 Folder 87, BRC.

being left for dead in a mud hole, the justice of the peace did nothing to stop the assault. In addition, Bent's source informed him that Pascual Martínez masterminded the entire affair, giving specific orders to his servants to attack the two Americans. "While this family is in authority," the fortunes of the Americans "are not secure," Bent concluded. He pressed Alvarez to intercede on his behalf to the governor, and warned the consul that any investigation must take place far from Taos; "it must be done, intirely out of reach of the influence of theas men who are in power heare….If we are no longer protected by the authorities we had better leave as soon as possible," Bent wrote. Armijo ordered a thorough investigation and apprehension of the guilty parties. However, although Taos authorities arrested some of the attackers, they were set free before a hearing took place, further aggravating the American faction.[34]

Unsurprisingly, Bent also took every chance he got to mock the priest personally, taking great relish in repeating salacious stories and mocking Martínez's intellectual pretensions. A Bent letter from January 1841 is especially sarcastic. In this communication, the trader informed Alvarez that the priest had recently returned from a visit to Durango. Upon his return to Taos, he immediately began to spin improbable tales of his reception for the easily duped provincials. Everyone Martínez met in Durango praised his abilities, labeling him "as one of the greatest men of the age as a literary, and eclestiastic, a juror, and a philanthropist," Bent scoffed. The Duragueños marveled that such a man, marooned on the furthest frontiers of the nation "could possibly make himself so eminent in almost every

[34] Bent to Alvarez, May 3, 1846, Box 2 Folder 88, BRC; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 312.

branch of knowledge that can only be acquired by other men of ordinary capasity in the most enlightened parts of the world." The Taoseños were certainly fortunate to have such a Solomonic among them.[35] Bent also delighted in reporting anecdotes where Martínez displayed decidedly un-priestly characteristics. During the Christmas season of 1842, for example, the priest became drunk, prompting Bent to write that, "I think he is more sinsearly devoted to Baccus than any of the other Godes."[36] The priest was also extremely gullible. Bent took particular relish in relating a story in which Martínez believed that the American had tunneled under the parish church and planted three kegs of gunpowder, which he intended to detonate during mass on Good Friday. So overwrought was Martínez that he urged his brother to search Bent's home. Pascual, "fool as he is, told the Priest he could not doe so, it was too ridiculous to believe that such a thing was possible."[37]

Bent's view of Martínez was more broadly indicative of the American trader's attitudes towards most New Mexicans in general, intermarriage and business ties notwithstanding. Despite his union with the Jaramillo's, despite his political and economic connections to men like Cornelio Vigil, Charles Bent and most Anglos like him had little use for Mexicans. In an unguarded moment, Bent showed his deepest racial feelings in a letter to Alvarez. "Thare is no stability in theas people," he complained. They were servile and ignorant, incapable or unwilling to express their own opinions regarding anything. Their religion was a complete sham, consisting "entirely in outward show;" they had no concept of true

[35] Bent to Alvarez, January 30, 1841, Box 1 Folder 46.
[36] Bent to Alvarez, December 25, 1842, Box 2 Folder 60.
[37] Bent to Alvarez, April 18, 1846, Box 2 Folder 84, all in BRC.

spiritual devotion, relying rather upon crooked and greedy priests to mediate "between the supreme being and themselves," he continued. They cheated, lied, and stole with impunity. New Mexican officials were greedy, venal, and incompetent. They were neither patriotic nor did they possess the character and wherewithal for self-government. "The Mexican character," Bent concluded, "is made up of stupidity, obstinacy, ignorance, duplicity, and vanity."[38] Bent apologists like David Lavender expressed shock at the trader's withering assessment of the New Mexicans. After all, Bent had Mexican friends, and married a Mexican wife. "I find the whole thing inexplicable," Lavender confessed. However, Charles Bent's letter fits perfectly into the overall racial conceptions and opinions Anglo-Americans held of Mexicans during the nineteenth century. Although many observers made exceptions - generally for business partners, women, and politicians willing to accommodate themselves to advancing American interests - most found little to admire in their Hispanic neighbors.[39]

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[38] Bent to Alvarez, undated letter (attached to letter of February 23, 1845, box 2 Folder 66), BRC.

[39] There is a great irony is Lavender's confusion, for his work is shot through with ethnocentric language and characterizations Consider his depiction of life in Taos, "On winter days men found warmth by wrapping themselves in vivid serapes and congregating on the sunny side of some house, where they napped, gossiped, and smoked…and picked lice off one another. Now and then a loose burro wandered by, long ears waggling as it munched on bones or other refuse thrown carelessly from the houses," (Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 58). For his confusion, see *Bent's Fort,* 435-6, note 3. To place Bent's characterizations in the context of the racial attitudes of the time, see Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, December 1845, Box 1, Barclay Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley; Abraham Johnston, Marcellus Ball Edwards, and Philip Gooch Ferguson, *Marching with the Army of the West, 1846-1848,* ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1936), 176; Richard Smith Elliott, *The Mexican War Correspondence of Richard Smith Elliott,* eds. Mark L. Gardner and Marc Simmons (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 53-4; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 202; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 154, 166, 170; William Elsey Connelley, *War with Mexico, 1846-1847: Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California* (Topeka: Published by the author, 1907), 194; Kendall, *Texas-Santa Fe Expedition,* 298; Susan Shelby Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847,* ed. Stella M. Drumm, with foreword by Howard R. Lamar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 98, 177; George Frederick Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky*

The actions of the partners in the mid-1840s simultaneously strengthened and weakened their ties to the Mexican community in Taos. Similar to the Indian trade, the Bents and St. Vrain broadened their economic and political opportunities through marriage into prominent Rio Arriba families. Marriage extended the company's clientele and guaranteed the partners economic patronage. Most importantly, these relationships brought the potential for the acquisition of huge land grants. Finally, as Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain settled into Taos society they and their allies began to compete for political power within the community. These actions roused the ire of nationalists in Taos. These men worried that the success of the Americans further weakened the already tenuous hold of the Mexican state upon the frontier. The animosity between the two groups intensified during the 1840s as they grappled for power in the fluid political and economic borderlands of northern New Mexico.

Mountains (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1973), 190; David J. Weber, "'Scarce More Than Apes': Historical Roots of Anglo-American Stereotypes of Mexicans," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest,* 155, 165, 169.

Chapter 11 - Traders and Raiders: Bent-St. Vrain, the Indian Trade, and the New Mexican Frontier

The business conducted by American trading companies like Bent-St. Vrain represented one of the gravest threats to the security of New Mexico. Distracted by a continuous series of revolutions, authorities in Mexico City left the frontier largely unprotected. Surrounded by powerful Indian groups, chronically short of cash, men, and supplies, northern leaders found themselves in a precarious position. Furthermore, the presence of Americans ready and willing to trade guns and alcohol to Indian raiders in exchange for livestock and captives guaranteed the a continual state of warfare in the region. The trade carried on at places like Bent's Fort, in conjunction with the partners' political and economic exploits in and around Taos drove the wedge deeper between the American and Mexican nationalist factions. While neglect on the part of Mexico City regarding Indian raiding alienated some New Mexicans from the capital, others like Padre Martínez grew even more disenchanted with the Bents and St. Vrain. The specter of violence and theft added to the discontent between the two camps.

The defense of Mexico's northern frontier languished during the 1840s because of the political and economic chaos that wracked the nation's core. The majority of the military funds and manpower in Mexico went towards keeping order in the most populous states of the country's core.[1] Lacking an overall Indian

[1]David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 120; Brian DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," *American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 42; David J. Weber, "'From

policy applicable to the entire nation, politicians and military officers found it difficult to plan, much less implement, a coherent Indian policy for the northern frontier. Orders to bolster frontier defenses, the issuance of reports and stirring circulars, and the occasional appropriation of funds constituted the bulk of Mexico City's attempts to curb Indian raiding. Even when leaders cooperated long enough to plan offensive strikes into the homelands of the northern tribes, lack of funding and the inability to coordinate between states and provinces rendered most campaigns meaningless. It became evident to many frontier leaders, military and civil, that they would have to shoulder much of the burden of self-defense. Donaciano Vigil spoke for many of his disaffected New Mexican compatriots when he criticized the lack of responsiveness from Mexico City regarding frontier petitions for military aid. Ultimately, the initiative and manpower must come from New Mexico herself. "To expect much protection from the Supreme Government of the Nation is to expect in vain," he complained, "particularly in the present reduced state of the Republic by reasons of the different factions that are constantly being formed for personal gains and aspirations, therefore, I believe that for our own interest and security…we should not rely upon more protection and resource, than what New Mexico can furnish."[2]

Hell Itself:' The Americanization of Mexico's Northern Frontier, 1821-1846," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest: Essays by David J. Weber* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 111.

[2] DeLay, "Independent Indians," 54-5; Brian DeLay, "The Wider World of the Handsome Man: Southern Plains Indians Invade Mexico, 1830-1846," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007), 97; Lansing B. Bloom, "New Mexico Under Mexican Administration," *Old Santa Fe* 2 (1914-1915), 351-2; Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 145-7, 193; Daniel Tyler, "Mexican Indian Policy in New Mexico," *New Mexico Historical Review* 55 (1980), 114; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading*

Despite Vigil's rousing call for New Mexicans to take action in their own defense in the absence of aid from the state, the province faced a number of daunting challenges. Lack of funds often crippled frontier defenses. Lack of manpower, combined with a barebones operating budget to produce a largely moribund military presence in New Mexico. For example, as late as 1841, the garrison at Taos, responsible for protecting the hazardous northern border, comprised only twenty-seven soldiers. The nature of the provincial economy also made the area an inviting target for Indian raiders. Many New Mexicans raised livestock for a living. Horses and sheep required pasturage, often far from the villages. The exposed flocks and their shepherds were easy prey for Ute and Navajo raiders. Furthermore, frontier garrisons often struggled to protect their own horse herds from hostile incursions. Thieves struck the presidial horse herd at Santa Fe so often, that the garrison had to import remounts from Chihuahua. Lack of good horseflesh made pursuit, much less sustained offensive actions infeasible. Even had the soldiers been well-mounted, cynical Anglo observers noted that the Indian raiders were far superior as both warriors and riders. Francois Des Montaignes wrote, "T'is vain…for the cowardly and impotent Mexicans to endeavor retaliation, or even a pursuit," because the raiders, "can disappear in a few hours to such a distance as to defy all pursuit. They are indeed the Bedouins of

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Facts of New Mexico History, 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1912), 2: 41; Vigil, *Arms, Indians, and the Mismanagement of New Mexico: Donaciano Vigil, 1846,* ed. David J. Weber (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1986), 44, note 8; Vigil to New Mexico Assembly, May 16, 1846, Box 5 Folder 231, William Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino.

America."[3] Restrictive trade policies also limited the access New Mexicans had to quality guns and gunpowder. Donaciano Vigil urged the assembly to petition the central government to allow New Mexicans to import guns and ammunition duty-free. The majority of fighting men had only lances, slings, and bows and arrows, Vigil claimed. Should the frontiersmen be able to obtain good firearms, they could well hold their own, he continued. Indeed, even observers as acerbic as Josiah Gregg noted that the *rancheros* of New Mexico, properly armed, were courageous fighters, capable of defeating Indian war parties. Failure to act could be disastrous, Vigil concluded. Lack of direct action would continue to retard the economic growth of the frontier. However, New Mexicans faced a daunting challenge, for in every direction they turned they encountered powerful Indian groups.[4]

The challenge of confronting these tribes necessitated a flexible policy approach on the part of New Mexican leaders. Flexibility was especially important, for direct military action against Indian incursions was often impractical without aid from the central government. New Mexicans responded to their Indian situation in a number of ways. They might distribute gifts to Indian guests, or they might relax stringent trade regulations to allow for more open economic

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[3] Ward Alan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1965), 121-2; Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 109, 111; Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 103; Vigil to Departmental Assembly, Ritch Collection; Francois des Montaignes, *The Plains; being no less than a collection of veracious memoranda taken during the expedition in the year 1845, from the western settlements of Missouri to the Mexican border, and from Bent's Fort on the Arkansas to Fort Gibson, via the South Fork of the Canadian – north Mexico and north-western Texas*, ed. with an introduction by Nancy Alpert Mower and Dona Russell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 73.

[4] Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 111; Vigil, *Arms, Indians*, 46, note 19; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 155-6; Twitchell, *Leading Facts*, 2: 33; Vigil to Departmental Assembly, Ritch Collection; George Rutledge Gibson, *Journal of a Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan, 1846-1847*, ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), 194.

intercourse. Settlement of the frontiers was another option. Military action - regular patrols or sustained field campaigns followed by treaties - was the most direct policy. Governors like Manuel Armijo, possessed enough experience to know that military action rarely kept the peace for long periods. Rather, trade offered the best avenue to amicable relations with the Indians of the northern frontier. Practicality and self-interest, best revealed by localized trade arrangements, characterized New Mexican Indian policy. Yet, when the opportunity presented itself, New Mexicans revealed the iron military fist they concealed under the velvet glove of commerce.[5]

A state of constant, low-intensity, warfare characterized relations between New Mexico and the Navajos. Despite launching seven campaigns against the tribe during the late-1830s and into the 1840s, New Mexican governors accomplished little but two short-lived peace treaties. New Mexicans and Navajos engaged in a constant cycle of raid and retaliation. The Hispanic population launched slaving raids deep into Navajo country. In return, the Navajos launched their own raids, carrying off scores of prisoners and thousands of horses and sheep from communities as far east as Las Vegas. Such attacks led to direct military action by New Mexican authorities, and the occasional cessation of hostilities. However, raiding soon broke out again, and the cycle continued into the American period. New Mexicans complained about not only the lack of aid that came from Mexico City, but the incompetence of the help when it arrived. Speaking of Governor

[5] Tyler, "Indian Policy in New Mexico," 115; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 49, 55, 63, 100; Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 115; DeLay, "Wider World," 98.

Mariano de Lajanza Martínez's actions against the Navajos, Donaciano Vigil lamented the man's lack of skill as an Indian fighter and negotiator. The governor had the upper hand against the Navajos, Vigil admitted. Yet, once the sides began negotiations, "he showed that he was unacquainted with the disposition of the savage, and with the artifices they use. He was a mere puppet in the hands of the Navajo negotiators; they deceived him with fine promises." The war continued, unabated.[6]

Relations with the Utes were only slightly better. On-again, off-again warfare, raiding, and trading continued throughout the 1830s and 1840s. During the 1830s, the Ute-New Mexican relationship had not been entirely unfriendly. The provinces governors allowed inhabitants to travel into Ute country to trade, although the more unscrupulous traders dealt in slaves and rustled livestock. Because of these policies, intermittent raiding rather than full-scale warfare characterized any violent confrontation between the two groups. Conflict erupted in the early 1840s because of expanding opportunities for trade with Americans, and the ineptitude of New Mexican governor Mariano de Lajanza Martínez. Writing to the Commissioner of Indian affairs in 1846, Charles Bent characterized the Utes as, "a hardy, warlike people, subsisting by the chase, and several bands of them have been carrying on a predatory war with the New Mexicans for the last two years and killed and taken prisoner many of the people and driven off large

[6] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 71; Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Indian Campaigns, Slave Raids, and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 73, 79, 87 (quote is from 87); Vigil to Assembly, Ritch Collection.

amounts of stock." Conflict continued between New Mexicans and the Utes following the American conquest, into the 1850s.[7]

New Mexican pragmatism and self-interest displayed itself most prominently in relations with the Kiowas and Comanches. Although many communities in northern Mexico established trade relations with Comanche bands, New Mexico adopted the policy of conciliation on a much broader geographical scale. Beginning in the 1820s, the province quickly began deflecting Comanche aggression through open and peaceful trading. Furthermore, faced with Navajo and Ute raiders from the north and west, as well as Apaches to the south, New Mexicans could ill-afford armed conflict with the most powerful coalition south of the Arkansas River. This relationship might occasionally become strained, according to George Wilkins Kendall. The Kiowas and Comanches, "appear to be on terms of peace with the New Mexicans so far as it suits their interest and convenience – no farther," he wrote. Gift giving and direct trade, both in New Mexico and Comanchería, kept the province at peace with these tribes throughout the Mexican Period. Regarding these tribes, New Mexican policy was at direct odds with the bellicose directives issued by the central and state governments. Writing to the Minister of War and the Navy, Governor Armijo explained New Mexico's tenuous situation. Any directive to war against the Comanches and

[7] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 65-70; Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 121, 124, 185; Charles Bent to William Medill, November 10, 1846, in *The Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun while Indian Agent at Santa Fe and Superintendant of Indian Affairs in New Mexico*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915), 7. For Ute aggressions following the war, see Conard, *Uncle Dick Wooton*, 187. New Mexico also had somewhat sketchy relations with the Apaches. For a brief discussion of this intercourse, see Minge, "Frontier Problems," 58-60; Bent to Medill, November 10, 1846, in *Correspondence of James S. Calhoun*, 6.

Kiowas, he wrote, would be suicidal for his territory. Although perfectly aware of the chaos these tribes created elsewhere in Mexico, Armijo informed the minister of New Mexico's peaceable relations with these groups, and the potential consequences of war. He wrote, "since the Comanche nation is at peace for such a long time it would lead to a terrible war in which the Comanches could destroy many habitations on our fertile frontier."[8]

Although conflict between New Mexico and the Cheyenne-Arapaho confederation was neither as intense nor longstanding as that between the province and the Utes or Navajos, the plains tribes also struck the region from time to time. Evidence of Cheyenne and Arapaho raids into Mexican territory was apparent to American observers. George Nidever recalled that, although the groups traded with one another, woe to the lonely Mexican who fell into the grasp of the Cheyennes or Arapahos. Conversely, the Mexicans repaid in kind, sparing "no Arapaho who might fall into their hands."[9] Conflict between the tribes of the Arkansas River and New Mexico intensified during the 1840s, spurred by grievances over captive taking, horse theft, and hunting grounds. One military officer reported that the

[8] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 57;Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 229; Weber, *Mexican Frontier,* 115; Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* 436-7; George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition,* 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 1: 213; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 62; Armijo to Minister of War and the Navy, March 31, 1841, quoted in Minge, "Frontier Problems," 63.

[9] Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 127; Hugh Evans, "Journal of Colonel Henry Dodge's Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," ed. Fred S. Perrine, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 14 (1927), 211; George Nidever, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever,* ed. William Henry Ellison (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1927), 18. George Bent informed George Hyde that the Cheyennes also raided into Mexico, though he gave no details. See George Bent to George Hyde, January 6, 1912, Box 3 Folder 16, GBP-Yale. On conflict between Plains Indians and New Mexicans over buffalo hunting grounds, see William M. Boggs, "Narrative," 17, Boggs-Yale.

Arapahos "were daily coming in with herds of cattle and numbers of Mexican scalps." Lewis Garrad, traveling with company traders, encountered another Arapaho war party returning from New Mexico. They had "several scalps, two prisoners, and thirty or more horses and mules," with them.[10] Not every southbound band of Cheyennes and Arapahos reached their New Mexican targets. In 1847, Thomas Fitzpatrick wrote the Superintendent of Indian Affairs that he had encountered a war party of thirty-five Cheyennes bound for New Mexico. The agent informed the warriors that the region was now American territory and its inhabitants under the protection of the United States. The grumbling warriors turned back to their villages, wondering "why we should take such interest in the affairs of a people with whom we are at war."[11]

In addition to Mexico City's failure to provide for frontier defenses, the presence of American traders like the Bents and St. Vrain further destabilized the relations between the northern frontiersmen and the region's Indian tribes. If Mexicans could maintain a trade monopoly, they could use the market as the

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[10] James W. Abert, "Examination of New Mexico," 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 41, 526-7; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* with an introduction by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 108. Cheyenne incursions into New Mexico were bad enough in the late-1830s to merit special attention from military officials. In a treaty signed between New Mexico and the Navajos, one of the provisions obligated the Navajos to "stop the aggression or give immediate notice" of any raids by enemy tribes, including the Cheyennes. The treaty enjoined the Navajos to "be prepared to defeat them or in any case to impede their passage." See "Treaty of Peace and Friendship Celebrated with the Navajo Nation," July 15, 1839, quoted in Minge, "Frontier Problems," 76.

[11] Thomas Fitzpatrick to William Harvey, October 19, 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Platte Agency, Microfilm, Reel 889 (hereafter cited as UPA). Occasionally, it was difficult to tell the tribe responsible for raiding and theft in New Mexico. For an example of such confusion, see Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, no date, (probably January 17 or 18, 1847), Box 1 Folder 1, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archive, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as BRC and NMSRCA, respectively).

primary forum for conducting diplomacy. The arrival of more American traders in Texas and north of the Arkansas River, however, threatened to upset this delicate balance by providing alternative trading venues. Although Indian groups had their own reasons for raiding Mexican settlements – acquisition of horses, captives, war honors, and to avenge fallen comrades – the presence these new traders and their superior goods, helped embolden Indians to strike deeper into Mexico. Tribes like the Apaches, Utes, and Navajos continued to raid New Mexico, sure that the booty they secured would find American purchasers north of the international border. Although not every American trader actively sponsored or supported such raids, knowledge of these markets led Mexican nationalists to decry the actions of the Yankee merchants. Donaciano Vigil had a slightly different take. He argued that restrictive New Mexican trade policies and the harassment of American traders forced many to relocate north of the border, where they conducted trade to the direct detriment of the region's inhabitants. By swapping guns and liquor for pelts and buffalo robes previously bound for Santa Fe, the American traders caused the Indians to "lose all respect they had formerly shown us," Vigil cried. Not only that, because they were now armed with guns, the Indians were, "not afraid to attack [New Mexico] which they did constantly." By sponsoring or encouraging such Indian actions, directly or indirectly, American traders, including the principals of Bent-St. Vrain, jeopardized Mexico's already tenuous hold on its northernmost provinces.[12]

[12] David J. Weber, "American Westward Expansion and the Breakdown of Relations Between *Pobladores* and '*Indios Bárbaros'* on Mexico's Far Northern Frontier, 1821-1846," in *Myth and the*

On rare occasions, though, Americans like Charles Bent complained to New Mexican officials that the weakness of the state caused attacks upon United States citizens by tribes at peace with Mexico. Bent claimed that both "the Eutaws and Apachies of the Mountains," routinely crossed into American territory north of the Arkansas River, where they "almost invariably commit depradations on us," the trader informed Manuel Alvarez. On July 5, 1841, a party of Utes attacked an American caravan on the North Canadian River. Following the attack, the Utes proceeded to Taos, where they "threatened all the citizens of the United States they met, also, visited their houses insulting and abusing their families," Alvarez wrote Daniel Webster. The consul informed Governor Armijo of the actions of the Utes, then at peace with New Mexico, and demanded action on behalf of the Americans. Armijo and his associates assured Alvarez that they would take steps to "quiet the exalted spirit of that tribe." The governor ordered local militia leaders to reprimand the Utes, and inform them that they must cease attacks on Americans, since the two nations were at peace. However, the governor pointed out that American traders had an obligation to treat the Utes and other Indians allied with Mexico well also. If the Utes continued to agitate the Americans, the latter were completely justified in waging a retaliatory war, so long as they kept it north of the Arkansas. Regarding attacks on Americans north of the international border, Armijo could do nothing. "I shall consent to those mischiefs because it would be neither just nor

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History of the Hispanic Southwest, 121-2, 131; Weber, "'From Hell Itself:'," 111;Vigil, *Arms, Indians,* xi; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 212, 224-5; DeLay, "Independent Indians," 58; Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land,* 119, 133, 145-6; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 104-5; Vigil to Departmental Assembly, Ritch Collection; Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 14.

rational if it were possible," to halt such attacks the governor wrote Alvarez. Bent and the Americans got no satisfaction on this occasion. Over a year later, Bent wrote that they "have never had redress," from New Mexican authorities.[13]

The lucrative livestock trade, both licit and illicit, formed one of the bases of the Southern Plains economy during this period. Although this trade long antedated the arrival of American traders like the Bents, following Mexican Independence in 1821, the trade expanded in its geographical scope and possibly in its volume. Horses and mules provided critical services to frontiersmen and eastern customers. Used both for transportation and as draft animals, agriculture, the fur trade, and the Santa Fe trade relied absolutely on horses and mules. Capable of carrying a load of four hundred pounds, while negotiating difficult terrain, mules were especially valued as pack animals. Anglo observers readily admitted that Mexicans were master livestock breeders, and the United States provided a bottomless market for horses and mules from as far away as Chihuahua, Sonora, and Alta California. This Mexican stock, combined with American jacks, produced the renowned Missouri mule. They sold for high prices at the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail. In 1832, for example, William K. Rule wrote that, if they could stand the cold, Mexican jacks sold for up to $250 apiece in Missouri. Even colts fetched high prices: jennets at $50 apiece and jacks from $50 to $100. Traders who

[13] Bent to Alvarez, September 19, 1842, Box 2 Folder 57, BRC; Manuel Alvarez to Daniel Webster, February 2, 1842, Consular Dispatches, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as CDSF); Manuel Armijo to Manuel Alvarez, July 9, 1841, CDSF; Guadalupe Miranda to Manuel Alvarez, July 14, 1841, CDSF.

brought livestock to the Missouri markets found a lucrative way to supplement their other business interests.[14]

Although it is impossible to state specific numbers, a significant portion of the livestock driven east from Mexican territory to the United States was stolen. American traders were not overly scrupulous about whom they purchased livestock from, nor did they express much interest in where it came from. Insatiable demand in the United States – for the overland trade, for agriculture in the Midwest and Cotton South, and in Indian Territory – helped fuel the intensification of horse and mule theft in northern Mexico. Although they did not ask questions about the origin of their purchases, American traders well knew that they trafficked in rustled stock. For one thing, everyone knew the best horses and mules came from the haciendas of northern Mexico. They also knew that livestock raiding formed a critical component of the Indian socioeconomic system. Even as far north as Fort Laramie, observers knew the source of the horses the Indian rode and sold. Frederick Wislizenus observed that, "The Indian horses are said to have come originally from Mexico."[15] Sometime Bent-St. Vrain employee Dick Wooton, always candid in his opinions of Mexicans and Indians, wrote of this trade,

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[14] James E. Sherow, "Workings of the Geodialectic: High Plains Indians and Their Horses in the Region of the Arkansas River Valley, 1800-1870," *Environmental History Review* 16 (1992), 67; Dan Flores, "Bringing Home All the Pretty Horses: The Horse Trade and the Early American West, 1775-1825," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 58 (2008), 21; Floyd F. Ewing, Jr., "The Mule as a Factor in the Development of the Southwest," *Arizona and the West* 5 (1963), 317-320; William K. Rule to Messrs Waldo and Jackson, April 17, 1832, Folder 1, Waldo Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (hereafter cited as MHS).

[15]Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 121; Kavanagh, *Comanches,* 162, 279; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire,* 230; George Bird Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," *Kansas Historical Society Collections* 15 (1919-1922), 60; Montaignes, *The Plains,* 72; James B. Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West: Personal Adventures of a Border Mountain Man; Comprising Hunting and Trapping*

> The Indians were at war with the Mexicans about that time, and that was a good time for an American to trade with them. That was the time when they always had plenty of mules and ponies. That they ran a great many of them away from the ranches of the Mexicans I had no doubt, but they were shrewd horse thieves and had a way of effacing the brands, so that I had no means of knowing what animals rightfully belonged to them and what ones were stolen. Even if I had known I could not have refused to trade for anything that they wished to dispose of without giving them great offense and perhaps getting in serious trouble. They didn't set a very high price on either their mules or their ponies. The mules usually cost me ten or twelve dollars apiece in trade, and the ponies a little less.[16]

The influence of the American livestock trade at posts like Bent's Fort spread as far west as Alta California. In 1829, New Mexican traders began a direct overland trade with California. Caravans laden with woolen blankets made their way west over the Old Spanish Trail, and the merchants returned driving herds of California horses and mules. These herds caused a stir in Santa Fe, for the coastal stock was larger and stronger than local horses and mules. This lucrative trade soon gave rise to wholesale rustling, a cooperative venture between Indians like the Utes and white mountain men, most infamously Thomas L. "Peg-leg" Smith, Ceran St. Vrain's former associate.[17]

Adventures with Kit Carson and Others; Captivity and Life Among the Comanches; Services Under Doniphan in the War with Mexico, and in the Mexican War Against the French; Desperate Combats with Apaches, Grizzly Bears, etc., etc. (Hartford: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1872), 81; Grant Foreman, *Marcy and the Gold Seekers: The Journal of Captain R. B. Marcy, with an account of the gold rush over the southern route* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 240-1; Frederick Wislizenus, *Memoir of a Tour to Northern Mexico, Connected with Col. Doniphan's Expedition in 1846 and 1847* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 24, 70 (quote is from page 70).

[16] Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton: The Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1957), 92-3.

[17] Ewing, "Mule," 319; Eleanor Frances Lawrence, "Mexican Trade Between Santa Fe and Los Angeles, 1830-1848," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 10 (1931), 27-9, 39; LeRoy R. and Anne W. Hafen, *Old Spanish Trail: Santa Fe to Los Angeles* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 227-57; Robert Glass Cleland, *This Reckless Breed of Men: The Trappers and Fur Traders of the Southwest* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 270; George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 138, note 7; Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land,* 140; Delmont Oswald, "James P. Beckwourth," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark

The Bents bought California horses, no questions asked. In 1839, for example, Bill Williams embarked on a great rustling foray. There, they rustled a sizable herd, although many died or scattered on the trip to the Arkansas. In 1846, Joseph Walker drove a herd of horses, probably stolen, east from California towards the fort. Overland traveler Edwin Bryant met Walker's party and about five hundred horses near Fort Bridger in present southwestern Wyoming. Bryant wrote that Walker intended to sell the horses – "high-spirited animals, of medium size, handsome figures, and in good condition" – to American buyers. The same year, the young Boston Brahmin, Francis Parkman encountered two men "who had just come from California, with a large band of horses, which they had sold at Bent's Fort." George Frederick Ruxton provided a semi-fictionalized account of a California horse rustling party around the same time. He wrote that the Americans rested the herd along the Front Range of the Rockies, before traveling downriver to Bent's Fort to sell them. The stock "found a ready sale," at the fort. Ruxton's narrator went on to report that, "every season the Bents carried across the plains to Independence a considerable number [of horses and mules] collected in Indian country, and in the upper settlements of New Mexico." If stolen California horses never constituted the backbone of Bent-St. Vrain's livestock trade, they were a common enough sight around the fort not to elicit much comment. Although indirectly, the market provided by the Bents allowed unscrupulous American traders to expand their enterprise as far west as the Pacific Ocean, linking through

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Company, 1965-1972), 6: 52 (hereafter cited as *MMFTFW*); Janet Lecompte, "Thomas Boggs," 2: 50 in *MMFTFW*.

theft the economies of the Upper Arkansas and San Joaquin river valleys, and providing another link in a trade that spanned the length and breadth of the trans-Mississippi West.[18]

The Bents and St. Vrain got most of their rustled livestock much closer to New Mexico, however. David Lavender, usually a Bent-St. Vrain apologist, is candid in his assessment of the Company's horse and mule trade: "Though the partners might resent having their own stock raided, they nonetheless did not question the ethics of the matter when the thievery was committed on someone else. Readily, they bought all animals offered for sale, without questioning the source."[19] The company's purchase of stolen livestock did little to endear them to their critics in New Mexico. Sometimes the company received stolen livestock via white traders living in Mexico. For example, the infamous scalp hunter and mercenary James Kirker sometimes drove livestock stolen in Chihuahua north to markets in El Paso del Norte, Santa Fe, Taos, and Bent's Fort. Most of the animals, however, came from Indians near the Upper Arkansas or northern New Mexico. In 1841, Charles Bent complained that Padre Martínez's brother, Ignacio, was spreading rumors that the company consciously purchased stolen Martínez horses from a Mexican renegade name Juan Nicholas Mestas. On another occasion, a

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[18] Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 5-6; Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California: Being the Journal of a Tour, by the Emigrant Route and South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, Across the Continent of North America, the Great Desert Basin, and Through California, in the Years 1846, 1847*(Philadelphia: G. S. Appleton, 1848), 143; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 139, note 8; 176, and 176, note 12 (the quotes regarding the Bents come from the text of page 176); Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky-Mountain Life,* ed. Charles H.J. Douglas (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 308; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 153-4; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 419, note 3.

[19] Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 162.

Cheyenne chief, Old Wolf, told the Bents that, in exchange for their wonderful liquor, his men would provide the company "with all the horses and mules he wanted by sending out parties and making raids into Mexico." The partners, "had no conscientious scruples about the way the Indian obtained them." The Comanches were especially good providers of Mexican stock. They often came to the company posts in the Texas Panhandle to exchange horses and mules for trade goods. Army officer Philip St. George Cooke wrote that Bent obtained robes, and apparently the horses, but refused to trade for the mules, "for fear of their stealing them [back]."[20]

Sometimes, however, Bent sought redress from New Mexican authorities for stock stolen from the company or the Cheyennes. Just as American traders purchased stolen Mexican livestock from Indian raiders, so to did New Mexicans purchase horses and mules stolen from American territory. In 1839, Bent reported to Alvarez the theft of a number of horses and mules from the vicinity of the fort. The raiders disposed of their haul in New Mexico. When Bent protested the purchase to the prefect of Taos, the man rebuffed him. The trader then asked the consul to contact Governor Armijo directly to see if he might do anything to aid

[20] Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 214; Ralph Adam Smith, *Borderlander: The Life of James Kirker, 1793-1852* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 39, 48; Tanis C. Thorne, "Marriage Alliance and the Fur Trade: Bent, St. Vrain and Company, 1831-1849" (M.A. thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1979), 32; Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, January 30, 1841, Box 1 Folder 46, BRC; Hobbs, *Wild Life*, 48-9; Philip St. George Cooke, "Journal," quoted in Otis Young, *The West of Philip St. George Cooke,1809-1895* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), 124. Pekka Hämäläinen writes that the Bents actively encouraged this raiding, while Thomas Kavanagh points out that the Comanches sometimes obtained the livestock they traded to Americans like the Bents through trade with other groups, rather than directly through raiding. See, Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 223; Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 279.

Bent. Specifically, Bent wished to know whether the purchases were legal, and if not, whether Mexican authorities might recover the stock and return it to its rightful owners.[21] The governor's response to Alvarez's inquiry was cryptic. The Mexican government allowed New Mexicans to purchase horses and mules from the Apaches, Navajos, and Comanches, so long as those tribes remained at peace with Mexico. However, regarding horses stolen from outside of Mexico, Armijo was vague. He informed the consul that, "In regard to the robberies that may be committed upon Mr. Bent at his fort, he can have recourse to the competent authorities for the justice he may require." Livestock stolen in the United States was, apparently, American business only.[22] In 1845, another incident took place that caused Bent great disquiet. A party of Mexicans stole about thirty horses from the Cheyennes. The trader urged Alvarez to impress upon the New Mexican government the gravity of the situation, and to make immediate redress. Bent told the consul to inform the governor that, "if there is not a stop put to this…theas Indians will revenge themselves upon all Mexicans they meete with, the caravans will be the greatest sufferers…you are also aware that if the Indians commit any depradations on the Mexicans they will say we are the cause of this outrage." Bent's sarcasm is indirect evidence of the frequency with which New Mexicans accused the firm of complicity with Indian raiders.[23]

[21] Bent to Alvarez, October 11, 1839, CDSF; Alvarez to Guadalupe Miranda, December 4, 1839, CDSF.
[22] Manuel Armijo to Manuel Alvarez, December 6, 1839, CDSF.
[23] Bent to Alvarez, February 23, 1845, Box 2 Folder 66, BRC.

In the late winter of 1846, Bent's alleged complicity with Ute raiders heightened the tensions between the trader and Padre Martínez. On February 15, 1846, the Utes made off with 8,000 sheep and 400 head of cattle belonging to Martínez and his brothers. Efforts by the priest, aided by local soldiers, failed to find the raiders or recover the livestock. Rumors quickly circulated throughout Taos that the American community, Charles Bent in particular, had foreknowledge of the raid. The vindictive padre, Bent wrote, was "determined to fix this theft on us is he can find the least pretext for doing so."[24] The priest initially claimed that Cheyennes, "our people," had stolen the livestock, although "he has since bean convinced to the contrary." Martínez expanded his argument for Bent's complicity in the raid by trying to connect the trader's activities with the population of Pueblo and the other Upper Arkansas settlements. This accusation infuriated Bent. The company did not employ anyone at these posts, nor were they "any ways connected with us," he fumed. Bent urged Alvarez to present his case to Armijo, "for fear that that the Governor and Comidante, should receive this information and give credence to the information of the Priest, I wish you to request these functionaries to suspend thare oppinion in this case until he se or heare from me." Such accusations and bitterness did little to lessen the tension between the two factions in Taos.[25]

[24] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 289-290, 311; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 163; Bent to Alvarez, February 16, 1846, Box 2 Folder 72, BRC; Ben to Alvarez, February 26, 1846, Box 2 Folder 74, BRC; Bent to Alvarez, March 4, 1846, Box 2 Folder 77, BRC.
[25] Bent to Alvarez, April 8, 1846, Box 2 Folder 82, BRC.

In addition to finding markets for their stock in Missouri, Bent-St. Vrain also turned its attention north, to supply the ever-increasing volume of emigrants traveling the overland trails to Oregon and California. George Bent informed Francis W. Cragin that some of the stock his father and uncles drove north was stolen. The Kiowas and Comanches, especially, provided the animals. "Bent and Company bought herds from them and took their ponies to Missouri and to Platte River to trade to gold hunters that were going to California," he wrote.[26]

Not all the Mexican stock the Bents drove to market was stolen, however. Over the years, the company engaged in direct horse and mule trades and purchases in New Mexico and further south. Traders like John Hatcher, Tim Goodall, and Tom Boggs accompanied one of the partners. George Bent recalled that all the traders were "good men," fluent in both Spanish and sign language. The traders procured the livestock from Mexican ranches and drove the herds north to the trails. Bent recalled that on one occasion, the traders returned with a sack full of $50 gold pieces. Thus, the company's trade in livestock linked together Indian traders and raiders, Mexican ranchers as far west as California, westbound emigrants, Missouri farmers, and Southern plantation owners.[27]

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[26] George Bent to Francis W. Cragin, December 4, 1905, Box 5 F(I), Box 72, Francis W. Cragin Collection, Starsmore Center for Local History, Colorado Springs, (hereafter cited as SCLH).
[27] George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 69; Grinnell, "Builders," 57, 60; George Bent to George Hyde, February 19, 1913, Box 3 Folder 20, GBP-Yale; Bent to Hyde, November 13, 1917, Box 4 Folder 42, GBP-Yale; George Bird Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-1, George Bird Grinnell Collection, ANC; Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations, 1795-1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), 67. On Bent-St. Vrain mule sales in Missouri, see Journal Book EE, June 27, 1842, Reel 9 Page 224, Chouteau Collection (hereafter cited as CC); Ledger Book FF, July 16, 1846, Reel 9 Page 276, CC; Bent to Alvarez, November 12, 1844, Box 2 Folder 63, BRC; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 103. The company also dabbled in the

The sale of guns and ammunition to the Indians presented an even greater menace to New Mexico's security than did the purchase of stolen livestock. The markets for firearms provided by American traders gave Indian groups another incentive to form trading ties with new partners at the expense of the Mexicans. These traders also repaired and maintained the weapons they offered for sale. The illegal sale of guns and ammunition to the Indians took place across Mexico's entire northern frontier, from Sonora to Texas. Unscrupulous American traders like James Kirker ran guns and stolen livestock along a line from Chihuahua as far north as Taos and the Arkansas River. Guns and ammunition allowed groups like the Comanches and Apaches to grow even more powerful. Some tribes were better armed and mounted even than the Mexicans. In 1847, Thomas Fitzpatrick, the Indian Agent in charge of the Upper Arkansas, wrote his superiors that Mexicans were actually traveling north to trade with the Indians for guns and ammunition. Fitzpatrick warned that the Mexicans intended to arm either themselves or the Indians of New Mexico for an uprising against the United States. The sale of guns to tribes like the Utes provided another incentive to strike at the settlements of northern New Mexico, causing nationalists like Padre Martínez and Donaciano Vigil to demand action from the central government.[28] As with most of their

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purchase of sheep from time to time. See Bent to Alvarez, no date, Box 1 Folder 13, BRC; Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, October 14, 1838, Barclay Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley; George Bird Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-2, Grinnell Collection, ANC.

[28] Weber, "Breakdown," 117-8, 124; Reséndez, *Changing National Identities,* 51; Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land,* 124, 182-3; Smith, *Borderlander,* 48; DeLay, "Independent Indians," 67; Thomas Fitzpatrick to William Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University

involvement in the shadow economies of the Southwestern Borderlands, the extent to which Bent-St. Vrain traded guns to the Indians is unclear. An officer attached to Henry Dodge's 1835 Dragoon Expedition wrote from Bent's Fort that, "Some few of them have guns and ammunition that they have bought of American traders for robes and fur." In 1843, Philip St. George Cooke wrote that the Cheyennes were armed with guns procured "at the trading houses – sundried brick 'forts' – of American trading companies…exchanging buffalo robes and some beaver." [29]

While the company probably sold guns to their native customers, analysis suggests that the weapons were of minimal quality. The partners most likely kept the best guns for themselves or their employees. Indians had little trouble procuring guns and ammunition from American traders throughout the West. However, traders generally provided their customers with specific types of weapons. There is no definitive evidence, for example, that traders provided the Indians with high-quality Hawken rifles, the weapon of choice for most traders and trappers. However, by the early-nineteenth century Indians had access to a fairly distinctive trade gun, known alternately as the "Hudson Bay fluke," "Mackinaw gun," or "North West gun." These firearms were modeled on light English fowling pieces. They were light, with a short barrel, and cheaply constructed. Most were

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of North Carolina Press, 2002), 206; Vigil, *Arms, Indians,* xi; James Calhoun to William Medill, October 15, 1849, in *Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun,* 51-2.

[29] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge, to the Rocky Mountains in 1835, in *American State Papers, Military Affairs, VI,* 24th Cong. 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1835), 141; Philip St. George Cooke, "A Journal of the Santa Fe Trail," ed. William Connelley, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (1925), 239; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 208; Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 149. Frank McNitt writes that in 1837, the company sold guns, powder, and flints to Cheyenne warriors heading south to avenge the death of the Bow String Warriors. However, he cites no evidence for this claim. See Frank McNitt, *The Indian Traders* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 32.

approximately sixteen-gauge, or .66 caliber, capable of firing either fine shot or a heavy ball, and accurate to fifty yards. Later, traders did provide rifles to Indian customers. Taking note of the fastidiousness of their customers, traders paid much attention to the quality of the guns they delivered. However, it is unlikely that the traders would deliver weapons of the same quality as those carried by company employees or independent trappers.[30] Extant company invoices indicate that they shipped a good deal of weaponry into the Indian Country. An 1838 trade invoice lists the purchase of over one hundred "common" North West guns in addition to fifty with forty-two inch barrels, and fifty with thirty-three inch barrels. In addition to the North West guns, the partners purchased ten "English rifles," twenty "American rifles," percussion caps, and one hundred pounds of Du Pont gunpowder. Later invoices also reveal the purchase of flints, caps, and powder as well. The archaeological record further indicates the presence of both lower quality trade guns and more advanced percussion rifles.[31] However, how many guns made it into Indian hands, or how the Indian customers used the weapons is unknown. It is not unlikely, though, that guns purchased at Bent's Fort ended up firing at Mexican targets.

In the absence of a strong state presence, the liquor trade was another potential source of trouble for residents on both sides of the international border.

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[30] Carl P. Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers: A History of Firearms from Colonial Times Through the Years of the Western Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); 60-76; 103-105, 131-4; Carl P. Russell, *Firearms, Traps, and Tools of the Mountain Men* (New York, Knopf, 1967), 60, 71, 94.

[31] Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, Ledger Z, 1838, Fur Trade Ledger Collection, 426-433, MHS; Ledger DD, July 21, 1840, July 24, 1840, FTLC, 76-89; Jackson Ward Moore, Jr., "The Archaeology of Bent's Old Fort" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1968), 111-112, 115.

Carried north from Taos into the United States by both Hispanic and Anglo traders, alcohol constituted an extremely lucrative item in the Indian trade. However, many critics, most associated with the United States government, pointed out that the liquor trade was bound to cause problems. Liquor, they claimed, debauched the Indians. Unscrupulous traders took advantage of drunken Indians to bolster their own bottom line. When the Indians drank, they fought. Furthermore, the sale of liquor by unlicensed traders of either nationality took business away from legitimate, licensed traders, critics argued. Perhaps most importantly, the liquor trade threatened the delicate balance of power between the region's Indians and the United States and Mexico. Officials on both sides of the border complained of the actions of liquor traders. Mexicans claimed that American traders provided liquor, in addition to guns and moral support, to Indians who then raided into Mexican territory. American screeds against "Spanish" liquor peddlers made much the same point. In these ways, the liquor trade potentially threatened the moral, economic, physical, and political well-being of all the inhabitants of the Southwestern Borderlands.

Whether peddled by Mexicans or Americans, most of the liquor that flowed across the Southern Plains originated in New Mexico, especially from Simeon Turley's distillery at Arroyo Hondo, near Taos. As early as 1835, American soldiers commented upon the actions of Mexican traders. Spaniards from "Touse" met Dodge's men along the Arkansas River that summer. They carried with them both whiskey and flour to trade to the Indians and the soldiers. The settlements just

outside of Taos constituted the epicenter of the Southwestern liquor trade. George Frederick Ruxton found "Several distilleries" in the area in the late-1840s, most of them belonging to American men married into Mexican families. From these locations, they dispensed "a raw fiery spirit" for sale to both the region's remaining trappers and its Indian traders. The Indian traders, especially, found liquor to be "the most profitable article of trade with the aborigines," Ruxton wrote.[32] In the New Mexico liquor business, Simeon Turley was king. Born in Kentucky, Turley migrated to New Mexico from the Boonslick country of Missouri in 1830. He settled in Taos and began operating a store with Job F. Dye. In 1831 or 1832, Turley bought land at Arroyo Hondo and constructed a two-story still. Turley faced stiff competition from fellow Anglo distillers until 1841, chiefly from William Workman and John Rowland. However, their departure from New Mexico in the wake of the Texas-Santa Fe Expedition solidified Turley's position as the primary distiller in the region. Turley wrote to his brother of the situation, "Roland and Workman is Silling Whiskey at half price to Sell out and gowe to Caleforni and until thay sell out I Shall have to say Silent and Sell none." By 1843, Turley was writing his brother in Missouri, requesting that he purchase another still and equipment for his enterprise.[33] Turley soon expanded his operations north

[32] Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 59. On Mexican traders, see "Report of an Expedition of Dragoons," 140; Evans, "Journal of Colonel Henry Dodge's Expedition," 210; Richard Hill Graham and Sidney Smith, "Report of a Journey to the Rocky Mountains," ed. John E. Sunder, *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 11 (1946), 51-2. On the distilleries around Taos, see George Frederick Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1973), 201.

[33] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 87; Janet Lecompte, "Simeon Turley," in *MMFTFW*, 7: 303-307; Simeon Turley to Jesse Turley, April 18, 1841, Folder 1, Turley Family Papers, MHS; Simeon Turley to Jesse Turley, April 18, 1843, Folder 1, Turley Family Papers.

towards the Arkansas River and beyond. Sent by mule train from Arroyo Hondo up the San Luis Valley and over Sangre de Cristo Pass to the Upper Arkansas, Turley's liquor found a ready market at the region's small trading posts, as well as the posts along the South Platte. By 1845, traders made the trip to Arroyo Hondo to purchase from him directly. Turley's death in 1847 during the Taos Revolt, combined with stricter supervision by government agents, largely quashed northern New Mexico's liquor trade.[34]

The independent trading posts along the Upper Arkansas were a natural market for Turley's liquor. Alcohol formed the backbone of their trade, much to the chagrin of the Bents and St. Vrain. The first major post constructed in the area was Pueblo. George Simpson, Joseph Doyle, and former Bent-St. Vrain clerk Alexander Barclay began construction of Pueblo in late-1841. Occupied steadily until about 1850, Pueblo functioned as the main base of operations for minor traders who traveled throughout the entire Rocky Mountain West, distributing Turley's liquor from the international border north to the vicinity of the overland trails near Fort Laramie and west to the Ute country.[35]

The polyglot population of the smaller posts like Pueblo had an unsavory reputation throughout the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. These small communities acted as a lodestone for those at loose ends, be they French, Mexican,

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[34]Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 88; Janet Lecompte, "The Hardscrabble Settlement, 1844-1848," *Colorado Magazine* 31 (1954), 95.
[35] Lecompte, "Hardscrabble," 85, 88; Rufus B. Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies: or, Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years, with a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Condition, and the Different Nations Inhabiting Them* (Philadelphia: Baird, 1854), 28; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 35, 74, 157, 225.

Indian, or American. Especially as the larger companies like the company tightened their grip over the buffalo robe trade, out of work traders, or employees dismissed by the companies gravitated to the Front Range. David Lavender wrote, uncharitably, "Pueblo was a collecting spot for the scum of the mountains."[36] Contemporary observers were seldom less critical. Francis Parkman found Pueblo, "a wretched species of fort, of most primitive construction," inhabited by a desultory population of Indians and Mexicans. George Frederick Ruxton reported that, as long as the liquor lasted, "the Arkansa resounded with furious mirth." However, these bacchanals could quickly turn dangerous, for a drunken trapper "is quick to give and take offense," Ruxton wrote. Many times, they settled their disputes with duels.[37]

Government officials worried about more than the drunken revels of a few unwashed mountain men, for the men who operated out of places like Pueblo threatened the business of upstanding traders, Indian agents and soldiers wrote their superiors. The traders were, "outlaws," and "men of desperate character," who, fired by reputable traders, congregated in the area to barter whiskey and "trinkets" to the local Indians, much to the dismay of licensed traders.[38] Stephen Watts Kearny warned that these men were "causing much difficulty and doing much harm," to both the Indians and reputable traders. He suggested the appointment of

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[36] Brooks, *Captives and Cousins,* 234; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 27; Arthur J. Fynn, "Furs and Forts of the Rocky Mountain West," *Colorado Magazine* 2 (1932), 51; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 228.
[37] Parkman, *Oregon Trail,* 301; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 179.
[38] Joseph Hamilton to Thomas Harvey, July 5, 1844, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm Reel 884 (hereafter cited as UMA); "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1844," 28th Cong., 2nd Sess. S. doc. 1, 437.

a sub-agent, based at Bent's Fort, to stop the liquor trade in the area. Thomas Moore seconded Kearny's assessment, pointing out to the Superintendant of Indian Affairs in St. Louis that the independent traders and the "half breeds and profligate men in their employment," defied all government authority.[39]

Padre Martínez expanded upon this connection between the liquor trade and its threat to Mexico's territorial integrity in an 1843 letter to President Santa Anna. The priest began by noting that, under Spanish rule, Americans had been unable to erect trading posts along the international border, for fear they might stir up the Indians. Under Mexico, however, they built forts with impunity. In addition to trading legitimate goods, the traders peddled liquor to their new customers. This trade created such a powerful thirst for alcohol, that the Indians began an indiscriminate slaughter of buffalo on the Southern Plains, in order to barter robes for liquor. Furthermore, the desire for illicit trade goods prompted them to make raids into New Mexico and further south. The slaughter of the buffalo, facilitated by the American demand for robes also threatened the economic and physical well-being of New Mexicans used to supplementing their crops with bison meat. As the herds retreated further east and north onto the Plains, it became more difficult and hazardous for the *ciboleros* to bring home meat for the winter. Martínez suggested that, in order to counteract the baleful influences of American traders like the

[39] Stephen Watts Kearny, "Report of a summer campaign to the Rocky mountains, &c., in 1845," 29th Cong. 1st Sess. S. doc. 1, 213; Thomas Moore to William Medill, May 14, 1846, UMA. On the whiskey peddlers taking business away from licensed traders, see Hamilton to Harvey, July 5, 1844, UMA; Andrew Drips to Harvey, April 11, 1845, UMA; Drips to Harvey, October 1844, Letterbook , Reel 2 Volume 8, page 212, William Clark Papers; Mitchell to Andrew Drips, October 6, 1842, Box1, Drips Papers, MHS; Hamilton to Drips, December 4, 1843, Box 1, Drips Papers, MHS.

Bents, the Mexican government should sponsor a civilizing project for local Indians – setting aside land and livestock for their use, and teaching them to read, write, and become productive citizens. Despite the clear and present danger foreseen by Martínez, the central government took no action on his proposals.[40]

Perhaps most alarmingly, liquor traders threatened to disrupt the political balance between the United States and Mexico in the region by encouraging intoxicated Indians to raid and kill on both sides of the international border. Bent's Fort could play a pivotal role in monitoring the activities of the American and Mexican traders, observers noted. Dodge recognized the strategic value of the post on his visit in 1835. Situated on the international border, the fort provided a base from which, "the movements of the Mexicans could be watched; and in case any encroachments are committed, the earliest intelligence might be received."[41] Charles Bent himself recognized the propitious location of the Company's post, even if he rarely drew the government's attention to it. However, when faced with the possibility of competition, either economic or political, from Mexican traders, Bent couched his self-interest in terms of national interest. Should the government choose to build a post on the Arkansas, the vicinity near Pueblo would suit admirably. From this location, Bent wrote Manuel Alvarez, American troops could prevent the Mexicans from "exciting the Indians to comit depredations on our

[40] Martínez to Santa Anna, quoted in William A. Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 67-70. See also, DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 89; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 294-5; Howard Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 47; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 17; Vigil, *Arms, Indians,* xi-xii; Weber, "Breakdown," 125-7; David J. Weber, *On the Edge of Empire: The Taos Hacienda of Los Martínez* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 75.
[41] "Report of the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge," 142.

frontiers," in case of war between the two nations. Already Mexican traders crossed the border with impunity, Bent complained. They came in "large partys," sometimes upwards of three hundred men, "for the purpose of trading with the Indians, and hunting," he informed the consul. Furthermore, their presence aroused the hostility of the Indians towards Americans. Bent wrote that, to his knowledge, any actions taken to stir up the Indians resulted from individual initiative, rather than conscious policy on the part of New Mexican leaders. However, the presence among the Indians of "Collars and Staffs," of New Mexican origin roused his suspicions, for Mexican negotiators used these items in the same way the United States used peace medals to cultivate ties with Indian groups. Nearly a year later, Bent wrote to the Superintendant of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, making much the same argument about the unlicensed traders. "It is all important," he urged, "that some measures should be taken on the part of our Government to prevent traders…into the territory of the United States for the purpose of trading with the Indians, the greatest objection to traders from New Mexico is that they introduce large quantities of spirituous liquors among the Indians; this is done both by Mexicans and Americans."[42]

The presence of the liquor traders unsettled other American officials as well. The mischief the traders caused adversely affected both the United States and

[42] Bent to Alvarez, September 19, 1842, Box 2 Folder 57, BRC; Bent to D.D. Mitchell, May 4, 1943, Letterbook, 112, Volume 8 Reel 2, Clark Papers. Numerous historians cite competition from Pueblo as the main reason Bent urged the government to build a post along the Upper Arkansas. See Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 228-9; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 98; Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 49.

Mexico. Liquor peddlers helped sew seeds of distrust between the two nations, he wrote. The New Mexican market more than made up for any shortfalls in illegal liquor shipments from the United States. Brought north by "large parties of Mexicans," who "are daily selling it to the tribes within our borders," caused chaos, the consul continued. Drunk on Taos Lightning, the Indians disputed and quarreled with everyone. Frequently, Alvarez informed the Secretary of State, the actions of the Indians "recoils upon the Mexicans themselves." However, Mexican authorities blamed only American traders, presumably the Bents in particular. "These thefts, robberies, and murders, when they happen to the Mexican he is said to refer exclusively to the influence of our legally authorized trader, instead of the true and natural causes," he griped. American traders, especially those operating out of Pueblo, shared much of the blame for the theft, murder, and plunder that sometimes accompanied the sale of alcohol. Alvarez urged his superiors to reach out to the Mexican government to solve the liquor problem. He implored, "Could some understanding be had with the Government of Mexico, so as to prohibit the transportation of spirituous drinks across the mountains to within our Territory, it would tend greatly to the good understanding between the citizens of the two countries, as well as to the gradual amelioration of the situation of Indian tribes along our Western border." Unfortunately, for Alvarez, the Mexican government, distracted by other issues, took no steps to solve the problem from the supply side.[43]

[43] Alvarez to Secretary of State, July 1, 1843, CDSF; Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez*, 49.

Even in the wake of the American conquest of New Mexico, Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick also complained about Mexican liquor traders crisscrossing the region. He vehemently opposed any interactions between these men and the Indians, "well knowing that such intercourse will not terminate favorably to us." Despite the danger, Fitzpatrick complained that American military men in Santa Fe gave him no advice; neither did they take action to remedy the situation. Without such support, Fitzpatrick warned ominously, "the time may again arrive when more American throats may be cut which by a little timely and judicious action might easily be prevented." Mexican intrigue, lubricated by bad liquor, had the potential to "cause a serious rupture between us and the Indians," the agent concluded.[44]

While railing against wily Mexicans and unscrupulous independent traders, Bent-St. Vrain undoubtedly took advantage of the lack of the state's regulatory authority and engaged in the liquor trade as well. As previously noted, the company imported vast quantities of alcohol, in direct violation of American laws. There was no shortage of liquor around Bent's Fort. The surviving company invoices testify to both the amount and variety of alcohol that made its way across the plains to the fort. The partners ordered alcohol for both trade and personal consumption. An 1838 invoice reveals the purchase of nearly 1200 gallons of alcohol, in addition to two copper stills, 117 and 124 gallons respectively. In 1839, they ordered over 1100 gallons of alcohol, and two more stills. More raw alcohol and stills show up in 1840, as well. In addition to these purchases, the partners purchased finer spirits. The invoices show purchases of rum, claret, shrub, gin, and

[44] Fitzpatrick to Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA.

two casks of "best brandy." Archaeological evidence shows that the partners also enjoyed fine red wine from France, possibly for entertaining purposes. The copper stills in the St. Louis invoices apparently found their way into New Mexico, because there is no record of the company operating a still at any of their posts. Thus, Bent-St. Vrain may have inadvertently supplied the very competitors they railed against to the government. Following Stephen Watts Kearny's arrival at Bent's Fort in the summer of 1846, one of his troops noted that the company sold rum for $24 per gallon. Although the partners kept a substantial stash of spirits for their own private use, especially for a minty, iced specialty known as a "hailstorm," George Bird Grinnell claims that the partners kept close tabs on how much alcohol they distributed to their employees, let alone to the Indians. [45]

However, there is anecdotal evidence for the company's attempts to curb the liquor trade in the vicinity of the fort. In 1843, Benjamin Clapp wrote to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., informing him of a discussion with the Oregon missionary Dr. Marcus Whitman. Whitman passed through Bent's Fort on a journey from the Pacific Northwest to Washington, D.C. Clapp wrote that Whitman, "had opportunities of seeing much of the operations, etc. of Bent's people and spoke

[45] Bent, St. Vrain and Company Invoice, 1838, Ledger Z, pages 426-433, FTLC; BSVC Invoice, July 29, 1839, Ledger DD and July 21, 1840, pages 76-89, FTLC; Moore, "The Archaeology of Bent's Old Fort," 29; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 93-7; Jacob S. Robinson, *A Journal of the Santa Fe Expedition under Colonel Doniphan,* with an introduction by Carl L. Cannon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), 17; Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," 56, 58-9; Mark L. Gardner, "Where the Buffalo Was Plenty: Bent, St. Vrain and Company and the Robe Trade of the Southern Plains," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* (2007), 26; Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 213-4; George Bent to George Hyde, July 25, 1911, Box 3 Folder 14, GBP-Yale.

highly…of the good effects produced by them not having any liquor in the country. Their trade was good and the prospects promising."[46]

Further compounding the irony of the company's cries against the residents of Pueblo was the fact that the partners and the employees at Bent's Fort enjoyed a great deal of interaction with the independent traders. Many former company employees found their way to Pueblo, and women from the community often traveled downriver to the fort to attend dances and celebrate saint's days. Furthermore, Bent's Fort offered the independents with a place to repair their wagons and gear.[47]

In addition to horses, guns, and liquor, human beings constituted part of the shadow economy of the borderlands. Slave raiding and buying had a long tradition in New Mexico, despite official protestations. However, New Mexicans could bypass restrictions by purchasing and then converting an Indian captive to Christianity. The captive then became merely a servant. Although outlawed by presidential decree in 1865, slavery continued, underground, in New Mexico for some years. Even the Martínez family had owned Indian slaves. Tradition said that the servants indentured to the priest and his brothers were descendants of Navajo slaves captured during military campaigns dating to the Spanish colonial period.[48]

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[46] Benjamin Clapp to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., March 7, 1843, Reel 28 Frame 509, CC.
[47] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 56, 67, 138; Alexander Barclay, "Diary," March 24, 1846, Box 1, Barclay Papers.

[48] Marc Simmons, *Coronado's Land: Essays on Daily Life in Colonial New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 19919), 45-50; Weber, *On the Edge of Empire*, 72-3; Gregg,

Indian raiders, especially the Comanches, provided most of the slaves purchased by American traders. Whether the Comanches raided with the intention of procuring slaves for sale, or simply to replenish their population, is unknown. Whatever the reason, there was no doubting the intensity and results of their raids. While New Mexico maintained a peace with the Comanches, their raiding concentrated upon the departments of Chihuahua, Durango, and Coahuila. Charles Bent reported that the Comanches carried out, "an incessant and destructive war," with these departments, "from which they carried off and still hold as slaves a large number of women and children and immense herds of horses, mules, and asses."[49] Donaciano Vigil lamented the reports he heard of Indian captive taking throughout the entire northern frontier of Mexico. Young Mexican women, he informed the New Mexican Assembly, "are compelled to satisfy the brutal lust of the barbarous bucks," and often tortured and killed. Should the government not take action, he would "blush with shame to see to what an extent misfortune has befallen our nation and what may befall many persons whom I esteem if proper steps be not taken to prevent such degrading misfortunes."[50]

Commerce of the Prairies, 153. The most thorough discussion of slavery in the Southwest during this period is Brooks, *Captives and Cousins.*

[49] Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 279; Hobbs, *Wild Life*, 23-5, 30; Bent to Medill, November 10, 1846, in *The Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun*, 7.

[50] Vigil to New Mexico Assembly, Ritch Collection. For more on the extent, economics, and rationale of captive taking, see Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War: Contrasting Forms of Intertribal Relationship Among the Historic Plains Indians," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians*, ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 128; Bloom, "New Mexico Under Mexico," 32; Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*, 48, 63, 197; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 91-3; Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-3, ANC; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 250-8; Mary Inez Hilger, *Arapaho Child Life and Its Cultural Background* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 53; "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," 1845, 29th Cong. 1st Sess. H. doc. 2, 538.

Although purchasing captives from Indian raiders never constituted a major component of its enterprise, former Mexican slaves made up at least a portion of the company labor force. Given the choice between living in peonage in Mexico or residing in the Indian camps, George Bent wrote, was not really much of a choice. Captives far preferred their new situation. The company purchased the majority of the captives from the Kiowas and Comanches. Trader John Tharp once purchased two captives, a young Mexican and an African American, from the Kiowas. The youngster was from Durango, but had spent so much time among the Comanches that he barely remembered his former home. James Hobbs reported that Charles Bent ransomed him from the Comanches for "the trifling consideration of six yards of flannel, a pound of tobacco, and an ounce of beads."[51] The most famous company-related captive story deals with a woman captured in Durango. After spending several years with the Comanches, they traded her to the Kiowas. The Kiowas brought her to Bent's Fort, where an employee purchased her. The couple then departed for Pueblo. Shortly thereafter, the woman's Mexican husband appeared, after traveling 1500 miles from Durango. The man wanted his wife back. Her new husband refused to give her up, and the "poor Duragueño returned to his home alone, his spouse preferring to share buffalo-rib and venison with her mountaineer before the frijole and chile colorado of the bereaved ranchero," George Frederick Ruxton jocularly proclaimed. Another version of the story says

[51] George Bird Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-2, ANC; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 68; Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains*, 285; Hobbs, *Wild Life*, 47, 49-50.

that William Bent adjudicated the dispute over the woman, finally determining that she should return to Mexico.[52]

More ominous for the stability and safety of the New Mexican frontier, though, was the continued use of Indian captives by the Mexican population. During one particularly tense situation in 1841, Bent kept up a steady stream of correspondence with Alvarez, warning the consul to advise Armijo that conciliation was New Mexico's best chance to avoid a costly war with the Plains tribes. Apparently, Bent acted as a go-between at some point, but documentation regarding the final resolution of the conflict is missing.[53] The trouble began when Mexicans purchased some Arapaho slaves from a party of Utes. Should the Mexicans not return the captives, Bent warned that trouble would follow. He expected 1500 lodges of Indians – Arapahos, Cheyennes, and Sioux – on the Arkansas the following spring. It was possible that the Arapahos could convince their allies to join them in retaliatory action against New Mexico. Furthermore, the Indians had "one or two Mexicans with them which will serve as guides."[54] The Arapahos offered the Mexicans one horse apiece in exchange for the captives, and Bent urged the authorities in Taos to take them up on the offer. A month later, there was still no progress, for Bent wrote Alvarez that, "The Indians from the Arkansas still continue to threaten theas people, and no doubt will comit depridations on the first they fall in with." Should threats fail, and the Indians take

[52] Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains*, 283-4; Henry Smith Turner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner: With Stephen Watts Kearny to New Mexico and California, 1846-1847,* ed. Dwight L. Clarke (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 67.
[53] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 65-8.
[54] Bent to Alvarez, January 16, 1841, Box 1 Folder 44, BRC.

action, "they will play the devil with the frontear settlements." Furthermore, conflict with the Apaches and Navajos would do little to prepare the New Mexicans for facing the formidable warriors of the Plains.[55]

Although Bent informed Armijo of the dangers posed by the Plains tribes, the trader resented the suspicion with which many New Mexican authorities viewed him. He explained his frustrations to Alvarez. Some in New Mexico, he complained, felt he was playing a double game, that while attempting to calm a volatile situation, he was actually preparing to profit from the chaos an Indian war might create. Bent forthrightly admitted that, in theory, a war between New Mexico and the Plains Indians would be greatly to his advantage. The Indians would raid Mexican herds, "and the more animals they steal the more they will have to sell and at lower prices, so you se the war between the Mexicans and them would be to my advantage." Should the Indians attack and route the Santa Fe caravan, Bent estimated he could possibly rake in between eighty and one hundred thousand dollars worth of goods for about $20,000 worth of trade goods. However, he had informed Armijo of the situation, hardly the actions of someone plotting to sew discord. If he really sought war, he told the consul, "I should be exerting myself to detain the prisoners whare they are, well knowing that this will be the cause of war between them and theas people." Instead of gratitude, all he got was suspicion and accusations. Should more trouble arise, he informed Alvarez, he might not be so forthcoming to New Mexican officials, "I gave the information

[55] Bent to Alvarez, January 30, 1841, Box 1 Folder 46; ibid., February 20-25, Box 1 Folder 48; ibid., March 15, 1841, Box 1 Folder 50; ibid., March 22, 1841, Box 2 Folder 51, all in BRC.

respecting the disposition of theas Indians because I felt it my duty so to doe and I can assure him I had not the most distant idea of deriving any benifit from thare being returned. From this forward I shall be verry careful how I intrude myself by giving information if it should come to my Knollidge of any disaster that may befall theas people," he concluded.[56]

By spring, Arapaho patience was exhausted. Bent reported that a war party made camp on the Animas River, bringing with them eight Mexican scalps, ten horses, and two guns. He had "no doubt they will kill all the Mexicans they can," in frustration over the refusal to free the prisoners. They might attack as far south as Pecos, in the vicinity of Santa Fe. He had done his part, he had warned the Mexicans, Bent wrote Alvarez. However, "The Arapahos will listen to us no longer when we solicit them to cease" fighting the New Mexicans. Captive taking and slave raiding threatened to disrupt life for everyone in the region.[57]

The deep involvement of Bent-St. Vrain in the shadow economies of the borderlands posed a severe threat to Mexico's northern frontier. By supplying arms and ammunition to Indian raiders in exchange for horses, mules, and captives, American traders helped perpetuate the violence that had plagued New Mexico for years. The lack of a strong state presence – either American or Mexican – guaranteed the continuation of military and economic instability on both sides of the border. However, despite occasional violence north of the Arkansas River, New Mexico bore the brunt of the raiding. Bent- St. Vrain's well-known

[56] Bent to Alvarez, March 29, 1841, Box 2 Folder 52, BRC.
[57] Bent to Alvarez, April 30, 1841, Box 2 Folder 53, BRC.

complicity in the underground economy made the company a target of accusations by nationalists like Padre Martínez, who viewed American traders as a dire threat to the territorial integrity of northern Mexico. These raids, coupled with the Texan invasions, the acquisition of land grants, and the political maneuverings of the pro-American faction further poisoned the atmosphere of Taos. The situation would only get worse, for in 1846 word reached the area that the United States and Mexico were at war.

Chapter 12 - Apogee: 1846

On April 25, 1846, a party of American scouts clashed with a detachment of Mexican soldiers on the north back of the Rio Grande River in south Texas, prompting President James K. Polk to announce that the Mexicans had shed American blood upon indisputably American soil. Polk seized upon the clash to declare war on Mexico, the culmination of years of fruitless attempts on the part of the United States to acquire territory through negotiation, purchase, and belligerent diplomacy. The president called upon state governors to raise tens of thousands of volunteers for the coming war, and Missourians responded with alacrity. In the summer of 1846, the Army of the West, Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny commanding, began its march along the Santa Fe Trail, bound for Santa Fe.

Kearny's march and the bloodless conquest of the New Mexican capital initially seemed like a culmination of years of work for the Bents and St. Vrain. Charles Bent's appointment as the first American governor of New Mexico assured the American faction political and economic influence stretching far beyond Taos. Bent and his American associates now seemed to have the upper hand on the Martínez faction. Kearny's use of Bent's Fort as an outfitting depot also seemed to bode well for the prosperity of the company. However, although the accommodations and business alliances American traders formed with their New Mexican counterparts had slowly drawn the northern frontier into the orbit of the United States, discontent with the new government and the Americans in general

boiled over in January 1847. Mexican and Indian residents of the Rio Arriba rose up, killed Charles Bent, and tried to overthrow the new regime. Although they failed in their attempt to roll back the American conquest, the rebellion and bloodshed demonstrated their extreme discontent. The political and economic interests pursued by the Bents, St. Vrain recoiled on them. The Taos Revolt showed the limits of accommodation and sowed the seeds for the ultimate destruction of Bent-St. Vrain as an institution in the Southwestern Borderlands.

The men marching with Kearny's army justified their endeavor by appealing to racial, political, and patriotic rationales. Conventional wisdom held that the New Mexicans had failed utterly to develop their own viable social, political, and economic institutions. Race figured prominently in the arguments of American expansionists. Fueled by the eyewitness reports of travelers and traders like Josiah Gregg, George Wilkins Kendall, and George Frederick Ruxton, Anglos formed a distinctly unfavorable view of Mexicans, arguing that the mixture of Indian and Hispanic blood created a hybrid race characterized by cruelty, greed, venality, treachery, superstition, and general backwardness. By comparison, Americans possessed superior intellects, values, socioeconomic, and political institutions. Furthermore, devastating Indian raids along the whole of Mexico's northern frontier convinced American policy makers of that nation's inability to defend itself and develop its own territory. Thus, Americans viewed their campaign as one of regeneration and patriotic duty. Only Americans, with their republican institutions, could adequately capitalize upon the opportunities offered

by the annexation of Mexican territory. Finally, they marched to defend national honor. Feeling repeatedly snubbed by an arrogant government in Mexico City, Kearny's men determined to demonstrate their heroism and martial skills. They brought freedom and opportunity with them, they told one another. Why would the New Mexicans, dull as they were, not welcome them as liberating heroes?[1]

Despite the expansionist enthusiasm sweeping many parts of the nation, Charles Bent and some other Americans in the Southwest were not initially thrilled about the possibility of war. Polk's election caused some traders great disquiet. In

[1] David J. Weber, "'Scarce More than Apes;' Historical Roots of Anglo-American Stereotypes of Mexicans," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest: Essays by David J. Weber* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 153, 166. On the rationale of Manifest Destiny generally, see Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 243; Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85. On race as a justification for conquest, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), especially 1, 41, 43, 147, 175, 210-12, 220, 246; James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 69; Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 21; Andrés Résendez, "An Expedition and Its Many Tales," in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*, eds. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 127; Robert W. Johanssen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 21, 167, 290-91. On contemporary accounts of New Mexican character and institutions, see Weber, "'Scarce More than Apes," 157; David J. Weber, "Mexico's Far Northern Frontier, 1821-1854: Historiography Askew," in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest*, 98; Johanssen, *To the Halls*, 173, 189; Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1997), 168-69; Paul Horgan, *Josiah Gregg and His Vision of the Early West* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1979), 63-4; Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 275; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexico History*, 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press), 2: 198. On Mexico's problems with Indian raiders, see DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 218, 227-49, 291;Brian DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S. –Mexican War," *American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 50-1, 63, 66. On patriotism and the defense of American virtues, see Johanssen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, viii, 45-50, 111, 210; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 85; William Elsey Connelley, *War with Mexico, 1846-1847: Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California* (Topeka: Published by the author, 1907), 152-3. On the probability of New Mexicans welcoming the Americans as liberators, see DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 263-65; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 232; Roger D. Launius, *Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 84; James Buchanan to Manuel Alvarez, May 14, 1846, Box 2 Folder 98, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archive (hereafter cited as BRC and NMSRCA, respectively).

January 1845, Bent expressed his Whiggish disappointment with Polk's elevation to the White House. He wrote Manuel Alvarez in Santa Fe, thanking the consul for forwarding news from the United States, "all except the ellection of Polk…I am fearfull that this election will cause difficulty between this and our country," Bent confided. Trader James Josiah Webb's reaction to the news was far less subdued. "I was a Whig," he wrote, "Henry Clay was now my idol, and defeated by such a man as Jim Polk! My Country! Oh, my Country! What are we coming to, when my countrymen make such a choice! To wait three months for news, and then get such news, was more than I could sleep over."[2] Presidential politics in Mexico also caused anxiety on the northernmost frontiers of the republic. Bent reported that the ascent of Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga to the presidency met with a cool reception in Santa Fe. The trader worried that Paredes, whose anti-American views were well-known, might expel United States citizens from New Mexico, "or due worse," and that the Anglos "should be prepared and on our guard."[3]

Mindful of Bent's extensive experience in New Mexico and the strategic benefits of the company fort, yet apparently unaware of the trader's ambivalence towards American designs in the Southwest, strategists moved to incorporate the man and Bent's Fort into their plans to invade the province. In addition to mobilizing Kearny's men and calling on the governor of Missouri to raise one

[2] Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 98; Charles Bent to Alvarez, January 24, 1845, Box 2 Folder 65, BRC, NMSRCA; James Josiah Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847*, edited by Ralph P. Bieber, Introduction to the Bison Book Edition by Mark L. Gardner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 118.
[3] Bent to Alvarez, February 23, 1845, Box 2 Folder 66, BRC; Bent to Alvarez, February 21, 1846, Box 2 Folder 73, BRC.

thousand volunteers, the Secretary of War, William Marcy, dispatched trader George T. Howard west to warn Americans along the Santa Fe Trail and in New Mexico of the impending war. The mission required "great discretion," the secretary wrote Howard. Howard was to inform the American community in Santa Fe of the situation, while simultaneously trying to keep word from leaking out to Mexican authorities. To facilitate the mission, Marcy recommended that Howard apprise Charles Bent of the mission. The secretary wrote Howard, "You will communicate your instructions to Colonel Bent at Bent's Fort so that he may be placed upon his guard. He is a brave enterprising and excellent man whose advice may be of great service to you." By July, Howard completed his mission, and informed Kearny that the populace of New Mexico had no desire for war, but that the leaders of the province were raising an army to contest the general's march.[4] Others also recognized the strategic advantages of Bent's Fort. The same week Marcy wrote to Howard, the *St. Louis Reveille* printed a letter from a visitor to the fort, which forecast that it was "destined to become of deep importance," to the United States because of its location on the border.[5]

By late May, Kearny began dispatching detachments of troops west along the Santa Fe Trail. The Army of the West consisted of three hundred regulars from the First United States Dragoons, supplemented by about one thousand volunteers of the First Missouri Mounted Infantry, under the command of Colonel Alexander

[4] On the Howard mission, see K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War,1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 127, 131; William Marcy to George T. Howard, May 13, 1846, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, Letters Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1861, Reel 26 (Hereafter cited as War Department).
[5] *St. Louis Reveille,* May 17, 1846.

Doniphan. Kearny's orders were to march to Bent's Fort, and to use the post as a supply depot and staging ground for his march into New Mexico. Despite the fact that no one informed the Bents or St. Vrain of this development, Kearny expected no trouble from the traders. Realizing that rations and teams for the wagons and artillery would be in short supply, Kearny commanded his men to stagger their marches in order to preserve supplies. Therefore, the Army of the West did not march as one body. Rather, Kearny dispatched detachments from late May into early July.[6] Although undersupplied, the men of the Army of the West "bore the evils of the march with Roman fortitude," one man recalled, and the lead detachments of the army reached Bent's Fort during the third week of July. Kearny arrived at the end of the month.[7]

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[6] Good surveys of the Army of the West and the conquest of New Mexico are found in George Rutledge Gibson, *Journal of a Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan,1846-1847*, ed. by Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), 17-107, and Joseph G. Dawson III, *Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 28-102. On the recruitment of the Missouri Volunteers and Doniphan's election as Colonel, see McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 17-24, 90; Johanssen, *To the Halls*, 63; Launius, *Alexander Doniphan*, 83-97; Dwight L. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny: Soldier of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 116; Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 56, 66; Walker Wyman, "The Military Phase of Santa Fe Freighting, 1846-1865," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (1932), 416; John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 205-210.

[7] Connelley, *War With Mexico*, 187, 204; Gibson, *Under Kearny and Doniphan*, 127, 134; Thomas L. Edwards to Joseph D. Edwards, September 15, 1846, Box 1, Mexican War Collection, Missouri History Museum (hereafter cited as MWC and MHS, respectively). One of the first detachments Kearny sent into the field was charged with overtaking and halting two caravans already departed from Missouri. One, under the direction of Albert Speyer, carried weapons and ammunition intended for Chihuahua, while another reportedly transported $70,000 worth of trade goods ordered by the New Mexican governor, Manuel Armijo. The troops failed to overtake the traders, and they continued on into Mexico. See Stephen Watts Kearny to George T. Howard, June 4, 1846, Kearny Letterbook page 12, Stephen Watts Kearny Papers, MHM (Kearny Papers hereafter cited as KP); Kearny to B.D. Moore, June 6, 1846, Letterbook page 16-17, KP; William Y. Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage: The Santa Fe Trail and the Mexican War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 30; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 317; Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade*, 9; *Niles' National Register*, July 11, 1846, 304.

Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain learned of the state of war existing between the United States and Mexico while traveling east with their summer caravan.[8] Rumors circulated at both ends of the Santa Fe Trail. In Missouri, a story spread that Mexican forces had marched north and sacked Bent's Fort. However, the *Missouri Republican* assured its anxious readers that, "there is no truth in the report. It is believed that it originated from an unguarded expression of one of the men who came from the Fort." Although they had no definitive news of the state of war, rumors of American intentions circulated throughout New Mexico as well, and the partners must have been uneasy as they traveled east. Somewhere in western Kansas, they encountered a courier who informed them that the two nations were at war. The traders proceeded to Fort Leavenworth, where they reported to General Kearny.[9]

At Leavenworth, Bent and St. Vrain apprised Kearny of the situation in New Mexico, and speculated that the locals would not put up much of a fight. There was still some confusion among the Americans as to whether or not the Mexicans even knew a state of war existed. One source has Bent saying that the citizens "were totally unapprised of the existence of the war," but that Armijo and his inner circle "had some news of it."[10] Lacking hard intelligence, Bent could

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[8] *Missouri Republican,* July 3, 1846; *Niles' National Register,* July 11, page 304.
[9] *Missouri Republican,* June 25, 1846; *Niles' National Register,* July 11, 1846, page 304; Clarke, *Kearny,* 109; Marc Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives: A Family History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 68. On the lack of accurate news, see also Josiah Gregg to John Bigelow, May 8, 1846, *Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg,* ed. Maurice Garland Fulton, 2 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941-1944), 1: 190-91.
[10] Clarke, *Kearny,* 114; Abraham Johnston, Marcellus Ball Edwards, and Philip Gooch Ferguson, *Marching with the Army of the West, 1846-1848,* ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1936), 121-22.

only report rumors to the commanding general. The most disturbing rumor was one the trader got directly from a conversation with Governor Armijo. Armijo reported that a Mexican army was on its way north to Santa Fe. Gathered from Sonora, Zacatecas, and Durango under the command of General José Urrea, the army's intention, the governor informed Bent was to quell a series of uprisings reportedly springing up across northern Mexico. Although Bent could not vouch for the veracity of Armijo's report, the possible presence of three to five thousand Mexican troops in the north indicated to Kearny and other observers that the Army of the West might face a fight after all. Urrea, the *Missouri Republican* reported, "is said to be a man of approved courage and military capacity. Should he make his appearance there in time…he may give the command of Colonel Kearny something to do, before possession of New Mexico is obtained." The American trader remained sanguine, though. Urrea had not yet arrived in New Mexico, and the Missouri papers reported that, left to his own devices, Armijo would not make any resistance to Kearny's takeover of the province. Furthermore, Bent reported that there was little love lost between Armijo and Urrea. Kearny wrote to the Adjutant General that, "Mr. Bent is of the opinion that there can be no good feeling between Urrea and Armijo and that if I can get there in time, the services of the latter may be made against the former, even if he should come with the largest number of troops reported to be with him." Following his conference with Kearny, Bent traveled on to St. Louis, where he gave much the same report; a Mexican

army might be headed for New Mexico, but the people and governor favored the American cause.[11]

Upon his arrival at Bent's Fort, the principals greeted Kearny and his officers in high style. Decades later, William Bent's son George recalled the general's arrival. The employees and their families "in gala dress" flocked to the walls of the fort, gazing eastward at the large cloud of dust drawing nearer. Through this dust, Kearny and his officers appeared. Bent reported that the Indians near the fort, "were wonder-struck," not knowing that so many white men existed in the entire world. The Bents ran a huge American flag up the flagpole and ordered a salute fired from the company's brass howitzer. The Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain greeted Kearny and his officers with mint juleps and a fine dinner. Following dinner, the partners sponsored a fandango to honor the new arrivals. [12]

Kearny's soldiers had more prosaic duties to perform during the Army's brief sojourn at the fort. In addition to resting their weary feet, some enlisted men took advantage of the opportunity to explore their new surroundings. George Gibson ventured into the fort, and found it "quite convenient and capacious,

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[11] *Missouri Republican*, July 3, 1846; *Niles' National Register,* July 11, 1846, 304; Kearny to Adjutant General, June 29, 1846, Letterbook pages 41-2, KP; Ward Allan Minge, "Frontier Problems in New Mexico Preceding the Mexican War, 1840-1846" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1965), 313. Rumors of Armijo's disinclination to resist Kearny circulated among the rank-and-file of the army as well. Soldier Christian Cribben, for example, wrote that, "General Armijo is known to favor our claims and unless he be forced at an early time, by the Central Government, to resist, will, in any case, make only the mere show of opposition against our claims to the whole country east of the Rio Grande." See Cribben to Unknown, July 16, 1846, typescript page 5, Box 1, MWC.

[12] George Bird Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-2, George Bird Grinnell Collection, ANC; George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 85; Philip St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army: Or Romance of Military Life* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857), 417-18; Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 68-9.

affording all kinds of accommodations to travelers," including a blacksmith, gunsmith, and store. Many other soldiers simply stayed in camp, bathing in the Arkansas, shaving, washing clothes, writing letters home, and catching "some fine fish." There was some trouble, though. One soldier got drunk, got in a fight, went for a swim, laid down under a tree, and died of apoplexy. Furthermore, despite the vigilance of the herders, the Army's horses stampeded. Although the troops recovered most of the animals, some nearly fifty miles away, they still lost sixty-five of the best mounts.[13]

The arrival of so many soldiers, in addition to the company's regular employees, made the fort and its environs seem like a bedlam, and strained the traders' ability to provide supplies and space for the army's provisions. Traders, soldiers, and Indians all jostled each other in the fort's courtyard. The incessant noise – the clang of the blacksmith's hammer, neighing horses, braying mules, laughing children, scolding mothers, and fighting men, "are all enough to turn my head," Susan Shelby Magoffin reported. "The Fort is crowded to overflowing," she wrote, "Colonel Kearny has arrived and it seems the world is coming with him."[14] Kearny had failed to consult with the partners when he selected Bent's Fort to be the army's supply depot. However, there was little the Bents and St. Vrain could do but comply. Troops beset the fort's quartermaster with requests for food and

[13]Gibson, *Under Kearny,* 161, 167-68; Susan Shelby Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847*, edited by Stella M. Drumm, with a foreword by Howard R. Lamar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 59; Connelley, *War with Mexico,*178.
[14]Gibson, *Journal of a Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan,* 168; Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail,* 66-7.

whiskey, the quartermasters demanded space to store supplies, and 20,000 animals vied for grass along the banks of the river. George Bent noted, laconically, "The fort was headquarters for the commissary department and many supplies were stored here."[15]

"Many supplies," was an understatement. From the outset of the campaign, the quartermaster at Fort Leavenworth intended to supply the Army of the West with rations for six months. In addition to finding space for so much stuff, the partners also had to accommodate the teamsters and animals who freighted the cargo west from the Missouri frontier. By August 1846, those in charge of logistics wrote of an increasing stream of goods about to descend upon the outpost. The six months of supplies ordered to outfit the army consisted of, among other things, 33,000 pounds of pork and bacon, 89,000 pounds of flour and hardtack, nearly 12,000 pounds of coffee, over 19,000 pounds of sugar, "exclusive of the other smaller portions of the rations." The goods kept coming throughout 1846 and into 1847. During the winter and spring of 1847, Bent's Fort held nearly 140 tons of government supplies. The army sent thirty wagonloads of rations south to New Mexico every week during this period. By the fall, the fort was out of provisions. The impositions the army made upon the company's resources soured William

[15] David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 263, 273-76; Connelley, *War with Mexico,* 179; George Bent to George Hyde, February 26, 1906, Box 3 Folder 4, George Bent Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter cited as GBP-Yale).

Bent's relationship with the government, and had negative ramifications in the years to come.[16]

When not drinking juleps, chasing horses, or worrying about logistical issues, Kearny and his men spent their time attempting to gather more information about Armijo's intentions. Despite Bent's report concerning the governor's disposition, doubts and contradictory rumors continued to plague the army. Christian Cribben wrote with some trepidation that the civil and religious leaders of New Mexico had inflamed the passions of the rabble against the Americans, magnifying Kearny's modest force into a bloodthirsty horde of barbarians, 50,000 strong. Yet, Armijo himself seemed uninvolved in the rumormongering. He still seemed, "uncertain and irresolute in purpose," Cribben wrote an unknown correspondent. Others, including Philip St. George Cooke and Abraham Johnston complained about the existence of the rumors themselves, blaming "something in the atmosphere of the prairies which prompts men to lie."[17]

Although information on New Mexico remained muddled, the Americans had a chance to display their military might to local Indians and Mexican spies. A band of Arapahos visited the encampment, intent upon meeting with Kearny and inspecting the "big guns." Their chief, according to an observer, "expressed his

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[16] Quartermaster Commissary to Richard B. Lee, August 11, 1846, William E. Prince Army Letterbooks, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Prince to Assistant Commissary of Subsistence, August 25, 1846, ibid.; Prince to Assistant Commissary of Subsistence, August 26, 1846, ibid.; Prince to Assistant Commissary of Subsistence, September 1, 1846, ibid.; *Niles' National Register,* "Army of Occupation," August 8, 1846, 20, 368; Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 199.

[17] Christian Cribben to Unknown, July 23, 1846, typescript page 11, MWC; Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures,* 402;Johnson, *Marching with the Army of the West,* 87.

admiration of the Americans," and assured them, "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."[18] Kearny's men also captured a number of Mexican spies. Armijo had apparently dispatched them with the intention of spreading rumors and sewing discord among the Americans. However, Kearny showed the men every courtesy, and allowed them an unrestricted inspection of his men and material. The general then released the prisoners, telling them to return to Santa Fe posthaste and inform Armijo of all they had seen. Kearny hoped that their stories might act as a deterrent against any aggressive actions the governor might consider.[19]

Kearny spent his last days at Bent's Fort formulating proclamations and letters intended to convince the New Mexicans of the pointlessness of resisting his march. He informed the citizenry that he marched "for the purpose of seeking Union with and ameliorating the conditions of," the people of New Mexico. He urged them to remain peaceably at home. If they offered no resistance, the troops would not molest them. However, should they decide to take up arms, he would regard them as enemies and treat them accordingly.[20] Kearny also wrote directly to Armijo reiterating his pacific intentions and his warnings about resistance. He urged the governor not to resist and, "for the sake of humanity call upon you to

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[18]Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan*, 165; James Madison Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico, by the Forces of the United States, in the Years 1846 and 1847* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1847), 42; Connelley, *War with Mexico*, 181.
[19] Clarke, *Kearny*, 124-25; Frank S. Edwards, *A Campaign in New Mexico with Colonel Doniphan* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), 37; Cribben to Unknown, August 24, 1846, typescript page 14, Box 1, MWC.
[20] "Proclamation to the Citizens of New Mexico," July 31, 1846, Letterbook 45-6, KP.

submit to fate and to meet me with the same feelings of Peace and friendship which I now entertain for and offer to you and all those over whom you are Governor." Should he chose to resist, the blood of the citizens of New Mexico would be upon his head, and instead of blessing him, posterity would make the name of Manuel Armijo a byword for foolishness. Thus, informing his superiors that "I have done all in my power to obtain possession of the Country quietly and peaceably," Kearny marched the Army of the West south towards New Mexico.[21]

The army departed Bent's Fort on August 2, 1846, marching south along the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail. On the day of departure, the inhabitants of the fort lined its walls, wished the troops well, and again raised the enormous American flag in salute. The march southwest from the fort to Raton Pass was a difficult one. Along Timpas Creek, one officer complained that it seemed as if the area "had not been refreshed by a shower since the day's of Noah's flood." The sun had baked the ground rock hard. The soil was sandy, the grass spotty, and water hard to find. Hot winds from the west further dampened the spirits of the men.[22] Compounding the misery of the soldiers, the quartermaster cut rations, allotting each man only a half-pound of flour and three-eighths a pound of pork per day. Some officers and men blamed the Bents for misleading statements about the nature of the land and trail between the Arkansas and Raton. Along the Purgatoire River, H.S. Turner griped that the army, "found no grass on the bottom although

[21] Kearny to Manuel Armijo, August 1, 1846, Letterbook pages 46-7, KP; Kearny to Adjutant General, August 1, 1846, Letterbook, page 47, KP.
[22] Connelley, *War with Mexico*, 181-83 (quote is from page 183); Christian Cribben to Unknown, August 24, 1846, typescript page 16, Box 1, MWC.

assured by Mr. Bent that it would be abundant." Nevertheless, the army reached Raton Pass on August 8, and spent two days crossing over the treacherous terrain. Traveling into New Mexico by way of the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail had advantages for Kearny. Taking that route allowed him to utilize Bent's Fort as an outfitting point, furthermore, the Cimarron Route crossed more Mexican territory. Finally, many in New Mexico deemed the route over Raton Pass to be too difficult for a large party of men encumbered by wagons to cross successfully.[23]

While at the fort, Kearny secured the services of William Bent as a guide and scout for the march to Santa Fe. On July 31, Bent approached Kearny and offered his services, along with those of his employees. The two men proceeded to dicker over wages, and Bent left in a huff, convinced the general had vastly undervalued his talents. However, the following day, he returned, and reached an agreement with Kearny, who hired Bent and six of his men to accompany the column. Relations between William Bent and any government officials remained strained, however. Kearny's niggardliness, and his appropriation of the fort for the army's use rankled the trader. Despite the tension, Bent and his scouts left the fort on August 1, intending to scout as far as Raton.[24]

The most valuable service Bent and his scouts provided was their capture of numerous New Mexican scouts and spies. On August 10, Bent's men brought the

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[23] Edwards, *Campaign With Doniphan,* 36-7; Henry SmithTurner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner: With Stephen Watts Kearny to New Mexico and California, 1846-1847,* ed. Dwight L. Clarke (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 68; Cribben to Unknown, August 24, 1846, typescript page 16, Box 1, MWC; Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage,* 6.

[24] Clarke, *Kearny,* 130; Johnston, *Marching with the Army of the West,* 92; Turner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner,* 67;Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan,* 180; William H. Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth, in Missouri, to San Diego, in California* (Washington, D.C.: Wendell and van Benthuysen, 1848), 18.

first prisoners into the American camp. The information obtained from these scouts indicated that New Mexican authorities intended to resist Kearny as vigorously as possible. The men carried orders from the Prefect of Taos calling upon the local inhabitants to take up arms against the invaders, and threatening anyone who failed to do so with death. They also had instructions to halt every traveler they found along the roads, demand a passport, and detain anyone attempting to leave the province. William H. Emory wrote that, "mounted on diminutive asses," the Mexicans, "presented a ludicrous contrast by side of the big men and horses of the first dragoons." An encounter with another party of Americans confirmed Bent's information about Mexican intentions. This source, "confirms the news of Mr. Bent that there is some prospect of a fight, and it puts all in a good humor, and we set about making preparations for such an event. The probable force of the Mexicans is variously estimated, but we think we can meet any that will be brought against us."[25]

Bent's men continued to gather information as the army moved from Raton south towards Las Vegas. The scouts continued to bring captured Mexicans to the general. On August 11, they detained eight prisoners, four more on the thirteenth.[26] The information the Mexicans provided to Bent and Kearny was muddled. The men said they came from Las Vegas, and that six hundred men were assembled there, waiting to give battle. Another American traveler confirmed the story of the

[25]Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan,* 186-87 (quote is from 187); Tuner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner,* 70; Johnston, *Marching With the Army of the West,* 96; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance,* 21.
[26]Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan,* 188; Turner, *Journals of Henry Smith Turner,* 71; *Niles' National Register,* "Diary of an Officer of the Army of the West," October 10, 1846, 21, 90.

Mexicans at Las Vegas, and added that Armijo had marched out of Santa Fe with 12,000 men in order to fortify a canyon fifteen miles outside of Santa Fe. The reaction of the residents of Mora, north of Las Vegas, indicated otherwise to Christian Cribben. While Armijo may have raised an army, "The people were little disturbed at our approach and rather hailed it as a delivery from their oppressors, and protection from the danger threatening them from the surrounding Indian tribes."[27] Despite the rumors and information provided by the scouts, Kearny faced no opposition on the march to Las Vegas. One soldier, who itched for combat, dismissed the rumors as nothing but Mexican "braggadocio." Yet, stories of Mexican troops in the area persisted. On August 15, Bent's men informed Kearny that between one and two thousand Mexicans, armed with lances and bows and arrows awaited the general six miles outside of the town. This information proved faulty as well.[28]

Kearny ordered the populace of Las Vegas assembled in the town plaza to inform them of his pacific intentions. The United States had a just and longstanding claim to this portion of New Mexico, the general began. For this reason, he came peacefully. "We come among you as friends – not as enemies, as protectors not as conquerors. We come among you for your benefit – not for your injury," he informed the tense assembly. He assured the locals that the stories spread by meddlesome priests – that the soldiers would rape the women and brand

[27] Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 24; Johnston, *Marching With the Army of the West*, 98; Cribben to Unknown, August 24, 1846, typescript page 16, Box 1, MWC.
[28] Connelley, *War with Mexico*, 190; Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan*, 195; Marcellus Ball Edwards to Joseph Edwards, August 23, 1846, Box 1, MWC.

the men on their cheeks like mules – were false. Further, the government of the United States had no intention of interfering with the religious practices of the New Mexicans. "I am not a Catholic myself," the general informed them, " I was not brought up in that faith, but at least one-third of my army are Catholics, and I respect a good Catholic as much as a good Protestant." Kearny absolved the citizens of their allegiance to Armijo and Mexico, promising that the troops would respect private property and take "not a pepper, nor an onion," without compensation. He concluded with an ominous warning. Anyone who promised to remain peaceful, and then took up arms against the United States would hang. After administering an oath of allegiance to the still baffled audience, Kearny continued the march to the capital.[29]

Despite the consistent rumors of Mexican mobilization near Santa Fe, the Army of the West encountered no resistance from Armijo as it marched towards the capital. Kearny and his men approached Apache Canyon, just outside Santa Fe, with a mixture of anxiety and anticipation. The general's information stated that if Armijo made a stand, he would make it in this easily defensible position. However, no Mexicans appeared to challenge Kearny's approach. As they marched through the narrow defile, the Americans marveled at Armijo's lack of nerve. Had he wished to, the governor could have made a vigorous defense, holding up Kearny's advance indefinitely. Thomas Fitzpatrick wrote Robert Campbell incredulously, "Had Armijo acted as a brave and patriotic man…in defence of the country…and

[29] Proclamation to the People of Las Vegas, August 15, 1846, Papers of Governors Kearny, Bent, and Price, Box 13888, NMSRCA; Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan,* 201.

taken advantage of the strong position which the country afforded him together with the exhaustion of our men and horses after our long march he could certainly have given us hard work to perform and he would have now held a very different position in the opinion of his own people…but he has fallen to rise no more." Abraham Johnston concurred with Fitzpatrick's assessment. "Had Armijo's heart been as stout as the walls of rock which nature gave him to aid in the defense of his country, we might have sought in vain to force this passage," he concluded.[30] Casting about for an explanation, the Americans received one from another prisoner, the son of a high-ranking Mexican officer. The youth informed Kearny that his father and Governor Armijo had bickered with one another about strategy. The discord among the leadership, and a general apathy among the soldiers, led to a mutiny. Fearful for his life, the governor fled south, opening the road for Kearny to march into Santa Fe, unopposed.[31]

Over a year later, the *Santa Fe Republican* toasted August 18, 1846, the day the Army of the West marched into Santa Fe, as the day that "gave New Mexico political and religious liberty."[32] Despite the fact that some of his men found Santa Fe intensely disappointing – Marcellus Ball Edwards called it "a dirty filthy place built entirely of mud and flat roofed houses," with "women pissing right in the street in plain view" – the general was well pleased with his achievement. Kearny

[30] Connelley, *War with Mexico*, 61-2; Thomas Fitzpatrick to Robert Campbell, September 3, 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Platte Agency, Microfilm, Reel 889 (hereafter cited as UPA).
[31] Marcellus Ball Edwards to Joseph Edwards, August 23, 1846, Box 1, MWC; Cribben to Unknown, August 24, 1846, typescript page 18, Box 1, MWC.
[32] *Santa Fe Republican*, December 1, 1847.

wrote a colleague, "I have to inform you that on the 18th Instant, without firing a gun or spilling a drop of blood, I took possession of this city….Everything here is quiet and peaceable – the People now understand the advantages they are to derive from a change of Government and are much gratified with it." One of Kearny's soldiers was less overtly optimistic. The people, "although civil and well-disposed," were still quite shy, and gave little indication of receiving the Americans "as deliverers." Fortunately, the civil authorities appeared to be more welcoming, and the writer felt assured that this attitude "no doubt will influence the balance and bring them to the same state of mind."[33] Somewhat uncertain of the American's intentions, acting governor Donaciano Vigil sent an official to meet with Kearny. The general informed the New Mexicans that his men would in no way molest the local population. By August 24, the Army of the West was settled in the ancient city. "We are not as yet 'reveling in the Halls of the Montezuma's' but…the General has taken up his headquarters in the Palacio," Fitzpatrick wrote a friend in Missouri.[34]

Unsure of Armijo's ultimate intentions, Kearny had left little to chance. From Bent's Fort, he dispatched an envoy to the governor in an attempt to convince Armijo to acquiesce peacefully to the American invasion. In consultation with Senator Thomas Hart Benton, President Polk referred James Wiley Magoffin to Kearny. Magoffin was an excellent choice for the delicate mission. The eldest son

[33] Marcellus Ball Edwards to Joseph Edwards, August 23, 1846, Box 1, MWC; Kearny to John E. Wool, August 22, 1846, Letterbook page 51, KP; Gibson, *A Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan*, 210.
[34] William A. Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 13; Fitzpatrick to Campbell, August 24, 1846, UPA.

of a family of traders with long experience in Mexico, Magoffin had impeccable credentials. He had traded on his father's behalf in Mexico as early as 1825. In addition to a deep familiarity with Mexican society and business, the trader was fluent in Spanish, and married to the daughter of a prominent Chihuahuan family. Appointed Commercial Agent for the United States in Chihuahua and Durango in 1830, Magoffin served the American government off and on until 1846. The trader was also a gregarious host, "a man of wealth, with unlimited capacity for drinking wine and making friends," Hubert Howe Bancroft wrote.[35] A detachment of dragoons under the command of Philip St. George Cooke accompanied Magoffin to Santa Fe. Kearny chose Cooke in part because of the officer's actions during the 1843 Texan filibustering expeditions. His dispersal of the Texans, Kearny felt, might aid the envoys in their attempt to negotiate with Armijo. The peace party left Bent's Fort with the main body of the Army of the West on August 2, before pushing on ahead.[36]

Although it is impossible to state definitively that Magoffin's mission paved the way for Kearny's occupation of Santa Fe, the trader certainly felt that way. On August 12, 1846, Cooke and Magoffin held a private meeting with Armijo and his top advisors. Magoffin repeated the strength of Kearny's force, and reiterated the general's claims that he came with the best intentions. Cooke later wrote that the

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[35] Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, xiv-xxiv; James Wiley Magoffin to Secretary of War, April 4, 1849, typescript page 221, Box 8472 Folder 65, Ralph Emerson Twitchell Collection, NMSRCA; Philip St. George Cooke to Magoffin, February 21, 1849, typescript page 235, in ibid.; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, vol. 17 (San Francisco: History Company, 1889), 412.
[36] Clarke, *Kearny*, 127; Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail*, 73.

meeting proved that the governor and most of his advisors inclined towards peaceful accommodation. The one obstacle, the officer continued, was Colonel Diego Archuleta, an ardent nationalist who urged Armijo to resist. Magoffin mollified the young officer by stating that Kearny intended to annex New Mexico only as far as the eastern bank of the Rio Grande; Archuleta might keep control of the territory west of the river. Under whose authority Magoffin made this offer is unknown.[37] Perhaps Magoffin's stock of liquor helped ease the tensions. The trader traveled in style, and Cooke recalled that his stock of wine, "defied all human exigencies." In the meticulous claim he submitted to the United States government, Magoffin included a charge of $2,000 for entertaining Mexican officials, both in Santa Fe and further south, containing entries for a substantial amount of claret and champagne. Whether through cultural awareness, personal charm, the alcohol, or outright bribery, Magoffin was certain that he had played a pivotal role in the conquest of New Mexico. He wrote officials in Washington, D.C., "Bloodless possession of New Mexico was what President Polk wished. It was obtained through my means." He continued, "I went ahead of General Kearny and secured his unopposed march into Santa Fe. I went down the country and conciliated the people." Magoffin informed the government that he would be satisfied with a refund of $40,000 for his services; the official in charge of inspecting Magoffin's claims recommended that the government refund him to the

[37] Magoffin to William Marcy, August 26, 1846, typescript page 213-14, Box 8472 Folder 65, Twitchell Collection; Cooke to Magoffin, February 21, 1849, typescript page 235-36, in ibid.; Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, xxvi.

tune of $30,000.[38] Although it is impossible to prove that Armijo accepted a bribe in return for not resisting Kearny, it is probable that Magoffin's mission played a role in convincing the governor to leave the province peacefully.[39]

However, a host of other problems unique to New Mexico beset Armijo, which further undermined any inclination he may have had to fight the Army of the West. Lack of concrete evidence of American intentions hampered the governor's attempts to prepare New Mexico for invasion. News of the annexation of Texas by the United States reached Santa Fe on July 1, 1845. Such news, local officials realized, made war almost inevitable. The following month, Armijo issued a stirring circular throughout New Mexico urging the inhabitants to prepare for battle, and instructing militia officers to keep careful records of their men and weapons. By the autumn of 1845, New Mexico was practically cut off from the rest of the nation, and the flow of official correspondence all but ceased. Armijo received his last substantive communication from Mexico City on June 4, 1846, informing him that Mexico and the United States had broken off diplomatic relations, and that war was inevitable. Still, Armijo had no knowledge of the existence of a state of war until later that month. By July 9, 1846, an official from Taos informed Armijo that, "beyond doubt the invading forces of the United States are on the march to this Department," probably from the direction of Bent's Fort.

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[38] Philip St. George Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California; an historic and personal narrative* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1878),10; "Magoffin Claim," 220-29; Magoffin to George W. Crawford, April 4, 1849, typescript page 217, 221, Box 8472 Folder 65, Twitchell Collection.

[39] Bancroft, *Arizona and New Mexico*, 413, note 7; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 331; Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, xxv; Sister Mary Loyola, "The American Occupation of New Mexico, 1821-1852," *New Mexico Historical Review* 14 (1939), 162; Daniel Tyler, "Governor Armijo's Moment of Truth," *Journal of the West* 11 (1972), 313.

Even the United States Consul in Santa Fe, Manuel Alvarez, was unaware of Kearny's march until late-June. Once he received confirmation of this intelligence, Alvarez took it upon himself to consult with the governor. During a meeting with Armijo, the consul wrote that he used his, "best endeavors to convince him, that it would be better for himself and the people…to capitulate, and far preferable to become an inconsiderable portion of a powerful republic, than a considerable one of a nation continually engaged in revolutions, with no stability in the public administration of their affairs." Although he apparently had little success with the governor, Alvarez informed the Secretary of State that he had had better luck wooing Armijo's advisers.[40]

Beset with economic, military, and political problems, New Mexicans found it difficult to form a united front against the coming American invasion. Other issues loomed larger than the state of war between the two nations. Raids by hostile Indians, the threat of bankruptcy, and contentious relations with the central government in Mexico City posed as much of a threat to New Mexico as did the Army of the West. Politics divided New Mexicans at the highest level of society. Nationalists like Padre Martínez urged the central government to take aggressive steps to check the influence of the pro-American faction within the province. Those with mercantile interests tied to the United States, on the other hand, resented any attempts by Mexico City to dictate political or economic policy to the

[40] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 319-324; Donaciano Vigil, *Arms, Indians, and the Mismanagement of New Mexico: Donaciano Vigil, 1846,* ed. David J. Weber (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1986), x; José Pablo Gallego to Manuel Armijo, July 9, 1846, Box 5 Folder 237, Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino (hereafter cited as Ritch); Manuel Alvarez to James Buchanan, September 4, 1846, Consular Dispatches, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as CDSF).

frontier. Furthermore, the political instability of the Mexican core made it difficult to formulate coherent policy for the areas surrounding the national capital, let alone for the northernmost regions. Raiding by hostile Indians, particularly the Navajos, also commanded Armijo's attention. Despite the news of Kearny's march, the tenuous situation on New Mexico's western border diverted precious men and weapons away from Santa Fe. The specter of bankruptcy also hovered over the region; civic officials and soldiers alike went unpaid, causing some in the military to desert their posts, spreading dissension further throughout New Mexico. Kearny's approach merely compounded these preexisting problems. As rumors about the strength and size of his army reached Santa Fe, Armijo attempted to rally the fractious natives.[41]

The staunchest nationalists urged the governor to resist vigorously. On August 9, 1846, Armijo called a meeting in Santa Fe to determine a course of action. Many in the assembly preferred to submit peacefully to the American demands, but a more vocal faction headed by Miguel Pino, Diego Archuleta, and a number of priests urged resistance. Eyewitness reports from those later critical of the governor stated that, "after a long discussion in which all expressed their most patriotic sentiments…his excellency stated that he was ready to sacrifice his life and property in the defense of his country." Realizing no aid was forthcoming

[41] Vigil, *Arms, Indians,* x; Howard Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 60-1; Tyler, "Armijo's Moment of Truth, 307-11; Andrés Résendez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 241, 244; Launius, *Alexander Doniphan,* 197-98; Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids, and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 90-1.

from Chihuahua or Durango, the governor then called upon the Assembly to raise one thousand pesos to defray the costs of defense.[42]

Upon receiving accurate news concerning the size of Kearny's force, Armijo mustered the entire militia and marched to Apache Canyon, where he began defensive preparations. Four thousand men, sans those who contributed between $20 and $100 to the governor, assembled at the canyon. The militia turned out despite the danger the Navajos still posed to the frontiers of the province. Upon arrival at the canyon, Armijo called together the Departmental Assembly and again inquired whether they should fight or not. The politicians answered in the affirmative, as did the militia leaders. Witnesses stated that the governor then decided to disband the militia and face the Americans with regulars only, news that was "received with shouts and acclamations of pleasure." However, as soon as the militia retired, Armijo countermanded his previous statement about standing to fight, and fled ignominiously towards Chihuahua. The governor's abrupt action mortified many of his subordinates, as well as the soldiers. An old story goes that when the people attempted to stop Armijo from fleeing, the governor threw a handful of gold and silver coins onto the ground and fled while the crowd jostled for the money. Despite the attempts by hardliners to rally the troops in the face of Armijo's retreat, Manuel Alvarez informed the Secretary of State that the men

[42] Marc Simmons, *The Little Lion of the Southwest: A Life of Manuel Antonio Chaves* (Chicago: Sage Books, 1973), 89, 91; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 255; Tyler, "Armijo's Moment of Truth," 312; Juan Felipe Ortiz, et al. to José Joaquín Herrera Concerning the Conduct of Manuel Armijo during the Entrance of the Americans in New Mexico," September 26, 1846, Box 6 Folder 243, Ritch; Minge, "Frontier Problems," 331.

dispersed in disgust at the conduct of their leaders.[43] In view of the obstacles he faced as governor, combined with the martial superiority of Kearny's force, Armijo's withdrawal was probably the most practical course of action. The retreat certainly forestalled bloodshed, and possibly a drawn-out guerrilla war.[44]

Shortly after his arrival in Santa Fe, Kearny began the process of wooing local leaders and the construction of a new government. On August 22, he issued a general proclamation to the citizens of Santa Fe, repeating his promises to respect the property, beliefs, and persons of all New Mexicans cooperating with the new regime. He also stressed the importance of forming a government to replace the old one.[45] In order to reinforce his message of friendship, the general held a lavish ball for local luminaries at the Palace of the Governors. Magoffin wrote, "The palace was crowded and many bottles of generous wine was drunk," adding that the festivities were, "universally attended by all the respectable citizens of the city, and passed off in handsome style."[46] Following the celebration, Kearny put Doniphan to work drafting a new government for the territory. Doniphan worked closely with David Waldo, Francis Preston Blair, Jr., and Charles Bent in crafting the new laws and governing structure. The men drew on a wide range of sources: the laws of both Mexico and the United States, the state of Texas-Coahuila, and the organic

[43] Lamar, *Far Southwest,* 61; Ortiz to Herrera, "Report," Ritche; Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico,* 12-13; Simmons, *Little Lion*, 92-3; Alvarez to Buchanan, September 4, 1846, CDSF. Magoffin, on the other hand, wrote the Secretary of War claiming that Armijo intended to fight and that his subordinates urged the withdrawal. See Magoffin to William Marcy, August 26, 1846, typescript page 214-15, Box 8472 Folder 65, Twitchell Collection.
[44] Minge, "Frontier Problems," 332; Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico,* 12; Bancroft, *Arizona and New Mexico,* 414; Vigil, *Arms, Indians,* xvi-xvii; Cooke, *Conquest,* 32.
[45] "Proclamation to the Inhabitants of New Mexico," August 22, 1846, Box 6 Folder 242, Ritch; Kearny to Adjutant General, August 24, 1846, Letterbook pages 52-3, KP.
[46] Magoffin to Marcy, August 26, 1846, typescript page 215, Twitchell Collection.

law of the Missouri Territory. Manuel Alvarez translated the laws into Spanish for distribution to the public.[47] The new laws created a government with an executive branch consisting of the governor and his secretary, a territorial legislature elected by the citizens, and three judges for a superior court. The laws also created counties, and appointed justices of the peace, sheriffs, and tax collectors. The Kearny Code, as it came to be known, also mandated the separation of Church and State, called for a standing militia, direct taxation, and a system of public schools, all revolutionary concepts to the New Mexicans.[48]

The Kearny Code and the men the general appointed to lead the new American government caused great discontent among many New Mexicans. In June 1846, the Secretary of War had advised Kearny regarding civil appointments in New Mexico. "In performing this duty," Marcy wrote, "it would be wise and prudent to continue in their employment such of the existing officers as are known to be friendly to the United States, and will take the oath of allegiance to them." Manuel Alvarez suggested the same approach to his superiors at the Department of State in early September. He wrote Buchanan, "a good portion of the Public Offices should be filled by native citizens, all this will contradict the thousand reports that are in constant circulation among the poor ignorant dupes, that we intend to make slaves of them, or at least grind them into the dust." The consul recommended that these men remain in place for a couple of years until the rest of

[47] Launius, *Alexander Doniphan,* 113-14; Loyola, "American Occupation," 166; Kearny to Adjutant General, September 22, 1846, Letterbook page 62, KP; "Receipt," October 20, 1846, Box 14023 Folder 29, L. Bradford Prince Papers, NMSRCA.
[48] Launius, *Alexander Doniphan,* 115; Lamar, *Far Southwest,* 64-6.

the populace learned the rudiments of republican government. Another observer reported that the New Mexicans themselves seemed willing to fill offices in the new government. Men that had been "eager to fight the battles of their country, would now lay down their arms in order to fill a petty office in Santa Fe."[49]

Kearny's appointments pleased few New Mexicans. Americans and American sympathizers dominated the highest offices: Charles Bent became governor, Donaciano Vigil secretary, Blair the United States District Attorney, Charles Blumner treasurer, Eugene Leitensdorfer auditor, and Joab Houghton, Carlos Beaubien, and José Otero justices of the superior court. Naively, the general snubbed the leading families of New Mexico, the Senas, Archuletas, Ortizes, Delgados, Pinos, Pareas, and Chavezes. Even the appointment of Vigil and Otero to the new government could not salve the wounded egos of the local aristocracy. Nationalists viewed both men as collaborators with the pro-American faction. Had Kearny had more experience with New Mexico politics, had he bothered to consult those outside of Bent's circle, the general would have found a great deal of resentment and discontent.[50]

The Americans, of course, were pleased with the new government functionaries. "The choice of Mr. Bent as governor is a most excellent one," Christian Cribben wrote. No one else, in his opinion, was as suited as Bent to the

[49] Myra Ellen Jenkins, "Rebellion Against American Occupation of New Mexico, 1846-1848," 14, Box 6 Folder 148, Dorothy Woodward Collection, NMSRCA; Marcy to Kearny, June 3, 1846, War Department, Reel 26; Alvarez to Buchanan, September 4, 1846, CDSF; Fitzpatrick to Campbell, September 3, 1846, UPA.

[50] List of Civil Appointments, September 22, 1846, Letterbook 61-2, KP; Launius, *Alexander Doniphan*, 116; Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 64-5 (quote is from 64); Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 350-1; Jenkins, Rebellion," 14-15, Woodward Collection.

task of governing New Mexico. In addition to his long experience as a trader, the local population seemed to like him immensely. Of the other officials, the soldier concluded, "The appointment of Don Asiano Vigil is said to be a popular one indeed so are all the appointments."[51] Lieutenant James W. Abert, who had spent much time at Bent's Fort, wrote, "I called upon Governor Bent, who, to all the qualifications necessary to his office, possesses those of a long residence in this country, a constant intercourse with the people, and an intimate knowledge of their language and character." Early twentieth-century historians agreed with these assessments. Paul Walter, for example, wrote glowingly of Bent's "tact, prudence, and cordiality," as well as his knowledge of local language and culture. The New Mexicans, Walter went on, adored Bent, loved and trusted him.[52]

For many Anglo observers, the arrival of Kearny's army and the appointment of the new government promised a bright future for an appreciative local population. Kearny brought order, liberty, peace, and the prospect of future prosperity, they enthused. So long as the American flag flew over Santa Fe, it flew as a beacon of hope for a previously downtrodden and benighted population. Less than a week after his arrival, Kearny wrote his superiors in Washington that, "The people of the Territory are now perfectly tranquil and can be easily kept so – The intelligent portion know the advantages they are to derive from the change of government and express their satisfaction at it." Other letters composed within the

[51] Cribben to Unknown, September 26, 1846, typescript pages 25-7 (quotes are from pages 25 and 27), Box 1, MWC.
[52] James W. Abert, "Examination of New Mexico," 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 41, 447-48; Paul A. Walter, "The First Civil Government of New Mexico under the Stars and Stripes," *New Mexico Historical Review* 8 (1933), 100, 103 (quote is from 103).

same week repeated Kearny's optimistic assessment. "Kearny is fast reaping for himself a crown of unfading laurels for his affable and kind treatment of the people, and the wise and statesmanlike policy which he pursues," Cribben wrote. Magoffin agreed wholeheartedly with Cribben's assessment, and stressed Kearny's "mild and persuasive manners," and his promises of protection from Indian raiders.[53]

Throughout the autumn, the occupiers radiated confidence in the efficacy of their mission and the satisfaction of the local populace. Thomas Edwards wrote a relative in Missouri that the New Mexicans "appear perfectly friendly and I believe the majority of them are highly pleased, if you meet one of them he will say…'you Americana me Americana too.'" By the middle of September Kearny was confident enough of his position that he wrote to the Adjutant General that the only source of disquiet in the entire region was the continued raiding by Utes and Navajos. The general's subordinates continued to marvel at his abilities. It seemed that peace and tranquility reigned – except on the frontiers – and that, "The work is over, the war ended and 'General Estefan Kearny is great and Don Carlos is his Prophet.'" The Americans told themselves that they brought justice, industry, thrift, honesty, generous Christianity, and protection in degrees never before experienced in New Mexico. Order overcame anarchy, and the development of republican political institutions continued apace. These praiseworthy actions and

[53] Bernard DeVoto, *1846: The Year of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, Co., 1943; reprint, New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 13; Edwards, *Marching With the Army of the West*, 222-23;William R. Franklin to Robert H. Miller, January 27, 1847, Folder 2, Miller Papers, MHS; Kearny to Adjutant General, August 24, 1846, Letterbook page 53, KP; Cribben to Unknown, August 24, 1846, typescript page 19, MWC; Magoffin to Marcy, August 26, 1846, typescript pages 215-16, Twitchell Collection.

characteristics, Americans gushed, did more credit to Kearny and the Army of the West than ten victories over Mexican arms.[54]

[54] Fitzpatrick to Campbell, September 3, 1846, UPA; Thomas L. Edwards to Joseph D. Edwards, September 15, 1846, Box 1, MWC; Kearny to Adjutant General, September 16, 1846, Letterbook page 57, KP; Cribben to Unknown, September 26, 1846, typescript page 20, MWC; Connelley, *War with Mexico*, 206, 246-47.

Chapter 13 - Backlash: 1846-1847

The consolidation of American power over New Mexico provoked an intense nationalistic backlash in late 1846 and early 1847. Despite the glowing accounts of the region's passivity, the actions of the occupying forces, combined with discontent over Kearny's civil appointments boded ill for the stability of the new government. In January 1847 the pent up tensions burst into violence in Taos. On January 19, nationalist New Mexicans aided by Indians from the Taos Pueblo killed Charles Bent and a number of his key collaborators. The rhetoric of the rebels, combined with their careful selection of targets indicated their deep antipathy against the American regime in general and the pro-Bent faction in particular. The conquest of New Mexico only added to the hatred and mistrust of Bent and his allies that dated back to at least 1841.

Despite the optimism that radiated from the correspondence of Kearny and his men, a strong undercurrent of discontent was still evident. War, and rumors of war, still threatened to upset the tranquility of the new American province. The keenest observers recognized that demagogues might still sway a "fickle" and "ignorant" populace to the undoing of the region.[1] If unrest came, many Americans

[1]Thomas Fitzpatrick to Robert Campbell, August 24, 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Platte Agency, Microfilm, Reel 889 (hereafter cited as UPA); Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The History of the Military Occupation of the Territory of New Mexico from 1846 to 1851 by the Government of the United States, together with biographical sketches of men prominent in the conduct of the government during that period* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Company, 1909), 57, 60; William Elsey Connelley, *War with Mexico, 1846-1847: Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California* (Topeka: Published by the author, 1907), 64, 207; Alvarez to Buchanan, September 4, 1846, Consular Dispatches, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as CDSF).

believed that it would spread from the actions and rhetoric of New Mexico's Roman Catholic clergy. Upstanding republican Protestants that they were, Kearny's men feared and loathed the Church of Rome for its supposed bigotry, backwardness, and opposition to enlightened political philosophy. Recognizing that an overwhelmingly Protestant army might cause the Catholic population great distress, Polk attempted to secure the services of a respected and well-placed churchman to accompany Kearny and allay any fears the New Mexicans might have. The army never implemented the suggestion. Even on the march to Santa Fe, the rank and file of the Army of the West speculated upon the craft and guile of the New Mexican padres. Indeed, they were more to be feared than any soldiers the Americans might encounter. Cribben speculated that, "The worst enemy whose movements we shall have to counteract will, in all probability, be an ignorant and fanatical clergy, disposed to oppose us from motives entirely their own." Alvarez warned his superiors of the necessity of keeping a strong garrison in New Mexico, "as well to guard against the machinations of intriguing clergy, as to meet any armed force from the interior." Despite Magoffin's assurances to the Secretary of War that Kearny's meeting with local prelates had allayed all of their fears, suspicion remained.[2]

[2] Robert W. Johanssen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 167; Marcy to Kearny, May 27, 1846, War Department, Reel 27; Cribben to Unknown, July 23, 1846, typescript pages 10-12 (quote is from page 12), Mexican War Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (hereafter cited as MWC and MHS, respectively); Alvarez to Buchanan, September 4, 1846, CDSF; Magoffin to Marcy, August 26, 1846, typescript page 215, Ralph Emerson Twitchell Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe (hereafter cited as Twitchell Collection and NMSRCA, respectively).

New Mexicans did not need plotting priests or American defeats to stir their anger against the occupying force; the actions of the volunteers themselves exacerbated tensions over the course of the autumn of 1846. Having little respect for the New Mexican people or their customs, the Missourians garrisoning Santa Fe soon showed themselves to be rude occupants. Although volunteers proved their fighting abilities throughout the Mexican-American War, their lack of discipline and their strained interactions with the civilian population limited their effectiveness as garrison troops. Over the course of the war, complaints about outrages committed by volunteer soldiers filled the accounts of the Army regulars. Following the departures of Kearny and Doniphan, Sterling Price had a difficult time controlling his men. Even the officer corps was divided between Whigs and Democrats, making the enforcement of discipline more difficult.[3] The condescending attitude most of the soldiers exhibited towards the locals helped matters not at all. Christian Cribben thought them juvenile, "but children unaccustomed to be governed or to govern themselves," he felt. Still, he lamented the behavior of his comrades. They were idle, insubordinate, and undisciplined. "I do not exaggerate at all when I say that not a day passes but what some outrage, some crime is committed by the American soldier, whose victims are usually

[3] James A. Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos: The Revolt of 1847* (Plano: Republic of Texas Press, 1995), 96; Howard Lamar, *The Far Southwest,1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 66-7; Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the U.S.-Mexican War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 84, 94, 120; James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 119-21; Jenkins, Myra Ellen Jenkins, "Rebellion Against America Occupation of New Mexico, 1846-1848" 15, Dorothy Woodward Collection, NMSRCA; Robert E. Shalhope, *Sterling Price: Portrait of a Southerner* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 62.

Mexicans. The state of things here is indeed deplorable," he lamented.[4] Other observers confirmed Cribben's characterization of the volunteers as swaggering bullies. They went about letting everyone know how they were "the freest and 'smartest people in creation,'" Lieutenant Jeremy Gilmer complained. British writer George Frederick Ruxton described "Crowds of drunken volunteers," filling the streets, "brawling and boasting," of their superiority. Shortly thereafter, he added, "I found all over New Mexico that the most bitter feeling and most determined hostility existed against the Americans, who certainly in Santa Fe and elsewhere have not been very anxious to conciliate the people, but by their bullying and overbearing demeanor towards them, have in a great measure been the cause of the hatred, which shortly after broke out in the organized rising of the northern part of the province."[5]

Some time around December 1, prominent New Mexican nationalists alienated by the actions of the new regime began holding secret meetings to discuss a plan of action. The conspiracy, "seems to originate with a few men of desperate fortunes, who wish to expel us that they may take the Government in hand," wrote Richard Smith Elliott. Anglo accounts recorded rumors of "secret cabals" held in shadowy places – a rented room, or the roof of an abandoned building. American

[4] Cribben to Unknown, September 26, 1846, typescript page 23, MWC; Ibid., October 20, 1846, typescript pages 29-30, MWC (quote is from page 30).
[5] Letter of Jeremy Gilmer, quoted in George Winston Smith and Charles Judah, eds., *Chronicles of the Gringos: The U.S. Army in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 127; George Frederick Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1973), 189, 197. Adding to the problems, one soldier recalled that the troops brought a measles epidemic down upon the population of Santa Fe. However, this is the only reference I have found to the disease. See Frank S. Edwards, *A Campaign in New Mexico with Colonel Doniphan* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), 47.

sources, corroborated by the testimony of native New Mexicans years after the fact, listed the primary conspirators. These sources named many of the most prominent men in the territory on this list. Included were Santiago Armijo, Tomás Ortíz, José María Sanchez, Agustín Durán, and Manuel Pino. Diego Archuleta, Nicolas Pino, and Manuel Antonio Chaves initially acted as leaders in formulating the revolutionary plan. Each man had strong nationalist credentials. Archuleta, apparently dissatisfied with Kearny's refusal to give up the west bank of the Rio Grande, had served as a militia captain during the Texas troubles of 1841, a Deputy to the Mexican Congress, and Armijo's second in command during Kearny's invasion. Pino was the son of Don Pedro Pino, one of the most prominent politicians in New Mexican history to this point, as well as a firm advocate of defending Apache Canyon. Chaves was a seasoned Indian fighter who fought with Archuleta against the Texans, and served under Armijo at Apache Canyon. Ralph Emerson Twitchell, the most ardent American historian of early New Mexico also states, without evidence, that Padre Martínez collaborated with these men. At some point, the ardor of Chaves and Pino cooled considerably. Chaves biographer, Marc Simmons, writes that the men voiced their opposition against "unbridled bloodshed, and when they could not carry the others with their arguments for moderation became lukewarm to the intrigue."[6]

[6] Richard Smith Elliott, *The Mexican War Correspondence of Richard Smith Elliott,* eds. Mark L. Gardner and Marc Simmons (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997),133, 135; Connelley, *War with Mexico,* 511;Twitchell, *Military Occupation,* 122, 239-248, 298-308, 310-21; M.F. Sena to Ralph Emerson Twitchell, no date, Box 8474 Folder 173, Twitchell Collection; Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos,* 98; Marc Simmons, *The Little Lion of the Southwest: A Life of Manuel Antonio Chaves* (Chicago: Sage Books, 1973), 97.

The initial plan called for the New Mexicans to rise up on December 19. The conspirators reached this decision on December 15, at the home of Tomás Ortiz. After further deliberation, however, the men rescheduled the date for December 24, "when the soldiers and garrison would be indulging in wine and feasting, and scattered about through the city at the fandangos, not having their arms in their hands," according to one Anglo. The rebels would meet at the parish church in Santa Fe. There, they would ring the church bell as a predetermined signal for the assault. They planned to divide themselves into groups, seize the American artillery, and capture Governor Bent and Colonel Price. Anglo sources are more lurid; they claimed that the conspirators planned to kill every American in the area, along with those New Mexicans perceived as collaborators.[7]

The plan never came to fruition, for someone tipped off the American officials. Bent himself was vague on the source of the plotting when he wrote James Buchanan on December 26. The governor noted simply, "I received information from a Mexican, friendly to our government, that a conspiracy was on foot among the native Mexicans, having for its object the expulsion of the US troops and the civil authorities from the territory."[8]

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[7] Twitchell, *Military Occupation,* 122-23; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 20, DWC; Connelley, *War with Mexico,* 512-13 (quote is from 513); Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and American Conquest, 1806-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 381; Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos,* 96.

[8] Connelley, *War with Mexico,* 93, 513 (the quote about the "woman of loose habits" comes from 93). On Doña Tules, see Janet Lecompte, "La Tules and the Americans," *Arizona and the West* 20 (1978), 227; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 21, DWC; Twitchell, *Military Occupation,* 314. On Sanchez and Duran, see Sena to Twitchell, Twitchell Collection. For Vigil, see *Santa Fe Republican,* December 1, 1847. See also Charles Bent to James Buchanan, December 26, 1846, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 70, page 17.

Bent and Price mobilized their forces swiftly to quash the planned rising. Upon receiving the news of the plot from the "friendly" Mexican, Bent and Price moved to round up the conspirators. "I immediately brought into requisition every means in my power to ascertain who were the movers in the rebellion," Bent wrote Buchanan. Elliott praised the governor who had been, "very active in ferreting out this conspiracy," primarily on account of his wide network of contacts, "sources of information which but few other men in the country possess." Had anyone but Bent held the governor's chair, Elliott speculated, the outcome might have been much worse. The soldier saved some praise for Price. The colonel, "has displayed promptness in all his movements since this conspiracy [began]," Elliott concluded. Bent and Price's sweep of Santa Fe netted "seven of the secondary conspirators," the governor informed his superiors in Washington. The Americans arrested Chaves and the Pinos as they sat outside the Exchange Hotel in the capital.[9]

In the wake of the aborted rising, an uneasy calm settled over Santa Fe during the Christmas holiday. Bent turned the arrested conspirators over to Price for trial believing that, "these persons might be dealt with more summarily and expeditiously than they could have been by the civil authorities." According to Kearny, all New Mexican citizens were now American citizens, ergo anyone rising in arms against the United States was guilty of treason. The defense attorney for Chaves, a Missouri lawyer who commanded two companies of infantry, argued that as long as a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico it was illegal to charge Chaves with treason. Only Congress had the authority to

[9] Bent to Buchanan, ibid.; Elliott, *Mexican War Correspondence,* 135; Simmons, *Little Lion,* 98.

determine the legal status of those in conquered provinces. Technically, Chaves was still a Mexican citizen. The court agreed, acquitting and releasing him.[10] Although Bent noted to his superiors that the aborted uprising made necessary the continuance of a military presence in Santa Fe, he dismissed the leaders of the plot. They "cannot be said to be men of much standing," he wrote Buchanan. Writing of the December events weeks later, perhaps with the luxury of hindsight, Price differed with the governor's assessment of the conspirators. The colonel wrote the Adjutant General that, "a full investigation proved that many of the most influential persons in the northern part of this territory were engaged in the rebellion." Regardless of the social status of the conspirators, Price put his men on high alert, declaring martial law, and a curfew.[11] The unease created by the conspiracy did not keep the governor from enjoying the holiday, however. On the evening of December 26, Bent hosted a lavish banquet at the Palace of the Governors, complete with shad, oysters, preserves, and "delightful champagne in the greatest abundance." The governor seemed jovial. He joked and yarned with a former company employee who "noticed that he was unusually gay and cheerful, telling me many funny stories about his recent experiences in his character of governor over that semi-civilized community."[12]

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[10] Connelley, *War with Mexico,* 519; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 381-82; Bent to Buchanan, December 26, 1846, H. ex.doc. 70, 17; Simmons, *Little Lion,* 100-101.
[11] Bent to Buchanan, H.ex.do. 70, 17-18 (quote is from page 17); Price to Adjutant General, February 15, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 520; Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos,* 97; Shalhope, *Sterling Price,* 60-1.
[12] James W. Abert, *Western America in 1846-1847,* ed. John Galvin (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1966), 75; Abert, "Examination of New Mexico," 512-13 (quote is from 512); James B. Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West: Personal Adventures of a Border Mountain Man; Comprising Hunting and Trapping Adventures with Kit Carson and Others; Captivity and Life Among the*

Taos became the epicenter of anti-American activity after the New Year. Despite the insistence of Anglo reminiscences that the inhabitants of Rio Arriba maintained an outward show of peace and satisfaction, trouble brewed just below the placid surface. Regardless of their tenuous ties to Mexico City, both the elites and non-elites of the Rio Arriba bridled at the expansion of American influence before the war, and Kearny's imposition of the new order the previous autumn. The period between Kearny's entrance into Santa Fe and the outbreak of violence in Taos was a transitional period. The old order was gone, but the Americans had yet to consolidate complete control over the province. The revolutionaries in northern New Mexico may have felt that the proper time had come to rise up against the Americans.[13] Longstanding grievances, as well as new rumors contributed to the unrest. The Martínez faction, of course, resented the Bents, and had opposed their commercial and land acquisition schemes for years. The Pueblo Indians also had long memories. Thomas Chavez speculates that the 1843 Texan expeditions predisposed the local Indians towards anti-Americanism. The majority of those who fell in battle with Warfield's men had been residents of the Taos

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Comanches; Services Under Doniphan in the War with Mexico, and in the Mexican War Against the French; Desperate Combats with Apaches, Grizzly Bears, etc., etc. (Hartford: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1872), 138.

[13] Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 154-55; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* with an introduction by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 185; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 266;Paul A. Walter, "The First Civil Government in New Mexico under the Stars and Stripes," *New Mexico Historical Review* 8 (1933), 103; Sister Mary Loyola, "The American Occupation of New Mexico, 1821-1852," *New Mexico Historical Review* 14 (1939), 167-69; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 13-14, 18, DWC; Andrés Résendez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 256; Rebecca McDowell Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy: Mexican-Anglo Intermarriage in New Mexico, 1821-1846* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1982), 45.

Pueblo, and it is possible that they believed that the Americans had been in cahoots with the Texans. More immediately, rumors circulated that the American government intended to levy new taxes, and that the Anglos planned to encroach upon, or perhaps confiscate outright, tribal lands. George Frederick Ruxton found the Americans "in bad odor" throughout northern New Mexico following the New Year.[14]

Bent recognized that tensions still existed, and before he left Santa Fe for his home in Taos, he attempted to mollify further the local population. Prior to his departure north, he issued a proclamation, urging the New Mexicans to reject those clamoring for revolution. He wrote,

> You are now governed by new statutory laws and you also have the free government promised to you. Do not abuse the great liberty which is vouchsafed you by it, so you may gather the abundant fruits which await you in the future. Those who are blindly opposed, as well as those whose vices have made them notorious, are the ambitious persons who aspire to the best offices, also those persons who dream that mankind should bow to their whims, having become satisfied that they cannot find emplohyment in the offices which are usually given to men of probity and honesty, exasperated have come forth as leaders of a revolution against the present government….Their treason was disconvered in time and smothered at its birth. Now they are wandering about and hiding from people, thereby causing uneasiness, and they still hold to their ruinous plans….There is still another pretext with which they want to alarm you and that is the falsehood that troops are coming from the interior in order to re-conquer the country. What help could the department of Chihuahua, which is torn by factions and reduced to insignificance afford you? Certainly none….I urge you to turn a deaf ear to such false doctrines and to remain quiet, attending to your domestic affairs, so that you may enjoy under the law, all the blessings of peace, and by rallying around the government, call attention to the improvements which you deem material to

[14] Thomas E. Chávez, *Manuel Alvarez, 1794-1856: A Southwestern Biography* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 114; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 18, DWC; Lamar, *Far Southwest,* 67; Résendez, *Changing National Identities,* 257; Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains,* 206-207 (quote is from 206).

> the advancement of the country and that by doing so you may enjoy all the prosperity which your best friend wishes you.[15]

The storm broke over Taos on January 19, 1847. The governor encountered discontent the moment he arrived in Taos on the eighteenth. A crowd greeted him, demanding that he release three Pueblo Indians incarcerated in the town jail on charges of theft. Bent angrily refused to free the prisoners, and pushed through the crowd to his home. The following morning, a crowd approached the jail, calling upon Sheriff Stephen Lee to release the men. Vastly outnumbered, Lee prepared to acquiesce to their demands when Cornelio Vigil, prefect of Taos and staunch Bent ally, arrived at the jailhouse. Vigil, "came in and objected, denouncing the Indians as thieves and scoundrels." The crowd charged forward, killed the prefect, "and cut his body to pieces, severing all the limbs from it," before releasing the prisoners.[16] Thus, the Taos Revolt began spontaneously. However, the violence that followed was the result of years of pent up rage, rage against the American faction and their collaborators, rage against the newly imposed government, and rage against those who threatened the land holdings of the local population.[17]

From the jail, the crowd proceeded to the governor's home. Around six o'clock in the morning, they assembled outside Bent's house, shouting for him to come out and show himself. Oral reminiscences state that the members of the crowd called out that, "no 'American' would be left alive in New Mexico." The most complete eyewitness account of what followed comes from Bent's daughter,

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[15] *Santa Fe New Mexican,* March 2, 1910, Prince Papers; Charles Bent, "Proclamation to the Inhabitants of the Territory of New Mexico," January 5, 1847, Inez Sizer Cassidy Collection, Box 13694, Folder 5,NMSRCA (hereafter cited as Cassidy Collection).
[16] Elliott, *Mexican War Correspondence,* 139.
[17] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 386.

Teresina. Five years old at the time of her father's death, Teresina first related the events of January 19 in an 1881 interview with Army officer and amateur ethnographer John Gregory Bourke. Throughout the testimony, she portrayed her father in the best light possible, stressing that he had always had good relations with the locals, and that their actions caught him by complete surprise.[18] The family was in bed "when the Mesicans and Indians came to the house," she recalled. The crowd began trying to break down the doors, while others clambered onto the roof. Bent arose and went out to meet them, asking them what they wanted; "we want your head gringo, we do not want for any of you gringos to govern us, as we have come to kill you," they shouted. Baffled, the governor tried to remind them of his past kindnesses. Had he not always been a good neighbor? Had he not treated them when they were sick, and never charged for his services? They shouted back that that made no difference to them, and opened fire on him. Accounts differ as to the sequence of events that followed. Teresina remembered that her mother implored Bent to mount the horse hitched in the corral behind the house and ride to safety. He rebuffed her, saying that it was unseemly for a governor to flee his own home. Besides, if he was to die he preferred to die with his family. George Bird Grinnell tells of a more bellicose Ignacia Bent. He claimed that she brought Bent a brace of pistols, and urged him to defend himself.

[18] "The True Story," LAFRF; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 176; Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 74; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 387; Account of Teresina Bent Scheurich, Box 8342 Folder 13, Jaramillo-Bent-Scheurich Papers, NMSRCA (hereafter cited as JBSP).

Bent allegedly replied, "No, I will not kill any of them; for the sake of you, my wife, and you, my children. At present my life is all these people wish."[19]

The crowd surged forward as the governor retreated into his house. While Bent had attempted to calm the crowd, the women in the house began a frantic attempt to escape. With the aid of their Indian servant, they dug desperately at the adobe walls, eventually punching a hole through into the next house, whose occupant "with all her strength rendered…assistance, though she was a Mexican." As the men poured into the house, Bent again appealed to them, without effect. One of the Indians drew a bead on Ignacia Bent, but Teresina wrote that, just before he fired, the family's Indian servant lept in front of her mistress, took the ball in the chest, and died. Wounded in the head with arrows, Charles Bent attempted to climb through the tunnel into the next house, "but when he was going through the arrows that he had in his head hurt him so he pull them out, and crushed them against the wall," Teresina remembered. Multiple sources agree that, once in the adjoining room, Bent called for paper and pen and began to write something. Before he could finish, his assailants poured into the room. A bullet struck him in the chest, knocking him to the floor. As he lay there, a Pueblo Indian stepped forward, snatched up one of the governor's pistols, and shot him in the face. Then, according to Grinnell, "They took his scalp, stretched it on a board with brass nails, and carried it through the streets in triumph." Dick Wooton gave a more lurid account of Bent's mutilation. Wooton recalled that the Indians

[19] Account of Teresina Bent Scheurich, JBSP; George Bird Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-2, George Bird Grinnell Collection, ANC.

decapitated the governor and paraded his entire head through the streets of Taos, "to terrify women and children and those Mexicans whom it was thought were not in full sympathy with the rebellion."[20]

The crowd then turned its attention to the cowering family. Unconfirmed testimony states that the crowd intended to kill the women and children, but that Rumalda Luna and Josefa Jaramillo fell to their knees and begged for the lives of the family. Teresina recalled that, "some of the crowd wanted to kill all the family, but some of the Mesicans said no, women folks and children we must not kill, but we will not help them for anything." Bent's friend William Boggs, whose wife was present, informed his brother that a Mexican woman saved her life by draping a serape over her as she cowered in the corner. The crowd, bent upon looting the house, paid her no attention. The men then left the family who, still clad in their nightclothes, remained huddled in the house throughout that day and into the following night. Early the next morning, a friend brought them food, clothes, and blankets. Two days later, the family escaped to the home of Juan Catalina Valdez. They stayed at the Valdez home until Sterling Price and his soldiers arrived from Santa Fe, nearly two weeks later. Another friendly local

[20] "Account of Teresina Bent Scheurich," JBSFP; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 176; Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," Autry National Center; William M. Boggs, "The W.M. Boggs Manuscript about Bent's Fort, Kit Carson, the Fur Trade, and Life among the Indians," ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado Magazine* 7 (1930), 59; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 160. In the most notable full-length study of the revolt, James Crutchfield cites Wooton as proof of Bent's decapitation. Although numerous sources agree that Bent was scalped, Wooton's account is the only one I have found that says Bent's head was cut off. See Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos,* 105.

took Josefa and Rumalda into her home, disguised them as Indian women, and set them to work grinding corn.[21]

From the governor's home, the crowd fanned out throughout the town, searching for other American officials and their New Mexican collaborators. Price wrote his superiors, "It appeared to be the object of the insurrectionists to put to death every American and every Mexican who had accepted office under the American government." Lee escaped the riot at the jail, but the assailants quickly caught up with him and killed him on the roof of his home. The rebels trapped James W. Leal, scalped him alive, and paraded him through the streets of Taos, prodding him with lances. Tiring of this, they threw him into a ditch, where he lay for hours until a Mexican dispatched him with a bullet.[22] Had Carlos Beaubien been in Taos he certainly would have died. Unable to find him, the Indians searched for his son, Narciso. Garrard, a recent acquaintance of Beaubien, stated that the young man and an Indian servant fled, either to the family outhouse or to the stable, when they received news of the violence. There, they hid under a pile of straw. The rebels conducted a swift search of the building, and finding nothing, prepared to leave. At that point, one of the family's Indian servants called out to them that the two were cowering under the straw. Garrard has her screaming out, "Kill the young ones, and they will never be men to trouble us." The searchers

[21] Simmons, *Kit Carson's Three Wives,* 73-4; "Account of Teresina Bent," JBSFP; William M. Boggs, "Narrative," 40, Boggs-Yale; Boggs, "Boggs Manuscript," 60.
[22] Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," Autry National Center; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 386;Sterling Price to Adjutant General, February 15, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 520; Luís Martínez, "The Taos Massacre," 3-4, Box 7 Folder 154, DWC; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 177; "The True Story," LAFRF; James Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, as told to Thomas D. Bonner,* introduction and notes by Delmont P. Oswald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 486.

doubled back, killed Beaubien, scalped him, and cut off one of his fingers to get his ring.[23]

The lucrative business and familial connections that some local New Mexicans had made with the American faction now marked them out for attack. The crowd destroyed the home of José Rafael Sena le Luna. They also killed Ignacia's older brother, Pablo Jaramillo. In typical fashion, Wooton adds further grahic detail. He claimed that, "The half-breed children were…marked for slaughter, and as the Mexicans and Indians all had dark complexions the color of the hair and eyes was made the test of blood. Spanish women who were married to Americans had to disguise their children who had light hair and blue eyes….Those who escaped in this way were the fortunate ones, and there were comparatively few of them."[24]

The revolt spread quickly outward from Taos to the other communities of northern New Mexico. Charles Towne, the lone surviving American in Taos, escaped the revolt on his father-in-law's mule. From Taos he rode to Simeon Turley's mill and distillery at Arroyo Hondo to warn him of the violence. Turley and the Americans at Arroyo Hondo ignored Towne's report, whereupon he turned his mule south, and brought the news to Santa Fe on January 20. Like Lee and Bent, Turley was deeply involved in business enterprise in New Mexico. Like these men he had also married a Mexican woman. Nationalists like Martínez, also

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[23] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 177; Interview with Eliza Ann Walker, December 4, 1907, Trinidad, Colorado, notebook 11 page 1, Cragin Notebooks, Francis W. Cragin Collection, Starsmore Center for Local History, Colorado Springs (hereafter cited as SCLH).
[24] Simmons, *Kit Carson's Three Wives,* 73; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy,* 43-4; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 159.

marked Turley as a potentially disruptive political and economic influence in the region, pointing especially to his liquor trade with Indians north of the border.[25]

John D. Albert left a vivid description of the fight that took place at Turley's Mill. The Mexicans and Indians trapped the men in the mill. The besiegers sent forward a party with a flag of truce, and called for the Americans to surrender their arms. Albert recalled that, "I told the boys they could do as they pleased, but I knew their treachery would lead us to certain death in the end, and I was going to die with my gun in my hands, and not be murdered like a common dog." Roused by Albert's stirring declaration, the men decided unanimously to resist. They shouted their defiance to the attackers. Then, "the hurrah commenced and the air was filled with bullets." They hammered the walls of the mill, "like hail," shattering all the windows. The Americans fought all day, and at sundown the Mexicans renewed the attack, setting fire to the mill. "Soon everything was ablaze; the uproar of the yelling devils on the outside and the excitement of the men on the inner side was deafening," Albert remembered. Trapped, the Americans attempted to tunnel through the adobe walls to freedom. Albert escaped, "in the confusion," and fled for the timber-clad hills surrounding the mill. Although bullets peppered his coat and clipped the brim from his cap, he escaped to safety. However, he still had a treacherous 140-mile trek over the mountains to

[25] Janet Lecompte, "Charles Towne," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, 10 vols. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 1: 394 (hereafter cited as *MMFTFW)*; Janet Lecompte, "Charlie Autobees," in *MMFTFW,* 2: 275-78; Interview with Tom Autobees, November 9, 1907, Avondale, Colorado, notebook 2, page 12, Cragin Notebooks, SCLH; Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains,* 204-5; Craver, *Impact of Intimacy,* 44.

the Arkansas River. Days later, he reached Pueblo with the news of the assault.[26] Although Albert believed himself the sole survivor of the attack, two of his companions also escaped. When the attackers fired the mill, Turley, Tom Tobin, and William LeBlanc dug through the walls and fled. The Mexicans and Indians caught Turley in the hills and killed him. Tobin escaped to Santa Fe, while LeBlanc continued to the settlement at Greenhorn on the upper Arkansas.[27] New Mexicans also killed eight American traders at Mora, drove off the livestock from the Bent-St. Vrain ranch on the Ponil River, and harassed government grazing parties near Las Vegas.[28]

The news of his brother's death reached William Bent at a Cheyenne village along the Arkansas River. From Pueblo, Albert had continued down the Arkansas, bringing the news of the uprising to Bent's Fort. From the fort, trader Louy Simmons carried the message downriver to Bent.[29] Garrard, staying in the same lodge with Bent, reconstructed Simmons's account in the mountain vernacular. "So when Charles was down to Touse to see his woman, the *palous* (loafers) charged afore sunrise," Simmons began. "The portal was too strong fur 'em, an' they broke in with axes, an' a Purblo, cached behint a pile of dobies, shot him with

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[26] LeRoy R. Hafen, "John D. Albert," in *MMFTFW,* 2: 23-5; LeRoy R. Hafen, "Mountain Men – John D. Albert," *Colorado Magazine* 10 (1933), 58-9, 61; Conard, *"Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 161.
[27] Harvey L. Carter, "Tom Tobin," in *MMFTFW,* 4: 361-62; Janet Lecompte, "William LeBlanc," in *MMFTFW,* 5: 171-72.
[28] On these conflicts, see Harvey L. Carter, "Mark Head," in *MMFTFW,* 1:293; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 26-7, DWC; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 392; Twitchell, *Military Occupation,* 136, 138; Donaciano Vigil, "Memoranda," no date, Box 6 Folder 235, Ritch; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 151; 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 528-535.
[29]Hafen, "John D. Albert," in *MMFTFW,* 2: 25; LeRoy R. Hafen, "Louy Simmons," in *MMFTFW,* 5: 318. George Bent recalled that Charlie Autobees brought the news to Bent's Fort. See George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 88.

a Nor'west fuse twice, an' skulped him."[30] The Cheyennes were enraged by the news, Garrard wrote. The chiefs consulted with each other and proposed to Bent that they raise a party of warriors to march to Taos and scalp every Mexican they found. Bent tactfully refused the offer. Doubt and uncertainty mingled with grief along the Arkansas. Might not the Mexicans overwhelm the Santa Fe garrison, and march north to the Arkansas? Certainly Bent's Fort offered a tempting prize. The following morning, Garrard and Bent departed for the fort. Upon arriving Bent called his men together and explained the situation to them, asking them whether they would accompany him south to avenge his brother. The agitated men responded overwhelmingly in the affirmative, "declaring themselves ready to wade up to their necks in Mexican blood." Anxious for news of their other loved ones in Taos, Bent and his men rode south, consciously aware that they knew little of the actual situation. However, before they reached Taos, they encountered an Indian servant of George Bent, riding north towards the fort. The man informed the party of avengers that Colonel Price had already exacted a terrible revenge upon the Taoseños.[31]

Upon receiving the news of Bent's death, Price quickly organized his men to march north. Price got word of the uprising on January 20, most likely from Charles Towne. One story says a friendly Indian brought the news, another that a messenger from Padre Martínez alerted Price to the unrest. James Beckwourth gave the honor to Towne. The mountain man was reposing in his Santa Fe home

[30] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 117-19 (quote is from 117-18).
[31] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 207; 119-120, 122-23, 132, 143-44 (quote is from 120).

when "a violent rapping at my gate," caught his attention. Beckwourth rushed to the gate, where he found an exhausted and distraught Towne. The messenger clasped Beckwourth around the neck, "and gave vent to uncontrolled emotion," as he related the story of the massacre and his escape. Beckwourth then took Towne to see Price, who "immediately adopted the most effective measures." On January 23, 1847, the colonel, along with three hundred fifty men and four howitzers left Santa Fe.[32]

Accompanying Price's Missouri troops was a volunteer company raised by Ceran St. Vrain. The events in Taos galvanized the American community in Santa Fe. The *Santa Fe Republican* noted that, "The merchants almost universally closed their stores and started with the determination of avenging the death of their fellow citizens….all were determined for either death or revenge." Most of the men St. Vrain recruited, Wooton included, had lost friends or acquaintances in the revolt. Wooton recalled, "Among those who had been so brutally murdered at Taos and Arroyo Hondo were men who had been my warmest and best friends ever since I had come to the country, and I felt that I should, if possible, do something toward securing punishment of their murderers and protecting the property which they had left, for the use of those who were entitled to it."[33]

Price's column had two sharp skirmishes with rebels on the difficult march to Taos. At Cañada, St. Vrain's scouts discovered the enemy dug in along a ridge, and "three strong houses" at the base of the hills. The four twelve-pound

[32] Shalhope, *Sterling Price,* 64; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 27, DWC; Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures,* 484.
[33] *Santa Fe Republican,* August 31, 1848; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 161-62.

American howitzers opened fire on the strong points from an elevated position. When the Mexicans attempted to divert the attention of the regulars by attacking the column's supply train, St. Vrain's volunteers held them off. Price then ordered a general advance, before which the enemy scattered. Nightfall prevented pursuit, but Price had won a solid victory. His losses included two killed and six wounded; he counted thirty-six enemy dead. The next skirmish took place at Embudo. Between six and seven hundred rebels once again held a strong, elevated defensive position. "The rapid slopes of the mountains rendered the enemy's position very strong, and its strength was increased by the dense masses of cedar and large fragments of rock which everywhere offered them shelter," Price wrote. Nevertheless, Price's men, with St. Vrain's on the left, outflanked the defensive positions and put the rebels to flight with heavy losses. Price's column reached Taos on February 2, 1847, after a march "through deep snow." Despite their frost-bitten feet and "jaded" condition, the Americans were spoiling for a fight. The sights that greeted them in Taos further aroused their ire. Wooton spoke of sacked stores and burned houses. Beckwourth claimed that the "mutilated and disfigured" bodies of their fellow countrymen lay strewn throughout the town, feasted upon by pigs and dogs.[34]

The battle for Taos took place over two days. On February 3, after he reconnoitered the enemy's position, Price ordered his artillery to begin a bombardment. Prepared for Price's retribution, the rebels retreated to the Taos

[34] 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 522-23; Twitchell, *Military Occupation,* 128-133; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 170; Beckwourth, *Life and Adventures,* 485-86.

Pueblo, a position eminently suited to defense. Price admitted that he found the pueblo, "a place of great strength, being surrounded by adobe walls and strong pickets….The town was admirably calculated for defense, every point of the exterior walls and pickets being flanked by some projecting building." The following day, he ordered an assault on the pueblo, focusing upon the parish church. The American batteries began firing at nine o'clock and continued until eleven, with little effect. Infantry assaults upon the northern and western walls, and upon the church, failed. Around 3:30, Price moved his artillery forward to within two hundred yards of the church, and opened fire with grapeshot. Facing little resistance, the gunners wheeled a six pounder to within sixty yards of the church doors, blowing holes in the walls and doors. The Americans continued their advance, bringing the gun to within ten yards of the church, and fired three rounds of grapeshot into the crowded sanctuary. The soldiers charged, and "took the church without opposition," as the defenders fled.[35]

As Price's guns raked the church with grapeshot, many of the defenders fled the pueblo in an attempt to reach the safety of the mountains. The colonel, however, had placed St. Vrain's mounted volunteers on the outskirts of town with orders to prevent reinforcement of the enemy, and to cut off any escape attempt. St. Vrain's men responded with alacrity. About fifty of the defenders broke for the mountains. The volunteers rode them down. Wooton recalled that the fighting

[35] *Santa Fe Republican,* August 31, 1848; Price to Adjutant General, February 15, 1847, in 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc 1, 523-25; File, "The True Story," LAFRF; Donaciano Vigil to James Buchanan, February 16, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 18; Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos,* xi, 126.

was bloody, that they "were resisted as stoutly as were the American soldiers upon any battlefield of the Mexican War." The Americans showed no mercy. "We pursued them, and not much quarter was asked or given," Wooton stated matter-of-factly. Another wrote that the Americans "followed and slew them as long as it was daylight, to see them." The *Santa Fe Republican* reveled in the thoroughness of St. Vrain's victory. The paper gloated that, "scarcely one of the enemy was left to tell the tale," estimating that the volunteers killed eighty-five Indians and Mexicans.[36] There was melodrama among the slaughter. Legend says that during the fight St. Vrain encountered Pablo Chavez, a ringleader of the uprising. Chavez wore the blood-stained coat and shirt of Charles Bent. The *St. Louis Daily Union* reported that, "Mr. St. Vrain, it seems, the late partner of Charles Bent, has wreaked vengeance upon the probable murderer of his friend." George Frederick Ruxton has one of the characters in his semi-fictional *Life in the Far West* reporting, "The Greasers payed for Bent's scalp, they tell me. Old St. Vrain went out of Santa Fe with a company of mountain men, and they way they made 'em sing out was 'slick as shootin.' He 'counted a coup' did St. Vrain. He throwed a Pueblo as had on poor Bent's shirt. I guess he tickled that niggur's hump ribs." Another story says that St. Vrain would have died in the battle had not one of the volunteers saved his life. Manuel Chaves and Dick Wooton both claimed the

[36] Price to Adjutant General, February 15, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 525; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 187; Conard, *"Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 165-66; Boggs, "Narrative," Beinecke; *Santa Fe Republican,* August 31, 1848.

honor of saving St. Vrain's life.[37] When the smoke of battle cleared, Price had won a resounding victory. His report estimated 150 rebels dead and an unknown number wounded. The Americans lost seven dead in the fighting, in addition to 45 wounded. "Many of the wounded have since died," the colonel ruefully informed his superiors.[38]

News of the revolt and the retribution took longer to spread outside of New Mexico. On February 7, Doniphan's soldiers encamped at El Paso emerged from church services to hear the news that "Governor Bent and all the Americans in Taos were assassinated."[39] The news also flowed slowly east, along the Santa Fe Trail. On February 16, Donaciano Vigil wrote James Buchanan informing him of Bent's death, though the letter would not reach Washington for some time. Bent's friend James Abert heard about the "fiendish massacre" while encamped along Cow Creek. He lamented to his journal that, "everyone in that country looked upon Charles Bent as one in a thousand."[40] By early-March, the story appeared in the St. Louis papers. The *Reveille* received the news from Lucien Maxwell on March 9. A headline in the same day's issue told of, "SAD NEWS FROM SANTA FE. SLAUGHTER OF GOV. CHAS. BENT AND TWENTY AMERICANS – RISING OF THE RABBLE AND THREATENED ATTACK

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[37] Simmons, *Kit Carson's Three Wives,* 74; *St. Louis Daily Union,* April 1, 1847; Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 6; Simmons, *Little Lion,* 108; Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton,* 167; Harvey L. Carter, "Dick Wooton," in *MMFTFW,* 3: 401.

[38] Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *Old Santa Fe: The Story of New Mexico's Ancient Capital* (Santa Fe: Santa Fe New Mexican Publishing Corporation, 1925), 297; Price to Adjutant General, February 15, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 1, 525.

[39] Connelley, *War with Mexico,* 97.

[40] Vigil to Buchanan, February 16, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. Ex.doc. 70, 18; Abert, "Examination of New Mexico," 541.

ON SANTA FE, &tc." *Niles' National Register* picked up a report from the Independence *Expositor* from March 25 for its eastern readership.[41] Definitive news of Price's victory did not reach Missouri until April 1847. On April 8, newspaper editor Robert H. Miller received word from Gallatin, Missouri, of a raucous celebration. The news of victories by Zachary Taylor near Saltillo resulted in "the most enthusiastic thrilling of patriotic joy," Volney Bragg wrote. The militia discharged round after round in celebration, while the air resounded with "deafening huzzas for great Taylor," and even the "temperance men" celebrated with refreshing "Taylor bumpers." Price and his men were not "forgotten in these joyous conclamations," Bragg assured Miller. Ironically, as late as the end of March, the War Department still lacked official confirmation of Bent's death, let alone the victory at Taos.[42]

American authorities moved quickly to put on trial those arrested for treason in the wake of the violence. The first trials began in Santa Fe in March. The basis of the government's case revolved around the treachery and ungratefulness of the New Mexican population. Rather than express gratitude for their liberation from years of oppressive government, the local citizenry had risen up in treasonous rebellion against the new political order. As a result of the trials in Santa Fe, the court handed down four indictments for treason, with one ultimate conviction. The defendants, the prosecution claimed, had by their actions,

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[41] *St. Louis Reveille,* March 9, 1847; *Niles' National Register,* "Army of the North," April 10, 1847, 22, 1.

[42] Thomas L. Lillerey to Robert H. Miller, March 25, 1847, Folder 2, Robert H. Miller Papers, MHS; Volney E. Bragg to Miller, April 8, 1847, Folder 2, Miller Papers; Marcy to Kearny, March 30, 1847, War Department, Reel 27.

maliciously intended to "subvert the laws and constitution of the United States." Not only did the leaders of the rebellion demonstrated terrible judgment, they provided an "evil example" for the rest of the population, swaying the rabble, and inciting their basest passions against the United States.[43]

Despite the assumed guilt of the defendants, the conviction of Antonio Maria Trujillo for treason caused some Americans great disquiet. During the trial, the prosecuting attorneys produced revolutionary circulars addressed to Trujillo, which urged him to raise and arm the men of the region, "in defense of our abandoned country." Both the prosecution and Judge Joab Houghton chastised Trujillo for his lack of loyalty to the United States. The judge was especially harsh in his condemnation of the convicted man. Houghton seethed, labeling Trujillo a reprobate. "Not content with the peace and security in which you lived under the present government secure in all your personal rights as a citizen in property in person and in your religion you gave your name and influence to measures intended to effect a universal murder…and overthrow of the government," Houghton concluded. Citing the decision of the "enlightened and liberal jury," Houghton sentenced Trujillo to death by hanging. The death penalty, however, proved unpopular, and an appeal by Donaciano Vigil and other prominent citizens soon reached President Polk. Under instructions from the president, Secretary of War Marcy wrote Sterling Price to point out that only Congress could decide the legal status of the inhabitants of any territory annexed

[43] Jenkins, Rebellion," 34-5, DWC; *U.S. v. Pedro Vigil,* March 18, 1847, United States District Court Mexico Territory, First Judicial District, copied from "History Files," #166, "1847 Treason Trials," NMSRCA; *U.S. v. Trinidad Barcelo,* March 10, 1847, in ibid.

during war. As such, Trujillo was not yet a citizen of the United States. The charge for murder might stand, but a conviction for treason, Polk would not accept. Marcy added, however, that the administration shared the sentiments of the court that the New Mexicans had treacherously risen up against a benevolent political system.[44]

The trials for the Taos rebels began in April. Lewis Garrard, a young easterner vacationing with Ceran St. Vrain and company employee John Hatcher, left the only eyewitness account of the trial and the resulting executions. The accused men stood no chance of a fair trial in Taos. Friends and supporters of the slain governor filled the court offices. Charles Beaubien presided as judge. Bent's brother George served as jury foreman, while Ceran St. Vrain acted as court interpreter. Among the other jurors were acquaintances and employees of Bent-St. Vrain. Garrard could not help commenting upon the makeup of the court. "American judges sat on the bench, New Mexicans and Americans filled the jury box, and an American soldiery guarded the halls. Verily, a strange mixture of violence and justice – a strange middle ground between the martial and common law," he wrote.[45] The court heard testimony from several Mexican witnesses,

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[44]On the revolutionary circulars, see Juan Antonio Garcia to Antonio Maria Trujillo, no date, and Jesus Tafoya to Antonio Maria Trujillo, January 20, 1847. Both documents come from *U.S. v. Trujillo*, March 1847, United States District Court of New Mexico Territory, First Judicial District, copied from History Files #166, "1847 Treason Trials," NMSRCA. All the quotes regarding Trujillo's actions come from this case. On the pardon, see Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexico History*, 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1912), 2: 252-54; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico*, Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, vol. 17 (San Francisco: History company, 1889), 436; Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos*, 143; William Marcy to Sterling Price, June 26, 1847, War Department, Reel 27.

[45] On the makeup of the court, see Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos*, 136; Blanche Grant, *When Old Trails Where New: The Story of Taos* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, Inc., 1934), 98;

including the wives of Kit Carson and Charles Bent. Señora Bent's testimony, Garrard noted, was especially damning. Before the assembly, she calmly pointed out her husband's murderer. The accused, however, betrayed no sign of agitation, rather he presented "an almost sublime spectacle of Indian fortitude," the young observer marveled.[46] The jury deliberated for a "few minutes" before returning with the verdict. In the dimly lit courtroom, Judge Beaubien pronounced sentence, "in his solemn and impressive manner." The jury found all six men guilty, five of murder, one of treason.[47] Due to overcrowding in the jail, Beaubien expedited their execution. The treason conviction left Garrard deeply troubled. Although he agreed wholeheartedly with the murder convictions, he could not bring himself to support a treason charge for "those who defended to the last their country and their homes."[48]

The convicted men died on April 9, 1847. The day dawned, perhaps incongruously, Garrard thought, with an "unspotted" sky. Indeed, the entire Taos Valley "wore an air of calm repose." Around nine o'clock, an escort marched the six men to the plaza, under the eyes of 230 American troops and a howitzer. The Mexicans mounted a makeshift gallows – a long board thrown across a wagon, the nooses attached to a tree limb. Before they died, one of the convicted broke down, muttering something about his mother and father. Garrard had far more respect

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Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 316; Francis T. Cheetham, "First Term of the American Court in Taos," *New Mexico Historical Review* 1 (January 1926), 23-41; Harvey L. Carter, "Robert Fisher," in *MMFTFW,* 4: 99; Hafen/Lecompte, "William LeBlanc," 5: 172; Lecompte, "Charles Towne," 1: 394-95; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 172.

[46] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 182.

[47] Ibid., 172-73.

[48] Ibid., 173.

for the accused traitor. He faced his death like a true patriot, the young American recalled. The man denounced the whole trial as a sham, reaffirmed his innocence, and told the Americans assembled in the plaza to go to hell. The executioner slapped the mules, which sprang away from under the tree. The six bodies dangled, swaying back and forth, Garrard wrote. "While thus swinging, the hands of two came together, which they held with a firm grasp till the muscles loosened in death," he reported. Garrard then helped cut down the bodies, before retreating to a local cantina to split a bowl of eggnog with the jubilant Americans.[49] Years later, however, William Boggs recalled the hanging scene differently. According to Boggs, the condemned men lamented their actions, admitting to the assembly that the governor had always been a true and generous friend. They cursed their chiefs and the priests for deceiving them, and angrily demanded that the main conspirators own up to their actions and face the consequences. Despite the intercessory efforts of Padre Martínez, who wrote Price condemning the American juries as "a class of ignorant men…tainted with passion," the hangings continued throughout the rest of April and into May.[50]

The Americans did not limit their assignation of blame only to the men tried and condemned in Santa Fe and Taos. As soon as word spread of the revolt, American authorities scrambled to find villains behind the violence. Contrary to Bent's late-December assessment of the rebels as men of no standing, men of the highest social standing were prominent among those most discontented with

[49] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 190, 196-98.
[50] Boggs, "Boggs Manuscript," 60; Boggs, "Narrative," 39, Boggs-Yale; Martínez to Price, April 12, 1847, Box 13694 Folder 5, Cassidy Collection; Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos*, 177-78.

American rule. However, the revolt was not merely the work of a powerful few, who manipulated a gullible mob to do their bidding. Rather, the violence that erupted in Taos cut across class and racial lines. As noted, the uprising itself might have been spontaneous, but the problems contributing to it were longstanding, and affected all levels of society in northern New Mexico.[51]

Some, both Anglo and Hispanic, blamed the violence on the region's contentious citizenry, and its long history of revolutionary behavior. The Rio Arriba country figured prominently in every major outbreak of civil unrest in New Mexican history, from the Spanish period down to the Mexican-American War. The native inhabitants of the region played a major role in the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680, and were among the last subdued by Vargas during the reconquest in the late-1690s. Rebels from the region led the uprising that unseated and killed Governor Albino Perez in 1837. Native New Mexicans themselves recognized a deep, underlying streak of independence and belligerence in the inhabitants of Rio Arriba. Oral recollections of the Taos Revolt described the citizens of the region as a "rough and ready, fire-eating element."[52] Donaciano Vigil went to great lengths to convince American authorities that the blame for the violence rested solely upon the disgruntled northerners. In February, he issued a circular to the citizens of New Mexico, laying out the causes of the violence, and those responsible for it. Vigil singled out Taos and its inhabitants for special criticism. The valley, he declared, "sheltered in her bosom a class of population wholly

[51] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 383; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 22, DWC; Twitchell, *Leading Facts,* 2: 236.
[52] Jenkins, "Rebellion," 17, DWC; Martínez, "Taos Massacre," 2, DWC.

demoralized, the history of whose civil existence is a record of a series of crimes." Most notable among these, Vigil cited the 1837 rebellion, and the attacks on foreigners during the Texas troubles of 1843. Vigil did not blame the new American regime for bringing violence upon itself. Rather, the official cited a long history of criminal neglect on the part of the Mexican government, which failed repeatedly to reign in the rowdy northerners. Never had officials in Santa Fe called the men of Rio Arriba to account. "The apathetic and criminal conduct of the previous administrations with respect to popular commotions, gave…much encouragement to the perpetrators of these crimes," Vigil complained. Anglos added their own commentary on the Taoseños, both Hispanic and Native American. The Pueblos, in particular, James Madison Cutts wrote, "were accounted the most warlike and the bravest race in Mexico; certainly the circumstances of the murder of Governor Bent…evince their extreme barbarity." The St. Louis *Daily Era* added that they, "are in a degraded condition, scarcely half-civilized, and might be excited to murder without difficulty." George Frederick Ruxton also gave much the same opinion, writing of the New Mexicans, "cruel, as all cowards are, they unite savage ferocity with their want of animal courage; as an example of which, their recent massacre of Governor Bent and other Americans may be given – one of a hundred instances".[53]

Observers like Vigil were also quick to argue that the rabble was responsible for the violence in Taos, while the most responsible citizens had held

[53] Donaciano Vigil, "Circular," February 12, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 70, 22-3; Cutts, *Conquest of California and New Mexico,* 222; *St. Louis Daily Era,* March 9, 1847; Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains,* 192.

aloof. He wrote Buchanan of the revolt, "in the north hardly a man of wealth or consequence has been concerned." He went on to blame the Indians and the "lower class of people" for assassinating the Americans and pillaging their homes. Murdering Bent was not enough for this "revolutionary army," Vigil continued. He poured out his condemnation of the rebels, calling them a "gang," "scoundrels," "desperadoes," and "the rabble." Any of the better sorts who became mixed up in the rebellion had certainly been intimidated into joining the rebel army, Vigil assured Buchanan.[54] The Missouri newspapers took their discussion of the perpetrators a step further by differentiating between the rebels and the New Mexican victims. The rabble was made up of "Mexicans," the St. Louis *Daily Era* claimed, wreaking their vengeance upon "all the Spaniards supposed to be favorable to the American cause."[55]

Fickle as the New Mexican "rabble" might be, most Americans attributed the violence to a designing few of high social standing. Lewis Garrard wrote that, "It was afterward seen that designing men – artful and learned natives – were busily, insidiously sowing the seeds of discontent among the more ignorant class of the community." Loyal Taos Indians fingered Diego Archuleta, Pablo Montoya, and Manuel Antonio Chaves as being among the principal architects of the revolt. Hispanic oral tradition affirms Archuleta's leadership. The Chicano newspaper, *El Grito del Norte,* portrayed Archuleta's involvement as a redemptive

[54] Vigil to Buchanan, February 16, 1847, 30th Cong.1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 70, 18-19; Donaciano Vigil, "Memoranda," no date, Box 6 Folder 235, Ritch; Vigil, "Proclamation," January 25, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 70, 20.
[55] (St. Louis)*Daily Era,* March 9, 1847.

action. The same man whom Magoffin bought off with promises of his own political fiefdom west of the Rio Grande, turned upon the treacherous Americans when Kearny annexed the entire territory. Another source speaks of Archuleta's military training and his delusion that a Mexican army was marching from the south to compliment the actions of the rebels.[56] Stories told by both sides agree that demagogues kept the rabble awake through the night preceding the violence, haranguing them and plying them with liquor in the local cantinas. Hispanic sources lament these actions. "Archuleta committed the grave mistake of allowing them to partake plentifully of liquor which turned them into real savages; and they ran out of control, that being the real cause of the butcheries at Taos and the Rio Hondo," Luis Martínez recalled in a 1936 newspaper interview. Had the leaders of the plot not made this mistake, Martínez claimed, Bent and the others probably would not have been killed. On the other hand, L. Bradford Prince informed an assembly in Santa Fe that the drinking was part of the plan. "Demagogues were haranguing the population and inflaming their passions," he thundered. "Whiskey and wine were flowing without stint and the excitement and tumult increased with the passing hours…the Mexicans and Indians were aroused to a condition of frenzy." Vigil also used the language of mental imbalance to attach blame to the conspirators. He wrote scathingly of Montoya's "insane passions," and his "brutal sacrifice of defenseless victims."[57]

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[56] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 185; Vigil, "Circular," 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc 70, 23-4; File, "The True Story," LAFRF; Martínez, "Taos Massacre," 2-3, DWC.
[57] Martínez, "Taos Massacre," 2-3, DWC; *Santa Fe New Mexican,* March 2, 1910, Prince Papers; Vigil, "Proclamation," January 22, 1847, 30th Cong. 1st Sess. H.ex.doc. 70.

Probably the most enigmatic figure in the entire controversy surrounding the revolt was Padre Martínez. Accounts of the priest and the actions he took during the time of the revolt are highly biased, making it impossible to make a definitive statement regarding his culpability. Despite disagreement over the role he played in northern New Mexican society in general, and his supposed connection to the revolt, commentators on both sides agree that the priest was probably the most influential New Mexican in the Rio Arriba. He also possessed a keen political sense, and felt he had ample reason to oppose the American Party, and Charles Bent in particular.[58]

Many Anglos, including Bent, felt uneasy about the priest's political power in the region. As early as February 1846, Manuel Alvarez wrote James Buchanan of the padre's machinations. "I am informed," the consul wrote, "that on the night of the 18th ult. a sermon was delivered to the people of…Taos assembled for the purpose by their Curate – bitterly denouncing the annexation of any part of this country to the United States…to excite the strongest prejudices against the Americans…and endeavoring to arouse the people to a determined resistance." Only days before the revolt, Bent reported a "very strong anti annexation sermon," preached by Martínez in Taos. Rumors reached the governor that the priest, "has directed some of the citizens to attack the soldiers heare and if possible to drive

[58] Jenkins, "Rebellion," 37-8, DWC; David J. Weber, *On the Edge of Empire: The Taos Hacienda of Los Martínez* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 76; Ray John de Aragon, "Padre Antonio José Martínez: The Man and the Myth," in E. A. Mares, ed., *Padre Martínez: New Views from Taos* (Taos: Millicent Rogers Museum, 1988), 125.

them of, the truth of this I doe not affirm."[59] Other friends of the governor, including Kit Carson blamed the priests in New Mexico, particularly Martínez, for stirring up anti-American sentiment. Historian Ralph Emerson Twitchell concurred, writing that the new political and social regime posed a direct threat to the fortunes of the Taos priest.[60]

Martínez apologists, on the other hand, argue that although he was unable to prevent the revolt, the priest took steps to protect the lives of potential victims. New Mexican tradition states that the priest's home became a safe haven for those fleeing the mob. Luis Martínez recalled that a terrified crowd gathered outside the priest's house, banging on the door and shouting, "For God's sake open the door! Open it! The Indians are murdering Don Carlos Bent, Don Luis Lee, and others!" According to this story, not only did Martínez give sanctuary to the refugees, he also armed his personal retainers, ordered them to construct breastworks, and "to repel any assault at all cost." Martínez goes on to claim that it was the priest who first sent word to Price in Santa Fe informing him of the violence and begging for reinforcements.[61] American testimony corroborates the padre's actions on behalf of the Americans during the revolt. Specifically, numerous sources mention that he saved the life of Elliott Lee, brother of the slain sheriff. The story goes that Lee fled to Martínez's home, where the priest hid him under a pile of wheat. When the

[59] Manuel Alvarez to James Buchanan, February 9, 1846, CDSF; Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, no date (probably January 17 or 18, 1847), Box 1 Folder 1, Benjamin Read Collection, NMSRCA.
[60] Boggs, "Narrative," 38; Simmons, *Kit Carson's Three Wives,* 75; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 19, DWC; Twitchell, *Military Occupation,* 123, 133-36.
[61] Jenkins, "Rebellion," 42-3, DWC; E. A. Mares, *I Returned and Saw Under the Sun: Padre Martínez of Taos: A Play* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 45; Martínez, "Taos Massacre," 4, DWC; Simmons, *Kit Carson's Three Wives,* 73; Aragon, "Man and Myth," 139; Weber, *Edge of Empire,* 77.

rebels came and demanded his return, the padre "interceded for him so strongly that they abandoned their purpose," Richard Smith Elliott wrote.[62] Other writers argue that the political positions the priest and his family held in the period following the revolt, are evidence that the Americans could not have blamed him for collaborating with the rebels. If he had, why would the Americans not have charged him with anything, let alone honored him with political office.[63]

Almost as quickly as they sought to uncover the identity of the villains behind the revolt, Americans moved to eulogize the fallen governor. Bent's brother-in-law, Kit Carson gave his imprimatur to the stories circulating about the governor's magnanimity and friendliness. "His death was regretted by all that knew him," Carson wrote. Even those who had known Bent but a short time offered their own pleasant memories. Frank Edwards recalled that when the news reached his mess in Mexico, it affected all of them. The governor had mingled with them in Santa Fe, Edwards wrote, "showing, in many ways, his amiable disposition." Others mixed their grief with expressions of outright surprise, followed quickly by a condemnation of the treachery inherent in the Mexican

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[62] On the saving of Elliott Lee, see Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 388; Jenkins, "Rebellion," 25, DWC; William Waldo, "Recollections of a Septuagenarian," *Missouri Historical Society: Glimpses of the Past* 5 (1938), 63; Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains,* 201; Elliott, *Mexican War Correspondence,* 139-40. For a Hispanic version of the story, see Interview with Juan Estevan, April 24, 1908, Taos, New Mexico, notebook 12, page 13, Cragin Notebooks, SCLH.

[63] Mares, *I Returned*, 45-6; E. A. Mares, "The Many Faces of Padre Antonio José Martínez," *Padre Martínez: New Views from Taos*, 27; Thomas J. Steele, "The View from the Rectory," in ibid., 88; Weber, *Edge of Empire,* 77; Aragon, "Man and Myth," 136; E. K. Francis, "Padre Martínez: A New Mexico Myth," *New Mexico Historical Review* 31 (1956), 269; Grant, *Old Trails,* 89; Martínez, "Taos Massacre," 4-5, LAFRF. The most thorough treatment of Martínez's life can be found in Fray Angélico Chávez, *But Time and Chance: The Story of Padre Martínez of Taos* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1981). It is my contention that, given his prominent position in Taos, the padre must have known of the discontent with the American regime, and failed to take steps to speak against it. However, it is unlikely that he urged violence, and when events got out of hand, took steps to aid the refugees.

character. The governor's merciless assassination was his reward for trying to better the lot of the benighted populace, they wrote accusingly.[64]

The American conquest of New Mexico should have represented the ultimate triumph for Bent-St. Vrain. Years of cultivating business ties with the local inhabitants of the region placed the partners in a prominent position within New Mexico. Once Bent became governor, he could finally ignore the grumblings of the Martínez faction. However, a decades-worth of frustration over the company's sometimes shady business practices and political associations ultimately played a prominent role in the violence that erupted in January 1847. Ignored by the new government, bullied by the volunteers, and fearful of their eroding status within the new regime, the New Mexicans rose up against the Americans. Although the immediate violence in Taos was spontaneous, the rebels targeted their victims with great care. Anyone closely associated with the Bents and the new government faced violent reprisal. The familial and business ties that once held such potential for mercantile success and land acquisition only exacerbated the discontent of the nationalist Mexican faction. Those New Mexicans who allied themselves with the Americans paid a bloody price for their dreams of fortune. In the wake of the revolt, the company's fall from prominent heights came with dizzying speed. Charles Bent's death proved the catalyst for the declining fortunes of the remaining partners. However, the Americanization of New Mexico, disease, and the insatiable demands the American markets placed

[64] Quaife/Carson, *Autobiography*, 65; Edwards, *Campaign with Doniphan*, 103; *Santa Fe Republican*, August 31, 1848; Edwards, *Marching with the Army of the West*, 244-45.

upon the Company's best Indian customers ushered in two years of confusion and discontent, ultimately resulting in the dissolution of the most powerful American trading firm on the Southern Plains.

Chapter 14 - Collapse: 1847-1849

The fortunes of Bent-St. Vrain declined rapidly and precipitously following the extension of American power into the Southwest Borderlands. Before the year was over, Ceran St. Vrain and William Bent dissolved a partnership that had lasted nearly two decades. However, because of the convergence of numerous factors, many beyond his control, Bent abandoned the Arkansas River post in the summer of 1849. Increased traffic on the Santa Fe Trail during the Mexican-American War, combined with a much larger American military presence in the region made interactions with local Indian groups tense and often dangerous. Indians and whites clashed over the rapidly diminishing natural resources of the region. Disease also decimated the Southern Cheyennes, Bent's best customers. Finally, the depletion of the bison herds, due to both market hunting and natural phenomena made profitable business ventures more difficult. In 1849, rather than turn the fort over to the United States, Bent set fire to his post and moved his operations down the Arkansas River to the region around the Big Timbers. William Bent realized that the glory days of the Company were over, in part because of the forces the Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain had helped set in motion almost twenty years before.

As early as the 1830s, some in the United States government recognized the potential benefits of establishing a military presence on the upper Arkansas River. Such a post, John Daugherty informed Superintendant of Indian Affairs William Clark, would act as a rendezvous point for fur trappers and Santa Fe traders. More importantly, mounted troops stationed at such a post could routinely patrol the

region, "protecting an invaluable commerce with the Mexicans and Indians, and maintaining peace and tranquility along that extensive and exposed frontier." Daugherty drove the same points home in a letter to the Secretary of War, Lewis Cass. Stressing the protective nature of such a post, Daugherty assured Cass that the soldiers garrisoning a fort along the Arkansas would provide crucial protection to traders whose work benefitted the entire economy of the western frontier.[1] Writing from Bent's Fort in 1835, Colonel Henry Dodge elaborated on the points made by Daugherty. Dodge suggested the establishment of a military position forty miles downriver from Bent's Fort. In addition, the officer urged the establishment of an Indian agency to serve the tribes of the region. Such an agency, he wrote, would be instrumental in restoring peace to the region. Intertribal peace, in turn, would stimulate the regional economy, securing Bent's Fort as the great entrepot of the buffalo robe trade.[2]

Although generally loath to involve the government in his personal business matters, Charles Bent, too, had offered his considered advice regarding the potential for a military installation near the company fort on the border. In a letter forwarded to Manuel Alvarez for comment, Bent wrote that, "some point on the Arkansas River, between what is known as the big Timber on said river, and the foot of the Rocky Mountains, would be most sutable." Bent specifically suggested constructing the post at the junction of the Arkansas and the Fontaine qui Bouille, a

[1] John Daugherty to William Clark, October 25, 1831, Letterbook, Microfilm p. 339, Reel 2 Volume 6, William Clark Papers (Hereafter cited as Clark Papers); Daugherty to Lewis Cass, November 19, 1831, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Microfilm, Reel 883.
[2] "Report on the Expedition of Dragoons, Under Colonel Henry Dodge to the Rocky Mountains in 1835," in *American State Papers, Military Affairs, VI,* 24th Congress, 1st Session, 1835, 142.

point "about equidistant from the north Platt (the rout to the Origan) and the Santefe trace; and at the same time in the hart of the Indian range." Such a position could cover both the trails along the Platte and the Arkansas while simultaneously presenting a strong front against "all the different Indian tribes in the vasinity of theas two points," he concluded.[3] The trader revealed his true motives for suggesting a military presence in the region in a January letter to the Superintendant of Indian Affairs. Liquor smuggling, especially on the part of "several renigate Americans," along the Fontaine qui Bouille, threatened to disrupt not only Indian relations, but also the profits of Bent-St. Vrain. This illicit trade, Bent complained, constituted a "great injury" to both local Indians and licensed American traders. Furthermore, the posts from which these independent traders operated also catered to Mexican traders whose trade could disrupt the stability of relations between the two nations. A fort, "would (be) sure to keep the Mexicans from tampering with the numerous tribes of Indians in the country, in case of war between the two countries, and at the same time teach the Indians to respect American citizens and their property," Bent concluded. Finally, he reiterated the possibility for "disagreeable consequences" should the government fail to establish a strong presence in the region. It should be noted, however, that following these letters, Bent never again pushed so openly for a direct American military presence within his trading territory.[4]

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[3] Charles Bent to Manuel Alvarez, September 19, 1842, Benjamin Read Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe.

[4] Bent, St. Vrain and Company to D.D. Mitchell, January 1, 1843, Letterbook, p. 93, Reel 2 Volume 8, Clark Papers; Bent to Mitchell, May 4, 1843, Letterbook, p. 112, Reel 2 Volume 8, Clark Papers.

Increased commercial traffic over the Santa Fe Trail during the Mexican-American War added a special urgency to calls for the government to anchor itself along the Arkansas. Longtime mountain man and trader Thomas Fitzpatrick, the first United States Indian Agent appointed for the Upper Arkansas thought the construction of military posts paramount. He envisioned a fort in the region as just one of many in a cordon stretching from the Rio Grande to the Missouri. Fitzpatrick recommended building a post on the Mora River southeast of Taos, or along the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail near Bent's Fort. Difficulty securing forage, water, and fuel along the Cimarron Branch of the trail, he speculated, would lead traders to make greater use of the route over Raton Pass via Bent's Fort. He wrote his superiors that, "by establishing posts or depots at conspicuous points on those rivers, efficient command over the whole country could be had, and from which expeditions could be performed at any season of the year to great advantage." In addition to a post, Fitzpatrick stressed the necessity of appointing an agent well-versed in Indian customs, who possessed a deep familiarity with the geography, politics, and trade patterns of the Southern Plains and Rockies. Furthermore, observers including trades and military men urged the government to station mounted troops at any fort constructed by the government. Strategically positioned forts, garrisoned by mobile troops, under the direction of veteran leadership would go far towards securing peace and prosperity for everyone in the region, observers like Fitzpatrick concluded.[5]

[5] W. J. Ghent and LeRoy R. Hafen, *Broken Hand: The Life of Thomas Fitzpatrick: Mountain Man, Guide, and Indian Agent* (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1951), 191-92, 194, 211;

Fitzpatrick spent much of 1847 attempting to maintain the peaceful relationship between the United States government and the Cheyennes. Utilizing Bent's Fort as an agency had advantages, for it gave the agent ready access to William Bent's expertise regarding the tribe. Although the Cheyennes had had no quarrels with the United States, their close trade ties to the increasingly restless Kiowa and Comanche bands south of the Arkansas River, made it imperative that Fitzpatrick and Bent continue to cultivate close relations lest the Cheyennes turn their attention to raiding American caravans along the Santa Fe Trail. Despite occasional unease, the agent and other government observers were confident of the goodwill of the Cheyennes. The tribe seemed contented with the American presence along the Arkansas, and even expressed a desire to settle down at the agency, according to Indian agents and military men like Andrew Drips and James W. Abert. In the summer of 1845, for example, Drips wrote the Superintendant in St. Louis that the Cheyennes, "are very anxious to have an agent among them. They say the Great Father…must have forgotten them entirely – they are well disposed towards the whites." In 1846, Abert reported a conversation he had with the Cheyenne chief Yellow Wolf. The lieutenant informed his superiors that Yellow Wolf was cognizant of the fact that the traditional Cheyenne way of life was disappearing. The buffalo herds were shrinking, and the Cheyennes must

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Thomas Fitzpatrick to John W. Abert, August 23, 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Upper Platte Agency, Microfilm Reel 889 (hereafter cited as UPA); Fitzpatrick to William Madill, August 11, 1848, UPA, Reel 889. On the necessity of mounted troops, see Stephen Watts Kearny, "Report of a summer campaign to the Rocky mountains, &c. in 1845," 29th Congress, 1st Session, HED 2, Serial 480, 212; H. L. Routt to Robert H. Miller, December 6, 1847, Folder 2, Robert H. Miller Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. Hereafter cited as MHS.

shortly become farmers after the fashion of the Americans. After lamenting the government's lack of attention, and citing his tribe's peaceful relations with the whites, Yellow Wolf requested that the whites build the Cheyennes "a structure similar to Bent's Fort, and instruct them to cultivate the ground, and to raise cattle." Throughout the autumn of 1847 and into the winter of 1848, Fitzpatrick echoed these sentiments regarding the Cheyennes. In February 1848, he wrote his superiors that, "The Arapahos and Cheyennes have been competing whose conduct should be the most pleasing."[6]

The predisposition of the Cheyennes towards friendship with the Americans, combined with Fitzpatrick's efforts, secured peace with the tribes of the upper Arkansas. In the spring of 1847, the agent gathered the Cheyennes at Bent's Fort for a council in which he reiterated the government's peaceful intentions, warned the Cheyennes against raiding along the Santa Fe Trail, and pointed out that the buffalo herds were diminishing. Despite the fact that the groups signed no formal treaty, Fitzpatrick was cautiously optimistic. "I have used my best endeavor to keep quiet and reconcile the Indians hereabout, and I flatter myself that I have in a manner succeeded. Yet I am still apprehensive of a union between them and the Comanches, notwithstanding the Cheyennes have offered their services to fight in our behalf," the agent informed his superiors. He continued his efforts through the

[6] William Y. Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage: The Santa Fe Trail and the Mexican War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 25; Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 108-09; Drips to Mitchell, August 29, 1845, Letterbook, page 245, R2 V8, Clark Papers; James W. Abert, "Examination of New Mexico," 30th Cong., 1st Sess. H. exdoc 41, 422; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, October 19, 1847, UPA; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, February 13, 1848, UPA.

winter, persuading the Cheyennes and most of the Arapahos to refrain from joining Kiowa and Comanche raiding parties along the trail, and even convincing some of these bands to cease their hostile actions.[7]

The agent continued similar operations throughout 1848 and 1849. Despite complaints that he lacked an interpreter and adequate supplies of gifts, Fitzpatrick held peace talks with the Northern Arapahos and Sioux along the South Platte River in February 1848. Less is known about his specific duties during late-1848 and 1849. The agent held a few informal talks with local Indians around Bent's Fort, and negotiated for the release of some Mexicans held captive by the tribes.[8]

Cultivating peaceful relations with the Cheyennes was especially important, for Indian raiding along the Santa Fe Trail escalated dramatically during the Mexican-American War. By 1849, reports of depredations formed a sizable portion of the communication between New Mexican officials and their superiors in St. Louis and Washington. Lack of sufficient manpower, especially mounted troops, allowed the Indians to raid at will James Calhoun reported to Madill. The tribes had little respect for the new government, Calhoun continued; "they do not believe we have the power to chastise them. Is it not time to enlighten them upon this subject, and put to an end their ceaseless depredations. At this moment, above our established Indian country on the Arkansas, these people are committing every

[7] Hafen, "Tom Fitzpatrick and the First Indian Agency in Colorado," 55-6; Stan Hoig, *The Western Odyssey of John Simpson Smith: Frontiersman and Indian Interpreter* (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1974; University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 74; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, October 19, 1847, UPA.

[8] Fitzpatrick to Harvey, June 24, 1848, UPA; Fitzpatrick to Madill, August 11, 1848, UPA; Hafen, "Tom Fitzpatrick and the First Indian Agency in Colorado," 56-7.

depredation within their power, so far up as Bent's Fort."[9] Fitzpatrick also complained about Indian raiding, and argued for aggressive military action as the only way to curtail raiding along the trails. Much of difficulty in dealing with Indians, he claimed, resulted from coddling by the government. The agent complained of the "great forebearance and constant humoring of all their whims," by officials in the Office of Indian Affairs and missionary lobbyists. As early as 1847, Fitzpatrick reported that the trail between Bent's Fort and Taos, "is becoming daily more dangerous for small parties."[10] The agent complained that any treaties he made were "less than useless," without military muscle to back his play. There would be no peace on the plains until the United States military demonstrated its ability to punish raiding tribes. Fitzpatrick wrote, "these Indians are not at all aware of our capacity or power to chastise them and never will believe it until they have proof of the fact, and that can only be done by giving some of these tribes…a severe chastisement – that once done I firmly believe would be the means of putting a stop to the frequent robberies and murders in that country."[11]

Never had the trail been as crowded as in the years between 1846 and 1849. In addition to the regular flow of merchant caravans, active troops, discharged troops, quartermaster supply trains, surveying parties, and dispatch bearers crowded the route along the Arkansas. In 1849, D. D. Mitchell noted laconically,

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[9] James Calhoun to William Madill, August 15, 1849, quoted in *The Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun*, ed. Abel, 20; Calhoun to Madill, October 1, 1849, in ibid., 31-2 (quote is from page 32).
[10] Fitzpatrick to Harvey, October 19, 1847, UPA; ibid., December 18, 1847, UPA.
[11] Fitzpatrick to Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA; William Gilpin to Fitzpatrick, February 8, 1848, UPA; Fitzpatrick to Gilpin, February 10, 1848, UPA; Fitzpatrick to Madill, August 11, 1848, UPA.

"Our relations with the various prairie tribes…are very much changed by our territorial acquisitions in New Mexico, and on the Pacific Coast." While Mitchell did not dispute the legality of the traffic crossing the Southern Plains, he pointed out that its increased frequency led to more trouble. Prior to the war, "there were only a few Mexicans and Indians passing through this section of the country," and they purchased safe passage through trade. Furthermore, he pointed out that Indian raiding posed the least threat to white travelers during the winter months, when, "there is no passing, and repassing of troops, traders, or immigrants across the plains, consequently no Indian depredations can be committed."[12] Other observers noted this phenomenon long before Mitchell. In July 1847, M.L. Baker wrote, "the whole road is full of hostile Indians who are plundering all the trains not guarded by a military escort." Fitzpatrick also drew a direct connection between the war and increasing Indian hostilities. "I can say that the country is at present in a far less state of security and tranquility than before the commencement of the Mexican War or before the marching and countermarching of United States troops to and from New Mexico the assertions of the Washington journals to the contrary notwithstanding," he informed his superiors. In August 1848, he was more frank: "The Santa Fe Road at the present time is in…need of some speedy measures for its protection."[13]

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[12] Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1942; St. Martin's Press, 2000), 251; Walker Wyman, "The Military Phase of Santa Fe Freighting, 1846-1865," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (November 1932): 415; Mitchell to Madill, June 1, 1849, UPA; Mitchell to Orlando Brown, August 27, 1849, UPA.

[13] M. L. Baker to M. D. Baker Martin, July 14, 1847, typescript letter, Mexican War Collection, MHS; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA; Fitzpatrick to Madill, August 11, 1848, UPA.

American observers noted that, in addition to their sheer volume, the types of travelers along the Santa Fe Trail stimulated Indian raiding. At the beginning of the Mexican-American War, the Army faced a severe shortage of experienced teamsters. Private traders employed the most experienced bull-whackers and wagoneers. Because the military required an enormous amount of supplies, government officials employed whomever they could find to guard and handle the wagons and teams streaming back and forth along the length of the trail. Most of the government teamsters were raw and inexperienced; they let stock stray, panicked at the slightest whisper of Indian trouble, and proved singularly inept at defending themselves.[14] William Clark had recognized the importance of experienced plainsmen to this overland trade as early as 1831. He wrote the Secretary of War that, "the safety of a Trading party either to Mesico or in the direction of the Mountains will depend principally on the material composing it: If they are men of great prudence and firmness and withal have a sufficient acquaintance with the Indian character, there chance of success is good, but if on the contrary, the party is composed of raw young men…their destruction is certain." Fitzpatrick, characteristically, was more direct. He informed his superiors that, "no sooner than the Indians learned that 'greenhorns' were again on the trail they changed their operations from the south to the north and as I am

[14] Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage*, 74, 161; Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 80.

informed intends making the Santa Fe Trail the theatre of warring operations for the future."[15]

Increased commercial and military traffic led to more intense conflict over diminishing natural resources along the length of the Santa Fe Trail. Teamsters, emigrants, and Indians clashed over access to grass, water, wood, game, and campsites. Although these issues affected all the tribes of the region, the Comanches and Kiowas especially felt the pinch of diminishing resources, and they proved the most aggressive raiders.[16] George Bent recalled that, during the Gold Rush, emigrants plied the Santa Fe Trail, shooting buffalo, cutting timber, and fouling traditional Indian camping grounds. He noted, "in all the valleys for miles away from the river the grass was eaten down into the ground by the emigrants' hungry horses." Fitzpatrick felt that the destruction of game and cutting of timber by white travelers was not the fundamental cause of Indian hostility, but he feared with good reason that such actions would inevitably heighten tensions between the groups, and recommended that the Indians be in some way indemnified "for the trespass which they have of late commenced to complain of."[17]

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[15] William Clark to the Secretary of War, November 20, 1831, Letterbook, p. 299, R1 V4, Clark Papers; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA.

[16] Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage,* 23, 152 (quote is from 23); Wyman, "Military Phase," 420; Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest, 1806-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 321. On Comanche and Kiowa raiding specifically, see Kevin Sweeney, "Thirsting for War, Hungering for Peace: Drought, Bison Migrations, and Native Peoples on the Southern Plains, 1845-1859," *Journal of the West* 41 (Summer 2002): 73; Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage,* 24; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 292-93; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 175; Thomas W. Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 280.

[17] George E. Hyde, ed., *Life of George Bent, Written from His Letters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 96; Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains*

The most dramatic conflict over resources reported by white travelers was the cavalier and wasteful way in which they hunted the region's buffalo. Indeed, the very presence of the herds helped underwrite the trade with Santa Fe. A steady supply of buffalo meat allowed traders to dedicate less cargo space to foodstuffs, and more to trade goods. The traffic of soldiers, traders, and emigrants combined with hunting expeditions by local tribes, tribes from the Indian Territory, and New Mexican *ciboleros* placed an increased strain upon the regional herds. During his 1846 adventure on the prairies, Francis Parkman wrote, "Great changes are at hand….With the stream of emigration to Oregon and California, the buffalo will dwindle away, and the large wandering communities who depend on them for support must be broken and scattered."[18] Comments on the wasteful way in which white travelers hunted buffalo are common throughout the primary literature of the western trails. George Frederick Ruxton, no great admirer of Americans in general, wrote of the "cruel slaughter made by most of the white travelers across the plains, who wantonly destroy these noble animals, not ever for the excitement of sport, but in cold-blooded and insane butchery." In 1843, John C. Frémont's waspishly tempered cartographer Charles Preuss noted simply, "Shooting buffalo with the howitzer is a cruel but amusing sport." During the march of the Army of the West, Marcellus Ball Edwards criticized the bloodlust of his compatriots. None of them

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(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 27; Fitzpatrick to Mitchell, May 22, 1849, UPA.

[18] Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe,* 10; Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991), 482; Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky-Mountain Life,* ed. by Charles H. J. Douglas ((New York: Macmillan, 1923), 190.

"feels satisfied with killing a sufficient number to supply all his wants." Rather, they killed as long their rifles were in range, "either to count in the future the number he has destroyed, or to obtain a tongue, a hump rib, or a marrow bone." Because of such practices, Ball reported that the range of the herds had shrunk to the area between Pawnee Rock and Bent's Fort.[19]

Indian raiders began striking trading caravans during the summer of 1846. Although the Army of the West marched to New Mexico without being harassed, wagon trains that followed Kearny were not always as fortunate. Even the 1846 eastbound Bent-St. Vrain caravan was attacked. Comanches struck the company caravan in late-May, west of Pawnee Fork, killing one employee. About one week later, traveling scientist Frederick Wislizenus encountered "the grave of the unfortunate man," near the site of the attack. Raiding during the latter part of the summer season prompted Ceran St. Vrain to take greater care in planning the return trip to Bent's Fort. Initially, the trader departed ahead of his caravan with a small escort. However, the members of an eastbound government wagon train informed him of Indian trouble ahead. As a result, Lewis Garrard wrote, "he waited for us to come up, preferring slow travel and a large company to a small party and uncertain possession of his scalp."[20]

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[19] George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 63; Charles Preuss, *Exploring with Frémont: The Private Diaries of Charles Preuss, Cartographer for John C. Frémont on His First, Second, and Fourth Expeditions to the Far West,* trans. and ed. Erwin G. and Elisabeth K. Gudde (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 84; Abraham Johnston, Marcellus Ball Edwards, and Philip Gooch Ferguson, *Marching with the Army of the West, 1846-1848,* ed. Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1936), 130-31 (quote is from 130).

[20] Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail,* 79; Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972),

Eighteen forty-seven proved the most hazardous trading season since William Becknell's first trip over the Santa Fe Trail in 1821. A Comanche war part attacked their wagon train at the crossing of Walnut Creek on May 28, 1847. The attackers killed one man, William Tharp, cutting him off from the caravan while he hunted buffalo. The *St. Louis Reveille* reported that the attackers were Cheyennes and Arapahos, and that "the rascals drove off large numbers of mules and oxen, belonging to the party." The company lost forty head of stock in the attack. Less than a week later, raiders struck the train at Ash Creek, but inflicting no casualties. The men reached Westport on June 9.[21] Raiding remained a serious problem throughout the summer. Former company employee turned independent trader, Alexander Barclay, sought the protection of St. Vrain's caravan, "in consequence of the depradations of the Comanches during the summer in the neighborhood of Pawnee Fork." The entire caravan arrived at Bent's Fort on September 23, 1847.[22]

In the autumn of 1847, Fitzpatrick disconsolately wrote his superiors of the Indian situation along the trail. "It is very evident," he reported, "that our Indian affairs in this country and New Mexico are in a very bad state, and nothing having

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589; Frederick Wislizenus, *Memoire of a Tour to Northern Mexico, Connected with Col. Doniphan's Expedition in 1846 and 1847* 10; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail; or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire,* with an introduction by A. B. Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 15.

[21] *St. Louis Reveille,* June 15, 1847; *Missouri Republican*, June 14, 1847; Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage,* 158-60; Barry, *Beginning,* 690. Although it seems unlikely that the Cheyennes or Arapahos attacked the Bent-St. vrain wagon train, tensions were rising between the tribes and the Americans. That same summer, skittish traders shot and killed a Cheyenne chief who rode towards their wagons in an attempt to initiate trade. See Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage*, 159; George Bird Grinnell, "Diary," 1914, entry 352, 53, Autry National Center.

[22] M. L. Baker to M.D. Baker Martin, July 27, 1847, typescript letter, Box 1, Mexican War Collection, MHS; Alexander Barclay, "Diary," August 7, 24, 1847 and September 23, 1847, Box 1, Barclay Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley. (The quote comes from the August 7 entry).

yet transpired to check their ardour and hostile movements, are becoming still more insolent and emboldened every day. Their great success on the Santa Fe road, with little or no loss, together with the failure of all the campaigns made by our troops in New Mexico against them…have had the worst possible effect." The agent pleaded with the government to send more troops to the region, and to accelerate the size and scope of their operations both along the Arkansas and in New Mexico. Indeed, he reported that the news and rumors of American incompetence in New Mexico circulated among the tribes of his agency, and "have a strong bearing on the dispositions of those under my jurisdiction," the agent wrote in October. To make matters worse, Fitzpatrick had received rumors of "a combination between the disaffected Mexicans, Apaches, and Comanche Indians," for the purpose of "carrying on a guerrilla war against all travelers on the Santa Fe road next summer."[23] The total costs of the summer's raiding, in terms of lives and monetary losses, provided Fitzpatrick's superiors with startling confirmation of his pessimistic assessments. The agent reported that the Comanches, Kiowas, and Pawnees were responsible for the deaths of forty-seven Americans, the destruction of 330 wagons, and the theft of 6,500 head of livestock, mostly from government wagon trains.[24]

Such bleak reports prompted the Army to take action during 1847 and 1848. In the spring of 1847, an Army detachment began construction on Fort Mann, a

[23] Fitzpatrick to Harvey, October 19, 1847, UPA; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA.
[24] Fitzpatrick to Harvey, October 19, 1847, UPA; Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage*, 164; Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History*, 318; David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1954; Bison Books, 1972), 320-21; Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail*, 84.

tiny outpost on the Arkansas, east of the Cimarron Cutoff. By June, Comanche raiders made occupation untenable, and the post was abandoned. In November, the newly formed "Indian Battalion," under the command of William Gilpin reoccupied Fort Mann. Gilpin's men were singularly unsuited for the task of protecting the commerce of the prairies. Composed mostly of undersupplied and undertrained German immigrants, the force accomplished little of note between the autumn of 1847 and the final abandonment of Fort Mann a year later.[25] While preparing for a spring campaign, Gilpin wintered his cavalry at Big Timbers, subsisting on whatever supplies he could buy from William Bent or the traders at Pueblo. Bent aided the officer in procuring horses and mules for the Battalion's operations the following spring, accompanying Gilpin's column as far south as the trader's ranch near Mora. From Mora, Gilpin conducted a fruitless search for hostiles along a great stretch of the South Canadian River, before turning north for Fort Mann. Although the Indian Battalion proved incapable of finding Indians, let alone subduing them, Army detachments inflicted heavy casualties upon the Comanches in two other engagements, ending hostilities along the trail for the remainder of 1848.[26] Despite having loudly and consistently demanding military aid, Fitzpatrick was caustic in his assessment of the Army's performance in 1848. He wrote that, "the Indians seem to have partially ceased their continued warring upon our people passing through the country, more particularly on the Santa Fe road, inasmuch as fewer attacks have been reported, and comparatively but little

[25] Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage*, 48-53, 166-69; Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail*, 80-81, 92; Fitzpatrick to Harvey, December 18, 1847, UPA.
[26] Chalfant, *Dangerous Passage*, 186-195, 237-250.

loss sustained last season." However, the agent did not attribute this trend to Gilpin's martial prowess. Rather, Fitzpatrick wrote that in 1846 and 1847, the Indians had "secured so much booty by their daring raids upon travelers," that they "are now, and have been the past summer, luxuriating in and enjoying the spoils." He cautioned, though, that raids would undoubtedly continue in 1849.[27]

In this increasingly unstable environment, William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain dissolved a partnership that had lasted for nearly twenty years. No details exist regarding the specifics of the dissolution. Following the death of Charles Bent at Taos, William and St. Vrain reorganized their operations, forming the new partnership of St. Vrain and Bent. William served as the new firm's junior partner. The men established a store in Santa Fe, located on the town plaza. The store catered to a wide variety of consumer tastes. Advertisements posted in the *Santa Fe Republican* testify to the diversity of the partners' stock of goods. The newspaper proclaimed that this "extensive establishment" housed "a large and splendid assortment of goods of every variety from the United States," at retail prices. The partners sold clothing "of all kinds and qualities excelling in quantity and quality any ever opened in Santa Fe." Coffee, sugar, tea, jellies, butter, cheese, sperm candles, sardines, glassware, mackerel, oysters, raisins, "SUPERIOR LIQUORS" and "BOTTLED CHAMPAGNE," could "be purchased uncommonly

[27] On peacekeeping efforts among the Cheyennes and Arapahos, see Fitzpatrick to Harvey, February 13, 1848, UPA. On the ineffectiveness of the military, see Fitzpatrick to Mitchell, May 22, 1849, UPA.

low for cash."[28] The partners operated the store for a short time, however. In November, Joab Houghton bought out St. Vrain and Bent. The *Santa Fe Republican* encouraged customers to patronize Houghton's establishment. "No man deserves more consideration and respect of the public, and we hope to see him liberally patronized in his commercial pursuit," the paper enthused. One week later, the paper reported that "Capt. St. Vrain has sold out his stock of goods and returns to the United States."[29] William's sister, Dorcas Carr informed Silas Bent that, with the dissolution of St. Vrain and Bent, the former partners had settled all the debts they owed to the Chouteaus in St. Louis. Why the men ended the partnership is unclear. Charles Bent seems to have provided the driving energy behind the firm, and his death proved disillusioning to his partners. David Lavender cites St. Vrain's increasing business connections with the Army in New Mexico. He could make more money freighting and contracting for the military than he could in the Indian trade, Lavender concludes.[30]

It appears that the instability caused by the greatly enhanced American presence on the Arkansas and in New Mexico increasingly undermined the profitability of William Bent's Indian trade. The escalating violence that accompanied the growing traffic along the Santa Fe Trail made travel and trade hazardous. As noted earlier, Bent wagon trains suffered numerous attacks,

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[28] Lavender, *Bent's Fort*, 334; Harold, "Ceran St. Vrain," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 5: 313; *Santa Fe Republican*, November 20, 1847.
[29] *Santa Fe Republican*, November 20, 27, 1847.
[30] Dorcas Carr to Silas Bent, December 26, 1848, Box 1, William C. Carr Papers, MHS; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 88; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 322.

resulting in the loss of men and livestock. While William Bent might urge the Cheyennes to maintain peace in the face of aggressive American expansion, other tribes did not differentiate between Bent's employees and those of other merchants or the government. Company relations with the Comanches, for instance, began deteriorating as early as 1846. Not only did the establishment of Bent's Fort on the Arkansas have the potential to disrupt the tribe's commercial dominance of the region, but expansion into the Texas Panhandle further undermined the Comanche's economic autonomy. By usurping the role of the Comanches as the preeminent economic player in the region, Bent-St. Vrain inadvertently sowed seeds of hostility with their new customers. Increasingly marginalized, the Comanches accelerated raiding into Mexico and along the Santa Fe Trail. Much of the partners' success in the Indian trade resulted from its relative isolation. Far from the centers of American power, visited only occasionally by soldiers or Indian agents, relations with the Cheyennes remained stable. However, with the advent of the Mexican-American War and the discovery of gold in California, whites poured into the Arkansas River Valley. Familiarity increasingly bred contempt, discontent, and the potential for violent confrontation. Bent found it increasingly difficult to persuade the Cheyennes that they might coexist peacefully with the newcomers. The voracious herds accompanying the emigrants and traders, and especially the depletion of the buffalo herds sparked retaliatory raiding. The raids, in turn, prompted an increased military presence, which would initiate a new cycle of violence in the coming years.[31] Douglas Comer writes, "The principals of the

[31]For general information concerning the effects of deteriorating Indian relations upon the Bents, see

BSVC had been greatly involved with the preparations for the Mexican War and were instrumental to the war's success. It is ironic that the war destabilized the area to the extent that the BSVC could no longer survive." He continues, "The successful conquest of New Mexico by the United States…opened the area to new interests that would destroy the company and drive out William Bent's adopted people." Other factors also contributed to the decline in William Bent's fortunes.[32]

Squeezed by so many new arrivals, the Cheyennes also suffered dreadfully from disease in the late 1840s. Numerous scourges struck the Southern Plains in the 1840s, undermining the strength and vitality of local Indian groups. Disease hit white travelers and traders as well. Close, crowded environments, like those at Bent's Fort, provided a breeding ground for disease. Douglas Comer speculates that one of the reasons for the decline and abandonment of Bent's Fort was cholera, the product of fouled wells supplying the post with water. However, disease ravaged the tribes of the Southern Plains far worse than any whites in the region.[33] Although the great smallpox epidemic that devastated tribes like the Mandans in 1837 had little effect on groups like the Cheyennes and Comanches, the disease

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Samuel P. Arnold, "William W. Bent," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 6:78; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes,* 100; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 289, 319; Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 221; Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 16, 223. For information specific to the Comanche trade see Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire,* 167; Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System," *Western Historical Quarterly* 29 (1998): 512; Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 115; Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 125; Abert, *Examination of New Mexico,* 511-12; Janet Lecompte, "Bent, St. Vrain and Company among the Comanche and Kiowa," *Colorado Magazine* 49 (1972): 286-90.

[32] Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 125, 219.

[33] Ibid., 195.

found its way to the region in 1839-1840. The Kiowas called the winter of 1839-40 the "Smallpox Winter." Their oral tradition states that Osage traders brought the disease, which killed many Comanches, Apaches, and Kiowas all over the Staked Plains. The Southern Cheyennes dealt with measles and whooping cough in the middle of the decade. George Bent informed George Bird Grinnell that 1845 was the worst year for the "Red Small Pox" among the Cheyennes. Whooping cough came hard on the heels of this epidemic. Disease, combined with the shifting migration patterns of the buffalo herds away from the Arkansas River made 1846 a very difficult year for the Southern Cheyennes. Starvation became a major threat.[34]

Cholera was the worst disease to strike the Southern Cheyennes during the final years of William Bent's operations. The scourge came to Cheyenne country in a number of different ways. California-bound emigrants, traveling along the Arkansas and Platte rivers probably infected some Indians. It is also possible that those infected along the trails transmitted the disease to other bands. The 1849 cholera epidemic struck as far south as the Kiowa country. James Mooney writes that hundreds of Kiowas died, and some committed suicide rather than succumb to the wasting disease. A Cheyenne story says that the tribe caught the sickness from travelers along the Platte. A raiding party searching for Pawnees happened upon an emigrant camp, already devastated by the disease. Instantly recognizing the danger, the warriors fled south. However, George Bent stated that one young warrior rode on ahead to warn the main camp along the Smoky Hill River. The

[34] Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119; Mooney, *Calendar History*, 274; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 101; Bent to Grinnell, November 18, 1908, MS5 F-122b, Autry.

man rode into camp and cried out that the "whole war party that he was with [was] now dying and falling off their horses with cramps." The Dog Soldiers in charge of the camp immediately ordered the panicked families to scatter.[35]

Cheyenne and Kiowa sources agree that the Osages brought the worst of the disease to the Kiowa sun dance in 1849. The events of that summer became seared into the collective memory of both tribes. The Kiowas called the summer of 1849 the "Cramp sun dance" summer. George Bent recalled that all the tribes of the Southern Plains remembered the time "When the Big Cramps Took Place." The Kiowas held their annual sun dance on Mule Creek, located between Medicine Lodge Creek and the Salt Fork of the Arkansas. The disease had an especially devastating psychological effect, because it struck so quickly. Someone might wake up perfectly healthy in the morning, and be dead by noon. The 1849 sun dance "was an awful big gathering" of Cheyennes, Kiowas, Comanches, Osages, and some Arapahos. The Osages had come as traders, bringing with them goods like otter skins to barter during the festivities. Unfortunately, disease travels over the same trails as trade goods.[36]

The epidemic broke out during the middle of the religious ceremonies. The Kiowas say that during the dancing, one man saw a vision, and began to prophesy about a coming calamity. The rest of the people thought him "crazy" until one man

[35] Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 113; Mooney, *Calendar History*, 173; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 96-7; Bent to Hyde, March 16, 1915, Box 4 Folder 36; Bent to Hyde, October 6, 1916, Box 4 Folder 39, Yale.

[36] Bent to Hyde, January 23, 1905, Box 3 Folder 3; Bent to Hyde, April 3, 1915, Box 4 Folder 36; Bent to Hyde, October 17, 1916, Box 4 Folder 39; Bent to Hyde, October 26, 1916, Box 4 Folder 35; Bent to Hyde, March 29, 1917, Box 4 Folder 41, all at Yale; Mooney, *Calendar History*, 289; Mildred Mayhall, *The Kiowas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 177; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes*, 113-14; Hyde, *Life of George Bent*, 97, note 20.

sickened and died within hours, then another, until within a few days the disease spread through the entire camp. Kiowa tradition says half the tribe died as a result, though James Mooney thinks that figure an exaggeration.[37] George Bent's Cheyenne sources provide more detail. Porcupine Bull told Bent that a Kiowa sun dancer fell over and died within the sacred medicine lodge. Then, an Osage trader died within "a few feet" of Porcupine Bull. The man cried out for everyone to leave the lodge and abandon the camp.[38] Sitting in Lodge remembered that the disease struck just as the dance was ending. A Kiowa sickened and died. Curious, the men, women, and children gathered around the dying man. An old Kiowa man recognized the symptoms and cried out that the cramps had come. Other Indians quickly sickened and died, and a great cry went up throughout the entire camp. Sitting in Lodge said, "the Kiowas and Osages made the most noise of any…Indians."[39]

The Cheyennes joined the chaotic exodus from the sun dance site the same day the disease broke out. Bent recalled that the Cheyennes and Arapahos fled north towards their camps along the Arkansas, the Kiowas fled south, the Osages east. The Cheyennes fled all through the night, Bent remembered. His grandmother died during the night. Near the Arkansas, the panicked Cheyennes ran into another band coming south, the same band that caught the disease from the sickened emigrants along the Platte. Thus, the disease closed in upon the Southern Cheyennes from two directions. In the confusion, one warrior, Little Old Man,

[37] Mooney, *Calendar History*, 289-90;
[38] Bent to Hyde, March 16, 1915, Box 4 Folder 36, Yale.
[39] Bent to Hyde, October 17, 1916, Box 4 Folder 39, Yale.

painted himself for battle, mounted his war horse, and rode through the camp shouting, "if I could see this thing if I knew where it came from, I would go there and fight it!" Tradition says that, immediately after dismounting, Little Old Man collapsed into his wife's arms and died.[40] Cholera devastated the Southern Cheyennes. Bent's sources informed him that a "whole lot of them died and cholera was only few days among them." It is also possible that some Cheyennes contracted the disease in the vicinity of Bent's Fort. Regardless of the exact source of the disease, the sickness ruined William Bent's trade prospects for 1849. The Cheyennes, scattered and demoralized looked to survival first, and only then towards commerce. The disruption of the epidemic, combined with the increased hostility of the Comanches and some Arapaho bands made Bent's position on the Arkansas practically untenable.[41]

Environmental factors, combined with market hunting also placed great pressure on the bison herds of the Southern Plains. Increasingly erratic migration patterns, and shrinking numbers further undercut both the fortunes of both the Southern Cheyennes and William Bent. The bison population on the Southern Plains was neither static nor as high as the estimates given by awestruck white observers. The declining number of bison during the first half of the nineteenth century is attributable to a number of factors. Although the demands of the robe trade encouraged regional Indians like the Cheyennes and Comanches to increase

[40] Bent to Hyde, February 10, 1915, Box 4 Folder 35, Yale; Hyde to Grinnell, February 9, 1916, MS 5 Folder 51-B, Autry; Hyde to Grinnell, October 12, 1916, MS 5 Folder 51-C, Autry. The story of Little Old Man comes from the letter of February 9.
[41] Bent to Hyde, October 26, 1916, Box 4 Folder 39, Yale; Comer, *Ritual Ground,* 226; Berthrong, *Southern Cheyennes,* 114.

the number of animals they killed, market demands are not enough to explain why many observed their dwindling numbers. Natural phenomena, combined with overhunting increasingly jeopardized both the subsistence base of the Southern Cheyennes and the economic basis of the robe trade at Bent's Fort. The margin for error was slim in an environment as unforgiving as that of the Southern Plains. Those who succeeded adapted. However, James Sherow observes, "From around 1820 through the 1860s, the Plains Indians' adaptation strategies worked less well in a region undergoing rapid environmental change each passing year."[42]

Drought contributed greatly to the declining numbers of bison. Lack of rainfall exacerbated the other natural hazards faced by the bison herds: fire, floods, wolf predation, and disease. Without rain, the grass withered and the rivers dried up, thereby dramatically limiting the grassland's carrying capacity. Migration onto the plains, and the transition to full-blown nomadism, by tribes like the Cheyennes and Comanches took place over a period of three and a half centuries, some of the wettest on record. This weather pattern broke around 1850, and rainfall dropped by around 30% over the next decade. Between 1849 and 1862, the Southern Plains suffered one of the worst draughts of the nineteenth century. Prolonged draught struck at a time when the population of the region was at an all-time high. Indian groups had converged upon the Southern Plains, taking advantage of the grass,

[42] Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison,* 29-30 (quote is from page 30); West, *The Way to the West,* 21, 33, 71; Richard White, "The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of American History* 25 (1978): 330-31; Flores, "Bison Ecology," 470; James E. Sherow, "Workings of the Geodialectic: High Plains Indians and Their Horses in the Region of the Arkansas River Valley, 1800-1870," *Environmental History Review* 16 (1992): 80.

timber, and water found in the Platte and Arkansas river valleys. However, the newcomers, and the vast numbers of horses they brought with them, competed directly with the bison for access to these precious locations. Even in good years, water can be difficult to find on the Southern Plains. Below Pueblo, for example, the Arkansas River sometimes ceases to flow during the summer. The sharp decline in precipitation cut deeply into the bison population. In addition, the herds shifted their annual wanderings further east, away from the Cheyennes and Comanches. Traveler Frederick Wislizenus noted the connection between the fortunes of the bison and those of the Indian. "The Indian and the buffalo are Siamese twins," he wrote, "both live and thrive only on one ground, that of the wilderness. Both will perish together."[43]

Despite the critical role of environmental degradation in the decline of the buffalo herds, human agency was also a critical component. By itself, subsistence hunting contributed to the decline. In the case of the Comanches, expanding military and economic power went hand-in-hand. As they raided and traded further afield, they became richer; as they became wealthier, their population grew, as did the demand for meat and hides. The arrival of traders like the Bents and St. Vrain accelerated the pace of Comanche hunting, for now they hunted to satisfy the

[43] Flores, "Bison Ecology," 470, 481-82; West, *Way to the West*, 17,33, 38, 81 (quote is from 81); Sweeney, "Thirsting for War," 71-7; Sherow, "Geodialectic," 75, 79; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 285, 296; Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 216; Isenberg, *Destruction*,28, 110; Richard White, "Animals and Enterprise," in *The Oxford History of the American West*, eds. Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 249; Mitchell to Madill, June 1, 1849, UPA; Abert, *Examination of New Mexico*, 422; William H. Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth, in Missouri, to San Diego, in California* (Washington: Wendell and van Benthuysen), 14; Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* , 269; Wislizenus, *Journey*, 53.

demands of American markets. Furthermore, Indians hunting for these markets disproportionately targeted buffalo cows for slaughter, since their hides were lighter, more pliable, and converted more easily into the robes sought by white traders. Such hunting patterns curtailed the natural reproduction of the herds. The arrival of tribes like the Shawnees and Delawares in Indian Territory only increased the number of hunters on the plains. Hispanic hunters from New Mexico added to the number of bison killed each year.[44]

Anglo observers made the connection between market hunting and declining bison numbers. As early as 1835, an officer with Dodge's dragoon expedition wrote, "the fact that on this part of the Arkansas two trading establishments have been in operation for nine years until very lately, fully accounts for the scarcity of buffalo."[45] Another officer wrote,

> From all we have been able to learn, we cannot but believe that the Buffalo…are rapidly diminishing. This may be attributed in great measure to the inducements held out by the traders, as Buffalo Skins are the only commodity the Indians possess to give them in exchange for their goods. We were told by persons, who were well acquainted with this country that in large tracts through which we passed without seeing a single buffalo, they had never failed to find them in great abundance, and it is the belief of the traders…living in this country, that unless some plan can be adopted to prevent the immense slaughter of these animals…the Indians must necessarily in a few years be in a very destitute situation, or be subsisted by the Government.[46]

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[44] Pekka Hämäläinen, "The First Phase of Destruction: Killing the Southern Plains Buffalo, 1790-1840," *Great Plains Quarterly* 90 (2003): 103-7; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 294-95; Flores, "Bison Ecology," 483.

[45] James Josiah Webb, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade* (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1931; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 73; Lemuel Ford, "A Summer Upon the Prairie," in *The Call of the Columbia: Iron Men and Saints Take the Oregon Trail*, ed. Archer Butler Hulbert (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library), 290.

[46] Richard Hill Graham and Sidney Smith, "Report of a Journey to the Rocky Mountains," ed. John E. Sunder, *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 11 (October 1946): 51.

Some associated with the robe trade at Bent's Fort commented on this alarming trend as well. "Our chief dependence here is on the Buffalo for meat which are generally found to be within fifteen to thirty miles of the fort," post clerk Alexander Barclay wrote his brother in 1838. By the summer 1845, his assessment was far bleaker. Although he hoped to enter the robe trade for himself, he noted that, "the buffalo are decreasing rapidly," and that the future, "is all uncertitude." At the close of the year, he wrote his brother, "the Buffalo robe business is becoming limited every year from the decrease of the animal itself which is now becoming such a rarity with us even at the foot of the Mountains that we have to go one or 200 miles to get the first sight of one."[47] Reminiscing years later, former employee Dick Wooton marveled at the decline of the herds. "It never occurred to me then that I should live long enough to see all the buffaloes killed off," he said sadly. Long gone were the days when he could ride out, shoot a buffalo, dress the meat, and gather the hide, "with about as little trouble as a ranchman has in getting a beef out of his herd of cattle." When he hunted for the company, he recalled, he could kill thirty bison a day, more than enough to supply the needs of the fort's employees.[48] William Bent must have recognized the increasing tenuousness of his business situation by 1846, for he informed Captain William Emory that he was considering moving the Company's operations downriver to the Big Timbers where

[47] Alexander Barclay to George Barclay, October 14, 1838, June 19, 1845, December 1845, all in Box 1, Barclay Papers.
[48] Howard Louis Conard, "*Uncle Dick" Wooton: The Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountain Region* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1957; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 69.

he had better access to water, wood, and the buffalo who sometimes sought shelter there during the winter.[49]

George Bent said his father abandoned the fort along the Arkansas because it contained bad memories. Too many loved ones died within its walls, Bent wrote George Hyde in 1913. "Four of his brothers had died, "he informed the historian, "they had lived at this fort and our mother died there and he told our step mother…he was disgusted on account of this whenever he looked around where they used to live…it made him feel sad and this why he blowed the fort up."[50] William's sister, Dorcas, wrote an acquaintance that the deaths of so many family members had indeed worked a change in the trader's demeanor. He was "entirely changed" by the death of his brother George, she wrote. "I could myself perceive a great change, he says he intends henceforth to devote his life to his brothers children they were now his children and he must work for them," Dorcas informed Silas Bent. Apparently, William Bent became responsible for George's children, in addition to keeping an eye on those of Charles.[51] There were indeed many unpleasant memories at Bent's Fort. George Bent died there in October of 1847, of either consumption or fever. George had come west with his brothers, and almost immediately assumed a position of importance in the company. He took charge of Fort St. Vrain in 1837. By that same year, if not before, he was a full partner in

[49] Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance,* 13. On the advantages of the Big Timbers region, see Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 114; George Routledge Gibson, *Journal of a Solider Under Kearny and Doniphan, 1846-1847,* ed. by Ralph P. Bieber (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), 163.
[50] Bent to Hyde, February 19, 1913, Box 3 Folder 20, Yale.
[51] Dorcas Carr to Silas Bent, December 26, 1848, Box 1, William C. Carr Papers, MHS.

Bent-St. Vrain. He was often in charge of Bent's Fort while his brothers or St. Vrain were away on business. George also spent much time in Taos, cohabiting with a local woman, with whom he had a son. An obituary in the *Santa Fe Republican* stated, "His loss will create a great void, and one which it will be hard to supply."[52]

Although sorrow might have played a role, William Bent had more pragmatic reasons for abandoning the fort, especially the great tension between Bent and the United States government over Kearny's commandeering of the post during the war with Mexico. The Army of the West swarmed over the region, eating up post supplies, taking up valuable storage space, and probably scaring many potential Indian traders away. Furthermore, Francis Parkman noted, "It seemed as if a swarm of locusts had invaded the country. The grass for miles around was cropped close by the horses of General Kearney's soldiery. When we cam up to the fort, we found that not only had the horses eaten up the grass, but their owners had made way with the stores of the little trading post; so that we had great difficulty in procuring the few articles we required for our homeward journey."[53]

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[52] George Bird Grinnell, "Bent's Old Fort and Its Builders," *Kansas Historical Society Collections* 15 (1919-1922): 51; Harvey L. Carter, "George Bent," in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 4: 39-43; Barclay, "Diary," November 9, 1847, Box 1, Barclay Papers; Interview with Thomas Autobees, November 9, 1907, Avondale, Colorado, notebook 10, page 1, Francis W. Cragin Collection, Starsmore Center for Local History, Colorado Springs; Josiah M. Ward, "Historic Bent's Fort and Its Founders," newspaper clipping from the *Denver Post,* January 11, 1920, Box 5 Folder (I) B: 73, Francis W. Cragin Collection; *Santa Fe Republican,* November 13, 1847, in Cragin Collection.

[53] Arnold, "William Bent," 6: 75; Nolie Mumey, *Old Forts and Trading Posts of the West: Bent's Old Fort and Bent's New Fort on the Arkansas River* (Denver: Artcraft Press, 1956), 64; Dwight L.

However, Bent's dislike of the government most likely had roots that dated back to the summer of 1843 when Bent-St. Vrain contracted with the United States government to haul 35,000 pounds of supplies to Bent's Fort and store them there until October 1844. The government would reimburse them at the rate of $0.08 per pound. The supplies were intended to provide support for dragoons under the command of Philip St. George Cooke. Cooke's superiors thought the dragoons would be in the field throughout the fall and winter, thus they offered the contract to the company. St. Vrain proceeded to New Mexico to fill the order. By the time he returned to Bent's Fort with the supplies, he learned that Cooke had returned to Missouri. Thus, sitting on tons of beef, flour, and other provisions, the partners put in a claim against the government for $6, 500. However, they had a great deal of trouble with the government when they tried to redeem their claims, despite the recommendations by those reviewing the claim that the government ought to uphold its end of the original contract. Commissary officers offered to sell the supplies to Bent-St. Vrain at their original cost. The partners declined purchase, stating that they would only pay prices offered in St. Louis. It took the Bents and St. Vrain three years to collect their claim from the government. The bureaucratic foot-dragging probably did little to endear the government to William Bent, even before the arrival of the Army of the West in 1846.[54]

Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny: Soldier of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 109; Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 222; Parkman, *Oregon Trail*, 306.

[54] Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 497-98; "Petition of Bent, St. Vrain and Company," 29th Cong., 2nd Sess. S. doc. 115, p. 1-3; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 244.

Discontent with the government, however, did not prevent the partners from attempting to sell Bent's Fort to the Army. In the summer of 1847, Ceran St. Vrain offered to let the government take over the fort for the price of $15,000. On July 21, 1847, St. Vrain wrote Lieutenant Colonel Eneas Mackay with the offer. The trader wrote that he knew of the military's intentions to construct a chain of posts throughout the plains, and offered Bent's Fort as a suitable location. St. Vrain then proceeded to give Mackay a brief lesson on the history of the post. The partners had founded it in 1834, "for the purpose of trading with the several tribes of Indians in its vicinity." The Bents and St. Vrain chose the location "on account of its central situation in regard to the largest Indian tribes in that section, and on account of its proximity to the settlements of New Mexico." Strategically speaking, the fort was prime real estate. Bent's Fort had other advantages, St. Vrain continued. The walls were high, thick, and "in good repair." There was a good well within the walls, and the shops and trading rooms could easily be made into quarters and a hospital for the garrison, and storehouses for its goods. Furthermore, firewood and timber, "have been and can always be procured within a convenient distance." The route to New Mexico via Bent's Fort also had advantages over the Cimarron route, St. Vrain pointed out. The route trail was longer by about fifty miles, but the supply and quality of wood, water, and forage was much better via the Mountain Branch. Finally, the trader offered an impeccable set of references. Both Kearny and Frémont could vouch for the utility of the fort, and its potential as a military post. These advantages notwithstanding, Mackay turned St. Vrain's offer down.[55]

[55] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 222; St. Vrain to Eneas Mackay, July 21, 1847,

Unsubstantiated stories state that, following the dissolution of St. Vrain and Bent, William also attempted to sell the fort to the Army, only to face rejection as well. David Lavender speculates that St. Vrain's initial offer to sell Bent's Fort caused some tensions within the partner's relationship, thereby speeding the break up of their partnership. Rumors circulated that the Army offered Bent anywhere between $12, 000 and $50, 000 for the facility. Others say that the trader initiated the talks, and asked for $16,000; the government responded with an offer of $12,000. Affronted, William Bent decided to torch the post rather than accept the lower offer. George Bent stated that these latter amounts caused his father to take drastic measures. Bent wrote George Hyde that, " as no agreement could be reached he loaded what goods he could into his wagon and set fire to the powder magazines and blew up the fort."[56]

Some confusion surrounds the story of Bent's abandonment of the fort in 1849. The preponderance of evidence indicates, George Bent's reminiscences notwithstanding, that William Bent abandoned the post in August 1849. In October 1849, the *Missouri Republican* printed the report of some plains travelers regarding the destruction of the fort. Encamped at Hole in the Rock, the travelers "heard distinctly a loud report, resembling that of cannon." On August 22, they came upon "the rubbish of the buildings," all that remained of the post. The paper

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quoted in Creswell Taylor, "Charles Bent has Built a Fort," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society,* 11 (October 1954): 82-4. The quotes all come from page 83; Harold Dunham, "Ceran St. Vrain," in *Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West,* ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965-1972), 5: 313.

[56] Ghent/Hafen, *Broken Hand,* 219; Lavender, *Bent's Fort,* 327, 335; Mumey, *Old Forts,* 108; Hyde, *Life of George Bent,* 93; Bent to Hyde, February 26, 1906, Box 3 Folder 4, Yale.

reported that Utes had fired the fort's magazine, causing the tremendous explosion and fire. "The guns and traps were consumed, and it is supposed all the goods, books, etc. of Bent's concern, had shared the same fate….What had become of Mr. Bent, or any one connected with the concern, they could not tell, there was no trace of them or their whereabouts."[57] The Superintendant of Indian Affairs in New Mexico reported a more prosaic story to his superiors. On October 5, 1849, he wrote simply, "One of the owners of Bent's Fort, has removed all property from it, and caused the fort to be burnt."[58]

Contemporaries and historians both debated the extent to which the fort itself was damaged. George Bent stated that his father "blew up the fort," implying almost total destruction. Others state that Bent simply set fire to the fort. William Arnold argued that Bent did not blow up the fort. The thickness of the walls and the size of the fort made it impractical for the trader to destroy it. Furthermore, the amount of gunpowder required to create such a blast would have made that project impractical. Rather, Arnold speculated that Bent set fire to the ceilings and the supporting beams, intending to damage the post just enough to make it unusable by anyone else. While there is certainly evidence of a fire, the fact that others utilized the fort's buildings in later years, as either a camping spot or a stagecoach station, makes George Bent's recollections unreliable. Regardless of the actual damage

[57] Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 883; *Missouri Republican*, October 2, 1849. Bent told Grinnell that his father blew up the fort in 1852. Grinnell accepted this date, although George Hyde was somewhat more suspicious of Bent's dating. On Bent and the dating of the fort's destruction, see Grinnell, "Notes on Bent's Fort," MS 5 Folder 32-1, and Hyde to Grinnell, May 9, 1917, MS 5 Folder 51-E, Autry.
[58] Calhoun to Madill, October 5, 1849, in *Correspondence of James S. Calhoun*, 42.

done, by the summer of 1849, William Bent had abandoned the site where the old fort stood for almost twenty years. With his family, he moved downriver to the vicinity of the Big Timbers. Here, he built another, far more modest trading post, living out his life as a merchant and Indian agent.[59]

The establishment of a permanent American presence in the borderlands, combined with environmental degradation and disease ultimately destroyed Bent-St. Vrain. American expansion between 1846 and 1849 upset the delicate balance of political and economic power in the Southwest. Most notably, the rapidly increasing volume of traffic along the Santa Fe Trail led to a spike in violent conflict between white travelers and local Indian groups. The resulting animosity rendered William Bent's trade operations nearly impossible. Environmental factors exacerbated the rising interracial tensions. Drought, deforestation, and the shrinking of the buffalo herds adversely affected the fortunes of the region's Indian tribes. Finally, the explosion of white migration through the Southern Plains brought with it a series of devastating outbreaks of disease. By 1849, the situation had declined to the point that William Bent abandoned the great adobe fort on the Arkansas and departed for greener pastures downriver. Thus, rather than opening

[59] Arnold, "William Bent," 6: 78; EnidThompson, "Life in an Adobe Castle," in *Bent's Old Fort* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado, 1979), 25; Mumey, *Old Forts*, 109-13;Harvey L. Carter," *Dear Old Kit:" The Historical Christopher Carson, with a new edition of the Carson Memoirs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 81, note 125; Hyde to Grinnell, April 13, 1917, MS 5 Folder 51-E, Autry; R. Phillips to Grinnell, October 20, 1927, George Bird Grinnell Papers, Microfilm, Reel 41 Frames 38-9. Jackson Ward Moore, Jr., presents much archaeological evidence for fire at the fort, see Jackson Ward Moore, Jr., "The Archaeology of Bent's Old Fort" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1968), 29, 43. For the best modern discussion of the fort's uses after Bent's abandonment, see Mark L. Gardner, "Bent's Old Fort on the Arkansas: Bent's Old Fort NHS Resource Study" (La Junta, CO: Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, no date), 307-17. The best study of Bent's New Fort is found in Mumey, *Old Forts,* especially 123-221.

new economic opportunities, American expansion radically altered the environment within which Bent-St. Vrain had prospered for nearly two decades.

Conclusion

The rise and fall of Bent-St. Vrain's fortunes was the result of a unique set of geographic, social, economic, and political circumstances. The primary force that shaped the situation was the state – both American and Mexican. The institutional weakness of the state in the borderlands affected the ways in which the partners did business, who they allied themselves with, and who they competed with. Far from the centers of state power, the company adapted to local circumstances as best they could. Unable to call upon the military protection of the United States they endeavored to accommodate themselves as far as possible to Native American trade protocols and social practices. The weakness of the Mexican state presented its own unique set of challenges and opportunities. American merchants, aided by their New Mexican counterparts, shifted the economic focus of Mexico's northern frontier away from Mexico City and towards the United States. However, some of the activities the partners participated in – especially the acquisition of land grants and the Indian trade – alienated deeply those in New Mexico who favored the maintenance of ties with the mother country. The political and economic calculus changed radically with the permanent arrival of American power in the region. The conquest of New Mexico in 1846 unleashed years of pent up frustrations and created new power dynamics that ultimately undid the company.

Much of the success of Bent-St. Vrain in the 1830s and 1840s came because of their conscious accommodation to the longstanding social and economic systems they found in the Southwestern Borderlands. Company profits often resulted from the ability of the partners to form solid business and familial contacts with a wide network of individuals from Missouri to Santa Fe to the Rocky Mountains. The ties they formed linked the Bents and St. Vrain to a world of business that extended far beyond their adobe post on the Arkansas River. Familial connections in Missouri allowed the Bents and St. Vrain to take advantage of increased mercantile opportunities. By eventually aligning itself with the Chouteau family, the company gained increased access to credit, suppliers, as well as retailers for its furs and buffalo robes. Contact with the Chouteau's and - by extension - the powerful American Fur Company drew Bent-St. Vrain into an economy that stretched from Europe to the ports of the eastern seaboard, west to St. Louis, and out onto the Great Plains. Recognizing that they did not have the financial clout to make their way in the complicated eastern markets, the partners relied upon the expertise of the well-capitalized St. Louis merchant elites.

On the Plains, the partners realized quickly that they must be keenly attuned to the desires of their Indian customers. Not only did the Indians provide the valuable buffalo robes, so sought after in the St. Louis markets, the local tribes held the upper hand in the region politically and militarily. Attention to native tastes and trade protocol were crucial to financial success. Furthermore, in an effort to enmesh themselves more firmly into the native plains economy, William Bent,

Marcellin St. Vrain, and a number of company traders established marital ties with various tribes. Bent's marriages proved especially helpful, for they united the company with one of the most powerful families in the entire Cheyenne tribe.

Recognition of the importance of accommodation applied to Bent-St. Vrain's interactions with New Mexico. The partners learned Spanish, and cultivated contacts with local merchants and government officials. Furthermore, they also established firmer trade ties through marriage into well-placed Taos families. Marriage could bring citizenship, which in turn had the potential to expedite the acquisition of baronial land grants on the northern frontier. As with intermarriage into Indian groups, marriage to local Mexican women allowed Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain to widen their network of customers, suppliers, and political contacts.

The Bents and St. Vrain could not dictate policy on the Plains. Despite the lengths to which the partners went to accommodate themselves to local conditions, their actions sometimes had the potential to ensnare them in the tumultuous intertribal relationships of the Southern Plains. The Plains were often a violent place. At one time or another, nearly every tribe was at war with someone else – over horses, honor, or to redress past grievances. The Cheyennes, the best customers of Bent-St. Vrain, engaged in longstanding conflicts with the Pawnees to the east, and the Shoshones and Utes to the west. Most serious, though, was the decades-long tensions between the Cheyenne/Arapaho alliance and the Comanche/Kiowa alliance south of the Arkansas River. For years, these groups

raided one another, occasionally inflicting a grievous military defeat. While intermarriage with the Cheyennes brought the potential for increased trade opportunities, the union also had the potential to expose Company traders to recriminations from Cheyenne enemies. It is probable that the alliance with the Cheyennes made it impossible for the company to expand its operations into Comanche country, until the early-1840s.

The Bents and St. Vrain also had to interact with white traders on the plains. In the absence of a strong, regulatory state presence, however, the company generally took a more confrontational, often illegal approach to the problems of economic competition. Although the large trading companies usually sought to avoid the use of alcohol as a trade item, when faced with stiff competition, they broke the law. Selling alcohol to the Indians was illegal under United States law. Yet, confronted by a host of independent, often unscrupulous, traders who traveled the length and breadth of the region plying Indian customers with booze, the partners responded in kind. Their use of alcohol as a way to lubricate the wheels of trade represented another departure from their general accomodationist trade policies, a departure they piously decried.

The weakness of the Mexican state presented the partners simultaneously presented them with their greatest opportunities and challenges. Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain settled in Taos, long a haven for American trappers and traders. In Taos, they allied themselves with an increasingly prominent community of naturalized Mexican citizens, both American and French. These newcomers, the

Bents and St. Vrain included, often took local wives, thereby attaching themselves to a wide network of new political and economic contacts. While these alliances opened up new opportunities, they also proved potentially hazardous. Mexican nationalists never ceased to view the American faction in the province with deep suspicion. The attempts in 1841 and 1843 by Texans to annex New Mexico made many in the local populace intensely resentful of the newcomers. Most importantly, however, the type of business Bent-St. Vrain conducted had the potential to undermine seriously the military and political stability of northern Mexico. Critics of American traders like Bent urged the Mexican government to pay closer attention to their activities north of the Arkansas. American trading posts like Bent's Fort provided Indian raiders like the Comanches with a market at which to dispose of stolen Mexican livestock and captives. In return, the raiders received guns, liquor, and trade goods. New Mexico's political and economic status was shaky enough, without traders like the Bent's possibly abetting the raids that devastated much of the nation's northern frontier. Still, such shrill condemnations of American activity ignored the fact that tribes like the Comanches and Kiowas had their own reasons for raiding.

Finally, when the United States conquered New Mexico in the summer of 1846, the governmental appointments made by General Stephen Watts Kearny caused deep discontent throughout the territory. Rather than seeking to maintain native officials in their former positions, the general handed the reins of power to Charles Bent and his cohort. The events of the first half of the 1840s had made

New Mexican nationalists intensely suspicious of the Bents and St. Vrain. Now, conquered by a foreign power, often bullied by an occupying army, and fearful of a further erosion of their political and economic rights, the populace of northern New Mexico rose up in 1847. They killed Charles Bent, along with a number of his collaborators, both Anglo and Hispanic. Though the revolt ultimately failed, it served as a reminder of the perils of failing to accommodate fully to the political and economic system of the host population.

Although Bent-St. Vrain did not originally set any of these trends into motion, its position as the preeminent American trading firm on the Southern Plains meant that the actions the partners took accelerated preexisting trends. The ways in which the partners conducted trade and diplomacy did impact the local economy and local politics. However, the company did not dictate policy, as historians writing in the first half of the twentieth century claimed. Rather, the Bents and St. Vrain helped connect the Southern Plains and Rockies with broader national markets. Through their actions as Santa Fe traders, they aided in binding the economies of Missouri and New Mexico more closely together, thereby easing the northern province slowly out of the economic and political orbit of Mexico City. The Bents and St. Vrain helped enmesh the Cheyennes and, to a lesser extent, the Comanches more firmly into the American market economy. As the demand for buffalo robes increased in Missouri, the Company's Indian customers demanded adequate compensation for their work. By providing their customers with the

goods they desired, company traders facilitated bargains that were, for the moment, equally beneficial.

However, the economic success the Bents and St. Vrain enjoyed during the 1830s and 1840s actually undercut their long-term economic prospects. In a sense, they helped sew the seeds of their own failure. The company's actions in the buffalo robe trade had an inadvertently negative impact on the native societies of the Southern Plains. By providing a lucrative trading market, they and other American traders enhanced already bitter rivalries among the local Indian groups. Eager to gain access to the best buffalo hunting grounds, the tribes jostled one another for position. Increased collisions sparked a new series of raids and counter raids. Ironically, however, peace on the Southern Plains after 1840 proved increasingly detrimental to the company's long-term prospects. With the scale of warfare dramatically decreased, new hunting grounds opened up to erstwhile rivals. Warfare had created numerous contested zones in which the buffalo herds flourished. The opening of these zones to hunting began to decrease the number of bison in the region, thereby potentially undercutting the economic stability of the company. Finally, the combination of market demands, environmental degradation, and white expansion led to a decline in the fortunes of the Indian tribes of the Southern Plains. Although the Bents and St. Vrain did not intend for any of this to happen, their very presence, the very way in which they conducted business, accelerated these trends, and ultimately helped make their business prospects increasingly untenable.

In this sense, then, the Bents and St. Vrain were victims of their own success. By establishing such a range of economic and social ties, they became economic power players in the region. Recognizing that success usually followed close adherence to local customs and strictures, they built a diverse business enterprise. However, the ways in which they did business – the Indian trade, the robe trade, and trade with New Mexico – ultimately undid them. Hunting for the robe trade led to the increasing destruction of the bison herds, trade with the Indians along the Arkansas helped destabilize northern New Mexico and caused intense distrust and dislike on the part of Mexican nationalists. Their success made Bent's Fort a natural choice from which to launch the invasion of New Mexico. The successful annexation of the territory, however, caused a rapid decline in company fortunes. On their own, far from the reach of American power, Bent-St. Vrain and their local clients flourished. When the United States began to catch up, however, their fortunes began to decline.

Despite claims by historians enamored of the western march of American civilization, Bent-St. Vrain played only a de facto role in the Manifest Destiny project. Traditionally viewed as forerunners of American civilization, an advance guard establishing and holding a beachhead in hostile territory, only in hindsight did the partners aid in American expansion. They rarely called upon the United States government to do anything. In general, they preferred to be left alone, to operate as they saw fit, without interference or oversight by American officials. When they did seek the help of national authorities, the Bents and St. Vrain did so

primarily to further their own economic agenda. They urged the military to provide troop escorts along the Santa Fe Trail, to build a post along the Arkansas River, or to lobby for a reduction in tariff duties. Everything they asked for was designed to aid the company's bottom line. However, by couching their self-interest in the language of national interest, they hoped to see quicker action. Government involvement in the west would protect trade, clamp down on the competition of independent traders, or help Americans try to secure a dominant portion in the Santa Fe trade. Thus, any rhetoric about the expansion of American government or military power by the partners, should not be read as an invitation for expansion, but rather as a cagey attempt to secure the profitability of their business enterprises.

Compounding the irony, the arrival of American power on the Arkansas proved disastrous for the company. The coming of the Army of the West in 1846 ultimately proved a cause for unease, not cause for rejoicing. The Army overran the fort. Kearny's livestock ate all the grass. The soldiers frightened local Indians away. Although the appointment of Charles Bent to the position of Governor of New Mexico in a sense represented the height of the company's success, it also led to the undoing of its enterprise. Bent's appointment caused widespread resentment. His death staggered the partnership. Within months, William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain had dissolved their partnership. The conquest of New Mexico accelerated the process of integrating the Far West with the rest of the nation. Traffic along the Santa Fe Trail increased at an alarming rate. The increased number of teamsters, soldiers, mules, oxen, and horses consumed increasingly scarce sources of grass,

water, firewood, and buffalo. Pinched by these new arrivals, many Southern Plains Indians lashed back; raiding along the trail intensified to a level never before seen. Though Bent helped keep the Cheyennes at peace, the escalating violence made it more and more difficult to conduct business. The very success of the company, at the western terminus of the Santa Fe Trail, made their fort along the Arkansas a vital cog in the American annexation of the Southwest. With annexation, though, the opportunities for autonomous action and peaceful accommodation for both William Bent and local Indian groups declined.

The American penetration of the Southwest unleashed a wave of destructive forces that upset the often precarious balance of economic and political power necessary for the success of the Bents and St. Vrain. American conquest created an intense backlash from Mexican nationalists who chafed under the new regime, and from Native American groups who found their hunting grounds under intense pressure. The violence spawned by American expansion helped destroy the company's fortunes. The weakness of state power – both American and Mexican – that existed in the 1840s created space in which New Mexicans, Native Americans, and Anglo traders like the Bents could maneuver and interact. The arrival in force of the United States severely circumscribed the options of those operating in the vast social, political, and economic networks of the borderlands.

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