

A Selected History of the Lower Arkansas Valley: A Narrative for the West Field Trip
By Michael Schaub

The Spanish were the first to explore the region, sending exploration parties which reached into Nebraska, Wyoming, and as far as Montana. Lacking cities of gold, the Spanish were content to leave this region undeveloped, to simply act as an unpeopled wilderness buffer to separate New Spain's xenophobic administrators from the aggressive French and English, and later the Americans.

Zebulon Pike was one of the first American explorers in the region. His expedition was authorized by Thomas Jefferson to determine the southwestern limits of the Louisiana Purchase. This expedition was similar in purpose to that of Lewis and Clark and partially overlapped in time. The party traveled across present day Nebraska and Colorado till they came to the Arkansas River. There Pike split the party, one group proceeding down the Arkansas River, and the other group under his leadership attempting to find the headwaters of the Red River. Pike's group became confused geographically and wound up wintering in the San Luis Valley where they were confronted and arrested by Spanish authorities as spies. Pike and most of his men were held only a few months before being released, however some of his men were held for years before being granted their freedom. This paranoia wasn't directed only at Pike, Spanish authorities sent out at different times four separate military expeditions to intercept and either arrest or turn back the expedition of Lewis and Clark, with one of these expeditions coming as close as one hundred miles.

While in Mexico, Pike made careful notes of military and economic conditions, which were subsequently published in his reports. Based on this information, business interests in the United States were able to project great demand for consumer goods with commensurate opportunities for great profits in the northern departments of Mexico.

U.S. businessmen were not long in testing the prospects for trade with Northern Mexico. One of the first expeditions was organized by Robert McKnight of the firm McKnight and Brady in 1810. This party of 12 men, on arriving in Santa Fe discovered they were no more welcome than the military expedition under Pike. Accused of being spies, their goods were confiscated and sold at public auction and they were thrown in prison for a period lasting ten years.

The Auguste Choteau and Julius Demunn expedition of 1815-17 was organized with the purpose of trapping and trading in the southwest. On their arrival in New Mexico, they received the usual welcome and were thrown in prison, with all of their goods and property confiscated. Although these men were held only relatively briefly, their property was not returned. Choteau later reported the value of the confiscated property to be \$30,000. As this was a trapping and trading expedition, the value reported was probably the estimated retail value rather than wholesale, and was probably inflated as well.

Because the geography of North America was only poorly understood at best, no one clearly knew what was being passed back and forth when the Louisiana country was ceded to Spain by France in 1763 and then back to France and then immediately to the United States in 1803. By definition the Louisiana Purchase included all lands west of and draining into the Mississippi River. This, however, included lands that had long been settled by New Spain, and clearly which the Spanish authorities had no intention of ceding. These boundary disagreements were settled by the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, also known as the Transcontinental Treaty. This treaty precisely defined the boundary between the United States and New Spain from the mouth of the Mississippi River westward across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. A part of this boundary was defined as the Arkansas River. By the terms of this treaty Spain also ceded Florida and parts of modern Alabama and Mississippi states to the U.S.

Factions within Mexico had been seeking independence from Spain starting around 1810. On September 27, 1821 Mexico won her independence. About this time William Becknell was considering risky business opportunities. Due to financial reverses in previous years, he was deeply in debt. Owing \$1,200 he had been briefly jailed till a friend posted bail, but the judge gave him only until early 1822 to pay off his creditors or face additional jail time. With a number of partners, he put together an outfit to the southwest. According letters he wrote at this time his purpose was to trap and to trade with the Indians. That he was contemplating trade in New Mexico is apparent as he obtained passport and papers from the Spanish diplomats in the U.S. Whether his desperation was so great he would risk a different outcome from earlier expeditions, or if there were rumors that Mexican independence was imminent we cannot know. In either case his timing was nearly perfect. Arriving in Santa Fe in mid-November he was welcomed by the new civil authorities in Mexico and with a population eager to purchase his consumer goods. By mid-December he was entirely sold out and returned to Missouri. His investment of \$300 in trade goods had brought a return of \$6,000 in silver coins. By January of 1822 he was back in Missouri planning his second trading expedition to New Mexico. For this expedition he took \$3,000 in consumer goods, and hauled the merchandise by wagon, rather than by pack animal. Leaving in May of 1822, this expedition elected to take the shorter Cimarron Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, which nearly proved disastrous as the party crossed the "water scrape" and nearly perished of thirst. This second venture was even more profitable with returns of some \$91,000.

Over time profits from the trade with Mexico came to be transferred in three different forms: horses

In 1822 there was no such thing as "electronic funds transfer." Profits were transferred physically. Through much of the 18th and 19th centuries the Spanish milled dollar, or 8 reale piece, was the global standard for monetary exchange. This coin, on which the U.S. silver dollar is based, weighs slightly less than one ounce Avoirdupois (16 ounces to the pound). Thus if Becknell took his returns of \$91,000 in Spanish dollars, he would have been hauling approximately 2.84 tons of silver coin back to St. Louis.

and mules; specie; and buffalo robes and furs. Horses and mules could be purchased very inexpensively in New Mexico, and sold for much higher prices in Missouri, where demand for these animals was high. The merchant had to be prepared for losses as some of these animals would wander off, or die in the journey across the prairies. Also, such herds of animals were irresistible to Indians, whether friendly or hostile. In a night-time moment of terror and chaos a merchant's sweet anticipation of profits leveraged into even greater profits could evaporate into the reality of a massive loss. Robes and furs could also be leveraged to increase profits in St. Louis. These were bulky, especially buffalo robes, and a merchant transporting these back to Missouri might have as many or possibly even more wagons to contend with on his return as on his outbound trip. Furs and robes also required special care to protect them from becoming wet, either from weather or river crossings. Specie was usually in the form of silver Spanish milled dollars. These were packed in wet rawhide bags sewn up tightly. On drying the rawhide shrunk forming a dense, hard mass weighing on the order of one-hundred or more pounds, both difficult to break into and difficult to walk off with. Having a higher value, gold was in great demand for transferring profits. Because of this, gold coinage could at times command a trading premium of as much as 25% over face value. Both silver and gold coinage were subject to a 6% export tariff.

Becknell's success set off a rush of merchants and fortune seekers down the Santa Fe trail and into northern Mexico. It was not long before consumer demand in Taos and Santa Fe was overwhelmed and profits dropped considerably. In order to dispose of their goods at reasonable returns, merchants found it necessary to travel into central Mexico. By 1843 Josiah Gregg found that net profits after all costs seldom exceeded 20-40 percent over cost of goods. After 1824 there were seldom fewer than 100 wagons on the Santa Fe Trail, and in some years as many as 350 wagons loaded with consumer goods.

The Arkansas River had throughout prehistoric times had always been utilized as a trail for east-west travel across the semi-arid prairies. By connecting the river by means of overland travel to St. Louis and to Taos/Santa Fe William Becknell fundamentally established what came to be called the Santa Fe Trail. There are two main branches of the Santa Fe Trail; the Cimarron Cutoff and the Mountain Branch. The advantages of the Cimarron Cutoff were that it was considerably shorter than the Mountain Branch and was topographically less demanding. However, in many years and seasons, the Cimarron River was dry, and in that featureless landscape it was often difficult for travelers to even determine if they had crossed the Cimarron River. More than one wagon train all but perished in crossing the "water scrape." The Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail followed the Arkansas River up to the Timpas Creek and thence over the Raton Pass. This route passed by Bent's Fort (after it was constructed in 1835) where craftsmen were available to make wagon repairs, fresh draft animals and or supplies could be obtained. But that portion of the trail over Raton Pass was brutal, hard on both animals and wagons.

Other offshoots of the Santa Fe Trail were developed by Antoine Robidoux. Robidoux was born 1794 in St. Louis of French-Canadian descent. His family had a long history of involvement in the fur trade and it was only natural that he would also find a career in the trade. In order to more effectively pursue the trade in northern Mexico he took Mexican citizenship in 1823. In 1828 he established Fort Uncompahgre on the Gunnison River to trade with the Ute Indians in what was then Mexican territory. To supply this post, he pioneered the use of both the Mountain Branch of the Old Spanish Trail and what was known as Robidoux's Cutoff. The Mountain Branch of the Old Spanish Trail ran from Santa Fe up the San Luis Valley over Cochetopa Pass and down into the Gunnison basin. Robidoux's Cutoff branched off of the Santa Fe Trail from the point where it started up Timpas Creek. The Cutoff continued up the Arkansas River thence over Mosca Pass into the San Luis Valley where it took up with the Mountain Branch of the Old Spanish Trail. The use of these routes allowed Robidoux to more efficiently transport goods out of both St. Louis and Santa Fe to Fort Uncompahgre. Furthermore, use of these routes allowed Robidoux to evade trade restrictions of two nations. Mexico prohibited the sale of guns to the Indians, whereas the U.S. prohibited the exportation of alcohol into Indian Territory. By using these routes Robidoux was able to evade trade restrictions of both countries.

In 1820 the United States sent out another military expedition to explore the regions along the Upper Missouri River. The expedition comprised of approximately 1,200 soldiers, three steamships plus the experimental steamship "Western Engineer." Initially this expedition was under the leadership of Colonel Henry Atkinson and Major Stephen Long and had the ambitious purposes of establishing a chain of military forts up to the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, to intimidate British traders in the upper Missouri River country, to overawe Indian tribes with the military might of the U.S. and to make scientific and geographic observations. By all measures the expedition failed to accomplish any of these objectives. Problems with the steamboats on the Missouri River included the anticipated difficulties with snags, shifting channels and sand bars, but also the unanticipated difficulty with suspended sediment in the river water. This latter problem led to fouling of the steamship boilers and required time at intervals to cool and then flush the boilers. One steamboat was sunk, taking the honor of first steamboat to be sunk on the Missouri River. Because of these difficulties the expedition eventually went back to the traditional method of transportation on the Missouri, that is dragging their supplies and equipment up river by keelboat. Travel was slow and the expedition only got as far as Council Bluffs before winter set in. Then over winter about 200 men died of scurvy with many more weakened and ill. Meanwhile, Congress was greatly displeased with the lack of progress and increasing costs of the expedition.

Rather than admit failure and face the humiliation of having the expedition canceled, the size, scope and objectives of the expedition were greatly reduced and changed. Major Stephen Long was now commanding the expedition, which had been reduced to 22 men. The objective was now largely scientific in nature, including a zoologist, botanist, geologist, naturalist, landscape

painter and topographer, but was also intended to contact Indian groups along its course of travel. The expedition was mounted on horseback and would travel up the Platte River to the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, and thence south. When the expedition reached the Arkansas River, Long divided the force; one party under his leadership to explore the headwater region of the Red River, the other led by Captain John R. Bell to explore the Arkansas River. In his journal John R. Bell described the Arkansas Valley as “wholly unfit for cultivation and habitation” and the official report for the expedition shows the valley lying within the region labeled the “Great American Desert.” Also in his journal, Bell describes the Indians in the region as being totally unfamiliar with alcohol, suggesting they had no contact or only very limited contact with Mexican and U.S. traders till this time.

Another Army officer who came to be involved in the regions was John Gantt. John Gantt commenced his career as an Army officer serving from 1817-1829, primarily in the West and eventually attaining the rank of Captain. He served under Colonel Leavenworth during the abortive Arikara campaign of 1823. This expedition was assembled to severely chastise the Arikara after they had attacked and mauled William Ashley’s party of trappers ascending the Missouri River earlier in that year. The expedition consisted of 230 Army regulars and artillery, 40 mountain men from Joshua Pilcher’s outfit and about 80 mountain men in the employ of William Ashley. About 750 Sioux warriors accompanied the expedition to take advantage of an opportunity to score coup against their old enemies and perhaps steal some corn and squash. Two years later in 1825 Gantt accompanied the expedition of General Atkinson and Major O’Fallon to the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Later that year he met Charles Bent at Fort Atkinson at a time that Bent was working for the successor company to the Missouri Fur Company. These experiences provided Gantt with exposure to the fur trade and wilderness commerce, the individuals involved in the trade and a working knowledge of travel and life under primitive conditions. Gantt was discharged from the Army after being found guilty of falsification of payroll records in 1829. The circumstances regarding his discharge were somewhat unusual and there is a suspicion that perhaps the animosity of fellow officers was involved. In any case, Gantt found himself without the means to support his family and the necessity of starting a new career. Based on his previous experience in the West he chose to go into the fur trade as a small independent. He formed a partnership with Jefferson Blackwell in 1830 and by 1831 the partners had received a

In 1706 the Spanish explorer, Juan De Ulibarri, described the Arkansas Valley as “the best and broadest yet discovered in New Spain, that the land is extremely fertile with beautiful open stretches abounding in cottonwood, plums, cherries & wild grapes.” The difference between Ulibarri and Bell was a result of where they came from.

Bell came from the eastern U.S. where forests had to be cleared to make room for fields, and lumber was readily obtainable from those same forests and water was abundantly available as rain.

Ulibarri came from central Mexico, where wood for lumber was hauled from distant mountains at great expense, agriculture was impossible without irrigation, and homes, even of the wealthy were constructed of sun-fired clay bricks.

three-year license to trap in the northern Rocky Mountains and to trade with the Indians. With a brigade of 60-70 men he departed in April 1831 for the North Platte and Laramie River area. During the winter of 1831-32 he divided the brigade into three parties to more efficiently harvest the fur resources of the region. Two of these parties, including the party lead by Gantt lost significant numbers of horses to theft by Indians. As a result, Gantt found it necessary to make a mid-winter trip to Mexican Santa Fe to obtain additional horses. While on this errand, he appears to have determined that the Arkansas Valley had untapped potential for trapping and trade with the Indians. Gantt's third party of trappers appears to have had no communication with Gantt, and also lost all of their horses to starvation. The location chosen by this party for their winter camp was ideal in all respects, except for lack of fodder for the horses. Horses would thrive over the winter on the bark of sweet cottonwood trees, but at this location the cottonwood had a bitter bark and the horses refused to eat it. As the horses were dying of starvation one of the men in this party, Zenas Leonard, writes of this situation "*For ourselves we had plenty to eat, and were growing fat and uneasy.*" In the spring of 1832 this party encountered Thomas Fitzpatrick leading a party to that year's rendezvous. Fitzpatrick falsely informed these men that Gantt & Blackwell had become insolvent thereby inducing these men to sell him their accumulated furs and to join with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

Although the defection of these men and loss of their furs was a severe blow to the partnership of Gantt & Blackwell, the company continued to trap in the northern Rocky Mountains, but at the same time expanding the geographic scope of their activities. By September 1832 Gantt's Stockade was established on the north bank of the Arkansas River across from the mouth of the Purgatoire River (just down river from present day Las Animas) where he spent the winter trapping and trading. This post was an impermanent facility, probably consisting of two or three log houses enclosed in a cottonwood stockade. In the spring of 1833 they cached their furs and returned to the Laramie area to trap. Two of his men deserted. Fearing they were going to robe the cache, Gantt sent Kit Carson and others back to intercept them, in which they were unsuccessful. Loss of these furs represented another financial blow to the partnership.

In the meantime, William Bent constructed Fort William (currently referred to as Bent's Picket Post) by December 1832 at a location on the north bank of the Arkansas River and about 9 miles below the mouth of Fountain Creek. This was also an impermanent facility, probably constructed of cottonwood logs. It was successful in drawing some of the Indian trade away from Gantt's Stockade. In order to better compete Gantt abandoned the stockade and constructed a new fort, Fort Cass (named for the Secretary of War at the time), at a location about 3 miles below the mouth of Fountain Creek. Completed by May 1834, this was an imposing structure built of adobe by Mexican workers imported from Taos for this purpose.

William Bent was not long in responding. Late in 1834 Bent and 10 men showed up at Fort Cass where a party of Shoshone Indians were engaged in trade. Claiming he recognized horses that

had been stolen from Charles Bent, William and his men attacked the Shoshone, killing a number of the men, taking scalps, capturing women and finally dividing the plunder amongst themselves. This attack was very uncharacteristic of William Bent, who was normally very tactful in all his dealings with Indians no matter what the tribe. However, there were no real consequences to Bent resulting from this savage attack. Shoshone Indians were only rarely in this area and never would constitute a major trading partner. However, the act demonstrated to local Indians, that Bent was strong, could do as he pleased and that Gantt was weak, that he couldn't even protect his customers. As a result of Bent's actions at Fort Cass Gantt's trade with the Indians declined significantly. Because of this and previous financial setbacks, Gantt abandoned Fort Cass and left the fur trade after the winter of 1834-35.

Further enhancing Bent's reputation was an incident in which he saved the life of two Cheyenne warriors. These men had tarried at Bent's Picket Post after the balance of their party had traveled on. Unexpectedly a war party of Comanche Indians made their appearance. Bent hid the young men amongst the trade goods. From signs on the ground the Comanche knew that Cheyenne had been at the post and suspected that some were still there. The Comanche demanded Bent turn them over. Bent indicated that the Cheyenne was no longer there. After scrutinizing the post without finding the young men, the Comanche departed. The Southern Cheyenne would become major trading partners with the Bent & St. Vrain Company at Bent's Fort.

In 1835 another military expedition past through the area under the leadership of Colonel Henry Dodge. This expedition consisted of three companies of dragoons, about 120 men. Dragoons were basically mounted infantry, trained to fight equally well from horseback or dismounted. The expedition traveled from Fort Leavenworth up the Platte and South Platte Rivers to the Rocky Mountain Range front, then south along the Front Range and then down the Arkansas River. The expedition covered about 1,600 miles in 3 ½ months. The military objectives of the expedition were to effect treaties with the Indians along the route, and to investigate conditions along the border with Mexico (the Arkansas River). Another objective might have been to determine if a military unit could operate for extended periods on the prairies without support from a fixed supply base. John Gantt, because of his geographic knowledge of the area and military contacts, served as a guide for the expedition. One of the junior officers on this expedition was First Lieutenant Lancaster Lupton. Another individual was Captain Lemuel Ford. Ford maintained a journal, and while the expedition traveled along the Arkansas River created a map. This map, although generally quite crude, is fairly accurate in depicting the course of the Arkansas River and the relative distances at which tributary creeks and rivers intersect it. This map also portrays the locations of Fort Cass, Fort William (currently known as Bent's Picket Post) and Bent's Fort (currently known as Bent's Old Fort).

The partnership of Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain came about in 1830, creating the firm of Bent, St. Vrain & Co. The Bents had known St Vrain, first from the fur trade on the

Upper Missouri River, and then as merchants on the Santa Fe Trail. Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain were more interested in the mercantile aspects of trade with Mexico. Early on they opened stores in both Santa Fe and Taos and then expanded with outlets down into central Mexico. William Bent had a preference for the prairie and Indian trade, and was the motivating force leading to the construction of Bent's Fort. Today Bent's Fort and the Indian trade is what Bent, St. Vrain & Co. are popularly known for, but at the time the firm was active, the Indian trade represented only a minor segment of its business. By at least 1835 Bent's Fort was a major center for the southern fur trade.

However, the Bent, St. Vrain & Co. didn't enjoy this monopoly for long. To the north on the South Platte River a series of opposition outfits was making themselves known starting in 1835. The first trading post constructed in that area was Fort Vasquez in 1835. Operated by Louis Vasquez and Andrew Sublette, these partners received financial backing from longtime fur trade entrepreneurs William Sublette and Robert Campbell. William Sublette and Campbell may have provided backing because they believed that there were still openings for a small company to thrive in the fur trade. However, William Sublette and Campbell had a history of annoying the American Fur Company and its successor company Pierre Choteau Jr. Co., and this may have been simply another opportunity to irritate their long standing rival as well as the Bent, St. Vrain & Co. Both the Bent St. Vrain & Co and Pierre Choteau Jr. Co. swiftly responded to the commercial challenge of Fort Vasquez by constructing Fort George (aka Fort Lookout or Fort St. Vrain) and Fort Jackson respectively. Operations at Fort Jackson were managed by Peter Sarpy and Henry Fraeb, both highly capable men with long experience in the fur trade. At about this same time, Lancaster Lupton, now a former Army Lieutenant who had traveled through region with Colonel Henry Dodge in 1835, also chose this area as a location for his Fort Lancaster (later known as Fort Lupton) after his Army career ended in March 1836. By 1837 there were a total of four trading posts established along a 15-mile reach of the South Platte River.

After only one year of brutal competition, the two big companies determined they were causing as much injury to each other as to the smaller opposition outfits. By the end of 1838 they came to a non-compete agreement in which they divided up the region, the goods from Fort Jackson were sold to Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and taken to Fort George, and Fort Jackson was subsequently destroyed. Vasquez and Andrew Sublette found they were unable to withstand the commercial pressure and soon went out of business. Lancaster Lupton, though, was tenacious even with the torrid competition, holding out till 1842. Later Lupton would briefly operate a store at the Hardscrabble settlement down in the Arkansas Valley.

Alexander Barclay was another individual who was active at Hardscrabble as well as elsewhere throughout the Arkansas Valley. Alexander Barclay was born in England and commenced his livelihood in London as a corsetiere which he worked at till he reached the age of 23. Eventually he gave this up as he had trouble creating undergarments that gave a proper fit. In

1833 he departed England for Upper Canada (that region north of Lake Huron and Lake Ontario) where he took up farming. The property he obtained under a kind of lease/purchase agreement which was raw land, no fences, fields, or structures of any kind. After three years of effort, including a series of misfortunes which included losing all of his personal property in a house fire, and his livestock freezing to death one winter, he determined he wasn't suited for life as a farmer. In 1836 he sold out his farming interests and moved to St. Louis where he became a book-keeper for a firm of druggists. In a letter to family he projected his income at about \$600 per year, but also anticipated his expenses, including fashionable clothing and entertainment at about \$500 per year. Because he had much greater ambitions for himself he was ultimately dissatisfied with this arrangement. Bent & St. Vrain Co. offered him employment in 1838 which Barclay accepted. He was given a two-year contract which was subsequently renewed at a rate of \$650 per year during which he functioned as a trader, clerk, and superintendent at Bent's Fort. Although his wages were not much greater than he earned in St. Louis, his expenses at Bent's Fort were essentially nil. Ultimately he was dissatisfied with the arrangement and as early as two years into his employ with the Bent & St. Vrain company was considering options for going out on his own. During the summer of 1842 he was given a task which was for him the final straw. That year there were inadequate numbers of wagons to transport robes from Bent's Fort back to St. Louis. To alleviate this situation, Barclay was tasked with taking a load of furs and robes from Fort George down the South Platte and Platte Rivers by boat. Because of the nature of these rivers this would have been an iffy proposition in a wet year, and in 1842 there existed low river conditions. Eventually, Barclay's boat and men were grounded, unable to proceed or return. The furs and robes were cached on an island and some of the men, including Jean Baptiste Charbonneau remained behind as guards. Barclay proceeded overland down to St. Louis to make arrangements from there for wagons to retrieve the robes. After this was done, Barclay resigned his position with Bent, St. Vrain & Co. and was paid the wages that were owed him.

At this time Barclay determined to set himself up as an independent businessman/trader. One of the lines of business that he early pursued was buffalo ranching. Based on his observations of the slaughter of these animals he was able to project the extinction of these animals in the not too distant future. He may have been encouraged in this endeavor by Dick Wooton's previous example in which Wooton managed to sell 46 buffalo in St. Louis for \$100 apiece. Whether Wooton saturated the market for buffalo, or whether buyers learned that buffalo were not amenable to cattle ranching, by the time Barclay brought his herd to St. Louis in 1843 there was no local market for the animals. Barclay considered alternate markets in Mexico City, England and Europe, thinking there might be demand for the animals in zoos/museums, or as curiosities on private estates. Inquiries by Barclays brother in England disclosed that Barclay would be unlikely to sell the beasts for more than the transportation and boarding costs to get them overseas. By the summer of 1844 he had a small herd of 21 head of buffalo boarded on a farm outside of St. Louis that he was unable to sell at a price acceptable to him. In 1845 Indians

drove off or killed all but six of his animals. He sold the remaining animals for what he could get. This ended his venture in buffalo ranching.

At the same time as he was pursuing buffalo ranching, he continued as a fur trader. While in St. Louis in 1842 he acquired a wagon and a stock of trade goods with the intention of trading in the Arkansas Valley. He didn't get his outfit together in time to go along with one of the wagon trains heading up the Santa Fe Trail. Later in the autumn an outfit of Sybille and Adams were leaving for their post at Fort Platte (formerly one of Lancaster Lupton's posts), located on the North Platte River, so Barclay accompanied this group. This was out of the way for where Barclay was intending to go, but was much more desirable than traveling alone. He was at Fort Platte by early November 1842. Traveling and trading his way down the Front Range, he was temporarily at Bent's Fort by Christmas where he wrote a letter to his family back in England. Continuing up the Arkansas River, he wintered at El Pueblo, a post located at the confluence of the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek, and about 70 miles upriver from Bent's Fort. This is the first primary reference to the existence of El Pueblo (located at modern day Pueblo, Colorado).

Documentation for El Pueblo is poor because this post was never licensed for trading in the Indian territory, and was therefore an illegal operation. It was founded as an informal cooperative rather than a partnership. The founding members may have included George Simpson, Robert Fisher, Mathew Kinkead, Francisco Conn and Joseph Mantz or Mantas. Other individuals that are closely associated with El Pueblo are David Spaulding, Alexander Barclay, William Tharp, John Brown, Dick Wootton, and Joseph Doyle. Many of these men were former employees of Bent, St. Vrain & Co, and/or also had continuing close relations with the company.

El Pueblo was constructed of adobe in the standard New Mexican style, being an outer wall in the form of a square, the inner side of the wall lined with rooms, and a central common courtyard or plaza. In addition, there were two bastions at opposing corners. The post was never intended as a defensive structure, it's walls being no taller than 8 feet. During most of its occupation, the Indians in the area were of a friendly disposition. Unlike Bent's Fort, where each room served a distinctive purpose, at El Pueblo each room was occupied by an individual member of the cooperative and had a multipurpose role as warehouse, store and living quarters. Although trade did take place at El Pueblo, mostly the post served as a base of operations, the individual members taking out trading outfits directly to their Indian customers. Maintenance of the facility was typical of cooperatives with informal rules, that is poor. When Ruxton passed through in 1846 he mentioned among other things that the main gate was in danger of collapse. In 1854 the occupants of the post were massacred by Indians and the fort was abandoned.

There is another post which briefly existed in the valley which was also known as El Pueblo. This post was located about five miles upriver from Bent's Fort as was variously known as Fort

Independence , Fort Leche, or the Milk Fort (for the goat's milk that could be obtained there). This post was constructed of jackal (clay plastered over a supporting structure of interwoven sticks and twig) as an open square enclosing perhaps as many as thirty rooms. The occupants consisted of ex-trappers, Mexicans and their families who supported themselves by Indian trading, hunting and some agriculture. The post was abandoned by 1840 with no trace remaining.

Both the economy and the ecology of the southwestern plains were rapidly changing the late 1830's and early 1840's. As observed by Barclay, the vast buffalo herds were rapidly declining, and the range over which the animals roamed was becoming much reduced. Beaver was paying \$4.50 in 1842, \$3.00 in 1843 and by 1846 was down to 90¢. These changes were being reflected in regional employment. At Bent's Fort the number of traders employed by the company decreased by at least 1/3 to 29 from 1842 to 1843. There is an increasing reliance on agriculture as a means of livelihood. In 1845 Alexander Barclay wrote that the goods he's getting from the States then consisted more of implements of agriculture than items for the Indian Trade. Numerous individuals in the valley began experimenting with buffalo or cattle ranching or farming. New types of trade are beginning to evolve. There is a growing demand for supplies and services by emigrants traveling to Oregon and California and skilled craftsman and traders from along the Arkansas are filling those needs by traveling up to the North Platte River. There is a great demand by the emigrants for fresh oxen and draft animals to replace those worn down by months of labor on the trail. Beginning in the early 1840's numerous small communities are being established, including the Huerfano settlement, Doyle's Ranch, Barclay's Houses, Hardscrabble, Kinkead's Ranch, the Greenhorn settlement and others. One of the factors leading to the founding of these settlements, and also limiting the size of the settlements was the need for forage. Every trader and man of means had numerous pack and draft animals, riding animals, cattle and other types of livestock. However, without irrigation, the semiarid prairies were only able to sustainably support about 15 head per square mile. Without adequate forage around these communities, the livestock would wander off, sometimes for considerable distances. In his journal, Alexander Barclay often writes about sending out men to find the animals, and then later sending out men to find the men he had sent out for the animals. None of these settlements were recognized by either the governments of Mexico or the United States. Had either government the will or reason, these settlements would have been removed.

Hardscrabble was established about 1844 and about 25 miles west of El Pueblo on the south side of the Arkansas River (Mexico). Hardscrabble was variously described as a farming, ranching, trading community, and got its name because a man had to "scrabble hard" to get in a field. Alexander Barclay established both a store and farming operations here, but also continued to operate out of El Pueblo. After Lancaster Lupton shut down his fur trading operations at Fort Lancaster, he relocated to Hardscrabble where he briefly operated a store before moving on to gold rush California. The community was never successful in any of these

types of activities. The weather was too inconsistent to successfully implement agriculture, the prairies, like other locations, couldn't sustain large numbers of cattle, and the location was not well suited for trading operations. By 1848 Hardscrabble was abandoned.

After just two years Barclay could foresee that Hardscrabble wasn't going to be successful for him. In 1846 he again relocated downriver to a site just two miles upriver from El Pueblo, which became known as "Barclay's Houses." Here he conducted ranching operations for about two years before attempting a new venture. In 1848, after New Mexico had become a territory of the United States, Barclay moved to establish a trading fort near Mora, New Mexico. The fort was an impressive affair rivaling Bent's Fort in size and construction. Barclay constructed this fort both to supply travelers along the Santa Fe Trail (whose numbers he anticipated would greatly increase with the inclusion of the territory in the United States), and he was speculating the U.S. Military would eventually purchase the fort as a fixed base from which to protect travelers on the Santa Fe Trail and pacify the Indians. The venture became a failure on many levels. Trade never lived up to Barclay's expectations. Travelers generally chose to continue on to the growing communities further along the trail to conduct their business. The U.S. Military found this location favorable for a base, but elected to build their own fort, Fort Union, immediately adjacent to Barclay's Fort. Then as expenses mounted his personal life began falling apart. His longtime companion, Terisita Sandoval left him, and with his business partner (and son-in-law) Joseph Doyle returned to the Arkansas River country in 1853. Barclay died in December, 1855.

The Huerfano settlement, located on Ceran St. Vrain's Spanish land grant, was one of the few settlements in the area with any legitimacy. The settlement was located about 20 miles below El Pueblo at the confluence of the Huerfano River with Arkansas River. After the War with Mexico, the United States continued to recognize Spanish Land Grants as private property, even though they were located in what was then considered to be Indian Territory. The Huerfano settlement was founded in 1853 by Charles Autobees, Dick Wootton and others with the approval and support from St. Vrain. In 1854 Joseph Doyle joined the growing community. The Huerfano settlement was one of the largest communities on the Arkansas up to this time. Compared to earlier communities the settlement was rather dispersed, consisting of five primary placitas, with numerous log cabins and jackal structures spread around.

The War with Mexico had its origins directly from Texas independence. After the defeat of Mexican force under General Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, Santa Anna signed a document under duress agreeing to Texas independence. Although very powerful, Santa Anna did not represent the government of Mexico, which refused to recognize the legitimacy of the document. However, after its independence, various nations throughout the world did recognize to various degrees the sovereignty of the Texas as a nation, though Mexico continued to view Texas as an ungovernable province. When in 1845 Texas was annexed by the United States this led immediately to a diplomatic crisis. Then in 1846 when the United States sent

troops to patrol its new border with Mexico, Mexico viewed this as an invasion force to be repelled and thus the war was on. In planning the war, President Polk who was an advocate of Manifest Destiny, determined also to seize the province of New Mexico and California as part of the military resolution.

Colonel/General Kearney with the Army of the West was tasked with the conquest of New Mexico and then providing support to the subjugation California. Kearney's Army of the West consisted of about 300 regulars of the 1st Dragoons, 250 men in an artillery battalion, and Colonel Doniphan's 856 men of Colonel Doniphan's 1st Missouri Mounted Regiment of volunteers and a 145 volunteers of St. Louis in infantry and 107 riders in "Leclède Rangers". The military was accompanied by contract teamsters, roustabouts, servants, merchants and other hangers-on. The total number of men moving as part of or in support of, or being protected by the Army of the West is estimated to be about 3,000. The total number of draft and riding animals, cattle and other livestock is estimated to have been about 20,000.

In order to minimize interference while on the march and to ensure adequate forage for the animals, the Army traveled in dispersed units along the Santa Fe Trail, only rendezvousing when they arrived at Bent's Fort in late July. Again for reasons of adequate forage, the army camped about seven miles below Bent's Fort and only remained there for about three days. While at this location, warehouse and storage facilities at the fort were commandeered for staging military supplies while the army continued on into New Mexico. The fort was also used as a station for treating sick or injured soldiers.

The Mormon Battalion was a special military unit raised to support Kearney in his efforts to subdue Mexican California. At the time, relations between U.S. Federal and local civil authorities and the Mormon Church was strained at best and there were concerns about the loyalty of the Mormons to the country. By providing men for this unit Brigham Young sought to reassure the U.S. that the Mormons were indeed loyal citizens. Also, this was at the beginning of the Mormon's Great Migration, and providing men for this unit did two things to support the migration: by being in the military food, transportation, and equipment was provided for a large number of men and some of their families to move west; wages paid these soldiers were appropriated by the Church to support the transportation expenses of other church members moving west. Although this unit did not arrive in time to accompany Kearney, they did follow Kearney's trail to California. The Battalion was organized and outfitted by July of 1846 and traveled along the Santa Fe Trail on foot. By the time the Battalion reached Bent's Fort many of the soldiers were unfit to continue the march. These men were sent on up the river to a temporary community known as Mormon Town.

Mormon Town was located on the south side of the Arkansas River and about ½ mile below El Pueblo. Originally founded by about 43 Mormon families on the Great Migration, the addition of the soldiers brought the population to about 275 men, women and soldiers, who lived in

approximately 50 cottonwood huts. This was not a health resort and the soldiers continued to drill regularly. This community had good relations with the denizens of El Pueblo. Between the two groups there were regular gatherings for trade, fandangos, and socializing and some proselytizing. Most of the residents of Mormon Town departed in May of 1847, traveling north along the Front Range up to Fort Laramie where they joined with others in the migration. All were gone by 1848.

With the discovery of gold in California in 1849 a flood of emigrants from the States set out for both Oregon and California. A significant number of these emigrants traveled the southern route, taking the Santa Fe Trail. These travelers feared the Indians, saw them as a nuisance at best, and had no desire to understand them. A series of conflicts ensued, followed by demands for military protection. The military was no better equipped to deal with the Indian problem, except to apply even greater force and the Indians responded in kind. Indian hostility led to the 1854 massacre at El Pueblo. Because most of the settlements in the Arkansas valley were illegal, they could hardly request military protection. By drawing attention to themselves they would have been as likely to have been evicted as receive protection. As a result of the Indian hostility, most of the Arkansas valley settlements were abandoned.

In 1858 gold was discovered in Cherry Creek, a tributary to the South Platte River, about 100 miles north of the Arkansas. This set off the misnamed "Pikes Peak" gold rush of 1859-60. Although still Indian territory, the discovery of gold led a host of miners and get-rich-quick types to flood into the region. Soon Denver City, Auraria City, Golden and a number of other mining supply centers sprang up throughout the area. As the area to the north was developing some of the abandoned settlements on the Arkansas, most notably Pueblo were re-occupied. Of course the spread of white settlements throughout this part of Indian territory did not sit well with the Indians, bringing on a new wave of response and counter-response. But that's another story for another time.