

Since man's first steps in the Southern Rockies and on the Southern Plains, animals - providing meat, skin, hides ... - have been a key factor to survival, relationships (peaceful and violent) and to trade and commerce in the region. From the earliest Native presence, through the Spanish and Mexican eras and the coming of Anglos to the area, to the present day, animals, wild and domestic, continue to play a major role in the area's economy.

Following animal trails, Tribal routes, and the "traces" of Spanish, Mexican and American frontiersmen, the Santa Fé Trail developed into a commerce road beginning in 1821. With cloth, iron ware and other manufactured products from the States in trade for silver, mules & horses, fur and woolen goods, traders would foster an exchange amongst the Mexican, Indian and American cultures which would carry on past the 60-year lifespan of the Trail.

Of all the traders along the Santa Fé Trail, three men forming one partnership, utilizing a combination of ingenuity, wise business practices, and the willingness to take risks would epitomize commerce along the Santa Fé Trail. Charles and William Bent, and Ceran St. Vrain; together as Bent, St. Vrain & Company, would develop a trade monopoly that extended from the North Platte River to the Canadian River; from the Colorado Rockies to Central Kansas, and beyond. The Bent, St. Vrain & Company was one of the most popular and most respected trading partnerships in the entire West.

Fort William, later known as Bent's Fort, would be the hub for the Company's trade. Along with other ventures in Santa Fé, Taos, Westport, Ft. St. Vrain, & Ft. Adobe, as well as trade in countless Indian villages; Bent, St. Vrain & Company would become the dominant trading company in the Southern Rockies - Southern Plains from 1833 to 1849. Various describe as a "castle" or "citadel on the Plains," as a "crossroads of culture," Bent's Fort developed into a respite for all. Here, numerous Tribes, Mexican and American merchants and travelers would find a taste of "civilization." Besides American and Mexican patrons, at various times, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, Snake, Ute, Sioux, Arikaree, Pawnee and Delaware members, among others, could be found doing business with the Company. In the early years, beaver was a most-prized commodity at Bent's Fort. But as the 1830s progressed, beaver became scarce and prices declined and thus the buffalo robe trade became the mainstay of the business.

Now, after a 27-year hiatus, the Fur Trade Symposium will return to the Southern Rockies-Southern Plains and Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site on 23 - 26 September 2015. Join the staff, volunteers and sponsors at the reconstructed trading post on the Santa Fé Trail for an experience not seen in these parts since the 1988 Fur Trade Symposium. An outstanding group of highly accomplished speakers will share their expertise on all aspects of trade in the Southwest. Numerous Living History demonstrators invite you to join them back in the 19th Century as they reveal the skills, the talents, and the ingenuity needed to survive and earn a living at the time. Period entertainment, food & drink, and fine camaraderie at the dominant trading post of the region will provide attendees with a truer feeling for the era and the lifestyle at Bent's Fort during its existence from 1833 to 1849.

"A trading establishment to be known must be seen."

-Thomas Farnham