**INTRO:**  At about fourteen years of age, Lewis H. Garrard, read John C. Fremont’s Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, an account published in U.S. newspapers in 1843. Fremont’s descriptive account enticed Lewis to venture West by himself only three years later. Garrard wrote his own book of experiences lasting from 1846-1847 titled Wah-to-yah and the Taos Trail. “Wah-to-yah” is a Comanche word meaning “double peaks,” which described the mountainous Spanish Peaks found in southeastern Huerfano County, Colorado. As Lewis set off, Ceran St. Vrain, the founding partner of the Bent, St. Vrain, & Company, guided his wagon from Independence, Missouri to the trading operation along the Arkansas River, known as Bent’s Fort, in September of 1846.

**SECURITY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE:** Unlike any of the buildings that Lewis would have seen in Ohio, Bent’s Fort, as well as many other structures in New Mexico would have been built out of adobe, a mixture of straw, sand, clay, and water. In the 1830s, when Bent’s Fort was constructed, no other adobe buildings were in the region, nor were Charles Bent or Ceran St. Vrain builders. Therefore, the Bent, St. Vrain, and Company hired dozens of Mexican adobe masons to build the trading post.

Although Bent’s trading post is styled like a military fort, its initial purpose was trade, not military defense. However, given the imposing presence of a post with bastions and weaponry, historians are left to conjecture why Bent and St. Vrain chose this architectural style. Most trading posts at the time were wood constructions. However, in the southern Great Plains, there are very few trees. Charles Bent discussed the prospect of building a trading post with a Cheyenne chief named Yellow Wolf. Yellow Wolf and the Cheyenne and Arapaho nations agreed to partner together for the trade of buffalo robes, which became Bent’s Fort primary trade good. Situated on Native American homelands with the Santa Fe Trail route to the north and the Arkansas River to the south, Bent selected an area in unorganized southeastern Colorado territory which was then right on Mexico’s border.

Unexpectedly, Garrard was put to work making adobe brick while he was in New Mexico. It’s clear he doesn’t enjoy the process when he writes, “The painful necessity of making brick was forced upon us at last, with all its muddy unpleasantness. The molds were sixteen inches long by eight in width and four in depth – the facsimile of brick molds on a larger scale. These were filled with stiff mud and turned out on the smooth ground – the molds brought back, dipped in a barrel of water to free them of earthly particles, filled again, and so on *ad infinitum*…Three hundred and twenty-six were the result of the day’s labor.” Lewis Garrard remarked on adobe’s durability. He states, “The adobe, or sun-dried brick, is, I think, even better than burnt brick, or stone, to resist a bombardment; as the ball either passes through, making but a small hole, or the force is spent against the wall, without shattering the building” (Garrard, 189).

In 1846, the Army of the West used Bent’s Fort as a staging station before invading New Mexico and claiming the territory for the United States in the U.S./Mexican War. Lieutenant James Abert, a topographical engineer for the army was among them and resided at Bent’s Fort for several weeks. During his stay, he provided detailed drawings and descriptions of the fort. In fact, without his work, the current 1976 reconstruction of our current fort would not have been possible. On September 8th, Abert wrote the following: “I spent this morning employed in taking the dimensions of Bent’s fort. It required some time to complete all the measurements. The structure is quite complex; they may, however, be useful in giving one an idea of the forts that can be built in that country. The roof and walls of clay cannot be set on fire, and the thickness of the walls renders them impenetrable to the fusil balls of the Indians. Wood is too scarce, and of such a kind as is not suited for building, while the ‘adobes’ answer every purpose…”

Both Garrard and Abert recognize the secure nature of Bent’s Fort through its material composition. With an international war taking place in the later years of the trading post’s operation, historians are left to decide whether Bent and St. Vrain chose to build a military-looking adobe structure to protect their goods, communicate their status, identify with the Mexican culture, or accommodate future American military purposes.