**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.

**LESSON 5: BUSINESS VENTURES:** The Bent, St. Vrain, & Co. located at Bent’s Fort in southeastern Colorado received its license to trade from William Clark, leader of the Lewis & Clark expedition and later governor of the Colorado territory. Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain chose the spot along the Arkansas River for many reasons including: access to water and timber, proximity to trade with other nations particularly Mexico on the other side of the Arkansas River, and its location along the well-known Santa Fe Trail. In many ways the fort worked like a large retail store, truck stop, and hotel rolled into one.

Lewis Garrard’s arrival to Bent’s Fort from Ohio made an impression. Lewis writes, “it would be well to state the size and intention of the company. It was commanded by St. Vrain, an old mountaineer of the firm of Bent, St. Vrain & Co., Indian and Mexican traders. The firm is rich, and owner of several forts, of which Bent’s or Fort William, on the Arkansas River, is the principal” (13). As Garrard notes, Bent’s Fort, was one of several operations held by these two businessmen. Fort St. Vrain operated near Platteville, Colorado, and Charles Bent’s Taos trading post, as well as the Vermejo and Ponil ranches extended reach beyond Colorado and into New Mexico.

International relations between the United States and Mexico began to unravel leading up to the U.S./Mexican War. In 1846, the Army of the West used Bent’s Fort as a staging station before advancing into New Mexico and claiming it for the United States. Garrard remarks that “Bent’s Fort contained much of the value and was an important post, [therefore] a Mexican expedition [or conflict] might well be expected” (119). The significance of Bent’s Fort during this era was easily seen. It was a target for some groups and a haven for others.

On Lewis’ final return home, he relates, “by the time the slanting sunbeams had ceased to peer under our hatbrims, we ‘rolled’ along the elastic turf, with ‘Bent’s Fort, ho!’ as the watchword, for it was part of the way home – so gushing-full of melodious thought – so touching and so peaceful!” (245).