**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.

**MULTICULTURAL TRADING POST LABOR:**  Adobefort construction depended on Mexican laborers. Bent, St. Vrain, & Company hired workers who had expertise in building with adobe. Although not part of his original adventure plans, Lewis also received experience in adobe labor which he termed “muddy unpleasantness.” (275). Successful building with adobe bricks is not just hard work but is also a time-consuming process since the bricks take several days to cure in the sun before use.

The labor at Bent’s Fort didn’t end with its construction. The entire operation over the long-term relied on a wide range of skills. The primary object of trade, the bison robe, was procured by local Native American tribes, mainly the Cheyenne and Arapaho. Skilled hunters killed the bison and brought the hides to encampments for processing by the women. It took about ten days to produce one soft bison robe ready for trade. In addition, accountants, craftsmen, domestics, herdsmen, and others were all essential to continued operation. Lewis lists a few of these workers in 1846 by name: “Mr. Holt, the storekeeper,” “Captain Enos, assistant quartermaster, and his clerk, Dyer, Doctor Hempstead, Mr. Holt, the carpenter, blacksmith, and a few fort and government employees” (73). Encountering women at the fort during this period was especially rare. During his visit, Lewis encountered only two: Rosalie, the wife of Ed Raymond, a carpenter for Bent, and Charlotte, “the culinary divinity” (73). For both women, he makes note of their ancestry. Rosalie is a French and Native American woman, while Charlotte is an enslaved black cook whose dishes like pumpkin pie and slap-jacks become widely popular among the fort’s guests.

The Bent St. Vrain & Company traded not only in material goods like blankets and buffalo hides, but also in livestock. This required hiring fort employees to travel vast distances as livestock drivers or teamsters and merchants. They often contracted with outside individuals to secure inventories as well. Lewis writes, “The maneuvers of the Mexicans of our company are really astonishing in lassoing unruly mules and horses” (15). Garrard was impressed not just by the skill he witnessed, but also the physical endurance across the cold deserts and plains: “A common person would have frozen with so slim an amount of covering, but Valgame Dios! these *rancheros* can undergo that which would kill a dozen respectable white men” (160).

Early in the business, Bent, St. Vrain, & Company traded goods directly with Plains tribes and New Mexicans. Their incoming goods were destined for St. Louis, Missouri to be distributed even further to eastern markets. However, as more merchants crossed the Santa Fe Trail, skirmishes between peoples increased. This caused a military presence to become more common to ensure protection of merchants and their goods against raids from all sides – those in Texas, New Mexico, and on Native American homelands. Although Bent’s Fort was not erected as a military installation, rising political tensions with Mexico, made Bent’s Fort a host to Stephen Kearney’s “Army of the West” in 1846. Lewis writes, “On the 4th of March, all were busied in making a large corral in which to drive the stock, so as to count and send a report to Colonel Price, commanding the army at Santa Fe. Before the insurrection, one thousand head of beeves for the government forces, several hundred yoke of oxen and four hundred and more horses and mules, bearing the United States brand, which, with a considerable number of each kind belong to Bent, St. Vrain & Co., were here herded by their employees, with the aid of a few soldiers” (150-151).