The entrepreneurial spirit of William and Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain brought them to the banks of the Arkansas River where they built Bent’s Old Fort in 1833. Mutual respect, intermarriage, and economic interdependence among these businessmen and the Plains Tribes allowed them to trade and live peacefully together. They traded primarily with the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes for buffalo robes. Bent’s Old Fort became the seat of a trading empire that included forts to the north and south, along with company stores in Mexico at Taos and Santa Fe. During the war with Mexico in 1846, the fort became a staging area for the United States’ “Army of the West.” Disasters and disease caused the fort’s abandonment in 1849.

A New Fort for William Bent

William Bent had known and stayed in this area (Big Timbers) before. In the 1840s he built cabins and a corral on the flats west of the bluff here. In 1853 his new trading fort emerged on the cliffs above the Arkansas River. When the US Army set up here in 1860, the site became the commissary for a military fort that played a pivotal role in the declining relationship between Plains Tribes and the federal government. From here troops marched north in 1864 and committed the Sand Creek massacre. What started as a peaceful trading post became a place associated with the tragic deaths of about 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho people.

Tragedy and Restoration

Bent Family Beginnings

The entrepreneurial spirit of William and Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain brought them to the banks of the Arkansas River where they built Bent’s Old Fort in 1833. Mutual respect, intermarriage, and economic interdependence among these businessmen and the Plains Tribes allowed them to trade and live peacefully together. They traded primarily with the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes for buffalo robes. Bent’s Old Fort became the seat of a trading empire that included forts to the north and south, along with company stores in Mexico at Taos and Santa Fe. During the war with Mexico in 1846, the fort became a staging area for the United States’ “Army of the West.” Disasters and disease caused the fort’s abandonment in 1849.

A New Fort for William Bent

William Bent had known and stayed in this area (Big Timbers) before. In the 1840s he built cabins and a corral on the flats west of the bluff here. In 1853 his new trading fort emerged on the cliffs above the Arkansas River. When the US Army set up here in 1860, the site became the commissary for a military fort that played a pivotal role in the declining relationship between Plains Tribes and the federal government. From here troops marched north in 1864 and committed the Sand Creek massacre. What started as a peaceful trading post became a place associated with the tragic deaths of about 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho people.

The Semmens Family: Preserving Local History

Born in Yorkshire, England in 1852, John Squire Semmens eventually moved to Kansas City, Missouri where he was a professional portrait artist. After Semmens gained American citizenship in 1887, he sent for his wife Alma and sons William, Archie, and Edgar. Once the Semmens boys received their education in Missouri, the family traveled west to Colorado to settle.

An entrepreneur like William Bent, Semmens looked for a place to raise bees and trade honey for local commodities. He purchased the Bent’s New Fort parcel of 4.44 acres from Phillips Investment Company with a down payment of $5.00 on July 3, 1905. His total investment of $46.60 has become a legacy. Great-grandsons Brad Semmens and Gary McCall began the site’s preservation when they purchased surrounding lands and decided to protect the site as an archeological preserve.

The fort eroded in sandstone. This is just one example of technology that will be protected by the Semmens’ family dedication to preserve this site.

An entrepreneur like William Bent, Semmens looked for a place to raise bees and trade honey for local commodities. He purchased the Bent’s New Fort parcel of 4.44 acres from Phillips Investment Company with a down payment of $5.00 on July 3, 1905. His total investment of $46.60 has become a legacy. Great-grandsons Brad Semmens and Gary McCall began the site’s preservation when they purchased surrounding lands and decided to protect the site as an archeological preserve.

Regional Map

John Squire Semmens

Born in Yorkshire, England in 1852, John Squire Semmens eventually moved to Kansas City, Missouri where he was a professional portrait artist. After Semmens gained American citizenship in 1887, he sent for his wife Alma and sons William, Archie, and Edgar. Once the Semmens boys received their education in Missouri, the family traveled west to Colorado to settle.

An entrepreneur like William Bent, Semmens looked for a place to raise bees and trade honey for local commodities. He purchased the Bent’s New Fort parcel of 4.44 acres from Phillips Investment Company with a down payment of $5.00 on July 3, 1905. His total investment of $46.60 has become a legacy. Great-grandsons Brad Semmens and Gary McCall began the site’s preservation when they purchased surrounding lands and decided to protect the site as an archeological preserve.

The fort eroded in sandstone. This is just one example of technology that will be protected by the Semmens’ family dedication to preserve this site.

The fort eroded in sandstone. This is just one example of technology that will be protected by the Semmens’ family dedication to preserve this site.

John Squire died in 1930. The land stayed in the family through sons William, Archie, and Edgar; then to Gid Semmens and Alma Bell McCall (Archie’s children); then to current owners Gary McCall (Alma’s son) and Brad Semmens (Gid’s son).

Regional Map

Santa Fe National Historic Trail

Safety

For more information contact

Santa Fe Trail Association

www.santafetrail.org

Santa Fe National Historic Site

www.nps.gov/safe

Bent’s Old Fort NHS

www.nps.gov/beol

Sand Creek Massacre NHS

www.nps.gov/sand

Bent’s Old Fort

www.nps.gov/beol

The Semmens Family

John Squire Semmens

John Squire died in 1930. The land stayed in the family through sons William, Archie, and Edgar; then to Gid Semmens and Alma Bell McCall (Archie’s children); then to current owners Gary McCall (Alma’s son) and Brad Semmens (Gid’s son).

Regional Map

Santa Fe National Historic Trail

Safety

For more information contact

Santa Fe Trail Association

www.santafetrail.org

Bent’s Old Fort NHS

www.nps.gov/beol

Sand Creek Massacre NHS

www.nps.gov/sand

Bent’s Old Fort NHS

www.nps.gov/beol

The Semmens Family

John Squire Semmens

John Squire died in 1930. The land stayed in the family through sons William, Archie, and Edgar; then to Gid Semmens and Alma Bell McCall (Archie’s children); then to current owners Gary McCall (Alma’s son) and Brad Semmens (Gid’s son).