

THE HISTORY OF OLD FT. BENT AND BENT'S FORT, ETC.

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The story of Old Fort Bent or "Bent's Fort", as it was generally called by all western men or travelers to the Rocky Mountains, or Sante Fe, New Mexico, either by the Cimaron route, the old Santa Fe wagon trail, by the familiar peaks known by all travelers to New Mexico, by way of the Rabbit Ears and wagon mounds, via Las Vegas and San Miguel into Santa Fe, or by way of Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River, situated some forty miles below what is now known as the City of Pueblo, not far from the junction of the Huerfano (a small stream) and the Arkansas River, the route from Independence, Missouri, the old frontier town, the original starting place for all the old Santa Fe travelers and trappers for the extensive plains and hunting grounds of the Rocky Mountains and New Mexico, either passed from Independence in Missouri by way of Bent's Fort and the Raton Mountains, or took a route for the south by way of the Cimaron and wagon mounds, San Miguel, the old Pecos Mission into Santa Fe, and another route by <sup>Taos</sup> ~~Taos~~ Trail from Bent's Fort through and over the mountains by the Sangre de Christo Pass and the Spanish Peaks or, as the Indians called them, the two "Wak-hatoyas" by way of Taos or San Fernando de Taos, the home of Charles Bent, the senior brother of the three brothers, Charles, William and George Bent, of the firm of Bent and St. Vrain, owners of Bent's Fort. These men were all of St. Louis, Missouri. The father of these three brothers was Judge Silas Bent, <sup>one of</sup> ~~one of~~ St. Louis' oldest residents, residing there when the population was nearly all French

people. When Judge Bent first came to St. Louis the writer does not know, but his father, the late <sup>L</sup>ilburn W. Boggs, became acquainted with Judge Silas Bent in St. Louis about the year 1815, and was married to Julia A. Bent, eldest daughter of Silas Bent, Esq., near St. Louis the 24th of July, 1817, by whom he had two sons, Angus I. and Henry C. Boggs.. Angus Langham Boggs, the elder son of L. W. Boggs, by Julia A., his wife, was born the 18th of June, 1818, at Judge Silas Bent's near St. Louis. Henry Carroll Boggs, the youngest, was born at Ft. Osage June 1st, 1820, Jackson County, Missouri. Their mother died when they were small children. Julia Ann Boggs, nee Bent, was born in Charlestown, Virginian, the 15th of July, 1807, according to the family record of L. W. Boggs, which the writer of these pages now has in his possession. This same family record has the record of the marriage of L. W. Boggs with Panthea Grant Boone, after the death of his first wife. His second wife was a granddaughter of Daniel Boone of Kentucky fame, and she had the care and training of the sons, Angus and Henry. She was also the mother of ten children. The first or oldest one of her sons was Thomas O. Boggs, late of Bent's Fort, who was for a number of years employed by Bent's Company as one of their traders with the Indians for buffalo robes. Kit Carson, the famous scout and guide, was an associate of Thos. O. Boggs, subsequently for Col. Fremont in his trip to California in 1845, and rendered very important services to the government during the conquest of California while with Col. Fremont in California, and was also sent with despatches from Fremont and Commodore Stockton, who was in command of the Navy at the time of the Mexican war, on the Pacific Coast; co-operated with Fremont in the conquest of California, after Commodore John Drake Sloat had landed and hoisted the American flag at Monterey,

the old capitol of California, under Mexican rule. Kit Carson was Fremont's guide and chief scout in his journey to California in 1845 and was sent with despatches back to the States by Col. Fremont, to inform the government of the occupation of California by his forces, and that of the U. S. Navy. Kit was met by Genl. Kearney, and a company of U. S. Dragoons on his way to California. He turned Carson back and sent the despatches ~~back~~ forward by some of his own men, retaining Carson to guide him into California. Carson in scouting in advance of Genl. Kearney and his troops discovered a large party of Californians commanded by Don Andres Pico, who was a brother of a former governor of California, Don Pio Pico, of Los Angeles. He had gathered together a force of his countrymen and had come out to meet Kearney and prevent him from entering California. Carson reported what he had seen and induced Genl. Kearney to make a forced march and take Pico by surprise, and after a hard night's ride on their worn down horses Kearney came upon the Californians about daylight, and attacked them and a bloody fight took place in which Genl. Kearney was wounded and lost a number of his men, and had to fall back on the side of a mountain, where Pico surrounded him and demanded him to surrender, but Kearney refused to surrender and was kept there a number of days, and being without supplies was forced to eat mule meat, and while the Californians kept mounted sentries all around them, ~~being~~ largely outnumbering the Americans, Kearney called for some one to volunteer to crawl through the lines of sentinels and convey the news to Fremont and Stockton at Los Angeles to send out re-enforcements to relieve him. Kit Carson volunteered to creep through the line of sentinels, who kept up close watch all round the Americans. Carson waited until

night, and accompanied by a young lieutenant, Edward F. Beal, they succeeded at great risk of their lives in getting through the enemy's line of mounted pickets and made their way on foot by a circuitous route into Los Angeles, and Commodore Stockton and Fremont went out (with a large force) and relieved Genl. Kearney. Kearney lost about 22 men and two officers in this battle, called the battle of San Pascual. Fremont when he started for California in the spring of 1845 came by way of Bent's Fort and engaged Carson there to accompany his expedition. The writer of these pages had gone into the States or to Missouri in the spring with William Bent, with whom he had spent the greater part of the winter in the Cheyenne villages about seventy-five or eighty miles below the fort at what was called the Big Timbers, where part of the winter of 1844 was spent trading ~~for~~ <sup>for</sup> buffalo robes, and had a successful trade that winter as buffalo were very plenty and fat. William Bent lived in a tepee or lodge with his wife, a full blooded Cheyenne, and a most excellent good woman. She was the daughter of a Cheyenne chief or brave that had been killed in some of the fights with some tribes that they were at war with. Her mother was living in the village also but in a separate lodge. The writer saw her after she was an influential person among her tribe, who were at war that winter with their old enemies, the Pawnees, who frequently made raids out on the plains to the buffalo range, and the Cheyennes and Sioux Indians fought them and took scalps and horses from them by war parties of young braves going on the war path. The Cheyennes took about eighty scalps from <sup>the</sup> Pawnees that winter. ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ The writer witnessed many of their war dances and scalp dances while in the village. I was in the lodge where the

companies' ~~fun~~ were kept all winter. The old chief Cinemo had the largest lodge or tepee in the village and tendered the use of one-half of it to William Bent, to keep the goods in that we had brought down from the Fort, and we received the buffalo robes as fast as they were dressed and gave them goods. The Cheyenne village was located for the fall and winter of 1844, to surround, and kill buffalo and make and dress robes for the trade of the Fort at request of Wm. Bent. The writer of these pages was sent from the Fort in company with Bill Gary and goods. Gary was an old trader in employ of the company and was well versed in the Indian's language and a Canadian Frenchman, but could not write. He could speak the Cheyenne language both by signs and words? He had a Sioux Indian wife and one little boy, and lived in a lodge near to the large tepee of old Cinemo, the old Cheyenne chief who had given one-half of his lodge for the use of Bent's Company to keep their goods in and receive the robes as fast as they were dressed and prepared by the squaws of the village, the squaws doing all the manual labor of stretching and drying the skins; and when dressed they were brought in to the trader and exchanged for such goods as their men chose. The squaws did all the work of the village, such as putting up and taking down the lodges, preparing and cooking the meat for their men, bringing in wood with their dog drays, and only received such things from their lords as they chose to give them. The kind of goods mostly used in the trade was red cloth, beads, tobacco, brass wire for bracelets, wire for arrow points, butchers' knives, small axes or tomahawks, vermillion, powder and bullets. The beads were of three different colors, red, white and blue. The white

kind were prized the most highly by all the different Indian tribes, the blue next and the red last. The company also traded them Abalone shell, which they prized very highly for ornaments. One shell would often be valued as high as four buffalo robes, according to the brilliant colors contained on the inside of the shell. The chief or warrior who purchased the shell would saw it in to two oblong parts, and after squaring the pieces would polish the outside of the shell and make a hole in the small end and suspend one in each ear, giving the fragments to their squaws and children, who would polish them and decorate their frocks that were made of antelope or deer skins, dressed and neatly fringed, and trimmed around with beads and fragments of these shells or antelope hoofs, all polished. Their moccasins were of the most beautiful make and highly ornamented with various colored beads and colored porcupine quills that were worked in various shapes of ornamental patterns, according to their taste, and with a Navajo blanket and their faces tinged with vermillion, the young squaw or girl presented a very neat appearance. These Navajo blankets were close knit, and all alike, a white and black stripe, about two inches wide. They were not so large as the American trade blanket, and <sup>was</sup> only worn by the young squaws of the village. They were water proof, so close woven or knit with a bone, and procured from the Navajos at great expense by the company. I have seen several hundred of these young Indian maidens, dressed in their Navajo blankets, form a circle at a war dance outside of the circle of braves, who were dancing around a large bonfire at a scalp dance, with their trophies of Pawnee scalps suspended from a small stick stretched around small

hoops, with their faces painted black, carrying their trophies and beating a kind of tom-tom<sup>t</sup> or small drum, and singing their war songs, and the old Medicine squaws, with many hideous trophies and scalps, of former enemies taken in battle, dancing around in the inner circle formed by the braves that had been successful on the war path against their ancient enemies, the detested Pawnee<sup>s</sup>. To receive a mark from the blackened face of one of these braves by his own hand on your face was to confer the same honor and glory that he had attained in taking the scalp of his enemy on the war path. The writer had this compliment paid him by one of the <sup>W</sup>White "Antelopes" braves after a successful raid of his party against the Pawnees.

In the winter of 1844 while at the Cheyenne village his party brought in eleven Pawnee scalps, three of which were taken by the "White Antelope" himself, he being leader of the party that went on foot against the Pawnees. They were absent about five or six weeks and much concern was felt for the party by the old warriors and their families during their prolonged absence, and many mournful dances were held in the village before the return of the war party, and equally as much rejoicing on their return, which occurred in a snow storm. The return of the party was delayed by the bringing home on litters of <sup>some</sup> those of their wounded braves. The custom of a war party on their return was to despatch one of their number ahead of the returning party to locate the whereabouts of their village and for him to return to the party without being discovered by their friends and to bring with him some emblem or trophy that he could take from some one of the numerous tepees in the village, which was usually some emblem or medicine bag sign of the family kept out in front of the tepee on a kind of tripod of three stakes

set in the ~~ng~~ ground and the shield of the owner of the lodge hanging to it. It was on a very stormy night, in mid winter, and snowing heavily and wind from the north, when the "runner" from White Antelopes returning war party reached the village, at the Big Timber and stole in and took from in front of a tepee the usual family sign or motto that was attached to this shield, and started back to escape from being caught or seen by any of the people; but he was seen, and the news spread faster in the village than news could be carried by telegrams or telephones now-a-days. It was soon after midnight and great excitement prevailed and pursuit was made by the more swift running young men of the village, to overtake and capture the ~~runner~~ from the returning war party, but he was too fleet of foot for them. All the whole village had turned out and went far out on the plains. Some ran as much as eight or ten miles to catch the messenger. Had he been caught he would have lost the entire glory that had been gained by his being one of the successful war party. I have been explicit in this description of the methods of the Indian tribes with whom Bent's Company traded. These customs would apply to the <sup>Cheyennes</sup> Arapahoes, Kiows <sup>a</sup> or Sioux, all of whom William Bent had great influence over, especially the Cheyennes. The trade for robes the winter of 1844 was a successful one for the company. William Bent sent to the Arapahoes an invitation to come to the Cheyenne villages and live through the winter, close to the Cheyennes, and kill buffalo and dress robes for trade to the Company. No other trading post nearer than Fort Laramie on the Platte River, except a small log hut occupied by a man by the name of Sharp, who traded the Indians whiskey and sometimes he got a robe or two from some straggling Indian

from the Cheyenne village, but his trade did not amount to much. William Bent had built a couple of double log cabins some years before 1844 at the upper end of the bottom of the Big Timber which he removed to with his family, and <sup>where</sup> the buffalo robes could be stored. He had an old French cook called Old Pierre, about 80 years old, and was there during the Christmas holidays; and he invited the writer to come and take a Christmas dinner with him. It was about two or three ~~miles~~ miles from the Cheyenne village where the writer was located in charge of the goods and robes kept in old Cinemo's tepee. This old chief had the largest lodge in the village. He was known among the white traders as "Old Tobacco" and he was a great friend of the white traders of Bent's Company and was subsequently killed by a soldier or teamster in 1846, as he approached a government train traveling up the Arkansas Valley near where this old friendly lived with a small band of his tribe off on the river from the road. On seeing a train of wagons approaching, he went out to meet the wagons to get some tobacco, and have a friendly talk, and smoke with them. But unfortunately the officer in command had issued orders that morning to the teamsters not to allow any Indian to approach the train. And as this old chief approached unarmed with nothing but his large redstone pipe that the writer of this had often smoked with him in his hospitable lodge, the teamster, who was armed with a gun, motioned to him to go back by raising his hand and bringing it down two or three times, calling out as he motioned to go back, go back. Now, in the sign language of the Indians a motion raising the hand at arm's length and bringing it down once is a sign to come to me; twice or three times, is to come quick. So the old Indian chief

advanced more rapidly, and when near was shot down by the teamster obeying the order given by the officer in charge of the wagon train. The old chief lived but a few hours or days, and warned his tribe not to go to war with the whites as they threatened revenge for his death. And that was the way that in which the old chief Cinemo, or Old Tobacco of the Cheyennes, lost his life, and I lived in the same tepee with him all the winter of 1844. He and his band accompanied us on our trip over in the Cimarron <sup>r</sup> valley, in the latter part of the winter, where the Indians had gone to get out of the way of a war party of the Delaware Indians that was reported to be advancing on the Indians of the plains, to get revenge for the massacre of their old chief Swarnuc, that had been on a trapping expedition in the mountains and was enticed by the Indians of the plains into some recess of the mountains and robbed of their braves' pelts and murdered, and his son, Capt. Jim Swarnuck, had come out with two or three of his braves and one or two Shawnees to search for his father, and on ~~xxxxxx~~ learning of the fate of his father, was returning to the Delaware tribe near the Missouri State line, threatening to come out on the plains with five hundred Delaware braves and Shawnees, ~~xxxxxx~~ and rub out, as he stated, all those Indians that was concerned in the massacre of his father's trapping party. And he did start with his war party for that purpose, when he was stopped by the government soldiers from Fort Leavenworth. The writer met him ~~ix~~ on his return from his search for his father's party, as we were going out to Santa Fe with a merchant train, not far from the old Santa Fe crossing of the Arkansas River. He had only two or three men with him. One

was a Shawnee who brought us a venison, while Swarnuck was telling how his father had been murdered by some of these Rocky Mountain tribes. By some means this news of the approach of the Delaware war party reached the Cheyenne village, where William Bent and the writer of these pages had passed several months with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. They took alarm and pulled down their tepees in less than one hour and were on the move, breaking up into several bands, the band of Heap of Crows and Whirlwind going in one direction and old Cinemo yellow wolf's band going to the Cimarron. William Bent ordered a return to the Fort with the robes and goods, and after replenishing with more goods and pack-animals, started to follow the Indians, expecting they would find plenty of buffalo over in the Cimarron country, but <sup>we</sup> did not overtake them until we reached the Cimarron valley. We passed up the Las Animas or Pura-toire river to the mouth of the Box Elder creek and up the Box Elder and out across to the Cimarron valley. Only one surround of buffalo was made by the Indians that we were following, before they reached the Cimarron, as it was snowing and they traveled in haste and found no buffalo in the Cimarron country. After getting down into the Cimarron valley near the head of the Cimarron valley, we came upon land or village of the Cheyennes, and no game whatever, finding only one old starved blind buffalo bull, so poor that we would not kill him. There were a few wild turkeys in the valley but so wild that Indians only killed a few of them. The Indians after we joined them commenced moving down the Cimarron valley and went as far as the old Santa Fe wagon trail, where the writer had passed the fall previous and where a merchant trader by the name of