

Joseph Robidoux

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Joseph Robidoux, well known as the proprietor of the trading post at Black Snake Mills, which became the nucleus of St. Joseph, Missouri, has never been adequately recognized as a formidable rival of Manuel Lisa, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and other giants of the fur trade. He was one of the earliest inhabitants of the Omaha-Council Bluffs area, an entrepreneur whose initiative revitalized the Santa Fe trade, and the man whose fur caravans were among the colorful highlights of the California gold rush. This Joseph was the kingpin of the prolific and energetic Robidoux family whose various other members figure more or less prominently in the history of the nineteenth century trans-Mississippi fur trade. That is to say, Joseph seems to be the relatively stable member of the family who usually obtained the trading licenses, put up the capital, organized expeditions, and managed the headquarters posts, while five brothers, one son, and at least two nephews manned the outposts, roamed widely and have been identified with episodes throughout the West--in both lower and upper Missouri country, the headwaters of the Yellowstone and the Columbia, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, California, New Mexico, the Oregon-California Trail, etc. Brothers Antoine and Louis, whose biographies appear elsewhere in this Mountain Men Series and other Robidoux may have equalled Joseph in importance in their respective spheres, but to understand the complex family of fur traders it is necessary to understand Joseph Robidoux.

Anyone foolhardy enough to research Joseph Robidoux of St. Joseph has three formidable problems to contend with. First of all, some of the fur-trading Robidoux were illiterates; none kept journals. At the same time no full-scale scholarly effort has been made to produce a biography of this colorful Missourian, even by patriotic local historians of St. Joseph, so that knowledge of his career is plagued with hiatuses and confusion of identity. (There is a family biography, 'Memorial to the Robidoux Brothers - Kansas City, 1924-', by Orral Messmore Robidoux, wife of Louis Robidoux, son of Julius C., second oldest son of the Joseph of St. Joseph. She obtained her data from family tradition rather than documentary sources. The basic genealogy is probably accurate, but the historical treatment is hazy, repetitious and unreliable.) Secondly, there were three other Joseph Robidoux, a grandfather, a father and a son, who themselves played no small role in the history of the fur trade, so that it is sometimes difficult to tell which Joseph Robidoux is referred to even when sources give the full name. Thirdly, and most distressing of all, is the fact that the name "Robidoux" or one of its many spelling variables crops up in innumerable sources, usually with no first name whatever, so that the researcher is frequently thrown back on pure speculation, often compounded by misinterpretations which have been cheerfully volunteered by other writers. In any given case, is the Robidoux referred to the Joseph, or the father or the son or one of several brothers, or possibly even a nephew? The following discussion, therefore, is not so much a straightforward biography as an exercise in sorting

Robidoux brothers
? 2 sons
There were 7

Doubtless other trappers and fur traders, whose activities have not yet come to light, found their way into New Mexico during these first years. Louis Robidoux, for example, once swore under oath that he had been living in Taos since the winter of 1822-23.

In 1824, trappers working out of Taos and Santa Fe somehow attracted the attention of officials in Mexico City. On June 26 of that year an agency of the central government ordered the governor of New Mexico to prevent foreigners from trapping in his territory. Unfortunately this order cannot be described with greater precision, for no copy has yet been found. It was, in fact, lost from the New Mexico archives as early as 1825. Still, there is no doubt of its existence.

According to a contemporary description, the "regulations provided that only settlers should hunt the beaver; to this end, after paying a municipal tax, they were given a written hunting license which recorded the number of hunters in the party, the manner of hunting, the weapons to be used--fire arms, traps, or snares and the number of days to be spent on the expedition."

If this order was designed to protect a natural resource from wholesale foreign exploitation, it had slight effect at first. The Missouri Intelligencer at Franklin, usually sensitive to problems affecting the Santa Fe trade, does not even mention it. Josiah Gregg, who traded at Santa Fe in the 1830's, explained why. Since native New Mexicans did not trap, Gregg said, both governors Bartolome Baca and Antonio Narbona gave licenses to foreigners in the name of Mexican citizens, provided the foreigner took along "a certain proportion of Mexicans to learn the art of trapping." Thus, up to the spring of 1826, when Narbona underwent a change of heart, foreigners continued to trap Mexican waters without opposition. In fact, they dramatically expanded their operations, beginning with a massive movement into the Colorado River Basin in the fall of 1824.

A pioneer venture into this area had been made in the spring of 1824 by William Wolfskill, Ewing Young, and Isaac Slover (of the 1822 Slover-Glenn party), who after outfitting a party in Taos in February, trapped their way west on the San Juan River. Their return to Taos in June, 1824, laden with furs, was probably sufficient in itself to motivate an exodus from the Rio Grande Basin, although the awakening hostility of the Mexican government toward foreign trappers may have given additional impetus to the westward move. But most important, three seasons of concentrated trapping on the Rio Grande and its tributaries must have depleted the local beaver and forced the trappers west out of necessity.

Many of the trappers who were to beat new trails to the Colorado Basin were among the eighty-three men who arrived in Santa Fe toward the evening of July 28, 1824, with the annual caravan from Missouri. Most ~~of~~ these men remain nameless, but it is certain that Paul Anderson, formerly of "Andersons, Foughlin and McGunnegle," had returned, for he was elected first lieutenant of the caravan. Other leaders of the caravan were its captain, Alexander

Le Grand, and Augustus Storrs.

Upon returning to the Missouri settlements in the fall of 1824, Storrs penned a letter to Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri which provided his contemporaries, and posterity as well, with a valuable glimpse at the workings of the New Mexico fur trade. Storrs described it as a "business, which, is exclusively enjoyed by American citizens." He explained that trappers had worked the Rio Grande and nearby mountains up to the previous winter when some "descended the western slope of our continent," (apparently a reference to Wolfskill, Young, and Slover). During the present season the number of trappers in New Mexico had tripled. These men, traveling in one large force, had left Taos on August 1, planning to travel "westward thirty days' journey, probably seven hundred miles." Then, Storrs wrote, they would divide into contingents of three or four in order to trap. Storrs seems to have been describing the plans of a group, or combination of groups, led by Etienne Provost and Francois Seclerc, Thomas L. Smith, William Huddart, and Antoine Robidoux, all of whom led trapping expeditions west from New Mexico in the early fall of 1824. These New Mexico-based trappers would find themselves competing with British trappers and other American trappers from the Missouri frontier; the season of 1824-25 saw groups converge from three directions on the basins of the Salt Lake and the Colorado River. Those from Taos formed the vanguard of this movement.

One of the first trapping parties to head northwest from Taos in the fall of 1824 was led by Thomas Long Smith, a young man of twenty-three who had not yet earned the sobriquet of "Peg-leg." Described a few years later as "a middle sized, stout man, with a bold, rather handsome and expressive countenance," Smith had been born into a large family on the Kentucky frontier and had run away from home at age fifteen. Even before his arrival in New Mexico, Smith had become an experienced trapper and trader, working for two years among the Sioux and Osage Indians. In the spring of 1824, he joined the large Santa Fe caravan under Alexander Le Grand, taking along "a hunting horse and few mules packed with goods suitable for the market, besides Indians trinkets, beads, buttons, awls and paints." From Santa Fe, Smith quickly found his way to Taos, which became his home, in between adventures, for the next decade or so. From there, in September of 1824, Smith set out for his first hunt in the Rockies.

As Smith later told it, he left Taos that fall with eighty men. Allowing for some exaggeration, this sizable group might have represented the combined parties of William Huddart and other free trappers to whom Augustus Storrs alluded. On the headwaters of the Rio Grande, Smith, Maurice "LeDuke" (LeDuc), men named Hopper and Marlow, and three Mexicans separated from the larger body. Proceeding west through the rugged San Juan Range, they crossed the continental divide and found their way to one of the affluents of "Grand River," as the Gunnison was then called. This stream, which they traveled toward the Gunnison, may have been the Uncompahgre or the San Miguel, but we may never know, for Smith modestly called it Smith's Fork. At least one of the three New Mexicans who accompanied him probably knew the stream by another name, however, for it seems likely that Smith was being guided over a

variant of the well-known route to the lute country which Spaniards had used for a half-century.

After Smith and his seven companions trapped their way some fifty miles down the Gunnison, they concluded that the group was too large to trap profitably: "Whilst Hopper, Marlow and the three Mexicans went off westward for Green river," Smith and Maurice LeDuc continued down the Gunnison, where some lites soon robbed them of five horses. Fearful of further robberies, Smith and LeDuc left the Gunnison and headed south. Crossing the San Juan River and a "high range of mountains," they reached Navaho country. There they traded "trinkets for sheep and goat skins, also serapes of superior quality manufactured by the Indians and so closely woven as to be almost impervious to water." They were back at Taos by mid-December.

At Taos Smith busied himself that winter by building a distillery with James Baird, Samuel Chambers and a man named Stevens as partners. Although this appears to be the first American-made distillery in Taos, Smith and his cohorts have never received proper recognition as pioneer industrialists. Others soon paid them the high tribute of emulation, however, making their monopoly short-lived. The effects of "Taos Lightning," as the locally produced whisky came to be called, could be attested to throughout the Rockies by a generation of mountain men.

In February, as Smith remembered, Hopper "with his little band from Green river arrived." By that time virgin streams in the Green River country were probably scarce, for, on his return to Taos, Hopper had been "accompanied by Antonio Rubedoux, John Roland and some twenty-five men of Provost's company," all of whom had been trapping to the northwest of New Mexico. In addition to these trappers, a group led by William Huddart had also been in the Green River country that season. A Missourian, Huddart had probably first come to New Mexico with Benjamin Cooper in 1823. His companions on that trip long remembered how Huddart, crazed by thirst, stuck his head inside a freshly killed buffalo to drink its blood; the story continued to be told on the trail for at least another decade. Huddart had started for the Green from Taos on August 24, 1824, with fourteen men, at about the same time that Thomas Smith remembered leaving Taos. Perhaps their parties joined together on the first leg of the trip. We know very little, however, of Huddart's experience in the mountains and would know nothing if it were not for a brief account that he gave the Missouri Intelligencer upon his return to Franklin in April, 1825. The newspaper reported that Huddart and his men had 'left Taos for the purpose of trapping for beaver, and travelled west thrity days. On Green River (probably the Rio Colorado of the West) the company separated, and nine ascended the river. Our informant was among those who remained; and in a few days they accidentally fell in with five other Americans, among whom was Mr. Rubideau. Two days after this junction, a large party of Aripheoes attacked them, killed one person by the name of Nowlin, and robbed the others. The party of six then concluded to return to Taos, and left Mr. Rubideau and his men in the mountains without a single horse or mule.'

Huddart's account not only furnishes us a view of his activities, but also suggests the wide-ranging interests of the Robidoux brothers.

The "Mr. Rubideau" whom Huddart met on the Green was probably Antoine. Thirty years old, the fifth of seven brothers, Antoine was a tall, slender, and handsome figure whom many found courteous and charming. Early in 1824, Antoine had taken "a small assortment of goods" up the Missouri River from St. Louis to Fort Atkinson, where his arrival as "young Robidoux" was recorded by the post sutler on February 15. Four days later he received a permit to travel through Indian Territory from Fort Atkinson "in the direction of Santa Fe." From there, Antoine must have continued west to the Green River, where Huddart saw him. By February, 1825, Peg-leg Smith later recalled, "Antonio Rubedoux" had come into Taos from the Green River. For the next two decades Antoine Robidoux would be associated with the fur trade from New Mexico.

*William S. Wallace, Antoine Robidoux, 1794-1860, 4-5, 48.

In addition to Huddart, Smith and Robidoux, the perplexing Etienne Provost and his even more enigmatic partner, Francois Seclerc, also operated in the Colorado Basin in the season of 1824-25. Provost and Seclerc seem to have journeyed farther north and west than their contemporaries from New Mexico, and we are able to piece together some of their activities from the accounts of other American and Canadian trappers in the area. The Provost used New Mexico as a base was advantageous, for he had had considerable experience in the area while trapping and trading with Jules de Mun and Auguste Chouteau--including an inside look at Santa Fe, where, along with the rest of that unfortunate party, he had spent a month and a half in the local jail. In 1823 Provost returned to New Mexico for awhile, perhaps to trap, but we know nothing of his motives that year. In the late summer or early fall of 1824, Provost and Seclerc left Taos for the Green River. Their route very likely followed the Spanish Trail or a northerly variant. Perhaps Mexican traders guided Provost; there is no doubt that Mexicans went with him. Provost's party, contemporaries reported, consisted of twenty or thirty men.

Antoine Robidoux may have been among those trappers who accompanied Provost, for both were of the clannish French fur trade fraternity on the Missouri River and both seemed to use Council Bluffs as an outfitting point for their journeys to New Mexico. Robidoux may have traveled to the Green with Provost and then, as was customary, split off from the main party to trap. After his meeting with Huddart and their near-tragic encounter with Indians, Huddart reported leaving Robidoux in the mountains without any pack animals. Yet, Peg-leg Smith remembered that in February Robidoux showed up at Taos with some of Provost's men. Robidoux, it seems likely, had returned to the main party after the Indian attack and then had come back to Taos with some of Provost's men.

*Provost and Seclerc seemingly returned to Fort Atkinson in the summer of 1823. Robidoux's license to go to Santa Fe was issued in February, 1824.

Meanwhile, after establishing a base camp at the mouth of the White River where it joins the Green, Provost had divided his men to trap and trade. Provost pushed westward with a group of ten through the Wasatch Mountains into the basin of the Great Salt Lake, probably to trade with Utes as Spaniards had done before him.

By October, 1824, Provost had reached today's Jordan River and may have been the first white man to see the Great Salt Lake. On the Jordan, the Snake Chief "Bad Gocha" invited Provost and his men to smoke the peace pipe and lay down their arms. For eight of the trappers, acceptance was a fatal mistake. Only Provost and one other escaped the ensuing slaughter. With considerable justification, the Americans later blamed Hudson's Bay Company trappers for inciting the Indians. Peter Skene Ogden, who made his well-known first Snake country expedition that same season, reported to the Company that the Snakes had retaliated against the Americans because a Hudson's Bay man had killed a Snake chief. Thus, Ogden explained, the Americans were "greatly irritated...against us, and they would most willingly shoot us if they dared."

The massacre seems not to have seriously interrupted Provost's plans for the winter, for he remained in the mountains while some of his men returned to Taos, apparently for supplies. Francois Seclerc was probably in this group and may not have returned to the mountains that season. Perhaps Seclerc was again at Taos in 1826, but little can be said of Seclerc with certainty.

From his base camp at the mouth of the White River, Provost split his remaining men into small groups to trap the Green and its tributaries. Four men, for example, descended the Green in a canoe, a voyage that they later reported, in a classic understatement, was "very dangerous." Game was so scarce that they had to eat the skins of beaver that they trapped along the way. The four also reported that Indians in the area were "hostile desposed and have killed and robbed 15 to 20 men who were from the neighborhood of St. Louis." Perhaps the trappers had heard indirectly of Robidoux's or Huddart's misfortunes. Provost himself led a group into the Wasatch Mountains, where, in Weber Canyon in May, he was surprised to run across Peter Skene Ogden and his Hudson's Bay Company trappers. As Ogden reported to his employers: 'On the 23 a party of 15 Canadians and Spaniards headed by one Provost and Francois an Iroquois Chief who deserted from our party two years since joined us, we were surprized of seeing them, and still more so when they informed me, that the Spanish Settlement where they had received their Supplies was not more than 15 days march with loaded horses. This place is called Taos distant about 100 miles from St Fe and is now supplied with goods from St Louis overland in waggons by the Americans.' Provost thus added significantly to the geographical knowledge of the Hudson's Bay Company officials and Ogden did not soon forget the proximity of Taos to the Rockies. Nevertheless, relations between the Americans and the British remained hostile.

On June 7, two weeks after meeting Ogden, Provost ran across William Ashley near present-day Fruitland, Utah. A successful businessman, politician, and experienced Missouri River fur trader, Ashley's entrance into the Rockies that season was destined to change the entire character of the Rocky Mountain trade. At the time he met Provost, however, Ashley was short of pack animals and welcomed Provost's assistance in transporting supplies. It was the Taos trappers who told Ashley that the name of the river ~~the~~ was on was the Green, the Spanish Rio Verde. He had been calling it the Shetskedee, while its present-day name was already in com-

mon usage among Becknell, Huddart and others trapping out of New Mexico. Thanks to Ashley, however, merchants in New Mexico were denied at least a part of the harvest of Provost's months in the mountains, for in July, 1825, Ashley inaugurated his famous rendezvous system on Henry's Fork of the Green River. Without returning to the settlements, Provost, like other trappers, was able to obtain sugar, coffee, and tobacco from Ashley, as well as beads and colored cloth for the Indian trade. It is curious that beaver from Provost's party brought only \$2.50 per pound, while Ashley bought beaver for \$3.00 from his own men. Provost's skins, many of which he apparently obtained from the Utes, may have been inferior.

The rendezvous seems to have lured Provost permanently from his Taos base. He remained in the mountains until September, 1826, when he returned to Missouri. The promise of his adventurous early career remained unfulfilled, for no outstanding achievement distinguished his later life. Although he continued his involvement in the fur trade, there is no evidence that he saw New Mexico again before his death in 1850.

Late in the fall of 1824, the Father of the Santa Fe Trail, William Becknell, attempted to follow the snow-covered tracks of Smith, Huddart, Robidoux, and Provost toward the northwest. Even before leaving Missouri, Becknell told one of his neighbors of his plans to trap his way into the mountains and "to visit the Oregon" before returning. But Becknell got off to a late start. His party of sixteen did not leave Franklin, Missouri, until sometime after August 19.

Becknell may have been the first American to receive a Mexican license to trap. In a letter of October 29, 1824, to "His Excellency governor of New Mexico Bartola Marie Baker (Bartolome Baca), Becknell said, "Sew I recvd the licance you granted me by the onrabel Priest of Santa Cruze Manuel Radar and will Comply with your orders and obey them punctaly." In any case, Becknell does not appear to be concealing his impending trip from Governor Baca. He mentions that, "I shall be in next June if nothing hapins to us," and "I shal Cum an see you when I cum in from the woods the winter is aprochin so near I cant time to Cum now." Indeed, winter was approaching. Not until November 5, did he and nine others set out from Santa Cruz de la Canada, just above Santa Fe, "with a view of trapping on the Green River, several hundred miles from Santa Fe." He too probably followed the Old Spanish Trail, but his late departure was costly: "The depth of the snow and the intense cold of the season rendered trapping almost impracticable." Becknell and his men set up winter quarters, perhaps in the area of present-day Mesa Verde National Monument, where he found pieces of pottery, the remains of furnaces and of "many small stone houses, some of which have one story beneath the surface of the earth." After a miserable winter in the "inhospitable wilderness," Becknell reached a New Mexican village on April 5. Although discouraged, he was still "disposed to make another experiment," but there is no further record of his participation in the fur trade of the Far Southwest.

Remarkably, by the end of 1824, no fewer than six groups--those of Wolfskill, Smith, Huddart, Robidoux, Provost, and Becknell--had attempted to trap in the Colorado Basin from a New Mexico base.

All six had probably followed known trails, there being more continuity between the routes of Spanish traders and those of American trappers than is usually realized. Even at this early date, trappers operating out of New Mexico had visions of reaching Oregon via Santa Fe. We have seen that Beckmell had such ambitions. Peter Shene Ogden had learned from the American trappers themselves, that they had not only opened a wagon route from St. Louis to Taos, but that "they intend reaching to Columbia also with Waggons (which is) not impossible so far as I have seen."

The great expectations of the New Mexico-based trappers were not to be realized; their bold thrust into the upper Colorado and Salt Lake basins ended almost before it had begun. For the next decade, this area would be the scene of ruthless competition between the British Hudson's Bay Company and Americans represented by Ashley and his successors. Despite their pioneering efforts, several years passed before the Taos mountain men would again be serious competitors for the furs of the area. Ashley's rendezvous ~~system~~ provided a more popular and effective base than Taos, and his return to St. Louis in the autumn of 1825 with a cargo of beaver valued at close to fifty thousand dollars completely overshadowed the returns from Santa Fe.

Ironically, much of the Green River country and the popular trapping grounds to the east of the ~~Great~~ Salt Lake were in an area legally under Mexican sovereignty. The first four mountain rendezvous, held respectively on Henry's Fork, in Cache Valley, and twice on Bear Lake, all took place in Mexican territory, just below the forty-second parallel. But the trappers, and even the Mexican government, had only the haziest notion of their location in respect to international boundaries. The various administrations in Mexico City during the first decades of independence, occupied with the tasks of shaping anew nation and maintaining themselves in power, rarely turned their attention to beaver hunters roaming the uncharted northern frontier.

Although the rendezvous system eclipsed New Mexico as a source of supplies and a market for beaver from the central Rockies, Taos remained an important outfitting point for mountain men. Checked in their expansion to the northwest by Ashley, the trappers from Taos soon discovered new beaver streams in other directions.

While trappers from Taos found their way to the Green and Colorado rivers in the fall of 1824, word of New Mexico's fur wealth continued to reach the Missouri settlements and excite the attention of experienced Missouri River traders.

In November, 1824, Augustus Storrs reported to Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri that the furs on the return caravan from Santa Fe, of which he had been a member, valued some \$10,044. This, Storrs later admitted, was only a small part of the profits taken from New Mexico in 1824, because the figure did not account for three other companies operating there that year. The same month that Storrs made his report to Benton, Jean Pierre Cabanne of Bernard Pratte and Company learned that a Mr. Anderson, doubtless Paul or William, and a man named Hubert, had recently brought thirty packs of beaver back from Santa Fe. A few months later, in January, 1825, the Missouri Advocate of St. Charles reported that "north of Santa Fe the country is said to abound with beaver and

several Missourians have returned richly rewarded for the labor.

Beaver from New Mexico found anxious buyers in 1824. In late October, William B. Astor, president pro tem of the New York-based American Fur Company, learned of the arrival at St. Louis of "some persons with Beaver" from Santa Fe. Immediately, Astor wrote to his St. Louis agent, Oliver N. Postwick, "If it is as I presume Rocky Mountain buy it by all means, for the article is in demand and will pay well." Astor seems to have used the term "Rocky Mountain" beaver synonymously with "drab" or light-colored beaver which was very much in demand that season. Apparently most of the beaver in the southern Rockies had what Ramsay Crooks called "hale fur," and the demand for this color vacillated with the whims of fashion.

Buyers other than Astor also had their eyes on the beaver from New Mexico. Oliver Postwick was soon reprimanded by Astor, who wrote: "I regret you allowed our opponents to get into their hands the 1500 pounds of Beaver from New Mexico--the connection between them and the owners of the beaver may have given them a preference over you; but I do hope, and shall be glad to hear, that you exerted yourself to effect the purchase, and only failed because it was impossible to succeed---"

Among those with a reported interest in Santa Fe beaver was William Ashley, whose efforts to ascend the Missouri had been frustrated in the previous year by the Arikaras. Rumor in the fall of 1824 had it that Ashley would soon start for New Mexico. J. P. Cabanne remarked, "I would be quite surprised if he did not go to Taos, to try obtaining the right, perhaps exclusive, to hunt," and James Kemmerly, the sutler at Fort Atkinson, noted, "Genl Ashly passed this place some 20 or 30 days ago, with a party of men for the spanish country and I believe for the purpose of trapping and hunting near the mountains."

Ashley, as we have seen, managed to reach the new source of fur wealth by a more northerly route, avoiding New Mexico settlements entirely, but the interest of Bernard Pratte and Company in Santa Fe transcended mere rumor. Known as the "French Company," Pratte and his partners had been one of the principal trading firms on the Missouri River since 1821. By 1824, crusty, fifty-year-old Jean Pierre Cabanne, one of the partners in the firm, was looking toward Santa Fe, eager to secure "an arrangement" with Provost, Seclerc, or James Baird, apparently for sending out a party of trappers. But in its ventures into New Mexico, Bernard Pratte and Company were one step behind its own employee, Joseph Robidoux, and his ubiquitous brothers.

The brothers Robidoux-- Joseph 111, Francois, Isidore, Antoine, Louis and Michel--had been born to the fur trade on the Missouri River. When their father, Joseph 11 died in 1809, the family business continued under the leadership of the eldest brother, Joseph 111, as an ad hoc organization. By 1822, Joseph Robidoux was in the employ of the French Company as a factor at the Oto post, near Fort Atkinson. He remained with Pratte and Company into the period under consideration, when employer and employee rivaled one another for a share of the New Mexico fur trade. Clearly, as one scholar has commented, "the comings and goings of 'Robidoux' parties during the 1820's and 1830's are perplexing," and perhaps they always will be.

Although it has been suggested that Joseph Robidoux sent trade goods to Santa Fe as early as 1822, solid evidence of this is unavailable. That Joseph Robidoux sent a party to New Mexico in 1822 seems more likely. If so, Louis Robidoux probably led this group, for in December, 1825, he swore under oath that he had been living in Taos for the previous two years.

*See Wallace, Antoine Robidoux, 4-7. A seventh brother died in infancy.

*Ibid., 154. Orrol M. Robidoux, 'Memorial to the Robidoux Brothers,' 168-69/

*David J. Weber, "Louis Robidoux," in Hafen, Mountain Men, V111

By the early fall of 1824, it will be remembered, Antoine Robidoux had found his way ~~to~~ to the green River from a New Mexico base. But he was not the only member of the family to reach northern Mexico that season. Even while Antoine was traveling toward the Colorado Basin, his brother Joseph had launched another expedition to Santa Fe. This included two more of the brothers, Alvarez, a Spaniard who migrated to the United States by way of Cuba and who would soon become an important figure in the fur trade of the Southwest.

Although still employed by Bernard Pratte and Company, Joseph Robidoux had privately equipped this trading party, purchasing some of his merchandise from the Company. Irascible J. P. Cabanne was particularly vexed. Robidoux had reached Cabanne's post near Council Bluffs on September 14, "full of ardor, and interested only with his trip to the mountains," and had raided Cabanne's warehouse to equip his twelve traders. "What an annoyance! I want to oppose his trip by trying to tell him how indelicate his conduct is, and even blamable, in wanting to appropriate to himself a branch of the business which we are certainly not going to give up." Cabanne did just that. Joseph Robidoux complained to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., another partner in Bernard Pratte and Company, that "Cabanne reproached me for hunting two hares at the same time, by taking away from you this business branch--because I was your employee." As Joseph Robidoux told it, Cabanne had first showed "repugnance" for his ventures into New Mexico. Only when the Robidoux had succeeded did Cabanne become interested. "Well," Robidoux told Chouteau, "I flatter myself to be in a position to tell you that it is not my fault if you do not own the whole. It's your turn to say your 'mea culpa'." There is no evidence that either Chouteau or Cabanne asked Robidoux's forgiveness. Cabanne, too short of manpower to send a competing party to New Mexico and aware that the furs would be gone by the time he raised a party, did the best he could--he bought a one-third interest in Robidoux's party.

The bickering and bargaining ended, Francois and Isidore Robidoux, Manuel Alvarez, and the others set out from Council Bluffs. The post sutler, James Kennerly, noted in his diary of September, "Robidoux party started for St. Afee to day." Francois Robidoux, presumably accompanied by the remainder of the trading party, arrived in Taos, on this his first visit, on November 25. There the alcalde, for reasons not yet clear, confiscated his merchandise. In March, 1825, Goernor Bartolome Baca ordered it returned and instructed the alcalde that Robidoux was prohibited to trade arms with the Indians, but he and any other Americans were not to be detained if

they wished to trade legitimate goods with the Indians, or if they wished to trap beaver in the rivers of the Territory of New Mexico. Thus, it was probably at this time that, in the name of the tariff collector, Juan Bautista Vigil, Robidoux received the trapping license from Governor Baca which is mentioned in later documents.

Francois Robidoux may have had a group trapping during this winter of 1824-25, even though he had not yet received official permission. At least the furs of the area had not escaped his attention. In the spring of 1825, his brother Joseph, still on the Missouri remarked: "You have the letter that Francois, my brother wrote to us. I don't believe he makes any mistake as to the beaver over there."

Francois Robidoux saw more than beaver in New Mexico, and through his eyes we see that Taos was even then enjoying the "civilizing influence" of the mountain men. In a letter to the alcalde of Taos, he complained of a "slandorous acusation" which was sent to the government of the territory and which reflected on "the good reputation of the residents of this plaza and on that of the foreign inhabitants of it." He protested: "During my stay in this plaza since the 25th of November until today, there has not been committed, on the part of my people or myself, any disorder, scandal nor any controversy with these honorable neighbors.

Moreover, my people, as well as myself, in our business dealings and community and political relationships, have always exhibited the greatest harmony and brotherhood....We have always respected the laws, and the authorities, and the well established customs." One suspects that Francois protested too much. Nevertheless, he (age 37) had good reason to concern himself with these community affairs, for by the spring of 1825 Taos was fast becoming his home. There on January 30, of the following year, Luisa Romero would bear him a daughter.

*Joseph Robidoux to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., March 15, 1825, Chouteau Collection. Portions of this document are translated in Morgan, Ashley, 154. Joseph mentions the return of Michel Robidoux with thirty packs of beaver, from Santa Fe. There is no record of his entrance into New Mexico at this time, but this furnishes another example of the mysterious and wide-ranging activities of the Robidouxs.

*Wesley (ed.), "Diary of James Kennerly, 1823-26," MHC, Vol. VI. No. 1 (October, 1928), 75. Wesley identifies this as a party led by Antoine Robidoux. Other historians have agreed with him. See for example Joseph L. Hill, "Antoine Robidoux, Kinship in the Colorado River Fur Trade," Colorado Magazine, Vol. VII, No. 4 (July 1930), 126; Wallace, Antoine Robidoux, 10. This seems unlikely from the documentation now at hand and, if William Huddart's account may be relied on, he met Antoine Robidoux on the Green River at the very time he is alleged to have been leaving the Bluffs.

*Testimony of Francisco Robidoux, December 9, 1825, MAMM (Mexican Archives of New Mexico) Francisco Robidoux to the Alcalde of Taos, January 14, 1825, Ritch Papers, No. 82.

*Joseph Robidoux to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., Council Bluffs, March 15, 1825, quoted and translated in Morgan, Ashley, 154 (original in Chouteau Collection).

*J. Robidoux, January 14, 1825, Ritch Papers, No. 82, Chavez, "New Names," El Palacio, Vol. LXIV, Nos. 11-12 (Nov. Dec. 1957), 373.

When Antoine Robidoux¹¹ returned from the Green River in the Spring of 1825, he very likely encountered his two brothers at Taos. Then Antoine and Isidore apparently returned to Missouri, where their names, as well as that of Michel Robidoux, appear on a passport of June 29, 1825, allowing them to travel through Indian country back to the "Republic of New Mexico."

Although this passport bore a June 29 date, they waited until fall to make the tedious trip. Again they traveled by way of Council Bluffs, doubtless to report in to brother Joseph and pick up trade goods. While at the Bluffs, another member of the family returned from New Mexico, for on August 30 James Hennerly recorded the arrival of "Robideaux party from Taos." The new arrivals, probably led by Francois, brought back furs which were turned over to Joseph Robidoux and shipped down the river to St. Louis (after Cabanne took his share of one third). On September 14, after a two-week respite, four of the brothers, Antoine, Francois, Michel and Isidore, started again for Taos, arriving in early November.

The enterprises of Joseph Robidoux¹¹ and his brothers in New Mexico did not go unnoticed by Bernard Pratte and Company. Yet, in order to minimize Robidoux's effectiveness as a competitor, they kept him in their employ. From Cabanne's point of view, this strategy had clearly failed. In the spring of 1825, he complained to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., "I ask you in the name of the friendship that is between us, no more Robidoux! This man will bring about our ruin! His competition is no more to be feared than any other's; disabuse yourself, my friend, it is buying him at too high a price." Nevertheless, the relationship continued.

Bernard Pratte and Company, however, had not abandoned the New Mexico trade to Robidoux. In the fall of 1824, apparently unknown to his partner Cabanne, General Pratte had equipped a small party to capture some of the furs of New Mexico. Although the leader of this venture, Ceran St. Vrain, was only twenty-two years old, he enjoyed a position of considerable trust, for he had lived, since his mid-teens, in the general's household. From December, 1822, until October, 1824, St. Vrain had worked for B. Pratte and Company, drawing twenty dollars a month. In autumn, 1824, he formed a partnership with Francois Guerin, in which B. Pratte and Company owned one-third of the stock.

St. Vrain's small party did not leave St. Louis until November. Winter probably caught them on the trail, although they might have lingered deliberately on the Arkansas to trap. In either case, their arrival in New Mexico was not noted until late March, when Tomas Sena, the alcalde at San Miguel del Vado, a small town on the Santa Fe Trail near Santa Fe, informed Governor Baca that two Frenchmen and three Americans had arrived there; their trip to the capital would be delayed because their livestock had been stolen. Three days later, Sena informed the governor that two of the Americans had gone to trap, while the remaining two Frenchmen and one American continued on to Santa Fe. Baca immediately responded, ordering that the American and two Frenchmen were not to sell any of their merchandise until they had reported to Santa Fe and paid the customs duties. Nor were the others to be allowed to hunt beaver. Baca explained to Sena that an order to that effect had been received from the Mexican federal government and had been circulated among the alcaldes, but had somehow been lost. He in-

structed Sena to prevent the foreigners from trapping. St. Vrain eventually found his way to Taos, where he and Guerin hoped to sell their merchandise to trappers, but business was slow. St. Vrain discharged one of his employees named "Safleche," sending him back to St. Louis with twenty-five beaver skins which Bernard Pratte bought for three dollars apiece. Then Guerin sold his share of the partnership to St. Vrain "for reasons too ~~longly~~ to mention." On his return to St. Louis, Guerin carried a letter for Pratte from St. Vrain which explained that he was remaining in Taos: "We have sold but verry few goods and goods is at a verry reduced price at present, I am in hopes that when the hunters come in from there hunt that I well sell out to Provoc and Seclere." But Provost seems to have sold at least part of his furs to William Ashley and to have obtained supplies at the July rendezvous far to the north. St. Vrain was forced to seek his fortune elsewhere. In July he wrote to his mother, 'I have equipt Sum men to goe trapping, thinking that it will be the moste proffatible for me, I have sold the greater part of my goods at a verry good profite if I am fortunate enought to be paid, the men that I have Equipt is all the best United (kind) of hunters, if they make a good hunt, I will doe verey good business.' The trappers whom St. Vrain stalked in the summer of 1825 may have been a group which included Peg-leg Smith. Indeed, Smith later remembered that "St. Vrain of St. Louis, a merchant of Taos," had outfitted him and nine others "to trap the St. Juan. Dolores, St. Miguel and other tributaries of Grand river."

After outfitting Smith, or perhaps some other party, St. Vrain himself gave trapping a try. Sometime in the fall of 1825, he led a party of "18 or 20" men to the area of Utah Lake. It must have been a long winter, for the group did not return until early July of the following year. This hunt was apparently outfitted by Pratte and Company's newest representative in New Mexico, Sylvestre Pratte.

By themselves, St. Vrain's small-scale operations in New Mexico would do little credit to Bernard Pratte's powerful company. Jean Pierre Cabanne, eager to launch a more significant expedition into northern Mexico, made plans for a larger party to leave for Santa Fe in the spring of 1825. Selected to lead this group was Sylvestre S. Pratte, the eldest son of the general. Born in St. Louis in 1799, Sylvestre Pratte had been employed by his father's company on the Missouri River at least as early as 1820. When Joseph Robidoux beat Cabanne to New Mexico in the fall of 1824, Sylvestre Pratte was responsible in part for Cabanne's shortage of manpower, for, believing "that the mountains would remain exclusively Robidoux's and that the company did not desire to send there anymore," Pratte had taken a number of engages with him to trap and winter on the James River. Thus, instead of competing with Joseph Robidoux, Cabanne had been forced to buy a one-third interest in his venture. Certainly this episode contributed to Cabanne's future disenchantment with Sylvestre Pratte.

Cabanne grew restless as his spring departure date for the Santa Fe party was delayed. On June 5 he wrote to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., at St. Louis, "If Pratte or Pahrin have not already left, hasten their departure; I have several engages here; not only do they cause me a great deal of trouble and increase expenses, but they may very well become impatient waiting." On July 26, Pratte finally

reached Council Bluffs, and Cabanne lamented: "The expedition for the mountains, if it had left 1½ months ago; as it should, would probably have good results and what I said about 80 packs will make me seem an overexcited mind....I will not think of the Mountains again." Probably angered at Pratte for the delay, Cabanne now charged that Pratte's performance on the James River during the previous season had not been satisfactory. He asked Pierre Chouteau, Jr., "How can a young man who seems to be guided by a sense of good have so little success in what he undertakes? Cabanne repeated these sentiments two months later and predicted that, with Sylvestre Pratte as its leader, "the expedition to the Mountains will undoubtedly be unsuccessful." Bernard Pratte was, he thought, "much to be pitied, for having children who, by their incapability, show themselves so little worthy of him." Cabanne's gloomy predictions of failure would prove to be true.

Pratte's delay in leaving had one unexpected advantage that would not be appreciated for another generation. It enabled the young Kentuckian, James Ohio Pattie, to join the expedition and record some of its adventures in his famous and controversial Narrative. Pattie and his father, Sylvester, both bereaved at the loss of James Ohio's mother, had left their farm and large family behind to travel to St. Louis and outfit themselves for a trapping and trading venture on the Missouri River. They were forbidden to proceed upriver beyond Council Bluffs, however, for they had no license to enter into the Indian trade. So, when they stopped at Cabanne's post and learned of Pratte's plans, they decided to accompany him to New Mexico.

Finally, on July 30, Pratte left the Council Bluffs area with 116 men (according to Pattie). But they did not reach Taos until October 26, only a few days before the Robidoux brothers, for Pratte paused on the way to trade buffalo robes with Pawnees and beaver and deerskins with Utes on the Arkansas.

Interestingly, both Pratte and the Robidoux brothers made Taos their first stop and never took their merchandise into Santa Fe. This seems to have been the pattern for those who used the Taos Trail to enter New Mexico. Although the border guard, Rafael Luna, and the Taos alcalde, Severino Martinez, were empowered to intercept Americans and examine their invoices and merchandise, it seems to have been customary at this time to send to Santa Fe for the customs collector to come to Taos for the final assessment. The traders were reluctant to carry their goods on to Santa Fe if they did not intend to market them there because, as they complained, the road was too rough. *Juan Bautista Vigil, instructions to Rafael Luna and Severino Martinez, Santa Fe, April 20, 1825, MAM; testimony of James Baird in the case involving the embargo of the merchandise of Francisco Robidoux, December 9, 1825. Sylvestre Pratte, although a novice in New Mexico, relied on the common expedient of burying some of his goods on the eastern side of the Taos mountains before entering the settlement to avoid paying duty. The Robidoux, when they arrived, probably did the same thing. Pratte then journeyed to Santa Fe to hire the services of the tariff collector, Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, apparently taking James Baird along to act as an interpreter. Vigil took some time reaching Taos, where one contemporary recorded in his diary on November 8 that "Will has been expected every day for a week past." "No pin-

ally arrived at Taos on November 12.

*Sibley, Road to Santa Fe, 114; testimony of James Baird in the case involving the embargo of the merchandise of Francisco Robidoux, December 9, 1825, MANM.

*Case concerning the embargo of merchandise of Francisco Robidoux, December 9, 1825;; report of legislative committee to Narbona, January 11, 1826, MANM.

Pratte's merchandise entered New Mexico with no apparent difficulty, while the more experienced Francois Robidoux had his goods promptly confiscated by Juan Bautista Vigil, for they lacked the proper factura or invoice. Francois--Francisco to the Mexicans--told Vigil that his brother Michel would be along in two hours with the proper papers, but Vigil returned to Santa Fe and left Robidoux's goods under lock and key at the house of Alcalde Martinez. Francois Robidoux and Manuel Alvarez, then an employee of Robidoux and Manuel Alvarez, then proceeded to Santa Fe, reportedly to petition the governor for the release of the goods. Instead, as Alvarez told it, they found themselves at Vigil's house where the payment of a one hundred-peso debt secured the immediate release of the merchandise. That this was a debt, rather than a direct bribe, seems clear from the documentation, for even Francois Robidoux admitted to this. Perhaps the one hundred pesos represented a fee which Robidoux had neglected to pay to Vigil in return for Vigil's securing a trapping license for Robidoux the previous spring, or perhaps it represented a share of Robidoux's trapping proceeds. Whatever the particulars, Vigil had used his power as a public official to settle a private matter. For this, and other indiscretions, he soon lost his job as tariff collector but continued to hold public offices on and off for the next twenty years. When Stephen Watts Kearny led American troops into Santa Fe in 1846, Juan Bautista Vigil, as lieutenant governor of New Mexico, took the place of the fleeing Governor Manuel Armijo, and welcomed the conquerors with an impassioned speech.

Unlike Francois Robidoux, Sylvestre Pratte found Vigil to be a most obliging official and through him obtained from Governor Antonio Narbona a license to trap. Pratte dispatched at least three different trapping parties that winter. Twelve or thirteen men, he later reported, trapped on the headwaters of the Rio Grande. Ceran St. Vrain led eighteen or twenty men to the area of Utah Lake, and still another group, whose destination is not clear, left in February and would not return to Taos until November. Pratte and Francois Robidoux themselves may have led a group into the mountains which returned in May, 1826.

James Ohio Pattie and his father had considerably more difficulty than Pratte in obtaining a trapping license in the fall until a characteristically dramatic event intervened to help them. As Pattie tells it, Governor Narbona delayed answering their first request for a trapping license because he "did not know if he was allowed by law" to grant the license. Pattie's recollection seems quite plausible, for Narbona had just assumed office. When Pattie returned to see Narbona the following day, the governor had decided that issuing a license to trap beaver would be illegal, but an offer to pay him five per cent on any beaver caught, according to Pattie, kept the matter open for further consideration. While these

negotiations were taking place, Pattie and his father, along with several of Pratte's men, effected a daring rescue of the daughter of a former New Mexico governor from Comanches. A license was forthcoming--or so the story goes. It is just as likely, however, that this never occurred and that Pattie and his father trapped under the protection of Sylvestre S. Pratte's license. Theirs may have been one of the groups which Pratte outfitted that winter.

Regardless of the source of their license, James and Sylvester Pattie, along with two others who had accompanied them from Missouri and three of Sylvestre Pratte's men, started south ~~along~~ the Rio Grande in late November. Of these seven trappers, four remain nameless. Pattie refers to one member of the party as Allen. This might be Jose Manuel (Hiram?) Allen, a Canadian who was baptized later at Taos in 1828, when he was thirty-one years old, then became a Mexican citizen in 1830. The Patties, "Allen," and their four companions were joined on the Rio Grande by "seven hunters," and the enlarged group continued south. At a point four days' journey below Socorro, they struck out to the west for Santa Rita del Cobre (the Santa Rita copper mines), a place where Spaniards had been mining since the turn of the century. Here they hired two Mexican servants, probably as guides, and continued on to the Gila River. Beaver were plentiful; the traps yielded thirty beaver after the first night on the river. Their fortunes changed, however, when the seven who had joined the Patties on the Rio Grande abandoned the party. The deserters trapped ahead on the Gila, leaving few beaver in their wake and forcing the Patties to travel north up the San Francisco River, a tributary of the Gila. Two weeks on the San Francisco yielded, according to Pattie, two hundred and fifty beaver. They returned to the Gila, cached their furs, and continued downstream hoping to find another beaver-laden tributary. The seven deserters, in the meantime, had been attacked by Indians and one of the party killed. The remaining six, aided by the forgiving Patties, eagerly returned to the copper mines. The Patties continued down the Gila to the San Pedro River, upon which their good fortune inspired them to bestow the name of "Beaver River." They were back at the Santa Rita mines by the end of April, 1826, and James Pattie set out for Santa Fe for supplies and horses to enable them to retrieve the beaver they had cached. By the time that Pattie and a party of fifteen, including four Americans, got back to the "Beaver River" where the main cache was located, the fur was gone. They recovered a small quantity buried at the San Francisco River, and returned to the copper mines in July, apparently poorer than when they had started.

Despite their initial failure, Pattie and his father remained in New Mexico and continued to trap. So did many of the Frenchmen who came into the Southwest with the Robidoux brothers or Pratte. Men like Gervais Nolan, Jean Baptiste Trudeau, Anastasio Carriel, Jean Vaillant, Carlos Beaubien, Joseph Bissonette, and Antoine Leroux swore at a later date that they had first come to New Mexico in 1824. Most of these Frenchmen settled quietly some at Taos and elude mention in the documents of this period, but some of their number probably accompanied each of the expeditions from New Mexico that we are able to chronicle. When, in 1853, Antoine Leroux testi-

fied that he had "trapped the whole country, every river, every creek, and branch from the Gila to the head of the Grand River fork, " his exaggeration was probably slight.

Clearly, the entrance of the Robidoux brothers and Bernard Pratte and Company into the Santa Fe fur trade did not deter independent trappers and traders from also entering the field.

One aspect of the Santa Fe trade from which New Mexico officials had hoped to benefit was the nascent fur trade. Thus governors Baca and Narbona had winked at the federal decree prohibiting foreigners from trapping and, during 1824 and 1825, had granted trapping licenses to William Becknell, Sylvestre Pratte, Francois Robidoux, and doubtless others as well. Even as they were doing this, however, national and local pressures were being exerted to enforce the law.

When some of their trappers returned from the mountains in May, Francois Robidoux and Sylvestre S. Pratte found themselves in the unhappy position of being among the first Americans to enter hostile climate. On May 10, 1826, the alcalde of Taos informed Agustin Duran that, in compliance with orders, he had confiscated the beaver pelts of Francois Robidoux and Sylvestre S. Pratte. Robidoux had about 630 pounds of beaver fur, and Pratte had 1,885 pounds. In his defense Robidoux presented a license to the alcalde which had been issued to him in the name of Juan Bautista Vigil by Governor Baca, and Pratte produced a similar document from Governor Narbona. The alcalde suggested that Vigil's part in this matter be investigated and reported that the two owners of the embargoed fur were on their way to Santa Fe that day.

When Pratte and Robidoux arrived in Santa Fe, they found that the deputation had revoked their permits to trap. Protesting to the governor, the two trappers argued with some justification that they had been treated unfairly and that some of their men had not yet returned and supposed themselves to be licensed. Apparently impressed by this argument, Narbona ordered Duran to return the furs of Robidoux and Pratte and extended protection to those who had departed on trapping expeditions before licenses were revoked.

Most of the trappers about whom Pratte and Robidoux professed concern had no apparent difficulty in getting their furs to market. Less fortunate were some who had trapped perhaps as far as the upper Colorado, returned to Taos on November 12. Notified of their arrival by the alcalde of Taos, Jose Antonio Martinez, Narbona ordered their furs confiscated "immediately" and the group's license sent to Santa Fe. If they had no license, Martinez was to send the entire group to Santa Fe.

Instead of complying with the governor's order, Martinez wrote back on November 20 and asked to which furs the governor was referring, since in the previous May the governor had extended Pratte's now-rescinded license to include those trappers who had not yet returned. Narbona, who must have been in a rage, accused Martinez of insubordination and again ordered him to seize the furs. But, Martinez replied that he was still unable to carry out his orders. He explained that when he went to the house where the foreigners kept the furs, he could not enter because the trappers who guarded the furs

did not have the key. Martinez suggested that he should await the return of Pratte, who had the key, or if the governor desired he would break into the house and take the furs. In addition he apologized for having questioned the governor in the first place. He had since discovered eight of Pratte's trappers and five of Francois Robidoux's guarding the furs, and he now realized that the governor had only given permission for three persons to continue trapping. Robidoux's men, he reported, had left their furs guarded in the "Indian Country" for want of animals to transport them back to Taos.

Like Robidoux's trappers, many of these Frenchmen also resided in Taos.

These expeditions of Pratte and Francois Robidoux, in the winter of 1826-27, are most noteworthy for the unusually complete roster that we have of their personnel. We know nothing more, unfortunately, of the activities of these men that season. Certainly, in the face of Governor Narbona's new hostility toward foreign trappers, Pratte and Robidoux took great care to keep their activities secret. Perhaps the foreigners had even made a "deal" with Manuel Martinez so that he would look the other way when they brought "entierros" into Taos. Clearly, foreign trappers would need either to circumvent New Mexico officials or to come to an understanding with them, for the opposition that surfaced in 1826 remained the official posture of the New Mexico government as still more pressure was put upon it to stop foreigners from trapping in northern Mexico.

In a roundabout way the Mexican government had received early warning of the Americans' intentions to trap the Gila in 1826. Perhaps Obregon, Mexican minister in Washington, had heard of the plans of the Robidoux brothers.

That Narbona, who had been a major obstacle to Pratte and Francois Robidoux, should allow some ninety trappers (by his own count) to slip by him is puzzling.

The foreign trappers about whom Baird and Ramirez remonstrated were described tersely by Governor Narbona: "J. William and Sambrano is accredited with leading 20 and some odd men; Miguel Rubidu and Pratt 30 some odd; Juan Roles 18 and Joaquin Joven also 18." Later in the fall Antoine Robidoux received guias (permits).

The brief story of the third group which Narbona identified, the one led by "Miguel Rubidu and Pratt," is known largely because James Ohio Pattie was along. Miguel (Michel) Robidoux, youngest of the Robidoux brothers, became the sole leader of this group while Sylvester Pratte remained at Santa Fe to fight the embargo that Narbona had placed on his furs.

According to Pattie, Miguel Robidoux's party, composed almost entirely of French trappers, traveled down the Rio Grande and over to the Santa Rita copper mines--probably in September, 1826. There, James Pattie, lately returned from his own unsuccessful sojourn on the Gila, joined Robidoux. Leaving Sylvester Pattie at the mines, the trappers followed the Gila to the mouth of the Salt River at present-day Phoenix. There, as Pattie tells it, the carelessness of Miguel Robidoux enabled Pahagos to massacre the entire party. Only Pattie, an unnamed Frenchman, and Robidoux escaped. These three soon joined a group of about thirty trappers operating nearby under Prince Young, the "Pascua Young" of Narbona's list.

leader of the fourth and final group that Narbona identified. Previous to this encounter with Pattie and Robidoux, Young's men too had been beleaguered by Indians on the Gila.

*Pattie never mentions Robidoux or Young by name, but it has long been accepted that his Narrative, 75-82, recounts the activities of Robidoux's party to the Salt River and then tells of Young's adventures, as demonstrated by Joseph J. Hill in "New Light on Pattie and the Southwestern Fur Trade," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXIX, No. 4 (April, 1923), 243-54.

In the summer of 1826 Ewing Young and William Wolfskill, trapping companions since 1822 had returned from St. Louis to Santa Fe to trap the Gila. Like Miguel Robidoux, Wolfskill also traveled to the Gila via the Santa Rita Mines. Young's group returned to the Gila to chastise the Indians and added Pattie and Miguel Robidoux to their number and resumed trapping. Young led his trappers all the way to the Colorado, the first Americans, so far as we know, to follow the Gila to its mouth. They ascended the Colorado to the Mohave villages, where their path intersected that of Jedediah Smith, who had traveled downstream from the summer rendezvous.

Young's difficulties are not illuminated by any other extant documents of those years, but in August, 1831, after Young had returned from California, the governor wrote to Suis Robidoux expressing surprise that the alcalde of Taos "has not complied with his obligations by immediately placing the foreigner, Joaquin Yon, in a secure prison and formed a suitable case against him!" The governor suggested to Robidoux that trial be in Santa Fe since the witnesses against him lived there.

Jackson produced a license which the governor of New Mexico had given to Waldo. This may have been the trapping license that Governor Chavez had granted to Antoine Robidoux and David Waldo on Sept 19, 1831.

In 1844 Louis Robidoux and Jean Jeantet, one of Sylvestre Pratte's former engages, also settled permanently in California, having come with a train of Mexican traders. Neither returned to New Mexico and Robidoux became a prominent California rancher.

*Weber, "Louis Robidoux, in Hafen, Mountain Men, 111.

An American from an old St. Louis family, Guion had left Missouri in July, 1827, in a company which included such well known fur traders as Paul Baillio, Thomas Boggs, Manuel Alvarez and Suis Robidoux. This group reached Taos in November, and Guion lost no time in sending two agents to Abiquiu to buy furs. One was Juan Butista Trudeau, a French-American who had been living in Taos, who had married there in July, 1826, and who would soon become a Mexican citizen. Trudeau had gone with Francois Robidoux in March, 1827, when he visited "Indian Country" in search of "entierros." The other agent is identified in the documents only as "Americanito," the little American. As Guion's agents, Trudeau and Americanito bought the furs that the Mexican traders had obtained from the lites. Pedro Leon had already sold his furs to Mateo Garcia, and Tomas Chacon had sold his to the alcalde of Abiquiu, and Trudeau bought the furs through these "middlemen."

*Case of the embargoed merchandise of Francois Robidoux, December 9, 1825, MAM.

Task of determining ownership of the tercio of fur taken from Phillip Thompson's store aroused considerable controversy involving many of the New Mexico fur traders. Antoine Robidoux among them, to determine the origin of the furs.

After a trip to Missouri, Boggs had returned to Taos in November 1827, in company with Guerin, Guion, Alvarez and Luis Robidoux, then left immediately for Sonora, where he reportedly intended to buy horses.

Sylvestre S. Pratte, Backed by his father's powerful company, which had become the Western Department of John Jacob Astor's giant American Fur Company by 1827, seemed to have sufficient resources behind him to give him an edge over independent trappers who worked the Southwest. Yet somehow Pratte had been losing money ever since his arrival in New Mexico in the fall of 1825. Bad luck seemed to dog his every move, as when he outfitted Miguel Robidoux's party that was massacred on the Pila in the fall of 1826.

That foreigners were slow to change national allegiance was probably not due to any motives of patriotism. More likely, word of the new law had not yet circulated around Taos and Santa Fe. On February 22, 1829, however, two French-Canadians, Charles Deaubien and Gervais Nolan, expressed willingness to surrender their fidelity to the British Crown; on June 25, they became the first foreigners to be naturalized in New Mexico under the new law. By summer John Rowland and Antoine and Louis Robidoux had followed their example. The influential Robidoux brothers had asked for citizenship on July 16 and received papers the next day. Most of them used their new citizenship papers to continue that association in a legal capacity. (the fur trade)

Four of those who became Mexican citizens in 1829 took out licenses to trap within the next year: John Rowland, Gervais Nolan, Antoine Robidoux, and Richard Campbell. Like Rowland and Nolan, new citizens Antoine Robidoux and Richard Campbell asked for a license to trap in the fall of 1830. Campbell should be remembered as the first of the Taos trappers to find his way to California by an overland route. In their application to trap, Robidoux and Campbell professed concern with furthering Mexican commerce, as well as earning living for themselves and their families. Where Robidoux and Campbell trapped in 1830, or who constituted their party, remains unknown; more is known of Antoine Robidoux's trapping exploits in the 1830's than of Campbell's. In Sept., 1831, David Waldo, who had become a Mexican citizen that June, asked for a license on behalf of himself and Robidoux; and two days later it was granted. This license was used by Ewing Young's party, which left that fall for Calif. and the license was then carried back to New Mexico by David Jackson, who produced it when Mexican officials confiscated his furs in the summer of 1832. Perhaps using the same license, Antoine Robidoux outfitted his own trapping party that season. Clearly Robidoux continued to trap and trade furs out of New Mexico. By the end of the 1830's he had constructed two trading posts to the northeast of Taos, but this takes us ahead of our story.

Antoine and Louis Robidoux provide outstanding examples of the power a naturalized citizen could achieve in the economic and po-

litical affairs of the primitive frontier province of New Mexico. Sach was elected first alcalde and regidor, or alderman, of Santa Fe on various occasions. *In December, 1829, Antoine was elected ninth regidor of Santa Fe and in 1833 he served as third alcalde of Santa Fe. Antoine, in fact, was elected first alcalde in December, 1830, only a little over a year after he had become a citizen. His right to that office was challenged, it is interesting to note, on the grounds that he had only naturalization papers and Governor Jose Antonio Vizcarra received little support from other prominent New Mexicans. Governor Chavez felt that Robidoux was entitled to the office, but forwarded both sides of the argument to Mexico City for a final decision. *Papers concerning the election of Antonio Robidoux in Archivo de Gobernacion. Some of the documents pertaining to this case are scattered throughout the MAM. The outcome of the case is not clear. Antoine Robidoux also appears to have been one of the outstanding merchants of Santa Fe. He operated a store there which might have been well-provisioned, for it was robbed two years in succession. Antoine stocked his store with merchandise brought over the trail from Missouri and, like other merchants, sent good to Chihuahua regularly. Louis Robidoux served a full one-year term as first alcalde of Santa Fe in 1839. Matt Field, a reporter for the New Orleans Picayune who visited Santa Fe that year, wrote that Louis Robidoux "shares the rule over the people almost equally with the Governor and the priests." Operating a grist mill and iron works in Santa Fe (where he might have manufactured traps), Robidoux seems to personify American initiative and shrewdness.

*For robberies of Robidoux's store see the cases of December 4, 1829, and March 28, 1831, MAM. Antoine's name appears frequently in custom house records of the period. See also Weber, "Louis Robidoux," in Hafen, Mountain Men, v111.

Antonio Blanchard and Luis Ambroise were, respectively, in the employ of Francois Robidoux and Sylvestre Pratte in the spring of 1827. Jean Baptiste Trudeau, ("Bautista Truido"), who was naturalized in September, 1830, had come to New Mexico in 1824, married in Taos in 1826 and had been trapping under Francois Robidoux in the spring of 1827. A resident of Arroyo Hondo near Taos he used his new citizenship to trade with Indians in the southern Rockies. On a trading foray to the Arkansas in 1833 he met some Arikaras who were traveling to Santa Fe to make a treaty. According to Trudeau, they asked him to lead them to the governor and to obtain for them a sign of friendship. Trudeau, the governor reported, spoke the language of the Arikaras (Pawnee) perfectly and wanted the job of official interpreter.

Francois Robidoux sent Antoine Leroux to lift a cache in the country in the spring of 1827.

Just how important Taos was as a market for the furs of the Rockies cannot be said with precision. Too many small groups trapped north from New Mexico of whom nothing is known. Some of these were led by naturalized Mexicans such as Antoine Robidoux, Campbell, Nolan, Sesperance and others. Antoine Robidoux received \$3,806.50 from Sublette's own account for furs.

Antoine Robidoux's mountain forts served to extend the New Mexico fur trade. Antoine and Louis Robidoux had become Mexican

citizens in 1829 and remained influential politician-merchants in Santa Fe for the next decade. Sometime in the 1830's Antoine built two trading posts to the northwest of Taos. He probably built Fort Linta (also called Fort Robidoua) in the winter of 1837-38. Located near the forks of the Linta and Whiterocks rivers, near present-day Whiterocks, Utah, the post occupied a site in an area that Robidoua and other Taos trappers knew well. In 1831, for example, Denis Jukien, a trapper who had been in the employ of Francois Robidoua in 1827, inscribed his name on a rock near the Linta. *Albert B. Reagan, "Forts Robidoua and Kit Carson in Northeastern Utah," New Mexico Historical Review, Vol. X, No. 2 (April, 1935), 122. Along a route that trappers would take to Fort Robidoua (in the Willow Creek drainage, south of Ouray, Utah), carvings on a cliffside reveal the names of Juan Valdes, "J. Chalifou" and others; all carved in 1835. In the winter of 1833-34, Kit Carson remembered meeting a "Mr. Robidoua" who had twenty men trapping and trading on the Linta. Since Antoine seems to have been in Santa Fe that winter, this Robidoua might have been one of his brothers--perhaps Louis--assuming that Carson remembered the season correctly. *Carter, 'Dear Old Kit,' 58-59. On December 6, 1833, Antoine's signature appears as one of the members of the commission in charge of the formation of election districts, Santa Fe, NM. On February 19, 1834, Antoine purchased a mine in Santa Fe. See the certificate of sale of that date, cited in Twitchell, Spanish Archives, 1, 215. *Mallace, Antoine Robidoua, 14, 53, n. 31; Hafen and Hafen, Old Spanish Trail, 102.

About the time that Antoine Robidoua built Fort Linta, he also constructed Fort Uncompahgre on the Gunnison River near the mouth of the Uncompahgre. Perhaps, in point of time, this was the second of the two posts, built as a way station to the Linta. Or, it may be that Fort Uncompahgre was built first to offset the influence which Gent's Fort and the South Platte forts were gaining on the Indian trade. In that case, Fort Linta might have been built later to counter the establishment of Fort Davy Crockett, built in Brown's Hole on the Green in northwestern Colorado about 1837. Still, the years in which Robidoua's temporary trading sites became permanent posts cannot yet be ascertained. The earliest known description of either fort comes from a sixty-six-year-old Methodist minister, Joseph Williams, who visited Fort Linta in July, 1842. Scandalized by the trappers' keeping of Indian women, their drinking and swearing, and unfavorably disposed toward Roman Catholics anyway, Williams found Robidoua and his trappers "as wicked men, I think, as ever lived." Furthermore, "Some of these people at the Fort are fat and dirty, idle and greasy."

Another visitor to Fort Linta in 1842 was more interested in Robidoua's trading activities than with the morals of his men. Trapper Rufus B. Sage described the chief business of the post as outfitting "trapping parties frequenting the Big Beaver, Green, Grand, and the Colorado rivers." He noted that "a small business" was carried on with Snakes and lites who lived near the post and who traded pelts and skins with Robidoua in exchange for guns and ammunition, among other things. "The trade," Sage said, "is quite profitable. The articles procured so cheaply, when taken to Santa Fe

and the neighboring towns, find a ready cash market." Both of Robidoux's forts depended heavily on New Mexico for supplies and used New Mexico ~~as~~ a market for beaver on occasion. Perhaps Louis Robidoux served as the Santa Fe agent for his brother. On at least one occasion in the spring of 1841, Louis journeyed from Santa Fe to Fort Uinta.

Trappers who used the services of Robidoux's forts, then, were spared the long trip to Taos. After 1839, when the annual mountain rendezvous was no longer held, Robidoux's location became particularly strategic. A party which had been trapping as far away as the Gila, for example, arrived at Fort Uinta in the fall of 1842, "bringing with them a rich quantity of beaver," according to Rufus Sage. That same fall a group of trappers left from Fort Uinta for the headwaters of the Columbia River. Kit Carson, who had formerly trapped out of Taos, furnishes another example. In the spring of 1840, after trapping high on the Missouri and the Snake, Carson took his furs to Fort Uinta. Again in the spring of 1841, after hunting on the Grand River, wintering in Brown's Hole on the Green, and trapping in North Park, Carson and five others returned to Fort Uinta to sell their furs. They remained there for the summer. By the, according to Carson, "beaver was getting very scarce."

It is probably more than coincidence that by 1839, soon after Fort Uinta was established, the traditionally friendly relations between Utes and New Mexicans had begun to deteriorate. As Antoine Robidoux later told it, the enraged Utes returned to their own country and spent some of their fury on Mexicans who were working at his Fort Uncompahgre ("the Tamhagarha Fort"). At least three Mexicans were killed. One American who was there "was spared and sent to let Mr. Robidoux know (who was 120 miles distant; probably at Fort Uinta), that the peltries were unharmed." Robidoux maintained that Utes were not hostile to Americans, but another contemporary reported that an American had been killed at the fort, as ~~more~~ five or six Mexicans. News of the attack on Fort Uncompahgre demoralized Robidoux's employees at the Uinta Fort. Some of them stole weapons and supplies and fled the post.

*(Fayette) Missouri Democrat, Sept. 17, 1845, quoting the St. Joseph Gazette, which seems to have obtained Robidoux's story from his own lips. This article is copied in Dale Morgan's collection, "The Mormons in the Far West," copy in the Huntington Library.

Following the hostilities at his fort, Robidoux suddenly left New Mexico and the mountains, returning to Missouri. His biographer William S. Wallace, sees the low price of furs, danger from Indians, and general financial losses as contributing to Robidoux's departure. His final action, Wallace suggests, was precipitated by the attack on the fort which was "the last straw for Antoine." Despite some setbacks, however, Robidoux's trading post seemed to be doing well; it is difficult to explain why he would leave his home and store in Santa Fe. Yet, his brother Louis also quit New Mexico about this time, moving to California in lat 1843. Deteriorating commercial conditions may have prompted their departures, but they may also have been motivated by self-defense. Mexican officials in Santa Fe suspected that the Utes had been obtaining arms and ammunition from one of the Robidoux's forts and were satisfied that the results

of an investigation, which they ordered, showed this to be the case. Antoine could not have felt very comfortable walking the streets of Santa Fe as a known gunrunner.

Many of the furs gathered in the southern and central Rockies in the late 1830's and early 1840's found their way to forts operated by Robidoux.

Charles Robidoux sat on jury in Taos in January 1847. Antoine Robidoux, as a former trapper, was exceedingly useful. Familiarity with Spanish, acquaintance with Mexican culture, and connections with leading New Mexican families, unusual geographical knowledge and facility with Indian languages would serve to extend American control of the Indians beyond the settlements and further American exploration of the Far Southwest. Though the trapper as an occupational type had nearly disappeared in the Southwest by the time of the Mexican War, former trappers continued to exert influence in the region.