

The Missouri Merchant One Hundred Years Ago

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THE MISSOURI MERCHANT ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.¹

JOHN BARBER WHITE.

Trade and commercialism were the chief factors in drawing the first settlers to Missouri. The attraction of the immense possibilities in fur trading caused the early homes and settlements along the rivers and in the valleys of Missouri, and led to the establishment of trading posts at St. Louis, Ste. Genevieve and other places during the Spanish occupation.

I am indebted to that great Missouri historian, Col. Louis Houck, in his *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, for many of these historical facts, which he has recovered from the dim past and which he has dug up and preserved for future generations.

He mentions the oldest settlement, Ste. Genevieve. Among the early merchants and traders there was a Louis Lambert, who was the wealthiest and most important. Louis Viviat, Francis Datchurnt and Louis Duchonquette were also prominent traders, as were the Valles and Henry Peyroux de la Condreniere, Post Commandants, and Walter Kennedy, brother of Patrick Kennedy of Kaskaskia, a noted

¹Address delivered at banquet at Daniel Boone Tavern, Columbia, Missouri, on January 8th, 1918, in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the filing with Congress of the first petition of Missourians requesting statehood.

English speaking trader at Ste. Genevieve. Jeduthen Kendall had a tannery and made boots and shoes there nearly a hundred years ago.

It was John Nicholas Maclot, who had once suffered imprisonment in the Bastille suspected of republican sentiments, who, when released, came to Philadelphia and was a merchant there for several years. He came to St. Louis with a stock of goods, a hundred years ago, and later with Moses Austin, a Connecticut pioneer, who was working lead mines in Potosi, went to Herculanum on the bluff of the river and established a shot tower.

Mr. Houck mentions Moses Austin as a big representative of commercialism in the enterprises and mine operations in the district. In 1820 he followed his son, Stephen F., to Texas. He succeeded in obtaining from the local government a recommendation permitting him to establish on Texas soil three hundred families from the United States. He died in 1821, aged fifty-seven years, just as he had received word that the Spanish government had approved of his colonization plans.

Laclede as the representative of Maxent and Company was sent up the river, not to establish a town, but to trade in furs; but the town grew up around him.

See Houck's chapter on St. Louis for a record of all the big traders, including the Chouteaus, Martigny, Cerre, Clay Morgan, Manuel de Lisa, James Mackey and others. Lisa helped establish the Oregon Trail and was the most prominent man of 1807-8 engaged in the fur trade of that period. In the winter of 1808-9 he helped organize the Missouri Fur Company. He made extended voyages far up the Missouri, as far as Kansas City and beyond, as did also James Mackey and Gen. Ashley; the latter an early explorer of the Rocky Mountains.

Read what Houck says about Col. George Morgan, who was so closely connected with the early history of New Madrid. He brought many Americans into what is now Missouri. One of these was Christopher Haynes of Pennsylvania, who was Colonel in the Revolutionary Army in Westmoreland County.

Another was Moses Shelby from Kentucky, a brother of Gen. Isaac Shelby, who came with other Kentuckians. Dr. Dorsey and Dr. Richard James Waters were merchants and traders in New Madrid, and Louis Lorimer from Canada established a trading post at Cape Girardeau. Daniel Steinbeck and Frederick Steinbeck, Maj. Thomas W. Waters, a Revolutionary soldier from South Carolina, and others, also established trading posts at Cape Girardeau.

In Scharf's *History of St. Louis* is mentioned the merchant Francis Vigo of the mercantile firm of Vigo and Yosti, who rendered personal service in the Revolutionary War and sacrificed his fortune in redeeming continental paper to the extent of four thousand pounds.² Also see Walter B. Steven's *Missouri The Center State*. This gives the wonderful exploits of George Rogers Clark and his three hundred and fifty Virginians and Kentuckians in 1778 and 1779.³ Clark wrote from St. Louis July, 1778, that "Our friends the Spainards, are doing everything in their power to convince me of their friendship."

Francis Vigo of St. Louis was of great help in the Kaskas-and Vincennes expeditions. Stevens says that Clark made repeated expeditions to St. Louis before he started in February, 1779, across the Illinois prairies. He had raised in St. Louis nearly twenty thousand dollars for his little army. Father Gibault, the priest who alternated between St. Louis and Kaskaskia, gave his savings of years—one thousand dollars—and he and his Kaskaskia parishioners knelt and prayed for American success at Vincennes. It was Col. Vigo, a citizen of St. Louis, who gave to Clark the information which enabled him to capture Hamilton and Vincennes. Father Gibault was in Kaskaskia and had the currency there when Commander Clark took this British Post on July 4th, 1778. So it was St. Louis merchants and St. Louis citizens who helped to make success in the Revolutionary War. Gabriel Cerre should be mentioned as another prominent St. Louis merchant who helped to finance General George Rogers

²Vol. I, p. 191.

Vol. II, p. 538.

Clark's expedition against Vincennes in the Revolutionary War.

The free and unrestricted exercise of trade and commerce throughout the world is stimulating to the civilization of the world. The exchange of commodities of one country with that of another brings the products of each country, as well as the best in art and literature, to our very doors. The world's development has largely followed the trade routes of commerce. The first efforts in the struggles of life are put forth in the struggle for bread; first for the absolute necessities and later for life's comforts and luxuries. And it is this development of all routes of travel that has enlarged our civilization in enlarging our wants and needs for the products of other climes and other peoples. While trade and commerce with the nations of the world have brought their national and international blessings to the inhabitants of the world, they have also brought strife and war. It is the selfish struggle of the infant in taking its playmates' playthings developed in the grown man and in growing nations and groups of men, for men are but children of larger growth. Our present war is an instance.

As infants and as grown ups, we often know best the law of might; but later we learn the easier and fairer methods of trade ethics and the wholesome consideration of the rights of others, and a national diplomacy that is not born of deceit. It was trade, the search for treasure, that brought Europeans to our shores and their object was development through exploitation; exploitation of land and of the people.

Not so with some of the early Missourians who came over as far back as 1703 and landed in New Orleans with some French savants and scientific scholars, working under the authority of the French Government, and proceeded up the Great River as far as the present site of Kansas City. They came both for the material and spiritual benefit of the inhabitants. They were of the intellectual and spiritual type of men like the well known Father De Smet, who came over a hundred years later. Their records are still on file in France.

They show from the maps they made that they stopped for a time at what is now Jefferson City and went farther up to the mouth of the Kaw. Theirs was not a mercantile exploitation, but was wholly a magnanimous and Christian mission for the elevation of man.

See an address given before the Missouri Valley Historical Society in Kansas City, February 7, 1914, by Father William J. Dalton. I also wish to acknowledge the historical data collected for me by the efficient secretary of that Society, Mrs. Nettie Thompson Grove.

First comes the explorer, who may become a commercial exploiter in laying the foundation for a future permanent and growing development in civilization. He helped in the planting, but the spirit of love and sacrifice is necessary to intelligent national growth.

Comparatively few may know that the great American naturalist, John James Audubon, was a merchant in Ste. Genevieve.⁴ He was born near New Orleans, Louisiana, May 4, 1780. He was educated in Paris, but returned to the United States in eastern Pennsylvania about 1798. He married in 1808 and first became a merchant in Louisville, Kentucky, and then removed to Hendersonville. After making unsuccessful efforts in mercantile business at Hendersonville, Audubon and his partner, Rosier, decided to remove their business to Ste. Genevieve on the Mississippi River.

"Putting our goods, which consisted of three hundred barrels of whiskey, sundry dry goods, and powder, on board a keel-boat, my partner, my clerk and self departed in a severe snow storm. The boat was new, staunch, and well trimmed, and had a cabin in her bow. A long steering oar, made of the trunk of a slender tree about sixty feet in length, and shaped at its outer extremity like the fin of a dolphin, helped to steer the boat, while the four oars from the bow impelled her along, when going with the current, about five miles an hour. The third day we entered Cash Creek, a very small stream, but having deep water and a good harbor. Here I met Count De Munn, who was also in a boat like ours, and bound also for Ste.

⁴See *Life of Audubon*, edited by his widow.

Genevieve. Here we learned that the Mississippi was covered with floating ice of a thickness dangerous to the safety of our craft, and indeed that it was impossible to ascend the river against it.

.....
We arrived in safety at Ste. Genevieve and there found a favorable market. Our whiskey was especially welcome, and what we had paid twenty-five cents a gallon for, brought us Two Dollars. Ste. Genevieve was then an old French town, twenty miles below St. Louis, not so large, as dirty, and I was not half so pleased with the time spent there as with that spent in the Tawapatee Bottom."⁵

We read that Audubon was not pleased with Ste. Genevieve and longed to be back with his young wife in Kentucky. He sold out to Rosier. It develops that Audubon's clerk was named Nathaniel Pope.

In 1793 two flouring mills were established, one at New Madrid and one at Ste. Genevieve, with the purpose of promoting agricultural settlements and commerce along the Missouri and Mississippi.

The early mercantile history of Missouri and of its merchants is so great that one cannot cover the subject in much detail in a paper for an evening's reading. The best that can be done is to give names and authorities. Reference may also be had to the following:

Missourians One Hundred years Ago, by the Hon. Walter B. Stevens, President of the State Historical Society of Missouri, 1917. This is a wonderfully interesting booklet of about fifty pages and should be read by every Missourian.

Chittenden in his monumental work on the *History of the Fur Trade* is the best authority on the close relation existing between the early Missouri merchant and fur trader and the Indians. He has reproduced many of the old letters and diaries of the men of those days that are invaluable sources of information. These extracts from a letter of Thomas Forsyth to Lewis Cass, dated St. Louis, October 24, 1831, reveal the widespread character of the trade and the ascendancy maintained by the American Fur Company in this field.⁶

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶Chittenden, III. 926 f.

"The fur trade of the countries bordering on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, as high up the former river as above the Falls of St. Anthony, and the later as the Sioux establishment some distance above Council Bluffs, is carried on now in the same manner as it ever has been. This trade continues to be monopolized by the American Fur Company, who have divided the whole of the Indian country into departments, as follows: Farnham and Davenport have all the country of the Sauk and Fox Indians. . . . also the Iowa Indians, who live at or near the [Black] Snake Hills on the Missouri river. [St. Joseph]. . . . Mr. Cabanne (of the American Fur Company) has in his division all the Indians on the Missouri as high as a point above the Council Bluffs, including the Pawnee Indians of the interior, in about a southwest direction from his establishment. Mr. Auguste P. Chouteau has within his department all the Indians of the Osage country and others who may visit his establishment, such as the Cherokees, Chickasaws, and other Indians. Messrs. McKenzie, Laidlaw and Lamont have in their limits the Sioux Indians of the Missouri, and as high up the river as they choose to send or go. The American Fur Company brings on their goods annually in the spring season to this city [St. Louis] from New York, which are then sent up the Missouri to the different posts in a small steamboat.⁷ At those places the furs are received on board and brought down to St. Louis, where they are opened, counted, weighed, repacked, and shipped by steamboats to New Orleans, thence on board of vessels to New York, where the furs are unpacked, made up into bales, and sent to the best markets in Europe, except some of the finest (particularly otter skins) which are sent to China."

"The goods of Mr. A. P. Chouteau are transported by water in keel-boats as high up the Osage river as the water will admit; from thence they are carried in wagons to his establishment in the interior of the country.⁸ In the spring of the year when the Arkansas is high Mr. Chouteau sends his furs down that river to New Orleans, from whence they are shipped to New York.

"By the time that the Indians have gathered their corn, the traders are prepared with their goods to give them credits. The articles of merchandise which the traders take with them to the Indian country are as follows: viz., blankets 3 points, 2½, 2, 1½, 1; common blue stroud; ditto red; blue cloth; scarlet do; calicoes; domestic cottons; rifles and shot guns, gunpowder, flints, and lead; knives of different kinds; looking glasses; vermilion and verdigris; copper, brass and tin kettles; beaver and muskrat traps; fine and

⁷This was as late as 1831. Before 1819 there were no steamboats on the Missouri.

⁸*Ibid.*, 928 f.

common bridles and spurs; silver works; needles and thread; wampum; horses; tomahawks and half axes, etc. All traders at the present day give credit to the Indians in the same manner as has been the case for the last sixty or eighty years. That is to say, the articles which are passed on credit are given at very high prices. Formerly, when the opposition and competition in the Indian trade was great, the traders would sell in the spring of the year, payment down, for less than one-half of the prices at which they charged the same articles to the same Indians on credit the preceding autumn. This was sometimes the occasion of broils and quarrels between the traders and the Indians, particularly when the latter made bad hunts.

"The following are the prices charged for some articles given on credit to the Sauk and Fox Indians, whose present population exceeds six thousand souls and who are compelled to take goods, etc., of the traders at their very high prices, because they cannot do without them, for if the traders do not supply their necessary wants and enable them to support themselves, they would literally starve. An Indian takes on credit from a trader in the autumn—

A 3-point blanket at.....	\$10.00
A rifle gun.....	30.00
A pound of gunpowder.....	4.00

Total Indian dollars.....	\$44.00
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The 3-point blanket will cost in England, say, 16 shillings per pair

1 ¹ / ₂ blanket at 100 per cent is equal to...	\$3.52
A rifle gun costs in this place from	
\$12 to.....	13.00
A pound of gunpowder.....	.20

	\$16.72
Add 25 per cent for expenses.....	4.18

\$20.90

Therefore, according to this calculation (which I know is correct), if the Indian pays all his debt, the trader is a gainer of more than 100 per cent. But it must be here observed that the trader takes for a dollar a large buckskin, which may weigh six pounds, or two doeskins, four muskrats, four or five raccoons, or he allows the Indian three dollars for an otterskin, or two dollars a pound for beaver. And in my opinion the dollar which the trader receives of the Indian is not estimated too high at 125 cents, and perhaps in some instances at 150 cents.

In the spring the trader lowers his price on all goods, and will sell a 3-point blanket for five dollars, and other articles in proportion as he receives the furs down in payment, and as the Indians always reserve the finest and best furs for the spring trade. In the autumn of every year the trader carefully avoids giving credit to the Indians on any costly articles, such as silverworks, wampum, scarlet cloth, fine bridles, etc., unless it be to an Indian who he knows will pay all his debts; in which case he will allow the Indian on credit everything he wishes. Traders always prefer giving on credit gunpowder, flints, lead, knives, tomahawks, hoes, domestic cotton, etc., which they do at the rate of 300 or 400 per cent, and if one-fourth of the prices of those articles be paid, *he is amply paid*. After all the trade is over in the spring it is found that some of the Indians have paid all for which they were credited, others one-half, one-third, one-fourth, and some nothing at all; but taken altogether, the trader has received on an average one-half of the whole amount of Indian dollars for which he gave credit the preceding autumn, and calls it a tolerable business; that is, if the furs bear a good price the trader loses nothing, but if any fall in the price takes place he loses money.

"The American Fur Company ought to be satisfied with the Indians, for they have monopolized all the trade, especially at the posts before mentioned. There is a man now in this city who receives annually a sum from that company on condition that he will not enter the Indian country. They have also monopolized the whole trade on the frontiers together with the Indian annuities, and everything an Indian has to sell, yet they claim a large amount for debts due them for non-payment of credits given to the Indians at different periods."

"I visited this country as early as April, 1798, and in many conversations I had with the French people of this place, all that they could say on the subject of the Indian trade was that there were many Indian nations inhabiting the country bordering on the Missouri river who were exceedingly cruel to all the white people that went among them."

After General Wm. Ashley had some trouble with the Indians, the traders began to employ hunters to secure furs and this practice grew rather than depending on the Indians for them, according to the original method.

As an indication of the extent of fur trading business it may be stated that when the Hudson Bay Company and the Northwest Company consolidated, nine hundred clerks were dismissed.⁹

⁹*Ibid.*, 933.

In 1762, the Louisiana Fur Company was organized by Maxent, Laclede and Company under charter granted by Gov. General D'Abadie for the purpose of trade in fur and minerals.

On the third day of November, 1763, a trading expedition under Laclede, with a large stock of merchandise likely to appeal to Indian taste, reached Ste. Genevieve, where a short stop was made; then continued to Fort de Chartres on the Illinois side before continuing to their original objective point, the mouth of the Missouri.

However, after a few weeks' rest at the Illinois post, Laclede, en route, was impressed by "a bluff on the western shore of the Mississippi at a sweeping curve of the river, on which now stands the city of St. Louis . . . and determined to establish here the settlement and post he desired."¹⁰

Laclede placed the active establishing of this settlement in the hands of a youth, Auguste Chouteau (his stepson), who later became a leading merchant and trader of that place. He was the first of the family whose name became associated with all this great west.

This story of merchandising in early days is told: A "typical Missourian" was hanging about a slave dealer's stall one day when the dealer asked him what he wanted. He replied that he wished to buy a negro. Making a selection from the samples on display, he was told by the slave dealer that the negro was valued at \$500.00 but that, "according to the custom of the country," he could have one year's time in which to pay the bill. But the question of debt so troubled the Missourian that he exclaimed: "No, No! I would rather pay you Six Hundred right now and be done with it!" Whereupon the slave dealer very obligingly remarked, "Very well, anything to oblige!" thereby relieving his customer's mind and at the same time adding \$100 to his own pocket.¹¹

At the time of the cession Ste. Genevieve was a more important place (it is reasonable to believe) than St. Louis, from a commercial point of view. At this time "the princi-

¹⁰Davis and Durrie's *Hist. Mo.*, 14.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 34.

pal St. Louis merchants and traders were Auguste Chouteau, Pierre Chouteau, Manuel Lisa, Labadie, and Sarpy, Clamorgan, McCune & Co., and Messrs. Hortez, Pratte, Gratiot, Tayon, Lacompte, Papin, Cabanne, Alvarez, Lebaume, and Soulard."¹²

"The merchant of those times, it must be remembered, was a different personage, in all his business relations, from the merchant of today.¹³ His warehouse occupied only a few feet;¹⁴ his merchandise usually was stored in a large box or chest, and was only brought to view when a customer appeared. Sugar, coffee, tobacco, blankets, salt, guns, dry goods, etc., were all consigned to the same general receptacle."

"Imported luxuries, such as tea, brought enormous prices, because of the length of time involved in mercantile transactions * * * Sugar was \$2.00 a pound, and tea could be purchased at the same price; other articles being sold at prices just as high in proportion. Tea was comparatively unknown to the masses." These prices prevailed in St. Louis according to Davis & Durrie probably at the time of the cession of the territory to the United States. It was but a few years until more normal prices prevailed, according to a letter, one of a series, owned by the Missouri Valley Historical Society.

This letter, dated St. Louis, December 29, 1820, is addressed to Nathaniel Jacobs, Catskill, N. Y., and is signed by J. Klein. It quotes the following prices: fine flour, five dollars a barrel; pork and beef, three dollars a hundred; butter, twenty-five cents a pound; lard, ten cents; coffee, thirty-seven and a half cents; red onions, often four dollars a bushel., etc. Also sugar was twelve and a half cents a pound, tea one dollar and sixty cents, and salt from one dollar to one dollar and a half for a bushel of fifty pounds.

Scharf in his *History of St. Louis* writes of the old St. Louis merchants as follows:¹⁵

¹²*Ibid.*, 35.

¹³*Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴Brackenridge says his store was usually in his own home.—Nettie T. Grove.

¹⁵Vol. I, p. 287.

"Its early traders, from the very first, undertook extensive operations and embraced wide areas in their transactions, employing not only capital, but the best men who could be found. Laclede had his partners in New Orleans, and the most of his time was spent in establishing trading posts up the Arkansas, the St. Francis, and the Red Rivers. The Chouteaus spent years among the Indians, acquiring such a familiarity with their language and manners and customs that they were sought after by the government as Indian agents and interpreters. In addition to the posts which Laclede established, they had stations on the Osage, the Upper Missouri, the Des Moines, and on Lake Michigan. Vigo traded from St. Louis to Vincennes, thence to Montreal and Detroit, and back again to New Orleans. Gratiot traded to Prairie du Chien and New Orleans, and went to England in the regular routine of business for his partners. Manuel Lisa was an explorer as much as a fur-trader, and he was as ready to fight his rivals and the Indians as to buy their peltries."

"Charles Gratiot and Auguste and Pierre Chouteau, indeed, were merchants such as sometimes do not appear more than once in a century. The former, for all he did business in Cahokia, and had lawsuits with Sanguinet of St. Louis, was better known in New York and Philadelphia than in the latter town, and better known in Paris, London, and Geneva than on this continent. As a business man, Pierre Chouteau is said to have had no rival in the valley of the Mississippi for forty years. The very genius of commerce inspired him, and the plans of this Indian trader, who got his earliest training among the Osages, on the borders of Kansas, reached out wide like the arms of the Mississippi River. Men of this sort ought to have been able to build up their own town, since they built up others when it suited their business. Note this of the founding of New Madrid by Cerre."¹⁶

Cerre sent two penniless French adventurers down the river to find a suitable place for placing a trading post.

The first point deemed advantageous was a large Delaware Indian town where New Madrid now stands. Mr. Cerre accepted their report, erecting the building and stocking it with a large amount of goods. Some years later the son of one of these adventurers reports doing \$60,000 or \$70,000 worth of business annually in furs for Pierre Chouteau at this same trading post.¹⁷

¹⁶Cerre was a St. Louis Merchant, originally from Kaskaskia.

¹⁷Scharf, I, 288.

"This business it was which established St. Louis at once, gave the town stability, and the leading inhabitants incentives to enterprise and control of wealth. Hunters found regular employment and good pay in the little trading-post town, and they profited by it. The spot, indeed, had been a hunter's paradise from the first, as well as a fur-trader's goal.....The hunters went forth from St. Louis to gather furs and peltries for the traders of St. Louis, and from Laclede's day up to 1830 the town was the general rendezvous of hunters and fur traders, and the Montreal of the Mississippi, and the depot of all the basin of the great rivers emptying into that river between the Minnesota and the Rio del Norte."¹⁸

"After the demise of this company [The Missouri Fur Company] the Chouteaus, Lisa, and Astor formed an alliance under the name and style of the American Fur Company, the successor of the Missouri and the Rocky Mountain Companies; and when Astor withdrew, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., became himself the American Fur Company. This company continued the work of the two companies which it had succeeded, opened up and explored the Rocky Mountains and Western waters, and for thirty years held a monopoly of the fur trade south of the vast regions ranged over by the Hudson's Bay Company. The firm did business on a very large scale, and at one time owned and maintained five forts, all built by themselves in the heart of the Indian country—Forts Sarpy, Benton, Union, Pierre, and Berthold....."¹⁹

"This trade was very valuable. The average returns on goods sent out was 100 per cent in peltries, and this by no means represented the actual profits, for the goods were valued at their selling price in St. Louis, not their cost, and the peltries at their currency value in St. Louis. But red cloth that might retail at 5s. a yard in St. Louis probably did not cost the companies more than 3s., including freight, interest, and insurance; and on the other hand, beaver worth \$2.00 a pound in St. Louis might fetch twice as much in London, and five times as much in Canton."²⁰

It is easily judged, therefore, the per cent of profit upon which the St. Louis merchant built his fortune.

"Brackenridge, in his 'Views of Louisiana,' notes the fact that in 1810 the Indian trade of St. Louis with the Osages alone was worth \$30,000, or nearly \$6 per capita, the outlay in goods being \$20,000—a profit of 50 per cent measured in furs. With the Cheyennes the trade was expected to yield a profit of 100 per cent,

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 289.

²⁰*Ibid.*

and so also with the Poncas and Arickarees. The trade with the Crows was counted on to return three for one, and that with the Pastanounas fifteen for four. The trade at Arkansas Post with the Chickasaws and Cherokees yielded five for two, and that with the various bands of Sioux four for one."²¹

"Fur was the currency of St. Louis from the days of Laeclde very nearly until Missouri became a State and the town an incorporated city. Other things were taken in exchange and barter—beeswax, whiskey, potash, maple-sugar, salt, wood, feathers, bear's oil, venison, fish, lead, but fur was the currency and standard of value, the representative of and equivalent to the *livres tournois* of hard metal. The only small coin consisted of Mexican dollars, cut with a chisel into four or five pieces—"bits." A pound of shaved deerskin of good quality represented about twice the value of the livre, and a pound of beaver, otter, and ermine represented so many pounds of deerskin. A "pack" of skins had a definite weight, and thus trade and computation were both easy. Checks and notes were drawn against them, deposits were made of furs and packs, and on the whole they constituted a much better and more uniform currency than the staple tobacco which was at one time the only circulating medium of Virginia and Maryland. "Bons" were a species of order or note for goods, redeemable in peltries, which, when signed with the name of any responsible merchant or trader, had full currency in local and general trade. Practically, they were certificates of deposit, but convertible or exchangeable into any other equivalents in the course of trade and barter. Next to the peltry, which had a regular currency and pretty near a uniform value from Mackinaw, Detroit, and Prairie du Chien among the French settlements all the way to New Orleans and the Belize, the best medium of certain value, but only of limited circulation, was the "carot" of tobacco. This article is still prepared in Louisiana by the plantation manufacturers of tobacco, and "carots" of "Perique" may still be seen in all the tobacconists' shops—a solid roll of the shape and appearance of a bologna sausage. These rolls were called "carots," from their resemblance to the root of that name, and they were in common use and demand in the early days in Lower and Upper Louisiana from their convenience. All the grown population, male and female, took snuff; each carried his or her snuff-box habitually, and each prepared his snuff and filled his box in the morning. The snuff was not ground as now, but rasped or grated from the end of one of these rolls, and hence their form and solidity was a desideratum. The carots had a definite weight, like the packs of furs, and their usual value was about two livres."²²

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 291. A livre was worth about eighteen and a half cents at that time

"The fixed price was forty cents per pound for finest deer-skins, thirty cents for medium, and twenty cents for inferior, and all contracts, unless there was an express stipulation to the contrary, were made in this medium. Spanish coin never affected the fur currency. The Spanish government paid off its officers and troops in hard dollars, but this was a mere drop in the bucket—less than twelve thousand dollars a year for St. Louis. Even after the transfer to the United States, peltry continued the controlling currency for a number of years. Judge J. B. C. Lucas made his first purchase of a house for his residence in St. Louis in this currency, buying of Pierre Duchouquette and wife their domicile, for the price of six hundred dollars in peltries. This was December 14, 1807."²³

These peltries were redeemable in money only at New Orleans, and as the skins were subject to risk and loss on the way, the merchant sold his goods at a price proportionate to the venture. Everything sold at an enormous price, the result being that a common workman received ten to twelve francs a day.²⁴

Scharf paid this remarkable tribute to Robert Campbell, fur trader and St. Louis merchant:²⁵

"Years before, however, Col. Campbell had gained an enviable reputation for great energy of character, rare administrative ability, and dauntless courage, in connection with his fur-trading operations in the Indian country, in conducting which he did as much perhaps as any other single individual to give St. Louis her early fame in the far west. . . . General Ashley retired in 1830, having amassed a fortune, and then Campbell rose from being merely a leader of expeditions to the position of a prominent partner in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, which was organized upon the withdrawal of Gen. Ashley, the leading spirits in its formation being Robert Campbell and Col. William Sublette. The American Fur Company, represented by Chouteau & Co., was an energetic rival in the field, and the vastness of the operations of these competitors appears from the fact that when, in order to prevent ruinous rivalry on the same ground, a division of the territory was agreed upon, there fell to Mr. Campbell's company all the immense region west and south of a line commencing on the Arkansas River at a point south of the Platte, on the twenty-

²³*Ibid.*, 292.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, 370 f.

fourth meridian, up to the forks of the Platte, thence to the dividing line of the waters emptying into the Platte and the waters emptying into the upper Missouri, thence to the Rocky Mountains, and thence to the forks of the Missouri. . . . John Jacob Astor had a house in St. Louis, and there were also engaged in the trade Gen. Ashley, Campbell, Sublette, Manuel Lisa, Capt. Perkins, Hempstead, William Clark, Labadie, the Chouteaus, and Pierre Menard—"mighty hunters before the Lord"—all of whom either lived in St. Louis or made it their headquarters. . . . Campbell's straightforward and truthful dealings made a similarly happy impression on the Indians. He never deceived or cheated them, as many white men had done, and therefore enjoyed their perfect confidence and friendship."²⁶

Campbell acquired a large fortune in the fur trade and upon returning to St. Louis engaged in mercantile and other pursuits and became an extensive owner of real estate.

One of the first cotton dealers in Missouri Territory was John Mullanphy, of whom Brackenridge has recorded the following story:

Mullanphy speculated largely in cotton, and it was his bales with which Jackson erected a defense at New Orleans. When the owner entered complaint against such use of his property, Jackson replied—

"This is your cotton? Then no one has better a right to defend it. Take a musket and stand in the ranks." After peace was declared, Mullanphy dug out his cotton and cleared \$1,000,000 on it in the Liverpool market.²⁷

The first record of a trading deal on the site of St. Louis was in the digging of the first cellars in the town. A group of the Missouris were drawn down to the site of the new town in search of aid from the white men, and Auguste Chouteau had the squaws dig the cellars for the houses he was building.

Brackenridge says that the squaws were paid in beads and ornaments, but Chouteau's diary says he gave them vermillion, awls and verdigris.²⁸

Probably the most noted merchant of the day of American birth was General William Ashley, who emigrated to this

²⁶This Robert Campbell was an uncle of Dr. W. L. Campbell, of Kansas City, who is a member of the Missouri Valley Historical Society.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 188.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 69.

territory from Virginia in 1803. He was also one of the most noted of the fur traders and established the trade with Utah in 1824.

Early St. Louis is thus described by one author:

"When this territory was ceded in 1804 in St. Louis there were one bakery, two taverns, three blacksmiths, two mills and one doctor. The settlement was well supplied with merchants who held their goods at exorbitant prices. Coffee and sugar each at \$2 per pound....Stores of the day were commonly stored in family homes and were a general assortment from fish hooks to lexicons."²⁹

"No scales were in use in St. Louis prior to 1831....Coal was sold by the bushel or wagon load. And hay by the load—so much for so much."³⁰

Another author writing of the fur trade, shows the great importance of this industry to St. Louis:

"The average annual value of the furs collected in St. Louis for fifteen successive years (ending 1804) is stated to have been \$203,750.00. James Pursley in 1802 was first hunter and trapper, and probably the first American who traversed the great plains between the United States and New Mexico. The Missouri Fur Company with a capital of \$40,000.00 was organized in this city (St. Louis) in 1808, and the hunters in its employ were the first who pitched their camps on the waters of the Oregon. That company was dissolved in 1812. Between the years 1824 and 1827 General Ashley and his men sent to St. Louis furs to the value of \$180,000. The annual value of the fur trade for forty years (1804-1847) has averaged from two to three hundred thousand dollars, and hence an important item in the growth of St. Louis."³¹

Major Amos Stoddard was the American representative in the formal transfer of Upper Louisiana at St. Louis in 1804, and was the first American commandant at that place. He wrote of his impressions of this new country and his book is valuable for its reliable information. He wrote in part:

"Agriculture and industry, by which wealth is at first accumulated in new regions, necessarily preceedes commerce, and are the foundations of it."³²

²⁹Shepard's *History of St. Louis*, p. 35.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 113.

³¹Perkin's, *Annals of the West*, pp. 807f.

³²Stoddard, *Sketches of Louisiana*, p. 293.

"Had Indian commerce been wholly prohibited, or confided to a few exclusive traders only, and the settlers generally restricted to agriculture, and to the acquisition of raw materials for foreign markets, the power of France in America would have been much more formidable than it was."³³

The following great industrial activities were sources of revenue in early Missouri history: mining, Indian fur trade, frontier military posts, Mexican trade, outfitting Western expeditions. Thirty years later, in 1848, came the California gold rush.

Beltrami wrote in 1828....."The trade of St. Louis is prodigiously increased. The merchandise it furnishes to the traders with the Indians to the north and west in exchange for furs, which are almost all sent hither—the provisions with which it supplies all the garrisons and new settlements over the whole extent of this vast country—are sources of great profit, as well as of constant employment for all classes."

In the first decade of the nineteenth century Auguste Chouteau was the richest man in St. Louis. His taxes were \$87.42, altho the rate of assessment seems to have been only one-half cent on the dollar, and total exemptions on some classes of property.³⁴ Bartholomew Berthold was called the most finished and accomplished merchant of his day in St. Louis.³⁵ Berthold, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., John Pierre Cabanne and Bernard Pratte became connected with John Jacob Astor as partners in trade, under the name of the American Fur Company. They all made large sums of money.³⁶

I want to call attention to Hon. Wm. P. Borland's masterful speech in the House of Representatives, May 22nd, 1911, on "Missouri the Mother of Empires," and I urge also that one read and preserve that splendid address of former Governor Herbert S. Hadley before the meeting of the Missouri Valley Historical Society in Kansas City, Missouri, April 19, 1913.

No record of the Missouri Merchant One Hundred Years Ago is complete without reference to that great artery of

³³*Ibid.*, p. 295.

³⁴*Scharf*, I, 193.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 196 fn.

³⁶*Ibid.*

trade, the Sante Fe Trail. The town of Franklin in Howard county was the cradle of the Sante Fe Trail, which was made up so largely of Missouri merchants. This work really began in 1819, and when a yearly record began to be kept of this trade, in 1822, we find that that year the merchandise amounted to 15,000 pounds; in 1828, 150,000 pounds, 100 wagons and 200 men; in 1831, 250,000 pounds, 130 wagons and 320 men; in 1843, 450,000 pounds, 230 wagons and 320 men. The classic authority on the Sante Fe Trail and the trade development is found in the book published in 1844 in New York and London, by Dr. Josiah Gregg, and is said to be the foundation of every work on this subject since its appearance.

Senator Benton in his *Thirty Years View* speaks highly of Col. James Magoffin, who was a great merchant and lived at one time at Independence. He aided the United States Government in the Doniphan expedition, and it was through his work and diplomacy with the Mexican authorities that New Mexico became United States territory without the shedding of blood. Benton said that he wished posterity to know the sacrifices made by Magoffin in the interest of his country.

The tale of the origin of the Oregon Trail, beginning in 1808, is almost like that of the Sante Fe Trail. They were both the most direct and available routes between trade centers and starting from the Missouri River.³⁷

I will close with an extract from Col. D. C. Allen's paper on "The Bonnet Show at Big Shoal Creek Meeting House, Clay County, Missouri." Col. Allen is eighty-three years old and lives at Liberty, Missouri. This paper is recorded in the archives of the Missouri Valley Historical Society.

"The beginnings of Liberty (Clay county) were in 1821 and, until after the building of Weston and Platte City, and even somewhat later, was the center of trade and fashion in all the surrounding country north of the Missouri River. In the county it maintained its pre-eminence in a degree until Kansas City assumed importance and trade was attracted thither. Here was the town, one can see, for a period almost the only town in the

³⁷Wm. E. Connelley, *Kansas and Kansans*.

county, where ladies could purchase fine goods, fashionable bonnets, etc., in the springtime.

"The first settlers in Clay county—far back in 1819 and the early twenties—could have hauled in their wagons but little beyond absolute necessities. Finery could not have been largely considered. The slow and laborious navigation of the Missouri River by keel boats added something, but not much, to the comforts and convenience of the people.

"But, after Long's Expedition up the Missouri River in 1819 by steamboat, its navigation by steam began to develop. By 1826 it assumed something like regularity. Allen's landing three and one-half miles south of Liberty was established in 1825. At once on the beginning of steam navigation of the River, the merchants of Liberty began to purchase for local trade fine goods, bonnets and the like in Philadelphia and their fine groceries in Baltimore. This continued for a number of years. Merchants left Liberty for the east to make their spring and summer purchases early in February. Their purchases began to arrive in Liberty during the latter part of March, or the forepart of April. The stores in Liberty thus became centers of attraction for the ladies, old and young, in Clay and the surrounding country. The spring bonnets! The spring bonnets! It was a race with all the girls for the first pick of the new bonnets.

"Mr. W. S. Embree (now in his ninety-sixth year) says the annual bonnet show at the Big Shoal Church was in existence prior to 1835. It could not well have had a beginning until fine goods, above all spring bonnets, could be transported up the Missouri River and displayed in the store of Liberty. The origin, then, of the bonnet show was near 1826. Then, and for many years later, there was no church in Clay County which attracted so many persons to its religious service, particularly on the Second Sunday in May, the annual exhibition of the spring bonnet show, as did the Big Shoal Meeting House, the Church of the Primitive Baptists.

"During all those years it was the fashionable church of Clay county. The second Sunday in May was its pre-eminent day in the year. Nature, commerce, and social life, here in Clay county were in harmony. The second Sunday in May is in the midst of the most flowery and delightful part of the spring. Nothing could be more natural than that the belles and beaux of all the surrounding country should instinctively flock to the Big Shoal Meeting House at the great annual meeting on the second Sunday in May to see and chat with each other. By that time the ladies, young and old, would have secured their new spring bonnets and dresses. The girls could display their youthful charms to the

very best advantage. The side of the church allotted to the ladies would be a mass of colors, topped by a gorgeous array of spring bonnets. Some person of happy thought and good taste, some phrase maker, seeing the gaily attired mass of femininity, conceived and gave expression to the term "bonnet show." It took hold firmly in the minds of the people and holds until this day."