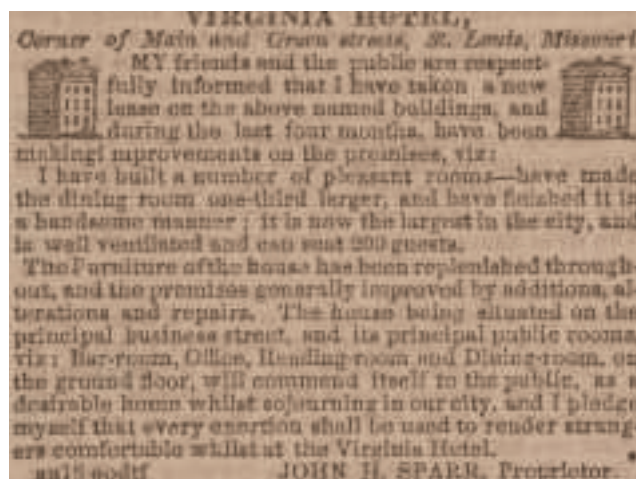


BY CHRISTOPHER ALAN GORDON

It had rained nearly every day for at least a week, turning the unpaved streets of St. Louis into a muddy, rutted mess. Taking refuge from the damp, a young man resigned himself to spending the day within the comfort of the barroom of the Virginia Hotel, located on Vine Street near the levee. It was Sunday, March 11, 1849, and Edwin P. Hollister, a 22-year-old traveling apiarist and salesman, could do little on that wet Sabbath but relax and hope for drier weather. It would prove to be a long wait as the continuous rain foreshadowed the beginning of a very wet year in the city. The lingering showers would contribute to problems throughout that spring and summer, but Hollister had more immediate problems. The roads and streets of St. Louis and the region had become a soupy mess, and as was all too often the case in this time of primitive thoroughfares nearly all forms of land transportation were rendered useless. Hollister was stuck in St. Louis.



The levee in St. Louis, with some three miles of riverfront, was a bustling hub of activity in 1849. Steamboats lined the riverbank faced by warehouses and merchants. Hotels like the Virginia Hotel, advertised here, were convenient for visiting businessmen. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

While sitting in the bar that afternoon, he took the opportunity to pen a letter to his cousin, William M. Black, of Vandalia, Illinois. This frank and sometimes humorous letter, preserved in the collections of the Missouri Historical Society, vividly reflects Hollister’s abilities as a keen observer. With precision he describes the events he had witnessed in the days since his arrival in the city. For Hollister, these observations seemed like good fodder for a

(Left) First page of a letter by Edwin Hollister, penned in early 1849 at the Virginia Hotel in St. Louis. A transcript of the full letter appears below. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

letter, but now, nearly 170 years later, this single correspondence acts as a snapshot of history. His account of the condition of the city, his descriptions of the curious arrival of new immigrants and gold rush travelers to the levee, and his comments on the American political climate of the period make for a fascinating narrative of life in St. Louis in 1849.

Hollister had arrived in St. Louis a week earlier and signed into the Virginia Hotel. To announce his arrival in the city, he took out an advertisement in the *Missouri Republican* seeking the attention of “farmers, capitalists, and all persons interested in the culture of the Honey Bee.” According to the ad copy, he was the first to introduce the patented Dofler Bee Palace to the farmers of the west. This product had “superceded all other hives” since its introduction to the market in 1843 by its ability to protect vulnerable honey bees from the dreaded bee worm. The west’s emerging farm fields seemed the perfect place to sell such a product, but with the roads out of commission he could only lament his present state.¹ “I suppose you have noticed my advertisement in the *Republican*,” his letter begins,

and become aware of my return to this city of “mud.” . . . My prospects are not very flattering as yet on account of the state of the roads which seem to have effectively closed up all avenues of communications between the city and the interior.²

He was not alone in his frustration with the state of the area roads. Throughout the winter and spring of 1849, city newspapers like the *Missouri Republican* frequently commented on the poor conditions of the streets. The complaints were certainly nothing new. City and county officials were actively taking measures to pave and macadamize streets and roads, but it was an expensive and slow process. The city engineer’s report for the period October 1847 to April 1848 states that the total amount spent for street contracts for improvements was \$54,941. This was a considerable sum, but as a steady stream of new residents entered the city, pressure to keep up with improvements grew.

The previous spring, Mayor John Krum had addressed the St. Louis Board of Aldermen and urged them to undertake a more aggressive stance on improving city streets. He told the aldermen, “The improvement of streets will necessarily occupy a large share of your attention. Extending as our city is in every direction, the demand for street improvements is very great.” The good news, according to Krum, was that a considerable

sum had been set aside in 1848 for street and alley improvements. The bad news, however, was that any street improvement was probably not going to be enough. He warned them, “You will find it difficult to satisfy the various interests of your constituents.”³

The condition of St. Louis’ streets was such that any work done on them would be a measure of improvement, noted Krum: “The mere *grading* of a street without any additional improvement, is a very great convenience.” The constant traffic of dray wagons, omnibuses, and every other manner of conveyance took its toll on the largely dirt and gravel streets. Much of the problem, Krum believed, was the type of materials used to cover road surfaces. Subpar soft limestone easily became powder under the intense weight of traffic, which resulted in clouds of fine dust in dry weather and sticky, glue-like mud in the rain. He urged the aldermen to investigate new options and pointed out that a newly discovered “bed of boulder and cobble stone” in the region should be considered as an alternative as paving material. No doubt referring to the granite deposits in the counties of Missouri’s mineral district, he proclaimed that “there is no better material than boulders for paving.”

The aldermen only had to look at the recent efforts to improve the landing on the wharf to see the benefits of laying cobblestone.⁴

In rural areas, pressure to build and maintain roads was no less than in the city, as new settlers entered the county and sought to improve lands for farming. Existing roads were often no more than paths, and better access to markets demanded better roads. Petitions to the County Court to lay out new roads poured in to the courthouse from all points of St. Louis County during this period.

Most often, the responsibility for road improvement fell to the property owners whose land included thoroughfares like Manchester Road or the St. Charles Road. The County Court often appointed farmers and landowners “road supervisors” and provided them with a contract to provide road maintenance or construction. The minute book of the County Court reads like a directory of St. Louis area roads, as familiar names such as Musick, Sappington, Dorsett, and Rott show up as appointed local supervisors. For their services, these men were paid either by road bonds or a direct payment from township funds. For example, George Hume



of Florissant was “appropriated the sum of twenty dollars out of the road fund . . . for the purpose of building a culvert on the south St. Charles Road” near his residence.⁵

As the demand for better roads increased, shortcuts were sometimes taken. Critics charged that St. Louis County road engineers were reacting to the need to build roads by employing haphazard methods. “It is now said that the County Court have commenced and gone on to grade and macadamize the main roads leading from the city, without having the whole line of the roads, from the city to their terminus on the county line surveyed and located,” stated the *Missouri Republican*. It further declared, “It is certainly injudicious policy . . . without having first surveyed and marked out the whole work, and estimated the cost.”⁶

The Missouri General Assembly was also getting into the act. Creating new roads to link market communities was the legislature’s chief aim, but this was hampered by technological and financial limitations. Macadamizing roads—the process of laying and compacting a gravel surface—was costly and labor-intensive over long stretches. The solution in 1849 for creating less costly stable roads was a method employed in many parts of the eastern United States: plank roads. This involved laying wooden slats or planks end-to-end to create an even surface. It was cheaper than quarrying stone, and costs were to be offset by establishing many of them as toll roads. Bills were introduced to fund the construction of roads by means of incorporating plank road investment companies. The Natural Bridge Plank Road Company in St. Louis County, for example,

When the steamboat *White Cloud* set fire on May 17, 1849, it set in motion the most devastating fire in St. Louis history. After burning through its moorings, the *White Cloud* drifted downriver that evening, burning almost two dozen other craft. The fire quickly moved inland, burning wide swaths of the city, completely burning five city blocks and destroying more than 400 buildings. It was commemorated by both noted daguerrist Thomas Martin Easterly and popular engravings like the one on the left. (Images: Missouri Historical Society)





was incorporated in 1852. The resulting single-lane plank road was built for \$120,000 and operated for five years before being sold to St. Louis County. But while it seemed a novel solution at first, the inherent vulnerabilities of using wood for road construction proved too much. The planks sank in the mud and rotted quickly. Traveling them was also exceptionally uncomfortable as the wagons bounced along from plank to plank like, as one traveler noted, “a ship riding ocean waves.” Ultimately, across the state, the road investment companies proved to be unprofitable, and they had all but disappeared by the start of the Civil War.⁷

As a prisoner of road conditions, Hollister had to spend his time in St. Louis doing what many persons often do—people watching. As an observer in 1849, he had no better place to do it than a city that was at the crossroads of westward expansion. A short walk from the Virginia Hotel to the levee was all that he needed to watch the world pass by. Thousands of immigrants, particularly from central Europe, and eastern families headed to the Oregon Country were in town, as well as companies of California-bound gold miners who entered the city with each arriving steamboat from New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Louisville.

Etienne Cabet (1788–1856) grew up and came of age during heady times in France. Born just a year before the French Revolution, he grew to adulthood and developed his political views during the Napoleonic Era, playing a role in replacing Charles X with the constitutional monarch, Louis Philippe, in 1830. Like a group of other intellectuals during the 1830s, Cabet’s thinking turned to ideas about reorganizing society around more communal ideals, referred to as Icarian. Cabet thought that the United States would be more receptive to his ideas, and he set his sights on moving to America in 1847; subsequent colonies arose in Iowa, Texas, Illinois, Missouri, and (later) California. He and a group of Icarians left Nauvoo, Illinois, for St. Louis in late 1856, where Cabet died just two weeks after arrival. His original gravestone, pictured here, was in the Old Picker’s Cemetery in St. Louis. (Images: Missouri Historical Society)

As luck would have it, on the day previous to penning his letter, Hollister observed the arrival of a group of immigrants who epitomized the changing cultural and political landscape of the world in the late 1840s: a utopian commune of the French Icarians. “I went down to the [steamboat] Marshal Ney this morning to witness a rather novel sight,” Hollister notes in the second page of his letter. “Some 300 French people just arrived from ‘La Belle France.’” He seems surprisingly familiar with the group’s origins and intentions, which are outlined

in his comments. “They were under the guidance of Mons. Capet (pronounced Coopa),” he continues, “an author of considerable celebrity of the Fourierite school and on their way to Fort Madison Iowa—intending to colonize there.” Perhaps he had read of Cabet before or simply learned much about him the day of his arrival. Whatever the case, the Icarians’ unorthodox approach to life would have certainly attracted the attention in the patriarchal society of the 1840s.

Seeking a lifestyle based on the equality of the sexes and shared labor, the Icarians were a product of the turbulent politics of a Europe struggling to adapt to the change brought about by the Industrial Revolution and a growing educated European middle class. The German states, France, and much of central Europe, as well as Great Britain, saw the emergence

The Icarian Colonies founded in five states after Cabet’s arrival in America were popularized by a wider movement to create utopian societies in the United States. The Icarians lived in communal societies—they lived in communal housing, their children were raised collectively, and they gave their worldly goods and assets to the community. Like some other utopian societies, they also gave men and women equality in community affairs and elections. (Image: *Missouri Historical Society*)



of groups pushing for political reforms or seeking alternative ways of life. In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels released the pamphlet *Communist Manifesto* as a way of encouraging revolution among disaffected workers; the following spring, Fredrich

Hecker and 800 fellow revolutionaries led an armed rebellion in the Duchy of Baden in an effort to establish a democratic republic. Hecker and many of his followers, known as the Forty-Eighters, would also arrive in St. Louis in 1849, but in 1847, French socialist Etienne Cabet decided that he and members of his *La Societe Icarienne* should emigrate to the United States in hopes of finding more fruitful land and stability. They first attempted to establish a colony near Denton, Texas, in 1848 but failed due to disease, dissension, and inexperience. Now Cabet was returning with more followers and a better understanding of the challenges facing an experiment in communal living.⁸

Although Hollister notes in the letter that Cabet’s intention was to proceed to Ft. Madison, Iowa, his final destination was actually Nauvoo, Illinois. On an earlier reconnaissance, Cabet had purchased the town site once occupied by Joseph Smith and his Latter-Day Saints. It was here that the French utopian hoped to establish his dream of a self-sustaining egalitarian society. In addition to equality among the sexes, the Icarians practiced communal ownership of property and an emphasis on hard work and mechanization. Hollister’s descriptions of Cabet’s Icarian followers clearly confirms what is generally understood about the group in terms of its consisting mainly of members of the French and German working class. “The men looked a little on the Dutch side with a broad phlegmatic [phlegmatic] physiognomy. The females generally small—well formed—and the merry look so commonly attributed to the French nation. The company consist mainly of mechanics.” He ends his description by commenting that they looked “very well indeed” considering their long steamboat trip from New Orleans as deck passengers.

In the days since his return to St. Louis, Hollister was also taken with those suffering from what he jokingly referred to as “yellow fever.” The “afflicted” were young men headed to the California gold fields. His words convey what seems like humorous fascination coupled with mild annoyance at their behavior. “The hotels are crowded with victims of yellow fever—who mostly buy up their necessary articles here causing most kinds of Business to already receive a share of the expected Harvest.” He had no doubts that St. Louis merchants benefited tremendously from gold-seeking Easterners. Merchandise meant to appeal to potential gold miners filled the merchants’ columns of the city’s newspapers. According to the *Missouri Republican*, St. Louis furniture and upholstery makers Scarrit & Mason introduced a “bedstead or cot for the use of emigrants that is eminently useful. It is so

constructed, by hinges, that it shuts up and occupies but little space, and is very light. It may, in one way, be used as a table, another as a bed . . . as a bench or settee.” All manner of businesses tailored their products to appeal to the gold-crazed consumers, everything from wagons to guidebooks and every form of mining equipment. Even Hollister’s bee hives attracted attention, but for the wrong reasons. “In nailing up my advertisements (having drawings of my Hive) in Bar Rooms—the general query was Is that a gold washer?” But sadly for him, “nothing will attract the least attention to wares of any kind unless California! Important to Gold Diggers!” He then asks his cousin, “Have you any premonitory symptoms! If not your wife must have been the ‘detergent.’” As a sideline conversation to William’s wife, Lizzy, he warns her not to let William go to St. Louis alone for fear that, he, too might be overtaken by the urge to buy provisions and head to California. “I fear,” Edwin tells Lizzy, “he will be borne away by the tide.” Of his own thoughts on going to California, he assures William that of the “contagion,” he has “not a bit of it.”⁹

Hollister may have tried his best to ignore the urge to go west, but he did not ignore national

politics. In November 1848, General Zachary Taylor, the Whig party nominee, was elected president. The election reflected the growing sectional differences brought on by the widening divisions over the question of slavery and its expansion into the new American territories of the west. The southern slaveholding elite eyed land recently ceded to the United States with the defeat of Mexico in the Mexican-American War as new territory for the expansion of the plantation system. Northern politicians and their abolitionist allies saw this as a blatant attempt to disrupt the balance of power between free and slave states. Tensions mounted as debates over the fate of slavery in America became nearly constant on the floor of Congress and within the homes of American voters. Consequently, the political parties faced growing shifts and dissent within their ranks. In the general election of 1848, Taylor faced not only his Democratic opponent Senator Lewis Cass but also Free-Soil candidate, former president Martin Van Buren.

Just as Hollister was arriving in St. Louis, Taylor was taking the oath of office. There is no mention of Taylor’s inaugural address in Hollister’s letter, but despite his assurances to his cousin that “politics is not my element,” he held fairly strong opinions on Taylor and the state of the American voter. Edwin’s cousin William was apparently a Taylor supporter, a condition they did not share. But, ironically, it was Edwin who had the opportunity to meet the president-elect when Taylor was traveling east on his way to

CALIFORNIA BEDS.
THE subscribers offer for sale and make to order, portable folding bed and bedstead, (for which they exclusively have a patent right,) which for the camp, or extra steamboat berths, are beyond comparison, superior to any before known in this country. They weigh only eighteen pounds, fold into a very small space, easily carried on a mule, and without mattress or pillow make a substantial and comfortable bed, and may in a moment be converted into a table or sofa.
 SCARRIT & MASON.

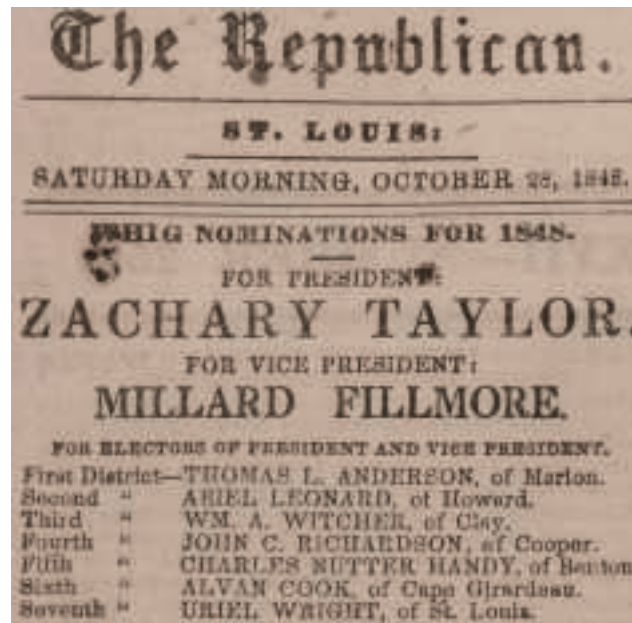
CALIFORNIA OUTFITS.—A complete assortment of pack and riding Saddles; Mule Harness; pistol and knife Belts, of the most approved style and make, of our own manufacture, constantly on hand and made to order.
 J. B. SICKLES & CO., 144 Main street, opposite the Bank.
 feb20 3m

OXEN AND MULES.—The subscriber, residing in Lexington, Lafayette county, Mo., offers for sale 300 head of Mules, and 150 yoke of Oxen, all in good order. California emigrants would do well to call and examine before buying. [mh]3 Bwo] WM. H. RUSSELL.

CALIFORNIA MULES AND OXEN.
IHAVE for sale 100 fine three and four year old MULES, in fine order for California trips, on my farm, adjoining Columbia, Boone county, Mo. Also, twenty or thirty yoke of oxen.
 Columbia is directly on the road from St. Louis to Independence and St. Joseph, nine miles from Providence, on the north side of the Missouri river. Those buying mules and oxen here, will save the expense and risk of transporting them by water. App'y early.
 mh22 lmo] JAMES S. ROLLINS.
 Columbia, Boone county, Mo. March 20, 1849.

GOLD WASHERS.
WE have invented a Gold Washer which has been pronounced by those professing to understand the business, to be superior to any in the city. They are very light and will cost but little for transportation. We are prepared to make them to order, and invite all who are bound for the gold diggings, to call and see them. Also—Pores and Lift PUMPS.
 We are also prepared to furnish outfits for all necessary cooking purposes for a trip over the plains—such as stoves, camp kettles, stew and fry-pans, tin pans, knives and forks, spoons, &c. All made in the best manner and cheap. Call at No. 119 Main street.
 mh2] TILDEN & DWYER.

St. Louis merchants scurried to find goods to respond to the sudden influx of Argonauts traveling to California for the Gold Rush starting in 1849. Published emigrants’ guides all recommended that people headed for the gold fields purchase their supplies in St. Louis rather than pay to transport them from, say, New York or Ohio (the two states besides Missouri with the most Argonauts traveling overland). Naturally, local merchants tried to find goods they wanted and marketed existing products like folding beds for their needs. And the market was huge; some 50,000 traveled overland to California annually between 1849 and 1854, all looking for the same goods recommended by emigrants’ guides, as these ads attest. (Images: Missouri Historical Society)



The Whig Party nominated Mexican War hero Zachary Taylor (left), a career army officer who had never held office, for his name recognition in 1848. After Taylor's death in July 1850, his successor Millard Fillmore signed the bills that comprised the Compromise of 1850. Taylor and Fillmore constituted the last Whig ticket to win a national election. (Images: Missouri Historical Society)

the White House. "I had the honor (as you would deem it) of shaking the Hand of Genl. Taylor," writes Hollister. "I had just got off from the Cincinnati Packet and hurried up to the hotel. Arriving just as he rose from the table."

"None of the current likenesses resemble him," notes Hollister. "He is small—very little taller than myself—with small eyes—nose etc. If you should see him on a load of hay taking it to market you would imagine him perhaps—a farmer—worth a good substantial property. But for scholarship—statesmanship or any other pursuit requiring a high order of intellect—he must be destitute." He does allow a small concession by declaring that the general's "eye is the only thing noticeable. It indicates considerable firmness and keenness of perception."

Whatever unfavorable opinion he had of Taylor prior to the meeting, it did not improve with the encounter. "My curiosity was satisfied in five minutes," he states. Taylor's fast rise from a nobody in Hollister's eyes to the leader of the nation was, in his opinion, a sad commentary on the American public. He believed that finer, more deserving men were pushed aside by the fickleness of voters. Hollister bemoaned that "when I think that four short years ago probably not one in five thousand of our population knew of his existence and that such men as Clay—Webster—Corwin, and a host of other truly

great men are forgotten by the crowd." He feared that choosing unqualified "Political Idols" would lead to no good and might cause "this great country [to] retrograde from the lofty position from whence she launched forth the tide of Nations."

Hollister's political intuitions were not far off base. Taylor's short time in office was marked primarily by his inaction. He was a man determined to maintain the status quo and fight the growing sectional dissension by avoiding the issues. Only sixteen months after taking office, a stomach infection proved fatal to the man who was known popularly as "Old Rough and Ready." Vice President Millard Fillmore assumed the presidency and embraced the controversial Compromise of 1850, an action deemed as an impetus for the Civil War.

Beyond Edwin Hollister's take on the world around him, his letter displays the hallmarks of someone who missed his family and friends. There is true affection in his words to William and his wife, Lizzy. He recounts old acquaintances and asks whether William's sisters are still staying with him in Vandalia. "I may be pardoned for expressing the sentiment that should they remain with you this spring—it would but add another motive for a visit from me." Edwin mentions "Miss Catherine" in particular. This inquiry allows him to include one last story.

He tells of his run-in with a fortune teller in Louisville. It is yet another revealing example of the times in which he lived. In 1849, the spiritualist movement was just gaining steam in America. Only a year earlier, two teenage sisters in western New York, the Fox sisters, became a national sensation when they claimed to have the ability to communicate with the deceased. Imitators quickly emerged throughout the country, and many took up residence in hotels, including those in St. Louis. Tarot card readers and others claiming divine powers reaped the benefits of a populace eager to witness extraordinary powers. But Hollister's opinions of soothsayers seem to differ little from his take on Taylorite politics.

"While at Louisville a gentleman came in one evening to the bar room . . . stating that he had had his past life recalled with wonderful accuracy etc.—My room mate went up the next day and returned with a similar statement." This definitely fed his curiosity, and he went to see things for himself. "I found a lean sallow—keen eyed woman—Madam Something about 50 years of age—who with the aid of a pack of cards began to reveal my destiny." The woman, he says, described things with "great clearness" and noted many specifics, which apparently, despite the detail, were not accurate.

These revelations proved her to be a "false prophet," but none so much as when she described a woman he was destined to meet. It was someone, she claimed, whom he had previously met, "a lady with light hair and complexion." He said he could not apply it to anyone he had recently met, but "perhaps she only made a slight mistake as to the color of the hair." She describes two other women that Edwin and William apparently knew and whom Hollister had recently seen during his travels.

Here the letter concludes: "So with a kiss to the baby for me—I wind up this rainy sabbath day epistle—Respectfully, E.P.H." Unfortunately, this letter remains as Hollister's only known communication. His success or failure with his beehive operation is lost to time, and sadly the record appears to indicate that Edwin Hollister died only four years later. He is buried in Geneva, Illinois, the town where his family settled after leaving Massachusetts.

While history books attempt to explain the details that existed in the growing and turbulent America of 1849, primary sources such as Edwin Hollister's letter make it all real. We have the luxury of hearing his voice across time and seeing a changing nation through his eyes. Fortunately, he possessed an eloquence and mastery of words to preserve those moments in time for us.

Transcript of ALS Edwin P. Hollister to William M. Black, March 11, 1849

Virginia Hotel St. Louis
Cousin Wm

I have a rather indistinct recollection of having written you a letter several weeks since from Cincinnati and although it may argue a very feeble memory I must acknowledge that this recollection dim though it be is impressed in far more vivid colors on my memory than the answer it received. I trust therefore that you will deem this a sufficient apology for not alluding further to its contents as I candidly acknowledge that I have not the [apprehendotist] inkling of an idea of their character "Requiscat in pace."

I suppose that you have noticed my advertisement in the Republican and so become aware of my return to this city of "mud" and of my entrance upon my Bee Hive operation. My prospects are not very flattering as yet on account of the state of the roads which seem to have effectually closed up all avenues of communication between the city and the interior. I have had to content myself with hearing the flattering encomiums bestowed on my Hive by those under whose notice it has fallen which proves far more gratifying to my feelings than weight to my purse. I shall succeed however on getting it introduced to use by some of the citizens here whose favorable opinion I have won and which will be of great value to me another season—after they have seen its plausible theory a tangible shape. As soon as the weather and roads allow—I shall go north for my own neighborhood where little attention is paid to the cultivation of the Honey Bee.

Will it be worth my while to visit Vandalia with my Hive? If you think it would pay expense I will agree to visit you as soon as the roads are passable.

I had a letter from Father last week. The folks were all well—they had had fine sleighing most of the winter. He had hauled most of his grain to market and was ready to take up his note for the Horses.

He wishes me to find out how you wished the money sent, and sent the love of the family to your own. Mr. Kimball and family had 'emigrated' to Milwaukie—which item I put down for the benefit of George. I suppose he can do up coffee according to Euclid [?] by this time.

I went down to the Marshall Ney this morning to witness a rather novel sight viz—some 300 French people just from "La Belle France." They were

under the guidance of Mons. Cabet (pronounced Coopa) an author of considerable celebrity of the Fourierite school and an on their way to Fort Madison Iowa—intending to colonize there. The men looked a bit on the Dutch order—with a broad phlegmatic [phlegmatic] physiognomy—the females generally small—well formed—and the merry look so commonly attributed to the French nation—The company consist mainly of mechanics—and look very well indeed—considering the unfavorable position they occupy (on main deck) for cleanliness and comfort.



Etienne Cabet as he appeared when developing his ideas about communal living. He publicized his ideas in his novel *Travel and Adventures of Lord Willam Caridall in Icaria* in 1840. His works on communal societies influenced other thinkers' including Karl Marx. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

When at Madison Ia. I had the honor (as you would deem it) of shaking the Hand of Genl. Taylor. I had just got off from the Cincinnati Packet and hurried up to the Hotel—arriving just as he rose from the table—to start for Frankfort. None of the current likenesses resemble him.

He is small—very little taller than myself—with small eyes—nose etc. If you should see him on a load

of Hay—taking it to market—you would imagine him perhaps—a farmer—worth a good substantial property. But as for scholarship—statesmanship or any pursuit requiring a high order of intellect—he must be destitute of unless Lavater and Combe are utterly at fault. His eye is the only thing noticeable. It indicates considerable firmness and keenness of perception. My curiosity was satisfied in five minutes and when I think that four short years ago probably not one in five thousand of our population knew of his existence and that such men as Clay—Webster—Corwin and a host of other truly great men—are forgotten by the crowd—who tomorrow will hunt up a new Political Idol—before which to prostrate—in the same ratio will this great country retrograde from the lofty position from whence she launched forth the tide of Nations—But enough of this Politics is not my element.

California—the lone star—is in the ascendant. The Hotels are crowded with victims of the yellow fever—who mostly buy up their necessary articles here causing most kinds of Business to already receive a share of the expected Harvest. In nailing up my advertisements (having drawings of my Hive) in Bar Rooms—the general query was Is that a Gold Washer? And nothing will attract the least attention to wares of any kind unless California! Important to Gold Diggers! is connected therewith. Have you any premonitory symptoms? If not your wife must have been the “detergent” How is it Lizzy? Don’t let William come to St. Louis to buy goods unless you are along. Or I fear he will be borne away by the tide. Perhaps you imagine by this that I am infected by the contagion myself. Not a bit of it. I keep perfectly cool by the constant use of the ‘douche’ bath and intend to “Pursue the even tenor of my way” through the Sucker state this coming season—looking after the welfare of the Fathers-Brothers—I wish I could add the rest of the Gold Fever “case.” It will give me great pleasure—if in my peregrinations—Vandalia falls in my way. In the meantime an acknowledgement of our relationship in Black and white will be thankfully received.

Your aff. Cousin
Edwin P. Hollister

P.S. 1 o'clock P.M. raining hard—I managed to fill three pages—the ennui of a Hotel Bar room on the Sabbath is insupportable.

I called at Mr. Simmons the other day to learn whether your sisters had returned to Pa. Mr. S. had not seen or heard from you since last fall—and inferred that they were yet at Vandalia. If so—I

can not close without tendering to them my best wishes—I may be pardoned for expressing the sentiment that should they remain with you this spring—it would but add another motive for a visit from me. And I just think how that fortune teller cheated me in supposing that I was to have the pleasure of seeing Miss Catherine in Cincinnati. I will explain.

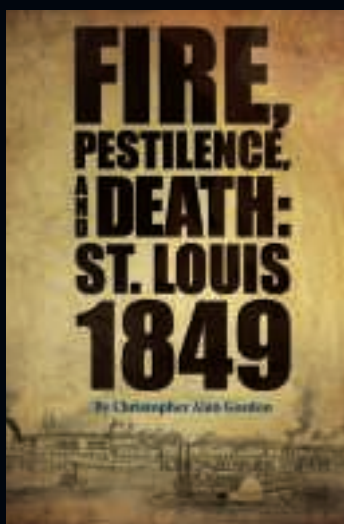
While at Louisville—a gentleman came in one evening to the Bar room of the Taylor House stating that he had had his past life recalled with wonderful accuracy etc—My room mate went up the next day and returned with a similar statement—So for the curiosity of the thing I went myself—I found a lean sallow—keen eyed woman—Madame Something about 50 years of age—who with the aid of a pack of cards began to reveal my destiny—She explained things with great clearness such as my destination—kind of business—our family affairs at home—and a great variety of things—which to say the least was very singular—Among other things in which she proved a false prophet—was the fact I attended to—She told me that I was soon to meet a lady with light hair and complexion whose acquaintance I had recently made and for the life of me I could not apply it to any other person than Miss Dale—Perhaps she only a slight mistake as to the colour of the hair—for at Madison—I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Barbor formerly Henrietta Hinman of Lee—whom you no doubt well remember.

So with a kiss to the baby for me I wind up this rainy sabbath day epistle.

Respectfully
E.P.H.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Jefferson Barracks weather report, January–December 1849, National Archives Microfilm Publication T907, Roll 284; *Missouri Republican*, March 10, 1849.
- ² ALS Edwin P. Hollister to William M. Black, March 11, 1849. Missouri Historical Society Archives.
- ³ Mayor’s Message. Reports of City Officers, May 1848. St. Louis Board of Aldermen, 3.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁵ Minutes of the St. Louis County Court, January–December 1849. Missouri State Archives.
- ⁶ *Missouri Republican*, March 24, 1849.
- ⁷ *Watchman Advocate* [Clayton, MO], July 22, 1949; *Roads & Their Builders* (Jefferson City: Division of Public Information. Missouri State Highway Commission, 1971).
- ⁸ Larry Franke, “Etienne Cabel and *La societe icarienne (Icarian Society)*,” *PastPorts*, vol. 9, no. 8 (August 2016), St. Louis County Library.
- ⁹ *Missouri Republican*, April 4, 1849.



Fire, Pestilence, and Death: St. Louis, 1849

By Christopher Alan Gordon

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In 1849, St. Louis was swelling under the pressure of rapid population growth, creaking under the strain of poor infrastructure, and often trapped within the confines of ignorance. A massive cholera outbreak and devastating fire were consequences of those problems—and chances for the city to evolve. Prepare to discover the dramatic events of 1849 St. Louis through the words of the people who lived through them.

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