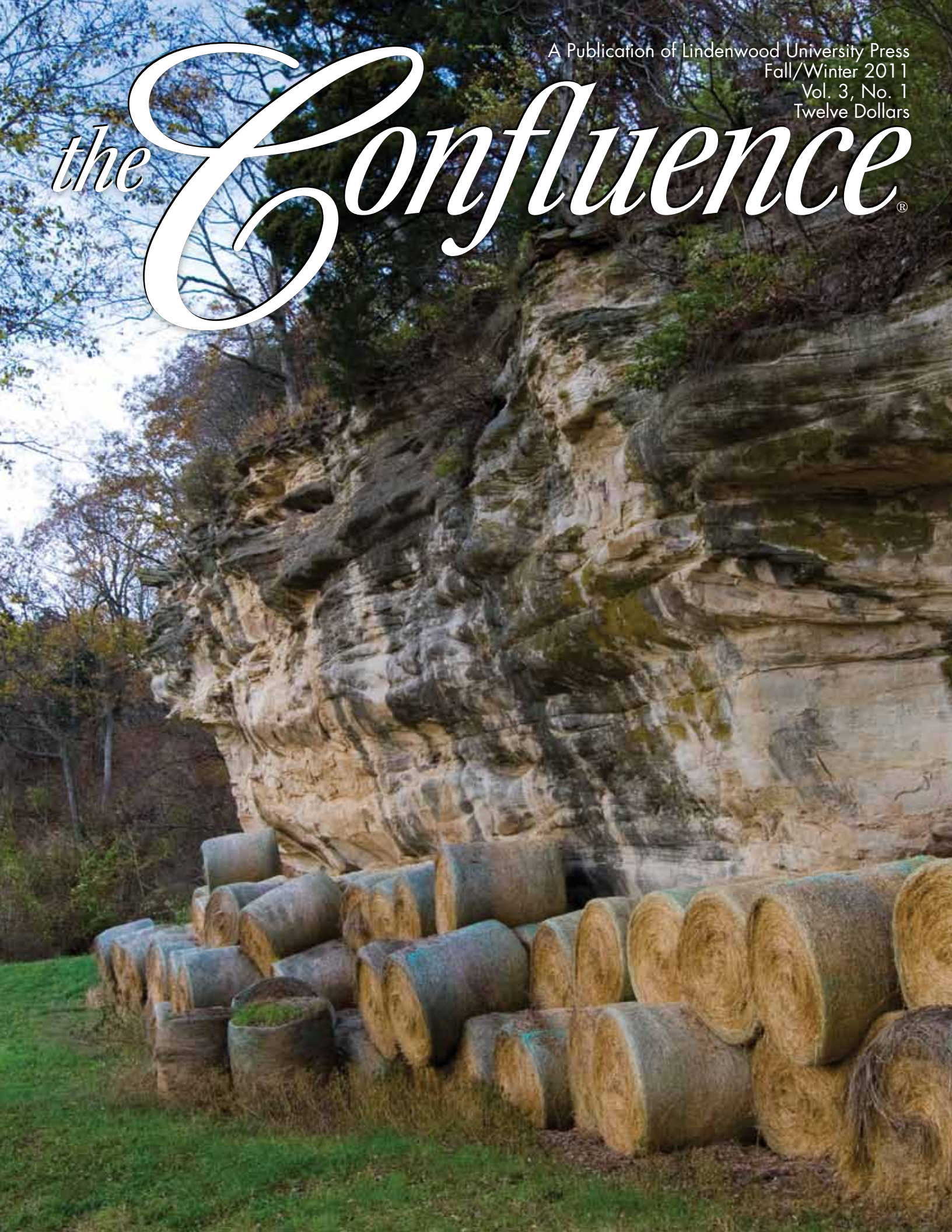


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Former slaves continued to move to places to seek better lives. Originally, those who arrived in Union military areas, known as “contrabands,” were often protected by the army. Later, freedmen were moving again—westward to places like Kansas starting in 1879, as seen here in the July 5, 1879, *Harper’s Weekly*. For more on former slaves in contraband camps in St. Louis, see “Contraband Camps in St. Louis: A Contested Path to Freedom,” by Jane Davis, starting on p. 18. (Image: griffingweb)

C O N T E N T S

C O V E R I M A G E

Hay Shelter

Even today, farmers protect their hay bales and implements under the rock shelters. In front of the low terrace and bluff, humans began farming the rich alluvial soil of the floodplain 800 years ago. Modern farmers cultivate wheat, corn, and soybeans between the bluffs and the levees. The levees protect the floodplain and the remains of Old Valmeyer, which was inundated by the Flood of 1993, and Prairie du Rocher, which was rescued from the wall of water that wiped out Valmeyer by the efforts of volunteer sandbaggers and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. For more on the Mississippi River ecosystem see Quinta Scott, in "Above the American Bottom," starting on p. 4.



- 4 "Above the American Bottom: The Bluffs and the Sinkhole Plain"
by Quinta Scott

In this photo essay, Quinta Scott examines the natural history of the Mississippi River wetland and the varied landscapes that comprise the American Bottom.



- 18 "Contraband Camps in St. Louis: A Contested Path to Freedom"
by Jane M. Davis

During the Civil War, Union officers were sometimes inundated with former slaves, which the Union considered "contraband," and refused to return them to their owners. Jane Davis examines these contraband camps in St. Louis.



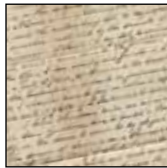
- 30 "'A New Order of Things': St. Louis, Chicago, and the Struggle for Western Commercial Supremacy"
by Drew VandeCreek

St. Louis leadership during the Gilded Age was nothing if not confident, even suggesting that the nation's capital be moved to the St. Louis region. Drew VandeCreek offers some of the writings of these boosters.



- 40 "Gambling on the Economic Future of East St. Louis: The Casino Queen"
by Anne F. Boxberger Flaherty

When the Casino Queen opened on the riverfront at East St. Louis, it was touted as a major contributor to the city's economy. Has it been so?



- 52 "St. Louis Builds a Post Office"
by David L. Straight

As the city of St. Louis burgeoned in the middle of the nineteenth century, services struggled to keep up. David Straight examines the challenges presented to mail delivery in 1851.

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This past summer and fall in Missouri were marked by much debate over the state’s economic future and the potential role of trade with China. Part of this was a proposal to create an “aerotropolis” in St. Louis to facilitate this commerce with a country that is some 10,000 miles, including a very large ocean, away. Still, you have to give folks credit for thinking big as they seek to develop a vision for the future.

No one said that “visioning” was necessarily easy, or that prognosticators are often right. Sometimes visions are actions to plan for the future, sometimes they are loftier.

In many ways, this issue of the *Confluence* is about developing visions of the future. These articles come from an array of disciplines and periods, but chronicle attempts to figure out what the future could, should, or might look like. Perhaps the great visionary featured here is Uriah Logan Reavis, showcased in Drew VandeCreek’s “‘A New Order of Things’: St. Louis, Chicago, and the Struggle for Western Commercial Supremacy.” In this issue, you can read the words of the man who thought the United States capital ought to be moved from Washington, D.C., to a place more central in both geography and commerce—say, St. Louis. (By the way, Reavis wasn’t the only one to have such lofty aspirations for the region; St. Louis and Missouri submitted a proposal to the United Nations at the end of World War II to have the UN located near Weldon Springs—a region with “so much America around it” and about halfway between the world’s two great trouble spots of Japan and Germany.)



In a different vein, Jane Davis’ “Contraband Camps in St. Louis: A Contested Path to Freedom” explores federal efforts to manage the waves of recently freed slaves pouring into Union army installations. These army officers at places like Benton Barracks in St. Louis were on the ground floor of figuring out the future of the freedmen in former slave states. Similarly, David Straight documents the development and construction of a new and expanded post office as part of a process of managing change as well. By the time this new facility was opened on the riverfront in the 1850s, St. Louis was growing rapidly—its population had doubled every decade from 1810 to 1840, then again by 1845—which required developing ideas about the future of needed services and infrastructure. Like their Union army counterparts, early postmasters like Archibald Gamble had to plan the future on the fly.

Anne Boxberger Flaherty examines a different kind of response-to-a-problem visioning in her article, “Gambling on the Economic Future of East St. Louis: The Casino Queen.” When the Casino Queen opened on the East St. Louis riverfront just south of the Eads Bridge, it was hailed as an economic godsend of sorts, creating jobs for people and revenue for an impoverished city government. Flaherty addresses the question of success—did the plan do what it was supposed to do?

Lastly, Quinta Scott’s photo essay on Mississippi River wetlands invites readers to think in terms of the future of the Father of Waters. Through these compelling images and text, Scott examines the changes in the river borne of the work of humans, leading one to ponder the future of the waterway.

So, one wonders if the China hub proposal will be seen as a Reavis-like vision of pie in the sky, or the opportunity that got away, or a story of leaders trying to solve problems on the fly. Herein are examples of all of them.

Jeffrey Smith, PhD
Editor

Above the American Bottom: *The Bluffs and the Sinkhole Plain*



BY QUINTA SCOTT



Cross the Jefferson Barracks Bridge from St. Louis County, Missouri, into Monroe County, Illinois, and the American Bottom, that vast Mississippi River floodplain that extends from Alton to the Kaskaskia River. Ahead are the Mississippi River bluffs that mark the eastern edge of the floodplain, across which the Mississippi once meandered before settling into its modern channel. Drive south on Illinois Route 3 from Columbia. To the east are glaciated prairies; to the west, the Illinois Northern Ozark Natural Division, characterized by a sinkhole plain, a band of forest, hill prairies, and tall bluffs. At Waterloo, turn right on Illinois 156, cross the sinkhole plain, and descend to the bottoms through Dennis Hollow—named after Dennis Datchurst, who mined salt at Salt Lick Point in the eighteenth century—to Old Valmeyer. Connect to Bluff Road, which gives you access to the bluffs, the hill prairies, the bottoms, and the river. This is the American Bottom, a special place that offers prairies to hike, roads to bike, and lakes to fish, all within thirty miles of the Gateway Arch.

Sinkhole plain, bluffs, bottomland farmland between the bluffs and the river levees, the batture lands beyond the levees, and the islands at the river's edge: all the elements of the American Bottom are interrelated. This is the first of a series of photo essays on the landscape that forms the American Bottom.

Millions of years ago, the Mississippi severed Illinois' bluff lands to the east from Missouri's Ozark Plateau to the west. Three hundred thousand years ago, glacial ice pushed south from the Arctic, barged across the Midwest landscape, and flattened the northern two-thirds of the Illinois landscape. In Monroe and Randolph Counties, ice came up to the edge of the Illinois Northern Ozark Natural Division, but it left untouched a unique landscape that includes sinkholes, hill prairies, tall bluffs, rock falls, and colluvial slopes and terraces.

Humans arrived in this landscape and camped in the protection of the bluffs soon after the last of the great glacial floods expired 9500 years ago. They occupied sites at Salt Lick, high over the floodplain, and at the Modoc Shelter, under the bluff. The French settled Illinois Country in the early eighteenth century, at Kaskaskia on a peninsula between the Mississippi and Kaskaskia rivers in 1703 and Prairie du Rocher in the shadow of the bluffs in 1722.



The Mississippi Bluff Lands—Monroe and Randolph Counties, Illinois

As a glacier barged across the landscape, it ground rock into cobbles, gravel, sand, and silt—rock flour, which was stored under, in, and on top of the ice. When the last ice sheet wasted away, it sent pulses of outwash, water laden with rock flour, into the Mississippi as a valley train that filled the Mississippi gorge between the bluffs. In winter, when the outwash froze, westerly winds picked up the very lightest rock flour and deposited it as loess (“luss,” rhymes with russ), a dry, well-drained soil, on the eastern bluffs, almost forty feet thick near the edge of the bluff—the steep hill that characterizes the bluff tops, where prairie grasses took root. The deposits thinned to as little as five feet as the loess blew east across the sinkhole plain.¹



Sinkhole in the Upland

Illinois 156 crosses the sinkhole plain, which becomes evident a little over two miles outside Waterloo. Here, the loess, lying over a base of St. Louis limestone, thins to about 5 feet and offers farmers productive, well-drained soil. Water seeps down through the soil and into fractures in the rock, dissolving it and forming cracks, shafts, and caves. Should the roof of a cave collapse, a sinkhole follows. Should the sinkhole form in a stream, it becomes a losing stream and is swallowed up by the earth to flow underground through a cave. Eventually, the underground stream comes to the surface in a spring or emerges through a crevice in the valley wall. With all this water flowing underground, the bedrock in the sinkhole plain holds only small amounts of useable groundwater in aquifers.

Because loess drains so quickly into the cracks and crevices in the underlying St. Louis limestone, groundwater is recharged almost instantly and is not well filtered. Hence, agricultural fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and other contaminants also drain into the groundwater and spill out through the valley wall. Eventually, the nutrients end up in the Mississippi and flow to the Gulf of Mexico, where they nourish algae, which grow, die, decay, soak up the oxygen in the water, and create a dead zone. Fish, which cannot escape the oxygen-depleted water, die. Vegetative buffers around sinkholes would help soak up some of those nutrients and keep them out of the groundwater.²



Talus Slope: Terry Spring

From the sinkhole plain, water seeps into vertical cracks in the limestone, slides across horizontal bedding planes, and consolidates into an underground stream, which hollows out a cave. Finally, the stream spills out of the bluff in a conduit spring. For over 10,000 years, Terry Spring and others found in the valley wall above the American Bottom have been draining the sinkhole plain. Where you see V-shaped cuts in the wall, you can guess that it is a conduit spring. An axe-head or celt found at Terry Spring signals that Mississippians knew the spring a thousand years ago.

About eleven miles north of Old Valmeyer, Bluff Road crosses a culvert over the Terry Spring springbrook, which leads to the mouth of the Terry Spring cave. The cave opens up about 25 feet above the American Bottom, at a place where the valley wall is 130 feet high. Water springs from the bluff and falls six feet over a limestone ledge into a limestone bowl about 25 feet in diameter. Water quality at Terry Spring is good, with levels of fertilizers and herbicides that measure below EPA standards. Hence, its springhead hosts cave-dwelling macro-invertebrates: flatworms and a variety of small crustaceans.

Water in the limestone bowl spills into the very short springbrook. Like the springhead, the brook is also home to a variety of crustaceans. Trees common to the colluvial slope, which forms as soil washes off the bluff top in sheets and piles up at the base, shade the brook: sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), chinkapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*), hackberry (*Genus Celtis*), and some American elm (*Ulmus Americana*). A variety of forbs, grasses, sedges, and other wetland plants grow at the edge of the stream.³

Fults Hill Prairie—Loess Slope

Hill prairies are islands of grass surrounded by forests on the steep slopes of the western facing bluffs along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers in Illinois, but, in the Upper Mississippi Valley, they extend from St. Paul to the head of the Lower Mississippi Valley where the bluffs end. They can also be found in the Loess Hills region along the Missouri River in northwest Missouri, western Iowa, and southeastern South Dakota. Most are anchored in loess, but glacial drift, gravel, and sand provides the substrate for a few. Early settlers, who grazed their livestock on slopes too steep for cultivation, called them goat prairies. A. G. Vestal applied the term *hill prairies* to them in 1943.





Hill Prairie—Valmeyer (above)

Just south of Valmeyer, a prairie, covered with invasive cedar, rises above a bottomland pond.

A forested corridor, two to three miles wide, spreads across 35,000 acres atop the bluffs in Monroe and Randolph Counties. It is the largest contiguous forest remaining in Illinois. Plants and animals that are found nowhere else in Illinois, but are found in the Missouri Ozarks, are found here. The bluff lands provide habitat for eighty percent of Illinois' mammals and half its reptiles, amphibians, and butterflies. Two to three hundred species of birds visit the bluffs. Some are migratory, others permanent residents.⁴

In the last fifty years, their numbers have shrunk by half. We can attribute some of the loss to Smokey Bear, who has been warning Americans, "Only you can prevent forest fires," since 1944. The resulting fire suppression has allowed woody plants—red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*), and rough-leaved dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*)—to take over the prairies. Before Smokey, the lightning that started fires maintained the prairies. Native Americans burned them as lookout points and maintained the prairies. The goats grazed the hillsides and maintained the prairies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today, we maintain the prairies with controlled burns.⁵

Hill Prairie undergoing Restoration, Salt Lick Land and Water Preserve (above, right)

Once cleared, the bare slope is seeded by volunteers, using seeds from plants that evolved in the local climate and are able to resist local pests and diseases. In the spring, when the ground reaches 55 degrees, they broadcast grass seed either by hand or by spreaders. Grasses become established more easily than forbs, which respond better to fall planting.

As the grasses and forbs become established in the first and second years, volunteers work on weed control. They mow in the first year, but as the native grasses crowd out weeds, the weeds must be pulled by hand in the second year. After that, controlled burns keep the prairie thriving.

Salt Lick Point Quarry, Old Valmeyer (below, right)

The prairies are also losing out to development: quarrying, mismanagement of the steep slopes, pollution of the watershed, destructive forestry, and the invasion of exotic plants—specifically cedars, which love limestone—and bush honeysuckle. All threaten habitat for wildlife.

Rock City, on Quarry Road off Bluff Road a mile north of Old Valmeyer, is an abandoned quarry turned into a deep freeze for ice cream and military records.

Above it all, at the highest point in Monroe County, is Salt Lick Point, a 450-acre tract of bluff lands that protects a dozen hill prairies, seven limestone glades, racks of limestone cliffs, and runs of upland forest.

The Village of Valmeyer owns the land; the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission manage it under an easement agreement with the village.

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Illinois Audubon Society are also involved in the project. The Valmeyer Boy Scouts are working to restore the bluff lands, removing invasive species of plants from the prairies and the glades.

A network of hiking trails that crisscrosses the bluff lands and runs along the base of the bluff is open from sunrise and to sunset.

At 827 feet in elevation, Salt Lick Point is the highest point in Monroe County and rises over 400 feet above the floodplain. Archeologists have found sixty-six shallow pits arranged in clusters and stone tools made from chert at a site atop the point, evidence of human activity 7000 years ago during the Middle Archaic Period.⁶





Talus Slope: Salt Lick Point

As the reclamation work happens above the bluff, springtime magic happens below the bluff. Sheer walls of Kimmswick limestone rise out of the colluvial slope. A moist or mesic forest—treed in white (*Quercus alba*) and red oak (*Quercus rubra*), chinquapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), and hickories (genus *Carya*)—takes root in the hillside at the base of the bluff.



Colluvial Slope: Salt Lick Point

A rich variety of spring ephemerals carpets the ground at the base of the bluff: Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), blue phlox, mayapple, white trillium (*White Trillium grandiflorum*), and wood poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*).



Talus Slope: Salt Lick Point Vernal Pool

As the bluff weathers, large and small rocks break off and slide down the slope, accumulating at the base of the bluff. This is the talus slope. A vernal pool, a wetland fed by runoff from the uplands, puddles against the fallen rocks at Salt Lick Point. It is ephemeral. Wet and shallow during the winter and spring, the vernal pool dries out during the summer and fall. Cattails (*Typha latifolia*) and bulrushes (*Cyperaceae*), which do well in static water, thrive in the pool. About half of all frogs and a third of all salamanders in Illinois breed in such wetlands. Wood ducks and mallards stop to feed on the insects, crustaceans, and seeds to fuel their migrations. Box turtles and eastern garter snakes dine in pools as they move from one to next. Bats, dragonflies, and swallows patrol for flying insects, particularly mosquitoes, which breed in the pools.⁸

White Rock Hill Prairie

Clifftop, a local conservation organization, and Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development purchased the White Rock Hill Prairie just south of Valmeyer in December 2010. They received partial funding through a State Wildlife Grant, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Additional funds came from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Grand Victoria Foundation Vital Lands program.

Clifftop volunteers will restore the preserve, remove woody plants through controlled burning, develop hiking trails and parking, and open it to public use at the end of 2011, all a part of the organization's efforts at land stewardship and outreach.⁹



Fults Hill Prairie: Kidd Lake Marsh

About seventeen miles south of Old Valmeyer and above the bluff is the Fults Hill Prairie State Nature Preserve; below is the Kidd Lake Marsh Natural Area, the remnant of an 800-acre lakebed.

The State of Illinois established its nature preserve system in 1963 to protect the state's few remaining high quality natural areas and dedicated Fults Hill Prairie as a preserve in 1970. In 1986 the U.S. Department of Interior recognized the prairie as a National Natural Landmark, a program established in 1962 to identify and preserve the nation's geological and ecological heritage.



Fulfs Hill Ravine

Forested ravines fragment the hill prairies. A wooden staircase running up the bluff of St. Louis Limestone through a ravine gives access to Fulfs Hill Prairie. A moist or mesic upland forest—treed in white and red oak, chinquapin oak, sugar maple, and pidgnot (*Carya glabra*) and shagbark (*Carya ovata*) hickories—anchors the soil in the colluvial slope. Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), grey dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*), strawberry bush (*Evonymus americanus*), and spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) populate the understory. Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), bristly greenbrier (*Smilax hispida*), poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), and riverbank grape (*Vitis riparia*) crawl up the trees. Exotic species have invaded and degraded these hillside forests: the white mulberry tree (*Morus alba*) and the honeysuckles, both bush (*Biervilla sessilifolia*) and Japanese (*Lonicera japonica*). To stay moist, the forest depends on rain and runoff, which spills off the bluff in sheets that carry soil to the slope.

The staircase gives way to a short hike through a dry forest to the prairie.



Fulfs Hill Prairie: Limestone Glade

Where weather is hot and sunny, the soil is thinner at the edge of the bluff where the limestone becomes an outcropping.

The high mineral content of the soil that trickles down into the limestone crevices makes it very fertile. Tall grasses of the prairie give way to short side-oats gramma (*Boutelouca curtipendula*) and little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) that must be able to root in the crevices in the rock. Ferns can be found in the rare puddles of shade, along with columbine (*Genus Aquiligia*) and dwarf larkspur (*Delphinium tricorne*). Many are plants that are typical to the Missouri Ozarks and found in Illinois only at Fulfs Hill Prairie.

The limestone glade must be maintained by controlled burning to weed out unwanted trees. Most of Illinois' glades have been lost to red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and other trees that thrive on limestone.

It's hard work to reclaim a glade. The trees must be cut one by one. Bulldozers are a no-no. They tear up the thin soils and damage the rock formations underneath.

As on the hillsides, the cut cedar must be allowed to dry on the ground. Then, it is burned to rejuvenate the native plant community: American aloe (*Agave americana*), purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*), false boneset (*Brickellia eupatorioides*), and Missouri orange coneflower (*Rudbeckia missouriensis*).

Fults Hill Prairie

Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve—532 acres of upland woodland, prairie, and glade communities—is the largest complex of loess hill prairies in Illinois. Every season brings new blooms to the prairie: woodland wildflowers in the spring, prairie wildflowers in early summer, grasses and wildflowers in late summer, and a blaze of color as the grasses and trees change in the fall. The list is long: tall anemone (*Anemone virginiana*), many asters (*Genus Aster*), blue hearts (*Buchnera Americana*), rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*), spiked lobelia (*Lobelia spicata*), cleft phlox (*Phlox bifida*), a variety of goldenrods (*Genus Solidago*), and others. Of the threatened and endangered species, pale false foxglove (*Agalinis skinneriana*) and crested coral-root orchid (*Hexalectris spicata*) are only found on hill prairies like Fults.

Along with the seasonal blooms, new birds come to the prairies with each season as well: migrating warblers in the spring and hawks in the fall. By late fall, eagles might be seen soaring over the bluff.

Winter brings tracks in the snow from deer, rabbits, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, coyotes, and foxes. From spring to fall, all hikers should keep an eye out for snakes, particularly the Great Plains rat snake, which spends its days hiding under a rock, but forages on small mammals at night. Only the copperhead and the timber (*Illinois threatened species*) and the eastern massasauga (*Illinois endangered species*) rattlesnakes are poisonous.



Fults Hill Prairie/Kidd Lake

The common grasses—little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and side-oats gramma (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)—anchor the well-drained loess. Forty feet thick at the top of the hill, the loess thins to almost nothing at the edge of the bluff. Exotic grasses—Canada bluegrass (*Poa compressa*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), and meadow fescue (*Festuca pratensis*)—must be controlled.

Managers burn the prairie to stop the encroachment of woody plants: black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), the oaks (*Genus Quercus*), roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), and smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*). Controlled burning is done on many of the bluff top prairies on the American Bottom, even those not in state preserves.

The hike down to the edge of the bluff is very steep and the path very narrow, but it will take you to the limestone glade at the edge of the bluff.¹⁰





Fults Hill Prairie: Dry Upland Forest

On the upper slope of the prairies and on the ridges that surround the hill prairies and the limestone glades are dry-mesic upland forests, treed in black oak (*Quercus velutina*), post oak (*Quercus stellata*), and black hickory (*Carya texana*),

which is more common west of the Mississippi. These are slow-growing, drought-resistant trees that thrive on rocky ridges or in sandy soils and provide nuts and acorns—food for wildlife. Redbud (*Cercis Canadensis*), dogwood (*Genus Cornus*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), and sassafras (*Genus Lauraceae*) grow in the understory. Woody vines—poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), bristly greenbrier (*Smilax hispida*), and summer grape (*Vitis aestivalis*)—cling to the trees. Spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) blossom in April and disappear. So do woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*), false Solomon's seal (*Smilacina racemosa*), Virginia spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*), and bell wort (*Genus Uvularia*).

Once these forests were open savanna, woodlands scattered with large spreading trees, generally oaks, which had little competition as they grew. Fire suppression has allowed trees to fill the spaces between, and the oaks gave way to sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*), and slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*). Should logging and grazing occur, exotic species follow: Osage orange (*Maclaura pomifera*), white mulberry (*Morus alba*), the honeysuckles (*Genus Caprifoliaceae*), and multi-flora rose (*Rosa multiflora*).

Kaskaskia Quarry

South of Fults and a little north of Prairie du Rocher, Bluff Road runs along the valley wall. The Kaskaskia Quarry, just north of Prairie du Rocher, produces high quality, chemical-grade, crushed limestone, which is used for agricultural lime and which is carted directly to the Prairie du Rocher dock on the Mississippi where it is loaded into barges.





Modoc Rock Shelter National Historic Site

In the four miles between the villages of Prairie du Rocher and Modoc to the south, humans have lived in the shadow of the bluffs for the last 9,500 years. Twenty-three miles south of Old Valmeyer, three miles south of Prairie du Rocher, and immediately south of Barbeau Creek, the bluffs turned to soft Aux Vases Sandstone resting on Ste. Genevieve Limestone. Glacial floods, bursting out of clear lakes that covered northern Minnesota and stretched north into Canada, eroded shelters and overhangs into the base of the bluffs. Archeological studies in the 1950s and 1980s discovered that humans began occupying the site soon after the floods expired 9,500 years ago, ending the last ice age. Barbeau Creek, carrying soil eroded from its upland watershed, buried evidence of successive layers of human habitation as it deposited its alluvial fan on the floodplain.

In two different areas, 150 feet apart, archeologists dug down through the layers to discover hearths where people have

gathered over the last 9,000 years. The earliest were small groups of hunters who camped in the shelter, probably for short stays in the fall. They hunted deer, raccoon, opossum, ducks, geese, and swans; caught fish; dug freshwater mussels; and ate pecans, walnuts, and hazelnuts. People of the Woodland Culture occupied the site beginning about 4,000 years ago. This period saw the beginnings of agriculture and the use of pottery. Wild game still made up most of their diet.

Beginning about 800 years ago, farmers occupied the site. They grew corn to supplement their diet of wild game. They created tools, ornaments, and utensils from bone, fashioning awls from splinters of the long bones of deer. Using stone, they made hammers and choppers. They cut beads from the hollow wing and leg bones of turkeys, eagles, and swans. Archeologists found evidence of birds in the shelter, birds rarely seen in Illinois today: the Brown Pelican, the Mississippi Kite, the Sandhill Crane, and the extinct Passenger Pigeon.¹¹

Doiron/Bienvenue House south of Prairie du Rocher

A terrace of either glacial outwash or colluvium or both rests against the bluff and rises five to twelve feet above the floodplain. French settlers who arrived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found protection here when the Mississippi inundated the floodplain from valley wall to valley wall. French priests settled on the American Bottom at Kaskaskia in 1703 on the peninsula between the Mississippi and Kaskaskia rivers. Prairie du Rocher, which gives its official founding as 1722 and draws its name from the rocks that rise above it, emerged as a hamlet early in the 1730s. For mutual protection, the early French settled in nuclear villages, farmed common fields, and pastured their livestock in common lots. Few located "habitations" outside the villages. That pattern began to break down by the mid-1780s as new arrivals settled outside the compact villages and built farms. Joseph Doiron migrated from Canada in 1839 and built a small French vertical post house (*poteaux-sur-sole*) with brick fill on a low rise of colluvium at the base of the bluff. Here, his house would be protected from flooding on the bottoms. The Bienvenu family, which owned the house at a later time, descended from Antoine Bienvenu of Kaskaskia, who built one of the original "habitations" outside of Prairie du Rocher after he received land grants between the bluff and the river in 1737.¹²





After a long hot summer with little rain, the moist soil that held water so well in the vernal pools dries out and can carry the weight of a person walking through the forest.

Before the Village of Valmeyer purchased the Salt Lick Land and Water Preserve from Columbia Quarry, hikers had to bushwhack through the woods to get to the highest point in Monroe County. Now volunteers have started blazing hiking trails and reclaiming its hill prairies and glades. It's demanding work: They take chain saws to elm, maple, and pin oaks, cutting them one by one and running the felled trees through a wood chipper. Once they cut cedar, it has to be allowed to dry on the ground. Then, it is burned. They attack bush honeysuckle aggressively. If they don't, it will return and spread like wildfire. And they learn what keeps forbs like the crested coral root orchid endangered in Illinois.⁷



NOTES

- ¹ Quinta Scott, *The Mississippi: A Visual Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), chapter 1, “Assembling the Basin.”
- ² *Sinkhole Plain Area Assessment*, Vol. 1, Geology (Champaign: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Office of Scientific Research and Analysis, State Geological Survey Division, 1998); *Sinkhole Plain Area Assessment*, Vol. 2, Water Resources (Champaign: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Office of Scientific Research and Analysis, State Geological Survey Division, 1998); *Sinkhole Plain Area Assessment*, Vol. 3, Living Resources (Champaign: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Office of Scientific Research and Analysis, State Geological Survey Division, 1998); *Sinkhole Plain Area Assessment*, Vol. 4, Part III, Archaeological Resources (Champaign: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Office of Scientific Research and Analysis, State Geological Survey Division, 1998).
- ³ D. W. Webb, M. J. Wetzel, P. C. Reed, L. R. Phillippe, and T. C. Young, “Karst Springs in the Sinkhole Plain of Illinois: Their Community Diversity and Hydrogeology,” Technical Report 1996, *Illinois Natural History Survey*, Center for Biodiversity, Carbondale, 1996; Timothy R. Pauketat and Susan M. Alt, “The Making and Meaning of a Mississippian Ace-Head Cache,” *Antiquity* (December 2004).
- ⁴ “Clifftop: Protecting Our Bluffs in Monroe and Randolph Counties,” *Natural History Survey of the Renault Grant*, <http://clifftopalliance.org/nhsurvey/nhsurvey.htm>.
- ⁵ Kenneth R. Robertson, Mark W. Schwartz, Jeffrey W. Olson, Brain K. Dunphy, and H. David Clarke, “50 Years of Change in Illinois Hill Prairies,” *Erigenia: Journal of the Illinois Native Plant Society*, no. 14 (January 1996), 41-52, <http://www.inhs.illinois.edu/~kenr/hillprairie.html>.
- ⁶ Dale L. McElrath, Andrew C. Fortier, Brad Koldehoff Emerson, and Thomas E. Emerson, “The American Bottom: An Archaic Cultural Crossroads,” in Thomas E. Emerson, ed., *Archaic Societies: Diversity and Complexity across the Midcontinent* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 338.
- ⁷ Maddox, Teri, “Blufftop treasure: Volunteers build trails to Valmeyer’s Salt Lick Point,” *Belleville News-Democrat*, October 31, 2010, <http://fefwww.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/4625953>.
- ⁸ Thomas R. Biebighauser, “A Guide to Creating Vernal Ponds,” OPFW Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management, <http://herpcenter.ipfw.edu/outreach/VernalPonds/VernalPondGuide.pdf>; F. B. Denny, R. J. Jacobson, and W. J. Nelson, 2009, Bedrock Geology of the Valmeyer Quadrangle, Monroe County, Illinois: Illinois State Geological Survey, Illinois Geologic Quadrangle Map, IGQ Valmeyer, 2 sheets, 1:24,000, <http://www.isgs.illinois.edu/maps-data-pub/isgs-quads/v/pdf-files/valmeyer-bg.pdf>.
- ⁹ “Clifftop: Protecting Our Bluffs in Monroe and Randolph Counties, Illinois,” <http://www.clifftopalliance.org/>.
- ¹⁰ Jason Ney and Terry Nichols, *America’s Natural Places: The Midwest* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010), 9-10.
- ¹¹ Steven R. Ahler, “Stratigraphy and Radiocarbon Chronology of Modoc Rock Shelter, Illinois,” *American Antiquity* 58 (July 1, 1993); Timothy R. Pauketat, “A Tour Guide to the Prehistory and Native Cultures of Southwestern Illinois and the Greater St. Louis Area, Springfield, Illinois,” Illinois Humanities Council, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1993, 38-39; Melvin L. Fowler, “Modoc Rock Shelter: An Early Archaic Site in Southern Illinois,” *American Antiquity* 24 (1959), 257-70.
- ¹² Conversation with Ruth Bienvenue Menard, August 29, 2011, at Ruma, Illinois; Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 109; William Rector, Surveyor, Common Field Lands and Low Land Commons of Prairie du Rocher, 1810, http://www.visitprairiedurocher.com/history/maps/pdr_commons_map_1810.html.



Want a more in-depth look at this topic? You can acquire Quinta Scott's new book, *The Mississippi: A Visual Biography*, from either Amazon at

http://www.amazon.com/Mississippi-Visual-Biography-Quinta-Scott/dp/0826218407/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320087304&sr=1-1

or from the University of Missouri Press by calling 1-800-621-8476, or on line at

<http://press.umsystem.edu/product/Mississippi,1255.aspx>



Many African Americans saw serving in the army during the Civil War as a precursor to full citizenship rights. Frederick Douglass summed it up best: "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship." Prints like this one encouraged former slaves—"contraband," to some—to enlist. (Image: Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University)

Contraband Camps in St. Louis:

A Contested Path to Freedom

BY JANE M. DAVIS

In the early years of the Civil War, the Union army and the Federal government faced an unexpected consequence of success. As Union armies pushed through the outskirts of the Confederacy and into the heart of the South, slaves from surrounding plantations and communities began to flock to Union lines. Due to an unclear Federal policy, Union commanders answered in a variety of ways the question of how to treat African American refugees. From providing employment and the opportunity for freedom to refusal of shelter within Union lines or even return to slave owners, the commanders of the Union forces shaped the fate of African American refugees and, in many ways, the Federal response to the emancipation question. As the number of refugees increased, the Union army and

various aid agencies began to create camps near Union lines and in Northern cities to shelter the refugees. These "contraband" camps, as they became known, often became the foundation for African American communities after the war.

In May of 1861, Union General Benjamin Butler determined that since slaves in Virginia were being used to build fortifications by the Confederates, blacks who fled to Union lines were in effect confiscated property of the enemy and, therefore, "contraband." This was a reversal of his previous decision to return slaves to their owners when they made their way to Union lines. Butler changed his treatment of fugitive slaves in part because he was no longer in the loyal Union state of Maryland, but also

because his understanding of the African American refugee or “contraband” issue had changed with the dramatic increase of slaves fleeing to Union lines. In November of 1861, orders from generals Henry Halleck and John Dix refused to allow African American refugees within the Union lines. Other generals held an even more proslavery view, allowing for Confederate slave hunters to enter Union lines and retrieve fugitive slaves upon identification. Still other commanders were more sympathetic to the plight of the slaves and refused to enforce the fugitive slave laws; two such officers lost their commands over the issue and were reprimanded.¹

The practice of allowing citizens permission to search Union camps for fugitive slaves was so great a concern that General Ulysses S. Grant issued General Order No. 14 in February of 1862, reiterating Halleck’s prohibition of fugitive slaves in the line. Grant was primarily concerned about the possibility of Confederate sympathizers entering camps to search for fugitive slaves, and he saw permits to search for slaves as a method for the enemy to gain military information in the process. Grant’s Order No. 14 addressed this by clearly stating that no permits would be granted for retrieval of slaves.



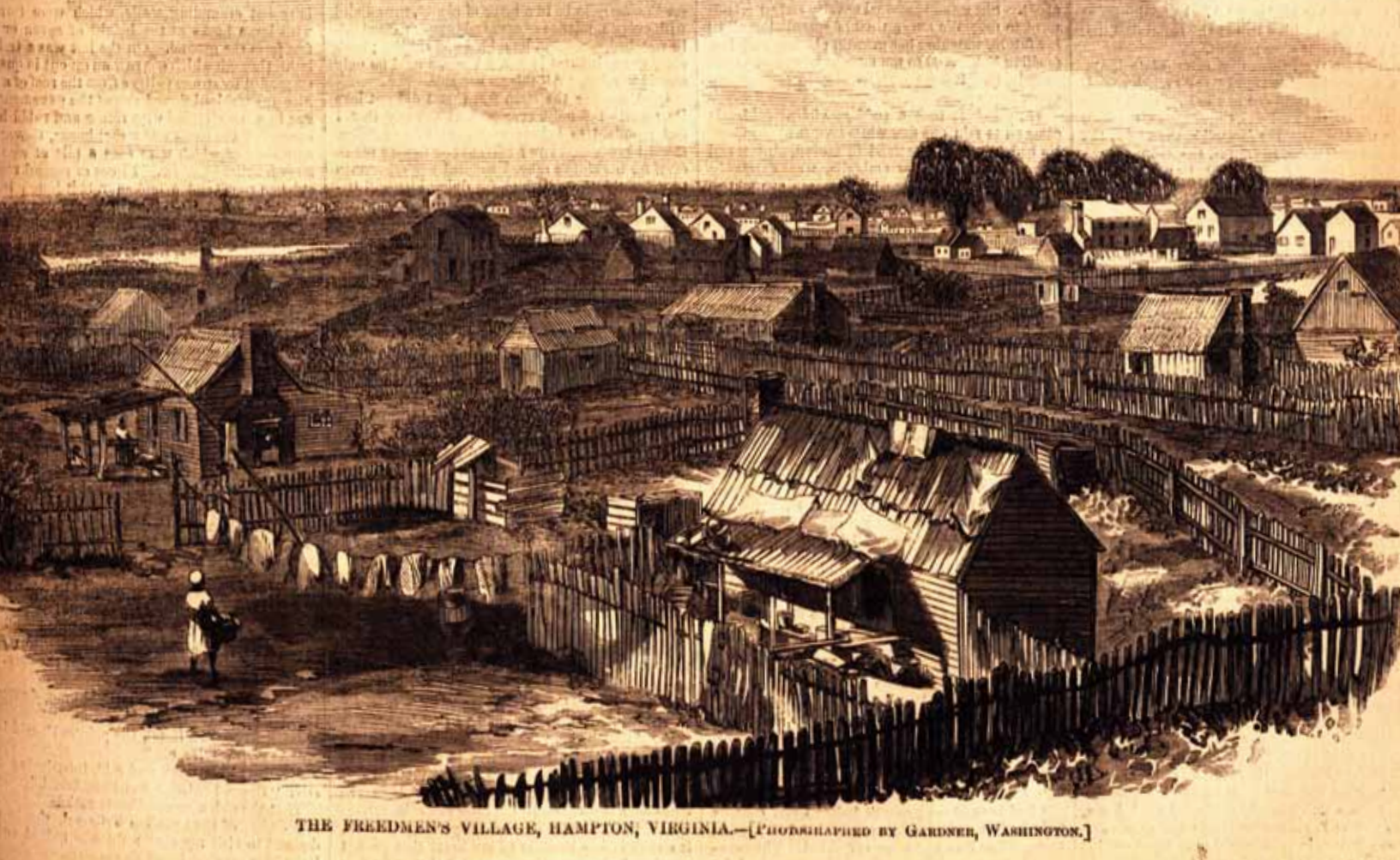
New Englander Benjamin Butler (1818-1893) was commander at Fort Monroe in Virginia when he first refused to return contraband slaves to their owners, flying in the face of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Starting in May 1862, Butler was commander of the newly occupied New Orleans; so many slaves arrived in the city with hopes of being emancipated under Butler’s command that he eventually had to exclude all unemployed former slaves from the city. Ironically, Butler supported Jefferson Davis over Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas at the 1860 Democratic National Convention. (Image: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)

Grant, like Butler, also saw the value in allowing fugitive slaves to remain within Union lines and proposed that African American refugees already in the Union lines or in areas captured by the Union army “will not be released or permitted to return to their Masters, but will be employed in the Quarter Masters Department, for the benefit of the Government.”² Grant did not wish to see the army used as a tool to return slaves to Rebel slave owners, but at the same time he did not seek to punish pro-Union slave owners and deny them access to their property. Since the majority of slaves fleeing to Grant’s lines in the South were obviously property of Rebel slave owners, Grant’s policy toward African American refugees solidified around the combined advantages of using African American labor to bolster and aide Union forces and to remove such labor from the hands of the enemy. In mid-August of 1862, Grant wrote to his sister:

The war is evidently growing oppressive to the Southern people. Their *institution* [sic] are beginning to have ideas of their own and every time an expedition goes out more or less of them follow in the wake of the army and come into camp. I am using them as teamsters, Hospital attendants, company cooks &c, thus saving soldiers to carry the musket. I dont [sic] know what is to become of these poor people in the end but it weakening [sic] the enemy to take them from them.³

Grant later mentioned in his memoirs that he felt compelled both by the army’s regulations and human decency to establish some method to house and employ the thousands of fugitive slaves who fled to Union lines. While primarily concerned with the employment of those able-bodied fugitive slaves that could perform essential support duties to the Union army, the Federal government and the Union commanders were eventually forced to create methods to deal with those refugees who were too infirm, too old, or too young to work for the army directly. Additionally, as the Federal government began to allow African Americans to serve in the military (permitted by the Emancipation Proclamation, effective January 1, 1863), black women were also excluded from this form of paid employment. Faced with these dependent refugees, Grant, Butler, and other Union generals authorized camps to house and feed these individuals.

Grant chose Army Chaplain John Eaton to organize the camps and coordinate the use of freed slave labor to support the Union army’s needs in Tennessee and the Lower South. Grant explained to Eaton that in doing so, the camps’ primary purpose was to transform the fugitive slaves from a burden to an asset.⁴ Eaton worked extensively both in Tennessee and Mississippi to coordinate the labors of African Americans and to establish pay scales and contracts for their labor. As the war progressed, African American men were encouraged to join the military and, as they did so, their families



THE FREEDMEN'S VILLAGE, HAMPTON, VIRGINIA.—[PHOTOGRAPHED BY GARDNER, WASHINGTON.]

During and soon after the Civil War, the federal government tried several experiments in granting land to former slaves. One was this Freedman's Village at Arlington, Virginia, the grounds of the former Custis-Lee plantation at the former home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The village housed some 1,100 freedmen after its dedication in December 1863. Later, it became the site of Arlington National Cemetery. (Image: Harper's Weekly, September 30, 1865; Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)

sought protection and shelter from the military as well. Throughout the course of the war, camps to house the “contrabands” were established throughout the South and border states to provide refuge to the growing number of African Americans fleeing the bonds of slavery. These camps became, according to many scholars, the foundations of African American communities throughout the South. As contrabands gathered together, they sought to reunite with their families, re-establish churches, and begin the building blocks of freedmen’s communities.⁵

Contraband camps that sprang up in the deeper South typically did so near Union encampments or near battlefields. The land surrounding the camps was usually unoccupied, and the Union military officials encouraged contrabands to farm and make use of this land. Villages and farms thus were established on the land surrounding contraband camps throughout the South. Some of these camps—like the one at Davis Bend in Louisiana on the former property of Jefferson and Joseph Davis and Freedmen’s Village in Arlington, Virginia, on the former Custis-Lee Plantation—became permanent African American communities. In other instances where the camps existed near urban centers, African American communities sprouted up near the camps in the cities.

The newly freed African Americans established churches and schools and began to establish businesses in these communities that would, like the ones in Arlington, Virginia, and near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, continue well into the twentieth century.

One such camp that was considered wildly successful by leaders at the time was the contraband camp at Davis Bend in Louisiana. Grant and Eaton worked together with the existing slave community to create a “Home Farm” system that sought to employ those slaves who remained and those who fled to the camp, and to provide them with food and shelter. By March of 1864, over 3,000 African American freedmen and women had gathered on the former plantation.⁶ Historian Eric Foner referred to Davis Bend as the “largest laboratory in black economic independence,” and Grant himself had urged Eaton to establish Davis Bend as a “Negro Paradise.”⁷ By leasing the land to the freedmen collectively and allowing them to pay for only rations, equipment, and animals from the government, Eaton helped to establish a community of freedmen that was not only self-sufficient but initially successful. The African Americans at Davis Bend had some strong advantages over the average freed slave, and the education and autonomy provided them by their previous masters only further

promoted their independence. In the years following the war, Davis Bend became a flourishing community in the Mississippi delta. In 1866, after the plantation was returned to his possession, Joseph Davis sold the land to his former slaves, Benjamin Montgomery and his sons. The Montgomery family would go on to be the founders of an African American community that would last until the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁸

In her book *Pursuit of the Dream*, Janet Hermann examines the unique situation at Davis Bend. Encouraged by the notions of productivity and the desire to create a workforce that would be autonomous and self-sustaining, the Davis brothers provided the slaves on their plantations with an unprecedented level of self-government and education. The Davis Bend slaves operated their own court system and were better educated than many of their white peers. The success of Davis Bend as a community is due to the combination of many factors, but Eaton and Grant saw the community's prosperity as a shining example of how free labor, as they envisioned it, could work.

Another such camp that evolved into a strong African American community well into the twentieth century was Freedmen's Village on the former Custis-Lee lands near Arlington, Virginia. Established in the summer of 1863 due to worsening conditions in the contraband camps near Washington, D.C., and a flood of newly freed slaves following the Emancipation Proclamation, Freedmen's Village was a thriving African American community until the War Department bought the lands in 1900 to establish, in part, Arlington National Cemetery. Working with the American Missionary Association (AMA), U.S. Army Quartermaster Colonel Elias M. Greene established the village to provide housing, work, and education for the newly freed slaves. The village had a hospital, school, and chapel, as well as a variety of shops where men could learn carpentry and blacksmithing and women could learn sewing and dressmaking skills. Any able-bodied inhabitants who were not otherwise employed by the military or these businesses were to work on nearby government farms for \$10 per month, with \$5 per month withheld for the "Contraband Fund" to pay for their upkeep.⁹

When the town was disbanded and the residents dispersed, many chose to remain in Arlington County and continue the communities established in the camps. In nearby Arlington, Virginia, some modern-day descendants of Freedmen's Villagers attend a number of churches originally established in the camp, and they continue to honor the camp as a foundation of the African American community in Arlington. Like many other contraband camps throughout the South, Freedmen's Village provided a foundation for fledgling African American communities even after the war ended and the communities were relocated. In recent years, a number of National Parks employees have begun to interpret and bring to light these African American communities. In the cases of Stones River National Battlefield and Shiloh National Military Park, the interpretation has included a discussion of contraband communities created on the sites of Civil War



General John Eaton (1829-1906) became Superintendent of Negro Affairs for Tennessee by appointment of General Ulysses S. Grant in 1863. He was responsible for not only the Davis Bend contraband camp, but also for establishing more than seventy schools for freedmen. (Image: Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Reference to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley, by John Eaton and Ethel Osgood Mason. Longmans [Greenman and Co., New York, 1907]. Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)

battlefields only to be uprooted when the War Department sought to preserve the lands as national battlefields.¹⁰

This pattern of community growth out of the former contraband camps does not seem to be reflected in the African American communities in St. Louis. Contraband camps played a very different role in border-state St. Louis than in Southern cities like Nashville, Memphis, New Berne, and Arlington. The camps of St. Louis—first in the Missouri Hotel and later in Benton Barracks—were not established to provide for the local fugitive slaves but rather for the fugitive slaves arriving from points south and west.¹¹ St. Louis also acted as way-station between the slave South and the free North and Midwest. Many African Americans who fled slavery in the Mississippi River valley did so by making their way as individuals to the promised lands of the North and Midwest, using the assistance of white Union soldiers who made arrangements to transport fugitives North, or through the organized relocation of contrabands to Northern employers by the military or aid societies.¹²

In further contrast to the rural areas where many Southern contraband camps were established, the areas in which the camps were established in St. Louis were not abandoned lands and were not available for confiscation after the war. In fact, the existing African American community in St. Louis often worked to provide assistance

Copy

Private and confidential

Washington D.C. Sept. 2, 1861

Major General Fremont

My dear Sir.

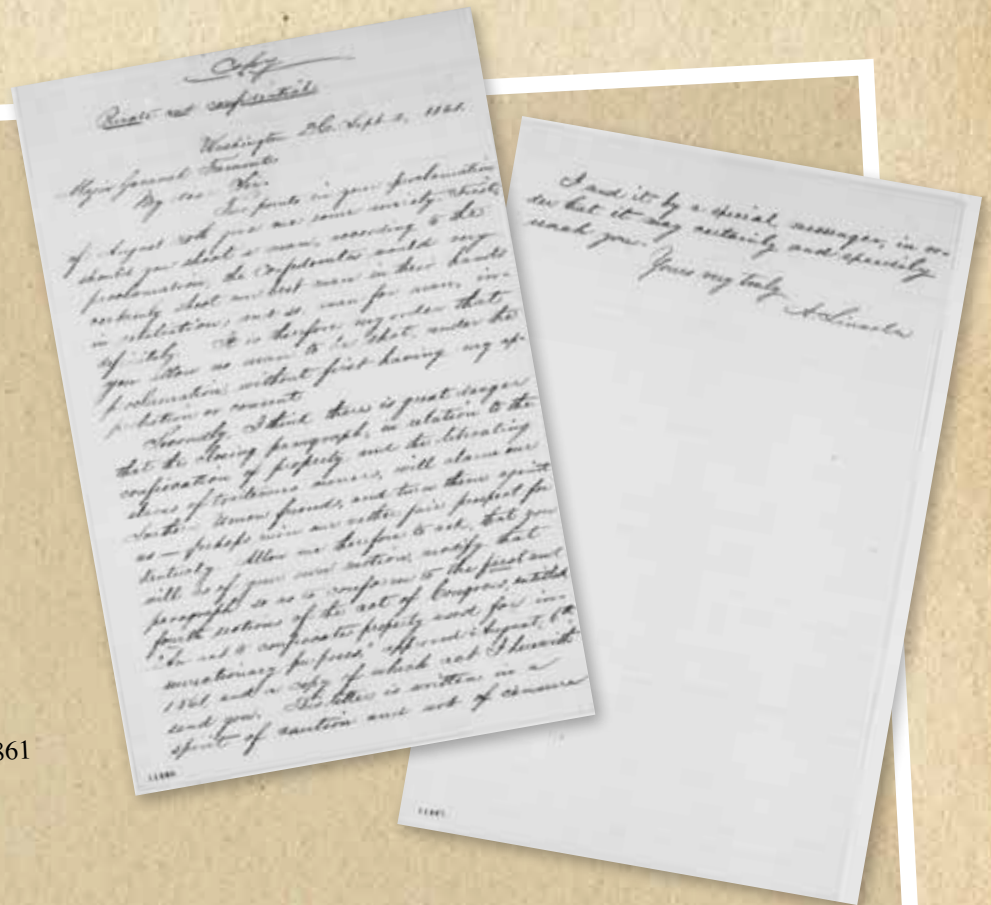
Two points in your proclamation of August 30th give me some anxiety. First, should you shoot a man, according to the proclamation, the Confederates would very certainly shoot our best man in their hands in retaliation; and so, man for man, indefinitely. It is therefore my order that you allow no man to be shot, under the proclamation, without first having my approbation or consent.

Secondly, I think there is great danger that the closing paragraph, in relation to the confiscation of property, and the liberating slaves of traitorous owners, will alarm our Southern Union friends, and turn them against us—perhaps ruin our rather fair prospect for Kentucky. Allow me therefore to ask, that you will as of your own motion, modify that paragraph so as to conform to the first and fourth sections of the act of Congress, entitled “An act to confiscate property used for insurrectionary purposes,” approved August 6th 1861, and a copy of which act I herewith send you. This letter is written in a spirit of caution and not of censure.

I send it by a special messenger, in order that it may certainly and speedily reach you.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln

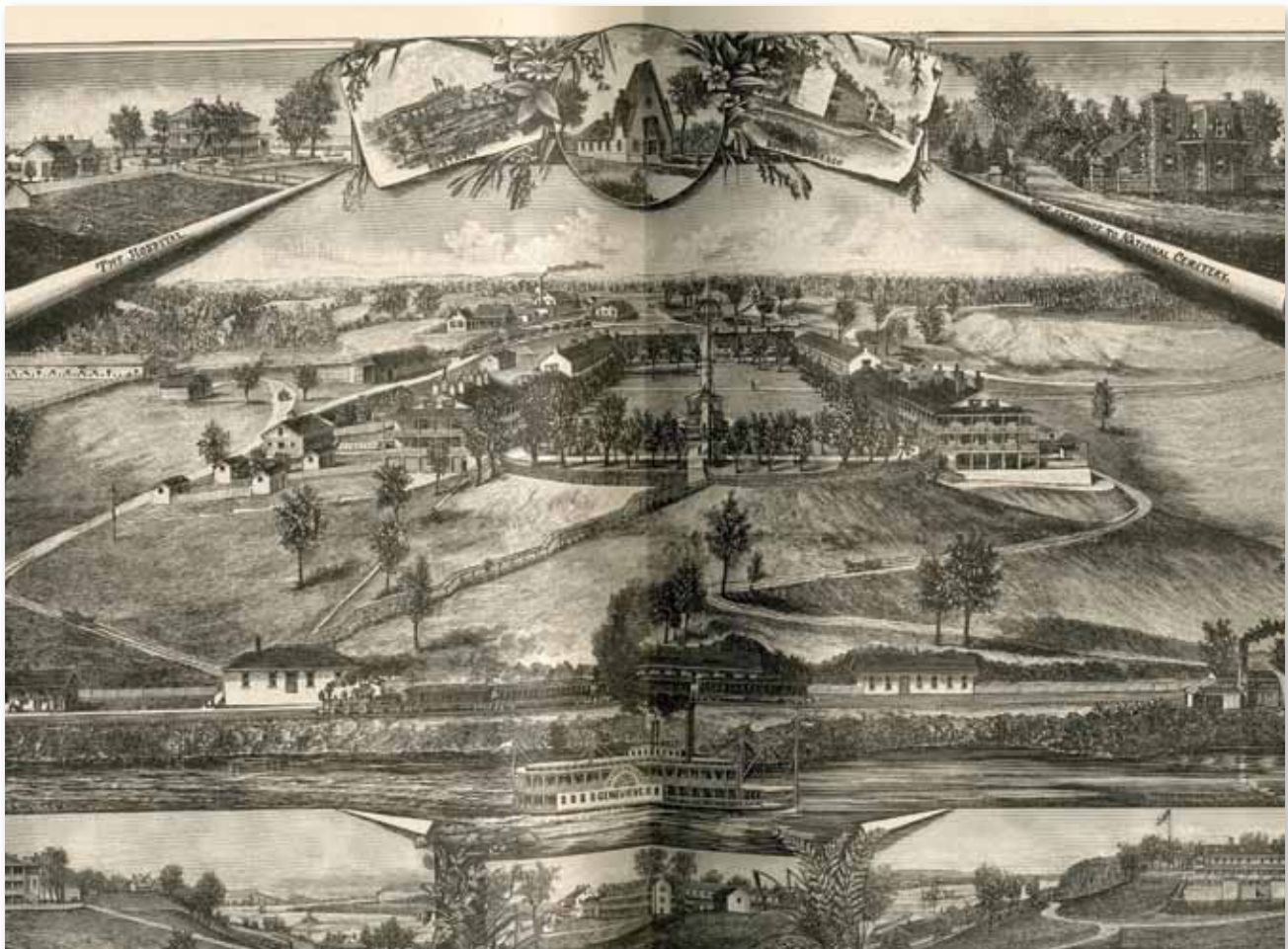


to those living in the camps and formed a number of aid organizations to enable their fellow African Americans to begin lives as freedmen. The combination of an existing African American community, the lack of available open land for settlement near the camps, and the policy of neutrality toward Missouri's slave owners by the Federal government created a very different experience in the contraband camps in St. Louis as compared to camps in the South. Unlike the camp at Arlington, Benton Barracks would not become the foundation for the African American community in St. Louis. The camps in St. Louis would instead act as another area where the notions of freedom, slavery, and emancipation were hammered out in the lives and actions of individuals.

African Americans living in contraband camps throughout the South and border states faced a number of challenges. Inadequate food and shelter, irregular pay, and, most importantly, a very uncertain status made life in the camps difficult. Despite congressional actions like the Confiscation Acts that allowed for the Union army

to employ and use fugitive slaves' labor as they saw fit, Southern blacks working for the United States military and living in the camps were not free, but merely confiscated from their Rebel owners.¹³ Before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, they were still technically the property of their masters, albeit "confiscated" property. Even after Emancipation, many residents of the contraband camps were still not legally free. Those contrabands residing in camps in border states or in areas that were Union controlled at the time of the Proclamation were not freed, and in some instances they faced a return to slavery and their masters.¹⁴ In the border states like Missouri, their status was extremely difficult to determine. Torn between the desire to appease loyal Union slaveholders and the urge to punish the Confederate sympathizers within the state, Union commanders, as well as state, federal, and local officials, interpreted the vague rulings on contrabands and fugitive slaves issued by the president, Congress, and military leaders as they saw fit. In some cases commanders overstepped the boundaries sketchily drawn by the

When Jefferson Barracks was established just south of St. Louis in 1826, it was the army's first Infantry School of Practice for training troops. By the Civil War, more than 200 future Civil War generals had served at some time at Jefferson Barracks. During the war, much of the Barracks was used as a hospital. *(Image: Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)*





Samuel Curtis (1805-1866), the former mayor of Keokuk, Iowa, joined the Union army soon after the Civil War started. As a reward for his organizational work in St. Louis in late 1861, General Henry Halleck (John Charles Fremont's successor commanding the Western Department) placed him in command of the Army of the Southwest. Before war's end, Curtis defeated Sterling Price's army at the Battle of Westport in 1864. (Image: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)

president and the people of Missouri, and in others they did as little as possible to enforce existing policies. Fueled by the First Confiscation Act in August of 1861, General John C. Fremont challenged the authority of slaveholders in Missouri by declaring martial law and announcing that all slaves of Rebel masters were to be free. However, Fremont had taken too bold a stance against slavery and taken action that was beyond what Lincoln or Missouri officials would support at that time. Loyal Union slaveholders objected so strongly to the proclamation that Lincoln was forced to step in and require Fremont to comply with the more restrictive Confiscation Act. After Fremont was relieved of his duty shortly thereafter in November of 1861, his replacement, General Henry Halleck, issued General Order No. 3 banning fugitive slaves and all other “persons not explicitly authorized” from Union camps. The order was intended to “separate the Union army from any involvement with slavery in the loyal state of Missouri.” However, the enforcement of the order proved difficult, and Halleck was forced by circumstances to explain the order time and again. By preventing Union troops in Missouri from seizing slaves from loyal owners or allowing fugitive slaves to seek protection from their masters in Union lines, Halleck attempted to walk the fine line between support of loyal slave owners and denial of support to Rebels. After the

passage of the Confiscation Acts, it became more difficult for Union commanders to walk this line.¹⁵

Contraband camps in St. Louis and the rest of Missouri suffered from this lack of clarity in status. While camps in Mississippi, Louisiana, Virginia, and the tidelands of North Carolina were organized to provide African American refugees with work and shelter with varying degrees of success, camps in St. Louis—like the ones established at Benton Barracks, Jefferson Barracks, and the Missouri Hotel—were of a more transient nature, designed to provide immediate aid to fugitive slaves rather than acting as a transition from slavery to freedom. The military authorities in Missouri responded to plaintive requests from African American soldiers to provide rations and housing to their dependents with refusal. “Since they were legally still slaves, their owners, not the government, were responsible for their care.”¹⁶

In March of 1863, former Arkansas slaves were sent by steamboat to St. Louis. The conditions at the camp in Helena, Arkansas, were abysmal, and military officials and aid agencies determined that the best solution was to move the African American refugees to a location where they might be more able to find work and support. When 500 freed slaves landed in St. Louis in the custody of Army Chaplain Samuel W. Sawyer, the commander in charge of St. Louis, General Samuel Curtis, was faced with a difficult decision. Curtis was initially upset and overwhelmed by the surprise arrival of the refugees and the associated difficulties of housing and feeding the refugees in a city where slavery was still legal, but he made an effort to accommodate them to the best of his ability. While Curtis was challenged by city officials and pro-slavery sympathizers, some insinuating that the refugees would not be safe in a slave state, he determined that if the government were going to begin an official policy of shipping and moving contrabands, it should be done so where there was an armed force to support that policy.¹⁷

Sawyer set up the contrabands in the Missouri Hotel at the corner of Main and Morgan streets near the river where they were provided with a quartermaster, a surgeon, and some staff to work as clerks. Curtis also allowed the St. Louis Ladies Contraband Relief Society to set up an office in the hotel and a neighboring building to function as a hospital. Despite a desire to return to his family in Indiana, Sawyer was required to stay and find work for the refugees. Not only did he find work on the levees and fortifications around the city for the contrabands, but within a very short time, Sawyer had arranged to employ over 300 throughout the city. Sawyer and Curtis encouraged a policy of hiring out the refugees for work either out of state or housed elsewhere in the city. As a result, the number of residents at the hotel was low.¹⁸

Besides finding work for the refugees, Sawyer was also responsible for providing them with documentation to prove their status. As of May 1863, the status of African Americans in St. Louis was defined in a variety of ways. Contraband or those former slaves who were employed by Rebel forces were given certificates of freedom upon proof

of such employment. Freedmen and women, or those who were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, received certificates of freedom by showing that their owners' residences were in states included in the Proclamation. The most difficult were those individuals who were slaves in Missouri. Not yet freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves of loyal Missouri residents could only be freed by their masters or by service in the military. Slaves of masters deemed disloyal by the provost marshal could gain their freedom by presenting the evidence and receiving a certificate of freedom; however, it was difficult for the military officials to consistently judge who was a loyal slave owner from a disloyal one, and oftentimes the determination was left up to an official's personal view of



Certificates such as this one from Virginia were designed to document that African Americans in slave states were, in fact, free blacks rather than slaves. They functioned as a sort of "passport" for free blacks or manumitted slaves in slave states. (Image: Library of Congress)

emancipation. Finally, there were those African Americans from Tennessee or Kentucky who were "presumptively free" based on the assumption that their masters had been disloyal, but these states were not included in the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves from these states were not given certificates of freedom in St. Louis or Missouri, but instead were given passes to leave the state and migrate to free states.¹⁹

While the camps in St. Louis were relatively safer than nearby camps in Helena and Cairo, Illinois, and the African American refugees in St. Louis were far more likely to be provided with work, shelter, and education, they were also very vulnerable to kidnapping and sale further south. In her book *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest*, Leslie A. Schwalm examines the difficulties facing African Americans in St. Louis. Alice Jones, a free woman with papers, was held in jail at the word of a local slave trader until she could have witnesses testify that she was not

a runaway slave. Those who were fugitive slaves were subject to arrest and imprisonment in the St. Louis city jail, where they might be freed by Union soldiers only to be recaptured by a different unit.²⁰

Despite the danger of capture and imprisonment, African American refugees at the Missouri Hotel and later at Benton Barracks worked to create lives for themselves outside of bondage. Instrumental in this transition to freedom was the work of the various aid societies in St. Louis. Both black and white aid organizations worked to feed, clothe, house, and educate the residents of the Missouri Hotel and Benton Barracks. The Contraband Relief Society, a branch of the St. Louis Ladies Union Aid Society, was an organization of white women who sought to "clothe the destitute, feed the starving, provide medical treatment and care for the sick, furnish those who can work, with employment, and give such other aid as particular cases may require."²¹ Working in conjunction with the military and other aid societies, the Contraband Relief Society helped establish two schools to provide much needed educational opportunities, and it took on much of the work of organizing employment outside the city.²²



From the outset, camps in St. Louis and throughout the South were not just intended as places of refuge that would merely house and feed African American refugees. Instead, those involved intended the camps to lift former slaves out of subjugation and provide them with the means of self-support. Grant was reported to have said that not only could the contrabands support the troops, but after proving himself as an independent laborer, the freedman could be made into a soldier, and then a citizen.²³ John Eaton reported in his memoirs that the challenge of the camps was quite simply, "how was the slave to be transformed into a freeman?"²⁴ One path for this transformation was education. In addition to helping African American refugees find work and shelter in the city, the camps provided an opportunity for education. The American Missionary Association (AMA) began teaching in earnest at the Missouri Hotel in March of 1863. J. L. Richardson began teaching in the kitchen of the hotel, but he was soon given a classroom and was extremely impressed with his students' eagerness to learn. Richardson's classes grew and despite a number of challenges (including the burning of a school building days after it was opened), the AMA's effort to educate blacks in St. Louis continued.²⁵

Whites were not alone in their efforts to assist the African American refugees at the contraband camps in St. Louis. Free blacks of St. Louis did a great deal with limited resources to help their newly freed brethren. The Colored Ladies' Contraband Relief Society made every effort to visit wounded African American soldiers housed in Benton Barracks. In addition to visiting wounded soldiers, the ladies would make efforts to "teach them to read, read to them, and comfort them in many ways."²⁶ African American free women who were employed as nurses and laundresses also made efforts to provide support and comfort to the fugitives in the camps and the African American soldiers housed in Benton Barracks in a

To Miss Sadie Curtis.

BENTON BARRACKS

PARADE MARCH

BENTON BARRACKS
From S. East.

COMPOSED BY JULIUS TENZLER

ST. LOUIS


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When Julius Tenzler wrote this march in 1862, Benton Barracks was primarily an encampment for Union troops. Over time, it housed a substantial hospital, became a barracks for paroled prisoners of war released by the Confederacy, and acted as a substantial "contraband camp" for former slaves. (Image: Special Collections, the Sheridan Libraries, The Johns Hopkins University)

similar manner. In 1864, supported by the AMA, ten black men were chosen by their community to create a school board and began to establish free schools for the African American children of St. Louis. In the years following the war, the St. Louis African American community held fairs and raised money to provide for education and assistance to those less fortunate. They even made a concerted effort to aid those African Americans fleeing the South for Kansas during the Exoduster migration. While it was difficult for free blacks in St. Louis to aid the new arrivals in the contraband camps due to limited resources and white interference, the community did attempt to provide support in ways that were possible. Throughout the city, African Americans worked with churches, aid agencies, and as individuals to provide aid and support to their community.²⁷

A number of factors made the St. Louis contraband experience vastly different from the contraband experience further south and in more rural settings. A limited amount of available land near where camps were established, an existing free African American community, and a different style of management in the camps all combined for a unique camp experience. A number of scholars have examined how contraband camps acted as a foundation for African American communities throughout the South and in border states. In a number of instances, the foundations of twentieth-century African American communities were based in the camps. However, St. Louis had little available land near the camps, and the existing African American communities inhabited other areas of the city. Well before the Civil War began, six African American churches had been established in St. Louis serving congregations throughout the city. Additionally, schools for free blacks had been established before the war, although they were met with harsh resistance by whites.²⁸

The African American community in St. Louis, free or slave, faced a number of challenges during the Civil War. While trying to preserve their communities, navigate the ever-changing waters of who was free and who was not, and maintain a secure environment for their families, African Americans of St. Louis were also faced with the additional challenge of dealing with a massive influx of newcomers who were, for the most part, unprepared to be self-sufficient. The free blacks of St. Louis stepped up and did what they could to provide for the fugitive slaves entering the city. While they were somewhat limited by resources and restrictions placed on them by white aid

organizations, they still made the attempt. Both the area around the Missouri Hotel and the land around Benton Barracks show great increases in African American population in later years, but this may be due to a variety of factors. The African American population of St. Louis rose astronomically during the Civil War years, from 3,297 on the 1860 Census to 22,088 by the 1870 Census. The areas near the river and downtown St. Louis showed the largest increase in African American population, particularly the eighth ward, during this time. Later in the twentieth century, a strong African American community arose in the neighborhood known as the “Ville” near Fairgrounds Park and the remains of Benton Barracks. When restrictive covenants preventing African Americans from purchasing property in specific neighborhoods became popular in the twentieth century, the Ville remained one of the few neighborhoods open to African American homeowners.²⁹

In areas where an African American community did not exist or was sparsely populated before the war, the settlements that occurred near former contraband camps provide a clear picture of how communities form. However, in areas where the African American community existed prior to the war, the camps played a more subtle role. In Arlington, Virginia, Freedmen’s Village arose out of a camp that was created on vacant lands confiscated during the war. In cities like St. Louis, the camps were located where there happened to be available property or in a military barracks. The rise in African American population in the eighth ward following the war might have been a direct result of the Missouri Hotel and the initial contraband camp, or it might have been the result of a combination of factors, such as lower property values near industrial areas and an existing African American community in the downtown area. The twentieth-century African American community that arose in the Ville was less a result of the proximity of Benton Barracks than the impact of racially restrictive covenants. While the contraband camps’ direct impact on the St. Louis African American community is not as clear as it is in other regions, the camps and emancipation did lead to a dramatic increase in African American residents throughout the city and a community that sought new life in freedom.

NOTES

- ¹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3; John Eaton and Ethel Osgood Mason, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Attention Paid to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), 5; Louis S. Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy toward Southern Blacks, 1861-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 136-37.
- ² Ulysses S. Grant, John Y. Simon, and Ulysses S. Grant Association, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), vol. 4: 290.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 5:310-11.
- ⁴ Howard C. Westwood, "Grant's Role in Beginning Black Soldierly," *Illinois Historical Journal* 79 (Autumn 1986): 199-200.
- ⁵ Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen's Community* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977), Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 186-88, 484; Joseph P. Reidy, "'Coming from the Shadow of the Past': The Transition from Slavery to Freedom at Freedmen's Village, 1863-1900," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95 (1987): 404.
- ⁶ Stephen Joseph Ross, "Freed Soil, Freed Labor, Freed Men: John Eaton and the Davis Bend Experiment," *Journal of Southern History* 44 (May 1978): Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 91-96.
- ⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, The New American Nation series (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 58; Eaton and Mason, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, Loc. 2321-26.
- ⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 58; Eaton and Mason, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, Loc. 2321-26.
- ⁹ Reidy, "'Coming from the Shadow of the Past': The Transition from Slavery to Freedom at Freedmen's Village, 1863-1900," 405-27.
- ¹⁰ "Civil War Defenses of Washington—Living Contraband—Former Slaves in the Nation's Capital during the Civil War (U.S. National Park Service)," n.d., <http://www.nps.gov/cwdw/historyculture/living-contraband-former-slaves-in-the-capital-during-and-after-the-civil-war.htm>; Jesse J. Holland, "Arlington Graves Cover 'Freedman's Village' — US news — Life — msnbc.com," n.d., http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/36651047/ns/us_news-life/t/arlington-graves-cover-freedmans-village/.
- ¹¹ Ira Berlin *et al.*, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 133.
- ¹² Leslie A. Schwalm, "'Overrun with Free Negroes': Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest," *Civil War History* 50 (2004): 153-54.
- ¹³ Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, Loc. 190-95.
- ¹⁴ The issue of Unionist slave owners was particularly thorny, and the Emancipation Proclamation did little to provide clarity. Union commanders in the field were left to their own prejudices and in many cases allowed to make their own judgments about who was free and who was slave. Some generals felt that the return of slaves to loyal Unionists was necessary and made every effort to do so in spite of the wishes of Congress. "While the freedom of blacks fleeing from the enemy was assured after January 1, 1863 (when the final Emancipation Proclamation was issued), black residents of loyal counties remained legally enslaved. Congress restrained General John Dix from seeking out the masters of fugitive slaves, but when loyal masters retained actual possession of their slave property. Dix promised recognition and protection." *Ibid.*, Loc. 326-29.
- ¹⁵ Louis S. Gerteis, *Civil War St. Louis* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 263; Berlin *et al.*, *Slaves No More*, 21-23.
- ¹⁶ Berlin *et al.*, *Slaves No More*, 160.
- ¹⁷ Samuel Sawyer to Brigadier General Prentiss, March 16, 1863, quoted in Ira Berlin, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*, Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, ser. 1, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 565.
- ¹⁸ Samuel Sawyer to Brigadier General Prentiss, March 16, 1863, *Ibid.*, 565-566; Gerteis, *Civil War St. Louis*, 273-275.
- ¹⁹ Lucien Eaton to Major General Schofield, May 30, 1863, Berlin, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*, 571-73.
- ²⁰ Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), Kindle Electronic Edition Loc. 1095-97, 1104-6.
- ²¹ Contraband Relief Society, "Circular Letter from the Contraband Relief Society, St. Louis, Mo. to the Public," Circular, February 1863, 1, <http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/CivilWar&CISOPTR=7293&REC=8>.
- ²² Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, Loc. 1080-89. Initially, many Union commanders, including Grant, sought to ship the Southern contrabands North to Midwestern states like Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin to alleviate the labor shortage caused by the war and to provide work and shelter for the African Americans fleeing the South. This was faced with immense opposition by Midwesterners, despite the acknowledged labor shortage due to a number of reasons. Schwalm examines this issue in depth in her article "'Overrun with Free Negroes': Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest." Since officials in St. Louis were well aware of the inherent problems of relocating fugitive slaves from the deeper South to Missouri and surrounding areas, this article may reveal

insights into white attitudes towards contrabands in St. Louis and the reasons many were shipped out of the area to work. Leslie A. Schwalm, “‘Overrun with Free Negroes’: Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest,” *Civil War History* 50 (2004): 145-174.

²³ Eaton and Mason, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen*, Loc. 523-29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Loc. 570.

²⁵ Joe M. Richardson, “The American Missionary Association and Black Education in Civil War Missouri,” *Missouri Historical Review* 69 (July 1975): 438-39.

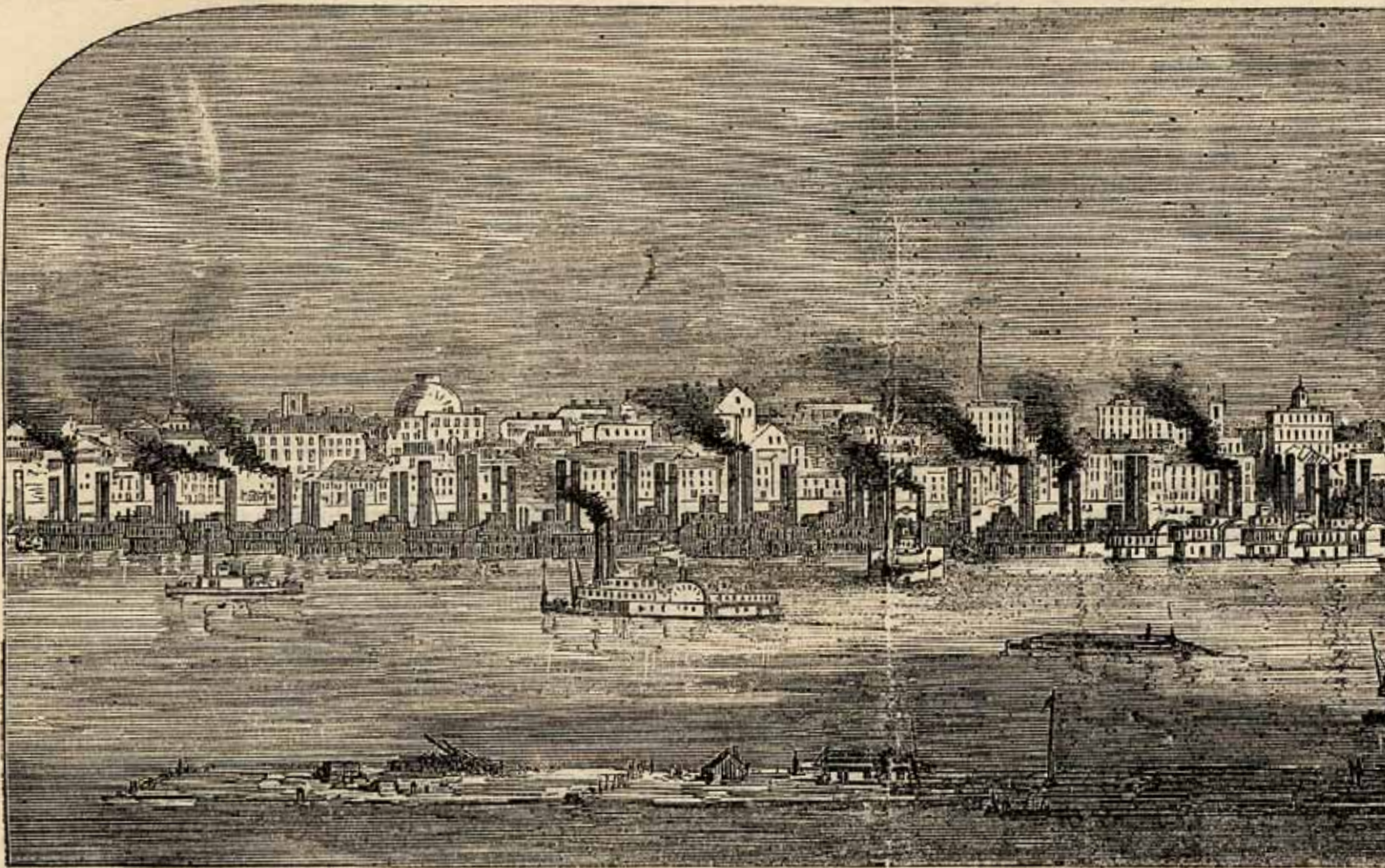
²⁶ Emily Elizabeth Parsons and Theophilus Parsons, *Memoir of Emily Elizabeth Parsons. Published for the Benefit of the Cambridge Hospital* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1880), 140.

²⁷ Katharine T. Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis*

Women’s History (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1999), 88-93; John A. Wright, *Discovering African American St. Louis : A Guide to Historic Sites* (Saint Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2002), 11; Glen Schwendemann, “St. Louis and the ‘Exodusters’ of 1879,” *Journal of Negro History* 46 (January 1961): 32-46.

²⁸ Lawrence Christensen, “Race Relations in St. Louis, 1865-1916,” *Missouri Historical Review* 78 (1984): 124-25.

²⁹ Wright, *Discovering African American St. Louis*, 75, 86; 1870. United States Bureau of the Census, 9th census, and National Archives and Records Service, “Population schedules of the ninth census of the United States, 1870 Missouri” (National Archives and Records Service, 1872).

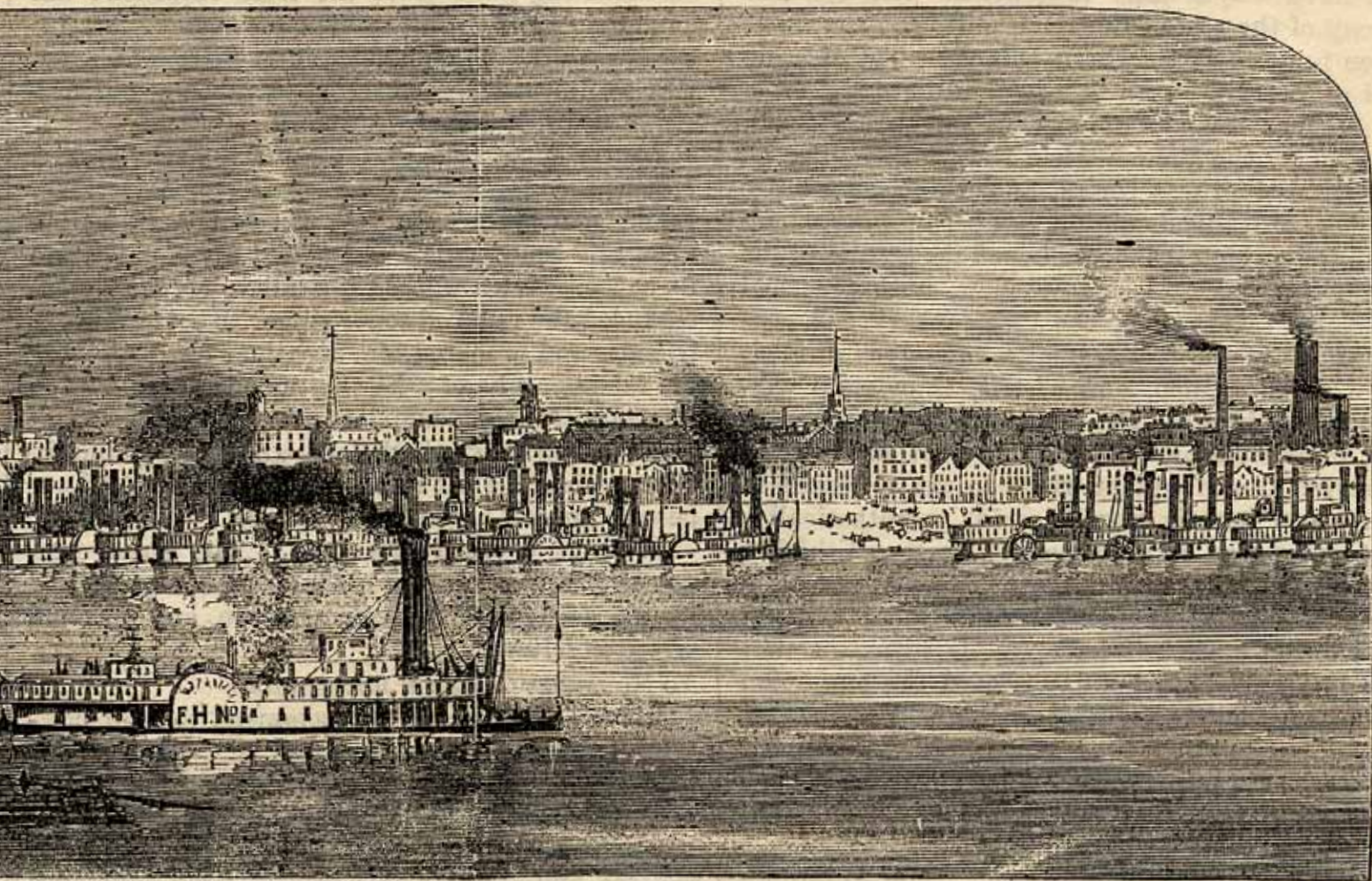


ST. LOUIS, 1

“A New Order of Things”:

St. Louis, Chicago, and the
Struggle for Western Commercial Supremacy”

BY DREW VANDECREEK



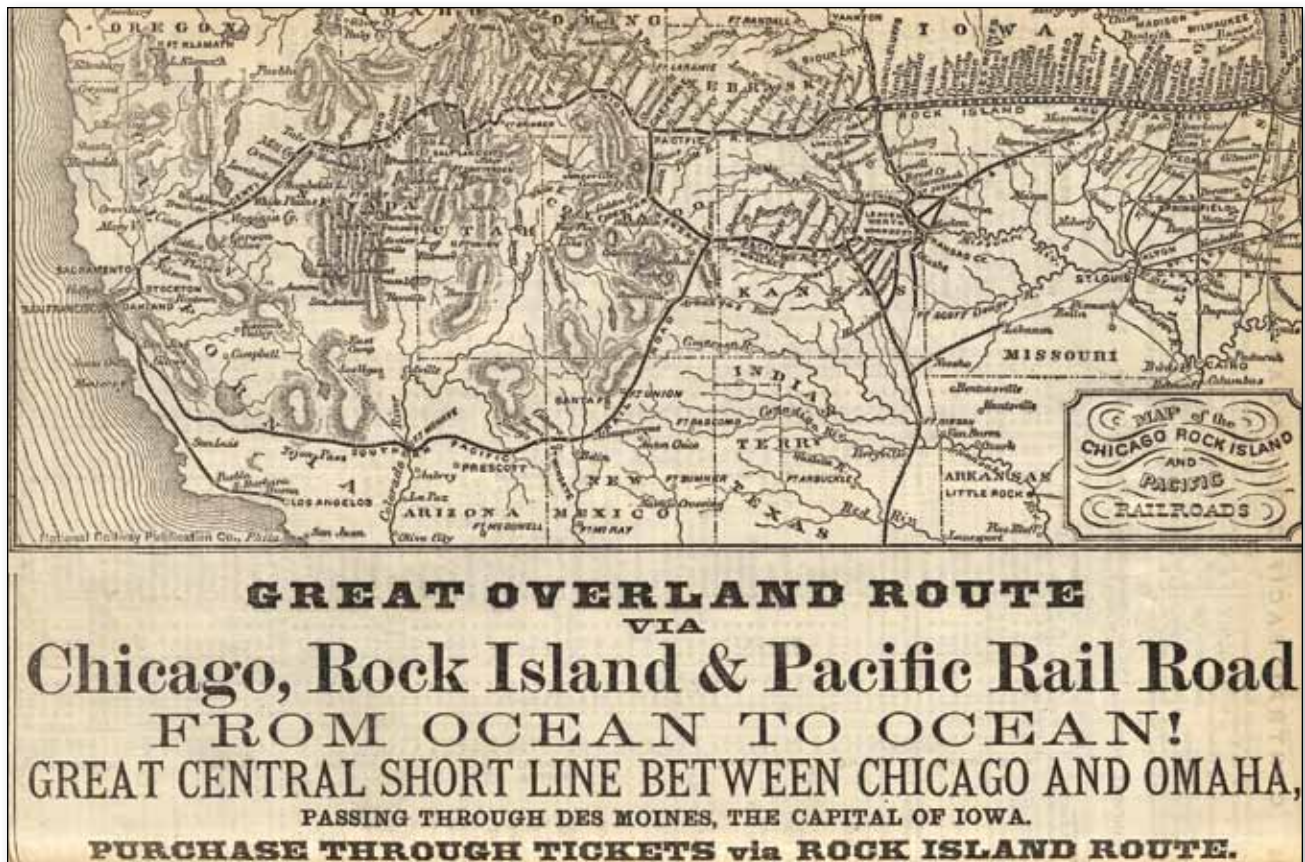
MISSOURI.

In its article, "A Railroad Pleasure Trip to the West," the July 4, 1857, issue of *Harper's Illustrated Weekly* featured an illustrated journey between Cincinnati, Ohio, and St. Louis, demonstrating the city's economic focus on river traffic. *Harper's* was one of two large national illustrated newspapers that were published starting in the 1850s, somewhat akin to today's *Time* and *Newsweek*. *Harper's* dubbed itself "The Journal of Civilization." (Image: St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis)

In the antebellum period, St. Louis' boosters crowed about the city's advantageous position on the emerging North/South axis of the nation's western trade: the Mississippi River. Many boasted that their hometown would become the leading city of the West. As the Civil War approached, Chicago, approximately 300 miles to the northeast, emerged as the city's bitter rival for western commercial supremacy. The conflict dealt St. Louis interests a devastating blow with the Mississippi's closure, but equally damaging was the rapid increase in railroad construction that it occasioned in the North. At the end of the Civil War, St. Louisians mustered their political forces for a new round of river and harbor improvements to bolster their competitive position. Yet they often struggled to grasp the fact that Chicago was well on its way to securing its position as what William Cronon has called "the greatest metropolis in the continent's interior, with all the Great West in some measure a part of its hinterland and empire."¹ Indeed, led by the indefatigable Logan U. Reavis, St. Louis promoters mounted a campaign to move the nation's capital to their city.²

Reavis and his collaborators emphasized several factors

in their quixotic initiative, including St. Louis' central location and commercial primacy. They also developed a subtler argument designed to appeal to the ascendant Republican Party and a war-weary nation. The antebellum political arrangements that Reavis identified as the "Old Government" had been a product of a nation originally bounded by the Appalachian Mountains and tainted by slavery, he maintained. Washington, D.C., had become the nation's capital in 1800 as part of a delicate balancing act between northern and southern interests. Its location near the border between the regions also saved many legislators and other members of the government needless travel. Western expansion placed an increasing number of federal officials at greater distances from Washington, and the Civil War swept away the larger political context that had helped it to become the seat of the federal government. The Union's victory in war announced an opportunity for a fresh start, for the construction of what Reavis called "a new order of things," with St. Louis becoming the capital of a reconstructed, expanding nation that he called the "New Republic." In 1869, he boldly predicted that the national capital would reside in his city within five years.



Maps such as this one were published in *Official Time Tables of Railways in the United States and Canada*, this one from 1871. They provided not only a map of the route, but also suggested the ways city boosters in places like Chicago saw themselves and their role in national progress. (Image: St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis)

Efforts to move the capital to the West fizzled by 1871.³ Reavis and other boosters often acknowledged Chicago's recent advance, even as they reasoned that their city's natural geographic advantages would surely help it to reclaim a position temporarily undermined by the wartime closure of the Mississippi. Yet even as they maintained this brave face, Reavis and several collaborators recommended that the city's businessmen expand their relationships with regions south and southwest of St. Louis, rather than face Chicago's withering competition for the northern trade. They argued that the nation had reached a point at which its leaders, both in the business community and government, must decide if its commerce would principally travel east-west across the continent by railroad, or north-south by a combination of railroad and water transportation. In regard to the emerging issue of the nation's foreign commerce, they suggested that trade within the Western Hemisphere favored St. Louis, situated as it was on a north-south transportation artery. By contrast, commercial relationships with nations beyond the west coast represented an inconceivable fantasy. Reavis and his fellow boosters' qualifications represented an acknowledgement, however implicit, that Chicago had

assumed the leading position in the trade of the American West and beyond.

The river trade proved unable to sustain St. Louis' growth in the Gilded Age. Mark Twain chronicled its decline when he returned to the valley in 1882. The author and his party arrived in St. Louis, where they quickly concluded that "the most notable absence observable... was the absence of the river-man. If he was there... he was in disguise." On the city's celebrated levee, the travelers found "half a dozen sound-asleep steamboats where I used to see a solid mile of wide-awake ones! This was melancholy, this was woeful. The absence of the pervading and jocund steamboatman from the billiard-saloon was explained. He was absent because he is no more. His occupation is gone, his power has passed away, he is absorbed into the common herd.... The towboat and the railroad had done their work, and done it well and completely." Twain concluded that "Mississippi steamboating was born about 1812; at the end of thirty years it had grown to mighty proportions; and in less than thirty more it was dead!"⁴

The stagnation of the river trade signaled an end to St. Louis' claims of western economic supremacy. Although

die-hard boosters continued to insist that the city would eventually surpass Chicago as a rail hub, the massive infrastructure represented in the continental railroad had already been built. A prostrate South proved incapable of providing St. Louis with sufficient economic sustenance to bolster its deteriorating position. The nation's commerce increasingly moved back and forth between the east and west. Even an 1883 history of St. Louis, published in the city, concluded that Chicago had gained control of the trade to its north and west and competed evenly with St. Louis for trade as far south as Texas. As the realization that Chicago had become the primary link between the Atlantic coast's financial and industrial centers and the American West set in, St. Louis boosters came to characterize their nemesis as the fortunate beneficiary of eastern financial largesse, doubtlessly referring to the investments that had built the city's railroads and the contributions that had helped it to rebuild after the disastrous fire of 1871. Only fate and outside influence, it seemed, could trump St. Louis' immense geographical advantages. In the 1890s, St. Louis authors continued to emphasize the city's economic ties to the south and southwest, and they urged travelers from those regions on their way to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago to stop over in their city for a few days. As Logan U. Reavis had imagined, a new order had emerged as the United States moved on, through

time and space, from the Civil War. For denizens of the trans-Mississippi west, that new order revolved around Chicago.

What follows is a series of documents tracing the thinking at the time examining boosterism both in and about St. Louis.

W. D. Skillman

The Western Metropolis; or, St. Louis in 1846
(St. Louis: Skillman, 1846)

The location is a most admirable one in every point of view. Its commercial advantages of position have already placed St. Louis in a high rank among business places, and it is now universally acknowledged that the "Mound City" must eventually become the "New York of the West."

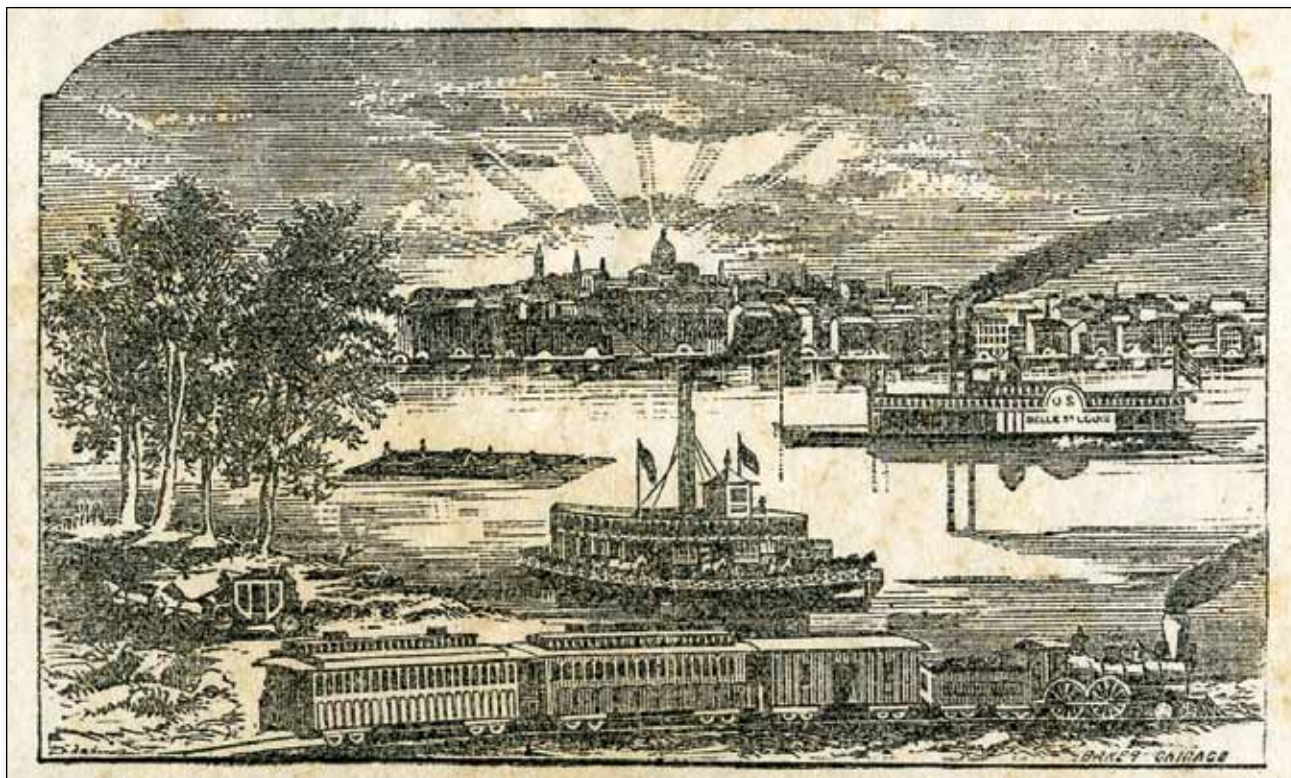
S. Waterhouse and William B. Dana

"Missouri—St. Louis, the Commercial Centre of North America"

Merchants Magazine and Commercial Review
(July, 1866)

St. Louis is ordained by the decrees of physical nature to become the great inland metropolis of this continent. It cannot escape the magnificence of its destiny. Greatness is the necessity of its position. New York may be the head, but St. Louis will be the heart of America.

In this engraving from Nathan Parker's 1867 book *Stranger's Guide to St. Louis: Or What to See and How to See It, in and Around the City, comprising Notices of Every Object of Interest to Strangers, with City Map and Illustrations*, railroads and steamboats are juxtaposed with a rising sun over American democracy and progress. While steamboats may have been "strangers," the train in the foreground is the symbolic tool of the future. (Image: St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis)



Chicago is an energetic rival. Its lines of railroad pierce every portion of the Northwest. It draws an immense commerce by its network of railways. . . . Chicago is vigorously extending its lines of road across the Missouri River. The completion of these roads will inevitably divert a portion of the Montana trade from this city to Chicago. The energy of an unlineal competitor may usurp the legitimate honors of the imperial heir. St. Louis cannot afford to continue the masterly inactivity of the old regime. A traditional and passive trust in the efficacy of natural advantages will no longer be a safe policy. St. Louis must make exertions equal to its strength and worthy of its opportunity. It must not only form great plans of commercial empire, but must execute them with an energy defiant of failure. It must complete its projected railroads to the mountains, and span the Mississippi at St. Louis with a bridge whose solidity of masonry shall equal the massiveness of Roman architecture, and whose grandeur shall be commensurate with the future greatness of the Mississippi Valley.

The march of St. Louis will keep equal step with the progress of the West. Located at the intersection of the river which traverses zones and the railway which belts the continent, with divergent roads from this center to the circumference of the country, St. Louis enjoys commercial advantages which must inevitably make it the greatest inland emporium of America. The movement of our vast harvests and the distribution of the domestic and foreign merchandise required by the myriad thousands who will, in the near future, throng this valley, will develop St. Louis to a size proportioned to the vastness of the commerce it will transact. This metropolis will not only be the center of Western exchanges, but also, if ever the seat of Government is transferred from its present locality, the capital of the nation.

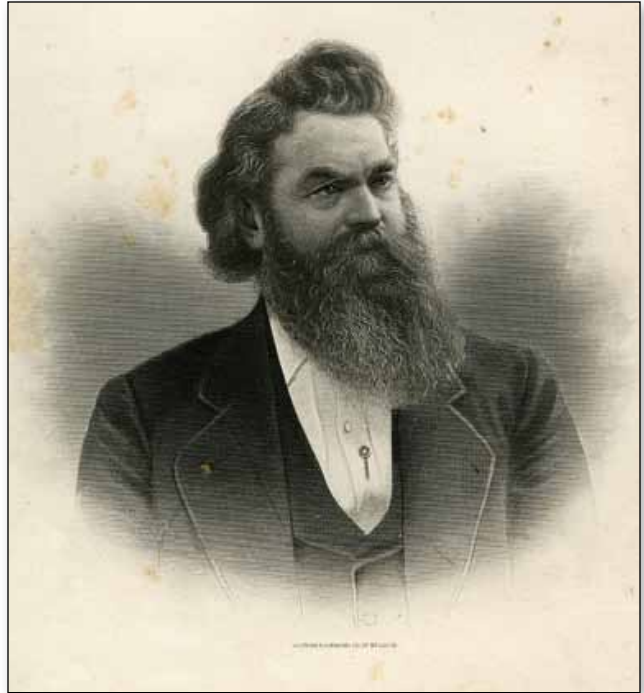
Logan U. Reavis

The New Republic, or the Transition Complete, with an Approaching Change of National Empire, Based Upon the Commercial and Industrial Expansion of the Great West: Together with Hints and National Safety and Social Progress

(St. Louis: Jos. F. Torrey and Co., 1867)

Nations and men, by an inherent law of progress, are compelled, as they approach riper years, to out-grow the errors contracted in infancy and early life, and those errors that are not disposed of in a legitimate and lawful way are disposed of by penalty and by revolution.

The United States has not escaped this certain and infallible law of correction, and what she failed in due time to do by legislation, Providence has done for her by revolution. It was a heathen custom to expiate great crimes by a paramount sacrifice. Such has been the obligation imposed upon the United States by Him who sits on the high and holds place, and sends his rains upon the just and the unjust.



When Logan Uriah Davis (1831-1889) died in 1889, the *New York Times* described him as "a conspicuous and well-known citizen." One of the great boosters of St. Louis, he was best known for his proposals to move the nation's capital from Washington, D.C., on the east coast to the more central (and prosperous) St. Louis area. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

The Republic having made the heathen sacrifice and atoned for the sin of slavery, and cleansed her garments of its stain, it is now to be seen whether we are not on the threshold of a new era, pregnant with unlimited political progress and commercial expansion. Let us see with the eyes of Cassandra what is in the future.

Looking forward to the presidential election of 1868 –

Among the many great advances that will be made under the new President will be the removal of the Capitol from Washington to the banks of the Mississippi.... The commercial expansion and multiplication of new States in the great West, and their preponderating millions of industrious and intelligent people dwelling in the Mississippi valley, will claim its removal.... Not even a wall around the city of Washington, with a cherubim and flaming sword upon its ramparts, can hold the seat of Empire from the Great West.

With the development of the whole country and its commerce, will also come the development of commercial centers, or great cities, monopolizing and controlling the trade of the country. Geographical conditions, and the inevitable tendency of the future commerce of the United States and the world, point to New York, San Francisco, Chicago, St. Louis and

Orleans [sic], as destined to be the great depots and entrepots for the external and internal commerce, seeking markets to and from this country.... New York, as she is now, will remain a great American city, but with the civilizing growth of the continent, and the change of commerce, she will be shorn of her controlling influence and leading greatness. The completion of two great internal works – the Pacific railroad to California, and the ship canal from Chicago to La Salle – will change the internal and foreign commerce of the country, and divide between New Orleans and San Francisco one-half the trade that now, or hence, would go to New York.... St. Louis, occupying, substantially, the geographical and commercial center of the country, and in the heart of the richest agricultural and mineral lands on the continent, is destined to be the great central depot of the United States, and the seat of national empire. She is the Babylon of the New World, not standing on the Euphrates, but upon the banks of the great Mississippi.

With all this great advance, this magical transfer of power, who can be so simple as to rest in the belief, that with it will not come a change of national empire, or a removal of the Capital of the Government to the banks of the great Mississippi? Who is so foolish as to think that an ambitious, industrious and successful people, with millions of population, and millions of treasure in their favor, will not demand, in due time, the removal of the Capital from its present location to their midst? It will come, and come soon. National gravity will bring it.

“The revolutions of the human mind,” says Lamartine, “are slow, like the eras in the life of nations.” It is no ordinary work for a great nation to pass a transition—to revolutionize the mental status of its people, to cool passions and remove prejudices, kindled into heat and produced by destructive and unrelenting war—and, by reorganization and new legislation, set up a new order of things. It is not the work of a day, nor a year, but the work of time and deliberate and far-reaching statesmanship. In every great movement mistakes will delay a success or a victory, while wise counsels will accelerate them. Whatever may be the anxiety of statesmen to heal up the wounds of the rebellion and to restore the revolted states to political equality and harmony in the Federal Union, the completion of the work is still in the distance. As we go forward to its end, “hills peep o’er hills, and Alps o’er Alps arise.” Difficulties in the machinery of the government, arising out of unexpected interpretations of its law by men of diverse opinions, prolong the work of reconstruction. Nor can the work be thoroughly completed until an entire change and reorganization of the government has fully taken place and a new order established, substantially as follows:

I. The election of a new president and his instalment into office.

- II. The formation of a new national constitution, and, under it, the reorganization of the Supreme Court, and the making of such other changes as seem best for the safety and perpetuity of the Republic.
- III. The removal of the National Capitol [sic] to the Great West.

It is not possible, in the nature of things, that a Constitution framed in the infancy of a nation, and by its own weakness and the error of laws enacted under it, sustaining and spreading the greatest moral deformity of the nineteenth century, is a fit fundamental law for the nation after having thrown off, by revolution, that great moral deformity.

Logan U. Reavis; S. Waterhouse, William H. Seward; Orville Hickman Browning
A Change of National Empire; Or Arguments in Favor of the Removal of the National Capitol [sic] from Washington City to the Mississippi Valley
 St. Louis: J. F. Torrey, 1869

That the argument may be made stronger in favor of the removal of the National Capital from its present place to the Mississippi Valley, two maps of the country are submitted, with accompanying statements.

The first map represents the territorial extent of the United States Government at the time of the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and when the first Congress, sitting at New York, located the seat of government at its present place. In addition to the first map showing the territorial extent of the government at that period, it also shows the vast extent of wild country which has, since the incoming of the present century, been acquired by our government.

The first map represents the Old Government.

The second map represents the New Republic, or the territorial extent of the United States government as it now is, and in contrast with the Old Government we behold the growth of the American nation.

The debates upon the bill locating the seat of government at its present place show three considerations involved in the discussion:

First, that common selfishness which is everywhere seen in the acts of men. Many desired its location where it would build up local and personal interests.

Another argument was in favor of putting the Capital where it could be easily defended in time of war.

But the most important consideration was that which required its location in a central position, so as to accommodate the States as they were situated along the shore of the Atlantic. This, I repeat, as the debates upon the removal of the seat of government from New York to its present place show, was the most important consideration. The Constitution had just been adopted and the new Government took its place among the nations of the earth, and the representatives of the people at once sought to permanently locate the seat of government at such a place as would be most central to

the States and the business interests of the people. Such was the wisdom of the representatives of the people at the foundation of the Old Government, and such ought to be the wisdom of the representatives of the people at the foundation of the New Republic. Passing from a consideration of the Old Government, let us now turn to a consideration of the New Republic, or of our country as it is now, in all its broad extent. . . .

By reference to the map it will be seen that the New Republic, or the territorial extent of the Government as it now is, spans the continent in extent from ocean to ocean, and in breadth reaches from the lakes to the Gulf. Instead of the old thirteen States and one Territory, which constituted the Old Government. . . .

Besides the immense acquirement of natural wealth, to us are given the wonderful creations of genius. We have the railroad traversing our lands everywhere; we have the steamboat upon all our navigable rivers; we have the telegraph connecting our cities, and the steam-engine doing our bidding in almost every phase of industrial enterprise. Thus we are, with all our continental growth, a new nation, requiring new laws, new advantages, and more appropriate uses in governmental affairs. Our limited sea-coast uniting us with all the commerce of the world, and our vast domain putting us within reach of every climate on the globe, and all our natural advantages combined, point to our future imperial greatness; and at every step we take forward wisdom tells us that the conditions and regulations of Old Government are not adapted to the wants of the New Republic, for they were only the regulations and conditions of childhood, and not suited to the growth and maturity of manhood. It will be found, on examination, that we are met everywhere with evidence demanding a change of the National Capital from the Old Government to the New Republic.

At this time there is a continental strife for commercial supremacy inaugurated between the Atlantic cities and the people of the West. The contest is for the purpose of determining whether the trade of the West shall go across the continent to the Atlantic cities, or whether it will go down the Mississippi river and her tributaries to the Gulf, and from thence to the markets of the world. In this contest the West will triumph and her products follow the water courses. The question will be settled in the next three years.

Following this contest will come that long-anticipated change, or at least the time for it, when a railway is completed to the Pacific Ocean, and we look for our trade with China and India to find its way to us through different channels. In this matter the people have no doubt over-estimated the importance and magnitude of that great continental change in our foreign commerce. It is true the completion of those great railways will be a wonderful triumph of American industry; but their completion will not bring such a change and such

an era in our continental development as many have anticipated. On the other hand, the great commercial and civil era to which we are approaching will come, with our industrial and commercial tendency, to the tropics of our own hemisphere. In industry the destiny of this people is a continental conquest. Nothing but wild and foolish extravagance and impracticability will lead our people over distant oceans to distant lands for products, when we have at home all the climates, all the soils, and all the advantages that the globe can afford. Nor will the American people act so foolishly. It is not in their experience to do so. They will do otherwise. Already there is a great trade in the tropics, which our people can easily command if they do but make the proper use of the means within their reach.

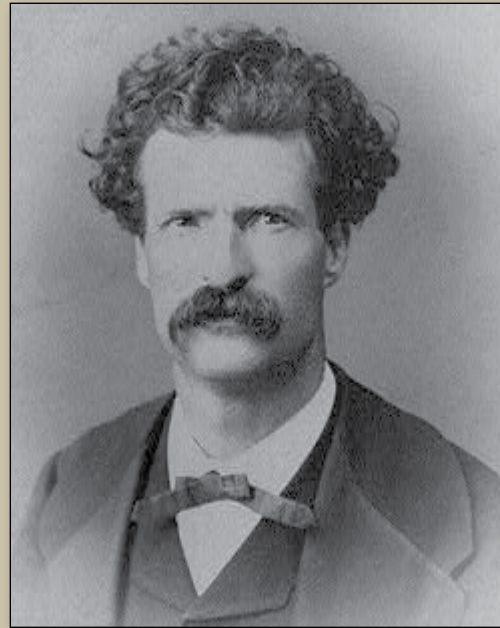
The people of St. Louis and the West must learn that next in importance to the Mississippi river is a railway through the Southwest to Galveston, thus making a great trunk line from Chicago *via* St. Louis to the Gulf, and uniting the Gulf and the lakes at a distance of about 1,000 miles, and St. Louis to the Gulf at a distance of about 700 miles. Akin to this road in importance will be another from Denver City into Mexico. By these means will be won a commerce from the tropics and South America surpassing the distant trade of the Orient. With all these future developments of our continental and foreign trade, St. Louis will still remain the central city and commercial depot of the country; and with the minerals and coal of Missouri and Illinois, the timber and the water, the great workshops of the country will be hers.

Chicago, on the completion of the Illinois canal, may command, in its exchange of agricultural for manufactured products, an extent of territory as large as that controlled by Maumee. Admitting it to be larger, and of this our readers must judge for themselves, it does not seem to us probable that within the forty-seven years it can even approximate in population or wealth to the comparatively old and well-peopled territory that comes within the range of the commercial influence of Maumee. We have not sufficient data on which to calculate the extent of country that will come under the future commercial power of Chicago. That it is to be very great seems probable from the fine position of that port in reference to the lake, and an almost interminable country southwest, west, and northwest of it. An extension of the Illinois canal to the mouth of Rock River seems destined to give her the control of the Eastern trade throughout the whole extent of the upper Mississippi, except what she now has by means of the Illinois River. She will also probably participate with Maumee in the lake trade with the Missouri river and St. Louis. On the whole, we deem Chicago alone, of all the lake towns, entitled to dispute future pre-eminence with Maumee. The time may come, after the period under consideration, when the extent and high improvement of the country making Chicago its mart for commercial

All of the materials examined in “A New Order of Things”: St. Louis, Chicago, and the Struggle for Western Commercial Supremacy” are drawn from the collections of the Mark Twain’s Mississippi Project (<http://dig.lib.niu.edu/twain>), an online resource developed by Northern Illinois University Libraries with funding provided by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (<http://www.imls.gov>). Institutions contributing materials to the project include the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis; the Newberry Library; Tulane University Libraries; and the Mark Twain Project at the University of California, Berkeley.

The Mark Twain’s Mississippi Project website presents users with materials shedding light on the historical setting in which Samuel Clemens grew to maturity, and which he remembered and imagined as Mark Twain in a series of celebrated works based in the Mississippi River Valley of the mid-nineteenth century. Twain first evoked this landscape in his essay “Old Times on the Mississippi” in 1875.¹ He then revisited it through the youthful exploits of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and their young accomplices. With *Life on the Mississippi*, which built upon his “Old Times” essay, Twain explored how rapid technological and economic developments had changed the Mississippi Valley of his youth. Finally, in Huck and Jim’s raft voyage down the river in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, he addressed one of his era’s central social and political problems: the pervasive taint of slavery and racism in America.

While Twain’s fiction provides a uniquely vivid introduction to these topics, many other authors described them in works pertaining to the nineteenth-century Mississippi Valley as well. Presented in a searchable format on the Mark Twain’s Mississippi Project website, these accounts, drawn from the collections of the collaborating institutions, provide readers with a richer, more detailed aggregate picture of society and culture in the Mississippi Valley than do Twain’s works alone. A set of nearly 2,000 images makes up another set of primary resources available on the project website, providing users with vivid depictions of locations along the river and the dynamics of river life. These materials include images drawn from the pages of the above texts, as well as others selected from participating institutions’ collections of visual resources. Available images include maps, photographs, engravings, and drawings as well as



Samuel L. Clemens (1835-1910), better known as Mark Twain, grew up in the Mississippi River town of Hannibal, and spent part of his early adult years as a riverboat pilot. Despite moving to Connecticut, Clemens never lost his affinity for the Mississippi River and its symbolism. (Image: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division)

musical scores. The Mark Twain’s Mississippi Project also provides its users with spatial representations of demographic/census data via an interactive map interface using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology and sound materials comprised of latter-day recordings of period sheet music.

In addition to the above resources, the project website also features original interpretive material in text and video formats, contributed by leading students of Twain’s works and nineteenth-century America. Together, these tools make the Mark Twain’s Mississippi Project website a broad and deep repository of materials pertaining to the river, its cities and towns, and its people in the nineteenth century. You can also access Mark Twain’s Mississippi Project through the *Confluence* website.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mark Twain “Old Times on the Mississippi,” *Atlantic Monthly*, January-June, 1875.

operations, may enable it at least to sustain the second place among the great towns of the North American valley, if not to dispute pre-eminence with the first.

The reader of this little pamphlet will no doubt be desirous to know what time the seat of government will be moved from its present place to the Mississippi Valley, or, at least, will be anxious to know what time one so sanguine as the writer has fixed for the change. I unhesitatingly answer that the change will be made within five years from January 1, 1869. Before two years from January 1, 1869, Congress will authorize, by its own act, the removal of the seat of government from its present place, and soon will follow the President, national archives, and the legislature of the Republic.

Logan U. Reavis; Nathaniel Holmes; William T. Sherman, J.W. Scott; Horace Greeley; William Darby; G. Gratz Brown; Charles Gibson

Saint Louis: The Future Great City of the World
St. Louis: Gray, Baker and Co., 1875

The great cities of the world were not built in a day.... It is not impossible that our city of St. Louis may be "the future great city of the world," but if we are to come to practical facts for our day and generation, and take the safe and sure way. I think we may be content to set it down as both the present and future great city of the Mississippi Valley.

The first leading feature that impresses me is this: that St. Louis is a central mart, seated on the great southern water line of transport and traffic, by the river, the gulf, and the ocean; and that Chicago is another, less central or quite eccentric, situated at the end of the great northern line of traffic and travel, by the lakes, canals and rivers to the sea. Both are, and will be, great centers for internal distribution; but St. Louis is, or will be, in all the future, in this, the more central and important of the two. For exportation of products, Chicago has been, of recent years, the greater in quantity and value: but St. Louis, in this, has of late rapidly approached her, and in the near future may be expected even to surpass the City of the Lakes. Both were exported mainly by the same channels. Such manufactures as could be made here, and were in demand for the Western country, rapidly grew up, and the manufacturers (as of stoves, castings, saddlery, mill machinery, steamboat machinery, white lead and oil, refined sugar, bagging and bale rope, tobacco, etc., etc.) grew rich. And St. Louis had overtaken Cincinnati before the war. Five years ago, the value of the imports paying duties here or at New Orleans, was five millions; this last year it was eleven millions. This must be taken as simply the small beginnings.

The railroad system, in its westward movement, embraced Chicago first; the regions immediately around Chicago first became the more densely settled and cultivated; and Eastern capital pushed her railroads out in all directions, largely taking away the trade of the Northwest from the rivers and St. Louis, and they

had extended them even into Northern Missouri when the war shut up the Mississippi, and also stopped the progress of our incipient railroads; and then, of course, the larger part of the trade went to Chicago, because it could go nowhere else. ("Letter from Judge Nathaniel Holmes," xiv-xv)

Commercially, St. Louis is scarcely one generation old. In the Eastern cities are the accumulations of one or two centuries. The capital accumulated here, however large, is all employed in the immediate business of the city. The vast amount required for this rapid construction of long lines of railroad, must come chiefly from abroad. Meantime, it is not surprising that the business men of St. Louis turn their faces to the South and Southwest, where they have an almost exclusive monopoly of the trade, rather than to the North and Northwest, where they come into more stringent competition with Chicago and the Eastern cities. ("Letter from Judge Nathaniel Holmes," xvi)

Chicago, the pampered child of a rich and indulgent East, may boast her railways and enviable position for freighting on our inland seas; and yet the fact remains that she draws trade and distributes supplies to a section which lies almost entirely on her west and north, and is included in an angle which is but little more than the one-fourth of a great circle.

Alexander D. Anderson

The Mississippi and Tributaries: A Commercial and Statistical Review

(Washington, D.C.: National Republic Printing House, 1881)

Under the stimulating influence of American enterprise the commerce of the Valley rapidly developed. In 1812 it entered upon a new era of progress by the introduction, for the first time upon the waters of the Mississippi, of steam transportation.

The river trade then grew from year to year, until the total domestic exports of its sole outlet at the seaboard — the port of New Orleans — had, during the fiscal year 1855-6, reached the value of over eighty million dollars. Its prestige was then eclipsed by railways, the first line reaching the Upper Mississippi in 1854, and the second, the Lower Mississippi, at St. Louis, in 1857. Says Poor: "The line first opened in this State from Chicago to the Mississippi, was the Chicago and Rock Island, completed in February, 1854. The completion of this road extended the railway system of the country to the Mississippi, up to this time the great route of commerce of the interior. This work, in connection with the numerous other lines since opened, has almost wholly diverted this commerce from what may be termed its natural to artificial channels, so that no considerable portion of it now floats down the river to New Orleans."

J. Thomas Scharf
*History of Saint Louis City and County, from the
Earliest Periods to the Present Day, v. II*
(Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts and Co., 1883)

Mr. Joseph Nimmo, Jr., chief of the Bureau of Statistics of the Treasury Department, Washington, in his very comprehensive and suggestive report on the "Internal Commerce of the United States," submitted to Secretary of the Treasury Windom, July 1, 1881, attempts to define the "territorial limits of the commerce of St. Louis." What he says is as follows:

"The commerce of St. Louis west of the Mississippi River and north of the State of Missouri is quite small, the city of Chicago having secured the principal control of that trade by means of the system of east and west roads centering in that city."

"St. Louis competes sharply with Chicago for the trade of Northern Missouri, Kansas, Southern Nebraska, Colorado, the Territories tributary to the traffic of the Union and Central Pacific Railroads, and for the transcontinental trade with the States of the Pacific coast, and mainly controls so much of the trade towards the Southwest as is embraced in the southern and central portion of Missouri, the State of Arkansas, the larger part of the State of Texas, and the northwestern section of Louisiana. For the trade of Kansas, the northern part of Texas, and the Indian Territory, St. Louis meets an active competition in the commercial enterprises of Chicago."

Author unknown
*Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Saint Louis: The Commercial
Gateway to the South*
(Chicago: Phoenix Publishing Company, 1892)

Spread on the west bank of the far-famed Mississippi River, "the father of waters," is the city of St. Louis, the commercial "Gateway of the Sunny South," and one of the most populous, progressive business centers on the American continent.

This northernmost southern city maintains the confidence of the entire South....

James Cox
St. Louis through a Camera
(St. Louis: Woodward and Tiernan, 1892)

A perusal of the pages following will show the reader that St. Louis is a cosmopolitan city in every sense of the word. Its manufacturing establishments rank among the very best in the world; its streets are

the best paved, cleaned, sprinkled and lighted on the Continent; its public and office buildings are costly, modern and magnificent; its dwelling houses are admitted by visitors to represent a greater number of types of architecture than those to be found in any other city in America; its system of rapid transit is the best in the world, and some of its electric cars are best described as palaces on wheels; its parks are scenes of beauty, and are maintained in the highest possible condition of cultivation and adornment; its stores are among the finest and best stocked in the world; its libraries are convenient of access, luxuriously appointed and supplied with the best collections of modern and classical literature that money and research could procure; its clubs are models of elegance and comfort; its schools are the admiration of a Continent, and its system of tuition is admitted to be the best yet perfected; its churches are numerous and beautiful; its water supply is never-failing and of admitted purity, and its climate is at once healthful and delightful.

It is to a city blessed with these and a thousand other advantages that St. Louisans bid the visitor welcome. Those attending the World's Fair are especially invited to secure transportation reading "via St. Louis," in order that a few days may be spent here either going to or returning from the Fair. The railroad companies recognize in the City of Conventions a place well worth a visit, and will issue tickets with stop-over privileges at St. Louis if desired. That hundreds of thousands of visitors from all parts of both the Old and New Worlds will take advantage of this opportunity to remain for a time in the great city on the banks of the mighty Mississippi is an assured fact, and to each visitor the city of St. Louis extends in advance a cordial Welcome.

St. Louis is the acknowledged metropolis of the West, the Southwest and the South. It has absolutely no rival, so far as the South and the Southwest are concerned, and when it is remembered of what the new South, and the still newer Southwest, are composed, it will readily be seen that no city in the world is more fortunately located. The awakening in the South during the last five years, and the general tendency towards the encouragement of manufacturing interests and the abandonment of cotton growing as a sole source of income, have resulted in a demand for a higher class of mercantile products in all the Southern States, and the shipments south from St. Louis, are, in consequence, five times greater to-day than what they were but a few years ago.

NOTES

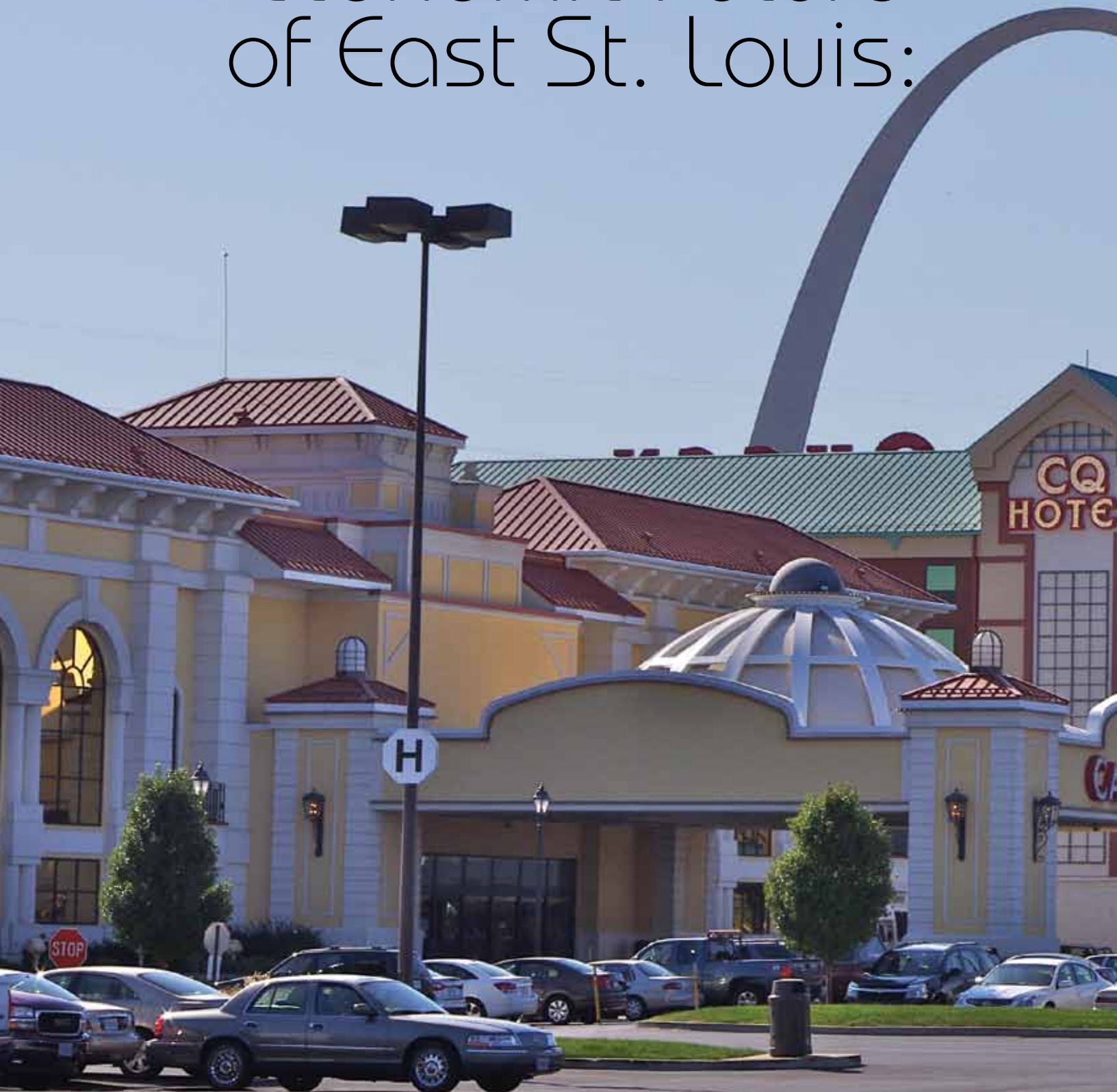
¹ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1991), 26.

² Patrick E. McLearn, "Logan U. Reavis: Nineteenth Century Urban Promoter" *Missouri Historical Review* 66, no. 4 (1972), 567-88.

³ *Ibid.*, 578.

⁴ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1883), 210.

Gambling on the Economic Future of East St. Louis:





The Casino Queen has been a significant source of financial support for the city of East St. Louis since its introduction in 1993. The Casino Queen has generated more than \$160 million in tax revenue for East St. Louis between 1993 and 2009. In addition to these direct funds, Casino Queen, Inc. has also contributed money, support, and services to the city, nonprofit organizations, and residents as part of its ongoing commitment to the social and economic development and future of East St. Louis. An issue that the city needs to address in the future is the large proportion of its operating budget that comes from taxes generated by the Casino Queen. Casino revenues—and the resulting taxes—have been reduced in East St. Louis and across the country in the wake of the economic downturn that began in 2007. This has meant challenges for many urban and state governments, including East St. Louis and the State of Illinois, that anticipate and rely on gaming-related funds to provide basic services to citizens.

State Oversight and Gaming in Illinois

The city of East St. Louis faced a deep economic crisis during the 1970s and 1980s. The loss of industrial and manufacturing businesses, employment for residents, and mismanagement in city government nearly resulted in bankruptcy. The loss of businesses meant that the City of East St. Louis was left without a steady source of tax revenue or even sources of employment. The city resorted to levying extremely high property taxes for the same residents who were now increasingly unable to meet those burdens. The late 1980s and early 1990s were a low point for the government of East St. Louis, which faced a budget crisis so severe that it was essentially unable to function. The city could not provide basic services such as garbage collecting for residents, supplying police and fire equipment, or meeting payroll for employees.¹ With the city in precipitous economic decline, the state government intervened in 1990 with the Illinois Financially Distressed Cities Act (IFDCA). The IFDCA prevented the city from declaring bankruptcy and authorized a state loan to pay off the city's debts of nearly \$75 million. The IFDCA also appointed a state panel named the East St. Louis Financial Advisory Authority (ESLFAA) to oversee the finances of the city until it could produce and implement balanced budgets for a ten-year period.²

At nearly the same time that the State of Illinois was dealing with the decline of East St. Louis and other urban industrial governments, the state was also facing its own serious economic problems. Many government entities (from local to national) faced economic challenges during the 1980s and sought alternate means of generating income. In this environment, states began to explore the option of gambling and the accompanying taxes to generate additional revenue.³ New Hampshire had been the first state to reintroduce the lottery in 1963, the first time since the 1800s that lotteries were considered legal, and many other states followed suit. As a form of entertainment tax, lotteries were considered more politically palatable than income taxes or other compulsory tax increase for all citizens. Illinois adopted a statewide lottery in 1973, earmarking the funds generated for education in 1985.⁴

Riverboat gaming and casinos were also considered by lawmakers across the country in the late 1980s as a means of aiding both state and urban communities falling into economic trouble.⁵ Nationally, plans for casinos were supported by politicians as a means of generating much-needed tax revenue for both local and state governments. Iowa allowed casino development in 1989, prompting



Illinois lawmakers to act as the residents of Illinois (and their money) left the state to gamble at the new facilities in neighboring Iowa. In February 1990, the Illinois Riverboat Gambling Act (IRGA) was signed into law. Ten casino licenses were allowed, and gambling had to be conducted on riverboat facilities. Specific tax schedules were laid out (and later modified) defining the percentage of revenue to be collected as taxes by the

state and by local communities. The first riverboat casino operation in Illinois opened in Alton, about thirty miles north of East St. Louis, in 1991.⁶ The plans for a casino operation in East St. Louis were not far behind.

The Development of the Casino Queen

After the passage of the Illinois gaming law, the idea of a casino was floated as a potential solution to some of the economic problems of East St. Louis. Private investors applied to the state for a gaming license at the same time they entered into discussions with government and property owners in East St. Louis. The original home of the Casino Queen was a four-story riverboat made to resemble the riverboats of the nineteenth century. The boat could carry as many as 1,800 passengers and 200 crew members.⁷ The development was supported by the ESLFAA as well as local investors with the hopes of encouraging broader economic development and growth in East St. Louis. Investors and the city of East St. Louis were reported by *Bond Buyer* magazine to have put in \$43 million to help develop the gambling boat and the administrative complex.⁸

The Casino Queen began operations in East St. Louis in 1993. It was the biggest new employer to enter the city for decades, and many East St. Louisans sought one of the 900 jobs available when it opened.⁹ The casino remains a significant source of jobs in the city, second only to the city school district in terms of number of employees. At the time of the casino's opening, the proportion of employees who would have to be residents of the city was a matter of contention. While the owners initially promised thirty percent of the jobs to local East St. Louisans, they were under pressure from city officials to bring the number to fifty percent. The Aldermanic Council made a statement that locals should get eighty percent of the jobs.¹⁰ A report from early 1993 shows that about 350 of 1,100 jobs were held by East St. Louis residents, meeting the thirty percent threshold but falling far short of the fifty percent or eighty percent goals.¹¹ Given the lack of employment opportunities in East St. Louis at the time, this was a significant number in terms of employment.

For employees, a job with the Casino Queen meant not only direct employment and income, but also benefits for themselves and their families, patronage for local doctors and the hospital, and additional money redistributed into the local economy.

The Casino Queen proved its viability as a source of direct revenue for the city almost immediately. Only open for a portion of the year, casino taxes brought nearly \$4 million into the city in 1993. This allowed the city to reduce its property taxes for businesses and residents, which had been among the highest in the state. The city was able to put together a budget (in itself a political feat in the early 1990s) that added firefighters and policemen, paid bills, restored basic services, and began to pay off state loans.¹² The first full year of operations in 1994 pumped over \$10 million into East St. Louis. This more than doubled the city's general fund from \$9 million to \$19 million.¹³ The tax revenue generated for the city has hovered between \$9 and \$11 million every year since then (with the exception of 2007), and has continued to make up a huge proportion of the city's income. A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article in 1994 titled "Seeds of Hope" reflected on the positive changes in the city: "The Casino Queen, the largest new employer in decades, swept into town, bringing jobs and millions of dollars for the city's treasury. The raft load of money from 'The Queen' has resulted in new fire trucks, more police and firefighters and a lower property tax rate..."¹⁴

There is a flip side to this success: the health of the city's

budget is now closely tied to the health of the casino's revenue and the accompanying taxes. The tax revenue from the casino has consistently been a major source of income for the city, in some years constituting as much as fifty percent of the general fund, so when the casino suffers there is little buffer for the city's often precarious finances.¹⁵ This has come into play during the economic recession that began in 2007, and was cited as a major concern about the city in the 2005 report of the ESLFAA, a scathing document that offers a dismal view of the city's economic future. The authors warn in the report that without additional development, attentive management, and long-term planning, East St. Louis stands in grave danger of backsliding into another period of economic turmoil.¹⁶

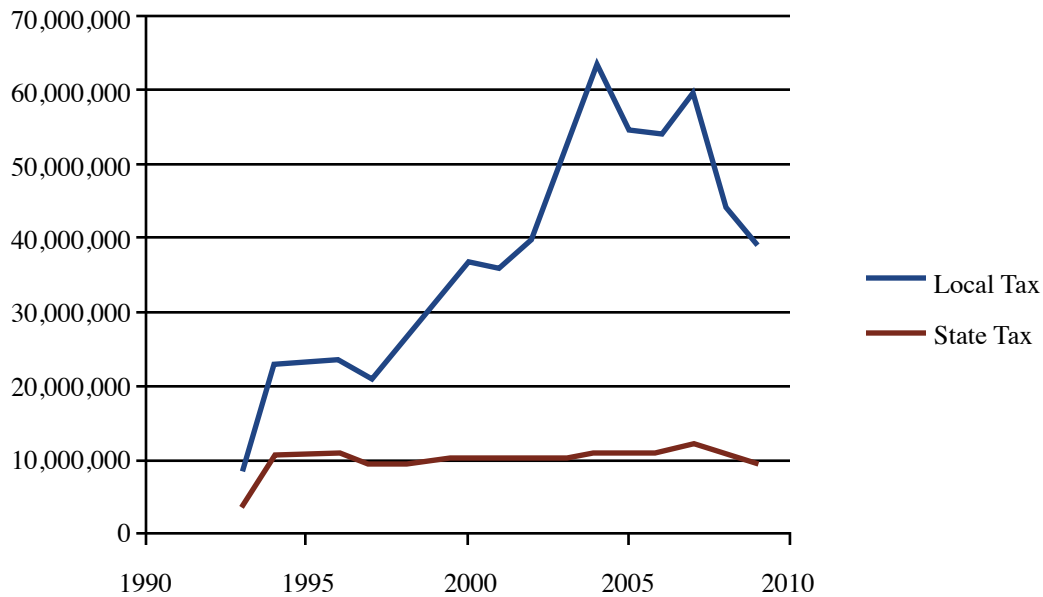
The State of Illinois has also relied on gaming as a source of revenue. After the initial law, the state raised taxes on gaming operations multiple times. In 1998, the State of Illinois passed a gaming law that increased state tax rates and included a "boat in a moat" provision that allowed gambling facilities to move off rivers into land-based moats. The Riverboat Gambling Act was amended in 1999 to allow riverboat gaming operations to remain permanently moored at dock sites without conducting cruises. This meant that patrons could board at any time and stay as long as they wished, rather than having to hold to set cruising times. The change increased overall gambling revenue (people gambled and spent more in the casino) and sent far more money to the state, but actually

Casino Queen Receipts and Distributions to the State of Illinois and the City of East St. Louis

Year	Adjusted Gross Receipts	Local Tax	State Tax
1993	51,541,276	3,793,015	8,947,142
1994	129,785,446	10,161,155	23,139,700
1995	128,197,800	10,293,069	23,112,849
1996	128,987,975	10,555,319	23,454,116
1997	116,590,371	9,437,080	21,096,117
1998	116,486,988	9,254,006	25,895,369
1999	138,202,218	9,719,782	31,762,447
2000	156,880,385	9,954,810	36,681,103
2001	155,082,587	9,780,703	36,063,984
2002	156,943,162	9,895,991	40,184,130
2003	158,033,927	9,926,617	52,995,840
2004	166,262,134	10,483,185	63,224,264
2005	168,724,765	10,545,446	54,343,093
2006	174,279,291	10,820,363	53,995,657
2007	188,624,732	11,738,204	59,547,076
2008	160,194,391	10,292,397	44,166,962
2009	147,539,524	9,623,667	39,343,475

(Data from the Illinois Gaming Board Annual Report, 2009)

State and Local Tax Dollars Paid by the Casino Queen



decreased head tax amounts going to East St. Louis. The reason for this is that the head tax was now only being paid once. Previously, a head tax was paid for every gambler each time a two-hour cruise began. So, while the change brought immediate payoffs for the state, it also resulted in a loss of revenue and resulting layoffs for East St. Louis.¹⁷

Illinois raised taxes for gaming facilities again in 2002, lifting the top tax rate from 35 percent to fifty percent. Then in 2003, the legislature approved another hike and raised the top tax rate to a staggering seventy percent for those in the highest category for income. For those facilities in the lower revenue ranges, taxes were raised as much as 7.5 percent. Along with the five percent guaranteed to East St. Louis, therefore, the Casino Queen now pays a state tax rate of around 45 percent based on its revenues. The state's willingness to increase gaming taxes has been a major challenge for all casino operations in the state, which have struggled to keep profits high enough to make ongoing business worthwhile.¹⁸ Increases in state taxes have cost the Alton Belle and Casino Queen millions of dollars, decreased profit margins, and made it harder to compete against competitors on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River, which have lower tax rates and operate under different state regulatory requirements.¹⁹

The Casino Queen was developed as an enterprise that would offer economic benefits for the City of East St. Louis as well as the State of Illinois. As discussed above, the needs of the state budget have meant several increases in tax for casinos. In 2010, the most recent for which data

exists, the nine gaming operators in Illinois expected to contribute over \$500 million to the state's General Fund, which is used for purposes such as education, human services, healthcare, and family services. This made up about 3.5 percent of the total general fund budget, or three percent of all appropriated funds for the state.²⁰ Just as there are concerns about the reliance of the city on gaming funds, the state has increasingly relied on and taxed casinos in an attempt to balance budgets. While the demands of the state have increased, there have been no increases for the city's benefit. At some point, there is the danger that the State of Illinois (which again faced a massive deficit and budget crisis in 2010) may increase taxes again and lean too heavily on gaming for revenue. This may put operators out of business, harm the state, and devastate cities such as East St. Louis or nearby Alton, which have come to count on casino taxes for funding day-to-day operations.

The Casino Queen has continued to pursue new avenues for development in order to increase revenues in the face of city, state, and market changes. A related area of success—both for the gaming facility and for the city in general—has been the addition of services for tourism, such as an RV park and the Casino Queen hotel. The RV park, opened in 1998, was immediately popular and saw more than 12,000 visitors in 1999, its first full year. While many of the RV park visitors gamble, others come primarily to take advantage of the park and its services as a stand-alone destination.²¹ In January of 2000, the Casino

Queen also opened a 157-room hotel as part of a larger plan for development.²²

After the state law was changed to allow gaming to leave rivers, the owners of the Casino Queen began to develop ambitious plans for a new land-based casino and entertainment complex.²³ The new, modern facility was expected to generate increased business. The plan for a \$150 million project on eighty acres was the largest development project in the city for fifty years, proposing a park, lookout, and other outdoor facilities.²⁴ The plans were put on hold when Illinois raised taxes for gaming operations in 2002 and 2003, but ultimately the project continued. Another hindrance in the development of the new facility was local politics, which again caused a delay. After the initial deal was made with the city government—which had promised \$11 million in support—Mayor Carl Officer said the agreement was not finally approved and could be changed. His attempt to renegotiate the terms was met by disagreement within the city government itself, and ultimately the original agreement prevailed.²⁵ The actual cost of the final Casino Queen development project was around \$92 million.

The new Casino Queen was seen as a way to compete in a market that was expanding rapidly, with several new facilities having opened on the Missouri side of the river in the 2000s. The new land-based facility expanded the Casino Queen's casino floor from 27,000 square feet to 38,000 and floated in a ten-foot-deep moat. Importantly for the city, the anticipated increase in business meant that tax revenues were expected to bring in an additional \$1 million to \$1.5 million per year.²⁶ After about one year of construction the 207,500-square-foot facility opened on schedule in August 2007.²⁷ There was a push to open the new facility before the opening of the new Lumière casino on the St. Louis side of the river in the fall of 2007. The timing of the new Casino Queen reopening and its appeal gave it a market edge and a banner year. The casino brought in more business than ever before and generated more money than ever before, over \$11.7 million in taxes for the City of East St. Louis.

Since 2007, however, the Casino Queen (along with the other gaming facilities across the country) has seen a downturn. In 2008, the Casino Queen distributions to the City of East St. Louis declined twelve percent, from \$11,738,204 in 2007 to 10,292,397 in 2008. They continued to decline in 2009, with a decrease of 6.5 percent to \$9,663,627 in taxes distributed to the city. For 2008 and 2009, however, the local revenues for the Casino Queen did decline less than the state average of almost twenty percent in 2008 and 7.75 percent in 2009. In 2007, all casinos in the state sent \$115,727,277 in taxes to local governments; in 2008, taxes to local governments came out at \$93,095,279, and in 2009, it was down to \$85,885,708. This dramatic decline has meant challenges for both casino operators and local governments in dealing with the inhospitable economic climate, a trend that continued into 2010. The state has also been hit hard, with the total state tax payments from casinos going from \$718,157,094 in 2007 to \$473,648,638 in 2008 (a drop of

more than 34 percent) and \$409,510,245 in 2009, a further decline of 13.5 percent.²⁸

The downturn in gaming revenues across Illinois has been attributed to the overall decline in the national and state economies beginning in 2007, as well as the passage of the Smoke Free Illinois Act in 2008, banning smoking from casino floors.²⁹ The Casino Queen, as part of the metropolitan St. Louis region, has also faced stiff competition from other area casinos. The Argosy Alton and Casino Queen both operate in Illinois, while the Missouri side of the river is home to the Ameristar, Harrah's President (which closed in 2010), and the two most recent casinos, the Lumière (which opened in 2007) and the newest facility, the River City Casino, which opened in March 2010. Another hit for Illinois operators has been the repeal of the loss limits in Missouri, which had previously steered those who wished to gamble with larger amounts of money into Illinois.

The decline of tax flow from the Casino Queen to the City of East St. Louis has combined with the loss of other tax revenues to create pressing economic problems for the city. In the beginning of 2009, the city was forced to eliminate six unfilled police positions and struggled to continue to provide fire services as the operating budget failed to meet expectations.³⁰ In June 2010, members of the city government proposed the reduction of the police force by laying off 27 of the 62 officers because of declines in business, property, and gaming taxes. The proposal was initially rejected and met with a public outcry.³¹ In July, the plan was revisited and on August 1, 2010, the city eliminated jobs for "37 employees, including 19 of its 62 police officers, 11 firefighters, four public works employees, and three administrators." The layoffs were a response to a massive budget shortfall, due in part to tax revenues from the Casino Queen that were nearly \$900,000 below expected levels in 2009.³² The situation



clearly points to the city's need for diversification of income and better long-term economic planning.

Community Involvement

The commitment and contributions of the Casino Queen to East St. Louis have gone beyond taxes. The corporation has also remained invested and involved in various projects to benefit the city, nonprofit organizations that serve the city, and its residents. The Casino Queen

Foundation became active in 1994 to support the surrounding community, citizens, and businesses through investment and support.³³

From its inception, the Casino Queen Foundation began a program for distributing low-interest small business loans for East St. Louisans, setting the minimum five-year total investment at \$2.5 million. A major problem in East St. Louis had been the lack of available capital; new businesses or programs struggled to get off the ground and were unable to secure loans. The Casino Queen



Foundation's small loan program was designed to offer loans between about \$10,000 and \$15,000 at low interest to help encourage business development, particularly in needed business areas such as family restaurants or a farmers' market.³⁴ The Foundation also contributed to the early development of the East St. Louis Small Business Development Center, designed to provide training, services, and counseling for small business start-ups.³⁵

The Casino Queen Foundation has also remained committed to its pledge to continue to bring money and

support to the broader East St. Louis community, donating to groups such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, scholarship foundations, musical and dance troupes, and other community groups.³⁶ The Foundation has offered a great deal of support to and through the school system, such as a \$25,000 donation to the Lion's Club for vision screening through local School District 189.³⁷ Other involvement within the East St. Louis School District includes a range of educational and training programs that promote leadership, community involvement, and good citizenship



among students.³⁸ Contributions have also been made to surrounding communities, such as a \$1,000 grant to a Catholic school in nearby Belleville, Illinois, to help provide computers for families that could not afford them on their own.³⁹ The Foundation has also regularly sponsored a Holiday Toyland program, distributing toys and gifts to up to 3,000 children in East St. Louis each Christmas season.⁴⁰

In addition, the management and owners of the Casino Queen have partnered in programs that work more directly with the city. In 2007, the Casino Queen joined Mayor Alvin Parks and representatives from the city and School District 189 in order to work on the physical clean-up of the city. This was seen as both a short-term goal and part of encouraging community service and volunteerism over the long term. The Casino Queen has offered physical support for the partnership, providing supplies such as lawnmowers and trash bags.⁴¹

Ongoing Issues

Wherever there are gaming establishments, regardless of the good that they bring to the surrounding community and economy, there are often concerns about the negative repercussions. In East St. Louis, faced with so many challenges before the casino was introduced, it may be harder to attribute problems directly to the casino. Still there are ongoing concerns and challenges that face the Casino Queen and its relationship with the city and residents.

Political conflict and change have been a recurring concern for all businesses in East St. Louis. One specific example, mentioned above, was the disagreement with Mayor Officer during the development of plans to build a new facility. Political disagreements and transitions have been an issue for East St. Louis over an extended period of time and have at times been a hindrance to bringing in other business development or addressing the challenges that the city faces. Political changes and economic demands from the state have also hindered the growth and development of the Casino Queen as it has been forced to contribute more and more to state taxes.⁴²

As has been discussed, even with the support of the Casino Queen's tax revenue, the City of East St. Louis has continued to face economic struggles. The city government went into a crisis in 2002 in response to a massive budget shortfall in 2001. This was the first time, since the Casino Queen opened in 1993, that the city had faced a shutdown; revenues dipped in 2001 and did not meet expectations, which had been optimistically factored into an increased budget.⁴³ The severe cuts to the city's workforce in August 2010 show all too starkly that the tenuous economic situation of the city had not improved. The heavy reliance on the tax revenues from the Casino



Queen makes the city extremely vulnerable to any economic downturn.

There has continued to be a lack of additional economic development in East St. Louis. Certainly, some new businesses have opened since 1993, but nothing on the large scale that was envisioned or hoped for at the time.⁴⁴ While the Casino Queen's investment in the city government and involvement in the community have had major effects on the self-sufficiency of the city, the Casino Queen itself remains a main source of income for the city with few other current alternatives for major economic support. This is not necessarily an unusual situation for urban-based casinos. As they tend to draw gamblers

from the local area, urban casinos do not often prompt the same level of economic development that destination-style casinos (such as those in Las Vegas) may spur.⁴⁵

In East St. Louis, further economic development has also been hindered by business concerns about the political and economic security of an investment in the area. Among earlier failed attempts to spur development was a 1985 plan that would have included \$500 million for barge traffic and a recycling plant; instead it resulted in lawsuits and criminal indictments.⁴⁶ The combination of city political turmoil, problems with perceptions of crime and insecurity, and the lack of a strong supportive infrastructure have limited interest or investments in large-scale development in East St. Louis for many years.

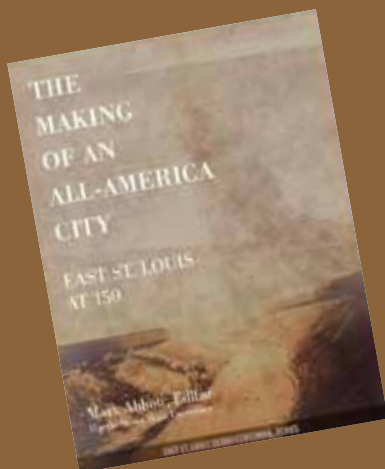
Casinos are often linked by opponents to crime and the introduction of moral concerns.⁴⁷ East St. Louis faced problems with high crime rates long before the arrival of the casino. Because of this, the facility has given ongoing attention to the security of its patrons. While there have been isolated incidents of theft, age violations, and a handful of violent incidents related to Casino Queen patrons, crime in East St. Louis generally has not been adversely affected by the introduction of gambling into the community.⁴⁸ In fact, given the influence of the tax revenue from the casino in allowing the city to support the police force, fire department, and basic infrastructure, the Casino Queen's presence has likely made the city a safer place. As with any gaming enterprise, there may be concerns about the role of the casino in questions of morality, social issues such as gambling or alcohol addictions, or family issues, but these are difficult to track. In the case of the Casino Queen, however, the positive effects of gaming on government funding, employment, and support or community businesses and development far outweigh any concerns in terms of its detriments to East St. Louis and the city's residents.



Conclusion

The Casino Queen and East St. Louis continue to face uncertainty in the still-shaky economy. The economic viability of the Casino Queen is important not only as a business, but to the success of the City of East St. Louis. The revenue from the Casino Queen is an integral part of the operating budget of the city and has proven

fundamental to its economic success. This means that as the business of the casino prospers or suffers, the city and its residents do as well. Since 1993, the casino has been and will continue to be an important element in the economic development and success of the city. For true stability, however, the City of East St. Louis needs a greater range of economic development and sources of revenue.



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St. Louis Builds a Post Office

BY DAVID L. STRAIGHT



The Post Office occupied the ground floor of this modest Italianate building at 22 North Second Street from 1852 until 1859. The C. A. Roberts Company, which stored steel tubing on the ground floor, was the last tenant. Eugene Taylor took this photograph in 1936. (Photo: National Park Service, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Archives, Record Unit 106.8-5 Parcel Files)

By 1851, Postmaster Archibald Gamble realized that St. Louis needed a larger post office sooner than Congress would act to provide one. The cramped quarters he rented at 87 Chesnut were no longer adequate for either the city's rapidly growing population or the surging mail volume encouraged by cheap postage. From 16,469 inhabitants in 1840, the population of St. Louis had exploded to 77,860 by 1850. It would more than double again, reaching 160,773 in 1860. St. Louis was the eighth-largest city in the nation, closely trailing Cincinnati and New Orleans. Nationally, the U.S. Post Office delivered slightly fewer than 40 million letters in 1845, the first year of reduced postage rates. By 1854, that volume had swollen to nearly 120 million letters. Exceeding mere population growth, the average number of letters received per capita more than tripled from 1.61 in 1840 to 5.15 in 1860. Having the support of local investors, Gamble wrote to Third Assistant Postmaster General John Marron in October 1851:

have therefore made an arrangement with some Gentlemen here to build a Post Office, the house to cover 60 by 96 feet at the corner of Second and Chesnut Streets for the lower story of which I agree to pay \$1500. And in as much as I had no authority to lease it for a term of years, they build under the expectation that the Department will permit it to be so occupied for eight or ten years.

This building, erected on the southeast corner of Second and Chesnut streets, approximately one block west from what is today the north leg of the Arch, was the first building constructed in St. Louis to be a post office.

The first meeting of business leaders to discuss memorializing Congress for the construction of a post office in St. Louis was held in November 1838; committees were formed, but their efforts came to naught. At that time, newspapers comprised 95 percent of the mail by weight. Most Americans received no letters; those mailed usually concerned business and legal matters, not chatty family correspondence. The condition and location of the post office was primarily a concern of the business community. Although resulting from a change of administrations in Washington, the appointment of Archibald Gamble as Postmaster coincided with the rebuilding of St. Louis in the wake of the 1849 fire, which had destroyed much of the business district. Born in Winchester, Virginia, and trained as a lawyer, Gamble had moved to St. Louis in 1816 when he was about 24. He first worked as the clerk of the St. Louis Bank, then as a deputy court clerk. Territorial Governor William Clark appointed him Clerk of the Circuit Court and ex officio recorder of deeds for St. Louis County, a post he held for eighteen years. In 1822, he married Louisa, the daughter of Rufus Easton, the first St. Louis Postmaster. Gamble's career included several local business ventures as well as serving as city alderman and the legal agent for the public schools. After Congress appropriated \$50,000 in September 1850 for a combined customhouse, post office, and sub-treasury in St. Louis, wrangling over its location began. Gamble

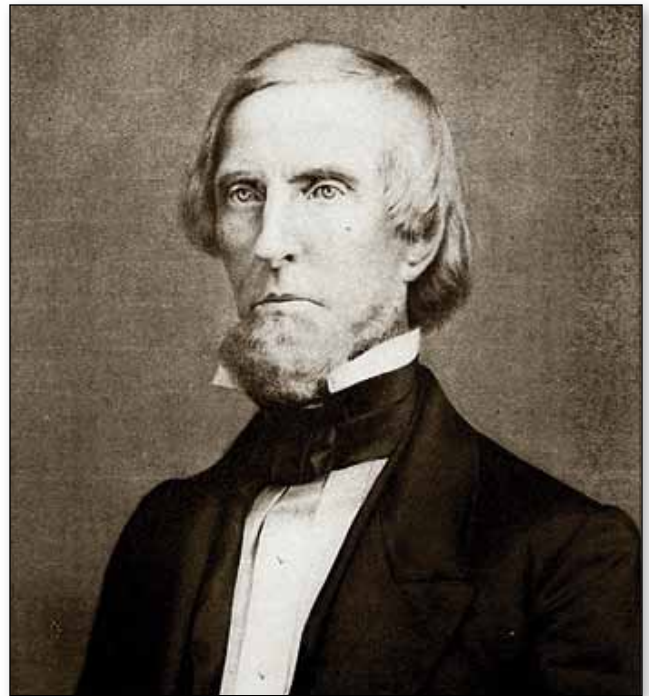


The Gamble family burial lot was among the earliest purchased at the rural cemetery in St. Louis, Bellefontaine. (Image: Bellefontaine Cemetery Association)

began searching for an immediate solution to the needs of the St. Louis Post Office.

In the spring of 1851, the county was considering constructing two office buildings—one on Chesnut, the other on Market—in front of the unfinished courthouse. Gamble requested that they include temporary quarters for the post office and the customhouse. For the post office, he requested “one apartment be set aside, forty feet front by one hundred in depth.” The County Court did not agree to build a temporary federal office building. In the meantime, the St. Louis Post Office Building Company organized, leased a vacant lot (burned in the 1849 fire) from D. D. Page, and approached Gamble with a proposal to construct a post office to his specifications. He accepted, as outlined in his letter to John Marron, and they erected a three-story brick building, with a modest cornice and stone quoins at the corners, in the popular new Italianate style for commercial architecture. Prominent St. Louis architect George I. Barnett designed the building. With all the chimney flues located in the exterior walls and only three rows of wooden structural columns, the large open ground floor was easily customized for the needs of the post office. Lawyers’ offices were planned for the second floor and “sleeping or other private apartments” for the third. Gamble opened his new post office on April 18, 1852.

This new St. Louis Post Office served a population that had grown far beyond the city boundaries, set in



Archibald Gamble (1792-1866) St. Louis Postmaster 1849-1854. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)



October 15, 1851, letter from St. Louis Postmaster Archibald Gamble to Third Assistant Postmaster General John Marron, informing him of the plans for a new St. Louis Post Office. (Image: United States Postal Service Library)



P. O. St. Louis, Oct. 15, 1851

Sir

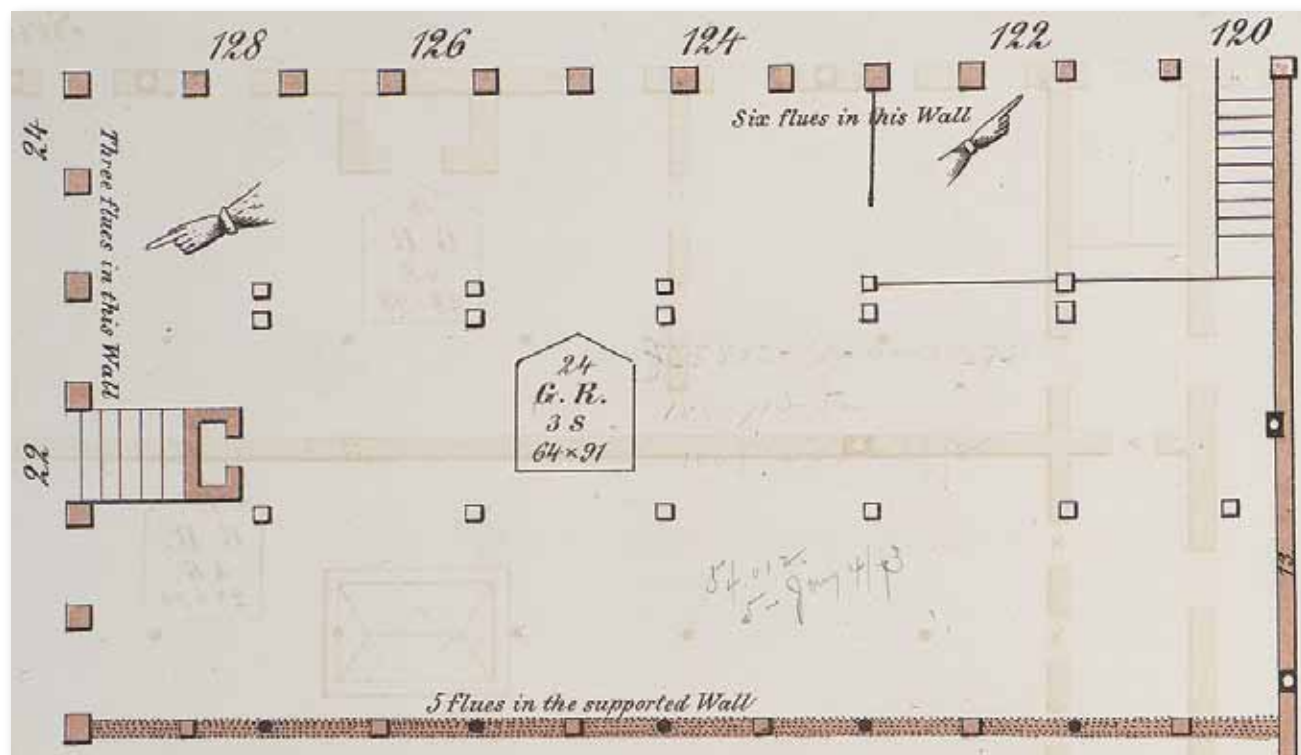
Having had some correspondence with you on the subject of a Post Office building for St. Louis, without obtaining the authority asked, and the matter being left to my judgment and discretion restricted by the amount of commissions. I think it my duty to communicate what I have done in the premises.

The office I now occupy and for which I pay a rent of \$1000 per annum is too small for the business and labor to be performed, and still I should have to pay an advance upon that rent of \$250 if I continue to occupy it. I have therefore made an arrangement with some Gentlemen here to build a Post Office, the house to cover 60 by 96 feet at the corner of Second and Chesnut Streets for the lower story of which I agree to pay \$1500. And in as much as I had no authority to lease it for a term of years, they build under the expectation that the Department will permit it to be so occupied for eight or ten years. The position is central and will give general satisfaction.

As the rates of commissions to the Post Masters under the new law has not yet been fixed this item of increased expense of the St. Louis Office should be borne in mind.

With great respect
your obedient servant
Archibald Gamble, PM

Hon: John Marron
Washington City



A ground floor plan from A. Whipple & Co.'s *Insurance Map of St. Louis, Mo.* (1870) provides construction details. The pentagon in the center gives the dimensions of the building, 64 by 91 feet; three stories in height; a gravel roof; and walls extending 24 inches above the roof. Three rows of wooden posts support the upper floors. The east wall (at right) is thirteen inches thick. The south wall (bottom) has both iron and wood support columns, as well as five chimney flues. The west (left) and north (top) walls consist of masonry columns with large window openings; there are chimney flues in those walls as well. Street numbers are shown outside the building. The entrance is on Second Street at the left. (Photo: *The Unreal City: Historic St. Louis Maps*, <http://digital.wustl.edu/w/whi/>)

1841 at 18th Street. Finally, in 1855, the state legislature extended the city boundaries to Keokuk Street on the south, 660 feet west of Grand Avenue, and East Grand Avenue on the north, incorporating several subdivisions and settlements previously outside the city limits. Carondelet, which would become part of St. Louis, had its own post office. The farmers residing in the rest of St. Louis County received their mail from post offices in the villages of Belle Grove, Bridgeton, Des Peres, Ellisville, Fee Fee, Fenton, Florissant, Fox Creek, Jefferson Barracks, Manchester, Oakville, Rock Hill, Sappington, or Waltonham.

1851 was a pivotal year for the U.S. Post Office; it marked the beginning of a substantial growth in letter mail. The cheap postage reforms had brought the cost of mailing a letter within the financial means of all American families. Before 1845, the maximum postage rate, 25 cents for each sheet of paper mailed over three hundred miles, exceeded the daily wage for most people. In that year, the rates were reduced to five cents per ½ ounce under three hundred miles and ten cents over three hundred miles; most St. Louis correspondence traveled over three hundred miles. Rates were further reduced in 1851 to three cents per ½ ounce, except for transcontinental letters, which were

charged six cents. The introduction of postage stamps in 1847 simplified mailing letters; they could be stamped and simply dropped into collection boxes. Weight-based rates (rather than rates based on the number of sheets of paper) encouraged using envelopes rather than folding letters and sealing them with wax, because using an envelope, another sheet of paper, no longer doubled the postage cost. The 88-percent reduction in postage rates between 1845 and 1851 transformed the way Americans used their Post Office. With this communications channel now affordable, they responded by writing letters. At a time when America began to experience large population movements—the gold rush, western settlement, the Civil War, and urbanization—the new postage rates allowed families to stay in contact. A flood of chatty, personal letters came to dominate the mail stream.

The St. Louis Post Office employed only nineteen men in 1853. Besides the Postmaster, there was a Principal Assistant, the Chief Clerk for the Distribution Room, the Chief Clerk for the Newspaper Room, the Principal Box Clerk, thirteen other clerks, and a Mail Agent, stationed on the wharf to accept mail from steamboats. The most obvious difference from today was the absence of mail carriers. Until 1863, when city carriers were introduced

in the largest cities, mail had to be picked up at the post office. Also, there were no collection boxes, branches, or substations. Outgoing mail from the entire city had to be brought to the post office at Second and Chestnut. The post office was open long hours; in 1850, “from sunrise to sunset” six days a week and one hour on Sunday to distribute mail.

To receive a letter, one entered the Distribution Room, gave his or her name to the clerk, and waited while the clerk checked to see if there was any mail. With this system, the post office naturally became a place of social interaction where one might see neighbors or business colleagues. By 1859, St. Louis, like most urban post offices, had established a separate entrance and window for women, so they did not have to stand in line with the men. Because of the large immigrant population, the St. Louis Post Office had a separate window and clerk for German mail. Many who regularly received mail found that renting a box at one dollar per three months was more efficient for collecting one’s mail. The 1859 post office had nearly 5,000 boxes for rent. Those not wishing to make a trip to the post office to pick up or drop off mail could hire

a carrier. There were both private firms and government contract carriers in St. Louis in the 1850s. They charged a penny or two for each letter carried to or from the Post Office.

Upon receiving a letter, postage might be owed. Originally, nearly all letters were sent collect out of a fear that prepayment removed the incentive to have them actually delivered. Prepaying postage was a social slight, suggesting the recipient was too poor to afford to receive mail. However, following the introduction of postage stamps, prepayment quickly became the norm. The social mores changed to suggest that senders who failed to stamp their letters were rude. The post office encouraged prepayment by charging a higher rate for unpaid letters. Finally, in 1855, prepayment became mandatory for letters.

The volume and clerical burden of newspapers and magazines required a separate room and division of clerks in the post office. As with the Distribution Room, unless a patron rented a box, he or she gave a name and waited while the clerk searched for the newspapers. By 1859, a separate clerk handled German newspapers. From the Post Office Act of 1792 until today, letter

The interior of Gamble’s Post Office as it looked in 1938, just prior to demolition. This view from the southeast corner of the first floor shows the three rows of columns supporting the upper floors, the entrance at the left, and the windows on Chestnut Street (right) and 2nd Street (center). A man holding a signboard to identify the building appears in many Historic American Buildings Survey photos. (Image: National Park Service, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Archives, Record Unit 106.8-5 Parcel Files)





The basement at 22-26 North Second Street. Before structural steel, a three-story building required a wide stone foundation and massive wooden beams. (Image: National Park Service, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Archives, Record Unit 106.8-5 Parcel Files)

postage has subsidized low rates for newspapers and magazines. Publishers did not prepay their postage until 1875. Although the rates were cheaper if a subscriber prepaid their postage one quarter in advance at their local post office, many newspapers still arrived with postage to be collected. Publishers mailed copies to former subscribers as well as large numbers of sample copies in hopes that someone would pay the postage and read their publications. As a result, every post office in America was burdened with mounds of unclaimed newspapers, which the post office had already transported without receiving postage.

In 1852, the federal government purchased the St. Louis Theater at the corner of Third and Olive streets and hired George I. Barnett to design the post office and customhouse. David Armstrong succeeded Gamble as St. Louis Postmaster in 1854. Now over sixty, Gamble retired; he died in 1866. Although by 1858 it was “not

sufficiently large for the increasing business,” Gamble’s post office continued to serve the citizens of St. Louis until the Greek Revival structure on Olive Street was finished in 1859. Afterwards, the building at Second and Chesnut served a variety of tenants. Business directories list commission merchants in lumber, grain, butter, and eggs; salesmen of surgical instruments; distillers’ agents and gaugers; and small newspapers. Gradually, the renters became more industrial—a machine shop and a warehouse for steel tubing—while the upper floors became a flophouse. The building was part of the riverfront property purchased by the National Park Service in the 1930s for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Before they were demolished, the Historic American Buildings Survey photographed and measured the buildings that once comprised a vibrant business district in St. Louis.

NOTES

- ¹ Before the Civil War, Chestnut Street was often spelled without the first t. Buildings in St. Louis were numbered consecutively westward from the Mississippi River. Six different city directories published between 1844 and 1850 give the post office address as “87 Chesnut,” while W. D. Skillman’s *The Western Metropolis; or St. Louis* (1846) gives the location as “the north side of Chestnut Street, between Third and Fourth.” Quite likely, these are the same location.
- ² Postal reformer Pliny Miles provided these estimates in his tract *Postal Reform: Its Urgent Necessity and Practicability* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1855), 26-27.
- ³ Allan Pred, *Urban Growth and City Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980), 224.
- ⁴ Archibald Gamble to John Marron, October 15, 1851, United States Postal Service Library.
- ⁵ J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Saint Louis City and County* (Philadelphia: Everts, 1883), 2:1434.
- ⁶ Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 38.
- ⁷ William Hyde and Howard L. Conard, *Encyclopedia of the History of St. Louis* (St. Louis: Southern History Company, 1899), 2:861; and Scharf, *History of Saint Louis City and County*, 2:1469.
- ⁸ Lawrence Lowic, *The Architectural Heritage of St. Louis, 1803-1891* (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1982), 76.
- ⁹ *Missouri Republican*, May 6, 1851, 3.
- ¹⁰ *Missouri Republican*, October 9, 1851, 3.
- ¹¹ *Missouri Republican*, November 9, 1851, 3, gives the name as George G. Barnett, probably a typo.
- ¹² *Missouri Republican*, November 9, 1851, 3.
- ¹³ *St. Louis Intelligencer*, April 18, 1852, quoted in “Building History, Parcel 215, Block 33” in the National Park Service, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Archives, Record Unit 106.8-5 Parcel Files.
- ¹⁴ *History: Physical Growth of the City of Saint Louis* (St. Louis City Planning Commission, 1969) 14-15.
- ¹⁵ Taken from the Missouri list in *The United States Post Office Directory* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1850), 97-99. [reprinted Holland, Michigan: Theron Wierenga, 1981]
- ¹⁶ The social significance of this change in letter writing is explored by David Henkin in *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- ¹⁷ Their names are listed in William L. Montague, *St. Louis Business Directory for 1853-54* (St. Louis: E. A. Lewis, 1853), 119-20.
- ¹⁸ James Green, *The Saint Louis Business Directory for the year of our Lord 1850* (St. Louis: McKee, 1850), 96.
- ¹⁹ There is no surviving description of the interior or operation of Gamble’s post office. However, there is an excellent description of the “new” (1859) post office in Robert V. Kennedy’s *St. Louis Directory for 1859* (Appendix, 10-12). Some of the procedures that Kennedy documents may have been implemented in the previous building.
- ²⁰ Jacob N. Taylor and M. O. Crooks, *Sketch Book of Saint Louis* (St. Louis: George Knapp, 1858), 40.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jane Davis is a former cataloging librarian in the pursuit of a PhD in Public History from Middle Tennessee State University. Although now a resident of St. Louis, her degree and the majority of her academic and personal background has been in Tennessee. She just completed her residency at the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in St. Louis and is researching adaptive reuse of historic buildings for her dissertation.



Anne F. Boxberger Flaherty is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She teaches courses on American and Comparative Politics and specializes in teaching on the political experiences of ethnic and racial groups in the United States and around the world. Her research focuses on American Indian politics, land rights, and gaming. Dr. Flaherty lives in Webster Groves, Missouri, with her husband, two dogs, and three children.



Quinta Scott is the author of *The Mississippi: A Visual Biography*. She is also the author of *Along Route 66: The Architecture of America's Highway*, a great read-aloud guidebook of the old road. She is the photographer/author of *Route 66: The Highway and Its People* with Susan Croce Kelly, and of *The Eads Bridge: Photographic Essay* by Quinta Scott; *Historical Appraisal* by Howard S. Miller. She and her husband, Barrie, live in Waterloo, Illinois, close to the American Bottom and the great Mississippi River Bluffs.



After 32 years with Washington University Libraries, **David Straight** recently retired to devote his full time to his postal history research and writing. His article "Cheap Postage: A Tool for Social Reform" was published this fall in *Smithsonian Contributions to History and Technology*, No. 55. He is currently co-chair of the annual Postal History Symposium, a member of the Museum Advisory Council for the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, and vice-president of the Postal History Society.



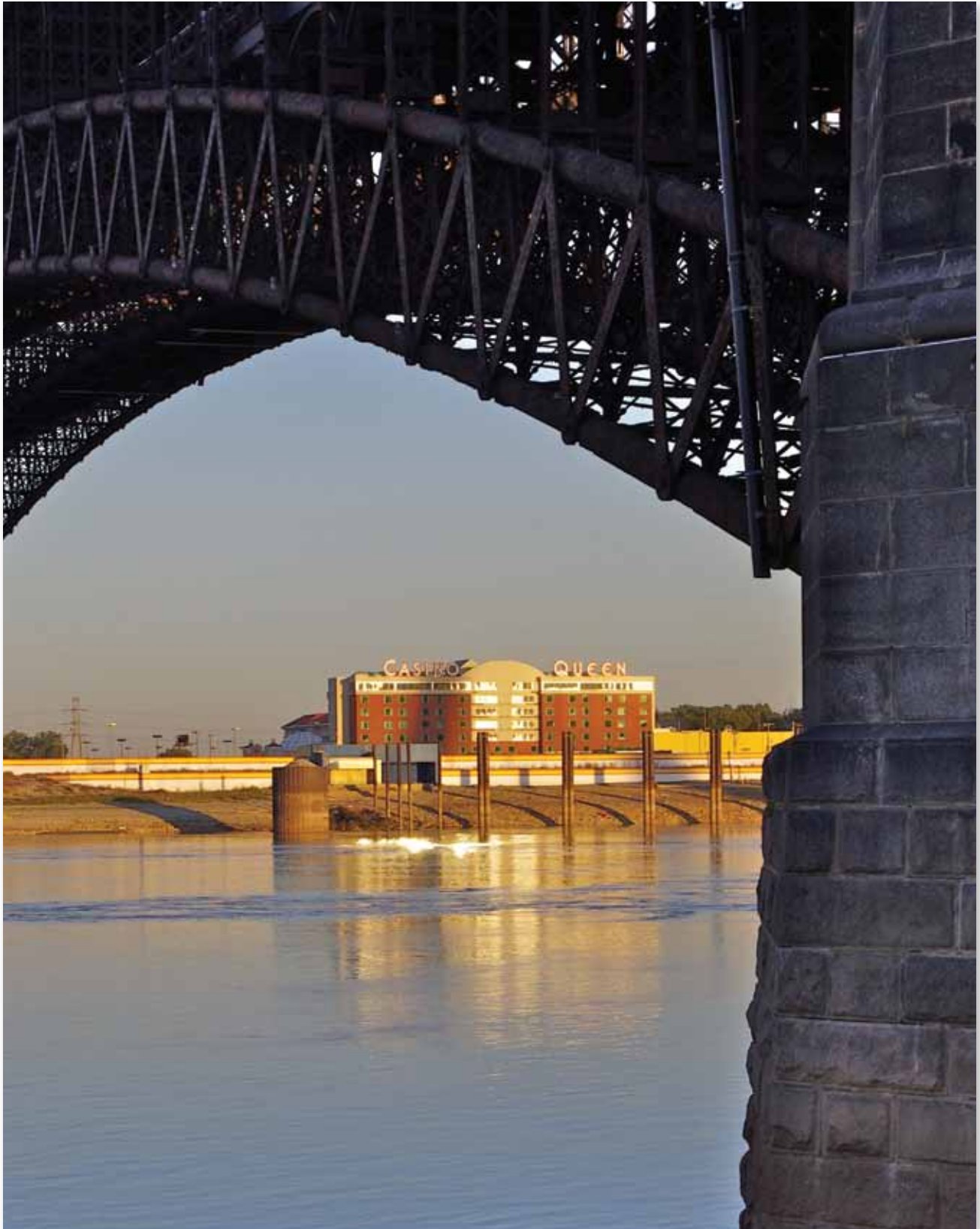
Drew VandeCreek is Director of Digital Initiatives at Northern Illinois University Libraries. He is a graduate of the College of Wooster and holds a PhD in American History from the University of Virginia.



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The Casino Queen from under the Eads Bridge. For an examination of the political and economic impact of the Casino Queen on East St. Louis, see "Gambling on the Economic Future of East St. Louis: The Casino Queen," by Anne Boxberger Flaherty, starting on p. 40.

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