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St. Louis as Historical Hub

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ST. LOUIS CURRENTS

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In May 2011, the Missouri legislature adjourned without passing an economic stimulus bill that included an "Aerotropolis" at Lambert Airport in St. Louis. The idea behind it was to create a hub for international trade, particularly with China, through a series of tax credits for those forwarding goods to foreign destinations and incentives for those building the facilities to support that commerce.[1] On the surface, it seemed like a bold innovation to connect Missouri, located in the center of the United States, with the global trade far from its borders by envisioning St. Louis as a "gateway zone" for goods. This new concept is not very new at all—St. Louis was founded on much the same premise and has continued to build around this "hinge economy" connecting regions, the nation, and the world. Since its inception, Missouri's economy has been an international one; indeed, the region's greatest economic growth had strong foundations in the efforts of public-private partnerships to nurture Missouri's role in international markets and commerce. And, as with the aerotropolis proposal, government played a role in the development of the Missouri economy and its directions.

The Fur Trade and the International West

The story of St. Louis as an international trade hub starts in New Orleans in 1763. At the time, France controlled (or at least claimed) all the lands drained by the Mississippi River and its tributaries, thanks to a grandiose claim made by Rene-Robert La Salle in 1682, naming the huge swath of land "Louisiana" for the reigning French monarch, Louis XIV. Over the next eight decades after La Salle's tour, the French focused much of their energies in North America on the lucrative fur trade with Native American tribes. At the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, officials in New Orleans rewarded local merchant Gilbert Antoine St. Maxent with an exclusive charter to trade with the tribes on the Missouri River for his service as a colonel in the militia. He joined Pierre Laclede Liguest, with whom he had served in the war, to create Maxent, Laclede, and Company. Laclede set off with his stepson Auguste Chouteau the following July to build a trade fort and establish new commercial relations with the tribes on the lower Missouri. The North American fur trade connected producers of raw materials (pelts) with markets as distant as Europe and East Asia; by the time of Missouri statehood, John

Jacob Astor had become the leader in the lucrative business of selling furs in China to exchange for tea and silk. The French gave the company an exclusive charter, not unlike a license granting a sort of monopoly on that commerce in that region. Conceptually, St. Louis began as an "aerotropolis," complete with government support.

What Laclede, Chouteau, and the others did not realize when they first established the trade fort was that they were no longer living under the French flag, but rather the Spanish one. France lost the French and Indian War to Great Britain, but in order to keep all of Louisiana out of British hands, France had signed the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau in late 1762 with the Spaniards ceding its North American holdings to Spain.[2] Meantime, St. Louis grew based almost entirely on commerce in furs with native tribes. Each year traders traveled north and west, and every spring tribes traveled to St. Louis with piles of pelts to exchange with Europeans for myriad goods—blankets and tools, hoes and axes, kettles and tobacco, gunpowder and ribbons. The value of this trade was immense; trade with just one tribe, the Sac and Fox, was $60,000 per year by 1804.[3] Spanish government officials required licenses to trade with the tribes—perhaps the area's first public-private partnership—and they were easily acquired by compensating local officials, so the fur trade quickly came to be in the hands of a few large traders like the Chouteau family and Manuel Lisa.[4] So successful was this business that St. Louisans found it more lucrative to focus their energies there and importing food from downriver, earning the village the moniker "paincourt"—short of bread. The problem was not that they could not produce foodstuffs, but that it made economic sense to focus energies on commerce and import food.[5]

Even after farming began in the St. Louis area, the village became a central clearinghouse for the fur trade. Spain proved unable to supply the burgeoning demands of the fur trade by the end of the American War of Independence, but Great Britain was more than able to fill the void. Britain ran its fur trade in Canada primarily through two chartered joint stock companies, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, which had made Britain the largest fur dealer in the world.[6] As a rapidly industrializing power (and the first to experience the Industrial Revolution) financed by its mercantilist-based global system of colonies (including the thirteen on the Atlantic coast of North America), Britain was in prime position to address the demand for furs in both Europe and East Asia as well as to fuel the growing commerce with native tribes. By the late eighteenth century, the British were the largest buyer of furs from native tribes in the Mississippi Valley and Great Lakes.

St. Louis remained a center for the exchange of goods going to the far reaches of the globe. Anxious to divert British trade, Spain reopened the Mississippi River to American shipping in 1789; despite having to pay duties to Spanish officials, American merchants and farmers became part of the same network of goods as St. Louisans.[7] Spanish officials managed the Indian trade in much the same way as other Europeans, by granting licenses to traders and giving individuals or joint stock companies trade rights with specific tribes, often along the Missouri or Mississippi rivers and their tributaries. Spain endorsed a new concept to trade with tribes farther up the Missouri with the Mandan in present-day North Dakota in 1794, but meager profits from several expeditions slowed interest in the region until the United States acquired Louisiana.

Thomas Jefferson clearly understood the pivotal role of the region in a broader global commerce in which the fur trade was central. Jefferson expanded the Indian factory trade system, an early public-private partnership that started under the Washington administration. As originally conceived, these trade "factories " (so named because they were managed by men called factors) were embedded in army forts as places where regional tribes could exchange their goods, primarily furs, for an assortment of goods that would, Americans thought, help them become more "civilized." President George Washington saw the promise of such commerce and goods as giving Native Americans the "blessings of civilization" that would transform them into Christian, English-speaking, land-owning farmers who would contribute to the national economy. The number of trade factories, trading for furs with Indians and selling them at auction to fund the factory system, more than doubled under Jefferson, the most under any president.[8] Even before the Louisiana Purchase was complete, Jefferson expanded on his views regarding a western public-private partnership in the fur business; in early 1803, he sent Congress a confidential message saying that the region "is inhabited by numerous tribes, who furnish great supplies of furs & peltry to the trade of another nation [i.e., Great Britain]," and suggested a route connecting the United States to the Pacific (and, by extension, China and India) "traversing a moderate climate, offering according to the best accounts a continued navigation from it's [sic] source, and, possibly with a single portage, from the Western ocean."[9] Jefferson was even clearer in his instructions dated June 20, 1803, to Meriwether Lewis, co-commander of the Corps of Northwest Discovery commissioned to traverse the route from St. Louis to the Pacific: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river [sic], & such principal stream[s] of it . . . [that] may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce."[10] Captains Lewis and William Clark conveyed these sentiments to the tribal leaders they met on their expedition, telling chiefs that they were not there as traders, but others would follow with more goods and, the captains said, the new "Great Father" (that is, Jefferson) expected that those traders would be treated well.[11] Although supported with public funds, Lewis and Clark were clearly to advance private enterprise, including the fur trade from St. Louis.

By the start of the War of 1812, St. Louisans still saw their city as an epicenter of the fur trade. A group of leading fur traders and government officials, including Auguste Chouteau, Manuel Lisa, explorer-turned-Indian-Agent William Clark, and territorial governor Meriwether Lewis's brother Reuben, pooled resources in 1809 to form the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company. However, the company was eventually driven out of business by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, which held a virtual monopoly on the American fur trade by the 1820s. St. Louis thus became only one part of a large network within Astor's network that acquired furs in the West, which it then exchanged for silk, tea, and other products in China. Thus, furs that passed through St. Louis ended up as part of a web of commerce that stretched to western Europe and the coastal trade ports in China.

The national fur business declined starting in the 1830s due to competition from the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada, declining supplies, and changing styles, and that downturn included St. Louis. During the 1880s, however, the fur business in St. Louis experienced a renaissance; local fur receipts increased almost fivefold during the decade, and continued to grow into the early twentieth century.[12] Furs from Alaska, Canada, and the United States continued to flow into St. Louis, making it the leading market for raw furs by the early 1900s. By the 1912—1913 fur-harvesting season, for example, furs sold in St. Louis were valued at some $12 million—an increase by a third in less than a decade.[13]

A series of federal laws and policies helped secure St. Louis's place as a global fur center in the 1910s. The fashion for fur coats, with fur on the outside of the coat rather than as a lining and collar, grew during the Gilded Age, with sealskin furs being particularly popular. By 1910, fur-bearing seals were approaching extinction.[14] The federal government responded with the Fur Seal Act of 1910, placing Pribilof seals under regulatory control of the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Fisheries and signing the North Pacific Fur Seal Convention in 1911 with Great Britain and Japan whereby all agreed to a temporary moratorium on harvesting seals heading south on annual breeding migrations. St. Louis fur magnate Philip Fouke, president of Funsten Brothers, convinced federal officials in 1913 to sell the now-regulated harvests of furs through St. Louis rather than London, making St. Louis a global leader in fur sales, especially with its contract two years later to become the exclusive seller of government furs.[15] When World War I ended, St. Louis was flooded with furs and fur dealers from Europe, making the newly formed St. Louis Fur Exchange created in 1916 immensely profitable.[16] In 1920, following two record-breaking auctions, the St. Louis Fur Exchange built its new seven-story exchange in downtown St. Louis near the waterfront. Its display rooms, storage facilities, and auction room allowed it to declare itself "the world's largest raw fur exchange."[17] After a brief downturn, the fur auctions resumed in 1934 and continued profitably until the Fouke Fur Company (successor to the St. Louis Fur Exchange) ceased auctions there in 1956.

Steamboats, Commercial Growth, and the Global Hinge Economy

With so many furs of such great value being exported, it meant that there was much imported as well. St. Louis evolved quickly into a commercial center. Because it was the gatekeeper to the Missouri River, Missouri also became a key transfer point for goods and people. Location was key to this development. From the standpoint of the early twenty-first century, it seems counterintuitive that a state in the center of the nation would be a hub for international commerce, but for much of the state's first century, Missouri was at a critical juncture with foreign commerce that shaped the early business community. As with the value of real estate, a central tenet to the early development of the Missouri economy, and especially that of St. Louis, was location.

Early river commerce was central to the fur trade since the Missouri and Upper Mississippi rivers and their tributaries were the main thoroughfares for connecting tribal regions with the new United States. Yet St. Louis remained on the edge of the frontier until the arrival of the first steamboats. Swift currents and shallow waters meant that steam-powered river craft on the western rivers required a different design with a shallower draft and different engine configuration. When the first steamboat, *Zebulon Pike*, arrived at the wharf in St. Louis in 1817, and on the Missouri two years later, it ushered in a revolution in transportation for Missouri. Previous craft had to rely on the current and wind for power going downriver, and had an arduous trip back up against the swift currents. That all changed with new transportation; even the earliest steamboats traveled from New Orleans upriver to St. Louis in just ten days, as compared to more than ninety for unpowered flatboats and keelboats. In 1849, the record for the same trip was three and a half days.[18] By the time of Missouri statehood in 1821, the St. Louis riverfront was a beehive of activity with steamboats parked along its wharf in front of the present-day Gateway Arch grounds.

Steamboats facilitated the rapid growth of the St. Louis economy in the state's first decades. When St. Louis was chartered as a city in 1822, the city's first mayor, William Carr Lane, immediately called for public funding of an enhanced levee on the Mississippi River to facilitate expanded steamboat trade. This public-private partnership was successful; by 1832, just fifteen years after the arrival of the *Zebulon Pike*, some 532 steamboats docked at the St. Louis wharf, unloading and reloading goods from not only North America but also Europe, coastal Africa, India, and China. The number of steamboats almost quadrupled by 1845, and grew another 50 percent within just a few years. Not only were there more steamboats on the rivers, but they were bigger, so tonnage grew almost fourfold between 1834 and 1844, and doubled again ten years later. Even when shipping and travel rates doubled during the 1850s, commerce continued undeterred.[19] Each of those 3,000 steamboats carried between 300 and 400 passengers and 700 tons of freight, all stopping in St. Louis for people to spend money and for goods to be bought, warehoused, financed, and sold. St. Louis's location as the main port near the divide between the Upper and Lower Mississippi River and between the points where the Ohio and Missouri Rivers flowed into the Mississippi made it an ideal connector location. Goods from overseas came up the Mississippi via New Orleans, pork and precut houses from Cincinnati, furs from the Upper Missouri and the Great Lakes, and tobacco from Missouri plantations all converged on the St. Louis waterfront.

Commerce and Western Trade

Westward expansion, starting with Mexican independence in 1821, also contributed to the rapid growth of the Missouri economy in the 1820s and 1830s. Spanish policy had ensured that the Americans were kept out of the lucrative trade with Santa Fe, its northernmost important settlement, but the newly independent Mexican government opened the city. Almost immediately, William Becknell led a group along the six-hundred-mile trek from Franklin, Missouri, to open this new market, supplying furs, silver, and mules with standard returns on investment between 20 and 50 percent. Within the next few years, the starting point for the Santa Fe Trail moved westward to the new Westport (later Kansas City), further enhancing the region's importance as an exchange center for distant goods. As with steamboats, wagons on the Santa Fe Trail grew as commerce demanded. Murphy wagons, which were manufactured in St. Louis and assembled in Westport, required six yoke of oxen to haul in caravans as large as twenty five wagons.[20] This role of St. Louis and Missouri as an economic exchange point lessened the impact of the Panic of 1837 in the state. The flow of goods into the state's economy and specie into the State Bank of Missouri, existing through a charter granted by the Missouri legislature, kept currency stable; migration kept money coming to the state as well. St. Louis's population doubled during the 1820s and again during the 1830s, with many immigrants bringing money with them to invest in new businesses.[21]

This westward movement of people and goods created additional opportunities for new and existing businessmen with the aid and support of government. This was particularly true when settlers began moving west to the Oregon Territory. Migration started slowly in the 1830s,[22] picked up in the 1840s, but exploded starting in 1849.[23] By the first part of that year, word had traveled back east of gold discoveries at a mill owned by John Sutter in California, which had just been acquired by the United States in its war with Mexico. Between 1849 and 1854, more than fifty thousand people moved to California annually in search of easy wealth. The great majority of them went overland on the Oregon and California Trails, which started in western Missouri. Most of these argonauts—typically young, male, and single with little intention of remaining in California—had read at least one of the standard "emigrant's guides," sort of the Fodor's of the western trails, which advised them to purchase needed supplies in St. Louis rather than carry or ship them from home in places like New York or Ohio (the states sending the most argonauts west, besides Missouri). This was a boon to the St. Louis economy, since thousands of men were passing through the city each spring, all looking to purchase the same list of goods from guidebooks by Lansford Hastings or Joseph Ware. Prices for coffee, hardtack, salt pork, gold pans, floppy hats, horses, wagons, and other essentials skyrocketed; indeed, every diarist of the Gold Rush who commented on St. Louis decried the high prices and (often) low quality of the goods.[24] Other cities and towns upriver soon expanded as suppliers as well, with outfitters emerging in places like Independence, Westport, and St. Joseph.[25]

The Role of Bridges and Railroads

As a river-based transportation hub, St. Louis grew and flourished. Having said that, a river-based economy had its problems. Rivers are not easily crossed and they do not always flow everywhere people, goods, and products need to go. In Missouri as elsewhere, railroads and bridges, starting with the Illinois and Missouri Bridge (later named the Eads Bridge for its chief engineer), were the solutions. By the early 1830s, railroads were the cutting-edge technology; just ten years after John Stevens showed his steam-powered locomotive on a circular track in New Jersey in 1825, some sixty-four delegates attended a statewide railroad convention in St. Louis and proposed construction of two roads to connect the two regions producing export products to St. Louis, the largest shipping and warehousing city in the state—one westward to Fayette in the heart of the state's tobacco plantation country, the other southwest to the mineral mining counties.[26] Typically, eastern states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, and New York were heavy investors in such costly infrastructure during the period, but Missouri was different. With neither sufficient private capital nor state or federal underwriting, the proposals languished during the Panic of 1837.

But with hopes of becoming the eastern terminus of a national rail line that would connect east and west, St. Louisans hosted a national railroad convention in 1849. It was one of several held by cities at the time. Both Chicago and Memphis, for example, had similar aspirations and held such conventions. Among its speakers was Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, one of the Senate's great orators and a noted proponent of expanded rail lines and commerce. In his speech, Benton called on the United States to complete the vision that started with Christopher Columbus and build a route to East Asia with a new sort of public-private partnership. For Benton, his home state of Missouri was the key hinge point between the developed United States and the lucrative trade in Asia; it could be the place of exchange where exotic goods from the east mixed with those of Europe and the United States. Appropriately enough, the statue of Benton in Lafayette Park (sculpted by Harriet Hosmer in 1868) faces west, inscribed with Benton's quote from the convention, "To the East, to India."

Railroad investment was somewhat slow in Missouri during the decade before the Civil War, particularly after the disastrous Pacific Railroad's Gasconade Bridge collapsed in November 1855, leaving thirty-one dead. The state legislature started a program of state aid for construction in 1851, and the federal government gave the state alternating sections of public land along the route of the Hannibal & St. Joseph and Pacific Railroads.[27] Although about eighty percent of the stock sold in the Hannibal & St. Joseph was to private individuals (many of whom were in eastern cities like New York and Boston), this was not the general trend with antebellum railroads in Missouri; overall, during the 1850s, individuals purchased only about a third of the stock sold in railroads.[28] Public opposition to state operation and construction of railroads meant that the state resorted to financial aid to these start-up companies, which often managed the money poorly and defaulted during the 1860s.[29]

During the Civil War, state government facilitated migration to the state through agents and advertising in the eastern United States, Canada, and even Europe. Thanks to offers of free or cheap transport and promises of homesteads in "one of the richest and healthiest agricultural and pastoral regions on this continent," the Hannibal & St. Joseph had sold some five hundred thousand acres of land mostly to individual farmers rather than speculators, increasing the state's population by as much as one hundred thousand by 1870.[30] However, the Hannibal & St. Joseph was the only railroad completed across the state at war's end, with a combination of eastern capital and a $3 million loan from the state, leaving the state government, now under a new constitution written in early 1865, faced with the possibility of railroad connections to some regions of the state bypassing cities like St. Louis and connecting to railroads that went straight to Chicago. Pressures from around the state after the war compelled the state legislature to actively facilitate completion of roads crisscrossing the state by absorbing railroad debts, releasing some roads from liens, and offering financial incentives for completing roads to key points and penalties for failing to do so. Despite the cloak of suspicion of bribery of state officials, three east-west roads and another north-south one were completed by the early 1870s.[31]

Cities and towns after the war invested heavily in bringing the railroad to their communities. As in other states, town fathers knew that rail connections were critical to their town's growth, and that being bypassed would leave them an economic backwater. Between 1867 and 1872, Missouri governmental entities invested more than $17 million in intrastate railways and another $1 million in connector lines outside the state.[32] Completion of the Pacific Railroad to Kansas City spurred rapid growth of the old Santa Fe Trail hub as a processing point for the commodities from the emerging West, most notably processing cattle and milling flour. With an economy resting on "bread and beef," it also experienced growth in the smaller industries to support its burgeoning population, which grew some eightfold in the 1860s.[33] In all, railroad investment worked. The areas with new rail connections grew far faster than others, and Missouri manufacturing trebled in the decade.[34] By 1880, Missouri had more almost four thousand miles of railroad track—double the miles just a decade before.[35] Only three counties (Dallas, Douglas, and Ozark) had no rail connections by 1904.[36]

Essential to the successful transformation of the Missouri economy through railroads was crossing the Mississippi River. Until after the Civil War, ferrying companies facilitated crossing large rivers. At St. Louis, the Wiggins Ferry Company had a virtual monopoly on ferrying railroad cars, cargo, and people across the Mississippi at St. Louis. For companies like Wiggins, ice was a major hazard; in the three years after the Civil War, for example, the Mississippi was closed to ferry traffic no fewer than sixty days.[37] The first bridge over the Mississippi at St. Louis (completed in 1874) connected Illinois with a system of tunnels running beneath the streets of downtown St. Louis. Although designed by James Buchanan Eads, the bridge construction was contracted to the Keystone Bridge Company, whose vice president Andrew Carnegie, helped organize the financing for the bridge; a third of the investment funding for the bridge came through Carnegie's contact with Junius Morgan (J. P. Morgan's father) in London.[38] Bridge operations suffered economic woes, and eventually two more bridges were built across the river to circumvent high tolls on the Eads.

It would be difficult to overstate the transformative impact of railroads on the St. Louis and Missouri economies. After 1870, more trunk lines were built with a growing number of feeder lines that connected more and more people to cities and, therefore, to burgeoning global markets. St. Louis in particular was a center for goods both domestic and international, with its role as a hinge center for river and rail transport; people in rural communities now had access to those goods through the middlemen, wholesalers, and transporters based in St. Louis.

The railroad transformed the lives of rural Missourians in fundamental ways. Not only did they have access to goods from distant places that had once been impossible luxuries, but they also conducted business differently. The combination of transportation and mechanization meant that farmers in the Great West, including Missouri, raised more commercial crops on more acres than ever; railroads contributed by giving them ways to ship those agricultural commodities to eastern markets. By 1880, there were markedly more farmers cultivating more acres than just ten years previous.[39] Herein lies the crux of the fundamental transformation in western agriculture of which Missouri farmers were a part. More acres came under cultivation thanks to the use of new farm machinery, which was expensive, increasing the debt carried by farmers. It also meant that farm commodities were increasingly part of a global marketplace, so that prices for, say, Missouri wheat might be shaped by the wheat harvests in other parts of the world. Exacerbating the problem was the growth of agricultural output nationally, which meant that supply rose faster than demand, driving down prices. Small wonder that western farmers in places like Missouri started to support national monetary policies that were inflationary, such as printing paper money (advanced by the Greenback Party) and increasing money supply through monetizing silver as proposed by the People's Party or the populists. So prominent was this region that the populists held their convention to nominate William Jennings Bryan for president in St. Louis in 1896.[40]

St. Louis remained the great transportation and manufacturing hub of the state in the Gilded Age, though. Transportation connections combined with raw materials (lead, zinc, and coal, primarily) and agricultural commodities (wheat, corn, and cotton) from the state to transform the city into a manufacturing center. The value of manufactured goods from St. Louis mushroomed fourfold between 1870 and 1880, and doubled again ten years later; capital invested in manufacturing and industrial establishments both more than trebled in the 1880s.[41] Even as late as the 1970s, the St. Louis riverport was the nation's largest; the port's docks processed more than 24 million tons of goods in 1979, including coal being shipped to the Gulf of Mexico.[42] During the 1880s and 1890s, St. Louis boosters actively solicited business with interests in Mexico, and even sent to Mexico City several hundred copies of *St. Louis Through a Camera*, an illustrated booklet published in 1892 designed to promote the city.

The Transformative Effect of Cupples Station

The tunnels constructed in the 1870s were the foundation for an innovation in the Gilded Age that became a prototype for cities across the country—and a sort of "aerotropolis" for railroads on the outskirts of downtown St. Louis that became the origin of ideas about air hubs and shipping industrial parks in the twentieth century. As Cupples Station was constructed and expanded over three decades, it successfully made St. Louis a rail-shipping hub. The last third of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid and profound industrial growth in the United States. As manufacturing grew, so too did the need to transport, sell, and redistribute these manufactured goods. Just as manufacturing centralized and grew into large companies, so too did the concept of the merchant into a network of wholesalers, jobbers, and distributors who acquired goods from manufacturers and sold them to retailers and customers elsewhere. By their very nature these middlemen were located in places that could serve as hubs with transportation spokes stretching throughout the region. However, the transportation component was not as efficient as it might seem on the surface. These wholesalers had to rely on local drayage and transportation to move goods from their points of entry to warehouses, then again when shipped out to different places.[43] Cupples Station changed all that.

The brainchild of Robert Brookings (vice president of Cupples Woodenware Company, the largest woodenware company in the United States), Cupples Station stood between the mouth of the Terminal Railroad Association tunnel (adjacent to present-day Busch Stadium) and the tracks that connected to all the main rail lines on both the Missouri and Illinois sides of the Mississippi. Under Brookings's leadership, Cupples Station became a complex of warehouses (mostly seven stories) with rail spurs connecting them to main lines. Within six years after completion of the first warehouse at Seventh and Pine Streets, ten warehouse buildings stood in the complex. Now wholesalers did not have to move goods from the railroad tracks to warehouses and back again when shipping goods out to customers. The warehouses were designed with efficiency and safety in mind.[44] By the turn of the century, Cupples Station handled more than one thousand tons of freight every day, making it the largest and busiest rail freight station in the United States.[45]

For wholesalers, this innovation could not have come at a better time. By the late nineteenth century, manufacturers of a growing number of consumer goods started marketing products directly to consumers, which altered a series of relationships in the chain of distribution. Direct marketing of brand-name products to consumers also carried with it responsibility for delivery and quality control, so a growing number of manufacturers of everything from flour to shortening, soda pop to beer, crackers to canned soup, along with catalogue houses like Sears and Montgomery Ward, moved into the distribution business. Therefore, wholesalers like those in St. Louis specializing in nonbrand products were under increased pressure to cut costs and operate more efficiently than ever before. A centralized warehousing and distribution center was the answer to the question of managing goods coming into and leaving St. Louis; Cupples Station became the model for other distribution cities by the early twentieth century. In many ways, Cupples Station was also a rail-based prototype for both industrial shipping centers such as Earth City and the aerotropolis proposal of 2011.

Air Transport: Economic Déjà Vu

Rail and river travel continued to be the principal modes of transporting both goods and people well into the twentieth century, but new technologies contributed to the role of the St. Louis region as an economic hub. St. Louis played an early role in air transportation as well. Within less than a decade after the Wright brothers made their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, Archibald Huxley took former president Theodore Roosevelt on a plane ride at Kinloch Field in St. Louis, making him the first president to fly in an airplane.[46] Former Olympic golf star and pharmaceuticals manufacturer Albert Lambert became so enamored with flight that he purchased 550 acres northwest of the city to operate as an airfield. The year after Charles Lindbergh left Lambert's field in his *Spirit of St. Louis* to start a journey that ended in Paris in May 1927, Lambert sold the land to the city of St. Louis to operate as an airfield.

The new terminal at Lambert Field was dedicated in 1930, and completed three years later.[47] Regional population growth and increased air traffic for both shipping and passenger travel meant that the region was rapidly outgrowing its airport. So great was interest in the future of air transportation that noted city planner Harland Bartholomew called for more than thirty airports and heliports scattered around the metropolitan area in his 1947 St. Louis city plan.[48] The new Lambert International Airport, designed by the architectural firm Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Leinweber, was completed in 1957.

Despite several additions to Lambert over the next decade or so, there was much public debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s over airports and their locations. More runways were needed, and Lambert appeared to be landlocked. Some called for a new regional airport across the Mississippi River in Illinois, and the state of Illinois offered substantial financial support for it. Critics of the Illinois plan wanted to keep the airport—and its jobs, business, and tax revenues—on the Missouri side. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* stridently advocated for a Missouri airport at an expanded Lambert; in 1977, the Missouri congressional delegation led by Sen. Thomas Eagleton convinced Transportation Secretary Brock Adams to put federal funding into expanding Lambert.[49]

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the aerotropolis proposal and the economic incentive bill was not that Missouri sought to be an innovator, but rather that it stood on the shoulders of its history spanning to the days when St. Louis was not even part of the United States and Missouri did not even exist. The notion of government and private industry working together to facilitate economic growth—a series of public-private partnerships—by capitalizing on international commercial connections seems new and foreign to some, but it is not. It is the story of the decades of our greatest economic growth.

Endnotes

1. Kelsey Volkmann, "Mo. Senate Gives Green Light to Aerotropolis Incentives," *St. Louis Business Journal,* April 28, 2011. http://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/news.
2. In the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which ended the French and Indian War (parallel to the Seven Years' War in Europe), Great Britain gained control of all of North America east of the Mississippi River and Canada; Spain ceded the Floridas to Britain but, thanks to the Treaty of Fontainebleau, had nominal control of all of North America from the Mississippi to the Rockies.
3. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Prelude to Disaster: The Course of Indian-White Relations Which Led to the Black Hawk War of 1832* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1970), 10.
4. William A. Foley, *A History of Missouri, Volume I: 1673–1820* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 24–25.
5. There were certainly other examples of this economic model. As early as the fifteenth century, independent trade cities on the Latin peninsula like Venice did much the same thing, preferring to import food staples to free land and time for producing more profitable commodities. For a full discussion, see Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996).
6. Foley, *A History of Missouri, Volume I,* 32–33.
7. Ibid., 37.
8. The factory at Fort Bellefontaine was replaced in 1808 by two new ones farther west, one at Fort Madison in present-day Iowa, the other at Fort Osage, just east of today's Kansas City. The factory system was disbanded by the federal government in 1822, in part from pressure from fur trade magnate John Jacob Astor.
9. Thomas Jefferson to Congress, confidential message, January 18, 1803, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, ed. Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 12.
10. Jefferson to Lewis, June 20, 1803, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents*, 61.
11. The terminology of a "great father" addressing his "children" was typical nomenclature of the age.
12. Receipts reported by the St. Louis Merchants' Exchange grew from 26,115 bundles of furs in 1881 to 125,526 ten years later. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places nomination form, "International Fur Exchange Building," 1998, section 8, 6.
13. Ibid. Estimates at the time held that some $9 million in raw furs were sold in St. Louis in the 1905–1906 season.
14. Ibid., 7. By 1910, the herd's population stood at 132,279, down from an estimated 2 million in 1870.
15. Fouke wasn't the first to envision St. Louis as the center for auctions of government-owned furs. Before Missouri was even a state, Indian agent William Clark proposed to officials in Washington that all furs acquired by federal officials at Indian trade factories in the West (several of which were under Clark's supervision) be auctioned at St. Louis rather than incurring the cost of shipping them to eastern markets.
16. Ibid., 9. Government regulation of the seal population apparently helped everyone. By 1921, the seal population had grown some 370 percent, government profits from sealskin sales grew more than sixfold (from $4.10/skin in 1909 to $31.20 each in 1921), and St. Louis Fur Exchange sales in 1919 exceeded $32 million.
17. Ibid.
18. Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri, Volume II: 1820–1860* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 137–138. For more on the unique nature of steamboats on western rivers, see Louis C. Hunter, "The Invention of the Western Steamboat," *Journal of Economic History* 3 (November 1943): 201–220. The best discussion of the environmental impact of steamboats is F. Terry Norris, "Where Did the Villages Go? Steamboats, Deforestation, and Archaeological Loss in the Mississippi Valley," in *Common Fields: An Environmental History of St. Louis*, ed. Andrew Hurley (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997): 73–89.
19. McCandless, *A History of Missouri, Volume II*, 137. Duane G. Meyer, *The Heritage of Missouri* (St. Louis: River City Publishers, 1963), 247.
20. Ibid., 128–130.
21. Reginald Charles McGrane, *The Panic of 1837: Some Financial Problems of the Jacksonian Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 28–30.
22. Ibid., 130–132.
23. See *Gold Rush: The Overland Diary of Samuel A. Lane, 1850*, ed. Jeffrey E. Smith (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, 1984).
24. McCandless, *A History of Missouri: Volume II*, 131.
25. Ibid., 144.

26. This sort of public-private partnership for early railroad growth was typical, and while Missouri started early, its experience reflected eastern states. New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland were all successful in chartering railroads, creating incentives to have rails traverse their states, and even acquiring stock in those companies to bolster state coffers. Similarly, the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, which provided federal financing for a transcontinental railroad (completed in 1869 at Promontory Point, Utah Territory), was a public-private partnership to span areas under federal control as territories.
27. Ibid., 146–149. County governments were the largest investors in railroads before the Civil War, with some 54 percent of the stock, and municipal governments bought another 12 percent of the $12 million invested in Missouri railroads during the decade. Despite all this the Hannibal and St. Joseph, the largest railroad in the state at the eve of the Civil War, had only 206 miles of track, and the Pacific had only 189 more miles.
28. Ibid., 150.
29. William E. Parrish, *A History of Missouri, Volume III: 1860–1875* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 199–200. The population figures for 1870 are difficult to measure accurately since the St. Louis census was fraudulently inflated.
30. Ibid., 207–218. Despite the almost certainty of graft, Parrish asserts that the legislative action could have never completed the roads in a timely fashion.
31. Ibid., 222.
32. Ibid., 221–222.
33. Ibid., 223. The thirty-two counties with rail connections in 1870 saw 56 percent of the state's population growth.
34. Lawrence O. Christensen and Gary R. Kremer, *A History of Missouri, Volume IV: 1875–1919* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 29.
35. Ibid., 79.
36. Jeffrey Smith, "A Match Made in St. Louis: Andrew Carnegie and the Eads Bridge," *Gateway Heritage* 17 (winter 1996–1997): 18–25.
37. Joseph Wall, *Andrew Carnegie* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 273–276; David Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 134–135.
38. Ibid., 33. Comparatively, the number of farms rose 45 percent, from 148,328 to 215,575, while the number of acres under cultivation rose by 77 percent, from 9.1 million acres to 16.7 million.
39. For an excellent discussion of the commodification of products of nature, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company), 57–60. For an excellent discussion of the relationship between agrarian discontent, farm commodity prices, and farm debt, see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
40. Christensen and Kremer, *A History of Missouri, Volume IV*, 43.
41. James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 1764–1980* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1981), 488.
42. For the best treatment of this system and the ways centers like Cupples Station transformed the ways wholesalers and manufacturers conducted business, see Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1989), 58–89.
43. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places nomination form, "Cupples Warehouse District," 1976, section 8, 1–4; Toni Flannery, "The Cupples Warehouse Block," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 28 (January 1972):87–93.
44. Ibid., 4.
45. A three-minute silent film appeared in the new movie houses showing the former president's flight; the copy owned by the Library of Congress can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIlpDwMKzJo, accessed July 10, 2014. The first sitting president to fly in an airplane was Franklin Delano Roosevelt.
46. Rockwell Gray, *A Century of Enterprise, St. Louis, 1894–1994* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1994), 65.
47. City of St. Louis, *Comprehensive City Plan, St. Louis, Missouri* (St. Louis: City Plan Commission, 1947). The city hired Bartholomew's firm to develop the plan for the Plan Commission.
48. Primm, *Lion of the Valley*, 482–89.

About the Author

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