



Pressing West

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A Page In History



WRITTEN BY

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In the coming weeks, gossip flew through the streets of St. Louis like snowflakes in a blizzard. Everywhere people congregated, at the mercantile stores, the saloons and along the riverfront, talk centered on the Ramage press and what it would produce.

A newspaper! St. Louis was about to get its first; Charless was going to see to that. A man with high ideals, tired of being oppressed in his native Ireland, Charless came to America for freedom and job opportunity. He'd found work as a printer, a trade he'd learned back home.

Charless opened a bookstore in Pennsylvania, set up a press and started a newspaper, one that wasn't successful. But that didn't discourage him; he printed,

sold and distributed books in a number of frontier towns before settling in Kentucky. In Louisville, he started another newspaper and had better luck.

Now he planned on keeping that newspaper office open and launching another publication — the *Missouri Gazette* — thanks to funds provided by Gov. Lewis, who needed a newspaper in St. Louis to print the laws of the frontier territory.

Long hungry for reading material and news from Europe, the thousand or so citizens of St. Louis were anxious to get their hands on the first edition of the *Missouri Gazette*.

"And I was there Ma, saw that press first," Gabe said. "I helped get it on the wagon and up the path. That's a powerful hill from the river up the bluff, and the team strained against their traces. Mr. Charless

has a stepson — Robert McCloud, who's just my age. They invited me inside the Roubidoux House where the printing office will be."

Gabe ran on without taking a breath, pausing only when Josephine reminded him to bring in wood for the fire. March had been brutal, with plunging temperatures and a late snow. The family had used nearly all the wood Gabe and Andre had cut the fall before.

"Sounds like you had quite a time, Gabe, but these coins aren't enough pay for the long day you put in," Josephine blurted out, wiping flour on her apron as she reached to pick up little Anne, who was pulling at her hem.

"But Mother, think about it. We're going to have something to read. All we've got now is a Bible and an almanac. Soon we'll have a weekly paper. Mr. Charless said he hopes to have first-

hand accounts from people who've been out West, news about goings on in Europe, even poetry and reports from local folks. There'll be ads, too. Say someone has a horse to trade, or the dry goods store gets a shipment of muslin or Irish linen.

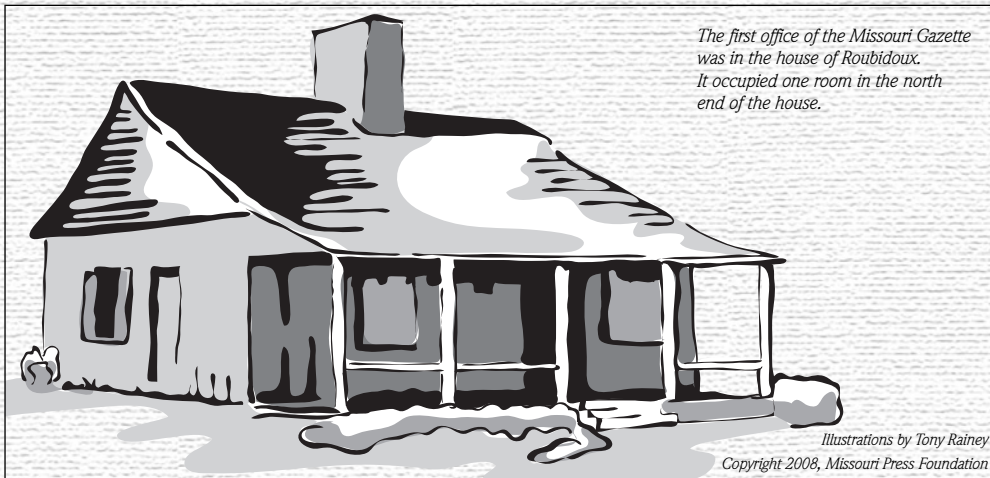
Gabe's rhetoric was met with a sigh.

"Your father and I want what's best for you," Josephine said. "But right now we're struggling to get food on the table. How many times do we have to tell you that?"

"I know ma, but..." Gabe stopped mid-sentence, his mother's impatience extinguishing his enthusiasm. Slump-shouldered he pulled on his coat and headed for the woodpile.

LEARN MORE

- The story says Joseph Charless was oppressed in Ireland. What does oppressed mean? Find examples in the news of people in other countries who are oppressed. Why do people still want to come to America to escape oppression?
- Charless' equipment, which could be moved by wagon, likely cost \$200-\$800. Research modern press-rooms. How have things changed?



The first office of the *Missouri Gazette* was in the house of Roubidoux. It occupied one room in the north end of the house.

Illustrations by Tony Rainey
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