



# Pressing West

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A Page In History



WRITTEN BY

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Though Gabe felt bad about his aunt's mishap, he was more worried about his mother leaving. Gabe didn't know his Aunt Margaret very well, having only seen her twice. The boy mostly knew her from the letters she'd send. Those letters were often delayed because the mail service was unreliable. Getting correspondence on time depended on the weather and condition of the roads that riders traveled, their mailbags bulging.

With Josephine away, Gabe would be busier than ever, having to be a mother as well as a breadwinner. The boy's emotions flipped back and forth. On the one hand he felt guilty for being selfish, on the other angry as a polecat about having his plans waylaid.

"I might have to accept that I've lost the opportunity with Mr. Charless. The first edition has to be out by July, and it's already the first of May," he wrote in his journal.

Not able to sleep, Gabe sat at his usual place at the table, the flickering candlelight making dancing shadows on the walls of the log house.

"Mother left yesterday," he wrote. "I thought about

going by the *Gazette* when the twins were asleep, but I couldn't face Robert and his father. Being anywhere near the office would be too hard. Excitement about the newspaper is growing—and I was fixin' to be a part of it."

Sighing, Gabe closed his journal, blew out the candle and made his way to bed, where he tossed and turned, wondering how many of his tomorrows would be packed with responsibility, chores his father expected him to handle, and crying children to pacify.

As the weeks passed, sleep didn't come easily to Joseph Charless either. June had arrived. Missouri's hills and river valley were awash in green. Wildflowers sprinkled the fields with color. Inside his one-room printing office in the Roubidoux House, Charless didn't notice the fullness of the trees or appreciate the

warmth of the breeze coming through the open door.

The printer-editor spent long hours bent over his work, nursing a cold that had lingered too long, leaving him with a nagging cough. As his deadline for the *Gazette* approached, he doubted his ability to accomplish his mission — getting a newspaper into the hands of his subscribers.

There were stories to pull from eastern newspapers, a common practice at the time, rounds to make soliciting additional subscribers, columns of type to set, a press to run and a finished paper to distribute. Get that first paper out, and the following day he'd have to start all over again on the next week's issue.

Charless occasionally voiced his concerns to Robert, wondering aloud if the *Gazette* was worth all the work involved.

"Why is being a newspaperman so important to you sir?" Robert asked.

"Folks deserve to be represented, to have a say, be able to read about what's happening abroad, hear views from the locals. The *Gazette* will give people a voice, and an opportunity to become more literate. I'm also hoping to encourage businesses and settlers to come to St. Louis. Running a newspaper has its ...,"

A spasm of coughing interrupted the exchange, rendering Charless breathless. Robert looked on worriedly as his stepfather leaned against the press for support.

## LEARN MORE

- Gabe wrote about his disappointment that he wasn't able to work on the *Gazette*. Make your own journal entry about something in your life that didn't work out as you'd hoped. Include the outcome of your problem. Now predict what you think the outcome will be for Gabe.
- *Gazette* readers wanted news from other places. Look in your newspaper for stories from other places. Why do you think they are important to local readers?



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