



# Pressing West

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A Page In History



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It had been weeks since Charless had offered Gabe the apprenticeship. Since then the boy hadn't darkened the door of the office. It was a puzzle to Charless, who realized now more than ever he needed extra help. Fatigue was his constant companion.

"Something's happened to Gabe's father, I just know it," Robert said one morning. "Gabe wouldn't just stop coming by the *Gazette*. It's not like him."

"I agree, son. I've never seen a lad so excited about printing and learning the trade," Charless said. "I took a liking to Gabe too, but we're going to have to manage without him."

Lately, for Charless, managing felt like a drowning man trying to keep his head above water. Just getting paper for printing was

a complicated issue. The process of making paper was time consuming and required a number of steps. Charless' concern grew as he waited for a paper shipment from the East.

Paper was made from rags that had been boiled and bleached, then set aside for six to eight weeks to ferment and disintegrate. The rag mixture was ground into pulp, put in large wooden vats and pounded. Drying was required, and a sizing agent had to be applied before ink would adhere to the paper. The finished product had a yellowish cast, and would last a long time.

The responsibility of getting all the type set weighed on Charless' mind, too. It would have been a tall order if the printer only planned to publish the newspaper in English, but the majority of St. Louis's population was French, so the *Gazette* would be printed in French

as well as English. Gabe was fluent in both languages – that would have been a help.

"All in all, son, we've got a considerable endeavor here, but I'm sure those territorial laws will be ready when the governor needs them," Charless said with bravado, as if trying to convince himself. "We won't disappoint the people of St. Louis, but I have to admit, Gabe Martin has disappointed me."

Across town from the *Gazette*, Gabe's thoughts were never far from the apprenticeship. It was Tuesday. Mail was due to arrive, and Gabe was hoping for a letter from his mother. He paced like a caged cat.

"I'm anxious for her to get home too, but we have to be patient," Andre reminded him. "I'll be happy to see her, and the little ones are missing her something terrible."

"She'll be surprised at how well we've done, won't she, Father? You're able to work some each day, and the twins are none the worse for wear. Mother will be proud of us; that's a fact."

There was plenty of excitement in the Martin home later that afternoon. A letter addressed in a pretty hand carried the news they all longed to hear.

"It looks like I'll be home soon after this letter arrives, providing it gets to you in a timely fashion," Josephine wrote. "A neighbor lady has agreed to help Margaret, so I'm able to leave without worry. Oh, how I've missed all of you; I can't wait to get back and be with my family again. I'll bet the twins have grown like weeds."

Gabe still felt convoluted about his mother's absence – guilty that he wasn't more sympathetic about his aunt's plight, but more anxious than ever for his mother to get home. Gabe wanted life to get back to normal.

He just hoped the apprentice offer still stood, that Mr. Charless would understand why he hadn't come back. Everything had looked dismal. Now he felt foolish for leaving the *Gazette* in the lurch.

## LEARN MORE

- Paper was difficult to acquire in the early 1800s. Why? Is paper today still made with rags? What happens to newspapers after they are read?
- Research these terms associated with early papermaking: vatman, coucher, layman, mold, post. Can you trace any of them to modern uses?

GLE/SMS: G1:2, 1:4, 3:5, CA3, CA7, SS4, R1E, R2B

