



# Pressing West

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A Page In History



WRITTEN BY

CHRIS STUCKENSCHNEIDER

Though Josephine's absence was a hardship, it offered Gabe the opportunity to spend time with his father, and bring up the apprenticeship.

"This is really what you want, Gabe, this grueling messy work? Once you agree to take the position there's no turning back. Most apprentices don't become journeymen printers until they're 21."

"But by then, Father, I'll know a trade. Newspapers are popping up across the East like mushrooms after a rain, the frontier will be next."

Gabe didn't convince his father right away, but Andre finally agreed he'd talk to Josephine when she got back to Missouri.

And he did just that, but not before a joyous homecoming, with tears and hugs. Andre was so thrilled to see his wife that he picked her up and swung her around

like she was a girl, with Josephine protesting, "Put me down, put me down," over the giggles of the children.

Emotions ran high again a few days later when Gabe lit off across town like he had wings for feet, hoping that Charless would understand the turn his life had taken, and with a handshake their deal would be solidified.

A storm had turned the main street to mush, and as Gabe darted along he thought of the day he'd met Charless on the riverfront. What a fool he must have looked, covered in mud.

It had only been a few months, but Gabe felt like a lifetime had passed. He wasn't sure about what to expect when he arrived at the door of the *Gazette*. Charless might have found another apprentice, or be so angry with Gabe that he wouldn't offer him a second chance.

Nothing could have prepared Gabe for what he saw when Robert opened the

door and reached around to clap him vigorously on the back.

"Gabe! You're back. Father, look who's here!" Robert exclaimed. He stood aside so his friend could enter the room, now jammed with stacks of paper, ceramic jars of thick, pasty ink, and a table holding galleys of type.

Overjoyed at Robert's reaction, Gabe beamed, but his smile faded when his eyes fell on a cot in the corner. Charless sat there propped up, his face gaunt, his eyes dark with circles.

"Don't look so alarmed, Gabe. I know I look like I'm half-dead, but there's considerable life left in this body. Something got a hold of me, but I'll be good as new in no time. Come over here, lad, let me have a look at you."

Gabe humbly walked toward the printer, who beckoned to him with an ink-stained hand. The boy pulled a chair up next to the makeshift bed, inquiring about Charless' health, then explaining his own family's trouble.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Charless. I should have come back to explain. I just didn't know how long mother would be gone and was afraid you couldn't wait for help."

Gabe continued his torrent, "The timing couldn't have been worse. I didn't

know what father would think, but he's letting me make the decision. It's a good offer and I'd be honored to learn the trade from you, providing you haven't found another apprentice?"

Minutes felt like hours as the question floated in the air. Charless leaned back, his eyes cast upward in thought.

"Gabe, I've thought about what I'd do if you showed up," Charless said. "Being ill has taken its toll, but has given me time to reflect. I don't appreciate the way you hightailed it out of here, but you're back. And I'm glad. You show great potential, young man."

"So yes, the offer still stands. You might tire of wearing ink home every night, but you'll learn a lot in the coming years. But let's quit jawing shall we? Grab an apron, lad, and help Robert. We've got a paper to get out. The frontier is waiting!"

## LEARN MORE

- Gabe learned the trade of printing as an apprentice. Look at the Classified ads in your newspaper for a job that could be learned through an apprenticeship. Write an editorial to support why you think an apprenticeship is a good way to learn a skill.

