

# A Store Almost in Sight: The Economic Transformation of Missouri from the Louisiana Purchase to the Civil War

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ered the change from credit to cash sales, and from cash to pre-emption entries, military bounty land warrants, and graduated (discounted) land prices. The wonder is that the Jeffersonians kept Federalist land policies for as long as they did.

Payson Treat was correct in 1910: Some knowledge of public land policy is needed to understand the way Iowa was settled. In the aftermath of Indian Removal from Iowa in the 1830s and 1840s, all the circumstances were in place to encourage a wave of Euro-American settlers to take into private ownership what became some of the richest agricultural land in the world. Iowa and Ohio may both be in the Midwest, but the policies designed to dispose of the public lands in Ohio in the 1780s were a continent away from those in place to dispose of Iowa's public lands.

*A Store Almost in Sight: The Economic Transformation of Missouri from the Louisiana Purchase to the Civil War*, by Jeff Bremer. Iowa and the Midwest Experience. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014. 239 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 paperback and e-book.

Reviewer Kim M. Gruenwald is associate professor of history at Kent State University. She is the author of *River of Enterprise: The Commercial Origins of Regional Identity in the Ohio Valley, 1790–1850* (2002).

Of *A Store Almost in Sight*, Jeff Bremer writes, “This is a story about people, the economic choices they made, and their struggles to build their lives” (4). In the debate over the transition to capitalism, Bremer sides firmly with those who favor the market-oriented interpretation. After delving deeply into dozens and dozens of collections of family history papers located in Missouri archives, he concluded that, rather than fearing capitalism as disruptive to society, frontiersmen and women actively sought market participation.

The first three chapters set the stage and introduce readers to “an enterprising and industrious population” (1). The first chapter sketches the background to U.S. settlement: the fur trade, French settlements, and a brief takeover by the Spanish. The second chapter details the rush to settle Missouri after the turn of the century. Settlers from the upper south and Kentucky moved west because elite planters controlled too much of the land back home. Initially, they settled in St. Louis's hinterland but gradually spread out along the Missouri River and its tributaries, bringing slaves with them. From the beginning, they exported livestock and crops. Chapter three focuses on settlers' motivations as they came looking for enough cheap land to make their families independent.

Fertile land and the mild climate proved to be draws, and many hoped to make money by speculating in land.

In the next three chapters, Bremer explains just how much hard work it took to make a go of it. Anyone starting a new life in Missouri needed an axe to fell trees and a gun to shoot game. Diseases such as malaria, cholera, and dysentery slowed down many and destroyed the dreams of others. Corn and hogs proved to be early staples. Farmers employed both subsistence and market-oriented strategies, and they shared and traded labor, tools, food, livestock, and grazing land with their neighbors. In a chapter titled "Cook, Nursemaid, and Housewife," Bremer chronicles the amount of time women spent caring for children, gardening, preparing food, and taking care of livestock. Their participation in the market economy proved crucial to the success of families as they sold butter, cheese, eggs, and cloth to local merchants.

In the final two chapters, Bremer analyzes the expanding market economy. During the first half of the nineteenth century, farmers shipped a wide variety of goods, including flour, whiskey, pork, corn, hemp, tobacco, and livestock, down the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers by flatboat. The proliferation of steamboats in the 1820s and beyond drove the need for wood used to fuel the craft. Yankee peddlers sold goods by wagon to those living too far from the rivers for easy access, but travel by river trumped travel by road until the coming of railroads. Steamboat travel transformed life on western waters. St. Louis quickly became a hub of activity, and other market centers grew as well, providing links between farmers and the wider world of trade. Looking in the other direction, trade with Santa Fe, New Mexico, and, later, with those heading for the gold fields of California helped Missouri's economy expand further as domestic markets grew. Missouri settlers wanted consumer goods, and general merchants provided them in exchange for farmers' crops, serving as middlemen if farmers did not want to make the flatboat journey to market on their own. Shopkeepers provided credit, allowing farmers to purchase not only spices and tools, but chocolate, gloves, and window glass as well. Consumerism expanded and thrived on the frontier as steamboats brought a wider variety of goods at cheaper prices. Bremer concludes by noting that getting ahead proved much more difficult after the Civil War.

For the most part, the author keeps his study narrowly focused on the choices made by ordinary settlers. He does not ignore the issue of slavery but concentrates on the actions of white farmers and shopkeepers. He does discuss the transportation revolution but does not address the relationship between economic change and the rise of sectionalism, the Second Great Awakening, or the age of Jackson. What he does, he

does well. He tells many, many specific stories to make his points, and the occasional focus on the differences between American and German migrants is welcome. *A Store Almost in Sight* is a carefully researched book and an interesting read. I recommend it to anyone who wants to know more about the material life of those who settled Missouri during the first half of the nineteenth century.

*The Great Medicine Road: Narratives of the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails, part 1, 1840–1848*, edited by Michael L. Tate with the assistance of Will Bagley and Richard L. Rieck. American Trails Series 24. Norman: Arthur H. Clark Co., an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 339 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 hard-cover.

Reviewer J. T. Murphy is professor of history at Indiana University South Bend. His research and writing have focused on the military history of the nineteenth-century U.S. West, the Oregon Trail, and frontier settlement, among other topics.

On April 1, 1846, as J. M. Harrison recalled, the villagers of Birmingham, Iowa, witnessed “an unusual bustle and stir.” “Friends and relatives, came in from the surrounding country, to witness our departure for the far off Oregon” (216). His family, lured by a mild, healthy climate and available land, joined a modest-sized wagon train, “The Iowa Company,” and were among 1,200 people who traveled overland to Oregon that year. Harrison soon became an ardent booster, promoting the Pacific Slope’s economic potential and raising money for schools, but when relating his trail experience 29 years later, he emphasized its hardships and wildness, possibly to enhance his worth as a pioneer. “We were without the pale of civilization,” he remembered. “The space of two thousand miles of plains, sands and deserts, inhabited by numerous tribes of Savages, lay between us and our final goal” (218). As proof, he highlighted one of the few Indian depredations along the trail, a Shoshone massacre of 20 emigrants in 1854—an incident that underscored his own narrow escape eight years before when Indians had stripped him naked and killed his companion, Edward Trimble.

Harrison’s account is one of 15 collected and edited by Michael L. Tate, a noted historian of the American West, with the assistance of Will Bagley and Richard Rieck, scholars who have written extensively about the overland trails. This volume, covering the period 1840–1848, is the first in a series focusing on individual narratives about going to Oregon, California, and Utah through 1869. Using diaries, letters, and memoirs from men and women of varied ages, backgrounds, and experiences, the editors “allow the pioneer generation to speak directly to modern