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

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At the start of the nineteenth century, the United States was a rural, agricultural nation, where the seasons and weather regulated life and work. The vast majority of its 5,300,000 people lived on farms and plantations in the original thirteen states or along rivers such as the Ohio or Mississippi. Less than 10 percent of its population lived west of the Appalachian Mountains, and its cities were small, with Boston having fewer than 25,000 people. America was a poor, preindustrial society, and was undeveloped compared to its European rivals, Britain and France. Steamboats and railroads had yet to be invented. The world usually moved at only a few miles an hour. It took weeks for news of the death of George Washington in December 1799 to reach most parts of the country.¹

By the time the Civil War began, steamboats, railroads, and canals had tied the nation together. Steamboats moved people and goods quickly and cheaply across the vast interior of the country in days rather than weeks, traveling on thousands of miles of rivers. Railroads linked Missouri with cities such as New Orleans, Chicago, and Philadelphia; travel time between St. Louis and New York was less than three days. In 1860, people were no longer concentrated on the Atlantic seaboard. Half of the population lived west of the Appalachian Mountains, and from east to west the country spanned a continent. New York City had more than one million inhabitants, about the same as the entire state of Missouri. Population growth, territorial expansion, and transportation improvements had allowed the country to become the world's second greatest industrial power.²
This book details a small part of the story of America's great antebellum economic transformation. By examining white farm families in Missouri and their economic pursuits, its main goal is to determine the market orientation of that state's rural residents. It provides a history of commercial development in central Missouri from the Louisiana Purchase to the Civil War, focusing on those counties near or adjacent to the Missouri River, which was the region most changed by settlement (fig. 1). Historians, finding various degrees of market participation across the antebellum United States, have debated the timing of its emergence, as well as its acceptance, in the past several decades. Charles Sellers, for instance, argued that capitalism was a malign and amoral force where "competition undermined neighborly cooperation and family equality." In his interpretation, the market threatened the family farm economy, which promised opportunity and equality. It disrupted traditional ways, reduced the independence of families, and exploited urban workers. Sellers asserted that when capitalism emerged in the antebellum period and brought about drastic change, resistance to it was widespread.¹

However, a consensus is emerging that details a commercial and acquisitive society in the early Republic. In this view, the nineteenth-century market economy built upon its foundations from the previous century, developing
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An Enterprising and Industrious Population

further and spreading across the United States. There was no great disruption
in the countryside during this period. Most Americans viewed the spread of
commercial markets and the opportunity to participate in them favorably.
This book's conclusions are in agreement with these ideas.

Most Missourians welcomed the opportunity to take part in the market
economy. They often produced a surplus for sale to improve their family's
economic position, especially as improved transportation increased the oppor-
tunities to do so. These people were commercially minded, rather than
outright capitalistic. Indeed, most lacked the necessary financial capital to be
capitalists, neatly defined by historian Beatrice Craig as using capital to make
money and multiply investments. The transition to capitalism had already
begun by the early nineteenth century, and most migrants to Missouri had
developed an interest in market participation before they arrived. Families
sought out a competency, or comfortable independence, buying fertile land
with market access that would best reward their labor. They wanted to own
land and pass property on to future generations. A mix of production for their
households, as well as markets, preserved family welfare. Increased produc-
tion for trade did not erode the bonds between friends and neighbors, and
the neighborhood exchange of labor, livestock, tools, and foods continued
throughout the antebellum era, supporting the mix of subsistence and market
farming that developed in Missouri. There was relatively little resistance to the
market economy. Those who wanted to avoid neighbors or markets simply kept
moving west or went into the isolated Ozark Mountains of southern Missouri,
remaining on the fringes of settlement.

Americans transformed a mostly empty region into a thriving, commercial
society full of people out to get land and make money. By the mid-nineteenth
century, American settlement had created a society that was much more influ-
cenced by market values than had existed earlier in the state. This commercial
society was also far larger in terms of population. Americans pursued their
own economic goals, as Simpson Kensinger wrote to his brother Lewis in
Ohio. Missouri was a "rich country," he boasted. "Go way with your old poor
land their you cant make the money their you could here." Restless people
flooded in, searching for opportunities that were disappearing east of the Mis-
sissippi River as land prices increased or game for hunters diminished. They
also came looking for new chances to make money from land speculation,
family farming, or trade. Migrants from both the North and South found the
region along the Missouri River to be a “land of promise,” as William Davis Jr. boasted. Preacher Charles Peabody, traveling in Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois in 1846, described the St. Louis area as a “busy stirring country, too full of noise and tumult to suit my quiet spirit.” He also noted in his diary, near Lexington, Missouri, “every man is most deeply intent upon doing his own business, and looking after his own affairs.”

Slavery was part of Missouri’s business, though this story will not focus upon it. Several recent histories have detailed its role in the state. The newest of these is Diana Mutti Burke’s *On Slavery’s Border: Missouri’s Small Slaveholding Households, 1815–1865*, the first comprehensive history of the peculiar institution in the state in nearly a century. She argues that the owners of a small number of slaves, who dominated Missouri, created a society very different from other Southern states. They built a system founded on family farms, not larger plantations, where white owners and black slaves worked and lived more intimately than elsewhere. This system did not require large numbers of slaves to practice the small-scale, diversified agriculture of Missouri. Families focused not on staple crops or capital accumulation, but on providing land or education for children. They also took advantage of river transport to take part in commercial markets. Another fine work, limited to the center region of the state, is R. Douglas Hurt’s *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri’s Little Dixie*. Hurt’s study of seven central Missouri counties where slavery was most widespread focused on the importance of bondage to the social and economic development of the region. He found a small planter class in these counties, with a far larger group of small farmers who produced a diverse mix of crops and livestock. Migrants brought Southern cultural ideals with them, but neither slavery nor Southern culture precluded the rapid development of commercial agriculture.

This is a story about people, the economic choices they made, and their struggles to build their lives. The rural population of Missouri made millions of small decisions—ranging from how much of a certain crop to plant to how many eggs to take to the local store—that influenced the development of their state and contributed to the larger changes documented in this study. Thousands found economic independence, improved their families’ lives, or realized their dreams. Many achieved their goals, but many failed. In total, they utterly changed Missouri. The life of ordinary people was tough, often short, and full of difficulty. Family, friends, and optimism about the future moderated such burdens. However, despite their travails, most Missourians
accepted the market economy and its crucial role in their lives, even if they may not have always directly benefited from it.

Previous inhabitants, including the Osage and French settlers, had been linked to international markets long before any Americans arrived. The Osage played a dominant role in the region for more than a century and built an empire in the middle of the continent that remained the region's power until the arrival of the Americans. Living in the area between the Mississippi, Missouri, and Arkansas Rivers, by the late 1700s the Osage dominated the fur trade of St. Louis and used their vast hunting territory to bring in hundreds of deerskins each year. They operated as middlemen for the fur trade of the entire Missouri basin, controlling access to tribes farther west and denying their rivals the chance to gain weapons from trade. However, competition for animal resources reduced the availability of game and led to increased warfare among the area's tribes. These pressures splintered the Osage into three separate and independent bands in the last decades of the eighteenth century. In the early 1800s, smallpox, measles, and cholera repeatedly weakened them, as they struggled against incoming tribes for the diminishing resources in the Ozarks. By the time they surrendered their remaining lands in Missouri and Arkansas to the United States in 1825, incessant warfare, political division, and the destruction of their economy had devastated them.8

The French were the other influential power in the region before the arrival of Americans. They moved into the Mississippi River valley, lured by dreams of riches in the form of furs and precious metals, as well as by the hope of the conversion of natives to Christianity. Between 1699 and 1720, France built trading posts and settlements along the Mississippi River and Great Lakes. They ranged from Detroit to Mobile and Biloxi along the Gulf of Mexico, east of New Orleans. The French founded the villages of Cahokia and Kaskaskia along the Mississippi River, south of the Missouri River. They also built Fort Des Chartes, which served as the capital of Upper Louisiana, which included the future states of Arkansas and Missouri. By the middle of the century, France only had a few scattered settlements in the middle of the continent to support its claim to possession of the vast region between Canada and Spanish Mexico.9

French settlement in the Mississippi valley resembled that of northern France, but land distribution was more equitable. Settlement adopted a configuration of small, compact villages, surrounded by a fenced field of strips of privately owned land. Another field of commonly owned pastureland lay outside the
enclosed field. French farmers devoted themselves to producing a mix of grain and livestock and produced considerable surpluses. Fertile soils and good growing conditions resulted in harvests that could be sent downriver to feed settlements along the lower Mississippi River. Exports grew so much that large boats had to be built to move foods south. With only a few small villages along the Mississippi River, the French could not develop the region or transform these settlements into a productive colony. Little changed when France gave Louisiana to Spain in exchange for its assistance in the Seven Years War.10

Even as the region was being transferred to Spain, the city of St. Louis was founded in 1763. St. Louis sat in the middle of a vast wilderness, at the meeting point of two of the greatest rivers on the continent. The town operated as a free-trade zone, outside the boundaries of French restrictions and Indian alliances. Osage, Sac, Fox (Meskwaki), and Missouri tribal members all came to trade and barter goods. French settlers, traders, and missionaries flocked to St. Louis in 1764 when the eastern bank of the Mississippi was transferred to England. They embraced the lucrative fur trade and also some production of corn, wheat, tobacco, oats, and beans. The new French settlement “quickly became a boomtown” and the center of a trading-post frontier. Most settlers devoted themselves full time to the fur trade, but some were also part-time farmers.11

St. Louis was the base of operations for the fur trade, and nearly everyone in the town was involved in some way. Trapping parties were organized and equipped in St. Louis, and most traders lived in the town. Warehouses and mercantile firms provided the necessary goods and services for the trade; they also purchased and stored the annual accumulation of furs and pelts. Merchants supplied the necessary Indian presents and trading goods, which included tobacco, guns, alcohol, thread, and tools. They could sometimes make a profit that exceeded 300 percent. In the spring, hunters and traders headed up the Missouri River. Hunters—mostly French and Indian—took beaver pelts in the spring, when the fur was thick after a long winter, and in the fall, after beaver coats recovered from the summer molting. Most commerce linked with the trade occurred in these seasons. Trappers and Indians were tied into international markets for furs and goods, but there was no self-sustaining domestic market in the region.12

This mix of agriculture and commerce did not change when Spain took possession of the province. The Spanish gladly accepted Louisiana from France, as it acted as a buffer against English and, later, American encroachment into
Spain's valuable Mexican colonies. However, like France, Spain suffered from an inability to adequately guard or people the vast region. When the first Spanish governor arrived, he had only ninety soldiers with him. During the thirty-eight years that Spain ruled Louisiana, less than twenty Spanish families settled there. Only a small number of top officials, clerics, and merchants moved to the province. Spanish Louisiana was chronically underfunded, and Spain never spent enough money to gain the loyalty of the Indian tribes in the region. Thus, many tribes traded directly with the English, who were much more generous with their gifts. Operating from a series of posts and forts near the Great Lakes and along the upper Mississippi, English traders continually challenged Spanish trade and authority. Customs, manners, and language remained French. From the start, Spanish authority was weak and its influence light. What control it had would be completely undermined by the arrival of the Americans. 

After the United States gained independence from England, American settlers surged westward over the Appalachian Mountains. At first, Spain attempted to choke off this migration by closing the Mississippi River to American commerce in 1784. Spanish authorities hoped that shutting off the only outlet for American exports would bring a halt to American settlement in the Ohio valley. Frustrated Americans threatened to open the river to trade by force, if necessary. Access to the Mississippi River was crucial, because New Orleans provided the most inexpensive trade route for Americans west of the Appalachian Mountains. Overland transport to east coast markets was prohibitively costly, and local markets were limited. Development beyond subsistence farming would have been very difficult without a market in New Orleans, and many farmers would have had little reason to move to Kentucky, Tennessee, or Ohio. 

The Spanish, realizing that angry, rifle-wielding American frontiersmen posed a serious threat to their weakly defended lands, decided to change their policies. Since the Americans could not be halted, Spain decided to allow them to move into Louisiana. Spain hoped that western settlers could be convinced to abandon their loyalty to the United States and embrace Spanish rule. Lieutenant Governor Zenon Trudeau contended that many Catholics, French, and Germans, as well as those who were "disgusted with their government," could be lured into Spanish Louisiana. The Americans who had migrated to Upper Louisiana, he noted, "have found lands superior to those of the Ohio, they are..."
earnestly beginning to improve them." The newcomers built new flour mills and sawmills, cultivated hemp, and lived in houses better than those of the French inhabitants, he wrote. The administration in Louisiana believed that American pioneers were not strongly attached to the United States and that they could be convinced to accept Spanish culture, religion, and language. Unfortunately for Spain, this did not occur.\(^\text{15}\)

Much to the concern of Spain and France, American commerce and settlement began to dominate the Mississippi River valley in the 1790s. Kentucky and Tennessee became states in this decade, and by 1800 cities such as Nashville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Lexington had been founded. Tens of thousands of Americans moved west every year. The Spanish governor of Louisiana, Baron de Carondelet, expressed concern about the newcomers. The advantages of the province were "counterbalanced by the unmeasured ambition of a new people, who are vigorous, hostile to all subjection, and who have been uniting and multiplying in the silence of peace, and almost ignored, with a remarkable rapidity." He believed, quite rightly, that the ambitions of this "vast and restless" population were not limited to the region east of the Mississippi River. If they lived on the banks of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, Spain could not halt an invasion of its provinces.\(^\text{16}\)

Carondelet's fears were justifiable. The region from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico rapidly became an American sphere of influence, as land-hungry Northern and Southern families pressed west. One hundred and fifty thousand Americans lived west of the Appalachian Mountains in 1795; this number reached more than one million by 1810. The newcomers migrated in search of land, market access, and opportunity. They exported wheat, cattle, and lumber from western New York soon after settlement and sold whiskey and beef to Quebec. Americans also sent wheat from western Pennsylvania to New Orleans during the Revolutionary War. Farmers in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys shipped hundreds of flatboats full of flour, whiskey, and other agricultural products downriver to New Orleans. In 1801, nearly 600 vessels passed Natchez, Mississippi, on their way to New Orleans from Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and Upper Louisiana. These ships took lead, salt, tobacco, and other goods south to the port and demonstrated the economic power of the expanding United States.\(^\text{17}\)

The Spanish tried to lure American settlers into Louisiana with a number of generous policies. Beginning in 1786, Spain opened the Mississippi River
The newcomers built new flour mills and lived in houses better than those of the administration in Louisiana. The Spanish governor of Louisiana, Baron de France, American commerce and settlement in the 1790s, Kentucky and Ohio, and by 1800 cities such as Nashville, had been founded. Tens of thousands of American emigrants moved into Upper Louisiana in the 1780s and 1790s, including the famous American frontiersman Daniel Boone. He moved with his extended family to central Missouri in 1799 at the invitation of the Spanish lieutenant governor, who offered him 1,000 arpents of land (about 850 acres). Boone accepted, in large part because of his frustration with land disputes and lawsuits in his home state of Kentucky. “Little by little his wealth had melted away before these constant claims for damages, and when he finally left Kentucky in 1799 he was poor,” recalled his son, Nathan. Boone suffered from serious legal and financial difficulties, which left him embittered and exhausted. He had capitalized on his fame after the Revolutionary War and became involved in land speculation, trade, and surveying. The old war hero was often a sloppy surveyor who left a confusing maze of overlapping plats behind. This imprecise and messy system cost him dearly, when his own claims were denied or disputed. Boone’s trust in others was misplaced, as his loans to friends went unpaid or others cheated him of his land claims. He did not have the ruthlessness that land speculation required, noted historian John Mack Faragher.

By the late 1780s, legal matters consumed Boone’s life in Kentucky. He was sued for faulty surveys, breach of contract, personal debts, and the debts of others he had pledged to support. Opponents threatened his life, and he even feared assassination. “He often said he could not travel with safety. Even in time of peace he felt his own Kentucky was as dangerous to him as in the time of Indian wars,” his son noted. Bad luck also struck, when a cargo of fifteen tons of ginseng for export to China was ruined by a collision. Nathan Boone sadly observed, “when I was married, it grieved the old colonel that he had nothing to give me and my wife with to start our new life.” Daniel Boone moved to Missouri, pulled by the opportunity to find new lands across the
Mississippi and pushed out by financial troubles. Thousands followed him in the decades before the Civil War.10

When Upper Louisiana became part of the United States, 6,000 Americans lived in the region. They outnumbered everyone except the native Indians. American immigration led to the increased development of agriculture and industry in the province, contributing to salt making, lead mining, and farming. The French had begun to exploit the resources of the region, and the flood of incoming Americans accelerated this process. This progress came with a price, though. While Spain's immigration policies had encouraged the settlement of Louisiana and made the region a vital buffer for Mexico, Spain had practically handed the region to the Americans. Thus, the United States had enacted a "peaceful conquest" of the region even before it officially took it over.11

A French engineer working for the Spanish explained how the region was changing. Nicolas de Finiels wrote An Account of Upper Louisiana in 1803. St. Louis and the settlements around it depended almost wholly upon their own food production, he noted. The city contained about 1,000 inhabitants, and its citizens cultivated all sorts of agricultural products. He reported that the people of St. Louis grew many vegetables and fruits, including apples, pears, and grapes, as well as thousands of bushels of corn and wheat. In the woods, they found hazelnuts, cherries, pecans, blackberries, and walnuts. Other villages, such as St. Charles, just west of St. Louis, did not yet "believe that they need creature comforts and therefore disdain the arts and crafts." Scattered families and settlements produced almost all they needed, from carts and plows to shoes and clothing. People went to St. Louis for foodstuffs, luxuries, or items that they could not produce.12

Finiels argued that American migration to Upper Louisiana had begun to transform this region. He contrasted what he considered to be the idleness of the French inhabitants with the "industry" and drive of the newcomers. The Americans grasped at advantages that the region presented, and they pursued new avenues of business. Sawmills worked by Americans supplied more wood at lower prices, and more iron was also available and less expensive. Masonry, carpentry, cabinetry, and furniture were cheaper, too. Finiels, in fact, argued that Americans had changed the entire economic atmosphere of the St. Louis area. Before they had arrived, "you had to wait four to six years for windows, doors and furniture, which grew old in the workshops before they were completed. Vegetables, eggs, poultry, milk, butter and grain are more readily available,
Irrational troubles. Thousands followed him in part of the United States, 6,000 Americans entered everyone except the native Indians. Increased development of agriculture and to salt making, lead mining, and farming, resources of the region, and the flood of process. This progress came with a price, policies had encouraged the settlement of for Mexico, Spain had practically s. Thus, the United States had enacted a en before it officially took it over.41 The Spanish explained how the region was in *Account of Upper Louisiana* in 1803. St. depended almost wholly upon their own contained about 1,000 inhabitants, and ical products. He reported that the ales and fruits, including apples, pears, bushels of corn and wheat. In the woods, ns, blackberries, and walnuts. Other vil­ of St. Louis, did not yet “believe that they are disdain the arts and crafts.” Scattered almost all they needed, from carts and went to St. Louis for foodstuffs, luxuries,11 ration to Upper Louisiana had begun to what he considered to be the idleness of ustry” and drive of the newcomers. The it the region presented, and they pursued ered by Americans supplied more wood o available and less expensive. Masonry, e cheaper, too. Finiels, in fact, argued that onomic atmosphere of the St. Louis area. wait four to six years for windows, doors workshops before they were completed. r and grain are more readily available, and thanks to the Americans’ industry subsistence is generally more secure than before.25)

Another Frenchman, Pierre-Charles de Hault de Lassus de Luzieres, also had favorable comments about the immigration of Americans. Speaking of Kaskaskia, a village about fifty miles southeast of St. Louis, he called the American migration “advantageous.” Their arrival “provided skilled farmers,” as well as masons, blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, and “other useful artisans that we are lacking,” he wrote in 1797. “This immigration is already stimulating distinct and beneficial improvements in agriculture, handicrafts, and industry.” The newcomers also built flour mills and sawmills. Overall, he was very pleased that the majority of farmers were now increasingly devoted to agriculture.24

Amos Stoddard and John Bradbury made similar observations about Americans in Missouri. Stoddard noted that the distance from “ready markets in their neighborhood” was the greatest problem for the development of the region. Despite the problems of isolation and distance, Americans were exporting significant quantities of corn, tobacco, beef, pork, and even butter. “A spirit of industry prevails among settlers,” Stoddard declared—ignoring the decades of French commercial pursuits—as the newcomers focused on agricultural production. American migration “gave a spring to agriculture and commerce; a spirit of foreign intercourse was diffused among all classes of the people; exertion was made to prepare raw materials for the West India and other markets.” John Bradbury, an Englishman sent by the Botanical Society of Liverpool to investigate plant life in the United States, echoed the comments of Stoddard, de Luzieres, and Finiels. He wrote that French settlers were attached to the less productive traditional agricultural practices of their ancestors. He contrasted them with their American neighbors, who used improved tools and techniques and cultivated twice as much land. Bradbury also wrongly thought that the French lacked “industry.” But he noted that their villages still had “an appearance of comfort and independence.”25

The economy of Upper Louisiana was predominantly agrarian at the end of the eighteenth century, but it rapidly grew and diversified with American migration. Most agricultural production went to feed the local population, but an increasing surplus was sent to New Orleans. Americans settled around New Madrid, in the southeast corner of the state, and they increased the area’s production of corn by ten times within five years of migration. Near Cape Girardeau, the newcomers grew large quantities of wheat, corn, and tobacco.
Incoming Americans were responsible for most of the new surpluses and their export. Boats carried ever-larger amounts of flour, corn, salt, pork, whiskey, and other products from the settlements along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers to Illinois, up the Ohio River, or south to New Orleans. Americans also established flour mills, distilleries, salt works, and new farms. They produced a greater abundance and variety of farm goods and livestock for export and local consumption than ever before. 46

After the Louisiana Purchase, thousands began to move into the region in search of cheap land. When people discovered that Upper Louisiana was to be transferred to the United States, the value of all property in the province skyrocketed, since almost any land, even that which was wild and uncultivated, had future value. Timothy Flint, a missionary from New England who lived in Missouri for four years between 1816 and 1822, argued that the scramble for land introduced "that restless spirit of speculation and improvement which characterize the people of the United States. The tide of emigration once more swept by the dwelling of Daniel Boone, driving off the game and monopolizing the rich hunting grounds." But the rush to make an easy fortune, where speculators purchased land that often was not legally held, seriously complicated life for migrants who wanted to buy land and settle in the territory. A horribly tangled mess of competing French, Spanish, and American land claims further complicated the situation. A series of severe earthquakes also rocked the Mississippi River region in late 1811 and 1812. 27

Missouri was a sideshow in the greater story of the War of 1812 and suffered from no serious invasion during the war. However, it experienced many skirmishes, raids, and minor attacks that disrupted settlement and terrorized residents of the territory. The violence began in 1809, and the center of the state, the northwest edge of American settlement, bore the brunt of attacks. The Osage remained allied to the United States during the war, due to their dependence on trade goods and weapons. Other tribes—including elements of the Winnebago, Kickapoo, Sac, and Fox tribes—went to war to push settlers out of hunting lands and gain plunder. Local militia patrolled the countryside in an effort to deter attacks, while farm families took shelter in forts and local blockhouses when threatened. Violence peaked in 1813 and 1814, and terrified families rarely left their cabins or cornfields. Tribes made peace by the summer of 1816. 28

The end of the war encouraged large-scale American migration. More than 40,000 people flooded into Missouri in search of land and economic oppor-
An Enterprising and Industrious Population

Thousands began to move into the region in search of land and economic opportunity between 1815 and 1820. This migration did more than anything else to help ensure the security of Missouri, and sheer numbers overwhelmed the Indian population. Timothy Flint observed, “the immigration from the western and southern states to this country poured in a flood.” Watching the incoming settlers from St. Charles, he counted over 100 people passing through the village in one day, and “the number was said to have equaled that for many days together.” The ferry near the village was continually busy, and he observed one wagon train of settlers, children, slaves, and hundreds of animals that was three-quarters of a mile long. Flint wrote that there was a “rage for speculating” after the War of 1812 ended and that the greed for profit dominated all conversations. Minister John Mason Peck commented that the “new-comers, like a mountain torrent, poured into the country faster than it was possible to provide corn for breadstuff.”

The territory’s population nearly tripled between 1815 and 1820, and Missouri applied for statehood in 1819. Even before the war concluded, Henry Marie Brackenridge reported American settlements had appeared on the Missouri River 200 miles above St. Louis. Towns materialized almost overnight, and farms dotted the lands along the river in increasing numbers. The town of Chariton contained about 500 inhabitants, Stephen H. Long’s expedition reported in 1819. It existed “on a spot where two years previous, no permanent habitation had been established. Such is the rapidity, with which the forests of Missouri are becoming filled with an enterprising and industrious population.” The first steamboat, the Zebulon Pike, docked at St. Louis in 1817 and heralded a new age of rapid transportation in the West that promoted migration, settlement, and commerce. The government sold almost 900,000 acres of public land in Missouri before the Panic of 1819 brought migration, and the demand for land, to a sudden halt. Missouri turned a corner in the years after the end of the war. In the middle of the continent and straddling the major western waterway, as the focus of the fur trade, the Santa Fe trade, and overland western migration, Missouri became an economic center for the antebellum trans-Mississippi West. Cheap, fertile land encouraged settlement, and thousands of families moved into Missouri after the War of 1812, eagerly participating in the growing American market economy.

The decline of European and Indian rivals allowed the United States to control Missouri and surrounding areas by the end of the War of 1812. Disease, overhunting, and warfare overwhelmed the Osage and ended their hegemony for most of the new surpluses and their mounts of flour, corn, salt, pork, whiskey, or south to New Orleans. Americans also salt works, and new farms. They produced farm goods and livestock for export and
of the region. They were forced out of the Missouri River valley before most Americans arrived. The French were unable to exert much control over the area, due to a limited population. However, Upper Louisiana enjoyed strong economic ties to outside markets, exporting skins, fur, and grains. The Spanish brought the first Americans into Louisiana in an attempt to populate the vast region and maintain their hold on it. But American settlement only led to the more rapid social and economic conquest by the newcomers. The transfer of the territory to American control set off a rush by thousands into central Missouri that overwhelmed any possible resistance. The “industry” of the Americans in Upper Louisiana, as explained by Nicolas de Finiels, John Bradbury, and others, led to increasing economic development. Settlers produced greater amounts and an increased diversity of farm goods and sent their surpluses downriver. The greatest challenge to the new American administration was the tangled mess of competing land claims, which helped to delay settlement. The conclusion of the War of 1812 denoted the end of the first stage of Missouri’s frontier history. The large-scale migration reported by Timothy Flint and John Mason Peck marked the beginning of widespread American settlement along the Missouri River.