

200 YEARS AGO, MISSOURI WAS JUST WILDERNESS WAITING TO BE TAMED BY THE EARLY PIONEERS! BOB PRIDDY, AUTHOR OF THE MISSOURI HISTORICAL BOOKS, "ACROSS OUR WIDE MISSOURI" CONTRIBUTED THIS SPECIAL ARTICLE ON WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN MISSOURI 200 YEARS AGO WHEN THE CONSTITUTION WAS BEING WRITTEN.

In Philadelphia, 55 men struggled to revise the Articles of Confederation, meeting secretly so the public and the Congress would not know they were going far beyond their mandate. In September, 1787, 39 of them signed the finished document, the United States Constitution.

Those deliberations meant almost nothing in Missouri 200 years ago.

The Governor of Missouri was Spanish.

The few white people were French, generally, although there were some slaves, some Indians.

But 1787 was to be a historic year for America in Missouri.

Settlement was still sparse. St. Louis was only 23 years old, still a crude frontier trading post at the junction of two great rivers. Ste. Genevieve was already 52 years old, but its population numbered only a few hundred.

St. Charles was 18 years old and already on the way

to becoming a town so distressing that in 1795, the Governor of Missouri (they were actually called Lieutenant Governors in the Spanish scheme of government) would write its residents were "depraved" because it was "in a most out of the way location" inhabited by "savages, mongrels and the worst scoundrels..." He asked that a priest be sent there to "restrain them in their vices."

Missouri underwent a change in leadership in 1787. Lieutenant Governor Francisco Cruzat — whose wife had been kidnapped five years earlier and held for almost three weeks before her release — was replaced by Manuel Perez.

Cruzat had found only sorrow in Missouri during his two terms as Lieutenant Governor of this area. Three of their children died while here and in 1786, first lady Dona Cruzat, had died.

Missouri came under the

command of Perez, a veteran Spanish soldier, described as amiable. He became the last Spanish-born official to command what was then called "San Luis des Illinois."

The scattered settlers of Missouri 200 years ago were mostly farmers and miners. Some were traders and businessmen. But most survived on the land.

The first mines had been opened by the French more than 60 years earlier, in eastern Missouri.

During the American Revolution, Missourians were generally pro-American. France was, after all, an ally of the Americans. And the French and British were rivals of long standing.

In 1780 the French residents of Spanish St. Louis had defeated the British and their Indiana allies in a battle that some say is the westernmost battle of the Revolution.

Missouri in 1787 was a state of scattered people,

living in settlements with a distinct French flavor. The early villages had residential areas, a "common" area where livestock was kept and where firewood was harvested, and another "common" area, where each family was given a strip of farm land.

Homes were of wood, usually one-story with a shingled roof in towns, more functional log cabins in the wilderness. A few houses were of stone but they were usually built by the more financially favored few.

Henry Marie Brackenridge, who lived in Missouri before 1800, said the typical furniture "excepting the beds and the looking glass, was of the most common kind, consisting of an armoire, a rough table or two, and some coarse chairs."

The religion of the early Missourians — those who cared to practice it — was Catholic. In 1787, in fact,




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ACROSS OUR WIDE MISSOURI: 200 YEARS AGO!

colonists "retain as much fondness for showy dress as the most foppish of their ancestors."

Education? In Missouri of 200 years ago there was little. In fact there was little demand for it. The early French Missourians did not oppose education, they just weren't enthusiastic about it. A few priests offered some lessons as did a few lay people. But of the 659 white residents of St. Louis in 1800, only 56 owned books.

There were no newspapers. It would be more than 20 years before the first newspaper was published in Missouri.

Something had happened in the few years just before 1787, though, that would bring about great change in Missouri and lead to the first Americans to settle here.

Lieutenant Governor Cruzat had seen settlement increasing rapidly on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. It led the

you were forbidden to come to Missouri if you were a Protestant. Not until 1795 would Protestants be allowed in Missouri, but all marriages and baptisms still must be Catholic and non-Catholic services were prohibited.

What did Missourians eat in 1787? Wild game was plentiful, but in a matter of years it was becoming depleted and there are notes saying some game was becoming scarce in some parts of Missouri before 1800. Wild berries and mushrooms added variety, as did the produce from family gardens. Bees provided honey; maple trees provided sap that became sugar.

Two centuries ago, Missourians wore everything from animal skins to colorful bandannas around their heads, or brightly-colored striped, polka dot or checked skirts. Historian Duane Meyer notes that one early observer said the French

Spanish to recruit Canadians to come to this country. French, German, Spanish and Italian Catholics were offered free land and enough "maize in the ear" for their first year here. They were also offered "an axe, a hoe, a scythe or sickle, a spade, two hens, a cock, and a pig of two months" which the Spanish thought the new settlers would find adequate to "establish a household which will provide them with a living, or may even make them a fortune."

But those inducements were not enough.

Cruzat had seen the need to promote the cultivation of a particular crop here and suggested the introduction of slaves. The government decided it would supply slaves to new settlers "in such manner as may be practicable."

In the same year that Perez succeeded Cruzat, an American entrepreneur approached Perez with a

suggestion that he establish a colony on land granted in this territory across from the mouth of the Ohio River. George Morgan was given guides and ample help to explore the area he proposed to settle.

Why did they want to come here, these first American settlers? They came because of something else that happened in 1787 - the Northwest Ordinance, which ordered the emancipation of slaves in the lands northwest of the Ohio River. Many slaveowners decided to head west.

Morgan had trouble establishing his colony. Not until two years later did he found the colony and name it in honor of the capital of Spain, New Madrid.

In 1987 we celebrate the bicentennial of the United States Constitution, a document that had almost no impact on the people of Missouri at the time it was written. But we also

celebrate the 20th anniversary of George Morgan establishing the first faltering American foothold in what became, 16 years later, part of the nation being constructed by those 55 delegates in far-away Philadelphia.



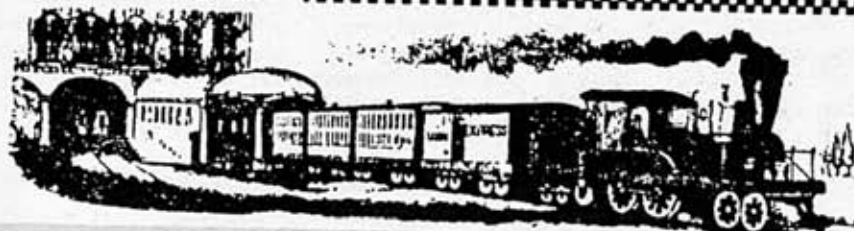
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SENIOR DINNER HELD INSIDE BELL MOTEL CIRCA 1928. NOTICE THE DECORATIONS AND FLIGHT CAPS DENOTING LUCKY LINDY. (PHOTO COURTESY OF EARL AND ANNA ROBERTS)



THE ST. LOUIS SAN FRANCISCO RAILROAD SECTION CREW NEAR DIXON, MO. (PHOTO COURTESY OF WAYNE BURNS)

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