



# History Day

## Regional History Topic Resources

Dr. Adam Criblez  
Director, Center for Regional History

[acriblez@semo.edu](mailto:acriblez@semo.edu)

573-651-2555

## The New Madrid Earthquakes

The New Madrid fault runs from the northeastern corner of Arkansas, up the Mississippi river into southern Missouri and Illinois. In 1811 and 1812, a series of violent and severe earthquakes struck the region. Named after the largest settlement between St. Louis, Missouri and the towns that lined the river in Louisiana, the New Madrid Earthquakes created vast amounts of damage and the shaking reportedly rang church bells as far away as Boston. The quake was strong enough to force waves backwards up the Mississippi river, level towns, and caused volcanic-like sand blows to shoot from the ground.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- The New Madrid Earthquakes by James Lal Penick, Jr. **Location:** SEMO Kent Library; Cape Girardeau Public Library
- The New Madrid Earthquake by Myron L. Fuller **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Government Documents (this is a 1912 geological and historical study)
- *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*; June 1968, Vol 27 Issue 2, pgs 83-104 by Margaret Ross **Location:** SEMO Kent Library
- “The New Madrid Compendium” (a website dedicated to the history of the earthquakes, with many eyewitness accounts) **Location:** <http://www.ceri.memphis.edu/compendium>
- “Historic Earthquakes” (A US Geological Survey webpage covering the earthquakes of 1811 and 1812) **Location:** <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/states/events/1811-1812.php>

## Louis Lorimier

Pierre-Louis de Lorimier is considered the founder of Cape Girardeau. He was a prominent businessman in the region and ran a trading post. He served as the Spanish Land Commandant when the Spanish owned what was known as the Louisiana Territory, and was also there when it transferred from the Spanish to the French and then purchased by the United States. Lorimier reportedly met with Lewis and Clark when they traveled through Cape Girardeau on their way to the Pacific coast. Sources show that Lorimier's home, now known as the Red House, sat where St. Vincent's Catholic Church sits today. A replica of what people believed the Red House looked like has been built across the street in downtown Cape Girardeau. Louis Lorimer died in 1812 and is buried with his wife in the Old Lorimier Cemetery on North Fountain Street.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- The journals of Pierre-Louis de Lorimier, 1777-1795 **Location:** SEMO Kent Library
- Louis Lorimier by Jane Cooper Stacy **Location:** SEMO Kent Library; Cape Girardeau Public Library
- Cape Girardeau Scrapbook **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives
- Cape Girardeau County Tax Records **Location:** Cape Girardeau County Archive Center, Jackson, Missouri
- The Red House Interpretive Center **Location:** Cape Girardeau, Missouri -OR-  
<https://www.cityofcapegirardeau.org/Parks/Red-House-Interpretive-Center.aspx>

## **Sharecropper's Strike of 1939**

This protest movement came about at the end of the Great Depression in southeast Missouri when many poor farm workers were evicted from their homes by the landowners. These farmers and many other sharecroppers staged a demonstration along highways in southeast Missouri to bring public attention to their struggle. Their efforts helped bring an end to the exploitation of poor farmers under the sharecropping system.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- From Slavery to Sharecropping: White Land and Black Labor in the Rural South, 1865-1900 by Donald G. Nieman **Location:** SEMO Kent Library
- Sharecropping and Sharecroppers edited by T. J. Byres **Location:** EBook in SEMO Kent Library catalog
- Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South by Jarod Roll **Location:** SEMO Kent Library
- Thad Snow: A Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel by Bonnie Stepenoff **Location:** SEMO Kent Library; Cape Girardeau Public Library; Amazon
- Thad Snow Collection (microfilm) **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives
- *Oh Freedom after Awhile: The Missouri Sharecroppers Strike of 1939* (film) by Lynn Rubright, Candace O'Connor, Steven John Ross **Location:** SEMO Kent Library

## **Bollinger Mill Historic Site and Bollinger Family**

George Frederick Bollinger was an early pioneer in southeast Missouri and an acquaintance of Louis Lorimier. He was an enterprising businessman who owned a great deal of land in present Cape Girardeau County. His mill sits on the Whitewater River in a small town now known as Burfordville, and is a Missouri State Historic Site. Although the mill was burned and rebuilt after George Bollinger's death, the site still focuses on Bollinger's legacy. Bollinger County, the next county west of Cape Girardeau County, is named for George Frederick Bollinger.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- Bollinger Mill State Historic Site archives (they contain a lot of information on Burfordville, the mill, and George Frederick Bollinger and his family) **Location:** Burfordville, Missouri
- Tax Records **Location:** Cape Girardeau County Archive Center, Jackson, Missouri
- Bollinger Mill State Historic Site- General Information (Missouri State Parks webpage)  
**Location:** <https://mostateparks.com/page/54947/general-information>

## **Little River Drainage District**

In 1914, the Little River Draining District project began. It was designed to drain swampland in the Missouri Bootheel region to make way for more farmland. It involved constructing an intricate system of ditches and levees to direct water from the area. Between 1914 and 1928, those working on the district moved more earth than was moved in the construction of the Panama Canal. The district and its levees are still maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers today. What remains of the swamp land is preserved in Missouri's Big Oak Tree State Park.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- Photograph collection: Missouri State Archives **Location:**  
[http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/mdh\\_splash/default.asp?coll=lilrivdd](http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/mdh_splash/default.asp?coll=lilrivdd)
- The Little River Drainage District of Missouri: 1907-Present **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Special Collections; Cape Girardeau Public Library
- “Little River Drainage District Records” (records include correspondence, minutes, financial and legal papers, field books, maps, publications, photographs, and artifacts)  
**Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives

## **Louis Houck**

Louis Houck was a prominent businessman in Cape Girardeau and southeast Missouri around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Houck was instrumental in bringing the railroad to southeast Missouri and was also heavily involved with founding of the Little River Drainage District. He was a key player in the establishment of Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau and was a major benefactor of the university for most of his life. On the side, Houck also considered himself a journalist and historian. During his lifetime he wrote an extensive history of southeast Missouri.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- [A Missouri Railroad Pioneer: The Life of Louis Houck](#) by Joel Rhodes **Location:** SEMO Kent Library, Cape Girardeau Public Library; Amazon
- [Louis Houck: Missouri Historian and Entrepreneur](#) by William Thomas Doherty, Jr. **Location:** SEMO Kent Library; Cape Girardeau Public Library
- Louis Houck Papers Accretion **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives and Special Collections
- Louis and Gibboney Houck Papers **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives
- Tax records **Location:** Cape Girardeau County Archive Center, Jackson, MO
- Deeds **Location:** Cape Girardeau County Recorder's Office, Jackson, MO

## Thad Snow

Thad Snow was a wealthy landowner and businessman in southeast Missouri. He owned around 1,000 acres of land near Charleston, Missouri. Thad was an interesting character in rural Missouri, as he was well-read and liked to ponder and write about philosophical questions. He was interested in economics, and wrote many letters to the government and Department of Agriculture on how best to handle the Depression and condition of farmers. He invited a union official to organize the sharecroppers on his property and he strived to treat them fairly (this being uncommon for many landowners at the time). Thad befriended and advised Reverend Owen Whitfield, one of the major figures in organizing the sharecropper's strike in 1939.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- Thad Snow Collection (microfilm) **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives
- Thad Snow: A Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel by Bonnie Stepenoff  
**Location:** SEMO Kent Library; Cape Girardeau Public Library; Amazon
- From Missouri: An American Farmer Looks Back by Thad Snow (This book is the personal memoir of Thad Snow about his life and experiences, written and published shortly before his death) **Location:** SEMO Kent Library; Cape Girardeau Public Library; Amazon

## **Southeast Missouri State University**

Originally founded in 1873, Southeast Missouri State was then known as the Third District Normal School, normal schools being the name for teachers colleges. Mark Twain mentions the school in his book “Life on the Mississippi.” It remained a teachers college until the 1950’s, when the university branched out to offer courses in business and liberal arts. In 1973 the school officially became Southeast Missouri State University. Notable people who had an influence on the University include Louis Houck, and Willard Vandiver. Vandiver spent a term as president for Southeast before becoming a US Senator and coining the term “Show-Me State” as Missouri’s nickname.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- University Archive Collection **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives
- Southeast Missouri State University website page: “History” **Location:**

<http://www.semo.edu/future/whysoutheast/history.html>

## **Fort Davidson and the Battle of Pilot Knob**

One of the more well know battles fought in Missouri during the Civil War, Pilot Knob took place at the Union stronghold of Fort Davidson in Arcadia, Missouri. Fort Davidson lay in between Union held St. Louis and Confederate General Sterling Price and his army. The Union army retreated back to Fort Davidson, where they managed to hold off the Confederate troops that outnumbered them. Union General Thomas Ewing knew his troops would not be able to hold out long. Under cover of night they slipped out of the fort undetected, and left the supplies they could not carry inside the magazine which was rigged with a slow burning fuse. While the Confederate troops were able to take the empty fort in the morning, the battle was considered a Union victory.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- Missouri State Parks website for the Battle of Pilot Knob State Historic Site  
<https://mostateparks.com/park/battle-pilot-knob-state-historic-site>
  - <https://mostateparks.com/page/55084/research-resources>
- <http://www.nps.gov/abpp/battles/mo021.htm>
- Bulletin written by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
<http://freepages.military.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~caulleyfamilyinfo/HISTORY.HTML>

## **Missouri Lead Belt**

The official mineral of Missouri is Galena, which is a silvery cubic substance that is one of the leading sources of lead ore. Missouri's high concentration of galena made it one of the largest lead producing regions in the world throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today Missouri is still active in the mining industry and the largest portion of the so-called Missouri Lead Belt is located in the upper counties of the Southeast Missouri Region. Mining and smelting have been responsible for much of the economic development in the state and continues to play an important role in the economies of many counties within the Lead Belt region.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- <http://dnr.mo.gov/env/hwp/sfund/history-mo-lead.htm>
- Doe Run Mining Company history, the primary company behind much of the lead mining in Missouri <http://www.doerun.com/who-we-are/doe-run-history>
- Missouri Mines State Historic Site. Visit their site to find out more about the history of mining and lead in Missouri. <https://mostateparks.com/park/missouri-mines-state-historic-site>

## **Battle of Cape Girardeau**

During the Civil War the city of Cape Girardeau belonged to the Union forces, which created four forts to protect the city. These forts, known as A, B, C and D were located on four different corners of the town, two overlooking the river and two watching the roads leading into town. The so-called battle was really a conflict, caused by the retreat of General John McNeil and his pursuit by the confederate Colonel George W. Carter. Carter followed McNeil's troops up to the edge of the fortified city, where he then sent a letter to the Union troops demanding their surrender. McNeil had prepared the city for attack, and had women and children evacuated up the river. Union forces were not expecting any threats from the river side of town so they moved their cannons to the forts protecting the roads. On April 26, 1863, Confederate troops charged on the city. The fighting lasted only a few hours, ending with the confederate forces retreat.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- <http://www.nps.gov/abpp/battles/mo020.htm>
- <http://www.capecounty.us/ProsecutingAttorney/battleofcapegirardeau.aspx>
- SEMO Archives microfiche collection: First hand accounts of the Battle of Cape

Girardeau **Location:** SEMO Kent Library Archives

## Trail of Tears

In 1830 the United States government issued the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which both President's Jackson and Van Buren supported during their administrations. Under this act, various Native American groups were forcefully relocated from their lands in the eastern US. Tribes involved in the Trail of Tears included the Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw and Choctaw. The movement earned its name from the terrible conditions which the Native Americans faced, including disease, exposure and starvation. More than ten thousand people died before they reached their destination. Some of the Cherokee Indians being relocated crossed the Mississippi just north of Cape Girardeau, in an area that is now Trail of Tears State Park.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- <https://mostateparks.com/park/trail-tears-state-park>
- *The Trail of Tears* by R. Conrad Stein **Location:** SEMO Kent Library
- *The Trail of Tears Across Missouri* by Joan Gilbert
- A pamphlet on the Trail of Tears

<http://semorpc.org/assets/tourism/Trail%20of%20Tears%20bro.pdf>

## CCC and WPA in Missouri

During the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his administration created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to both train and employ young workers. The CCC took in young, unmarried men and gave them unskilled manual labor jobs which dealt with environmental conservation and natural resources. Those involved had the option of taking classes to increase their chances of getting a better job once they left the CCC. Most of their wages were sent home to support their families. The WPA was similar to the CCC in that it employed a large number of unemployed, unskilled workers to carry out public works projects. Projects and the impact of the CCC and the WPA can still be seen today in Missouri.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- A video on the Civilian Conservation Corps in Missouri  
<http://www.hectv.org/watch/two-birds-one-stone-the-ccc-in-missouri/two-birds-one-stone-the-ccc-in-missouri/2114/>
- <http://www.nps.gov/ozar/learn/historyculture/ccc-2.htm>
- <https://livingnewdeal.org/missouri/>

## **Marie Watkins Oliver**

Marie Oliver was the wife of Missouri senator Robert Burett Oliver and lived in Southeast Missouri for most of her life. In 1896 the Oliver family moved to Cape Girardeau, where Mr. Oliver set up a law firm and Marie Oliver began to get involved with the community. She joined the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1904. It was through her involvement with this organization that Marie Oliver took up the task which has made her famous. Missouri at the time still did not have an official state flag, so Marie Oliver took it upon herself to create one. Although there were other flag designs in the running, it was Marie's design that was chosen. On March 22, 1913, Governor Elliot Woolfolk Major signed the bill which named the Oliver flag as the official flag of Missouri.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- <http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/o/oliver/>
- <http://columbia-mo.aauw.net/notablewomen/womenos/marie-oliver/>
- Chapter 9 of *Hardship and Hope: Missouri Women Writing About Their Lives, 1820-1920* edited with an introduction by Carla Waal and Barbara Oliver Korner.

## Warren Eastman Hearnese

Warren Eastman Hearnese was Missouri's 46<sup>th</sup> governor and a native of Charleston, Missouri. Hearnese was elected governor in 1965 and was the first Missouri governor to serve two consecutive terms. Although a Democrat, he was able to make friends in both parties and was successful at accomplishing many of his legislative goals. He was responsible for signing in some of the first civil rights laws in the state and is also known for increasing spending on education, mental health, and highways. One of his most famous accomplishments was the signing of the Public Accommodation Act in 1965, which ended segregation in public places.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- <http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/h/hearnesw/>
- *Warren Eastman Hearnese: A Memoir, From the Personal Notes and Recollections of Betty C. Hearnese* by Rob Crouse
- *If Walls Could Talk: the Story of Missouri's First Families* by Jean Carnahan

## Francois Valle

Francois Valle was a captain in the French militia who was very prominent in the Upper Louisiana Region, which includes modern day Illinois, Indiana and Missouri. Although illiterate, Valle managed to work his way up in the world from being a cattle herder to finally settling and opening a business in Ste. Genevieve. He not only owned land, loaned money and ran a business, but he also invested in mining. Valle was reportedly the wealthiest man in Upper Louisiana as well as the largest slaveholder. The man was so well liked that he retained his military position after the Spanish took over the territory. Francois Valle was a very important figure in Ste. Genevieve and Upper Louisiana and his legacy is still remembered today. His home and business is now a Missouri State Historic Site.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- *François Vallé and His World: Upper Louisiana Before Lewis and Clark* by Carl J. Ekberg.
- <http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/v/valle/>
- <https://mostateparks.com/park/felix-valle-house-state-historic-site>

## **John Hardeman Walker**

John Hardeman Walker moved to Little Prairie, Missouri from Fayette County, Tennessee in 1810. After the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811 and 1812 many settlers decided to leave the area, but Walker stayed behind. He saw an opportunity to gain property. When Missouri first began to petition for statehood its boundaries ended just south of New Madrid. The people of the area relied on their ties with the towns north of them. Walker used his position as landowner to lobby for the cause of including the “bootheel region” within the state. He is also responsible for laying out the town of Caruthersville in 1857.

### **Sources to Explore:**

- <http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/w/walker/#intro>
- Kelley, Max L. “Missouri Heel Is Memorial to John H. Walker.” Blytheville Courier News. June 27, 1930.
- “How Missouri Was Carved Out.” University Missourian. January 19, 1912. p. 2.

### **Additional Topics**

- Plank Road from Ste. Genevieve to Farmington MO
- Salt Springs, Ste. Genevieve
- Battle of Fredericktown
- Tom Sauk Mountain (2005 breach)
- The Lead Belt Mining Riot of 1917
- Perl Decker
- John L. Handcox

### **Helpful Resources**

- Southeast Missouri State University Kent Library and Archives
- Farmington, MO Public Library Genealogy section (many local history books and records)
- State Historical Society of Missouri