

Annual Report of the American Historical Association  
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STEPHEN F. AUSTIN'S DIARY

(May 17-19, 1812)

This is one of the (wor)st Eddies in the River (and) ought carefully to be guarded against by hug(ging) the left shore very close, the River turns short to the left and opens very wide immediately below the Eddy forms itself into two currents which are divided by an Island the left being the Main channel in low water but the right the nearest and best in flood.

The navigation from Cape Gerardeau is very good - except at the Grand Tower where the utmost caution should (be used) the Current being both (swift) and furious. It is best (to) pass as near the Tower as you can with safety- James Rich settled on the right bank at this place- Cape Gerardeau where I landed on the 17th is a flourishing little Place situated most delightfully on an eminence which command a fine view of the river, this place has another most fertile tract of country Back of it, in that country which is filling up very fast with emigrants from the neighboring States, and bids fair one day to become a Rich and flourishing place-

The Earthquakes were felt severely here having t(h)rown down, or cracked every chimney in the place and Ruined two handsome Brick Buildings which were not quite finished- Left the Cape on the 18 and pass the settlement of Tiwappita which is very considerable on the right Bank-at the Lower end of the settlem took leave of the last high Land which appears on the Right Bank of the River from this place to Balize landed near the mouth of Ohio on the Right Bank- the next day pass by the mouth of Ohio and stop a few hours at Birds to get some vegetables &c found them very obligeing and hospitable, while I lay here a chorus pas by from Pittsburg-and put off just as the second one was coming out of the Ohio with which we floated in company the Balance of the day she was from Marrietta. The Mississippi is not as wide nor by any means has so beautiful and Majestic appearance as the Ohio has at their junction had a short glimpse of the clear pelucid water of the Ohio as I pass between the two currents which however onely serv to lighten the thick muddy appearance of the Mississippi by the forcible contrast which the approximation of the two waters presented-

The settlements from the mouth of the Ohio are very thin and wretched the Land on the Right shore being so low and swampy as to be unfit for cultivation and that of the left belonging to the Chickasha nation of Indians- made a good landing about sun down on Wolf Island at house of Mr. Hunter, who was rather More than hospitable being anxious to reclaim by his acts of apparently disinterested hospitability, that character which some of his deeds while living near N Madrid had render suspicious,

Stephen F. Austin's Diary (Cont'd)

The next day the 19th landed at N Madrid-

The Philanthropic emotions of the soul are never more powerfully exercised than when called on (to) witness some great and general calamity originating either in the cupidity and oppression of Governments which involves the defenceless Subject in Misery and want and even renders his life Precarious, or in the wise Dispensations of Providence who withholding the ordinary aid in bringing the maturity the natural productions of the husbandman with Famine or putting in motion and terrible engines of his Power and by some extraordinary convulsions throwing a hitherto fertile country into desolation and plunging such of the unfortunate wretches who survive the ruin, into Misery and despair.

These emotions I experienced when on landing at N. Madrid the effects by the Earthquake were so prominently visible as well in the sunken and shattered situation of the Houses, as in the countenance of the few who remained to mourn over the ruins of their prosperity and past happiness As I view the present situation of this place and reflected on the cause which desolated it I could not refrain from heaving a sigh at its departed prosperity and at the same time from regarding with fearful astonishment the Force of a Power sufficient thus to agitate the Earth-

The effects of the Earthquake began to be visible about 20 miles above this place by the shattered state of Bank of the River. 6 miles above this the Bed of the river rose on the night of the 7 Feb the most severe shock which has been felt, and formed a kind of falls very similar to the falls of Ohio, and rendered the navigation very dangerous until the spring floods had wash it away being only sand- There were a number of Boats lost at this place, and many lives. The Banks are very much shattered and sunken from this place to N.M. where the Bank has sunk about nine feet which reduces the former site of the Town, below high-water mark, The shock of 7 Febr. altho not attended with quite so terrible a catastrophe, yet excited all the horrors of the most violent, and destructive Earthquakes in those who were at this place-the agitation was so great that a man could not stand without holding on by something and the Mississippi rose in an instant 15 feet which brought the water all around and in some of the Houses, which justified the Idea that the whole country was sinking, and as there was no high land to fly to they considered themselves as lost- happily however there was not many lives Lost, an unfortunate family who were moving down the River and had Landed here a few days before was all lost by the overturning of their Boat which was carried with a number of others some distance into the woods and left dry by fall of the water,- Having had occasion to go into the country twenty Miles to the Big Perain (sic) I had an opportunity to seeing all damage which was done-this is nothing compar to what has been reported tho considerable. the Earth is very much crack all the way to the Perain and

Stephen F. Austin's Diary (Cont'd)

perferated with holes of different sizes out of which emmence quantities of white sand has been discharged mixt.d with a Kind (of) stone coal which altho it resembles the common fossil coal in smell yet is more regular in its grain and of clearer Black and will not burn so freely-

There is not any of these places the smallest appearance of Volcanic Matter altho. there are numbers of marks of the most violent operation of heat-as well in the coal which was discharged as in a kind of Sinder which has been found in small quantities-