ST. LOUIS The Fourth City 1764-1911

By WALTER B. STEVENS

"He said he had found a situation where he was going to form a settlement which might become one of the finest cities of America."— Laclede's prophecy, from the narrative of the settlement of St. Louis by Auguste Chouteau.

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lives and 430 houses, twenty-three steamboats, nine flatboats and barges, three of the principal printing offices, the post office, three banks—property valued at \$2,750,000.

The hero of "the fire of '49" was Thomas B. Targee. He had come from his native New York City in 1836 and engaged in mercantile business, following at times the vocation of auctioneer. Joining the volunteer firemen, he became the head of the Missouri company and a recognized leader in fire fighting. This did not interfere with his activity as a churchman. He was the choir leader in Christ church and highly esteemed by Bishop Hawks. The fire starting on the night of the 17th of May ate its way steadily down the Levee and through the business blocks. When morning came the volunteers were worn out. Targee urged that the time had arrived for extraordinary methods. He advocated the blowing up of houses in advance to the flames as the most effective means of stopping the spread. This was agreed to. A wagon was sent to the Arsenal and several kegs of powder were conveyed to the southwest corner of Third and Market streets where it was proposed to make the stand. While the powder was being brought, Targee went to his home near Fourteenth and Market streets and remained a short time with his family. He told his wife what he proposed to do and caressed his children. He expressed the hope that the plan would be successful but he did not conceal the fact that it was dangerous.

Going back to the place which had been selected for the use of the powder, Captain Targee undertook the active direction of the work. He carried the powder into the buildings which were to be blown up, taking a keg at a time from beneath the tarpaulin where it had been placed to prevent explosion from sparks. He had blown up three structures, successfully making a gap across which the flames might not spread. The next building marked for destruction was Phillips' music store, two doors east of Second street. Targee came down Market street carrying the keg of powder in his arms. He was just within the doors where he expected to throw the keg and retreat before the fire communicated when there occurred a terrific explosion. Captain Boyce and other firemen who made a careful investigation always believed that some one had already placed a keg of powder in the music store and that its presence there was unknown to Targee.

The gift of a steam fire engine to the city by the Unions was the first telling step toward the paid fire department. Acceptance of the engine by the city and organization of a paid department were very materially helped by the presence in the council of three volunteer firemen, members of the body at that time. These councilmen were Daniel G. Taylor, George Kyler and Davis Moore. The bill to accept the engine and employ firemen went through. Most of the volunteer firemen opposed the innovation. Within three years the last of the companies, which was the first organized, went into dissolution.

More than forty years ago St. Louis took up earnestly the question of water purification. In that direction this city pioneered the way for other American municipalities. In 1866 the water board sent an eminent hydraulic engineer, James P. Kirkwood, to Europe to investigate water purification as far as developed there. St. Louis had grown beyond the pumping plant and the reservoir system near the foot of Biddle street. Bissell's Point was in view for a new system. If it was possible to get rid of what Mark Twain called the "mulatto complexion" of the water St. Louis proposed to do it. Mr. Kirkwood made an exhaustive investigation. His report came out in 1869. It was the earliest publication of elaborate character treating on that subject. Mr. Kirkwood reported upon the filtration plants he found at Berlin, Nantes, Marseilles, Edinburgh, Dublin, London and other foreign cities. His report was authority on the subject in this country many years. Adopting Kirkwood's suggestions, Hudson, Poughkeepsie, St. Johnsbury and several American cities put in the filtration process. St. Louis did not. Generations of water commissioners groped for a solution through some sedimentation process. There are children learning to read in the schools of St. Louis who do not know what their fathers and mothers and elder brothers and sisters drank. Here is Mark Twain's affectionate description of the liquid:

It comes out of the turbulent, bank-caving Missouri, and every tumbler of it holds nearly an acre of land in solution. I got this fact from the bishop of the diocese. If you will let your glass stand half an hour you can separate the land from the water as easy as Genesis; and then you will find them both good—the one good to eat and the other good to drink. The land is very nourishing, the water is thoroughly wholesome. The one appeases hunger; the other thirst. But the natives do not take them separately, but together, as nature mixed them. When they find an inch of mud in the bottom of a glass, they stir it up and then take the draught as they would gruel. It is difficult for a stranger to get used to this batter, but once used to it he will prefer it to water. This is really the case. It is good for steamboating and good to drink; but it is worthless for all other purposes except baptizing.

When Rolla Wells became mayor in 1901 he discovered that the water department of St. Louis was committed to the filtration process as the only method to insure pure water. Sedimentation had been an aggravation. It meant clean water one month and "mulatto" water the next month. Results were dependent upon the "June rise," the ice gorges, the floods and the droughts' and various other natural conditions. The introduction of the filtration process for St. Louis meant the wiping out of a plant which had cost \$30,000,000. The lowest estimate the mayor could get of the actual expenditures necessary to create an adequate filtration plant according to the process which the water department said was the only solution in sight was \$30,000,000. Filtration meant \$30,000,000 wiped out and \$30,000,000 more to be spent. The mayor changed the water department head. He put in a new water commissioner, but a man who had grown from boyhood in the service of the water department, Benjamin C. Adkins.

In his appointments of chiefs of departments and bureaus, Mr. Wells pursued a policy rather unusual with American mayors. His policy was to select a man he believed to be efficient and to give him a free hand. Very seldom did Mayor Wells interfere with the details of the business in any department. If the appointee didn't measure up to expectations, he had to give place to another man. In the case of the reorganization of the water department, the mayor made an exception to his general policy. He wanted water purification and he wanted it badly. He urged prompt action. He advised the Board of Public Improvements to go on a tour of investigation. He told Commissioner Adkins to make the water purification problem his first and most important business. He insisted upon trial of every suggested treatment by

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sedimentation before any more consideration was given to filtration. The latter method was to be adopted only in the event that no means could be found to produce sedimentation. A young man named John F. Wixford had been experimenting with chemical processes to perfect sedimentation. He had been taken off this laboratory work and given something else to do. One of the first acts of the new commissioner, having in mind the urgent instructions of the mayor to give the sedimentation theory thorough trial, was to send Wixford back to his experiments, to demonstrate either that sedimentation of St. Louis water could be made successful or that the process must fail.

When the water began to run clear from every faucet, many people were sure they tasted alum in every mouthful. They didn't. There was no alum in the water. Lime and iron in solution, applied in the ways which the experiments proved to be effective, accomplished the purification. The doctors agreed that the process was not deleterious but rather beneficial. The bacteriologists made four tests a month through a period of years. Their analyses showed the changes which resulted. Before the present methods of purification—discovered and applied about seven years ago—the sedimentation process previously in use removed from 64 to 66 per cent of the bacteria in the water. The tests, after the new method of treatment of the water was applied, showed from 96 to 99 per cent of the bacteria removed. The increased percentage of bacteria removed from the water was attended by a corresponding reduction in the amount of typhoid fever in St. Louis. The cost of this process of purification was 4.62 per 1,000,000 gallons.

Of the thirty-five mayors the city has had in eighty-six years seven were natives of the city. The others were widely distributed as to places of birth, a fact which illustrated the many sources from which the citizenship has been drawn. There had been only two foreign-born mayors—one from Scotland and one from Germany. The extent to which New York state contributed to the population of this city was scarcely realized. St. Louis had had five mayors who were born in New York. Three mayors were Virginians; Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Maryland contributed two, each. Among other states represented in the roll of the thirty-five St. Louis mayors were Maine, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Ohio and Illinois.