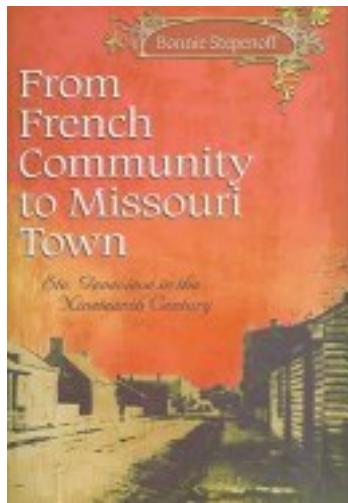


From French Community to Missouri Town



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A small French settlement thrived for half a century on the west bank of the Mississippi River before the Louisiana Purchase made it part of the United States in 1803. But for the citizens of Ste. Genevieve, becoming Americans involved more than simply acknowledging a transfer of power. Bonnie Stepenoff has written an engaging history of Missouri's oldest permanent settlement to explore what it meant to be Americanized in our country's early years. Picking up where other studies of Ste. Genevieve leave off, she traces the dramatic changes wrought by the transfer of sovereignty to show the process of social and economic transformation on a young nation's new frontier. Stepenoff tells how French and Spanish residents-later joined by German immigrants and American settlers-made necessary compromises to achieve order and community, forging a democracy that represented different approaches to such matters as education, religion, property laws, and women's rights. By examining the town's historical circumstances, its legal institutions, and especially its popular customs, she shows how Ste. Genevieve differed from other towns along the Mississippi. Stepenoff has plumbed the town's voluminous archives to share previously untold stories of Ste.

Genevieve citizens that reflect how Americanization affected their lives. In these pages we meet a free woman of color who sued a prominent white family for support of her children; a slave who obtained her own freedom and then purchased her daughters' freedom; a local sheriff who joined Aaron Burr's conspiracy; and a doctor who treated cholera victims and later became a U.S. senator. More than colorful characters, these are real people shown pursuing justice and liberty under a new flag. The story of Ste. Genevieve serves as a testament to Tocqueville's observations on American democracy while also challenging some of the commonly held beliefs about that institution. From French Community to Missouri Town provides a better understanding not only of how democracy works but also of what it meant to become American when America was still young.

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