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DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES & HISTORICAL RECORDS
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final disposition of one of the remarkable documents of the religious literature of the age.

Readers of *The Missourian* will be interested to know that on last Sunday, September 18th, there journeyed to this city a number of pious Latter Day Saints of high authority, coming for the sole purpose of kneeling at the grave of David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery. Every hallowed spot anent Book of Mormon history is being touched this week, from Cumorah Hill, New York, to Far West, to Kirkland, Ohio, to Independence, to Salt Lake.

The writer asks leave to speak personally of two of his individual friends whom he considers as a pair of the most genuine gentlemen of his entire acquaintance. They are second-cousins to each other, yet leaders in the two widely differing religious groups—President Frederick A. Smith of Independence, Mo., and Apostle George Albert Smith of the Council of Twelve of Salt Lake City, Utah!

A SAILOR'S RECORD OF THE NEW MADRID EARTHQUAKE

From an old clipping. No date. Probably a St. Louis paper.

It was in the year 1811 that the first great earthquake known to white men in the Mississippi Valley occurred, and the town of New Madrid, in the southeastern part of Missouri, was practically destroyed, its cemetery being especially the apparent object of the seismic convulsion and its dead unburied for the river to carry away.

There are very few trustworthy accounts of the down-river cataclysm, as the people who saw the most of it were neither accurate observers nor given to writing their impressions. Firmin La Roche, who was the patron or master of a fleet of flatboats going down the river from St. Louis to New Orleans at the time of the disaster, has left an account of the earthquake which is still in the possession of his descendants, at Ninth and Souldard streets, and which has never before been printed. It is written in crabbed and contracted French and one of the pages is so mutilated as to be almost undecipherable. Two handwritings are evident in the manuscript, the second being possibly that of the Fr. Joseph mentioned in the story, as it is much more clerkly than La Roche's. The account appears to have been prepared at the request of somebody whose name is not given, but who seems to have put several questions, which La Roche answers *seriatim*. The document begins:

"New Orleans, Feb. 20, 1812.

"1. I am named Firmin La Roche, sailor, living in St. Louis, and I was present at the earthquake which lately occurred above and below the mouth of the River Ohio along both shores of the River Mississippi. There were with me the Fr. Joseph of the Mission to the Osages, returning home

to France; Jacques Menier, Dominic Berges, Leon Sarpy, Henry Lamel, five other men and the negro slave, Ben, who was killed at New Madrid. I had three boats and I was taking to New Orleans some furs bought in St. Louis.

"2. We set out from St. Louis on Nov. 8, 1811, but because of an accident to one of the boats we were four days delayed near the mouth of the (probably Meramec), and again we had to stop for a time at the Chagres, so that on the evening of Nov. 15, we tied up maybe eight miles north of New Madrid, near the house of my cousin, John Le Clerq.

"3. No, we did not notice that the weather was bad at that time. It was chilly. There was, I think, some wind. I do not remember that there was clouds in the sky. I think not. Neither does Fr. Joseph remember. After we had supper we went to sleep, and I was awakened by a crash like thunder, and the boat turned upon its side so that Lamel, who slept beside, was thrown on me and both fell against the side. It was very dark then. After perhaps half an hour, when we got away from the bank, we looked at the watch and it was 3 o'clock. When I could see, the trees on the shore were falling down and great masses of earth tumbled into the river. Lamel cut the rope that tied us to a log that was there, and in a moment so great a wave came up the river that I never seen one like it at sea. It carried us back north, up-stream, for more than a mile, and the water spread out upon the banks, even covering maybe three or four miles inland. It was the current going backward. Then this wave stopped and slowly the river went right again.

"Everywhere there was noise like thunder, and the ground was shaking the trees down, and the air was thick with something like smoke. There was much lightning. We believed we must surely die. Fr. Joseph gave absolution. We did not see either of the other two boats; one of them we never saw again, nor do I know whether the men in it were drowned. I do not know how long this went on, for we were all in great terror, expecting death."

The following is in another writing, probably the priest's.

"I think there were two great shocks about half an hour apart and many small ones between and after. The water rose so where we were that a tree on the bank whose top must have been thirty feet above the river level was covered all over. All of the crew were sleeping and awoke greatly confused and frightened, so that even a few hours after, when we were again safe, nobody could agree in his recollection of that awful night. It was dark. We saw two houses on fire on the left bank, and when we came to New Madrid there were houses also burning there. The people were crowded out upon the hillside and were in great fear. We tied up to the shore about dawn, and a hickory tree fell upon the boat, killing the negro, Ben, and breaking the left arm of the patron; also the boat was damaged. We ran upon shore, thinking we would be drowned, but the vessel did not sink. Some people called to us that we should go back upon

the water, or that we would be killed. We went on, fearing the land less than the river. When the people there, about twenty at this place, understood that there was a priest present they knelt and had absolution. There were small shocks now and then and much rumbling that frightened us greatly, as we looked for nothing but our destruction, and these noises, we expected, foreran our end. The sound was in the ground, sometimes muffled and groaning; sometimes it cracked and crashed, not like thunder, but as though a great sheet of ice had broken.

"4. We made no effort to find out how many people had been killed, although it was told us that many were. We saw the dead bodies of several and afterwards drowned persons we saw floating in the river. We hastened when it was light to mend the boat that we might get away. The load was thrown into the water by the people who crowded into the vessel with us, until we could take no more. We carried so many that we were all often in danger of being drowned before we could land them again, as the bottom leaked badly."

The handwriting is again La Roche's from this point to the end.

"5. We observed the marks of the earthquake upon the banks on both sides to a point forty or fifty miles south of the River Arkansas. Trees were thrown down. Great cracks were in the soil, some stretching, people said, ten or fifteen miles and very deep. We were told there is a new lake in Tennessee, and the water courses there have been changed. The Yazoo has a new mouth. I was in great pain with my broken arm, and having fever did not observe closely, not knowing that this information would be asked.

"6. Of those who were with me there is not but Father Joseph now in New Orleans, nor do I know where the others have gone, except Leon Sarpy, who has returned to St. Louis. He would be there if a letter was written to him now. My personal loss I make \$600. I hope that this is what you require, and I am sorry that I can tell you so little. It is three months ago now, and even had I written down what we saw when I first got to the city I could say little more. When a man expects nothing but instant death it is hard for him to think or notice anything but his danger.

Your humble servant,

FIRMIN LA ROCHE."

MARK TWAIN AND THE BOOK AGENT

From the *Maysville Register*, July 24, 1874.

A book peddler visited Mark Twain at home to get his subscription for a new book, of which he carried a copy. He found the genial Mark hoeing in his garden. He was kindly received, and asked to take a seat. He took a seat. The seat was on top of a fence, the uppermost rail of which was sharp. He was not happy when he sat down, and he got no