Michael C. Garber, Sr., and the Early Years of the Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier

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W. H. Gray founded the Madison Courier in May, 1837. He was, however, not the first Madisonian to enter the newspaper field. Seth M. Leavenworth and William Hendricks, who was later chosen governor of Indiana, jointly started the Western Eagle, the first issue coming off the press on May 26, 1813. John Paul, one of Madison's earliest residents, was the proprietor. It was the state's second paper. Four months after the Western Eagle was founded, Hendricks resigned as editor in favor of Jacob Rhoads. In July, 1815, the publication was moved to Lexington, Indiana, with Rhoads continuing as editor. Other early papers published in Madison included the Indiana Republican and the Banner.

From the few extant copies of the Madison Courier edited by Gray, there is evidence that he attempted to issue a daily at least part of the two and one-half years during which he was owner. Thus, in a sense he holds the distinction of editing Indiana's first daily newspaper. Gray sold the paper to Rolla Doolittle and A. C. Grady in November, 1839. Doolittle was apparently the active partner. Four years later the paper changed ownership again; this time it was S. F. Covington who "took over."

Even though Doolittle had many a creditor by 1843, Covington got a clear start, thanks to his predecessor. A court verdict ordered that the Courier plant be confiscated and sold. When the sheriff arrived to carry out the orders of the court, he found no printing plant. The night before, Doolittle and his men had knocked out the wall between the shop and the adjoining building and sealed the exit. Thus the property could not be taken over legally since the location of the plant

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*It was founded in December, 1816, by Samuel Pelham and later edited by John Lodge.
had changed. By the time the court had convened again Doolittle had transferred ownership to Covington.8

One of the many cholera epidemics of that era struck Madison particularly hard in 1849. S. F. and John B. Covington had just started the Daily Courier on April 30, 1849, with the promise “that we intend the paper shall be continued for one year, whether profitable or unprofitable.”4 According to Michael E. Garber, present owner of the Daily Courier, the Covingtons moved to Rising Sun, Indiana, to escape the 1849 epidemic. There a business trade was completed with one Michael Christian Garber, owner of a general store. Thus the Covingtons entered merchandising whereas Garber left it. In their “valedictory” the retiring owners indicated full confidence in Garber as a competent successor and stated that he had the “energy, the ability, and the disposition to improve” the paper.8

Michael C. Garber was born in Staunton, Virginia, in 1813 of Scots-Irish descent. Early boyhood training in stage coaching was followed by merchandising experience with an uncle who lived in Pennsylvania. For eight years Garber was in the “forwarding” business, that of carrying freight by canal and railroad between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. He came to Rising Sun in 1846 to set up a store with his brother. Three years later he moved to Madison as the new owner of the Daily Courier.

Although he had had no previous newspaper experience, Michael Garber was soon to show that he possessed that quality which often meant the difference between a good and a great publisher—fearlessness. Under Covington the paper had supported the Democratic party. In fact, it was generally considered to be the personal organ of United States Senator Jesse D. Bright, Madison resident. Garber also was a Democrat; so it was expected that he would promise his readers in his first issue to “use all the time, energy, and talents” he had to make the Daily Courier a Democratic paper, “devoted to the cause of the masses.”8

Three weeks later he reaffirmed his party allegiance and extolled the prosperity of the state after six years under Dem-

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8 Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier, April 28, 1937.
4 There is no evidence that the paper was losing money when it was sold in July.
8 Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier, July 11, 1849.
8 Ibid.
ocratic rule.' Garber, however, was aware of the fact that neither of the major parties had yet taken a clear stand on the slavery question. He recognized that both parties had their proslavery and antislavery factions. The result of the national election of 1848 made that clear when Zachary Taylor was victorious in seven free states and eight slave.

By 1852, Garber was bemoaning the low ebb of political strife. "PARTY ISSUES! What has become of them?" he cried. And yet the Madison editor did not hesitate to condemn the actions of his own party if they were not acceptable to him. He spoke strongly for freedom of speech and press, writing, "Nor do we intend to allow either to be curtailed or hedged round, in our person or press." Again two years later he asserted his editorial independence. He was even more outspoken in 1853 when he wrote boldly: "We belong to each party as long as we believe its actions right and conducive to the best interests of the masses of the people, and we feel as free to condemn what we consider wrong in the course of the administration of President Pierce as we approve that which we deem good." By 1854 when the Whigs and Democrats as they were then organized were on their way out as significant political parties, editor Garber said that his party was the masses of the people.

It was this growing freedom to express in print his convictions regardless of party affiliation that eventually brought on difficulties between the editor and Senator Bright. When the Indiana Statesman accused Garber of being a Bright underling, the Madison editor denied it emphatically. Yet two months later the Daily Courier editorially favored the selection of Bright as a representative from Jefferson County to the state constitutional convention. It also attacked the Madison Banner's charge that Bright was betraying his constituents. As late as January, 1851, the Daily Courier urged the election of Bright to the United States Senate. So far Senator Bright and Michael C. Garber seemed to be in agreement. But the honeymoon was soon to end.

On October 23, 1850, there appeared in the Daily Courier an editorial strongly opposing the Fugitive Slave Law. "We

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* Ibid., July 31, 1849.
* Ibid., July 22, 1852, April 20, 1850, September 9, 1852, December 19, 1853, May 19, 1854.
* Ibid., March 16, 1850, April 18, 1850, January 4, 1851.
don't, can't like it. It is repugnant to all the feelings of a man living in a free State. . . . For our part, as we are a law-loving and law-abiding citizen, should we hear a cry for help to catch a fugitive from bondage, we would turn one deaf ear and blind eye."

Since Bright believed that his hometown paper should never print anything that was not in accord with his personal views, he apparently influenced the editor of the Indiana State Journal, John Defrees, to take Garber to task for printing an editorial so definitely opposed to the views of the senator. Still the editor from Madison remained reasonably calm, referring to Defrees as one who "elevated his ears and brayed a four-line paragraph at us, and in those four lines it has managed to tell two lies." Garber admitted differing with the senator on many issues but recognized that Bright was fearless yet aware of the rights of other people.10

The senator's attitude toward Garber is quite understandable when one realizes that Bright was an autocrat. He "classed every man as foe who would not do his bidding, and made personal devotion to himself the test of Democracy."11

Bright was re-elected on January 11, 1851. As has been indicated, in the main Garber supported the senator even though he did take issue with him on the slavery question. The first overt act in the quarrel came when the Indiana House of Representatives passed a resolution forbidding distribution of the Daily Courier in the house chambers. No longer was Garber calm. He lashed out vehemently at the solons: "The 'savans' of the House, it appears, do not like independence and straight-forward dealing in an editor, and have wilfully shut their doors against light and truth. This body, had it the power, would establish a censorship over the Press of the State; and would forbid every article that in the least related to their 'high mightiness,' except in terms of praise."12

Further differences between Garber and Bright developed when the latter attacked the administration of Governor Joseph A. Wright. Garber cited evidence to show that Bright believed the governor to be a "d—d corrupt scoundrel." He

10 Ibid., December 7, 1850.
11 William W. Woolen, Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana (Indianapolis, 1883), 223.
12 Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier, February 4, 1851.
reviewed the facts of the quarrel between him and Bright and explained that the latest act of the senator was to have nothing more to do with the Daily Courier. Bright had the right to establish his own paper if he so wished, stated Garber, "but what right has he to crush us?"\(^\text{14}\)

As far as the senator was concerned, Garber was neither a loyal Democrat or even a respectable citizen of Madison. In a letter addressed to Judge William M. Taylor of Madison which was inadvertently delivered to another Taylor, a friend of Garber who turned the letter over to the editor, the senator wrote that Garber is "deadly hostile at heart to me, and has been for the last twelve months" and that he is "too low and corrupt a scoundrel to entitle him to my notice . . . and I intend to use my efforts to bring about a short peace, which will result in the expulsion of this dam’d scoundrel from our ranks."\(^\text{14}\)

Now the war was in the open. Garber fully understood the basic cause, that he would not "bow down and worship" Bright. This reaction is more clearly explained when one knows that on July 8, Garber was "read out" of the Democratic party at a meeting in the Madison courthouse.\(^\text{14}\)

Finally on July 26, 1851, the editor held no punches. He forgot any good that the senator had achieved. The man from Washington was base and corrupt. He did not even have a basic knowledge of Indiana geography! "Can he tell you the counties in whose bosoms the coal and the iron ore lay now unproductive? Can he tell you the difference between the soils of Jefferson and Tippecanoe?" Garber’s final blow came when he referred to Bright as an "expert political manager," "wire-worker," and "straw-puller."

A large number of Madisonians, however, were loyal to the editor of the Daily Courier. At a Democratic mass meeting in Madison on July 26, Garber’s character was fully endorsed and his actions given hearty support. Similar endorsement came to the editor through a meeting in North Madison three days later. The Daily Courier also made much of a letter from Governor Wright in which he referred to Garber as "a consistent Democrat."\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{13}\) Ibid., June 12, 1851.


\(^{15}\) Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier, July 12, 1851; Garber, "Jesse D. Bright and Michael C. Garber," Indiana Magazine of History, XXVIII, 84.

\(^{16}\) Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier, July 20, 1851, August 28, 1851.
Meanwhile, Bright was not idle. He called Rolla Doolittle, former Courier editor, back into the newspaper field to edit the new Madisonian, the first issue of which appeared on July 25, 1861. Soon Robert S. Sproule of Washington D.C., was put in as co-editor. It was Sproule who threw the barbs at Garber and thus greatly precipitated the final episode in this Democratic quarrel.17

On January 25, 1862, a public meeting was held to arrange for the coming of the famous Hungarian statesman and patriot, Louis Kossuth, to Madison. Garber and Hamilton Hibbs, a Bright man, were members of the reception committee. A notice signed by Hibbs appeared in the Madisonian on the following day in which he stated that he “would rather be associated with a negro than such men [Garber and his assistant C. P. Baymiller].” Thus he declined to serve on the committee.

This was the last straw. Hibbs, a carpenter, was probably told by the Madisonian editor, who well may have written the notice himself, to hang around the Courier office, which was next door to the Madisonian office, to see what Garber would do when he read the notice after issues had been exchanged by the two journals. Another version of the story is that Hibbs was going home from work and “happened” to pass the Courier plant exit just as the editor came forth.

In any case Garber with the latest insult fresh in his mind upon seeing Hibbs spat in his face and struck him. Hibbs quickly pulled a conveniently located chisel and plunged it into Garber’s chest. The Madison Banner of January 29, 1862, described the incident: “At a late hour yesterday afternoon great excitement was produced in our streets by a violent and bloody collision that occurred between M. C. Garber, principal editor of the Courier, and Hamilton Hibbs, in which the former received three very severe, probably mortal, stabs by a chisel in the hand of the latter.” The contrite Hibbs came often to the Garber home to learn of the condition of his victim. The Daily Courier published regular reports on its editor’s state of health starting on January 31 and ending with the favorable report that Garber was “out of all danger from his

wounds" on February 12. He returned to part-time duty on March 1. No legal proceedings developed from the incident.

The difficulties between Bright and Garber have been developed at some length for several reasons. First, the quarrel shows that the editor was certainly in the stream of personal journalism which was coming to dominate the American journalistic scene through such nationally known figures as the James Gordon Bennetts, Horace Greeley, and Joseph Medill. Then one can see that "Mike" Garber and his Courier represented a potent force in Indiana politics.

Garber used his editorial columns, however, for other than personal diatribes. He expressed himself vigorously, though not always fluently, on the leading questions of the day. "We hate slavery as much as man can hate sin," he wrote; "and there is only one thing we hate worse than slavery—Disunion." He refused to accept the thesis that the slavery question was a "temporary struggle for political equality." He insisted that the Union was at stake.18

He indicated an advanced view on citizenship as it related to the race question when he opposed the stand of John M. Clayton, Secretary of State of the United States, who refused to grant a passport to a Negro, a United States citizen. "If the negro, or any negro, be a citizen," stated editor Garber, "he is entitled to a passport just the same as a white man who is a citizen."19 And this was written on the banks of the Ohio River!

In keeping with the current prohibition crusade Garber took an oft-repeated stand against the use of spirits: "Let no advice, however renowned, seduce you into the dangers that beset those who handle the alluring bowl."20

Labor came in for favorable recognition in an editorial in which Garber advocated high pay as the reward for good work. "A bare subsistance is not enough for good workmen; they should have something to lay up for old age."21

Usually his prose was somewhat cumbersome. Yet in the Daily Courier of September 22, 1854, Garber became especially lucid and fluent in his generalizations on politics. "The true

18 Madison, Indiana, Daily Courier, February 18, 1850, August 2, 1850.
19 Ibid., August 22, 1849.
20 Ibid., August 9, 1849.
21 Ibid., April 19, 1853.
American is always a politician, but never a partizan. As a part of the governing power of the country, he is responsible for its policy, and is bound to exert his political influence in behalf of what he considers the right and the true glory of the nation. But he will act from his own convictions, not from the dictations of a party. All political parties, from their very nature, are liable to become corrupted; it is the citizen's duty to see that they do not corrupt him. He will use parties as a means of enforcing his political convictions, but he will be careful that they do not use him.... He who gives up his conscience to the keeping of the party, has made shipwreck of his principles, and becomes a traitor to his country. On the other hand, he who shrinks from politics because they are impure, neglects the duty of a citizen, and imperils his country's safety."

The Daily Courier of this period contained chiefly advertisements. Over half of the front page was so filled. The rest of the page contained general information of a standing nature together with a continued article, story, or reprints from other newspapers. The second page featured several columns of editorial comment and local news with detail accounts of governmental proceedings. Except for telegraphic news and legal notices pages three and four had advertisements whose copy was changed very infrequently.

The Daily Courier doubtless did a service to its readers in publishing such documents as the new state constitution, the complete report of the Select Committee of Thirteen on the Slavery Compromise, and the testimony of the Webster-Parkman trial. Debates in the state and national legislative bodies were frequently printed in their entirety.

These were great days for Madison. During the late forties and early fifties the city was one of the leading industrial centers of the Ohio Valley. It grew from a population of 3,798 in 1840 to 9,839 in 1850, more than it is able to claim one hundred years later! Indianapolis, founded later but growing rapidly during this period, was jealous of Madison's leadership.

Issues of the Daily Courier indicate the importance of pork packing houses. Hogs, fattened on the many species of nut trees found in southern Indiana, were raised at little or no expense and brought by the thousands to Madison for slaugh-

**Ibid.,** October 25, 1850.
tering. On a per capita basis Madison slaughtered five times as many hogs in 1850 as did Cincinnati. As forests were cleared from the area, however, the supply of food for hogs proportionately diminished and the importance of the pork slaughtering decreased.\

Woollen's description of the "Golden Era" is vivid: "She [Madison] was the entrepot of the merchandise sold and consumed in Indiana. She was the gate at which the traveler entered the State. She had three wholesale dry goods houses, and as many wholesale groceries and boot and shoe establishments. She was one of the largest pork-packing points in the country. No less than four establishments were engaged in the killing and packing of hogs, one of them being the largest then in the world. She had a starch manufactory on Crooked creek and a glue factory just outside the city limits. She had several of the largest flouring mills west of the Allegheny mountains. She had three large iron foundries, a brass foundry, a boiler manufactory, and many other establishments of great value. She had a chamber of commerce, a reading room, and a public library. In addition to the magnificent 'Pike' and the 'Ben Franklin,' which landed daily at her wharfs, she had daily lines of steam packets to Cincinnati and to Louisville, and a regular one to Frankfort. Her wharfs were covered with hogheads of sugar and molasses from New Orleans, and with boxes and bales of merchandise from the Atlantic slope. Her streets were crowded with men who came to buy her merchandise and her manufactured goods. Her citizens were jostled on the sidewalks by strangers who came hither to view her greatness, or to enter Indiana through her portals."

Editor Garber would certainly have approved this glowing tribute to Madison's glory; in fact, he included fighting men, duelist, and pretty women as objects of civic pride. He was proud of Indiana too. Garber was certain that no state in the Union would be more influential or hold a higher rank than his own.

The *Daily Courier* did its part to help justify such strong

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state and civic pride. The editor said that no paper in Indiana or, for that matter, anywhere else in the Union could boast of a "more liberal set of patrons." The publishing plant kept pace with mechanical developments too. Steam took over the task of running the press in 1853, relieving staff members of a difficult manual task. The following year a three-story building, probably erected in 1832 and previously used for a ship's chandlery, was purchased as the new home for the Courier. The newspaper was published in this building for seventy-two years.

During the 1860 presidential campaign Garber staunchly supported the candidacy of Republican Abraham Lincoln. This stand requires explanation. It was chiefly over the Kansas-Nebraska Act that the Democratic party split.

The Whig party had for all intents and purposes become ineffective. In their 1854 convention the anti-Nebraska Democrats bolted and called a meeting of their own at Danville. Other "revolt" meetings were held throughout the state. The Jefferson County conclave on June 13, 1854, found Garber as an active participant. The Daily Courier dramatically described those who attended the meeting: "It was not the grog shop republicans and the cross roads politicians who assembled yesterday.... They were the solid men of the country of all parties: farmers who had dropped the work on their farms as did the farmers on the vicinity of Concord and Lexington in 1775, in the busiest season of the year; mechanics who had left their work-shops to vindicate free labor and to protest against the iniquity of the Nebraska and Kansas bill, composed this the longest meeting held in Madison since the canvas of 1844." This group voted to oppose the re-election of all senators and representatives from a northern state who aided in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

At the state convention of July 13, 1854, it was Garber who again played a leading role. In reporting on the meeting he wrote that the delegates were "democrats, whigs and free soilers, all of whom had come determined to bury old party affiliations and act together in [the] future to effect a restoration of the Missouri act." The convention passed a resolution uncompromisingly opposing the extension of slavery and at-

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26 Ibid., November 22, 1849.
27 Ibid., June 14, 1854.
tacking the platform adopted by the "self-styled" Democratic convention approving the Kansas-Nebraska "iniquity."  

Naturally Garber could not hold an important post in the revolt movement without drawing fire. A radical religious journal called the Indianapolis Platform classed him as a "rank infidel, whose library is filled with infidel works, and whose scoffs at religion and the Bible are notorious throughout Jefferson county." The editor tossed off the charges with a shrug. 

By 1855 the term "Republican" was regularly being attached to the anti-Nebraska group. The movement was making steady headway in Indiana. The 1855 Indianapolis convention had double the number of delegates who attended the meeting of 1854. 

Pittsburgh was the scene of the first national convention of the Republican party on February 22, 1856. Michael Garber was there. Starting on March 3 the Daily Courier carried in its masthead the three-point platform adopted by this convention: (1) repeal of all laws allowing introduction of slavery into the territories, (2) admission of Kansas into the Union as a free state, and (3) overthrow of the current national administration which it termed "weak and faithless." 

But Garber did not stop here. He helped organize a Republican Association for Jefferson County. Two years later he was made chairman of the State Central Committee. So when the 1860 presidential election occurred, it was not surprising to find Garber giving staunch support to Lincoln's candidacy. 

Although Michael C. Garber, Sr., was active head of the Courier until his death in 1881, his most significant contribution to his city and state came in those six or seven years after 1849. Thus the following tribute, although possibly a little too glowing, describes the Mike Garber of 1849-1856: "Colonel Garber was a strong man, possessing an unusual independence of character and abundant common sense. He thought deeply, read intelligently, and formed his own conclusions. While always reasonable, willing to confer and counsel with others, 

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28 Ibid., July 15, 1854. 
29 Ibid., August 26, 1854. 
30 Ibid., July 14, 1855. 
31 Ibid., March 8, 1856. 
32 Ibid., March 10, 1856.
he accepted no man's dictum. His defiance of generally ac-
cepted leadership in his own party, when it stood opposed to
his own sense of right, evidences his moral courage and self-
reliance. As a writer, he was plain, direct, powerful, going
straight to the mark without circumlocution or unnecessary
verbiage. His judgment as to news was discriminating, his
business ability large. He was a brave man, kind-hearted and
ture, radical in his views, just in his judgments, honest in
every impulse of his nature."""

"" George I. Reed, Encyclopedia of Biography of Indiana (2 vols.,