

I knew Phillips Store 4 or 5 years before the fire — I saw it on

The building that exploded around Targee was the Phillips Music Store, located near 2nd and Market streets, a 2½ story former residential structure converted to commercial use, as were many of the buildings in the riverfront area. A large portion of Nathaniel Phillips' stock of sheet music, musical instruments (including several pianos and a harp), and military paraphernalia was lost in the explosion.

Phillips was insured for \$10,000 with the Protection Insurance Company of Hartford, Connecticut, but when he appealed for restitution for his losses, they refused him, citing several procedural errors he made in providing them with the required information. Phillips took them to court in a case that dragged on for many years. The records of the St. Louis Circuit Court—now under the care of the Missouri State Archives, which is overseeing their restoration and preservation—contain many case files of the period, but few are anywhere near as thick as the file on the Phillips Music Store case. That is because Nathaniel Phillips paid a stenographer to write out longhand notes during the trials. All of the testimony

heard from witnesses was transcribed in longhand.

Today we are used to seeing the transcripts of a trial, because a court reporter takes down every word that is said. In 1850, this was not the case: trials were recorded with the barest descriptions of plaintiff, defendant, motions made by counsel, and verdicts. The lively exchange of human beings and their testimony is sorely lacking from the record, except in the cases of written depositions prepared prior to a trial. So the Phillips Music Store case is exceptional. Interwoven with testimony about the amount of stock that Phillips had in the store at the time of the fire is dialogue regarding the fire itself and the valiant efforts of Phillips and some of his friends to move his stock of merchandise to other locations before the fire arrived.

Initially, Phillips lost his case in the St. Louis Circuit Court in 1850, but on appeal the Missouri Supreme Court overturned the verdict in 1851 and returned the case to the Circuit Court for another trial, which was held in 1853.

The transcriptions contain fascinating testimony, including that by Thornton Grimsley, a well-known St. Louis saddler, who described his journey to the St. Louis Arsenal to acquire the gunpowder and his delivery of the powder to the vicinity of the Phillips Music Store. Unfortunately, because the testimony was taken down in longhand with pen and ink, it reads more like hurried notes than conversational dialogue; however,



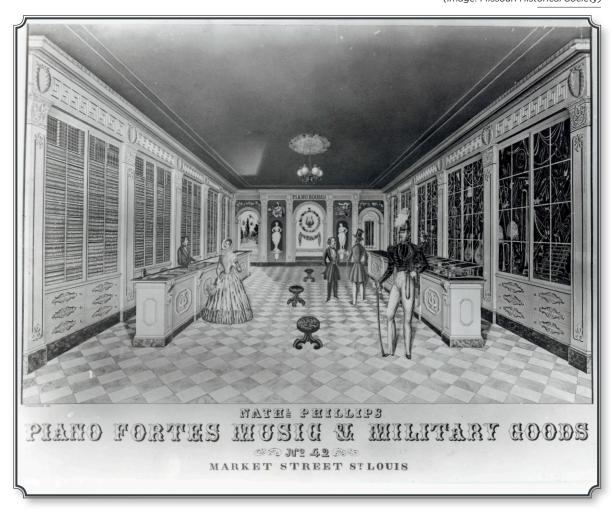
Walnut Street looking east from 3rd Street, 1848, by Thomas Easterly; the Old Cathedral is prominent on the left. The Phillips Music Store was located behind the Cathedral on the next street to the north (left), Market Street. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

pg. 45



the night of the fire—I was there—

Phillips Music Store as it looked before the fire. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)



readers can fill in the blanks to get a flavor for what the testimony was like in its original form. They can also enjoy some dramatic language regarding the fire itself. One other note—the dashes in the testimony, I believe, are areas where the attorneys posed their questions, which were not written down. As a result, when reading these excerpts, readers are only seeing the responses and not the questions. This testimony was given between the dates of May 30-June 4, 1850, during the first trial of the Phillips case in the Old Courthouse.

Thursday May 30, 1850

William Catherwood¹ for Pltfs.

I knew Phillips Store² 4 or 5 years before the fire—I saw it on the night of the fire—I was there—my own place had burned + I was walking by there about 3 o'clock A.M.—the fire was then at the N.W. corner of Main + Market and not there—Phillips was there trying to get teams [of horses and a wagon]—I told him I thought the fire was coming there in answer to his inquiry + we bustled about + got teams—it was some time before we could

get any—there was great demand for teams—I tried in vain for a team—I lost my goods except \$50 worth + was not insured—I was at the corner of Chesnut + Levee -Phillips secured a team—a 2-horse sand wagon I think—have seen the man since hauling sand—the fire had then got up to Jacoby's nearly opposite³ + it was very hot as we began loading up—the wind was from the north + blew the fire over—then we began loading-Phillips, myself & Henry & one or two more—in that wagon Music mostly went—some was down on

The fire began about 10 o'clock—

The Great Fire, Henry Lewis (1858) (Image: Missouri Historical Society)



the counter & off of the shelves we worked pretty hard—it was getting hot there—we got a fresh load + I went up with it to his house + while I was there another load came + after getting off that I returned + there was a cry of powder 4 + I kept off—Phillips' house [residence] was on Olive between 8th & 9th—I piled the goods in the door + on the stoop—then came the 2nd load—partly music—I didn't stay to unload—went across to my home + then off downtown—but I couldn't get to the store—there was cry of powder & grimsly [sic] was riding about warning every body off—great confusion notice was given that the buildings were to be blown up—I got down only as far as 3rd Street & there heard the cry—I know of no other goods saved from

that store except the 2 loads afterwards I saw goods which I had seen before the fire in Phillips' store—from the time I first spoke to Phillips up to the explosion of powder I don't know how long it was—not exceeding 1/2 an hour—I heard some talk of powder before I went up with the load—saw Targee⁵ + heard him talking of it—we seized the Music because easiest to get at-I seized the first things I could get hold of—The fire began about 10 o'clock—don't know the hour my store caught—I was at the theatre—went up to the Virginia Hotel 6 with a person—Staid there some time—had no idea of the fire reaching my store hurried down + my store was on fire—they got out most of my stock of liquors in casks into the street but they burnedI + Phillips were the first person I think who took anything from his store—this was about 3 I suppose—Phillips I know had a Show case there but I didn't observe it that night—part of the time Phillips was there + part of the time getting another team—I saw no military goods removed—they might have been on the last load—I didn't tell him to save his most valuable goods—I knew the military goods were valuable—

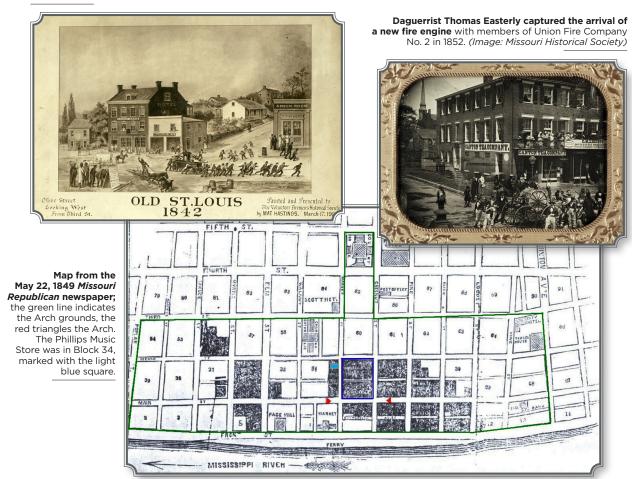
Friday May 31, 1850

Frederick Kretschmar⁷ for Pltfs.

I was in the city at the time of the fire—I was at the fire—my residence was opposite to the Paul House + I had to move my family—I watched as high up as



The Fire House of Missouri Volunteer Fire Company #5, southwest corner of Olive and 3rd streets in 1842, with the company rushing to a fire. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)



Market St. the approaching fire—it came nearer + nearer.

Cross Examined.

... I was near the corner and saw the fire raging so that Phillips' house on the opposite me was on fire—then came an explosion of gunpowder but in what building it was I couldn't tell—I began to move my family between 12 + one—I then thought Market St. was in danger—I thought nothing in all that region would be saved—the wind was N.E. + cinders fell—I took my family to Olive St. to Mr. Harts-I think a man ought to have moved his goods between 12 + one—but it was difficult to get help—I couldn't get drays to move my furniture before daybreak—I got carriages for my family—don't

know when it raged worst—when I began moving the Town Hall was on fire long before I could move my family. . . . 8

Re-Examined.

It was near day before I could get vehicles to move my furniture though I hunted very hard....

James Shoeb⁹ for Pltfs.

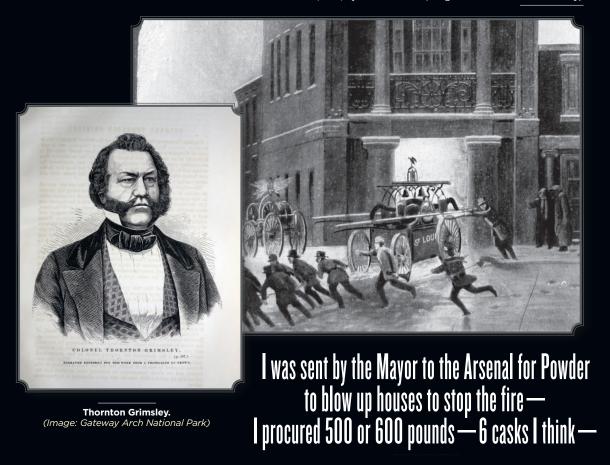
Phillips had his store in '49 in Market St. between 2nd and Main—I was a musician by profession + was often there—was there night of fire—about 2 o'clock perhaps—the fire was then in the Hat Store opposite a little below—Phillips was there in front of the store—the door was open—at 1st I didn't stop—I went home and staid 5 or 10

minutes + then came back to assist him to move—he asked me at 1st to help and I said I would soon be back + assist—then when I returned we began to move—one of my brothers was there + a man in his store + a man painting Regalias or printing music—there were no carts then there—we carried the things to a house on market between 2nd + 3rd North Side—I + my brother + the two others helped carry things . . .

Monday June 3, 1850

Thornton Grimsley for Pltfs.

I was present at Fire of '49—I saw it directly after it struck in from the boats at Locust St—had not reached Olive—about 11 o'clock—I knew Phillips Store



ever since established—6 or 7 vears—don't know the number or the block—it was a brick house on south side of Market 2nd door I think east of 2nd St—it was in a row called Mrs. Perry's Row from Main to 2nd St.—that Row all burnt—don't know when it struck the Row—I was moving my own things from Main between Olive and Chestnut—I was sent by the Mayor to the Arsenal for Powder to blow up houses to stop the fire—I procured 500 or 600 pounds—6 casks I think perhaps two of 50 pounds each didn't notice the time of night then—I brought it up 4th Street + kept it out + [of] sparks—brought it down Elm to 2nd & then up to Walnut—Phillips' house was on fire + all the houses below were burnt + the opposite row of houses were on fire—I am satisfied that nearly all the houses below the

ally [sic] were burnt down + all on fire—several persons rushed up + I drove them off + sent + reported to the Mayor that the Powder was there—Targee11 + George Morton12 had charge of the powder + Morton I think put it into Phillips' Store by order of the Mayor—on the north side it was ordered to be put into Johnsons Do'ench + P's house¹³ —an explosion took place in both houses near the same time—all the insides of the houses were blown out + all the ballance [sic] was burned up—nothing could be saved after the powder was in there I think—I proclaimed in every possible [way] that everybody should get away after fixing the train I brought the balance of the powder up to the Court House¹⁴ for safety—I suppose Phillips was doing as everyone else was + trying to save his goods—My house in Main St.15

was all in flames when I left for the arsenal—I was insured I saved all I could—I never saw a large fire before but I thought that it went very fast—the wind was blowing right high from the N.E.—the fire companies were all broke down when the powder was got—we rallied a company 3 times—they were completely disconcerted + there was lack of water I think—there was not the least probability of saving Phillips' Store—if not blown up it would have burnt up—I know the character of Phillips' business but not the amount—I bought all kinds of military appurtenances of him—gilt eagles, stars, lacescostly—75 cts to \$1.50 pr. yard for laces — Some laces are higher than that—the laces I used for Saddle covers—he had customers in officers of the army—Swords + pistols—he also sold laces to





Heroic portrait of fire captain Thomas Targee commissioned by the St. Louis Fire Department many years after his death in the Great Fire of 1849. (*Image: Missouri Historical Society*)

Thomas Easterly Daguerreotype of the fire damage; the steeple in this view is the Old Cathedral. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)



Panoramic watercolor painting depicts the aftermath of a fire that destroyed much of the St. Louis riverfront in 1849, showing burned out buildings, the wreckage of steamboats and damaged docks. Although often attributed to Henry Lewis, it is signed lower right "Lemasson." In the testimony, Lemasson was identified as an artist who worked for Phillips painting decorative work and scenes on items Phillips sold, including military items. The St. Louis Mercantile Library, which owns the work, lists both artists. (Images: St. Louis Mercantile Library Association at the University of Missouri-St. Louis)







the wind was quite Strong—as to danger to houses on Market St.

the priests for robes—I was in the Store very often + have been a constant customer for 5 or 6 years—I had been there recently before the fire—as to his stock I don't know—he was often out + constantly missing articles I needed—just before the fire I suppose he had as great a stock as usual he had just furnished laces +c. for the general officers burnt in my store.

Cross Examined.

Don't know when the fire reached Phillips' Store or when it was burned up — my store was a Square + a half distant from Phillips' — the fire was coming in

the east corner of Pine + Levee when I began moving—the wind was quite Strong—as to danger to houses on Market St, I didn't think my house in danger till it got very near—a block of brick lay between the fire and me—there were no iron shutters on any of the stores + no Slate roofs¹⁶—I don't think I was gone over over





I didn't save my goods — I lost several thousand dollars — I saved nothing — we moved all our goods to another building called fire proof directly opposite during the fire but that burnt —

[sic] two hours to the Arsenal— Armstrong the Comptroller¹⁷ receipted for it—I was sick or I should have gone at first—many were appealed to but declined—I went down as quick as my horse would carry me—I had never examined Phillips' Stock—merely looked at it—he used to telegraph for goods to come express for me—I needed much—the laces +c. for the equipments for the general officers got by me just before the fire of Phillips were costly—Stars \$5 each—Eagles \$10—designed for the housings of the saddle—not many were used for each.

E.N. Parker¹⁸ for Pltfs.

...—I was not at the store during the fire—I saw it shortly after it began—when the first boat floated down stream + between Locust + Olive on Main I had my Store + watched the fire most— I was on the east midway of the block in business—I didn't save my goods—I lost several thousand dollars—I saved nothing—we moved all our goods to another building called fire proof directly opposite during the fire but that burnt—my goods were furnishing goods—shirts, drawers, +c., +c., -

Tuesday June 4, 1850

Francis Lammerson¹⁹ for Pltfs.

I knew Phillips' Store for five years before the Fire—I was in it after—every day—I was there at the night of the Fire—don't know the exact hour—the fire was then burning on Main St.—it was at the corner of Market + Main—I lived then below the city + I went up 2nd St. - went into a gate + saw shingles burning + went to the hydrant + got no water + then went into the green house + broke open the door of Phillips Store — I helped Phillips—I took Folios from the Shelves—as soon as a wagon arrived I loaded it with the Folios—3 or 4 were there

working—they were Shoab— Werner + Catherwood—... we continued working until the house blew up—I was in the next Ally [sic] behind the Cathedral—they brought powder—I saw it— + people got frightened + stopped work—the powder was brought in at the back door—no one but myself was in at the time—I went once more up stairs—I heard Appolo [sic] Hall²⁰ opposite was to be blown up but didn't believe it—only two persons were there + they carried the powder in—I went up stairs once more to save my papers—Drawings + Sketches -my work-they were in the 3rd story in the drawer of my table— I got them—I happened to think of it + particularly wanted the things—this was when they began rolling the powder in—at the moment I started up to get my papers they were just entering the back door with the powder-I knew it could be nothing else— I got only my papers—...



The Great Fire by Julius Hutawa, 1849. Although the fire started to the north (on the right) in the commercial district, a southern fire began when the steamboat Edward Bates caught fire and touched the shoreline. Winds blew the blaze ashore where it caught the small homes and shacks of primarily poor immigrants along with a candle factory. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)



The St. Louis Volunteer Fire Department wore uniforms like these for parades, but not for fighting the fire in 1849. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Catherwood was the St. Louis merchant who assisted Phillips in moving some of his stock before the Phillips store was engulfed in flames. As it transpired, the building was blown up before the fire reached it—but the result was the same. In the 1848 City Directory there is no William Catherwood listed, but there is a Robert H. Catherwood, profession rectifier (maker of distilled liquors), listed at the corner of Chesnut and Front, which is precisely where Catherwood savs his store was located in the testimony. Catherwood's residence is listed at Olive between 8th and 9th streets. It seems likely that these two men-William and Robert-are one in the same, and that a mistake was made either in the City Directory or in the court transcription. See the 1848 St. Louis City Directory, J.H. Sloss Printed by Charles and Hammond, Book and Job Printers. Corner of Main and Olive Streets, St. Louis, MO, accessed online at http://repository.wustl.edu/ concern/texts/1544br47h, p. 50.
- ² The 1848 City Directory contains an advertisement for the store: "Nathaniel Phillips, old established music & military store. No. 42 Market Street. St. Louis. sign of the golden eagle. Piano Fortes, music and Musical Instruments. The subscriber keeps constantly on hand the largest and most complete assortment to be found in the western country. Travelers are particularly invited to examine this stock, which will be sold at eastern prices, CHICKERING'S PIANOS— These instruments, for superiority of touch, readiness of tone, and elegance of workmanship, have always obtained the Gold Medal, and are not equalled by any in the country. A most satisfactory guarantee is given with every instrument sold, and great care taken packing. Music published and constantly received from all parts of the country. Seminaries, Music Dealers, Military Bands and Officers of the Army, supplied on the most reasonable terms. MASONIC AND ODD-FELLOWS' REGALIA; ALSO-FLAGS AND BANNERS, OF ALL KINDS, constantly on hand, and made to order. sole agent for CHICKERING'S PIANOS. J. F. BROWN'S HARPS, AND CARHART'S IMPROVED MELODIAN This establishment has no connection with any other in the city. All orders must be addressed to N. Phillips, 42 Market Street." 1848 St. Louis City Directory, 241.

- ³ This would be the store run by Charles and Frederick Jacoby at 33 Market Street. See the *1848 St. Louis City Directory*, 122.
- ⁴ A signal that the firemen were about to explode gunpowder charges and a warning to all to take cover.
- ⁵ Much has been written about Thomas Targee and his death during the Great Fire of 1849. The testimony presented in this insurance lawsuit refutes some of the information usually cited about his death. In particular, the final witness quoted here, Francis Lammerson, states that he was still in the music store on the second floor when "they began rolling the [powder] casks in," meaning that Targee entered the store after everyone else had left and the powder casks were already set in place. Thomas Targee was born in New York City in 1808 and moved to St. Louis in October 1836. He was an auctioneer, and he was later appointed to the important and lucrative position of City Weigher, in which he was in charge of weighing items shipped in and out of the city and charging fees and duties for them. He would have had an office in the City Market Building and been in charge of the many large scales positioned along the levee. In that era it was fashionable for prominent citizens to join volunteer fire companies-St. Louis did not have a professional fire department until 1857. By the time of the Great Fire the city had ten volunteer companies. Targee joined the Union Fire Co. in 1836, and in 1839 he helped to form Missouri Fire Co. No. 5, where he became a captain. According to historian Walter Barlow Stevens, Targee "advocated the blowing up of houses in advance of the flames as the most effective means of stopping the spread." Accounts of his death state that "the explosion was almost instantaneous, and [that] poor Targee's body was found in pieces here and there, his head being discovered on the roof of a building nearly a block away." See Thomas Lynch, The Volunteer Fire Department of St. Louis 1819-1859 (St. Louis: R. & T. A. Ennis, 1880) 89 and Walter Barlow Stevens St. Louis, the Fourth City 1764-1911, Volume I (St. Louis: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 121.
- ⁶ The Virginia Hotel, John H. Sparr, proprietor, was listed at the northwest corner of Main and Green Streets (in the area today known as Laclede's Landing) in *Green's 1851 St. Louis City Directory*, 354, accessed online at http://repository.wustl.edu/concern/texts/6h440v98r
- ⁷ Frederick Kretschmar is listed in the 1848 St. Louis City Directory, 136, as "justice of the peace, office corner Walnut and Second, residence 32 Walnut."
- ⁸ The Town Hall was then located inside the St. Louis City Market Building fronting the river. Accounts of the period say that the roof caught fire but that it was extinguished quickly. The building survived the fire but was torn down by 1852 to make way for new commercial buildings being built along the riverfront.
- ⁹ James Shoeb is not listed in the 1848 City Directory. As a musician he may not have been a resident of St. Louis but may have traveled frequently and rented a hotel room when in town.
- 10 Thornton Grimsley is listed in the 1848 City Directory, 102, with "saddlery ware rooms, 41 north First, residence Fourth between Myrtle [Clark] and Elm." Grimsley was a nationally known figure, most famous for his design of new types of saddles, first for the fur trade and then in 1833 for the U.S. military. The Grimsley Saddle was the regulation army saddle for 26 years. Grimslev was born in Kentucky in 1798 and moved to St. Louis in 1822, where he was one of the leading businessmen and involved in community affairs. He raised a unit for service in the Mexican-American War but was not called up for service. A Whig. Grimslev served as a city alderman and in both the Missouri House of Representatives and later the State Senate. Grimsley had ten children. His daughter Minerva married Henry Taylor Blow, and their daughter Susan Elizabeth Blow founded the free kindergarten movement in the United States. Grimsley died in 1861 in St. Louis. See the Lawrence O. Christensen, William E. Foley, and Gary Kremer, eds., Dictionary of Missouri Biography, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 1999.
- ¹¹ Thomas Targee, listed in the 1848 City Directory as "city weigher, 67 Front."



- ¹² George Morton, listed in the 1848 City Directory as living at 140 Spruce Street, was one of St. Louis' first practicing architects. In partnership with Joseph C. Laveille. Morton formed the first architectural firm west of the Mississippi in St. Louis about 1823. His firm designed not only the first courthouse for St. Louis (1828), but also the Old Cathedral (1834, the only one of their buildings still standing), the first Episcopal church on the northwest corner of 3rd and Chestnut (1825-1826), St. Louis University at Christy and 9th streets, and the first buildings at Jefferson Barracks (1826) south of the city. George Morton was born in Scotland in 1790 and immigrated to the United States, first settling in Pittsburgh. He moved his family to St. Louis in 1818. Morton first formed a partnership with Philip Rochblave as carpenters and builders, but by 1823 was linked with Laveille. Morton also served as a city alderman. In later years he retired due to ill health. Despite having single-handedly designed most of early St. Louis' most notable public buildings, in 1834 Morton and Laveille dissolved their partnership: Laveille went into the lumber business, while Morton went into real estate. Joseph Laveille died in 1842, while George Morton lived until 1865.
- ¹³ Do'ench & Pelloux, wholesale druggists, were located at the "northeast corner of Second and Market," according to *Green's 1847 City Directory*, Published by James Green, and Cathcart & Prescott, accessed online at http://repository.wustl.edu/concern/texts/9g54xm452, 59.
- ¹⁴ Today known as the Old Courthouse.
- ¹⁵ Grimsley's saddlery business was located at 41 North Main (or First) Street. The 1848 City Directory contains an advertisement for the establishment: "Thornton Grimsley's Patent Dragoon Saddle, Manufactured at No. 41 N. First Street, St. Louis. All kinds of Military Work constantly on hand, or made to order, at short notice." *1848 St. Louis City Directory*, 290. This store was completely destroyed in the Great Fire.
- ¹⁶ After the fire, buildings were mandated to be built of brick in the business district, with cast-iron shutters on the windows and roofs of sheet iron or slate.

- ¹⁷ David H. Armstrong is listed as the City Comptroller in the *1848 St. Louis City Directory*, introductory pages.
- ¹⁸ Edward N. Parker, of Parker & Co. The business was listed at 85 North First Street in the *1848 St. Louis City Directory*, 180.
- ¹⁹ Francis Lammerson was not listed in the 1848 City Directory. He said in his testimony that he lived "below the city," that is, south of the city.
- ²⁰ Apollo Hall was a rival store to the Nathaniel Phillips Music Store. Apollo Hall was run by James Phillips (no relation to Nathaniel, so far as is known) and was located at 39 Market Street, almost directly across the street from the Phillips Music Store. The fact that two stores run by men named Phillips selling almost identical merchandise and being located across the street from one another has been a source of confusion to historians. Apparently, it was also confusing to St. Louisans of the era: advertisements for both music stores take pains to state that they are "not connected with any other Music Store in this city." In the 1848 directory is an advertisement for Apollo Hall which reads: "Has constantly on hand and for sale, at his Music and Umbrella Store, a complete catalogue of Vocal and Instrumental Music. Also, a large and well selected assortment of Piano Fortes. among which are Grow & Christopher's, of New York and Hallet Cumston & Allen's, of Boston. These manufacturers have received gold medals from the three last Fairs in Boston and New York. for fine touch and good toned Piano Fortes. Musical Instruments and Musical Merchandise. Umbrellas. Parasols. Canes. And every variety of Fancy and Military Goods. Wrought, Shell and Buffalo Combs, of new patterns; Work Boxes, Card Cases, Card Receivers. Jewel Boxes. Jenny Lind Silver Candlesticks, Silver Fruit Knives, Polka Bells, Fans, elegant Dressing Cases, Odor Cases, Head Ornaments, Purses, Trimmings, & c. Dr. Ward's Tooth Powder, of Boston; Lubin's and Roussel's Perfumery. & c.

^{*}The above establishment is not connected with any other Music Store in this city. "Remember, there is but One Apollo Hall—39 Market Street." 1848 St. Louis City Directory, 292.