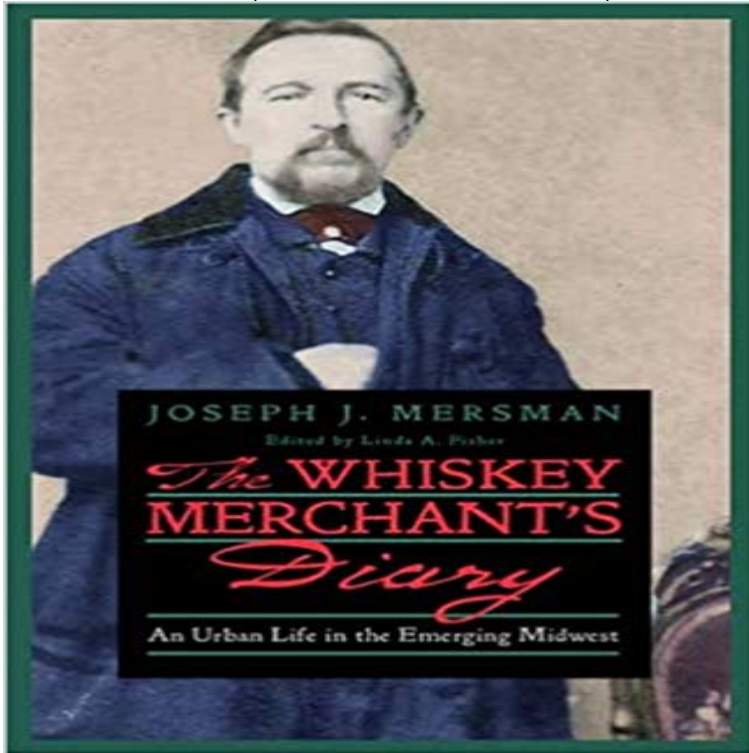


The Whiskey Merchant's Diary: An Urban Life in the Emerging Midwest



Business during the Week was very dull. The great Plague of the Year Cholera is driving every Country [person] and Merchants from Surrounding Cities away. The City looks like a desert Compared to its usual animated appearance. Last week ending the 6th there were 78 deaths from it, altogether 173. This week ending yesterday 278 deaths 189 from Cholera. People parting for a day or so, bid farewell to each other. My Partners family are fortunately in the Country. I and Clemens sleep in the Same bed, in Case of a Sudden attack to be within groaning distance. . .Diary entry for Sunday, May 13th, 1849

Joseph J. Mersman was a liquor merchant, a German American immigrant who aspired with success to become a self-made man. The diary he kept from 1847 to 1864 provides an intriguing account of life in Cincinnati and St. Louis, America's emerging frontier. Outside of Gold Rush diaries and emigration journals, few narrative records of the antebellum period have been published. As a record of both the man and the time in which he lived, *The Whiskey Merchant's Diary* is a valuable resource for social historians, providing significant details about bachelorhood, whiskey making, ballroom dancing, circus history, card games, steamboat transportation, gender roles, theater history, and Victorian etiquette. The diary is also the story of a man who confronted serious disease, and his descriptions of cholera and syphilis are exceptional. Complemented by photographs, maps, and period advertisements, the diary reveals how a German American businessman worked to establish himself in his newly adopted country during an era that was rife with opportunity. Linda A. Fisher's professional training as a physician makes the public health aspect of this project particularly valuable, and her annotations throughout serve to emphasize the significance of Mersman's firsthand observations.

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