

**THE GIRARD COLLEGE AND ITS FOUNDER:  
CONTAINING THE BIOGRAPHY OF MR.  
GIRARD, THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTION, ITS  
ORGANIZATION AND PLAN OF DISCIPLINE,  
WITH THE COURSE OF EDUCATION, FORMS OF  
ADMISSION OF PUPILS, DESCRIPTION OF THE  
BUILDINGS, ETC., ETC.**

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The Girard College and Its Founder: Containing the Biography of Mr. Girard, The History of the Institution, Its Organization and Plan of Discipline, with the Course of Education, Forms of Admission of Pupils, Description of the Buildings, Etc., Etc. by Henry W. Arey

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**HENRY W. AREY**

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## BIOGRAPHY

OF

## STEPHEN GIRARD.

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No contribution hitherto made in this country to the great cause of human charity, has excited more general interest, or become more widely known, than the Bequest of Stephen Girard to establish and maintain a College for orphans. The character of the benevolence, the magnitude of the fund, and the splendor of the building, have all contributed to bring his institution prominently before the public eye, and to make it the object of pride to every citizen, and of attraction to every stranger.

The history of any man, whose kind heart could conceive, and whose vast means could accomplish a purpose fraught with so much good, would be interesting; but the life of Mr. Girard is more than this,—it is instructive. It teaches us what we can do in the face of obstacles, when we are patient, zealous, and self-reliant; it shows that there is at least a partial omnipotence about the human will, that can supply the want of wealth, of friends, and of education; but above all, it exemplifies how the hard toil of a life-time, and the thirst for gold, may be elevated and sanctified by being devoted to the claims of humanity.

Although comparatively humble in his origin, and without the advantages of wealth or education and the influences of friends, he has reared to his memory the proudest and most enduring of monuments. Yet splendid as is the marble structure which stands



above his remains, it yields in beauty to the moral monument. The benefactor sleeps among the orphan poor, whom his bounty is constantly rearing. Thus for ever present, unseen but felt, he daily stretches forth his "invisible hands" to lead some friendless child from ignorance and vice, to usefulness and perhaps distinction. And when, in the fullness of time, many homes have been made happy, many orphans have been fed and clothed and educated, and many men rendered useful to their country and themselves, each happy home, or rescued child, or useful citizen will be a living monument to perpetuate the name and embalm the memory of the dead "Mariner and Merchant."

The retiring disposition and unobtrusive character of Mr. Girard, refused to gratify the curiosity, which was not unfrequently expressed during his life-time, to learn something of his early history. It is not therefore remarkable that hitherto, in the absence of all means of knowledge, no reliable information, particularly of this portion of his life, has existed, and that many erroneous statements have been so frequently made, that Fiction has now almost grown to be Fact. Among the provisions of his will is the direction, that his books and papers shall be deposited in a room of his College, and be therein carefully preserved. Fortunately these musty records have afforded in a material degree the light which has hitherto been wanting, and to them the writer has been principally indebted for the materials of this brief Biography.

Stephen Girard was born in Bordeaux on the 21st day of May 1750. He was the eldest of five children who were descended from Pierre Girard, described in the registry of Baptism, now preserved in that city, as a sea-captain, and Mdlle. Lafargue his wife.

Without wishing to trespass upon the sacred privacy of domestic life, it is painfully evident even from the scanty light afforded by his letters, that the early life of Stephen was by no means a happy one. In every one of the few references which are found in this portion of his history—for it was a subject that he seldom referred to,—there is the same proof, that his childhood had no pleasant or sweet remembrances. Sixty-three years afterwards, he thus wrote of this portion of his history. "I have the proud sat-

isfaction to know that my conduct, my labor, and my economy have enabled me to do one hundred times more for my relatives, than they altogether have ever done for me since the day of my birth. While my brothers were taught at College, I was the only one whose education was neglected. But the love of labor, which has not left me yet, has placed me in the ranks of citizens useful to society." The correct cause of this unhappiness is now difficult to ascertain, but one reason is at least suggested in that not unfrequent source of similar difficulties,—a second marriage by his father. In a letter written in 1789, he thus again refers to this period of his life. "I was very young when my father married again, and since then, I can say with truth, I have made my way alone, with means gained from my nurse, the sea."

The early career of Stephen affords nothing of particular interest. Entering upon the active pursuits of life at a period when most children are yet at school, his education was necessarily limited, but he subsequently partially supplied this want, by careful study and observation, as is sufficiently attested by the neatness and accuracy of many early papers in his hand-writing yet in existence.

Thus impelled by feelings of early disappointment, but most likely influenced still more by that self-reliance and persevering ambition which were so characteristic of him, Stephen early decided to throw himself upon his own resources, and, guided no doubt by the occupation of his father, selected the sea as his future means of livelihood. In the year 1764, then not quite fourteen years of age, he left his home with the consent of his parents, and for the purpose of acquiring a practical knowledge of the profession he had chosen, sailed for St. Domingo in the capacity of a sailor on board a vessel called the "Pelerin," commanded by Captain John Courteau. Upon the termination of this voyage, which lasted some ten months, he returned to his home, but soon sailed again for the French West Indian possessions, between which islands and Bordeaux he continued to make frequent voyages in the course of the next nine years. During this time he labored assid-

ulously to supply the want of early education, and particularly to perfect himself in nautical information. And with such favorable results was this industry attended, that his last voyages were performed in the capacity of first officer, or, as the office was then termed in the French mercantile marine, Lieutenant of his vessel.

Stephen was no idler during these cruises. In addition to becoming proficient in practical navigation and astronomy, he was laying the foundation of his future fortune by careful study of general mercantile operations, and particularly of the products of these Islands, the habits of their people, and their mode of buying and selling.

Upon his return to his home at the termination of his sixth voyage, having now obtained the requisite theoretical and practical knowledge, he applied for authority to command a vessel. The existing laws of France required that in addition to a fixed period of sea service, the applicant should have made two cruises upon a national vessel, and should be at least twenty-five years of age. These two latter requisites were wanting in his case, but the influence of his family was sufficient to obtain a dispensation, and after undergoing the necessary examination, a license was duly granted on the 4th of October 1773, which is yet in existence, giving (for so it reads) "to Stephen Girard of Bordeaux full authority to act as Captain, Master, and Patron of a Merchant Vessel."

The early age at which he attained this rapid promotion in the face of limited education and other difficulties, sufficiently attests the zeal and energy with which he must have labored during these ten years, and gave earnest of that decision of character and perseverance which so distinguished his after life.

His attention appears now for the first time to have been turned to the prosecution of commercial affairs in connection with the pursuit of the sea; and at this period commences the first continuous record which is to be found among the large mass of books and papers, the accumulation of nearly sixty years of active business life, which he directs shall be preserved in one of the rooms of the College. This Record consists of a Journal kept by himself in a neat and careful style, and contains the invoices and the