

## December 25

The children of the French and Spanish settlers of early Missouri observed the old custom of placing their shoes by the fireplace on Christmas Eve so the Christ-Child could fill them with presents. On Christmas morning, the children and the slaves of French settlers shouted "Christmas Gift" to everyone, expecting to be rewarded. The early German settlers introduced the Christmas tree to Missouri. In German folklore, the evergreen is said to represent the tree of life.

One of the world's most beloved Christmas carols was originally titled "St. Louis." In 1868, The Reverend Phillip Brooks of Philadelphia asked church organist Lewis Redner to compose music for a poem Brooks had written after a visit to the Holy Land. Brooks promised that if the tune was a good one, he would name it "St. Lewis." Brooks modified the name to "St. Louis" to avoid embarrassing the organist. The first words of the song were "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

**1825** Irish immigrant Joseph Murphy's apprenticeship to a St. Louis wagon maker ended. He set up his own shop, and gained fame as the finest builder of wagons in the West. In 1839, authorities tried to keep merchants out of what is now New Mexico by levying a stiff tax on each wagonload of imported merchandise. Murphy designed a massive wagon that could hold more merchandise.

**1846** A force of 463 infantrymen, most of them from Missouri, defeated a Mexican army of 1,200 at Las Cruces. Colonel Alexander Doniphan led them. The victory completed the conquest of New Mexico by the United States.

**1855** James Francis Galvin was born in St. Louis. He played for the St. Louis team in the American Association in 1875 and ended his career with the Browns in 1892. In between, he racked up 365 wins, yet never played on a pennant winning team. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1965. At that time, only four pitchers in Major League history had won more games.

**1895** William Lyons and his friend Lee "Stag" Lee" or "Stack Lee" Sheldon argued inside Bill Curtiss' saloon at 11<sup>th</sup> and Morgan. (Now Delmar) Lyons grabbed Sheldon's lucky hat, and Sheldon shot him. The incident became the basis for the folk song, "Stagger Lee," recorded by Lloyd Price, James Brown, Cab Calloway, Bob Dylan and many others. Sheldon once lived in the lone row home on 12<sup>th</sup> Street (now Tucker) that still stands across from the *Post Dispatch* Building.

**1913** The whitest Christmas on record in St. Louis. Nine-point-five inches of snow fell on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

**1927** Christmas, 1927 went down in St. Louis history as "Black Christmas." St. Louis had become one of the most polluted cities in the nation, due to the burning of soft Illinois coal. On that Christmas day, the choking smoke blotted out the mid-day sun, and the streetlights were on at high noon.

**1927** *The Jazz Singer*, the first full-length talking-picture, had its St. Louis premiere. The film at the Grand Central Theatre wowed a capacity invitation-only audience.

**1931** The St. Louis area celebrated Christmas with sunshine and warmth, despite the depression. Over 6,900 needy people were fed at various public institutions. Five hundred baskets of food were distributed to the needy.

**1934** Mayor Bernard Dickmann had vowed that "No one shall go hungry on Christmas Day" in St. Louis. In response to his plea, 68,000 needy people were served dinner in a 24-hour period at Kiel Auditorium. City employees served the meals.

**1938** Noel Picard was born in Montreal. The tough defenseman played six seasons with the Blues. He is probably best remembered for a famous photo that shows Bobby Orr flying through the air after scoring the goal that gave Boston the 1970 Stanley Cup Championship over the Blues. Picard had tripped Orr. Blues fans will remember how Picard mangled the English language as a radio color commentator.

**1941** A Christmas disaster. A city bus collided with fuel tank at Ninth and Allen in South St. Louis. The bus burst into flames, trapping the passengers inside. Most of the victims were returning from midnight mass at St. Vincent's. Ten people died and 22 were injured.

**1945** The churches were packed on the first peace-time Christmas since 1940. Archbishop John Glennon, recently named to the College of Cardinals, celebrated midnight Mass at the Old Cathedral.

**1948** The first ocean-going freighter to make it to St. Louis arrived on the riverfront. The Honduran freighter "Angele Higgins" left Havana on December 9th, but got stuck on a sandbar 36 miles south of St. Louis. A tugboat offloaded much of the load of scrap iron. The difficulties encountered by the Angele Higgins ended any dreams St. Louis had of becoming an international port.

**1951** Christmas, 1951 is memorable because of a terrible ice storm. Three people died, and more than 600 people were sent to the emergency rooms because of falls and traffic accidents. Thousands of travelers were stranded.

**1964** The first "twin" indoor theatre in St. Louis opened. The Sunset I and II was built by General Cinema at the new Sunset Hills Shopping Center, Lindbergh and Highway 66. The two theatres could hold a total of 1500 people. *Goldfinger* was the first feature at the forerunner of today's massive multiplexes.

**1966** A St. Louis tradition began when a group snuck into the McDonnell Planetarium and tied a huge ribbon around the hyperboloid roof. They left behind a card saying that it was the work of students from the Washington University School of Architecture. During the Iranian Hostage crisis, a yellow ribbon was tied around the roof.

**1971** The Blues were under fire for being insensitive. They fired coach Bill McCreary on Christmas Day. Al Arbour replaced him.

**1983** The coldest Christmas Day ever recorded in St. Louis. The temperature hit 13 below. Eight people had died since the cold snap had begun eight days earlier. December 1983 would go down in the record books as the coldest in St. Louis history. The average temperature for the month was 20-point-eight-degrees.

**2002** Up to a foot of snow made for a very white Christmas across southern Missouri and Illinois. About five inches fell in St. Louis, where last minute Christmas shoppers braved icy roads. Six deaths were blamed on the storm in Missouri. A foot of snow fell in Potosi. Fourteen inches fell in Salem. Based on past weather records, St. Louis has a 13% chance of a White Christmas any given year.