

January 31

1812 The founder of the Pony Express was born. William H. Russell gambled that he could win government mail contracts. But the funding was never approved, the telegraph rendered the ponies obsolete, and the Pony express failed after just 79 weeks.

1864 Governor Hamilton Gamble of Missouri died. Appointed as provisional governor at the outbreak of the civil war, he provided stable leadership at a chaotic time. His leadership helped to keep Missouri in the Union.

1874 Jesse James and his gang held up a train near Gad's Hill, Missouri. After the gang had cleared out the safe, Jesse handed a press release to the conductor. The release was complete with a blank space to fill in the amount stolen. The papers dutifully reported it as \$22,000. It was the first train robbery ever in Missouri.

1914 J.J. Wright assistant manager of the Ford St. Louis branch declared that the new plant at Sarah and Forest Park Boulevard was nearing completion. Wright said the plant was part of Henry Ford's plan to standardize the price of his cars. He added that the plant would employ 250 men at the prevailing Ford wage of \$5 per day.

1920 City Health Commissioner Max Starkloff ordered the schools closed in an attempt to halt the flu epidemic. 46 people had died in 24 hours. All 24-hour theaters were ordered to close for at least one hour each day for ventilation.

1926 Five men, identified by witnesses as members of the St. Louis Eagan Gang, pulled a daring robbery at a Cicero, Illinois roadhouse. (Al Capone's home base) They robbed 100 stunned men and women, including some of the most powerful men in the Chicago mob. The papers here said swift retribution was sure to follow.

1929 The Fox Theatre was dedicated. Governor Henry Caulfield and Mayor Victor Miller attended the showing of *Street Angel* starring Janet Gaynor. William Fox had turned a \$1,600 investment in a single Brooklyn theatre into an empire of 305 nationwide by 1929. A few months after the Fox opened, he took over the Loew's Corporation, adding 500 more theatres and MGM studios. But the expense of converting his theatres to sound in the midst of the Great Depression bankrupted him in 1936.

1931 Tom Alston was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. In 1954, he became the first African-American to play for the Cardinals. At the time, black players were still not allowed to stay at the Chase Hotel. Alston suffered from mental problems and was released in 1957. He wound up broke, living in public housing before he died in 1993.

1934 Actor James Franciscus was born in Clayton. He appeared in several movies, including *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* and *Marooned* with Gregory Peck. He co-starred in *Naked City* and had the lead role as *Mister Novak* on television.

1941 Dick Gephardt was born. Gephardt began his political career as a precinct captain, and then was elected to the Board of Alderman from the 14th Ward in 1971. He was elected to represent Missouri's Third Congressional District in 1976. He ran for President in 1988 and was named House Majority Leader in 1989.

1945 The last ferry in the immediate St. Louis area closed. The opening of the Jefferson Barracks Bridge made the Davis Street Ferry obsolete after 85 years of operations. Many roads once led to ferries, including those operated by Captain Edward Hall, Oliver Dougherty and Francois Lemais. Ferries still serve Calhoun County, Illinois.

1949 East St. Louis police were under orders to run two well-known gangsters out of town to head off a threatened gang war. They were after Frank "Buster" Wortman, the leader of the Capone faction. They were also on the lookout for Roy Walker, head of the rival Shelton Gang.

1958 The news that America had entered the space race shared equal billing with a big snowstorm in St. Louis. Nearly a foot of snow brought bus and trolley lines to a halt.

1975 Bridget Cronin and Patricia Wright became the first women to join the Missouri State Highway Patrol in its 43-year-history.

1979 Police arrested 47 demonstrators who refused to end a sit-in at the office of Mayor James Conway. They were protesting a reduction in services at Homer G. Phillips Hospital.

1980 General Motors announced it would build a passenger car assembly plant on a 400-acre site in Wentzville. The automaker said it would close its 60-year-old plant in North St. Louis. The new plant was slated for completion in 1982.

1982 The Missouri National Guard was called out after the worst blizzard in 70 years paralyzed the area. County Executive Gene McNary and Mayor Vince Scheomehl declared snow emergencies. At least ten people were dead. Exactly nine months later, nurses at St. John's Mercy Medical Center said they noticed a marked increase in births due to the blizzard. The babies began arriving on schedule between October 23rd and November 14th.

1992 TWA filed for reorganization under Chapter Eleven of the Federal Bankruptcy Code. Reorganization was completed in November 1993. The airline's financial problems began in October 1988, when Carl Icahn used over \$1 billion in borrowed money to complete a buyout started three years earlier.

2000 About 100,000 people braved the cold and lined the parade route downtown for a parade honoring the Super Bowl Champion Rams. Players rode by in the back of pickup trucks while waving and shaking hands with the crowd. The Anheuser-Busch Clydesdales led Coach Dick Vermeil through the parade.

