

May 17

1673 Cartographer Louis Joliet and Jesuit missionary Father Jacques Marquette began their expedition down the Mississippi River. They were searching for a passage to the Pacific Ocean. They noted a landmark on the bluffs, “two painted monsters which at first made us afraid and upon which the boldest savages dare not long rest their eyes.” The beast was part bird, with the face of a man. The Indians called it “Piasa.”

1803 Hudson Erastus Bridge was born in New Hampshire. In St. Louis, he made a fortune manufacturing stoves and poured much of the money back into the city. He was responsible for connecting St. Louis and Kansas City by rail. He was among the business leaders who formed a company to hire James B. Eads and construct a bridge over the Mississippi. Bridge was also one of the founders of Washington University.

1836 “Professor” Richard Clayton made the first recorded balloon ascension in St. Louis. He made a six-mile flight in “The Star of the West” after taking off from Fourth and Market. Clayton had tried without success to charge admission to watch his flight. A huge crowd chose to watch for free from a few blocks away. Clayton swore he would never return to a town filled with such cheapskates.

1849 Fire broke out aboard the steamboat *White Cloud*, moored at the foot of Franklin Avenue. Within one-half-hour, the blaze spread to 23 boats. The worst fire in St. Louis history had begun. The flames jumped to the buildings crowded along the levee. 430 buildings, eleven city blocks and 23 riverboats were reduced to ashes by morning.

1861 A regiment of Union troops took control of St. Charles. All men who refused to take a loyalty oath were marched to the prison on Gratiot Street in St. Louis.

1864 The Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair opened in a 500-foot-long building on 12th Street erected just for the three-week fair. Thousands of visitors saw the exhibits and heard patriotic speeches to raise money for wounded soldiers. More than \$500,000 was raised for the work done by the Western Sanitation Commission.

1872 Mayor Joseph Brown told the City Council that Tower Grove Park would soon be ready to open for the public. Henry Shaw had donated the land and personally oversaw construction and planting. All that remained was for the council to pass a measure providing for maintenance.

1875 Henry Overstolz challenged the results of the special election that had chosen James Britton as Mayor to replace the late Arthur Barrett. Overstolz charged that the election was rigged. The City Council seized the ballots and began calling witnesses in January, 1876. In February of 1876, Overstolz was declared the winner.

1896 The Reverend Irl Hicks forecast that a tornado would hit St. Louis on this date. He based his prediction on the moon and the planets. Since he had made a similar prediction in 1895, no one paid much attention. This prediction was off by ten days.

1903 James "Cool Papa" Bell was born in Starkville, Mississippi. In 1922, he signed with the St. Louis Stars of the Negro National League for \$90 per month. Bell may have been the fastest man to ever play the game. His playing days ended just as Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. He ended up working as a custodian and night watchman at St. Louis City Hall. Dickson Avenue was renamed in his honor in 1997.

1926 Doctor Malcolm Bliss, a crusader for the mentally ill, addressed the Missouri State Medical Association. He called for the establishment of a hospital for the criminally insane and proposed the creation of a state agency to examine people charged with a crime who pleaded insanity.

1954 Reacting to the Supreme Court ruling barring school segregation, the city Board of Education said it was prepared to integrate the schools next fall. It was also prepared to integrate Harris and Stowe Teacher's Colleges. They were maintained as separate facilities, one for whites and one for blacks.

1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a bill authorizing construction of the Arch under the plan by Eero Saarinen.

1956 The Cardinals traded the 1955 rookie of the year, Bill Virdon, to the Pirates. In return, the Redbirds picked up pitcher Dick Littlefield and outfielder Bobby Del Greco.

1960 Steel company executive Harry Kiener died. His will left \$200,000 for the erection of a fountain with an athletic motif to be built at a prominent spot in St. Louis. The fountain and the statue of "The Runner" were unveiled in Kiener Plaza in 1966.

1963 Drivers were complaining that the St. Louis area had the only stop sign on Route 66 between Chicago and Los Angeles. It was a four-way stop at Watson Road and Cheshire Lane in Marlborough. The Missouri Highway Department said the sign was put up as an experiment because of a shopping center at the intersection.

1965 A five-mile stretch of the new I-270 was opened from Route 66 (at Troy) through Glen Carbon to 157. It marked the completion of a 12-mile stretch between Route 66 and Illinois Route Three. Construction was continuing on the new Chain of Rocks Bridge to carry the highway over the Mississippi.

1973 Developer Don Breckenridge was negotiating to build a \$10 million, 300-room hotel atop the vacant Spanish Pavilion downtown. Mayor Cervantes brought the pavilion here from the New York World's Fair as a cultural center. The foundation formed to operate the pavilion went bankrupt and it closed in 1969. The pavilion is now the lobby of the downtown Marriott.

1985 The Cardinals traded Lonnie Smith to Kansas City for minor leaguer John Morris. The deal was made to allow more playing time for Andy Van Slyke and to make room for red-hot rookie, Vince Coleman.

1996 President Bill Clinton came to St. Louis. He attended a Democratic fund-raiser at the TWA Dome. He also visited Webster Groves High School and a Bocce Club on the Hill.

1999 The pink slips began going out at Boeing in St. Louis. About three to 400 workers were the first to be laid off. The firm planned to cut about 2,000 jobs by the end of the year because of a lack of orders for the F-15 fighter.