

October 31

Halloween stories:

The Ralston-Purina parking lot now occupies a spooky spot. Doctor Joseph McDowell opened a medical college at 9th and Gratiot in 1847. He raided cemeteries for bodies to use in dissections. When his daughter died, he sealed her body in a Hannibal cave to study petrification. A young Samuel Clemens often visited the cave, described in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. McDowell was a rebel sympathizer, and his property was seized and turned into a prison in 1861. Three wagonloads of human bones had to be removed. The ghosts of the rebel prisoners who died under horrific conditions there were said to have haunted the castle-like building, which was torn down in 1882.

The man who may have been “Jack the Ripper” died in St. Louis on May 28, 1903. Francis Tumblety was a porn-peddling quack that was once arrested here in the 1860’s for “putting on airs.” He had a bitter hatred of women, referring to them as “cattle,” and kept a collection of human uteri. Tumblety came to London two months before the horrific murders began. Scotland Yard called him their primary suspect, but there was not enough evidence. After being arrested for homosexual activity, he fled England under an alias on December 4, 1888. The “Ripper” never struck again.

One of the strangest supernatural tales began here in July 1913. A housewife named Pearl Curran claimed she used a Oiuja Board to contact the spirit of a puritan settler killed by Indians. The spirit identified herself as Patience Worth. Over the next two decades she dictated hundreds of poems and several best-selling novels to Curran. The works were filled with period references and old language that the uneducated Curran could not have known about. When Pearl Curran died on December 4, 1937, the headline above her obituary in the *Post Dispatch* read, "Patience Worth is dead."

Halloween is a good time to tell the tale of the St. Louis incident that inspired the film *The Exorcist*. The Reverend William Bowdern performed the exorcism on a young Maryland boy at the old Alexian Brothers Hospital in the spring of 1949. Strange markings appeared on the child’s body. He reportedly levitated, spit and cursed at priests and nuns and broke a priest’s nose. Bowdern lost 40 pounds during the three-week ordeal. After the demon departed, the room was sealed. When Alexian Brothers Hospital was torn down in 1978, workers found a diary of the incident inside.

In 1980, *Life Magazine* named the Lemp Mansion as one of the ten most haunted houses in America. Brewery magnate William Lemp killed himself in the mansion at 3322 DeMenil Place in 1904. William Lemp Junior killed himself in 1922 after prohibition caused the brewery to fail. Charles Lemp also committed suicide in the mansion in 1949. The house is now a restaurant where staff members report strange happenings, including appearances by the “Lavender Lady,” Lillian Lemp.

1789 John Mason Peck was born in Connecticut. The pioneer Baptist missionary arrived in St. Louis in May 1817. He and James Welch founded the first Baptist Church of St. Louis, which had a mostly black congregation. They constructed the first protestant church in the city at Third and Market in 1818.

1835 The first German language newspaper in St. Louis was published. *Anzeiger des Westens* became one of the foremost German newspapers of its day. It was discontinued in 1912.

1912 The *Post-Dispatch* reported that the body of a man had been standing in the window of a Market Street mortuary for 27 years. J.P. Murrell and sons displayed the body of a Negro former employee to prove the perfection of the firm's embalming. No one had claimed the body when the man died. The firm also was keeping the unclaimed body of a young Japanese girl, killed in the 1896 tornado.

1921 William Egan was shot to death as he left a saloon at 14th and Franklin. The leader of "Egan's Rats" said he was a "good sport," and would not say who shot him. But his gang suspected members of the gang led by Edward "Jelly Roll" Hogan were paid \$30,000 to kill Egan. William P. "Dinty" Colbeck took over the Egan Gang and started a bloody war against the Hogans.

1926 The great Harry Houdini died at the age of 52. Houdini introduced his famous "Milk Can Escape" at the Columbia Theatre in St. Louis on January 27, 1908. The handcuffed magician escaped from a padlocked oversized milk can filled with water. In 1922, He escaped from the best straitjacket in the St. Louis Police Homicide Department's wardrobe--while suspended from the 5th floor of city hall.

1952 18 people were killed in a fire at the Cedar Grove Nursing Home in Hillsboro. Firefighters from five communities battled the flames, and managed to save 85 people.

1967 The Cardinals defeated the Chicago Bears 24-17 at Busch Stadium in a Monday night game televised nationally. The *Post-Dispatch* later said this game convinced the NFL to institute Monday Night Football.

1978 The last train pulled out of Union Station, once one of the busiest in the world. Amtrak's Number 22, bound for Chicago, ended 84 years of service to the grand old station. Amtrak moved operations to the forlorn "Amshak" east of the station. Union Station deteriorated, a haven for the homeless, until redeveloped in 1985. Today, it is the second biggest tourist attraction in the area.

1999 A St. Louis landmark closed its doors forever. The Parkmoor Restaurant at Clayton Road and Big Bend opened in 1930. It was the first restaurant in the area to offer curb service. At one time, there were five Parkmoor locations.

2000- A man described by police as a "drifter" shot and killed St. Louis County Police Sergeant Richard Weinhold. Thomas Meek was taken into custody following a stand-off

with police. Weinhold had been responding to a call for a disturbance at a residence where Meek was staying.