

FOR THE RECORDS

Cholera in St. Louis

On June 17, 1849, when four hundred Irish and German emigrants stepped off the steamship *Sultana*, they may have already known that the end was near. During the 1,039 mile, ten-day river journey from New Orleans, Louisiana, twenty-five people had died between Cairo, Illinois, and St. Louis alone. According to newspaper reports, at least 68 cholera deaths occurred in St. Louis on this date. The Old Cathedral buried 26 people. Half of them were either German or Irish.

Cholera, or *Vibrio cholerae*, has caused seven world-wide pandemics since the nineteenth century. (Fig. 1) It is known today that cholera infects a person who drinks water or eats food contaminated with the cholera bacterium, which in turn spreads via the oral-fecal route. Cases occur in settings that have unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, and inadequate hygiene, and nineteenth-century urban towns were rife with unsanitary conditions. Despite the advances in urbanization that were occurring throughout the Western world, basic infrastructure did not improve as rapidly, and St. Louis' population grew too quickly for its leaders and planners to accommodate its citizens. The massive influx of new citizens and travelers, combined with the lack of adequate sewerage and clean water supply, created the perfect soup in which the cholera bacterium could thrive.

Getting to St. Louis, and What They Found There

For about \$2.60, a person could buy basic passage on a steamship going from New Orleans to St. Louis, stopping at a variety of ports along the way. For context, the average laborer in 1849 made \$5.52 for a 6-day work week. The fare for passage was almost half of what a male person would make in a single week, which would also be needed to house, feed, and clothe a family, in addition to any other expenses. Newly arrived emigrants frequently had nothing upon arrival apart from poor health from the long and cramped sea voyage from Europe, and whatever belongings they'd managed to bring with them. When they did manage to pay the fare, it was often for a space on the steamboat's deck, which offered little privacy and minimal shelter from the elements, and "little attention was paid to the cleanliness of the deck."

During the first seven months of 1849, six different steamships are recorded as having arrived in St. Louis with passengers who were sick with cholera or who had died on the journey. In this weakened state, they disembarked on a levee



Fig. 1: Lithograph of cholera, as a large shrouded specter with skeletal hands and feet, representing the miasma theory of disease.

that was crowded with boats, workers, and as much sanitation as you might expect from such a setting, which is to say, not much. (Fig. 2) Prior to 1849, the city depended mainly on surface drainage, although some private drains had been constructed by the well-to-do. The City Engineer of St. Louis, Henry Kayser, supported the reliance on sinkholes, assuring government officials that these could handle the waste that the city produced. The main source of water was the Mississippi River, where the drainage frequently ended up. There were wells and water pumps which citizens could access (for a fee paid to the St. Louis Water Works), and which were sometimes located near outhouses. Heavy rains during the 1849 spring season overflowed privies, wells, and the already damp tenement houses. Altogether, the condition of drinking and cooking water in St. Louis was exceedingly poor, and only helped the spread of cholera.



Fig. 2: View of St. Louis levee with steamboats docked and people walking along it.

Beyond the general cleanliness (or lack thereof) of the city, conditions were worst in areas that had unpaved streets, overflowing water, and crowded, neglected houses. (Fig. 3) In short, the areas where newly arrived emigrants inevitably wound up due to a housing shortage. The worst of these locations were described by one contemporary doctor as filthy, low and damp, with flooded cellars, close to large ponds of stagnant water, and in some cases with outhouses placed within a few feet of the back doors. Multiple families were forced by necessity to share a single-family dwelling, crowding as many as thirty men, women, and children in one room. These close quarters, shared by individuals who had already been exposed to cholera on the journey from New Orleans, were breeding grounds for the bacteria, which in those days was not understood by the scientific community.



Fig. 3: Ninth Street looking north from Chestnut Street, 1852. This was about one block north of Shepherd's Grave Yard.

Medicine and Cholera

The germ theory of disease posits that illness is spread via miniscule particles such as bacteria and viruses. However, that theory was not widely accepted until the late nineteenth century. During the 1849 cholera epidemic, the medical field upheld the miasmatic theory. This belief laid the blame of disease on miasma, or bad air, and didn't give weight to the idea that some illnesses could be spread from contact with another person. Dr. William McPheeters, who was in charge of the St. Louis Hospital during the epidemic, argued that it couldn't be spread person to person because none of the doctors and nurses under his command had contracted cholera while caring for seriously ill patients. The real reason that they did not get cholera was because they were not ingesting the polluted water which proliferated in the slums, so he was technically correct in doubting contagiousness, though he still did not understand its true nature.



Fig. 4: A young woman of Vienna who died of cholera, depicted when healthy and four hours before death. C. 1831.

In order to combat the epidemic, doctors and public health officials recommended that citizens avoid going out at night (due to miasma), avoid eating first vegetables and later meat, clean their homes and belongings, and hold nightly bonfires in order to burn away the foul air. Of course, none of these orders affected the real issue which was the city's water and sanitation, and in June of 1849, emigrants and other citizens began to fall ill in droves.

Who's got Cholera?

"It seems strange to me to see so little of the effects of it. I always imagined it would be awful to be in a city with so much sickness and yet I see & think no more of it than if it were in another city...I am not thrown in contact with any scenes such as are read of in books..." Edward Chase wrote

this to his wife, June 24, 1849. An estimated 80 people died of cholera on this date.

Edward Chase lived at 192 Pine Street. He was fortunate enough to see very little sign of cholera, so much so that he could pretend it didn't exist if he wanted to. But for the roughly 3,750 German and Irish emigrants who died during the epidemic, there was no way to escape cholera's presence.

Shepherd's Graveyard, Kayser's Lake, Vinegar Hill, and other blocks without creative names were hit hard by cholera. Located in areas with the most unsanitary conditions and the highest concentrations of emigrants, these miserable locales saw death on a high scale. For one row of small, two-story buildings on St. Charles Street between Eighth and Ninth Streets, 192 deaths occurred, killing off nearly the entire population of the block.

It is no surprise that cholera spread as violently as it did. The symptoms of cholera were extreme, presenting within as little as twelve hours to five days after infection. Succumbing to the disease once it started could take less than a day in some cases. The first stage of cholera is diarrhea, to the point that the body seems to shrink or shrivel due to extreme dehydration. Dehydration is so severe that the water content of a person's blood lowers significantly, rendering the still-living body blue. Discharges by the stomach, intestines, and skin are next, followed by a state of corpse-like coldness. Finally, the patient develops a fever and soon after dies. (Fig. 4)

It is difficult to imagine the fear that must have consumed families that watched as their loved ones suffered. German emigrants Bernard and Mary Daniel died together on 19th June. Thomas and Ellen Preston, recent emigrants from Ireland, saw the loss of three of their children within four days: John, age 5, on the 14th June; Bridget, age 7, on the 15th; and Andrew, age 8, on the 17th. As crowded families attempted to care for the ill around them, they would have been unable to avoid being contaminated themselves. In a time when personal hygiene was a convenience and clean water was essentially impossible to come by in a city without proper sewerage, any attempts to wash away the byproducts of cholera would only slow the spread of the bacteria, rather than eradicate it completely.

A Doctor a Day

Doctors had no real idea how to treat cholera. They misunderstood the cause and spread of the bacteria, and believed that individuals who drank and ate excessively were particularly predisposed to fall to cholera. While they did make the connection between cholera and poor sanitation, their adherence to the miasma theory meant that they were in the dark as to exactly how it infected.

Dr. McPheeters provided examples of different treatments that were tried during the cholera epidemic. Mercury, calomel, bleeding, cupping, chloroform, salt and mustard emetic, carbonate of ammonia and astringent injections are some of the treatments that McPheeters and his nurses attempted, though most of them did not make a difference in a patient's outcome. Today, the CDC lists rehydration, antibiotics, and vaccines as the most effective treatments for cholera.

For patients that couldn't travel to, or afford, hospitals, the citizen-led Committee of Public Health set up temporary hospitals in each ward. For those who were most incapacitated, or who chose not to seek treatment for another reason, some doctors made rounds, McPheeters among them. He described visiting neighborhoods around Biddle, Eighth, and Tenth, often going for a single case but remaining for hours, "going from house to house, prescribing as rapidly as possible".

The Committee

The Committee of Public Health had its first meeting on June 27th, 1849. Consisting of 12 men from varying backgrounds, the Committee stepped in under ordinance number 2215 to address the epidemic that was raging throughout the city. (Fig. 5)

The Committee's first order of business was to appoint Block Inspectors for each of the six wards: at least 142 different men served as Block Inspectors for the month of July. The responsibilities of these men were to visit and thoroughly examine each tenement and premises in their districts at least once per day; remove all the "filth" from their districts once per day; to determine the number of people living in a house and their condition; to send sick "destitute" people to the Hospitals designated by the Committee; and to generally cleanse their districts using lime and other solutions. All men were volunteers, and the majority of them declined to accept payment at the end of the epidemic. It was thanks to these Block Inspectors that the city and its "nuisances" were cleaned, and they often reported serious issues to the Committee, who then undertook to address them with the power they'd been granted by the City Council.

One such nuisance was a stopped-up sinkhole, "in the shape of a pond", in the Sixth Ward. The situation was so severe that the Committee appealed to the City Engineer, Henry Kayser, to drain the pond, but Kayser responded that "the means at present at command are entirely insufficient to accomplish the said object fully." Eventually the pond, which was nicknamed Kayser's Lake in the engineer's honor, was drained, but not until after the epidemic was over.

Proceedings of the Committee of Public Health.
June 27th 1849.

At a meeting of the Committee designated by the ordinance passed by the City Council, held yesterday evening at the Court House, were present Messrs: Gent, Chambers, Clark, Fields, Hedges, Gray, Salt and Blankenship.

Absent, Messrs: Clemens, Collier, Kennett and Bach.

On motion, J. J. Gent, Esq., was elected President, and J. M. Fields, appointed Secretary pro tem.

The meeting being informal, they not having been officially advised of the passage of the ordinance, the following address and proceedings were had:

"Fellow Citizens: It is known to you that a public meeting was held at the Court House on the evening of Monday last, the object of which was to urge upon the constituted authorities of this city the adoption of urgent sanitary measures which might be, under Providence, the means of arresting the progress of Cholera amongst us."

Fig. 5: Proceedings of the Committee of Public Health, June 27th 1849 [first page].

One of the worst areas in the city was given the moniker “Shepherd’s Grave Yard” due to the number of deaths it experienced. (Fig. 6) Located on the edge of Chouteau’s Pond, the two blocks were “chiefly fringed by hovels of the most wretched description, each one of them a receptacle for utter destitution, while the interior of the unfilled squares presents vast beds of putridity.” These types of colorful descriptions can be found in the Third Ward Committee’s report on this area, which they also described as a depot of death. As of the Committee’s report on the 4th of July, at least 74 people had died within that area alone.

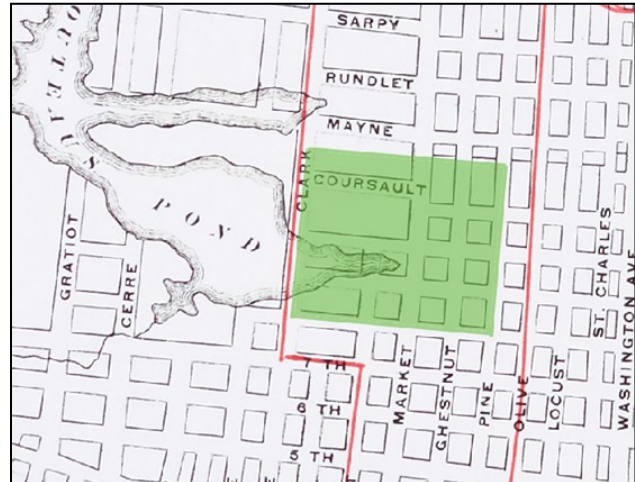


Fig. 6: The green block shows the area called Shepherd’s Grave Yard.

Another measure taken by the Committee of Public Health was to establish a quarantine on Arsenal Island, also known as Bloody Island. The quarantine station’s goal was to stop all incoming steam boats and have them inspected by the resident quarantine physicians. If sickness was found on board, the passengers (usually emigrants) were removed from the boat and kept at quarantine for 10 days, after which they were permitted to either carry on to the city or to locations upriver. In their accounts of their duties, the quarantine physicians, led by Dr. Richard F. Barrett, described the passengers who were removed from the steam boats: usually 70 to 100 individuals of German or Irish origin. At least 30 individuals, unnamed in the Committee’s meeting notes, died in the Quarantine between its inception on July 5th to the dissolution of the Committee on August 1st.

Aftermath and Changes

Cholera had arrived in St. Louis during the early winter months of 1849. Over the next seven months it wreaked havoc in the city, killing an estimated total of around 4,500 people. Patrick Ryder of the Old Cathedral, now Basilica of St. Louis, King of France, recorded over two thousand deaths and burials during May, June, and July of 1849, the most choleric months of that year. (Fig. 7) Other churches were unable to keep up with the number of burials, having to curtail formal funerals and record-keeping due to the sheer quantity. Some deaths likely went unreported, or occurred after individuals traveled out of St. Louis, and it is probable that the number of people who died in the 1849 cholera epidemic is greater than what was formally tabulated: most historians estimate 10% of the St. Louis population died during the heaviest months.

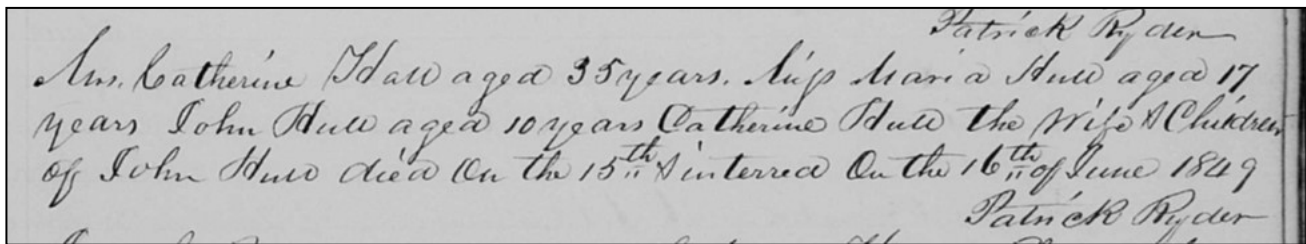


Fig. 7: Old Cathedral parish record of the deaths and interments of Catherine, Maria, and John Hull on the 15th of June.

After the epidemic, changes in infrastructure finally started to occur. Chouteau's Pond was filled in. The sinkhole on Biddle St. was also drained, freeing the surrounding neighborhoods from pools of stagnant water. Proper sewer systems were constructed, street cleaning was implemented to remove the refuse that had previously been left to rot, and more.

It had taken the deaths of thousands for the city to advance its infrastructure in a way that would benefit the inhabitants. Cholera did affect people from across all classes—Pierre Chouteau, Sr. (1758-1849), one of the earliest French settlers of St. Louis, died on July 10—but it predominantly struck those living in the worst conditions, who were almost invariably Irish and German emigrants. They had come to America, and then St. Louis, in hopes of finding a better life, but their dreams were cut short by an epidemic that was too vicious for the city to handle.

References

- Brewer, P. W. (1975). Voluntarism on trial: St. Louis' response to the cholera epidemic of 1849. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 49(1), p. 102-122. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44450206>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Cholera - vibrio cholerae infection. <https://www.cdc.gov/cholera/general/index.html>
- The Daily Delta*. (1849). New Orleans, Louisiana. Various issues.
- Edward [Chase] to wife, June 24, 1849, Edward Chase Papers.
- Godwin, B. (1951, February 3). *The Saint Louis cholera epidemic of 1849 as it appeared in the newspapers* [Master's thesis, St. Louis University].
- History and Genealogy. (2017/2018, Dec/Jan). The St. Louis cholera epidemic of 1849. *PastPorts*.
- History and Genealogy. (2021, November). Rollin' up the river. *PastPorts*.
- Kennedy, J. (2023). *Pathogenesis: A history of the world in eight plagues*. Crown.
- McPheeters, W. M. (1905). Epidemic of cholera in St. Louis in 1849. In E. J. Goodwin (Eds.), *A history of medicine in Missouri* (pp. 71-92). W. L. Smith.
- Office of Coast Survey. (2019). *Distances between United States ports, 13th edition*. National Ocean Service; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. <https://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/publications/docs/distances.pdf>
- Reperant, L. (2023). *Fatal jump: Tracking the origins of pandemics*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Saint Louis (Mo.). Committee of Public Health. *Committee of Public Health Minute Book, June 27-August 1, 1849*. Missouri History Museum. <http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/1021509>

St. Louis Cathedral (Old). (1849). Old Cathedral Parish Deaths, Burials, 1847-1870, 1937-1993 [Microfilm]. FHL no. 8198944, images 71-100.

Stewart, E. M., Bowen, J. C. (1929). History of wages in the United States from colonial times to 1928. *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, no. 499. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Images

A young woman of Vienna who died of cholera, depicted when healthy and four hours before death. Coloured stipple engraving. [1831?]. Wellcome Collection. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vt5g3jxf>

Easterly, T. M. (1848). View of St. Louis levee with steamboats docked and people walking along it. Missouri History Museum. <http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/1014577>

Seymour, Robert (1831). Lithograph of cholera, as a large shrouded specter with skeletal hands and feet, representing the miasma theory of disease. https://dynamic.stlouis-mo.gov/history/displayimage.cfm?Image_ID=408

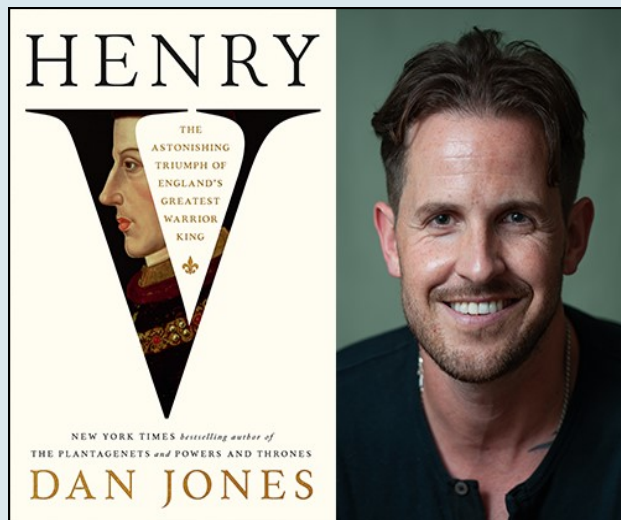
St. Louis, Mo. Boundary of 1841. (1841). St. Louis Public Library.

Unknown. (1852). Ninth Street looking north from Chestnut Street. Missouri History Museum. <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/N39163>

SLCL Author Event

WESTFALL

POLITICS & HISTORY SERIES



“Henry V: The Astonishing Triumph of England’s Greatest Warrior King”

Monday, October 7, 7:00 pm, Clark Family Branch

Bestselling historian Dan Jones presents a biography examining the dramatic life and unparalleled leadership of England’s greatest medieval king. Henry V reigned over England for only nine years and four months, but he looms over the landscape of the late Middle Ages and beyond. He was a hardened, sometimes brutal, warrior, yet he was also creative and artistic. He was a leader who made many mistakes, yet always seemed to triumph when it mattered. As king, he saved a shattered country from economic ruin, but sowed the seeds for three generations of calamity. Writing with characteristic wit and style, Dan Jones delivers a thrilling account of the contradictions and complexities in the life of a historical titan.

Data Life

DNA DATABASES

With the ever-changing world of genetic genealogy services, including a recent upheaval at 23andMe, many different platforms now offer storage for your DNA data. Each company has their own privacy and security policies and options. These standards tend to evolve over time due to the changing legal and economic landscape. The standard industry format for your genealogical DNA data is called a “raw genotype file.” It displays thousands of your key “SNP” mutations that help to distinguish you from other test-takers. Genotype files have a .txt filetype. All DNA testing companies allow you to download your DNA in this format, and many DNA testing companies allow you to upload your file from a different testing company. The different genetic genealogy platforms each offer their own unique tools with which to visualize and analyze your DNA data.

In order of popularity:

- **AncestryDNA** allows you to download your data, but does not allow you to upload data from other testing companies.
- **23andMe** allows you to download your data, but does not allow you to upload data from other testing companies.
- **MyHeritage** allows you to download your data, and allows you to upload data from other testing companies.
- **FamilyTreeDNA** allows you to download your data, and allows you to upload data from other testing companies.
- **GEDmatch** does not offer their own tests, but they do allow you to upload data from other testing companies.
- **DNAPainter** does not offer their own tests, but they do allow you to upload data from other testing companies.

If you have more specific questions about genetic genealogy, please reach out to us at genealogy@slcl.org!

New Soldiers Memorial Museum Exhibit: Ghost Army: The Combat Con Artists of World War II

The exhibit “explores the story of the US Army’s 23rd Headquarters Special Troops, a top-secret unit who waged war with inflatable tanks and vehicles, fake radio traffic, sound effects, and even phony generals. This carefully selected group of artists, engineers, professional soldiers, and draftees—armed with nothing heavier than .50 caliber machine guns—saved thousands of lives and played an important part in Allied victory in World War II.”—Website

The exhibit runs from 9/25/24 through 1/12/25.

See mohistory.org/memorial for more information.

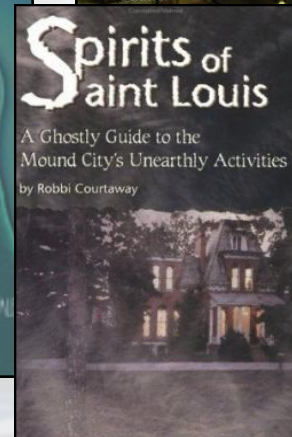
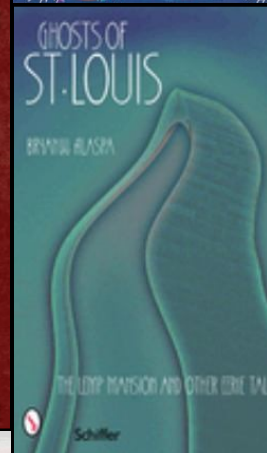
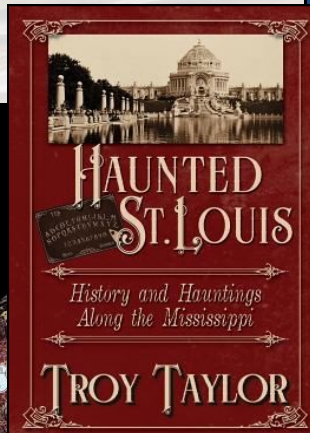
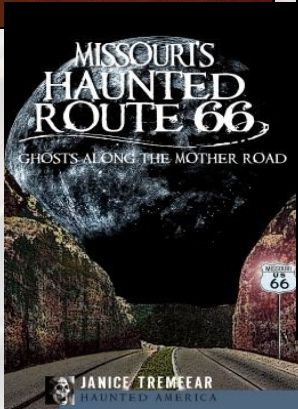
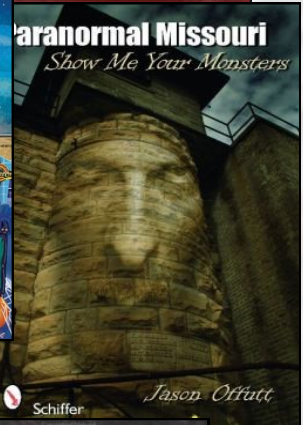
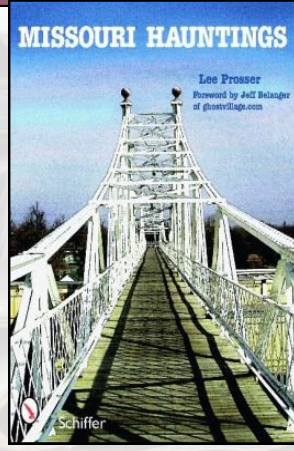
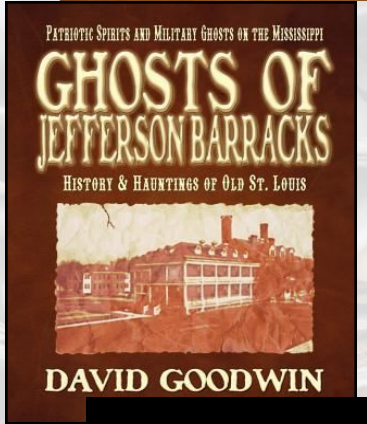
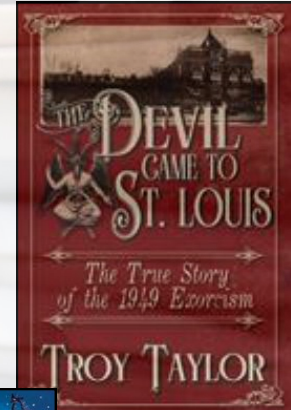
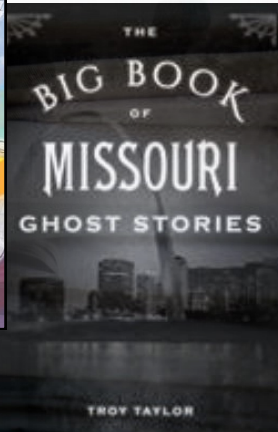
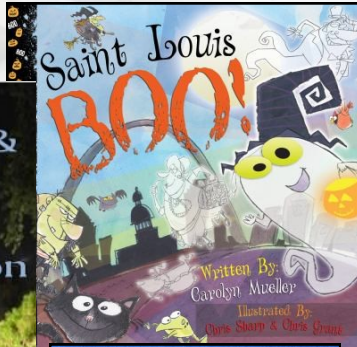
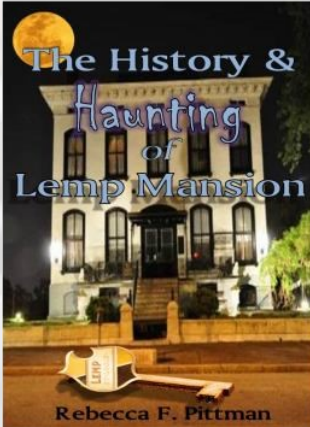


SPOTLIGHT ON



HAIR-RAISING HISTORY

With Halloween approaching, check out some of the spooky local history titles for all ages that can be found in the St. Louis County Library's catalog!



H&G Classes & Programs

Exploring Ancestry Library Edition

Thursday, October 3, 2:00 pm, Virtual

The Ancestry Library Edition database is a powerful tool for genealogical research. Find out how to search it and take advantage of its many records. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

From Québec to France: Tracing the Journey

Monday, October 7, 6:30 pm, Virtual

Learn to use the Emerson History & Genealogy Center's vast collection of print resources to trace your Québec ancestors back in time through the earliest days of the colony, and ultimately to their hometowns in France. Part of the Family History Month Webinar Series: Unique European Resources at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Beginning African American Genealogy

Wednesday, October 9, 10:00 pm, Florissant Valley

Do you want to research your African American family but don't know where to start? This class will teach you the basics of genealogical research and introduce you to specific tips and resources for African American research that are available in History & Genealogy at the St. Louis County Library. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Preservation @ Florissant Valley

Wednesday, October 9, 1:00-4:00 pm, Florissant Valley

A History & Genealogy staff member will be available to assist with scanning and saving old pictures and documents. Up to 20 items permitted, 8 ½ x 11 or smaller. Attendees are encouraged to bring a digital storage device, such as a flash drive, and are responsible for handling their own items. Attendees may arrive at any time during the event, and wait times may vary depending on scanner availability. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Genealogy @ JB

Friday, October 11, 1:00-4:00 pm, Jamestown Bluffs

The History & Genealogy Department is taking the show on the road! Ready to research your family history? A staff member will be available at the branch to answer questions and share information about how to begin your research and use the library's resources. Attendees may arrive any time during the event, and wait times may vary.

Adults. No registration required.

Hearth & Home: Sources for English Genealogy Research

Wednesday, October 16, 6:30 pm, Virtual

The Emerson History & Genealogy Center collects print resources for English genealogy. Learn about English tax books, local histories, and other items in the collection to help you locate your English ancestors. Part of the Family History Month Webinar Series: Unique European Resources at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Cholera in St. Louis

Friday, October 18, 2:00 pm, Clark Family

The year 1849 saw a cholera epidemic sweep up the Mississippi River and take the lives of nearly five thousand St. Louisans, or one-tenth of the population of the city. This presentation will examine the factors that contributed to the epidemic and its impact on the immigrant population. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Bygdebøker: Norwegian Rural Books

Monday, October 21, 6:30 pm, Virtual

Since the early 20th century, Norwegians have produced manuscripts that contain rich details about rural individuals and families. Learn about Bygdebøker and the growing collection at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center. Part of the Family History Month Webinar Series: Unique European Resources at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center. Adults. [Registration](#) required

Exploring FamilySearch.org

Wednesday, October 23, 2:00 pm, Virtual

FamilySearch.org is a free website offering access to millions of records for genealogy and family history research. Learn how to search for ancestors, navigate the catalog, and take advantage of other features. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Continued next page

Ortsfamilienbücher: Researching German Ancestors

Monday, October 28, 6:30 pm, Virtual

Ortsfamilienbücher contain genealogical information about families within a specific town, village, or parish, sometimes going back to the beginning of written records. Learn about the Emerson History & Genealogy Center's large collection of these books and how to use them. Part of the Family History Month Webinar Series: Unique European Resources at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center. Adults. [Registration](#) required.

Programs are available for registration on the first day of the preceding month. See all SLCL programs at slcl.org/events-classes.

Coming in November:

Beginning German Genealogy

Genealogy in Newspapers

Branching Out with DNA

DIY Family History Gifts

Starting Your Genealogical Journey at the National Archives at St. Louis

Exploring the Memory Lab

St. Louis Germans in the Civil War

Beginning Genealogy Research

SLCL Databases for Genealogy Research

FILM FIRST

The very first "horror" film is considered to be *Le Manoir du diable* ("The Devil's Manor" or "The House of the Devil"), released in 1896. It was a French silent "trick" film directed by George Méliès. It is approximately 3 minutes long and depicts a bat, a cauldron, skeletons, ghosts, and more. The entire film can be viewed on its Wikipedia page at [wikipedia.org/wiki/The_House_of_the_Devil_\(1896_film\)](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/The_House_of_the_Devil_(1896_film)).

**SOCIETY SECTION**

"The mission of the State Historical Society of Missouri is to collect, preserve, publish, exhibit, and make available material related to all aspects and periods of Missouri history. SHSMO also seeks to generate interest in and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of the state and its people through education and outreach.

Research centers in Cape Girardeau, Columbia, Kansas City, Rolla, Saint Louis, and Springfield provide access to an ever-growing number of reference materials and historical collections. The Center for Missouri Studies in Columbia also houses the nation's best collection of Missouri regional and westward expansion art. The Center serves as the administrative headquarters for the Society and has flexible public spaces available for hosting a wide range of events.

The State Historical Society of Missouri collects stories from the past and the present to ensure Missouri's history is preserved and shared. Holdings currently boast:

- unique manuscript collections
- an extensive newspaper collection dating from 1808 with newspapers from all 114 Missouri counties and the city of St. Louis
- thousands of editorial cartoons that are national in scope
- rare and specialized books
- thousands of maps and photographic images
- oral histories
- an extensive art collection that includes major works by George Caleb Bingham and Thomas Hart Benton"—Website

See shsmo.org for more information.

History & Genealogy Services

Print collection

More than 25,000 books in the collection can be checked out. The entire collection is included in the library's [online catalog](#). Books with call numbers that do not begin with "R" are available to check out. Patrons can request books online. Reference materials may be used in person during library hours.

Database access

Many library [databases](#) can be used at home by St. Louis County Library cardholders living in the metropolitan area. Some databases are restricted to branch or H&G department access only. H&G also maintains the [SLCL Digital Archives](#).

Research guidance

H&G staff members can provide research assistance by phone and in person. Contact information can be found in the lower right corner of this page.

Lookup service

H&G can provide photocopies, prints, or digital scans of many library materials from indexed sources or when given a specific citation. Requests can be made through the [online lookup request form](#).

Book a Genealogist

Researchers encountering brick walls, or who would like assistance in developing a plan to achieve specific research goals, can schedule a consultation with an H&G staff member. Requests can be made using the online [Book a Genealogist form](#).

Memory Lab

H&G has personal recording and scanning & digitization studios for preserving family history. [Reservations](#) are required. Recorders and scanners may also be [checked out](#) for home use.

Classes & programs

H&G offers a variety of in-person and virtual [events](#) for new and experienced genealogists. All events are free and a library card is not required.

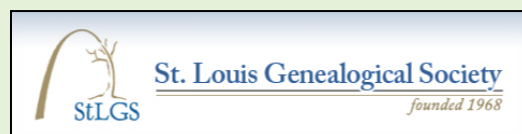
StLGS Event

Monthly Meeting: Hidden Treasures on the St. Louis Genealogical Society Website

Saturday, October 12, 10:00 am, Clark Family & Virtual
With more than 1,600 pages, about seven million searchable names, one-of-a-kind interactive maps, and many additional resources, the St. Louis Genealogical Society website is a must-visit for those researching St. Louis ancestors. Take a tour of the site with one of the webmasters to see the highlights.

See [stlgs.org](#) for more information and to register for virtual access.

StLGS events are free and open to the public.



PastPorts is published by the Emerson History & Genealogy Center at the St. Louis County Library.

[Subscribe](#) to PastPorts or [view](#) current and past issues.

Contact us:

Emerson History & Genealogy Center

St. Louis County Library

1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd.

St. Louis, MO 63131

314-994-3300

genealogy@slcl.org

slcl.org/genealogy

Mon-Thurs 9 am-8 pm, Fri-Sat 9 am-5 pm, Sun 1-5 pm

WHAT'S THE WORD

The word “quarantine” was first used in the 14th century in Venice. The root of the word comes from the Italian *quaranta giorni*, which means “40 days.” It referred to the period during which all ships were required to be isolated before passengers and crew could go ashore during the Black Death plague to prevent spread of the disease.



STL OKTOBERFEST

The first Oktoberfest was held in Munich in 1810, but despite the mass of German immigrants, St. Louis wouldn't get in on the action for another 150 years. The Munich festival began as a celebration in honor of the marriage of the future King Ludwig I of Bavaria and Princess Therese of Saxe-Hildburghausen. There was beer (of course!) and a parade, but the real highlight of that first celebration seems to have been the horse races. Attendees enjoyed themselves so much that another event was held the following year. The Napoleonic Wars were the first interruption in what became an annual tradition, but they would not be the last. Munich's Oktoberfest grew during the age of romantic nationalism, which also gave the world the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales and the operas of Richard Wagner. Consequently, as the years passed it became more of a celebration of the region's folk culture than a Bavarian Kentucky Derby.

Despite the physical distance, German-language newspapers in St. Louis began making note of Oktoberfest as early as 1859—still a century off from the city's own celebrations. Munich itself frequently suspended the festival in the 19th century, owing to Bavaria's involvement in the many Prussian-initiated wars prior to German unification in 1871. The contin-

Continued next column

ued growth of the festival was such that even English-language newspapers in St. Louis published occasional pieces about it in the '20s and '30s. Unfortunately, Oktoberfest's roots in romantic nationalism made it ripe for appropriation by the Nazis. WWII caused sentiment in the U.S. toward all things German to fall to



St. Louisans celebrating Oktoberfest. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Oct 27, 1963.

an all-time low. Still, by the early '60s attitudes had changed enough that there were advertisements in the Post-Dispatch for tourist flights to Munich on Lufthansa.

St. Louis finally got its own Oktoberfest in 1963. It was an auspicious year. In June, John F. Kennedy gave his “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech, which signaled a shift in popular attitudes toward West Germany as an essential ally against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. An organization founded in Chicago called the “American Aid Society” saw this as an opportunity. Their group was made up of ethnic Germans who had been forced to flee their homes in Hungary, Czechia, and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe as the Iron Curtain came down. They sponsored the festivities that took place at the South County Center that first year, and kept things going until 1971.

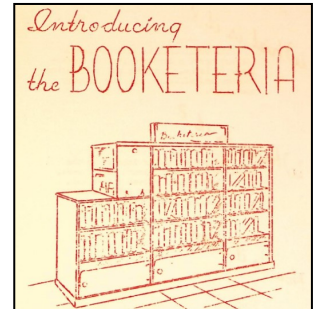
The Dutchtown area put on its first Oktoberfest in 1973, though it always included food, music, and dance from other South City ethnic groups, particularly the Polish community. That festival lasted until the mid-1990s. St. Charles held its first Oktoberfest in 1982, which is still going strong today. Soulard began hosting an Oktoberfest in 2004, and The Grove started one in 2021. Those celebrations are also still going. The one in Munich is still the largest, of course, but if you are looking to celebrate your German heritage or just German culture generally, you don't have to go very far in St. Louis nowadays!

SLCL REWIND



BOOKETERIAS

The St. Louis County Library's first director, Stewart Smith, brought the idea of Booketerias with him from his job in Lincoln, Nebraska. According to a 1946 information pamphlet produced by the Lincoln City Library, the Booketeria operated on a self-service basis. Patrons would select their own books, borrow them, return them, and compute and pay their own fines. (According to the library, patrons were more likely to overcharge than undercharge themselves for overdue materials!) Booketerias were installed in a variety of public spaces, such as grocery stores and high school cafeterias.



1946 Lincoln City Library informational pamphlet

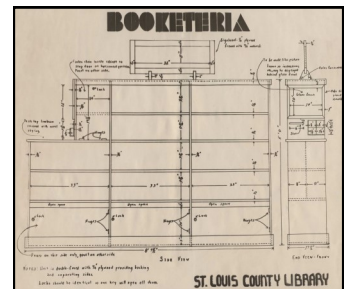
When Smith moved to St. Louis to become SLCL's director, he brought a variety of ideas and innovations with him, including the Booketeria. In 1947, within only a short time of operation, the library had opened Booketerias in Ritenour, Normandy, Jennings, West Walnut Manor, Hancock, and Eureka high schools, plus the first supermarket stand at St. Ann's Village.



March 1947 St. Louis Post-Dispatch article

The Booketerias held between 300 and 800 books, and were quite popular. Within less than a year of operation, library users had borrowed over 38,000 books from Booketerias alone. If a Booketeria did not have an item the patron was looking for, they could submit a request and the book would be delivered to the Booketeria within a few days. A mix of children's and adult materials were stocked in the stand,

which was serviced once per day by a library employee.



1946-47 design sketch of an SLCL Booketeria unit

The concept of the Booketeria is similar to the new "read while you wait" eMedia service SLCL offers at bus stops and grocery stores!

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

The Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota was completed on October 31, 1941. The project took 14 years to complete. The memorial contains 60-foot tall sculptures of the heads of Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.



WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA



Do you have military ancestors? Would you like to honor their final resting place with a wreath?

Check out Wreaths Across America! Supporters can purchase a wreath, volunteer to place wreaths at participating cemeteries, or donate to educational programs.

Find out more at www.wreathscrossamerica.org.



Monday, October 7, 6:30 p.m.

**From Québec to France:
Tracing the Journey**

Learn to use the Emerson History & Genealogy Center's vast collection of print resources to trace your Québec ancestors back in time through the earliest days of the colony, and ultimately to their hometowns in France.

Wednesday, October 16, 6:30 p.m.

Bygdebøker: Norwegian Rural Books

Since the early 20th century, Norwegians have produced manuscripts that contain rich details about rural individuals and families. Learn about Bygdebøker and the growing collection at the Emerson History & Genealogy Center.

Monday, October 21, 6:30 p.m.

**Hearth & Home: Sources for English
Genealogical Research**

The Emerson History & Genealogy Center collects print resources for English genealogy. Learn about English tax books, local histories, and other items in the collection to help you locate your English ancestors.

Monday, October 28, 6:30 p.m.

**Ortsfamilienbücher:
Researching German Ancestors**

Ortsfamilienbücher contain genealogical information about families within a specific town, village, or parish, sometimes going back to the beginning of written records. Learn about the Emerson History & Genealogy Center's large collection of these books and how to use them.

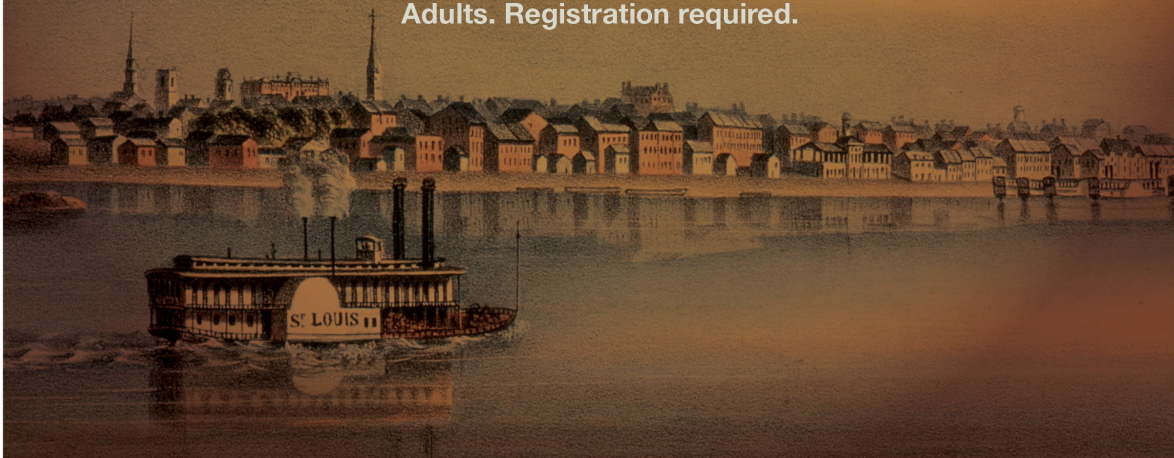
Want to learn more about cholera?

Cholera in St. Louis

Friday, October 18, 2:00 p.m.

The year 1849 saw a cholera epidemic sweep up the Mississippi River and take the lives of nearly five thousand St. Louisans, or one-tenth of the population of the city. This presentation will examine the factors that contributed to the epidemic and its impact on the immigrant population.

Adults. Registration required.



Clark Family Branch

1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd. | St. Louis, MO 63131 | 314-994-3300

Program sites are accessible. With at least two weeks' notice, accommodations will be made for persons with disabilities. Call 314-994-3300 or visit www.slcl.org.

