



# The Mistletoe Express

www.mistletoeheights.com

October 2008

## Remembering My Alley

*St Louis Alley*

### Jim Piepert

Marjorie Day's nice piece in the July newsletter on the importance of alleys in American life dredged up a raft of childhood memories **about** alleys in St. Louis.

My mother, Virginia Sieve, was born at 3302 Cherokee St. in south St. Louis, a part of the city where the streets are named for states and Indian tribes – Meramec and Michigan, Iowa and Osage, Chippewa and Vermont.

That enclave, hard by the Mississippi River, was inhabited by blue-collar Germans with names like Kleycamp and Feltmann, Strathmann and Lakebrink. They attended Mass at St. Anthony's of Padua, shopped at Eichelberger's grocery and grieved their dead at the Kriegshauser's funeral home.

Not without a hint of condescension, my mother's people were called "South St. Louis Dutch" and their neighborhood "Dutchtown."

Family gatherings at my grandmother's house at 3920 Virginia Ave. – where one of my cousins still lives – invariably included talk of baseball and – if the weather

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## Art and the Great Pumpkin

### Editor

Back in the day, all we ever did to our orange pumpkin was carve a toothless grin, two triangle eyes and pop an emergency candle in its gut, and Mom claimed we had a future in the world of art. Today, non commitment to the carving of the annual autumnal pumpkin is history. From the artistic painting of pumpkin faces to carefully carved spooky scenes, the pumpkin of today has gone art house. Some folks still make the classic Jack o Lantern while others push the pumpkin into the extreme. The editor opines that the old school funky steak knife cut pumpkin with a grin trumps a stencil hands down.



## Great Gourds A Fire!

### SteveMcReynolds

After a long hot summer, the mornings are once again crisp, and fall is threatening. Before you turn around, it's time for the annual Mistletoe Heights Pumpkin Carving Contest. The rules for this event are simple.

After dusk, on the night before Halloween (Thursday October 30<sup>th</sup>) an elite gang of gourd judges hit the street to pick the best pumpkin creations.

Only real carved pumpkins can be entered into the contest. The Grand Prize winner will get 100 shares of Lehman Brother's stock or a \$50. prize (to be decided later). The winner and all honorable mentions will get a fabulous write up in the newsletter.

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was nice – a game of “bottle caps” in the alley.

In a living room filled with the blue haze of cigarette smoke, my uncles waxed poetic about the St. Louis Cardinals of Stan Musial, Red Schoendienst and Joe Garagiola or lamented the latest misadventures of Bill Veeck’s hapless St. Louis Browns.

A saying of the day about St. Louis cited three of the city’s institutions, Brown Shoe Co., Anheuser-Busch and the Browns: “First in shoes, first in booze and last in the American League.”

My mother’s four brothers – three of them former Marines recently back from such Pacific hell holes as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan and Iwo Jima – were enthusiastic practitioners of bottle caps, a game peculiar to south St. Louis played with beer bottle caps and broomsticks.

The venue for bottle caps was the paved thoroughfare behind the back yard that was used for garbage pickup and for delivery of coal, ice and groceries.

My uncles were prodigious consumers of the products of the Anheuser-Busch brewery – on the northern edge of the neighborhood on Pestalozzi Street – and other local brews like Griesedieck Bros., Falstaff and Stag. So there was never a shortage of bottle caps for a game. Boxes of them were always on hand to be hauled out to the alley.

Like Wiffle Ball of a later generation, the game involved trying to hit a spinning projectile with a skinny stick. But a bottle cap was much harder to hit than a Wiffle ball.

One advantage of the game is that it didn’t require a lot of park space and could be played in a narrow alley.

I don’t recall the arcane rules, as I most often served as beer boy (“Jimmy, get me another beer, wouldya?”) But a quick troll on the Internet turned up a posting by Carl Benjamin, apparently of my vintage as he describes south St. Louis as a boy in the early 1950s.

He outlines the rules of bottle caps this way:

*“Similar to baseball, three outs made a half-inning. There were only two ways to make an out. One way was to catch a bottle cap after it had been hit in the air. The other way was a*

*swinging strike when the catcher held onto the bottle cap after a foul tip or even a swing and miss. No bases were used. Since the alley was so small, the cap had to be hit within the confines of the alley itself. Anything hit outside was ruled foul. Although if a player caught it in the air before it went foul, it was an out.*

*“Ghost runners would be used for all base hits except home runs. Ghost runners could only advance one base on a hit. It was the catcher’s responsibility to be fair and keep track of the base runners. We would use a common boundary such as a back yard gate, concrete trash pit or garage to mark the distance for a home run. Anything on the fly hit past that mark was a homer, unless it was caught.*

*“The great thing about bottle caps was that a pitcher could throw a curve or slider very easily. With some work, they could even throw a riser. This put a lot of pressure on the hitter to make contact. There were many strikeouts and foul tips. That is why a catcher wore gloves. Catching a hit cap sometimes was very easy and then other times they would be difficult because of their action. A pitcher who would come side arm could really break off a curve on a cap.”*

We’re not likely to organize a bottle caps league in the alleys of Mistletoe Heights. But Marjorie’s right! Alleys, particularly in larger American cities, were the warp and woof of the fabric of America’s social life. And ours are due for a comeback.



## CURB APPEAL AND YOUR CAR

YOU CAN INSTANTLY IMPROVE YOUR STREET'S CURB APPEAL BY SIMPLY PARKING YOUR CAR IN THE GARAGE. IF THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE, PARK YOUR CAR AND OR CARS IN THE DRIVEWAY, UNDER YOUR PORTECHERE OR AT LEAST BEHIND THE FRONT FAÇADE OF YOUR HOME. THIS MAKES THE EYE GO TO THE BEAUTY OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF OUR HOMES AND NOT A SERIES OF MODERN CARS. THIS IS A NO COST IMPROVEMENT THAT REALLY UPS THE BEAUTY OF OUR STREETS AND ALLIEVIATES CONGESTION ON THE NARROW BLOCK. IT ALSO REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF AUTO THEFT AND VANDALISM AS THE CARS MOST OFTEN SOUGHT AFTER ARE THE ONES FARTHEST FROM THE HOME.

## OCTOBER EVENTS AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

### HALLOWEEN PUMPKIN CARVING CONTEST

YOUR FRONT PORCH-MISTLETOE HEIGHTS  
DUSK - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30<sup>TH</sup> (NIGHT BEFORE HALLOWEEN)  
CARVE YOUR PUMPKIN, AND WAIT FOR THE JUDGES!

### BOO AT THE ZOO

FORT WORTH ZOO  
October 24-29 (817)-759-7360

Great Event for Little Trick or Treaters

### HALLOWEEN OCTOBER 31

DUSK AND BEYOND  
Mistletoe Heights gets plenty of action! Be sure to have treats because they will come. Don't be a deadbeat, be candy and treat ready. Leave your porch light on!

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING

NOVEMBER 3 FIRST MONDAY OF THE MONTH  
THE PRESERVATION COMMITTEE MEETS TO DISCUSS AND REVIEW  
UPCOMING HOME RENOVATIONS AND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORIC  
CHARACTER KATHY McREYNOLDS-KMTIS@SWB.NET

Plan your gourds grimace now...get the whole family involved! Remember judging occurs the night before Halloween and Styrofoam and plastic pumpkins will not be considered a viable entry.

## NEW NEIGHBORS!

I should point out that Trick or Treaters flock to Mistletoe Heights from all over town so be prepared to deliver the hospitality and treats.

And keep an eye out for The Mistletoe Halloween Street Band on their annual roam...

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*Do we have time to sew these up for Friday?*



## PHOTOS OF YOUR COSTUMES!

SEND IN PHOTOS OF YOUR HALLOWEEN COSTUMES FOR OUR NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER. WHETHER YOU ARE WHIMPING OUT WITH A POLITICAL MASK AND SUIT OR YOU HAVE REALLY INVESTED YOUR TIME AND CREATIVITY INTO YOUR COSTUME...WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU DRESSED UP!

SEND THE NEWSLETTER PHOTOS OF YOUR HALLOWEENED CHILDREN, COSTUMED PETS, PICTURES OF YOUR DECORATED HOME, AND THE EVER WONDERFUL GROUP PORTRAIT OF TRICK AND TREATERS.



## Questions and Answers-Alleys

### *What's the status of the alleys?*

Our alleys are a right of way for utilities providers above and below ground. Originally, alleys served as access for servants, carriage houses and the delivery of milk, ice and the collection of garbage. John Hobson, who runs Fort Worth's Alley Maintenance Program, says as long as utilities are in alleys, the city will keep the status of alleys as is.

### *Many people think that their back lot line is in the middle of the alley. Can they make an alley part of their yard?*

No, absolutely not. The alley is owned by the city and residents cannot move their fences to impede access.

### *Who's responsible for maintaining the alleys?*

Mr. Hobson told me that Fort Worth passed an ordinance saying that homeowners are responsible for maintaining half of the alley space to the mid point, but that the city doesn't issue violations if residents don't maintain the alley.

### *Doesn't the city clean the alleys?*

Fort Worth cleans on a quarterly basis, trimming

trees to avoid hazards to service lines, and whacking down tall weeds and grass. Easy access is important for utilities, especially with our potential for severe weather.

### *What about tall grass, weeds and debris?*

The city will pick up debris on a quarterly basis, but that doesn't include stuff that's dumped illegally. This means that tossing yard waste and unwanted items into an alley is a code violation. Homeowners should mow the grass.

### *May we garden the alleys?*

The city is excited about homeowners improving the alleys and making them neighborhood assets. The homeowner must make it obvious that a flower or vegetable bed is along the fence line by using a small barrier, such as a bed liner, small divider, a raised bed or clearly cut-in beds. It should extend no more than two feet into the alley from the fence line so that maintenance vehicles are able to pass through.

*Do you need help with a fence or debris, or would like to take part in an alley improvement program contact [perrellim@aol.com](mailto:perrellim@aol.com) and put "alley" as the subject.*



**Mule Drawn Ice Delivery Truck from the early 1900's. Mule Drawn Deliveries were made in our alleys, along with milk and food delivery and Garbage Collection. Our alleys are an important part of our American History. Please consider helping to bring back them back**

### **10 Steps to Improving our Alleys**

1. Take immediate responsibility for the care of your half of the alley by mowing, edging and performing weekly maintenance. This is covered by a city ordinance. However, the city doesn't issue citations or impose fines if you don't mow and edge the alley, but it is our charge as good community homeowners.
2. You should repair broken fencing in the alley. Failure to do so is a code violation.
3. Get on your gloves on and clear your alley of debris.
4. Put motion-detecting lights and/or solar-activated lights on the alley to help prevent crime. Please don't aim the lights into your back neighbor's yard and demand they have eternal daytime.
5. Consider that the alley was the main drag for the workers of Mistletoe Heights. For many folks, the alley was the way they were told to travel. It's a discredit to their memory to leave our alleys in such disrepair.
6. If replacing fencing, consider putting in a locking alley gate for visitors. Consider period-style fences. We will be publishing an article about period fences in a future issue of the newsletter.
7. The alleys make great walking and jogging areas.
8. Remember, your alley is a neighbor's view. Take an honest look and ask yourself, "Am I a good neighbor?"
9. Take a walk through our alleys. You'll get an eye-opener on what an untapped historic resource we have and a shock at how horribly we are maintaining them
10. Working on the alley is like cleaning a closet. Once it's done, you'll feel great, but maintenance is the key to success.

## Helpful Phone Numbers, Emails and Websites

	Phone (817)	Email	Website
City Code Violations	392-1234		<a href="http://www.fortworthgov.org">www.fortworthgov.org</a>
City of Forth Worth	392-2255		<a href="http://www.fortworthgov.org">www.fortworthgov.org</a>
Police-Non Emergency	335-4222		
Garage Sale Permits	392-7851		<a href="http://www.fortworthgov.org">www.fortworthgov.org</a>
Graffiti Abatement	212-2700		
Historic Preservation Officer	392-8037	<a href="mailto:larry.abrigg@fortworthgov.org">larry.abrigg@fortworthgov.org</a>	
City Councilman District 9	392-8809	<a href="mailto:district9@fortworthgov.org">district9@fortworthgov.org</a>	
Lily B. Clayton Elementary	922-6600		<a href="http://it.ftworth.isd.tenet.edu/116/">it.ftworth.isd.tenet.edu/116/</a>
Paschal High School	922-6600		
Southside Preservation Hall	926-2800	<a href="mailto:Hallyes@earthlink.net">Hallyes@earthlink.net</a>	<a href="http://www.southsidepreservation.com">www.southsidepreservation.com</a>
The T/Longhorn Trolley	215-8600		<a href="http://www.the-tcom">www.the-tcom</a>
Trinity Railway Express	215-8600		<a href="http://www.trinityrailwayexpress.org">www.trinityrailwayexpress.org</a>

A Special Thank You to Claudia Wilson for editing the newsletter. Making a newsletter is a lot of hard work and a real commitment of time and energy. Mistletoe Heights Association really appreciates all of the work Claudia has done on behalf of the neighborhood by being the editor for these many months.

Thank you for your service to the community.

