

Peeking into the Past: THE LOST HOMES OF I-44

By Cara Jensen

In 1950, the population of St. Louis peaked at 856,000. The city could not grow beyond its fixed borders, and much of the housing stock had become neglected. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 paved the way for suburban development and facilitated the population's westward expansion. The construction of Interstate 44 cut block-wide swaths through St. Louis city neighborhoods, permanently altering the landscape and changing the very identity of each community. Thankfully, this loss prompted the genesis of historical preservation legislation in St. Louis and emphasized the importance of community stewardship. Here are a few memories of those lost homes of I-44:

1821 California: Home of Joseph Kocien, a Bohemian frame carver and gilder. Frame carvers were skilled artisans, crafting wood to enhance the beauty of each painting. Gilders applied finish to decorative church and cathedral fittings, altarpieces, architectural ornaments, and panel paintings.

1803 S. Compton: Home of Frank P. Crunden, president of Udell, Crunden & Co., makers of wooden and willow ware. Frank was the brother of the St. Louis Public Library's first chief librarian and director, Frederick Crunden.

1743 Missouri: Home of German born William Bodeman, president and owner of Wm. Bodeman & Co.'s Tobacco. In 1873, St. Louis was the largest chewing and pipe tobacco processor in the United States. By 1890, St. Louis hosted the largest maker of plug-style chewing tobacco in the world - Liggett and Myers.

3300 Lafayette: Home of Martha Roe, widow of a prominent St. Louis steamboat captain who mentored Samuel E. Clemens. The vast estate included the family of her widowed daughter Emma Copelin, who dedicated Copelin Avenue when the land was subdivided in 1885, her California born nieces and nephews, eight house servants, a German-born teacher, two African-American coachman, and two gardeners.

1818 S. Compton: Home of Annie and Peter Oakes, owners of A. Oakes & Co., a candy manufacturer and confectionery shop which employed eight female salesladies in 1890.

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