

Peeking into the Past: ST LOUIS MIDWIVES

By Cara Jensen

Midwives have been the primary caretakers of birthing women and their newborn babies throughout history. The oldest known reference to midwives can be found in the Old Testament in the book of Genesis. The derivation of the word midwife is from the Anglo-Saxon "mit wif" and for many centuries has been used to describe the individual who was "with women" in childbirth.

Successive waves of St. Louis immigration brought the traditions of trained midwives to a new land. In 1821 there were 3 midwives listed in the St. Louis city directory, and by 1890 there were more than 275. The highest concentrations of midwives at that time were found in the populated immigrant neighborhoods. Many were trained by their mothers and continued to practice after they were married. As you may notice, most names are of German origin, where midwives traditionally held positions of authority and influence. Here are some women listed as midwives from our surrounding neighborhoods:

919 Ann: Louisa Boehler
2928 Missouri: Wilhelmina Duewel
2026 S. 12th: Catherine Lammers
1712 S. 8th: Mamie Wochosky
2828 Lemp: Frida Dinger
1808 S. 10th: Susanna Armknecht
1229 Lami: Anna Backer
2335 S. 7th: Lily Huber
1228 Sidney: Mary Wachter
819 Allen: Mary Timpe
2023 Shenandoah: Emma Gabrillac

Cara Jensen is the founder of Sherlock Homes, a historical research company and is also an independent public relations and marketing consultant. She is the past president of the Shaw Neighborhood Improvement Association, serves on the Grand South Grand House Tour committee, and is active in ward politics. Contact Cara Jensen at 773-2881 or carajensen@sherlock-homes.us for information about your historic property.