

PREFACE

By Jo Ann Vatcha



2008 brought a great opportunity to work with the Missouri History Museum to finish this book and record an oral history of the comeback of the Skinker-DeBaliviere Neighborhood. The realization that our neighborhood's

Centennial Year was at hand was true serendipity, and working with the Centennial Celebration Committee and our generous contributors, we were able to bring this project to reality at long last.

Many who proudly make this neighborhood their home are not really aware of its origins and history. In fact, there was previously a detailed historical account of our area, published in 1973. Called *The Neighborhood, A History of Skinker-DeBaliviere*, it was researched and written by Kathleen M. Harleman, Georgiana B. Stuart, and Susan K. Tepas, three former residents, who wrote: "We are not historians, and we offer the results of our research in the hope that residents and friends may find it interesting. Perhaps others will be stimulated to add additional information and research, anecdotes and facts." As they were writing that book, the neighborhood was experiencing crisis.

In 1999, with the "Millennium" approaching, I thought it important to document the comeback of our neighborhood from the brink of urban despair. It was in that memorable period of the 70's when the neighborhood made its important stand against blockbusting and white flight, and for diversity and integrity. In writing about the people, we wanted to honor Skinker-DeBaliviere's most important characteristics. Our beautiful buildings make the neighborhood historic; our dedication to diversity makes it stand out even among other urban success stories. And so we hope readers will enjoy and learn from our neighborhood's history in this book, compiled from the following resources:

- *The Neighborhood, A History of Skinker-DeBaliviere*, written by Kathleen M. Harleman, Georgiana B. Stuart, and Susan K. Tepas in 1973
- *Chronicles of the 70's*, written by Jo Ann Vatcha in 2000
- Other articles from THE TIMES OF SKINKER-DEBALIVIERE, published continuously by an all-volunteer neighborhood staff since 1970.
- The Skinker-DeBaliviere Centennial Oral History Project, organized and implemented by neighborhood resident and TIMES contributor Marjorie Weir, working with Jody Sowell, oral historian, whose interviews are recorded in our accompanying DVD
- Neighborhood residents' contributions from their memories and photographs, soon to be accessible through a new website

This book honors our predecessors and adds the more recent history of the neighborhood, recorded faithfully over the past 39 years in THE TIMES OF SKINKER-DEBALIVIERE.

Included in this book you will learn about our origins and landmarks, about prominent leaders and residents, institutions like St. Roch, Skinker-DeBaliviere Community Council, the Residential Service, the Skinker-DeBaliviere Community Housing Corporation, and our Community Gardens, as well as activities like the Dinner-Theatre and the Art Fair/House Tour, and more, together with many photos and memories gathered during this Centennial Year. Many thanks to all those who have shared their memories and thoughts to make what we hope is a full and loving depiction of our great neighborhood. Special thanks to my collaborator Marj Weir, to Angie Dietz, of the Missouri History Museum, and Jody Sowell, oral historian, and to Lois Schoemehl, Lana Stein, and Lu Green, and my husband, Neville, for making this dream a reality.