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CONTRIBUTORS' COLUMN FOR SUMMER 1984

THOMAS E. MURRAY is completing his first year as Assistant Professor in the English Department at The Ohio State University in Columbus. His article "The Language of Body Building" is scheduled to appear in the Fall 1984 issue of *American Speech*, and he is currently at work on a number of projects growing out of his dialectological and sociolinguistic research on the speech of St. Louis.

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MICHAEL I. MILLER returns this summer after a two-year Fulbright at the Polish University of Silesia. An active supporter of the American Dialect Society, he is Assistant Professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. His essay in this issue of *American Speech* was read in a briefer form at the Philadelphia conference on New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English, October 1981.

GARLAND CANNON is Professor of English and Linguistics at Texas A&M University. This paper was presented at the Modern Language Association meeting in 1981, where Frederic G. Cassidy and others made valuable suggestions, as did (he asks us to say) the Editorial Board of *American Speech*. He has completed the draft of a book that analyzes the new meanings and the new items in Merriam-Webster's 1981 Addenda Section and in the two Barnhart dictionaries, in relation to the history of the English lexicon.

Regular readers of this journal will have noticed that, beginning with the Spring 1984 issue, MARY GRAY PORTER and I. WILLIS RUSSELL have reversed positions in the by-line for "Among the New Words." Having reached the age of eighty, Professor Russell felt that it was time that his collaborator and colleague at the University of Alabama, Professor Porter, take over first-author duties. We are pleased that he will continue his work on the column and wish to salute both scholars for their ongoing contribution to new words scholarship.

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POPPY SHOW

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DURING THE SUMMER OF 1982, as I was conducting a preliminary interview for a sociolinguistic study of the speech of St. Louis, Missouri, one of my informants gave the following response to a query concerning childhood games:

Well, things were sure a lot different back then in the early '20s, that's for sure. We never had none of them fancy pinball games or TV video stuff. Didn't even have TV. [Laughs.] So we just amused ourselves, mainly. You know. In the winter, 'course, we'd—[laughs]—we'd take a stick and run it down the neighbors's fence—picket fence—click-click-click-click-click-click—or play charades, something like that. You know. Simple things. Not like today. Oh, and sometimes we'd play pin-a-pin-a-poppy-show. That was always real fun, too.

This particular informant was a sixty-seven-year-old white female, Hester B., and she was more than a little amused at my next question: "Pin-a-what?"

Further questioning revealed that *pin-a-pin-a-poppy-show* is actually a slightly clipped form of the first line of a once-popular children's rhyme:

A pin, a pin, a poppy show;
It's very nice inside, you know.
Give me a pin and I'll let you look in
To see my pretty poppy show.

The central subject of the rhyme, the poppy show, was a shoe box with a small, square hole cut in one end and another small hole cut in the center of the lid. The inside of the box was decorated to look like a room—complete with miniature cardboard furniture and doll-like figurines, and perhaps even windows (cut out of the sides of the box and covered with scraps of cloth that served as curtains)—after which a tiny candle was lit and set in the center of the box and the lid put back in place. Then the child who had constructed the show would walk slowly along the sidewalks of the local neighborhood, carrying the box and chanting in sing-song fashion the rhyme printed above. As other children became aware that one of their playmates was displaying a poppy show, they immediately ran to him or her and, for the price of a single straight pin, were allowed to view the show through the peephole cut in the end of the box. Although fortunes were not made and lost this way, a certain amount of status was apparently accorded the child who consistently collected a large number of pins, for that implied that the child's peers considered him or her something of an artisan.

In subsequent interviews with over 200 other St. Louis informants ranging in age from sixty to ninety-four, all of the information given above was corroborated in striking detail. Although the setting of the box's interior was not always a room (it might have depicted a pastoral scene, for example, or the interior of a church) and the props and characters were frequently made of wood, plastic, or some other material, the box was always a shoe box, never a cigar box or other small type of container; the peephole cut out of one end was always square, never circular or irregular; the price of a peep was always one straight pin, never two or more, and never any other object; the candle was always placed in the exact center of the box, never at the other end or off to one side; and finally, the words, prosody, and melody of the rhyme were always the same, never varying in even the smallest detail. But accounting for this extreme regularity of data is only one of the questions the poppy show phenomenon brings to mind. Why, for example, should it be called a *poppy show* at all? Where and when did the term and the show originate, and how did they make their way to the heart of the Midwestern United States? Is a knowledge of *poppy show* and the activity it describes limited only to certain segments of the American (or St. Louis) population, or is it more pervasive? In short, what exactly is the history of the poppy show phenomenon?

Surprisingly, the vast majority of the standard sources for answers to questions like these do not discuss (or even record) poppy show.¹ (It will almost certainly appear in the forthcoming *Dictionary of American Regional English*; my queries to DARE's staff to confirm that supposition, however, are still pending.) One source that does list *poppy show*, however, is Partridge (1937, p. 650), in which we find this entry:

poppy-show. A display, esp[ecially] if accidental, of underclothes; orig[inally] and properly, of red or brown flannel underclothes: low coll[oqial]: late C. 19-20. [From] dial[ectal] *poppy show*, a peep-show, a puppet show (see E.D.D.).

The *EDD* (Wright 1898-1905, vol. 4, p. 584), in turn, says that *poppy-show* 'peep-show, puppet-show', pronounced [papiʃou], was found in Scotland, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Hereford, and Oxford, and could be used in the following ways: "A pin to see a poppy show"; "You meant me for a poppy-show"; and "You'd mak[e] a noble poppy-show." As an explanation for the children's activity alluded to in the first of these usages, Wright offers this: "Children place flowers behind a small piece of glass, and fold all up in paper. They then cut a trapdoor in the paper, and make it into a sort of peepshow. Each person who looks at it has to pay a pin." Wright also directs the reader to *puppy-show* (vol. 4, p. 649),

where we find a definition identical to that for *poppy-show*, pronunciations varying from [pupɪʃou] to [pepiʃou], an extent of usage reaching from Scotland and the North Country through Yorkshire and Cheshire and into Nottingham and East Anglia, and citations similar or identical to those given above.

Partridge and Wright thus seem to solve the mystery of *poppy show*,² but a number of old questions remain unanswered and some new ones arise. The remarkable homogeneity of my data is still unexplained, as is the problem of how the poppy show phenomenon traveled from England to St. Louis—both of which are especially intriguing questions when we consider that although nearly ninety percent of my St. Louis informants were familiar with poppy shows, none of my informants from far-outlying areas or surrounding towns in Missouri or Illinois had ever heard of the phenomenon. Furthermore, while the original coining of *poppy show* seems to have resulted from a dialectal pronunciation change, the origins of the neosemanticism '(accidental) display of underclothes'³ are not at all obvious. (To assume the linking feature to be the various connotations of *peep show* would be incorrect, for the term in its voyeuristic sense of 'furtive, perhaps one-eyed viewing of nude or seminude women' does not occur in any of the several contemporary or historical dictionaries I checked. I will return to this point in greater detail later.) Were there any other linguistic influences that may have had a bearing on the history of the term? The answers to these questions and others like them fall very neatly into two distinct categories—the history of the poppy show phenomenon from its inception to the beginning of the twentieth century in England, and its subsequent arrival in the United States and, more specifically, its travel to and lifetime in St. Louis—and I would like to spend the remainder of this essay treating each in some detail.

POPPY SHOWS IN ENGLAND.⁴ I think it would be worthwhile to begin this section by presenting my informants' views concerning the origins of both *poppy show* and poppy shows, for although none of those informants is an expert on language, flowers, or miniature dolls, all had some very definite—and, again, remarkably homogeneous—opinions on these topics (opinions which, it is curious to note, can all be incorporated to some extent into the probable history of the poppy show phenomenon). First, several people offered attempts to link *poppy show* to the poppy flower, and especially those grown in the Flanders Field area of Alsace-Lorraine (a region that is apparently well-known for its expansive poppy fields). While most linguists (and even some nonlinguists: see, e.g.,

Newell 1903, p. 253) would probably label such attempts as merely naïve folk etymology—particularly considering that none of the informants could remember ever having used or seen live flowers in poppy shows, and that some, in fact, specifically denied such a possibility on the grounds that they would considerably shorten a show's life—it is interesting that, according to Wright's citation, flowers (species and nationality unspecified, though Gomme [1894, p. 42] says "pansies or other flowers were used") were one of the main ingredients in English poppy shows. Is this a mere coincidence, or could it be that these flowers served as a catalyst for the pronunciation change necessary for *peep* to become *poppy*?⁵

But I mention France here not primarily to suggest that French children might have carried their native poppies to England, whence they were suddenly incorporated into English poppy shows; such an assertion would be a cultural long shot at best and a linguistic near-impossibility (the French words for 'poppy' are *pavot* and *coquelicot*; thus, unless translated, it seems unlikely that they would have had any influence on either *peep* or *poppy*).⁶ Perhaps, however, given that a good deal of cultural and linguistic exchange has existed between the two countries throughout history, other relevant objects or words might have crossed the Channel from France to England. *Poupée* 'small doll', for example, is extremely suggestive, and McPharlin (1965, p. 798) says that "toy puppet theaters and small hand puppets were favorites [throughout Europe] in the 1800s." As the contents of English poppy shows began to change from flowers to human figurines, might not the small French dolls have been adopted, and with them an Anglicized version of the term *poupée*? Or at the very least, might not *poupée* have either assisted a pronunciation change already in progress or helped that change become more pervasive through geographical space or socioeconomic strata?

The second and by far most common category of suggestions I received from my informants places the origins of poppy shows in Germany. (Strangely, however, none of the many people who offered this theory could explain it in any detail; they merely "had a feeling" that such was the case.)⁷ The hypothesis is entirely plausible, for as Jordan (1965, p. 239) states, Germany "made most of the best dolls between 1870 and 1914," and was undoubtedly making them in a variety of shapes and sizes long before that. Furthermore, "box rooms," from which poppy shows seem to be descended, "are thought to have appeared first in the collection of Princess Augusta Dorothea in Schwarzburg-Arnstadt . . . between 1715 and 1750" (O'Brien 1974, p.

19). Surely some of these German dolls and box rooms were carried to England by immigrants, travelers, or merchants, and with them would have gone terms such as *Puppe* 'doll' (cf. Dutch *Popenspel* 'puppet play') and *Puppenaushau* 'doll display'. (Such travel in England is confirmed by O'Brien [p. 19], who says that after the first appearance of box rooms, "many artists—Dutch, French, and English—executed [them] according to their own ideas, and the small pieces soon grew popular as table ornamentations and wall decorations.") And again, *Puppe* could easily have had a phonetic influence on *peep* or could have helped in the propagation and spread of *poppy*, just as *Puppenaushau* could have done the same for *poppy show*.

Finally, four informants suggested that *poppy* was derived from English *poppet* 'puppet'—a hypothesis not only linguistically possible, but extremely attractive as well.⁸ Consider, for example, that the *OED* lists *poppet* as first occurring in print in 1413 (its oral use doubtless extended well back into the fourteenth century), approximately 350 years before the appearance of *poppy show* (recall that Wright cites it from 1798), which is certainly enough time to allow the pronunciation change and subsequent orthographic change from *-et* to *-y*. And although Wright does not list it as such, *poppet show* was apparently an earlier (or perhaps co-occurring) variant of *poppy show*: Gomme (1894, p. 41) says, "I remember well being shown how to make a peep or poppet show." (In all fairness to Wright, he does list the two terms as being used in some of the same counties; he merely does not provide the conclusive link that Gomme does.) There is a problem with this theory, however, which lies in the semantic referentiality of *poppet*. As I will discuss the problem in greater detail later, suffice it here to say that any influence on *peep* by *poppet* probably occurred only after the contents of poppy shows began including human figurines as well as flowers.

All of the foregoing suggestions concerning possible or probable influences on the poppy show phenomenon have assumed a relatively straightforward dialectal picture of pre-twentieth-century England (that is, they have assumed *poppy show* to be the only—or, if we include Wright's *puppy show*, at least the major—variant of the former *peep show*). But, of course, nothing could be farther from the truth: England has always been a potpourri of dialectal variation, and it seems reasonable to assume, especially in light of Gomme's use of *peep show* and *puppet show*, that *poppy show* is no exception. Indeed, our expectations can be filled more than adequately with even a cursory examination of Gomme's and Wright's works, in one or the other of which we find *peep*, *puppet*, *puppy*, *poppet*, and *poppy show*; *pippy show*; *penny-* and *pinny-show*; *pin-*, *pin-a*,

pin-a-sight, and *pin-to-look-in-show*; and *poppin* and *poppinette show*.⁹ That all of these variants seem to have coexisted in nineteenth-century England raises a sensible question: why have I limited my discussion thus far to just *poppy show*?

There are at least two answers. First and most obviously, my primary concern in this essay is with the variant or variants existing in the United States and, especially, in St. Louis. And as I stated earlier, the only one of the several terms listed above that I could find in St. Louis is *poppy show*. (I am less certain that *poppy show* is the only variant to be found in the entire United States, but I have limited data that points to such a conclusion: *poppy show* exists in Chicago, New Orleans, New York City, and Bloomington, Indiana; yet none of my contacts in these other cities had ever heard of any of the other variants; and O'Brien [1974, pp. 19–20], though not a linguist, mentions only *poppy show* in her discussion of the game she says was formerly "popular in this country.")¹⁰ Second, there is some evidence to suggest that *poppy show*, in spite of originally having been a (perhaps nonstandard) variant of *peep show*, later came to be the accepted standard term used to describe the children's game in question. Consider, for example, that all of the other variants except *peep* and *puppy* were either confined to extremely limited geographical locations (Wright lists *pinny-show* as restricted to Yorkshire, and *pin-show*, *pin-a-show*, and *pin-to-look-in-show* were each limited to various diverse parts of the same county) or had inadequate semantic referentialities to cope with all versions of the game (*poppin show*, *poppinette show*, and *poppet show*, to name only three, seem not to have contained the semantic feature [+peep] until after they had been adopted as names for shows containing human figurines, and so could not have been applied to those early shows containing only flowers). Furthermore, of the fourteen variants listed above, it is interesting that *poppy* and *puppy* seem to be phonetically most similar to all of the possible linguistic influences postulated earlier; thus if any of the other variants had come into contact with, for example, *poupée* or *Puppe*, any phonetic movement would have been in the direction of *poppy* and *puppy*. And the pronunciations that Wright gives for *puppy*, especially the one involving the low back vowel [ɐ], are not far removed from that listed for *poppy*. Considering that the two terms were current in many of the same counties, it seems likely that they would have been perceived as one and the same, with *poppy* eventually becoming the standard spelling by virtue of its being heard by non-*puppy* [pɛpi] speakers. Finally, *poppy show* was apparently the only term used in London English (O'Brien 1974, p. 19), the influence of which on the standard language has been well documented, and is also

the only term that seems to have adopted the neosemanticism '(accidental) display of underclothes'.

With my focus on *poppy show* justified thus, I would now like to return to that term and consider some additional possible linguistic influences on it, this time with the goal of establishing a plausible link between the older sense 'children's game' and the neosemanticism '(accidental) display of underclothes'. As I mentioned earlier, such a linking feature cannot be found in the various modern connotations of peep show that associate the term in some way with the voyeuristic viewing of buxomy, unclad women, for those connotations appear to be very recent.¹¹ Fortunately, there are a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English words that could easily have contributed the semantic features necessary to arrive at the new meaning. Consider, for example, the now-obsolete *popplet* 'female favorite, light woman, wench', which the OED dates to 1557 and derives from Old French *poupelet* 'darling': surely a woman thus labeled would be more likely to reveal her underclothes ("accidentally" or not) than would a nonwench, and many a Renaissance and post-Renaissance Englishman undoubtedly had his own private popplet show. Furthermore, the OED says that *popplet* was once defined by the *Ladies Dictionary* (1694) as "a puppet or young wench"; thus a "popplet show" would also have been known as a "puppet show," and *poppet show*, of course, was one of the variants of *poppy show*.

Interestingly, the OED tells us that several of the variants of *poppy* mentioned earlier also had additional meanings that referred to women in some negative sense. The definition just cited from the *Ladies Dictionary*, for example, was by no means a nonce use of *puppet*; the word was used frequently—and usually contemptuously—in the sense 'low or debauched woman'. Similarly, *poppet*, though often used as a term of endearment, could also mean 'lass or wench'. And *poppin*, too, though referring to any small, pretty woman, apparently developed a pejorative sense, for *puppet* is listed as its synonym. (It is no linguistic accident that so many words beginning with *pop-* or *pup-* refer to women; the Indo-European root *pap-* 'teat' [cf. Middle English *pappe* 'nipple'] is undoubtedly responsible, perhaps in combination with unattested **pup(p)-* 'young person' [cf. Latin *pupa* 'girl, doll', and English *pupil*]. That such a high number have pejorative senses, however, is more of a mystery, and may provide an interesting commentary on what is often called the "traditional" male view of the role of women as playthings. As a final example, consider *poplolly* 'mistress, wench'.)

But possible semantic influence on *poppy* would not have to have been limited to words referring to women; indeed, at least two focus on the

'underclothes' aspect of the new meaning '(accidental) display of underclothes'—*poplin* 'a mixed woven fabric' (from 1710) and *poplinette* 'a woolen or linen fabric in imitation of poplin' (from 1861). I have been assured by a number of fabric retailers that such materials, especially poplinette, could have been used in the making of any number of undergarments. And as to Partridge's assertion that poppy shows "originally and properly" involved the display of "red or brown flannel underclothes," poplinette and flannel apparently have a good deal in common and are sometimes combined into a fabric known as flannel poplinette; and recall that the poppy itself is bright reddish orange in color.

To conclude this section I feel it necessary to state the almost-obvious. The poppy show phenomenon in England, however clearcut, straightforward, and simple I may have made it seem, was anything but. Not only did *poppy show* have well over a dozen coexisting variants, any one of which might have been influenced phonetically or semantically by the others or in the ways I have described, but at some point it acquired a new meaning as well—and all of this taken together created what can only be described as an etymologist's nightmare. Nor can I visibly lessen the intensity of that nightmare with any conclusive, substantive linguistic evidence. Most of the variants, for example, occur only in an occasional word glossary (e.g., Gomme 1894, p. 41) or book on children's singing games, and are not to be found in any contemporary or historical dictionary. Moreover, only Partridge discusses the neosemanticism '(accidental) display of underclothes', and he does so without listing sources or giving illustrative examples. Perhaps an exhaustive search of pre-twentieth-century personal documents such as letters and diaries would prove useful in helping to clear up much of the uncertainty about what influenced what and when, or when and how the new meaning was added to the word. Lacking access to such documents, however, I have presented what seem to be the most probable forces for the pronunciation alterations necessary for *peep* to become *poppy* and for the semantic change necessary for '(accidental) display of underclothes' to be added to 'child's peep show'. As will become clear shortly, the poppy show phenomenon in the United States—or at least in St. Louis—can be documented a bit more reliably, and it is to that topic that I would now like to turn.

POPPY SHOWS IN AMERICA. It is only natural that the poppy show phenomenon so popular in nineteenth-century England should have been brought to the United States: not only did ample opportunity exist

in the millions of immigrants who came to the New World after about 1840 to serve as factory workers in the American Industrial Revolution, but as Richter (1970, p. 21) says, those immigrants "brought their puppet heritages with them." Once in America, puppet and doll shows of all kinds became extremely popular, and especially so in the early 1900s among people who were poor or who lived far away from the theater: miniature shows were set up "at fairs and circuses, in town halls and schoolhouses, and in parks and streets" (McPharlin 1965, p. 798).¹² And one of these miniature street shows, according to O'Brien (1974, p. 19), was the poppy show.

As I discussed earlier, there were several variants of *poppy show* in England, and although limited evidence points to only one in particular as being introduced to the United States, there may have been others as well. In any case, it is much more certain that several versions of the poppy show game itself—including the accompanying rhyme—landed on American soil, for O'Brien (1974) and Yoffie (1947) each provide slightly different accounts from the one I gave at the beginning of this essay, and Gomme (1894) describes a number of variations that were popular in England. Several kinds of small containers were used to conceal the show, for example, and the contents varied from flowers to miniature figurines and furniture to pictures of home or pastoral settings. And as for the rhyme, at least the following have been recorded:

Pinny, pinny, poppy-show,
Give me a pin and I'll let you know. [Newell 1903, p. 252]

A pin, a pin, a poppy show,
Give me a pin and I'll let you know. [Yoffie 1947, p. 37]

A pin to see the poppet show,
All manner of colours oh!
See the ladies all below. [Gomme 1894, p. 41]

A pin to look in,
A very fine thing. [Gomme 1894, p. 20, quoting "*Leed's Glossary*"]

A pin to see a poppy* show,
A pin to see a die,
A pin to see an old man
Sitting in the sky. [Gomme 1894, p. 42]

A pinnet a piece to look at a show,
All the fine ladies sat in a row.
Blackbirds with blue feet
Walking up a new street;

One behind and one before,
And one beknoocking at t' barber's door. [Gomme 1894, p. 42, quoting "Addy's
Sheffield Glossary"]

Come and see my poppy show!
It's really very nice, you know!
A pin, a pin, and I'll let you look in!
Just come and see my poppy show! [O'Brien 1974, p. 20]

One can imagine that even more rhymes and versions of the show must have sprung up as the poppy show phenomenon spread in the United States, especially since tradition seems to be largely responsible for that spread. And this makes the extreme homogeneity of my data all the more mysterious: with such a large number of informants and with virtually every section of St. Louis represented in my survey, why did I find no variation in either the show or the rhyme? (Yoffie [1947, p. 37] recalls the alternative rhyme given above from her own childhood in St. Louis, but this irregularity will be discussed later.)

This question becomes all the more perplexing when we consider the settlement history of St. Louis. Despite any popular notions concerning American culture to the contrary, St. Louis is one city that is not a great melting pot of ethnic cultures; that is, although a good many ethnicities can be found within the city's limits, certain sections of the city are irrefutably Italian, German, Irish, and so on, and this observation was even more true a century ago.¹³ Furthermore, the late 1800s and early 1900s were not witness to any extensive ethnic intermingling; indeed, it was even rare for children who lived on the fringes of one ethnic section to play with children who lived on the fringes of the next.¹⁴ If the poppy show phenomenon had made its way to St. Louis via a particular ethnic group, then the chances are good that it would have remained with that group, confined to a limited section of the city. But such, obviously, is not the case. My informants come from a number of diverse backgrounds, yet almost all were familiar with poppy shows. The two most readily available solutions to this dilemma—that the various ethnic groups mingled freely before settlement or that each group adopted poppy shows from the English at some earlier time—are extremely unconvincing.

Common sense suggests only two possible alternatives for how the poppy show phenomenon might have arrived in St. Louis: either it trickled in from a variety of different sources—perhaps, for example, with settlers moving west from the East Coast—or it arrived in a single fell swoop from only one source. Although the first method of cultural and lexical spread is certainly more plausible, in this case all the available

evidence points to the second. In addition to the extreme homogeneity of my data and the settlement history of St. Louis, we must also recall that only those of my informants living in St. Louis were familiar with the poppy show phenomenon. If it had been part of the culture that various settlers brought with them as they trekked westward from the East Coast, would it not also occur in outlying areas and Illinois towns only a few miles away?¹⁵ Resigning ourselves to the strong probability that the poppy show phenomenon arrived in St. Louis all at once, then, we are faced with the problem of explaining that arrival.

Perhaps the best place to begin is to return once again to the testimony of my informants. Regrettably, although the sources of their first knowledge of poppy shows are remarkably homogenous, they are equally as frustrating: all but fourteen (whose responses will be discussed later) reported being introduced to the game either by an older sibling (who is now inevitably deceased) or by "some other kid on the block." But the time period of first introduction is considerably more promising, for although the responses vary from "just after the turn of the century" (for the oldest informants) to "the late '20s, maybe 1930" (for the youngest informants), they are still very definitive. To understand why, we must consider that poppy shows were the diversion of only a limited age group of children, ranging from five or six (before which they had neither the necessary expertise nor, apparently, the permission of their parents to play with a lit candle) to about twelve or thirteen (after which the onset of puberty undoubtedly turned their minds in new directions and made poppy shows unnecessary if not burdensome vestiges of childhood). But even the oldest of my informants, who are ninety-six and ninety-seven years old, claim not to have had any knowledge of poppy shows until some time after 1900, when they were well into their teens; thus we can be relatively certain that the poppy show phenomenon was introduced to St. Louis after that date. (Yoffie [1947, p. 37] recalls the game from as early as 1895-1900, but, again, I will discuss this irregularity later). Similarly, those of my informants born after 1925 and with no older siblings had never heard of poppy shows until I questioned them on the subject; and those born between 1920 and 1925 speak of poppy shows as having been "a dying fad" or "on the way out" even as they used to play with them. 1930, then, seems to be the general date after which the poppy show was no longer popular, and we are thus left with a lifespan for the St. Louis poppy show of some twenty-five to thirty years.

From what we have said thus far, poppy shows seem to have arrived in St. Louis both all at once and at some time between 1900 and 1905

(Yoffie's reports to the contrary). These conclusions present quite an enigma, but, fortunately, the perfect solution would appear to lie in the Louisiana Purchase Centennial Exposition—a gala celebration lasting from April 30, 1904 to December 1, 1904 and involving no fewer than fifty-three nations and forty-two states. It is known more commonly as the 1904 World's Fair. Not only would the Fair account for my oldest informants' being introduced to the poppy show phenomenon "just after the turn of the century," but it would provide the chance for any number of ethnic groups to receive exposure to it without intermingling. Furthermore, although thousands of non-St. Louisans attended the Fair and would have had ample opportunity to view the poppy shows and then take that little bit of West European culture home with them, two pieces of evidence suggest that residents of nearby small towns and outlying areas may not have been among those thousands. First, these people were typically poor—lower to lower-middle class—and would not have been able to afford an extended stay in downtown St. Louis (especially considering both that the United States was in a mild economic depression at the time and that prices for all goods and services in the city had been inflated because of the Fair's arrival). Second, because transportation was still relatively primitive, often limited to horses and buggies, many of those people would not have been able to make the trip in any case; although St. Louis was and is a well-known railway center of the United States, even if the trains had traveled among all the smallest towns rather than just the larger cities, using them would have required precious time and money that many people simply did not have.¹⁶

Unfortunately, neither England nor any of the states attending the World's Fair is recorded as having had anything even remotely resembling poppy shows in their exhibits (Bennitt and Stockbridge 1905). Although this is a disappointing fact, it is not a particularly surprising one: exhibits were, after all, intended to represent both the best aspects of each country's or state's culture as well as their newest technological innovations. Poppy shows would not do. On the other hand, there was a section of the Fair given over completely to the strange, the outrageous, and perhaps even the unsettling. It was called "the Pike," and was advertised as being "a living color page of the world" in which "[a] great majority [of the entertainments] are entirely new" (Macmechen [n.d.], p.1).¹⁷ Furthermore, because "by day the Pike was the mecca of children and casual visitors, souvenir hunters, and those less interested in the serious educational exhibits offered by the fair" ("St. Louis Celebrates," p. 63), it seems to have been a likely candidate for a display of poppy

shows. Again, however, such seems not to have been the case: not only do none of the sources on the Pike mention poppy shows, but a comprehensive search of all of the *Bulletins* of the Fair (Selph 1899–1904), which list and discuss virtually all of the Fair's happenings, month by month and in extraordinary detail, has proven similarly fruitless. In short, there is no official record of the poppy show phenomenon having been present at the 1904 World's Fair.

I would now like to return to the fourteen informants who reported having been introduced to the poppy show phenomenon in ways other than through older siblings or playmates. Following is the extended response of Joe P.:

Well, 'course I's just a young fellow back then. I remember I just turned eleven when the Fair begu—started that May. But I know I went down there every day with my grandpa. We'd go down early, maybe about nine, and stay almost 'til supper. Every day. 'Course I knew he was just taking me along as an excuse. See, him and grammy—grandma—never got along good, and bringing me to the Fair—well, it got him out of the house. Anyways, we'd take the car—the trolley car, I mean—and we'd get down there early, like I said. Then he'd want to get rid of me so's he could go off and drink beer with his friends. I remember him cussing a lot 'cause it was so expensive, too—ten cents a bottle, I think. Anyways, he'd stick me on this train, see, kind of like the ones at the zoo. You know what I mean. [The St. Louis zoo has several miniature trains that carry tourists and other visitors to various points of interest within the zoo's perimeter.] And that damn train'd carry me all around the Fair. And if I get back to the beginning and—I'd start looking for grandpa, and he'd still be drinking. Well, I got scared, you know, what with all them people and me just a little kid. Most of 'em were weirdos anyway. Once I started crying and they had to page grandpa over the spe—loudspeaker. Jee-sus! You talk about mad! Interrupted his drinking and em—embarrassed him in front of his friends besides [laughs.] But that was just once—just the first time. He hit me so hard I knew I'd never do that again. So next day, I got off the train and and looked around a little bit. Got off at the Pike. That place had everything. Just like a carnival. . . . [Joe gives an elaborate description of some of the carnival-like booths.] Anyways, that's where I seen this little girl with the poppy show. I remember she had bright red hair. Real red. Almost orange. New, there musta been a million people there, and here's this little red-haired girl trying to collect pins. Kids were really crazy back then, huh? [Laughs] I don't think she was even in a booth. I mean, she was just there, you know. Other kids were carrying around dolls or animals, and—you know, stuff. I had a jackknife, I know. But this girl had this shoebox! I tell you, it was crazy. But you shoulda saw the pins she had! Jee-sus! I mean, who carries around a goddamn pin?! But they had 'em, I guess, 'cause she had more stuck in the top of that box than I ever seen in one place before. And she just kept singing that same song [sings rhyme printed at the beginning of the essay] over and over. Well, like I said, I never had no pin, but the next day I did. And sure enough, there she

was again. I tell you, if I had a nickel for every pin that girl had, why, hell, I'd be rich. Anyhow, that's—I think that's the first poppy show I ever seen. And then I started making 'em, too. You know. I mean, it was something to do with the other kids after supper.

This account is really quite amazing; indeed, it borders on the unbelievable, especially since the informant had said initially that he did not know where he had first encountered poppy shows, at which time I prompted him by mentioning the world's Fair and, in particular, the Pike as possible sources. Although he gave every outward indication of telling the truth, it does not seem absurd to suspect that Joe P. fabricated the entire account of the little red-haired girl merely to appease the incessant questioning of a frantic researcher. And my suspicions did run quite high until, one by one, I collected responses from thirteen other informants that corroborate his story. (None of the thirteen knew the others or Joe P., thus eliminating any possibility of collusion.) It is true that I had to prompt all but one of these people in the same way that I prompted Joe P.—that is, I mentioned the Fair and the Pike—but I offered no additional information. Incredibly, all thirteen recall seeing a little red- or orange-haired girl (some volunteered the color of the girl's hair; some mentioned it only after I asked specifically whether they could recall it) who carried a shoe box, recited a rhyme, and collected pins. Consider the following dialogue between another informant, Bud W., and myself:

TM: So you're sure, then? I mean you can't remember where you saw your first poppy show?

BW: Naw, you kidding? Hell, I'm an old man. [Laughs.] I can't hardly 'member what I had for breakfast, much less something happened eighty years ago.

TM: Yeah, well, let me ask you about something else, then. You were around here when the World's Fair was in St. Louis, weren't you? Back in 1904?

BW: Oh, sure. It was a big deal. Yeah, I can remember that.

TM: Did you go?

BW: Oh, yeah. To the Fair? Hell, all us kids went. There was streetcars back then—in them days, and you could just hop on and it'd take you down to Forest Park [where the Fair was held], no problem. Yeah, we all went. In fact, me and my friends, we kinda opened up the Fair—place. It was in May, I think.

TM: And do you remember something called the Pike?

BW: Oh, God! How'd you know about that?

TM: I think I read something about it somewhere. Did you go?

BW: To the Pike? Oh, hell yes. You didn't go to the Fair if you didn't go there—to the Pike. In fact, that's where all us kids went—about all we did, walk up and down the pike. [Laughs.] Our parents give us a nickel for carfare so we could go down and learn a lotta stuff about other countries and stuff—you