

# Q&A

## Beverly Schuetz

By Joan Lerch

**F**amiliar and yet mysterious, he's as integral to St. Louis history as the 1904 World's Fair. But have you ever tried to explain to someone just exactly who the Veiled Prophet is? In her fascinating and carefully researched presentation, *Beneath the Veil: The Story of the Veiled Prophet*, speaker and historian Bev Schuetz brings VP history to life, with details more colorful than a rack of debutante gowns. One of the popular speaker's most-requested lectures, it will be presented at the Hawken House fall luncheon on Sept. 22 in Webster Groves. It's not easy to keep up, or catch up, with the energetic and in-demand Schuetz, but when we did, it was easy to understand why her business, History Talks, is such a success.

**LN: What inspired you to launch a speaking career?**

**SCHUETZ:** I was retired and often attended lectures where they would ask *What subject would you like to hear about?* I always mentioned the Veiled Prophet, but no one ever covered it. I started thinking I could do it myself, and then I became very enthusiastic after doing a ton of research and learning the fascinating and sometimes salacious history.

**LN: Did you have a stage background?**

**SCHUETZ (laughing):** I have never met a spotlight I didn't like, even as a little girl. I majored in drama and English at a girls' college, and then did community theater and summer stock wherever I happened to live.

**LN: How do you make history real for your audience?**

**SCHUETZ:** I like to think that no one else can give my lecture. For one thing, I

write it. Anybody can give you the history, but these stories are mine, they're personal—as the topic relates to me, or my family or experiences. And being from a lively Irish family, there are lots of anecdotes.

**LN: Does being Irish give you an advantage?**

**SCHUETZ:** My dad was a real Irish storyteller! He could describe an ordinary day in a way that would make my mother laugh until tears rolled down her cheeks. That's a wonderful gift—to make it alive and real.

**LN: Coffins, underwear, great lawyers and theatrical giants: Where do you come up with your topics?**

**SCHUETZ:** I wish I had a simple answer for you! That's just one of the wonderful things about this—I have so much freedom to cover any subject. When I hear about something intriguing, I can incorporate it into a lecture. For example, the history of undergarments begins with the loincloth, but goes right up to the present. Did you know the Japanese have invented a solar bra that harnesses the movement of breasts to create enough energy to power an iPod?

**LN: And what about your newest lecture, *The World's Oldest Profession*?**

**SCHUETZ:** Years ago, in summer stock, I won the role of Sadie Thompson, the prostitute in Somerset Maugham's *Rain*. I called my mom and my grandmother and

they were so excited! Later my mom overheard my 8-year-old sister in the backyard bragging, *Ya know what my big sister is gonna be this summer?* She's a PROSTITUTE! So of course, Mother had to run outside and do damage control. So you see, I do have some qualifications for speaking on that topic.

**LN: In addition to your speaking, you do all of your own research and writing. What do you enjoy the most?**

**SCHUETZ:** I dearly love to write, but I love the research, the communication, the performing. I feel very blessed because I get to do it all. How many people get to do that?

**LN: Sounds like you're having a great time!**

**SCHUETZ:** At this stage of my life, it's almost indecent to be having this much fun! I even have groupies—they come to every single lecture. I just turned 75 and I have groupies! ♣

