



ParkNotes

A semi annual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 15

Winter 2014

President's Message

By Wardwell Buckner

2014 has been a very good year for Lafayette Park. The Kern Lakeside Pavilion is finally available for weddings, receptions and other events. The remarkable transformation of the "Boathouse" into the Kern Pavilion was made possible because the Near Southside Improvement Corporation, (the neighborhood T.I.F.) agreed to fund the entire project. Steve Coffey, AIA, was the architect. BSI Constructors was the general contractor.

Sidewalks around the park have been repaired and improvements inside the park, including resurfacing the pathways, are being made possible by the sale of Park Bonds by the City. Restoration of the park fence will be our next and most challenging project. We ask for your help. Your memberships, gifts, advice and support continue to be tremendous help as we work to implement the Master Plan for the park. Enjoy reading more about all these projects and more in this issue of *ParkNotes*.



Restored doorway of the Kern Pavilion

MAXIMILIAN GOTTLOB KERN: *The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful*

Max Kern was a 19th century Landscape Architect educated at Tubingen University in Germany. He immigrated to the United States in 1848, settling in Cincinnati where he developed a landscaping business, learned English, and married Elizabeth Pinger. Kern taught botany at Farmer's College and published *Practical Landscape Gardening*, one of the first American books on landscape gardening.



the 30-acre square was transformed from a relatively flat area of the old St. Louis Commons into one of the most beautifully landscaped parks in the United States.

Kern moved to Alton, Illinois in 1857 and opened a nursery. He was asked to help with the floral hall displays for the early St. Louis Agricultural and Mechanical Fairs. Toward the end of the Civil War, Kern chaired the Floral Department of the Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair, the forerunner of the American Red Cross.



Jolyon Gissell stands next to a plaque honoring his great-great-grandfather. Earlier, a brief history of Mr. Kern was presented by Carolyn Willmore.

In the early 1880s, Kern was a professor of horticulture at the University of Missouri and published the book *Rural Tastes in Western Towns and Country Districts*. Later that decade, Kern created a master plan for the grounds of Kansas State Agriculture College in Manhattan, Kansas; was appointed to the new United States Department of Forestry; and worked on the agriculture exhibit at the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris.

In 1864, Kern became superintendent of Lafayette Park. Under his leadership, they drew up plans for their 11 park system

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MAINTENANCE OF THE PUBLIC MONUMENTS

The decades following the Civil War became the grand era of urban park development. Crowded cities enhanced their parks with fountains, ornamental gardens, bandstands, monuments and other features.

There are three monuments in the park today: the Senator Thomas Hart Benton Monument, the Washington statue and the Revolutionary War Guns Monument.

Time and the elements have affected each of them. They cannot take care of themselves so the Conservancy has established a Statue Maintenance Fund to provide annual inspections and maintenance for the statues and is reconstructing the Revolutionary War Guns monument.

The Benton Monument is important for at least two reasons. It is the first public sculpture erected west of the Mississippi River. The colossal bronze statue of Benton was made by one of the very first professional female American sculptors, Harriet Hosmer.

Shortly after Missouri's first U. S. Senator died in 1858 the Missouri General Assembly appropriated \$2,000 for a monument. The original intention may have been to erect a monument at his grave site in Bellefontaine Cemetery but the commissioners decided eventually that a public monument was preferable.

Harriet Hosmer was commissioned to sculpt a greater-than-life-size bronze of Benton. It was cast at the Royal Foundry in Munich and erected in the park. The final cost of the project, including the bronze and its pedestal, was \$32,000, most of which amount was raised by private contributions. Its dedication in 1868 was a grand ceremonial event attracting crowds estimated at tens of thousands.

The Conservancy selected Russell-Marti Conservation Services to repair

Benton Monument undergoing conservation, October 2014



surface flaws, remove decades of grime and corrosion and restore the original gold patina at a cost of \$56,000. That work was completed in 2011. This fall, it received a follow-up treatment by Russell-Marti at a cost of \$4,600.

Problems associated with the Quincy granite pedestal, the limestone platform and steps must be addressed in the future.

The Washington Statue is a bronze copy of Jean Antoine Houdon's life-size marble statue of Washington in the Virginia State Capitol. A mold was made by William A. Hubard and six casts were made before the mold was destroyed in an explosion at his foundry in Richmond during the Civil War. It was placed in the park in 1869.

It has been repeatedly conserved because of a casting flaw. It was treated this summer by BRH Sculpture Conservation LLC at a cost of \$1,300.

The Revolutionary War Gun Monument may be the only Revolutionary War monument west of the Mississippi River. It is a trophy monument consisting of three guns from the *Acteon*, a British Man-of-War sunk during an attempt to seize Charleston, South Carolina in 1776. An organization of former Union military officers purchased the guns at an



Benton: After and Before Restoration



L A F A Y E T T E P A R K

auction in 1887 and presented them to the park in 1897.

The wooden carriages have deteriorated to the point of near collapse. Zymo Sculpture Studio built a new carriage for one gun in 2008 using Ipe wood from Central America. A second gun carriage from Zymo was ordered in 2014. Sometime in 2015 it will be placed on a masonry platform matching the first one which was built by Delahanty Construction Services.

The third gun, a carronade, presents us with a number of challenges. It was made of an inferior grade of iron and layers of iron are peeling away. Tests have revealed that it is still deteriorating today and it will have to be sent to a conservation laboratory for treatment to halt further deterioration.



The restored Revolutionary War gun. Restoration work for the second of the three guns is currently underway.

Improvements Around the Playground Area

For the first time in decades there is a public restroom for men as well as one for women in the park. The LPC instructed its architect to convert the tool storage room into a restroom for men. The old men's restroom was inaccessible because it was inside the building which was always locked. Now, both will be open to the public year round because they can be heated.

A generous grant from UPS arranged by former board member Cheryl Andrews was used to buy park benches and two additional picnic tables. The tables were placed near the playground and have become very popular. They can be moved and people just pick them up and move them where they want them. The benches will be installed in the park in early 2015.

The Haws drinking fountain we bought for the children's playground and picnic area was selected because it would not freeze in cold weather. It passed its first test this past winter and was free flowing despite the bitter cold weather. Many thanks to the Parks Department for installing it.

The drinking fountain, one of the picnic tables and both restrooms are ADA accessible.

New playground drinking fountain.



Demolition of the old woman's restroom.



PARK BOND PROJECTS

The City of Saint Louis sold bonds in early 2014 to pay for capital improvements in its public parks.

The Conservancy was asked to make a list of capital projects for Lafayette Park and the Board selected these four:

Pathway Resurfacing

About one quarter of the pathways in the park were resurfaced in 2012 thanks to a grant from the Darden Foundation. The year before the Grotto Bridge was reconnected to the pathway system for the first time in decades thanks to a grant from Alderman Phyllis Young.

The gravel surface had become worn and uneven. The smooth asphalt surface was instantly popular with the persons who use it most frequently: walkers, children on bicycles, parents pushing strollers and dog walkers. Just hours after the Grotto Bridge was connected to the pathway system a wheelchair was seen on the bridge. This would have been nearly impossible before then.

The LPC asked Steve Coffey, AIA, to prepare a set of detailed drawings on ways to upgrade the rest of the pathway system and his plans have been delivered to the Parks Department. The Board of Public Service will select a contractor and construction should begin soon.

Grotto Bridge Handrail

The grotto bridge was built around 1900 by the Koken Iron Works. It replaced a rustic wooden bridge built over the Grotto in 1865. That bridge was blown away in the Great Cyclone of 1896 which devastated the park.

In time, the Koken bridge became unstable. The bridge would shake to such an extent that some of us feared a large wedding party posing for



photographs might collapse into the lake below.

Delahanty Construction Services LLC stabilized the bridge in 2012 and Steve Coffey, AIA, was the architect for the project. The project entirely consumed a generous \$75,000 grant awarded to the LPC by the Whitaker Foundation intended for pathway renewal.

The original handrail would be too low and open to meet the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The LPC consulted Classic Metal Craft and they have designed a handrail which would satisfy the requirements of the Act and be elegant and appropriate for this bridge.

Fence Repair

Falling trees have dented many sections of the 1869 iron fence by crumpling several fence sections and breaking off the spear points. The most seriously damaged sections will be repaired, cleaned and painted before being reinstalled. *A discussion of our plans for restoring the fence is found elsewhere in this report.*

Sidewalk Repair

The perimeter sidewalk has been in need of repair for decades. Sections raised by tree roots and broken sections made using it difficult for the constant stream



of walkers, runners and dog walkers who use it every day.

The entire Lafayette Avenue sidewalk was replaced. Individual sections along Mississippi, Missouri and Park Avenues and the corner at Park and Mississippi were replaced this fall.

Brown gravel aggregate was mixed into the concrete so the new sections would blend with the old sections.



PARK FENCE AND GATES

The 4,100 foot long iron fence with its large stone gate posts and massive iron gates is the most distinguishing feature of the park. It is cherished by the neighborhood residents. Its spear point was chosen as the symbol of the neighborhood and the Lafayette Square Restoration Committee.

The most amazing thing about the fence and gates is that they are still there. Long after other park's fences were melted down in patriotic war efforts or were neglected to the point of collapse, ours remain.

The fence was built in 1869. An architectural competition was won by Francis Tunica and the firm of P. J. Pauley and Brother won the contract to build the fence.

The stone gate posts were constructed later. The stone is "Glencoe marble", which really is limestone from the quarries in Glencoe, Missouri.

The large iron gates were made by the firm J. Stupp and Brother following the design of Tunica's fence.

By 1979 the condition of the fence had deteriorated to the point that the Parks Department thought it was necessary to take it down and re-erect it using new fence posts cast from a mold of an original post. The eleven inch high base plate was not reinstalled, apparently because so much of it was missing or beyond repair. The fence was painted a few years later.

Today, the list of its problems is very long. There are many broken, wobbly and missing fence posts, parts of the 15 foot long fence sections are broken or missing, fourteen gates are missing and weather has damaged the stone gate posts.

Missing and broken fence posts must be replaced. The anchoring system used in the 1970s has failed. Sections rock back and forth so a new support system has to be engineered. Ten gates

are missing at the corner gateways so new ones must be made.

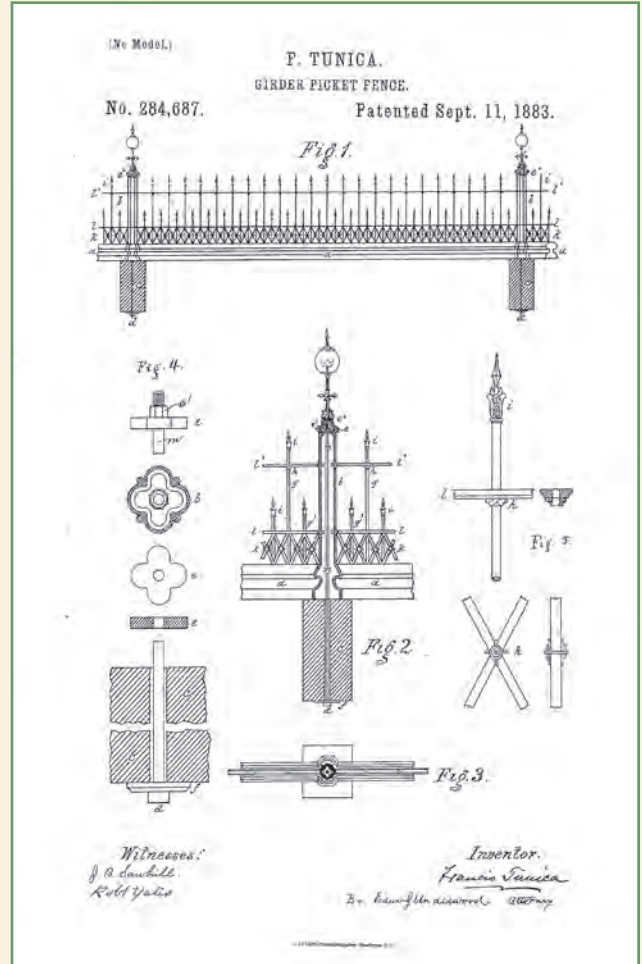
"Saving the Fence" will be the Conservancy's major project for the next few years.

A committee of the LPC has made two recommendations about how to start..

First, stabilize the fence. This will require casting replacement posts and coming up with a new anchoring system to hold them and the fence in place to keep it from rocking back and forth.

Second, replace missing gates at the corner entrances. They are the most visible and the most used entrances to the park.

The entire project is very large, very expensive and will take a lot of time to complete but we are confident that it is manageable.



Design for the Lafayette Park fence patented by its creator Francis Tunica in 1883



The iconic Lafayette Park gates and spear points—there are 14 gates missing from the fence and numerous damaged spear points.

Restored Kern Pavilion Dedicated



The restored Kern Lakeside Pavilion (formerly the Boathouse) was formally dedicated at the annual meeting of the Lafayette Park Conservancy on November 9, 2014. The ribbon was cut by a host of dignitaries—Alderwomen Christine Ingrassia and Phyllis Young; Wardwell Buckner, LPC President; Carolyn Willmore, Historian; Jolyon Grissell, Great-great-grandson of Max Kern; Steve Coffey, architect; Kathy Sullivan, St. Louis Parks Department; Chris Goodson, Near Southside Improvement Corporation President; Joe Carlson, BSI project manager.

The dedication reception was catered by the five approved caterers for Kern Lakeside Pavilion rentals (see full list below).

The building now features beautiful windows (made following the original 1908 architectural plans), dedicated men's and women's restrooms and a catering kitchen. The bulk of the \$600,000 restoration was paid for by The Near Southside Improvement Corporation from T.I.F. funds.

New drains and water lines were installed. Both restrooms will have handicapped accessible and regular facilities. New doors open into the meeting room and will be unlocked when the boathouse is rented. A new patio overlooks the lake. The gracefully arched stairs reflect the design found at the Benton statue.

Rental for the Kern Lakeside and Elizabeth Cook Pavilions or the Grotto and Bridge is handled by St. Louis Parks, Recreation and Forestry. Contact Steven Frager at 314-289-5389 or fragers@stlouis-mo.gov.

Rental of the Kern Pavilion is \$80 per hour with a 4-hour minimum. The facility is available for rental Monday through Sunday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight. It is available for catered events only. The five authorized caterers are Butler's Pantry, Hendri's, Moulin, Square One Brewery & Distillery, and Westwood Catering.

Rental of the Park House and attached gazebo is handled by the Lafayette Square Restoration Committee. Contact Bethany Budde at 314-865-3522 or bethanybudde@me.com.



L A F A Y E T T E P A R K

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and built roads, bridges and installed plantings.

When “The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful” was written, Kern was in his 80s and working on a sunken garden for Oscar Johnson’s home on Portland Place. Kern moved to Holly Springs, Mississippi to landscape Johnson Gardens. Today the gardens are known as Walter Place. Kern died at Holly Springs in 1916.

By Carolyn Willmore, Park Historian



Maximilian Gottlob Kern
1825 – 1916

“The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful”

Designed Lafayette and Forest Parks
Laid out Westmoreland and Portland Places,
Compton Heights Reservoir, Benton and Hyde Parks

Superintendent of Lafayette Park	1864 – 1869
Superintendent, St. Louis Parks Department	1871 – 1875
Superintendent of Forest Park	1875 – 1877
Superintendent of Toledo, Ohio Parks	1892 – 1895

Professor and author of
Practical Landscape Gardening 1855
Rural Tastes in Western Towns and Country Districts 1884

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of M.G. Kern's
appointment as Superintendent of Lafayette Park
2014




During the 1870s Kern developed other city parks including Benton and Hyde parks, and served as Superintendent of the Parks Department. When Forest Park was created, Kern became General Superintendent and, as Landscape Gardener, created a master plan for the park.



Kern also designed the grounds of Compton Heights Reservoir and Chain of Rocks for the Water Department.

The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful

MAX KERN, THE AGED LANDSCAPE ARTIST WHO WAS THE ORIGINAL DESIGNER OF LAFAYETTE AND FOREST PARKS, WHO LAID OUT WEST-MORELAND AND PORTLAND PLACES AND WHOSE WORK YET DELIGHTS THE EYE AT COMPTON HEIGHTS RESERVOIR, BENTON, HYDE AND OTHER PARKS, IS STILL PLANNING GREAT WORKS FOR HIS BELOVED CITY



ORIGINAL PLAN OF LAFAYETTE PARK

Feature article in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat on Sunday, June 14, 1908



Kern’s opinion was sought for private and civic landscape projects throughout St. Louis. An example is the 1890s park-like design for Westmoreland and Portland Places.



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L A F A Y E T T E P A R K

The mission of the Lafayette Park Conservancy is to restore and preserve the historic legacy of Lafayette Park, the first developed urban park in the Louisiana Purchase Territory, and to raise funds for those purposes.

I want to begin/renew my membership to the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Membership Level:

- \$35 Friend
- \$50 Family
- \$75 Botanist
- \$150 Historian
- \$300 Preservationist
- \$500 Benton Society
- \$1,000 Lafayette Society

Benefits at all levels: Advance notice of special events and projects in the Park • Invitations to Conservancy events • Newsletter via postal delivery and email • Volunteer opportunities to work in the park, on restoration projects, and on events.

My company will match my gift (please include form)

Name(s):.....

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Please mail to:

Lafayette Park Conservancy, 2023 Lafayette Avenue, St. Louis MO 63104

**Or pay online using your credit card by visiting
www.lafayettepark.org.**



SLU "Make a Difference Day" volunteers at work in the park.

Memberships are tax-deductible to the extent allowable under IRS regulations. The LPC is a 501(c)(3).

Need a program for your club?

The LPC offers "The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful" and "The Fascinating History of Lafayette Park." To schedule a program, contact Carolyn at cgwillmore@gmail.org.