



# ParkNotes

a semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 2

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Image provided by The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute - Harvard University

## Did You Know?

- ☼ Sculptor Hattie Hosmer was born in Massachusetts, studied in St. Louis and practiced her craft in Rome, initially under the great John Gibson. She was recognized worldwide for her brilliant neoclassical sculptures.
- ☼ Hattie was a close contemporary of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was prominent in the Italian artist colony. His novel *The Marble Faun*, set in Rome, contains a painter and a sculptor.
- ☼ The Kemper Art Museum on Washington University's campus will display Hosmer works from May 2 through June 21, and features a gallery talk on June 18. For details see <http://kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu>.

## "Stepping Up" To Save The Benton Statue

It's time for us to step up and restore the famous bronze statue of Senator Thomas Hart Benton that stands so proudly in the center of Lafayette Park. Like the statue, the fiercely competitive Benton was larger than life. Nicknamed "Old Bullion" because of his strong belief that paper money and central banking harmed the common man, he was elected our U.S. Senator when Missouri gained statehood in 1820, then re-elected for four additional terms, serving in the Senate until 1850. The statue honoring him was dedicated in 1868 before a crowd of nearly 40,000 citizens. It gazes serenely over the western horizon, signifying Benton's staunch support for westward expansion and manifest destiny.

To celebrate the 140th anniversary of the monument's dedication and to help raise the funds needed to restore it, the Conservancy has organized the following three events, to be held on June 13 and 14. These events celebrate not only the statue, but also the uncommonly talented and fiercely independent woman sculptor who created it—Harriet Goodhue Hosmer.

**Hosmer Symposium.** This entertaining and educational event focuses on the life and works of Harriet Hosmer. Although most of her professional career was spent in Rome, Hosmer attended medical school in St. Louis to study anatomy. Several of her works are also located here, providing a further St. Louis connection. The symposium will kick off with a one-woman play and a dessert reception on Friday evening, June 13, at the Saint Louis Mercantile Library located on the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis. It will continue on Saturday morning, June 14, at the Kemper museum on the campus of Washington University. Admission to the Symposium is \$40 for the general public, \$30 for members of the Conservancy and other sponsoring organizations, \$15 for students. To register, use the enclosed form, visit [www.lafayettepark.org](http://www.lafayettepark.org), or call (314) 772-5724.

**Benton Monument Celebration.** On Saturday afternoon, June 14, we will celebrate both Flag Day and the statue's 140th birthday, from 4:30-6:00 p.m. at the Benton Monument in Lafayette Park. Enjoy patriotic music, speeches, horse-drawn carriage rides and more. Snacks and merchandise, including event T-shirts, will be available for purchase. You may also tour the personal gallery of the well-known contemporary female sculptor, Gail Cassilly. Come one, come all—attendance is free and open to the public!

**"Hats Off To Hattie" Gala.** Beginning at 6 PM on Saturday evening, June 14, this elegant fundraising event will feature mansion and garden tours, musicians, dining under decorated tents, fine art sales and an auction of irresistibly indulgent items. If you would like to receive a formal invitation or to reserve a table, please contact Linda Weiner at [linderweiner@gmail.com](mailto:linderweiner@gmail.com) to add your name to our mailing list. You may also order tickets by visiting [www.lafayettepark.org](http://www.lafayettepark.org) or by contacting the Lafayette Park Conservancy at (314) 772-5724.

## From the President...

I know that I share with many others the belief that Lafayette Park is a unique and special place, not only within the City of St. Louis but across a much broader region. On neighborhood walks we often meet visitors from outside the St. Louis area who are amazed that such a beautiful place exists so close to the city center.

St. Louis has 105 parks, but only the five largest have an operating budget of their own. I would argue that Lafayette Park, despite, or perhaps even partially because of, its comfortably walkable size of thirty acres, belongs either with the "Big Five" or in a special category of its own. As the first truly developed city park not just in St. Louis but west of the Mississippi, and as the heart of the first fashionable St. Louis neighborhood peopled by locally and nationally significant power barons, its historical significance is certainly without parallel.

But it is Lafayette Park's beauty, beginning with its landforms and extending to the magnificent iron fence enclosing them, that most affects first-time visitors and causes them to return again and again. The park's most striking features were created by superintendent Maximillian G. Kern, who moved just slightly west to the even larger canvas of Forest Park after he worked his magic here.

Improving public awareness of Lafayette Park's historic importance, its great beauty, its deteriorating infrastructure, and its tremendous value to the City of St. Louis and the surrounding region is crucial to building the support needed to fund park improvements. We are seeking volunteers for the Publicity Committee who can produce high-quality newsletters, press articles, grant proposals, presentations and other types of communications. Also needed are volunteers with strong desire and/or experience to do capital development. We are putting together current cost estimates to restore and improve the most important park features, including pathways, benches, the boat-house, the music stand, the cannons, the gates and the fence, but it is already clear that the cost of these projects will total several million dollars. Let us know if you would like to join the crusade.

— Bob Bischoff

## Errata

In the inaugural issue of ParkNotes we named John Davidson as the original donor for the urns on the Grotto bridge. The generous benefactor was actually John Nicholson, whose name is prominently displayed on the first urn to be installed.

## "Green Thumbers" Make New Babies

Volunteer plant nursery workers Susan Pinker-Dodd, Carolyn Willmore, Ward Buckner, Ruth Kamphoefner, and Carol Surgant spent much of their "spare" time this winter at the Forest Park greenhouses, where they grew an extensive variety of plants for transplanting to Lafayette Park. A wonderful partnership between the city's Parks Department and the Lafayette Park Flora Conservancy affords us the use of the city's greenhouses each year to over-winter tender perennials, propagate cuttings and start new seedlings.



The month of April saw Conservancy members and the city's greenhouse staff moving two large truckloads of vigorous, well-grown plants from Forest Park to Lafayette Park for setting out during May. Volunteer gardeners will plant more than 100 trays of plants, dressing Lafayette Park in its spring and summer finery in preparation for the June house tour, the Benton Statue celebration, and many other planned events throughout the growing season. Many thanks to these dedicated volunteers!

## Swans Happily Re-Gendered

When three new swans were introduced to our lake this spring, resident swan Samantha seemed to welcome or at least ignore them. But her partner Sophia drove them onto the bank and would not let them into the water. Much to everyone's surprise, a closer gender examination by the chagrined breeder eventually revealed that Sophia was actually a male! This explains the territorial behavior. Some people will remember how territorial Willie was and he didn't even have a mate.

Sophia was exchanged for a female. After spending some socializing time together back at the breeder's, the five female mute swans have returned to Lafayette Park. New arrivals Sue, Linda and Evelyn, together with Samantha and the re-gendered Sophia, present an ever-changing, graceful visual panorama as they glide smoothly across the lake.

The bevy of swans joins our resident geese, Bonnie and Clyde, their six goslings, the White Pekin ducks Aflac and Poodle, and the unnamed mallards and their eight ducklings. Our lake has gradually become a bird-lovers paradise. Now if we can just encourage a little more grass to grow on its banks...



## Why Those Flowers Sparkle

This spring dozens of volunteers have “sprung” into action to beautify the park! Many thanks to Patricia Barber, Erin Budde, Glen Eckert, Doug Fish, Jessica and Daniel Miller, Mary Otto, Ian Stallman, Don Terrill, CJ and Kerri DeGroot, David Horr, Julie and Shane Piatchek, Jon Ritter and son, Ken Stone, Ella Heigham, Rachel Witt and I’m sure I’ve missed a few. Thanks to you all!

To keep our most decorative plantings healthy and attractive throughout the long, hot St. Louis summers, the Conservancy encourages individuals and groups to “adopt” a site in Lafayette Park for watering, weeding and other maintenance. Many sites have already been adopted by individuals, but the need is ongoing and ever present.

Susan Pinker-Dodd, Carolyn Willmore, Ward Buckner, Marsha Lange and others have lavished exceptional care on the very large Grotto area that surrounds the lagoon, but they would enjoy having additional adoptive parents to help them. This restful area is greatly admired by park patrons for its pleasing overall design and the many varieties of treasured plants that thrive in its microclimate.

On the west side of the park lies the Rock Garden, an equally beautiful planting that has long been faithfully maintained by Rebecca Wright. Her fellow adoptive parents include Sue and Terry Linhardt, Vickie Houghton, Bridgid Simpson, Margaret Howard, Pam Behnen and others. They, too, would welcome the commitment of others to help manicure this extensive area through all seasons.

Other successful adoptions include: Robert Bischoff, Marilyn Lane, Artemus Phillips and others at the Washington Statue beds; Mitchell and Devyani Hunt at the stone urn on the west side of the park; Bev McClain, Bob Pinkowski and others at the Park and Missouri entrance plantings; David and Nancy Bridwell at the Park and Mississippi entrance gates area; Steve Davis and Kerry Brooks at the mid-Mississippi gate area; Ruth Kamphoefner at the circular bed to the south of the Park House; Carolyn McAvoy and Addy Donnelly at the Benton entrance; Billie Jean Portas at several of the benches around the park; and Ellie Snyder at many of the welcoming urns at park entrances.

Orphan plantings that are still seeking adoptive parents include those around the Park House, the Benton Statue, and the “wedge garden” inside the Park and Mississippi entrance. Call Linda Weiner at 621-7071 to volunteer!

## Music Stand Project Gets Under Way

Thanks to the successful efforts of progressive dinner organizers Mary Visintainer, Suzanne Sessions and Kathy Marks-Petit, plus gracious hosts and attendees, the funds dedicated to restoring the large Music Stand, located



just south of the Benton statue, continue to grow. We’re excited to report that Conservancy board member David Bridwell, who has extensive construction experience, will lead the restoration project. His first step is soliciting bids for preliminary design so we can estimate overall cost and begin raising funds in earnest to restore this Victorian jewel.

The ornate roof pictured here was constructed in 1876. Sadly, it was destroyed by the epic tornado that swept through Lafayette

Square and much of St. Louis in 1896, laying waste to nearly all park trees and infrastructure and severely damaging many Lafayette Square mansions. The Music Stand was subsequently rebuilt with a simpler roof, but that, too, was demolished in 1951, leaving only the stone base.

Live band concerts and music stands were important identifying characteristics of Victorian parks and are still quite popular today, as the Compton Heights Band has shown with the strong attendance at their Tower Grove Park concerts. Lafayette Park’s own summer concerts are perhaps even more popular, but are currently limited to groups that can fit within the considerably smaller Elizabeth Cook pavilion where they are now held. Restoring the original Music Stand will provide a stage that is twice as large, supporting bigger musical groups. And it will look terrific, too!

## What’s Going On With The...?

**Boathouse.** We’re still awaiting a few bids for the Phase I stabilization (roof and walls) described in our last issue. Nearly half of the funds required have been raised and work is expected to begin this summer.

**Gazebo.** The LSRC will use funds raised by the Spring House Tour to complete this project in 2008. Final design approval is expected in June.

**Playground.** A public meeting to explain the color modification was held in April. The proposal will go to the Implementation Board again in June.

**Lagoon.** The city replaced the broken drainpipe and filled the sinkhole that was its proximate cause, but the lagoon still has leaks that keep it from filling completely with water. Soil beneath the concrete bottom has eroded and a more comprehensive fix may be required in the near future.

**Cannons.** A multi-phase plan has been drafted to conserve and restore the three cannons (ship’s guns) from the British warship *HMS Acteon*, sunk in the Charleston harbor during the revolutionary war. If Phase I goes as planned, the first cannon’s wooden carriage should be rebuilt by early 2009.