



ParkNotes

A semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 23

Winter 2018

You Don't Know Much About History

Unless you attended the Successful LPC History Lecture Series



This colorized sketch shows the unveiling and dedication of the Thomas Hart Benton statue in Lafayette Park during June of 1868. Part of the recent lecture series was a presentation on the history of the Senator Benton statue.

This autumn, the Lafayette Park Conservancy hosted a series of lectures on the history of Lafayette Park and Lafayette Square. About 40 people gathered in the Kern Lakeside Pavilion for each talk. History buffs from around the city joined Lafayette Square residents for an afternoon of learning, fellowship and refreshments.

The LPC thanks Andrew Hahn, Carolyn Willmore and Mike Jones for presenting a fascinating glimpse of the history of St. Louis in the 19th century. If you missed Mike's talks, read his article about Harriet Hosmer's statue of Thomas Hart Benton in this newsletter. Or buy a copy of "Thomas Hart Benton in Lafayette Park", a publication of the Lafayette Park Conservancy. Copies are available for \$5 each at Forrest Gallery on Park Avenue.

Because the response to this first lecture series has been so positive, the LPC has reserved the Kern Pavilion for the second annual series in 2019.

President's Message

by Wardwell Buckner

We have good news about our Park Fence Project. The Board of Public Service has approved our new plan to construct the fence to make it even stronger and more closely replicate the 1868 design.

A base plate made of ¼" steel fabricated in St. Louis will be the main support for the fence sections. It will replicate the profile of the original base. Our first thought was to use a base plate that could be replaced if it was damaged but that idea was impractical.

The fence posts will be redesigned in Alabama by Robinson Iron Company to add even more strength to the fence. We will use a precast concrete anchoring block. When we have everything here, the test section along Lafayette Avenue will be removed and reconstructed using the new design. If it meets our expectations we will be ready to move further down Lafayette Avenue.

There is more good news. Just like any other major restoration project, the Band Stand Project has many

parts that have to fit together to make it work. We have contracted with Killeen Studio Architects to help with some of them. Killeen will provide additional engineering work and cost estimates to construct the base so it will be capable of supporting the columns and roof structure.



On your next park visit check out the new sign explaining the Band Stand Project

We are working on better irrigation for the grotto gardens and on other ways to improve the park. All of this is made possible by the loyalty and support of our members and friends. Your advice and suggestions are welcome and we would like to hear from you.

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Status of Park Projects in 2018

It's been another good year for the park. The following is a list of the most significant projects completed or underway to date.

- The restoration of the Revolutionary War Monument has been completed. The carronade and its new carriage constructed at the Zymo Sculpture Studio were delivered to the monument a few days before its dedication at our Annual Meeting. It took eight or nine years and about \$30,000 to complete this project. That may seem like a lot, but as major park projects go, this one moved fast and was within its budget.
- Most of the pathways were resurfaced this year. This was one of the projects nominated by the LPC to be paid out of the remaining park bond issue.
- Another park bench was installed. This one is at the Park and Mississippi Avenues entrance.
- Our challenge matching grant was a success. The offer to match a total of \$3000 was oversubscribed and raised more than the expected \$6000. The Board will decide how to apply the entire amount raised to an existing or new project.
- The worn and dangerous surface material of the children's playground was completely replaced.
- The committee to rebuild the 1876 Music Pavilion has solved the issue about providing a way for persons with disabilities to get up to the floor. They are getting lists of fabricators who can recreate the late 19th century design using modern materials. They are consulting with engineers and architects and have let a contract with an architectural design firm.
- A pair of gates has been ordered to replace the missing pair at the mid-Lafayette entrance. They are under construction and will be in place by year end.
- We have nominated two new projects to use up the remainder of the park bond issue funds. One is to run new water lines into the park from Mississippi and Missouri Avenues to supply water for irrigation. The other is to install a new concrete surface to replace the broken and partially missing concrete leading to the top of the granite staircase leading to the Kern Pavilion landing.
- Many trees have been planted in the park using the SWT tree planting design as a guide. The LSRC has a fund for trees and the LPC is encouraging a parallel effort through the Forestry Division's TreeMembrance program.

Thomas Hart Benton Statue History

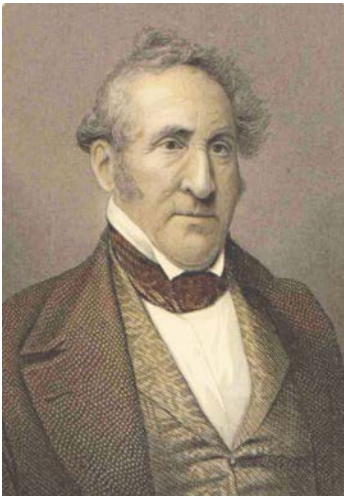
Presented during the LPC History Lecture Series

by Mike Jones

The year 2018 has been a notable year for celebrating Lafayette Park. It represents 180 years since the St. Louis city ordinance that created the Park from the old St. Louis Commons. It is also 150 years since the installation of the Thomas Hart Benton statue, and ten years since the start of its last major restoration.

Celebrity dims with time and it becomes the task of historians to maintain the memory of those who were important to the foundations of what we are today. With regard to Senator Benton, there are seven states with counties named for him, in addition to Benton Harbor, MI; Fort Benton, MT; Bentonville, AR; the mineral bentonite and both Benton Place and Benton Park here in St. Louis. Here's a refresher for our collective memory as to who he was and why he's important.

Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858) was the nation's first five-term Senator and his 30 years of Democratic party leadership occurred during a time in which America gained definition and temporarily came apart. He was instrumental in the westward expansion of this country to the extent that almost everything he did served that effort. This made Benton the logical heir to Thomas Jefferson, who had envisioned a "North American Road to India".



Thomas Hart Benton
Courtesy of Carolyn Willmore

His rise also parallels that of Andrew Jackson, a true believer in enlarging American dominion. Benton was aide-de-camp to Jackson during the War of 1812, and, ever irascible, even joined his brother in a melee in which Jackson was shot in the shoulder. Although there seemed to be no hard feelings, the ambitious Benton realized his political prospects would be more favorable further from where he had helped shoot Tennessee's favorite son. Thus he moved to St. Louis.

Benton began a law practice and founded a newspaper in his new hometown. Ever curious, he interviewed trappers and traders returning down river from their adventures in the Far West. Benton became convinced of a vast economic potential beyond Missouri, and used his paper both to champion westward expansion and develop his political standing.

When Missouri became a state in 1821, slavery was already the defining issue in enlarging America, as the Missouri Compromise allowed Missouri as a slave state only with Maine counterbalancing it as a free state. Benton was, with David Barton, elected one of Missouri's first Senators. He held his seat for the next thirty tumultuous years.

Benton put forward legislation designed to forward his dream of a transcontinental America. He was author of the first homestead act proposal, and enthusiastic advocate of stitching West to East with rail and telegraph lines. He enlisted his son-in-law, John C. Fremont, into becoming the agent of his policies, and enabled Fremont to lead a series of expeditions with direct bearing on creation of the Oregon Trail, settlement along the Santa Fe Trail and annexation of California. Indeed, Fremont and his primary scout Kit Carson become something of superheroes along the way. Benton's daughter Jessie wrote books featuring glowing descriptions from Fremont's dry military notes. These became very popular, convincing many to undertake the journey west on the newly mapped pathways.

Jackson and Benton shared the view that easy credit, or "soft money" encouraged speculation on Western land that Eastern interests wanted to buy and sell, but not emigrate to or develop. They oversaw the abolition of the Bank of the United States, and espoused hard money, or gold and silver. This led Benton to be known as "Old Bullion". Similarly, he felt slavery only impeded the rate of progress West, and, in 1849, formally came out as anti-slavery. This was a bridge too far at that time, and ran counter to the direction of both Benton's own party and state. He thus lost his reelection bid in 1850, and was finished as a political force.

Article continues on the next page.

Interestingly, his readings of Seneca had led him to conclude that one must sometimes sacrifice one's own self-interest for principle, and Benton did so. It was this strength of conviction under pressure that led both Theodore Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy to write admiringly of the Senator.

When Thomas Hart Benton died in 1858, his funeral was oversized, as was his political impact on the times. Three days of wake and funeral attended by thousands, and a five block long procession to the train taking his remains to Bellefontaine Cemetery. He was, perhaps next to Mark Twain, the most famous Missourian of the 19th Century.

Two years later, the Missouri General Assembly voted to spend \$2500 toward creation of a monument to Benton. A committee of seven prominent St. Louisans was formed to oversee the project, and they raised another \$7500. It was decided to make the project a public, rather than a graveside tribute, and a search was begun for art and artist.

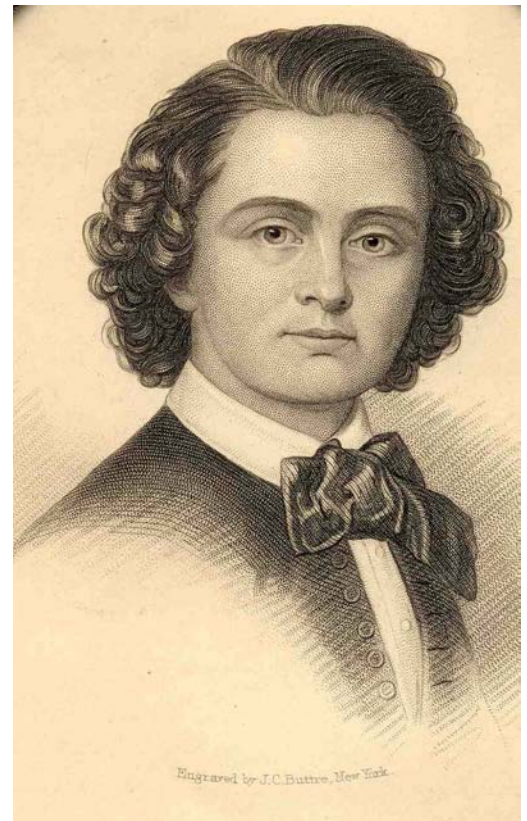
One of the leaders of the committee was Wayman Crow, a man who had become wealthy in the dry goods business and spent the balance of his life engaged in political and philanthropic pursuits. He sent his daughter to an exclusive ladies finishing school in Massachusetts, and it set everything to follow in motion.

The Hive, as it was known, was run by the Sedgwick family. Catherine Sedgwick was a well regarded novelist, and the school benefitted from her connections, attracting a host of famous writers and thinkers of the day, like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher. Students included Winston Churchill's mother, Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, actress Charlotte Cushman, and an aspiring artist named Harriet Hosmer.

Harriet had boundless energy and a charismatic personality. The free-thinking environment at The Hive encouraged Harriet to follow her muse, and enter the traditionally male-dominated realm of sculpture. After initially struggling with modeling the human form due to her lack of anatomical understanding, Cornelia Crow enlisted her father in St. Louis to help. Wayman was eager to help the young artist, and found a most unconventional man to assist.

Joseph McDowell ran Missouri's first medical school, which he built to resemble a fortress, and stocked it with muskets and cannons. He had the colorful reputation of digging up gravesite for dissection specimens and often waved human skulls and bones during his fiery lectures. He also took a personal interest in Harriet, and she earned a certificate in anatomy from McDowell's College. Thus informed, Harriet joined with Charlotte Cushman and headed to Rome.

Rome in the 1850s was the center of neoclassical sculpture, and of its chief practitioner, John Gibson. For seven years, Harriet served as Gibson's only student, refining her technique and developing her style. Meanwhile, Charlotte's house attracted famous world travelers who loved the creative energy there, making wealthy and influential patrons for Harriet in the process. In 1854, she carved a small statue of Shakespeare's Puck, and quickly sold 50 copies at \$1000 each. She was then able to open her own studio and create larger works. Several ended up back in St. Louis, giving her an artistic exposure that grew her reputation.



Harriet E. Hosmer from a drawing by Miss Stebbins
Courtesy of Ward Buckner

Article continues on the next page.

Thomas Hart Benton Statue History *continued*

Harriet Hosmer corresponded frequently with Wayman Crow back in Missouri. When, in 1861, the committee for the Benton statue voted on the various submissions for a monument, it may have been no accident that Harriet was chosen the winner. She set to work on a clay model, and sent photos to St. Louis, gaining the approval of both the committee and John and Jessie Benton Fremont.

A full-size clay model was ready by the end of 1861, but the Civil War and shortage of funds slowed the work. Finally, in 1865, a bronze casting was done by the Royal Foundry of Bavaria, and shipped to St. Louis. All was well, except that a firm site had not been designated for placement. Originally, it was to be in Missouri Park at the foot of Lucas Place, but the Lucas family strongly objected on the grounds that the cantankerous Benton had fatally shot James Lucas in an 1817 duel. Another site was rumored but nothing happened for two full years before a frustrated Wayman Crow wrote the Mayor, offering to pay all costs incident to putting the statue in Lafayette Park. Work began on the site, and on the first public statue in Missouri, in summer of 1867.

On May 27, 1868, a grand event was held to dedicate the new statue. Somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 people crowded the park to witness the event. On a warm sunny afternoon, a brass band played, Senator Frank Blair spoke, and a thirty-gun salute commenced. Jessie Benton Fremont, supported by Wayman Crow and James Eads, pulled a cord and a drapery slid down the colossus, revealing a gilded ten foot bronze of Senator Benton in toga and sandals, with the inscription below. "There Is The East, There is India". Fitting too, as Benton's vision of U.S. migration to the Far West was to enable trade with the Far East. Maybe it's appropriate, from that perspective, that we consider St. Louis "Gateway To The East".



*Hosmer inspecting Benton at foundry
Courtesy of Schlesinger Library,
Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University*

Article continues on the next page.

Hosmer's Benton led a statue's happy life in bucolic Lafayette Park for the next 28 years. In 1896, an F-4 tornado cut a swath directly through Lafayette Square, destroying mansions and uprooting trees. The park fared little better, and the Benton statue was one of the only objects remaining upright after the storm. Residents of means chose to rebuild further west, and the area sank into a slow decay, eventually becoming an urban slum. In 1968, a new generation of young urban restorationists banded together and began rehabilitating the housing stock and neighborhood of Lafayette Square. It was noted that the years had not been kind to our statuary. Decades of the burning of soft coal had acidified the air, pitting and corroding both patina and underlying bronze of the Benton monument. An initial restoration was performed by the Washington University Department of Archaeometry under Phoebe Dent Weil. It stabilized the statue beautifully, but another 30 years elapsed without further maintenance.



*Senator Benton statue before and after 2011 restoration
Courtesy of Jim Willmore*

By 2001, a newly dedicated group set about the task of improving the park. The Lafayette Park Conservancy in 2008 held a weekend long event toward restoration of the Benton statue. An educational program, gala dinner, and auctions raised both awareness and funding. In 2010, work was begun by Russell-Marti Conservation. Donations and grants raised \$54,000 to enable the effort. A rededication was held in November 2011. A large crowd gathered to enjoy a procession, laying of roses, speeches, and an unveiling of the revived Benton by Bethany Spaulding in the role of Jessie Benton Fremont. The lesson is well-learned that routine maintenance is required to preserve the monuments in Lafayette Park. This can't happen without the active financial support of those who enjoy the park. Please help keep Benton shining for future generations by giving to the Lafayette Park Conservancy.



*I want
YOU
to help out
Lafayette Park*

Work for a French Aristocrat!

He fought for you during 1776. You can make his legacy by volunteering in the park named after the Marquis de Lafayette, otherwise known as Gilbert du Motier.

Lafayette Park is the heart of Lafayette Square, let's help Gil's namesake park look beautiful. In preparation for Spring House Tour, volunteers are needed to prepare garden beds, plant annuals and mulch. Check Nextdoor and www.lafayettepark.org for workdays. Better yet, contact Carolyn at cgwillmore@gmail.com

Not interested in gardening? The LPC needs volunteers with computer skills, grant writing and fundraising expertise, as well as general park maintenance.

Charleston Wants Their Guns Back!

A group in Charleston, SC wants their guns back. the timing is amazing. Just one year ago, after completing a decade-long preservation effort costing over \$30,000 to conserve the guns, having new gun carriages made for them and building a brick platform to set them on, we get a request to give them back.

A little history: our Revolutionary War Monument consists of three naval guns from the *HMS Acteon*, a British frigate that was sunk while the British were trying to invade Charleston in 1776. In 1887, the *Acteon's* guns were brought up from the harbor and sold at an auction. A patriotic organization of Missourians bought three of them. The rest may have ended up as fill to construct a jetty. The guns were given to Lafayette Park in 1897 and have been here ever since.

The LPC published "The Guns of Lafayette Park" last year. The booklet has many illustrations and explains the history and significance of the monument. The booklet is available for \$5 each at Forrest Gallery on Park Avenue. The guns spent 111 years on the floor of Charleston Harbor and 120 years in Lafayette Park. We think Charleston is a little late in remembering them. Besides, they were donated to the park and so are the property of the citizens and the City of St. Louis.



On the left: the guns of the HMS Acteon after being dredged up from Charleston Harbor



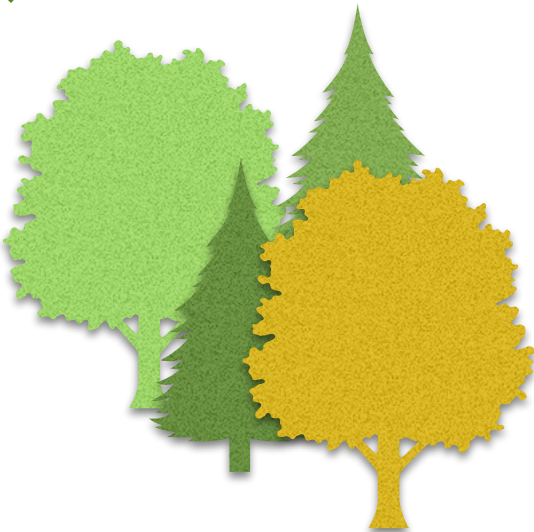
On the right: the guns as part of the Lafayette Park Revolutionary War Monument

Tree-Membrance Program for the Park

Next Spring, the LPC will have ten high canopy shade trees planted in Lafayette Park by the St. Louis Forestry Division through their Tree-Membrance program. The park's tree inventory is aging and shrinking. New trees must be planted each year to replace the ones lost due to age, disease and wind damage and also to add new trees to fulfill the SWT Tree Planting Master Plan for Lafayette Park.

The LPC is supporting the Tree-Membrance program because Forestry plants large caliper sized trees and guarantees replacement for five years if a tree dies within that time. The cost of \$150 per tree is well worth the expense. We encourage everyone interested in replenishing the park's tree inventory to consider this option and contact the Forest Division for information:

<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/parks/forestry/Tree-Membrance.cfm>



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 or renew my membership to the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Membership Level:

- \$35 - Friend (one named member)
- \$50 - Family (two named members)
- \$75 - Botanist (two named members)
- \$150 - Historian (two named members)
- \$300 - Preservationist (two named members)
- \$500 - Benton Society (two named members)
- \$1,000 - Lafayette Society (two named members)
- My company will match my gift (include a matching form from your employer)
- In addition to my membership, or instead of, I'd like to make a special donation of \$ _____ toward restoration of the Park fence.
- In addition to my membership, or instead of, I'd like to make a special donation of \$ _____ toward restoration of the 1876 Bandstand.

Memberships are valid for one year from date of joining and are tax-deductible to the extent allowable under IRS regulations. The LPC is a 501(c)3 organization.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State &

Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please return with check or money order payable to:

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

Or make a donation online using PayPal at: www.lafayettepark.org



Lafayette Park Conservancy

2023 Lafayette Avenue

Saint Louis, Missouri 63104

www.lafayettepark.org

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