



ParkNotes

a semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 3

Fall 2008

Plant A Tree? Not *There!*

Have you ever thought about where the trees in Lafayette Park are planted or how they are maintained? Amazingly enough, there is no established plan to manage these valuable assets. On just a short walk through the park you will notice broken limbs, amputations, overcrowding and poor placement and spacing of trees. It's obvious that someone needs to do something about the tree situation but its not clear who should do it and what should be done. The park Master Plan sets out guidelines but offers limited direction.

The Conservancy is asking its interested members and other folks concerned about trees to meet, study the issues, make recommendations, and form work parties to begin to manage the trees. Items for a Tree Committee to address include:

(a) Updating the 2002 inventory of existing trees.

The locator map should include trees newly planted, delete trees that are missing and show current tree size and condition. Planning will be much easier with an accurate map to guide us.

(b) Planning. We can't implement a plan if there isn't one. Developing a plan for the whole park is ambitious and expensive but we can start on it.

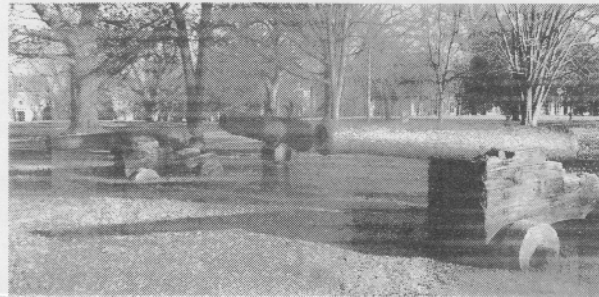
(c) Managing what we have. We can do some of the work ourselves, like removing dead branches and raising the canopy in a few places. This requires a permit from the Forestry Division.

(d) Making recommendations. Some trees need to be removed because they are dying, they are the wrong variety, or they are in the wrong place. New trees pop up willy-nilly in odd places and we need to work with the Forestry Division to understand why this happens and how to prevent it.

Tree planning is undoubtedly a long-term effort, but if we get it right the good results will last for decades. If we don't get it right our mistakes might also last for decades. If you would like to become involved in this important effort please contact Ward Buckner at ewbuckner@yahoo.com or Bob Bischoff at rbischoff@yahoo.com.

You Say Cannons, I Say Ship's Guns

The Lafayette Park Conservancy has commissioned the Zymo Sculpture Studio to build a carriage for one of the three Revolutionary War ship's guns salvaged from the wreck of the British warship HMS Acteon.



The Acteon sank during an attack on Charleston, South Carolina in 1776. Its guns lay undisturbed in Charleston harbor for 111 years until a ship entering the harbor struck the

remains of the Acteon. The guns were pulled from the water to clear the wreck site, sold at auction and purchased by an organization of former Union military officers in Missouri. They were brought to St. Louis where they resided in the organization's museum with other war trophies and memorabilia until they were given to the park in 1897.

These ship's guns are a unique and fascinating historical feature of Lafayette Park. Most Revolutionary war relics are found in the original thirteen states and it is unusual indeed to find them in the Midwest. Sadly, they are not in very good condition. The wooden carriages barely hold up the two long guns and they are in danger of imminent collapse.

The Conservancy and Zymo Sculpture Studio have extensively researched examples of late eighteenth century naval gun carriages and new carriages will be built based upon these examples. The northernmost gun will be moved to Zymo's studio as soon as their current workload permits them to start on this project.

In addition to getting a new carriage, the gun itself will be cleaned and conserved at the studio. Upon completion the carriage and gun will be placed on a masonry platform, approximately 10 feet by 16 feet, which will display the gun much better than before and will also keep it safe from mower damage. Our plan is to restore the guns one by one.

The Conservancy has appropriated \$6,000 of the approximate \$8,000 cost of the first carriage project. Our long term neighbor Walter Hauck, owner of the Zymo Studio, and former neighbor Bill Hibdon, owner of Hibdon Hardwoods, are also making sizable contributions of their own time and materials to support this project.

**Note: artillery pieces on land are known as cannon, but on ships they are called guns, no matter how large they may be.*

From the President...

The LPC is modeled after the long established, highly successful Forest Park Forever organization in St. Louis. Established in 1988, FPF has raised more than \$50 million and negotiated a matching public funds to achieve spectacular capital improvements in Forest Park. Now they are raising more money and negotiating maintenance funding to ensure that Forest Park can maintain those improvements *forever* (hence their name!) Similar conservancy groups have sprung up around the country wherever residents have realized that their most unique and valuable treasures, city parks, are threatened by crumbling infrastructure due to slashed government budgets.

Saving any park even such an historic and lovely space as Lafayette Park, may not make your personal list as you decide where to invest your time, effort and money. But let me ask you to at least try this mental exercise to evaluate the importance of the park to you. Do you walk, jog, garden, play ball, fish, or play on the playground in the park? Do you visit for concerts, movies, ball games, bike races, house tours, weddings, picnics, or meetings? Do you go to the park to admire the flowers, plantings and vistas? Do you ever eat lunch in the park for a sanity break? Just jot down your thoughts about Lafayette Park, what you like or don't like, and send them off to me. I can promise you this—we will read every comment and even post the best of them on our website!

— Bob Bischoff rbischoff@yahoo.com

Conservancy Enters Year 8

Members of the Lafayette Park Conservancy met on November 16 to elect directors and celebrate the seventh anniversary of the Conservancy's founding. The treasurer reported total funds on hand of \$142,661, of which \$77,478 are restricted to projects designated by donors. Once the 2009 budget is approved it will be posted on the LPC website. The Membership Committee reported current membership of 101 and still growing.

To enhance organizational memory and continuity members of the Conservancy now elect directors for two-year terms, with half of the directors elected each year. Because this was the first election following the change in director term length from one-to two years, members elected eight directors for two years and seven directors for one year. The twelve returning directors welcomed three new members—Larry Dodd, Jocelyn Jones and Tom Keay—to the board.

Benton Will Shine Once Again!

Last June saw the Conservancy hosting an array of successful educational and fundraising events to restore the Thomas Hart Benton Monument. "Benton Weekend" began with a Friday evening reception at the St. Louis Mercantile Library, where Elizabeth Pickard delighted the audience with her portrayal of Harriet Hosmer in *Zenobia Unchained*, her one-woman play created for the Missouri History Museum. Hosmer's famous statue of Beatrice Cenci provided a perfect backdrop for the play. Mercantile Library also displayed documents showing how Beatrice came to St. Louis.

On Saturday morning Andrew Walker, Curator of American Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum, served as moderator for "The Life and works of Harriet Goodhue Hosmer," a symposium held at Washington University. Prof. William Gerdt's keynote speech "The White Marmorean Flock" explored the beginnings of professional American sculpture in Italy, where Hosmer was the first and foremost female sculptor of the flock. Julia Markus related the controversial lives of the women artists working in Rome, while Julie Dunn-Morton evaluated the images of the women in Hosmer's sculpture, and how the ideas of her influential women friends and authors affected her works. Melissa Dabakis presented "From Boston to Rome: Harriet Hosmer's Professional Journey" and Phoebe Dent Weil explained the process of repairing bronze sculpture damaged by airborne pollutants.

Saturday afternoon activities took place at the Benton Monument in the park. The day was balmy and clear, reminiscent of that day in 1868 when tens of thousands gathered in Lafayette Park for the statue's original dedication. Music filled the air, the gathering crowd was sprinkled with people dressed in Victorian costumes, and vintage refreshments and even Hosmer Mountain soft drinks were offered for sale. Carriage rides, face painting and a coloring contest featuring the Benton statue added to the festive atmosphere. Boy Scouts presented the colors and rendered a history of Flag Day, several city dignitaries addressed the crowd, with Alderman Kacie Starr Triplett presenting a proclamation from the Board of Aldermen and Alderman Phyllis Young presenting a proclamation from Mayor Slay. Both proclamations honored Harriet Hosmer and the Benton statue, remarking that it was the first public monument in Missouri.

A "Hats Off to Hattie" gala honoring Harriet Hosmer saw guests enjoying a delicious meal prepared by Sqwires restaurant as they dined under tents on the Benton Ellipse. Musicians Terry Barber, Jr. and Jim Marks entertained in two homes while the work of local artists was displayed in other homes and gardens. The evening concluded with a silent auction and a lively custom hat auction conducted by Paul Sauer. The Gala and auction together raised approximately \$24,000. The Conservancy has committed an additional \$16,000 to the restoration of the Benton Monument, providing sufficient funds for the bronze conservation work expected to begin in the spring.

In addition to successful fundraising, the group of extraordinarily talented volunteers who made these events happen under the capable leadership of Carolyn Willmore, Pat Barber and Linda Weiner can take pride in bringing about the first successful collaboration of the Missouri History Museum, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri at St. Louis and the Saint Louis Art Museum. One remarkable result of this focus on Harriet Hosmer and her works is the recent announcement that the Saint Louis Art Museum has located and purchased for its collection "Zenobia In Chains," one of Hosmer's most famous works. This sculpture has long been out of the public view and was thought to be lost.

Pathway Project Takes Off

Serendipity can be a good thing. As the Conservancy began seeking grant funding for its major projects—conserving the Benton Monument, preserving the Boathouse, re-creating the Music Stand—one of our grant providers who specializes in aiding parks told us they felt that the pathways in the park should be improved ahead of other projects, and asked us to submit a full proposal to them seeking funds to make such improvements. We assured them that upgrading paths is a high priority for us, too, and we are now hard at work preparing a grant proposal. A committee has met with landscape architects to begin preparing specifications for estimating construction costs. Improvements will include more attractive and inviting paving at the eight gated entryways, re-paving many of the paths where needed, establishing effective path edging and drainage in areas adjacent to formal plantings and where soil has encroached on the fence surrounding the main lake removing excessive paving near the Music Stand base, and resurrecting the pathways that lead to and from the grotto bridge.

Our completed grant proposal must include a timeline for the project, and our plans for overall funding. If you have any interest in landscape planning, grantwriting or fundraising, we encourage you to join the Pathways Committee. Just email linderweiner@gmail.net or rbischoff@yahoo.com, or leave a message on the LPC phonenumber.

Flora Conservancy Grows

Whenever you see a decorative planting anywhere in the park, be it spring bulbs, flowering bushes or small trees, annuals or perennials, you can be sure that the planting is being maintained by our dedicated corps of volunteer gardeners. The reward for their efforts can be seen on the faces of thousands of visitors to Lafayette Park, which is so renowned for its beauty that scores of newlyweds continue to make it their venue of choice for wedding ceremonies and photographs.

The Flora Conservancy of Lafayette Park is growing, with membership (no dues required!) nearly doubling to 41 in 2008. If you would like to join the Flora Conservancy volunteers this winter by working in the Forest Park greenhouse on Wednesday mornings, or a little later in the season, to begin the spring clean-up and planting in Lafayette Park, just leave a message on the LPC phonenumber and Linda Weiner will be sure to get in touch with you!

What's Happening With The...?

Benches by the Park House. Enjoy the newly handsome look and comfortable seating of these historic benches. A big Thank-You to the tall gentleman with the Southern drawl, Ward Buckner, who stripped and painted the iron supports, obtained and installed new hardwood slats, and replaced all the rusty nuts and bolts to make everything go together!



Music Stand. Architect Steve Coffey has completed preliminary specifications for the re-creation of the Music Stand. We received one estimate of \$500,000 for construction costs. The re-creation will be closely modeled after the 1876 Music Stand, incorporating its unusually detailed decorations, unique 12-sided configuration,

and overall proportions, but will be a little larger to accommodate more performers. We are currently seeking an artist of any persuasion—architectural, graphic or fine—to produce a color rendering at a reasonable price for our use in seeking construction funds from grant providers and the general public. If you are a capable and interested artist please send an email to Bob Bischoff at rbischoff@yahoo.com or leave a message on the Conservancy phonenumber to discuss the project.

Playground. Modifications and additions approved by the Lafayette Park Implementation Advisory Board and the Parks Department include:

- a) Three large trees that have been planted near the playground to provide shade. Several more may be planted in the spring.
- b) The two existing red-and-yellow signs will be replaced by one green-and-tan one with a message board on the back. The new sign is on order and may be installed during December.
- c) Swingset frames will be painted forest green once the weather warms up. Painting will be done using manufacturer-approved materials and methods.
- d) Tools are available to round off the abrupt concrete curb cuts, and that will be accomplished as work schedules permit.
- e) The city was approached about moving the frog sculpture but they fear damaging it. We have approached Bob Cassilly's company who we hope to have move it as soon as a timeslot opens up in their moving schedule.

Park House Gazebo. We understand that the LSRC, which leases the Park House and is closely managing this project, has obtained sufficient funds and city approvals to complete construction by mid-2009.

Boathouse. Approximately \$40,000 of the estimated total cost of \$80,000-100,000 to stabilize the Boathouse has been accumulated in an account reserved for that purpose. Stabilization is the first step in a phased program to enlarge and reconfigure the boathouse into an event venue that can accommodate up to 200 guests, with adequate restroom facilities, a caterer's kitchen and other amenities. The stabilization estimate includes tuck pointing, roofing, copper flashing and restoring the decorative rafter ends. Construction work will not begin until additional funds are in hand or pledged.