



ParkNotes

a semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 5

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Boathouse Boogey Bubbles



Like a witch's cauldron, the Boathouse Boogey bubbled over with fun and a little bit of scary dancing. Many thanks to all of you who attended our Boathouse Boogey party on Halloween, spearheaded and organized by Lyn Demoss. The band, Gumbohead, was lively, costumes were clever or strange, and some folks even came dressed as regular people. A fortune teller and Tarot card reader were on hand to make predictions. We forgot to ask them what our 401k accounts will look like next year, but apparently we're going to prosper in our relationships!

Just over \$1200 was added to the Boathouse repair fund. We plan to begin demolition of the ceiling shortly to expose the rafters and see the full extent of damage to the roof deck. Phase 1 work will include repair of the roof deck and rafter ends, outside insulation so rafters can remain exposed, Spanish tile roofing with copper flashing, and some tuck-pointing of the brick chimneys and walls. Those repairs will begin to bring the Boathouse back to its original 1908 configuration. Of the \$100,000 needed for Phase 1, we have raised about \$70,000, leaving a gap of \$30,000 to complete the work. We don't need fortune tellers to tell us that we need more money, and we ask you to help if you possibly can by making a designated gift.

We believe the Boathouse can once again become a central focus in Lafayette Park, serving as an immediate focal and meeting point for park events, then, after expansion, as an attractive venue for catered parties. Besides, where else would we store the Swan Boats that once transported Victorians so gracefully across the lake?

Maximillian Kern Family Visits

In October, we were both surprised and pleased to receive an email from St. Louis resident Andrey Shaw. He was seeking information about Lafayette Park in preparation for a tour during the impending visit of his close friend from Seattle. We were delighted to learn that his friend is the great-great-granddaughter of Maximillian Kern, and that she would be visiting St. Louis along with her mother and father. We have been seeking any of Max's relatives for quite some time and were happy to have found this connection.

Kern, for those of you who may not know, is, the renowned landscape architect who became Lafayette Park's first superintendent, and the single person most responsible for shaping its outstanding features. Hired by the Lafayette Park Board of Improvement in 1864, Max developed what was previously a converted pasture with planted trees and a wooden paling fence to keep out the cows into a most attractive Victorian strolling park, featuring numerous restful vistas and eye-catching details. Three of the most prominent and endearing features implemented under his leadership are the central lake, the rockery in the grotto, and the magnificent iron fence, gates, and stone pillars that enclose the main body of the park. Each serves immeasurably to define its character.



Dan and Pattie Devin and their daughter Melinda, posing on the grotto bridge by the urn dedicated to Kern.

After 1867, Kern went on to become Superintendent of all St. Louis city parks. He was instrumental in the design of quite a few of them, including, most notably, laying out Forest Park. For a number of years following his service to St. Louis, he was a professor at the State University of Missouri and became widely recognized as an outstanding botanist. During President Cleveland's administration, Kern was tapped for a Forestry appointment in the US Department of Agriculture.

Maximillian's last work was at Holly Springs, Mississippi, where he continued to work his landscape magic in Johnson Park, famous for its cedars, rhododendrons, and rose garden, until his death in 1915 at age 90.

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From the President...

I always feel a bit bipolar at this time of the year-- buoyed by what the Conservancy has been able to accomplish, yet disheartened by how much still needs to be done. As with other urban parks throughout our fair nation, Lafayette Park continues to suffer from a perpetual shortage of the resources needed to maintain its grace and function.

Lafayette Park holds a unique position among St. Louis parks, and, indeed, among parks throughout the greater Midwest. Originally part of the common grazing ground of the village of St. Louis, it has never been held as private property. Formally dedicated as a city park in 1851, its thirty acres were developed by Maximillian Kern, one of the foremost landscape architects of his time (profiled in this issue of *ParkNotes*) into an exceptionally walkable and beautiful Victorian park.

If you would like to help restore and maintain this truly historic and delightfully usable oasis in the heart of our city, please consider making a donation or volunteering your time. To learn more, please contact me at rbischoff@yahoo.com.

--Bob Bischoff

What's Happening With...?

Trees. We are pleased to report that the inventory of more than 700 trees in Lafayette Park is now complete. Our forestry consultant has provided many detailed recommendations for future management, including pruning, removal, and planting. Pruning will begin next spring.

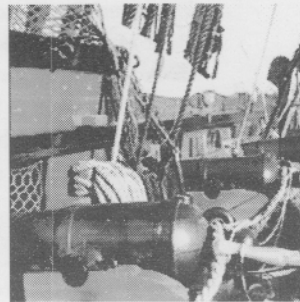
Benton Statue. Thanks to a host of volunteers, led by the tireless Carolyn Willmore, we have accumulated just over \$40,000 to restore the monumental statue of Thomas Hart Benton. Restoration will cost \$54,000, however, so we must still raise about \$14,000 before we can proceed.

1876 Music Stand. We have schematic drawings and a construction cost estimate of \$500,000 for rebuilding this truly significant focal point of the park. Our only real constraint is the time and people to seek out and present to potential funders.

Historic Walk. The committee led by John Bishop altered its initial direction for this Lafayette Square neighborhood project, placing the first embedded bronze plaque at Fountain Plaza, a block from the park. No Conservancy funds were used for that installation, although we do expect to collaborate with the Historic Walk group as our Pathways Committee finalizes the paving design for the corner entry to the park at Park and Mississippi.

Revolutionary Annual Meeting

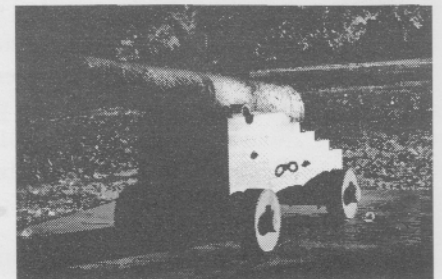
Odds didn't favor the fledgling American patriots in June of 1776 when several ships showed up at Sullivan's Island off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina. These ships had ten times the firepower of the Fort Sullivan soldiers, who themselves were outnumbered more than two to one. Yet, with a well built fort and well aimed cannonballs, the patriot forces repelled the British attack and won a spirit-raising victory at this early point in the Revolutionary War.



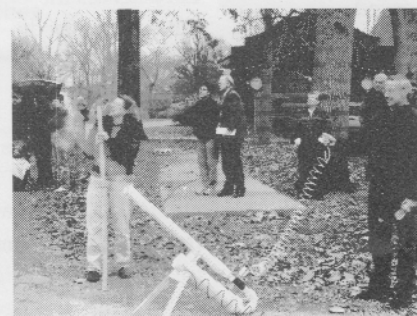
What the guns would have looked like on the Actaeon.

One of those British warships was the newly commissioned HMS Actaeon, which became grounded on a sandbar in the battle and was subsequently burned by the British to prevent its capture. Nearly one hundred years later, while dredging the Charleston harbor, three guns from the Actaeon were salvaged along with other artifacts. The salvaged guns were purchased by the Missouri Commanderie of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States and presented in 1897 to Lafayette Park, where they now rest so nobly, just east of the Benton statue.

Well, perhaps not as nobly as we would like, since two of the gun carriages are still pitifully dilapidated. At its recent annual meeting on November 15, the LPC celebrated its completion of the first gun restoration with champagne, a patriotic cake and even a working tennis ball cannon! Now come on, where else can you have such fun at a non-profit annual meeting?



The restored cannon on its new carriage.



The homemade cannon was so cool, especially for big kids.

LPC members also elected new directors Joe Carpenter, Andy Hahn, and Mark Kalk to the Board, and recognized retiring directors Jocelyn Jones, Paul Sauer, Bridgid Simpson and Linda Weiner for their efforts on behalf of the Conservancy. Status updates were provided for all park improvement projects. These are now available on the LPC website at www.lafayettepark.org.

If you'd like to participate more actively in this kind of revolutionary fun, we'd love to have you as a member and/or volunteer. Just visit our website or use the form on the back page to join us. We promise we won't shoot any tennis balls at you.

Maximillian Kern (cont'd)

Bob Bischoff, Ward Buckner, and Carolyn Willmore shared the unique pleasure of spending the morning with Maximillian Kern's great-grandson, Dan Devin, his wife Pattie, their daughter Melinda and her friend, Andrey Shaw, to show them around Max's old haunts. The Devins entertained us with some of the Kern family history, even including a few stories that might have been considered scandalous during Victorian times.

After an extended guided tour of the park, including much discussion of how it looked in Max's day and the Conservancy's current plans for its restoration and enhancement, we all adjourned to Eleven Eleven Mississippi for a cozy luncheon and more conversation. We found the Devins quite personable and enjoyed their visit immensely, vowing to maintain future contact.



LPC members lunching with the Devins and Andrey Shaw after their visit to Lafayette Park.

LSRC Completes Gazebo

Late summer saw the completion of a very handsome gazebo, attached to the western end of the Park House. In addition to providing expanded warm weather event space, the gazebo design allows for on-grade ADA access to the Park House itself, further enhancing its usability and desirability for meetings and party rental. Formal dedication of the gazebo will take place in the spring of next year.

The Lafayette Square Restoration Committee, the seminal group that was primarily responsible for the amazing renaissance of the Lafayette Square neighborhood surrounding the park, now leases and maintains the Park House as its headquarters, and also offers it for rental as a small event venue. To learn more, please visit their website at www.lafayettesquare.org.

Promoting Pathways

Following several meetings to obtain input from the general public and city officials, the Pathways Committee has continued working with H3 Studio to come up with a viable plan for pathway improvement. A draft of that plan was shown at the annual LPC membership meeting, and we are now working to clarify costs for each implementation phase.

In Phase 1 we are planning to resurface the most deteriorated pathways, enhance the paving at the four corner entrances, construct a new ADA-compliant pathway that will connect to both ends of the grotto bridge, and provide permanent edging around the flower beds near the Washington statue. Once the plan has completed development we will present it to all interested parties.

The Whitaker Foundation has expressed interest in helping to fund the Pathways Project. They have invited us to submit a funding proposal to them for approximately \$75,000, which we will complete before the end of the year. Matching funds will be needed to complete Phase 1, and we are presently identifying other potential funders. If you'd like to see your name engraved at one of the corner entrances just let us know!

"Mastering" Lafayette Park Gardens

The Flora Conservancy of Lafayette Park benefits from the volunteer efforts of many gardeners. Several of these--notably Mark Kalk, Susan Pinker-Dodd, and Carolyn Willmore--have been certified as Master Gardeners through a program supported by the Missouri Botanical Garden and the University of Missouri Extension. Master Gardener certification requires extensive initial and ongoing education in all facets of gardening and landscaping. Our Master Gardeners spend many hours planting and maintaining flower-beds and other decorative plantings throughout the park, not only getting their own hands dirty but also supervising other volunteers.

An important Master Gardener project in 2009 was installing a homemade irrigation system in the grotto area around the bridge. This has been quite a time-saver, in that it eliminates dragging sprinklers around. Building on that success, the Flora Conservancy has applied for and been awarded a grant from the St. Louis Master Gardener organization, to help pay for an irrigation system in the Rock Garden next season. This is the perennial garden on the west side of the park, near the mid-Missouri entrance. It has a large flagstone path running through it and is maintained under the able leadership of Rebecca Wright.

Year-End Donations

Imagine if your Holiday shopping could happen without you leaving your house. No crowds to fight, no surly store staff, no cold weather to deal with, and plenty of time to watch the new season of "Lost." All you have to do is pay the credit card bill next month.

Well welcome to the 21st century! The Conservancy has now made it super easy for you to help fund any or all of the improvement projects in the park, by making a tax-deductible, year-end donation or renewing your membership via our website at www.lafayettepark.org. Of course, if you want to work a little harder, you may still send donations via traditional mail. Just make your check out to "LPC" and post it to:

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