



ParkNotes

a semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 8

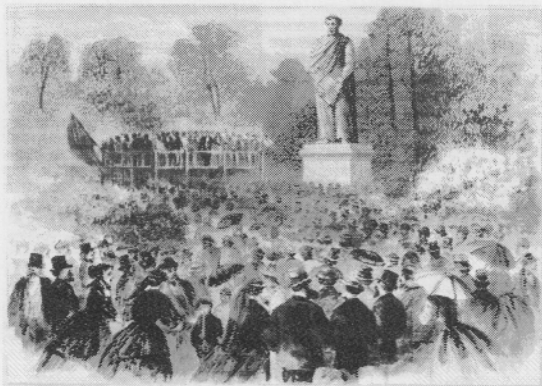
Spring 2011

Party Like It's 1851 or 1868!

The Lafayette Park Conservancy will celebrate its tenth anniversary at its 2011 Annual Meeting, to be held on Sunday, November 13. The Conservancy was founded on the 150th anniversary of the original dedication of Lafayette Park. According to the *Report of the Board of Improvement of Lafayette Park-Saint Louis*, published in 1874, "Lafayette Park was dedicated, and a Board of Improvement provided for by ordinance No. 2741, approved November 12, 1851."

A special anniversary celebration, with details still being worked out, will take place as part of this year's annual meeting, held under the (hopefully) restored clay tile roof of the boathouse. Save the date and join in our celebration!

Part of the celebration will be a rededication of the statue of Senator Thomas Hart Benton, one of Missouri's first U.S. senators upon becoming a state in 1820. Benton served as a senator until 1850. The statue's original 1868 dedication drew a crowd estimated at 20,000 to 40,000 people. The twice-life-size Benton statue was the first public monument erected west of the Mississippi, and the first in the United States to be created by a woman, the renowned sculptor Harriet Hosmer.



Artist's impression of dedication ceremony

Illustrations provided by Carolyn Willmore

Benton Statue Will Shine Again

Restoration of the Senator Thomas Hart Benton statue is scheduled to begin in late June, thanks to the untiring efforts over several years of Vice President and Benton Committee Chair, Carolyn Willmore.

Russell-Marti Conservation Services, the firm that restored Forest Park's statues, will be performing the work at a total cost of \$54,000. The statue was last refurbished several decades ago. It has since accumulated many pinholes, cracks and other faults that must be repaired, along with much unsightly black and green corrosion that currently hides its unique, bright golden color.



Early photograph of the Senator Thomas Hart Benton statue

The Conservancy's original cost estimate was for a much lower amount, and so we have had to continue seeking additional funds to complete the project. More than \$8,000 has been raised since last fall, led by significant donations from Kim Peterson and an anonymous donor, but another \$5000 is still needed to finish the restoration.

If you would like to help preserve this historic statue for future generations, you may send contributions to: The Lafayette Park Conservancy, 2023 Lafayette Avenue, Saint Louis, Missouri 63104. Be sure to indicate that your donation is for the Benton restoration. You may also donate at the Conservancy's website, www.lafayettepark.org.

From the President...

Immediately following the storm of a week ago, my better half and I strolled through the park to see what damage the high winds had done. Six or seven large trees had significant portions split off. One had even been felled entirely, landing on the Tunica-designed iron fence surrounding the park, where it severely bent one fence section.

One of the things I found most interesting was the varieties of trees that sustained damage. As a recent graduate of the TreeKeepers program developed by Forest ReLeaf and the Missouri Department of Conservation, I was not at all surprised to find that the damaged trees were, without exception, either silver maples, Bradford pears or Ailanthus. All of these cultivated varieties have weak branching, making them susceptible to storm damage. Just one more reason never to plant one in your yard--or in Lafayette Park.

The Conservancy obtained a Missouri grant in 2009 that paid for mapping and assessment of all trees in the park, plus the removal and pruning of some potential problem trees. Thanks to the diligence of Linda Pallman and Skip Kincaid, we have recently applied for a follow-on grant to do additional preventive pruning. Taking good care of our large, stately trees, many of which are older than any one of us, is an important part of what we all do to keep the park both safe and beautiful.

-- Bob Bischoff

Bring Your Own Popcorn...

Quick, what's the name of Dorothy's dog in *The Wizard Of Oz*? Better start studying the Internet Movie Database now, to get ready for LPC's second annual Trivia Night, to be held as in 2010 at nearby St. Vincent DePaul church, located at Park and 10th. The date is Saturday, August 20, 2011.

Our theme will be Movies, Movies, Movies! Round up a team of all ages, from grandparents to grandkids, and get ready to answer a wide range of scintillating questions, such as, "Who is Harry Potter's girlfriend?" (Beats me...)

There will be a silent auction to tempt you, too, and prize(s) for best decorated table(s). This event sold out last year and we're expecting it to do so again, even though we've squeezed in a few more tables. We'll provide soft drinks and ice, but feel free to bring whatever munchies and alcoholic beverages your hearts desire.----"Lights, camera, action! I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille!" (last words in *Sunset Boulevard*)

Rain Doesn't Dampen Wreath Ceremony



Photo by Carolyn Willmore

For the first time in many years, President's Day did not dawn cold and snowy. Temperatures were above normal, but a steady drizzle persisted all morning. The Cornelia Greene Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution celebrated Washington's Birthday under a canopy of umbrellas. Their wreath-laying ceremony has been a much looked forward to annual event in Lafayette Park since 1963, and this year's was no exception. The LPC hosted a reception in the Park House before the ceremony, providing a dry place for neighbors and dignitaries to gather. Sara Sanders, Regent of the Cornelia Greene Chapter, cut a cake topped with an image of Washington surrounded by cherries. The period costumes of the Colonial Guard of the Son's of the American Revolution added color to event, and Mr. William Groth, an educator and naturalist, presented a most informative talk about George Washington's military career.

Take The Mystery Out Of History

History buff Conservancy members under the direction of Carolyn Willmore are now offering two informative programs about Lafayette Park to St. Louis area organizations.

With dozens of striking PowerPoint images, "The Fascinating History of Lafayette Park" relates how thirty acres of the old St. Louis Common grazing ground became a Victorian strolling park, praised as one of the most effective pieces of landscape architecture in the United States. The Great Cyclone of 1896 ushered in a long period of decline, until the renaissance of the 1970s that began a miraculous park and neighborhood restoration. Attendees at the Conservancy's annual meeting in November 2010 can attest to the fascinating breadth and depth of information presented here.

The second program, "The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful," takes its title from a 1908 Globe-Democrat article about the great German-American landscape artist who "...was the original designer of Lafayette and Forest Parks, who laid out Westmoreland and Portland Places, and whose work yet delights the eye at Compton Heights Reservoir, Benton, Hyde and other (St. Louis) parks..." Even then few people remembered his name, and today he is almost completely forgotten. Rediscovered his life and works, for it is his shining vision that makes Lafayette Park such a delightful space.

The not-for-profit program fee for either presentation is \$50 for any size group. All proceeds go to the Lafayette Park Conservancy, to fund park restoration and improvements. The Conservancy also offers guided tours of Lafayette Park that cover both its award winning gardens and its historic monuments. To arrange a program or guided tour for your group, please contact LPC Outreach Chairman Carolyn Willmore at clwillmore@me.com, or call the LPC main number and leave a message telling us of your interest.

Roofing The Boathouse

Although we hate to talk about it for fear of a jinx, the long-awaited restoration of the boathouse roof to its original Spanish tile configuration is about to begin. Documents and funding are in place, and the city's Board of Public Service, who will oversee construction, is now identifying their preferred contractor to perform the work.

The entire roof structure has rotted and must be completely removed, so the boathouse will be open to the weather for a short time during the demolition phase. We are praying for dry weather. Construction should begin around July 1 and be completed this summer. We can't wait!

Once the new roof is in place we will be seeking additional funding to renovate the restrooms, the interior, the mechanical and electrical systems, and the fenestration (windows and doors). Donations including winning lottery tickets are welcome!

Free Spa Next January?



You are probably reading this when the weather is very warm and the air is heavy with humidity. It's also probably June, so that seems right. By August many people are wishing for cooler temperatures and air you don't have to cut with a knife.

Now, fast forward if you will to January. Wouldn't it be satisfying to visit a warm tropical place, just by driving a few miles? If that appeals to you, then come join us as we work in the city greenhouses in Forest Park this autumn and winter. Our volunteer gardeners, lead by a team of Missouri Botanical Garden Master Gardeners, grow plants for the Park and to sell at the LPC Plant Sale during the Lafayette Square house tour.

Stop by our Plant Sale booth during the house tour and we'll tell you how to get involved this coming season. You can also give Sue a call at 314-231-5367 or check out our website at www.lafayettepark.org

NWF Certifies Our Park

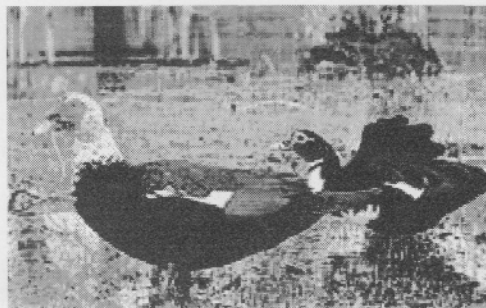
In 2010 the National Wildlife Federation designated Lafayette Park as a certified wildlife habitat. This photo by neighborhood resident Jim Willmore shows one individual who's seems to be very happy about that certification. Jim took this photo of a Brown Creeper as it stopped by for a snack. See the website www.nwf.org to learn how you can create and certify your own wildlife habitat, or just enjoy ours.

Visitors to the park often ask us about its waterfowl, especially those ducks that "...look like turkeys." Here's their story, plus a few more.

In the fall of 2009, two Muscovy ducks were "dropped off" at the park. A family had raised them over the summer, but when they got larger and messier the parents decided to get rid of them. Muscovy ducks, especially the males, grow to ten or fifteen pounds. Abandoning your unwanted pets is not a good thing for the pets, or for the park! In the spring of 2010 our newly named Salt and Pepper had four ducklings--two females, Brownie and Nippy and two males, Oscar and Chocolate. Brownie, the small brown and white one, has been missing for a couple of months now. At first we thought she was nesting, but it only takes 37 days for their eggs to hatch and it's been much longer than that. Salt laid numerous eggs inside a tree this spring. Five ducklings hatched out, but none survived. Muscovy ducks like to eat bugs. They especially love mosquitoes (yay!), fleas, worms, and beetles. When we are gardening in the park, they line up to get the grubs we find as we dig in the dirt.

For more than twenty years a wonderful couple that lived on Park Avenue came to the park everyday to feed the ducks and geese. Domestic ducks, like the Pekins, are unable to fly and depend on us to provide them with food. There were Pekin ducks, Canadian and African geese, miscellaneous wild ducks and Willy, the male swan. He wasn't exactly a favorite of the Bells because he picked on the other birds, but everyone still loved him because he looked so regal on the lake.

Al and Ethel Bell would take corn to the park every evening, rain or shine. When Al Bell passed away in 2000, Ethel continued to go to the park everyday. A kind neighbor, Sam Coleman, lent her a hand, carrying the food down to the lake and keeping her company. About a year later, Ethel also passed away. The Bells were long time supporters of Lafayette Square and



A pair of Muscovy ducks

Our ducks, geese and swans make a lovely addition to the park. Next time you are walking past the lake, please take a moment to stop and visit them.



were missed by many in the neighborhood. At a neighborhood meeting it was decided to put in place funding to continue care for the ducks as a tribute to the Bells. Care of the waterfowl continues to this day, with several residents now taking on the daily feeding of the ducks and swans.