



ParkNotes

a semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy

Issue 9

Fall 2011

Benton Statue Shines Again

"Old Bullion" Is Golden Again! This project was an early goal of the Lafayette Park Conservancy. The "Hats Off to Hattie Gala" in 2008 raised about half of the funds needed for the project. The remaining funds came from private donations and the Lafayette Park Conservancy.

Harriet Goodhue Hosmer's statue of Benton was cast at the Royal Bronze Foundry in Munich, Germany, then under the direction of Ferdinand von Miller. The marvelous quality of the von Miller bronze helped Benton withstand 140 years of air pollution. Like most industrial cities of the time, coal was a major fuel for homes and industry in St. Louis. By the 1930's, so much bituminous (soft) coal was being used that thick grey smog blanked the city. A Smoke Ordinance was passed requiring the burning of cleaner coal. One day in 1939, a heat inversion trapped the smog creating "a day the Sun didn't shine."

By the 1970's, Benton had turned green and had large black and pitted areas. Phoebe Weil, Director of the Washington University Center for Archimetry Conservation Laboratory, discovered that a statue's green patina, long thought to protect a statue, indicated a severe corrosive attack produced by sulfur-polluted air. Working with a team of art historians, scientists, archeologists and physicists, they developed a new method to restore outdoor sculpture. Their first projects were the Washington and Benton statues in Lafayette Park. Unfortunately, both statues were not maintained after restoration.

On July 6th of this year Russell-Marti Conservation Services (RMCS) put up scaffolding and evaluated Benton's current condition. Their earlier assessment of Benton found "several issues affecting the sculpture, including varying degrees of corrosion activity, surface flaws, areas of investment seepage, and damaged metal from water retention and associated freeze/thaw activity." RMCS began by plugging the largest holes and breaks in the metal surface with threads of copper alloy. Then the white plaster-like material left over from the casting process that had seeped onto the surface was carefully removed along with the protective coating from the 1970 restoration. These procedures were gently and carefully done using wooden sculpture tools, dental picks, and brushes with soft bristles. In preparation for a very low pressure cleaning with microscopic glass beads, the scaffolding was draped in plastic sheeting. St. Louis was in the grip of a heat wave, a streak of days with temperatures in the 100s. Working in the blazing sun at the top of the statue looked unbearably hot, but proved to be the coolest spot in the park since the protective gear was air-conditioned.



The newly restored Benton statue. Photo by Carolyn Willmore

As work progressed, the original golden colored bronze began to emerge. With all the green and black corrosive crust removed, the statue was polished and the patina was carefully restored. Finally, a protective coating was applied. Using old newspaper articles as a guide, the lettering on the base was gilded. Urns placed at the base of the stairs replicate urns in photos from the 1870's.

See the article on page 3 for a brief description of the re-dedication ceremony for the Benton statue.

From the President...

November 2011 marks the tenth anniversary of the Lafayette Park Conservancy, which was founded in 2001 on the 150th anniversary of Lafayette Park, to foster its restoration, development and preservation, and to raise funds for those purposes. Ten years have seen substantial progress, beginning with the creation of a Master Plan to guide park restoration.

I first became involved with the Conservancy in 2006, when Shirley and I moved to Lafayette Square. The LSRC neighborhood organization had just completed its magnificent restoration of the Park House, though its gazebo addition had yet to occur. The Conservancy was beginning to install its wonderful recreations of the four oval urns at the grotto bridge, and was beginning to raise funds to restore the Thomas Hart Benton statue.

Since that time much more has been accomplished. One of the three cannon from the Revolutionary War era has been restored, irrigation systems have been installed in two of the three largest decorative planting areas, park benches have been restored and more new ones installed, the grotto overflow drain has been repaired and seems to be working well, a new playground addition is getting lots of use from kiddies, dead and dangerous trees have been removed and trimmed, additional urns have been installed at the grotto, decorative planting areas continue to grow and improve, a gazebo was added to the Park House, swans were added to the lake, and wonder of all wonders, Senator Benton was recently restored to his lustrous golden bronze color.

None of these things would have been possible without the numerous unpaid hours put in by Conservancy directors, committee members, and all those who work in the park. The short but important history of the LPC has shown what can be accomplished if enough folks care about the results. I urge you to continue or deepen your commitment to making Lafayette Park better. The cause is worthy, the need is great, the time is now. There is still much more to do and your involvement will be key in getting it done

Other Project Updates

We have several projects in various stages of completion, here's a brief description of some of them:

- We have received our second TRIM (Tree Resource Improvement and Maintenance) grant for \$10,000 from the MO Dept of Conservation.
- The LPC has two presentations of interest to St. Louis area organizations: "the Fascinating History of Lafayette Park" and "The Man Who Made St. Louis Beautiful". Contact Carolyn Willmore (cwillmore@me.com) to arrange one of these programs or a park tour.
- The LPC Trivia Event will be held on March 10, 2012. Stay tuned for more information on this big fundraiser.

A Bridge to the Future

Renovation of our wonderful grotto bridge has long been a goal of the LPC. Thanks to the generosity of the Whitaker Foundation we're on the way toward that goal.

We have been awarded a \$75,000 grant from the Whitaker Foundation to be used specifically toward Lafayette Park Pathway renovation. Our long range goal is to make our photogenic bridge structurally sound and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

We've enlisted Architect Steve Coffey of the Coffey Design Group to supply drawings and specifications needed to be presented to the Cultural Resources Office, the City of St. Louis, the Board of Public Service and the Lafayette Park Improvement Advisory Board. The drawings are now in the first part of the process with the City of St. Louis.

Our Phase One plans include the much needed structural repairs, an ADA Compliant design plan to restore two pathways leading to the bridge and a preliminary design for the railing to replace the "tube railing" with one that is more historical. We'll start working soon on a final design of the rail.

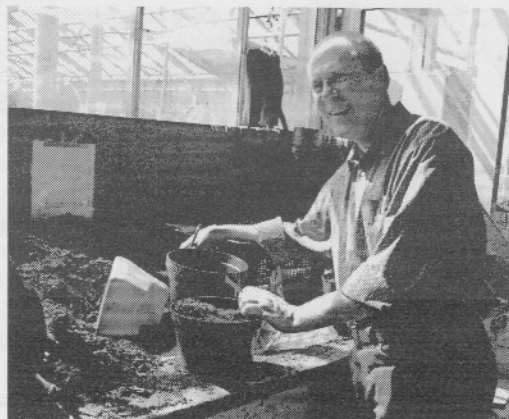
Then the hard part begins, as usual a project of this magnitude will require more funding. The Whitaker Foundation grant will help us to complete Phase One. Then we must start raising funds to complete Phase Two, the railing and the paving components.

This major project is a part of the Lafayette Park Master Plan. Visit this link to download a copy:
<http://www.lafayettepark.org/parkplan.htm>

Lafayette Park Flora Conservancy

We accomplished a number of Park beautification projects during this past growing season. We have planted many more perennials and shrubs in the Grotto area and around the gazebo music stand. We

also removed weeds from around the Benton statue and planted roses, the Senator's favorite flower. With the arrival of winter we begin working in the Forest Park greenhouses. Come join us if that sounds appealing. Our volunteer gardeners grow plants for the upcoming season in Lafayette Park. Call 53-FLORA for information on hours of operation and what kind of activities we will be doing.



Volunteering at the Forest Park greenhouses

Photo by Carolyn Willmore

LPC Annual Meeting and Re-dedication of Senator Benton's Statue

This year's annual membership meeting on November 13th was quite a shindig. We tended to the regular business as usual and then had two parties! All the hoopla was to celebrate our Tenth anniversary of operation and the re-dedication of the restored Benton statue. We also saw pictures of the proposed renovation of the Grotto bridge as part of the Pathways Project.

The Benton statue re-dedication ceremony included a train ride for neighborhood children

(courtesy of George Randall) as a reminder that Senator Benton was a proponent of westward expansion. We had a flag presentation by local Boy Scout troop 724, ceremo-



A composite picture of the Benton statue after and before renovation. Photo by Jim and Carolyn Willmore

Participating in the Benton statue re-dedication are from left to right: Ward Buckner, Alderwoman Phyllis Young, Bethany Spaulding (as Jessie Benton Fremont), Carolyn Willmore and Phoebe Weil. Photo by Jim Willmore

nia speeches and a brief history of the Senator's life. Assisting with the ceremony was Bethany Spaulding in the role of Senator Benton's daughter (and in period dress), Jessie Benton Fremont.

We even had a touch of humor as the large canvas cover refused to fall off of the statue even with very windy conditions. Happily, the cover did come away and the beautifully restored statue shined golden in the setting Sun. The weather was a balmy autumn day, the crowd was large and a post ceremony piece of cake was enjoyed by all.

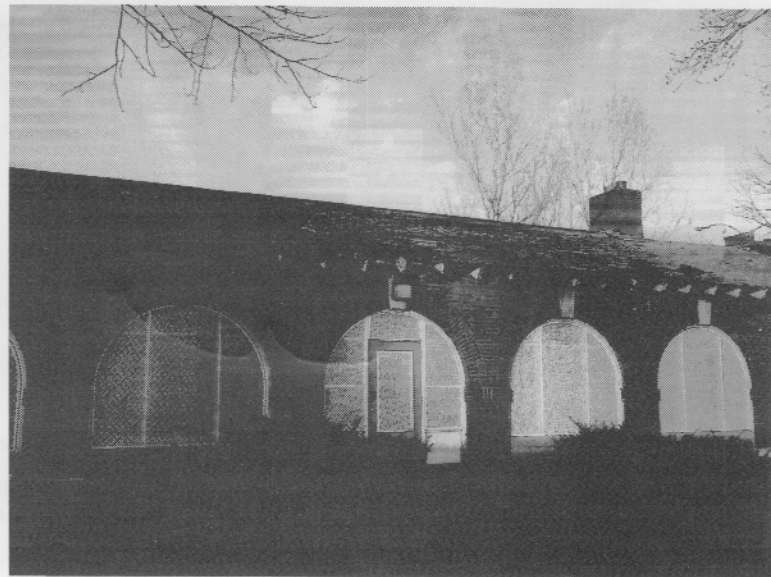
The business portion of the meeting included the election of new directors and officers. Please see the last page below our logo for a list of the new board of directors.

Boathouse Roof Gets Real

It's really true this time! No, really! Construction to replace the boathouse roof structure, rafters, decking and all, will begin in early December and will be completed by April 2012. Thanks to a funding partnership between the LPC, the LSRC neighborhood organization, the Near Southside Improvement Corporation TIF, and the City of St. Louis (special thanks to Aldermen Kacie Starr Triplett and Phyllis Young), the boathouse will soon be wearing a handsome new roof of Spanish clay tiles, as it did when originally built in 1908.

Although we call this structure a boathouse because it is near the main lake, it was actually built as a pavilion, comfort station and tool shed long after the swan boats of the late 1800s had disappeared from the park. Originally designed to be open in the summer and closed in the winter, it was modified in the mid 20th century to a permanent enclosure that could be heated and cooled. The new roof will be insulated on the outside so that the original interior look of exposed rafters and decking will be visible once again.

Making the boathouse roof watertight is just the first step in restoring this wonderful historic structure. Additional improvements, as soon as we figure out how to pay for them, will include restoring the original multi-pane and porthole windows, and upgrading the restrooms. Replacing the heating and cooling unit and more decorative interior and exterior lighting are also on our wish list. If you have ideas or would like to help fundraise, we'd love to have help on this important and exciting project.



Current state of the Boathouse roof. Photo by Bob Bischoff

Watch for further updates on the status of the Boathouse roof and be sure to look out for our next newsletter in June of 2012 where we will show the results of this winter's hard work.