



February 2016

ILLUMINATIONS

quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

Inside/Outside

Historical Society will offer two special programs about the Civic Plaza this Spring



Shaare Emeth under construction in 1931 >

This spring, the Historical Society focuses on University City's Civic Plaza with two unusual events: a City Hall "open house" Sunday, April 17 and a walking tour of the Civic Plaza and surrounding neighborhoods Saturday, May 14. The tour, to be led by semi-retired St. Louis County preservation historian Esley Hamilton, is bound to be a hot ticket, so don't wait to make your reservation! Please send in the order form below.

From noon to 4 pm April 17, City Hall will be open and visitors can wander at will. A Historical Society docent will be stationed on the first floor to talk about the ornate lobby; another will be on the second floor to describe the unique staircase and E.G. Lewis's office; a third will be on the fifth floor to talk about the City Council chamber, its statues, vaulted ceiling and panoramic views, as well as the searchlight on the roof (not open to the public). The program is free.

Starting at 1 pm May 14, Hamilton will lead a group on a two-hour walking tour of the Civic Plaza, including the Lion Gates, the Lewis Center (built as the Art Academy in 1910), the Community Music School (built in 1931 as Shaare Emeth)) and other buildings on the Plaza and in adjacent neighborhoods. For practical reasons the group will have to be limited to 30 and interest will run high, so for this special event, reservations are required and cost \$5 for HSUC members, \$6 for nonmembers. Included in the price is a copy of Hamilton's illustrated booklet, "Civic Plaza," published by the Historical Society.

Reservation Form

Civic Plaza Walking Tour

Meets at 1 pm Sat May 14 in front of City Hall, 6801 Delmar Blvd.

Please reserve ___ places at \$5 (member) and \$6 (nonmember) for a total of \$___ for

name _____

address _____

Mail with check made out to HSUC to: Eleanor Mullin, President HSUC, 7162 Delmar Blvd. University City MO 63130

Rain date: Saturday May 21 at 1 pm

Vote Yes on Prop H

The Historical Society urges a vote in favor of Prop H on the April 5 ballot. This is a measure to protect University City's historic buildings. A petition drive led by Don Fitz of University Heights garnered more than enough signatures to place Prop H on the ballot. It is a proposed amendment to the City Charter that would require a vote of the people before any of the following structures could be demolished or sold: City Hall, its Annex, the Lion Gates, the old and new libraries and the Sutter-Meyer House. The amendment is based on a similar one that protects the city's parks.

The ballot drive arose from concern over a developer's announced proposal to demolish Delmar Harvard School and replace it with an apartment complex. The school's buildings were constructed in 1912 and 1922. They have stood empty since the school closed in 2008. This is part of a disturbing pattern. The old library has been empty for years. The Fire Department moved out of the Annex several years ago, leaving the Police Department as the only occupant. The city has announced that the police urgently require a better facility, and that renovating the Annex will cost twice as much as constructing a new building. It has now condemned the Annex.

Bill Bryson writes in his new book *The Road to Little Dribbling*, "If you have a lot of good old stuff and you want to keep it, it will cost you. If you don't pay for it, you can't keep it."

Bryson is talking about England, but the same holds true for University City. A pattern of allowing buildings to deteriorate until they can no longer be occupied, then letting them deteriorate more until they have to be demolished, is evident. E.G. Lewis, who founded the city and built City Hall, its Annex and the Lion Gates, was famously a man whose reach exceeded his grasp. It would be a sad case of history repeating itself if the city allows the splendid architectural heritage Lewis left us to be lost piece by piece.

Preservation historian Esley Hamilton wrote that the buildings of Civic Plaza "constitute one of the most remarkable civic



The Annex in the 1960s. Built in 1903, it has been Police Headquarters since 1938.

centers in the country, an especially notable accomplishment for" a small city. He also noted that the buildings are a highly successful example of adaptive reuse, as almost all have been repurposed over their long lives.

David Heimos opposes Prop H. He is running for Second Ward Councilmember against Paulette Carr, who supports it. Heimos said that the City Council should decide the fate of historic buildings. But unlike most actions taken by a city council, the decision to demolish a building is final and irrevocable. Once lost, a unique historic building is gone forever. Such decisions should be made by the people.

Some residents have expressed concern that Prop H would negatively affect the Sutter-Meyer House, which the city leases to the Sutter-Meyer Society. Prop H would call for a vote on future long-term leases of historic buildings, since such leases are almost equivalent to sale. But Prop H would not be retroactive, and would not disturb the Sutter-Meyer arrangement.

Unfortunately, Prop H would not apply to Delmar Harvard School, which is owned by the School District, not the city.



David Linzee and Liz Beall rehousing the archives.

HSUC Archives Reorganized

The Historical Society has long maintained an archive of newspaper clippings, photographs, correspondence and other documents, on University City's buildings, businesses, residents, schools and government, and other subjects ranging from "Ballooning and lighter-than-air" to "University City movie locations," from "Auditorium fire" to "Wireless station." The archives are housed in the public library. HSUC staff draw on them to write articles for Roars and this newsletter and to answer questions from the public. Lately the archive had grown to the point where it was bursting its bounds. Almost literally--some of the boxes in which documents were kept were overstuffed and ready to explode. So chief archivist Sue Rehkopf and assistants Liz Beall and David Linzee dedicated two days to rearranging the collection, making it easier to use and giving it room to grow as U City continues to make history.



<Two Bagatelle Boards>

On Jan. 12, at the library, HSUC boardmember Ed Nickels gave a talk on the game of Bagatelle. Enormously popular in America in the early Twentieth Century, it was a forerunner of pinball. Bagatelle gameboards from Ed's collection were on display in the library's gallery in January and February.



Rain Man and Public Art

In April, works by Washington University student artists will go on view at various locations in University City. It's the 30th anniversary Sculpture Series, now called Public Art, a collaboration between the university and the city that began in 1986. "The series is the longest-running partnership of its type in the United States and has produced almost 200 temporary public works," a university spokesman said.

Sculptures generally remain in place only through the summer, but one work has proven to be a keeper: Rain Man. The sculpture by Greg Cullen made its debut in the 1994 season, in the fountain of Epstein Plaza. Cullen said that at the busy intersection of Delmar and Kingsland, he wanted to salute pedestrians. The original Rain Man was made of plywood. In the course of seven months in the water, he simply rotted away. But people started calling the Arts and Letters Commission, which administers the sculpture series for the city, saying they missed Rain Man and wanted him back. Jane Morris of the Arts & Letters Commission formed a committee that solicited donations and held fundraisers, including a dance and auction. Support came from local notables Leo and Kay Drey and Mary Engelbreit. \$25,000 was raised. Rain Man returned in more durable form as a bronze sculpture. Morris said, "I think he was very whimsical and made people smile. People relate to him like a relative." In October 1996, a rededication ceremony took place, attended by sculptor Cullen.

The Historical Society of University City
6701 Delmar Blvd.
University City MO 63130

Address Service Requested

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History Round-Up

*At the Missouri History Museum, "Spies, Traitors Saboteurs: fear and freedom in America" runs until May 8. The exhibition originated at the International Spy Museum in Washington, DC. It covers threats to national security from the Revolution to the war on terror, and the often controversial government responses to them. "Where did you go to high school?" opens Mar 12. It covers the 200-year history of secondary education in St. Louis.

*New initiatives are under way to preserve St. Louis's last surviving Indian mound. They were the subject of a Feb. 11 report on St. Louis Public Radio. Sugar Loaf Mound at 4420 Ohio St. was built by the Mississippians, who also built Monk's Mound in Cahokia, more than 1000 years ago. The Osage Nation bought it in 2009. They've obtained funds to work on the mound this summer. A tree will be removed and a house demolished to restore it to its original appearance. New radar technology will be used to explore what's inside the mound.

*St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay has announced that the Confederate Memorial will be removed from Forest

Park. The Missouri Civil War Museum has agreed to accept it. But the money will have to be raised from private donors to make the move, and that may take awhile.

*Heavy rain and Mississippi flooding have delayed the Arch grounds renovation, but the City Arch River partners have announced that the Gateway Arch will re-open in March when visitors will again be able to take tram rides to the top. Programs and exhibits will be in the Old Courthouse. The Central Riverfront section of the grounds is to be complete in May, and most landscaping will be done by fall. Kiener Plaza and the expanded museum and visitor center under the Arch are scheduled for completion in 2017.

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6701 Delmar Blvd.
University City MO 63130
www.ucityhistory.org
ucityhistory@hotmail.com