



ILLUMINATIONS

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

The Historical Society

of University City

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The Historical Society is preparing three **programs** for winter-spring 2011. Archivist Sue Rehkopf will speak about the U. City Fire Department, which is celebrating its 100 anniversary. St. Louis County Preservation Historian Esley Hamilton will give a slide lecture about cemeteries. Finally, Joe Edwards, Blueberry Hill owner, will tell us about the Loop Trolley. Dates and venues will be announced.

Annual Meeting

Sculptor on Lewis & Clark...and Chuck Berry

Sculptor Harry Weber was the guest speaker at the annual meeting, held at Lorenzo's Garden Restaurant Oct. 4. President Eleanor Mullin announced that the Society is in good financial health. We await the conservators' report on the lion gates. A new director, former City Councilmember Bob Wagner, was elected to the Board. Boardmembers Pat Perryman, David Linzee, Bob Kaufman, and Wayne Hanebrink were re-elected.

Weber said that he was happy to talk to a historical society. History and bronze sculpture go together, because bronze is as close as mere humans can get to permanence. He noted that the Swahili language has three words for death, indicating that a dead man gets even deader when everyone who remembered him is dead. Hence, bronze. "One of the last things that disappears," he said, "is a bronze statue."

Weber stated that historical accuracy in sculpture is important—but not safe. He noted that Rodin's Balzac, one of the most

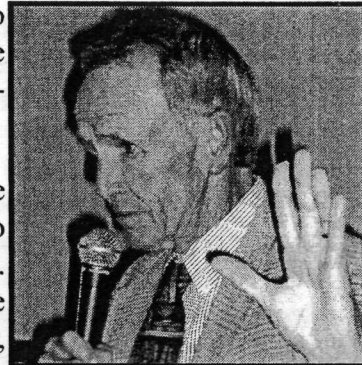
famous portrait sculptures today, was rejected at the time for presenting a too-accurate portrayal of the great but portly novelist. Weber himself believes that "there's something about bronze that demands truth."

Famous for his sports sculptures, Weber said that he seeks to capture his subject's soul at a vital moment: "What would it feel like to be Bob Gibson throwing the fastball," he

asks himself. So he did a lot of research on the moment in Sept. 1806 when Lewis and Clark stepped ashore on their return from the Northwest: what they were wearing, which type of rifle they carried, whether their faithful dog, Seaman, had survived the expedition. (On the last point, he couldn't

find a definite answer, so being a dog lover he included Seaman.) With the faces, imagination builds on research. Clark is exultant. Lewis's expression is more ambiguous, sensing that with his mission accomplished, his best moment is behind him.

Weber showed and narrated a film by Jerry Mandell, which told how a group of private citizens raised



Weber addresses Annual Meeting

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A Message from the President by Eleanor Mullin

Is there a more nostalgic time of the year than the holidays? I think back to my childhood in the 1950s, in University Heights 1. School never closed, no matter the weather, and we all walked. The Loop was as vibrant then as it is now, though there were fewer entertainment venues, and more 'everyday' stores. I remember Toby's shoe store, where the salesman would have you stand on a machine that x-rayed your foot to give him the correct size. I remember being sent to Schoenberg's Grocery to pick up a few things my mother forgot. I remember the drugstore on the corner of Kingsland and Delmar, where my friends and I would go and buy candy after school. And of course, the weekends! Most Saturdays, a group of us would head to the Loop with fifty cents in hand. First, lunch at the counter at Kresge's—a hot dog, coke and hot fudge sundae for a quarter. And then, across the street, either to the Varsity or the Tivoli, where another quarter got you a long afternoon of entertainment—

a cartoon or two, and a movie—usually of the monster variety. And better yet—during December, the theatres also gave you a bag of candy!

The Centennial celebrations in our city keep coming. 2011 will mark the hundredth anniversary of the founding of our school district. If you attended U. City schools, and have any items from them that you can part with, or make copies of, we would love to have them. A classmate of mine recently found a booklet our 5th grade class had produced on the history of Delmar Harvard. My husband found a film on a day in kindergarten at Pershing that his mother had made. What's hiding in your attic or basement?

The Board of the Historical Society wishes you and yours a happy healthy New Year, and we look forward to seeing you at our programs.

Annual meeting cont'd from p. 1

\$750,000 and negotiated approval of the location just south of Eads Bridge from seven government agencies (by happy coincidence, it is probably where the Captains actually stepped ashore). The 22 foot-tall statue arrived in pieces by truck. The film showed the ceremony on the Levee in 2002, with the reenactors in costume landing their boat and crowds cheering

Since then, it's been rainy, the river's been high, and the statue has been underwater much of the time. But Weber says it's doing well, thanks to its Permalac coating. Its concrete and granite base cost as much as the statue and took as long to build—it will stand up to the Mississippi for a long time.

People in the film expressed the hope that installation of the statue would begin progress to a more vital riverfront, but Weber is wary of big plans, including the current ones for the Arch grounds. Like most St. Louisans, he's seen too many grand dreams.

He concluded by talking about his Chuck Berry statue. It is nearly finished and in his facility at Soulard, waiting for construction of the bike trail/park where it will stand, in the Loop across from Blueberry Hill. It's 9 feet tall. Chuck was a pleasure to work with, he said; his only demand was that the statue show him with a full head of hair.

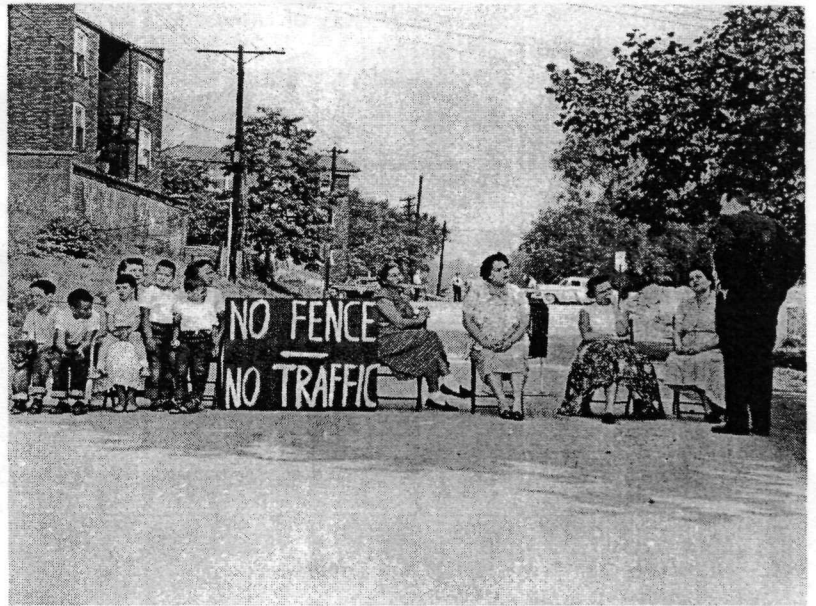


Century Plaque Presentation

On behalf of the Historical Society, Treasurer Marian Flowers presents a Century Plaque to Beverly and James Sporleder. Their house on Radcliffe Avenue in University Heights was built in 1909. The architect was Oscar Rabenach, the first owner J.T. Riley. The house, of stucco and shingle, is two stories tall and notable for its hip dormers and oriels. If you're a U. City homeowner and think that your house is 100 or more years old, contact the Historical Society.

Vexing Vernon

Roadblocks past and future



It was the morning of June 16, 1955. Harold C. Ackert, chairman of the City Council, was preparing to celebrate the opening of Vernon Avenue, University City's newest street, running from Skinker to Hanley, with a ribbon-cutting and parade. But he found the road blocked by protesters. The women, residents of the 6400 and 6300 blocks of Cabanne, whose backyards met the new street, stated that the traffic would be dangerous to their children and demanded a fence.

The protest made both daily papers. The *Post-Dispatch* headline was "Angry Women Use Chairs to Delay Street Ceremony" a convoluted phrasing that reminds us this was the placid '50s, and the term "sit-in demonstration" wouldn't be coined for a few more years. The demonstrators were identified only as "irate housewives." The *Post* reporter didn't identify Ackert by name either, but did manage to report the piece on the day it happened—the *Post* being, in those days, an evening paper. The *Globe-Democrat* did identify Ackert. He negotiated "pleasantly" with the women, explaining that he saw the necessity of a fence, and promising that a public hearing would be held in a few days. After half an hour, the women took their chairs and went home. The ribbon was cut, and "a procession of city vehicles, fire trucks and police cars formally opened Vernon Avenue."

Akert proved good to his word. On June 28, the *Post* reported that the city Council had appropriated \$3000 for construction of the fence.

This explains why Vernon Avenue has always seemed anomalous to the residents of the Parkview Gardens neighborhood. Their other streets and most of their buildings date back to the '20s. Vernon was pushed through in the '50s, on what had been wasteland, which

U. City acquired atop the pipe that carried the River des Peres eastward. The City wanted a through-route from Skinker to Hanley that would relieve traffic congestion on Olive Street Road. Because of the narrowness of the street, parking was banned between Eastgate and Westgate. No houses or apartment buildings face the street, only that fence. The result seems like a limited access freeway. The fact that it's only a block long doesn't prevent some drivers from putting the pedal to the metal.

A new effort is now underway to block Vernon, by people who are even more formidable than the irate housewives. They are the main property owners in the area, the Parkview Gardens Association and Washington University. In 2009, they hired H3 Associates to conduct a public planning process to refurbish the neighborhood's three parks and to close Vernon between Skinker and Westgate, replacing it, probably, with a bike/pedestrian trail.

Times have changed. U. City wants to stimulate commercial development along Olive Blvd and would welcome more traffic on it. At the public meetings in summer 2009, some drivers spoke up in favor of Vernon as a convenient through-route. But the H3 designers said that it divided the neighborhood, isolating the northern part and turning it into a trouble-spot—source of more calls to police than anywhere else in U. City. They agreed with those '50s demonstrators that Vernon draws fast, dangerous traffic.

The plan was approved by the City Council in February. In October, the City received a federal planning grant of \$300,000 for the project. So it probably won't be long until Vernon is closed from Skinker to Westgate.



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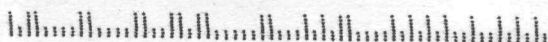
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Inside:

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- *Winter/Spring Program Preview
- *Vernon Avenue controversies

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Thanksgiving 100 Years Ago

Did Pilgrim men indulge in smoldering sidelong glances? According to the cover of the November 1910 *The Woman's Magazine*, the enormously popular periodical published by University City Founder E. G. Lewis, they did--and with good reason. Pilgrim women were lovely, even if they did have plants growing out of their backs. The issue contained a suggested design for the Thanksgiving dinner table from the Up to Date housekeeper, Ida B. Wells: "a basket filled with nuts and fruits, trimmed with autumn leaves and sheaves of wheat, and four strings of raisins run across the table." And there was the poem "November" by Sarah E. Wiley:

*Death in the garden now--but in my heart
warm life
And peace in place of pain and calm in place of strife;
And a hope that's singing loud of wonder ever new;
Singing of joy to be--of love--of love and you.*

