

February 2011



# ILLUMINATIONS

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

## Spring Programs

*The Historical Society is going to kick-start Spring with a series of exciting programs about the past of University City—and its present and future, too.*

**State of the City** \* 7 pm Thursday March 3 \* Fifth floor, City Hall, 6801 Delmar

The city's top officials, Mayor Shelley Welsch and City Manager Lehman Walker, will be the speakers. They'll give us the latest on the important issues facing us now, such as the budget, the audit, the Federal census, refuse collection, crime and parking. After the Mayor and City Manager speak there will be refreshments and conversation.

**The U. City Fire Dept.** \* 7 pm Tuesday, March 22nd \* Second floor, U. City Public Library, 6701 Delmar

We'll take a look at the fire trucks, fire houses and firefighters from 101 years in University City's Fire Department. Historical Society archivist Sue Rehkopf will be our speaker and promises photographs and stories, and maybe even a short movie or two.

**Cemeteries of St. Louis County** \* 7 pm Tuesday April 12 \* U. City Public Library

Over 200 cemeteries going back 200 years dot the landscape of St. Louis County. This talk by Esley Hamilton, St. Louis County Preservation Historian, looks at the various types of cemeteries that have developed over that time and highlights the most important of them, including the five in University City.

**The Loop Trolley** \* 7 pm Tuesday May 24 \* U. City Public Library

Who better to tell us about the trolley than Joe Edwards? He's been pushing for it for 14 years. He will fill us in on how close he is to his fundraising goals and starting construction, as well as the City Hall roundabout and other changes to the streetscape.

The Historical Society

of University City

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—All donations are tax deductible.

Books published by the

Historical Society and gift items

can be purchased year round

at the University City Library.

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## A Message from the President by Eleanor Mullin

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We have so many activities planned for the next few months, my head is spinning!

I spoke to Mayor Welsch last week about our March 3 E. G. Lewis Birthday party, and inaugural 'State of the City' speeches. She is thrilled with the concept, and credit goes to our Board member Elsie Glickert for coming up with the idea. We intend to make this an annual event.

Our friends at the Sutter Meyer Society are happy to report that they will be open as a museum May 1. They have decided to do this, as opposed to creating period home displays. The Historical Society will be working with them to provide pictures and artifacts which are in our archives for display.

We received a few artifacts this month, including an

original copy of the 1935 bond issue to build Hanley Junior High School—\$426,000.00. But this was a sad reminder of the fact that, during some office reorganization years ago, the school district inadvertently threw out file cabinets with their archives. So again, if you have any items from the school system, we would love to have them. Remember, this is the district's 100th anniversary. Alan Spector, author of 'Hail Hail to U City High', and one of our speakers last year, is working on a book about the district with our help

The report on the Lion Gates is in, and is being studied by board members, city officials and some outside consultants. There has been quite a bit of deterioration, and we hope to have a plan of action in place in the next few months.



**Snow-  
Falls  
Past:**

**1910  
(pictured)**

**and**

**1940**

We've had some heavy snowfalls this winter, which have come as a shock after the relatively mild winters of recent years. But looking farther back in time, we find that snowstorms have not been strangers to University City. The winter of 1940, in fact, turned bitter early. The November 11 issue of the University City Tribune reported that there were already 8 inches of snow on the ground, and another 6.5 inches were expected. (The paper noted that this was the heaviest snowfall in 10 years; even back then, St. Louisans were fascinated by weather records.) University City and St. Louis County had marshaled six trucks and 34 men. But city authorities were concerned, because they had only three teams of horses available to pull ploughs. They wondered if a tractor could do it. After being filled with snow, the trucks would drive to the "huge" vacant lot at Kingsland and Vernon, where they would dump their loads. Children liked to go to this lot as the snow was melting, to look for change, keys and (ick!) "used chewing gun." In addition to the city's 70 miles of streets, the crews had to clear the three underpasses (Delmar at Kingsland, Enright at Kingsland and Clemens) used by pedestrians, including schoolchildren. The photograph of the Lion Gates was taken Feb. 28, 1910.



*For Valentine's Day,  
a tale of romance  
and scandal from the  
early days of  
University City...*



## THE AUTO ELOPEMENT

On Jan. 14, 1914, Alonzo Heman was walking from the family home in Parkview to Washington University, where he was a law student. A car pulled up beside him, and its driver, an 18 year-old acquaintance named Gladys Smith (pictured above), offered him a ride. History has not preserved their conversation, but the result was that they decided to get married. Immediately.

So began the scandalous tale of the "auto elopement," as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch dubbed it. The "borrowed electric automobile" was prominently featured in the story. A marker of social change, it no doubt struck fear in the heart of many parents reading the paper, who recognized that the car, offering a combination of privacy and mobility to young couples, was a threat Victorian morality would not survive—especially when a woman was at the wheel.

To make matters worse, or more titillating, these were the children of prominent families. Gladys was the daughter of the former Surveyor of the Port of St. Louis, lived on Cornell and was a student at Lenox Hall, which was apparently the MICDS of its day. Alonzo was the son of August Heman, president of a construction company and candidate for second Mayor of University City.

The couple drove to Clayton, where they got a marriage license and headed for Clayton Methodist Church. They were spotted by an acquaintance, who telephoned Mrs. August Heman. She was shocked, but managed to get the minister on the phone. Alas, he had concluded the ceremony just two minutes before.

This crisis unfolding at the breathless pace made possible by modern technology must have shaken

Mrs. Heman to the core, because not only did she give a candid interview to the Post-Dispatch, but forgot her son's age. She told the paper he was only 20, so she could seek an annulment, lest the marriage distract him from his law studies. Later the paper established that Alonzo was 22, making the marriage legal. Mrs. Heman changed her story, saying he had promised to remain single until he was 30. Possibly she had reason to disapprove of her new daughter-in-law, for the Post mentioned that Gladys Smith had other beaux, and had made a date with one of them only hours before she eloped.

The couple set off for a honeymoon in Chicago. Mr. Heman remained silent. He had enough controversy already. He was in a three-way race for Mayor, and he was the candidate who supported his predecessor E. G. Lewis, who had left town in 1912, leaving debts and lawsuits behind.

It would be nice to report that the young couple lived happily ever after. But the marriage came to a sad if predictable end. The Post reported "the wreck of the auto elopement" Sept. 20, 1914. Gladys sued for divorce, charging that Alonzo was "morose and taciturn" at home, and sought his pleasures elsewhere.

Things turned out better for his father. In April 1914, August Heman won the election by 40 votes, a result the Post viewed as a "vindication" of Lewis, went on to a successful term as mayor of U. City, and is commemorated today by a park and street.



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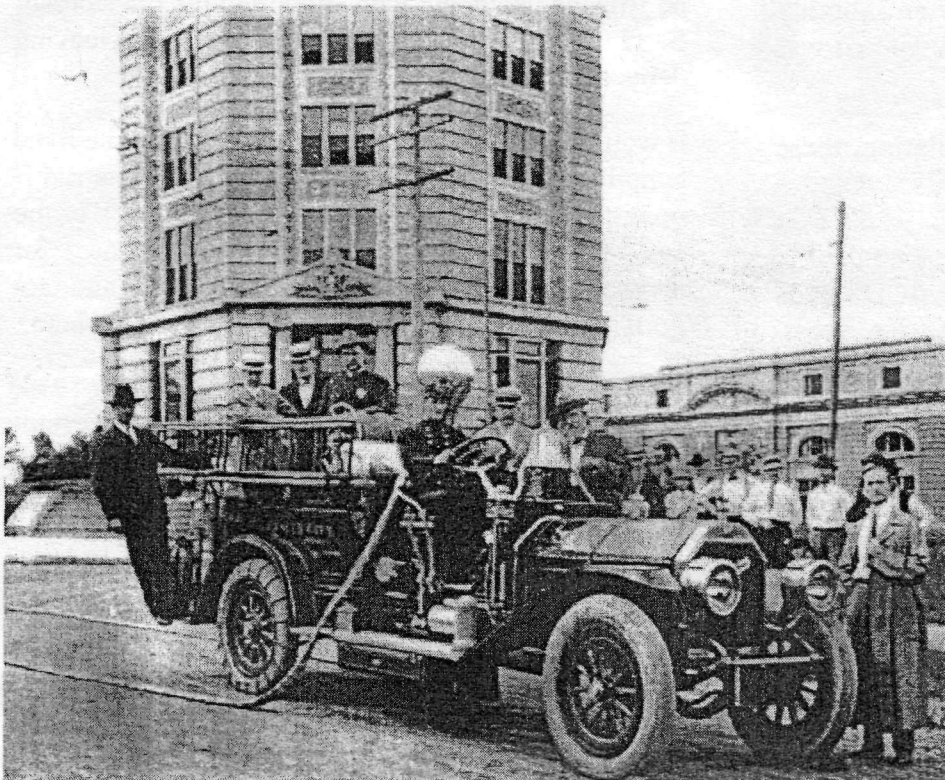
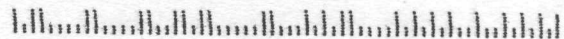
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## Men & Machine

With the hiring of Fire Chief Oscar Kortkamp in the spring of 1910, University City established an official Fire Department. The City purchased their brand new, state of the art Robinson 6 cylinder 650 gallon pumper/ladder truck that Fall, and the Department moved to the forefront of modern firefighting in the metropolitan area. Join us at the library on March 22 at 7:00 to take a look at the firefighters from 101 years in the University City Fire Department.