



illuminations

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

The Historical Society

of University City

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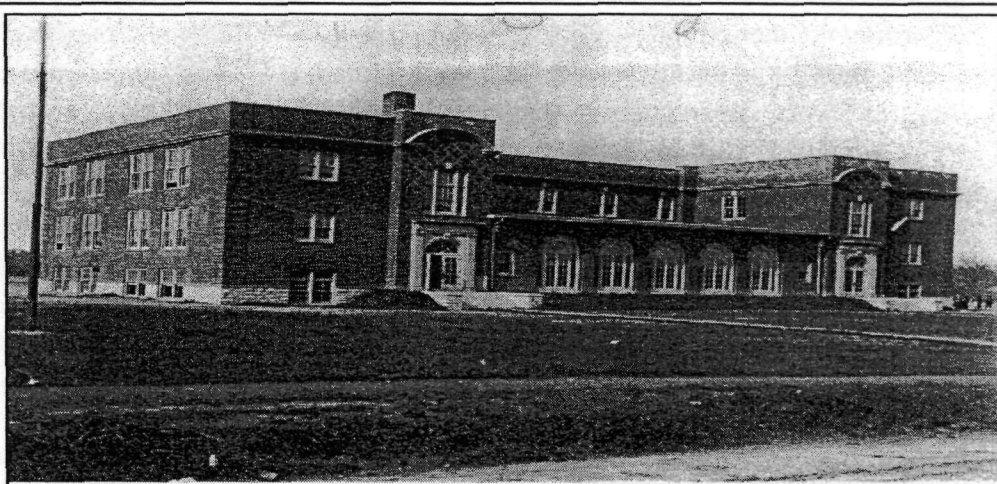
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Pershing School, 6761 Bartmer, after renovations circa 1930. The University City School District plans to demolish the building. The Historical Society opposes the plan. See page two.

The Old Chinese Cemetery

U. City Pre-history

by Elsie Glickert

The Chinese community's association with Olive Street Road has a history dating back to 1879, albeit not in the style we know it today.

The Wesleyan Cemetery was on the southeast corner of Olive and Hanley. According to *Chinese St. Louis* by history professor Huping Ling, it was "a cemetery of ordinary people" 10 acres in size.

Although Hop Alley—St. Louis's Chinatown with an 1894 population of 1,000—was located in downtown St. Louis, the Chinese chose to bury at Wesleyan Cemetery in what was to become University City much later (founder E.G. Lewis was 10 years old at that time). The

first Chinese interment recorded at Wesleyan was in 1879, a Chinese laundry owner named Wong You. Because of scant funds and a transitory attitude, there were no grave markers (early Chinese immigrants dreamed of making a fortune and returning to China).

In 1894 William Schneider, the Sexton at Wesleyan, gave the following description of a Chinese burial to Theodore Dreiser. The great novelist was then a reporter for the *St. Louis Republic*:

"They come out here in carriages, sometimes as many as 19 or 20 of them. They have the corpse in

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A Message from the President by Ed Nickels

Greetings for the year of the 100th anniversary of the "Gates of Opportunity," and as you may, or may not, know there will be a grand celebration this September. More information about this celebration and the events will follow in our next newsletter.

What I really want to talk about is the impending issue from the University City School Board regarding the demolition of Pershing Elementary School in order to build a new school on its site and the possible sale of both the Nathaniel Hawthorne and Delmar-Harvard Elementary Schools. The Pershing School was built in 1919 and was built by William B. Ittner and named for General John J. Pershing, a native Missourian and Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I. General Pershing was present at the dedication and laying of the cornerstone in December 1919. William B. Ittner also built both the Delmar-Harvard School, in 1913, and the Nathaniel Hawthorne School, in 1930. All three of these school buildings include historical artifacts that are very important in the history of University City.

HSUC Announces Spring Programs

Two film showings--one a premiere--and a timely lecture on the schools controversy will be the first Historical Society programs of 2009.

As part of the year-long 100th birthday celebration of the Lion Gates, the Historical Society will show the prize winning video, **Gates of Our Past, Gates to Our Future**, about the 1990 restoration of the monument. Local historian and former boardmember Judy Little will be on hand to answer questions. The program is at 7 pm Tuesday, March 24, in the auditorium of the public library, 6701 Delmar.

The story of how a grand old U. City mansion that suffered abandonment and fire came to be renovated and lived in again is told in the film **15 Princeton Place**. The Historical Society will host the premiere screening at the Tivoli, 6350 Delmar, at 7:30 pm Tuesday April 28.

Architecture and heritage of U. City's public schools will be discussed by Esley Hamilton, St. Louis County preservation historian, and Sue Rehkopf, HSUC archivist, at the library, 7 pm Tuesday May 19.

(Also slated for demolition is the Barbara C. Jordan School built much later and still in good operating condition.) Preserving artifacts is not an adequate mitigation measure in the demolition of a site that cannot be re-produced!

In April there will be a bond issue that would not raise any of your taxes being put on the ballot for this specific purpose. If it passes the demolition will begin. If it doesn't pass, the demolition will be delayed. It might also be noted that **IF IT DOESN'T PASS YOUR TAXES WILL ACTUALLY BE REDUCED.**

The School Board has elected to do this rather than seek bids to renovate and modernize Pershing School. Across the State, and under the guise of giving students "what they deserve", the Kansas City School District spent over \$3 billion making their schools "state of the art" to improve academic achievement and racial integration. At the end of the day, the schools were less integrated and they failed at improving achievement to the point that they are on the brink of unaccreditation. Considering what we've seen happening to many of the older and historical buildings of the downtown and central West-End St. Louis and the marvelous renovations that have preserved the history of these buildings and the area, one would have to ask why is our School Board choosing to go another path and destroy an historical building when another city that has done this has failed.

Both your Board of Directors and that of the Historic Preservation Commission are in agreement to oppose this issue. If this issue passes and the demolition and possible sale proceed, the Historical Society of University City will make every effort to preserve and care for those historical artifacts that may otherwise be destroyed. Our hope is that you will support our efforts as well and preserve this piece of history for future generations.

We all know that these are not the best of times financially and that with declining enrollment in our schools the sale of some buildings may very well be necessary, but the demolition without really looking into the alternatives is something we as historians and as University City residents should not tolerate. Again, we as your Board of Directors would appreciate your support as well as any comments you might have regarding this important historical issue. If you believe another path should be chosen, please write a letter to the School Board and/or vote NO on the bond issue in April.

Graveyard...continued from page 1

a coffin and rough box stowed away in a hearse, just like Americans. One of them will sit on the hearse with the driver, or in the first carriage, and drop little bits of paper with holes in them all along the road. I always receive notice beforehand that they are coming, and so I have the grave ready. They'll drive in and take out the coffin. Then they always have a bottle with them that holds some kind of liquor and a little bit of china cup that holds about two thimblefuls. One of them will take the cup and pour it full of liquor. Then he'll go and kneel down about six feet away from the foot of the grave and begin mumbling something. At the same time he'll have the china cup between his thumbs before him and he'll keep swaying it up and down and crosswise until all at once he pours it around on the ground. Then he'll take the empty cup and go through the same motions. Everybody takes a turn doing this until all of them have blessed the grave. Then they throw the cup and bottle down alongside.

"Then I put the coffin down and when I begin to throw on the dirt they pass crackers around to one another and begin to eat. Some throw a bit of rice in the grave, another scatters the pieces of paper around, and another cuts the head off one or two chickens that they bring, and throw them in the grave. When the grave is filled they go away."

According to Professor Ling, Schmieder's description was a vivid and accurate account of a Chinese burial in the tradition of China. The blessing, money, food and beverages were for the deceased's trip to the other world. They "were consciously preserving Chinese tradition in a foreign land."

In 1924 the Wesleyan Cemetery was closed, and in 1927 it was sold for other land use. According to an article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "On a November day in 1928 Mr. Lee Mow Lin, a leader from On Leong (a prominent and influential Chinese Society and de facto Chinese government in St. Louis), along with two other members of On Leong, piously removed the remains of 100 Chinese bodies, cleaned and washed their bones before placing them in individual metal boxes to be returned to Hong Kong and subsequently to their native villages to be buried near their ancestors."

Following the closing of Wesleyan Cemetery, Chinese burials were at neighboring Valhalla Cemetery

on St. Charles Rock Road. Of interest to University Citizens the final and most influential Mayor of Hop Alley (China Town) was a University City businessman, Charles Quin Chu, who owned the Shanghai Café at 6314 Delmar, and resided at 434 Melville in Ames Place. He was buried at Valhalla in 1976.

I remember my family reflecting about funeral corteges passing their home at 6805 Olive Street Road (both Jewish and Chinese) and stopping at Grueninger's Seven Mile House or Roth Grove for rest and refreshment before their long sad return to downtown St. Louis by horse and buggy.

A partial site of former Wesleyan Cemetery presently houses a grocery supermarket, and the early Chinese settlers who were buried there are at rest in China with their ancestors.

Hop Alley was demolished in 1966 under the St. Louis Urban Renewal Program to make way for Busch Stadium Parking Garage.

New and Returning Members of the Historical Society

Senior Memberships

John A. & Melissa Kreishman
Wayne T. & Annaliese Hennebrink

Individual Memberships

Warren & Sharon Danziger,
Peter J. & Rachel L. Lipowicz
Lewis Thomas, Jr.
Elise Joerger

Judith and Albert Baernstein

Family Memberships

Eric Wachter
David A. Linzee

Patron Memberships

Paul & Suzanne Schoomer
Mary Jeanne Suppiger
Johnnie Early-Smith