

August 2012



# ILLUMINATIONS

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

## Annual Dinner

author to speak on women's suffrage

The Annual Dinner Meeting will start at 6:30 pm Tuesday, October 9 at Pasta House, 8213 Delmar in University City. Tickets for members are \$30, for non-members \$35. Please return the enclosed flyer by Oct. 1. Our speaker will be Margot McMillen, author of *The Golden Lane*, which takes its name from a famous suffragist demonstration at the Democratic Convention held in St. Louis in 1916.

Margot McMillen has been writing about Missouri history and culture for more than 30 years. In her latest book, she outlines the fight for woman suffrage in Missouri. She was born and raised in Illinois, but has lived in Callaway County since 1973, where she farms and raises food for the local community. She writes a regular column for *Progressive Populist* and produces a weekly radio program, "Farm and Fiddle," for KOPN 89.5 FM, Columbia, focussing on sustainability and the local food system

## Loop Architecture and Parks History

two summer events

Meredith Hawkins Trautt of the Architectural Research Center gave a slide lecture on the architecture of the Loop at the Regional Arts Commission May 29. Her talk was based on a cultural/environmental impact study of the whole Loop Trolley route down Delmar, across Skinker, turning right at DeBolsion.

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The Historical Society

of University City

6701 Delmar Blvd.

University City, Missouri 63130

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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As I'm sure you're aware, the biggest item of interest and controversy in our city at the moment is the Trolley. Much praise to Mayor Shelley Welsch and City Manager Lehman Walker for continuing to hold public forums on this. Many of you know that I spoke at one meeting, and was quoted in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and, I'm happy to state, accurately. I started my statement by saying I was a lifelong U. City resident, and President of our society, which the article stated. What did NOT occur to me was that many people would assume I was speaking on behalf of the board, or the society in general. I simply stated it to identify my involvement in our city. Our board is divided in its opinion of the Trolley, as I'm sure our membership is. When this was brought to my attention, I offered to call the reporter and ask that a clarification be put in, but we decided they would either not do that, or it would be not very noticeable.

In any event, my apologies to the pro-Trolley board members and society members. I am pleased that our and other citizens' statements about the Trolley have had the very good effect, from a historical standpoint, of changing the plans so that the Trolley does not go through Civic Plaza, but stops in front of the Library. At least that is the current information.

As you have (or will) read in other articles in the newsletter, we have a very busy fall planned. We hope to see many of you at the Annual Dinner, and don't forget to ask friends who may have an interest in women's suffrage—they will surely find the program fascinating. I also hope many of you will be able to help us staff the table at the Preservation Conference. It is quite an honor for our city to be hosting this event.

### Historical Society To Host Major Events This Fall

On Sunday, November 4 we will host the quarterly meeting of local historical societies in the Council Chambers at 2:00 p.m. This event is very informative. Each society attending tells what it has been doing recently and promotes its upcoming events. Sue Rehkopf, David Linzee and Eleanor Mullin attended the last one in Ellisville, at a restored 'one room' schoolhouse; it was very well done and fascinating. You are welcome to join us.

Our city is the host for the 2012 Missouri Preservation Conference. October 24-26. They expect approximately 200 people. Most workshops/events will take place at COCA. Our City Hall and Council Chambers will shine Thursday night as the venue for a dinner, and board members will act as docents for informal tours of City Hall. Those attending will be able to take a tour of the Loop and U. City cemeteries. There will be workshops on stained glass, wood graining techniques, tax credit and historic building development, and creating an historic commercial district. Two of our members, Joe Edwards and Esley Hamilton, will be playing key roles in many of these activities.

During all three days of the conference, we will have a table at COCA selling our pamphlets, posters and other items. We need YOUR help to make this work, as we need to staff this table during those three days. Below is a form with the times needed.

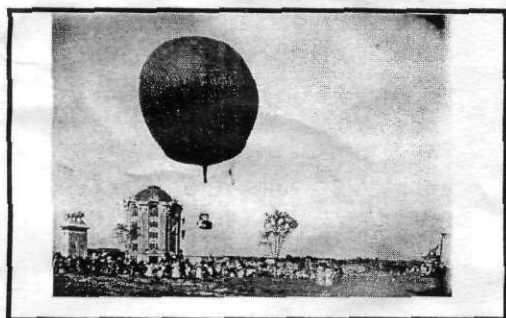
We need two or three people to stay for a few hours each. Bring your spouse, ask a neighbor, strong-arm a relative! This could be a real boost to our society, both in spreading the word about our city and making money for our projects. Below is a form you can fill out and return.

Please consider taking a few hours out of your day to help the Historical Society.

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## Airborne Adventure the balloon 'University City' by David Linzee



*The 'University City,' piloted by John Berry, rises above the American Woman's League Convention, June 14, 1910.*

The Great Forest Park Balloon Race celebrates its fortieth anniversary Sept. 15. But the history of ballooning in St. Louis goes further back—and University City played a prominent part. In the early 1900s, the public keenly followed balloon races, which were won by the team who went the farthest before landing and sending a carrier pigeon back to race officials with the news. A prominent competitor was the 'University City,' owned and flown by Captain John Berry, whose backers included city founder E. G. Lewis.

On Aug. 21, 1909, the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that the University City was in a near disaster. A balloon ascension was the main event of the Carnival for the Benefit of the *Post-Dispatch* Pure Milk and Free Ice Fund at American League Park. Berry waved to the large crowd and stepped into the basket, along with *Post* reporter Andrew Drew and Ethel Weir, "an 18 year-old showgirl of the Delmar Garden company." A clown drew a laugh by running away, as if afraid to ascend in the balloon.

It was a prophetic stunt. As the balloon rose, Berry climbed up into the "load ring", where he discovered that the rip cord and valve cord were tangled beyond hope of unsnarling them. This meant that it was impossible to let any air out of the balloon without letting it all out. Berry had no control of altitude.

He clambered down to the basket and quietly informed Drew. He was hoping that once they rose higher, cooler temperatures would cause the gas to condense,

allowing them to descend slowly enough to survive a landing. The men kept the dire situation from Weir, fearing she would panic. When the balloon reached 700 feet, she began to get suspicious and ask questions. Berry gave her his coat against the chill. The balloon reached a maximum height of 10,000 feet before it started to descend.

Gentle at first, the descent became rapid. The balloon flapped ominously. Far from panicking, Weir joked, "Now it's getting interesting, isn't it?" When the balloon reached 2,000 feet, Berry judged the moment was right to slow their descent by dropping ballast bags. The balloon's drag rope actually touched ground, but unfortunately by now they had blown across the river into rural Illinois, and there was no one to grab it. The balloon began to ascend, faster than the first time because it carried fewer sandbags. It reached an altitude of 15,000 feet. Drew noted that the Mississippi looked like "a yellow ribbon." They stayed there for half an hour. Weir felt woozy in the thin air.

Finally, they began to descend. This time Berry had the timing right in jettisoning the remaining sandbags. They came down gently in a cornfield and Berry threw out an anchor, which held. He pulled the tangled cords, dumping out all the air, with enough force to rip the balloon.

Nine days later, Berry tried to take another party up, but the balloon had too many leaks. He told the *Post* the balloon was worn out. He was going to throw it away, and perhaps even give up ballooning, which was too expensive a sport.

Two months later, though, the University City, either repaired or replaced, was racing again. Berry won the Nationals in Indianapolis. He was a colorful character who got into the papers often. In 1922, at the age of 75, he was reported to be competing in a race in Birmingham, in a balloon called "Atascadero, Cal." That was the name of E.G. Lewis' new model community, an indication that he continued to support Capt. Berry.



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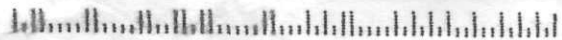
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## Annual Dinner Meeting Invitation Inside

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### Murray Prairie Dedicated

C. Edwin Murray Prairie at Brittany Woods Middle School was dedicated April 14, 2012. It is maintained by the Green Center. "Ed" Murray was a noted genealogist and local historian.

Murray, who died in 2006, co-authored with his wife Ilene *University City, Missouri: its people and events, 1906-1931*, which was published by the Historical Society in 2009. He lived most of his life in University City, graduating from the public schools and Washington University. He earned an M.A. from Webster University. He taught life science at Brittany Woods Middle School for 28 years, and enjoyed especially hiking, bird watching and gardening.

He conceived the idea to turn the unproductive weed and grass patch on the west side of Brittany Woods into an asset for the school district and the community. The prairie became a teaching tool. With the help of Dr. Sarah "Sally" Elgin and her students at Washington University, the Missouri Prairie Foundation, and the staff at the Green Center, the students learned about prairies, selected native plants, started seedlings, and waited until they were strong plants ready to be transplanted. School district personnel helped in allocating the space and preparing the ground, and the kids got to work digging. Within a year or two, with thriving native plants, it attracted a variety of wildlife, including several nesting bird species, and was a source of pride for everyone who helped create it.