

illuminations

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

The Most Interesting Mayor I Never Met

How E.G. Lewis, driven from town by fraud charges in 1913, inspired U. City to face challenges of '60s.

The Historical Society

of University City

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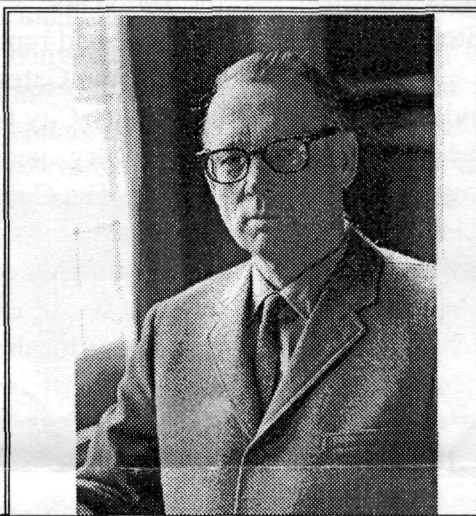
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at the University City Library.



Charles T. Henry, City Manager of University City 1959-1975, describes the lasting influence of founder Lewis

What conceivable impact could this improbable and charismatic character have upon the city manager of University City and the affairs of University City after 50 years? From my point of view, E.G.'s influence sometimes was personal and pleasurable. At other times he and his influence became a significant community force. On the personal level, he provided me with a very agreeable working environment in the Magazine Building, with its Florentine carved-marble spiral stairways, its magnificent gilded copings, its heavily carved oak panelings, its statues of Greek goddesses and lions, its painted ceiling murals of angelic looking women holding cog wheels, electric light bulbs, and other symbols of scien-

tific and industrial progress. It was a pleasure to lean back in my chair on a sunny working afternoon and bask in the colorful shade of beautiful stained glass windows while viewing the lightly-clad women, perfect in feature and form, painted on the ceiling of my office.

Thank you, E.G.

But E.G. actually made the city manager's life at University City far more interesting than relaxing. In fact, the pursuit and restoration of "Lewisiana" memorabilia became both an integral part of the manager's job and a necessary service to the community of University City. A kind of historic-preservation fever began to permeate the community.

Unlike Atascadero, [California, Lewis' other community] where the Atascadero Inn burned, the packing plant burned, and the Cloisters were destroyed while the town more or less stagnated as a small, sleepy village, University City blossomed into a truly beautiful residential community of more than 50,000 population by 1960. Most of Lewis' monumental works remain, except the Egyptian temple, which, after serving as another printing building, and then a movie-producing stu-

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A Message from the President by Ed Nickels

Recently my wife and I, while visiting our son and his family in New Jersey, took a trip to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. While I had seen both on numerous trips to New York City in the past, I had never been on Ellis Island or at the base of the Statue of Liberty. What an experience to enjoy these historical sites with my family, especially for the first time, and to wonder what it was like for those who immigrated to the United States and saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time. The Statue must have symbolized to many of these immigrants a passage or "gate" to their "opportunity" that awaited them in the United States.

In September, September 12 and 13 to be exact, University City will celebrate the hundredth birthday of its historic Gates. That's right; the "Gates of Opportunity" will turn 100. The "Lion Gates," as most University City residents refer to them, will have a birthday party like none other, complete with live music, a parade, vintage base ball matches, a tour of University City gardens, several children's activities and even a "lion" dog parade complete with a pool

party just for the "dogs". Plus, there will be a special birthday cake during the festivities. And, several decorated life size lions will be placed in various locations throughout our city to commemorate this event. It will be a party like none other seen in University City.

In 1909 E. G. Lewis commissioned sculptor G. J. Zolnay to create from plaster castings the ten feet high concrete lion and lioness that surmount the entrance gates to University City. I'm sure Lewis would look back and be proud of what the Gates have come to symbolize in the 100 years. Even though the original concrete statues are gone and replaced with "modern material" lion and lioness, the Gates have and will continue to symbolize University City to countless residents. Our Lions are and will be very special.

"The Gates of Opportunity" is our monument. Like the Statue of Liberty, our Lions welcome all to University City and they symbolize a truly remarkable city that we all can be proud of. Join the celebration this September for this important Birthday Bash. Mark your calendar--birthday parties like this only come once every 100 years.

More Lion Birthday Events

Fiberglass felines on the prowl

With the Historical Society of University City taking the lead, the Lions' 100 Year Birthday Bash Committee is planning multiple celebratory events in 2009 focusing on education and children. The Committee is co-chaired by President Ed Nickels and Board Member Petree Eastman.

The most prominent project will be to bring Lions to every corner of the City. The Committee has purchased 9 life-sized fiberglass Lions to be artfully adorned by artists from our community and placed throughout the City. A family scavenger hunt will allow citizens to seek out the lions and see parts of the city they may never have seen. The Lions will be in place from June until mid-September 2009. Once the Lions have served their City, they will be auctioned off at the Big Birthday Bash in September in order estab-

lish a fund for new "Gates of Opportunity" at Olive and I-170, our western entrance to the City. We expect this project to enlighten and thrill citizens, students and visitors to University City.

To engage children even further, the Committee is planning on providing ornament sized papier mâché lions to all fourth and fifth grade students in University City to decorate. It hopes that each school will have lion-themed art throughout the schools in early fall to get the kids excited about the events. There will be a writing contest for middle and high school students asking them to write a story about "what the Lions have seen in the past 100 years." The members of the Historical Society will be participating by going to the schools and talking about the Lions and what they signify.

Docents Wanted

The Historical Society seeks volunteers to lead tours of City Hall. We'll train you. Hours flexible. Learn about U. City history and meet visitors! Call Elsie Glickert, (314)725-9094.

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dio, was replaced by a magnificent Jewish reformed temple. It is now a music institute. Other parts of his university have become schools and school-administration buildings. The powerhouse was razed for playground space and city public-safety buildings.

The prosperity and tranquility of University City did not continue unabated. During the 1960s, racial changes throughout the community caused considerable insecurity among many residents. Some real-estate practitioners worked hard at blockbusting, and even the Federal Home Loan Bank Board headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa, effectively redlined the entire city by discouraging savings and loan associations lending in University City. Thus, University City was again under siege by the banking and real estate community. [In 1912, Lewis' defenders against fraud charges had published *The Siege of University City*.]

Fortunately, all this negative action has been overcome. Today the racial balance is stabilized, housing values in University City have skyrocketed, and private investment in new housing and properties is flowing into whatever vacant land is available.

The numerous techniques used to achieve this result included stricter housing-code enforcement, sustaining high levels of municipal service in all neighborhoods, undertaking major rehabilitation renewal in both private housing and commercial facilities, cultivating strong neighborhood organizations, establishing volunteer house-showing services (to combat real estate steering), conducting periodic house and garden tours, shaking up the Federal Home Loan Bank Board via Senator Eagleton [U.S. Sen. Thomas F. Eagleton, 1929-2007], and above all, pride in the city and its heritage. Old E.G. and his strange and wonderful works proved to be the focus of much of that latter effort.

The restoration of the 84-inch searchlight is a good example of unique and productive assignments. A very creative member of the city engineering department became so fascinated with Lewis' exploits, the searchlight in particular, that he spent almost all his spare time (and perhaps a lot of job time) running down spare parts and skills necessary

to activate this giant searchlight. He succeeded, despite an occasional personal bout with John Barleycorn. Once illuminated, the searchlight attracted people from miles around. (Consequently, on a typical bond-election day, we painted a huge YES on the backside of the searchlight, a gesture good for an extra 500 supportive votes.) Of course, my job included finding the money and resources to pursue this bizarre project.

However, the greatest demonstration of E.G. as a living force in community morale was our annual spring weekend street festival, a series of events, held around the Magazine Building, demonstrating to the world what a livewire community University City really was, contrary to the ugly mouthings of real-estate agents. The first such celebration started on a Friday night in April with a full-dress, champagne ball held in the city council chambers on the fifth floor of the



Lewis' office in 1910, later Henry's

Magazine Building, where in years gone by E.G. had held balls for his employees. All seats of the council chamber were removed, and huge 1920 Aubrey Beardsley sketches of graceful women were pasted on the walls. Potted palms, champagne by the case, bartenders, and dance bands were brought in. In line with E.G.'s approach to such affairs, a magnificent and fully restored 1937 Cadillac delivered the manager and his

family to the entrance, where we were greeted by the city council and a baroque music quartet on the Florentine staircase landing. The ballroom was packed, money flowed freely, and the event was a tremendous financial success as we danced and wine through the night. The next two days included tours through the city hall, reviews and presentation of Lewis memorabilia and displays. All around the civic center were dozens of ethnic food and beverage stands, games of chance, arts and crafts stands, and the like. Fifty thousand people flocked to this event from all over the metropolitan area. It was the first of several such successful annual affairs now held in University City. [Fair in The Square was held 1970-2000.] As with E.G.'s searchlight and tent city of 65 years earlier, I am sure many prospective real-estate purchasers have been attracted and impressed. Thank you, E.G., for this fun

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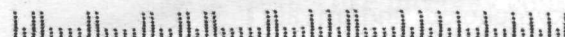
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Inside U. City Lions' Birthday Celebration

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Mayor continued from p.3

and for your help. We did well by you.

Although some may remember Mayor Edward Gardner Lewis as simply a cheat and a scoundrel, always too free with other people's money, I and many others think he was a fabulous, thoroughly delightful, charismatic producer, a gifted planner and entrepreneur, even if a rogue. His career as a magnificent manipulator of the American free enterprise system outshines anything Hollywood has produced, and so I say, "May your blithe spirit live on, E.G." Reprinted from *THE SERVANTS OF ALL* ed. by Leroy Harlow, Brigham Young University Press 1981

HSUC Publishes New Memoir of Ames Place

Later this spring, the HSUC will publish the first booklet in its series on "Growing up in University City." The first memoir has been submitted by noted St. Louis author and pianist, Elizabeth Gentry Sayad. The booklet's title is

"MEMOIRS OF A CHILDHOOD IN AMES PLACE" and will contain photos of Ms. Sayad as a young girl along with her recollections of growing up in Ames Place. The booklet will sell for \$5.00 and be available at the University City Public Library, or by mail with a postage and handling charge of \$1.50. Two excerpts follow:

"My parents added a large sleeping porch on the rear of the house's second floor for hot summer nights. Fans blew constantly in every room. When the Ames Place Bridge Club rotated to our home for their annual dinner, Daddy would place large blocks of ice behind the fans for instant air-conditioning."

and

"The urbanity of brick alleys, night watchmen with the regular rhythm of their night sticks on the sidewalks, organ-grinders with dancing monkeys, and the clanging of the knife-sharpeners' carts gave Ames Place a special character."

The booklet has been designed and laid out by board member Carol Diaz-Granados. If you have a collection of clear photos from the 50s or earlier and can compose your memoirs for a similar booklet, please get in touch with Carol at cdiaz-granados@wustl.edu.