



# illuminations

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

The Historical Society

of University City

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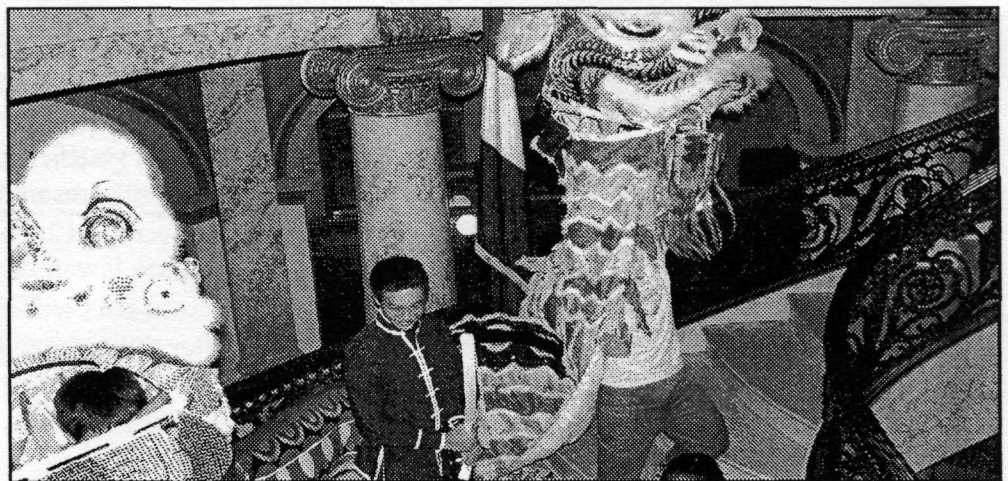
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*Lion Dancers on City Hall stairs*

## City Hall Birthday Party

*--Finale of Lion Year--*

University City has been celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gates of Opportunity on Delmar throughout 2009. The grand finale of the Year of the Lions was the Lion Gala and Auction, held Oct. 10 at City Hall. The Parks Foundation and the City joined with the Historical Society in putting on the event. A group from the Chinese Language School performed the lion dance in the lobby as guests enjoyed cocktails, wine and chat. Then all went up to the Council Chamber. Ed Nickels thanked Petree Eastman, assistant city manager, and others for their work on the Lion Year events.

Mayor Joe Adams, who is stepping down to run for the State Senate next year, received the first Gates of Opportunity award for his contributions to historic preservation. Adams thanked his predecessor and mentor, Mayor Nathan

Kauffman, and said, "You don't know how great it's been" being mayor. Guests enjoyed a lavish buffet spread, and then it was time for the auction. Seven of the painted fiberglass lion statues that had stood around the city all summer were auctioned by Bill Henson of the Fire Department. Some lions will remain on public view: at the public library, high school and Centennial Commons. The lion quilt prepared by Circle in the Square quilters was raffled, and won by Bob Kauffman. A silent auction was also held to benefit the Parks Foundation. The evening raised more than \$15,000. After the Gala bills are paid, the money will go into a special fund for preservation and repair of the Gates of Opportunity. The City Hall searchlight went on to mark the successful completion of the auction and party.

**A Message from the President  
by Ed Nickels**

The Lion's Birthday Bash was a big success with the total amount raised over \$15,000. The final amount will not be known until later this month and that amount will be placed in the Lion's Fund for future care and maintenance of our "Gates of Opportunity" All the events associated with the Birthday Bash drew much praise and many accolades from all over our city from both young and old. It was a delight to see our young school children taking such pride in decorating the small lions and tigers. A special thanks to Society members Petree Eastman and Judy Prange, for without them I doubt that the Bash would have been as big of a success as it was. How spectacular it was that the historic searchlight atop city hall should light our beloved "Lion" and "Tiger" as a fitting ending to a truly fantastic birthday party. Also, thanks should go to all those other Society members as well as the many City employees, Loop businesses, the U. City in Bloom and the Parks Foundation members who made this event so memorable. Again, thanks to all. It was truly a team effort of the highest caliber.

Likewise our annual banquet was a success as well. Robbi Courtaway's talk about prohibition in St.

Louis and beyond and the U. City connection taken from her book *Wetter Than The Mississippi* was a big hit.

Speaking about books, the long awaited book by Ed and Ilene Murray (who took on the task of finishing the book after Ed died) is finally completed and at the printers. *University City, Missouri: Its People and Events 1906-1931* is set to debut the middle of December and just in time for the holidays. Some 400 pages of information and stories should be a must for every U. City historian. Copies may be ordered now through your Historical Society for \$35 per copy. Also, Ilene will present a program based on the book sometime this spring. I'm sure you will not want to miss that program.

This will be my last message as your President. After three short years I will be turning the reigns over to Eleanor Mullen who I know will do an excellent job as your President. I would also like to thank all the Board Members both past and present who have assisted me during the past three years.

**Annual Dinner  
"Dry" U. City**

The Historical Society annual dinner was held Sept. 22 at the public library. The speaker was Robbi Courtaway, author of *Wetter than the Mississippi*, a history of Missouri during Prohibition. Courtaway's humorous illustrated presentation took members back to the days when it was said, "There's a still behind every bush in St. Louis County." Olive Street Road in U. City boasted several speakeasies, notably Spotty Reagan's Olive Inn. North and South Avenue was known as "the whiskey chute" because it was a major bootlegging route. Still, University City was not the most infamous town in the county; Brentwood was far worse.

On a more serious note, Courtaway said that Prohibition was especially disastrous for Missouri's "legal" economy. It ruined for decades the thriving wine business centered on Hermann and closed St. Louis's many breweries. The blow to the local economy was so heavy that people said for St. Louis, the Depression came early. Some brewers had seen trouble coming. Bevo Mill was the Busch family's attempt to persuade Temperance activists that a restaurant could

be respectable and still serve beer. The brewery also introduced a non-alcoholic drink called Bevo. But the Temperance supporters would not be deterred. Women heavily supported Prohibition, and the movement had a strong undercurrent of nativist prejudice against cities, Catholics and immigrants. Courtaway concluded with photos of happy crowds celebrating the repeal of Prohibition in downtown St. Louis in 1933.

**First Program of 2010**

*Baby-boomer days*

Alan Spector will discuss his book *Hail, Hail to U. City High* at the public library, 6701 Delmar, at 7 pm Jan. 14, 2010. The author is a member of the Class of '64. For more about him and the book, go to [aaspector.com](http://aaspector.com). The event is co-sponsored by the library and Historical Society.

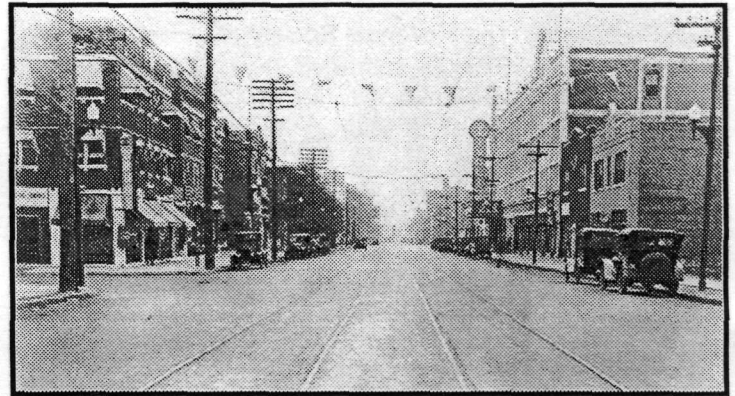


## Loop History Online

--New photo archive--

A collection of Loop photos is newly available on the U. City Library website ([ucpl.lib.mo.us](http://ucpl.lib.mo.us)). The photos document the Delmar business and entertainment district from 1902 to the present. The work was supported by a grant under the Library Services and Technology Act, the third the library has received to maintain and make available historical photographs.

"There are 169 now, and the collection will grow," said Historical Society Archivist Sue Rehkopf, who researched and scanned the photos. They come from a variety of sources, most from the library's own collection. Pictures from the World's Fair era come from the collection of Etta Taylor, whose family helped establish Parkview. The Urban Renewal era is documented by photos from the Land Clearance for Development authority, which were stored in the library basement. Joe Edwards, owner of Blueberry Hill, provided his own pictures of the tavern, which opened in the early 1970s. "The evolution of the loop tells a story," Sue Rehkopf said, noting that in street-car days it was a shopping street for locals, with grocery stores, pharmacies, and hardware stores. The



The Tivoli, 1925

Loop went into decline in the late '60s and early '70s, then was reborn as the glittering entertainment district we know today.

The collection is short of recent pictures. In the '80s, color slides become more popular, and they discolor and can't be digitized. Now people use digital cameras. Such pictures, captives of technology that becomes obsolete, tend to disappear. If anyone would like to make prints of their photos of the Delmar scene and events, Sue said, "we'd love to have them."

### ***The Hydraulic Seltzer Wagon in a Sharp Brush With Oldfield, Kiser and Webb on the Delmar Track,***

runs the caption of this drawing from the front page of the May 7, 1905 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Delmar Race Track was a well-known venue for horseracing. But it also held automobile races. The accompanying story is a humorous one, in which the *Post-Dispatch* pretends to sponsor the imaginary Seltzer Wagon. But the other cars and drivers in that day's race were real. The *New York Times* reported that A.C.



three-heat special match.

It was unusual for Oldfield (1878-1946) to lose. He was a motorcycle racer whom Henry Ford converted to car-racing. He became famous as the first man to drive at a mile a minute around an oval track. In the early 1900s he was traveling all over the country, competing in special events, similar to the one at the Delmar Track.

In fact, he much preferred time trials and match races to conventional races. Though these irregular events made Oldfield rich, they eventually got him suspended by the racing governing body of the time, the now much-changed

Webb defeated Barney Oldfield and Earl Kiser in a

American Automobile Association