



ILLUMINATIONS

A quarterly publication of the Historical Society of University City

The Historical Society

of University City

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In the Swim

Heman Park Pool opens for another season on Memorial Day. It's the oldest municipal pool in St. Louis County, built in 1933. Before that, University. City swimmers who were members of the YMCA could swim there. Others had to trek to the Meramec River. In summer 1928, they got a more appealing option.

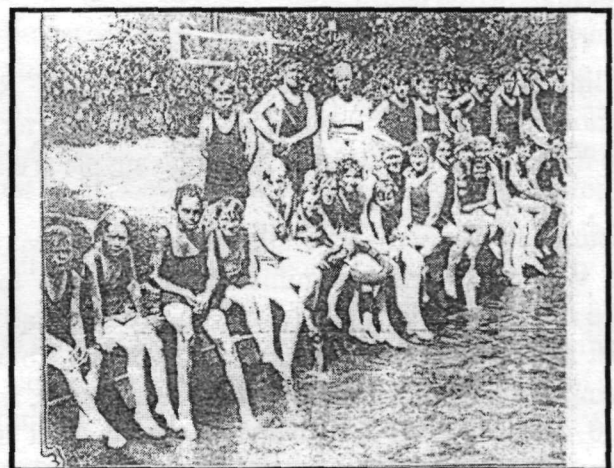
Eugene D. Ruth, Jr. was a real estate man who lived at 7210 Waterman Avenue. Every spring he tilled his backyard and planted vegetables. But he had been elected mayor in 1926 and the cares of office were taking their toll. In spring of '28, he decided not to garden. He asked his wife and son if they wanted to go on vacation that summer, or put in a swimming pool. Mrs. Ruth was neutral, but Dorsey,

15, was a keen swimmer. So the Ruths decided to stay put, install a pool—and invite the whole city over for a swim.

The St. Louis Globe-Democrat reported in a lavish photo spread Aug 12, 1928 that the pool took 6 weeks to put in. It was 40 feet by 20, 3 to 8 ft. deep, and held 35000 gallons of water. (The next year, Mayor Ruth would negotiate cheaper water rates for U. Citians.) It was equipped with ropes, ladders and a diving board. The pool opened on Decoration Day (Memorial Day). "Dorsey broadcast the news around the neighborhood, and you should have seen the crowd," Ruth told the Globe. "We had a hundred people in the water all day."

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U. City youngsters enjoy Mayor Ruth's backyard pool, August 1928



A Message from the President by Eleanor Mullin

Well, I know I'm writing to a very well informed group! The Board was thrilled with our inaugural "State of the City" meeting—over 60 attended, a few became members, and we hope more will, and will attend our upcoming programs. Mayor Welsch and City Manager Walker impressed me with their thoughtfulness and visions for our city. Sue Rehkopf's program on our Fire Department was wonderful, and we were pleased to host and get to know many of our fire men and women at that event. As with so many other aspects of St. Louis history, we have been leaders in fire fighting also—the first with state of the art equipment and training. And of course, Esley Hamilton's presentation of Cemeteries was great fun—in an eerie way!

Congratulations to our friends at the Sutter Meyer Society—the opening May 1st was wonderful—house and grounds looked immaculate, information was great, and the large crowd certainly enjoyed viewing and socializing.

Repairs for the Lions, after our inspection, are still in the investigation process. Local sculptor Harry Weber, who was the speaker at our last annual dinner, is going to bid on the repairs. The Fire Dept graciously took Harry Weber up to the Lions on May 9, but high winds had them back on the ground within a minute. We will reschedule as soon as possible. The estimate for repairs from the Russel-Marti Conservation Company is an astounding \$90,000.00, and that does not cover the pylons. Of course, our City Council will be involved, and we are hopeful that funding can be found with grants, state or national. If you have any knowledge or expertise in this area, please let us know.

If I don't see you at the May 24th program (Joe Edwards speaking about the Trolley), have a wonderful summer, and we'll see you at the Annual dinner in September

Swim, continued from p. 1

It soon became apparent to the Mayor that his grown-up neighbors wanted a dip, too. For their convenience he put a locker room, with showers, in the basement. He also rigged floodlights for night swimming. A line of trees provided shade and a modesty screen from the street. One thing the pool lacked was a life-guard. Ruth couldn't afford one. He just asked people if they could swim, and if they said they could, he let them in. No fees were charged. The only rule was, "All must conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen. And all do," Ruth said. The Globe did not provide any information on the filtration system, or even if there was one. The pool had to be cleaned every 10 days. All boys present were required to help Dorsey with the job.

Lolling in his lawn chair, the Mayor bragged of "Ruth Summer Resort, University City," to the reporter: "I like it so well, I don't think I'll ever go anyplace else."

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Ruth was reelected Mayor. His was an eventful administration, because these were heady days for the city. University City had the most rapid growth of any town in St. Louis County, having grown, according to Ruth's own figures, from 2500 citizens to 35000 (which is about what it is today). Residents enjoyed amenities unknown to other

suburbanites, like the 9-hole golf course Ruth was building, in the park that today bears his name. It was Ruth who made E.G. Lewis' Magazine Building, then being used as a warehouse, into City Hall. He was a far-sighted official who led a group seeking to merge city and county. But factionalism on the Board of Alderman (City Council) and corruption charges, never proven, dogged him. An attempt to widen Hanley Road angered property owners. Ruth lost to David L. Millar in 1933.

Mayor and Mrs. Ruth with son Dorsey in their backyard.



State of the City

HSUC hosts Mayor and City Manager

At City Hall on March 3, the Historical Society hosted the first "State of the City" report, uniting themes of University City's past, present and future. The event drew a large and interested crowd. The date was the birthday of city founder E. G. Lewis, and the guests enjoyed birthday cake and conversation at evening's end. Society President Eleanor Mullen thanked boardmember Elsie Glickert, whose idea it was. Mullen took the occasion to remind public officials of the importance of refurbishing the Lion Gates, following up on the conservator's report the Society had sponsored. She reviewed Lewis' activities as mayor: regulating dancehalls and dram shops, protecting dumb animals and conducting a census. He set up the three-ward political structure, which still stands. City Manager Lehman Walker then spoke about the city's fiscal crisis and his proposed budget, which makes severe cuts he believes are necessary in light of the shaky national economy and the city's declining population and tax base. Controversy about the budget has been ongoing and the last of several public meetings is scheduled for May 23, 6:30 at City Hall. The budget will be finalized before the beginning of the next fiscal year July 1. Mayor Shelley Welsch then spoke about the importance of a sustainable budget. But all is not grim in U. City; Welsch expressed confidence that citizens of one of the most diverse cities in St. Louis County can still work together. She announced that Fair U. City, continuing the celebratory spirit of Fair in the Square, will be held Memorial Day weekend in Heman Park. "If Lewis were here today," she concluded, "he would say this is a great community with potential to be greater still."

A Hot Time at the Library

At the Historical Society program on the history of the University City Fire Department, held March 22 at the library, President Eleanor Mullen took note of the presence of Fire Chief Don Miner and several firefighters, and thanked them for using a ladder truck to lift the Society's conservators to inspect the Lion Gates last summer. Archivist Sue Rehkopf began her lecture at the beginning. When the city was incorporated in 1906, the Police Department

was the first to be established; cops and volunteers fought fires. A costly blaze on Amherst Avenue in 1909 provided the impetus for establishing a professional department. No expense was spared. Founding Mayor E.G. Lewis' policy was "the best is barely good enough," Rehkopf commented, and he paid \$8,300, a fortune at the time, for a pumper truck, the first in the county. Its missions were widely covered by the press. In 1930, Mayor Eugene Ruth moved the police and fire departments into the building on Harvard Avenue (now Sergeant Michael King Drive) where they remain today, though the Fire Department has just received a federal grant to build a new firehouse at Vernon and Kingsland. The Department's duties have diversified over time. U. City was the first community in the county to train all police and firemen in First Aid through the Red Cross. Later, it would be the first to require all firefighters to be paramedics. Relations between Department and city have not always been smooth. In the mid-'70s, a bus crashed into a firetruck responding to a call and three firemen were badly injured. A dispute over disability payments developed into a bitter strike. The lecture included some interesting minor points. School groups are regular visitors to the firehouse. U. City High School students designed the logo the Department uses today. The Department experimented with painting trucks high-visibility yellow in the '80s but went back to red. A firefighter's protective uniform weighs 25 pounds. Slides of some of the city's most spectacular fires enlivened the talk.

Grave Concerns

"We have a wealth of great cemetery design, great monuments, and ethnic history" in St. Louis area graveyards, said Esley Hamilton, St. Louis County preservation historian, in his illustrated lecture at the library April 12. The oldest in the County is the Conway family graveyard in Chesterfield, established 1802. Also venerable is the Sappington Cemetery in Crestwood, which holds the grave of a Revolutionary War soldier. In the 1830s, the rural cemetery movement began. A break with the tradition of crowded churchyards, the new ideal was a spacious park, making use of natural topography. St. Peter's in Normandy was the first in St. Louis County. Our best-known historic cemetery, Bellefontaine in north St. Louis, is another example. Other cemeteries are worth seeing for a variety of reasons. St. Joseph's in Manchester, established 1870, has some of the most elaborate monuments of any local cemetery. The oldest Jewish cemetery is New Mount Sinai in Affton, founded 1850. The earliest large cemetery for

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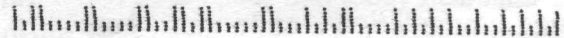
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Special Program

Joe Edwards updates us on the Loop
Trolley. 7 pm May 24 at the library,
6701 Delmar.

David Linzee
744 Syracuse
University City, MO 63130

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African Americans is Greenwood, from 1874. St. Louis has only one national cemetery, at Jefferson Barracks.

Hamilton showed slides of distinguished funerary art. The great enemy to grave markers is acid rain. Granite stands up to it, but marble doesn't. Unfortunately, granite resists carving. Over the years some designers have experimented with ingenious alternatives, like zinc, which resembles stone, but the print remains more legible, the carvings more crisp. Others have tried etched glass. Some people chose to be buried under monuments to their fraternal order rather than purely religious symbols. Elks Club members in Bellefontaine rest under impressive elk statues. We have two especially beautiful 1920s cemeteries: Chevra Kadisha in Vinita Park, and Oak Grove in Hanley Hills, which has a Tiffany window in its mausoleum.

Sutter-Meyer Preview Party

Defying chilly, rainy weather, the Sutter-Meyer Society and friends gathered May 1 to celebrate the

opening of the House, University City's oldest standing structure, as a museum. Current society president Stefany Brot introduced Mayor Shelley Welsch, a former president, who noted that the renovation and re-opening was a successful collaboration of volunteers and city government. Exhibit designer Emily Hoehn described the show inside the house, "On the Farm: Glimpses of St. Louis' rural past," which includes pictures of the people who lived in the house, provided by descendants. She reminded the guests that "history isn't all generals and politicians. The other side is people like us, and their stories are important, too." The project was her thesis for her M.A. in museum studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Guests included Historical Society president Eleanor Mullin, City Manager Lehman Walker, City Councilmember Steve Kraft, and Elsie Glickert, a descendant of the family that lived in the house. They toured the house and enjoyed a buffet provided by Ginger Bistro and music by the University City High School Jazz Combo and Mile 17 Bluegrass Band. the house at 6826 Chamberlain Court will soon be open to the public. The website is www.suttermeyer.org.