

Carondelet Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Preserving and Presenting the Heritage of Carondelet

Vol. 46, No. 1

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Spring 2019

Memories of Susan Blow Carondelet's Pioneer Educator

When the Des Peres School on Michigan Avenue, now the home of the Carondelet Historical Society, opened in 1873, one of the original four classrooms was dedicated to Susan Blow's experimental kindergarten. Blow worked with the City's outstanding Superintendent of Public Schools, William Torrey Harris, to conduct a kindergarten based on the teachings and philosophy of German educator Friedrich Froebel. While conducting the kindergarten in that classroom, Susan Blow was also training the teachers who helped her spread the kindergarten movement throughout the St. Louis Public Schools and then across the nation. She dedicated her life to developing and spread-



ing early childhood education. After her death in March of 1916, memorials poured in from around

the nation. The most endearing are the reminiscences of her former students, including Mrs. Minnie Haines Barnard.

In her memories of attending "Miss Blow's First Kindergarten," Minnie Haines Barnard affectionately called the revolutionary educator "Miss Susie," and recalled the pioneer educator's many kindnesses. Minnie Haines' childhood home was the then new frame house at 6712 Michigan Avenue, near Des Peres School. When the weather was pleasant, young Minnie Haines and her sister Allie walked to Kindergarten. In harsh weather, they were

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Happenings

In the past, the Carondelet Historical Society was quieter in winter. The winter of 2019, however, saw an increase of tours of senior groups. Residents from the St. Louis Altenheim located on Chouteau's Bluff, Alton's Presbyterian senior club lead by Jacqueline Wiseman, and residents from Our Lady of Life community in Shrewsbury toured the Society this past winter.

The Society hosted the meeting of the St. Louis Browns Historical Society. One hundred and twenty-five attended their Saturday afternoon program. Sixty Carondelet Historical Society mem-

bers attended an historical presentation by the Old Courthouse Players also hosted at the Society. Nancy Hillhouse and Joan Perdue have been assisting Dave Bouchein and John Remelius in presenting tours of the Society to groups. Since the number and size of tour groups is growing, there is need for additional docents. Dave Bouchein will be conducting another training session for docents later this year.

As part of their ongoing training, the volunteers and board members made field trips to other museums and sites. During the past year

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Historical Society Board of Directors

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Upcoming Events

Sunday, May 5
Author Dan O'Neill
"The Magic of the Cardinals"
1:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 19
Annual Membership Meeting
1:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 15
Historic Saint Louis Tour
Open House
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Historic Saint Louis Open House

Carondelet Historical Society is sponsoring the Historic Saint Louis open house and tour on Saturday, June 15 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00. Through this event, the staff and volunteers from over 20 small museums, historic sites and private homes in St. Louis City, St. Louis County, Illinois and Ste. Genevieve come together with the mission, "to bring St. Louis's Past to the Present."

Change of Address Requested

If you have moved, please notify the Society of your new address. In that way you can save the Society volunteers hours and postage.

Carondelet Historical Society

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Members enjoy these free benefits:

- Unlimited museum visits & tours
- Unlimited use of research library
- Speakers, presentations & social events
- 20% discount on books & gift items
- Newsletter - January, May & September
- Special gift

Contact us about volunteer opportunities or about making a gift of stock or making a bequest through your estate plan

Website: www.carondelethistory.org
Email: carondelethistoricalsociety@yahoo.com

Mail to: **Carondelet Historical Society**
6303 Michigan Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63111

Membership Levels

___ Susan Blow, Educator \$200
___ James Eads, Engineer \$150
___ Fred Bouchein Library \$100
___ Victor Kunz, Artist \$75
___ Business \$50
___ Family \$30
___ Individual \$20
___ Life Member Support \$ _____

We accept major Credit Cards, Checks, PayPal. All membership levels are tax deductible

When Stores Were Brick Castles - 6600 Michigan Avenue

The handsome commercial building on the Southeast corner of Michigan Avenue and Mott Street exemplifies the Romanesque architectural style popular at the end of the Victorian era. A massive turret with a slate-covered, conical roof dominates the corner. The corner storefront entrance and second-floor facade windows feature fully-rounded Roman arches out-lined in a label course of molded brick. Ornamental brickwork highlights the entire facade.

The City of St. Louis issued a building permit to construct the castle-like storefront on September 14, 1892. The permit described the building simply as a “2-story brick store” with the cost of construction estimated at \$2,000.00. The permit was issued to John Beckert. His two story building offered two storefronts facing Michigan (one with the corner entrance), a smaller storefront facing Mott, two apartments on the second floor, and an attached frame stable. Though changes have been made over its nearly 120 year history, the building still dominates the corner with its impressive Victorian character.

The character of the building seems to have been the work of the owner John Beckert. According to the 1900 census, this man who made his money in real estate was the Illinois born son of a German immigrant father and a Swiss immigrant mother. The St. Louis Daily Record documents that Beckert was the contractor on the building and suggests that he also designed the building.

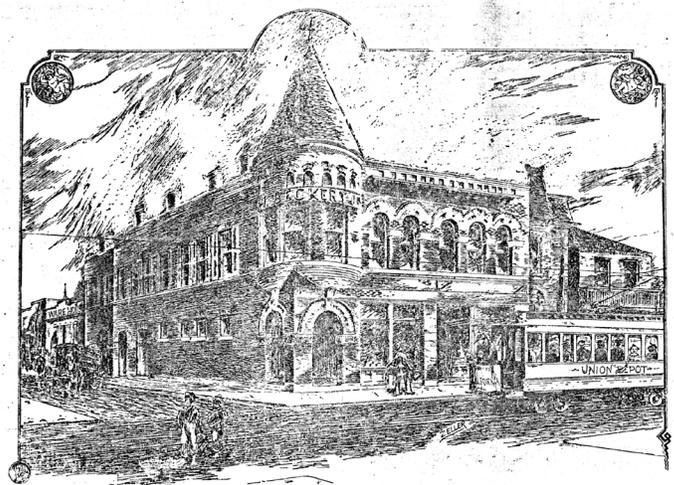
The Whippel Fire Insurance Map from 1896 provides information about the building’s early uses. The footprint of the building on the Insurance Map indicates that the store that originally faced Mott housed a feed store. The largest part of the building, with the corner storefront entrance, was described as a “Grocery.” According to the insurance map, the second storefront entrance facing Michigan housed a pharmacy.

A special edition of the newspaper the *South St. Louis Progress*, dated Saturday, April 7, 1900, described “John Beckert, Jr. Mercantile Company at 6600 and 6602 Michigan avenue” as “One of the most signal successes in the commercial life of Carondelet in recent years.” According to the newspaper, the Mercantile Company sold a “complete line of dry goods, clothing, shoes, hats, caps, groceries, flour, firewood and coal.” The article listed Beckert as president of the firm, P.A. Schmoll as vice-presi-

dent and Martin Schmoll as secretary.

Through the decades, changes in commerce and technology changed the uses of the building. The stable was razed and its site used for off-street parking. The grocery, pharmacy and feed store became a neighborhood confectionary. Vacancies plagued the building during the Great Depression. During the mid 20th century, the storefronts were combined and housed a tavern. In recent decades, the victorian-era commercial palace sat vacant.

Three years ago, Jeffrey Uren and Amanda (Mandie) Arney were enchanted by the Victorian storefront building. Jeffrey, a realtor, is a native of Canada. Mandie, who grew up in St. Louis County, has spent the last 17 years in city neighborhoods. Together, they have renovated seven historic city buildings. They purchased the nearly 6,000 square foot building and began renovating the impressive building into their home and play space for their



A streetcar appears in front of the storefront at 6600 Michigan Avenue in this illustration that appeared in *The South St. Louis Progress* in 1900.

three children – an eight year-old daughter and two year-old twins. They are slowly converting the second floor, that had been subdivided into four apartments, into their own nine room home. While planning to restore the original first floor storefront windows, they are temporarily keeping the commercial space as a family room and play space. Long-term, they are considering installing an old-fashioned bar in the corner store space and creating a home office in the other storefront.

Important Acquisition for Society's Library



Charles L. Webster & Co. produced this steel engraving portraying Ulysses S. Grant as a Union General.

A general who commanded an army of a million men and then became President of the United States once walked the streets of Carondelet to deliver firewood. During his years of struggle, Ulysses S. Grant named Carondelet residents among his friends and supporters. Because of the connections between President Ulysses S. Grant, President from 1869 to 1877, and the Carondelet neighborhood, the Carondelet Historical Society recently purchased the 32 volume *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* for the Society's Archives.

The Papers contain thousands of documents both personal and professional from Grant's entire life beginning with the enlistment oath that Grant signed as a 17 year-old entering West Point and concluding with notes he wrote during his last days in 1885. Grant's military orders and directives reveal a man who possessed a keen ability to analyze and assess situations and topography and remarkable skills in writing and communicating – skills that enabled him to successfully move great armies through enemy territory. His personal letters unveil a man who faced many financial challenges, awkward situations with his father and his in-laws, and a compassionate man who adored his wife and children.

The letters from the antebellum era, also refer to events in St. Louis and specifically mention several Carondelet residents. In a letter to his wife Julia, Grant mentions stopping by the home of friend and relation Bill Barnard, who lived at 3316 Meramec Street near Louisiana Avenue. (His elegant, frame gingerbread house was moved to 4227 Virginia Avenue where it stood until 1962. It was razed to build an apartment building on the site.) Two of Bill Barnard's sisters-in-law had married Grant's in-laws.

In a business letter, Grant refers to a deed for a property in Carondelet. The location and ownership of this property is still a mystery.

Most enlightening are the let-

ters chronicling his attempt to be hired as the St. Louis County Road Surveyor on the eve of the Civil War. From the time of his resignation from the army in 1854 through to his re-enlistment at the outbreak of the Civil War, financial struggles plagued Grant. During these years, he and his wife Julia Dent Grant lived at her father's plantation in South County and for a time in the Soulard neighborhood. Grant's efforts at farming were not profitable. His efforts in the real estate business were not successful. At various times he delivered firewood in Carondelet to supplement the family income.

The West Point graduate applied for the job of the County Road surveyor beginning with a letter to the County Commissioners on August 15th, 1859. This job would have brought some financial security to the man who now had four children to provide for. One of his classmates from West Point noted that Grant excelled in mathematics, mechanics and engineering and demonstrated integrity and industry, well-qualifying him for the job. Among the dozens of local citizens recommending Grant for the job were two relatives of Susan Blow -- Taylor Blow and T. Grimsley (Thornton Grimsley was Susan Blow's maternal grandfather). Grant's dozens of references included members of all political parties.

Despite his qualifications, the County Commissioners denied Grant the job voting 3 to 2 against him. The vote was entirely political. It was an era when the nation was dividing itself between the Democrats, who were sympathetic to secession and allowing slavery, and the new Republican movement, which encompassed many of the Free Soilers, citizens devoted to saving the Union and to abolition.

Grant explained the vote to his father, Jesse Root Grant, in a letter written on September 23, 1859. "You may judge from the result of the action of the County Commissioners that I am strongly identified with the Democratic party! Such is not the case." Three members of the board were "free soilers," or men who opposed the expansion of slavery into the territories. Ironically, the party that supported slavery voted for Grant, and the party that supported abolition and the Union voted against Grant -- the man who would rise to the rank of Lieutenant General in the Union Army and accept the surrender of the Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

One of the County Commissioners who voted against Grant was the former Mayor of Carondelet, Dr. William Taussig. Grant had been hopeful of receiving Taussig's support for the job. However, Grant explained to his father, "The F.S. (Free Soiler) party felt themselves bound to provide for one of their own party who was defeated for the office of County Engineer; a Dutchman,..."

This remarkable collection of papers resulted from the formation of the Ulysses S. Grant Association

in 1962 with the purpose of researching the life and writings of Ulysses S. Grant and publishing a collection of his writings and speeches. The association, spurred by outstanding historians including Bruce Catton and Allan Nevins, began collecting Grant documents. They hired Harvard-trained historian John Y. Simon as executive director and managing editor. Southern Illinois University



A steel engraving of Grant as a young infantryman illustrated the first volume of the *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*.

Press published the collected writings of Grant as they were edited beginning with Volume I in 1967. Simon passed away as Volume 31 was near publication. John F. Marszalek succeeded Simon as managing editor completing Volume 32, published in 2008. Volume 32 includes documents from throughout Grant's life that were not available when the earlier volumes were published. The understanding and appreciation of Ulysses S. Grant's talents, patriotism and character and the significant role he played in our nation's history has grown immensely with the publication of his *Collected Papers*.

The Society purchased the *Collected Papers* from the Southern Illinois University Press. The Central Library of the St. Louis Public Library, the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in South County and Carondelet Historical Society are the only institutions in St. Louis that have full sets of the *Collected Papers* available for study and research by the public.

New Members

The Board of Directors welcomes the Carondelet Historical Society's new members – Bryan Buer of Webster Groves, Matt Dauphin of the Carondelet neighborhood, Daniel Evans, Jr. (a descendant of the family that built the Lyle House in Carondelet Park) of St. Charles County and Mrs. Janis Fisher of South County.

In Memoriam

In recent months, five members of the Carondelet Historical Society-- Rosemary Bellers, Sharon Bergauer, Art Lohse, Mary Ann Plasmeier and Shirley Weathers -- have passed away.

A life-long resident of Carondelet, Shirley Weathers' life reflected the neighborhood's history. Shirley raised her family in her ancestral home, an antebellum cottage at 315 Iron Street. She lived in the home until she moved to the St. Louis Altenheim. Shirley was a direct descendant of German-American Bernard Poepping, who served as the last Mayor of Carondelet from 1859 to 1870. She was also a direct descendant of original Creole settlers of St. Louis.

Growing Collections

Gloria Havermann recently donated three undated, historic maps of the Carondelet Commons found in the estate of South Countians Herman A. Idecker and his wife Clara Decker-Idecker. The maps document ownership of the Commons after their subdivision and sale. They show the Jefferson Barracks Tract, the location of several stone quarries, and a settlement adjacent to Jefferson Barracks described as "South Carondelet."

Our Members Are Generous

Since the last newsletter, the following members and friends have made donations to the Carondelet Historical Society: Matt and Terri Borowiak, Ron and Vicki Flier, Nancy Hillhouse, Dorothy Krehbiel, Laura Murra and Gloria and Thomas Zimmermann.

Susan Blow

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sent, "to the kindergarten in an old-fashioned brouche..." She added, "in bad weather, Miss Susie sent her carriage for those who could not get to the school."

"One day I was suddenly seized with a fit of homesickness, and Miss Susie in her gentle, loving fashion took me on her lap and told me a little story about two small buckets, one behind each eye, that turned over and spilled out the water for tears when I wanted to cry." She then recalled that William Torrey Harris, who would become the National Commissioner of Education, came into the room. He "carried me around the room on his shoulder to divert me."

Barnard recalled Miss Susie inviting the kindergartners to her home for a party. "[T]he ice cream was frozen like a big white hen and lots of little yellow chickens. When I was given a little chicken my delight was so great that I carried it around the house until it melted all over my blue sash but I could not be persuaded to give it up until Miss Susie herself took me to her room and induced me to let her wash off what was left of the ice cream."

Blow's fellow educators described her humility and "self-effacement." Cynthia P. Dozier, who was one of Blow's student teachers at Des Peres School in 1873 wrote about her classroom routines.

"There were no maids in the schools in those days, and Miss Blow, who had in life been surrounded with luxury, tugged away at the dozens of little overshoes, coats, mufflers, and mittens that sent the children home protected from the weather, at the close of the day. I remember one day some careless assistant (like as not my own self) had forgotten one pair of rubbers. Miss Blow's eagle eye saw them, and, picking them up, she rushed out into the storm coatless, hatless, and rubberless, to catch the boy and put on his rubbers."

"As soon as the children were well out of the way, she would seize the dishpan, and begin to clear up the lunch dishes, and, as she washed them and we dried them, she would repeat the stories, most of which were untranslated French and German stories, she had told the children, and the assistants would later write out from memory. She never by any chance left a closet in disorder, or any vagueness in the minds of the assistants as to the morning's work, and what the demands of the work for the next day would be."

Happenings

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they toured the Henry Miller Museum run by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the new museum under the Gateway Arch, and the Central Library of the St. Louis Public Library.

John Remelius and Dave Bouchein have been reviewing and organizing the Society's map collection. One of the maps was produced as part of the 1964 Bicentennial Celebration and shows the City's 19th century annexations, including the annexation of Carondelet. This map and a neighborhood map, with footprints of all the buildings in Carondelet in the mid-1960's, have been framed. The third map measures 50 inches wide and 60 inches long and covers the entire region stretching from the Missouri River on the north to Meramec Bottoms on the south and from the Mississippi River on the east to Babler State Park on the west. Parks and civic buildings are highlighted on this reference map.

Dave Bouchein has hung more artwork by Ron Flier and Victor Kunz in the meeting room.

During operating hours, the Historical Society is a hub of activity with board members and volunteers working on a series of projects.

Board member Jerry Martin is conducting an inventory of all the library's holdings. This will be a lengthy process since the library's collections of books, clippings, photos and ephemera have grown substantially since the initial computerized inventory was conducted.

Board member Bee Parsons continues the endless job of entering biographical information accompanying the photos on the Wall of Honor into a spread sheet. This will enable visitors to easily search our veterans' records.

Board Member Bob Fox continually updates the membership files in between answering the Society's e-mails. Both St. Louisans and out-of-towners contact the Society asking about our collections and if we have information pertaining to a specific house or family. While no volunteers are available to do the research, Bob scans the indexes to see if the Society records include pertinent materials. His efforts have resulted in many researchers coming to the Society to use our archives.

Board Member Mary Ann Simon is the voice of the Historical Society – answering the phone during all the Society's regular hours. A life-long Carondelet resident, Simon is responsible for much of the Society's bookkeeping.

The Legacy Circle

The gift of a simple bequest in your will is one of the best ways to ensure the long-term future of the Carondelet Historical Society. A bequest is a gift that is made through your will or trust and can establish your wishes today without relinquishing needed assets during your lifetime.

We invite you to become a member of The Legacy Circle and join the following generous benefactors, past and present, who have included CHS in their estate planning.

Please consult your attorney and/or your financial advisor and let us know of your generosity.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Secretary Bob Fox at (314) 481-6303.

Past Benefactors' Bequests

Fred Bouchein, 2007

Hubert Chartrand, 2001

Ethelyn Cline, 1999

Hildegard Eiler, 2009

Fr. Edward Feuerbacher, 2003

Edna Kunz, 1998

Victor J. Kunz, 1991

Willis Potthoff, 2002

Paul Rathgeber, 2015

Isabelle Rolland, 1992

Charles Van Ronzelen, 2003

Russell Schrempp, 2007

Herman Telthorst, 2002

Violet Telthorst, 2002

Lois Waninger, 2012

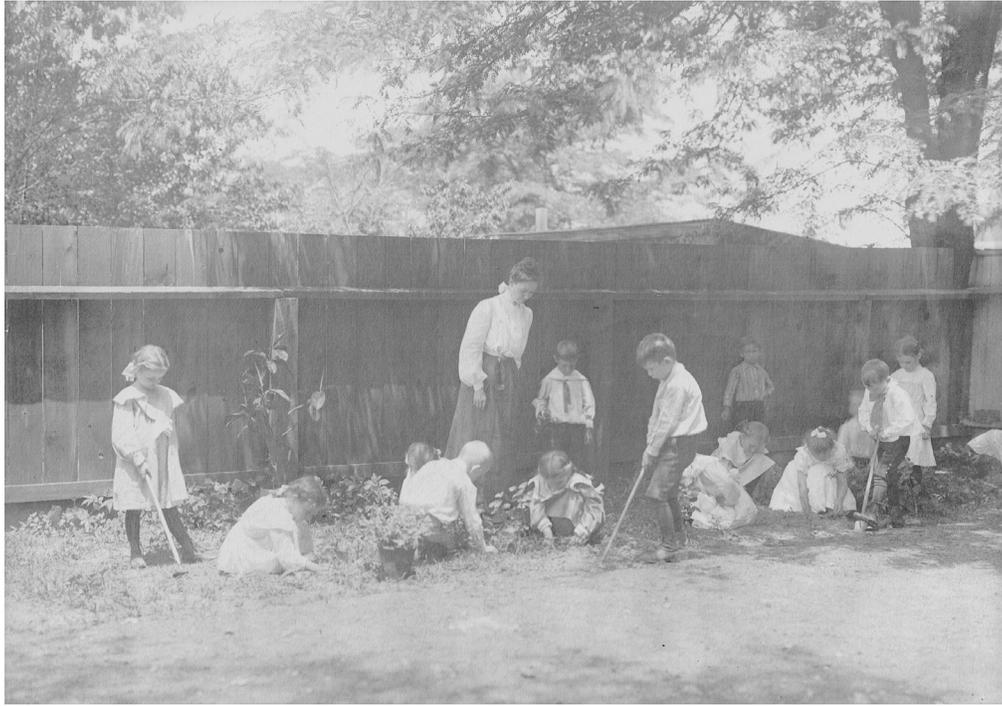
Candace Warden, 2001

John Williams, 2017

Larry Wilms, 2013

Elisabeth Winterhoff, 1981

Doris Wolff, 2014



This photo of the kindergarten class working in their garden in the school yard of Des Peres School dates to 1905. Gardening was a key part of the kindergarten curriculum. The children sang this ditty as they gardened, “Do you or I or any one know, How oats and beans and barley grow, First the farmer plows the ground, Then the farmer sows the seeds and turns around, Stamps his feet and claps his hands, And turns around to view the land.”

Researched and written by NiNi Harris

Layout by Chad Huber

The Carondelet Historical Society will be open for visits or tours on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 2:00 p.m. Visit any time we are open. To schedule a special tour, call (314) 481-6303.

Hours

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