



LANDMARKS
ASSOCIATION of SAINT LOUIS

LANDMARKS LETTER

**Join Landmarks for our Annual Fall Fundraiser
at the Former Columbia Theater** by Andrew Weil



Photo by Tim Rice

THE FORMER COLUMBIA THEATER (now one of St. Louis' most unique private residences and the home of the Columbia Foundation for the Arts) welcomes Landmarks on **Saturday, October 3rd for a fabulous reception honoring John Karel**. John will be presented with the H. Meade Summers Jr. Award for lifetime achievement in historic preservation for his tireless efforts to protect and enhance Tower Grove Park. Under John's management, the decline of the 1980s in the park was stopped cold. During his 27 year tenure, the park created four private support organizations, completed 27 million dollars in capital improvements, and increased the number of annual visitors exponentially. In addition, the beautiful Victorian landscape and the park's collection of historic statuary, buildings, and structures including perhaps the country's greatest collection of picturesque recreational pavilions, was registered as a National Historic Landmark (the highest level of recognition that exists in the United

States). Please join us in congratulating John for his remarkable contributions to historic preservation in St. Louis and enjoy the rare chance to party under the stars at the Columbia Foundation.

WHERE: Columbia Foundation for the Arts, 5333 Columbia on The Hill

WHEN: Saturday, October 3, 6pm-9:pm

RESERVATIONS: Call 314-421-6474, or email stschetter@landmarks-stl.org or through eventbrite: www.eventbrite.com and search for Landmarks Association Summers Award Columbia Theater.

TICKETS: Cost \$100.00 for Landmarks and Tower Grove Park members and \$125.00 for non-members and include unlimited food, drinks, live music, fabulous wines, Urban Chestnut beer, ice cream treats from the Fountain on Locust and many more surprises.

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Andrew Weil, 314-421-6474 aweil@landmarks-stl.org

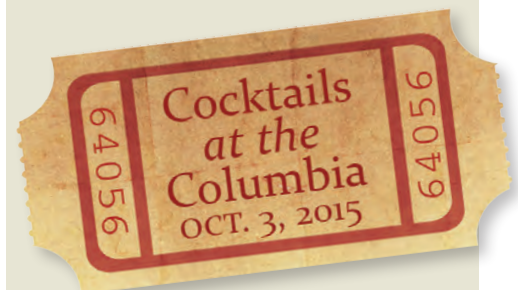
The History of the Columbia Theater, pg 3 >



Can you guess which building this architectural detail is from? Test your knowledge with our column, *Elements* on page 2.

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Elements



THIS IS AN IMAGE of a handmade sign on the door to the Luepker tinner’s shop in Dutchtown. Though no longer completely intact, you can clearly see some of the tools of the trade represented. An imp at the right is operating tin snips, and another (now missing) at the upper left once held soldering irons into the rectangular fire pot at the center.

See page 4 for the
entire Luepker story...

2015 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

9TH STREET ABBEY
1808 S. 9th Street in Soulard
Sunday, September 20, 3pm-5pm

This event is FREE, but reservations
are kindly requested.

Please join Landmarks’ Board, staff and membership for our annual membership meeting. Enjoy a reception with drinks and light snacks, hear a report on the organization’s activities over the course of the last year, and cast your vote for Board members. The 9th Street Abbey (originally St. Paul’s German Evangelical Congregation) was constructed in 1896 as the third church on the site. St. Paul’s congregation was founded in 1848 and its first church on 9th Street was constructed in 1850. In 1874, the original church was replaced with a larger building, which was then destroyed by the great tornado of 1896. Closed for religious purposes in 1986, Patty Long Catering purchased the building in 1992 and converted the complex into a lovely event space.

Reservations by calling 314-421-6474,
by emailing stschetter@landmarks-stl.org
or through www.eventbrite.com
(search for “Landmarks Association
of St. Louis Annual Meeting”)



Summer 2015

Rewind & Fast Forward

The History of the Columbia Theater by Andrew Weil

THE BUILDING PERMIT FOR the Columbia Theater at 5257 Southwest Avenue on The Hill was issued to owner George Skouras in 1925. Skouras’ older brother Charles had arrived in St. Louis in 1908 and worked as a busboy at the Hotel Jefferson. Within a few years he had saved enough money to bring his two brothers over from Greece and in 1914 Charles and his brother Spyros purchased an interest in the Olympia nickelodeon theater at 14th and Market. Joined in the enterprise by youngest brother George, their business acumen was such that by 1920 the brothers owned nine theaters and by 1924 more than thirty. While most of the Skouras’ theaters were modest neighborhood establishments like the building on Southwest Avenue, they also owned and operated the much larger Missouri and Grand Central theaters in Midtown and in 1926 they built the enormous Ambassador Theater downtown (demolished 1997). Designed by architects C. W. and George L. Rapp, the Ambassador was the most lavish and costly (per seat) theater in the country at the time, exceeding even the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and the Uptown Theater in Chicago.

In 1928, the Skouras Brothers sold their companies to Warner Brothers Pictures for whom

they then went to work in California. In 1932 they had taken over management of over five hundred Fox West Coast Theaters. Over the next two decades the brothers enjoyed astounding success; Spyros became President of 20th Century Fox, George became Chairman of the Board of United Artists, and Charles became head of Fox West Coast and then later National Theaters. A devout member of the Greek Orthodox Church, Charles had vowed that if God granted him success in the film industry, he would build a cathedral for the Greek community of Los Angeles. In 1952, having achieved enormous wealth, Charles held up his end of the bargain by constructing the marvelous Saint Sophia Cathedral (a designated Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument).

The Columbia Theater on the Hill was operated in the 1920s and 1930s by Bess Schulte and presented both movies and vaudeville shows. It continued in operation until 1974 when it closed due to declining ticket sales. In 1975, local resident Dominic DiFranco spent \$700,000 to repurpose the building as a racquetball club. Following a fire in the late 1970s, the building was vacant until it was purchased and renovated as a residence by its current owners in 1987.



ABOVE: The Columbia Theater in its hey day. Originally published in The Hill by Rio Vitale. ABOVE RIGHT: Today as a private home and headquarters of the Columbia Foundation for the Arts. Photos by Tim Rice.



EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW MARTY LUEPKER, you have probably heard of the Feasting Fox Restaurant, which he and his wife Sue saved from the wrecking ball in 1993 and continue to operate at Grand and Meramec in south St. Louis. A lifelong resident of Dutchtown, Marty was born just blocks from the Feasting Fox in a house at the corner of Meramec and Virginia. The third generation of his family to live and work in the neighborhood, Marty's grandfather and father were what he described as "tanners": craftsmen who worked with various kinds of sheet metal including tin, copper, lead and galvanized iron. Marty was raised in the business and grew up working with his father fabricating cornices, gutters, rolled metal ceilings, downspouts, flashing, fancy copper work and all the other products of the tinner's trade. This business, as they practiced it, is essentially extinct today due to the availability of mass produced metal and synthetic products, but Marty remembers it well.

Marty's Grandfather Frank N. Luepker came to St. Louis from Millstadt, Illinois and established his tinning business in Dutchtown in 1896. He bought a small frame building on the southwest corner of Meramec and Virginia where Winkleman's Pharmacy is today and moved it several hundred feet back onto the alley to be used as a workshop. This building served three generations of the family business and is still intact down to the massive machine known as a "break" that was used for shaping sheet metal. Manufactured in 1888 and installed c. 1896, this incredibly powerful yet elegantly balanced machine still functions and sits on the skids Marty's great grandfather used to move it into the room well over a century ago. An unusual fence made of heavy boiler plate separates the shop's yard from the alley. Marty's grandfather Frank also had a boiler works in north St. Louis and, the way he understands it, built the boilers for the Lemp Brewery. When Prohibition put an end to the Lemp's operation, he salvaged the boilers and the fence is what remains of them.

The Luepker's shop contains an enormous variety of tools that were used for shaping and joining metal, rolling guttering and downspouts, and assembling the beautiful cornices that grace the facades of so many St. Louis buildings. One such cornice is prominently displayed on Marty's grandfather's business card being transported by a wagon pulled by Daisy the draft horse. Hollow and relatively light, cornices were hung on pieces of lumber that were anchored to roof rafters and then extended through the plane of the wall. Made of galvanized iron or copper, cornices are very durable, but their wooden anchors can rot resulting in the need to either remove or repair the system. Unfortunately, when the support system decays, the cornice itself is not always replaced.



PICTURED ABOVE: Marty Luepker in his shop.

The Luepker's shop contains an enormous variety of tools that were used for shaping and joining metal, rolling guttering and downspouts, and assembling the beautiful cornices that grace the facades of so many St. Louis buildings.

Next time you are in a historic neighborhood and you see a house with a flat band running the width of the façade below the gutter with what appear to be rafter tails cut flush with the wall plane, you'll know where the cornice once was.

The Luepkers' business was wide ranging. One day they might be fabricating or installing cornices, downspouts, and gutters, another day they would be installing a new tin roof, another day they might be fitting together furnace ductwork in a new house. According to Marty, the family worked on many high profile projects including the copper roof of the Compton Hill Water Tower and the roof of St. Anthony of Padua church on Meramec. Marty remembers walking the gutter system there as a kid (well over a hundred feet above street level) tied to his father who was straddling the roof ridge.

As the neighborhoods surrounding the Luepker's shop developed rapidly in the early 20th century, Marty's father and grandfather worked directly with developers (including Marty's uncle) who were building new houses. Rather than being

ON JUNE 15, 1965, Gateway National Bank, the first African-American owned bank in the State of Missouri, opened at 3412 N. Union Boulevard. The bank was conceived in 1963 by George L. Montgomery and Melvyn A. Harrington, who gathered friends and business colleagues to discuss the possibility of opening a bank to provide much needed loans to black-owned businesses and future homeowners. The importance of this financial institution to St. Louis' African-American community cannot be overstated. Gateway opened shortly after culmination of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) demonstrations at Jefferson Bank in St. Louis and prior to the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination in all aspects (including financing) of home rental, sales and ownership. The bank was taken over by Central Bank of Kansas City in 2009 and permanently closed in 2012. The building was demolished in July of this year, however a new financial institution bearing the Gateway name is planned for the site. The new bank's owner, St. Louis Community Credit Union, is working with Landmarks to record Gateway's



history. The project includes interviews with former bank employees, founders and their relatives, and customers of Gateway National Bank. Many of these stories are being video recorded and will be available online. Stay tuned for more details about the Gateway National Bank history project.

Luepker continued...

paid in money, he remembers, they and other tradesmen were frequently paid with houses. As he remembers it: "the tinner would do the cornice, the furnace, the flashing and the gutters, and he would maybe get one in every five or six houses. The bricklayer would get two houses, maybe three, the contractor would get one; the various trades and the developer would split up the subdivision. Once the neighborhood was complete, on Sunday each tradesman's job was to go down and sit on the front porch and try to sell his house."

Marty recalled that the work was frequently very hard and hazardous. He would have to climb into coal furnaces in the late summer to get them ready for use in the fall. He talked about assembling flat porch roofs out of 15 inch squares of leaded tin and having to solder each seam while laying flat on his chest. When working with furnaces and ductwork, the men would cut long sheets of asbestos paper off of 50 pound rolls and wrap everything by hand. These are aspects of the business he did not miss as the company made the transition to working with air conditioning in the 1960s.

Marty's memories and his family's shop provide a fascinating view into the daily life of a bygone trade. It is humbling to think of how many different skills went into the construction of a single historic home in St. Louis, and how many of those once common skills are virtually unknown today. Next

time you look at a cornice or an ornamental scupper on a downspout, consider that every angle, joint and curve were made by hand in a tinner's shop. While we have a tendency to focus on a building as a whole and consider its composition as a unified work, each constituent part also has a story to tell. Historically, the materials that comprised a building were much more likely to be closely tied to the manufacturing skills of individual local craftsmen and artisans. For this reason, they can speak to everything from the types of materials that were locally available at a given time, to the aesthetic preferences of consumers, to the persistence of cultural traditions among immigrant craftsmen. We are lucky to live in such a "custom made" city where unique buildings made from high-quality, skillfully wrought materials abound. In such a place, the bond between people and buildings can and should be as strong as the buildings themselves.



LEFT: Luepker Cornice delivery wagon transporting a complete cornice.

Historic Missouri Roadsides Lecture & Booking Signing

Join Landmarks on Wednesday, September 23rd from 5pm-8pm
at Sqwires in Lafayette Square, 1415 S. 18th Street

LANDMARKS ASSOCIATION is hosting an evening with author Bill Hart on Wednesday September 23 as Bill discusses his new book “Historic Missouri Roadsides.” Bill will hold a lecture and book-signing at Sqwires Restaurant, 1415 S. 18th Street in Lafayette Square from 5pm-8pm. **This event is free—no reservations are required.**

Historic Missouri Roadsides is a richly illustrated travel/history/photography book, consisting of several tours of Missouri on mostly two-lane roads and highways. Varying greatly in length, most of the tours mark their beginning points near Kansas City and St. Louis, making them attractive to Missouri “staycationers” who are eager to get out into the countryside. The following are examples of tour routes, each of which includes many fascinating stops along the way.

- The “Gottfried Duden/Lewis & Clark Tour” traverses Missouri Highway 100 from Gray Summit in Franklin County westward to tiny Bonnot’s Mill on the Osage River in Osage County.
- The “Mostly Route 24 Tour” begins in Excelsior Springs in northwest Missouri and travels eastward across the state to New London.
- The “Osage Hills and Prairies Tour” travels through southwest Missouri beginning with Lebanon in Laclede County and then following part of Old Route 66 to Carthage before ending at Nevada in Vernon County.
- Finally, the “Platte Purchase Tour” begins in St. Joseph and heads north and east through all of the counties of the purchase (which completed the map of Missouri in 1853 and then some), traveling to Unionville in north central Missouri.

Places to eat, stay, and visit are listed in the book and include only small, Missouri-owned businesses. Don’t look for McDonald’s here—only “real” places owned by “real” people. Richly illustrated and informed by the author’s decades of experience traveling Missouri’s back roads, this book is a must have for anyone interested in the history, architecture and culture of our state.



About the Author

BILL HART GREW UP IN Perry County in southeast Missouri. His interest in small town and roadside Missouri was fostered by his work for the past several years with the Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation (Missouri Preservation), where he currently serves as executive director. He holds a degree in Historic Preservation from Southeast Missouri State University and did his graduate coursework in Architectural History at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia. Bill is particularly interested in vanishing Missouri building types, including those found in roadside and rural contexts. He was one of the founders of the Missouri Barn Alliance and Rural Network (Mo BARN), advocating for documentation and preservation of Missouri’s historic farmsteads.

What’s That Building?



Das Deutsche Haus

THE BUILDING ONCE KNOWN as “Das Deutsche Haus” at **2345 Lafayette Avenue** was constructed in 1928 as a community space to be used cooperatively by a wide variety German societies. Designed by architect and German immigrant Jacob Heim, to reference the Heidelberg Castle, the building contained meeting rooms, banquet facilities and a large theater that were all available for use on a rental, or dues-based arrangement. Constructed in the Interwar Period when outward pride in German culture was beginning to be socially acceptable again, Das Deutsche Haus and its clientele were boisterously Teutonic for about 14 years. Then the outbreak of World War II once again suppressed uninhibited expressions of German identity. It was in this climate that the name of the facility was changed to the innocuous “St. Louis House.”

Interestingly, years earlier outspoken pride in German heritage had almost scuttled architect Jacob Heim’s application for citizenship, for which he applied in the unlucky year of 1917. A component of the naturalization process at that time was the presentation of witnesses that could attest to, among other things, an applicant’s loyalty to the United States. For this purpose, Heim had chosen the prominent attorney Kurt von Reppert to serve as one of his witnesses. Von Reppert proved to be a poor choice as the ongoing war had caused him to become so stridently pro-German in his public comments that he was barred from acting as a witness for naturalization applicants in the Federal Court. Navigating these troubled waters, Heim successfully withdrew his initial application and succeeded in becoming a naturalized citizen during the war. Like so many, he found a way to balance pride in his culture with commitment to his adopted country and maintained close ties to the German American community of St. Louis throughout his life.



Heidelberg Castle courtesy of Wikimedia

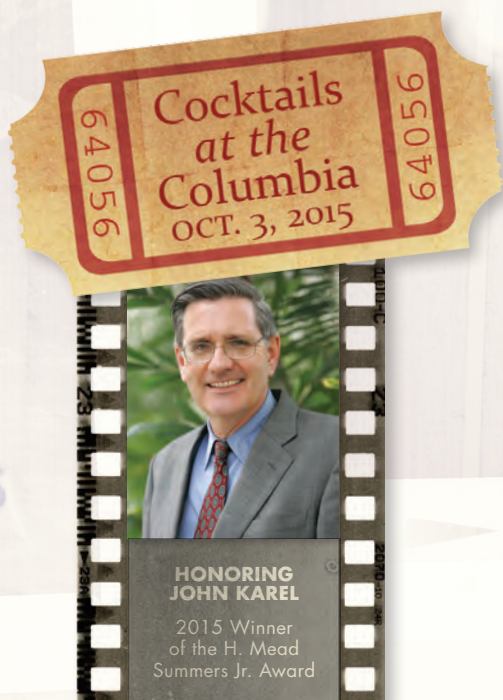


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LAFAYETTE PARK FENCE RESTORATION

IF YOU SEE SECTIONS of ornamental iron fence disappearing from the perimeter of Lafayette Park in coming months, don't worry, it is all part of the Lafayette Park Conservancy's effort to restore the structure. The park is surrounded by an astonishing 4,100 feet of wrought iron fencing that was originally constructed in 1869. Based on photographic evidence we know that a "rehabilitation" of the fence in the 1970's deviated from Francis Tunica's original design by eliminating the structural base "girder" and using a different post anchoring system. The result was that the fence was approximately 11 inches shorter than originally intended and unstable. This situation will be rectified by the current plan.

The first stage of the project is underway; specialty contractor Robinson Iron of Alexander City, Alabama has taken six 15-foot-long fence sections to their workshops where they will be taken apart so patterns can be made to replace missing and broken parts. The repaired fence sections will be returned to the park this fall. In addition the Conservancy has begun a project to repair or replicate a substantial number of damaged or missing gates. This repair work will be also completed by Robinson Iron, with Perpetua iron of St. Louis fabricating the replicas.

The Conservancy has received initial funding for this massive project from the Near Southside Improvement Corporation which was chartered to provide funding for Master Plans for Lafayette Park and for the Lafayette Square neighborhood. Additional funding will be required for this project, which is expected to take many years.

The Lafayette Park Conservancy was founded in 2001 on the 150th anniversary of the founding of Lafayette Park. Its mission is to preserve and restore the historic legacy of Lafayette Park. For more information visit lafayettepark.org.



*Right: a section of the fence being removed.
Below: a picture of the original fencing.*



www.landmarks-stl.org