

The Charlemagne

215 East Main Street - St. Charles, Illinois 60174 - (630) 584-6967

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WINTER 2011
ST. CHARLES
HERITAGE CENTER



The First Annual St. Charles Heritage Ball

January 29, 2011
at the historic Hotel Baker

Honorary Co-Chairs

Mayor Don DeWitte, Sue Klinkhamer, Fred Norris

Dinner É Dancing É Live Auction É Silent Auction É 50/50 Raffle
Music by the Lazy Maybes

An evening celebrating 100 years of the St. Charles Park District

For more information on placing an advertisement in the
commemorative booklet or to purchase tickets
contact the St. Charles Heritage Center 630-584-6967.



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St. Charles in the 1980s and 1990s by Jim McGuire

According to the 1981 City Directory, St. Charles is a community of well-kept homes, twelve schools with an enrollment of close to 7,000, including a new solar-heated high school. Teacher/student ratio is 1/16. Fifteen churches are located in the community. St. Charles had become a thriving city with an ever-rising population. The estimated population in 1980 was 17,000 people, with 6,365 homes, approximately 300 businesses, and 108 miles of streets. All of these numbers would increase throughout the decade, and by 1990, St. Charles had a population of over 21,000, had 7,884 homes, had 1,400 business houses, and about 125 miles of streets.

Throughout the 1980s, St. Charles was warmly regarded for its many historic buildings and quaint shopping areas. People often shopped at one of the 8 shopping centers in town and dined at one of the 30 restaurants. Like the population and number of homes and businesses, these numbers also increased throughout the decade. By the 1990s, there were fourteen shopping districts in town, including three enclosed malls, the St. Charles Mall, Piano Factory Outlet Mall, and the new Charlestowne Centre Mall, which opened in April 1991. The thirty restaurants in town grew to sixty. St. Charles was growing.

Residents certainly had their

share of options to have fun in the city. The St. Charles Park District encompassed thirty-seven parks, with 663 total acres. Pottawatomie Park had among its facilities a baseball diamond, tennis courts, playgrounds, both a swimming and wading pool, a golf course, concessions, and boat launching piers. The Baker Community House had the park district offices and posted various recreational opportunities. Pheasant Run Resort, located on Route 64, just east of St. Charles downtown, was not only known for its fine accommodations for visitors and conventions, but also for its golf course, theatre, and indoor swimming pools. There was a new family recreation center that opened in 1975 and contained an

Olympic-size swimming pool and both tennis and hardball courts. There was a new Cultural Arts Center, completed in 1977, located adjacent to the recreation center. The Lester J. Norris Sports Complex, completed in 1983, contained a football stadium, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, and an indoor track. St. Charles also became known for its monthly flea markets that were held at the Kane County Fairgrounds.

The city was more than simply recreational fun. St. Charles had over 518 acres of industrial sites within the greater city limits. The Chicago and Northwestern continued to service the city, as did state highways, its 78 civic organizations, and 96 trucking firms.

Its mayor/council form of government was determined to keep the city attractive for both future residents and businesses-industries.

The decade was notable for several events. On July 30, 1981, Lester J. Norris passed away at his home in Florida. Both Lester and his late wife, Dellora were generous in giving back to St. Charles. They helped contribute an area hospital, bridges, area school sites, a bank, and cultural and recreational facilities. Lester was also an accomplished sketch artist, working for the Chicago Tribune as a cartoonist. In addition to his famous 1927 sketch of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and a sketch considered to be an inspiration for the Walt Disney character, Tinker Bell, Lester also designed the Arcada Theatre and Main Street bridge.

For a period of five days in 1984, June 30-July 4, St. Charles celebrated is

sesquicentennial with celebration. Among the highlights were the dedication of an 1850 historical landmark home, dedication of a "Heritage Square" along the Fox River, and a historical pageant at the Norris Cultural Arts Center. The five days of celebration coincided the building of the area's first log cabin by Evan Shelby and William Franklin 150 years earlier.

The production and growth in the 1980's carried over to the 1990's. The population topped 21,000 was not the only growth the city had. The number of schools increased to fourteen, with eleven elementary, two Junior high schools, and one high school. There were also two private schools, St. Patrick's Catholic School and Valley Lutheran High School. There were now around twenty churches in town, representing the city's different denominations. Joining the many cultural and recreational centers already established in town was the Pottawatomie

Community Center in 1991. The park district offered many programs at this facility, which was unique for its "nature window." This window was made of one-way glass, which allowed viewers, especially children, to see out, but prevented birds and other animals from seeing them. More activities were now offered throughout the year, also. There was the Pride of the Fox Festival, Mid-America Canoe Race, Kane County Fair in July, Sidewalk Sales in August, the Scarecrow Festival in October, and the Christmas Parade and Christmas Walks in December.

St. Charles was still known for its many downtown historic buildings, which now housed some antique, specialty, retail, and service stores. Some of the buildings had histories going back several decades, much like St. Charles itself. They watched St. Charles grow into what it is today, a vibrant and attractive city for both residents and businesses.

Going Dry: St. Charles' Speakeasies by Elaine Higham

On May 16, 1918, inhabitants of St. Charles had no idea the newly instated "dry law" would turn their small community into the epicenter of the newly illicit activity of alcohol production and sale in Kane County. With the recently christened Federal Bureau of Investigation on the heels of saloons, dives, and any establishment violating Prohibition, speakeasies became rampant across the country and outnumbered the formerly legal saloons. St. Charles' location, just close enough to Chicago to allow trade but far enough to keep out of the eye of the law, made it a prime choice for organized crime

In order to serve the liquor in the first place, it needed to be produced, and, considering the heavy equipment requisite to produce anything worth bottling, was no small task. Manufacturers needed somewhere isolated, small, and above all beyond suspicion. One such location was Al Capone's Blackberry Creek Farm. The mob owners hired a farmer to front the operation, storing liquor in barrels in the basement of the barn while the farmer worked the scenic fields. People living around the farm noted, "Well dressed men in expensive cars hauling sugar. Sometimes they got stuck in the mud, and local farmers had to pull them out with oxen." Despite these and other minor mishaps, the liquor production flourished,

and the finished products found their way in to dances, parties, and establishments of "questionable reputation."

After the alcohol was produced, distribution became the next problem. A slightly more sinister setting than Blackberry Farm provided Albert's Corner with both an ominous reputation and the esteem of the mob. Used exclusively as a link in the distribution chain, Albert's Corner was "designed to give lookouts a good view of oncoming traffic from all sides." Garage doors allowed farmers coming in with cart-fulls of soon to be fermented corn mash to enter and exit quickly. Men in grey fedoras and matching suits patrolled the balconies with barely concealed Tommy guns and vicious attitudes. Alcohol was shipped and stored in the basement, and then transported to the speakeasies in St. Charles itself.

Any venue open to circulation had to be private and reachable for its clientele. The Hideaway provided the perfect combination. Purchased by the Soukup family in 1920, its hidden back rooms reverberated with the rattle of slot machines and clank of mugs of criminal gin. New Year's Eve echoed with the shotgun blasts of drunken celebrators shooting out the shoreline lights. And, despite obvious patronage,

the police rarely investigated. No sign led the way down the steep driveway; no phone number was listed and directions were never posted. Only tips from the jealous owners of other speakeasies advised the authorities.

With all the activity of the speakeasies, it was inevitable authorities would catch on eventually. Police broke in to Blackberry Creek farm and, after spilling their contents across the dirty floor, cemented the barrels into the wall and bricked up the entrances. Shirley Pieper Sportsman recalled how police raided the Hideaway. "Feds would suddenly arrive, axe down locked doors and haul out bushels of bootleg booze from their hiding places. With a dramatic flourish, the agents mashed the quart bottles on the rocks out front." However, after a brief restocking and renovation period, the speakeasies were back in business, selling their illegal wares to the citizens of St. Charles as if nothing had happened. Pleas from the Justice of the Peace and Chief of Police to report speakeasies fell on mostly deaf ears. The illegal liquor trade flourished in the Fox Valley until the end of Prohibition.

Elaine is one of the many student volunteers who donate their time and energy to promote our mission to collect, preserve and present St. Charles history.

Thursday Evening Lectures

This year for the first two Thursday Evening Lectures we will be partnering with the St. Charles Park District and the St. Charles Public Library for the St Charles Park District's Centennial Speakers Series. Subjects will address events that helped shape the parks in their first hundred years. We hope you will join us on the following evenings for these interesting programs.

Thursday April 21

The Civilian Conservation Corps was one of the most popular "alphabet agency" programs of the New Deal era. This presentation will explore the work and educational opportunities available to young men in the CCC between 1933 and 1942, and place the program within a local as well as global context.

Thursday May 19

The Federal Arts Project: How Illinois Artists Survived the Great Depression
From the Great Crash of 1929, America's economy remained devastated for over a decade. President Roosevelt's New Deal programs put the nation back to work and eventually included employment for artists. Come learn what the Illinois Art Project entailed, the role Chicago played and how citizens disliked the idea of people creating artwork in exchange for a government paycheck.

Looking to make a tax deductible donation?

Remember the St. Charles Heritage Center! Donations to the Heritage Center are completely tax deductible and help us to provide our many educational programs for adults and children. These programs include:

- Book Club
- JHS Programs
- Thursday Evening Lecture
- Grave Reminders
- And much more!

Membership Event - Invite a friend!

The annual membership meeting of the St. Charles Heritage Center will take place on Sunday afternoon January 16th from 12:30 - 2:00 pm at the Carnegie Room of the St. Charles Public Library.

St. Charles Heritage Center Book Club

The Heritage Center's Book Club is back for another year! As always anyone is welcome to join us for any or all of the discussions, the group meets at the St. Charles Public Library on the first Tuesday of everyone other month beginning in January.

Tuesday January 4th – *The Women* by T. C. Boyle. The genius of Frank Lloyd Wright was both magnetic and cruel, as evidenced by the succession of failed marriages and hot-blooded affairs depicted in this biographic reimagining that drills into Wright mythology and the dark shadows of the American dream. The narrative moves backwards in time

through the accounts of four women in Wright's life: Olgivanna, the steely, grounded dancer from Montenegro; Miriam, the drug-addled narcissist from the South; Kitty, the devoted first wife; and Mamah, the beloved and murdered soul mate and intellectual companion. But the novels centerpiece is Taliesin, Wright's Oz-like Wisconsin home. The tragedies that befall Taliesin's fires, brutality serve as proxy for Wright's inner turmoil.

Tuesday March 1st – *Framed in Blue* by D. C. Brod *please note that this book is also under the title *Masquerade in Blue*

In order to get a claustrophobic reporter friend out of jail, rugged p.i. Quint McCauley agrees to meet the "Blue Fox" and decide for himself whether the activist/environmentalist is guilty of the murder of real-estate developer Leonard Novotny. There were many, it seems, who wanted him dead, including his chilly wife; his alcoholic, banished (for undisclosed reasons) son; his crooked, blackmailing business partner; and most of the membership of SOW (Save Our Wetlands). Meanwhile, someone's putting snakes in Quint's car; a state senator is killed; the Blue Fox is framed again; and tales of Novotny family incest emerge.

St. Charles Heritage Center & History Museum

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Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 4pm

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50/50 Raffle

The Heritage Center will
be having a 50/50 raffle
drawing at the Heritage
Ball on January 29, 2011.

To purchase tickets
please see a board
member or stop by the
museum today!

Calendar of Events

January

- 1st ó Museum and Gift Shop Closed for the New Years Holiday
- 4th ó Book Club, 7:00pm St. Charles Public Library, no cost
- 14th ó Junior Historical Society Meeting, overnight at the History Museum 6:00pm
- 16th ó Annual Membership Meeting, 12:30pm St. Charles Public Library
- 19th ó Education Committee Meeting, 10:00am St. Charles History Museum
- 26th ó Board of Directors Meeting, 5:00pm St. Charles History Museum
- 29th ó First Annual St. Charles Heritage Ball, 6:00pm Hotel Baker

February

- 19th ó Junior Historical Society Meeting, overnight at the History Museum 6:00pm
- 16th ó Education Committee Meeting, 10:00am St. Charles History Museum
- 23rd ó Board of Directors Meeting, 5:00pm St. Charles History Museum

March

- 1st ó Book Club, 7:00pm St. Charles Public Library, no cost
- 19th ó Junior Historical Society Meeting, overnight at the History Museum 6:00pm
- 16th ó Education Committee Meeting, 10:00am St. Charles History Museum
- 23rd ó Board of Directors Meeting, 5:00pm St. Charles History Museum

Junior Historical Society

The St. Charles Heritage Center is excited to announce the return of their award-winning Junior Historical Society (JHS). This program has been honored by the Illinois Association of Museums for their outstanding programming and is recognized as a benchmark for other similar programs. The JHS is a group for students from 8-13 years old. The JHS meets once a month, during the school year, at the Heritage Center and the members participate in a variety of activities. In the past members have gone on walks through one of the oldest cemeteries in town and heard the stories of the town founders buried there, they have learned how to take oral histories from family members to preserve family memories, they have put together scrapbooks to preserve their own memories, they have learned about various aspects of St. Charles History and produced award-winning exhibits, last year members spent the night at the museum for a program and each year the group takes a trip to a Chicago or other Illinois museum. Last year the group traveled to Springfield for the day to visit New Salem, the Old State Capitol and the Lincoln Presidential Museum!

The JHS is open to any students interested in history and museums! Previously membership dues and other activity fees were collected from each member, however **thanks to a very generous grant from Comcast there will be NO CHARGE for membership in the JHS or for any of the programs/activities this year!** This program is made possible through funding from Comcast. For more information about Comcast and their Comcast Cares initiative please visit their website www.comcast.com. For more information on the JHS or to sign up please call Natalie at 630-584-6967!

Join us at our Overnight at the Museum on January 14th at the History Museum. Members will meet at the Museum Friday night at 6:00pm and enjoy pizza, a craft, museum activity, and a movie before turning in for a night amongst the exhibits!

For more details or to reserve your spot please contact Natalie!