

The Charlemagne

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

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ST. CHARLES
HERITAGE CENTER

General John F. Farnsworth: A Legacy of Service

Earlier this month we received an exciting new donation to our collection from the Farnsworth family, decedents of General John F. Farnsworth. Farnsworth was a Civil War General and US Representative. The family donated the Congressional desk and chair used by Farnsworth while he served as the Representative from Illinois' 2nd District.

Farnsworth, whose home was on Geneva Rd. on the east side of St. Charles, was first elected to Congress in 1856. He served for four years before he was defeated in 1860. The following year brought the start of the Civil War and

another way for Farnsworth to serve his community. Because of his friendship with President Lincoln, Farnsworth was granted permission to establish Camp



Members of the Farnsworth family delivering General Farnsworth's Congressional desk to the Museum

Kane, a Civil War training camp for the 8th and 17th Illinois Calvary units. The men who enlisted in these units were

from St. Charles and the surrounding com-

munities. Farnsworth rose to the rank of Brigadier General before resigning his commission in 1862 to resume his work in Congress.

The voters had once again elected Farnsworth as their Representative and he served for the next ten years. After his defeat for the nomination in 1872 Farnsworth resumed practicing law in Chicago until moving to Washington D.C. in 1880. General Farnsworth passed away at the age of 77 on July 17, 1897 in Washington D.C.

The home Farnsworth owned in St. Charles was sold to Charles Minard in 1879 and burned down in 1885. It was rebuilt and later was part of Mount Saint Mary Academy. It was taken down in 1993 to make room for the Viewpoint development.



Desk and chair used by General Farnsworth

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General Farnsworth sitting in a chair that appears to be the same one donated by the Farnsworth family

More photos of Farnsworth's desk and chair can be seen on page 7

The Historic Hotel Baker: The Crown Jewel of the Fox By Jessie Shattuck, St. Charles Heritage Center Intern

Director's Note: This past summer we were fortunate to work with two talented interns from Northern Illinois University. Natalie Cincotta and Jessie Shattuck, both Humanities Majors at NIU, spent eight weeks with us gaining experience in working for a small museum. Natalie and Jessie researched St. Charles history topics, wrote articles, developed exhibits, and produced short videos based on their research. Please stop by the Museum to check out their exhibits which will be on display in the front windows until November. You can also view their videos on our YouTube Channel or on our Facebook page. We would like to take this time to thank Natalie and Jessie for all of their hard work this summer - Good luck with school this fall, ladies! Enjoy Jessie 's article on the history of the Hotel Baker:

One of St. Charles greatest philanthropists, Colonel Edward J. Baker spared no expense when it came to building the Hotel Baker. Originally planning to spend only \$600,000 on the hotel's construction, Baker ended up spending around \$1,000,000, which is equivalent to over thirteen million dollars today, in order to include the latest conveniences and to perfect every aesthetic detail.

Popularly known as the "Gem of the Valley" and "Beauty Spot of the Fox River Valley", Hotel Baker had everything to do with elegance. It was a place for the rich to play, and an opportunity for the city of St. Charles to prosper. The first class operation held black-tie affairs with men and women showing up in the latest fashions in their

Pierce Arrows, Hudson Teriplanes and Packards.

The Hotel Baker was at first the site of the Old Haines Mill. Built in 1837, it burnt down in 1919 and the lot remained empty for seven years. Accumulating trash for those seven years and with talk going around that a new factory was going to take its place, Edward J. Baker bought the property in 1926 deciding that the focal point of St. Charles should be much grander. With the money he inherited through his older sister and her

husband John Warne "Bet-A-Million" Gates, the founder of the Texaco Oil Company, Edward J. Baker broke ground in September that very same year and began construction of the famed Hotel Baker. With the prosperity of St. Charles in mind, Baker desired to only hire local contractors and suppliers.

Though Colonel Edward J. Baker ("Colonel" due to his many successes in horse- racing) first planned for the hotel to be finished in 1927, he opened the doors of Hotel Baker to the public on June 21st, 1928 with a grand opening dinner celebration in the Rainbow Ballroom, where 301 guests attended. The two-story ballroom and dining room had a dance

floor lit-up with 2,620 yellow, red, green, and blue lights under 300 glass blocks, and was wired for more than 63,000 watts of electricity. The lights within the floor and the damn

outside on the Fox River were synchronized with the music from the Spanish Renaissance-style pipe organ, creating a festive ambiance with a bright kaleidoscope of color. At the time there were only three lighted floors of its kind in the entire world, and the \$30,000 pipe organ (equivalent worth of \$400,000 today) was 100% unique, being designed solely for the Hotel Baker.

Next to the Rainbow Ballroom was the Trophy room, now known as the Waterfront Room. Acting as a lounge for the hotel guests, the walls were painted in order for the room to replicate a courtyard of a Spanish mansion with Moorish influence, complete with decorated eaves, balconies, canopies, and terra cotta tiles. The ceiling was painted and lit to replicate moving clouds in the open sky. Two walls of the room have big windows overlooking the formal rose gardens and the Fox River.

When the hotel opened on June 2nd, 1928, accommodations started at a whopping \$2.50 a night. By 1947 a room was up to six dollars a night. In the thirties and forties Hotel Baker acquired the reputation of being the "Honeymoon Hotel" because of its proximity to the river, Pottawatomie Park and the Arcada Theatre. During the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago, the Hotel Baker was advertised as one of the best places in the area to stay.



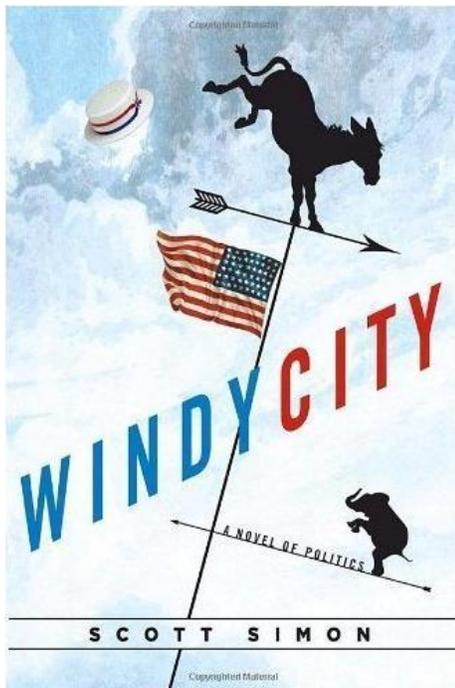
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Reading History: St. Charles Heritage Center Book Club

The St. Charles Heritage Center Book Club has book discussion scheduled on **November 6**.

Join us as we discuss **“Windy City: A Novel of Politics”** by Scott Simon.

The mayor of Chicago is found in his office late at night, sitting in his boxer shorts, facedown dead in a pizza. The mayor was a hero and a rascal: dynamic, charming, ingenious, corruptible, and a masterly manipulator. The city mourns. But it's discovered that the mayor was murdered—shortly after he may have begun to squeal on some of his colleagues at City Hall. Over the next four days, police race to find the mayor's killer, while the politicians who bemoan his passing scramble for his throne.



At the center is Sundaran “Sunny” Roopini, forty-eight, alderman of the Forty-eighth Ward, and vice-mayor. Sunny is an Indian immigrant, a restaurant owner, and a recent widower. He is getting tired of politics and wants to hold on just long enough to do the best for his two restive teenage daughters. But as acting interim mayor for a few days, Sunny must deal with forty-nine other aldermen who have their own clashing ambitions.

The St. Charles Heritage Center's Book Club will meet at the St. Charles Public Library from 7 - 8pm. We will be meeting in the Bisbee Conference Room right of the main lobby. For more information please call Natalie at 630-584-6967.

Join us in saying “Thank You” to Melvin Peterson

This month Melvin Peterson will be honored with a Proclamation from the City of St. Charles for his many years of service to our community. Over the past 70-plus years Melvin has served on numerous boards, including the St. Charles Heritage Center Board and the Baker Community House Board.

For almost 15 years Melvin Peterson has served the St. Charles Heritage Center as a volunteer, Board Member and Treasurer. He is a walking encyclopedia of St. Charles history and we are extremely grateful for all he has done for our organization!

Join us for an Open House Reception at the History Museum from 5-7pm on Wednesday, October 17th as we say “Thank You” to Melvin for his many years of service. Punch and refreshments will be served and exhibits will be open.

When you stop by to visit with Melvin you will also have the opportunity to view the newly donated

Congressional desk and chair used by St. Charles resident General John F. Farnsworth. General Farnsworth was the US Representative from the Illinois 2nd District (1856-1960, 1862-1872). General Farnsworth also started Camp Kane in St. Charles, a Civil War training camp for the 8th and 17th Illinois Calvary units.

We look forward to seeing you on October 17 to help us honor Melvin Peterson!



New Gift Shop items just in time for Christmas!

We are excited to announce that we have two new ornaments available in our gift shop this year.

The 2012 edition of the Christmas in St. Charles Collector's Ornament features the Old Post Office, now home to Doc Morgan. The Post Office was one of several WPA projects in St. Charles during the Great Depression. The 3-inch glass ball ornament is royal blue with white lettering. The 2012 ornament is available for \$10

New this year is a flat disc ornament with a line drawing of the Hotel Baker, Municipal Building, and Arcada Theatre. This ornament sells for \$14.95



Our neighbors across 3rd Avenue have offered to help us in our fundraising efforts! Wells Fargo Home Mortgage will make a \$300 donation to the St. Charles Heritage Center for each closing or loan refinance when you indicate the St. Charles Heritage Center as your organization of choice.

Thank you, Jay, for your support!



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NMLSR ID 404161

1. The recipient organization must have status under 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Contact a home mortgage consultant for details. Information is accurate as of date of printing and is subject to change without notice. Wells Fargo Home Mortgage is a division of Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. ©2011 Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. All rights reserved. NMLSR ID 399801.



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Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 4pm

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Stay up to date with information about events, promotions and news from the St. Charles Heritage Center. "Like" our fan page on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @STCHeritageCent Links to both can be found on our website
www.stcmuseum.org

Calendar of upcoming meetings and events for the St. Charles Heritage Center

October

- 5-7 Scarecrow Festival
- 10 Fundraising Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 17 Education Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 17 Melvin Peterson's Open House, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.
- 24 Fundraising Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 24 Board of Directors meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

November

- 6 Book Club, St. Charles Public Library, 7 p.m.
- 14 Fundraising Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 21 Education Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 23 Museum Closed for Thanksgiving
- 28 Fundraising Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 28 Board of Directors meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

December

- 6 Member's Day Sale & Open House, St. Charles History Museum
 - 12 Fundraising Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
 - 19 Fundraising Committee meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
 - 19 Board of Directors meeting, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.
 - 25 Museum Closed for Holidays will reopen January 2
- Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**

Program dates and times are subject to change, please call to confirm all events (630) 584-6967

From the Archive



A visit with Santa. What are your memories of Christmas in St. Charles?

Continued from page 2

The hotel and the Arcada Theater, built by the Norris' who also inherited John Gate's fortune, sparked a business and economic boom in St. Charles and it has been a busy and bustling town ever since.

Many famous guests have stayed at the hotel through out its history, including John F. Kennedy, Gerald Ford, Richard Daley, Louis Armstrong, and many more. While some guests arrived by chauffeur, others flew in with the Central Airway Corporation, which had three, 5-passenger Stinson Detroit planes. It was a fifteen minute trip between an airstrip west of town and the Chicago Flying Field. Roundtrips cost \$30 and Mr. Baker himself would greet them when they arrived at the airstrip.

For electricity, Hotel Baker was one of the few hotels in the world to generate its own power. It did so by channeling the Fox River into an underground raceway below the hotel. The river poured through sluice gates into alcoves where it turned two 50 kilowatt generator turbine blades, and then circled back out from below the hotel through a tunnel under Main Street and rejoined the river below the bridge. The generators have since been donated to a museum because they could not provide enough electricity for modern conveniences.

After World War II, the elegance of the Hotel Baker unfortunately began to deteriorate. Fashionable spiked heels began to scratch the glass blocks in the rainbow room, and after the flood of 1954 the lights in the floor became permanently damaged. In addition, the hotel lost its appeal when people began to travel farther by plane and car. Edward Baker died in 1959 at the age of 90, and his property was bequeathed to his niece Mrs. Dellora A. Norris. In 1968, after not being able to sell the hotel within her time restraints, she donated it to the LSSI,



or Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. The Hotel Baker retained its name, but was converted into a retirement home for men and women of an ambulatory age who could no longer handle a home or apartment on their own. During the ownership of LSSI, the hotel's parking

garage was razed and replaced by the Carroll Towers, the Rainbow Room floor was restored almost to its former glory, and Hotel Baker as a whole was listed as a local landmark by the St. Charles Historical Museum for its historic and architectural significance. In addition, the state of Illinois and the United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, placed the hotel on its National Register of Historic Places.

In 1996 the Hotel Baker was purchased by two local business men, Craig A. Frank and Neil D. Johnson, who sought to reopen it as a hotel to the public again, and to restore it to its original European elegance while renovating it with all the comforts and conveniences of today. The city of St. Charles created its first tax increment finance district to help fund the rehabilitation of Hotel Baker, and nine million dollars was used in the restoration. Also in 1996, Craig Frank and his mother Ruby received the Preservation Partners Award for their renovations of the Arcada Theatre and their renovation plans for the Hotel Baker.

Unfortunately in 2001 the new owners of the Hotel Baker missed a mortgage payment, partly to do with the events of September 11th, and the hotel was foreclosed and auctioned off. It was sold in a sealed-bid auction to Joe Salas, a computer consultant and real estate investor, with his partners Sonny Salas and Dan Burns. Today the Hotel Baker is just as beautiful and magnificent as it was in its heyday under the ownership of Edward Baker. Though it has been updated with modern conveniences, much of the hotel has been kept in its original state. Walking through the ornamental doorway through the Spanish-Moroccan inspired foyer, into the grandiose lobby, it's like walking back in time to the 1920s when it was first built. It is a transcendent experience and I think everyone should experience at least one night in this unique and beautiful historical landmark.



St. Charles Heritage Center Member's Day

Heritage Center Members receive 10% off gift shop purchases all year, but once a year as a special bonus we offer a 20% to say "Thank You for your continued support!"

Stop in the Museum Gift Shop on Thursday, December 6, for our special Member's Day Sale. All Members will receive the 20% discount on their entire purchase (some exclusions do apply), enjoy some holiday treats, and view our Christmas Exhibits in the front windows.

There are new items in the gift shop, including a new flat disc ornament featuring the Hotel Baker, Municipal Building and Arcada Theatre, new books, and a new St. Charles charm bracelet.

Get your Christmas shopping done while supporting the St. Charles Heritage Center!



Continued from page 1

Photos of the Farnsworth Congressional desk and chair:

- 1 - Close up of front detail on desk
- 2 - Front panel of desk
- 3 - Side view of chair
- 4 - Close up detail on top of chair
- 5 - View under the desk



Membership Form

Please check the yearly membership level of your choice:

- Grantor \$5,000+
- Benefactor \$1,000 - \$4,999
- Corporate \$500 - \$999
- Patron \$250 - \$499
- Sponsor \$100 - \$249
- Family \$45
- Individual \$30
- Senior \$20
- Student/Junior \$10



My check # _____ for \$ _____ is enclosed.

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NOTE: We do not rent or sell our private mailing list.

I would also like to be involved with the following:

- Grave Reminders Cemetery Walk Gift Shop Assistant
- Award Winning Junior Historical Society Special Events
- Museum Docent Book Club
- Office Assistant/Data Entry Other (please specify) _____

Print & Mail to:

**St. Charles Heritage Center
215 E. Main Street, St. Charles, IL 60174**

A large portion of the Heritage Center's budget comes from membership dues and we cannot operate without the support of our members. Please take a moment to fill out this membership renewal form and submit it with your 2013 membership fees. Thank you for your continued support of St. Charles history.