The Charlemagne

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

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ST. CHARLES HERITAGE CENTER

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Happy 80th Birthday

St. Charles Heritage Center

On January 19, 2013, the St. Charles Heritage Center celebrated its 80th Anniversary. Beginning in 1933 with the intent of collecting, preserving, and presenting St. Charles History, the Heritage Center has continued to be an important organization within the community.

Members of an early St. Charles Historical Society Board of Trustees

In the early days records, photos, and artifacts were kept above Colson's store on Main Street. In 1940 when the Baker and Norris families jointly built the Municipal Building for St. Charles, E.J. Baker made plans to ensure there was space for a Museum in the new government center. For the next 60 years the St. Charles Historical Society called that space home and their collection of artifacts and historic documents continued to grow. By 2000 that growing collection, along with the City's own expanding staff and office needs, led to the need for a new space. Renovations began on the old Texaco Station located at 215 E. Main Street. In May 2001 the new Museum space opened, and the St. Charles Heritage Center had a new home.

According to an early document from the 1940's, some of the first people to get involved with the St. Charles Historical Society included Mayors I.G. Langum and Ralph Richmond; civic leaders Col. E.J. Baker, Mr. and Mrs. Lester Norris, Lina Paschal and Effie Hunt; teachers Alice Davis and Helen Munhall; and businessmen S. E. Pike, F. M. Underwood, H. E. Colson, and J.H. Rockwell. These folks, along with others, made up the 25 member Board of Trustees. Today the Heritage Center is governed by a 15 member Board of Directors comprised of current and former St. Charles residents, teachers, business owners, and civic leaders. Though the faces have changed over the years, the love and and passion for St. Charles has remained strong.

Through the last 80 years the St. Charles Heritage Center has undergone a name change (from the St. Charles Historical Society to the Heritage Center), two moves, numerous staff and countless Board Members, but one thing has always remained constant – the focus of collecting, preserving and presenting St. Charles History. Today the Heritage Center collection includes over 10,000 images, more than 5,000 artifacts, numerous primary documents, and countless research documents pertaining to the history of St. Charles. Many of these items are on display in the exhibits or are available to the public by appointment through the research archive. The Heritage Center is an invaluable asset to the town and its residents.

For the whole of its existence, the St. Charles Heritage Center has been an independent non-profit entity, relying on memberships, donations, and support from residents and the city alike. As we celebrate the milestone of 80 years, we are not only continuing to collect the history of our wonderful town, we are also looking to ensure the future of the Heritage Center. With your help and support we will be able to guarantee the success of the Heritage Center for generations yet to come. Thank you to all of our members, visitors, and supporters for your interest in St. Charles History. Here's to another 80 years!

The exhibit hall at the St. Charles History Museum today

The St. Charles History Museum Building Celebrates a Milestone

By: Phil Johnson, Heritage Center Volunteer

The St. Charles Heritage Center is not alone in celebrating an Anniversary this year; the building we call home is turning 85. Here is a look back at the history of this St. Charles landmark

To the eye of an outsider, St. Charles might seem like any other suburban town. Lost in neighborhoods of cookie cutter homes and the fluorescent lighting of big box stores, its residents often ignore the historical marvels that surround them. From being an integral piece of the Underground Railroad to being ranked the number one place in America to raise a family, St. Charles has long exemplified excellence in a historical light.

Nothing illustrates the history of our city and its people more than the building at 215 E. Main Street. Here, this gas station turned history museum serves not only as a place to preserve our historical identity, but also as a living reminder of it. Although the building dates back to 1928, its story begins in 1904 when the son of a Swedish immigrant decided to capitalize the growth of industry.

It was 1904 when Charles McCornack took a calculated risk to leave the family farm just west of Elgin. He purchased a small company that sold oil and kerosene to the general public, and named his business the McCornack Oil Company. The growth and development of Route 64 contributed greatly to Charles McCornack's success, and it allowed him to open his first filling station on West Main Street. Most St. Charles residents know of this place as a popular watering hole named "The Filling Station".

McCornack Oil Company in the early days

Ira Minard's home was located where the St. Charles Heritage Center now stands. The home was moved in 1928 to make way for the McCornack Oil Company

While riding the economic growth of the roaring twenties, Charles again expanded his business when he purchased property on the other side of the river. Located in the same building where the St. Charles Heritage Center is today, McCornack established his headquarters. The building's architecture was a popular throwback to 16th century England known today as the Tudor Revival. It's half-timbered gable, chimney stack and bays of stone and brick reflected what was seen in other Chicagoland homes at the time. However, the expansion of his business to both banks of the Fox River meant that McCornack Oil needed to take the next step. In 1934, McCornack became affiliated with Texaco.

Texaco's affiliation with McCornack Oil signaled the beginning of many changes for the business and building. Charles McCornack didn't live long after to see these changes to his business, as he died in 1935. This left Don McCornack, Charles' son, in command. But Don had other priorities. Seeking to decrease his holdings and focus on other business, he sold the Main Street headquarters to Bob Henningson and Len Askeland.

Bob Henningson

Story continued on page 6...

Annual Membership Meeting Date Changed

Due to several conflicts we have rescheduled the Annual Membership Meeting and Open House originally scheduled for Saturday, January 26. **The new date is Saturday, February 23, at 1:30 p.m.** at the St. Charles Heritage Center. We apologize for the inconvenience and hope that you will be able to attend on this new date. We have several new exhibits on display at the Museum and we are looking forward to sharing what we have accomplished during the past year and our plans for the future with all of our members at this meeting. If you are interested in attending, please call Natalie at 630-584-6967 prior to February 20th to be entered into a special raffle. After a brief business meeting the Museum exhibits will be open, and members will have a rare opportunity to view ñbehind the scenesò spaces in the Museum. We look forward to seeing you next month at the Membership Meeting!

Brown Bag Lunch Program

Co-Sponsored by the St. Charles Heritage Center and the St. Charles Public Library

Please join us at noon on Thursday, March 7, at the St. Charles Public Library for a free brown bag lunch program. Pack your lunch and meet us downstairs in the Huntley Meeting Room where Lance Brown will present his first person performance ñWill Rogers Now!ò

Lance Brown as Will Rogers

Will Rogers was born on November 4, 1879, in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). "My ancestors didn't come over on the Mayflower, but they met the boat," said Rogers. His diverse talents and humanitarian work kept him in the public eye most of his life. He wrote a column for the New York Times, was a radio and film personality, humorist, and a grass-roots philosopher. Will's direct, straightforward attitudes about life, politics, and the world reflect the values of the cowboy culture in which he was raised.

Mr. Brown's address, "Will Rogers, Now!" takes an entertaining and insightful look at the cowboy's life and values. As Will Rogers, Mr. Brown speaks on subjects ranging from leadership and teamwork to human folly and todayôs headlines. He uses Rogers' famous trick roping and playful humor to bring America's most loved citizen to life. He points up the irony of how many of Will Rogers' comments apply directly to what is happening today.

Drawing on over 15 years experience portraying Will Rogers, Lance Brown brings this great American hero to life to motivate and inspire his audiences. Rogersôdown-to-earth style and common sense wit and wisdom are perfect antidotes to the fast-paced world we live in today.

We hope to see you at this exciting program. Reservations are not required, for more information please contact Natalie at 630-584-6967.

St. Charles Public Library

New Exhibits on Display at the History Museum!

Heritage Center staff and volunteers have been busy over the last month changing around some of the exhibits in the Museum! We have such a wonderful collection of St. Charles artifacts that we try to rotate items from time to time so everything has a chance to be seen by the public.

Dr. Carlson's Dental Office exhibit, which was a favorite for many visitors, has been taken off display and returned to storage so the beautiful baby grand piano made by the Cable Piano Company in St. Charles could be moved into the center space in the main exhibit hall.

A new display showcasing items made here in St. Charles during the 1950s and 1960s will be up through May. Items on display are from Howell Manufacturing, St. Charles Kitchens, Hawley Products, and Riverview Dairy. Additional items used in town during that time are also included in the display.

The History of St. Charles Mayors is the focus of another new exhibit. Visitors can learn about our city's leaders and their impact on our community's history through the photos, artifacts and interesting facts shared in this display.

The front windows also have new displays which will be up for the coming months. The Winter Activities window shows off some of the favorite winter pastimes including ice skating, tobogganing, and hockey, while the other two windows detail the history of businesses in St. Charles. Operadio/ DuKane products fill one window, and photos and items from the Blue Goose and other family run grocery stores fill the other.

We hope you will stop by soon and check out our new exhibits! We also welcome any suggestions on exhibits you would like to see in the future.

St. Charles Heritage Center & History Museum

215 East Main Street
St. Charles, IL 60174
Office & Museum 630-584-6967
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Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 4pm

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Julie Bunke, Treasurer
Karen Comstock
Sue Glad
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Brian Henry, Treasurer
Bob Matson
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Natalie Gacek, Director/Educator
Jim McGuire, Collections

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Stay up to date with information about events, promotions and news from the St. Charles Heritage Center. ñLikeò 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

January

2 **Museum reopens after break**

9 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.

23 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.

Februray

2 **Split the Pot Raffle Kickoff**, Blue Goose Supermarket, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

13 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.

23 **Annual Membership Meeting and Open House *This is the rescheduled date**, St. Charles History Museum, 1:30 p.m.

27 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.

27 **Board of Directors meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

March

7 **Brown Bag Lunch Program**, St. Charles Public Library, 12 p.m.

13 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.

27 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.

27 **Board of Directors meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

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

From the Archive

Ice skating on the Fox River was a popular winter pastime for many. What are your memories of St. Charles during the winter?

Continued from page 2

Bob & Len's operated for 13 years, but eventually had to close down in 1960 and sell all the company assets to Texaco in 1962.

Many owners operated the building until 1989, when Mobil closed due to gasoline leaking into the Fox River. Because of the leak, no new owner purchased the gas station and the building sat vacant for a decade. However, the building's unique architecture and historical significance to the city earned it landmark status in 1991 by the St. Charles Historical Society. While the updated status gave strict standards for development, it didn't protect the building from the wrecking ball.

The Texaco Men ready to help service your car

St. Charles Alderman Peter Grathoff, recognizing the importance of the former McCornack Oil Company, devised a practical plan to save the building. In his plan, the St. Charles history museum would be moved from the Municipal Building to the old gas station so that there would be more room for city offices. In 2000, the plan was implemented and the old McCornack building was renovated for $435,000. Renovations were completed without compromising the integrity of the original Tudor architecture.

215 E. Main Street circa 1928

By May 2001, the building was reopened to the public as the St. Charles Heritage Center, where the history of our collective past is displayed for the public. To this day, the Heritage Center and the building it occupies serve as a reminder to residents that there is more to St. Charles than meets the eye.

215 E. Main Street 2012

The St. Charles Heritage Center Split the Pot Raffle is BACK

This year the Heritage Center will once again be holding a "Split the Pot Raffle" in conjunction with our major fundraiser. Our 3rd Annual St. Charles Heritage Celebration will take place Saturday, June 29th (watch for more information on this event in the next issue of the Charlemagne!) At that time five (5) lucky tickets will be pulled and the winners will share in a percentage of the prize money. Ticket sales will kick off on Saturday, February 2, at the Blue Goose; after that day tickets will be available at the St. Charles History Museum or through Board Members and Fundraising Committee Members. Ticket prices are $5 each, OR - 3 tickets for $10, 8 tickets for $20, or 50 tickets for $100. Half of the total money raised from the ticket sales will be split into shares for the winners. Good luck!!

Split the Pot Raffle Winner's Share Breakdown:

5th Place will receive **5%** of the Pot

4th Place will receive **10%** of the Pot

3rd Place will receive **15%** of the Pot

2nd Place will receive **20%** of the Pot

1st Place will receive **50%** of the Pot

There will be one winner for each place, winners do not need to be present at the drawing to win

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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Jay Jacobson
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1. The recipient organization must have status under 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Contact a home mortgage consultant for details.
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Together we'll go far

Membership Form

ST. CHARLES HERITAGE CENTER

To Collect, Preserve & Present St. Charles History

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.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

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

_____

Print & Mail to:

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

A large portion of the Heritage Centerôs 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.