

# The Charlemagne

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

VOLUME XXVII  
ISSUE 1  
SPRING 2010  
ST. CHARLES  
HERITAGE CENTER

## St. Charles in the 1920s & 1930s by Jim McGuire

St. Charles' reputation as one of the premier cities in Illinois continued into the 1920s. The city's population continued to rise, topping 4,500 residents and more businesses and industries began operations, joining those already established in town.

In 1926, the community high school was built on fourteen acres of land at the corner of Seventh and West Main at a cost of about \$250,000. Two years later, Lincoln Elementary School was built. That same year, Nancy Lencioni opened the Blue Goose Grocery Store. The store was the first to have a refrigerated display of fresh produce, go to a customer self-service, and install a walk-in refrigerator. On May 29, 1929, the St. Charles Chamber of Commerce (though previously organized) received its official certificate of incorporation. Local police officers were kept busy with the problem of the illegal distribution of alcohol. The bootlegging practice was rampant in the area. Al Capone, owned a hideaway near downtown St. Charles and was a bootlegger. The illegal practice went on until 1933, when the prohibition amendment was repealed.

Colonel Edward J. Baker and Lester and Dellora Norris also made their lasting impact on St. Charles during the 1920s. As the only two

heirs to the John W. Gates' Texaco oil fortune, Colonel Baker and Dellora used much of their inheritance to give back to the city that they loved. Colonel Baker worked with local politicians, including St. Charles Mayor Henry Roehl, in convincing state officials to designate Main Street (Rt. 64) a state highway in 1920. On May 1, 1926, the Henry Rockwell Baker Memorial Building was dedicated and instantly became a hub of social activity for residents. That same year, the Arcada Theatre opened. Through the efforts of Lester and Dellora, the Arcada became one of St. Charles' finest institutions. John Philip Sousa and his band performed two concerts at the Arcada in 1928. The building for the St. Charles National Bank was completed in 1926. On June 2, 1928, the Hotel Baker opened its doors and soon became one of the premier hotels in the country. The hotel was promoted as one of the best places to stay at in the Fox River Valley during the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago, with room rates starting at \$2.50 a night. With such establishments, more people came to reside in St. Charles during the 1930s. According to the

1930 census, St. Charles' population was at 5,377. A 1932 City Directory canvas put the population at 6,500, and by 1936, the population count was up to 6,900. Many residents enjoyed going to Pottawatomie Park. The park had around twenty acres of recreational facilities, including tennis courts, a baseball diamond, horse-shoe courts, bathing beach, playground equipment, a pavilion, boating, and picnic areas.

St. Charles' growth and reputation became known nationally during the two decades. In 1928, a victory bus containing literature that promoted the presidential campaign of Herbert Hoover stopped in town. In 1938, much of the national media, including CBS and NBC, covered the St. Charles Fall Festival, as many local, state, and national politicians attended. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, son of the twenty-sixth president, delivered the main address during the festival's Republican Day, while Illinois Governor Henry Horner did the same a day earlier, during the festival's Democrat Day. Even the local baseball game between House of David and Kane County All Stars drew national attention, as Major

League Baseball announcers Russ Hodges and Bob Elson provided analysis.

As with previous decades, new businesses and industries began operations during the 1930s. On September 1, 1939, Frank Burger, formerly a Walgreen's manager in Chicago, opened his own drug store, Burger Drugs, in town. However, unlike previous decades, the Great Depression forced some local businesses to close their doors. Most notable was the Cable Piano Company, which ceased operations on January 7, 1937, as a result of declining sales caused by the economic crisis.

While being projected as a national economic downturn, the Depression had a profound impact locally, as well. With many residents unemployed, Mayor I.G. Langum, instituted a soup kitchen in St. Charles in 1931, and for two years, it was a successful operation. The soup kitchen was for those in need, as well as their families. If workers put a full day in cleaning the area along the Fox River in Pottawatomie Park, then they and their families would receive food. On average, the soup kitchen fed 3,500 people per month. Though deep and profound, the Depression did not stop St. Charles' progression.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

St. Charles history	1
Fundraising	2
New Donations	2
Evening Lecture	2
Education News	3
Book Club	3
Calendar of Events	4

**Join us for BINGO!**

On Saturday evening June 26th we will be holding a special fundraising evening at the Baker Community Center for an ice cream social and to play BINGO! Doors open at 6:00pm Bingo begins at 6:30pm and ends at 9:00pm.

Bingo cards will be sold for \$5.00 each for the first card and \$2.00 each for subsequent cards.

Refreshments will be available for purchase.

**What a fun way to raise money for the museum!**

**Thursday Evening  
Lecture**

Please join us at the St. Charles Public Library on Thursday, April 8th, from 7 - 8 pm for a presentation on the *I&M Canal and it's People* by James Carr.

This program is open to everyone and is free for members; donations are appreciated.

**MEMBERSHIP**

**Thank you to those who have renewed your 2010 Membership!**

**If your newsletter has a red smiley face on the front that means your membership has expired and this will be the last newsletter sent to you. Please contact the museum about renewing your membership today.**

*Thank you for your continued support!*

**New Donations to the History Museum**

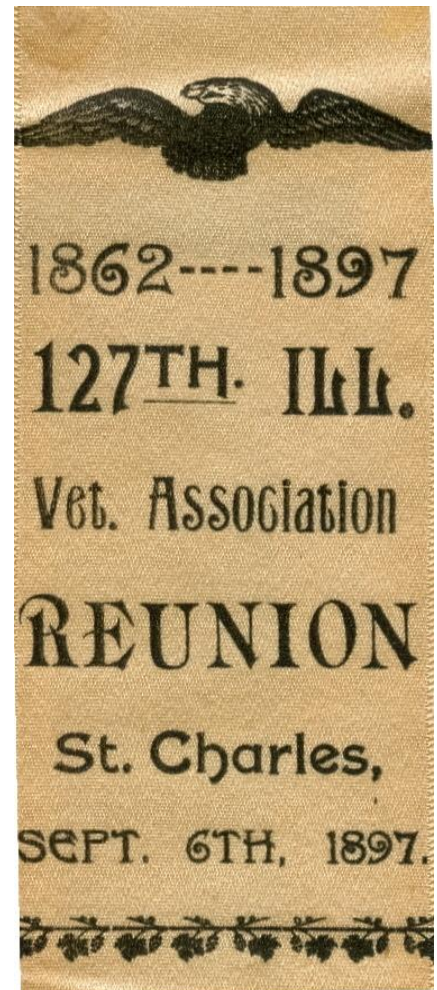
Once again several new donations have been presented to the museum. Included in the donations is a program for the 1922 St. Charles Day Celebration (shown below). Given by Ron Warner, this program highlights the festivities that could be enjoyed at Pottawatomie Park.



Judy Shaw, descendant of James Frank Richmond, St. Charles resident and President of the 127th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Reunion Association, donated dozens of reunion ribbons from the association (shown at right) This particular reunion was held at the Odd Fellows Hall in downtown St. Charles with tickets to the reunion banquet costing 50 cents.

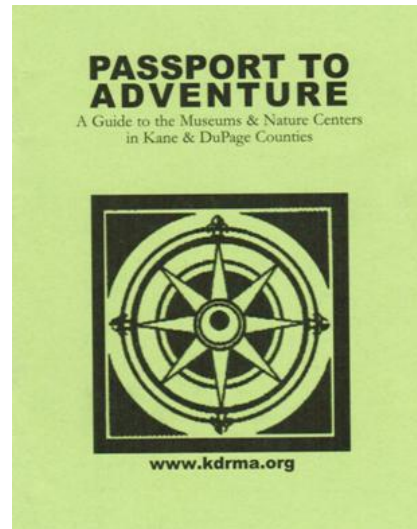
The banquet was open to oldies, and all who have at any time been members of the Regimentö.

Also donated to the museum is the St. Charles sign which graced the Chicago and Northwestern Depot located on South First Street. The building was razed in the 1970s and the sign was saved and donated by Heritage Center Board Member Bob Matson. Look for it in the museum exhibit hall on your next visit.



## Education News

Spring has (finally) sprung! With the change in weather we are reminded that soon there will be plenty of free time for youngsters in this area. If you know any children ages 4 and up you might be interested in the Kane-DuPage Regional Museum Association's program - *Passport to Adventure*. Each year KDRMA puts together a Passport book of all of the museums, nature centers, zoos, and arboretums in Kane and DuPage Counties. The books are free and can be picked up at the St. Charles History Museum or the St. Charles Library beginning Memorial Day Weekend. The program runs from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Participants who visit more than 7 sites in the book are eligible for a prize! With over 60 sites listed in the Passport, there is something for everyone. These books also make a great resource for the rest of the year because they have the location, hours, and cost for all of the sites! For more information on KDRMA or the Passport book, visit their Facebook site [www.facebook.com/kdrmapassport](http://www.facebook.com/kdrmapassport)



## St. Charles Heritage Center Book Club

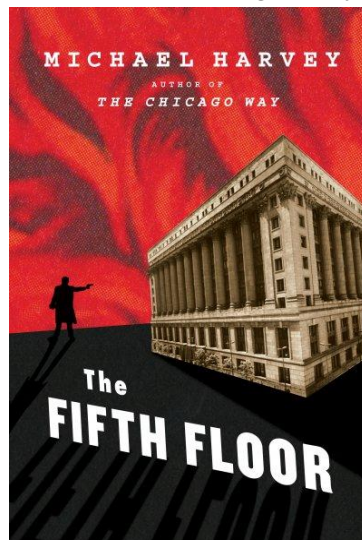
Looking for a good book to read? The St. Charles Heritage Center has a book club that meets every other month to discuss a book that relates to local, regional, or state history.

The group meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7pm in the Carnegie Room at the St. Charles Library. The group meets in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

This is a free program open to everyone in the community. Please join us on May 4th to discuss *The Fifth Floor* by Michael Harvey.

Private detective Michael Kelly returns in a lightning-paced, intricately woven mystery. When Kelly is hired by an old girlfriend to tail her abusive husband, he expects trouble of a domestic rather than a historical nature. Life, however, is not so simple. The trail leads to a dead body in an abandoned house on

Chicago's North Side and then to places Kelly would rather not go: specifically, City Hall's fabled fifth floor, where the mayor is feeling the heat. Kelly becomes embroiled in a scam that stretches from current politics back to the night Chicago burned to the ground. Along the way, he finds himself framed for murder, before finally facing a killer bent on rewriting history.




Are you on facebook? So is the Heritage Center! Check out the Heritage Center's new facebook Fan Page and join as a fan. Fans get weekly updates about the goings on at the Heritage Center, reminders about programs, and special discount alerts for our gift shop. You can link to our facebook page from our website [www.stcmuseum.org](http://www.stcmuseum.org) or by searching St. Charles Heritage Center on facebook.

**A very special thank you goes to Kathy Brens and family!**

**The Brens Family made a very generous contribution of \$5,000 in honor of the late Jack Brens, who was active with the Heritage Center Board of Directors and Grave Reminders Cemetery Walk. He will be remembered for his dedication to the museum and love of St. Charles and the community.**

## St. Charles Heritage Center & History Museum

215 East Main Street  
St. Charles, IL 60174  
Office & Museum 630-584-6967  
Fax 630-584-6077  
www.stcmuseum.org  
info@stcmuseum.org

Hours of Operation  
Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 4pm  
Sunday noon - 4pm June, July and  
August

### Board of Directors

Kathy Brens  
Karen Comstock  
Kevin Gaffney, Vice-President  
Sue Glad  
Carol Glemza  
Roseanne Gulisano  
Brian Henry, Treasurer  
Jo Krieger  
Allen Landmeier, Secretary  
Mike Landmeier  
Bob Matson  
Martha Miller  
Joe Schelstreet  
Brad Urhausen, President  
William Warner

Melvin Peterson, Asst. Treasurer

### Staff

Julie Bunke, Director/Registrar  
Natalie Gacek, Educator

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**The Heritage Center**  
**will be holding its**  
**first annual**  
**Heritage Ball on**  
**Saturday**  
**January 29th, 2011**  
**at the historic**  
**Hotel Baker!**  
**More information to follow in**  
**the next Charlemagne.**

## April

- 8 **Thursday Evening Lecture**, St. Charles Public Library, 7 p.m. Free to members, donations appreciated.
- 10 **Junior Historical Society meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 1 ó 2:30 p.m.
- 14 **Education Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 28 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 28 **Board of Directors meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

## May - National Historic Preservation Month

- 4 **Book Club**, St. Charles Public Library, 7:00 p.m.
- 5 **Joe K. Anderson Roundtable Discussion**, Pottawatomie Community Center, 12:30 - 2:00pm. Free to members donations appreciated.
- 8 **Junior Historical Society meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 1 ó 2:30 p.m.
- 19 **Education Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 26 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 26 **Board of Directors meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

## June

- 12 **Junior Historical Society meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 1 ó 2:30 p.m.
- 16 **Education Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 23 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 23 **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



Men working on the Langum Trail during the Depression. The Langum Trail, named after Mayor Ival Langum, was north of Main Street on the East bank of the Fox River. Men could work 8 hours for the city and get enough food to feed their family.