

# The Charlemagne

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

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ST. CHARLES  
HERITAGE CENTER

## St. Charles in the 1900s & 1910s by Jim McGuire

By the late nineteenth century, St. Charles had grown from a village into a city, complete with a rising population and high number of businesses and industries. With the dawn of the twentieth century, these two facets helped make St. Charles one of the premier towns in all of Illinois.

The population of St. Charles grew to around 3,000 during the early 1900s. According to the 1902 St. Charles City Directory, the city's site was regarded by many to be one of the most beautiful places for a town that there is in Northern Illinois. Trees lined many of the side streets in town, while the primary road was Main Street, then covered with nothing more than mud and dust. Businesses aptly lined Main Street, though, on both sides of the Fox River, which cut through the center of town, dividing businesses and residences into equal parts. As more the population and number of businesses continued to grow, St. Charles' popularity spread. Soon, the city became a popular destination for get-aways, especially during the summer, mainly for those coming from Chicago.

St. Charles had over twenty lodges. New social organizations were formed, including the Tuesday Club. This was a women's club with a rather high membership. It was a member of the state federation of women's clubs and quickly became one of the leading clubs in the state. The four schools, including the new high school, were highly regarded throughout the area. The public library, incorporated in 1888, now would have its own build-

ing at East Main and Fifth Avenue. St. Charles was an appealing place to visit and reside in.

The city was also appealing for businesses to come to. In the 1902 St. Charles City Directory, the city was fast taking rank as one of the leading manufacturing towns in the industrial belt surrounding Chicago. Among the many industries in town during the 1900s first decade were the St. Charles Condensing Company, the National Milk Sugar Company, Sherwin Creamery, Moline Malleable Iron Company, Cable Piano Company, Crown Electrical Manufacturing Company, Glenn Manufacturing Company, Leader Fence Machine Manufacturing Company, and the St. Charles File Company. In 1904, Charles S. McCornack started the McCornack Oil Company. In 1906, The St. Charles Net and Hammock Company began, specializing in the sale of hammocks, basketball goals, woven minnow skeins, and various other textiles nationwide.

With the success of its creameries, St. Charles was among the world's richest dairy districts. In 1901, a milk route was started that would eventually grow into a bigger business. That year, the Anderson family moved to St. Charles from Batavia. One of the children, Simon, founded the family milk route in the area, known as Anderson Dairy. A decade later, Anderson Dairy began production of ice cream, and Colonial Ice Cream began.

The next decade saw still more people and more businesses. The population topped 4,300 in the 1910s, with around 1,400 employed in many of the businesses mentioned earlier. Still others worked in new establishments, such as Bowman Dairy Company, Faultless Stove Works, Doige File Company, Borden Condensed Milk Company (formerly St. Charles Condensing Company), Globe Music Company, and Western Seamless Pail Company. In 1915, Illinois Cleaners and Dyers was started in town and quickly became one of the largest such establishments in the country.

Residents attending church went to St. Patrick's Church (Catholic), the Congregational Church, the Good Sheppard Mission at Library Hall (Episcopal), the Swedish Free Mission at Library Hall (Evangelical), the Free Methodist Church, the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Church, or Methodist Episcopal (either First Methodist Episcopal Church or Swedish Methodist Episcopal Church). Some attended weekly Christian Science services at Library Hall.

In 1912, sewers were installed in the city, marking the end of outdoor plumbing. Also in 1912, on May 20, Pottawatomie Park became property of St. Charles. This was the first public park established under the 1911 Illinois Park Act. In 1915, Main Street became a paved road, albeit with brick.

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1918 began with the burning of Haines Mill in January. The blaze occurred during one of the areas fiercest snowstorms. The amount of snow, coupled with the efforts of the St. Charles Fire Department, prevented the fire from doing more catastrophic damage. In December, Dellora Gates, widow of John Gates, passed away, bequeathing the Gates' Texaco fortune to her brother, Colonel Edward J. Baker, and her niece, Dellora Angell.

The railroad was still a major asset to St. Charles during the first two decades of the 1900s. The Chicago Great Western Railroad continued to pass through town. A branch of the Chicago and Northwest Railroad maintained city connection with the main line in Geneva. In 1902, the Aurora, Elgin, and Southern electric line connected St. Charles with Aurora, Elgin, Batavia, Geneva, Carpentersville, Dundee, and Yorkville. During the 1910s, The Aurora, Elgin, and Chicago Railroad connected St. Charles with Aurora, Elgin, and Chicago, as well as with points in between.

Within the forty-six years after receiving its charter to become a city in 1874, St. Charles grew into one of the premier cities in Illinois for residences and businesses alike.

### Join us for Dinner!

On Thursday evening January 14th we will be holding a special fundraising evening at the Colonial Café Restaurant at 1625 East Main Street in St. Charles.

Simply eat at the restaurant between 4:30 pm and close, place your receipt in a specially marked box for the Heritage Center and the museum will receive up to 20% of the net sales for that evening.

What a tasty way to raise money for the museum!

### Annual Membership Meeting

*The Annual St. Charles Heritage Center Membership Meeting will be held at the St. Charles Public Library Sunday January 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 beginning at 12:30 am.*

*There will be a brief program with committee presentations and light refreshments. Members are encouraged to bring friends who are interested in joining. Questions? please call 630-584-6967.*

### Membership Dues Increase

The St. Charles Heritage Center, as many other non-profits, has been affected by the economy and we regretfully have had to increase membership dues for the 2010 year.

Dues have remained unchanged at the museum for 18 years but will increase as of January 1st to the following rates:

- Seniors - \$20.00
- Individual - \$30.00
- Family - \$45.00

**Thank you for your support!**

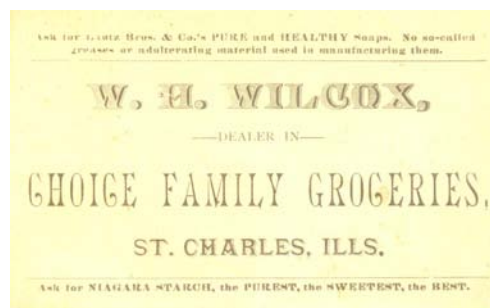
## New Donations to the History Museum

New donations to the Heritage Center include several family photos of the Swan Erickson family (pictured below) given by **Lennart Jonsson** of Geneva. Swan and his wife, Carolina, resided in St. Charles where Swan worked as an Engineer at the Cable Piano Company. The couple lived at 402 South First Street. (Swan and his wife are the couple on the right)



The above image was donated by **John Forni** of St. Charles. Mr. Forni played Santa Claus in the Fox Valley area for 60 years. After retiring last year, John donated his Santa suit complete with boots, glasses and gloves to the museum which are currently on display in the front window of the museum through the holidays.

Pictured below is an advertising trade card given by **Carl and Liz Safanda** for Acme Soap sold at the W.H. Wilcox Store which was located on East Main Street in downtown St. Charles. This card dates to about 1900 and boasts that the Lutz Bros. & Cos. soaps are the Purest, the Sweetest, the Best.



## The Junior Historical Society

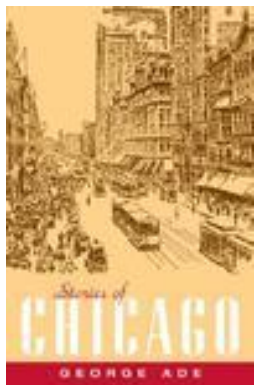
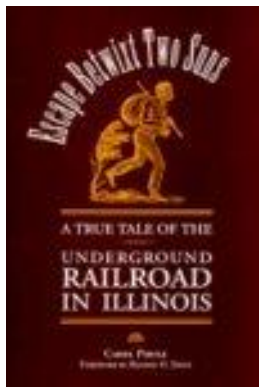
The Junior Historical Society is a group for 8 - 13 year olds interested in local and regional history. The group is open to all students in the area. The JHS meets once a month (typically on the second Saturday of the month). Past meeting activities include Cemetery Walks and Scavenger Hunts, tours of historic places in town, visits to Chicago area museums, behind the scenes tours of the St. Charles History Museum, exhibit planning and installation, and artifact and photograph preservation. In the upcoming months members of the JHS will be spending the night at the St. Charles Heritage Center, visiting museums in Springfield, IL, and participating in a scavenger hunt throughout downtown St. Charles. Membership to the group is \$15 for each school year and is always open. New members are welcome to come and try out a meeting, and attendance at all meetings is not required. For a membership brochure or for more information please contact Natalie at 630-584-6967.



Members of the JHS on a trip to Chicago in 2009

## St. Charles Heritage Center Book Club

The Heritage Center Book Club will be meeting in January and March to discuss the first two books of the year. The first meeting will take place on Tuesday January 5th at 7:00 pm in the Carnegie Room at the St. Charles Public Library. The book we will be reading and discussing is *Escape Betwixt Two Suns*, by Carol Pritle. This book relates the true tale of the Underground Railroad in Southern Illinois. *Escape* follows the story of Susan ôSukeyô Richardsonø escape from slavery on the Underground Railroad and the involvement of her ownerø neighbor William Hayes. Pritle uses letters sent to Hayes, trial transcripts from the Hayesøcivil trial, and newspaper articles to tell a story that until now had remained untold.



The book we will be reading and discussing at the March 2nd Book Club Meeting will be *Stories of Chicago* by George Ade.

This book is a compilation of over fifty short stories that were written by Ade and appeared in the *Chicago Record* between 1893 - 1900. These stories are energetic, detailed and affectionate slices of the social life in Chicago in the gay Nineties. They range from candid character sketches and snapshots of everyday street scenes to fiction and fantasies drawing on the endless stream of inspiration the bustling city provided. Accompanying these lively tales are drawings from John T. McCutcheon and others.

Please join us for the discussions on these interesting books! For more information on the book club please contact Natalie at the Heritage Center, 630-584-6967.



Are you on Facebook? So is the Heritage Center! Check out the Heritage Centerø 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.

### 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!

## **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

### **Board of Directors**

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Melvin Peterson, Asst. Treasurer

### **Staff**

Julie Bunke, Director/Registrar  
Natalie Gacek, Educator

### **January**

- 2 **Museum Re-opens**
- 5 **Book Club**, St. Charles Public Library, 7 p.m.
- 9 **Junior Historical Society meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 1 ó 2:30 p.m.
- 17 **Annual Meeting**, St. Charles Public Library, 12:30 p.m.
- 20 **Education Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 27 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 27 **Board of Directors meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 5 p.m.

### **February**

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

### **March**

- 2 **Book Club**, St. Charles Public Library, 7 p.m.
- 13 **Junior Historical Society meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 1 ó 2:30 p.m.
- 17 **Education Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 10 a.m.
- 24 **Fundraising Committee meeting**, St. Charles History Museum, 4 p.m.
- 24 **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

## **It's not to late to sponsor your special year!**

**Purchase a memorable year in our St. Charles History Journal for just \$175 from 1834, the founding of St. Charles, to the anniversary year of 2009. Purchase multiple years, and discounts apply. The Center's staff will research your year and provide the buyer with a certificate of notable events commemorating the year.**

**Visit our website at [www.stcmuseum.org](http://www.stcmuseum.org) to print off a blank order form to reserve your year.**

**Thank you for your continued support!**

# In Memory

On December 18th, the St. Charles Heritage Center lost a very dear and close friend, Jack Brens. Jack gave of his time and talents to make the Heritage Center a success and he will be greatly missed for his humor and wisdom. Each fall Jack was instrumental in organizing the Grave Reminders Cemetery Walk where he played many characters from St. Charles history including Dean Ferson, Bela T. Hunt and J.T. Wheeler. His love of St. Charles and its history was evident in the way he gave back to his community. His admiration for and service to his community should be looked to as an outstanding example for us all to follow. Below is his obituary as printed in the Daily Herald.

John K. Jackö Brens, 67, a long-time resident of St. Charles, died at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. He was born April 8, 1942, in Chicago, the son of John and Dorothy (Sheehan) Brens.

Jack was a graduate of St. Charles High School, (1960), attended University of Wisconsin where he played basketball from 1960-1964, and graduated from Aurora University in 1973.

He retired in 1994 from All-Steel Inc in Aurora after 29 years of service. His second career was giving back to his community with great joy. He oversaw the building of the Congregational United Church of Christ, St. Charles, on LaFox Road. He served on several boards, most recently as president at the St. Charles Heritage Center and on the Carriage Oaks Board. Jack was a recipient of the Jodie Harrison Lifetime Achievement Award. He also served on the Distinguished Alum Committee. He was a charter member and former president of the St. Charles Kiwanis Golden K. He was honored as Kiwanian of the Year in 2006.

His greatest loves were taking care of his family (a master chef), following sports events, and traveling with family and friends.

Jack is survived by his beloved wife of 43 years, Kathy; his children, J. P. (Kendra) Brens of Plainfield, IN, Jake (Kelly) Brens of Sycamore and Joel (Gena) Brens of Aurora; his dear grandchildren, Danielle and Conner Brens; his sister, Grace (Gordon) Gunnlaugsson of Hartland, WI; his brothers, Charlie Brens of Denver, CO and George (Sue) Brens of Batavia.

A service to celebrate his life will be held on Saturday, January 9, 2010, at 10:00 A.M. at Congregational United Church of Christ, 40W451 Fox Mill Blvd, St. Charles with Rev. Dr. John R. Rodgers officiating.



Jack portraying Dean Ferson at the 2002 Grave Reminders Cemetery Walk.

# St. Charles Heritage Center..

The St. Charles Heritage Center is a 501(c)3, not-for-profit organization consisting of historic archives and two museums, The St. Charles History Museum and the Dunham-Hunt House. The Center serves citizens and the community by collecting, preserving and presenting local and regional history.

The Center holds more than 10,000 photographs in its archive and 15,000+ artifacts in its collection. These historic items are available for all to enjoy, and learn about our fascinating past. Financial support comes solely from the Center's membership, citizen's donations, organizational support and grants.

## *St. Charles History Museum* • 215 E. Main

The History Museum Houses the exhibit hall, the Anderson Research Room, photo & research archives, Museum Gift Shop, administrative offices and the storage-preservation repository for the Center's collections. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm .

## *Programs & Events...*

The Center offers many enlightening programs for all ages, including the Grave Reminders Cemetery Walk; Thursday Evening Lecture Series; Heritage Center Book Club; biking/walking self-guided tours and more.

Visit our website at [www.stcmuseum.org](http://www.stcmuseum.org) for the latest calendar of events. Please email us at [info@stcmuseum.org](mailto:info@stcmuseum.org) with any questions.

## *Membership*

Please Check the Yearly Membership Level  
of Your Choice

- |                          |            |                   |
|--------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Grantor    | \$5,000+          |
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