The Field House Museum Has Reopened!

The Field House Museum Board and Staff are excited to announce the Museum reopened on July 8, 2020. In accordance with CDC and city guidelines, the Museum has several precautionary measures in place to ensure the safety of guests and staff. Not ready to visit us in person? Don’t worry, you can still find digital programs, exhibits, and tours on our website and social media pages.

Precautions in Place:

- Guests ages 9 and up will be required to wear a mask. If you do not have a mask, the Museum will provide one.
- Guests will be required to fill out a short health screening form.
- Guests will be required to practice social distancing and to remain six feet away from other Museum patrons.
- We strongly encourage all guests to schedule their tour in advance to ensure the number of visitors adheres to capacity limits.
- The Museum is disinfected and cleaned daily following CDC and city guidelines.
- Hand sanitizer is provided throughout the facility.
- Staff will be required to fill out a daily health screening.

All the Museum’s exhibitions that opened before the closure have been extended and new exhibits are opening soon. Please see our website for more information. Thank you for your patience and understanding during these trying times. We look forward to seeing you in person at the Museum!

Kudos For Kisses

Published last year, With Ten Thousand Kisses has received important recognition from the Library of Congress. Of course, the compilation of Eugene Field’s love letters to his wife Julia is only one of more than 24 million books in the Library of Congress, housed there with other artifacts. Nevertheless, a copy resides in Washington, D.C. in the Library’s permanent collection.

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In March 2019, a copy of With Ten Thousand Kisses was submitted to the Library for its permanent collection; this collection is not available to the general public. Nearly a year later in February 2020, a second copy of the book was requested by the Library. The reason: the Library of Congress deemed the book “historically significant” and intended to enter it into the reading section of the Library, making it available to all.

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As we noted in the last issue of Field Notes, 2020 marks the 175th anniversary of the construction of the Field family home at 634 South Broadway. The house is the oldest remaining brick residence in St. Louis, and has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

The following is the second in a series of three articles that will be published in the Field Notes newsletter this year, each offering information about the home’s history and about the efforts undertaken by a noble, dedicated group of St. Louisans – both adults and children – who valiantly sought to protect and preserve it.

Roswell and Frances Field moved to the three-story house at 634 South Broadway in 1850, making it their family residence until 1864. Eugene Field was born in the home only a few months after his parents moved there. Eugene, however, lived in the house only until 1856 when he was six years old. That year, Eugene’s mother passed away, prompting father Roswell Field to send his sons to live with an aunt in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Although a fashionable residential section of St. Louis while the Field family lived there, the surrounding neighborhood deteriorated over time. The block became a row of increasingly shabby and unkempt boarding houses, then deteriorated further into empty and dilapidated structures. Though the St. Louis Board of Education owned the property, it was the leaseholder, local printer Con P. Curran, who was given authority over the buildings at the site. Aiming to avoid the $1,500 annual taxes on his property investment, Curran razed 10 of the 12 row houses at the site by the start of 1934. He proposed to demolish the Eugene Field House as well, intending to establish a parking lot by which he could generate income. Consequently, the former Field family home was scheduled to be torn down that spring.

Irving Dilliard, an editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, learned of the intended demolition of this historic treasure. Incensed by the lack of interest in salvaging this significant piece of St. Louis history, he wrote an incisive newspaper editorial about the impending destruction of Eugene’s childhood home and offered his opinion why this house should be saved. He hoped his words would ignite a flame of enthusiasm for saving the property. The editorial, titled “St. Louis Doesn’t Care,” was published on Saturday, February 24, 1934. It included a 2-column picture of the vacant house, and featured the caption, “Eugene Field House to be Torn Down.” Below was this explanation: “Building at 634 South Broadway, where the poet spent part of his childhood, to be removed to save taxes and provide space for a parking lot.”

Dilliard’s inspirational editorial did exactly as he had intended. It stirred Jesse Powell Henry, a local insurance broker and businessman, into immediate action the very next day. Henry was a practical enthusiast in art and history, and had long been interested in preserving pieces of the past, especially Americana. It was largely through Henry’s leadership and generosity that the Fields’ house was preserved and restored. Henry and his partner, Carl P. Daniel, owned the Daniel and Henry Company, a well-known St. Louis insurance company that remains in business today. In 1934, Henry and Daniel agreed to pay the immediate cost of preserving the home. These inspired St. Louisans set the wheels in motion to correct the damage to the property and to return it to the public as a shrine to Eugene Field.

Soon after, a committee to make plans for the restoration of Eugene Field’s childhood home was appointed by Superintendent of Instruction Dr. Henry J. Gerling of the St. Louis Board of Education. The committee consisted of four members: Dr. Gerling; Jesse P. Henry; McCune Gill, a local historian; and Meyric R. Rogers, director of the City Art Museum.
As the people of St. Louis learned of the plight of the house and the heroic mission to save it for future generations, they generously gave to support the effort of the committee. Though St. Louis was reeling from the Great Depression, schoolchildren in the St. Louis Public Schools collected approximately $1,800, mostly in pennies, nickels, and dimes, to contribute to the restoration of the Field family home.

As the years of grime and neglect began to be stripped away from the structure, the brick exterior was cleaned and tuckpointed, while windows and doors were painted a gleaming white. Fireplaces were cleaned and restored. From the wreckage of the former adjoining houses, it was found that the house’s joists were of an exceptionally thick and sturdy white pine. The staircase balustrade was carefully repaired. Based on some markings on the back wall of the dwelling, it was discovered there had been a narrow wing in the back of the house, which had been removed with its doorways converted to windows; this may have provided an answer to where the kitchen may have been housed in the original residence. Throughout the restoration process, Henry contributed his expertise in preserving and restoring old houses and maintaining their original character.

_In the next issue of Field Notes, learn how the Field House Museum and its interiors were meticulously designed to replicate the childhood home of Eugene Field, engaging and delighting generations to come._

**Welcome Interns!**

The Field House Museum has two summer interns to assist with education and exhibits. Every year the Museum is proud to offer learning opportunities for students to gain real-world experience working in a professional environment. From exhibits and collections to education and general operations, students learn what goes on behind-the-scenes in the small museum workplace.

**Josh Rohlffing**

Josh is attending Truman State University working on a Bachelor of Arts in History/Philosophy and Religion. As a future educator, Josh is always looking for opportunities to try to inspire people and encourage their desire to learn.

**Rebecca Peterson**

Rebecca is attending Coe College and plans on majoring in Creative Writing and Theater with a minor in Anthropology. Beck desires to use her experience to connect people with history and help them to engage with exhibits rather than view them passively.
Having collected letters written by and to Eugene Field for the past forty-plus years, there was a surprise in a recent acquisition. Though aware that Field was in high demand as a popular speaker at myriad events, there had never been an indication in any writings of his fee, or whether he indeed had one. At such events, Field was normally requested to read a selection from his poems, sometimes as an after-dinner speaker and at times in conjunction with George W. Cable. Cable, an author of regional literature and columnist for the New Orleans Picayune, also worked with Mark Twain at reading engagements.

In modern times of presentations and talks, it has been common for the attendee to pay to hear a speaker’s presentation on any given topic, whether reading from a recent publication or orating on the subject of the day. During Field’s time, individual attendees occasionally paid a fee to hear featured presenters, though most often the hosting women’s club, church group, or other organization would incur the fee. The surprise mentioned above appeared in a letter dated October 30, 1894, written in Field’s microscopic hand, in which he quoted the amount he charged for such an engagement. Attesting to his renown, Field stated “My terms call for one hundred and fifty dollars a reading.” When adjusted to today’s economy, that amounts to approximately a whopping $4,226!

The sum may not seem excessive to some but one must take into consideration that in 1892, the average hourly pay was 45 cents per hour! In the 1890s, the average monthly salary of a teacher was $40. Field, therefore, earned quite a nice sum for his readings. (This particular event he declined, citing ill health.)

Following Eugene Field’s death in 1895, his daughter Mary French Field continued the tradition of reading her father’s poems for a fee, though she was not in as high demand as was her father.

What’s New with Programs

Staff members of the Museum will continue to expand upon and develop new online content as more programming moves towards digital platforms but will also begin to welcome guests back for in-person events beginning in August. On August 1, 2020 the Museum will host Stephen Davis for “Mormonising” Political and Religious Dissent in Nineteenth-Century Missouri” at 1pm in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council. Space for this event will be limited to adhere to social distancing guidelines and reservations must be made in advance with staff.

On August 29th, our Speaker Series will continue online with guest Kelly Kennington, who will be discussing her book In the Shadow of Dred Scott: St. Louis Freedom Suits and the Legal Culture of Slavery in Antebellum America through Facebook Live beginning at 7pm. If you are looking for more ways to join us online, be sure to visit the Museum’s website for our digital exhibit, Purrfect Portraits, under the exhibits tab. You can also visit the new Field House Museum YouTube Channel for videos from staff, local authors, and more!

Although the pandemic continues to change our daily routines, the staff is excited by the new opportunities and challenges presented. Be sure to visit the Field House Museum’s website for the latest developments and don’t forget to share these new opportunities with friends and family.
WELCOME MEMBERS

The Board of Trustees and staff of the Field House Museum thank the following members who have continued to support the mission, preservation, and programming of the foundation with their generous membership donations:

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March 2020 - June 2020

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March 2020 - June 2020

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Special Thank You!

The Board and Staff of the Field House Museum would like to give a special thank you to those who supported the Museum on Give STL Day this year! It was a crucial time for the organization on May 7, 2020 as the pandemic had forced us to close. We are eternally grateful for those who shared our campaign on social media, donated, or otherwise contributed to our success. The Field House Museum quickly met the matching funds and surpassed our expectations. Thank you again and we look forward to seeing you soon.
Shop The Field House Museum

Find great gifts for your friends and family while supporting the Field House Museum in the gift shop! Many of the products are also available in our online store. Take home delightful pop-up cards for every occasion or unique wind-up toys that everyone will love. The reader in your life will enjoy one of the many book options, or pick up a candle and a bath bomb for that special someone. Plus, our seasonal stock will help you dress your home for every occasion!