

Field Notes

Volume 5 - Number 2

Summer 2020

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.



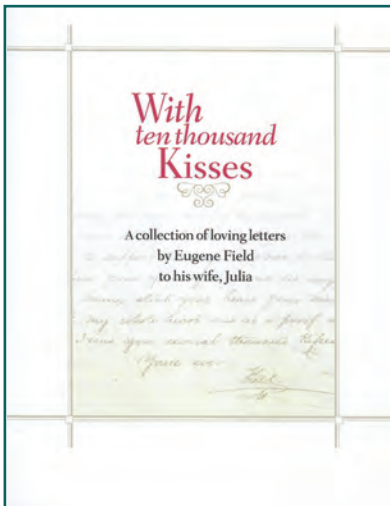
Precautions in Place:

- 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.



The first Library of Congress, established in 1800, was burned by the British during the War of 1812. Shortly thereafter, Thomas Jefferson sold his personal collection of approximately 6,000 books to the Library. Since that time, there have been only 14 librarians; the current librarian, Carla Hayden, is the first African American and the first female librarian.

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.

Thank you to Marianne and Peter Gleich, publishers of the book, for sharing with us this important insight into our collective history. *With Ten Thousand Kisses* is available for purchase in the museum gift shop.

Building on History: Celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the Field Family Home in Saint Louis

By Sally Smith

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.



Henry Gerling and Mrs. F.W. Kemper.



Jesse P. Henry



Charles Fridley

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 Rohlfling

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.



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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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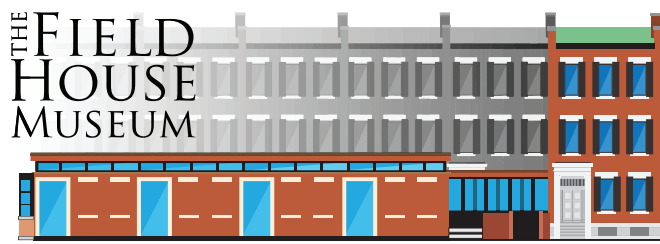
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Special Thank You!

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.



THE FIELD HOUSE MUSEUM

WHERE INSPIRATION HAS A HOME

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