

Field Notes

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Fall 2020

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

By Sally Smith



2020 marks the 175th anniversary of the construction of the Field family home at 634 South Broadway. The following is the third and final installment in the series of articles published this year in the *Field Notes* newsletter, focusing on the home's history. (To read the first two articles, visit the Field House Museum website, hover over "About" in the menu bar, then "News," and finally click on "Field Notes – Newsletters.") In this article, we describe how the rehabbed property was meticulously designed to replicate the original boyhood home of Eugene Field, how it was unveiled to the public in 1936, and how it has inspired St. Louisans and visitors in the years since.

Under the direction of the public-spirited St. Louisans committed to saving and restoring Eugene Field's childhood home to its original state, the renovation of the structure began in earnest in 1934. Jesse P. Henry, the St. Louis businessman leading this effort, obtained the workmen and supervised their work to the last detail, anxiously checking to see that it was carried out in the proper way. An enthusiast of antiques and historic preservation, Henry sought fittings and furnishings that were characteristic of the 1850s, the time when Eugene Field lived in the house.

Wallpaper in vogue during the period was affixed to the walls. The fireplace, stairs, and balustrade were repaired. Fieldiana and furniture of the period began to fill the empty spaces of the house. An Empire chest and mirror; a mahogany secretary; a sofa, chairs and stools; a Colonial table; and a candle snuffer were but a few items installed there. The house was greatly enriched by a collection of Eugene Field artifacts bequeathed by Eugene's widow, Julia Comstock Field, and with memorabilia donated by the Fields' children, including the poet's own furniture.

Newspapers wrote about the restoration and anxiously awaited the house's completion and public opening. Even the best-laid plans, however, can sometimes go awry: In April 1936, only a few months before the home was to open to the public, the *Post-Dispatch* reported that the north wall of the house was damaged inadvertently when trucks on a neighboring parking lot backed into the wall, tearing a hole about 10-12 feet above the ground. Jesse Henry again rose to the challenge by building a six-foot wall around the property to protect the house from further damage.

On the afternoon of December 18, 1936, the restored home was finally unveiled to the public. Eugene and Julia's son, Eugene Field II ("Pinny") and daughter Ruth Field Foster ("Sister Girl") were present to celebrate the milestone event. Children from the St. Louis school bearing Field's name were the first visitors to inspect the collection of relics associated with the poet's pen and life, and items collected by him on his travels in many lands.



Eugene Field II at the Museum's opening.

Continues on page 2

The renovated house had six rooms, with two rooms on each of three floors. Three of the rooms housed Eugene's possessions; one room was dedicated to his wife, Julia; and the remaining two rooms were to be used by the custodian of the building. The two rooms on the first floor featured "many glass cases displaying Eugene's manuscripts, contracts with publishers, medicine cabinets, tooth brushes, a razor, and other personal belongings of the poet." The room dedicated to Julia, on the second floor, contained dresses and personal apparel which belonged to Julia, who had died in June before the opening. The other room on the second floor was decorated to conform with Eugene's former den. His bed, bookcase, and other furnishings were displayed here.

Perhaps the *Post-Dispatch* editorial of December 17, 1936, put it best: "The city now has a literary shrine which ranks in beauty and intimateness with any to be found in the United States. St. Louis neglected the memory of the poet of childhood for a third of a century, but it has now made amends. The door to his birthplace stands open to the world."



Mark Twain dedicating the home to Eugene Field.

Samuel L. Clemens (better known as Mark Twain) to return to St. Louis for his very last visit to the city in 1902. Twain returned expressly to dedicate the bronze plaque that bears the words, "Here was born Eugene Field, The Poet, 1850-1895." This plaque still graces the front of the house.

In 2007, the Eugene Field House was designated a National Historic Landmark. The National Historic Landmark designation is the highest such recognition accorded by the nation to historic properties determined to be of exceptional value in representing or illustrating an important theme, event, or person in the history of the nation. These landmarks can be actual sites where significant historical events occurred, places where prominent Americans lived or worked, as well as sites that represent the ideas that shaped the nation. Today, fewer than 2,600 historical places bear this national distinction. Additional information on the National Historic Landmark program can be found on the National Park Service website at www.nps.gov/nhl.

This year, please join your fellow Field House Museum friends in applauding all of the generous St. Louisans, from business leaders to wee schoolchildren who worked so hard to save this historic treasure, and in celebrating the house in its 175th year!



Ruth Field opening the door at the Museum's opening.

Coming Programs to the Field House Museum

The Field House has started the 2020 – 2021 school year by kicking off with the first Museum School Day. This unit on journalism and poetry was the summer project for our intern, Josh Rohlffing, who put together many wonderful worksheets, educational packets, and videos. Accessible online for parents and educators, we hope that the program will entice families to visit and learn more about the poet and journalist, Eugene Field. The Museum School Days program will continue in November with a unit on Dred Scott, examining the important role that Roswell Field played in the landmark case.

GUEST SPEAKER: GEORGE DANISH



LIVE-STREAM WITH THE
ST. LOUIS PARANORMAL
RESEARCH SOCIETY
OCTOBER 21, 2020 7:00-8:00PM



Thrills await with a new Speaker Series virtual event! Join the Field House Museum and George Danish of the St. Louis Paranormal Research Society (STLPRS) as he puts the “normal” in “paranormal” on October 21 at 7:00 pm. Live on Facebook, Danish will delve into the society, how they conduct paranormal investigations, the equipment used, and, of course, the best haunted places in St. Louis.

With the holiday season quickly approaching, prepare for the festivities by making ornaments with us online on November 18 at 7:00 pm. Everyone is invited to either gather your own supplies or purchase one of our kits containing all that you need to make two ornaments, plus a special holiday surprise from our gift shop. Boxes

will cost \$24.95 and can be purchased over the phone or online beginning October 22.

On December 9 at 6:00 pm, Rebekah Kaufmann, a.k.a. Steiffgal, third-generation Steiff enthusiast and creator of the “My Steiff Life” blog, will be joining the Field House Museum on Facebook Live. Kaufmann will be discussing the history of the Steiff teddy bear through her presentation, “Can You Bear It? A Steiff Teddy Master Class.”

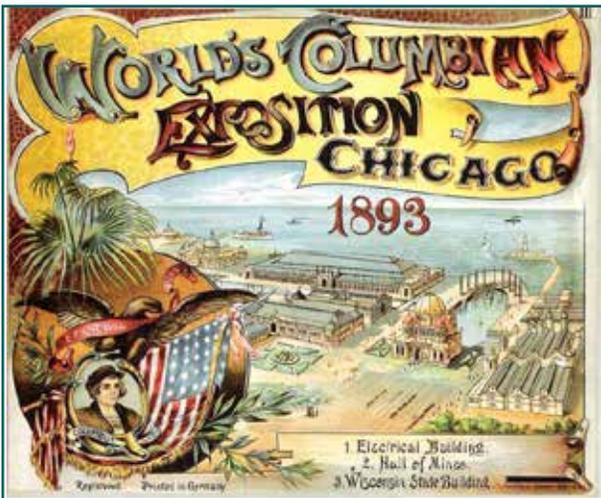
GUEST SPEAKER: REBEKAH KAUFMAN



“CAN YOU BEAR IT? A STEIFF
TEDDY MASTER CLASS”
DECEMBER 9, 2020 6:00-7:30PM



Exhibits Still to Come



This December the Field House Museum will be bringing the joy of the holiday season to the Museum with new exhibits that are sure to delight visitors of all ages.

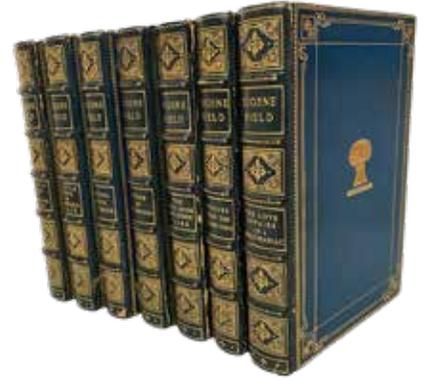
Fabulous Fairs, in the Museum’s entry, will highlight the 1893 and 1904 World’s Fairs attended by the Field family. View items from the collection pertaining to Eugene and Julia Field’s time at the fairs and browse their individual “scrapbooks” for additional photos and newspaper clippings. This exhibit will open to the public on December 9, 2020.

Alongside this final exhibit for the year will be the traditional historic house holiday decorations. Nostalgia abounds in this imaginative display of tinsel and toys! Each period room of the house will have its own theme inspired by the whimsy of Eugene Field’s poetry.

Then in January don’t miss *Marching On*, featuring war toys from the collection coming January 16, 2021, and explore Eugene Field’s short stories in *Writing the Tales*, opening in the Eugene Field Library January 20, 2021.

A Bibliophile's Mystery

Mr. William Bixby Sheldon, former board member at the Field House Museum, recently donated a unique set of *The Writings in Prose and Verse of Eugene Field*. The twelve-book set was originally printed by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1896, just one year after Eugene's death, and pays homage to the remarkable writings of the famous poet. Often these sets are donated in full or part to the museum in a standard binding of dark green. The set donated by Mr. Sheldon came bound in a beautiful blue that the staff had not seen before, beginning the quest to discover their provenance.



On the back pages could be found the customary stamp reading "The De Vinne Press," the major American printer of the time based in New York. Today the building is a state and federal landmark, but that does not really give any clues to the unique binding. However, just inside the front cover, centered at the bottom, was the word "Brentano's."

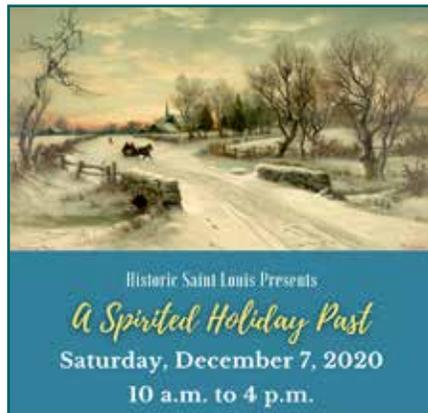
A quick internet search yielded that Brentano's was a bookstore in New York at the time. The first store opened in 1884 and grew in popularity until the company filed for bankruptcy in 1933, as a result of the Great Depression.

To ensure there were no other leads to follow, the Museum reached out to the Grolier Club, a group for bibliophiles and enthusiasts in the graphic arts founded by Theodore Low De Vinne, owner of The De Vinne Press. After speaking with Irene Tichenor, it was decided that the set was likely specially bound by Brentano's for sale in their shop. Without extensive research it cannot be known how many sets like this one exist, if any, and so we are eternally grateful to Mr. Sheldon for this generous contribution to the Museum's collection.

'Tis the Season for Tours



It has been a difficult year for everyone, but the Field House Museum hopes to brighten the holiday season with two annual events. On Thursday, December 3, the museum will partner with the Campbell House Museum for the Holiday House Tour. This event is always a favorite for St. Louisans who come out to tour the historic homes in their holiday dress. There will not be bus passes available this year, but guests will be able to enjoy longer hours and tasty treats at both locations!



Then Saturday, December 5, you can explore more of the region's historic sites during Historic Saint Louis' *A Spirited Holiday Past*. Learn about the thriving history of St. Louis at these unique destinations open from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Visit www.historicsaintlouis.org for more information.

Eugene Field House Events Calendar

~ October ~

21 St. Louis Paranormal Research Society Presentation*
7:00 – 8:00 pm

~ November ~

12 Museum School Day*
18 Ornaments Craft Event*
7:00 pm

25 History Happy Hour
4:00 – 7:00 pm

~ December ~

3 Holiday House Tour
1:00 – 8:00 pm
4 DAR Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony
11:00 am

5 A Spirited Holiday Past
10:00 am – 4:00 pm
9 Steiff Teddy Bear Presentation
6:00-7:00 pm

*denotes online event

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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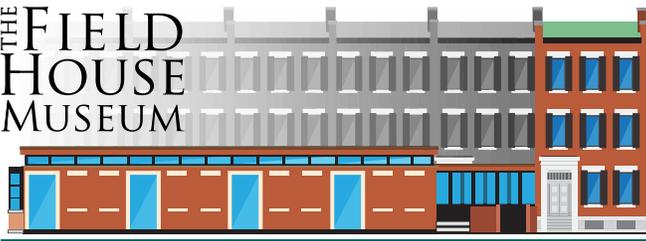
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Mums the Word at the Field House Museum!

Fall is here, and the gardens have never looked better thanks to the help of two very dedicated volunteers, Stephen Hanpeter and Yvette Bly. These two worked hard pulling weeds, pruning bushes, mulching, and landscaping to make the grounds more inviting for guests. A special thanks also goes to The Home Depot for a generous donation of gift cards that allowed the museum to purchase the mulch the volunteers requested. Please reach out if you are interested in becoming a garden volunteer for the Field House Museum!





WHERE INSPIRATION HAS A HOME
634 South Broadway, Saint Louis, MO 63102

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Holiday Gifts Made Easy

This year the staff at the Field House Museum are ready to help you get your holiday shopping done early! We have taken the hard part out of gift-giving by creating special gift bag options for everyone on your list. Check out the catalog insert to view different options perfect for kids, spouses, friends, and more. Gift bags are available for pick-up or drop-off only. They come nicely packaged in one of the museum's gift bags with price tags removed and a gift receipt for you.

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