

FLORISSANT VALLEY QUARTERLY

VOLUME 38

JANUARY 2020

NUMBER 1

“Whose Waterloo?” The City Election of 1896

THE HEADLINE in the *Post-Dispatch* on April 3, 1896 was ominous: “Whose Waterloo Will This Be?” What started out as an uneventful little election was becoming a heated battle among the factions of little Florissant, and power would shift back-and-forth between them all.

Just a month before, all seemed like it would be just another regular election. Mayor Humphrey J. Moynihan, who had served terms in 1894 and 1895, had not expressed interest in another term.

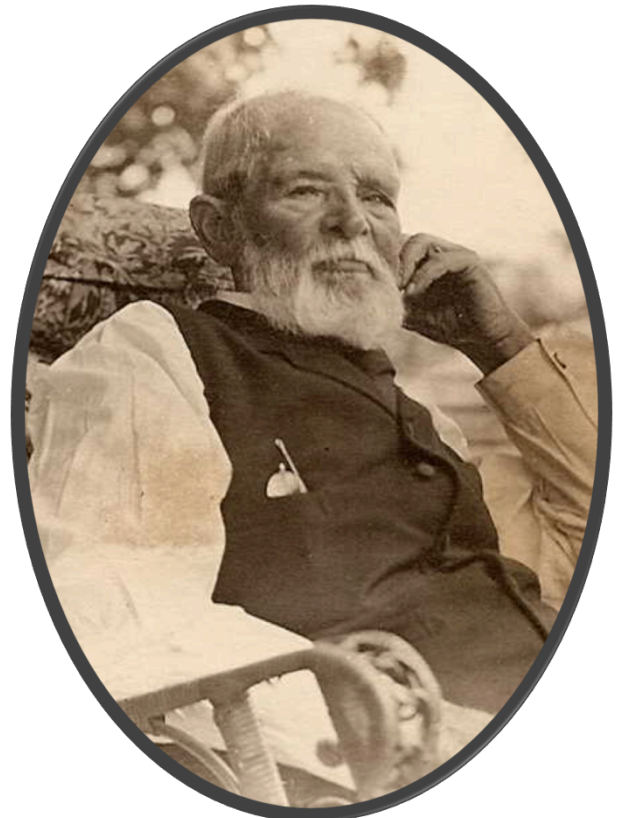
Joseph Peters Sr. and Charles Griesse were being encouraged to accept nominations for the one-year mayoral term. The two men would offer a choice to voters for the April ballot. The process was playing out as it usually did, quietly and without fanfare. Elections in Florissant were simple affairs, even referred to locally as “the annual joke.” This year would be different.

Things started changing when Mayor Moynihan decided that he would like to stand for re-election after all. It was assumed that, upon hearing of the Mayor’s desire for another term, that Peters and Griesse would step aside and allow him to be chosen without opposition. It was not uncommon for elected officials in Florissant wanting re-election to be the only name on the ballot. Again, this year would be different.

The job of mayor was rather uneventful. The main duty was to collect license fees, but the newspaper also noted that it was the mayor who had to listen to salesmen pitching their products and services for everything from fire extinguishers to electrification. It was also the mayor’s duty to collect the license fee from peddlers—so at least the salesmen had to pay the city in order to consume the mayor’s time!

There had been a disagreement between the mayor and the city council. One of those salesmen who had called on the mayor proposed to run electric lights on the city’s main streets, replacing the candle- and oil-lit lamps that had been doing the job to date. Mayor Moynihan, a young man who was in his mid-30s, saw the proposal as being progressive and using the latest technology. The city council, led by President Leon DeLisle, thought it to be a scam. The council insisted that the vendor provide a \$50,000 surety bond. The vendor balked, and decided to take his services to Kinloch Park instead. The council saw it as proof of the vendor’s deceit; the mayor saw it as a great opportunity missed.

The job of being a city councilman was also uneventful. The *Post-Dispatch* described how little there was to do in Florissant, while also taking some stabs at the City of St. Louis. In the City of St. Louis, the paper noted, the council requested a three-page opinion from the city attorney to decide if chicken feathers constituted “garbage.” Florissant had “no such economic problems.” In the City of St. Louis, the council had to pass an ordinance prohibiting cows from grazing in city streets, while “every cow in Florissant is well-behaved and gets enough to eat at home without bothering the neighbors.”



The Hon. Joseph Peters Sr., 1832-1913

Courtesy of Ray Kraatz; public domain

Continued on page 5

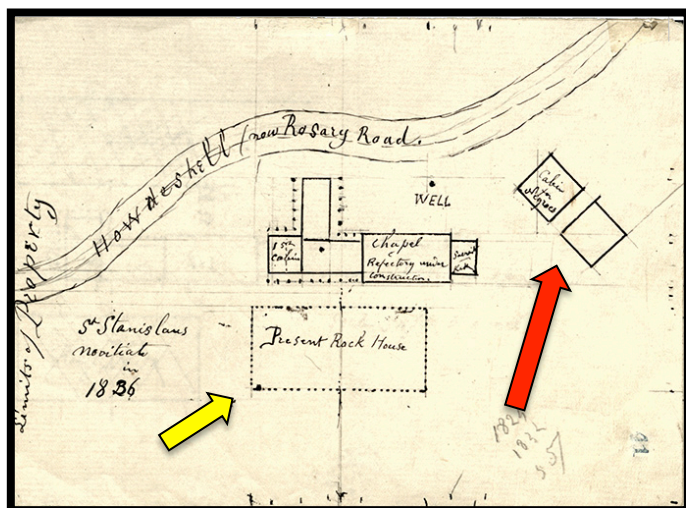
When the first Jesuits came to Florissant in 1823, the priests were accompanied by six slaves. They were identified as Thomas and Mary (Molly/Polly) Brown, Moses and Nancy Queen, and Isaac and Susan Queen-Hawkins. In 1829, two more families were forced to relocate from Maryland to Florissant to serve the Jesuits, also bearing the Hawkins and Queen surnames. A total of 22 slaves (adults and children) then resided on the St. Stanislaus property.

The Jesuits of Central and Southern USA, which serves Missouri, have launched the “Slavery, History, Memory, and Reconciliation Project” to help trace the Jesuit role in slavery in the United States and locate descendants of enslaved families.

The Jesuits operated a plantation at White Marsh, Maryland, since 1729 that depended on slave labor and indentured servitude. St. Stanislaus Seminary in Florissant was established from the White Marsh facility.

The *Quarterly* is featuring articles and notes to coincide with the “1619 Project” that recognized slavery’s 400th anniversary. Last issue’s article by Cindy Winkler was well-received and we will continue this topic for the next few issues.

Below: This map from 1836 shows the location of “Cabins for Negroes” on Howdershell Road. The long red arrow points to the cabins; the short yellow arrow points to the Rock Building that still stands on the site. This would indicate that the cabins stood near the entrance drive of the property at 700 Howdershell Road. (Note—two cabins are shown for 22 known people!) Photo: www.jesuitcentralsouthern.org

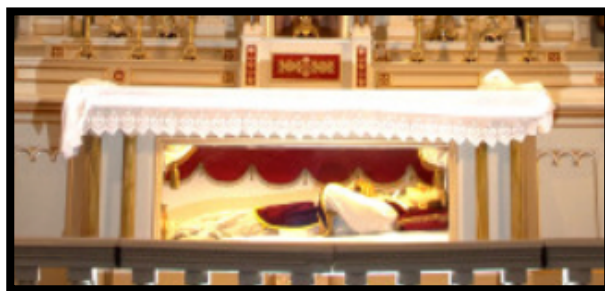


The *Florissant Valley Quarterly* shares news and educational articles about local history, and is published four times each year by the Florissant Valley Historical Society, Friends of Old St. Ferdinand, Inc., and Historic Florissant, Inc.

Mary Kay Gladbach, Editor

Andrew J. Theising, Managing Editor

www.florissantvalleyhs.com



St. Valentine’s wax figure containing relics at Old St. Ferdinand Shrine. FOSF photo

Visit the Old St. Ferdinand Shrine on Valentine’s Day weekend and you can visit St. Valentine himself! He has “lived” in Florissant for well over a century. The relics of St. Valentine have been encased in a wax effigy in the altar of Old St. Ferdinand. Plan your trip now by visiting www.oldstferdinandshine.com for tour hours.

Landmark Story: Joseph Peters Sr. Home



The house shown in this photo was the home Joseph Peters Sr. had built in 1904. It replaced his earlier home that had been on the same lot. He served as mayor in 1896 and 1897. It is a lost landmark—the house was demolished in 1970 to build the present city hall that has the address 955 Rue St. Francois.

Peters was an amateur botanist. Many of the fine old trees that surrounded city hall were those planted by him to adorn his 1904 home. Joseph Sr. is buried in Calvary Cemetery. This house should not be confused with the extant Joseph Peters House, which stands across the street and has been lovingly restored and maintained. *Davison/HFI Photo*

Rita Meyer Moellering: In a League of Her Own



Above: Rita “Slats” Meyer as shortstop for the Peoria Redwings in the late 1940s. HFI Photo

Below: Mayor Tim Lowery with Rita’s daughter Laura Moellering at the plaque placement ceremony on December 7.

City of Florissant Press Photo



Rita Meyer Moellering, one of the first female professional baseball players, who was depicted in the 1992 movie *A League of Their Own* and a Florissant native, was honored Saturday, December 7 with a plaque on the History Walk on St. Francois Street in Old Town Florissant. Laura Moellering, daughter of Rita Meyer Moellering, joined Mayor Lowery in saying a few words before revealing the plaque at 990 Rue St. Francois.

Rita Meyer went to Pascagoula, Mississippi, in 1946 to try out for spring training in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. She was quite good and assigned to the Peoria Redwings. She played shortstop regularly and also pitched 13 games in the 1947 season—including a no-hitter that the Redwings lost 1-0! She played for the Redwings from 1946-1949.

Her 1948 season was pretty good. Her batting average was .232, she hit 12 doubles, stole base 45 times, and had 68 runs batted-in. Her performance helped get the team to the playoffs that year. She was nicknamed “Slats” because she moved like Cardinals shortstop Marty Marion who also had that nickname.

Rita Meyer married Robert Moellering in 1949, and they resided in Florissant. She was recognized in 1988 as part of the installation of a permanent exhibit at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY that honored the All-American Girls league. She died in Florissant on June 16, 1992.

On Sunday, December 8, at Historic Florissant’s Gittemeier House, Laura Moellering unveiled her mother's photo display and spoke to a small crowd regarding her mother's life in Florissant and her experiences on the road with the Peoria Red Wings. The display will be a permanent fixture at the Gittemeier House.

Save the Date for Historic Florissant’s Annual Benefit Dinner

Historic Florissant’s Annual Benefit Dinner will be held at Hendel’s Restaurant **Monday, March 30**. Cocktail hour will begin at 5:00 pm and dinner service will begin at 6:00 pm. Tickets will be \$50 per person and \$100 per person for a VIP table.

The VIP table is new this year and includes an entree upgrade, a specialty dessert made by Lia, a signature bottle of wine, before and after dinner cocktails of your choice, white linen service and a floral design.

The Benefit Dinner is one of Historic Florissant’s most important fund raisers and a lot of fun. Be prepared to buy raffle tickets for some exciting items! We hope you are able to join us. To purchase a ticket, please remit the form on page 7 or call 314-565-1468 to purchase using a credit or debit card. There is a \$1 fee per ticket when using a card.

Mystery Photos

Do you recognize an ancestor in these pictures? Historic Florissant has several interesting area photos that are unmarked, most likely came from the same photo album. Please call 314-565-1468 if you can help identify any of these fun-loving people. *HFI Photos*



A New Acquisition for Taille de Noyer

The Florissant Valley Historical Society is pleased to welcome a new girl at Taille. Her name is Louise, and she is a gift from **the daughters of Mary Lingeman Boland** (Mae). Mae was married to Joseph M. Boland Jr., whose great-great-grandparents were Charles and Jane Chambers—fourth owners of Taille de Noyer in the Florissant Valley and residents for many years. Louise is a 24-inch Bergman child doll, with a marked bisque head and a composition ball-jointed body. She was made in 1916 in Waftershausen, Germany, and was a gift to Mae from her Great Aunt Louise for her fifth birthday. On your next trip to Taille, look for Louise, who appears to be enjoying her new surroundings amidst the antique toys and vintage children's clothing displays.



Above: A wonderful snapshot from the family album showing Mae with her doll, Louise, in April 1922.
Right: Louise in her new home at Taille de Noyer. Come visit her in the Spring!

Hilmer Photos

The City Election of 1896 *continued from page 1*

So in old Florissant, where the politicians did not have enough to do, a battle was brewing. Mayor Moynihan felt the council was being too conservative and as a punishment to the council he began to veto all of the bills sent to his desk. The council was angry but would just wait out the mayor's term and then find someone new. After all, the mayor had not expressed interest in another term.

Mayor Humphrey Moynihan was born in Florissant in 1860. He was the son of Timothy and Mary Moynihan of County Cork in Ireland. Timothy may have been Florissant's first blacksmith and Humphrey ran the family shop at the corner of Rues St. Francois and St. Pierre after his father died. He had married Jessie Aubuchon, a descendant of one of Florissant's oldest French families. The *Post-Dispatch* described him as "a powerfully built young man, self-educated, a working Catholic, and the head of a little family that he worships."

Joseph Peters Sr. decided to take the nomination he had been offered and openly challenge the young mayor. Peters had never held elected office before but he was quite familiar with executive power. He was born in Prussia in 1832—making him nearly three decades older than his opponent. He arrived in St. Louis at age 21 and worked as a cabinet maker. By 1855, he opened the Joseph Peters Furniture Company in St. Louis. Within 20 years he became a leading manufacturer in the city, employing over 150 workers. (He brought them all out to his Florissant country house on a special train to celebrate his 50th birthday, according to a newspaper article of the day.)

Peters first came to Florissant in 1878 as his country home, and by 1890 made it his full-time residence. He was wealthy and experienced. His large home stood in the 900 block of St. Francois, on the site where City Hall stands today. His family built homes on adjacent land on St. Francois and his son Joseph Jr. became a leading businessman locally.

The two 1896 candidates for mayor could not have been more different. One was young, one was old. One was working-class, one was a wealthy business executive. One had been in Florissant for his whole life, one was a "suburbanite" from St. Louis. One had political experience, one did not. But the distinction that drew the most attention was that one enjoyed the support of the French community and the other enjoyed the support of the German community.

Florissant's 1896 election would be the battlefield "on which the gore of the Franco-Prussian war will be re-spilled, excepting that the gore is only the personal feelings which are prominent at any interesting election," said the newspaper. The election stirred animosities from 25 years earlier. Stories were revisited how the French fled from Bismarck and the Germans were routed by Napoleon III. Moynihan was the French candidate and had the support of the "fust" and "secon" wards [the newspaper imagined a French accent pronouncing those words]. Peters had the support of the German community that the newspaper said pronounced the city *Fleursong* "with an extreme catarrh effect" [describing the guttural inflection of the Germans]. The election opened some old cultural wounds.

Just like the Franco-Prussian War, the German faction won the election. Joseph Peters defeated his young rival by just 19 votes. While this likely pleased the members of the city council, it was not to last very long. Peters won re-election in 1897—as was the custom, the entire ballot for mayor and council in 1897 was unopposed—and then promptly resigned for reasons that are not recorded. The position of mayor was then filled by the president of the city council, Leon DeLisle. He now held the job that he found so infuriating just over a year before. Between April 1896 and August 1897, three different men had been mayor of Florissant.

DeLisle's day job was a politically-powerful position: he was a conductor on the Narrow Gauge/Suburban Railway. This meant that he had a captive audience of Florissant voters each day on the 50-minute commute to St. Louis! He was known for the way he would help ladies up the steps of the train car, make funny faces to amuse the children, and wear a rose on his lapel each day. DeLisle also ran a tavern in town, undoubtedly helpful as well. He served as mayor until 1901, and again from 1903 to 1905.

Sources: "Whose Waterloo Will This Be?" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 03 Apr 1896 and Rosemary Davison's *Florissant, Missouri*.

Thank you for Year-End Gifts to Historic Preservation Groups!

The three historic preservation groups express their thanks to the generous donors who made year-end gifts to them. All of these groups are driven by volunteer labor, charitable fundraisers, and generous donors. Historic buildings require a constant source of resources. They have stood another year because of you. Thank you for your contributions in 2019. Happy new year!

Historic Florissant's 2019 Annual House Tour a Success

Historic Florissant, Inc., extends a sincere thank you to all who attended or participated in the annual Christmas house tour. This year 14 locations including historic homes, historic businesses, mid-century homes and Florissant's log cabin were visited by approximately 300 guests. Several locations served mulled wine and cheese, coffee and homemade cookies and much more. Tickets were \$20 and all proceeds will be used to further restore the Gittemeier house and protect archival records and documents. Mark your calendars now for next year's tour scheduled for the Sunday after Thanksgiving, Sunday, November 29.



The lovely dining room of the Joseph Peters House from the HFI Annual House Tour. HFI Photo



Above: An 1895 advertisement from the St. Louis Globe-Democrat for the school that used to stand on the grounds of Old St. Ferdinand Shrine and Knights of Columbus. The school closed in 1919 after the building burned. The Sisters of Loretto maintained other educational facilities on Lafayette Avenue in St. Louis and also in Webster Groves.

Newspapers.com image; public domain

HFI Recognizes Its 2019 Supporters

It is often said, "It takes a village to raise a child." This also holds true for Historic Florissant, Inc., a non-profit organization. Our success is based on the support we receive from our community. As we close out the year 2019, Historic Florissant would like to thank the following for their continued and varied support. We cannot do our work without you!

Hendel's Restaurant, Dooley's Florist, Korte's Custom Framing, Florissant City Diner, Chism's Dry Cleaners, Kwik Kopy, Goeke's Produce, Click Heating and Cooling, B&B Heating and Cooling, Abco Plumbing, Winschel Carpet Service, Custom Carpet, Citizen's National Bank, The Marketplace, Village of the Blue Rose, Helfer's Pastries, Old Town Donuts, Handi-man Hardware, O'Hare Interiors, Crest Bowl, Gardeners of Florissant, City of Florissant, Florissant Police Dept., American Family Insurance, Selective Insurance, Old Town Partners, Florissant Valley Historical Society, Old St. Ferdinand Shrine, Daughters of the American Revolution, Historic Saint Louis, JR Tree Service, The Gutter Guy, Archway Trophy, Reclaim Paranormal Solutions, Steve and Peggy Gettemeier, and the many, many donors who have sent funds to help us in our efforts to restore the Gittemeier house and preserve Florissant's history through archiving records, documents, and photographs and / or have donated items.

We can hardly wait to attend **Historic Florissant's Annual Benefit Dinner** at Hendel's Restaurant on Monday, March 30 at 5:00 p.m.

Please send me _____ tickets at \$50 each.

Please send me _____ VIP tickets at \$100 each.

Your Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Please send this form along with your check to:
Historic Florissant, Inc., 1067 Dunn Road, Florissant, MO 63031

Information or questions? Call 314-565-1468

Luncheon at Taille a Sell-Out Success!

The Florissant Valley Historical Society served 100 people at the annual FVHS Holiday Luncheon. A big **thank you** to all who attended! There were two seatings of 50 people each. Taille de Noyer was the elegant setting for the event, and the highlight of the luncheon was the Chicken Tetrassini from Don Krause of Krause Katering.

The proceeds of the luncheon go toward the maintenance and restoration of Taille de Noyer. Thank you to our volunteer team and special thanks to the **McCluer High School** students who volunteered to help serve the luncheon!



HISTORIC TRIVIA CHALLENGE


Historic Florissant, Inc., Florissant Valley Historical Society and The Friends of Old St. Ferdinand Shrine will be taking reservations for their respective tables at the **First Annual Historic St. Louis's Trivia Night** to be held on Friday, January 24, from 6:00 to 10:00 pm. The event will be held at Crestwood Community Center.

Each historic group will have a table for 8 participants. The **Meet Me In St. Louis-themed** evening includes a table decorating contest, Dead or Alive and 50/50 games. Tickets are \$25 per person.

To participate please contact the historic group of your choice. Historic Florissant: 314-565-1468, Florissant Valley Historical Society: 314-409-9478, Old St. Ferdinand Shrine: 314-837-2110.

Florissant Valley Historical Society
P. O. Box 298
Florissant, MO 63032

Non-Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
St Louis MO
Permit 2828



Calendar Items—Opportunities to be Involved!

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2020: Taille de Noyer closed for the winter; tours by appointment only

JANUARY 24: St. Louis Trivia Night; Crestwood Community Center; see page 7 for details

JANUARY 26: Old St. Ferdinand Winter Gala, Norwood Hills Country Club, info: 314-837-2110

FEBRUARY 8: Old St. Ferdinand Speakers Series “In the Shadow of a Saint” 10 A.M.

MARCH 1: Taille de Noyer reopens for regular Sunday tours—come visit us!

MARCH 30: Historic Florissant Annual Benefit Dinner—see page 7 to order tickets

MAY 1-2-3: Valley of Flowers Festival—Old St. Ferdinand Shrine grounds

MAY 9: Old St. Ferdinand Speakers Series “In the Shadow of a Saint” 10 A.M.

SEPTEMBER 12: Old St. Ferdinand Speakers Series continues 10 A.M.

*History Fact: The Florissant Historic District was established in 1965,
along with the city's first comprehensive zoning ordinance.*