

FLORISSANT VALLEY QUARTERLY

VOLUME 39

OCTOBER 2021

NUMBER 4

IN THE 250th ISSUE:
Fingers Crossed!
Taille Applies for a
Major Grant

FVHS has applied for a
major federal grant for
Taille de Noyer—so
keep those fingers
crossed for good luck!

Page 3

Remembering
Florissant's
Joe Desloge Jr.:

John Caravelli provides
a review of Joe Desloge
Jr.'s autobiography
Passport to Manhood, the
adventures of his life
growing up in Florissant
and serving during World
War II.

Page 5

You know it's
autumn when the
Holiday House Tour
is announced!

Historic Florissant Inc.
will hold its annual house
tour Nov. 28, which
invites you to experience
Florissant's rich history!

Page 7



Florissant's Unknown Soldier

On Memorial Day 1984, a Vietnam soldier was interred in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. On May 14, 1998, the remains were exhumed and DNA testing later confirmed that they were of **First Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie** of Florissant.

More on Page 6

Library of Congress image, 1938

Golf Cart Raffle Raises Needed Funds for Shrine

Congratulations to **Matt Becker**, winner of the Golf Cart Raffle at Old St. Ferdinand's on August 29. Thanks to all those who participated and helped raise funds for the maintenance of the Shrine, especially plaster work, reglazing windows, painting, and restoring the historic exterior doors.



FOSF image

One of the big projects undertaken by The Friends of Old St. Ferdinand was the replacement and/or addition of heating and cooling to all of the building spaces. This work was completed in time for September activities. The Friends are grateful for the individuals and businesses that supported the effort.

Historic Saint Louis House Tour is December 4th, 10am-4pm

Historic Saint Louis, the consortium of historic preservation groups in the metro area, is coordinating the annual “**A Spirited Holiday Past**” focusing on holiday themes in historic houses. Twenty-seven houses, museums, and privately-owned places around the entire STL region will be open. Locally, the Gittemeier House, the Myers House, Taille de Noyer, and Old St. Ferdinand's will be open. Each site charges its usual admission fee. There is no overall charge to participate—you can go to the HSTL Facebook page for a listing of participating homes.

For this one-day event, each venue will be decorated with a festive flair and some may offer costumed skits, music, other seasonal activities, as well as refreshments. Choose a themed tour or customize your own. Visit the Historic Saint Louis website <http://historicsaintlouis.org> to discover your newest, spirited holiday tradition.

250th issue of *Quarterly* Released;

THIS ISSUE marks the 250th issue of the *Florissant Valley Quarterly*. The magazine will enter its 40th volume starting with the next issue, January 2022. Normally, each volume consists of one year's worth of publications. The publication began as the *Florissant Valley Historical Society Quarterly* in April 1959 (Volume 1, Number 1). The “publishing year” then ran from April 1st to March 31st, and so each new annual volume started with the April issue (Number 1) and ended with the January issue (Number 4). That run of the *Quarterly* lasted through the October 1983 issue (Volume 24, Number 3), so Volume 24 only had three issues.

Beginning January 1984, three important changes happened. First, **Historic Florissant Inc.** joined in as a publishing partner. Second, the publication's name was shortened to the *Florissant Valley Quarterly*. Third, the numbering system started over and publishing year changed to the calendar year—from that moment to the present time the January issue always is Number 1 and the October issue always is Number 4. **The Friends of Old St. Ferdinand Inc.** joined as a publishing partner in subsequent years, but the numbering system did not change.

There was an unexplained change in 2001. It may have been simple clerical error. The January issue of that year bore “Volume 18, Number 1” and the April issue bore “Volume 19, Number 2.” That means that Volume 18 was a single issue instead of four issues, and Volume 19 started with Number 2—so was a volume of only three-issues.

FVHS Annual Bouillon Party Returns for January 23, 2022

The Florissant Valley Historical Society will end its tourist season with the annual **Bouillon Party** at Taille de Noyer, long a French tradition in the Florissant area.

Tasty chicken soup, light sandwiches, sweet desserts, and live music will warm you on a wintry day. You can browse the house, take in the new exhibits of African American history and see the new displays from the fiber arts clothing collection.

According to legend, the best soup is made from a stolen chicken—so lock the hen house in January!

SAVE THE DATE—JANUARY 23

More information will be available in the next *Quarterly*.

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. A complete set of bound issues is held by the St. Louis County Library, and electronic issues since 2017 are made available online after six months at www.florissantvalleyhs.com. Back issues are available for purchase from Historic Florissant. Uncredited articles are by the editorial team.

Mary Kay Gladbach, Editor; Andrew J. Theising, Managing Editor

The January 2002 issue was “Volume 20 Number 1” and that is the numbering that is still used—so 20 years later we are at Volume 40.

The current editorial team has been in place since 2017. **Mary Kay Gladbach** and **Rosemary Davison** served as editors of the publication for decades, and Mary Kay remains in that role. She approves all of the copy placement, design elements, and mailing lists. **Andrew Theising**, Rosemary Davison’s nephew, serves as the *Quarterly’s* managing editor—so he’s the one who does the actual magazine layout, manages the publishing calendar, and distributes the proofs to the larger editorial team for approval (Mary Kay for FVHS, **Gina Siebe** for HFI and **Carol Campbell** for FOSF).

In 2018, the *Quarterly* started to be printed in color. These digital files have since been converted to PDFs and are available for free on the FVHS website after six months. One of the publication goals in the coming years is to create an index of all issues back to 1959. This will be an arduous task—if anyone wishes to be part of this work, please reach out to florissantvalleyhs@gmail.com.

The entire bound collection is held by the Florissant Valley Historical Society and Historic Florissant Inc. The **St. Louis County Library Headquarters Branch** also has a bound collection available for viewing. **Historic Florissant** has printed back issues for sale.

Thank you for your memberships and/or financial support that make you a subscriber to the *Quarterly*. You are supporting the legacy of historic preservation by doing so! ■

50 Years Ago: Restoring the Narrow Gauge Railroad Station

In 1971, the *Post-Dispatch* ran a feature showing how **Historic Florissant Inc.**, with assistance from the **Florissant Valley Jaycees**, the **City of Florissant**, and hardworking volunteers from **Florissant Valley Community College**, helped transform the old train station to a visitors center in Tower Court Park. It was to open in May of that year.

The city contributed \$10,000 to the preservation and HFI coordinated raising the remainder--and doing the work of restoration. The station had been moved from its old location on Graham Road, where it opened for business on October 1, 1878.

Adolph Straub, age 81 and a jack-of-all-trades, completely replaced the station’s roof. Afterward, the station was painted “Florissant Red,” shade between Spanish Red and Indian Brown, in keeping with historic Old Town color guidelines.

Prior to being moved, the old station housed a soda fountain, later a confectionary, and finally an equipment rental office on Graham Road.

“Raise the Roof” Raises Needed Repair Funds

The **Florissant Valley Historical Society** expresses gratitude to **all those who attended the annual dinner** in support of Talle de Noyer on September 19th at the Catering to You banquet hall. High on the list of repairs is a new roof for the house, which will run about \$20,000. FVHS is willing to spend part of its reserves to cover the cost, but is hoping to raise at least \$10,000 toward the goal this fall—starting with the annual dinner.

Thanks to generous donors, **the annual dinner raised over \$6,000** toward the season’s goal. Special thanks are extended to the **Very Rev. Msgr. Mark Ullrich**, Sacred Heart Parish; **Donald J. Zykan Jr.**; and a special donation in memory of **Joseph Desloge Sr.**

FVHS hopes to raise additional funds with its October, November, December, and January events. Your generosity is appreciated deeply. Please continue the drive with us!



The room was filled with guests (above), enjoying dinner and drinks. The evening’s program was an address from the great 19th c. industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who shared his views on wealth, work, and philanthropy (left, portrayed by Dr. Jeff Smith of Lindenwood University). FVHS

Father Claude Herman Heithaus, S.J.:

Founder of Jesuit Museum in Florissant Made History of His Own

The old “Rock Building” at what was St. Stanislaus Seminary on Howdershell Road was established as a museum after the Jesuits disposed of the property in 1972 (selling it to the Gateway College of Evangelism). St. Louis University retained ownership of the Rock Building and the adjacent graveyard, and it was operated as a museum by the **Reverend Claude H. Heithaus, S.J.**, then an emeritus professor of archaeology. He received his doctorate in London and worked archeological sites in Syria and the Middle East in the 1920s.

By 1940, he was back in his hometown and back at his alma mater, St. Louis University. Father Heithaus had been trained around the world, and had seen the shortcomings of the United States. He was quoted in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in 1941 as saying “We of America demolish our past to make a desert, then go to Europe to see what we have destroyed.” (“*Here and There*,” by Darst, 15 May 1941, p. 3). He would not stay for long. He was about to take on a human rights issue that would, for a time, end his career here.

On February 11, 1944, he was about to challenge the status quo. He was about to challenge his school, his employer, his church, and his order of priests to a new and higher calling—that of integration. He knew his remarks would be controversial and that people would try to silence him, so he made plans. He gave the text of his homily to the school newspaper in advance (it helped that he was the faculty advisor to the newspaper staff). He invited one of the editors from the *Post-Dispatch* to be in the choir loft of the church. After readings from the Bible, it was time for Father Heithaus’s homily to a church filled with 500 souls. He did not hold back.

He started off by denouncing racial intolerance and injustice. “[To] some followers of Christ, the color of a man’s skin makes all the difference in the world.” He noted that SLU admitted Protestants, Jews, Muslims, pagans, and even atheists in the spirit of “teach all nations,” yet would seemingly “slam our doors in the face of Catholics because their skin complexion happens to be brown or black.”

He exhorted the students in attendance to commit themselves to ending the injustice and do all in their power to prevent it from happening further. The crowd jumped to its feet and “even the pews stood up,” in favor of his words. His superiors were stunned.

SLU President Patrick Holloran, S.J., reprimanded him and told him never to speak publicly on the subject again. Archbishop Glennon called both of them to his office for a scolding. When Heithaus wrote a pro-integration essay for a 1945 newspaper, he was transferred away for 14 years.

His plan had worked, though. Months after the 1944 homily, President Holloran received a call from the U. S. Jesuit Superior’s office. He was instructed to desegregate. SLU was the first segregated university in a former slavery state to do so.

After Fr. Heithaus’s death 45 years ago this year, he was succeeded by **William Barnaby Faherty, S.J.**, a lover of Florissant history and author of several books. However, St. Louis University (and the entire St. Louis region) benefitted from Heithaus’s bravery back in 1944. He was never thanked or acknowledged. ■

Source: <https://www.slu.edu/news/2020/february/slu-legends-lore-heithaus-homily.php>



Father Heithaus in 1941, *Newspapers.com* image

Order Now from HFI! Florissant Books Make Great Gifts!



- *Florissant Missouri*, by Davison \$25 (Signed Copies \$35)
- *St. Ferdinand de Florissant*, by Garraghan, S.J. \$25
- *Rail, Mail and Dreams*, by Davison \$20
- *In the Walnut Grove*, by Theising \$20
- *Images of America, Florissant*, by Wright \$22
- Old Florissant Maps (1845, 1854, 1878, 1909) \$15
- \$20 Gift Certificates: \$20

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Shipping and handling charges apply, US addresses only.

FREE gift bag with every purchase.

Methods of Payment - check, cash, gift card, credit (fee)

www.HistoricFlorissant.com

Passport to Manhood: A Review of Joe Desloge Jr.'s Autobiography

by John Caravelli

The Desloge name is well known in the Florissant area. **Joseph Desloge, Sr.** built a French-chateau-style mansion, Vouziers (now the Boeing Leadership Center), on the bluffs of the Missouri river north of town and moved his family there in the 1920's. **Joseph Desloge, Jr.**, the author, (1925-2009) was born and raised there. His autobiography, *Passport to Manhood* tells the story of his life, anecdotally in a series of vignettes and recollections from his childhood to the time of writing in 1995. In total, the stories tell of fascinating places and times of the twentieth century made more fascinating for people living in or familiar with the Florissant Valley.

The book's chapters each cover formative periods of time in Desloge's life including his childhood at Vouziers, the Great Depression, World War II, his experience in business, trips to and adventures in Latin America and, finally, his support of family planning. A central theme running through the book is that of poverty; the "haves" versus the "have nots." Desloge was obviously one of the "haves." His grandfather, Firmin Vincent Desloge, was one of the wealthiest men of his time. His father, Joseph Sr., was successful in mining and electrical businesses, as well.

Joseph Sr., "Papa" as the author affectionately calls him, is an important character through the first chapters. Joseph Jr. states his love and respect for his father and proudly describes his many accomplishments as a businessman, philanthropist, and father. He recounts his father's generosity to neighbors in need during the Depression of the 1930's and describes the era in the Florissant Valley through depictions of those struggling in their circumstance.

After Pearl Harbor, Desloges' father recommended that his son enlist with the American Field Services, or he would "...never have a chance to go to war!" So, it was at seventeen years old that Joseph Desloge went off to serve in the ambulance corps on the front lines attached to the British and French armies as well as the French Foreign Legion. His service took him to the Middle East, North Africa, Italy and, eventually, to India, Dachau and London.

Through a series of somewhat disjointed stories, Des-

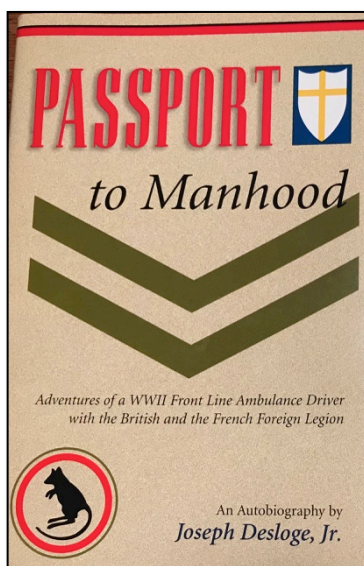
loge describes his time at war, the horrible as well as the boring; of carting the dead and wounded in ambulances and of the terrible field rations. His depictions of war will ring true for those who have ever seen front line action, both the horror and the dark humor. Desloge also makes special note of the lives of the local people and the poverty.

That theme carries through his depictions of his life following the war and his travels through Latin America. His descriptions are not those of wealthy tourist destinations but of peasants, shacks, and slogs through mud and the jungle. These are trips of discovery and mission.

Combined with his observations of his struggling neighbors during the Depression and the locals during the war, Desloge concludes that there is not the abundance to care for all the poor of the world. He is led to the conclusion that the main issue is one of overpopulation and the need for family planning, the subject of his philanthropy for the remainder of his life.

Passport to Manhood depicts the life of a man of wealth, born and raised in the Florissant Valley, with an adventurous, caring, and philanthropic soul. ■

Copies are available from Historic Florissant, Inc.



Annual Holiday Luncheon Returns In-Person at Taille de Noyer

After a year of quiet, the activity is starting to happen around Taille again! The 2021 Holiday Luncheon is back and will be a wonderful way to celebrate the holiday season.

Visit with old friends and make some new ones! Gift baskets, delicious food, and beautiful Victorian decorations will make it a perfect day!

Tickets are \$20 and reservations are required. To do so, you may Call: Mary Kay at 314-409-9478

Send an email to: florissantvalleyhs@gmail.com

Pay online at: www.florissantvalleyhs.com.make-a-donation

(put "luncheon" in the comments and your address)

Mail the enclosed flyer to FVHS, P. O. Box 298,

Florissant MO 63032



FVHS Sets New Fees

The Florissant Valley Historical Society at its July 2021 meeting has approved new membership and admission fees starting in the 2022 season. Annual membership will now be \$20 and life memberships will be \$200. Admission fees to Taille de Noyer during regular operating hours starting in 2022 will be a \$5 donation per adult, age 16 and up (accompanying children are free). Taille de Noyer is closed to the public during the winter, January-March, but is open by appointment and for special events—so please ask. The house can be rented year-round. Consider Taille for your next get-together!

Year-End Donations Are a Great Way to Help!

All three of the historic preservation groups that are responsible for maintaining some of our most precious landmarks and history depend on generous donations from the community. Please consider including one or all of these groups in year-end giving plans. All are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Thank you for consideration.

The Friends of Old St. Ferdinand, Inc.

#1 Rue St. Francois, Florissant MO 63031

Historic Florissant Inc.

1067 Dunn Road, Florissant MO 63031

The Florissant Valley Historical Society (FVHS)

P. O. Box 298, Florissant MO 63032

\$100K Federal Grant Pursued for Taille de Noyer

The FVHS Board of Directors approved the pursuit of a \$100,000 special federal grant in August. The grant is aimed at helping nonprofits that were closed during COVID and unable to carry out fundraisers and community engagement work.

If awarded, the grant would help make Taille de Noyer more accessible to the handicapped. The FVHS Board recently has purchased a small ramp to make entry to the lower first floor possible. The grant would allow better access to the upper first floor.

One community outcome of the award would be to fund new ways to engage students across the Ferguson-Florissant School District. Additional programming with art and cultural teachers is also included.

"It has been a difficult time for Taille and all nonprofits. COVID has really set us back," said FVHS treasurer Andrew Theising. An award decision is expected before January 1.

Remembering Michael Blassie



Blassie's grave at Jefferson Barracks, front (left) and back (right). The back of the stone notes his dates of interment as an Unknown. Images by KPthegravehunter, findagrave.com, used with permission

Michael Blassie (1948-1972) was the first of five children born to Jean and George Blassie. He was part of the class of 1966 at St. Louis University High School, and the class of 1970 from the Air Force Academy. Before the family moved to Florissant, Blassie had grown up on East College Avenue in the College Hill neighborhood of St. Louis.

In a July 1, 1998 *Post-Dispatch* feature, he was remembered as an outstanding student, a varsity soccer and tennis player, a track and field athlete, and even a bassoon player! "He was good at everything he tried to do," recalled his mother Jean.

After his remains were disinterred from the Tomb of the Unknowns, a funeral was held at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Florissant. Officials decided that the Vietnam crypt in the Tomb would remain a vacant *cenotaph* thereafter.

North County Inc. Recognizes Historic Florissant's Gina Siebe

Dr. Gina Siebe received NCI's Special Recognition Leadership Award at their annual Leadership Breakfast on September 17th. She has been president of Historic Florissant for three years and has helped raise funds and volunteer hours for HFI's many historic preservation projects. She has also been a great supporter of HFI's partner organizations.

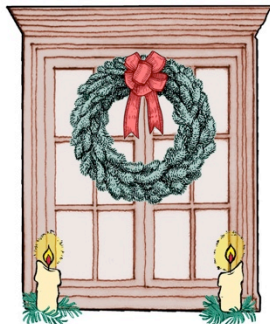
Dr. Siebe utilizes community outreach opportunities, such as having booths at local fairs and library events. She is an advocate for historic preservation, lives in a historic house listed on the National Register of Historic Places and promotes Florissant's Historic District at every chance. Congratulations and thanks for your hard work! *HFI image*



Fall House Tour is Nov. 28, 1-6 p.m.

Historic Florissant Inc. is planning its longstanding tradition of welcoming the holiday season with the annual house tour on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, November 28 from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Annual Old Town Florissant Christmas House Tour



Sunday, November 28, 2021

1:00 to 6:00 pm

Spend an afternoon
visiting thirteen beautiful homes
& impressive historic locations
while enjoying some interesting conversation.
(Some locations will be serving light refreshments.)

Tickets are available at
Dooley's Florist or Korte's Frame
on rue St. Francois

Tickets cost \$20 per adult &
\$5 for children 18 and under.

For more information call

314-565-1468

www.HistoricFlorissant.com

Presented by



Historic Florissant, Inc.
1067 Dunn Rd. 63031

Sites on this year's tour include:

- The Belleville-Castello House
- The August Aubuchon House
- The Raup House
- The Jasper House
- The Archambault House
- The Gittemeier House
- The Myers House
- Old St. Ferdinand's Shrine
- Taille de Noyer

HFI Fundraiser/Booksigning Nov. 4 at 7 p.m.—Save the Date

Remember *Wrestling at the Chase*? Historic Florissant is planning a fun event for November 4th at the Eagan Center Theater. This will be a **Tribute to Bob "Cowboy" Orton**, attending with his son Randy. Author Ed Wheatley will sign copies of his latest book *Wrestling at the Chase* (Reedy Press 2021). More details to come...save the date! For info, call 314-565-1468.

Ghastly and Ghostly Stories at Taille de Noyer Oct. 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Come join FVHS on Sunday evening, October 24, for a brand new pre-Halloween frightful walking tour around Taille de Noyer, and hear a few ghastly stories about real events and a couple super-natural ones!

Park in the lot right in front of the house, then walk and listen to four ghastly real-life stories as we make a loop around the property—including the plane crash that happened practically in Taille's back yard! (pictured below) We will end at Taille de Noyer for brief refreshments and warm-up inside. Back at the house, we will hear **Andrew Theising's** ghostly stories from when he was the caretaker at Taille de Noyer 30+ years ago. (The house itself is not open for touring.) Ends about 8 p.m.

Donation: \$20. The fun happens, rain or shine. (Why, a thunderstorm that kills the power might be appropriate, right? Events may be moved to locations inside the house or on the porches as needed.) **Dress for the weather. This is an after-sundown event, so may want to bring your own flashlight! There will be hills and steps. Bring your mask for the indoor portion.** Light refreshments on hand. BYOB. Limited to 25 participants.

Send your check payable to FVHS to P. O. Box 298, Florissant MO 63032-0298, or you may pay online at www.florissantvalleyhs.com/make-a-donation (put your address and "ghost tour" in the comments), or you can email florissantvalleyhs@gmail.com with your name/address/phone to reserve a place and pay that evening (you will be charged for non-attendance, but your donation is tax-deductible). Tickets held at the door. **BOO!**



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

(isn't it nice to have a calendar again?)

October

Sunday 24th—Ghastly and Ghostly Stories at Taille, 6:30 p.m.

November

Thursday 4th—Tribute to Bob “Cowboy” Orton at Eagan Center, 7 p.m.

Thursday 18th—St. Philippine Duchesne Feast Day

Sunday 28th—Holiday House Tour, 1-6 p.m.

Buy your holiday gifts from our local museums!

>>>history books, cookbooks, maps, ornaments, souvenirs

December

Thursday 2nd---Holiday Luncheon at Taille de Noyer (two seatings—11:30 and 1:00)

Saturday 4th—Spirited Holiday Past Tour, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., various sites

Anytime up to the 31st: Consider a year-end donation online:

<https://www.oldstferdinandshrine.com>,

<https://historicflorissant.com>,

<https://florissantvalleyhs.com>

January

Sunday 23rd—Bouillon Party at Taille—Save the Date!

FLORISSANT VALLEY QUARTERLY

Give the gift of *The Florissant Valley Quarterly*. A one-year subscription is included with a gift membership in the Florissant Valley Historical Society (still just \$15 this year). When you give the gift through FVHS, you will receive a special announcement page that you can print and present to the recipient!

You may also subscribe through membership in/donations to our partner organizations. (websites at left)