

Generous gift will enrich collection and benefit researchers

Last month, St. Louis County Library announced the receipt of a substantial gift to the Special Collections Department in memory of William C.E. and Bessie K. Becker given by their children and grandchildren. A committee representing the donors and the library met to discuss possible acquisitions and identified a number of sources for German, Swiss, Irish, and U.S. research for purchase. The gift will greatly expand the offerings available to researchers and make the Special Collections Department a premier destination for Swiss research. Acquisitions for the collection will be identified by a specially designed bookplate. Updates about the collection will be announced in PastPorts.

The following biography of Mr. and Mrs. Becker was provided by their grandson, Edward Dolata, past president of and current volunteer in the St. Louis Genealogical Society.

William C.E. and Bessie K. Becker

William C. E. and Bessie K. Becker were life-long residents of St. Louis City and County. William was born in 1890 and lived in South St. Louis near the 3500 block of South Jefferson Ave. Bessie was born in 1896 and lived in North St. Louis near the 2600 block of North Jefferson Ave. They both attended local public schools.

Bessie R. Kohl graduated from Yeatman High School in 1914. During high school and after graduation she studied music at the Strassberger and Heink Conservatories of Music. She graduated from the Heink Conservatory, receiving the gold and diamond medal award which recognized master musician graduates. She taught music until her marriage to William in 1919. She was a homemaker and at times the bookkeeper for her husband's business. At their 50th wedding anniversary celebration in 1969, a long-time friend referred to her in a speech as the power behind the throne.



Photo courtesy of Edward Dolata.

The Jewel Box in Forest Park, completed in 1936, was designed by William C.E. Becker and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

William C. E. Becker attended school in St. Louis until forced to drop out in 1907 to maintain the family grocery store. He later applied and passed the entrance examination to Washington University, graduating in 1915 with a degree in civil engineering.

William's first job was with the Michigan Central Railroad in Detroit, where worked until 1917. At that time, some professors from the Washington University Department of Civil Engineering had volunteered or been called to serve in the army during World War I. The remaining faculty would not have been sufficient to keep the department open, so William was asked to return to St. Louis to join the faculty.

In 1920, he started working for the St. Louis City Department of Bridges and Buildings where he eventually attained the position of chief engineer. In 1924, Mayor Henry Kiel appointed him building commissioner, a position he held until the end of Kiel's administration in 1925.

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Genealogy PROGRAMS

JUN
JUL
2014

**PROGRAMS ARE FREE
AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.**

Registration is not required.

**Call 314-994-3300
for more information.**

Programs take place at:
**St. Louis County Library
Headquarters**
1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri, 63131

St. Louis Genealogical Society General Meeting **Tuesday, June 10, 7:00 p.m**

Headquarters Auditorium



Genealogical Research in the St. Louis Area

Featured Speaker: Ilene Murray

Just beginning? Learn about tried and true St. Louis repositories. Been researching for a while? Explore the many other places we are fortunate to have in St. Louis including many that have an active online presence.

St. Louis Genealogical Society General Meeting **Tuesday, July 8, 7:00 p.m.**

Headquarters Auditorium



In die Kirche gehen: German Churches in St. Louis

Featured Speaker: Scott Holl

The church was an important institution in the lives of many German immigrants and a vital source of records for genealogical research. The speaker will provide an overview of German denominations active in St. Louis and tips for finding and researching their records.

StLGS Italian Special Interest Group **Monday, July 14, 7:00 p.m.**

Headquarters East Room

U.S. Census Reports: Federal, State and Special

The speaker will review federal, state, and special census reports, including a detailed examination of the data collected for each and a discussion as to why the information was important at the time a census was taken.

Featured speaker: Ken Webb

StLGS Irish Special Interest Group **Tuesday, July 22, 7:00 p.m.**

Headquarters Auditorium

Using Passenger Lists for Genealogical Research

Passenger lists document an ancestor's entry into U.S. history. This presentation will cover the importance of passenger lists, when they were created, what clues they provide and the ports to which they relate.

Featured Speaker: Ken Webb

After leaving his position with the city, he joined Frederick C. Taxis to form Taxis and Becker, Consulting Structural Engineers. Taxis was a local engineer who had immigrated to St. Louis from Germany about 1904. He had a well-established structural engineering office before the partnership was formed, doing design work on the Arcade Building, the Bevo bottling plant and the Bevo Mill restaurant for Anheuser Busch, and the Moolah Shrine. The new firm did the structural engineering work for a number of landmark buildings in St. Louis, including the Civil Courts Building, Deaconess Hospital, Missouri Pacific Railroad Building, and the Federal Court House and Custom House building, which is today a courthouse for St. Louis.

William returned to work for the city of St. Louis as chief engineer of bridges and buildings when Bernard Dickmann became mayor in 1933. He was given the task of designing a new floral conservatory structure in Forest Park to replace an old building called the Jewel Box. After consulting with George Moore, director of Shaw's Garden, its superintendent, George Pring, William made light reading studies on

various models, and the current Jewel Box design was chosen. It was a revolutionary design for its time and is still a landmark structure. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999.

William again left his position with the city in 1941 when Bernard Dickmann's administration ended, and he went into private practice. His office did the structural engineering work for the new Terminal Building at Lambert St. Louis Airport in 1953 and the addition of a fourth dome structure in 1965. Other St. Louis projects included many buildings within the Barnes Hospital–Washington University Medical School complex and others on the campuses of Washington University and the University of Missouri–Columbia. He also worked on the Military Record Center on Page Blvd. and many flood walls along the Mississippi River.

In 1955, at the 100th anniversary celebration of Washington University, William and 57 other graduates were recognized with alumni citation awards for outstanding achievements and services reflecting honor upon the university. That was the inaugural year for those awards. He was one of the first trustees appointed by the city to the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District Board of Trustees. In 1963 he was recognized by the St. Louis chapter of the Missouri Society of Professional Engineers as Engineer of the Year. From 1947 through 1970, he served on the American Concrete Institute's committee writing the building code requirements for reinforced concrete governing the construction of reinforced concrete buildings across the United States.

In the mid-1960s, William joined the Committee to Save the Old Post Office. The Old Post Office and Custom House building occupying the St. Louis City block bounded by 8th, Olive, 9th and Locust Streets was built in the 1870s and had been abandoned by the federal government by 1961, except for a branch post office. He worked with the Landmarks Commission to convince the federal government to save the landmark. In August 1970, he flew to Washington, D.C. with members of the committee to testify about the building before a government panel. He suffered a stroke on the night of the return flight and died three years later in 1973. Bessie Becker lived another 14 years and died in 1987.

PastPorts is published monthly by the St. Louis County Library Special Collections Department, located on Tier 5 of the Headquarters location.

[Current and past issues can be downloaded from the web <http://www.slcl.org/pastports>](http://www.slcl.org/pastports).

Contact the Special Collections Department

Special Collections Department
St. Louis County Library
1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd
St. Louis, MO 63131

Phone: 314-994-3300, ext. 2070
Email: scollections@slcl.org
Website: <http://www.slcl.org>

Tours

Tours of the Special Collections Department are conducted on the first Wednesday and third Saturday of the month at 10:30 a.m. No registration is required. Group tours are gladly arranged with advance notice by calling the Special Collections Department at 314-994-3300, ext. 2070.



Immigrants in St. Louis an overview

People from many countries have come to the St. Louis area, located strategically near the center of the country at the crossroads of two great rivers, the Mississippi and the Missouri. Some came for economic reasons, others for political or religious ones. Some came to stay; others were simply stopping on their way west. This article takes a brief look at the major immigrant groups who have made St. Louis what it is today. Please note that an asterisk (*) indicates that records are available in the Special Collections Department.

The French

The French were the first Europeans to settle in this area, encountering the indigenous inhabitants, who were primarily Missouri and Osage Indians, although parish records from the Old St. Louis Cathedral indicate that Paducahs, Omahas, Foxes and members of other Native American tribes were here, too. Many of the original French were

coureurs des bois, “runners of the woods” (hunters and trappers), and *voyageurs*, “voyagers,” who traveled the rivers and streams of North America, as agents of the fur trade. Many worked their way down from Canada and up the Mississippi from New Orleans and the Caribbean in the late 1600s and early 1700s and founded the city of St. Louis in 1764. Nineteenth-century French immigrants to St. Louis came mainly from Alsace-Lorraine, an area that was sometimes part of France and sometimes part of Germany. The French Mutual Aid Society was established in 1859 to help French speakers needing help with life’s difficulties. Microfilm copies of extant issues of two St. Louis French-language newspapers, *La Revue de l’Ouest*, 1854* and *Le Patriote*, 1878-1887* are available for researchers interested in the nineteenth-century French-speaker’s perspective in St. Louis.

The Americans

The Americans, the descendants of early settlers with mostly English or Scotch roots, gradually moved across the continent from east to west. Under French and Spanish rule, residents of the Louisiana Territory were required to be Catholic. The areas transferred to the United States through the Louisiana Purchase opened St. Louis and the West to Protestant settlement. An early “American” newspaper published in St. Louis was the *Missouri Republican** (also variously known as the *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, and the *St. Louis Missouri Republic*), published 1822–1888 (the Special Collections Department has the publication on microfilm for the years 1828–1888 on microfilm and back to 1822 on Nineteenth-century U. S. Newspapers, a subscription database).

The African Americans

The majority of African Americans came to St. Louis against their will. However, by 1835, “free Negroes” were allowed to live in St. Louis by obtaining a license from the St. Louis County Court*. By 1830, there were 569 “free Negroes” living in Missouri (not all of them in St. Louis). Sumner High School, the first high school for African American students west of the Mississippi River, was opened in 1875, and the Annie Malone Children’s Home was founded in 1888 to care for African American orphans. Homer G. Phillips Hospital served the African American

community from 1937 until 1979 and converted into a senior citizen housing center in 2003. Sumner High School, the Annie Malone Children's Home and Homer G. Phillips Dignity House/Senior Living Community are all located in the Ville, a historically African American St. Louis neighborhood. Since 2000, the International Institute of St. Louis has resettled more than 1500 refugees and immigrants from Africa, the largest group coming from Somalia. Newspapers published by the African American community include the St. Louis American, 1949–present*, St. Louis Argus, 1919–1997* and the St. Louis Palladium, 1903–1907*.

The Germans and Swiss

No discussion of St. Louis is complete without mentioning German-speaking immigrants, the largest immigrant group and one that completely overwhelmed the French by the early 1840s. In 1830, the entire population of St. Louis was 6,694. Sixty years later, in 1890, the German population alone was ten times that number and located mainly in north-side and south-side neighborhoods. The Germans and Swiss brought numerous contributions to St. Louis, including breweries, singing societies, gymnastics clubs and many other social and religious organizations. Several newspapers were published by the German-speaking community, including *Amerika*, 1872–1914* (Catholic), *Anzeiger des Westens*, 1842–1898*, *Herald des Glaubens*, 1889–1899* (Catholic), and the *Westliche Post*, 1857–1938*.

The Irish

As early as 1820, nearly 1500 of St. Louis' population was of Irish descent. By the time of the 1880 census, it had grown to 28,536. The two main Irish population centers in St. Louis were traditionally Kerry Patch on the near-north side and Cheltenham, or Dogtown on the south side. At one point, there were 29 Irish Catholic churches* in the city of St. Louis. Today, there are several Irish pubs in St. Louis, three St. Patrick's Day parades and Irish music and dance schools, such as St. Louis Irish Arts.

The Poles

The Poles started arriving in large numbers in St. Louis in the late nineteenth century. By the mid-1890s, St. Stanislaus Catholic Church* (1880) had more than 2300 parishioners.

Later Polish parishes include St. Casimir* (1889–1992), St. Hedwig* (1904), Our Lady of Czestochowa* (1906–1957) and St. Adalbert* (1912–1993). Weekly Polish language classes are taught at St. Stanislaus, and the Polish-American Cultural Society of Metropolitan St. Louis produces programs in the areas of Polish art, language, literature, drama, history, dance, crafts, foods and observances of significant traditions. By the time of the 1904 World's Fair, there were about 16,000 Poles living in St. Louis.

The Czechs / Bohemians

The Czechs began arriving in small numbers following failed European revolutions in Europe in 1848. By 1855, the new St. John Nepomuk Catholic Church* was opened in an area of South St. Louis known as Bohemian Hill, between Lafayette Square and the Soulard neighborhood. By the end of World War I, there were 12,000 to 15,000 Bohemians living in South St. Louis. In order to serve the growing Czech community, a second Catholic church, St. Wenceslas*, was opened in 1895. The Czechs, like the Germans, established their own gymnastic clubs, dramatic and singing societies, and other social and fraternal organizations. *St. Louiské Listy**, a Czech-language newspaper, was published from 1902 to 1923. The Hessoun Bohemian Catholic Orphanage, founded by Monsignor Joseph Hessoun of St. John Nepomuk Church, operated from 1908 to 1954.

The Italians

By 1848, the Italian population in St. Louis numbered only around fifty, but by 1866, it had grown to more than 600, most from Northern Italy. Between 1890 and 1930, large numbers of Sicilians began arriving in St. Louis. Soon there were three Italian Catholic parishes in the city: Our Lady Help of Christians (1900–1975)*, St. Charles Borromeo (1900–1982)* and St. Ambrose (1903)*, as well as the *Fratellanza**, the Italian Union and Fraternal Society, which was organized in 1866. *La Lega Italiana**, an Italian-language newspaper, was published from 1914 to 1920, and *Il Pensiero* (Italian with some articles in English) has been published since 1904. Although Italians have worked in all fields, they are now best known in St. Louis for their restaurants and bakeries, primarily located on the Hill in Southwest St. Louis City.

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THIS MONTH IN SAINT LOUIS HISTORY

June 15, 1859

Missouri Botanical Garden

The Missouri Botanical Garden opened its Tower Grove Avenue gates to visitors for the first time on June 15, 1859. The garden is one of the oldest botanical institutions in the United States and a national historic landmark. Its renown is due to the vision and generosity of its founder, Henry Shaw.

Henry Shaw was born in Sheffield, England on July 24, 1800 and immigrated to the U.S. with his father in 1818. At age 19, he settled in St. Louis, chosen for its central location and river traffic. He opened a hardware-general store, and with his Sheffield connections, imported goods of “superior quality” for nearly 20 years. Later in life, he was quoted as saying, that at the age of 39 he made \$22,000 in one year, more money “than any man in my circumstances ought to make.”

Shaw had a profound interest in gardening and plants. After visiting the Britain’s Great Exhibition of 1851, he returned to St. Louis with the idea of developing gardens for botanical research on the grounds around his country estate, later known as Tower Grove and located in what had been the Prairie de Noyers common fields. He solicited the guidance of Sir William Jackson Hooker, Director of the Royal Gardens at Kew; St. Louis physician and botanist, Dr. George Engelmann; and Harvard’s premier botanist, Dr. Asa Gray.

A true philanthropist, Shaw intended his garden to be a public institution and a gift to his beloved St. Louis where he prospered. Shaw established the Henry Shaw School of Botany at Washington University and the Engelmann Professorship of Botany. Shaw also helped found the Missouri Historical Society, and donated land to the city for school and hospital development. Shaw died in 1889 and is buried in a mausoleum surrounded by a grove of trees on the grounds of his beloved garden.



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The Jews

It is generally believed that Joseph Philipson was the first Jew in St. Louis, arriving in 1807. By 1840, the Jewish population had risen to around fifty. The first synagogue, B'nai El, was completed in 1855 as the first synagogue west of the Mississippi River. The Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), founded locally in 1896, later evolved into the present-day Jewish Community Center (JCC) with branches in Creve Coeur and Chesterfield. Jewish Hospital, now Barnes-Jewish Hospital, opened in 1902. Jewish newspapers that have been published in St. Louis include the Free Press, 1885-1887*; Jewish Light, 1947-present (St. Louis County Library's Special Collections Department has 1947-1977)*, Jewish Tribune, 1878-1884*, and Jewish Voice, 1888-1920*. Since Philipson's arrival, Jews from many countries have immigrated to the area, pushing today's St. Louis Jewish population to more than 60,000.

The Greeks

By the early 1900s, a "Greek Town" consisting of boarding houses, cafés, and grocery stores developed in the area where Busch Stadium is now located. Two Greek churches, Holy Trinity and the Church of the Evangelismos, served the Greek community for a short time until St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church opened in 1917 at Garrison and St. Louis Avenues. Unfortunately, the church was destroyed in the tornado of 1927. It was rebuilt in the Central West End on Forest Park Boulevard in 1931. The Church of the Assumption, organized in the late 1940s on Delmar Boulevard, was the second Greek congregation in St. Louis, and has since moved to Des Peres Road in Town and Country. St. Nicholas remains on Forest Park Boulevard, but it has recently added a community center located on the south

outer road of Interstate 40 in Town and Country. Greek festivals with music, food and dance are held annually at both churches.

The Chinese

As surprising as it may seem, the first Chinese person to arrive in St. Louis came in 1857. His name was Alla Lee, and he ran a small tea and coffee shop on North 10th St. By the end of the 19th century, there were about 300 Chinese people in St. Louis living in "Hop Alley," an area bounded by 7th, 8th, Market and Walnut Streets. Construction of Busch Stadium led to the neighborhood's destruction in 1966. Main businesses included laundries (providing 60% of the laundry services of the city at one time), merchandise stores, grocery stores, restaurants, and tea shops. Today many Chinese-run businesses may be found on Olive Boulevard in Olivette and University City. Two Chinese language schools, two Chinese-language newspapers, and numerous Chinese religious and social institutions offer cultural support to St. Louis' growing Chinese community. Deceased St. Louis Chinese are generally buried in Valhalla Cemetery*.

The Bosnians

The war in Bosnia in the 1990s left 250,000 people dead and another 2.5 million displaced as refugees. Approximately 20,000 of them found their way to St. Louis. Since then, the St. Louis Bosnian population has grown to about 70,000, according to [the St. Louis Bosnian website](http://www.stlbosnians.com) <<http://www.stlbosnians.com>>. The Bosnian Cultural Center, Bosnian Islamic Center, Bosnian Sport and Cultural Association and various other organizations located in South St. Louis and St. Louis County serve Bosnian cultural, social and religious interests. A multitude of Bosnian-run businesses meet the daily needs of St. Louis Bosnians and others.

Immigration to St. Louis today

Today, according to the [Immigration Research and Information website](http://tinyurl.com/nwrhdg2) <<http://tinyurl.com/nwrhdg2>>, about 126,000 St. Louisans were born in another country, less than five percent of the region's population. The study shows that immigrant households in St. Louis earn \$83,000 a year on average—25 percent more than native-born residents. Foreign-born residents are 44 percent more likely to

HOLIDAY CLOSING

Friday, July 4 — Independence Day

All St. Louis County Library locations will be closed.

have a college degree, and 60 percent more likely to start a business. Today, most immigrants come from Asia (including China, Korea, India, and Pakistan), Mexico, and other Latin American countries, with smaller numbers from many other places. St. Louis' [International Institute's web-site](http://www.iistl.org/) <<http://www.iistl.org/>> states that the organization currently provide services to more than 7500 immigrants and refugees from more than 75 countries.

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CLASSES

Classes are free and open to the public, but registration is required. ☎ Call (314) 994-3300 to register. Space is limited.

JUNE

Genealogical Research: Getting the Most out of the Special Collections Department

Wednesday, June 4, 2 p.m.
Headquarters East Room
Larry Franke, instructor
Registration is now open.

Introduction to Ancestry Library Edition

Thursday, June 12, 2 p.m.
Headquarters Computer Lab
Larry Franke, instructor
Registration is now open.

History and Genealogy in Newspapers

Wednesday, June 25, 2 p.m.
Headquarters Computer Lab
Larry Franke, instructor
Registration is now open.

- Merkel, Jim. *Beer, Brats, and Baseball: St. Louis Germans*. St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2012. 977.866 M563B
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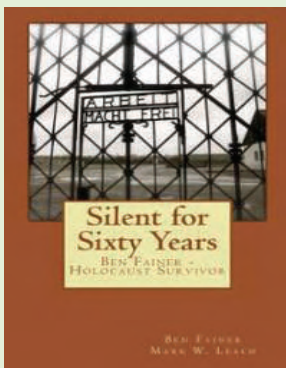
Poles

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SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT
SPECIAL EVENTS
 HEADQUARTERS AUDITORIUM

■ **Wednesday, July 23 | 7 p.m.**



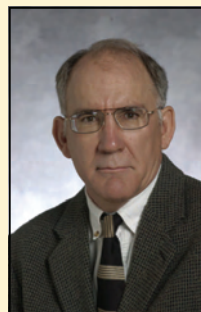
Silent for Sixty Years

Holocaust survivor Ben Fainer discusses his memoir about the six years he spent in six different concentration camps and his eventual

liberation by an American soldier. Sixty years later, Fainer and the American soldier were reunited by chance, an experience that inspired Ben to finally tell his story through this memoir.

■ **Saturday, August 9 | 9:30 a.m.**

St. Louis Germans: Insiders or Outsiders?



Dr. Walter D. Kamphoefner, professor of history at Texas A&M University and a native of St. Charles County, will discuss German-American culture and society in St. Louis from the early 1830s through the mid-1930s,

including issues surrounding political and economic patterns, bilingual education, and language preservation.

9:30-10:30 a.m.

Part I: The Heroes of the Union

11 a.m.-Noon

Part II: The Scapegoats of World War I

Programs are free and open to the public. No registration is required.

NEW TITLES ADDED IN MAY: 130

NEW IN THE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT



View the list of new books on the web

A list of new books received during the previous month now appears on the [library's website](#). View the list by clicking on the graphic, left, or by typing the URL into your browser:

<<http://tinyurl.com/ktha6fr>>.

Looking for a specific state, or county ?

Books pertaining to specific states (and counties within states) begin with the same call number. [A chart of Dewey Decimal numbers for states and counties is posted on the library website](#) <<http://tinyurl.com/oqy8xp8>>. Other subjects are also grouped by call number. For example, family histories begin with 929.2. Materials for Scotland begin with 941 and those for Germany begin with 943.

To find new titles on the book list, note the Dewey Decimal Number for the state / county or subject you are interested in. Scroll through the book list until you find items beginning with that call number.

Books with call numbers **not beginning with "R"** are listed in Dewey Decimal order first, followed by those beginning with "R" (denoting "Reference" books that may be used only in the library). Book titles can be selected from the online list and emailed, printed, or saved to a file. An additional feature for library card holders is the ability to login to their library accounts and save titles to a customized list. [You can also download the list as a PDF from the library's website](#) <<http://tinyurl.com/okz4vvs>>.

For more information about viewing the new book list online, exporting records, and saving items to a customized list, call (314) 994-3300 or ask a librarian when visiting any St. Louis County Library branch.

Fading Ads of St. Louis
by William Stage

The History Press, 2013; 121 pp.
R 659.1342 S779F

Before the billboard, radio or television commercial, there was the painted ad. Today, these aging ads capture the imagination, harkening

back to a bygone era. Vanishing paint on brick walls speaks to a time when commerce was much simpler and much more direct. Few cities in America have produced as many intriguing fading ads as St. Louis. Fewer still are home to such an expert on the subject as author Wm. Stage. For decades, Stage has studied and researched the lost art form of the painted ad, carefully tracking the history of this hands-on approach to advertising from its lustrous heyday to its disappearing present. Join Stage on a tour through St. Louis's fading ads hidden in plain sight.—*Publisher*



Images of America Series

Arcadia Publishing

Arcadia Publishing is well known for the many books published in its Images of America Series. Each volume is richly illustrated with historic photographs and captions and other text

offer historical information. The Special Collections Department has received a large shipment of books in the Images of America Series. Two pertaining to St. Louis history include "St. Louis's Delmar Loop," by M.M. Costantin, and "Missouri Botanical Garden," by Todd E. Styles. Click on the "new books" icon above to see other titles added to the collection.

