Members of the Missouri Historical Society receive Gateway magazine as a member benefit. For subscription information or change of address notification, please call Membership Services, (314) 454-3101, or write join@mohistory.org.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
Gateway Circulation Dept.
Missouri Historical Society
PO Box 775460
St. Louis, MO 63177

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Submissions are accepted as hard copy, disk file, or email attachment. Please prepare footnotes, if any, in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style. We will happily return any manuscript accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please contact the editor before submitting irreplaceable or delicate photographs and slides to Gateway through the mail.

Please address manuscript submissions to:
Editor-in-Chief, Gateway
Missouri Historical Society
PO Box 775460
St. Louis, MO 63177
LMitchell@mohistory.org

Requests for footnoted manuscripts of published articles should be sent to the above address.

Special thanks to the Missouri History Museum Subdistrict of the Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District. Thanks to the taxpayers of St. Louis City and St. Louis County and the members of the Missouri Historical Society for their continued support.
Contents

p. 6
FROM CAPTIVE TO CREOLE
María Rosa Villalpando
Dr. Frances Levine

p. 16
THE SKOURAS BROTHERS
20th-Century Titans
Michael G. Tsichlis, PhD

p. 32
THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
A Century of Service
Anna Crosslin

DEPARTMENTS
p. 2  Treasures from the Collections
p. 4  As We See It
p. 44  As They Put It
p. 50  Sneak Peek

Front cover: Natalie Merli Pabon, a member of the folk dance troupe Grupo Atlántico, performs at the Festival of Nations. Pabon is a longtime member of this troupe that performs Colombian folk dances with African and Spanish artistic influences. Grupo Atlántico was founded in 1995 by Carmen Dence. Photo by Wayne Crosslin, 2012.

Silver comes in all shapes and sizes, from humble soup spoons to elaborate tea services—and the variety of style and design is just as wide. For thousands of years silver has been associated with wealth, but the hundreds of pieces in the Missouri Historical Society’s silver collection are worth much more than their monetary value. Our silver conveys stories about the people and events that shaped the city of St. Louis.

By Hattie Felton, Curator of Domestic Life

St. Louis Aero Club trophy made by Mermod, Jaccard & King Jewelry Co., 1909.

Any discussion of St. Louis silver would not be complete without mentioning Jaccard’s, the city’s powerhouse silver and jewelry makers and retailers for nearly a century. Louis Jaccard arrived in St. Louis in 1827 and set up a small shop on Main Street. He offered repairs and silver household objects, as well as imported items. Despite setbacks over the years and several partnerships, the Jaccard family business became a thriving dynasty and St. Louis institution. After being purchased by Scruggs, Vandervoort, and Barney in 1917, Jaccard’s continued to retail jewelry and silver well into the twentieth century.

This St. Louis Aero Club Long Distance Challenge trophy, made by the partnership Mermod, Jaccard & King Jewelry Co., was awarded to Tony von Phul and Albert Bond Lambert in 1909 in recognition of their 500-plus-mile flights that year. However, the strikingly elegant trophy wasn’t designed by Jaccard’s; that honor went to Marguerite Martyn, an accomplished young St. Louis artist and journalist. For decades Martyn worked for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, where she wrote about suffrage, cultural events, politics, and everyday life, often pairing drawings with her stories. Martyn’s artistic style—generally ink on paper illustrative work—is airy and delicate, yet energetic. Her style translated seamlessly to this trophy, which today is the only known example of her design work for Jaccard’s.
Antoine Danjean arrived in St. Louis around 1800 and was the city’s earliest recorded silversmith. Danjean built a lucrative business as a maker of silver trade goods at a time when the fur trade was at its height. Danjean and his assistants worked from their shop, located conveniently close to the Office of Indian Trade, to produce objects like silver medals, small pins, jewelry, and gorgets. This silver was then dispersed across the West in vast quantities, including an order in 1810 that called for seven thousand pieces of trade silver to be made “as quickly as possible” for use at Fort Madison and Fort Osage. Danjean also crafted silver flatware, snuffboxes, and other household items. Prominent St. Louisans including William Clark, Joseph Hirtiz, and the Bates family commissioned orders. Three beautiful silver spoons bearing his mark—including this one, made for the Tesson family—are preserved in the Missouri Historical Society’s collection. Danjean’s mark is located on the back of the handle, and the handle’s front is engraved with the initials PT.

Sterling silver Keser Torah Award, 1983.

The St. Louis Rabbinical College presented this silver Keser Torah Award to George Duncan Bauman, longtime editor of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, in 1983, honoring his years of support for the city’s Jewish community. Bauman recalled the award in his 1999 book, Behind the Headlines:

“The Globe-Democrat gave generous news space to St. Louis Jewish activities. The St. Louis community appreciated the support and acknowledged it on a number of occasions. I have great admiration for the Jewish people. They teach charity, family loyalty, and good conduct in the home. In appreciation, the St. Louis Rabbinical College presented to me a magnificent sterling silver Crown of the Torah. Such a crown rests atop the two poles of the Torah when carried in a formal ceremony. I believe I am one of the few Gentiles to receive such a significant memento of friendship and respect. I have given it a prominent and honored place in the living room of my home.”
Sterling silver letter opener made by Maria Regnier, 1955.

The work of St. Louis silversmith Maria Regnier stands out for its unflinching simplicity and eye-catching modern lines, both of which are on display with this letter opener. It might look simple by today’s standards, but Regnier was on the cutting edge of twentieth-century style.

After immigrating to St. Louis in 1921 from Hungary, Regnier took a class at Washington University that inspired her interest in silver. She continued her studies at the Rhode Island School of Design in the 1930s. She honed her distinctive style in the following years, gaining local and regional recognition. Her works embrace bare, unembellished silver brought to life through the art of hand smithing. Ever visionary, her work stood in stark contrast to the ornate, showy style common to silver earlier in the century.

Regnier was one of only a few women who worked with the medium, and some people were slow to accept her as a serious artisan. Newspaper articles praised her for turning a hobby into a business and referred to her as a woman who made beautiful gifts. It didn’t go unnoticed. Once, Regnier remarked that she might take up plumbing, implying it would be easy after mastering the challenging art of smithing. She was a trailblazer on multiple fronts. Her persistence and success as a studio silversmith resulted in press attention, national exhibitions, and awards.

Silver baby food pusher belonging to Tom Singer, ca. 1935.

Though uncommon today, a food pusher was once considered a standard transitional piece of tableware for children who were old enough to use their own utensils but too young to use knives effectively. This silver food pusher was donated to the Missouri Historical Society along with a touching back story.

Tom Singer’s family lived in Germany in the 1930s. After Kristallnacht (or the Night of Broken Glass) in November 1938, his family knew they had to leave. In early December they fled to France and on to America, settling in St. Louis. Singer was only two at the time. He didn’t want to be separated from his parents while aboard the ship to the United States, but when it came to mealtime, he was expected to sit at the children’s table. He refused. But his skills with this silver baby food pusher saved the day and impressed the other adults, making Singer a welcome addition to the adults’ dining table—and earning him compliments on his table manners.
Silver spectacles belonging to Lucy Meriwether Lewis Marks, ca. 1830.

Edmund Hughes, a spectacle maker and silversmith from Connecticut, made these silver reading glasses worn by Lucy Meriwether Lewis Marks, Meriwether Lewis’s mother. These spectacles are powerful, indicating that Marks would have had a difficult time seeing clearly without them. Having good vision was crucial for this active and intellectual woman. She was a practiced herbalist and folk doctor who traveled to communities around her Albemarle County, Virginia, home helping the sick with her knowledge of medicinal plants. An avid reader, she also owned a small personal library. When Marks’s great-great-granddaughter donated these spectacles in 1937, they were reunited with her portrait that had been given to the Missouri Historical Society by another descendant. In Marks’s portrait, painted by artist John Toole likely in the late 1830s, she is depicted wearing her silver spectacles.
Captive stories from the colonial era in the United States are full of romance, mystery, and violence, but they often lack historical facts and nuance. María Rosa Villalpando was a real woman who lived in the northern Río Grande Valley of New Mexico until her family’s compound was raided in 1760 by Comanche Indians. She was taken captive by the tribe and years later settled in St. Louis. Author and explorer Josiah Gregg first introduced her story, likely after reading captive narratives and hearing accounts of María Rosa from men and women who knew of her. As in many folk narratives, Gregg’s retelling mixes history and fantasy while diminishing the importance of kinship and historic trade relationships between frontier settlers and their Native American neighbors. Though some details of María Rosa Villalpando’s life can only be speculated upon, legal documents and census records held in our own Library & Research Center reveal a fascinating life that needs little embellishment.

By Dr. Frances Levine

The literature of the Santa Fe Trail is vast. For nearly two hundred years journals, diaries, guidebooks, and edited volumes have documented travelers’ observations on the western exploration of North America and northern Mexico. Some of these early publications remain relevant today. Though it was published in 1844, Josiah Gregg’s Commerce of the Prairies is still widely consulted by modern scholars across many fields for its detailed descriptions of the geography and botany of the American Southwest and northern Mexico. Gregg was a keen observer and recorder of the logistics of travel, as well as the tactics and diplomacy of international trade. He dismissed St. Louis as a starting point of the trade, citing locations farther west in Missouri as gathering places for caravans. He linked St. Louis and New Mexico, however, in a fascinating incident that occurred before the Santa Fe Trail became a major North American route.

The pattern of vermilion paint on this Native American woman’s face and the part of her hair may indicate an affiliation with the Osage or Missouri nations. Her blanket cloak and red leggings were surely trade goods. Watercolor painting by Anna Maria von Phul, 1818. Missouri Historical Society Collections.
Gregg briefly relates how Comanches captured María Rosa Villalpando during a raid on the settlement of Ranchos de Taos in the northern Río Grande Valley in the summer of 1760. Gregg accents the story with romantic flourishes and a trope typical of many captives’ tales in nineteenth-century American literature: He says María Rosa was to blame for the raid because she refused to marry a Comanche chief, a union her father had supposedly arranged when she was a child. After almost a decade in captivity—and a series of trades or purchases—she was eventually brought to St. Louis, where she became a well-connected member of the Creole community. Gregg recounted that “there are many people yet living who remember with what affecting pathos the old lady was wont to tell her tale of woe.”

María Rosa’s decision to remain in St. Louis shows the agency she exerted as she evolved from captive to Creole. Although her captivity ended before the beginning of the Santa Fe trade, she lived to see the French, Spanish, and American flags raised over the bustling mid-continent city, as well as the blend of customs, traditions, and laws that defined the expanding frontier.

**The Eighteenth-Century Taos Frontier**

Ranchos de Taos is located about four miles south of the Spanish colonial settlement of Taos in northern New Mexico, adjacent to the Pueblo Indian community of Taos. It was a settlement where hyphenated identities were common. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries communities of the valley were crossroads of cultures, places where Plains and Pueblo Indians, French fur trappers, and Spanish settlers gathered to trade. Comanches made their first appearance at the Taos trade fairs in 1706, as they extended their range out of the Northern High Plains west and south into the Spanish frontier. The fairs were, in many ways, precursors of the Santa Fe trade, though they benefited Native American groups more directly. Trade fairs at Taos Pueblo were encouraged by several New Mexico governors, endured by New Mexico’s Spanish settlers, and abhorred by officials of the Catholic Church. These fairs were part of the alternating cycles of warfare and peacemaking that characterized the relationship between Pueblo Indian and Hispanic settlers in the Taos area and the Plains Indian groups that ranged into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that straddle the border of present-day Colorado and New Mexico.

Comanche bands dominated the Southern Plains and exchanged goods with traders from all over North America, intensifying competition among French, Spanish, and British settlers and governments. Trading partnerships were essential, and they gave Comanches a way to publicly express their leadership qualities. As the Comanches acquired horses, their partnerships expanded geographically. Horses were a form of mobile wealth, and Comanches looked for opportunities to steal the animals from Spanish (and later, American) settlements. The Comanches enjoyed considerable social fluidity. Groups formed rapidly under new leadership, and their sizes could fluctuate in response to trade, subsistence, and geographic circumstances. Taking captives in raids gave Comanches human capital that could be used in several ways. Captives could be held for ransom, or they might...
be adopted to replenish tribal numbers that had been depleted by disease and warfare. Certain adopted captives might allow Comanches to form kinship links with strategic trade partners. Between the late 1740s and the late 1770s, Comanche and Ute allied forces attacked northern New Mexico, including the Taos area, more than one hundred times. Some Spanish Colonial-era governors pursued the Comanches and Utes with retaliatory force, and others alternated between using trade to placate or punish the offenders. The raid on the Villalpando compound in Ranchos de Taos ended a fragile peace that had been brokered by New Mexico’s diplomatically skilled governor Tomás Vélez Cachupín during his first term in office (1749–1754). Bands of Comanches attacked Ranchos de Taos on August 4, 1760, in response to a scalp dance that had been performed at Taos Pueblo that had allegedly used the scalps of Comanches. Though María Rosa was not named in the official report, her husband and mother were killed during this ferocious battle, and she was among the women who were captured thus.

[The Comanches] diverted, or provoked, [the settlers] from a very large house, the greatest in all the valley, belonging to a settler called Villalpando, who luckily for him, had left that day on business. But when they saw so many Comanches coming, many women and men of that settlement took refuge in this house as the strongest. And, trusting in the fact that it had four towers and in the large supply of muskets, powder, and balls, they say that they fired on the Comanches. The latter were infuriated by this to such a horrible degree that they broke into different parts of the house, killed all the men and some of the women, who also fought. And the wife of the owner of the house, seeing that they were breaking down the outside door, went to defend it with a lance, and they killed her fighting. Fifty-six women and children were carried off, and a large number of horses which the owner of the house was keeping there. Forty-nine bodies of dead Comanches were counted and other trickles of blood were seen.

Following the raid of Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico governor Francisco Antonio Marín del Valle and one thousand Spanish and allied Native troops pursued the Comanches. They reportedly covered more than five hundred miles in forty days until they ran out of food.

The Native auxiliaries were dispirited and starving, and the troops returned to New Mexico.

In the year following María Rosa’s capture, Fray Pedro Serrano wrote a report to the viceroy in Mexico City, Mexico, describing the shocking social conditions, immorality, and lax religious practices he found in New Mexico. He was appalled by the utter debauchery and frenzy that accompanied the trade fairs at Taos Pueblo. New Mexican officials—from the governor to local military officers—were among the greatest offenders and biggest beneficiaries of the trade. The governors brought farm implements, axes, knives, horse tack, and commodities to exchange with the Plains Indians for deer and buffalo hides. But, Fray Pedro noted, “what is saddest” were the Indian men, women, and children who were exchanged like so much chattel. Women and girls as young as ten years old were some of the most prized and the most horrendously victimized of the captives exchanged at the trade fairs. Fray Pedro was pained by
the obscene treatment they received, such as public rapes— ordeal s that he described as “hellish ceremonies.” Once deflowered, the girls and women were considered ready for sale and the enjoyment of other men. Trade fairs also became venues for the ransom and return of men, women, and children who were taken in previous raids. The Spanish term rescat e, or rescue, was often used to refer to the fairs.

In the winter of 1761, Comanche leader Onacama and ten others journeyed to Taos, bringing seven captives with them. Interim New Mexico governor Manuel de Portillo Urrisola and a small party of soldiers traveled to the Comanche camp not far from Taos Pueblo. The Comanches were refused entry to the trade fair, where they had planned to present the seven captives as a peace offering. Portillo demanded the return of all captives taken in 1760 before the Comanches would be admitted to the trade fair. When negotiations broke down, Spanish and Ute forces attacked the encampment and killed some four hundred Comanche men. The Utes ran off with more than one thousand horses and mules, and they captured three hundred Comanche women and children. Portillo considered this a victory, and in his letter to Bishop Pedro Tamarón relating the “glorious” details of the battle, he criticized Governor Tomás Vélez Cachupín for what he assumed would be the returning governor’s response to the battle. Surely Vélez Cachupín would have used more diplomacy than force to secure Comanche cooperation.

Vélez returned to New Mexico for a second term (1762–1767) in January 1762, equipped with his understanding of Comanche diplomacy to negotiate again for peace. Using Comanche women as emissaries, he promised to restore the previous amity with generous terms for the Taos trade and the return of captives. Vélez sealed this peace when he brought thirty-one Comanche women and children to a council for the visiting Comanche leaders, allowing them to select relatives to be returned to the tribe. The restoration of trade relations between the Spanish and Comanche leaders represented what historian Richard White has referred to as a negotiation for a middle ground. The parties created more neutral positions brought about by a process of mediation, mutual invention, and shared production where Native peoples and governing authorities reached a kind of equilibrium and restored the trade valued by both sides.

María Rosa was not among the women and children returned to New Mexico in the 1761 or 1762 visits (although none of the documents named the women or children who were part of these negotiations). It’s possible she never returned to Taos because she adapted to life in the Native American villages—or because she found wealth and established a new family in St. Louis.

This City of St. Louis map from 1823 by Charles DeWard denotes property owners and the town’s settlement pattern. Missouri Historical Society Collections.
Life in Captivity

Though María Rosa’s fate was a notable exception to that of others who suffered in the raids and battles that took place between 1760 and 1762, evidently she never saw New Mexico again. She probably heard occasional reports from fur trappers and traders who traveled between New Mexico and Plains Indian settlements, and later from the parties that traveled to the Missouri and Mississippi river valleys.

María Rosa was a married woman and the mother of at least one son when she was kidnapped from her parents’ home during the 1760 raid on Ranchos de Taos. Though her mother and her husband were killed in the attack, her infant son, José Julián Jáquez, miraculously survived and was not captured. How María Rosa was treated during her nearly ten years in captivity has gone undocumented, but the stories of other women and children held captive by the Comanches may provide some clues to her experience. Several biographies depicting the lives of captives have been written, and from them it’s possible to imagine (obviously imperfectly) what María Rosa may have gone through during her time with the Comanches and, later, the Pawnees.

María Rosa would have most likely lived among the Comanches who camped along the Arkansas River, north and east of Taos, where French fur traders ventured from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. She would have entered their camp following the pitched battles and frenzied pursuit, and she probably didn’t know if she would be ravaged and killed or brought into the tribe. Though she would have endured a mournful period of indoctrination, María Rosa’s status as enslaved or adopted might have changed over time. She became pregnant soon after she was taken captive. She brought her son along to St. Louis to raise him but never recognized the child as her legitimate heir. She would also have seen how both the Spanish governors and Comanche leaders used women as emissaries of peace. It’s possible that she was beneficial to some of their peace talks and trade negotiations.

Making a Life in Creole St. Louis

Jean Baptiste Salé dit Lajoie took up with María Rosa while she was living in a Pawnee encampment on the Platte River around 1767. Lajoie, born in Saintes, France, around 1741, was one of the men recruited by Pierre Laclède and Auguste Chouteau to come to St. Louis in 1764 from the Illinois settlements. He would have been about twenty-three when he arrived and about twenty-six when he met María Rosa. He had served as a voyageur with the founding party and seems to have begun his involvement with the fur and Indian trade quite promptly.

Lajoie and María Rosa evidently entered into a domestic arrangement while she was living among the Pawnees. Their son, Lambert, was born in St. Louis in November 1768. María Rosa became part of a community that would have shared some similarities with Taos. Both were frontier settlements inhabited by people of many cultures, such as mixed Native American and European
populations who engaged in intertribal and intercultural commerce based on the fur trade. Once again she would have lived in a community with a strong Catholic faith governed by the Spanish, although St. Louis's population was predominantly French. Among the five hundred settlers in St. Louis in 1770, María Rosa would have found a population of métis people, those of mixed European and Native American ancestry, as well as enslaved people of Native American and African heritage. She also would have met other women whose children had different fathers and mixed ancestry—whether they publicly acknowledged this fact or not.

Lajoie and María Rosa settled on a portion of Block 57, located on one of the original townsite lots that had been distributed among members of St. Louis's founding party. Their house, measuring twenty-five by twenty feet, was built in a French style with vertical posts set on a stone foundation, according to legal documents. On July 3, 1770, María Rosa and Lajoie married or at least signed their marriage contract, stating their intent to marry at some future, unspecified time. They identified twenty-month-old Lambert as their legitimate child, but Antoine, born to María Rosa when she was in captivity among the “savages,” had no claim on their estate. Still, they acknowledged their obligation to nourish and educate him. The timing of this marriage contract is interesting, as the Spanish lieutenant governor, Pedro Piernas, was charged with enumerating the Native American men, women, and children enslaved in Ste. Genevieve and St. Louis. On the enumeration completed on July 8, 1770, Lajoie is shown as the owner of “Indian slaves” boy and girl, each thirteen years of age and not baptized. Their tribal affiliation is not shown on the census, nor is Antoine’s, whose ancestry was at least half Native American. Lajoie went on to acquire several pieces of property in St. Louis. On the 1791 census their St. Louis household included three enslaved people, two men of mixed race, and one woman said to be “negro.”

In 1792, when he was about fifty years old, Lajoie returned to France with their son Lambert, leaving María Rosa behind. Their younger daughter, Hélène, had married into a well-connected family in St. Louis around the same time. Why he returned to Bordeaux may never be known, but María Rosa considered herself abandoned. She was not without resources, however, as he evidently left her with a store of supplies, wines, and pelts. She also began making her own bequests in a series of legal actions to distribute some of her property, including two young children of enslaved African American women in her household. She gave these children to her minor granddaughters but placed them in trust to Lambert and Hélène.

She was likely surprised, then, to receive a visit from the son she might have assumed was killed during the 1760 raid on Ranchos de Taos. José Julián Jáquez, who had been living with family members near San Juan Pueblo in New Mexico, appeared in St. Louis in 1802 seeking to exert his right to his maternal inheritance. How he knew his mother was still alive is unclear, but he might have learned about her from fur traders. María Rosa acknowledged him as her legitimate son. He brought legal action against Hélène and forfeited the rights to his mother’s estate for the sum of $200. It seems he may not have immediately returned home: In 1809 the governor summoned José Julián Jáquez on behalf of his wife, whom he had left behind in New Mexico.

“Marie Rose Vidalpando,” identified as the widow of Jean Baptiste Salé dit Lajoie, is listed on the 1805 enumeration of St. Louis property owners with property valued at $800. In the early 1800s, María Rosa took legal
Emile Herzinger’s 1863 drawing of Hélène LeRoux, daughter of Jean Baptiste Salé dit Lajoie and María Rosa Villalpando, was based on a daguerreotype made a few years before Hélène’s death in 1859. Hélène’s grandson, Judge Wilson Primm, was considered St. Louis’s first historian. Missouri Historical Society Collections.
action to clear the title to the property that had been in her possession since Lajoie left her. She also filed and received several claims for payments owed to her son Antoine, who likely died before 1806. Though she did not acknowledge Antoine as her legitimate heir, she did claim entitlement to the debts owed to him.

Exactly why María Rosa remained in St. Louis may never be known, but she undoubtedly built a successful life. The legal and social status of women in the eighteenth-century Creole communities along the Mississippi and Missouri river frontiers make a compelling case that it was her choice to remain and that she found good fortune. In a case study from Ste. Genevieve, located about fifty miles south of St. Louis on the Mississippi River, writer Susan Boyle found evidence that women who lived in St. Louis around the same time as María Rosa enjoyed wide authority to establish and manage commercial enterprises; to buy and sell property; and to inherit and hold the titles to real and movable property from their families of origin, as well as their spouses. In 1812 the United States commandant of the Upper Louisiana Military District noted that the women of this relatively new territory seemed to have great influence over their husbands, and thanks to premarital contracts that set the terms of property rights and inheritance, they had more authority and respect in their marriages. Certainly, María Rosa had learned to manage her family affairs, protecting her property and her heirs through the courts under Spanish and American jurisdiction.

The Dance of the Captives is held each year in Ranchos de Taos and Talpa as part of a cycle of religious and social celebrations that recall the historic Comanche raids on northern New Mexico villages. Villagers are “held captive” in a circle of dancers until “ransomed” by family and friends. Photograph by Miguel Gandert. Used with permission of Miguel Gandert and Enrique R. Lamadrid.
María Rosa died on July 27, 1830, at the home of her daughter Hélène on Elm Street, between Fourth and Fifth streets, not far from where she had first settled. María Rosa, a captive who became a Creole, was buried the following day in the Old Cathedral’s cemetery. Her passing is mentioned in a brief obituary that notes she was well over one hundred years old, an unusually advanced age for the time. Though many details of María Rosa’s life are speculative, the story of her captivity and her adaptation to Creole life over the formative years of colonial St. Louis remain a fascinating account of one woman’s extraordinary resilience and cultural dexterity. Her experience has not been forgotten in Ranchos de Taos, either. On New Year’s Day each year, dance troupes in the village honor the feast of St. Emmanuel, combining a Mass at the village church with the elements of their Comanche heritage, dressing in buckskins and dancing to a sustained drumbeat as they visit each home in the community where a Manuel or a Manuela resides. Though her name may not be spoken during this annual dance cycle, María Rosa and the memory of other captive men, women, and children are remembered. The music and oral traditions pay honor to the captives and the children of mixed ancestry who were born in captivity.

References


Reports of the Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Missouri from 1827 to 1830. St. Louis: The Gilbert Book Co., 1834.


Dr. Frances Levine has been president and CEO of the Missouri Historical Society since April 2014. She trained as a historian archaeologist and ethnohistorian with a PhD from Southern Methodist University. Having lived at both ends of the Santa Fe Trail, she is impressed by the scope of the MHS collections.
The Skouras Brothers
20th-Century Titans
Commentators have long offered opinions on their idea of the American Dream. The term, coined by historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book The Epic of America, was meant to convey “a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class.” While one may contend such a vision is aspirational at best, during the 1910s and 1920s, three young, struggling Greek immigrant brothers who began their American journey in St. Louis achieved just that. Charles, Spyros, and George Skouras reached a pinnacle of success and notoriety achieved by few, and it would not have happened without the trials and opportunities they experienced during the two decades they lived in St. Louis.

By Michael G. Tsichlis, PhD

The source of the Skouras brothers' dreams and motivations began far away, in a small village in the rural province of Elis on the western side of the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece, just 25 miles from the ancient site of Olympia. At the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, the Skourases' great-grandfather, Demetrios Skouras, led fellow Greeks alongside the British army in a bloody skirmish against the Ottoman Turks, who had ruled Greece for four centuries. After the war ended in 1829, the Greek government granted Demetrios a large tract of land in a valley where he founded Skourohorion, meaning Skouras's village or Skourasville. The surname Skouras derived from the Greek word skora, meaning the dark ones.

Demetrios Skouras’s grandson, Panagiotis Skouras, inherited his family’s land, which was filled with vineyards, olive groves, cattle, and sheep. He and his wife, Spyros, Charles, and George Skouras, ca. 1911. Photograph courtesy of the Spyros P. Skouras Archives, Stanford University.
Spyroula, had nine children who survived to adulthood. The five girls and four boys all contributed to daily life on the farm. The children were twenty-five years apart in age. Constantinos Skouras, who later anglicized his first name to Charles, was the eighth child, born on January 25, 1889. Another son, Spyros, followed on March 28, 1893. Demetrios and Spyroula's final child, George, arrived in 1896.

Spyros tended fields and herded sheep as a boy, enjoying the quiet solitude that allowed him “to think and plan [his] future.” However, in the spring of 1907 tragedy upended the family’s business. A nearby river flooded and engulfed their farm in water and sand, destroying the crops. The catastrophe was worsened by a worm infestation that decimated the olive groves. The income and sustenance derived from the farm plummeted. For the first time, Spyros recalled, his family was confronted by a profound financial crisis and the threat of starvation. “From that time on,” he said, “I felt the pinch of poverty with a vengeance, and can still remember my mother crying because she did not have enough food to give her children.”

In order to survive the family decided it was best for the boys to travel to America to find work, as many Greek men were doing at that time. The eldest son, Demetrios, stayed behind to help care for the family. Pulling together what they could to pay his travel, the next eldest male, Charles, left his ancestral village for America at the age of nineteen. Charles arrived in New York on June 25, 1908. He remained there for several months, reportedly working as a dishwasher in a restaurant earning 50 cents per day, plus meals. He saved enough money to take a train west to St. Louis, a city that had become known as a place of opportunity for Greek immigrants. As far back as the 1860s, a trickle of Hellenes began arriving in the city and setting down roots. As the St. Louis World’s Fair approached, the need for Fair workers attracted many young, job-seeking Greek men. In February 1909 the St. Louis Republic reported with a bold headline that a “Greek Invasion” was underway. Between 1900 and 1910 the city’s Greek-born population grew from fewer than one hundred to more than twenty-eight hundred.

Knowing his countrymen were avid newspaper readers, Charles Skouras set up a route delivering Greek- and English-language papers to about two hundred locations. These drop-off encounters enabled him to expand his community contacts, and soon he found work busing tables at the opulent Jefferson Hotel on Twelfth and Locust streets. He was quickly promoted to waiter, earning about $1 a day, plus tips. During his first year in St. Louis he lived in the back room of a Greek-owned store.

Half a world away, sixteen-year-old Spyros Skouras was preparing to follow his brother to America. After Charles’s departure, Spyros moved to the nearby Greek coastal city of Patras, where he studied commerce, accounting, and English while working as an office boy for a local insurance and navigation company. He also saw his first movie at this time, later recalling how impressed he was by this “newest development of ancient drama.”

In the spring of 1910 Spyros received a money order from Charles for steamship passage to America. He spent three weeks at sea, traveling with other steerage immigrants. While almost everyone aboard was identified in the manifest as a "workman," Spyros's stated occupation was a “scholar” who “knows a little English language.” After passing his physical at Ellis Island and celebrating the thrill of arrival with his shipmates, Spyros boarded a 5:00 a.m. train for a two-day journey to St. Louis. Not finding his brother at the train station, he went straight to the Jefferson Hotel, which he recognized from the hotel stationery Charles used to write letters home. Awed by its grandeur, he ambled around the building several times before inquiring of his brother's whereabouts to a doorman dressed “like an officer in the Czar's Army.” At that moment Charles appeared, and after over two years apart the brothers warmly embraced. From there Charles took him home, where Spyros “took a long-needed bath.”

Charles quickly set up his brother for employment, purchasing American-style business clothes and landing him a job first busing tables and then as a bartender at the Planter’s House Hotel. From this moment on, the brothers’ bond was unbreakable. One family account later compared it to the ancient Greek tale of Damon and Pythias, two friends who would give up their very lives for each other.

Charles met Florence Souders, the fifteen-year-old daughter and only child of a widowed mother, Ida, who managed two boarding houses and lived in one of them. Charles and another Greek youth lived in the other. Struggling with his English skills, Charles asked if she
knew someone who could help, and Ida suggested he meet her daughter. Florence recalled Charles as “a good-looking kid” and said he soon began expressing affection by bringing her a gold bracelet and other gifts. The couple married on May 17, 1910, in Macoupin County, Illinois. Their first child, Edith, was born two years later.

Within a year of Spyros’s arrival, sixteen-year-old George Skouras journeyed to join his older brothers. The three took up cramped quarters in a tenement building at the corner of Locust and Fifteenth streets on the west end of downtown. Once a fashionable private neighborhood known as Lucas Place, it was now a rundown area. The group lived with Florence and her mother, who handled housekeeping and chores while the brothers worked long hours at the hotels. They pooled their resources, and at the end of the day they counted their earnings. George joined Charles as a waiter at the Jefferson Hotel, a short walk from their quarters. Rather than spend 10 cents in trolley fare, Spyros walked over a mile each way to his job at the Planter’s House. With his workday beginning at 3:45 a.m. and ending at 4:00 p.m., he later recalled the slog of “[trudging] through winter snows and at other times in the sweltering heat of a St. Louis summer.” By the end of 1912 the brothers and their now extended family moved into larger quarters in a home at 3126 Washington Avenue in midtown St. Louis, another mile and a half from their work.

For three years the brothers worked, saved, and dreamed about where the future would take them. Gregarious and ambitious, Spyros so often spoke about his aspirations with fellow hotel workers that they threw dirty dish rags at him to get him to stop. Spyros only replied, “All right, you’ll see, you guys will be around asking me for jobs one day.” Bar patrons were so impressed with the young man’s tenacity that after hearing about the long hours he worked while also attending night school at Jones Business College, many left him 15-cent tips rather than the customary 10 cents. The brothers were determined to succeed as a team. The looming question was: By what path?

A NEW MEDIUM CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The motion picture exhibition industry in America was born in the first decade of the twentieth century. Thomas Edison’s early moving picture projector devices had brought recorded movement storytelling to the masses. Actors working in vaudeville took part in productions filmed as short one- or two-act stories, often appearing back-to-back on the same celluloid reel. Films such as 1903’s The Great Train Robbery proved the medium had broad appeal. Moving-picture theaters began popping up across the country in 1905.

On October 17, 1906, the first continually operating, stand-alone movie theater opened in St. Louis at 1413 Market Street, in a retrofitted former tailor’s shop. Called the World’s Dream Theatre, it provided 120 folding chairs for patrons and standing room for 200 more. The owner of this novel venture was John Karzin, a twenty-four-year-old Greek immigrant. Along with Harry “Doc” Miller, Karzin opened the theater for $1,000. Most early movie houses were known as nickelodeons, a word derived from their 5-cent admission cost and odeon, the ancient Greek word for theater. The World’s Dream kicked off a long and prosperous career for Karzin.

In 1910 Karzin briefly left St. Louis to open a movie house in Springfield, Illinois, and sold the World’s Dream to another Greek immigrant, eighteen-year-old Thomas James. James continued its operation until 1914, when he sold it to his business partner and fellow Hellene George Dubis and theater manager John Francis. The theater was remodeled in 1914 with two hundred fixed seats and renamed the Amuse U, only to be sold in 1916 to two other Greeks who opened a pool hall at the site, ending St. Louis’s first dedicated foray into moving-picture exhibition. By now motion pictures were a permanent American cultural fixture, and in 1915 the trade publication The Moving Picture World reported that St. Louis was “one of [the country’s] best picture towns.” The city had gone from one movie house in 1906 to more than one hundred just eight years later.

Even would-be exhibitors of modest means could rent a small storefront venue, obtain a movie projector, set out chairs, lease films, and charge admission. The key to strong ticket sales was to make the venue as inviting as possible and ensure that quality “first-run” films were always available. Short films were evolving into lengthier ones with complex plots, multiple sets, and actors who became national celebrities. Film studios like Pathé, Mutual, Rialto, Paramount, and Universal competed for movie-house screen time. Theater owners brought
sound to the silent medium, such as live piano or organ accompaniment during screenings. Larger theaters added vaudeville acts to an evening’s entertainment.

Meanwhile, the Skourases pondered their own business niche. They discussed opening a saloon or a business improving shipment packaging for Greek food imports. The brothers’ rare free time came on Sundays, when they attended church in the morning and watched vaudeville acts in the afternoon and evening. They were especially attracted to movies because of their low cost and high appeal, and they began reading trade publications to learn more about the industry. They quickly realized that movie exhibition was a business where, as Spyros recalled, “new-comers [could] get in on the ground floor and still rise to the top within their lifetime.”

In 1913, Spyros and another Greek immigrant, thirty-seven-year-old George Tompras, began discussing the prospect of opening a movie theater. Tompras knew two other Greeks who were ready to enter the exhibition business but needed additional capital: carpenter George Gallanis and restaurant owner Gus Gallanis. After conferring with his brothers on Tompras’s business proposition, the Skourases agreed to invest $3,000 of a total of $12,000 in initial capital stock in the new venture. Tompras contributed another $3,000 and Gus Gallanis $6,000. On July 7, 1914, the partners incorporated the Olympia Amusement Company.

The company acquired adjacent storefronts at 1420 and 1422 Market Street, combining and renovating the spaces to create their first theater enterprise, an eleven-hundred-seat venue replete with an illuminated marquee topped with a life-size statue of a goddess-like woman supporting a lantern globe on each of her outstretched arms. They named the theater the Olympia and opened it in October 1914. It was across the street from the World’s Dream, and its much higher seating capacity likely forced the smaller theater to close within a year.

George Tompras and Gus Gallanis wanted Spyros to manage the Olympia, but Spyros pushed for his brother Charles instead, insisting he was “a shrewd, hard-working man, as well as my older brother, and that I had a lot of respect for him, and that it had to be him.” It turned out to be a smart move. While the theater began showing no-name, ten-minute shorts, Charles’s genial negotiating skills enabled the Olympia to lease first-run feature films, like popular comedies starring Charlie Chaplin and Mack Sennett’s Keystone Kops. Charles did not take a salary his first year. As they often did, the Skourases were willing to sacrifice in the short term for something bigger in the long run, gaining experience and connections along the way.

The Olympia featured a four-piece orchestra accompaniment that included Charles’s wife, Florence, on piano. The following year he was able to purchase a $7,000 Wurlitzer orchestra organ. Movie exhibitions ran continuously from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and Charles charged 5 cents admission when most movie houses were charging 10 cents. One trade publication described the theater as equipped with “the latest ideas in ventilation and air cooling” and whose projecting room “is a model of neatness.”

Patrons of the Olympia were of “all kinds and classes,” Spyros recalled. Audiences were usually about half African American and half Caucasian, many of whom were immigrants. The brothers did not turn away

George Tompras, a Greek immigrant entrepreneur, was the Skourases’ first partner in the movie theater business. Photograph courtesy of Michael G. Tsichlis.
patrons or impose segregated seating. At times the theater could become raucous, but after the Skourases began employing “girls of nice background[s]” as ushers who were trained to speak and act politely toward patrons, calm was restored. Skouras service became a term the brothers marketed heavily to the public.

Within a year the brothers bought out George Gallanis, who repeatedly butted heads with Charles over management. They reorganized as the Athenian Amusement Company, still in partnership with George Tompras and now his nephew Chris Tompras. They then made their second property acquisition, the Lafayette Theater on South Jefferson and Lafayette avenues on St. Louis’s south side. Spyros cut operating costs by dropping vaudeville acts for full-time movie exhibition. A December 1915 article in The Moving Picture World praised Skouras for consistently packing the house—even during the Christmas season, when movie business was down across the city.

Spyros took the lead for acquiring new venues, and within several months he obtained a lease to operate the Russell Airdome, just four blocks from the Lafayette. A precursor to drive-in theaters, airdomes (also called skydomes) provided outdoor movie and vaudeville entertainment during warmer months. They had an entry gate and sidewalls but no roof, and chairs were placed on a field of grass facing a large screen or stage. The Russell was one of the city’s first airdomes. Skouras again ditched vaudeville in favor of movie-only exhibition, and to create an upscale look, he placed three Grecian king statues at the entrance, set out bright lighting, and planted 120 symmetrically arranged trees. With seating that could hold two thousand people, the Russell was now the brothers’ largest venue.

After two years of some success, new opportunities emerged. While tending bar and waiting tables, Spyros and Charles were able to cultivate relationships with members of the city’s business and civic elite, such as Leo Rassieur Jr., an attorney and judge with offices a block from the Planter’s House. Politically connected and civic-minded, Rassieur led a legal fight in 1917 to stop the enactment of a residential segregation ordinance passed by St. Louis voters. He took great interest in the brothers’ plans, reviewing and notarizing their company documents and providing legal and business advice. In
his memoirs, Spyros directly linked the brothers’ success to their “good friend and advisor” Leo Rassieur, “a man of high character.”

In January 1917, Rassieur, the Skourases, and Gus Gallanis formed the Marathon Amusement Company. With Rassieur as an investor, the brothers were able to realize Spyros’s dream of acquiring the Pageant Theater. It opened to great fanfare in the West End neighborhood in September 1915. Its name came from *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*, the civic theatrical event with a cast of thousands held a year earlier to celebrate St. Louis’s sesquicentennial. Spyros personally took over management of the Pageant and soon opened an airdome a block west he named the Crystal.

As the brothers’ operations grew, Spyros made a surprising announcement in June 1918: Pulled by patriotism and a desire to learn new skills, he enlisted in the US Army to fight in the Great War. During his absence, George, now twenty-one, took on a larger role in the business. George had been “sowing his wild oats,” Spyros later recalled, spending his spare time dancing at clubs and attending baseball games. In her memoir, Florence Skouras recalled how George brought home popular songs on sheet music, and she would entertain him by playing the tunes on the piano. She also felt sorry for him, noting how his brothers “used to treat him like a child.”

Leaving Charles to manage the Pageant and George the Olympia, Spyros joined the Army Air Service, where he learned to fly. Although he never saw combat, he valued the experience and came away feeling transformed, noting how “before the service, I had always been an immigrant; afterwards, that immigrant feeling evaporated and I just felt American.” But the theater business
was changing, and during his service Charles frequently reminded his brother that he was needed back home.

Feeling more confident after his return, Spyros wasted no time expanding operations. The profitable Pageant Theater was enlarged to accommodate two thousand patrons. He also set his sights on the purchase of the West End Lyric, an upscale theater at Delmar Boulevard and Euclid Avenue described by The Moving Picture World as “one of the most pretentious houses in town.” The death of owner John Cornelius prompted his widow, Rose, to sell the theater. During an afternoon of talks over bourbon with Spyros, Charles, and Leo Rassieur, Rose sold all her theater holdings for a modest $87,500 in cash, which also included the downtown Lyric and the Lyric Skydome, the latter called “America’s Most Beautiful Open-Air Motion Picture Palace.” All the theaters had first-run rights to films produced by Paramount Pictures. The Skourases were elated, and Rassieur wrote a contract on the spot. Spyros proudly heralded the “reopening” of the West End Lyric in September 1919 by flying a plane over the city and dropping thirty thousand passes to matinee showings, along with a handful of season passes and five passes to join him for a flyover of St. Louis. He even filmed the scenic overview to show in their movie houses.

But challenges quickly followed success. In late 1919 intense competition erupted among theater operators seeking to secure exclusive rights from the big studios to be the first in the region to show the latest hit films. When Paramount representative Sidney Kent tipped off the brothers that the studio’s film rental fees were about to increase, Spyros negotiated a generous deal with Paramount founder and head Adolph Zukor to split ownership of all Skouras theaters with the studio on a 50–50 basis, as long as they could continue to be the first St. Louis market to show Paramount films. While waiting for Zukor to return the contract, Spyros heard the studio had struck a deal with the brothers’ biggest local theater competitors that included Harry Koplar, William Goldman, and Ben Cornwell. The deal would ultimately end the Skouras’ partnership with Paramount. But while challenges quickly followed success. In late 1919 intense competition erupted among theater operators seeking to secure exclusive rights from the big studios to be the first in the region to show the latest hit films. When Paramount representative Sidney Kent tipped off the brothers that the studio’s film rental fees were about to increase, Spyros negotiated a generous deal with Paramount founder and head Adolph Zukor to split ownership of all Skouras theaters with the studio on a 50–50 basis, as long as they could continue to be the first St. Louis market to show Paramount films. When Paramount representative Sidney Kent tipped off the brothers that the studio’s film rental fees were about to increase, Spyros negotiated a generous deal with Paramount founder and head Adolph Zukor to split ownership of all Skouras theaters with the studio on a 50–50 basis, as long as they could continue to be the first St. Louis market to show Paramount films. But while waiting for Zukor to return the contract, Spyros heard the studio had struck a deal with the brothers’ biggest local theater competitors that included Harry Koplar, William Goldman, and Ben Cornwell. The deal would ultimately end the Skouras’ partnership with Paramount.

With his first-run theater status at risk, in January 1920 Spyros met with Zukor on a train from New York to Chicago. The magnate insisted Skouras enter into a partnership with the Koplar group and Paramount, but Spyros declined, expressing his concern that as young men he and his brothers would likely take the fall for any problems that might emerge. Skouras later recalled how Zukor “gave me hell” and “became very hostile and said I should accept his advice.” But Spyros stood his ground. He lost the Paramount deal, but as he predicted, within a year difficulties between the studio and the Koplar group led Zukor to sell back their interests and break with Koplar.

Meanwhile, the Skourases pursued a new strategy. To secure quality first-run films, the brothers approached Paramount’s biggest competitor, the First National Exhibitors’ Circuit. By 1920 the group was producing films under the First National Pictures brand and contracting with top stars like Mary Pickford, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin.

In February 1920 the Skourases sought to purchase the Central and the New Grand Central theaters as exclusive First National venues. The former was a small downtown house, and the latter was built in 1913 for $180,000 as the largest movie theater in St. Louis. It seated two thousand people and boasted a fifteen-by-twenty-foot screen. The owners were William Sievers, who managed the New Grand Central, and Edmond Koeln, who also served as
St. Louis’s city collector. The partners set their price for the two theaters and First National distribution rights at $350,000—higher than they assumed the Skourases could afford. But they were wrong. Without the deal, the brothers would be relegated to second-run houses, an unacceptable option for Spyros. Again teaming with Leo Rassieur as a one-third investor, on March 27, 1920, the brothers formed the Skouras Brothers Company, soon renamed Skouras Brothers Enterprises. This time all their business partners were non-Greek, established St. Louis professionals.

The Skourases now operated nine major St. Louis movie venues: New Grand Central, Central, Pageant, Arsenal, Shaw, Lyric, and West End Lyric, as well as the Crystal Airdome and the Lyric Skydome. The brothers’ first theater, the Olympia, was sold to John Karzin. The Skourases’ success attracted wide attention. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch ran a story headlined “Two Former Busboys Own 9 Movie Theaters: Brothers Who Worked for $1 a Day in 1914 Have Gross Income of $775,000.” Similar stories appeared across the nation touting the brothers as striking examples of “the rise of the immigrant.” At ages thirty-one, twenty-seven, and twenty-four years, the Skourases’ legendary Horatio Alger story was born.

In June 1920 the brothers took another big step by extending their reach to Kansas City and purchasing a theater there for $250,000. Spyros leveraged the deal to obtain exclusive rights to First National film distribution in the entire state of Missouri and serve as franchise president. The Skourases now had first-person access to the studio’s top management and talent. Important among them was Joseph Schenck, the producer managing the acting careers of his wife, Norma Talmadge, and her sister Constance.

Despite the accolades he received, the pressures Spyros endured from the business caused him to fall ill. His doctor speculated he might have lymphoma, and the young theater executive was sent to the Mayo Clinic, where Dr. Charles Mayo diagnosed him with a benign condition brought on by “over work.” Taking a respite from his whirlwind schedule, on June 27, 1921, Spyros married a young woman he had met at Jones College, Sarah Briuglia, the daughter of an Italian immigrant saloonkeeper. He called her “Saroula,” an affectionate Greek derivative similar to his mother’s name. After the war Spyros had moved into a modest two-family flat with her parents on Erzel Avenue near the Pageant in University City. The couple wed in a Greek Orthodox service, and after a honeymoon to Niagara Falls they settled in an apartment near Washington University.

As their operations grew, the brothers hired Sydney J. Baker as their publicity director. Baker was formerly the merchandising director for the St. Louis Star, and his connections helped increase the amount of column space devoted to Skouras Theater exhibitions. Through publicized events—such as free movie screenings for children from St. Louis orphanages, or holding fundraisers for schools, hospitals, or the Community Chest—Spyros understood that engaging area charitable organizations was good for business.

When Charlie Chaplin debuted The Kid in February 1921, the highly anticipated First National comedy/drama he produced, directed, wrote, and starred in, the Skourases employed a unique publicity campaign. In the days running up to its exclusive St. Louis premiere at the West End Lyric and the Grand Central, the brothers hired six Chaplin imitators and six young boys portraying the title character to accompany them. The pairs were sent out on streets across the city heralding the premiere, attracting onlookers everywhere. The gimmick worked. The Skourases sold fifteen thousand seats on opening day, smashing all earlier records. “It was the best pulling card we ever had,” Spyros told The Motion Picture News.

The brothers’ success was watched closely by their chief competitors, Harry Koplar, Sam Hamburg, and Ben Cornwell of the City-Wide Amusement Company, now aligned with Famous Players–Lasky Studios, producers of Paramount films. In November 1921, the option was floated between the rivals that they would be better served by a merger. Leo Rassieur and Arthur Stickney of A. G. Edwards & Sons brokered the deal, leading to the creation of the St. Louis Amusement Company, with Spyros as president, Koplar as vice president, and Charles director of theater management. At its inception, the St. Louis Amusement Company owned fourteen theaters and several large airdomes valued at $1.5 million, and there were plans to add more. Among those acquired was a newly built movie house that was the first to open in University City. Named the Tivoli, it seated fifteen hun-
dred people and was part of a larger four-story structure also housing shops at 6350 Delmar Boulevard.

**From Bus Boys to Palace Builders**

The brothers next turned their focus toward larger theaters. They invested heavily in the Grand Central, spending $100,000 on a big electric sign, updated cooling system, new seating, and deluxe concert organ. While continuing to show nationally acclaimed films and paying record first-run fees for hits like Universal’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, the Skourases did not forget that they catered to a local audience. In October 1923 they paid a premium for exclusive first-run rights to *The Spirit of St. Louis*, a locally produced film depicting the history of the city meant to boost civic pride.

Operating a large theater like the Grand Central required the brothers to bill top-notch live performances. Their biggest rival, William Goldman, had been doing so for several years. He operated the city’s major first-run Paramount house, the Missouri Theatre, just a block south on Grand. It was opened in November 1920 by Adolph Zukor himself, who before a crowd and Mayor Henry Kiel “presented” the theater to the citizens of St. Louis.

In addition to screening First National films, Charles began cutting his teeth overseeing stage productions. With help of the talented stage producer Larry Conley, the Grand Central featured sketches such as actors riding on Pullman cars with a scenic film backdrop creating the illusion of a moving train. Under the direction of David Silverman, the brothers also initiated a first in St. Louis movie exhibition by performing jazz riffs rather than standard classical music during movie screenings. Dancers were a favorite, and in *Domino Soldiers*, a line of chorus girls dressed as dominoes finished a routine by falling onto one another as the orchestra drummer tapped in sequence. Two sisters named Jane and Ginger Rogers were a popular song-and-dance duo. Ginger was especially renowned for her dance skills and mastery of the Charleston, talents that put her on a path for future movie roles alongside Fred Astaire.

To the surprise of many, the Skouras-Goldman rivalry came to a sudden halt in November 1925, when both sides agreed to a merger of their first-run houses that included the Grand Central and the Missouri theaters. Goldman and Spyros had worked together on labor talks with striking theater musicians who for a time shut down musical performances at both houses. The mutual booking arrangement allowed the Skourases to now show first-run Paramount films. It also put management of the Missouri under Charles. But other factors were at play in the deal. After a big marketing buildup, another formidable competitor in the Grand entertainment district was set to open. Immediately north of the Grand Central, the new forty-two-hundred-seat, $2 million St. Louis Theatre was a palatial showcase inside and out. It operated under the Orpheum theater circuit, long affiliated with quality vaudeville acts.

After the Goldman deal was reached, the brothers lost no time finding novel stage acts for the Missouri Theatre. Popular jazz music director Gene Rodemich and organist Stuart Barrie were moved from the Grand Central to the
Missouri, and the orchestra grew to thirty players. While in New York in 1922, Spyros witnessed a performance of *The Ziegfeld Follies*, a Broadway theatrical revue with precision dancing showgirls. He was so impressed that he hired their trainer, choreographer Russell Markert, to start a similar troupe at the Missouri. Markert recruited and trained a group of sixteen young St. Louis women, as well as a local child dancer named Betty Grable. The Missouri Rockets, as they came to be called, were a big hit. “The work was hard—three or four shows a day, seven days a week,” dancer Ann Lorenzen remembered. “Each girl would work three weeks, then take a week off.” The dancers were paid $35 a week. “Not bad for those days,” she recalled. (When the Great Depression hit, Markert took his “Rockets” dance concept to New York, where he started an enlarged chorus line of thirty-six dancers at Radio City Music Hall and renamed them the Radio City Rockettes.) Variety shows at the Missouri ranged from jazz revues to a family-themed Circus Week, patriotic renditions, tropical beach dances, and fashion festivals.

The Missouri was put to multiple uses. As part of a group of investors in the city’s first high-powered radio station, KMOX (1120 AM), the Skourases hosted the station’s first live broadcasts from a makeshift studio at the theater. *The Skouras Brothers Sunday Night Club* became a regular feature on KMOX. To show they were good neighbors, Charles allowed the large Third Baptist Church next door free use of the auditorium for Sunday-morning Bible studies. To lure local sports enthusiasts, the Skourases showed exclusive film of the first World Series game between the St. Louis Cardinals and New York Yankees that had been played the day before at Yankee Stadium.
While his older brothers busied themselves with big studio negotiations and large-scale theater management, George found his own successful niche negotiating the Skourases’ financial investment and long-term leases with smaller neighborhood houses: King Bee, Aubert (and its airdome), Chippewa, Powhatten, Congress, Virginia (and its airdome), Ozark, Ashland, Newstead, Webster Groves, and the Columbus Theater in the Hill neighborhood. He even started his own company for the purpose, called Columbia Amusement. Among George’s arrangements with local houses was a 1 percent interest in the Hi-Pointe Theatre Company with his brothers’ first partner, George Tompras, and members of his family. The Hi-Pointe and its adjacent airdome were at the city’s western edge on McCausland Avenue. Such agreements assured the Skourases management influence and a margin of ticket sales. For the partners, a corporate tie to a Skouras lent financing clout. The very name was a bankable brand.

In November 1925, The Motion Picture Daily reported that the brothers had accomplished quite a feat. Through purchases, co-ownership, or long-term leases, they controlled or had substantial interest in twenty-eight operating theaters, in addition to three to be built, three that were closed, and eighteen airdomes. Their total holdings comprised 84,460 seats—42 percent of the St. Louis market and most of its large first-run theaters. No other major American city could claim a company with such a high market percentage. A later deal struck with the Publix Theatres chain extended their theater holdings to Indianapolis.

But there was more to be done. As rivals began building palaces, the brothers planned to erect their own, one embodying their achievements and exceeding the competition in grandeur. Its location would be the corner of Locust and Seventh streets, a site Spyros had passed many times twelve years earlier on his way to tending bar. They named the future palace the Ambassador and hired renowned Chicago theater architects Rapp and Rapp to design it, the same firm that created the lavish St. Louis Theater. With total costs for the project at $5.5 million, Skouras Brothers Enterprises held a public stock offering in April 1925, with eighty thousand shares valued at $36 each. The price took off, and shares rose up to $60. However, the brothers still had to take on a great deal of debt, which only increased when excavators hit sand.

The Ambassador opened its doors to the public with great pomp on August 26, 1926. The seventeen-story building with its two soaring vertical corner signs topping a triple marquee signaled to patrons that they were entering something magnificent. As long lines filed down the street, Air Service flyers from Scott Field buzzed the skies, blimps floated overhead, and an escape artist named Raffles performed bound and dangling by ropes and chains from the top of the building. The theater took up the building’s first six stories, immediately below the brothers’ seventh-floor offices.

Patrons entered an exquisitely detailed Spanish Renaissance marble lobby rising forty feet, described by the Post-Dispatch as “decoration... heaped upon decoration and tint inlaid among tints until the eye turned for relief from sculpture, panel, and molding to the silver pools of the ‘hanging ceiling,’ the largest of them a lake of restless sheen.” Floor to ceiling was trimmed in brilliant
hues of “buff, a light green gold and a striking shade of red.” In the great marble lobby stood a golden statue of city namesake King Louis IX of France flanked by gold-draped maidens, a clear nod to civic pride. The theater’s $115,000 Wurlitzer organ was custom designed by Stuart Barrie. It featured four keyboards with ninety-three keys, and pipes ranging from a quarter inch to six feet in diameter and thirty-two feet high.

Former mayor Henry Kiel, whose firm was the general contractor, took the stage and led a group of dignitaries in their praise of the Skourases, while congratulatory cables came in from Hollywood celebrities. The brothers never appeared on stage even to take a bow but instead worked the floor to ensure everything was running smoothly. “It was orderliness personified,” reported The Motion Picture News. Skouras service had reached a new level.

To announce the Ambassador’s daily bill, the Skourases hired a thirty-two-year-old vaudevillian comic and singer named Eddie Lowery. With piercing eyes and a wide smile, each day Lowery introduced a string of performers. One of Lowery’s most popular acts was to imitate the three Skouras brothers, replete with Greek accents, in a back-and-forth disagreement over how a stage show should be run. Adoring fans lined up outside the theater as early as 9:00 a.m. for the day’s first show. Between the Grand Central, the Missouri, and the Ambassador, the brothers had a near lock on live St. Louis entertainment.

Even as the brothers’ new palace and stage shows drew national acclaim, as director and trustee of First National Pictures, Spyros worked feverishly to head off encroaching competitors. Chief among them was William Fox of Fox Pictures, who was constructing his
own luxurious first-run palace across the street from the Grand Central and the Missouri. In 1928 squabbles erupted within First National when, against Spyros's advice, Boston financier Joseph Kennedy was hired to run studio production. Prioritizing cost-cutting over creative standards, film quality plummeted. Spyros saw disaster looming and spearheaded Kennedy's ouster. He and other company directors spent hours in New York negotiating a contract over production control they knew Kennedy wouldn't accept. The father of future president John F. Kennedy tore up the contract and walked out in disgust.

Seeking a better studio partnership for the brothers' St. Louis theaters, Spyros met with Harry Warner of Warner Bros. Pictures to negotiate a merger with First National. Early on, Warner had envisioned movies incorporating sound and had released the first successful “talkie,” The Jazz Singer, produced by a young scriptwriter named Darryl F. Zanuck. It had its exclusive St. Louis premiere at the Grand Central. After three months of intense negotiations, in October 1928 Warner purchased all of First National's stock. As part of the buyout Spyros took over Warner's nationwide theater operations, which required he move to the company's management headquarters in New York. In January 1929, Spyros Skouras left St. Louis for the city that had greeted him to America nearly twenty years earlier—but now as a wealthy man and major studio executive. George went along to assist him. Meanwhile, Charles stayed in St. Louis managing the Skourases' former theaters, now under the Warner Bros. banner.

Transfer of their regional theater empire to Warner placed the brothers in a sound financial position, as they took a large cash buyout that also paid executive-level salaries. But they heeded advice to invest their entire payout in equities, and in terrible timing lost nearly everything in the stock market crash of 1929. The Great Depression took a tremendous toll on theater exhibition and live performances.

With their former St. Louis theater businesses placed in financial receivership in order to pay back losses to stockholders, in 1932 Charles left St. Louis to regroup with his brothers. After a two-decade ride from poverty to meteoric growth and sudden loss, the Skourases left St. Louis behind. The one asset they retained was ownership of the Ambassador Theatre.

**An Epic Sequel**

The brothers soon grew frustrated working for the Warners, who they felt acted in bad faith after the merger by “playing games with the stock arrangements” that didn't fare well with First National shareholders. Although the brothers had far less money in the bank, with their proven experience as executives and showmen and their top industry contacts intact, once more the Skourases charted a new career path. With the help of their friend Sidney Kent, now general manager at Paramount, they left Warner Bros. in 1931 to briefly assist with Paramount operations. In 1932 Kent became president of the struggling Fox Film Company, and Spyros and Charles helped him turn around Fox's financially troubled theaters under a subsidiary called Wesco. Meanwhile, George remained in New York, developing a new chain of Skouras theaters there.

Despite stabilizing its exhibition venues, Fox's production studio was faltering. In his memoirs, Spyros proudly noted that in 1935 he facilitated a merger between Fox and 20th Century Pictures, a company headed by his old friend and veteran executive Joseph Schenk and dynamic film producer Darryl Zanuck. Kent went on to become president of the new 20th Century Fox Film Company. When Kent died in March 1942, discussion about a replacement turned to Spyros, who was the preferred choice of Darryl Zanuck and 20th Century Fox employees. For the next twenty years Skouras, working closely with Zanuck, authorized the production of nearly eight hundred 20th Century Fox films, including acclaimed classics Gentleman's Agreement, Twelve O'Clock High, Three Coins in the Fountain, The Seven Year Itch, The King and I, The Three Faces of Eve, and The Diary of Anne Frank.

During a time of increasing screen competition from television, Skouras successfully spearheaded the introduction of CinemaScope, a novel widescreen color movie technology. The first movie released in the format was Fox's 1953 biblical film The Robe, a box-office success starring Richard Burton. Soon other film studios adopted similar technologies. Spyros's influence was extensive, with one studio historian claiming that during his tenure as CEO, 20th Century Fox's “product and policies reflected the personality of Spyros Panagiotis Skouras.”
Meanwhile, Charles managed the 650-theater Fox West Coast and National Theaters chain, which stretched from Los Angeles to Kansas City. In 1946 he was the highest paid man in America at $985,300. (Betty Grable was the highest paid woman at $299,300.) Although the overwhelming majority of his income went to pay taxes, Charles had no issue with it, expressing only appreciation for America: “I found economic hardship coupled with spiritual exultation in the principles of freedom each man considered his own.” He died of a heart attack in 1954 at sixty-five.

George, an important but always a background player in the brothers’ success, continued to build a Skouras theater chain in New York. In 1953 he co-founded Magna Pictures with producers Joseph Schenck and Michael Todd to distribute films like Oklahoma! in the widescreen format known as Todd-AO. He later served as president of United Artists studios and served as its board chair. He died in March 1964 at the age of sixty-eight.

Spyros’s tenure as head of 20th Century Fox ended in August 1962, in the wake of publicized cost overruns filming Cleopatra. Although he remained on as chairman of the board at Fox until 1969, his active years in the industry were behind him. One of the studio’s last films he authorized was based on a play about a musical family. Sensing a hit, Spyros spent $1.5 million for its production rights. Released in March 1965, The Sound of Music was one of Fox’s greatest artistic and financial successes, earning five Academy Awards. While head of Fox, Spyros also hired and cultivated talent such as Gregory Peck and Marilyn Monroe. In October 2017, after numerous reports of forced sexual encounters by contemporary movie studio and television figures, Joan Collins accused Spyros (without specifically naming him) of propositioning her for the lead role in Cleopatra fifty-eight years earlier. While not refuting Collins’s claims, a scholar who published Spyros’s memoirs and extensively researched his correspondence asserts that Collins was only considered for the role when the film was slated for B-movie status but was dropped when it was decided that Cleopatra would be produced as a high-end epic. The role instead went to A-lister Elizabeth Taylor.

As he did while in St. Louis, Spyros Skouras engaged in many philanthropic and civic causes, most notably spearheading aid efforts for civilians dying from starvation in Nazi-occupied Greece. He endured personal tragedy as well. Just two years after Fox released The Snake Pit, a milestone film about mental illness and institutionalization, Spyros’s twenty-four-year-old daughter, Dionysia, who had been institutionalized a year earlier, committed suicide by jumping off the four-story Fox West Coast building.

The Skourases made occasional return trips to St. Louis to visit friends and family, including a niece named Costula whom they had helped bring to St. Louis in 1914. She married George Caporal, another local Greek movie theater owner. During his final visit to St. Louis in October 1968 to speak at a fundraiser before the St. Louis Children’s Variety Clubs, Spyros didn’t forget his roots. Calling St. Louis his “native city” and recounting his early successes that began there and culminated in control of over forty-five theaters, hiring 550 musicians in addition to hundreds of other employees, and showcasing
memorable acts and performers that went on to national renown. Spyros Skouras died of a heart attack at his home in Rye, New York, on August 16, 1971.

It’s been more than a century since the Skouras brothers launched their careers as movie magnates from a nickelodeon at the site of what now is the entrance to the Stifel Theatre. As with the Olympia, few other Skouras-affiliated St. Louis theaters survived decades of urban decay and theater industry change. The Pageant closed in August 1966 after a final screening of *The Agony and the Ecstasy*. It briefly operated as an R&B concert venue but was torn down in 1975. Its name lives on in the Pageant Theatre, which opened in 2000 as a concert venue three blocks west of the old site on Delmar Boulevard. The Skourases’ flagship theaters are also gone. Both the Grand Central and the Missouri were razed for parking lots, the former in 1949 and the latter in 1959. Their crown jewel, the Ambassador, which continued under family ownership after the brothers’ deaths, was plagued with high office vacancies and competition from entertainment destinations in the suburbs. During the mid-1970s the shimmering theater served as a concert hall for rock and pop performers including Jefferson Starship, Steely Dan, James Taylor, and Jim Stafford. Despite attempts by cultural and architectural preservationists to save it, the great palace was razed in 1996. Today it’s the site of U.S. Bank Plaza.

Two Skouras-related theaters are still showing films today. Now a three-screen venue, the Tivoli Theatre endures as an essential part of the popular, eclectic Loop district in University City. The second is the Hi-Pointe Theatre, owned by family members of Tommy James, who once operated St. Louis’s first movie house, the World’s Dream, and went on to operate many others. Tommy James and Spyros Skouras remained in lifelong contact after Spyros left St. Louis. It was reported that when James experienced a time of financial distress in the theater business, Spyros telegraphed his fellow countryman with a short statement of encouragement: “No mariner ever distinguished himself on a smooth sea.”

**References**


Missouri State Archives, Office of Missouri Secretary of State. Movie industry trade publications, various years and articles: *Exhibitors Herald, Exhibitors Trade Review, The Film Daily, Motion Picture World, Motography, Moving Picture News, Moving Picture World, Variety*.

Newspapers, various years and articles: *New York Times, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Louis Star, St. Louis Star & Times*.


Spyros P. Skouras Papers, Stanford University, select correspondence.

St. Louis City Office of Recorder of Deeds, Incorporation Papers: Athenian Amusement Company; Marathon Amusement Company; Olympia Amusement Company; Skouras Brothers Company; Skouras Brothers Enterprises.

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, St. Louis, Missouri, marriage records.


U.S. Census Bureau, 1910, 1920, and 1930.

*Michael G. Tsichlis* is an independent scholar who has researched, published, and presented on a variety of topics relating to St. Louis regional history. He holds a PhD in public policy studies and is owner of AXIOS Communications.
In its one hundredth year of service, the International Institute of St. Louis (IISTL) continues to promote our nation’s motto, E pluribus unum: Out of many, one. As it has for the past century, the International Institute helps build a more connected and productive society for immigrants, their families, and the St. Louis community. From its headquarters in Tower Grove East, IISTL provides essential immigrant integration services to more than six thousand foreign-born people from eighty countries. Nearly one thousand volunteers and ninety staff members offer English and citizenship classes, career path assistance, job placement, and counseling, as well as small-business development and microloans. More than one hundred thousand visitors attend the International Institute’s annual Festival of Nations and other events it hosts throughout the year. Learn more at iistl.org.

By Anna Crosslin

Although Americans today are familiar with the overt hostility directed toward “the other,” anti-immigrant rhetoric is nothing new. The term “nativism” was first used in 1844. Its name was derived from the “Native American” parties of the 1840s and 1850s and referred to people who were descended from the founders of the original thirteen colonies. Nativist sentiment was visible in St. Louis as early as the 1840s. The worst nativist riot happened a decade later on Election Day 1854, when a nativist mob attacked Democratic Irish voters and destroyed Irish-owned property in south St. Louis. By the time the riot was quelled ten people were dead, thirty-three people were wounded, and ninety-three buildings were damaged.

Newcomers to the United States were often hated and feared. Some people even claimed that most new immigrants did not have a “gene for democracy”—that
is, they were too racially different to assimilate. The idea was advocated by Madison Grant, an American lawyer, eugenicist, anthropologist, and author. In 1916 he wrote _The Passing of the Great Race: Or, The Racial Basis of European History_, a book Adolf Hitler later referred to as his bible.

At the turn of the twentieth century the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) stepped into this immigrant-hostile environment. Based on a series of local and national studies, the national YWCA board of directors recognized the need for and value of specialized immigrant integration services for women and children. Learning from Jane Addams’s settlement house model, Edith Terry Bremer launched the first International Institute in New York City in 1911. By 1925 fifty-five additional International Institutes had opened, primarily in the industrial Northeast, the Midwest, and California, the state that led the nation in immigrant population.

**St. Louis International Institute Debuts**

In 1919, Ruth Holliday Watkins and a group of young St. Louis women founded the International Institute of St. Louis to help the large number of displaced and refugee women arriving here from war-torn European countries. Other founding members of the board included Lillian Stupp, Julia Hafner, and Josephine Fritsch. IISTL opened for service in September of that year. The early International Institute teamed with the Red Cross to rent a three-story building at 2338 S. Broadway, located in one of the city’s main “foreign” areas. Previously the building had been a saloon and lodging house with a dance hall on its third floor.

By the end of its first year St. Louis’s International Institute had eight people on staff. Letitia Fyffe, the organization’s first executive director, and two other Americans worked with five “nationality” (ethnic) employees. They spoke languages including Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Armenian, Turkish, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, French, and German.
The Role of Ethnic Festivals

The 1920 census indicated that St. Louis had 135,498 foreign-born residents—about 16 percent of its population. Experiences that would help foreign- and native-born citizens get to know one another were badly needed, and ethnic festivals were an effective way to bridge divides. Leaders of the International Institute have long believed that such celebrations help immigrants preserve and present their culture to the community—and help native-born community members learn about and appreciate their city’s rich cultural fabric.

The St. Louis International Institute’s annual Festival of Nations traces its origins to the International May Festival, which was first held in 1920 and was one of the earliest multicultural celebrations in the country. The first Festival of Nations as we know it today was organized in 1934. Other celebrations hosted by the International
Institute over the years include the International Christmas Folk Festival (1931–1938); a folk costume pageant (1950); International Folkfest (1992–2002); and since 2001, the annual Festival of Nations in south St. Louis’s Tower Grove Park.

But despite the efforts of local festivals and nationwide integration initiatives, anti-immigrant debates raged on in political and private spheres, ultimately resulting in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. This act capped the U.S. immigration number at 165,000 for countries outside the Western Hemisphere—an 80 percent reduction in the number of immigrants the United States accepted prior to World War I. Quotas for specific countries were limited to the number that composed 2 percent of the U.S. population from that country in 1890. Populations that were poorly represented in 1890 were all but excluded from immigrating—particularly Italians and Jews. All Asians were inadmissible. With the exception of a few Western European nationals, large-scale immigration came to a halt for the next forty years.

The Institute’s Middle Years

In 1923 the St. Louis chapter became the first International Institute to separate from the YWCA, emerging as a fully independent entity able to work with clients from all religious affiliations. The next year services were expanded to include men. The International Institute focused on teaching English and civics and celebrating immigrant culture while helping newcomers integrate. By 1929 the institute’s budget had grown to $45,000—approximately $665,000 today. But then the stock market crashed, shaking the economic and social core of the United States.

In the early 1930s the institute was run primarily by volunteers. Cultural festivals and international arts and crafts exhibits from 1931 to 1933 were a bright light in an otherwise depressing landscape. Several Works Progress Administration (WPA) initiatives funded services and projects, as well as personnel to teach English and citizenship classes. The WPA also provided St. Louis immigrants with stipends to create collections of plaster dolls dressed in intricate native costumes. One of the collections is on permanent display at the International Institute and serves as a colorful reminder of bygone ethnic traditions and national borders that have shifted over time. Still, in 1933 more than twenty-five thousand foreign-born St. Louisans had yet to become U.S. citizens.

In 1935 the International Institute of St. Louis received government funding to establish a branch in the Fairmont Hill neighborhood where many Italian immigrants lived. Over the next several years the International Institute’s staff operated fathers’ and mothers’ clubs in the neighborhood now known as the Hill. With the community’s help, the clubs also organized band concerts, street dances, and Italian theatre productions.

During World War II, agency staff and volunteers worked with Washington University’s dean of students, Arno J. Haack, at the school’s YMCA to help relocate thirty Japanese Americans from internment camps around the U.S., the Obata family among them. Gyo Obata would go on to become a world-famous architect and the acclaimed leader of St. Louis–based HOK design firm. After World War II ended the institute created programs for war brides. At first most of the brides were European, but services were later expanded to include Japanese women. Both groups formed their own clubs under the institute’s umbrella.

The International Institute introduced citizenship classes at the St. Louis chapter in 1950. English and citizenship classes for the Japanese wives of American servicemen were offered in collaboration with the St. Louis chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. These classes were expanded when all immigrants of Japanese
heritage could finally apply for U.S. citizenship after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1952.

The 1950s also saw the launch of many group activities, including welcoming parties, Friday Nighters, the Happy-Go-Luckies, International Club, and International Friendship Club. Before universities operated foreign-student programs, the institute was a home away from home for international students and academics living in St. Louis. Staff and volunteers facilitated social and educational events for homesick students. A Ping-Pong table and record player helped break down social barriers and encouraged interaction among newcomers from all over the world. A number of foreign students who met at these socials married each other: Couples included Ecuadorian and Italian, Danish and Asian Indian, and dozens more.

World War II had an enormous impact on labor—and on the immigration narrative. Labor shortages during the war and refugee arrivals after the war began to shift public opinion. From 1956 to 1958 the International Institute operated as a welcoming and hospitality location for refugees and displaced persons from Hungary. From 1955 to 1957 the organization produced several films by education director Stuart Moore. One, titled...
From “Foreigner” to Citizen, was shot on 16mm film—complete with a soundtrack—and featured immigrant clients as actors. Unfortunately, all copies of the film appear to have been lost.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Immigration Act of 1965 went into effect, it overhauled the U.S. immigration system. Quotas were added to allow immigration from non-Western nations. Around the same time, the total number and share of immigrants in St. Louis had dipped to its lowest point. Although the population of St. Louis City and St. Louis County had grown to 1.4 million in 1960, only 46,652 people—a decline of nearly 89,000—were foreign born. The foreign-born share of the region’s total population had dropped from 16 percent to just 4 percent. Both city and county foreign-born populations continued to decline until 2000, when the impact of the International Institute’s refugee resettlement programs grew to prominence, especially within city boundaries.

Advent of Modern-Day Refugee Resettlement

In 1975 resettlement was organized quickly with public and private resources to address the urgent needs of thousands of Vietnamese refugees who had been evacuated to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, after the fall of Saigon. Dozens of St. Louis churches and families served as sponsors. Resettlement activity declined until late 1978 when the plight of the Vietnamese “boat people” began to attract

Tony Le, a Vietnamese IISTL caseworker, played Santa for newly arrived Vietnamese refugee children in the 1980s.
widespread media attention. Their story was rife with tragedy: Thai pirates attacked boatloads of refugees at sea, ships refused to accept refugees from floundering crafts, and hundreds of thousands of refugees lived in squalor in camps in Thailand and Malaysia.

In September 1978, I joined the International Institute as its executive director. I soon heard rumors that the United States would launch a large-scale Vietnamese resettlement program. However, I also learned that Missouri was the only U.S. state ineligible to resettle refugees. State officials had removed Missouri from the federal program during Governor Christopher Bond’s administration. Working with State Representative Steve Vossmeier, my colleagues and I were able to identify a way to re-admit Missouri to the federally operated refugee resettlement program. So when President Jimmy Carter announced a special humanitarian program in 1979 to sponsor 121,000 Vietnamese boat people, Missouri resettlement agencies were ready.

Two Vietnamese resettlement programs, both under the umbrella of the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), were added a few years later. The first in the mid-1980s allowed for the resettlement of Amerasians—children with Vietnamese and American parents—and their families. The second focused on former Vietnamese re-education camp internees and their families. St. Louis resettled a share of both populations, and their children and grandchildren are now part of the city's ethnic mosaic. Many of the Vietnamese women working today in St. Louis arrived as children in re-education camp families.

The International Institute has undertaken the resettlement of many refugee populations, in addition to the Vietnamese, in the last three decades. Since the passage of the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980, St. Louis has welcomed thousands of refugees from almost every continent. The International Institute is Missouri’s largest refugee resettlement agency. As the federal designee, the organization coordinates refugee-services grants as well as transitional cash assistance and medical insurance for newly arrived refugees throughout the state. Between its St. Louis and Springfield, Missouri, locations, the International Institute has sponsored more than 23,000 refugees since 1979. New arrivals have included Laotians, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Poles, Bosnians, Somalis, Afghans, Syrians, Congolese, and many others.

**Bosnian Resettlement Comes to St. Louis**

The Bosnian American resettlement experience is a major part of St. Louis's recent settlement history. During the 1990s, Bosnians accounted for the single largest influx into an American Rust Belt city that had been rapidly losing population since 1950. Bosnians reoccupied neighborhoods, enrolled in public schools, and filled open jobs.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, 168,644 refugees from the former Yugoslavia were admitted to the United States between 1983 and 2004. Of that number, approximately 6 percent were initially settled in St. Louis: nearly seven thousand by the International Institute and another three thousand by Catholic Charities Refugee Services. The Bosnian community grew substantially larger, however, through “secondary migration,” which occurred when Bosnian refugees who had originally been resettled in other U.S. cities moved to St. Louis. The International Institute estimates that, at one time, St. Louis's Bosnian community totaled seventy thousand, including American-born children.

Bosnian American refugees in St. Louis and their children are now successful entrepreneurs, professionals, students, workers, and technicians. Although many have relocated to south St. Louis County from their original homes in south St. Louis City, their influence
remains visible in the businesses that occupy the stretch of Gravois Boulevard nicknamed Little Bosnia.

At first some St. Louisans took issue with Bosnian resettlement. From 2001 to 2005 newspaper articles in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *Riverfront Times* identified numerous complaints from neighbors, particularly in the city's 25th ward, known as Dutchtown. Neighbors aired grievances about teens speeding (they had been accustomed to driving on German autobahns) to “excessive” smoke pouring from backyard smokehouses to Bosnians slaughtering live animals and hanging their carcasses in the alleys (no evidence of this practice was ever found) even to leaving their shoes on the front porch. Fortunately, these tensions eased over time.

The story of how Bosnians came to St. Louis is a fascinating one. In 1992, U.S. Department of State representatives sought input from various resettlement leaders with the intention to select twenty-five sites for initial Bosnian resettlement. St. Louis was a strong contender: The city offered sufficient affordable housing, industries that matched Bosnians’ job skills, and an array of resettlement services. To launch the resettlement program the International Institute identified a cadre of native-language speakers through St. Joseph Croatian Catholic Church in Soulard, where perhaps a dozen families included Bosnian spouses. These early program volunteers were not refugees themselves, but they shared a common language and culture with the newcomers.

Ibro Dedic, a Bosnian American associated with the church, eagerly stepped forward to assist with resettlement. Dedic met refugee families at Lambert Airport and served as the community's main interpreter until program staff could be hired from the new arrivals. He also facilitated the resettlement of numerous members of his own family: More than one hundred relatives eventually joined him in St. Louis. Other volunteers included Ermina and Sulejman Grbic, owners of popular south St. Louis restaurants Grbic and Lemmons by Grbic. They welcomed new families into their home and helped ease the pain of war and loss felt by so many.

In 1998 the Bosnian community was shattered by the kidnapping of Selma Ducanovic, an eleven-year-old girl who was lured from her home and murdered. The crime was even more horrific when it was discovered that for weeks the perpetrator had been impersonating a police-

man or doctor in order to gain entry into refugee homes. Within a few days International Institute staff organized a community safety forum at the Carpenters Union Hall where more than four hundred Bosnians and every city police official—including Chief Ron Henderson and his entire executive staff—met to formulate a safety plan for the refugee community.

As a result St. Louis police officer Barry Lalumandier was reassigned to the International Institute as its refugee community liaison for the next five years to work exclusively on immigrant issues. Officer Barry, as he became known, served as the first point of contact for thousands of St. Louis refugees who could not or would not talk with law enforcement in other circumstances. He eased the fears of numerous refugees who had previously avoided officers because of rampant police corruption in their home countries. Officer Barry also worked closely with American-born residents who were leery of their new Bosnian neighbors.

The Missouri Historical Society has filled a valuable educational role in Bosnian resettlement by helping St. Louisans better understand and appreciate this refugee population. Over the years the Missouri History Museum has offered many exhibits and programs that have explained aspects of the Bosnian genocide and the rise of the Bosnian American community in St. Louis. Unlike other U.S. cities where Bosnians settled, St. Louis was home to several thousand survivors of the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica during the Bosnian War. In 2000 the Missouri History Museum mounted an exhibit called *We Will Survive/Prezivjet Cemo*. It ran for ten months and attracted more than fifty thousand visitors. Patrick McCarthy, associate dean of libraries at Saint Louis University, co-authored the book *After the Fall: Srebrenica Survivors in St. Louis*, which was published that year by the Missouri Historical Society Press.

On July 9, 2005, the Missouri Historical Society hosted the program Remembering Srebrenica: 10 Years After the War and Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In July 2015 the organization collaborated again with McCarthy and the International Institute, as well as Benjamin Moore, founder of the Bosnian Memory Project at Fontbonne University, to host a series of lectures and events commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Srebrenica.
Women Volunteer Leadership

At both local and national levels, women have been at the heart of the International Institute since its agency’s inception one hundred years ago. The first board of the International Institute of St. Louis was drawn from YWCA volunteers, including twenty-six-year-old Ruth Holliday Watkins, its first chair who served in the position through 1923. She was married to International Shoe Company executive Horton Watkins, after whom Ladue Horton Watkins High School is named.

When I interviewed her in 1989, Ruth Holliday Watkins reminisced about the International Institute’s early years. Volunteers faced the challenge of providing welcoming services to newcomer immigrants with a small staff of eight and modest budget that was nearly eradicated by the 1929 stock market crash. Classes and services continued in the 1930s with borrowed books, reused paper, watered-down Kool-Aid, and pencil stubs. Volunteers—particularly women volunteers—were critical to the organization’s survival.

In 1955, Vera Howes was elected chair of IISTL’s board. She reached out to her dear friend Molly Sverdrup who convinced her husband (and CEO of Sverdrup & Parcel), General Leif J. Sverdrup, to chair a capital campaign to purchase the institute’s first permanent home, an 1890s Victorian mansion at 4484 W. Pine Boulevard. The Sverdrups were both Norwegian born and recognized the value in helping the International Institute give safe haven to refugees. The capital campaign raised $45,000 for the house, where services were provided until 1982.

The St. Louis chapter of the United Nations Association presented the International Institute with its 1982 Human Rights Award for the stellar work the organization had done in resettling more than one thousand Vietnamese refugees the previous year. Margie Wolcott May, a long-time UNA chapter supporter, was there for the ceremony and became interested in the institute’s work. She joined the board of directors in 1984 and was a dedicated member, serving until her death in 2001.

May and her friend Jane Straeter organized many successful fundraisers for the International Institute, including a seventieth anniversary gala at the Adam’s Mark Hotel with guest Nien Cheng, the celebrated author of Life and Death in Shanghai. May also connected with famed Vietnamese French artist Lebadang and arranged...
for him to visit St. Louis and the International Institute. Lebadang, who had fled to Paris from Vietnam decades earlier, was so moved by the stories of the Vietnamese Amerasians who were coming to St. Louis that he gifted the institute a number of signed lithographs and a sculpture from his *Family of Man* series. May went on to serve as honorary co-chair for a capital campaign to move the institute’s headquarters from Park Avenue to larger, more modern headquarters on S. Grand Boulevard. Other long-serving board members included Anne Tao (1984–1991), Juanita Hinshaw (1988–1994), Kiku Obata (1990–2002), and Linda Morice (1994–2006).

These women and dozens more built a solid foundation based on their personal beliefs and expectations that St. Louis would be a stronger, more vibrant community for all if it welcomed and integrated immigrant newcomers from the moment they arrived in the city.

**Today and Tomorrow**

Today the estimated size of the St. Louis Bosnian community is fewer than fifty thousand, including American-born children. Attrition through death and further relocation—especially during the financial downturn from 2009 to 2013—has taken its toll. Still, St. Louis remains one of the largest Bosnian communities outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Many Bosnian refugees arrived in America with strong science and math skills, which enabled them to step into manufacturing, construction, mechanical, and other types of skilled blue-collar jobs. In St. Louis they performed sewer work for the airport, purchased and operated rental properties, and launched over-the-road trucking businesses. Those with fewer technical skills filled custodial and housekeeping jobs and worked in retail.

The terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, resulted in substantial changes in refugee resettlement in St. Louis and across the nation. Although none of the 9/11 terrorists were refugees, the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program was suspended for five months following the attacks to review and implement additional vetting procedures for refugee applicants. Since then there have been significant changes in the federal refugee resettlement program. The program now admits smaller groups of refugees from more locations, in contrast to the large-scale Vietnamese and Bosnian programs of earlier decades. As a consequence St. Louis is now home to communities of Somalis, Nepalese, Congolese, Syrians, Afghans, Burmese, and more.

In the meantime general immigration in St. Louis has started to grow, albeit modestly. From a low point of 46,652 foreign-born citizens in 1960, St. Louis’s city and county foreign-born population has nearly doubled to 89,402 in 2018. Many organizations, including the International Institute, are working together with the St. Louis Mosaic Project to attract more immigrants—and the significant economic and cultural value they bring to our region.
Anna Crosslin has led the International Institute of St. Louis since 1978. In the last two decades she has been named to St. Louis Business Journal’s “Most Influential St. Louisans” and St. Louis Magazine’s “St. Louis Power” lists. She has also earned leadership awards from the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, the William T. Kemper Foundation, World Trade Center, YWCA, and FOCUS St. Louis, and in 2016 she received philanthropist David Wohl’s St. Louis Award. Crosslin is a board member for the St. Louis Regional Chamber and chairs the board of the Seattle-based National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. In June 2015, Crosslin traveled to the White House to be recognized by President Barack Obama as a Champion of Change for World Refugee Day. She has two honorary doctorates: one from Webster University and another from Washington University in St. Louis, her alma mater.
Festival of Nations

Text and photos by Wayne Crosslin

The International Institute of St. Louis relaunched a weekend festival in 1994 to celebrate the ethnic diversity of the St. Louis region. I was then a photojournalist and picture editor at the local daily newspaper.

My involvement with the institute is a close one: My wife, Anna Crosslin, is its president and CEO. So naturally, I have documented the festival over the years. Now in its fourth location, the Festival of Nations is firmly settled on the last weekend of August in Tower Grove Park on the city’s south side. Along with a group of volunteer photographers, I continue to document the event—particularly its performers.

Here are some of my favorite images from over the years. Many of these photographs were shot at the main stage of the festival. Three of the photographs were captured in a portable studio that I set up behind the main stage. The photo of the four Chinese girls was taken backstage as they were smiling at a picture of themselves from the previous year in the current year’s program. Whether the performers are immigrants, refugees, or native-born Americans, all enjoy sharing their ethnic heritage with the audiences.
Boys' soccer team at South Side Catholic High School (now St. Mary's) on March 24, 1939. Isaac Sievers.
As they put it.

Talking Trade on the Santa Fe Trail

Kristie Lein, Editor

From 1821 to 1880, hundreds of thousands of items were shipped over the Santa Fe Trail from St. Louis and points east to those living in the country's farthest western reaches. One of the trail's most important traders was James Josiah Webb, who managed general stores in St. Louis, Georgia, and New Jersey. In 1844 he made his first trip across the Santa Fe Trail with a load of goods worth about $20,000 and then used his profits to establish a business in Santa Fe. Webb found a savvy partner in businessman William Sluman Messervy, who had moved from St. Louis to Santa Fe in the late 1830s. Messervy and Webb soon became the town's foremost mercantile house: Some of their shipments were so large that up to seventy wagons were needed to haul goods across the trail. The journey was often treacherous—attacks, robberies, and illnesses were not uncommon.

The Missouri Historical Society's Library & Research Center houses the James J. Webb Collection, a fascinating assemblage of letters, bills, and receipts from Messervy and Webb (later known as Webb and Kingsbury) that documents the business's successes and hardships, divulges political news and gossip, and underscores how important the Santa Fe Trail was to travel and trade in the mid-1800s.

After Messervy retired from Messervy and Webb in 1853, Webb found his next partner in John M. Kingsbury, who had been the company's bookkeeper. The new business was known as Webb and Kingsbury. This letter from Kingsbury to Webb summarizes the firm's transactions, and it outlines plans to buy goods in St. Louis and move them from Kansas City (then called Westport) to Santa Fe for trade throughout the New Mexico Territory, northern Mexico, and western Texas.

June 30, 1858

Letter signed J. M. Kingsbury, Santa Fe, to James J. Webb

By last mail I sent you two checks amounting to $4,000. I am now in receipt of your note of May 19. . . . This is the first I have received since those written at Westport. I can hardly think you left St. Louis without writing me. I have no bill of the chairs, and I see no invoice of hats. Estes & Mercure's goods got here on the 23rd. This makes about 70 wagons up to the present that have arrived. Levi's ox train will be here in a few days. Since the new goods commenced arriving my sales have stopped short—I have sold only $750 this month, collections amount to $5,000. The last account of our wagons they were at Pawnee Fork on the 11th, had lost 26 yoke of cattle which had run off with buffalo. They expect to be here July 8. The cattle loss will weaken the team so much that it will be difficult to calculate when they
arrive. They are loaded very heavy, three have over 5,500 [lbs.] in them.

Our wagons being so far behind, I have already lost the sale of from $12,000 to $15,000, which I cannot recover. County merchants were here and were bound to buy where they could get goods. Levi must have sold over $30,000 this month. It may prove all the better in the end, we will have a full fall and winter, and perhaps prices may go up a little.

Herewith you will find a small book with memos for the east; other business about checks, etc. By the mail of the 15th I will send all I can raise to St. Louis for purchase of groceries. I am now retaining enough to see my way clear to settle with Hays for the goods on the road. It will be in drafts and check unquestionable so that I will have no necessity of drawing on you. You said you would have a written copy of the contract with Hays & Fogleson, but I have not received it.

In this letter Webb talks politics, gives business advice to Kingsbury, and urges him to resist the lure of gold.

September 2, 1858
Letter signed James J. Webb, Westport, to John M. Kingsbury, Santa Fe
Your [letter] of Aug. 1 was received in St. Louis. I think you have done exceedingly well in selling considering the time our goods arrived.

I am sorry to learn that Tom has returned. He ought to have continued on and acted with firmness in protecting the interest of parties he went out to represent. I think it is a bad speculation. I heard in St. Louis that they were making very slow progress and had left a part of their goods at Fort Laramie. Watch them for our account—don’t place too much confidence in Hovey. Kavanaugh is honorable but his ability depends on a good many contingencies. Pino is uncertain always. If Tom goes into business for himself you can rely on him. Try and get him to quit that woman. I think you will be pleased with the services of young Weirick. Try to get rid of old Thom. He is perhaps strictly honest, but he is an old fool about women.

I notice what you say about politics. [Congressman Francisco] Perea is not the man, he will disappoint the people worse than [Congressman Mariano] Otero has done. They ought to send an American. . . . Why cannot they all unite and send Jackson. He is universally popular. Even though [Superintendent of Indian Affairs James]
Kingsbury tells Webb that business in Santa Fe has been poor. This morose correspondence ends with a jab at Kirby Benedict, the judge for the Territory of New Mexico. Six years after this letter was written, Judge Benedict was removed from office by President Andrew Johnson and was disbarred by the New Mexico Supreme Court in 1871.

January 15, 1860
Letter signed J. M. Kingsbury, Santa Fe, to James J. Webb
I wrote you by last mail, since then I have nothing from you. I hope in your next letter you have something about the Arkansas farm.

The present month is half gone, and I have nothing favorable to report in the way of business. Money is very scarce, and it is really hard times with the people. I never saw it so hard to collect little bills. I thought I had a good excuse in urging these little matters through it being the first of the year, but so far, for all my work, I have hardly been paid for shoe leather. I have frequent applications every day to loan in sums of $1.00 and up. I deny them in the plainest terms and actually quarrel to keep what I have got. If something does not turn up to relieve money matters I do not know what will become of the Territory. I am really afraid to sell goods any more on credit. The way things look now we cannot be too thankful that we are ready to quit, and above all that we are having no more goods coming to put through. I am every day more and more convinced that we have not

Collins & [Surveyor General William] Pelham have tried to injure me personally, I am convinced they could do some good for the Territory. Politics in New Mexico are so uncertain and unprofitable, and I hope you keep yourself aloof from them.

There is excitement about the discovery of gold at Pike’s Peak—but don’t get excited, our business is in New Mexico.

A bill of lading for items received of J. Riddlesbarger of Kansas, Missouri, to be delivered to Webb and Kingsbury in Santa Fe, New Mexico, dated May 1855. Missouri Historical Society Collections.
started winding up too soon. I only wish I could see my way out of the woods soon. We have a large amount at stake in the Territory, and it will be no easy job to get it in.

Joe Hersch has sold all his goods in store to his two nephews in a lump for $15,000 on one year credit, rents them his store for one year at $25 per month. They now have possession. Joe has a little office and gives his whole time to his niece and to closing up. He talks of taking his train in by the way of Pike's Peak, loading it with groceries here to take to that place.

They have introduced a set of resolutions in the Council against Judge Benedict denouncing him as a habitual drunkard, being drunk on the bench and asleep while lawyers were addressing him, with sundry other charges, and carried them 8 votes by 4. This is a bad lick at the judge's dignity, and the worst of it is, it is all too true.

~

Here Webb questions Kingsbury on the whereabouts of one of their employees and offers hope that business will improve the following year—particularly if the United States goes to war with Mexico.

March 16, 1860
Letter signed James J. Webb, New Haven, Connecticut, to John M. Kingsbury

A receipt of goods from Webb and Kingsbury, dated May 1, 1857. Missouri Historical Society Collections.
Yours of Feb. 19th came to hand yesterday. I am sorry to hear that Charles has run off. I did not expect it. I thought he would stay, but never expected to get the amount of our debt. You say you are getting along well without Weirick. I did not know he had left. You told me he talked of leaving but have not advised me that he had left. When did he leave, what for, and where did he go?

I see by the papers they have been having a big fuss between the Mexicans & Americans at Mazilla. How does Judge Benedict get along?

Goods must be a drug in Santa Fe, but I would not advise you to force sales. The people will be better able to pay for goods next year than this. There will be more troops in New Mexico next year than before, and it would not surprise me if we should have another war with Mexico, in which event you will have a spur of more lively times in Santa Fe, but result in the depreciation of the value of real estate. If so, we have done well to sell. The troops will be active with the Navajos & Kiowas, and a war with Mexico would call out more troops for a short time, but our Govt. will make short work with that affair. A new and large slice will fall to the U.S.

War has broken out, but not between the US and Mexico. On April 13, 1861, the day after the Civil War began, Webb wrote to Kingsbury, “We have advices today that war has commenced and there is no knowing where it will end or what will be the result. I have no doubt it will be a long and bloody contest.” Kingsbury’s response a few weeks later indicates that he is anxiously settling debts and making plans to leave Santa Fe.

May 5, 1861
Letter signed J. M. Kingsbury, Santa Fe, to James J. Webb, New Haven
I have just returned after an absence of four weeks. I am back again all safe, though I had a hard and exciting trip, and with all I have the extreme pleasure to refund a full and final settlement of the H. & A. debt. I realized in cash out of it $1,045 making a sacrifice of the balance of the debt to secure this, we are now done with them and the debt is canceled in full. I think I mentioned to you before that I feared that I was losing my energies. In accomplishing this settlement it called into practice every talent of business that I possess and when finally closed, I could not refrain from the expression to myself: John is himself again. I am well satisfied and when I can explain to you all the circumstances I feel sure that you will be satisfied with the settlement. My expenses on the trip are $127.87. My last to you was of April 7 notifying you that I had that day under another envelope sent you a check for $6,000, and 13 coupons for interest amounting to $455. . . . Our news is that war has started.

I think I can now manage things here so I can leave in two or three weeks. You may contact me in care of Bernard & Co. at Westport. I shall stay long enough to close up the Marsh farm business properly. Let me again warn you to keep our funds safe, if you can do no better buy a safe to put it in.

Kingsbury and Webb’s partnership ended in 1861, but their voluminous correspondence continues to give us a remarkable view of their lives and livelihoods on the Santa Fe Trail.

These letters have been edited for space and clarity.
Ruth's River Dreams is a charming historical-fiction picture book for pre-K to third-grade students, based on the life of Ruth Ferris, educator, curator, and collector of Mississippi River lore. Young readers will join Ruth as she daydreams of riverboats while playing with her friends, shopping with her mother—even when doing her math homework! They’ll come on the journey as Ruth grows up and teaches students about the river at Ladue’s Community School, educates the public as a museum curator, and rescues the steamboat Golden Eagle’s pilothouse.

Ruth’s River Dreams is illustrated with original woodcuts and drawings created by Ruth Ferris herself—many of which have never been published before. Originally made as greeting cards for friends and family, these colorful prints are gathered here for the first time, revealing her love of the river on every page. Discover all of the adventures waiting around the next bend in Ruth’s River Dreams, coming this spring from the Missouri Historical Society Press.
Great River City: How the Mississippi Shaped St. Louis

by Andrew Wanko

isbn 978-1-883982-95-9, $35 paperback, 308 pages, 450 images

For St. Louis, the Mississippi has always been more than just a river. It’s been the focus of the local economy, a shaping force on millions of lives, and a mirror for the city’s triumphs, embarrassments, joys, and tragedies. Through fifty-six snapshots from the city’s history, Great River City examines the many ways St. Louis has interacted with the mighty river running past its front door. Included among the dozens of stories are landmark moments in the history of St. Louis, from Lewis and Clark’s 1803 expeditionary stopover and the construction of the Eads Bridge to more recent events, like the Great Flood of 1993. But this book also reveals some unexpected connections between the Mississippi and St. Louis, diving into subjects as diverse as sanitation, urban planning, and racial and ethnic conflicts.

Countless works have examined the importance of the Mississippi River in American history, but rarely through the lens of a single city. Illustrated with hundreds of maps, artifacts, and images from MHS’s rich archives, Great River City is a companion to the Missouri History Museum exhibit Mighty Mississippi, running from November 23, 2019, to April 18, 2021.

Andrew Wanko is a public historian at the Missouri Historical Society.
Gateway
The Magazine of the Missouri Historical Society
volume 39, Number 2 • Fall 2019