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# *The Society of Architectural Historians* **Missouri Valley Chapter**

Volume XV

Number 2A

Summer 2009



## **News Letter**

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### **CHAPTER WEBSITE DEBUTS: STLOUISARCHITECTURE.ORG**

Thanks to the hard work and creativity of Michelle Kodner, the St. Louis Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians now has an attractive website of our very own: [www.stlouisarchitecture.org](http://www.stlouisarchitecture.org).

The site has five sections in addition to the home page:

- “Chapter & Membership” outlines chapter objectives and lists the address, membership categories, and board of directors.



*Harris Armstrong, McDonnell Douglas Engineering Campus, Hazelwood, circa 1965, photo by Michelle Kodner from the new chapter website*

- “Newsletters” has back issues of our newsletter. So far, we go back to 2004, but we hope to have at least ten years available online. All these issues are searchable by Google, and we have already received an inquiry from a researcher based on our Summer 2007 article about Union Station’s stained glass windows.
- “Events and Tours” will have our activity calendar plus other events of interest to the membership. It also includes links to many of the historic sites in the region.
- “Resources” has links to sources for research and to related organizations concerned with architecture and preservation. This is a good place to find all the leading

blogs on St. Louis architecture and historic preservation, many of them previously reported in these pages.

- “Architect Files” marks the beginning of our projected dictionary of Missouri architects. So far we have more names than materials, but we hope to add many items over time, including copies of obituaries, lists of works, references from other publications, and, where possible, full-scale biographies from our own newsletters.

As noted, we hope that additions and changes to our new website will be frequent. But we have begun!

### **CHAPTER ANNUAL MEETING, SATURDAY, JUNE 20**

Please join your board and friends for the annual meeting of the St. Louis Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians. This year we’ll meet at the Central Library of the St. Louis Public Library, 13<sup>th</sup> and Olive. We’ll gather at 10 a.m. in Meeting Room I on the third floor for a brief business meeting, then adjourn to the Art Room, where Fine Arts Librarian Suzy Frechette will be on hand to show us some of the recent acquisitions of the Steedman Architectural Collection. St. Louis businessman George Fox Steedman donated his rare books to the St. Louis Public Library in 1928, with the express purpose of exposing local architects to the great published works on architecture, and the beautiful Jacobean-style Steedman Room was subsequently constructed to house the collection. The meeting starts at 10 a.m. and will end in time for those interested to adjourn to lunch at a nearby downtown restaurant. Street parking is free on Saturdays in the vicinity of the library, and the library also has its own parking lot one block west at 15<sup>th</sup> and Olive.

### **CARONDELET ARCHITECTURE FEATURED AT CARONDELET HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The Carondelet Historical Society has a new exhibit on architecture, continuing through Tuesday, September 1. It features the Society’s own collections of old photos, paintings, and newspaper depictions of Carondelet buildings. The extensive exhibit includes displays on all three floors of the Society’s Historic Center, the historic Des

Peres School at 6306 Michigan Avenue.

The exhibit is organized around five themes, based on function. Transportation includes images of boats and trains along with ancillary buildings along the river and the tracks. Several railroad stations once served Carondelet, including the multilevel station that was draped down the side of Chouteau's Bluff, the brick station that stood at Elwood Street, and the frame station in Carondelet Park.

Industrial buildings grew up along the river and the railroad tracks, while commercial buildings lined South Broadway. These old commercial buildings were actually multi-purpose, with housing on the floors above the 19<sup>th</sup>-century storefronts. The section on public buildings includes churches, schools, the library, police and fire stations, and park buildings. The last theme is residential architecture, ranging from primitive rock dwellings to Romanesque castles.

The Society's collections include many portrayals of buildings that have been razed or radically altered. One remarkable collection that has not been widely seen is a set of photographs taken by Donald Dates in 1945 to record buildings that were deemed historic at that time. Mr. Dates included information about the buildings that had been passed down through his family. Hazel Lee's watercolors depict neighborhood houses and storefronts circa 1970. Victor Kunz, an architect turned artist, sketched and painted local architecture for over half a century of his long life – 1899 to 1991 – and the Society owns 130 of his works. New photos documenting features of Carondelet Park have been made by Ken Bolte, one of the exhibit's organizers.

Two new collections round out the exhibit. Architectural drawings of homes in the holly Hills subdivision and subdivision maps have been donated by Dick Federer, whose family developed that much-admired neighborhood. Bill Paule has donated photographs from Paul Real Estate, a family firm founded in Carondelet in 1887.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Ron Bolte, president of the Society, has compiled a survey of over forty church buildings in the Carondelet area, and this will be available for sale for \$5.00. The History Center is open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30 to 3 and Saturday from 10:30 to 3. To schedule a tour of the building during these times, phone 314-481-6303.

## FAIRFAX HOUSE HAS NEW WEBSITE

Our own Michelle Kodner has created a new website for Rock Hill's historic Fairfax House. You can view it at [www.fairfaxhouse.org](http://www.fairfaxhouse.org). This is another exciting develop-

ment for a house that only a year ago was listed by Missouri Preservation as one of the most endangered in the state.

Fairfax House was built between 1839 and 1841 by James Collier Marshall, who was from Fairfax county, Virginia. James and his brother John Marshall had adjacent land holdings that extended south to include part of the present business district of Webster Groves. They founded the Rock Hill Presbyterian Church in 1845.

The house originally sat on the south side of Manchester, far back from the road. It was moved close to the road in 1941 to make way for a subdivision. Then in 1997 the city persuaded a developer to move it across Manchester onto the grounds of the church to make way for a stip mall. The intention at that time was to rehabilitate the house as a community facility, and architect Seth Langton prepared plans for that purpose, including a new rear wing. But the City of Rock Hill's subsequent financial difficulties prevented these plans from being realized, and subsequent administrations virtually abandoned the building.



*Fairfax House about 1911, with a later porch that partially blocks the second-floor door. Note also the additions to the side and rear that were taken off in later moves.*

The city's committee, however, under the leadership of Donia Hunter, never gave up. They continued to draw attention to the house and listed it in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004 as an outstanding example of pioneer construction. Following the publicity about the building's plight in 2008, they have been able to raise funds and volunteer support for a partial restoration, which is still continuing.



*Fairfax House after the recent restoration of the front elevation. The house is being repainted a distinctive slate-blue color, which was the third oldest color found in paint analysis.*



The new website features a history of the house, photos detailing its distinctive features and restoration, and a full collection of recent news articles. Of course, further contributions of time and money are essential if Fairfax House is to be preserved for future generations.

## GRIFFIN SOCIETY MEETS JUNE 20

The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will hold its tenth annual meeting on Saturday, June 20, in Chicago's north-shore suburb of Kenilworth. St. Louisan Peter Griffin, who is a great-nephew of the architect, notes that this is the closest to St. Louis the meeting has been in some years, and the exciting events that are planned may entice interested St. Louisans to make the trip.



*Walter Burley Griffin, Orth House II, 42 Abbotsford Road, Winnetka, Illinois, 1908*

The annual meeting and morning lectures begin at 9 a.m. in the Kenilworth Assembly Hall, designed and built in 1906 by George W. Maher and located at 410 Kenilworth Avenue at Richmond Road. Speakers include Kathy Cummings, discussing Maher's planning in Kenilworth; Sharon Darling on Teco pottery; and Paul Truty examining the Trier Center and the Tempel subdivision, located in nearby Winnetka.

After lunch, houses by Griffin, Maher, and John Van Bergen in Kenilworth and Winnetka will be open for tour. The cost for the morning events is free for Griffin Society members and Pleasant Home Foundation members. For the afternoon tours, there is an additional charge of \$10 for members. A membership in the Griffin Society costs \$25. Register for the Annual Meeting by June 6 by e-mailing [info@WBGriffinSociety.org](mailto:info@WBGriffinSociety.org) or phoning Peter Griffin at 314-644-4546.

Walter Burley Griffin, the great Prairie School architect,

grew up in Edwardsville, where the house he designed for his brother remains one of the community's chief ornaments. He and his wife Marion Mahoney Griffin, one of history's greatest architectural renderers and a creative architect in her own right, left their successful practice in the Chicago area after winning the international competition to design the new national capital of Australia at Canberra, and they later moved to India, where Walter died in 1937.

This year's meeting also features the work of George W. Maher (1864-1926). After growing up in New Albany, Indiana, Maher apprenticed in the office of Joseph Lyman Silsbee in the 1880s while Frank Lloyd Wright and George Grant Elmslie were there. He partnered with Charles Corwin from 1889 to 1893. His solo practice thereafter was large and varied with a concentration in North Shore communities. He designed more than 40 houses in Kenilworth, along with a school, the Kenilworth Club, municipal buildings and a suburban extension. Stylistically, his work moved from eclecticism to the Prairie School, which he advocated in articles and talks promoting "the Western Spirit" and "indigenous architecture."



"Pleasant Home" was the family name for the John Farnson House, 217 Home Avenue in Oak Park, built in 1898. As the best preserved example of Maher's work (including nearly all the original furnishings and decoration) and an early and distinguished example of the Prairie School, it has been designated a National Historic Landmark. The Pleasant Home Foundation was organized in 1990 to restore and maintain the 30-room house. Tours are Thursday through Sunday, 12:30, 1:30, and 2:30. For more information phone 708-383-2654.

## THE ST. LOUIS RIVERFRONT IN THE 1930S: A NEW WEBSITE

Bob Moore reports that the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial is putting up a site as an offshoot to the park's main website, about the riverfront in the 1930s. "The site will go into detail about the people who lived on the riv-

erfront, the Hooverville, the artist's colony, blues music, etc. We have a wealth of photos of the area taken before all the buildings were demolished. It makes you want to cry to see some of them. The Roy House, the National Hotel, the Old Federal Customs House, the Papin building, and some private homes that were still standing from the 1830s, not to mention the Old Rock House. My interviews with the woman who grew up in the Old Rock House and some of her personal photos will be on the site, as will be information about artists Joe Jones, Milovich, Nuderscher, Radulovich, etc., as well as Harry Turner, Rock House Annie, and others who made the riverfront a special and unique place.”

## HARRIS ARMSTRONG'S TRADITIONAL DESIGNS: THE HOUSE AT 423 MIRIAM

*by Andrew Raimist*

If I recall correctly, I last visited 423 Miriam Avenue in Kirkwood when the house was on market; it must have been around the turn of the century (*our* century). The owners at the time told me Harris Armstrong designed the house. Inquiring as to the source of the information, they explained, “The previous owners told us this was well known in the neighborhood.” When I asked for documentation indicating Armstrong’s involvement in the design (drawings, written records, articles, etc.), they told me they knew of none, but that it was commonly understood in the neighborhood that it was indeed by Armstrong.



*423 Miriam Avenue, Kirkwood, entry facing north (by author).*

My comment at the time and this remains my opinion was, “Armstrong *may* have designed the house, but in lieu of substantive evidence, I’m unable to determine whether it is the case.” I leave open that possibility and welcome any information regarding this home (or others with a similar status).



*423 Miriam Avenue, Kirkwood, street façade facing east (by author).*

I know with near certainty Armstrong edited his office files removing projects he apparently did not wish attributed to him at the time of his retirement in the late 1960s. It’s possible 423 Miriam Avenue (1936-37) was one of those redacted projects. Part of my problem in this case is I don’t see anything particularly “damning” or unappealing about the house he’d want to conceal. It isn’t terribly different from other projects completed around the same time included in Armstrong’s office files. I haven’t studied his more traditionally based brick detailing in great depth and while such analysis could be suggestive, it would be far from definitive, particularly when dealing with variants of traditional masonry detailing. Nevertheless, the brickwork on the house does offer some tantalizing clues.

The house features segmental shallow brick arches on the ground level generally using a single rowlock. The second story windows have flat tops. At the north and south elevations, the white painted fascia board conceals what is likely a wood structural lintel. On the east elevation however, the two outer windows have more expressive horizontal jack arches several brick courses high while the central extra tall opening features a half round transom with a single rowlock.

On the east wall the areas between the first and second floor windows are rather curious for a house of this type. These recessed bricks panels are set back from the face of the wall itself as visible in the detail photograph below. Two vertical grooves aligned with the edges of the window openings seem to express the structural condition where the weight of the wall above the second floor window is divided between the left and right sides of the opening. The segmental arch at the first floor is limited *only to the width of the opening* where normally they would extend beyond the opening on either side to distribute the weight downward in the wall. The manner in which the spring points are “cut off” expresses the relative lack of weight being distributed at the first floor window head.





423 Miriam Avenue, Kirkwood, east façade brick masonry details

This condition, creating vertical slots determined by the width of the fenestration, suggests the later modernist trope of expressing non-structural infill spandrel panels within vertically stacked openings. Armstrong would have been familiar with this approach to wall construction, having designed several high-rise buildings in the early 1930s following the approach celebrated in Louis Sullivan's Wainwright Building. Armstrong's high-rises include a 12-story Medical Arts Building constructed in Minneapolis and an unbuilt 40-story office tower for downtown St. Louis. Both were the result of an Armstrong partnership with engineer Alexander B. Boyer. 423 Miriam's volumetric form is typologically similar to



12-Story Medical Arts Building, Minneapolis by Boyer & Armstrong

an Armstrong designed home for Louise F. Walker at 20 Overhills Drive in Ladue of 1936. This traditional brick masonry design was completed the year *following* the construction of the Shanley Building and Cori House, two of his most significant early modernist works. If Armstrong had wished to conceal his traditional architectural production, he likely could have done so. However, a photograph of the Walker house was published in a local paper with a caption mentioning owner, architect and contractor.



Perspective rendering of Walker House, 20 Overhills, Ladue, 1936

In addition Armstrong kept this signed rendering of the house as a part of his office records. Documenting the house appears to have held particular importance to him since he had it professionally photographed from *precisely* the same vantage point illustrated in his perspective.

Comparing these houses, the use of heavy brick gable end walls with parapets capping the end of the primary rectangular mass is a common expressive feature. The house on Miriam features a similar façade composition with a central white painted entryway as well as an ell containing a garage. The Walker House includes white stone lintels and full wood shutters; the Miriam Avenue House has shallow segmental arches at the first floor and lacks shutters or stonework. The east wall includes three brick high segmental arches and taller more expressive jack arches at the second floor. Both houses have a single semi-circular brick arch constructed in a similarly minimal manner.



Early photograph of Walker House, 20 Overhills, Ladue, 1936

The window openings on the side elevation of the Walker house extend down to the floor along with full-height shutters. Historically, such access was sometimes provided to facilitate holding funerals allowing for access for a coffin and pallbearers. While the east elevation windows at 423 Miriam do not extend full-height, they are constructed with a lightweight wood panel at floor level rather than brick.

The Overhills and Miriam houses feature nearly identical designs of their gable end walls, with several courses of bricks set along the rake up to the peak as well as cast iron stars set into the upper corners of the wall. An unusual feature of the Miriam House is its lack of a basement; the house was built as a slab-on-grade structure, which became common practice in postwar residential construction.

Another common feature is the use of simple brick masses for the chimneys. The Miriam House lacks a projecting chimney on the end wall, but this would be consistent with an effort to mimic the general form of the Walker House with a lower budget. Finally, both houses include low brick walls creating a forecourt at the entry.

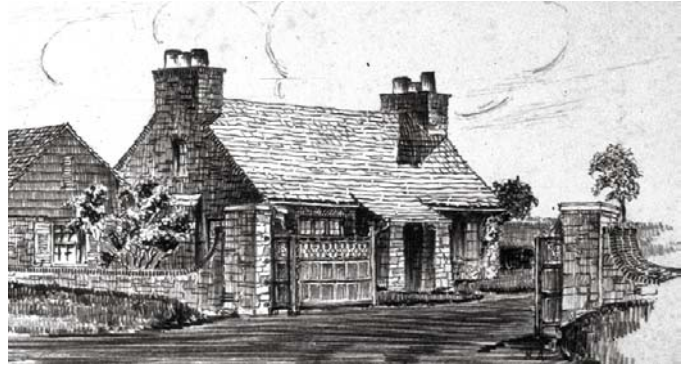
It appears Armstrong undertook quite a number of other projects in the Depression years which were later edited out, lost, or otherwise removed from his office files. There are numerous drawings for residences from the 1930s varying in style from traditional gable homes to abstract modernist experiments.

The primary evidence of an intentional culling of work from the office files is a comparison of the “original” project numbers and the project numbers indicated in the Armstrong Archives. The missing projects may not have proceeded into design and/or construction, but they may have been removed intentionally.

A year after the Miriam house, Armstrong built the Schnaare Residence, “Orchard House,” at 6 Lindworth Place in Ladue, about which an extensive article including floor plans and perspective rendering was published. The text made very clear that Armstrong had designed this home as a “Missouri-type” construction. Similarly, Armstrong promoted the Williamsburg Colonial residence for William De Loss Love of 1939, and the surviving materials include professional photographs, articles, and publications. These homes will be the subject for a subsequent article.

The house on Miriam also reminds me of three traditional brick structures located at 9024, 9026, and 9076 Manchester Road. I’ve suspected them of being Armstrong designs but have no definitive evidence beyond some external similarities in design and detail to other Armstrong designs of the 1930s, the use of reclaimed brick,

and the fact he designed a number of commercial buildings in the area.



*Sketch by Harris Armstrong, 1926, of an unidentified house.*

A surviving sketch by Armstrong dated 1926 suggests other influences and additional context. This unidentified design appears to be a rendering of the gatehouse of the large estate at 2601 South Warson Road built around 1925 by New York architect Harrie T. Lindeberg for financier Harry F. Knight. Louise Armstrong, driving down Warson with me some years ago, was adamant that the owners of this house had wanted Armstrong to design it, but that he had refused because they wanted to build in a traditional manner.

The sketch suggests he might have been retained to prepare this perspective rendering, played some role in its design, or simply recorded the built structure for his professional development.

Although the evidence of Armstrong’s involvement in 423 Miriam Avenue is based primarily on comments handed down by previous the owners, I have no substantive reason to dispute this attribution. On the contrary, the construction offers tantalizing suggestions of his possible participation.



*Photograph of 2601 South Warson Road, 2009 (by author).*



**Exhibition: "Architects and Architecture of Carondelet"**

Friday, May 1 through Tuesday, September 1  
Carondelet Historical Society  
6303 Michigan Avenue, St. Louis 63111

The Carondelet Historical Society is located in the historic Des Peres School, site of Susan Blow's first public school kindergarten. The museum includes permanent exhibits on the kindergarten, Carondelet history, and Cleveland High School. Museum hours for the exhibit: Tues, Wed, & Fri 9:30 to 3; Sat 10:30 to 3. Admission: Adults \$2, children free

**Exhibition: "Mississippi Valley Architecture"**

Wednesday, May 13 through Friday, July 31  
Carolyn Hewes Toft Gallery, Landmarks Association  
911 Washington Avenue, Suite 170

This photographic exhibit, designed by the architecture firm Kromm, Rikimaru and Johansen, showcases their study of vernacular architecture in the Mississippi Valley and the region around Mineral Area College, located in Park Hills, Missouri, about sixty miles south of St. Louis near Fredericktown. The college sponsored the project, which was funded by the Missouri Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The study found a greater wealth of forms and trends than expected, drawing beauty from materials and construction methods. Landmarks Association and the Toft Gallery are open Monday through Friday, 9 to 5.

**Architectural Field Trip to Connecticut and New York: Classic Modern Houses**

Tuesday-Friday, August 11-14

The Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park is offering a trip August 11-14 to see the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibit at the Guggenheim in New York, to visit Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, CT, to tour with architect and author, William Earls, houses designed by the *Harvard Five* which include Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, Philip Johnson, Landis Gores, and John Johansen in and around New Canaan, to visit other noteworthy houses and exhibits and to have a private tour at Storm King Art Center, the renowned sculpture park in the Hudson Valley. The group will stay at the Roger Sherman Inn in New Canaan. For a complete itinerary and registration form, please contact FLWHEP Administrative Director, Laura Meyer at [LLM9450@aol.com](mailto:LLM9450@aol.com). The tour will be led by expert tour guide, Karen Bergenthal of East Town Travel.

**Annual Meeting, St. Louis Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians**

Saturday, June 20, 10 to 11:30 a.m.  
Central Library, St. Louis Public Library  
1301 Olive Street, Meeting Room I, Third Floor

After our brief business meeting, we'll adjourn to the Art Room, where Fine Arts Librarian Suzy Frechette will show us the Steedman Room and some of the exciting new additions to the Steedman Architectural Book Collection. Stick around afterward for lunch with other chapter members at a nearby restaurant.

**Exhibition: "A Reflection of National History: Photos of Berlin Architecture by Amy Metzger"**

Friday, June 12 through Saturday, September 12  
Bernoudy Gallery of Architecture, Sheldon Galleries  
3648 Washington Avenue

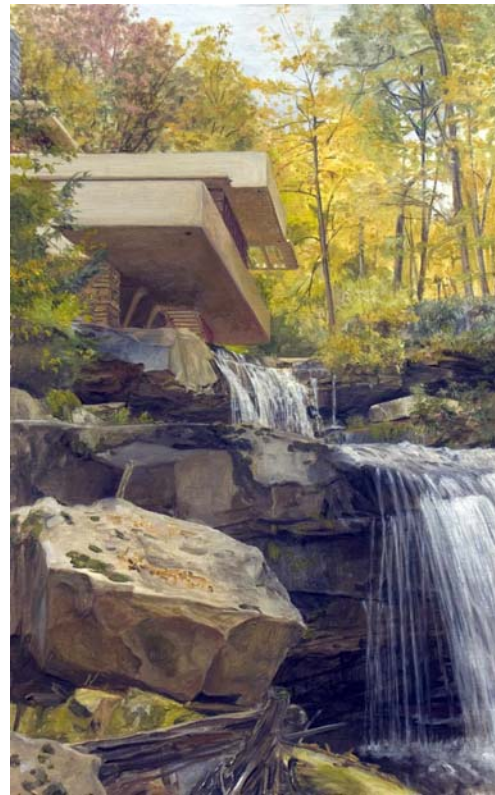
Photographer Amy Metzger explores the visible traces of 20<sup>th</sup>-century German history in the city's architectural landscape in photographs of some of Berlin's most important buildings. The buildings Metzger has photographed act as witnesses to history and reveal the vision and ideals of the political systems under which they were built. Accompanying the photographs are texts that describe the historical and architectural significance of each building. The Sheldon Galleries are open Tues, Noon to 8; Wed, Thurs, and Fri, Noon to 5; Sat, 10 to 2 and one hour prior to Sheldon performances and during intermission. Admission is free.



*Amy Metzger, New National Gallery, 2007, inkjet print from black and white negative, courtesy of the artist, from the exhibit at the Sheldon Galleries. The Anhalt Train Station in Berlin was designed by Franz Heinrich Schwechten (1841-1924) and opened 1880. Damaged by air raids in 1943 and 1945, it was finally demolished in 1961. This shows the inside elevation of the surviving façade fragment.*

**Exhibition: Fallingwater en Perspectiva:  
Félix de la Concha Paints  
Frank Lloyd Wright's House on the Waterfall**  
Sunday, May 31 through Sunday, August 9  
Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park  
120 North Ballas Road, Kirkwood

Spanish-born painter Félix de la Concha (born 1962) was invited to live and work on site at Fallingwater for a residency in 2005 and 2006. His paintings of interior and exterviews capture Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece in different seasons, times of day, and lighting conditions. Eleven of his paintings will be on display in the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park and can be seen by taking a docent-led tour of the house by appointment only: phone 314-822-8359. Fee: \$10 adults, \$5 children 12 and under, members free.



"View of the Second Fall," one of the paintings by Félix de la Concha to be seen at the Frank Lloyd Wright House this summer.

# News Letter

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Historians. St. Louis and Missouri  
Valley Chapters.

**NewsLetter** is published quarterly by the St. Louis and Missouri Chapters  
of Architectural Historians.

Please mail editorial correspondence and submissions for publication to:  
Esley Hamilton, Editor, 7346 Balson Avenue, University City, Missouri  
63130 or contact him by telephone: (314) 615-0357 or by email  
ehamilton@stlouisco.com. Deadlines for submission of material for  
publication in **NewsLetter** are as follows:

Spring issue	15 February
Summer issue	15 May
Fall issue	15 August
Winter Issue	15 November

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