

MOVERS
AND SHAKERS
SCALAWAGS
AND SUFFRAGETTES



TALES FROM
BELLEFONTAINE
CEMETERY

CAROL FERRING SHEPLEY

FOREWORD



AT ONE TIME, THE DEAD were routinely buried in churchyards or unadorned vacant lots set aside for that purpose. When what passed for progress encroached upon the graves, the remains were moved to the next convenient location, or occasionally merely ignored and plowed under. In the early nineteenth century a movement toward more structured burial grounds developed. Cities of the dead, they were called, a rural setting of winding paths, peaceful landscapes, and handsome sculptures that honored both the dead and those they had left behind.

Bellefontaine Cemetery, established in 1849 and dedicated the next year, was an early example of the new kind of graveyard, one meant to be a permanent monument to those who had come and gone before us. In the growing metropolis of St. Louis, the older burial grounds were crowded and deemed unhealthy as well as obstacles to further growth of the city. A group of prominent St. Louisans—"movers and shakers," in common parlance—organized the purchase of a tract of land up on the Bellefontaine Road to be used specifically for a burial park. They hired a landscape architect who immediately developed plans for picturesque pathways and scenic vistas and even reflecting ponds for St. Louis's first garden of the dead. The very year that the work began was the year of a disastrous cholera epidemic that killed more than 10 percent of St. Louis's population. The 4,500 burials would have choked the city's lots while Bellefontaine, far north of the city, would offer a safe and peaceful haven.

Cemeteries became memory places, gardens of remembrance, a tangible reminder of continuity, and affirmation that we are not the first to inhabit this place and will not be the last. A cemetery not far from the small iron mining town where I grew up in Michigan's Upper Peninsula was a backdrop of my youth, a place where I could hear stories of my

father's people, where I could feel a connection with those people, most of whom I had never met. I found nothing forlorn or spectral in my visits, not even after my grandmother, whom I loved and knew well, was buried there. I viewed these trips with delighted anticipation because what occurred between the marble stones was a running dialogue, full of marvelous anecdotes and lessons for me to grow on. Here, I realized that I was not alone in the present but that I was connected to the past and to the future. It was in that place that I learned who my people were and learned about myself. Here, I first discovered the ties that extended from me back in time, and here I could imagine that they would also extend beyond my own lifetime into a future inhabited by others.

These are the lessons we can take from cemeteries. They are not places of morbid fascination or the grim lairs of ghouls and ghosts. True, we mourn for the loss of the loved ones we have buried here, but our visits also ensure that their memory remains strong within us and carried on to our children.

Bellefontaine Cemetery is one of the showpieces of St. Louis. As a storied place it has no superior, for here you will come upon some of people who made St. Louis. Some of them, as Carol Ferring Shepley tells us, were well-known movers and shakers, scalawags and suffragettes. Others had names you may not quickly recognize but whose stories will intrigue you. All of them you will surely enjoy.

—Robert R. Archibald, Ph.D.

President, Missouri History Museum

INTRODUCTION



WHEN BELLEFONTAINE CEMETERY was founded in 1849 by a group of St. Louis's leading citizens, railroads were for the most part a progressive dream, and the Mississippi River had not yet been spanned by the majestic arches of the Eads Bridge. Thanks to the confluence of the two great rivers and the energy of its citizenry, St. Louis stood in the first rank of American cities. Until the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, all trade with the western United States had to pass through the city. A city as significant as St. Louis demanded a necropolis of suitable magnificence where the city's leading lights could be laid to their eternal rest.

Thus, Bellefontaine became the fourteenth of the great rural cemeteries of the United States, the first west of the Mississippi. Before the nineteenth century, burials took place in churchyards or on family land. As cities became increasingly congested, so did church graveyards—graves were commonly dug two or three deep. Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, founded in 1804, was the first of the new cemeteries to be built in beautiful park-like settings outside of city centers in response to this overcrowding. Rural cemeteries allowed families to honor and visit their dead in an appropriate setting. In the nineteenth century, people were more mindful of their dead because of the high incidence of infant mortality and because average life expectancy did not much exceed forty. Yet the cemetery was placed at a distance from the city center because it was believed that effluvia from corpses was unhealthy.

Almerin Hotchkiss from Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York, was hired by James Yeatman, one of the cemetery founders, to lay out the winding roads and wooded vistas that grace Bellefontaine. Much of the beauty of the site can be attributed to Hotchkiss's careful planning and diligent supervision during the forty-six years he served as superintendent of the cemetery.

Bellefontaine became the final resting place not only for the city's leading citizens, but also for many, such as William Clark, who had died before its establishment and were reinterred among its hills. Thus, a history of Bellefontaine Cemetery becomes a history of St. Louis; the people buried there took the city, the region, and even the country forward.

St. Louis has always capitalized on its location in the center of the United States. The position of its port on the major U.S. waterway led explorers and fur traders who opened up the West to settle there. During the era when steamboats were the most efficient means of conveying goods and people, St. Louisans naturally took to the river. As railroads grew in importance, railroad men found the Gateway to the West the place to settle. Following in the footsteps of these earlier pioneers in transportation, St. Louisans also became leaders in the field of aviation.

The Civil War sent many men to make their peace forever in Bellefontaine. Because of Missouri's status as a border state, some of the cemetery's generals wore blue, others gray. Throughout the cemetery's history, politicians, mayors, senators, and congressmen came to be interred there. They lie among suffragettes who fought for the right to vote them into office. The fields of finance, business, manufacturing, education, and law all produced figures of renown who are buried in Bellefontaine. The arts are also well represented with artists, architects, and authors.

Not all of Bellefontaine's tombstones tell tales of lofty deeds. The cemetery has its share of criminals, scalawags, and notorious women. Murderers, con men, madams, and adulteresses also have stories to tell.

Within the 87,000 graves of Bellefontaine Cemetery are buried men and women who made this country great. Although the selection is by no means complete, this book proposes to tell the stories of the most interesting and noteworthy individuals who lie there. By learning their stories and visiting their graves, we honor their deeds and keep their memories alive. These people shaped our city. As we come to an understanding of their past, we let them into our lives and welcome their influence upon us.

The cemetery is blessed with employees who have made its study their avocation. I have been fortunate to have spent countless hours with superintendent Mike Tiemann and gatekeeper Manuel Garcia, listening and learning from their stories. Both opened their extensive files to me. Together, for three years of Sundays, we explored these sacred spaces and

roamed these hallowed hills. Mike Tiemann worked at Bellefontaine for thirty-six years, starting as a boy during school summers and spending the last eleven as superintendent. He retired in 2006. In 1970, Manuel Garcia first visited Bellefontaine in search of the graves of Sara Teasdale and William Clark and lingered long in his pursuit of St. Louis history. In retirement, he returned eleven years ago to serve the gatehouse and share his knowledge with the families who visited. When he passed away in 2006, he also came to rest on a hillside in Bellefontaine close to the characters who fascinated him in life. Tiemann and Garcia's rich remembrances and their files dedicated to the individuals buried here have inspired this history.

MOVERS
AND
SHARERS

PART ONE



MOVERS AND SHAKERS



THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS of St. Louis who are buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery affected not only the city but also the region and the country as a whole. Their stories tell the tales of St. Louis, the settling of the West, the conflicted loyalties of the Civil War, and the struggle for women's suffrage, among others. Most of these people were not born in the city but came to the shores of the Mississippi in search of a better life. They heard St. Louis offered them opportunities to make their mark upon the world, and they used their enormous talents to give shape to a city still raw and unformed. Missouri History Museum president Robert R. Archibald said,

First settled by Pierre Laclede as a base for trading for furs, St. Louis was founded for commercial reasons, unlike some East Coast or even western cities that were founded for political or religious reasons. This set a tone and character for the city. Because of the tone initially set, St. Louis became a magnet that attracted some of the most entrepreneurial and successful capitalists in the Western Hemisphere, beginning with Laclede himself.¹

William Greenleaf Eliot, who came to St. Louis in 1834 as a Unitarian minister and later founded Washington University in St. Louis, saw dangers in founding a city so focused on "commercial reasons" and considered it his mission to offer an alternative. Many of St. Louis's leaders sought "religion and learning and morality and education" in their later lives, after they had spent their young years earning money.² First and foremost of the movers and shakers is William Clark, who, along with Meriwether Lewis, used the city as the port of exit for his explorations of the West and would stay to govern and set policies for the treatment of Native Americans.

Integral to commerce was geography, which made St. Louis what it is, with both its position near the joining of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and its location in the center of the nation. The Mississippi River ferried the first settlers up from New Orleans. Before the era of the railroads, rivers provided the swiftest means of conveying people and goods over vast distances. Later, as other modes of transportation surpassed river traffic, St. Louis's central location proved advantageous to

such entrepreneurs as brewer Adolphus Busch and aviation pioneer James S. McDonnell Jr. Even though the St. Louis of 2008 almost turns its back on the river, the city never would have existed without the Mississippi. For bridge builder James Buchanan Eads, the Mississippi River was “the stream which . . . holds in its watery embrace the destinies of the American people.”³

Hearing stories of St. Louis, the mecca of the West, settlers came there on foot or by the inland waterways and then used the Missouri River as a conduit to take them farther west. In the city itself, fur traders and explorers bought their supplies, guns, and maps, and they heard tales of the perils ahead of them. Later, businessmen such as Robert S. Brookings bought manufactured goods there to sell throughout the western part of the country. Because so much of the city’s trade was oriented to the West, St. Louis became the last eastern city, a combination of both the last of the old ways and the jumping off place for the new.

St. Louis combines cultural elements of the four regions of the country (North, South, East, and West), as well as many nationalities, principally French, German, English, and Scotch Irish. Unlike the other groups, the Germans came seeking political freedom, fleeing from their disappointment in the failed revolutions of 1848.

Because of its industry, wealth, and strategic location, and because it was such a microcosm of the split between Northern and Southern loyalties during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln attached great significance to St. Louis. Banker-philanthropist James Yeatman served on a commission advising the president as to the situation in the city. Important generals from St. Louis served both sides of the conflict. General Sterling Price led the Confederate troops on the field of battle, while General John Pope fought for the Union, exemplifying the claim of the 1994 book *The Civil War in St. Louis* that “it would almost be possible to retell the history of the Civil War in Missouri simply by moving from gravesite to gravesite within [the] Cemetery.”⁴

St. Louis produced men who led the nation in industry, medical research, journalism, and finance. Industrialists, such as Edgar Queeny of Monsanto Chemical Works and Edward Mallinckrodt of Mallinckrodt Chemical Works, used their fortunes to improve their city. Others, like William K. Bixby and Robert Brookings, retired relatively young from the

world of commerce to devote themselves entirely to philanthropy. With the Washington University Medical School and notable researchers such as Nobel Prize winners Gerty and Carl Cori, St. Louis became a great medical center. When St. Louis was still just a small town of one thousand souls, the city's first newspaper was published, setting the tone for an emphasis on journalism. Many of the city's successful businessmen eventually became bankers and were thus able to finance other people's dreams. St. Louisan William McChesney Martin Jr. led the Federal Reserve System for nineteen years, setting monetary policy for the entire country.

Many of St. Louis's movers and shakers exhibited a similar pattern in their lives. Coming from relatively humble origins, they were adventurous and did not take the easy way in life. Believing in themselves, they persisted despite failures. The best—men like Eads, Brookings, and Yeatman—believed the purpose of their labors was not to enrich themselves, but to improve the lot of humankind.

As for the women, their stories followed a different path. They were first wives and mothers. With their families established, women such as Virginia Minor and Edna Fischel Gellhorn set out to achieve their mission in life, securing the vote for women and fostering better social welfare for all. Unmarried and without children, Eliza Haycraft became one of the town's wealthiest businesspeople. Widowed and with her children grown, Irma Rombauer wrote the country's best-selling cookbook.

To read the stories of the city's movers and shakers is to understand the lifeblood of St. Louis. They took the region forward and made the country great. They were critical to American democracy.

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1. Robert R. Archibald (president, Missouri History Museum), interview with the author, March 26, 2008.
 2. Charlotte Eliot, *William Greenleaf Eliot* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), 35.
 3. Howard S. Miller, *The Eads Bridge* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1999), 69.
 4. William C. Winter, *The Civil War in St. Louis* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1994), 110.



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