

## FOR THE RECORDS

### Inventive Ancestors: Searching for Patents

Genealogists fill out charts with names, dates, and places. But how do we put some more “meat on the bones” of those trees? One way is by researching whether or not you have an “inventive ancestor!”

#### What is a patent?

A patent for an invention is a type of intellectual property that grants a right to the inventor. The right conferred by the patent grant is, according to the law, “the right to exclude others from making, using, offering for sale, or selling the invention in the United States or importing the invention into the United States.” A patent can be granted for a new invention or an improvement.

#### History of patents

There is some evidence that a form of early patent rights existed in ancient Greece for culinary dishes. In early England, grants in the form of “letters patent” were issued by the sovereign to inventors. The earliest evidence is a 1331 grant to John Kempe for improvements in weaving cloth. The earliest surviving Italian patent was from the Republic of Venice in 1416, for a device for turning wool into felt. A few years later, in 1421, The Republic of Florence granted a patent to Filippo Brunelleschi for a barge-hoisting invention.

In the United States, the Patent Act of the U.S. Congress was passed on April 10, 1790. It was titled, “An Act to promote the progress of useful Arts.” The first patent was granted on July 31, 1790 to Samuel Hopkins of Vermont for a method of producing potash to be used in fertilizer. The early law required that a working model of each invention be submitted, although this was eventually dropped in favor of a sketch. Granting standards, documentation, and patent length have all changed over time.

The number of patents has increased exponentially over the years, and as of today, the United States Trademark and Patent Office has issued over 10 million. Notable patents include the cotton gin in 1794 (Eli Whitney, #X72), lightbulb



Figure 1: The United States Patent and Trademark Office seal.

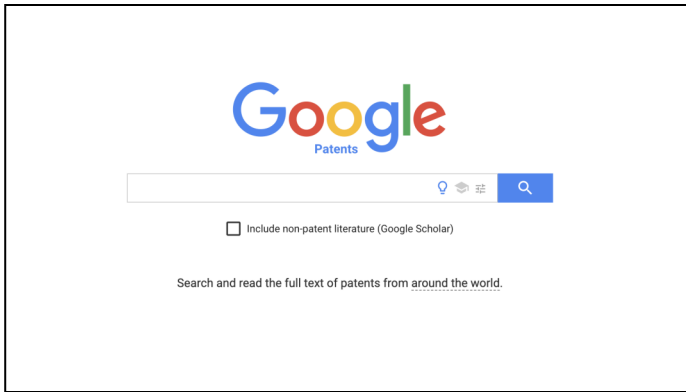


Figure 2: The Google Patents search page.

in 1880 (Thomas Edison, #223,898), flying machine in 1906 (Orville & Wilbur Wright, #821,393), personal computer in 1979 (Steve Wozniak, #4,136,359), and Bluetooth in 2003 (Jaap Haartson, #6,590,928). Mary Dixon Kies was the first woman to apply for and receive a U.S. patent in her own name. Her patent, issued May 5, 1809, was for a process for weaving straw with silk that was used in the hat-making industry. Most historians agree that Thomas L. Jennings was the first African American patent holder in the United States. He invented a dry cleaning method for clothes in 1821.

Unfortunately, the first approximately 10,000 patents, issued from 1790 to 1836, burned in a fire in the Washington D.C. building where they were being temporarily stored. About 2800 pre-1836 patents have been recovered, and these have an “X” added to the number. These first patents are called “X-Patents.”

**Where to find patents**

Along with just about everything else these days, if you are looking for a patent, you can just “Google it!” at [patents.google.com](https://patents.google.com). (Figure 2) Google Patents is the quickest and easiest way to search for ancestor’s patent. The database became active in 2006, and includes patents from the United States and several other countries. A search can be performed by name, and downloadable PDF documents include sketches and detailed descriptions. There is also an advanced search function at [patents.google.com/advanced](https://patents.google.com/advanced), where filters such as dates and invention types can be added.

**Examples**

Some members of the History & Genealogy staff have researched their own ancestors’ patents. Here are a few of their inventions, as examples of what may be discovered:

**Foscolo Hendrick**

Foscolo Hendrick, born in Connecticut in 1871, had a patent for the “Roller Towel Cabinet” granted in 1913. (Figure 3) His description is as follows: “My invention relates to improvements in towel holders and more particularly to that class of towel holders embodying a supply roller carrying a roll of toweling from which a clean supply of toweling may be drawn as required, and a take-up roller operative to take up the soiled toweling at substantially the same ratio as that at which the clean toweling is drawn from the supply roller; both of said rollers

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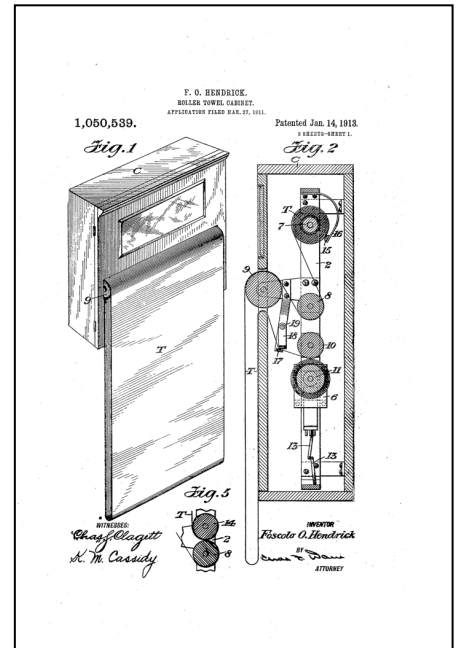


Figure 3: Sketches of the Roller Towel Cabinet patented by Foscolo Hendrick.

being mounted in a suitable holder or cabinet and the towel between them hanging from the holder or cabinet.”

**Erle Martin**

Erle Martin, born in Tennessee in 1907, along with his colleagues at the United Aircraft Corporation, had over seventy patents for inventions that improved airplane propellers. The description for one them, the “Multiposition Controllable Pitch Propeller,” from 1936, states: “This invention relates to improvements in multiposition controllable pitch propellers and more particularly to propellers which may be controlled either by hand or a governor through a predetermined working range, and may also be adjusted so that its blades are in a feathering position. Another object is the provision of a propeller mechanism in which the blades are normally curved in the direction of the action of centrifugal force, but may be turned in the opposite direction by means of hydraulic pressure at a time when no centrifugal force is available. Other objects and advantages will be more particularly pointed out hereinafter, or will become apparent in the description hereinafter. In the accompanying drawings there is illustrated a suitable mechanical embodiment for the purpose of describing the invention. The drawings, however, are not to be taken as limiting the invention, the scope of which is to be measured entirely by the scope of the appended claims. In the drawings, Fig. 1 is a sectional view of a three-bladed propeller taken along the center line of the propeller shaft and one of the propeller blades. Fig. 2 is a section taken along the line 2-2 of Fig. 1, showing the principle of operation. Figs. 3 and 4 are sections taken along the lines 3-3 and 4-4 of Fig. 1, showing details of the positive stop mechanism. Fig. 5 is a detail of the rotary cylindrical cam. Fig. 6 is a section taken along the line 6-6 of Fig. 1, showing the spring connection between the blade and its operating gear. Fig. 7 shows a modification of the propeller shaft structure to permit breathing through the propeller shaft. Fig. 8 is a schematic view of the propeller and its control device. Referring to the drawings in detail, the mechanism includes the propeller shaft on which is mounted a spider 12 carrying blades 14, which blades are preferably of metal and are held in position by the hub barrel 16. Any metal suitable for a propeller blade will, as is well known, have a high modulus of elasticity compared with the modulus of non-metallic materials. This blade modulus is generally desirable to the blade mounting shown in Patent No. 2,022,252 of Frank W. Caldwell to which reference is made for a more complete description. The description herein will be confined, therefore, to features which differ from that disclosure. The hub barrel 16 carries at its forward portion a housing 18 which houses the hydraulic pitch changing mechanism. This pitch changing mechanism comprises a motor 19, a piston 20 formed of concentric sleeves 21 and 22 joined at their forward ends by web 24. This piston 20 carries pins 23 on which are mounted a series of ball bearings 24 and 25. The ball bearings 24 are in contact with a stationary cylindrical cam 26, and the ball bearing 25 coact with a movable cylindrical cam 27. The cam 27 will cause rotary movement of that piston and also increased rotary movement of the motor cam 19. Motion of the cam 26 is transmitted by means of gear teeth 28 to the blades 14 to thereby change their pitch. Fluid under pressure is led through the hollow shaft 16 to the side of the piston 20, and the propeller blades to change the pitch of said blades in one direction. In the embodiment shown, the pitch is increased in this manner. Under normal operating conditions, the blade pitch is changed in the opposite direction by the action of centrifugal force. The above described principle of pitch changing is disclosed generally in Patent No. 1,992,412 of Frank W. Caldwell, to which reference is made for more detailed description. It is shown, however, that by a suitable arrangement of parts the principle of operation disclosed in Patent No. 2,022,252 and 2,232,252 of Frank W. Caldwell could be utilized. The fluid, which may be either lubricating oil or any other suitable fluid, is led through a passage 29 of shaft 16, and passages 30 of pin 23, and through holes 40 into one side of the piston 20. The fluid, after passing through the holes 40,

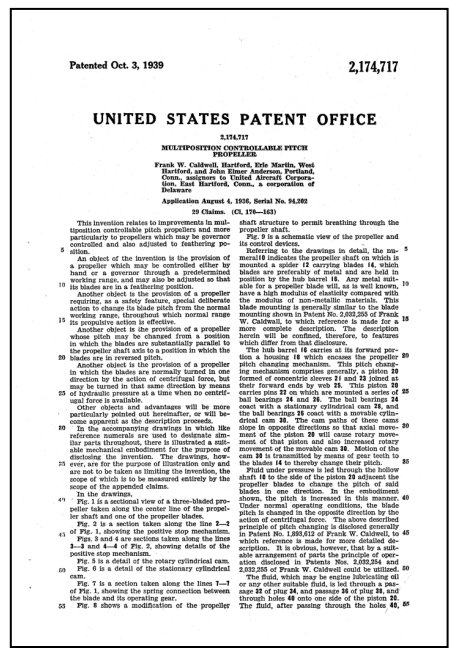


Figure 4: The description for the Multiposition Controllable Pitch Propeller patented in 1936.

**Arthur Wurdack**

Arthur Wurdack, born in 1864 in New York, held multiple patents. One was for a “Chain” in 1926. (Figure 5) He states that: “The object of my invention is to provide a simple economical chair having a yielding back, to provide a chair which may be easily assembled and disassembled for shipping or storing, and to provide a chair which may be used outdoors as well as indoors without deterioration due to the weather.”

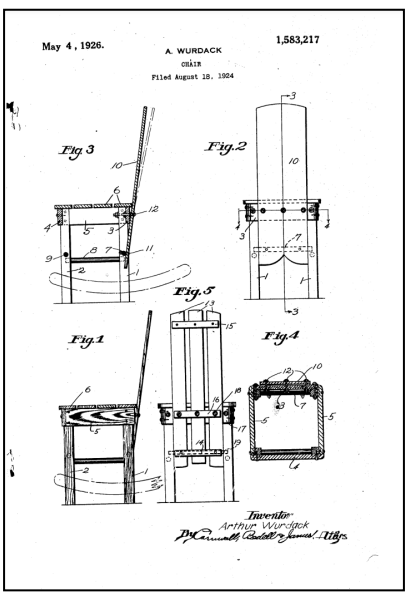


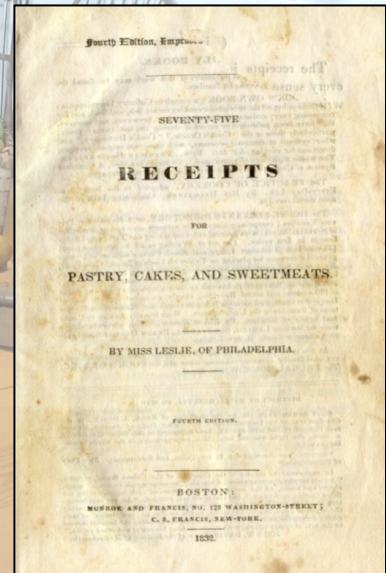
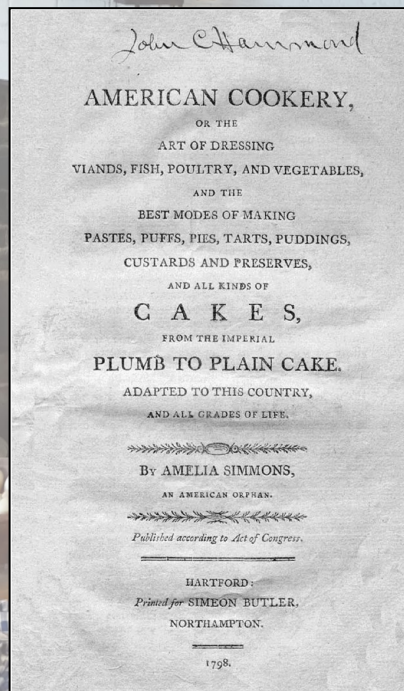
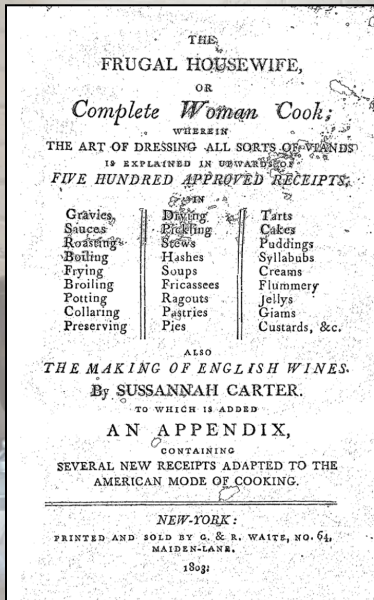
Figure 5: Arthur Wurdack's Chair sketches.



SPOTLIGHT ON

HISTORIC COOKBOOKS

Interested in cooking the recipes your ancestors did? The St. Louis County Library has historic cookbooks! The A to Z Food America database has over 90 at your fingertips. Access these cookbooks with your library card at [www.slcl.org/databases/atoz](http://www.slcl.org/databases/atoz).





# H&G Classes & Programs

The following History & Genealogy classes and programs are offered for June 2023.

## Beginning Genealogy Research

Monday, June 12, 6:30 pm, Virtual

If you have little or no research experience, this is the class for you. Learn about the genealogical research process, the many resources available through History and Genealogy at the St. Louis County Library, and how to get started. Adults. Registration required. Participants will receive Zoom information via email immediately after registering.

## Beginning Genealogy for African American Researchers

Thursday, June 29, 6:00 pm, Lewis & Clark

Do you want to research your African American family but don't know where to start? This class will teach you the basics of genealogical research including resources available in History & Genealogy at the St. Louis County Library. Adults. Registration required.

Register at [slcl.org/events](https://slcl.org/events).

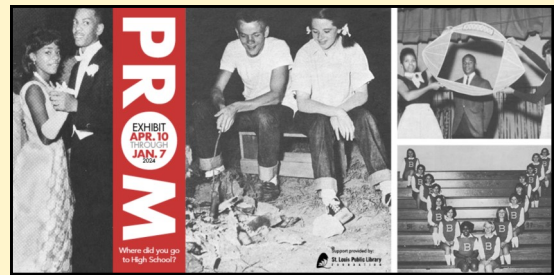
Recordings of our most popular classes can be found at [slcl.org/genealogy/virtual-classroom](https://slcl.org/genealogy/virtual-classroom).

## PROM MAGAZINE

The St. Louis Public Library has digitized Prom magazine! Prom was a monthly magazine published for high school students in the greater St. Louis area from 1947 to 1973.

SLPL is also hosting an exhibit, "Where did you go to High School?" from 4/10/23–1/7/24. For more information, visit [slpl.org/news/prom-magazine-where-did-you-go-to-high-school/](https://slpl.org/news/prom-magazine-where-did-you-go-to-high-school/).

Access Prom magazine here: [slpl.org/resources/genealogy/](https://slpl.org/resources/genealogy/).



## FEATURED HIST PROGRAM

Check out this unique SLCL offering:

### Doughnuts: A Delicious History

June 27, 7:00 pm, Daniel Boone Branch

From ancient Greeks to modern times, learn how this sweet treat travelled the high seas before becoming an American staple. Participants will learn about its wartime significance, industrial production, local St. Louis doughnut shops, and library resources for further exploration. Samples from a local shop will be provided. Registration required. Meeting Room 1.

Register at [slcl.org/events](https://slcl.org/events).

## History & Genealogy services

The following H&G services are free and available to researchers who are unable to visit the library.

### Lookup service

H&G can provide photocopies, prints, or digital scans of many library materials from indexed sources or when given a specific citation:

- Up to 30 pages from one book or one article from a journal issue. Staff can also photocopy or scan tables of contents and index pages.
- Microfilmed records—A list of microfilm available in the H&G collection can be viewed [online](#).
- Print outs from database records if patrons cannot access the database at home.
- Please use the [online lookup request form](#) to submit requests.

\*Some items may be temporarily unavailable due to construction

### Print collection

More than 27,000 books in the collection can be checked out. The entire collection is included in the library's [online catalog](#). Books with call numbers that do not begin with "R" are available to check out. Patrons can request books online or by calling 314-994-3300.

\*Some items may be temporarily unavailable due to construction

### Research guidance

H&G staff members can provide research assistance by phone.

### Book-a-Genealogist

Researchers encountering brick-walls or who would like assistance in developing a plan to achieve specific research goals can schedule a consultation with an H&G staff member. Requests can be made using the online [Book-a-Genealogist form](#).

### Database access

Many library [databases](#) can be used at home by St. Louis County Library card holders living in the metropolitan area. For more information, please contact the History & Genealogy Department at 314-994-3300 or [genealogy@slcl.org](mailto:genealogy@slcl.org).

## STLGS Events

The St. Louis Genealogical Society presents the following events:

### Monthly Meeting: Using the St. Charles County Historical Society Website as Your Gateway to St. Charles County History

June 10, 10:00 am, Hybrid, Thornhill

Did you know that St. Charles was Missouri's first capital city? That Daniel Boone and Lewis and Clark have ties to the city? Greg Hilton will show how using the St. Charles County Historical Society's website can point you to some amazing original records.

### German SIG Meeting: Who Was John Gergen? Reconstructing the Life of a German-Hungarian Immigrant

June 21, 7:00 pm, Hybrid, Oak Bend

John Gergen, a German born in Hungary, died in St. Louis in 1935, having lived a working class life. Dr. Moore wrote a book on this boy after finding his schoolwork, and in detailing John's life, he discovered a rich social history of the south St. Louis neighborhoods in which John lived.

See [stlgs.org](http://stlgs.org) for more information.

The St. Louis Genealogical Society (StLGS) is a not-for-profit, all volunteer organization with members in almost every state and several foreign countries. Begun in 1968, it is now the largest local genealogical society in the United States, renowned for its excellence in programming, resources, classes, and membership services.

## GERMAN CONFERENCE



**INTERNATIONAL GERMAN**  
Genealogy Partnership

Have German ancestors? Check out the International German Genealogy Partnership's 2023 Conference.

June 9-11  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

In-person & Virtual  
Over 100 presentations!

See [iggp.org](http://iggp.org) for more information.

**PastPorts** is published by History & Genealogy at the St. Louis County Library

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

### Contact us:

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[slcl.org/genealogy](http://slcl.org/genealogy)

## HOLIDAY CLOSURE

All SLCL locations will be closed on Monday, June 19, in celebration of Juneteenth.

## FAMILYSEARCH CLASSES

Did you know that FamilySearch offers free classes and webinars?

Live presentations are available, as well as recorded versions. Topics range from beginning genealogy to how to research specific groups and places.

Upcoming June topics include the U.S. Census, Swedish genealogy, Chinese genealogy, and U.S. Land Records.

See all of the offerings at [www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/FamilySearch\\_Library\\_Classes\\_and\\_Webinars](http://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/FamilySearch_Library_Classes_and_Webinars).

St. Louis County Library is a FamilySearch Affiliate Library.





## TRANSPORT MUSEUM

### THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TRANSPORTATION

Want to know how your ancestors got around?

Visit the National Museum of Transportation! The museum is conveniently located on Barrett Station Rd. in west St. Louis County.

“The Museum’s rail and transit collections have grown to encompass more than 190 major exhibits. Our collection is recognized as the largest collection of transportation vehicles in the world. Please bring a camera or cell phone to snap photos. Your cell will also come in handy to open QR codes that explain artifact histories and tell their stories.”- NMOT website

See [nmot.org](http://nmot.org) for more information.

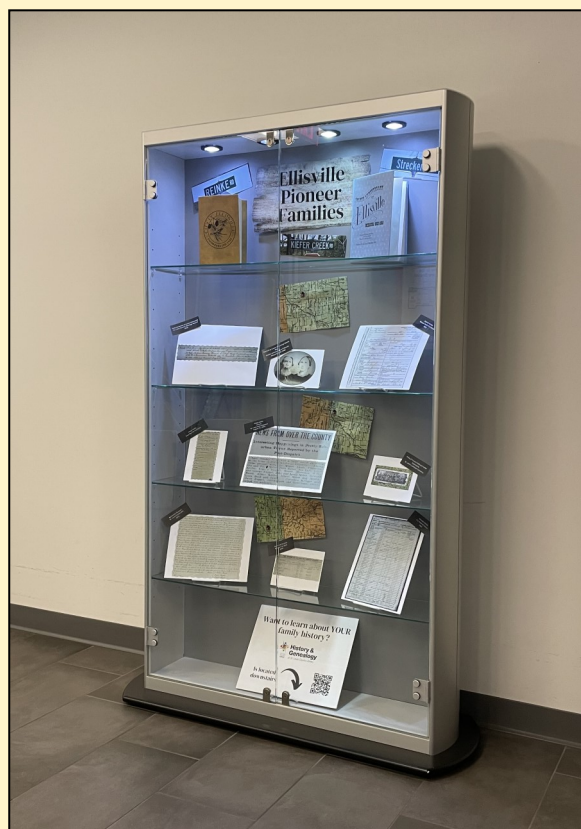


## ELLISVILLE DISPLAY

History & Genealogy has been welcomed with open arms by our temporary branch, Daniel Boone. To repay the favor, we thought we would help decorate! H&G commandeered the display case in May, and we highlighted “Ellisville Pioneer Families.” We displayed records from three early families: Reinke, Kiefer, and Strecker, all of whom have roads named after them. If you have ancestors in the Ellisville/Ballwin/Wildwood area, come take a look at the books we featured:

*Ellisville, Missouri 1932-1982* (R 977.865 D235G)

*City of Ellisville, Incorporated 1932* (R 977.865 C581)



# NEWBook

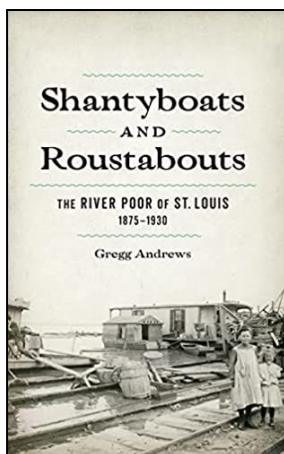
GREGG ANDREWS

## Shantyboats and Roustabouts: The River Poor of St. Louis, 1875-1930

LSU Press

R 977.866 A566S & 977.866 A566S

Shantyboat dwellers and steamboat roustabouts formed an organic part of the cultural landscape of the Mississippi River bottoms during the rise of industrial America and the twilight of steamboat packets from 1875 to 1930. Nevertheless, both groups remain understudied by scholars of the era. Most of what we know about these laborers on the river comes not from the work of historians but from travel accounts, novelists, songwriters, and early film producers. As a result, images of these men and women are laden with nostalgia and minstrelsy. Gregg Andrews's *Shantyboats and Roustabouts* uses the waterfront squatter settlements and Black entertainment district near the levee in St. Louis as a window into the world of the river poor in the Mississippi Valley, exploring their daily struggles and experiences and vividly describing people heretofore obscured by classist and racist caricatures. - Publisher



## NEW ANCESTRY RECORDS

Ancestry Library Edition has added the following new United States record sets to its database:

Atlanta, Georgia, U.S., Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta Sacramental Records, 1840-1980

Illinois, U.S., Catholic Diocese of Joliet, Sacramental Records, 1800-1976

Washington, U.S., Catholic Diocese of Spokane, 1850-1971

U.S., Index to Alien Case Files, 1944-2003

Connecticut, U.S., Excise Tax Lists, 1865-1874

Alaska, U.S., Deed and Tract Books, 1906-1975

Alaska, U.S., Masters and Owners of Vessels Oaths, 1893-1997

New Jersey, U.S., Birth, Marriage and Death Records, 1711-1878

New York, New York, U.S., Tax Photos, 1940

Oregon, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1849-1967

Oregon, U.S., County Divorce Records, 1917-1948

Oregon, U.S., Alien and Japanese American Registration Forms, 1942-1947

Salt Lake County, Utah, U.S., Births, 1890-1911

Salt Lake County, Utah, U.S., Deaths, 1847-1949

South Carolina, U.S., Sheriff Department Records, 1865-1966

Washington, U.S., Military Records, 1855-1950

## DID YOU KNOW?



Forest Park opened on June 24, 1876. The park covers 1,326 acres, and is home to the St. Louis Zoo, the St. Louis Art Museum, and the St. Louis History Museum. St. Louisans Thomas Skinker, Charles P. Chouteau, Julia Maffitt, and William Forsyth sold their land to the city to begin the project. The park was home to the 1904 World's Fair and the 1904 Summer Olympics. Efforts are currently being made to restore prairie and wetland areas of the park.

History & Genealogy was at the St. Louis Scottish Games! We saw bagpipes, clans, wool spinning, sheep herding, tug-of-war, caber tossing, and more. Jamie and Claire Fraser from "Outlander" even made an appearance! We also talked to many people about family history and our St. Louis County Library resources. See you next year!

