

preservation **issues**

NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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St. Louis Jewish Landmarks



Nathan Frank donated the money for the 1925 construction of the Forest Park bandstand saying, "All that I have, all that I have acquired, I owe to St. Louis." Historic photo courtesy Landmarks Association of St. Louis. Photo J.W. Oldfield.

During the latter half of the 19th century, the civic and political leaders of the St. Louis Jewish community possessed a number of common characteristics. They were, for the most part, descendants of German Jews who had migrated in large numbers to the United States as a result of the 1848 Revolution in Europe. Politically, these Jews, like their non-Jewish counterparts, were Republicans. And, finally, although proud of their Jewish heritage, they began to break away from Orthodox Judaism to become Reform, secular Jews.

Two outstanding men, Nathan Frank and Louis P. Aloe, shared not only these attributes, but also two more: they were both elected to prominent civic positions and left behind landmarks honoring their contributions to the city of St. Louis.

Nathan Frank's parents immigrated from Bavaria in 1849, and Nathan was born three years later in Peoria, Ill. The family moved to St. Louis in 1867, and Frank attended city public schools. He graduated at the top of his class from Central High in 1869, and two years later he received a law degree from

Harvard Law School. He returned to St. Louis where he earned a reputation as an expert in commercial and bankruptcy law. His book, *Frank's Bankruptcy Law*, was widely used and went through four editions.

In addition to his law practice, Frank became active in the Republican Party. In 1886, he was the Republican nominee for the U.S. House of Representatives, losing the general election to his Democratic opponent John Glover by fewer than 200 votes. He contested the election, but Congress awarded the seat to Glover. Two years later, Frank again ran for Congress and this time won by more than 2,500 votes, becoming Missouri's first and, to this date, only Jewish member of the U.S. Congress.

During his single term in Congress, Frank gave unswerving support to his party and his president, Benjamin Har-

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rison, but he was also responsive to the needs of his district. He sponsored private pension bills for St. Louis Civil War veterans; obtained federal funds to pave the streets around the U.S. Customs House in St. Louis; helped improve the Missouri River; and helped protect hide dealers in his district by including a ban on duties on hides in the Tariff of 1888. However, although he fought valiantly, he was unsuccessful in bringing the 1892 World's Fair to St. Louis.

After serving one term in the House, Frank retired from Congress in 1890 to devote his time to his law practice.

Twenty years later he tried to fulfill his ambition to serve in the U. S. Senate but was never able to win the Republican nomination despite three attempts.

In addition to politics, Frank's contributions to St. Louis were many and varied. He served as one of seven commissioners for Missouri at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, and he founded the St. Louis Star, a daily which later became the St. Louis Star-Times.

Frank was also one of the city's most active real estate investors. He helped construct many buildings in St. Louis, including the original Metropolitan Life Building, the Star-Times Building, and the Loew's State Theatre.

Prior to the 1904 World's Fair, a ca 1890 bandstand, which stood on an island in Pagoda Lake in Forest Park, was reputed to have been the most photographed object in St. Louis. The bandstand, however, was declared unsafe and was then destroyed by a storm in 1911. In 1924, Nathan Frank offered to donate \$50,000 needed to restore this landmark. The Nathan Frank Band-

stand was dedicated the following year. In making his gift, Frank stated that he wanted to make it possible for everyone to enjoy the outdoor pleasure and cultural education of the music that would be played there.

Nathan Frank died in 1931. The years following his death took their toll on the physical condition of the bandstand. In 1981, 50 years after Frank's death, the Central West End Charitable Trust raised \$13,000 to fund priority repairs to the bandstand. In 1987, the not-for-profit Forest Park Forever organization began further renovation, stabilizing the lake and repairing the

bandstand can now be enjoyed by thousands of St. Louisans.

Louis P. Aloe was born in St. Louis on July 27, 1867. His father, Albert, founded A.S. Aloe Company, a manufacturer of surgical instruments, optical equipment and photographic supplies. Louis Aloe left Washington University to enter his father's business, which he developed into the largest of its kind in the United States.

In addition to succeeding in business, Aloe found time to take part in politics. At the age of 24, he became president of the Merchants League Club, an 8,000-member Republican organization. He was a member-at-large of

the Republican State Committee, and from 1891 to 1894 Aloe served on the St. Louis Board of Election Commissioners.

One of the most far-reaching of Aloe's political activities was his prominent role in the drafting of the first St. Louis City Charter, which was written during Aloe's term on the Board of Freeholders between 1912 and 1914. Aloe was credited with creating an eight-hour work day for

city employees and creating the public welfare and the public service departments for St. Louis.

The new charter also created the position of President of the Board of Aldermen, and in 1915 Aloe ran for and won that post. However, before he had an opportunity to implement any of his proposals to improve and reform the city, Aloe became acting mayor due to the illness of Mayor Henry Kiel. World War I had just broken out and, as acting mayor, Aloe turned the city's energies into helping the war effort.



The A.S. Aloe Company, founded by Louis P. Aloe's father Albert, was located at Olive Blvd. at 19th. This building housed what once was the largest distributor of surgical supplies in the United States.

edges of the island and the shore.

During the next four years, Forest Park Forever completely renovated the structure of the bandstand. Iron railings and structural steel beams were replaced, and a fiberglass replica of the original ceiling was added. Trees, shrubbery and flowers on Pagoda Island around the bandstand were planted and today Victorian-style benches can be found on the outer shore. Environmental lighting in the structure and on the island are planned. Nathan Frank would certainly be pleased that his

In 1919, Aloe was re-elected president of the Board of Aldermen, and he began to implement programs for the betterment of St. Louis. Aloe considered his greatest contribution to St. Louis the successful passage of an \$87 million bond issue that incorporated a building plan on a scale never attempted before by any city in America. Included in the bond issue was Aloe's plan to clear the area directly across from Union Station, an area he considered a perfect site for a mall. This area was bounded by Market Street on the south, Chestnut Street on the north, 18th Street on the east and 20th Street on the west.

In 1926, at the urging of over 250 prominent residents of St. Louis, Aloe announced his candidacy for mayor of St. Louis. Aloe had the backing of the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* and the St. Louis *Argus*, a prominent black newspaper. During the 1920s, the Republican Party was dominant in St. Louis and for this reason a victory in the Republican primary was tantamount to winning the general election.

Aloe had two Republican opponents but was favored to defeat both of them. He ran on his record as a member of the Board of Aldermen, citing the civic projects with which he had been successfully associated. He stressed the fact that he was an ordinary businessman with a businessman's common sense.

However, Victor Miller, a practicing

attorney, won the Republican nomination and later the general election. Aloe was bitterly disappointed by the election's outcome. He often expressed the opinion that anti-Semitism and money from the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia had helped defeat him. Within a year after the election, Aloe suffered a stroke, and on January 12, 1929, Aloe died.

Aloe's wife, Edith Rosenblatt Aloe, daughter of the former Republican Collector for the City of St. Louis, was aware of her late husband's concern for clearing the area across from Union Station for a plaza and of his work for the passage of the \$87 million bond issue that would have done just that. She was convinced that this area would be an ideal place for a fitting memorial to her late husband. The noted sculptor, Carl Milles, suggested a sculpture portraying the junction of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

After financial problems were solved, Milles created the group of 19 figures called "The Wedding of the Rivers," which today adorns the plaza. On May 11, 1940, the statues were formally unveiled and the area across from the Union Station was formally named Aloe Plaza, after the late Louis P. Aloe, the man who made the renovation of that area possible.

For a number of years, and especially those during World War II, both Union Station and the area immediately sur-

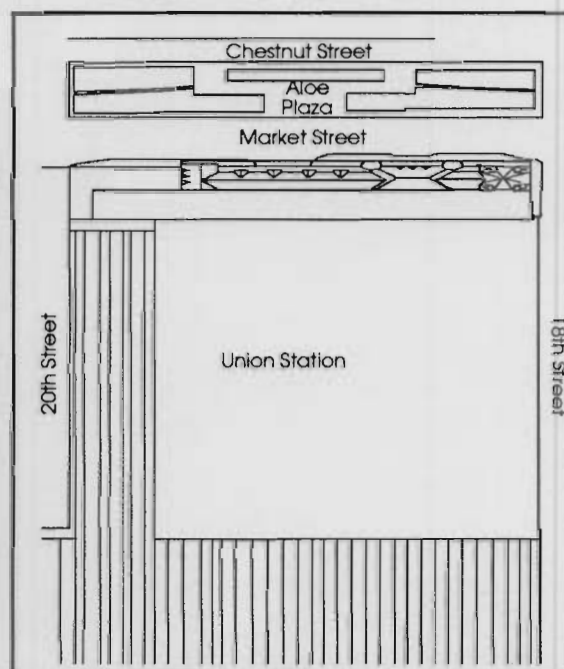
rounding Aloe Plaza thrived. St. Louis was a hub of rail traffic, bringing visitors who admired Aloe Plaza and the Milles statues. During the post-war years, rail traffic began to decline, and both Union Station and its environs became delapidated and desolate.

However, during the past decade, Union Station has been rehabilitated. Shops and a new hotel have brought residents and tourists to the area and new construction has taken place on all sides of Aloe Plaza. Like the Nathan Frank Bandstand, Aloe Plaza has received a new lease on life and both are being enjoyed by a new generation of people.

Once again, these two landmarks honoring two of St. Louis' most prominent citizens, are serving as fitting memorials to the men after whom they are named. — **Burton Boxerman**

Burton Boxerman holds a Ph.D. in American History from St. Louis University. He has taught at both the high school and university level and has written extensively about the St. Louis Jewish community.

(Bottom left) Aloe Plaza's "Wedding of the Rivers." (Below) Site map of Union Station, Aloe Plaza, and surrounding area.



MISSOURI

Historic Architecture

International Style Buildings 1930-1950

Characteristics:

- Roofs are flat, projecting eaves are boxed and covered with the same finish as the wall surfaces. Roofs without eaves terminate flush with the plane of the wall.
- Plan shape is irregular but balanced and is sometimes placed in a dramatic orientation with the landscape.
- Skeleton construction of steel or reinforced concrete is typical.
- Although stuccoed exterior walls were favored elsewhere, Missourians more often chose brick veneer.
- Upper floors and balconies are usually cantilevered – carried outside of the structural supporting columns.
- “Ribbon” windows – linear bands of glass – are nearly always present. Windows may be framed in wood or metal, but exterior reveals are absent giving a visual impression of a continuation of the wall surface in a different material. These bands of windows separated by bands of wall surfaces create a horizontal feeling, even in multi-story buildings.
- Corner windows, in which the glass was mitered without any corner support, are also prevalent. Rectilinearity predominates in windows, as in other design elements, although circular windows and curved surfaces sometimes appear as elements of contrast.
- A complete absence of exterior ornamentation is typical.

PHOTO CHARLES S. PAYNE



The B'Nai Amoona Synagogue, designed ca 1946-47, was German architect Eric Mendelsohn's first commission in the United States. Located in University City, it is an excellent example of the International Style.

Mendelsohn designed the interior of B'Nai Amoona for flexibility with movable walls in the assembly room and foyer.

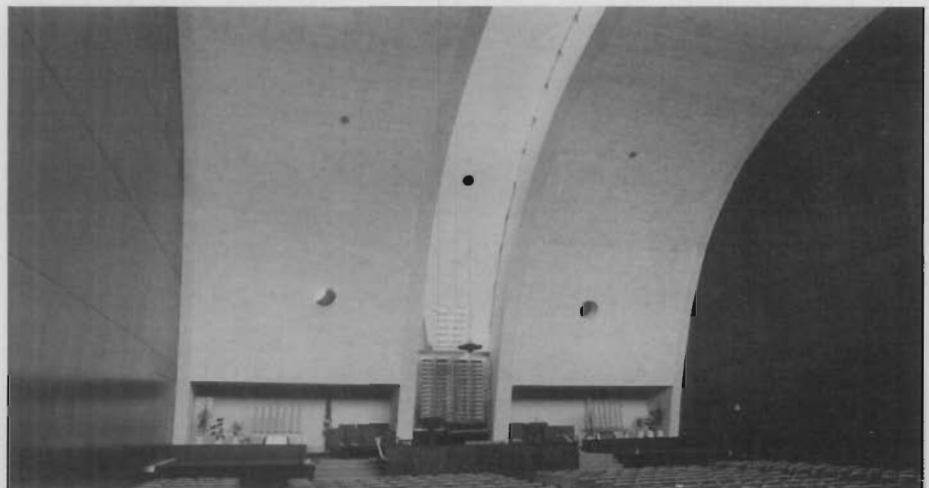


PHOTO CHARLES S. PAYNE

B'nai Amoona Synagogue

B'nai Amoona Synagogue in University City was designed in 1946-47 by internationally known architect Eric Mendelsohn and opened in 1950. It was a milestone in synagogue design, both in terms of its style and its planning. In it, Mendelsohn was able to break with the period style customary for synagogues. His design was for a building free of period references but having a strongly emotional quality, derived from the peaceful courtyard and the soaring roof of the auditorium. Mendelsohn felt strongly about this: "It has been said that religious structures must be traditional to impart a sense of the sacred, that the dignity and emotional significance of a building can only be expressed through an historic association. To admit this is to deny that religion is an important part of today's society."

Mendelsohn's plan allowed the auditorium to be expanded to more than twice its size by opening moveable walls to the assembly room and intermediate foyer. This was the first example of the now familiar "flexible plan." Moreover, he conceived this

worship space as the focus of a multi-functional community center which included administrative offices, classrooms, and a kitchen. Some changes in the plan resulted from budgetary constraints, but Mendelsohn was pleased with the final building. He reported to his wife following the dedication in 1950: "The inside is exactly as I envisioned it . . . The building is visited daily by crowds of all denominations, and the Congregation is very proud."

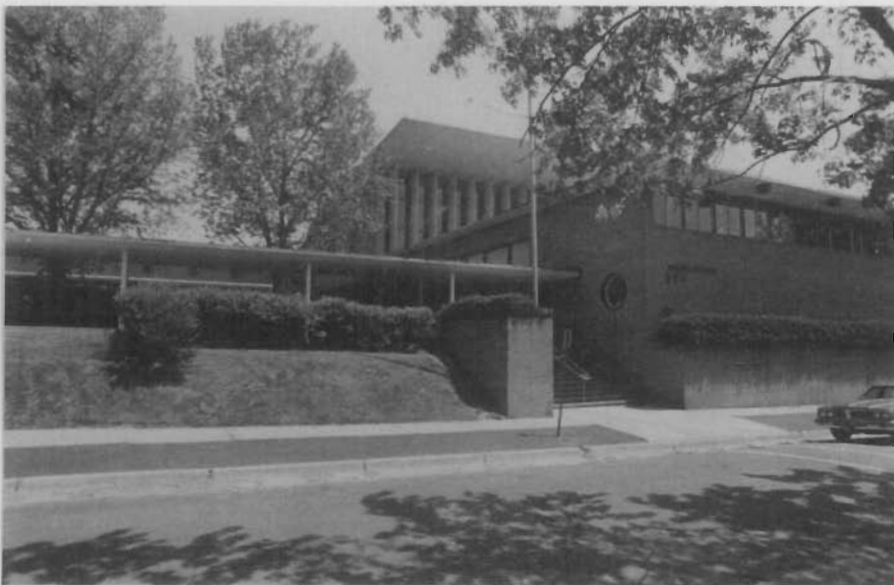
B'nai Amoona traces its origins to a group of immigrants from Cracow, now in Poland but then a part of Russia. The "Krakover Congregation" is said to have held its first St. Louis services in 1882, but the name "B'nai Amoona", meaning "Children of Light," does not appear in local directories until 1885. It was "modern orthodox" in outlook, or what is now termed Conservative. The congregation purchased a building at 13th and Carr in 1888. A move was made to a former church at Garrison and Lucas in 1906. The congregation built its own new synagogue in 1919 at Academy and Vernon in the Central

West End. The westward movement of St. Louis Jewry continued, however, and the present site at the corner of Washington and Trinity in the Civic Plaza of University City was purchased in 1942.

Eric Mendelsohn first came to St. Louis in 1944 to attend a display of his work at the City Art Museum and to give two lectures. He had been born in East Prussia in 1887 and had studied in Berlin and Munich. He came to public attention in 1919 with his futuristic architectural drawings, and in 1921 he designed the Einstein Tower near Potsdam in a sculptural Expressionist style. In the '20s he became a leader of the modern movement, known especially for his Schocken Department in Stuttgart and Chemnitz (now Wroclaw). A Jew, Mendelsohn fled the Nazis in 1933 and came to the United States in 1942. B'nai Amoona was Mendelsohn's first executed design in this country, and it had a worldwide influence. He produced three more synagogues in the United States before his death in 1953.

(See B'NAI AMOONA, Page 6)

PHOTO CHARLES S. PAYNE



No longer a house of worship, B'nai Amoona is now the Center of Contemporary Arts.

"His design was for a building free of period references but having a strongly emotional quality, derived from the peaceful courtyard and the soaring roof of the auditorium."
Esley Hamilton

The St. Louis Jewish Community: A Short History

The first Jewish resident of St. Louis was Joseph Phillipson who arrived in 1807. Other Jewish pioneers followed Phillipson during the first three decades of the 19th century, but the Jewish community remained small.

In the 1830s, the first of several waves of German immigration occurred; these were caused by severe political and social unrest in the homeland. Among these new German St. Louisans were many Jews. And, as more Germans came in the 1840s and 1850s, there was a sufficient number to begin a Jewish community life in the city, including congregations, newspapers, social organizations and benevolent societies.

The German Jewish immigrants first settled along the Mississippi River in a broad corridor stretching from north to south St. Louis. But, as they became more prosperous, they began to move westward through the city. This population movement continued through the late 19th and into the 20th century. And, by the 1960s, the majority of the Jewish population had left the city and settled in suburban St. Louis County.

The first Orthodox Jewish congregation in St. Louis, which was also the first west of the Mississippi, was United Hebrew organized in 1841. It was the 1852 B'nai El congregation, however, that constructed St. Louis' first synagogue. St. Louis' third congregation, Shaare Emeth, was established in 1868 and was the city's first Reform congregation.

Two English-language newspapers for Jews were established in the 1870s: the *Jewish Tribune* and the *Jewish Voice*. Both newspapers emphasized the acculturation of the Jews into the larger non-Jewish community while

maintaining their own cultural and religious customs as well.

A new and much larger migration of Jews into St. Louis began in the 1870s. These "new immigrants" came from Eastern Europe, primarily from Russia, Poland, the Ukraine and the Balkans. Their mass exodus from these countries was the result of religious persecution and displacement due to revolutions and wars.

The "new immigrants" or "Russian" Jews could not afford to live in the upscale residential neighborhoods occupied by their German counterparts. Instead, they settled in or near the north side of the city, which was also home to other recent immigrants, including the "Kerry Patch" Irish, the Polish and, late in the century, a large number of African Americans. The B'nai Amoona congregation was founded in the 1880s by these St. Louisans.

As the new Jewish community became more prosperous, they followed the lead of their earlier German counterparts in a westward migration through the city. And, from approxi-

mately 1910 to 1945, nearly the entire Jewish population of St. Louis, including both German and Eastern European Jews and their descendants lived in St. Louis' Central West End neighborhood.

The Jewish propensity for philanthropy is well documented on the St. Louis landscape. One of the most prominent is Jewish Hospital, which opened in 1902 on Delmar Avenue and moved to a larger building on Kingshighway in 1927. Jewish Hospital was originally constructed because the Jewish population was discriminated against in other hospitals. But, although both hospitals were constructed with funds raised within the Jewish community, their charters mandated services to all regardless of race, religion or ethnicity.

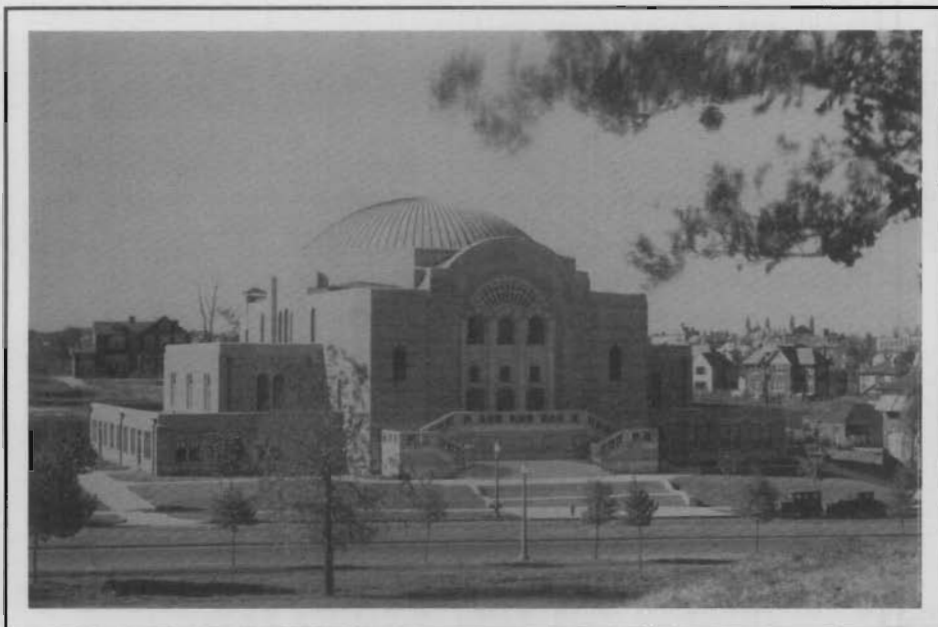
St. Louis Jews have established numerous social service agencies, educational, religious and cultural institutions in the city, and later in the county, and have, by their numerous contributions, enriched the lives of all St. Louisans. — *Karen Grace*

(B'NAI AMOONA, from Page 5)

The desire for ever more comprehensive synagogue facilities eventually worked against University City, as its Jewish institutions began to seek larger sites farther west. B'nai Amoona moved to Mason Road at Conway west of Creve Coeur in 1985, and the future of the building was in jeopardy. A group of St. Louisans led by Richard Baron, a local developer, then purchased the building and created a not-for-profit corporation to run it as the Center of Contemporary Arts. COCA, as it is known, has made the building available to a wide range of cultural organizations, and also presents performances and classes in dance, music,

theater and the visual arts. An art gallery now occupies a space just off the courtyard while the assembly room has become the dance studio and the sanctuary a theater. — *Esley Hamilton*

Esley Hamilton is a historian/architectural historian employed by the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation. He has conducted numerous cultural resource surveys in St. Louis County and elsewhere in Missouri and has prepared many nominations of Missouri properties to the National Register of Historic Places, including one for B'nai Amoona. Hamilton is also the co-author, with Julius K. Hunter, of Portland and Westmoreland Places.



The United Hebrew Temple, ca 1924-27, was at the time of its construction one of the three largest temples in the nation. Its detailing and central dome reflected the interest in Byzantine design as an appropriate expression of Jewish tradition. Today this magnificent building is the home of the Missouri Historical Society's Library and Collections Center (right).



The Romanesque Revival style B'nai El Temple, ca 1905-06, is St. Louis' oldest surviving building constructed for a Jewish congregation. B'nai El's rabbi, Moritz Spitz, was also the editor of the Jewish Voice from 1880-1920. The B'nai El building is no longer used by the congregation and is now the Temple Apartments.

"St. Louis Jews have . . . enriched the lives of all St. Louisans."

Historic photos, left and below, from St. Louis Views, Will Shelly, Publisher.



Jewish Hospital, ca 1927 (above), was the first in St. Louis to have a nondiscriminatory admission policy.

Lost or Stolen

The Kansas City Landmarks Commission requests the return of eight historic light fixtures needed to complete the rehabilitation of Kansas City's New York Life Building. The building was designed by the nationally prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White.

The missing fixtures include two six-foot torchieres and six wall sconces.

Call Lisa Lassman Briscoe at (816) 274-2555 with information.

Dates to Remember

Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Quarterly Meeting, Nov. 4, Jefferson City. For more information, call Margaret Barnes at (314) 751-5365.

Re-enactment of the Battle of Clark's Mill at Vera Cruz, Nov. 12-13. For more information, call the Ava Area Chamber of Commerce at (417) 683-4594.

"Jefferson and the Changing West", Nov. 18-20, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. Call (314) 454-3136 for registration information.

Christmas Candlelight Tours at the Alexander Majors House, Dec. 6 and 8, Kansas City. Call (816) 333-5556 for more information.

ABPP Funds Missouri Projects

Every year the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) awards partnership monies to local and state battlefield preservation organizations to be used for research and documentation, land use or protection planning, interpretation, heritage education and community consensus building. This year, the ABPP awarded more than \$375,000 for 26 projects in 13 states. Eligible projects were those

"Priority 1" battlefields from the "Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields."

There were three 1994 ABPP awards to Missouri:

- City of Kansas City, \$20,000 to conduct an archaeological survey of the Westport battlefield.
- Iron County Historical Society, \$15,000 to research the cultural re-

sources associated with the Battle of Pilot Knob.

- Newtonia Battlefields Protection Association, \$15,000 to survey resources associated with the battles at Newtonia.

Call (402) 221-3426 for more information about the ABPP awards program.

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