

# Tower Tribune

WATER TOWER & PARK PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## Photo Reveals a Missing Lampstand



**This photo, discovered this summer in Water Div. archives, depicts a spiral bronze torchere, or lampstand, on a ledge on the south face of the Water Tower. Long absent from that location, the lampstand is believed to be stolen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

Turn-of-the-century photos just discovered this summer reveal that an ornate spiral lampstand—technically called a “torchere”—originally graced a pedestal on the south face of the Compton Hill Water Tower.

“The lampstand was probably made of bronze or brass,” speculated John Maxwell, WTPPS President. “And, being such an eye-catching feature, no doubt caught the eye of thieves early in the Tower’s life.”

Maxwell said there have long been suspicions of some kind of electrical lamp at that place on the tower. The limestone pedestal has the stub of what looks to be electrical conduit, and about five feet up on the Tower wall there is a remnant of a

metal support bracket.

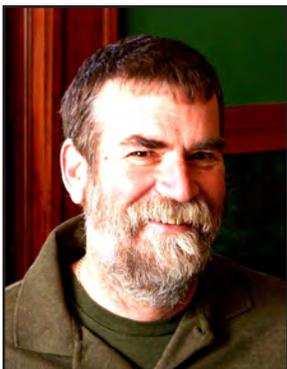
“We can thank the City Water Div. for uncovering photos of this lampstand in their archives”. Maxwell said. “I’d been looking for about a dozen years for something that would show what, if anything, stood on that pedestal. These photos confirm that the Tower designer, Harvey Ellis, had a pretty fanciful idea here.”

“It’s an exciting discovery that enhances our appreciation for the wonderful architecture of our historic Tower,” he added.

The photos have been forwarded to Vlad Zhitomirsky, sculptor and restorationist of the “Naked Truth” statue, to determine if a replica of the missing lampstand could be fabricated.

## President’s Message

### *What Keeps Us Going*



**THIS ISSUE OF OUR NEWSLETTER** is brimming with accounts of major – even historic – progress made in our Water Tower and Park. Clearly, the board members and other point persons involved in these projects have been hard at work.

Might I turn your attention, now to another corps of workers? This would be the teams of volunteers who provide what might be called “support services” that keep our Water Tower and Park an

important and much-admired landmark.

I have in mind those volunteers who spent several hours weeding and refreshing the planting beds along the Russell Blvd. entrance. And those who regularly pick up trash and scattered

debris in the park. There are others who make the phone calls that remind Tower docents of their work shifts, rescheduling assignments and times if needed. And, finally, those who tack up and take down the bright banners on the Russell & Shaw announcement sign, alerting passers-by of the “OPENING THIS SATURDAY” and “MOONROSE OPENING AT SUNSET.” These banners, I should tell you, are extremely significant in boosting attendance for each Tower visitor opening—and, in consequence, the income that pays for our various improvements.

**THE VOLUNTEERS** who’ve been doing these tasks for a year or so have, in several cases, completed their term of service, and so it’s time for replacements to be named.



## First Memorial Bench Installed

WTPPS President John Maxwell, right, fits into place the engraved brick designating the first new Memorial Bench in Reservoir Park, located on a gentle slope just east of the pond. Patricia Taillon-Miller, seated, a Shaw Neighborhood resident, donated the bench in memory of her late husband, Dr. Raymond Miller. Watching carefully is her

pet, “Hank.” The Memorial Bench Program is a long term effort to replace all the benches in the park with victorian-era seating. At the same time, the memorial bricks will create a gallery of persons especially important to our community. To place a new bench in the park at an available site of your choosing, call 314-552-9000.

## Heat, Hurricane Trim Tally Of Tower Visits

The Water Tower can survive extremes of the weather—but human beings, not so much.

Thus, this summer’s blistering heat caused the cancellation of the July and August first Saturday visitor openings, reports John Maxwell, WTPPS President. “It was just too blamed hot for us volunteers, and probably for anyone thinking about climbing 198 steps to the top,” he remarks.

A torrential rainstorm, a remnant of hurricane Irene,

scratched the Aug. 31st “Moonrise” opening. “Too much water, and no moon” he noted.

The tally of visitors is: First Saturdays: 306; Full-Moon, 245, and special events, 53, for a five-month total of 604 paid visitors.

Winners of the July 4<sup>th</sup> party raffles were Scott Specter, Mary Thoele, Bob and Jeanette St. Vrain and Rebecca Greenburg.

## Planting the ‘First Impression’ Garden

Workers Charles Gray (left) and Joe Lieberman spread still-steaming mulch on April 18 as the final step in installing all new plants in the Shaw Blvd. & Grand flower garden, the ‘first impression’ many passing motorists get of Reservoir Park. The plants were purchased by the WTPPS and installed courtesy of Growing Green, Inc., a local plant maintenance firm. Twice during the summer, volunteers from Occupy St. Louis came and weeded the new garden, by way of offset for graffiti caused by vandals to the park during March.



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# ‘Naked Truth’ - Granite Base Cleaned, Sealed

Stonemason Marc Weis, 50, is a native St. Louisan who’s spent his entire career in stonemasonry. Not only is that type of work very traditional, Weis has an impressively long family tradition of doing it. “I’m the fifth-generation of men in my family doing this work,” he says simply. “It goes back to my great- great-grandfather, a marble and granite worker in Trier, Germany.”

Weis has impressive credentials for the work. He’s done granite work in rural Missouri churches and in the burial crypt of the St. Louis Cathedral on Lindell Blvd. Sometimes he does routine jobs, such as kitchen countertops, bars and fireplaces, “but I prefer jobs with some artistic or historical significance—the base for the Mark McGwire statue at Busch Stadium and the black pearl granite base for

**Granitemason Marc Weis injects polyurethane coating into the joints of the red granite base of ‘Naked Truth.’ Weis, a fifth-generation stonemason, cleaned, tuckpointed and sealed the base in late June.**



the new Dred and Harriet Scott statue at the Old Courthouse.”

Weis is pleased to get the “Naked Truth” assignment because of its significance to the local—and German--community.

He began in late May by power-washing the 19-foot by 25-foot assemblage of red granite blocks—all quarried from Iron County, the source of Missouri’s geologic gift to the architectural world. The Ph-neutral scrubbing took away the grime and stains that years of air pollution deposited on all St. Louis structures. He then raked the several hundred feet of joints, scraping out loose and crumbling mortar and re-tuckpointing with a custom-mix of white portland cement, “sugar” sand and, for color, some iron oxide.

The final step in mid-June was a urethane coating to resist weather and graffiti.

A relaxed, genial guy, Weis said he enjoyed his weeks at the ‘Naked Truth’ worksite. “It’s peaceful, quiet work. I find it very satisfying.”

Every once in a while, he says, somebody would stop by and chat. “One woman who lives across the street”—he gestured to The Saum Apartments—“even said, ‘This is wonderful. What can I do to help?’”

Although his is a one-man shop, Weis occasionally has his two sons, ages 16 and 19, come and help when they’re not in school. “When I’m up on a scaffold, they’re my ‘legs,’ my ‘go-fers.’”

Any chance they’d be the sixth generation of Weis stonemasons? Weis just smiled wryly. “You never know.”

## ‘Naked Truth’ - The Mythic Medallions

Probably the most creative stage of the “Naked Truth” restoration was the research, artistic re-creation and casting of the three mythological medallions and frieze across the top of the granite base.

One of the medallions featured Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, bearing a young boy holding a globe in his hand. This 24-inch bronze disc had been removed by the City Water Div. more than 30 years ago and stored in a warehouse, safe from the thieves who had stolen the other two medallions years before. The Pegasus disc was cleaned, re-bronzed, lacquered and waxed by Vlad Zhitomirsky, the sculptor and restorationist hired by the WTPPS.

The other two missing medallions were trickier. Last winter, Zhitomirsky found photos of “Naked Truth” taken at the time of its installation in 1914. He then made detailed pencil sketches from enlargements showing the medallions’ features. From these sketches he sculpted clay molds, which were then shipped in March to a Lawrence, KS, foundry to be made into hollow bronze castings.

One of the recreated medallions depicted the Greek goddess Europa riding a bull across a body of water, presumably the Atlantic. The other featured a Christian myth, St. George astride his horse piercing a dragon—symbol of evil and ignorance.

Finally, stainless steel rods were welded to the rear of each disc for mounting into the granite base. Each received a coat of patina, layers of protective lacquer and a coat of wax.

The morning of Monday, June 25, Zhitomirsky and his son, Daniel, climbed the scaffolding fronting “Naked Truth,” drilled holes into the granite blocks, applied high-grip epoxy to both the steel rods and into the holes. They pressed the discs and frieze into position and by noon the historic recreation was in place.

**The three memorial medallions—for Schurz, Preetorius and Daenzer---were lined up in proper order on the grass. Moments later, each was fitted with welded steel rods and anchored into the granite base.**



# 'Naked Truth' - The Statue Is Renewed

From mid-July to late August—six of the hottest weeks in an historically hot summer—sculptor and restorationist **Vlad Zhitomirsky** and his team restored the “Naked Truth” statue to a brilliance and beauty it hasn’t had in nearly 100 years.

It was multi-stage process which Zhitomirsky, the Souldard-based artist contracted by the WTPPS, proudly displayed his expertise.

It began with long-handled scrub brushes swabbing a light solvent over the entire surface, removing any protective lacquer which may have remained.

Then came repairs. A crack in the statue’s left wrist, gouges in many surface areas, and even discovery of a long-ago unknown repair job. In the waist area, on the statue’s left side, Zhitomirsky found a lead plug. “Apparently there was a hole and instead of rewelding, they hammered in a lead plug and melted it,” he said.

The following week, the work got more serious. On a morning when it was already 90 degrees by 11 a.m., the crew fired

up propane torches and adjusted the flame to blue-hot temps. Zhitomirsky, aided by his son, Daniel, and co-worker Mikahil Matveyev, heated the hollow bronze statue to several hundred degrees, then sprayed on a chemical

solution—ingredients a professional secret—which oxidized the surface, the better to create a strong bond with the patina finish which followed.

Ambient temperatures over 100 degrees cut several workdays short. Then, in the week of Monday, July 30th, came a “shroud,” a tent-like enclosure over the entire statue and base, for keeping out dust while they were spraying on lacquer--several coats—to preserve the finish. The final step, a coating of wax, came in early August.

The wax will need to be re-applied in future seasons, he remarked, but the basic restoration should keep the statue secure for decades to come.



**In one step of the restoration process, Vlad Zhitomirsky and his son, Daniel (out of photo, right) heat the bronze statue with propane torches. This promotes bonding with a chemical patina solution, sprayed on moments later. When cooled, it was followed by several coats of lacquer and a final coat of wax. Restoration of the statue, which initially cost \$31,000 in 1914, is costing the WTPPS \$58,000.**

## Withered Witch Hazels

In this stretch along the fence above I-44, 12 of 13 Witch Hazel trees are now lifeless brown branches, victims of this summer’s scorching heat. John Maxwell, WTPPS President, said the temperatures---21 days above 100, 12 days of 105 and two days at 108—were amplified by heat reflected from the

asphalt pavement of the highway a few feet below. Fortunately, adjoining red bud trees survived the temperatures. In all, some 50 witch hazels were lost. In Mid-November, some 50 students will be removing dead trees as a community service project. New trees donated by Forest ReLeaf will be planted.



# 'NT' Plaza Project Gains Materials, Money, Momentum

The project for a landscaped plaza around the just-restored "Naked Truth" statue has attracted money, materials and strong momentum over the summer.

In May, the Norman Stupp Foundation agreed to provide \$25,000 toward the cost of the plaza, both landscape and hardscape. The Foundation, honoring the founder and longtime owner of a bridge and iron foundry in south St. Louis County, was impressed at the statue's preservation, "and wanted something that would complete, or 'put the icing on the cake,'" said **John Maxwell**, The Stupp grant is expected to cover about half the cost of the plaza, although construction bids have not yet been received and total costs are uncertain right now, Maxwell said.

A detailed plan by Shaw Neighborhood resident Rick Kacenski, a landscape architect with a prominent downtown architectural firm, has been refined. The original design (see Tower Tribune, Winter-Spring, 2012) is retained. It features a grassy plot 36 feet in diameter encircling the granite base—with either fescue grass or, if costs permit, permeable pavers, a type of porous blocks.

Around this circle is an 8-ft. wide pavement. Kacenski's design uses poured concrete, but with exposed aggregate of "deconstructed red granite", which he describes as granite pulverized almost to the consistency of dust. This addition gives the concrete a continuous tint of red granite at much less than the cost of granite slabs.

Encircling the pavement will be a 6-ft. wide planting bed, itself rimmed by granite curbing. "The City is generously donating the granite curbing from their 'boneyard' of paving materials," Maxwell noted. "It was an



**Now a half-destroyed remnant of bench, railing and garden rock, this area will be cleared by the City Water Div., in preparation for construction of a new landscaped plaza.**

unexpected gift, and we're very, very pleased and grateful."

One feature of the design—steps leading from the plaza to the level of the pond—has been realized in a very unusual way. "You may have noticed that a small empty plot at Vandeventer Av. and the exit ramp from Hwy. 40—where 'Demo Man' stands—also has a set of five red granite steps," Maxwell noted. They were salvaged by Dan Bellon, prominent demolition contractor, simply because he liked their looks. "In late August, Bellon agreed to sell us the granite and deliver them to our site, giving our plaza a local connection and great visual harmony with the granite base of the statue", said Maxwell."

The five steps will take visitors to a 25-foot wide apron, linking the plaza and the pond. Like the pavement around the statue, the apron will be concrete tinted with red granite aggregate.

One obstacle to creating an attractive plaza, Maxwell said, has also been surpassed—again, thanks to the City. "The Water Div. has agreed to demolish, without charge, the derelict rubble rock, bricks, bench and concrete railing posts," Maxwell said.

"This gives us an area completely clear and ready for improvements."

A final bit of serendipity comes, again, from Bellon demolition. The firm has several red granite foundation-sized blocks from a demolished home. "With some cutting, trimming and polishing, they can become seating benches on the plaza that, again, will match the granite base of the statue," Maxwell said. Cost of acquiring the blocks and shaping them hasn't been determined, he said.

"I am just amazed at how all these different elements have come together to advance this project," Maxwell said. "It's a terrific happenstance that I think shows how much enthusiasm we've tapped in this community to restore a historic treasure and to enhance the entire Reservoir Park."

Funds to match the Stupp Foundation grant are being sought, and hopefully will soon be received to get the work started, possibly by the end of this year.



**These granite steps, sitting here at Vandeventer Av. and the exit ramp of Hwy. 40 (right), have been purchased from Bellon Demolition Co. They'll be positioned adjacent to the new Naked Truth plaza, leading visitors down to the edge of the pond.**

# President's Message

Might I ask you to consider being among them? A few hours of time every month or so will help will keep the Park attractive, will keep the Tower openings supplied with docents and will keep the many "supporting services" in place. These contributions are not singular milestones, but they are absolutely fundamental. They are the energies that keep the WTPPS going.

**IT WAS JUST ABOUT** 14 years ago that the WTPPS was formed to work with the Water Dept. and the City on the future of the Water Tower and Park. The reservoir was outdated and susceptible to earthquake damage that could take half the City's water supply off-line for an extended period. The Tower had both structural and public safety (asbestos) issues, as well. Public Utilities Director at the time, David Visintainer, loved the Tower and wanted to be sure it was saved and made accessible to the public. Public

hearings were held, a partnership was formed, plans were made, bonds were sold. Look what's happened since then! With the Tower restored, a program of visitor openings was launched and continues vigorously to this day. Since that initial project many, many improvements have added to the beauty and importance of this once-neglected Park. All of it, at each step along the way, is the result of volunteers giving of their time and effort.

Joining this on-going tradition of "support servers" is a simple matter of giving me a call. You'll learn what particular job needs a hand, and how your own time and interest might be of help. I'm reachable at my cellphone (314) 398-2519. The future of our Water Tower and Park is yours to shape!

***John Maxwell***

## MISSION

*The central purpose and role of the Water Tower & Park Preservation Society is defined as:*

**TO RESTORE, PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE COMPTON HILL WATER TOWER  
AND ITS IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS AND TO FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBOURHOODS AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES.**



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