

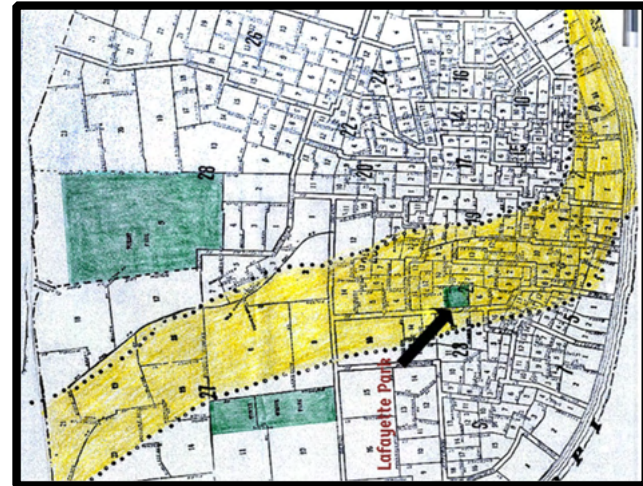
1-Index

- 2) A Remembrance: the 130th Anniversary of the 1896 Tornado
- 3) Der Grosse Tornado – German Publication
- 4) Der Grosse Tornado Description
- 5) 1896 Tornado & Destruction Statistics
- 6) Weather Conditions on May 27, 1896 (NOAA)
- 7) Destruction Across the Mississippi (NOAA)
- 8) Map of the 1896 Tornado Path Through St. Louis
- 9) St. Louis Public Service Company’s Newsletter, Transit News: 1931 Request for the Public’s Recollections of the 1896 Tornado
- 10) Quotation from a Written Response to Transit News About “grand piano” & “#7 Engine House”
- 11) Quotation from a Written Response to Transit News About “children be sent home”
- 12) Photo: Lafayette Park NE Corner (birds eye view)
- 13) Photo: Lafayette Park NE Corner (close up of crowd)
- 14) Photo: Lafayette Park Interior Looking NW with Missouri & Park Aves in the Background
- 15) Photo: 1500 Block of Mississippi Ave
- 16) Photo: 1400 Block of Missouri Ave
- 17) Photo: 2150-64 Lafayette Ave
- 18) Photo: 2300 Block of Park Ave
- 19) Photo: People’s Railway Co Powerhouse
- 20) Photo: 1700 Block of Park Ave
- 21) Photo: 1500 Block of Vail Place
- 22) Photo: 2300 Block of Albion Place
- 23) Photo: 2300 Block of Lafayette Ave
- 24) Photo: Mt Calvary Episcopal Church
- 25) Photo: Lafayette Park Presbyterian Church
- 26) Photo: 1515 Missouri Ave & L.P. Presbyterian Church
- 27) Photo: Lafayette Park Methodist Episcopal Church
- 28) Photo: Lafayette Park Baptist Church
- 29) Photo: Church of the Unity
- 30) Photo: Ruins of Fire House No. 7
- 31) Photo: 1300-02 S. 18th St & Fire House No. 7 BEFORE
- 32) Photo: 1300-02 S. 18th St & Fire House No. 7 AFTER
- 33) Photo: 1726 S. 18th St
- 34) Photo: NW Corner of Lafayette Ave & Truman Pkwy
- 35) Photo: City Hospital (undetermined perspective)
- 36) Sources & Credits

A Remembrance: the 130th Anniversary of the 1896 Tornado

It was 130 years ago that one of the worst tornadoes in U.S. history devastated Lafayette Park and many of the surrounding homes, churches, and commercial buildings. They were directly in the path of the tornado (known by some as “The Great Cyclone”). It was Wednesday, May 27th when this EF4 tornado tore through the bi-state metropolitan area.

In addition to death and destruction, the aftermath of a natural disaster leaves many communities facing decades of disruption. For Lafayette Square, there was a long period of decline after 1896. It took 70 years before individuals in the late 1960s began to restore the 19th century homes, build replica homes on vacant lots, and focus on the care of Lafayette Park. Our restoration community is now thriving, but it took time, money, sacrifice, and sweat equity to get here.



Many of the wealthy property owners here in May 1896 had recovery resources and options available to them that are not available to most communities. We need look no further than the destruction we still see from the May 16, 2025 tornado here in St. Louis to appreciate the level of public and private investment necessary to reclaim and revitalize neighborhoods.

Der Grosse Tornado

27 MAI, 1896

EINE SAMMLUNG VON
ANSICHTEN
SEINER VERHEERUNGEN



Graf Eng. Co. St. L.

HERAUSGEGEBEN VOM
Anzeiger des Westens.

St. Louis, Mo.

This pamphlet was published by the German language newspaper *Anzeiger des Westens* shortly after the tornado of 1896 wreaked havoc in St. Louis. Translated from German, it reads: The Great Tornado; a collection of views of its devastation. The pamphlet contains text, photographs and drawings.

3rd Deadliest Tornado in U.S. History

In just 20 minutes, the massive EF4-rated storm carved a devastating path across the St. Louis metropolitan area (with likely wind speeds of 160 to 200 mph).

- At least **255 people were killed** (with historical estimates varying between 255 and 306) and **over 1,000 people were injured** (some records estimate upwards of 2,500).
- **Property Damage:** \$10 million in 1896 dollars, which is the equivalent of roughly \$387 million to \$700 million in modern terms.
- More than **5,000 people** were left homeless. Over **300 buildings** were destroyed, and approximately **7,200 structures** sustained severe damage.
- The devastating path cut directly through bustling downtown St. Louis, famous neighborhoods like **Lafayette Square**, and crossed the Mississippi River to inflict catastrophic damage in East St. Louis, Illinois.

Weather Conditions Set the Stage for the Great Cyclone

That fateful Wednesday began as many summer days still do in the Midwest—warm and muggy. By midafternoon, a storm system had moved over Illinois and Missouri, blanketing the St. Louis area with thick clouds. Just after 5:00 p.m., the torrential rain, thunder, and lightning began.

Moments later, the clouds took on a greenish hue and began to swirl ominously. The barometric pressure dropped significantly. What would become known as the “Great Cyclone” or the “Great St. Louis Tornado” touched down 6 miles west of Eads Bridge.

In less than half an hour, the tornado carved a three-mile-wide path of destruction across St. Louis. It would most likely be rated as an EF4 today, with winds estimated between 168 and 199 mph. While it was just one of nearly 40 tornadoes to touch down in the central and southern parts of the country between May 15 and May 28, the Great St. Louis Tornado of 1896 still remains one of the deadliest tornadoes in United States history.

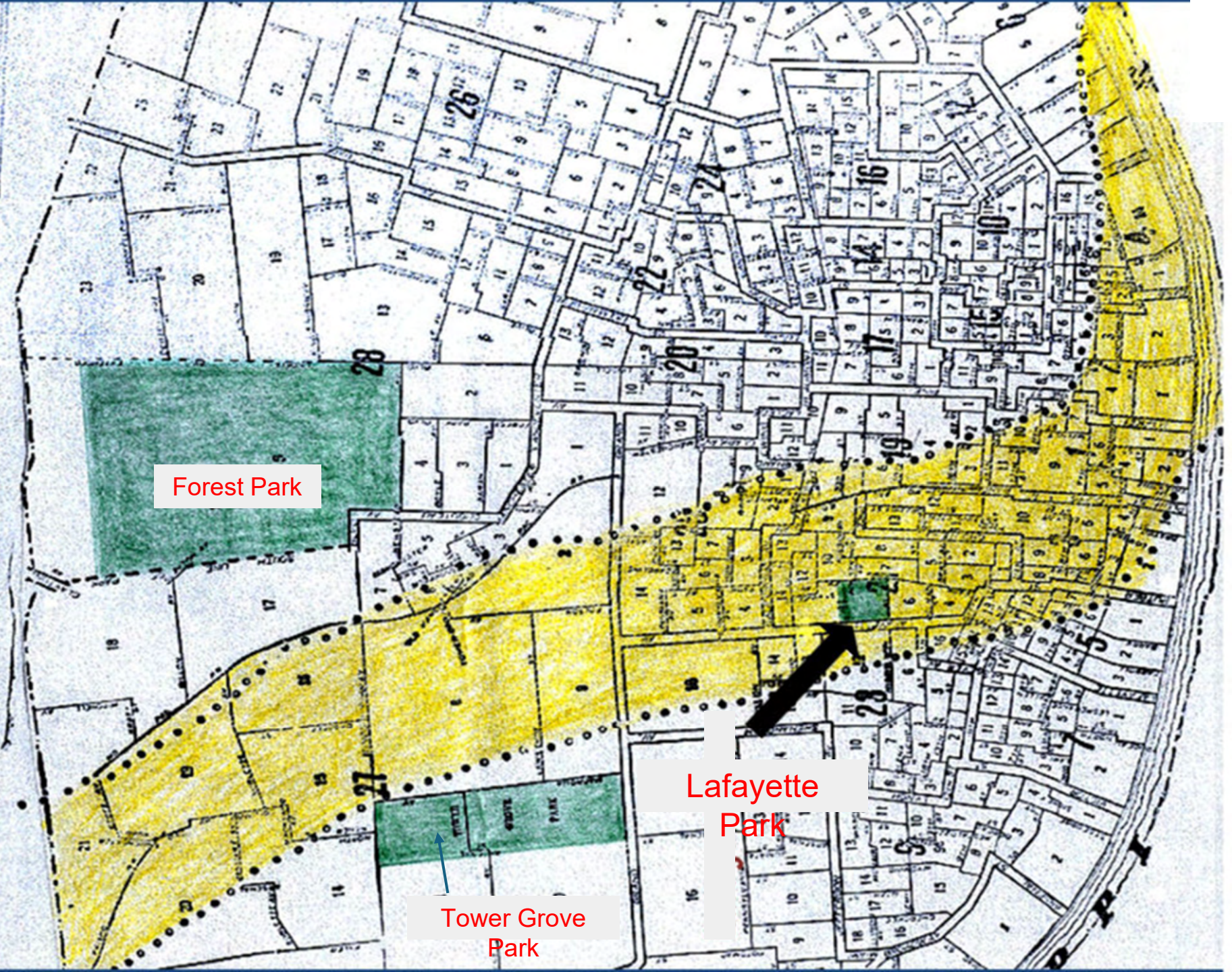


Destruction Across the Mississippi River

Once the tornado made it to the Mississippi River, it decimated steamboats and other vessels in the harbor, breaking them into pieces and scattering them from the Missouri to the Illinois shore. While the sturdy Eads Bridge remained standing, nearly 300 feet of its eastern approach was torn away. Pieces of the bridge weighing several tons were even scattered 100 feet away.

After it battered the Eads Bridge, the tornado continued across the Mississippi into East St. Louis, Illinois, where it did the worst of its damage. Scarcely a house or building remained standing, with everything along the river completely swept away.

BEG. ST. LOUIS, MO., THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 28, 1896.—606 OLIVE STREET.



Forest Park

Tower Grove Park

Lafayette Park

The Tornado of 1896, Do You Remember?

The devastating tornado of 1896, which swept south St. Louis, still is a vivid memory to many St. Louisans. Transit News is considering the possibility of broadcasting a description of that tornado. It seeks from its readers and listeners their recollections of that tornado, so that its account may be complete and interesting. It will pay \$5.00 for incidents in the tornado which will be useful in the broadcast. Address Transit News, 38' 9 Park Ave.

In the January 6, 1931 issue of the St. Louis Public Service Company newsletter, Transit News, a notice appeared asking people for their recollections of the 1896 tornado. This notice resulted in a large number of submissions. Over fifty of these letters were donated to the St. Louis Public Library in 1961 and are housed in the Rare Books and special Collections Department.

Another thing I saw was a grand piano, (and they were large in those days) in the small lake in Lafayette Park. This lake is in the middle of the park, a good block away from any houses. Plenty of metal and weight in that piano.

Another metal object that was moved was the fire engine at #7 Engine House. It crossed the street and was slammed against a brick house without the aid of horses, they being dead in their stalls.

“Another thing I saw was a grand piano, (and they were large in those days) in a small lake in Lafayette Park. This lake is in the middle of the park, a good block away from any houses. Plenty of metal and weight in that piano.

Another metal object that was moved was the fire engine at #7 Engine House. It crossed the street and was slammed against a brick house without the aid of horses, they being dead in their stalls.”

Alma L. Stephenson
7152 Lanham

A word of commendation should be given the Rev. Irl Hicks, the Astronomer and Weather Forecaster. The day of the Tornado was a perfect spring day, not a cloud in the sky and no one would have had any idea that a storm condition was approaching. However the Rev Hicks saw his barometer start down about one oclock and notified the Public School Superentendent that a storm was due and advised that the children be sent home. Fortunately the Superentendent was an intelligent man and the warning was headed, the children were sent home. This action saved many lives as several schools were demolished.

Alma L. Stephenson
7152 Lanham

“A word of commendation should be given to the Rev. Irl Hicks, the Astronomer and Weather Forecaster. The day of the tornado was a perfect spring day, not a cloud in the sky and no one would have had any idea that a storm condition was approaching. However the Rev Hicks saw his barometer start down about one oclock and notified the Public School Superintended that a storm was due and advised that the children be sent home. Fortunately the Superintendent was an intelligent man and the warning was headed, the children were sent home. This action saved many lives as several schools were demolished.”

Alma L. Stephenson
7152 Lanham



Edward W. Schumann

Lafayette Park NE Entrance at Park & Mississippi
Looking SW



Edward W. Schumann

Lafayette Park NE Entrance at Park & Mississippi



Lafayette Park Presbyterian
Church on Missouri Ave

2233 & 2229
Park Ave

Edward W. Schumann

Lafayette Park interior & blocks of 1400 Missouri & 2200 Park
Looking W/NW



1520 1526 1532 1534

Edward W. Schumann

1500 block of Mississippi Ave
Looking SE from Park Ave



1400 block of Missouri Ave
Looking West/SW



Edward W. Schumann

2150-64 Lafayette Ave
Looking South from the Park



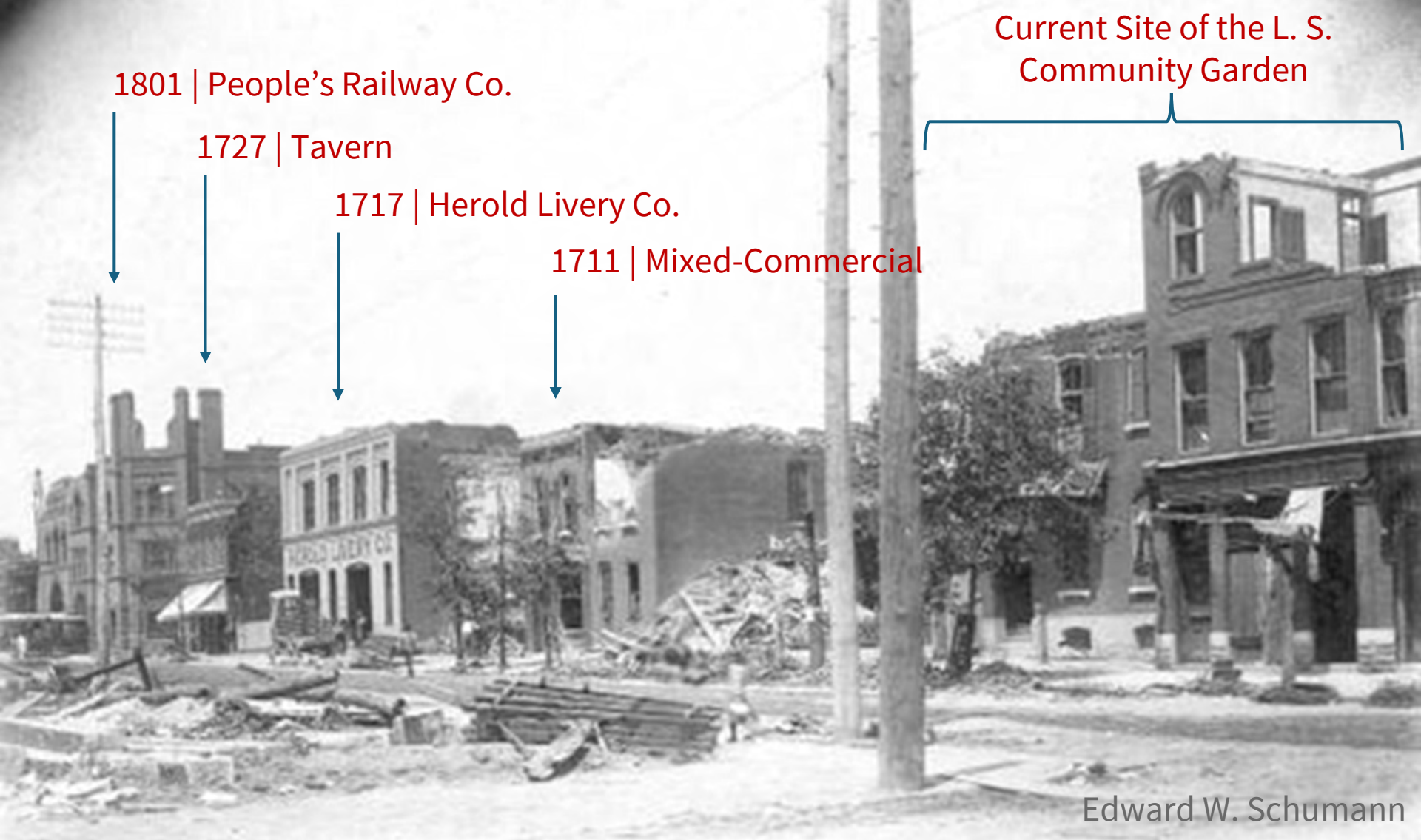
Lafayette Park
Presbyterian Church

2310

2300 block of Park Ave
Looking South between present day 2310 & 2320



People's Railway Co. Powerhouse
At Park Ave & S. 18th St
(present site of Fountain View on Park Condos)



1801 | People's Railway Co.

1727 | Tavern

1717 | Herold Livery Co.

1711 | Mixed-Commercial

Current Site of the L. S. Community Garden

Edward W. Schumann

Present Day:

- 1709-11 – Four Muddy Paws
- 1717 – law offices
- 1727 - Square One Brewery & Distillery
- 1801 – (destroyed) condos w/ commercial

1700 block of Park Ave
Looking NW from Dolman St

1515 | Excelsior Laundry Co.

1507-09



J. C. Strauss

1500 block of Vail Place
Looking West

2300 block of Albion Pl
Looking North/NE from Jefferson Ave

2351

2347

2343





*Question - Provision
Lafayette Ave*

Northside of 2300 block of Lafayette Ave
Looking NE from the current site of SLPL Barr Library
None of the homes shown exist today.

Julius Gross



Mt Calvary Episcopal Church
At SW Corner of Jefferson & Lafayette Aves
(current site of the SLPL Barr Library, circa 1906)
See Tour Book Page 36



Genelli Photo Company

**Lafayette Park Presbyterian Church
(presently Abbey on the Park, condominiums)
Looking West**



1515 Missouri Ave & Lafayette Park Presbyterian Church
Looking West

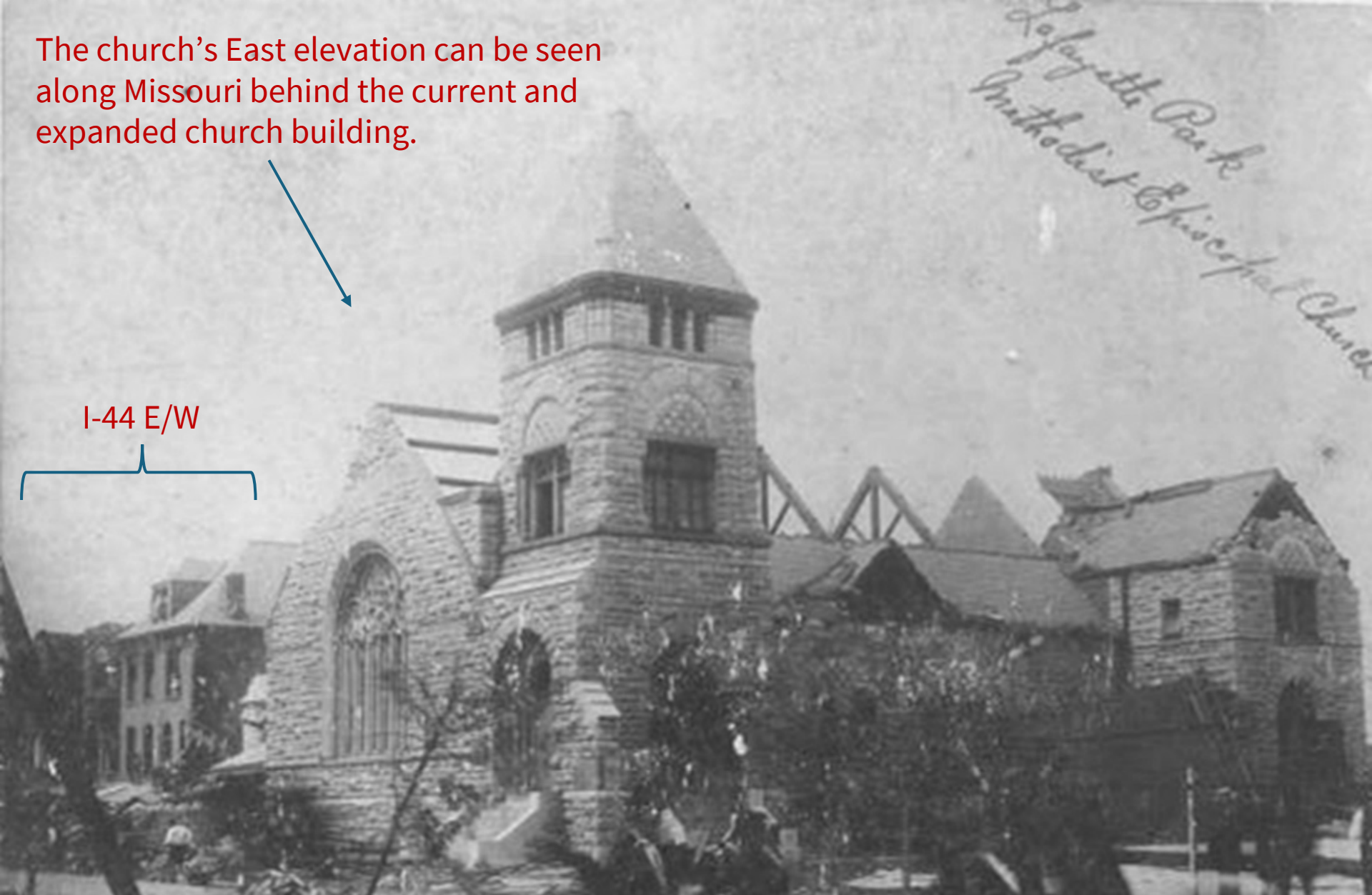
The church's East elevation can be seen along Missouri behind the current and expanded church building.



I-44 E/W



*Lafayette Park
Methodist Episcopal Church*



Lafayette Park Methodist Episcopal Church
(presently Lafayette Park UMC)
Looking SW from Missouri & Lafayette

Julius Gross



Lafayette Park Baptist Church
At Lafayette & Mississippi Aves
(presently City Church w/ Lafayette Prep Academy to the East)
Looking South

J. C. Strauss



J. C. Strauss

Church of the Unity
At Park Ave & MacKay Pl (formerly Armstrong Ave)
(presently private residence)
Looking North

Ruins of Fire Station No. 7
1304 S. 18th St
Looking East





1300-02 S 18th St

Before 1896 Tornado,
circa 1870s-90s

Fire House No.7
1304 S 18th St



After 1896 Tornado

1300-02 S 18th St

Fire House No.7
1304 S 18th St



1726 S 18th St (saloon/brewery)
(presently I-44 EB off-ramp to Lafayette Ave)
Looking East

J. C. Strauss



J. C. Strauss

**NW Corner of Lafayette Ave & Truman Pkwy (formerly Grattan)
(present site of Zumwalt Corp - an overhead door supplier)
Looking North**



J. C. Strauss

City Hospital at Lafayette Ave & Grattan St

Content sources include:

- NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information – *On This Day: The Great St. Louis Tornado of 1896*
- Book “Normalized Damage from Major Tornadoes in the United States: 1890-1999” (2001) by Harold E. Brooks and Charles A. Doswell III
- Book “St. Louis Fire Stations” (2020) by Dennis Maag and Robert Pauly
- “St. Louis Public Library – The Great Cyclone of 1896”
- St. Louis Public Library Historical Digital Collections – “Tornado of 1896 Collection” photographs and letters
- Lafayette Park – “Tornado of 1896 Gallery” Lafayette Square Community Facebook Group
- Photographers: J. C. Strauss, Edward W. Schumann, Julius Gross, Genelli Photo Company

Special Thanks to our neighbors:

- Tim Dexheimer – research, photo curation, titles and legends
- Wayne White – printing and production
- Vincent Volpe – title slide & creative vision

We are all building a better St. Louis. If you have photos, text, or artifacts from the Great St. Louis Tornado or other notable events in Lafayette Square, please share them with info@lafayettesquare.org or homeselection@lafayettesquare.org.