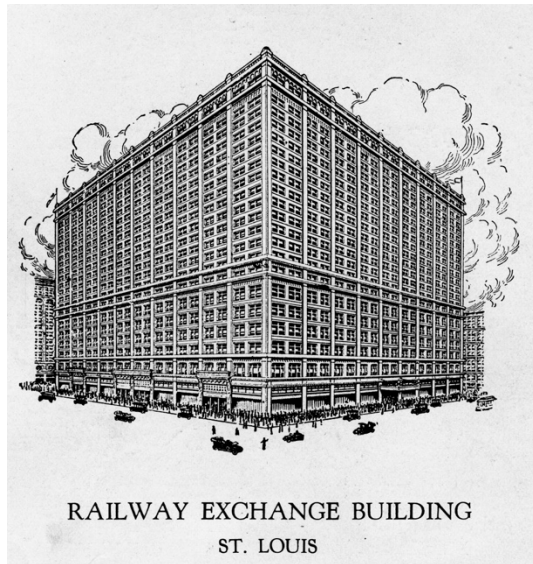
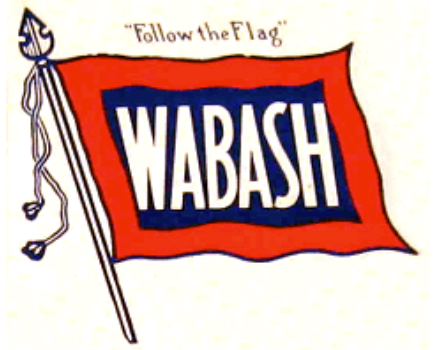


Ferguson Has A History Museum

Ferguson, indeed, does have a Historical Society and a History Museum and we are moving forward with the help of our readers of the past weeks. We encourage any of you reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

Last month we covered the 2nd Mayor Forum and introduced you to the **Wabash Club**. A quick review: William Ferguson, in 1855, donated about 10 acres to the North Missouri Railroad allowing the railroad to lay tracks through what became Ferguson Station. The area had an available lake for the steam engines to take on water. The North Missouri Railroad eventually became the Wabash Railroad in 1915. The Wabash was a class 1 national railroad serving 5 states and Canada. That is where the story continues.



Interest in travel became a national concern in the early 1800's. The war was over and Americans needed ways to move their merchandise as well as themselves. In 1806 President Jefferson authorized the creation of the Cumberland Road – later to become the National Road from Cumberland Md to St. Louis (it only reached Vandalia Il for a 591 long road in 1839). Currently US Route 40 covers that eastern part of the road (not I-40). Canals were also being built during this time (think the Erie Canal (remember the song?) and the Illinois Canal). Along came rail travel with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1837. Railroads, once built, were faster and more reliable than either the road or the canals (they froze in winter). All of this paves the way for nation-wide railroads such as the Wabash.

The Wabash was a major railroad with its national headquarters located in St. Louis – right in the center of the city – a whole city block – Olive to Locust, between 6th and 7th streets. The Railway Exchange Building – better known by most, older St. Louisians as the Famous Barr Department Store (later Macy's) – with that wonderful 8th floor toy department, Santa and the great toy train and Christmas windows. It was a different era.

Here is when Ferguson (remember that depot and lake back in 1855) and the Wabash come together. The Wabash owned land and a lake in Ferguson – and the big guys at Wabash were looking for recreation in their time off. The railroad ran through Ferguson – and that is the beginning of the Wabash Club.



By now you may be figuring out that this land and lake is now January-Wabash Park and lake. (note: Mr. January's home – now Ferguson Middle - was on the top of the hill with his lake below). In 1910, the Wabash Railroad leased 19.5 acres to the "Wabash Club" for recreation. The purpose of the Club was *"to cultivate and foster good fellowship among the officers and employees of the Wabash Railway Company, and to discuss, formulate and execute plans which shall have in view the mutual benefit of the members and the company"*. The first meeting was held on May 24th, 1911. Photo above is from a 1911 dinner.



Photo by R. W. G. ...
 21 1924
 First Annual Dinner -
 Wabash Club
 St. Louis - June 27 1911.



They began by improving the area – at that time in a somewhat wild state. They began to fence it in, improve it and set up tents as shelters. Eventually they built a frame clubhouse and bathhouse along with a beach along the lake and a playground for children. To the left a photo of the original building as shown in the 1923 yearbook.

The History House has two yearbooks on file, 1923 and 1930. Photos in this article are from these two books. While this was very much like a country club, it was quite different. No intoxicating beverages were allowed, smoking was not permitted indoors, no profanity, dogs or open fires were permitted and there were over 28 detailed rules for people and 1 for autos. This was a family affair. Originally for men only, in 1919 ladies (girls) were allowed. Yearly dues were \$5.00 if you were a resident, \$2.00 if you weren't local (Wabash covered 5 states and Canada).

The 1930 yearbook shows the new clubhouse. Older residents of Ferguson may recognize this as the building when the club became a Ferguson Park – in recent years taken down for the new park structures.



The Wabash Club offered members many things to do: all number of sports (basketball, handball, baseball, tennis, horseshoes, gold, billiards, bowling, water sports, etc.) – for both men and "girls". Many were intermural sports, but some were competitive with

outside teams (Men's baseball for example). There were social activities (Dramatics, concerts, social dinners and picnics, etc).



"THE WABASH BANNERS 1922"



WABASH BANNER BLUE BIRDS



Photo to the left shows a view of the lake and clubhouse in the 1930's. Below, we will show some composite pages from the two Souvenir books on file at the History House.



Eventually the end of the Wabash Club would come around. As in the early 1910s, World War I interrupted (many were drafted), and so did World War II. Other types of recreation became available and by the end of the war the Wabash Club was on the way out. This prompted the City of Ferguson to contact the Wabash Railroad for the sale of the property. The railroad generously agreed to sell the acreage and the properties for \$40,000. A bond issue was passed for \$155,000 in November 1947 and the land became January-Wabash Park. The park was dedicated on October 30, 1948 with Mr. A.K. Atkinson, President of the Wabash Railroad making the dedication speech.

In 1949, with the help of the Lions Club, the clubhouse was renovated and the original pool was constructed (1950). 1951 saw the first of many fireworks displays. In 1960 Florissant Road was widened and we lost some of the park. In 1963 a bandshell was constructed and in 1969 the lake was drained and deepened. 1970 saw the Armed Services Monument installed. January-Wabash Park is a show-place for the City of Ferguson – it's history dates back before 1855 with the Wabash Club a major player. Next month we will take a look at the 100th anniversary of Historic Route 66 and it's relationship with Ferguson

Research for this article was from the two Souvenir Books of the Wabash Club, an article in the History House by Jill Holtrop, and articles on the Wabash Railroad.



If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact **Jerry Benner** at fjbenner@mindspring.com. If you wish to become a member or make a money donation, you can send it to Ferguson Historical Society at 716. N. Elizabeth Ave, Ferguson, MO 63135. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum. Please email me at the address to set a date and time to visit. Board meetings are on the third Wednesday at 6:30 PM. Interested people are invited to attend the meetings. We have capabilities to do oral histories and would love to add to our collection on any Ferguson or North County subject. *“The Ferguson Historical Society preserves Ferguson’s historical record and engages the public through programs, research and exhibitions that deepen understanding, strengthen civic pride and connect past, present and future generations.”*

Fergusonhistoricalsociety.com