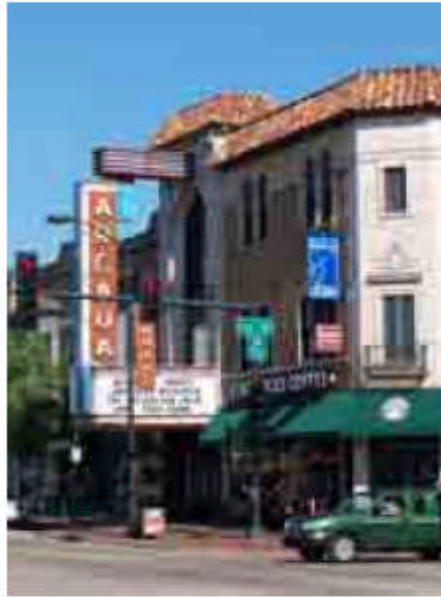


Welcome to historic St. Charles, Illinois



The Arcada Theatre
105 E. Main Street - photo circa 1930



The Arcada Theatre - 2005



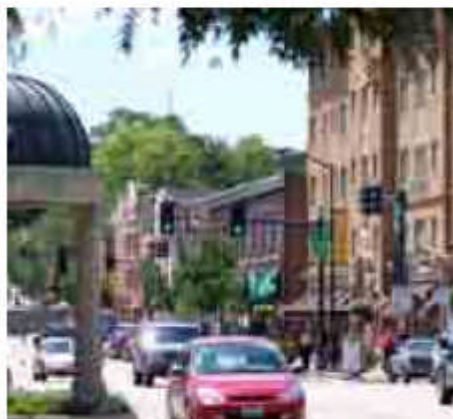
The Wing House - now TownHouse Books
105 N. Second Ave. - photo circa 1890



TownHouse Books - 2005



West Main Street - photo circa 1927



West Main Street - 2005

St. Charles embraces its rich history while providing top-notch, 21st century style amenities, dining, shopping, entertainment & accommodations.

The staff of the St. Charles Convention & Visitors Bureau welcomes leisure guests, tour groups and convention attendees with a variety of value-added assistance.

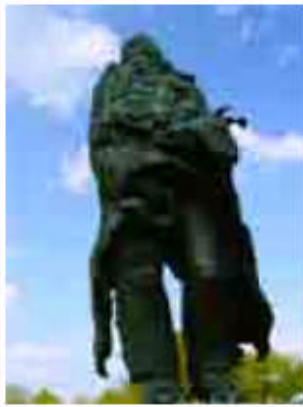
St. Charles and the surrounding Fox River Valley offers exceptional leisure-time activities, peaceful natural areas, big-city entertainment and a wealth of historic sites.

Please allow us the privilege of helping make your visit to St. Charles a warm and memorable experience.



For any information on St. Charles,
call the St. Charles Visitors Bureau:
800-777-4373

www.visitstcharles.com
info@visitstcharles.com



"Ekwabet" stands as a guardian of the City of St. Charles on the east bank of the Fox River. Ekwabet is a Potawatomi word meaning "watching over."



Camp Kane in St. Charles

The City of St. Charles invites you to discover its distinctive past, present and future. Community members share a common history that makes St. Charles what it is today. Scenic River views, neighborhood ambiance, stunning architecture, friendly faces and a small-town atmosphere were created through 168 years of a colorful past.

Historically, the Fox River area was an ideal place to settle because of its lush forests, expansive prairies and abundant resources.

Prior to the Blackhawk War, the area was inhabited by the Potawatomi, Native American Indians and earlier by the Fox Tribe, from which the name of the river is derived.

In March of 1834, Evan Shelby and William Franklin established a settlement they named "Charleston" on the east bank of the Fox River at what is now Baker Memorial Park. In the years that followed, entrepreneurs – like Dean and Read Ferson, Ira Minard and Bela Hunt – arrived from New England states and settled along the Fox River. The original name of the settlement was changed in 1839 when it was discovered that there was another town in down-state Illinois with the same name. Steven S. Jones, an early settler, lawyer and publisher, is credited with suggesting the new name of St. Charles.

The first industries in town were lumber mills, grist mills and wool carding mills, all powered by the water wheels near the man-made dam on the Fox River.

St. Charles was home to many "firsts" in the state, including the first medical school, The Franklin Medical Institute, which opened in 1842 at the northeast corner of First Avenue and east Main Street.

Prior to and during the Civil War, a number of Underground Railroad "stations" existed throughout St. Charles. Leading citizens of the town were known abolitionists and members of the Kane County Anti-Slavery Society. And many were "conductors" on the Underground Railroad who assisted fugitive slaves on their journey north to freedom.

St. Charles was also home to the 8th and 17th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry Units who trained here at Camp Kane, now Langum Park on Route 25 east of the river and south of Main Street. Marcellus Jones, a member of the 8th Illinois Cavalry, is credited for firing the first shot at the Battle of Gettysburg.



General John Farnsworth organized the 8th & 17th Illinois Cavalry. Farnsworth was a personal friend of President Abraham Lincoln.

From 1874 to 1910, St. Charles, like other towns, experienced monumental changes in industry, “technology” of the times and government leadership. The first mayoral election was in 1874. Muddy, wheel-rutted dirt roads were paved with bricks to accommodate the new “horse-less” carriages. Local industry expanded with the help of the railroad, street cars and new road construction. As industry grew, so did the need for laborers.

Many of the town’s original citizens were immigrants from Lithuania and Belgium, who came to work at the Moline Malleable Company or the Cable Piano Factory. By the turn of the century, St. Charles had shifted from a small farming community to a multi-cultural and primarily industrial city.

During the early years of the 20th century, St. Charles offered a “resort” town atmosphere to Chicago-area residents with its scenic river views and the creation of Pottawatomie Park in 1912, the first designated public park in Illinois. As the “Roaring Twenties” rolled in, St. Charles became a destination for pleasure with the construction of the Arcada Theatre and Hotel Baker.

Local philanthropist Edward J. Baker, his niece, Dellora along with her husband, Lester Norris, were heirs to the John W. Gates wealthy estate. John “Bet-A-Million” Gates made his fortune in the marketing and selling of barbed wire. Later, he founded the Texaco Oil Company.

The Baker and Norris families generously shared this inherited wealth with their hometown and built many of the historic structures enjoyed today, including the St. Charles Municipal Center, the Baker Memorial Community Center, the Baker Memorial Methodist Church, Hotel Baker and the Arcada Theatre.

The Arcada Theatre, built in 1927, was an immensely successful theater and vaudeville stage. Popular actors and entertainers of the day performed on the stage at the Arcada, such as Burns and Allen, Ginger Rogers, Maria Von Trapp, Edgar Bergen, Will Rogers and the John Philip Sousa Band. The Arcada is one of the few remaining vaudeville theaters in the area that has retained its original interior and offers today’s audience a wonderful atmosphere of yesterday’s lavish theater experience.



Hotel Baker opened its doors in 1926. With its Spanish decor and richly appointed guest rooms, it was one of the most beautiful hotels west of the big city of Chicago. As word spread, it became a popular, romantic get-away and was nicknamed the “Honeymoon” hotel.

Today, St. Charles still beckons visitors and corporate conventions from around the world to experience its historic downtown districts, abundant recreational opportunities and beautiful river-side setting.

Greyhound: Horse of the 20th Century lived here

Local businessman and generous patron to St. Charles, Col. Edward J. Baker, purchased Greyhound for \$900 in 1933. Little did he know then that his beloved trotter would earn the title of “Horse of the Century” bestowed posthumously upon the magnificent animal in 1971. Even though 29 years remained in the 20th century, members of the Trotter Hall of Fame honored Greyhound with the title, not just “Horse of the Year” or “Horse of the Decade,” but horse of the entire century.

Col. Baker, as he was affectionately known, already had several racing horses when he bought Greyhound, named for his dappled grey coat. He placed the young trotter in the hands of renowned trainer and driver, Sep Palin. Greyhound launched his illustrious racing career in 1934, during which the horse won 71 of 82 starts and set no less than 25 world records.

Often called the “Grey Ghost” because of his color and incredible speed, Greyhound set a world record at Lexington’s Grand Circuit in time trials at 1:56. His record for the mile, set at 1:55.25, stood on the books, unchallenged for 31 years until 1969, when Nevele Pride broke the record with 1:54.4.

First-hand accounts of his racing describe the sight of Greyhound as thrilling, with his dark mane whipping straight out behind him and all four of his hooves leaving the ground. He was like a bird in flight. Greyhound had an incredible stride of 30 feet. He stood 16.1 hands at his withers.

He went on to win the coveted Hambletonian Stake at Goshen, New York, the Horseman Futurity at Indianapolis, Indiana and the Championship Stallion State at DuQuoin, Iowa. He so far outdistanced his competitors that eventually, no other horse could be found to race against him.

After his retirement in 1940, Greyhound continued to make personal appearances, especially at Sportsman’s Park, where his birthday, March 4, was an annual track event. He would appear with a ring of red roses encircling his neck and his hooves were painted red to match the rider’s silks.



Greyhound was stabled at a farm in Northbrook, Illinois, but the big horse seemed lonely. So, Col. Baker had a custom stall built for Greyhound at his Silver Glen farm, complete with air-conditioning, wood paneling and picture window for the aging horse to view his surroundings. There, Greyhound rested in comfort, romped in the pastures and was visited often by Col. Baker.

Somehow, the Colonel knew that his beloved trotter would outlive him, so Baker’s will provided for the Greyhound’s care and even stipulated where his friend should be buried. Col. Baker died in 1959; Greyhound died on February 4, 1965 at age 33.

The magnificent trotter rests at the privately owned Red Gate Farm in St. Charles. A monument topped with a bronze angel on rearing horseback marks the grave and a tablet is inscribed with Baker’s own words:

“This monument is dedicated in affection and pride to him who needs none. The Horse. May neither rain nor wind nor flight of time erase the glory of his memory.”