



ST. CHARLES  
SINCE 1834

## AGENDA ITEM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title:	Recommendation to Approve Installation of Downtown Partnership Historic Signs
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Presenter:	Peter Suhr
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*Please check appropriate box:*

	Government Operations	X	Government Services 03.25.13
	Planning & Development		City Council
	Public Hearing		

Estimated Cost:	\$	Budgeted:	YES	X	NO	
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If NO, please explain how item will be funded:

**Executive Summary:**

In May of 2012, the Government Services Committee approved the installation of a Downtown Partnership Historic Sign highlighting the history of the Municipal Center, which is now installed near the building. The Downtown Partnership has received a \$5,000 grant for this program which includes the purchase of two (2) additional historic signs. Staff, on behalf of the Downtown Partnership, is seeking approval for the installation of the next two (2) signs in the locations and as per the descriptions attached. Similar to the first sign installed, City staff will install the signs, and the City will assume maintenance of the markers in the future.

**Attachments:** *(please list)*

Historic Marker Location Maps, Sample Sign Information

**Recommendation / Suggested Action** *(briefly explain):*

Recommend approval of installation of Downtown Partnership Historic Signs.

*For office use only:*

*Agenda Item Number: 4.m*

## Piano Factory Site

In 1901, the Cable Piano Co. erected a factory that would remain a St. Charles landmark for almost a century. Herman D. Cable's factory became one of the largest producers of pianos in the U.S., employing some 500 workers and turning out 35 pianos a day during its height of operations. The factory was known for its superb working conditions. A footbridge was constructed in the early 1900's to help workers cross the Fox River and is still in use today. The plant was hit hard by the Depression, ceasing operations in 1937.

The Cable factory did not remain vacant for long, as the Howell Manufacturing Company of Geneva moved its operations to the site. Howell manufactured furniture and dinettes with a brief stint producing materials to support American efforts in WWII. Howell changed hands numerous times over the next five decades, finally shuttering its doors in 1980.

The site remained unoccupied until 1986, when after extensive reconstruction it opened for retail shopping as the Piano Factory Outlet Mall of St. Charles. A few years earlier, the nearby Beith House was saved during the conversion of the old Crown Electric building into Fox Island Square. The Piano Factory was demolished in 1999 to make way for the Brownstone subdivision.



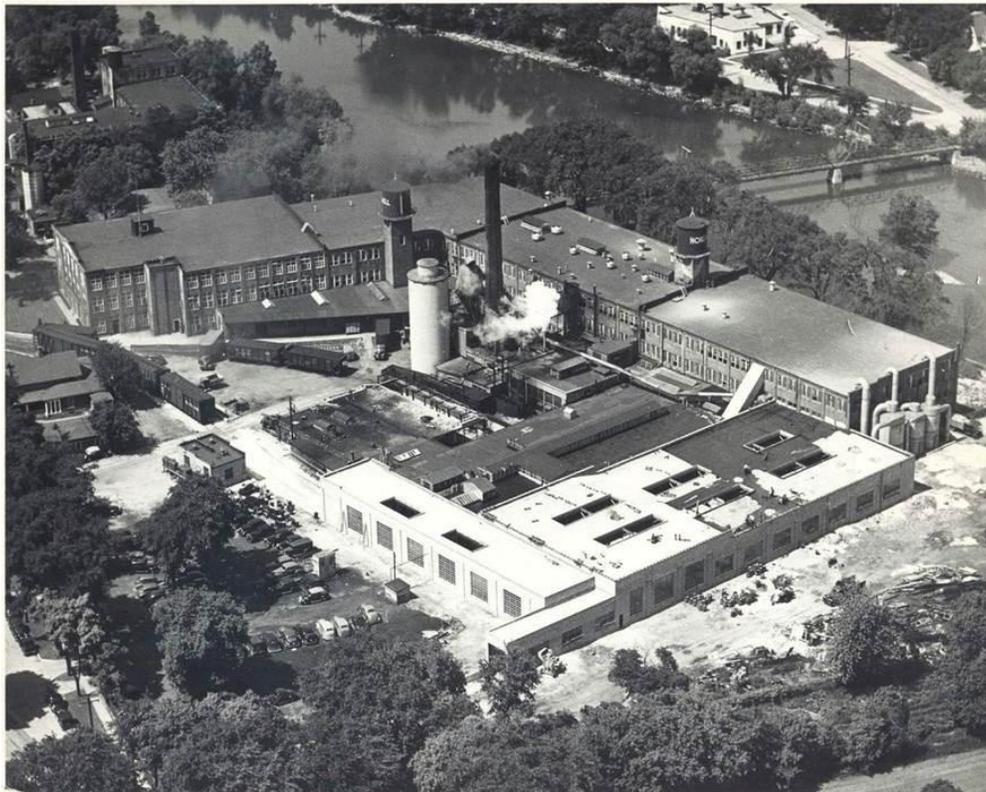
Raw materials arrived at the Cable Co. from around the world, including ivory from Africa. Pianos were completely assembled at the factory and shipped by rail all over the U.S. and as far away as Australia and South America. Note the original footbridge.



Cable Co. employees were active in sports teams, clubs, choirs, and bands. The factory was well regarded for the fine working conditions and well-kept lawns. The Kingsbury was one of many piano models made by Cable.



Crown Electric Mfg. began in St. Charles in 1892 and built this factory in 1910 at 1<sup>st</sup> & Illinois St. (right, smokestack). The building was converted to retail stores and offices in the 1980's



Howell Mfg. Co., Geneva's oldest manufacturing plant, moved to the Cable Co. site in 1937. Howell made numerous expansions to the original factory over the years. The company was known for its chrome-plated furniture.



Beith House was constructed in the Greek Revival style by William Beith in 1850. Beith was a stonemason, working in St. Charles, Aurora, and Chicago.



# City of St. Charles, Illinois

Two East Main Street St. Charles, IL 60174-1984  
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## Precision GIS

DONALD P. DEWITTE *Mayor*  
BRIAN TOWNSEND *City Administrator*



Data Source:  
City of St. Charles, Illinois  
Kane County, Illinois  
DuPage County, Illinois  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Coordinate System: Illinois State Plane East  
North American Datum 1983  
Printed on: March 20, 2013 07:07 AM



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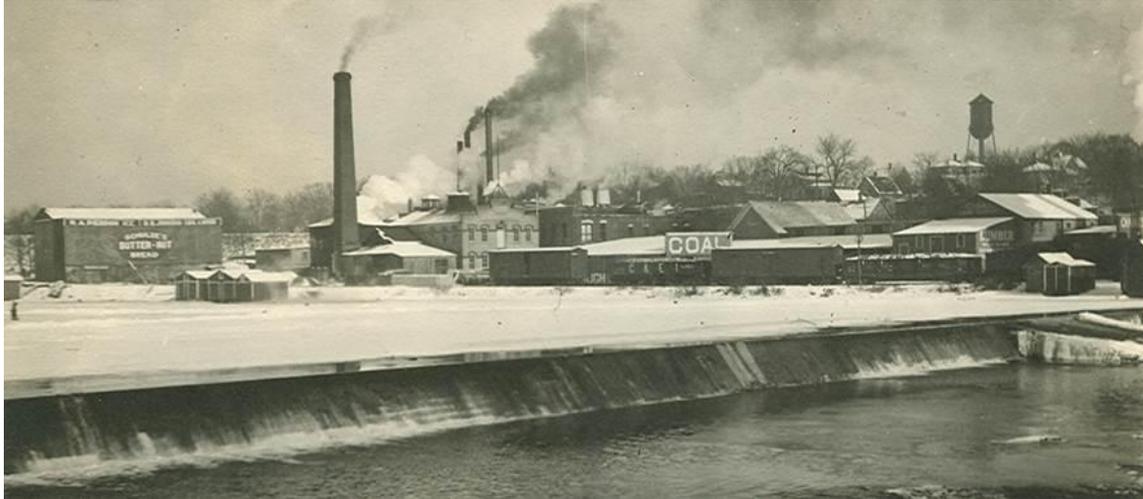
## Early Industry on the Fox

In the 1830s, early settlers of St. Charles built new industries along the Fox River. By 1850, the town had lumber, flour, grist, paper and carding mills, an iron foundry, condensed milk and pottery factories, and a linseed and castor oil plant. Several of these were located near this sign.

With the transportation opportunities provided by a railroad spur that ran from the trestle bridge to Main Street, St. Charles became a major dairy center by the early 1900s. The St. Charles Condensing Company produced evaporated cream, which won top international awards. The St. Charles Pure Milk Company, precursor of Colonial Café & Ice Cream, built its first milk processing plant on the city's west side.

Following a decline in the dairy industry, other businesses flourished. Among them, Hawley Products became well-known for Boy Scout and U.S. Army pith helmets, radio equipment, and military aircraft parts.

After more than a century, all industry had left this Fox River area, creating space for expansion of the city's fire and police departments.



Smokestacks rise from the St. Charles Condensing and National Milk Sugar factories. The Harbaugh Lumber Company sold coal for heating, as did the R.B. Johnson Ice and Coal Company, which stands to the left of small boathouses on the east shore of the Fox River.



Men work to construct a footpath along the Fox River from Main Street to Pottawatomie Park in the early 1930s. The path was named Langum Trail in honor of St. Charles mayor and physician Ival G. Langum. Among other contributions to the community, Langum established work programs and a soup kitchen for unemployed men and their families during the Great Depression. The path was renamed the Freedom Trail in 1976.



City leaders join Pottawatomie Garden Club members in a ceremony to recognize the club's donation of trees to the city. Note the Hotel Baker and Hotel Baker parking garage in the background, and the Great Western Railroad spur along the river.



The Minnesota & Northwestern Railroad Company completed this railroad bridge over the Fox River in 1886, and passenger service began on July 31, 1887. The fare to Chicago cost 99 cents. The railroad reorganized in 1892 to become the Chicago Great Western Railway.



Simon Anderson (right foreground), founder of the Colonial Ice Cream Company, helps with the company's last ice harvest on the west side of the Fox River in 1928. Colonial used the ice, packed in saw dust and stored in their ice house, to refrigerate dairy products and to make ice cream.



Data Source:  
City of St. Charles, Illinois  
Kane County, Illinois  
DuPage County, Illinois  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
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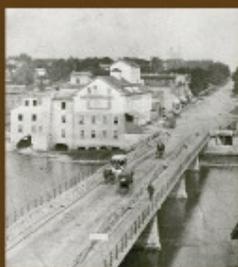
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# Historic St. Charles

## The Municipal Plaza



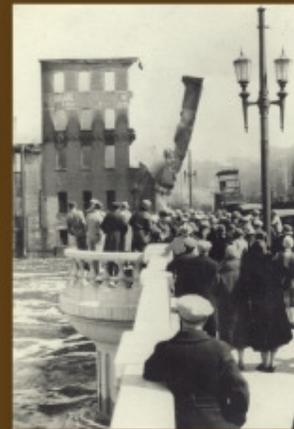
A. Fredenhagen  
Flour & Grain Mill  
circa: 1877

The site of the Municipal Plaza in St. Charles has undergone several dramatic transformations in the past 100 years.

The first dam and a sawmill were built in 1836. In 1866 a flourmill, operated by Civil War veteran Major W.G. Conklin, replaced the sawmill. In 1877, A. Fredenhagen took over operation of the flour & grain mill. Fire destroyed the mill in 1896. One year later Crown Electric rebuilt on the site. Beginning in 1908, the St. Charles Fixture Co., a manufacturer of gas and electric light fixtures, operated on site for 21 years before fire destroyed the building in 1929.

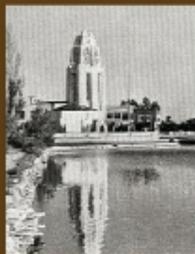


Crown Electric Co.  
circa: 1896



In 1929 fire destroyed the St. Charles Fixture Manufacturing building

In 1940 the Municipal Building was completed, its construction funded by local residents Col. and Mrs. Edward J. Baker and Mr. and Mrs. Lester J. Norris. The Municipal Building is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece reflecting the Art Moderne style which is identifiable by the combination of 'modern' machine age technology and the artistic expression of the late 1930's. It was designed by notable local architect R. Harold Zook and nephew D. Taylor Cody. Zook's buildings are creative, reflective of the era, constructed using natural materials as well as the highest quality of craftsmanship. The Municipal Building clad in Georgian marble leaves a lasting impression.



Municipal Building

The Municipal Building is a Designated Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



### Train Accident on Main Street

In 1915, across the street from current day Municipal Plaza, Great Western Engine #214 ran off the end of the track on the riverfront spur line, crashing into the St. Charles Fruit & Confectionery Shop. No one was injured; the shop was only slightly damaged.



More of the story available for download here!

Downtown St. Charles Partnership  
City of St. Charles  
St. Charles Heritage Center