

The Saga of Sappington House

It was a jolly group that gathered on the brisk fall day of October 27, 1808, at the new Trading Post in Bonhomme Township in the District of Saint Louis, Louisiana Territory.

The most exuberant person in the crowd—and it was a crowd for such an occasion in those days—was perhaps John Sappington, a boisterous newly transplanted resident of Upper Louisiana and a former distinguished senator from Kentucky who earlier in life had served as a personal body guard to General Washington. He also had the reputation, which he fostered more than anyone, of being a fearless oppressor of the redman and fought many bands of Indians single handed, according to him, while mounted on his faithful horse, Monitor.

On this particular day, however, John Sappington had reason to be joyous. One of his sons, Thomas Sappington, at the age of 21, took as his bride the beautiful, but illiterate, young maiden, Miss Mary Ann Kinkead, whom all the other eligible ladies envied for snatching the prize "catch" among the scarce eligible young men.

The civil ceremony was performed by Justice of the Peace Richard Caulk, and, if for no other reason, this marriage was an historical event, in that it was the first to be recorded under Federal authority in Saint Louis.

In recording the marriage, Justice Caulk noted that it was performed "in the presence of witnesses," and if they included the Sappington clan alone, it

indeed, would still have been quite a gathering. For fearless John Sappington, while still living in Kentucky, had purchased three years earlier 1,920 acres of land in the Gravois area in the Saint Louis territory after the United States acquired the Louisiana Purchase. He went back to Kentucky and moved his family of seventeen children and forty other families to the virgin Saint Louis area and established a trading post. So, excluding children of the other forty families, guests at the wedding of Thomas and Mary Ann could have numbered nearly one hundred.

History strongly indicates that John Sappington was a domineering hellion, especially when it came to his family. One of his maneuvers to keep his children within horseback riding distance was to give—but not legally deed—each son 200 acres of his land on which to build as each selected a wife. The plots of land were never legally theirs until their father's death.

Thus, as soon as his son Thomas had spoken for the hand of Mary Ann, the couple began to plan their house on their allotted 200 acres. Thomas dispatched plans for the house by horseback from Kentucky, gathered together the family's band of slaves to build it, and shortly after their marriage he and his bride moved into their new home which, even to this day, is considered to be a prime example of Federal architecture.

The house was so well constructed that it is the only one still remaining. Today, it's affectionately called simply

the Sappington House and has a more specific address of 1015 South Sappington Road in Crestwood. In the last few years, it has undergone a complete restoration which has involved as many dedicated historians and civic leaders as there were in the Sappington clan.

Last month, after being deserted to become a neighborhood eyesore in 1959, the doors of Sappington House were reopened for everyone to relive the gracious era of Saint Louis at the beginning of the 19th Century.

The Sappington name, because of the street and municipality in Saint Louis County, is familiar to most residents but the average citizen knows little or nothing about the original family. Therefore, let's return briefly to the happenings at Sappington House.

Thomas and Mary Ann had only one child, a daughter, Lucinda. Their happy home life was interrupted by the War of 1812 when Thomas, always a quiet and reserved man, left to serve as a First Lieutenant. After the war, in which he received many honors, he returned home and resumed his career as a court clerk. Their daughter grew up to become the wife of Granville O. Eades of another prominent family in Saint Louis history.

On January 13, 1842, Thomas Sappington found himself alone. His father, and many of his brothers and sisters, had long since died, and on that date he lost Mary Ann at the age of 58.

One year after Mary Ann's death, the

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Three of the costumed guides await visitors. They are (left to right), Mrs. Emily Pakse, Mrs. Clair Beger, and Mrs. Urtice Frumar.



Mrs. McDonnell arranges a tea setting in the livingroom of the Sappington House. The portrait over the mantle is of a Sappington descendant, and clock on the wall is one of the original "banjo clocks."



(Above) Mrs. Walsh sets a dining table with antique pistol-handled knives and forks and Staffordshire china.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM MORTON

The bedspread in the master bedroom, which Mrs. McDonnell straightens, is rare and unique in that it has a "hidden" design of the American eagle.



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SAPPINGTON HOUSE—continued from page 19
vigorous 60-year-old Thomas took himself another bride—a lady by the name of Miss Houser—and a new mistress presided over the fashionable Sappington House. Despite Thomas' age, he and his second wife had four children, and, perhaps because of fond memories of his first wife, Thomas named their first born Mary Ann.

All of the children by the second marriage were still minors when their mother died in 1858. And Thomas, at the age of 77, died two years later and was buried alongside other members of his family in a cemetery which still exists near Sappington Road on Highway 66 in the southwest county.

The fact that Thomas was always a respected gentleman of the community is revealed in his obituary, which, in part, read:

"Thomas Sappington died Tuesday morning May 15th, 1860, at five o'clock at his residence in Gravois of bilious fever, age 77 years. He was a noted pioneer of the west, having emigrated with his brothers from Lexington, Kentucky, to St. Louis, Upper Louisiana, in the spring of 1804, settling upon the tract of land upon which he lived and died 56 years. He was an officer under Major McNair (later a governor of Missouri) in 1814-15, passed through the perils at Cap Au Grist, Fort Mason, Quiver on Loutre Island and the rough marshes of Calhoun County and Illinois. He was associate of Ramseys, Boones, Harrisons, Whitesides and Longs in the early struggles in Upper Louisiana from savage and hostile bands of redmen.

"Thomas Sappington that spirited soldier and quiet citizen is now no more. Gone to meet officers and brother soldiers in another field. To meet again his old Revolutionary father, his brothers and sisters who have gone before him. He leaves four orphan children of his second marriage to mourn his loss. Rest in Peace."

While Thomas may have rested in peace, the land he left behind has been in a constant state of turmoil. At first it was divided between his four children, and, by 1875, 25.5 acres, including the house, was owned by one of his sons, Marshall. Marshall sold it in 1877, and thereafter it changed hands many times, mostly involving families by the name of Wingate and Nickels. Then came the Picrauxs, the last private owners who sold much of the property to the Lindbergh School District and industrial developers.

The last of the Picrauxs moved out in 1959, and almost 150 years after Thomas built it for Mary Ann, the house was deserted.

Vandals took over, breaking windows and sash and damaging interior woodwork, considered Americana classics.

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"Before it's too late, Harry, why don't you quit the old rat race?"

SAPPINGTON HOUSE - *continued from page 36*

Many local residents and historians became concerned, but what could be done to preserve Sappington House?

William Bodley Lane, architect and president of the Kirkwood Historical Society, was one of the people pondering this question. Positive that some day, some how, the house would be restored, he personally boarded up the windows and doors, removed much of the woodwork, such as mantle pieces, and stored them in his own basement until the inevitable restoration took place.

In 1961, the City of Crestwood was successful in getting the Sappington House restoration included in a city park

bond issue. It passed, but no immediate funds were available for fixing up the dissipated historic house.

Crestwood Mayor Paul T. Koenig, Charles Van Ravensway, former director of the Missouri Historical Society, and many other interested persons, appeared before the Park Department of the Saint Louis County Historic Buildings Commission and presented the case on behalf of Sappington House.

Finally, the County Council agreed to appropriate up to \$27,500 to put the house back in reasonable condition if the City of Crestwood would develop the park around it and maintain the house. Architect Gehardt Kramer was engaged to work with the Historic Building Commission.

In order to discourage further vandalism and to return the house to a respectable status in the community, it was decided to restore the exterior first and the interior second. However, it was the consensus of those close to the project that it would take up to \$10,000 more to complete the work.

While the county was proceeding with its part of the bargain, the City of Crestwood was moving forward on shaping up the surrounding grounds under the direction of a local committee appointed by Mayor Koenig. This committee included Mrs. G. J. Walsh, a Crestwood Alderman; Mrs. W. H. Buxton, committee chairman

and a Sappington descendent; and William Bodley Lane, with Mrs. William A. McDonnell as an advisor.

Their plans included the digging of a small pond, to be used for fishing and ice skating, on the south end of the property, a large paved parking area on the north side and preliminary grading and landscaping.

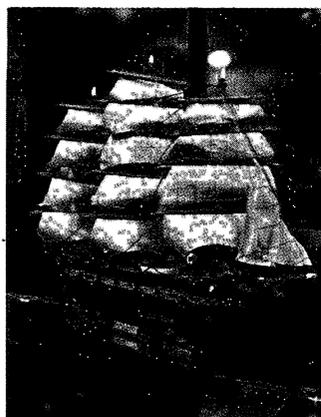
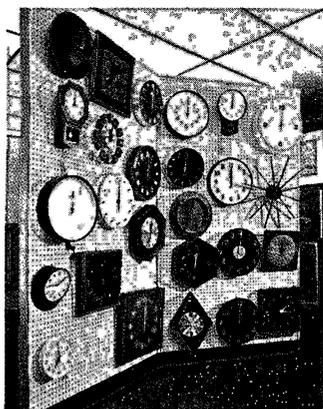
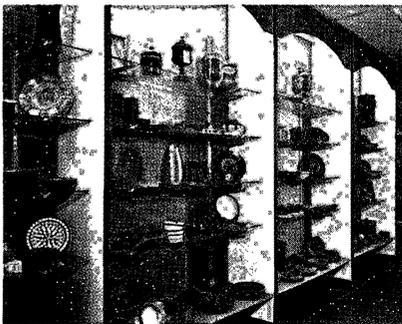
Last year, the county turned the partially finished building back to the City of Crestwood, and it was estimated that an additional \$8,000 was needed to finish the inside of the house alone. And vandals were at it again, making it obvious that a resident caretaker would be necessary. But the problem was that Sappington House was too small to accommodate a caretaker and still have an adequate restoration area to show the public.

Fortunately, Mrs. McDonnell, who worked on the restoration of the Bolduc house in Ste. Genevieve and the General Bissell house in Saint Louis, had not lost her interest. She gave birth to the idea of a one-story caretaker's house simulating a summer kitchen to be constructed, in the same Federal style, alongside the original house. But this would take another \$40,000.

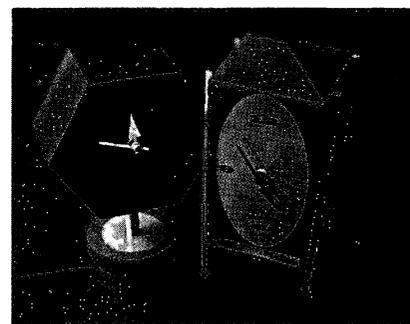
The determined Mrs. McDonnell set out to find the additional funds. She was successful in obtaining a \$20,000 grant

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SAPPINGTON HOUSE—continued from page 39
 from a private trust fund if the restoration committee could match the amount.

This was the time when just about everyone in the City of Crestwood got into the act. Crestwood businesses, such as Crestwood Plaza and the Bank of Crestwood, and other profession people, including members of the Chamber of Commerce, made donations. Laclede Gas Company and Southwestern Bell Telephone Company donated hundreds of dollars in equipment. Meanwhile, housewives were holding benefit card parties, while their children were conducting garage sales. One group of children raised \$125 through a rummage sale to buy a cradle.

It wasn't long before they had the \$20,000 to match the trust fund and work proceeded, with William Bodley Lane engaged to design the caretaker's cottage. Norbert Markway Construction Company, the lowest bidder, was hired to start construction, and Miss Edith Sinclair Mason was asked to design the gardens. Word spread of the activities at Sappington House, and the Crestwood Federated Garden Club offered to donate the formal gardens in the rear and the Crestwood Associated Garden Club choose the herb garden, with the Saint Louis Herb Society donating the herbs.

Mrs. McDonnell, meanwhile, was busy collecting furnishings for the house, traveling throughout Missouri and the country in search of authentic pieces. She pointed out that some of the furnishings seen in the house are appropriate although they are not all "antique Missouri."

"The first steamboat to dock in Saint Louis was called the Pike, in 1817," she explained. "And within ten years, more than 80 boats were docking regularly, thus it was no problem to import furniture from throughout the country."

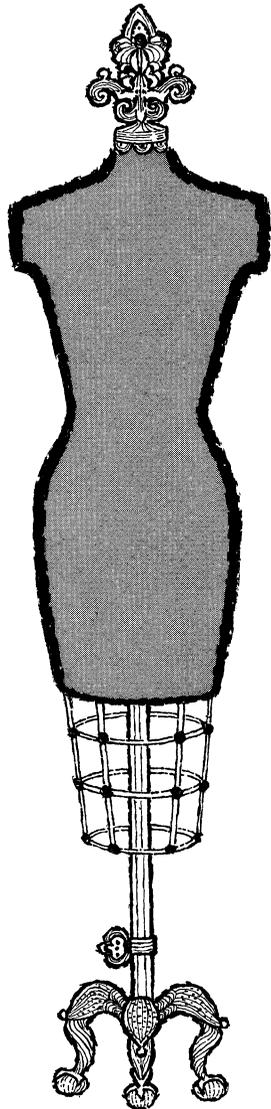
Many of the plaque "samplers" seen on the walls, and several other pieces of furnishings, are from Mrs. McDonnell's own private collection.

The Sappington House, which may be seen by the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and from noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, is a five room structure—a livingroom, dining-room, kitchen and two second-story bedrooms. The kitchen area will be utilized as a public library containing books on historical Americana and antiques.

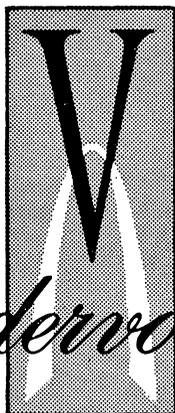
Visitors to the historical site will be assisted by colonial-dressed volunteer guides who will relate the history of the Sappingtons and the furnishings.

It's been a long, hard life for the house that Thomas built for Mary Ann. But now, it, too, is resting in peace as a living showplace—instead of an eyesore—in the heart of the community which refused to let it die.





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AUGUST, 1966, Vol. IV, No. 2

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 SATURDAY REVIEW

**THIS
MONTH'S
COVER**

The delicate charm of historic Sappington House (the genealogy of which is traced in this issue) is depicted in this watercolor by Roscoe Misselhorn. The artist, who lives in Sparta, Illinois, is especially well-known for his original Christmas cards of Saint Louis scenes. After attending the Saint Louis School of Fine Arts and Washington University, Misselhorn worked as a commercial artist and cartoonist in Chicago and authored the book, "Sketching with Pencil," published by Bridgman Publishers, New York, in 1949. He has held many one man shows in Saint Louis, California and Illinois, and his works are seen in the Library of Congress and Carnegie Institute. A regular contributor to Ford Times and travel magazines, Misselhorn's current activities also includes an adult extension class in oil painting for Southern Illinois University. Among Misselhorn's many awards are two from the First National Bank of Saint Louis in Christmas card competition.

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These aerial views show early construction of Crestwood Plaza (top photo) in 1956 and the latest addition—Stix, Baer & Fuller (bottom photo, right foreground)—which is now being built and will be opened next month.



The Crestwood Boom



Members of the fire department receive constant up-to-date instructions in their work from Capt. Robert Berra.



Which came first—the City of Crestwood or Crestwood Plaza?

This variation on the ancient “chicken or egg” riddle has been a constant nagging question to residents of the city located just west of Webster Groves and about 14 miles west of the heart of Saint Louis. Some resent that thousands of Saint Louis countians think of Crestwood only as a shopping center and are completely baffled when they discover that there’s a city that goes with it.

But to set the record straight, the city came first. Recorded history can’t deny that. It became an incorporated village in 1947 by an act of the county court, and changed its embryo status to a Fourth Class City by a vote of the people in 1949.

Crestwood, however, was a “mother hen” determined to hatch a mammoth “egg” that would make it one of the most prosperous and fastest growing municipalities in Saint Louis County. Although originally it was unwanted by many of the residents, that offspring was Crestwood Plaza Shopping Center—one of the largest and most successful centralized business meccas in the nation.

To a non-resident driving through the city on Highway 66, Crestwood is a hectic

mumbo-jumbo of businesses, all shapes and sizes, ranging from the Plaza to small roadside donut shops. Nestled on each side of this median is a serene city of 14,000 which appears to ignore the continuous havoc of shoppers and traffic which breathes life into it.

There live residents who have as much for far less than those in neighboring municipalities. For instance, its police and fire departments, schools, parks, and health and sanitation services have undisputable reputations, but a Crestwood home owner pays about half as much in taxes as those in nearby Kirkwood.

Why? Simple. With the opening of Crestwood Plaza Shopping Center in March, 1957, the city’s management quickly realized that businesses make for lower residential assessments. Thriving businesses attract other businesses, and the city government, while still holding a rigid rein on zoning balance, has since encouraged additional reputable firms to settle in the commercial complex.

But the city can’t take all the credit for this mushrooming of business enterprises. Most of it must go to two brothers by the names of Louis I. and Milton L. Zorensky.

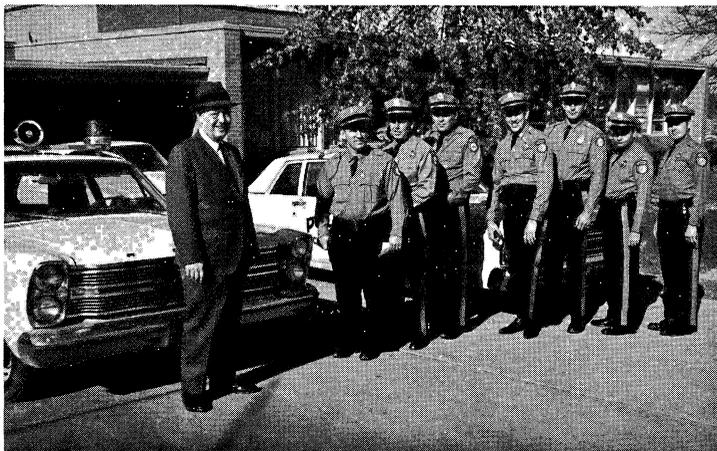
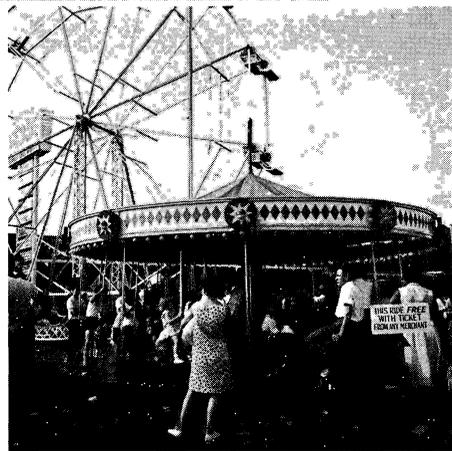


The first building of Crestwood Bank when it opened in 1958. Three years later, the bank moved into an ultra-modern building at Highway 66 and Sappington Road.

In the early 1950s, the Zorenskys, both of whom graduated from the School of Business Administration of Washington University, spotted a rather unsightly area of land at the corner of Highway 66 and Sappington Road. It was a gully of thirty-four acres, not much good for anything—certainly not for farming, which took up a sizable portion of acreage of



Lions, carnivals and movie stars—just a few of the promotions that cause excitement at Crestwood Plaza.



Police Chief Al P. Steimel poses with Crestwood's outstanding police force.

will tie-in this area with stores in the existing shopping center. Leading from Stix, the mall will connect between the present National Shirt Shop and Sears, with the latter also having an entry way from the pedestrian bridge.

Meanwhile, at the far north end of the center, Vandervoort's, which also houses Jaccard's—the nation's largest suburban jewelry store—has been busy remodeling and enlarging store facilities to keep in step with the fast and demanding growth of this shopping area.

But Crestwood Plaza, to the thousands of people who know it, is more than a shopper's paradise. It's a meeting place (the saying, "Meet me at Crestwood," is as familiar as "Meet me under the Biltmore clock" in New York City); it's a fun place (they even have occasional Saturday night dances with big name bands on the parking lot); and it has become an exciting place of the community which it helped to mold.

Sometimes, however, the excitement is unplanned. Each month there is a different promotion, usually in the form of entertainment. These have included trained seals, Elvis Presley's gold car, celebrities, "Miss Teen-age America" contests, and Santa Claus' arrival by helicopter.

The one promotion, however, which the Plaza management will never forget was the trained lions. One night, near closing time, one of the lions broke loose and decided to take a stroll down the center's walkway. A group of imbibers, just leaving a restaurant bar, spotted him first and sounded the distress signal. The gentle lion was quickly apprehended by the trainer, and peace was restored as quickly as the shocked onlookers returned to the bar.

Two years ago Louis I. and Milton L. Zorensky received recognition for their achievements from the hyper-active 85-member Crestwood Chamber of Commerce. He was the first to receive that group's "Crestwood Award," an annual presentation. Morris H. Sternick, manager of the center, also is active in the community's civic affairs and is currently serving as the Chamber's president.

A year after the shopping center opened, in 1958, a small bank with headquarters in a converted house on an opposite corner from the center was introduced to the community. It was—and still is—called Crestwood Bank and is a member of the "Family of Banks," which also includes Clayton and Hampton banks.

With J. R. James, Jr., as chairman of the board, Henry E. Klug as president, and Walter Nentwig as vice president, the bank deserted its temporary quarters three years later, and in 1961, moved into the newly constructed Crestwood Bank Building, creating a complimentary busi-

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that area in those days.

The Zorensky brothers, private investors and early developers of shopping centers, felt this to be an ideal location for their new concept in mass merchandising. Until then, and even in many cases today, the hub of a shopping center was one major store surrounded by smaller businesses, mostly specialty shops.

But this plan wasn't acceptable to the Zorenskys. Why not two major stores, each geared to two different incomes? Therefore, as it turned out, Crestwood Plaza, shaped somewhat like an elongated croquet wicket, has a branch of Vandervoort's on one end and a Sears store on the other.

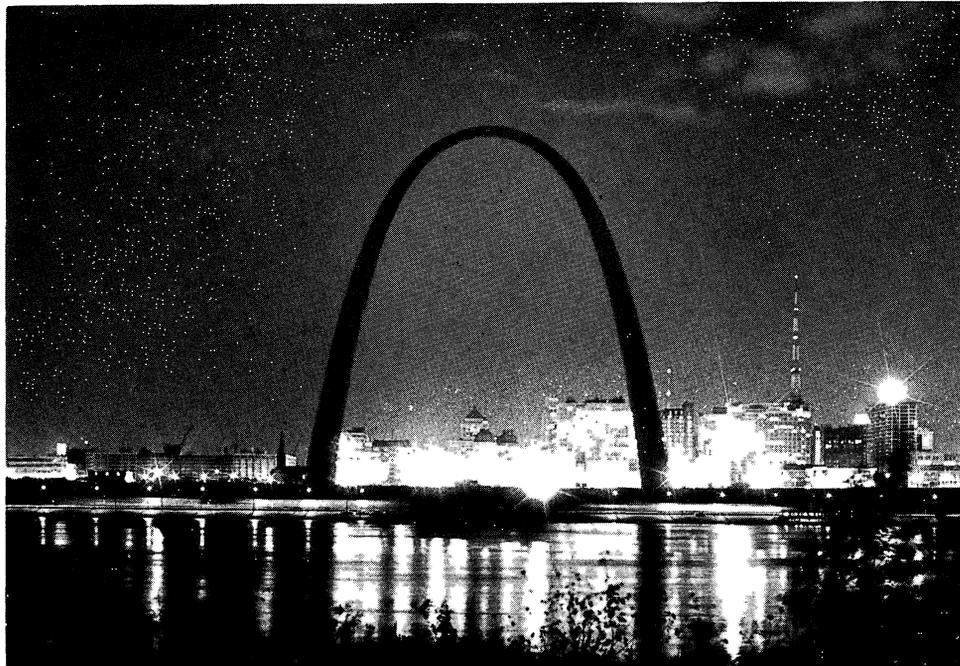
In laying out their center, the brothers also kept in mind the smaller merchants. They realized that specialty shops need traffic to thrive. So they placed these

inbetween the two major stores, creating a constant flow of customers.

The Zorenskys have never deserted the center which they imaginatively built, and have constantly expanded the facilities throughout the years, but never so hurriedly that they interfered with the comfort of shoppers. And next month, one of the most major undertakings since the center opened will be unveiled.

A third major department store—a branch of Stix, Baer & Fuller—will open its doors. To make room for this addition, it was necessary for the Zorenskys to secure another eleven acres adjacent to the eight-year-old Plaza.

The new four-story Stix store is being built above three parking decks which will provide added space for 2,000 cars, bringing the center's total capacity to about 5,400 autos. An air-conditioned mall, with specialty shops on each side,



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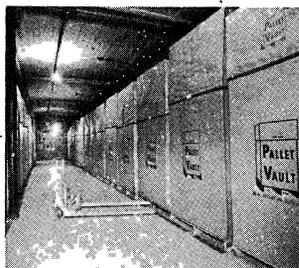


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CRESTWOOD—continued from page 23
ness center to Crestwood Plaza. The building is also the home of some thirty other business offices.

Dedicated to serving primarily residents and industries in Fenton, Sappington, Afton, Valley Park and Crestwood, the bank's resources, in less than eight years, has grown to exceed \$22,000,000. One of the unusual services the bank offers is Saturday morning drive-in facilities, since many of its working customers are only in their home area after the bank's week day closing hours.

Just recently, James and his organization opened another new edifice in the area—the Crestwood Executive Center, an office building.

While it may be true that the business hum-drum of Crestwood over shadows the city, this doesn't mean that city officials have been at a standstill.

Paul T. Koenig, vice president of Foster Brothers Manufacturing Company, is currently serving his fourth two-year term as Mayor of Crestwood—a city which boasts of an average annual income of more than \$8,000 per family.

The city, however, which consists of 3.114 square miles, or 1,993 acres, has very little historical data to call its own, because the area was between major points of early settlement.

The vast majority of the land was held in large estates. Some of the early land holdings were under the titles of Eddie Estate, Conrad Wheat, J. G. Aff, Joseph Mackay, and John Sappington (see the "Saga of Sappington House" elsewhere in this issue).

However, in addition to Sappington House, there are remnants of the past scattered throughout the city. Some of the more notable historic landmarks still remaining are cemeteries containing graves of the early families.

But Crestwood isn't particularly interested in history. The present and future are more exciting. Mayor Koenig, recipient of the Chamber's second "Crestwood Award," has always been one of the advocates of keeping a proper balance between residential and business zoning—the secret behind Crestwood's success.

"We have tried to create a good climate for fine homes," he explained, "yet maintain an enviable business complex. Our residential development is 90 per cent completed, but there is room for additional commercial expansion to help carry the cost of expanding municipal services to our citizens. Currently there are 233 business firms operating in our city."

Perhaps neighboring communities, where in recent years many businesses have left for more fertile fields, should take notice of Crestwood's success program, which even, just two years ago, permitted a reduction on taxes that were already far less than its counterparts.

