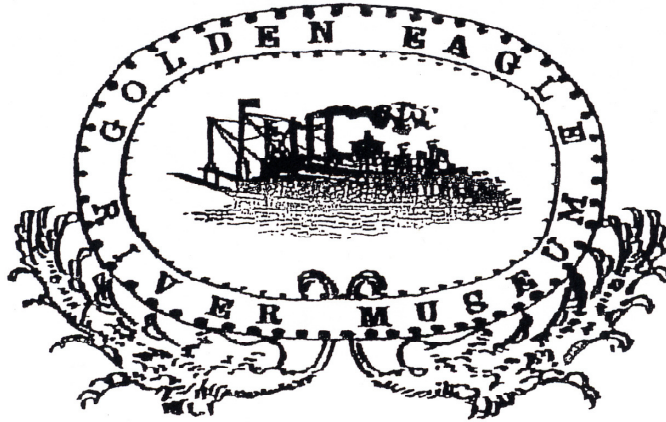


# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE RIVER MUSEUM

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The Golden Eagle River Museum has had an interest in the river and its history for over sixty years. The organization began in February 1941, with a meeting of 125 "river fans" who met at the Mark Twain Hotel in St. Louis to outline the objectives of the proposed club. The group was then known as the Golden Eagle Club.

This organizing meeting came about after two women had planned a trip on the Steamer Golden Eagle on the Mississippi River from St. Louis to St. Paul, Minnesota. Unfortunately, their trip was cancelled because the steamer had been damaged when it struck a dike near Chester, Illinois the previous day. The women decided the next best thing to do was to book a passage on the Steamer Gordon C. Greene out of Cincinnati and take a trip on the Ohio River. While on that trip they visited a river museum in Marietta, Ohio. These two young women wondered why this town had a river museum and St. Louis did not. Upon their return to St. Louis they talked about establishing a river museum in St. Louis and organized the meeting of "river fans."

Their aims were to: 1) perpetuate the name of the Steamer Golden Eagle, the last overnight packet out of St. Louis; 2) establish a permanent river museum in St. Louis; 3) educate the members and visitors in river lore and the history of the City of St. Louis from the standpoint of its founding on the banks of the Mississippi; 4) exchange river books, data, pictures, etc. Originally, only people who rode on the Steamer Golden Eagle could become members, but that all changed after the boat sank near Grand Tower on May 18, 1947. The boat never ran again, and soon the group was open to anyone who had an interest in river history.

Through the following years, the members met regularly. They also collected Golden Eagle and other river memorabilia. The collection grew quite large and included pilot wheels, boat models, photographs, original riverboat bells, anchors, steam whistles, tableware and other equipment that recounted the story of steamboat days on the western rivers, when river packets carried much of the nation's passengers and freight to and from their inland ports. The items were displayed in various places in St. Louis (including the Old Courthouse, Cherokee Cave, shopping centers, etc.). In 1974 the group opened a museum at the Nims Mansion in Bee Tree Park in South St. Louis County. At that time the name of the club was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation under the name Golden Eagle River Museum.

The museum was open from May to October for five days a week. It was operated completely by volunteers for thirty-one years. While in the Nims mansion, the

volunteer staff greeted several thousand visitors each season, gave numerous school and other group tours, and set up educational booths at various festivals in the area. The monthly membership meetings almost always had a program featuring a guest speaker talking on some aspect of the river.

In 2002, the group realized that the volunteer pool was aging and their numbers were shrinking rapidly. A committee was formed to determine the future of the museum. By this time the number of days open each week had been shortened to three to accommodate the smaller number of volunteers. After looking at a number of proposals from various outside organizations, the Board of Trustees, along with the membership, voted in October 2004 to close the museum and split up the collection. Most of the artifacts were given to the Southeast Missouri Regional Museum in Cape Girardeau and the Herman T. Pott Inland Waterways Library at Mercantile Library in St. Louis. The extensive library was split between those two organizations and the Missouri Historical Society, with some books going to other organizations. A farewell party was held at the museum on October 31, 2004 with guests attending from several states.

The organization of the Golden Eagle River Museum has not disbanded, and it is continuing with its tradition of sharing river history through programs and exhibits (on a smaller scale). It keeps an office at the Carondelet Historical Society in St. Louis, has a quarterly newsletter, holds membership meetings several times a year, and plans other activities.