The History of Hunting in St. Charles County
Located at the juncture of three major rivers, St. Charles County has long been a “hunting ground” for all who have called the area home

The ecology of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers varied because of the nature of each river. The Missouri River’s average gradient of one foot per mile enables it to move more sediment. Because it drains a loess-mantled region, it carries high suspensions of loess materials, giving the river its famous muddy color. In its natural state, the Missouri River channel was broad and shallow, with numerous islands and sandbars. Before the 20th century, it was approximately twice its present width, occupying thirty to fifty percent of the width of its floodplain. The Missouri River bottoms had natural lakes or perennial wetlands in St. Charles County, including Marais Croche and Marais Temps Claire. Amos Stoddard reported in 1804 that the extensive bottoms of the Missouri River “are generally covered with wood, and are seldom inundated.”

Describing the Mississippi River floodplain, Rev. Timothy Flint observed, “Between such magnificent outlines, from the foot of the Mamelles, the prairie, in ascending to the north, has a width of five miles, and is seventy miles in length…Two fine islands of woodland, of a circular form, diversify the view.” Its floodplain was wetter than that of the Missouri and a much better habitat for wildlife, causing Flint to record, “In the autumn immense flocks of pelicans, sand-bills, cranes, geese, swans, ducks and
all kinds of aquatic fowl, are seen hovering over it.” ³ In his autobiography, Sauk Chief Blackhawk stated, “We always had plenty – our children never cried with hunger, nor our people were never in want. Here our village had stood for more than a hundred years, during all which time we were the undisputed possessors of the valley of the Mississippi from Ouisconsin (Wisconsin) to the Portage des Sioux, being about seven hundred miles in length.” ⁴ When the Sauk and Fox tribes ceded by treaty a vast area that included St. Charles County the treaty stated, “As long as the lands that are now ceded to the United States remain their property, the Indians belonging to said tribes, shall enjoy the privilege of living and hunting upon them.” ⁵

French settlers hunted the grasslands for bison and other game. Manuel Gayosa De Lemos, visiting San Carlos del Misuri in 1795, stated, “To the rear of San Carlos immense savannahs begin which extend as far as the hunters have penetrated in all directions…” ⁶ Perrin du Lac explained in 1802, “After St. Louis and Ste. Genevieve, St. Charles is the most important place…the results of the emigration of some families from St. Louis, who being hunters by profession came to reside there, in order to be near a country the most abundant in game.” ⁷ Many of the French-speakers of St. Charles were involved in the fur trade. A contemporary explained, “Their young men were engaged during the summer in hunting, boating and trading, whilst the old men and boys were left with their families to cultivate the little farms.” ⁸

Many of the American settlers who came to St. Charles County were hunters who made their living with the rifle. Nathan Boone, son of Daniel Boone, left St. Charles County in the autumn of 1800 to go hunting south of the Missouri River, and did not return, with meat for his family and skins to sell in St. Louis, until January. Nathan, like his father, was a good hunter, but an indifferent farmer. While profits from the land were meager and required backbreaking work, the woods provided a bounty of skins, furs and meats for anyone willing to endure its hardship and privation.⁹ Wolves, bears, mountain
lions and other predators threatened livestock and the pioneer’s supply of wild game. The first bounty laws on adult wolves and panthers were passed in Missouri in 1816. The County Court paid the bounty hunter two dollars for each adult wolf or panther, and fifty cents for every bobcat, shot within two miles of a settlement.

As frontier society disappeared in St. Charles County, hunting for sport became popular. By 1850, wealthy gentlemen from St. Louis had established the Hermitage Club in the Mississippi River floodplain. When Darius Heald, an accomplished hunter, was elected to the Missouri legislature, the only state regulation on hunting was that you could not do it on Sunday. He sponsored and passed the first game law in Missouri. Even the Civil War did not dampen the enthusiasm of the hunters. Missouri Governor Hamilton Gamble wrote Heald in 1863 requesting, “Two friends of mine, Col. More, Quartermaster General, and Reverend Mr. Brooks whom you know have been expecting to go up into your neighborhood to take a hunt with me, but I have found it impossible to get off. They have finally concluded to go without me, if they can make an arrangement with you to hunt with them...Drop a line to Col E. Anson More, Quartermaster Gen’l and let him know whether you can go with them, and whether you can get a dog.”

In 1868, Darius Heald, John B.C. Lucas and George Myers founded the 2,500-acre Cuivre Gun Club, known as the “Millionaires Club.” The 1885 history boasted “vast quantities of water fowl and game birds of passage,” and claimed the county had “nearly every variety of duck known on the North American waters.” It went further to explain, “These, twice a year, pass up and down their great line of migration, which follows the course of the Mississippi leading north and south, on their way leaving the lakes, rivers and plains of British America and the North, in the fall for the warm bayous, streams and marshes of the Gulf States, and again in returning north in the spring. We are located directly under the great aerial highway of the wild fowl, and in both spring and autumn they stop in vast numbers on our lakes, rivers and prairies.” The Dardenne Club, formed in 1878, was incorporated in 1888,
the same year the 1,555-acre Brick House Club, later Silver Lake Club, was established. Other hunters established the 1,100-acre Horseshoe Lake Hunting and Fishing Club on the west side of the Burlington tracks at Dalbow Station in 1894.

After the new Union Station opened in St. Louis that same year, trains filled with sportsmen departed there, proceeding north along the newly completed Burlington route that crossed the Missouri River at Bellefontaine. At each station in St. Charles County, hunters would leave the train and proceed to one of what became known as the “Burlington Clubs.” According to the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, the Hermitage Club, located near Peruque, was “so closely adjacent to the spots ducks frequent that it is said any of the trio (of owners) can drop a brace of mallards from his bedroom window – if conditions are right.” The *St. Charles Banner-News* reported in November 1902:

Members of the aristocratic Cuivre Club are up at the club grounds near Richfield in Cuivre township, enjoying in-door and out-door sport in all its forms; but ducking is said to be very good there now. The Cuivre men are wealthy, and the cost of an outing is only a secondary consideration. The club fees run up into the thousands every year, and each visit to the grounds costs a considerable sum. They travel in their own private car, and it is now on the siding at O’Fallon, from which depot they go to the club grounds overland. They have entertained a number of distinguished men there, and they are prepared to do it in first class style.
When St. Louis businessmen wanted a place for “short vacations” where they could remain in touch with their business affairs, they established the Alton Slough Rod and Gun Club. They leased 410 acres near West Alton that had been known as the “Burlington Park” in the 1890s. They erected a two-story clubhouse and had 500 members by 1911. The Willow Club was located further upstream near St. Peters, just a mile north of Highway 40. Referring to the Willow clubhouse, the Globe-Democrat remarked, “The plainness of the architecture is in no way indicative of the comfort within.”

According to the by-laws of the 3,500-acre Lemp Hunting and Fishing Club, the purpose of the club was “to promote field sports, to encourage the protection of fish and game in the State of Missouri, to encourage rational enjoyment and social amusement.” Historian Lynn Morrow points out, “In contrast to these stated aims, six shooters killed 463 ducks, mostly mallards, outside of the clubhouse at Dardenne Lake during three days in October 1880. A generation later, one member scored 300 duck kills in a season at the nearby Richfield Club. Restraint in shooting ducks had not yet become a sporting ethic along the Burlington route.”

While their conservation ethic was probably no better, locals sometimes showed their resentment of wealthy St. Louis hunters. The Banner-News reported, “Because most of the fishing places are monopolized by the richer class of people in St. Louis, excavation for an artificial lake began yesterday morning.” R. L. Brennan, and H. C. Tully, residents of St. Louis were in St. Charles County on a Sunday in 1901. While dressed in hunting outfits, they killed no game, nor fired any shots until about the time they were leaving. When Brennan discharged his gun into the air near Seeburger Station, where they intended to catch a train to St. Louis, they were confronted by the St. Charles County sheriff. While not known for strict enforcement of the state blue laws, Sheriff John H. Dierker put them under arrest for hunting on
Sunday. On another occasion, when the non-resident owner of a large acreage of hunting land in The Point complained to County Recorder Charles Kansteiner that taxes were high and roads were bad, Kansteiner remarked, "You millionaires come out from St. Louis and kick about good roads without so much as an offer to assist financially in building them." 

Less wealthy St. Charles County sportsmen of every background established hunting and fishing establishments as well. Friedrich Muench recorded that “target shooting” was popular among German immigrants and their children. The First Ward Social Club, a group of young German-Americans that met in a clubhouse on Pike Street in St. Charles, became known as the Pikers Hunting and Fishing Club in 1888. In addition to the Pikers, there were the St. Charles Hunting and Fishing Club, and the Cave Springs Gun Club. By 1894, members of the Orchard Farm Protective Association had a clubhouse and an agreement that they could hunt on each other’s farms. The 1910 St. Charles City Directory listed the Crystal Springs Hunting and Fishing Club, the Horse Shoe League Hunting and Fishing Club, the Marais Croche Hunting Club, and the Raccoon Hunters Club. Smeltzer’s Lake, near West Alton, was a well-known fishing resort open to the public. The Banner-News described the 770-acre Marais Temps Claire Club as “the favorite resort of St. Charles sportsmen.” It added, “There was good duck shooting on the lake in season; in the fields quail shooting was at its best; and the marshes furnished sport for snipe hunters.”

The Orchard Farm Hotel and Saloon was advertised as the “Hunter’s and Fisherman’s Headquarters.” Sportsmen who rode the Burlington from St. Louis in 1894 stayed at the hotel while hunting in the area. It was reported that 1,500 people attended a fish fry at Elm Point Grove, sponsored by the Elm Point Hunting and Fishing Club in 1901. Local sportsmen established the Ballast Pits
Hunting and Fishing Club in 1891. Members fished in the water-filled pits from which workers had dug ballast when the tracks of the North Missouri Railroad were laid. Members hunted on the adjacent ground. Indeed, sportsmen and their families from St. Charles and St. Louis came to the floodplain in great numbers to hunt, fish and socialize.  

Farm prices significantly improved after the turn of the century, causing farmers to seek additional acreage for cultivation. Steam tractors were capable of plowing through the heavy black stick and gumbo soils of the floodplain north of St. Charles. William Kirkpatrick and John Stonebraker were using “traction steam engine gang-plows” on their more than 2,000 acres of farm ground by 1885. In the confluence floodplain, the Burlington and MKT railroads provided access to markets; the flat land allowed maximum use of time-saving machinery; and the rich soil guaranteed high yields. The Banner-News reported the sale of the Marais Temps Claire Club grounds in 1902, explaining, “In 1900 the lake ‘went dry’ and some of the club men believe that the hunting and fishing would never again be good. The land is rich and fertile from fish and decayed vegetable matter: and all that it needs is the right kind of draining to insure the safety of crops.” To reclaim some of the area covered by the Marais Temps Claire Lake, farmers dug a drainage ditch to the Mississippi River in 1903.  

Weber Lake was a natural lake fed by that drainage ditch from Marais Temps Claire, about two miles away. About half the year, one could go by rowboat from the lake into the Mississippi River. The Weber family built a concrete dam
in 1908 between Weber Lake and the Mississippi River, raising the level of the lake by several feet. The family leased the facility in 1910 to a group of St. Charles businessmen, who built a clubhouse on the lake, where members fished, swam, pitched horseshoes and played card games at what became known as the St. Charles Club. The Blue Wing Rod and Gun Club grounds was along the Mississippi River above Weber Lake.

When the Corps of Engineers began draining the swamps in the Bootheel, the Missouri legislature passed a measure making it easier to form levee and drainage districts.27 A “Petition and Decree for Incorporation of Drainage District #1” was filed in October 1895 in the West Alton Area.28 The County Court created the Marais Croche Lake Drainage District in 1903.29

As the agricultural value of the ground increased, rather than renew their leases with the hunting and fishing clubs, farmers began to drain the wetlands and bring more land into cultivation. The Banner-News reported in 1902, “The thrift and skill of man has changed the face of mother earth on the prairies Northwest of town in a manner that has added much to the wealth and prosperity of St. Charles County. Thousands of acres of land have been reclaimed in recent years. A few years ago much of the land was the home of snipe and plover and was the paradise of the hunter. The ‘old citizen’ who goes out there these days hardly recognizes the country. The land has grown valuable and this year produced marvelous wheat crops.” 30 The editor of “Rod and Gun” predicted in 1904 that the great hunting preserves would “be drained out of existence.” 31 Dardenne Club member Charles W. Scudder
forecasted a gloomy future for the Burlington Clubs.\textsuperscript{32}

To meet that threat, many hunters, including August A. Busch, purchased land in St. Charles County to keep it from being drained. He later stated, “I am familiar with the game value of lands in this region, as I believe I have one of the most successful shooting grounds in the State at my duck preserve at St. Peters, Mo., about 8 miles north of St. Charles.”\textsuperscript{33} Another influential Missourian, former Governor Frederick Gardner owned property along Elm Point Road and on nearby bluffs overlooking the Mississippi floodplain. Its clubhouse, for friends and employees of his company who hunted, also became the sight of parties for family, friends and political associates. The \textit{Banner-News} had reported:

\begin{quote}
At the dedication of the new county residence of former Governor Frederick Gardner situated near Elm Point depot west of St. Charles last night he announced that he might soon be a voter in St. Charles County. The assembled guests voiced the general acclaim of the public at large in having the opportunity of welcoming such a distinguished Missourian in our midst. The new home, costing perhaps $25,000, stands on a promontory adjacent duck hunting lands owned by the late governor. It is a beautiful bungalow whose doors the owners says shall be open to his friends at any time or occasion.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Commercial hunting was also a threat to sportsmen. In the middle of the 19th century, Missouri’s deer population was estimated at 700,000 and the turkey population was abundant. By the early 20th century, unregulated hunting had drastically impacted the turkey population and reduced the deer population to 295 by 1925. Other animals, including wood duck, beaver, otter, badger, turkey, prairie chicken and grouse, were at risk of disappearing as skilled marksmen and trappers sent wagon loads of game to city markets. The unregulated killing of game contributed to the extinction of the passenger pigeon and the Carolina Parakeet and impacted the populations of many more animals in the state. While laws passed in the early 20th century essentially put
an end to market hunting, the damage to wildlife already was done.

When the federal government announced in 1929 its intention to establish a wildlife sanctuary in each state, Governor Gardner and August A. Busch had suggested the Baldwin Farm in St. Charles County. Busch stated, “If I didn’t have two boys whose enthusiasm for duck hunting exceeds what mine was at its height, I would turn over my St. Peters place to the state tomorrow.” A year later, Busch hosted a meeting at the Racquet Club in St. Louis in the wake of what a local paper described as “the worst hunting season in this territory for many years.” Former Governor Gardner spoke of the need for state and federal bird sanctuaries, as well as additional wardens. At the urging of the Restoration and Conservation Federation of Missouri, a federation of sportsmen’s clubs, a bi-partisan commission was established in 1937 to remove wildlife from political control and to establish scientific conservation measures.

The debate continued on enforcement of the prohibition on hunting on the Sabbath. In 1931, the St. Charles Cosmos-Monitor reported, “St. Charles is overrun every Sunday by hunters from St. Louis and elsewhere.” A local prop-
erty owner, complaining he had to miss church on Sunday to keep hunters from trespassing on his property, explained, “Heretofore, the hunters have been doing their Sunday hunting in Warren County and in St. Charles but now Lincoln and Warren have clamped down on them and all must come to St. Charles county for Sunday hunting.” Less concerned that hunters “keep holy the Lord’s day,” but more concerned that selective enforcement of an unpopular law was in jeopardy, the article suggested, “How the situation will be handled is not known at this time. There is a law against hunting on Sunday and any landowner or anybody else for that matter can file a complaint and cause the arrest of anybody caught hunting with gun or dog on Sunday. These intruders are making it hard for St. Charles county people who have been doing a little hunting on Sunday and it is being overdone by outsiders.”

Hunting and fishing remained popular in St. Charles County, where 2,712 county hunting and fishing permits were issued in 1930. After the establishment of the Conservation Commission, the populations of endangered species increased in the state. Agents of the Division of Conservation arrested 29 hunters in St. Charles County during 1941 and convicted all but one of them. Agents also issued 1,585 “field acknowledgements” to county hunters during 1940 and 1941. The St. Charles Conservation Club began holding an annual sportsman’s dinner in 1941, where guest speakers discussed hunting and fishing. During the Second World War, hunting was seriously curtailed by the lack of ammunition available in the stores.

To make sure our fighting men had ammunition, construction began on an ordnance plant near Weldon Spring in January 1941. Twenty-seven cemeteries, including an Indian burial ground, were fenced; two villages were evacuated;
and the federal government acquired 700 parcels of land to build the TNT Plant. After the war, safety experts decontaminated the TNT plant and the federal government offered 18,000 acres for sale. The Missouri Conservation Commission purchased 7,000 acres for $250,750 in April 1947. The payment included a $70,000 gift from Alice Busch in honor of her late husband, August A. Busch, who had worked for decades trying to establish a wildlife refuge in St. Charles County. The area, set aside as a game refuge and recreational area, was named the Busch Wildlife Area.

The Mississippi River floodplain continued to be what the *Banner-News* termed “an historic duck hunting center.” Announcing the beginning of the 1947 waterfowl season, the paper explained, “From 15,000 to 20,000 mallards, sprigs, green-winged teal and blackjacks are reported using all lakes at vast Cuivre Club. Tim Heintzelmann, manager of Dardenne Club at Peruque says several hundred quackers are down on Lake Adirondack. Silver Club reputedly has several large gangs of mixed ducks, Prairie has 2,000 in its 110 acres, according to Louis Kline, and Baldwin Farms, Willow, Evans and *Marais Temps Claire* lakes also have birds at last report.” [39] The following year, more than $21,000 in fees was collected on 9,282 hunting and fishing permits in St. Charles County.

In 1960, the *St. Charles Journal* explained, “The general area from Peruque to Portage comprises rich farm land in addition to vast acreage that is used for private duck hunting.” While farmer and hunter were coexisting quite peacefully in the floodplain, the same article mentioned a new potential neighbor in the floodplain when it continued, “The Elm Point area, northwest of here is considered by many to offer one of the best possible sites for industry.” [40] This area, which was in the 500-year floodplain, did develop over the next several decades. The adjacent upstream areas in the 100-year Mississippi River floodplain could be developed only after building levees. The City of St. Peters began construction in 1997 on the Old-Town Levee Project, designed to protect old town along Dardenne Creek and a 644-acre industrial park to the north. In 2000, the city proposed an additional 1,600-acre flood plain development in the 370 corridor, protected by a 4.2-mile, 500-year levee.

Like the Native Americans almost 200 years earlier, hunter now fought to protect their hunting grounds from the encroachment of commercial and industrial development behind the 500-year levee. Adolphus Busch and others who lived or hunted in the floodplain founded the Great Rivers Habitat Alliance (GRHA) dedicated to “conserving, restoring, and maintaining approximately 30,000 acres of habitat and flood plain at the confluence of North America’s two largest rivers through conservation easements, agricultural easements and private and public land acquisitions.” The GRHA opposed the St. Peters levee proposal and passed state legislation limiting
flood plain development. Adolphus Busch, who resided on some of the land purchased by his grandfather, stated, “The whole place was bought for hunting by my grandfather. He started buying the land in 1910. On the farm, he developed his love and passion for hunting. “It’s something you never forget, being able to be out in the outdoors with your father.” The conflicting values of the pro-growth advocates were highlighted by Terry Hawkins, St. Peters aldermanic president, who suggested, “There is no reason why, if you can develop flood plain ground and do it properly, I don’t see why you shouldn’t.” He continued, “It may hamper the fact the birds may stop and rest here, and not go a couple of miles over and get shot. But they are going to stay on the floodplain.”

GRHA worked to pass the “Hunting Heritage Protection Areas Act” in the General Assembly in 2007. Commenting on the pro-hunting bill, a spokesman for the National Rifle Association (NRA) explained, “Missouri provides some of the richest and most pristine wildlife habitats in the world. Hunters here continue to be leaders in ensuring sound wildlife management and conservation practices. The ‘Hunting Heritage Protection Areas Act’ will protect these diverse lands critical for wildlife species and preserve hunting opportunities into the future.” St. Charles County government decided against building the 600-foot runway extension at Smartt Field. Despite efforts to derail the St. Peters projects at the ballot box and in the courts, the project was completed. Nevertheless, GRHA continues to fight for preservation of the floodplains today.

The Busch Family continues to support hunting in St. Charles County. In 2016, August A. Busch III donated $100,000 to the St. Charles County Parks Department for completion of an exhibit on hunting and fishing at the St. Charles County Heritage Museum. The exhibit includes a Marksman Hunting Simulator (pictured on the cover of this booklet) that has been used to expose youngsters to hunting and allow hunters to refine their skills and have fun. St. Charles County expresses its sincere appreciation to August A. Busch III for this gift to all hunting enthusiasts in the St. Louis Region.
Footnotes

5. Place Names, Western Manuscript Collection, HSM; Foley, A History of Missouri, 1683-1820, 92; Daniel T. Brown, Westering River, 160; Foley, A History of Missouri, 1683 to 1820, 94; Flynn, St. Peters at its Best, 34.
10. Hamilton Gamble to Darius Heald, December 8, 1863, Heald Family Papers, MHS; See also obituary of Darius Heald, Banner-News, November 25, 1904.
11. The St. Charles County portion of the History of St. Charles, Montgomery, and Warren Counties, was reissued in 1997 as the History of St. Charles County, 1765-1885, by the Partria Press with an introduction by Paul R. Hollrah and an index, 145. Referred to hereafter as the “1885 history,” all page references are to the 1997 edition. 146.
17. Ibid.
19. State ex rel. Brennan v. Dierker 101 Mo. App. 636, 74 S.W. 153, Mo. App. 1903. The hunters were successful when they sued the sheriff for false arrest. The court held that he could not arrest them without a warrant since he had not seen them hunting himself. Ibid.
24. 1885 history, 399.
27. Shoemaker, Floyd C., “Kennett: Center of Land Reborn In Missouri’s Valley of the Nile,” MHR, Vol. 52, January 1958, 106. The St. Francis Levee District was established in 1893, and the legislation forming the Little River Drainage District was passed by the General Assembly in 1905. Ibid.
28. Cage 8, Box 4, File1-MDD, SCCA.
29. Cage 8, Box 4, SCCA.
32. Ibid.
35. Ibid. February 23, 1929.
42. Interview with Lisa Ziegman of KSDK, Channel 5, St. Louis.