



SUNDAY

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, (St. Louis, Missouri)
19 Mar 2017, Sun • Main Edition • Page B 1 and 5



PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN GOODEN • cgooden@post-dispatch.com

The likeness of George Engelmann, a friend of Missouri Botanical Garden founder Henry Shaw, is seen peering from an entombed ceiling in the old library building at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Workers renovating the building discovered it and the likeness of Carl Linnaeus, known as father of botanical taxonomy, while removing a dropped ceiling last week.

FACES OF THE PAST ENLIVEN RENOVATION

Long-hidden murals come to light at Missouri Botanical Garden

BY VALERIE SCHREMP HAHN

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS • German-American botanist George Engelmann probably would approve of the restoration of a historic building at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

When a contractor recently knocked out part of a dropped plaster ceiling in a side room of the garden's Museum Building, a studios-looking portrait of Engelmann on a revealed barrel-vaulted ceiling above stared back at him.

The discovery is among the first workers have made as they've started restoration and construction efforts at the red brick building, which was constructed in 1859 and often referred to as the old library and museum.

"It isn't every day you find such things," said garden president Peter Wyse Jackson.

The building, which sits at the Tower Grove Avenue end of the garden, is considered one of the most historically significant buildings in the Midwest. Still, it's been closed to the public for more than three decades, and visitors to the garden may have strolled by without noticing it.

But it caught the eye of Wyse Jackson when he arrived in 2010. The garden has since raised the \$3 million needed to restore the building and add a small addition, which will include bathrooms, a stairwell and an elevator.

This week, scaffolding will go up in the two-story atrium so conservators can re-create the botanical paintings on the ceiling. Officials hope to have the building open to the public late this year or early next year and will



President of the Missouri Botanical Garden Peter Wyse Jackson (right) and Paul Brockmann, senior vice president of general services, get a look at the recently uncovered murals on the grounds of the Missouri Botanical Garden on Thursday.

See MURALS • Page B5

Murals revealed at botanical garden



PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN GOODEN • cgooden@post-dispatch.com

George Engelmann, whose portrait was discovered by contractors, is credited with convincing founder Henry Shaw to make the gardens a research institution.

MURALS • FROM B1

use it for special exhibits and events.

But back to botanist Engelmann — and the eye he's keeping on the restoration.

Engelmann was born in 1809 and lived in St. Louis and near Belleville for a time. He and businessman philanthropist Henry Shaw were good friends. In fact, as Shaw decided to create a botanical garden that the public could enjoy on the grounds of his country home, Engelmann encouraged him to make it a place for scientific research as well. The garden, along with the Museum Building, opened in 1859.

Shaw had hired architect George Barnett to design his home on the estate, known as Tower Grove House, and he also hired him to design the 7,000-square-foot Museum Building. The building is modeled after one at the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens in England. When Shaw died in 1889, his body lay in state inside the Museum Building. Barnett designed Shaw's mausoleum near the building as well.

Engelmann's face isn't the only one workers recently discovered on the ceiling. As they knocked out more plaster, they found a portrait of Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish researcher who lived in the 1700s and is known as the father of modern taxonomy, or the system of classifying and naming organisms. The garden's brick Linnean House, the oldest continually open public greenhouse west of the Mississippi River, is named after him. Barnett designed that building as well.

Workers also found what they believe is a third ceiling portrait that has since crumbled away. They have left it alone

for now and will have conservators take a closer look.

They don't believe there are more portraits under the ceiling — they've craned their necks and peeked with flashlights. Still, their plan to hide ductwork, wiring and lights in the dropped ceiling will no longer work. Brian Micklewright, construction manager for the garden, was among a team of architects, engineers and consultants who gathered under the ceiling the day after the discovery to gawk and murmur.

"This plan we've been working with — we had to throw it out the window," said Micklewright.

He and Paul Brockmann, the garden's senior vice president of general services, were on hand Thursday when Wyse Jackson got his first in-person look at the portraits. Wyse Jackson was on a business trip to Haiti when he got news of the discovery the week before.

"Splendid. Splendid," Wyse Jackson breathed in his Irish accent as he gazed up. "Gosh."

Wyse Jackson guessed Shaw had the portraits painted after Engelmann died in 1884. Undoubtedly, the connection between the two is significant. Shaw endowed a professorship of botany at Washington University called the George Engelmann Professor of Botany.

"And I'm that," Wyse Jackson explained. "I am the George Engelmann Professor of Botany. You can see how I was excited."

The portraits are just a small part of the restoration work.

Visitors will notice a section of the stone garden wall between the Museum Building and Tower Grove Avenue has been taken



The old library building on the grounds of the Missouri Botanical Garden, where the portraits were discovered, has been closed to the public for more than three decades. It is undergoing a \$3 million renovation and will be open to the public once the work is done.

away. That's so contractors can reach the building, Brockmann explained. The wall will be rebuilt as the work on the building wraps up.

Workers will restore the building's tile floor, strip the white paint off the bookshelves and re-create the botanical paintings on the ceiling. The paintings were re-created in the 1930s, but the efforts were not as detailed as the originals. The plaster is too delicate to restore the original paintings, so artists will re-create them on canvas and cover the old paintings.

They'll restore windows, install insulated glass, insulate walls and install air conditioning.

The museum will be named for brothers Stephen and Peter Sachs, in honor of the family's support for the restoration. Stephen Sachs was a garden board member who died last year.

Wyse Jackson is excited the museum will offer even more for today's visitors.

"When it was first opened, it had 60,000 specimens Engelmann had acquired for Shaw," he said, smiling. "The number of specimens we have now is 7 million."

Valerie Schremp Hahn • 314-340-8246
@valeriehahn on Twitter
vhahn@post-dispatch.com