

# Gateway

RECKONING IN  
CREVE COEUR  
*Venable Park*

AFTER THE STORM  
*The African American Community's  
Response to the 1927 Tornado*

BEVY JAEGERS  
*The "Grande Dame" of  
St. Louis Psychics*





# MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Members of the Missouri Historical Society receive *Gateway* magazine as a member benefit. For subscription information or change of address notification, please call Membership Services, (314) 454-3101, or write join@mohistory.org. Contents copyright © by the Missouri Historical Society. All rights reserved.

Contents may not be reproduced without permission. The Society disclaims responsibility for statements of fact or opinion expressed in signed contributions to *Gateway*.

*Gateway* (ISSN 0198-9375) is printed by Modern Litho, St. Louis, Missouri, and is published biannually by the Missouri Historical Society. Nonprofit bulk mail postage paid at St. Louis, Missouri.

disk file, or email attachment. Please prepare footnotes, if any, in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*. We will happily return any manuscript accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please contact the editor before submitting irreplaceable or delicate photographs and slides to *Gateway* through the mail.

Please address manuscript submissions to:  
Editor-in-Chief, *Gateway*  
Missouri Historical Society  
PO Box 775460  
St. Louis, MO 63177  
LMitchell@mohistory.org

Requests for footnoted manuscripts of published articles should be sent to the above address.

---

## MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES 2020

### DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

LAUREN MITCHELL

---

### EDITOR

KRISTIE LEIN

### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

ELLEN KUNKELMANN

### DESIGN/PRODUCTION

LAUREN MITCHELL

### PHOTO EDITOR

AMANDA CLAUNCH

### PHOTOGRAPHER

CARY HORTON

### CIRCULATION

LAURA BECK

### PRESIDENT

DR. FRANCES LEVINE

### CHAIR OF THE BOARD

ROBERT M. COX, JR.

Robert M. Cox, Jr.  
*Chair of the Board*

Dr. Frances Levine  
*President*

Lisa D. McLaughlin  
*Vice Chair*

Scott Galt  
*Secretary*

Marvin Anderson  
*Treasurer*

Harry Rich  
*Chair Emeritus of the Board*

Ann Cady Scott  
*Thomas Jefferson Society Representative*

Robert W. Fulstone  
*Friends Group Representative*

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Lourdes T. Bailon

Marie Casey

S. Wray Clay

Daniel Cole\*

Ljiljana Cvijanovic

Julie Desloge Dubray

Kim Eberlein

Steve Ehlmann

Judge Gary M. Gaertner, Jr.

Mary Heger

Heather Hunt-Ruddy

Tom Irwin

Frank Jacobs\*

Richard Jensen

Peter Kastor

Doug Koch  
Ken Kranzberg  
Richard A. Liddy\*  
Paul E. Martin  
Lauren Nash Ming  
Sandra M. Moore  
Valerie Patton  
Raymond W. Peters II  
Mary Ellen Ponder  
Gary L. Rainwater\*  
Harry K. Ratliff  
Greg R. Rhomberg  
Elizabeth T. Robb  
John R. Roberts\*  
Erika Schenk  
Laura Shaughnessy  
Patrick Sly  
V. Raymond Strangoener\*  
Frederick R. Strasheim  
Austin P. Tao  
Phoebe Dent Weil  
Donna Wilkinson\*  
Honorable Michael A. Wolff  
Clint Zweifel

HONORARY TRUSTEE  
Reeve Lindbergh Tripp

LIFE TRUSTEES  
Mrs. Stephen F. Brauer  
Mel F. Brown  
Marilyn Fox  
Honorable Wayne Goode  
James S. McDonnell III  
Mabel L. Purkerson, M.D.

THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM SUBDISTRICT OF THE METROPOLITAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK AND MUSEUM DISTRICT OF THE CITY OF ST. LOUIS AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY

### OFFICERS

Judy M. Abrams, Chair  
Laura T. Cohen, Vice Chair  
Jeremy Colbert, Secretary  
Simone Cummings, Treasurer

COMMISSIONERS, CITY OF ST. LOUIS  
Laura T. Cohen  
Cynthia Crim  
Simone Cummings  
Frank Hamsher\*  
Elizabeth P. McNulty

ADVISORY COMMISSIONERS, CITY OF ST. LOUIS  
Honorable Thomas Grady  
Gilberto Pinela

COMMISSIONERS, COUNTY OF ST. LOUIS  
Judy M. Abrams  
Valerie Bell  
Jeremy Colbert  
Constance Gully  
John Nations

ADVISORY COMMISSIONERS, COUNTY OF ST. LOUIS  
Joan Cronin  
Vickie F. Henson

\*PAST CHAIR

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM SUBDISTRICT OF THE METROPOLITAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK AND MUSEUM DISTRICT.  
THANKS TO THE TAXPAYERS OF ST. LOUIS CITY AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY AND THE MEMBERS OF THE MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT.



# RECKONING IN CREVE COEUR

VENABLE PARK

COUNTRY VIEW DRIVE, LOCATED OFF OF SPOEDE ROAD BETWEEN OLIVE AND LADUE ROADS IN THE WEST ST. LOUIS COUNTY SUBURB OF CREVE COEUR, WINDS PAST SPRAWLING, WELL-MAINTAINED HOUSES ON ONE-ACRE LOTS AND ENDS IN A CUL-DE-SAC AT A CITY PARK. BUT THERE IS NO DIRECT ACCESS TO THE PARK FROM A PUBLIC ROAD. FOR MANY YEARS THE PARK HAD ANOTHER DISTINGUISHING FEATURE: A CLUBHOUSE THAT LOOKED MUCH LIKE THE OTHER HOUSES IN THE SUBDIVISION. IT ALMOST SEEMED AS THOUGH THE PARK HAD BEEN BUILT AROUND THE CLUBHOUSE. IT WAS A CURIOSITY TO SOME OF CREVE COEUR'S YOUNGER RESIDENTS, BUT FOR THOSE WHO KNEW THE STORY, IT STOOD AS A REMINDER OF A PAINFUL EPISODE IN THE CITY'S HISTORY. BUT RECENT EFFORTS ARE STARTING TO RIGHT A SIXTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD WRONG.

By James Singer and Ellen Kunkelmann

**S**poede Meadows—now known as Country View Drive—was just one of many subdivisions in St. Louis County that were developed during the post-World War II building boom. In the 1950s more than 83,000 dwelling units were built in St. Louis County as more than 100,000 city residents headed for the suburbs. Creve Coeur's population more than doubled from 2,040 in 1950 to 5,122 in 1960. John T. Beirne, Creve Coeur's

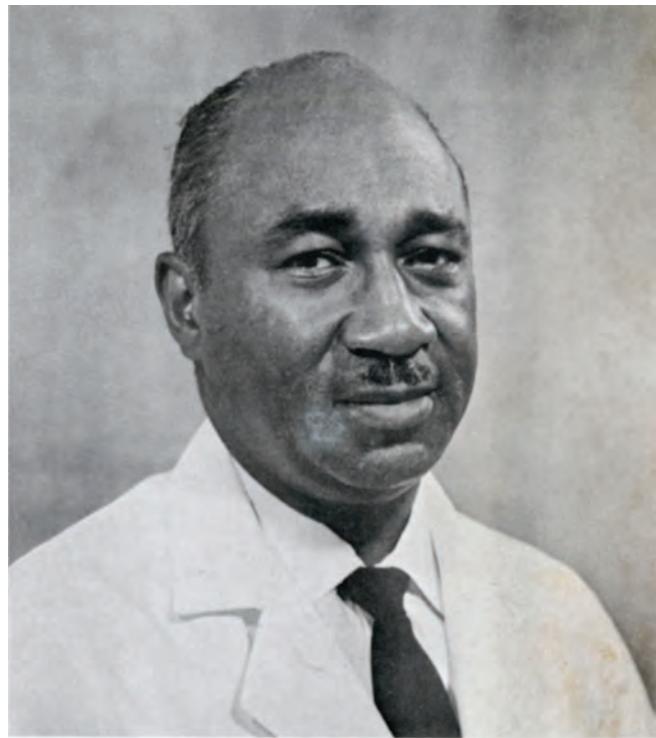
mayor (1952–1956 and 1960–1968), boasted in 1955 that three hundred new homes would be built that year, and he pledged that zoning would be strictly upheld: “Our primary concern is to make Creve Coeur a fine residential community. We have a good zoning code, and we take pains to make sure it is properly enforced. No residential lot in the city can be less than one-third of an acre. . . . We do not have any apartments or multiple-unit dwellings.”

{ Oil portrait of H. Phillip Venable.  
Unknown artist, ca. 1965.  
Bernard Becker Medical Library at Washington University in St. Louis.

On March 18, 1956, a small advertisement appeared in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*: "Spoede Meadows—Attention Builders Investors—22 One-Acre Sites—Ladue Schools." Dr. Howard Phillip Venable and his wife, Katie, were among those who responded to the ad. Venable was born in Windsor, Ontario, on January 27, 1913, and grew up in Detroit, Michigan. After receiving a bachelor's degree in zoology in 1935 from Detroit's Wayne State University, he helped finance his medical studies by singing and playing the trumpet, including a gig with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. In 1939 he earned a medical degree from Wayne State and moved to St. Louis for his ophthalmology residency at Homer G. Phillips Hospital, the largest training hospital for African American doctors and nurses in the country. In 1943 Venable was appointed chief of the ophthalmology department, a position he held for forty-two years. During his lifetime he served on the faculties of Saint Louis University and Washington University in St. Louis. By 1950 he was one of the leading African American physicians in the country and a highly respected member of St. Louis's black community. That year he represented the United States at the International Congress of Ophthalmology in London. Racial discrimination at home, however, kept him out of the St. Louis Ophthalmological Society until 1953. In a 1994 interview, Venable said he had been excluded by another doctor who told him, "You'll get in over my dead body." Venable added, "But he died, so I got in."

Venable had learned that he would lose his home in a middle-class African American neighborhood on South Hanley Road in Richmond Heights owing to construction of the Daniel Boone Expressway (later known as Highway 40). In April 1956 the Venables paid cash for lots 10 and 11 in Spoede Meadows at \$6,800 an acre (a total of approximately \$131,000 today). Venable, a golf enthusiast, described plans to build a home with a three-hole golf course and an in-ground swimming pool.

As construction began on the house in Spoede Meadows, several of Venable's African American colleagues considered purchasing lots as well. In a 1987 oral history interview recorded for the Missouri Historical Society, the seventy-four-year-old Venable said that he and other black doctors had been approached to buy the properties: "This contractor said they had a plat called Spoede Meadows, and it was going to have twenty-two acres, and they were going to put some blacks out there."



H. P. Venable, M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Asst. Instructor in Clinical Ophthalmology  
Washington University School of Medicine;  
Section Head and Director, Department of Ophthalmology  
Homer G. Phillips Hospital

Dr. Howard Phillip Venable as shown in a Homer G. Phillips Hospital publication, ca. 1960. Bernard Becker Medical Library at Washington University in St. Louis.

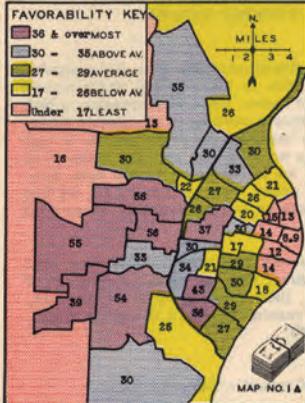
This may have been the same rumor that reached the Venables' prospective white neighbors. The possibility of a small African American community in Creve Coeur was perceived as a significant threat to home values. White homeowners' anxiety was sanctioned by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and reinforced by real estate agents. In 1935 an FHA manual instructed appraisers to downrate integrated neighborhoods and steer private mortgage investors and insurance companies away from minority neighborhoods, a practice known as redlining. It remained legal until 1968.

## A NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

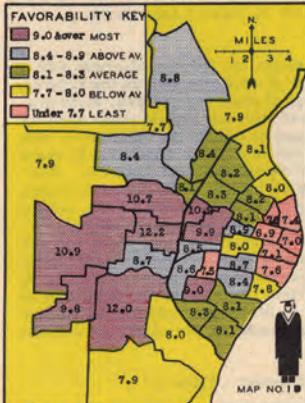
Determined to prevent the Venables and other African Americans from moving into Spoede Meadows, a group of citizens asked Creve Coeur's newly elected mayor,

# PEOPLE WHO CAN, MOVE AWAY.

AVERAGE RENTS  
(INCLUDING EST. RENTAL VALUE  
OF OWNED HOMES)

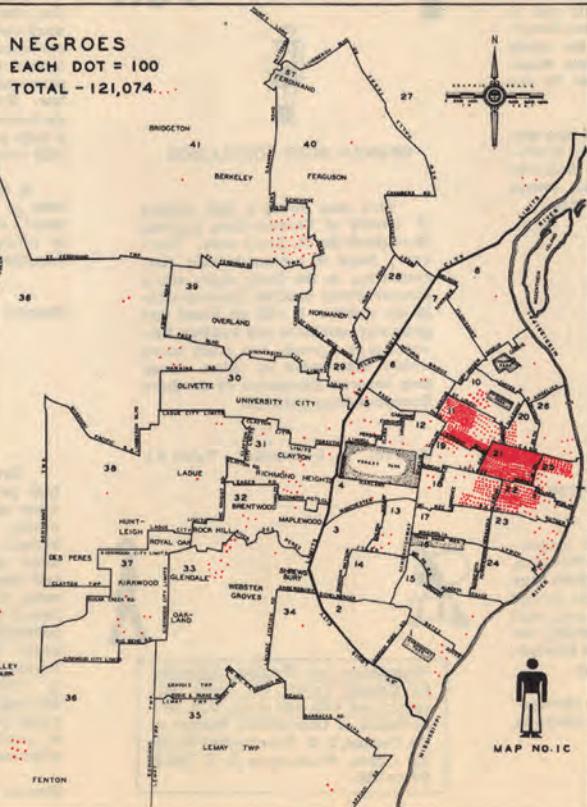


AVERAGE YEARS OF SCHOOLING  
OF ADULTS

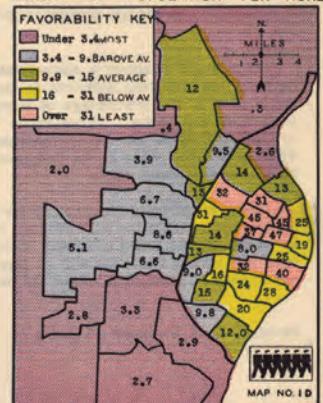


## PLATE I

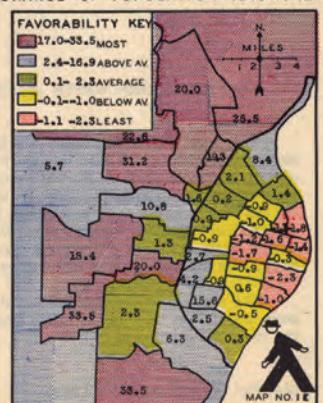
Note: Small Maps Are About Total Population.



DENSITY OF POPULATION PER ACRE



CHANGE OF POPULATION 1940 TO 1945



Page 9

"People Who Can, Move Away." This image from a 1947 book, Graphic Facts about People in St. Louis and St. Louis County, shows the population density of African Americans in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. The City of Creve Coeur was incorporated in December 1949, two years after this map was created. On this map, Creve Coeur lies west of Olivette and north of Ladue. Social Planning Council of St. Louis and St. Louis County Research Bureau, 1947. Missouri Historical Society Collections.

Jimmy Wilson, to create an advisory committee on parks. Although Creve Coeur had no park tax and no plans to finance a park, city attorney William H. Wyne Jr. claimed that the timing was coincidental and that Creve Coeur had been looking for parkland for "some time." In 1956 only 60 percent of Creve Coeur's land was developed, and plenty of green space was available.

Wilson was authorized to establish the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Parks on May 9. City records show that this committee met only once, on July 19. Several potential properties were briefly discussed during the

meeting: one hundred acres on land owned by Monsanto, sixteen acres on Olive Street Road, and thirty-five acres on Mosley Road. It was resolved that these properties, along with their pros and cons, would be brought to the board's attention. Then a new idea was proposed, one considerably more detailed than the others: to find a way to buy out the Venables, stop construction on their home, purchase all remaining lots in Spoede Meadows, and quickly raise \$25,000 from neighbors to be donated to Creve Coeur.

Two motions related to the creation of a new park were made by committee member Tom Warner and sec-

onded by former mayor Beirne. The first was for a resolution approving a policy that Creve Coeur must establish a public park when residents of a subdivision were willing to contribute funds to acquire parkland. This resolution was passed on a 6–1 vote.

The second resolution was to create a park in Spoede Meadows at the precise location of the Venables' lots. According to the meeting's minutes, "Warner proposed that a neighborhood park be established at the eastern-most boundary of Spoede Meadows, a subdivision located on Spoede Road. He furnished the members with an informal plat of the proposed park and explained the features of the park. He further stated that he represented numerous people on Spoede Road who felt that such a park would cost approximately \$50,000, \$25,000 of which would be contributed by the residents of that area." This resolution passed 6–0.

Steps were taken to make sure that the neighborhood's residents would agree to help. Creve Coeur alderman Francis A. Casserly incorporated Spoede Realty on July 23. With Warner acting as the agent, Spoede Realty contracted to purchase Spoede Meadows lots 1 through 9 and 12 through 22 and approached the Venables four times in an attempt to buy them out.

It appears that the other African American physicians withdrew from the project around this time. Venable said later, "All the other people took their money out, because [Spoede Realty] scared them. I went to them and said, 'They can't take the lot away from you [even if you have just a down payment]. That lot is yours, unless you default on the payment.' But they got scared." He felt empowered by the fact that he had paid cash—a definite advantage in a time of housing discrimination.

## CONDEMNATION

The committee's recommendations did not specifically address what would happen if the Venables did not sell their property to the city. However, it became clear at the next board of aldermen meeting that the committee intended for the city to use its right of eminent domain to condemn the Venables' property if they would not sell. A city has the right of eminent domain to file a condemnation action against a person to take private property for a public purpose. (In recent years, cities in Missouri have exercised this power by "blighting" property so

that private property may be taken for redevelopment.) To defend itself against charges of racial discrimination, Creve Coeur would also seek to condemn acreage owned by two white families, the Wileys and Dielmanns, which bordered the subdivision.

The minutes from that meeting record a prescient dissenting opinion by Mayor Jimmy Wilson, who was willing to accept a donation of land for a park but was firmly against the committee's strategy:

I am, however, opposed to the plan of the City accepting or becoming a part of, the plan for acquiring the park site suggested by a number of citizens in the Spoede Road area which involves the condemnation of Lots 10 and 11 of Spoede Meadows as well as the condemnation of four undeveloped acres to the east of Spoede Meadows for two basic reasons. First, the City would be establishing a precedent in handling a situation that will almost inevitably occur again. Second, the cost to the City may prove very burdensome, in that the cost of acquiring the property after deducting the \$25,000 the citizens have indicated their willingness to contribute may easily cost the City far more than the \$25,000 estimated.

Further, while I am not qualified to express an opinion on how the Courts may rule on the suggested condemnation, I do know that such a procedure will be attacked by a plaintiff with very powerful backing and that the City defense of its position, whether or not it can be successfully defended, may well run into a considerable sum for legal fees and court costs.

Wilson further cautioned, "It is my recommendation that in any matter as serious as the one proposed, the citizens of Creve Coeur should have the opportunity to express themselves at the polls."

Wyne assured the board of aldermen that this legal strategy would succeed in the Missouri courts. The city would deny that the Venables' race had anything to do with taking their land, and it would prevent the Venables from offering evidence of race discrimination. The minutes record that "City Attorney Wyne advised that he had done considerable research on the subject of condemnation by a municipality and could see no serious problem the city might have in this case." Wyne stated that the law provides that the right of condemnation, if



NEGRO DOCTOR'S HOUSE IN CREVE COEUR CONTROVERSY



DR. HOWARD P. VENABLE  
—Globe-Democrat Photos

## Homesite Seizure Voted Over Creve Coeur Mayor's Veto

The Creve Coeur ordinance plans to finance purchase of the park site, nor to build the club-house, tennis courts and ball diamond planned on it. Creve Coeur has no park tax, but there is a possibility one will be established, The Globe-Democrat was told.

A city official also said that persons living in the vicinity of Dr. Venable's property have pledged \$25,000 towards purchase of the park site.

Dr. Venable, ophthalmologist-in-



Article from the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, October 28, 1956. Courtesy of James Singer.

used for a public purpose such as a park, may be appealed only on the basis of the amount paid for the condemned property. With this assurance from the city attorney, the board of aldermen unanimously approved an ordinance to condemn the Venables' property over the veto of Mayor Wilson. The Venables, Wileys, and Dielmanns were given two weeks to "voluntarily dispose of their property at a reasonable market value" or face condemnation proceedings.

The city found two other ways to pressure the Venables to leave Spoede Meadows. On July 19, Alderman Casserly petitioned the city to develop a storm and sewer plan for the subdivision and reject any individual plans—specifically for the house under construction on lot 10. He requested that until such a plan was filed with and approved by the Metropolitan Sewer District and the

City of Creve Coeur, "any and all storm and sanitary sewer work and plumbing installations of every kind be held in abeyance." On July 23, Creve Coeur filed a lawsuit against the Venables' contractor, claiming that inspection fees had not been paid in advance and plumbing had been installed without a permit. Venable said that the city refused to issue him such a permit.

At a September 5 board meeting it was unanimously agreed that because the two-week deadline had passed without an agreement to sell from the Dielmanns, Wileys, or Venables, the city would move forward with the condemnation ordinance.

The board of aldermen held a special meeting where the city attorney presented the bill for condemnation and a letter from attorney Edward J. Delworth containing

advice on how to avoid potential pitfalls in the condemnation action. First, Delworth recommended that money raised by the white neighbors to fund the acquisition of the Venables' lots be held in escrow so that the court would not be confused over private and public actions. Second, he advised that the Venables' lots could not be resold and had to be used for a park: "A word of caution is hereby made that the contemplated condemnation procedures are only good to the City of Creve Coeur for park purposes and not a fee title so that a discontinuance of use for park purposes reverts ownership to the condemnees."

The next month the board unanimously approved the condemnation ordinance, sending it to the mayor's desk as a bill. The mayor promptly vetoed it, reminding the board that "the City would be establishing a precedent in handling a situation that would almost inevitably occur again, and further, that the cost to the City may be very burdensome, the estimated acquisition cost to the City of \$25,000 may very likely exceed this amount considerably." Nonetheless, the board unanimously overruled the mayor's veto and agreed to accept \$23,000 of Spoede Realty's promised \$25,000 donation to the city.

### **"A CLEAR-CUT CASE OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION"**

News of the condemnation action spread quickly. On October 27 the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported on Creve Coeur's filing of a condemnation action "on a property on which a St. Louis Negro physician is building a \$55,000 residence." Venable told the newspaper that the home was halfway completed and that the lawsuit was a "clear-cut case of racial discrimination," a charge Wyne dismissed as "ridiculous."

On November 1 the *St. Louis American* reported that "Creve Coeur officials admitted they have no plans to finance purchase of the park site, nor to build the clubhouse, tennis courts and ball diamond planned on it. Creve Coeur has no park tax, but there is a possibility one will be established. . . . Dr. Venable has declared that he will fight the discriminatory action all the way to the US Supreme Court if that is needed to vindicate his rights to build his own home on property that he has bought."

Local civil rights groups lent strong support to the Venables. Samuel Guze, chairman of the St. Louis Civil

Liberties Committee, wrote to the *Post-Dispatch*: "The attempt by the Creve Coeur Board of Aldermen to condemn Dr. Venable's property in order to establish a city park is clearly an example of racial discrimination which has not been successfully disguised by the transparent cloak of legal maneuvers. . . . One could not have asked for a more suitable beginning than to have a Negro citizen of Dr. Venable's intelligence, ability, education, and background initiate a program of racial harmony in neighborhood relations."

On December 13 the St. Louis Council of Human Relations wrote to Mayor Wilson: "It is most unfortunate that the Creve Coeur Council has taken this apparent biased position against a prominent Negro physician at the very time the Greater St. Louis community is receiving national acclaim for progress made in extending housing, health, education, swimming, tennis, municipal sports, hotel and theater facilities and services to all residents, regardless of race or religion." As the council requested, Wilson shared this letter with the board of aldermen on January 14, 1957 (although the meeting's minutes indicate there was no discussion of it).

That same month Venable spoke at a panel about "subterfuges" faced by African Americans who wanted to move to better neighborhoods, such as how financial groups refused to give them home loans. He also pointed out a policy in St. Louis that he said prevented blacks from moving into a block with fewer than three non-white families. On March 15 the *St. Louis Argus* awarded Venable its Distinguished Public Service Award "for his courage in seeking a home in Creve Coeur."

### **"IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CITY"**

Just as the mayor had predicted, the plan to develop the park was far more costly than the board had anticipated. The white neighbors came before the City of Creve Coeur twice seeking a financial bailout from the costs related to excluding African Americans from Spoede Meadows. In January 1957, the Citizens' Committee requested that the city reimburse its members for legal fees "inasmuch as these men were acting on behalf of and in the best interests of the City." The cost to the city was \$1,500—30 percent more than the original estimate.

The second request for a bailout occurred when it became apparent that Spoede Realty could not sell its

Spoede Meadows lots at cost—possibly a result of negative publicity. Spoede Realty requested that its unsold Spoede Meadows lots be rezoned from one acre to approximately a half acre. Creve Coeur residents who supported the Venables objected to the rezoning petition, calling it “spot zoning” and saying it would set a bad precedent.

Spoede Realty's motives were challenged by a newspaper reporter at a public rezoning hearing in spring 1958. Although Warner denied that “the Spoede firm was formed to halt the construction of homes by Negroes,” he “would not say there was no connection” between construction of the Venables’ home and the “formation of the concern.” Warner added, “None of us is in the real estate business, but we do have an investment in the area. Our group is interested only in recovering its money and going out of business. Frankly, I had better not say any more.”

Despite having close ties to public officials, Spoede Realty's rezoning petition was ultimately rejected.

## IN THE COURTS

The battle over civil rights and race discrimination between the City of Creve Coeur and the Venables moved to the Missouri courts. After Creve Coeur filed its condemnation lawsuit, the Venables filed a cross-claim on January 29, 1957, against the board, the city attorney, and the building commissioner, alleging a number of acts of race discrimination, including that city officials had “yielded to the importunities of citizens of Creve Coeur, motivated

H. PHILLIP VENABLE, M.D., F.A.C.S.

2841 NORTH UNION AT TERRY

ST. LOUIS 15, MISSOURI

EVERGREEN 7-6500

November 20, 1959

Mrs. Victor W. Weir  
Mosley Road  
Creve Coeur, Mo.

Dear Mrs. Weir:

May I humbly express my deepest sympathy to you at this time. We all share your grief as Mr. Weir was an outstanding individual.

I shall never forget your kindness to me just three short years ago. Your personal greeting gave me courage to uphold my rights as a citizen inspite of the fact that some would have it otherwise. Although we conversed only a few brief minutes, I soon realized that you were one of the finest women I have ever met. Your article in the Post-Dispatch still stands out quite vividly in my mind.

Today, as you know, my family is still struggling with the Administration of Creve Coeur to get into our home. Several acts of litigation have been made but we are no closer now than we were three years ago.

May God bless you in your hour of sorrow, for you have exhibited the true christian spirit especially in my behalf. It is the knowledge that there are many others like you in Creve Coeur which gives me the courage to fight the discriminatory tactics of the Administration. It is my fervent hope that within the not too distant future I may succeed in this endeavor.

Very sincerely yours,  
*H. Phillip Venable, M.D.*  
H. Phillip Venable, M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Section Head and Director Dept. of Ophthalmology  
Homer Phillips Hospital  
Clinical Instructor Dept. of Ophthalmology  
Washington University  
College of Medicine

Toward the end of his legal battle, Venable wrote this letter of condolence to a pro-integration Creve Coeur resident. Marian (Mrs. Victor W.) Weir was the sister of Creve Coeur mayor Jimmy Wilson, who had vetoed the condemnation action. Courtesy of Steve Stradal.

solely by reason of racial prejudice against prospective Negro residents, designed to bar Negro residents from the community.” Their lawsuit was assigned to St. Louis County Judge Noah Weinstein, who was prepared to hear the Venables’ claims of race discrimination. However, in November 1958 Creve Coeur petitioned the Missouri Court of Appeals for a preliminary writ of

prohibition to block the judge from hearing the Venables' argument. The Venables appealed, stating that their constitutional rights, due process, and equal protection of the law were being denied.

On November 8, 1959—just over three years after the City of Creve Coeur had condemned his house—the *Globe-Democrat* reported that Venable worried “about relations with his new neighbors if he should win the fight and move in. But he says he has no plans to give up.”

Two weeks later, in a letter to Creve Coeur resident Marion A. Weir—the sister of former mayor Wilson who had vetoed the condemnation ordinance—Venable again expressed his determination to continue on with his struggle with the City of Creve Coeur: “It is the knowledge that there are many others like you in Creve Coeur which gives me the courage to fight the discriminatory tactics of the Administration. It is my fervent hope that within the not too distant future I may succeed in this endeavor.”

The fight was drawing to a close, however. On December 3 the Missouri Court of Appeals sided with the City of Creve Coeur, saying the Venables' claims of race discrimination would not be considered by the Missouri courts because their property had been taken for a public purpose. The court acknowledged the serious charges of race discrimination raised by the Venables but concluded that it had no jurisdiction in the matter: “The whole theory of the counterclaim and cross-claim filed by the Venables is that the legislative body of the City of Creve Coeur was actuated by motives that were improper. . . . The motive which actuates and induces the legislative board to enact legislation is wholly the responsibility of that body and courts have no jurisdiction to intervene in that area.”

The court had given Creve Coeur and other Missouri cities a green light to exclude African Americans in response to white neighbors' racial prejudices. On December 16 the Venables asked for a rehearing or transfer to the Missouri Supreme Court: “The holding of this Court is a holding in effect that a city government can condemn property purchased by the persons of the negro race solely for the purpose of depriving those persons of their constitutional right to live in the place of their choice.” The motion was overruled.

After losing their right to bring race discrimination cross-claims and counterclaims, the Venables agreed to

settle their lawsuit and Creve Coeur's condemnation lawsuit for \$31,000. In an editorial, the *St. Louis Argus* wrote:

When the other Negro families pulled out of the corporation when the issue of prejudice reared its head, Dr. Venable withdrew and held firm. And fight he did. Countless dollars and painful hours were expended by the physician.

Now it is all over. We can understand the frustration of Howard Phillip Venable.

We can sympathize with the thwarted dreams of his family regarding their modern comfortable residence. There was to be a swimming pool, air conditioning, all of the comforts of this standard.

The bar on the Venable family is typical of thousands of other cases whose victims have neither the resources nor the courage to fight back. The shame of Creve Coeur lies not upon the courageous surgeon and his family, but upon the minds and hearts of the bigots who forbade an American to build a home where he might live in peace with his family.

## BEIRNE PARK'S “REMODELED RESIDENCE”

On March 15, 1960, the *Post-Dispatch* reported that Creve Coeur had approved payment to the Venables, thus ending their lawsuit. Beirne, who had been elected mayor a second time, said that the Venables' house would be completed and used as a clubhouse. A baseball diamond and playground would be constructed on the other lot.

The new park was dedicated on October 15, 1961, as John “Jack” T. Beirne Park. The *Globe-Democrat* mentioned that the dedication ceremony would be held at “a remodeled residence in the park. . . . In selecting a name, the Board of Aldermen chose to honor Mayor Beirne, noting that it is the city's first park and has been acquired and developed during his tenure.” In fact, Creve Coeur's city records show that Beirne had been involved in the park's acquisition from the very beginning.

In 1962 Beirne stated, “My continual goal is effective, sound zoning practices to maintain an extremely desirable community with preservation of property values, along with improved and expanded services to the residents in an efficient manner at an economical cost.” In a letter to residents, he cited the city's progress during his terms, such as the “opening of the first city park on an eight-acre tract and completion of a park building for use by any civic group.”



Venable seated in his home with his trumpet, ca. 1979. Bernard Becker Medical Library at Washington University in St. Louis.

Beirne Park continued to be an uncomfortable topic for some Creve Coeur residents. In 1966 future US senator John C. Danforth, representing a group called West County Citizens for Freedom of Residence, wrote to Creve Coeur mayor Harold L. Dielmann, “[Recently] I took the position that the Beirne Park was of little use to the City of Creve Coeur, that it was a constant reminder of an unfortunate incident in the history of our city, and that the property should be sold. . . . I was instructed to write you concerning the possibility of selling the existing park and acquiring a more suitable location. Our organization would encourage you in such a plan. We would, however, hope that a new park would not be named after Mr. Beirne.” Dielmann rejected this plan.

## COMING HOME

Venable later recounted that several Creve Coeur residents had encouraged him to move back during the 1960s, but instead he moved on. In 1963 a *Post-Dispatch* feature on housing integration in the suburbs mentioned that the Venables had built a “handsome residence” in Ballwin in 1961 with a three-hole golf course, and there were plans to add a tennis court and swimming pool. Venable said that his white neighbors had been very friendly: “I can say the climate is changing. It’s bound to.”

Venable lived in Ballwin until shortly before his death in 1998. Throughout his life, he worked toward civil rights in healthcare. In 1962, as vice president of the Metropolitan Church Federation, Venable publicly named the fourteen faith-affiliated hospitals in St. Louis that refused to have black doctors on staff or as visiting physicians. The results of a *Post-Dispatch* investigation supported his statement. Within six months, these hospitals were integrated. In addition, he helped found the Roman-Barnes Society of Ophthalmology, a medical society for African Americans; he established a research fund for African American ophthalmology students; and he contributed research related to AIDS and glaucoma.

In 1994, Venable was awarded the Outstanding Humanitarian Award by the American Academy of Ophthalmology. In an interview with the *Post-Dispatch*, he talked about his experiences in Creve Coeur and Ballwin and described a lifetime of racial discrimination: “I’ve been segregated against all my life—school, housing, church, country club. . . . I got used to it and just let it roll

off my back.” He mentioned how white doctors had even tried to exclude him from a funeral. “Segregation, it kind of pounds on your heart. . . . I realized that if I lived long enough, I’d run into people who were nice. And I have.”

In a 1987 oral history interview with the Missouri Historical Society, Venable spoke of his experience in Creve Coeur: “Unless you stand up and fight, you don’t have a case. . . . My point was that I wanted freedom of choice. I wanted to be able to move anywhere that I had money and I felt I could move to, just like a white doctor with comparable financial savings could move anywhere he wanted.”

Creve Coeur’s denial of the Venables’ freedom of choice had a significant impact on the city’s diversity: According to the 2000 census, Creve Coeur’s black and biracial population was around 4 percent. Today, fewer than 12 percent of its residents are black or biracial.

In recognition of the lasting effect the Venables’ case had on the city—and as one step to make amends—on December 9, 2019, the Creve Coeur City Council approved Resolution 1467 to change the park’s name to Dr. H. Phillip Venable Memorial Park. Pointing to city and court records, the resolution states:

When the City used the power of eminent domain from 1956 to 1960 to acquire land from Dr. Howard Phillip Venable and Katie W. Venable in connection with the creation of its first park, the City acted at the urging and direction of people whose ulterior motive was the exclusion of the Venables from the City due to their race. On behalf of the entire Creve Coeur community, the City’s current elected officials express sincere regret and apologize for this abhorrent action of their predecessors. In recognition of the Venables’ noble effort to oppose the misuse of government authority and to protect their individual rights as citizens, and in an effort to assure that City officials and the community will remember this history while the public continues to enjoy the park, the City in accordance with the family hereby renames the park: Dr. H. Phillip Venable Park. 

## REFERENCES

City of Creve Coeur. Archival records relating to Spoede Meadows, 1956–1960.

———. Resolution 1467. December 9, 2019.

Dr. H. Philip Venable, interview for “I Too Sing America” oral history project. Missouri Historical Society, August 28, 1987.

Dr. H. Philip Venable to Marian A. Weir (personal communication), November 20, 1959.

Harold L. Studt to Mayor John T. Beirne (personal communication), January 9, 1956.

“The Shame of Creve Coeur.” *St. Louis Argus*, December 3, 1959.

St. *Louis Globe-Democrat* articles, chronologically:

- “Creve Coeur Sues to Condemn Negro’s Homesite,” October 27, 1956.
- “Homesite Seizure Voted Over Creve Coeur Mayor’s Vote,” October 28, 1956.
- Guze, Samuel B. “Housing Discrimination,” December 4, 1956.
- “Subterfuges Block Negroes Moving, Panelist Asserts,” January 7, 1957.
- “Dr. Venable Sues Creve Coeur,” January 30, 1957.
- “Globe-Democrat Honored for Its Racial Fairness,” March 15, 1957.
- “Federal Court Won’t Rule on Dr. Venable Suit,” July 23, 1957.
- “Zoning Hearing,” February 13, 1958.
- “Creve Coeur Acts to Bar Injunction,” November 15, 1958.
- “Dr. Venable Loses Round in Suit,” December 14, 1958.
- “Creve Coeur Order Stands, Court Says,” February 10, 1959.
- “The House Dr. Venable Almost Built,” November 8, 1959.
- “Beirne Park to Be Opened in Creve Coeur,” October 12, 1961.
- “John T. Beirne Seeks Re-election as Mayor,” March 1, 1962.
- Beirne, John T. “Creve Coeur Mayor Cites City’s Progress,” March 5, 1962.

St. Louis Council of Human Relations letter to Creve Coeur mayor and board of aldermen, December 13, 1956.

St. *Louis Post-Dispatch* articles, chronologically:

- “Creve Coeur Sues for Negro’s Land,” October 27, 1956.
- Guze, Samuel B. “Creve Coeur Transparency,” November 30, 1956.
- “Rezoning Bill,” March 16, 1958.
- “Creve Coeur OK’s \$31,000 for Venable Property,” March 15, 1960.

Wyant, William J. “Race Discrimination in Housing Major Issue Here,” May 27, 1963.

“Venerable Venable: Black Doctor’s Work Made History and a Difference,” October 31, 1994.

O’Neil, Tim. “Look Back: St. Louis Suburbs Erupt After World War II,” December 13, 2014.

State *ex. Rel. Creve Coeur v. Weinstein*. 329 SW 2d 399 at 410 [Mo. App. 1959]. Missouri Court of Appeals.

“Stubborn Bias Is Seen in Home Condemnation.” *St. Louis American*, November 1, 1956.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. CPI Inflation calculator. data.bls.gov (March 17, 2020).

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Federal census. Washington, DC: Author, 1950.

*Ibid.*, 1960.

*Ibid.*, 2000.

*Ibid.*, 2010.

---

**James Singer** received a bachelor of arts degree in history from the University of Michigan and a juris doctorate degree from Northwestern University Law School, where he served on the editorial board of the Northwestern University Law Review. He is a partner in the St. Louis law firm of Schuchat, Cook & Werner, specializing in employee benefits and labor law. Singer also serves as a St. Louis County trustee of the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District and is an adjunct faculty member at Saint Louis University Law School.

**Ellen Kunkelmann** graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign with a bachelor of arts degree in English. She is an associate editor at the Missouri Historical Society.