

The Gannon Family of University City

By Edward E. "Ted" Steele

Gannon Avenue runs one block to the north of Delmar Boulevard from Jackson to McKnight. In this part of University City most streets north of Delmar are named after schools: Cornell, Stanford, Amherst, etc. When I moved to University City and bought my house on Gannon Avenue, I wondered why this street didn't have a university name. (At least I had never heard of "Gannon University.") The answer, of course, is the Gannon family.

James GANNON was an immigrant from Ireland to St. Louis, arriving here about 1851.¹ On 2 October 1853, he married Catharine RAFFERTY at St. Patrick's Catholic church, at 1000 N. 7th Street in St. Louis.² Catharine had arrived here from Ireland in 1849.³ The record of their marriage at St. Patrick's reads as follows:

October 2nd. I united in the holy bonds of Matrimony Ja's Gannon, son of Patrick Do & Mary Meany, To Catharine Rafferty, daught'r of Tho's Do & Winifred Rafferty.

P. A. Ward

*Witnesses: Martin McCue
Winifred McCue*

James Gannon was born in Roscommon County, Ireland, about 1814, the son of Patrick Gannon and Mary MEANY.⁴ The 1870 U.S. census indicates that James was a U.S. citizen eligible to vote, but no naturalization record for him has been found.⁵ His wife, Catharine, was the daughter of Thomas and Winifred Rafferty, born in the parish of Tuam, also in Roscommon County.⁶

After their marriage, James and Catherine settled upon a tract of native timberland out west in what was then known as the Central Township. At the time, land in Central Township (part of U.S. Survey No. 2033) was largely held by Charles S. RANNELLS, a St. Louis attorney who had come from Kentucky to St. Louis in 1843. James believed it to be public land, but when he learned that it was already owned by Mr. Rannells, he purchased farm-

land of slightly over twenty acres from Charles and Mary WARDER Rannells on 7 January 1867.⁷ The land was located to the northwest of the current intersection of Delmar and Hanley. He and his family cleared the land and worked the resulting farm. It was a typical family "truck farm" of the period. They grew corn, oats, and potatoes, and cultivated hay for their livestock, which consisted of a horse or two (and later a pair of mules), a few milk cows, a dozen or fewer pigs and a few dozen chickens. They sold enough hay, milk, butter, and eggs to make a living.⁸ Although no subsequent deeds record any further land purchases, James was farming slightly over 100 acres by 1880.⁹

Devout Catholics, the Gannon family joined St. Martin's Catholic Church, sometimes known as the Central Catholic Church, located on Bonhomme Road in what is now Centerton Park in Olivette, just west of University City. In 1885, the church relocated into Clayton and its name was changed to St. Joseph's. All six of their children were baptized there and their oldest son, Thomas, was married there. When there was a death in the family, the services were held there.

On Tuesday, 3 April 1888, James and his son, Jack, spent the afternoon cutting hay and loading it into their wagon to bring back to the barn. After a long afternoon of work, Jack hitched up their team of horses and his father jumped onto the back of the cart. Heading home, they had to cross a ditch, which jolted the cart. Concerned that some hay may have fallen off, Jack called back to his father but received no reply. He stopped the cart and ran back to find James lying on the ground beside the ditch. Unable to rouse his father, Jack carried him to the house. There they called the family doctor who arrived to confirm that James Gannon had broken his neck and died in the fall.

James's funeral was held two days later at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Clayton. Rev. Father James JACKSON conducted the funeral service, after which James Gannon was laid to rest in the old Central Catholic cemetery (known then as St. Martin's Cemetery) in what is now

Upcoming Classes

From the St. Louis Genealogical Society

June 2004

Legacy: A Genealogy Software Program for PCs

Dates: 6 and 13 June 2004

Days: Sunday

Times: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Sessions: 2

Location: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Suite 140, Sunnen Business Park, Maplewood, Missouri

Taught by: Alan Rogg

Prerequisite: All students must know how to use Windows and a mouse and have a basic knowledge of genealogy. Limit of 12 students; 2 per computer.

Cost: \$20 for StLGS members; \$32 for non-members

Resources at the Family History Library

Dates: 7 June 2004

Days: Monday

Times: 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sessions: 1

Location: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Suite 140, Sunnen Business Park, Maplewood, Missouri

Taught by: Patricia Walls Stamm, CGRS

Prerequisite: Students must know how to use Windows and a mouse and have a basic knowledge of genealogy.

Cost: \$15 for StLGS members; \$24 for non-members

Everything You Should Know About Catholic Church Records

Dates: 14 June 2004

Days: Monday

Times: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Sessions: 1

Location: St. Louis Genealogical Society, Suite 140, Sunnen Business Park, Maplewood, Missouri

Taught by: Patricia Walls Stamm, CGRS

Cost: \$10 for StLGS members; \$16 for non-members

For more information or to register, contact:
St. Louis Genealogical Society at 314-647-8547
or go to <www.stlgs.org>.

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St. Louis Globe-Democrat, November 25, 1874

Police Court Notes

Henry HOFFMAN was brought up as a vagrant and fined \$100.

Stanley KELLER was charged with talking with a loud voice and reciting dramatic poetry in the streets at night while under the influence of too much benzine [*sic*]. The court discharged him.

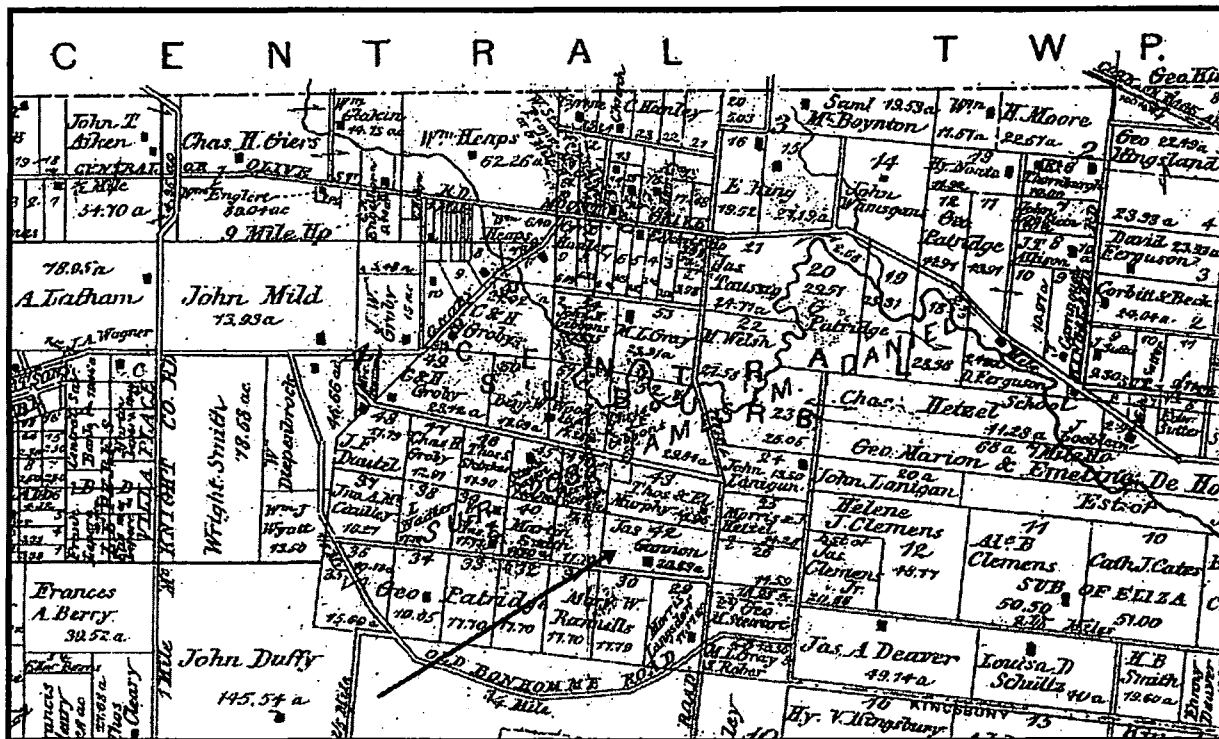
South St. Louis

The iron for the bridge over the River Des Peres, on the Lemay Ferry Road, is partially in position. The work is being pushed forward as rapidly as possible and will be finished in about two weeks, to the gratification of many who have been inconvenienced since the work began.

The new temple is fast approaching completion, and will be occupied when finished by Dr. S. C. MARTIN, as a drug store and dwelling. This building is situated on the southwest corner of Main and Franklin streets, and is a three-story brick built on a lot 25 feet by 50 feet deep, and is one of the handsomest [*sic*] buildings in this portion of the city.

Gannon Family

The Gannon Family



The Gannon Farm in 1878. The farm of James Gannon is shown by the arrow. The farm is boarded on the east by Hanley Avenue and on the south by what later became Gannon Avenue. Delmar Boulevard did not extend this far west. [Taken from the 1878 Pitzman's Atlas of St. Louis, p. 61.]

Olivette. When that cemetery was eventually closed, he was reinterred at Calvary Cemetery.

James's death was the result of an accident and the 74-year-old had prepared no will. His estate was probated in St. Louis County on 23 April 1888, his widow, Catherine, serving as administratrix.¹⁰ She was illiterate and signed with her mark. At the time of his death, his personal property included: two mules, a black mare, a gray mare, a gray horse, a milk cow, a cow and calf, three heifers, and six shoats (young pigs), plus three wagons and other farm equipment.

After James's death, his younger children, Jack and Kate, remained on the farm with their mother until her death in 1905. In 1923, with both of his parents dead, Jack decided to turn the family farm into a residential subdivision. That year he worked with the University City Building

commissioner to develop a new housing tract which became known as Gannondale. After the property was divided into streets and lots, Jack and Kate lived in what had been their farmhouse, now known as 7503 Gannon Avenue. Jack died in the family home in 1938, and Kate moved in with her sister, Mary Gannon KELLY, in the Shaw neighborhood of the city.

James Gannon founded a family early in the history of University City, with both a subdivision and a street named after him. Yet today there are no descendants of this pioneer University City family named Gannon.

The Gannon Children

James and Catharine Gannon were the parents of six children, four of whom lived to adulthood and only two of whom married:

The Gannon Family

- Thomas Gannon, born 3 September 1854, married Mary REKART, and died on 5 August 1898. Children: None.
- Patrick Gannon, born on 8 March 1856, baptized on 11 March 1856,¹¹ and died before 1860.¹²
- Mary Gannon, born on 15 April 1857, married Christopher J. Kelly, and died 4 June 1946. Children: Katherine, Ann m. Joseph PHELAN, Esther m. George SINNOTT.
- Honora "Anna" Gannon, born 26 January 1859, baptized that same day,¹³ and died after 1860.¹⁴
- John J. "Jack" Gannon, born 4 January 1861, and died 13 September 1938, unmarried.
- Katharine Agnes "Kate" Gannon, born 28 June 1864, and died 16 February 1954, unmarried.

Thomas Gannon was born 3 September 1854, and was baptized at St. Joseph's Church in Clayton on 6 September 1854.¹⁵ On Sunday morning, 16 January 1884, he literally married the girl next door — a German girl named Mary Rekart.¹⁶ Mary was the daughter of Edward J. Rekart and Mary HEZEL, both German immigrants (he from Baden and she from Wurttemberg) who had met and married in St. Louis in 1853.¹⁷ The Rekarts first lived in the south St. Louis neighborhood of Carondelet. But by 1870 they had moved west into Central Township next to James Gannon, where Edward Rekart operated a dairy farm. There were eight children in the Rekart home; Mary, who was born in 1857, was the second oldest. She was thus twenty-seven years old at the time of her marriage. Thomas Gannon was twenty-nine. Their wedding was held at the Central Catholic Church (now known as St. Joseph's in Clayton) by Rev. Father James Jackson. Mary's sister, Bertha, was her bridesmaid and Jack Gannon served as his brother's

best man. For the first few years following their marriage they made their home in the city, but in the early 1890s they moved back out west into a home at 312 West Avenue in Clayton.

Thomas was probably in his late thirties when he first began suffering lightning pains in his legs, which would later be diagnosed as "*locomotor ataxia*" (also known as *tabes dorsalis* or *posterior sclerosis*), in which there is a slowly progressive degeneration of the spinal cord and sensory nerves, occurring fifteen to twenty years after an initial infection of syphilis.¹⁸ A progressive and incurable illness, it also caused dizziness and staggering, loss of control over most bodily functions, and eventually confined him to his bed. He died from the disease at the early age of forty-four on 31 October 1898. His brief will leaves his entire estate to his wife, Mary, and appoints her as executrix of his estate. The estate, valued at \$1,739, was probated in St. Louis County on 18 November 1898.¹⁹

His widow remained in their 312 West Avenue home with her sister, Lucy Rekart, until her final illness. Mary Rekart Gannon died at St. Mary's Hospital on 9 July 1932 of heart failure. In her will, she left her property to her sister, Lucy, and to her many nephews and nieces. Her estate was probated in St. Louis County on 15 July 1932, with her brother-in-law, John P. Ossenfort, an attorney, serving as administrator.²⁰

Mary Gannon was also born on 15 April 1857, and was baptized at St. Joseph's Church on April 19.²¹ She grew up and attended school in the area that later became University City. She was thirty-seven years old when she married Christopher J. Kelly at the Gannon home on Wednesday, 25 April 1894.²² Her sister, Kate, served as her bridesmaid. Chris was a blacksmith who worked for the railroad in St. Louis. She and Chris made their home in the city, at 1260 Old Manchester Road, which would be renamed as Vandeventer Avenue in 1920.²³ Here Mary became the mother of three daughters: Mary Katharine, Anna A., and Esther R. The Kellys lived on Vandeventer for over twenty-five years.

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About 1921 they moved into a house at 4553 Gibson, where they stayed only two years. In 1923 they bought a home at 4038 Flora Place in the Shaw neighborhood just north of Tower Grove Park. They would remain in this house for the rest of their lives. They became members of St. Margaret's of Scotland Church, located just a few blocks away at 3854 Flad Avenue. Their daughter, Esther, married George H. Sinnott at St. Margaret's on December 27, 1933.²⁴ He was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 11 June 1898, the son of Joseph Sinnott and Elizabeth DOYLE.²⁵ The Sinnotts made their home in River Forest, Illinois. George Sinnott died there in November 1962, and Esther Kelly Sinnott died in August 1983 in Massachusetts.²⁶ Although no record of it has been found in St. Louis civil or church records, Anna Kelly also married in the

1930s. Her husband was Joseph F. Phelan from New York; they lived in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Chris Kelly died on Friday, 22 September 1944, and was buried at Calvary Cemetery.²⁷ Mary Gannon Kelly died on Saturday, 1 June 1946, at her home at the age of eighty-three years. The funeral was held at St. Margaret's, with interment beside her husband at Calvary Cemetery.²⁸ No probate record for either Chris or Mary Gannon Kelly has been found.

John James "Jack" Gannon was born on his parents' farm in what would later become University City on 4 January 1861; he was baptized at St. Joseph's Church on 13 January.²⁹ He attended public schools and grew up to assist his father on the farm. It was Jack who was driving their cart home from gathering hay in the fields when the cart bumped over a stream, causing his father to fall and break his neck. Following his father's death, he and Kate remained on the farm, caring for their mother until her death in 1905.

In 1916, Mayor HEMAN and the University City City Council voted to extend the city limits westward from Hanley Road to North and South Road.³⁰ This extension, which also allowed the city to extend Delmar Blvd. from Hanley to North and South, included the old Gannon farm. On 16 November 1921, Jack bought out his siblings to acquire sole ownership of the property.³¹ In 1923 Jack worked with area businessmen to establish

the Gannondale Realty Company, which was incorporated on 28 July 1923.³² He registered the Gannondale subdivision with St. Louis County on 14 September of that year.³³ He then worked with Arthur H. KUHLMANN, the University City Building Commissioner, to develop the properties in Gannondale. Kuhlmann worked with the Mississippi Valley Trust Company as trustees to secure the payment of a promissory

note to John James Gannon as parcels of lots were released to him for development throughout the fall and winter of 1923.³⁴

With the farmland being turned into housing for University City residents, Jack had to find other work. He had years of experience in maintaining the farm equipment and found employment in one of the area automobile factories as a mechanic.³⁵ He bought a 1932 Nash coupe, which he drove until his death in 1938.

Early in the 1930s, Jack became a member of the University City Board of Park Directors (now the Board of Park Commissioners). He served on their Finance, Sports, and Tennis Committees, where he was involved in projects such as improving the baseball diamonds in Heman Park (adding wooden dugouts and bleachers).³⁶ In a meeting on 17 May 1933, the Board discussed whether or not to allow the sale of beer in Heman Park. Jack abstained from the vote, but he said, "If it is the Board's wishes to

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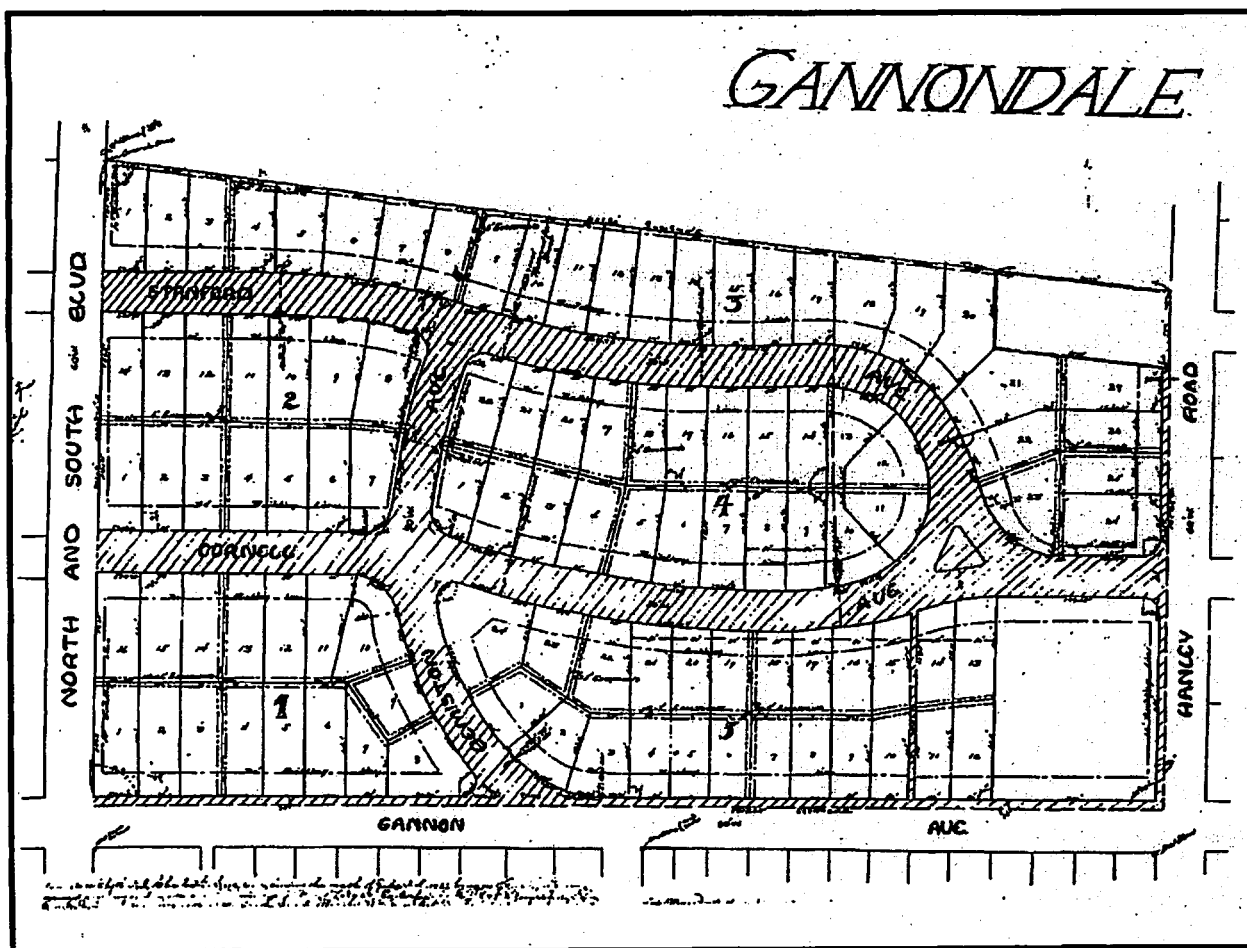
The Gannon Family

sell beer, it is all right with me." He was elected second vice-president of the Board at their meeting on 8 June 1938.

Jack attended only one Board meeting (on 22 June) in the capacity of vice-president, as he became ill the next month. He died in the same house where he was born, now at 7503 Gannon Avenue, on 13 September 1938, at the age of seventy-seven.³⁷ The 28 September 1938 minutes of the Board of Park Directors includes the following, "A letter from Miss Katherine Gannon and family acknowledging the expression of sympathy from the Board in the death of Mr. John J. Gannon, was read."³⁸ His funeral was held at St. Joseph's Church at Clayton and he was buried at Calvary

Cemetery.³⁹ His will left monetary bequests to his sister, Mary Kelly, and her three daughters, to the pastors at St. Joseph's and Christ the King Catholic Churches in Clayton and University City, respectively, and to St. Ann's Foundling Asylum in St. Louis. The balance of his estate was bequeathed to his sister, Kate. He appointed his two sisters, Mary and Kate, as executrices of his estate, which was proved on 21 September 1938.⁴⁰

Katherine Agnes "Kate" Gannon was the youngest of the Gannon children. She was born on their farm on 28 June 1864. She never married, but assisted her brother, Jack, in running the farm throughout her life. After her brother's death she moved in with her sister, Mary Gannon Kelly, in



Gannondale Subdivision 1923. [Plat Map from St. Louis County, Recorder of Deeds]

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her home on Flora, where she doted on her various nieces — her sister's children and grandchildren. Mary Kelly died in 1946, and Kate continued to live in her home on Flora until her own death. The last of the Gannon children, she died on 14 February 1954, just a few months short of her ninetieth birthday.⁴¹ The funeral services were held at St. Margaret of Scotland Church and she was laid to rest in the Gannon plot at Calvary Cemetery. No probate record for Kate Gannon has been found in either St. Louis City or County.

Endnotes

1. James Gannon's 1888 obituary states that he "resided in St. Louis County . . . for 37 years."
2. St. Louis Marriage Records, vol. 6, p. 273, recorded 12 December 1853. Records of St. Patrick's Church, Book VI, Marriages, 1853–1887, (Roll 78 at St. Louis County Library), p. 24.
3. 1900 U.S. Census, Central township, St. Louis Co., Mo., ED 117, p. 25B. Also, *St. Louis County Watchman-Advocate* newspaper, Fri., 22 December 1905, p. 1.
4. St. Patrick's Marriages, *loc. cit.*
5. 1870 U.S. Census, Central township, St. Louis County, Mo., p. 59 (original), p. 166 (stamped).
6. *Ibid.*
7. St. Louis Deeds, Book 332, p. 287. The deed actually reads, "We, Charles S. Rannells and Mary W., his wife, in consideration of one dollar to us paid by James Ganning [*sic*] of St. Louis County Missouri. . . ." Thus, either Mr. Rannells effectively gave the land to James Gannon, or other considerations were transacted privately. The exact acreage stated in the deed is 20 and 89/100 acres. Also, at the time of this transfer of property, "Mr. Rannells had become incompetent to manage his own affairs, and Robert M. REMICK was appointed guardian. Remick subdivided Survey 2033 for sale in 1866, calling it Central suburbs." [Quoted material for information provided by Esley HAMILTON, Preservation Historian, St. Louis County Parks.] The Gannon purchase was part of that subdivision.
8. 1870 Federal Agricultural Census, Central Twp., St. Louis Co., Mo., p. 11. (Mo. Historical Society)
9. 1880 Federal Agricultural Census, Central Twp., St. Louis Co., Mo., ED 175, SD 1, p. 16. (Mo. Historical Society)
10. St. Louis County Probate Court, Estate Case No. 00617, granted 23 April 1888. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Baptisms, vol. 1, p. 30.
11. 1860 U.S. Census, Central Twp., St. Louis Co., Mo., p. 13, in which Patrick Gannon is not listed. A Patrick Gannon is buried with the Gannon family at Calvary Cemetery; see Calvary Cemetery Records, Section 26, Lot 91.
12. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Baptisms, vol. 1, p. 50.
13. 1860 U.S. Census, Central Twp., St. Louis Co., Mo., p. 13, in which Ann Gannon, age 1, is listed. Also, 1870 U.S. Census, Central Twp., St. Louis Co., Mo., p. 166, in which Ann Gannon, is not listed. An "Agnes" Gannon died 1 August 1877, and is buried with the Gannon family; see Calvary Cemetery Records, section 26, lot 91.
14. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Baptisms, vol. 1, 21.
15. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Marriages. Also, *St. Louis County Watchman-Advocate* newspaper, Fri., 17 January 1884, p. 4.
16. Rekart Family on Rootsweb, by Robert H. Berg, from Hezel Family History file on Ancestry.com; *St. Louis Watchman-Advocate* newspaper, Fri., 4 November 1898, p. 8. Also see *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, Edition 14, 1981, p. A-135, for a clinical definition of *locomotor atixia*. Penicillin is used in treatment, ". . . but complete cure is rare."
17. St. Louis County Probate Court, Estate Case no. 01557, granted 18 November 1898.
18. St. Louis County Probate Court, Estate Case no. 10308, granted 15 July 1932.
19. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Baptisms, vol. 1, p. 39.
20. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Marriages. Also, *St. Louis County Watchman-Advocate* newspaper, Fri., 27 April 1894, p. 4.
21. 1900 U.S. Census, Ward 25, St. Louis, Mo., ED 371, p. 3; 1910 U.S. Census, Ward 23, St. Louis, Mo., ED 385, p. 3; 1920 U.S. Census, Ward 23, St. Louis, Mo., ED 443, p. 38.
22. St. Margaret's Church, Record of Marriages, 1933–1941 (Roll 110 at St. Louis County Library), p. 5.
23. Social Security Death Index. Also, 1910 U.S. Census, Worcester, Worcester Co., Ma., p. 190. Social Security Death Index.
24. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 24 September 1944, p. 2C. Calvary Cemetery Record, sec. 26, lot 91, site 5.

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25. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 3 June 1946, p. 7B. *St. Louis County Watchman-Advocate*, 7 June 1946, p. 1. Calvary Cemetery Record, sec. 26, lot 91, site 4.
26. St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Clayton, Mo., Record of Baptisms, vol. 1, p. 61.
27. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* newspaper, Wed., 10 May 1916, p. 16, "University City Adds Tract of Home Sites."
28. St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book 529, p. 257
29. St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book 619, p. 7.
30. St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds, Plat No. 79, Plat Book 18, p. 47. Gannondale is recorded as being in lot 42 of the Central Suburb, St. Louis County. It was divided into five blocks of residential property, lying between North and South Road on the west, Hanley Road on the east, Gannon Avenue on the south, and including Stanford Avenue on the north.
31. St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book 603, p. 361 (establishing an indenture between John James Gannon and Arthur H. Kuhlmann including all lots in the five blocks of Gannondale); Deed Book 608, p. 557, releasing ten lots for a payment of \$5,120.80); Deed Book 641, p. 14, releasing 11 lots for a payment of \$5,900); Deed Book 637, p. 31, releasing ten lots for a payment of \$6,300).
32. 1920 U.S. Census, University City, Central Twp., St. Louis Co., Mo., ED 133, p. 44A.
33. City Hall, University City, Mo., Board of Parks Commissioners, *Minutes of Meetings, 1933-1938*.
34. *St. Louis County Watchman-Advocate*, Fri., 16 Sept. 1938, p. 1; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Wed., 14 Sept. 1938, p. 5C; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Thurs., 14 Sept. 1938, p. 6D.
35. City Hall, University City, Mo., Board of Parks Commissioners, *Minutes of Meetings*, September 28, 1938.
36. Calvary Cemetery Record, sec. 26, lot 91.
37. St. Louis County Probate Court, Estate Case no. 13464, Granted 21 September 1938.
38. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Mon., 15 February 1954, p. 5B. Also, Calvary Cemetery Record, sec. 26, lot 91.

Edward E. "Ted" Steele is an author, teacher, and lecturer. He was the Chair of the GEN-TECH 2004 Conference, Co-Chair 1999 FGS Conference, Local Arrangements Chair 1993 FGS Conference, and has presented lectures at several national conferences. He is a member of StLGS, NGS, APG, NEHGS, NYGBS and several other genealogical societies.

Generation Gap

Wanted: Information or photo of J. W. HENNINGER, d. 1918 in Bloomington, Illinois. He was from St. Louis, was a minister, and was also Superintendent of Schools in Jacksonville, Ill., in 1900. He was a past president of Western Illinois University, Macomb, Ill. So far a photo eludes those who want to get all past presidents' photos hung. Please contact: Jacksonville Area Genealogy & Historical Society, Attn: Corresponding Secretary, P.O. Box 21, Jacksonville, Ill., 62650.

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