

West from St. Charles

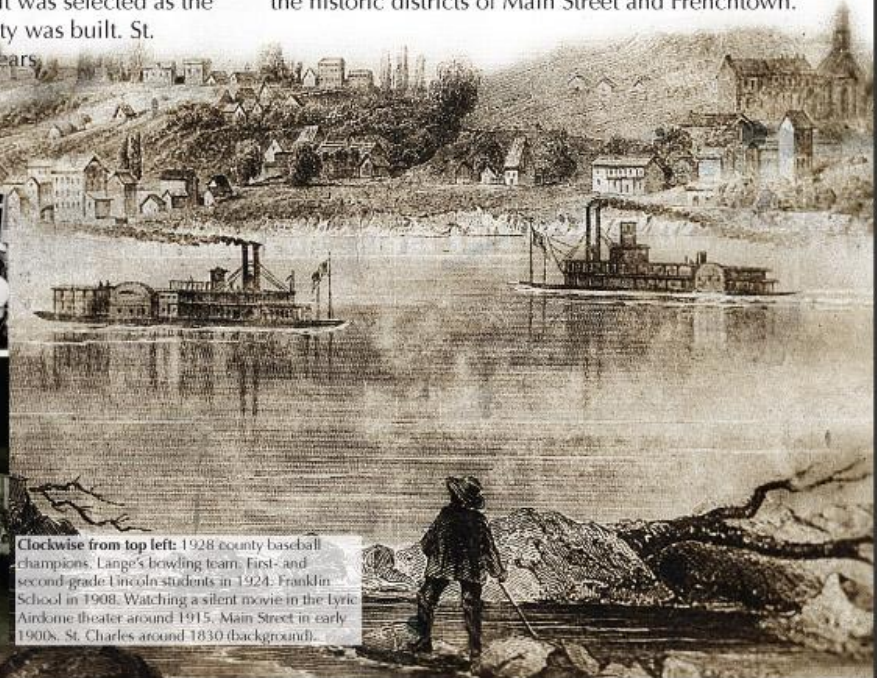
Whether known as Les Petites Côtes ("The Little Hills," the first French settlement) or San Carlos (under Spanish rule), St. Charles was important for its location. As the gateway to the west, St. Charles stood on the first high ground going up the Missouri River from the Mississippi.

Most early residents were hunters and traders. Wheat, corn, and tobacco were grown in St. Charles' common fields. After a new United States purchased the immense Louisiana Territory, St. Charles became a jumping-off point for western settlers. In 1820 it was selected as the first state capital while Jefferson City was built. St. Charles served as capital for five years.

Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, an African American born in what is now Haiti, moved to St. Charles late in life to live with his granddaughter. He died here in 1818. The first permanent resident of Chicago, du Sable led a remarkable life as a wealthy trader and important member of the Potawatomi tribe. Point DuSable Park is named after him.

With such a busy past, St. Charles wisely preserved its old buildings (including the First Capitol) and formed the historic districts of Main Street and Frenchtown.

Image credits: St. Charles County Historical Society (1,2,3,5,6), Frenchtown Heritage Museum and Research Library (4), State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia (background).



Clockwise from top left: 1928 county baseball champions, Lange's bowling team, First- and second-grade Lincoln students in 1924, Franklin School in 1908, Watching a silent movie in the Lyric Airdome theater around 1915, Main Street in early 1900s, St. Charles around 1830 (background).