One of the more mysterious places in Webster Groves history is the area known as ‘Forty Acres,’ located at the corner of South Elm Avenue and East Glendale Road, currently the site of Webster Groves Recreation Center, Moss Field, and Hixson Middle School. In years of research, we have only seen one photo of the area, from the early 1900s, showing it as a quarry of some sort, with many laborers, multiple mule-drawn wagons, and large buildings in the background.

We recently uncovered the Sanborn map for this area, and it was very revealing. Created between the 1860s and the 1950s, Sanborn maps were surveys of the built environment in U.S. metropolitan areas, created to help insurance companies assess fire risk. Kind of the original Google Maps!

The Sanborn map that includes part of Forty Acres shows a large structure labeled ‘Clay Shed,’ and also says ‘Hydraulic Press Brick Company: Shady Side Clay Fields.’

Now we know that clay mining went on here, probably part of the Cheltenham Seam that ran through St. Louis City and County. The clay was produced for Hydraulic Press Brick Company, a major producer of bricks in the early part of the 20th century.

After the clay was mined out, the area sat as a dump until after World War II, when major municipal projects in the city began, including development of Memorial Field. Later, the School Board bought part of the land to build Moss Field and Hixson Junior High.

Our Reference Room staff found a dozen Sanborn maps from Webster Groves in the early 20th century, and had them printed in large format. Check them out the next time you’re in the Library—they’re very interesting.

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**Forty Acres & Sanborn Maps**

For several weeks now, the Children’s Room has been expecting—a new live mascot! We are very excited to get our new baby, who will make its home in the Librarian’s office where everyone can see it. It has just been born, and we will get it as soon as it is old enough to leave its mother. Can you guess what it might be?

Starting May 1, we will give hints about what it is. Check for those in the Library, or on our Facebook and Instagram pages.

We will reveal the mascot at a Summer Reading Meet & Greet on Saturday, May 26 at 2 p.m. We will also have a Name the Mascot contest starting that day. Submissions will be accepted from both children and adults through June 15. It will be very exciting, so don’t miss it!

This year’s theme for Summer Reading is ‘Libraries ROCK!,’ so get ready to do some rockin’ and readin’! As usual there are reading clubs for children, teens, and adults, with fun prizes and premiums.
Put Friday evening, June 8, on your calendar to attend our Annual Friends Meeting. It will be a time to meet and vote on the slate of officers for the coming year. Even more exciting, it will be the first of our new speaker series inviting special guests to answer questions about the books, libraries, and literary influences in their lives. On June 8, the winner of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch’s Best St. Louis Stage Director for 2018 and current artistic director of the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Steve Woolf, will be in the hot seat. Also, don’t forget to check out the basket of literary-related goodies we will be offering as an attendance prize.