Landmark Report (Vol. 24, no. 2)

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The Landmark Association and Meyer Mortgage present

Christmas in the Grove

Smiths Grove, Kentucky
Saturday, December 4, 2004 • 12:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Tickets: $10
Can be purchased at the door of any site on tour date

Tami Meredith ............................ 774 Plum Springs Rd. (on the way)
Winner of the 2004 Jean Thomason Historic Home Award
Mary Jane Cassady ......................... 10683 Louisville Rd. (on the way)
Victorian House Bed & Breakfast ....................... 130 Main St.
Baptist Church .................................................. (5th & Main)
Methodist Church ................................................. (4th & Main)
Presbyterian Church .............................. (2nd & College)
Christian Church ................................. 427 College St. (5th & College)

Landmark Store at the Victorian House
(Early Bowling Green Landmarks available for only $24)
Antique Shops will be open for business
Seasonal entertainment at several tour sites

Silent auction items include:
Set of Little Colonel books, Large framed photograph of the Helm Hotel (frame from barn wood),
The People’s House: Governor’s Mansions of Kentucky with dust jacket,
Irene Moss Sumpter’s Early Warren County Landmarks (out of print), Small, brass desk lamp

See details about our Christmas Tea on page 11.
Architectural Details

- On Saturday, October 9th, approximately 20 volunteers went through a cemetery documentation workshop with Robin Zeigler, preservation planner and administrator for the Historic Preservation Board. Workshop attendees learned how to read lichen covered and worn monuments without causing further damage, how to identify the major types of monument types found in most cemeteries, and how to complete accurate transcripts and documentary forms. Each volunteer was loaned some basic tools and was asked to document at least one Warren County cemetery. Additional workshops for groups of six or more can be configured with Ms. Zeigler. Contact her at 842-1953 or robin.zeigler@bgky.org. The group may select the site, and the workshop can be conducted at that location. Other volunteers can help find contact information for cemeteries, map the cemeteries using GPS, or transcribe information already available at the Kentucky Library. Those wishing to do transcription work at the Kentucky Library must have a laptop computer and a basic understanding of Microsoft Excel.

- Landmark’s annual dinner meeting has been scheduled for Friday, May 20, at the Presbyterian Church. Besides a historical tour of the oldest church in Bowling Green (built in the early 1830s), attendees will hear a brief organ recital by church organist and Landmark member, Thomas N. Moody. Stay tuned for details about this exciting event, when the Association recognizes its annual award winners.

- The BGWC Historic Preservation Board is seeking sponsors for next year’s Warren County Preservation Planner, an HPB and Insight publication about local history and preservation issues. If you would like more information, contact Robin Zeigler at 842-1953 or robin.zeigler@bgky.org

- Kudos to all those who attended the informational session for the old/new City Commission. The session involving the potential LifeSkills building is currently under arbitration with the National Historic Preservation Advisory Board in Washington, DC. The Association will e-mail the results of this arbitration as soon as possible after the verdict. If you are not on our e-mail list, please send your e-mail address to our secretary Melodie Smith at himeleni@vnetmail.com

- Approximately 45 people attended our lecture “He Didn’t Do Bungalows: The Bowling Green Architecture of James Maurice Ingram.” Special thanks to our speaker Jill Britt, Eileen Starr for the refreshments, Alicia Carmichael for the story in the Daily News, WKYU for airing a public service announcement, and to Mrs. Ruby Stephens Ingram who donated the Ingram architectural drawings to WKU. We’ll plan an ironing party for this February in order to preserve some more of these beauties.

- We were saddened to hear of the death of long-time members, Dixie Davison and Noble Burford.

Eliza Calvert Hall Seen at Close Range

Well Known Kentucky Author Talks of Her Work and Family Life A Many-Sided Person A Little Journey to the Home of the Creator of “Aunt Jane of Kentucky.”

Henderson Daily Gleaner, August 30, 1908 by Ewing Galloway (with annotations by Lynn Niedermeier)

In summer 1908, journalist and photographer Ewing Galloway visited Bowling Green to interview Lida Calvert Obenchain (pen name “Eliza Calvert Hall”) about her popular book of stories, “Aunt Jane of Kentucky.” At age 52, Lida was not only an author of fiction and poetry but a wife, the mother of four children and a long-time advocate of suffrage and women’s equality. This article appeared in Galloway’s hometown newspaper, the Henderson Daily Gleaner, and in the Bowling Green News-Democrat. Annotations are in italics.

On a typical Chestnut Street in Bowling Green lives one of Kentucky’s noblest women—one who has endeared herself not only to native-born Kentuckians in every State in the Union, but to thousands of other good Americans into whose hands her book and her short stories have fallen.

Aunt Jane of Kentucky was one of 1907’s most successful books by a new author. Six months after it was published, Lida and her family moved into a Dutch Colonial Revival-style cottage (which still stands) at 1353 Chestnut Street. A few days after giving this interview, Lida used royalties from her book, then in its 11th edition, to make the final payment on what she called “the house that Aunt Jane of Kentucky bought.”

Eliza Calvert Hall, creator of Aunt Jane of Kentucky, is a woman of whom the people of the Park City are rightly proud, for she not only stands among the foremost novelists of Kentucky, but belongs to the highest type of Southern womanhood. Every one who has read Aunt Jane of Kentucky will agree that the author of that splendid book is endowed with a great soul in tune with God and Nature and possesses the true art of expression. A broad outlook upon nature and humanity, a sensitiveness to the rights of her own sex, and ideals attained only by work, patience and painstaking, are undoubtedly the qualities that have won for her the esteem in which she is held in the literary world and the devotion of her friends and acquaintances. The secret of her literary success, to be sure, lies in her power to bring before our vision the divinity of commonplace things.

Although reviewers often erroneously described the setting for Aunt Jane of Kentucky as the “Bluegrass,” they were charmed by the book’s elderly narrator, Aunt Jane, and by the humor, sentiment and wisdom in her stories of the plain folk of the Pennyrile region. Lida employed her poetic talent as well as her knowledge of Warren County lore and of domestic arts like quilting and gardening to evoke the people, sights, sounds and smells of rural 19th-century Kentucky.

Though known to her readers as Eliza Calvert Hall, she is Mrs. Lida Calvert Obenchain, wife of Major

continued on page 4
Eliza Calvert Hall Seen at Close Range (cont'd)

Kentucky to be a many-sided woman. She is the mother of four children whom she idolizes, and is mistress of a household that bespake family devotion and true Southern hospitality. When Aunt Jane of Kentucky was published in March 1907, Lida modestly hoped that her "March book" would be as successful as her "March baby"—her youngest daughter Cecilia (Ceci), born twelve years earlier. Though she pronounced all of her children "remarkable," Lida constantly worried about her family and spent much of her married life bored and exhausted by her domestic duties. A wife, she once complained, was "cook, scullion, nurse, laundress, charwoman, dining room servant, and chambermaid all in one short twelve hours."

Lida's daughter Cecilia (Ceci) Obenchain performed for Galloway during his visit.

While she understood the pressure on suffragists, particularly in the South, to appear respectable and ladylike rather than "shriek in public," Galloway understated her devotion to the cause. In national suffrage publications like the Woman's Journal and the Woman's Tribune, Lida wrote with intellectual breadth, passion and singling sarcasm of the legal and social injustices heaped upon women.

Mrs. Obenchain may have her hobbies—and if she has, I am sure they are family, literature and woman suffrage—but she is far from being narrow. There are few women better informed on all subjects of general interest. She admires President Roosevelt, for his praise of Aunt Jane of Kentucky did as much as anything else toward placing it before the reading public. John Brisbin Walker, former editor and publisher of the Cosmopolitan Magazine, was first to accept and publish any of her more successful writings, and it was through Mr. Walker's publication that "Sally Ann's Experience" became known. The Cosmopolitan Magazine was nothing like its namesake of today. In addition to news, travel accounts and essays on culture and politics, it published fiction by H. G. Wells, Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle and a host of lesser-known writers. The literary success her husband would become Aunt Jane of Kentucky's first and most famous chapter, "Sally Ann's Experience." Inspired by stories Lida heard while circulating petitions for suffrage and the reform of married women's property laws, it was a plain-spoken indictment of husbands' insatiable and parsimonious treatment of their wives under the cover of law and scripture. "You're one of the men that makes me think that it's better to be a Kentucky horse than a Kentucky woman," Sally Ann tells one of them. Three other stories in Aunt Jane of Kentucky also first appeared in the Cosmopolitan.

In May 1907, before an audience of 25,000 in Lansing, Michigan, Theodore Roosevelt created widespread interest in Aunt Jane of Kentucky when he called "Sally Ann's Experience" required reading for men who tended to "sellish or thoughtless." He was overbearing disregard of the rights of their womenkind. "The New York Times" took notice of his recommendation, publishing an excerpt from the story under the headline "Husbands, Love Your Wives."

"I am going to quit writing Aunt Jane stories next spring," she told me, as we sat on her vine-clad verandah. "I am tired of writing dialect, and I find it difficult to keep from permitting it to corrupt my English. My second book of Aunt Jane stories will be published next spring, and after that I will try to write something else. Little, Brown & Company, my publishers, write me that the sales of my first book, Aunt Jane of Kentucky, are increasing."

In portraying their characters' distinct regional identities, Lida and other practitioners of the literary genre known as "local color" fiction reproduced clipped New England accents, Creole patois, " negro dialect" and Southern drawls; thus did Aunt Jane, a "plain old woman" of Kentucky, speak of the "daffidyds" in her "garden" and wives who "bled their clothes" in a "kittle" on wash day. Aunt Jane of Kentucky was in its 14th edition when Lida's second book of stories, The Land of Long Ago, appeared in September 1909. She published a short novel, To Love and To Cherish, in 1911 and a unique, non-fiction exploration of the weaver's art, A Book of Hand-Woven Coverlets, in 1912. Lida's last "Aunt Jane" story appeared in Clover and Blue Grass, published in 1916.

"Of your later stories, which do you like best?" I asked her.

"Next to 'Sally Ann's Experience' comes 'The House That Was a Wedding Fee.' Of course the former is the best story I have ever written. I wrote 'A Ride to Town,' which, as have all my latest stories, appeared in the Cosmopolitan Magazine, when I was ill. I was feeling miserable at the time, but somehow I wanted to complete it while it was on my mind, and, too, the publishers wanted to get it as soon as possible."

Between September 1907 and October 1909, Lida published nine "Aunt Jane" stories in the Cosmopolitan. "The House That Was a Wedding Fee" was loosely based on a local legend about Reverend Joseph Lapsley, founding pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, and James Rumsey Skiles, who was said to have given Lapsley a house and farm as payment for performing his wedding ceremony. Local readers would also have recognized some of Bowling Green's history and landmarks in "A Ride to Town." Then she changed the subject rather suddenly, shifting to something she seemed to like better than anything else in the world. "You must see my four children," she said, "They are just the finest in all the world, and you may rest assured that I am prouder of them than of anything I have ever written, or expect to write."

Her pride in the third of them I had the pleasure of meeting a little later was wholly justifiable. The eldest, a handsome young man of pleasing address who stands six feet three, is preparing himself for the profession of civil engineer.

Lida's oldest son William Alexander Obenchain, Jr. (Alex) became a highway engineer in Kentucky and Texas, but his life would be scarred by a melancholy and restless nature and a weakness for alcohol. Later in life, he expressed pride in his mother's writing even as he blamed his family for his unhappiness. Opinions differed on whether Alex's mysterious death at age fifty was due to murder or suicide.

The second was a pretty girl of sixteen or seventeen, with many of her mother's characteristics. Margery Obenchain was actually nearing her twenty-first birthday. She married two years later and moved to Dallas, Texas. When her daughter was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1919, Lida, now widowed, took charge of Margery's household and two young children with a sense of both maternal duty and dismay. "I seem to have started life all over again, raising children and keeping house, when I thought I was through with such work forever," she wrote. Margery's death in 1923 left Lida deeply sad.
and pessimistic.

The third was a miss of thirteen summers, who has displayed remarkable musical talent. In the course of the interview Mrs. Obenchain inquired of the youngest girl's whereabouts and urged the remarkable musical talent. In December 2004, Cecil pursued both her mather furnishing the children. Their complex; I left mental care for it. After she she left her, as she she was skeptical of socialism's attempt

right of the "literary woman" to exemption from household chores. One of these articles came to Walker's attention, prompting the syndicate offer and, soon afterward, his publication of "Sally Ann's Experience."

"Are you still interested in the woman's suffrage movement?" I asked her, knowing well that I was bringing up one of her favorite subjects, for she has been engaged for several years in spreading suffragist propaganda.

"I am glad you mentioned that subject," she replied. "I am really more deeply interested in woman suffrage than in literature. For some time I have been compelled to drop my work in that connection, but I will take it up again. I believe we will win in our fight for suffrage. It has been my duty to send suffragist literature to one hundred newspapers, but I am going to weed out all except those papers which give space to some of the matter I send."

On her mailing list of Kentucky newspapers, Lida tried to keep track of those which were sympathetic to suffrage and those which were not. The state's most influential paper, Henry Watterson's Courier-Journal, was in the latter category; in fact, Lida complained, there was "not a paper in Louisville friendly to Equal Rights." Despite her devotion to the cause, exhaustion and illness forced her to give up her press work in 1909. Another contributing factor was Lida's grim determination that, in light of her husband's modest teaching salary, she had to concentrate on her fiction writing in order to "support the family."

"I am a believer in the public ownership of public service corporations."

This brief interjection hinted at Lida's opinion of trusts and corporate concentrations of wealth. She had other highly reform-minded political views. Writing on the "industrial problem" in the 1890s, she expressed sympathy for labor unions even though they were often associated with communism and anarchism. As a self-described woman of "very, very moderate means," Lida object ed to her culture's unwillingness to assign monetary value to wives' domestic work and supported the idea of "public kitchens" to provide families with pre-cooked food and other services. Like many modern feminists, she deplored consumerism, especially as practiced during the Christmas season. In later life, however, she was skeptical of socialism's attempt

order to "turn society bottom side upwards." She was, she wrote, "a firm believer in classes."

In the course of the interview Major Obenchain told of a striking little incident in his wife's struggle to "get into print."

"She sent" Sally Ann's Experience to several publishers before it was accepted by Mr. Walker, all of whom returned it. Among these was a Philadelphia editor who returned the story with a polite letter in which he explained that he liked it for its literary value, but that he thought the church scene, in which Sally Ann spoke her mind to a little congregation of her country neighbors, telling them how she viewed the treatment some of the wives received at the hands of their husbands, was irrelevant. He feared the story would not be received in the right spirit. Later the story was published in the Cosmopolitan Magazine and when and it became popular this same editor offered my wife a very large sum of money for permission to reprint it in his magazine.

The Philadelphia editor who rejected "Sally Ann's Experience" was Edward Bok of the Ladies' Home Journal. To Lida's great satisfaction, in 1907 he paid $200 for reprint rights, equivalent to about $3,900 today.

Mrs. Obenchain remarked that she would be pleased to recover possession of some of her short stories that were accepted and paid for by John Bris ben Walker but never published, the failure to publish being caused probably by his retirement from the editorship of the Cosmopolitan Magazine. Walker had sold the Cosmopolitan to William Randolph Hearst in 1905. In contrast to her fiction, Lida was less concerned about retaining copies of her suffrage writing, considering it to have no lasting literary value. She acknowledged, however, that if she had not worked for the Kentucky Equal Rights Association "I would never have been the author of Aunt Jane of Kentucky, so my share of literary fame and fortune rest on my belief in woman suffrage." This "many-sided" woman later began other projects—a book of poetry, one of essays and another on basketry—that, unfortunately, never saw publication, but even in 1935, struggling with arthritis in the last year of her life, Lida was ambitious. "There is so much work that I am capable of doing and want to do," she wrote. ▲
Changes at Warren County Courthouse by Robin Zelgler

The addition of the new war memorial by Donnie Finkins in the Courthouse's northeast courtyard has prompted interest in "dressing" that area to make it more accessible and usable. Landscape Architect, Brian Shirley has designed a series of new brick pathways and entrances that allow visitors to contemplate the memorial and that create visual and physical connections with City Hall across College Street.

There is a new entrance on College Street created by removing one section of wrought-iron railing. The railing will be used to replace another section that is severely damaged. The damaged section of fence and the limestone foundation of the fence, now exposed at the new entrance, will both be retained. The original brick walkway that ran along the side of the Courthouse was in such poor shape that it was dangerous. The bricks have been temporarily removed and will be replaced. In addition, a strip of concrete, about 12" wide will be laid between the courthouse wall and the brick pathway to help direct water away from the foundation of the building. The entrance to this walkway to the right of the main door of the courthouse had a limestone sill that was damaged beyond repair. The sill will be replaced with a concrete version, making the entrance accessible and safe for wheelchairs as well as pedestrians.

In addition, the Kentucky Historical Society has been contacted about moving one of the historical markers that currently blocks the view of the memorial to the opposite courtyard.

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Account Book Makes Interesting Reading by Jonathan Jeffrey

Dr. Douglas Fugate, of WKU's Marketing Department, recently donated an interesting florist account book to the Kentucky Library & Museum. Dozens of account books—usually for general stores—are housed at the library, but this is the first one for a florist. The 472-page book documents Robinson's Flowers from 1924 to 1929. The shop was operated by Lonnie R. and Novice C. Robinson. An invoice, dated in 1926 and found inside the ledger, indicates that the operation was located at 912 State Street, but the 1927 city directory shows that the shop had moved to 432 East Main Street in the Princess Theatre Building.

Mr. Robinson had been in the retail business for many years. His parents, Emma and Rufus L. Robinson, operated a grocery and meat market at 224 East Main Street from around 1905 until 1920; they then operated a furniture store at 232 East Main. In the 1911 city directory Lonnie is shown as a clerk in his father's store. On February 26th of the following year, he married Novice C. Madison, a native of Warren County.

The 1920 census indicates that Lonnie and Novice were boarders at 925 Elm Street, and that he was making a living as a traveling salesman. Soon he was working for his father again, but in 1924 Lonnie and his wife opened Robinson's Flowers. What Lonnie didn't know about flowers his wife did, and what Novice didn't know about retail operations her husband did. It seemed like a perfect match.

During this period the couple was living on Nashville Road.

The account book is valuable for several reasons. It indicates the types of products and services offered by a florist of the time period, as well as the prices paid for these items. It also represents a chronological digest of important events in the community, i.e. funerals, weddings, homecomings, showers, illnesses, dances, births of babies, etc. In addition, the ledger indicates the monthly income for the operation, allowing a researcher to gauge the success of the operation and compare it with similar operations.

Dr. Fugate and Dr. Douglas Fugate have the book to any page to find the various types of flowers used in arrangements; a significant percentage of the flowers were carnations, although you will also find entries for potted house plants, ferns, roses, sweet peas, zinnias, narcissus, chrysanthemums, tulips, hydrangeas, lilies, and gladiolus. The company advertised that it carried "Old Fashion Garden Flowers." Notes made by the Robinsons indicate the occasion for which clients purchased flowers: "casket spray," "funeral spray," "cemetery vase," "fair hop," etc.

Of course the chief product offered by the operation was flowers. One need only open the book to any page to find the various types of flowers used in arrangements; a significant percentage of the flowers were carnations, although you will also find entries for potted house plants, ferns, roses, sweet peas, zinnias, narcissus, chrysanthemums, tulips, hydrangeas, lilies, and gladiolus. The company advertised that it carried "Old Fashion Garden Flowers." Notes made by the Robinsons indicate the occasion for which clients purchased flowers: "casket spray," "funeral spray," "cemetery vase," "fair hop," etc.
funeral spray was $2.50; a basket florists, Robinson's Flowers retailed to us. A typical casket spray was sold for a dozen gladiolas was $1.50; a basket of the holidays that garnered the most income for the operation. We do not know why Robinson's Flowers closed, but we do know that the Deemer Floral Company closed in June 1929, however, because Mrs. Robinson later worked for Deemer's and eventually retired from that business. The Robinson ledger closes in June 1929, although phone books show that the store moved in the late 1920s to the "Nashville Pike" and stayed open until the end of 1931. It seems rather clear that the shop ended as a result of the financial struggles resulting from the Great Depression. In 1932 the Robinsons purchased the old Adams farmhouse from M.D. and Clyde Hall. The farm was located off the Russellville Road on what is now known as Creason Lane. The street that runs between Russellville Road and Creason (crossing the CSX railroad) is named Robinson Street in the family's honor. Lonnie opened a hardware store briefly and in 1933 opened a liquor store that he operated until his retirement in 1942. Mr. Robinson died in May 1955; Novice outlived her husband by 29 years. The Adams-Robinson House was razed on March 25, 1996 to make way for The Gables apartment complex.

Mrs. Robinson loved flowers. She maintained flower beds at her home, and was instrumental, along with ten other charter members, in founding the Warren County Garden Club in 1933. Her flower arranging skills were known throughout the state, and she served as a national flower show judge as well as chairman of the Southern Kentucky Fair Flower Show for many years. A signal honor came when one of her flower arrangements was featured in a National Garden Club Calendar. In 1961 the Warren County Garden Club had her name entered in the Book of Appreciation at the National Council of Garden Clubs home in St. Louis. This signal honor was bestowed on Mrs. Robinson for "many years of service to garden clubs." At the time, she was the first person from this region to receive this honor. She had twice served the local club as president, been the first district director of the Dogwood District of Garden Clubs in Kentucky, held several other regional and state garden club offices, and was a Kentucky Colonel.

Mrs. Novice Camilla (Madison) Robinson died on March 11, 1984 at the Medical Center after a brief illness and her body was laid to rest beside her husband in Fairview Cemetery.

Settle a family discussion...

In this photo, does the truck parked in front of City Hall contain refuge from a WWII scrap drive or does it contain the remains of an aircraft that crashed in Warren County in the 1940's? Contact Jonathan Jeffrey at 745-5083 if you know.

LANDMARK ASSOCIATION
Bowling Green—Warren County

“A future with a past”
Perhaps you could pass this newsletter along to someone you think would be interested in supporting Landmark’s efforts in historic preservation advocacy.

I (we) want to support the Historic Preservation efforts in Bowling Green and Warren County.

Name ____________________________

Mailing Address ____________________________

City ___________________ State _______ Zip ___________________

Telephone _______ E-mail _______________________

---------------------------------- Levels of Membership ----------------------------------

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I have enclosed $______________ to support the Irene Moss Sumpter Preservation Endowment Fund.

Checks should be payable to: Landmark Association
PO. Box 1812
Bowling Green, KY 42102-1812

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BOWLING GREEN, KY 42102-1812

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December 2004

Landmark Report 12