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Camelot Visits Bowling Green, 1960

By Jonathan Jeffrey

viewed the Commonwealth’s ten electoral votes as important. Kennedy, his running mate Lyndon Baines Johnson, and several of their family members canvassed the state frequently that fall. Kennedy, himself visited Louisville, Lexington, Bowling Green and Paducah in one two-week period, the last three cities he visited on Saturday, October 8th.

In late-summer 1960, Democratic Party leaders planned for JFK, accompanied by Mrs. Kennedy, to make a quick solo of visits in the Commonwealth during early-October. Although rumors flew around for several weeks in the late-summer about a potential visit to Bowling Green, townspople, other than a few key Democratic operatives, didn’t get the official word until the local paper announced it on September 13th. It had been nearly thirty years since President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had stopped at the city’s L&N depot to give a stump speech for Senatorial candidate Alben Barkley and it had been a full forty years since Democrat James Cox had given a campaign oration in their fair city. Local Democrats felt that the city had long been overlooked in the campaigns of national candidates, and the paper noted that the “scheduling of Kennedy’s speech…followed extensive negotiations.” Part of the negotiations revolved around who would actually make the campaign visit, as a number of important Democrats felt that vice-presidential candidate Lyndon B. Johnson would have more affinity with local audiences however Kennedy supporters won the day.

The local paper announced October 6th as the visit’s official date, which was changed when the presidential debate schedule was released. Because the second debate was planned for Friday, October 7th, planners rescheduled the Kentucky visit to Saturday, October 8th. Due to Mrs. Kennedy’s pregnancy, she was unable to be a part of the

Rambling in Lexington on October 8th.
Photos by Michael Trapasso

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contingent. Commonwealth Attorney and chairman of the Bowling Green JFK visit, Morris Lowe, expressed pleasure with the adjustment. "We are extremely happy with the change," said Lowe, "because we believe more people will be able to see and hear Senator Kennedy" on a Saturday as opposed to a weekday. Lowe predicted a huge local crowd supplemented by caravans that would arrive from every county in Kentucky’s 2nd Congressional district.

Lowe assembled a capable cadre to assist him in facilitating the visit. City Police Judge Basil Griffin was put in charge of bands; City Police Sergeant Wayne Constant headed the security detail; local attorney George B. Boston was in charge of the airport reception; jailer Raymond McClard was to oversee the public address system; City Councilman Edward Henderson was to supervise the grandstand’s construction in front of City Hall; Warren County Circuit Clerk John Hones was to handle publicity; and Young Democrat activities were to be orchestrated by Floyd Hayden. Local Democrats promised that “no stone will be left unturned in an effort to give Senator Kennedy and the entire Democratic ticket a resounding majority in the November 8th general election.” This was a tall order considering the fact that although Warren County typically leaned Democratic, it had voted for Eisenhower in the past two presidential elections.

Only days prior to the visit, Dan Ogden, an advance representative of the candidate, met with the local committee to iron out details. On October 8th, Kennedy was scheduled to fly first to Lexington and give a morning address. The day’s events survives and includes every choreographed detail; it also included an alternate plan to hold the event in the Bowling Green High School gym in case of rain. Finally October 8th arrived, fully of sunshine and promise. Kennedy, slightly late, was greeted at the Bowling Green airport by 300 well-wishers including Congressman William H. Natcher, who introduced him to a number of local dignitaries as well as Miss Kentucky Alice Chumley and B.C. Hayden, a 92-year-old, life-long Democrat, who the itinerary noted “will be in a wheel chair.” The candidate then entered the motorcade’s fifth vehicle, a red Oldsmobile convertible loaned by Bettersworth Motor Company and driven by City Treasurer William F. Scates. He was accompanied in the car by event chairman Morris Lowe and Police Sergeant Wayne Constant. The motorcade consisted of sixteen vehicles, including several buses for members of the press, with state police cruisers at the start and finish. At City Hall, the candidate disembarked, walked through the building, and ambled out the front door to the grandstand.

Surrounded by local and state politicians, the candidate faced one of the largest crowds ever assembled in Bowling Green for a political speech. Papers estimated the crowd at 5,000. Nine-year-old Lucinda Francis was awed by the keening crowd and was surprised to look up and see grown men with their legs dangling from the trees in the courthouse lawn across the street. She also recollected how well the large speakers that were strategically located in trees and on trucks amplified the speech so that everyone could hear the candidate.

Several crowd members remember the speech as rather typical campaign broilerplate, but they were surprised at the delivery. This was no Southerner speaking to them, and Lucinda Francis pondered if anyone could really understand what this handsome young man was saying in his distinct Boston accent, although she admitted that he spoke in a slow, deliberate cadence. Before JFK left the platform, Bowling Green mayor, Robert Graham, presented him with a large country ham which displayed a fine patina of mold. Kennedy jocularly accepted the token and noted that back in Massachusetts, “it took a brave man to eat the first oyster,” so “I’m going to take your word for this. If you say it’s good, I’ll eat it.” Before leaving that day, Kennedy slipped Graham his home address on a slip of paper and asked him to send Jackie directions on how to prepare the Kentucky delicacy.

After the speech Kennedy returned to the red Oldsmobile. As the car pulled away from the rear of City Hall, the Democratic candidate heard the plaintive cry of “Daddy, Daddy!” A new father himself, JFK heard the shout and asked Police Sergeant Wayne Constant if this was his daughter, Constant assented and told the candidate that her name was Susie. At that, Kennedy turned to her, beamed one of his iconic smiles, and enthusiastically yelled: “Hi Susie!” Even 50 years later, Susie (Constant) Poschal recalls the moment lucidly and said that... (continued on page 5)

shortly afterwards she was so overcome with emotion that she began to cry. The motorcade then proceeded to the Kentucky Colonel Motel, where the candidate dined on a hot dog and had a few minutes to rest in his room while the press corps were entertained in the hotel’s upscale dining room. Close to 12:30 the motorcade reassembled to head to the Bowling Green airport. En route the procession skirted the city’s municipal golf course where an inordinate number of women golfers happened to be on the fairways. When they saw the motorcade, they dropped their clubs and rushed to Kennedy’s vehicle; one woman was so excited about seeing him, she actually jumped into the automobile and had to be extricated by police. This had already happened to Kennedy several times on the campaign trail. Women were attracted to this handsome, charismatic gentleman. One girl who got Kennedy’s autograph at the Bowling Green airport that day recalled years later: “JFK was gorgeous, one of the most beautiful men I’ve ever seen. At that point I didn’t know they made him like that. A revelation. Sandy hair, a golden tan, sea green eyes. Photos don’t do him justice.”

A crowd of approximately 300, with a strong contingent of Western Kentucky State College co-eds, saw the candidate off from the airport. Bowling Greens remember Kennedy’s visit with fondness, and they grow sentimental when they ponder his subsequent election, brief but eventful presidency, and his untimely assassination. Did his visit make a perceivable difference in election results in Bowling Green? No, Nixon carried Warren County with 54.9% of the vote and carried Kentucky with 53.6% of the vote, but Kennedy was able to pull out some decisive wins in those key Northern...
Reflections of the Twentieth Century Club

by Jean E. Nehm

The daffodil is the Twentieth Century Club's official flower and can be found on many of their yearbooks, such as this one from the 1982.

If they could have imagined 50 years into the future, they would certainly have been amused to read an entry in the minutes book by a renowned member named Margie Helm (only fourteen years old when the club was organized) who wrote, "Back on State Street again! No wonder we meet so often on State Street where there are six members who live within one block, and six members are nearly one third of the club."

On May 10, the members of this new club voted to study the World's Greatest Novelists, and a program committee was assigned to bring a list of the most famous novelists for the club to choose at their next meeting. The entry for May 17 itemizes the chosen authors and works, adding that they would spend one afternoon studying the life and style of the author and another afternoon studying the novel itself. The meetings began in full and included the following literary works:

Les Misérables, by Victor Hugo
Oliver Twist, by Charles Dickens
The Three Musketeers, by Alexandre Dumas
Waverly, by Sir Walter Scott
The Last Days of Pompeii, by Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Adam Bede, by George Eliot
Captain Singleton, by Daniel Defoe
Vanity Fair, by William Makepeace Thackeray
The Scarlet Letter, by Nathaniel Hawthorne
Elise Verney, by Oliver Wendell Holmes

The original constitution for the club specifies that "the Club shall meet at the residence of the members in alphabetical order." The twenty members gathered at the home of a hostess to hear a program presented by another member. In 1910-1911, they changed from fiction to Nineteenth Century poetry, and members gave presentations on Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Burns, Keats, Robert Browning, and Tennyson. On the date for Byron, "each member answered the roll call with some quotation from the poet." Other program themes during the first years included Germany, Mythology and the Formation of Modern Beliefs, Kentucky, and Modern Drama. By the end of the 1915-1916 season, the precedent for hard work had already been established, and the club was proud of its identity. In June, Mrs. Margaret Wilson, the secretary, wrote, "The club adjourned, thus bringing to an end a club year of much profit and promise—profit in that the Club work has at all times been given most conscientious study, and we have striven always toward a duty well done—Promise in that the club is a stronger organization than a year ago and stronger today than ever in its history."

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The club meeting at the home of Nonne Smith in January 1973. It is interesting to note how often the work of the club, in both their literary study and their community work, reflected the march of time and major events in our country and city. During World War I, for example, Mrs. S. H. Garvin gave a program on H. G. Wells' Mr. Bridling Sees It Through.

The minutes state, "The club was particularly interested in this book on account of the light it throws on the present world crisis. Miss Reed Potter presented The First Hundred Thousand, a 1915 bestseller by Ian Hoy Bith, which helped members "feel much better acquainted with the men and conditions at the front." During these years, members voted to go to the local Red Cross Society headquarters to sew garments and work on surgical supplies. They also voted to support a war orphan. Writing about a program on Florence Nightingale, a secretary wrote, "In these days of Red Cross activity, everyone is interested in nurses and especially in the Mother of all the Angels of Mercy." Mrs. Drake told of this splendid woman in a most interesting way." At the close of the war, program topics shifted to contemporary issues such as the League of Nations, the 1920 presidential candidates, Einstein's theories, and the production of moving pictures.

Sadly, with the passage of time the first petal fell from the beloved club daffodil—the death of charter member Helen Galloway Drake in February, 1924. The club responded by writing formal resolutions: "Resolutions on the death of Helen Galloway Drake. We, the members of the Twentieth Century Club, adopt the following resolutions regarding the death of our beloved member, Helen Galloway Drake on February 25, 1924—Resolved: That death has taken from our midst one whose bright and happy presence will be greatly missed—That we deeply mourn the loss of our dear friend, and cherish with loving thoughts the memory of her loyalty, cordiality, and enthusiasm. That all who knew her have sustained a great loss and ours is a particularly keen one because of her long association with us as a charter member of the club. That we extend to her sorrowing family our heartfelt sympathy in their bereavement. That a copy of these resolutions be spread on our minute book and that copies be sent to her family."

For many years, formal resolutions were written for passing members. Today, honoring members continues, for the club has an "In Memoriam" page in every yearbook, listing all the members who have passed away since Mrs. Drake.

Later in 1924, members gave programs on the latest Pulitzer Prize winners: Robert Frost's New Hampshire: A Poem With Notes and Grace Notes; Hatcher Hughes' drama Hell-Bent 'Fer Heaven'; and Margaret Wilson's novel The Able McLoughlins. In 1934, they began their own circulating book club. Librarians in the club, Miss Margie Helm and Miss Elizabeth Coombs, graciously drew up a list of recommended books. Each member purchased a book, and the books were passed around. "Those unable to finish their books at the (continued on page 8)

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failed to return a book for the book exchange. Their right to take another until the one they are reading is expiration of two weeks may keep them, but must forfeit the woman's inspired a year-long study of immigrants to America from Italy, Greece, Iceland, and Poland. For many years after the war, the ladies presented programs on many newly published books—*Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), *The Thread That Runs So True* (1949), *World Enough and Time* (1950), *Men and the Sea* (1953), *Profiles in Courage* (1955), and Doctor Zhivago, indicating under-representation in many areas of society. However, some club members expressed the opinion that the woman's influence is very strong in many areas . . . but is exercised in a more subtle manner and is not measurable by facts or figures."

Just as the literary work of the Twentieth Century Club has reflected the passage of time, so too has the club's community service and charitable donations paralleled the passing years. During WWII and WWIII, members were actively engaged in Red Cross work. They also donated food and other items to an underprivileged family during the Great Depression and supported a canteen for soldiers during the 1940s. They were also active letter-writers, appealing to the General Assembly in 1930 to make Mammoth Cave a national park and to the Park City Daily News in 1958 to protest the idea of making a parking lot on the grounds of the Courthouse. The club's generous financial donations have supported a wide range of organizations: the Red Cross, the Women's Community Chest, Girls' Club, Boys' Club, United Givers Fund, American Cancer Society, Barren River Area Safe Space (BRASS), and the city's refugee center.

Each member of the Twentieth Century Club, however, is not exclusively work; the club's history has myriad examples of great entertainment and humor. In 1927, club members planned a cabaret luncheon for five other women's literary clubs: Ladies Literary Club, Browning Club, Current Topic Club, Current Events Club, and the X Club. Committees were formed for decorations, refreshments, entertainment, and a reception. They decided to perform *The Stolen Prince: A Playlet Done in the Chinese Fashion*. An extant kite-shaped invitation to this special event at the Helm Hotel on April 30, 1927 lists all the characters and club actresses in what must have been a most enjoyable performance.

Wearing a hat to club meetings was expected, but the scene at Kate Davidson's home in February, 1949 must have been a milliner's delight. According to Sara Tyler's club history, "We are agreed that Kate had the most unique encouragement that had ever been given in the club. She requested each member to wear the style hat which was in vogue the year she was taken into the club." Hat styles ranged from 1910 to 1947. The Park City Daily News described them as "all handmade numbers of past glory . . . ." Mrs. Roy Claypool, wearing a Merry Widow model of black trimmed with willow plumes took the prize.

Another eventful meeting occurred at Jean Thomson's home, where she introduced her guest speaker, Dr. Montell Montell. The minutes report, "Dr. Montell gave a most interesting review of his book *Ghosts Along the Cumberland: Deathshire in the Kentucky Foothills*. He related many folk tales of the people, beliefs, practices, and ghosts of the area from Gainsboro up to Burnside. . . . While Dr. Montell was talking, something very strange and eerie happened!!! The light on the table behind him went out (perfect timing)—which needless to say, evoked much laughter!! One wonders? A bad bulb or—maybe a ghost could have been in that room with us?!!"

It was the club tradition to serve refreshments following the program. The secretary's description of a unique setting shows how much effort the hostess, Christine Lozanus, went to and how much the club members appreciated it. The date was near the end of October, 1933 when guests approached the dining room to find "a perfect Halloween setting. The walls were lined with corn stalks reaching almost to the ceiling and here and there a bunch of pensimmon and autumn leaves . . . and pumpkins made into Jack o'lanterns, which cast a glow over the entire room. A beautifully appointed plate lunch was served at four tables with a smiling pumpkin in the center of each table. The unusual setting was greatly enjoyed by the entire club."

Members of the Twentieth Century Club have been proud of their club and especially observant and appreciative of their own history. Agnus annually began in 1920s, a member has chosen for her topic the history of the club. During the club's 50th anniversary celebration in 1959, members looked over a collection of annual booklets, "most of them with covers designed by our club artist, Reed Potter." Many variations of daffodils graced those covers. For many years, the club preserved its history with an annual group photograph taken on the lawn of Nelle Travestead's log home with a view of Barren River. In 1983, Nelle Tyler compiled a thorough, eighteen-page history, filled with interesting details. The most recent history was given on April 14, 2009 on the occasion of the club's milestone 100th anniversary. The guest speaker was Jonathan Jeffrey, "always a very special guest," who spoke of the history of the club and all the records archived in Western Kentucky University's Special Collections Library.

Conversations with current members reveal a beautiful melding of the present and the past. Peggy Pock, a member since 1967, reports a few changes in the format of club meetings. Now, each member's responsibilities alternate: she serves as a hostess one year and gives a program the following year. Refreshments are now served first, before the meeting.

With enthusiasm, Peggy remembers Margie Helm. "Miss Margie! We all loved Miss Margie!" She also fondly recalls Sara Tyler and how everyone relied on her judgment whenever there was any question about the Constitution or By-Laws. Carole Harned also has a special memory of Margie Helm. One year Ray Buckberry was Carole's guest speaker, giving a program about Bowling Green historical postcards, with pictures projected on a screen. Margie Helm, by then an aging honorary member, was still able to contribute the exact dates for the scenes in the post cards. Having been a member for thirty-two years, Carole feels a deep bond with her literary club friend and still enjoys the opportunity to meet with such an interesting group of women. One of the newest members is Susan Dobson, whose first timely program on Saudi Arabia was presented from personal experience since she had lived there for eight years. She may be most famous, however, for her unique program on Brenda Lee, including her own rendition of a Brenda Lee song. Susan loves both the camaraderie of friends in the club and the lifelong learning. Jean Thomson joined the Twentieth Century Club in 1961 and has now "graduated" to being an honorary member. She has a memory brimming with interesting details of the many past members who lived on State Street, including herself and her dear friend, Sara Tyler. She also notes that there have been a large number of mother-daughter-and sometimes granddaughter families connections within the club. If she needed a guest speaker, Jean had to look no further than her own family; her sons, daughters, and husband all gave programs. The Twentieth Century Club (continued on page 10)
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History for Sale

This attractive notecard of the side yard gate of 610 East Main will be one of the many items available for purchase at the Landmark Christmas Tour of Homes. The Landmark Store will be located in the Sky Ranch Professional Lofts at 314 East Main. Notecards make great stocking stuffers for adults. We will also have our notecards featuring city hall, the LRN train depot, and the Warren County courthouse for sale as well as Christmas cards that showcase Fountain Square Park. In addition to notecards, we'll have the popular Arcadia series books, our own books, Irene Sumpter's Bowling Green book, maps, and sundry other items available.

Local architect Creadmore Fleenor designed the house at 610 East Main in the Arts & Crafts style for Carrie Burnam Taylor, a local modiste who made a substantial fortune in that business. When Moro & Blanche Sharpe purchased the home in the early-1930s, they had architect James Maurice Ingram make substantial interior changes as well design this attractive gate for their side yard. Ingram, a native of Paducah and a graduate of Notre Dame, began practicing architecture in Bowling Green in 1929. Favoring the Colonial Revival style, he designed hundreds of residences, schools, and commercial buildings in the city.

Some of the oldest members of the Twentieth Century Club help observe the Club's 60th anniversary at the home of Jean Thumaan in April 1969.

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Works Cited


Perhaps you could pass this newsletter along to someone you think would be interested in supporting Landmark's efforts in historic preservation advocacy.

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