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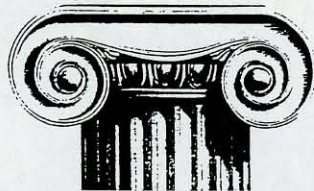


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"A future with a past"

LANDMARK REPORT

VOLUME XXXII, NUMBER 1

LANDMARK ASSOCIATION OF BG/WC

JULY 2014



Elm Grove located at 1006 South Park Drive is the home of Steve & Jeannie Snodgrass.

Elm Grove: Bowling Green's Edenic Estate

By Jonathan Jeffrey

Jeannie Snodgrass figuratively calls her home Nirvana, her own little Eden right in the center of Bowling Green. This beautiful property has been called Elm Grove for over 200 years. This piece of land is the heart of one of Warren County's most hallowed estates, a treasured property that was home to four generations of Covingtons and later the showplace farm and dairy for two generations of the Smith

family. The history of any home cannot be severed from the people that lived there, and one of Jeannie's reasons for favoring historic properties is the fact that they've been lived in. Someone else has tread the floorboards fretting over a sick child or a wounded husband, someone else has trudged through the endless chores of food preparation and laundry, another woman has put her hand to the soil and
(continued on page 3)

The Landmark Association of Bowling Green-Warren County

A non-profit organization established in 1976 as a community advocate for preservation, protection and maintenance of architectural, cultural and archaeological resources in Bowling Green and Warren County.

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During Historic Preservation Month Jonathan Jeffrey gave a tour of Fountain Square Park and other buildings downtown for sixty sixth graders from Cumberland Trace Elementary School. At the tour's conclusion, the students declared the Warren County Courthouse built in 1867 as "My Old Kentucky Home," part of a statewide initiative sponsored by Preservation Kentucky and the Kentucky Heritage Council.

Annual Meeting Held on May 22

The Landmark Association annual meeting was held at La Gala, a renovated meeting space in the Old Galloway Building at 601 State Street. The facility is owned and managed by the proprietors of the Brickyard. The large meeting hall is designed to break down into smaller venues. Members applauded the work of the owners in an effective adaptive re-use project.

After a fine meal, the Association was treated to a presentation by Ray Buckberry about neighborhood groceries in Bowling Green. Afterwards, awards were presented by president Dr. Jeffrey Adams. General House Awards were given to Michella Dillaha for work done at 1230 Park Street, Brad Wayland for work at 1260 State Street, and Mitch Wright for work done at 1246 Chestnut Street. Dan Murph received a Landmark Building Award for transformation of the old Dollar General Store into the Sky Ranch Professional Lofts at 314 East Main Avenue. The Jane Morningstar Award of Merit for continued restoration of a historic property went to Jeff Samuels for work at 525 East 12th Avenue.

Finally, the Association's highest honor, the Heritage Award, was presented to Emily Perkins Sharp. A second generation preservationist, Emily was inspired by the work of her parents, John & Emily Perkins. They restored and maintained several historic properties under the aegis of John's real estate firm and preserved the unique house at Keystone Farm. Emily, and brother John, have continued



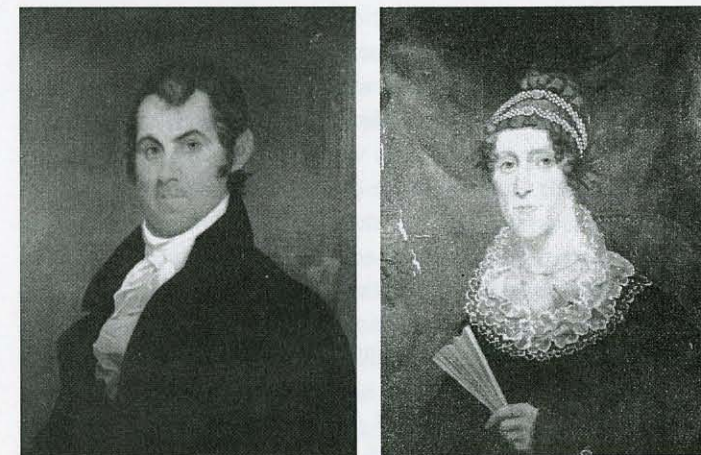
Emily Sharp the 2014 recipient of the Landmark Association's highest honor, the Heritage Award.

to steward several historic properties in the family. Emily has also served on the Bowling Green-Warren County Historic Preservation Board and has been an important member of the Downtown Redevelopment Authority.

Perhaps her best claim to fame was her "Joan of Arc" battle with East Kentucky Power Cooperatives. She and several rural property owners fought the utility's attempt to force 150-foot-wide easements for dual lines of electrical towers across historic properties. The work of Sharp and other Landmark members such as Carroll and the late Doris Tichenor are to be lauded. Thank you Emily for fighting for your hometown and county.

(continued from page 1)

nurtured it, an eye has grown misty as children married there and the same eye mourned as the patriarchs passed on. Elm Grove has a rich history.



Elijah and Harriett Covington moved from the Gasper River region of Warren County to Bowling Green in 1812. They built themselves a home and called it Elm Grove.

The story starts with Elijah Moorman Covington and Harriet (Baldwin) Covington. Mr. Covington came to Warren County from North Carolina around 1795. As county surveyor, Covington had ample opportunity to view and purchase properties, and he eventually amassed over 20,000 acres in Warren County and several adjoining counties. In 1812, he and his family moved from the Gasper River section to Bowling Green. He chose a piece of fertile, relatively flat land on the outskirts of town. He built a commodious, but not ostentatious, home where he and his wife eventually had ten children, 5 girls and 5 boys. His property included slave quarters and other appropriate outbuildings, none of which have survived. He was enamored with names that started with E's, as his own did, as evidenced by some of the names he gave his children: Erasmus, Euclid, Eugene, and Eliza. Elijah died in 1848, and today his remains, as well as most of the rest of his family, rest in Fairview Cemetery. Euclid Covington died in mid-February 1888 and was buried in Fairview Cemetery. Four months later Wells Covington, had the bodies of family members that were buried at Elm Grove disinterred and moved to the more fashionable Fairview Cemetery. The Gerard funeral ledgers indicate that the cost of moving seven bodies from Elm Grove to Fairview was \$45. At that time, new graver markers were erected for family members. A portion of the original stone ledger from Harriet Covington's grave remains at Elm Grove.

The Covingtons were an admired clan. Here's what John B. Rodes had to say about them en toto: "They were never bitter men—these Covingtons. Nor have there ever been any reformers among them. They took the world as they found it and it was good. There was never a fanatic in the whole tribe, nor a puritan. The usual Covington respected piety

and conformed in religion, though he was never cramped by it. It was a good world, and all the good things were never made solely for the sinners. They loved good liquor but drank seldom to excess, had a gentle weakness for women but usually kept out of trouble...They never became absorbed in causes. Even in the Civil War none were deeply involved. They owned their slaves and were sympathetic with the South, but none engaged in battle."

Harriett Covington perished a full two decades before Mr. Covington. When he died, his estate passed first to his bachelor son Euclid Covington, who had his hands in all types of land schemes and internal improvement projects. One of the ones we know the most about was the Portage Railroad, which was built on land given by Euclid. It ran from the Barren River boat landing to downtown Bowling Green, carrying both freight and passengers. Completed in 1837, it is said to be the second railroad constructed in Kentucky. Both Euclid and his brother Albert died within a year of each other, so the family farm was passed on to the only male heir who carried the Covington name, Albert's son Robert Wells Covington. Thus in 1888 Robert owned two of the largest and most productive farms in the county. He too eventually fell under the spell of Elm Grove and moved there with his wife Mary Wickliffe Cooper, a talented artist from Shelby County, whom he had married in 1892. She painted beautiful portraits. She also taught art and china painting. Two examples of her portrait work are in the collection of the Kentucky Museum and several others samples can be found in private collections throughout the city. No known pieces of her china painting have survived. Actually the only surviving evidence that she participated in china painting comes from a letter, recently donated to the Department of Library Special Collections at WKU by Barbara Gary, written by Wickliffe to a counterpart, Daisy. In the letter, penned on Elm Grove stationery, Wickliffe writes: "Dear Daisy, I send you some China to be fired—a chocolate pot, bell, parasol handles and a plate. I have a doz. Plates ready, but altho they looked all right before I put them in the oven—they seemed so full of dust afterwards that I was afraid to risk all and I can't get any more ivory yellow in town. So will see how this one comes out. Please send me word when you fire, so I can get my things as soon as possible to have them re-fired. Would a dozen plates and chocolate pot justify you in firing in case you do not fire very soon again? I think the color on the handle of pot may run or scale, but it does not matter as I shall use a good deal of gold."

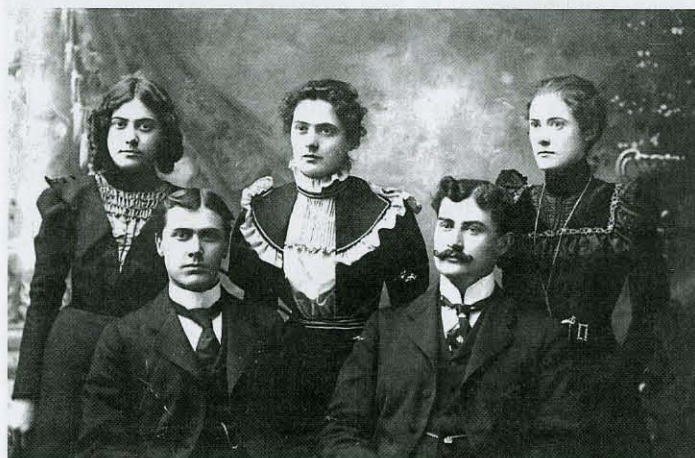
The quaint log cabin at Elm Grove, east of the main house, was built in 1907 as a private art and music studio for Wickliffe. With its commodious fireplace, it could have been used year-round. Later, when the Smiths lived here, we know that it was used for a time by a tenant family who looked out for the farm and for the elder Smiths. Eventually they moved to another house nearby. It is possible that with its large

(continued on page 4)



The log cabin northeast of the main house was built in 1907 as a studio for Wickliffe Covington, a talented artist.

fireplace and chimney flue that the building was also used as a summer kitchen where canning fruits and vegetables and other food preservation activities occurred. An ice house was located nearby. It was constructed like an underground silo from large, arched limestone slabs and topped with a simple shed-like structure sporting a gabled roof. The ice was generally packed with sawdust as insulation and to keep the blocks from naturally welding together. The ice was cut from a pond on the property.



The Ham siblings included Mordecai F. Ham (bottom right) and Lucy Ham (top right). Lucy married Charles A. Smith and later became the matriarch at Elm Grove.

Charles Asher Smith bought Elm Grove and 576 acres of land for \$40,000 in 1919. One of his contemporaries noted that he had covetously eyed the farm as early as the late-nineteenth century but did not have the means to purchase it. In 1899 C.A. eyed something much prettier in Allen County, Lucy K. Ham, the daughter of Tobias and Ollie (Lady Olivet) Ham. She was the granddaughter of a well-known Baptist minister from south central Kentucky, Mordecai Fowler Ham, who pastored several churches in Warren and Allen counties at varying times. Lucy was the sister of the second Mordecai Fowler Ham (grandson of the aforementioned), who went on to become one of the best known southern evangelists of the

early-twentieth century. He held huge revival meetings across the south. He was a product of his era, a fundamentalist, ardent proponent of prohibition, and quite honestly a bit of a bigot. At one of Ham's evangelistic meetings held in Charlotte, North Carolina, a young Billy Graham was converted. They remained in close enough contact that Billy Graham preached Ham's funeral in 1961.

With an adventurous spirit and nothing to lose, Charles and his young bride trekked to Montana to seek their fortunes in of all things sheep. Charles was industrious and scientific in his approach, and he soon possessed one of the largest sheep herds in the Big Sky state. In 1907 he returned to Kentucky where he purchased the noteworthy McElwain farm near Woodburn consisting of 551 acres. Again he diligently went about improving the farm: erecting barns and other outbuildings, installing a modern heating plant and a lighting plant for both his residence and barns. With the exception of 35 acres of timber, the farm was "under a perfect state of cultivation," producing tobacco, hay and corn. He also erected a huge silo for storage of silage. He had learned the advantages of storing silage in Montana, and his Woodburn land produced 12 tons of silo corn to the acre. In a 1913 special edition of the local paper, a journalist noted: "Mr. Smith, with his advanced ideas on farming, is doing incalculable good to the community besides merely 'making a living' for himself and his estimable wife. He is setting an example to other farmers that cannot but bring good results, and he is a leader worthy of following."



Charles A. Smith and his wife Lucy and their two children Luther and Mary, ca. 1904.

The Smiths had two children: Luther born in 1900 and Mary in 1902. Several surviving photographs indicate that Luther's first trip to Kentucky came in 1902. Because we don't know the exact date of the visit, Lucy may have brought Luther here, because she wanted to deliver her new baby in an area where medical help and family were nearby, or perhaps Lucy was bringing both babies to present to the Kentucky family. Later, when the family moved to Elm Grove,

(continued on page 5)

Mary and Luther were already adults, 19 and 17 years in age. Luther attended Kentucky Military Institute, although he did not graduate. Mary attended county public schools. Honestly, the family had means, but everyone still learned the value of hard work, Miss Mary in particular learned the benefits of industrious activity. Luther, was not known in the community or by his family as a hard worker, but he did other things that benefited the family such as bookkeeping, investing, banking, correspondence, and he handled real estate transactions.

They were members of First Baptist Church, although Luther rarely attended, especially in older age. Miss Mary attended regularly, and one contemporary remembered her attending until her health waned. The friend reminisced in particular about Mary's rather large feet and how her shoes featured cut out holes for her bunions.

The family's hard work paid off. In 1921, the local paper reported that Charles had sold an outstanding crop of tobacco only two years after purchasing the farm. The crop grown on 3.75 acres sold for \$200 per acre or \$814; the grades being sold at \$32 for leaf, \$8.50 for lugs, and \$2 for trash. The paper noted: "This land was filled with trees when purchased by Smith from Major Covington and this is the first time it has ever been cultivated." Only four years later, the paper exclaimed on the front page that Smith was adding an ice cream manufacturing plant to the farm which would include strictly modern and up-to-date machinery with a capacity of 400 gallons per day. Smith intended to use cream from his own dairy herd, some of which he had brought with him from Woodburn. It is here that Miss Mary found her place and where many Bowling Greeners came to love this plain spoken woman when they paid their dairy bills on Sunday afternoons. After settling accounts, customers could enjoy a free pint of ice cream, a tradition that continued for decades. Many also remember that the pints were often split in two vertically, so you could savor two different flavors of the dairy's rich ice cream.



Elm Grove milk and dairy products were delivered by a series of wagons. The Snodgrass family owns a bridle used on one of the horses.

Elm Grove milk and dairy products were delivered for years by horse and wagon. Local native Bill Stamps relayed stories of going out to meet the wagon. Bottles of milk were delivered to the door, but, in the early days, if you wanted buttermilk you had to go out with your crock or jar and the milk man would ladle it out for you. He also noted that the horses were intimately familiar with their routes. This was confirmed in a 1948-article by Jane Morningstar in the local paper when she noted that the two Elm Grove Dairy milk wagons were pulled by Bill, a 17 year old bay, and Dan, a 16 year old grey horse. "Call it horse sense or whatever you like," she wrote, "Bill and Dan know every customer and they 'tell' the drivers if they miss a single one. The horses have their stopping spots, and if a driver is gone longer than usual, they will turn around and look for him. Dan and Bill are such old horses at the business of delivering milk that they... 'teach' the novices the routine. If the going gets a little too much for old Dan, he will back the front wheels of the wagon into the curb and sit down in his harness and rest." Stamps swore that on the way home from delivering, the driver could actually take a nap, because the horses knew how to navigate their way home. The driver need not even lift the reins.



The house at Elm Grove burned on December 31, 1939.

Shortly before celebrating New Year's 1940, the Smith family awoke to find their home on fire. The Smiths had retired at about 10 o'clock that evening and roused at 2:00 a.m. with Elm Grove in flames. Investigators determined the fire's cause to be faulty wiring in the attic, where the family had stored several thousand pounds of wool that no doubt exacerbated the conflagration. The family saved the majority of their furniture, even though the house was totally engulfed in flames within thirty minutes of being discovered. The newspaper reported that "within an hour after the fire, scores of automobiles were parked about the home, and women in evening gowns and pajamas were among the scores who watched the house burn to the ground." The fire did spread to the adjoining dairy operation, destroying considerable refrigeration equipment and several pieces of expensive

(continued on page 6)



The ruins of Elm Grove after the fire of 1939.

processing equipment. With the help of several other local dairies and the Pet Milk Plant, Elm Grove Dairy did not miss one day of deliveries.

When asked about the home a few days later, Mary Smith said: "We will probably rebuild, but we haven't had time to think about it." Soon thereafter, the Smiths started rebuilding in earnest. They hired the best contractors to construct their new home on the existing foundations which were all that was left after the cleanup. Undoubtedly they paid premiums to hasten the building's completion as the family moved into their new home before the year ended. It would be interesting to know if they hired an architect to design the house. Trained architect James Maurice Ingram was practicing in Bowling Green at the time, but we also had several talented draftsmen and carpenters that were capable of seeing such a project to completion. The resulting house was a simple design with plenty of windows, an expansive verandah, and an attached port cochere. The side-gabled roof featured three dormers, each crowning a set of double windows on the second floor. The rooms were commodious and a number of them featured a simple wood paneling. The current owners and I believe the elaborate wainscoting and cornices currently in the public rooms was added later and that was confirmed by a Smith family friend who visited the house frequently.

One thing that many Bowling Greeners fondly recall about Elm Grove was its seemed isolation, just outside of the hubbub of the city. One of the favorite activities of young folks here in the 1950s and 1960s was to park on the soft lane leading to the house to—How shall we say?—get acquainted. A short excerpt from Bob Dickey's first book *Near Misses* documents an encounter he had at Elm Grove with a young lady: "It was beginning to look like this would, despite all my worrying, turn out to be a perfect night to drive through the back lane to Elm Grove Dairy where it was possible to park and look at the moon for a while without being disturbed...I had heard the older boys talk about the thrills of parking with your best

girl but, if we were lucky, this would be our first experience at a grand old BG High tradition—necking in a parked car crammed full of classmates similarly engaged. If we were lucky. Royce slowed after passing the golf course on BG's second Edgewood, merely an extension of 10th Street, and turned into the land leading to Elm Grove Dairy...With four tightly fitted in the crowded backseat, there wasn't much room to do much of anything except hold hands until I squirmed and turned to face Connie, thereby putting myself into position to take a shot at a kiss. Caught up in the moment and being tightly pressed against Connie, bulky coats notwithstanding, I threw caution to the wind as temporary amnesia set in—I quickly forgot about the toughest boy in the school being Connie's boyfriend."



Everyone loved Elm Grove dairy products, particularly the rich ice cream made on the property.

The community treasured Elm Grove as did the Smith family. It was their home and sheltered them well for many years. The first member of the Smith family to die here was Leila, Charles's sister who never married. Luther and Mary had undoubtedly observed how someone could live and survive without a spouse when in the bosom of the family. Leila died in 1947 at the age of 85. Charles passed in 1956 and his wife Lucy followed in 1967. Although it is unclear when the dairy operation stopped operation, people have noted that they were still coming to pay their bills in the early-1960s. Siblings Luther and Mary Smith continued to run the farm with tenant help. Undoubtedly Luther was a little lost after Mary died in 1983. They had simple tastes and entertained only very close friends. After Luther died in 1986, the *Daily News* reported rather incredulously that "A Bowling Green man" who died on the 25th of June 1986 "willed about 600 acres of land to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association." Luther's May 7, 1985 will proved the statement correct.

The Smith's 617 acres of land was sold in three tracts: Elm Grove, land on Lovers Lane, and acreage on Campbell Lane. After the estate was settled, the land was auctioned on December 2, 1987. The auction brochure contained one

(continued on page 7)

of the few colored photographs of the house prior to it being painted. The house and 289 acres was sold to Reginald Ayers, Steve Blanton and J.C. Traylor for almost \$2.5 million dollars. The house passed through several hands over the next decade. The majority of the land became Hartland, a mixed-use development that included a golf course, mixed housing, offices, and the site of the Bowling Green Convention Center. In 1998 Steve and Jeannie Snodgrass bought the property and moved in during the infamous hailstorm of 1998. They made a number of improvements to the house without disturbing its

Heirs of All the Past, Trustees for All the Future

by Jean E. Nehm

Peering inside the boxes, one finds treasured items including letters, invitations, poems, photographs with people carefully identified, newspaper clippings, booklets tied with gold ribbon, and a detailed record of all activities and birthdays over many generations. While these items may sound as if these boxes belong to a loving family, they are, in fact, keepsakes of a Bowling Green literary club known as the Current Topic Club.

The founding of this club occurred on February 23, 1895, at 1224 Kentucky Street in a modest white frame house, the home of Mrs. Ely Adams. The ladies elected Mrs. John Galloway president, Mrs. Will Jones (considered the founder) vice president, Mrs. D. M. Lawson treasurer, and Miss Eliza Anderson secretary. A committee of Mrs. Barr, Mrs. Porter, and Mrs. Cuthbertson was formed to write the constitution and by-laws and to suggest a suitable name for their new club. Mrs. Jones, Miss Anderson, and Miss Ragland formed another committee to select topics for study. When the ladies met again, they unanimously decided that "the most suitable and appropriate name would be Current Topic Club." On January 14, 1897, a committee announced that the club colors would be white and gold, and the goldenrod (not selected as Kentucky's state flower until 1926) its emblem. Mrs. Thomas wrote a poem about the flower for the occasion:

The Goldenrod

A roguish elf in dappled green,
To guard his tent with goldenrod,
Stole the seed from a woodland queen
And scattered it over the sod.

A fairy's wheel spun silken thread
To robe its form in royal gown,
To deck its head in tawny gold
And leave it crested crown to crown.

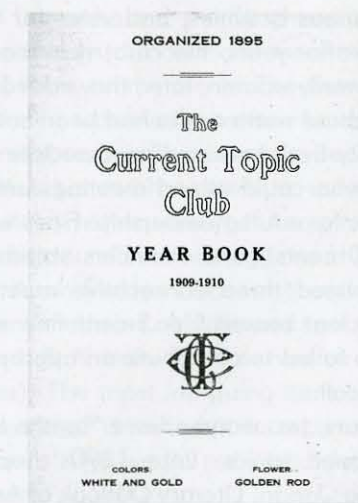
historic integrity, including refinishing the ash flooring on the first floor, exposing brick in the sun room area, modernizing the kitchen and bathrooms, installing quality wood flooring upstairs, updating light fixtures, finishing out and converting the basement and attic into family and work areas, as well as pouring the circular drive outside and customizing the landscaping. Most importantly, they've made the house their home—their own little Nirvana right in the heart of what this author calls the best little hometown in American—Bowling Green, Kentucky. ▲

A sylvan nymph proclaimed it King,
And bade it rule the realm of bloom,
To star the fields with flowers gay,
And fringe the stream with regal plume.

A laughing faun that errant knight,
Came with the witches wise and old
To slipper its feet in grasses sweet,
To dance with the nymphs of the wold.

A firefly lit his little lamp,
And then merrily whirled away
To dance around the Goldenrod
In the dusk of the evening grey.

O regal knight of elfin land!
O crowned king of summer's wane!
Thy glory lingers like a dream
To gild the path of autumn's train.



The oldest known surviving yearbook sporting the Current Topic Club's logo dates from 1909. Potter College art professor Beulah Strong designed the unique moniker.

(continued on page 8)

On that same date, Miss Beulah Strong, an artist and art educator at Potter College for Young Ladies, created a club logo with the intertwining letters of C, T, and C, still used today on annual yearbooks and on a commemorative brick in the public library garden. In addition, a committee presented the club motto, printed in every yearbook for over 100 years: "We are the heirs of all the past whether we will or no; we are trustees for all the future and cannot refuse the trust."

The purpose of the Current Topic Club was stated as "intellectual culture; back of it lurks its social power." Many of the local literary clubs concur that their great pleasures are lifelong learning and deep friendships with fellow members. However, according to an article probably written by Mrs. Galloway for the fall 1903 edition of the Louisville Herald, another very interesting purpose of the Current Topic Club was achieved, one that we may not have considered from our contemporary perspective. She writes, "Extemporaneous speaking is urged upon all members, and I would that I had space to give you some laughable accounts of our efforts along this line, frightened as we are at the sound of our own voices. While we have not mastered the elusive art, yet we are proud of the progress we have made and realize that continued practice is the keynote of success and a conversational club a means." Opportunities for speaking took several forms: answering roll call, contributing comments about a current topic in a group discussion, or reading a prepared paper on an assigned topic.

Meeting on alternate Thursdays beginning in September, Current Topic Club members followed a structured protocol. Roll call was taken, with members offering an interesting topic in response to their names, which were always called with the formal title and husband's name. Minutes from the previous meeting were then read and approved, and a treasurer's report was given. Business meetings also included announcements, election of officers and committees, discussions of various activities, and votes for the selection of new members. For years, the club maintained an active membership of twenty women; later, they added an honorary membership for those women who had been active members for at least twenty-five years and an associate membership for two women who could attend meetings until a vacancy became available for a full membership. Fines were assessed for absences (10 cents), and members voted to drop any member who missed three consecutive meetings without "good and sufficient reason." A 5-cent fine was assessed to members who failed to contribute an appropriate current topic during roll call.

In the early years, two women were "on the class" to give papers on assigned topics. Late 1890s' topics included Hypnotism, China, Japan, Literary Outlook of America, Louis Pasteur (who died the same year the club began), and the Electrical Outlook. Being sick did not release a member's responsibility for having her program prepared. For example, In March, 1895, the secretary wrote, "Mrs. Lawson, being

absent on acc't of illness, sent a very interesting paper on 'Facts of Napoleon's Life' which was read by Mrs. Jones." In November, 1895, Mrs. Galloway and Mrs. Cuthbertson presented a program on The New Woman. They declared that the modern woman was "not the ridiculous female pictured by newspapers but the educated womanly woman of today."

In 1914, members began to discuss Causes of the European War. All previous hesitancy in public speaking must have dissipated by then, for the "subject was one which every member wanted to discuss, and it was with great difficulty the Pres. finally succeeded in suppressing that enthusiasm and patriotism in order that Mrs. Adams could proceed with her paper." Two years later, the topic was Preparedness for War. This program "so stirred the ladies that the round table discussion which followed crowded out completely the discussion of the study subject for the coming year, and we were only cooled down by the appearance of our hostess with such delicious fresh strawberry cream in rum kisses which pleasantly reminded us that she had been to the city and had not forgotten us."

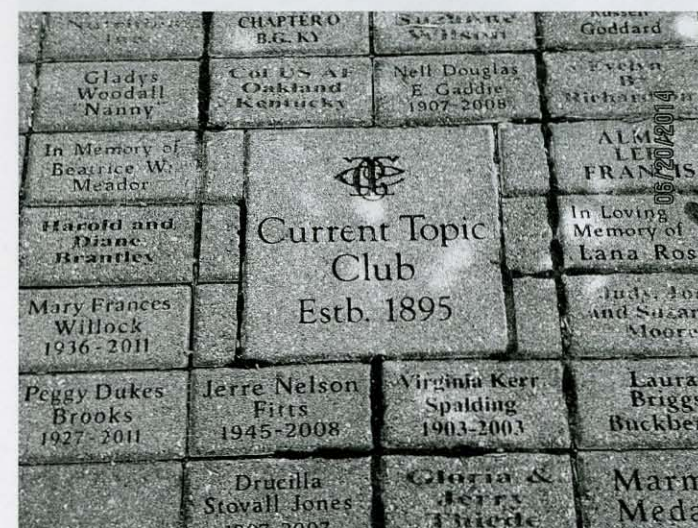
Interest in many contemporary topics ran parallel to major events over the years: the League of Nations, women's suffrage, Einstein's theory of relativity, aviation, the building of Boulder Dam, King Edward and Mrs. Simpson, Anne Frank, the Bay of Pigs, and the European Common Market.

Sometimes the topic was not one from the major news headlines of the day but was still of great interest for women. One example is their discussion of playgrounds in 1915. These play areas for children, which we take for granted today, were once a new idea. First established in urban areas, playgrounds offered a safe place for children to play, build character, and integrate with immigrant families (Solomon 7-8). Although the Current Topic Club "decided that there was not yet a crying need for that form of entertainment" in Bowling Green, they were very interested in the founder of playgrounds in our country, Jacob Riis, and gave "special attention to what had been accomplished in New York City, Rochester, New York, St. Louis, and Louisville." In 1940, the ladies were discussing a letter to the club which encouraged American women to wear the brand new Nylon hose instead of their silk stockings. The rationale was to hurt Japan's silk industry and thus its war effort. In 1970, a guest speaker informed the members about the latest fashions, including proper skirt lengths: "All lengths are acceptable from 2" above the knee on down. The junior lengths are 2" above the knee, but the best length for most of us is from the middle of the knee to 2" below. Jump suits are proper at home; pant suits at football games."

Over the years, the formality of a topic-selection committee gave way to a more relaxed approach so that members could pursue their own interests and choose a broad array of topics, such as biographies, Kentucky literature, various

(continued on page 9)

authors and book reviews, music, and the New Medical Center. Another example was a program given by Jean Harris in 1986 about her life-long joy in the special art of French hand sewing. Club minutes report that she shared examples of "laces, embroidery, fine stitching on beautiful items, such as children's dresses, baby layettes, dresses made for wedding attendants," as well as christening gowns. A program on October 18, 2001 was the epitome of a current topic. Guest speaker Dr. Patricia Minter, WKU professor of history, spoke of her experiences in Washington, D. C. only a month earlier when the terrorists attacked. She reported that cell phones were jammed, stunned onlookers watched the unfolding events, those wanting to donate blood had a 12-hour wait, and people's faces reflected a feeling of deep sadness. The Minters traveled to New York soon afterward and found on the streets, not the usual street musicians, but people searching for others. Shops located blocks away from Ground Zero were closed because of fire, smoke, and inches of ash. Dr. Minter's poignant remarks generated many September 11 memories from club members.



The center brick commemorates a donation made by the Current Topic Club to the Warren County Public Library. Subsequently the club has purchased bricks for departed members which surround the larger brick.

As busy as they were with pursuing "intellectual culture," members of the Current Topic Club were also active in community affairs, most particularly collaborating with the Ladies Literary Club in organizing the Woman's Library, which eventually became Bowling Green's first public library. They were also interested in donating their dues to many organizations over the years (including the Red Cross, the Community Chest, the Infant Paralysis Fund), buying war bonds, and contributing to the Shaker restoration and to the repair of the fountain in Fountain Square Park. Another example was a program by Ticka Linder about Heifer International, a charitable organization that gives calves, chickens, goats, llamas, and other animals to individuals in poverty-stricken areas worldwide. The mission of sustainability and empowerment of women so resonated with these women

in Bowling Green, Kentucky that they, too, donated to the organization.

In the midst of all the work and activities of the Current Topic Club, one of the most anticipated traditions is the annual President's Day luncheon. Although refreshments were not expected when the club was first organized, on the date of the club's first birthday, the hostess served some "elegant refreshments," which were "quite a pleasing innovation." For several years, birthday celebrations were held at the Helm Hotel. In 1935, the 40th birthday celebration featured a centerpiece model of a "miniature highway—with brooks crossing the highway, stepping stones, mile stones, and all that makes a real highway. Lighted candles casting a soft glow over the cheerful faces gathered around the board." At their 43rd celebration, guests were seated at a table "resplendent with lighted tapers and a three-tier birthday cake surrounded by forty-three candles." The 45th celebration in the hotel's Colonial Room featured a cake looking like a grand replica of Scarlett O'Hara's Tara from *Gone With the Wind*. Eventually, the birthday celebrations in February were replaced by a spring luncheon hosted by the president in her home. In her essay "A History of the President's Luncheon of The Current Topic Club," Mary Lucas writes, "Refreshments became more extensive as each hostess began to display her best recipes on beautifully appointed tables laden with flowers and silver." The club minutes record descriptions of the food and table settings, such as the event at Laura Buckberry's home in 1979. The secretary wrote that the table "carried out the club colors of gold and white. The placemats and napkins were of gold. The centerpiece was all white—peonies, big white daisies, and mock orange blossoms." Mrs. Buckberry's program was about the proper etiquette required if this event had been held in 1895: "Invitations to a dinner party were delivered by hand. It was a breach of etiquette to send them through the mail. Invitations were always handwritten."

When Mrs. Lucas hosted the luncheon in 2002, guests were treated not only to a delicious meal but to a historical explanation of items on the menu. The Current Topic Turkey Salad, for instance, was made so often for the club by Peggy Brooks that members fondly named the recipe for the club. The Benedictine sandwiches were in memory of George Anna McKenzie's mother, George Anna Hobson Duncan. The "L & N petits fours" reminded guests of Mrs. McKenzie's grandmother, Anna Perkins Hobson. Years ago, those tasty treats had been "made in Louisville and sent down to Bowling Green on the L & N train to be served at teas at Hobson House" (Lucas). The most intriguing item on the table was "Chocolate Mystery," an attempt to recreate a specialty of Alma Lee Francis who would not reveal her recipe for her delicious dessert.

With all this experience in entertaining, it is no surprise that the Current Topic Club knew how to plan an elegant gala to celebrate its 100th birthday on February 23, 1995 at the

(continued on page 10)



Members of the Current Topic Club at the organization's centennial, 1995. The members are, back row, left to right: Jerre Fitts, Gail Brooks, Mary Ann Berry, Debbie Medalie, Vickie Campbell, Jamie Higgins, Laura Buckberry, George Anna McKenzie, Gretchen Betterworth, Mary Lucas, Jean Harris, Mary Lloyd Moore, Mary Frances Willock, Kay Cole, Carrie Gott; front row, left to right: Casey Lester, Marmee Medalie, Betty Jo Beard, Nell Douglas Gaddie, Gayle Hurley, Virginia Spalding, Drucilla Jones, Mary Belle Willock, and Peggy Brooks.

Bowling Green Country Club. Photos in an album in the club's collection tell the story of this memorable event. Husbands were invited to the black tie affair, and the ladies wore beautiful dresses, some modern and some from an earlier time. George Anna McKenzie was pleased to wear her mother's black velvet dress with a white hand-worked collar, which had been purchased in 1939 for an important trip to New York for the American Saddlebred Horse Show held in Madison Square Garden. At the tables, guests found place cards written in calligraphy and centennial programs tied with gold ribbon. Following a dinner of salad, blackberry chicken with rice pilaf, and peas, President Betty Jo Beard spoke of the club's rich history and how the club is like an extended family. According to the minutes, Mrs. Beard added that the "diversity of our ages lends a richness to the membership that is especially appreciated by those of us who live far from our own families." Some of the husbands, members of several men's literary clubs, offered toasts on this special occasion. One of the toasts, entitled "Rhyming Toast from the Fortnightly Club," was delivered by Mr. William McKenzie:

To the ladies of Current Topics,
we toast you.
We find you to be so fair –

we decided to pen a rhyme
to show you how much we care.

You have met for a hundred years now
to discuss people, places, and things—
from horse-drawn carriage and gas light
to space travel in high flying planes.

From the Lindberg kidnapping
right up to O.J.,
you have studied it all and had your say.
You are better informed than our Fortnightly group,
but—after all, girls--
you've been 22 years longer in the loop!

As we close this toast,
we'd just like to say—
we never saw ladies looking this way—
with your lovely faces and beautiful smiles—
How could you have traveled these many miles?
Now, if we may,
we wish your club Happy One-Hundredth Birthday!

(continued on page 11)

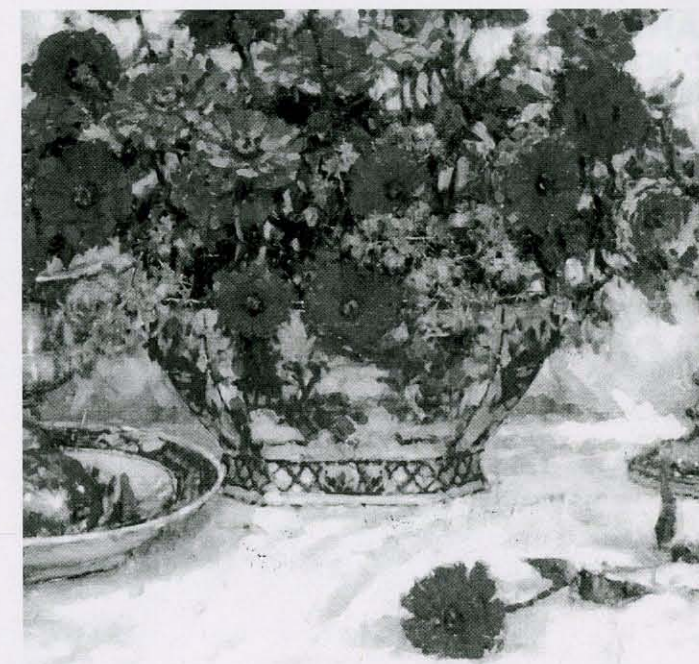


Gayle Hurley, Virginia Spalding, and Nell Douglas Gaddie cut the commemorative cake, designed by Peggy Brooks, at the centennial celebration held on February 23, 1995 at the Bowling Green Country Club.

After the toasts came the symbolic cutting of the cake, a three-tiered white cake adorned with pastel flowers, designed by Peggy Brooks. Using a sword to cut the slices were the club's newest member, Gayle Hurley, together with the two oldest members, Virginia Spalding and Nell Douglas Gaddie.

Understandably, the club has experienced changes over time. Rules concerning attendance and tardiness are more relaxed, in response to women's very busy lives today. Mary Lucas, a member for 45 years, is delighted that the younger members "pull the older members into the current scene" with their new current topics. At the same time, she hopes that coming to meetings is a "restful step back" in time, a visit to an older culture for the younger women. George Anna McKenzie feels there is an appropriate balance between valuing tradition and making the club relevant to today's interests and concerns. Ticka Linder appreciates knowing both younger and older women and how all these relationships and the current topics have greatly enriched her life.

In 1939, secretary Birdie Reed Ellis wrote about closing their forty-fourth year of club meetings, calling it the "44th link in the chain of Time." With perhaps the club colors and the goldenrod in mind, she added, "A golden chain, building the friendships, mutual interests, achievements and a fine cooperative spirit into a united whole, so that one is proud to be part of such an organization." After more than a century of golden links, it seems clear that today's "heirs of all the past and trustees for all the future" share the same pride in their Current Topic Club. ▲

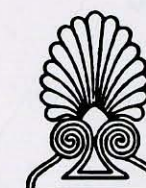


Please join
The Current Topic Club
for the
Spring Luncheon
Friday, May twenty-fourth
twelve o'clock noon

Members enjoy entertainments throughout the year, including the annual President's luncheon.

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- Solomon, Susan G. *American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space*. Lebanon, NH: UP of New England, 2005. Web. 05 June 2014.



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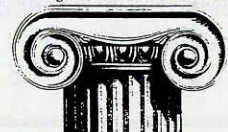
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