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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)
Annual Meeting Held on May 22

The Landmark Association annual meeting was held at La Gola, 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 Michelle Dillaha for work done at 1230 Park Street, Brad Wayland for work done 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 Offices at 314 East Main Avenue. The Jane Montgomery award for Merit for completed 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 Shar. A second generation preservationist, Emily was inspired by the work of her parents, John and 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 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 Shar 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.

The story starts with Elijah Moonman Covington and Harriet (Baldwin) Covington. Mr. Covington came to Warren County from the Carolinas 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 Cooper River section to Bowling Green. He chose a place of fertility, 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 enomarized with names that started with E's, as evidenced by some of the children he gave his children: Erasmus, Euclid, Eugene, and Eliza. Elijah died in 1846, 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 Morehead/Orleans 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—their Covingtons. Nor have there ever been any reformers among them, for 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.”

Harriott 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 acquisition and achievement 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 was 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 painted portraits of her children. 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 say you some China to be fired—a chocolate pot, bell, parasol handles and a plate. I have a few. Plates ready, but oh 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 never fired them, I don’t seem 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 on 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 older Smiths. Eventually they moved to another house nearby. It is possible that with its large
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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 was not confirmed, especially in older age. Miss Mary attended regularly, and one contemporary remembered her attending until her health waned. The friend reminded 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 to Kentucky from Missouri, to make his ice cream.

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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 equipment.

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Mary and Luther were already adults, 19 and 17 years in age. Later, 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.

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The ruins of Elm Grove after the fire of 1939. Processing equipment. With the help of several other local drayiers 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 time to think about it. It was 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 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 seemingly 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 packed car crammed full of classmates similarly engaged. If we were lucky. Royce slowed after passing the golf court 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 in 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 job 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 operating, 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 infully that “A Bowling Green man” who died on the 25th of June 1986 “willed 629 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 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. Taylor 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 Jeanie 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 historic integrity, including refinishing the oak flooring on the first floor, exposing brick in the sun room area, modernizing the kitchen and bathrooms, installing quality wood flooring, 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.

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. Cathberston 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 Roygland 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 rosy flag in dappled green,
To guard his tent with goldenrod,
Stole the seed from a woodland queen
And scattered it over the sod.

A laughter faun that errant knight,
Came with the witches wise and old
As pouring the stream with regal plume.

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

The oldest known surviving yearbook, The Current Topic Club's logo dates from 1909. Peter College art professor Beulah Strong designed the unique moniker.
On that same date, Miss Beulah Strong, an artist and art educator at Potter College for Young Ladies, created a club for women who would meet there at least once a month to discuss facts of life, Ephemera, and use 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 united by an appreciation of language. No group could succeed in suppressing that cultural practice 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 and 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, 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. Roll call was taken, with members offering an interesting topic in response to their names, which were always called for at least twenty-five years and an associate membership for two women who could attend meetings until a vacancy was achieved, one that we may not have considered from the practice is the keynote of success and Q conversational club lifelong learning announcements, election of officers and committees, to members who failed to contribute an appropriate current papers on assigned topics. Late 1890s' topics included Electrical Outlook.

Meeting on late Thursday evenings 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 for at least twenty-five years and an associate membership for two women who could attend meetings until a vacancy was achieved, one that we may not have considered from the practice is the keynote of success and Q conversational club lifelong learning announcements, election of officers and committees, to members who failed to contribute an appropriate current papers on assigned topics. Late 1890s' topics included Electrical Outlook.

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 byTicka 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 addition to all of 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 "interesting 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 that run, hills that rise and fall, and roads that make 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 topers 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. The 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. Thank you, my dear inlaws, for bringing me into your family."

Ladies to dinner parties were delivered by hand. It was a breach of etiquette to send them there, and was a crying need for that form of entertainment. 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 byTicka 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.

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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, Daddie Medalle, Vickie Campbell, James Higgin, Laura Budenny, Doris Anna McKenzie, Glatchan Brattemark, Mary Lucas, Jean Harris, Mary Lloyd Moore, Mary Frances Willock, Kay 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. A visit to an older culture for the younger women. George Anna McKenzie feels there is an appropriate balance to discuss people, places, and things—from horse-drawn carriage and gas light to space travel in high flying planes. 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 club's collection tell the story of this memorable event.

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As we close this toast, we'd just like to say—

we never saw ladies looking this way—

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)
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 ___________________________

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[ ] Foundation $25  [ ] Ionic Order $100  [ ] Entablature $500

[ ] Doric Order $50  [ ] Corinthian Order $250  [ ] Cornice $1,000

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