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The Landmark Association & Meyer Mortgage present a

Christmas Tour of Homes

Saturday, December 6, 2014 • 12:00 – 5:00 p.m. • $10 per person

Tom Morris – 1123 State
Eleanor Asher – 1153 State
Victory Baptist – 1202 State
Shea Apartment (Above Tea Bayou) – 906 State
Alice Gatewood Waddell – 513 East Main
Candlemakers Loft – 415 Park Row
Shawn Sinclair – 1318 College
Stephen & Patsy Morgenthaler – 1310 College

(Tickets may be purchased at any home on tour day)

Landmark Store & Silent Auction
Morgenthaler Home - 1310 College
Banker’s Memorial

The death of our President

JULIAN W. POTTER
brings to the Directors of the Cool & Iron National Bank a personal sorrow and a sense of loss that cannot be measured.

In the short span of years he won our deep regard and the abiding respect and confidence of his brother officials and the whole bank.

Thank you Roger & Dan Thoms for hosting the annual picnic at the Whirligig-Thompson House. Members donated $250 at the picnic toward a memorial tree to be planted in memory of Dave Galvin and his preservation efforts in Bowling Green and Warren County. A story about the house will appear in the next issue of Landmark Report.

Banker’s Memorial

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Kentucky Building last month, curators selected several items from the collection to highlight the variety of treasures it houses. One of those was an illuminated memorial for Julian Whitfield Potter, the president of the Cool & Iron Bank of New York City. The bank’s board commissioned the item from Tiffany’s, signed it upon completion, and sent it to Mr. Potter’s widow, Blanche. The paper announced that he died after a “long siege of typhoid fever.”

Potter worked with his father J. Whit Potter in the Potter-Matlock Trust Company. He left that association in 1920 to become vice president for the Italian Discount and Trust Company. He held that position until 1922, when the Cool & Iron Bank hired him as president, making him at the age of 34, the youngest president of any New York City bank. At the time of his death he was planning a merger of the Cool & Iron Bank and the Fidelity-International Trust Company.

Potter’s funeral was held at First Baptist Church on New Year’s Day 1926. The newspaper reported: “The large altar and choir loft were filled with floral offerings from relatives and friends in Bowling Green and Warren County, New York City, and various other points. One of the offerings was an elaborate pall covering the casket, from the officials and employees of the Cool & Iron Bank. It was made of lilacs-of-the-valley and orchids.”

The cortege, said to be “the longest ever seen in Bowling Green,” rendezvoused its way to Fairview Cemetery where Potter was interred.

The Current Events Club Tapestry

by Jean E. Nehm

Recorded among the artifacts of the Current Events Club are several statements about the founding of the club. Most of them simply report that the women’s literary club was organized on January 1, 1902 in the Park Street home of Mrs. Jennie McClure Sims. However, one special narrative, written in 1918 by Mrs. J. Porter Hines, not only relates the facts but does so in the flowery language popular in those days. In her special voice, she gives us a more intimate glimpse into the women’s personalities and motivations. Mrs. Hines writes, “Once upon a time, there lived in a beautiful colonial home typical of the old South, a woman who was of herself a fitting character of the old South: genial, charitable, hospitable, and one who loved her neighbors. This woman was so intense that she never tired of the company of those she most admired, and in order that she might draw them the closer to herself, she advocated their forming themselves into a social club.

That the vulgar type of social gossip might be crushed first, last, and always, she planned that the current events of the day might be discussed during the hours of meeting. She told her dream to her dearest friends and neighbors who were eager for membership, and it is to the memory of Jennie McClure Sims that the Current Events Club owes its birth.”

For the first months, the club was called the Park Street Literary Club, but the ladies soon settled on the permanent name of Current Events Club. As was done in other clubs of the time, members selected a club flower (the pansy) and club colors (purple and gold). They chose lines from the English poet Edward Young (1683 – 1765) as their motto, printed in club yearbooks for over 100 years: “Thoughts shut up want air, and spoil like buds uncovered to the sun.”

In an era when women may have had limited opportunities for education or socializing outside of the home, the members of the new Current Events Club had no intention of keeping their thoughts “shut up.” Indeed, they seemed to thrive in their “united effort towards intellectual growth,” the club’s official objective.

Though the club was organized in 1902, the first minutes of a notebook, archived in the Kentucky Building, did not record activities until 1906. What a busy agenda the ladies set for themselves! The assigned literary programs included Shakespeare’s A Winter’s Tale, Macbeth, The Tempest, Cymbeline, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, King Richard III, andHamlet. At each meeting, members answered the formal roll call with a quotation from that day’s play. In addition to the literary works, reports were given from leading magazines, including articles on political reformers and a biographical sketch of Thomas Edison. Interwoven with their reading were discussions of current events, such as Wealth and Expansion of the Nations, the Panama Canal, Susan B. Anthony, Pure Food Legislation, and the Affairs of Cuba in 1906. The members were also concerned with civic affairs, and were “urged as individuals to take a membership in the Library as it would be of benefit to our club work as well as encouraging a very worthy and commendable effort on the part of the ladies in charge.”

In the fall of 1918, the society dutifully recorded minutes for their first meetings, which included programs about French Women in War Industries and Literature of the War. Abruptly, there were three meetings missing from the chronology. A note of explanation was added: “Owing to the order of the State Board of Health, the meetings with Mrs. R. E. Ellis Oct. 15, Mrs. J. E. Meredith Oct. 29, and Mrs. A. M. Foster Nov. 5 were cancelled.”

This may have been precipitated by the outbreak of influenza. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, in an article entitled “The Great Pandemic: The United States 1918 – 1919,” “Influenza first appeared in Kentucky about September 27. On that date, troops traveling from Texas on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad stopped off in Bowling Green. There, soldiers left the train to explore the city. They infected several local citizens before returning to the train and traveling on . . . On October 6th, the Kentucky state...”
The members of the Current Events Club at the 100th anniversary meeting held at Village Manor on May 21, 2002, left to right: Nina Bennett, unidentified, Beverly Wells, Sue Poul, Ruth Denhardt, Elizabeth Honeycutt, Land Land, Pearl Beach, Caraice Scarborough, Jane Gables, and Helen Almond.

The club once described its mission: "The Current Events Club, although essentially a literary club is interested in any improvement--civic or otherwise--and considers it a privilege to assist in any worthy cause presented." Indeed, the members were generous over the years, donating to the Pine Mountain School, the Armenian and Near East Relief funds, Boys and Girls Clubs, the Red Cross, the Bowling Green Hospital, and many other worthy causes. These transactions, along with the annual collection of dues, were regularly reported by the treasurer. The Order of Business proceeded with Unfinished Business (an update on a current project), Communications (letters, thank-you notes, a petition in support of making Mammoth Cave a national park), New Business (nominating and voting on new members, planning a Christmas dinner), Announcements (upcoming events in the community), and Apointments (nominating committee or menu committee).

Scholarly programs of the day, which were once assigned, included numerous authors and poets (the Brontë sisters, William Faulkner, Edna St. Vincent Millay), Kentucky themes (history of the Derby, early inns and taverns, early churches, Kentucky women, the Shakers), Wonders of the Armenian and Near East, the United Nations, outer space, atomic energy, and human transplants. Indeed, all of these activities were woven into the fabric of this very busy club.

As the years rolled by, the members celebrated anniversaries of the founding of the club. In the club's collection is an invitation to celebrate its 50th anniversary: "The Current Events Club requests the pleasure of your company at a centenary celebration...." (continued on page 6)
company at a Tea in Observance of its Fiftieth Anniversary at the home of the President Mrs. James F. Searcy. The Daily News reported that 100 guests called between the hours of 4:00 and 6:00 on June 3, 1952 and enjoyed punch served from a silver punch bowl, ice cream, and cake. The newspaper also reported the 75th anniversary, celebrated in 1977 at the State Street Methodist Church, where members were proud of having held 1,500 meetings since Jennie McClure Sims had organized the club.

A grand centennial celebration was held on May 21, 2002 at Village Manor. Refreshments, décor, and fashionable ladies were the perfect combination for a most memorable event. Chicken salad, lemon tarts, cookies, strawberries, mints, and petit fours were served. The lovely serving table also featured linen napkins, punch, and tea in a silver tea service. Smaller tables "were adorned with white tablecloths and golden colors." Many members wore period dresses. For example, the president, Beverly Wells, made a Victorian dress, including a bustle, which she wore to greet guests from other literary clubs. "Jane Gillspie wore a cameo her father had bought for her mother when he was in Paris in World War I. Clarice Scarborough donned a black shawl and an 1895 bonnet," according to a Daily News article. To complete the scene of this historic event were a display table of club memorabilia and background piano music played by Sue Poull, Clarice Scarborough, and Helen Maywhort. Ruth Denhardt had prepared a history of the club along with a list of current members and all past presidents, presented to each member in a ribbon-tied scroll.

Reflecting on her club, current member Linda Booth thinks it takes a special type of person to belong to a literary club—one who is a deep thinker. She values the friendships she has made in her nearly 30 years of membership. She has been the treasurer for as long as she can remember; in that role, she collects the annual dues of $2.00 and oversees expenditures, which sometimes include the purchase of a special book to be donated to the library or church of a departed member. Martha Jenkins, a Western Kentucky University Professor Emerita who taught courses in the Textiles and Clothing major, appreciates the opportunities for intellectual growth and sharing her own interests and expertise, as she did recently with an interesting program on silk, the strongest natural fiber. Elizabeth Honeycutt, too, enjoys the programs and dear friendships. Smiling, she adds that it is very enjoyable to keep the traditions and to get out the silver service and china to serve dessert and coffee when the club meets at her home. Helen Almond, now a 95-year-old honorary member, has 40 years of lovely Current Events Club memories. She recalls a program she gave on the history of the Mariah Moore house. But over and above specific programs, what she values most are the many interesting people she might not have otherwise met and the perpetually interesting topics and current events. Mrs. Almond still enthusiastically looks forward to every meeting, convinced that association with the club contributes to "a better quality of life."

For over a century, the interweaving of quotations, literature, current events, and a busy club schedule, along with golden strands of friendships, has created a beautiful tapestry, contributing to the rich texture of Bowling Green culture.
Architecture on Trial: The Porters and the Pest House

by Lynn Niedermeier

When four-year-old Amelia Porter fell ill on September 6, 1902, her parents did not have far to look for help. Luther and Lizzie Porter resided at 1149 State Street in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and their family physician of ten years, Dr. Joseph N. McCormack, lived opposite at 12th and State. Dr. McCormack knew Amelia as a robust and ordinarily healthy child, but when called in three days later, he found her suffering from a "well-defined" case of variola—smallpox.

McCormack stood ready to lead the battle against this dangerous and highly communicable disease and its growing presence in Bowling Green. Besides being a practicing physician of 32 years, McCormack was a crusader for public health and was practicing physician of 32 years, McCormack was a crusader for public health and was currently acting Health Officer for Warren County. A tireless public health advocate, he frequented every session of the state legislature and was called "the State Board of Health" by the state legislature and was generally regarded as the author of all of Kentucky's public health laws since 1888.

McCormack at first instructed Amelia’s parents to confine her to a rear room on the second floor of their well-appointed brick home, but on September 13, with the girl now weak and feverish, he informed the Porters of their obligation. State law called for Amelia and others infected or exposed to infection by smallpox to be removed "to some house or place in the county where the disease will not spread, there to remain" until recovered or certified not to be at risk. Some in Bowling Green's medical community strove to refer to the place of quarantine as the "Eruptive Hospital," but this clinical name commonly yielded to a more medieval-sounding one: in the language of the notice delivered to the Porters on September 15 and signed by Dr. John H. Blackburn, acting City Health Officer, Amelia and her parents were requested "to go to the pest house."

The Porters refused. When Chief of Police and city board of health member Henry James returned later that day with a warrant to take the family into custody, Luther Porter struck back. The 37-year-old former bank cashier was by now familiar with the workings of the legal system, having been accused of embezzlement 19 months earlier and embroiled in numerous related civil suits. In response to this latest intrusion, he produced a writ of habeas corpus—in effect, a restraining order challenging Chief James’s authority to move his family. James, however, immediately procured a hearing before the county court judge who had issued the writ and convinced him to change his mind.

It was now after sundown, and James and police officer Tom Potter agreed to wait until the morning of September 16 to convey the Porters to the pest house. By the time they returned, however, the Porters had revived the restraining order by filing a lawsuit in Warren Circuit Court. The defendants in the suit—officers James and Potter, and Drs. Blackburn and McCormack—responded just as quickly. Since the presiding Circuit Judge, Warner E. Settle, was not only absent from the district but married to a cousin of Amelia’s mother, they notified the Porters the next day of their intention to ask a judge in Louisville to dissolve the restraining order.

Meanwhile, Amelia’s fever had subsided, but she was still covered with large pustules and in the most contagious phase of her illness. The stage was set for several days of legal wrangling over the family’s fate as doctors, lawyers and even other victims of the disease took up sides in anticipation of the court hearing. Public health, medical expertise and parental rights all became subjects for debate, but the star witness in the proceedings would be the pest house itself.

Bowling Green had used quarantine as a weapon against smallpox at least since 1865, when the city trustees contracted for the building of a pest house in the "New Cemetery grounds"—a somber but convenient location, since the city arranged to bury smallpox victims in what is now Fairview Cemetery. Public funds also paid for African-American women to provide nursing services, but the same community could be segregated for the disease itself; the Porters, charged Dr. McCormack, had not only neglected to vaccinate little Amelia, they had "suffered and permitted her to be nursed by a negro nurse, residing in Jonesville, a suburb of Bowling Green, where smallpox was prevalent."

The pest house was likely relocated from time to time as Bowling Green grew, but as the parties to the Porter lawsuit gathered evidence for and against moving the family, a wide gulf emerged in their perceptions of the amenities of the current facility. Affidavits placed the location of the pest house "in the woods," on an elevated plane between 1.5 and 3 miles from the city. Two buildings, for white and African-American patients, stood on different sections of the site. Joseph Franklin, a messenger who visited the pest house daily conveying patients and supplies, described the structures as "boxed houses, built of plank set upright, being one story and ceiled inside." Each had two rooms about 15 feet square, and a kitchen. In order to accommodate the volume of patients, tents with screening and plank floors had also been erected. Both the houses and tents had stoves for heating and were, according to Dr. McCormack, "in perfect sanitary condition. Two patients also provided testimonials. Edward Sears had been the "first inmate" of the pest house, and after his recovery had served as occasional cook and nurse for the last three years. He described the rooms as well lit, heated, ventilated, and "entirely comfortable" all year round. Stonewall Hayes, a patient in the "White Department" for the past month, found the rooms large and clean, his caregivers considerate and kind, and the surroundings "so pleasant as they could be made" in the circumstances.

Not so, claimed the Porters. The pest house consisted merely of "a few hastily built cabins, thin, open and poorly constructed, and a lot of tents," it was one of those tents, in fact, to which McCormack was proposing to consign the family. A security guard posted at the Porters’ home shared their view. His sister and brother-in-law, he stated, had both died at the pest house, and the structures were "not suitable or fit places to carry sick persons to."

Medical opinion was similarly divided. The Porters secured affidavits from six physicians concluding that it was both...
cases he had seen, no deaths or other ill effects had ever resulted from the patient's removal to a pest house. A colleague, Dr. James O. Carson, and three Louisville physicians, including that city's health officer, submitted affidavits endorsing the policy of isolating smallpox patients and emphasizing its practical benefits for both the patient's recovery and the community's safety. Dr. Carson included photographs he had personally made of the pest house, although the whereabouts of these fascinating pieces of evidence are today unknown.

Dr. McCormack also disputed the Porters' charge that he had exhibited a considerable lack of bedside manner in the execution of his public duty by placing their home under guard, interfering with other doctors' access to Amelia, and generally causing the family, “distress and mental anguish” through his “high-handed, overbearing and domineering manner.” His denial nevertheless carried an admission that he was not popular with every local member of the profession. No physicians had been refused permission to examine the girl, he protested, except for one who was unlicensed and another who was “the personal enemy” of McCormack and with whom he was not on speaking terms.

On September 23, the day of the court hearing, even as their attorneys appeared before Judge Henry S. Barker in Louisville, the parties to the lawsuit were engaged in dramatic negotiations. Alarmed at rumors that the entire city of Bowling Green was now at risk of quarantine, a committee of citizens had brought both sides close to compromise. The Porters agreed that, rather than go to the pest house, they would retire to some suitable isolated cottage. When such a dwelling was found, however, its owner demanded a steep rent of $500 and refused to settle for $200 offered, generously, by McCormack himself. Just as a member of the citizens committee volunteered to pay the entire cost, time ran out. A long distance telephone message arrived from Louisville reporting that Judge Barker had dissolved the restraining order. Without further ceremony, McCormack and Police Chief Henry James descended on the Porter household and whisked the family to the pest house.

"BY FORCE," exclaimed the headline in the next day’s Louisville Courier-Journal, summarizing the tactic that had quickly become “the gossip of the entire town” of Bowling Green. In a lengthy front-page story, the paper reported Judge Barker’s vindication of McCormack and his allies. The proceedings of the local health authorities, he ruled, were “warranted and justified both by law and by the facts.” With respect to the pest house itself, Barker found that such accommodation, while “far less elegant than her own home,” presented a danger to Amelia that was “imaginary rather than real,” and would “afford her every necessary shelter and protection.” While sympathetic to the plight of the Porters and others caught up in this compulsory exercise, he reminded them that “this is a hardship which must be endured for the good of the community.”

Perhaps the community eventually determined that its own sympathies were due, particularly to Amelia’s besieged father. Four months after his well-publicized attempt to evade the pest house, a jury acquitted Luther Porter on the first of the embezzlement charges hanging over his head. An even happier ending to the story, however, lay in the fact that when they relocated to Texas a few years later, all members of the Porter family were alive and well. As Joseph N. McCormack predicted, those little plank houses and tents outside Bowling Green had performed their necessary function.
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.

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