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Folklife Archives, Manuscripts &, "Current Events Club - Bowling Green, Kentucky (MSS 543)" (2015). *Manuscript Collection Finding Aids*. Paper 3932.
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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
 Department of Library Special Collections
 Western Kentucky University
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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 543 CURRENT Events Club – Bowling Green, Kentucky

6 boxes. 37 folders. 414 items. 1902-2014. Originals or photocopies

SC2015.17.1

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

This organizational history titled “The Current Events Club Tapestry” was written by Jean E. Nehm for the *Landmark Report*, vol. 32, no. 2 (December 2014). 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 love 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 so 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 bales unopened 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 notebooks of minutes, 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*, and *Hamlet*. 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 us in 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 secretary 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. B. R. 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 in 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 board was forced to issue a state-wide proclamation closing ‘all places of amusement, schools, churches and other places of assembly.’” In the November 12, 1918 minutes, the secretary was pleased to write, “The ban having been lifted, the club rejoiced that conditions were so improved that we were allowed to continue our year’s work.”

The year 1920 was a sad one for the club, as several members passed away during the summer: Mrs. T. Barclay Lee, Mrs. Yarbrough, and Mrs. Binkley. The death of Mrs. Helm in October was a surprise since she had just given a “splendid paper on New Nations” and had hosted the club as well. Secretary Lena Williams wrote that Mrs. Helm’s “bright and happy smile was a deceiver, and few knew she was not well. . . . Our hearts ache to have to give up such a beautiful life.” A letter of sympathy was sent to Mrs. Helm’s family, saying, “We deeply feel the vacancy that has been left in our hearts and midst; but the memory of Mrs. Helm shall be a guiding star causing us to strive for a higher standard.” The letter goes on to offer comfort with a few lines from an anonymous poet:

“Not until each loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the pattern and explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful in the weaver’s skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern that He planned.”

One of the most anticipated traditions of the Current Events Club was the annual picnic, held at the close of the year’s meetings before a summer recess. The picnics at Beech Bend Park in the 1920s inspired lyrical descriptions from the secretaries. In 1921, for instance, the event was described as “one of the most delightful institutions of the club. The lunch was served under the wonderful Beech Trees.” The following year, the secretary noted that “just before sunset, the club enjoyed a very elaborate lunch served from a long table out among the grand old beeches.” The entry for June 12, 1923 records, “The menu committee composed of Mrs. Long, chairman, Mrs. Goodrum and Mrs. Ashley, had proved what a wonderful triumvirate they could make, and the lunch was perfect in every detail. The table was set in the large dining hall,

and it seemed more like a banquet than a picnic when we consider the sunny linen, vases of cut flowers, and the very high class waiters (husbands of the members of the committee).”

Mrs. McElroy, the secretary in 1925, writes a long entry about not only the special picnic but also its growing significance for the members: “Each year we seem to feel more and more how fortunate we really are to have as beautiful a spot as Beech Bend for our outings. . . . After some of the club and guests had enjoyed a dip in the cooling water of Big Barren, our very efficient menu committee arranged the lunch which was a feast for the gods. . . . After a most delightful evening, the Club separated for the summer, feeling if possible, just a little closer to each other, after having together another picnic.”

Regrettably, the secretary in 1927 did not sign her name, so we do not know who wrote the lively description of the rainy but memorable picnic that year. The minutes report, “The Club Picnic was held at Beech Bend on the afternoon of June 21. A wet day failed to dampen the ardor of the members one for another and all for the good lunch. It was first hoped to have the spread under the trees but Pluvius reckoned otherwise and after fairly trying to sit out the rain, the whole part and parcel was ignominiously routed to the pavilion – that is – all but the pies. They were safely snug in big dress boxes so came to no serious grief. . . . It is such a good, pleasant custom to be together in this type of freedom that at the end of every year, all the members begin immediately looking forward to the next club picnic. ‘Vive la picnique’ and on to 1928!”

During the early years of the Current Events Club, an Order of Business was established, to which members have adhered ever since:

Order of Business

- Club Called to Order
- Roll Call
- Reading of Minutes
- Report of Treasurer
- Unfinished Business
- Communication
- New Business
- Announcements and Appointments
- Program of the Day
- Round Table -- Current Events
- Adjournment

Within this structure flowed a continuous, multi-hued textile of traditions and topics over the years. Responding to roll call with a quotation, for example, has been a source of pleasure for over 100 years. As one secretary stated, “The quotations always add very much to the program; we get an insight into the poetical taste of each member from their response.”

The club once described its mission: “The Current Events Club, altho 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 Appointments (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 Ancient World, the Bible, Rachel Carson, and the national parks. Later, members were free to choose their own topics, which resulted in a wide variety of book reviews. In 1967, for example, Mrs. Chapman gave a book review of Cornelia Otis Skinner's book on Madam Sarah Bernhardt that was so interesting that "not an eyelid drooped, nor was there even a brief flicker of boredom on the countenance of all listeners as Mrs. Chapman took us through the sometimes sordid, sometimes humorous, and at times exhilarating experiences of this great and eccentric actress." Recently, a committee has selected a theme, such as Nature, within which members are free to select a particular topic to share.

Following the program were round table discussions on current events. For several years, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was the topic of discussion. In 1915, "A petition was read from a Longfellow Club in Massachusetts for contributions for the restoration of the poet's birthplace. An assessment of ten cents for each member was voted and paid of the sum collected." Four years later, the club again donated \$2.00 for the Longfellow home. In appreciation, the home sent a portrait of Longfellow to the club, which they donated to the high school. In 1924 a lively round table discussion focused on the subject of the proposed location of a new hospital on Reservoir Hill. The ladies vehemently protested this site because it would destroy "the beauty and appearance of the only park we have." Other interesting topics have included women's suffrage, moving picture shows, child labor laws, Hitler, the United Nations, outer space, atomic energy, and human transplants. Seamlessly, all 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 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 decorated by Helen Almond with pansies in rings or on candlesticks with purple candles to carry out our purple and gold 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 Gillaspie 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 Pauli, 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.

Works Cited

- Carmichael, Alicia. “Literary Club Becomes Centenarian with Old-Fashioned Tea.” *Daily News* 22 May 2002.
- “Current Events Club Celebrates 75 Years of Consecutive Meetings.” *Daily News* 12 May 1975. Found in Bowling Green Warren County Vertical File. Department of Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University.
- “Current Events Club Observes Anniversary.” *Daily News* 04 June 1952. Found in Bowling Green Warren County Vertical File. Department of Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University.
- “Great Pandemic: The United States in 1918-1919.” United States Department of Health and Human Services. Web. 27 June 2014.
- Hines, Mrs. J. Porter. “History of the Current Events Club.” Found in Bowling Green Warren County Vertical File. Department of Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection includes the archives of the Current Events Club, a literary club, in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Boxes 1-3 includes the constitution and by-laws of the organization (Folder 2) and minutes from meetings, 1906-2014. Most of the minutes were in spiral bound books or notebooks. They were removed from those enclosures and all staples and paper clips removed. Each year’s minutes generally include an attendance roster. There are small gaps in

the minutes, most notably 1969-1974. Boxes 4-5 contain the organization's yearbooks which include names and addresses of members, the dates and titles of the year's programs, and a list of officers. These yearbooks typically have decorative covers that vary from year to year.

Box 6 contains a variety of materials related to the club. Of significance is a 1918 broadside in Folder 1 titled "The XX Revue," which documents through doggerel the annual soiree for all of Bowling Green's ladies literary clubs given by a designated club. The broadside mentions the Browning Club, Current Events Club, Current Topic Club, Ladies' Literary Club and the Twentieth Century Club. Folder 1 also includes program and auxiliary information about a statewide meeting of the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs held in Scottsville in November 1922. Folder 2 contains correspondence that is chiefly thank you notes for gifts made in memory or honor of someone or related to club membership. Folder 3 contains a unique set of programs from when the Current Events Club's hosted the annual soiree for local clubs in 1914. Each of the five programs features a unique Japanese scene on the front; the interior lists the program of the day that included Japanese dance and music. This folder also contains an illustrated brochure which provides information about the guest artists for that event. Folder 5 contains information about various club anniversaries: 1952 (50th), 1977 (75th), and 2002 (100th). The majority of the material consists of photographs of the 100th Anniversary held at Village Manor in Bowling Green in 2002.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Minutes	1906-1926	22 items
Folder 1	Descriptive inventory	n.d.	1 item
Folder 2	Constitution and by-laws, history	1906-2014	7 items
Folder 3	Minutes	1906-1910	4 items
Folder 4	Minutes	1910-1914	2 items
Folder 5	Minutes	1914-1920	2 items
Folder 6	Minutes	1920-1922	2 items
Folder 7	Minutes	1922-1924	2 items
Folder 8	Minutes	1924-1926	2 items
BOX 2	Minutes	1926-1969	50 items
Folder 1	Minutes	1926-1929	11 items
Folder 2	Minutes	1929-1933	4 items

Folder 3	Minutes	1934-1938	15 items
Folder 4	Minutes	1938-1941	3 items
Folder 5	Minutes	1942-1950	7 items
Folder 6	Minutes	1953-1958	5 items
Folder 7	Minutes	1960-1969	5 items
BOX 3	Minutes	1975-2014	38 items
Folder 1	Minutes	1975-1980	6 items
Folder 2	Minutes	1980-1985	5 items
Folder 3	Minutes	1985-1990	5 items
Folder 4	Minutes	1990-1995	5 items
Folder 5	Minutes	1996-2000	5 items
Folder 6	Minutes	2000-2004	4 items
Folder 7	Minutes	2007-2014	8 items
BOX 4	Yearbooks	1902-1972	67 items
Folder 1	Yearbooks	1923-1933	10 items
Folder 2	Yearbooks	1902-1914	10 items
Folder 3	Yearbooks	1914-1923	9 items
Folder 4	Yearbooks	1933-1943	11 items
Folder 5	Yearbooks	1943-1956	12 items
Folder 6	Yearbooks	1956-1972	15 items

BOX 5	Yearbooks	1972-2014	33 items
Folder 1	Yearbooks	1972-1983	11 items
Folder 2	Yearbooks	1984-1995	10 items
Folder 3	Yearbooks	1995-2014	12 items
BOX 6	Miscellaneous	1905-2014	205 items
Folder 1	Miscellaneous	1905-2014	24 items
Folder 2	Correspondence	1912-2014	58 items
Folder 3	Programs and news clipping of a special Japanese dance program sponsored by the Current Events Club	1914	7 items
Folder 4	Photos	2002	15 items
Folder 5	Anniversary items	1952-2002	100 items

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS 543 CURRENT Events Club – 1902-2014
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Minutes, yearbooks, administrative papers and program information related to the Current Events Club, a ladies literary club in Bowling Green, Kentucky, that was founded in 1902.

6 boxes. 37 folders. 414 items. Originals, photos, and photocopies.

SC2015.17.1

SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Browning Club – Mentioned, 1918 B6,F1
Clubs – Bowling Green
Current Events Club – Anniversaries B6,F4-5
Current Events Club – Photographs B6,F4-5
Current Topics Club – Mentioned, 1918 B6,F1
Japan – Social life and customs, 1914 B6,F3

Kentucky Federation of Women's Club – Relating to, 1922 B6,F1
Ladies Literary Club – Mentioned, 1918 B6,F1
Poetry B6,F1
Societies – Bowling Green
Twentieth Century Club – Mentioned, 1918 B6,F1
Women – Societies and club

Jeffrey 06/17/2015