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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
 Department of Library Special Collections
 Western Kentucky University
 Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

Descriptive Inventory

MSS 610 PIERIAN Club – Bowling Green, Kentucky

4 boxes. 39 folders. 237 items. 1935-2023. Originals, photocopies, photographs.

SC2017.48.1

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

(This organizational history, titled “Inspired by the Pierian Spring,” was written by Jean E. Nehm for the *Landmark Report*, August 2013):

By 1935, Bowling Green already had ten active women’s literary clubs (beginning with the Ladies Literary Club founded in 1880, followed by the Browning Club, Current Topic Club, Current Events Club, XX Club, Twentieth Century Club, Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, Amigo Club, Larths Club, and the Mothers Club). Each club had fifteen to twenty members, with a total number of about 184 participating women. Mrs. R. H. Holdsworth and Mrs. John B. Dodson felt that in a city of approximately 13,000 (Caron’s), there was an opportunity and a need for more study clubs. So on the evening of May 22, 1935, they invited Mrs. Ralph Boyd, Mrs. Guy Forman, Mrs. W. L. Hall, Mrs. Bonnie Hayden, Mrs. S. E. Cranfill, Mrs. Judson Griffin, and Mrs. Carlo Steed to meet with them in Mrs. Dodson’s home for the purpose of founding a new club, which they temporarily named the Monday Night Study Club. The ladies elected officers and agreed to begin their work on the second Monday evening in September.

When that date arrived, the Monday Night Study Club was officially renamed the Pierian Literary Club, a reference to Alexander Pope’s lines from *Essay on Criticism* (1711):

“A little learning is a dangerous thing:
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring:
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.”

The Pierian Spring was a mythological fountain in Macedonia that was sacred to the Muses. It was believed that anyone drinking from the spring would gain knowledge and inspiration. The club’s goal of drinking deeply from the Pierian Spring was communicated in Article II of its constitution which stated that their objective “shall be growth and development of mind, together with fluency of speech, as a result of investigation and free discussion of religious, educational, political, and other topics.”

According to the constitution, the Program Committee “shall suggest the year’s program topics to the club for selection; outline the work for the year, name the leaders, the hostesses,

dates and places of meeting.” For their first year of study, they chose the theme of Kentucky authors, some of whom we still recognize and others who have faded from familiarity: Mary J. Holmes, John Fox, Jr., Alice Hegan Rice, Eliza Calvert Hall, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and James Lane Allen. Their second theme was Kentucky Snapshots, for which the ladies chose individual topics such as the state’s history, geography, Native Americans, superstitions, feuds, transportation, camp meetings, and the Shakers. Subsequent themes varied widely over the years: foreign countries, American literature, book reviews, Bible characters, world leaders, contemporary literature, famous families, Eastern cultures, advances in science, women’s lives, biographies, the Kentucky Bicentennial, and so many others.

The constitution also delineates the responsibilities of the secretary-treasurer: she “shall keep an accurate record of all meetings of the club; give notice of the meetings to the paper; send flowers to club members in case of serious illness; send flowers when there has been a death in the immediate family; and send cards of ‘remembrance’ as the occasions arise.” At each monthly meeting, the secretary would take minutes, recording information about business transactions (collection of dues, motions, votes, announcements), the speaker and the topic for the evening, and refreshments served by the hostess at whose home the meeting was held. Early in the club history, the ladies set up a system of fines. The only acceptable reason a member could be absent was illness or travel; if someone had an unexcused absence, she had to pay a 25-cent fine. If a member were tardy for a meeting, a 5-cent fine was assessed. To reduce the formality of meetings, the ladies voted to call each other by given names rather than by married names. Whenever anyone forgot, she had to pay a 1-cent fine. Ironically, for years, the secretaries continued to use the more formal names in their minutes. For example, “The Pierian Literary Club met with Mrs. W. L. Hall Monday evening Oct. 14.” Occasionally, very formal language was used for the plural: “Mesdames Holland, Thomas and Rotenberry were introduced as new members.”

The elected secretaries wrote their minutes in prose. One exception was Elizabeth Munday, who submitted the entire evening’s report on the business, program, refreshments, and fines for September 10, 1956 in verse:

On September 10th, at half past seven
 To Novice Barbee’s we went.
 We all had it right--
 ‘Twas Pierian Night
 And fifteen girls did attend.

The yearbooks then to each were given;
 Everyone said they were fine.
 The minutes were read,
 The treasury fed.
 Mrs. Pedigo presided on time.

Cora Dodson then the program gave;
 21 *Stayed* was reviewed.
 We listened with zest,
 She’s one of the best.
 Some discussion then ensued.

At the social hour we ate and talked
 And enjoyed Novice's treat.
 We all had such fun,
 And 5 guests had come,
 Pauli, Barbee, Banks, Wood and Peete.

Fourteen dollars in dues have been paid,
 2 cents fine [for] saying 'Mrs.'
 We've paid for our books,
 Eight fifty it took,
 Seventeen – we have clear.

By 1945, the club was ready to celebrate its 10th anniversary. According to a newspaper clipping, "The guests were seated at one long table which was beautifully decorated with yellow chrysanthemums and green candles in crystal holders and centered by a large birthday cake. . . . Mrs. W. S. Bolles sang a solo, accompanied by Mrs. Johnson, and a duo-piano number was given by Mrs. Gaddie and Mrs. Bolles. Games were also enjoyed during the evening." Club members had sent invitations to former members who had moved out of town. Responses show how meaningful the club had already become in members' lives. One example is a telegram from Nellie Boyd, now living in Champaign, Illinois, saying, "I HAVE A SOFT SPOT IN MY HEART FOR PIERIAN AND EACH OF ITS MEMBERS WE BOTH SINCERELY REGRET WE CANNOT BE WITH YOU ALL AT THIS TENTH ANNIVERSARY DINNER." Mrs. Cranfill sent a letter from Waco, Texas on Baylor University Department of Sociology letterhead saying that though she has been away from Bowling Green for years, "I think of the Pierian Club often and long for the inspiration and fellowship of those good friends."

Mrs. Spriegel sent a note from Evanston, Illinois on pale blue stationery dated "Wednesday, October the twenty-fourth, nineteen hundred and forty-five." She writes, "My dear Pierians, It is hard to believe that 10 years have elapsed since the Pierian Club of Bowling Green came into existence. . . . You asked what the club meant to me during our stay in Bowling Green. Probably more than anything else, it meant Friendship—and also Enlightenment. We used to have such fun getting together for the purpose of learning more about some subject in which we all were interested. . . . May 'Pierian' mean as much to each of you as it has meant to me! Lovingly always, Gladys Maree Spriegel. P.S. I hope you have received the candy which must represent me in my absence. GMS."

Hostesses seemed to delight in preparing lovely tablescapes for special occasions, and secretaries found equal pleasure in describing them, sometimes so well that even decades later we can almost visualize the scene. At one Christmas party, the "centerpiece for the table was a mirrored sleigh filled with candy and driven by Santa Claus. Candelabra holding red tapers tied with silver bows marked the ends of the table." Another Christmas party was held at the home of Mrs. Gunderson, whose husband, a professor of music at Western Kentucky State College, gave the program. He spoke about holiday traditions in Norway, such as the Christmas tree being placed in the center of the room and Norwegian children holding hands and singing as they danced around the tree. The Gundersons' two young daughters "Karen and Sonja added much to his talk by singing a Christmas song in Norwegian." Refreshments consisted of "about six different kinds of Norwegian bread and pastries, . . . but the table's centerpiece was the

biggest cause of the 'ohs and ahs,' for it was a gingerbread house which Mrs. Gunderson had made." Another festive table was described on the occasion of a Husbands' Night dinner at the home of Mrs. Wilfred H. Duncan on Chestnut Street: "Dinner was served from the dining room table, which was covered with an imported Italian cutwork cloth and centered by an arrangement of spring flowers and lighted tapers. Favors for the women were small hand-mirrors and, for the men, novelty key chains." A final example is from the club's silver anniversary, celebrated at Mrs. John Dodson's home in May of 1960. "Spring flowers in a crystal bowl centered the lace-covered dining table, and lighted pink tapers in crystal candelabra on either side. A birthday cake, trimmed with pink rosebuds holding twenty-five candles, was served by Mrs. Judson Griffin. Mrs. Selby Smith was at the punch bowl."

It is important to note that the Pierian Literary Club, in addition to its scholarly work, has been dedicated to community service. The Civic Relations Committee has had a long-standing tradition of suggesting a variety of opportunities to help others. Minutes written during the war years of the 1940s exemplify the interweaving of programs and engagement. Topics discussed included Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, reports on the Red Cross and War Stamp sales, and current events. One evening, the ladies conducted their business meeting, listened to the program, shared refreshments, and then at 9:00 paused to listen to President Roosevelt's radio message together. During those years, they donated to the USO and the War Fund Drive, participated in the Red Cross Bandage Project, and prepared gift packages of handkerchiefs and cigarettes for soldiers at Christmas time.

For several years after the war, they turned their attention to helping residents at the County Farm, also known as the Poor Farm. The concept of a farm for housing and taking care of the indigent arose in the earliest days of Warren County. The County Farm, which no longer exists, was located near Woodburn, Kentucky. In the 1940s, the thirteen men and four women residents worked in fields of corn, wheat, tobacco, alfalfa, potatoes, and sugar cane; they also raised chickens, hogs, and cows (Morningstar). Living conditions were stark, and the entire facility relied primarily on contributions. How pleased the residents must have been to receive the Pierian Club's gifts. According to the January 1947 minutes, "Mrs. Hall reported that residents of the County Farm remembered the club's Christmas gifts of last year and were looking forward to our coming again this year. She told of the long red stockings filled and each with a pretty card plus the fruit baskets that she and Mrs. Brauns took this year."

Pierian generosity, as noted in many secretaries' minutes over the years, extended to an impressive array of community needs: the Warren County TB Hospital, the Red Cross, the Infantile Paralysis Fund, the Foster Parent Association, the Lion's Club Handicapped Children's School, books and magazines to the library after it was destroyed by fire, gifts of socks and underwear to the Girls Club, and books for special education students at Jones Jagers School. Current member Joan Capps notes that rather than giving gifts to each other, members prefer to use their club treasury to help others. Peggy Pack adds that it seems especially fitting for a literary club to donate books to schoolchildren.

Among the Pierian books of minutes archived in the Special Collections Library at Western Kentucky University is a small, colorful box with an interesting story to tell. Inside is a complete set of the club's yearbooks from 1938 through 1996. These annual booklets from the 1930s through 1965 were printed at a print shop on 10th Street owned by Selby E. Smith, the husband of charter member Bonnie Smith. When Bonnie died, Mr. Smith offered the yearbooks to Lura Adams, who continued to save them and add to the collection until her death. Lura, in turn, had instructed her daughter Marion to take care of them and keep them safe. When

donating the yearbooks to the library, Marion wrote a note saying, "All these remind us of how much my mother's membership in the Pierian Literary Club meant to her and how she treasured the friendship of its members."

Inevitable changes have occurred in the Pierian Club since its founding in 1935. The traditions of a Guest Night, a Husbands' dinner, and a summer picnic have been abandoned. So, too, have the fines for nonattendance, tardiness, or addressing a member by her married name. Yet current members have fond memories of the past even as they look forward. Several of them remember special attributes of very early members, such as Helen Griffin's sparkling wit as well as Frances Huddleston Link's loving personality, vivacious skill in storytelling, and pride in the club. When Cora Dodson, one of the first women who envisioned the Pierian Club, died in 1967, Lura Adams wrote this tribute: "She was always a person who believed in learning and growing as the years went by, and from dream to reality the club was an expression of what she wanted not only for herself but for all the members as well. . . . We shall cherish her memory and all that she has meant to our club."

Clarice Scarborough, a member since 1967, recalls the formal, strict protocol of the past but thoroughly enjoys the current, more relaxed gatherings of this "very collegial group." Joyce Wilder, who also joined the club in the late 1960s, loves her Kindle, considering it a "new avenue in reading." She adds, "We love technology, but nothing beats the face-to-face spontaneity, the sharing of opinions, and the humor" of the Pierian meetings.

Becky Leavy smiled as she recalled the pleasure she found in reading as a very young child and the fun she had reading to her sister. She finds the same deep pleasure today in reading and sharing ideas with other members of the club. Interestingly, Becky invited a guest speaker for her most recent program to discuss the book she had chosen, *Josie Underwood's Civil War Diary*. This very special guest speaker was Nancy Baird, the author of the book and herself a former Pierian.

Joan Capps, too, appreciates the opportunity to meet new people and to share stimulating programs and lively conversation. She anticipates a long future for the club because "it is such a nice way to spend the second Monday of each month!" Peggy Pack, reflecting on her forty-three years in the club, speaks of the warm camaraderie among members and the lasting friendships in addition to the enjoyment of learning together.

The quotation by Alexander Pope about the Pierian Spring has been included in every yearbook since 1935. According to Elizabeth Stone, the verse "suggests going more deeply into a topic to satisfy a thirst for learning." Agreeing with other members, she enjoys reading and learning, yet the club is far more meaningful than merely the scholarly quest. Having been in the club for four decades, she has valued meeting people of all walks of life, cherishing their deep friendships. For her, being a Pierian "is a matter of the heart!"

The mythological Pierian Spring continues to flow and to provide inspiration well into the 21st century. Mrs. Dodson, Mrs. Holdsworth, and the other charter members of the Pierian Literary Club launched their club in order to drink deeply of knowledge. Clearly, that goal has been attained, along with the lovely addition of the personal enrichment so eloquently described by Pierians past and present.

Works Cited:

Caron's Bowling Green Warren County City Directory 1937-1938 and 1947-1948. St. Louis: Caron Directory Co., 1937 and 1947.

Morningstar, Jane. "County Farm is Home to Seventeen But an Ice Box is Not Provided." *Park City Daily News* 21 July 1946. Bowling Green/Warren County "County Home" Vertical File, Library, Special Collections, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of records of the Pierian Club of Bowling Green, Kentucky. The collection has been divided into three series. Series I, Administrative Papers, consists of three subseries: founding documents; minutes; and correspondence. Series II, Publications, consists of one subseries: Club yearbooks. Series III, Miscellaneous, consists of three subseries: History, Photographs, and Miscellaneous.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Pierian Club		
Folder 1	Inventory		1 item
SERIES I	Administrative Papers		
SUBSERIES 1	Founding documents		
Box 1	Founding documents	1978-1997	6 items
Folder 1	Constitution and bylaws	1978-1997, n.d.	6 items
SUBSERIES 2	Minutes		
BOX 1	Minutes	1935-1974	6 items
Folder 1	Minutes	1935-1940	1 item
Folder 2	Minutes	1940-1952	1 item
Folder 3	Minutes	1952-1960	1 item
Folder 4	Minutes	1960-1964	1 item
Folder 5	Minutes	1965-1969	1 item
Folder 6	Minutes	1969-1974	1 item

BOX 2	Minutes	1974-2022	46 items
Folder 1	Minutes	1974-1978	1 item
Folder 2	Minutes	1978-1983	1 item
Folder 3	Minutes	2007-2013	1 item
Folder 4	Minutes	2013-2015	1 item
Folder 5	Minutes	2017-2019	19 items
Folder 6	Minutes	2020-2022	19 items
Folder 7	Minutes	2023	4 items
SUBSERIES 3	Correspondence		
BOX 1	Correspondence	1942-2014	58 items
Folder 1	Correspondence	1942-1948	18 items
Folder 2	Correspondence	1971-2017	32 items
Folder 3	Correspondence	n.d.	8 items
SERIES II	Publications		
SUBSERIES 1	Yearbooks		
BOX 1	Yearbooks	1935-1973	38 items
Folder 1	Yearbooks	1935/1936- 1939/1940	5 items
Folder 2	Yearbooks	1940/1941- 1945/1946	6 items
Folder 3	Yearbooks	1946/1947- 1949/1950	4 items
Folder 4	Yearbooks	1950/1951- 1953/1954	4 items

Folder 5	Yearbooks	1954/1955- 1957/1958	4 items
Folder 6	Yearbooks	1958/1959- 1962/1963	5 items
Folder 7	Yearbooks	1963/1964- 1967/1968	5 items
Folder 8	Yearbooks	1968/1969- 1972/1973	5 items
BOX 2	Yearbooks	1973-2018	47 items
Folder 1	Yearbooks	1973/1974- 1977/1978	5 items
Folder 2	Yearbooks	1978/1979- 1981/1982	4 items
Folder 3	Yearbooks	1982/1983- 1987/1988	6 items
Folder 4	Yearbooks	1988/1989- 1991/1992	4 items
Folder 5	Yearbooks	1992/1993- 1995/1996	4 items
Folder 6	Yearbooks	1996/1997- 2004/2005	9 items
Folder 7	Yearbooks	2005/2006- 2010/2011	6 items
Folder 8	Yearbooks	2011/2012- 2018/2019	9 items
SERIES III	Miscellaneous		
SUBSERIES 1	History		
BOX 1	History	1945-2013	16 items
Folder 1	Historical sketches and data	1945-2013	6 items

Folder 2	Memorials to members	1967-1968	2 items
Folder 3	Clippings	1946-1997	8 items
SUBSERIES 2	Photographs		
BOX 1	Photographs	2015-2017	15 items
Folder 1	Photographs	2015-2017, n.d.	15 items
SUBSERIES 3	Miscellaneous		
BOX 1	Miscellaneous	n.d.	1 item
Folder 1	“Chatman Artillery Punch” recipe	n.d.	1 item

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS 610 PIERIAN Club – Bowling Green, Kentucky 1935-2023

Minutes, correspondence, yearbooks, and miscellaneous records of the Pierian Club, a women’s literary club in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

4 boxes. 39 folders. 237 items. Originals, photocopies, photographs.
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SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Adams, Lura Alice (Hopper), 1903-1996
Clubs – Bowling Green
Recipes
Women – Clubs and societies

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