MSS0133. Katherine Lawless Compton papers finding aid

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Katherine Lawless Compton papers

Title: Katherine Lawless Compton papers
Collection No: MSS.133
Creator: Katherine Lawless Compton (1894-1978)
Extent: 1.25 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1869-1957

Abstract: The collection fragmentarily documents some aspects of the life of Katherine Compton (1894-1978), including her college days at Mississippi State College for Women, circa 1914-1918; her family’s interest in amateur and professional theatricals; her activities in the Bickford Civic Club, 1951-1959; and her church activities.

Donor: Katherine Compton Bournake, Wisconsin, April 1978.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Katherine Lawless Compton papers, Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: March 2014
Biographical information

Katherine Lawless was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on September 16, 1894, the daughter of John J. Lawless (d. circa 1929) and Rebecca Wilhelmina Burkle Lawless (1861-1943). She had three older brothers: John J., Frederick (Fritz), and Joshua. All the children were baptized at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Memphis. For part of her childhood, Katherine lived in the house at 826 N. Second Street built in 1849 by her grandfather, German immigrant Jacob Burkle (1834-1874), who owned a stockyard and bakery nearby. Her father had a store at 840 N. Second Street. She attended private schools and around 1914 went to the Industrial Institute and College in Columbus, Mississippi. After graduation she was a county Home Demonstration agent based at the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Charleston, Mississippi, where she knew William Faulkner. She married E.M. Compton and moved to Lucas Township, Crittenden County, Arkansas, to help her husband operate his plantation. Their daughter, Katherine Compton Bournake, was born in the 1920s. After her husband’s death, Katherine Compton returned to the family home in Memphis and took an active part in community, church, and family affairs. She chaired the Bickford Civic Club–City Beautiful Commission from 1956 to 1959, and was the historian of the Bickford neighborhood and the Burkle/Buerkle family. In adulthood, she became an Episcopalian. Katherine died on February 18, 1978.

Fritz Lawless was a local baseball player and coach and worked at the 515 Tire Company and in other sales jobs. But he was also a popular local entertainer who performed in the 1920s and 1930s in minstrel shows around the United States, and partnered with Rudy Willing in a production company.

Scope and contents

The collection fragmentarily documents some aspects of the life of Katherine Compton, including her college days at Mississippi State College for Women, circa 1914-1918; her family’s interest in amateur and professional theatricals; her activities in the Bickford Civic Club, 1951-1959; and her church activities. Information on the family’s financial affairs can be found in the personal papers and the financial records (Box 1, folders 6-10, 17). The notes from a pre-interview for an oral interview which was not held are in Box 1, folder 15.

Provenance

On Katherine Compton’s death, Katherine Compton Bournake allowed Special Collections’ staff to remove papers and memorabilia from her mother’s house before it was sold. In 1997 Katherine Compton’s house opened as the Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum, based on the claim that her grandfather had sheltered runaway slaves there.
**Processing information**

The papers were not in any particular order when received and were processed into alphabetical subject files. A scrapbook belonging to the Bickford Civic Club was disassembled and the contents placed in a folder for preservation reasons.

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**Subject terms**

**SUBJECTS:**
Women college students--Mississippi.

**NAMES:**
Bickford Civic Club (Memphis, Tenn.)
Compton, Katherine Lawless, 1894-1978.
Industrial Institute and College of Mississippi.
Lawless, Frederick.
Lawless family.
Mississippi State College for Women.

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**Inventory**

**Box 1**

Folder

3. Christmas lighting contest, 1957

**Family financial records:**

5. Ledger: Athletic League, Industrial Institute and College, Columbus, Mississippi, 1912-1914.
10. Light List, Lower Mississippi River, 15th Lighthouse District, 1912 (2); notebook, 1909; notepad, 1924; small ledger, 1910, 1926-1927.

**Musical and theatrical materials:**

“Fun-Master Minstrel Budget No. 1”, 152 p., circa 1950s.
Programs, 1897-1951 and undated.
Programs, 1914-1954.
Personal papers: Notebooks, undated.
Registration of voters, Memphis, 22nd Ward, 1900.
School programs, 1896-1945. St. Mary’s Catholic School, Mississippi Industrial Institute and College.
Travel brochures, 1950s. (2)

Box 2
Photographs:
Lawless family, 1915, 1943 and undated.
Mississippi Industrial Institute and College/Mississippi State College for Women, 1914, 1918 and undated.
Miscellany, 1953 and undated.
Unidentified man in firefighter’s uniform, undated.
Sketch: 826 N. Second Street, Memphis.