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**University of Memphis Libraries  
Special Collections Department**

126 Ned R. McWhorter Library  
Memphis, TN 38152 - 3250  
Phone: (901) 678 - 2210  
E-mail: lib\_sc@memphis.edu

## **Katherine Lawless Compton papers**

**Title:** Katherine Lawless Compton papers  
**Collection No:** MSS.133  
**Extent:** 1.5 cubic feet  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1869-1977

**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.

**Processed by:** Kathryn S. Shockley, 1981; Gerald Chaudron, 2014, 2024.  
**Access:** Open to all researchers.  
**Language:** English  
**Preferred Citation:** Katherine Lawless Compton papers, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

**Publication date:** 2024 February

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## 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. 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.

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## 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 22.

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## 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.

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## Processing information

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

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.  
Women college students--Mississippi.

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## Inventory

### Box 1

#### Folder

- 1 Bickford Civic Club papers, 1951-1959.
- 2 Scrapbook: Bickford Civic Club, 1951-1956 and undated. Clippings, photographs.
- 3 Christmas lighting contest, 1957
- 4 Church brochures, 1905-1956.  
Family financial records:
  - 5 Ledger: Athletic League, Industrial Institute and College, Columbus, Mississippi, 1912-1914.
  - 6 Receipts, 1875-1968.
  - 7 Tax and other receipts, 1899-1959.
  - 8 Receipts, bank statements, 1899-1959.
  - 9 Tax and other receipts, 1877-1977.
  - 10 Light List, Lower Mississippi River, 15<sup>th</sup> Lighthouse District, 1912 (2); notebook, 1909; notepad, 1924; small ledger, 1910, 1926-1927.
  - 11 "Outline, Judge J.P. Young's History of Memphis", undated (photocopy).  
Musical and theatrical materials:
    - 12 Scripts and other materials, 1931 and undated.
    - 13 "Fun-Master Minstrel Budget No. 1", 152 p., circa 1950s.
    - 14 Programs, 1897-1951 and undated.
    - 15 Programs, 1914-1954.
    - 16 Personal papers, 1917-1958.

- 17 Personal papers: Notebooks, undated.
- 18 Registration of voters, Memphis, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, 1900.
- 19 School programs, 1896-1945. St. Mary's Catholic School, Mississippi Industrial Institute and College.
- 20 Travel brochures, 1950s. (2)
- 21 United States Inspectors' License to Pilots, John J. Lawless, Jr., 1913 December  
1. Licensed for 5 years to pilot steam vessels on the Mississippi River between Vicksburg, Miss., and Hales Point, Tenn.
- 22 Record of conversation with Mrs. Katherine Compton by Eleanor McKay, Memphis State University Libraries, and Lou Gruenberg re: Burkle House and her family, November 1, 1977.

**Box 2**

Photographs:

- 1 Lawless family, 1915, 1943 and undated.
- 2 Mississippi Industrial Institute and College/Mississippi State College for Women, 1914, 1918 and undated.
- 3 Miscellany, 1953 and undated.