

WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

The Scrapbook of Emery Mack Bell: A window to WWI life



PHOTO PROVIDED A photo of the Seminary from the year Bell graduated that was included in her scrapbook.

The history of Lycoming County women appears in unexpected places. Perusing World War I items at a Baltimore flea market, Erich Marschner discovered a scrapbook of a student who was attending Williamsport Dickinson Seminary during the war.

He

was intrigued not only by the scrapbook's descriptions of war events, but also about the day-to-day life of its author, Emery Mack "*Pete*" Bell, an enthusiastic student with a keen sense of humor. Marschner bought the scrapbook for \$25, hoping to return it to some of Bell's descendants, but when that proved impossible, he donated the book to the archives at Lycoming College.

Emery Bell

Emery Mack "*Pete*" Bell (1898-1960) was born in Easton, Pa., the daughter of John and Claudia Kitchen Bell. Her father and grandfather were Methodist ministers, and her father graduated from Lafayette College.

Although Bell attended the Seminary after high school, correspondence between her father, "*Brother Bell*," and the school president, Benjamín Conner, tells us that as early as 1913, she traveled by train from her home in Watsontown to the Seminary on Saturdays to take violin lessons, which cost \$1 apiece.



PHOTO PROVIDED A photo from Bell's scrapbook.

Bell's memory book captures not just current events, but school rules, details of musical and theater productions, glimpses of life in Williamsport, and mementos from social occasions.

Bell earned good grades during her time at the Seminary — one semester collected in the scrapbook showed Psychology A, Bible A, Piano B, Violin A, Harmony B, Music History A, Deportment, A. A math test on which she got a B has her note on the bottom: *"These look very simple — but believe me they are not."*

The Belles Lettres Literary Society for young ladies was an important part of Bell's social life. The girls sang victory songs before competing against their male rivals the Gammas. For example, the scrapbook reports how before a debate, the girls set their chant *"We'll give the Gammas one good fight. We'll pay up every debt"* to the melody of *"Auld Lang Syn."*

During Bell's junior year, her father was invited to address the students at chapel. The school newspaper describes the subject as *"The glory of a young man is his strength"* and says it was *"instructive, inspiring, and practicable."* Perhaps the students sang the Williamsport Dickinson Seminary student prayer found in the scrapbook: *"Help us to meet each daily task. And strive till we have won. Then shall we glorify thy name, and honor Dickinson."*

Programs from campus concerts and theatrical performers fill the memory book. Bell played the violin and performed in plays, as well as contributing to the school newspaper and holding offices in clubs. Her newspaper article *"The Aristocrat and the Democrat"* defines the different types of aristocracy and compares them to democracy.



PHOTO PROVIDED A photo of Emery Mack Bell from Lycoming College's archives.

Bell included a mimeographed announcement from the school that informed senior girls of their privileges. They could skip breakfast, gain shopping privileges and be on the upper campus any time of day. Seniors could also play tennis with the boys during the day and use the bowling alley with other girls as long as there was a chaperone.

No item seems too small to be included: the remnants from a candy wrapper given to her by a classmate when she was very hungry, her baby comb, flowers now dried beyond recognition from various occasions and some straw *“as a reminder of our wild ride, Friday evening, March 22, 1918.”*

Life in

Williamsport

Bell took advantage of her life in Williamsport. She dined at tea rooms, one of which was represented by a newspaper clipping advertising the Vogue Tea Room located Over 41 W Fourth St. that offered *“a dainty luncheon any time after 11 a.m.”* Perhaps too dainty to satisfy young people, because there was also a special serving of waffles for seminary students between 4 and 5 p.m. on Wednesdays. She included church bulletins and movie tickets, and notes from lectures, such as one

she termed “*wonderful*” by Bishop Hughes titled “*The Autobiography of a Boy*,” held at a conference in Newberry.

World War I is woven into the entire 55-page scrapbook. The first page has a copy of The Pledge of Allegiance, and there are various clippings with reminders such as “*Hush, little thrift stamp, don’t you cry, you’ll be a war bond by and by.*” A program from a play in Watsontown notes that the ticket profits will support the Red Cross.

There are many references to the Kaiser in writings and poems clipped from various sources. One article said that even ministers had run out of words to illustrate the evil character of the German emperor. A poem titled “*Hymn of Hate*” includes the lines “*My Tuesdays are meatless, my coffee is sweetless, my stockings are feetless, how I do hate the Kaiser.*” Another undated newspaper article states that the Kaiser is Darwin’s missing link because he represents a cross between the devil and a boa constrictor.

In 1918, Bell graduated from the Seminary with a degree in instrumental music with expertise that allowed her to step in when a touring Russian violinist did not arrive for his concert. An alumni news column mentions Bell returning to visit campus after graduation, but the scrapbook leaves many mysteries. We may never know why students referred to her as “*Pete*” or why the campus newspaper, when giving tribute to the graduating seniors, mentioned that students will miss Bell’s “*social-holding propensities.*”

From the 1920 Census, we know Bell worked as a stenographer at a peanut factory in Bradford, Pa. Her father had accepted a church appointment there during her time at the Seminary. The Bradford newspaper mentions her being active in the local Methodist church as well as playing the violin at community functions. Bell died in Longmeadow, Mass., where her sister lived. Her obituary, published in the Sunbury Daily Item on March 17, 1960, states that she graduated from the Churchman Business School in Easton, Pa., in 1919, and later worked for a real estate company in Longmeadow. Bell is buried in a family plot in Easton.

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