

— hidden — HISTORY

SCRAPBOOK SOUVENIRS

By Amy Ensley

The scrapbook belonging to Carolyn Townsend '20 holds everything from a tiny folded piece of paper labeled “The day I forgot to go to German class” to a chicken’s wishbone tied to a red ribbon.

Unfolded, the paper reveals a permission slip allowing Townsend to return to class after being summoned to the dean’s office. The wishbone, glued to a page documenting the election of Woodrow Wilson on Nov. 9, 1916, is from a campus “spread” on election night. Townsend noted in the scrapbook: “Wild excitement about the election. Menu is roast chicken and cake. We ate every scrap and even took the bones for souvenirs.”

The scrapbook is one of more than 75 alumnae scrapbooks housed in the C. Elizabeth Boyd '33 Archives at the Hankey Center. These student memory books, with their vast visual record dating to the 1880s, are miniature archives of students’ time at Wilson.

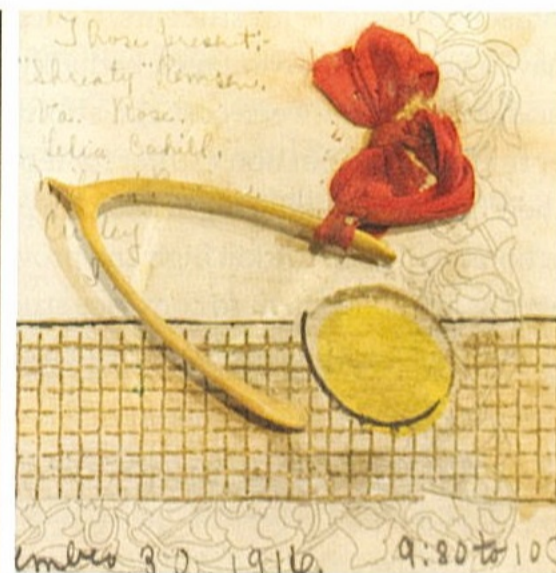
Scrapbooks gained popularity during the Victorian era. Improvements in printing methods and lithography at that time created increasing quantities of ephemera—paper items not meant to last beyond the short-term purpose of announcing an event or keeping score in a card game. Wilson scrapbooks are full of lovely lithographed dance cards, bridge card tallies and greeting cards, along with programs from campus music recitals, plays and dances. Townsend’s includes a tiny picture book from a silent movie shown in Chambersburg.

Eventually, scrapbooks evolved from homemade collections of hand-bound pages to beautifully decorated commercial versions designed for the college student. Townsend’s memory book, a classic example of a commercially available scrapbook, was printed in 1910 by the Frederick A. Stokes Co. of New York. Entitled “My School Days,” its pages divide the details of college life into categories, including sororities, athletics, theatricals, prizes and “Men I Have Met.”

Also included are designated pages for “Class Suppers, Spreads, Etc.” Spreads refer to the common practice of sharing food sent from home with close friends in one’s dorm room, usually late at night. Townsend details several of these, listing the food items and the guests—among them, Margaret Disert '20.

The items collected and preserved show a different side of life at Wilson beyond the posed portraits taken for the yearbook. While Townsend’s book contains relatively few photos, other early scrapbooks in the collection contain rare candid photos revealing playful scenes of students enjoying life.

A study of the entire scrapbook collection illustrates how leisure changed over time. Students spent a significant amount of time during the 1920s playing cards and writing plays, which they then



This chicken wishbone (above) was included in a college scrapbook (left) made by Carolyn Townsend '20.

PHOTOS BY KENDRA TIDD

performed. They attended events in Chambersburg and Gettysburg with regularity. There were a few organized dances with men from other colleges, but not nearly the number that became common in the 1950s.

Scrapbooks are a blend of student memory with the cultural context of the time and place. They reveal the aspects of Wilson life important to many students, as well as the unique mementos precious to one individual. Including a wishbone.