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Bowling Green State University. Center for Archival Collections

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## Archival Chronicle

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August 2002: Volume 21, Number 2

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### Glimpses of Everyday Life



◀ *Children at the Dewese School in Weston Township of Wood County entertain themselves during a break from lessons in 1951. Gift of Dottie Zimmerman.*

Is history merely composed of the biographies of famous men and women? Even the greatest people must be understood in the context of their times. Today, historians try to learn about the everyday lives of ordinary people for the light their observations can shed on the "great events" in which they participated. Contemporary archeologists rarely work on finds as spectacular as King Tutankhamun's tomb, but rather on the sites of the homes and communities of average people.

Genealogists not satisfied with a simple list of names and dates usually want to go on to learn what their ancestors' lives were like. Many past issues of the *Archival Chronicle* have dealt with the subject—the homefront during wartime, or women's roles in their communities, for example. Researchers can gather information about daily life in Ohio in times past through the letters, diaries, manuscripts, and other resources available at the Center for Archival Collections. It is the accumulation of many small details taken from many resources that gives the most accurate picture.

Although people commonly believe that human characteristics remain the same through time, the details that make up daily life in times past are often surprisingly mysterious. College life is one example. Bowling Green State University student life today bears much superficial resemblance to college life of generations past, but there have been many changes since the founding. Students are amazed to learn about the restrictions on women's freedom of movement in earlier decades. As recently as the 1960s, women were required to be in their dormitories by 11:00 p.m. and to sign in and sign out when they were going out of town for a weekend. Dress codes prohibited everyone from wearing shorts and t-shirts in academic buildings such as the library. Still earlier, weekly chapel attendance was required of all students.

The Center for Archival Collections has many resources which allow researchers to put together a picture of student life through the years. Diaries and scrapbooks of individual students include the Esther Irene Brisbin Collection ([MS 98](#), covering 1918-1924), the Kathryn Ziegler Jeska Collection ([MS 352](#), covering 1936-1940), and the Mickey (Maxine) Campbell Welker Collection ([MS 704](#), beginning in 1941). The Women's League/Women's Self-Government Association/ Association of Women Students Records ([MS 660](#), covering 1918-1970) documents the activities of the organization which established rules of conduct and dress for all women students. These and related collections can be found through the [Education Bibliography](#) on the CAC's website.

*Dormitory life has been a part of the college experience for generations. Students in 1970, as today, display photos of family and friends and decorate their rooms to make them more homelike. University Archives Photograph Collection. ▶*



Contributing to the picture of life at BGSU are such University Archives holdings as the records of the Deans of Men and Women and the Vice President of Student Affairs, and student handbooks. *The Key* yearbook provides an annual snapshot of the faces and organizations that have passed through the University, but for a really in-depth look at student life, one of the best sources is *The BG News*. While researchers may find value in comparing diary entries to newspapers of the same date, much everyday detail can be gleaned by reading the editorial pages, day after day.

Both the editorials and the letters to the editor serve as barometers of student opinion and reflect the average student's view of current events, whether on international conflict or on the choice of the best band to play at an upcoming dance. Advertising that appears in the paper puts student life into the context of the wider American community in terms of popular fashions, pastimes, and aspirations.

Similar resources are available to those interested in the lives of earlier Ohioans. Most of the manuscript collections in the **Family Bibliography** provide a wealth of information about the daily activities of businessmen, farmers, housewives, and educators for nearly the last two hundred years. Some collections which are especially noteworthy include the William H. Gorrill Papers (**MS 446**) which provide documentation on Wood County, and travels through the West, and life on the west coast during the 1850s through the mid 1870s; the William C. Holgate Diaries (**MS 335**), which contain information on local events as well as those of national importance and describe travels all around the nation during the nineteenth century. The George and Myrtle Phillips Collection (**MS 377**) covers the years 1844-1976 in the lives of an African-American Ohio family. The O. B. Workman Papers (**MS 19**) include historical sketches of the Paulding County area. The strength of this collection is in the the photographs and sound recordings which include interviews with long-time county residents about rural life, industry, and social life of the Black Swamp region. The CAC also has a growing collection of military-related materials which describe soldier's lives in many time periods through their letters and diaries. See the bibliography, **The U. S. in Wartime** for examples. Military and pension records further document the lives of soldiers, veterans, and their families.

*Young couples with children are often cramped for space. This family lived in married student housing at BGSU shortly after World War II. University Archives Photograph Collection. ▶*



Women are also well represented in their diaries and correspondence and are good sources for domestic details. Letter-writing often figured among their chores, keeping their own families in touch with parents and cousins far away. Like the men, they also recorded political events and opinions of the day. The Hill/Morgan Family Collection (**MS 190**) is just one example of a typical Ohio family. Collections which focus more specifically on women's lives can be found in the **Women's Studies Bibliography**. Children's lives are documented through parents' and teachers' diaries and letters.

Photographs are a very tangible way of looking at the past.

The CAC has many collections composed primarily of photographs. See our [Photograph Bibliography](#) for examples. Again, newspapers are valuable resources, used issue after issue. Although 19th century publications often lack the editorials and letters columns we are familiar with today, the "social news," advertisements, and legal announcements provide a context for the manuscripts of individuals. Court records in each county record disputes within the community and their resolution. Probate Court records and other estate records are especially valuable for the details provided in wills or inventories of estate property.

The best way to get a good picture of everyday life, however, is to use as many sources as possible and to read as much as is available in each source. Omissions are common, even when an event looms large. After months of longing for war to end, soldiers' diaries often neglect to mention when it does and how they feel about it. Details of battle are glossed over, if they are present at all. Women who mention shopping for and sewing special dresses fail to state that they are preparing for their weddings. The weddings are not described and the only change seems to be that they are living somewhere else. A teacher who has faithfully recorded daily school attendance ranging from eighteen to thirty students over the course of the term simply mentions that over fifty students arrived at school one day, but doesn't say how she coped alone. Many of the details researchers would most like to know often are not discussed at all. Standards of propriety sometimes prevent writers from discussing the delicate topics of childbirth, suicide, or domestic troubles. Common knowledge is usually not recorded—for example, details of building construction or doing the laundry. Newspapers, periodicals, textbooks, housekeeping manuals, and even period novels can capture much of this information.

Learning about what everyday life was like years ago is a fascinating pursuit, richly rewarding for those patient enough to put the clues together from a wealth of available sources.

—Lee N. McLaird

#### Famous Fakes: *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, December 7, 1941

Holding an original newspaper reporting a major world event is like holding a piece of the event itself. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew the United States into World War II, changing the course of history and the lives of every American since that time. It is not surprising that people treasure copies of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* for December 7, 1941. The *Star-Bulletin's* current editor and publisher, John Flanagan, noted humorously in "Who Wants Yesterday's Newspaper? People Want to Know" (see: [To Our Readers](#)) that people frequently inquire about the value of the newspaper. One such letter said "What I have here is a 1941 *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* 1st Extra newspaper. I have the hole thing, the hole newspaper, and its in a great shape (sic). So anyways, how much (is) something (like) that maybe worth?" Flanagan's response? "It's worth exactly what somebody is willing to pay."

Flanagan commented that "We're told reprints of the famous *Star-Bulletin* WAR Extra are still bestsellers at the Arizona Memorial. They are also available in hotel gift shops all over Hawaii and tens of thousands of the keepsakes have been sold over the decades."

There were apparently three "Extras" printed on December 7, 1941, and at least three reprint versions of the edition are known to exist. Is your copy an original or a reprint? If your newspaper matches any of the following descriptions it is probably a reprint:

About a week after the bombing, the *Star-Bulletin* reprinted the last several days' front pages as an insert. This version was the one that many servicemen who were in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack bought as souvenirs. On the front page in the upper right hand corner there is a large "1st Extra." The same large number in sequence with "Extra" was used in the upper right hand corner of the second and third pages.

A later eight-page reprint has the large number with "Extra" on the first and third pages, while the second page contains war news. Pages four to six focus on war news and photos. A tag in the bottom margin of page six reads: "Printed and Distributed in Hawaii by Pacific Film Corporation, 1649 Kalakaua Avenue, Honolulu." Page seven is a replica of the December 8, 1941 edition with the headline "Saboteurs Land Here." "Flash Bulletins" appear on page eight.

A ten page reprint was produced with the first and third pages again having the large page numbers with "Extra." Page two contains war news and pages six to ten have news stories and photos. A tag in the bottom margin on page six reads: "Copies Available Thru Fleet Reserve Association Branch 46, P.O. Box 6067, Honolulu, Hawaii 96818." The zip code dates this reprint to after 1962.

Thanks to all these reprints, many people believe that they have various pages from different editions.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor is of abiding interest to Americans, and the newspaper documenting the event will be cherished by generations to come. But don't offer it to the *Star-Bulletin*. They already have copies.

—Eric Honneffer