



## THOMAS & KATHERINE DETRE LIBRARY & ARCHIVES TREASURES

By Suzanne Gilliland and John Paul Deley

### The Bits and Pieces of Memory

Pittsburghers seeking to create contemporary documentation of their lives often post to social media tools like Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. Before the advent of digital dissemination, individuals clipped articles and trimmed mementos, then amassed them in bound volumes called scrapbooks. These ephemeral bits and pieces (and the dedication with which they were tucked, taped, folded, and fixed onto the pages) reveal what collectors found meaningful, and represent their whims, tastes, interests, and priorities.

With more than 1,000 scrapbooks in over 300 collections, the History Center's Detre Library & Archives has a unique cache of materials that volunteer Ms. Suzanne Gilliland has commenced inventorying. These scrapbooks contain photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, ribbons, badges, pressed flowers, menus, sports programs, theatre ticket stubs, matchbook covers, pamphlets, documents, and other assorted items on thousands of local, regional, national, and international subjects. Regrettably, the wide array of material formats and the multi-media approach to fastening them to pages often create special preservation challenges for archivists. Many scrapbooks are stained, brittle, bulging, and



The inside of the scrapbook belonging to Josephine E. Lee, which was completed when she was a child.

HHC Detre L&A, Josephine E. Lee Collection, MFF 2948.

lacking bindings. Whatever the condition, scrapbooks strengthen our connection to the aesthetic, artistic, and intellectual perspective of the creator.

One example of a scrapbook that contains a distinctive arrangement of materials was put together by Josephine E. Lee when she was a child. Ms. Lee glued trade cards, calling cards, holy cards, greeting cards, advertisements, cutouts, and other clippings that provide examples of her floral tastes, fashion trends, and the fantasies of a young adolescent at the turn of the century. Although seemingly miscellaneous, the creator took the time to gather an assortment of artifacts that spoke to her sense of identity and meaning, and created a record that can be used to obtain a better understanding of social customs, marketing techniques, and visual sensibilities.

Prominent Pittsburgh gentlemen were

scrapbook makers as well, as illustrated by Dr. Thomas S. Arbuthnot, former dean of the University of Pittsburgh Medical School and president of Children's Hospital (1927-1947). Dr. Arbuthnot had an interest in scholastic baseball, the Pittsburgh Symphony, and big game hunting. He spoke of his adventures frequently throughout Allegheny County and documented his exploits in photographs of African hunts with his trophies. He included pictures of his home "Old Orchard" on Fifth Avenue, sports programs, mementos of his school days, and activities associated with his civic interests.

Scrapbooks were also assembled by groups, as in the case of the Jewish Home for Babies and Children (scrapbook spanning 1935 to 1943). This book contains photographs, clippings, programs, ticket stubs, invitations, telegrams, postcards, and correspondence that recount group administration, its

fundraising activities, its membership, and the programs it ran to support its mission including card parties, garden parties, fashion shows, dances, and luncheons.

Although the Detre Library & Archives has more than 1,000 scrapbooks, the finding aids provide general access. Ms. Gilliland's project is designed to enhance locating details on local topics, and involves creating a database of all scrapbooks and attaching searchable key words. She is also evaluating the condition of volumes and making recommendations to staff members, who can then take action on cataloging, storage, and treatment priorities. The Detre Library & Archives keeps scrapbooks intact in order to retain their original integrity and has eight pre-1800 scrapbooks and over 120 from the 19th century. More than 150 scrapbooks were created by individuals, 49 by families, and over 140 by civic groups, companies, or schools. Reflecting the period in which they were assembled, scrapbooks are rich sources for capturing the ephemera that is often considered expendable. They reveal the private and personal tastes of the individuals and associations who chose and edited their content.

**Suzanne Gilliland** is a volunteer in the Detre Library & Archives and **John Paul Deley** is the Director of Library & Archives.



**Above:**  
Josephine E. Lee's scrapbooks.  
HHC Detre L&A, Josephine E. Lee Collection, MFF 2948.

**Left:**  
On the right side of the page in the middle is the family home called "Old Orchard," from the Arbuthnot scrapbook.  
HHC Detre L&A, Arbuthnot Family Papers, MSS 0115.