

DANCE CARDS, 1903-1935, 1946

Series 31/6/52

Box 1-2 (card-file boxes)

History

In the first decades of the twentieth century, formal dances comprised a significant component of the social life of Northwestern University students. Behavior at these formals followed relatively strict rules of etiquette. Gentlemen could solicit dances from any of the young ladies present; however, the young women were allowed the privilege to either accept or decline any solicitations they wish. Once a gentleman's request was accepted, however, the young lady had to honor her promise. To keep track of her engagements, the woman recorded the name of her promised partner in her dance card. These small booklets, usually attached to a cord she could wear on her wrist, listed the evening's scheduled program with a space next to each dance where the partner's name could be pencilled in. Young men also carried dance cards.

Although the dance cards served the practical purpose of reminding the dancers of their schedule, they were also a decorative souvenir of the event. The covers were fabricated from paper, cardboard, leatherette, wood, metal, or celluloid. Hand-decorated or printed, embossed or otherwise embellished with the logo of the organization, the cards reflect the prevailing styles of the era. Although the cards very seldom show the names of the women who carried them, they furnish useful information about student activities and dance trends and document a social form that endured over the course of several decades.

Description

This collection consists of dance cards from events spanning the years 1903 to 1935. The cards are separated according to the particular sponsor student organization for a given dance. The majority of dance sponsors were fraternities and sororities. However, there are also dance cards from Sophomore, Junior, and Senior Prom in addition to other student organizations. The organizations are then arranged alphabetically and for each separate organization the dance cards are arranged chronologically. If only one card exists for a particular event, it is filed in the general file for that letter of the alphabet. There are a few duplications of events.

The cards show the name of the organization, the date and location of the dance. Some cards list the dances by name, while others provide just the number of each dance. Other information revealed by the cards includes mottoes, song lyrics, and names of committee members. Most of the cards have retained their cords, but only one or two still have their pencils attached.

Oversize dance cards are contained in a separate folder on top of the cards in Box 2. This folder also contains a small card, apparently used by dance chaperones, to discreetly distribute to immodest dancers as a warning.

Provenance: This collection is comprised of two accessions: a collection of dance cards transferred from the Evanston Historical Society as part of Accession #99-60 in March 1999, and dance cards boxed as Accession #74-30, from the University Archives' holdings.

Restrictions: None.

Separations: A few items and cards not related to Northwestern University events were separated and returned to the Evanston Historical Society.

Processor: Kate Mazurek, May 11, 1999.

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Additions: 1922-1946

Five dance cards were added to the collection. These included three card from dances given by Phi Mu Delta, one dance card from a Naval ROTC and V-12 Unit dance held in 1946, and one undated, unidentified card (filed as “General”).

Provenance: These dance cards were separated from Accession #06-173 in November, 2006.

Restrictions: None.

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Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Span Dates</u>
1	Inventory	
	A: General	1908-1933, n.d.
	Alpha Chi Omega	1909-1912
	Athletics	1912, n.d.
	Beta Phi Delta	1909-1913
	Chapin	1911
	Chi Omega	1904-1933, n.d.
	Commerce Club	1933-1935
	Delta Delta Delta	1910
	Delta Gamma	1909-1911
	Delta Kappa Phi	1903-1912
	Delta Sigma Delta	1914
	Delta Sigma Phi	1909-1911
	Delta Tau Delta	1909-1921, n.d.
	Eclectic Ball	1910
	Holiday	1909-1934
	I: General	1911, 1917
2	Junior Prom	1910-1920
	Kappa Alpha Theta	1908
	Kappa Delta	1908-1911
	Kappa Kappa Gamma	1909
	McKinlock Campus Prom	1934
	Military Ball	1923-1931
	Naval ROTC and V-12	1946
	Neatawhanta	1908
	P: General	1908-1929
	Phi Alpha Delta	1911-1912
	Phi Delta Theta	1908-1910
	Phi Mu Delta	1923-1925
	Pi Beta Phi	1919-1921
	S: General	1913-1919
	Senior Prom	1912-1935
	Sigma Alpha Epsilon	1910-1911
	Sigma Chi	1911-1912
	Sophomore Hop	1919-1922
	Teddy Bear Club	1909-1910
	Utopia Club	1910
Zeta Pi Sigma	n.d.	
	Oversize cards	1910-1911, n.d.