

Long-lost yearbooks hold clues to times past

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A box containing 111-year-old Jambalaya yearbooks was recently discovered in the attic of the Bea Field Alumni House on the uptown campus. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A cardboard box containing several vintage Tulane University yearbooks lay tucked away in the attic of the [Bea Field Alumni House](#) on the uptown campus before being discovered recently during a maintenance check of the building.

The books are not one of a kind as there are other copies in existence within Howard-Tilton Memorial Library and within the alumni house's personal collection. The yearbooks, named for the famed local cuisine "Jambalaya" are also available online via the [Tulane University Archives Digital Collections](#).

Still, there is something mysterious about a finding like this. To whom did they belong? How long ago were they stored away?

So far, one thing is known. It was Barbara Cooper, special assistant to the vice president of Tulane Alumni Relations, who made the discovery and carried the books from the attic 111 years after the oldest book was printed.

“I was up in our attic with a maintenance worker when I came across them,” said Cooper. “I knew what a find they were, so I brought them down to take a look at them. The books are in bad shape and need to be preserved.”

A closer look at the oldest book in the box— dated 1906 — reveals an inscription that offers a clue: “Presented by Mrs. JVN Talmage.” It is handwritten in cursive letters inside the book, which has yellowed pages and a tattered spine.

The leather cover remains flexible. The book’s smell is distinct. The pages are brittle.

Photographs are either taped or glued inside, unlike the printed photo pages used today.

So, who is Mrs. Talmage? And to whom was she presenting the book?

University records show that Mrs. JVN Talmage is actually the late Eliza Emerson Talmage, a 1906 Newcomb College graduate who received a bachelor of arts degree in liberal arts. Her husband, JVN, is the late John Van Neste Talmage, a 1907 graduate of the Tulane School of Engineering, who majored in mechanical and electrical engineering.

Both have since passed away — Eliza in 1962 and John Van Neste in 1964 — and there isn’t much remaining that we know. However, at the time of their son John Edward Talmage’s death at age 94, his obituary notes that he was born to parents who were “Presbyterian missionaries” — another small clue about the lives of two people who possibly met and fell in love at Tulane a long time ago.

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