

Western College focus of book

Local woman put together book about the school.

By Bob Ratterman
Contributing Writer

OXFORD — If a picture is worth a thousand words, the recently-published book by local author and archivist Jacky Johnson is a treasure trove of the history of Western College.

Her latest effort, “Western College for Women,” was published April 21 and includes more than 200 images tracing the history of the college, which is now part of Miami University but started as an institution for the higher education of women.

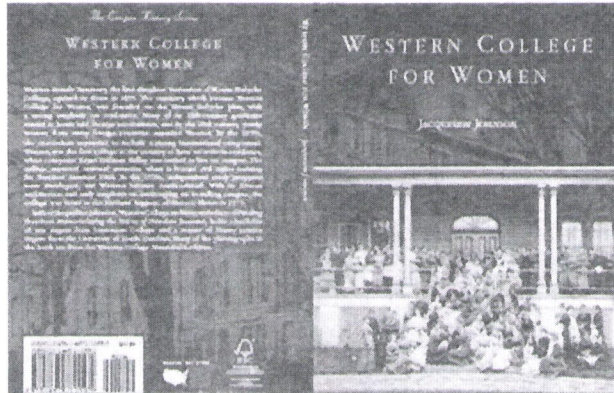
The book is the latest in the “Campus History” series by Arcadia Publishing.

“I aimed to create a pictorial history that captured the essence of the school that will appeal to alumni and former faculty as well as those interested in the history of private women’s colleges,” Johnson said.

As the archivist of the Western College Memorial Archives since 2005, Johnson used her access to many historic photographs for this project but went outside to private collections to complete the story.

Johnson said about half the photos were from other sources, often tracked down because she wanted one to illustrate a certain part of the college’s history.

“There was a lot of international travel. Western was known for that. The picture of international



Local author and archivist Jacky Johnson's nbook, “Western College for Women”, was published in April. CONTRIBUTED

travel (in the book) is neat,” she said. “It is a picture of a group meeting King Hussein of Jordan not seen before. A group had a chance to meet him on a trip to Jordan in 1960.”

She wanted to include a photograph of Narka Nelson, who wrote a book on Western College history, now referred to as “The Bible” on the subject of Western.

“It was difficult finding a picture of her. It took a while,” Johnson said.

Two other people needed to be included and it took Johnson some time and research to locate pictures of them. One was former Western College trustee Richard Ernst, for whom the outdoor theater is named; and Mary Lyon, who was the mentor of Helen Peabody. Lyon was at Mount Holyoke, which founded The Western College for Women, and when she located a picture she had to obtain permission for its use from Mount Holyoke.

Western Female Seminary, the first daughter institution of Mount Holyoke College, opened its

doors in 1855. The seminary, which became Western College for Women, was founded on the Mount Holyoke plan, with a strong emphasis on academics. Johnson’s book follows the path of the college from its founding until its merge with Miami University in 1974. The book illustrates the students, leadership, buildings and activities of the college over a 125-year period.

Actual work on the book took two years but the process was really much longer, Johnson said.

“When I would see an interesting photograph, I would say, “That would be a good photograph for a book,”” she said.

In the foreword written by Curtis W. Ellison, a former Dean of the Western College program, Ellison recounts an alumna explaining Western as “a place to prepare to go out into the world and do good.”

The book is available at Western College Alumnae Association website, at the Miami University Bookstore and Follett’s Coop.