



The Founding of the Ceramic League of Miami



Archive and Library Committee

Program

6:00 to 7:00 Silent Auction

Check in/name tags – 2 people

Appetizers

Reception/Name tags – 2 people

7:00 to 7:30 Opening Remarks - Nan

Program – Comm Cohen-Higgins – CLM resolution

James - History of the organization

7:30 to 9:00 Dinner/Music

9:00 Cake/Coffee

9:30 Silent Auction closes/purchases to be completed on Square

10:00 Good Night!

The Exhibit That Started It

A Modest Room and Big Dreams

There was a time—long before kilns hummed steadily and shelves brimmed with student work—when ceramics in Miami lived inside a single bare room at Lindsey Hopkins Vocational School, affectionately known as *Tech High*. There were no sinks, barely a bucket of water, and certainly no guarantee that clay creations would survive the journey down the hallway.

What *was* abundant was enthusiasm. Students from all walks of life gathered there, united by curiosity and a shared love for making things with their hands. From teenagers to retirees, from Miami locals to newcomers from distant countries, the classroom became a melting pot of creativity.

At the center of it all stood **Josephine “Jo” DeVille**, a beloved teacher whose humor, patience, and boundless encouragement convinced people not only that they *could* make something beautiful—but that they *should*. Her classroom became a community long before anyone considered forming an organization.



The Big Idea: “Let’s Put on a Show!”

By 1949, Jo and her growing group of ceramic devotees felt it was time to show Miami what was happening in that little room. No one was quite sure if Miami had ever seen a true all-ceramic exhibition—but they decided to make one anyway.

With Jo guiding from the sidelines, student and volunteer **Helen Steele** stepped up as the general chairman. A flock of willing classmates quickly formed committees: staging, judging, hospitality, publicity—if it could be named, someone volunteered to do it.



Their headquarters?

The school library, where tables, shadow boxes, and borrowed palms transformed the space into a tropical art showcase.

Their tools?

Posterboard, gummed brown tape, mimeographed postcards, and sheer determination.

Their goal?

To show Miami what clay could become—and maybe to justify a little more classroom space while they were at it.

The Exhibit That Shaped a Legacy

The **1949 Ceramic Exhibit**, held April 21 and 22, was a smashing success. Over **1,500 visitors** streamed through the doors in just

two days. Newspapers covered it, local radio hosts chatted about it, and visitors lined up to register for ceramic classes—more than **200 new sign-ups**, an astonishing number.

Judges praised the quality of the work, awarding 67 ribbons in categories ranging from sculpture to functional ware. Students beamed, committees glowed with pride, and Jo quietly watched as her once-tiny program blossomed into something none of them had anticipated.

And perhaps most importantly:

The community had formed.

People who had once been strangers now worked side by side—teaching, staging, creating, and encouraging one another.

The Momentum Builds

That exhibit, born from a bare classroom and a bold idea, created the foundation for what would soon become the **Ceramic League of Miami**.

The friendships forged during late nights of glazing, the confidence built through shared learning, and the joy of showing their work publicly convinced the group that they needed something more permanent—something that would nurture ceramics in Miami for generations.

And so, with the energy of that first major exhibit behind them, and the encouragement of Jo DeVille still echoing through their memories, they took the next step:

They founded a league.

The Ceramic League of Miami was born from that spark—a spark that began with a teacher, a classroom, and a group of people who simply loved working with clay.



The League Takes Shape

From a Living-Room Meeting to a Miami Arts Institution

On October 25, 1949, only months after the success of the Lindsey Hopkins ceramic exhibit, twenty-four women—students of Josephine “Jo” DeVille—gathered at the home of Juanita May. That evening, in a cheerful swirl of conversation, snacks, and excitement, they discussed the possibility of forming a ceramic league of their own.

They agreed on annual dues: **three dollars**, payable with optimism.

They agreed to brainstorm official names, to be voted on at the next meeting.

And they agreed on one thing above all: the energy sparked at Lindsey Hopkins needed a place to grow.

When they reconvened—this time back at the vocational school so Jo could attend—officers were elected, committees appointed, and the name “**The Ceramic League of Miami**” won the vote. It felt right. It felt real.

Foundations and Paperwork

The early months of the League were filled with spirited debate and practical decisions. Members met at the home of Edna McCoy to draft the organization's first bylaws, which were later approved by the membership. A Charter Committee was formed, and attorney H. H. Taylor prepared the legal documents.

On **May 25, 1950**, twenty-four women proudly signed the application for incorporation, officially becoming the League's first **Charter Members**. On **August 6, 1950**, Judge Marshall C. Wiseheart signed the charter, and a recorded copy was placed in the hands of the League's secretary. The Ceramic League of Miami had become a legal entity.

Fundraising the Fun Way

To raise money, members did what ceramic artists do best: they gathered, they hosted, they created, and they improvised.

- **Edna McCoy** offered the first fundraising party—a pot-luck luncheon during the Christmas holidays, complete with demonstrations and lively conversation. It raised a modest **\$10**, but lifted spirits enormously.
- The next event, hosted by **Sally Abele** and **Lu Strong**, included games, raffles, and a pair of hand-knitted argyle socks that brought in **\$9.50**—a fortune in sock-based fundraising. By the end of the afternoon, the League had raised **\$50**.
- A later luncheon at **Florence Taylor's** home featured fried chicken, punch, and a tour of her studio. Members shared insights, tips, and experiments—an early version of the “show and tell” sessions the League still loves today.

These gatherings became essential to the League's identity: social, supportive, creative, and always ready to laugh.

The League's First Exhibits

The League's very first public exhibit took place on **April 5–6, 1950** at the Miami Woman's Club during the Junior Woman's Club Bazaar. Under the leadership of Show Chairman



Frances Williams, Vice-Chairman **June Knouse**, and committee members—including Ruth Walker, Gola Wilson, Isobel Jones, Olive Hogan, Edna McCoy, and Constance Erickson—members displayed **248 ceramic pieces** on beautifully draped tables.

Sales were small, but the attention was significant, and the Show Committee gained invaluable experience.

Then came the next opportunity—one that put the League on the map.

The First Burdine's Show (May–June 1950)

Mrs. Lillian Sutton, Gift Buyer for Burdine's Department Store, invited the League to mount an exhibit in the store's auditorium. The show took place from **May 29–31, 1950**, and quickly proved so popular that Burdine's extended it through **June 1**.

The store's display department provided tables, fabrics, drapes, props, and printed name cards. Window display staff created a striking storefront exhibit featuring work by members such as Juanita May, Helen Steele, Kay Law, Maud Erk, Olive Hogan, Florence Taylor, Edna McCoy, Fran Williams, and June Knouse.

Nearly **900 pieces** were displayed—an astonishing number for such a young organization.

The show drew enormous public interest. Demonstrations on hand-building, pouring, and wheel-throwing drew crowds so tightly around the demonstrators that they could hardly move. Guest book signatures reached **850**, with many more visiting.

The press took notice too. The *Miami Herald* and *Miami Daily News* published glowing articles and photos, including a photograph of one of Edna McCoy's figurines. Miss Nell Bower, a columnist for the *Daily News*, praised the League's talent and predicted strong sales for Miami-made ceramics.

Burdine's executives were equally enthusiastic. At a special tea given for members and exhibitors on **June 5**, Vice-President Mr. Salverson and Merchandise Manager Mr. Baxter announced that the store wished to host **two League shows per year**. They even offered to dedicate a display table in their Gift Department exclusively for work by League members.

It was a major triumph for the young organization.



Building a Studio of Their Own

During the summer of 1950, Juanita May's mother offered a small outbuilding for use as a workshop. Though tiny, it held enormous promise. Under Workshop Chairman **June Knouse**, members planned renovations and spent **\$50** on materials—supplemented by generous volunteer labor from members and their families. By **December 12**, the little studio was ready. Members toured it with delight, proud to finally have a dedicated space for creativity and fellowship.

A Festive End to the Year

The year concluded with a warm and lively Christmas party at the home of Edna McCoy. Decorations, games, raffles, and gift-picking from a box of mystery packages set the tone. Charter members were surprised with printed membership cards—a gift from President Olive Hogan. A delicious buffet, bird recordings made by Mr. McCoy, and a display of Edna's beautiful ceramic pieces rounded out the celebration.

The party marked the end of a remarkable first full year for the League—one filled with exhibits, growth, creativity, new friendships, and a shared belief that ceramics mattered in Miami's artistic life.

And as 1950 drew to a close, the members knew one thing for certain:

They had built something real, something lasting — and that was just beginning.

CLM Founding Members

ADDENDA 1

FIRST BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1950.

JOSEPHINE DEVILLE
OLIVE HOGAN
HELEN STEELE
HARRIET VAUGHAN

JUANITA MAY
CONSTANCE ERICKSON
EDNA MCCOY
KAY LAW

FLORENCE TAYLOR

EXECUTIVE BOARD

JOSEPHINE DEVILLE
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CONSTANCE ERICKSON

EDNA MCCOY
KAY LAW

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2nd VICE-PRESIDENT - HARRIET VAUGHAN
RECORDING SECRETARY - KAY LAW
TREASURER - CONSTANCE ERICKSON
CORRESPONDING SECRETARY - FLORENCE D. TAYLOR
PARLIAMENTARIAN - JUANITA MAY

CHARTER MEMBERS.

Sally Abele	667 N. E. 105th Street, Miami, Fla.
Mary Calbeck	R. F. D. Route #3, Hollywood, Fla.
Ruth Conklin	2527 S. W. 9th St., Miami, Fla.
Josphine DeVille	330 S. W. 25th Avenue, Miami, Fla.
Constance Erickson	P.O.Box 2176, Hollywood, Fla.
Maud Erk	105 N. E. 107th St., Miami, Fla.
Olive Hogan	569 N. W. 101st St., Miami, Fla.
Isabel Jones	939 N. W. 81st St., Miami, Fla.
June Knouse	40 N. W. 83rd St., Miami 38, Fla.
Fred Lowe	93 N. E. 59th Terrace, Miami, Fla.
Mary McLaughlin	2970 S. W. 13th St., Miami, Fla.
Edna McCoy	901 N. E. 90th St., Miami, Fla.
Juanita May	7830 N. W. Miami Place, Miami, Fla.
Janice Mehrling	365 LaVilla Drive, Miami Springs, Fla
Katherine Nichols	320 S. W. 25th Avenue, Miami, Fla.
Erie Anna Ringey	175 N. W. 68th Terrace, Miami, Fla.
Helen Steele	239 S. W. 29th Road, Miami, Fla.
Lu Strong	751 N. E. 114th Street, Biscayne Park
Florence D. Taylor	803 E. Dilido Drive, Miami Beach 39, Fla
Harriet Vaughan	2420 S. W. 4th Street, Miami, 35, Fla
Ruth Walker	75 West 14th St., Hialeah, Fla.

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