

**THE CHICAGO
LITERARY
CLUB**

One Hundred Twenty-Five Years

1874-1999



CHICAGO : 2001

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Foreword

ONE hundred twenty-five years is a long time in the life of any organization—especially one like ours. Several years before the Chicago Literary Club reached this milestone, there was a growing sense among its members that the Club's one-hundred-twenty-fifth year had a special significance and that steps should be taken to arrange for an appropriate celebration. The first step came during the presidency of Francis A. Lackner, Jr. Early in his term, he arranged for the formation of an anniversary committee. The publication of this anniversary volume, five years later, marks the last official act of the committee.

The first meeting of the anniversary committee was held in November 1996. A month or so earlier, I had met for dinner with Dr. Orville T. Bailey to discuss plans for the anniversary year. Dr. Bailey had then been a member of the Club for thirty-five years. He had served as president during the 1975–76 season, presented ten papers (two at Ladies' Nights and two of which were published by the Club), and attended our meetings with an enviable regularity. He had also been a member of the centennial committee. Over the years, it had occurred to me more than once that, apart from his chosen profession of medicine, in which he had achieved national distinction, his principal interest was his membership in the Chicago Literary Club.

During our dinner that evening, it became clear how much Dr. Bailey wanted to be a part of our anniversary celebration. Unfortunately, his health had been failing in recent years, and he died three weeks short of the opening meeting of the anniversary year, having been made aware, however, through the committee's plans to honor him at that meeting, of the affection felt for him by the membership and their regard for his lifetime accomplishments and his contributions to the Club.

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At the outset, the committee decided that the anniversary celebration would be a year-long affair, that each weekly meeting would be a part of the celebration, and that five major anniversary evenings would be scheduled and held at outside venues. Committee member Anthony J. Batko took charge of planning the schedule of exercises for the anniversary year. The opening meeting was held October 5, 1998 at the Fortnightly of Chicago. The evening featured a brief ceremony honoring past presidents Orville Bailey and Elmer Gertz and concluded with a paper by John S. Broeksmit, Jr., the Club's anniversary-year president.

The next major-event evening was held January 11, 1999, at the Newberry Library. The Newberry has been the principal repository of the Club's papers and archival materials, and some of those materials were displayed for members and their guests at the meeting. The evening was dedicated to Herman H. Lackner, a past president of the Club, recording secretary for sixteen years, and a member from 1955 until his death on June 24, 1998. Following the dedicatory ceremony, past-president Roger E. Ball presented his paper, *A Literary Club for the New Millennium*.

The next major-event evening was held at the Fortnightly. In Chicago history, the Fortnightly of Chicago has been known as the sister organization to our own. Starting in 1996, in recognition of this relationship, our two clubs began to hold a yearly joint meeting. At the 1998 joint meeting, we helped the Fortnightly celebrate its own one-hundred-twenty-fifth anniversary. The following year, on March 6, the Fortnightly returned the favor. The Club's presenters that evening were past-president Anthony Batko and former Arthur Baer Fellow C. Anderson Hedberg.

On April 19, 1999, the Arthur Baer Fellowship Address was delivered at the Arts Club of Chicago, the first time that the address had been given at an outside venue. The Baer Fellow was Neil Harris, the well-known cultural historian, author, and professor of history at the University of Chicago. His address was titled *Chicago Magna*. The evening also featured dedicatory remarks in memory of Arthur Baer. One month later, on May 17, at a meeting at the Casino dedicated to Robert Collyer, the Club's first president, Leonard Reiffel presented the final paper of the anniversary season, *Turn Down an Empty Glass*. The meeting also included the unveiling of the restored portrait of Robert Collyer,

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which had been made possible by a gift from member David R. Vopatek in memory of Orville Bailey.

A significant addition to the anniversary year—one which the members seemed to look forward to with increasing interest as the year progressed—was the preparation of short biographical sketches of past members of the Club for reading at the weekly meetings. A total of twenty-seven such biographies were written and presented to the membership. All of them have been reproduced and included in this anniversary volume.

While the weekly meetings were the principal vehicle for the celebration of the Club's one-hundred-twenty-fifth year, the committee decided to undertake a number of other projects. One of these, made possible by the efforts of committee member Ralph Fujimoto, was the reprinting of five hundred copies of the centennial volume, *The First Hundred Years*. Copies were distributed to members who had joined the Club in the past ten years and are presently being distributed to all new members. A somewhat related project was the printing and distribution to members of a paper found in the Newberry archives that had been presented by Earle A. Shilton, a past president of the Club, at a meeting held in November 1960. Entitled *A Twenty-Minute History of the Chicago Literary Club*, it was intended by Shilton for the "younger members" of the Club, who were presumed to be less familiar with its history. Finally, the committee set about investigating the possible publication in a local newspaper or magazine of an article describing the Club and its proceedings. William E. Barnhart enthusiastically agreed to take on this assignment, and on March 14, 1999, his article about the Club appeared in the *Chicago Tribune Magazine*.

Two other projects were initiated by the committee. One was the restoration, referred to above, of the magnificent oil portrait of Robert Collyer that had been in the Club's possession for more than one hundred years. Painted in 1897 by New York artist Percival de Luce, it is an exact copy of a portrait executed by the artist in 1882, and thus depicts Collyer at the age of fifty-nine. The portrait had previously been restored at least once, in 1958. Because of forty or so subsequent years of nicks, scratches and one puncture, it was restored again, in time for the closing meeting that was dedicated to the memory of Collyer. The other project in-

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volved the Club's oak lectern that came from Collyer's first church in Chicago, about 1874. A gift from Collyer, the lectern had been dragged from venue to venue as the Club changed meeting places over the years, and had suffered numerous inexpert reworkings. It, too, was restored as part of the year's celebration.

Shortly after the committee was formed, several of its members, joined by Hubert R. Catchpole and John S. Wilson, made frequent visits to the Newberry Library to examine the papers on file as well as early Club archival materials. This effort not only resulted in uncovering substantial historical material for the anniversary year, but also provided the basis for correcting and updating our membership records and preparing an accurate list of literary exercises. In a real sense, it led to the publication of this anniversary-year volume. This effort also led to the establishment by committee member Manly W. Mumford of the Club's website, which carries membership information for the past one hundred twenty-five years as well as the full text of papers that are available in electronic form.

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On March 13, 1899, ninety-five members of the Chicago Literary Club met to celebrate the Club's twenty-fifth anniversary. William M. R. French, the first director of the Art Institute of Chicago, a position he held for nearly thirty years, gave a short address on his recollections of various events in the Club's history. Other members present that evening did the same, and letters from members who could not attend, including Robert Collyer, were read. The focus was distinctly on the past, and although the evening also provided those present with an opportunity to ponder the future, there is no indication that any of these ninety-five men did so. One wonders, had they been so inclined, whether any of them would have foreseen that our Monday-night meetings would continue for more than another hundred years and into the twenty-first century.

CLARK L. WAGNER
Chair, Anniversary Committee

February 2001

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