

1924-1946

WHEN Mr. Gookin laid down his pen in 1924 he had chronicled the birth of the Club, its formative years, and growth into maturity. Then came Payson Sibley Wild to Nestor's mantle, and he carried forward the account through the 20's, 30's, and into the mid-40's.

Wild was a worthy and competent successor to the first historian. He was the inevitable choice to prepare a second volume of the history, for after Gookin had served for forty years as Recording Secretary and Treasurer, Wild succeeded him in both posts and maintained the tradition for thirty years more. He was thus singularly equipped to recreate the life of the Club during this 22-year period. Indeed, as an historian, only modesty could have barred him from truthfully asserting that "all of this I saw; a part of this I was".

Wild's history is a leisurely stroll, season by season, through the Confident Years of the 20's, the Age of the Great Depression, the Gathering Storm of World War II, and into the Age of Anxiety, with the organization poised for new growth in its eighth decade. Though the worthy scribe duly notes these surging tides in the affairs of men, he more than once returns to the observation that the abiding amenity of the fraternity is the consolation and comfort it provides "amid the confused voices of the world's ignorance and sadness". Although during this period many papers addressed the complex social, economic, and political concerns of a modern state, Wild suggests that its members turned to the Club as an Ivory Tower, "leaving our sordid shoes at the door, (to) don the robes of the human spirit blithe, and give ourselves over for a brief hour to meditation on the finest and greatest things of our inheritance".

Indeed, of the more than six hundred papers given during this time, those most remembered largely derived from the academic

disciplines representative of a society of learned men: Literature, both classical and modern; History, ancient, medieval, and modern, including that of the Midwest and Chicago; Philosophy, Music, Art, and Architecture; and the learned professions with Law, Science, and Medicine in the forefront. Although there was no dearth of essays dealing with public affairs, personal reminiscences, and humor unadulterated, the solidly researched, soundly written disquisitions on topics of substance appear to have made the most lasting impressions.

The 51st season opened with a total of 253 members, of whom 182 were resident. Three individuals were designated as Associate Members, a category now absent from the By-Laws. The idea was conceived by Merrit Starr, an active and enthusiastic Clubman, to enhance the prestige of the organization by enrolling distinguished academics from distant parts. Only two papers ever resulted from this arrangement, and one of them was the work of Starr, whose interest was Italian literature, in collaboration with one of the scholars recruited as an Associate. It was entitled "Dante Six Hundred Years After" and was published by the Club.

In the fall of that 51st season an invitation was received from the Literary Club of Cincinnati to attend the celebration of its 75th anniversary. Edwin H. Lewis served as delegate and brought back the report that he had been "pleasantly entertained by a colorful group of amateur and semi-professional literati, men like ourselves, of education, eager to learn more of literature and science and practice the art of writing".

Of special interest to us today is that 1924 included a maiden paper by Ernst Wilfred Puttkammer, who, a half century after, is with us for the Centennial Year. His essay was entitled "The Most Commonplace Thing in the World" and was reread by request in 1945. Other highlights were Frank J. Loesch's "Personal Recollections of the Republican Convention of 1880" and the first of a series of three papers by Governor Horner, all of the same title, "Restless Ashes".

The season of 1925 saw a brilliant series of presentations by distinguished scholars and specialists: Paul Shorey, Professor of Greek at the University of Chicago; James Westfall Thompson, Professor of European History at Chicago and later at Berkeley; George H. Mead, Professor of Philosophy at Chicago; William E.

Dodd, historian and later President Roosevelt's Ambassador to Nazi Germany; Henry Justin Smith, Editor of the Chicago Daily News; and Sigmund Zeisler, the noted attorney, who contributed his "Reminiscences of the Anarchists' Case". Such men were not only learned but prolific as well, Thompson alone contributing a total of twenty-eight papers over the years.

Ladies' Night was announced thus: *Nox Dominarum Uxorum Virginum*. The Secretary adds a note: "If any apology for using a little Latin in a semi-public record is required, let it be said at that time Latin as a medium of linguistic exchange was still alive, though breathing heavily, whereas today it is in a triple state of coma, disfavor, and disrepute".

A word must be said of the speaker on that occasion, William McAndrew, a public school educator who was frequently at odds with the Chicago Board of Education. In the midst of a hot political fight he gave a paper provocatively entitled "Life Among the Boneheads", a garbled version of which appeared the following day in an afternoon newspaper. The Club President admonished the editor for having violated "the sacredness and intimate character of Club proceedings".

Two members, lost by death during the year, left singular records: Robert Todd Lincoln came into the Club in 1876 and remained a member for fifty years without attending a meeting. Denton Snider was active for thirty-seven years and, though he was a prolific writer with forty published volumes on almost as many subjects, he never contributed a Club paper.

Notable exercises of this era included Arthur J. Todd's "The Secularization of Domestic Relations: Nineteen Centuries of Church Versus Sex", characterized by Wild as a "sociological study of considerable import".

The spring of 1928 afforded a genuinely rare occasion, the single Club paper given by Roscoe Pound, "Another Side of British Criminal Justice". The great teacher of law became a member in 1910 and, although he was called away to head the Harvard Law School in 1916, he retained non-resident membership and interest until the end of his long and distinguished life.

In May of 1929 the Club, lured by the prospect of a much lower rental, and apprehensive of a possibly unfriendly change of man-

agement of the Fine Arts Building, moved to the Medical and Dental Arts Club, 185 North Wabash Avenue. That autumn of 1929 was a disaster—not only in the world of finance, but for the peace and serenity of our quiet brotherhood. “Cacaphony reigned . . . culinary clangor . . . disquieting applause from raucus rioters . . . deafening alarums of divers sorts . . . and unrestrained conversations of otologists, laryngologists, and various other votaries of Aesculapius.” By the opening of the 1930 season the brethren had fled back to sanctuary in the Fine Arts Building, “a case of quitting Bedlam for Beulah Land”.

Several noteworthy foregatherings took place in the 1934 season. The Sixtieth Anniversary was celebrated in April with a reading of the address delivered by President Collyer at the first Club Dinner in June of 1874. Book Night on December 10, 1934, competed on equal terms with a blizzard, but sixteen stalwarts appeared for the exercise.

The gathering of March 25, 1935 was held in the Physics Laboratory of the University of Chicago, the topic being “The Production and Use of Scientific Talking Pictures”, with examples of same. On April 29, 1935, the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Horace was observed on the 2000th consecutive meeting of the Club. One doubts that this was blind chance or left to coincidence, for the paper of the evening was “How Old Is Horace?” by Payson Wild. On March 11 of the same year a complimentary dinner was given by President Henry M. Wolfe in honor of the Club’s six octogenarian members: Mess’rs. John J. Glessner, George E. Dawson, Joseph Adams, Frank J. Loesch, Frederick W. Gookin, and Charles S. Cutting. All save Mr. Adams attended and actively participated in the exercise.

As previously mentioned, the thirst of the members for scholarship and sound learning did not exclude an awareness of the great social issues that swirled in the world outside. It was in this spirit of openness that the fellowship took cognizance of the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. A frequent site of Club dinners had been the Woman’s Club, which followed the rule of total aridity. At the close of the exercises on May 11, 1936, a resolution was offered to the effect that the Club consider holding its annual reunion at some place where the mem-

bers might drink in both knowledge and stronger waters than had previously been available. The record notes that the motion was resoundingly carried, *viva voce*.

Representative papers of the season included the inaugural essay of President George Burwell Utley, "An American Collector and His Bag", an account of the life of Edward E. Ayer, whose rare book collection is now in the Newberry Library; "Petronius" by Theodore A. Buenger; and "Zeitoun" by Percival Bailey.

Frederick William Gookin died on January 17, 1936. He was 83 years old, and had been a member for 59 years.

The first meeting in the fall of 1936 was at the University Club, with President Irwin Gilruth giving a dissertation on Kipling as "the last of the Victorians". Other high spots were a discussion of "The Railroad Problem" by ex-President of the Santa Fe Railroad, William B. Story; and an account of the author's experiences as a correspondent in the Spanish War of 1898 by Henry Barnett Chamberlain. Ladies' Night was a lively exercise, with Anton J. Carlson delivering a startling paper entitled "Black Oxen and Toggenburg Goats", a "prudery-shaming" exposé of the human rejuvenation fad then current. Wild notes that the lecture was enthusiastically received by the young in the audience, to whom the scientific facts were nothing new, but "with weaker approval by some of their elders, who were as yet not fully conditioned to the broadening dissemination of biological knowledge".

The Chicago Athletic Club was the site of the first dinner in October 1937, with President O. J. Laylander in the chair. The world groped its way from depression toward armed conflict as the Club began its 64th season. Henri David attracted a large attendance in November with his "Casanova", and in the same month Morris Fishbein, then editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association, unmasked "Modern Medical Charlatans". The final paper of the year was "Collectivism" by Billy E. Goetz, "a well-equalized and dramatic presentation of two opposite points of view".

Opening exercises in October 1938 were conducted against the background of Hitler's annexation of Austria and his march into Sudetenland. In this month Irving K. Pond read his 26th and last paper, "Do Children Think?" It was autobiographical, a careful

analysis of his own psychology and mental growth. At his death the following year he had been a member for 51 years. Other remarkable essays of the year were Bernadotte Schmitt's resume of the period "From Versailles to Munich", and Charles Megan's "Murder in the Tower", another look at the two little princes.

Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and the long night of World War II commenced. Notwithstanding, President Puttkammer launched the year with "Marshalls of Napoleon", Charles Reed followed with his 29th paper, "The Gossip of the Pines".

The disquieting season of 1940 opened with a diverting paper by President Harry S. Hyman, "Sour Grapes", which concluded that, despite the many attempts to rationalize old age, it seems probable that most men who give the matter serious thought find it difficult to be convinced deep down within that the so-called compensations of old age outweigh its deficiencies. Thomas C. McConnell read his first composition and subsequently recounted the true facts of how he ran to earth and brought to justice the infamous swindler John Factor (Jake the Barber).

In the fateful year of 1941 Douglass Pillinger presented his first paper, "Within Four Walls". Paul H. Douglas, later United States Senator, presented a study of Robert Owen as his first essay.

By 1942 the list of resident members had begun to be reduced by war service, and it was not until four years later that the rolls were returned to full strength. Joseph Adams, who joined the Club in 1876, died in 1943, having been a member for 67 years without writing a paper. The 70th Anniversary was observed quietly on March 13, 1944, with thoughts from Carey Croneis on "Science and the Future". George W. Gale came forward for the first time with his "Silver Creek", as did Meyer Kestnbaum with "Six Days Shalt Thou Labor", a look at organized labor. L. L. Thurstone, the constructor of psychological tests, made his bow in "Three Theories of Intelligence".

In May, 1945, it became imperative to find a new location after 36 years in the Fine Arts Building, and in June 1946 the Club moved to the John Crerar Library Building at 84 East Randolph Street. At this time there were 208 members, of whom 155 were resident.

In summarizing a season of long ago, Payson Wild used words that might well be employed to characterize these decades of the late middle period. Quoting Cicero, "Life is sustained by three things—food, drink, and the spirit; that is, the mind". Wild adds: "The Club has all three of these things, especially the *spiritus*, that mysterious quality without which a Literary Club would be but a collection of witless wights, alive but wholly non-noetic".

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