

THE CHICAGO
LITERARY
CLUB

1974-1989
Supplement
To
*The First Hundred
Years: 1874-1974*



CHICAGO: 1990

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THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB
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Introduction

The written history of The Chicago Literary Club has appeared in three volumes. The first, *The Chicago Literary Club: A History of Its First Fifty Years*, by Frederick William Gookin, was printed in 1926. Gookin, Secretary-Treasurer from 1880 to 1920 and President for 1921-22, wrote a narrative based on his own recollections and those of several other members.

In his Foreword Gookin wrote: "The account of the later years should, perhaps, be more full, but conspicuous happenings in these years have been comparatively few. They have been years marked chiefly by sustained interest on the part of the members, by the excellence of the literary feast provided at the meetings, by the steady maintenance of the spirit of fellowship between the members, and by the atmosphere that this has created and which has been a distinguishing feature of the club from its earliest days to the present time."

Gookin's enjoyable and well-illustrated text (the pictures include members and meeting rooms) concludes with four appendices: a list of the locations of Club meetings (these were held at the Union League Club as early as 1887; the University Club, 1892; and the Orchestra Building from 1906 to 1910); a list of officers; a roll of members; and a list of papers. The Lakeside Press printed 250 copies of this volume.

The second volume, by Payson Sibley Wild, was entitled *The Chicago Literary Club: Its History from the Season of 1924-1925 to the Season of 1945-1946* and it was printed in 1947. Wild had succeeded Gookin as Secretary-Treasurer in 1920 and served in that capacity until his death in 1951. Wild's 22-year history aimed "to review both outstanding and minor events as they appear in the written records" and "to honor the memory of our members who have died within [the] period; to laud the work of those whose contributions have been of significant value to the Club;

and to comment *ad libitum et amanter* on any or all matters that may seem to be worthy of note." This combination of annals, memorials, and anecdotes includes 13 portraits (the last being that of Mary Green, caretaker, guardian, and cateress for almost forty years) and three appendices which list officers, members, and papers for the period Wild covered. The Lakeside Press once again served as printer, producing 300 copies.

As the Club approached its centennial plans were developed to mark the event. Part of this celebration consisted of the third volume. A small advisory committee (Nathaniel Apter, Orville Bailey, and Herman Lackner), produced *The Chicago Literary Club: The First Hundred Years, 1874-1974*. This volume consists of three general chapters, five chronological sections covering the century, chapters on "Ladies Nights" and "The Centennial Year and After," and concludes with valuable appendices (compiled by Walker Davis and Herman Lackner) which bring together for the whole century lists of officers, members with papers read, and publications. Illustrations include portraits, the first meeting place, the bulletin board, and a selection of publications. The end papers show the Club's Charter and the Minutes of the first meeting. The Lakeside Press printed 450 copies of this optimistically-titled history and reference work.

The centennial volume in its appendices brings the Club's records up through January, 1974. This present 15-year supplement carries the record from February, 1974, through May, 1989, inclusive, so the Club's history is now documented well into its second century.

Fifteen years translates into approximately 450 meetings of the Club and each of these had something to offer the members and guests. The papers read during this period have ranged from autobiography to history, from travel to philosophy, and from literary criticism to literary works written by the Club's members. This variety of subject matter, approach, and delivery is a major attraction for the members. Next week is usually different.

While one could comment on each of these papers several possessed unusual aspects. We have heard, for example, two essayists read their papers as classics 19 years after they originally presented them; a son read his father's essay as a classic 18 years later; and essayists who have played musical instruments or have

sung or have played tapes of songs. One member put his paper in the form of a letter to the Chairman of the Committee on Arrangements and Exercises explaining why he had no essay for that night. Another essayist included a tape of himself reading a short speech written by his famous subject. One of our artistic members illustrated his paper with slides of his own drawings. A member even combined the roles of gourmet and public health officer by using colored slides to show how to identify, gather, and eat wild mushrooms.

As for book nights we once had two in a row—perhaps the most literary period in the Club's history. We also, during another book night, had the pleasure of hearing a father review one of his daughter's novels. One essayist gave his paper a second time during the same season; this was at the request of several members who had been unable to forge their way through the terrible weather that surrounded the first presentation.

During these fifteen years the membership has declined slightly, but the average age of the members has also declined; this latter figure suggests a healthy and active future for the Club. The strong attachments members have for the Club are demonstrated, in part, by the brief obituaries in the Year Books which not infrequently show durations of membership in the three, four, or five decade spans. While dues have more than doubled in this period, membership in the Chicago Literary Club is still the best bargain of its kind in the city.

The Club has not worn its geographic rut too deeply. At the beginning of this period we were meeting at the Lake View Building, 116 South Michigan Avenue. In the fall of 1977 we moved to the rooms of the Cliff Dwellers (220 South Michigan Avenue), at the top of Orchestra Hall. The essay on the first evening in the new location was, by chance, entitled "Running Away in America." Ladies Nights have for much of this time been held at the Arts Club, and the President's Inaugural Banquet has taken place at The Fortnightly. Other meetings have been at the University Club, Adventurers Club, Union League Club, Illinois Athletic Club, and the Glessner House.

A major step in the Club's history occurred in 1976 when several members contributed money to a fund in honor of Arthur A. Baer who had died the previous year. Baer had been a member

for 32 years, had served as President (1966-67), Chairman of the Committee on Rooms and Finance (1959-75, except for his year as President), and had contributed "to its welfare in many quiet, often anonymous, ways." The fund pays the dues of an Arthur Baer Fellow, appointed by the President, for his first year of membership. If the Fellow delivers a paper during that year he may become a regular member.

Some of the twelve Fellows have made substantial contributions to the Club. All have presented their fellowship essays, half are still members, and one has also served as President. The Baer Fellowship honors an important member, provides opportunities to obtain new members with a wide variety of interests, and helps to join the Club's past (through the memorial to Arthur Baer) to its future (through the activities of new members).

The Chicago Literary Club, having just completed its 115th season, has not only much to look back on but also much to look forward to during the coming years. While over 50 of its current resident members joined in 1980 or later 37 have been members for 20 years or more. Good fellowship, lively conversation, and informative and stimulating papers will continue to make Monday evenings enjoyable.

WILLIAM K. BEATTY