

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB: ITS PEOPLE, PLACES, and SMELLS

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This is not the first time that a member has written about our Club. In fact, almost immediately after the Club was formed in 1874, members began writing its history. Essays include:

- *Reminiscences of the Early Days of the Club*, by Edward Gay Mason, March 19, 1894;
- *Personal Recollections of the Early Days of the Club*, by Edward Osgood Brown et al., March 13, 1899;
- *Memories of Early Days and Early Members of the Club*, by Robert Collyer, October, 1905;
- *Another Reminiscences of the Early Days of the Club*, this time by Edward Osgood Brown and William Merchant Richardson French, March 16, 1914;
- *Robert Collyer, Our First President*, by Franklin Bing, October 15, 1973;
- *A Twenty-Minute History of the Chicago Literary Club*, by Earle Shilton, November 28, 1960;
- *The Club's Victorian Roots*, Clark Wagner, November 16, 1998; and,
- *The Chicago Literary Club Enters the Internet Age*, Francis Lackner Jr. (originally entitled *Looking Forward From 4,533 Meetings.*)

We also have the books including *The Chicago Literary Club, Its First Fifty Years* (1926) by Frederick William Gookin; *The Chicago Literary Club, Its History From the 1924-25 Season to the 1945-46 Season* (1947) by Payson Sibley Wild; *The Chicago Literary Club, The First Hundred Years, 1874-1974* (1974) by the Centennial Committee; and *The Chicago Literary Club, One Hundred Twenty-Five Years, 1874-1999* (2001) by the Anniversary Committee. Even as I speak, Michael Koenigsknecht is working on the history of the first 150 years to be released in the 2023-24 season.

What could I possibly add to this massive body of work? A lot.

While much has been written about the distinguished members of the Club such as Roscoe Pound, Paul Douglas, Laredo Taft, Arthur Goldberg, Charles Hutchinson, William Rainey Harper, and others, not enough attention has been paid to the felons, the con men and the hoax creators who have walked in our midst.

I will be bringing to light facts that have not received adequate coverage in the annals of Club History such as how one of our founders kissed his Chief Assistant in 1909. He was married and sixty-five at the time. She was twenty-two and a lesbian. Do not underestimate what painstaking laborious research at the Newberry Library during a pandemic supplemented by countless hours on the internet can accomplish.

I will also address these existential questions:

- What did our founding fathers do when they were not founding?
- Has The Chicago Literary Club ever been literary?
- Should it be?
- Should titles be transparent?
- What should be the criteria for admission of new members?

That of course leads to these corollary questions:

- Am I worthy enough to be a member? Are you worthy enough?

And perhaps more importantly,

- What does it smell like at the Club?

I have been a member for thirty-two years. During that time period, I have failed to express a single opinion or one original thought about anything. That ends now, as may my Club membership.

I will start with biographical information about the founders, then discuss the founding events of 1874, the purpose of the club, admission criteria through our history, places we have met, stories of a few notable fraudsters, and wind up with the smells.

Who Were the Founders?

There were seven men present at the initial organizational meeting held at the Sherman House on March 13, 1874. The men at the original meeting were Robert Collyer, Reverend Dr. John C. Burroughs, Judge Henry Booth, Reverend Horatio N. Powers, Edward G. Mason, John M. Binckley and W.J. Leonard. Mr. Leonard was in the printing business. He attended under the misconception that a new journal was to be published requiring chromolithographic illustrations. After learning that was not the case, Mr. Leonard did not return to any further meetings.

The man who came up with the idea of forming the Club was not present at the initial meeting due to ill health. Francis Fisher Browne was born in Vermont, learned the printing trade and worked for his father's newspaper, *The Chicopee Journal*. In 1862, at age nineteen, he enlisted to fight in the Civil War with Company D of the Massachusetts Volunteers. He caught Camp Fever, now known as typhus, which was to afflict him for the rest of his life. After leaving the army, he worked at a Rochester, New York law office, studied law briefly at the University of Michigan, got married, and moved to Chicago to start a literary career. Here, he edited journals including *The Lakeside Press*, *The Alliance* and *The Dial*.

In October 1907, Browne opened a bookstore on the seventh floor of the Fine Arts Building in Chicago aptly named Browne's Bookstore. Every aspect of the shop -- windows, shelves, knickknacks were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright had met Browne through the Caxton Club. The store incorporated Wright's trademark design elements such as high-backed chairs, reading alcoves, a massive fireplace and winding snaking passages. The windows were copied

from the children's playroom in Wright's own house right here on Forest Avenue in Oak Park, Illinois.

It was at this store, surrounded by iconic Frank Lloyd Wright bookshelves, that Browne made his fateful, unfortunate decision to kiss his young lesbian assistant, Margaret Caroline Anderson. She immediately quit.¹ Margaret went on to form her own art and literary magazine, *The Little Review*. She introduced Americans to the writings of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Browne was not the only man to fall for this woman who preferred other women. Screenwriter, director, producer, playwright, journalist, and novelist Ben Hecht, wrote this sentimental ode to her:

She was blond, shapely, with lean ankles and a Scandinavian face. ... I forgave her chastity because she was a genius. During the years I knew her she wore the same suit, a tailored affair in robin's egg blue. Despite this unvarying costume she was as chic as any of the girls who model today for the fashion magazines. ... It was surprising to see a coiffure so neat on a noggin so stormy.²

Browne became friends with John Muir and Walt Whitman. He spent time in his later years at Yosemite Valley with Muir. Upon Browne's death, Muir wrote a moving eulogy, "Browne the Beloved", which was published in *The Dial*. Muir said:

During the last five or six years of his life, when I came to know him intimately, my love and admiration have been constantly growing as the noble strength and beauty of his character came more and more clearly to view. ... Beloved Browne was the only American I ever knew or heard of who had all of Burns by heart, and who understood him so thoroughly that he was able to enjoy the immortal poet almost as well as veritable Scot.³

Founder and first President Robert Collyer was born in Keighly, Yorkshire, England in 1823. When he was a month old, the family moved to Blubberhouses in north Yorkshire. He dropped out of school at age eight to work thirteen hours a day on a loom in a linen factory. After work, he would read vociferously late into the night. At age fourteen, he was apprenticed to the

same blacksmith who had trained his father. At twenty-six, his first wife and infant daughter died. He turned to the Methodist church and became a lay preacher. He remarried and emigrated to Shoemakersville, Pennsylvania where he took up work not as a shoe maker, but as a hammer maker. When the hammer making business was temporarily shut down, he worked odd jobs as a hay maker and well digger. He resumed lay preaching, but his first attempt was a complete disaster due to his thick Yorkshire accent.

Collyer was an avid abolitionist. He accepted an invitation to give a guest sermon at a Unitarian church, but the Methodists were not amused. They tried him for heresy and barred him from further preaching in Methodist churches. He then left Pennsylvania after landing a position as minister at large of the First Unitarian Church in Chicago. From there, he went on to found the second Unitarian church known as Unity Church. Five years after helping to found our Club, he moved to New York to be pastor of the Church of the Messiah. He died in New York in 1912.

John C. Burroughs was raised on a family farm in western New York and was commissioned to be a teacher at age sixteen. He started to study law, but switched to classics and graduated from Yale in 1842. After serving as Principal of the Hamilton Academy, he entered Madison Theological Seminary. In 1852, he became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Chicago. He preached but one sermon before the church was destroyed by fire.⁴ Undeterred, he helped raise \$30,000 to build a new church.

In 1856, Burroughs worked with Stephen Douglas to form the original University of Chicago sometimes then called Chicago University. After initially rejecting the job, Burroughs served as its first President and one of its first three faculty members. In 1859, Burroughs set up the Law Department of the University which was Chicago's first law school. Financial difficulties beset the University from the outset and then came a devastating fire in 1874. The University

unsuccessfully sought large donations from John D. Rockefeller and Leland Stanford to bail itself out (Thank goodness, they declined because otherwise I would have been forced to attend Stanford University in Hyde Park, not Palo Alto.) The Old University came to an end when its chief creditor, Union Mutual Life Insurance, filed a foreclosure suit in 1881. Burroughs went on to sit on the Chicago Board of Education where he was Assistant Superintendent of Schools from 1884 until his death in 1892.

Founder Henry Booth was born in Connecticut and another Yale alum. He was a Cook County judge and the first President of the Chicago Ethical Humanist Society. His career intersected with John C. Burroughs. Booth was the first dean of the law school that Burroughs founded at the Old University of Chicago. Its name changed to Union College of Law when it became associated with Northwestern University. Then it became Northwestern University Law School before more recently becoming Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. Therefore, those of you who went to Northwestern Law School are also alum of the Old University of Chicago. Today, Booth Hall sits above Lincoln Hall at the law school. Many alumni regard this as ironic - perhaps not realizing that the Booth in question is Judge Henry Booth not John Wilkes Booth.

The good Booth left a major mark on Chicago. Henry Booth House founded in 1898 is currently the second largest provider of head start services in Chicago, educating pre-school children at forty-three sites. Booth was eulogized as a "latter day Puritan with a stern facing of truth, willing to do any painful kind of duty [and possessing] a strict rule of conscience".⁵ He presented one paper as a Club member, his infamous *Evidences of the Resurrection Examined*.

Horatio Nelson Powers was born in Dutchess County, New York in 1826. He graduated from Union College and studied at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church

before being ordained as a deacon at Trinity Church, New York. He was then appointed to St. John's Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

He married Clemence Emma Fauvel-Gouraud. Power's father-in-law, Francis was French and a student of Louis Daguerre, inventor of the daguerrotype. The father-in-law came to the United States to promote his new technology, but fell sick, died indigent, and was buried along with his wife in the Unclaimed Body Lot at Greenwood Cemetery in New York.

In 1857, Powers left Lancaster, Pennsylvania to accept a rector position at St. Luke's church in Davenport, Iowa. When St. Luke's had to close due to financial problems, Powers landed on his feet as President of Griswold College, named after Episcopal Bishop Alexander Viets Griswold, not Clark Griswold of *Christmas Vacation*. Powers relocated to Chicago where from 1868 to 1874, he was pastor of St. John's Church at Ashland and Ogden. His poetry was featured in the *New York Evening Post* and *The Lakeside Monthly*. He was a devotee of and correspondent with romantic poet William Cullen Bryant. Powers published a book of religious essays which Bryant praised as "genial", "unaffected", and "truly catholic", lower case "c".⁶ St. John's church ran into financial difficulty and Powers returned East to be rector at Christ Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut and then Christ Church in Sparkill, Rockland County, New York.

Meanwhile, Powers' brother-in-law, Union Army Colonel George Gouraud got a Congressional Medal of Honor for fighting at the Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina. George went to work for an up and coming inventor named Thomas Alva Edison. When Edison completed his Perfected Phonograph, he asked our founder Powers to write a poem for the occasion. The poem entitled, *The Phonograph's Salutation*, reads as follows:

I seize the palpitating air. I hoard
Music and speech. All lips that speak are mine.
I speak, and the inviolable word

Authenticates its origin and sign.

I am a tomb, a paradise, a throne,
An angel, prophet, slave, immortal friend:
My living records in their native tone
Convict the knave and disputations end.

In me are souls embalmed. I am an ear
Flawless as Truth; and Truth's own tongue am I.
I am a resurrection, and men hear
The quick and dead converse, as I reply.
Hail, English shores and homes and marts of peace!
Well were your trophies through the ages won.
May "sweetness," "light" and brotherhood increase!
I am the youngest born of Edison.

Powers' brother Edward is worthy of a short detour. Edward was an engineer and Civil War general who successfully petitioned Congress to conduct an experiment with gunpowder and cannons to determine the effect of explosions on rainfall. Edward Powers posited that since rainfall often followed civil war battles, that loud explosions could prevent droughts. He set up camp at the Texas ranch of Chicago meat packing tycoon Nelson Morris to test his theory. After a number of experiments involving kites, bombs, balloons, mortars, dynamite sticks, and the detonation of many pounds of explosives, the result were inconclusive. The more likely explanation for why rain often followed Civil War battles was not the explosions, but rather that generals chose to not to fight on rainy days.

Founder Edward Gay Mason was yet another Yale and a lawyer. His father was Mayor of Chicago at the time of the Great Fire. Mason had thirteen children who survived. All ten boys went to Yale. He was President of the Chicago Historical Society and the driving force in the construction of its new building at Dearborn and Ontario after its two prior structures had burnt to the ground. Lost in one of those fires was the original of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation

Proclamation. Writing about the new building, the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* of November 1, 1896 reported:

If there is a fireproof structure in the world it is the new Historical Society Building. There is not within its stone walls a piece of wood or any bit of inflammable material as large as a match.

The remaining founder, John M. Binckley, is the most colorful. Binckley was an Assistant Attorney General under President Johnson and then Solicitor of the Internal Revenue Bureau. He was removed by the Grant administration for his investigation of the Whiskey Ring. Whiskey distillers were supposed to pay a federal tax of seventy cents a gallon. Instead, they paid a bribe of thirty-five cents a gallon to avoid the tax.

Binckley resigned from the Club in 1876 having presented no papers. However, he made it into newspapers such as *The True Northerner* of Paw Paw, Michigan and the *Memphis Daily Appeal*. On October 14, 1877, the following dispatch was sent from William Beck, Milwaukee Chief of Police, to M.C. Hickey, Esq., General Superintendent of Police, Chicago:

John M. Binckley of this city, formerly a resident of your city [Chicago], left here this morning for your city with murderous designs on Dr. John Tape, of Oak Park. Jealousy the cause. Notify Tape at once.

Three weeks earlier, Binckley had discovered that his wife, a niece of Confederate General Joe Johnston, had become too familiar with Dr. Tape. Tape was duly notified of the Milwaukee police dispatch. A week went by and nothing happened. Tape was beginning to breathe easy until this letter from Binckley appeared in his mailbox:

SIR. Last Sunday, a week past, I called at your lodging, about sunset, and was invited to wait in your room. I chose not to stain a blameless fireside with your blood, and left word for you meet me at the depot... I avow here my proposal which is for a mortal combat... If you evade this, I will, I must, adopt another way.⁷

No duel took place. Instead, Binckley was found, arrested and posted a \$3,000 bond.

The story ends sadly. The *Appleton Crescent* of May 11, 1878, reports that Binckley drowned himself in Lake Michigan near the southern limits of Milwaukee having earlier failed to kill himself by swallowing three ounces of laudanum. The newspaper noted that he was finely educated and a gentleman of the highest grade of literary culture. It listed several notable people who had been his friends and concluded that he could not in any respect have been a bad man.

Founding Days

The origins of our Club are cloaked in amiable conflict, hyperbole and abandoned objectives. Francis Browne's *Lakeside Monthly* had been launched in January 1871. The periodical had survived a fire at its offices, then the Great Chicago Fire, and the Panic of 1873. In that year, the journal had run over 100 pieces of fiction and non-fiction, 50 book reviews and 50 poems. Browne needed to establish an ongoing source of supply of articles for his content hungry publication. His idea was to form a Lakeside Contributor's Club. Informal discussions around this concept were held at his office during the winter of 1873-1874.

During this time, Chicago was growing rapidly. In 1840, its population was 4,470. That number swelled to 503,185 by 1880, and 1,099,850 in 1890. Due to the Great Fire, there were only two buildings in central Chicago that were more than three years old in 1874. Founders of the Club blamed the fire on a city that had grown too fast and had ignored cultural development in the process. John Binckley felt that Chicago was little more than "a sojourner's resort", "a produce and merchandise exchange", and that the "moneyed dullard" were ignoring "the true, the beautiful and the good" by constructing temples of trade instead of museums. Founder Horatio Powers piled on by saying that the world thought of Chicago not as a civilized gentleman, but as "a huge monster, gorged with pork and grain, and absorbed in the single thought of business".⁸ He opined that while a few cases of individual culture could be found, the ruling spirit was not an admirable one.

Our initial organizational meeting was held at 3:00 p.m., on Friday, March 13, 1874. The front page of the *Tribune* that day carried news of the death of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner and the funeral of President Millard Fillmore. There were reports of a three-inch snow storm in London, England which had impeded the arrival of the newly wed Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh who were returning to London from Windsor. The newspaper also reported that Lizzie Lloyd King of Brooklyn, New York was employing her leisure hours in prison after conviction for the murder of Charles Goodrich by writing a pamphlet on how she had discovered his suicide. The far-left column of the *Tribune* had an offer to sell Illinois lump coal for \$3.75 a ton; a message addressed to Opium Eaters offering them help at a doctor's office at 259 Randolph Street; and a personal ad telling the beautiful young lady in the blue veil that she could buy two ounces of fine tobacco for fifteen cents at 177 LaSalle Street.

Four of the seven men present at the Sherman House meeting were associated with *The Lakeside Press*, but the concept that members would be content generators for the journal never materialized. However, Browne's desire to form an entity along the lines of the Century Club of New York, an organization of congenial persons, distinguished by a love of letters, did take hold. The Century Club never held itself out as only a literary club. Its membership was open to artists, scientists, physicians, officers in the Army and Navy, members of the bench and bar, engineers, clergymen, representatives of the press, merchants and amateurs of the letters and fine arts. Amateurs were defined as persons of any occupation provided their breadth of interest and qualities of mind and imagination made them sympathetic, stimulating and congenial companions in a society of authors and artists.

Another Club inspiring our founders was the Literary Club of Cincinnati established in 1849. One of our early members, William F. Poole, had been a member of the Cincinnati Club.

He moved to Chicago shortly before the formation of our own Club. While he was not present at the initial meeting, he did show up in time to help with the drafting our constitution. The Cincinnati club is housed in a handsome two-story red brick Greek Revival building in the Lytle Park Historic District. It is limited to 100 members, all male, even though one of its founders, was an early advocate for equal education for women. The club meets every Monday from September to June. Meetings begin with drinks and then the members proceed into the reading room passing under an archway on which is inscribed, "Here Comes One with a Paper." Each of the 100 members is required to deliver a paper once every two years. All topics for essays are permitted, except those promoting a religious or political view. Following the reading of the essay there is a supper at the clubhouse where informal discussion of the paper takes place. The officers include a Club Historian who must deliver an annual paper on a topic of his choosing so long as it relates to the Club's history. We have 137 resident members and a shorter season. We should encourage people to attend at least one meeting a month and to present a paper once every three years.

There would be seven more organizational meetings for our Club. The first draft of a constitution was prepared and read to organizers on April 7, 1874. The document called for establishment of the offices of Chaplain, Poet, Orator, Marshall, Assistant Marshall, Scribe and Assistant Scribe. Various committees were to be created including "Art in the Western States", "Art in the Eastern States", and "Art in Europe". According to Frederick William Gookin, the reaction of those around the table to the reading of the proposed Constitution was stunned silence. He described it as a model of what a literary club constitution should not be. The document itself was lost almost immediately after a unanimous vote to reject it. Enter William Poole who had showed up on April 7th with a copy of the Cincinnati club's constitution in hand. He persuaded

the others to accept it as template. As soon as the constitution was adopted, numerous amendments were proposed – almost none of which were approved.

The first regular meeting of the Club was held on Monday, May 4, 1874. Two weeks later, the first paper was presented by Reverend Leander Chamberlain entitled, *Physical Pain; Its Nature and the Law of Its Distribution*. Note that while the stated purpose of the Club was the promotion of literary and aesthetic culture, the very first paper had nothing to do with either subject.

Collyer gave his inaugural address, “Literature and Great Cities”, on Monday, June 15, 1874. The manuscript is available at the Newberry Library and consists of twelve typed pages. Collyer proclaimed that when friendly creative people in large cities gather together, they produce great literature. He said that the time had come when all true lovers of books should enter into a league so that there might be a common wealth of culture. Unfortunately for those of us who devoutly believe that this is not a literary club, the Collyer manuscript does contain the words “Literary Culture” in all capital letters.

News reporters were present. Early meetings were open to the public and attended by the press. Collyer’s address was published in the *Tribune* the next day together with a description of the sumptuous feast that had been devoured. For an itemized description of the courses, consult Clark Wagner’s *Victorian Roots* essay. The *Tribune* noted that “the literary men displayed an epicurean taste and delicacy that presages that they will live long to confer the benefits of their labors upon us.”⁹ Members grew weary of reading accounts in the local press about how much they had eaten and drank. They would later close meetings to the public.

On November 3, 1874, the Club celebrated the eightieth birthday of poet William Cullen Bryant. Bryant could not be present, but his brothers Arthur and John were in attendance. The *Tribune* reported that they bore a strong physical resemblance to their more famous brother. At the

conclusion of a paper about Thomas DeQuincey, the men adjourned to the “ladies ordinary” of the Sherman House. Members dined on oysters on the half shell, smoked tongue, partridge, trout, lobster salad, mutton, capon, baron of beef, fillet of beef, turkey, sweet breads, pigeon, fried oysters, venison, quail, topped off by plum pudding, lemon pie, blanc mange, and champagne jelly.

Robert Collyer rose to deliver a toast to poet Bryant. Always the orator, Collyer did not hold back. He pronounced Bryant to be a man of genius, who dwelled in a tabernacle, who was a star that shone in the daylight, who had brought new glory to the American name, and who had created a new order of nobility in the world.

In return, a letter from Bryant was read thanking the Literary Club for its celebration of his birthday and expressing his regrets about not being able to attend. What I found quite remarkable about Bryant’s comments was this statement:

Now that I think of it, there must have been born on the 3rd of November a great many excellent persons, of both sexes, to whose virtuous lives, the world is under great obligations. Will not my friends of the Literary Club pass to the credit of those persons such share of the honors of their festival as I am not worthy of, and thus square the account.¹⁰

How could Bryant possibly have known that was I was to be born on November 3rd? One hundred forty-seven years later, here at the same Club where his words were first read, I am pleased to accept his prescient and pre-humous comments.

Nature of the Early Membership

I had a discussion a while ago with our Webmaster Francis Lackner, Jr. where I opined that early members were more distinguished than the current proletariat. He told me that I was delusional. Recently, however, he made the mistake of emailing me a copy of the 1878 yearbook since he is scanning the early yearbooks and posting them on line. I picked four names of members at random to see if they were men of wealth and taste. I came up with Melville Fuller, Chief

Justice of the United States, Charles C. Bonney, Illinois Supreme Court Justice and President of World Congresses at the Columbian Exposition, John Crerar, an early investor in the Pullman Palace Car Company, and Timothy Blackstone, founder of the Union Stockyards whose mansion became the Blackstone Hotel and Theater. I rest my case.

Purpose of The Club

Our founders were unsure about the exact purpose of the Club. The names they considered included The Club, The Chicago Lyceum, The Thackeray Club, The Open Ballot Club, The Kinzie Club, The Sphinx Club, The Goodenough Club, The Club for the Aggregation and Fostering of Old Citizens Regardless of Qualification, and The Marquette Eye and Ear Infirmary.

The original Constitution stated that the object of the Club was to be literary and aesthetic culture, but this was amended on March 6, 1876 to add the word “social”. So now the Club officially had a three-part purpose: literary, aesthetic and social. Yet, the constitutional amendment did nothing to end the debate over whether the Club was fulfilling its stated purpose. Our late President, Bill Hannay, was not the first person to bemoan our lack of literary culture. In 1899, a member of the English Parliament visited us. Upon his return to London, he reported to the English press that the most extraordinary thing had happened in the remarkable city of Chicago. He had participated in the exercises of a literary club where not a single man was literary.

Thirty years after the formation of the Club, Frederic Root, composer, conductor, organist, and music teacher delivered his inaugural address in which he asked, “what is our *raison d’être*?” He wrote the founders had wanted to create something that was free from sectarian controversy, hostile competition and a host of petty anxieties. He said that the emergent brotherhood devoted to the worship of the mind had been affixed with the wholly inadequate name of Chicago Literary Club. He proposed lofty goals for the Club implying that it had fallen short in its first three

decades: it should stand as a temple of the mind, a Jupiter of the modern Olympus, from where members could view with unruffled serenity the activities of the lesser Olympians. He urged praise for the saints of our culture such as Plato, Cicero, Galileo, Beethoven, Shakespeare and Emerson. More mundanely, Root's tenure marked the beginning of the tradition of the passing of the gavel to the new President instead of the previously used drinking horn. Seven years passed, and at least one member still did not believe that the Club had succeeded in meeting the goals laid out by Root. On October 2, 1911, William Newnham Chittin Carlton presented his essay, *The Decline and Fall of Literary Ambition in the Chicago Literary Club*.

The debate over the purpose of clubs such as our own goes on at similar organizations. Dr. Cruciger of the *Chit Chat Club* in San Francisco suggests that the more appropriate appellation for clubs of our ilk would be "essay club". He defined an essay club to be "a small, private, carefully selected group of individuals who meet regularly in order for one of its members to read aloud an original essay to the membership, and, after its presentation, the membership is encouraged to comment on the essay."¹¹

So, have we ever been a literary club? Absolutely not. Less than twenty percent of the essays are about literary topics. Just about every other subject has been covered: philosophy, religion, biography, autobiography, architecture, history, politics, medicine, law, finance, business, engineering and travel. We are an essay club, a dining club and a conversation club. While Article II of the by-laws says that our object is literary culture, it must be read in conjunction with Article VII, Section 1, which states that each essayist shall select his or her own subject and be free to express any opinions whatsoever thereon.

Admission

What should be the grounds for admission? According to our website, we are a voluntary association of men and women interested in writing original essays and listening to others present such essays. At the March 13, 1874 meeting, it was proposed that the organization should be composed solely of the fifty richest men in Chicago. Paralyzed silence ensued. One attendee finally had the courage to speak up. He said that there should be one place in Chicago where money did not count, and that limiting admission to the fifty richest Chicagoans would not be the best way to achieve that end.

While wealth as a criterion for membership was never applied, intellectual snobbery did pervade the Club in its early years. In 1885, Frank Hamline Scott penned the following comment about a membership application, “we should not take men into the Club because they are simply ‘reputable and pleasant gentlemen.’” Frederic Root expressed a similar sentiment in his 1904 inaugural address when he asked “why is it that so few of our daily associates are men that we should regard as eligible for membership?” By 1960, Earle Shilton was not so harsh. He wrote that “the man [woman] must have a literary bent, he must be a good fellow [lady] and companionable to the group; and lastly, he must be expected to contribute.”

If we need to articulate the criteria for membership, we can look to The Club formed by Samuel Johnson and Joshua Reynolds in 1764. Their rubric for admission was described this way:

It was intended the Club should consist of Such men, as that if only Two of them chanced to meet, they should be able to entertain each other without wanting the addition of more Company to pass the Evening agreeably.

Therefore, am I worthy enough to be a member? It depends on which one of you I meet on the street.

Transparency of Titles

Titles should be opaque and obscure – the only exception being this paper. Not knowing what the paper is about in advance encourages people to expand their horizons and to not opt out of attendance based solely on subject matter. The subject of the paper should only be revealed after the paper has been concluded and perhaps not even then. If we had a policy of requiring transparency in titles, we would never have had the pleasure of titles such as *Puff, Puff, Puff*, *The Girl in the String Bikini*, *Je Ne Sais Quoi*, or *Title Impaired*. *Title Impaired* turned out to be an essay by Arthur Baer about his visit to Florence with a fallen Russian prince as his guide.

Places

It would be easier to list the places where the Club has not met than to identify where it has met. Meetings have been held at the Sherman House, the American Express Building, Grand Pacific Hotel, Portland Block, Kinsley's Restaurant, Union League Club, the Art Institute, Lake View Building, University Club, Orchestra Building, the Onwentsia Club in Lake Forest, the Fine Arts Building, the Skyline Club, the Ryerson Physical Laboratory at the University of Chicago, Cliff Dwellers at Orchestra Hall and now the Borg Warner Building.

Needless to say, there is ample folklore about these various dwellings. For instance, on April 25, 1904, at the University Club, a fire broke out in a dumb waiter. Members quickly carried out portraits of our Presidents Collyer and Larner to a saloon on Dearborn Street for safekeeping. On another occasion, former President Puttkammer fell asleep due to the warmth of the room and was quietly removed while still sitting in his chair. His wife chose to remain and enjoy the paper.¹²

Fraudsters Among Us

Shakespeare's Insomnia and the Causes Thereof, dated May 3, 1886, was authored by Franklin Harvey Head. Head practiced law in Kenosha, Wisconsin and worked as a rancher before

arriving in Chicago in 1872. Here, he became a successful man of business with officer and director positions at Continental Casualty Company, Protection Mutual Fire Insurance Company, SS Hadley Company Bank, Toledo, Peoria and Western Railroad, and Street's Stable Car Line. His civic activities were diverse and impressive. He was a Director of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, a member of the Jury of Awards at the Paris Exposition in 1900, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor of France in 1901, a Trustee of the Newberry Library, President of the Chicago Historical Society, twice President of the Union League Club, and President of the Literary Club during the 1890-1891 season. And yet, he was also an early manufacturer of real fake news.

His essay on Shakespeare's insomnia explored how mental anguish and anxiety disturb sleep. He cites numerous examples of insomnia from the plays. For instance, Iago tells Othello after Othello has murdered his wife:

Not poppy nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou own'dst yesterday.

Head posits that Shakespeare himself must have suffered from insomnia. He decided to investigate the causes of the bard's sleeplessness and he wrote to the Office of the Chief Curator of the British Museum to inquire if there might be archival records that would shed light on the subject. To his excitement, he received a response that the Museum had recently discovered letters in the dungeon of the Earl of Southampton's castle which were addressed to Shakespeare.

Head quotes from more than a dozen of the letters all of which concern unpaid debts. A law firm from London's Inner Temple calls to Shakespeare's attention the Statute of 16 Elizabeth concerning the imprisonment of insolvent debtors. Another letter from Mordecai Shylock says that a bill for ten pounds sterling has been secured by two plays in manuscript, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Romeo and Juliet". So why have I mentioned Head's essay when I promised

to speak of fraudsters among us? For the simple reason that the title page of Head's essay contains this transcriber's note: "[t]he following is a literary hoax and the letters quoted below are fictitious". I do not know whether this disclaimer was read before Head presented his paper to the Club, but I doubt it.

Head did not stop there. He wrote *A Notable Lawsuit* in January, 1896. It was a made up story about Captain Kidd hiding treasure in a cave on property owned by Frederick Law Olmsted. A fur trader employed by John Jacob Astor discovers the treasure and delivers it to Mr. Astor. The essay was read before the Club, and then published as fact in *Liberty Magazine*. Frederick Law Olmsted had to write a disclaimer that the paper was intended as a burlesque hoax and that "it is getting to be something of a bore to explain to unnumbered eager inquirers that it is not true".

Some fraudsters were acquaintances of members such as the one described by Sigmund Zeisler in his essay, *A Prince of Swindlers*, dated February 24, 1902. Zeisler was born in Austria, and graduated from Northwestern Law School. Among his clients were the defendants in the Haymarket riot cases and he wrote a paper, *Reminiscences of the Anarchist's Case*. In total, he wrote thirteen papers on subjects ranging from Nietzsche to the prevalence of perjury in the United States. *A Prince of Swindlers* begins in Sherlock Holmesian terms:

It was a sultry afternoon in June of 1887. I was reclining in my easy chair, puffing of the unusual heat. "Ah, if only a client would show up". The office boy entered my room and handed me a card which read Barron Egon von Niederndorf. Above the name was an embossed crown.

The Barron was described as medium sized, military carriage, well-shaped head, black hair parted in the middle, Kaiser Wilhelm moustache, Prince Albert coat, white silk scarf and pearl pin. He was attending the Columbian Fair as a supposed correspondent of the *Vienna Neue Freie Presse*. Von Niederndorf told Zeisler that he was the inventor of an automatic car axle greasing device and needed legal assistance. He claimed to have studied under Theodore Leschetizky, a Polish

professor, pianist and composer who happened to have also taught Zeisler's wife. Zeisler recounts that the Barron disappeared for a few weeks and then showed up again— this time with a constable in tow, the Barron having been charged with obtaining money under false pretenses. Zeisler wisely declined to post bail, but he did lend the Barron \$10 in order for him to recover his laundry. He also negotiated a settlement with the victim, a Mr. Bartcher who ran a cigar store in the First National Bank Building.

Zeisler recounts how the Barron took on many different guises – starting with Emanuel Borges who worked as a general utility man for a German theatrical company in New York. Borges disappeared from the theater company owing varying amounts of money to all the male members of the director's family having made unfulfilled promises of marriage to the female members. He went to Europe, duped various people there, and then showed up next in Cambridge, Massachusetts as Emil Blum. Blum wrote two novels which were privately printed for Boston society women; he put on a successful play; he gave private readings; and he taught a class on Russian literature. He was warmly welcomed into the private homes of Harvard professors. *The Boston Globe* reports that Blum left Boston as unexpectedly as he had arrived leaving a number of aching female hearts behind him.¹³

On June 9, 1901, a tall well- dressed man using the name of Franz Von Berger was arrested at Grand Central Station, New York City, and charged with larceny from Deutsche Bank in London. He was in the company of an unnamed woman who started weeping. She visited him at the Ludlow Street Jail before his extradition to London. At the Old Bailey, on the 10th of September 1901, Franz Von Berger pled guilty to larceny, stealing an order for the payment of 543 pounds, eight pence, which was the rightful the property of one Helena Croydt. He was sentenced to five years of penal servitude.¹⁴

Smells

I promised a description of smells in my title. I do not wish to disappoint. I did my best to smell something at our meetings. I decided that it would be untoward to stick my nose near the body parts of other members. So instead, I got very close to an apple pie who said it could trace its ancestry to Daniel Burnham's mother. It smelled like warm apples. The cherry pie was less fragrant. The blueberry pie omitted a distinct odor of blueberries. So, I am pleased to report that my investigation into the odors of the Club found items that bear a distinct resemblance to its current members: warm, crusty around the edges, occasionally hard baked, but always fruity.

¹ Adam Morgan, "When Frank Lloyd Wright Designed a Bookstore", *Paris Review*, March 22, 2018.

² Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, (1950), p. 233.

³ John Muir, "Browne the Beloved", *The Dial*, June 16, 1913, p. 492.

⁴ *Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men of Chicago* (1868) p. 588.

⁵ James A. Rahl & Kurt Schwerin, Northwestern School of Law, *A Short History to Commemorate its Centennial. 1859-1959*, (1960) pp. 6-7.

⁶ Steve Dunlop, "the bard of sparkill",
https://n.b5z.net/i/u/10149573/f/the_bard_of_sparkill_2011.pdf (2011).

⁷ *The True Northerner*, November 9, 1877 and *Memphis Daily Appeal*, November 3, 1877.

⁸ Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Disbelief*, (2d ed). (2007) p. 84.

⁹ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1874, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 4, 1874, p. 5.

¹¹ Cruciger, “Reflections on My Writing”, presented to Chit Chat Club, June 11, 2019.

¹² *The Chicago Literary Club, The First Hundred Years 1874-1974*, (1974) p. 65.

¹³ *Boston Globe*, June 13, 1901, p. 1.

¹⁴ <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?name=19010910-->