

Minutes of the Literary Club September 16, 2013

The year began, before 51 members and eight guests, with Bill Pratt reading a concise, but richly informative memorial to Keith Stewart, late of this club and of the UC faculty, where he was a professor of literature for 38 years.

Former club president Bob Dorsey threw the season's first pitch, with a paper entitled "Summer Reads, Autumn Thoughts," and let me just say: if "beach reads" and summer escape are synonymous for many people, Bob would not be among them. His choices included the final installment in the Winston Churchill Trilogy, "The Last Lion, Defender of the Realm," parts of Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," "The Great Gatsby," "An Army at Dawn," about the U.S. campaign in North Africa in 1942-43, "Goodbye Darkness," William Manchester's memoir of war in the Pacific, and "Book of Honor," about the CIA's clandestine, Cold War attempts to blunt the Soviet secret police.

Out of all this came ruminations on everything from Winston Churchill's probable linkage of Attila the Hun's European rampages in 450 A.D. with Hitler's designs on his neighbors in 1939, to the UN Monetary Conference at Bretton Woods, to the building of the Interstate Highway System under Dwight Eisenhower, to concerns over how to pay for Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Bob leavened his dissertation with a few fun factoids – the recent auction price of a first edition of "Gatsby," William Manchester's speculation about the delights of bedding movie star Maureen O'Hara, Charles Lindbergh's siring of seven offspring of three German women in the late 1940s. But his larger purpose was to be taken seriously.

To that end, he concluded by asking: Are we experiencing Autumn in America now? Offering many facts and statistics, he made the case that the country's mounting debt may be its undoing. While he sees solutions, he also sees political obstacles to each. He is not optimistic.

Maybe a beach read, to ease the anxiety, could help.

Minutes of the Literary Club September 23, 2013

Emerson Knowles read to 49 members and six guests a paper in the voice of a quill pen! Yes, I am not making this up! The first person narrator of Emerson's opus was "the first feather of the left wing of an eagle – The Pinion" – used for writing in colonial America and now on display between various letters and artifacts in a Philadelphia museum.

But why? Why go to such an admittedly imaginative extreme to tell us the story of contrivance and deceit that ultimately unfolded? We get a hint in Emerson's deliciously florid lead, and I quote: "How I long for the touch of my master's hand; his warm caress, his strong thrusts in passion, the pauses to collect his energy and press again, his mind lost in thoughts that pass through me. Oh, but for the joy of the passionate man do I long, so long to feel again." Wow! Could any of us be faulted for wondering where that was going? You dog, Emerson!

But soon enough, the quill revealed his real mission – "a quest," as he put it, "to feel the soul of man." Throughout much of history, he reminded us, quill pens were the sole

recorders of man's concerns: his loves, his businesses, his quotidian activities and more. As such, they have been privy to both a writer's outward face and his inner being – the latter, inevitably, pointing to where his passions truly lie. Being privy to that, said the quill, was his greatest reward.

Then followed a lengthy series of letters between one Charles Buckley of colonial Philadelphia and various figures in both his personal and professional lives. Suffice to say that the seemingly decorous citizen we meet in the early letters eventually gives way to a cad of most unseemly proportions. But only the quill, in his role as transcriber of the letters, knows the whole truth, that is, knows where the passion lay.

“History will never know this man,” the quill concludes. “A man who cloaked himself in a cloud of deception, a man, as in the victor of war, who wrote his own version of history.”

It may be sad, but if it's as much fun to read as Emerson clearly had writing it, perhaps not all is lost.

Minutes of the Literary Club September 30, 2013

Sixty four members and five guests assembled to hear a warm and evocative memorial to Frank Davis, who died in May at age 95, and to greet the first budget of the year. There were two papers, recounting – in remarkable detail, considering the passage of time – some early life experiences of two of our number.

First up was Bill Burleigh, with tales of his rookie years at the Evansville Press. Starting as a 15-year-old part-timer in Sports, and then on the City Desk, Bill described himself as “green” but “self-assured” – why am I not surprised? – as he moved from baseball to obits to investigations, helping unmask a fire chief illegally commandeering his men to build him a house in a secluded rural area.

The characters Bill encountered, including the inebriated managing editor who could edit copy and read Shakespeare simultaneously and the society editor with a “mother hen's eye for detail,” were right out of “The Front Page.” His recollection of a harrowing fight over integration at the Sturgis School in Western Kentucky vividly reminded us of one of the uglier episodes in our civic history. The kudos he earned for his reporting at the time no doubt contributed to the “adrenaline-pumping excitement” he felt about newspapers – and, if I may be so bold, helped launch one of the nation's great careers in journalism.

Tuck Asbury followed with a charming memoir of his early years in baseball, a passion nurtured by a baseball-crazy father and still felt as we speak. In chronological sequence, we heard of Tuck's own ball- playing, from Country Day to Andover, Yale and UC, but always peppered with anecdotes and reminiscences of sparkling dimension.

At seven, he was taken by Eppa Rixey, perhaps the most famous pitcher in Reds history, to Redland Field (it hadn't yet been named Crosley Field); Eppa was a friend of his father. At fourteen, he was playing on a semi-pro team in Paris, Kentucky good enough to make a state tournament . . . but foolish enough to succumb to so many temptations of wine and women the night before the game that they lost 16-1. At Andover, Tuck played with George Bush senior, who struck him even then as an exemplary human being. At UC,

Tuck believes he was the only med school student ever to play for the college, which he did for three years. Throughout, Tuck was an excellent player in his own right, and we should not have been surprised to hear, toward the paper's end, of his opportunity to go pro – nor of his decision, when all was said and done, to stick with medical school and a lifetime, no doubt, of compiling box scores from the stands.

Respectfully submitted, Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club October 7, 2013

Jump 200 years ahead, to the year 2218, and imagine what it could be like to look back at the way we live in these early years of the 21st century – the fast foods, the video games, the Tupperware and particle board furniture, and much more. That's what Rick Kesterman asked of the 43 members and 10 guests gathered to hear "Looking Back at Today."

Premised on the idea of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the restoration of a prototype Midwestern small town, a.k.a. Oakwood, Rick's tour of antiquity examined everything from the houses people lived in to the cars they drove to the post office that survived from 1997 until 2073. What happened after that – indeed, what happened to mail as we know it – is left to our imaginations. Presumably, something more agreeable came along . . . as it did, Rick suggests, for Facebook, flash drives, YouTube, Twitter and laptops.

Part of what makes this re-creation a major tourist attraction in 2218 is the completeness of its offerings. Williamsburg and Dearborn Village have nothing on Oakwood. There is a high school, a toy store, the boyhood home of U.S. President Joseph Huber, who was sworn in 2065. There is also an auto dealer with -- and I quote -- "interpreters on hand to let 23rd century guests experience what it was like to purchase a car nearly 200 years ago." I wish I could hear that one!

Reading closely, one detects Rick's predictions that Kroger and Starbucks will no longer exist 200 years from now, but that people will still be going to church and will still be drinking whiskey. Each of which seems plausible. But when, towards the end, he intimates that eating fried chicken will eventually be regarded as a quaint practice of the early 21st century, I take exception. Lattes may be all the rage, but fried chicken is here to stay.

Minutes of the Literary Club October 14, 2013

Richard Gass has a nice, dry sense of humor, which he shared liberally with his audience of 68, including nine guests, concerning a year spent in rural England when he was eleven. Here's Richard describing eating arrangements on the S.S. France, which his family took to Europe in 1965: "Children ate separately from the adults in the children's dining room – a custom that I loathed. As an adult, my views on this custom have evolved."

Recalling an unbearably cold night in a guesthouse in Scotland, Richard said, "I remember the proprietress remarking that since it was a lovely evening we would eat on

the porch. Apparently anything slightly above freezing qualified as lovely. So we sat outside on the porch and watched our tomato soup congeal.”

The Gass family had gone to England because Richard’s father had a sabbatical and a Guggenheim fellowship. Their perch was the small town of Chorleywood, about 20 miles northwest of London, most famous for its bread making process, but also as a haven for Quakers.

Richard’s time there was spent mostly in the Rickmansworth grammar school, and in the course of the paper, we learned a fair amount about English schooling, including the national examinations to determine competency, the uniforms, the curriculum, the role of religion, music and sports, and the food. “Glue would be an adequate description of the mashed potatoes at the school,” Richard said, and that was just the beginning of his lament.

The paper built to a climax, of a kind, with the family’s cruise on a self-guided canal boat on the Grand Union and Oxford canals, a trip of about 150 miles. The boat steered poorly, leaked badly and before the trip was over, its engine quit. The early spring weather was cold and wet, and at least once, Richard fell into the canal. His father knew nothing about boating; at one point, he all but drained the water in the section of the river above the lock in which they were having lunch! Yes!

If Richard has returned to England since, it is a triumph of putting the past in the past, and moving briskly ahead.

Minutes of the Literary Club October 21, 2013

Before 55 members and seven guests, Ted Jaroszewicz, in his first- ever paper, gave us a disquisition on the importance of college sports in the development of well integrated human beings . . . but not, I hasten to add, before explaining the very un-Tommy Hilfiger sport coat he wore – dark, with white piping all around the edges – and not, honesty compells me to say, without expressing a short prayer that the potentially poisonous commentary of the Club’s secretary would treat him charitably.

So I’m on notice.

Ted’s story began with memories of growing up in the Jaroszewicz household, a place where his immigrant father had no regard for sports; he didn’t see how they could help earn a living. Ted always loved them, and when he enrolled at Yale and was found ineligible for football due to extreme near sightedness, he quickly discovered crew – a pastime and a passion that he continues to enjoy to this day.

Part II of this paper dealt with the “athletic arms race” in which even the nation’s most elite colleges now engage. Amid a profusion of statistics about numbers of varsity sports offered, percentages of athletes within student bodies and numbers of championships won, Ted asked: Why do we do this?

Part III then examined the place of sport in human culture from the ancient Egyptians to the present. Sprinkled into the history were a number of interesting factoids, for example,

the word gymnasium has at its root the word Gymnos, which means to disrobe or get naked.

Then going into extra innings, part IV explored the development of intercollegiate athletics in this country from the mid-19th century on. With the spotlight still on the Ivy League, Ted noted that “America’s elite colleges created avenues for social, educational and economic mobility,” and that despite his father’s oft-stated misgivings, “In America, one could be a scholar, an athlete and put bread on the table.”

He might have added, but left it to my poison pen: Game over.

Minutes of the Literary Club October 28, 2013

It was the night of the annual dinner, a celebration of the Club’s 164th anniversary. Sixty-eight of us were in attendance, with one guest, all in black tie, and all more than willing to make merry.

In his debut paper as Club historian, Bob Vitz talked first about the many father-son relationships that have figured into the Club’s membership over the years, then focused on the well-known name of Alphonso Taft. He was, Bob said, “our most prolific producer of legacy members,” one who “foisted on the club four of his sons.”

Bob dispensed with the first three fairly quickly: Peter Rawson Taft, who died in 1889, his half-brother, William Howard Taft, whose

national accomplishments are well known, and William Howard’s younger brother, Horace Dutton, who founded the Taft School. The bulk of the paper then concentrated on Charles Phelps Taft, the eldest of Alphonso’s sons – and the one most critically linked to the city and to this Club. Through marriage, and by dint of his own energies and enthusiasms, Charles Phelps Taft pursued lifelong involvements in both business and the arts, leaving many handsome legacies, not least, the gift of this building to the Literary Club.

Jack McDonough’s presidential address reflected first his thoughts that a kind of “literary friendship” – a shared interest in learning, writing and improving – has sustained this Club throughout its long life. He noted only seven other literary clubs in the United States that bear any resemblance to ours.

Recently, Jack said, he queried twenty-eight of our number, most of them new to the Club within the past five years, as to “What did they expect?” when they joined and “What hasn’t happened?” In doing so, Jack hoped to uncover some ideas and direction on how to make this Club, which he loves and admires, even stronger and more effective than he perceives it to be.

Out of many thoughtful responses, Jack identified a range of feelings about the weekly papers – some members quite pleased with what they are hearing, others pointing to what they feel is uneven quality. He also found some reservations about the ease with which a newcomer can hope to assimilate into the culture of the Club.

From all this, Jack generated many thoughts and suggestions about how we might do better – everything from a discussion table concerning the night’s paper to opening to non officers the Board of Management meetings. We will be hearing-more of these recommendations almost immediately.

As Jack said, “We’re good, but there’s plenty of room for improvement.”

Respectfully submitted, Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club November 4, 2013

An unusually large gathering – 68 members and eight guests – turned out to hear Paul Franz’ twilight zone tale of Gil, a recently retired classics professor at a small, Midwestern college.

A brilliant academic and athlete while in school, Gil gradually became known as a “retrograde curmudgeon” in his professional life; even so, his courses in Latin and Greek were immensely popular, and in time he received Monroe College’s distinguished teaching award.

With that as background, the story dissolved into a memory of Gil’s most gifted student, a farm boy named Ken who had a genius for the classics. After a brilliant undergraduate career at Monroe, Ken had gone on to become a professor at Cambridge. The two kept in touch until, years later, they re-connected at a conference in Asheville, NC.

There, the two friends took time to go canoeing where, in a moment that he had been building up to for years, Gil challenged Ken with knowledge that Ken had plagiarized an important Ovid paper while still an undergraduate. And here is where the twilight zone took hold:

Suddenly Gil is marooned on a rock, with blood dripping from his head into the river – and Ken’s body, discovered later with head trauma, prompts a ruling of “accidental death” by the local coroner. No further elaboration ensues. Instead, the narrative shifts to Gil’s post-retirement renovation of a townhouse in Monroe, his “Mr. Chips”-like persona with visiting undergrads and another brilliant student named Dunn, who, as fate would have it, wants to know all about Ken.

Well, I won’t say one thing leads to another, because it’s more surreal than that. Moisture in the basement leads to real water problems, with water that smells like sulfur, and these lead to sleep- deprived nights and dreams haunted by people like Ken and Dunn, and ultimately, to Gil’s own death from a fall down his basement stairs.

Give Paul this: His quiet delivery, and the calm accretion of Edgar Allen Poe-like detail, blended well to create the eerie tone he sought.

Minutes of the Literary Club November 11, 2013

The meeting opened with a pithy, loving, full-of-life tribute to Richard Newrock, read by Richard Gass, co-authored by Jack McDonough and Lou Witten.

Dale Flick's paper, read before 55 members and seven guests, recounted an incident in 1842 aboard the sailing brig USS SOMERS, an experimental training vessel of the then primitive U.S. navy. The captain of the ship, Alexander Slidell-Mackenzie, was a well-connected member of the young country's educated and moneyed classes – and a sadist of the worst imaginable sort. During the six-week preparation for the training cruise, he inflicted fifty punishments with a dozen lashes and . . . it got much worse, but I won't go into detail.

Within Mackenzie's crew was midshipman Phillip Spencer, also well connected, but at 18, a cut-up and a wastrel, known for a "poor school record in various academies, drunkenness, fighting, habiting brothels." Inevitably, Mackenzie and Spencer were fated to clash.

Watching his captain's sadism play out on the trans-Atlantic voyage, Spencer became sufficiently aroused to conspire with a group of shipmates to seize the SOMERS. When Mackenzie found out, he wasted no time seeing that the plotters were hung from the yardarm.

When news of what had happened made its way back to Washington, one of the first recipients was Secretary of War John Canfield Spencer, father of midshipman Phillip Spencer. Stricken with grief, he did all that he could to bring Mackenzie to justice, calling what had happened a "mockery of justice . . . cowardly butchery." The SOMERS returned to New York with still more young men in irons, but a defiant captain hell-bent on defending himself.

Despite overwhelming evidence that Mackenzie and his officers had violated every law and standard in their imposition of the death penalty without proper trial, Mackenzie was fully exonerated in a court of inquiry. It was, many thought, a "white wash" to save face with the navy. Dale, whose emotional temperature can be measured by the timbre of his voice, clearly thought it was an outrage. In a lengthy epilogue, he explained some of the far-reaching fallout of the incident, not least, the establishment of the U.S. Navy Academy at Annapolis.

Minutes of the Literary Club November 18, 2013

The meeting began with Jack McDonough's report on a new-member packet of materials and a Board of Management decision to allow two interested members per month to listen in on BOM meetings. He said that Robert Smith will be elevated to the status of honorary member following Club approval on Jan. 6. The applause greeting this announcement left no doubt as to the outcome of the vote. Jack also said that the revised bylaws, constitution and traditions were in the mail.

Fifty-three members and five guests were gathered to hear Mark Schlacter's debut paper, a charming bit of whimsy about the early development of an imaginary county – Ersatz County – in Northern Indiana. Populating his fiction with a rogue's gallery of frontier characters – a brewer, a toymaker, an Amish, an ironmonger, a tinkerer, a witch, a "strangely silent" boy and a con – Mark cited appropriate and amusing contributions from each as Ersatz took shape. Example: two centuries after the toymaker fashioned a

crude dollhouse that had been dismissed by his companions as a waste of time, architectural historians would recognize it as the inspiration for Levittown.

Mark took Indiana from territory to state and from peace to the Civil War. Throughout, the narrative was peppered with a humor that managed to be both dry and slapstick at the same time. Thus we met Indians named Mellow Fellow and his wife, Lame Deer Dancing, who made a small fortune selling high-inducing mushrooms to the settlers. We saw the brewer expand his product throughout the state under the legend “Schexnayder -- more than a beer . . . a reason for life!” We saw the “strangely silent” boy, named Deuteronomy Murphy, nicknamed Dutch, soon to become a “born politician” with “innate ability at working, and gaming, the system.” When, as a congressman, he arranged a contract for the locals at home to build a gunboat to keep the nearly Koontz Lake safe during the Civil War, it was christened the USS Dutch Treat.

And so it went. A bumbled trip to Abraham Lincoln’s burial, a pork barrel lighthouse for Koontz Lake, a marketing slogan for the local ironworks, in Old English, reading: “If we weren’t Amish, we’d yodel for Yoder, but you can.” It was crazy, it was off-the-wall, and in some undeniable ways, it was America in microcosm. It got a lot of laughs.

Minutes of the Literary Club November 25, 2013

Before 53 members and four guests, Ernie Eynon and Steve Strauss presented a budget in two parts, one longish, one shortish. If the duo had a unifying theme, it might be characterized as formative experiences.

For Ernie, this was a summer spent in a steel mill in Portsmouth, Ohio. The job, and the place, sounded Dickensian in its awfulness . . . which was not unintended, because Ernie prefaced his travails with extensive references to Charles Dickens’ famous novelistic denunciations of harsh labor conditions in Victorian England.

Ernie’s experiences ranged from long, tedious shifts as a de facto janitor in one part of the mill to a gruesome stint in the hellish coke ovens that his first supervisor told him to do anything to avoid. Along the way, he encountered organized labor’s opposition to his working too hard (thus potentially destroying their sinecures), and his boss’ imprecations that he not go to college but consider a life in the mill instead. He also ran into fellow workers’ advisories about “foolers,” or falsies, on the girls he might date off hours. It all had big impact on Ernie, not least, he hints, a lifelong habit of voting Republican.

Steve’s paper, the shorter of the two, recounted with unabashed enthusiasm his lifelong love affair with trains: his early rides on the Baltimore & Ohio to visit his mother’s family in Baltimore, later rides on such famous trains as Santa Fe’s Super Chief and the California Zephyr, and more recent rides in Ireland and the Canadian Rockies. Steve went to camp in Canada on a train and he rode to army basic training the same way – at a minimum, a joyful prelude to an uncertain experience.

In the paper, we learned about railroad memorabilia that Steve treasures, including a painting of the New York Central’s James Whitcomb Riley that hangs over his mantel at home. We heard about his early tussles with his father and grandfather for the right to play with his own electric trains (they feared he would break them). Finally, we heard

how, as a lawyer tasked with earning a living, Steve endured the ironic necessity of representing shipping companies against, as he put it, his “beloved railroads.”

But it could have been worse. Steve might have fallen in love early with . . . streetcars!

Respectfully submitted, Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club December 2, 2013

The “Black Hole” of Philadelphia, read by Joe Moran before 50 members and two guests, refers to a vast track of sparsely developed land some ten miles west of Philadelphia’s Main Line suburbs. The site of two venerable foxhunts, the Cheshire and the Brandywine, it becomes, under Joe’s tutelage, a proxy for upper class sport in Philadelphia – and Joe led us through all of it: fox hunts, horse shows, coaching, auto races, rowing and fine firearms for hunting.

Starting with a nod to the Radnor Hunt and the Devon Horse Show, two of Philadelphia society’s most enduring observances, Joe traced the origins of the latter, peppering his narrative with the names of fancy clubs and fancy people – from early retailing titans to Main Line grande dames to artist Mary Cassatt and actress Katherine Hepburn.

Joe’s primary concern, however, was to impress upon us the vast scale and scope of these sporting events in their time: auto races that drew hundreds of thousands of people to Fairmont Park, coaching runs that required gentlemen’s uniforms of bottle green cutaway, yellow striped waistcoat, white linen ascot and grey top hat.

Along the way, we learned something of Philadelphia artist Thomas Eakins, whose famed canvases depicting both coaching and rowing are among the greatest legacies of the era. We met Jack Kelly, a Philadelphia bricklayer who became an Olympic rower and the grandfather of Grace Kelly. He also became the biggest bricklaying contractor in America and the father of a son who won the Henley Regatta and the Henley Diamond Race.

Joe concluded his romp through these plutocratic precincts with discussion of a shotgun for Teddy Roosevelt, manufactured gratis by Ansley H. Fox, owner of the A.H. Fox Company, which was, for a time, the most celebrated firearms company in the country. Teddy loved the gun. Mr. Fox would have loved that three years ago, at auction, it brought \$862,500 – making it the most expensive shotgun ever sold.

Minutes of the Literary Club December 9, 2013

The gory story of early settlement in this region makes for a harrowing tale. Terry Horan, in his first paper, gave it to us straight: pioneers unprepared for what they had bitten off, flatboats fortified against Indian raids, hatchets through heads, scalping and burning at the stake. His paper, read before sixty-two members and six guests, was aptly titled “The Miami Slaughterhouse.”

Inspired by a diary of the time, written by one of his distant forbears, Terry framed his remarks as a discussion of “ordinary men and women coming down the Ohio River to

settle in the land between the Little Miami and Great Miami Rivers.” Before he got to that, however, he gave us the historical context.

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the American Revolution, the United States government owed millions to France for its help in the war; to raise money, the U.S. began selling land in the old Northwest Territory (now Ohio and other states) to ambitious settlers. Indians, not surprisingly, were anything but pleased to see these intruders surging west. Meanwhile, the British, resentful because the former colonists were not paying them debts agreed upon in the Treaty of Paris, lost no time stirring up the Indians against the newcomers. It was the perfect storm of its time.

Terry then invoked Benjamin Stites, who originally scouted the land between the two Miamis. Stites persuaded John Cleves Symmes to purchase that land – about 311,000 acres for \$225,000. Symmes then transferred 20,000 of his acres back to Stites – land around what is now Lunken Airport. Stites, in turn, sold 1300 of those acres to Abraham Covalt, the father of the woman who wrote the diary that Terry found some 170 years later.

The rest of the paper included excerpts from Mary Covalt Jones’ diary and some discussion of the planting, milling and river boating that comprised daily life. But the bulk of it, rendered with a vividness that Ken Burns could love, was descriptions of the Indian raids and Indian wars that went on until, in 1794, General Anthony Wayne put a merciful end to them at the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

Minutes of the Literary Club December 16, 2013

The annual Christmas dinner drew 68 of us, including three guests, to hear Chris Miller’s Yuletide songfest. Featuring nearly a dozen club members in the chorus, and a few outside talents to play the piano and cello, Chris gave us songs ranging from “Greensleeves” to the “Carol of the Humbuggers,” with all joining in a rousing Christmas medley to conclude. A happy turkey dinner with all the trimmings followed, then three papers by our three trustees.

The first, by Bill Friedlander, was a starkly unemotional account of his ten-month battle with pancreatic cancer: the nature of the disease, the course of treatment, the drugs employed (and their side effects) and, finally, his current status. Happily, the story had an uplifting ending. After considering treatment out of town, Bill decided to remain in Cincinnati, where he feels the quality of his medical support has been first-rate. It is a primary reason for his optimism that he may well survive this very difficult disease.

Allan Winkler told of his wife Sara’s confrontation with another difficult disorder – Parkinson’s Disease. He described the initial diagnosis by a less-than-compassionate physician and subsequent treatment at the hands of an excellent UC neurologist. In ten years, Sara’s condition has worsened, but it has not become disabling. Allan and Sara have learned to live with the spin-offs -- among them an interrupted semester to Africa, some inconvenient bouts of forgetfulness and mood swings. After some time trying, however, Sara has been successful in finding the right balance of drugs for her best

treatment – and it was encouraging to hear Allan report, “things are so much better than before.”

Bill Pratt reported on a college-level year in Scotland 60 years ago, an experience that has stayed with him throughout his life. Citing first some substantial differences between the British and the American educational systems, he next discussed the differences between the British and the American approaches to Christmas and New Year’s. Christmas there is a religious holiday – literally a holy day – while New Year’s is more secular, more festive and, to the Scots anyway, more important. It even has its own name: Hogmanay. Bill said, “It is the day most eagerly awaited and celebrated in Scotland.” Bill closed by telling of some wonderful holiday experiences he had in Scotland, but I’ll let those who are interested find them online, meanwhile wishing all, at this dawn of the New Year, a Happy Hogmanay for sure!

Minutes of the Literary Club

January 6, 2014

On a night with temperatures hovering around zero, only 42 members and three guests attended. They heard first that longtime member Robert Smith had been elected to honorary status, prompting heavy applause.

Prior to reading his paper, “Why do Giraffes Have Long Necks?”, John Bracken advised us that what we were about to hear would be satire, and we should feel free to laugh liberally. In fact, we did exactly that – frequently. Besides being a riff on college football, the paper was a laundry list of what not only John, but many thoughtful people, have come to recognize as the grotesque distortion of values that college ball imposes on much of contemporary American culture.

The set-up was a game between the fictional Carson College, a.k.a. the Giraffes, and Stillwater State, a.k.a. the Spear Chuckers – a moniker, John said, that persisted “despite the obvious ‘slap in the face to ‘political correctness.’ “ With the Spear Chuckers heavy favorites to win, indeed to trample, their opponents, John then fed us:

Players smoking marijuana; tailgating alumni in Mercedes, Range Rovers and Cadillac SUVs; faculty who haven’t had a raise in ten years, a lightweight college president whose primary job was to “convince the well off to open their wallets to Carson’s benefit,” (and who is having an affair with the wife of one of his largest donors); big-wig alumni and trustees munching on shrimp in the VIP box; and a transgender running back for whom, John said, “the last thing he wanted to do as a woman trapped in a man’s body was to carry a football, but he could not turn down the scholarship help that playing offered. Otherwise, he had no hope of becoming a fashion designer.”

Do we detect cynicism here? Let the listener be the judge. When the professors complain that male attendance at classes is extremely low after a game, and attempt a protest sit-in outside the president’s office, they are shooed away. “Faculty were a drain on resources,” John explains, “whereas the alumni made donations.” Ouch!

Following the paper, and following discussion, the membership voted to adopt the revised Constitution, Bylaws and Articles of incorporation proposed by the Board of Management.

Phillip Diller was elected a new member of the Club. Minutes of the Literary Club

January 13, 2014

With the weather a little more accommodating, 63 members and four guests showed up for Ed Burdell's recounting of one man's war on stinkbugs in the home. Although delivered in the third person, the paper quickly enough revealed itself to be Ed's own experience; his wry, up- close-and-personal account could not have been anything else.

Ed's war began about a year ago, when he and his wife moved into a new, single-story house – and sometime later he began smelling something unidentifiable: not too strong, not everywhere, but persistent. Next he began seeing the bugs – on the walls, on curtains, inside lampshades – and right after that, he began festering about what to do. Not only were there plenty of them, but his wife, who believes that all of God's creatures have a right to co-exist, refused to join him in their eradication. The most she would do was to pick them up with a Kleenex and empty them outside.

Soon enough, Ed learned a whole lot more about what he was dealing with from two experts on the Diane Rehm show. He called an exterminator – from the office, so as not to engage his wife – and learned that they tended to lurk outside doors and windows, but could come in almost anywhere, including on the dog.

Eventually, Ed decided the bugs were massing in the eaves over his garage. His description of his three attempts to verify this, in a specially ordered jump suit, with latex gloves, a flashlight and an industrial-strength bug spray – and doing it all without Mrs. Burdell's knowledge – can only be compared to a Steve Martin routine. When the first attempt failed, Ed formed strategy for a return engagement, again requiring all the right equipment and elaborate schemes to get his wife out of the house.

When circumstances conspired to foil this effort too, a third assault was planned. And for a third time, Ed's build-up to what he was sure he would find created a suspense that Alfred Hitchcock would have admired. As he approached the farthest reaches of the rafters over his garage, and as we listened, you could have heard a pin drop in the Reading Room.

Minutes of the Literary Club January 20, 2014

Jack McDonough opened the meeting, before 69 of us, including eight guests, with two items: first, that Arnie Schrier has requested associate status, and next, that Jim Myers had volunteered to create a blog on the Club's website for commentary on a letter that members had received over the weekend. Jack said he would have more to say about the letter at a future meeting.

Then Peter Stern, in a first paper, recounted in some detail the birth of penicillin. Recalling a childhood incident wherein the use of penicillin had saved his own life, Peter

said his grandmother had subsequently given him an autographed picture of Alexander Fleming, the British physician credited with “discovering” the serum.

Actually, Peter told us, a British physicist named John Tyndall observed by chance the antibacterial properties of the penicillium mold in 1875. But not understanding what he had seen, nothing came of it.

Fast forward, Peter said, to 1928. That was the year Alexander Fleming, who, in addition to providing patient care, was also experimenting with bacteria. Specifically, he was conducting tests on staphylococcus. Leaving for vacation one day, he left some of his Petri dishes exposed to penicillium spores randomly wafting into his lab – with the result that after two weeks, there were areas on the Petri dishes where bacterial growth had been completely inhibited. He presented his discovery to colleagues at the Medical Research Club in London in 1929. But, for various reasons, no official pick-up occurred.

Now the scene shifts to Oxford, where a small group of scientists and physicians who had read about Fleming’s work applied penicillin topically to several eye infections. The results were dramatic. Enter Howard Florey, a brilliant scientist-physician who launched a crusade for foundation dollars to study penicillin’s potential. More tests and experiments followed until, in the spring of 1940, the worth of penicillin in combating systemic infections in mice was verified – and the era of antibiotics was established.

Successful applications to human beings followed shortly. Florey, working with the pharmaceutical industry, oversaw the development of mass-produced penicillin. Very quickly, doctors established its effectiveness in treating both combat infections and venereal disease. Peter concluded his paper with warnings about the several challenges to effective antibiotics today.

Minute of the Literary Club

January 27, 2014

Gibby Carey, Rich Lauf and Ted Silberstein promised not to sing in their budget about the beginnings of classical opera, titled *Il Trittico*, after Puccini’s grouping of three short operas into one rapturous entertainment. Speaking before 55 members and three guests, they did their best, then, to overcome this self-imposed handicap. They presented their findings in three operatic “acts.” With impressive scholarship and a strong case for the emergence of Christoph Willibald Gluck as the father of modern opera, they began:

In the first of these acts, we learned how discontent with early forms of what would become opera evolved. Composers started to integrate music and story. They started to ensure that all parts of the piece were sung, not spoken.

In the second act, Claudio Monteverdi’s *Euridice* brings to audiences fully sung arias and larger, richer sounding orchestration for the first time. That was in 1607. One hundred years later, opera divides into serious and comic formats, but many of the old customs – like the singing of a single syllable of text over a long series of notes, or singers improvising on the composer’s themes to such an extent that the melody was no longer recognizable, or dry, spoken recitative – persisted.

In third and final act, Gluck comes along to put an end to these and other now primitive devices. With advice from Handel, and determination to bring the operatic format into modern practice, he created *Orfeo and Euridice*, a work that has been a part of the standard repertoire for 250 years.

As with any good production, it was thrilling to reach such a satisfying resolution. But oh, to have heard our principals sing! Rich Lauf's paper, titled "The Demands of Art," reflected both taste and restraint on the part of the author; it could well have been titled "Everything you always wanted to know, but were afraid to ask, about becoming a castrato (or castrated male singer).

In keeping with the evening's opera theme, Rich informed us that by the middle of the 18th century, as many as 70 percent of the men singing in Italian opera were castrati. Most were orphans, or recruited from the ranks of the poor, at approximately ages six thru eight. While few in Italy were proud of the practice, fewer still tried to stop it, because audiences loved the results.

In castrating a young male, the perpetrator fixed his vocal chords to remain at pre-pubescent length, thus enabling him to sing alto or soprano parts. He also caused a number of other changes, or arrests, to normal male development as well, none of them desirable. Although documentation as to how castrations were actually performed isn't great, Rick gave us several possibilities. The prospect of any one, I think it's safe to say, would be enough to unglue most of us.

Rick also gave us several ways to try to approximate, with contemporary singers and technology, what the castrati sounded like. And I have to say, in spite of myself, I'm curious.

Gibby Carey's paper was a look back at Cincinnati Opera during what he calls "the middle years," when it was transitioning from its birthplace at the zoo to Music Hall. Gibby recalled fondly those hot summer nights in Avondale when the nation's best singers trooped to Cincinnati because it was the only game in the nation in the summer. He talked about the storms, the animal shrieks, the singers with moths in their mouths and more, all making some of us very nostalgic – and then he mustered the arguments for moving to Music Hall: freedom from the weather, no possibility of riots such as had occurred in 1967, the zoo's needing the space for other things and, finally, the undeniable reality of better productions in a tailor-made facility.

Then followed the challenges of remaking Music Hall, the largesse of the Ralph and Patricia Corbett, which is what made it happen, and, at last, opening night in 1972. The production was Boito's "Mefistofele," starring Norman Treigle, and it was everything the faithful had hoped for. It was also the prelude to a number of challenges – administrative, financial and artistic – that the move downtown occasioned. But with the passion of its supporters, and the support of its patrons, Gibby says, the Cincinnati Opera has met them all and continues to thrive today!

Minutes of the Literary Club February 3, 2014

Sam Greengus' paper, read before 67 members and one guest, sought to determine the true nature of Hammurabi, ancient king of Babylon and progenitor of the famous Code of Laws that even today bears his name. Following a brief chronicling of their creation, their subsequent fade into obscurity, and then, in 1902, an archeologist's rediscovery of the laws, Sam told us these things:

That Hammurabi called himself a "king of justice," that he was as concerned with "equity" as with justice, that he exhibited great social conscience in administering the affairs of state, and that in any number of surviving letters there is overwhelming evidence that Hammurabi tried consistently to do the right thing – that is, the fair and just thing – by his subjects.

In a prologue to the laws, Hammurabi wrote that the gods made him king in order "to make justice (equity) manifest in the lands, to annihilate the wicked and the evil, to not allow the strong to oppress the weak." History records, however, that in Babylon the strong did oppress the weak. Which led Sam to speculate that in writing down the Code, the famed king may have been attempting to extend the program of justice beyond his lifetime.

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Finally, we learned that Hammurabi was commander-in-chief of his army as well as king. In the early part of his reign, which lasted 43 years, Babylon was not strong and had to compete with several rivals for important positioning along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Hammurabi, it turns out, was not above – as Sam delicately put it – throwing a major ally under the bus to consolidate his power . . . which he ultimately did most effectively. By the end of his reign, Babylon ruled supreme in the Middle East.

To sum up: Hammurabi may not have been perfect, but the vibes we get 3,765 years after he died are still pretty wonderful. Who among us wouldn't choose Hammurabi over the leaders we've had for much of our adult lifetimes?

The annual business meeting followed the paper. In it, Bill Sena reported that the Club is in good financial health and the members approved a motion to transfer \$31,000 from the endowment to the building fund.

Minutes of the Literary Club February 10, 2014

Ah, Paris! Bob Vitz took us – 53 members and five guests – to the City of Light to hear about the rise of the Eiffel Tower in 1889. And a fascinating tale it was.

Designed and built by the company bearing its owner's name, Gustav Eiffel, the tower was to be the centerpiece of the Paris Exposition of 1889 – the latest in a series of World's Fairs reflecting nothing so much as the rivalry of the cities putting them on, primarily London and Paris.

Eiffel, an engineer by training, had proven himself something of a genius in the field of iron construction. His trademark was a trussed arch, and between 1867 and 1886 he

constructed 42 railroad bridges in France alone. Among many other assignments, he also shaped the interior iron skeleton and supports for the Statue of Liberty.

In the late 1880s, when plans for a Paris Exposition were announced, designers in Eiffel's company published a general description of a plan for a 1,000-foot tower – something many had attempted but none had achieved. Edouard Lockroy, the minister of commerce and industry and the exposition's guiding force, liked what they showed him. Eiffel got the job.

Then followed all kinds of aesthetic concerns, financial obstacles and construction issues. But eventually, as any postcard will tell you, all was overcome and the tower arose. Soon upon completion, it was recognized as a triumph. And though some would have removed it after the 20 years guaranteed to Eiffel, time, habit and the structure's utility as a radio antenna eventually secured its immortality.

Eiffel, alas, did not have an easy time in the years that followed. Falsely embroiled in a scandal involving a money-losing French attempt to build a Central American canal, he suffered the loss of his reputation. His solution was to move away from engineering and into meteorology, which a weather station on his tower encouraged. Before long, he was a pioneer in this field too, and by the time he died, at 91, he was an *homme d'honneur* all over again.

Minutes of the Literary Club February 17, 2014

No guests showed up to hear Tom Murphy's tale of tawdry youth, and it's a pity, because they don't know what they missed. For the 38 of us who were here, Tom's revelations of the people he met hitchhiking 32 years ago, the LSD trips he took, the beery parties he embraced and the nights passed sleeping fitfully along interstates, all rang true. It was a time to wear your hair long and vomit by the side of the road and sleep in a cave if nothing better offered itself. Tom did them all.

The year was 1980, and as Tom recounted it: "LSD had fostered a desire in me to discover what lay outside of the comfortable existence I had enjoyed. I decided to go on the road. I wanted to travel alone, to find what the world was like. . . ."

Warming up for his odyssey by signing on to a National Outdoor Leadership School session in the North Cascades, Tom emerged 30 days later with a determination to hitchhike back to Cincinnati, come what might. Much did. First, he made himself sick by gorging on a steak dinner after weeks of vegetarian dieting. Next, he was picked up by a beautiful woman who, instead of fulfilling the romantic fantasies that overcame him, asked if "had any weed?" When he could not answer in the affirmative, she dumped him.

Subsequent rides included a born-again proselytizer, a salesman who ejected him upon learning Tom had the flu (thus the stomach upset at the side of the road), and an apparent man named Joe who turned out to be a woman named Josephine, with her own idea of how Tom might enrich his rapidly expanding resume. Tom left her the moment she went to sleep. Finally arriving in Boulder, his mid-point destination, Tom had his backpack stolen immediately, then found the thief and wrestled him to the ground in a successful

effort to recover his goods. He next met Star, who had gonorrhea, but who refused to take penicillin because it wasn't "natural." To which Tom replied, "Dying is."

Whether Star lived or died was not revealed to us, and, I judge, not to Tom either. Once done with her, he was done with any further self-discovery. He purchased a one-way ticket from Denver to Cincinnati, flew home and – sometime between then and now, cut his hair, shaved his beard and showed up as – you can't deny it, Tom – a pretty traditional guy.

Minutes of the Literary Club February 28, 2014

The evening began on somber notes. There was a stand-up moment of silence for Fred Carey, son of member Gibby Carey, who was tragically killed in a bicycle/automobile accident the previous Friday. Then followed a memorial to former member Ted Gleason, who died in December. The piece, authored jointly by Peter Briggs and Gibby Carey, was warm, admiring, comprehensively biographical and evocative.

It was a budget night. Fran Barrett was in charge. Tony Covatta and Peter Briggs were his seconds. Seventy-two people attended, of which 13 were guests.

First up was Tony, with reverent praise for a Norwegian author that he has recently discovered: Karl Ove Knausgard. Karl Ove, as Tony referred to him, has written a six-part series of novels based on his own life experiences, the first one of which is available in English in a bookstore near you, and the second one of which will follow soon. Eventually they all will.

Tony sees in these books many of life's most profound truths, as filtered through the ordinary and quotidian events of Karl Ove's experiences. This quote from Tony, describing something of the author's response to his father's death, is typical: "As he views his father's corpse for the last time, in lovely prose he understands at last that there is nothing in death to fear; it and we are only a small part, one species and one process in a world of many forms, things and events as the world shifts and surges."

Tony concluded by applying some of Karl Ove's lessons in the art of writing memoir to similar efforts undertaken here at the Literary Club.

Peter's paper referenced two world-class athletes with whom he feels privileged to have had glancing acquaintance: marathon runner Joan Benoit, and tennis champ Arthur Ashe.

In Joan's case, Peter recalled how he met her by accident, when she was a girl running on his rented beach in Maine, and then how, years later, when she was at Bowdoin and he was a school head outside Cleveland, he recognized her name as the unexpected winner of the 1979 Boston Marathon. The story went on from there, detailing Benoit's Olympics win in 1984 and later triumphs, but what emerged so clearly was the portrait of a fine, accomplished and humble person who has touched many lives, including Peter's, by her talent and grace.

Peter came to know Arthur Ashe when the great player would come here to play in what is now the Western & Southern Masters tournament. Ashe would always make time to

see Paul Flory, who was running the tournament, and together with Peter, they would talk with 40 to 50 talented African-American kids whom Peter had recruited for private-school education via a foundation he was chairing. Those evenings, Peter told us, were some of the most inspirational of his life. His tender recounting of Arthur Ashe's unlikely rise to athletic super-stardom in the not-so-inclusive America of the mid-60s and 70s, was equally inspiring.

Fran Barrett launched his remarks with an inquiry as to why so many Literarians, each gifted with special brands of humor – and he named them and their brands – mightn't consider stand-up comedy as a paper on any given night. Citing most of the prominent stand-up comics of recent times by quoting some of their jokes, he well made his point as to the potential popularity of the concept. But since I wasn't writing them down, and since Fran did not make his paper available to Jim Myers, let me give you an example from my own archives:

A man called his mother in Florida. "Mom, how are you?" he asked. "Not too good," she said. "I've been very weak."

"Why are you so weak?" the son asked. She said, "Because I haven't eaten in 38 days." The son said, "That's terrible. Why haven't you eaten in 38 days?"

The mother answered, "Because I didn't want my mouth to be full in case you should call."

There were a lot of laughs.

Minutes of the Literary Club March 3, 2014

Fred McGavran's fiction is much like Forest Gump's box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get. On this night, before 51 members and nine guests, we got quite a confection – the tale of young Sylph Trillingham Quimby, an appealingly precocious girl growing up in privileged circumstances in pre-War World II Britain.

The step-daughter of Lord Rockingford, a member of the House of Lords, Sylph spends considerable time in London, where she befriends an older and mysterious gentleman, Sir Parsifal Yaeger. Sir Parsifal lives in Jaeger House, just across Quimby Square from her own domicile, Quimby House, and he is no friend of Sir Rockingford. As the tale unfolds, Parsifal turns out to be a German spy – an identity to which Sylph remains oblivious, despite all the sophistication beyond her years. The story plays out from there.

Fred's handling of things, though, made it much more than the sum of these parts. Two reasons: First was the delightfully evolved personality of Sylph herself – who is seven when we meet her! – cheerfully understanding that Lord Rockingford would need another whiskey soda when upset by the day's events, or enthusiastically absorbing the teachings of Schopenhauer and Heidegger when sequestered with Parsifal.

Second was Fred's dry humor, popping up again and again in Sylph's trenchant observations. For example: "Mother and Lord Rockingford always said that one must accept a gentleman's word except, Mother would add when we were alone, in certain

matters.” Or, upon hearing that Parsifal should have slaughtered some captured soldiers rather than allowing them to surrender: “Had I been more perceptive, I would have learned then that mercy in war is not to be tolerated among the advanced nations.”

Fred must chuckle a lot when he takes pen in hand.

Minutes of the Literary Club March 10, 2014

Jerry Kathman’s bittersweet homage to his mother-in-law, Irena Churayev, was one of those rare papers that combines heartfelt emotion with a world book of information – in this case about the evolution of Stalin’s Russia – and a jam-packed narrative thread in which every sentence was a high performer.

Read (and partly sung) with great feeling before 54 members and seven guests, this “Russian Lullaby,” as Jerry named it, began in 1949, when Irena was a recent immigrant to the U.S. and a nanny for an employer in New Jersey. She was enjoying a cup of tea and a moment of peace, Jerry said, in a life that had known very little of the latter.

She had been born a child of privilege, to a father prominently placed under the czars as Dean of Mathematics at the oldest, and arguably the most prestigious, engineering college in Russia. Yet in short order, the Russian Revolution, the civil war following, the terror under Stalin, the purges, World War II, the Siege of Leningrad and life in a forced-labor camp in Germany, made of her life a textbook study of hell. Irena and her family just barely circumvented probable execution under the Soviets when her father was able to persuade a childhood friend from Russia, then living in New York, to sponsor them in America.

Much of the paper chronicled this history in vivid, but never excessive, detail. We learned, among other things, what it meant to be a “former person” in the Soviet Union, an “untermensch,” or sub-human in Nazi Germany and a displaced person in the chaos following the war. We saw the intensely human experiences of Irena interwoven with the horror of her circumstances: Example: “For Irena, the timeless themes of the classical repertoire – fidelity, integrity, honor and love – presented a window into a rare world unmanipulated by the commissars. Her lifelong passion for opera was formed at this time. Opera gave Irena hope that there was life beyond the cruelty of Stalin’s Russia.”

Jerry closed his memorial with thoughts from Viktor Fankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*, with a quote from *Angels in America* about how those who come before us remain a part of us, and with the memory of a night at the Met with Irena and his family. At the close, Irena had turned to him and said, “Did you enjoy that, Jerry?” When he said he did, she followed with, “No one can ever take that from you, Jerry.” It was, Jerry

said, the “transcendental” truth that life had taught her: Nothing material survives, but experience is everlasting.

Jerry was humbled, and so were we.

Minutes of the Literary Club March 17, 2014

Nobody ever came down harder on “er,” “uh,” and “um” as impediments to the solid delivery of a spoken presentation than did Kingston Fletcher at this podium last month. Nor was he enthusiastic about drinking water mid-delivery.

Declaiming on the important things to keep in mind to give an effective paper, King first quoted some of the more stirring words in our patriotic canon – “Give me liberty or give me death!” and the like -- and then talked about his own experience with Toastmasters, an organization expressly designed to give reluctant speakers the poise and confidence to speak effectively.

Speaking before 55 people, including six guests, King described Toastmasters, of which he has been an enthusiastic member, as “exercise for the brain.” He described what he calls “disfluency,” a mismatch of words and syllables. Then, just to ensure that the assembled missed no nuance of his message, he spelled out ten maxims for all of us to heed, everything from enunciation to eye contact. I won’t take you through them again; I have no doubt that King will if only you would ask.

But hydrate before you start in!

Minutes of the Literary Club March 24, 2014

Jack McDonough opened the meeting with the announcement of an exhibition of recent sculpture by Mark Schlacter at the Architectural Foundation of Cincinnati from April 3 thru May 30.

Jack said that members would be receiving in the mail, in a few weeks, some options to vote on concerning the issue of women and the Literary Club.

Dale Flick read with great verve the evening’s paper, “Those Flying Machines,” which was penned by Jim Durham and heard by 56 members and four guests. Ranging widely over the long history of non-airplane flight, Jim’s story began with references to ancient, Biblical and mythological texts on flying, then moved to Leonardo Da Vinci’s famous “Ornithopter,” finally arriving at the discovery of such lighter-than-air elements as hydrogen, helium and coke gas, each one of which occasioned some kind of balloon or blimp or dirigible.

Jim peppered his narrative with cameos of various individuals closely associated with this kind of flying, one being a Professor Charles, whose gas-filled balloon so terrified the peasants in rural, 18th century France that they came at him with pitchforks. Only the intercession of the chevaliers of the French army saved the professor’s life.

Next we heard about Thaddeus Lowe, whose experimentation with lighter-than-air balloons took him, in 1861, from Cincinnati to South Carolina, where he was arrested as a union spy. It required the Smithsonian to attest to his scientific credentials before he was released. Lowe went on to help the union with his invention of the first air-to-ground technology. Indeed, he was reporting from above at the first battle of Bull Run when a bullet brought down his balloon behind Confederate lines; amazingly enough, it took his wife, dressed as an old hag in a wagon, to rescue him. Lowe went on to many triumphs in his life, not least founding Lowe’s still viable hardware.

Third in this rogue's gallery was Alberto Santos Dumont, a Frenchman of Brazilian background or a Brazilian of French background (nobody's sure), who, right around 1895, came up with the first genuine dirigible, prompting some people to name Dumont the first man to fly. Meanwhile, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin had pioneered a new type of airship in 1874, and this became the forbear of the doomed Hindenburg, which burst into flame over Lakehurst, New Jersey in 1937. The famous disaster doomed forevermore travel by airship, but not, mercifully, discounts at Lowe's – perhaps the most beloved legacy of this colorful era.

Minutes of the Literary Club March 31, 2014

Bob Faaborg and Bill Sena gave us a different and interesting budget: a point/counterpoint on the virtues and failings of Fannie Mae, the vaunted Federal National Mortgage Association of home mortgages fame. Turnout was light – 44 people, with two guests, likely due to worry over Opening Day parking.

Bill began the proceedings with a history of Fannie Mae, noting its Depression-era inception, its governance, the changes in the home financing market in the 1970s and the subsequent emergence of those infamous debt instruments called collateralized mortgage obligations – which turned out to be a great thing for Fannie Mae.

Bob began his remarks with the true and sad story of a man who lost his house to foreclosure in housing bubble of recent years, noting that Fannie Mae, as he put it, “was at the core of the meltdown.” Bob then argued that while in the beginning “Fannie was a relatively benign, small organization, it eventually metastasized into a cancerous, ravenous, too-big-to-fail financial monster.” The principal reason, he said, was the institution's “intrinsicly contrary dual mandate”: to help finance homeownership for Americans and to maximize profits for its shareholders. His elaboration on that premise took us through the many violations of traditional lending practice and common sense that almost brought the nation to its knees six years ago.

Our two jousters then concluded with Bill saying that Fannie Mae should be preserved because its fundamental mission – to help people secure housing – is noble. Bob, however, found Fannie Mae inherently unsustainable. He said its favored position within the U.S. government gives it unfair advantages in the marketplace. He said that political cronyism and influence-peddling are rife, and that as a result, no attempt to “regulate” it will ever succeed.

And one final indignity: the European Union has banned precisely the guarantees that our government gives Fannie, on grounds that they “grossly interfere with free markets.” Said Bob, “And I thought it was Europe that was the socialist!”

Minutes of the Literary Club April 7, 2014

For anybody who loves golf, Dave Reichert's paper, “Norman Conquest,” was pure heaven. His subject was the great – and eccentric – Canadian golfer, Moe Norman, who burst on the scene in the mid-1950s, became a pro in 1957 and remained a fixture among Canadian professionals pretty much until his death in 2004.

Norman, we learned – and that includes 48 of us and two guests – owned his swing like virtually no other golfer and could hit his balls so straight and so consistently that pros like Ben Hogan, Lee Trevino and Tiger Woods can only marvel at his performances. Once challenged to hit a hydro cable overhanging a course, he hit it three out of ten times. Once asked to wait before hitting a four wood because two women were walking on the fairway 200 yards ahead and ten years apart, Moe said not to worry, that they would never know he had hit; his ball landed between them, and they never did know!

Moe, whose background was exceedingly modest, was pathologically shy, uncomfortable around the country-club golfers who comprised the preponderance of players, and he dressed like a ragamuffin. Yet in 1956, just a year before he became a pro, he set nine course records, shot 61 four times and won 17 of 26 amateur tournaments.

David's paper was mostly anecdotes about Moe Norman, each one fascinating to this hopeless duffer, so I'll just end with one that I particularly loved: Facing a 400 yard hole, Norman heard his caddy say, "A driver and a wedge." Norman teed off with his wedge, then hit his driver from the fairway, 250 yards to land within three feet of the hole. "A driver and a wedge, a wedge and a driver – it makes no difference," he said. And for Moe Norman, it didn't.

Minutes of the Literary Club April 14, 2012

Harry Santen has such a soft voice and such a fetching smile that it seems almost a disconnect when out of them comes a tale of devotional rigidity and suppressed passion – but that's what 61 of us, including three guests, got on this night.

The narrative – at first blush autobiographical – told of a young man who spent four years in a monastery, then thought better of it and asked to be released. The Father Prior agreed, reluctantly, and absolved him of his vows of poverty and obedience. But because he had been ordained a priest, the father said, he could not be released from his vow of chastity. He told our young protagonist that Rome was loosening up, however, and that freedom from this vow, too, would come soon.

So much for the set-up. Our hero then moves to New York and, in wine-by-a-romantic-fire prose, falls for a woman who seems to be his soul mate in all matters of music, art and poetry. She is also mysterious; for some time she refuses to reveal much about herself. When finally she unloads, it turns out that she, too, has spent years in a convent before seeking an escape; she left it, but she remained a devout Roman Catholic. Not the kind of girl to become wrapped up with a priest.

But of course, that's exactly what happens. The narrator – clearly by now not Harry, but a figment of his remarkably rich imagination! – winds up helping out the cardinal in St. Patrick's one Sunday. And who should be in the congregation, witnessing him traipsing to the altar in his priestly robes, but Marie, the object of his simmering affections.

She shuns him forevermore and returns to a convent. He returns to Gethsemani, no longer to be a priest but, presumably, to live a life of atonement for his straying. At least, that's what I think happened. The ending was a little murky. More than clarity on that topic,

however, I wish I knew: Harry, what spirit moves you when you sit down to write these papers!

Minutes of the Literary Club April 21, 2014

This paper, one of the more complex I have read in nearly four years of doing minutes, was about a stolen Ferrari, model # 3084, and what happened to it and its parts as it made its way from Ohio to Atlanta to Belgium and – over the course of 28 years – to the auction block in Chichester, Sussex, England, where it will be put up for sale next month – at an expected price of some \$30 million.

Speaking before 54 members and six guests, Tyler Winslow, in his debut effort, introduced us to a large cast of characters, including petty thieves, owners, buyers (or would-be buyers), auto enthusiasts, collectors, advisers to collectors, legal authorities, experts in the recovery of stolen goods and more. Each had a role in a saga of greed, chicanery and covetousness that would do the pages of *Vanity Fair* proud. We could be proud, too, to keep all the tangled threads straight; yet just as we might have thought we were doing so, Tyler said, somewhat apologetically, “It seems impossible, but things get really complicated from here.” The Reading Room erupted in nervous laughter.

But give Tyler credit. He brought his tale to a tight and tidy close, then took time to raise a number of issues that it suggested: When is a car, after substantial restoration and new part acquisitions, still an original and when does it become something else? And why does it matter? How could a car even start to be worth something like \$30 million? How is the car collecting market like the contemporary art market? What motivates people to participate in it? How is car collecting – still a young field – likely to evolve?

Tyler took all these and more on, giving each a thoughtful, interesting answer. He also gave us, I think, implicit assurance of many more solid papers to come – as long as we are willing to do the work to figure them out!

Minutes of the Literary Club April 28, 2014

The meeting began with a resolution of gratitude by Paul Franz to recognize Jim Myers’ many years of service as Webmaster for the club’s Website. Dusty Rhodes, the county auditor, who was Bill Sena’s guest, then stood up to remind everyone in the room to take advantage of the county’s Homestead Exemption, which will no longer be available after May.

The evening’s budget, given before 57 members and six guests, included three papers, by Fred McGavran, Ted Striker and Jack McDonough. There was no discernible theme between them.

Fred’s paper, one of his signature twilight-zone flights of fancy, told of the disappearance of the narrator’s wife into a “parallel universe” of realigned atoms. The narrator, Walter, was endearingly crusty; the wife, Joyce, was a caricature of corpulent maturity, and the charm of the piece was all in Fred’s droll descriptions. Consider: “When we finally returned to the condo, I waited at the foot of the stairs until she had completed her ascent,

wondering how those tiny heels could support such a mass, and fearing that if she lost her balance, I would not be able to get out of the way in time.”

Ted’s paper examined a longtime interest: locks and safes. Beginning with how to find a safe place to store a stamp collection, Ted moved quickly on to a brief history of locks, and a corollary history of how safe-crackers throughout the centuries have been adept at breaking through any kind of new lock. The latter part of the paper traced the founding, evolution and eventual dissolution of the Mosler Bank Safe Company, a distinguished enterprise in this city for 120 years and for all of that, one of the most reputable manufacturers of safes in the nation.

Jack’s paper focused on the talent and accomplishments of a young man named Joseph Mason who worked as an apprentice to John James Audubon in the years between 1820 and 1822. An unusually talented painter of botanical subjects, Mason used his gifts to provide background illustration for Audubon’s early renderings of his “Birds of America” series. The arrangement, as Mason was led to believe by Audubon, was that he would be credited for his work under the master’s signature. Ultimately, however, Audubon betrayed him and erased his name. Jack’s paper was a bid to set the record straight and to tell of the discovery of Mason’s grave in Spring Grove Cemetery – a site long thought to be lost to history. He also told how local naturalist and illustrator John Ruthven has worked to resurrect the proper memory of Mason with a special marker at Spring Grove.

Minutes of the Literary Club May 5, 2014

A big turnout on this night – 67 members and three guests – signaled an impending vote on the topic that the membership has loved to hate – and debate – for much of the year: Women and the Literary Club. Ultimately, the issues had been boiled down to four proposals, with members from Rabbit Hash to Oxford showing up to cast ballots. The results:

Should the Club admit women as full members? 15 YES. 51 NO.

Should women be allowed as guests of any member at any meeting? 21 YES. 45 NO.

Should women be allowed as guests of readers, with prior notice to members? 28 YES. 38 NO.

Should women be invited to special events arranged by the Board of Management? 37 YES. 29 NO.

Clearly, it was an outcome that left many happy. Based on my observations, it left some – the congenital worriers despite the many tealeaves in their favor – relieved. And it left some – those who felt that an event with women once every quarter century was quite ample – unsettled. But few were surprised.

Bill Pratt’s paper, “Not Marble, nor the Gilded Monuments,” was a poetry professor’s trip tik to the final resting places of six writers he greatly admires: William Butler Yeats at Drumcliff Churchyard in northwestern Ireland; Rainer Maria Rilke in Raron, Switzerland; Ezra Pound on an island in the Venice lagoon, T.S. Eliot in the poet’s corner

of Westminster Abbey; William Faulkner, in Oxford, Mississippi, and Thomas Jefferson, at Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In each case, Bill served us with a poem or verse that related to the writer's surrendering of his mortality, the most famous, I think, being Yeats' proud tombstone inscription: "Cast a cold eye/on Life, on Death/Horseman pass by." And he told us a little about how that verse gives insight to its author. In Yeats' case: "He seems to be saying that he will never rest in peace, but will go on actively defying death forever. In his imagination, his soul has become a ghostly horseman, riding past his own grave and casting down on it a glance of cold disdain."

Bill told us something about each of the writers he selected – their triumphs, their trials – whatever seemed to stand out about their lives. He noted that in seeking out their final resting places, he does not search for the "lingering ghost of a writer," but tries to understand better the meaning of their words. This, he said, is to satisfy a "spiritual appetite," to discern "possibilities of enchantment beyond the beauty of natural spectacles." In learning what we did about these writers, then, we learned something essential about Bill.

Minutes of the Literary Club May 12, 2014

A biographically informative and tenderly felt memorial for former member George Palmer, given by Gordon Christenson, opened this meeting of 55 attendees, including three guests.

Jim Myers, the evening's presenter, addressed head-on his lifelong history of participation in sports as a one-armed player. The chronology, which included swimming, diving, table tennis, basketball, jogging, rollerblading, sailing and golf, each in some depth, was peppered with anecdotes and evidence of Jim's remarkable tenacity and courage throughout. His comments were vivid, touching, funny and proud.

Here's an example: "It isn't easy to learn to swim in a pool full of thrashing 10 to twelve year-olds, but even more difficult than that was to summon the courage to appear in public without a tee shirt to cover my chicken wing of a stump and the surgical scars from a lot of pointless operations that had been meant to fix me. The choice was clear, and somehow I did learn both to swim and to ignore the staring."

Jim became quite good at paddle tennis, partly through pluck and partly through serving by holding the paddle under his chin, tossing the ball up with one hand, grabbing the paddle and hitting the ball – and then playing. The only problem, he said, was that in gripping the paddle with just the two fingers he has, it would sometimes fly out of his hand, and, "There is some unfair advantage over an opponent who fears decapitation, I admit."

There were similar stories about each of the sports: rollerblading across a protruding root and smashing a shoulder, trying to sail by tying the mainsheet to an ankle, then capsizing, playing golf with a pro hell- bent on teaching someone with one arm to play. The sum was more than heart-warming; it was inspiring. Strong evidence of Jim's conviction, stated early on: "Failure is not the worst thing. Not competing is the worst thing."

Minutes of the Literary Club May 19, 2014

With 65 members present (and three guests sequestered), a new slate of officers was elected. For the coming year, Mike Kremzar will be president, Bill Pratt will be vice president, Bill Sena will be treasurer, Jim Myers will be secretary and Rich Lauf will be clerk. New trustees are Paul Franz and Tom Murphy.

Nick Ragland's first full-length paper before the club chronicled the military life and military times of Terry de la Mesa Allen, a brigadier general in the U.S. army who saw constant combat in both World Wars, was never a favorite of two of his immediate commanders, George Patton and Omar Bradley, but who was beloved by his men and greatly honored in his time.

When he retired from the Army, in 1946, after 33 years of active service, his awards included two Distinguished Service Medals, a Silver Star, a Legion of Merit, two Purple Hearts and Several foreign decorations. During the Second World War, he had been pictured on the front of Time Magazine, with the inside article noting, "Yet upon Terry Allen and his 1st Infantry Division, as upon no other commander or unit in Sicily, there had fallen a special mark of war and history."

Clearly part of what fascinates Nick is that Allen is largely forgotten today.

Thus we learned, in considerable detail, many of his military exploits, from the Argonne Forest in World War I to North Africa, Sicily and finally, Germany itself. Along the way we received several fascinating cameo glimpses of people like Patton – in one instance, urinating into Allen's slit trench, which was providing shelter from Luftwaffe raids, solely to embarrass an officer he disliked. Perversely, though, Patton not only wanted Allen on his team, he stood up to Eisenhower and Bradley when they tried to remove him for permitting undisciplined behavior among his troops. "I want those 1st Division sons of bitches," Patton said. "I won't go on without them.

In the middle of the war, despite his prowess, and the recent awarding of a Distinguished Service Medal, Allen was relieved of duty for reasons that are still not clear – but that Nick assigned to a variety of petty possibilities. In almost no time, however, the controversial general was back, in charge of yet another division – having been granted a "second chance" by his greatest patron, General George C. Marshall.

Perhaps his best epitaph was penned by Ernie Pyle, the great war correspondent: "If there was one thing in the world Allen lived and breathed for, it was to fight."

Respectfully submitted, Polk Laffoon IV

Minutes of the Literary Club

June 2, 2014

“No man is ambivalent about his father,” Richard Hunt told us at the start of this earnest inquiry into the nature of father-son relationships. “The way we view our fathers has marked every one of us . . . and possibly seared our souls.”

Wow! Serious stuff. No doubt, the four guests and 55 members in attendance fastened their seatbelts.

“Fatherhood is a mirror,” Rich continued, reflecting familial resemblances, speech patterns, gestures and the like from one generation to the next.

So where was all this going? The elder Mr. Hunt, we soon learned, was an “inflexible, unfeeling, close-minded man who sat silently at the head of our dinner table.” What is it about fathers, Richard seemed to be asking, that they have such influence . . . even if too much of the time they make us uncomfortable, even if we never achieve the closeness with them that, at some level, all sons seek?

With that, he launched into a review of fathers and sons in art and literature, from the Illiad thru pop culture, always contrasting the way father-son relationships were either negatively portrayed or dismissed in favor of mother-and-child. Thus: many Madonnas and infants, but no Josephs and infants. Much of this was a high-spirited romp, i.e., “Juno does swell our tides, casting the soft light of her moon . . . Big Daddy Jupiter, on the other hand, is the badass who creates storms filled with thunderbolts and high winds. Warm and fuzzy and caring – not so much.”

In the midst of it all, Richard called a time-out to tell us that the posthumous discovery of some photos of his father, as he prepared to ship out for World War II, caught him quite off guard. “Holy scheist, I thought. It took my breath away.” All in an instant, Richard realized what his father must have been feeling that day, what it must have been like to be in a bomber over enemy territory – and why, possibly, his father had been so silent for so many years.

If Richard is not ambivalent about his father, I believe this paper helped him to clarify why.

Minutes of the Literary Club

June 9, 2014

For the annual outing, Bill Burleigh provided both weather and setting of ideal description. His handsome home overlooking woods and hills framing the Ohio River

were rivaled only by the multiple varieties of bourbon, the five-star barbecued chicken and the myriad dinner tables on a wide and welcoming terrace. Scores of Literarians were there to enjoy it, and I know they join me in saying again, “Thank you, Bill.”

Bernie Foster’s paper, a memoir of the middle years of his childhood spent in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, offered many inside glimpses of everyday life in the rural laboratory that sprang up overnight, in 1943, for the development of the atomic bomb. We heard about the assembly-line prefab housing – a new unit was created every 30 minutes, Bernie said – the carefully organized schools, so that scientists recruited for the Manhattan Project would feel secure about their children’s education; the now unthinkable treatment of the 7,000 African Americans brought in to undergird the war effort (they were forced to live in 16x16 wooden huts with no running water or electricity); the kids, Bernie among them, playing in the woods wherever they wished – so long as they didn’t go outside the chain-link fence bordering the entire seven-by-17 mile perimeter of the project. In one amusing anecdote, Bernie recalled their discovery of a moonshine apparatus left behind in the hurried evacuation of those forced out when the project was established.

In all, Bernie said, it was a very fine, almost unreal, place to be an adolescent – strong schooling, no crime, violence or unemployment, a lot of smart people and some notable diversity. When a young Jewish friend came to visit, and his mother insisted on sending Kosher hot dogs along, Bernie’s family was predictably undone.

The evening concluded first with remarks by outgoing president Jack McDonough, who referenced the positive things accomplished by the outgoing board and said what a privilege it had been to serve; Jack received a standing ovation for his efforts.

Incoming president Mike Kremzar stressed his commitment to “healing” the club in the wake of the debate over women as members and the recent election of officers, which many felt had been badly and hurtfully handled. Some discussion followed. Former president Tony Covatta said that he had talked with Mike, and he felt confident that the new board would work hard to return the club to its long-standing traditions of mutual respect and comity.