

JOSEPH S. STERN, JR.

Joseph S. Stern, Jr. born March 31, 1918, died January 2, 2010. As 7:30 approached on many Monday nights over the years of the mid 1990s through 2005 or so, you would find this writer or another Literarian arriving at the striking Carl Strauss house at 3 Grandin Place, to pick up Joe Stern for his weekly jaunt to The Literary Club. After a stroke in the early 90s, Joe didn't drive much, and other members were glad to give him a ride to the Club. After the invariable affectionate kiss for his beloved wife Mary, it was off down Grandin and Torrence to Columbia Parkway and then the Clubhouse. En route Joe would treat the driver to salty and wise observations on all things Cincinnati, and an acerbic or complimentary remark might be advanced in anticipation of the evening's speaker and paper.

Joe loved the Club, and the Club loved Joe. Joe joined the Club in 1977 and was an Honorary Member at his death. No one then a Member can forget Joe's triumphant, humorous return to the Club as the author of "Sidney Greenstreet or There's a Rainbow Around the Corner," Joe's first paper for the Club after his first stroke in the early 90s. The paper recounted Joe's return to fly fishing, something he thought was gone forever, and his landing of a legendary fish, "Sidney Greenstreet" himself. It was an excellent example of his work and delivery. Joe was a great reader and a good writer, investing his papers with intelligence, wit, emotion, and humor. His topics ranged from the historical to trenchant personal observation. That night, as always, Joe indulged himself in his idiosyncratic reading style. He regularly ignored one of the

Club's unwritten rules, indulging himself in ad-lib comments as the spirit struck him during his readings. The membership always forgave him these minor transgressions.

Joe was a pillar of the Club. For years, he served as Trustee on the Board of Management, a group he cheerfully referred to as "The Apparatus." He surely would have risen to be President had he not been felled by his debilitating first stroke.

Joe brought a distinguished background to our Club. A graduate of Harvard College, as he might well tell you, he returned to Cincinnati to go to work in the family business, at least one run by his father, US Shoe Corporation. He rose through the ranks to serve as President and Chairman of US Shoe before retiring and becoming a Professor of Business at the University of Cincinnati. Joe was deservedly named a Great Living Cincinnati in 1989. His other honors and achievements were legion. To name only a few, he was an active member for over 30 years and President of the Board of Trustees of the Public Library, co-founder of the Friends of the Public Library, a trustee of Children's Hospital Medical Center, the CSO, and the Cincinnati Historical Society. He was Chairman, sparkplug and chief fundraiser for the Bicentennial Commission that so splendidly celebrated our City's 200th birthday in 1988. He took a great interest in downtown development.

Joe received many other honors and did much for Cincinnati during his 91 years, but none of it defines the man. I cannot contain this protean figure in the few minutes allotted me, but let me relate a few of the things Joe liked as a way of giving you the flavor of Joe Stern: collecting Presidential signatures; dude ranches; the Cincinnati Reds; fly fishing; The Arizona Inn in Tucson; the Grand Tetons, the tallest of which he

once scaled; grilled lamb chops; signed first editions. Joe was a man of great intellect and strong passions. He was a stout defender of Literary Club traditions. Joe spoke out vigorously in favor of a membership that was able to write and speak well.

Joe had a terrific sense of humor. For him the Club was a wonderfully arcane, Byzantine institution in which he took great delight. He was not afraid to poke fun at the Club, himself and his fellow members. I cannot resist recounting one of the best pieces of folklore of our Club of the last half century. Older members will remember affectionately Joe's effort in a 1987 budget paper, co-authored with the late Bob Allen, "Post Time." Our most senior member for many years was Oliver Gale, the retired P&G flack, who had a penchant for writing romantic tales of love affairs gone awry, generally about elderly gents who looked somewhat like Ollie, and toothsome misses very much the gents' juniors, although superior to them in the wiles of love. In "Post Time," Allen and Joe penned the story of a bumbling UC business professor who fell into an unlikely but most welcome romance with a student. When the ultimate moment arrived and it looked as if despite himself the disrobed prof would consummate his relationship with the willing co-ed, a noise emanated from the bedroom closet. Opening the closet door, the professor was amazed and discomfited to find Ollie Gale, presumably taking notes for his next story.

On trips home after club meetings, as he munched on a filched piece of Braunschweiger—don't tell Mary I'm eating this! -- Joe's highest praise was to call the work of the night a "good Literary Club paper." A "good Literary Club paper" may well have been on any subject, authored by anyone in the Club, whether or not one of Joe's intimates. His only requirements for a "good Literary Club paper" were that it had to be

interestingly written and delivered and contain either abundant information, well structured thought, or insight into the personality of the writer, if not all three.

And so we have picked Joe up at home one last time, visited the Club with him and taken him back to 3 Grandin Place, something that occurred far too little after Joe's second stroke a few years ago. We won't see him or his like again. As we march inexorably toward the distant goal of the Club's own Bicentennial, let us remember Joe Stern, his fine papers, his contributions to our City, his affection for us, his love for our Club.

--Submitted by Robert
Dorsey, Henry Winkler and
Anthony Covatta

March 1, 2010