

## OUR CLUB: THEN AND NOW

It seems hard to believe that this year marks my 50<sup>th</sup> as a member of The Literary Club. Perhaps this makes it acceptable for me to make a few observations. It seems worthwhile to compare the Club today with the Club of 50 years ago. In many ways there is very little change. We have the same clubhouse with the same kind of furniture, and we continue to be comfortable with this. The membership has much the same composition; mostly lawyers, physicians, teachers, with a few clergy and business men. Women have continued to be excluded which seems to be the prevailing will of the club and I hope we stay that way. Their induction would change the nature of the club considerable, and probably not for the better. External pressures have forced many clubs and other organizations to include women, often appropriately, but sometimes to the club's detriment. We have no compelling reason to take this chance. Looking at this from the other direction, I would have no desire to join any women's club. Let's hope that a few sacrosanct areas remain designated for each sex exclusively.

Getting back to the composition of our membership. Without doing any research. I believe there are more lawyers and less physicians than 50 years ago. The club is decidedly more liberal politically although we are not without some dedicated conservatives. There were no Afro-Americans then; there are several today, and I am sure other worthy Afro-Americans will be elected in the future. Eslie Asbury nominated and helped elect Ken Blackwell years ago. I believe Ken was our first Afro-American member and though presently living out of town is still an associate member.

It is pleasant to recall such things as the fine wines provided by Woody Garber at the annual black-tie banquets. Also for over 40 years, the holiday celebration included a farm raised turkey courtesy of Eslie Asbury, and who can forget Dr. Ralph Carothers occupying the same

chair every week at the head of the three steps. He did occasionally need to be aroused from a light slumber, which at times became a bit noisy. No worthy successor has as yet taken his place.

One thing that has definitely changed for the better is the acknowledgement of the evening's essayist. I can remember when few, sometimes no one, congratulated the reader upon completion of the paper. Today, of course, most of the audience files by with a friendly word or compliment, regardless of the quality of the paper. I believe that the papers of today are significantly better than in my early years. It has been said that a literary club paper should be on a subject that only the author could write or that the author knows the subject better than anyone in the audience. This is usually the case and a good rule to follow. With a few exceptions, current essayists continue to follow the club's tradition of avoiding partisan politics and religion.

There have been very many memorable papers given over the years. A few readily come to my mind. Bill Lotspeich about his mother, "As I remember her". Oliver Gale, "Bitter Waters" which was a spoof of Ted Kennedy's Chappaquiddick escapades. John Wulsin with several papers, especially one on Ulysses Grant. Bill Friedlander, on Wallace Warfield Simpson. Bill Burleigh on many occasions, recently "Oh Give me a home where the buffalo roam", a paper about Big Bone Lick and its remarkable treasures. Of course many other papers by many authors could just as well be cited.

I believe the club owes its longevity and quality to the adherence to tradition and to the policy of making few changes, and these only after careful consideration. The club currently seems more vigorous than ever and I feel privileged to be a member.

Taylor Asbury  
Presented at the Literary Club  
September 17, 2010