

A Knight at Our Round Tables: Alfred Traber Goshorn

Alfred Goshorn, a native Cincinnati, was born in 1833. His father, Nicholas Goshorn, is listed as a salesman in several city directories of the time, and his mother, Lorenia, was a daughter of Seth Cutter, a well to do local farmer and land owner. At some point Nicholas became a partner in a wholesale dry goods firm, and the family home was on the corner of West Eighth and Cutter Street, the street taking its name from Lorenia's father. This is where Alfred grew up. During the 1840s he attended Woodward High School and furthered his education at Marietta College, graduating in 1854. Three years later, he graduated from the Cincinnati Law School, and for the next ten years he practiced law, partnering first with Edward Mills and then Drausin Wulsin.

In 1859 the Literary Club welcomed him as a member. Like so many of our early members, he enthusiastically joined the Burnet Rifles at the outbreak of the Civil War, but, as you know, this "unit" never became part of the Union army. After three more years lawyering, in 1864 he accepted a position as captain in the 137th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment, a one hundred day service unit. The lightly-trained 137th served at a prisoner of war camp outside Baltimore, Maryland, where it freed a veteran unit for active fighting. Following the completion of his allotted service time, Goshorn returned to Cincinnati, holding the rank of major. If you are looking for heroic military ventures, Alfred Traber Goshorn is not your man.

Apparently he did not find the legal profession sufficiently attractive, for he soon emerges in the city directory as a partner with his older brother operating the A. O. Goshorn & Company, manufacturers of "Paints, Oils, and Glass." In 1868 this became the Anchor White Lead Company, producers of white lead for paint. Soon he is listed as its president, and in this capacity he quickly became a player in Cincinnati's economic, political and civic life.

For two years Goshorn served on city council, the second year as its president. He also headed the important Board of Trade, and in July, 1866, he helped found and became the first president of the Cincinnati Base Ball Club. At this time the club largely consisted of lawyers and law students, including Bellamy Storer, Jr., Drausin Wulsin, whom we've already met, Stanley Matthews, son of the U.S. Supreme Court associate justice, and Andrew Hickenlooper. Bellamy Storer eventually married Maria Longworth Nichols and later served as U. S. minister to Belgium and Spain. Hickenlooper, after serving admirably in the Civil War, founded the Cincinnati Gas, Light and Coke Company, the predecessor to CG & E, now Duke Energy.

Under Goshorn's direction the base ball club joined with the Union Cricket Club to build the Union Grounds, first home of the newly named Cincinnati Red Stockings, and it was Goshorn who helped put together the famous first "professional" team of 1869 that went undefeated while playing teams from New York to San Francisco. But he was not to receive the laurels from that glorious season, for early in 1869 he resigned his office to involve himself in the industrial expositions that city leaders hoped would recapture Cincinnati's pre-war economic stature.

The first of these expositions, held by The Woolen Manufacturers Association of the Northwest, paved the way for annual displays of the region's manufacturing prowess. The 1870 Industrial exposition, now larger and installed in the newly constructed Saengerfest Hall at Elm and 14th

Street, proved remarkably successful. With the additions of a Mechanics Hall, a Fine Arts and Music Hall, and Power Hall, the total display space exceeded 109,000 square feet, or about 2 ½ acres. Some 300,000 visitors streamed through its grounds, oohing and aahing at the variety of exhibits. Although Goshorn did not head this first industrial exposition, since he was serving as president of City Council, he had been instrumental in launching the idea and no doubt continued to be involved in some capacity. A year later he was elected director of the second fair, held in 1871, a position he held the following year as well.

While the Queen City stoked the fires of its economic growth, the rest of the country was turning its thoughts to the nation's centennial observance, due in 1876. Spurred by the successes of Cincinnati's various expositions, national leaders began to think of a world's fair. Great Britain had inaugurated the concept in 1851 when Prince Albert opened the famed Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. Not to be outdone, France countered with its *Exposition Universelle* in 1855. Paris held a second exposition in 1867, followed six years later by one in Vienna, Austria. World's Fairs not only showcased a host country's industrial and cultural contributions, but they provided viewers the opportunity to learn about other cultures. In their prime, World's Fairs proved to be enormously educational, as well as entertaining. They also allowed host countries to practice a form of one-upmanship, and the United States wanted to show the world its own industrial production, its inventiveness, and its artistic growth. The result was the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876.

In planning for this extravaganza, every state was invited to send its own representatives to Philadelphia to discuss how this great event could be accomplished. Goshorn became part of the Ohio commission. His practical experience and intelligence--and probably his membership in the Literary Club--quickly led to his election as director-general of the entire affair. The Philadelphia World's Fair went on to become a major national success story, drawing more paid visitors--almost 9 million--than any previous fair, and Americans were not the only ones to come away with feelings of awe. Although the United States exhibits, particularly in the arts, often paled in comparison with the products of Europe, the Centennial exposition certainly introduced the world to American inventiveness: the telephone, Remington typewriter, Edison's phonograph, Cyrus McCormick's reaper, and Colt's repeating revolver, along with Heinz catsup and Hires root beer all debuted in Philadelphia. But nothing impressed people more than the massive, 50 foot tall Corliss steam engine that powered, through a series of belts and shafts, all 800 of the machines in the main exhibit hall.

All of this intricate planning, construction, physical layout, and the coordination of 34 nations (along with some 20 colonies) fell under the guidance of Alfred Goshorn. And for his successful efforts, a dozen or more countries honored him. France, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Russia, Turkey, Japan, Italy Sweden, and the Bey of Tunis presented him with medals. Most impressive of all, Queen Victoria granted him a knighthood, which required a special act of Congress before he could accept it. From then on, he was Sir Alfred Goshorn, and the often reproduced portrait of him shows Sir Alfred wearing a sash and his chest covered with the various medals bestowed on him. The portrait also reveals his enormous, but still fashionable, mutton-chop whiskers and a very fleshy Teutonic face.

There is no question of Goshorn's managerial abilities, and when he returned to Cincinnati, local leading citizens, led by Julius Dexter, honored him with a testimonial dinner. On March 22, 1877, some 150 distinguished gentlemen in formal garb gathered at the Grand Hotel. With Currier's band playing in the background, they enjoyed a menu that would put our anniversary dinner to shame. At the risk of embarrassing our club steward, the menu consisted of the following: cherrystone oysters and sauterne; both terrapin and julienne soups, served with Topaz sherry; broiled shad and potato croquettes . . . and then things got serious. Fillet of beef with mushrooms, mashed potatoes, and asparagus, accompanied by champagne; then came oyster patties, sweetbreads and green peas, followed by Roman punch and cigarettes.

After this brief smoke break came stewed diamondback terrapin, accompanied by old port wine, roast snipe on toast, and a nice claret. No sooner had this been ingested than platters of boned turkey with truffles, roast ham, and chicken salad appeared on the tables. The feast concluded with vanilla ice cream, assorted cakes, and various fruits and nuts.

Following the distribution of French coffee and brandy, the organizers launched into the traditional series of toasts. Judge George Hoadley served as toastmaster, and the assigned long-winded toasts, some lasting over ten minutes, were delivered by Alphonso Taft, William Groesbeck, Manning Force, Murat Halstead, George F. Davis, and Mayor Johnston. These were then followed by so-called "volunteer" toasts from Edward Noyes, Job Stevenson, Carl Adae, an unidentified representative from Philadelphia, and finally the president of Yale College. One can only assume that the cigars were quite long and the brandy served in large snifters.

If you recognized many of the names represented at the banquet, it is because our club made a considerable showing at the dinner. Of the approximately 150 attendees, I have identified at least 37 club members.

And so, with bulging waistlines and mellow dispositions, Cincinnati's finest departed the hotel shortly after midnight, with Courier's band still playing softly in the background.

During the years after the Centennial Exposition, Goshorn sat on the board of the Music Hall Association, serving as its third president. And in short order he became vice-president of the College of Music, director of the Cincinnati Art Museum and adjacent Art Academy, and mayor of the Village of Clifton. In 1877 he received an honorary L.L.D. degree from his alma mater, Marietta College, where he also served for many years on the board of trustees. Of course, he continued as president of the Anchor White Lead Company, the source of his by now not inconsiderable wealth.

Not having married, Goshorn continued to live in the Goshorn homestead on the corner of Cutter and Eighth Street where in 1881 he hosted a "reception for his friend, Governor Edward Noyes . . . another Literarian of course. A reporter for the *Cincinnati Commercial*, attending the event, brought the evening to life. Despite a steady December rain, civic leaders and their wives turned out in force, or, as the reporter described them, a collection of "fair women and brainy men." Although men's clothing fashion reflected only the formal attire of the era and received no mention, the ladies hair, bonnets, dresses, and jewelry he described in great detail. The unknown reporter also found the house's interior most impressive, a veritable "private

museum” filled with pottery, bronzes and art. Gas jets and candles provided soft illumination, while floral arrangements and many potted plants added to the occasion.

In 1886 in a private ceremony Goshorn married Mary Langdon, the widow of Captain James Bugher, and the two planned to move to the fashionable suburb of Clifton. In 1887 he hired local architect James McLaughlin to design a Romanesque-styled house on Clifton Avenue, now on the National Register of Historic Places, where he planned to move in with his new wife the following year, but the now Mrs. Goshorn ‘s health began to fail and she died before the house was completed.

No doubt you will recall that James McLaughlin also designed the art museum and art academy buildings, so the two men knew each other quite well, even without their shared connection to the Literary Club. As director of the Cincinnati Art Museum, Goshorn was largely responsible for assembling its first collections and establishing its early reputation. By this time he had also assembled a considerable personal collection of books and art, his art collection said to be the finest in the city.

Sir Alfred also became something of a fixture in Clifton. He often strolled around the leafy community, wearing a top hat, white vest and swinging a gold-headed cane. Known for his “courtesy and dignified urbanity,” Cliftonites thrice elected him mayor, and he served the community until its annexation by Cincinnati in 1896. Apparently not everyone responded favorably to Goshorn’s personality. Some found him pompous, and his prominent mutton-chop whiskers may have encouraged that. According to a *Cincinnati Enquirer* account in 1963, the original name carried by his great-grandfather when he immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1750 was Ganshahn, supposedly meaning “gander” in German,” but through local pronunciation it gradually changed, first to “Goosehorn” and finally to Goshorn. However, the uncertainty of his name led one local wag to write in the *Enquirer*, “Goose by birth and goose by Nature, but Gosh by Legislature.”

In 1894 Sir Alfred suffered a stroke and lost partial use of his legs. He suffered a second stroke a few years later. Although cared for by his younger sister Adele, his general health steadily worsened over the next few years, and he was seldom seen outside of his Clifton home. He died on February 19, 1902, with funeral services at Calvary Episcopal Church and burial in Spring Grove Cemetery. His estate, valued at \$450,000 (Approximately 10 million in today’s dollars) largely went to various nephews, nieces, and siblings, with his faithful sister Adele receiving the house and furnishings. His art collection went to the art museum.

For all of his civic involvement, however, or perhaps because of it, Goshorn seems not to have been strongly involved in the Literary Club. Our records indicate that he presented only three papers, two in 1878, an account of the Paris Exposition held that year and one titled, “A Visit to the Rheims Cathedral.” Two years later he contributed “The Templars,” to a budget session. Unfortunately, the volumes which should include those presentations are not in our library, nor in the bound copies at the Cincinnati History Library. Perhaps club secretaries were less than vigilant about collecting and preserving papers in the 1870s. Following Goshorn’s death in 1902, there is no record of the customary club memorial, which suggests that Goshorn resigned

from the club at some point in the 1890s. So, in conclusion, I have turned to the memoriam published by the art museum. It described his character as “large hearted and genial, broad-minded and considerate of others.” And with that eulogy, we will leave Sir Albert to a well-deserved “knight’s” rest in peace.

The Literary Club

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