

### MEMORIAL FOR STEPHEN Z. STARR

Stephen Z. Starr was an active member of The Literary Club from 1962 to 1978, was president in 1975 to 1976 and became an associate member in 1978 when he and his wife moved to Vermont, where he died on January 19, 1985. He had suffered a massive stroke two weeks before his death, and his last days were peaceful, without pain and attended by his wife, Ivy Jane, a well-known artist and sculptor, and by his four children, George, Ivy Elizabeth, S. Frederick and Diana Jane.

Steve was born in Hungary early in 1910, the oldest of three children. After his mother died, the family lived with his grandmother on a farm in Hungary, until the end of the First World War, the event which apparently precipitated the family's move to America. Steve's father settled in Detroit, prepared a home for his children and in 1924 sent for them to join him. So it was that Steve, a boy of fourteen, brought himself and his younger brother and sister through the tangle of Europe to London and finally New York. It was a major lesson in the acceptance of responsibility and accomplishing its objective.

The family moved to Cleveland a few years later. Steve earned his undergraduate and law degrees at Western Reserve University, served as a reserve officer in the U.S. armed forces in World War II and on release joined Schenley Distillers, which brought him to Cincinnati. He later became an officer of Clopay Corporation, from which he retired in 1972 to become director of the Cincinnati Historical Society. He resigned in 1978 to move permanently to his second home in Underhill, Vermont, there to live the country life he loved and to work on his Civil War history.

Steve's writing for The Literary Club was as refreshing as the man himself. His candor was sometimes blunt, rarely rude, always honest and for the most part good-natured, direct and understanding. His sense of humor, which never flagged, delighted in the ironies, contradictions and inconsistencies that make humans human. His use of words, spoken and written, was precise and direct; he used exactly the right word to say exactly what he wanted to say with exactly the nuance he wanted to express.

Beneath these surfaces was a warm, intelligent, complex man, strong of will yet innately tender, deeply committed to living a

complete twentieth-century life and deeply committed to his ultimate vocation, the study of history. To his life and vocation he brought an instinctive, almost automatic, creativity.

There are many kinds of creativity. Steve's was not the kind that makes a statue out of a block of marble, nor the kind that makes a novel out of the debris of daily life. His was the kind implied in the phrase "creative criticism"; he perceived values, relationships and implications not apparent to others. He was particularly fascinated by the relationships and tensions among aspiration, capacity and accomplishment -- both in individuals and in organizations. This theme was an underlying, but not often expressed, element in much of what he wrote. In the preface to his book, Colonel Grenfell's Wars, he did express it in describing Grenfell as

A talented British cavalry officer whose  
bravery became a byword but whose  
congenital restlessness nullified his  
effectiveness. . . . (page v)

His hilarious O Rare McGonagall, a spirited catalogue of poetic bathos, rests on the big, empty space between McGonagall's aspiration and his performance. As Steve would have said, and perhaps did, "The elevation is there, but the poetry ain't."

When the president of our university read a paper deploring the disappearance of decisive leadership in academe, it was Steve who organized a full, three-page budget explaining in three different idioms that academic leadership itself had not disappeared, but that academic leaders had failed to accomplish what their responsibilities demanded.

Finally, there is the work that stands as his imposing monument, not only to his life and his work, but to historiography itself, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War. Out of the countless volumes on the Civil War, out of the numberless regimental histories, diaries, letters, records, debates, recollections -- out of these he wove a coherent, colorful, unified history. Superficially it was, as written history often is, a chronological account of the U.S. cavalry from its revival to Appomattox. Actually (though the third volume has not yet been published) it was again an analysis of aspiration, capacity and accomplishment; this time the story of movement from potentiality to technical excellence to achievement.

Here is revealed the core of the man, our fellow member, who died on January 19. His work, his life and the man himself had somehow coalesced into a single moral imperative: the presence of aspiration and capacity compels accomplishment. It had become a moral, almost a cosmic, compulsion denial of which would have meant, to Steve, the disintegration of all final values. It is a moral imperative which we as individuals are free to accept or reject, but of the man who had the strength and courage to bend his life to it we can accurately affirm that he was a worthy model of contemporary manhood.

Charles D. Aring  
John A. Diehl  
Kornel Huvos  
Edward W. Merkel, Chairman

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