

## The Wayward Wine for Ninety Nine

29 October 2007

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I had prepared a paper for this evening about a mid-nineteenth century member who enjoyed an international reputation as an actor and elocutionist. But, with the recent loss of our good friend and fellow member, George Rieveschl, I decided to change course and sail on a different tack tonight. Reporting Club lore that happened over a century ago isn't particularly urgent. So, God willing, I'll tell you about our famous actor next year on our one hundred and fifty-ninth. Tonight's story is about more recent Club history. It will be a short paper about a little-known facet of George's wonderful largess.

For our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1999, I wrote two papers, but read only one of them. At the banquet, George sat in his usual place during his terms as treasurer of the Club, at the far end of the speakers table. I sat next to him. On learning, during our dinner conversation, of his surprise gift to the Club, I felt my second short paper might not be appropriate at the time, so I did not read it.

The one I did read was based on a letter Eslie Asbury 'received' in April 1965 from the Celestial Branch of the Club. To maintain the mood for this paper I'm going to repeat As's letter. Those of you who've come aboard since 1999 haven't heard it. I'm sure the rest of you will be glad to hear again one of the gems from the pen of Eslie Asbury who became "Mr. Literary Club" during his long, active, 63- year membership. It began:  
"Dear Editor of the Budget,

Please report to *your* members that regular meetings are held by the Celestial Branch of the Club. It may come as no surprise to you that through a decree of St. Peter, all members of the Literary Club who are in good standing when they leave the Earth, automatically enter heaven and automatically become members of *our* club. ----All of your doctors and even lawyers are here, thanks to their Literary Club membership, but it is true that these two professions are (otherwise) poorly represented. A study of the classified (Heaven) roster revealed only two other doctors and one other lawyer.”

“Our meetings are held only once a month because most of our members are busy with other interests. By special dispensation, a few, including Walter Draper, Charlie Wilby and Walter Keagy are literally tied up by the club officers on the last Monday in October. They were caught trying to escape back to Earth for your anniversary dinner. At our meetings the appointed reader selects one of the papers he wrote for the living club. We require the body of the original paper to remain the same but we permit and encourage revision within certain limits. It may be shortened, lengthened and mechanically improved to meet the higher standards of Celestial Belles- Lettres.”

“Much lively conversation at the tables is engendered by this variation. We recall our many mistakes and absurdities especially of our over-long and over-serious first papers and are pleased to be able to correct them. What more could a Literary Club member ask of heaven? We immortals also make the author the center of congratulation and are glad you continue the custom since it provides one place on Earth where a high-class mortal can earn a kingship for one night every two years.”

“As you can see, we continue to feel about tradition as you do. –On the whole we find ourselves in the same position as some of your older members—we have arrived. They found peace on Earth. We have found peace in heaven. We fill out no forms. We have no bureaucracy. We have attained permanent angelic security. Old political opponents look back with many a laugh at their sham battles having found their total motivation as earthlings to be consistently protoplasmic. To wit 1) All of us liked to eat to preserve ourselves. 2) All loved to at least go through the motions and emotions of reproducing ourselves. And 3), when we sought power, actually all we needed was appreciation and applause. Since our reactions were exactly the same as any good bird dog, we must confess to having taken ourselves a bit too seriously.

“I apologize for moralizing from an unassailable position and all heaven knows we abhor preaching, but in closing I must congratulate you on not reverting to a debating society and not becoming a downtown branch of some professional club, political party or reform organization. Above all, it pleases us that you still cherish literally your motto, “Here comes one with a paper”.

Sincerely yours,

The secretary of the Celestial Branch of the Literary Club”<sup>1</sup>

Now for the second short paper I did not read on our 150<sup>th</sup>.

‘The Wayward Wine For Ninety Nine’

Since we’ve been ruminating on the Celestial Branch and the archives, I can’t resist a very short epilogue about another more recent letter that turned up in the files.<sup>2</sup> It was written by Woodie Garber on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1983. Some of you may recall that Woodie recognized himself as an accomplished expert on wine. For a few years in the 80s, he selected the

wines served at our anniversary dinners. They were quite good. Woodie's letter, addressed to seven members of the Club, begins:

"Gentlemen,

"Late this June, I paid a visit to my dear friend, Sam Aaron, to talk of many things – mostly wines. Early summer is the time when the fruits of the prior vintage have been tasted, tested and first prices bid, quieting the endless rumors that accompany most harvests. It is the best time to buy.

"Sam was unrestrained in praise of the First Growth 1982 Vintage Bordeaux which he had again tasted on his spring trip to France this year.

"I quote from his description: 'The 1982 Vintage is truly great ---the kind that rarely occurs more than once in a generation. It is similar in style to --- and quite the equal of --- the revered 1929s and 1947s.'

Sam's description continues, waxing ecstatically:

"The '82s exhibit overwhelming fruit --- a fruit of such richness and intensity --- that the tannin in the wines appear to be tamed. This makes for surprisingly attractive drinking almost from birth, while at the same time giving them all the depth and balance that will assure a long cellar life."

"This is a bit like 'having your cake and eating it too! "

"Here is a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire the great vineyards of Bordeaux, produced during the greatest vintage of our generation, at the lowest first tranche price.'" Woodie's letter goes on:

"I shared his enthusiasm, but my vintage Bordeaux are well aged now and will meet my lifetime needs adequately. Then too, I was preoccupied with the scarcity of any good buys for this year's club anniversary, and even next year's. These '82s won't ship until 1985."

"As I traveled on from New York, visiting in Pennsylvania and Virginia, the conversations with Sam penetrated my consciousness. I have

long pondered the problem of purchasing good wines for the Literary Club Anniversary Celebration each October. Good wine buys are predicted on so many variables that one would be hard pressed to discover a method less likely to produce results than our present annual ‘hit or miss’ search and purchase mode.” EUREKA !!!”

Woodie hatched a bright idea and continues with exultation:

“I cut my trip short and returned to Cincinnati. Thanks to your hasty and generous response: In October 1999, at our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, two cases of Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1982 will have reached absolute perfection and will be served. The price we have paid will be a fraction of the irreplaceable value and distinction attained in the intervening sixteen years.”

“Some of us may be there, some not, N’importe. It seems an appropriate special tribute to the Literary Club from our generation at the last Anniversary Celebration of this twentieth century,”

Gratefully,

(Signed) Woodie

Woodward Garber (negotiant)”

Dear old Woodie had planned a delightful treat for us. Unfortunately, by the time 1999 rolled around, he had shuffled off to the Celestial Branch himself -- without telling anyone where he stashed that marvelous liquid loot. I’ll ask him about it, when I get there, and try to let you know so you can savor it on your 175<sup>th</sup>.

That’s the end on my unread second paper in ’99 but by no means the end of the story. When George Rieveschl learned that the special wine was missing he quietly found and generously bought two cases of Chateau Mouton Rothschild ’82 to fill the void. Woodie’s predictions about the wine

were true. Those of you who were there to taste it will remember that it was superb. He was also right about the escalating price. George showed me the paperwork on his purchase. By 1999, Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1982 was selling for \$615 a bottle, and close to \$14,000 for two cases.

After the dinner in '99, Giovanni and Nick saved one of the empty bottles for me. I still have it and made it into a little memorial to George. We might want to put it on the mantel for awhile with our little herd of pigmy hippopotami. I added a label that reads "In memory of / George Rieveschl / Who, among other generous / Gifts to the Club, replaced "The Wayward Wine For '99 / Two cases @ \$615 per bottle / For more details, see paper 10/29/07" / I also checked the current price of Chateau Mouton Rothschild 1982. It's now being offered at \$1,425.00 a bottle and \$17,700.00 per case- a close to 250% rise in the eight years since 1999. The Lord only knows what the price might be in the next eight years. It obviously has gone from the drinking to the investment stage and those two missing cases, if they still exist, have become a significant property that rightly belongs to the Literary Club.

Now that both Woodie and George are safely ensconced in the Celestial Branch, maybe they can get their heads together and figure out some way to tell us where Woodie hid that missing liquid gold.

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<sup>1</sup> Eslie Asbury "A letter to the editor" 26 April 1965

<sup>2</sup> Woodie Garber Letter to 7 members 4 Aug. 1983