

Membership

Budget -- November 29th, 2010

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Rogers said in his book, *Diffusion of Innovation*: those with similar interests eventually find each other and become members of an "Invisible College." Age? Never a factor. Literarians chuckle when a new member's sponsor arises to extol his youth. In the 1860s, Cincinnatians at the indigent's hospital died, on average, at age 33 (n=755). Now the mean Literary Club member's age is 73; they have been members for an average of 17 years; its members were voted upon by age 56. Our eldest member is 68 years older than our youngest. But what we write has been saved and bound in leather-backed volumes only since 1885. We know the founders by their writing elsewhere. What their papers might have told us!

I learned some club's customs. Leaders intervened early. If they had not, a reading member might have been shot. I have no references. Now, we line up to convey comments to the evening's reader. In times past, a reader's statements about war, slavery, abolition, states' rights, etc., were challenged from the floor, and grew heated. The next step: challenge to duel. If a member read a paper and was shot, other members would be forced relate to man with the better shot. Literarians believed that comments must be privately conveyed. Thus the line began.

Before my election, I studied the lives of medical men, mostly Literarians. I first came here at age 27, on January 22nd, 1968, when Dr. Charles Aring read "The Ladies Byron." Later, Aring gave me a book that contained the 44 papers he read here. He had bum right leg from polio; was he drawn to Lord Byron, with his bum leg?

Unaware of the Club's library limitations, I sought the doctors' papers. Papers at the Cincinnati Historical Society Library began in the 1920s. No papers were saved from 1849 to 1885.

Perhaps Dr. John Shaw Billings, a March 1860 graduate of the Medical College of Ohio who was elected Literarian, had written a paper. Not so. He probably visited for three times soon after he had submitted his thesis, and before he was elected, on March 17, 1860. He wrote many papers after the Civil War. In my opinion and for those who knew about him, long after he died, he was the University's most distinguished medical graduate, for he changed the face of medicine. He was identified early after he wrote his thesis, "The Surgical Treatment of Epilepsy," which he wrote to expiate the deaths of these two young men.

He sought an index of the medical literature, but it did not exist. Operative field sterility was not considered. In 1879, he produced the first annual index of the world's medical literature. In it, one might find another physician's conclusion, if he examined the same problem in a similar patient.

Perhaps Dr. Billings's friend and classmate, Dr. Charles Ravenscroft Greenleaf, or their friend, Alexander Ingram, all elected in 1860, at age 22, were writers. Again, no. Ingram was elected at the last meeting in the spring of 1860, when he was a student clerk. He would graduate in March, 1861.

Billings gained membership because of his thesis's literary value. It was likely read by wary club members, before they voted. Billings used humor to camouflage his hard points, but he omitted one terrible issue. It took 28 years for him to tell that. Billing addressed Cincinnati medical alumni, and revealed that Professor Blackman did not see his patients after surgery. Who did? Probably it was Billings, with only 3 weeks of clinical experience. Read it closely to determine that his introduction to patient care was similar to being tossed into a pond like a small boy, expected to swim.

Both his sponsor, Literarian and Surgeon Henry E. Foote and non-literarian Dr. John A. Murphy, who was co-editor of The Cincinnati Lancet and Observer, and both men were faculty members who knew that secret, for they practiced at the same in the hospital as did Blackman. Blackman was powerful; his comments were withering; there was no state licensure. Murphy chose to publish Billings's thesis, the only thesis ever so honored.

Billings believed that trephining the skull to create a hole the size of a quarter was folly. Today, surgeons call it a burr hole. Anesthesia was used. Billings watched Blackman, his preceptor, grind a hole through each man's skull with a trephine. Blackman placed the trephine's biting end into the depth of each man's caved-in skull. Did that hole release evil seizure spirits? Of course -- not.

Billings canvassed other surgeons to learn their trephine experience. He collected 18 patients; 16 died – 89% mortality. Billings did not state that death rate, but the raw data is in his thesis. If the 89% death rate was included, Blackman might have believed it was too inflammatory, and failed it. Billings would not graduate.

Billings's Literary Club sponsor, Dr. Henry E. Foote, probably told members why Billings's thesis was important. Although Blackman was an experienced surgeon, these two

operations were his attempt to "cure" epilepsy. He may have said that Blackman was an alcoholic. Most knew that Blackman's violent outbursts and paranoia were hazards, who claimed that he did not remember. His alcoholism can be inferred from a Cincinnati medical journal. An unsigned obituary the Philadelphia Medical Times that listed his cause of death: cirrhosis and abdominal dropsy. (I suspect that Billings wrote this obituary, for there are telltale marks, but that will be on another subject). Blackman's own inexperience, not seeing his patients after surgery, and other surgeons who failed to report honest patient outcomes, were taken to task. Billings could not determine the procedure's mortality, for there was no base number.

Dr. Foote's father, an attorney and President of the Medical College of Ohio's Trustees, knew Blackman's foibles. He resigned, as did other trustees, when he lost the vote to dismiss Blackman.

Billings never mentioned his Literary Club membership. Some believed that Billings was surprised when Fort Sumter was shelled. Yet Larz Anderson, the brother of the Commandant of Sumter, Major Robert Anderson, was a Literarian. The coming Civil War was often discussed. Billings was a member for a year before the War began. There was no preparation on the national front. Congress knew, but failed to authorize funds, for its members represented both sides.

Billings left Cincinnati six months later for his regular army commission examination. Some concluded that Billings did not accept Blackman's offer of partnership for patriotic reasons. Billings never explained his refusal. Regular Army was the closest job one could get for what has been called "tenure."

Club meetings were suspended for 18 months, beginning in 1862. Most went to war. Billings and Greenleaf survived. Alexander Ingram was killed in the wreck of Brother Jonathan. All three names are listed in the framed broadside on second fireplace's mantle.

The first and only paper to escape Literary Club walls was printed in the Cincinnati Daily Gazette's February 15th, 1861, edition. Captain and later Union Major General John Pope read "Fortification and National Defense," when President-elect Abraham Lincoln spent the night in Cincinnati, when he traveled to his inauguration. Pope was a member his entourage. Had Billings missed that reading, he could have read the Gazette. That paper was always sent to Washington, for it was a useful to gauge the temper of its readers. When Pope arrived in Washington, he was served with court-martial papers. He criticized President James Buchanan,

while on active Army duty. Buchanan quashed it. Others might have found that he could have done something, but he was the soon-to-be ex-President.

In 1862, one Literarian officer destroyed, but did not kill, another Literarian. Well-liked John Pope is best known for his terrible defeat in Second Battle of Bull Run, while commanding the Army of the Virginia. Cashiered Literarian, Major General George McClellan had fresh troops, watched, and did nothing. Both were once in Cincinnati. Maybe McClellan knew that Pope was the better man, for he sent Pope, his aide, to speak to Ohio's Governor on his behalf. Governor Dennison probably determined that Pope did not have that fire in his belly, and he insisted that McClellan come to Columbus, when he was given command of the state militia. After the Civil War, Pope redeemed himself in another battle.

Senator Salmon Chase's Literary Club papers were not saved. He proposed the Cincinnati Marine Hospital that later was called the Hospital of the Good Samaritan. Gone are papers written by future Literarian, Dr. William Mussey, Company A's surgeon of Burnet Rifles. Mussey organized the Voluntary Military Hospital to treat once healthy, now sick Ohio recruits.

His successor, Major J. J. B. Wright, Surgeon, USA, was driven from Cincinnati, when newspapers printed examples of his incompetence, for he was reprimanded by BG Ormsby Mitchell. In St. Louis, he was again reprimanded by Major General Henry Halleck. At his third command, he was sent to out-of-the-way Carlisle Barracks. In the last days of June, 1863, it was occupied by three Rebel brigades before the Battle of Gettysburg.

There are no papers, only titles, written by Dr. Roberts Bartholow. He was elected Literarian in 1864. Ten years later, he saw a woman whose skull was eaten away by a cancer that exposed her brain and its covering. He inserted needles directly into her brain while she was awake. She felt no pain. Twenty years before Dr. Charles Aring was elected a Literarian, he and Dr. Otfried Foerster sat in Breslau's main square, and discussed Bartholow's work. Foerster believed that it would take longer for a surgeon to learn neuroanatomy than for him to learn surgery, so he, a neurologist, began to operate. A young neurosurgeon, Wilder Penfield, spent nearly a year with him, then returned to Montreal, and began to operate on awake persons with epilepsy. Bartholow's work led to Penfield's epilepsy surgery, and later to the insertion of stimulator wires through the brain in awake persons with Parkinson's disease.

Everett Rogers studied the adoption of innovation. He evaluated its need, communication channels, the time, and social structure of adaptors of new technology, long after the Literary

Club was formed. In Cincinnati, members meet weekly, listened closely, and mostly trust one another in this "Visible College." They share what my sponsor, Sam Trufant, talked about in his Presidential Address: educating each other. Age? Irrelevant. Interesting and well researched papers are expected from all.

References

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Rogers, Everett	2005	Diffusion of Innovation, 4 th Edition, Free Press (Macmillan) .
Diehl, J.	2010	Our Mystery Member. Cincinnati Literary Club, October 25, 2010
Steiner, JC	2010	Excel spread sheet to determine mean age and time in the Club. Available by Request only to Literarians (Send request to jcsneuro@fuse.net). A second spread sheet of 6 years between 1855 and 1870 calculates the average age of death of those who died in the Commercial Hospital or the Cincinnati Hospital may also be requested. There is another page that lists the ages of death of those recently listed in Cincinnati Enquirer.
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