

## Memorial George H. Palmer (1924 - 2014)

George Palmer, erudite judge, learned lawyer and distinguished citizen, died at his home in Lyme, New Hampshire, February 24, 2014. He was an active member of the Literary Club from 1975 to 1996, then associate member until his death at age ninety.

Judge Palmer was one of my earliest friends in Cincinnati after we moved here in 1979. Not many of our current members knew him. Few of us here now were present in 1995 to listen to his last paper and fewer still for his first paper in 1977. Over seventy percent of our current membership joined the Club after he moved to Lyme and became an associate member.

Born in Middletown, Ohio, George did his undergraduate work at Miami University in Oxford interrupting for service in the China Burma India Theatre during WWII and later serving in the Korean War. He graduated from the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 1949 with the high honor of election to the Order of the Coif. He also was editor of the Law Review. He started practicing law with the Cincinnati firm Strauss and Troy. His judicial career began as trial judge of the Common Pleas Court of Hamilton County, in 1973, then on to the Ohio First District Court of Appeals, where his opinions were models of judicial craftsmanship and sagacity, until he left the bench in 1985. Many of his law associates thought he should have been on the Ohio Supreme Court.

George was a true public citizen. He served as Acting Executive Director of the Cincinnati Bar Association in 1995, and was a member of the American and Ohio bar associations. He was senior warden of Calvary Episcopal Church, leader in the Cincinnati Association, past director and president of the Mercantile Library Association, director of the board of governors of the University Club of Cincinnati. We served together on the board of the bail project, an important local innovation to divert drug addicts charged with drug-related crimes into treatment at the time bail is set rather than as part of punishment after conviction. He was founding member of the Potter Stewart American Inn of Court and Master of the Bench in it.

It was my privilege as dean of the College of Law to present him with two of the College's highest honors: the Sesquicentennial Award in 1983, on the occasion of its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and in 1985 the Distinguished Alumni Award.

After the death of Mary Helen Palmer, his first wife of many years, George met Jane Tucker Moore, a widow. They married in 1992, and began looking for a place to relocate for their new life together. They found the village of Lyme, New Hampshire. In 1996 they moved from Jane's great house off Grandin Road to a 1789 farmhouse there. I visited and saw firsthand the active village life they enjoyed amidst the Upper Valley's beauty and stimulating environment close to Dartmouth College. George's library was fulsome, his reading eclectic. His family said he was his own walking library. He was ever curious, with passion for opera, the classics, theater, the best literature, and history. He even served on the Town of Lyme Budget Committee. He gardened.

George was a genteel, well-traveled Anglophile: courtly, kind and jovial, learned and fair, tough when required. You might hear some of this in the very first words he uttered from this podium, as he read the first sentence of his first paper, "All Gaul is Divided":

In that soft and burnished land of glistening green and gold, where every corner is rounded and every road is curved, where every hurried crossing and hidden corner attests the tender devotion of generations of flower-lovers whose gardens become in consequence like genuflections before a chthonic nature goddess — in that tidy land, I say, our view, my wife and mine, as we rested in the tea room overlooking Bristol Bay spooning clotted Devonshire cream over fresh strawberries, struck us, shockingly, with the flat force we might have felt had we suddenly seen a pool of blood in a warm crib.

This full paragraph is but a single sentence with a jolt, showing little concern for our late literary sensibility of keeping sentences muscular, short and witty. Continuing in this style, he tells how the Celts found their way into the countryside he and his first wife were visiting, near Glasconbury. He plunges into Celtic influence and Roman occupation, the history of Arthurian legends and of the Anglo-Saxon kings who resisted Caesar's conquest until the Romans finally leave England and Wales. To his bowdlerized Malory, George dreams of "unstained honor and irresistible virtue which, like a saint in a Sherman tank, swept evil before it with shining steel. . . ."

He gave nine papers in all over the course of his twenty-one years as an active member: The others are "The Play's the Thing," "The Commencement Address," "The Art of Opera," "The Last Englishman," "The Tales of Harrison," "A Count in Time," "Gettysburg, 1993," and his last one Nov. 13, 1995, "A Conversation on Parnassus," a

story of the eternal disputation between two of his inner gods, Apollo of order and reason and Dionysius of hedonism and wine.

“The Last Englishman” read December 16, 1985, might be seen as an autobiographical reflection on leaving the bench after defeat in an election that seemed to repudiate own his legacy. In it he tells the story of the heroic but unsung Hereward the Wake, who rescued the English from the Danes and reinforced the Norman Conquest with a suburb amalgam of French and English languages. Had he not called me soon afterwards to talk about his future, I’d never have understood how deeply this defeat affected him nor fully have appreciated this paper, which he read a month later.

For his ninetieth birthday Jane took him to England to celebrate. He was in great spirits, Jane said. They had lived a fulsome, happy second life together, these cultivated cosmopolitans who were also loving village literati. Soon after their return home, the doctors discovered late stage cancer throughout his body and within weeks he was gone.

George Palmer was predeceased by his first wife, Mary, and their daughter Deborah Palmer Schober. Survivors in addition to his wife Jane include grandson Peter Schober of Purchase, N.Y. and his son-in-law George Shober, three step-children and eight step-grandchildren. He loved them all dearly, as did they him.

He was interred in Spring Grove Cemetery, in a prearranged site next to his first wife Mary and their daughter Deborah.

Respectfully submitted,

Gordon A. Christenson  
May 12, 2014