For the More We Get Together...

Good times have been happening on top of the Cliff the past few months. Phase I of our renovation is officially concluded. The “punch list” of final details such as completing the stencil surrounding the Kiva is finished. The history wall in the Sullivan is in place. The furnishings by the fireplace are becoming more comfortable every day. Even the bar is up and functioning for our pleasure, including an appetizer menu created by Chef Victor.

Yet beyond the exterior facelift our home has received, we are witnessing an increase of traffic to the Club. The number of members and guests dining at the Club is rising. Lunchtime has been busy and plentiful. According to Club Manager Don Santelli, we have held an increased number of sponsored events on the Cliff with rave reviews coming from our visitors and customers.

Another very positive area of expanded activity has occurred as a result of our “trial membership” initiative as a follow-up to fund-raising for the renovation. Since re-opening the Club in April, 51 new members have joined The Cliff Dwellers. Much credit goes to our Membership Committee for their diligent and creative efforts. Combining monthly Prospective Member Receptions with CD Art Exhibition Openings, for example, has brought between 45 and 75 individuals interested in the arts together for casual evenings of conversation and camaraderie—accompanied by live music and a bit of food and drink. The recent October Opening for artists Bob Guinan CD’84 and Kathryn Gauthier accompanied an evening reception when more than ten new members came aboard. These are good nights. The prime directive of the Club is being lived and fulfilled.

Additionally, we have had some excellent programs these past several months. From Bruce Kraig and Patty Carroll’s Man Bites Dog hot dog event to the CD Art Foundation’s 3rd Tuesday presentation from Synapse Arts Collective performing excerpts from Swath, from celebrating Bastille Day and all things French to participating as a Club site in “Open House Chicago” for the first time—we are affirming that life on top of the Cliff is revived, alive, and growing stronger.

...the happier we’ll be. For your friends are my friends, and my friends are yours...
Celebrating Lorado Taft

On June 25, Lynn Allyn Young presented a program and had a book signing at The Cliff Dwellers, based on her new book entitled Beautiful Dreamer: The Completed Works and Unfulfilled Plans of Sculptor Lorado Taft. Ms. Young, a former docent with the Chicago Architecture Foundation, has done extensive research to identify all of Taft’s works and has documented her search with photographs and an extensive history of Taft’s life, including his relationship with The Cliff Dwellers. Taft, one of the founding members of the Club, was a gifted sculptor who completed many public art works, including the Fountain of the Great Lakes, located in the South Garden of the Art Institute; the Fountain of Time, near the University of Chicago; and The Eternal Indian, more commonly known as Black Hawk, poised on a bluff above the Rock River where Taft’s Eagle Nest summer camp was located. Ms. Young captures Taft’s contributions to the Club’s founding and early years in the following excerpt from her book.

Of the many cultural organizations Taft joined, The Cliff Dwellers Club appears to have had a personal significance for him, although archival references to his membership are few. After the exhilarating work at the 1893 Columbian Exposition was completed and the participating artists left Chicago, he missed the camaraderie and opportunities to share ideas. His studio on Van Buren Street became a gathering place for rising young artists and writers of Chicago, and they took the name “The Little Room.”

Writer Hamlin Garland came to Chicago in 1892, predicting that the city “was about to take its place as one of the literary capitals of the world.” Soon after his arrival, he was invited to give a lecture on “Impressionism in Art,” and he met Taft following his presentation. This, writes Cliff Dwellers archivist Henry Regnery, “was the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship, one result of which was Garland’s marriage in 1899 to Taft’s sister, Zulime.”

Garland was the person who came up with the idea to form what became known as The Cliff Dwellers Club, and he approached Taft with the suggestion. Regnery writes:

“‘The time has come,’ he remarked to his brother-in-law Lorado Taft, ‘when a successful literary and artistic club can be established and maintained.’ What he had in mind was a club which would be like the Players in New York, ‘a meeting place for artists and writers, a rallying point for Midland Arts.’ Besides Taft, Garland discussed the idea with other friends from the Little Room, including Henry Fuller, Charles Francis Browne, and Ralph Clarkson. All thought well of the idea except his good friend Henry B. Fuller, whose novel, The Cliff Dwellers, is said to have provided the name for the new club.”

The new club was formally organized at a meeting on November 6, 1907. A constitution was adopted that provided that the membership be limited to 250, of whom three-fifths “shall be professionally engaged in literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, or drama, and two-fifths shall be lay members comprising persons who are connoisseurs and lovers of the fine arts. Taft was one of the first directors and, in the first few years, also served on the art and reception committees. He was listed as a member every year until 1935 and then as an honorary member of one year until his death.
Finding Fredda: A Brief Backstory for Our New Club Piano

By Dominic Johnson CD’12

I’m a violist and the Executive Director for the New Millennium Orchestra in Chicago, and I’m also a recent addition to both The Cliff Dwellers and to The Cliff Dwellers Arts Foundation board. My first few times in the Club were as a performer, a privilege made possible by winning a Cliff Dwellers Arts Foundation grant. Putting on concerts in the space has been both fulfilling and humbling, given the lofty musical tradition that abounds: for me, it’s impossible to make a sound in the place without thinking about Frederick Stock, Walter Damrosch, and other legendary former members. As it would be difficult to fit our whole orchestra under the Kiva, we programmed smaller chamber music ensembles, initially comprised of string players. After sawing through Brahms, Haydn, Bartok, and Ligeti with some shared enjoyment, we thought to try an evening with piano.

We chose the piano quintets of Schumann and Schostakovich, with an ensemble that included guest artists Jasmine Lin on first fiddle and Inna Faliks on the keys, a brilliantly dynamic pair of musicians representing some of Chicago’s finest classical music talent. This marked my first encounter with the club’s piano, which I was to later find out was infamous within the boundaries of Cook County as being a notable impediment to pianistic artistry. I would honestly have never known that there was any issue, but for the extra-musical noises wheezing from the instrument’s moving parts, as Ms. Faliks stormed and soared through both works with her usual bravura. As she made no comment then, I asked Inna if she cared to recount her experience for this piece, and she was kind enough to comply:

"The Cliff Dwellers is a magic place to perform. Its intimate yet refined atmosphere inspires the most warmhearted, spontaneous and natural musical exchange possible. I loved performing here. I felt that the piano was perhaps not to the standard of the world-class surroundings and the world-class string players that I had the pleasure of playing with--and the squeaking pedal didn't help in the Schostakovich’s triple pianissimo. However, we made it work. I am thrilled that the Club is now graced with the piano it deserves, and I am looking forward to performing there again!"

--- Inna Faliks, concert pianist, Professor of Piano, UCLA

When I was asked to help find the club’s new piano, I sought out the assistance of our orchestra’s conductor, Francesco Milioto. He, CDAF president Trish VanderBeke, and I trouped down Michigan Avenue to Piano Forte Studios for several weeks to try many potential replacements, eventually finding the Steinway that now lives most of its days nestled in the Sullivan Room. This piano came from the Music in the Loft concert organization, where it was known as "Fredda’s Piano" (after the series’ founder Fredda Hymen), and is in excellent voice and condition.

Many huzzahs to the Foundation and club officers who worked diligently together to raise the funds necessary to secure this beautiful instrument, one which we will all have the pleasure of hearing for many years to come. We might see a few more pianists around as well.

“Fredda,” our new Steinway, graces the renovated Kiva.
“The Way We Were” Revealed through the Club’s Growing Archives

By Richard L. Eastline CD’73

Documents of every kind—letters, announcements, posters, photographs—are the measure of an organization’s history. Over the decades since the club’s founding in 1907, Cliff Dwellers have managed to save and then pass along hundreds of communication samples to bolster the broad collection of memorabilia that is archived at The Newberry Library a mile-and-a-half away from the clubhouse. Even a brief viewing creates a sense of what members and guests saw and did in years past. Some of that was reported in the newspapers of the time while much more no doubt became memories that fortunately were preserved via club correspondence and even the mute entries of the bookkeepers.

Within the past several years there has been renewed interest for filling in the gaps, those many years—particularly during the last quarter of 20th century—during which far less content was formally preserved. In an effort to remedy that condition through a variety of means, the most productive has been the formation of the History Committee, chaired by Walker Johnson, a Cliff Dweller since 1984 and a former club president. Since its formation in October 2012, members of the committee have inspected the archives at the Newberry to ascertain the scope of its holdings and have unpacked numerous boxes of items in the club’s storeroom on another floor in the 200 S. Michigan Avenue building. (These were miscellaneous materials brought over from the former clubhouse when the move was made to the new quarters.) In addition, older members of the committee examined their own personal files and came up with numerous samples of brochures, membership rosters, meeting agendas, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia.

The results of this first year’s search-and-preserve activity yielded substantial additions to the existing archives and this led to the decision to post a representative collection of highlights from the past. The north wall of the Sullivan Room has become a permanent exhibition space for the display of several dozen items at any one time. The current exhibit is not a complete timeline but does well in opening the door to past events and the many personalities involved.

As a sampling of what has been rediscovered recently, examine the images that accompany this article. The club’s adoption of its official anthem, Zivio, has a murky background. Suffice to say that it’s a highly unusual choice but years of performance (of varying quality) have made it as much a part of The Cliff Dwellers identity as the familiar Burnham deep-dish pies. Jack Cowan writes in his 1967 note that in earlier decades the teaching of Zivio was the province of the senior Slavic members.

It is hoped that more will become available from the History Committee and perhaps even from the personal collections of other Cliff Dwellers. All Club members are urged to share their trove of souvenirs so that the “missing pages” in our history book can be restored. For any questions or possible contributions, simply leave a message for the committee at the club office.

MEMBERS WISHING TO CONTRIBUTE TO ON AND OFF THE CLIFF CAN SUBMIT STORIES, REFLECTIONS, ARTICLES, POEMS, PHOTOS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE ARTS TO EDITOR: MIKE DEINES 1512 TYRELL AVE. PARK RIDGE, IL 60068 Or – mail mjdeines@yahoo.com
From the Archives: A Taste of The Cliff in the 70's

Found by Richard Eastline CD’73

Opening night for CSO lovers: It’s a grand feast

Out on the sidewalk, the white canopy was up, the red carpet still rolled to the side. A finicky janitor polished the glass with a dizzying dust-nag attack on some unseen spot.

Up in the penthouse at 220 South Michigan, behind the stove that’s been her battle station for the last 28 years, Willia Cook set the deep-dish blueberry pie in its crust and made sure the gold linens were on the buffet.

Obviously, all was aflutter, it was opening night at Orchestra Hall. And as Sir Georg Solti warmed up his orchestra for the 97th season opener:

Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5, the kitchen maestro at The Cliff Dwellers readied the club for its 78th opening night buffet.

“Oh golly, it’s a gala affair,” said Cook who, with her recipe box from Sunflower, Miss., was the first woman to set foot in the once all-male club atop Orchestra Hall. “For opening night, the waiters would be dressed special. Their shoes had to be just right and shining pretty. My special for opening night is prime rib. We bring out our nice, dark wood cart with the big silver dome. I carve right at the table and lay it out on their plates.”

Cook’s Thursday night groaning board, stretched from the top of the club’s marble stairs to its windows overlooking Monroe Harbor, is as much a part of the symphony’s opening as is the orchestral “Star Spangled Banner” salute.

The Cliff Dwellers, founded in 1900 by novelist Hamlin Garland as an antidote to an embarrassing lack of literary haunts in town, has long been the private aire of great names in Chicago art, architecture, music and letters. Doctors and lawyers on the club roster are relegated to the ranks of mere laymen.

Except for the revolutionary admission of women in 1984, the tweedy atmosphere familiar to Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Theodore Roosevelt remains unchanged.

Beyond the 10-foot oak doors just off the 8th floor elevator, there lies a daunting 25-step marble staircase. The head of an Indian water buffalo, shot by late Chicago mayor and club president Carter Harrison II, keeps watch over imbibers. Chairs are wing-backed and leather. A grandfather clock ticks by the door to the Sullivan library, the room where the downtrodden architect spent his last days curled on a couch.

Ascending the stairs for his martini and prime rib, Robert Dawson, psychologist, broke into song when asked of the bond between Cliff Dwellers and CSO. “Another opening, another show. This is the way life ought to be. The CSO doesn’t unfold without this. This begins the feast.”
On the Calendar

October 17  Dinner and Presentation by Heather Becker, CEO of The Conservation Center about conserving Navajo, the mural created for The Cliff Dwellers by founder John W. Norton.

October 19-20  “Open House Chicago” organized by the Chicago Architectural Foundation will open 150 sites across Chicago. The Cliff Dwellers will be one of those sites. Volunteer as a host or come by and enjoy the music, artists, and interaction with other members and visitors. 10am to 4pm each day.

October 26  CAF guided tour of the CD. 45 minute docent led tour and history of The Cliff Dwellers. Lunch available.

October 31  Celebrate Halloween with a recreation of Orson Welles’ War of the Worlds in conjunction with Columbia College. No Tricks, just Treats.

November 1  Enjoy a Night of Jazz with French Flavor as Claudia Hommel returns to the penthouse of The Cliff Dwellers with her ensemble.

November 6  Wednesday evening Art Opening and Prospective Member Reception.

November 13  Ed Gordon, CD’00 author of Future Jobs: Solving the Employment & Skills Crisis will present actionable highlights from his book. Panel discussion and audience questions follow.

November 15  Chicago Literary Hall of Fame dinner saluting 2014 inductee Ben Hecht.

November 19  Third Tuesday Presentation by The Cliff Dwellers Art Foundation.

December 10  Art Exhibition Opening featuring art by Club members. Prospective member reception accompanies the annual display by CD artists.

December 13  Holiday Luncheon for Members and Staff recognition.

December 14  Children’s Holiday Lunch.

December 21  Club Closes during the holidays. Re-opens January 6.

January 6  Annual Meeting and Dinner.

Cliff Notes

Since our last publication 35 individuals interested in literature and the arts have become new members of The Cliff Dwellers. We welcome them and look forward to their active participation in Club activities and events.


Thanks go out to the following Cliff Dwellers for recently sponsoring new members to the Club. Zivio!

Pat Savage, Charles Hasbrouck, Leslie Recht, Brian Bernardoni, Bill Locke, Vic Vickery, Mike Deines, Bob Miller, Abigail Spreyer.

A special note of appreciation is extended to Donna Santelli, wife of Don Santelli our Club Manager. Donna has stepped up twice this year to become our interim receptionist and greeter while we worked our way through several short-term replacements for Bob Thiebout.

If you have not yet seen Crain’s October 16, 2013 issue, you will enjoy the following feature article:

Cliff Dwellers Club gets a new lease on life

By: Joanne Trestrail October 16, 2013.

“There’s nothing like a major renovation to give a 106-year-old arts club a new lease on life.” is the lead sentence on the article and it only gets better from there. Check it out.


Zivio!