

“What a Global City Can Learn from The Cliff Dwellers – Past, Present and Future,”

by Gary T. Johnson<sup>1</sup>

Centenary Address to The Cliff Dwellers,

Chicago, Illinois, November 27, 2007

I am honored to be with you today to help you celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of The Cliff Dwellers. I particularly thank the president of the club, William J. Bowe, for this kind invitation.<sup>2</sup>

The topic I have chosen is what the Cliff Dwellers can teach Chicago as a global city. As promised by the title, we will consider the lessons from the past, but, perhaps most importantly, look at what you are showing us today and can show us for the future.

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It all began in the Fine Arts Building, that hothouse for the arts. This 1885 building had been constructed as the Studebaker Corporation’s carriage factory and showroom, but a decade later, was transformed into a home for studios, clubs and offices.<sup>i</sup> On November 6, 1906, according to an article appearing the next day in the *Chicago Tribune*, an organizational meeting for a new club was held in the studio of the artist, Ralph Clarkson. Presiding was Henry Pratt Judson, President of the University of Chicago. This was to be “a social organization of artists and art lovers.”<sup>ii</sup>

Let’s pause on the name for the moment, because there has been some disagreement on that subject.<sup>iii</sup> Was the club named for the novel by Henry B. Fuller, who was present at the organizational meeting – but never joined the club?! Certainly, with that background, the use of those words could not have been an accident, but there was another inspiration that comes through in that first *Chicago Tribune* report. The founders spoke of their desire to make their clubhouse a “bungalow” set on a

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<sup>1</sup> Gary T. Johnson is the eighth President of the Chicago History Museum. This is the written version of an address, illustrated with images, that was given at the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of The Cliff Dwellers.

<sup>2</sup> I thank Mr. Bowe, not only for the invitation to speak, but for his research suggestions. William J. Bowe is Executive Vice President and General Counsel, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

"skyscraper." That would be their "cliff": "not a real cliff of stone, such as afforded lofty abode to the cliff dwellers of New Mexico." So the allure of Native Americans also had something to do with it. This was a period when Chicagoans were looking at Native Americans through romantic eyes and feeling some sense of loss. Club member John T. McCutcheon's famous pair of cartoons, "Injun Summer," had appeared just a few weeks earlier, on September 30, 1907.<sup>iv</sup> Neither reference, to the novel and to Native Americans, could have been lost on club members when they settled on the club's name two years later.<sup>v</sup>

Let's also note the 1907 newspaper report's use, without any need for definition, of two key terms from Chicago architecture: skyscraper and bungalow. These are words not ordinarily found in the same sentence! The bungalows being built in Chicago neighborhoods of the day, such as the Villa, were not yet the so-called "Chicago bungalow," but were still in the arts and crafts style. Those comfortable 1 or 1-1/2 story homes emphasized horizontality, and usually included front porches. The *Chicago Tribune* article spoke not of a porch, which in fact was what did emerge at the Cliff Dwellers in the form of a terrace, but of a "hanging garden." (The club's organizers originally had in mind the rooftop of the newly-opened International Harvester building at 600 S. Michigan, but did not come to fruition.)

A delicious sense of irony, I think, is what must have pleased the club's founders the most. A low-lying, horizontal bungalow on a vertical skyscraper was to be the club's perch! And who ever heard of a bungalow that would boast "art galleries that will constitute a salon of the best works of Chicago artists"? And, the biggest irony of all, what was a club known as "Cliff Dwellers" doing in the flattest of all flat cities in the vast plains of the Midwest? But why not?! Chicago's towers formed man-made "cliffs." In any event, thinking outside the box must have pleased the founders, and their dreams of a comfortable bungalow complete with art gallery, sitting on top of a skyscraper, came to pass with the "KIVA" which was built behind the cornice on top of Daniel Burnham's Orchestra Hall, the club's home from 1909 until 1995.

At the organizational meeting in 1907, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that fourteen members would manage the club. Here is the list, and I have added their occupations: Arthur Aldis (architect), Frederic C. Bartlett (artist/industrialist heir), Hobart C. Chatfield-Taylor (writer/arts patron), Ralph Clarkson (painter), Clarence Dickenson

(organist/composer), Hamlin Garland (writer), Alfred Hoyt Granger (architect), Wallace Heckman (lawyer and, later, business manager of the University of Chicago), Charles L. Hutchinson (business/arts patron)<sup>vi</sup>, Henry Pratt Judson (historian/President of the University of Chicago), A.B. Pond (architect), I.K. Pond (architect), Howard Van Doren Shaw (architect) and Lorado Taft (sculptor).

So the organizers entrusted their fledgling club to five architects, six from the world of culture (art, literature and music), one from education, and two from business. Upon closer examination, however, there is even a stronger business representation, because writer Hobart C. Chatfield-Taylor also was a wealthy patron of the arts, and Frederic C. Bartlett not only was a muralist, but was the son of a wealthy industrialist. You can find one of his murals in Bartlett Hall at the University of Chicago, but you also might want take a moment to view his philanthropic legacy at the Art Institute, which includes "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte," by Georges Seurat, among many others donations. In any event, as a group, the club's founders were not starving artists, and the business element was very strong from the very start.

The overlap between business and culture ran in both directions. Among the fourteen managers, both businessmen also had a strong interest in education and the arts. It was attorney Wallace Heckman who had purchased the land for Lorado Taft's Eagle's Nest colony,<sup>vii</sup> and Heckman also served as business manager of the University of Chicago. In his business and philanthropic life, Charles Hutchinson was President of the Board of Trade and a founder and first President of the Art Institute of Chicago. At the Cliff Dwellers, he was one of the "'men who were interested in art but did not produce it professionally.' In other words, business men. These latter, Charles Hutchinson used to say, were the 'lay members'— *the geese that laid the golden eggs.*"<sup>viii</sup>

In other words, the Cliff Dwellers would be an arts club with a business plan!

Writer Hamlin Garland, the first President, said that the club would be "jocund."<sup>ix</sup> He did not, however, share the idea that merriment and high spirits should include libations. So there was celebration when his term ended – the bar opened and the spirits flowed.<sup>x</sup> It was said that club member Carter Harrison Jr., who had served five terms as Mayor of Chicago, found a way to allow the spirits to continue to flow even during Prohibition.<sup>xi</sup> So here's one lesson the Cliff Dwellers can teach us: When it comes to having a good time, don't fight Chicago history!

My first visit to the club as a guest came when I was still a law student, back in 1975. The era of the two-martini lunch was coming to an end, but the era of the deep dish pie, for which the dining room was famous, was in full swing.

I loved the club. The old clubhouse view had the feel of a “window on Main Street.” It was high enough to get a good view of Grant Park and the lakefront, but not so high that it was hard to enjoy the view. It felt to me like a college dining hall where cultured conversation prevailed, and happy memories were formed.

I think, though, that I missed the point in saying that it felt like a college dining hall with a view. What I missed was that I was conversing, by and large, not with observers and critics, but with movers and shakers. These were not only experts on the arts; these were practitioners of the arts – some with very big reputations. These were not only architecture historians, but practicing architects. I believe, by the way, that the strong presence of architects, right from the start, was one of the Club’s keys to success, and, of course, Chicago’s success. Architects stand at the juncture between art and business, dreams and practicality. And of course, the members also included business leaders whose firms were reshaping the city.

I also missed the point that, for many of the Cliff Dwellers, what spread before them to the east was not a view but a *canvas*. The oldest among the founding members had witnessed how the rubble from the Great Chicago Fire had become Grant Park when the city rebuilt. Just two years after the club’s organizational meeting, Daniel Burnham and other civic leaders proposed the Plan of Chicago, with its visionary imagined landscapes of a lakefront and a city transformed yet again. Watching the changes directly across the street at Charles Hutchinson’s Art Institute must have reinforced the idea of Chicago and its lakefront as a work in progress. The original Beaux-Arts building opened in 1893, the year of the World Columbian Exposition. Then the museum pushed out over railroad air rights. And now, the canvas of the Art Institute will feature a pedestrian bridge to be built by Renzo Piano that will connect it to Millennium Park.

Over the years, many plans were hatched right there in the KIVA, including, it is said, the concept of the Century of Progress.<sup>xii</sup> The new clubhouse, of course, has witnessed that most extraordinary of recent transformations, the creation of Millennium Park. It is said that the idea of Millennium Park began with Richard M. Daley’s visits to the office of his Michigan Avenue dentist; every six months, the Mayor had a reminder of the ugly

railway yards that remained along the lakefront and he resolved to do something about it.<sup>xiii</sup> Think of what a good view can do – even under trying circumstances! And now, there might even be new dramatic additions to the lakefront canvas in the form of proposed 2016 Olympic venues.

But I am getting ahead of myself. In the changing canvas of Chicago's downtown, there was one long period when essentially nothing changed because no new building was built for 21 years. This dry spell for downtown Chicago construction began with the completion of the Field Building in 1934 and did not end until the appearance of the Prudential Building in 1955. It is astonishing for us now to think of that interval without new downtown buildings.

Even then, of course, the city and its region were changing in profound ways, but the activity lay in other directions, not visible on the lakefront canvas. Much of the work was infrastructure. The predecessor of O'Hare International Airport was constructed in 1942-43 as a two-million-square-foot manufacturing plant for Douglas C-54s. The Calumet-Sag Channel was widened from its original 60-feet to 225 feet in 1946. Then infrastructure plans at the national level, such as the interstate highway system, and the international level, such as the St. Lawrence Seaway, also shaped Chicago. The post-war housing boom pushed out to the suburbs, including the 1946 announcement of construction plans for Park Forest. It was work such as this that offered jobs in the Chicago area and kept the *lay members* of the Cliff Dwellers *laying the golden eggs* that kept the Club alive.

During this long dry spell in downtown building, the program for the Club's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1947 portrayed the business life of the city almost in Hobbesian terms. It spoke of the "Grimy buildings and canyon-like streets" of the "Loop District," the "anxious-faced citizens [who for a while have] forgotten their obsession of maintaining the artifices of urban civilization." It described the clubhouse as "a refuge from some of the insistent and wearing features of city living, a stronghold where men and their friends have lived happy and imaginative hours."<sup>xiv</sup> Those words hearkened back to a Hamlin Garland poem from the club's earliest days, which had said:

*Warriors, are we, but in another fashion;  
Rivals for wealth and happiness and fame.  
Down in the city's deeps we meet in savage fashion,  
And play as best we may the selfish, sordid game.*



*But here, at peace, before these glowing embers,  
Meeting this ample bowl's hospitable design,  
Man greets his fellow-man, and only then remembers,  
Art's magic bond of light, and beauty's bloodless shrine.<sup>xv</sup>*

Why does this description of rival business leaders laying down their arms to partake of the Club as a refuge now seem so strange to us? I think, in fact, that business during the Club's early and middle years must have seemed to the participants as a battle of all against all. This was an era of steel mill against steel mill, meatpacker against meatpacker, contractor against contractor. Then, competition was local; but today, competition is global. Today's business rivals can be found in major centers all over the world, and you probably won't bump into them at the Cliff Dwellers.

Once the Prudential Building opened in 1955, the downtown canvas became interesting again. Marina City apartments appeared in 1964. Other cliff dwellers were beginning to appear in Chicago's downtown, and now a few of them were spending the night!

Sometimes changes on the canvas are subtle, until they take form in a dramatic fashion. Education began to take hold on the lakefront, as epitomized by Roosevelt University, which, since 1947, has found its home in the Auditorium Building. What was originally the International Harvester Building was acquired by Columbia College in 1974.

Who would have thought that Chicago's State Street emporiums would be "repurposed" as universities? In 1993, the former Goldblatt's department store became the DePaul Center.

These are signs of a vibrant downtown, a downtown, like those of historic Western European cities, that finds new ways to make itself lively and attractive. These are signs of a "global city," so let's examine that term and think about what the Cliff Dwellers can teach us about the era that we find ourselves in as a city and as a region.

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A study group convened by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs recently issued a report entitled "The Global Edge: An Agenda for Chicago's Future."<sup>xvi</sup> Its 40 members were drawn from the worlds of business (such as Andrew J. McKenna, Jr., President, Schwarz and executives from Boeing and Exelons); education (including Dennis H.

Holtzschneider, C.M., President of DePaul University and faculty from Northwestern University and the University of Chicago); and social services (such as Eboo Patel from the Interfaith Youth Core). As a museum president, I was a representative from the world of culture. (If this sounds a bit like the composite group that first managed The Cliff Dwellers club one hundred years ago – you’re right!)

Many believe that Chicago is a “global city,” and by some measures, is one of the **top** global cities.<sup>xvii</sup> If you think that “global” is a politically loaded term, then I invite you to use the term “key city.” Whatever the terminology, the concept is the same. Chicago is among the cities that plays a leading role in today’s world.

That status, however, can change very quickly because it rests upon a city’s continuing ability to attract and retain talent. According to our report, a global city attracts talent with “the irresistible lure of a **rich quality of life** and **stimulating work**.”

What are the components of “the irresistible lure of a **rich quality of life** and **stimulating work**”? **Education, culture** and **business**.

Lo and behold, in today’s global cities, there are **three** geese that lay golden eggs! Congratulations, Cliff Dwellers. Right from the start, one hundred years ago, you got it right. Your unique balance of education, culture and business is just what we need today. All make for “a rich quality of life.” Without that balance, we cannot attract and hold the talent that today’s global city needs in order to thrive.

What else does the report tell us? Just as your club needed a business plan to make sure that it got the balance right, a global city also needs a business plan. Here’s where Chicago stands.

Regarding the **fine arts and popular culture** needed to draw and keep creative people, Chicago already has –

- Symphony, opera, theatre, art fairs, free concerts.
- Jazz, blues bars, public statuary, ethnic fairs, public rock concerts.
- World-class museums.

And it needs – continuing support of music, drama, filmmaking art and culture.

Regarding the *education* needed to build a skilled work force, Chicago already has –

- Vibrant universities; international reach.
- Tremendous scale, e.g., DePaul University.
- Booming schools in the Loop.

And it needs – constant attention to public education as an urgent priority, including city colleges.

But – in our euphoria for arts and education, let’s not forget that *business* is also a necessary part of the equation. That’s something that the Cliff Dwellers knew from the start, in your practicality for the sake of the arts, and something that we must not forget today. Our report is emphatic, that the business priority now is *transportation and infrastructure*:

- Expedite the O’Hare airport expansion.
- Reform the CTA and the RTA on a regional basis.
- Reconfigure Chicago’s transport system to speed the movement of both people and goods.
- Maintain the most modern communications system.
- Manage the local effects of global climate change, with particular attention to infrastructure questions such as storm sewer management, rail, and roadways and the protection of vulnerable populations. Provide for the upkeep of the city’s water system, which is inadequate to meet the challenges of climate change.
- Work with leaders in other states to speed ratification of the Great Lakes Water Resources Compact and to encourage steps to maintain water levels in the Great Lakes.

“Human capital” is also part of the business plan. Our study finds that the City of Chicago and its businesses must work with Congress and the administration to support federal immigration policies that welcome highly qualified immigrants – workers and students—including those who stay and those who visit. Immigration is one of the great



themes of Chicago's history, as is made very clear in our Chicago History Museum's Exelon Wing, which documents Chicago as a global crossroads. A crossroads can attract human talent, but it also can repel, if it cannot resolve the social issues that arise when very different people rub shoulders. But, again, our study throws a spotlight on some surprising new trends. Did you know, for example, that DePaul University has a worldwide reach, not only in attracting students *to* Chicago, but in offering programs *outside of* Chicago, in Bahrain, Poland, Thailand, and the Czech Republic?

Let's conclude by taking a look at one of the newest additions to our downtown canvas, the University Center of Chicago, built in 2004 at the corner of State and Congress. This is an 18-story residence hall used by students from Columbia College, DePaul University and Roosevelt University.<sup>xviii</sup> It epitomizes what is happening in Chicago today.

Guess what! Some of its advertised features include: a dining center, a rooftop terrace, meeting rooms, music practice rooms, and an art studio. It also has a view to die for!<sup>xix</sup> Sound familiar? It's so comfortable, that you might even call it a high-rise bungalow—one equipped for education, arts and the good life.

Cliff Dwellers: If we get it right as a global city, we can thank *you* for pointing the way toward the rich quality of life that the human spirit always has needed and that, it turns out more than ever before, is even good for business!

Thank you for letting me help you to celebrate your first 100 years. The next 100 years will be even more exciting, both for you as a club and for us as a city and a region – but only if we continue to get the balance right.

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<sup>1</sup> See Darling, Sharon S. "Arts and Crafts Shops in the Fine Arts Building." *Chicago History* 6 (Summer 1977): 79-85. Note also that, although The Cliff Dwellers club was founded for men only, and stayed that way until 1984, the Fine Arts Building itself was the home to a number of women's clubs, such as the Chicago Woman's Club, the Colonial Dames and the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association. Its studios included a book bindery owned by Rose Chatfield-Taylor, wife of Hobart Chatfield-Taylor, a founder of The Cliff Dwellers. *Ibid.*, 79-80. See also Wiche, Glen N., ed. *Some Famous Early Tenants of the Fine Arts Building in their Own Words*. Chicago: The Cliff Dwellers, undated.

<sup>2</sup>"Cliff Dwellers in Chicago." *Chicago Tribune*, 7 Nov. 1907. (The full headline was: "Cliff Dwellers in Chicago. Club to Occupy Bungalow on a Skyscraper Roof Near Lake. ARTISTS AND AUTHORS IN IT. Organization Effected. Members to Plan and Decorate House."). There was no photograph of the occasion, as far as I know, but there is a photograph of "Lorado Taft and His Friends," which is evocative of that meeting

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because all four men in the photograph also were present at the organizational meeting of The Cliff Dwellers: Ralph Clarkson (painter), Lorado Taft (sculptor), Oliver Dennett Grover (painter) and Charles Francis Brown (landscape painter). See "Lorado Taft Papers," in the University of Illinois Archives (Record Series Number 26/20/16). Available at <http://images.library.uiuc.edu/projects/taft/images/photo130.jpg>, viewed November 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> See Getzoff, William. "A Literary Puzzle." Chicago: The Cliff Dwellers, 2003. Available at <http://www.cliff-chicago.org/reminiscences.htm>, viewed November 2007. (Remarks by past president of The Cliff Dwellers, delivered to a joint meeting of The Cliff Dwellers and The Chicago Literary Club, April 14, 2003).

<sup>iv</sup> McCutcheon, John T. "Injun Summer." *Chicago Tribune*, 30 Sep. 1907. McCutcheon was yet another Cliff Dwellers founder with a studio in the Fine Arts Building. See Darling, "Arts and Crafts Shops in the Fine Arts Building," 79.

<sup>v</sup> From the time of its 1909 opening above Orchestra Hall, the clubhouse was universally referred to as the "KIVA," a word that evokes the pueblos of the American Southwest.

<sup>vi</sup> Hutchinson had a high-impact career, both in business and philanthropy. He was President of the Chicago Board of Trade and a founder and first President of the Art Institute of Chicago. See The University of Chicago Library, "A Centennial View of the University of Chicago." Available at <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/excat/city7.html>, viewed November 2007. For more on Hutchinson, see Notz, John K., Jr. "Charles L. Hutchinson and His Design Professionals." Chicago: The Chicago Literary Club, 2001. Available at <http://www.chilit.org/NOTZ4.HTM>, viewed November 2007. (Remarks delivered to The Chicago Literary Club (at The Cliff Dwellers), Nov. 19, 2001).

<sup>vii</sup> In many ways, the Eagle's Nest Colony served as a rural model for the urban Cliff Dwellers and involved many of the same people from the worlds of art, education and business. See a posting by Northern Illinois University, "Lorado Taft Field Campus." Available at <http://www.niu.edu/taft/aboutus/index.shtml>, viewed November 2007.

This artists' colony, founded in 1898 outside Oregon, Illinois, had been built on land owned by University of Chicago business manager and attorney Wallace Heckman. It attracted luminaries from Chicago, such as Hamlin Garland, Harriet Monroe, Henry B. Fuller and Lorado Taft. See also a posting by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, "The Rock River Country." Available at <http://www.dnr.state.il.us/orep/c2000/assessments/rock/towers.htm>, viewed November 2007.

<sup>viii</sup> Smith, Alson J. *Chicago's Left Bank*. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953, 208 (emphasis added). See also *ibid.*, 215.

<sup>ix</sup> Quoted in Getzoff, "A Literary Puzzle": "Hamlin Garland, who was the driving force behind the establishment of the Club, recounts a conversation he had with Fuller in one of his memoirs, *Companions on the Trail*. Garland told Fuller: 'It isn't a matter of ten years or your lifetime, Fuller, We are building something in this Club which will be alive and jocund when you and I are gone, and I want its name to be characteristic of Chicago and a reminder of you and your first fictional study of Chicago life.' 'Nobody will want to be reminded of me.' Fuller responded. Garland dismissed Fuller's comment and proceeded to name the Club after Fuller's novel. As we shall see, Garland's appeal to Fuller's ambition shows that Garland never really understood Fuller but Fuller had taken the full measure of Garland."

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<sup>x</sup> See Smith, *Chicago's Left Bank*, 207-209.

<sup>xi</sup> See Hasbrouck, Wilbert R. "A Brief History of The Cliff Dwellers Club and its Relationship with the Literary Club of Chicago." 17 April 2006: 7 (unpublished paper in possession of The Cliff Dwellers).

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 ("I have it on good authority that it was at the Member's Table that the idea of the 1933 World's Fair first was put forth.").

<sup>xiii</sup> For an excellent account of the background and development of Millennium Park – including the story of Mayor Daley's visits to the dentist – see Gilfoyle, Timothy J. *Millennium Park: Creating a Chicago Landmark*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

<sup>xiv</sup> "40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of The Cliff Dwellers Club." Chicago: The Cliff Dwellers, 1947, 5-6 (40<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner publication). The publication also describes the founding of the club, "in the very nick of time," when a "rather unexpected materialism was beginning to be felt throughout the nation, material achievements were capturing the imagination of and holding the interest of almost everybody. It was becoming increasingly hard for the Arts to hold their place in the lives of those who made up Chicago's population." *Ibid.*, 7-8. Another account, also written during this dry period for Chicago downtown building, spoke in similar terms: "In the midst of the crashing commercialism and savage bustle of Chicago's downtown district, this place is a quiet and refreshing oasis." Smith, *Chicago's Left Bank*, 207.

<sup>xv</sup> "40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of The Cliff Dwellers Club," 10.

<sup>xvi</sup> Madigan, Charles, ed. *Global Chicago*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

<sup>xvii</sup> "Inventory of World Cities," table taken from Beaverstock, J.V., R.G. Smith and P.J. Taylor. "Research Bulletin: A Roster of World Cities." *Cities* 16 (6) (1999): 445-58.

<sup>xviii</sup> Sharoff, Robert. "3 Chicago Universities to Build Dormitory in the Loop." *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 2002. Available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E00E1DD173BF937A35751C1A9649C8B63&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Organizations/D/DePaul%20University>, viewed November 2007. The trend of Chicago downtown dormitory space had begun with the 1993 conversion of space by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. See *ibid.*

<sup>xix</sup> See DePaul University. "Loop Housing Options." Available at <http://housing.depaul.edu/housing/loop/index.aspx>, viewed November 2007.