

**ESSAY CLUBS OF THE UNITED STATES**

BY

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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 2009

## **Introduction**

Good evening, gentlemen.

On November, 10th, 2009, the Chit Chat Club will celebrate its 135<sup>th</sup> birthday. That, gentlemen, is a long time for any organization to exist. But it is particularly noteworthy when one considers the size and the nature of our club. Since picking up the reins of the Secretarial position of our Chit Chat Club with my good friend John Schram, I decided it might be helpful for me and, for that matter, for us all, to get an overview, as it were, on our particular genre of club.

Although our archives contain excellent essays by Osgood Murdock, Frank Sloss and Bill Kuder regarding the history of our very own Chit Chat Club, I found it very interesting and a bit paradoxical that there has never been an essay documenting the presence or absence of other clubs such as ours. If it could be determined that other “chit chat clubs” do exist, some important questions could be answered:

How many are there?

What are their ancestral roots?

What similarities do they share?

How are they different?

And, importantly, would these similar clubs, if they exist, be interested in cross communication and visitation?

With some trepidation, I resolved to take on this task. I started with the one club that I had heard might be like the Chit Chat Club, namely the Chicago Literary Club. In addition, I had a personal friend involved in an essay group here in San Francisco. From these two initial contacts along with lots of time on the internet and the telephone, I was able to come up with some answers that I wish to share with all of you tonight. But, gentlemen, suffice it to say that, in the course of all this research, I have discovered that essay clubs such as ours are rare and potentially fragile creatures. If the Chit Chat Club and the very few clubs like it are to survive, it will take some very good shepherding from all of us involved in this genre of club.

## **Terminology**

First, terminology. The best description of the Chit Chat Club is that it is an “essay club.” Although I learned that clubs like ours often refer to themselves as “literary” clubs, I would still strongly argue that the best term is “essay club.”

Let us begin with the first word, “essay.” It is derived from the French word “essais” meaning “trial” or “attempt.” In 1580 a Frenchmen named Michel de Montaigne wrote a collection of short literary compositions that he published collectively under the title “*Essais*.” In each composition, Montaigne emphasized his personal thoughts or opinions on the subject. This new genre of writing became extremely popular. The French word “essais” was changed to simply “essay” in England where it described a short, prose composition in which the author analyzes and interprets a topic. Because subjectivity was key to this new and popular literary genre, the poet Matthew Arnold, delightfully described an essay as, “a dialogue of the mind with itself.” However, in 1974, our very own Chit Chat Club member, William Kuder, did, I think, a bit better. He described an essay as a “crystallized conversation.”

The second word, “club” is a bit easier. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines it as “an association of persons for some common object...usually meeting periodically.” Groucho Marx, not so many years ago, delightfully reminded us that all clubs are about exclusion and inclusion. That is certainly the case of an essay club. All the essay clubs in existence today are private entities that carefully select their members. Because the membership of essay clubs is required to write and read their own original essays, intellectual curiosity, good writing and presentation are essential. And, because essay clubs meet regularly, usually involving a dinner with the presentation of the original essay, the membership seeks socially affable people with catholic interests and a good sense of humor.

Finally, it is important to note that the Chit Chat Club and all others like it are more than just about a small, private group of carefully selected individuals writing and reading original essays to each other over a dinner. At all existing essay clubs in the United States the original essay, or, to use Kuder’s superb metaphor, “crystallized conversation,” is read aloud and then discussed by all present. So, in a very real sense, the author’s essay, or “crystal of conversation” that he had with himself when he wrote the essay, is passed around the room and examined by all, remarking on its clarity, sparkle, flaws, weight, and ultimately, value. And that, gentlemen, is what all essay clubs do. So let me propose a definition.

**An “essay club” is a small, private, carefully selected group of individuals who meet regularly in order for one of its members to read aloud an original essay to the membership, and, after its presentation, the membership is encouraged to comment on the essay.**

In that definition it is clear what an essay club is not. It is not a lecture service. It is not a dinner club. It is not a random intellectual discussion group. And it is not a book

review club. However, paradoxically, in the course of the essay club's evening it actually combines many of the activities found in those kinds of clubs.

Today, as best as I can determine at this writing, there are only nine clubs in the United States that perform the unusual activity that the Chit Chat Club performs ten times a year. But essay clubs did not appear de novo. Historically, private clubs have arisen that engaged to a greater or lesser degree in some of the activities that we do. These early clubs exerted a profound influence on the birth of the nine essay clubs that we have today. And it shall come as no surprise that some of the world's best essayists established some of those early clubs. With that in mind, gentleman, before discussing those nine essay clubs, let us make a journey to discover those ancestors of ours.

### **British Origins**

As mentioned earlier, Montaigne invented the essay as a literary device in France. However our American essay clubs arguably have their influential ancestral roots in England. In 1764, the great English essayist Samuel Johnson and his friend, artist Joshua Reynolds, founded a group that called themselves simply "**The Club.**" The nine founding members would meet one evening per week at the Turk's Head Inn in the Soho district of London where they would dine and discuss topics of interest. The reason to meet went beyond general comradery. These gentlemen met for intellectual stimulation. I am unable to determine whether an essay was formally presented at these meetings. However, the criteria for membership were very strict. Definitely no mental midgets or social misfits allowed. Here, in their own words, is how high they raised the bar for membership:

*"...the Club should consist of such men, as that if only two of them should chanced to meet, they should be able to entertain each other without wanting the addition of more company to pass the evening agreeably."*

Over the years, the membership roster of The Club reads like a who's who of Great Britain. However, of historic note, Winston Churchill was rejected for membership because he was considered too controversial. The Club is still functioning today. I would like to think of The Club founded by the great English essayist Samuel Johnson as one of our ancestors because it was essentially a private group that convened regularly for intellectual stimulation, albeit not necessarily prompted by a formal essay despite one of the founder's reputation as an essayist.

Another English ancestor of essay clubs that I would like to include in our family tree is **The Lunar Society**. It was established in 1765 in Birmingham and comprised such intellectuals as Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestley and James Watt. Once a month, using the light of the full moon to navigate their way, members would meet to discuss intellectual topics. The Lunar society quickly developed an international reputation for intellectual vigor. There is documentation that both Benjamin Franklin and Antoine Lavoisier communicated with the members. The Lunar Society ended in 1813. We have no records of its proceedings but it is no leap to imagine that lively intellectual discussions over written documents and letters were a major focus.

The final English ancestor of American essay clubs I would like to site is the **Athenaeum Club** of London. It was founded in 1824 and, as noted by the Secretary of the Athenaeum, it is a club for men who “enjoy the life of the mind.” Still in existence today, every fortnight a dinner is held at their magnificent clubhouse on Pall Mall Street where one member discusses a subject of his interest. It boasts 52 Nobel laureates in its membership history. In 2002 it opened its doors to women members.

From these British private intellectual clubs, we can begin to see, gentlemen, the rudiments of the genre of an essay club. These clubs are composed of a carefully selected group of well-educated men and, in the case of the Athenaeum Club, women, who meet once a month for dinner and stimulating intellectual conversation. Importantly, they are private groups, membership being carefully vetted for intellectual vigor and personal affability.

### **American Origins**

And what of our American ancestors?

I would argue that the first American ancestor in our family tree was the **American Philosophical Society** founded in Philadelphia in 1843 by an essayist of no minor stature, Benjamin Franklin. Interestingly, you will note that the American Philosophical Society predates all three of the British intellectual clubs. A man of many interests and accomplishments, Franklin did communicate with the Lunar Society of Birmingham. It is provocative to imagine that it was perhaps he who stimulated the birth of the British club of Darwin and Watt. Whatever proceedings occurred in its early years, the American Philosophical Society is now strictly an honorary society with 975 members of top scholars in the fields of science, humanities, arts and public affairs. Its membership history boasts over 200 Nobel

Laureates. It now convenes twice a year when original papers are presented before several hundred people. Although private and honorary, the APS does promote publications and community outreach. I suspect, however, that in its infancy this society had a lot of the elements of an essay club, namely: a private meeting of a carefully selected group of individuals to discuss intellectual topics and read interesting material on a regular basis.

In 1847, a group of men who were members of the Sketch Club in New York City founded a club that would become **The Century Association**, the name derived from the fact that there were originally 100 members. The founders were artists and writers. However, the Century Association did allow one other group of individuals to join described as "...amateurs of letters and fine arts." This key phrase allowed the membership committee leeway to admit non-artists into the club. However, all members have to be "sympathetic, stimulating and congenial companions in a society of authors and artists." Therefore, the club membership over the years included prominent members in business, law, medicine, religion and academia. The Century Association has had seven United States Presidents as members. Today it has many events at their magnificent clubhouse on West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street that include essay readings and discussions along with musical concerts, art exhibitions, film screenings, poetry readings, great book discussions and, in a nod to the club's origins, even sketch classes. There are at present 2400 members including women.

Although starting humbly, the American Philosophical Society, the Century Association of New York City, as well as the Athenaeum Club of London, successfully developed into greater entities than just "pure" essay clubs. However, these three clubs, especially the Century Association, served as a catalyst across the country for the founding of several of the essay clubs of today.

Our family tree would not be complete, I believe, without citing two very famous intellectual clubs in Boston: **The Saturday Club** founded in 1855 and **The Examiner Club** founded in 1863. Both of these clubs were established by America's premier essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson and, because of that fact, must be included in our influential ancestry of "essay clubs." Emerson initially populated both clubs with his literary and intellectual friends. Both clubs met at the Parker House on Tremont Street where Emerson would often dine with his friends when he would come to Boston. Early members of these clubs included Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, James, Holmes, Sumner, Agassiz, Pierce and Dana to name just a few. Interestingly, both the Examiner and the Saturday Club do not present formal essays today.

**The Examiner Club** meets on the third Wednesday of every month from October to May for dinner and a discussion of ideas at the Union Club across from the Boston Commons. The Secretary of the Examiner Club takes notes about the discussion and they are distributed amongst the members. One current member with whom I have communicated, Dr. Diana Eck, a religion professor at Harvard, describes the minutes as “extraordinarily literate...a wonderful summation.”

(personal communication) Another member, James Miller, shortly after joining the Examiner Club in 2002, described the members as “...united by our unfashionable love of talk and ideas” in his essay entitled “A Splendid Anachronism.” The title of Miller’s essay eerily echoes the nostalgia of our own Chit Chat Club member Frank Sloss who described the Monday evenings at the Chit Chat Club as “...a(n)...escape into the eighteenth century.” The Examiner Club presently has about 40 members including women. About 20 members are present at any given meeting where intellectual discussions occur.

**The Saturday Club** meets at the Somerset Club on the Boston Common in a small room with an oval table designed by one its present members. About 25 members, both men and women, attend the meetings. The membership draws from the academic, legal, artistic, medical, journalistic and business communities. Harvard professor Dr. Diana Eck describes the meetings in the following manner: “Usually we circle through two or three topics at a lunch meeting – political issues, economic issues, current topics in the Boston arts, religion,...It is a very substantive discussion, and very enjoyable.” (personal communication) Obviously, the discussions, although focused, are not formal and no minutes are taken. The only written records of the Saturday Club are the volumes containing the biographies of those members who have passed away. Those biographies are written by one of the club’s members who knew the deceased well. Although no essays are formally presented at their meetings today, the Saturday Club did leave a written legacy of essays. In 1857, the members founded the magazine “The Atlantic Monthly” that today is known as “The Atlantic.” Any reader of that fine magazine will encounter stellar essays within each issue.

### **The Nine Essay Clubs of the United States**

Enough, gentlemen, of our influential French, English and American ancestors and let us turn our attention to the essay clubs that are in existence in the United States today. I shall present them chronologically.

The **Cincinnati Literary Club** is the oldest essay club in the United States. It was founded in 1849. Now comprised of 100 male members, the Cincinnati Literary Club has a grand tradition. The club meets every Monday from September to June. At each

meeting at their private clubhouse, there is time for drinks and then the membership proceeds under an archway into the reading room. Delightfully, the inscription on the archway reads, “Here Comes One With a Paper.” Each member writes and reads an original essay every two years. Following the reading of the essay there is a supper at the clubhouse where informal discussion of the paper takes place. Since 1885 all the essays have been archived in their clubhouse. The CLC also has a website that archives their essays. The Cincinnati Literary Club has only cancelled meetings during the Civil War and the 1918 Flu Epidemic. All topics for essays are permitted except those promoting a religious or political view.

1874, gentlemen, was a very good year for the founding of two essay clubs in the United States. Both the **Chicago Literary Club** and our very own **Chit Chat Club** were born in that year. Mr. Lackner, one of the officers of the Chicago Literary Club told me that the Century Association of New York City was the direct catalyst for the founding of the CLC. Ten times larger than our club with its 250 members, the Chicago Literary Club meets every Monday evening from October through May at the Borg Warner Building’s 22<sup>nd</sup> floor. An original paper is presented by one of the members. The essays are then archived on their open website making them accessible to the general public. The CLC, although large, carefully vets its prospective members. One of them, Mr. E. Shilton, wrote in an archived essay that a prospective candidate to the Chicago Literary Club must “...have a literary bent, be a good fellow and companionable to the group...and he must be expected to contribute.” The CLC opened admission to women in 1995.

**The Chit Chat Club of San Francisco** was originally founded by six lawyers. After the first year of its existence, the membership opened its doors to other professions but restricted the membership to 25. As we all know, gentlemen, the Chit Chat Club meets on the second Monday of every month at a restaurant in San Francisco. Sadly, we cannot boast of an meeting record like our brethren in Cincinnati. After a dinner in a private restaurant, an essay is read and then each member is asked for comments without interruption. The essays are archived at the Green Library at Stanford University. The Chit Chat Club has no website and no female members.

In 1877, three years after the establishment of the Chicago Literary Club and the Chit Chat Club, the **Indianapolis Literary Club** was born. Like Chicago and Cincinnati, it calls itself a “literary club.” Its membership is large, 150 male members and each new member is expected to present a paper within three years of election into the club. The ILC meets every first and third Monday of each month except June through September. They also suspend activities in December. After the reading of the essay, a discussion follows. Like a tradition that started in the 1950’s in our club, the titles of



the essays at the ILC are purposefully opaque. The Indianapolis Literary Club, like the Chicago Literary Club, has a website.

Also, in 1877, the **Madison Literary Club** was founded. On the occasion of its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, one of its members stated that the purpose of the club is "...to carry its members away from the fretting cares of the day's work and to place them for a time in the society of the great masters of the world." The membership consists of 60 members with both genders allowed. The club meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of every month of the academic year. At their meetings, a 45 minute essay is read and then commentary is invited.

In 1902 another essay club was founded, this time in Cheyenne, Wyoming. It is called the **Young Men's Literary Club**. It consists of 30 members who meet every Tuesday evening from September to May to discuss topics of interest for one hour. After this conversation period, a formal 20 minute essay is read and discussed. A designated member then makes a final summary and critique of the essay. The Secretary of the club writes a summary of the whole evening's proceedings and sends it, along with the copy of the original essay, to the Wyoming State Archives. Interestingly, the topics of the essays are assigned a year in advance by a rotating group of three members of the club. A year ago, the club entertained a motion to admit women but it was rejected. They have no website.

The Chit Chat Club's closest essay club by proximity is called simply "**the club**" and meets in San Francisco. It was originally founded in 1951 by a group of lawyers and Berkeley professors. "the club" is quite small, having only 12 members. It meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month, excluding July and August, usually at the home of one of the members. After dining, a member reads his essay followed by a discussion. Members are encouraged to write on subjects outside their vocation. The members are, at this writing, attempting to archive their essays on the web. However, hard copies of the essays continue to be sent, as they have in the past, to the Bancroft Library. They have always used small case letters in their name.

One of the youngest essay club is the **Cedar Rapids Literary Club** in Iowa. Founded in 1974, there are presently 55 members. Women are permitted to join and, in fact, there are many husband and wife members. The club meets monthly on the last Tuesday of the month except for the summer months and December. The club dines at the Cedar Rapids Country Club after which an original essay is read and discussed. Sadly their archives were destroyed in a flood in June, 2009.

The youngest essay club in the United States was founded in 1998. It is an interesting story. After spending an evening at the Chit Chat Club as guest of Richmond Prescott, this gentleman returned to his home in Missouri and established the **Chit Chat Club of Columbia, Missouri**. Our namesake in Missouri consists of 20 men who meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of every other month at the Alumni Club of the University of Missouri. Their format follows closely our own. They archive their essays with the founder. It is fun to know that the Chit Chat Club has progeny. We can all give Richmond a cigar at the end of the evening!

### **Similarities and Differences of the Essay Clubs of the United States**

At the time of this writing I have been able to determine that there are only nine essay clubs existing in the United States today. Interestingly, many of them call themselves literary clubs. Semantics aside, I could uncover only nine clubs whose sole purpose is for the members to meet on a regular basis to read and comment aloud on an original essay written by one of its colleagues. These “pure” essay clubs are the following:

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|---|-------------|
| 1. <b>The Cincinnati Literary Club</b>            | <b>1849</b> |
| 2. <b>The Chicago Literary Club</b>               | <b>1874</b> |
| 3. <b>The Chit Chat Club (San Francisco)</b>      | <b>1874</b> |
| 4. <b>The Indianapolis Literary Club</b>          | <b>1877</b> |
| 5. <b>The Madison Literary Club</b>               | <b>1877</b> |
| 6. <b>The Young Men’s Literary Club</b>           | <b>1902</b> |
| 7. <b>“the club” (San Francisco)</b>              | <b>1951</b> |
| 8. <b>The Cedar Rapids Literary Club</b>          | <b>1974</b> |
| 9. <b>The Chit Chat Club (Columbia, Missouri)</b> | <b>1998</b> |

All nine of these essay clubs have the same “raison d’etre,” namely to meet on a regular basis for the reading and discussion of an original essay by the one of the members. All nine are exclusively private, having a strict membership evaluation process. Not surprisingly, all emphasize intellectual vigor and personal warmth in the selection of members. Five of the nine clubs were founded in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most are exclusively male only clubs with the exception of the Chicago Literary Club, the Madison Literary Club and the Cedar Rapids Literary Club. Size does vary amongst the six clubs, the largest being the Chicago Literary Club with 250 members; the smallest being “the club” with only 12 members. However, when one adds up all the membership of these six private essay clubs, the sum is only 672 individuals that are doing this in the United States. Most clubs meet on Monday evenings, breaking in the summertime. Two of them, the Cincinnati Literary Club and the Chicago Literary Club, have a clubhouse, the rest meet in a public facility or at a member’s home. The Chicago Literary Club and the Indianapolis Literary Club have

websites where essays are available for reading and “the club” of San Francisco is actively working to put its essays on the web.

### **The Future of Essay Clubs in the United States**

Yes, gentlemen, as best as I can determine there are only nine essay clubs in the United States in 2009. But will all of them still exist in 2109? To try to answer that very important question, let us listen to the thoughts of a former Chit Chat Club member and historian of California history.

Kevin Starr, a former member of our club, gave a lecture in 2008 regarding private clubs at the Bohemian Club. In that lecture, he surveyed the history of private clubs in the Bay Area. He noted that many of the private clubs founded years ago are no longer in existence. In attempting to analyze this demise, Starr concluded that there are three important concerns that all private clubs must address in order for them to maintain their existence. Those three ingredients are (1) Keeping the goal of the club clear and distinct, (2) Keeping pace with and incorporating changes to the club that occur in society at large be they demographic, cultural or technical, and (3) good governance. All three ingredients are critical for longevity and vigor.

Let us take the first issue of clarity of goal and purpose. There is no question that the nine existing essay clubs have kept their purpose clear and distinct. All nine club’s DNA, if you will, is about the writing and discussing of original essays by a private group of good-natured, articulate, well informed and intellectually curious gentlemen and, in the case of Chicago, Madison and Cedar Rapids, ladies. The members of these nine clubs have worked hard at not letting any retrovirus contaminate the genetic material to extend the metaphor. However, we nine clubs are the fortunate ones. Dr. Stephen Jay, a member of the Indianapolis Literary Club who recently surveyed essay clubs, remarked to me in an email that “the half life of literary clubs appears to be short – a few years to 40 years.” It is hard to find these shards of now non-existent literary clubs in the historical record because, due to their size and private status, many were not well documented. But one only has to think of the countless “book clubs,” for instance, that come and go to begin to understand how fragile any small literary club can be. On the other hand, it is important to note that some organizations that started like our essay clubs found great success and continued viability when they broadened their focus of interest. New York’s Century Association, San Francisco’s Bohemian Club, and London’s Athenaeum Club had, to a greater or lesser degree, similar beginning interests to the nine currently existing essay clubs. However, all three were successful in their expansion of their domain of interests beyond just writing and discussing essays. And all three enjoy remarkable popularity and

desirability as private clubs in this modern age. The waiting list for the Bohemian Club, for example, is about 20-25 years.

The second issue, emphasized by Starr, is the need for a private club to keep pace with and incorporate changes that occur in society at large be they demographic, cultural or technical. The Lunar Society of Birmingham, so well described by our own Chit Chat Club member Gray Patton in 2007, is a case in point. The Lunar Society had in its ranks very distinguished members: Darwin, Wedgwood, Priestley and Watt to name only four. But the Society only survived 48 years. The reason is that the membership died. They did not increase their membership. That, gentlemen is the most important demographic for a club's viability, namely to keep admitting new members, especially when the club's demographic tends to be a bit on the grey side. And a quick perusal of our archives shows that our very own Chit Chat Club could have had an early demise if it were not for the six founding members' rectifying a mistake that they made when they founded the club. What was that mistake? Specifically, the initial membership of the Chit Chat Club was restricted to those of the legal profession. However, within one year of the club's history, sensing the error the Chit Chat Club opened the membership up to men of all vocations.

Perhaps the most critical issue for any club's viability is member selection. It is most important to choose club members who have a love and respect for what the club is all about. One does not admit non-skiers to a ski club, teetotalers to a wine club and illiterates to a book club. To admit members to an essay club who do not have an abiding love of self-expression through writing and speaking as well as a genuine native intellectual curiosity for ideas is a recipe for an essay club, and especially a small one such as ours, for disaster. All nine of the essay clubs still active in the United States choose their members carefully and require their participation. They all emphasize that an essay club is not a lecture service, dinner club, or random intellectual discussion group.

And what about the cultural and technical changes noted by Starr. Certainly, after this past presidential race, no one at this table needs to be reminded of the cultural shifts in our nation in the gender or racial departments. By admission of women, the Chicago Literary Club, Madison Literary Club and the Cedar Rapids Literary Club were prescient in regards to this change in our cultural landscape. An example of an essay club that "died" perhaps on that basis is the Men's Literary Club of Sandusky, Ohio. Founded in 1899 by twelve gentlemen and run just like all the essay clubs I have referenced in this essay, its last meeting was in 1954. The death knell occurred when the wives of the members, all costumed as a different character out of a Dicken's novel, crashed an evening's meeting and demanded that the members identify the character each wife represented. Mmmm.... maybe it was a gender issue

that resulted in that essay club's closing. And let us not forget that there was some soul searching in our own Chit Chat Club a few years back in terms of gender admission. At that time, it was decided, by a relatively close vote, to maintain the status quo of the all male membership. However, those who experienced that bump in the road will attest to the fact that there was a 20% attrition in the membership as a result of that soul searching.

From the technical side, it is crucial for a private club to keep in step with the changes of the times. It is fun to go to our archives and see the papers and I encourage you all to do so some rainy day. In the first 10 to 15 years many of the essays were written in long hand. You will also see if you make the journey that many of the early essays were quite lengthy, often averaging 20 to 30 pages. As the years passed, one sees typed essays and, most recently, computer generated ones. Likewise, if our secretaries over the years had not changed their habits of communication, we would still be posting letters back and forth asking, "Will you be there on Monday?" The archives, in the early years, actually contain such memos. Obviously, telephones mostly eliminated the need of the mail and now phones have given way to faxes and, most recently, emails. Finally, the day is coming when archival material for submission to the libraries will be required to be in digital form. Our own archivist is pressuring us to do so. In the not too distant future a trip to the archives to enjoy our wonderful treasure of essays will be accomplished at home with a cup of coffee and a couple of strokes of the keys on one's computer. The essay clubs of Chicago and Indianapolis have already accomplished this task by archiving their material electronically. Chicago's material is open for all to read. In short, all clubs, to maintain their viability, must attend to these changes as painful as they might be for many of us who sport lots of grey hair or no hair at all.

Finally is the issue of governance. The need for good governance is obvious. Officers of any club need to be open and welcoming to all the members, receptive to new ideas and guard against genuinely destructive forces, be balanced and fair in all dealings, and be ready and helpful when the baton needs to be handed off. We of the Chit Chat Club have been fortunate to have good leadership over our 135 years. We have had 14 secretaries and our club is still strong. However, even we, in November of 2008, decided to take a second look at our governance to see if some of the duties of the Secretary, namely the financial aspects of the club, need to be relegated to another member.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, gentlemen, we, and just a handful of lucky few in the United States, sit around a table on ten Monday nights a year doing something that is very special and quite rare today. We listen to one of our members “crystallized conversation” that takes the form of an original essay and, when it is concluded, we make comments on this “crystal” that was so kindly and generously given to us. And in order to do so, we call upon our intellectual acumen and integrity, our rhetorical skills, our life experiences, and, yes, gentlemen, our humor and our kindness. And when we depart from each other at the end of those few but very special Monday evenings, we leave richer, not only in knowledge, but in something perhaps more important, namely in friendship. I wish to conclude my “crystallized conversation” tonight, gentlemen, with a quote from, appropriately one of America’s great essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson who, as you now know if you did not know before this evening, founded two intellectual discussion clubs in Boston. He said the following:

*“ A friend is one before whom I may think aloud.”*

I want to thank you, my Chit Chat Club friends, for allowing me to think aloud before you tonight and, of equal importance, privileging me with your spoken thoughts.