Leisure with Dignity
A History of the La Crosse Club

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The essence of life is the ability to adapt to change. If such is true, the La Crosse Club lives. Now over a hundred and fifteen years alive, the Club has seen La Crosse change from a river town with mud streets and wood sidewalks to a small city of great beauty and modernity.

It has seen the recreational needs of its members change from cigars and checkers; to billiards and bowling; to slot machines and booze; to gin rummy and poker; to today’s professional meetings and business lunches. Club members also have seen travel change from horsecar and steam train to jet airplanes; communications move from telegraph to fax and satellite television.

But the La Crosse Club’s purpose is constant: to provide a comfortable locale for intelligent conversation and relaxing pleasure.

We, who have been part of its life, salute the La Crosse Club, its motto, Leisure with Dignity, and its coming contribution to La Crosse’s vibrant future.

Charles D. Gelatt, President
La Crosse Club
1976 and 1982-1995
After a hard day's work in late 19th century La Crosse at Cargill and Van, the National Bank of La Crosse, the Gund Brewery or La Crosse Plow Co., a fellow needed a place to relax ... to play some cards... talk over the day's events ... maybe go over a business deal. For a group of La Crosse businessmen in the 1880s, the place to get together was not one of the 27 hotels in town or the 99 saloons. It was one of the eight cigar shops in the city, where they could gather under a cloud of blue smoke to play chess or checkers or just talk.

W.R. Putnam, who operated a "gents furnishing goods" business in 1880 at 128 Main St., was a member of a group he described as young and old bachelors and a few widowers whom he said "vibrated" during their free time from the Spence Drug Store, 303 Main St., to the cigar store of Max Weix, 313 Main St., just to the east of where the State Bank of La Crosse was in 1888 on Main.

This group could be found "vibrating" between the stores on most evenings and on Sunday afternoons. "Of course, we all attended church in the morning," he assured readers of the La Crosse Chronicle in a column he wrote in 1906 about the origins of the club.

The group's routine usually began at the Spence store, where they would "fill the house with smoke," and then move on to the store of Max Weix, where they would "repeat the program." They sat in the back room of the "tobacconist's"
store, challenging each other to a board game or reading the newspapers and magazines that covered a table.

"Many a jolly afternoon and evening were spent by the gang in this way," Putnam wrote in an era long before "gang" meant anything other than a group of fellows who shared fine cigars.

On a cold winter Sunday afternoon in 1881, all this was about to change. As best Putnam could remember, the usual crowd had gathered ... bookkeeper John "Bunn" Webb, Ed Ellis, attorney T.A. Dyson, Sam Cargill of W.W. Cargill grain and produce, J.R. Wallace, newspaper publisher Ellis Usher, lumber dealer Forrest Smith, lumber baron L.C. Colman, bookkeeper E.N. Osborne of Cargill and Van, assistant bookkeeper J.D. McMillan also of Cargill and Van, and himself.

Just as the air was filling with smoke, Weix startled the lads with the news that he was about to lock up the shop. "Boys, I am sorry to be obliged to turn you out, but I've got an engagement for the afternoon."

As Putnam told the story, "many dissenting grunts were visible."

"Pretty tough," said Bunn.
"It's cold outside," said Ellis.
"Give the girl a rest," said another.

Most enterprising of all was Ellis Usher, proprietor of the Morning Chronicle, who said "If the fellows in this town had any snap in them, they would soon have comfortable club rooms in which to spend their spare moments."
And so they did — have snap and have club rooms.

Smith said he had a lease on Sanctum Hall in the La Crosse Opera Company building that had been erected in 1867 at the southwest corner of Fourth and Main streets by the notorious former editor of the La Crosse Democrat, Marcus “Brick” Pomeroy.

When Smith said he would turn over the “old Pomeroy Sanctum” and adjoining rooms to the club, the men began talking about the cost of fitting the rooms with billiard tables and other furnishings. When Bunn Webb estimated it might be as much as $1,000, Putnam immediately pledged $100.

“I will be one of ten men to guarantee that one thousand dollars,” he announced. “This seemed to strike the boys favorably and although they took my proposition jokingly, it was enough to incite immediate action.”

That action resulted in the La Crosse Club, a social organization that has been home to the La Crosse leaders and businessmen for more than 100 years. For women, it’s been a much shorter time — since 1985.

The La Crosse Club was organized in 1881, not with ideals to change the world but to make the world more enjoyable for its members. It offered a refuge from the demands of business and family. For nearly all its history, this reserve of men was, as the La Crosse Chronicle’s 1906 headline called it, “a comfortable loafing place.”
The 300 block of Main Street in about 1885. Notice in the lower left of the photo is the M. Wiex Tobacco shop where members of what would become the La Crosse Club used to meet.

Photo courtesy of the Arm Research Center, Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
‘Organized with a splendid membership’

A fter the first rush of enthusiasm of the Spence-Weix cigar gang, a committee was formed to further discussions about forming a club. Forty “gentlemen of La Crosse” signed a letter calling for a meeting in Sanctum Hall on Dec. 13, 1881. Attorney Mills Tourtellotte chaired the meeting, which Putnam described as “filled with enthusiastic citizens and the La Crosse Club was organized with a splendid membership.”

E.G. Perkins (supervisor of the Southern Minnesota Division of the Milwaukee Road) was recording secretary for that first meeting. Bookkeeper John B. Webb was elected president; A. Jurgens (steamship agency collection), vice president; C.L. Colman (lumber), secretary; F.P. Cook (Hogan and Cook, wholesale grocers), treasurer. The directors were W.A. Anderson (physician and twice mayor of La Crosse), attorney C.W. Bunn, T.A. Dyson, Joseph Tuteur (I. Tuteur & Sons, wholesale wines and liquors) and Tourtellotte (an incorporator, with Colman, of the La Crosse Street Railway Co.).

The club’s incorporation papers, signed by Anderson, G.W. Woodward and Tourtellotte, said it was formed “for the general
purposes of improved social intercourse, enjoyment and culture among its members; to procure by purchase or otherwise such rooms, buildings and grounds as may be necessary, therefore, to properly furnish, warm and light the same; provide and maintain therein billiard tables, reading rooms and other means of innocent recreation; and to acquire all such sums of money, and to control, expend, invest and dispose of the same in such a manner as may be necessary for the purposes herein and forth."

Such a place of innocent recreation was dearly needed, according to the La Crosse Republican & Leader, which wrote on Dec. 14, 1881:

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\text{The fact is that La Crosse has no place outside the public resorts on the street, where a gentleman who comes here from abroad can be entertained in a suitable manner. There never has been a place, outside of the hotels and saloons, where gentlemen could meet and enjoy leisure hours together in a social way. The La Crosse Club aims to provide comfortable quarters of this kind. There is nothing religious, political, literary or commercial in this project, and yet, the club room will afford a place where, religion, politics, literature and business will be discussed.}
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The La Crosse Club was one of many clubs formed in La Crosse during the last decades of the 19th Century. Most others were short-lived, including the Social Club, which was followed by the La Crosse Social Club and then the XL Club. Among the other early clubs described by the La Crosse Tribune in 1964 were the Social Assembly, Chow Chow Club, Acme, and Young Bachelors. Then there were the Married Folks’ Club, Young Men’s City Club and the Old Folks Dancing Club in the 1890s. The Winneshiek Club joined forces with the
Rescue Hose Company Club to form a volunteer fire department. The La Crosse Elks Club, which started in La Crosse in 1895 with clubrooms in Gund Hall at Fourth and Jay Streets, opened its clubrooms at the corner of Fifth and State in 1912. With the exception of the Elks and the La Crosse Club, none of these social organizations survived.

Early women's clubs, according to Margaret Larson in *For the Common Good ... A History of Women's Roles in La Crosse County, 1920-1980*, included the La Crosse Women's Club, the Coterie, the Ladies Art Class, the La Crosse Women's Club, the Fortnightly Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Woman Suffrage Club, the Women's Industrial Exchange and a reading circle that became the Ibsen Club. None had a permanent headquarters, however.

The first home of the La Crosse Club was one that had been the hotbed of heated discussions of politics and other matters. By the time the La Crosse Club came into existence, the *La Crosse Democrat* offices, including Sanctum Hall, were long vacated by Brick Pomeroy, the newspaper's fiery editor, who left in 1868 to launch the *National Democrat* in New York City.

The once luxurious offices could be reached only by steep steps at the rear of the building at Fourth and Main streets, which some surmised was designed to discourage visitors to the newspaper's offices. Pomeroy, who at this time had already moved west...
from La Crosse, needed to discourage visitors from his offices.

In a 1916 article in the *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, the Sanctum was described as the place “where the Democrats’ punchful editorials had issued to startle and interest the country.” Pomeroy was a “Copperhead,” an anti-Lincoln editor in the heart of Lincoln country. This faction of Democrats was bitterly opposed to the Civil War and especially to President Abraham Lincoln. In fact, Pomeroy even suggested in 1864 that “If Lincoln is elected, we trust some bold hand will pierce to his heart with a dagger point for the public good.”

After Pomeroy moved, the building was sold at sheriff’s auction for a mortgage of $35,000 just a few years after its construction for $80,000. Not many years later, the building would be on the market for a dismal $14,000. (Pomeroy died in
1896, a financially broken man after a scheme to produce the Atlantic and Pacific Tunnel under Gray’s Peak near Georgetown, Colorado, failed and he was accused of mismanaging the funds.)

Despite the fiery history of the Pomeroy building, it was a good deal for the La Crosse Club, which leased the sanctum and two adjoining rooms. The organizers immediately made plans to buy two regulation size Brunswick & Balke carom billiard tables and a fifteen-ball pool table. The tables were ordered in rosewood with matching cues and cue racks. The ivory billiard balls were only the best.

The day after an oil-finished, hardwood floor was installed in Sanctum Hall on Jan. 14, 1882, the Chronicle indignantly came to the defense of the club, which apparently had been the subject of criticism from some quarters of La Crosse:

> It may not be amiss to remark here that the people who object to this club, and there are some, are more nice than wise. The constitution strictly forbids the use of liquor on the premises and gambling in all shapes is absolutely prohibited in the same document. It is expected by those who inaugurated the project that it will furnish reading rooms and an opportunity for social amusements among the gentlemen that has long been needed in this city, and there will be nothing in the rules or conduct of the rooms to prevent them from being agreeable to any gentleman in La Crosse.

Furnishings arrived Jan. 25, 1882, including temporary billiard tables, overstuffed, comfortable chairs and card tables. The club opened Jan. 28, 1882, reported the Chronicle, with “a most excellent mission and we believe is destined to grow steadily in popularity.”

Any male, age 21 or older, who paid a $25 initiation fee, was admitted. Membership that first year was limited to 75.
Membership hovered around 90 to 100 in the early years.

There were strict rules of behavior at the La Crosse Club, at least according to its first constitution, which was found in the cornerstone of the old La Crosse City Hall. That cornerstone, which was laid on July 4, 1891, was opened by then Mayor Warren Loveland and other city officials in 1970 when demolition of the old City Hall was begun to make way for a new building. James Gelatt (then president of the La Crosse Club and founder of Norplex, which he sold to United Oil Products in 1966 and which later merged into Allied Signal) had the constitution reprinted to share with club members.

"Games of hazard or playing for money shall never be permitted in the club rooms, nor shall liquor of any kind be brought into or drunk therein," the constitution said. "Club members shall express no opinion on any religious, political or social question."

The same constitution also said "No subject or question of any nature shall be prohibited as a topic of conversation or discussion among members; but all obscene or insulting language and all loud and boisterous conversation calculated to annoy or disturb persons not participating therein, and all disorderly conduct or ungentlemanly conduct, shall be strictly forbidden."

The directors even had the power to suspend, fine or expel any member who was "charged with any gross, immoral, dishonorable or ungentlemanly conduct or any conduct which damages the welfare, interest or character of the corporation."

All this good behavior wasn't for the benefit of the ladies, however. The La Crosse Club was a "high society exclusive of women," as one early member put it in an early newspaper account. Women were not allowed into the men's sanctum except on special Ladies' Nights, the first of which was held February 6, 1883. "Before nine o'clock the room was thronged and everybody devoted himself to having a good time," the
Chronicle reported. "There were thirty or more registered on the guests' book. Games of whist were inaugurated and lessons taken in pool and billiard."

Later, Ladies' Night was held every Thursday — at least early on when the ladies wanted to know where their husbands and sons were spending their free time. But the La Crosse Club for the most part just wasn't a place for women, particularly in the sanctum of its dining room. "The ladies didn't play a very good game of billiards," said an unnamed charter member in a 1916 La Crosse Tribune article. "After a while the novelty wore off and Ladies' Night was less of an institution."
The Burton Murder

The La Crosse Club was crowded the night that La Crosse Club member Frank A. Burton was shot under the balcony of the club in an assassination that the Chronicle's editor called "the most terrible tragedy the city of La Crosse has known in all its history."

It was during the bitter presidential campaign between Democrat Grover Cleveland and Republican James G. Blaine. Long before radio or television, supporters of candidates expressed their opinions by marching publicly in support of their man. On October 15, 1884, Burton, a popular grain broker, was at the head of a group of Republican marchers who met at Fourth and Main Streets to form a torchlight procession in support of his candidate. Suddenly out of the crowd came Nathaniel "Scotty" Mitchell, who fatally shot Burton.

Mitchell was said to have had a grudge against Burton from the days the grain broker was surveyor of customs. Burton apparently would not allow Mitchell, a riverman who had been injured, hospitalized and discharged, to re-enter the Marine Hospital. Mitchell, according to A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900, was regarded as unbalanced by those who knew him.

The police immediately seized and jailed Mitchell, but an angry crowd followed officials demanding the prisoner. The mob shattered the door of one entrance to the jail and, after a two-hour fight, grabbed Mitchell, and hanged him from a tree in La Crosse.

"A rope was ready over the limb of a tree. Twice it broke from the weight of the murderer, but at last the tragedy ended," wrote Albert H. Sanford and H.J. Hirshheimer in the early La Crosse history.
Club members were among those in emotional turmoil. As the *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press* reported in 1916, “The club balcony was packed that night to watch the parade file past the corner of Fourth and Main Streets, and there was a near panic in the club when Scotty’s fatal shot rang out and Burton fell beside the curb.”

Frank Adams Burton was shot under the balcony of the club in an assassination that the *La Crosse Chronicle*’s editor called “the most terrible tragedy the city of La Crosse has known in all its history.”

*Photo courtesy of the Area Research Center, Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse*
'Hello, hello, are you there?'

Although La Crosse historian Doug Connell said the records of long-distance calls go back to 1879, it is part of the La Crosse Club lore that the first long distance call placed from La Crosse was made from the club on a Ladies' Night in October 1886.

Even if records show otherwise, that phone call is part of the club's history that has been handed down through the generations and reprinted in newspaper recollections. Local historical writer Myer Katz wrote that the La Crosse Club was the first social association in the city to have a telephone at the time the instrument was still suspect by some who could see no need for such a contraption. Katz vividly described this call to a private club in Milwaukee:

Other club members who knew of the historic call crowded into the meeting rooms, bringing with them wives and children. News of the happening spread through this town of 21,800, and in a brief time the hall outside the club, the steep stairway leading to the second floor and the wooden sidewalk on Main Street were jammed with hundreds of curious people.

John 'Bunn' Webb, the La Crosse Club's first president, had the honor of placing the call. He cranked the handle that alerted the operator who proceeded with the complicated process of contacting the Milwaukee Exchange.

After much scratching, squeaking and static, there came the unmistakable sound of a human male voice,
originating from a site some 200 miles away, shouting, 'Hello, hello. Are you there? I'm here. Hello.'

Even the faint sounds of a band playing martial music in the background were heard, probably from a phonograph, invented the year before.

The receiver was passed from man to man in the room so all were impressed. Word filtered through the crowds and people stood in awe. How could one possibly talk personally to someone 250 miles away? Indeed, some scurried off to nearby churches to offer praise and thanks for this marvel.
Move to new quarters

Just a month after the legendary phone call in 1886, the La Crosse Club moved from its Fourth and Main location. In addition to needing more space, the old Pomeroy Sanctum didn’t live up to its description, published in the 1881 History of La Crosse County. That book described the building as “one of the most complete and architecturally elegant edifices in the Midwest.”

In fact, another early writer described the four-story building as “so miserably planned that there is not a good room in it, and that it never could be rented at a price that compared with other buildings near it.”

City residents, who feared it was a fire trap, rarely filled the building’s secondfloor theater, which Pomeroy once claimed held 1,200 seats but historians have estimated at 800 to 900. Those fears were warranted. In 1897, fire destroyed what was then known as the MacMillian Opera House. The Linker Building, which was built on that site, also burned in 1961. The Linker Building site later was the home of the downtown McDonald’s Restaurant, which opened in 1976 and closed Nov. 19, 1995.

The decision to move to new quarters at Fifth and Main may have been an attempt, as well, to increase membership which dropped to just 60 before the move. “The shift to the new quarters in the Stirneman Building brought a renewal of prosperity to the club, which remained for comfortable, uneventful years,” the La Crosse Tribune recalled in 1916.

With the move came a round of boosterism from the local papers. The La Crosse Republican & Leader reported “by night the rooms will exhibit a scene of social life and comfortable, well arranged surroundings that cannot be excelled anywhere... The beauty of the new rooms is the ease of access...
that will be enjoyed by a larger number of people than were the old ones."

The new club had six rooms, as the newspaper reported, "exclusive of the cloak room, bath room and storage closets." The parlor rooms were carpeted in dark colors and the rooms were heated with coal stoves and open grates. The furnishings included easy chairs, card tables, center tables, sofas, engravings and paintings.

At the time of the move, the president was F.A. Copeland, a bookkeeper for La Crosse Lumber Company of which Gov. C.C. Washburn was president. Later he would be involved with the Hixon lumber interests. La Crosse Club vice president was the Chronicle's publisher Ellis B. Usher; secretary was Dr. Daniel S. McArthur; treasurer was F. H. Hankerson (president of the National Bank of La Crosse). Directors were Bunn Webb, Lafe Holmes (bookkeeper for P.S. Davidson groceries), and George Salzer (manager of J. Paul, a manufacturer of wood doors and sashes.

To celebrate the opening, "A Pleasant Event" was held, the Republican & Leader reported on December 9, 1886. About 300 invitations were sent out and "very few regrets were received."

The guests were ushered into the pleasant rooms of the club to the music of Isador Tippman's orchestra, supper was served in the billiard room by members of the club, who waited upon the guests in an admirable manner. The evening was passed in social intercourse, and many expressions of admiration of the new quarters of the club were made by those present.

On January 6, 1888, the Republican & Leader reported on an "At Home" event at the club, an annual occasion when the members of the club "received" their guests.

"On entering their elegant rooms in the Stirneman block, one was greeted with a warmth of cordiality quite in keeping
The new La Crosse Club at Fifth and State in 1920. The club’s address was given at various times and in various sources as 115 N. Fifth Street, 115 First Ave. N., and 121 Fifth Street and Fifth Avenue North. Fifth became an “Avenue” after Jake Hoeschler’s uncle returned from New York where he was much impressed by Fifth Avenue. This photo shows the porch where Mrs. Louise Holley drove up in her first and only driving experience.

Photo courtesy of the Area Research Center, Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

with the brilliant illumination, cheerful fires and rare exotics which met the eye and charmed the senses,” the paper reported.

Members of the La Crosse Club were valued, as one resolution attached to the club roster of visitors on July 11, 1889, attests. This resolution noted the membership of Aaron H. Davis “was terminated by death” on July 9, 1889:

Whereas said deceased has been for several years a member of the La Crosse Club, resolved therefore that this club enjoin to the memory of its late member and friend in this public expression of the high esteem it
had long entertained in behalf of the deceased, and that its members, as citizens, attend the last sad rites and ceremonies on the day of the burial, and that the club rooms be closed for 24 hours from Friday forenoon. Resolved that this club extend their sympathy to the widow and members of the family in their most severe affliction.

Despite glowing reports about the La Crosse Club in the newspapers, the club was soon in a struggle for financial survival, as evidenced by the decision in 1895 to lower the minimum age for membership from 22 to 18. Clearly, there was a need to attract more members. Lowering the age of admission was not enough, however. By 1899 membership had declined to only 35 from a high of 203 in 1886 just after the club moved.

Reminiscing in 1933, Dr. Daniel S. McArthur noted a decided difference between the interests of younger and older members. "The trouble was," Dr. McArthur said in the July 2, 1933, La Crosse Tribune, "that the older members wanted to sit around quietly and play cards and whenever we made a little more noise than usual at billiards or pool, the old timers would scowl and ask for quiet."

An October 23, 1899, newspaper report claimed the La Crosse Club would disband on Jan. 1, 1900, with the Elks Club likely to take over the building at Fifth and Main. "The club membership has been gradually decreasing and the breakup has been contemplated for some time past," the newspaper reported.

By December 6 of that year, the club was saved — at least temporarily. "The La Crosse Club is not ready just yet to give up the Ghost," said the Republican and Independent. At an "important meeting" held on December 5, 1899, the newspaper reported "members were not ready for social death." Instead, they voted to continue the organization, which the newspaper predicted would "make it once more the leading club of the city."
A new club

Early in 1900, however, the club disbanded, and a group of business leaders met to organize the *New* La Crosse Club. Led by younger leaders as well as some of the older members of the first club, consideration was given to working with the La Crosse Theater Company to provide a new front on its building so it could serve as the new club sanctum. The Theater Company said it would do so if the organizing committee could sign up at least 125 new members.

Incorporated by W.W. Cargill, John Pamperin (cigar manufacturer) and Claude K. Pettingill (insurance, real estate and later an organizer of First Federal Savings Bank), the club had 177 members. The initiation fee was $10, and annual dues were set at $20.

The club decided to build its own quarters when negotiations with the La Crosse Theater broke down. The theater announced it would cost more to remodel for the club “than it cared to invest.” Furthermore, the *Republican* reported, “It would seem that they had but little faith in the ultimate success of the institution.”

Apparently some of the 177 initial members who signed on later admitted to the paper that they joined only to make the new club “an institution for the city.”

So determined was Fred Copeland to organize the new La Crosse Club, he said, “We will either have a club house or I will move out of town.” Copeland, who served as a mayor of La Crosse, lived at 1327 Cass Street in a home now owned by Jeff and Kristin Sexton. His daughter, Irene, said to be “the most beautiful girl in La Crosse,” married J. M. Hixon. They built a house across the street at 1326 Cass.
They planned to withdraw soon after it was established.

F.A. Copeland was committed to building a new club facility at Fifth and State, despite the price tag of $20,000. Reportedly, he even told the Republican that "We would either have a club house or I will move out of town."

Publicly, he presented an optimistic front. "Prospects are good for the success of the movement," he said, "and we anticipate no great difficulty in the work."

When the club opened, all but $1,000 in bonds had been endorsed by the members. Within the hour, the last bonds gained the members' support. The club opened with the usual flourish on February 3, 1901, with the club's good friend, the Republican & Leader reporting "It is certainly a model affair in every respect." When "the palatial home" of the new club opened, there were 200 members with others on a waiting list. Members could spend time reading in the library, playing billiards in the billiard room or cards in the private or public card room. Directly off the card rooms was the assembly room for meetings of the club's directors or "societies which have been in the habit of using the club rooms as a meeting place." Four Brunswick-Balke bowling alleys were built in the basement.

The "handsome appearance" of the clubrooms were said to be due to the "excellent taste" of Mrs. W.W. Cargill, who supervised the work even if she, as a woman, would never be able to enjoy the experience herself.

The first officers of the new club were a who's-who list of La Crosse: F.A. Copeland was elected president; brewer John Gund, Jr., vice president; E.M. Wing, secretary; F.H. Hankerson, treasurer. Other members of the board of directors were J.W. Skinner, F.P. Hixon (lumber), John Burton, A. Hirshheimer (La Crosse Plow Works) and W.W. Cargill.

By 1905, one-third of La Crosse's population belonged to fraternal or social organizations at one time or another,
according to *La Crosse: A Case Study in Social History, 1900-1910*, a master's thesis written by Donald J. Berthrong in 1948 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Members were involved in organizations according to their nationalities and social standings.

"Although not a typical social organization, the La Crosse Club is perhaps the most significant and interesting," Berthrong wrote. "The committee, composed of F.A. Copeland, John Gund, Jr.; and J.M. Hixon, were interested only in people with money. This is perhaps the key to the whole social organization."

"Within the three principal nationality groups, the German, Norwegian and Yankee, the criterion for selection of club
members was financial status. The religion, nationality, education, profession, business interest or political affiliation of the individual seemingly made little difference....The criterion which applied to all was wealth. Wealth carried with it prestige and by belonging to a social organization such as the La Crosse Club, the less important members added to their prestige," he continued.

The La Crosse Club in its earliest years offered a meeting place for the La Crosse Board of Trade and the Manufacturers and Jobbers Club, Berthrong wrote. "This type of association solidified the businessmen and the manufacturers into a compact organization. The Board of Trade and the Manufacturers and Jobbers Club represented the economic interests of the dominant group directly, while the La Crosse Club gave organizations a concrete social base by providing a suitable meeting place."
Another technological development

In an era before the long-distance telephone made the telegraph antiquated, Walter Holmes was said to have “the fastest, clearest key” between Chicago and Minneapolis. This La Crosse telegrapher and later passenger agent for the Burlington Railroad proved his abilities at the La Crosse Club.

It was election night 1916 and Woodrow Wilson was in the fight of his political life against his Republican opponent, Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes. Wilson and much of the country went to bed that night believing Wilson had lost and that the nation would have a new president.

Meanwhile in La Crosse, Holmes was invited into the La Crosse Club to provide its members with fast-breaking news about the election. Fast breaking is a relative term in the early decades of the 20th century. In 1916, fast breaking generally meant waiting for the newspapers — and there were several then even in a small community like La Crosse — to print the news.

The privileged and innovative members of the La Crosse Club preferred to have their news before others in the community. Holmes was asked to tap into the Associated Press wire from the La Crosse Club so he could listen to national results as they came through. Members of the club stayed all night listening to the returns the telegrapher relayed to them. They were among the first in the country to learn that California Republicans, believing Hughes had not given them the attention they deserved, had thrown the election to Wilson. Club members learned before other La Crosse citizens that Wilson’s 4,000-vote edge in California gave him 277 electoral votes to 254 for Hughes, who received 46 percent of the popular vote to Wilson’s 49 percent.
Hey-dey of the club

Outsiders may think the early billiard games, bowling in the basement or cards in the parlors were mere backdrop for business deals. But the reality was they were not, at least in the first few decades.

As Charles Gelatt, president of the club in 1976 and from 1982 until 1995, learned from his father, Philo, the earliest members were not there for business but to get away from it. Woe be to anyone who interrupted this respite from business and home.

In the late 19th Century and in the first three decades of the 20th, the very wealthy in La Crosse — and there were a surprisingly number for such a small city — worked only until noon. Then they spent their afternoons in recreation in places like the La Crosse Club or on the golf course of the La Crosse Country Club during summer.

Turn of the century La Crosse had its share of those who made their fortunes through industry ... the Cargills in grain ... the Gunds in brewing ... the Hirshheimers in La Crosse Plow Works... the Funks in the La Crosse Rubber Mills ... and the Hixons and Colmans in lumber. These 19th century industrialists were helped because they came to La Crosse from New York and other places in the East with family money behind them.

La Crosse, Wisconsin, then was a crude, river town where the frontier began just a few steps outside of the city to the west. The economy was based on lumber, with many men making tremendous fortunes before the pine forests were depleted. Others developed the only major industry between Chicago and Minneapolis. Because of their financial stature in life, the word of these men was never questioned in business or anywhere else in their lives.
“They were vigorous pre-emptive bosses, the kind who commanded men in the Civil War. To be a general in the Civil War, you had to be a very, very strong boss,” said Charles Gelatt, a 20th Century industrialist in his own right. “These were very, very strong-willed men who were not going to take ‘no’ for an answer.”

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, business moved at a much slower pace because communications took much longer. Businessmen and women today must stay in close touch with their offices (by fax, pager and cellular phone), but back then communications came in the daily mail or, if important enough, by telegraph. And, there were fewer fast breaking decisions to make.

These industrialists hired capable assistants to run their operations. The Hixons, for example, each earned an estimated $1 million a year at a time when the average worker’s annual salary was $300. And, the millions earned by these lumber barons were virtually tax free.

“They were well established men who could command good lieutenants, and their business problems were rarely political and rarely labor,” Gelatt said his father, Philo, told him. “Labor was plentiful then. Their problem usually was how to get capital together. If they had enough capital to start a business, they usually were making good money. Once they started making good money, they hired an assistant, the most intelligent and capable person they could find. That person did the work. And there were some very good ones.”

After they put in a morning’s work, gentlemen with the wealth of a Cargill, a Hixon or Gund went to their club to play cards or billiards or to the golf course. One story illustrates how strong was this work ethic of working only until noon. Philo Gelatt told the story of going to Madison to play golf with lumber magnate Joseph Hixon (son of Gideon) and others. They boarded the 7 a.m. Northwestern to Madison, arriving at 12:10 p.m. As they got off the train, a young man, Tom Brittingham,
came running up to his senior partner and backer, Joe Hixon, to discuss an important business matter. Brittingham then ran the Brittingham-Hixon Company, which had lumber yards all over the Midwest.

Joe Hixon looked at him and said “Tom, you know I never talk business after 12 o’clock.” Hixon brushed his number one lieutenant, the one who’s making him so much money, off the platform and onto the tracks.

When these men were at the La Crosse Club, they sat on the balcony and had their drinks brought to them. Their value to the club could not be over-emphasized. Emil “Punch” Niemeyer, a long-time club member, said in a 1964 interview that if money were ever needed to keep the club afloat, wealthy members just kicked in personal funds.

“In the club’s early days, one of the wealthy members would sit down and write out a check for $5,000 or $10,000 to pay expenses,” Niemeyer said. “Officers would meet and tell what was needed for the club. Someone would say, ‘I’ll give $5,000, you $2,500 and you $5,000.’”

The presence of these men of wealth in La Crosse was about to change with the coming of the state income tax in 1911. Over the years, the United States had periodic income taxes for special needs like raising funds to pay for the Civil War. However, they were temporary measures, ones that the wealthy in particular viewed with disdain.

Wisconsin was the first in the nation to have what is called “a workable income tax.” It was small, to be sure, by today’s standards, but the prevailing sentiment, according to the Wisconsin Magazine of History, was that it was “pro-farmer and anti-manufacturer, the work of a progressive Republican legislature dominated by farmers and determined to realize Robert M. La Follette’s dreams about redistributing wealth and power.” Wisconsin’s law “was a landmark and a beacon to the federal government and the forty-five other states which since have passed income tax laws and depend on them for a
substantial share of their revenue," John O. Stark wrote in that 1987 article.

The tax on income replaced much of the property tax, which had been particularly hard on farmers.

Although the Wisconsin income tax law may not have been designed to be anti-manufacturer, it surely infuriated the manufacturers. A manufacturer’s state income tax went up 653 percent, according to Dane County records, while the increase for farmers was only 331 percent. By today’s standards, the actual dollars were small. The average state income tax per individual was a mere $12.90 a year for farmers and $61.49 for manufacturers at a time when the average income was $300 a year.

Still, men who had built fortunes were no longer able to hold on to their every penny. Shortly after its establishment, 13 millionaires left the city of La Crosse, including the Sawyers, Pauls, Scotts and Hixons. The Funks (La Crosse Rubber Mills) stayed as did the Hirshheimers (La Crosse Plow Works), but their accumulated capital was believed to be less than a million.

"There was not a millionaire left in La Crosse. That’s what my father told me," Gelatt said.

Of course, for the Hixons and other lumber barons, the decision to move on may have been influenced by the state of lumbering in Wisconsin. By 1905, the pine woods of Wisconsin had all been depleted. From a total lumbering payroll of $955,000 in La Crosse in 1895, the total payroll had declined to $16,150 in 1904, according to A History of La Crosse Wisconsin 1841-1900 by Albert H. Sanford and H.J. Hirshheimer.

The departure of these men, whether because of the depletion of the pine forests or out of indignation about the burden of the state income tax, meant there were few, if anyone, left at the club who could simply write a check to cover needed capital expenditures.
Steward Paul Vidani, Sr.

In the early 20th Century in America children frequently went to work at an early age. Among them was Paul J. Vidani, who first worked at La Crosse Boot & Shoe Co. as a shoe cobbler when he was a mere 12 years old.

When Vidani’s good friend, Rudy Harder, hired on at the La Crosse Club a few years later, Vidani joined him. He was 18 years old and “stayed a lifetime,” said his son, Paul J. Vidani, Jr., a self-made man who grew to be wealthy despite growing up on what he called “Hood alley” on La Crosse’s South Side. His success came through three Green Bay, Wisconsin, businesses. Prior to moving to Green Bay, Paul, Jr., had a distinguished career in the U.S. Navy until his retirement as a commander in 1962.

Among the remembrances in the Vidani papers is a poem written by a member named Yorick on the occasion of the close of the billiard tournament of 1912. Unfortunately, several stanzas of the poem show the wear of time. Holes prevent the ode from being printed in its entirety. But the poem apparently included nearly all if not every club member of the time. The following is the poem as best it can be deciphered, with lines indicating places where there are holes.
A Few Remarks on the La Crosse Club
and Its Members
Made by the Humblest of them

There is a place in our little town
To which we hurry, when the sun goes down,
to spend an hour with friends so dear
And take a drink and a little cheer.
You meet men there, distinguished or plain,
Some few modest and still fewer vain;
What matter it thought? Poor, millionaire,
As long as the right kind of spirit is there.

We have friends under contract, to light and warm us;
What we mostly get though are bills enormous;
So we sit in the dark with chattering teeth,
And bless our light and our good city heat.

There is Lute C. and Harry Colman and Ed
And there is Hankerson, dear old Fred;
They all look sad and we know the reason;
It's just because golf is out of season.

We also have Hixons — Joe, Rob and Frank;
They are men all three of the highest rank;
Doc Anderson, Sam, Mr. Allen, Medary,
And, in the reading room, Bird quite hairy.

Here is a big man with a great Roman nose,
Who is commonly known as Sir Walter Rose;
And there is one, whom I'll call ________
Our stately friend, Mr. George M. _____.
There are notable men — Whelpley, Gelatt, Henry Boehm and Paul D. belong in that set; When their ladies feel good, they let them go To the Club and spend a night or so.

There sits Uncle Emil, so round and red, With several hairs upon his head; He'll spring his rhymes and stories galore — It's all the same if you heard them before.

He'll laugh and roar (if you don't) and ring The bell for the waiter and any old thing Your heart desires you may have. It's a go! As long as he gets his good "you know."

At the other table there sits Mr. Bryant Together with Kroner, the hardware giant; Now and then you will hear some witty sally From Bryant, while John sips his Mountain Valley.

There is Taylor and Mac and Percy and Ablett, Who always carries his writing tablet, For he is the scribe of the board of directors, That honored group, or noble protectors.

Two "great" little men, Mr. Wing and Burke, With Gordon and Perkins, both hard at work, With gestures fierce and words aggressive They are trying to down the so-called "progressives."

There is Michel, Humbolt and H.O. Klein; You never say any of them with a "sine;" They drink no whiskey; when they say "How!" Down goes a bottle of Elfenbrau.
And Bobbie Keyes with moustaches swell,
We have known him long and like him well.
With "Your Secretary" — Herr Uttermoehl,
He means no harm, the good old soul.

He tried to hand us some nice "soft soap"
But the town won't stand for Norgaard's dope;
So now he is trying with might and main
To rest his bones from the awful strain.

Upstairs, in front, there is quite a "Bund"
There is "Doc," the dentist and Henry Gund.
And Miller, the fat man, and Felber, the thin;
They're sweating and trying a pot to win.

And then there is Linker, who lives upon shavings,
We all know that Skat is the worst of his cravings;
He sits there and "maurers," the Proselytes win
From poor little Georgie his well loved "tin."

And once in a awhile comes the "Deutscher Verein"
Carl Michel, Bosshard, Humbolt and Klein,
With Tisdale, Capt. Thompson and Andy Lees
Be sure, when they come, there is always a breeze.

Here's Arthy E., the noble old Dane;
He who tried so hard, but all in vain,
To give us fresh air with a nice aquarium
And, later on, bought a big herbarium.

In which to keep those filthy weeds
Which many a man to an early grave leads,
And to make him so sick when he smokes "prima vista"
Particularly so if it be "Capitalista."
If we listen, we hear such a merry click
"They are “rolling the ivories,” round and slick,
There is Hough and Mitchell, Schwalbe and Craft,
And Charley Schweizer just making a raft.

And further down, at the end of the hall,
Moll and “Cash” play at Carrom with crooked ball
And Robbins and Dow, two knights of yore,
Are keeping track of each other’s score.

While F.C. Beisel, watching Forest Smith
Making grand-stand shots, softly murmurs “quit!”
And little Gene Edwards, so plump and round,
With his fine pointed cue on the floor does pound.

Hart plays with Lawrence, that Nelson’s Lawrence;
And Marboe beats Torrance, to his abhorrence;
Bill Fox and Lamb each other slam
While watching some “beaut’s” made by Gatterdam.

There is Wager and Evans and Spence, by heavens,
And Willibald Ott making tens and elevens
and Hurtgen and Salzer with F. Koppelberger
A beer in one hand; in the other, Limburger.

Here is Johnnie Burns, the champion of old,
A business man with a heart of gold;
He can “hand you a lemon” from way down Santiago
And show you some shots he learned in Chicago.

In the “buffet” George Schweizer stands, eating bologna
Discussing quite loudly, with Wolfe and Mahoney
The subject, I think, is our new water plant
They tried to drink water, but found that they can’t.
In the back room, up-stairs the “American boys”
Devote their time to more el-vated joys;
They play on the table, on string or on key,
And once in awhile you can hear “By me.”

There is Percy and “Sheep” and Ole and Dick
And Felber and Bartl with Reiman, a brick
Who laughs like a lady at “Alex the Kid”
when he tussles around with Law’s Young Sid.

We have A. Funk, the strong man, and Wells;
Neither one has much use for the beautiful belles,
The one builds houses in little old Salem,
The other makes rubbers, but doesn’t retail ‘em.

Down in the grub room, that nice cold place,
Where Miss Lena rules with queenly grace,
You may see, after six, round the meager board,
Of big hungry savages quite a horde.

There comes Jesse and Colleran and Doctor Mull,
And by this time, I guess, the quota is full;
Some order big steaks and others eat cakes
That swim in molasses like islands in lakes.

I almost forgot Jim Thom(p)son (with p)
He’s a man of proportions immense you see
He can eat! My God, What’s the best you’ve got?”
____________, Lena, while I pray the plates were hot.

The place is __________, to most our directors,
Perhaps on account of such poor inspectors;
But I think, myself, if so ___ were done
That little old place would get quite ___.
At last there is "Yorick, the man with the pen
Who once in awhile takes "just one too much;"
But boys just remember the poor old "dub"
has to sit all day on his seat and rub.

In the early days of his employment at the La Crosse Club, Paul Vidani worked solely as a steward, mixing and serving drinks to the members. He learned to make drinks with the Mixologist's Reminder and Dictionary of Alcoholic Beverages, a copy of which was in his papers. The guide, with a handwritten date of Dec. 2, 1913, included recipes for cocktails, fizzes, rickeys and frappes plus a category of miscellaneous drinks like the Widow's Kiss, Sherry Flip and Widow's Dream. He also was in charge of keeping the club stock filled with the essentials — cigars and liquor. He was the buyer for whisky, which was purchased by the barrel because it was more economical.

The other steward was Les Tanke, whose family had once been involved with the operations of the Germania Hall at Fifth and Market. Germania Hall was said to be the center of German culture and home to the "upper crust of La Crosse, the 400 of La Crosse." Germania took on the more "patriotic" name of Pioneer Hall in 1918 because anything Germanic was suspect during World War I — even Berlin Street became Liberty Street on La Crosse's North Side. Pioneer Hall was torn down in the late 1950s after serving for years as a union hall. It is now the site of the No. 1 Fire Station.

Tanke and Vidani alternated shifts called "longs and shorts" as steward. One would open each morning at 7 a.m. and work until noon. Then the other steward would come on duty and work until 6 p.m when the first steward returned to work until the midnight closing. They reversed shifts each day, a pattern that continued seven days a week.
Daniel Samuels was 90 when this birthday photo was taken of the La Crosse Club member standing in front of the club’s oak bar on Fifth Street. Samuels was a member who practically lived in the club, often arriving when it opened and staying until it closed. The bar was crafted by Segelke-Kohlhaus Manufacturing, then a nationally known woodworking company based in La Crosse.

Paul Vidani, Jr., collection

Despite a demanding job that offered no time off except for vacation, salaries were small. The February 3, 1942, minutes of the club’s Board of Directors noted the monthly salary for Paul Vidani would increase from $76.62 to $86.62. “The most my father ever made was $250 a month at the end when he retired in 1960,” his son said. “He had no pension and no money set aside.” Extra jobs at the club made it possible for Vidani to
make ends meet. He'd be hired for weddings or special dinners that might earn him an extra $10 to $15 for a night.

In 1960, the club’s Board of Directors did approve giving Vidani $2,500 upon retirement for “his faithful years of service” to the club if it could raise its mortgage from $10,000 to $12,500. That award apparently never materialized, particularly with the club heading in financial difficulties.

There was to be no fraternizing between club members and the staff. The La Crosse Club Board of Directors minutes from an October 8, 1935, meeting indicated a decision to set the bar closing time at 1 a.m. and, added the minutes, “no dice shaking with stewards would be permissible.” Again in 1941, the Directors expressed the opinion that “the hired help at the La Crosse Club should not play cards with the members.”

Among the papers retained by the club that had been in Vidani’s collection was a 1914 financial statement for the La Crosse Club, which showed the club taking in $5,415 in dues and fees that year. Sales for cigars were $422.11 and for wines, $511.79. Other income came from billiards ($282.31), bowling ($38.85) and sundry ($8.38).

Also part of Vidani’s papers was an early, undated menu. The La Crosse Club Buffet Service menu offered sandwiches for a dime, including an imported limburger cheese, potted ham and tongue or meat loaf. Imported sardines added another 10 cents to the check, and baked beans, 15 cents. Thirsty patrons were charged a nickel for buttermilk, 10 cents for plain lemonade or 15 cents for a cocktail (or two for a quarter). Members could run a tab, which they were expected to pay monthly, or pay in cash.

Another menu, also undated, listed a large porterhouse with onions for 70 cents; a large porterhouse with mushrooms for 85 cents; breaded mutton chops were 20 cents and a half dozen raw oysters were 25 cents. German fried potatoes added a nickel to the bill, but French friend potatoes were a dime. The
handwritten specials included fresh fish, lobsters, oysters, squabs and spring chicken, but no prices were given.

One of Vidani's most remembered skills was his many punches. Ten days or so before a special event, he'd begin making the punch, cutting up lemons, oranges, pineapples and other fruit and putting them into a 10-gallon tub for "aging like a good whisky." To that base, he added wines, champagnes, brandies and carbonated water. He'd have a big chunk of ice in the middle of the ice bowl and decorate with fruit at the time of serving. "The secret to the punch was the fruits' fermentation," Paul, Jr., said.

The Vidani papers included a number of different recipes, including special punches for parties for H.K. Holley on Oct. 24, 1943, for La Crosse Tribune Publisher Frank Burgess in 1939 and at the home of one of the Gundersens in 1945.

Among the punch recipes, which date back to 1918, was this one designed to serve 50 people:

Punch No. 1

Punch bowl with large piece of ice.
2 pounds of loaf sugar
Juice from a dozen and a half lemons
One dozen sliced oranges
One can of sliced pineapple
Five quarts of claret
One quart of cognac brandy
Four quarters of Carbonated water
One pint of absinthe

Punch No. 2:

1 can of sliced pineapple
2 dozen sliced oranges
1 dozen sliced lemons
Half pint of Jamaican rum
Half pint of absinthe
Half pint of Curacao
2 gallons of Tokay
2 gallons of bourbon

“They were potent I can tell you that,” Paul, Jr. said. “A couple of cups of this punch were enough to set them all on their rear.”

For events such as those, Vidani recruited his son to work by his side. Paul Jr. served at many special occasions, including one with Norway’s Crown Prince Olav and Princess Martha, who in the 1930s visited Gundersen Clinic founder Adolf Gundersen, M.D., and his wife, Helga, both Norwegian immigrants. Their dinner parties, to which visiting Norwegian dignitaries were invited, still are talked about today by family members. Paul, Jr. can remember serving courses of wines at the Gundersen luncheon for the crown prince. The courses of wine began with champagne and continued with dessert wines after the meal.
Prohibition

"Prohibition makes you cry into your beer and denies you the beer to cry into."
Journalist and humorist Don Marquis, 1927

When the Volstead Act was passed in 1920 prohibiting the manufacture, sale and possession of alcoholic beverages, not everyone was willing to give up their drink. As anatomist and teacher Florence Sabin put it in 1931: "The prohibition law, written for weaklings and derelicts, has divided the nation, like Gaul, into three parts — wets, drys and hypocrites."

After prohibition began in 1920, the question was not whether club members would have liquor but how they would get it. Liquor sales were an important part of the income that kept the club afloat and very much a part of its social life.

While liquor could not officially be served at the club during Prohibition, members who were used to their drink were not ready to give it up. They turned to Vidani and quietly asked him to be the go-between for them to make sure members had a ready supply of alcohol. "They wanted their booze and my dad had contacts with local bootleggers," Paul, Jr. said.

But Paul, Sr., took some time to think the request over. Most worrisome were the legal risks, particularly when he had a son to raise alone. Club members assured Vidani that there were enough lawyers and local government officials in the club to protect him should he ever be nabbed by federal agents. While Vidani agreed there were many attorneys in the club, his son said he still wanted a greater protection — a cut of the sales. The small commission he took in from liquor sales would give him an added cushion should he be arrested. Thankfully, he never had any trouble with the law.
Nearly every city in the 1920s and early 1930s had its share of bootleggers. With vestiges of its wild river city days still with it, La Crosse was no exception. Very soon after Prohibition began, community members realized that the federal agents primarily were interested in the big time bootleggers in Chicago and that state agents pretty much looked the other way and allowed bootleggers to flourish.

Among Vidani’s contacts was a Genoa man who owned a well-known South Side La Crosse restaurant. It was common knowledge that alcohol could be purchased at this restaurant, even though it was the subject of periodic raids by the feds. When faced with a padlocked front door, the ever-resourceful restauranteur simply moved his operation around to the back. When caught in the back, it generally was the time he was allowed to reopen his front door. So, he simply moved his operation to the front again.

Other bootleggers, like the founder of a downtown tavern, kept La Crosse in alcohol. One man operated a 100,000-gallon still in what later became an old furniture warehouse that served Ross of La Crosse. It was supposedly Western Wisconsin’s largest still. “The state ignored it but not the feds,” Fred Pederson said. “It was a major source of booze from Milwaukee to St. Paul.”

The feds caught up with the La Crosse man in Georgia as he was coming back from Florida with a truckload of alcohol hidden in big tanks under the riding boards of his old Cadillac. The woman and baby he had hired to serve as his “wife and
child” did not fool agents in Georgia, who made an educated guess about what was hidden in the car after it did not bounce quite right over a railroad crossing. The La Crosse bootlegger served time in a Georgia chain gang.

So wide open was bootlegging that Paul, Jr., remembered Chicago gangsters driving through town on their way to Minneapolis. On one occasion a truck filled with whisky was being refueled at a Standard Oil gas station located where the State Bank of La Crosse drive-in facility is today at Fifth and State. “The truck was loaded with booze covered with a tarp,” Vidani recalled. “Guys were sitting in the back with machine guns.”

Even during the height of Prohibition there were saloons operating in La Crosse. “They just sold illegal beer and whisky. Everyone knew what was going on,” Vidani said.

The G. Heileman Brewing Company and some other brewers hung on during Prohibition by producing “near beer.” The process for making near beer was to brew the real thing and boil off the alcohol. Vidani said he knew of some hard drinkers outside the club who made do with near beer by pouring a few ounces out of the non-alcoholic brew and replacing it with illegal grain alcohol. Some were so used to the added kick of grain alcohol in their beer that they continued to add it to their beer even after alcohol was legal again.

Alcohol generally came out of Cuba and landed in Miami. Paul Vidani Jr., often delivered alcohol in unmarked tin cans for his father.

Sometimes, the senior Vidani made bathtub gin, which his son said was 180 proof. That was cut to 80 to 100 proof by using distilled water. However, the hydrometers used to determine the proof of the “cut” alcohol were not always accurate. Consequently, the end product martinis that Vidani’s father made were 100 proof or slightly more.

“It those days it was sacrilegious to drink a martini any other way than straight-up in a cocktail glass. Martinis on the
'rocks' was unheard-of!" Vidani said.

"As a result, the martini wasn’t diluted except a very small amount from the ice when it was mixed. The 180 proof alcohol, if sampled, felt like an icicle when it hit your tongue and throat," he continued. "Today’s gin checks out at 80 proof. Considering that the bath-tub gins that my Dad used were around 100 proof, they were potent. These guys would dare each other to drink Pauly’s martinis. They would get absolutely blind.

Bathtub gin was made with Essence of Juniper Berry, an ingredient available from druggists, and Martini and Rossi sweet or dry Vermouth. Also common in this area was "Mississippi River Valley Bourbon," which was distilled in the wetlands.

"It was horrible stuff, I tell you that. I don’t know why anyone drank the stuff, but they did," Vidani Jr. said. "Those things were open. This area had taverns before Prohibition ended in 1933. Everyone knew bootlegging was going on."
Remodeling

The La Crosse Club was spruced up from time to time, including when it was closed while work was done on the kitchen and dining room in 1927. The largest remodeling occurred in 1936, when the William A. Doerflinger Company, then a downtown department store, created a 17th century England theme for the club.

"The atmosphere of hearty good fellowship that was a part of that period has been subtly interwoven to carry out the good fellowship philosophy for which the club is famous," the La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press reported in 1936. Blue, yellow, rose and brown were used in the color scheme for the main lounge "in shades that blend in perfect harmony and cast a cheerful glow over the spacious room." The Matchmaker, a beautiful painting in a heavy orange-gold frame, hung over the mantle. To the right was an old etching with an English Georgian setting, portraying an English dinner party with guests drinking a toast to their host. Among other furnishings were formal chairs and tables of 17th century design.

The grill had heavy feudal oak chairs and round tables to match the paneling. Above the panels were murals of English hunting scenes. The grill also featured a collection of 19th century steins that were donated to the club and displayed on a high mantle. Those same steins, on display today in the Heileman Room of the La Crosse Club, were verified by staff from the Technical University of Munich, Germany, as being from the late 1800s.

After the 1936 remodeling, some 300 persons attended a "gala" reopening of the club, where members and their wives and friends had a "splendidly informal time." Paul Vidani, Jr., and Miss Velma Gattenbein received the guests while Johnnes
Fossum, violinist, and Frank Modahl “added to the gaiety with music from the wide landing of the open Georgian stairway.” Velma Gattenbein was the sister of La Crosse’s singing bartender, Charlie Gattenbein, whose claim to fame was appearing on the Major Bowes amateur hour in New York before heading to a musical career in California.

Toasts were drunk to the success of the club, and the “famous punch” of head steward Paul Vidani was praised. Vidani was lauded again in a 1936 La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press article as “one of the most indispensable members of the organization. It is he who looks after the needs of the members when they drop into the clubhouse, sees that their wants are supplied, and maintains a general supervision so that everything is kept in smooth running order.” The article went on to report his reputation as a “premier drink mixer of La Crosse.” The only comment from Vidani in the article was simply, “I take care of all of them.”

Paul, Sr., had fierce loyalty to the La Crosse Club and pride that he knew so many important people. He’d say, “I know all the big shots in town. I take care of all of them,” his son said.
Playing the slots

By the time liquor was legal again in 1933, the La Crosse Club was undergoing a change in the makeup of its members. The earliest members for the “new” club were dying off and a new generation was coming in. Most of them were not as free with their dollars like the early Hixons and others had been when the club needed refurbishing or funds to keep it operating.

The club clearly needed another source of income. Slot machines became the revenue of choice, particularly when club members Norm Moll, Russ Thompson and Tubby Keeler went into a business they called the Acme Sales Company. They brought in nickel, dime and quarter slot machines for club members’ amusement. On turkey raffle nights, when members spun a wheel to win turkeys, the three entrepreneurs upped the ante with half dollar machines.

“Certain members were nuts about slot machines. They would get rolls of nickels and dimes and stand there and play the slot machines like I could never understand. You couldn’t win no matter how you played it,” Vidani said. “The revenue off the machines kept the La Crosse Club afloat. It also kept the Elks Club and other clubs afloat.”

The La Crosse Club machines were configured so that for every dollar put in, the house kept 60 cents and players averaged wins of about 40 cents. That still offered a far better chance of winning than the common practice of today’s casinos, which pay back only 20 percent on each dollar plugged into the machines. Vidani sometimes was given a roll or two of nickels to thank him for keeping the machines filled.

The slot machines did allow the club to make occasionally donations to charitable organizations, including $25 to the dedication fund for the new Cass Street bridge over the Mississippi River in 1939 and turkeys for New Year’s for the
La Crosse Home for Children and St. Michael's Orphanage in 1939. The club also donated $25 in 1940 to both the La Crosse Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to help send needy scouts to summer camp, and $20 to the La Crosse Home for Children in 1942.

The club showed its patriotism in 1942 by purchasing a $1,000 Series G, War Savings Bond and later donating $200 to the La Crosse County War Fund and another $250 to the American Red Cross.

Charitable giving by the club pretty much ended when slot machines were forced out of the club. "During the 1930s, the club could afford to give to charity because it had a heavy intake from the slot machines in the bar room," said Fred Pederson, a long-time club member and retired vice-president of sales for Northern Engraving Corp. "In fact, during that time most clubs in La Crosse made all kinds of money from slot machines and other gambling rackets, ignoring state gambling laws as they were not enforced."

The end of slot machines throughout the state came shortly after Walter Samuel Goodland became governor in 1943 in a strange twist in Wisconsin politics.

Goodland was nearly 80 when elected lieutenant governor, a role that was largely an honor given him for his long years of service in the Wisconsin Legislature. He was the running mate for Orland Steen Loomis, a 49-year-old Progressive.

According to the 1960 Wisconsin Blue Book, which describes state government operations, "the hand of fate occasionally defeats the best-laid plans of man...death struck down the Governor-elect in 1942 before he could assume office, leaving to the realm of speculation what would have occurred if the younger man trained in the Progressive traditions had lived to assume the duties which befit the octogenarian, Goodland."

A controversy immediately followed Loomis' death concerning who would take office as governor. At issue was whether Goodland really was lieutenant governor since Loomis had been elected to the office of governor but did not live long enough to be inaugurated and to serve.
His opponent in the race, incumbent Governor Julius Heil, felt there should be a new election. The Supreme Court disagreed, naming Goodland acting governor. He was elected governor in his own right two years later and died in office, giving him the dubious distinction of being the only governor to get into the office and leave via a death.

"He was a young, energetic man," Pederson recalled of Loomis. "They thought he'd be good for the long haul. Goodland was named lieutenant governor as an honor for his last years. The young man died and the old man lived. And, he hated gambling."

Wisconsin, like many states, long had laws prohibiting gambling. Also, like many states, its law enforcement agencies had looked the other way whenever gambling went on among the good citizenry. As a result, gambling was common in places like the La Crosse Club, the Elks Club, and other social organizations. Goodland, a Republican, changed that. As an outspoken opponent of gambling, he warned local officials throughout the state to enforce the laws or be removed from office. When some ignored the warning, he fired several lax local law enforcement officers in the state. Others, including those in La Crosse, heeded the warning and began enforcing the anti-gambling laws. Out went the slot machines from the La Crosse Club and other organizations.

"So clubs had to give up their slot machines," Pederson recalled, "and many felt the pinch when that easy cash flow came to an end." As a result, there was less money available for club maintenance and repairs as well as gifts to charity.

As the finances of the La Crosse Club became more difficult, Vidani's role as steward expanded. He no longer had women "swamping" the club floor to keep them clean, as he called it. Not only did he clean, Vidani maintained the billiard tables level and in repair, saving the club "lots of money" because it did not have to hire the Brunswick serviceman.
The 1940s

Charles Gelatt, who returned to La Crosse from the University of Wisconsin in 1939, waited until 1944 to become a member of the La Crosse Club, the year that his father died. His decision was based on respect for his father, Philo — known as P.M. Gelatt, whom he believed enjoyed the club as a haven away from business and family.

"I always thought he might go to the club as a way to get away from business and family and I didn't want to infringe on his free time," Charles Gelatt said.

Before his father's death, Gelatt was taken to the club by his father only on very rare occasions. Occasionally, he was the guest of others, such as Alf Gundersen, M.D., a Gundersen Clinic urologist who was then on the La Crosse School Board. "He said he wanted my ideas on education. He was probably about 40 and I was then 21. Being fresh from the university, he thought I knew a lot or at least he made me think he thought I knew a lot," Charles Gelatt recalled.

By the mid 1940s, the La Crosse Club was already showing signs of wear, related in part to its loss of income from the slots. Furniture was worn and dust was everywhere. "It was not being maintained properly. Functionally, it was showing a lot of wear and the place was a little dusty," Gelatt said. "Men did the cleaning. Maybe that's why it was dirty."

The La Crosse Club still had smokers, of course, but in the 1940s the thick haze of the cigar shops that were the origin of the club had passed. Still, an undated La Crosse Club Cafe Menu offered a "Choice line of Domestic and Clear Havana Cigars on hand at standard prices."

There were differences between the La Crosse Club and the Elks Club in the 1940s and 1950s, as Gelatt recalled. Owners of businesses and top managers selected the La Crosse Club, while
The Elks was for more rising businessman who had not yet reached the top of their businesses or the owner of a small business like a hardware store. Somebody who showed "energy, enthusiasm and go-gettedness could join the Elk's Club," Gelatt said. "It would cost him a lot less money than the La Crosse Club, less than half as much and probably offered more facilities."

Despite a headline in the *La Crosse Tribune* in 1964 referring to the La Crosse Club as a "haven for the wealthy," Gelatt said it really was not a club for the kind of rich who might be found in other cities. "La Crosse's definition for wealthy is rather low. I don't know what wealthy means. To me, it's somebody who doesn't have to count it. Certainly everybody in La Crosse still has to count it," he said.

Gelatt believes his father joined the La Crosse Club shortly after he arrived in La Crosse in 1901. He was a member of the La Crosse Country Club by 1906, which was located on land near the intersection of Highway 16 and Losey Boulevard that had been donated by the Hixons and Colmans to the city Park Board in 1912. They were members of the Board at that time.

Most of the membership of the La Crosse Club and Country Club overlapped in the 1940s and beyond, with the
country club offering summer activities like tennis and golf. The La Crosse Club had its largest business during the winter months.

Charles Gelatt called his father “a young aspiring businessman” at the time he joined the club. “He was not well to do,” Gelatt said, “that being at least a step below wealthy. He wasn’t wealthy.”

Surprisingly, there were fewer discussions about business at the La Crosse Club in these years than most outsiders would suspect. “That doesn’t go on as much in clubs as you would imagine,” Gelatt said. “They are there to relax. They like to hear the gossip. You don’t make deals in public and the club is still public.”

Pederson agreed. “They went to the clubs to relax a bit.”

The “gossip” included changes in business and in the personal lives of members. Sometime after World War II, Reuben Trane talked with Gelatt about his plans for the Trane Company, La Crosse’s premier manufacturer of air conditioning equipment and a Fortune 500 business until it was acquired by American Standard in 1984 (and therefore no longer independent).

“He talked freely when I was there,” Gelatt said. “I’d bought some stock in Trane and he thanked me. He said he was taking Trane Company from a large, small company to a small, large company. He was retiring all the top men who had helped the business reach its then level of success. He was searching for younger men who would take it to a new level of operation.”
The hierarchy of seating

Before he joined the La Crosse Club, Charles Gelatt took most of his noon meals either at the Stoddard Hotel or at home, as was common practice in the years before America became so dependent on automobiles — and therefore able to travel farther away from work for meals or other entertainment. "The automobile was quite present in 1944 but still people didn't go a long way from home," Gelatt said.

When he joined the La Crosse Club, the main dining room had four tables of six, with a long, unwritten tradition about where each member sat. Trane business leaders had one table and Heileman had another. Among those with assigned seats were the presidents of local banks then in La Crosse, including the Batavian (now First Bank) and the State Bank.

"It was quite traditional," Gelatt said. "When I joined, I asked where I should sit. They said, 'So and so died. Why don't you take his chair?"

Gelatt recalled his table including John Holley from State Bank, Frank Greer from Segelke-Kohlhaus Manufacturing, then a nationally known
woodworking company based in La Crosse; and urologist Alf Gundersen. Gelatt enjoyed listening to their stories and their advice to a young man in the early stage of his business career.

"They were heroes at first," Gelatt said. "Within a year or two I could see they had the same feet I did."

During the 1940s and 1950s, the La Crosse Club served solid, but plain food by today's standards. It was produced by a much respected and appreciated cook, Mary Olson, whose kitchen was in the basement. Food was served via a dumbwaiter system. For added income, the kitchen also served as a small public restaurant which was accessed through an entrance under the front porch of the club.

There were three choices each day for meals that included soup, meat and vegetables. "They were old kinds of foods that Fred (Pederson) and I like that we don’t get any more. No golldern spices, no cheese on everything," Gelatt said. "Real chicken, real fish, real meat."

Under rationing during World War II, clubs could get additional ration stamps for special events; and in the meat eating era of the ‘40s, the treat was a standing rib roast. "Otherwise, we were eating roosters or chickens," Gelatt said. "If we were having a party, we could go the Ration Board and get extra stamps. Because meat was so rare, everybody came. The place would be jumping."

For about five years beginning in the mid 1940s, New Year's Eve parties at the club were popular, complete with dances and live musical entertainment. The parties were special for the wives who were eager to see where their husbands spent their free time. "Such parties are impractical today as the cost of hiring an orchestra is too high," Gelatt said.

The La Crosse Club was always a genteel place; controversies were rare. One of the very few concerned seating and surrounded none other than the late Jake Hoeschler, a legendary figure for his colorful, profane language and strong opinions. No one was ever in the dark about where Jake stood
Leisure with Dignity

on any issue involving business, sports or recreational life in La Crosse.

Jake, never one to be shy and retiring, had the nerve one day in the late 1950s to take Frank Hood's seat at his table. Hood, vice president of Trane Company, was outraged and demanded Jake move. The irrepressible real estate developer would not, announcing "It is a free country."

Freedom of assembly did not extend to the La Crosse Club dining room. Jake was asked to leave the main dining room and never returned to it. He still spent time at the club, although his noon hours were at the card tables. In one hand he held his cards and in the other his sandwich, which he kept moving flamboyantly in the air between bites. So intent was he on his game that Hoeschler did not notice when Pederson replaced the meat in the sandwich with a card, making it an exceedingly tough sandwich. "He was baffled at first," Pederson recalled. "He couldn't bite it. He'd had the same sandwich for years. He stood up and gave it a yank. The card went flying off."
Good times at the club

The La Crosse Club at its various locations over the years was a place for recreation. The La Crosse Club awarded trophies for billiards and bowling. Members made an evening of it, coming to bowl and staying for thick, juicy steak dinners.

The bowling lanes in the club basement were anything but the sophisticated lanes found today in La Crosse and other cities. For years, boys like Emil “Punch” Niemeyer set pins at the club for 50 cents a night and were messengers for club members. Later, Niemeyer became chairman of Northern Engraving and was a club member for many years. As historian Myer Katz once wrote about Niemeyer’s rise, “only in America.”

La Crosse Club lore, recited by Niemeyer in a 1964 La Crosse Tribune story, has it that the first perfect game ever bowled in La Crosse was at the La Crosse Club. Although disputed by other historians, member Willibald Ott who was said to bowl that 300 game during a phenomenal series of 10 games totaling 2,436 pins. The date of the accomplishment is unknown, however.

During his younger years, Niemeyer remembered the Gundhs and Hixons sitting on the second floor balcony of the La Crosse Club, waiting for their drinks to be brought to them. Members would drive up in front of the club in their carriages or horseless machines and have their drinks served there. At a time when cars still were rare, members on the balcony shouted down questions to those who arrived with their “new machines.”

Among the famous visitors who once came to the club was former President Howard Taft, who occupied one of the club’s overstuffed chairs to chat with his close friend and former Yale
University classmate, George W. Burton, president of First National Bank of La Crosse for many years. Taft was in La Crosse for the dedication of the new YMCA in 1909.

President Teddy Roosevelt also spoke to club members, explaining his “Speak softly but carry a big stick” policy, which was said to “alarm” local business leaders because of “his trust busting program.”

Entertainers who visited the club included Irish tenor Chauncey Olcott, musical theater star Eddie Foy, and authors Fiske O’Hara and Walter Whiteside. In modern times, the club was said to be a favorite place for relaxation and card playing by the late U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, whose meteoric political rise and fall was based on his hunts for Communists in the federal government in the early 1950s.

What the club really was, according to H.K. Holley, president of the La Crosse Trust Co. and a La Crosse Club member from 1909, was a bastion of maleness. It was a place to go “to have a drink without having to push through women at some bar.”

It was at a special event in the late 1920s that Louise Holley, wife of Horace King “Hod” Holley, Sr., president of the La Crosse Trust Company, decided she was ready to go home long before her husband was ready.

As a grandson, King Holley, told the story, his grandfather told her the car was in front. If she wanted to go home, the keys were in the car.

“He always left his keys in the car no matter what,” his grandson recalled. “My grandfather would drive to the Trust Company every day and aim the car at the curb. He’d leave the keys in the car and people in the Trust Company would go out and park it properly for him.”

Louise Holley, who had never driven a car before, took her husband up on his offer. “My grandmother turned it on and it went right up the front steps of the La Crosse Club. She turned it off and left and walked home,” King Holley said.
King Holley learned about the story through family legend. Periodically as a child growing up in the 1940s, Holley heard his Grandmother asked when she planned to drive again. Everyone always laughed loudly at the retelling of the family story. Years later, he learned about his grandmother’s one and only driving experience.

The move to the Stoddard Hotel

By the late 1950s, La Crosse was entering a time of tremendous change. It was the beginning of the end for many downtown businesses. As late as 1958, Allis Chalmers, Electric Autolite, La Crosse Rubber Mills, the Trane Company and Northern Engraving all had offices within minutes of the La Crosse Club. That meant executives could easily go to the club for lunch. By the mid 1960s, Allis Chalmers and Autolite had closed down; Trane Company had moved to Pammel Creek; and Northern Engraving’s corporate office was in Sparta. Segelke-Kohlhaus had closed and the La Crosse Rubber Mills was struggling. That meant problems for the La Crosse Club which no longer could count on these executives coming for lunch.

With membership declining, La Crosse Club President John A. Murphy raised the question in 1957 about consolidating the La Crosse Club with the La Crosse Country Club. He suggested either running both locations as a Town and Country Club or consolidating all functions at the La Crosse County Club.

The possible merger, which was discussed for years, was logical because nearly all members of the La Crosse Club were members of the Country Club as well. Murphy appointed a
committee of attorney Robert Johns, clothier Ed Newburg and himself to begin negotiations with the Country Club.

The La Crosse Club Board of Directors sent its members a plan for merger in 1960 and announced there would be special meetings of members of both clubs on Feb 18. Members who could not attend were given absentee ballots.

"If the plan is adopted, it is intended to provide family and social activities at the downtown club during the months of November through March each year, using the same staff of personnel which operates the club house at the golf course during the months of April through October," the board letter said. "It is hoped that bowling, dancing, card playing and similar activities can be provided for the whole family at the downtown club rooms with separate meeting rooms for the men, women and children." The downtown facilities would be closed during the summer months with all activities shifted to the golf course and club house facilities.

One reason the merger was suggested was golf had come into its own in the 1950s. When Dwight Eisenhower became president, golf received a big boost as the commander in chief considered it his favorite pastime. With a greater interest in golf, the Country Club had more money to invest in its course. Prior to the increased interest in golf, the fairways would be so dry in August that golfers could shoot 2 strokes on a par five fairway. The course was like cement; it was so dry grass wouldn't grow there.

The advantage to merger, the La Crosse Club Board of Directors wrote to its members, was greater economic stability for the club. Members who belonged to both clubs would use all the facilities at a "considerably decreased cost in dues." The La Crosse Club had less usage at night as fewer and fewer businessmen returned downtown at night for dinner.

All but 28 of the La Crosse Club's 136 members also belonged to the Country Club. Those 28 who did not hold dual memberships were advised that they could gain a social
membership at the Country Club for only $90 more a year. The Country Club "overwhelmingly approved the merger with an in favor vote of 10 to 1," the La Crosse Tribune reported in a February 19, 1960, article.

The La Crosse Club meeting planned for February 18 was adjourned to March 21 because members pointed out that Article VII of the club constitution requires voting to be done in person rather than by absentee ballot. The meeting was rescheduled with a note to members urging them to come to the meeting regardless of their position. When the vote was held, less than half of the members participated in the election. Those who did vote, rejected the merger 34 to 16.

With the vote going against merger, the club now had decisions about its future and its facilities. The La Crosse Club was not alone in having financial struggles. Board minutes from Feb. 20, 1962, indicated the manager of the Madison Club, a comparable business club in Madison, Wisconsin, reported similar financial problems.

By 1962, the club knew it had to move. One proposal was to move the club to new rooms that would be erected over the Holiday Inn, across the Mississippi River and on the eastern shore of the West Channel. One suggested price from club member and Holiday Inn developer Jake Hoeschler was a lease for $4,800 a year. Several members felt the club should have a firm offer from someone to buy its building before it entered into a contract for a lease.

Meanwhile, the La Crosse Club board of directors decided to have its facilities appraised so it would know how much they were worth. Sealed bids were sought on the property, which had been appraised by the Leuning Agency at $30,000 for land and $20,000 for the building.

Attorney Robert Jenkins offered to purchase the building for $34,350 in the only bid opened on March 30, 1962. When the Standard Oil Co. asked that it be allowed to negotiate a price
rather than submit a bid, the Jenkins bid was rejected and negotiations began. Standard Oil wanted the land in order to expand its service station at Fifth Avenue and State Street, adjacent to the club.

The Standard Oil purchase and the move to the Holiday Inn never materialized. Instead, the old building was purchased by M. William Gerrard of Gerrard Realty, Corp., in 1964 at a cost of $21,500. Gerrard, president of the La Crosse Club in 1959 at the height of the merger negotiations with the La Crosse Country Club, announced no immediate plans for the building when he bought it, although it was purchased on behalf of Eugene Murphy, an officer with Gateway Transportation. Murphy was then acquiring properties in the downtown area as investments.

The building was later razed and is now part of the State Bank of La Crosse drive-through facility along with the site of the old Colman Lumber Company building (which had a stint as the Knights of Columbus Club), the Standard Oil station, and the city’s No. 1 fire station.

In 1964, the La Crosse Club moved into the basement of the Stoddard Hotel, which in its day was La Crosse’s finest. Named after the city’s first mayor, Thomas B. Stoddard, it opened in 1904. Over the course of its history, it was the place where famous people visiting La Crosse stayed. Among them were Presidents Howard Taft, Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy, author Sinclair Lewis, actress Tallulah Bankhead (who once listened to the acting aspirations of a Stoddard staff member who knocked on her room door), architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and musicians Cole Porter, Robert Merrill, and Guy Lombardo. When Elvis played at the old Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium and stayed at the Stoddard, he had to be taken up to his room via freight elevator to avoid the masses of screaming adolescent girls who followed him after his performance.

The La Crosse Club spent about $40,000 to remodel an area of the Stoddard Hotel basement that had previously been used
as a barbershop. The club put in carpet, added partitions and installed a bar. "I remember the club rooms there as being pretty cozy, especially on cold winter days due to the lack of exposure to the elements," Gelatt said.

The 75 or so club members entered the club from stairs leading down from the sidewalk. Inside the door was a cloakroom, where members initially left their coats until several had been stolen. One inconvenience of the Stoddard’s facilities were the rest rooms were located on the first floor of the hotel, something the occasional women guests particularly disliked.

Among those who frequented the La Crosse Club in the Stoddard was Richard Lommen, current La Crosse Club president. Lommen has had only one job in his life — working for McDonald’s. He began in 1959 as a high school student and
bought La Crosse's first McDonald's restaurant in 1968 when he graduated from University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. At the time he was McDonald's youngest franchise holder anywhere. He has since gone on to own 25 of the stores in Wisconsin and Iowa.

Lommen was in the early stages of his hamburger-slinging career when he joined an investment club that met in the La Crosse Club. He remembers being a bit unnerved by the experience at first. "I felt like an outsider," he said. "I was in the hamburger business and everybody looked down their nose at McDonald's in those days. I also didn't have a whole lot of self confidence then."

Among those who joined the La Crosse Club during the Stoddard years was R. Nicholas Trane II, club president 1977-1981, and a member from the mid 1960s when he came to

Nicholas Trane, II, stands by the photo of his grandfather, Reuben Trane, founder of the Trane Company. The photo is in the Trane Room of the La Crosse Club.

C. Schneider Photography
work at the Trane Company, which was started by his grandfather, Reuben N. Trane. Nick Trane, II, had grown up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where his father, James, had started a Trane Company plant.

Joining the La Crosse Club was natural when he moved to La Crosse. "I expected it of myself," Trane said of membership. "I thought that was what I should do. I joined the Country Club and I joined the La Crosse Club as a very young man. The folks I hung out with all were there." Trane's interest was social — playing bridge on Saturday, rotating partners with whomever happened to come in for a card game. Bridge would begin at 11 a.m. and continue until 4 or 5 p.m.

The move to the Stoddard Hotel was always perceived as temporary, according to Trane. "It was never considered permanent, but a temporary fix."

By the early 1970s, the temporary fix had worn pretty thin. The Stoddard clearly was in its declining years. John Elliott, one of only three managers in the hotel's history, sold it to Peter Hurtgen and James McLoone, men who happened to be La Crosse Club members.

Even in their hands, the tide could not be turned back. In 1980, the Stoddard ceased to operate as a hotel. The State Bank bought it in a sheriff's auction in 1981 and decided to demolish it in 1982. The demolition took months because the hotel was built to last, including incredibly thick walls separating its
The Stoddard comes down. Stoddard manager John Elliott stands before what had once been La Crosse's finest hotel and onetime home to the La Crosse Club. The photo is autographed for Gordon Feinberg, a former La Crosse county supervisor and collector of history.

Photo courtesy of the Area Research Center, Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

many rooms. Many people expressed dismay when the Stoddard joined the La Crosse County Courthouse and La Crosse Post Office as the third building of major architectural significance to be torn down in downtown La Crosse in a five to 10 year period.

Elliott, in a La Crosse Tribune interview conducted as he watched the demolition, was among those deeply saddened by the loss. "Architecturally, the Stoddard Hotel was a handsome building and enhanced its strategic location. It was one of the few buildings left in downtown La Crosse with architectural character," he said. "Some of its beauty, with marble, crystal and artisanship of old failed to receive the recognition it deserved. Though, it had many good years of serviceability."
Conditions in the Stoddard became increasingly primitive over the La Crosse Club’s 16-year stay. The basement quarters were dark to begin with and meal service became more limited as time went on. "During the last four or five years, they didn’t have a kitchen. Our reason to be there disappeared," Gelatt said. "We were making our own sandwiches."

The Stoddard years were the golden years for card playing at the La Crosse Club. From the mid 1950s to the 1980s, gin rummy was a popular noon time game for many men and a source of profit for a few. There were three or four tables of gin rummy every day. The best players were Dr. Robert Gilbert, insurance agent Earl Stuckert and Dr. Alf Gundersen.

"Dr. Alf Gundersen was a frequent winner. He once beat me 27 hands in a row. I thought that was so much beyond the odds that I never played him again," Gelatt said. "All I know is that he won 27 times against a fellow who does not consider himself to be stupid. That’s stretching it pretty far."

Card playing ended by the time the La Crosse Club moved adjacent to the Radisson La Crosse Hotel, either because the older members who enjoyed the game did not move with the club or the atmosphere was not conducive to it.

"We’ve never had a gin table since we moved," Gelatt said.

There were other events in the Stoddard, including at least one stag party in which Trane got himself into a bit of trouble for taking pictures that might have been incriminating in the participants’ homes had they seen the light of day. The party would have been tame by today’s standards — scantily clad women sitting on the laps of club members. For the times, though, it was scandalous stuff that would not be appreciated at home. The pictures, if they still exist, do not see the light of day.

The Stoddard years also included periodic gambling nights for its members, including one that was raided and landed one member in jail briefly.
The Old Guard and the Thomas Book Club

The La Crosse Club has long been home to two other organizations, the Old Guard and the Thomas Book Club. Beginning in about 1883, a group called The Old Guard met on New Year's Day and drank a Tom & Jerry or an old fashioned Egg Nog to the New Year and to each other. They gathered at noon in Harry "Hub" Miller's saloon at Third and Main streets, where Miller always remembered to reserve a table and chairs for the group.

La Crosse Club member Fred Pederson described the origins of The Old Guard in a book listing its membership (see appendix 4 for listing).

By 1883, the city of La Crosse — Nathan Myrick's former trading post at the confluence of the Mississippi, Black and La Crosse Rivers — was scarcely forty years old. The city had grown rapidly. Industries arose, professionals appeared, the aspirations of citizens became evident. A livable and promising community had been established. A small group of citizens emerged who were active participants in the growth of La Crosse. Unofficially, they began to meet on New Year's Day morning to socialize a bit and discuss in an informal manner the status, problems, projections and aspirations — their own and those of the city of La Crosse. This was the foundation of the Old Guard. The actual origin of the name rests in the midst of antiquity.

Among its original members were Capt. I.H. Moulton, N.D. Allen, S.Y. Hyde, W.W. Cargill, J.S. Medary, C.E. Bennett
and Dr. Edgar Palmer. Eventually, the major requirement for the by-invitation only memberships in the Old Guard was residence of at least 25 years in La Crosse.

Dues initially were set at 50 cents, considered an outrageous figure at the time. Because membership is limited to 20, openings for new members are rare. For example, James Brindley, retired president of W.A. Roosevelt Company, became a member in 1950 after the death of his father, who also was a member. Usually, only one member of a family is a member at a time.

The Old Guard still conducts its meetings in the La Crosse Club at 11 a.m. each New Year’s Day to welcome the year with a Tom and Jerry toast. Meetings are dictated by tradition. Toasts at each of the annual sessions were directed to “absent guardsmen, to each other and to the good, old U.S.A.”

One of the senior members — currently Pederson — reads from the minutes of the Old Guard from 70, 60 and 50 years ago. President of the Old Guard is the member with longest tenure. Currently holding that office is Albert Funk, Jr.

“I’ve been appointed to give the official temperature and a toast to our deceased members,” Gelatt said. Each member of the Old Guard has a copy of a log of Old Guard members, which lists the births and dates of deaths of its members, as well as obituaries of those who have passed on.

Every year, members tell stories of early La Crosse or told stories of “varying degrees of chasteness,” according to the minutes.

“There is a strong sense of camaraderie at Old Guard meetings along with a reverence for the past, an appreciation of the present and hope for the future,” Pederson wrote in 1992.

Is it an honor to be a member? “We think so,” Gelatt said in his decidedly understated manner.

To date, there have been no women members of the Old Guard, but Gelatt also notes there were no male members of the 20th Century Club, an organization, that began as a literary
club, but in the first three decades of the century got involved in civic activities. It supported women for the school board and lobbied for prohibition of spitting on street cars and argued for the construction of housing for low income families. Today, its members are in their 80s and 90s.

The La Crosse Club also is the home of the Thomas Book Group. It was named for the Rev. Al Thomas, a Viterbo College philosophy professor and director of the Newman Center from 1974 to 1981. Thomas originally organized a literature group for Catholic men under the auspices of Leo Murphy, a La Crosse Club member who was chairman of his family’s business, Gateway Transportation.

Later, other men joined, including Trane, Gelatt and Pederson. Thomas was a corpulent man who looked the picture of a Medieval abbot, gave brilliant book reviews and then led discussions of a different book each month. Thomas was more liberal priest at the time. “He was great,” Trane said. “He was like one of the professors you remember in college. He was so dynamic.”

Meetings were held monthly at the La Crosse Club and included dinner and free drinks as part of the monthly fee. Later, as the Stoddard declined, the meetings were held in other restaurants like Piggy’s. Books ranged from nonfiction to the classics to best sellers, all purchased at Readmore, the downtown bookstore that has been in La Crosse longer than any other.

The group moved to the new La Crosse Club when it opened and the group was named after Thomas, who died in 1981. The Thomas Book Group continues on at the La Crosse Club as a tribute to Thomas, Trane said. “It’s a tradition, like the Old Guard.”

Like the Old Guard, Thomas Book group members did not necessarily have to belong to the La Crosse Club, although most did. Today, members take turns picking the books and leading the discussions. The club has about 35 members with between 20 and 30 attending each month. Twice a year spouses or
friends are invited to attend the meeting and college age children of members are traditionally invited in June of each year.

Membership in the "gentlemen's book group" is about $35 a year with $20 a meeting for dinner. Some years back free cocktails were dropped as a benefit of membership, a move that somewhat reduced attendance.

Father Al Thomas, founder of what would become the Thomas Book Club.

Photo courtesy of the Times-Review.
Move to the Radisson

By the late 1970s, conditions at the Stoddard Hotel were such that moving again was on the mind of the La Crosse Club Board of Directors. Minutes from the Annual Meeting of the club showed 105 members, down from 110 the year before. But the club still was described as having "a healthy financial situation."

The minutes noted an "excellent relationship" with the Stoddard but said it was "facing change and possibly there will be no food service whatsoever after October."

Trane appointed Jim Erickson to work with him on the problem of relocation and new facilities. The most obvious choice was the soon-to-be-built Radisson-La Crosse Hotel, which was then in development in Harborview Plaza. Harborview was an area of downtown La Crosse that sustained major flood damage in the city's great flood of 1965, which brought hundreds of citizens out to try and hold back the waters with sandbags. Still, much light industrial and warehouse buildings were severely damaged, causing urban blight.

The Harborview project, first proposed in 1968, resulted in demolition of numerous warehouse properties between Mount Vernon and State Street and between Front and Second streets. The idea was to make room for urban redevelopment — primarily a large shopping mall — but the land languished unused. By 1975, Harborview was in a stalemate that clearly frustrated city residents and city alderman, who called it everything from a $4.5 million alfalfa field to "an illuminated race track for gophers."

With so little action for nearly a decade, development plans for the area seemingly clicked into place in 1978 after La Crosse
citizens approved a referendum to build a convention center to replace the aging Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium. At around the same time, the G. Heileman Brewing Co. announced plans to build a new corporate headquarters in Harborview and local investors, headed by D.B. Reinhart, announced plans to build a Radisson Hotel in La Crosse.

The Radisson, which would be La Crosse's finest hotel, seemed the perfect location for a new La Crosse Club. Many of the Radisson investors were club members eager to find more suitable quarters.

Trane and Erickson were the negotiators in name, but the real force behind the scene involved Gelatt who met with Reinhart. The fact that both were La Crosse Club members did not make the discussions easy between the two men. Reinhart and Gelatt were businessmen who dearly loved the art and challenge of negotiating a deal.

“Our earlier discussion with the Radisson Hotel group revealed that a substantial sum of money, up front, would be required to build in, so to speak, planned club rooms in the new hotel,” the minutes of the May 29, 1979, Club directors meeting said. “We do not rule out a later accommodation with the Radisson after the situation has settled down.”

During this same time, the La Crosse Club also approached the Elks Club about use of the first floor of its Elks Grand Lodge
at Fifth and State Street. "There are other alternatives, some temporary, that can be pursued pending a final solution," the minutes said.

Minutes for the August 22, 1979, Board of Directors meeting showed kitchen service at the Hotel Stoddard had been terminated. The hotel now was paying its rent to the State Bank, which had taken its operations over even before buying it through sheriff's auction in 1981.

"There was general agreement that the club stick it out, so to speak, in its present Stoddard Hotel locations. Because any definitive solution or action or sale by the Stoddard might seemingly involve some reparations to the club should it be disposed," the minutes said.

The Board of Directors did decide, however, to investigate a microwave food service, with the possibility of renting microwave ovens from Wettstein and Sons, the electronics dealer on Third Street in downtown La Crosse. In the meantime, club members continued to work towards developing club rooms at the Radisson.

A final resolution about where the club would be built came with the financing for the Radisson. Charles Gelatt did not originally plan to invest in the Radisson until one day in 1979 when automobile dealer Carl Schneider called to say another $100,000 was needed to construct the hotel or it would not be built. Gelatt agreed to put up the money if the La Crosse Club would have space for its clubrooms.

Schneider then asked how soon the money would be available. When Gelatt replied he could have it that day, Schneider wasted no time, arriving 40 minutes later at the corporate headquarters of Northern Engraving in Sparta to pick up the check.

It took some time to negotiate the ultimate location for the club, according to Gelatt. Radisson officials wanted the La Crosse Club to be in the northwest corner of the hotel where the business offices now are located. Gelatt and others found
that location unacceptable because food would have to be 
brought in across the lobby.

The final negotiations for the clubrooms led to agreement 
that they would be built on the west side of the hotel so 
members could have a breathtaking view of the Mississippi 
River as they dined.

The La Crosse Club paid $325,000 to construct the 
clubrooms, to which the G. Heileman Brewing Co. and the 
Trane Company each pledged $50,000; the First National Bank 
(now Norwest Bank) and First Federal each contributed $10,000; 
State Bank donated $5,000, while First Bank pledged $10,000.

In recognition for their support, separate meeting rooms 
dubbed the Heileman Room and Trane Room were constructed 
as part of the new facilities. The Trane Room includes historic 
photos of the early Trane operations, including a large photo of 
Trane Company founder Reuben Trane. The Heileman Room 
has a display of the 19th century German steins.

James Brindley, left, and Richard Lommen, stand in the Heileman Room in front of 
the collection of 19th century German beer steins.

C. Schroeder Photography
The agreement with the Radisson called for a 30-year lease, expiring in 2010. The club leases the space from the hotel for $1 a year and pays its own utilities. Food service is provided by the Radisson.

Both Gelatt and Pederson plan to be on the negotiation’s committee for renewal of the lease. “We’ve appointed ourselves,” Gelatt said. He admits the Radisson may increase the cost of the lease. “A dollar is probably not worth what it was in 1980,” he said. “We’ll probably be willing to settle for what it’s worth then, $3 or $4. We could bring that to the board.”

Trane knows Gelatt, 78, and Pederson, 84, will do a good job. “They’ll be in on the next negotiations. I’m sure of that. The board of the club at the time of the 2010 negotiations will look for able and wise guides. Mssrs. Gelatt and Pederson will preside over the negotiations as they have in the past.”

Lommen said he long enjoyed the relationship between Gelatt and Reinhart, a La Crosse Club board member who died in 1996. “Until D.B. Reinhart’s death, one thing that he enjoyed was for he and Charles Gelatt to spend four or five hours arguing over whether a $20 bill was the Radisson’s responsibility or the La Crosse Club’s. They’d do it for hours and hours over a $20 item. They both loved to negotiate.”

The new clubrooms opened on May 27, 1981, with 80 members donating $1,000 each toward the new clubrooms. The new facilities increased a greater interest in the club, which the May 12, 1981, board meeting described as “gratifying.”

“It was an exciting time. It had a lot to do with the club dying in the Stoddard,” Trane said. “Here was the chance for a rebirth of the club and it has now never been stronger.”

Trane gives full credit to Gelatt for keeping the club alive. “He is a traditionalist. Keeping the club alive was very important to him personally.”

Lommen also gives credit to Gelatt. “The interesting thing to me is the respect that he has. It is not just because he is
wealthy or because he is brilliant. It is because he has given so much to the community and knows the community. It’s never been fully publicized. If it had, more people would be in awe of him. He is really a generous, generous man.”

As part of the celebration of the new club, it was Gelatt’s idea to develop a heraldic coat-of-arms similar to those found in other social clubs. The coat of arms, developed by a Northern Engraving artist, consists of a crest containing a replica of Wisconsin with two la crosse rackets crossed over the approximate location of La Crosse. Above the crest is a knight’s headdress which is topped by a steamboat. Below the crest are
the Latin words *Otium Cum Dignitate*, which mean "Leisure with Dignity."

The coat of arms was registered in conformance with the standards set by the College of Arms in London. It was framed and unveiled at the club's Christmas party on December 12, 1986. As part of the celebration, Gelatt presented board members with reproductions of the coat of arms on metal, produced by Northern Engraving, which performs magic with aluminum as the preeminent decorative supplier in the world. Some 150 club neckties with the new coat of arms woven into the fabric were ordered from England and sold to club members in spring 1987 for $15 each.
Women members

Throughout much of the history of the La Crosse Club women had an ambivalent relationship with the club. There were ladies nights and women were allowed in certain parts of the building, including the main dining room.

It was not until 1983 that the decision was made to officially allow women to have full membership privileges. Although Mrs. Wayne (Elizabeth) Hood was an honorary member for years and Gail Cleary was given early membership, credit as the first woman member went to the legendary Margaret Annett.

Although details are sketchy, she apparently was given the honor because her family goes back to the earliest days of La Crosse. Her great grandmother Grams was said to be the second white child born in La Crosse. Her father, Cornelius Leinfelder, who changed his name to Linfield in World War I to sound less German in those troubled times, was in real estate as was she for many years.

Annett attended the Art Institute of Chicago, but left school there when she broke her arm. She enrolled at La Crosse State where she was a student of music professor Thomas Annett, whom she later married.

A former librarian at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Annett also served on the La Crosse School Board and La Crosse Housing Authority, which met for years in the La Crosse Club. She also has been active in many arts organizations. "I know everybody. I've lived here so long and have so many relatives," she said.

On the occasion of her 72nd birthday in 1983 Annett was surprised with the La Crosse Club membership and birthday party. A split of pink champagne was poured into a crystal
slipper ordered from Neiman-Marcus of Dallas, Texas, and passed to other diners at the party. She also was given a pink sweatshirt which said “Lady Margaret ... No. 1 Woman ... Awesome!”

Dick Record, a planner for the party and a La Crosse Club member, described Annett as having done many outstanding things for the community.

“She’s probably one of the most active people I know, ignoring her age,” he said in an article in the La Crosse Tribune at the time of the party. “She’d never live in Sun City. She’s been to almost every part of the world, but she’s convinced La Crosse is the best place to live.”
Being named the first woman member of the club was an honor. "I was their first lady," she said. "I never even thought of such a thing, even in my wildest dreams I had never given them a thought."

Women who are members of the club today do not think of themselves as women members, but simply as business members who happen to be women. Sheila Garrity, executive director for the La Crosse Community Foundation, uses the club as a place to talk business and appreciate the history and natural beauty of La Crosse.

"The river has always sustained life in this area. I can have lunch at the La Crosse Club and look out and see a spectacular view of eagles flying over the Mississippi river," she said. "We're also a stone's throw from Nathan Myrick's first permanent trading post which was next to what is now Riverside Park. And Myrick's trading post was the birthplace of commerce in La Crosse."

Attorney Patricia Heim said she finds it hard to believe that women have not always been a part of the club because they are accepted like any other members. The concept of a male-only club seems out of place in today's world.

Heim, like any other member, uses the club for office functions and meetings, including entertaining clients. The La Crosse Club is not that well known in the community, she said, "but I think it will perpetuate itself into the future."

Anita Froegel, president of McLoone Graphics, was invited to join the club, which she uses for business purposes, including entertaining clients and prospective managers and recognizing
employees who have worked at the company 25 years.

"It is an impressive place to take business associates, an impressive place to take people if you are doing interviews," she said. "The specialness of it is in the attractiveness of the decor and the ambiance of the club itself — like the view."

Gelatt said he is "delighted" the La Crosse Club has women members. "We have not yet had a woman board member," he said. "We still do have ribaldry at board meetings that might not comfortably cross the gender lines."

Anita Froegel
A different atmosphere

There are about 20 female members in the La Crosse Club. Some are wives or widows of members. Most are in business themselves and use the club in the same way as men do, as a place for lunch or to meet with clients.

The addition of women had less of an influence on the club than the move to the Radisson. "The club took on a different tone in lots of respect from the days in the Stoddard," Lommen said.

Long gone are the hard drinking days, card parties and, now, even smoking. From its origins in the Max Weix cigar shop, the La Crosse Club turned 180 degrees in January 1996 with the banning of smoking, a decision that was not universally welcomed. But like women in the 1980s, a smoking ban’s time had come, according to Lommen.

Today the club is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday with opportunities for private gatherings on weekends or evenings. Business leaders meet and privately discuss matters of importance to them.

Sadly, the characters of yesteryear that were mainstays of the club, such as Punch Niemeyer and Jake Hoeschler, are gone. They have been replaced by a more sedate crowd. Lommen recalled the first time he met Hoeschler. As a new McDonald’s franchise holder, Lommen could not believe his ears when a customer came into La Crosse’s first McDonald’s at Losey Boulevard and Ward Avenue (kitty corner from its current location). Jake ordered food and announced to the counter worker to “charge it to Jake” and left with his sack of burgers in hand.

“I got in my car and chased him,” Lommen said. “I got my money. I think he respected me for that. I had enough trouble
meeting a payroll in 1968 without having people charge their food. And that was when hamburgers were still 15 cents and french fries 10 cents."

Today, club members are more a cross section of the community — business leaders, members of the medical and education professions. "We have a much wider range of members than we did in the past," Lommen said, adding there are still many members of the community who don't know about the club.

Gelatt agreed the atmosphere has changed. "The card players disappeared. Those who profited by it are not members any more. I think it is a more business-like place. It's certainly a lovely location and I think it is very nice for someone in small business or medium sized business to be able to bring a customer or client or discuss an important business deal. You can take them there and be called by name. You may be called by name in the Boatworks (the Radisson restaurant), but you may not be. Here, at the La Crosse Club, you are called by name."
A powerful brick

Of course, the La Crosse Club is not completely without a certain tradition. Located inside the glass cabinet in the Heileman Room that holds the 19th century steins from Bavaria is a brick tied with ribbon that is said to have special powers.

The late Romeo Ross had a great view of the old European Hotel — Ma Bennett's — from his Ross of La Crosse furniture store, 101 State Street. When the bordello — Ma's not Ross of La Crosse — was torn down around 1970, he noticed men driving up during the day, pausing a moment reverently and taking a brick or two from the pile at 216 North Second Street. One lucky former customer even snatched the door knob from the house, which operated in La Crosse from 1925 to 1946.

Ma's was the best La Crosse had to offer in a bordello. The going rate was said to be $2 at most houses (one dollar for the woman and one for the madam). At Ma's, the girls charged $5.

One night at the La Crosse Club, Ross asked Pederson why he had not yet seen him taking a souvenir. "This was a Friday night at the La Crosse Club," Pederson recalled. "On Saturday morning, I drove down there. There was still a small pile of bricks. I got a couple. I gave one to a good friend of mine who was not a stranger to the place. The other I took home."

Knowing the Minnesota Club in St. Paul had a door knob from a well known bordello from that city, Pederson decided to make a gift of the brick to the La Crosse Club. He asked his wife to put a ribbon around the prized brick and took it to the club, which "is a repository of history for the city."

Of course no one can tell the story of the brick with as much elegance as Fred Pederson, a wordsmith who spent World War II in public relations in the Pentagon. So highly
respected was his work, Dwight D. Eisenhower signed his biography for Pederson with: “To Fred Pederson — a student of history and a soldier — from a comrade of World War II. Dwight D. Eisenhower.”

The following is Pederson’s description of the brick:

In the broad lexicon of Americana, La Crosse qualifies as an historic river town. As such, it shares fully in all of the attributes, scenic or otherwise, the Mississippi River has brought to a number of cities up and down its long course.

Sex and sin were exported by steam boat from New Orleans to St. Paul. New Orleans never had a reputation
for prudery and benevolently bestowed its accommodating attitudes to other communities along the river. In the old days — the late 19th Century and early 20th — La Crosse sported gambling casinos with black tie suited croupiers spinning the roulette wheel and it possessed colorful bordellos where one might enjoy his winnings. Some of the early Madames in the city bore provocative names, such as Rose Vermont and Frankie LaSalle (probably pseudonyms).

La Crosse is still cloaked with a tolerant liberalism, but the age of bordellos has passed. The last one went out of existence at the suggestion of the City Fathers as World War II began and the military authorities at Fort McCoy looked askance at such nearby temptations for adolescent draftees. Anna “Ma” Bennett’s emporium was located on North Second Street and bore the camouflaging name of the “European Hotel.” “Ma” retired and departed for California. Her girls dispersed and, hopefully, assisted the war effort in their own various ways. The European Hotel building, long vacant was demolished circa 1970. This historic brick was a part of the demolition, a reminder of La Crosse’s colorful past.

However, it has become increasingly apparent that this particular brick — presumably attributable to its long and untiring service as part of a sturdy structure catering to man’s earthly requirements — has absorbed, by its proximity, certain powers of salubrious, even magical nature.

In fact, the chronicles of legerdemain, attested by many experienced stalwarts of the impassioned nobility of the era, tells us that there are soulful absorptions from an environment that enhance one’s particular abilities or
vanities. For instance, scholars become more scholarly in a beautiful oak paneled library surrounded by great books; a visitor’s sense of art appreciation rises precipitously as he walks through the marble corridors of the great museums of the world. Similarly a few minutes in a historic harem — such as visiting the one formerly enjoyed by the Sultans in Istanbul — send an energized frisian surging through the visitor. Even a saunter in the halls of Versailles, where Madame Pompadour and Countess DuBarry gave exhaustive performances, has an effect. And, of course, merely crossing the threshold of a bordello provides a similar enthrallment.

This brings us up to the present and this magic brick of distinguished heritage. We have heard from those who swear that merely touching the brick provides restorative powers beyond one’s imagination or aspiration. It is fortunate that this brick was saved from the wreckage and is available by appointment to members of the La Crosse Club. It is suggested that its stimulating effect be limited to those over 40 years of age — and the TOUCH take place shortly before one leaves the club.”

With so much power, the brick is kept in the cabinet of the Heileman Room. “That’s why we keep it under lock and key,” Gelatt said. “If someone’s abilities are fading, they get rejuvenation by touching it under the proper circumstances or auspices.”

A member in need, presumably male, would have free access to the brick, Pederson said.

“But only infrequently,” Gelatt added. “We don’t want to ruin his health.”
Fred Peterson, a long-time club member and retired vice-president of sales for Northern Engraving Corp., holds the famous brick from Ma Bennett's that's in the La Crosse Club display case. It is said to have special powers.

C. Schroeder Photography
Membership has its privileges

Gelatt believes there are four good reasons for belonging to the La Crosse Club. Beyond the opportunities for rejuvenation, they are:

1. Luncheon in a dignified attractive atmosphere.
2. Availability of space for private business or social meetings.
3. Three social parties a year for members in which they are allowed to invite guests for a modest cost.
4. Reciprocal arrangements which Pederson has pursued for the last 20 years with clubs around the country and world. These clubs allow members to visit other clubs in other cities without paying additional membership fees.

These clubs range from the University Club of Milwaukee to the Los Angeles Athletic Club to the Riviera Tennis Club and Seoul Club in Korea. A La Crosse Club member even can go to the American Club in Singapore.

It is Pederson’s eloquence that has made it possible to have so many reciprocal relationships with clubs throughout the country and world. “He has a magnificent way of describing the club,” Lommen said.

Here’s an example of a letter written in 1992 to Leonard F. Bush, general manager of the Great Southern Club in Gulfport, Mississippi:

This will introduce the La Crosse Club, Western Wisconsin’s most distinguished organization of its kind. Founded in 1882, the La Crosse Club membership historically has included the prominent business and
HiswKy oly the la Cuosse Cluh professional people of our area. La Crosse, itself, is the base of many nationally known corporations, including two on the Fortune 500 listing. Our membership limitation is 150....

The physical location of the La Crosse Club is unique and breathtakingly beautiful. The club, in its own separate building adjacent to the Radisson Hotel, overlooks Riverside Park as well as the scenic and legendary bend on the Mississippi River where it is joined by the Black River and the La Crosse River — much heralded as 'where three rivers meet.' The front facade is entirely composed of long glass windows affording this magnificent view. Visitors are usually very profuse with laudatory comments. We enclose our brochure.

Any of your members who may be visiting La Crosse would surely enjoy the privileges of this outstanding club, its juxtaposition to the Radisson, its central city location, the class of its appointments and the caliber of its membership. Impeccable banking and professional references are available.
The club's future

The La Crosse Club today is anything but its smoke-filled cigar shop origins. Today men and women are members, who primarily enjoy luncheon meetings in a quiet and elegant location overlooking one of La Crosse's greatest assets, the Mississippi River.

The club is managed by Theresa Thaldorf, who moved with the club after helping out at times at the old Stoddard.

"Theresa has done a very good job," Lommen said. "She's our first female steward, or manager of the club."

While some clubs of its kind have closed in recent years, Lommen sees a strong future for the La Crosse Club.
Membership dues for the 185 members remains $369.25 annually, with new members paying an additional $1,000 up front.

The club leases its space from the Radisson and makes no profit from the food ordered at the club and cooked at the Radisson. It does earn some income from liquor sales, which have been declining in recent years.

"The future for private clubs isn’t very good, they are closing everywhere," Lommen said, "but I believe that is not true for La Crosse. If we keep it going as it is now, keep membership stable, continue the strong management, it will continue. The future is good. It is still a damn good place to have a business meeting, a good place to have lunch."
List of Members in 1887

N.D. Allen
Ora G. Austin
C.R. Benton
C.H. Burroughs
H.I. Bliss
E.E. Buckingham
W.C. Bussell
S.S. Burton
H. Cramer
Chas. Case
F.A. Copeland
F.P. Cook
C.L. Colman
L.C. Colman
J.B. Canterbury
S.D. Cargill
W.W. Cargill
C.P. Crosby
J.T. Daggett
A.H. Davis
W.S. Davis
L. F. Easton
B.E. Edwards
J.A. Eppinger
F.M. Egbert
W.D. Fox
Geo F. Gund
Abner Gile
J.J. Hogan
West M. Holt
S.Y. Hyde
Lafe Holmes
Fred. H. Hankerson
G.C. Hixon
M.F. Hayes
C.L. Halstead
A. Hirshheimer
W.H. Holcomb
D. Law
W.H. Lathrop
Wm. Listman
Jno. Michel
D.S. McArthur
M.T. Moore

D.A. McDonald
A.F. Metzger
J.D. McMillan
J.S. Medary
Jas. McCord
E.N. Osborne
D.H. Palmer
W.R. Putnam
E.G. Perkins
A. Pfiffner Jr.
A.W. Pettibone
A. Platz
F.W. Powers
Fred Ring Jr.
E. G. Rudolf
W.A. Roosevelt
George Salzer
W.A. Sutor
F.J. Smith
Jno. C. Smith
J. Stirneman
W.E. Sawyer
Jos. Tuteur
Vincent Tausche
G.W. Traer
E.B. Usher
W.J. Underwood
G. Van Steenwyk
J. B. Webb
Levi Withee
J.L. Wallace

Honorary Members

Hon. Angus Cameron
Hon. G.M. Woodward
A.A. Freeman
A. Jurgens
H.E. Keeler
The “New” La Crosse Club
Presidential Roll Call

F.A. Copeland, lumber 1900-1901
F.P. Hixon, lumber; builder of Hixon House 1902-1903
G. H. Gordon, attorney 1904-1905
L.C. Colman, lumber 1906
H.L. Colman, lumber 1907
Orlando Holway, lumber 1908
E.C. Higbee, attorney 1909-1910
E.J. Evans, doctor 1911-1912
G. Van Steenwyk, banker and investor 1913-1914
D.W. MacWillie; Wisconsin Button Co; Dolly Madison Dairies 1915-1916
J.H. Gordon, attorney 1917-1918
E.A. Gatterdam, dentist 1919-1923
A.L. Miller, Miller Broom Co. 1924-1925
Harry Watkins, credit manager, Trane 1926-1927
F.W. Fox, J.J. Hogan wholesale groceries 1928-1931
D.S. Law, attorney 1932-1933
Harry Watkins credit manager, Trane 1934-1936
J. F. Greer, Segelke Kohlhaus 1937-1938
Arthur S. Funk, La Crosse Rubber Mills 1939-1944
Stanley McDonald, insurance 1945-1947
Alf Gundersen, M.D., urologist 1948-1953
Ollie Olson, dental supply company 1954
Everett Yerly, Yerly Coal and Oil 1955
John Murphy, Gateway Transportation 1956-1958
William Gerrard, Gerrard Realty 1959
Howard Dahl, WKBT-Television 1960-1961
Peter Hurtgen, McLoone Metal Graphics 1962-1963
Max O. Welby, president-treasurer, Pyroil Oil Co. 1964
George C. Kroening, Northern Plastics (Allied Signal) 1965-1967
James S. Gelatt, founder, Northern Plastics (Allied Signal) 1968-1970
Robert Johns, attorney 1971
Jay Gelatt, investor, Northern Engraving 1972
John McDonald, attorney 1973
Warren Loveland, La Crosse mayor, investor 1974
James Erickson, lumber broker 1975
Charles D. Gelatt, Northern Engraving 1976
Charles D. Gelatt, Northern Engraving 1982-1995
Richard Lommen, Courtesy Corp/McDonalds 1995-present
La Crosse Club Members
as of January 1, 1997

Charles Ablan
Marshall Anderson
Margaret Annett
Gerald Arndt
Ellen Ash
Glen Bakalars
James Bannen
Fred Barge
William Barney
Barry Blomquist
R. Jerome Boge
Sabina Bosshard
Daniel Brady
Doris Brindley
James Brindley
Tom Brock
Nelson Brown
Robert Bue
Charles Buettner
Mark Bulriss
Robert Burg
George Bushek
Joe Chilsen
Dr. Brian Campion
George Carmona
Mark Chamberlain
Merrill Cina
Russell Cleary
Charles Collins
Michael Collins
Maripat Coughlin
Harold Craig
Harry Dahl
Mrs. Howard Dahl
Nancy Dahl
David Dale
Robert Daley, Sr.
Ruth Nixon-Davy
Michael F. Davy
Kevin Dean
John Desmond, Jr.
James Donisky
Dr. Joseph Durst
David Eber

Peter Eversole
Peter Friddle
Robert Frise
Anita Froegel
Albert Funk
Michael Galstad
Patrick Gantert
Sheila Garrity
Dick Gasterland
Charles Gelatt
Daniel Gelatt
James Gelatt, Jr.
Philip Gelatt
Sarah Geophart
Jack Glendenning
Jackson Gouraud
Richard Graw
Dr. Adolf Gundersen
Dr. Jerome Gundersen
Dr. Sigurd Gundersen, Jr.
Tim Hall
J. Stephen Hamilton
Dr. John Hayden
Thomas Hefferson
Patricia Heim
Alexander Hix
Jay Hoeschler
Harold Hoffinan II
Wayne Hood, Jr.
Mrs. Wayne Hood, Sr.
Sanders Hook
Richard Horak, M.D.
Ronald House
Lorin Hyslop
Jim Jarnbois
Jeffrey Jensen
Donald Jobe
Mrs. William Johnson
Noel Jordan
John Katrana, Ph.D.
Fred Kautz
Richard Kinsley
Jerome Klos
Judith Kulpers
L. Hope Kumm
Donald Lee
Bruce Lento
Dr. David Litzow
David Llewellyn
Richard Lommen
Warren Loveland, Jr.
Lutheran Hospital Administration
John Lyche
Thomas Lynch
W. Duncan MacMillan
Michael Manglitz
Marvin Manske
James McDonnell
Sandra McCormick
Harold McEuen
Richard McLoone
Gundersen Medical Foundation
William Medland
James Meinke
William Meyer
Thomas Mikulina
Dr. David Morris
Ted Motschman
Mrs. Eugene Murphy
H. John Naper
Dr. Kermit Newcomer
Northern Engraving Co.
Norwest Bank La Crosse
C. Garry O'Connor
Robert Ortloff
Dr. Edwin Overholt
Karl Paasch
George Parke, III
Frederick Pederson
Arnis Peters
Robert Poehling
Philip Quillin
Radisson Hotel
Dr. Abbas Rahimi
Charles Raymond
Richard Record
Duane Ring
Duane Ring, Jr.
Robert Ringdahl
Charles Robers
Roger Roslansky
Dr. Arthur Ross, III
Jim Santori
Thomas Schini
Mark Schneider
Harry Schroeder
James Schultz
Philip Schumacher
William Schwartz
James Senty
Nicole Shriner
Donald Sieger
Martin Smith, M.D.
Brent Smith
Robert Smyth
Arthur Soell
Bradley Sturm
Edwin K. Sullivan
Gerald Symmonds
Elmer Topel
Tim Tracy
The Trane Company
R. Nicholas Trane II
Mike Vallance
Larry Vangen
Gary Veldey
Jan Ver Hagen
Michael Wahlen
Ronald Wanek
Alan Wehrenberg
Brent Welch
John Wettstein
Michael Wilde
Anthony Wilson
Harry Woods
Elaine Yerly
Donald Zietlow
Reciprocal Relationships

Akron City Club, Akron, Ohio
American Club, Singapore
Army Navy Club, Washington, D.C.
California Yacht Club, Marina Del Rey, CA
Chicago Athletic Association, Chicago, Illinois
Cincinnati Athletic Club, Cincinnati, Ohio
Cincinnati Club, Cincinnati, Ohio
Collier Athletic Club, Naples, Florida
Davenport Club, Davenport, Iowa
Decathlon Club, Bloomington, Minnesota
Doha Club, Doha, Qatar
Great Southern Club, Gulfport, Mississippi
Harbor Club, Seattle, Washington
Kansas City Club, Kansas City, Missouri
Kona Kai Club, San Diego, California
Los Angeles Athletic Club, Los Angeles, California
Madison Club, Madison, Wisconsin
Metropolitan Club, Covington, Kentucky
Milwaukee Athletic Club, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Minnesota Club, St. Paul, Minnesota
Rancho San Juanito, Mexico
Riviera County Club and Tennis Club, Pacific Palisades, California
St. Paul Athletic Club, St. Paul, Minnesota
Seoul Club, Seoul, Korea
Tower Club, Oxnard, California
University Club, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
University Club of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Washington Athletic Club, Washington, D.C.
Wausau Club, Wausau, Wisconsin
Wichita Club, Wichita, Kansas
The Old Guard

1. Issac H. Moulton, River pilot; La Crosse Telephone
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* 1864
   *Born:* Nov. 28, 1828; *Died:* Feb. 3, 1919

2. John S. Medary; J.S. Medary Saddlery Co.
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* 1860
   *Born:* March 12, 1839; *Died:* Feb. 24, 1926

3. Samuel Y. Hyde; grain merchant
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* 1878
   *Born:* Jan. 31, 1837; *Died:* March 9, 1916

4. Nelson D. Allen; lumber
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* 1862
   *Born:* Dec. 5, 1837; *Died:* March 23, 1914

5. William W. Cargill; grain; railroad financier
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* 1875
   *Born:* Dec. 15, 1844; *Died:* Oct. 17, 1909

6. Chas. E. Bennett; Hyde Elevator
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* 1881
   *Born:* Jan. 22, 1835; *Died:* Nov. 20, 1907

7. Edgar Palmer; dentist
   *Elected:* Charter/1880 *Came to La Crosse:* —
   *Born:* May 7, 1840; *Died:* May 21, 1926 (non-resident)

8. Joseph W. Skinner; business leader
   *Elected:* 1890 *Came to La Crosse:* 1885
   *Born:* Oct. 22, 1860; *Died:* May 16, 1928

   *Elected:* 1892 *Came to La Crosse:* —
   *Born:* May 3, 1841; *Died:* December 1904

10. Joseph Clarke; president, La Crosse Manufacturers and Jobbers Union
    *Elected:* 1892 *Came to La Crosse:* 1862
    *Born:* Jan. 16, 1841; *Died:* January 1904

11. James B. Canterbury; grain, Burlington Railroad
    *Elected:* 1892 *Came to La Crosse:* 1862
    *Born:* Jan. 16, 1841; *Died:* January 1904
12. Gilbert M. Woodward; attorney
   Elected: 1900  Came to La Crosse: 1860
   Born: Dec. 25, 1835; Died: March 13, 1914

13. Frederick A. Copeland; lumber; light company, Batavian National Bank
   Elected: 1900  Came to La Crosse: 1869
   Born: July 14, 1846; Died: May 21, 1926 (non-resident)

14. Eugene G. Perkins; Milwaukee Road
   Elected: 1900  Came to La Crosse: 1871
   Born: Feb. 13, 1848; Died: Oct. 5, 1912

15. Lucius C. Colman; Colman Lumber
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1855
   Born: March 27, 1853; Died: Dec. 22, 1925

16. Frank P. Hixon (president); Hixon Lumber
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1862
   Born: Oct. 13, 1862; Died: Oct. 23, 1931

17. Henry Gund (president); Gund Brewery
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1859
   Born: March 2, 1859; Died: July 2, 1945

18. George W. Burton, National Bank
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1873
   Born: Feb. 22, 1858; Died: July 31, 1941

19. Frederick H. Hankerson; National Bank
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1869
   Born: Jan. 6, 1861; Died: May 11, 1938

20. Alfred James; James Foundry
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1874
   Born: June 15, 1856; Died: Nov. 24, 1926

21. George H. Gordon; attorney
   Elected: 1905  Came to La Crosse: 1860
   Born: July 3, 1859; Died: Jan. 15, 1926

22. Frederick A. Holbrook, Vote-Berger Company
   Elected: 1911  Came to La Crosse: 1878
   Born: Sept. 15, 1854; Died: Sept. 1919

23. Samuel W. Anderson
   Elected: 1911  Came to La Crosse: 1858
   Born: Dec. 13, 1858; Died: Aug. 17, 1927
24. Wendell A. Anderson; mayor, doctor
   *Elected:* 1911 *Came to La Crosse:* 1866
   *Born:* Sept. 9, 1840; *Died:* Jan. 23, 1929

25. John Brindley, judge
   *Elected:* 1911 *Came to La Crosse:* 1880
   *Born:* July 18, 1850; *Died:* Feb. 21, 1926 (non-resident)

26. Orlando Holway, National Guard general
   *Elected:* 1911 *Came to La Crosse:* 1869
   *Born:* Oct. 10, 1859; *Died:* February 1923

   *Elected:* 1913 *Came to La Crosse:* 1880
   *Born:* Jan. 18, 1856; *Died:* Jan. 3, 1930

28. Edward L. Colman; Colman Lumber
   *Elected:* 1913 *Came to La Crosse:* 1865
   *Born:* May 18, 1865; *Died:* Jan. 3, 1926

29. Daniel Cunningham; Burlington Railroad Supt.
   *Elected:* 1915 *Came to La Crosse:* 1887
   *Born:* Nov. 27, 1856; *Died:* Sept. 19, 1923

30. Carl F. Michel (president); Michel Brewing Co.
    *Elected:* 1915 *Came to La Crosse:* 1877
    *Born:* April 24, 1877; *Died:* May 26, 1958

31. William A. Thompson; district river engineer
    *Elected:* 1915 *Came to La Crosse:* 1886
    *Born:* Dec. 16, 1853; *Died:* Dec. 15, 1925

32. Joseph M. Hixon; Hixon Lumber
    *Elected:* 1915 *Came to La Crosse:* 1864
    *Born:* Sept. 23, 1864; *Died:* Jan. 24, 1936 (non-resident)

33. Gysbert Van Steenwyk (president); Batavian Bank
    *Elected:* 1917 *Came to La Crosse:* 1876
    *Born:* March 29, 1876; *Died:* June 14, 1967

34. Alexander G. Paul; Paul sawmills
    *Elected:* 1919 *Came to La Crosse:* 1874
    *Born:* Aug. 28, 1874; Oct. 23, 1943 (non-resident)

35. Arthur F. Espersen; lumber
    *Elected:* 1920 *Came to La Crosse:* 1862
    *Born:* Aug. 1, 1862; *Died:* Jan. 8, 1932
36. John C. Burns; State Bank president
   Elected: 1923; Came to La Crosse: 1863
   Born: June 1, 1863; Died: June 1, 1863

37. Andrew Lees; attorney
   Elected: 1924; Came to La Crosse: 1896
   Born: Dec. 28, 1872; Died: June 5, 1943

38. William Torrance; Torrance Foundry
   Elected: 1926; Came to La Crosse: 1859
   Born: Jan. 24, 1857; Died: Jan. 21, 1934

39. Eugene A. Gatterdam; dentist
   Elected: 1926; Came to La Crosse: 1881
   Born: Oct. 5, 1862; Died: Aug. 7, 1936

40. Edward Evans; doctor
   Elected: 1927; Came to La Crosse: 1888
   Born: March 7, 1860; Died: June 1, 1932

41. David S. McArthur; doctor
   Elected: 1927; Came to La Crosse: 1859
   Born: March 28, 1859; Died: Jan. 3, 1941

42. Albert P. Funk; Rubber Mills president
   Elected: 1927; Came to La Crosse: 1875
   Born: Sept. 20, 1875; Died: Jan. 31, 1945

43. Thaddeus H. Brindley; W.A. Roosevelt president
   Elected: 1927; Came to La Crosse: 1883
   Born: Nov. 28, 1883; Died: Oct. 28, 1950

44. John M. Holley; State Bank president
   Elected: 1928; Came to La Crosse: 1874
   Born: July 7, 1874; Died: July 7, 1874

45. John A. Bayer; Batavian Bank president
   Elected: 1929; Came to La Crosse: 1868
   Born: Dec. 13, 1868; Died: Dec. 13, 1868

46. Reuben N. Trane; Trane Co. founder
   Elected: 1930; Came to La Crosse: 1886
   Born: Sept. 13, 1896; Died: Sept. 5, 1954

47. Robert C. Whelpley; Citizens Loan and Investment Co.
   Elected: 1930; Came to La Crosse: 1866
   Born: Sept. 3, 1866; Died: June 4, 1942
48. David S. Law; attorney  
   **Elected:** 1931  **Came to La Crosse:** 1881  
   **Born:** March 21, 1881;  **Died:** March 7, 1944

49. Adolf Gundersen; surgeon  
   **Elected:** 1933  **Came to La Crosse:** 1891  
   **Born:** Oct. 8, 1865;  **Died:** Sept. 15, 1938

50. Gregory J. Egan; doctor  
   **Elected:** 1933  **Came to La Crosse:** 1901  
   **Born:** April 9, 1877;  **Died:** Dec. 7, 1947

51. Horace K. Holley (president); La Crosse Trust Co. chair  
   **Elected:** 1935  **Came to La Crosse:** 1887  
   **Born:** Jan. 3, 1887;  **Died:** Feb. 17, 1972

52. Jesse E. Higbee; attorney  
   **Elected:** 1935  **Came to La Crosse:** 1885  
   **Born:** Jan. 16, 1882;  **Died:** March 30, 1943

53. Frank W. Schwalbe; contractor  
   **Elected:** 1937  **Came to La Crosse:** 1867  
   **Born:** Oct. 8, 1863;  **Died:** June 10, 1941

54. Frank H. Burgess, La Crosse Tribune publisher  
   **Elected:** 1939  **Came to La Crosse:** 1907  
   **Born:** Sept. 4, 1875;  **Died:** July 7, 1939

55. Claude K. Pettingill; real estate  
   **Elected:** 1940  **Came to La Crosse:** 1874  
   **Born:** June 25, 1873;  **Died:** Sept. 23, 1948

56. Sigurd B. Gundersen (president); surgeon  
   **Elected:** 1941  **Came to La Crosse:** 1895  
   **Born:** Sept. 28, 1895;  **Died:** March 11, 1964

57. John J. Esch; congressman; attorney; ICC member  
   **Elected:** 1941  **Came to La Crosse:** 1887  
   **Born:** March 20, 1861;  **Died:** April 27, 1941

58. William F. Goodrich; charter member UCT; president La Crosse Hospital Board  
   **Elected:** 1941  **Came to La Crosse:** 1888  
   **Born:** Oct. 9, 1871;  **Died:** Feb. 5, 1953

59. Joseph A. Bartl; Bartl Brewing president  
   **Elected:** 1942  **Came to La Crosse:** 1875  
   **Born:** Jan. 31, 1875;  **Died:** Nov. 27, 1957
60. Louis F. Robinson; La Crosse Trust chair
   Elected: 1942 Came to La Crosse: 1891
   Born: July 20, 1891; Died: March 7, 1979

61. Alfred J. Capellen; Batavian Bank exec. vice president
   Elected: 1942 Came to La Crosse: 1889
   Born: April 30, 1889; Died: Sept. 21, 1955

62. Cameron L. Baldwin; attorney
   Elected: 1943 Came to La Crosse: 1894
   Born: Aug. 24, 1872; Died: May 15, 1962

63. Gunnar Gundersen; radiologist; president AMA
   Elected: 1943 Came to La Crosse: 1897
   Born: April 6, 1897; Died: May 22, 1979

64. Otto Bosshard; attorney
   Elected: 1943 Came to La Crosse: 1900
   Born: Aug. 9, 1876; Died: Oct. 10, 1943

65. William F. Funk; vice pres., Rubber Mills
   Elected: 1944 Came to La Crosse: 1870
   Born: Sept. 27, 1870; Died: May 13, 1958

66. Roy C. Davidson; Holley & Co., Normal School regent
   Elected: 1944 Came to La Crosse: 1894
   Born: May 1, 1894; Died: July 1, 1950

67. Kenneth E. Salzer; Salzer Seed president
   Elected: 1944 Came to La Crosse: 1894
   Born: April 25, 1894; Died: April 5, 1958

68. Arthur S. Funk; president, Rubber Mills
   Elected: 1945 Came to La Crosse: 1884
   Born: July 12, 1884; Died: May 7, 1954

69. Stanley McDonald; insurance agent
   Elected: 1946 Came to La Crosse: 1915
   Born: Nov. 7, 1893; Died: July 16, 1946

70. Alf H. Gundersen; urologist
   Elected: 1946 Came to La Crosse: 1898
   Born: Dec. 10, 1898; Died: June 1, 1986

71. Vilas Horner; vice pres, State Bank
   Elected: 1947 Came to La Crosse: 1894
   Born: May 13, 1894; Died: April 14, 1967
72. Edward P. Newburg; Newburg Men's Wear
   Elected: 1949  Came to La Crosse: 1889
   Born: Sept. 25, 1889; Died: July 5, 1963

73. Emil Niemeyer; chair, Northern Engraving
   Elected: 1951  Came to La Crosse: 1890
   Born: May 14, 1890; Died: Feb. 2, 1968

74. James S. Taylor; vice pres., Taylor Lumber
   Elected: 1951  Came to La Crosse: 1909
   Born: Aug. 3, 1894; Died: April 25, 1977

75. Archie O. Olberg, district manager, Mobil Oil
   Elected: 1953  Came to La Crosse: 1892
   Born: Nov. 14, 1892; Died: Dec. 2, 1965

76. Henry N. Holley; State Bank pres.
   Elected: 1954  Came to La Crosse: 1904
   Born: Aug. 30, 1904; Died: March 31, 1986

77. Elwin Schwalbe; pres., La Crosse Amusement Co; La Crosse Theaters. Co.
   Elected: 1954  Came to La Crosse: 1894
   Born: March 1, 1894; Died: March 25, 1961

78. Francis E. Yerley; pres, Yerley Corp. Fuels; GOP state chair
   Elected: 1955  Came to La Crosse: 1910
   Born: Sept. 16, 1901; Died: Oct. 31, 1968

79. Albert P. Funk, Jr. (president); Rubber Mills chair
   Elected: 1957  Came to La Crosse: 1919
   Born: Aug. 6, 1919

80. Richard H. Pearse; Trane Co. Vice pres.
   Elected: 1958  Came to La Crosse: 1926
   Born: March 6, 1898; Died: Aug. 18, 1976

81. Ollie Olson; dentist
   Elected: 1959  Came to La Crosse: 1927
   Born: June 7, 1906; Died: April 6, 1988

82. Robert A. Farnum, pres., Star Knitting Co.
   Elected: 1959  Came to La Crosse: 1894
   Born: Dec. 20, 1894; Died: Sept. 7, 1970

83. James C. McCord; securities and investment
   Elected: 1959  Came to La Crosse: 1899
   Born: June 16, 1899; Died: Aug. 23, 1982
84. **Horace K. Holley, Jr.; vice pres., La Crosse Trust**  
   Elected: 1962  Came to La Crosse: 1911  
   Born: March 22, 1911; Died: Feb. 21, 1964

85. **James S. Gelatt; Norplex founder**  
   Elected: 1963  Came to La Crosse: 1913  
   Born: Dec. 11, 1913; Died: April 10, 1985

86. **Wayne J. Hood; Trane Co. vice pres.**  
   Elected: 1964  Came to La Crosse: 1939  
   Born: July 23, 1913; Died: Jan. 30, 1988

87. **Kenneth V. Dahl; Dahl Ford**  
   Elected: 1965  Came to La Crosse: 1915  
   Born: Sept. 20, 1915; non-resident

88. **James M. Brindley; W.A. Roosevelt**  
   Elected: 1965  Came to La Crosse: 1924  
   Born: Feb. 17, 1924

89. **Robert D. Johns; attorney**  
   Elected: 1968  Came to La Crosse: 1915  
   Born: April 10, 1912; non-resident

90. **W. Leo Murphy; Gateway Transportation chair**  
   Elected: 1968  Came to La Crosse: 1903  
   Born: June 21, 1903; Died: May 18, 1972

91. **Warren Loveland; mayor**  
   Elected: 1969  Came to La Crosse: 1920  
   Born: Aug. 8, 1920; Died: April 14, 1995

92. **John Murphy; Gateway Transportation**  
   Elected: 1969  Came to La Crosse: 1916  
   Born: March 30, 1916; non-resident

93. **Stanton Taylor; Taylor Lumber**  
   Elected: 1971  Came to La Crosse: 1909  
   Born: Aug. 20, 1906; Died: Oct. 17, 1975

94. **Carl H. Iverson; North La Crosse Lumber Co.**  
   Elected: 1973  Came to La Crosse: 1937  

95. **Frederick W. Pederson; Northern Engraving v.p.**  
   Elected: 1973  Came to La Crosse: 1912  
   Born: May 31, 1912
96. Charles Gelatt; chair, Northern Engraving
   Elected: 1976 Came to La Crosse: 1918
   Born: Jan. 4, 1918

97. William O. Newburg; Newburg's Men's Wear
   Elected: 1977 Came to La Crosse: 1914
   Born: Dec. 27, 1914; non-resident

98. Thorolf E. Gundersen; doctor
   Elected: 1978 Came to La Crosse: 1911
   Born: Jan. 12, 1911

99. G. William Cremer; jewelry
   Elected: 1979 Came to La Crosse: 1925
   Born: May 31, 1924; non-resident

100. Louis F. Robinson, Jr.; La Crosse Trust
    Elected: 1980 Came to La Crosse: 1924
    Born: Jan. 21, 1924

101. R. Nicholas Trane, II; Trane Co.; NMT
    Elected: 1980 Came to La Crosse: 1939
    Born: April 4, 1939

102. Thomas H. Thompson; systems engineer, IBM
    Elected: 1980 Came to La Crosse: 1919
    Born: May 30, 1914; non-resident

103. Harry A. Schroeder; HSR architect
    Elected: 1983 Came to La Crosse: 1956
    Born: Oct. 7, 1924

104. Robert Funke, Honig Books and Gifts
    Elected: 1983 Came to La Crosse: 1917
    Born: Sept. 28, 1924

105. Sigurd B. Gundersen, Jr.; surgeon
    Elected: 1985 Came to La Crosse: 1924
    Born: Sept. 28, 1924

106. Edward S. Carlsson; administrator, Gundersen Clinic
    Elected: 1986 Came to La Crosse: 1926
    Born: Sept. 14, 1926; non-resident

107. James O. Ash; partner, HABCO
    Elected: 1986 Came to La Crosse: 1921
    Born: Nov. 4, 1921; Died: Oct. 3, 1993
108. Russell G. Cleary; H.J. Heileman, development
   Elected: 1987  Came to La Crosse: 1934
   Born: May 22, 1933

109. A. Erik Gundersen; heart surgeon
   Elected: 1987  Came to La Crosse: 1930
   Born: Dec. 26, 1930

110. D.B. Reinhart; Gateway Foods
   Elected: 1987  Came to La Crosse: 1956
   Born: May 13, 1920; Died: April 13, 1996

111. Henry N. Holley, Jr.; State Bank
   Elected: 1987  Came to La Crosse: 1935
   Born: Aug. 26, 1935

112. Charles Mathy; Mathy Construction
   Elected: 1989  Came to La Crosse: 1943
   Born: June 22, 1935

113. Richard J. McLoone; v.p., Blunt Ellis Loewi
   Elected: 1993  Came to La Crosse: 1932
   Born: Dec. 3, 1932

114. Ted D. Solie; Swiss Chateau
   Elected: 1993  Came to La Crosse: 1915
   Born: Nov. 14, 1915

115. Peter Pappas; judge
   Elected: 1994  Came to La Crosse: 1917
   Born: Sept. 18, 1917
Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without the help of Ed Hill and Linda Sondreal of the Area Research Center/Special Collections at Murphy Library on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Campus; the Archives staff of the La Crosse Public Library and local historian Doug Connell.

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Bibliography

Personal interviews by the author

Margaret Annett, May 17, 1996
Charles Gelatt and Fred Pederson, May 28, 1996 and July 30, 1996
Paul Vidani, Jr., June 21, 1996 and January 9, 1997
Theresa Thaldorf, July 3, 1996
Richard Lommen, July 15, 1996
Nicholas Trane II, July 23, 1996
William Gerrard, August 1, 1996

Additional interviews by telephone

Charles Gelatt
Sheila Garrity
Patricia Heim
Anita Froegel
Richard Record

Publications

La Crosse Tribune
La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press
La Crosse Leader Press
La Crosse Morning Chronicle
The La Crosse Republican & Leader
Corrections and Additions
since publication of
Leisure with Dignity

La Crosse Club Members as of January 1, 1998

Charles Ablan
Marshall Anderson
Margaret Annett
Gerald Arndt
Ellyn Ash
Glen Bakalars
James Bannen
Fred Barge, D.C.Ph.C.
Barry Blomquist
R. Jerome Boge
Sabina Bosshard
Daniel Brady
Mrs. Doris Brindley
James Brindley
Tom Brock
Jon Bruss
Robert Bue
Charles Buettner
Robert Burg
George Bushek
Richard Campbell
Dr. Brian Campion
George Carmona
Mark Chamberlain
Mrs. Russell Cleary
Charles Collins
Michael Collins
Dr. Mark Connelly
Maripat Coughlin
Harold Craig
Harry Dahl
Mrs. Howard Dahl
David Dale
Robert Daley, Sr.

Ruth Nixon-Davy
Michael F. Davy
John Desmond, Jr.
Dean Dickinson
James Donskey
Dr. Joseph Durst
David Eber
Leslie Eversole
Peter Eversole
Douglas Farmer
Don Flynn
Peter Frederikson
Robert Frise
Anita Froegel
Rex Fuller
Albert Funk
Michael Galstad
Patrick Gantert
Sheila Garrity
Dirk Gasterland
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Daniel Gelatt
Philip Gelatt
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Jack Glendenning
Jackson Gouraud
Richard Graw
Jeb Griffith
Dr. Adolf Gundersen
Dr. Jerome Gundersen
Dr. Sigurd Gundersen, Jr.
J. Stephen Hamilton
Mark Harrison
Dr. John Hayden  Thomas Mikulina
Thomas Heffernan  Dr. David Morris
Steven Hedberg  Ted Motschman
Patricia Heim  Mrs. Eugene Murphy
Edward Hengel  H. John Naper
Alexander Hixon  Dr. Kermit Newcomer
Steve Hochhouser  C. Garry O'Connor, D.D.S.M.S.
Jay Hoeschler  Robert Ortloff
Harold Hoffman, Jr.  Dr. Edwin L. Overholt
Wayne Hood, Jr.  Dr. Edwin M. Overholt
Mrs. Wayne Hood, Sr.  Karl Paasch
Sanders Hook  George Parke III
Dr. Richard Horak  Frederick Pederson
Ronald Houser  Arnis Peters
Lorin Hyslop  Philip Quillin
Jay Jaehnke  Dr. Abbas Rahimi
Jim Jambois  Charles Raymond
Jeffery Jensen  Richard Record
Donald Jobe  Mrs. D.B. Reinhart
Mrs. William Johnson  John Reinhart
Debra Johnson  Robert Reinhart
Thomas Johnson  Lynn Reister
Noel Jordan  Duane Ring
John Katrana, Ph.D.  Duane Ring, Jr.
Fred Kautz  Robert Ringdahl
Jerome Klos  James Riniker
Alma Kohnert  Charles Robers
Judith Kuipers  Dr. Arthur Ross III
L. Hope Kumm  Jim Santori
Donald Lee  Thomas Schini
Bruce Lenio  Douglas Schmidt
Dr. David Litzow, D.D.S.  Mark Schneider
David Llewellyn  Harry Schroeder
Richard Lommen  James Schultz
Warren Loveland, Jr.  Philip Schumacher
John Lyche  William Schwartz
Thomas Lynch  James Senty
W. Duncan MacMillan  Nicole Shriner
Michael Manglitz  Donald Sieger
Marvin Manske  Dr. Martin Smith
Ellen McCoy  Brent Smith
James McDonnell  Robert Smyth
Sandra McCormick  Arthur Soell
Harold McEuen  Bradley Sturm
Richard McLoone  Edwin R. Sullivan
William Medland  Gerald Symmonds
James Meinke  Douglas Tompkins, M.D.
William Meyer  Elmer Topel
Tim Tracy  
R. Nicholas Trane II  
Mike Vallance  
Larry Vangen  
Gary Veldey  
Jan Ver Hagen  
Michael Wahlen  
Ronald Wanek  
Alan Wehrenberg  
Brent Welch  
Mary Jo Werner  
John Wettstein  
Michael Wille  
Anthony Wilson  
Donald Zietlow

Additional Members of the Old Guard

116. William Meyer; lawyer  
Elected: 1996  Came to La Crosse: 1954  
Born: July 13, 1926

117. Duane W. Ring, Norwest Bank  
Elected: 1996  Came to La Crosse: 1962  
Born: May 27, 1930

118. Frederick Motschman, Mount La Crosse  
Elected: 1996  Came to La Crosse: 1959  
Born: May 23, 1929

119. Richard Lommen, Courtesy Corp.  
Elected: 1997  Came to La Crosse: 1944  
Born: June 29, 1944
Leisure with Dignity

Additional Clubs with Reciprocal Relationships with the La Crosse Club

Barclay, Ltd., Chicago, Illinois
Cardinal Club, Raleigh, North Carolina
Charlotte City Club, Charlotte, North Carolina
Plimsoll Club, New Orleans, Louisiana
St. James Club, London, England
Surf Club, Surfside, Florida
Summit Club, Tulsa, Oklahoma
University Club, Cincinnati, Ohio