

Indianapolis Literary Club

Charles Latham Jr. Memorial

January 24, 2011

October 31, 2010 marked the passing of former Literary Club member and past president, Charles Latham Jr. at age 93. He was born May 6, 1917 in Indianapolis, the only child of Charles Latham and Josephine Parker Latham. Charles Latham Sr., was a local homebuilder specializing in residential work, and built homes for some of Indianapolis's more prominent citizens including, Eli Lilly, Nicholas Noyes, and Bowman Elder. Charles's mother was an accomplished pianist and was a founding member of the Indianapolis Symphony Society. Thus, this was the cultural world that fashioned Charles as he grew up in the upper echelon of Indianapolis society. He attended Park School (now Park Tudor), but his parents decided to send him east to Exeter Academy in New Hampshire to finish his early education.

Following graduation Charles remained in the east. In 1939, he received an undergraduate degree from Princeton. A year later he received a Master's Degree in history from Harvard. During World War II he served in the Army Signal Corps. After the war he resumed his career as a history teacher, spending ten years at Dublin School in Dublin, New Hampshire and twenty-four years at the Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia.

Retiring in 1982 Charles moved back to Indianapolis to be near his mother who was now in her 90th year and in declining health. On January 24, 1984 he was elected a member of the Club, his sponsors were: Alexander Holliday, Noble Dean, and Russell Ryan. Charles's first paper was delivered on April 4, 1988 and over the next eight years he read another six papers, his last being on January 8, 1996 while he was serving as Club President. (His introduction of the speaker was not only brief, but we all assumed factually correct.)

In 1985 he began working part-time for the Indiana Historical Society as an assistant archivist on the staff of the library. His basic responsibilities included organizing and creating a finding aid for the numerous manuscript collections that were donated to the library.

According to the staff they could always count on his guides to be written with the researcher in mind, along with information he thought pertinent to the collection. In preparing for this memorial I spoke to several members of the library staff who worked closely with Charles. In response to my question as to what one staff member remembered most about Charles, she thought for only a moment and then said, "Charles spoke in beautifully arranged paragraphs. He instantly assembled the data, drew an outline, wrote the introductory concluding sentences, and filled in the body of the paragraph."

Not long after joining the staff he began organizing the papers of William Fortune, an Indianapolis newspaperman, executive and civic leader. This eventually led to his excellent publication, *William Fortune: A Hoosier Biography*, published in 1994. It was during this time that I had the pleasure of working with Charles. Although we worked in different divisions of the Society we occasionally had lunch together in the staff lounge and it was here that we enjoyed discussing a number of topics in the field of history and an opportunity for me to learn about the prominent early families of Indianapolis: skeletons and all.

In 1996 following his term as Club president and having sold his home on North Delaware, Charles bid farewell to his close friends, attending several parties in his honor, and moved back east to live in the Latham family house near Thetford, Vermont, where his Latham ancestors were early residents of this small community. He purchased the house in the 1950's and spent each summer and fall in the two-story house that dated back to the 1790's. Those who told me of visiting the house said that it had a fireplace in every room, had been modernized over the years, to include running water and electricity, but surprisingly the kitchen remains today as it was in 1910!

With his interest in local history he began a long association with the Thetford Historical Society, serving as its president and principal archivist for many years. In 1997 he moved to Kendal at Hanover, a highly respected retirement home located in Hanover, New Hampshire. It was here that he would call home for the remainder of his life.

Charles was a tall, quiet, and cordial man with a delightful sense of humor, who was generous with his time in assisting others in need of help, he served on several boards in the community, yet, a frugal individual who would bring his lunch to work and for many years drove a Ford Escort ... used. He was a man who fit easily into any conversation on a number of topics and among individuals of varying educational levels.

Although his family ancestry had its start in New England, and with degrees from Princeton and Harvard, he never-the-less remained a Hoosier at heart. Until his death last fall, he made an annual trip to his home state, which he always described as a "spring break," to be with friends and visit with the Society staff. He always received a warm welcome wherever he stopped.

This cultured gentleman lived in two worlds separated by several centuries of history, but throughout his life he was able to easily find a home in each.

Charles was cremated and his ashes will be brought back to Indiana to join his parents in Crown Hill. A memorial service will be held sometime in early 2011 in Indianapolis.

Prepared for the Indianapolis Literary Club by member:

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