

Quest Club: Then and Now

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December 6, 2024

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Imagine it's 1911. According to the website "Historical Events in 1911," a lot is happening in the world during that year. The city of Almaty is destroyed by a 7.7 magnitude earthquake. In Europe over 1 million men and women attend rallies to discuss a woman's right to vote. Aerial bombardment is used for the first time when Italy declares war on Turkey. Roald Amundsen of Norway is the first to reach the South Pole beating out Robert Scott from Britain by 34 days.

Meanwhile, in America tragedy strikes in New York City when the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory catches fire, causing the deaths of 145 mostly young immigrant girls. President William Taft sends 20,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexican border in response to the rebellion in Mexico. The first transcontinental airplane flight from New York to Pasadena takes 82 hours of flying over 49 days. A strong cold front passes through the Midwest creating record highs and lows as the temperature falls 70 degrees in some cities that day. In New York City Irish Americans protest the opening night production of *The Playboy of the Western World* and throw rotten fruit and vegetables at the actors. (Historical Events)

And finally the most important event of 1911: the Fort Wayne Quest Club is formed. As you can see, the world was very different from what we see today, and yet as the old saying goes: "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Earthquakes still cause destruction, women still strive to gain equal rights, wars still occur, and humans still try to conquer nature.

In America fires continue to cause death and destruction, troops continue to be sent to the Mexican border, and weather continues to wreak havoc. Airplanes still fly across country, but hopefully audiences at Quest Club will not be flinging their lunch at the speaker today.

Quest Club in 1911 is, without a doubt, different from Quest in 2024, but one thing remains the same: The purpose is “to provide a forum for Club members to prepare, present, and discuss research papers” on various topics. As Allen Steere pointed out in his Preface to the Quest Club book, “members wish to increase their knowledge through new information and acquire additional education.” (Preface, Quest book) Questors are curious, have a passion for learning, and want to discover and understand the unknown, as Charles Shepard explains in his Prayer for Questors, and that has never changed. (Prayer, Quest book)

When I first received this topic “Quest Club: Then and Now,” I thought, “Wait a minute. John Beatty wrote an excellent paper a few years ago on the history of Quest, and he covered thoroughly the changes that have taken place in the club in the past 100 years. How could I possibly top that? Thank you, John, for allowing me to utilize your paper.” Well, as Jane Gerardot pointed out in her membership report last year, Questors do not whine or complain when given their topic. They put their whole heart and soul into the process and come up with something they hope will be enjoyed by the club.

So now let's imagine it is 1912, and the newly-formed Quest Club, according to John's paper, has a total of 41 businessmen as members, who have gathered in the auditorium of the Physician's Defense Building at Wayne and Clinton streets for meetings. (Beatty paper) Most of them are enjoying puffing away on their cigars. By some amazing magical power, five Quest members from 112 years into the future suddenly barge in to what appears to be a very formal affair.

Edward Yarnelle, the new president of the early club, leaped to his feet, cigar in hand, and demanded, "What is the meaning of this rude interruption? How dare you come in here dressed the way you are. Who are you, and why are you here?"

President Melinda Haines replied, "We are members of Quest Club from the future to meet with the original Quest Club members. And what's wrong with the way we are dressed? And why are you all smoking cigars? (photo-Burry) No one smokes at Quest Club anymore."

Yarnelle stated, "What! Not smoke at our meetings? When did that happen? And as far as the way you are dressed, isn't it rather obvious? We are all wearing suits and ties and dress shoes, and you are looking rather informal in casual blue denim pants and shirts with no collars. And what is on your feet? Those shoes have rubber soles and cloth tops and are very colorful. We have seen them, but they are not suitable for our Quest meetings."

Vice-president Al Brothers replied, "These shoes are called sneakers. Everyone wears them."

"Sneakers!" Yarnell responded. "That's exactly what you are doing—sneaking around here trying to take over our meeting."

Michael Lindvall, secretary/treasurer replied, "We are not trying to take over your meeting. We merely want to discuss the changes you will encounter in the future. Things have changed in the last 112 years. Our meetings are more informal, and we dress to be comfortable."

Yarnelle then noticed, "And why have you brought women with you? As you can see, there are no women present in our group."

"Women have been allowed to join Quest Club since 1982, and they have added a great deal to our membership," Melinda Haines responded.

"How can that be?" shouted Arthur Hall, another early member. "Women don't even have the right to vote, and they certainly don't know anything about business."

Melinda reacted, "Women will be getting the right to vote in a few short years. We women are intelligent, educated, hard-working and are involved in many community organizations and have our own businesses."

Arthur Hall responded, "Our Quest Club does not have any women members, and we are solely interested in helping each other grow our businesses. Things are changing in Fort Wayne, and we need help with how to deal with labor unions, how to advertise our products, and how to learn new technology." (Beatty paper)

"Well, that much has not changed," replied ex-president Fred Hasecke. "Our businesses struggle with unions, advertising, and technology too, but we also have to deal with new technology, robots, and artificial intelligence, and women have definitely helped organizations and businesses deal with these struggles."

"What do you mean artificial intelligence? How can intelligence be artificial? How does it work? And what can robots do?" Hall demanded.

“Robots are machines that can do tasks normally done by humans, especially tasks that are repetitive or dangerous. (“Robot.” *Wikipedia*. Web. 18 June 2024.) Scientists also created artificial intelligence, which gives a computer the ability to perform intellectual processes, such as reasoning, learning, problem solving, and using language,” Fred explained. (Copeland, B.J. “Artificial Intelligence.” *Britannica.com*. 18 June 2024.)

“Now you can’t be serious! How can robots do our work? And how can computers think like humans?” Hall continued.

“Our scientists have created amazing things in the past 100 years, and each year they come up with more,” Fred added. “We have state of the art television where we watch the news, movies and sporting events, jet airplanes that can span our country in a few hours, space rockets that have allowed humans to walk on the moon, cellphones you hold in your hand, and medicines to cure many diseases. Another amazing advancement is what our automobiles can do now. We know that most likely many of your members own Model Ts that you paid \$800-900 for and that their top speed is 42 mph while traveling on mostly dirt roads. Today in 2024 you can purchase a basic car for around \$20,000 and a luxury car for \$500,000 to over a million dollars, and they can all go well over 100 miles per hour. Even more astonishing is that we now have electric cars that run on batteries that can be charged either at home or a charging station. And would you believe there are even driverless cars being used in Phoenix and San Francisco?” (waymo.com)

“The advancements you describe are beyond belief,” exclaimed Albert Bond, an early member. “We can hardly imagine so many changes in our world. If you are not solely concerned with business, how do you decide on topics for your members?”

“We are more concerned now with assigning papers on a wide range of subjects,” Fred clarified. “Our members suggest the topics, and a committee chooses which ones to use. Members give a paper every four years and are assigned a topic. We end up with a variety of ideas, everything from “The Evolution of the Bible” to “Why Does a Baseball Curve?” and to “Plastic: The Wonder Material’s Uses.”

“We have heard of plastic, and, of course, we all read the Bible, but we know a lot more about baseball,” stated Hall. “Back in 1871 the Fort Wayne Kekiongas played here as a major league team, and right now we have our own minor league team, the Fort Wayne Railroaders.” (Fort Wayne Railroaders, *Wikipedia*. Web. 8 September 2024. 2 October 2024.)

Fred pointed out, “We know all about the popularity of baseball in Fort Wayne’s past, so I’m sure you will be happy to know that Fort Wayne now has its own minor league baseball team called the Tincaps, and their ball diamond is right downtown surrounded by shops and hotels and apartments.”

“Now I’ve heard everything,” Albert Bond replied. “Have there been other changes in Fort Wayne that affected Quest Club over the next 112 years?”

Fred began to tell the early Questors of the major events that have taken place in Fort Wayne and added how Quest Club had influenced the growth of these events. According to John Beatty’s paper, the “local YWCA, the paving of Calhoun Street, the relocation of International Harvester, and the elevation of local railroad tracks”

(Beatty paper) all became possible because of discussions at Quest Club. A paper by Alfred Kettler in the 1950s showed why a new university was important to provide our young people educational opportunities for their future, and a few years later IPFW opened. (Beatty paper) That university, now called Purdue-Fort Wayne, has grown to about 9,000 students and offers many programs and majors to undergraduate and graduate students. (PU Fort Wayne)

Another instance of Quest's influence happened when Questor Mac Parker wrote four papers concerning business and industry in Fort Wayne and helped evaluate changes that were happening in our local economy. (Beatty's paper) So you can see that Quest Club has impacted Fort Wayne in many ways. Just a year ago, a Quest Club paper followed and highlighted the transformation of the old General Electric campus into an exciting property called Electric Works filled with businesses and a food court and soon to offer apartments and condos.

Fred continued, "As far as events in the world, I am sad to report that in two short years a war will break out in Europe when Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and his wife are assassinated by a Serbian nationalist. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria will battle against Russia, Great Britain, France, Serbia, and Belgium in a deadly war lasting four years and killing more than 16 million soldiers and civilians. You may think that the United States will be able to stay out of the war, but after German U-boats sink several ships, including the Lusitania carrying hundreds of Americans, the U.S. will declare war on Germany in 1917 and fight in the trenches with the rest of the Allies. It will be called the Great War and the War to End All Wars, but about 20 years later Adolf Hitler and Germany will try to take over Europe

and parts of Africa in a second world war that the United States will again enter after Pearl Harbor is bombed by Japan. (Diffen.com)

In the next 112 years, we will fight in two world wars, wars in Korea and Vietnam and the Middle East, and will drop two atomic bombs on Japan, causing a great loss of life. In 2001 the entire world will watch on television as we are attacked by terrorists in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. Even now, power struggles are occurring in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The early Questors cannot imagine these horrific events happening and are deeply saddened to know some of them will occur in their lifetime.

Trying to change the subject, Yarnelle asked, "With all these events taking place, how else has Quest Club changed?"

"I would love to answer that," remarked Melinda. "You will be happy to know that we now have 132 members, and the club is made up of every profession you can think of. We have men and women, African-Americans and Caucasians, and members who are Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. With this wide variety of people, our topics are more diverse, and our methods of researching our papers have changed. Whereas in 1912 you counted on other business people to help you solve your problems or used library books to provide information, we in 2024 can use the library, but we can also go online on our computers and research our subject matter to find books and articles in newspapers and magazines to print out. It is much easier to find information today, and in fact we often find too much.

Myron Downing, an early member, commented, "That is beyond belief for those of us who have never heard of computers. We do have to count on library books to

find information, or we invite guest speakers to share their expertise on productivity and salesmanship. We either write our papers out in longhand or use manual typewriters to type up our papers, and if we make a mistake, we have to try to erase it. Of course, we are not actually doing the typing. Our secretaries do an excellent job of typing all of our papers. How do you create your papers for meetings?"

Al Brothers explained, "We write our papers on our computers and are able to correct any mistakes immediately. We are also able to move paragraphs around to different places in the paper. When we are satisfied with our writing, we simply hit a key, which sends a message to our printer to print out the finished product."

"Incredible!!" exclaimed Yarnelle. "It almost makes writing a paper seem easy."

Al continued, "Our members would probably not agree with you because we often come up with too much information and have to cut part of it out. Because of the internet, we have access to more research than we can possibly use."

"How did all these wars and changes in America affect Quest Club?" asked Downing.

"Good question!" responded Al. "These events have definitely affected Quest Club. For example, an early paper dealt with problems soldiers faced when they came back from World War I. Others discussed women's suffrage, the miracle of building the Panama Canal, and how to reform our prisons."

Yarnelle wondered, "With all these changes over the years, do you still host formal parties?"

Fred explained, "We do still enjoy our parties, but they have really changed. Until about 15 years ago, our gatherings were formal affairs with men wearing tuxedos

and women donning long gowns. We also had musical programs and dramatic performances, but that has changed over the years with less formal clothing and more informal programs. You may be saddened to find out that last year we had only one party and the dress was business casual, not even requiring a suit, and there was no program. However, one diehard Questor appeared dressed to the 9s, clad in his tuxedo and wearing a broad smile. He remarked to those around him, 'I refuse to dress casually at a Quest Club party.'

"Good for him!" shouted Yarnelle.

Michael Lindvall countered, "You need to understand our culture has changed. Dress codes are more relaxed in business, education, and social gatherings. If you attend a concert, funeral, or wedding, you will likely see these blue denim pants on a few people. Many of us feel our culture has gotten a little too casual."

Yarnelle declared, "I'm not sure I would want to live in that future time period. Let us end this discussion now, and allow me to inquire how you will travel back to 2024?"

Mark Rudolph stepped forward and affirmed their group would journey back the same way they arrived—by an electric car with the ability to fly, and he would be at the wheel. "It's the latest in time travel and transports you to any period in history. And now we must depart before our electric charge dies. Obviously, you do not provide charging stations in 1912."

Yarnelle summarized, "It has been enlightening to learn about the changes in the next 100 years, but we all agree that while some are frightening and sorrowful, the advances in medicine and technology are at least advantageous. But please tell us if

your papers are in the same high quality as ours and if the purpose of the club remains the same.”

“Michael Lindvall responded, “I can assure you that our members still wish to increase their knowledge and to create excellent research papers.”

Yarnelle let out a sigh of relief and murmured, “We are confident that Quest Club is in good hands in the future. We bid you a fond farewell as we desire to get back to our cigars and our meeting.”

Melinda gathered her group and led them to the electric vehicle and then turned back to add, “We thank you for being the ones who saw the need for Quest Club so many years ago. We are grateful for your foresight and will endeavor to maintain the level of excellence you established in 1911.”

And with that, the EV car soared into the sky.

It would be entertaining to travel back in time. Maybe in the future, but in the meantime I contacted some of our members who have been in Quest Club the longest and had some delightful responses from them. Mac Parker believes the papers have gotten better over the years, particularly since women have joined the group. The program committee always does a good job, but he would like to see more topics on current events that would stimulate more audience participation. (Parker email)

Fred Hasecke suggested that our culture is different than it was 112 years ago, and I have tried to highlight how that has impacted Quest Club today. (Hasecke email)

Dave Ridderheim mentioned that locations have changed over the years and that membership numbers have grown. He especially enjoyed one particular topic he was given: "Military Aviation – John Glenn to Buck Rogers." (Ridderheim email)

Sherrill Colvin remembers being on the committee to discuss whether to include women as Quest members. At first many Questors felt it wasn't necessary because there were already several groups for women, including Duodecimo and the Fort Wayne Women's Club, to satisfy their educational, cultural, and intellectual desires. However, Sherrill now concedes that including women in the organization has been one of the best things that has happened. (Colvin interview)

Howard Chapman remembers the discussions about including women, but several Questors were not in favor of the group becoming a couples' club. Howard fondly recalls a particular meeting when George Mather stood up during the question and answer period and shouted, "When will women be allowed?" After the by-laws were changed and the controversy was over, women did become members, and it was never a problem.

Another incident involving women that Howard recalled was when Allen Steere in his 90s stood up at the end of a meeting and sang out, "I'm getting married in the morning!" to the enjoyment of all.

Howard's favorite paper was on William F. Buckley because he was able to contact Buckley and meet him in New York and interview him. Over the years they became friends and had the opportunity to get together several times. One hundred years ago it would have been difficult for the early Questors to make a connection like that.

Other differences that Howard cited between then and now include no executive director, no technology, papers were longer, the president said very little and called on someone to stand and give a 1-2 minute prayer, and men always wore a coat and tie. (Chapman interview)

Dick Florea recalls he was invited to join Quest in 1978 when it was an all-male membership, and everyone did wear a coat and tie. One humorous incident Dick remembers was that Allen Tremper, when he was at an advanced age, attended every meeting, always sat right in front of the speaker, and promptly fell asleep. Dick also recalls that in 1985 Fort Wayne Community was deeply involved in school desegregation issues, and he was horrified to find that his next paper was on that controversial subject. He worked hard on the paper but was still worried about the questions that could be asked at the end. When Dick arrived to give his paper that day, he found that Superintendent Bill Anthis (a former Questor) had brought the entire school board and seated them right in front of him as a show of support. Dick said it all ended well, and he still has a letter from Anthis saying it was “the single best presentation concerning desegregation as it applies to schools” that he had heard.

Dick added that he remembered with great sadness the day in 1985 when David Peters began his paper and suddenly collapsed and dropped to the floor. Three doctors present rushed to administer CPR, and the EMS soon arrived, but the members all sat silently in stunned witness to the unsuccessful effort to revive him. (Florea interview)

Mick Parrott, another longtime Questor, remembers joining the club in 1977 when he was the youngest member. Quest was a “proudly all-male organization,” and it was a real honor to be invited to join. Jackets and ties were expected, and the Fort Wayne Country Club set the right tone for business-like discussions. He recalls presenting six papers in all on such subjects as “Who Gets the Heart?” and “The Electric Church.” He said two of the most memorable papers presented to the group were from R. Nelson Snider and his paper on “Anatomy of Humor” and from Bud Latz and his hilarious subject “Sex over Sixty.”

Mick added that the question and answer period after a paper was presented was “always lively and sometimes a bit testy. Two senior members who regularly terrorized the speaker with very intriguing and often controversial questions were from George Mather, Lead Pastor at First Presbyterian Church, and Leonard Goldstein, strongly opinionated local businessman and political activist. Generally both of these brilliant men knew more about the speaker’s subject than the speaker himself and would often ask some oblique question that led to a rambling answer from the flustered speaker.” (Parrott interview) Mick says he remembers living in terror that one of these fellows would raise his hand with a question on the paper he had just delivered. It usually happened.

Another humorous recollection Mick had was the day Mark GiaQuinta appeared the day of his paper with a large dog-eared yellow legal pad on which he had written his Quest paper. Apparently, Mark skipped lunch and continued to write his paper right up to the moment he was called to the lectern. Amazingly, it was a very good paper.

One year Mick and Joan Goldner were in charge of the annual Quest party and decided to shake things up by changing the venue from the country club to the newly spruced up Broadway RR Station. Mick admits it was a bad choice because “the food was cold, the entertainment boring, the sound system broke down, and the setting generally uncomfortable.” (Parrott email) Needless to say, he was never asked to organize another Quest party.

Now that he has been in Quest 48 years, Mick emphasizes that it has always been “a very special part of (his) life in Fort Wayne, then and now.” (Parrott email)

It would be enlightening to know what the next 100 years will hold for Fort Wayne and Quest Club, but unfortunately no one has found a way to travel into the future. There will be many changes, especially in the area of technology, although it’s hard to imagine what more technology can do. With artificial intelligence on the rise, it will be difficult to determine what’s true and what isn’t. Driverless cars will, no doubt, become standard, and maybe they will actually fly. No one knows how these will affect our government, the economy, and culture, but the changes will likely be as dramatic as they have been in the last 112 years. We can hope our club members continue to want to learn and share their knowledge and that they will want to support and be involved in all that Fort Wayne has to offer.

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