



SPOKANE CLUB

# LIVING HISTORY WITH A LIVING LEGEND

BY KATE SPENCER





## THE SPOKANE CLUB

*In February of 1890, a group of business and civic leaders in the town of Spokane Falls came together to form an organization that has endured for 125 years.*

*That organization is the Spokane Club. This iconic club has shaped, and been shaped by, the greater history of Spokane and the Inland Northwest for many generations. It has survived and thrived by evolving with the times, the people and the economy, from the small town of Spokane Falls to the robust city that is today's Spokane.*

Like many of Spokane's historic landmarks in the downtown core, the Spokane Club was built from the ashes of the Great Fire of 1889. What started as a potentially containable emergency went out of control quickly because of the failure of the town's fire hoses to maintain water pressure. The predominantly wood building went up like matchsticks.

In a misguided effort to contain the fire, workers set dynamite to the buildings, which only spread the fire's reach. In the end, 32 blocks were completely destroyed. Remarkably, only one person died.

In the aftermath of the fire, businessmen who were now without offices set up shop in temporary tents and began the arduous task of rebuilding the town. One of those businessmen was Herbert B. Nichols, a driving force behind the creation of the Spokane Club. He arrived in Spokane Falls in 1886 and established the first electric light plant and the first telephone company.

Six months after the Great Fire, followed by a harsh winter with snowstorms frequently blocking railroad tracks, delaying supplies and mail, Nichols was fed up with wet tents and makeshift meeting spaces. He dreamed of an elegant gentleman's club modeled after the historic clubs of England. Nichols rallied 20 prominent leaders around his cause, including Arthur A. Newbery, who ran a coach line and later, the Northern Pacific Railways, and William A.



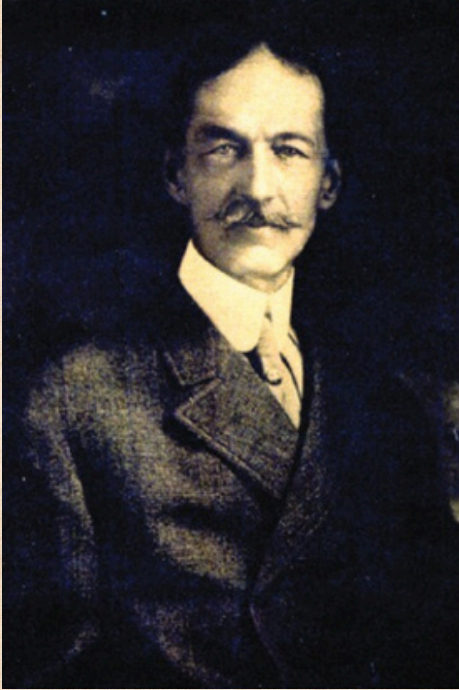
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F. Lewis Clark

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lost, great wealth with the rise and decline of these industries.

A native of Maine and educated at Harvard, Clark was a devoted yachtsman, the Commodore of the New York Yacht Club and one of the founders of the America's Cup race. Clark came west in his 20s and founded C&O Mill and Elevator, the largest flour mill in the Pacific Northwest. At 29, he became the youngest person to ever serve as President of the Spokane Club.

In 1900, Clark proposed the building of a new clubhouse to occupy the top three stories of a building on the northeast corner of Riverside and Washington. Clark, who owned the property, built the club's second home and leased it to the club members. The architect who designed the new club quarters was John K. Dow. The building opened in 1901 and for years was known as the Spokane Club Building. That building still stands today and is now known as the Legion Building, part of the East Downtown Historic District.

Taylor, a former Spokane Falls Mayor and President of Spokane National Bank. Each of the 20 men invested \$500 in the club venture.

Nichols took on the task of locating a building suitable for occupancy and remodel. In that role, he became the first Club secretary, with Taylor serving as Treasurer and Newbery as the first club President. The enterprising Nichols was soon successful in his search. The first home of the Spokane Club was just one room on the second floor of the Lamona Block, where today's Ridpath Hotel is currently located.

As Spokane grew, (the "Falls" was dropped from the town's name in 1891), membership to the Spokane Club grew with it and soon the need

for larger quarters became a pressing concern. Undertaking this next phase of growth became the mission of F. Lewis Clark, the club's second president who served from September, 1890 to February, 1891.

Clark was a multimillionaire who made his fortune in the leading industries of his day: mining, milling, real estate, lumber and banking. Not coincidentally, these were the leading industries in Spokane at the time and Clark, like many of his contemporaries, amassed, and later





*The new permanent home of the Spokane Club.*

By 1910, with 500 members and bursting at the seams, the Spokane Club had once again outgrown its location. Club leadership decided they needed a permanent home that would allow them the space to accommodate their next 500 members and well beyond that number. Kirtland Cutter, an esteemed colleague and member of the club, was called upon to create a permanent clubhouse. Cutter's name would become synonymous with the Age of Elegance in Spokane.

Though lacking a formal education in architecture, Cutter had a solid background in art and a world traveler's eye for classic design elements. His innate ability to "see" a finished structure in his mind's eye, coupled with his consistent choice of technically gifted partners, were two of Cutter's keys to success. Beyond

his substantial talent, Cutter was also a man who found himself precisely in the right place at the right time.

Prior to the Great Fire, Cutter had won commissions to build some extraordinary private homes in Spokane, notably the mansion of James Glover, the founding father of Spokane, and the Gothic Tudor mansion, Undercliff, for F. Lewis Clark. But Cutter was still unable to find enough steady work in the field he loved. To supplement his income, he worked part time at First National Bank for his uncle Horace. The day after the fire, with a business district to rebuild, Cutter quit his bank job and never looked back.

The Cutter-designed clubhouse on



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Riverside and Monroe was completed in 1910 and opened for member use in 1911. In December of that same year, the new Spokane Club was formally celebrated at a gala attended by over 700 members and their guests. For over 100 years, this Georgian Revival classic at the corner of Monroe and Riverside has been the central headquarters for the Spokane Club.

The evolution from a gentlemen's club to a multi-faceted gathering spot for families, foodies and fitness fans didn't occur easily or overnight. But the seed of one of those changes was



*Touring the Northwest circa 1922*

clearly planted in the 120 pages of Cutter's original blueprints and the finished building.

Prior to the Riverside and Monroe location, women were only allowed

in the club once a year for a special occasion. In the design of the new building, Cutter envisioned the front of the clubhouse with two entrances on Riverside, one to welcome men

and the other to welcome women.

The primary entrance, still in use today, had an air of stately distinction and elegance. This was the men's entrance and generations of townsmen, visiting dignitaries and performers have climbed the entry stairs.

From Mark Twain to George Plimpton, Teddy Roosevelt to George H. Bush, Harry Truman to Bill Clinton and Bing Crosby to Lorne Greene, the club has hosted lectures, fund raisers, meetings and parties for an incredibly diverse group of people. Many of them have stayed at the club's hotel, which has been part of the club's services since 1910 and remains today one of the best locations in town for full service accommodations.

The secondary entrance, still intact and occasionally used today for special events, was much smaller



and very discreet. This street-level entry was designated as the women's entrance. Wives and daughters were welcome to step down the stairs into their own elegant reception and dining rooms.

They were not, however, granted access to the rest of the club except when accompanying their husbands or fathers for a special event, nor were they considered members in their own right. These regulations, like many at the club, would change dramatically over the decades, mirroring the social and cultural changes of a growing city.

World War I brought new challenges to the all-male club. Young men left Spokane in droves to join the war effort, including those living in the 64 bedrooms on the club's lodging floors. There were no military installations or wartime industries to bolster the economy and Spokane, and the Spokane Club, suffered the results.

As the war stretched on and membership and funds dwindled, the club was facing foreclosure. It was saved at the last minute by a heroic group of club members led by Thaddeus Lane who personally delivered \$150,000 to the Spokane County Courthouse to redeem the debt. Today's club is a non-profit, member-owned organization.

New Years Eve, 1915, was celebrated state-wide as Washingtonians' last night for legal alcohol. Prohibition would go into effect the following day. At least that was the official story. But

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*Thaddeus Lane*

as the recently-aired, Rum Runner's Paradise on KSPS showed, the Prohibition years in Spokane were a booming time for entrepreneurial rum runners, bootleggers and moonshiners as well as their loyal customers. Some of those customers socialized regularly at the Spokane Club.

The back side of the club on Main Street was, and still is, the delivery entrance for all food and beverage vendors. Local legend has it that many clandestine deliveries were made to the back door of the club during Prohibition. Those prized items found their way to storage in the sub basement and later, to private parties in the upper rooms of the club. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, most of the Northwest rum runners went back to their previous day jobs and the government returned to the lucrative business of alcohol management.

A few years later, the Spokane Club welcomed "one-armed bandits" to its basement level. Slot machines were a highly profitable, wildly popular enterprise in Spokane starting in the 1930s and the Spokane Club had the best room in town for "the slots."

The Rendezvous Room with its knotty pine paneling boasted a wide variety of machines in close proximity to a fully stocked bar. The money window was open for brisk business



and the room became a favorite gathering place for members, as well as a dependable profit center for the club. It remained so for nearly two decades. Today, it serves as an employee break room.

World War II brought many of the same challenges to the Spokane Club's stability as the first Great War, but this time the club was better prepared to deal with the challenges. It offered special military memberships for one dollar and waived all dues for armed forces officers. Both the officers and the club benefited from this arrangement.

Ration points were in short supply for private clubs, but officers fared much better. Many member officers gave their ration points to

the club which in turn used the points to special order items that were in short supply.

Red Cross War Work groups were formed by the club's women who gathered weekly to sew and knit for wounded servicemen. The meetings averaged 75-100 women who met regularly until the war ended.

The end of the war brought several decades of great prosperity to the Spokane Club and it became the hot spot for social and civic events. Some of the best parties in Spokane's history have occurred at the club including military receptions, Christmas galas,



*Debutantes and their escorts*

the New Year's Open House and the legendary White Cotillion.

The first Cotillion was held in 1950 and for 25 years it was the singular avenue for Spokane debutantes to receive their formal introduction to Spokane society. The presentation ceremony was followed by a dance where friends and families of the "debs" mixed and mingled.

Membership to the Spokane Club was a mandatory requirement for presentation at the Cotillion and membership numbers always spiked in the months preceding the event. Typical attendance at the Cotillion was 40-50 debutantes and 150-200 guests.

During the course of the Cotillion's 25-year run, two major social movements and one controversial war changed the landscape of life in our country forever. The Women's Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War all contributed to major cultural shifts.



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Changes for the Spokane Club during this time included reconstructing membership classifications to give men and women equal status, allowing women full use of the club facilities and allowing women the right to hold office.

However, much like its namesake city, the club was sluggish in implementing some of the cultural changes it faced. It wasn't until 1995 that the first female club President, Priscilla Gilkey, was elected. Although membership was open to minorities in the late 70s, the club did not see significant growth in that area until the late 90s and early 2000s. Today, diversity in the both club membership and leadership is robust.

In a city that remains predominantly white (the last census shows the City of Spokane as 86.7% white), opportunities to invite minority members to join would have been rare throughout most of the Spokane Club's history, even without the prejudices and economic disparities of the times. But in the 1940s, when many local businesses refused to employ minority workers, the Spokane Club's waiters, bartenders and maids were African American. One of them was Will Barron.

Over the course of Barron's 51 years at the Spokane Club, he rose through the ranks to become the wine steward and Maitre D' of the club's multiple fine dining venues. In 1992, the wine list he worked long and devotedly to build won Wine Spectator magazine's Award of Excellence. Barron helped

*When Will Barron retired in 1997, over 400 members gathered to laud Barron's impeccable style and grace.*

define a new era of elegance in dining at the Spokane Club that set the bar for the rest of the city. When he retired in 1997, over 400 members gathered to laud Barron's impeccable style and grace.

In a current footnote to history, on November 20, 2014, the Barron Wine Room was established in loving memory of Will Barron. What started as the vision of three Spokane Club members — Toby Hatley, Mick McDowell and Paul Viren — and their desire for a first class wine cellar, caught the imagination of fellow Club members who helped to provide the seed money for the project.

"We wanted to honor Will Barron and his legacy with this project," said Mick McDowell, whose idea it was to name the room after Mr. Barron. "And we want to build on that incredible



*Will Barron, Club Maitre D'*

legacy both for our current members and future generations of Spokane Club members."

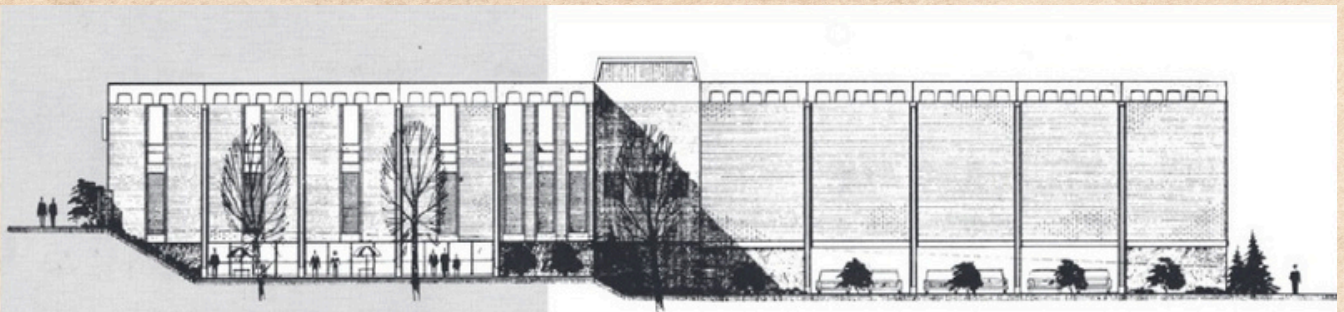
The launch party for the wine room brought all the founding investors out for the celebration as well as prospective new investors. Only members who invest in the room by purchasing wine lockers are allowed access to the room, adding to its cachet and glamour.

Mr. Barron is the first person to have an honorary namesake room at the Spokane Club in the club's 125 years of operation.

"I think it's great," said Reho Barron, the beloved wife of Will who was the guest of honor at the launch party and a former club staff member herself. "It would make him really proud."



*The Barron Wine Room*



**Athletic Facilities  
for the entire Family!**

Competition swimming pool, gymnasium, squash and handball courts, snack bar, athletic store, barber shop, massage room, Boys and Girls areas—lockers, showers, dressing rooms. Men and Women conditioning departments—lockers, showers, sauna and steam baths.



*The proposed plans for the athletic building addition. When the downtown Athletic facility opened in 1968, it was the largest and most comprehensive center in the Inland Northwest.*

Social and cultural changes continued their progression through Spokane and the Spokane Club, signaling the end of many eras. But another cultural movement was rapidly rising and the Spokane Club rose to meet it.

Physical fitness first became a household name in 1951 when Jack LaLanne, the father of the fitness movement, launched his television show. LaLanne preached the importance of exercise and healthy diet to a primarily female audience, encouraging his followers to not only exercise along with him at home but to join their local health clubs. The message stuck.

When the Spokane Club opened its downtown Athletic facility in 1968, it was the largest and most comprehensive center in the Inland Northwest. Long a dream of the future thinkers at the club, the idea of an athletic center went against the grain of a traditional social club, which caused some lively debate among members. But progress, and a strong sense of future growth, prevailed.

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*Athletic facility planners, 1965*

*Joe Lux, W. S. Bingham, Walter Toly, Ben Smick, Joseph Burke and Joe Smith*



*Community and member engagement remains the club's greatest strength.*

A sky bridge between the Cutter clubhouse on Riverside and the Athletic Center on Main remains a living symbol of the joining of the business and social side of the club with the fitness lifestyle. Many world class athletes have trained at the club including Don Kardong, the father of Bloomsday, and mountain climbers Chris Kopczynski, John Roskelley and Kay LeClaire who each in their own right made history in their sport.

As anyone who has lived to be over 100 can attest, history has its strengths as well as its challenges. One of the challenges is that people think they know you, even when they haven't seen you in years. Spokane Falls isn't what it used to be and neither is the Spokane Club.

The upside of being over 100 is a rich, shared history. The history of Spokane is ingrained in the history of the Spokane Club, reflecting

the struggles and triumphs of each generation and the social change wrought by those engagements. The Spokane Club, like Spokane itself, draws on the best of its past to shape the best of its future.

***To learn more about the Spokane Club visit [www.SpokaneClub.org](http://www.SpokaneClub.org) or call 459-4236 to schedule a tour.***

