

EDGAR S. BYERS

Edgar S. Byers was born in 1876 in Sharpsville, Pennsylvania. Ten years after his birth his family moved to Cleveland. In 1901, after attending Western Reserve University Law School, he teamed up with Carl Friebolin in what became the longest unchanged law partnership in the history of the Cleveland Bar.

Byers was a Republican until he became an admirer of Tom L. Johnson, but as with many other members of the City Club his loyalty was always more to the man than to the party. This independent attitude was clearly demonstrated in the national election of 1924. When the Republicans nominated Calvin Coolidge, and the Democrats put forward the equally conservative John W. Davis, Byers and a number of his friends supported Robert La Follette, who was running on the Progressive ticket. To the amazement of all the political pundits Byers managed to organize a political machine that carried the county for La Follette. Unfortunately his next political effort, for Peter Witt's mayoralty primary campaign in 1932, was not so successful.

Through the years, until his death on February 21, 1963, Byers continued to play an active role in his com-

munity. His letters to the editors of the Cleveland papers were often the rallying point for strong-minded independents, who subsequently initiated civic protests or taxpayers' suits to protect the public interest. It has been estimated that he saved Cleveland taxpayers several million dollars by his intervention in such affairs as the building of the Stadium and the infamous land frauds of the late 1920s. On the other hand, Byers chafed at his failure to get the city administration to pay what he considered an adequate price to the owners of the city's transit system, when it was turned over to Cleveland in 1942.

Byers joined the City Club in 1915 and served as a director in 1927-30. The daily lunch sessions with his friends at the Soviet Table provided him with his greatest satisfaction. When Byers, Doty, and Witt gathered at the table, it was an unfortunate man who ventured an opinion that ran counter to theirs. The only escape was the sudden discovery of an urgent appointment.

Byers had another commitment that coincided with his devotion to the City Club. For over forty-three years he was a clarion advocate of civil liberties and had been called "the outstanding liberal in the State of Ohio, a constitutional liberal who believes in free speech, free press, and free creed." In 1958 the Cleveland chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union gave him the rare distinction of an honorary life membership in recognition of his years of work for civil liberties.