Good evening. I'd like you to meet an Ohioan tonight who has been nearly lost in the years since his death on February 10, 1863. That was, of course, in the depth of the Civil War. Plans for the Battle of Vicksburg were being made. Lincoln was planning his 55th birthday. Yet THE front page of Harper's Weekly featured my topics obituary. The New York Times' obit mentioned the fact that he was the second wealthiest man in America—behind only William Backhouse Astor, son of John Jacob Astor.

If you were to drive down I-71 to Cincinnati, just as you near downtown off to the left, you'll see a large wooded area, Eden Park. It was his. If you drive through that park, you'll soon find the Cincinnati Art Museum. His family founded and funded it---as well as the attached Cincinnati Art Academy. If you go into the Art Museum, you would find a bust of him by Hiram Powers, who did it in appreciation of his support.

If you left the museum and continued to the top of Mt. Adams, you would soon find the old Rookwood Pottery Building, his granddaughter started it. If you looked down on Cincinnati's downtown from Rookwood, you'd see Great American Ballpark, home of the Cincinnati Reds. His grandson was a member of the first team in

1868. He was also a member of the Ohio Supreme Court—before playing baseball. (The careers these justices have after they retire!) Then, if you continued walking around Mt. Adams, you'd be walking on the land he planted with thousands of grape vines, some still visible and bearing fruit. He is today regarded as the Father of American wine.

Or, if you get downtown and visited his house on Pike Street, you would be going to the Taft Museum but no, the name is not Taft. But if you did visit the Taft, you'd find he commissioned handsome murals by Robert S. Duncanson, a noted black artist of the Hudson Valley School. If you drove east out Columbia Parkway, you'd be driving on land he owned that also was once full of his vineyards.

Or, if our journey took us to Washington, to the U.S. Capitol perhaps to admire the statuary you'd find a connection. And if you traveled just a bit south, you'd come to the House Office Building named after a former Speaker of the House who was his great-grandson. Incidentally, that rather promiscuous great-grandson was also husband of Teddy Roosevelt's unruly daughter, Alice Roosevelt. (Their marriage was tempestuous. They both practiced low fidelity with high frequency.)

The Congressional Office Building, there at Independence and New Jersey Avenues is, of course, the Longworth Building, named after Nicholas Longworth--The Third. And that is also the name of my brief biographical study tonight, Nicholas Longworth, only it is the great-grandfather--Nicholas Longworth The First---Nick the Timeless.

Our Nicholas Longworth was born January 16, 1783, the year The Revolutionary War ended. That would seem to be an auspicious start for young Nick Longworth except that his father, Thomas, was a Tory, a deeply loyal Royal Magistrate to King George III and, therefore, the despised enemy of the victorious rebels. Thomas Longworth, once the King's representative in Newark, N.J., was fined and taxed into poverty, his extensive property holdings confiscated. The family finances were ruined. Two of Nick's impoverished brothers fled to South Carolina, surely the most royal of the original 13 colonies.

He, too, went to South Carolina where Joseph and Archibald Longworth had worked hard and managed well enough to become planters. Young Nicholas, poor and 18 years old, worked there briefly as a cotton broker.

While living just outside Charleston, he met and fell in love with Mary.

Her family, wealthy patricians, ran large, slave-operated plantation in Georgia and South Carolina. The notion of people owning people repulsed young Nick and in 1801, he left the south, slavery and the love of his life.

He returned to Newark, New Jersey, scraped some money together and then headed to Pittsburg where he caught a flatboat bound for Cincinnati. He arrived in May, 1803, just 21-years-old with a leather trunk and a lawyer's briefcase and looking to start his career. He carried in the briefcase an introduction to Judge Jacob Burnet, a former neighbor in New Jersey whose family was smart enough to have fought against England. Cincinnati then was a town of 800, most living in log cabins. For a dollar a week, Nick lived and ate with Judge Burnet. He began to read the law and after six months felt qualified enough to be tested and then start his practice.

A few facts about young Mr. Longworth: He was short—between 5'2 and 5'4. He was homely. He was eccentric. He helped the downtrodden, both black and white. While some are gardeners, he

truly was a horticulturalist. He was quite political. He was charming and witty. He was a winemaker. He owned land. He helped thousands of German immigrants. He was rich. He whittled. He mumbled to himself and often referred to himself as Old Nick. He caused Cincinnati to be named The Queen City. He was an art patron. His home was where the visiting celebrities came to dine and converse. His house today is a gem of a small museum.

As Longworth was hanging out his shingle to practice law, an accused horse thief asked to be represented by young Nick, who managed to wrench a "Not Guilty" verdict from the jury. Trouble was the young man didn't have any money to pay Longworth's fee. Instead, he offered either his saddle or the two copper stills he owned. Nick suggested he might need the saddle to ride that stolen horse out of town--- which is where he belonged. So Nick ended up having to collect the stills. He went to haul them from Joel William's Waterside Tavern where Williams was starting his own distillery. The whisky maker proposed a swap. Instead of the two stills, he'd give him eighteen acres of land way out on Western Row between Sixth and Eighth Streets. Williams called it "wasteland and not worth shucks." Way out on Western Row

turned out today to be Central Avenue and the property was worth $2,000,000 at the time of Longworth's death in 1863.

Land swaps for a defense became a key ingredient to Longworth's practice. He bought and sold land on a continuing basis. The little town of 800 had 161,000 inhabitants at the time of his death, a significant number of them living on land owned by Longworth. In his lifetime he saw Cincinnati emerge from the rawest frontier to a village, then a town, then a city. He saw farms hacked out of the dense forest. He saw the first steamboat arrive, the Miami-Erie Canal open, the arrival of the stagecoach---the railroad---the telegraph. Given the fact that Cincinnati had expanded exponentially by 1860, it is easy to see how he made big money in real estate. It is not as easy to understand how he made so much--except to say he was extraordinarily shrewd.

Longworth acquired his home in 1830. It had been built by Martin Baum, who went broke in the early 1820s. Longworth bought it and 10 acres for $30,000. He added wings to it and it stayed as he envisioned it until the Sinton family acquired it in 1871. Just to keep the house's provenance correct, Anna Sinton, daughter of a coal and iron baron, married Charles Phelps Taft, publisher of

the Cincinnati Times-Star and half-brother of William Howard Taft. The childless Tafts gave it to the people of Cincinnati as The Taft Museum. (If you were to continue making that theoretical drive down I-71, when you take that curving tunnel, you are passing under the edge of The Taft Museum and directly under Lytle Park.)

Back to Old Nick, early on in his trip to fame, wealth and eccentricity, he would gladly provide 300 one-pound loaves of whole wheat bread to needy Cincinnatians. Every Monday morning, they would line up outside his home waiting for the baking to be done. They were then given, at no cost, a loaf of fresh bread. Unfortunately, one day there wasn't enough wheat flour to make the needed 300 loaves. Nick suggested the baker throw rye flour into the mix. The baker did. When the bread was baked, and the loaves handed out, some of the recipients grumbled that they were not getting what they were used to. Some even rejected the bread. The next week, and ever after, no more bread was doled out.

During the 1850s, he held regular office hours at the township office. He would listen to the pleas of those who needed help. He tended to help personally only those who were the most

desperate, referring others to existing charitable enterprises.

When you combine a man with vast property holdings and an intense curiosity about horticulture, you have an opportunity for great things to happen—and they did. Longworth experimented widely and wildly with grapes. Exhibiting a Jeffersonian belief, Longworth abhorred the consumption of hard alcohol. Today we probably underappreciate the reasoning behind the temperance movement. But in the mid-1800s, alcohol abuse was rampant along with the associated ills of destroyed marriages, families and careers. Wine was a naturally made alcoholic drink that fostered civility while eliminating what was once called "the heartbreak of distilled spirits."

The influx of Germans, more inclined toward beer and wine than whiskey, made a ready audience for his experimentation. He was able to produce a suitable hock wine, such as the dry whites grown along the Rhine. But things began to change when he planted the first Catawba cuttings in 1825. Over time the Catawba became the most planted grape in America. It made Ohio the wine capital of the United States. Longworth's sparkling Catawba inspired poetry from Henry

Wadsworth Longfellow. Here's the last stanza of "Ode to Catawba":

And this song of the vine,
This greeting of mine,
The winds and the birds shall deliver
To the Queen of the West
In her garlands dressed
On the banks of the beautiful river.

And that is how Cincinnati came to be known as "The Queen City." The poem was received after Longworth shipped a case of his sparkling Catawba to the poet's home in Cambridge, Mass. The sparkling became known throughout the United States and sold for the same price as French champagne. Charles Mackay of "The Illustrated London News" wrote that, "It transcends the champagne of France."

By 1859, there were two thousand acres of vineyards in the Cincinnati area. They produced about six hundred thousand gallons or about three million bottles of wine.

Besides the vineyards and the wineries (he had two), Longworth's gardens were extraordinary and well worth the visit. One Cincinnati history, "The Story of The Queen City" recounts a

wonderful story about the gardens. One summer morning, a tall man who appeared to have outgrown his clothes hesitatingly passed through the gates of the Pike St. garden. Time hung heavy on his long, lean hands because the business, which had brought him to Cincinnati, had not materialized. He had killed some of it by a visit to the observatory. The site which most appealed to his tourist sense was Longworth's garden, which was talked about even over in Illinois. "In the middle of the gravel path leading to a pillared portico, a small, queerly dressed old man was weeding. Loose pantaloons lay in folds over his shoe latchets and a shirt with a huge collar almost obscured his ears." The tall man said, "Excuse me, but I have heard a great deal about the beauty of these grounds and would be interested in seeing them. Does your master allow strangers to inspect his premises?" Longworth replied, "My master, they say, is a queer duck. He doesn't allow visitors, but he makes an exception about every time someone does come. He would be glad in the present case, to consider you a friend, sir. But before viewing the garden, perhaps you would like to taste his wine." "Excuse me, Mr. Longworth. Mine was a foolish mistake." "Not at all. I'm quite used to it. Some days I earn as much as a quarter showing visitors my own grounds and that's honest money for a fellow who used to

be a lawyer." And that's how Nicholas Longworth first met Abraham Lincoln.

Besides the grapes and gardens, he had two other discoveries either of which alone would have put him in some Horticultural Hall of Fame. He proved that many strawberries are infertile among themselves and require a pollinator. His theory and its publication led to explosive growth in strawberries at the marketplace and changed them from an infrequent luxury to a regularly available, delicious commodity. He also introduced the first domesticated variety of black raspberry without which we would never have tasted Graeters' black raspberry chocolate chip ice cream.

The record is not clear that Longworth's home, Belmont, was a station on the Underground Railroad. But there are sufficient anecdotes that could lead you to believe that the gnome of Pike St. helped escaping slaves head north through Ohio. Because there was so much secrecy involved in a project that moved human beings from station to station, not much was ever written down. It was just too dangerous. There is in the front yard of today's Taft Museum a deep, but scalable, well-like cavern that once opened into

the basement of the building. There is absolutely no reason for it to be where it is. Near where that entrance was there are 24 stick numbers etched into the brick that were next to the entrance. It's flimsy enough evidence but clearly dates back to the period when he owned the house. Couple that with the fact that his home was less than three quarters of a mile from the Ohio River dividing the free from slave states. Still circumstantial.

Then consider this verified story of an encounter with a runaway slave who was captured on a Cincinnati street near the Longworth's home. The slave-owner had just captured his man. The meeting of the three of them was not accidental. Longworth confronted the slave owner. There was little he could do since the law of the land favored the capturer, not the captive. Longworth instead took another tack. He offered to buy him outright, then and there, paying whatever was asked. The transaction was completed for $500. Papers of emanuation were signed. The newly freed man immediately went to work for Longworth where he made a good living as a paid member of the household staff as Longworth's personal manservant. This is but one verified story. Longworth was said to have purchased the freedom of more than half a dozen men fleeing north from slave owning states. By making

outright purchases and then giving them their papers, Longworth violated none of the archaic laws of the land.

It may have been difficult to be the manservant for the queer old duck but it had its rewards. The house overflowed with artwork and artists. Worthington Whittredge, one of those artists, said in his autobiography, "It may be said with entire truth that there was never a young artist of talent who appeared in Cincinnati and was poor and needed help that Mr. Longworth did not willingly assist him."

Longworth and the others of his day believed that the possession of works of art by a city demonstrated its enlightenment. Whittredge said, "His house contained many valuable paintings and pieces of statuary, the latter mostly the work of American sculptors—Powers, Clevenger and others he assisted in their studies abroad. Among the painting was a large scene from Hamlet by Benjamin West and several other excellent examples of the Dutch School at the time of Rembrandt. These pictures were to me a wonderful inspiration. When it is remembered that these works, all delicate to handle and some of them large canvases, were got out to Cincinnati before there were railroads or canals or

steamboats for even part of the way, we begin to perceive what must have been the love of art pervading the breast of this singular man."

Perhaps his most favored and accomplished artist was neoclassical sculptor Hiram Powers. Longworth found him working in a Cincinnati museum crafting displays out of wax. Nick paid to further his education. Eventually, when he was ready, Longworth sent him off to Washington with letters of introduction to President Andrew Jackson. Powers carved the bust that stands in the U.S. Capitol today. The sculpture was so successful he also did busts of Daniel Webster, John Calhoun, Martin Van Buren and Chief Justice John Marshall. Longworth later funded Powers' trip to Florence, Italy, where he resided the rest of his life. Powers reciprocated by naming his firstborn Nicholas Longworth Powers.

In the foyer of the Taft Museum, you can find eight handsome murals—each nine and a half feet by six feet painted by Robert Scott Duncanson. They were hidden for a while when the Tafts covered them over with wallpaper but that also tended to protect them from aging. They were painted right on the walls and remain today one of the largest pre-Civil War mural schemes in the country. When Longworth financed Duncanson's trip to Italy, his

letter of introduction said in part: "This letter will be handed to you by Mr. Duncanson, a self-taught artist of our city. He is a man of integrity and gentlemanly deportment, and when you shall see his first landscape he shall paint in Italy, advise me of the name of the artist in Italy that, with the same experience, can paint so fine a picture."

So there you have it, a brief sketch of a man of accomplishment in totally diverse fields. A man who used his money to brighten the lives of many through art, food, wine. He was simply an eccentric, decent human being who deserves to be well-remembered.