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The Occult Revisited

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Address by Professor Max A. Pape
on the occasion of the
Century Club Dinner
May 3, 1974
Memorial Student Center
Illinois Wesleyan University

Dr. Pape had been chosen by the faculty, students and administration as recipient of the Century Club Award for 1974
THE OCCULT REVISITED
by Max A. Pape

It is a Saturday night in Cleveland. A young army officer and his wife welcome a small group of people to their comfortable, modern home. The guests, most of them dressed in sports clothes, include a computer programmer, a clerk, a veterinarian, a psychologist, a personnel manager and a professor of English. They all troop downstairs. This could be a bridge party or a committee meeting for some action group. But it isn’t.

It is midnight. On the front door of the house is an orange emblem showing black pitchforks. Downstairs, the group gathers very solemnly before a black-draped altar. Facing them on the wall is a chartreuse goat-image, superimposed on a purple pentagram.

“Tonight, there is one among us elected to the priesthood of Mendes,” intones one of the men. “Satan, thou hast seen fit to charge Warlock Smith with thy priesthood on earth—the deification of the human race.” Reciting an ordination rite first in Latin and then in English, the speaker taps a second man on the shoulder with a sword. A woman pours flash powder on the sterno altar flame and the fire leaps toward the ceiling.

In an apartment in Beverly Hills, a petite blond model sits on a white sheet on the floor. She is dressed in a purple chiffon gown. Clouds of jasmine and sandalwood incense swirl around her as she draws a magic circle on the sheet with a stick of charcoal. This is intended to ban evil spirits. Then, by the glow of a flickering black candle, she chants, “By all the names of the spirit princes and by the ineffable name on which all things are created, I conjure you . . . ”

She is a witch, or at least she claims to be. On this particular moonlit evening, she is casting a love spell on a young man to whom she is attracted.

These scenes, and many more like them, are being enacted across the country by college students, by middle age persons and by the elderly.

In a college town, when the moon is full, a group of college students gather in a house, remove their clothes and whirl through a double spiral of a witch’s dance. In another town, a 35-year-old secretary winds thread around a voodoo doll and sticks steel pins into it in an effort to harass a rival at the office into resigning. In Chicago, from 100 to 150 mostly professional people, such as office managers, nurses, social workers, chemists, meet weekly in the Temple of the Pagan Way to take instruction in ancient white witchcraft and traditional paganism from a high priest, Herman.
Enderlee, and high priestess, Donna Cole.

A typical sabbat, which is a regular meeting of a witches' coven, is usually composed of about 13 persons. The witches and warlocks file in at about midnight and undress, because clothes hamper a person's full powers. They wash themselves for purity and enter a candlelit room. On a table that serves as an altar are candles, incense, statuettes and other ceremonial items. The high priestess forms a large circle, usually with sand. After all the witches are inside the circle, she purifies the circle by waving a small black-handled dagger over it. She next reads from a large, black book containing secret rituals and ceremonies, and summons a minor god who is saluted by the witches and warlocks. This can be followed by an animal sacrifice and a sex orgy, but it doesn't have to be.

Witchcraft has been described by British anthropologist Margaret Murray as basically a vestige of the nature worship of Europe's pagan days, although other anthropologists, while acknowledging that it is part of nature worship, give its birthplace as Egypt. Since witchcraft is still essentially a nature faith, covens celebrate the changing of the seasons: May Eve (April 30), Lammas (July 31), Allhallows Eve (Oct. 31), and Brigid Day (Feb. 2).

Most modern witches see witchcraft as a folk tradition of magic beliefs and as an ancient, pre-Christian fertility faith. Witchcraft has two types of believers: The first is composed of those who have learned the secrets of the art through kinship with a witch. This pattern is most often associated with rural areas, especially in the South, and consists of magical recipes and technologies. The second type comprises those who have invented their own techniques or have studied so-called witchcraft practices in the occult literature. The vast majority of witches today belong to the second class. And this brings up an interesting point—from the earliest times, it has been forbidden to write down any of the witchcraft words, symbols or techniques. Most of the major works on witchcraft state that before one becomes a practitioner of the craft, he or she must be initiated into a coven and in this way learn the coven secrets. And these secrets are not supposed to be available in the literature on the occult.

Now, just as there are two types of witches or warlocks, there are two types of witchcraft—black and white. The black witches try to invoke power from the darker forces of nature and are closely akin to Satanism. They generally use their magic for themselves, either to acquire something or to cast a malicious spell on an enemy. The white witches, on the contrary, try to derive their presumed power from beneficent forces of nature and use it to heal, resolve disputes and achieve good for others, which includes
defensive spells against black witches. Most witches, black or white, view magic as a value-free technology of the paranormal. The distinction between black and white is a matter of the user's intent rather than his technique.

In San Francisco, an artist and a self-styled warlock known only by his surname, Satty, lives in a bone-decorated lair in an environment he created to weave the proper atmosphere for his followers in the practices of "subjective alchemy"; instead of changing base metals into gold, he changes fragmented people into integrated spirits. In the Ozark hill country, the ceremony of initiating a witch ends with the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer backward.

Astral projection is becoming very popular in the U.S. The suggested method for projection is to "develop the Astral Body, or the Body of Light, until it is just as real to you as your own body. Ultimately the relation of that body with your own must be exceedingly intimate. But before this harmonizing takes place, you should begin by a careful differentiation. The first thing to do is to get the Astral Body outside your own. To avoid muddling the two, you begin by imagining a shape resembling yourself, standing in front of you. Try to imagine how your own body would look if you were standing in its place. Try to transfer your consciousness to the Body of Light. Your own body has its eyes shut. Use the eyes of the Body of Light to describe the objects in the room behind you. As soon as you feel more or less at home in the new body, let it rise in the air. Keep on feeling the sense of rising. Keep on looking about you as you rise until you see landscapes or beings of the astral plane. These beings have a quality of their own. They are not like material things; they are not like mental pictures; they seem to lie between the two. However unsuccessful your getting out of your body may apparently have been, it is most necessary to use every effort to bring your body back to normalcy. Make the Body of Light coincide in space with your physical body; then recover the unity of consciousness. If you fail to do this properly, you may find yourself in serious trouble. Your Astral Body may wander away uncontrolled, and be attacked and obsessed. You will become aware of this through the occurrence of headaches, bad dreams, or even more serious signs such as hysteria, fainting fits, possibly madness or paralysis. Even the worst of these attacks will probably wear off, but it may leave you permanently damaged to a greater or lesser extent."6

Other projectionists rely on an effort of the will in conjunction with yoga exercises involving more and more extended intervals of suspension of breathing. Great importance is attached first to the
building into the subconsciousness of a strong desire to be conscious in the Astral Body, then to the practice of concentrating on one's own image in a mirror. Next, attention is centered on the rhythm of the heartbeats, in an attempt to be conscious of the heart beating at any point in the body. Then by repeated mental suggestion the heart may be slowed down. And a warning is given: No one with heart weakness or irregularity should use this method.

One of the newest occult wrinkles is the acorn cult. The acorn is sacred to many cultures and has found an important place in magic lore. It is a symbol of long-term, high-potency fertility. The acorn cults in vogue in this country believe they are centering their rituals and beliefs on the ancient Celtic Druids who venerated the oak and ate acorns as part of their ritual preparation for foretelling the future. Dating back to Scandinavian myth, acorns can be used for many purposes, from appeasing the gods to protecting the house from lightning.

And, of course, alphabet analysis and numerology in all its forms are about as popular in this country—throughout the world, in fact—as is bridge.

And then there are all sorts of superstitions prevalent today. In show business, you will get into trouble if you whistle in a dressing room or throw your hat on a bed; it means the show is going to close. Sneezing twice a night for three consecutive nights is a warning of death in the house. The Greeks believe that when you sneeze, what you are thinking about at the moment will take place.

There are hundreds of superstitions that at least a great number of us believe in. To mention only a few: If you are having a bad run of luck at cards, you get up and walk around your chair. When you are playing bridge, how many of you like to have you and your partner sit in the direction in which the bath tub is placed? For the bride—something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. People don't like to walk under a ladder; and they fear Friday the 13th and the Ides of March. They like lucky pieces of any kind. (John D. Rockefeller carried a lucky stone to guard his health and to bring him fortune.) If you just give a cursory look at a book on superstitions, you will find that almost anything that happens in our lives has a superstition associated with it.4

Originally, occult meant hidden knowledge, secret arts or unexplainable phenomena. But today this definition is no longer appropriate, for while some of the practitioners of the occult guard their secrets and rituals jealously, much of what was considered
to be in the domain of the occult has emerged from underground. This emergence centers in occult bookstores such as the Metaphysical Center in San Francisco, whose book department sells out about 70 per cent of its $30,000 stock every month. The Center also gives Tarot-card readings, crash courses in palmistry for $25, reincarnation workshops, classes in astral projection, numerology and the Hebrew mystical system known as the cabala. There is a gift shop that sells ritual robes, amulets, special incense and crystal balls ($25 for the large size and $16.50 for the small). Conventional bookstores have been hit by the demand for books on the occult. At Scribner Book Store on Fifth Avenue, books on the occult have completely taken over a section that was once reserved for religious and philosophical texts. Major publishers and movie producers have been quick to recognize the magnitude of the demand for the occult. Witness the long bestseller career and box office attraction of *The Exorcist, Rosemary’s Baby, The Possession of Joel Delaney,* and *The Other.*

This revival of interest and practice of the occult has been highlighted by coverage in leading magazines and newspapers. *Time* magazine noted, “A mystical renaissance is evident everywhere from television to department stores.” *The Wall Street Journal* reported that interest in the occult has approached boom proportions: It stated, “Mysticism is becoming big business. A New York book store specializing in the occult says its sales have zoomed 100 per cent in the past three years.”

1. From 1967 to the present, the number of books dealing with the occult has risen from 367 to 2,574.
2. There were over 2 million ouija boards sold in 1967. Today, sales are about 6 million.
3. *The Secret Life of Plants,* which maintains that plants can feel the thoughts of humans, has become a best seller.
4. In Great Britain, there is such a resurgence of witchcraft and other occult dabbling that an ecumenical commission of Anglicans and Roman Catholics recently recommended that each diocese appoint an official exorcist to drive out demons.
5. Hundreds of thousands of people buy computer-produced personal horoscopes for $20 each.
6. The Rev. Ford, the medium who worked with Bishop Pike in trying to locate Pike’s son, is a minister of the Disciples of Christ and has founded the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship which has a membership of more than 5,000 religious leaders from every faith.
350,000 hardback volumes, and has gone through 27 paperback printings, with a sale of over 3 million.

8. Time Pattern Research Institute has sold millions of 30-page, one-year horoscope projections which are sold by 380 department stores and over 2,200 college bookstores.

9. Hans Holzer, a New York author and movie and television producer, has written 23 books on the occult and chases away about 500 unwanted ghosts a year, and has a constant backlog of about 6,000 haunted houses.

10. Twenty years ago only about 100 newspapers carried horoscope columns, but today 1,300 of the 1,750 daily newspapers regularly carry such columns. Some of the well known people who assiduously follow or followed astrology include: Napoleon, Hitler, Marlene Dietrich, Robert Cummings, Susan Hayward, Ronald Reagan, Conan Doyle and Marshall McLuhan. The musical, Hair, had its own company astrologist. The Dell Publishing Co. has about 49 horoscope publications in press and sold over 8 million of its annual astrological dope sheets in 1969. About 10,000 full-time and 180,000 part-time astrologers in the U.S. serve some 50 million persons.\(^3\)\(^5\)

Satanism is a popular form of occult practice in this country. It is usually considered as the worship of Satan and is marked by the travesty of Christian rites. Satanism is basically a worship of the Judeo-Christian Devil, which is at times a symbol and at other times very literally real. Satanists view themselves, either literally or symbolically, as members in league with the Christian’s devil. According to the anthropologist Truzzi, most of history’s Satanisms seemed to be direct outgrowth of the Christian Church’s misrepresentations of early witchcraft practices. The inquisitors so impressed some individuals with the fantastic and blasphemous picture of Satanism that some apparently decided that they, too, would “rather reign in hell than serve in heaven.” Satan comes out of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* looking pretty good . . . pretty strong.

In this country today, Satanists represent two distinct types of individuals: Those acting as solitary agents and those operating in groups. We know very little about the solitary agents.

Of the group Satanists, there are two types. Those who operate underground are primarily sex and drug clubs that embellish their orgies with Satanist rituals. The most famous of these groups is the Charles Manson Family, whose members committed the senseless, ritualistic murder of the movie stars a few years ago.\(^3\)

The second type of Satanist group can be termed the surface Satanists. This type is best exemplified by the San Francisco-based
Church of Satan; founded by Anton Szander LaVey. It offers a mirror image of most of the beliefs and ethics of traditional Christianity. An example from LaVey’s Satanic Bible is, “Blessed are the strong, for they shall possess the earth. If a man smite you on one cheek, smash him on the other.” The Church of Satan has a membership of about 12,000, and LaVey’s Satanic Bible has a circulation of about 150,000.\(^3\)

They do not invoke Satan as a supernatural being, but as a symbol of man’s ego, which is what they really worship. They look down on those who believe in the supernatural—good or evil. They are strictly materialists who take the position of extreme Machiavellianism and cynical realism toward the nature of man. There are philosophical parallels with the Objectivist Ideal of Ayn Rand. One of the major features is an emphasis on the importance of myth and magic, and upon their impact in a world of people who can still be manipulated through such beliefs and emotions. Members of the Church of Satan are the ultimate pragmatists. They are against drugs in any form because drugs separate rational man from his material environment. Members of the Church do not seek to escape from reality; instead, they want full control of reality.\(^3\)

Rituals of compassion are held all over the country, in which a written suplication is speared on a sword point and burned before a Mendes Goat Shield, a symbol of Satan.

A part of Satanism is the Black Mass. How prevalent they are in this country we don’t know, but we do know that they take place. Usually a Black Mass profanes a consecrated Eucharist which has been stolen, uses inverted prayers and crosses and a nude woman as an altar. There can be a bloody sacrifice. The purpose of the Black Mass is to enlist the aid of Satan in gaining money, destroying one’s enemies or achieving success in romantic liaisons.

Among the areas of interest of occultism, we must acknowledge that extra-sensory perception is an as-yet undiscovered territory between man and his universe and can be considered as a legitimate field for scientific investigation—if we stringently use the methods of science. But what do we do? Up to this point we have given the investigations into ESP the kiss of death by using what I term para-scientific methods and para-scientists. The study of ESP is called para-psychology. Now the term “para” means “closely resembling.” And that just isn’t enough scientific stringency to establish fact from wishful thinking.

Another area that has to be considered as actually separate from occultism is the whole business of exorcism, especially since large
numbers of people have, because of the movie and the book, *The Exorcist*, been running to priests and ministers claiming that they are possessed by Satan. What this obsession really amounts to is the innermost unexpressed concerns of many people with the presence of evil in the world, or an obsession with their own guilt feelings because of their behavior. They believe they are evil. It amounts to a neurosis, and it could be treated medically by an exorcism. This obsession that they are possessed by the devil is very similar to the man who thought he had a live bird fluttering around in his stomach. The psychiatrists could not convince him otherwise. So they decided to perform an operation and tell the man the bird had been removed. A surgeon made a shallow incision and, when the man came out from under the anesthetic, the doctor showed him a bird and said, “You were right. You did have a bird in your stomach. Here it is.” And he showed him the bird. The man was cured—at least from the neurosis that there was a bird fluttering around in his stomach.

Most of the occult groups that flourish in this country are eclectic. They are into everything: White witchcraft, palm reading, I-Ching, Tarot, dream interpretation, seances, numerology, astrology, prophecy, spiritualism, voodoo and ESP.

This wave of fascination with the occult that is sweeping the country—the world, in fact—first became apparent a few years ago with the astrology boom. But today it covers a wide spectrum of cults and ritualistic practices, as I have attempted to point out. How can this resurgence of the occult be explained?

The eminent anthropologist, Loren Eiseley, has described man as a cosmic orphan; the only creature in the universe who knows what it has been. Science has answered that question for him: “You are a changeling. You are linked by a genetic chain to all the vertebrates. The thing that is you bears the still-aching wounds of evolution in body and brain. Your hands are made-over fins, your lungs come from creatures gasping in a swamp, your femur has been twisted upright. Your foot is a reworked climbing pad. You are a rag doll resewn from the skins of extinct animals.”

But in addition to where he has been, man has always wanted to know where he is going, what it is going to be like once he gets there, and if he can control his destiny—here and there.

And this is where the explanation for the resurgence of the occult can be found—in an analysis of the development of religion.

Lewis Browne has described the origin of religion in this way: “In the beginning there was fear; and fear was in the heart of man; and fear controlled man. At every turn it overwhelmed him, leaving him no moment of ease. With the wild wailing of the
wind it swept through him; with the crashing of the thunder and the growling of lurking beasts. All the days of man were gray with fear, because all his universe seemed charged with danger. Earth and sea and sky were set against him; with relentless enmity, with inexplicable hate, they were bent on his destruction."

At least, so primitive man concluded. It was an inevitable conclusion under the circumstances, for all things seemed to be forever going against man. Boulders toppled and broke his bones; diseases ate his flesh; death seemed ever ready to lay him low. And he, poor gibbering savage nursing his wound in some damp cave, could only tremble with fear. He could not give himself stoical courage with the thought that much of the evil that occurred might be accidental. He could not so much as conceive of the accidental. As far as he could figure it out, all things that occurred were full of meaning, were intentional. The boulder that fell and crushed his shoulder had wanted to fall and crush it. The spear of heaven-fire that turned his squaw to cinders had consciously tried to do just that.

To the savage, there was nothing absurd in the idea that everything around him bore him malice, for he had not yet discovered that some things were inanimate. In the world he saw about him, all things were animate. And not only were all things animate to the savage, but they seethed with emotion. Things could be angry, or they could feel pleased. They could destroy him if they so willed, or they could let him alone.

Civilized people still cling to that primitive notion. Children angrily kick the tables against which they bump their heads as if those tables were human. Grown men curse at the rugs over which they stumble, just as if the rugs had intentionally tried to trip them. Even today there still lingers in the mind of man the primitive notion that all objects are animate. When caught off guard, man is still betrayed into trying to punish the inanimate objects that happen to cause him pain.

In time, primitive man came to the conclusion that things had a spirit or soul. He came to this conclusion because of the phenomena of dreams. He knew nothing of the concept of dreams, but he did know that while he was sleeping he had fought wild animals, talked with dead relatives, relived the past and anticipated the future. He visited places where he had once been and places where he had never set foot. Time, space and the limitations of his body did not seem to hinder him. So he decided that there were two parts to him—the bodily self of mortal flesh and the spiritual alter ego, the soul. The soul was the vital force. Its presence animates the body. Its departure stills it. It is in the stillness of sleep that the soul goes wandering. The long sleep
that is death comes when the sojourning soul does not return.

From experience, primitive man knew that fighting enemy objects was useless. They were, in some uncanny way, proof against his spears and arrows.

That was why he was finally forced to resort to more subtle means of attack. Since blows could not subdue the enemy-objects, our ancestor tried to subdue them with magic. He tried words, beating drums, wild dances, talismans. If these spells failed, he tried others. He was stubbornly convinced that some spell would work.

Just as primitive man had private fetishes, he also had tribal ones, such as the Kaaba Stone still worshipped by Moslems in Mecca. The tribal fetish soon became an idol; and the idol was smeared with blood to feed him and to keep him content. The smearing with blood soon turned to complete sacrifices and rituals were built around them. Certain men, adept at the ritualistic practices, were placed in charge and thus began the first priesthood. In time a shelter was considered necessary for the idol and thus the first church was built. Finally man reached the stage where he departed from the primitive concepts of basic animism and moved to the higher ground of a belief in a Supreme Being; and the great religions were born. All of the grace and color which transmutes mere brutish existence into a life of meaning and a hope for immortality can be said to have arisen out of, or because of, religion.

Man had to have faith in himself, or die, and he would not die. So he had faith; and developed first magic and then religion.

The distinction between magic and religion rests on man's assessment of the motivating forces behind the supernatural. If man is subordinate to the supernatural beings or being, then his relationship with the supernatural will be religious in nature. If man can, under certain conditions, dominate and control the supernatural; then his dealings with the gods or god will be magical in nature. That which distinguishes religion from magic is the state of mind of the believer and his consequent modes of behavior. In the religious state of mind, man acknowledges the superiority of the supernatural powers upon which his well-being depends. The magician, on the other hand, believes that he controls supernatural power: He has power over power. The distinction between magic and religion is best seen in the attitudes and practices of the believer. The religious person acknowledges his inferiority to spirits or to god. The magician believes he has mastered a supernatural force through the possession of a compulsive formula.

It is from this evolution from blind fear to magic and then to
religion that the answer to the question, "Why the resurgence of the occult?" can be found.

In times of great catastrophe, or times of great authoritarianism, some men believe that their religion has failed them. They still believe in animism; but they revert from religion to magic and some even stumble into the black abyss of blind fear and we witness a wave of suicides. The occult is basically a belief in magic, in the ability to control the supernatural or para-normal. There are many classic examples of this reversion in history. The Black Death witnessed the reversion by great numbers of people to magic and the occult. The Victorian Age, because of its authoritarianism, was another period of an upsurge in belief in the occult.

Just as the rocks and the wind and the waters and the sky were enemy-objects to primitive man because he didn't understand their nature, so today man has enemy-objects. Alvin Toffler has described them in *Future Shock*.

Our society is characterized by three things:

1. Transience—the new temporariness of everything—places, people, things, organizations, information.
2. Novelty—the newness of almost everything.

Man is suffering from future shock. Unfortunately for him, this future shock is hitting him before he has really recovered from the shock of the past and of the present. He becomes utterly unstrung when he suddenly discovers that Today is Tomorrow.

Today our society is inundated by ever-accelerating social change, by exponentially changing science and technology, by new information that is proliferating at a mind-numbing rate. According to Charles Bourne of the Stanford Research Institute, the number of significant journals now being published around the world is on the order of 15,000, with perhaps a million significant papers in them each year. These figures do not include books or other forms of publication. The sheer quantity of information is now doubling every 10 years. Add to this just some of the characteristics of the future profile such as the new biomedical technologies with the potentiality for genetic engineering and behavior control; the reconstitution of an entire organism from one cell; inter-species chimeras composed of cells of two different species; redefinition of death as the point when the brain ceases to function; the transfer of the brain from one individual to another, which in effect would be the transfer of life, giving rise to a new problem for religion; artificial placenta; use and abuses of power; invasion of privacy; dehumanization of the individual by computerization and automation; the creation of part human and part mechanical beings through transplants; world-wide political and economic instability.
Add to this a disenchantment with science and technology, because many people took them as substitutes for religion, and because Americans long believed science would create a better world, a utopia.

Apparently people cannot live without the depth of myth and symbol and richness of mysticism that existed before the rise of today's empirical scientific attitude. Another age might have turned to the church in its anxiety and desire for a mystical element in life. To many people, today's church seems impotent because it is identified with the problems it should be solving. They see the church as a mere authenticator of the Establishment.

To many people, especially the young, the individual is a unit to be counted in large church meetings, his money rung up, just as he is counted by business, universities and the government for their purposes. For most occultists, the occult arts and practices are a form of "pop" religion. They use the occult as a substitute faith, a kind of victory over the supernatural.

Adopting occultism as a substitute faith puts the accent on control and gives the individual a great ego boost; he has power over supernatural power.

This is an age mired in misery looking for an explanation for its ills. There is a preoccupation in the minds of many with despair and isolation. No answer is forthcoming. A perfect time for fascination with the devil and the occult arises because the devil provides an easy explanation. The Exorcist phenomenon is another example of sociologically perfect timing. The field was ripe for the harvest.

Perhaps eventually religion and science can come to mutual respect. But this vision is pinned to a fragile and perpetually unprovable faith—that the universe is a whole, with purpose and promise beneath its mystery.

As the Encyclopedia of the Supernatural says, "The supernatural is a word for a huge area of human speculation about things believed to exist beyond the threshold of our ordinary day-to-day existence." 6

The supernatural is the night sky of our minds, the shadow side of our mental daylight of reason and hard fact. Like the night, it contains mystery, beauty, enchantment and horror. Man's mental processes are a natural phenomenon, and just as nature abhors a vacuum, so do our minds. In times of extreme uncertainty, many people think a vacuum exists and they revert from a worship of God to an attempt to control Him or the forces they think are responsible for the shadow side of the daylight of reason and fact. They revisit the occult.
NOTES


This lecture is the fifteenth in a series prepared by Illinois Wesleyan University faculty members for presentation at the annual Century Club dinner. R. Mack Brown, president of the club, was Master of Ceremonies.

PAST CENTURY CLUB HONOREES

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