

Seventy Years Among Friends

INASMUCH AS OUR 70th anniversary coincides with the National Bicentennial Year, it was felt that an up-to-date history of the Society should be included in this year's program. It is the third time such a history has appeared.

As preparations for our 50th anniversary celebration approached, the late Matthew L. McGrath, then Chairman of the Board, engaged a professional researcher and writer to reconstruct the history from newspaper files. Shortly before the deadline for the printing of that history, the professional abandoned the task as being too arduous. Pressed for time Matt McGrath and the present Chairman did produce a hurriedly prepared history. It appeared in the 1956 program.

The next "history" appeared in the 1966 program, now a collector's item. We take it up from there.

As our 60th. anniversary date approached it was felt appropriate to not only update such history but to retrace the steps taken ten years ago; to search out additional information by reading the addresses and remarks made at the annual functions, often reported verbatim in the press of the day, and by consulting senior members of the Society and others who might shed light on the events of the past, and by seeking out still more programs and other mementoes of bygone days. The sources of information which proved most fruitful were copies of The Troy Record for the period 1906 to date; The Troy Times for the period 1906 to 1935 when that newspaper was absorbed by The Record Newspapers, and certain copies of The Troy Sunday Budget when cross-checking was indicated. Several additional and very early programs were made available; a number of older citizens were interviewed and other sources of information explored. It is hoped that with the publication of this year's printed

program still more sources of information will be uncovered and made available to the Society in preparation of future accounts.

Painstaking search of all known sources of information has thus far failed to produce a written record of the original 1906 luncheon, known to have taken place at the home of Troy Lodge No. 141, B. P. O. Elks on March 17, 1906. Not being a lodge affair or function, the minutes of the Order contain no reference to the luncheon. The newspapers of that period are likewise silent.

Remarks made by Toastmasters at subsequent annual dinners, and which were published in the press, and the word of members of Troy Lodge in their lifetime, and who were active in 1906, credit former County Judge Lewis E. Griffith, the first Exalted Ruler of Troy Lodge (1889) and a member of the congregation of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, with having suggested to a group of luncheon companions that a special luncheon be held on St. Patrick's Day. As a result a luncheon consisting of corned beef and cabbage and other appropriate foods was served at The Elks Club on March 17, 1906. There are differences of opinion as to the identity of some who attended that luncheon, but not all, and it would appear almost certain the original group consisted of Lewis E. Griffith, Louis Lowenstein (the lodge Secretary), Max Goodkind, a merchant, Peter McCarthy, James McDonnell and Edward Murray. The last three named were Irish Catholics. Mr. Lowenstein and Mr. Goodkind were Jewish and Mr. Griffith, as noted, was a Protestant. It is known, from such sources, that these men were accustomed to lunch together almost daily, although other members of the lodge joined them occasionally, hence the possibility of error.

What has since become a famous luncheon presumably caused some pleasant reactions for it was repeated in 1907. In that year St. Patrick's day fell on a Sunday and the luncheon

was served at the Elks Club on March 18th. News of the affair was published in The Troy Times of March 18th. and in The Troy Record on the morning of March 19th, 1907. Both newspapers published the names of those who attended. The lists are identical. Those attending were Lewis E. Griffith (presiding), Peter McCarthy, County Judge Michael A. Tierney, District Attorney Jarvis P. O'Brien, Edward P. Murray, William H. Anderson, Max Goodkind, Maurice H. Hartigan, James J. Ryan, James M. McDonnell, Louis Lowenstein, William Hutton Jr., Michael Organ, Dr. James Prendergast, John J. Ryan, Joseph Bolton Jr. and Thomas Madigan. Doring's Band furnished the music and Roy V. Rhodes was the soloist with J. Bert Curley as accompanist. The reporter for The Troy Record assigned the title "The Friends of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick" to the group, a name never before or thereafter appearing in print. Presumably it was a bit of journalistic license but may well have been the inspiration for the name thereafter adopted by the group. On March 17, 1908 another luncheon was served in the dining room of the Elks Club with Judge Griffith again presiding. "Guests filled the room" observed The Troy Record reporter, thus indicating an attendance of one hundred more or less.

The Troy Record of March 18, 1909 reported the "banquet" of "The Friends of St. Patrick" as being held at the Elks Club on the previous night with two hundred in attendance! Such numbers would require the use of the entire main floor of the Elks Home. Judge Griffith was reported as having acted as Toastmaster with Edward M. Murray as "presiding officer." The speakers were Hon. William J. Prendergast, Registrar of the Borough of Brooklyn, Reverend Robert M. Reilly, William J. Roche and John T. Norton, the latter two being prominent attorneys of the day. Doring's Band provided music and a quartet consisting of Michael T. Moran, Ernest Reuther, John J. Fogarty and Frank E. O'Brien sang Irish airs.

It was at the same 1909 banquet that a more formal organization was decreed. The late William H. Anderson was chairman of a nominating committee which presented the names of the following, all of whom were unanimously elected, a not uncommon experience in the annals of the Society. Those elected were William J. Roche as President; Lewis E. Griffith and James McDonnell as Vice Presidents; Maurice H. Hartigan as Treasurer; Michael T. Moran as Recorder; James V. Coffey as Historian; Michael T. Tierney as Toastmaster; Peter McCarthy and William A. Dunne as Trustees for one year; Cornelius Fogarty and William H. Anderson as Trustees for two years and Edward F. Murray and John T. Norton as Trustee for three years.

Judge Griffith attended subsequent dinners and was listed on the Committee in charge of the arrangements for the 1912 gathering. He died on October 6, 1912 at the age of sixty-five. Such a personage merits more than passing notice. Lewis E. Griffith was born in the old Fourth Ward of the City of Troy on September 12, 1847. He received his early education at Holy Cross School, Jonesville Academy in Saratoga and at Sand Lake Academy. He enlisted in the Union forces at the age of 17 and was thereafter commissioned a 2nd. Lieutenant and became an Aide-de-camp to Major General Thomas W. Emory. Upon his discharge from the military forces he studied law and upon admission to the Bar became, in turn. City Clerk, Assistant Police Magistrate, Assistant District Attorney, District Attorney, and County Judge, serving in the latter office for seven years. He became an astute trial lawyer as well as a noted raconteur. Judge Griffith was not only the first Exalted Ruler of the Troy Lodge of Elks but was also a Charter member of that organization. He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Grand Lodge. A member of the congregation of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, he is buried at Oakwood.

If William H. Anderson did not attend the luncheon of 1906 there is published evidence that he did attend each annual gathering of "The Friends of St. Patrick" from 1907 until 1940. There is likewise undisputed evidence that from the date he nominated the first formally selected officers of the group in 1909 until his death, William H. Anderson was the guiding spirit and leader of "The Friends." When wars or financial depressions lessened the ardor of many it was William H. Andersen's determination, foresight and deep appreciation of the significance of the unique group which kept it alive. Time and time again during his lifetime and following his death his contributions to the welfare of the Society have been retold, but it is felt that Thomas W. Rourke, when acting as Toastmaster at the dinner held in 1934, most eloquently expressed the love and esteem of "The Friends" for Mr. Anderson when he bestowed upon him the title of "Patriarch of the Society." He was indeed.

William H. Anderson was born at Troy, New York on January 31, 1862, the son of Robert and Honora Burke Anderson. He was educated at Christian Brothers Academy, now LaSalle Institute, the public schools and Troy Business College. When a boy he was struck by a railroad train and both legs were amputated. He entered the newspaper field at 16 years of age with The Troy Times at a time when Charles S. Francis, son of the founder, John M. Francis, was publisher. He worked his way up the journalistic ladder until he was entrusted with management of the newspaper during those periods Charles S. Francis was on diplomatic missions for the United States Government. Five years after the death of Charles S. Francis, Mr. Anderson and John Francis, son of Charles, became partners and continued as such until the death of Mr. Francis in 1923. From that time until The Troy Times was purchased by The Record Newspapers in 1935, William H. Anderson was its publisher.

William H. Anderson also had a great love for the Adirondack Mountains and its

people, where, even now, his name is a household word. In 1929 he became Chairman of the Whiteface Mountain Memorial Highway Commission. He also founded The Troy Times Fresh Air Home at Grafton, was Chairman of the Rensselaer County Child Welfare Board and a benefactor of underprivileged children. He was stricken by illness a few hours before our annual gathering on March 17, 1940 and died October 1st. of the same year. A lifelong resident of St. Peter's Roman Catholic parish, his remains rest in St. Peter's Cemetery.

As was stated in the Memorial which accompanied the 1941 printed program, "It is only when an oak is torn free from its accustomed place that we realize its strength and its blessing. It has made no attempt to be either shadow or shelter. It has just been there and its presence made .its value and its beneficence." The Patriarch was dead! The hearts of "The Friends" were heavy with grief.

While the luncheons and dinners for the years 1906, 1907, 1908 and 1909 were served at the home of the Troy Lodge of Elks at 39 Third Street, it was apparent at the 1909 dinner that the organization had outgrown the capacity of The Elks Club and the functions were thereafter held at the Rensselaer Inn later to be known as Hotel Rensselaer and Hotel Troy, until 1926. From 1927 until the present our annual gatherings have taken place at The Hendrick Hudson Hotel, which was erected in 1826.

The 1910 "banquet" with those present wearing white ties and tails, was held at The Rensselaer Inn, with Charles Evans Hughes, then Governor of New York and subsequently Chief Justice of the United States as the principal guest speaker. For many years thereafter the Governors of the State of New York as well as several heads of State of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, graced our Dais, as did the great in many other fields of endeavor. But it was for the native sons who returned home to address the Society that the greatest ac-

claim was reserved! These included the Reverend William H. Sheridan, Major General Edwin C. Markham, Major Ranson H. Gillet, Major General Thomas F. Farrell and Rev. Owen Bennett. A list of all guest speakers appears elsewhere in the program.

Research failed to disclose any reports of Dinners or Annual Meetings for the years 1913, 1918, 1920 or 1921. For the first time in fifty-seven years St. Patrick's Day, 1913 fell during Holy Week. The local newspapers reported that because of that fact all celebrations in the city had been cancelled. In 1918 our country was heavily engaged in World War I in Europe and presumably it was felt that celebrations of any kind would be in obvious poor taste. The shroud of War makes a poor banquet cloth. The lapses of 1920 and 1921 posed a different problem. A search and cross check of all locally published newspapers for the months of March in both years failed to produce a single lead. Interrogation of members : active in the Society at that period brought only frowns but no answers. Further consultation of the yearly almanacs for the years in question produced what is felt to be the obvious answer. On January 16, 1920 the National Prohibition Act became effective! It was strictly enforced for at least the first two years of its existence. Thus it would appear that those entrusted with the destinies of the Society in 1920 and 1921 had no wish to display a sham-rock utterly lacking in dew! Those were "the bad times" for men with an honest thirst! If clandestine gatherings were held, the conspiracy has thus far gone undiscovered and the secret well guarded.

Upon the death of William H. Anderson in 1940, the late Senator John J. Mackrell, long his associate in planning the activities of the Society, was elected Chairman of the Board of Directors and gave to it the benefit of his organizational ability and capable leadership, serving with the high sense of justice and integrity he brought to his many other activities, until

his retirement in 1950 because of poor health. While nominally an Honorary Director from that time until his death on August 31, 1961, he continued to give the Society the benefit of his counsel, attended the meetings of Directors and remained active in its deliberations. Senator Mackrell was a native of the Lansingburgh section of Troy, a devout Catholic, a distinguished lawyer, a civic leader and a kindly man. He was a communicant of St. Augustine's Church. A more complete appraisal of his worth and qualities will be found in the Memorial which was incorporated in the 1962 program of the Society.

When Senator Mackrell resigned as active Chairman of the Board of Directors in 1950, Matthew L McGrath, who had already devoted twenty-six years as its Secretary, was elected Chairman. It was under his leadership that much new blood was infused into the organization and a new vigor brought into being. A veteran of World War I, a noted athlete, a former Under Sheriff of the county, a widely known and highly respected business man, he brought to the Society a deep affection, a willingness to serve, and a determination that its purposes be more fully understood by all. Although in poor health for several years near the end of his term he remained at the helm after lesser men would have retired, this only because his friends urged him to carry on. Finally, in 1961, at the insistence of his physicians, he retired as active Chairman. Like Senator Mackrell and William H. Anderson, he was a devout Catholic. He was a communicant of St. Augustine's Church. His death on December 18, 1963 brought with it an irreparable loss to the Society. His Memorial will be found incorporated in the 1964 program.

The writer was elected Chairman of the Board on November 17, 1961.

Although a laymen's organization, the Society's annual dinners have been attended by substantial numbers of the clergy of all denominations for many years. For a long period of

time the "men of the cloth" attended as guests of individuals or institutions. Effective with the 1962 Dinner the Board of Directors decreed that an invitation would be extended to each Pastor, Rector and Rabbi in the city, to attend the functions as guests of the Society as a whole. The plan was endorsed by the membership, whose cooperation in this gesture of good will is something of which each can be proud. It is indeed an inspirational sight to behold priests, ministers, rabbis and Brothers mingling with one another and with men of all denominations.

We have likewise been blessed with having clergymen serve as Honorary Directors for many years. Their names have been listed elsewhere. They have invoked the Divine Blessing upon those gathered beneath our banner each March 17th. and pronounced Benediction as we separated for the evening. It is to be regretted that the jeweled words of those devout men have not been preserved. Each has been an able advocate of Patrick's teachings; each was eloquent in his praise for our endeavors. We are, all of us, better men because they came amongst us. We have drunk deeply of the spiritual refreshment they have provided.

The Words of Reverence which are repeated each year as we pay our respects to the memories of those of our Directors who have passed into God's Greater Kingdom during the preceding year, were created by the late Right Reverend Monsignor Edmund J. Burns only one year before his death on January 28, 1958. A memorial to this saintly man was incorporated in our 1958 program. His predecessors and his successors share in his holiness and steadfastness.

Economic conditions compelled the Society to discontinue the custom of inviting clergymen as its guests in the late 1960s. Many are present as guests of individual members or as regular paying members each year.

In 1967 baldrics were furnished the directors and Past Presidents, the baldrics of the directors being green in color with the initials of the Society in gold. The reverse colors are worn by Past Presidents.

In 1968 the Society adopted, for the first time, an official Seal which appears on all membership cards and all programs. It was created by the Chairman and executed by Mr. Frank McHugh of The Heritage Engravers of Southbridge, Mass.

In 1973 a beautiful new banner bearing the name of the Society was created and in 1974 the motto of the Society Cead mile failthe (A Hundred thousand Welcomes) was inscribed on a separate banner. Like the baldrics, these are the work of The Sisters of the Cross of Springfield, Mass.

The 1906, 1907, 1908 and 1909 luncheons and banquets of the Society were conducted at the home of Troy Lodge, No. 141, B. P. O. Elks at its home No. 39 Third Street, Troy. Because of the ever increasing numbers of those attending, the yearly affairs were thereafter held at the Rensselaer Inn (Hotel Troy) through 1926. With the erection of the Hendrick Hudson Hotel, with its greater capacity, the Society held its annual dinners from 1927 through 1968 at that establishment. Extensive fire damage to its banquet room in 1969 necessitated holding the 1969 dinner at the Holiday Inn in Troy. Its space was found to be inadequate and from 1970 the annual dinners of the Society have been held at Mario's Theatre Restaurant.

This then is but a brief resume of some of the highlights of a Society rich in tradition, blessed with a sentimental attachment to the past, aware of the richness of the companionship of the present and secure in its beliefs for the future. It is likewise the brief story of an organization composed of men of varying religious affiliations, of diverse nationalistic origins, of often opposing political leanings, joining with one another in the ancient custom of breaking

bread and drinking wine together beneath the banner of a Society whose patron is Saint Patrick, The Great Apostle.

As it had its origin with a luncheon of friends, may it evermore serve as a vehicle by which men may continue to find in one another not only the companionship of an evening, but the source of strength and respect for one another's beliefs; a love for saints like Patrick and an acknowledgment of a God who blessed us with the Lewis E. Griffiths and the William H. Andersons and the John J. Mackrells and the Matthew L. McGraths to show us the way.

The torch which Patrick kindled on Tara's hill centuries ago summoned all men to the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God. It is still ablaze!

Ireland, with her rosary of sorrows and joys, may be the origin of many of us, but other lands bred other saints and knew anguish and brilliant sunshine and produced sons of whom Patrick, like ourselves, would have been proud to greet as Friends.

United we can give evidence that the principles of tolerance and kindness and respect for one another are attributes of all men of good will. They constitute the shamrock of our existence; the trinity of reasons for a continuance of our efforts.

In 1972 the Society was saddened by the death of Reverend Seth Genung, an Honorary Director who rarely missed a Directors' meeting in the twenty-two years of his office. His love for St. Patrick and his affection for the Society were unsurpassed. Reverend Canon Frederick E. Thalmann, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, long an active director in the Society was elected to fill the vacancy. With the election of Canon Thalmann as an Honorary Director, Rev. John V. Casey, O. S. A., Pastor of St. Augustine's Church and Rev. Thomas S. Evans, Rector of the First Presbyterian Church of Lansingburgh were elected directors. In 1975 Rev. Charles Carter Smith, for reasons of health, retired as Honorary Director, touch to the

regret of the Board. On January 16, 1976 Rev. John V. Casey, O. S. A. was elected Honorary
Director.

A Memorial to Reverend Genung appeared in the 1973 Program.

JOHN SARKIS T. M. GUERIN JR.

Historian Chairman of the Board