

The Founders ... and Early Gyro

One day last fall I received an e-mail asking if I had any additional information about the lives of our founders, e.g. family, children and the like that could be of interest when celebrating Founders Night. Secondly was a question asking “why do we celebrate the founders in late October or early November? My response to the first question was ... I’ll try to do some research; and to the second, was perhaps it was a convenient time with children in school, etc., because we knew Gyro got its start during the summer, so there must be a different answer.

While visiting the office in December, I found that even though we have files and boxes stacked everywhere, most of what is contained is mostly after the early 1920s. With the help of Pat and Roberta, we did uncover a few answers and on my last day I investigated the glass bookcase that has stood near the Secretary-Treasurer’s desk for ages. I knew from an earlier investigation it contained some ancient pictures, a banner or two and the occasional artifact collected by past S-T’s.

Digging deeper this time, I uncovered a small but literal treasure trove of answers and insights to our early beginnings. Not as extensive as I would have hoped, but very informative none the less.

What follows is what I thought to be informative and of interest to Gyros. ~ EB



The Founders – Of course we know the story of how three college friends wished to continue their friendships after college and into the future, and how, after gathering a few additional friends together, formed a club that became Gyro. The three were Paul Schwan, Gus Handerson and Ed Kagy. They were students in the Arts Department at Western Reserve University – enrolled in the fall of 1907, and all three graduated in 1911. Paul changed his course from literary to law in 1908 and attained an L.L.B. degree. Handerson continued his studies in the pursuit of a business education; however, in his last year he devoted his time to a combined Literary-Law program, earning an A.B. degree. Kagy was quite the leader in many aspects of his college years – excelling in athletics, his fraternity and oratory and working in a number of jobs to make enough money to enjoy the good life as best he could. The trio, having established a firm friendship in their first year, never wavered from their camaraderie.

Edmund L. Kagy – probably the best known because of his long association with Gyro, was born 21 April 1889 in Cleveland Heights, Ohio ... one of seven children. He worked at a myriad of jobs, always striving to earn money. His athleticism showed early in high school, and he excelled in college – playing three years at right half in football and captaining the team; three years on varsity

baseball and one year of varsity basketball. Following college he played semi-pro baseball for several leagues.

While still in college, he formed a three-man team that lectured on human relations to various college Y.M.C.A. groups and in his senior year captured first place in an oratorical Peace Contest earning him election into the honorary forensic fraternity.

Following graduation, he joined the faculty at South High School where he taught physics and was in charge of all athletic teams. His college called him back, and for two years he was head baseball and basketball coach and assisted with football.

With the outbreak of war, he, along with two other friends, formed a Gyro training company, wherein the members gained valuable experience. Shortly, he was accepted in Officers Training School and became a second lieutenant in May, 1917. By May of 1918 he was now a first lieutenant and shipped overseas, first to England and then France. Within three weeks he was one of two selected for the “Army School of the Line” and promoted to Captain. He spent much of his time studying military offensives and their results. Later he was posted as a liaison assistant in charge of all A.E.F. athletics.

Returning to the US he started a dealership in oils and greases, and acted as Gyro International S-T on a half-time basis for two years, eventually becoming the full-time secretary in 1925. It has been stated that with his resume he likely gave up leading a prosperous life for his love of Gyro. As best as I could determine however, after allowing for inflation, he probably earned around \$50,000 annually in today’s dollars.

It was said that he was married to his Gyro dream in the beginning, but he took a wife later in the 1920s and sired two children. He died in 1960.

It was also noted that he answered all problems with the question “is it best for Gyro?” He was admired for his inflexibility of purpose, his devotion to duty, his kindness and his ability to appreciate the other fellow’s viewpoint.

Clarence H. Handerson – more familiarly known as Gus (the root of the nickname is unknown) was born on 23 February 1889 in Cleveland – the son of a doctor and one of three children.

His early ambition was to become a doctor like his father, but was dissuaded from choosing the medical profession on advice of his dad. He worked at several jobs while in high school – a druggist’s assistant and later as a deck hand on a lake boat.

Apparently he was a “bear for work.” Any project he took on was a success. He organized the “Sock & Buskin” club, made it a financial success and thus gave his university the best dramatic club it ever had. He became a monologist for the Glee Club and it was reported he was always the life of the party.

Upon graduation, he like Kagy, was lured by business. At first, as a private detective for clothing manufacturers, he was involved worming his way into strikers’ meetings, one

of which in the guise of a newspaper reporter, and when discovered, he had to leave by a side window of the theatre in haste. He then served as an advertising investigator and later sold ad space. He finally ended up in advertising – his true calling. During this busy life, he found time to get married in April 1915. He went on to various advertising positions, finally being the ad manager for the largest bank in the world. He was a member and officer of many advertising clubs and other civic groups.

He was Republican, a Mason, an Episcopalian, and, interestingly enough, he authored a published book “The Ladies from Hell.” He was fond of saying: “We have a daughter, dog, canary, a Grant, consumptive Ford, mortgage and a radio.”

Unfortunately, his health failed him in 1941 and he died in 1942 of heart problems.

Paul Schwan – was born in Cleveland on 27 July 1889, the son of a minister and one of four children. Raised in the atmosphere of the parsonage, he attained respect and appreciation for the handiwork of his Creator – the glories of the sunset, the wonders of nature, and the violence of storms found harmony in his soul.

It was said that Paul exhibited the “spirit of the hive” – a constant striving within his soul to make the world a little better place to live – a longing to exemplify friendship and to educate his associates, and the public, to an appreciation of the benefits of friendship. His philosophy by this time was deep rooted, more of an analyst, an absorber. He spent considerable time in his sanctuary, a large room in his house that was part bedroom and part library, lined on three sides with overflowing bookcases.

After attaining his law degree, he went into association at his uncles’ law firm, but he never lost contact with his college chums, meeting often for dinners at Webbers Café and lunches at Boehkes. It was during these meetings that he gave voice to his convictions on friendship which crystallized into Gyro. He was never considered the life of the party, but when he left a meeting, it was a different meeting.

Little is known later except that he was married in March 1918, and after a honeymoon of one week reported to the Army on April 1. His life in the military was colorless and brief. He contracted influenza and three weeks later he died on April 17.

Others, quoting from Shakespeare’s “As You Like It” noted that Paul heard the “sermon in stones,” listened to “tongues in trees,” he read the “books in brooks,” and he saw “good in everything.”

I suspect that in retrospect it might be considered that Kagy was the affable stalwart, Handerson the cheerleader, and that Schwan was the true instigator of Gyro.



Besides the three founders, Ed Kagy as S-T had profound admiration for several other key individuals who did most

exemplify the essence of Gyro, or advanced its cause.

Albert Kern – a charter member and member of the executive committee. He was club secretary and then International Secretary from 1917-1919 while the executive was off to war.

Orville “Orrie” Peterson – charter member and a real livewire. His droll wit was instrumental in the early days. As First Lieutenant, Artillery, in France 1917-1818 he went through numerous engagements unscathed, but developed pneumonia in his last week and died in France.

Leon K. Jordan – joined in 1913. He was entirely responsible for forming the Buffalo club and played a big part in starting Chicago and Cincinnati. He was elected to a two-year term as first International President 1917.

“Doc” R. L. Jett – also joined in 1913. A sanatorium physician, he enlisted Gyros to use his hospital grounds for rookie military training. He didn’t wait for call up, but hurried over to serve with a medical unit attached to the Serbian Army. Killed while on duty at an advance field hospital. He was the first Gyro to die for his country.

James L. “Jimmie” Hubbell – the last of the original group in 1912 before the organization was named. He had a fascination with the study of the gyroscope and, when others were facetiously discussing names like Peerless Perspirers and Ready Radiators, managed to advance his ideas related to the gyroscope – hence the name GYRO. He and Gus published the club bulletin until 1917 when it became an international publication. After 5-6 years of editing for Buffalo, Toronto and Cincinnati, he became editor of the GyroScope in 1923 and continued until 1934. He was a Singer, songwriter and peppy worker. A captain in WW I, he tried to go back in WW II, but had to remain as an official of the Ohio Civilian Defense organization.



[A typical GyroScope publication for April 1916. One 9x12 page, folded with info on inside and the back for ads.]

A look at the early years

Gyro was conceived by its three founders, but when organized, there were others had joined and who were considered charter members – Peter Hopper, Al Kern, Webb Handside, George Forbes, R. B. Hopper, and James Hubbell. Nothing is known about the others except as noted above.

The three founders had been meeting for some time and officially organized the Cleveland club on June 24, 1912. Incorporation took place on October 21, 1914, and that is no doubt why **Founders Night** celebrations are slated to occur as near as possible to that date. (Answer #2).



What I found in reviewing the few documents available was certainly surprising to me. All the fervor about friendship was somewhat in disarray throughout that first summer and fall after organizing until Jimmie Hubbell joined in December. With his contacts he was able to arrange a steady supply of interesting and able speakers and one of the first was able to ignite a key element in the success of Gyro. His ideas bore merit and when adopted, the membership soared. Friendship remained a key factor, but now the club had turned to Networking, at first allowing one member each from different occupations or services – one physician, one dentist, etc. Practically every member thus bought space in the early GyroScope publications, complete with their picture, to advertise their business. This no doubt helped with club finances and certainly paid for an ever increasing GyroScope. This networking was also instrumental in bringing into the fold the new clubs like Chicago and Toronto. What better way to introduce business contacts to the ideals of Gyro and to forming additional clubs. It was noted in a later publication that fortunately in the early 1920s, Gyro got away from the networking concept and returned to its initial ideals.

But in the beginning the interest was in having contacts with like minded, successful business men. In that next March alone, 39 new members joined, and at that time the executive put a temporary halt on more members, indicating the membership committee had little time to check out the candidates.

Networking was also paramount in bringing the members together, working, not only for business success, but to advance the clubs recognition within the city and the nation. Someone conceived the idea of organizing an Exposition in the Cleveland Armory wherein they would rent out booth space, offer prizes and offer a fun and exciting time for attendees. Somewhat like our current home shows, job fairs, and the like.

The program was to run from Wednesday through Saturday (sound familiar) and started with a fake funeral procession dedicated to “Mr. Can’t Be Done” in the

afternoon, followed by a formal opening in which the Mayor and then Governor would speak. This was followed by Glee Club and Mandolin Club concerts. The next day was started with another funeral (humor), then the awarding of original essay prizes. Another speaker in the evening. Friday had band concerts followed by more humor. Saturday had a Boy Scouts parade, a grand military parade followed by a speech by a congressman from Mississippi ... all ending with military drills.



[The fanciful cover advertising the 1916 Exposition]



[part of the Expo's funeral procession]

Since war was in the air, the parades served more than one purpose. Marching and military drills certainly invigorated the participants and the onlookers, and in many ways advanced American and Canadian patriotism.

It appears, along with the ideals of friendship, battling to enter military service was paramount within these men.

Following this epochal year of 1916 and promotion of the exposition "Gyro City," Gyros turned to planning the first International Convention. The dates would be January 17-18, 1917 and held in Cleveland. The purpose of this meeting was to form the International Association of Gyro Clubs, and although the initial 1912 bylaws were changed significantly in 1914, they needed further review by the new clubs. At the time of this first convention, the association was composed of Cleveland with 136 members, Chicago with 45, Buffalo with 51, Cincinnati with 33 and the newly formed Philadelphia with 14 ... a total of 279.



[47 delegates, out of 279 members at first International Convention]

The convention handbook contained the bylaws, and short histories of the five clubs, as well as the names of all the members. Each member also had his business listed along with that address, another sign of the influence of networking in the Gyro growth. It is perhaps interesting that though this business fact of life was officially noted in the following paragraph, it is downplayed by the executive in the next one as noted by this Utopian excerpt from the handbook:

"The Purpose of the Gyro Movement is to furnish a means whereby young men whose interests and opportunities are closely enough related to make their associations enjoyable, whose personality will make their friendships desirable and who are able and desire to help one another in a business way, may meet together, cement their personal friendships, discuss means whereby they can be of assistance to each other, take up matters of civic importance, listen to addresses by men of prominence and in these and various other ways thru their association, aid each other to achieve the success in life which they desire.

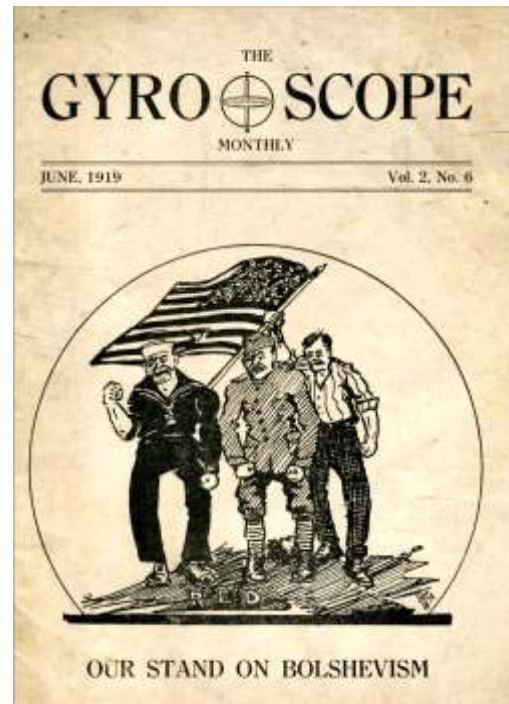
The spirit of the members is not that of seeing how much they can get out of their association for their own good but rather how much they can put into it for the benefit of their fellow members. It does not take great foresightedness to see that nothing of great value can be taken from the receptacle into which nothing of value has been placed."

The Cleveland club duly noted that some of the 39 members taken in March had been cast off after finalizing

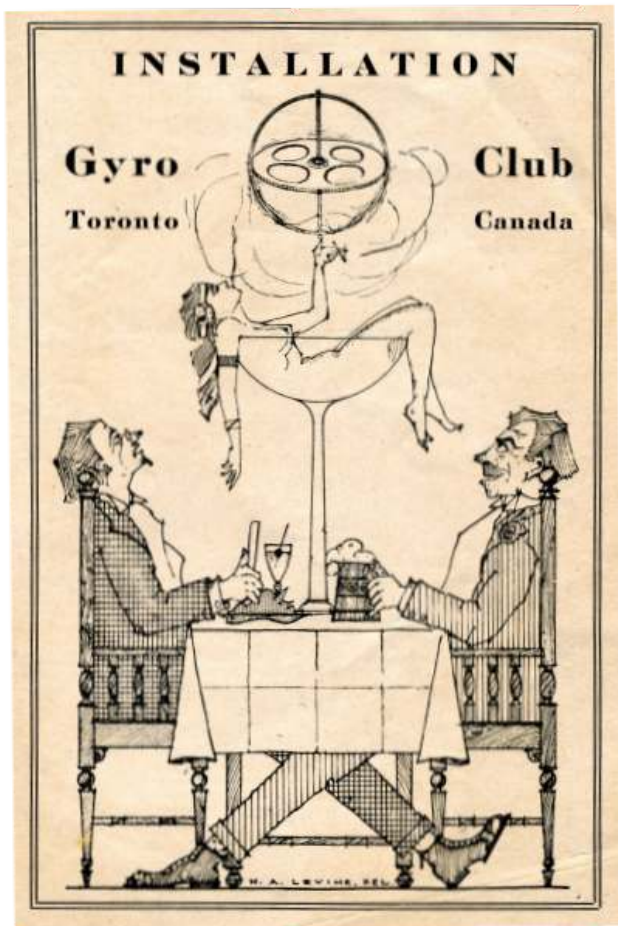
background checks – thus the Handbook also reiterated membership requirements and indicated the familiarity that membership would offer:

"The new member of a Gyro Club will be thoroughly investigated before his election. His personality and ability must not only be good, they must be positive qualifications recommending his election. One negative vote defeats an applicant. Once he is elected he is no longer an outsider. His nickname is the only one by which his fellow members address him and he is given every opportunity to partake of all the advantages that the club offers."

The convention slated for Buffalo in 1918 was cancelled because "too many of the boys are overseas." But under the guidance of Al Kern the GyroScope "monthly" led off in 1918 with news – the second issue in February now increased to 24 pages offering reports from Gyros in uniform, committee reports and advertisements. Each month was mostly the same ... patriotism was expressed often, and politics as well. Note this 1919 edition.



As the war ended and the next few years progressed, it was obvious that the Gyro membership was still young at heart and rapidly advancing into the "Roaring 20s" as is evidenced by the following 1919 advertisement in the Gyroscope. I would think that ads such as this might well make the ladies wonder (if they even ever saw the 'scope), what the fellows really did when attending a meeting. But there are notations that as far back as 1918 the Gyros planned ladies nights as well. These early Gyros also believed in having fun with their installations of new members as witnessed by one example of dire warnings that new members would "ride the goat." Many of today's clubs still honor these time-tested frivolities.



sincerity – those among us who like to appear hard-boiled, cynical, and immune to elementary emotions destroy harmony. In moving from sentimentalism to cynicism we are too prone to forget to stop at the right place between the two.

Each Gyro, officer or member, has a solemn duty of acting and expressing himself either verbally or upon the written page in a manner indicating that his mind has not forgotten his heart.

Throughout the whole history of Gyro the majority rule has prevailed and no member has been denied voice. Decisions handed down by the delegates have been the law of Gyro. As the vast majority of Gyro hearts beat in unison, is it too much to expect 100% loyalty?

As we say “fraternity of friendship” we may remind ourselves of those who refer to phrases in various articles and talks as empty platitudes. The founders and charter members never considered the friendship language as one of platitudes regardless of what was thought by outsiders. We can assure everyone that our Canadian and American leadership throughout our 22 years of existence attached real meaning to our friendship talk.

Let us all use a wise reticence respecting minor differences. Let us not parade those thoughts that destroy harmony. Let us remember that our battle for real friendships, in spite of much success, is in its infancy. The world has forgotten many clubs founded upon our motto and which have not lived; has forgotten too, many others, claiming much, whose claims are not justified by the actions of the majority of their members.”

I will close this essay on early Gyro with some snippets of advice as offered in 1934 for Founders Night by Secretary-Treasurer Ed Kagy – *‘The Old Grey Eagle’* (I have paraphrased some in the interest of space). Not all was easy in administering this fraternity of ours. Obviously, during the height of the “Roaring 20s”, Gyro had experienced a growth of some 50 clubs. A slowing of membership expansion thereafter and the failure of some clubs - and perhaps the onset of the Great Depression - caused many differing opinions to be expressed at the Calgary convention ... to which Ed offered gentle admonishment as follows:

“We may be well disappointed over seeming lack of gain in numbers, but the very height of our idealistic air may well be considered one big reason for our continuing disappointment.

Surely no member present at Calgary can doubt the genuine friendship relations existing nor can anyone say the cards were not all on the table. On the floor and in the meetings, wide differences of opinion existed, and as such in most organizations they would defeat the purposes. The feeling of respect at the beginning of the convention was even more noticeable at the conclusion. The founders and those who have best carried the banner have maintained a belief that genuine friendship demands whole-hearted

Finally, although I have no direct proof I would submit the following incidental conclusion regarding the words in the Gyro song, *“And he lives down in our alley.”*

This has always presumed to be an indication that one of the early meeting spots for the Gyro organizers was some bar/café that was located in an alley, hence the reference so fondly noted in Hubbell’s song.

Since the emphasis in those days was to promote business connections - along with friendship and trust - it would make sense that Gyros would patronize one of their own at his place of business.

There is a full page advertisement in the Exposition brochure advertising “The Alley Club” located on Third Street, between Euclid and Prospect – “This is the eats place where you meet everyone. Why not you?”

This is a Gyro I believe, supporting a Gyro endeavor, and enjoying the benefits of that association.

Although the alley concept is romantic, I rest my case.