

GUEST SPEAKER LEGATEE KEM KEMSLEY - TUESDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 1983:

It is very sad for me that neither Meldrum nor Joynt could be where I am today because both are about a fortnight or so senior to me in the establishment of this great movement. I am very sure that my First World War colleagues are flattered for the very kind way in which you received them today and for presenting them with certificates which I know they will prize as much as I prize mine.

You have asked me to tell you about the beginnings of Legacy and I should begin by saying that it really started in Hobart in 1923 when General Gellibrand called together a bunch of his ex-service fellows from his old battalion and mostly from his own brigade. He felt that it would be a good idea if they were to meet fairly regularly and that all of them that were in business or wanting to be in business would relate to each other. The plumber would go to the solicitor and the solicitor would go to the plumber.

Shortly after the Remembrance Club of Hobart opened early in 1923, Savige was going to visit Hobart as part of his duties with Geelong Woollen Mills and he was instructed by his ex-Commanding Officer, Gellibrand, that he was to attend a meeting of the Remembrance Club. Savige duly did that and was instructed by Gellibrand that he was to create a corresponding organisation in Melbourne as soon as he returned.

The objectives of the Remembrance Club were simply that they were to meet regularly for a mutual understanding of common responsibilities. In addition there was a feeling that preference to ex-servicemen should be generated and so the Club was established.

Savige returned to Melbourne and at a luncheon given to an ex-member of 24th Battalion by a bunch of 24th Battalion men Savige conveyed the instructions from Gellibrand telling those fellows that they had to do something about setting up a corresponding organisation to the Remembrance Club on the mainland.

About 24 fellows turned up for the lunch, most of whom were members of the 24th Battalion with some from the Colonel Eller's 8th Battalion. The arrangement was then to try and find a President, and they all agreed that something should be done. Savige was asked by the group to act as President but he had to stand aside because his duties with Geelong R.S.L. Woollen Mills required constant travel round Australia. General Tivey was then approached and he declined.

Just at that time Savige had an appointment with his dentist, Frank Meldrum, and they discussed possibilities for the first President, and it was agreed that General Monash would be ideal if he could be persuaded.

It so happened that Meldrum had a regular visit on Sundays to Monash's home to play tennis with his dentist friend Gershan Bennett who was Monash's son-in-law. So Savige persuaded Meldrum to approach Sir John on the next visit. Monash invited Frank into his study and after saying how involved he was as Chairman of the State Electricity Commission, felt he had to decline.

When Meldrum went to the Monash house the following Sunday he was invited to a further talk because during the week Monash had privately talked to his friend, Colonel Harold Cohen who was at the time President of Rotary and of the Boy Scouts. Sir John did not tell Meldrum he had spoken to Cohen and when Meldrum approached Cohen and after much discussion he agreed to accept the Presidency for the first year, he agreed to have a discussion with Meldrum and Savige the following week.



At this meeting Cohen said that, "we've got to form the Legacy Club on a corresponding basis to the way the Rotary Club operates. There will be one person from each different profession or business who will represent that profession until such time as the Club has established itself on a wider basis." And as a mere example we had two Solicitors - Downing and Armstrong, Meldrum as the Dentist, George Worboys as the Plumber, Dr. Gardner as the Eye Specialist, Doolan and Goodchild as Surveyors, Fred Wickham of the Premier's Department who was regarded as very important, Baker from Myer's emporium, Joynt from the printing world and Blackett the Architect.

A formal meeting took place on 10th September at which Cohen accepted the Presidency for the first year, and thereupon the following week a group met in his office. The first meeting of the approved group took place on 26th September.

We met as far as possible on the same day of each week, but when the time came round for the meeting on 3rd November there was a Police Strike in Melbourne. Over 600 policemen went on strike on the Saturday afternoon, and there was a tremendous calamity going on in Swanston and Bourke Streets with much looting and windows being broken down. I went home that night a very sorry man. On the wireless next morning the Government had called on General Monash to come in and set up a special constabulary force. Cohen was brought in to be Principal Officer in Head Office at the Melbourne Town Hall. I was sent for by Cohen and was given a job in the Town Hall. Joynt was another one who volunteered and you can imagine Joynt and a bunch of these ex-servicemen being brought together who had gathered in the Lower Hall, each of whom had been given a warning to go around selected areas of Melbourne to preserve the peace of Melbourne. Joynt was allotted West Melbourne which you can imagine would be very appropriate.

I was only recently appointed Secretary to the new Metropolitan Town Planning Commission and was released to be Secretary to the official Special Constabulary Force under first Monash and then General McCoy with responsibilities of finding available drill halls and any equipment for the special constables, as bases, for the 24 hour day operations. I was released after six weeks. Many of those who became special constables were gradually enrolled into Legacy. By December we had 54 Legacy members, all of them on the Rotary Club principle of selection. This was the system Gellibrand had established in Hobart.

A name for the Club took much consideration. There were all kinds of problems and it was felt that the word being used in Tasmania of 'Remembrance' did not quite meet the situation. They considered various other names and finally there was a suggestion made at one of the unofficial meetings that "Legacy" might be appropriate. It was Pip Powell who nominated the name of "Legacy" as one to be submitted to the next Meeting of the new Club.

However at the next meeting it was Frank Selleck who moved a formal resolution that the name should be "Legacy" and that was accepted.

It was a wonderful first year under Cohen whose influence was tremendous. By 1924 Peter Eller had taken over the Chairmanship, and by the end of this year we had 102 members. We kept the show going along on our weekly meetings with distinguished speakers coming just as we do today.

The Repatriation Department were pretty slow in accepting proper recognition of ex-servicemen at that time and we enlisted into the Club Mick Ryan who was then Victorian head of the Repatriation Department. We were then able to exercise a lot of influence on him and he set up a Committee to assist and advise him on things we felt should be included in the Repatriation Act. He did a lot of work in that direction with the assistance of a special Legacy Committee.



By the end of 1924 and early 1925 the Club had achieved most original objectives and it became apparent that something more by way of service was desirable. So a first new move was to take some mothers and children of deceased comrades for a picnic to Heidelberg followed by another one to Beaumaris. We were limited in numbers because at that time only a small proportion of members possessed motorcars.

Following on those successes a Committee studied how best to proceed and it was our good friend Frank Doolan who posed the question - "What does 'Legacy' really mean? Isn't our course best to do what we can for the legacy of war - the widows and children?" Thereupon the Deceased Soldiers' Children's Welfare Committee began the basis of Legacy as it developed.

Savige at that time had a property down at Balnarring and so we had the first boys' camp there. These boys had been collected from Carlton, North Melbourne, and Richmond. That was the origin of the boys' camp at Somers which still goes on today.

For the boys we set up a lacrosse team and a football team, and we had an arrangement with the baths to teach boys to swim. We also set up a literary and debating class which met once a week in Market Street and we used to have members of Legacy bring along as many boys as they could collect and give them talks which we hoped would be interesting and develop their minds along the proper form of citizenship. I'm proud to say that by the time the Second World War came along nearly every boy in that early literary and debating class went on active service.

Later on we were able to involve the widows and then later the girls. The way Legacy developed under those three different gradual processes was very much to the credit of the successive Boards of Management who didn't try to do too much too soon. They were very wise to take the boys first, the mothers next, and the girls after that.

I just want to finish by saying how grateful we were for the assistance we got from the Repatriation Department who were really extraordinarily kind and helpful to us. We made sure that we had Legacy members working in the Repatriation Department so we had extra influence. A lot of the improvements that were made to the Repatriation Act in those earlier years were due to our policy of co-operation with the Repatriation Department.

I wish to finish by referring to our next Conference which is to be at Hobart. It was my great pride to attend the Hobart Conference in 1949 when we really brought in the Second World War members in a very substantial way and they started taking over the responsibilities from we fellows who thought we were getting old. You know, it's nonsense, but we did think we were getting old and I'm not even old yet. We did enlist them and they came in with great enthusiasm.

It was at Hobart where two major things happened in Legacy of which I'm particularly proud because I had the honour of sponsoring them. We adopted the Code submitted by Hobart Club. By having the Code it meant that any future Clubs being formed would only be allowed to be formed as long as they followed the Code. We also set up the Legacy Co-ordinating Council. And so the tradition that we all know and honour so much today is all due to what happened in Hobart in 1949; there is no way any Club can break from the tradition to which we are all committed.

Gentlemen, I am proud to have been the speaker today, I'm very proud for the part I have been able to play in Legacy and I wish you well in the days ahead.