

SPEAKER LAST TUESDAY - FOUNDATION DAY

PAST PRESIDENT LEGATEE A. N. ("KEM".) KEMSLEY

"LEGACY - ITS BEGINNINGS"

On Tuesday last, the weekly luncheon meeting was observed as our annual Foundation Day luncheon and, on this occasion, we were privileged to have as the speaker of the day, Legatee Past President A. N. ("Kem.") Kemsley, who chose as the title for his talk, "Legacy - its beginnings". The President, Legatee Bruce Hall, very fittingly formally introduced our speaker and in doing so, made brief reference to Kem's dedicated Legacy service over the years since he was inducted as a member of Melbourne Legacy in December 1923 and made mention also of a number of the many postings he has so capably held to date.

The text of his talk follows -

"Today is the 54th recognized Anniversary of the foundation of this Club, 25th September, 1923. I think it's appropriate to begin by a reference from Emerson who said 'All history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons'. And I think that's a very appropriate quotation in relation to the history of this Club.

For those amongst us who are not at all familiar with its earliest days, I'm concentrating on that aspect of Legacy's history. It really began in Hobart, early in 1923, when General Sir John Gellibrand, a very great Tasmanian, a very great Australian soldier, who was living in Hobart with concern for those young professional men who were then trying to set up business in a competitive world which had been denied them while they'd been away, and he set up amongst his colleagues, the so called 'Remembrance Club', and that Club had only one principle objective and that was reciprocity in business.

It went very well, with a result that he got onto his ex-Staff Captain Stanley Savige, who had been his Staff Captain when Gellibrand was 6th Infantry Brigade Commander. He told Savige that he thought it was a movement that would be worthwhile on the mainland and he almost commanded Savige, in his professional and normal way for a man like Gellibrand, that he had to get it going. At the time at which he spoke to Savige, which was about the end of July or early August 1923, members of the 24th Battalion were giving a farewell lunch, at the then Phair's Hotel, to one of their number from Nagambie who was going overseas. "Sandy" Lowe is here today and I think he was there at that lunch and also at some subsequent ones. "Sandy" is probably the only one here today who was at that lunch.

Following that lunch Savige told them of the letter he had had and the instructions he had received from Gellibrand. There and then these 24th Battalion men said that they would follow his instructions and get ahead with doing something about it. They didn't waste any time and the idea went on quite rapidly. Those who were at that lunch, the particular ones that we of the older brigade should remember, included Savige, Frank Selleck, Ted Pittard, Bob Irving and "Babe" Norman who was at that time with the Orient Company. Because he was so employed he was regarded as not eligible under the idea of reciprocity in business to individuals, so he did not come on land join Legacy, but all those other men and "Sandy", and others, did a tremendous job to get this Club going - we owe an awful lot to the ex-24th Battalion.

Savige, although asked to take the Chair, didn't want to, because he was then beginning the merchandising of the new returned soldiers' woollen mills at Geelong, which necessitated constant travel all over Australia so Savige said "we've got to find somebody important to do it". And so in

Speaker last Tuesday (continued):-

"Monash said he couldn't, he had enough to do with the Electricity Commission coming up, and other things, and he couldn't look at it. They then approached General Tivey with the same result. It so happened, in a most extraordinary way, the manner in which the first President was secured. Savige was in Frank Meldrum's dentist's chair in Collins Street at the time that this was under consideration and he told Meldrum of his problem, knowing that Meldrum used to play tennis every Sunday afternoon at Monash's home. Savige asked him if he would speak again to Monash on the next Sunday. Meldrum went to the tennis match there and played with Monash's son-in-law, Gershon Bennett, a fellow with whom I served in both wars, and Bennett arranged that the matter would come up for discussion during dinner that evening. Monash was very silent during the dinner but afterwards he took Meldrum away into the study, and said, 'I'm still very interested in this thing, but, Meldrum, I just can't do this, but would you leave it with me, I'll see what I can do'. So, a few days later, he told Meldrum 'I have spoken to Colonel Harold Cohen. I think if you people approach him, it might be worthwhile'. And so it was on the 25th September there was a formal meeting at Anzac House, of interested people, Colonel Peter Eller was Chairman, and they discussed the idea of the proposed Club so they'd have something to say to the potential President when they approached him. It was left to Peter Eller as the Chairman of that group and "Pip." Powell, a very well known Accountant in the city, to go along and approach Cohen.

Cohen agreed to accept it on various conditions which he laid down and it was very fortunate that a selection was made. Eddie Cohen, our present valuable member, is his son. Colonel Cohen was then probably one of the most popular ex-servicemen in Melbourne. He was very heavily involved in his legal practice and in the commencement of Rotary. Later he became also the first President of the Constitutional Club at the same time as he was President of Melbourne Legacy. A series of conferences were held in his office, going the whole week after he accepted, determining policies for consideration. "Pip" Powell acted as the Secretary and Selleck as Treasurer. On 8th October Cohen took the Chair as President at the meeting that was held at Anzac House. The man who was to speak that day was Powell. There are some of us here still who remember him very favourably. It was arranged that Powell should speak at that meeting and that his address was appropriately 'Business Leadership'. It's very important for me to read to you the very last paragraph of that talk by Powell to that group on that day, in which he said -- "As a tribute to our departed comrades who made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of Australia and the Empire and who so completely typified the A.I.F. spirit, I humbly suggest that we name this Club the Legacy Club in token of the heritage that has been bequeathed to us by those who so nobly commenced the work that is left to us to carry on." They are extremely significant words in recalling the basic history of Legacy. They're a little different from the general impression.

Now, it so happened that on the 16th October, Cohen announced to the members the Policy and Objects that had been defined; about the draft rules which with mutual helpfulness were still carried forward; the control of membership, in his view, was vital and had to be restricted very carefully, in those early days; that it would be important to obtain very significant names for Presidents so as to keep the public status of the Club on a high level and therefore they'd have to look carefully for Patrons. The principle of preference to soldiers was accepted as an idea that should also be followed and they were the only policies then laid down. At that meeting, it was Frank Selleck who moved that the name of the Club be "Legacy", and that's why Selleck has so much recorded history in his favour. I have told you that the suggestion originally came from Powell, but historically it was Selleck who moved the necessary resolution.

Speaker last Tuesday (continued):-

"Now, it so happened, just at this time, the Police strike took place in Melbourne. It began on the 3rd November, and I was unfortunately very heavily involved from the start. It was there that I sat alongside Harold Cohen in the Town Hall in the administration of the special voluntary police force for a week or two and as a result, Harold invited me to join Legacy. I only mention it, not for my personal reference, but that strike brought the ex-servicemen of Melbourne into a cohesion which was just as if the war had never stopped. They worked from the first Sunday morning and took complete charge of all the rioting and all the unrest in the city, 600 Policemen lost their jobs, never dreaming that a strike by 600 police could be overcome. Men were enrolled out of this Force into the Legacy Club and that's how we reached the membership by the end of the year of almost 100 members, and they had all been pretty carefully chosen.

From there I must move a little bit quickly to say that immediately following all this, and in accordance with the previously declared wishes of Cohen, it was decided to appoint Gellibrand the first Patron without asking him and he held that distinguished office for the rest of his life. Later General Sir John Monash and General Sir Harry Chauvel were chosen. How nice it is to have Sir Harry Chauvel's son with us on an occasion when I'm proud to mention that name. So for years we had those three very distinguished men as the Patrons of this Club, which helped it to get its high status in the community.

We moved along from there pretty rapidly, as I have said, Savige was involved with the Geelong Returned Soldiers' Woollen Mills. He therefore became well known in Geelong and so our first offshoot occurred on the 25th August 1925 with the admission of Geelong Legacy into the Movement, for which Savige was entirely responsible. August/September of that year we had the first informal discussion between Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat which had just been formed, and that meeting indicated that it was time they began to think of other things, beyond those of the original conception. The idea of restricting the membership into business reciprocity had just about had its day and something else had to come along. A group of members of Melbourne were giving serious thought to the future, when Frank Doolan, as we all know so well, came up with the idea that the real Legacy of the war were the dependants that were left. As soon as Frank Doolan made that particular suggestion it just caught on straight away like a fire in the bush and it was taken up at once on the 1st October, 1925.

Frank Doolan wasn't a member of the Board of Management but he was invited to it, and from that moment Melbourne Legacy set off on the course that we have now pursued ever so successfully. The Committee to act comprised Cohen, Savige, Professor Browne, Bill Blackett, Ted Pittard, and Doolan and their task was to further the objectives that had been defined.

These discussions then immediately involved contact with the Repatriation and Education Departments in which Doolan played a very prominent part with Blackett. They obtained from the Repatriation Department figures and details as to what the potentialities were of eligible children, how many we were likely to have to deal with and so on. We had their addresses given to us and the first thing of a practical nature in regard to the children, was on 26th February, 1926, when we organised a picnic for them. We collected them on a beautiful Saturday afternoon and they were taken down to Rickett's Point for a party. Just one or two incidents in connection with that I must mention. The procession started in motor cars at the top end of Swanston Street and we went from there - just about lunch time - through Swanston Street down to Rickett's Point. By the time we got to Flinders Street junction a "Policeman" appeared in uniform, or in what appeared to be a uniform of a Policeman. It was Donovan Joynt, disguised as a Policeman directing the traffic at Flinders Street corner. He was met and quickly released. Harold Cohen turned out as a

Speaker last Tuesday (continued):--

"In July 1926 it was decided that we should get the widows together to discuss ideas for the boys, and an approach was made to the War Widows' Association following this picnic. They were invited to Anzac House one evening to see what their reaction would be to their sons being brought into this movement. We allotted Savige and Joynt as the people who should go and talk to them. I'm able to say that as I was present at the bar of the Naval and Military Club where we "prepared" Joynt and Savige before they went down to meet all these widows. They went off very light heartedly but with great anxiety. However, the outcome of it was that within a fortnight they nominated to us 142 boys to attend Anzac House a fortnight later and thereby we started what was called the Literary and Debating Class. This is an indication, which would take an awful lot of amplification if I had time, of just how enthusiastically this idea developed of taking an interest in the boys who had lost their fathers.

Some of them that first night arrived with trousers torn and others without buttons on their shirts and so on and others very nicely dressed ready for a Sunday picnic. And so what became Junior Legacy was on its way.

Then let me take it from there to the next major move. I'm hurrying a lot. In November of 1926, the first Legacy Conference took place in Melbourne, because by that time the Sydney Legacy Club was formed, thanks to Legatee Hilmer Smith who went over there and did it. He was a senior officer of the Commonwealth Bank transferring to Sydney, and had been a member of Melbourne Legacy. And so the first Conference was held in Melbourne. The main things that were dealt with there were the idea that nothing must be done in any Legacy Club without proper reference to one another; which is the policy we followed through Conferences from year to year; that we should have a proper recognised badge and Bill Blackett from Melbourne was selected to design the badge you now wear and that the term "Legatee" should become recognised amongst members.

The next major thing I think I would like to talk to you about was the Government House Christmas Party and I think Sir Harry Chauvel had a bit to do with this. Government House here at that time was still occupied by the Governor-General and I'm talking of 1926. I hope I'm right but I think it was Sir Harry Chauvel who used his influence with the then Governor-General, I think it was Munro Ferguson\* and he very generously and immediately said he would allow a Garden Party for all the children at Government House on the 17th December, 1926. The first Government House Children's Party took place which was a great success.

I've cut out a lot of things of interest because I wanted to bring you to the point where we had done the real establishment of the work of which we are so proud that has gone on all this time. It was my misfortune in Egypt in 1915 to be one of the few of my unit who were not permitted to go on to Gallipoli at the time my unit went, which has always been a regretful thing for me. But looking at my diary, I noticed that the first time I came under gunfire of the enemy was Pozieres in France on the 20th July, 1916 which is a date some people in this room have reason to remember.

I have mentioned that for another reason, nothing to do with myself other than to say, that on that lovely sunshining morning, we went up towards the line and for the first time in my life I had seen some dead colleagues waiting to be buried. I can't describe to you the emotion and what it did to me, but from that day onwards, the war had an entirely different meaning. Till then war had been an adventure as far as I was concerned and I loved the Army and enjoyed it, but from that morning on I had an entirely different attitude because as I saw these fellows, one man still had his bayonet and his rifle in his hands.

Speaker last Tuesday (continued):-

"I'll never forget this thing and that night and for nights afterwards I kept thinking about how I saw them before mother or father or sister or brother would know their loss and I got this spirit at that time, never knowing that it was going to apply to me so much in my Legacy years, but I put my interest in Legacy and the dedication I have given to it back to that. Which enables me to say that the point I want to make is in my final comment. On the 28th February, 1961, Brian Armstrong, one of Legacy's greatest stalwarts of all time, was standing where I'm standing today addressing the Club. He had just been overseas and he was giving us the story of his trip. He doesn't know I intended this. I have retained with my proud records, because of that significant thing to me, these final comments of Brian on the speech that he gave on that day when he concluded with these words when commenting on the many fine memorials in the area to the 1st A.I.F.

"The pilgrimage I made was to one of those memorials unmarked and almost unknown. It was dusk on Remembrance Day as I moved up the long Roman road that leads from Amiens to Bapaume and then along a high ridge of a grassy knoll that commands for miles that flat country leading to the sea. On the right is Villers Bretonneux and behind is Peronne. Here there is empty farmland and all is very quiet. I came to a small paddock where there were a few cows. Here I found some blackened stones and cut into one were these words - 'The ruin of Pozieres Windmill (and it is Pozieres to which I also referred just now) which lies here was the centre of the struggle in this part of the Somme battlefield in July/August 1916. It was captured on August 4th by Australian troops who fell more thickly on this ridge than on any other battlefield in the war'."

Recalling his personal feelings at that moment, Armstrong said:

"I have no doubt that each one of you has some similar special memory of the war that is bound up with your membership of Legacy, some event, place, or happening. This was one of mine. You will find the story in the book we all know 'There Goes A Man'. A story of endurance, determination and incredible courage. The feeling came to me as I stood in that little enclosure and here began the long road that led to Legacy, for in the middle of that holocaust was the Victorian Brigade from which later came the first man of Legacy. I am certain that many splendid men, some of whom were my friends, whose last sight was that battered windmill would, had the finger of fate been pointed the other way, been original members of this Club. A question seemed to hang in the still air, not for me, for I was only a cypher, but for all of us for whom in later years the finger has pointed to life - what have you done to merit and repay your deliverance from this and similar ordeals? And in that hour I was thankful for all men and women of goodwill who down the years have striven to give a practical and helpful interpretation to those challenging words - 'Lest we forget'."

Thank you, Brian."

Visitors at the weekly luncheon meeting last Tuesday were:-

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| Mr. Jim Neagle        | : | introduced by Legatee | Eric Baker |
| Colonel Ian Chauvel   | : | "                     | "          |
| Colonel Ferdie Wright | : | "                     | "          |
| Mr. Peter Forster     | : | "                     | "          |
|                       |   |                       | Tiger Lyon |

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