



THE ORIGIN OF ELKDOM



In the year 1867, Charles Algernon Sidney Vivian, the son of an English clergyman of the established Church, came to America. He was a ballad singer and found lodging at Mrs. Giesman's Boarding House, No. 188 Elm St., New York. The male boarders at Mrs. Giesman's, composed mostly of actors and musicians, spent their Sunday afternoons in friendly association. At one of the meetings, Vivian reported one of their group was sick and without funds to get medical care. He proposed that a collection be taken for the sick friend and that the group be organized permanently as a social and beneficial group. This organization was made and named the "Jolly Corks," being patterned after the Buffaloes, an English organization of which Vivian was a member.

The new Order became very popular and soon larger quarters were secured. Although it was the desire of its originators to be strictly an actors' organization, many men from other professions were accepted into membership.



The "Jolly Corks" • 10 of the original 15 members of the BPO Elks.
(From left): E. N. Platt, musician; Frank Langhorne, theatrical photographer; William Carleton, composer; William Sheppard, minstrel player; Richard R. Steirly, pianist; Charles Vivian, actor-singer; John T. Kent, minstrel player; Henry Vandemark, singer; Harry Bosworth, clerk; M. G. Ash, theatrical photographer.

On Sunday, February 10, 1868, at 29 Delancy Street, the "Jolly Corks" became the "Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks." The name Elk was selected because the Elk is "distinctively American, and is fleet of foot and timorous of doing wrong, avoiding all combat except in fighting for the female and in defense of the young, helpless and weak." Vivian was elected the Right Honorable Primo, now known as the Exalted Ruler.

The New York Lodge continued to grow and by 1871 requests were received to establish branch Lodges in other cities.

An application was made for the incorporation of the Grand Lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks under the authority of the State of New York.

The incorporation was granted on March 10, 1871. The first charter was granted the same day to New York Lodge #1.

Elkdom continued to grow and Philadelphia became Lodge #2; San Francisco Lodge #3; Chicago Lodge #4; Cincinnati Lodge #5, etc.

Meetings, or Conventions, of the Grand Lodge were held annually. All of these sessions were held in New York until 1890, when the conventions became migratory, and have been since held in most of the large cities of the United States.

In the early days of the Order the meetings were called after the evening show, as most of the members were of the theatre professions. Eleven o'clock was the meeting time and the first order of business was the "toast to the absent brothers."

The Eleven O'Clock Toast has remained through the years and now is observed at all Elks occasions. The first Sunday of December, known to all Elks as **Memorial Sunday**, is set aside in every Elks Lodge nationwide for suitable services in memory of those members who have made their last journey.