

THE EVOLUTION OF GYRO

As a member of this Fraternity of Friendship, you may well have wondered about the beginning process whereby the fraternal camaraderie of three recent college graduates evolved into a far-flung organization about to enter its second one-hundred years. Fortunately some of the early records are still available within the Gyro archives, and although the earliest written and pictorial records are sparse, they do recite the tale of the early Gyro incubation that soon led to rapid growth within a decade.

One can read about the three Founders and their immediate friends in the summer of 1912, and the influence that the GyroScope played in the early organization, elsewhere within this edition. The purpose of this effort is to take an abbreviated look at some of the events that shaped Gyro into the Association of Gyro Clubs. Or as one might say, when in January of 1917 the 279 members in five clubs got serious!

The five loosely aligned Gyro Clubs – Cleveland, Chicago, Buffalo, Cincinnati and Philadelphia – met together, along with two prospective clubs Rochester and Detroit, at a downtown Cleveland hotel and held the first annual convention. These seven clubs were represented by 47 delegates who, as one might imagine, braved all sorts of difficulties to travel in mid-winter at their own expense, to further the ideals of friendship.



During those two days, January 27 and 28, those delegates accomplished a great body of work – they wrote a constitution and bylaws, designed a letterhead and badges, made plans to establish additional clubs, set the princely sum of \$1.50 as annual dues, and thus established the “Association of Gyro Clubs.” L.K. Jordan was elected as the first International President. *(It is noteworthy that his son became president some 40 years later.)* A follow up meeting was planned for June of the same year, however with war imminent and so many members now in the military, immediate expansion plans were put on hold.

But even the war could not hold up the Gyro momentum. An executive meeting was held in Cincinnati in January 1918. It was determined that the newsletter created in Cleveland in 1912 – The Gyrocoop – would become the official bulletin of the association and they renamed it the GyroScope. The membership bristled with patriotism and became very involved in the selling of Liberty Bonds and other drives in support of the War Effort. Later in the year, the executives would request their first bank loan of \$200 to fund a yearbook.

By 1919, the war over, momentum picked up again. Philadelphia had resigned, but the association now consisted of 17 clubs, and by 1921 an additional 9 clubs would join with the assistance of the “Pioneer Fund” *(similar to today's Betterment Fund)* that was established to help expansion efforts. One interesting highlight was a resolution of congratulations to the Vancouver BC club for their work in promoting Gyro. Prophetic to be sure as those efforts became D-IV with an eventual 27 clubs and over 1000 members.

A meeting in December 1921 in Buffalo determined that representation was unequal, so the Association divided North America into districts, established the method of electing district officers, and devised a method to apportion voting rights of clubs.

(To learn about the Evolution of the Districts see the sidebar on page 9)

The GyroScope which had now grown to an average of 28 pages per issue was revised to be an entity unto itself, wherein an Editor would be appointed and the costs of production and mailing would be paid by club subscription. Since the beginning of the Cleveland Club, networking was the preeminent reason for

Gyro growth, and as such, practically every member had his name and business listed on the back pages causing the rapid growth of the magazine as well. There was not enough money to pay for this extravagance – the financial sheet showed a deficit of \$76 – this was corrected by increasing the dues from \$1.50 to \$3.00 per annum. Additionally, each club would be required to remit \$25 to International.

For the following year of 1922 the Gyro membership rolls showed that 35 clubs were now members, an impressive decade of growth. It had become truly International with clubs in the United States and Canada. Geographically clubs were located across N. America – from Halifax in the Canadian Maritimes to Nanaimo in British Columbia, and from Rochester in New York to Seattle in Washington State. *(There have been 249 clubs entered into Gyro over the years. Sadly some have fallen away for a variety of reasons—but the ideals of friendship remain intact and there is ever hope that new growth will occur.)*

In the years of the Great Depression of the early 1930s, International counted 86 clubs. But because of the financial collapse and near poverty for many, membership declined quickly.



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Although the benefits of friendship remained important to many, and kept Gyro alive, a number of clubs had to resign. Shortly after the depression, with the New Deal creating jobs, a resurgence of membership occurred with the addition of more than twenty new clubs. Unfortunately when Canada in 1938 and the United States in 1941 were drawn into World War II, many members were whisked away into the military and those left at home did as much as they could to maintain their clubs. Once again, as in 1918, those members not serving did what they could to help the war effort. One notable project to help the troops was known as the "Padre Jones Cigarette Fund" - started in Montreal - which spread across both countries with many clubs helping to send 'cigs' overseas. *(Although it would certainly be frowned upon as a worthwhile service today, it might be noted that Padre Jones of Montreal received the Gyro Honor Key after the war.)*

When the troops came home after years of war and reunited with their families, some went to college and/or searched for work in what was now a different world. There still seemed to be an aura of desire for male bonding. This was in Gyro's favor as in the decade and a half following VJ-day, 71 new clubs joined the fraternity. Long-time Secretary-Treasurer Ed Kagy *(a founder)* determined the work load required an assistant, and thus Al Hartmann was added to the staff. This enabled Ed to travel and visit 93 of the 101 clubs during the 1945-1946 fiscal year. It may be attributed in some degree, that this personal contact was very beneficial in motivating those clubs to aggressively seek new members and initiate other clubs, thus causing the fifteen-year growth.

In 1955 the "Gray Eagle" retired and the reins passed to "Chick" St. Clair who became another dynasty serving 22 years. Because of the expansion again, Gyro decided in 1957 that it needed a "home" - an office and staff that members everywhere could look to for resources,

advice and as a symbol that their organization was growing. After 55 years, this "home office" has undergone refurbishment and remains a viable headquarters for many years to come.

Following that last spurt of growth, Gyro expansion slowed appreciably. All men's clubs, be they charitable, service or fraternal, soon experienced a radical loss of membership, and although it has fared better than most, Gyro is now composed of 98 clubs and 40% fewer members than that experienced at its high point in 1957. This decline can be directly attributed - not to the product of friendship that is offered - but to the undeniable fact that the world has changed once again. Men are now working longer hours to better their lives; they have family commitments; they are often active in sport activities; and thus have less time for joining. Initially, what time was left over was taken by the advent of television. As the years move along, TV is still available, but it too is being pushed aside by the allure of ever emerging digital and other electronic gadgets. Competition for leisure time has become Gyro's adversary.

Gyro International has positive thoughts for the next century. Although it is ever seeking new tools and methods to promote expansion, in terms of "evolution" Gyro has come 100 years offering the same basic product. If you have read this far, you must enjoy the product and you are a friend. Consider making a personal commitment to help International once again enjoy growth. Consider other friends and acquaintances and invite them to a Gyro experience. Do not withhold from them the joys you have shared with other Gyros. This needn't take time or money. In other words, it is a simple act and only you can do it ... to "Share Gyro with a Friend!"

Then, as Jimmie Hubbell and the rest of the boys would loudly proclaim to new members as they sang with gusto in that old Alley Bar ...

"... and he lives down in our alley!"

DISTRICT EVOLUTION

At an executive meeting in 1922 in Toronto, the council decided that all Gyros would be better represented if North America were divided into five districts. Accordingly they set loose boundaries that would allow clubs in close proximity to join together. Immediately, those districts held elections and chose officers.

The first Board of Governors thus met in Detroit on December 7, 1922.

As more and more clubs joined the organization, the council tinkered again and again with the district boundaries over the next forty years.

Upon review, it can be seen that this was an orderly process to make sure that the selected clubs could support one another in a district. The International Border was never taken into consideration with the result that five of the eleven districts have clubs both in Canada and the United States.

At the time the districts were first formed in 1922, the districts were set up with constitutions and district officers. Needless to say, a great deal of the strength of our organization emanates from the district meetings and brought to the attention of the International officers. The Board of Governors plays a major role in the conduct of Gyro business. They represent the clubs and vote on all matters, as well as participating in conventions and programs. Only one body within Gyro has a higher authority - the delegates at the annual general meeting.

Currently, District V is composed of only one club, thus as a district they are considered inactive. Policy, however, dictates that the club president, for voting purposes, is considered the same as if he were Governor, and as such a member of the Board of Governors. Additional information and highlights about the various districts is contained elsewhere within this document.