

**The object of this brief History is to set forth the real facts of the Origin of the Order of ELKS.**

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**The Story, always interesting, is the story of the expansion of a dream of brotherhood into the greatest of American Fraternities.**

**On Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> , 1867, Charles A. Vivian, an English comic singer, landed in New York via an English trading vessel from South Hampton. On the night of his arrival he dropped into the Star Hotel, a Free and Easy@ kept by John Ireland on Lispenard street near Broadway. Richard R. Steirly, also of English birth, was a piano player at the Star Hotel. Vivian struck up an acquaintance with him and volunteered to sing a few songs. He made such an impression on John Ireland that the latter sent for his friend, Robert Butler, manager of the American Theater@ on Broadway. Vivian sang for Butler, making such a hit that he was engaged for a three week=s run at the American. When closing time came at the Star Hotel, Steirly took Vivian around to his boarding house at 188 Elm Street, kept by Mrs. Giesman, There he found a collection of congenial spirits, among them William Bowron, who also knew Vivian in his native land, \*\*\* The streets in that section of New York have been re-plotted and their names changed so that the plot known as A188 Elm Street@ can now be found on LaFayette Street in the block between Broome and spring Streets, In 1939 the Council of the City of New York passed the following resolution: Be it resolved... that the two blocks remaining on Elm Street be known as Elk Street to pay tribute to the famous Order of Elks which was founded on that Street in the year 1867.@**

On November 23<sup>rd</sup> , 1867, Dick Steirly went to the American Theater to take notes for the purpose of orchestrating some of Vivian=s songs. After the matinee, Vivian took Steirly over to Sandy Spencer place at Broadway and Fulton Street, There they met Hughley Dougherty, Cool Burgess and Henry Vandemark. The latter suggested that the party shake dice for the refreshments. Vivian replied that he never handled the cubes, but would show them a new game. Calling for three corks he gave one each to Steirly and Vandemark, keeping the other for himself, He asked Cool Burgess to be the judge and Dougherty to count to three. They rehearsed the trick of each dropping his cork on the bar and picking it up as rapidly as possible, several times, the idea conveyed to initiated being that the last man to lift his cork was to buy. Vivian then gave the word of command, Dougherty counted, He and Steirly passed their hands over their corks while Vandemark, eager to lift his cork from the bar, was both first and last to pick it up, and consequently was stuck for the round. This was the first introduction of a delectable form of amusement which became popular.

## BIRTH OF THE JOLLY CORKS

At about this time the Excise Law was being strictly enforced and Sunday in New York City was a very Adry@ day. Devotees of the cork trick formed the habit of congregating at Mrs. Giesman's on this day to hold social conventions under the inspiring influences of a stock of beer laid in the night before. This little coterie styled itself the Corks, with Vivian as the Amperial Cork.

The revels of the Jolly crew meeting at Mrs. Giesman's became disturbing to the other boarders and she finally required them to forego their Sunday gatherings in her house. Quarters were found at 17 Delancy Street, over a saloon kept by Paul Sommers, where the meetings were continued, The object of the Corks at this time was entirely convivial, it's membership was composed of professional and semi-professional entertainers with a sprinkling of legitimate actors. Among the latter were Thomas Riggs, George McDonald, William Sheppard and George Thompson, a theatrical agent. When the cork

trick was tried on McDonald it amused him so that he called the coterie the JOLLY CORKS, and as such it has gone down upon the pages of history, In the latter part of December just before the holidays, they were returning from a funeral of a friend, Ted Quinn, when McDonald suggested that the Jolly Corks become a protective and benevolent society. At the meeting held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 1868, presided over by Charles A. Vivian, George McDonald offered a motion to organize the Jolly Corks as a lodge along benevolent and fraternal lines and providing a committee be appointed to formulate rules and regulations for it's government, prepare a suitable ritual, and select a new name. Vivian having in mind an English organization, The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffalos, but the majority were desirous of bestowing a distinctively American title upon the new organization. A committee visited Cooper Institute Library, where the Brothers found the ELK described in a work on Natural History as an animal A fleet of foot, timorous of doing wrong, but ever ready to combat in defense of self or of the female of the species@. This description appealed to the committee as containing admirable qualities for emulation by members of a benevolent fraternity and the title ELK was incorporated in its report.

## **BIRTH OF THE ORDER OF ELKS**

**On February 16, 1868, the committee reported, recommending that the Jolly Corks be merged into the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and the recommendation was adopted by a vote of eight (8) to seven (7). Listed below are those who voted for what name.**

**For BUFFALO :Charles A. Vivian; Richard Steirly; M.G. Ash; HenryVandermark; Harry Bosworth; Frank Langhorne; E. W. Platt.**

**For ELK: George McDonald; George Thompson; Thomas Riggs;  
William Carleton; William Sheppard; George Guy; Hugh Dougherty;  
William Bowron.**

### **The Death of Charles A. Vivian**

**Before passing from this branch of the resume of Elks History, it will not be inappropriate to mention the death of Brother Vivian. With the beginnings of the B.P.O.E. a breach was opened between two factions within the ranks, which rapidly developed into a feud. On one hand were the legitimate actors, endeavoring to invest the new organization with principals and ideas in keeping with a benevolent and fraternal institution, while on the other were the semi-professional entertainers more in sympathy with the original purposes of the convivial Jolly Corks.**

**Charles Vivian was the leader of the latter faction, and when he appeared for the second degree on 14 June 1886, the professionals who were in command ordered a ballot and he was rejected. At the same time a number of Vivian's friends were barred from the meeting and afterwards declared expelled. This incident ended Vivian's connection with the B.P.O. Elks. He died in Leadville, Colorado, March 20, 1880, twelve years later, of Pneumonia. On April 28, 1889, the remains of Charles Vivian were exhumed and taken to Boston, under the auspices of Boston Lodge # 10, where they rest in Mt. Hope Cemetery. As far as can be learned from personal friends, Vivian never claimed to have been an ELK. He did claim to have been one of the organizers of the Elks, which he was, but ne never took the degrees of the Order, and severed all connections with it a few months after it was born.**

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