

Rough Rider & Friendly Sons: Theodore Roosevelt attends the 121st Anniversary Dinner of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick

BY ED O'SHAUGHNESSY

On March 17, 1905 the stars briefly aligned over Manhattan and a long-desired wish was fulfilled. The recently inaugurated President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, a New York City native son and possibly the most admired man in the United States, arrived in the city mid-day and that evening would be the guest of honor at the 121st anniversary dinner of the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick.¹ It would be a great day for the city and for the New York Irish; it would mark in history the progress of a people in a city they were helping to re-make.

The Friendly Sons of St Patrick had long sought Roosevelt to accept an invitation to be the honored guest at their annual banquet. Invited initially in 1901, after he assumed the Presidency upon the assassination of William McKinley, he was invited each year for three years thereafter. To each invitation Roosevelt



sent regrets, citing responsibilities he had to place ahead of the Friendly Sons.

Then, in late 1904, a request from Eleanor Roosevelt, daughter of Teddy's late brother Elliot, changed the calculus. Eleanor requested her uncle give her away in marriage to his distant cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Teddy was delighted to agree to Eleanor's request, quipping that it was "a good thing to keep the name in the family," and he offered

the White House as a venue for the Roosevelt wedding. But Eleanor turned his offer down, preferring, she said, to be married at the home of her New York City grandmother. When Eleanor subsequently stated an interest in a springtime wedding, in New York City, Uncle Teddy spied opportunity. After what we may imagine were delicate discussions, St Patrick's Day emerged as the wedding date. With a commitment to be in

Photo: President Theodore Roosevelt in his office taken in 1906 by George W. Harris, "portraitist to the presidents." Roosevelt met Harris, then a San Francisco news photographer, when Harris joined the press entourage on a Roosevelt train trip. So impressed was Roosevelt with Harris that he encouraged him to set up a studio in Washington D. C. Harris & Ewing was established in 1905 and Roosevelt was the first of many presidents Harris photographed. Courtesy of the National Archives & Records Administration.

Ed O'Shaughnessy finds his inspiration in family research. It was an inherited bronze memento from the 1905 Friendly Sons banquet that prompted research which led to this article. His great grandfather, a member of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, managed to get himself assigned as an Assistant Steward for this banquet. His honorific assignment can be found in the handsomely designed program online. Ed's articles and stories appear in Canadian, Irish, and American historical society journals and newsletters. He has an undergraduate degree in history and graduate degrees in political science and executive management. ©2020. Published with permission of Edward J. O'Shaughnessy.

Photo:

A Friendly Sons of St Patrick membership badge. Badges were usually worn by members around their necks suspended by dark green ribbons. The date of 1784 indicates that this badge was commissioned for the New York City society, the second oldest one in the United States. This badge was manufactured by Tiffany & Co. Courtesy of eMedals.com.

New York City on March 17 the stars began to shift in the firmament and Teddy sent the happy news to his good friend Frank C. Travers, an Oyster Bay neighbor, a New York City merchant, and a member of the Friendly Sons.²

The story of President Roosevelt's attendance at the Friendly Sons' 121st anniversary dinner in New York City is not just a story of a sitting president attending yet another banquet, but rather a story of political and social relationships formed over years by, and with, the New York Irish community. This story is especially instructive for students of Irish-American history. By reflecting upon the circumstances that culminated in Roosevelt's attendance at the 1905 banquet we discern the significant progress the Irish in America had made over the preceding century. The Irish in the nineteenth century had experienced the Great Famine, forcing mass migrations to North America where they were not warmly received. But by the dawn of the twentieth century the New York Irish were able to host as one of their own a popular president who would happily proclaim "I am proud of the strain of Irish blood in my veins."³

FRIENDLY SONS OF ST PATRICK

The societal gains made by the New York Irish are reflected in evolution of the fraternal organization that would host President Roosevelt on "the day we celebrate." Founded on March 17, 1771 in Philadelphia as a charitable organization to help Irish immigrants get a start in their new country, the Society of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick at the beginning of the twentieth century was firmly established in several American cities with sizeable Irish populations. New York City organized its Society of the Friendly Sons March 17, 1784, one year after British forces left the city, making it the second oldest in the United States. By 1905 the demographics of the membership had evolved too, moving towards an even distribution between older members born in Ireland and younger members born in North America.

As Irish Americans filled the executive and professional ranks of New York City the activities of the Friendly Sons took on a formal and affluent tone. Membership in the Society was



highly coveted, and in 1905 was limited to 500. Financial support to Irish causes and organizations continued but had broadened in scope and deepened in capacity. Irish heritage was much celebrated at every annual banquet and the banquets were as opulent as any upper tier social group could boast. Delmonico's restaurant, a favorite of New York City high society, had been the setting of the annual Friendly Sons banquets continuously since 1899, and that would continue. The honored guests and keynote speakers were always renowned in their professions, and who could be more renowned than the hometown celebrity, President Teddy Roosevelt?

FAVORITE SON OF THE CITY

Theodore Roosevelt was born at 28 East 20th Street, New York City on October 27, 1858 to a prominent father of Dutch ancestry and a mother of English and Scots-Irish ancestry. Educated at Harvard Roosevelt developed an early interest in the military and politics. He rose rapidly in stature and influence, serving with the New York Civil Service Commission in 1881, the New York State Assembly in 1882, 1883, and 1884, and running for New York City mayor in 1886 he placed third. In 1889 he was appointed to the United States Civil Service Commission where

he served until appointed to the New York City board of police commissioners in 1894.

In 1897 he was appointed Secretary of the Navy, resigning from that position in 1898 to lead the Rough Riders in the Spanish American War. Returning to New York a war hero he ran for the office of the Governor and served a two-year term. When Vice President Augustus Hobart unexpectedly died in late 1899 President McKinley requested Roosevelt be his running mate. Assuming the Vice Presidency in March 1901 Roosevelt served for six months, becoming President when McKinley was killed by an assassin's bullet on September 14, 1901.⁴ At age forty-two, he was then and is still the youngest person to serve as President.⁵ Roosevelt was elected president in his own right November 8, 1904. He was then and is remembered today an immensely popular President. Getting him to accept a long-in-the-offering invitation to the Friendly Sons annual banquet was an accomplishment indeed, and for that achievement one man in particular deserves the credit.

FRANK TRAVERS, FRIENDLY SON AND FRIEND OF THE PRESIDENT

While he considered the members of the Society of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick "an exceedingly good lot of fellows" one member of the Society was held uniquely close by Theodore Roosevelt.⁶ Francis Charles Travers, born in New York City in 1845, was of the second generation in his family to be born in New York. Losing his father at an early age, Frank and his brothers may have lived some of their adolescent years with their mother's family, also of Irish descent. At age twenty-six Frank, along with his younger brothers, started a twine company which grew from a single store into the Travers Brothers Cordage Company, a large manufacturing and distribution concern with three manufacturing plants. Frank was very active in the business community, serving on multiple boards and as an executive in several side businesses. He became acquainted with Roosevelt in 1894 at Oyster Bay, where both owned summer homes not far apart.

Both men were also founding members of



the American Irish Historical Society, which commenced activities in 1897. Roosevelt developed a deep friendship with Travers, and he looked to him for advice on many subjects. When Roosevelt took up residence in the White House, Frank Travers and his wife were among his frequent guests. When Roosevelt sought refuge at Oyster Bay, Frank Travers was there to greet him and to arrange community events to welcome him home.⁷ In his obituary Frank Travers was remembered as a confidant of President Roosevelt and his advisor on "all Roman Catholic interests."⁸

Among all Roman Catholic interests were the Irish American societies, and preeminent among them was the Society of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick. For the 1905 Friendly Sons banquet Frank Travers served as chairman of the arrangements committee, a position that acknowledged his special relationship with the President.

INVITATIONS BEGIN

So comfortable felt the Friendly Sons in their relationship with Theodore Roosevelt that only weeks after Roosevelt assumed the presidency

Photo:
Francis C. Travers.
This photograph is
found in the journal
of the American Irish
Historical Society,
volume I, published in
1898. Travers was a
member of the executive
council of the Society
from its organization
until his untimely death
in 1905. Courtesy
of American Irish
Historical Society.

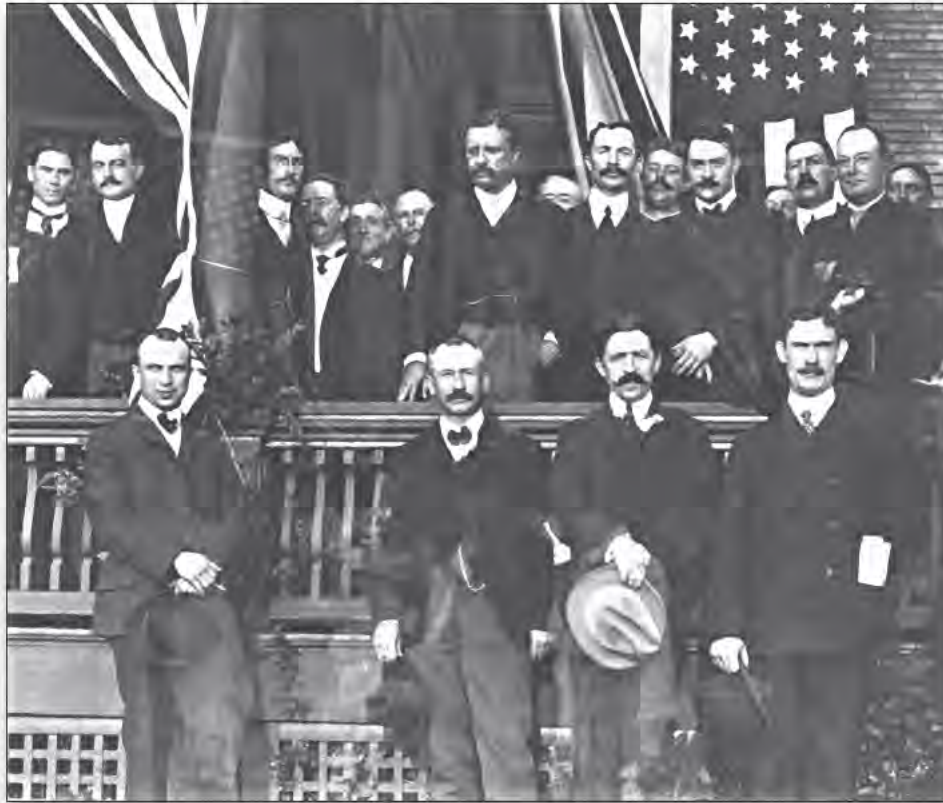


Photo:

This picture was taken at the September 15, 1902 reception at Oyster Bay for President Roosevelt shortly after he took office. The scene shows Roosevelt on the porch of Sagamore Hill surrounded by his security detail, White House staff, local dignitaries, and friends including Frank Travers, seen to the right rear of Roosevelt, and William Loeb Jr., Roosevelt's secretary, second from the left. Courtesy of Innis O'Rourke, great grandson of Frank Travers.

the organization called a special meeting to honor the new President by electing him an honorary member of their society. The only other president to be so distinguished was George Washington, so this was a rare honor indeed.⁹ At the time of this writing the identity of the Friendly Son who stood up to present the nomination is unknown, but we do know the identity of the Friendly Son who informed the President of the result.

In a letter to President Roosevelt dated November 25, 1901, Frank Travers wrote:

Dear Sir: Pleased to report to you that you are now an Honorary Member of the very old Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. You were elected at a special meeting called and held at Delmonico's with the largest attendance I ever saw and the great applause pleased me. We wish you to promise to attend our banquet March 17 and I hope you can. I know you will have a great reception. The officers will send you a special notice of your election Yours truly, Frank C. Travers¹⁰

In postscripts to the letter, Travers noted that

the Friendly Sons had postponed meetings due to the death of President McKinley, and that Travers had purchased two horses from Roosevelt in order to keep them at Oyster Bay: *On account of the death of President McKinley the Society did not hold any meetings until this one since last Spring. I am now the owner of "Havana" and "Cuba" of Oyster Bay.*

President Roosevelt responded the following day. He acknowledged the sale of the two horses and described their temperaments. He commented that he recently had a very pleasant lunch with Archbishop Corrigan, feedback that he knew Frank Travers would appreciate. In closing he wrote: *I am very much pleased with the attention shown me by the Sons of St Patrick, but I greatly doubt whether I can go to any dinner at that time. You have no conception of the host of invitations I receive.*

The immensely popular President had to turn down his first Friendly Sons invitation.

INVITATIONS CONTINUE

For the next several years invitations were sent by the presidents of the Friendly Sons with regrets returned by the President of the United States.

**Photo:**

The annual banquet for the Friendly Sons of St Patrick held on March 17, 1908. A much-cropped photograph shows the head table arrangement, portrait of St Patrick, and the illuminated Cead Mile Failte which were also used at the 1905 banquet. What is missing in this photograph are the relief images of Washington and Roosevelt which adorned the walls of the golden banquet room in 1905. Courtesy of Friendly Sons of St Patrick.

Mindful of the date of the banquets Roosevelt sent telegrams to be read at the banquets regretting his inability to attend. On March 17, 1903 and 1904, he sent those telegrams to Frank Travers to be read to the assembled Society.

On November 8, 1904 Roosevelt became the first president to be elected in his own right after serving upon the death of a predecessor. In a landslide victory he carried every state but the Solid South, which out of a Civil War era protest voted Democratic. Weeks later the Friendly Sons sent their annual invitation to the newly elected President. Having thrice been denied the opportunity to host Roosevelt and considering an additional hurdle possibly posed by his recent election, the Friendly Sons upped their ante and put their plenipotentiary, Frank Travers, to work.

On November 27, 1904 Frank Travers sent two letters to the White House. The two letters contain a wealth of information and draw attention to relationships that mattered to the President, relationships that Frank Travers would leverage. If we were uninformed of Frank Travers' special standing with President Roosevelt we might think his composition rather blunt. But Travers composed his letters with the certain knowledge that they would be well received.

To the President Frank Travers wrote:

Honorable Sir:

Honorable James Fitzgerald President of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick will forward to you today the invitation and greetings of our Society. When you write to him please state that you wish Frank C. Travers and Major John Byrne to be your special escort on March 17.

Your old friend & veteran in service Colonel Duffy of the 69th Regiment would consider it a very special honor if you will allow his Regiment to act as your military escort on that day. If this meets your approval advise me and I will [illegible] make the proper arrangements for the Regiment. I will see you later in regard to further details Yours truly. Frank C. Travers

This letter hints that a discussion has already occurred. Requesting the President ask for two named escorts sounds as if Travers is documenting a proposal previously presented. As was done in prior years, the president of the Friendly Sons, Judge James Fitzgerald, a man well-known to Roosevelt, will send an official invitation to the President of the United States. When Fitzgerald's envelope is opened by the President's secretary, a

man well known to Travers, the contents would not come as a surprise.

But in a departure from the approach of prior years Frank Travers dispatched a second letter to the White House that same day, this one addressed directly to Secretary Loeb, manager of the President's calendar:

Dear Sir:

I have at request of President Fitzgerald dropped a line to the President in reference to March 17 banquet. Now my dear old friend do not allow anything to interfere with this date for us. The President speaks in his letter to me about a dinner in February. If he desires me to get up another dinner I can do it alright but the St Patrick's association cannot change their date of March 17. Now if the President desires anyone else to be with us all he has to do is say the word. I wonder if he would like Secretary Taft or Postmaster General Wynne or General Nelson Miles in over and above [illegible] me as to your wishes. The 69th Regiment will turn out full ranks with full band to escort us and I will have [illegible] all along the route up to Delmonico's [illegible] how I can do the trick and make it the greatest success of the season. Yours. F. C. Travers

With a nod to protocol Travers states that he acted at the direction of the president of the Friendly Sons in dropping a line to the President. In this letter we also learn of a questioning communication sent by Roosevelt to Travers: should he find himself in New York City but not on March 17, could Travers arrange a substitute dinner instead? Travers informs Secretary Loeb that another dinner could be arranged but the tradition of the annual banquet on March 17 could not change. Travers is politely but firmly managing the message.

With a guest list already in consideration, Frank Travers asks Secretary Loeb if the President wishes others invited. As the Chairman of the Arrangements Committee Travers will have to see to additional invitations. Travers knows that General Nelson

Miles will be in the St Patrick's Day parade, and perhaps the others mentioned will be in New York City that day as well.

Knowing the President's fondness for the 69th Regiment, Travers tells Secretary Loeb that the regiment will turn out in full force, with its band, to escort 'us' the entire route up to Delmonico's.¹¹ The Chairman of the Arrangements Committee intended to make the banquet the highlight of the season.

LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS

Roosevelt was a man who savored relationships and Travers, his friend of ten years, was well aware of Roosevelt's many New York friendships and relationships. Roosevelt's relationship with the Friendly Sons was one relationship that Travers clearly wanted to nurture. To that end Travers would make use of multiple relationships important to Roosevelt in letters regarding the March 17, 1905 banquet. We begin an exploration of those relationships with the famous 69th Regiment.

Made widely known in the Civil War, the "Fighting 69th" was an all-Irish regiment that was part of the Irish Brigade. Still populated predominately by Irish Americans in 1905 the 69th had a special relationship with the Friendly Sons. When the 69th mobilized for the Spanish American War the Friendly Sons "adopted" the Irish regiment, providing the regimental chaplain, Fr. William J. B. Daly,¹² a special tent to protect him and his portable altar from the weather, and presenting the color guard with new standards: the American flag, the New York State flag, the regimental colors and the Irish flag.¹³ It also hosted the regiment's officers at a special banquet. When the payroll failed to materialize after several months on active duty the Friendly Sons collected funds from its members to bridge the gap.¹⁴

The 69th Regiment was a volunteer regiment, and in 1905, as today, was a New York State National Guard unit reporting to the Governor. Since 1851 the 69th has had the honor to lead the New York City St. Patrick's Day parade.¹⁵ Although today the unit is reduced to a battalion, that tradition continues.

Colonel Edward L. Duffy, born in Ireland, was the commanding officer of the 69th in 1905. He would serve in the regiment for forty-seven years, eleven years as its commanding officer. He was the commanding officer when the regiment mobilized for the Spanish American War. The 69th left New York City in May 1898 amid much fanfare on railroad cars for Tampa, Florida. But then languished in stateside encampments subject to War Department ineptitude, effects of hot and humid weather, camp-related illnesses and frustration.¹⁶ A year later, when Roosevelt became the Governor, Colonel Duffy reported to him, and their friendship continued from that time. Frank Travers knew the history when he described Colonel Duffy as Roosevelt's old friend and veteran in service.

Major John Byrne, born in Ireland, a Civil War veteran, was a member of the Reception Committee for the 1905 banquet. Recommended by Travers to accompany him as an escort for the President, Travers and Byrne were fast friends, which the President knew. Travers and Byrnes were presidents of businesses, active in the Catholic Church, Irish Nationalist activities, and the Democratic party. On a trip to Europe in 1892 Byrne was introduced to Prime Minister Gladstone. "The Grand Old Man" used the introduction to get an insider's take on how Irish-Americans viewed his approach to Home Rule for Ireland. Byrne was also a leader in benevolent organizations, which included serving as President of the New York Soldier's Family Protective Association. Though Democrats, Byrne and Travers broke ranks and publicly campaigned for Roosevelt in the 1904 election.¹⁷

GETTING TO YES

When President Roosevelt and Secretary Loeb met to discuss a response to President Fitzgerald's invitation to the 1905 banquet they were in the throes of a dilemma. Unknown to but a few persons, Eleanor Roosevelt had approached her uncle with her wedding plans, and the President was part of them. A commitment to Eleanor had to be honored. The wedding location had been decided, New York City, but apparently the date had not. On November 29 President Roosevelt sent a reply to President Fitzgerald's invitation.



His words indicate a current, but temporary, hesitancy to commit:

My dear Judge Fitzgerald:

I thank you for your invitation of the 26th. It is a little difficult for a President to make definite engagements so long in advance, but I intend if it is possible to be with you at the dinner of my fellow members of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick on March 17 next. If by any accident I find myself unable to come, I shall, with the permission of the Society, attend the following year instead. Just at the moment I will not be able to make a definite answer for next March. In a month I think I shall be able to tell you definitely. If I do come would it be possible to have Major Byrne and Mr. Travers on the committee of escort? I understand that Colonel Duffy of the 69th wishes to escort me to the dinner with his regiment, or a portion of it. Of course, if the Colonel so desires it would be a peculiar [sic] pleasure to me to have this done. Sincerely yours, Theodore Roosevelt

Photo: Colonel Edward Duffy in dress uniform in 1904. Duffy was breveted Brigadier General in 1903 for long and faithful service. He appears to be displaying his brevet rank on his sleeve in this much decorated photograph. Courtesy of New York Herald, April 17, 1904.

The hesitancy in getting to yes was likely due to family negotiations regarding Eleanor's wedding date. The wedding was to be at a family home,

Photo: Ignoring several ancestral Irish surnames, the Irish World seized upon the most illustrious family names and with enthusiastic editorial license placed Roosevelt's Irish pedigree in line with that of Brian Boru, the famous "emperor of the Gaels." Courtesy of the Irish World.

ROOSEVELT'S IRISH PEDIGREE.

Descended from the O'Briens, O'Neills,
and Butlers — President's Name
Cheered with Brian Boru's.

with a limited invitation list, and would not be excessively grand. Still, weddings require advance planning, and setting the date for this wedding was a closely held negotiation. In his reply Roosevelt stated that he expected clarity in the next month.

In a letter back to President Roosevelt dated December 5th, Travers thanked the President for his reply to Judge Fitzgerald and acknowledged Roosevelt's request "to place me and the Major on as your escorts for the 17 March." He expresses his hope that nothing will interfere with Roosevelt's attendance. He then states "I enclose a letter from Colonel Duffy to show you how pleased he is. They will be out in new uniforms and on their mettle." Colonel Duffy's letter was sent to Frank Travers. Travers forwarded it to Roosevelt clearly intending to leverage Roosevelt's friendship with Colonel Duffy.

On Friday, December 22, the press broke the news that the President had "promised" the Friendly Sons that he would be in their midst at the next annual banquet. This was a remarkable announcement as Monday of that week the same newspaper reported that the Anna Eleanor-Franklin Delano Roosevelt wedding was to be an Easter event.¹⁸ It seems reasonable to assume that Uncle Teddy had, somehow, persuaded his niece to acquiesce to his St Patrick's Day expectations. Assured now of the President's attendance on March 17, the Friendly Sons, the 69th Regiment and the City of New York continued their planning.¹⁹ Naturally there was much excitement, and with such a quintessential Dutch surname many were curious about President Roosevelt's claim to Irish ancestry.

THE CITY READIES FOR THE BIG DAY

As a founding member of the American Irish

Historical Society, Roosevelt's Irish pedigree had already been established. But in a request from the president of that society to share that information President Roosevelt replied:

I would say that my Irish ancestors came to Pennsylvania early in the seventeenth century. They included John Potts and his wife, Elizabeth McVaughn (so set down in the records—I do not know what the real name was), John Barnhill, whose wife was Sarah Craig, and a man named Lukens, who may have been a German from the Palatinate. They were all humble people, farmers, mechanics, etc., although Sarah Craig is put down in the book as being descended on her mother's side, through the Barnwalls from various well-known Irish families, both of the Pale and outside the Pale, the Butlers, the Fitzgeralds, O'Neills and O'Briens. But about this more illustrious descent I fear I cannot give you any specific particulars.²⁰

Specific particulars were not needed by those eager to establish the President as an Irish-American. The *Irish World* published the President's reply under the heading "Roosevelt's Irish Pedigree—Descended from the O'Briens, O'Neills and Butlers—President's name cheered with Brian Boru's."

As the big day approached the press continued to provide information. *The New York Tribune*, in a section titled "At the White House," reported visits made by Frank Travers, on February 13 and 28, to keep the President abreast of developments. "Arrangements" were reported as being concluded on March 8 and a brief summary was made public.²¹ The public would know where the President would be

throughout the day and they would gather in the thousands to greet him. They were in thrall to the President, who himself drew energy from the enthusiastic crowds.

On March 12 the *New York Times* announced that the St Patrick's Days events for 1905 would see the greatest turnout the city had witnessed in years. Although the main feature of the day was to be the parade with the expectation of 50,000 participants, the *Times* opined that

*easily capping all other events of that day in importance stands the dinner to be given by the Friendly Sons of St Patrick at Delmonico's. The guest of honor will be President Roosevelt, who for several years has been an honorary member of the organization. The certainty of his presence has already called forth more than 2,000 applications for tickets, but only 600 diners will be accommodated.*²²

The 69th Regiment readied itself for this day. Colonel Duffy issued orders to his regiment to assemble at its Tompkins Market armory at 9:30 AM, Friday, March 17, in newly

Lexington Avenue and 44th Street, where lunch would be served. The regiment was to form up again and be put on the march at 2 PM, proceeding to 5th Avenue and 42nd Street, where the regiment would take its place at the head of the column in their traditional duty to lead the St. Patrick's Day Parade.²⁴

But this day there would be a change in tradition, for upon reaching 125th Street the regiment would march away from the parade column and take the 3rd Avenue Elevated to 59th Street and proceed to an address at 5th Avenue and 57th Street, the home of President Roosevelt's aunt.²⁵ The Guardsmen would remain in marching order until President Roosevelt was seated in his carriage. The Regiment would then, with a police detail, escort the President to Delmonico's at 5th Avenue and 44th Street. The President thoroughly enjoyed his relationship with the 69th, and when he served as the Governor had occasions to review the 69th in parade formation. He was to review the regiment again this day as it stood facing Delmonico's. The regimental



issued olive-drab uniforms and Regular Army hats. They would then march in formation to St. Patrick's Cathedral to attend a pontifical High Mass to be celebrated at 11 AM.²³ Upon the conclusion of the service the regiment was to march to Grand Central Palace,

band had rehearsed for the occasion. When released from their escort duty the regiment would march back to the armory. It would be a momentous day for the Fighting 69th.

Photo:

The 69th Regiment's Color Guard in the 1905 St Patrick's Day parade. The soldiers are wearing pale blue-grey overcoats and khaki leggings. What we cannot see are the newly issued olive drab shirts and trousers which had replaced the Spanish-American War era blue shirts and khaki trousers. Courtesy of the New York Herald.

THE BIG DAY ARRIVES

When the big day arrived the planning by all parties allowed for a safe and efficient use of the President's limited time. On March 17, President Roosevelt and his party arrived at the Jersey City station at 12:30 where they were met by mem-

57th Street the President and his party received a continuous ovation from the double line of shamrock-bedecked holiday makers, and he was generous in recognition of their cheers and hand-clapping." As the President's party maneuvered through the intersection at 57th Street, the



Photo:
The Roosevelts in their carriage on the ferry crossing the Hudson River to Manhattan from the train terminal in Jersey City. This was likely the carriage in which they rode throughout the day. Courtesy of the New York Herald, March 18, 1905.

bers of the Friendly Sons reception committee, the New York City Police Commissioner William McAdoo, and a police escort. From there they took a ferry to 23rd street where several thousand citizens had gathered to get their first glimpse of the President. The "cortege [then proceeded] at a sharp trot to 5th Avenue but was halted at 42nd Street for a few moments by the St. Patrick's Day crowd assembled to view the parade. [At]

parade participants and the crowd had to make way. Seizing the moment Roosevelt stood up in his carriage and turning one way and then the other bowed deeply and doffed his hat. A nearby band struck up "Hail to the Chief." The crowds roared. When the party arrived at its destination, near 4 West 57th Street, they found that the police had cordoned off the block from traffic and pedestrians. The President and his party

would remain here to prepare for Eleanor's wedding.²⁶

At 3:15 PM the President, Mrs. Roosevelt, Miss Ethel Roosevelt, and Secretary Loeb departed for 8 East 76th Street escorted by a police detail. It was noticed that President Roosevelt wore a bunch of shamrocks as his boutonniere. Not allowed on the street, neighbors watched the arrival and departure of the President's party from their windows and balconies. Some had invited friends to observe the famous first family. As the President's party travelled to the home of Eleanor's grandmother it again crossed the route of the St Patrick's Day parade, giving the citizens another chance to see their President and "to wildly cheer him...[and he] seemed to greatly enjoy the typical Irish welcome."²⁷

Reports of the wedding were typical, with one exception. The bride's dress was described, family members and the minister were identified, etc., but commenters could not resist stating that the center of attention could not long remain on the bride with the exuberant chief magistrate in attendance.²⁸ (With this comment we are reminded of daughter Alice Roosevelt's delightful remark that her father "always wanted to be the bride at every wedding, the baby at every christening and the corpse at every funeral.") The President's party departed the site of Eleanor's wedding at 5 PM to return to 4 West 57th Street.

At 5:30 PM the 69th Regiment, with Colonel Duffy, now in dress uniform, arrived



Photo:
Colonel Duffy and Major Edward Gilgar in the 1905 St Patrick's Day parade. Major Gilgar had been selected by the Ancient Order of Hibernians to be the Grand Marshal. His selection was a huge honor for a serving member of the 69th Regiment. Courtesy of the New York Herald.

in front the house where Roosevelt was now preparing for the evening events. At 6 PM the President, Secretary Loeb, Dr Stokes, the President's physician, Major John Byrne and Vincent P. Travers, standing in for his bed-ridden brother Frank, got into the carriage, the police detail and the 69th then proceeded to Delmonico's.²⁹ As they departed the regiment's band played "Gary Owen," much to the delight of the President. The President's party arrived at 5th Avenue and 44th Street at 6:30 PM.

AT DELMONICO'S

A crowd of several thousand near Delmonico's awaited the arrival of the President, barely held a prudent distance away by a police line. The President and his party alighted from the carriage to the cheers of the onlookers and

Photo:

The Friendly Sons Reception Committee escorting President Roosevelt into the banquet room at Delmonico's. Roosevelt is labeled #1; Judge James Fitzgerald, President of the Friendly Sons is #2; Joseph I. C. Clarke, the 1st Vice President of the Friendly Sons to the right rear of Roosevelt is #5; Major John Byrne, escort to President Roosevelt seen just above Judge Fitzpatrick's head is #8; William N. Penney, the man responsible for the dinner's mementos and accoutrements, is #15.

Courtesy of the New York Tribune, March 18, 1905.



approached the entrance of Delmonico's where President James Fitzgerald and members of the Reception Committee greeted them. As the President went inside, the 69th reformed on the far side of 5th Avenue and faced Delmonico's. The regimental band readied its instruments. Moments later the exterior of Delmonico's was illuminated by green and white lights. President Roosevelt then stepped onto the balcony. Looking down he saluted the assembled regiment. Colonel Duffy returned his salute. The band struck up "Hail to the Chief." With all eyes upon him Roosevelt responded by solemnly holding his hat against his heart. When the band switched to "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" the President responded by breaking into a jig, bouncing his hat above his head as he danced.³⁰ Colonel Duffy drew his saber and called for three cheers for the President. Again the crowds went wild. Reporters noted that this was the greatest adulation the President received that day. Someone called out for a speech. Roosevelt's "quick ear caught it" and over the din he shouted, "Not today. Remember this is the Regiment's day." The band then struck up "Auld Lang Syne" and led the regiment in review as it marched away.³¹ After the President left the balcony Colonel Duffy, Lieutenant Colonel J. Duncan Emmet, the regiment surgeon, and Fr. William J. B. Daly, the regimen-

tal chaplain, entered Delmonico's to attend the banquet. Colonel Duffy and Lieutenant Colonel Emmet were seated at the head table.

As was the practice for the St Patrick's Day banquets, Delmonico's was decorated with American and Irish flags, green lights, bunting and flowers. A large painting of St. Patrick was mounted on the wall behind the head table and above it *Céad mile fáilte* was illuminated with electric lighting. Billy Penney, in charge of the accoutrements and mementos, had risen to the challenge. All those attending were provided specially commissioned badges depicting the likeness of George Washington and Theodore Roosevelt and handsome bronze plaques were provided as keepsakes.³²

Back inside Delmonico's President Roosevelt was escorted to an assembly room where a reception line had been organized. Each of the 615 attendees was introduced to the President by Judge Fitzgerald and President Roosevelt said something to each, and he "stopped dozens of his old friends for a longer chat."³³ Disappointingly, the old friend Roosevelt most wanted to greet, Frank Travers, was absent.

When a bugle called all to the banquet room the President was noted to step off smartly in martial pride wearing his largest smile. As the President was escorted upstairs the orchestra struck up "The Wearing of the Green." As

he entered the banquet room the orchestra struck up the "Star-Spangled Banner," and the entire assembly rose to their feet. After much cheering all took their seats, the majority in the main banquet room and the remainder in an adjoining room. Those in the adjoining room would move into the main room when the speeches began.

At each diner's setting were miniature American and Irish flags and a nine-page program that depicted the bronze souvenir on the cover, included a title page, the toasts, the menu, the musical program, and three illustrations; one depicted "the origin of the harp," one of George Washington titled "First in Peace," and the final one pictured Rough Riders charging up Kettle Hill with Colonel Roosevelt at center on horseback.³⁴ The menu that night called for beef, in addition to poultry and fish. This being a Friday in Lent and the majority of the diners being Roman Catholic, Archbishop John Farley had arranged a papal dispensation to allow partaking of meat for the evening.³⁵

After plates were removed and cigars lit the speeches began. The theme, as always, was Irish

heritage and Irish-American history, but tonight the emphasis was on two honorary members, General George Washington and President Theodore Roosevelt. After an introduction by President Fitzgerald, President Roosevelt got up to speak and when he did so the entire assembly again rose to their feet cheering and waving the miniature flags of stars and of green. Then the President began:

Judge Fitzgerald and my fellow members and my fellow countrymen, I listened with the greatest pleasure to the introduction by my good and old friend, the president of the Society. He did me more than justice in describing the difficulty of my coming here. The only difficulty was in keeping me away. All I needed was the invitation. I would do the rest.

Of course there was more to the story, as the assembled diners knew. What they did not know, and what Roosevelt did not share, was what it took to persuade Eleanor to forgo her Easter wedding so that Uncle Teddy could sup in March with the Friendly Sons. Acknowledging



Photo:

The bronze memento given to each diner. This image is taken from the program that was placed at each diner's setting. The manufacturer was the Art Metal Works, locally known for making handsome mementos for many notable events. The foundry was located in Newark, N.J., but a showroom was maintained at 621 Broadway. The company is now best remembered for making famous Ronson pocket lighters. Courtesy of Friendly Sons of St Patrick.

Photo:

This illustration was published in the March 23 issue of the Catholic Union and Times, a New York weekly newspaper. It was originally used as a portrait of younger Roosevelt who served as the thirty-third governor of New York State. His term in that office was relatively brief, from January 1899 to December 1900. Courtesy of Catholic Union and Times.



his welcome home and friendships in the room Roosevelt continued:

It is a cause of personal pleasure to me to come to this, my home city, and to be greeted by you, Judge Fitzgerald, whom I first met in the New York Legislature. I wish to express at the outset my special sense of obligation to Colonel Duffy and the officers and men of the Sixty-ninth who were my escorts today. I shall write to Colonel Duffy later to give him formal notice of my appreciation.

Then the President launched into his speech expounding on the Irish as a “masterful race.”³⁶

SO IT PASSED INTO HISTORY

The final two paragraphs of the Friendly Sons

1905 yearbook provide a summary of the evening. Though the summary today can be thought overwrought it does capture the sentiment of the evening. This event had been long in the waiting and the attendees that night no doubt thought it well worth the waiting:

It was a night of splendid joy. The martial spirit of the Celt with its love of the manly, the brave and the true shone on every face. Under radiant flag and banner long revered, the holy memories of centuries hovering in the air, the future of the deathless race before uplifted eyes seemed a stately reality embodying the great transfiguration of the Gael.

So it passed into history, and every participant will look back to it with pride, its gold words, its superb indi-



visualities, its glowing enthusiasm, its brilliance of light and color singing to the memory a perfect triumphant Irish melody."

The President departed Delmonico's at 10:30 PM to attend one more banquet and shortly after midnight made the return trip to Washington, D. C. In an action-packed twelve hours Roosevelt had satisfied or exceeded the expectations of thousands of New Yorkers. But the absent Frank Travers, the man most credited for President Roosevelt's attendance at the Friendly Sons banquet, sadly did not recover. Frank Travers died on March 18th while speaking with his son Vincent Travers. When Roosevelt was informed of Travers' passing the following day, he was much saddened, writing to his own son of how true a friend Frank Travers had always been.³⁷

Endnotes

1 This was President Roosevelt's first visit to New York City since his inauguration on March 4, 1905. It would also be the first time a president during the incumbency of his office was so honored.

- 2 Secondary sources state that Eleanor Roosevelt accepted March 17 as her wedding day to accommodate Uncle Teddy's schedule. But stated assumptions that his schedule included participation in the 1905 St Patrick's Day parade are not borne out by contemporary reporting and source material.
- 3 Roosevelt frequently spoke highly of his Ulster ancestry. The statement quoted here was made during a visit with President Roosevelt at the White House by the leadership of the American Irish Historical Society. The full quote is "I am proud of my membership in the Society and I am proud of the strain of Irish blood in my veins." See homepage of the American Irish Historical Society; see also the *Evening Star*, Washington D. C., January 15, 1909.
- 4 The Office of the Vice Presidency remained vacant from November 21, 1899 until March 4, 1901.
- 5 Theodore Roosevelt was the youngest to serve as President. John F. Kennedy was the youngest elected President.
- 6 Roosevelt letter to Justice White, March 2, 1903.
- 7 As one example, Frank Travers was Chair of the Arrangements Committee for a reception for Roosevelt at Oyster Bay on the first anniversary of his presidency, September 15, 1902. Upwards of 10,000 attended the event.
- 8 *New York Times*, March 20, 1905
- 9 George Washington was inducted while he was the Commander of the Continental Army. Theodore Roosevelt was inducted while serving as the President.
- 10 The correspondence between Frank Travers and the White House used in this article is found in the Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division. Courtesy of the Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University.
- 11 The 69th Regiment band was under the leadership of William Bayne, the only bandmaster in New York City to receive an annual salary from the State of New York. So renowned was "Bayne's Band" that it played at inauguration ceremonies for Presidents Cleveland and Harrison. The band played "Yankee Doodle" at the opening day of American League Park, on April 30, 1903, the future home of the New York Yankees. It was a favorite for contracting by the City of New York to provide summer concerts in the parks. It played at Carnegie Hall, for the funeral procession of General William Tecumseh Sherman, and

Photo:

The President did have a grand day in New York City. The Buffalo Evening News on March 18 correctly records why Roosevelt was in the city on St Patrick's Day. He was there to give away Eleanor, and to attend two banquets, the most important of which was that of the Friendly Sons. As he moved about the city, traveling to and from these engagements, he was continuously greeted by immense admiring crowds. Courtesy of Buffalo Evening News.

- for a memorial fund raiser for the *Titanic* band that famously went down playing. When the full band was not performing for military and civic functions, its tailored ensembles were available for hire.
- 12 Reverend William John Barry Daly, a young priest assigned to St Patrick's Cathedral, was made the replacement chaplain for the 69th Regiment as it mobilized for the Spanish American War. As the first American-born regimental chaplain for the 69th some Guardsmen thought him not Irish enough.
 - 13 The 69th was mustered into federal service May 19, 1898 at Camp Black, Long Island. Upon the conclusion of the mustering ceremony the Friendly Sons presented the color guard with the new colors.
 - 14 See the *New York Times*, July 15 & 16, 1898.
 - 15 See this news release discussing the 69th leading the 2018 St Patrick's Day parade: <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/News/Article/Article/1465922/fighting-69th-to-lead-new-york-citys-st-patricks-day-parade-for-167th-year/source/GovDelivery/>
 - 16 The 69th never made it to Cuba. Colonel Roosevelt's regiment, the 1st Volunteer Cavalry, almost did not either. Had Roosevelt not commandeered a ship, intended for another regiment, the Rough Riders may have suffered the same fate as the 69th.
 - 17 Major John Byrne was Frank Travers' friend, therefore a friend of a friend to the President. When Byrne died suddenly in December 1905 President Roosevelt honored his passing with a large bouquet of flowers sent to his Requiem Mass.
 - 18 *Sun and New York Press*, December 18 & 22, 1904
 - 19 It was noted in the December 22 report that Billy [William N.] Penney, charged with the development of the programs, recognition badges and souvenirs, was already at work to make the coming Friendly Sons banquet even more notable 'in this respect' than in previous years.
 - 20 *The Irish World*, February 4, 1905. The President's Irish ancestry affirmation letter appears to have been read to members of the American Irish Historical Society at their annual banquet on Jan. 24, 1905. But it was made public by the *Irish World*, thereby providing genealogical information about Theodore Roosevelt and suggesting why he was coming to New York on St. Patrick's Day.
 - 21 Made aware of the President's intended movements the citizens gathered on the streets to greet him. The NYPD implemented various security measures, but in their zeal to get close to the President the citizens often got past the police protection.
 - 22 *New York Times*, March 12, 1905
 - 23 Monsignor Lavelle welcomed the 69th at the cathedral doors, Auxiliary Bishop Cusack celebrated the Mass, and the 69th Chaplain, Fr. Daley, now rector of St Malachy's, delivered the homily.
 - 24 *Ibid.*
 - 25 All members of the 69th would march away from the parade route but one. Major Edward P. Gilgar, 1st Battalion Adjutant and the parade Grand Marshal, likely continued in the parade.
 - 26 *New York Times*, March 18, 1905
 - 27 *Watertown Daily News*, March 18, 1905.
 - 28 Years later the wedding reception was recalled as when "President Roosevelt walked away with the show." *New York Times*, March 17, 1935.
 - 29 Frank Travers was confined to bed per physician's orders. He had been feeling ill for a week due to 'heart disease'.
 - 30 *Catholic Union and Times*, March 25, 1905.
 - 31 *Buffalo Courier*, March 18, 1905, pp 1–2.
 - 32 Intrigued by the inheritance of the bronze memento from this banquet the author researched the event which led to the telling of the "rest of the story."
 - 33 A list of banquet attendees begins on page 51 of the proceedings of the 121st banquet at: <https://archive.org/details/vol121proceeding00soci>
 - 34 The handsome 9-page program was printed by the Dempsey & Carroll Company, founded in 1878 by two Irish Americans, John Dempsey and George Carroll. The company is quite prestigious today.
 - 35 The Poughkeepsie *Evening Enterprise* noted that the "other Irish organizations to have banquets tonight neglected to secure the Pope's dispensation regarding meat and must be content with fish as the principal fare." March 17, 1905.
 - 36 Published account of the 121st Anniversary Dinner, Friendly Sons of St Patrick, March 17, 1905, New York, Dempsey & Carroll.
 - 37 For obituary, see *New York Times*, March 20, 1905.