

**A Brief History of Lionism
in Connecticut
1922-1983**

Social and Recreational Activities



Chapter 10

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SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL LIFE OF THE LIONS

One attraction of Lionism for members and their families is social activities. Warm and lasting friendships often develop out of these interactions. Most of the opportunities are found within the clubs, but there are social functions at the zone, region and district levels, as well as at mid-winter conferences, state conventions and international conventions.

“Social activity” is not a precise term. For example, many clubs give awards dinners for students, together with plaques, trophies or certificates in recognition of outstanding achievements. Parents of honored students are invited along with two or three teachers or school officials. Another example is the citizen-of-the-year award given by some clubs to recognize outstanding contributions to the community by a person who is not a Lion. The purpose of giving awards is not strictly social, but the occasions are certainly pleasurable and not strictly business.

“Recreation” also has no defined boundaries. Aside from the game of solitaire and other activities where individuals practice their skills alone, there are few recreational pursuits without social aspects. In this chapter no attempt is made for a sharp distinction between social and recreational interactions.

Christmas Parties

Virtually every Lions club in the United States has a Christmas party for members and their wives or women friends. These are usually held on the last club meeting day before Christmas. There are different ways of celebrating, depending on the club. Some affairs are held in Lions’ homes, others in public places. A dinner is a must, dancing is an option. There is almost always a portly Lion dressed as Santa to pass out inexpensive gifts which the Lions themselves bring for exchange,



New Britain Evening Lions Christmas Party. Part of the line: Bruce Moore, Jeanette Demko, Jon-Paul Demko, Stanley Cop, Chick Herzy and Elizabeth Cop.

appropriately wrapped. Not uncommonly the wrapping costs almost as much as the gift.

Occasionally, an impromptu performance adds to the good feeling of a party. At a Christmas party given by the New Britain Evening Lions Club, Lion Bruce Moore played Santa Claus. At one point the band played a conga. Bruce, in his red outfit and with tassel bouncing, started a conga line which grew quite long as Lions and their wives joined in. The line weaved in and out among the tables. After a couple of tours around the room, Bruce led the line out the door while everyone sang "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer." It was hardly a conga tune, but that did not matter. The line proceeded down the hall, through the motel dining room, then through the bar and the lobby and finally back to the club's party, still singing "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer." It was not only the Lions who got a lift out of the performance but the motel guests as well, even though none of them joined the line.

Club Picnics

Perhaps the second most popular event is the club picnic. Again, this may be at a home or at a public park or beach. This is an all-day, family affair, children invited. Invariably, food and beverages with all the necessary equipment and supplies are provided by the Lions themselves. Wives play the central role in preparing the food. There are always Lions who volunteer to man the grills and do the hauling, lifting and grunting. Because it is a Lions capital offense to run out of anything, there is always enough left over to recover some of the cost by selling the remainder to themselves.

Another feature of the picnic is the games, the kind depending on who had what around the house that was transportable to the picnic area. The banter among Lions is really more important than the games themselves because nobody really cares who wins. Lions are not experts at games anyway.

Installation of Officers

Another occasion which is both official and social is the installation of new officers. It is the practice in Lionism that all Lions move up "through the chairs," that is, through higher offices each year until each serves as president of the club. There is no binding rule that a Lion cannot succeed himself in any office, but that is not recommended, with the exception of the offices of secretary and treasurer. Not every Lion is anxious to tackle these demanding responsibilities, and consequently, these two offices are frequently held by the same persons for many years.

The installation of new officers occurs annually and must be held before July 1, as that begins the Lions' new year. The event is always held in June unless there are unusual circumstances dictating an earlier date. There is a format generally observed for the installation of new officers, but not fixed as to details (see Appendix N). It is customary that wives and women friends of members attend this function. First there is dinner, followed by the installation. Afterwards, there is a lot of handshaking and congratulations, especially by the outgoing president's wife who hopes to see more of her husband in the coming year.

The small band plays a mixture of golden oldies, for those who talk knowingly of Glen Miller, and rock music for the younger ones who have only dim recollections of Elvis Presley. When the band plays the loud numbers, the older Lions sit at their tables yelling at each other over their decaffeinated coffee. The chairman of the entertainment committee announces that the bar is open and the men rush to form a tight semicircle around the bartender looking for a favorite drink for

themselves and their wives.

About 11:30 the group begins to thin out. The place is only rented until midnight. That will be the last hurrah for the club until September, except that the Board of Directors and some of the committees may meet once or twice during the summer.

Valentine's Day Dances

Valentine's Day dances are held by a few clubs as fundraisers. Lions and their wives attend and tickets are sold to the public. The public generally means people who are friends or acquaintances of Lions, though not so for every ticket sold. These affairs are excellent opportunities for dining and dancing as well as enjoyment of social relationships. Usually, a special program is thrown in as an added attraction.

Ladies' Nights

Every Lions club in Connecticut has one or more Ladies' Nights when wives attend. A cocktail hour and dinner may be followed by a short business meeting and then a special program with a guest speaker or a slide show. In some foreign countries, wives of Lions attend all club meetings and formal dinners are served. This is not the practice in the United States.

Other Club Social Activities

There are other social activities, one or two of which may be offered by a club, either regularly, infrequently, or, in some clubs, not at all. These include family bus tours, trips to sports events, cruises, etc. What a club does is entirely up to the membership.

Many clubs have some kind of special affair for Lions themselves. This would be held during a break in the regular business or at the end of the business session. The Bridgeport Lions have a grandfathers' club composed of those Lions who attain that exalted status. The Bridgeport club has developed an elaborate nonsensical ritual for induction into this group. The candidate is made to feel that he has insufficient grounds for membership or that for some other reason he is unworthy. In the end, the new grandfather takes his place with the other honored senior Lions. Thoughtful, considerate attention such as this adds immeasurably to the sense of fellowship Lions enjoy. This, in turn, is an asset which helps them achieve their goal of service to others.

Jamborees

An annual event in some districts or regions (two or more zones) is the jamboree. These are for Lions only and are held to honor the zone chairman, or if a regional event, the zone chairman and the deputy district governor. Tickets are sold in advance. Cocktails and dinner are followed by endless speeches, recognition of clubs and individuals, giving of awards and finally a program of light entertainment. All clubs in the zone or region are urged to promote the jamboree and have as many members as possible attend. A prize is awarded to the club having the highest percentage of its membership present. The winners get bragging rights for the year. The jamboree is intentionally a night for fun when Lions tell jokes on each other and on the other Lions clubs present.

Lionesses also have jamborees. They honor outstanding Lionesses for the work they do. It is not uncommon that a Lioness will outdo the Lions on a particular service project.

Breakfasts

Another annual event for some zones or regions is the breakfast. This is a family affair and is held in a public place which can accommodate upwards of 300 or 400 people in one room. Ranking Lion officials are introduced for brief remarks. Awards are given to two outstanding new Lions from each club. But the main features are the breakfast and the entertainment which ends the program. The entertainment might be a performance by a comedian, a magician, a singing group or amateur actors. Whatever is done is in a light vein because Lions never care for serious classics after breakfast.

Mid-Winter Conferences

All districts or multiple districts hold mid-winter conferences. The conference luncheon and the banquet are the two highlights of these affairs. There is always a guest speaker at each. The luncheon speaker usually provides a diversion by talking on a subject unrelated to Lionism, whereas the banquet speaker, usually from International, delivers a pep talk.

Candidates seeking election as district governors establish a hospitality room rented for the purpose. As there will be at least one candidate for each of the three Connecticut districts, there is a minimum of three hospitality rooms. There is often one or two more, especially in contested elections. Everyone is invited for cocktails and snacks whether they belong to the district or not. Lions and wives wander from one hospitality room to another meeting old friends and making new ones. The rooms are open except when there are important business meetings and during the luncheons and the banquet. Each candidate's campaign chairman tries to outdo the others with good cheer and showmanship to promote the candidate. But the basic element in the ritual is social interaction. There really is very little, outside of posters and ball-point pens with the candidate's name, to indicate that the hospitality is an appeal for votes. Lions and their wives relax and talk about golf, their children, the best restaurants in the state, gaining or losing weight and bargains or lack of them in local stores.

Special programs are arranged for wives during the conference while their husbands are taking care of business. The programs vary according to what is suggested by some of the wives in advance. These include talks on hairdressing, fashion shows, flower arranging, exercises, etc.

The conference provides an opportunity for wives to meet wives from other districts, regions, zones and clubs. This is an advantage that holds throughout the year. When husbands are traveling around on Lions business and meeting at various places, their wives at least know their female counterparts who also are having long evenings at home. Close friendships over distances develop out of conference associations.

State Conventions

The state convention is the year's big event for Connecticut's multiple district. Unfortunately, in recent years these have been held out of the state. Few places in Connecticut are large enough to host a Lions convention, and those few would have to sacrifice too much business for the three days.

The convention advance party arrives at the site on Thursday, and the last event is the Sunday luncheon. In the early years of Connecticut Lionism, the conventions lasted one day. However, in recent years it would be impossible to do all that needs to be done in so short a time. (For a discussion of the official business, see Chapter VIII).

Total attendance at recent Lions State Conventions averages about 900, including many wives and a few children. Since the conventions are held at the end of April or in early May in large resort hotels, varied outdoor activities can be planned. Golf, tennis, swimming, horseback riding, shuffleboard, volleyball and other recreational events are either scheduled by the entertainment committee as contests, or Lions make their own arrangements on the spot. The expectation of Lions is that the convention will be held where facilities are available for these recreational activities. This rules out virtually every convention site in Connecticut able to accommodate up to 1,000 people from one group. One needs to observe for only a few minutes the way these recreational activities are pursued to conclude that they are more social than competitive.

Special programs are offered for wives and young people, although women also participate in some of the adult outdoor activities. Special events vary with every convention, depending upon what is available and the amount of money allocated for entertainment. The events have included art shows, painting exhibits, art auctions, hairdressing demonstrations, hypnotism sessions, give-away affairs like those on television programs, local-area tours, card games, fashion shows, dancing lessons and musical performances.

Less attention is paid to organizing youth activities. Theirs are usually spontaneous and always include swimming, electronic games and billiards. Convention sites are equipped with the facilities for these activities. Older youth play tennis, go horseback riding, swim and sometimes play golf. Socialization is a natural part of recreation. Many of the young people have met before and even if they have not, they usually are not shy about meeting their peers.

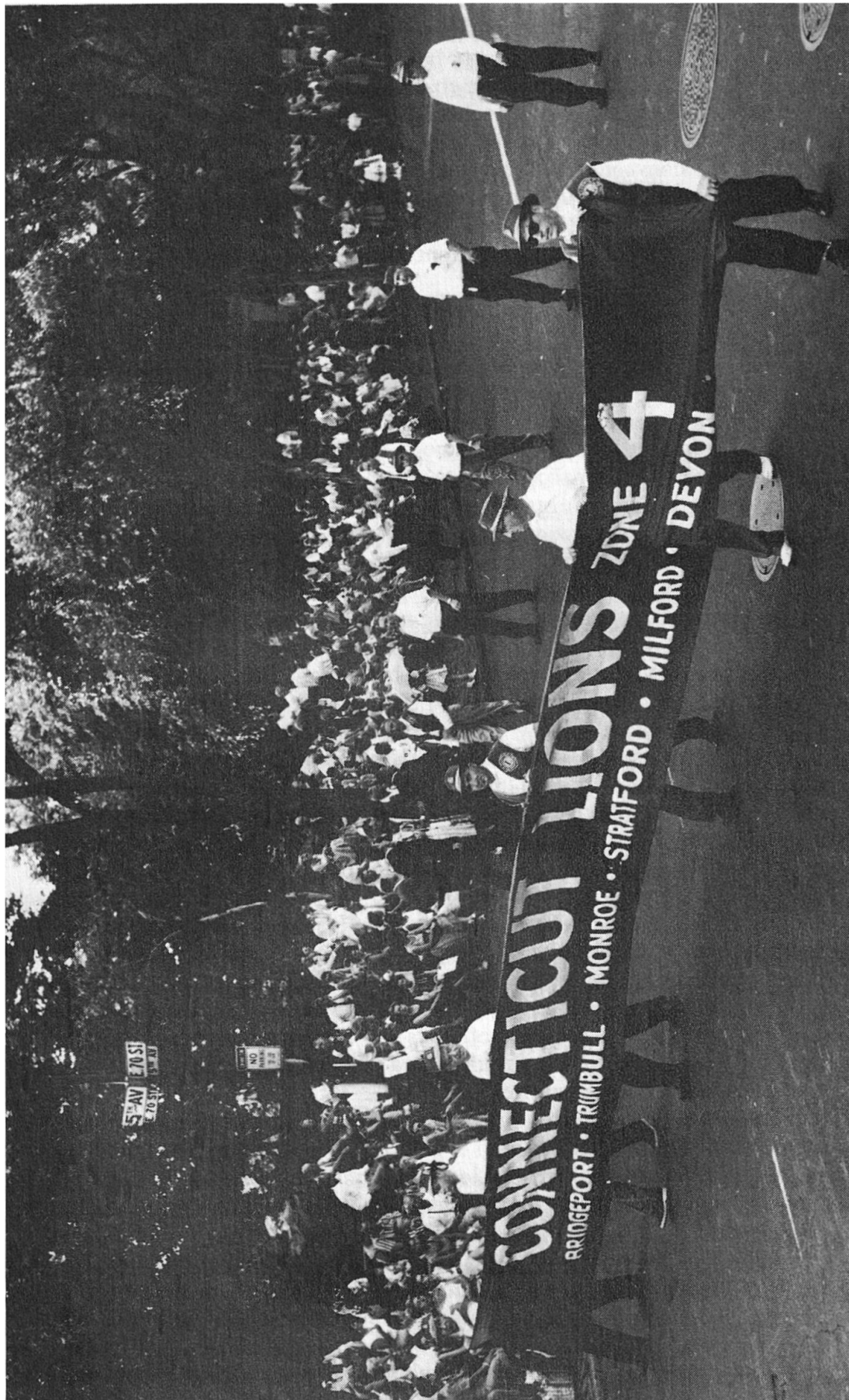
A purely social event, if there ever is such a thing, is the cocktail party which precedes the banquet. The hotel conducts this as part of the package arrangement. Ranking Lion officials and their wives are expected to wear formal attire, but other Lions may wear suits while their wives wear cocktail dresses or suits. Hors d'oeuvres are varied and plentiful, and only strong wills save enough room for the banquet meal. Anyone who has not met everyone already is likely to do so here. No other occasion provides a better opportunity to mix. The cocktail party is a stand-up affair, which almost forces people to move around.

After an hour or more, the doors to the big dining hall open. Clubs try to have tables in the same area to accommodate their own members and wives in spite of encouragement to mix. The head table is usually a long, two-tiered arrangement for ranking officials, visiting dignitaries and wives. (For details and for ceremonies, see Chapter VIII and Appendix L). Before dinner there are many introductions, remarks of appreciation by outgoing officials and other formalities. Dinner takes a great deal of time, and a pianist or other kind of musical entertainment helps between courses, especially when everyone joins in singing old-time songs.

After dinner, entertainment is provided, and this varies with conventions. An important part of the banquet program is always a flag ceremony where the many national flags of countries in which Lions clubs exist are presented. A necrology ceremony recognizes the Lions and Lionesses who have passed away during the year (See Appendix O).

A popular form of entertainment is presentation of skits by clubs. Each skit presents a theatrical turn either on a subject of interest to Lions or on a current news item or fad. These are interesting and occasionally surprising. The entertainment closes the banquet.

On Saturday evening, those who like nightclubs can enjoy entertainment by well-known performers and bands. This also is a courtesy of the hotel management



Clubs from District 23A on parade at the International Convention in New York City in 1959.

with no admission charge. That does not mean it is free. It is part of the package and drinks are expensive. Those who stay until the rotating, colored lights go out and the bright, eye-squinting white lights are turned on, and everyone and everything looks pale and weird, will find themselves going to bed after 1 a.m.

On Sunday, breakfast and lunch are served, lunch being the last hurrah. Squeezed in between are final business affairs, quick last rounds of golf, packing and checking out. The convention committee still has much work to do closing financial matters with the hotel, taking care of complaints, collecting materials and equipment, and answering hundreds of questions about lost-and-found and how to get to a main highway. All of it is a major logistical operation and the entire event must come together in the final convention report to the Lions State Council.

International Conventions

Those who work on state convention committees have some idea, faint though it is, of what it means to run a Lions International Convention. These may be held anywhere from Tokyo to London and suitable places between (see Appendix D.) An International Convention means about 35,000 people — Lions and their families — assembling from 157 countries, many of them unable to speak the language of the host country.

Expected to attend are the president, three vice presidents and all past presidents of Lions Clubs International, the International Directors, the 78 extension representatives, 643 district governors-elect from all Lions districts along with their outgoing counterparts, and the Lions Clubs International Executive Secretary with a suitable staff. Swell these numbers with every Lion in the world who is invited, even encouraged, to attend. It is fortunate that only 35,000 to 40,000 show up. To take care of nearly one and a half million people would tax even the resources of the Pentagon planners.

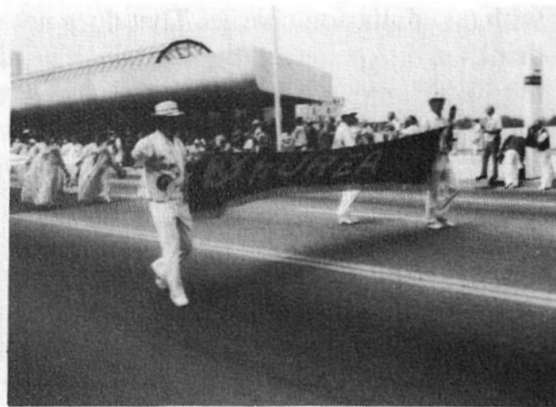
Even with 35,000 attending it is necessary to hold the International Conventions in a large city with several fine hotels within reasonable distance of each other, and where there is a large civic center or astrodome to accommodate general assemblies. Even so, except for officials and others whose tasks require their presence at plenary sessions, attendance is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Every country is happy to host a Lions Clubs International Convention, and within the country any big city to be chosen counts itself fortunate. In the short space of a week, eight to ten million dollars flows into the local economy, and Lions bring no problems of law enforcement characteristic of some other larger gatherings of people. Of the 66 annual International Conventions held from 1917 through 1983 (none was held in 1945), only seven were held outside the United States (see appendix D). The first of these was held in Havana, Cuba in 1940, followed by Toronto, Canada in 1942. The next in chronological order was Nice, France in 1962; Toronto, Canada in 1964; Tokyo, Japan in 1969 and again in 1978; and the last in Montreal, Canada in 1979.

Unlike state Lions conventions, the International Convention provides little opportunity for participation in outdoor sports. Where these are available in the metropolitan area, individuals must make their own arrangements. However, there are other opportunities for socialization. One of these on an official basis is twinning. This is not the same as club twinning reported in Chapter VIII. At International conventions, all district governors-elect must attend a breakfast where each is seated — twinned — with his counter-part from another country. If fortunate, they will be able to communicate in a language of one or both of their countries, or of a third country which they both understand. If unfortunate, they are reduced to signs



Hong Kong



Korea



India



Philippines



Italy



Scandinavia



Japan



Sweden

and facial expressions. In convention business meetings, simultaneous translations in several languages are provided. Furthermore, officials and delegates are familiar with proceedings and know what is happening.

Unofficially, there are other activities. Lions have their own stamp collecting club and the International Convention is made to order for stamp trading. A special place is set up for this. Also, pin trading is actively pursued. These pins are not the same as authorized by Lions Clubs International. Many clubs, zones, regions and districts around the world have designed their own pins bearing significations of their organizations and areas. In addition to these activities there are several international contests: a photo contest, a friendship banner contest, a newsletter contest and a club publicity contest.



Connecticut on parade.



Women parade too: Mexico



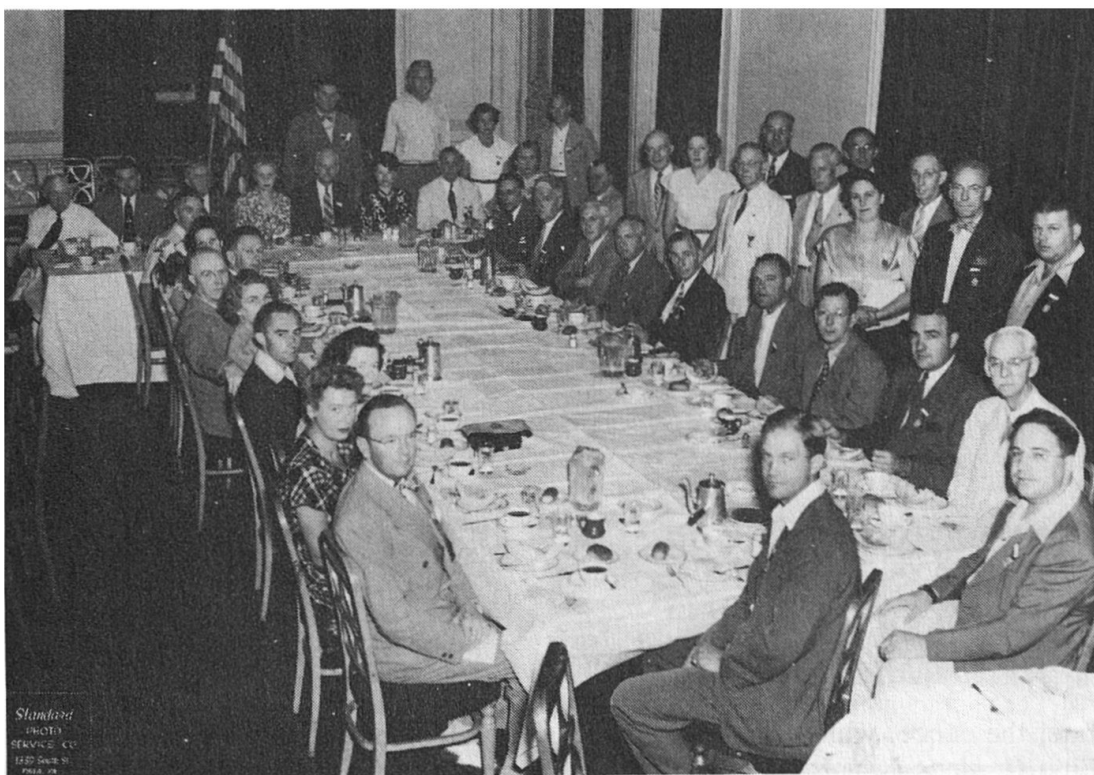
Brazil



Connecticut

Shopping is an item high on personal lists of things to do. For many Lions and their families it will be the first and perhaps only time to visit the country where the convention is held. Everyone buys something to take home, and they do not forget friends and relatives when shopping.

The Lions Clubs International parade is a big show event, with each country's delegation carrying a long parade banner giving the name of the country. Lions from several American states sponsor high school marching bands which participate in the parade, among them Ohio, Pennsylvania, Missouri and Texas. Connecticut sponsored a band in the past. At the Lions Clubs International Convention in 1955 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Al Urbinati was in charge of fund raising for



The Connecticut Delegates to the Philadelphia Convention, 1946. On left 3rd person is Marion Hentz, 4th person is Lester Hentz. In center at head table with striped necktie is Harold Ashley and his wife.

the Connecticut band. A budget of \$2,300 was set up for 125 high school students, 14 chaperones, two bandmasters and one nurse. Four buses were chartered for transportation. Funds were also provided for lodging for one night and at least four meals.

The Georgia Lions have a jamboree of country music and square dancing, open to all. The different state bands perform concerts in the morning and afternoon. The Lions convention committee puts on the big show, International Night, which is a concert with famous performers.

The Connecticut Lions' own contribution to the International Conventions is the teenage dance. Past International Director Charles Naylor of the New Canaan Lions developed the concept and plans, assisted by Joseph McLoughlin, later to be President of Lions Clubs International. The first teenage dance was held at the International Convention in New York City in 1954. Details on the event are not available. At the mid-winter conference in 1959, International Counsellor Stewart McKinney of Monroe reported on the teenage dance as follows:

"Our big, well-known teenage dance will be the highlight once again. The Manhattan Center on 45th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues has been reserved for the party. Their promenade ballroom will accommodate 4,000 people, and we expect it to be filled to capacity. Two orchestras will play alternately to eliminate intermissions."

All teenage dances are exciting, but one was more so than usual. At the International Convention in Nice, France in 1962, Charles Naylor said in his convention report that there was a "mob riot" the evening preceding the dance. On the night of June 19, the Lions of France held a flower parade. Six local policemen were injured when a large group of "teenagers" rioted. They were not the ones connected with the Lions dance, and Naylor did not report what the disturbance was about. At any



Connecticut Teenage Dance.

rate, the dance, which was scheduled for the following evening in the Albert-the-First Gardens, was held in the Mediterranean Casino on the evening of June 20 because a recurrence of the disturbance was thought likely. There were two dance bands playing without intermissions. Over 1,000 teenagers attended, but many were turned away because of limited space.

Connecticut still sponsors the teenage dance as an annual event at the Lions Clubs International Conventions. The dances are open only to that age group and attendance runs from 2,500 to 4,000, which indicates the popularity of the conventions as family affairs. When one thinks of the long-range possibilities of international understanding, the involvement of youth must be considered one of the main events of the conventions.

Other opportunities for youth are the International Leo Clubs (Lions organization for young people) forums and the International Youth Exchange program. At the International Convention in 1928, C.J. Vogelsson, speaking for International's Major Activities Committee, reported that 41 Lion-sponsored Youth groups, then called "Junior Lions Clubs," were organized. Of the total, 21 were in California. Connecticut had several Leo clubs in past years, but all of them folded. They are not reported in this history. (For information on the Youth Exchange, see Chapter VIII). The Leo forums and Exchange forums are business meetings, but interaction of youth is a prime element.

There are no special programs for women at the International Conventions. They can attend any of the meetings or make their own arrangements. Hospitality rooms are open to anyone who cares to wander in, and particular delegations sometimes have their own parties.

Lionesses can attend any meetings, as can anyone officially registered for the convention. But Lionesses have no official standing or representation in the plenary sessions. They have their own leadership seminar, but do not have any umbrella decision-making structure parallel to Lions Clubs International. This does not mean they are in limbo. It means that Lioness decision-making is a club responsibility. Lionesses do communicate through state mid-winter conferences, state conventions, and their International seminars, as well as through informal correspondence.



Japanese ladies supporting their candidate for International president, 1981.



Korean children.

In Conclusion

It is repeated for emphasis that social and recreational programs and events are not mandated by constitutions or bylaws. Therefore, what is done is strictly up to the membership. The role of leadership is to encourage perpetuation of worthwhile traditions or explore new paths in the development of social relationships. There is a sound principle behind this aspect of Lionism. Personal contact and relationships at all levels, from a club picnic to a Lions International Night, infuse Lionism with esprit de corps and a feeling of solidarity. There is no way to measure the extent to which these relationships enhance the Lions' efforts to serve others. But no one disagrees that they do.

