

OD by rod the metropolis has crept almost up to the quaint sylvan retreats of King's Bridge. Crabbing nowadays in the placid and shallow waters of the Upper Harlem, you are very nearly in the roar of the great city itself.

A few of nature's own hills and dells remain, nevertheless—the last of old New York. Here, though the builder is abroad and there are signs of his progress and energy, the curving banks of the river are much as they were years ago. Suited to the place, therefore, are two structures—a pavilion open on all four sides, and a shanty, on the Harlem's west bank—the home of one of the oldest of the city's institutions.

Broad and high black letters on the side of the shanty announce this organization's existence to the world that skurries past on the Hudson River trains. "Hoboken Turtle Club" are the words these letters spread out. They should be fraught with deep significance to the epicure and the historian alike, for the green turtle in the hands of these men is succulent, and this society of dining has kept its course despite war, politics, literature, art, theology, for 102 years.

Is it well implanted in the minds of all men as one of the most curious as well as the most antique of American social institutions? I fear me not. The pity of the Hoboken Turtle Club, indeed, is that it is known about on the part of so few. By this the compiler of this "brief for the green turtle and his friends" does not mean to imply that the club lacks a worthy roster and fitting fame, but rather that there are still, he is sure, some hundreds of thousands in New York alone who wot not of these banquets, and to whom the Hoboken Turtle Club is simply a name, if, as a matter of fact, they know it at all.

Well, the gastronomers who have eaten, year following year, of the turtle in soup and steaks cooked under the eye of John Tarbell, chef, can afford sympathy for such. It is the compiler's pleasant task to set down in black and white, with the aid of the faithful camera, just what the Turtle Club is, how it came into being, and grew, of what manner its joyful banquets are, and, relating a tradition, to spread in print how the sins of the mud turtles of early Hoboken have been visited upon their progeny's progeny—the green turtle of four generations of men.

It must first be premised that this is no ordinary club. From the day of its foundation—in 1796—it has existed for but one thing—epicurean pleasure. And for epicurean read turtle soup and turtle steak. Very truly are these dainties flanked by good capon, steaks of the porterhouse brand, a punch made after a brew a century old, &c., but all these are but side issues and side dishes. Turtle alone has been the bond of union.

As the banquets were in the old days so are they now. At 8 in the morning, four times each Summer, the "turtlegusters" sit down to turtle steaks. "On the side," for this breakfast, are stewed eels, fried eels, broiled bluefish, porterhouse steaks, boiled potatoes, cucumber and tomato salad, white and brown bread, and coffee. Between breakfast and dinner time some of the members hasten back to town, some drive about the country, some sit and smoke, with a careful eye on the final cooking of the soup and the making of the punch. At 4:30 the turtle, reduced to his final principle, is ready. More members and guests have come from the city. Very nearly two hundred men surround the board. They are feasted with speeches, drowned in Turtle Club punch, but not until this alimentary programme has been passed upon:

Green turtle soup, cold boiled salmon, honeycomb tripe, green corn, broiled Philadelphia chicken, cucumber salad, watermelon, white and brown bread.

'Hark back, now, for the space of a moment, 102 years, and see, in a room in the old Tontine Coffee House, on the corner of Broad and Pearl Streets, (Fraunces's Tavern, it had just then been named, and the building stands to-day,) a band of dandies

of the time, sturdy gentlemen of Knickerbocker stock and statesmen of the hour. The coffee house, the tavern, then took the place of the club of later days. In this group, as tradition states, were Col. John Stevens of Hoboken and Alexander Hamilton

The Colonel was wroth, and he had good reason. He, the land owner and greatest citizen of the Jersey shore, had been defied by so insignificant a thing as a mud turtle. The man who owned Castle Point, progenitor of the noted Stevens line, one of the great personages of the latter half of the last century and the early days of this, had been rendered powerless in a most exasperating way. Into the sympathetic ears of the loungers in the coffee room he unfolded his tale.

It appeared he had imported a fine stock of European fowl for Castle Point. That these chickens of pedigree might flourish he gave them the entire run of his property, even down to the "cave" jutting in on the Hudson's shore at the foot of the hill and to the north of the Castle. The chickens developed a great fondness for this cave, and would gather there. As time went on Col. Stevens could not but notice that his stock was diminishing. He puzzled long over this, and finally engaged a shepherd's boy to fathom the mystery, to track the thief.

In the bushes the following day the shepherd's boy watched and waited. Nothing in human shape appeared, but as the fowl of lineage daintily picked their way along the shore he saw an astounding sight. A mud turtle that had crawled from his lair seized upon one and held it firmly. The mysterious disappearances were explained.

Big-eyed and shaking in his boots, the shepherd's boy related the story to Col. Stevens that night. When that doughty land owner had heard it he swore a mighty



OFFICERS OF THE HOBOKEN TURTLE CLUB.
Alonzo T. Decker, Steward. William H. Van Tassel, Auditor. William H. Kirby, Secretary.
Washington L. Jaques, Treasurer. William Sperb, Jr., First Vice President. Charles W. Kaufmann, Second Vice President. Schuyler L. Gerard, Auditor.

oath. According to Capt. James de Man-deville, who is writing a book on the Turtle Club and has hunted o'er the traditions of the Stevens family for data, John Stevens then said: "Let the turtles go on eating the chickens—see if I don't turn around and foray on them."

This was the tale the Colonel told in a room in the Tontine Coffee House on a certain day of 1796. Though to-day John Stevens is hailed as the founder of the Hoboken Turtle Club, the actual idea of founding it did not, so it seems, occur to him. Tradition weaves a new bay about the forehead of Alexander Hamilton, for—the story goes—that worthy, having heard the tale to its end, spoke up with the deliberation he would have shown in proposing a scheme of finance.

"Gad, you ought to start a turtle soup factory on your grounds, Colonel."

It was no sooner said than the plan was adopted. Again Alexander Hamilton had proved the man of the moment. On the very shore where the chickens, one by one, had come to an untimely end, a "gigantic kettle of soup" was made. The savory contents had such charm that then and there an organization was formed, and the Turtle Club entered upon its century's career.

What was then thought and can now be considered little short of a calamity, has swept away nearly all of this organization's early history. A fire in the early forties in a cockloft in Broad Street destroyed all the old books and records. All that remains is that handed down through the generations by word of mouth. Slight as it is, there is yet enough to hint at these old "turtle days" and to draw some sort of a picture of them.

Who the original members were is, too, lost in obscurity. Col. Stevens and Alexander Hamilton are all that are recalled through the mists of years, though there is no doubt that Aaron Burr was a member in the club's early days. This much is certain, at all events, that on the rolls were many of the most representative men of the hour—authors, statesmen, merchants, the descendants of old patroons. The coterie that ate the soup on the Hudson's west bank, in the "Cave," were beyond all peradventure men of distinction.

For half a century mud turtles ruled, and the "Cave" continued to be the Turtle Club's headquarters for its banquets. Back a little distance from the beach was the cooking shanty, which tradition identifies as the "Cave" famous in the club's memories. These early spreads of turtle meat and the kettle's contents, flanked by Turtle Club punch, were primitive affairs. They were eaten on the beach of the "Cave." Every member had to play a part in the cooking, and it was then the rule that no man was eligible for the office of President unless he was a practical soup maker.

The story is told that Brillat-Savarin, in the height of his fame, when resident in New York for some years in the early days of the century, came often to the feasts of the Turtle Club, and gave the cooks many a hint, all of which have been handed down. The legend, too, has some semblance of probability, though it cannot now be verified.

The banquets were set in those times for the hour of 3. The man who downed the greatest number of plates of turtle soup was awarded a medal—a piece of turtle shell, hung about the neck with a bit of string. After the feasting was over mem-

bers and guests used to repair to Baxter's Inn, a very famous hostelry of Hoboken, there to quaff "Hoboken bier." The favorite ballad of these occasions is still remembered in part:

"When Fame sung loud pacans of Hoboken bier,

And told in Olympus Gambrinus's success,

'A keg of their nectar!' said Old Jane, 'bring here,

And summon the Deities hither express.' Capricorn on the floor

Kept the table in roar, As they hurriedly bolted their savory cheer,

While they vowed to their thinking That for exquisite drinking

Our nectars were rotgut to Hoboken bier.

• • • • • "Apollo indorsed the brew as divine,

And repeats he drank Helicon water so long,

Then bow'd—being asked by the musical Nine—

And gave the gay board an extempore song."

The woods nearby the "Cave" were given the name of "Turtle Grove." On the hill above stretched the Elysian Fields, then a beautiful playground of New York, now Hoboken building lots. When the "bier drinking" at Baxter's Inn was over, the diners would find their way to the ferry and cross to New York in the old horse ferry-boat—a journey uncertain in point of time, that seemed always to have no end.

Such was the Hoboken Turtle Club during the first sixty years of its life. On their beach and in the "Cave" it entertained Congressmen, Mayors, Judges, and had them on its rolls. By the time 1860 had come around moving the then historic grounds was proposed. A new headquarters was found at Stryker's Bay, across the river at the foot of Fifty-eighth Street. A few years later the club moved again, this time to Claremont, into an old wooden building but a few feet away from where the bones of Grant, the great American, now rest in peace.

The close of the sixties found the "turtlegusters" in a new home—one so pleasing that it continued to be the club's head-



The Mascot of the Hoboken Turtle Club.



THE DAY BEFORE THE FEAST—PREPARING THE TURTLES.



HOBOKEN TURTLE CLUB.
A Gathering of the Members.

quarters for twenty-three years. Old New Yorkers will remember Macomb's Dam Bridge (now replaced by the viaduct and structure known as Central Bridge) and Gabe Case's on the Westchester shore just beyond. It was nowhere else than at Gabe Case's that the green turtle banqueters found a refuge. There, as brilliantly as ever, did the dinners go on.

Pausing a moment before one comes to modern times, let there here be recorded the names of a few of the "old timers" who joyously feasted over many years. Samuel Mott, on the rolls for nearly sixty years, was one of them; "Lamb" Black another, (it was he who handed down the recipe of the Turtle Club punch, which he made for thirty years—Louis Schlamm, the assistant steward, is the possessor of the secret now.) Then, too, there were William H. Boyd, whose membership ticket, dated June, 1824, is one of the curios of the club—almost its sole relic of the early days; Silvanus Bradway, Frank A. Ridabock, Augustus Fuller, and Thomas C. Acton.

Modern times find the Hoboken Turtle Club in the full tide of prosperity. There was an hour, it is true, when it seemed as if the end of things had come. Tempted by ambition, the club in 1891 purchased a house and island at Larchmont and began what was expected to be a new era. But the financial load proved too great a one. The club, too, was disrupted. A receivership was imminent; it came.

Out of the old, however, a new arose. King's Bridge was chosen as the home for the new club's future days. In 1893 the first banquets were held there. In 1896—on June 18—the Turtle Club's centenary was celebrated most gorgeously, William Sulzer, Congressman, being then President.

It was only the other day that the third breakfast and dinner of the one hundred and third year—Aug. 18—took place. The accompanying pictures portray precisely what a turtle banquet is, and how the preparations are made. That the curious may learn, however, of the way the green turtle becomes a soup, of the amount of care and detail that must be spent upon him, the "time table" of Steward Alonzo T. Decker is appended. The feast, it should be remembered, came off on Thursday.

Wednesday, 6:30 A. M.—Arrival of the six Turtles at the Grand Central Depot.

6:50—Arrive at King's Bridge—Weighing.

7:30—Arrive at Clubhouse.

8:30—Killing of Turtles.

9:10—Preparing the soup. Preparing the steaks for the Breakfast.

10—Beginning to cook the soup.

Thursday, 8 A. M.—Breakfast.

11—Beginning to make the Punch.

2:30—Final mixing of the Punch.

4—Soup finished. Dinner.

Thus, it will be seen that the soup must cook thirty hours. It is placed, in the kitchen of the shanty, in five great kettles, thirty, forty, forty-five, fifty, and sixty gallons' capacity, respectively. The steaks are cut from under each turtle's flippers and cooked in a rich gravy. Truly has it been said that in green turtle one may get beef, mutton, pork, chicken, and fish, all in one. The punch is mixed in a bowl of deep red, a bowl of strange shape, older than any one can remember. It stands on a huge round-topped table, the top of which has painted on it "1796." Those who know say that this table has come down direct from the days of Alexander Hamilton and Col. John Stevens.

A turtle, of course, is the club's insignia. In a scroll about him, on the stationery, appears the motto of these notable epicures: "As we journey through life let us live by the way."
CROMWELL CHILDE.



Capt. Alonzo T. Decker,
Steward of the Hoboken Turtle Club.