

TRIBUTE

The Board of Directors voted at its October 2001 meeting to cancel the Midnight Bash and forgo the traditional giving of souvenir gifts at our 100th Anniversary Banquet. Instead, we will donate these funds to benefit the families of the victims of the September 11 disaster. We are sure all our members and guests at the banquet support this decision.

The Twenty-Four Karat Club has an honorable history of donating funds to worthy causes during times of U.S. crisis. After America joined World War I, the Club canceled its 1918 banquet and purchased Liberty Bonds. During the Depression, the Club donated money to U.S. unemployment funds and canceled several banquets. Before Pearl Harbor brought America into World War II, the Club donated hospital beds and a mobile feeding kitchen to the British War Relief Society. After we entered the fray, the Club eschewed lavish gifts, gave funds regularly to the American Red Cross and skipped a banquet in 1943.

We join the rest of our country in saluting the heroism of our rescue workers and ordinary citizens, and we fervently hope for a swift, successful conclusion to the war against terrorism on which our country has now embarked.

The Board of Directors of the Twenty-Four Karat Club of New York

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Paul W. Nordt, III



At the Twenty-Four Karat Club's 40th anniversary banquet in 1942, it was decided not to give out the usual gift to attending guests, and the funds were used to contribute to the war effort. The pocket piece shown was given to each guest to commemorate this action. Courtesy of Michael Kaplan. Photo by Robert Weldon.

*The History of the
Twenty-Four Karat Club of the City of New York*

by Peggy Jo Donahue



The History of The Twenty-Four Karat Club of the City of New York

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DEDICATION

To T. Edgar Willson, long-time editor in chief of *The Jewelers' Circular*, who was a member and 1928 president of the Twenty-Four Karat Club. He carefully recorded the happenings of the organization from its genesis in 1900 through the Roaring Twenties. Thanks for the assist, Edgar.

And to George Holmes, editor in chief of *Jewelers' Circular-Keystone* from 1974-1996, for all he taught me.

-P.J.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been a dream for several years on the part of many current members of the Board of the Twenty-Four Karat Club. The idea was born out of a desire that many of us have to commemorate the Club's traditions, which we love and honor.

We also wanted to share the Club's history with younger members, as well as the many guests who attend the Annual Banquet, who may not be aware of the beautiful and long standing rituals the Club embodies.

To survive for a century, especially this particular century just past, is an amazing feat. Our members endured two world wars, the Great Depression and the rollercoaster economic and social changes that rocked the twentieth century.

Though many of the Club's traditions were not publicized in the second half of the century, the Club's annual events were recorded in great detail by the trade magazines of the day during the first half of its existence. *The Jewelers' Circular* and *The Keystone*, which merged during the Depression to form *JCK* magazine, were the magazines of record in the early years of the Club's history. Thanks to a complete set of those publications on microfiche at the Philadelphia Public Library, writer Peggy Jo Donahue was able to unearth an amazing record of how our forbears celebrated their annual banquets and beefsteak dinners, partied at their annual outings and joined each other to support philanthropic causes and charities in the industry.

Thanks to Club Secretary Jim White's careful preservation, the minutes of early Club meetings, the financial records of the Club and other documents and photographs were also available for Peggy Jo's perusal and filled in important gaps where magazine records fell short, especially at the very beginning of the Club's history, as well as from the 1930's on. The records and correspondence of Club members Paul Nordt, Jr. and Charles Bond were invaluable for tracing the history of the Club after 1970.

Before Peggy Jo began her work on this history, Club members Joe Thompson and Hugh Glenn also lent a hand by interviewing older

members, most significantly the late Norman Morris, who was approaching the age of 100, but still had clear memories of his many years as banquet chairman of the Club.

Peggy Jo also interviewed other members, including Denham C. Lunt, Jr., Ted Lisnow, T. Somers McTeigue, Gerard Ditesheim, Raymond W. Zrike, Gary Flyer, George R. Knight, Jr., Melvin S. Cohen and the late Stanley Church, who all deserve thanks for their terrific memories.

Club members Mort Weisenfeld, Earl Lynch and Maurice Shire and the current Board of Directors of the Twenty-Four Karat Club also merit thanks for reading the manuscript before publication and offering careful suggestions.

Susan Kilkenny, advertising production manager for *Professional Jeweler* magazine, receives our thanks for handling of the publishing of this history. Susan ably took care of all aspects of the book's look, feel and production.

We are also grateful to Robert Weldon, director of photography for *Professional Jeweler* and a well-known industry writer and photographer, who carefully photographed all the artifacts shown in this book.

Finally, thanks to Peggy Jo Donahue, editor in chief of *Professional Jeweler* and formerly editor in chief of *JCK* magazine, who researched and wrote this history and selected its visual images. It was a labor of love, says this jewelry industry historian, who had previously penned other jewelry industry histories.

The Twenty Four Karat Club of the City of New York is now officially launched on its second century. Long may it live!

Sincerely,
Jose Hess
Chairman
History Committee
The Twenty Four Karat Club of the City of New York

PROLOGUE

*N*ovember 3, 1900...The Business Men's Republican Parade

The shops along Broadway were shuttered and the tentative glow of the new electric street lamps had risen when the thundering voices of the Business Men's Republican Parade began to pierce the quiet dusk of the late autumn evening. The shop boys sweeping the sidewalks in front of stores paused when they heard the din. Soon, torchlights appeared and all semblance of work ended to watch the spectacle.

The businessmen were out in force on this last weekend before the presidential election of 1900. A large contingent of New York's jewelry and watch trade, under the proud banner of The Jewelers' McKinley & Roosevelt Club, was among the ranks, for this was an important election for anyone whose trade depended on gold and silver.

On the Republican ticket were incumbent President William McKinley and newcomer Theodore Roosevelt, the former New York City Police Commissioner who had charged up San Juan Hill with his Rough Riders during the recent Spanish-American War. The McKinley-Roosevelt ticket was important for what it fought against: the hated Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan, who was running for a second time on the issue of taking the country off the gold standard and allowing unlimited coinage of silver.

Jewelers never forgot Bryan's impassioned speech: "You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." The metals pricing chaos that would result if Bryan succeeded had even industry Democrats steaming. Augustus K. Sloan, who helped found the Jewelers' Security Alliance in 1883 and who would be one of the early honorary members of the Twenty-Four Karat Club, told a cheering post-election victory dinner a few weeks later: "I have been a Democrat all my life, but I marched in the parade with you and voted the Republican ticket four years ago and did the same this year. I'll keep it up as long as they put up a man like William J. Bryan!"

Three days later, the parade participants had a victory under their belts. McKinley and Roosevelt won nearly double the electoral votes of Bryan and it was time for the The Jewelers' McKinley & Roosevelt Club to hold its Victory Dinner. From that dinner, held Nov. 24, 1900, would come the inspiration for the Twenty-Four Karat Club of the City of New York.