

## This Day in History... February 16, 1868

### Founding of the Elks

On February 16, 1868, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE) was founded in New York City.

The story of the Elks begins on November 15, 1867, when British comic singer Charles A. Vivian arrived in New York. That night, he visited the Star Hotel and met piano player Richard R. Steirly. Vivian offered to sing a few songs with Steirly and the two became fast friends.

Steirly soon introduced Vivian to his friends and fellow entertainers and they spent much of their free time together drinking and playing games. Vivian introduced the group to a game of corks, in which they dropped their corks on the bar and picked them up as quickly as possible, with the last to pick his up buying the drinks. The game proved popular among the group and they eventually became known as the Jolly Corks.

That December, one of their friends, Ted Quinn, passed away, leaving his wife and children impoverished. Group member George McDonald suggested that the Jolly Corks should become a protective and benevolent society, complete with rules and regulations, rituals, and a new name. Vivian suggested The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffalos, a British organization. However, the rest of the group wanted something entirely American.

Members of the group then visited the Cooper Institute Library where they read the description of the elk: "fleet of foot, timorous of doing wrong, but ever ready to combat in defense of self or of the female of the species." They thought this was fitting and suggested the elk for the group name.

In a meeting on February 16, 1868, the Jolly Corks assembled and voted eight to seven to become the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. In addition to the library's description, they chose the elk because it was "a readily identifiable creature of stature, indigenous to America."

From its simple beginnings, the Elks Lodge has grown into a major service organization with more than one million members in over 1,900 lodges. They provide for youth programs such as Boy and Girl Scouts, Little League, and Special Olympics. They also assist in medical programs for children and veterans. The Elks have given disaster relief to affected communities since the Chicago fire of 1871.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is one of the oldest and largest fraternal organizations in America. During its long history, the Elks have contributed more than \$2.69 billion in cash, goods, and services to America's youth, its veterans, the disadvantaged and handicapped, and in support of patriotic and civic programs. Elks headquarters are located at Elks National Memorial Building in Chicago, Illinois.



*Issued for the Elks' 100th anniversary and their "Support Our Youth" service program.*



*From the Wildlife in America issue*

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