KIT KAT CLUB

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Since the Beginning ....

The President of the fledgling organization looked out over an interested but somewhat disparate group of listeners and stated,

"In calling the Club to order for its first formal session, I wish to direct your attention again to the fact that the committee appointed at a previous meeting to devise a plan of organization has done so in a most liberal spirit. Under this plan, as it has been approved by some and as it will be submitted to you for ratification at this meeting, it is possible for the Club to do practically anything it wishes to do and to discuss any theme it wishes to discuss. It had been thought to exclude from our discussions questions of politics and religion, but to the wiser members of the conference it appeared that we should thus be shutting ourselves off from the consideration of some very interesting and important matters. And so even those restrictions have been omitted, and we are free to guide our craft as we will.

The general idea, as I have got it from the various conferences and conversations is that this is to be a club of gentlemen. That being the case, no speaker will say aught intentionally to offend, and no hearer will go out of his way to seek cause for offenses.

We are, as I understand it, learners and lovers of the good in the realms of literature, art and other matters of broad human concern. We are going to come to the meetings in a spirit of good fellowship to talk for the most part informally of some things worth while, about which some of us know something and all of us would like to know more. We are to have opinions which we shall be at perfect liberty to express, but we are not going to be bigoted or dogmatic. We are not to be peevish or thin-skinned, but good-humored, broad-minded, and as intelligent as possible -- in short, real simon-pure philomatheans ....

Our committee on entertainment will from time to time provide the outlines of a program -- something to talk about with somebody to furnish the central thought -- but there is always to be freedom of discussion and opportunity for members to contribute thoughts on other themes as they may desire. The idea is that those meetings in which there is the most general participation will be the most generally enjoyable. If we have in our reading or listening encountered a happy helpful thought, or some peculiarly apt expression of a common sentiment, let us bring it to the meeting and share with others the pleasure we have derived from it.

As I read the idea between the lines of the plan of organization, we are to have here a club whose meetings shall be mentally stimulating -- a club which shall be a credit to us all, representative of the city's culture and promotive of high ideals." (1)

Those were some of the words of O.C. Hooper, and, of course, he was addressing the inaugural session of the Kit Kat Club of Columbus. In this Club, steeped in tradition, one of the informal folkways has been the occasional "looking back," an evening of reflecting and re-collecting on the good fortune of the present members to have secured such an association. True "legends" of the Club, members with substantial seniority, perspective, and knowledge, have previously seen fit to honor their colleagues, past and present, by essaying on the development of Kit Kat and recounting several of its highlights. Hooper in 1931 and Jay Crane in 1961 made such presentations; both essays were subsequently published as semi-official histories of our group. One of our legends, Herschel Stephan, provided the foundation for Crane's performance by offering a warmly-received paper in 1959 on the Club and its 18th century namesake. And, of course, the enjoyable, anecdotal account written by Crane and fellow member James Pollard was polished and extended to 1983 by our colleagues and longtime Secretary, David Owens.

In offering the following remarks, I recognize the appearance of presumptuousness. This paper, though, is intended more to remind and to reinforce than it is to educate anew. I was moved to attempt such a topic in this, only my second essay before the Club, largely because I believe that we have a very special ambiance at work here, and I believe its flowering and its continuity are not foregone conclusions in today's