

The birth of Lionism

June 7, 1917: one man's public spirit opens the door to worldwide dedication

The International Association of Lions Clubs was born at the LaSalle Hotel. Here, a young, idealistic insurance man named Melvin Jones joined with about a dozen other civic-minded men to give direction to an organization of clubs which emphasized community service as their objective. This was a relatively new concept. Up until that time, men's clubs, luncheon groups for the most part, were devoted to advancing the business interests of their members. The Business Circle in Chicago which Melvin Jones joined in 1913 was no different. Jones, though, was interested in more than promoting his own business and reaping financial rewards.

"What if these men," he asked himself, "who are successful because of their drive, intelligence and ambition, were put to work helping improve their communities?" With this

How a Chicago insurance man made the ambition and business sense of his colleagues work for the whole community - and the world

thought, he invited leaders of various men's clubs to Chicago to investigate the possibility of establishing a new association. Enthusiasm ran high that June day in 1917 in the East Room of the LaSalle. Most agreed an organization of clubs, with a goal of community service, should be formed. They further agreed to meet in convention the following October in Dallas, Texas, to give additional impetus to the proposal.

Thus, was Lionism born! In Dallas, the delegates,

representing 22 Lions Clubs from around the nation, adopted a Constitution and By-Laws and drafted the Objects and the Code of Ethics. A fresh concept was set in motion at the Chicago meeting and the Dallas convention. Community-minded men would direct their efforts to helping people in need, to making their cities, towns and neighborhoods better places in which to live.

The United States had entered World War I in April, 1917, and Lions Clubs immediately

began to help the war effort. Bond drives and the collection of books and magazines for soldiers were carried out by a number of clubs. Later, the influenza epidemic of 1918 spurred many Lions Clubs to cooperate with hospitals and health officials in a variety of capacities.

The year 1918 saw an important "first" in Lionism. Volume 1, Number 1, of THE LION Magazine was published in November, with Melvin Jones as editor. It contained 28 pages and, of course, had a small circulation. Today, there are 20 editions of THE LION, in 15 languages.

KNIGHTS OF THE BLIND
Perhaps the most important development for Lionism during this decade, however, occurred at the 1925 International Convention in Cedar Point, Ohio. "Become Knights of the Blind. Will you not help hasten the day when there shall be no preventable blindness; no little deaf, blind child untaught; no blind woman or man unsided? I appeal to you Lions, you who have your sight, your hearing; you who are strong and kind and brave." The words of Helen Keller, blind and deaf, a heroine throughout the world, rang out to the convention delegates. The Lions accepted her challenge and Lions International soon became one of the world's leading organizations in the fight against blindness. Eye research facilities, eye banks, dog guide schools, assistance to the blind and a multitude of other programs have made Lionism and sight conservation practically synonymous.

A MOTTO, A NEW HOME
In the 1950s, the motto "We Serve" was officially adopted as tens of thousands of civic-minded men joined Lions Clubs throughout the world. During this decade, the International Headquarters also found another new home, a spacious office building on Chicago's Michigan Avenue. It was to serve the needs of international Lionism until Headquarters operations moved, in 1971, to its present site in Oak Brook, Illinois.

Melvin Jones, the man whose energy and inspiration guided the Association since those first few days at the old LaSalle Hotel, died in 1961. Though often ill in his later



MELVIN JONES

1879 - 1961

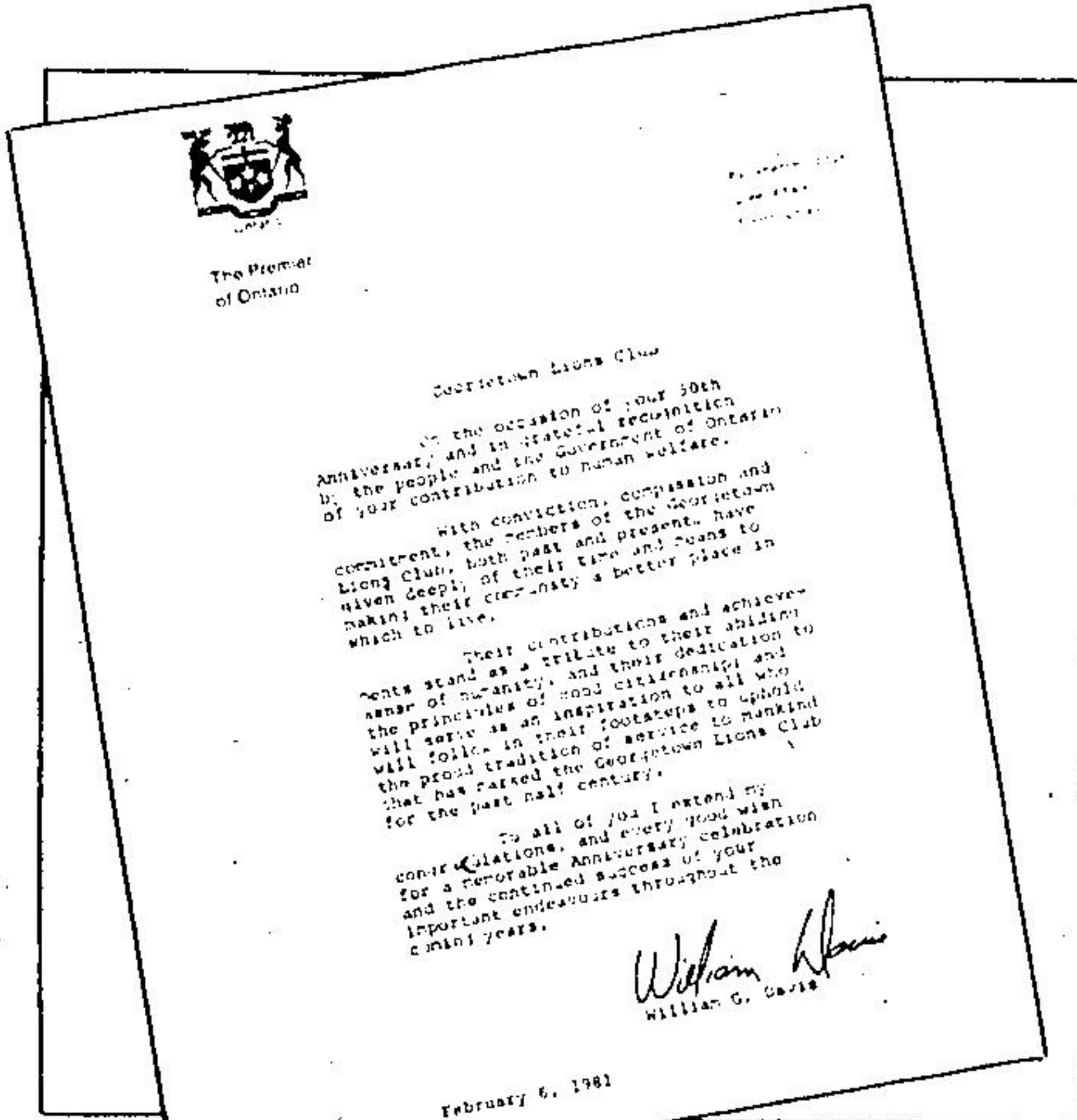
'Dreams are the fool ideas of the day before yesterday that have become the commonplace miracles of today.'

years and suffering the effects of severe strokes, he nonetheless appeared almost daily at his office at International Headquarters. Melvin Jones was 82 years-of-age at the time of his death. He had served Lionism for 44 years.

The Association he founded continued to grow and to bring healthier, happier and more productive lives to the visually handicapped, the infirm and the less fortunate the world over. Membership rose to 800,000 by 1968 and Lions were active in 20,000 clubs. When the Association celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1967,

the spirit of Lionism had extended to 135 countries and geographical areas. Lions International now prepared to enter another decade, the '70s, one that would witness an amazing growth in numbers and services.

A milestone was achieved in 1973 when membership reached the one million mark. And less than a year ago, the 30,000th club was organized. Lionism, however, has not only grown in manpower in the '70s. It has expanded in many directions, all with the ultimate goal of providing more and better services.



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