

# GEORGE FISKE

## *Testimonial Dinner*



These caricatures were used in presenting the “SAGA OF GEORGE FISKE” at the George Fiske Testimonial Dinner given by five hundred of his friends and held in the grand Ball room of the Hotel Muehlebach, in Kansas City, Missouri, on the night of March 5, 1953.

The narration which accompanied the showing of these cartoons is found facing each of the drawings in this book.

Cartoons by Lee Davis, artist.

Narration by Justin Bowersock, journalist.

Narrator – John Thornberry.

## George Fiske, the boy

Things were not easy for the boy George Fiske back in Kennebunk, Maine, in the early 1890's. He trudged back and forth to the little schoolhouse a mile and a half away. Sometimes the snow was so deep he had to wear his home-made snow shoes. But after attending Kennebunk P.S. No. 1 for six years, George Fiske got his first promotion. He was made janitor of the school at a salary of \$3 a winter. There was many a winter day he trudged from the home of his parents, Mr. And Mrs. John Fiske, all the way to the school house where he started a fire in the wood burning stove. And then he would just sit down and be the only one to reach the school that day. But in those days a penny bought a lot of candy and the energetic and studious Fiske occasionally dipped into his annual salary for a sack of refreshments. The little house where George was born July 23, 1886 was definitely lacking in modern facilities. No electricity, no running water, no forced air furnace, no inside plumbing. But it is different today. The home where George and Margery Fiske will spend their retiring days is sparkling with new paint; it's a bright spot nestled in the center of twenty-three acres of pine trees, just a spit and a holler from the rock bound coast of Maine. The Kennebunk River, which leads to the ocean, is at the doorstep and there is a boat ready to give hours of pleasure and relaxation as George runs his lobster pots, fishes, or walks out in the woods visiting his many feathered friends.



## The G.E. Man

The start of George Fiske with the General Electric Company was delayed four months. It seemed George took a swing with an ax at a piece of wood but struck his foot instead. The wound healed and the then 18 year old Fiske reported at the Lynn, Mass., plant, for the next four years; he studied the business and at the same time drew down a salary of \$4.86 a week. That was in 1904. With the aid of the Kempers and the collector of internal revenue, he has since figured it out that he was making \$252.72 a year or nearly \$100 less than the monthly pay of engineers starting with the company today. He was promoted to a new job at the Pittsfield plant and started to learn about the production of electrical apparatus. He had a tendency toward arc lamps, so he studied street lighting and ended up in Chicago in 1911 as an assistant specialist trying to sell the city fathers on the idea of brightening up their streets. He made his own cardboard model streets to demonstrate his product. When a lighting specialist was needed by G.E. in Minneapolis, George Fiske was the man; and using horse and buggy or any other form of transportation he could find, he traveled over half a dozen states. It was while in Minneapolis that the young salesman married Margery Frost, his childhood sweetheart. It was in Minneapolis, too, where Fiske had his first summer estate, since he and his bride liked to be near the lakes; they established a summer home on an island on Lake Minnetonka. The home was an 8 by 12 foot tent with extending canopy and a two burner oil stove.



## Fiske the Soldier

When newly commissioned first lieutenant George Fiske walked in to report to his captain in 1917 at Fort Snelling, he got bawled out for failing to salute. He decided right there and then he didn't like the army and that the army wouldn't miss him around there. He hadn't changed much when he was transferred to Fort Leavenworth. But Fiske became a good officer and served his country in action in World War I and in various capacities in World War II. He went overseas as adjutant of the 512<sup>th</sup> Engineers Battalion which built power plants and railroads to move troops up to the front. He was promoted to captain after six months in France. In 1919 when he returned to the states he got his discharge and "sixty bucks" at Camp Upton, NY, and headed for Lynn, Mass., to see his wife and baby daughter, Mary Helen Fiske. But that was not the end of a military career for Fiske, for when he was transferred to Kansas City he entered into other activities including the 3<sup>rd</sup> Missouri Regiment. He became a major in the regiment in December 1940 and a lieutenant colonel in 1941 and was elected a colonel of the regiment in 1942. Colonel Fiske was one of the organizers of the regiment and was active until he resigned as commanding officer March 31, 1946.



## Military Order, Navy League, 3<sup>rd</sup> Missouri Regiment

Yes, George's military activities increased in leaps and bounds. Busy as he was with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Missouri Regiment, he found time to be one of the active members of the Military order of World Wars and became that organizations commander. He took part in every activity of the order, served on committees and in his usual way was a competent and efficient leader. And while he was trying to keep appointments with the regiment and the order, he couldn't forget his work with the Navy League and the fact that since World War I he was a big part of the Military Engineer's organization. In fact George was so busy he couldn't even reach for a piece of paper to mark down his appointments. He just marked them down on the back of his hand.



## American Legion

Mr. Fiske's military activities naturally took him into the American Legion and he reached the top in his post when he was elected commander of the Heart of America; post September 19, 1930 and became national committeeman for the Missouri American legion in 1932. He served as state legion historian for three years. Legionaire Fiske went to Washington in 1933 to represent the Missouri department of the legion at the inaugural, serving on the stage of Louis Johnson, then national legion commander. As the legion post's safety chairman, Fiske in 1941 made news as usual in his appeal to cut down motor car accidents, pointing to the fact that 450 million man days of work were lost in that year through accidents, and that, as he said then, was enough man days to build twenty battleships or a thousand heavy bombers.



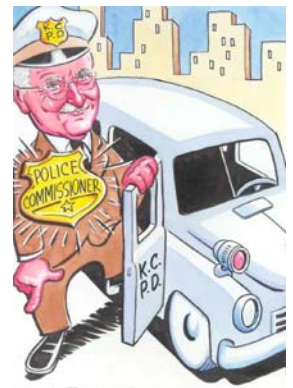
## 40 & 8

Along with the American Legion is a fun loving group known as the forty and eight. It is sort of the backyard playground of the Legion, but with that fun there are a lot of worthwhile activities. The name comes from the French cars, which would carry eight horses or forty men. After many years of activity in the Legion our military minded Fiske became a member of the exclusive Forty & Eight and even got up to be the chief Forty and Eighter, or if you are a legionnaire, that is the Chef de Gare Voiture Trois. That was in 1931. After proving himself a leader as usual of the Kansas City chapter he became Grand Chef de Gare, or state commander, for Missouri in 1936. He has so many friends in Forty and Eight he better start building forty cottages and eight dormitories at Kennebunk.



## Police Commissioner

On the night of July 8, 1939, George Fiske stood with upraised hand along with Edgar Shook, Russell F. Greiner and Milton B. Schweiger in the living room at the home of judge Brown Harris at 206 East Forty-fourth Street. There were just a few words said in administering the oath and the boy from Kennebunk, Maine, became Commissioner Fiske of the Kansas City Police Department. The day before Gov. Lloyd C. Stark had signed a bill turning the Kansas City Police Department from home rule to state jurisdiction. Fiske was the Republican member of the board. Two seconds after the oath had been administered Mrs. Harris let it be known she was worried about the flogging of prisoners and hoped the new commissioners would put a stop to the practice. Serving as a commissioner once was not enough for Fiske. On May 2, 1950 he was drafted again as a police commissioner by Gov. Forrest C. Smith. By this time Fiske had a good knowledge of crime conditions, having served as a member of the clean-up grand jury, called by Judge Allen C. Southern, which indicted gamblers on a wholesale basis. And in 1949 when a grand jury was called to investigate the Wolf Rimann murder and other crimes, Fiske was chosen foreman because of his wide experience. Fiske resigned from the police board in April 1952.



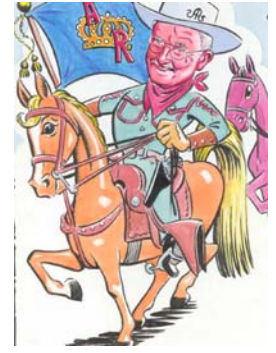
## Rotary Club

As a member of the Rotary Club, there was no job too large or small for him to tackle, even the presidency of the club, to which he was elected in May of 1940. Being an active member of the Rotary Club means selection from the group to serve on numerous other civic activities and so such enormous tasks as chairman of the special gifts committee of the Community Chest drive fell upon his shoulders. After that an even bigger job of heading a Red Cross drive for \$350,000 for wartime aid in 1941. Where does a man find time for all that work? His Red Cross job called for heading a corps of volunteers 5,000 strong who went out and got the needed financial aid for the Jackson County and Kansas City chapter. And that was a tough job in those war days.



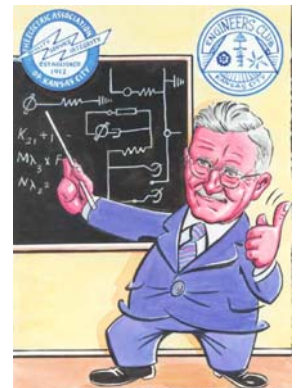
## American Royal

Twenty-one floors below the offices Mr. Fiske formerly occupied in the Power and Light company building is an intersection known to all as Fourteenth Street and Baltimore Avenue. But to George Fiske that is where the American Royal Parade starts each fall; and when George Fiske says a parade starts, that is what he means. Aside from being a member of the board of directors of the American Royal Association, Fiske has been parade marshal, not only for the Royal parades but other parades in Kansas City in the past. He has but one theory on starting parades on time. That is, when the appointed hour arrives, George motions the driver of his convertible to start. And then George never looks back. Fiske has served on numerous committees of the American Royal.



## Electric Association and Engineers Club

Sparks and high voltage seem to go along with George Fiske who joined anything he felt he could enjoy and work with for something to better himself and his fellow men. So it was natural, as a General Electric man that he joined the Electric Association in 1923 and has been a member ever since. He was president of the association in 1932. Last year he was voted both an honorary and life membership in the association. He was a member of the board and was a vice-president so many times he doesn't remember. He is a life member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, also.



## Helping Hand

When you stop and put all these things together you wonder when George Fiske ever got some rest. But take it easy, you haven't heard it all yet. Perhaps the days were forty-eight hours long for George Fiske. He always had a helping hand for anything good for the city. And so it was that he served and worked untiringly for the Helping Hand Institute. He became a member of the board of directors on June 5, 1936 and by 1947 he became vice-president. His keen interest in the work of the institute brought the honor of being elected president of the Helping Hand in July 1950, and he holds that office today. Is there a finer helping hand in Kansas City?



## Boy Scouts and Boys' Club

All of George Fiske's charitable work was not confined to adults. He had younger friends too like the Boy Scouts and the Boys' Club and served those organizations. He was on the board of directors of the boys' Club from 1939 until his resignation last year. And during that time he was a vice-president and also treasurer of the club. The Boy Scouts were his love, too, and he served on the board of directors of that group from 1937 until 1941. One of his keenest interests in the Scouts was the troop at the Delano School for Crippled Children. He gave them all many a happy moment.



## Saddle and Sirloin

When it comes to sports, George Fiske somehow or other found time to get away from all his duties and relax. As a member of the Saddle & Sirloin Club, the promotional organization for the American Royal, George can be found out at One hundred third Street and Mission Road in the dead of winter playing archery gold. Snow or rain or sleet or wind failed to daunt the brave Fiske who shot his arrows at the far away targets – and then walked all over the place looking for the arrow. He is one of the few experts in this sport in Kansas City, as his former foe, Ed Phelps, will testify. An ardent hunter, each year finds George venturing into the Dakotas for pheasants or other game. And just to keep up on his aim, he is constantly shooting skeet at the Saddle and Sirloin Club. He likes to dress up in his western clothes and while not a horseman, he could always be found on the trail ride in hot weather or cold on his rubber-tired hayrack. George became president of the Saddle and Sirloin Club in 1947, to add another honor to his long list of accomplishments.



## Citizens Committee

On July 9, 1947, George Fiske was elected the first chairman of the Citizens Committee to take part in a campaign for charter form of government in Jackson county. With him on the committee were Mrs. George H. Gorton, Henry A. Bodendieck, Kenneth E. Midgeley, Porter T. Hall and John M. Phillips. At a ceremony last year given by members of the association Fiske was described as a son of Maine in his adopted state of Missouri. He was praised for his administration of Kansas City's non-partisan organization dedicated to clean government in Kansas city, one of his many unselfish contributions to make this community a better place in which to live. Fiske not only fulfilled his responsibility to his company, but also as a citizen. He was honored by his company by receiving its highest award, the Charles A. Coffin award as a great employee and great citizen in the community in which he worked.



And with befitting dignity, it was on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1949, that The Most Reverend Edwin V. O'Hara, Bishop of this diocese, acting on behalf of the Catholic Community Services, personally conferred upon George Fiske the Bishop's Citation for Outstanding Civic Service to our community.

## Retirement

Yes, it's welcome home again to Kennebunk, the home of your grandparents and your parents, and all your old cronies of the Maine woods. But don't forget as you are pulling in your lobster pots, or trying to start the engine on that outboard motor boat, there are a lot of people in Kansas City who wish you were here. What you have done for this city in the last thirty years! What ever the civic task turned over to you, you did it well. Your untiring efforts have made this a better city in which to live. When you are not out in your boat, hunting, fishing or just tramping in the woods, and are sitting around your electric fireplace, remember there are going to be some Kansas City visitors at

Kennebunk. You might even plan some tourist cabins over on the north forty. And remember this, too. Your work with all the aforementioned activities in Kansas City cannot be forgotten. And you and Margery may have to jump into the old family car and come back here to help out some time. Who could do a better job of leading Kansas City on a parade to greater achievements? One thing for sure – it would start on time and judging by the way you handled things in the past that parade would pass that given point right on schedule with Marshal George Fiske, retired, in command.

