

## The Dining Room

"Dear actors, eat no onions, nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath." — A Midsummer Night's Dream (IV, ii)

The Players Dining Room plays host to more festive occasions than perhaps any other room within the club. Dozens of men and women of the theatre from John Gielgud to James Cagney to Jason Robards have been feted with Pipe Nights and other glittering tributes honoring their illustrious careers. Many of the finest actors and actresses of the 20th and 21st centuries have performed on the intimate stage at the back of the room. The polished parquet floor, the rich mahogany paneling, and the suffused glow of the lamps that illuminate the portraits lining the walls contribute to the room's warm and convivial atmosphere.

Here, Players and their guests dine and enjoy the entertainment presented at hundreds of special events throughout the year, including Pipe Nights, play readings, cabaret performances, and special presentations of the Edwin Booth Award, bestowed upon a Player with a distinguished lifetime of dedication to the Theatre.

Much has changed in the Dining Room throughout the decades. Perhaps only the two blue delft-tiled fireplaces (bearing quotations from Hamlet and A Midsummer Night's Dream) and the numerous pewter tankards suspended above them remain of much of the room's original design. Where the stage now stands, once there was a courtyard with a fountain, complete with live tortoises (all apparently named Myrtle the Turtle) which served as erstwhile club mascots. The area was used as a dining terrace. In 1961 Player Avery Fisher oversaw the installation of a then state-of-the-art sound system.

Lining the walls are portraits of Walter Hampden as Cyrano de Bergerac, 19th century tragedienne Nance O'Neil as Lady Macbeth, Otis Skinner, James Cagney, and Helen Hayes, the first woman to be made a Player, on Shakespeare's birthday, April 23, 1989. Two stained-glass panels, one depicting David Garrick as Richard III in 1741 and the other Richard Mansfield in the same role in 1889, contribute to the room's ambience. On display are programs from 19th century productions of Othello and Much Ado About Nothing starring Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett; the August 8, 1857 final performance of The Frozen Deep co-written by (and starring) novelists Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, as well as a stage bill from an 1859 production of The Iron Chest, wherein Edwin Booth played the role his father performed decades earlier.