Legend holds that the ancient Greeks were the first to wish someone good health while raising a glass and drinking. It is said that it was to prove that the drink was healthy (in other words, not poison). Somewhere along the line a Roman custom of dropping a piece of burnt toast into wine while following the Greek tradition of drinking to one's health gave way to the term that we know to this day as a toast. But it was the Irish that embellished the custom to a point that today a Google search of Irish toasts will result in 500,000 hits.

One hundred and eighty two years ago the first St. Patrick’s day celebration in the town of Greece was held. Along with that celebration the custom the Greeks started centuries ago was brought to the town of Greece by the Irish. It was at Mr. T Cleary’s tavern near Lake Ave and Latta Roads where the anniversary of Ireland’s patron saint was celebrated.

The Rochester Republican, one of the many papers of the day, reported that . . . “As many gentlemen as the room could accommodate, sat down to an excellent dinner about seven o’clock. It might well be called the feast of reason, and flow of soul. Never have we before witnessed on similar occasions such an exhilarating scene. It would indeed be impossible to describe the flow of patriotism and the reciprocity of liberal and generous sentiment which prevailed among persons, as they were composed of different creeds and countries.”

The report went on to quote the speeches and the toasts, no fewer than 13 regular toasts, and more than a dozen spontaneous ones from as many guests. After so many toasts I am sure the newspaper was correct in reporting that it was “impossible to describe the flow of patriotism and the reciprocity.”

Judge Nicholas Read presided over the celebration, with a speech about his native country and his allegiance to his new country. After toasts to God, St. Patrick, Ireland, the United States, and the President, they went on to toast the merchants and farmers of Greece, the enterprising citizens of modern Greece, and the sons of St Patrick that live in Greece.

Then the toasts with an Irish flair began: From G. Moore “May the oppressors of Ireland never enjoy the pleasure of kissing the pretty girls of it.” From Henry Benton, “God’s last best gift to man. With them we have a paradise on earth, without them man’s life is but a blank.” From John Moxon, “May the abilities of our Irish friends keep pace with their hospitable intentions.” From Thomas Gleason, “May the sun never rise on the throne of a tyrant, nor set on the cottage of a slave.” And from Cpt Barnes, “May the sons of Erin who have met on this side of the Atlantic to commemorate the birth day of their Patron Saint, never suffer the oppression which grinds their brethren at home.”

To some people, many of the toasts could be appropriate today: From James O’Maley, “May all religious discord cease throughout the known world.” From Patrick Beaty, “May the hand of friendship be ever extended to the exiles who seek refuge on our shores.” And from Mr. Blackwell “May the sordid and ambitions motives of any sect or party never predominate in these Unites States, nor sully our republican institutions by a union of church and state.”

The toasts and sentiments went on throughout the evening, and even though the drinks must have been flowing, good-will prevailed.