



MEAN STREETS

This Works Progress Administration photo tells the story of a man lucky to be wearing a cabdriver's uniform, lucky to have change in his pockets, lucky to be spending only part of the day cooling his heels (and those shoes look hot!). We know the big poster advertises *Three Men on a Horse*, a play about a henpecked greeting-card poet who picks winning horses (unless he's betting), because it was poor John Cecil Holm's only hit. The handbill advertises *The First Legion*, a "Jesuit play" performed at The Muny by St. Luke's Dramatic Club (formed by bored teens after Cardinal John Glennon outlawed dances at the parish halls). It was a fundraiser for Father Tim Dempsey's charities, including Father Tim's Free Lunch Room, which opened in 1931 and averaged 8,000 meals a day till the end of the Depression. But Dempsey was already an old hand at dealing with poverty: Born in Ireland 15 years after the famine, he was sent to St. Patrick's, in the center of the Kerry Patch, in 1898, when Irish families

squatted in clapboard shanties (and according to an 1897 guidebook, spent most of the day "punching each other's eyes"). He opened "The Exile's Rest," a hotel for impoverished working men, in 1906. Though it was only 10 cents a night, there were clean linens, baths and showers (both cold and hot), towels, soap, combs, shoe blacking, shoe brushes, a telephone service, lockers, stationery, a safe, a piano, a library of "all leading newspapers and magazines," and a free labor agency. Two weeks after this photo was snapped, Dempsey died of a heart attack; he was interred at Calvary Cemetery with the same poor men he served, in a section dubbed "Exiles Rest" after the hotel. No one remembers *Three Men and a Horse*. Very few remember St. Patrick's, torn down in the '70s. But downtown, there's still a hotel for men down at the heels—and it still bears Dempsey's name.

—STEFENE RUSSELL

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