

Centenary Minute No 1 - January 8, 2002

In the months ahead, leading up to our Centenary Dinner on November 15th, I shall speak briefly on some aspect of the Club's history at each of our meetings.

When I became secretary-treasurer in 1980, Hap Kennard called me over to his house to pass on the Club's records. John Field, who held the same office before me, had sense enough not to want to be bothered with such things. And all the secretary-treasurers since have held the same view, so the Club archives—the equivalent of two plus full-size file cabinets—remain with me.

These have pretty much sat unlooked at until the past few days when I started going through the scrapbooks, correspondence, minutes and so forth, in preparation not only for these short monthly observations but more importantly as a prelude in the preparation of a Club historical publication which if all goes well will be ready for our 100th anniversary. As I proceed with this project, my monthly comments should become more interesting. Let's hope so.

To start off tonight, I'd like to recount the circumstances surrounding the founding of the Club in 1902. This is taken pretty much verbatim from a Club history that was written in 1933.

One hundred years ago—this coming November 15th—Harvard's eminent geographer, Professor William Morris Davis, in association with Copley Amory, Roland B. Dixon, James H. Kidder, and the late Archibald Cary Coolidge, invited Harvard men and others in this vicinity, who might be interested in “promoting intelligent travel and exploration,” to meet together on November 15, 1902, in the assembly room of the Harvard Union at Cambridge, to consider the formation of a Harvard Travellers Club. Thirty men responded to the call. Professor Davis outlined his plans for the organization of the Club, and explained

its proposed objects. The idea met with enthusiastic reception. Professor Davis was elected the first President and Dr. John C. Phillips was chosen the first Secretary. As an earnest of interesting narratives to come, Mr. James H. Kidder gave an account of his experiences in hunting bears in Alaska, at that time a comparatively little-travelled region. Those registering at this first meeting included professors at the college, graduates and undergraduates, in all thirty. Thus the Harvard Travellers Club was auspiciously launched upon its career.”

In another publication, in 1908, Professor Davis, who really was the founding father of the Club, wrote this:

Membership is not limited to Harvard graduates or to travelers, but is composed of “men who are interested in the object of the Club.” A few undergraduates were originally included, but their number has decreased. Most of the members are doctors, lawyers, and business men in Boston. Resident members are those who reside within 40 miles of the State House. The numbers of these grew so rapidly in the third year of the Club’s life that a limit of 200 was then set. This limit was reached in 1906, and has since then been maintained. About 50 non-resident members are also on the Club list. Fellows are elected from among the members whose journeys have led them off the ordinary routes of travel; and to these Fellows, numbering nearly 60, is entrusted the government of the Club, under a constitution adopted in 1905. A council of five members attends to the ordinary affairs of meetings; it also elects new members, selecting from among those nominated the ones who it is believed will best contribute to the Club’s welfare.