

Centenary Minute No 5 - May 28, 2002

In researching the history of the Club I have been going through the minutes and records from its founding in 1902 and adding interesting and relevant details to a computer database. I have now reached the early 1960s. Food and drink and their associated cost have been a constant topic of discussion by the Council from the very beginning. And needless to say there have been many changes. Here are some of things I've found so far:

In the early days of the Club there were no dinner meetings as we now know them. Members gathered to hear a talk or sometimes two or three talks in a single evening. However, refreshments were often served afterwards, including beer apparently. Secretary Townsend Thorndike wrote President Davis after a meeting in 1906: "Do you know whether the beer held out? When I get through the doctor business I am going to become a professional caterer. There would be little waste in my kitchen. I have got the science of ordering down to the least common denominator."

The Minutes of the 216th meeting, April 25, 1933 note that "The supper afterwards was sufficient although not too generous, as I have cut the price from 75¢ to 50¢, but we had real ale which made up for any shortcomings."

Post-meeting refreshments were still being served into the 1940s. The Minutes of the 271st meeting, April 16, 1940, report "...43 stayed for the usual refreshments (beer, ginger ale, sandwiches, crackers and cheese) afterwards."

Initially, dinners were only served at the separate meetings attended by the Fellows, back when they were the ones that ran Club affairs. At one dinner in 1904 at the Colonial Club they dined for \$1 each on "... Mock Turtle Soup, Fried Scallops, Roast Spring Chicken, Lettuce & Tomato salad, Neapolitan Ice Cream & Cake, Cheese, Coffee."

Occasionally a special dinner was held when a particularly important person spoke (Teddy Roosevelt and Peary's captain, Bob Bartlett, being early examples) or in conjunction with an annual meeting. The First Annual Dinner was held on February 14, 1908, at the Hotel Brunswick and was attended by President Eliot. Here's what was served, all for \$2.00:

Cape Oysters
Radishes
Olives

Bisque of Lobsters a'la Travellers Club
Consomme Julienne

Filet of Chicken Halibut Estragon
Potato Croquettes

Tenderloin of Beef, Bordelaise
Delmonico Potatoes
String Beans

Roast Young Capon, Giblet Sauce

Frozen Tom and Jerry

Sweetbreads en Caisses
Peach Fritters, au Cognac

Fancy Assorted Cake

Neapolitan Ice Cream

Fruit Cheese Coffee

Eventually buffet dinners before some of the meetings became common. The Minutes of the 220th meeting, 19 December 1933 record "...a buffet supper at \$1.75 per plate, including cocktails. With the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment we are able to charge those present for the cocktails instead of having them furnished by some generous member of the Council (usually Mr. Lyon)."

By 1950 the cost of dinner had risen to \$3.00. The Council met in November and "...voted that starting at our next meeting there will be an extra charge for cocktails. Tickets will be sold; charge, 50¢ per cocktail."

Not long after the present pattern of sit-down dinners was established. From the Minutes of the Council meeting, April 14, 1953: "We discussed the Harvard Club meal charges for next year starting October, 1953. Including all taxes, a semi-buffet dinner will cost at the rate of \$4.00 per person, while a plated dinner will cost \$3.75 per person. It was the consensus of the meeting that for our October meeting we would try the plated meal at \$3.75, and then charge each member present \$3.50, the Travellers Club thus subsidizing 50 cents per person."

The subsidizing of dinners still continues today even with the price now at \$30.

"I enclose \$1.00 for my plate." (Response card for Fellows Meeting and Dinner, November 20, 1904.)

"Includes Mock Turtle Soup, Fried Scallops, Roast Spring Chicken, Lettuce & Tomato salad, Neapolitan Ice Cream & Cake, Cheese, Coffee." (Menu of the Colonial Club [presumably for Fellows dinner])

"...the dinner will be \$2.00 a plate. ...Among the guests of the evening will be President Eliot of Harvard University..." (Notice flyer for the first annual dinner and 40th meeting, February 14, 1908.)

MENU

Cape Oysters

Radishes

Olives

Bisque of Lobsters a'la Travellers Club

Consomme Julienne

Filet of Chicken Halibut Estragon
Potato Croquettes

Tenderloin of Beef, Bordelaise
Delmonico Potatoes
String Beans

Roast Young Capon, Giblet Sauce

Frozen Tom and Jerry

Sweetbreads en Caisses
Peach Fritters, au Cognac

Fancy Assorted Cake

Neapolitan Ice Cream

Fruit Cheese Coffee
(Menu for First Annual Dinner, February 14, 1908)

“Do you know whether the beer held out? When I get through the doctor business I am going to become a professional caterer. There would be little waste in my kitchen. I have got the science of ordering down to the least common denominator.” (Letter to W.M. Davis from T.W. Thorndike, a member, dated April 28, 1906.)

MENU

Cotuit Oysters
Celery Olives Radishes

Medaillon of Bass, Normandie
Pommes Noisettes

Contre Filet Pique a la Dumas
Petits Pois
Potato Croquettes

Punch a la Romaine

Breast of Chicken au Cresson
Salade Panachée

Frozen Pudding, Nesselrode
Fancy Cakes

Camembert Cheese

Café Noir

(Menu for 59th meeting, Captain R. A. Bartlett, 11 February 1910 at the Exchange Club. Price: \$2.00 per plate)

MENU

Cotuit Oysters
Celery Olives Almonds

Mock Turtle, au Madere

Medaillon of Sole, a la Victoria
Cucumbers
Pmmes Fondantes

Roast Jumbo Squab sur Canape
Julienne Potatoes
French String Beans
Salade Waldorf

Frozen Pudding, aux Marrons
Fancy Cakes

Cheese Croquettes

Cafe Noir

\$2.00 per plate (Menu for 67th meeting, January 27, 1911.)

Roosevelt Dinner

MENU

Cotuit Oysters

Celery Olives Salted Almonds

Broiled Halibut

Cucumbers, French Dressing

Roast Black Duck

Saratoga Chips

Grape Fruit and Red Pepper Salad

Frozen Pudding, a la Nestlerode

Cakes

Camembert Cheese

Coffee

(Dinner for Theodore Roosevelt, December 12, 1911 at the Exchange Club)

"The supper afterwards was sufficient although not too generous, as I have cut the price from 75¢ to 50¢, but we had real ale which made up for any shortcomings." (Minutes of 216th meeting, 25 April 1933.)

Buffet supper at \$1.50 a plate. (Minutes of 218th meeting, 17 October 1933.)

"...a buffet supper at \$1.75 per plate, including cocktails. With the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment we are able to charge those present for the cocktails instead of having them furnished by some generous member of the Council (usually Mr. Lyon)." (Minutes of 220th meeting, 19 December 1933.)

"The Secretary reported his negotiations with the Harvard Club and his conference with Mr. Taft relative to the same. After full discussion it was voted to leave the matter in the hands of the Secretary for further negotiaton, but it was reported as the concensus of opinion of the Council that the cost of dinners must be reduced to \$1.50 or less, and the cost of the suppers be retained at 50 cents, without extra charge for the room." (Minutes of Council Meeting, 3 May 1937.)

"Dinners were held before the first four meetings this year. At that time the Harvard Club notified your Secretary that they were raising the price of the dinner from \$1.75 to \$2.00. In view of the fact that the attendance at these dinners had been falling off your Secretary felt that with an additional raise in price there was not sufficient interest in the membership to warrant having the dinners until some arrangement could be made with the Harvard Club or some other place to provide a more reasonable dinner. Last year we averaged an attendance of nearly 30 at the dinners, the January dinner having an attendance Of 40. In October of this year we started out at 30, but the attendance had dropped to 18 in January at the time that they were discontinued. It is hoped that some way will be found of having a simple buffet dinner

with a cocktail that will cost not over \$1.50. If this can be done the experiment will be tried to see how much interest the membership takes, and consequently how many members attend. The Secretary would welcome any suggestions. (Report of the Secretary Treasurer May 1, 1937)

"There was a discussion as to whether it would be a good policy for the club to meet the difference between the \$2.00 charged by the Harvard Club for the pre-meeting suppers with cocktails, and a lesser amount, say \$1.00 or \$1.25 to be charged to members, to see if this would increase attendance. ... The Secretary feels that the attendance would be increased by as much as possibly fifty per cent, but questions wisdom of subsidizing attendance at the expense of the Club." (Minutes of Council meeting, 19 November 1937.)

"The experiment of charging the members only \$1.50 for the supper for which the Harvard Club charges us \$2.00 was tried without much success. There were 22 for supper, 50 at the meeting, and 42 stayed for the refreshments afterwards." (Minutes of 256th meeting, 12 April 1938.)

"Interest in the pre-meeting informal diners fell off during the autumn and they were given up for the remainder of the year. It is hoped that there will be demand for their resumption later on." (Report of the Secretary Treasurer May 1, 1939)

"...43 stayed for the usual refreshments (beer, ginger ale, sandwiches, crackers and cheese) afterwards." (Minutes of 271st meeting, 16 April 1940.)

"Informal dinners were held before four of the meetings with an average attendance of 36; much better than in some previous years. These seem to be more popular if not held too regularly. The Harvard Club charged us \$2.00 for dinner, including cocktails, but we collected on \$1.50 from those present. If we do have dinner before the meetings we are charged for the use of the room and more for the light refreshments afterwards." (Report of the Secretary Treasurer May 1, 1940.)

"We discussed the charge for our dinner meetings. We are now charging \$3.00 per person but it cost the Club about \$4.50 per person. We are going to give this subject further thought in the future." (Minutes of Council meeting, 10 October 1950.)

"...it was voted that starting at our next meeting there will be an extra charge for cocktails. Tickets will be sold; charge, 50¢ per cocktail. We discussed our idea of keeping the quality of food high, in order to attract more members to our meetings, and we hoped that by having a completely buffet system we could reduce the charge for help and so receive better food from the Club." (Minutes of Council meeting, 14 November 1950.)

"It was decided that in order to properly celebrate our fiftieth anniversary dinner on November 18th that champagne be served and that it be a sit-down dinner affair." (Minutes of Council meeting, 14 October 1952.)

"A special 50th Anniversary sit-down dinner was served. Champagne and a large birthday cake were presented by the Council." (Minutes of 344th meeting, 16 November 1952)

"We discussed the Harvard Club meal charges for next year starting October, 1953. Including all taxes, a semi-buffet dinner will cost at the rate of \$4.00 per person, while a plated dinner will cost \$3.75 per person. It was the consensus of the meeting that for our October meeting we would try the plated meal at \$3.75, and then charge each member present \$3.50, the Travellers Club thus subsidizing 50 cents per person." (Minutes of Council meeting, 14 April 1953.)

"The Harvard Club has presented to us four changes which they wish to make for our 1956-1957 season, and it was decided that we talk the matter over with Harvard Club and make arrangements as agreeable as possible for both parties concerned. The four points are --

- 1) They wish to increase the price of our dinners from the present \$3.50 to a figure between \$3.60 and \$4.00.
- 2) They no longer wish to handle our advance reservations and telephone calls.
- 3) They no longer wish to collect the dinner charge during the dinner.

4) They no longer wish to reset the room after dinner taking out the tables and lining up the chairs." (Minutes of Council meeting, 15 May 1956.)

"For the last two meetings, the Harvard Club has been charging us the increased amount of \$3.99 per meal. However, we noted in the annual report of the Harvard Club that they still lose money on the restaurant." (Minutes of Council meeting, 11 December 1956.)