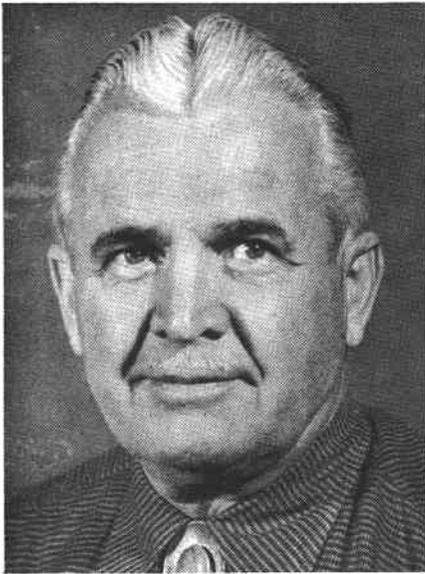


ORGANIZATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ARMS COLLECTORS
Harry C. Knode's Dinner Talk - - - - Philadelphia, Sept. 19, 1959



HARRY C. KNODE

When Henry Stewart, Chairman of the Philadelphia Committee, requested that I give a talk at this meeting, I tried to discourage him, but if you know Henry he isn't discouraged easily. He suggested as a subject that I discuss the steps taken in the organization of this fine group. I tried to point out to Henry that such a subject is bound to be rather dry as it has to be based mostly on statistics, but Henry insisted, so here I am and there you are. Any one caring to leave now before I get into high gear please do so quietly so as to not disturb those who are already sleeping.

During my tenure of office as president of the Texas Gun Collector's Association in 1952 it became quite evident to me, and many others, that the collecting of firearms was making rather rapid strides for the worse. The "fast buck boys" had begun to move in, faking was cropping up fast, displays at meetings were getting less in number and quality -- and if something was to be done to protect the interests of the collectors it had to be done quickly.

I, and I believe many other collectors, felt some group should be organized to include those that were primarily collectors and legitimate dealers. A group that would include, as well, students of arms, writers, curators of museums and most anyone that was a true lover of antique firearms. Just what steps to take, I wasn't certain because it seemed like a rather large task to sell an idea to men scattered all over the country and create enough interest so that they would come half way across the country to attend such a meeting at my suggestion.

On January 20, 1953 I sent out the first letter to sixty five hand picked men that I knew or had been recommended to me. This letter set forth my idea of organizing this group, some of it's objectives and purposes. The response to the letter was quite gratifying as about 50% of those written answered and displayed much interest in joining such an organization.

On March 16, 1953 the second letter went out accompanied by a questionnaire. This letter went to about the same group of men but with a few additions, as I recall. About the hardest part of all was selecting and/or obtaining names of the men that should be invited to join. My personal knowledge of collectors at that time was not too good, believe me, I've met a lot since, but then I had to rely on help from others - - and this wasn't forth-coming to the extent that I would have liked to have it. It was not my intent from the very first to have a large group nor to have a too limited, exclusive one, but an association that was large enough to encompass the cream of the crop. It was also my idea from the start that the membership should be by invitation, which I believe has worked out for the best.

This second letter set forth, and I quote "The consensus of opinion is strongly for a dignified, serious organization to meet periodically to display and discuss our rare arms to have talks by those who specialize in different types of arms and to assemble data for our mutual benefit as well as for the benefit of all collectors." Just to digress for a moment, unfortunately some of our members have forgotten that original idea "to display"; a gun meeting without guns isn't much of a gun meeting. Also the dissemination of the knowledge we have gained through fine talks by our members, through our bulletin has fallen by the wayside. The questionnaire contained such questions as: should the membership be composed of Advanced Collectors selected by invitation - - or open membership by application? Should we affiliate with other groups or operate independently. It requested member's ideas as to the size of the group, large or limited, whether we should have one or possibly as high as four meetings a year, ideas as to the locations for these meetings, whether there should be sales and trading of arms. And requested that they suggest a name for the association because out of a not too clear sky I had picked the name of "National Association of Advanced Collectors" and I forgot to add "and the brothers of I will arise". The response to the second letter and questionnaire was better than the first.

On July 1, 1953 the third letter went out. This gave a summation of the questionnaire. Just to show the thinking of these men and to show how close we have clung to the original ideas, I wish to take a minute and give you the break-down of the replies:

1. 30 preferred a membership of advanced collectors selected by invitation; 7 for open membership by application.
2. 28 for no affiliations; 8 for affiliating with state organizations and NRA.
3. 15 for limiting membership in size; 20 for no limit.
4. 13 for one meeting a year; 14 for two meetings; 4 for four meetings.
5. 18 for meetings to be held from coast to coast; 13 for central states only.
6. 26 for inviting legitimate dealers to membership; 27 favored sales and trades amongst members; 4 against permitting dealers; 5 against permitting any selling or trading at meetings.
7. (a) Almost every major city was mentioned as a proposed meeting place. However, Chicago and St. Louis were much preferred.
(b) September led as the most desirable month for the initial meeting.

Some suggested that St. Louis be chosen and that Dr. Thomas T. Hoopes, arms curator of the St. Louis art museum be asked to head the committee. This was done, and a wonderful job he did. I had not had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Tom before, but I soon learned that he was, and is one of God's fine men, and loved by all that know him.

As a result of this third letter St. Louis was selected for our first meeting, the dates September 12th and 13th, 1953.

On August 18, 1953 the fourth and final letter was sent. It announced that the meeting was to be held at the Park Plaza Hotel. The business meeting to open at 10 o'clock Saturday morning, September 12th. Dr. Tom Hoopes and Lt. Colonel R.C. Kuhn were scheduled as speakers. Naturally, quite a few showed up on Friday evening just in case there were any sleepers.

The result of scheduling this initial meeting was that 40 men signified that they would attend the meeting but due to circumstances beyond their control 13 were unable to attend, but most wrote or wired in that it was their intent to become a member and expressed their regrets. This left 27 to attend and I feel certain that all 27 left the meeting satisfied that we had the nucleus of a fine group and that the meeting had been a success. A few of the things that transpired are: I was appointed Chairman of the meeting and later elected President. My dear wife claims that I organize groups so that I can become President. Well, I can tell you it is a sure way to get in, I'd hate for this group to vote on me for membership now after associating with me for about six years; don't think I'd make it. Paul C. Mitchell was elected Vice-President, and good one he was. And that good ole workhorse Tom Holt drew the job - - and a job it was - - of Secretary-Treasurer. Tom served with me for two terms and I do want to say sincerely that a big portion of the success of this group is due to the efforts of Tom - - may we have more like him. The Directors selected were: Claude E. Fuller, Col. Arcadi Gluckman, S. Lou Hutcheson, Dr. Tom Hoopes, Sidney Aberman, and James R. Somers. The name suggested for our group by Lee Petrov was "American Society of Arms Collectors". The dues were set, it was decided to hold two meetings a year, membership to be by invitation, and that the second meeting be held in St. Louis, May 15th and 16th, 1954. So we were off to a fine start. I just want to express my thanks and say that I was never more proud than when I saw 27 men come from all over the United States to attend a gun meeting based upon an idea of mine. I get this same feeling every time I see this fine group gather. Gentlemen we have something in the American Society of Arms Collectors that no other group has, let's keep it alive, clean and active. Let's never let personalities enter into the operation of our association, or lose interest.

By the time of the second meeting in St. Louis in May of 1954, we had 50 members and 28 attended the meeting. It was a fine meeting and those that missed the dinner talk by our own President Herman Dean titled "The Philosophy of Collecting" will never hear anything like it anywhere else. He had them rolling off their chairs. I recorded that masterpiece as I was Editor of the Texas Gun Collector magazine at that time and felt it should go down in the printed pages for future generations, and things. In rewinding the wire on the recorder I got a back-lash in the hair like wire that was a duzzy and it took days for my secretary and me to untangle it and tie it together again before she could transcribe it. She finally accomplished this, muchly garbled; I deleted quite a bit as we couldn't publish a book - - by the way, have you ever heard Herman when he warms up on a subject and gets flying low? If not, you have missed something. I turned the transcription over to Jimmie Somers, who was Co-Editor. Jimmie deleted more and by the time it made the magazine even Herman didn't recognize it, so we must get him to do it again some day.

Just to give a short resume of the past, the third meeting was held at Chicago September 25th and 26th, 1954 at the Edgewater Hotel under the guidance of that rare character and wonderful friend, Jim White. Frank Horner spoke on "Origin and Development of Multi-Barrel Pistols" and a fine talk it was.

Tom Hall gave his wonderful talk on winchesters that was later published in the Texas Gun Collector. The talk that brought tears to the eyes of all present at the dinner was the talk by that wonderful collector, Claude E. Fuller on his experiences in collecting and the help given him by his partner of many years, his loving wife. When he finished I arose to thank him and couldn't speak for the lump in my throat. The officers were re-elected at this meeting with the exception that Sam Smith and George Missbach were elected Directors replacing Claude Fuller and Arc Gluckman. Each meeting got better.

The fourth meeting held in Cincinnati on May 21st and 22nd, 1955 at the Netherland-Plaza Hotel again produced an outstanding program including such speakers as C. Meade Patterson on Simeon North Variations; Tom J. McHugh and his interesting patent models; Eddie Reider discussed the subject he loves, Firearm Oddities and the dinner was topped off by Herschel C. Logan in full regalia telling of the "Romance of the Old West", and that guy knows romance.

Although every meeting has been a highlight in my collecting career -- and I would like to re-live all of them -- but as I can't keep this bunch of horse-traders away from their guns much longer, I do want to mention that outstanding fifth meeting at New Haven, September 17th and 18th, 1955, at the Hotel Taft. I remember clearly the trip to the Winchester Museum under the guidance of Tom Hall; the fine talk by Edwin Pugsley on the Winchester Collection, that fine luncheon served us by Winchester, the trip to the Colt Museum and the pleasure of meeting Charlie Coles, Curator, and Steve Granscy's fine talk on arms and armor that was quite a bit over my Colt-crammed head. The piece de resistance was that buffet supper served by Mr. and Mrs. Lou Hutcheson at their beautiful home. Collecting was never like that before.

Gentlemen I don't know what you have gotten out of this association of ours, but to me it has been something special in my life. The hobby of gun collecting is something to be protected, not just for financial reasons; I often think that if it had not been for gun collecting I possibly would not have known such men as Claude Fuller, Jim White, Ted Pittman, Herman Dean, and my closest friends Jimmie Somers, Miles Standish and Red Jackson. These few are only examples, each and every one of you mean much to me; it has been a pleasure that I could not have obtained otherwise. Just look around yourself and count the men here that have become your close friends; having a mutual interest and due entirely to this hobby you enjoy. I will always have many fond memories, I can look back at some of the fast trades that Jay Altmayer and George Missbach tried to pull on me, how Billy Johnson made my miniatures, of Gerald Fox, the "Three Musketeers", Red Jackson, Hank Stewart, and myself and that unforgettable trip from Dallas to Kansas City before the last meeting. They "queen bee'd" me out of everything but my bed. By the way, have you ever seen Hank drink coke out of a bottle with the top on? Well he tried, and he has such a nice way of telling if your soup is hot . . . he puts his finger in it. There are literally hundreds of such fond memories and I know you must have as many.

Well, I have always felt that the best way to irritate people and lose friends is to make a long dinner speech so I'm going to bring this to a quick close.

Before doing so I want to pay homage, and I believe you will want to also, to those 26 men besides myself that attended the first meeting and made the American Society possible. I would like those present to stand when I call their name and remain standing until I have called the roll

Sidney Aberman	Col. Arcadi Gluckman	Leon C. Jackson	A. F. "Bud" Roddy
George A. Carrico	Thomas E. Hall	Ray Kirby	Dr. C. J. Schneberger
Herman P. Dean	G. Charter Harrison, Jr.	Lt. Col. Roy C. Kuhn	Sam E. Smith
Joseph W. Desserich	Thomas E. Holt	Paul C. Mitchell	James R. Somers
Robert E. Ernst	Dr. Thomas T. Hoopes	Jack Moran	John Stapleton
Claude E. Fuller	S.L. Hutcheson	Lee A. Petrov	Herman Strumpf
		Eddie Reider	James White

Charter members, I sincerely thank you for the confidence you had in my judgment. I hope that it has proven worth while. And to you, one and all, I wish to thank you for the honors paid me at this meeting; but I have been well paid in the past by the privilege of associating myself with you and your fine families.

Editor's Note As of the fall meeting in San Antonio October 1962 the following three members had attended every meeting, R. C. Kuhn, Thomas E. Holt and Harry C. Knode.