

TWENTY YEARS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY*

by Samuel E. Smith

Thank you, Karl, for that kind (?) introduction; perhaps I can do the same for you some day. Members and ladies, let me add my welcome to all of you on this 20th anniversary of the founding of the American Society of Arms Collectors. However, I want to repeat to all of you what I said to George Missbach when he asked me to do this pleasant task: "I'm happy to do it, but the talk will not be a history of the American Society as such. Mere recorded history could be too dull for a talk following a fine banquet with our ladies present. Instead, I will confine my remarks to various unrelated events and observations of varying significance and importance that I have noted during the past 20 years of the American Society."

Incidentally, this is our 41st meeting – now you might think that this is our 40th meeting since this is our 20th anniversary but that's not the case. It's our 41st meeting. I know... I counted them all out on my fingers... just like a banker, I counted them all out!

Now lest some of you members think that, following this fine banquet, you can sit back and doze off a bit because what Sam is going to say about history will just be a Crock, let me quickly say I am going to try not to have it a Crock at all. No sir. I want to go into some of the unimportant and insignificant, but I hope interesting, details of things during the past 20 years. I want to mention the things that happened and the problems that came up when Harry Knode turned the idea of a national group of arms collectors from the thinking and talking stage into actuality. I thought it would be real nice and factual to quote verbatim from the files, but I happened to mention this to my wife and that was a mistake because Theora won't let me say those words in this talk. You see, I have all of Harry's old, pre-charter meeting correspondence in my files. It was in late 1952 and early 1953 that Harry wrote around to various collectors he knew asking for ideas, and also for suggested names of men to ask to come to a first meeting. Some of the replies he received are quite frank, to say the least, and I wanted to be factual and repeat that descriptive language. When someone wrote Harry and said, "Don't ask that Son uva B, John Doe," I wanted to be factual and say Son uva B too. But Theora said no. I pleaded for just a teeny bit of the salty language that was used, but to no avail. So I've deleted all Son uva B and similar descriptions that were used – and history must suffer.

Harry Knode had talked with a lot of us at the many gun collectors meetings that he and a number of us attended around the country in the 1950's – principally the Texas and the Ohio shows, tho a few others were also included. It seemed a consensus that some form of a national organization was needed, but when we got down to specifics,



there were many divergent ideas. Always, it was Harry Knode who kept it going and on January 20, 1953 he sent out the first letter to 65 men, almost all whom he knew, giving his ideas for such a national collector's group. He said he received about 50% replies right away, and those of you who do any mailing such as this, know that 50% replies is exceptional. Harry went over the replies, attended two more state gun meetings, and on March 16th he sent out a second letter. (By the way, I've still got my copies of these letters. As I told Bod Rubendunst, I save EVERYTHING up in that big attic I've got. My wife agrees I save everything and some of you who have been to my place and gone up in the attic will also agree.) Some of the men who received the first letter and who didn't respond, and a couple others who did not receive complimentary remarks when Harry told others who were all on the initial list, were dropped. And a few more names were added to this 2nd letter.

I'm going to quote a paragraph from this 2nd letter as I think it's really important and something we should all keep in mind:

"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 the benefit of all collectors." Notice two rather important words: to DISPLAY and for ALL. We have members who will attend meetings all right, but never contribute by displaying anything. And then the last part of the paragraph says for the "benefit of ALL collectors. Not just ASofAC members, but ALL collectors. We aren't a secret society and we want to benefit all collectors when we can.

You might wonder how at that primitive, almost pre-historic time in history, Harry gathered the names of those he thought were 65 men, good and true, to extend invitations to come somewhere to a meeting? Again, it was mainly from Harry's wide acquaintanceship in the Texas and the Ohio Gun Collectors Associations, plus recommendations from those to whom he broached the idea. I even wondered about myself – coming as I do, from a

little city in the wilds of central Wisconsin named Markesan. Actually, Markesan isn't really a little city — it's more of a small town without growing pains. To give you an idea of its size, it's the kind of a town where you could go out and paint the town Red on a Saturday night and be home by 9:15. With that idea of the town's size, you might think a local yokel could never get lost there. That's what Nick Harrison thought, too. (Nick was a Charter Member and Editor of the old Gun Collector magazine and at one time we were in pretty close contact with each other). I'll tell you a story Nick always liked to tell about me and Markesan. It was during World War II and Nick and I had been friends and Nick had visited Markesan a number of times. He telephoned me one morning and our "central" operator — that's 'way back when we had a local telephone exchange and "central" always knew everything and where everyone was and all their business — replied to this man's request for Sam Smith with the answer: "We lost Sam yesterday." Nick thought it was a joke and said that it was impossible to lose Sam or anyone else in Markesan. "Oh yes we did," Central told Nick. "He ain't here no more. We lost him to the draft yesterday and he's in the ARMY."

Well, to get back to Harry Knode and his attempt to hold a meeting, he sent out a 3rd letter the first of July 1953 and totaled up and summed up the results of the questionnaire from Letter #2. More correspondence followed, of course, and six weeks later in the middle of August, the 4th letter sent out saying the group would meet in St. Louis on Sept. 12-13. St. Louis was selected because it was a centrally located city, had good train connections (remember trains?) if you did not care to drive (no Interstates then) and the middle of September was deemed a cooler month than summer and past vacation time. Replies indicated 40 men would attend, but that Saturday only 27 were able to make it. Of course some of the other 13 sent wires or letters saying last minute problems prevented their coming. There were also a number more who definitely wanted to join, but knew right away that they couldn't make it on that September week-end that was chosen. And I might add that some men who were invited, had they come would have been Charter Members, but since they didn't come, were later voted upon and blackballed and never became members. I am not saying anything for or against what happened — just stating a fact, that's all.

Several times I have heard the question: Who are the Charter Members? Those present at the first meeting? Or those present then plus those who intended to come? Or both of those plus those who joined at the 2nd meeting? Or including others who helped Harry with suggestions and joined later, or what? I went thru all the minutes and records and find this: At the FIRST meeting on Sept. 12, 1953, "... on the question of Charter Members, after discussion at length, Herman Strumpf moved that only people present at this meeting be classed

as Charter Members. Seconded by S. L. Hutcheson. Motion carried on the vote." Then Harry Knode gave a talk in Philadelphia on Sept. 19, 1959 and referred to "the 27 men who attended the first meeting in St. Louis in 1953 as the Charter Members." And finally the April 2, 1966 minutes of the Director's Meeting states: "Who is a Charter Member? It was concluded that only those members who actually attended the Charter Meeting are Charter Members."

The tentative name Harry had used for the group was the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADVANCED COLLECTORS. We kinda tore that apart in the business meeting that Saturday with many suggestions during a lengthy discussion. No one man really selected our full name as we have it today. However, I wonder what the ramifications might be if we had chosen something like the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADVANCED COLLECTORS OF PISTOLS? Would we be known as the 2nd N.A.A.C.P.?

We elected officers and, of course, Harry was chosen President. Paul Mitchell was picked as Vice President and Tom Holt elected Secretary-Treasurer. Directors were: Claud Fuller, Ark Gluckman, Lou Hutcheson, Tom Hoopes, Sid Aberman and Jim Sommers. We knew the difficulty and the importance of getting this new organization going the right way and decided to hold the 2nd meeting in St. Louis too — at the same hotel the next spring. That next May of 1954 the American Society had 50 members, but there were only 28 present — one more than at the first meeting.

Those first meetings were rather informal and meals were impromptu. For instance: there was no banquet at the first meeting, but by the time of the second meeting the next May, we had a banquet and Herman Dean was the speaker. And we've had one ever since. From the minutes I read: "It was announced that there would be a dinner in a private dining room, after which Herman Dean would address the members on the "Philosophy of Collecting." I recall we were rather crowded around 4 or 5 tables in a small side room with no head table, podium or mike. Herman gave us one of the funniest banquet talks we've ever had. I'd been given the chairmanship of the Speaker & Entertainment Committee, with Nick Harrison and Bob Ernst as assistants for an indefinite period, and had heard about this talk that Herman gave and persuaded him to do it for us.

We did have programs from the very first meeting. Harry had arranged for Tom Hoopes to be our very first speaker and Tom spoke on "A Grecian Type Helmet Owned by the City Art Museum." And incidentally, Tom was a speaker today — 20 years later and Tom Hoopes is still on our program. Later on at the first meeting, Sid Aberman presented an illustrated talk on "Automatic Pistols." At that time, the talks were interspersed during the day with the business meeting and those

business meetings were long ones as you can imagine with all the organizational details to be ironed out. At the 2nd meeting I talked on Reid Knuckledusters since I'd brought a display of the knuckledusters and revolvers to the first meeting and had laid myself open to be a likely one to give a talk. Speakers were no easier to get then than now, as our current Speaker Chairman George Missbach knows. And on behalf of George, I'll throw out this plea to any of you who can and will provide a program to please let George know and make his tough job a little easier. Later on during that 2nd meeting, we had what Jim White suggested – a Bull Session in which any member could bring up questions or show arms about which he had or wanted information. Sort of a Show & Tell, but it had a tendency to get out of hand. As I've said, Herman Dean spoke at the dinner and the next morning Harry showed color slides of guns from various collections around the country.

Because of the results of the questionnaire Harry originally sent out and as a result of discussion and expressions during the first two meetings, it was decided to hold the next few meetings in the middle west as well. Chicago was picked for the 3rd meeting, Cincinnati for the 4th, and then we went 'way out to New Haven for the 5th meeting in the fall of 1955. It was there we learned the drawing power of the eastern meetings – the big reason being, of course, that the east is where most of our members lived. This made (and continues to make) it tough on our western members, always making them travel long distances to meetings, but that was a fact of life. In 1956 we went back to Chicago the second time and then east to Washington in the fall. Since then, the Directors have tried to accept invitations for meeting sites in a manner that will take the locations around the country somewhat. I suppose it is almost impossible to be equal as to geographical locations, but we try to do the best we can – considering the invitations that are extended. It is almost impossible to go where we don't have a local committee to make arrangements and Rolfe Holbrook knows this better than anyone else.

At the 3rd meeting we started the fine practice of having the members get up during the business meeting and introduce themselves and state their collecting interest. A few times some mighty strange interests have been mentioned – like those Gordon Frost claimed today! Attendance increased to 34 members present for the 3rd meeting and we had three fine talks. Col. Kuhn spoke on faking, Frank Horner discussed the development of the multi-shot pistol, and Tom Hall spoke on the Winchester Rifle. That night the banquet speaker was Claud Fuller. I was still the Program Chairman and got Claud to speak on "Collecting Thru The Years" and a banquet and speaker seemed so desirable for our meetings that they are now traditional. Incidentally, as a former banker, it was most in-

teresting for me to read in the minutes of that meeting that our expenses for the year thru Sept. 26th were \$447.11 and that we boasted a Cash On Hand of \$532.89.

It was at the 4th meeting in Cincinnati, and incidentally there were 34 members present again, same as at Chicago, that we decided to publish a Bulletin. Tom McHugh was appointed Editor, with help from Tom Holt and me, and it was Tom McHugh's wife, Helen, who did all the typing, addressed envelopes, made lay-outs, etc. for the Bulletin. I certainly wish she could be here so she could be thanked publicly. We ran two issues of the Bulletin – Sept. 1955 and Nov. 1956 – and then stopped. Why did it cease publication at that time? I had finished my two terms as President and wanted to ease up a little and Tom McHugh was perfectly correct in saying it was too much for him and Helen to continue. However, while there were no Bulletins, a few of the talks were mimeographed and sent out to the membership. There was discussion about starting the Bulletin but nothing happened until 4½ years later when Harry Knode brought out Bulletin #3 in the spring of 1961. Incidentally, that Bulletin cost \$460. Compare that with the cost of today's Bulletin and it sounds like the yearly inflation they have down in Chile. Red Jackson and Hugh Benet were appointed the new co-Editors. Later on, Harry ran it all by himself and it went that way for years until Bob Brooker took over in the fall of 1971. I saw that the cost of the First Bulletin was approximately \$400, resulting in a cost per copy of about \$2.00 and we sold the extra ones for that. Now those early #1 and #2 issues are out of print, along with #12, so if anyone knows where an extra copy of any of them are, please let me know. We later reprinted #1 – and then learned hardly anyone needs it. I would suggest that all members check their back issues and buy whatever they lack from Secretary Bob Rubendunst while issues are still available. And this will also ease his storage problems.

Now I don't feel it necessary to mention the Past Presidents; they are all listed by year in our Directory. The ones I specifically wish to honor are the Secretary-Treasurers. They do the real work and I'll bet a lot of you don't know who they all were. As I've said before, Tom Holt from Cincinnati was the first Secretary. He was followed by Tom Hall from North Haven, Conn. and Winchester. Then Bill Huckaba the Memphis Cotton King. Then the Springfield expert from Worcester, Mass., Jack Callan. Tom Holt came back for a second time and was followed by the present team of Bob Rubendunst and wife, Ruth, who took over in the fall of 1965 and have been guiding our affairs ever since. I understand Bob will take the job for two more years and then we must find a capable replacement – certainly one of our most important tasks in 1975.

Let me say a bit here about attendance; not the requirements of attendance, though we all know how important that is and we have gone over it so often over the years in our business meetings and Director sessions, but who are the members whose attendance has been exceptional. For a long time, we had three Charter Members who never missed a meeting. Then Col. Kuhn was unable to come, then Tom Holt had to miss because of his health, and finally it was Harry Knode who was not present. But Harry never missed a meeting when he was alive. We still have a few with 100% attendance and I want to mention three of them, although of course there are a few others who have only been members for a couple of years and thus their attendance string is not very long. The 3 hundred percenters are: Bob Rubendunst with 38 meetings attended out of 38 meetings held since he became a member, Walter Stryker with 15 out of 15, and Eldon Owens with 12 out of 12.

Then here is a group of members who have attended the most meetings and their ratings: Sam Smith with 38 out of 41, Jack Strassman 34/39, Red Jackson 33/41, Wm. Funderburg 33/39, R. C. Kuhn 34/41, Frank Horner 34/40, Arch Jackson 32/37, Rolfe Holbrook 31/40, Charles Hendricks 30/38, Bob Abels 30/40, Tom Hall 30/41, Bud Roddy 29/41, Gordon Frost 29/37 and Frank Russell 29/37. This information came from the Secretary's Official Records, of course.

Now as I close, I come to one of the most important parts of the American Society – I refer to the ladies – our wives, and the whole family for that matter. I delved into the records and minutes of past meetings for I was interested in learning how the society evolved to this fine turn-out of our wives that we have here tonight. I found that back at the time of our 6th Meeting at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago in May, 1956, there was (and I quote) “discussion of the advisability of extending special invitations to the wives of members to attend the May, 1957 meeting to be held in Memphis.” Huckaba put out with one of the finest sales pitches for a meeting that I ever heard, and he and his committee followed it up with one of our top meetings. Those of you who were there and took the river trip on the Memphis Queen with the sand bar supper will probably never forget it. And our wives began to come in slowly increasing numbers. It was at the Hartford meeting in Nov. of 1961 that the ladies had one of the first large, planned programs – this under the dual chair-womanship of Dickie Peck and Joey Leonard. We did have a breakfast and boat ride for the ladies in Miami in 1960, but after Hartford we did ease off a bit. Of course, there were always special events like the bus trip for the ladies in Detroit in 1963 and everyone went out to Andy Palmer's and Chuck Bricker's wonderful locations. The ladies had a special luncheon at Bookbinders in Phila. in the

spring of 1964. Then Lu Moldenhauer took over for the Milwaukee meeting that fall and we had another fine program for the ladies to equal Hartford. Since then, there have been ladies programs scheduled that are a definite part of every meeting. It's obvious that the ladies enjoy coming to American Society functions and of course, that makes for better attendance of the husbands, too. The Ladies Badges first appeared in 1962, by the way.

Of the original 27 men who met here in St. Louis 20 years ago, 15 are still members of the American Society. Nine of them could not be present tonight. They are: Herman Dean, R. C. Kuhn, Paul Mitchell, Eddie Reider, Joe Desserich, Lee Petrov, John Moran, Lew Hutcheson and Jim Sommers. Six of the Charter Members are here and I'd like them to stand up and to remain standing while I call off their names: Tom Hall, Red Jackson, Bud Roddy, John Stapleton, Tom Hoopes and Sam Smith.

And now in closing, I want to read this descriptive statement of ours: “The American Society of Arms Collectors, founded September 12, 1953 in St. Louis, Mo. for the mutual benefit of its membership in the preservation and study of, and the dissemination of information on arms and armor. The Society will uphold and promote the highest educational standards in the activities of its members. Membership shall be by invitation only. To be considered for membership, a man should have a keen interest to learn, and to possess a store of knowledge which he is willing to pass on to fellow members. He should consider his gains from membership to be strictly in terms of pleasure of association and increase of knowledge. The Society should not be considered as a means of bettering one's self financially, nor the meetings used as a business venture for dollar gain.” We have a fine organization of which all of us are proud to be members. Let's keep it that way and thank you very much.

*The Banquet Speech of Samuel E. Smith at St. Louis, September 21, 1973.