

**THE ATHENAEUM - A LOOK BACK**

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I think it would safe to say that each of us cherishes our membership in this society. The reasons are probably as varied as the members here present as to what we enjoy most about this society. It may be the camaraderie, the stimulus of thought, the debate during comment, but other than a brief outline in the set of bylaws that is given to each new member, probably none of us save my speaking companion tonight, William Turner, know anything much about the history and traditions of the Athenaeum. For that reason, I thought it would be beneficial for us to look at the origins and some of the early history of the Athenaeum and have therefore entitled this paper "The Athenaeum - A Look Back".

Believe it or not, minutes of an organization are taken for a purpose and luckily the minutes of this society are preserved and remain almost completely intact save a few gaps here and there. Fortunately, the very earliest minutes of the society remain in our possession. In reviewing those minutes, we find that our society's founder was one William H. Harrison who invited Edmond Harrison, Clifton Long, T.C. Underwood, E.B. Bassett, Ira L. Smith, John Stites, and Drs. Manning Brown and F.M. Stites to a meeting at the Hotel Latham on Friday night April 18, 1902, for the purpose of organizing a literary society. Refreshments were served and Mr. Harrison was chosen as temporary chairman and John Stites temporary secretary. It was decided that a name should be chosen for the society with the requirement that it meet with the unanimous consent of everyone present. Several names were proposed. The Reviewers, The Query Club, and

The Literary and Scientific Club, but unanimous consent could not be obtained. It was decided that the selection of the name be postponed until Monday, April 21, 1902 at 4:00 p.m. at which time the fledgling society would meet at Dr. F.M. Stites' office for the purpose of selecting a name and adopting bylaws. The election of permanent officers was then taken up and it was decided that a president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer be elected. William Harrison was elected President, Thomas Underwood was elected Vice-President, and John Stites as Secretary-Treasurer. It was further decided that the society should meet the first Thursday of each month and that an initiation fee of \$1.00 be charged each member and monthly dues of 50¢ per month payable in advance. The following persons who were absent from the meeting, but who had previously given the movement their support and expressed their desire to become members were elected to membership as well: W.T. Tandy (City Bank), C.M. Meacham (Mayor and Publisher of Hopkinsville Kentuckian newspaper), L. McCartney, F.P. Thomas, E.H. Barker, A.W. Wood (Publisher of Kentucky New Era), A.P. Crockett, John Feland (Circuit Clerk), and J.T. Hanbery (Circuit Judge).

As decided, the society again met on April 21, 1902 at 4:00 p.m. at the office of Dr. F.M. Stites to select a name and adopt bylaws. The committee appointed to select the name with Dr. Stites as its chairman reported that they had selected the name The Athenaeum. Unfortunately, the minutes do not reflect as to why the committee recommended the name, but it met with

unanimous approval. It is interesting to note that the name was simply The Athenaeum, not The Athenaeum Society as it has come to be known today. The bylaws adopted at that early meeting reflect the fact that our bylaws over the past ninety years have changed very little.

On Thursday, May 1, 1902, the first regular monthly meeting of the Athenaeum was held at Hotel Latham. The papers presented that evening were entitled "Cecil Rhoads" by T.C. Underwood and "Airships" by Dr. Manning Brown. Another paper was scheduled to be presented by E.B. Bassett, however, he was not present.

It is interesting to note in reviewing the minutes that early on, the papers were assigned by the program committee by announcing at the meeting who was to give papers the following month and on what topic. It is assumed that surely there had been prior communication with the proposed presenter as to what their topics would be. It is further interesting to note that there were four assigned papers each month but usually only two to three were read.

In the early years, the Athenaeum met from September through June taking a break only during the months of July and August. It surprised me as I am sure it will you, that in the early years there apparently was no prohibition against giving papers with a religious context. The minutes record such papers as "Adam and Eve" and "Lot's Wife" being presented to the society.

At the meeting of February 4, 1904, Charles M. Meacham moved that the society members be permitted to bring one lady as the society's guest at the May meeting. Therefore, on May 5, 1904, the first open meeting of the society was held with members as well as guests in attendance. Six papers were presented that evening and one paper, that given by Dr. W.L. Woodard on The Sanctuary Needs of Hopkinsville, was apparently so timely that the society passed a resolution requesting that the newspapers of the city publish his paper. By 1907, the open meeting of the society had apparently become a real social event in Hopkinsville. Members, by this time, were allowed to bring up to five (5) guests. Pasted in the pages of the minutes are clippings from the Hopkinsville Kentuckian reporting on the events of the evening, including the presentation of six papers. The paper reported that covers were laid for 120 in the Hotel Latham Ordinary. Dinner did not commence until 9:00 p.m and the minutes reflect that the meeting adjourned at 1:20 a.m.!

It was very interesting to me from that point forward to review the minutes of the open meetings. Not all open meetings were held at the Hotel Latham. By example, the minutes of May 5, 1910 reflect that the open meeting was held at the 9th Street Christian Church. According to the New Era clipping contained in the minutes, the attendance that evening was 104 and the program lasted until 1:15 a.m. My conclusion on the lateness of the early open meetings is that these were the days before

radio and I assume the people of Hopkinsville in that era were literally starved for entertainment.

The menus of the early open meetings were also interesting to me as Broiled Spring Chicken and Broiled New Spring Chicken continuously headlined the menu. Another interesting item that appeared on the early menus for the open meetings was an innovative new food that was apparently sweeping the nation and was a real curiosity to be served at such functions. The item: Saratoga Flakes - known now today as potato chips.

The minutes of the open meeting of May 18, 1918 reflect The Patriotic Spirit during the "War to End All Wars". This was known as the "Eatless" open meeting. It was decided that in lieu of a meal, each member had to pay \$1.00 for himself and each guest. After necessary expenses were defrayed, the balance of the proceeds were donated to the Red Cross for the war effort. A menu was given to each person in attendance with the explanation that the meal would be eaten at some future date after the war. The menu was as follows:

- Creme of Tomato Soup
- Olives
- Fried Chicken
- Sauteed Almonds
- Celery
- Frog Legs
- Country Ham
- Lamb Chops
- Fricasseed Hummingbirds Tongues
- Hot Rolls
- Beaten Biscuits
- Salt Risen Light Bread
- Asparagus - Creme Dressing
- New Potatoes in Balls

Peas in Rosette Wafers  
Tomatoes on Lettuce  
French Fried Potatoes  
Brick Ice Creme  
Charlotte Russe  
Fruit Cake  
Lady Fingers  
Apple Pie  
Saratoga Flakes  
Strawberries  
Peaches & Cream  
Angel Food Cake  
Macaroons  
Mince Pie  
Jelly Pie  
Edam Cheese & Wafers  
Demi Tasse

I have attempted in this paper to glean but a few insights from a virtual treasure trove of information that the old minutes provide.

As we celebrate our 90th year of existence as a society, it was interesting to me to reflect on our beginning and our root. During those ninety years I think the Athenaeum, in reviewing the minutes, has changed very little. We are basically an organization of men who gather on a monthly basis in a world now enamored with electronic communication yet we survive as a bastion of the past dedicated to the exchange of knowledge and the freeflow of ideas. May it ever be thus!