

CHAPTER II
THE ORGANIZATION OF THE
AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY

BY WILLIAM H. NICHOLS

The first meeting for the organization of the AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY was held on the evening of April 6, 1876, in the Lecture Room of the College of Pharmacy in the old building of New York University on Washington Square. An excellent account of this meeting is recorded in the *American Chemist*.¹ As copies of that journal are rare, it has been deemed advisable to prepare an account of the incidents of that evening in permanent form, and I have been asked, as one of the two living men who were present, to make some brief notes of the occasion, which is now historic.

The gentlemen who attended, thirty-five in all, were the following:

Meinhard Alsberg	T. Egleston	L. H. Landy
J. P. Battershall	Charles Froebel	Gideon E. Moore
F. M. Baumgarten	F. A. Grund	H. E. Niese
H. C. Bolton	Wm. E. Gifford	W. H. Nichols
A. Bourgognon	W. M. Habirshaw	Anthony Pirtz
Arno Behr	Fred Hofmann	Prochalzka
C. F. Chandler	Harwick	P. deP. Ricketts
Paul Casamajor	St. Krackowizer	Charles Rice
Chas. A. Doremus	Fred. Kammerer	Chas. M. Stillwell
F. A. C. Degenhardt	O. H. Krause	Waldron Shapleigh
Hermann Endemann	A. R. Leeds	Isidor Walz
E. P. Eastwick	A. R. Ledoux	

The name of Henry Morton does not appear in this list, although I believe he was present. At any rate, he took a most active part in the early work of the SOCIETY, and was one of the signers of the call for the first meeting. Messrs. Amend, Goldmark, Sticht, and Wendt sent letters regretting their inability to attend, but promising to join the society to be organized.

The chair was taken by Professor Chandler, who introduced the subject in his usual happy vein. In the report of his re-

¹ *American Chemist*, 6, No. 11 (May, 1876).

marks he is quoted as saying that he had been astonished to find that there were about one hundred and ten chemists in New York and neighboring cities whose training and pursuits rendered them fit to be members of a chemical society. I remember being just as much astonished when I learned of that large number. Chemists in those days had few opportunities to meet their fellows, other than college or business associates.

As stated by Dr. Chandler, among the objects of the SOCIETY was the securing of rooms which would be open in the day and evening and the establishment there of a reference library and a chemical museum. With one hundred members in sight, and an income of five hundred to one thousand dollars a year, this seemed like a large contract, but with the exception of the museum, we must admit he was not overoptimistic.

The meeting was fortunate in having for its secretary Dr. Isidor Walz, who became its first elected secretary and one of its most brilliant members. He was not strong physically, but was one of the most potent factors in the success of the SOCIETY in its earlier days. Unfortunately, he died less than ten years after its formation. At the organization meeting he made an excellent and well-considered address on the desirability of forming such a national society, and also expressed his astonishment to find that there were nearly, if not quite, one hundred chemists in the neighborhood of New York City who might properly be admitted to membership. The notice of the proposal to form a local society is given below:

New York, January 22, 1876.

Dear Sir:

For some time past many chemists of this city and vicinity have felt the want and deplored the absence of an association, such as exists among other professions, which would lead to a better understanding and a closer acquaintance among its members, in which scientific and practical subjects relating to our special science might be discussed, and means devised in the common interest of the profession. Widely scattered as the chemists in this neighborhood are, such an association would become the center of a pleasant personal intercourse, and of an interchange of views, experiences, and researches which would benefit all concerned.

The undersigned, believing the present an opportune time for establishing a "Chemical Society" in New York, respectfully invite your coöperation, and would be pleased to receive an early expression of your views on the subject. As soon as a sufficient number of assenting replies have been received, it is proposed to call a meeting for the purpose of forming a permanent organization.

CHAS. F. CHANDLER	HENRY MORTON
W. M. HABIRSHAW	ISIDOR WALZ
H. ENDEMANN	FRED HOFMANN
M. ALSBERG	P. CASAMAJOR

In response to this circular, addressed to the chemists of New York City and vicinity, about forty favorable verbal or written

assurances of interest and coöperation were received. Gratified by this unexpected interest, the committee decided to make an attempt to form a national, instead of merely a local society, and to that end issued the following circular to a much enlarged list scattered over the country:

New York, March 22, 1876.

Dear Sir:

Several weeks ago the undersigned issued an invitation to the chemists of this vicinity, requesting their coöperation toward the organization of a local chemical society. The response was so unexpectedly satisfactory, that on further consultation it was deemed opportune to attempt the formation of a national society, somewhat on the plan of those in such successful operation in France, Germany, and England. It is believed that the existence of such a society in this country would prove a powerful and healthy stimulus to original research among us, and that it would awaken and develop much talent now wasting in isolation, besides bringing the members of the association into closer union, and ensuring a better appreciation of our science and its students on the part of the general public. Guided by these considerations, we have, in consultation with other members of the profession, drafted the accompanying Constitution and By-Laws, which we submit respectfully to your kind consideration.

Among the objects contemplated are the fitting up of permanent rooms as the headquarters of the society, and in connection therewith the establishment of a library of reference, and the gradual collection of a chemical museum. It is also proposed to hold at least one meeting in each year outside of this city, at such a time and in such a place as to make attendance on the part of non-resident members more convenient and representative.

The proceedings of the society will be published and sent to the members.

If these views and objects meet with your approval, please sign and return the postal card enclosed.

CHAS. F. CHANDLER	HENRY MORTON
W. M. HABIRSHAW	ISIDOR WALZ
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This circular was accompanied by a copy of the suggested Constitution and By-Laws which the committee prepared, modeled on those of the English, French, and German chemical societies. The response to this circular was very heartening, and on March 27, 1876, an organization meeting was called for April 6, which was attended by those noted on page 11. The wording of this notice follows:

New York, March 27, 1876.

Dear Sir:

A meeting for organizing the AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY will be held on Thursday evening, April 6, 1876, at 8 P. M., in the Lecture Room of the College of Pharmacy, University Building, corner Waverley Place and University Place.

Your attendance is earnestly requested.

CHAS. F. CHANDLER	HENRY MORTON
W. M. HABIRSHAW	ISIDOR WALZ
H. ENDEMANN	FRED HOFMANN
M. ALSBERG	P. CASAMAJOR

The first two speakers at this meeting, Prof. T. Egleston and Dr. H. Carrington Bolton, voiced the thought that the time was

not opportune, and that the formation of the SOCIETY should be postponed a few years. In this judgment Prof. A. R. Leeds subsequently concurred. As I recollect, the balance of the meeting was overwhelmingly in favor of launching the craft, and proceeded to do so. From this point on, the action was unanimous. The Constitution and By-Laws were adopted. A nominating committee was appointed, and shortly afterward returned to the room and reported a ticket which, with slight modifications, was elected at the adjourned meeting, April 20.

<i>President:</i>	<i>Librarian:</i>
John W. Draper	Paul Casamajor
<i>Vice Presidents:</i>	<i>Curators:</i>
J. Lawrence Smith	Edward Sherer
Frederick A. Genth	W. H. Nichols
E. W. Hilgard	Fred Hofmann
J. W. Mallet	<i>Committee on Papers and Publication:</i>
Charles F. Chandler	Albert R. Leeds
Henry Morton	Hermann Endemann
<i>Corresponding Secretary:</i>	Elwyn Waller
George F. Barker	<i>Committee on Nominations:</i>
<i>Recording Secretary:</i>	E. P. Eastwick
Isidor Walz	Meinhard Alsberg
<i>Treasurer:</i>	S. St. John
W. M. Habirshaw	Charles Froebel
	Charles M. Stillwell

E. P. Eastwick presided at this meeting.

Although for a long time the librarian and curators did not have much to do, they assumed the duties of their offices with as much enthusiasm as any of the others. The curators gradually faded out of the picture, however, for lack of occupation.

At this second meeting it was proposed that in addition to the regular meetings more informal gatherings of the resident members be held, which would tend to bring them into closer intercourse and enable them to discuss matters of relatively minor importance not suited to the dignity of the regular sessions. This proposal was carried and was followed by many informal gatherings, known as "conversaciones," which were of the greatest value at this early stage. I think it would not be too high a flight of the imagination to conclude that these "conversaciones" were the cause of the foundation and success of The Chemists Club of New York.

It is difficult out of such a list to pick a few for special note. Some, such as Chandler, Doremus, Ledoux, and Ricketts, were with us nearly down to the present time, and were generally known to the membership of the SOCIETY. Of the remainder, many passed away long ago.

I have already alluded to Dr. Walz, to whom the SOCIETY owes much. Dr. Meinhard Alsberg, the father of one of our

distinguished members, was a man of much force and ability. He was works manager and chemist of an important manufacturing chemical concern.

Dr. Arno Behr was a sugar chemist of note. He subsequently cast his lot with the growing corn products industry, and became widely known as an inventor of several important processes and substances. For this work he received the Perkin Medal of the American Section of the Society of Chemical Industry. Paul Casamajor was also a sugar chemist, although he did not by any means confine his work to his principal line. A short time before his death he told me that he had discovered a certain cure for whooping cough which he was soon to give to the world. Unfortunately, he also experimented in mushrooms, and possibly from that cause died in a cab while crossing the East River Bridge, before he had published the formula of the whooping cough specific.

Dr. Endemann had the honor of presenting the first paper to the SOCIETY. It was a long one, and the discussion lasted until nearly midnight, which made it necessary to postpone two other papers announced for that evening.

W. M. Habirshaw, who for a long time was Treasurer of the SOCIETY, was a public chemist with a laboratory in the downtown district. He was a most genial man, and endeared himself to all who met him.

Dr. A. R. Leeds was a professor at Stevens Institute, and a man of very high attainments. Dr. Gideon E. Moore had the misfortune to be stone-deaf. In conducting a conversation with one, he always presented a pad on which to write the question or the reply. He was a brilliant chemist. Dr. Shapleigh was the handsome man of the gathering, and was very popular.

Dr. Henry Morton was president of Stevens Institute. One very stormy night, shortly after the formation of the SOCIETY, he invited as many as desired to visit the laboratories at Hoboken and inspect a curious instrument which seemed to have some possibilities. This instrument was the telephone.

Waller was the most distinguished member of the meeting. He was a man of great learning and had done much work in abstracting for the *American Chemist*. Stillwell was a very able analyst, his laboratory was down town, and he was called upon to decide many references. Eastwick was a member of the firm of Havermeyers & Eastwick, and a man of prominence. For a number of years he lived in Florence, Italy, in which city I believe he died last winter.

Of the company gathered at the organization meeting, H. E. Niese and the writer are all who remain.

The first out-of-town meeting was held, shortly after the organization of the SOCIETY, at Philadelphia, where we entertained the delegates from foreign countries to the Centennial Exposition. The dinner was at the Union League Club, and was really a remarkable occasion. I regret that I cannot find a list of our distinguished guests.

The whole feeling and outlook of the young SOCIETY cannot be expressed better than by Dr. John W. Draper in the concluding words of the first presidential address:

Let us continue our labor unobtrusively, conscious of the integrity of our motives, conscious of the portentous change which is taking place in the thought of the world, conscious of the irresistible power which is behind us! Let us not return railing for railing, but above all, let us deliver unflinchingly to others the truths that Nature has delivered to us!

The book of Nature! Shall not we chemists, and all our brother students, whether they be naturalists, astronomers, mathematicians, geologists, shall we not all humbly and earnestly read it? Nature, the mother of us all, has inscribed her unfading, her eternal record on the canopy of the skies. She has put it all around us on the platform of the earth! No man can tamper with it; no man can interpolate or falsify it for his own ends. She does not command us what to do, nor order us what to think. She only invites us to look around. For those who reject her, she has in reserve no revenges, no social ostracism, no Index Expurgatorius, no auto-da-fé! To those who in purity of spirit worship in her heaven-pavilioned temple, she offers her guidance to that cloudy shrine in which Truth sits enthroned, "dark with the excess of light!" Thither are repairing, not driven by tyranny, but of their own accord, increasing crowds from all countries of the earth, conscious that whatever their dissensions of opinion may heretofore have been, in her presence they will find intellectual concord and unity.