A HISTORY OF THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ARTS AND LETTERS

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The organization meeting of the Academy was held in the State Agricultural Rooms in Madison on February 16, 1870. A call for a meeting to form an Academy was issued in December, 1869, under the signature of 105 prominent citizens of the state. About two years previously there was an attempt made to organize "The Wisconsin Academy of Science." Apparently there were too few scientists to support an organization of this nature so the base was broadened to a "comprehensive State Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters."

A constitution was adopted at 7:30 P.M. on February 16, and the first formal meeting was held at 9:00 P.M. The by-laws were adopted the following morning. John W. Hoyt, who came to Madison in 1857, was elected President. Prior to his arrival in Madison he taught chemistry at several institutions in Ohio. When the burden of organizing the Academy was on his shoulders, he was Secretary of the State Agricultural Society. On February 12, 1911, he wrote of this task to Arthur Beatty: "I can never forget the difficulty I had in making a beginning—how nearly everybody I approached, while admitting that such an institution, in itself, would be immeasurably useful, thought it yet too early in the history of a new Western State." Thirty-six letters approving the organization of an Academy were printed in the first Bulletin.

At the preliminary meeting from one-fourth to one-third of the audience consisted of women "as listeners." Hoyt added: "The reason, I suppose, for this absolute silence on their part was that, in Wisconsin, the antagonism to woman suffrage as a political and social measure was at its height. Women sometimes have extraordinary common sense, expressed in extraordinary ways, and this was one such occasion." In spite of this encomium, women were barred from membership. There was even reluctance to admit Catholics.

Ardent support for the formation of the Academy came from Dr. P. R. Hoy of Racine and Increase A. Lapham of Milwaukee. Hoy was the foremost ornithologist, mammalogist, entomologist, and ichthyologist in the state. Lapham, who was elected General Secretary, was active in botany, geology, archeology, zoology, and meteorology. His efforts in inducing the United States Weather Bureau
to install a system of storm warnings for the Great Lakes resulted in impressive savings of life and property.3 J. G. Knapp was elected to the important position of Librarian while William Dudley became Director of the Museum. It was ruled that no books were to be taken from the Library or specimens from the Museum without the authority of the General Council. This was not an age of impatience.

The Department of the Sciences only was organized at the first meeting, those of Arts and Letters in 1871. A Department of the Social and Political Sciences came into existence in 1872 and there was a proposal for one on Speculative Philosophy. Each department had its own officers. Lyman C. Draper, “the accomplished and indefatigable” Corresponding Secretary of the State Historical Society, signed the special call for the organization meeting and in 1872 became one of the Counselors of the Department of Letters. Strangely, his name is not to be found in the list of members until 1878.

The charter was approved by the Legislature on March 16, 1870. It provided that the Academy be furnished space in the Capitol for an office, library, and collections, the latter comprising the Museum of Natural History and the Useful Arts. The President reported in 1874 that a large, adequate museum was highly desirable but progress was slow as additions to the collections depended upon the spare time of the officers.4 On December 29, 1891, a resolution was passed to deposit the collection of fossils in the University, the Academy to retain title.5 Its library was moved in September, 1900 to the “magnificent fire-proof building” of the State Historical Society, housing the library of the Society and that of the University.6 At this time the chief geologist was required by law to collect and present to the Academy, State University, incorporated colleges, and normal schools, if they so requested, specimens of rocks, ores, fossils, and minerals.

The ambitions of the Academy were beyond its resources, both human and pecuniary. The Charter states: “The general objects of the Academy shall be to encourage investigation and disseminate correct views in the various departments of science, literature and the arts.” The arts were to comprise the useful and the fine. President Hoyt reported in 1874 that there had been no success with the fine arts, a condition that has existed up to the present. Two years later he reported that only the Department of the Natural Sciences was in a flourishing condition. In 1881 an amendment was introduced to abolish the Department of the Arts but it failed to pass at the next annual meeting.7 Departments, as entities, have ceased to exist. Of the five that existed at one time only those of Sciences and Letters remain active.
Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

Certificate of Membership.

Rooms of the Academy, State Capitol,
Madison, March 1, 1870.

This shall certify, that Increase A. Lapham, of Milwaukee, having fulfilled the necessary conditions and been duly elected, is a Life Member of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

I. A. Lapham, General Secretary.

President.

Certificate of membership of Increase A. Lapham.
For the year ending February 13, 1872, the Academy had 28 corresponding, 12 life, and 56 annual members. Its growth was so slow that thirty years later the Academy had but 12 life and 196 annual members. With this small membership it was impossible to marshal a sufficiently large group to maintain a live interest in philosophy, or the fine arts. The founding of the Academy was due largely to the efforts of scientists and they have constituted the majority of the members. In an address on the founding of the Academy at the 50th annual meeting T. C. Chamberlain stated: “Of the papers presented during the first two years, 35 per cent related to geological subjects, 23 per cent to biological, 17 per cent to physical and mathematical science, 15 per cent to political and sociological subjects, and the remaining 10 per cent to historical and philological subjects or to topics not readily classified.” The preponderance of geological papers was due particularly to the charter members, I. A. Lapham, J. H. Eaton, and T. C. Chamberlain. The very useful index compiled by L. E. Noland shows that of the papers published by the Academy, 1870–1932, approximately 80 per cent are on scientific and related subjects. Botany led the field followed by zoology. The Transactions form an ideal medium for papers on the natural resources of the state so that many of the articles are of this type.

Exchanges of the Transactions for the publications of other learned societies has led to the formation of a superb library having approximately 36,000 volumes. President Hoyt reported in 1874: “It is not the policy of the Academy to build up a separate library, but rather to cooperate with the State Historical Society in sustaining and strengthening the Scientific, Art and Literary Departments of its already extensive Library. This it will be able to do in a large degree by securing an exchange of the Academy’s Transactions with those of kindred institutions throughout the world, provided its own publications are regularly issued at short intervals—annually, if possible.” W. A. Germain, Acting Librarian, in 1878, recommended that a certain sum be made available for binding as the accessions consisted largely of pamphlets and unbound publications, not usable in their present state. A list of the publications owned by the Academy covered eight pages. In 1881 $100 was appropriated for binding. E. A. Birge, then librarian, stated that the library now “crowds about 100 feet of shelving.” He was able to report that all complete volumes were bound or in process of binding. The cost of binding in 1893 ran from 50 cents to as high as 90 cents for one-half Morocco. The average cost per volume was 68 cents!

The initial caution in loaning books did not last long. A resolution was passed in 1878 that any member of the Academy could borrow books for a period of one year. The librarian’s report for
1893 reads in part: "The room should not be left open without an attendant, as we have already suffered too much from depredations." And: "Should the librarian have reason to think the books were no longer in use and retained because of neglect, he might at his discretion call them in." The Academy accepted an offer from R. G. Thwaites, Secretary of the Wisconsin Historical Society to aid in the loan of books by furnishing a member of his staff when the librarian or his assistant could not be in attendance. The Academy would be expected to pay for this service if it proved to be a "considerable burden."

The library was maintained in the Capitol under difficult conditions. W. H. Hobbs, in 1891, had great difficulty in arranging and cataloging the books owing to the use of the quarters for law and history classes. Access to the rooms could be had only on Saturdays and during vacations. This was not the sole trouble. Two years later the librarian complained: "As the cases have no backs, but rest against the rough plaster, it is impossible to keep from the books finely disintegrated plaster which shakes down from the walls. The books become covered with a considerable layer of this material, which is so gritty as to abrade the skin when the books are handled. On opening a book this material gets between the leaves and plates." New tenants, committees of the Legislature and compilers of the state census, occupied the library for most of 1895. The last straw was added in 1897 when the Academy's room was divided by a partition, one part being used as a committee room, the other as a cloak room. The library was now virtually inaccessible. In December, 1898 it was agreed that the library be placed in the custody of the State Historical Society, the arrangements to be left to the discretion of the Council of the Academy.

As early as 1892 a resolution was passed to memorialize the Legislature on the construction of a building for the libraries of the Historical Society, University, and Academy. The building was obtained but was not ready for occupancy until 1900. A year later it could be announced that the Regents of the University had been of great service to the Academy "by placing at the disposal of the Librarian of the Academy the library staff of the University under the direction of Librarian Smith." It was not only logical but almost inevitable that the library of the Academy be combined with that of the University and initial action to this end began in 1909. The University Librarian in 1954 began to reclassify the periodicals and journals of the Academy in changing from the Cutter system to that of the Library of Congress. The integration is now so complete that the library of the Academy has lost its identity; however the Academy retains title.
The Academy has published the *Bulletin, Transactions, and Review*. Five Bulletins were printed during the years 1870–1871. The pages are numbered consecutively and total 81. Bulletins 2 and 3, and 4 and 5 are bound together. These Bulletins give information on the founding of the Academy, Proceedings, and abstracts of papers. The *Transactions* consist of original papers, and the Proceedings. The Review is published quarterly, the first volume appearing in 1954. It contains information on the activities of the members, obituaries, brief articles by members of the Academy and those of the Junior Academy, reports on the annual meetings, and book reviews. This publication sustains interest in the Academy between the annual intervals of the appearance of the *Transactions*.

In 1920 the fiftieth anniversary of the Academy was commemorated by the publication of a volume of 776 pages for which the Legislature made a special appropriation of $2000. T. C. Chamberlin, one of the incorporators and presidents of the Academy, and formerly President of the University of Wisconsin was given the honorary degree of Doctor of Science. There was a special exhibit of photographs of former officers and members, correspondence and scrapbooks of the early secretaries, programs of past meetings, and copies of early and recent publications.

A handsome medallion by the artist Leonard Crunelle of Chicago was struck. The obverse carries the figure of Minerva with the motto, *Naturae species ratioque*. On the reverse were the portraits of six eminent members: William Francis Allen, historian; Thomas Crowder Chamberlin, geologist; Philo Romayne Hoy, physician and naturalist; Roland Duer Irving, geologist; Increase Allen Lapham, naturalist and geologist; and George Williams Peckham, zoologist.

The number of meetings held by the Academy varied. Three meetings were held in 1870. The following year there were special and semi-annual meetings. In 1896 only one meeting, the annual, was held, a practice that has been continued. There was the perennial problem of how to make the meetings of greater interest. At that of December 27, 1893, the President asked E. A. Birge to open the discussion of the subject. Most of the members present ventured suggestions. Joint meetings were held at intervals with other societies such as the Wisconsin Archeological Society, the Wisconsin Mycological Society, the Wisconsin Natural History Society, the Wisconsin Section of the American Chemical Society, and others, without apparent benefit. At the present time the Academy does meet with the Junior Academy which it fosters.

Every effort was made to keep the expense of attendance at meetings low. On July 4, 1871, President Hoyt wrote to Lapham that the railroads would carry members to the meeting on the 18th at
60 per cent of the regular rate. Meals and lodging by modern standards were fantastically low. When the meeting was held at Ripon College in 1892, supper, lodging, and breakfast could be had at Wood's Hotel for $1.25. The fare for the excursion to Green Lake was 18 cents. On December 18, 1902, Secretary Ernest B. Skinner sent the Madison members a card reading: "It has been customary whenever the Academy has met in Madison for the resident members to give a complimentary banquet to the visiting members. The banquet will be held this year in the Unitarian Church, Friday evening, December 26, at 6 o'clock sharp. The cost to Madison members will not exceed $1.25 each. Members may bring guests by paying for each guest an amount equal to the actual cost per plate." When the Academy met in Milwaukee the following year the Plankinton House offered to serve a dinner in a private dining room at $1.00 per plate "provided as many as thirty people wish to avail themselves of the privilege."

The original constitution provided for an initiation fee of $5.00 and annual dues of $2.00. The Treasurer reported in 1877 that only 62 of about 200 members had paid dues of any kind. Nevertheless the annual dues were increased to $3.00. In 1880 remedial steps were taken to strengthen the membership. The initiation fee was reduced to $2.00 and the annual dues to $1.00. In addition the old members were given credit for future annual dues to the amount paid in the past in excess of these dues. In spite of these heroic measures 31 members were suspended for non-payment of dues. The initiation fee was subsequently dropped. In 1952 a family membership was inaugurated for the sum of $4.00, the co-member paying $1.00. Only one copy of the Transactions went to the family.

The Academy has had financial problems during most of the years of its existence. It is vital that the Transactions appear annually for the purpose of exchange. This can not be done by dues alone. President Hoyt wrote to Lapham on February 28, 1870, that he considered it inadvisable to ask the Legislature for pecuniary aid until the Academy had shown that it could do useful work for the state. He soon reached the conclusion that the organization was worthy for on March 22, 1872, he wrote to Lapham that he had succeeded in getting through the Legislature a joint resolution providing for the printing of 2000 copies of the first volume of the Transactions to consist of 200 pages. For years afterward the Legislature authorized printing by the state printer of one volume biennially. In 1913, for the first time, a sum of money for printing was placed directly at the disposal of the Academy. Since that date appropriations have varied from zero to $5,000 biennially. The result has been that during the 91 years of the existence of the Acad-
emy only 50 volumes of the Transactions have been printed. This is far short of the desirable one volume annually.

The constitution provided that life members contribute $100, patrons $500, and founders $1000. At the second meeting of the Academy, July 19, 1870, a resolution was passed to place all monies from life memberships in a permanent endowment, the income from which was to be available for the general purposes of the Academy. The Treasurer reported $807.25 in this fund on February 14, 1872. C. S. Slichter wrote to Secretary Arthur Beatty in 1920: "I think that the Academy is making a great mistake by not soliciting more vigorously the interest of prominent families in the state as patrons of our work. When the Academy was originally started this particular function of its work was 'emphatically emphasized.'" In spite of the long existence of the Academy the endowment fund does not exceed $7500. This is far from the $100,000 contemplated by the founders.

The Academy from the beginning was interested in determining the natural resources of the state including geological and topographical surveys. A resolution was introduced by T. C. Chamberlin at the third meeting that the secretary present an outline of the scientific investigations that have been made in the state and indicate those investigations that were most worthy of pursuit. He was authorized to assign the projects to various members of the Academy. Little or nothing was accomplished in this direction. The President reported in 1872 that "no single county has been thoroughly examined in its relation to all departments of natural history, and much the larger portion of the State . . . has not been favored with so much as a general reconnaissance."

Geological investigations were intermittent. The first State Geologist, Edward Daniels, was appointed in 1853. The following year he was succeeded by James C. Percival who served until his death on May 2, 1856. The Legislature ordered a general geologic survey in 1873. It was commenced under Lapham who served two years, then O. W. Wright took over for two years. T. C. Chamberlin became State Geologist in February, 1876. The field work was published in four volumes between 1879 and 1883. In the latter year the organization passed out of existence. It was not until 1879 that geologic work under state auspices was again resumed.

The Academy was in no position to conduct geological and natural history surveys, but it could influence the Legislature to establish a department for this purpose. At the December 28, 1894, meeting a proposal for establishing a survey of this nature was discussed, and a committee was appointed to draft a bill and secure support for its passage. In Volume X (1895) of the Transactions there appeared
the "Report of the Committee on the Proposed Geological and Natural History Survey of Wisconsin." The report was printed as a separate of twelve pages under a somewhat different title. Specific objectives for the survey were outlined. The iron bearing formations were to be mapped, materials for building roads located, and samples of soils collected for examination. Attention was called to the diminishing forest resources and the desirability of knowing what trees to plant on particular soils. Nutritive forage plants should be sought for the large areas of sandy soil unsuitable for agriculture. The zoological investigations would be devoted mainly to the food and enemies of fish. Supporting arguments were: "As an example, we may refer to the whitefish. No one knows anything of the fate of the millions of fry planted in this and adjoining states. No one knows anything of the food, enemies, or habits of the young whitefish." An unsuspected resource were the pearls taken from the Sugar River. This stream during the past six years had produced pearls valued at $500,000 to $600,000. The pearls were removed by killing the clams but they could and should be removed without injury.

The chief supporters of the bill were Charles Van Hise, geologist, and E. A. Birge, zoologist. On January 1, 1895, the following letter, on Academy stationery, was sent to potential supporters:\(^2\)

Dear Sir:

There are enclosed herewith two copies of the following: the perfected bill for the establishment of a Geological and Natural History Survey in the State of Wisconsin, and a statement of the reasons for the establishment of such a survey, with a map showing the progress of surveys in Wisconsin.

Signed: C. R. VAN HISE, President.
C. R. BARNES, Secretary.

In giving their reasons for the survey the pearls were cast aside. A law was passed in the spring of 1897 creating the Survey.

The Natural History Division of the Survey was under E. A. Birge from the beginning. He served without compensation and was paid only for travel and field expenses. His assistant, Chauncey Juday, was employed full time. These gentlemen published in the TRANSACTIONS a long series of papers on the limnology of Wisconsin lakes. Their work is classic.

A few of the minor activities of the Academy may be mentioned. In February, 1874, a committee was appointed to "wait on the proper legislative committee to urge such changes relating to marriage certificates as are recommended in Mr. Holland's paper."\(^1\) Some months later another committee was appointed to investigate
an Indian mound near Madison at a cost to the Academy not exceeding $25.00. Resolutions were passed on February 11, 1909, for the conservation of natural resources and copies were sent to the Governor, members of State Board of Forestry, members of the Legislature, and the Public Press.22 Resolutions were also passed against a proposed extension of the open season for the shooting of ducks in April. Shortly thereafter Congress was urged to pass the proposed bill for the protection of migratory birds.

The latest important achievement has been the establishment of a Junior Academy of Science comprising the Science Clubs organized in the High Schools of the state. For a long time there had been discussion of the desirability of forming a Junior Academy but no concrete plan had emerged. Early in 1944 I discussed with President C. A. Dykstra the potential benefits to be derived from a Junior Academy. The project was placed in the competent hands of E. B. Fred who took the steps necessary to support a junior organization as a University activity. The budget of May 23, 1944, carried an appropriation of $2800 for an unselected person to organize and direct on part time a Junior Academy. The budget was approved on June 15 and John W. Thomson, Jr., was appointed to the position on August 18, 1944. He served until February 1, 1961. Too much credit cannot be given to Dr. Thomson for the organization and supervision of the Junior Academy, and for his long and faithful service. The head of the Junior Academy carries the title Chairman of the Junior Academy Committee. This title expresses inadequately the dignity and responsibility of the position.

The state is divided into seven districts. Each district holds a meeting at which three of the best papers are selected so that there are twenty-one papers presented by pupils at the annual meeting. The meetings of the Junior and Senior Academies are held separately, but at the same time and place. The purpose behind the founding of the Junior Academy was to encourage high school students showing ability and interest in science to follow it as a life profession. This aim has been well realized since 90 per cent of the pupils that attend the district and annual meetings have pursued science in one form or another.

The major accomplishments of the Academy have been the publication of the Transactions, the building of a science library, and promotion of the Geological and Natural History Survey and the Junior Academy of Sciences. It is doubtful if any other Wisconsin organization has accomplished so much at so little cost to its citizens.
REFERENCES

The Proceedings of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, cited below, were published in the Transactions. The dates are for the Proceedings, while the volume numbers are for the Transactions.

2. Wis. Hist. Soc. files.