

The American Alpine Club and the Museum Idea

J. MONROE THORINGTON

In the Presidential Address of 1941, the present writer offered as one of the Club's objectives the furtherance of the *Museum Idea*, which might be made possible by "quarters in New York large enough to accommodate our informal meetings, and where the treasures that are available to us can be properly displayed." This visionary project has become a reality through the acquisition of the new house at 113 East 90th Street.

The fact that it is a remodelled firehouse allows us a room on the ground floor where 125 members and guests can be seated for the showing of pictures, with screen and projection mounts in fixed positions. Since the first of the year 1949, we have added a series of museum cases in which our principal exhibits are shown, with printed cards such as are used in the Metropolitan Museum. One case contains badges and medals, and two cases with glass shelves and lighting units exhibit geological specimens and various mementoes of the Alps. A large case, 14 feet in length, is at present displaying rare Alpine books of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. In another case are shown the Troye reliefs of Mont Blanc, and of the Mont Cenis and Simplon passes, constructed in London about 1813 and probably the earliest reliefs of the Alps to be made in England.

Two tall mahogany cases are being used for print exhibits. For the January symposium on glaciers, a program arranged jointly with the Arctic Institute, some seventy 18th- and 19th century prints of Alpine glaciers were on view. In March a new show was set up of 19th-century costume prints, chiefly Swiss and Austrian. During the summer the cases will contain American views, and further exhibitions are projected.

On the walls of the auditorium many pictures are hung, notably the two imposing oils of the Matterhorn and the Grands Charmoz

AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB: MAIN ROOM, SECOND FLOOR

Top: lounge at north end

Bottom: looking from north to south

Photos, Victor Kayfetz

by Gabriel Loppé (1825-1913), the first artist to specialize in the painting of ice and snow. We also possess the spectacular oil of Kangchenjunga painted by Colin Campbell Cooper in 1915.

The Club has also acquired a unique collection of items relating to early American participation in Alpine climbing. On the first floor are the ice-axes and alpenstocks, some of them now a century old, while the walls of the second floor, where the library is located, are covered with photographs and documents.

The library now approaches 5,000 volumes, an important group having come from the Montagnier collection. The shelves rise under fluorescent lighting, and properly arranged tables and chairs make for comfortable reading. On this floor there is also a series of relief maps of the Canadian Rockies and other districts, as well as cabinets containing classified maps, prints and photographs, among the latter being numerous examples of Vittorio Sella's work.

During the winter, monthly evening meetings have been held, with several afternoon teas. During the Christmas holidays, a reception was given for undergraduate members of various college and university mountaineering clubs, at which time a program on mountaineering safety was presented.

In short, we have begun to justify the house as a means of preserving and showing the items connected with the history of our sport, and the membership may take pride in our progress.

AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB

Top: south end of main room, second floor. Office adjoins, looking out on 90th Street

Bottom: meeting and exhibition room downstairs

Photos, Victor Kayfetz