

OSCAR R. HOUSTON

1883-1969

On December 19, 1970, The American Alpine Club lost one of its older and most distinguished members with the death of Oscar Houston. Though a lifelong outdoorsman and conservationist, and a famous fisherman, he did not begin serious climbing until middle age, when he had already become internationally known as a maritime lawyer. Prior to this time he had moved from Logan, Ohio, where he was born in 1883, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia, and become editor of the *Law Review* at Columbia. His brilliant law career continued as a partner of Bigham, Englar, Jones and Houston, where he was principal counsel for cargo interests in the maritime disasters of the *Titanic*, *Lusitania*, *Morro Castle*, *Normandie* and *Andrea Doria*. He served both as president of the Maritime Law Association of the United States and the International Law Association, and for many years headed the Adirondack League Club.

Oscar Houston married Nelly S. MacDonald in 1912. Their three children are Barbara (Mrs. Grose), Janet (Mrs. Beal) and Dr. Charles S. Houston, whose mountaineering record is internationally known. Father and son shared a love for mountaineering, and many expeditions were proposed, assembled and sent off from their hospitable home in Great Neck, Long Island.

Oscar Houston contributed to American mountaineering in many ways. He encouraged young climbers, helped to develop and support climbing, and with his son organized the party that in 1934 made the first ascent of Mount Foraker in Mount McKinley National Park. In 1937 he led an expedition to Mount Hayes in the Alaska Range. Even more important to climbers, however, was his part in bringing about the successful ascent of Mount Everest, for in 1950, when he was 68 years old, he somehow (even his son doesn't know how) broke the political barrier that prevented climbers from entering Nepal, and he, his son, H. W. Tilman, Anderson Bakewell and Mrs. Elizabeth Cowles penetrated to Thangboche Lamasery. Charles Houston and Tilman a day later reached a point where they could see into the Khumbu Icefall, and so discovered the potential for the only route by which Everest has yet been climbed. Oscar Houston's imagination and resourcefulness were clearly responsible for the disclosure of the Khumbu route. And so at the age of 68 he changed the world of mountaineering!

Had he not been so modest, at the end of his life this admirable fellow member of ours could have quoted from *Ulysses*,

*Much have I seen and known – cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least – but honored of them all –*

ROBERT H. BATES

GARETH H. HEMMING

1934-1969

Gary Hemming's death has ended the career of a climber widely believed in Europe to have been among the best in the world. Less well known here – all his important climbs were in Europe – he had close to the same reputation in the community of American climbers. Although not a member of the AAC, his great record makes it appropriate to publish this obituary here.

He started climbing in the early 1950's at Tahquitz Rock while living in Southern California. He soon met John Harlin, then at Stanford, and, while working in the San Francisco Bay Area, began climbing with him and others from the Stanford Alpine Club in Yosemite. He and I first met on a trip to Mount Rainier in 1957 that included John and Hobey DeStaebler, that was designed, in John's words, to teach us ice climbing techniques "suddenly," in preparation for a trip we made later that summer to the Battle Range in the Selkirks.

Gary was uneasy and unhappy in the United States and a trip to Europe was the start of a new life for him in an environment freer, for him, of the restraints he sensed so acutely. He climbed in England and then in the Alps, attended the University at Grenoble sporadically, and tried to complete the aspirante guide course in Chamonix in 1961, failing in this for his refusal to dispose of a magnificently unruly beard. He climbed from time to time with Americans and began to eye the very important climbs. He made an attempt on the Walker Spur in winter but was forced off by a particularly ugly storm. This was a climb he completed late in the summer of 1961, the first American ascent of the face. It was a route that fascinated him and several years later he spent some effort in planning a solo ascent to be completed in a single day. It was possibly beyond his powers and the attempts depressed him.

He introduced Yosemite climbing techniques to the Alps starting with a fine new route on the west face of the Petit Dru and, in 1963, with Harlin,