

100 YEARS OF ALPINE LEADERSHIP



From social club to alpine warrior, the American Alpine Club's presidents look back on a century of defining who we are.

There have been 32 presidents of the AAC, including me. Like me, many (perhaps too many) were trained in the law. A fair number were educators and medical doctors, and even one was a man of the cloth who gave sermons upon his descent from climbs in the Canadian Rockies. Some were highly accomplished climbers, while others were more hikers or men of science. And even though the Club at its outset admitted women into its ranks of members, only one president has been a woman.

The presidents have generally been a hearty and long-lived lot, with many accomplishing significant climbs while in office and after. Nearly all have served the club in a myriad of other capacities and responsibilities, both before and after their presidencies. If there can be one uniting thread that binds us all, it is our devotion to and love of the Club and of mountains.

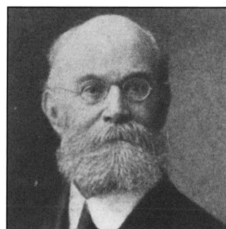
The issues we have faced are often the same, seemingly unchanging: East versus West, age versus youth, and where and how to spend our money. Another preoccupying matter for many has been the Clubhouse, its existence, location, and operation. A persistent issue has been the establishment and securing of the endowment, which has probably been resolved through the creation of an Investment Committee mandated by the Bylaws. Another relatively recently "resolved" issue is that of the qualification for membership, as the Club has gone from a social organization with a membership in the hundreds to a social and service organization with a membership in the thousands.

Let us now hear from those who have led the Club over its first century. I'll quickly summarize the terms of office of the presidents who have passed away, and let all the currently living presidents speak for themselves.

JAMES FRUSH

CHARLES ERNEST FAY (1902-1907, 1917-1919)

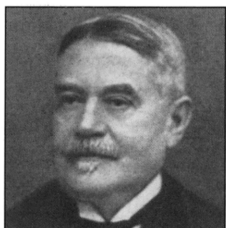
Presidents have traditionally served for three years, but Professor Fay, our first president, not only served a six-year term but was redrafted for an additional three-year term. He had served as President of the Appalachian Mountain Club of which he was also a founder. He climbed primarily in the Canadian Rockies and had served as the American agent for the Duke of Abruzzi's Mt. St. Elias expedition.

**JOHN MUIR (1908-1910).**

Muir is perhaps our best known president outside the Club. While Fay was from and of the East, Muir was from and of the West. There would often be this alternating, from the West to East, of the geographical source of our leaders. Muir also complemented Fay's literary and social standing in climbing with his fervent conservation of the climbing environment.

**JUDGE HARRINGTON PUTNAM (1911-1913)**

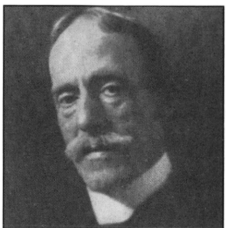
Putnam oversaw the first major controversy handled by the Club: expelling Dr. Frederick Cook from AAC membership. Now, nearly 100 years after the founding of the Club, this controversy still rages in the minds of not just a few, and the board of director has dealt with the issue as recently as last year. Under Putnam's leadership the issues of a Clubhouse and library arose for the first time.

**HENRY GRIER BRYANT (1914-1916)**

Bryant oversaw the formal incorporation of the Club under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Montagnier Collection of alpine literature was accepted by the Club to form the base of its library.

**LEWIS LIVINGSTON DELAFIELD (1920-1922)**

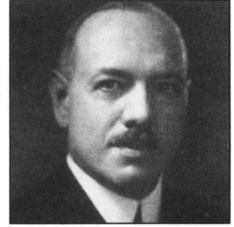
Delafield's presidency found the Club for the first time formally sponsoring expeditions. The Club's first sponsored expedition was to Canada's Mt. Logan for which a clubwide, and worldwide, fundraising effort was undertaken. And our annual meeting under Delafield had the now-typical visit from our British climbing friends. Movies of the British Mt. Everest North Ridge expeditions of the early 1920s were shown.

**REVEREND HARRY PIERCE NICHOLS (1923-1925)**

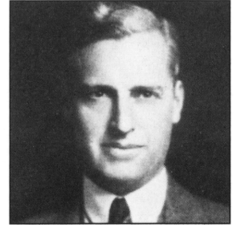
Honorary Membership became an issue under the Reverend's presidency as it often has since. His urging of the election of Pope Pius XI as an Honorary Member came to naught as the Pope declined the honor. In his stead, the Board elected George Mallory. There was also significant growth under the Reverend's leadership as the Club membership rose from 126 to 144 despite the deaths of some eight regular and Honorary Members.

HOWARD PALMER (1926-1928)

Palmer was another lawyer, although one who didn't practice law. He was typical of many of the Club's presidents in that he wrote extensively on the alpine environment. His *Mountaineering and Exploration in the Selkirks* formed the basis for his compilation of the Alpine Club's first guidebook, that to the Rocky Mountains of Canada.

**DR. WILLIAM SARGENT LADD (1929-1931)**

Ladd oversaw the participation and the founding of the Union International des Associations d'Alpinism (UIAA) and the gift of our first clubhouse, an old fire station located on the upper East side of Manhattan. The gift generated the first major fundraising effort for the Club and the establishment of an endowment to help fund the upkeep of the gift. It was during his term that the first *American Alpine Journal* was published (1929).

**HENRY BALDWIN DEVILLIERS-SCHWAB (1932-1934)**

Under deVilliers-Schwab's presidency the Club's membership increased past the magic number of 200. He was one of our most widely climbing presidents of this era with climbs throughout the world, including notable ascents in the Alps, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, South Africa, and Australia.

All photos from the AAJ article "Early History of the American Alpine Club," by Howard Palmer, which describes the "colourful background of the club, the commanding personalities of the founders, and the vicissitudes of earlier years..."

JOEL ELLIS FISHER (1935-1937)

Fisher oversaw the first and only proxy fight, or contested vote by the membership, in the Club's history. The goal of the dissidents was to require a bylaw amendment which would require that the annual meetings be held throughout the entire country and not merely among the major cities of the East. The proxy fight failed to obtain the amendment, but ever since the practice of the Club has been to attempt to rotate the location of the annual meeting.

JAMES GRAFTON ROGERS (1938-1940)

Rogers was our first Colorado president and was also the president of the Colorado Mountain Club. Under Rogers, the Club, and many of its members, were instrumental in bringing into existence the 10th Mountain Division of the U.S. Army.

JAMES MONROE THORINGTON (1941-1943)

One of the mission statements for our Club has always been the dissemination of information on the alpine regions, and yet the progress and financial success of our publications program has always been fraught with difficulties. Under Thorington, the Club became "the publisher of last resort" for mountaineers, ensuring that information was published which would otherwise not see the light of day. Thorington was perhaps the ultimate scholar of alpinism for the Club and involved in producing a long series of guide books for the Club. He also served as editor of the *Journal*.

JOHN CROWTHER CASE (1944-1946)

Case focused, as might be expected from the time of his presidency, on the furtherance of the 10th Mountain Division. At the end of his presidency, the Club membership had passed the milestone of 300 members.

WALTER ABBOT WOOD, JR. (1947-1949)

Wood focused greatly on the process of testing and certifying mountain guides. He himself was also a certified guide, having qualified in Switzerland. He also helped found the Arctic Institute of North America.

HENRY SNOW HALL, JR. (1950-1952)

Hall had previously served the Club for 15 years as its secretary and later became the Club's first Honorary President in 1974. His significant financial support helped not only the Club but many expeditions maintain solvency. Interestingly, he had been elected to Honorary Membership, a special category bestowed only by the board of directors, prior to his serving as president.

BRADLEY BALDWIN GILMAN (1953-1955)

Gilman was the only officer who sat in all four of the primary officer's chairs. He was intimately involved in uncovering and stopping, at the last minute, the plot by some members to attempt to obtain membership for a dog, a great difficulty in those days in that the application needed to go through the Board of Directors or, as it was known in those days, the Club's Councilors.

JOHN CAMERON OBERLIN (1956-1958)

When I was elected president of the American Alpine Club I was a resident of Cleveland, Ohio, and in those days I traveled to meetings by train.

Club affairs were then in disarray, lacking an editor of the *American Alpine Journal*, an administrative secretary, and a librarian. Leaders of the Sierra Club were pressuring the AAC to become a similar conservation oriented organization in a manner that unnecessarily cost the Sierra Club its tax-exempt status. Many western members were highly critical of the Club's operations but unresponsive when asked to make any helpful contribution.

The biggest accomplishment of my tenure in office was the appointment of H. Adams Carter, a close friend of Bob Bates, as editor of the *American Alpine Journal*. (Bob had himself been co-editor with David Robertson during an earlier difficult period.) The legacy of Ad Carter is so extraordinary as to place a heavy burden on subsequent editors to emulate him. The *Journal* is his monument and the most important continuing product of the Club.

An Expeditions Committee was inaugurated and I appointed George Bell its first Chairman. A Conservation Committee was also established, with Bill Child at its head. At the urging of Dave Brower, Corinne Albinson was made administrative secretary and took over the day-to-day operations at the Clubhouse. The Club's charter was dug out of the safe deposit box and examined by our former president Brad Gilman, a lawyer and a trust officer, who steered us in our conservation supporting activities without endangering our invaluable tax-exempt status. I myself went on a personal tour of our Western states and Sections (at my own expense) where such members as Pete Schoening, Raffi Bedayn, and Bob Craig made real efforts to be helpful.

With the Club's charter in mind, Ad Carter organized a small expedition to Chile (again, at our own expense with some contributions by other individual members) including Bob Bates and me to conduct a survey of Ojos del Salvado. There was a good chance it might turn out to be the highest peak in the hemisphere as Aconcagua had just been re-surveyed and drastically downgraded. Aconcagua retained its crown by a rather slim margin, but our survey was officially recognized by the Chilean government and the American Geographical Society.

The Club has come a tremendous distance since my day and it is to be congratulated on its successes. Old age does not bring any increase in wisdom but it does afford a certain perspective denied those who cannot look back down so many years.

There is simply no end to worthy causes the Club can be pressured to pursue, but it is always a mistake to "jump on one's horse and ride rapidly off in all directions." To stay focused on the objectives of the Club's charter will serve the great purpose of enhancing enjoyment of the high mountains for all of our members. To load us down with too much ironware and too much bureaucracy will cost us the freedom of the hills.

ROBERT HICKS BATES (1959-1961)

During my term of office the main issues concerned the New York Clubhouse and the cost to individuals to become members of the AAC. Increasing the membership was important too, and effort was made to get more young climbers as members. The Expeditions Committee was very active, and I tried to help with letters to the authorities in Pakistan, Nepal and elsewhere. The Club also worked with Mt. McKinley National Park people about establishing sound climbing regulations there. The *AAJ* and the *AAC News* were then the Club's major connections with its sections. Big issues, such as whether the Clubhouse should be moved, developed in the future.

My greatest challenge in AAC leadership was helping to solve a problem that threatened to split the club between East and West. Groups of fine climbers from both areas had been raising money to become the AAC expedition to climb the highest peak in Antarctica. Back then all flights to there were made by the U.S. Navy, and those with international implications were controlled by our state department. Here we had an advantage, for James Grafton Rogers, who had been president of the club from 1938 to 1940, was now an Undersecretary of the State Department. With his help we put together a meeting in Washington with representatives from the Navy and the State Department, and also from the two groups of AAC climbers. Rumors existed that Japanese climbers were already planning a similar expedition, but no official request had been made. At our meeting the state department and navy representatives strongly agreed that action had to be taken fast, for one expedition only, and that it must be an American expedition. It was left to me to decide who the leader of that expedition should be.

Obviously, the climbers from the East and from the West would need to be fused into a single party—if that could be done. Fortunately, I knew the man who could do it. He was an experienced climbing leader whose parties had included climbers from across the country. He was well liked by all for his judgment and sense of humor. The man was Nick Clinch, who was born in Texas, lived in California, and had good climbing friends everywhere. I called Nick, filled him in on the need to fuse the two groups into one, and assured him of the full support of all parties concerned.

The climbers of the two groups accepted Nick with acclaim, even as he accepted the position of leader. The result was a great success. The climbers became a fine team, making ascents of

the highest peaks, with no accidents. Their success was extolled by climbers around the world. Not everyone was pleased, as I learned a couple of years later in Kathmandu, when a Japanese climber confided to me that the one great climb he had expected to make was the first ascent of Antarctica's highest mountain. But somehow the Americans had gotten there first!

CARLTON PERRY FULLER (1962-1964)

Fuller helped move the Club from an organization that focused primarily on the East Coast into a more national organization. He encouraged the 1963 American Mt. Everest Expedition that made the first American ascent and the first traverse of the mountain. At the end of Fuller's presidency, Club membership was over 600 in number and disbursed widely throughout the country.

LAWRENCE GEORGE COVENEY (1965-1967)

Coveney accomplished what was near impossible for many of his predecessors. He succeeded in having the Club hold its annual meeting in Seattle, which turned out to be the first of many to be held in the Seattle area. He was considered as a bridge between a number of young "troublemakers" and the Club's financial "establishment," and eventually helped bring the "troublemakers" into the positions of leadership in the Club, arguably co-opting them forever.

NICHOLAS BAYARD CLINCH (1968-1970)

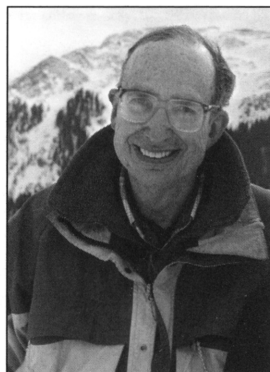
My presidency was a study in transition. For many years a small group of Easterners had run the Club, rotating the various offices among themselves. They had met the challenges of the Club and American mountaineering, but suddenly everyone had done everything, except for two new younger Councilors, John Humphreys and me. Then John was killed in a plane crash. That left me. Carl Fuller called and said "they" wanted me to be president. I was dubious but he insisted and promised me "full support."

There have always been two basic conflicts in the American Alpine Club. West versus East and Young versus Old. With the recent broad growth in climbing and the moving of the Clubhouse to Colorado, conflict between West and East has been reduced, but Young versus Old continues. It always will.

The Young are active and have the problems and the Old have the experience and ability to deal with them. Unfortunately, the Old are not familiar with the current problems and the Young are ignorant of what the Old are doing to promote mountaineering. The most effective efforts are not always the most visible ones.

The most important asset the Club has is its name: The American Alpine Club. This, together with its history, makes it a formidable instrument for those willing to put forth the effort to use it. But it does not do things on its own. Someone—officers, staff, members—has to do the work.

In the late sixties the challenges were made more difficult by an increase in mountaineering and by the cultural changes in society. I was young and from the West and I personally knew mountaineers everywhere. I visited all the sections and, as I was "one of them,"



they listened to me regarding what the Club was trying to accomplish.

My objective was to bridge the gap between Young and Old, West and East, and use that instrument. With all of us working together we achieved such things as the Grand Teton Climber's Ranch. When there was a problem we would try to help, but frequently I would ask the person who brought it to our attention if they would be willing to tackle it in the name of the American Alpine Club and promised "full support." This used the two most important advantages of the Club, its name and the energy of its members.

Today the challenges are greater but so are the resources of Club. We have a vastly bigger membership base and a larger, more efficient staff. Even so, President Kennedy had it right. The Club is a wonderful instrument, but the members have to use it. You cannot leave things to others.

JOHN LATHROP JEROME HART (1971-1973)

The first major revision of the Club's bylaws occurred under Hart's presidency. He was also instrumental in arranging climbing exchanges with alpinists from the Soviet Union.

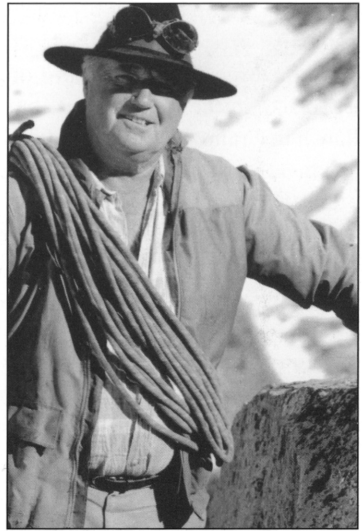
WILLIAM LOWELL PUTNAM (1974-1976)

Three main issues concerned me: the quality of mountain guiding, relationships with the U.S. Forest Service, and developing clearly written policy statements on issues affecting alpinists.

The late and much beloved Raffi Bedayn headed up the mountain guiding effort, and we failed to make much progress. Since the National Park Service managed most of the more popular climbing areas in the United States, and since they have a long-standing practice of dealing only with a single concessionaire for each park, we found two discouraging conditions. There was an established vested interest in maintaining the status quo, and it seemed to make little difference to the bureaucrats that we were offering a quality-assurance concept that had great potential benefits to the public. In later years, the American Mountain Guides Association started up completely independently from the Club. It seems to me that outsiders from the concessionaire guides founded the AMGA, and they have strived mightily to build a thoroughly trained roster of really good guides.

To establish relations with the U.S. Forest Service, volunteers from the Club's membership presented themselves to the supervisors in many of the national forests where climbing is a significant recreational activity. The objective was to have someone in regular contact with those supervisors who might insert a word of advice, the supervisor thus profiting from the experience of a knowledgeable mountaineer. These persons would be readily accessible to each supervisor to advise in resolving problems of access, camping, trail-making, etc.

To draft a series of statements that embodied the Club's well-considered attitudes toward ethics, access, environment, forest management, mining, registration, huts, and roads, I used some of the Club's most erudite members, led mostly by future president Price Zimmerman. In subsequent years my successors have encouraged further policy statements on other mountaineer-related issues as the need for a defined policy has become evident.



As we have found from our more recent and more intense involvement with issues affecting climbers, these long-standing, well-reasoned, and reasonable statements have been of great value in establishing our bona fides when dealing with land managers.

JAMES FRANCIS HENRIOT (1977-1979)

Many exciting and significant events occurred during my tenure, events that I look back to with sincere appreciation for the cooperation and support of our members. But what I particularly like to recall here are four issues that contributed to the sustainability of the Club, since they are very important as we move into our second century.

First, our outreach broadened to include a wider geographic spread. The strong formative influence of our East Coast location and membership shaped the Club into the powerful force that it became in the earlier years. But as the first president from the Northwest, I was pleased to set annual meetings and board of directors meetings at key places in the western part of the country, including Salt Lake City, the AAC's Climbers Ranch in Grand Teton National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Mt. Hood. Similarly our membership continued to extend westward. Our membership peaked at 1,360 at the end of my tenure.

Second, younger members joined the Club, increasing their percentage in a significant fashion. This meant fresh blood with a younger generation bringing new ideas, lively commitment, and an orientation toward the future.

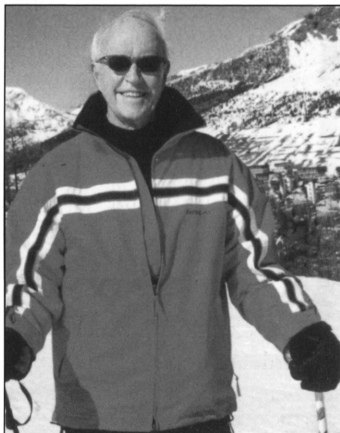
Third, the endowment fund was strengthened through a low-key campaign with the generous contributions primarily from board members and others. Over \$100,000 was added to the fund when the campaign came to an end in 1979.

Fourth, the Club's participation in international mountaineering was expanded through participation in the International Union of Alpine Associations (UIAA) and mountaineering exchanges. In 1977 the Club hosted the UIAA General Assembly meeting at Pinkham Notch, New Hampshire, its first meeting in North America.

Amateur expeditions to Himalayan countries grew significantly during my term. The Club screened and approved qualified expeditions, facilitating their efforts to obtain permission to climb. The Club had participated in the first large international climbing meet hosted by the Soviet Union in the Pamirs in 1973. Thereafter the Club began formal climbing exchanges annually with primarily the Eastern European Socialist countries. I was very interested in exchanges, and at the conclusion of my term as president I became chairman of the Climbing Exchanges Committee for 14 years.

Let me conclude by saying that I was fortunate during my term as president to have the assistance and guidance of the immediate past president Bill Putnam, an Easterner, and an earlier past president, Nick Clinch, a Westerner.

The future is built upon the past. I am very happy in this retrospective to be confident of the American Alpine Club's solid future.

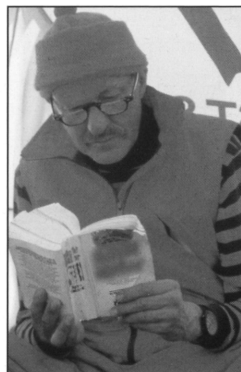


THOMAS CALLENDER PRICE ZIMMERMAN (1980-1982)

Having previously been chair of the Conservation and Access Committee, I was troubled by the Club's inability to lend significant material support to the activities it fostered, especially publishing, maintaining access, and granting climbing and research fellowships. To assure a reliable source of funds it was necessary to increase the Club's endowment, but to do this we had to win back the confidence of our principal donors, which had been forfeited by the raids on the endowment that had taken place in the past. A revolving fund was set up with the idea of putting publications on an independent footing, and a drive was launched to make good past losses to the endowment. With a giving record of 65 percent, equal to that of the best liberal arts colleges, the drive demonstrated the commitment of our members, but the confidence of major donors came slowly.

**ROBERT WALLACE CRAIG (1983-1985)**

Looking back, which is somehow getting easier than looking forward, I'm impressed that for the past 50 years the AAC has been in an accelerating state of transition, with the past 20 years being a time of such change as to make the earlier Club almost unrecognizable. Nevertheless, in spite of growth, of outreach, of unbelievable advances in climbing skills and expeditions to everywhere, the original spirit of friendship, camaraderie, humor, and curiosity that animated the early American climbers still prevails and makes the Club a very good place to be. When I was asked to serve as president in 1983, I accepted with a sense of indebtedness for all the expeditionary opportunities, the friendships, the inspirations that the Club had offered.



My term was one in which we continued to encourage younger, very active (in several instances world class) climbers to serve on the board of directors and committees of the Club. I urged the election of more young women to take part in the work of the Board (and for this some Victorian types accused me of ulterior motives). Following on the shoulders of Miriam Underhill, Ruth Mendenhall, Joan Firey, and Dana Isherwood, more and more young women climbers have served to the present.

If I made one fundamental mistake during my term (and I'm sure I made several) it was to accept leadership of an innovative Everest West Ridge expedition (oxygenless, porterless—and, I later concluded, a bit mindless). On that occasion the past friendships of 35 years in the AAC came to the fore and provided me with the support and insights needed to try to do a reasonable job: curmudgeonly and kind Bill Putnam, the wise and Pickwickian Nick Clinch, the gentleman scholar Price Zimmerman, the street smarts aristocrat Jim McCarthy, and the tirelessly supportive Jim Henriott were helpful in so many ways that express the best in the AAC tradition. And then there was Bob Bates, who was always available for counsel and moderate restraint.

We began to explore the possibility of an American mountaineering consortium to increase the impact of the AAC's Committee on Access, to encourage broader use of the Club's growing and outstanding library resource, and to possibly open new membership pipelines. The idea was that regional clubs might be helped on their access issues and in turn contribute in the policy arena to goals of the AAC. This did not quite happen, but it sharpened thinking

within the Club on how we might be more effective in pursuing policy goals within the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and in dealing with local governmental entities.

We initiated an effort to increase membership numbers in 1984, but found the qualifications required discouraged any significant gains. Notwithstanding, we did increase from 1,760 to 2,100.

JAMES PETER MCCARTHY (1986-1988)

One of the hottest and most contentious issues during my term was qualification for membership. As almost no one today will remember, the AAC was originally modeled on the Alpine Club (the world's original mountaineering association, founded in London in 1857). Membership was by invitation and two members had to propose a new member and the prospective member had to submit a résumé. In the very early days the council, and later the board, spent a good deal of time in reviewing such résumés. Later it became the job of the secretary and the membership committee to do so. It was my intention to do away with all that and accept anyone who had climbed for two seasons. This concept did not initially receive universally enthusiastic support from the board. Nonetheless, after several lively board meetings over a couple of years, the present structure of qualifications was finally agreed to.

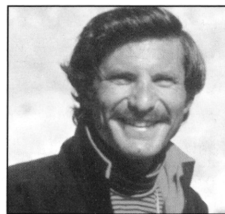
Another agenda that was pursued at this time was an attempt to reach out to what we would call today the sport-climbing community. This started out as an attempt to protect the interests of our great women competitors, Lynn Hill and Robyn Erbesfield, who were active in European comps and who were subject to a good deal of rule manipulation. Despite several trips to Europe by me, the issue of fairness was not completely achieved during my term. Along these lines, a very expensive, and in the end fruitless, attempt was made to organize and fund a national team. Fundraising efforts came to naught and the effort had to be abandoned.

Armando Menocal, one of the founders of the Access Fund, is fond of twitting me these days. He claims that I was the grandfather of the Access Fund. There may be a tiny kernel of truth in his jibe. It is true that I let the members of the Access Committee of the AAC, the forefathers of the Access Fund, have considerable leeway during my term. It pleases me these days to see our club and the Access Fund acting in concert on important issues such as the bolting controversy.

GLENN EDWARD PORZAK (1989-1991)

At the start of my tenure as AAC president, the Club was faced with a six figure annual deficit, a dwindling endowment, and a static and aging membership of approximately 1,500 climbers. The Club was also embroiled in the numerous controversies surrounding the organization of the emerging sport of competitive climbing—an activity that was not understood (or particularly embraced) by the Club's membership base and was overwhelming the Club's limited financial resources. It was clear that if the Club was going to survive, it needed to get its financial house in order and make some dramatic changes. To do this, however, some difficult and unpopular choices had to be made.

First, we proposed and the board passed a balanced budget amendment. We then organized the initial American sport climbing team and helped set up the World Cup competitive sport climbing circuit. Once organized, however, the Club removed itself from any future financial and leadership roles in this sport. The Club then spun off its Access Committee into a new organization, the Access Fund. This latter move allowed the important work of climbers' access to



continue with a new financial base, while at the same time enabling the Club to balance its budget.

The heart of the effort to change the direction of the Club, however, was centered on the need to relocate its Clubhouse. The time was long overdue to sell the New York headquarters and move west to the mountains, the geographic center of our membership base, and the greatest area of potential membership growth. At the same time, a move west would also enable the Club to reinvigorate itself with a new administrative staff. Perhaps most importantly, it would send a signal of a change in direction and that the Club would no longer be dominated by its "Eastern establishment." Rather, the Club's new direction would focus on membership benefits and service related issues to the climbing community at large. Highlights of that change in direction were our success in securing climbers rescue insurance for all Club members and upgrading the Teton Climbers' Ranch.

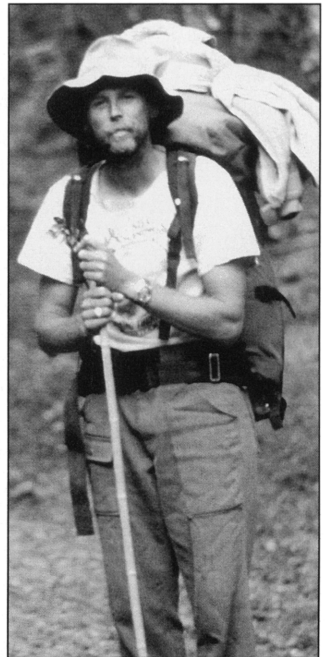
It took virtually my entire three-year term as president to build the consensus for such a move. Finally, the last actions I took at the final board meeting over which I presided were the introduction of the resolutions to sell the New York Clubhouse and move the new Club headquarters to Colorado. Both resolutions were approved unanimously. Little did I know then that those resolutions would embark me on a 10-year campaign to find the old junior high school in Golden; develop partnerships with the Colorado Mountain Club and the Colorado Outward Bound School in our new headquarters building; and finally raise and spend 8 million dollars to create a 40,000-square-foot complex now known as the American Center for Mountaineering.

The high point of my term as president, both literally and figuratively, was reaching the summit of Mt. Everest in May of 1990. As the first sitting president of an alpine organization to climb the world's highest peak, the ascent hopefully sent a message that the Club was composed of members who were active climbers.

JOHN EDWARD (JED) WILLIAMSON (1992-1994)

At the fall 1991 board meeting of the AAC, graciously held at Ad and Ann Carter's mountain retreat in Jefferson, New Hampshire, item eight of the agenda was clubhouse relocation. The minutes reflect "a straw vote clearly indicating that the board was in favor of such a move." At the December 1991 meeting, Honorary President Bob Bates moved "That the Board of Directors of the American Alpine Club sell the New York Clubhouse and relocate, the sale to be accomplished at a net gain to the club even after the cost of relocation." Unanimously carried. Then Jim McCarthy moved "That the next president should appoint a chairman and constitute a committee to oversee the sale and relocation of the American Alpine Club property." Also unanimously carried.

I was elected president at this annual meeting. My interest in taking this office was to help expedite such a move. I was among the few who had visited the New York office in recent years, and it had not escaped me, in looking at the guest book, that only six visitors (and not many members) had been to the headquarters in the previous few years.



Things moved quickly over the next year. Jim McCarthy and I were in charge of the “sell” end, while Glenn Porzak and Mark Udall would look for appropriate properties in the Denver area. The very short story is that the net result was a sale at a good price, with most of the proceeds going back into the endowment, and a good buy in Golden. This was followed by a successful Capital Campaign—and thanks to many, many good people. We bid farewell to Franc de la Vega, who had served 20 years as executive secretary, and Pat Fletcher, who had served nearly as long as librarian. I appointed Ralph Erenzo to become the managing director until, with Mark Udall and Bob Craig, I hired Charley Shimanski as the executive director to oversee the move west and set up temporary offices there until the completion of the American Mountaineering Center in Golden.

This was a large and rewarding task, but there were other matters as well. First, there was the ongoing struggle with our publications program—an issue that persists. Next, there were the feisty young sport climbers. As the AAC was the governing body for this budding enterprise, Jim McCarthy, Ralph Erenzo, and I headed up efforts to try to manage it. Will we ever forget that first American-sponsored competition on the outside of Snowbird Lodge? I also journeyed to Washington a few times to represent the club in discussions and committee meetings on Capitol Hill about the emerging topics of fixed anchors in the wilderness and paying for rescues. During this time I also helped form the Wilderness Risk Managers Committee, whose mission is to sponsor an annual educational conference for adventure-program administrators. I am still a presenter and the AAC representative for this issue-based gathering. Involvement in the AAC is like the Hotel California: you can check out—but you can never leave.

LOUIS FRENCH REICHARDT (1995-1997)

I joined the American Alpine Club in 1969 proud of climbs that would not even merit a footnote in the AAJ today, but happily did then. Shortly afterward, I joined Boyd Everett and his comrades for the first American attempt on Dhaulagiri, which was made possible by AAC sponsorship, as were all my subsequent expeditions to Asia. The AAC really captured my loyalty during this expedition by the extraordinary moral support that we received from Nick Clinch, Henry Hall, and others in the club after the avalanche that claimed so many of our lives. At a time when I could well imagine being subjected to an inquisition, the club was completely supportive. I realized then that a single life would not provide time enough to repay adequately this generosity.

For this reason above all others, it was a special pleasure to be asked to serve as vice president in 1991 under Jed Williamson. It was an exciting time to be involved with the AAC. Every board meeting was in Colorado, with half of the time spent inspecting empty warehouses or office buildings as potential future AAC headquarters. Every day of these three years was full of anticipation and excitement. The move to Colorado promised both opportunity and risk. Jed's superb judgment of people resulted in recruitment of two ideal people—Ralph Erenzo, who managed the move from New York as managing director, and Charley Shimanski, who took charge in Colorado as executive director. Glenn Porzak's judgment, patience, and persistence resulted in identification of a future headquarters with opportunities beyond our imaginations. Together these decisions went far toward ensuring the success of this exceedingly risky move.

With events so favoring success it was an easy decision when the nominating committee unexpectedly asked me to follow Jed as president. What possibly could go astray after so much positive momentum? How wrong I was! The first unimaginable challenge was the loss of Ad

Carter, who had contributed more than anyone else to the AAC through his editorship for more than 20 years of the *American Alpine Journal*. Ad's loss was not to the AAC alone, since he was the center of a network of informants on mountaineering throughout the world that was in danger of collapse. After serious arm-twisting, I persuaded Jed Williamson to step into the breach as managing editor. With advice from Yvon Chouinard, Christian Beckwith was identified as a worthy replacement for Ad as editor. As our recent *AAJ*'s demonstrate, Christian was an inspired choice, rising to the challenge of reestablishing a network of informants as well as ably editing the *Journal*. Also critical for the success of this transition was the generosity of Yvon and many other members who provided a financial cushion for the *Journal* during these challenging years.

There were also many anticipated challenges associated with our move and commitment to our new headquarters. First, of course, was financial. In collaboration with our partners in the Colorado Mountain Club, the AAC embarked on an unprecedented fundraising campaign to raise the several million dollars needed to realize our vision for the new American Mountaineering Center. During my three-year presidency, this was a constant challenge that absorbed almost the entire effort of our executive director and required dedicated leadership from Mike Browning, Glenn Porzak, Jed Williamson, Nick Clinch, and many others. This campaign was only completed on my final day in office.

The promise of our new headquarters and the exigencies of fundraising forced us to consider seriously how we could remain relevant in the climbing and mountaineering communities when such a small proportion of active climbers were AAC members. As a first response, we discarded in 1995 our arcane membership requirements and committed ourselves to discounts and other policies to encourage membership by young climbers. Supported by local volunteers, the Club established new sections in the Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, South Central, Northern Rockies, and North Central regions of our country, so that sections finally covered almost the entire span of the United States. The demands of granting agencies also forced us to make a serious commitment to increasing the diversity of AAC membership. Among other actions, we established a new award in the name of our Honorary President Robert Hicks Bates to recognize exceptional skill and climbing achievement by a young climber. Through outreach, sections, staff performance, and effective advertising, our membership expanded by more than 2,000 from approximately 2,300 in December, 1994, to more than 4,300 in December, 1997. In addition, the average age of our membership declined by several years, suggesting that our outreach to younger, more active climbers had some success. Nonetheless, this average remained in the low 40s, a decade or more above the average age of the American climber.

Certainly the most persistently annoying challenge during my presidency was that posed by our publications program. While we felt committed to the *American Alpine Journal*, despite its cost, and to *Accidents In North American Mountaineering*, a dependable revenue source, increasingly painful financial realities led to the realization that neither of two able publications directors could turn red ink into black ink at such a small press. We only associated with The Mountaineers Books reluctantly, but this immediately benefited the Club, both financially and by reducing a major diversion of staff effort from our core missions. Despite this, our publications program has continued to challenge each of my successors.

Challenges to access were given momentum by responses of the National Park Service to the publicity and political pressures generated by a series of accidents and costly rescues on Mt. McKinley. Efforts to prevent implementation of discriminatory fees and access policies chal-

lenged the connections and diplomatic skill of our Board during my presidency. Our success in challenging access fees and unreasonable pre-registration requirements was real, but only partial. The December 1996 flood of Yosemite Valley provided the second major challenge of access and environmental policy. Despite openness and sympathy from Park Service personnel for our positions, it gradually became clear that other pressures had persuaded them to propose unacceptable plans for redevelopment that would compromise Yosemite Valley's environment and accessibility to climbers. Whether we would be more effective inside or outside of the National Park Service tent was discussed repeatedly at our board meetings during 1997. In the end, John Middendorf, Tom Frost, and others persuaded our board to challenge the National Park Service to be true to its own mandate—"to protect and preserve natural resources"—through support of a lawsuit, an unprecedented act for our small organization. The future would clearly show how right were Frost and Middendorf to insist on such a dramatic shift from our policy of exclusive reliance on dialogue and persuasion. At the time, though, I was relieved to pass the challenge of getting the most possible from a mixed policy of simultaneous cooperation in some areas and confrontation in others to my extraordinarily able successor.

In summary, the three years of my presidency were ones of transition dedicated to realizing my predecessors' vision for a new mountaineering center, to acquiring new members, and to ensuring that the AAC regain its position of leadership as an advocate for climbers throughout this country. While there were challenges and disagreements, it was a wonderful experience because I always received unstinting support from my predecessors and from the board. It seems to me very unlikely that there is another organization as united and supportive of its core missions as is ours.

ALISON KEITH OSIUS (1998-1999)

No question, the defining issues of my term were the Yosemite and the fixed-anchor crises.

Yet at the same time, gifts rained from the heavens. Another major event was a great act of generosity, when Lyman Spitzer—climber, professor, and leading astronomer—left the AAC a bequest. We put the funding into perpetuity and designated the income for climbing grants, policy work, and worthy projects.

Yosemite was a hot potato early on, two months after my installment, when we were petitioned to join a lawsuit set up by Tom Frost and others to protect Camp 4, the historic climbers' campground in Yosemite. The Park Service, reconfiguring the floor plan in the Valley in the wake of massive flooding, planned to abut Camp 4 with new concession-employee dormitories. In 100 years the AAC had never sued anyone, but it was with full support of the board and past presidents that we joined this lawsuit, the first climbing organization to do so.

At Tom Frost's behest, Dick Duane applied in the name of the AAC to have Camp 4 placed on the National Register of Historic Places in Washington, D.C. It was declared eligible for nomination, a major (and rather stunning) boost to our team. Its listing now is virtually complete.

The AAC also strove to protect the pine-filled, rocky Swan Slab meadow from being filled with buildings from the Yosemite Lodge complex. We joined in this effort with the Sierra Club, which achieved a preliminary injunction against construction from a District Court judge in San Francisco.



In the end, our cause prevailed without a courtroom battle. More important, Camp 4 was not only preserved, but newly valued: the Park Service—to its credit—accepted our views, and ultimately expanded it. Moreover, Frost, Duane, and Linda McMillan created cordial, collaborative relationships within Park Service ranks that still serve us well. Among their gains was strong support for a proposed climbers' ranch/campground near Yosemite Valley. In the tradition of Raffi Bedayn and Nick Clinch, they serve as problem solvers and liaisons with the climbing community.

I did not think anything could top the Yosemite problems, until four months later the U.S. Forest Service suddenly dictated that no fixed anchors were allowed on Forest Service wilderness land. No pitons, no bolts, no slings around trees for rap anchors; no placement and no replacement of existing anchors on these lands. The justification cited was the Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibited installations. That prohibition, however, we felt certain was intended to mean buildings and airstrips.

We mobilized, and published op-ed pieces in: *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Rocky Mountain News*, *Oregonian*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Idaho Wood River Journal*, and *Denver Post*. Two supportive editorials came out in the *Denver Post*, written by a staff writer who is also an AAC member. Many other AACers were active and energetic in using their excellent connections to friends in high places.

Lloyd Athearn, AAC deputy director, read through guidebooks and journals, and documented extensive fixed-anchor use prior to the Wilderness Act. Jeanne Klobnak, our legislative liaison, went to Washington, D.C., and researched the legislative and philosophical history of the Wilderness Act. We joined forces with the Access Fund, ORCA, AMGA, and NOLs in many sessions of information sharing and strategizing. Lloyd was our representative in a negotiated-rulemaking process between interested groups and the USFS. He worked closely with Sam Davidson, policy director for the Access Fund. (Creating a bridge with the Access Fund was probably the only goal in my term that I came up with—as opposed to it coming at me!)

And we also celebrated: co-hosting a party with Tom Frost to honor the nomination of Camp 4 to the National Historic Register. All the generations of climbers gathered in Yosemite, with a sense that everyone should speak and be heard. All knew that everyone here would never be together again. And since then we have lost Chuck Pratt, Warren Harding, and, most recently, R.D. Caughron. They were greats.

Last, we allowed Greg Mortenson of the Central Asia Institute, as a winner of the AAC Conservation Award, to seek funding from AAC members for his causes of education and health care for the people of the Himalaya. Members came through beyond anything we could have dreamed (I can only call it gangbusters), allowing him to open a whole new school for girls, which he named for the AAC.

I am often asked what it was like to be the first woman president. Far from resisting that, the Club sought it; I was asked to take that office. No one ever had a more sterling bank of advisors, or better backup.

C. JAMES FRUSH (2000-PRESENT).

I suspect I will be best remembered for being the President of the Club during its Centennial. Still, a number of important things happened during my term and, I must say, the same old issues continued to dominate.

After years of listening to widely varying opinions on “what the membership wanted” at Board meetings, we finally took some concrete steps to determine what it is the membership

actually wanted. For the first time, the Club conducted a professional survey of its membership to learn about both its demographics and its members' needs and desires. The results indicated we are largely a group of middle-aged, well-to-do, white men who have climbed broadly around the world (no surprise). We most value the fellowship our club provides, and primarily support political and conservation efforts. And the annual meetings are important: over half of our membership have attended one.

As usual, the publications program of the Club was in financial disarray, despite significant efforts by my predecessors. In addition, the library was in need of some long-overdue improvements. The board agreed to take unrestricted funds from the Club's investments accounts, including some of the "Clubhouse" funds, to correct the cash flow shortage the publications program had created and to bring our library into the 20th century as we entered the 21st century.

Also at the Clubhouse, Colorado Outward Bound was brought in as a partner, which resulted in the completion of the American Mountaineering Center and the establishment of a conference center. Diligent efforts are being made to attempt to complete construction at the Golden Clubhouse by arranging and funding our museum.

Responding to our membership survey, the Club continued to increase its involvement in public interest activity, continuing our participation in the fixed anchor rule making process. We also became one of the leaders in interfacing and interacting with numerous land managers. We hired our first full-time professional lobbyist, located in Washington, D.C.

The Club's annual budget passed \$1 million per year with a staff of more than 10.

Numerous other initiatives have been undertaken, including digitalization of the American Alpine Journal, the establishment of the Spitzer Climbing Grants, the establishment of the Piolet Society (a planned giving society), the creation of the American Alpine Club E-News, the initiation of the Club's Hut System, and the adoption of a Code of Conduct for Club members and staff.

Lastly, a new editor for our beloved *Journal*, John Harlin III, was recruited and appointed during my term. A president can perhaps have no greater legacy.

Such is the past, but what of the future? Seemingly ageless, some of the old tensions arise now and again to trouble us, such as East versus West and age versus youth. Also, the tension between our existence as a social club and a service organization occasionally causes conflict. We must strive to be both in this our second century. We cannot ignore our necessity to be active in the areas of public policy and land management. We must work with like-minded colleagues in similarly oriented clubs to protect both the environment itself and our access to it.



We must grapple with the fact that we are both a fundraiser in need of contributions and a fund-giver helping climbers, researchers, and others active with alpine issues.

We must also struggle to remain relevant, particularly to young climbers, especially because of our demographic. To help, I've established our first Outreach Committee, with its focus on disadvantaged and minority youth.

We cannot and should not lose our roots. Tradition is a function of style. And as every climber knows, style is of utmost importance. Let us build upon our traditions, and with particular attention to style. With a comradeship which binds us all to the Club and to each other, as does the rope that joins us when we climb, we will move forward into our second century.

(I wish to give particular credit to Bill Putnam's Centennial History of the American Alpine Club for providing the factual background on the presidents who have not presented their own thoughts.)