

### A Short History of the Sumner Club

The first meeting of what is now called the Sumner Club was held in the residence of Dr. Francis B. Sumner on Monday evening, November 29, 1937. The following were present:

Reverend Edward L. Elson	Francis P. Shepard, Ph.D.
Richard H. Fleming, Ph.D.	Francis M. Smith, M.D.
Denis L. Fox, Ph.D.	Laurence H. Smith, Lawyer
Martin W. Johnson, Ph.D.	Francis E. Sumner, Ph.D.
Roger Revelle, Ph.D.	Harald U. Sverdrup, Ph.D.
Sibley Sellow, Banker	Claude E. ZoBell, Ph.D.

Initially, membership was restricted to twelve, this being the maximum seating capacity of some of the residences. However, since there were often unavoidable absences, the membership was soon increased to sixteen. There follows a list of members who were elected to fill vacancies during the first few years:

1938: Val Adams, Commercial photographer  
1939: Marston C. Sargent, Ph.D.  
1940: Louis Lek, The Netherlands  
1941: William F. Wilmurt, Architect  
1943: Keith Ferguson, Lawyer  
1943: Thomas W. Whitaker, Ph.D.  
1943: Norman J. (Jeff) Holter, M.D.  
1945: Earl Andreen, School Superintendent  
1945: Carl L. Hubbs, Ph.D.  
1945: Wesley R. Coe, Ph.D.  
1946: Reverend George C. Culbertson

In recruiting new members, attempts were made to have various disciplines or professions represented, including both "town" and "gown." The meetings were devoted largely to informal in depth discussions of topics of general interest. For several years it was tacitly understood that the speaker would not discuss his own speciality, particularly the Ph.D. people.

At first the club had no name. It has never had any by-laws, dues, or officers. It soon became known to members as the "Discussion Group." Following the death of Dr. Sumner on 6 Sept. 1945, a letter was drafted in which Mrs. Sumner was informed that the members had decided to call it the "Sumner Discussion Group." I could find no entry in either Volume I or II of the Record Book to indicate any other action on name change, although for several years members have been calling it the "Sumner Club."

During the first two years there was one meeting per month on a mutually agreeable date. At the meeting held on Wednesday, Jan. 17, 1940, it was decided that thereafter the meetings would be held the third Thursday of each month, except during the three

summer months. After a few years this was changed to the second Thursday. The nine-month schedule was reduced to eight months in 1958 as it is at present (1976).

The host has always been responsible for the meetings in his residence. As a matter of courtesy, the host generally reminds each member of the meetings a few days in advance, although members are automatically invited to be present. The host is also expected to make arrangements for the speaker, a month in advance whenever practical. The host prepares minutes of the meeting and passes the Record Book along to the next host. There have been some temporary departures from this routine which have sometimes resulted in confusion and incomplete records.

In the beginning, members took turns in alphabetical order serving as host and as speaker. Serving in both capacities at the same meeting has not worked out very well, so this is discouraged. Scheduling the hosts and speakers for meetings a year or two in advance, as proposed by Baird Hastings, has proved to be quite satisfactory. If it is impossible for a member to serve on a date as scheduled, he will usually have ample time in advance of the meeting to change places with another member, preferably the next one of the list.

The Sumner Club met for the 350th time on May 13, 1976.

Prepared by,

Claude E. ZoBell

August 15, 1976

P.S. The Sumner Club Record Book Volume I is stored for safekeeping in a fire-proof vault on the 6th floor of The University Library, UCSD.

Before becoming labeled the Sumner Club, in fun it was sometimes called the "No-name Club," the "Francis Club," the "Town and Gown Club," etc.

(1976)  
The present membership (restricted to 16) is as follows:

Andrew A. Benson	Martin W. Johnson
Kurt Benirschke	Allen Lein
Wm. E. Bethard	* Francis P. Shepard
Denis L. Fox	* Francis M. Smith
Jeffery D. Frautschy	Melvin J. Voigt
A. Baird Hastings	Thomas A. Whitaker
* Francis T. Haxo	Carl H. White
Carl L. Hubbs	Claude E. ZoBell

*The three Francis's account for the organization's  
sometimes being called the "Francis Club."*

*C. E. Z.*

12 June 1984

Dear Deborah:

I thank you for letting me see the draft of a guide to the personal papers of Dr. Denis Fox. It has been read with considerable interest. A few questionable statements came to my attention.

Dr. Fox became an American citizen several years before 1927 as stated in the first paragraph on page two. Without doing much more research, I cannot document the date of his naturalization. However, his wife, Meriam, found official papers showing that Dr. Fox's father became an American citizen in 1906. She expressed the belief that Denis also became an American citizen at that time, 1906. Certainly it was before 1927, because Denis served in the National Guard during 1917-18.

In paragraph five on page three, "elected," should be changed to "became." Anyone can become a member of the AAAS by the payment of the annual dues. Only a small percentage of the AAAS members are elected by the Board of Directors as Fellows. AAAS Fellows are professionals who have published papers or otherwise demonstrated superiority in some field of science. I feel sure that Denis became a Fellow, but I do not recall the date.

In the second paragraph on page two, the Sumner Club was not founded by Prof. Sumner nor was it founded in 1935. Enclosed is a copy of "A Short History of the Sumner Club." Please note that Dr. Sverdrup was present at the first meeting held of the Club on 29 November 1937. Those listed in the first paragraph were collectively the founders of the Club.

A longer history of the Club has been recorded elsewhere in my autobiography tentatively entitled, "An Idaho Farm Boy Goes to Sea" (see, or C for California). The following is for the SIO Archives and not for publication:

Shortly after becoming Director of the SIO in September 1936, Dr. Sverdrup asked me to accompany him on a reconnaissance mission to Berkeley, San Francisco, Palo Alto, Pacific Grove, and other places of academic or scientific interest. He invited me to serve as guide because (1) I was officially the "Assistant to the Director," and (2) I was well acquainted with the geography, transportation facilities, administrative officers, and marine science personnel in the San Francisco Bay area.

This being before the days of scheduled plane trips, we made the trip by rail going via the valley route and returning along the coast. We shared a double berth on a Pullman sleeper. At the insistence of Director Sverdrup, he took the upper berth and I slept in the lower. With his characteristic sense of humor, he explained that he liked to be on top and, moreover, he liked to get his exercise swinging into the upper berth using only one hand.

During this nearly two weeks together, we talked of many things, including personnel and would-be kings. Dr. Sverdrup told me about the "town and gown" clubs in Bergen and Oslo, where many of the university people met regularly with a like number of professional townspeople. He inquired whether the SIO had a similar club. When advised in the negative, we talked about the possibilities of starting such a club in La Jolla. As one of my responsibilities as Assistant to the Director, Dr. Sverdrup asked me to discuss the idea with the biologists, including Fox, Johnson, and Sumner. The Director agreed to talk with Roger, Dick Fleming (oceanography), and Prof. Shepard (geology). Every one seemed to be enthusiastic, especially Denis.

It was a few months before all parties concerned could get together, although small splinter groups were discussing who should be considered and who should be left out for one reason or another. From the very first, Dr. Sverdrup made it clear that the club should be an extracurricular activity. For this and other reasons, he did not care to be the first host, especially since Mrs. Sverdrup had not yet become proficient in English. As documented in Volume I of the minutes, the first meeting was held in the residence of Prof. Sumner on 29 November 1937. During the discussion, it was agreed that there would be no by-laws, no officers, no dues. The planned protocol for meetings was patterned closely after such discussion groups with which Dr. Sverdrup had had experience in Norway. It was agreed that minutes of all meetings would be kept in a cloth-bound record book.

Several months after the first meeting, Denis penned in a conspicuous space in the record book that he along with Dr. Sumner, Dick Fleming, and Martin Johnson had founded the Discussion Group at a specific date prior to the first Group meeting. I do not remember the date, because I always considered it to be pure fiction.

In the fourth paragraph on page three, it is stated that Fox published "several" books. I am acquainted with only three, one of which is a revision of his ANIMAL BIOCHROMES. I question whether either three, four, five, or six is several.

As soon as can be arranged, I will want to look through most of the Fox Manuscript Collection. Also I will be looking forward to discussing with you the disposition I should be making of my papers, manuscripts, files, and books.

We all appreciate the good work that you are doing as Archivist.

Sincerely,

*Claude E. ZoBell*

Claude E. ZoBell

*Professor, Emeritus*

*P.S. I'll be keeping the draft guide of Dr. Fox in my Fox file until there is time to make use of it.*