

Chapter 4:

Medals and Endowments

At the July 1889 meeting of the Society, President Holden announced the first of what was to become a number of medals and prizes awarded by the Society. Joseph A. Donohoe, a wealthy San Francisco businessman, had donated \$500 to endow a bronze "Comet Medal", to be awarded to the discoverer of each new comet. The directors accepted his gift with thanks, named him a life member, and laid out a set of guidelines for the award of the medal. It was to be given to "the actual discoverer of any unexpected comet," who was expected to notify the director of Lick Observatory, giving the exact time of discovery, the comet's position and motion, and its appearance.

Donohoe was in Paris in the summer of 1889, and chose a design for the medal, which was illustrated in the *P.A.S.P.* By late September the dies were being made. The first medal was awarded in March of 1890 to W. R. Brooks of Geneva, New York. From then on several medals were generally given each year. Donohoe died in 1895, but the Comet Medal Fund supported 250 awards until 1950, by which time comet discoveries had become so frequent that the Donohoe Comet Medal had to be discontinued. (The 250 medals are now collectors' items, and many recipients or their families have written to the A.S.P. to say that the medal is a prized family possession.)

During the first year of the Society's existence, another member, William M. Pierson, was also busy behind the scenes on behalf of the A.S.P. Pierson was a prominent San Francisco attorney, who had drawn up the A.S.P. Articles of Incorporation, signed by the officers on August 28, 1889. One of Pierson's greatest services to the Society was to obtain a \$2,500 gift from Alexander Montgomery, a San Francisco philanthropist.

In August 1889 Pierson wrote to Montgomery as follows:

"My dear Mr. Montgomery,—
I want to enlist your great public spirit in behalf of science. You have been most generous in the cause of Christianity: I ask your cooperation in the interest of scientific research. I have the honor to be the first Vice President of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific of which Professor E. S.

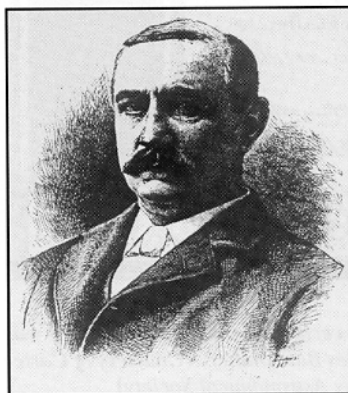


The Donohoe Comet Medal. (Photograph from the January 25, 1890, Publications of the A.S.P.)

Holden, Director of the Lick Observatory, is President. The Society is a most active and enthusiastic one. Many of its members, particularly its life members, are prominent and wealthy citizens... Mr. Joseph A. Donohoe has just founded a medal to be awarded by the Society for the first discovery of comets. Mr. C. F. Crocker has just equipped an expedition for the purpose of observing the solar eclipse in November next. Honorary stimulus of this kind is most important in scientific work.

Out of the great goodness of your heart and your love of all true progress, let me be able to report to our September meeting that you will found a gold medal to be known as the "Montgomery medal" of the Society to be awarded to the author of the most valuable paper on an astronomical subject read before the Society during each year...

I would very much like to confer with you on the subject. I know you have many calls on your purse but I believe that none outside of charity would be productive of greater results in a rapidly advancing science than this."



William M. Pierson. Attorney Pierson drew up the initial Articles of Incorporation for the Society in 1889. (Portrait from the A.S.P. archives.)

Pierson did meet with Montgomery, and wrote to Holden: “[Montgomery] told me that he feared that he was not educated up to the point — but on seeing him a second time he said that he was seriously thinking of it and quite encouraged me. I think I shall be able to accomplish it.” While Pierson was not able to announce the gift by the time of the September meeting, he was able to do so in November.

On December 1 he wrote to Holden, who had been unable to attend the meeting the day before:

“I telegraphed you last night about our meeting and the fact that Mr. Montgomery had given us the money for the medal... During the lantern exhibition of Barnard’s photographs I took a seat in the audience and presently heard some one taking a seat behind me and then a voice in the dark ‘Mr. Pierson, you can have that money for the Society’ — at the same time handing me my letter to him. He added ‘You think \$2000 would be enough but you had better make it \$2500. Send for the money as soon as you want it.’ I, of course, thanked him and afterwards on announcing it to the meeting we all rose to give him our thanks. The announcement was a great surprise and elicited a good deal of enthusiasm.”

Holden must have had somewhat mixed feelings on receiving this news. On the one hand, such a generous gift was a great asset for the youthful Society, but on the other, Holden had already made clear to

colleagues his feeling that the Society was too new to begin awarding medals. He did not want to diminish the value of such an award by having it come from an organization nobody had ever heard of. He and Pierson had evidently discussed this, for the latter continued: “I think that Mr. Montgomery will allow us to use this gift in any way that we desire.”

Pierson suggested using half the income for a medal and the rest “either for books or some other purpose.” In any case, he felt that the Board should meet soon and discuss the possibilities: “Mr. Montgomery’s health is not of the best and I deem it nice to obtain this fund as soon as possible.”

At the December Board meeting, Holden worked hard to persuade them to his point of view. He was successful, and after much discussion the Board voted in favor of using the income for the “Alexander Montgomery Library” of the A.S.P. Holden wrote Pierson to thank him for his role in securing the gift; Pierson replied: “I am obliged to you for your kindness in considering my service in the matter but it is too trifling to merit it. I feel very much as Mr. Montgomery did when I endeavored to express my thanks for his gift. He simply said ‘Now, my boy, don’t strain yourself’.”

Montgomery died in 1893, having seen the Montgomery Library grow considerably. Over the next decade it expanded to a total of 1,350 bound volumes, and almost as many unbound pamphlets and magazines. Unfortunately, the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed the Society’s headquarters, all its records, and the entire library. (See Chapter 8.) The collection was gradually rebuilt, however, in the succeeding years.

In late April of 1889, Holden had written on behalf of the A.S.P. Diploma Committee to P. R. Calvert of Nashville, Tennessee (the brother-in-law of Lick astronomer E. E. Barnard), asking for designs and a sketch for a diploma (membership certificate). By July the committee had a design which they recommended to the Society at its September meeting. It was described as follows:

...the centre of the upper panel contains the Sun, the Moon and the Corona of January, 1889. To the left and right of this are the symbols of the eight major planets. The twelve medallions of the lower panel include the twelve Zodiacal signs, copied from the beautiful designs of Mr. Vedder. The right hand panels represent first, the great comet of 1858, and second, the configuration of the Constellation of Orion. The stars of this constellation may stand for the stellar universe; while they also remind us that the central star of the sword-handle is the nucleus of the grandest of all the nebulae. The drawing of the Muse of Astronomy — Urania — in the left-hand panel is copied from the antique statue of the Vatican. The national coat of arms in the upper left-hand panel



The A.S.P. membership certificate (or “diploma” as it was called in 1889) of Charles Burckhalter. (Courtesy of Carter Roberts and the East Bay Astronomical Society)

designates the country in which the Society has its seat, and to which the work of our members should bring increasing honor as time goes on.

The Society adopted this design, and five hundred copies were ordered to be printed. By mid-October they were ready, and were signed by President Holden and the two secretaries, Schaeberle and Burckhalter. The diploma continued to be issued over the next two decades to all new members. Today, very few copies of the original diploma remain in public and private archives, and a much smaller membership card has replaced them as the Society's membership has grown into the thousands.



The original seal of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. (A.S.P. archives.)

Chapter 5:

Continuing Growth

By the time of the second annual meeting of the Society in March of 1890, President Holden could point with pride to the activities of the past year. In his address as retiring President, he noted that as of that date the Society had 192 members, distributed geographically "from London to Venezuela, from Mexico to British Columbia, and in the United States from Boston and New York to California." In addition, almost 100 observatories and libraries around the world were receiving the *Publications of the A.S.P.* These *Publications* had chiefly contained the work of Lick Observatory astronomers and students, but Holden still hoped to get papers from elsewhere, and especially from the amateur members.

The Society had benefitted from the gifts of Donohoe and Montgomery. Other members had made substantial contributions to astronomical research, such as Col. C. F. Crocker's expedition sent to South America to observe and measure a solar eclipse in December 1889. Holden urged the members to "help to place before the people of our State, directly and indirectly, the purposes for which observatories are founded and the problems which astronomy has now to consider... The members of the Society already exert a very wide personal influence to increase the general interest in astronomy, and this will grow from year to year."

At the same meeting, the Society voted to solicit a design for a Society seal. During the ensuing year, W. Lewis Fraser, Art Editor of *Century Magazine*, super-

vised the design, and the seal was adopted on January 31, 1891. It showed the god Mercury (messenger of the heavens) with his winged feet and his staff, against a background of stars, Moon, and clouds and surrounded by a rim bearing the name of the Society. This seal was immediately added to the membership certificates and to the cover of the *Publications*, as well as to the official A.S.P. stationery and other printed materials. The same design was still in use on the *P.A.S.P.* in 1970, with the founding date below it; since then a slightly modernized and redrawn version has been used.

Holden felt that the presidency of the Society should pass to one of the amateur members, William Pierson, and he wrote to Treasurer Molera to that effect in October 1889. Molera's reply was quick and vehement: "I cannot grant your request, i.e. to aid you in nominating, canvassing [sic] or voting for any person for President of the Astl Sc, excepting Edward S. Holden. It is no use for you to argue with me, I am a Catalanian... Now I take an uncompromising stand: I will not aid you in any way, and will fight you in this matter tooth and nail. If you are reasonable and consent to serve the coming term, then I promise next year to let you have your own way." Holden evidently gave in, for he was re-elected at the 1890 annual meeting to a second term as president.

Molera, who was trained as a civil engineer, was a charter member of the A.S.P. and its first treasurer; but he resigned this position in June 1890, after some aspersions had been cast on his bookkeeping methods. These complaints may have been justified, if the following note (now in the Lick Observatory archives) from Molera to Holden about a bill is any indication: "Yes: I paid the bill, but it does not appear in my check book as I paid you cash when eating an oyster omelette at Govey's restaurant. It is marked on the bill. — I did not think that that excellent dish would take your memory off." Molera did, however, continue on the Board of Directors of the A.S.P. for over a decade, and served as a vice-president for four years, and as president in 1893.

In November 1890, another step towards broadening the Society was taken with the amending of the bylaws to permit the creation of local Sections. This option permitted groups of A.S.P. members living in the same area to work more closely together and to have regular meetings. A group of nearly 30 members in the Chicago area, organized by George Ellery Hale, formed the first such Section. Holden recognized the advantages of such close association of members, as well as the potential danger that a Section might become too in-