THE ORIGIN OF THE CORNELL SOCIETY OF HOTELMEN

By former Hotel School Professor John Courtney ’25
(Written in 1952, revised in 1990)

The Cornell Society of Hotelmen, now known as the Cornell Hotel Society, is the alumni association of the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University. It has its inception in the early undergraduate years of the first classes, and to develop the background of its origin calls for a bit of reminiscing.

In the fall of 1922, at the request of the American Hotel Association, and at the encouragement and even the urging of such leaders in the hotel business as Ellsworth Milton Statler, Frank A. Dudley, John McFarlane Howie, Lucius M. Boomer, Thomas D. Green and many others, that a hotel school be founded. Professor Howard Bagnall Meek came to Cornell to organize a curriculum of instruction of hotel management, which has now become the School of Hotel Administration.

The school had its birth in a little cubbyhole up under the eaves in Comstock Hall (then the Home Economics Building) where Prof. Meek dispossessed some pigeons and cleaned out the cobwebs. With a few old boxes and orange crates for office equipment, and with Lena Swartwood at a typewriter out in the hallway, he released the news that a high grade education in all matters relating to the management of hotel and was now available and called for volunteers to “come and get it.”

Well, there were twenty-three of us who enlisted under his banner that momentous September in 1922. It was a precarious launching. Undoubtedly Professor Meek kept his fingers crossed, because we must have been a motley crew. From the various colleges on both the upper and lower campuses we came, all bitten by the boniface bug. We were subjected to considerable campus ribbing, but some of us survived. A picture includes Professor Meek and Dean Betten, but unfortunately, Bill Needham, Harry Reynolds, and Charlie Peckham were AWOL at the round-up for the picture. Some of these original twenty-three entered with advanced standing and were destined to become members of the class of 1925. Needham and Dunlap graduated in February 1925. Joe Nolin joined us in February 1923; and in June 1926,
there were nine of us who received our sheepskins, viz, Crandall, Dockery, Jennings, Marchand, Nolin, Olsen, Peckham, Reynolds and Courtney. Professor Meek began to surround himself with a staff that was to inspire and stimulate us. There was a relationship of physics, B.T.U’s and K.W.H.’s to hotel engineering. There was Louis Toth, with a night transcript and a morning report, teaching us to substitute the percentage of occupancy for the percentage of egg production; there were Jessie Boys and Lois Farmer giving new meanings to poached eggs or angel food cake; there was a Schutte laughing at Jack Crandall and me as we shimmied up a hot steam pipe when a bull objected to being butchered and shook himself loose.

In those early days, we had our bull sessions; we dreamed and planned, as I suppose normal undergraduates always do. We intended to conquer the world, specifically the hotel world. We intended to organize corporations, to open new hotels, to really grab the hotel business by the tail and subdue it. After and in conjunction with our food labs we were wont to get together for coffee and trimmings in an adjoining experimental kitchen under the watchful eyes of Madam Boys and Anna Driscoll. At these meetings we dubbed ourselves the “Coffee Hounds.” Great were the plans of the Coffee Hounds in those days.

At these bull sessions of the Coffee Hounds the spirit of stick-together was germinated. We swore mightily that after leaving Cornell we would remain united. The alumni association which is now the Cornell Hotel Society was conceived in the sessions of these early Coffee Hounds.

In those days new community-sponsored hotels were popping up right and left, and as undergraduates of the newly organized hotel courses at Cornell we were privileged to be present and to participate in many of these openings. Jessie Boys, “Madam Boys,” as we called her, was an honorary member of the Coffee Hounds. From the postmortem discussions of our activities at some of the hotel openings, the idea was born, which under her stimulus and encouragement eventually became the first opening of Hotel Ezra Cornell in Prudence Risley Hall on May 7th, 1926 with Walt Bovard ’26 as the managing director.

By the fall of 1923 the size of the Coffee Hounds had increased to the extent that it had outgrown the capacity of its original crib—the experimental kitchen. While a few of the old timers still had their coffee with Madam Boys and Anna, the Coffee Hounds met every morning, with more or less regularity, in the Coffee Shop of Barnes Hall. It was in one of the recreational rooms of Barnes Hall that the Coffee Hounds formally organized “Ye Hosts.”
It was intended by the original organizers that Ye Hosts should fulfill the functions that are now recognized as those within the proper sphere of activity for the undergraduate society, which is now named Collegiate Chapter of the Cornell Hotel Society. I know that deep in the minds of the original organizers of Ye Hosts was the thought that a similar society should be organized among the alumni to hold them together after graduation.

At the organization meeting of Ye Hosts, Alfred L. Olsen ’25 was elected the first president with Jack Crandall ’25 and Bud Jennings ’25 as vice presidents and with yours truly as treasurer, in which capacity I had my first experience in shaking everybody down for 50 cents dues.

A committee was appointed to recommend a symbol for a key. There were many heated discussions, but the symbol which was finally designed and adopted is still in use at the present day. It had patterned after a sign made from and old weather-beaten board broken diagonally at each end hanging in front of an old English inn.

One of the first properties of Ye Hosts was to promote a Ye Hosts dance in the auditorium of Home Economics (the present Comstock Hall) at which a huge banner was hung. The dance was a success, at least we thought so, and we were very proud of our banner and our Society. This was probably the first materialization of notions which had been tossed back and forth among the Coffee Hounds for some time and was eventually to become the Hotel Ezra Cornell opening.

When the first class graduated in 1925, Ye Hosts society was still the undergraduate society of the Hotel School in which every hotel school undergraduate was ipso facto a member.

In the spring of 1926 the constitution of Ye Hosts was changed to make it an honorary society. Seniors and juniors of the School could become members only by election. At the same time, new “Cornell Hotel Association” was formed to take the place of the old Ye Hosts.

The first officers of the new Cornell Hotel Association were:
   President – Walter Bovard ’26
   Secretary – Adolph Schimmelpfenig ’27
   Treasurer - -Fritz Miner ’26
From the very beginning the alumni of the School were a very closely knit group. As they had promised one another as Coffee Hounds, they maintained contact by means of letters, round robins, and in general leaving no opportunity lost to keep together. Specifically, as many as possible would get together for a dinner on the Wednesday of the week of National Hotel Exposition in New York City held each November. On Wednesday, November 16th, 1927, at such a reunion banquet at the Roosevelt Hotel, plans were definitely formulated for a permanent alumni association, John M. Crandall ’25 being elected acting secretary.

At the call of Mr. Crandall, School alumni met on Saturday morning, May 12th, 1928, in Willard Straight, for an organization meeting, and as a result the Cornell Society of Hotelmen was definitely and formally organized with the following officers:

- President – John M. Crandall ’25
- Secretary – Treasurer – John Courtney ’25