

FEDERATION OF NEW YORK STATE BIRD CLUBS

HISTORY OF THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

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Introduction: Fifty years old, going strong, and never healthier! Certainly an achievement worthy of pause and reflection. So let's do it. This Golden Anniversary record of our history will describe some of the most noteworthy events and activities during these last fifty years. It will also try, with sincere apologies to all not mentioned, to capture for posterity the record of at least some of the hundreds of wonderful volunteers who have made reaching this Golden Anniversary possible.

THE BEGINNINGS

Origins: As Gordon Meade, the Federation's first president said in his 1988 *Origins*, after the end of World War II "it became inescapably self-evident that some mechanism was needed whereby the birders of the state could get to know each other, to share their ideas and experiences, to jointly promote research and education in the field of ornithology, and to secure a stronger voice in conservation matters."

The first steps to address this need took place in Rochester in 1946, starting with an informal brainstorming dinner meeting on March 22nd, followed by another on October 26th. Those meetings set the stage for a formal meeting at the Rochester Museum of Arts and Science on December 7th. That meeting, hosted jointly by Buffalo Ornithological Society and Genesee Ornithological Society, and to which all known bird clubs in the state were invited, was convened to discuss the feasibility of forming a statewide organization. Twenty-one delegates representing 12 organizations attended this historic meeting. The organizations present, in addition to the two hosts, were Buffalo Audubon Society, Burroughs Audubon Nature Club, Cayuga Bird Club, Eaton Bird Club, Elmira Garden Club's Bird Section, Keuka Park Conservation Club, Sassafra Bird Club, Watertown Bird Club, Watkins Glen Bird Club, and Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology. Interest had also been expressed by others who were unable to attend.

Winston Brockner fondly recalls this gathering of "a remarkable group of enthusiastic people" that included, among others, Dr. Gordon M. Meade, who presided at the meeting, Dr. Peter Paul Kellogg of Cornell, who was given Secretary pro tem duties, Dr. Foster L. Gambrell of Geneva, Dr. and Mrs. Harry C. York of Elmira, Edwin G. Foster, Albert Bussewitz, Fred Hall, and Fred Raetz, all of

Rochester, Hazel P. Ellis of Keuka Park, Alice B. English of Amsterdam, Mrs. James A. Common of Watertown, and Louise Helfer of Watkins Glen. Meade and Brockner led a discussion, from which it became obvious that interest in forming a statewide organization was unanimous, as was the opinion that both a state ornithological journal and a new state bird book should be part of the objective. With this enthusiasm, Meade and Brockner were empowered to appoint a committee to prepare a draft constitution.

This work progressed throughout most of 1947, including meetings in Kellogg's office at Cornell as well as one in New York City at the American Museum of Natural History, and culminated in an organizational meeting in Amsterdam on October 27, 1947. Twenty-one people attended, representing 13 clubs, and at the end a proposed constitution was approved and ready to submit to the charter clubs for formal adoption. Temporary officers were also identified to hold office until the constitution was adopted and regular elections could be held. They were: President, Gordon M. Meade; Vice President, Winston W. Brockner; Corresponding Secretary, Peter Paul Kellogg; Recording Secretary, Fred M. Hall; Treasurer, Guy Bartlett. Most people, with sound reasoning, think of this as the actual beginning of the Federation. Indeed, to this day our stationery says, "Organized in 1947."

Actually, however, it took another year to deal with the necessary legal and organizing matters. Then, on November 13–14, 1948, the first formal Annual Meeting of the members of the newly created Federation was held. As initially organized, the Federation was unincorporated; incorporation didn't occur until 1955. State law requires all such organizations to hold an annual meeting of its members for basic business matters such as approving by-laws and holding elections. From the beginning, the Federation has included this required "business meeting" as one part of a larger two or three day weekend meeting, essentially organized and hosted by one or more of our Member Clubs. The Federation has consistently referred to these entire weekend meetings as the "Annual Meeting."

First Annual Meeting: The 1948 meeting, hosted by Genesee Ornithological Society and Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, was held at the museum. Essential business matters included formal approval of the new by-laws under which the organization would operate, and election of its first officers. From this date, the Federation was "officially" underway.

This first Annual Meeting actually established a model, set a standard for not only the form and content, but also the caliber of future Annual Meetings, which, with but few and occasional changes, hold to this day. In addition to the required business meeting, the weekend includes displays, a paper session, field trips, workshops (starting in 1975), a formal banquet with speaker, and just great fellowship. The first banquet speaker was Dr. Arthur A. Allen, who spoke of the "Quest for the Bristle-thighed Curlew," and the discovery of the nest of that elusive bird.

The first field trips found such local November rarities as a Red Phalarope, an Eared Grebe, a flock of Purple Sandpipers, and a very tardy Great Egret.

The first paper session also set a very high standard by including:
"Status of the Little Gull on the Niagara Frontier" by Harold D. Mitchell
"Observations on the Birds of the Adirondacks" by Harold Axtell
"How Birds Find Their Way" by Peter Paul Kellogg
"The Snowy Owl Incursion in New York in 1945-46" by Gordon M. Meade
"Northward Extension of the Range of Certain Species into the Hudson Valley" by Robert F. Deed
"Changing Distribution and Abundance of Certain Passerine Birds in Western New York" by W. C. Vaughan
"Observation of Common Tern Colonies on Oneida Lake" by Hazel R. Ellis
"Birds Can Be Missionaries" by Walter Elwood
"Bird Activities on the Montezuma Wildlife Refuge" by F. L. Gambrel

That's the way it all began. The first Annual Meeting clearly left all future hosts with a formidable goal to meet or surpass.

Charter Member Clubs: Initially, the Federation had 18 Member Clubs: Baldwin Bird Club, Brooklyn Bird Club, Buffalo Audubon Society, Buffalo Ornithological Society, Burroughs Audubon Nature Club, Cayuga Bird Club, Elon Eaton Bird Club (now Eaton Birding Society), Elmira Garden Club - Bird Section, Genesee Ornithological Society, Schenectady Bird Club (now Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club), Keuka Park Conservation Club, Linnaean Society of New York, North Country Bird Club, Queens County Bird Club, Rockland Audubon Society, Sassafras Bird Club (Amsterdam), Scarsdale Audubon Society, Watkins-Montour Bird Club (now Schuyler County Bird Club.)

See **TABLE 1** for a record of all current and former Member Clubs.

Charter Individual Members: Twenty people became individual members in 1948 or 1949, and may thus be considered our Charter members: Guy Bartlett of Schenectady, John B. Belknap of Gouverneur, Bernard P. Brennan of Brooklyn, Winston William Brockner of Buffalo, Mrs. Emma B. Brush of Brooklyn, Mrs. James A. Common of Watertown, Mrs. Charles J. Grace of Slingerlands, Louise Helfer of Watkins Glen, Mrs. Lester Loomis of Hammond, Louisiana, Samuel R. Madison of Delmar, Dr. Gordon M. Meade of Rochester, Harold D. Mitchell of Williamsville, Agnes M. Orbison of Elmira, Dr. Minnie B. Scotland of Cohoes, Mrs. Dayton Stoner of Albany, Beatrice Sullivan of Schenectady, Nelle G. Van Vorst of Schenectady, William C. Vaughan of Youngstown, Mrs. Clayton Wodell of Ellisburg, and Rev. John L. Wolff of Mohawk.