

OPPOSITION TO THE FORMATION OF THE AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY: NOTED ADDED IN PROOF⁽¹⁾

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The formation of the American Chemical Society (ACS) on April 6, 1876 in New York has often been linked in different ways to the Centennial of Chemistry celebration held in Northumberland, Pennsylvania on July 31 and August 1, 1874. A typical example is one drawn from the 50th anniversary of the ACS in 1926, when Samuel Goldschmidt, who was present in Northumberland in 1874, commented that “from this meeting sprang the present Society, the largest and strongest scientific society in the world (2). Goldschmidt’s implication is that there is a direct link between 1874 and 1876.

The intent of my previous paper (1) was to show that this link is very tenuous at best. As that issue of the *Bulletin* was going to press, a letter (3) was found in the

archives of Pennsylvania State University that adds considerable support to my premise that care must be used when associating the origin of the ACS with the 1874 Centennial of Chemistry celebration.

This letter was written by Charles L. Parsons, Secretary of the ACS, on official ACS stationery. It was address to Gerald L. Wendt, then dean of the School of Chemistry and Physics at Penn State, and dated August 5, 1926. Parsons was responding to Wendt’s invitation to join the celebration at the Joseph Priestley House in Northumberland, when a small Museum of Priestley artifacts would be dedicated as part of the ACS Golden Anniversary celebration. In his typical fashion, Parsons succinctly told Wendt his opinion of the relationship between 1874 and 1876:

There is one thing that I want to bring to your personal attention, but I do not want you to get the idea that I am an iconoclast or that I am worrying myself seriously about the absolute correctness of history. However, if you will read the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Number of the American Chemical Society (4) and study it with care you will, I think, see clearly that altho [sic] some people have attempted to claim so, *the little meeting at Northumberland had little or nothing to do with the organization of the American Chemical Society*. It was the precursor of Section C of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, but the American Chemical Society was started quite independently two years later, and I fail to find anywhere in the statements of those years that the calling together of a preliminary meeting for the American Chemical Society in New York *had the slightest connection with the meeting two years before at Northumberland*.

It is simply one of those traditions which has grown like the tradition that has been in my family for a good many years that a certain pair of silk stockings had been worn by one of my ancestors when he signed the Declaration of Independence. The silk stockings surely look as if they might have been worn by one of my ancestors, but the Josiah Bartlett who was my ancestor was a farmer down in Lebanon, Connecticut, and was a very different man from the Josiah Bartlett of New Hampshire who actually did the signing. With all respect, however, to the silk stocking. Their names simply happen to be the same (5).

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. J. J. Bohning, *Bull. Hist. Chem.*, **2001**, 26, 92–103.
2. S. A. Goldschmidt, in C. A. Browne, Ed., *A Half Century of Chemistry in America*, Mack Printing Company, Easton, PA, 1926, 3-10.
3. Pennsylvania State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts; Joseph Priestley Collection; File Folder VF 7-1: Priestley Museum Dedication, September 5, 1926.
4. *Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the American Chemical Society*, Chemical Publishing Company, Easton, PA, 1902.
5. I am indebted to Professor Roy Olofson of Pennsylvania State University for calling this letter to my attention.

FUTURE ACS MEETINGS

April 7-11, **2002**—Orlando, FL
August 18-22, **2002**—Boston, MA
March 23-27, **2003**—New Orleans, LA
September 7-11, **2003**—New York, NY
March 28-April 1, **2004**—Anaheim, CA
August 22-26, **2004**—Philadelphia, PA
March 13-17, **2005**—San Diego, CA
August 28-September 1, **2005**—Washington, DC
March 26-30, **2006**—Atlanta, GA
September 10-14, 2006—San Francisco, CA
March 25-29, **2007**—Chicago, IL
August 19-23, **2007**—Boston, MA
April 6-10, **2008**—San Antonio, TX
August 17-22, **2008**—Philadelphia, PA
March 22-26-, **2009**—Salt Lake City, UT
August 16-21, **2009**—Washington, DC
March 21-26, **2010**—San Francisco, CA
August 22-27, **2010**—New York, NY
March 27-31, **2011**—Anaheim, CA
August 28-September 1, **2011**—Chicago, IL
March 25-29, **2012**—San Diego, CA
August 19-23, **2012**—Boston, MA