

THE FIRST COA PRESIDENTS

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As part of its commemoration of the centenary of the Modern Olympic Movement, the Canadian Olympic Association has distributed a collage of images from the history of Olympic activities in Canada. The long-serving amateur sports leader J.H. Crocker peers out from the centre of the poster, over the caption, "COA President 1904." This claim is based upon the statement that Crocker was COA President from 1904 to 1921, published in "Canada and Olympism" in the *Olympic Review*.¹

Yet no Canadian NOC existed in 1904, nor was J.H. Crocker ever president of the organization which was subsequently established. I hope this brief report will set the record straight. It is based upon the minutes of the Amateur Athletic Union, an indispensable source for Canadian sports historians, a complete set of which is available on microfilm from the National Archives of Canada. (The AAU of C was created in 1884; in 1899, it was renamed the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union, and in 1909, it became the AAU of C once again. The entire set is listed under the AAU of C, Record Group 28 I 150.) In keeping with their ambition to provide orderly government to Canadian sport, the AAUers kept meticulous records. The minutes of their annual general meetings, containing the full texts of officers' reports, the voting on decisions and often verbatim transcripts of important debates, were usually printed, proofread and widely distributed. For the early years, there are also handwritten minutes of board and executive meetings, which note important correspondence. To the best of my knowledge, they were never seriously challenged as a statement of record. I consider them to be a reliable source.

When Pierre de Coubertin convened what became the founding meeting of the International Olympic Committee at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1894, no Canadian was invited, nor is there any record that the AAU of C took notice. No Canadian took part in the inaugural Olympic Games of 1896 in Athens. International competition was simply beyond the fledgling Union's organizational abilities. For example, in 1893, when J. Astley Cooper invited the AAU of C to send a Canadian team to his proposed Pan-Britannic Games, the AAUers concluded, after circulating member clubs, that such an effort was premature.² Even six years later, "nothing could be done" when renowned Canadian miler George Orton proposed that Canada send a team to Europe.³ Orton did compete in the Paris Olympics of 1900 -- he won the gold medal in the 2500-metre steeplechase -- but it was in the uniform of the New York Athletic Club. Alex Grant of St. Marys, Ontario and his brother Dick also participated in

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those Games, but they represented the University of Pennsylvania and the Boston Athletic Association, respectively. No other Canadians were entered.⁴ The *events* were so obscured by the World's Fair under whose auspices they were held that the athletes only realized that they were competing in "Olympic Games" when they read the inscriptions on their medals.

The AAUers began to stir when it was announced that the Olympics would be held in the United States in 1904. At the 1902 annual meeting, they promised Gordon Strong of Chicago (where the Games were first scheduled to take place) their full support, "recogniz(ing) that the International Olympic Games (are) the true, proper, and unquestioned international amateur championships."⁵ They encouraged the Americans to create a "Canadian Sports Committee for the World's Fair" to facilitate Canadian participation. But there is no evidence that any such Committee was ever formed.⁶ In the end, the Games were held in St. Louis⁷ and individuals and clubs entered themselves. At their conclusion, the Board recorded "its gratification at the work of (track and field competitors) Desmarteau, Deer, Peck and Lukeman. . . and that a copy of this motion be sent to these gentlemen."⁸ But there is no indication that the Board understood these athletes to be members of a national representative Canadian Team. In St. Louis, too, numerous athletic events were spread out over several months and historians have great difficulty determining which were "official" Olympic events and which were not.⁹

In 1905, the minutes indicate that CAAU president P. Gorman had been invited to serve on the organizing committee for the 1906 "Interim" Olympics in Athens, Greece. But there is no record that he accepted.¹⁰ The Canadian athletes who travelled to the Games, notably marathon winner Billy Sherring, got there on their own.

In point of fact, very few NOCs were in existence anywhere before 1905. In most countries with organized sports at the time, the initiative to put Olympic competition on a nationally representative basis, which necessitated formulation of responsible NOCs, came from the British Olympic Association (itself only formed in 1905) in the early stages of its preparations for the 1908 Olympics in London. In Canada's case, in 1907 the BOA asked Governor-General Earl Grey to coordinate Canadian participation in the 1908 Games. Grey delegated this task to his secretary, the veteran colonial administrator John Hanbury-Williams. Hanbury-Williams asked P.D. Ross (the publisher of the *Ottawa Journal* and a Stanley Cup trustee) and Dr. Bruce Macdonald (of St. Andrew's College and the University of Toronto Athletic Association) to join him on what became the Canadian Olympic Committee.¹¹ At the time, the CAAU was at loggerheads with a Montreal Amateur Athletic Association-inspired breakaway group, the Amateur Athletic, Federation of Canada, which allowed amateurs to compete with professionals.¹² Hanbury-Williams' Committee worked with both federations to organize selection trials, and then named the athletes on the team. They appointed CAAU President William Stark, a Toronto deputy police chief, as its Commissioner in London (the first Canadian Olympic Chef de Mission?); and J.H. Crocker of the YMCA as Team Manager. This -- and nothing else -- should be considered the first Canadian NOC.

By 1909, the AAF had lost much public support because of its haughty failure to recruit adherents to its athletic eligibility position. The AAF's endorsement of the

American protest against Canadian marathoner Tom Longboat forced it to surrender. Meanwhile, the AAU of C signed up hundreds of new clubs. In a face-saving gesture, a “new” federation was created, the AAU of C, but it was the strict “no contamination” rule of the CAAU which the new federation adopted. In 1910, after consulting Ross and Macdonald, the AAU of C nominated Hanbury-Williams (who had been posted to Scotland after just five years in Canada) to the IOC. He was subsequently named as the first IOC member for Canada.¹³

In 1911, after correspondence with Hanbury-Williams, the AAU of C created another “Canadian Olympic Committee” for the purpose of organizing the team to Stockholm. The Chair was AAU of C President James Merrick, a Toronto corporate lawyer and one of the fiercest advocates of strict amateurism during the battles between the CAAU and the AAF.¹⁴ When he returned from those Games, Merrick reported that the IOC wanted permanent NOCs.¹⁵ The AAU of C thus created the Canadian Olympic Association in 1913. It also decided that “the present Chairman of the Canadian Olympic Committee (J.G. Merrick) be continued in that capacity.”¹⁶ Merrick stayed on until 1921, when he succeeded Hanbury-Williams as IOC member for Canada.¹⁷

At its 1921 annual meeting, the AAU curtailed the growing power of the COA by making it a standing committee called the Canadian Olympic Committee. The new chair was to be elected by the members, who were to be appointed by the AAU branches.¹⁸ As Gordon MacDonald has argued, this step was promoted by the AAUs’ desire for greater control of the increasingly prestigious Olympic project.¹⁹ The process was not finalized until the following year, when another veteran Toronto amateur leader, P.J. Mulqueen was elected Chair.²⁰

J.H. Crocker had a long and distinguished career in amateur sport and physical education. He served as AAU of C president in 1933 and 1934, and was secretary of the Canadian Olympic Committee from 1922 to 1948. But he never led or chaired the Canadian NOC.²¹ He himself recounts the above history in a paper, “Amateur Sports and Games in Canada,” which he wrote for the AAU’s 60th anniversary in 1934. (It, too, can be found in the National Archives in Ottawa). The secondary sources say very much the same.²²

The first COA “president” was thus John Hanbury-Williams. Although he was only active during the preparations for the 1908 Games, and actually left Canada in 1909, he was considered the final authority on Olympic matters until the organizing committee for the 1912 Games was formed, so we can credit him with holding this position until 1911. The next presidents were James Merrick 1911-21, and P.J. Mulqueen 1922-1946.

Notes

1. No. 80-81, July 1974, pp326-357. According to COA Librarian Sylvia Doucette, the article was written by former COA Executive Director A.A. Crowell.

2. Minutes of the 1894 Annual Meeting pp. 3-4.

3. Minutes of the Executive Committee, September 5, 1889, p. 173.

4. Johann Louw, "Canada's Participation in the Olympic Games," unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1971, pp. 31-32.
5. Minutes of the 1902 Annual Meeting, pp. 30 and 33.
6. On October 31, 1903, pp. 119- 121 the Board of Governors minuted that it had received no reply from J.E. Sullivan, the secretary of the American AAU, to its queries about this committee.
7. Robert Knight Barney, "Born from Dilemma: America Awakens to the Modern Olympic Games, 1901-1903," *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, 1, 1992, pp. 92-135.
8. Minutes of the Board of Governors, September 3, 1904, p. 144.
9. Bill Mallon, "A Statistical Summary of the 1904 St. Louis Games," unpublished manuscript, Durham, North Carolina, 1981.
10. Minutes of the Board of Governors, October 4, 1905, p. 154.
11. Minutes of the 1908 Annual Meeting, 4-9.
12. Donald Morrow, "A Case Study in Amateur Conflict: The Athletic War in Canada, 1906-08," *The British Journal of Sports History* 3 (2), 1986, pp. 173- 190.
13. Minutes of the 1911 Annual Meeting, p. 7.
14. Minutes of the 1911 Annual Meeting, pp. 67-68.
15. Minutes of the 1912 Annual Meeting, pp. 4-12.
16. Minutes of the 1913 Annual Meeting, pp. 92-94.
17. Minutes of the 1913, 1919, 1920 and 1921 Annual Meetings.
18. Minutes of the 1921 Annual Meeting pp. 21-22, 30, and 38.
19. "The Amateur Athletic Union of Canada and the Control of the Canadian Olympic Committee," paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History, Saskatoon, May 30, 1994.
20. Minutes of the 1923 Annual Meeting, pp. 8-9.
21. Mary Keyes, "A Canadian Physical Educator - John Howard Crocker," *Proceedings of the 1st Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Edmonton: Faculty of Physical Education, University of Alberta, 1970), pp. 453-463.
22. E.g. Frank Cosentino and Glynn Leyshon, *Olympic Gold: Canadian Winners of the Summer Games* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975); Keith L. Lansley, "The Amateur Athletic Union of Canada and Changing Concepts of Amateurism," unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, 1971; Jean Leiper, "Canada and the IOC," *Proceedings of the 5th Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Toronto: School of Physical and Health Education, University of Toronto, 1982), pp. 231-237; Louw, "Canada's Participation in the Olympic Games;" Howard Stidwell, "A History of the Canadian Olympic Association," unpubl. M.P.E. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1981.