Dashiell Hammett Society of Studs
San Francisco International Headquarters

Officers

President	Bill Diefenbach
Communications Czar	Geoff Noakes
Procurer of Venues	Lee Tyree
AgendaMeister	Ken Monk
Archivist of Knowledge	Dale Fehringer

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Minutes of Meeting

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

Looking for the Green Flash

A dinner and business meeting of the Dashiell Hammett Society of Studs was held Wednesday, June 21 at the historic and newly-renovated Cliff House, at 1090 Point Lobos in San Francisco. It was a legendary event. Five highly-reflective men watched the sun set into the Pacific Ocean, guzzled strong drinks, devoured some very tasty food, and engaged in manly conversation -- all the while keeping an eye out for the elusive green flash.

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The Longest Day of the Year

This was one of the nicest restaurants at which the DHSOS has dined. That isn't to say it is too nice for us, which is not the case. But the Cliff House is a restaurant our wives would set foot in, which is opposed to a tenet we are trying to uphold.

Nevertheless, the Cliff House was a fine choice for the DHSOS. In fact, the PREZ went out of character and commended the Procurer of Venues on his choice of establishments.

This was an ideal setting for the DHSOS. The Cliff House has a quality bar with helpful female bartenders, waiters who are helpful but not a pain, and an incredible view of the ocean. While we got settled, groups of pelicans flew across the reds and golds of a gorgeous northern California sunset. Our waiter kept coming back to adjust the sun out of Ken's eyes.

It was the longest day of the year, and almost nine o'clock when the sun finally sank into the Pacific Ocean. We sat at a perfectly fine round table, which is the custom of the DHSOS. Our table had been painstakingly secured by the Procurer of Venues. It was not the table he wanted -- that went to another party – and you could tell that was eating at him as we sat down to dinner.

This is actually the fourth Cliff House.

THE FIRST CLIFF HOUSE

The first Cliff House was a modest structure built in 1863 by Masters Butler and Buckley. The guest register bore the names of three U.S. Presidents as well as prominent San Francisco families such as the Hearst's, Stanford's and Crocker's who would drive their carriages out to Ocean Beach for horse racing and recreation. In 1881, the Cliff House was sold to Adolph Sutro, a self made millionaire, philanthropist and later, mayor of San Francisco. Seven years later, Sutro built a railroad to bring the general public to this seaside attraction. On Christmas Day 1894, the Cliff House was destroyed by fire

THE SECOND CLIFF HOUSE

Sutro spent $50,000 in 1896 to rebuild the Cliff House in grandiose style. Fashioned after a French Chateau, the second Cliff House boasted eight stories, spires and an observation tower two hundred feet above sea level. Though never a hotel, it served as an elegant site for dining, dancing and entertainment. On the third floor were a photo gallery, reception room, parlors and panoramic views from its large windows. The second floor held 20 private lunch rooms, a large art gallery and a gem exhibit. At ground level, there was a large dining room, parlor, bar, numerous private dining rooms and kitchens. This was the most resplendent and beloved of all the Cliff Houses but it was short lived. This exquisite building survived the 1906 earthquake only to succumb to a raging fire the following year.

THE THIRD CLIFF HOUSE

A third Cliff House was built in 1909 by Sutro's daughter Emma. It was neoclassic in design and carried on the tradition of sumptuous dining. The Depression and two world wars took their toll on the area however, and the Sutro family sold the Cliff House in 1952 to George Whitney. The Cliff House was remodeled several times before the National Park Service acquired it in 1977.

THE FOURTH CLIFF HOUSE

Today the Cliff House is preserved as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Cliff House—San Francisco's westernmost restaurant, known for its expansive views of the Pacific—has been remodeled several times over the last 84 years. Most recently, under the direction of the National Park Service, a $14 million renovation returned the building to its 1909 design. The park service celebrated a groundbreaking ceremony Jan. 23, 2002.

Before renovation

After renovation

"We've peeled back the layers, demolishing any additions that were put in post-1909," says Carrie Strahan, the Park Service's project manager for the renovation.

The project removed facades added over the last 84 years, refinished the ornamental trim, and remodeled the existing wooden-framed windows in turn-of-the-20th-century style.

Renovators added a new two-story section, the Sutro Wing, to the main building, and gutted the inside of the original structure. While the interior redesign was massive, renovators retained certain historic features, like the staircase's marble veneer and a tin ceiling long-hidden by a drop ceiling.

The Sutro Wing -- named in honor of former San Francisco mayor Adolph Sutro, onetime owner of the property -- houses a restaurant.

Dan Hountalas and his wife, Mary, have been the concessionaires of the Cliff House's restaurants, bars, and gift shop for the past 30 years. "We tried to have something for everybody, so you could be in a running suit or a tuxedo," Hountalas says.

Working with the National Park Service (the property stewards), owner Dan Hountalas transformed the landmark with an $18 million renovation. Now wide public terraces -- great for seal and whale watching -- sweep around three sides of the Cliff House. The refurbished original building houses a bistro and to-go counter, and a new, ultramodern north wing encloses the posh and excellent Sutro's restaurant. Feeling nostalgic for the way things were? Camera Obscura still hunkers outside. Besides, the Cliff House's main attraction hasn't changed: As Hountalas says, you can "stand out here, watch the waves and fog, and never get bored."

An Educational Bar Session

Our time in the bar included discovering a new brand of vermouth (Lillet) that puts a little something special in martinis.

And there was quite a discussion of *the Bird* – its previous and current whereabouts, and the treatment it has received in the homes of various DHSOS members.

Note: If you haven't been keeping up with the DHSOS, the Bird is a life-size original replica, in original replica wrapping, of the Maltese Falcon, which resides in "an appropriately prominent location" in a DHSOS member's house. The lucky member rotates each meeting alphabetically by first name. It is now at Lee's house.

It seems that in some members' homes this most sacred of icons has been treated with less than full and proper respect. There is no need to name the guilty parties -- you know who you are.

Lee is not among you. He has not yet hosted *the Bird*, but he has it now. He assured the group this is not going to be a problem in his household. "If I say it, the Little Lady goes along with it," he proclaimed at 6:35 PM. He categorically stated that *the Bird* will reside on his mantle or the adjacent lighted glass shelves the entire time it is in his possession. We'll see.

Geoff reported that while *the Bird* was at his house his teenage daughter Katharine and a friend proclaimed it

"scary, creepy, and stupid." It was shortly thereafter removed to the back office.

Beautiful and Sophisticated Young Lady

Geoff passed around photos of Katharine's graduation and party, including shots of some grown-up blond lady kissing her father. Without the DHSOS, she would not have turned out so well.

The DHSOS issued a Proclamation, stating that, "Katharine looked beautiful and sophisticated at her graduation," and offered congratulations to her father. He, of course, accepted full credit.

Sharing Thoughts with GW

Lee's and Misty's impending trip to Washington DC was a source of active discussion. Among the highlights will be tours of Montpelier, Monticello, and Mt. Vernon; attending the Evening Parade; seeing a ballet with Christina; and a briefing session in the White House, during which Lee intends to share his thoughts with G.W. That should be interesting.

Lee also reported that his nephew and wife (Tim and Diane) and their lively twin boys are going to move to Austin, Texas. Lee is sick about it.

Lee also reported that his purchase of Tom McCrary's Porsche is complete. Now to get the car to SF.

Call to Order

It was about this time, which was about half way through the first course, that the PREZ called the meeting to order. So at 7:17 PM, the AgendaMeister whipped out the agenda and the meeting began.

Beginner's Luck

Bill shared the good fortune he and Beck had while gambling in Ely, Nevada on the way back from Illinois. Through a combination of skill and luck, they won $75 playing the blackjack tables. That left them a tidy profit, since it was five times what they paid for their room that night.

Ken and Vicki's Last Camping Trip

"It was a very good family outing." That was the report from Ken's family camping trip to Yosemite. There was hiking, biking, and lots of good company, and he reported the falls are jaw-dropping gorgeous. Vicki didn't really cotton to camping out, however, and this might have been their last such experience. A poll of the DHSOS revealed that is probably the case for all.

It's Too Big!

Lee briefed us on his experience while sharing digital photos of the Tyree Family Farm Reunion with his family. He tried to send them a bunch of photos, but they complained the file was too large. Even just a few photos elicited the same complaint. "I don't know what the problem was," he exclaimed, "I guess they are using telegraph lines, rather than DSL."

Next, Lee checked out several companies that host online photo albums, including Flickr and Picasa, before he finally found one (Snapfish) that would allow him to upload his photos. It was another technological challenge adeptly met by a member of the DHSOS – click here to see the photos.

Regarding the Tyree Family Farm Reunion, Lee reported that it was a complete success. Everyone had a

good time, and now even his relatives are now glad they did it.

Bill's favorite reunion-related event was Saturday night dinner in the chicken house, and his favorite sight was the sun setting into the cornfields and the dust from Beck's car snaking its way across the landscape as Bill guided Beck in for a chicken house landing.

The Lowdown on Splash Hits

Ken recently attended a Giants baseball game (to see how the other half lives) and wondered aloud why there have been so few home runs hit into the Bay (just 40 since the park opened in 2000). Quite a discussion ensued, with each Stud offering a plausible explanation. Opinions ranged from the height of the right-field wall to pitchers throwing outside to left-hand hitters.

"The prevailing winds from the West create an air tunnel over the west side of the ballpark, and knock down balls hit to right field."

-- The PREZ, on why there are few "splash hits" at PacBell SBC AT&T ballpark

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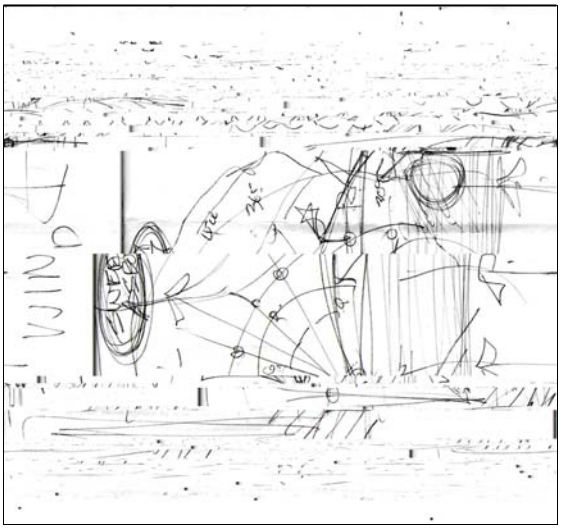
But Bill the Architect came up with what he believes is the real reason. It had something to do with the wind knocking down balls hit to right field. He sketched this drawing, which he said offers conclusive proof of his theory.



Geoff reported on a very pleasant anniversary dinner he and the Mrs. enjoyed at an inn called "River's End," near the Russian River in Jenner. A smile crept over his face as he recalled the wonderful food and pleasant surroundings.

He lost his smile when he tried to update the group on a new text messaging service introduced by VeriSign and Google. The service allows cell phone users to send and receive free text messages and make queries such as sports scores, stock quotes, and directions. Half his audience was discussing cars or golf or some other such manly topic, and Ken and Dale fumbled with their cell phones like teenage boys trying to unhook a bra. Geoff eventually gave up and instructed the group to get the manuals that came with their phones and look up how to send an SMS message.

BBQ Lessons

Ken asked for advice on grilling meat with a gas-operated Weber grill – another manly topic. Two alternatives were discussed:

Option #1: Slow and easy

1. Turn all burners on high until the grill is very hot
2. Turn the burners down to the MOM (medium-off-medium) setting.
3. Put the meat in the middle between the burners.
4. Cook four minutes twice on each side.

Option #2: Sear and Turn

1. Turn all burners on high.
2. Put the meat on directly over a burner.
3. Sear for two minutes on each side.
4. Turn the burners down to medium high and cook for 6-7 minutes on each side.

Flipping the Bird

The Bird sat quietly next to our table all night and was peacefully transferred from Ken to Lee at the conclusion of the meeting. As early stated, Lee has guaranteed that it will reside in a prominent place, either on his mantle or on the glass shelves next to the mantle, for the entire time it is in his home.

Adjournment

At this point, the agenda was complete and the food was gone. Eventually we had to surrender our table and make our way home. Dale took a taxi to SFO, for an overnight flight to D.C. Lee was heading to D.C. the next day, for a nearly three-week trip to the East Coast. The rest of the Society had to get up the next day and go to work, to ensure adequate social security for Dale and Lee.

Fireworks were going off along the coast as we headed our separate ways. It was another excellent evening with good friends.

The next meeting of the DHSOS will take place somewhere in SF sometime in October.