

The Campaign to Save THE NATIONAL COLLECTION OF HEADS AND HORNS



Boone and Crockett Club members, Jack Parker (2nd from left), William Harold Nesbitt (3rd from left), and Lowell E. Baier (4th from left) were instrumental in reviving and finding a new home for the National Collection of Heads and Horns.

PART 4

This four part series will narrate the history and legacy of Boone and Crockett Club's National Collection of Heads and Horns. From its inception in 1906 to the big move this spring to Springfield, Missouri.

It is a story that begins with an undertaking to memorialize through museum displays big game species whose futures, at the time, looked bleak. It is, however, a story that ends on a far more positive note: the dramatic restoration of these same species to healthy and abundant numbers throughout much of their native range. This historical recap was originally published in the 8th edition of Boone and Crockett Club's *Records of North American Big Game*.

Club member, Fairfield Osborn opens the NYC Aquarium in 1957. Osborn and the Zoological Park were increasingly preoccupied with endangered species being perpetuated as “living treasures” in zoo wards” and with the development of new methods through which animal life could be more sensitively and imaginatively maintained in captivity. The animals within the Zoo were referred to as “the living collection.”



The available written history of the 1930s is unclear as to whether the apparent philosophical differences on emphasis in the National Collection’s *raison d’être* were real or imaginary between Hornaday’s successor, M.S. Garretson, the Zoological Society’s Heads & Horns Committee, and the Boone and Crockett Club.

But, history is clear on several facts. Notwithstanding Garretson’s regular reports of large crowds visiting the Museum from throughout the world, the Society refused to provide him funds to print a catalog or guide book of the exhibits, although he pleaded for over 10 years. Of course, the 1930s brought the Zoological Park into a hard financial period, since much of their funding was privately donated. But their budget shows the Heads and Horns Collection being the only category in which funding, once begun, was totally suspended between 1896 and 1963 (save for building renovations in 195–60). Moreover, the only private donations to the Heads and Horns Fund after 1922 were \$1,000 donated by Madison Grant in 1937 and \$200 by Alfred Ely in 1936–39.

Where were the Zoological Society’s monies going? Into the Wild Life Protection Fund, the Education Fund, the Tropical Research Account, the Aquarium Research Account, and many others. The budget figures clearly signaled a shifting of emphasis in the focus of the Zoological Park.

History has also recorded a major changing of the guard within the Zoological Society and Park during this period. Between 1935 and 1940, all of the original founders and staff of the Zoological Society and Park that shepherded it into being over the previous 40 odd years died or retired, leaving no one in high command who had been molded by the past and felt an obligation to the old ways and traditions.

Fairfield Osborn, son of Henry F. Osborn, one of the Society’s principal founders in 1895, left Wall Street to become secretary of the Society in 1935 and president in 1940, immediately assuming a vigorous new leadership emphasizing conservation, research and education.

The National Collection seems to have been forgotten during the 1940s and the initiation of the Osborn era. Dr. John Tee-Van, then the executive secretary of the Zoological Society and operational chief of the Zoological Park, wrote Alfred Ely, head of the Society’s Heads & Horns Committee and also treasurer of the

Boone and Crockett Club, in 1950, “As far as sportsmen are concerned, the collection now is something of the past. I do not believe that many sportsmen think about it or come to see it.” The South Hall containing the “Geographic Collection” was closed to the public and used for temporary exhibits. Dr. Tee-Van, in consultation with Dr. James L. Clark, proposed consolidating the two collections into one (total of 2,371 specimens in 1940) to achieve Hornaday’s first objective of zoological completeness, discarding all duplicates and retaining only the best specimens of each species and subspecies. They advocated an exhibit devoted to the biology of the horns (their evolution, growth, and purpose in the scheme of life) and a reorganization that would relate the heads whenever possible to living animals in the park.

In 1949, President Fairfield Osborn encouraged Boone and Crockett Club member Samuel B. Webb to cull the Collection and “sell” it to the American Museum of Natural History or the Smithsonian. Neither museum wanted it. Webb did, however, cull the inferior heads, reorganize the remaining Collection and arrange for a taxidermist to spend over a year at the Zoological Park to renovate the Collection. Webb also classified, measured, and ranked the remaining 73 North American heads using the measurement system under development by

the Big Game Records Committee of the Boone and Crockett Club. The best 11 trophies were photographed by Grancel Fitz for the 3rd edition of the Club's records book, published in 1952.

The Zoological Society's attitude toward the records keeping system and their lack of response to the Club's efforts for restoration and reorganization was lamented by Webb in a letter to Alfred Ely in 1953:

My hope is that the Zoological Society or the Conservation Foundation will be willing to recognize our work in this field [of big game record's keeping] as the type that does promote sound conservation and help us with a financial contribution. Of course, you realize that the National Collection cannot benefit in the future without our knowledge and leads on record trophies. It is too bad we can't get Fairfield [Osborn] to take some action to revitalize that collection which could be made into an asset to the Zoo. I believe that funds for such work are available. In its present condition, I cannot solicit world's record trophy gifts from owners known to this Committee. We are ready and willing to help guide its restoration.

The Zoological Society finally responded to the Club's growing concern over the state of the Collection. In 1959 they expended \$21,800, (the first monies spent since 1937–39) to renovate the Heads and Horns Museum, then 38 years old, and refurbish the collection. The Collection was further consolidated to show only “the most important and significant heads,” reducing it to about 300 specimens, with the

balance being disbursed, most without a trace. The emphasis of the Collection was now solidly on trophy character rather than zoological completeness and classification. Moreover, the Collection now contained the treasured Chadwick Ram that had been restored in 1955 at the expense of the Boone and Crockett Club and transferred from the American Museum of Natural History.

As if writing the epitaph of the National Collection, Zoological Park Director William G. Conway's 1968 Annual Report stated:

Even if zoos had not been established for education and recreation, they would be instituted today as sanctuaries for the growing number of species threatened with extinction. Increasingly, the potential of zoos and aquariums for research upon forms of life not readily maintained in conventional laboratories is being recognized—and it is about time. It is remarkable that museums holding collections of dead animals have always been deemed places worthy of research and study while living collections of animals have frequently been relegated to the status of mere amusement.

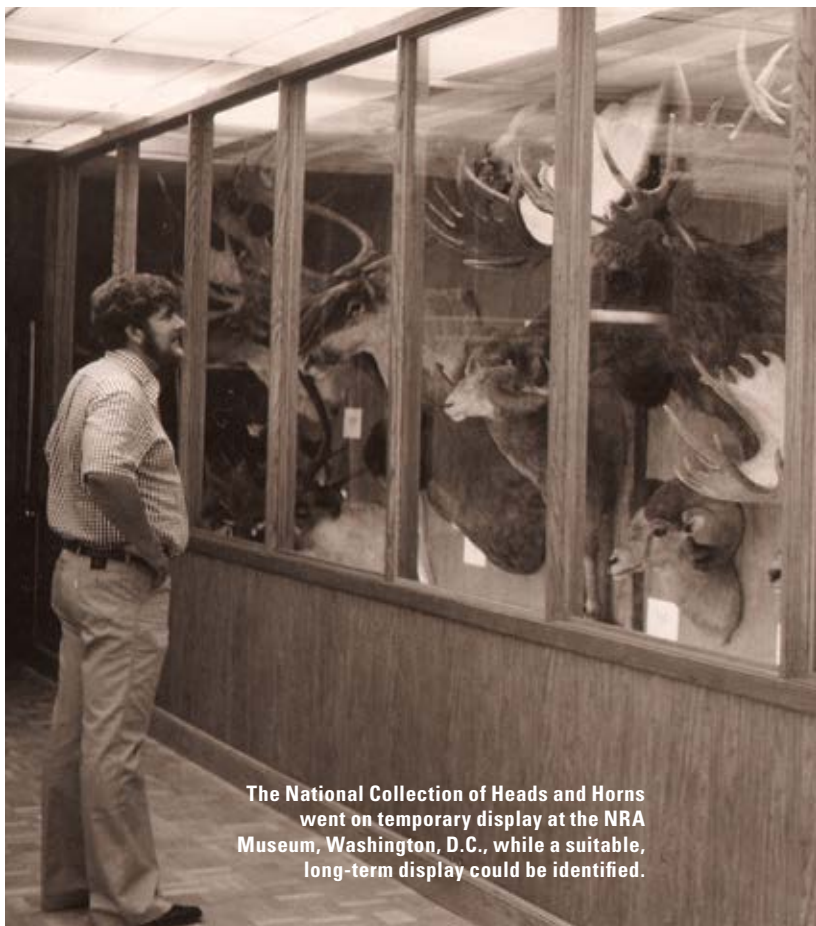
Thereafter, the Zoological Society's standing Heads & Horns Committee, in existence since 1932, was dropped from their Annual Report and the National Collection of Heads and Horns was quietly closed to the public, ceasing to exist as an appendage of the New York Zoological Society's Bronx Zoo. The Society's genuine concerns lay in sustaining existing diminishing species of wildlife on an environmental level worldwide.

Hornaday, the naturalist-taxidermist, viewed the National Collection at the turn of the century as a zoological entity against the backdrop of rapidly vanishing big game populations. The sporting fraternity of the 1930s viewed it as a trophy collection of record heads and horns at a time when the decline of big game had been successfully reversed. The hunter's interest in maintaining trophies and big game records overshadowed his many conservationist accomplishments and contributions in the eyes of an enlightened Zoological Society which was itself forging a new identity within the emerging environmental community. And, the sportsman's trophy interests colored the historical purpose and value of the National Collection in the eyes of the Zoological Society as purely self-serving, without broader educational or zoologic relevance; hence, it was

not deemed worthy of a place of recognition in the Zoological Park.

The story of the National Collection of Heads and Horns would perhaps have ended here but for my chance discovery of the state of the National Collection in 1977. I had gone to the Zoological Park on January 20, to talk with Dr. George Schaller about his recent expeditions through Asia. After visiting, I asked to see the National Collection and was reluctantly admitted after being told it was closed and no longer open to the public. I found the Collection in a deplorable state, boarded up from public view, dusty, dirty, unhumidified, and many of the hides badly in need of repair.

After a robbery of 13 heads in 1974 (including the world's record mule deer and Atlantic walrus, and number three pronghorn) the Zoological Society had quietly begun



The National Collection of Heads and Horns went on temporary display at the NRA Museum, Washington, D.C., while a suitable, long-term display could be identified.

trying to find another home for the Collection. The Boone and Crockett Club was contacted but could offer no aid. Subsequent to my discovery, I mounted what became a year-long crusade to enlist the aid of the sporting fraternity in trying to find a suitable home for the Collection that would allow public display while satisfying the Society's requirements of potential use in education of the public and/or research.

My efforts proved fruitless, although considerable interest was generated. By late 1977, it was apparent that the American Museum of Natural History was reluctantly going to receive the Collection, but could not display it as all their space was being utilized. At this point, W. Harold Nesbitt, then Director of the Hunter Services Division at the National Rifle Association and a Boone and Crockett Club Associate, picked up the

standard, convincing the Boone and Crockett Club to seek ownership of the Collection. Into the breach reappeared long-time Club member Samuel B. Webb who agreed to present the Club's plan to the Zoological Society. He convinced them that the Collection rightfully should pass to the Boone and Crockett Club, with formal acceptance being noted by letter dated January 23, 1978, from the Club's President, Wesley M. Dixon. Nesbitt and I served as an ad hoc Club committee that inventoried the collection, packed it for shipment and attended to the numerous small details of such an undertaking.

Our inventory of the Collection in February 1978 revealed only 238 specimens; 34 of North American origin and 204 from the world's five other continents. Six of the 238 specimens were retained by the Zoological Society,

making the total transferred 232, of which 34 were from North America. Arrangements were made by Nesbitt with the National Rifle Association, which generously renovated one section of its Firearms Museum in Washington, D.C., to display the North American specimens. On May 5, 1978, these trophies, re-designated as the National Collection of Heads and Horns, were put on public display for the first time in a decade. The remaining non-North American specimens were redesignated the International Collection of Heads and Horns and were deeded to Safari Club International in 1978 for installation in their museum.

In June 1978, the Boone and Crockett Club formed a subcommittee of its Big Game Records Committee, with Nesbitt as chairman and myself as member, to watch over the National Collection of Heads and Horns. With strong input and help from Michigan sportsman P. Franklin Bays, Jr., an enthusiastic fund raising program was established, offering donors a limited edition print of a handsome oil painting of the

"My hope is that the Zoological Society or the Conservation Foundation will be willing to recognize our work in this field [of big game record's keeping] as the type that does promote sound conservation."

*- Samuel B. Webb,
letter to Alfred Ely*



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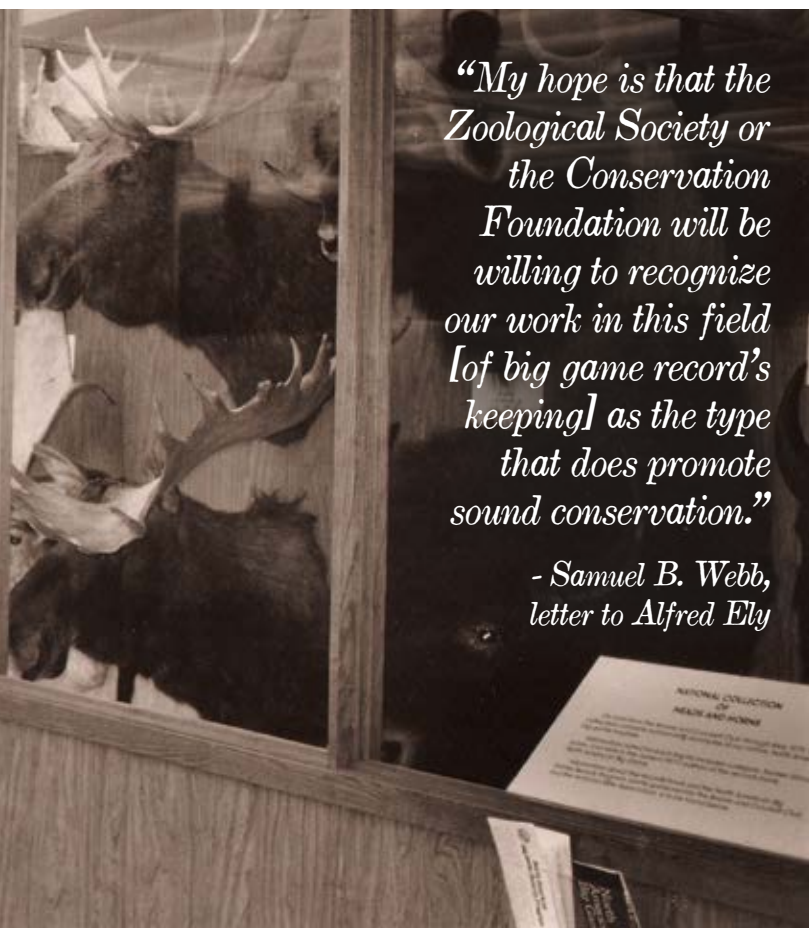
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Chadwick ram that was donated to the Club by Michigan artist Harry Antis. The funds generated by this project would be utilized to maintain and expand the Collection on a sustaining basis.

The National Collection now includes these notable trophies: the world's record Chadwick Stone's sheep; the world's record Zack Elbow Quebec-Labrador caribou; the world's record De Rham woodland caribou; the world's record Witherbee Canada moose; the former world's record Scull Pacific walrus; the former world's record Pop mountain caribou; the number two Kitto Rocky Mountain goat.*

In a very real sense, the Collection is today where it was in 1907, when William T. Hornaday created a Nucleus Collection with his own private specimens. It is a foundation around which a regeneration of the Collection can occur, albeit only with native North American specimens. The Collection contains irreplaceable specimens of significant historical value and extreme rarity. Life and vitality are given to such a collection by perpetual renewal and upgrading so that the collection takes on a living existence. It is this very character that becomes self regenerating by drawing to it the finest specimens as they become available, which Hornaday himself had in mind. ■

* This is a reprint of from an article published in 1981. This list is no longer up to date.

** NABGAP was the jointly sponsored big-game records keeping of the Club and the NRA during 1973 - 1980.

INSET: Lowell E. Baier with the Chadwick Ram Stone's sheep.
RIGHT: The National Collection of Heads and Horns was moved to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, in 1982.

WILLIAM HAROLD NESBITT, EMERITUS MEMBER NABGAP** COORDINATOR 1973 - 1980

FROM B&C ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER - VOLUME 6, NO. 2

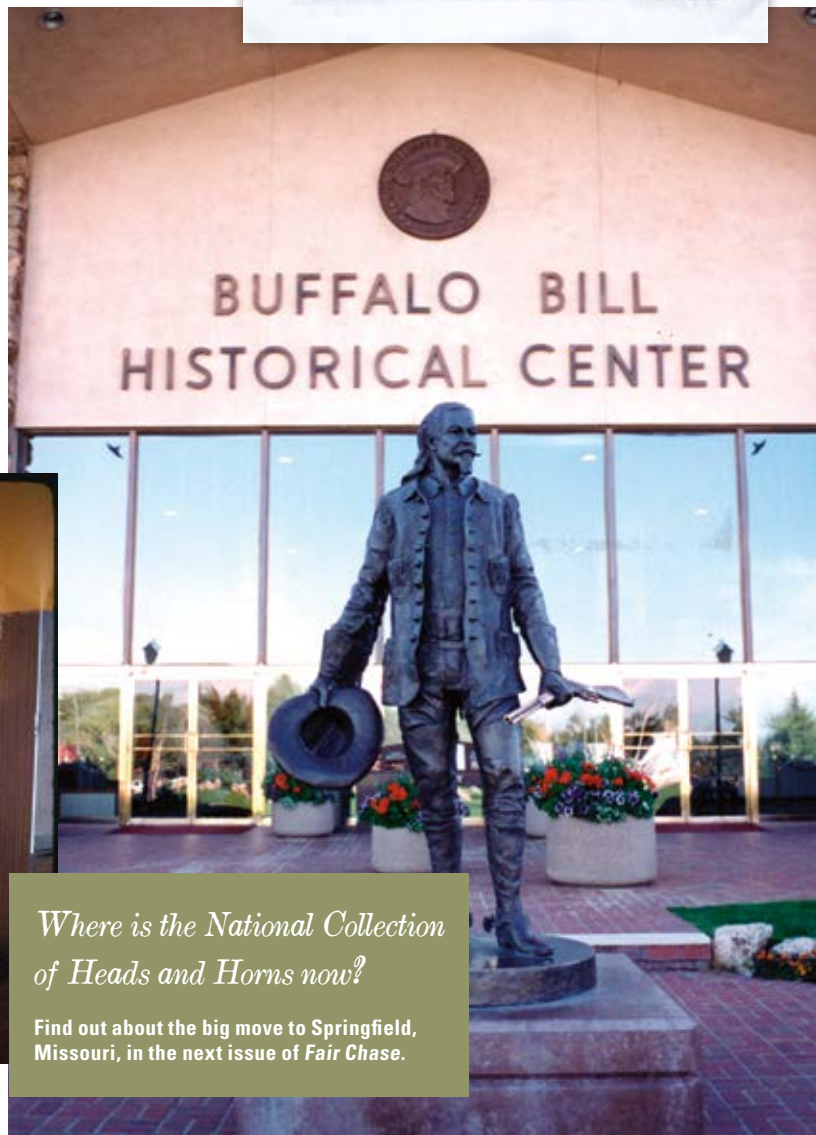
I was then Manager of the NRA's Hunting Activities Department. The warm summer day outside was much more appealing than the stack of work on my desk. I needed some fresh air. Telling my secretary I would soon return, I left the NRA building, walking down 16th Street. At the corner of K Street, I ran into Lowell Baier. The conversation went like this.

"Hi Lowell. How's the National Collection relocation going?"

"I don't want to talk about it. Let me tell you about this spring bear and I shot at him and he just disappeared into the mist. I could not believe it!"

During the next few minutes, Lowell told me details of an exciting Alaska bear hunt and I determined that he had hit bottom in trying to save the National Collection of Heads and Horns (NCHH). An agreement between the New York Zoological Society and the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) would transfer the specimens.

The AMNH was grudgingly accepting them for specimens and they would not go on display. It appeared dark indeed, but I knew of one final card to play. I persuaded Lowell to give me his files from his nearby office. As I lugged the heavy cardboard box back



Where is the National Collection of Heads and Horns now?

Find out about the big move to Springfield, Missouri, in the next issue of *Fair Chase*.

Where There's a Will...

“Making the decision to include the Boone and Crockett Club in our will was easy for my wife Cindy and me. We strongly believe in the Club’s multi-tiered mission of conservation leadership for North America, the support of science based conservation education, the fair chase hunting tradition, and maintaining the most respected record book scoring system in the world. Meeting this mission in the future will be much more challenging than it is today. Leaving a portion of your will to the Club is a positive way you can help. I think it is one of the greatest legacies one could leave.

Please join me in the Roughriders Society. Together, we can ensure that the Boone and Crockett Club will have the ability to fulfill its vital mission far into the future.”

- Terrell McCombs
Regular Member
Boone and Crockett Club



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THE NATIONAL COLLECTION OF HEADS AND HORNS

to NRA, I was mapping out a plan in my mind.

I reviewed all of Lowell's files and then wrote up a one-page summary of the problem and an executive summary. The Boone and Crockett Club's Records of North American Big Game Committee would soon meet and I felt sure this was an item they would not refuse. The Club had been a part of the NCHH from its start, from Club members forming the New York Zoological Society right through members making and encouraging major donations of money and trophies. Surely there would be a felt obligation to save this portion of the hunters' heritage.

Just prior to the Records Committee meeting, I gave the summary to Jack S. Parker, the committee chairman. He read it, asked a few questions, and took it under advisement. One of his questions had been what would be done with the trophies. I had already set up inquiry pathways that would enable proper displays of the specimens to be carried-out and I assured Jack of this. He then placed the matter before the Records Committee, which forwarded a recommendation to the Club's Executive Committee for action. The Executive Committee agreed and directed the Club officers to seek ownership of the NCHH. I was made chairman of an internal committee to carry out necessary details. Unfortunately, things had not been static at the Bronx Zoo in the meantime.

An agreement had been signed between the New York Zoological Society and the American Museum of Natural History to transfer the specimens to the AMNH. It

appeared to be a major problem until Samuel B. Webb answered the call for help. Sam had strong ties with the AMNH Board and he agreed to seek a reversal of the agreement. Sam accomplished the reversal and the Boone and Crockett Club accepted ownership of the specimens and records of the NCHH, by letter from the Club dated January, 23, 1978.

The redesignated 'National Collection of Heads and Horns,' consisting only of native North American specimens, went on temporary display at the NRA Museum in Washington, D.C., while a suitable, long-term display could be identified.

The NCHH moved to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in 1982. The June 1991 installation in the new Cody Firearms Museum provided a long-term home. One with a most appropriate complement of other displays and mission. It appeared unlikely that the Collection will ever again become an unwanted orphan.

With the NCHH safely on long-term display I find it interesting to speculate on several "ifs"; If Lowell Baier had not gone to see the collection...If Jack Parker and the Club had not agreed to action...If Sam Webb had been unavailable. And, if that summer day had not called me away from my desk. ■

TOP AND MIDDLE: The exhibit inside the Buffalo Bill Historical Center was built to look like a rustic hunting cabin displaying the North American trophies. **BOTTOM:** The Winchester Arms Museum in the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, houses more than 6,000 firearms and a varied collection of other weapons and materials. This museum contains the world's largest collection of American firearms.

