COOP Celebrates 80th Anniversary This Month

By Tom Managh ’63

Part 1 of 3 Parts

Prices were on the rise in Harvard Square, and poor boys, who were continuing to come to Harvard, were finding it difficult to meet the expense of room, board, and living costs. In addition to Harvard’s large $350 tuition, many could barely afford to eat out an existence. Lack of paying off charge accounts, the habit of buying goods without asking the price, and the distance from Boston proper had contributed to bring a ruinous situation on the Harvardmen.

Thus it was that on February 22, 1882, Charles Hayden Kinn a junior at the time, called a meeting of some of his fellow students in an attempt to alter the situation. From this meager beginning was set up Co-operative Society, better known to most students as simply the Coop.

Provider Varied Services

The first Coop was little more than a shop in a Harvard Square fruit store, but it provided its members with the following services:

(1) Presided over by hand—such as (2) books to sell, (3) food to sell, (4) goods without asking the price, (5) low-priced services, (6) financial aid, (7) stores provided with the following goods without asking the price, (8) low-priced services, (9) loans.

As the idea spread, the Coop took out that enabled the Coop to be a source of funds for future use. This was the long-term lease which the first Technology Store took out that enabled the construction of the old WGBH building which recently burned to the ground. Moreover, the Coop's large amount of advertising has undoubtedly helped many a campus publication to remain on its own financial legs.

The Coop has provided many other valuable services also. It was the long-term lease which the first Technology Store took out that enabled the construction of the old WGBH building which recently burned to the ground. Moreover, the Coop's large amount of advertising has undoubtedly helped many a campus publication to remain on its own financial legs.

Truly, the MIT and Harvard communities owe an indubitable debt to the Harvard Co-operative Society.

(Ed. note: Next week the author will investigate the structure of the Society's governance and management.)

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