

PRESENTED AT KIT KAT JANUARY 16, 1996
BY JOHN N. HOLSCHER

It is with considerable pleasure and interest that I would like to introduce you to Osman C. Hooper, first President and long time Secretary of Kit Kat, and a founder not only in the sense of organization but in philosophy and spirit.

If you have read our little blue history book so ably put together in 1984 by David Owens, you may recall that a precursor to Kit Kat was a small literary magazine called "The Honey Jar." Osman was an editor of this delightfully named private publication and contributed both prose and poetry to it. As matter of fact, the magazine continued after the founding of Kit Kat in 1911 and the title was changed to "THE KIT KAT, Being Some Personal Glimpses of Literature and Life."

Osman Hooper was born April 10, 1858 in Alexandria, Ohio, attended and was graduated from Denison University with a liberal arts degree. He earned Phi Beta Kappa honors. He spent most of his adult life living at 212 Jefferson Avenue in Columbus.

His entry into journalism came in 1880 as "telegraph editor" for the Columbus Dispatch. He left that paper in 1886 for a year as a reporter with the Cincinnati Enquirer. Returning to Columbus he edited and was part owner of the old Columbus Sunday Morning News. Shortly after he was made an editorial writer for the Dispatch, a position he held until 1917 when he became literary editor. This included a regular feature he wrote called "The Observation Car", stories, poetry and commentary.

In 1918, Hooper became a professor of journalism at Ohio State University, a post he held until 1932. All during these years he continued to edit the book page at the Dispatch.

Perhaps one of his greatest contributions was his interest and activity on behalf of Ohio's country newspapers.

He was called the "Grand Old Man" of Ohio's weekly newspapers and was credited with doing more for the country newspapers of the State than any other individual. For years he conducted the annual Ohio Newspaper Show held as part of the Buckeye Press Association convention. Here weekly publishers submitted their papers to be judged by experts in various phases of newspaper production.

He founded the Ohio Journalism Hall of Fame at OSU which still exists today and was set up to honor Buckeye journalists and to inspire younger newspapermen to greater achievement.

In 1918 he was awarded an honorary "Doctor of Humane Letters" from his alma mater, Denison University and went on to become a member of that institution's board of trustees. Hooper was also a prolific author. In 1920 he wrote a History of Columbus. He wrote the 1910-1925 segment of the history of Ohio State University. Our speaker tonight will be interested to note that Hooper also wrote three volumes of verse. Also scores of papers on historical subjects which reside in the Ohio Historical Society Archives.

It is only natural that this love of things literary led him to join a few kindred souls to form Kit Kat in 1911.

Here is what our little blue history book quotes from him as President of Kit Kat at its first meeting November 3, 1911:

The general idea is that this is to be a club of gentlemen. That being the case, no speaker will say aught intentionally to offend, and no hearer will go out of his way to seek cause for offense.

We are, as I understand it, learners and lovers of the good in the realms of literature, art and other matters of broad human concern. We are going to come to the meetings in a spirit of good fellowship to talk for the most part informally of some things worth while, about which some of us know something and all of us would like to know more. We are to have opinions which we shall be at perfect liberty to express, but we are not going to be bigoted or dogmatic. We are not to be peevish or thin-skinned, but good-humored, hard-minded and as intelligent as possible -- in short, real simon pure-philomatheans, which a girl who belonged to a society of that name once told me meant, not as I suggested learners of loving, but lovers of learning.

He firmly believed that papers should be literary or historical in nature. He felt that Kit Kat should always be in a member's obituary.

Hooper died on May 11, 1941 and I was touched by the following lines from one of the glowing obituaries:

Personally, he was one of those rare characters who, out of meekness and purity of his own mind and soul, saw the best in his fellow men and placed their good works above their occasional missteps. This viewpoint was in nowise in conflict with his insistence on accuracy, but rather a point of emphasis.

Men like Dr. Hooper leave such contributions behind them that it cannot accurately be said that they have died.

In Osman Castle Hooper we have the true ideal of Kit Kat.
We should keep him in mind as we spend our lives and intellects
here and use his standards as our goals.