Hundredth Anniversary Book

As you may know, the AMS is almost 99 years old and we are fast approaching our hundredth birthday: [cartoon of old man with cane, labelled 99 or 100, or something like that?]

A few years ago, with this in mind, the then AMS President Jeremy McElroy [Jeremy photo] came to me and suggested I write a book about the history of the AMS, or the students at UBC, in time for the anniversary. [photo of me]

But there were questions about logistics and, most of all, money. We were in tough economic times, and where would the money come from? [cartoon of money bag and question mark?] So there were delays; nothing happened for a while. But the clock was ticking, the anniversary was fast approaching [clock? Calendar?], it was time to get going.

We did begin to discuss how to do it, and last year's AMS President [photo of Caroline] even came up with the structure for the book: do it year-by-year, she said, the key events of each year, which seemed to me a good approach to handling 100 years of material.

And then finally we got the go-ahead this summer and I have set my assistants scurrying through the records [photo of researchers?]

They have been coming up with fascinating material from our early years, which I have begun to write up, but it's gone much slower than expected, the clock keeps ticking [photo of clock again?] and I am hiring more staff to help out – the budget amendment later in the evening will include additional funding for that.

Meanwhile we have been finding out all sorts of things about the High Jinks they got up to in the old days. And I mean literally High Jinks: that was the name of an annual costume party for women only – begun in 1918 during World War I. [photo of a High Jinks party?] Perhaps it was women-only because it was the war and the men were away, but the party was put on for many years after the war ended. Sometimes men tried to sneak in, but when they did they were unceremoniously removed. (2nd photo)

And there were all sorts of other high jinks in those days. There was Freshman Orientation, for one thing, in which the first years, or at least the first year men, were put through all sorts of humiliating torments, including a House of Torture: here in the top picture [photo] you can see one poor freshman blindfolded and being zapped with electricity. Down below is a picture of someone being tossed into the library pond and of someone else being shoved into a basket: basketing, I think this was called.

All this would culminate in a raucous race downtown, called the Snake Parade [photo?]. Eventually these sorts of activities got condemned for causing harm to the freshmen – and also to bystanders: there is more than one instance of someone being
knocked over by students running in the Snake Parade. One of them even threatened to sue us.

So eventually Firstweek Orientation became more sedate, and all that was required of the first year students was that they wear green ribbons or hats, though even that prompted complaints. Not sure why: wouldn't you want to go around all week dressed like this? [photo of dunce cap] And you even got to wear a nice big name tag on your back [2nd photo] so everyone would know who you were.

Besides high jinks, there was lots of emphasis on pep and spirit; there were even special positions created to encourage that: an early form of cheerleaders called Yell Leaders headed by a Yell King – and note that it's a King, not a Queen. The yell leaders were almost invariably male. Here you see two pictures of one of the Yell Leaders; in the one on the left he's using a megaphone at a Freshman Bonfire, part of Freshman Orientation. Then in this photo: [2nd photo] you can see another Yell Leader revving up the crowd at the Great Trek of 1922 (he's the one in the red circle).

But even the yell leaders couldn't always get everyone going, and there were constant complaints in AMS publications that the students were apathetic. Why, barely more than 50% of the students voted in the 1921 election. [photo] We might envy that turnout now, actually, though it's perhaps easier to get 50% of the students out when there are less than 1000 students on campus.

Things weren't always light-hearted. There was the war in the early days, World War I: many students went off to fight [photo], and 78 of them lost their lives. [photo] And there was also a flu epidemic, and then in the 1930's the Depression, which almost closed the University altogether. And there were University cutbacks that threatened education, which the AMS commented on, and a lack of funds for the AMS itself, which led to talk of fee increases. [photo? headline?] Some things never change – though the amounts involved may seem amusing. The total AMS fee then was $7, and the plan was to raise it to 9, so that the AMS could have a balance in its accounts in total of $2,000.

Some things change and yet don't change, or go away and come back. There's been concern about student conduct recently, and there were similar concerns way back when. Student Council, your predecessors, spent time passing motions urging the students to behave better. In particular they passed rules against loitering and littering, smoking, talking in the halls, and talking too loudly in the library. Here's the old library [photo] (you may recognize it as the central core of Irving), with a caption about the rule against talking.

One year Council even created something called the Vigilance Committee, a band of men who were to sneak around and report on student wrong-doing [that cartoon]. Here they are, catching someone smoking. And there was much talk of a Discipline Committee and using Student Court to make sure students didn't misbehave. At least one student was hauled up on charges for playing bridge for money [photo?] – in open
defiance of Council rules against gambling, as the Ubyssey reported, calling him a criminal (before he was even convicted).

Being in charge of discipline like this was one aspect of what was then called Student Self-Government. The AMS was keen on autonomy and had a lot of it, but it was not complete. Discipline decisions could be appealed to the University’s Faculty Council, and the University also stepped in in other ways that the AMS did not always appreciate. In 1917-18, our third year, the AMS was working on the third version of our constitution: we were always keen on doing governance reviews. [scan of constitution page] But this time the University vetoed the result, causing some consternation. There was also concern that the University had suspended some students from AMS activities and required that others resign from AMS positions.

Some things it’s been a surprise to discover. I hadn’t realized that as far back as the 1920’s the AMS was involved in the food business, running the University’s cafeteria for a while – till the University stepped in and took it back. [photo? headline?] There was even a hot dog stand on campus back then [photo?]

Hot dogs nearly became more than just food in the 1920’s. There was some discussion back then on a proposed emblem for the University. UBC had no mascot or emblem at the time. One student suggested a moose [photo]; another, in a letter to the paper, said no, no, it should be a hot dog rampant on a field of bread [photo]; this caught the fancy of the Ubyssey, as you can see, but no, the hot dog did not become our emblem. In the next decade the students chose the Thunderbird – though not before first voting for the Seagull, after which they were told, Don’t be ridiculous, choose again. And so we have the Thunderbird.

This and much more my assistants have discovered while poring through the pages of old Ubysseys and the like, and I will be taking this material and turning it into a year-by-year account of the students and the AMS, with an emphasis on pictures. The idea is to create a coffee table book, in hardcover, and perhaps in ebook form too.

One of my assistants has even mocked up something to show what a year might look like [that year you did].

I should mention my assistants, Emily Booth and Heather Muckart. Emily is the one who did that mock-up and she helped put together this powerpoint. And I will be hiring additional assistants in the fall, in part with the help of the budget amendment.