Leadership Changes

Increasing pressures to attend to family business matters forced Oliver Evans to resign the presidency in 1967. He had worked diligently and determinedly, and without compensation, in maintaining the Society as a dominant force in the humane movement. Now, however, family business affairs kept him away from Washington and he felt the Society needed the presence of a full-time chief executive. He remained active as a member of the Board of Directors and also served as Treasurer.

For some time thereafter the presidency remained vacant but the national staff, under the direction of Vice-President Patrick Parkes, continued to function effectively and The HSUS continued to grow and prosper. Finally, in 1968, the Board of Directors chose Mel L. Morse, long time executive director of the Humane Society of Marin County, California and former executive director of the American Humane Association, to fill the position of President. Mel Morse accepted the position and moved to Washington, D.C. About a year later, however, he resigned and returned to California to continue his work with the Humane Society of Marin County.

In 1968 it became apparent that Robert Chenoweth, now advanced in years and retired, was no longer able physically to carry on the duties of Chairman of the Board. By that time Coleman Burke, noted New York lawyer and prominent community leader, had been elected to the Board of Directors. Mr. Burke succeeded Mr. Chenoweth as Board Chairman and the latter was elected to the position of Chairman Emeritus.

The search for a new chief executive continued during this time and, on April 1, 1970, Dr. John A. Hoyt of Fort Wayne, Indiana was chosen as President. Dr. Hoyt was a minister who brought unusual talents to his new position. Mel Morse was elected Vice-President in charge of the Society's operations on the West Coast leaving that office several years later to assume direction of the Animal Care and Education Center located in Southern California.
Under Dr. Hoyt's capable leadership, The HSUS began to grow rapidly. Membership growth and new and expanded programs accelerated at a gratifying pace. During 1970 and subsequent years, the system of state branches was phased out and the regional office program begun. Also, accreditation of local humane societies and animal control agencies was initiated under the Department of Animal Sheltering and Control. The National Humane Education Center in Waterford, Virginia was transferred to the Washington headquarters office and the demonstration shelter was sold to the Board of Supervisors of Loudoun County, Virginia. Training seminars were no longer held at the Center. Instead, teams of experts in animal control and welfare were sent to selected areas across the country to hold workshops and seminars. This quickly proved to be successful as attendance at the workshops grew rapidly.

In 1976 a disaster relief program for animals was established. The program provided a response to both natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, and catastrophes caused by human accidents such as oil spills. Consultations were held with officials of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the revision of their pollution contingency plan. The Fish and Wildlife Service now frequently consults The HSUS when disasters occur and a great deal of rescue work has been done by HSUS personnel in oil spills such as the Olympic Games oil tanker that leaked 133,000 gallons of oil into the Delaware River. Help, too, was given by the Society in rescuing animals when the Teton Dam collapsed in Southeastern Idaho and during the massive flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1977.

New departments and staff were added to the organization. NAAHE was created and another division, the Institute for the Study of Animal Problems, was brought into being. The Institute is structured and staffed to undertake in-depth studies of the major problems that have plagued the humane movement for generations and discover solutions to those problems. Scientifically oriented, this division has already addressed in detail the plight of animals used in biomedical research and testing and in factory farming. Pet overpopulation is another of the Institute’s efforts and it is hoped that an injectible birth inhibitor for male dogs will be available soon. The Institute has been publishing a bulletin on animal welfare science and this publication will be incorporated in 1980 into the International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems. This new division has a board of advisors from the international scientific community.

The Legal Department was established in 1975 when the General Counsel for The HSUS, who had handled the Society’s legal affairs for many years, moved into the headquarters building and became an integral part of the staff. The quality of publications and other materials was upgraded and new publications developed. The HSUS began to give greater emphasis to public relations and publicity to make people conscious of the many forms of animal cruelty that exist and what can be done about them. Attendance at the Society’s annual conferences grew steadily as careful attention was given to choosing speakers and subjects for discussion and debate. The highlight of the Conference had always been the presentation of the "American Humanitarian of the Year" award at the Annual Banquet. To elevate the prestige of this honor it was decided to rename the award the Joseph Wood Krutch Medal after the famous naturalist and writer. The award was presented in the form of an especially designed bronze medal and its first recipient was Mrs. Joy Adamson of "Born Free" fame.
A vice-president for development was hired to help increase the organization’s outreach through increased membership and widespread mailings. A program coordinator was added to the staff to supervise and coordinate the many activities of the Society. Other personnel were added to the staff to handle legislative matters at both the state and federal levels of government. The organization also hired a director of wildlife protection and stepped up its campaign to clean up zoos and to eliminate cruelty in the “harvesting” of seals in Newfoundland and the Pribilof Islands. A program was also initiated to stop the killing of whales and porpoises.

By 1979 the number of staff members had grown from the original four people who organized The HSUS to eighty employees. The original membership of the board of directors had risen from fifteen to twenty-one. The constituency had reached 115,000 people. The modest budget of earlier years had climbed close to the $2,000,000 mark for the year. The Society purchased its present headquarters building in 1975 and staff occupied four of the five floors with the fifth floor being leased. The building, conveniently located in downtown Washington, was a great advance from the modest quarters the Society occupied in its beginnings and the several other addresses at which it was located between 1954 and 1975. More importantly, considerable cost savings were effected since payments for space were now building equity while, previously, the money had gone for rent. The new building was dedicated to the memory of Oliver M. Evans in recognition of his outstanding leadership to the humane movement and his personal dedication to animals.
A Heritage For The Future
Address to the 1979 Annual Conference
John A. Hoyt

Dedicated to the memory of Oliver M. Evans, The HSUS headquarters building in Washington, D.C. stands as a monument to his leadership and dedication. Evans is shown here talking to Phyllis Wright, Director of Animal Sheltering and Control.

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