

THE HISTORY OF THE HAIKU SOCIETY OF AMERICA

IN THE BEGINNING

Introduction¹

After Leroy Kanterman started *Haiku West* magazine in June of 1967, Nicholas Virgilio put him in touch with Harold G. Henderson. Professor Henderson had resigned his teaching position at Columbia University in 1955 to work on his *An Introduction to Haiku*, published in 1958. The book was an immediate success, and Henderson soon became the single most important influence on the development of American haiku. Many poets, like Virgilio, sought his advice on how they might adapt the genre into English. In 1965 he had, at the request of the Japan Society, written a booklet called *Haiku in English*, which the Society published. In it he discussed the work of a number of American haiku poets. Haiku by Virgilio and James W. Hackett were cited to demonstrate fruitful directions the genre was already taking.

Soon after they made contact, Kanterman began visiting the professor at his home in New York City each Friday evening to discuss the submissions that were coming in to *Haiku West*. Professor Henderson's wife, Mary, also took part in these talks. At some point Kanterman suggested it would be nice to have a small group get together on a regular basis to read and talk about haiku. Professor Henderson agreed, and a few people met informally to discuss the proposal, including the Hendersons, Kanterman and his wife, Mildred, Virgilio, and Elizabeth Searle Lamb.

Professor Henderson, with the help of the Japan Society—of which he was an Honorary Director and a past president—made arrangements for a place to meet, and the first meeting was held on October 23, 1968, in the library of the Asia Society, then located at 112 East 64th Street in New York City. The new group was called simply the “Haiku Society.”

MINUTES

No minutes were kept at the first meeting, which took place on October 23, 1968, though a list was made of those present. Starting with the second meeting, November 21, 1968, Minutes were kept and copies either given or mailed to members. These were at times very sketchy—perhaps just the names of those attending and a note to the effect that “members read their haiku and a lively discussion followed.” But a good many of the Minutes were fairly long—sometimes the whole meeting was taped, and a transcription running to several pages would be made by the hard-working secretary, or in some cases by the Society’s president. Papers were presented at some meetings, either through the mail or in person, and these would be copied and sent to members as part of the Minutes.

¹ Text adapted from Haiku Society of America Twentieth Anniversary Book Committee, eds. *A Haiku Path: The Haiku Society of America 1968–1998* (New York: Haiku Society of America, 1994), 23.

JOURNAL

Haiku West was named the Society's official magazine in April 1969. It remained so until it ceased publication in January 1975. The "Minutes" were called the "Minutes & Proceedings" from 1975 until early in 1978, when they were essentially replaced by the Society's magazine, *Frogpond*. Since then they have been either nonexistent or little more than short summaries. Papers presented at meetings are occasionally printed in the magazine.

MEETINGS

In the early days meetings were held nearly every month, except during the summer, then every other month, and finally four times a year. They moved from the Asia Society to the Japan Society's offices at 250 Park Avenue, New York City, in April 1969. In June of 1971 they moved again, when the Japan Society relocated to their newly built Japan House on East 47th Street. The Haiku Society continued to meet there until 1983. Due to financial considerations, the meetings were then held elsewhere in the city until 1984, when the Society found a home in the East Asian Lounge of Kent Hall at Columbia University. Because it was incorporated under the sponsorship of the Japan Society, the Haiku Society of America's mailing address was for many years c/o the Japan Society and that continues to be its legal address.

FOUNDERS

Since Professor Henderson and Leroy Kanterman had initiated the idea of meeting to discuss haiku, they are considered the founders of the Haiku Society. They and the others attending the first meeting are the charter members. Elizabeth Searle Lamb had agreed to be a member, but could not make it that evening. Because she had been to the preliminary meetings and was there in spirit, she is also regarded as a charter member. Leroy Kanterman was elected the first president of the Society at the first meeting, and Professor Henderson was named Honorary President for life.