



**Northeastern Section**  
of the AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY



## The Misogynist Dinner of the American Chemical Society

*Condensed from an article by George B. Kauffman in CONTACT, the Newsmagazine of California State University, Fresno 3 (1), 12 (1982), supplied by the author.*

On August 27, 1880 a meeting of the four-year old ACS was held in Boston. A little-known event took place at that meeting: A dinner to which wives were not invited and, in fact, were turned away at the door when some members brought their wives.

Henry Morton, a respected intellectual, educator and writer chronicled the event and Thomas Sterry Hunt, a founding member and fourth and thirteenth President of the ACS was one of the organizers of this event which, after dinner, featured poems, recitations, etc., all in the spirit of disparaging women and not sparing men either, who succumb to the charms of women.

Anti-female songs were sung, such as "The Origin of Women," "The Uncles and the Aunts," and "The Humbugged Husband." Quotations from poems of famous authors were offered, such as one by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in which he berates Beelzebub who took all of Job's possessions, except his wife, to try him all the more. Also a poem from "Bentley's Miscellany," a London Literary Magazine, called "The Temptation of St. Anthony" which in many stanzas describes the many type of devils which walk this world, and ends with:

*But a laughing woman with  
two bright eyes  
Is the worst devil of all.*

Morton's chronicle concludes with a story:

A spirit once knocked at the gate of Paradise. St. Peter looked through the wicket and asked what was the matter. The spirit replied that he wished to enter. "Have you been through purgatory?" asked the saint. "No," said the spirit. "Then you can't come in," replied the saint.

The rejected spirit drew aside disconsolately, watching the closed gate. Presently another spirit approaches, knocks, and in reply to the same question from St. Peter,

replies, "No; I have not been through purgatory but I have been married." "All right, then," says the saint: "You may go in!"

At this the rejected spirit runs forward exclaiming. "Oh, St. Peter, you must let me in, too; I have been married twice." "Not so, my son," replies the saint, "no fools are admitted here."

The consensus of the ACS members at the misogynist dinner of more than a century ago thus seemed to be that in the battle of sexes, marriage is a man trap, women are devils, and men are fools. In short, although they disparaged women, their treatment of their own sex was far from flattering.

If the participants in the event described were to be resurrected today, they would doubtless be scornfully viewed as unredeemable male chauvinists, and some of us would probably prefer to forget or to censor this little known chapter in the history of the world's largest scientific society devoted to a single discipline.

Yet the two principal participants presiding at the dinner whom we can identify -- Thomas Sterry Hunt and Henry Morton ö were both leading figures in nineteenth-century American chemistry, founders and early officers of the American Chemical Society, and respected and distinguished men with impeccable scientific, scholarly, and social credentials. To evaluate them overcritically in the light of today's standards would be to ignore more than a century of progress in the fight for women's rights and to ignore on of the fundamental tenets of social history, viz., that even the most enlightened of us are still products of our time.

Henry Morton (1836-1902) was Professor of Chemistry at the Philadelphia Dental College, secretary of the Franklin Society, and editor of its Journal, the first president of the Stevens Institute of Technology, expert witness in patent litigation, etc. etc. He was the recipient of several honorary degrees and a sought-after popular lecturer on science. He was one of the founders of the ACS.

Thomas Sterry Hunt (1826-1892), another co-founder of the ACS also served as its 4th and 13th President. He was a chemist working for the Vermont Geological Survey, professor of geology at M.I.T., the author of numerous scientific papers on chemistry and geology, the president of many scientific societies, Fellow of the Royal Society of London, and the recipient of several honorary degrees. One interesting side-light: He was married in 1877 (at age 51) but upon finding that it interfered with his scientific interests, he decided to live apart from his wife.