

## Men's Photo Club

**T**HE URGE TO GATHER AROUND shared affinities and avocations is a powerful one, and so is the attendant compulsion to portray the gathering. Open a typical high school or college yearbook to find a lengthy, well-populated section depicting clubs, teams, publications staff, councils, and other collective activities. In the Minnesota Historical Society collections reside group photos recording hiking and harmonica clubs, the “Hook ‘Em Cow Club,” and 4H-ers, of course.

Also, one can find “Meeting of men’s photo club, Hallie Q. Brown Center,” approximately dated 1955. At least two of the men sitting around a table in that photograph reappear in this one; perhaps this “ca. 1960” image represents a later meeting. (The Hallie Q. Brown Center, founded in 1929, is still active in St. Paul in its building on Kent Street, off of Summit Avenue.) Despite the gathering impulse of photography, no cameras are visible in either image.

The work these men are showing the camera may have resulted from an “animals” assignment. It’s safe to assume that each man produced the prints he holds, given the nature of the group. But how much can we safely assume beyond that?

This image is full of oddities, intriguing folds in the fabric of standard expectations. Why is everyone crouched down, squatting or kneeling on the floor? Was this a low-ceilinged room? And why all the glum faces? Only one man is smiling outright—pleased, perhaps, with recognition for his zebras and well-coiffed spaniel.



Photo identified as “Men’s photo club,” ca. 1960 (MNHS COLLECTIONS)

(Getting a good photograph of an all-black dog is no simple feat.) Two seem bemused, the two men to our right face the camera sternly, and the other two seem entirely distracted from the document being made: one seemingly casting his gaze at a spot on the floor, the other looking more or less at him with one of those looks that kill.

This is a group photograph that should not have survived the editor’s scissors—it doesn’t pass the “watch the birdie,” look-at-the-camera test. All the better for us, though, a half-century later. What would have been a conventional record of an amateur photography club has become a quirky, unintentionally revealing document of male interactions and poses. And a reaffirmation, if one

was needed, of the enduring appeal of pets as subjects for the camera. Still, I find myself wondering if there was a person making the photograph at just this moment or if the camera was mounted on a tripod and set to expose with a timer. Either way, fortune and fate conspired to bring us a picture that looks back.

—George Slade

This feature was made possible by the Henry and Donna Morgan Fund for Research and Publications.

**GEORGE SLADE** is a St. Paul native temporarily reassigned to northwest lower Michigan. He writes frequently about photographs and the history of photography.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: [contact us](#).

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#). Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

#### **Students and researchers**

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

#### **Teachers**

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. [Contact us](#) for more information.

#### **About Illustrations**

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](#).