

AOCS meetings: ideas for changing times

"A convention is a great place to get the association habit. There one meets the biggest men of his profession and rubs elbows and swaps stories with the finest fellows in his line of business. Be a gregarian, put yourself where you will get, not trade secrets, confidential information and all that bunk, but ideas."

—Herbert S. Bailey, editor
Chemists' Section, *Cotton Oil Press*
April 1923

For AOCS members, meetings have provided a chance to conduct business and to exchange technical ideas and share camaraderie.

In the beginning, AOCS (then known as the Society of Cotton Products Analysts) held its meetings in conjunction with its parent group, the Interstate Cotton Seed Crushers' Association. The meetings generally preceded the Interstate's and were held in the same city, allowing members to attend both. As time passed and AOCS membership grew, the society chose to hold separate conferences.

At the 1913 meeting, retiring president E. R. Barrow called it the society's first actual convention. "Formerly we have met at such odd intervals as presented themselves between the programme of the Crushers' Conventions, and our meetings have been more or less in the nature of informal gathering, during which our discussions have been at random, and often curtailed by the interference of other engagements."

In fact, at the 1912 meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, no business was transacted as a quorum wasn't present.

The society held its first 2-day meeting in 1918. A highlight was an address by W. D. Richardson of Swift & Co., who conceded he was finally convinced of the need for "cookbook recipe style" methods of analysis. Richardson said he believed concordant results could only be obtained by analysts in different laboratories by carefully outlining and precisely following the details of technique.

Speeches at the 1921 meeting focussed on committee reports: Oil Extraction Committee, Damaged Seed and Seed Analysis, Bleach Test and Fuller's Earth Committee, the Ammonia Committee, the Oil Constants Committee, Soap Stock Committee and the Sampling Committee. The main address was "Rancidity—Its Cause and Prevention."

A shorter agenda than that at meetings today did not necessarily signal brevity. According to a journal account of that 1921 meeting in Chicago, then president F. B. Porter used an alarm clock to time speakers.

The first fall meeting was held in October 1927 at the Chemists' Club in New York City. These fall meetings were initially held in New York, then moved to Chicago. The primary reason for the fall meetings was to attract oil, fats and soap chemists unable to attend the spring meetings in the South. Fall meetings continued through 1976.

Robert R. King, in his May 1946 president's address, said the society was unique as a technical group because fraternal association was paramount.

Even today, signs are that despite growth, such fellowship exists.

C. W. Hoerr, in preparation for the fall 1958 meeting, said:

"Far more than any other factor, our national meetings forge the society into a living, dynamic progressive organization. It is only by personal contact with the society at these meetings that we fully realize and appreciate the tremendous strides which we have been making in the fat and oil field through the years.

"Admittedly, most of the technical papers presented at the meetings can eventually be read in the journal, but consider how much more stimulating to our personal interests is the opportunity to discuss recent developments directly with the individuals who are responsible for them. Likewise we can learn of new equipment, supplies and services by reading advertisements, but this certainly cannot compare with the experience of actually seeing

the latest equipment and discussing individual applications directly with the representatives of the companies which display exhibits at our conventions. But I think that the significance of our annual meetings goes even deeper than the stimulating contacts with scientific and technological developments. I always look forward to meeting many of my old friends at our conventions. And also at each convention I make many new friends. In fact, I can think of no other adjective which characterizes the society so well as friendly. No one who has attended our conventions can deny that we are a friendly organization. I am convinced that it is this friendly attitude which is responsible for the continual growth and progress of the society."

However, society records show, a number of years elapsed for feelings of trust and friendship to surface.

In his president's address in 1915, G. Worthen Agee said, "We were at the beginning divided by conflicting interests, petty jealousies and suspicions. The independent or commercial laboratories were often jealous of one another, and the independent and the works chemists each held each other in suspicion. There was friction and distrust and secretiveness. Now, I think I can safely say, that there is an altogether different spirit evidenced in our meetings. There is a feeling of good fellowship, of belief in the other fellow's good intentions. I believe that we have all come to realize that we are working in a common cause."

Much of the camaraderie developed outside the technical sessions. One activity fostering fellowship was athletic competition—golf and bowling tournaments. For the 1929 meeting, the Industrial Chemical Sales Company of New York and Chicago donated a 31-inch silver loving cup, "Challenge Trophy," for the first golf tournament. The name of the winner and the year were to be engraved on the cup, then handed on to the new winner the next year. Any member winning the cup 3 times, not necessarily consecutively, would become permanent possessor. A bowling tournament was set up in 1930 as an annual fall event. A journal article after the 1937 tournament reported, "As usual, the bowling ranged all the way from the sublime to the ridiculous and the evening was enjoyed by both spectators and bowlers."

After dinner at the 1926 annual banquet, May 11, at the Chess, Checker and Whist Club in New Orleans, toastmaster David Wesson explained the story behind the synthetic steaks newspapers had been writing about. Wesson said it all started when he had announced, in simple scientific language, that a meat substitute could be prepared from cottonseed. Reporters then picked up the story. After reading aloud a newspaper article poking fun at synthetic beefsteak and at him,

Wesson announced that the "Croquettes a la Creole" on the menu had been made from cottonseed.

According to a journal account about the banquet the following year at The Peabody hotel in Memphis, "The festivities were inaugurated with a synthetic concoction pronounced by all present to be worthy of at least equal rank with Dr. Wesson's famous Croquettes Creole of Cottonseed 'beefsteak.'"

For banquets to include dancing and group singing as well as featured entertainment was not uncommon. At the 1941 annual dinner, for instance, participants were treated to an "Arthur Murray's Champagne hour." According to the June 1941 issue of *Oil & Soap*, "Mr. Murray and his charming partner first went through their dance routines and then initiated willing and unwilling partners from among the audience. All of the spectators enjoyed the awkward or graceful, as the case may be, efforts of the victims to follow the intricacies of the Argentine Tango, La Conga, Valse Viennese and other terpsichorean repertoire. Three of the participants were then selected as the prize winners by acclamation of the audience. In order to determine who should receive the first, second and third prizes, the three fortunate or unfortunate dancers were then required to race gaily painted wooden steeds across the ballroom floor. The beasts were very trickily designed so that any efforts at speed resulted in immediately unseating of the rider. Following the various inept displays of exhibition dancing and jockeying, the various participants up to this point were given lessons in performing La Conga en masse. The entire audience was invited to join the dance which ended in the ancient game of 'London Bridge is Falling Down.' The last affair brought the entire audience to the floor."

World War II forced changes at 2 AOCS meetings. The 1942 fall convention in Chicago was cut to 2 days "due to the fact that many members are extremely busy with critical work." According to an account in the journal, highlighting the conference were 2 discussions by George A. Wrisley, chief of the Soap, Glycerine, Fatty Acid and Inedible Fat Section of the War Production Board. Pointing out the aims of the War Production Board in allocating fats and glycerine supplies, Wrisley told AOCS members that the board was trying to conserve the nation's supply of these materials by regulating and limiting their use to essential purposes.

Because of a ban on conventions during 1944-45, the 36th annual meeting in 1945 was held with only officers and Governing Board members attending in Memphis.

Attendance at post-war meetings boomed, reflecting the growth in the society's membership. At the 1946 fall meeting in Chicago, 568 people

attended. The following fall, 627 people attended.

Soon, AOCS embarked on another undertaking holding its first short course, Aug. 16-21, 1948, on the University of Illinois campus in Urbana, Illinois. The topic was "Production, Processing and Uses of Vegetable Oils."

Attendance was to be limited to 50 people, but so much interest was shown that 136 technologists in oilseed and oil refining were permitted to take part. According to a September 1948 *JAOCS* article, "Students and faculty alike were impressed by the staggering amount of information presented by an imposing battery of American's foremost specialists in the field. No one played hookey."

Those attending represented industries and institutions in 22 states and 5 other countries.

Education Committee members who organized this first short course were so pleased that they said the question was not whether to conduct another but rather when, where and on what topic.

Since that time, approximately 40 short courses have been sponsored by AOCS, in addition to its national meetings.

Marvin W. Formo, in a commentary in the June 1959 *JAOCS*, summed up short-course benefits for participants: "For the neophyte, the short courses offer an unparalleled opportunity to acquire intensive knowledge; for the advanced chemist the courses given by ranking specialists fill in the holes in background and update critical information which so often makes the difference between getting a job done promptly or stumbling in the dark; for the specialist there are always new pieces of information, new concepts, and new interpretations to extend knowledge."

In a 1957 journal commentary, Karl F. Mattil wrote, "A number of objectives have been kept in mind in planning and preparing these courses: a means for the society to provide a service to its members and to the industries it represents; an opportunity to broaden the academic contacts of our society and to bring the attention of various universities to the activities of our society; and an opportunity to broaden the training and perspective of the younger men in our industries."

Mattil added, "It has never been and should not be the intent to make these short courses competitive in any way with the national meetings of the society. The speakers are not asked to present original material but rather to present information in a form such as would be given in a typical university course."

In 1969, a short course on Subcellular Particulates held at Indiana University Medical Center was the first short course using prerecorded video-tape demonstrations.

Another innovation was to hold joint meetings with other organizations. In 1969, AOCS held a joint meeting from March 31-April 4 with the

American Association of Cereal Chemists (AACC), in Washington, D.C. At this meeting, 270 technical papers were presented in 32 sessions. In the spring of 1972, AOCS held a joint meeting with the Japanese Oil Chemists' Society in Los Angeles. Registrants numbered nearly 700 people.

This conference emphasized what had long been evident to AOCS members—the international nature of the industry. Even back in the 1930s, attendance at AOCS meetings had been international in scope. At the fall 1938 meeting, for instance, registrants came from Brazil, Chile, Canada and Australia as well as 20 U.S. states.

In 1976, AOCS held its first world conference, on oilseed and vegetable-oil processing technology, in Amsterdam. Sixty-six countries were represented. William E. Link, president for 1975-76, in a *JAOCS* article called the conference the first of its kind anywhere. "This conference has done more to enhance our prestige and image overseas than anything we have done previously and has made the AOCS a truly international organization," Link said. The conference featured 60 speakers, 9 plenary sessions and 13 discussion groups. Attending were 846 registrants, 200 exhibitors and 167 other guests.

Since then, AOCS has sponsored other world conferences: Soaps and Detergents, 1977, Montreux, Switzerland; Vegetable Food Protein, 1978, Amsterdam; Soya Processing and Utilization, 1980, Acapulco, Mexico; Dietary Fats and Health, 1981, Chicago, Illinois; Edible Oil Processing, 1982, The Hague, The Netherlands; and Oleochemicals, 1983, Montreux, Switzerland.

Over the years, a number of cities have been favorite meeting places for the society. A count shows New Orleans, with 38 national meetings between 1909 and 1983, as the location chosen most frequently. Chicago was the site of 31 national meetings during that same time span.

Attendance at meetings, meanwhile, has grown from a few dozen to over 1,460, recorded at the 1983 annual meeting held in Chicago. According to an account in the *Journal* in 1964, AOCS spring meetings at that time normally brought 450 to 550 people together; that year, however, 850 people attended. At the 1967 annual banquet, attendance totaled more than 1,000 for the first time.

Technical sessions have grown immensely from the early days when the major talks were committee reports. This growth was already substantial by 1948, when 60 technical papers were presented in 4 simultaneous sessions during the 3-day fall meeting. In 1983, 323 papers were scheduled in 49 sessions over 3½ days in Chicago.

AOCS instituted a job placement center in 1974. This service is designed to bring together employers and job applicants in the fields of fats, oils, lipids and other areas served by the society.