**Historical and Reminiscent Review of the Conference of Research Workers in Animal Diseases**

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History is a methodical record of important events which concern a community of men, usually arranged to show a connection of causes and effects. Reminiscence is that which is remembered or recalled to mind. Whether his essay should carry the dignified and imposing title such as used for the caption, I leave for you to decide.

When thinking in terms of the history of some event one somehow gets the impression that the event occurred in the long-long ago, whereas a reminiscence extends only to a period in time that ones memory allows. This portrayal of the origin, development, growth and activities of the Conference of Research Workers in Animal Diseases is both historical and reminiscent. It is historical to those who have been members 25 years or less, reminiscent to those who have been members for 25 years or more.

The idea for organizing a conference and the call for the first meeting in 1920 stems to Dr. R. A. Craig of Purdue University. He was enthusiastically encouraged and actively supported in this venture by the Director of the Purdue Agricultural Experiment Station, Professor C. G. Woodbury. Craig was also urged to go ahead with his idea by his close friend Dr. J. W. Connaway of the University of Missouri.

A bit of reminiscence is “sutured-in” at this point since it was explained to me that Dr. Craig probably got his idea following a dinner in Chicago that was arranged by Dr. L. Van Es of the University of Nebraska. Van Es had taken it upon himself to invite a group of his colleagues to a dinner where, with good wine and cigars, they could carry on what he was want to call “more or less scientific shop talk”. He was firm in the belief that much good could come from a “bull session” where scientists could sit down together and “pull out the stops”.

Two of these so-called “Van Es Dinners” were held, one in 1918 and one a year later. They were held at a time the United States Livestock Sanitary Association was holding its meetings. While Van Es and Colleagues were members of the USLSSA and participated in its meetings, he, nevertheless, was of the opinion that it was not the place for free discussions of problems of special interest to research workers. There was present at one or both of the “Van Es Dinners”: R. R. Birch, J. W. Connaway, R. A. Craig, Marion Dorset, C. P. Fitch, Ward Giltner, L. W. Goss, Robert Graham, F. B. Hadley, C. M. Haring, Chas. Murray, V. A. Moore, A. F. Schalk, C. H. Stange and L. Van Es.

Returning to the history of the Conference we find that early in 1920 Dr. Craig corresponded with a number of men in different parts of the country whom he thought might be interested and prospective participants in a meeting to be convened for the purpose of organizing a conference of research workers in animal diseases. He received a sympathetic response which resulted in a meeting in Hotel Sherman in Chicago on May 3 and 4, 1920. At this meeting were R. A. Craig, R. A. Whiting and C. G. Woodbury (Indiana), B. A. Beach and F. B. Hadley (Wisconsin), Ward Giltner and E. T. Hallman (Michigan), M. Dorset (District of Columbia), L. Van Es (Nebraska), A. F. Schalk (North Dakota), C. H. Stange (Iowa), W. W. Dimrock (Kentucky), Robert Graham (Illinois) and C. P. Fitch (Minnesota). Professor Woodbury of the Experiment Station at Purdue was present to assist with the organizing and to get the Conference off on a good start.

In the course of the two day session various subjects of scientific interest were discussed. Topics on the agenda included: proprietary remedies and bacterins; abortion in cattle and horses; tuberculosis and the tuberculin test; swine plague and swine flu; suipestifer infections in swine; hog cholera virus carriers; swamp fever and diseases of poultry. The principal item of business was the drafting of a constitution and by-laws to govern the composition and operation of the conference and to set forth its objectives.

In the 42 years that the Conference has been functioning its Constitution and By-Laws was amended or revised nine times. It is not the intention to review each amendment but will confine our remarks to only those which were the more important and the most necessary.

The objectives set forth in the first Constitution were three: (a) to promote progress in animal disease research, (b) to encourage critical review of current projects, (c) to establish mutual understanding and coordination among workers. Five years later this clause was modified to read: “To afford opportunity for discussion of results on subjects of interest to the Conference and of importance to the livestock industry.” Interest in the standardization of biological products intended for use in animals and interest in uniformity and accuracy in methods of diagnosis of brucellosis and pullorum disease by the agglutination test was running high at this time. Because of this special interest, two objectives purposely directed to such matters were included in the constitution. However, both were deleted in 1937. Also, in 1937 the clause defining the objectives was amended to read: “To afford opportunity for discussion of results of research in progress on subjects of interest to the Conference and of importance to the livestock industry.” When analyzed this means that the essayist reports on what he or she is learning about the project under investigation from the approach taken to solve it. This is a fundamental tenet of this organization which I pray, will continue ad infinitum.

The article and /or by-law which deals with eligibility for membership has been revised many times. The original draft stated: “The participants shall be limited to two officials from each division of the United State Bureau of Animal Industry and State Agricultural Experiment Stations doing research work in animal diseases”. This was to assure that the membership would not become too large and possible create a feeling of hesitancy among the members about calling a spade a spade when a spade is turned. The following year this section was amended, stipulating that the two officials from the agencies specifies be actively engaged in research. It was reasoned that persons devoting full time to administrative functions were not in position to contribute much to a meeting of this kind. It was further amended to make eligible persons doing research on animal diseases at state organizations that were not administratively or financially a part of an agricultural experiment station, i.e., veterinary colleges and laboratories operated by the livestock sanitary services.

The base for admission was broadened in 1937. Research workers employed by any national, state or provincial government in North America or by endowed institutions who were engaged in the investigation of animal diseases would be eligible. Thus our Canadian and Mexican colleagues had ingress as did persons from such institutions as The Mayo Foundation, the Angel Memorial Animal Hospital, etc., etc. The restriction on the number of qualified workers from any of the recognized agencies was removed (this revision made the writer eligible since previous to it he was obliged to alternate with a colleague so as to be within the quota allowed the University of Minnesota). Also about this time membership was extended to graduate students working on projects of disease in animals. For the next few years the numbers of admissions from this category increased with most coming from institutions in the Midwest. Later, the advisability of this practice was challenged but not without contest. It was argued that most of the research was being done by graduate students and that they would be the ones to “carry the load” in the years ahead. The principal reason for denying them membership was a majority consensus that the organization would get too large which would have the tendency to lessen a free discussion of controversial questions. The proponents for the change won and in 1943 Article II of the Constitution was amended so that graduate students per se would not be eligible. This, however, did not deny them attendance since upon written request of a member, graduate students can be invited and report upon their researches. Moreover, I hasten to add, that graduate students may apply for membership and be accepted if they meet the qualifications for admission. (Reference to this follows)

Article II was further amended requiring that an applicant for membership must receive the approval of the Executive Council before his or her name is submitted to the members for final sections.

In 1947 the qualifications for membership was again revised. The revision required that the candidate demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Council, his or her ability to formulate and carry to successful completion, independent research of high standard of excellence and that published results of their work be available for review. By this action membership on the Executive Council is not an empty honor. The latest revision of Article II was voted in 1961 and provides that it is no longer necessary that an applicant be employed by a federal, state or provincial government or an endowed institution. The base for admission still remains that the applicant be a worker engaged in research on disease in animals. Thus, if a graduate student working on a problem of disease in animals complies with the qualifications for membership as set forth in the Constitution, membership in not denied.

Of lesser importance but none the less of historic interest is the fact that this organization has undergone three rechristenings. CONFERENCE OF STATE AND NATIONAL RESEARCH WORKERS IN ANIMAL DISEASE was the original name. It was changed in 1926 to CONFERENCE OF OFFICIAL RESEARCH WORKERS IN ANIMAL DISEASES OF NORTH AMERICA and in 1937 to CONFERENCE OF RESEARCH WORKERS IN ANIMAL DISEASES IN NORTH AMERICA. The present name, CONFERENCE OF RESEARCH WORKERS IN ANIMAL DISEASES was adopted in 1955. These changes correlate with place of meeting has moved to four different locations in Chicago. From 1920 thru 1939 (20 years) it was held in Hotel Sherman, 1940 thru 1955 (16 years) the Palmer House, 1956 and 1957 Hotel Maryland and in 1958 to the present, The Hamilton Hotel.

Eight men have served the organization as its Secretary-Treasurer (the workers for the research workers). R. A. Craig in 1920, R. A. Whiting 1921-22, L. W. Goss 1923-25, A. F. Schalk 1926-31, E. M. Pickens 1932 (Dr. Pickens term was cut short by death), A. F. Schalk 1932-35, W. H. Feldman 1936-49 (due to illness of Dr. Feldman in 1945, Dr. Harry Biester served as Secretary-Treasurer pro tem and for the same reason Dr. Alfred Karlson assumed the duties in 1948 and 1949), A. G. Karlson 1950-. Prior to 1936 no minutes were kept of the meetings. The reason for this is best illustrated in a letter written by Dr. Schalk to Dr. Van Es in1944. He wrote: “—it is too bad that rather complete minutes were not kept of its (the Conference) proceedings. But, as the original conception was to have no printed proceedings, minutes were not kept by any of the secretaries. Now one can really see the folly of this”.

From 1920 to 1961 inclusive a few over 800 papers (titles) have been presented at the meetings. Until 1952, the number per year ranged from 10 to 23. Since 1952 they have increased steadily and were of the order of 35 in 1953, 53 in 1956 and 80 in 1961.

In 1949 the matter of increasing the length of the meeting was discussed. It was voted to canvass the membership by mail ballot in order that everyone would have a chance to indicate their preference. This was done and a large majority favored the extension. In 1952 the length of the meeting was increased by one day. The wisdom of this has never been questioned.

The next major departure was when the meetings were sectionalized. This was inaugurated in 1957 but, as with most major changes, it did not come about without some opposition. The opponents, although not uncompromising, held that if the meetings divided into sections, much would be lost in the way of information valuable to all. It was argued that sessions where all would be together did much to widen the knowledge of the science of disease in animals. The proponents, on the other hand, maintained that the various disciplines in veterinary medicine were delving more and more into the fundamentals of their areas so that by splitting into sections more time would be permitted for discussion, the value and importance of which cannot be denied. The vote to sectionalize prevailed. While there can be little doubt of the advisability of sectionalizing, nevertheless it carries a mantle of misfortune. It was then agreed to allocate papers dealing with subjects in the areas of microbiology and pathology in one section and those dealing with physiology, pharmacology, biochemistry and endocrinology in a second section. Two more sections have been added this year (1962) to take care of the increasing number of papers (titles). Thus a third section will be devoted to parasitology and a fourth to electron microscopy, cytology, and histochemistry.

A second bit of reminiscence is injected here. Over the years a few unpleasantries have crept in on the activities of the Conference. They can be likened to an abscess. Abscesses as you know, cause varying degrees of irritation depending on their location, size and stage of development. Moreover, most abscessed are amenable to treatment so that when properly incised and drained, healing follows with a minimum of cicatrisation. One such “abscess” developed at a morning session of the Conference in 1930. Seated toward the rear of the room were several “self invited visitors”. From time to time they would carry on a conversation among themselves in audible overtones which tended to distract some of the speakers and disturb some in the audience. As a result the writer was delegated sergeant-at-arms at the noon recess and instructed to tyle the doorway and allow none to pass or repass except they be qualified members. The assignment was not difficult to fill although he was obliged to take a little ribbing and a few withering remarks. But, let it be said, they were made without malice or ill-will.

A second small abscess showed up in 1946. This was when a member innocently, and I believe unmindfully, over stepped a tradition and hard-headed policy of the Conference by sending a report of the proceedings to a British veterinary publication. When apprised of the incident this person expressed sincere regrets and apologized for his actions.

In line with this the matter of sponsoring a journal devoted to reporting the researches of members came to the floor of the Conference for discussion in 1943. No action was taken. Again in 1954 the question of printing and distributing abstracts of reports presented at the meetings was up for consideration and again no action was taken. However, in both cases it was an occasion to review certain policies that had been in force for nearly 20 years, to wit: (1) that only new and unpublished data be presented, (2) that the paper (titles) or reports be presented in abstract form and not read, (3) that the delivery time not exceed 10 minutes, (4) that reports of meetings not be published.

A third incidence in the category of reminiscences might be considered “cancerous”. The incident referred to is the constitutional amendment (Article II) of 1943 which excluded graduate students per se. (Discussion of the amendment is cited above). However, the tumor mass was excised as soon as it was discovered and to date no signs of recurrence have been observed.

Returning to recorded facts: The membership, numbering 13 when the Conference was organized, increased to 164 at the time of the 25th Anniversary and is 416 at the present. This is prima facie evidence that the idea of an assembly of this kind was thoughtfully conceived and is recognized as a vital force in all disciplines of veterinary medicine doing research on disease in animals.

I am indebted to the late Lenius Van Es for a very large share of the context of this essay. Dr. Van Es went to considerable effort to collect and put together an account of events which occurred in the early years of the Conference. He prepared it for the 25 Anniversary. I am also indebted to Drs. C. P. Fitch, Charles Murray, A. F. Schalk, Ward Giltner and L. Van Es for quips on the years before I was eligible to “sit in”.

In conclusion I think that in respect to the Conference the definition of history, as stated in the first paragraph, has been satisfied. Thus, the community of men is the 13 veterinarians who organized the Conference; the cause was their appreciation of the importance of getting together and exchanging ideas and information on research in progress; the effects are the results and benefits that have come out of this growing, vigorous and enthusiastic organization, THE CONFERENCE OF RESEARCH WORKERS IN ANIMAL DISEASES.