News Staff Additions

The *Science* news staff has two new members. Robert Gillette, a 1966 graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, worked as a science writer for the Toledo *Blade* and most recently for the San Francisco *Examiner*. Deborah Shapley, a 1967 graduate of Radcliffe, worked as a reporter for the Quincy *Patriot Ledger* in Massachusetts and came to *Science* from a job as an associate editor of *Technology Review* published at M.I.T.

elsewhere for its own uses—since DOT might want some. To date only $7 million of the equipment has gone elsewhere in NASA. Some is used by DOT; much of it is unspoken for.

Scientists Prefer to Buy

It is quite possible that these agencies transfer far less property than they could. Last year, GSA passed to other agencies only 13 percent, or $636 million, of the goods it screened. A main reason for the low rate of transfer is that the relevant lists, while technically public, only rarely reach the men in the laboratories who are most aware of what they need. NIH and AEC give their own and GSA's lists limited circulation; they transfer relatively little used property. Researchers on federal grants have complained that the lists are prized items, carefully guarded by those privileged to get them.

One scientist cites "shocking" examples of unused government-owned equipment. "I have been conducted through large government laboratories," he says, "where there were rooms full of new, unused equipment, set up to work, and my guide asked me, casually, 'Do you have an experiment you could do here? We don't have anybody to run these things since we're short on manpower.' "

A physician, who has overseen the management of equipment in private industry for 13 years and now does the same at a small ($2.2 million annually) university laboratory funded by the Air Force, says that in 7 years he has bought only one piece of government excess equipment which "did me any good."

He notes that the system of request and counter-offer, whereby a scientist specifies exactly what he wants, and the program supply director, possessing the precious lists, counters with approximately the same thing, does not work well. "In most cases the instruments they offer are not the same. Make and model numbers are often different. It's not worth it to me to replace my 7-year-old oscilloscope which is finally worn out, with a 6-year-old one whose useful life will end in 1 year!"

Moreover, he says, inspecting an instrument at a local government warehouse—the method by which the government tries to assure the researcher that he gets what he wants—is an inadequate way to see whether a bit of complicated machinery really works. "My experience has been that the government equipment doesn't work when it comes in," he says. Unable to order new things because of funds, he prefers to buy from commerical dealers specializing in science junk, whose prices are low and whose equipment at least comes guaranteed.

And commercial dealers can make money by selective bidding on the tremendous volume of goods that the government is discarding. The government can at will reject bids it deems too low on a valuable item and sell at a later time. But now, pressure is mounting to move equipment along. This gives the dealers an advantage; they usually bid on valuable items only if they can line up buyers who will give them their preferred 2 to 1 on their investment.

Electronics, for example, was a "hot item" on this market 5 years ago. But today the electronics market has become glutted, says one NASA property officer. But dealers from as far away as the West Coast are bidding on other items sold at a special GSA office recently opened at NASA's Cape Kennedy installation. And, if they are bidding, they must have some buyers somewhere.

But to make the federal disposal system truly promote economy in government requires not only improved federal management but cooperation from the scientists. One federal property officer finds some types of scientists unhelpful. Many, he says, always insist on brand new equipment, even "to dig a ditch." But some "only put an item on an excess list, literally, if they happen to stumble over it a few times in their laboratory." He says there is also the "pack rat—the guy who never wants to get rid of anything. If he sees something on an excess list, he'll take it, regardless of whether he needs it. This can be very expensive.

"Some scientists literally hide items. I'm not exaggerating. They hide things from their colleagues! If the guy across the hall needs it he'll tell him to go buy his own. He forgets that the federal funds paid for it. He gets personal and possesive about it. But that's good too because these people usually take very good care of their equipment. So what should the government do?"

—DEBORAH SHAPLEY

RECENT DEATHS

Max Beberman, 45; former professor of mathematics, University of Illinois; 24 January.

Fitzhugh W. Boggs, 59; professor of research engineering, Pennsylvania State University; 16 January.

Dwight L. Clark, 44; professor of dentistry, University of North Carolina; 15 January.

Edwin J. Dealy, 67; chief, anesthesiology division, Veterans Administration Hospital, Washington, D.C.; 23 January.

Ralph J. DeFalco, 64; professor of zoology, Rutgers University; 24 January.

James B. Mead, 37; research physicist, Naval Research Laboratories, Washington, D.C.; 11 January.

Henry E. Meleney, 83; former professor of preventive medicine, New York University; 30 December.

Leo Oliner, 45; professor of medicine, George Washington University; 8 December.

Federico J. Prohaska, 56; chairman, geography department, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; 22 December.

Alexander G. Ruthven, 88; retired president, University of Michigan; 19 January.

Joseph B. Sprowls, Jr., 58; dean, College of Pharmacy, University of Texas; 10 January.

William K. Squires, 43; former professor of electrical engineering, University of Buffalo; 9 January.

Herbert M. Stauffer, 56; chairman, radiology department, Temple University; 18 December.

Ruth Strang, 75; professor emeritus of education, Teachers College, Columbia University; 3 January.