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Life Members of AAAS

Members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science express their loyalty in a number of ways. They give freely of their time as officers and members of committees. During the course of a year they send in thousands of items to *Science*, and some 8000 reviewers carefully evaluate manuscripts. These activities involve only a fraction of the members. Loyalty is shown more universally in continuing membership.

After becoming members of the Association, most people maintain that status during their entire professional careers or longer. On the rolls of the Association are several hundred who have paid dues for 50 years and have thus become life members. Notable examples from the past were Anton J. Carlson, Herbert Hoover, W. W. Rubey, and Harlow Shapley. Herbert Hoover joined AAAS in 1900 and remained a member through thick and thin until his death in 1963.

During its history, the Association has provided various arrangements to enable individuals to become life members on payment of a sum of money, usually about 20 times the annual dues. For a period, beginning in 1884, there was a category called "Patron" attainable on payment of \$1000. This attracted seven participants; the first three were women.

Over the years some members have made monetary contributions in addition to dues. Perhaps the most faithful contributor was Charles Matthias Goethe of Sacramento, California. During his lifetime he made frequent gifts, and in his will he bequeathed \$340,000 to AAAS.

Today there are about 4000 life members. In some instances, parents provide life membership for their children. More typically, members of long standing change their status at middle or late career. In part the motivation is financial, in part there is the desire to make a long-term commitment of loyalty.

In the light of continuing inflation and the structure of income taxes, most life members now on the rolls made an astute investment. This is particularly true of a large group who became life members in 1967, when a special rate of \$150 was available. The fee is now \$420 and will rise to \$500 in May 1975.

Life membership is not intended to be perpetual membership—that is, it does not go on beyond the lifetime of the individual. In the past, there has been no annual verification of the continued existence of life members. As a result, a few instances of abuses have been noted. Thus, a woman became a life member in 1884. Until recently her grandson's wife was receiving *Science*.

Last year, the outlook for the financial affairs of the Association was bleak. As part of an effort to ease the problem, letters were written to life members describing some of the difficulties being encountered, asking for verification of continued existence, and seeking contributions.

A tiny fraction of the replies were critical. One male said, in effect, that he did not wish to be bothered by an annual query—when he was dead he would inform us. The reply of a woman was more constructive. She sent a contribution of \$250, saying, "In your recent letter you reminded me what an astute investment I made when I purchased life membership in AAAS. Well, I never did make a real bargain, and I don't intend to begin now." Many respondents included friendly notes, and about a third enclosed contributions. This was remarkable, as a substantial fraction of life members are beyond retirement age. The response was heart-warming and especially morale-building for the staff. It reconfirmed what we have known all along. The most important asset of any organization is the loyalty of its members and, in this respect, AAAS is indeed fortunate.—PHILIP H. ABELSON