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## Gordon Research Conferences

Most of the scientists who have attended Gordon Research Conferences give them highest marks. An indicator of the usefulness of the conferences is their survival for 50 years and growth in number from 1 in 1931 to 115 this year. Each brings together about 100 researchers for 5 days under circumstances that favor maximum interaction. Conferees include persons from academia, industry, and government who are active at the frontiers of a moving field. They range in status from Nobel laureates to graduate students. Most of the conferences are held during the summer on campuses of private schools in rural New Hampshire. Conferees sleep in the school dormitories and have their meals together. Sessions are held in the mornings and evenings with afternoons free for conversations. A limited number of talks are given and ample time is allowed for discussion. This is fostered by the rule that the talks and the comments on them are off the record. Topics for the conferences (*Science*, 13 March) are drawn from most of the natural sciences, including chemistry, physics, geochemistry, biochemistry, biophysics, physiology, neurochemistry, and medicine.

Holding more than 100 conferences with more than 10,000 participants involves a major exercise in logistics. These are managed by Alexander Cruickshank of the University of Rhode Island, who is director of the Gordon Research Conferences. Overall policies are set by a ten-person board of trustees, who are in effect the executive committee of a council that includes about 180 persons. Detailed scientific management rests with the chairpersons of the various conferences, who have authority to fix the agenda, choose and invite speakers, and select the conferees. This authority lasts for 1 year. Near the conclusion of a conference, a new person is elected to organize the next meeting.

Scientific research areas have a life of their own—birth, youthful exuberance, maturity, and senescence. It is a principal concern of the trustees and council to recognize new fields and to diminish or phase out holding of conferences in areas that are no longer yielding exciting new knowledge. Quality of conferences is assessed by monitors and by use of questionnaires distributed to all participants.

In 1930 Neil Gordon, then a professor of chemistry at Johns Hopkins University, recognized the need for better, more intense communication among research scientists. He envisioned most of the principles that now guide the conferences. The first implementation was modest. It took the form of a seminar at Johns Hopkins in 1931, which was attended by faculty members, students, and others. In 1932 and 1933 seminars organized by Gordon were again held at the university. In 1934 he arranged four conferences that were held at Gibson Island, on Chesapeake Bay near Baltimore. By 1935 the conferences had essentially taken their present form and had the following titles and chairpersons: "The chemistry of aliphatic free radicals," Francis O. Rice; "Long chain molecules," Thomas Midgley, Jr.; and "Vitamins," E. V. McCollum.

In 1938 Gordon was successful in negotiating a formal relationship with the AAAS; since then, programs of the conferences have been printed in *Science*. Gordon continued as director until ill health interfered. In appreciation for his wisdom and efforts, the conferences were named for him in 1948, a year before his death. The move to New Hampshire occurred in 1947 and W. George Parks became director. He was succeeded in 1968 by Alexander Cruickshank. During their combined tenure, the number of conferences expanded from 10 in 1947 to the present 115. In 1956 the Gordon Research Conferences were incorporated in New Hampshire, and since then the relationship with AAAS has been nominal.

Neil Gordon was a research scientist working in chemistry who perceived a need and had the energy, adroitness, and wisdom to meet the need. The product of his thought and initiative has become a unique and important series of conferences, and their name is a fitting recognition of his efforts.

—PHILIP H. ABELSON