Public Information at Philadelphia

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NEVER before for any annual meeting of the AAAS have the authors of papers been more cooperative with the Association's department of public information than for the Philadelphia convention. Nearly 1500 papers were listed on the programs of the 18 AAAS sections and subsections and the cooperating 71 organizations; 81% of them were available to reporters for the world press, radio, and television either as abstracts or as complete papers well in advance of presentation. This fact is rather good evidence that most productive scientists today no longer recoil at the thought of using the dignified methods of public information departments of scientific societies to inform the public about their research.

With human nature what it is, no one—not even a scientist—abhors mention of his work in the press or over the radio or television, *if it is favorable.* The words in italics are obviously the crux of the matter. The Association's department of public information has won the confidence of the majority of scientists in its programs, because they know it relays *directly* to competent reporters abstracts or complete papers of their contributions well ahead of each meeting, so that racing to meet a deadline, which may result in inadequate or inaccurate reporting, is avoided. No intermediary "handouts" are prepared by Association personnel. The reporters, as a general rule, prefer to write their reports directly from the abstracts or complete papers submitted by the authors. They often seek interpretation or amplification from authors or other qualified specialists in the respective fields. These specialists are always available to the press room at any Association meeting, and press conferences are arranged whenever requested by reporters. Obviously, a more accurate report of a paper can be prepared in this way than if reporters get their sole information about it by listening to the author report his findings at a scheduled meeting. The method outlined above has been in operation by the Association since Austin H. Clark initiated the service in 1924. If a paper is reported accurately from material submitted by the author himself, the results are invariably favorable to the author.

The secretaries of sections and subsections and the various program chairmen constitute a tremendously important link in the chain having to do with assembling papers prior to an Association meeting. Cooperation on the part of these officers was so complete and effective for the Philadelphia meeting that the Association's department of public information had obtained from them, approximately seven weeks ahead of the convention, the names and addresses of participants on 95% of the programs of the 248 sessions, together with titles of their papers.

About half the battle to secure world-wide coverage of an annual AAAS meeting is won when those on the program cooperate in sending copies of their papers to a central office. The other half has to do with convincing radio station managers, managing editors, and reporters that the meeting will be newsworthy enough to cover and that good facilities will be available for the six days of hard work. Over the years, members of the National Association of Science Writers and other accredited reporters have found from experience that there is an abundance of news to be obtained at a AAAS meeting, either directly from papers on the program or indirectly from interviews with attending scientists in all branches of science. Information obtained from such interviews is used for immediate release by the press, radio, and television or is made the basis of feature stories after the meeting is over. Since the AAAS is by far the largest and most influential group of related scientific organizations in the world, its annual meeting has evidently become a "must" for the top science writers of the nation. The New York meeting in 1949 was covered by 252 reporters for the press, radio, and television; the Cleveland meeting in 1950, by 148; and the Philadelphia meeting, by 162. Always in attendance are representatives from all press associations here and abroad, radio and television networks, most scientific and popular magazines, Unesco, publishing houses, local newspapers and other leading newspapers in America and abroad, schools of journalism, the U. S. Department of State and other government agencies, and public relations departments of industry, government, universities, and scientific societies. In addition, many free-lance writers are present.

Good working facilities for representatives of the press, radio, and television at a national meeting as large and diversified as a AAAS annual convention are obviously imperative. The arrangement of such facilities depends in large measure upon the members of the local public information committee. For the Philadelphia meeting, this committee was ably headed by Steven M. Spencer, associate editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* and former president of the National Association of Science Writers. Since the meeting, unusually favorable comments concerning this part of the Association's public information service have been received from those who reported the news in print and over the air. Headquarters for the service was the Junior Ballroom of the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. It was fully equipped with everything necessary to meet the demands of reporters. Thanks to Bennett E. Tousley, vice president and manager of this headquarters hotel, everything needed by this department was supplied quickly and cheerfully by

his hospitable assistants. With Mr. Tousley's compliments, luncheon was served in the press room for three days of the meeting. The Westinghouse Educational Foundation was host to the reporters at a luncheon on one of the days of the convention, and the American Tobacco Company Research Laboratory on another day. The General Electric Company held open house for all science reporters each evening of the week. The Harvard Club of Philadelphia made its quarters in the hotel available for conferences. Scouts representing the Boy Scouts of America, Philadelphia Council, served as messengers, and students of the Temple University School of Business and Public Administration acted as assistants to the three press room secretaries. Bernard A. Bergman, of Publicker Industries, Inc., and other members of the Philadelphia Public Relations Association were helpful in many ways. Marjorie R. Carmosin, publicity director for Drexel Institute of Technology, did an outstanding job as our assistant in radio and television reporting. She arranged 42 programs, some of which were on the air from coast to coast. We are especially grateful to those who took part in these broadcasts.

Because of the splendid cooperation of authors of papers, section and society secretaries and program chairmen, members of the local public information committee, assistants in the press room, and many others, our long-time, competent friends—the news reporters—must have felt constrained to reciprocate by filing sheaves of copy. Requests for additional information about the meeting are now being received from all over the world. In the last analysis, our especial appreciation must be given the reporters who covered the meeting. It is they who ultimately make it possible for the Association to carry out one of its principal purposes: "To increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress."

A Report of the Philadelphia Meeting December 26–31, 1951

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THE return of the American Association for the Advancement of Science to Philadelphia, where it was founded more than one hundred years ago, was considerably more than a pleasant, commemorative occasion. In many respects the Association's seventh Philadelphia meeting was one of its most significant annual conventions.

A scientific meeting is deemed a success if the programs are good, if it is well attended, and if its major objectives are realized. By these criteria the 118th meeting was a success: In the number, variety, and quality of the symposia, in the excellence of the special sessions and of the contributed papers, few if any other meetings of the Association have surpassed it. In the number of paid registrations, this was the largest meeting ever held in Philadelphia[1]—and only four other meetings have been larger in this respect. The convention brought together highly trained men and women of diverse disciplines to consider matters of general concern to them as scientists; it provided facilities for the meetings of specialists, and opportunities for the participation of the general public. Throughout the world, because of the excellent press coverage, public attention was directed to the importance of science and to its latest advances.

An important adjunct to scientific meetings—and a measure of their success—are the banquets or dinners arranged by sections and participating societies. In price, menu, and the speaker's after-dinner remarks, these can range from those that are sad and best forgotten to affairs that are pleasant and memorable. At the seventh Philadelphia meeting there were many particularly enjoyable meal functions. It was the writer's good fortune to attend the Botanists' Dinner, held under the auspices of Section G. It had been arranged by John M. Fogg, Jr., not in his capacity as vice provost of the University of Pennsylvania or as chairman of the Subcommittee of Physical Arrangements, but as a botanist in residence. For "technical reasons," the dinner originally limited to 75 had seatings increased to nearly 100; after dessert, another 25 or so were admitted to hear the introductory remarks of Stanley A. Cain and the talk of Ivey F. Lewis, retiring vice president of Section G. This traditional vice-presidential address was both an important summary of biological principles and their inescapably grim applications to man, and Dr. Lewis at his best as a raconteur.

Planning the meeting. Those who attend the sessions of a large scientific meeting, unless they have shared the experience of making some of the arrangements, may not realize the vast amount of planning and work required. The cooperation and services of many individuals are essential. The convention city is usually decided upon several years in advance, and only after a preliminary survey indicates that the physical facilities are adequate and generally satisfactory.

Early in the year of the meeting the session rooms are catalogued by capacities, relative desirability, provisions for darkening, need for microphones, the general furnishings, and location of black-out switches and obstructing pillars. Very early in the spring the secretary of each section and society must estimate the probable number of sessions and the attendance to be expected at each. Soon afterward, headquarters hotels for related societies are decided upon, and all meeting rooms are

[1] The registration totals for the sixth Philadelphia meeting (1940) and for the fifth Philadelphia meeting (1926) were 3339 and 3181, respectively.