

Public Information Service

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An annual meeting of the AAAS fosters all four of the objectives of the Association—to further the work of scientists, to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare, to facilitate cooperation among scientists, and to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress. One of the ways it promotes the latter objective is by maintaining a public information service for each of its annual meetings.

During the last 25 years, this service has expanded greatly. There were 11 science writers registered in the press room at the Richmond AAAS meeting in 1938. At the New York meeting in 1960, over 400 reporters participated and recently in Philadelphia, over 300 were present. In my opinion, however, the quality of science writing that was achieved a quarter of a century ago by such pioneers in this field as Howard W. Blakeslee, Watson Davis, David Dietz, Thomas R. Henry, Gobind Behari Lal, William L. Laurence, Herbert B. Nichols, Robert D. Potter, Allen Shoenfield, Jane Stafford, and Marjorie Van de Water has not been improved upon. There is just more coverage because of increased public interest in science. In 1938, there were 25 active members of the National Association of Science Writers with no other type of membership; there are now 194 active members. Counting members in other categories, those concerned for the most part with public information for various organizations, the total membership of the NASW (with Nate Haseltine of the Washington *Post* as president) numbers 575. Also, scientists for the most part have become more willing in recent years to cooperate with the press, whenever feasible. Obviously, the most important scientific achievements are difficult and often impossible to report to the public. Seldom, for example, does any science

writer spot the paper at a AAAS meeting for which the author is awarded the Newcomb Cleveland Prize for an outstanding contribution to science.

The initial step in setting up the public information service for the Philadelphia meeting was taken in May when Harry A. Batten of N. W. Ayer and Son, Inc., consented to be chairman of the local committee on public information on a volunteer basis. This nationally known communications leader soon had working with him on this important committee 10 local experts in this field. It was the responsibility of this group to help set the premeeting stage for the formidable task of informing the public throughout the world of the newsworthy reports to be made concerning the progress of science in all of its branches at this great gathering of scientists from over 300 colleges, universities, industrial organizations, and governmental agencies in this country and abroad. This local committee worked toward this end during the summer and fall most effectively.

The next step was taken at the Medical College of Virginia, Richmond, in June when active preparations were begun for this Philadelphia meeting. The usual extensive premeeting procedures, which have been developed and found more or less successful over the past 25 years, were followed [*Science* **127**, 409 (1958)].

Two hundred and sixty-one registered in the press room at Philadelphia; however, there may have been others covering the meeting who failed to register. Presumably 61 other reporters in the United States and abroad based their coverage on nontechnical abstracts and complete papers mailed to them before and during the meeting. Thus, the total number of those participating in reporting the meeting to millions of people around the world was 312. We were handicapped somewhat this year by the newspaper strikes in New York City and Cleveland.

The Philadelphia *Bulletin* must be highly commended by this department of the Association for its accurate reporting of many of the newsworthy papers on the program. Our thanks go especially to Adolph Katz for his excellent coverage of the meeting. (It is unusual that in a city the size of Philadelphia there is no active member of the National Association of Science Writers on the staff of any of its newspapers.)

Coverage by science writers for all the wire services and by reporters outside of Philadelphia, including those in the western world, was unusually good, as far as can be determined from clippings and letters sent to us by friends since the close of the meeting. A clean-cut analysis of this coverage cannot be made since the Association does not subscribe to a clippings service. We have been informed by Philadelphia Western Union that the total number of words filed by reporters to their respective newspapers numbered 123,000. This number is exclusive of words telegraphed by science writers representing the wire services and other organizations which have local bureaus in Philadelphia. In addition, since returning to Richmond, we have received requests from individuals and organizations in 28 foreign countries for more information about specific papers on the program. These facts give credence to reports that the convention must have been published widely.

Weekly magazines which devote some or most of their non-advertising space to news about science were well represented in most cases. Registered in the press room were representatives of such leading magazines as *Business Week*, *Chemical and Engineering News*, *Medical World News*, *Newsweek*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Public Health Reports*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Science*, *Drug Trade News*, *Science and Technology*, *National Geographic Magazine*, *Popular Science*, *Science Digest*, *Modern Medicine*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Medical Tribune*, *Scientific American*, *Science World*, *Life*, *Time*, and others. Besides these correspondents actively on the scene, other reporters for weekly news magazines, including many abroad, must have reported the meeting from the advance copies of papers which they requested. Feature stories concerning symposia and papers are now beginning

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to appear in monthly magazines. There were many representatives of magazines who registered in the press room for the primary purpose of interviewing scientists and picking up ideas for future articles. It is hoped, if and when these articles are published in the weeks and months to come, that a credit reference will be given to the Association's meeting in Philadelphia.

Local radio coverage was exceptionally good with an average of three feature programs a day for a total of approximately 15 hours on the air. It is impossible to report the number of the many spot news announcements made during the meeting. Also, there were a number of local television programs on which various scientists were interviewed. Much attention was paid nationally on radio and television to reports about NASA's orbiting solar observatory I satellite and the scientific information it has rendered since its launching last March, about preliminary results of the analysis of data from the Canadian-United States Alouette topside sounder satellite launched in September of 1962, and about Mariner II magnetometer data recorded as it flew by Venus on 14 December 1962. Edward G. Sherburne, Jr., AAAS director of studies on the public understanding of science, managed this broadcasting expertly. Marjorie R. Carmosin (Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital), our associate in charge of radio and television programs, has sent us an excellent 13-page report on the feature broadcasting which she arranged for the meeting. Working in close cooperation with us, Miss Carmosin began setting up programs early in October. This early start is indicative of the preparedness which is necessary when working with non-print media concerned with public information for a national meeting.

Much of the success of this AAAS department at the Philadelphia meeting must be credited to 41 major press conferences set up prior to and during the convention by Thelma C. Heatwole, associate director of the press room. In addition, many interviews with scientists by individual science writers and

other reporters were arranged by her on short notice. For example, four interviews were arranged by Mrs. Heatwole for Joy Miller, woman's editor of the Associated Press. The following conferences received exceptional attention from reporters: John C. Lindsay on the orbiting solar observatory; the symposium participants on the transfer of genetic information; the report of the psychological traits of the astronauts; dating man and the Pleistocene; and the symposium participants on modern science and the control of nature, especially Van Allen's paper. Never before at a AAAS meeting have press conferences been so appreciated by science writers. Evidently the combination of advance releases of complete papers (rather than nontechnical abstracts) having to do with newsworthy topics, press conferences, and individual interviews during the convention, plus arrangements for radio and television programs several months in advance are the principal answers to conducting a successful press room at a national meeting.

To Paul M. Gross, AAAS president at the time of the meeting; Thomas Park, immediate past president; Alan T. Waterman, AAAS president as of 15 January 1963; Dael Wolfle, executive officer; Raymond L. Taylor, AAAS associate administrative secretary; Hans Nussbaum, business manager; Edward G. Sherburne, Jr.; and members of the AAAS Board of Directors go the thanks of the public information service of the Association for their helpfulness on many occasions and for allowing it a free hand to function as it deems best for the organization.

The AAAS is grateful to the friends of this service for helping to make enjoyable the intensive task of reporting a meeting of this magnitude to the general public. Among these friends are the American Tobacco Company Research Laboratory, which has contributed daily coffee breaks for many years for the reporters working in the press room; the General Electric Company Research Laboratory, which has made its suite available over the years as a popular rendezvous for science writers

at the close of each day; and the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, which sponsored the Science Writing Awards reception and dinner attended by 190 reporters and scientists.

Besides those already mentioned, the following individuals carried out their press room assignments efficiently and effectively: Foley F. Smith, Richmond, Virginia, assistant; Margaret Safford and Esther E. Roach, assigned to us as secretaries by James E. Morrison, executive director of the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau; William E. Trout, III, graduate school, University of Indiana, messenger; and John E. Jacoby, Harvard College freshman, messenger. We also appreciate the cooperation of Arch J. Oliver, Jr., vice president and general manager of the Philadelphia Sheraton Hotel, and his associates for taking care of our many requests so promptly and courteously.

The resolution passed unanimously at the semi-annual meeting of the National Association of Science Writers commending the AAAS public information service for helpfulness to its members over the past 25 years is especially appreciated.

The press room prize for asking the least number of questions during the five days of the meeting was awarded to John Troan, science writer for the Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance and former president of the NASW. Previous winners have been Victor Cohn of the Minneapolis *Tribune*, the late Robert Dwyer of the New York *Daily News*, Harry A. Nelson of the Los Angeles *Times*, and Walter Sullivan of the New York *Times*. The science writer who traveled the farthest to cover the meeting was Alexander Dorozynski of Paris, France.

Awareness on the part of science writers and reporters in general that news in all branches of science is available at a AAAS meeting was certainly evident in Philadelphia. The Association compliments representatives of the press, radio, and television on this alertness and is extremely grateful that they assumed responsibility for reporting accurately and extensively this news throughout the world.